



Installation view *Wotruba International*, photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna

Vienna, 16 July 2025

Belvedere 21

Arsenalstraße 1
1030 Vienna

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday
11 am to 6 pm
Late opening:
Thursday 11 am to 9 pm
Only open on Mondays
during public holidays

Press downloads:
belvedere.at/press

Press contact:
Irene Jäger
+43 664 800 141 185
i.jaeger@belvedere.at

WOTRUBA INTERNATIONAL

July 17, 2025 – January 11, 2026, Belvedere 21

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of Fritz Wotruba's death, the Belvedere will present a comprehensive exhibition that, for the first time, highlights the international reach of the Austrian sculptor's career. The exhibition focuses on Wotruba's global exhibition activities, his artistic network, and the reception of his work, placing these in dialogue with sculptures by significant contemporaries, including Alberto Giacometti, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, and Alicia Penalba. On this context, Wotruba emerges as a central voice in the postwar discourse on the depiction of the human being.

General Director Stella Rollig notes: *Fritz Wotruba was more than just an Austrian phenomenon—his voice commanded respect in Europe and beyond. With this exhibition, we are honoring not only his singular sculptural presence but also his role as a cultural actor with a visionary commitment to art, education, and society.*

FRITZ WOTRUBA – LIFE AND WORK

Fritz Wotruba is regarded as one of the most influential figures in Austrian art since 1945. He achieved early international success with his first solo exhibition held at the Museum Folkwang in Essen in 1931. During his exile in Switzerland, he forged a sculptural language all his own. After returning to Vienna at the end of 1945, he continued to develop his artistic practice, teaching generations of sculptors at the Academy of Fine Arts and making a lasting impact as director of the Würthle Gallery. The human figure remained central to his sculptural work, which he increasingly abstracted and reduced to monumental blocks or cylindrical forms—yet never lost its connection to anthropomorphic origins.

He thought of his art as a humanistic counterpoint to the devastation of war. Even in the face of the collapse of civilization during the Second World War, the human being remained the central pillar of Wotruba's artistic work: *it stands at the beginning and will stand at the end* (Wotruba, 1959).

From the beginning of his career, Wotruba was a prominent figure on the international art scene. He participated in the *Biennale di Venezia* a total of seven times, exhibited twice at *documenta* in Kassel, took part in world exhibitions in Brussels, Seattle, and Montreal, and presented his work at major venues in Paris, New York, Milan, and São Paulo. Over the course of his lifetime, he held more than seventy solo presentations, nearly fifty of which took place abroad. Notable shows include those at the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris, the ICA in Boston, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. His works toured the United States and were regularly featured in outdoor exhibitions in London, Arnhem, Carrara, and Antwerp. Today, his works are held in major international collections, including those of the MoMA in New York and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Beginning in 2011, his extensive estate was placed on long-term loan to the Belvedere; since 2021, it has been part of the Belvedere's permanent collection.

Wotruba is considered one of Austria's most important sculptors. His artistic style, defined by the interplay between figuration and abstraction, was unique and influential in its time. He introduced Austrian sculpture to International Modernism and created a body of work that remains relevant today, as noted by Gabriele Stöger-Spevak, the curator who has overseen the Wotruba estate since 1995.

Curator Verena Gamper adds: *Wotruba's work has been exhibited and critically engaged with on an international scale: at documenta in Kassel, at numerous biennales and expos, and in exhibitions that addressed pressing issues, such as the legendary 1959 show New Images of Man at the MoMA in New York. The dialogues sparked by the current exhibition between Wotruba and his contemporaries shed light on both the broader discourse surrounding the sculptural representation of the human figure after 1945 and Wotruba's distinct voice within this conversation.*

THE EXHIBITION

Following Fritz Wotruba's death in 1975, his artistic presence dimmed—partly because the concept of sculpture since the 1960s had expanded, and the medium increasingly embraced performative, installation-based, and process-oriented forms. The exhibition at the Belvedere 21 provides a fresh impetus for the international reception of Wotruba's oeuvre by placing the artist in a global dialogue with a generation of sculptors who centered their practice on reflecting on the human condition. The exhibition demonstrates that Wotruba, the Austrian sculptor par excellence, was by no means a local phenomenon. It was primarily his mastery of stone that earned him early and significant international acclaim, establishing him as an important voice in the postwar discourse on sculpture.

Featuring over forty sculptures by Fritz Wotruba, shown alongside works by international artists who shared his artistic path, the exhibition offers a fresh perspective on postwar Modernist sculpture. Central to the presentation are twenty-four of Wotruba's large-scale works—from the Belvedere's collection and international loans—dating from 1928 to 1974. These are complemented by fifteen sculptures by artists who were either friends, collaborators, or fellow exhibitors on the international stage. The conversations between Wotruba's works and those of Kenneth Armitage, César, Lynn Chadwick, Alberto Giacometti, Barbara Hepworth, Henri Laurens, Jacques Lipchitz, Aristide Maillol,

Marino Marini, Henry Moore, Louise Nevelson, Isamu Noguchi, Eduardo Paolozzi, Alicia Penalba, and Germaine Richier bring these historical encounters to life. They highlight the broader international context and underscore the distinctiveness of Wotruba's sculptural language. The show is further enriched by a selection of models for his stage designs and the famous Wotruba Church, along with a stylistically diverse group of head sculptures and a group of drawings. These works draw attention to the Wotruba Depot and the study room in the lower level of the Belvedere 21, which invites scholars—and all those interested—to engage with the artist's oeuvre in greater depth.

For the exhibition, the Vienna-based architecture firm the next ENTERprise Architects has designed a scenography that resembles a landscape—one that responds in a congenial way to the questions of form and materiality raised by the sculptures.

CATALOGUE

Wotruba International

Editors: Stella Rollig, Verena Gamper, Gabriele Stöger-Spevak

Authors: Penelope Curtis, Verena Gamper, Arie Hartog, Stella Rollig, Gabriele Stöger-Spevak

Graphic Design: Astrid Seme

296 pages; 338 images

Format: 24 × 31,5 cm; Ota-Bind

German & English in one volume

ISBN 978-3-7533-0899-9, Price: 34,90 EUR

The publication will be released by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König in mid-August.

PRESS IMAGES

Scan the QR code below to access the press images – here you will find object images and exhibition views available for free download for press purposes.



FRITZ WOTRUBA – SHORT BIOGRAPHY

1907: Fritz Wotruba is born on April 23 in Vienna, the youngest of eight children. His parents are Hungarian housekeeper Maria Kocsis and Czech tailor Adolf Wotruba.

1921–25: Trains in an engraving and stamping workshop in Vienna.

1926–29: Studies sculpture at the Vienna School of Applied Arts under Anton Hanak and Eugen Steinhof. Conflicts with the teaching staff lead to Wotruba's being suspended in 1929.

1929: Wotruba marries fellow student Marian Fleck.

1931: First solo exhibition at the Museum Folkwang in Essen.

1933: Exile in Switzerland for several months after the Austrian Parliament was suspended. Returns to Vienna and becomes acquainted with writer Elias Canetti.

1938–45: Exile in Switzerland, mostly in Zug. Friendship with Robert and Martha Musil and with Fritz and Editha Kamm.

1945: On the initiative of Herbert Boeckl, Wotruba is appointed to the Academy of Fine Arts and returns to Vienna, where he becomes an important voice in the cultural discourse of the postwar years.

1948: Correspondent of the Salon de mai, a Parisian anti-Nazi artist league.

1951: Marian Wotruba dies.

1953–64: Artistic director of Galerie Würthle on Weihburggasse in Vienna. Wotruba's exhibition program, which focuses on Austrian and international contemporary art, is intended to drive the city's cultural reconstruction.

1954: The Austrian Gallery Belvedere acquires *Large Seated Figure* ("Human Cathedral") from 1949.

1955: Marries Lucy Vorel.

1957: Commissioned to produce *Large Figure Relief* for the Austrian Pavilion designed by Karl Schwanzer for the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels.

1959–67: Designs stage sets and costumes for various Sophocles dramas and Richard Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* in collaboration with director Gustav Rudolf Sellner.

1963: First comprehensive solo exhibition in Vienna in Karl Schwanzer's former World's Fair pavilion, which had opened the previous year as the Museum of the Twentieth Century (now Belvedere 21).

1971: Commissioned to design the *Church of the Most Holy Trinity* in Vienna-Mauer on the basis of a sculptural proposal dating from 1967. The church is built between 1974 and 1976 to plans developed by Fritz Wotruba and architect Fritz Gerhard Mayr.

1975: Fritz Wotruba dies in Vienna on August 28. A comprehensive exhibition of his work, which he had devised himself, subsequently opens in Milan in September.

In 1980 Lucy Wotruba opened the "Wotruba House" in Vienna. After her death, the artist's estate was managed by the Fritz Wotruba-Verein starting in 1986, and by the Fritz Wotruba Foundation starting in

2007. In 2011 the Fritz Wotruba Foundation lent the estate to the Belvedere, where a storage facility complete with a study room was set up in the basement of Belvedere 21. In 2021 the Foundation was dissolved, and the Fritz Wotruba estate was transferred permanently to the Belvedere collection.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	<i>Wotruba International</i>
Curators	Verena Gamper and Gabriele Stöger-Spevak
Assistant curators	Ana Petrović and Vasilena Stoyanova
Duration	July 17, 2025 to January 11, 2026
Location	Belvedere 21 Arsenalstrasse 1, 1030 Vienna
Opening hours	Tuesday to Sunday 11 am to 6 pm Evening hours: Thursdays 11 am to 9 pm Open Mondays on holidays
Tickets	Regular 9.30 EUR online; 11 EUR on-site Discounted 6.90 EUR online; 8 EUR on-site Belvedere Annual Ticket 44 EUR Children and youth up to the age of 18 free
Web	belvedere.at facebook.com/belvedere21 X.com/belvedere21 instagram.com/belvedere21wien #WotrubaInternational

For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos, please visit belvedere.at/en/press.