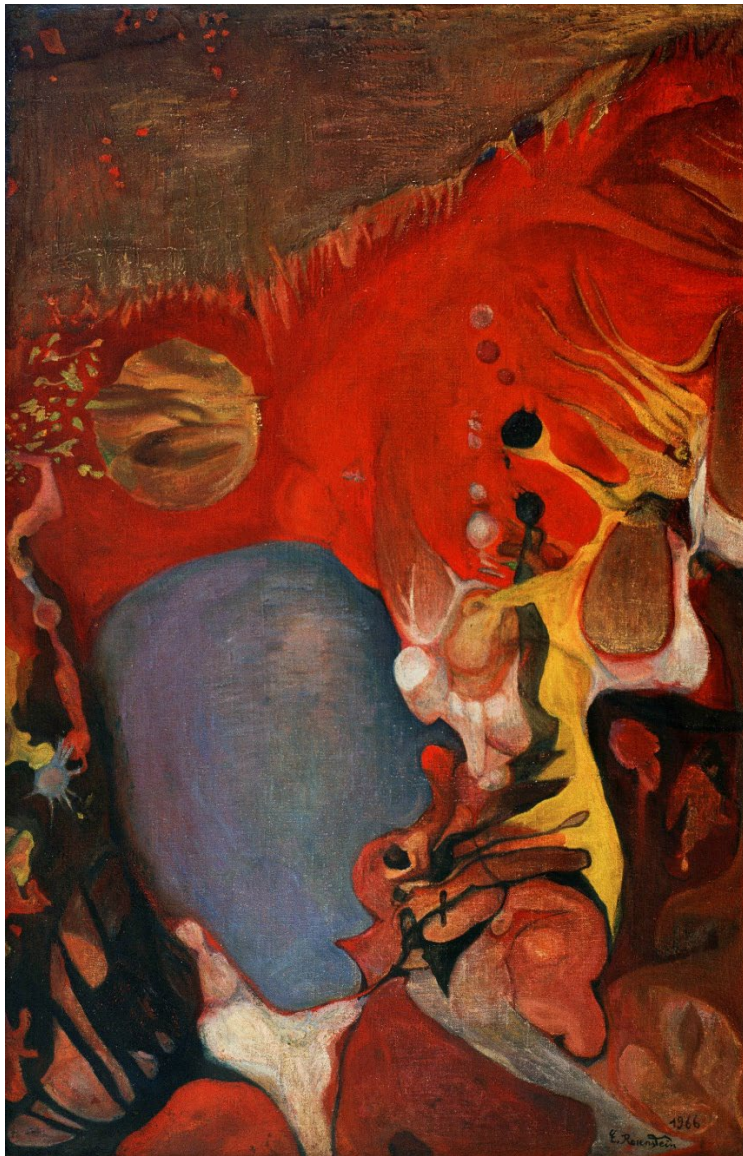


ERNA ROSENSTEIN
On the Other Side of Silence

Lower Belvedere
3 July 2026 to 10 January 2027



Erna Rosenstein, *The Burning of a Witch (Spalenie czarownicy)*, 1966
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For the first time in Austria, a major retrospective is paying tribute to Erna Rosenstein (1913–2004), a key figure of the postwar Polish avant-garde. Against the backdrop of the Shoah and political upheavals in Poland, her works bear witness to the resilience of an artist who never wavered in her political convictions and artistic ideals. In a career spanning six decades, Rosenstein developed a multimedia visual cosmos that reveals how the present interweaves with memories of the past, and how collective and individual experiences are intertwined.

Curated by Stephanie Auer.
Assistant Curator: Miroslav Halák

The exhibition

Rosenstein lived in Vienna for two years in the early 1930s where she studied at the Women's Academy, joined a communist youth organization, and witnessed the 1934 February uprising firsthand. None of the artist's works have survived from this period. They were lost or destroyed during the years of persecution in Nazi-occupied Poland.

After World War II, Rosenstein adopted an expressive visual language to articulate not only the collective experience of violence but also the question of complicity. She resisted the doctrine of Socialist Realism imposed during the Stalinist era in Poland and her art was instead guided by Surrealism and subjective experiences. One theme she kept revisiting over the decades was the brutal murder of her parents, which she explored as a form of remembering and processing. Rosenstein never abandoned figuration, even when biomorphic, abstract compositions began to characterize her visual language in the late 1950s.

Enigmatic and poetic work titles create space to explore memory, trauma, and personal narratives while also reflecting how for Rosenstein—as a painter and poet—word and image are closely intertwined. Her assemblages convey the

poetry of the everyday, bringing together found, used, and discarded objects to form unexpected and sometimes ironic constellations.

The approximately eighty works in the exhibition—paintings, drawings, assemblages, and poems—tell of persecution and flight, loss and grief while at the same time conveying the artist's resilience, artistic independence, and enduring commitment to renewal.

Biography

Erna Rosenstein, born in 1913 in Lviv in what is now Ukraine, joined the illegal organization International Red Aid (MOPR) while still attending school in Kraków. She studied at the Women's Academy in Vienna from 1932 to 1934, her parents hoping this would steer her away from political activism. However, Rosenstein remained politically active in Austria and after her return to Poland, where she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. During World War II and the occupation of Poland, the Jewish Rosenstein family faced persecution by the Nazis. Erna Rosenstein's parents were murdered in front of the artist while the family was trying to escape. Although wounded, she survived and spent the rest of the war in hiding, living under false identities. After the war, she traveled to Switzerland, Britain, and France in 1947/48. While in Paris, Rosenstein visited Surrealist exhibitions, and she also met her future husband, literary critic and translator Artur Sandauer. The couple settled in Warsaw in 1949. In the early 1950s, Rosenstein distanced herself from the official art world, opposing the doctrine of Socialist Realism and persisting with her Surrealist visual language. In postwar communist Poland, Rosenstein again faced waves of repression, culminating in the anti-Semitic campaign waged by the state in 1968. Yet the artist never left the communist party or went into exile, instead becoming one of the most important exponents of postwar art in Poland. A founding member of the second Kraków Group, which also included artists Tadeusz Kantor, Maria Jarema, and Tadeusz Brzozowski, Rosenstein contributed to major exhibitions of contemporary art both in Poland and abroad.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition	Erna Rosenstein: On the Other Side of Silence
Curator	Stephanie Auer
Assistant Curator	Miroslav Halák
Duration	3 July 2026 to 10 January 2027
Location	Lower Belvedere, Rennweg 6, 1030 Vienna
Opening Hours	Monday to Sunday, 10 am to 6 pm
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For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit www.belvedere.at/en/press