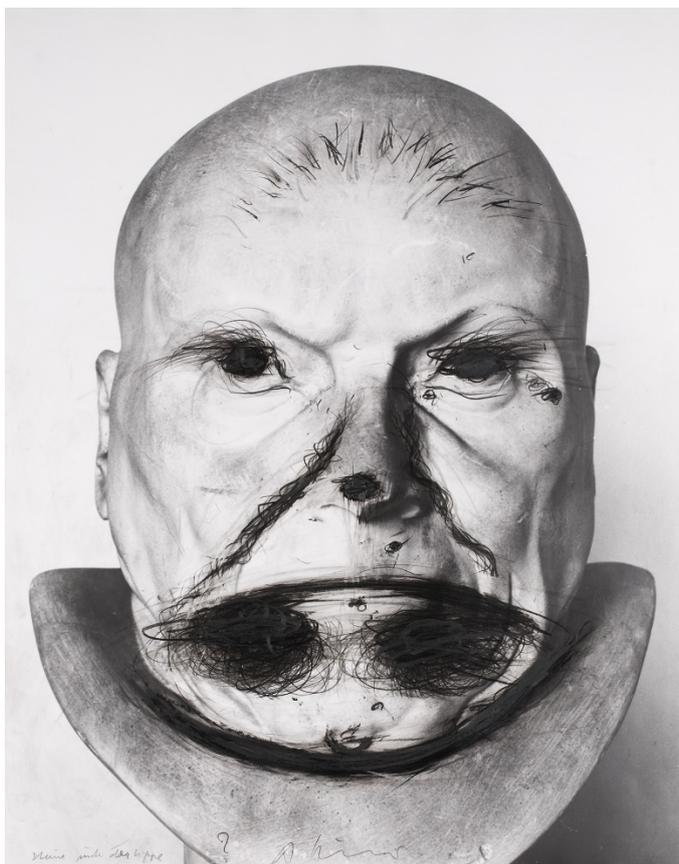


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TALKING HEADS
CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUES WITH
F. X. MESSERSCHMIDT

March 8 to August 18, 2019
Orangery, Lower Belvedere



Arnulf Rainer, Stones under the Lip, 1975-1976
© Belvedere, Vienna

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Anger, fear, disgust – depictions of extreme psychological states in Franz Xaver Messerschmidt's famous *Character Heads* remain an intriguing subject to this day. Using these Baroque masterpieces as a springboard, the exhibition focuses on the head as a motif in art. What does "headwork" in the works of Tony Oursler, Douglas Gordon, Arnulf Rainer, Maria Lassnig, and Bruce Nauman look like? And in the time of "Face"book, selfies, and the delusions of beauty what are the enduring qualities of the face aside from its mere surface?

At first glance, Messerschmidt's baroque sculptures appear notable for their analytical realism. They are indeed among the highlights of the Belvedere collection.

Artistic Director Stella Rollig: *"The powerful expression of each one of these heads has been for centuries – and continues to be – a captivating experience. Audiences love the bizarre representations, while artists are challenged by their psychological implications. What emerges is of astonishing topicality and diversity."*

The busts, arranged in a multimedia dialogue with ten contemporary artistic stances, are set in an eclectic exhibition environment. The artistic media on display range from painting and sculpture to film, video, and photography. The exhibition's structure puts Character Heads center stage: one wall shows nine of them as the focal point, with the others spread throughout the space. The title Talking Heads refers to the close connection between head/brain, language,

and image. The exhibition at the Belvedere raises categorical questions as to psyche, perception, and (self-)reflection. It is about the representation of distortions, transformations, and movements of mind beyond the mere surface of the face.

Exhibition curator Axel Köhne: *“The exhibition focuses on the head as an independent aesthetic motif and material. The artists often use their own heads here and work with them performatively. It’s all in the head!”*

The Head as a Motif

The head is the top part of our body. It serves as the administrative center of a human being, where stimuli, emotions, and opinions are processed and the activities of the rest of the body are controlled.

Franz Xaver Messerschmidt’s “head pieces,” approximately 69 in total and later known as “character heads,” emerged in the years 1770/71 to 1783, virtually at the beginning of modernism. It was no coincidence that they were made at the time of the burgeoning Enlightenment, when man began to reflect upon himself and question. The busts represent emotions to an almost caricatural level of exaggeration. Today, the Belvedere collection holds 16 of the artist’s famous sculptures, 12 of which will be on display in the exhibition. Juxtaposed are “brain works” of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The exhibition illustrates the type of topics in today’s art that are explored by works on one’s own head or that of another. A special focus is placed on the “dark side” of self-representation and the representation of another. The artists engage in direct and indirect dialogue with Messerschmidt. Arnulf Rainer and today Mara Mattuschka reference or rework the Messerschmidt heads on concrete terms. Alongside them, other original approaches are shown with the head as a motif. For example, Lutz Mommartz, who, in his cinematic portrait of the art

icon Joseph Beuys, works on the question of self-perception and that of the other. A further dichotomy, shown by Anna Artaker and Arnulf Rainer in the form of death masks, is the simultaneous presence and absence of man. Miriam Cahn reflects on the influence of violent incidents occurring in our present day with her radical head images. Tony Oursler, with his rather humorous head projections, casts the spoken and written word as human and theatrical forms of expression. Douglas Gordon and Bruce Nauman work with their own heads in their equally conceptual and radical video works.

In view of the current visual domination of the face itself in our society, this exhibition strikingly suggests that only through the accomplishments of the brain do we become thinking, speaking, and discerning individuals. The head is part of the human organism and, as such, is multidimensional in its output. The exhibition therefore consciously segregates the face and the head as motifs and presents contemporary versions of “talking heads.”

In addition to the 12 selections from *Character Heads* by Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, on view are some fifty works by Anna Artaker, Miriam Cahn, Douglas Gordon, Kurt Kren, Maria Lassnig, Mara Mattuschka, Lutz Mommartz, Bruce Nauman, Tony Oursler, and Arnulf Rainer.

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ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION

Anna Artaker

Miriam Cahn

Douglas Gordon

Kurt Kren

Maria Lassnig

Mara Mattuschka

Franz Xaver Messerschmidt

Lutz Mommartz

Bruce Nauman

Tony Oursler

Arnulf Rainer

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	Talking Heads. Contemporary Dialogues with F. X. Messerschmidt
Exhibition duration	8 March to 18 August, 2019
Venue	Orangery, Lower Belvedere
Exhibits	66
Curator	Axel Köhne
Curatorial Assistance	Vasilena Stoyanova
Exhibition Architecture	Gerhard Veigel
Exhibition Management	Tanja Angermann-Cekinmez
Exhibition Graphics	Monica Strinu
Exhibition Catalogue	<i>Talking Heads.</i> <i>Contemporary Dialogues with F. X. Messerschmidt</i> Editors: Stella Rollig, Axel Köhne Authors: Johanna Aufreiter, Axel Köhne, Georg Lechner, Bert Rebhandl, Stella Rollig, Judith Elisabeth Weiss Graphic design: Willi Schmid Verlag für Moderne Kunst 280 pages, 127 pictures; size: 16,8 × 23,5 cm, softcover German & English; ISBN 978-3-903114-70-8; EUR 34,-
Contact	Belvedere, Prinz Eugen-Straße 27, 1030 Vienna T +43 1 795 57-0 www.belvedere.at
Guided Tours	T + 43 1 795 57-134 M public@belvedere.at
Opening hours	daily 10am to 6pm Friday 10am to 9pm
Regular Entry	EUR 14,- (Lower Belvedere)

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Press Contact

Belvedere Press Office
Prinz Eugen-Straße 27, 1030 Vienna
T +43 1 795 57-177
M press@belvedere.at

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#TalkingHeads