

## COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE

### « 10 YEARS OF FRI-ART »

#### Etat des lieux #3

#### Robert Fleck

#### « Vivent et travaillent à Vienne »

Alexander Brener / Barbara Schurz - Wolfgang Capellari - Marlene Haring - Anna Jermolaewa  
Bady Minck - Ariane Müller - Muntean / Rosenblum  
Franz Pomassl (mit Richard Hoeck und Heimo Zobernig) - Octavian Trauttmansdorff

#### « Österreichische Exilregierung et d'autres documents »

(Otmar Bauer - Bünter Brus - Hermann Nitsch - Dieter Roth - Gerhard Rühm - Oswald Wiener - etc. 1969-1978)  
Aktions analytische Organisation (Otto Mühl, etc.) - Magna - Feminismus und Kreativität (Valie Export) - etc.

August 27 through October, 2000

Opening: Saturday 26 August at 5 p.m.

**FRI-ART Centre d'Art Contemporain - Kunsthalle - Petites-Rames 22 – CH 1700 Fribourg**

Tel. 026 323 23 51 – Fax 026 323 15 34 – [www.fri-art.ch](http://www.fri-art.ch)

Opening hours : Tues.-Fri. 2-6 p.m., Sat.-Sun.2-5 p.m., Thursday evenings 8-10 p.m.

It is a twofold challenge to commemorate the anniversary of Fri-Art by means both vibrant and meaningful. When Michel Ritter invited several guest curators to meet this challenge, he circumscribed one of its aspects more precisely: to define their view of what is most interesting in current art as freely as possible. In other words: to state what causes them to continue believing in art.

This, in consequence, is an exhibition that focuses on the "here and now". A further choice was to let the curators work without an "imposed subject", an uncommon approach for shows organised by guest curators. The considerable liberty generated by this concept would have remained abstract, or unjustified, if it had not tied in with a certain form of responsibility. And, though loath to use the word in overly solemn fashion, responsibility aptly expresses the second challenge that confronts the guest curator in this project.

What is the function of the present day art critic or curator? Certainly he may no longer claim to determine the future of art. Nor is the choice of a critic or curator a creative, or artistic, act in its own right. The apparently never ending debate on the "curator supplanting the artist" that originated in 1972 with the "documenta 5" (curated by Harald Szeeman), has to a large extent been bypassed or overtaken by the humility and pragmatism of the many free lance curators who have cropped up over the last ten years, profoundly influencing the artistic debate.

So, assuming that traditional functions and definitions no longer apply, what is the specificity of the critic or curator today? A possible answer might be that for the time being he or she is the only player on the art scene capable of linking, in a manner both pragmatic and committed, the following fundamental options: freedom of choice, responsibility towards the artist, extensive empirical knowledge. In spite of the pressures exerted by the media society, in spite of the clichés it transports, the free lance curator must uphold freedom of judgment at all cost - it represents his unique operational capital. Secondly, he is called upon to "defend" both the values and artists he is committed to, even when he does not share the latter's point of view, and to do so without giving up his independence. Loyalty continues to be crucial element in the relationship between curator and artist. Lastly, the critic or curator should be fully aware that his role is primarily an empirical one. Even when formulating a theory, he usually conceptualizes empirical observations supplied by the most innovative artists. It seems to me that it is this inductive method that distinguishes the critic or curator from the scientist. His role is neither deductive, nor normative; since the definitive downfall of the belief in a predetermined meaning to history he is no longer in a position to prescribe anything. This new position, on the other hand, both humble and empirical, consolidates the other options linked to his work - freedom of choice and responsibility towards artists.

This may seem like an overly elaborate justification for a temporary exhibition such as this one. But Michel Ritter's invitation of one year ago certainly implied reflecting and acting upon the above set of questions, and upon a supplementary one, to view: "What really is at stake when drawing up the program for an art center?" My initial reaction had been to propose an exhibition of painting. This concept, though apparently somewhat "out of time", might have offered some surprising revelations -

the marginal position occupied by painting on the current art scene sets free an experimental potential that is perhaps not sufficiently perceived by art show organizers.

However, a new government was voted into power in Austria February last. I shall not go into the political background and meaning of this event here; I have done so extensively on other occasions. But it set me to thinking that the anniversary of Fri-Art should now give rise to a tangible gesture directed at young Austrian artists, confronted as they are by circumstances that are in no way favorable to their reflection and work. At first, with the confusion and agitation that reigned in Austria throughout the spring, it seemed that a retrospective of the "Austrian Government in Exile", proclaimed between 1969 and 1978 by most of the protagonists of the Wiener Aktionismus, might offer an interesting metaphor for what is happening now. Since then, the situation of Austrian artists has become less dark. The most obvious and natural choice thus seemed to invite a certain number of the younger generation of artists, whose lives or careers are linked to Vienna, to take part in the show.

This is not a political exhibition. I consider the invited artists to be among the most promising of the many young talents I met in Vienna over the last years. Today, Austrian artists are less in need of new political declarations (important as these may be, and important as it is to uphold the ones that have been made to date) than of opportunities to show their work abroad, thus ensuring a greater measure of autonomy within their own country. The particularly heterogeneous group shown here bears witness to an extreme diversity and wealth of artistic expression on the Vienna scene in the 90s, born of an impressive creative effervescence often revolving around electronic music and the new autonomous structures it generated. For several reasons, it was hardly perceived abroad. Following a tradition that already characterized the Austrian avant-garde of the 60s and 70s, the artists in this show come from far-flung horizons that do not always mix: art criticism and town planning (Ariane Müller, who since 1995 lives principally in Berlin), experimental films (Bady Minck, a citizen of Luxembourg), painting outside the post-modernist discourse (Wolfgang Capellari, who has been commuting between Paris and Vienna for the past ten years), the management of an independent exhibition space and promotion of other Vienna artists as integral part of their work (Muntean/Rosenblum, who are soon moving to London), techno and electroacoustical music considered as a form of painting (Franz Pomassl), performance and new forms of public art (Marlene Haring), video testimonies of great simplicity and strength (Anna Jermolaewa, who left Russia for political reasons), a freely sociological and psychological art of considerable intensity (Octavian Trauttmansdorff). Certain of these were already important figures on the "young Viennese scene" in the early 90s: Ariane Müller, who co-founded the legendary "Art-Fan" fanzine with painter Linda Bilda, Wolfgang Capellari, an influential colleague for Pipilotti Rist at the Vienna School of Decorative Arts, Octavian Trauttmansdorff, one of the principal proponents of political art linked to the rediscovery of the French Situationist movement. Others have exhibited in major international venues: Franz Pomassl (Manifesta 2, 1998), Anna Jermolaewa (Venice Biennale 1999, Printemps de Cahors, 2000), Muntean/Rosenblum, whose work will be shown in the near future. Marlene Haring and Bady Minck (who has recently made a name for herself throughout Austria with the "Elektrofrühstück" or "electric breakfast" project, a "press commentary" project directed against the new government) bear witness to the vitality that informed the Vienna art scene until February and during the first months under the new government. To sum things up: art goes on, above all if the artists are present abroad, and fully independent of the public and political authorities.

Robert Fleck

There is no connection between this exhibition and the exhibition "*Lebt und arbeitet in Wien*" organised by the Kunsthalle Wien.

During the show, *La Cuisine* will be open every Thursday evening. Information and reservations : 026 323 23 51

**Thursday 5 October at 8 p.m.** : Guided visit of the exhibition with Michel Ritter, director of FRI-ART

**Sunday 8 October at 2:30 p.m.** : Creativity workshop for children with Françoise Emmenegger

**Coming exhibition : Etat des lieux # 4**, Prix fédéraux des beaux-arts 2000, Opening Saturday 4 November at 5 p.m.