

Press Release

## **SIGN LANGUAGE**

**Antunes | Bayrle | Brătescu | Castoro | Pichler**

Opening Tuesday, 9 February 2021, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.  
Exhibition Venue Central Space MAK DESIGN LAB  
MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna  
Exhibition Dates 10 February – 25 April 2021

The exhibition *SIGN LANGUAGE: Antunes | Bayrle | Brătescu | Castoro | Pichler* explores the manifold means of language from the perspective of visual arts. In literature, especially in poetry, language is given a poetic or musical order. The alphabet is a universal sign system for all languages and the development of script mirrors the stages of modern society, its revolutions, and ruptures. Written characters represent identities and, at the same time, digital technologies aim for universal imagery. 17 drawings, sculptures, and installations by internationally renowned artists Leonor Antunes, Thomas Bayrle, Geta Brătescu, Rosemarie Castoro, and Walter Pichler were purchased by the Austrian Ludwig Foundation for Art and Science and handed over to the MAK Contemporary Art Collection as permanent loans. Here, their individual (sign) language opens a space in the MAK exhibition for relationships, processes, and models.

A comprehensive series by Austrian artist Walter Pichler (1936–2012), which he developed over a time span of 40 years, takes up the bed as a sculptural form. The immanent tension between sculpture, body, and architecture characterized his oeuvre. In the exhibition *SIGN LANGUAGE*, the bed exemplifies Pichler's sculptural language which begins as an image or symbol. The starting point for the sculpture is a drawing which, autonomously, spans a narrative net. For example, a model from the series *Bett* [Bed] (2000) can be read as an interpretation of the Memento mori. A lying figure is dissolved according to the principles of architecture, the body consists of glass panels with sharp edges.

New York artist Rosemarie Castoro (1939–2015) developed her own artistic language between Minimal Art and conceptual art. Castoro was influenced by modern dance and collaborated with choreographer Yvonne Rainer. Her social circle included Carl Andre (married 1964–1970), Lawrence Weiner, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, and Agnes Martin. Castoro combined painting, performance, stage design, and sculpture, declaring herself a “paintersculptor.” In the MAK exhibition, she is represented by the installation *Land of*

*Lads* (1975), which is composed of numerous elements. The “Land of Lads,” as a counterpart to the female world, is built on permeable ground. Some ladders bend and stretch out like a row of young plants or trees. The artist playfully liberates herself and her generation from patriarchal patterns and creates a monument of fluid forms of gender.

Geta Brătescu (1926–2018), one of the most important protagonists of the Romanian art scene together with Ion Grigorescu and Ana Lupaș, can be seen with the installation *Didona* (2000). This work can be understood as a processual tactile drawing. Here, Brătescu interwove fragments and materials from other works. Black felt refers to the work *NO to Violence* from 1974. Mirror-like objects made of wood, aluminum, and velvet serve as symbolic tools in a ritual with feminist connotations. These objects are also displayed in the movie *The Studio* (1978), an action filmed by Grigorescu. Brătescu turned her studio into a stage for temporary installations. Besides her art making, she also worked as an illustrator and graphic designer for the culture magazine *Secolul 20*.

Portuguese artist Leonor Antunes (born 1972) portrays stories of the 20th century on art, architecture, and design in her sculptural works and installations. She examines questions of applied arts and artisanal production, traditional techniques, and the language of natural materials, such as wood, fabrics, leather, or metal. At the MAK, her two-part installation composed of the works *I stand like a mirror before you* (2015) and *discrepancies with F.K.* (2016), refers to a shop window designed by Friedrich Kiesler for the department store Saks Fifth Avenue in New York (1930). Antunes interprets the shop window as an experimental space. In the imaginary rhythm of artisanal materials, textures, and forms, she developed a model.

German illustrator, graphic artist, painter, and sculptor Thomas Bayrle (born 1937) investigates mechanisms of language, images, everyday objects, and creates ornaments of mass. In the exhibition *SIGN LANGUAGE*, he is represented by the sculpture *Objekt Singer* [Object Singer] (1999). The work made of cardboard with an integrated wooden display traces a network of highways, a synonym of political power. To Bayrle, the knot is a highway. The highway, which cuts through cities, landscapes, and continents, is the—questionable—symbol of modern civil society, progress, economy, ideology, nation—a world-wide flagship for politics in democracies as well as dictatorships, like once Germany and Austria during National Socialism when “the Autobahn” was declared a project.

The works presented in *SIGN LANGUAGE* enrich and expand the MAK Contemporary Art Collection, which places emphasis on international contemporary pieces of art with a special focus on Austrian artists. The collection, which has been compiled since 1986, is characterized by the contextual displacement of applied art, design, and architecture and their reflection in visual arts.

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](https://www.mak.at/en/press).

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Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–6 p.m. (until further notice) Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Curator	Bärbel Vischer, Curator, MAK Contemporary Art Collection
MAK Admission	€ 14 / Reduced € 11 / Family Ticket € 15 Free admission for children and teens under 19
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