

Mapping the 60s Art Histories from the mumok Collections

July 5, 2024, to May 10, 2026



Yoko Ono
Painting to Hammer a Nail, 1961/2005
34.9 cm x 26.6 cm x 11.4 cm
Iron nails, cloth, hammer, hairs, chain,
paint and acrylic lacquer on wood
mumok - Museum moderner Kunst
Stiftung Ludwig Wien, donation of the
artist, 2008
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The exhibition *Mapping the 60s* is based on the thought that substantial sociopolitical movements of the twenty-first century have their roots in the 1960s. Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, for example, have built on the anti-racist and feminist upheavals of yesteryear—as have current debates on war, mass media and mechanization, consumerism, and capitalism.

The developments of the 1960s in general and the events around 1968 in particular are not only paradigmatic in social and political terms, but also essential with regard to cultural policies. In 1962, the Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts was founded in Vienna, a precursor of mumok, whose collection focuses on Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme, Fluxus, Vienna Actionism, performance art, Conceptual Art, and Minimal Art—artistic movements of the 1960s. Even when we ask ourselves how to address art history today and make it productive, we encounter discussions that go back to that decade.

Concomitant with the sociopolitical shifts of the 1960s, theoreticians like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida developed a new understanding of history, historical knowledge, and historicity. Models of linearity and unbroken progression had become obsolete, and people recognized that historical works of art and concepts could not be transposed into the present without reservation or reflection.

Following these insights, *Mapping the 60s* attempts to create a selective cartography of the 1960s, moving away from a linear model of history toward a focus on specific discursive hubs and networks. The result is a deliberately fragmentary depiction of historical regularities, complexities, and contexts between individual events, artists, and works.

Seminal exhibition projects and publications (magazines, catalogs, and documents) from the 1960s are the departure point for this presentation of works from the mumok collection, expanded by permanent loans from the Austrian Ludwig Foundation. In addition to sketching specific contexts, they allow the show not only to do justice to the mediatization of the art of that period and to address new forms of presentation/representation but also to adequately confront the Foucauldian idea that historical events are always related to discourse.

This allows us to retrieve new or hitherto little-regarded correspondences, arguments, and discursive contexts from our collection holdings.

Selective aspects of the time can thus be highlighted like under a magnifying glass. Historical junctions become visible in which various sociopolitical concerns, aesthetic movements, and different approaches overlap and intersect in an exemplary fashion—simultaneously, in dialog, or even in conflict with each other.

Against the backdrop of a new war in Europe, continuing racist violence, gender inequality, and discrimination against minorities, the exhibition deliberately focuses on works from the collection that deal with these issues. However, it also grapples with the fact that in the 1960s the museum acquired very few works by women and that the important group exhibitions of the time were dominated by men—there were merely five women among the 150 participants at documenta 4 in 1968, and Harald Szeemann's groundbreaking presentation *When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969 only managed to show three works by women. We cannot let that stand anymore. Along with the historical constellations in the mumok collection, magazines, and exhibitions, *Mapping the 60s* highlights historical positions of women that were overlooked at the time but managed to be included in the collections in recent years. The few originally presented works by women will be given a special place.

The first part of the collection exhibition can be viewed on levels -2 and -3. This section focuses on mumok's history in the 1960s, on Pop Art as its most broadly received movement, on seminal international exhibitions, and on the significance of the founding of international art magazines. The second part of the exhibition on level -4 focuses on Fluxus, Nouveau Réalisme, Happening and Actionism in Vienna and in an international context.

– Collaboration, exchange, and new forms of presenting art were the focus of *Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS)* in London in 1966, in which more than one hundred international artists, writers, and scientists participated—among them leading figures of Fluxus, Happening, and Actionism. The DIAS allowed Viennese Actionists to discuss and contextualize their works on an international level for the first time.

– With Fluxus and Nouveau Réalisme, two art movements evolved in the United States and Europe at the beginning of the 1960s that were programmatically engaged in collective contexts. In ever-changing formations, the members of these neo-avant-garde movements worked on ways to expand the idea of art in terms of material, media, and participation.

– In Fluxus, experimental performances in which visual art, literature, and music blended into new forms of expression (especially Nam June Paik, for instance in *Klavier Intégral*, 1958–1963) were as much part of the package as collective and collaborative exhibitions, publications, and editions that served as models for future generations of artists and spheres of artistic action.

– Daniel Spoerri's "Suitcase" from 1961 may be regarded as a miniature exhibition of Nouveau Réalisme. Almost all main figures of this movement are included with small works that represent the artistic strategies of this period.

Mapping the 60s crystallizes around the following pioneering exhibition projects and publications:

Publications

– *ASPEN. The Multimedia Magazine in a Box*, 1965–1971, is regarded as the first three-dimensional magazine. Each issue was shipped in a uniquely designed box or folder filled with materials of different formats: brochures, Flexi-disc audio recordings, posters, postcards, and Super 8 cartridges. Many important art critics were involved in ASPEN as editors, designers, or contributors.

– Another magazine that led the way for mumok was *1 Cent Life*, 1964, a portfolio that included 62 lithographs by artists of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art as well as 62 poems by the Chinese American artist Walasse Ting. The publication's title alludes to the progressing commercialization of art and society.

– *Interfunktionen*, a West German art and theory magazine founded in 1968, is still regarded as a pioneering platform for 1960s and 1970s art in Europe. It was created as a protest medium against the orientation of *documenta 4*, which artists and theorists labeled apolitical, beholden to the market, and conservative—among other things—because art movements like Fluxus and Happening as well as European exponents of the time were not adequately represented.

Exhibitions

– *Live in Your Head – When Attitudes Become Form. Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969, curated by Harald Szeemann, subsequent stops in Krefeld and London): Although this exhibition also focused primarily on American and Western European artists, it highlighted the development of open, processual forms of production and presentation.

– Discourses about consumerism and commodification govern the way *documenta 4* was received in 1968. This fourth edition, which showed numerous works of American Pop Art, drew crowds and thus awarded the format the status of a world art exhibition.

– Additionally, *Mapping the 60s* focuses on a critical approach to the history of exhibition-making and the concomitant acquisition policies of mumok in the 1960s.

Curated by Manuela Ammer, Marianne Dobner, Heike Eipeldauer, Naoko Kaltschmidt, Matthias Michalka, Franz Thalmair

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