

March 28, 2025 to April 12, 2026

Press conference

Wednesday, March 26, 2025, 10 am

Opening

Thursday, March 27, 2025, 7 pm



Maria Lassnig
Fliegen lernen / Learning to Fly, 1976
 177 x 127 cm
 Tempera on canvas
 mumok – Museum moderner Kunst
 Stiftung Ludwig Wien, acquired in 1980
 © Bildrecht, Wien 2024

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Never Final! The Museum in Change

April 26, 1979, marked a touchstone for what today is mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, namely the expansion of the collections of the former 20er Haus by extensive and art-historically significant permanent loans from the Aachen-based collector couple Peter and Irene Ludwig. It was a substantive addition that also brought with it an expansion of the museum's exhibition spaces. 20er Haus was joined by the Museum moderner Kunst, which opened at Palais Liechtenstein. With this expansion, the intense networking efforts of Künstlerhaus president Hans Mayr since the mid-1970s and the strategic diplomacy of Hermann Fillitz (professor of art history at the University of Vienna) bore cultural-political fruit. The close to 200 loans were not only a boon to the extant holdings but introduced new thematic focal points to the collection. Works of Pop Art and Photorealism entered the building, which were yet again boosted by the acquisition of the Wolfgang Hahn collection and its focus on Nouveau Réalisme.

1981 saw another giant leap with the establishment of the Austrian Ludwig Foundation by then-Minister of Science Hertha Firnberg and the Ludwigs. A major portion of what constituted the loans at the time became the property of the foundation and could thus be anchored in the collection as permanent loans. In return, the Republic of Austria committed to making an annual index-linked payment to the foundation, enabling it to acquire important works of art in the future, the value of which far exceeded the internal acquisition budget.

This exhibition is dedicated to the genesis of the Museum moderner Kunst and the way the institution changed at the time of Dieter Ronte at its helm (from 1979 to 1989). Against the backdrop of the multilayered pluralism of the 1980s, it attempts to provide an interpretive overview of the historical and cultural-political parameters of the time, while considering the programmatic decisions in the exhibitions, events, and collection expansions of that decade. It was during this period that the museum laid the groundwork for collaborations with collectors (Gertraud and Dieter Bogner), was actively involved sociopolitical matters (artistic freedom), and engaged in fundamental research for projects that manifested in the years to come (Hermann Nitsch, Rudolf Schwarzkogler).

Ronte's term saw essential exhibitions by artists who emigrated from Austria (Oskar Kokoschka, 1982, Richard Neutra, 1983, Erika Giovanna Kliem, 1987, and Friedrich Kiesler, 1988) as well as important solo exhibitions (Arnulf Rainer, 1981, Christian Ludwig Attersee, 1982, Maria Lassnig, 1985, Kurt Kocherscheidt, 1986, Gerhard Richter, 1986, and Hermann Nitsch, 1989).

The themed exhibitions of the 1980s that illustrated the important trends of the time included *Monte Verità* (1979), *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* (1983), *Einfach gute Malerei* (1983), *Der Traum vom Raum* (1984), *Kunst mit Eigensinn* (1985), and *Hommage – Demontage* (1989). The collection expansions comprised the aforementioned permanent loans as well as acquisitions made by the Austrian

Ludwig Foundation since its founding, including the early handwritten scores for Hermann Nitsch's *Orgies Mysteries Theater*, the comprehensive Nachlass of the collection of Rudolf Schwarzkogler as well as acquisitions of works by Constantin Brâncuși, Giorgio de Chirico, and Jean Fautrier or work groups by Austrian artists such as Maria Lassnig, Josef Mikl, Markus Prachensky, and Arnulf Rainer.

The title of the exhibition *Never Final!* is programmatic and goes back to the cultural-political ambitions of Hertha Firnberg. As the minister stated in 1979, the mumok was “never final” and was to remain in constant flux. This vision has governed our work here at mumok to this day and is also mirrored in this exhibition's concept. Instead of relying on a representative exhibition architecture, interactive furniture will serve as workshops and dialogue spaces. The museum becomes a place in which art not only takes on a communicative role but can be investigated and challenged in the company of others.

Visitors will therefore encounter an open exhibition format in which the museum practice and everything it encompasses can be understood as relationship work—as a platform for joint research, learning, and experience.

The exhibition *Never Final!* is part of a series of presentations that revisit the museum's collection policies since its beginnings, making them accessible to a broad public. Following exhibitions on the founding director Werner Hofmann (1962–1969) and the era of Alfred Schmeller (1969–1979), the current exhibition is now dedicated to the directorial work of Dieter Ronte (1979–1989).

Curated by Marie-Therese Hochwartner