

Future of Melancholia

8.3. – 4.5.2025

Opening: 6.3.2025, 6 pm

Gallery-Legacy of Milica Zorić & Rodoljub
Čolaković, Museum of Contemporary Art
Rodoljuba Čolakovića 2, 11000 Belgrade

Kamilla Bischof, Flora Hauser, Katharina Höglinger, Ernst Yohji
Jaeger, Nanna Kaiser, Matthias Noggler, Maruša Sagadin, Anna
Schachinger, Klaus Schuster, Lisa Slawitz, Susanne Wenger

Cooperation: Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade (MoCAB),
HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark (HK Styria)

Press talk: 6.3.2025, 5 pm

Artist talk: 8.3.2025, 12 pm

Curator: Sandro Droschl; coordinating curator: Miroslav Karić

The exhibition *Future of Melancholia* in the Gallery-Legacy of MoCAB presents works by the Graz surrealism pioneer Susanne Wenger, who was also represented at the 60th Venice Biennale, and a further selection of outstanding Austrian artists whose often neo-surrealist works partly draw on the legacy of Wenger.

The Gallery-Legacy, run by Milica Zorić & Rodoljub Čolaković, is an exhibition venue in a in a high-class quarter in the outer suburbs of Belgrade. It was built in 1936 and 1937 as a two-story family villa with designed outdoor area in the style of 1930s modernism. Between 2007 and 2010, this former home of artist Milica Zorić and the Yugoslav politician, and writer Rodoljub Čolaković was redesigned and renovated, and since its reopening it has been part of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade. Zoran Radojčić, the architect responsible for the new design of the building, was inspired by so-called white architecture, with the result that the exhibition galleries align to the style of the white cube.

In the ground floor two groups of works by Austrian artist Susanne Wenger are on show. Wenger was born in 1915 in Graz. The works presented in Belgrade are formally particularly interesting, and derive from two different periods, with a group of pencil drawings entitled *Traumgesichte* (Dream Visions) (1943/44), depicting mainly hybrid human-animal creatures or anthropomorphic animals, and her series entitled *Icons of Great Sadness*, oil paintings from the 1990s with surreal melancholic designs, showing fantastic worlds and often using nearly geometrical shapes as well as ghostly figures that are enclosed in special iron frames. Wenger is a master of speculative fabulation, oscillating between earnest and humor, creating fantastic worlds that offer aesthetic solutions to skepticism toward modernism and the world as we know it, and engendering both positive and negative emotions.

In the first and second stories of the villa works by selected contemporary Austrian artists are presented. In dialogue with Susanne Wenger they provide multiple perspectives on the themes of melancholy and nostalgia, and open up a view into apparent inner worlds. They all develop their very own narratives, but they share the courage to go new ways. The artistic approaches shown in this exhibition can be seen as a reaction to current global populist developments and thus as a withdrawal into the private sphere and a form of introspection. These works are visualizations of sensations and emotions, and they are dreamy and future-looking motifs in turbulent times.

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Maruša Sagadins creates humorous artistic interventions consisting of fantastic and subversive furniture designs of ambivalent and melancholic character that are spread throughout the villa as if they belonged to it. Flora Hauser's work, created in the finest textile handicraft is dream-like and fantastic, with references to *Art Nouveau* and an interest in supernatural creatures, unfolding in epic and endless form that seems timeless, while the work of Kamilla Bischof is poetic and surreal with its permanent alternations of figure and background on the theme of a trip with a motor scooter. Anna Schachinger's large paintings with their sketchy bodies and figures, some of which have several faces, use narrative overlapping to create cycles of tension and release that are symptomatic of our time. Klaus Schuster's spaces and figures, by contrast, appear almost ghostly and very much abandoned. His works are narrative and melancholic in nature and draw on questions from the theory of perception and negotiate the duality of absence and visibility. Similar to Wenger, but with a different stylistic approach, Lisa Slawitz paints amiable fabulous creatures, often in outsized dimensions, onto textiles and canvases, showing situations in which something is happening to her protagonists. Katharina Höglinger's abstract faces seem to be fully at home in the abstract worlds they inhabit, asking anew as to a fundamental idea of truth. Ernst Yohji Jaeger's paintings of androgynous figures that seem to be prisoners in their own inner worlds not only communicate a sense of loneliness and the beyond but also are inspired equally by Western and Far-Eastern iconography, drawing on motifs of vanitas. Nanna Kaiser, by contrast, inscribes herself in her painting into the interiors of automobile brands such as Porsche and BMW and thereby not only challenges convention but also the psychological stigma of capitalism and its catastrophic effects. Finally, Matthias Noggler presents a perspective toward a more open future that unfolds in infinite connected layers from an abstract geometrical idiom that also develops figurative elements. Allegories of the surreal and nostalgia here seem to be a way out of oppressive emotional states, paving the way for a better future. For although the future may seem to be a confused matter to us, hardly predictable due to all the acceleration in digitalization and mobility and the political state of the world, positive artistic visions of a better future know no limits. We see artistic trends that connect across borders with other artists, making contact, and contributing to supranational and multilateral dialogue on European and international levels, all of which can be considered almost an avant-garde not only in terms of art but also politically.

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