

Maria Lassnig
WACH BLEIBEN
STAYING ALERT

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Wo entsteht das Bild? Was wird sichtbar und auf welche Weise? Bei den unterschiedlichen Arten der Sinneserweiterung – durch die Fotografie oder Science-Fiction-Sehbrillen – bleibt offen, ob sie in der Lage sind, auch unsere Perspektive zu erweitern. Sprechen die Science-Fiction-Sehbrillen wie in *Kleines Sciencefiction-Selbstporträt* (1995) vom Eintauchen in digitale Welten? So würde sich dort ohnehin die Frage nach den Körperempfindungen neu stellen.

Maria Lassnigs Werke lassen fragend zurück, weil sie uns, neben der Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Sprachen und Lesarten, auch auf uns selbst zurückwerfen und an unsere Selbstwahrnehmung appellieren. Auf geradezu visionäre Art und Weise machen sie die Zerrissenheit unserer sich grundlegend verändernden Körperempfindungen und Körperdarstellungen im beginnenden 21. Jahrhundert sichtbar. Maria Lassnig hat paradoxerweise, obgleich sie sich intensiv auf ihr Selbst konzentrierte, weit über das individuelle Sein hinausgehende Bilder von existenzieller Bedeutung geschaffen.

Introduction to the Exhibition

Stefanie Kreuzer

"I prefer to contradict myself rather than to repeat myself."¹
Maria Lassnig

With this self-confident and deliberately provocative statement once made by Maria Lassnig, viewers are catapulted right to the heart of her lifelong, existentially conducted, artistic investigation. Engaged in clear-eyed reflection through both language and pictures, Lassnig created an oeuvre which, with its extreme independence, dissected the artistic discourse prevailing at various times over the years and simultaneously exposed her own feelings unabashedly. It is in this sense that the exhibition title *Staying Alert* is to be understood; it not only means a "not becoming tired" on the physical level, but also holds in readiness a variety of further readings. Lassnig's constantly searching, deeply creative investigation of the theme of (self-)perception, accomplished in painting and drawing, in language and in film, conveys an insight that the artist intended to make things comfortable neither for herself nor for us, that not only the process in which the works were created but also their reception ignites an intellectual and emotional spectacle resembling flying sparks.

Staying Alert suggests a movement which, in Maria Lassnig's biography, not only leads to concrete changes of place from her home town to Klagenfurt, then to Vienna, from Vienna to Paris, from Paris to New York, from New York to Berlin and back again, then finally once again to Vienna and Carinthia, but at the same time also constitutes an intellectual progression which, in her pictures as well as in her written records, the artist brought to light with incredible energy during many decades of her life through her notes, her paintings, and her drawings. Maria Lassnig's perceptual experiences did not limit themselves to the sensory organ of the eye—especially because it sometimes risks much, as is not only indicated by the title of the work, *Auge in Gefahr* (*Eye in Danger*, 1993), but is also made clear by the voracious being depicted in this picture.

Delicate and simultaneously drastic observations of herself, her body, and also her relations to "Others" made their way into the world of her subject. Paradoxically, painting with her eyes closed was one of the actions which she practiced in order to render these observations visible. Inasmuch as her entire body advanced to the status of a perceptual organ, it was simultaneously obligated to guarantee the authenticity of the experience. Perhaps in the sense of Roland Barthes, who, in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* wrote about this immediacy of the body:

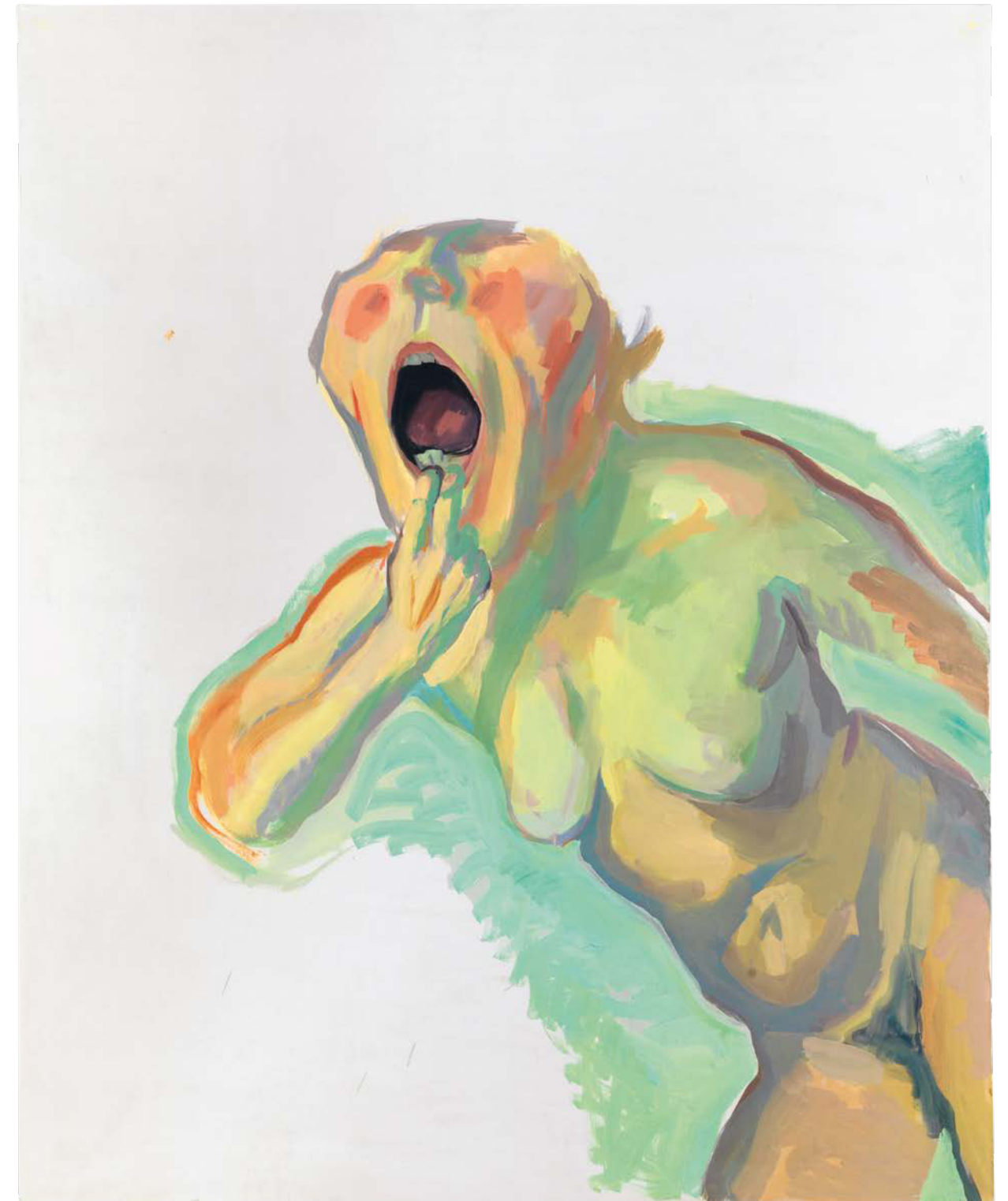
"I can do everything with my language, but not with my body. What I conceal with my language is uttered by my body. I can arrange my verbal message at will, but not my voice. [...] My body is a stubborn child, my language an extremely cultivated adult..."²

¹ Lettner, Natalie, *Maria Lassnig. Die Biografie* (Vienna, 2017), p. 162.

² Barthes, Roland, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. German *Fragments einer Sprache der Liebe* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), p. 229.



Füße / Feet, 1987–89 Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas 200 × 140 cm



Sprechzwang / Compulsion to Speak, 1980 Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas 160 × 130 cm



Augenläserselbstporträt / Self-Portrait with Eyeglasses, 1967 Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas 75 × 115 cm

Acknowledgements

Maria Lassnig's oeuvre, which focuses on the visualization of her body sensations in radical and mercilessly revealing self-portraits, on questions of relationships to other persons, on language and speechlessness, and on a reflection about media-conveyed perception, is more relevant today than ever before—not only with respect to our experiences during the pandemic, but also because her works speak about our existence on quite a fundamental level.

Hence, we are extremely pleased to have been able to realize this exhibition, featuring approximately forty works by the artist, with extensive support and expert advice from the Maria Lassnig Foundation. First and foremost, we would like to offer an emphatic expression of gratitude to Peter Pakesch, the chairman of the Maria Lassnig Foundation, as well as to Johanna Ortner and to Hans Werner Poschauko, without whose support it would not have been possible to accomplish the exhibition project, as well as the catalogue, in this form. Many collectors and institutions have made their deeply cherished works available for this exhibition. We offer our heartfelt thanks to the Collection de Bruin-Heijn, the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, Sammlung KiCo, and the Maria Lassnig Foundation, along with all the private collectors who prefer not to be named, for their remarkable and reliable support of our project.

We are deeply grateful to the authors of the catalog for the fresh insights that they have contributed with regard to the oeuvre of the artist. Siri Hustvedt and Michael Hagner, along with Stefanie Kreuzer as the curator of the exhibition, have made various perspectives onto the artist's works the focus of their respective essays, thereby initiating an intense discourse about Lassnig's artistic creations. The structure of the book is based on five thematic spaces: Self-portrait, Multiple Selves, Re-lations, Language, Photography against Painting. The curatorial concept underlying the exhibition comes to light in the layout of the book. We would like to thank Petra Hollenbach for the graphic design of the publication, with its excellent highlighting of the individual works through clear and vivid settings.

The present catalog and the exhibition have received generous support from the Kunststiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen as well as the Stiftung Kunst of the Sparkasse Bonn. We are extremely appreciative with regard to this unstinting support.

Finally, I would like to express my special thanks to Stefanie Kreuzer, who, with consummate mastery, guided this thoroughly challenging project past various trials and tribulations to a successful conclusion. I likewise salute our colleagues from all sections of the Kunstmuseum Bonn, without whose enthusiastic commitment the exhibition would never have seen the light of day.

Stephan Berg
Director, Kunstmuseum Bonn

