

Ultimately, what the Viennese Actionists suffered from in the midst of this morass that was so blind to possibility was a hunger for utopias; their cases showed, as did the criminal trials against Brus, Muehl, and Nitsch, that dreams were chased by few, but dreamers by many. But Brus kept dreaming on his dream, which is why this is not an obituary for a man still living, but a call to confront oneself with the unbroken topicality of this artist who holds such a central position in modern Austrian art. Whoever confines Brus – by trade an advanced action artist, book illustrator, “image poet”, draftsman, painter, stage and costume designer, language artist, and “rarely heard” musician – to the umbrella notion of “Viennese Actionism” downgrades his multifaceted oeuvre, which is made for ever-new discoveries and for being discovered ever anew.

Our house feels deeply attached to Brus and Viennese Actionism, for which the body of works exhibited here as well as a number of decisive previous MAK exhibitions bear clear evidence, among them “Aktionismus – Aktionsmalerei. Wien 1960–1965” (1989), “out of actions. Aktionismus, Body Art & Performance 1949–1979” and “Otto Muehl. 7” (1998), or “Otto Muehl. Life, Art, Work. Action, Utopia, Painting 1960–2004” (2004). Programmatically, the MAK’s notion of art also falls back on modern avant-garde movements: art, as the MAK sees it, intervenes into, and experiments against that which exists, a revolution in permanence and a utopia in action; never sworn in on the status quo, art manifests an uncompromising all-out deconstruction of customary practices and discourses.

Featuring yet little known individual works and “image poems” from the late 1970s and early 1980s, the MAK exhibition entitled “Midnight dawn” now presents another, equally important aspect of the artist, the “post-Actionist” Brus, so to speak. And yet: Brus will be Brus; here again, he dips his powerful pen into critical spirit. If I had to come up with a concise characterization of these frequently cyclical, allusive, symbol-loaded, expressively colorful, excessively fantastic, subtle and strong, oblique and opaque “image poems” I would call them “explosive”. What Brus sets off here is creative fireworks of thoughts, associations, emotions, etc. His ingenious “image poems” of handwritten and hand-drawn elements dock the real to the imaginary, shifting perspectives, making the invisible sayable and the unsayable visible – they are “illuminated” thought and thinking vision.

- 1 See his regular column and drawings in “Datum” magazine.
- 2 André Breton: “Second Manifesto of Surrealism” (1930), in: “Manifestoes of Surrealism”, transl. from the French by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 131.
- 3 Action “Art and Revolution”, University of Vienna, 1968.