
THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN



KATHLEEN RYAN: *BACCHANTE*

**APRIL 26 TO
OCTOBER 1, 2017**

Continuing our series of contemporary art exhibitions at the Theseus Temple, this year we are presenting *Bacchante*, a new commission by the young American sculptor Kathleen Ryan. This is Ryan's first museum exhibition. It is curated by Jasper Sharp, and generously supported by the Contemporary Patrons of the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

BACCHANTE

A cascade of bursting ripe, oversized grapes tumbles to the floor. Tethered by raw stainless steel chains and cast in polished concrete with a buoyancy that seems to defy the material, they are draped over a terracotta cushion and laid on a stone mattress. The work's title, *Bacchante*, points us away from the inanimate towards something more human, a female follower of Bacchus (Greek: Dionysus), the riotous, drunken Greek and Roman god of wine,

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freedom and ecstasy. Lying here in a temple, the sculpture is many things at once: playful and sensual, emancipated and restrained, ideal and blasphemous. The work draws on a visual vocabulary anchored in the history of art, from the voluptuous, overtly sexualized femininity of the Venus of Willendorf to the myths and iconography of Ancient Greece and the painted still lifes of Caravaggio. It manages to remain both resolutely classical and a contemporary provocation.

BIOGRAPHY

KATHLEEN RYAN

Kathleen Ryan was born in Santa Monica, California, in 1984. She studied archaeology and art as an undergraduate at Pitzer College, and graduated in 2014 from the prestigious Master of Fine Arts programme at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). Her teachers there included the artists Charles Ray and Catherine Opie. She has had solo exhibitions at Josh Lilley, London, and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, and was selected for the Frieze Sculpture Park in London and the 71st Scripps Ceramics Annual, the longest continuous exhibition of ceramics in the United States. Ryan currently lives and works between Los Angeles and New York.

CONTEMPORARY ART

AT THE THESEUS TEMPLE

Beginning in 2012, the Kunsthistorisches Museum initiated a new series of exhibitions within the Temple, a neo-classical structure built by court architect Peter von Nobile in 1823 to be the home for a single work of then-contemporary art: Antonio Canova's white marble masterpiece *Theseus Slaying the Centaur*. For almost seventy years, this artwork stood alone inside the building, until in 1891 it was moved to the newly-completed Kunsthistorisches Museum where it still stands today. More than a century later, these exhibitions have returned the Temple to its original purpose: to house remarkable artworks by contemporary artists, one at a time.

Artists who have previously exhibited at the Theseus Temple include Ugo Rondinone (2012), Kris Martin (2012), Richard Wright (2013), Edmund de Waal (2014), Susan Philipsz (2015) and Ron Mueck (2016).

HISTORY OF THE THESEUS TEMPLE

Pietro Nobile (1774–1854, Vienna's foremost Neo-Classical architect) designed the Theseus Temple in 1819–1823 for Emperor Francis I as part of the new layout of the Volksgarten. These major building works were necessary because the French army had razed the city's fortifications in front of the imperial palace when they withdrew from Vienna in 1809. Initially

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devised as a private park for members of the imperial family, it was later opened to the public, becoming the first imperial public park. Since 1825 it is known as “Volksgarten” (people’s park).

The Theseus Temple, a neo-classical copy of the Theseion in Athens, was conceived to house a single contemporary artwork: Antonio Canova’s celebrated *Theseus Slaying the Centaur*, a seminal neo-classical group. Antonio Canova (1757–1822, a leading representative of Italian neo-classical sculpture) is also credited with devising this unusual building. In 1890, Theseus was moved to the main staircase of the newly built Kunsthistorisches Museum, where it remains today.

The crypt beneath the Theseus Temple was accessed from a no longer extant sarcophagus-shaped side entrance; it initially housed part of the imperial Collection of Antiquities. From 1901, finds from Ephesus were shown in the temple’s cella (i.e., the inner sanctum); today they are displayed in the Ephesus Museum in the Neue Burg. Later the cella served as a venue for art exhibitions staged by the Academy of Fine Arts and, from 1992, by the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Totally refurbished in 2008–2011 in collaboration with the Bundesdenkmalamt, the facades of the Theseus Temple are once again painted with a dazzling polished lead-white. The newly installed electric lighting has turned the Theseus Temple into an elegant highlight of the nighttime skyline comprising the impressive Hofburg complex and grand buildings along the Ringstrasse. In the winter of 2014/15, the coffered ceiling of the Theseus Temple was extensively restored and thus returned to its original state.

The bronze statue *Young Athlete* (1921) in front of the Theseus Temple is by Josef Müller.

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PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Press photographs are available in the press section of our website at <http://press.khm.at> free of charge, for your topical reporting:



Kathleen Ryan: *Bacchante*

2017

Concrete, stainless steel, glazed terracotta, marble
Courtesy the artist and Josh Lilley, London

© Photo: KHM-Museumsverband



Kathleen Ryan: *Bacchante* (Detail)

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Kathleen Ryan

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Theseus Temple

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Theseus Temple

Illuminated by night

© KHM-Museumsverband

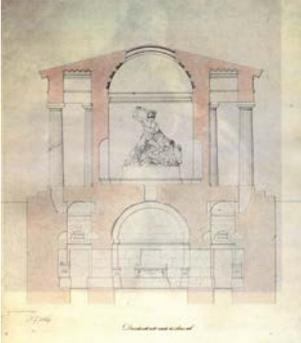


Restored ceiling of the Theseus Temple

2015

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Theseus Temple, cross section
Drawing by Karl Schmidt (1825)
after the design by Pietro Nobile (1820)
Vienna, Albertina, Architektursammlung
© Vienna, Albertina



Antonia Canova
Theseus Slaying the Centaur (1804–1819)
The statue at its original location in the Theseus Temple
Vienna, ÖNB, Picture Archive
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