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# THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN

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APRIL 25 TO  
OCTOBER 6, 2019

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MAURIZIO CATTELAN

Continuing our series of contemporary art exhibitions at the Theseus Temple, this year we present a single work by the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan.

A flock of pigeons is perched high up on the decorative cornice of an empty room. Sitting alone or in small groups, they appear to observe the visitors below, sharing their bemusement at the situation everyone finds themselves in. After some time, we realize that they are not in fact alive.

The fifteen taxidermied birds are a work of art by the artist Maurizio Cattelan. Born in Padua, Italy, in 1960, Cattelan is one of the most well-known and provocative artists of our time. His humorous and satirical sculptures – from *La Nona Ora* (1999), a wax replica of Pope John Paul II struck by a meteorite, to *Him* (2001), a life-like mannequin of Adolf Hitler as a small boy at prayer – invariably

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generate both controversy and debate. Like a court jester of the past, Cattelan employs irreverence and absurdity in order to question and undermine social conventions and hierarchies.

More than twenty years ago, Cattelan was invited by curator Germano Celant to participate in the main exhibition of the 1997 Venice Biennale. "I had gone to see the pavilion in Venice about a month before the opening," he later recalled. "The inside was a shambles and it was filled, really filled, with pigeons. For me as an Italian, it was like seeing something you're not supposed to see, like the dressing room of the Pope. But then again, that is the situation in Venice, so I thought I should just present it as it is, a normal situation."

The artwork's title, *Turisti* (Tourists), is a humorous and pointed reference to the hordes of visitors to the city of Venice and its Biennale, whose number is rivalled only by that of the city's population of pigeons. Looking down on the empty space once occupied by the colossal marble sculpture *Theseus Slaying the Centaur* of Antonio Canova (a countryman of Cattelan's, born in a nearby town some two hundred years earlier), it alludes to the passing of time, the de-monumentalization of art, and invites us to question our own relationship with the city, its buildings and green spaces. Who, we might ask, are the actual tourists among us?

The work on exhibition belongs to the Collezione Prada and was selected in collaboration with it. The Kunsthistorisches Museum has also partnered with Fondazione Prada, Milan, to conceive the exhibition *Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and Other Treasures*, curated by filmmaker Wes Anderson and writer and illustrator Juman Malouf, which will be presented in Milan in September 2019 following its presentation in Vienna (on view until 28 April).

Maurizio Cattelan lives and works in Milan and New York, and declared his retirement from art in 2011. The exhibition is curated by Jasper Sharp with the support of the Contemporary Patrons of the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

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## CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE THESEUS TEMPLE

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Beginning in 2012, the Kunsthistorisches Museum initiated a new series of exhibitions within the Temple, a neo-classical structure built by court architect Pietro 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 1890 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), Ron Mueck (2016), Kathleen Ryan (2017) and Felix Gonzalez-Torres (2018).

## HISTORY OF THE THESEUS TEMPLE

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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 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

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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

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



Maurizio Cattelan  
**Turisti**  
1997, detail  
Collezione Prada, Milan  
© Maurizio Cattelan  
Photo: KHM-Museumsverband



Maurizio Cattelan  
**Turisti**  
1997, detail  
Collezione Prada, Milan  
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Photo: KHM-Museumsverband



**Theseus Temple**  
© KHM-Museumsverband

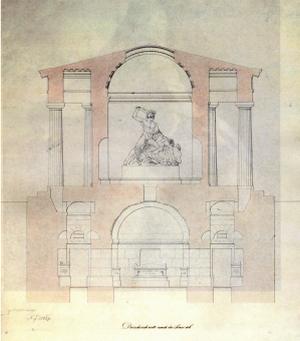


**Theseus Temple**  
Illuminated by night  
© KHM-Museumsverband

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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  
© Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

## OPENING HOURS

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April to October  
Daily 11am – 6pm

Opening Hours Volksgarten  
April 1 – October 31, 6am – 10pm

## PRESS CONTACT

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