
THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN



3 MAY TO
3 OCTOBER 2021

SUSANNA FRITSCHER

Continuing our series of contemporary art exhibitions at the Theseus Temple, this year we present an immersive environment by artist Susanna Fritscher (born 1960, Vienna).

Commissioned by the Kunsthistorisches Museum and created specifically for this unique architectural setting, the work consists of a parcours formed by thousands of translucent silicone threads stretched from ceiling to floor.

Suspended between painted steel lattices that echo the geometric patterns of the Temple's neo-classical interior, the installation appears to be in constant movement. A gentle, quivering vibration sustained by

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the flow of air and accentuated by the passage of natural light seems almost to give it its own breath. As we enter the work, our perception and experience of the space is transformed, shifting continuously as we move through it and heightening our awareness of our own physical presence.

“The materials that I use – films, veils or threads – are so volatile that they seem to merge with the volume of air which they occupy,” states the artist. “In the interplay that they create in and with space, materiality shifts and changes: air now has a texture, a brilliance, a quality. We can perceive its flow, its movement. It acquires a palpable, modular reality, a reality that is almost visible, or audible, and which can be described in terms of vibration, oscillation, of a wave, of a frequency.”

The effect of Fritscher’s installation is subtle, restrained and contemplative. It responds to the intimacy of the building, the milkiness of the light and the fragility of its own materiality, folding outside and inside worlds into each other. It has no narrative, preferring instead an open-ended relationship with its visitors, who bring meaning to the work through their own presence and movement through it. It does what all great artworks do: it rewards us for our patient engagement with it. On display throughout the late spring and summer and into the early autumn, it will change with the seasons, following the arc of the sun as the days first become longer and then shorter.

Susanna Fritscher has lived in France since 1983 and has worked from a studio in Montreuil, an eastern suburb of Paris, for the last twenty-five years. This new work is the most recent in a series of related large-scale installations developed by the artist in recent years. It follows presentations at the Musée d’arts de Nantes (2017), the Louvre Abu Dhabi (2019–2021) and the Centre Pompidou-Metz (2020). Several of these projects, including her participation at the 14th Biennale de Lyon in 2017, have incorporated additional elements of sound and movement.

The exhibition is the artist’s first institutional presentation in Austria. It was curated by Jasper Sharp and generously supported by the Contemporary Patrons of the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

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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 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), Felix Gonzalez-Torres (2018) and Maurizio Cattelan (2019).

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 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.

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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 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:



Susanna Fritscher, Theseus Temple, Vienna
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Susanna Fritscher, Theseus Temple, Vienna
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Theseus Temple
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Theseus Temple
Illuminated by night
© KHM-Museumsverband



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

April to October
Daily, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Opening Hours Volksgarten
1 April to 31 October, 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

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