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## **BMKÖS/Kogler: Florentina Holzinger will design Austria pavilion at the 2026 Biennale Arte in Venice**

*Kogler: 'Groundbreaking project will join the ranks of Austria's successful contributions in recent years'*

The Austrian pavilion at the 61st Venice Biennale Arte in 2026 will be designed by the internationally renowned Austrian performance artist Florentina Holzinger. This was announced by the Austrian Minister for Arts and Culture Werner Kogler at a press conference today.

Holzinger will collaborate with curator Nora-Swantje Almes and a team of performers, musicians, stunt creators and producers for the Biennale contribution under the working title 'Seaworld Venice'.

The 61st Biennale Arte will take place in Venice from April to November 2026.

*'Florentina Holzinger is quite rightly one of the most renowned Austrian artists of our time. Her innovative project for Venice breaks new ground and will join the ranks of the successful Austrian contributions to the Biennale in recent years - I am convinced of that,'* said the Minister for Arts and Culture Kogler at the press conference. *'I would like to thank the jury for their work and their clear recommendation for this exciting project and wish the team every success.'*

*'I am honored to represent Austria at the 2026 Biennale Arte. This opportunity presents an exciting and entirely new challenge for my team and me. Whether on stage, in galleries, or in public spaces, the essence of my work lies in the uncompromising use of the body as a medium. The body becomes the stage where social and political conditions and processes are negotiated directly. My work takes an unconventional and boundary-pushing approach to examining our reality and its transformation. In Venice - a city caught in a profound and precarious relationship with water - my ongoing fascination with this element will take on new dimensions. Here, the body will play a central role in exploring the interdependence and interplay between nature and technology. I am grateful for this trust and looking forward to the challenge ahead with great anticipation',* says Florentina Holzinger.

*'I am very excited about the opportunity to realize the Austrian contribution to the Venice Biennale Arte 2026 together with Florentina Holzinger and her team. Florentina Holzinger is one of the most significant artistic voices in contemporary art. She creates images that linger with us - shared experiences that move us deeply. We sincerely thank the jury for their trust*

*and are honored to present our work at the Austrian Pavilion in 2026',* says curator Nora-Swantje Almes.

### Jury statement

Florentina Holzinger impressed the jury with her innovative submission for the Austrian Pavilion 2026, in which she combines elements of dance, theatre and performance art in line with her interdisciplinary approach. The current relevance of her topics, from dealing with water as a resource to existential physical experiences and their social standardisation, convinced the jury, as did the planned implementation in different formats: both the installation in the pavilion and the etudes in the lagoon allow visitors to participate personally on different levels.

The artist thus creates a variable aesthetic space of experience that enriches the exhibition context with dramaturgical elements of theatre and generates powerful images. With her sometimes provocative and socio-critical examination of the human body, Florentina Holzinger also joins an Austrian art-historical lineage (Viennese Actionism, feminist body art).

### About the process

Since the 2021 Biennale, Austria's contribution to Venice is being sought through an open competition. The federal government invites curators, artists and cultural practitioners to take part in this competition. The submitted projects are presented to a jury of national and international experts in a three-stage selection process. This year's jury consisted of Gabriele Spindler, Head of the Department of Art and Cultural Studies at OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH and curator of the 2024 Biennale Arte contribution, Fatima Hellberg, designated Director of MUMOK, Harald Krejci, Director of the Museum Moderner Kunst Salzburg, Franziska Nori, Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein, and the artist Markus Schinwald. The decision on the nomination of the winning project as well as the curation is made on the recommendation of the jury by the Federal Minister for Arts and Culture.

## Project description

Florentina Holzinger (born 1986, Vienna) explores themes such as identity and physical transgression in her spectacular projects. Inspired by Viennese Actionism, body art and bodybuilding, but also by ballet, cabaret and circus, she deconstructs images of femininity in her works. She dissects patriarchy and capitalism and uses poetic imagery to show the vulnerability of our bodies and the world.

The work explores cultural phenomena and cultural-historical contexts and consciously plays with the constantly shifting boundaries between high culture and entertainment. The importance of the autonomous body as an instrument of action is central to Holzinger's work.

With her powerful, challenging images, Holzinger tests the boundaries of bodies and the world in a tangible way. In her productions, female bodies dominate large machines and hang from the ceiling on hooks - always at the limits of the imaginable. Since 2020 and the first experimental formats in urban space under the series title *Études*, Florentina has increasingly opened up her practice to the context of visual art. These etudes are exercises, site-specific actions in public places of transit. They often focus on the relationship between man, machine and water as a central element.

For the Austrian Pavilion, Holzinger is continuing her research into the element of water and expanding it further - for the first time, it is being translated into an exhibition concept. As always with Florentina Holzinger, a feminist approach to the motifs takes centre stage: she explores different modes of female representation and the potential of female physicality by constantly working on expanding them and discovering new possibilities. The context of Venice opens up new approaches to this long-term research. Aquatic creatures from mythological and classical tales form the starting point, diving into a possible future of Venice.

Holzinger's contribution to the Biennale Arte in Venice will include a permanent pavilion and site-specific actions in the urban space.

## About Florentina Holzinger

Florentina Holzinger studied choreography at the School for New Dance Development (SNDO) in Amsterdam. Her diploma solo *Silk* was honoured with the Prix Jardin d'Europe at the ImPulsTanz Festival in 2012. With Vincent Riebeek she developed the trilogy *No Applause for Shit, Spirit and Wellness* (2011-2015). Her solo piece *Recovery* (2015) took a critical look at a traumatic stage experience and the representation of female physicality.

In her later works, Holzinger dissects the narratives of classical ballet. With Apollon (2017), a reinterpretation of Balanchine's Apollon Musagète, and TANZ (2019), based on La Sylphide, she reflects on tradition and gender images. TANZ was shown at the Theatertreffen and awarded the NESTROY Prize for Best Director. This was followed in 2020 by Etude for an Emergency, a stunt opera with female opera singers and stunt performers.

In 2021, he created A Divine Comedy for the Ruhrtriennale, which was honoured with the FAUST Prize. With Ophelia's Got Talent (2022), developed at the Volksbühne Berlin, Holzinger won further prizes, including the FAUST Theatre Prize for Best Dance Performance. In 2024, she debuted with her first opera project SANCTA, a co-production with the Stuttgart State Opera and the Wiener Festwochen, among others.

In the same year, Holzinger took on her first leading role in cinema with MOND (directed by Kurdwin Ayub); the film won the Special Jury Prize at the Locarno Film Festival. Holzinger's work combines Viennese Actionism, body art, ballet, cabaret and circus. She playfully deconstructs images of femininity and transcends physical and sexual boundaries.

### About Nora-Swantje Almes

Nora-Swantje Almes is a curator specialising in performance in the visual arts context and performative exhibition formats. She has been Curator Live Programme and Outreach at the Gropius Bau Berlin since 2024. Prior to this, she headed the live programme at Bergen Kunsthall, Norway, for three years, where she realised the commissioned work Hafen-Etude with Florentina Holzinger and her team in summer 2024. In her curatorial career, she has held positions at Glasgow International, Participant Inc. New York, Artangel London, and Schinkel Pavillon Berlin.