

Press Release – Post Festum

Finale of Hermann Nitsch's "6-Day Play": An Arcadia for All the Senses

From sunrise on Pentecost Saturday to daybreak today, Tuesday, the final days of the posthumously staged "6-Day Play" by Hermann Nitsch took place at Schloss Prinzendorf in Lower Austria.

In accordance with the wishes of the artist, who passed away in spring 2022, his wife Rita Nitsch, adoptive son Leonhard Kopp as play director, Frank Gassner as stage director, and long-time musical director Andrea Cusumano brought the *Orgies Mysteries Theater* to life one final time. Days one and two were staged in 2022, day three in 2023, and now days four, five, and six – culminating in a finale that was as ecstatic as it was deeply moving.

This opulent spectacle unites art, ritual, and community in baroque abundance, as developed by the Austrian artist since the 1950s. It marked the 160th action of the *Orgies Mysteries Theater*.

A lavish *Gesamtkunstwerk*, highly sensual and archaic.

Each day, around 400 visitors flocked to the courtyard of the baroque castle in Lower Austria, about 50 minutes from Vienna, to experience a total work of art composed of color, flesh, sound, and symbolism. The performance demanded a great deal from the audience – and especially from the performers: blood, entrails, scents, sound clusters, incense, and ritual processions stimulated all the senses of the viewers – or "play participants," as Nitsch referred to them – and performers alike, transporting them into moving, at times ecstatic, at times meditative-mystical states. An artistic spectacle that breathes art history and made something unique palpable: emotions beyond the ordinary.

Schloss Prinzendorf as Stage and Artistic Center

The castle, acquired by Hermann Nitsch in the early 1970s, served him throughout his life as a home, workplace, and site of action. Renovated over many years, it now shines in splendid condition and continues to serve posthumously as a unique venue. Schloss Prinzendorf is the epicenter of the vision and artistic work of the exceptional Austrian artist.

In addition to the central courtyard and surrounding meadows, visitors could also explore the artist's summer studio inside the castle. His works were displayed in the castle's own chapel and adjoining farm buildings. In the "Glockenstall" (bell stable), the "Apothecary of the Senses" was presented – precise formations of spice and food samples and other ingredients laid out on long tables.

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Under the musical direction of Andrea Cusumano, a roughly 90-member orchestra performed minimalistic motifs, clusters, siren-like soundscapes, and the apocalyptic yet comforting crescendo during the closing procession – a deliberate intensification of the ritualistic Gesamtkunstwerk. Toward the end of his life, music became increasingly important to Nitsch. In 2019, a few years before his death, he finalized the score of the *6-Day Play* (2nd version), ensuring it could be performed even after his passing.

The production, choreographed based on the 1,000-page score, gave rise to scenes that were both shocking and touching: crucified performers, pig carcasses, internal organs and fruits, the orchestra, drums, bells, flutes, extravagant floral arrangements – and a community composed of art enthusiasts, professionals from the art world, young explorers, and loyal Nitsch fans.

Rita Nitsch, who fulfilled her late husband's final wish with this event, was visibly moved and expressed her heartfelt thanks to all performers, her long-time team, and other supporters.

Throughout the three days, play participants were treated to culinary delights. On the final day, Monday, gourmet chef Max Stiegl presented his grand "Sautanz." A proud pig gave its life, decapitated and presented impressively in the castle courtyard. The animal was fully and skillfully prepared for the concluding feast. For head chef Max Stiegl, this marked the closing of a circle and a high point in his 20-year friendship with Hermann and Rita Nitsch.

Outlook

Although no concrete plans are in place yet, it is already becoming apparent that the castle is to remain a vibrant venue for performance art in the future. It is the express wish of Rita Nitsch, the artist's nephew Paul Breitenfelder, and the Nitsch Foundation to keep Hermann Nitsch's life and work alive and make it accessible to a new, multifaceted audience.

Initial ideas and projects are beginning to take shape – with the aim of further developing Schloss Prinzendorf as a cultural site and continuing the artist's vision in contemporary forms.

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Hermann Nitsch: An Exceptional Artist of International Standing

Hermann Nitsch (1938–2022) ranks among the most influential artists of the postwar era. His interdisciplinary approach, which combines painting, music, performance, poetry, and ritual, has profoundly shaped the understanding of art. As a co-founder of Viennese Actionism, he created works that merge provocation with spiritual depth. His creations are part of the art historical canon and are represented in many of the world's most significant museums and collections—from MoMA in New York to the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Castello di Rivoli in Turin, the Lenbachhaus in Munich, and the Albertina and Belvedere in Vienna, among others. The Nitsch Museum in Mistelbach, Austria, and the Museo Nitsch in Naples are dedicated exclusively to his oeuvre.

Even after his death, Nitsch's work remains prominently featured on the international stage. In 2023, his pieces were exhibited in esteemed institutions such as the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris and the Pace Gallery in New York. However, nowhere can the visionary power of his work be experienced as intensely as at Schloss Prinzendorf, his residence, studio, and the primary venue for the 6-Day Play.

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About Hermann Nitsch

Hermann Nitsch (1938–2022) was one of the most influential and controversial artists of postwar art and a central figure in Viennese Actionism. His works, characterized by radical physicality and ritual intensity, dealt with existential themes such as life, death, and spirituality. Through his Orgies Mysteries Theater and his oeuvre as a whole, Nitsch created a unique total work of art that viewed art as a cathartic experience. Nitsch's work exemplifies provocation and a break from traditional art forms. His pieces are part of major collections and museums worldwide, underscoring his outstanding position in contemporary art.

About the O.M. Theater

The concept of the Orgies Mysteries Theater was developed by Hermann Nitsch in the mid-1950s. Its performances combine sacred and profane elements and often involve intense, sensory experiences where blood, flesh, and other organic materials play a central role. The first performance of the Orgies Mysteries Theater, titled "1st Action," took place in 1962. All actions are excerpts from the 6-Day Play. With this, Nitsch created a space for cathartic experiences, aiming to overcome taboos and confront the primal forces of human existence.

About the 6-Day Play

The 6-Day Play by Hermann Nitsch, first performed at Schloss Prinzendorf in 1998, is considered the most monumental work of his Orgies Mysteries Theater. It is a continuous six-day and six-night performance engaging all the senses of participants and spectators. Music, painting, ritual acts, sacrificial symbols, and sacred elements merge into an intense experience that explores existential themes such as life, death, ecstasy, and transcendence. The meticulously planned performance, involving hundreds of participants, reflects Nitsch's pursuit of a universal, spiritually charged artwork that provides space for reflection and catharsis.

About the Nitsch Foundation

Founded in 2009, the Nitsch Foundation aims to promote the significant position of Hermann Nitsch as an artist and to preserve his legacy, the Orgies Mysteries Theater. Its mission includes raising awareness of the conceptual foundation of his work, publishing editions and publications, organizing actions and performance events, curating and realizing exhibitions, fulfilling archival and documentation tasks, and expanding the catalogue raisonné.

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