



## The History

### Flashback.

To the year 1980. With the idea and backing of the popular Viennese actor Heinz Conrad, the first exhibitions were organised in the former counter hall of the Österreichische Creditanstalt für Handel und Gewerbe (Austrian Bank of Trade and Commerce), premises built in 1914 and then standing empty. The curtain-raiser was a comprehensive show on Austria's cultural and intellectual history from 1880 to 1980: »Aufbruch in die Moderne« (Starting out into the Modern Age), curated by Rupert Feuchtmüller and organised by Ivo Stanek, boasted straightaway the proud statistic of 28,000 visitors.

The occasion for this project was the Länderbank's centenary. And the subsequent exhibitions, such as »Fotografis« – a presentation of the superlative photograph collection of the Länderbank, as it was then called – also proved to be great attractions for the public. The success of these exhibitions was as surprising as it was overwhelming, so that the director of the Länderbank and later Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky initiated a resolution to set up a permanent exhibition venue oriented on international standards – the Länderbank Kunstforum was born, and the present director of the Albertina, Klaus Albrecht Schröder, was its first director.

### Trendsetter Bank Austria Kunstforum

In 1988, the Austrian star architect Gustav Peichl was commissioned to design the first reconstruction of the Kunstforum, making it the most modern exhibition building in Austria at the time. The re-opening was in March 1989 with »Egon Schiele und seine Zeit« (Egon Schiele and his Time). This exhibition attracted 186,000 visitors and was successful not only in Vienna; it created a sensation on tour in London, Munich and Wuppertal. The Schiele exhibition in the Kunstforum was the first major debut of the then little known Leopold Collection; it thus functioned as a booster for the Austrian Republic to purchase the collection and set up the present-day Leopoldmuseum.

Ever since this time, the objective of the Bank Austria Kunstforum has been very clearly defined: the presentation of international top exhibitions on classical modern art and its forerunners: Schiele, Kokoschka, Turner, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, Miró, Malevich, Schwitters, Kandinsky, Lempicka and many more. Ingrid Brugger took over as director of the Kunstforum in 2000 and since then the programme of the exhibition premises on Freyung has included major theme exhibitions designed to foster an in-depth, or fresh understanding of modern art (»Kunst und Wahn« (Art and Delusion), »Rot in der russischen Kunst« (Red in Russian Art), »Jahrhundert der Frauen« (The Woman's Century), »Mythos Großstadt« (The Myth of

the Great City), »Nolde und die Südsee«, (Nolde and the South Seas), »Futurismus – Radikale Avantgarde« (Futurism – Radical Avant-garde), »Superstars – Von Warhol bis Madonna«, as well as the presentation of the Austrian and international avant-garde since 1945 (Arnulf Rainer, Adolf Frohner, Christian Ludwig Attersee, Karel Appel, Roy Lichtenstein).

A relatively short period after the major reconstruction, the exhibition building – meanwhile renamed the Bank Austria Kunstforum – housed a large-scale retrospective on the painter Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller in 1992, which attracted such enormous crowds that it had to keep closing its doors at short notice. Winter 1992/93 saw the next great rebuilding phase and the Bank Austria Kunstforum was enlarged, doubling its exhibition space.

#### **Most successful exhibition venue**

Now the available space measures 1,120 square metres, a worthy venue not only for international museums to present their most important works – for instance the Guggenheim Museum New York and the Russian Museum St Petersburg; leading private collectors have also put their collections on show here to the general public for the first time, including Bernard Picasso in autumn 2000, the family Im Obersteg in autumn 2003, and the Berlin collector couple Ulla and Heiner Pietzsch.

2000 was extraordinarily successful for the Bank Austria Kunstforum. In this year alone, 550,000 visitors from all over the world saw the exhibitions »Cézanne: vollendet – unvollendet« (Cézanne: finished – unfinished), »Arnulf Rainer: Gegen.Bilder« (Arnulf Rainer: Against.Pictures), and “Picasso: Hauptwerke aus der Sammlung Bernard Picasso” (Picasso: Major Works from the Bernard Picasso Collection). This also proved to be a breakthrough: since 1989, the Bank Austria Kunstforum has welcomed around four million visitors!

And the score looks like topping the five million in the foreseeable future: every year about 250,000 people come and see Bank Austria Kunstforum exhibitions. This means that the Bank Austria Kunstforum is one of the five most frequented exhibition organisations in Austria and one of the Top 20 of all the most popular Viennese tourist attractions.