

Press Release

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## **Meret Oppenheim in the Bank Austria Kunstforum - PICTURE**

Visuals registered at:

<http://presse.leisuregroup.at/kunstforum/oppenheim>

**First museum retrospective of Oppenheim outside Switzerland on show starting tomorrow, Thursday 21 March until 14 July 2013 in the Bank Austria Kunstforum =**

Vienna (LCG) – **Meret Oppenheim** (1913–1985) is one of the most significant and individual artists of the twentieth century. To mark her hundredth birthday, the Bank Austria Kunstforum is presenting the first museum retrospective of this Swiss artist in Austria, which will afterwards be shown in the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin. With 200 loans from a great variety of European museums and private collections, the exhibition is an opportunity for the public to become acquainted with the entire artistic spectrum of an oeuvre covering more than five decades, which in its autonomy and diversity is still ground-breaking even today. The retrospective will contribute to overcoming Meret Oppenheim's one-sided image as the "muse" of the surrealists, also as the creator of the legendary Fur Cup (1936), which has warped the view of her multifaceted complete oeuvre ever since. Oppenheim's artistic position spans an arc between modernism and postmodernism and throughout has shown itself to be self-confidently independent.

Meret Oppenheim's artistic beginnings lie in Paris, where for five years she mixed with the circle of the Surrealists surrounding **André Breton**. Here the twenty-year-old, with her rebellious, freedom-loving attitude, met people of similar mind. The expansion of reality to include dimensions of play, the dream and the unconscious, the overcoming of conventional horizons of experience

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and artistic strategies of alienation, combinatorics and metamorphosis linked the work of the self-taught artist to her artist friends, who included **Alberto Giacometti, Max Ernst, Francis Picabia, Leonor Fini, Toyen** and **Man Ray**. In particular the Surrealist object art with alienation of function and re-assembly of everyday objects formed for her the ideal terrain for discovering the “miraculous in everyday things”. Even after her rejection of the Surrealist movement – she did not wish to subject herself to its dogmatism – myths, games and dreams formed the starting point for Meret Oppenheim, likewise literary models and the writings of **C. G. Jung**. Despite her heterogeneity, certain themes run as leitmotifs through her work: the transformation between male and female, nature and civilisation, dream and reality, the I and the Other. She is also preoccupied with the metamorphosing processes of nature, the cycle of life and death and the temporal and cosmic integration of the human being. Time and again she emphasises the imaginative power of art: “Artists dream for society”.

Opposing all rules of the art market, Meret Oppenheim rejects a homogeneous “signature style” in favour of a lust to experiment, which transports her beyond the boundaries of a single style or linear development. She feels reduced by any monopolisation or adherence to one artistic form of expression. Veristically surreal images are juxtaposed to geometric abstractions, intuitively sketched drawings exist as equals next to conceptual, photographic works or large-format, consistently formulated paintings, humorous material collages, macabre designs, and carnival masks next to pithy haiku-type poems: “Every idea is born with a form. I realize the ideas as they come into my head. You never know from where the ideas come from: they bring their form with them; just as Athena sprang out of the head of Zeus in helmet and breastplate.” (Meret Oppenheim) The delicate and poetic language of forms often tips over into the recalcitrant – Oppenheim deliberately brushes her art “against the grain”. The range of variation in form and content and her delight in dismantling habits of perception resist all the conventional classifications of art history – a quality that was first recognised only with the artistic changes taking place since the late 1960s.

The show, following Oppenheim's artistic methods, which constantly approach, deepen and elaborate specific topoi over extended periods, confronts the visitor with a challenging course of thematic condensations, a cross-section of the artist's creative periods: coded self-portrayals, erotic objects, images of the invisible, dialogue with nature, dream scenes and myths, play as an artistic strategy, the relationship of picture and text, metamorphoses and fabulous beasts. A networked presentation of exhibits conveys how important the associative interplay of different media is in Oppenheim. Her Surrealism of her own mould, her "multilingualism", her permanent reorientation, also her trans-disciplinary approach anticipate strategies of contemporary art.

Confronting Meret Oppenheim also means encountering a fascinating charismatic personality. Her imposing appearance and her extravagant self-presentation, occasionally dominating the attention to her work, is demonstrated in the exhibition with artist photographs ranging from the early nude photographs by Man Ray to the dignified portraits by **Nanda Lanfranco** shortly before Oppenheim's death in 1985. Her uncompromisingly lived-out, socially critical and emancipatory attitude to life made her one of the central feminist identification figures and model for generations of succeeding artists, both female and male. "Freedom isn't given; it has to be taken," was her credo and her legacy. But it wouldn't be Meret Oppenheim if the feminist discussion had not taken a direction of her own: Oppenheim opposed a feminist identification of herself as "female artist", quoting her fundamental belief in the "androgynous spirit", the conviction of a creativity encompassing both male and female, which she arrived at via her study of C. G. Jung and in which she saw the key for a society put out of balance because of the battle of the sexes. "Art has no sexual features. There's only one times one (...). Great art is always male-female."

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Exhibition: Meret Oppenheim

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Place: Bank Austria Kunstforum  
Address: 1010 Vienna, Freyung 8  
Website: <http://www.bankaustria-kunstforum.at>  
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