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Pioneering French artist Annette Messenger brings her world of tragedy, comedy and desire to Kunsthalle Praha

From 8 October 2026 to 28 February 2027, Kunsthalle Praha presents *Annette Messenger: Tragikomedie*, the first major exhibition in Czechia dedicated to one of the most influential French artists of her generation. Bringing together works from more than five decades of her career, the exhibition shows Messenger's distinctive world, where tenderness meets unease and the familiar becomes strange. From intimate works on paper to expansive installations, her art challenges established ideas about gender, society and the body, often moving between personal experience and wider social questions.



Annette Messenger: Tragikomedie, curated by Christelle Havranek and Theo Carnegie-Tan
8 October 2026 – 28 February 2027, Galleries 1 & 2, 900 m²

For over fifty years, Annette Messenger has developed an artistic language built on tension, transformation, and provocation. Photography, textiles, and found objects are used to tell stories where everyday life is destabilised and our assumptions regarding society, gender, and art are challenged.

Opposites comfortably share the same space in her works: suffering and joy, intimacy and spectacle, humour and seriousness all exist in a dynamic union. These tensions are at the heart of *Tragikomedie*. Inspired by one of Messenger's iconic works, the title speaks for an artist who has consistently brought seemingly contradictory qualities together rather than choosing between them.

Personification and mise-en-scène are central to her practice: her installations have the quality of theatrical scenes where objects have become characters. In this spirit, Kunsthalle Praha has been transformed into a stage for Messenger's singular world of tragedy, comedy, and desire.

"It is a real joy to introduce Czech audiences to the wonderfully strange world of Annette Messenger. Her work reminds us that art does not require precious materials, that beauty can emerge from the most ordinary things, that horror can lurk beneath the most reassuring appearances, and that creating means playing with the utmost seriousness," says Christelle Havranek, exhibition co-curator and chief curator at Kunsthalle Praha.

The exhibition moves through ideas that have returned throughout her work, such as the transfiguration of everyday objects, fairy tales and parables, and reflections on womanhood. Her experiences of the male-dominated art world, the political atmosphere of 1970s Paris and her complex relationship with religion all find echoes in the works on view as well.

Messenger first came to prominence in the early 1970s, adopting different identities including the "collector", "trickster", "peddler" and "practical woman". Working with photographs and albums, she blurred the boundary between private and public life and turned her body and her observations into artistic materials. These early works often have the intimacy of diaries or personal collections, an intimacy that remained part of her practice even as her installations grew dramatically in scale.

The ordinary is rarely simply ordinary in Messenger's hands. Throughout her career, objects associated with the home or childhood have been transformed into something unfamiliar, humorous or unsettling. In works including *Daily, Les 7 Balais (The 7 Brooms)* and *Les Dépouilles (Skins)*, the everyday becomes a place where what is usually hidden or repressed can surface.

Messenger approaches fairy tales, mythology and religion in a similar way, returning to stories and symbols that are deeply embedded in collective imagination. Fascinated by Catholic ritual from childhood despite growing up in an atheist family, she draws on the language of votive offerings in *Mes Vœux (My Vows)*. In *Chimères (Chimeras)*, spiders, bats and hybrid beings lead into the territory of myth and folklore. Across these works, Messenger takes familiar symbols and stories and opens them to new associations, particularly around womanhood and the way female figures have historically been represented.

"Our exhibition really highlights Messenger's unique ability as a storyteller. Her long engagement with literature and cinema has allowed her to create a character out of almost

any kind of object and gives her works the compelling feeling that they emerge from narratives of their own, as well as the well-known stories she often works with” adds Theo Carnegy-Tan, co-curator of the exhibition.

The body provides another thread through the exhibition. It appears in Messenger’s early explorations of gender and desire as well as in later works concerned with vulnerability, mortality and protest. Following her experience with cancer in 2019, she created the watercolour series *Tête-à-tête*, centred on recurring images of the skull. Elsewhere, references to the uterus and the actions of FEMEN connect questions of the body with feminism, while *Les Piques (The Pikes)* brings personal and political histories together, echoing both revolutionary violence and the unrest of May 1968 that Messenger herself experienced in Paris.

A recurring figure in *Tragikomedie* is Pinocchio, whose mixture of mischief, innocence and yearning reflects the contradictions that animate Messenger’s work. *Promenade de Pinocchio (Pinocchio’s Promenade)* unfolds in Gallery 1, where the familiar fairy-tale character becomes part of an expansive and psychologically charged scene.

The exhibition culminates in Gallery 2 with Messenger’s monumental *Casino*, continuing the story of Pinocchio in an immersive, stage-like setting. Billowing red silk evokes the moment when Pinocchio is swallowed by a whale and reunited with his father Geppetto inside, a place that is at once terrifying and one of reunion and fulfilled desire. Even the title shifts between meanings: casino can suggest entertainment as well as chaos. Bringing together theatricality, transformation and desire on a monumental scale, the installation forms a fitting finale to *Tragikomedie* and to the contradictions that run throughout Messenger’s practice. Originally presented at the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2005, *Casino* won the Golden Lion for Best National Participation.

Across these different periods and bodies of work, *Tragikomedie* reveals the consistency of Messenger’s approach: a willingness to collapse conventional boundaries and to let contradictory meanings remain unresolved. More than five decades into her career, her work continues to transform what seems familiar, inviting viewers to reconsider the stories, objects and assumptions through which we understand the world around us.

***Annette Messenger: Tragikomedie* is on view at Kunsthalle Praha from 8 October 2026 to 28 February 2027.**

The exhibition is accompanied by guided tours, performative tours with artists, the five-part TransformArt lecture series *Body and Material in Contemporary Art*, expert-led Sunday tours, KunstKino screenings and workshops with local designers exploring perfume, jewellery and metalwork.

In December 2026, Kunsthalle Praha will publish an English-language catalogue with international distribution by Berlin-based DCV, featuring extensive exhibition photography, a curatorial text by Christelle Havranek and Theo Carnegy-Tan, an essay by Léa Veinstein and an in-depth interview with Annette Messenger.

Visitors under the age of 26 are eligible for complimentary membership, allowing access to all Kunsthalle Praha exhibitions for free.

The exhibition is held under the honorary patronage of the Embassy of France in the Czech Republic and with the support of the Institut Français in Paris.

Kunsthalle Praha extends its thanks to its partners (MY CLINIC, The Pudil Family Foundation, Dentons).

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

Annette Messenger

Annette Messenger was born in Berck-sur-Mer in northern France in 1943 and moved to Paris as a young adult. She studied at the École des Arts Décoratifs from 1962 to 1966. Her first solo exhibition took place at the Städtische Galerie in Munich in 1973, followed by her first major solo presentation in France at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1974.



In 1995, Messenger became the first living French artist to receive a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, following presentations at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago. In 2005, she represented France at the 51st Venice Biennale, where her installation *Casino* received the Golden Lion for Best National Participation. A major retrospective, *The Messengers*, opened at Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2007 and subsequently travelled internationally. In 2016, Messenger received Japan's Praemium Imperiale for sculpture.

Recent presentations include *Desire Disorder* at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai in 2024, her first major exhibition in China, and *AM/CB* at Centre Pompidou Málaga in 2025, the first retrospective dedicated jointly to Messenger and her lifelong partner Christian Boltanski (1944–2021).

Kunsthalle Praha

Kunsthalle Praha is a contemporary arts institution in the heart of Prague's vibrant cultural scene. It presents art exhibitions, actively supports both Czech and international artists in

developing and presenting new work and hosts a rich variety of programmes and cultural events. Located in a former electric substation, the Kunsthalle building was awarded the Czech National Architecture Prize in 2022 for its transformation. Visitors can also enjoy a design shop and a café with a historic terrace offering views of Petřín Hill and Prague Castle.

Kunsthalle Praha's mission is to connect the Czech and international art scenes, present innovative perspectives on 20th and 21st century art and culture, and engage diverse audiences through a dynamic, interdisciplinary programme. The institution also holds its own art collection, focused on modern, post-war, and contemporary art. While not on permanent display, selected works are featured in exhibitions and accessible online. Kunsthalle Praha was established as a non-governmental, non-profit platform by The Pudil Family Foundation, founded by Pavlína and Petr Pudil.

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[kunsthallepraha.org](https://www.kunsthallepraha.org)

**Open daily (11 am—7 pm) and on Fridays (11 am—9 pm). Closed on Tuesdays.
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