



PRESS RELEASE

## KUNSTHALLE PRAHA EXPLORES THE IDEA OF BOHEMIA

PRAGUE (20/03 2023) – From post-war Paris and New York, through swinging London, to the free spirits of Tehran and Beijing.

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**Bohemia: History of an Idea, 1950–2000**  
23 March–16 October 2023

Kunsthalle Praha (Gallery 1 & Gallery 2, together 900 m<sup>2</sup>)  
Curated by **Russell Ferguson**

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- One year after opening its doors, Kunsthalle Praha, a contemporary art space in central Prague's Klárov district, presents international, cross-disciplinary, thematic exhibition *Bohemia: History of an Idea, 1950–2000*, guest-curated by Los Angeles based writer and curator Russell Ferguson.
- *Bohemia* will bring together artworks by thirty-nine artists, among them personalities as diverse as Alice Neel, Wolfgang Tillmans, Nan Goldin, Libuše Jarcovjáčková, Bijan Saffari, Martin Wong, Stan Douglas, David Wojnarowicz, Roy Arden, and many others. Some of these artists will be shown alongside each other for the first time, and most of them have rarely had their work exhibited in the Czech Republic.
- Spanning the 1950s to the 2000s, the exhibition features work in various media, with a predominance of photography, video, and painting. The kaleidoscopic experience ends with the turn of the century, when bohemia – still a worldwide phenomenon – begins to lose its momentum as a result of fast-paced societal changes.

From its origins in mid nineteenth-century Paris, **the idea of bohemia has been a powerful component of what it means to be an artist.** Bohemia, a real place, has thus given its name to a cultural movement and a way of living. Its values have always centred around a commitment to art in all its forms, an embrace of total freedom, a hostility toward work and conventional ambition, and a willingness to accept poverty.

*“One inescapable characteristic of bohemia is that it is largely a phenomenon formed in reaction to bourgeois society. An established middle class must exist before its values can be rejected. And while artists had often had a reputation for living outside societal norms, it was in mid-nineteenth-century Paris that the bohemian way of life was first codified and romanticized,”* explains curator **Russell Ferguson**. For more than one hundred years, Paris remained the global centre of bohemian life.

This exhibition conveys new insights into the notion of bohemia as it developed **from** the end of World War II to the end of the twentieth century, across multiple places, including **Paris, New York, London, San Francisco, Vancouver, Tehran, Zagreb, Prague, and Beijing**. Apart from chronologically examining some of bohemia’s most emblematic scenes, it also looks at both the differences and the continuities that mark various manifestations of the movement, taking visitors on a journey through centres of bohemian life and communities of people who choose to live outside of mainstream values, creating their own artistic subcultures.

The exhibition is curated around thematic ideas of what bohemia has meant over time, with each section representing one decade from the latter half of the twentieth century and a key city that showed a unique aspect of international bohemian culture.

*“The lineage of Parisian bohemia, which continued until the 1940s through the Impressionist, Cubist, Dada, and Surrealist movements, is well documented and the subject of numerous exhibitions and publications. Kunsthalle Praha’s newest project looks into bohemian manifestations after World War II, not only in Europe but also across other continents,”* adds **Christelle Havranek**, Chief Curator of Kunsthalle Praha.

Presented as the exhibition’s starting point, the post-war French capital, buzzing with cafés and bars, is portrayed, among other works, by photographs from **Ed van der Elsken’s** series *Love on the Left Bank*. Paris’ prominence is eventually usurped by its transoceanic rival, with New York commencing a long reign as the capital of bohemian culture; key works which trace this period in the exhibition include **Robert Frank** and **Alfred Leslie’s** short film *Pull My Daisy* (1959) and portraits by the radical painter **Alice Neel**.

The exhibition then moves through swinging 1960s London, where bohemians embraced fashion and celebrity, featuring work by **Richard Hamilton and Ken**

**Russell**. With the rising prominence of the hippie movement, bohemia's heart then settles in drug-fuelled 1960s San Francisco, with visitors having the opportunity to see **William Gedney's** photographs of the Haight-Ashbury district and **Bill Owens'** photographs of the Altamont Festival.

The show subsequently travels back to New York again, this time in the 1970s, when many classic bohemian tropes were re-invented in a city then thought to be in terminal decline, embracing its dirt and danger, as illustrated by **Nan Goldin's slide show** piece *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1985) and **Neville D'Almeida and Heilio Oiticica's** installation *CC5 Hendrix-War / Cosmococa Programa-in-Progress*.

After the 1970s, the idea of bohemia no longer seemed to need a capital city, and we can see it emerge in various forms adopted in Tehran (with **Bijan Safari's** elegant pencil sketches), Vancouver (with **Roy Arden's** photographs), Zagreb (with the performative actions and photos of **Tomislav Gotovac**), and Prague. Czech bohemia is expressed through the photographs of **Libuše Jarcovjáčová**, a pioneer in documenting the ostracized LGBT scene of communist Czechoslovakia during the 1980s. Reaching turn-of-the-century melancholy, the exhibition concludes with works from Mexico City, by **Gabriel Orozco**, and from London, by **Wolfgang Tillmans**, which nevertheless still evoke the hedonism and bars of mid-century Paris, where it all began.

With international loans from museums including the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Jewish Museum in New York City, the M+ Sigg Collection, the Walker Art Center, and the J. Paul Getty Museum, as well as from private collections and galleries such as the Marian Goodman Gallery, the Pace Gallery, and David Zwirner, the exhibition comprises seventy-seven artworks in total.

The show is extended by a **richly illustrated book** of the same name, written by Russell Ferguson and internationally distributed by Hatje Cantz. In chapters such as "Always Be Drunk", "Pop Goes the Easel", and "Broadway Looked So Medieval", the author further explores nonconformist ways of artistic life which still spark fascination.

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**Bohemia: History of an Idea, 1950–2000** is on display from **23 March until 16 October 2023** and is accompanied by a rich program of talks, screenings, and workshops.

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#### **PRESS CONTACTS**

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## **LIST OF EXHIBITED ARTISTS**

Neville D'Almeida and Hélio Oiticica, Roy Arden, David Bailey, Alvin Baltrop, Bill Brandt, Trisha Brown, Rudy Burckhardt, John Deakin, Stan Douglas, Ed van der Elsken, Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, William Gedney, Nan Goldin, Tomislav Gotovac, Bob Gruen, Richard Hamilton, Peter Hujar, Libuše Jarcovjáčová, Jess, Patricia Jordan, Jules Kirschenbaum, Jorge Lewinski, Fred W. McDarrah, Babette Mangolte, Alice Neel, Gabriel Orozco, Bill Owens, RongRong, Ken Russell, Bijan Saffari, Joan Semmel, Anita Steckel, Thomas Struth, Edmund Teske, Wolfgang Tillmans, Wang Jin, David Wojnarowicz, Martin Wong, Zhang Huan

## **KUNSTHALLE PRAHA**

Kunsthalle Praha is a new venue for art in Prague's centre. As a non-governmental and non-profit platform for connecting the Czech and international art scenes, it was founded by **The Pudil Family Foundation** of Pavlína and Petr Pudil. Kunsthalle Praha was created through the conversion of the Zenger Transformer Station from the 1930s, which now offers a modern gallery environment for short-term art exhibitions, innovative educational programs, and cultural events. Kunsthalle's primary mission is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Czech and international art of the 20th and 21st centuries. It has its own art collection focusing on modern, post-war, and contemporary art. Kunsthalle Praha officially opened to the public on 22 February 2022 and more than 120,000 visitors have already walked through its doors ever since. Recent exhibitions include the large-scale multimedia exhibition ***Kinetismus: 100 Years of Electricity in Art*** (22/2–29/8 2022) guest curated by Peter Weibel and Gregor Hildebrandt's largest exhibition and retrospective to date: ***A Blink of an Eye and the Years are Behind Us*** (29/9 2022–13/2 2023), hosted by the institution's chief curator Christelle Havranek. Over an area of **5,687 m<sup>2</sup>** the premises feature three large gallery spaces, a design shop, and a café with a historical terrace overlooking Petřín and Prague Castle.

## **RUSSELL FERGUSON**

Russell Ferguson is a **research professor at the University of California, Los Angeles**, has written widely about post-war and contemporary art. From 2001, Ferguson was Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Programs, and Chief Curator, at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. From 1991 to 2001, he was at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, first as Editor, then as Associate Curator. He has organized many exhibitions. At the Hammer, these included *Perfect Likeness* (2015), an examination of contemporary photography, and *The Undiscovered Country* (2004), a survey of various approaches to representation in painting, as well as solo exhibitions by Larry Johnson (2009), Francis Alÿs (2007), Wolfgang Tillmans (2006), Patty Chang (2005), and Christian Marclay (2003). At the Museum of Contemporary Art, he organized ***In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art*** (1999), an exploration of the circle of artists that revolved around the poet, as well as survey exhibitions of the work of Liz Larner and Douglas Gordon (both

2001). With Kerry Broucher, he organized *Open City: Street Photographs Since 1950* (2001) for The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, and *Damage Control: Art and Destruction since 1950* (2013) for the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington.