

2\_Press release for the exhibition *History Tales. Fact and Fiction in History Painting*, September 2023



Motif combining works by Ana Torfs, *Révolution*, photographic diptych (detail), 2003 © Ana Torfs;  
and Unknown artist after Paul Delaroche, *Napoleon I. in Fontainebleau on 31 March 1814* (detail), after 1840  
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## *History Tales. Fact and Fiction in History Painting*

From 27 September 2023, the Art Collections present another transhistorical exhibition that features works from all three collections of the Academy – Paintings Gallery, Graphic Collection, Plaster Cast Collection – as well as superb works from international museums and institutions, interacting with numerous contemporary art positions.

The theme of the exhibition *History Tales. Fact and Fiction in History Painting* has, rather unexpectedly, become highly topical, even frighteningly so, at this historical time of the much-cited ‘turning point’. Indeed, a geopolitical and economic equilibrium of values and forces appears to be out of step – also triggered by the war in Ukraine – and a global shift of immeasurable proportions seems to be set in motion.

The Art Collections exhibition will explore the representation of history and its narratives in terms of identity and nation. How is the rise and fall of civilisations depicted in history? How has the hubris of humankind been allegorised in history paintings since the 17<sup>th</sup> century? And what sort of media transformations has the invention of photography and film brought about on the representations of myths, heroes, heroines, rulers and sovereigns as well as on pivotal historical events since the 19<sup>th</sup> century right through to the present day?

The aim is to question and challenge the understanding of history in representational depictions and their counter-images while analysing how certain origin myths and key historical events are always subject to interpretations shaped by the age in which they are ‘revisited’. *History Tales* tells the story of these revisionary movements in the interpretation of ‘history paintings’, through which images of the past can become encapsulated commentaries on the present.

### History painting at the transition to modernity

The history painting has been in vogue time and again ever since the Renaissance proclaimed it was the pictorial genre of the highest order. Under the Sun King Louis XIV in particular, the French Academy underscored the superior value of the doctrine of virtue conveyed by the history painting through the example of great events, heroes and heroines, rulers and sovereigns while substantiating the history painting as a propaganda machine with an underpinning of art theory. The genre really came into its own at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after which its particular merits gradually gave way to conventional bourgeois taste and the fast pace of popular illustrations, press graphics and the new medium of photography.

Industrialisation, social unrest, social upheavals and the impact of the French Revolution on the political structure of Europe in particular and the self-perception of an emergent bourgeoisie as well as the impoverishment of large sections of the population proved to be the catalysts of an eventful transformation process. These bourgeois tastes were reflected more in the salons as a showcase for the self-representation of the gentry than in the academies and the moralising history painting taught there. Nonetheless, history painting throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century had the special merit of focusing attention on historicity even as the age of a ‘headless’ (i.e. monarch-less) modernity was dawning. People’s interest in specific historical events gradually gave way to a particular interest in history as a model reflecting the philosophy of history. The exhibition *History Tales. Fact and Fiction in History Paintings* sets out to explore the complex reasons behind this transformation as part of an outlined itinerary.

### Itinerary through the centuries to the present day

*History Tales* takes up the contemporary process of reassessment of the current position at a time when the talk everywhere is of a ‘turning point’ in world history, with new nationalist tendencies and wars threatening to rip apart the political fabric, both in Europe and globally. Familiar tropes such as ‘The Golden Age’ and the ‘Iron Age’ are invoked, i.e. times of political and social prosperity and equilibrium and, by contrast, times of decline, downfall and natural cataclysms.

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Indeed, the idea of the rise and fall of civilisations is the starting point of the new exhibition in the Paintings Gallery. It then continues via mythological depictions to narratives of nation-building, of heroes, heroines, rules and sovereigns, offset against anti-heroes and parodies as well as harsh social criticism in the still relatively young mass medium of newspapers. Last but not least, the exhibition focuses on the French Revolution and its aftermath as well as the Vienna Academy and its exponents Füger and successors, who revived heroic history paintings in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions (Pompeii) and their reception in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century are not excluded from the 'accounts' rendered by travellers on their grand tours. The impact of the discovery of Pompeii in 1748 on entire generations – their fashion, architecture and the idealisation of a post-Hellenistic *polis* – are also touched upon.

The role of battle depictions and their more fictional than factual 'event painting', mostly genre-like in their execution, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century are also addressed, as is the literary, cross-media approach to the Holocaust, the Second World War and the wars in Lebanon and Afghanistan. This raises the question of the factuality and authenticity of photography as well as the aesthetic and ideological demands placed on the 19<sup>th</sup> century's new medium for depicting reality. Finally, the Hansen Gallery leads into the inferno of the Bosch Room with its depictions of the Last Judgement, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

The exhibition examines history painting as well as works by contemporary artists.

The extensive show in the Paintings Gallery presents more than 400 works and objects by over 100 artists / writers / filmmakers / researchers / illustrators (selection):

Josef Abel, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Jan Asselijn, Hieronymus Bosch, Sébastien Bourdon (attributed), Jacques Callot, Antonio Calza, Wilhelm Camphausen, Daniel Chodowiecki, Hendrick van Cleve, Jacques Courtois, Lucas Cranach t. E., Henri Durand-Brager, Eduard von Engerth, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Heinrich Friedrich Füger, Peter Johann Nepomuk Geiger, Artemisia Gentileschi (attributed), Luca Giordano, Pietro Graziani, Jakob Philipp Hackert, Sir William Hamilton, Theophil von Hansen, Karel du Jardin, Joseph Anton Koch, Johann Peter Krafft, Johann Baptist von Lampi t. E., Filippo Lauri, Charles-Nicolas Lemercier, Herman van Lin, Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, Fritz L'Allemand, Nicolaes Maes, Hans Makart, Édouard Manet, Hubert Maurer, Adolph Menzel, Martin von Molitor, Petros Moraites, Felix Alexander Oppenheim, Max Raphael, Johann Elias Ridinger, Hubert Robert, Salvator Rosa, Peter Paul Rubens, Johann Martin Schmidt known as Kremser Schmidt, Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Johann Nepomuk Schödlberger, Moritz von Schwind, Francesco Solimena, Theodoor van Thulden, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Tiziano Vecellio known as Titian, Paul Troger, Charles André Vanloo, Paolo Veronese, Jacques Antoine Volaire, Johann Wittmer, Philips Wouwerman, Michael Wutky

Plaster casts after antique and classicist models, historical photographs and press graphics

Contemporary positions such as Eleanor Antin, John Berger, Hannes Boeck, Marcel Broodthaers, Anne Carson, Danica Dakić, Harun Farocki, Omer Fast, Cyprien Gaillard, Ulrike Grossarth, Alexander Kluge, John Murphy, W. G. Sebald, Megan Francis Sullivan, Ana Torfs, Akram Zaatari

Curated by Sabine Folie

# Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

Art Collections

## Exhibition

*History Tales. Fact and Fiction in History Painting*

- Exhibition run: 27 September 2023–26 May 2023
- Opening: 26 September 2023, 7 pm
- Press conference: 26 September 2023, 11 am
- Accreditation: [kunstsammlungen\\_presse@akbild.ac.at](mailto:kunstsammlungen_presse@akbild.ac.at)

- Where: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Paintings Gallery, Schillerplatz 3, 1010 Vienna

Opening hours: daily except Monday 10–18 h, T +43 1 588 16 2201

## Lektionen/Lessons

The lecture series on the exhibition

Lecture by Bernd Stiegler

*Geschichtsklitterung* [A Historical *Mélange*]. A brief history of political photo montage from 1870 to 1945  
27 September 2023, 6 pm

Lecture by Gudrun Swoboda

*Salvator Rosas Inversion des Helden: Zu einem wiederentdecktem Gemälde* (Lecture in German)  
9 November 2023, 6 pm

Lecture by Eva Kernbauer

*Geschichte in der Gegenwart: Das zeitgenössische Historienbild* (Lecture in German)  
24 January 2024, 6 pm

Maha El Hissy

20 March 2024, 6 pm

Peter Geimer

27 March 2024, 6 pm

Long Night of the Museums

Guided tours of the exhibition, on the hour every hour (6 to 11 pm)

Saturday, 7 October 2023, 6 pm to 1 am

## Overview tours

on Sundays, 10.30 am

## Curator's tours

Sabine Folie on the exhibition

15 November 2023 und Thursday, 14 March 2024, 4 pm

Exhibition publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication with texts by Maha El Hissy, Sabine Folie, Eva Kernbauer, Claudia Koch, Sven Lütticken, Alexander Roob, René Schober, Bernd Stiegler, Gudrun Swoboda and others, that will be presented in January 2024. Pre-orders: [kunstsammlungen@akbild.ac.at](mailto:kunstsammlungen@akbild.ac.at)

Full details of the exhibition and press photos for downloading *History Tales. Fact and Fiction in History Painting* can be found under <https://www.kunstsammlungenakademie.at/en/information/press>

All the current dates and full details can be found on the Art Collections homepage at [www.kunstsammlungenakademie.at](http://www.kunstsammlungenakademie.at)

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## Art Collections



Johann Peter Krafft, *David with the Head of Goliath*, 1852  
© Paintings Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna



Ana Torfs, *Révolution*, 2003  
© Ana Torfs



Unknown artist after Paul Delaroche, *Napoleon I at Fontainebleau on 31 March 1814*, after 1840  
© Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna



Michael Wutky, *Eruption of Vesuvius, seen across the Gulf of Naples*, c. 1780  
© Paintings Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna



Heinrich Friedrich Füger, *Alcestis sacrifices herself for Admetus*, 1805  
© Paintings Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna



Jacques Courtois, known as Le Bourignon, *Riding Battle*, c. 1650  
© Paintings Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna



John Leech, *Substance and Shadow (Cartoon No. 1)*, 1843  
© Courtesy Melton Prior Institut



Theophil von Hansen, *Athens, Academy of Sciences, elevation drawing of a lateral façade*, 1859  
© Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna



Exhibition view  
© Art Collections of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, photo: Iris Ranzinger



Hendrick Goltzius, *The Great Hercules*, 1589  
© Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna



Johannes Klaus after Siegmund L'Allemand, *Headquarters of Archduke Albrecht in the Battle of Custoza on 24 June 1866*, 1888  
© Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna



Eleanor Antin, *Constructing Helen from "Helen's Odyssey"*, 2007  
© Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome



Danica Dakić, *LA GRANDE GALERIE 2*, 2004,  
© Bildrecht, Wien 2023



Omer Fast, *Continuity*, 2012  
Still: Bernhard Keller  
Courtesy der Künstler | gb agency, Paris | Arratia, Beer, Berlin



*Head of Farnese Hercules, plaster cast of the head of the roman copy of Glycon of Athens (early 3rd cent. A.D.) after a lost Greek bronze of Lysipp, marble, Naples, Archaeological Museum*  
© Paintings Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Plaster Cast Collection



Hieronymus Bosch, *Last Judgement Triptych*, c. 1490–1505  
© Paintings Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, photo: Iris Ranzinger



*Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Schiller Monument (foreground)*  
© Helmut Wimmer

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