

Press Release, 21.3.18

steirischer herbst Announces its new Team and the 2018 Curatorial Concept:
Volksfronten

steirischer herbst 2018: *Volksfronten*
September 20–October 14, 2018
Opening Days: September 20–23, 2018
Various venues in Graz, Austria
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steirischer herbst, an interdisciplinary contemporary arts festival with a long-term tradition of reinventing itself with each new director, announces its new team and the curatorial concept for its 51st edition: *Volksfronten* (Popular Fronts).

Ekaterina Degot, a Russian-born visual arts curator known for her strongly contextual, anti-formalist approach and interest in contemporary art in relation to politics, literature, and history, began her five-year tenure as Director and Chief Curator in January 2018. In its new iteration, steirischer herbst presents itself as one overarching exhibition that includes performative, discursive, and cinematic elements together with installations. It turns towards intense political and aesthetic debates and invests in a dedicated site-specific approach, where each venue is chosen according to its history and the context it represents.

steirischer herbst intensifies its focus on Central and Eastern Europe, examining the complex internal dynamic between the countries commonly associated with this term as well as its relations with the rest of the world. The region reveals a global microcosm, where metropolis and periphery clash and form unruly and at times paradoxical connections. One of these “microglobalist” contexts has been the so-called Trigon, the zone of former Austrian colonial interests in Italy and Slovenia, reinterpreted in the 1960s as a purely artistic context in the Trigon biennial, itself once a part of steirischer herbst. Situating the festival in this geographical nexus and its histories thus reemerges as a central interest of steirischer herbst today.

steirischer herbst's 51st edition is a prologue that introduces some of the themes and principles that will be relevant over the coming five years. The title *Volksfronten*—consciously used in the somewhat unconventional plural form—resonates with very different historical contexts: the antifascist solidarity of the 1930s, the left-wing platform of some of the postwar European countries, as well as an ultra-right wing nationalist group in the US. It is deliberately ambivalent. It

addresses current ideological battles that seem to challenge the old dichotomies of right/left, archaic/progressive, nationalist/cosmopolitan, and diffuse the good, old antifascist Popular Front into a scattered, fragmented “human landscape,” as the visionary Turkish dissident writer Nazim Hikmet put it. Political wars are being interpreted as cultural wars and the atmosphere of the 1930s, with its dark ghost of fascism, is here again, but in an even more aberrant and entangled way. steirischer herbst was founded in 1968 in Graz, then on the ideological “edge” of the Western world, and brought to life by founder Hanns Koren through an unusual scenario: a political constellation of cultural conservatives created an avant-garde festival in order to oppose the fascists who remained in their midst. This paradoxical context strongly resonates with the bizarrerie of the current political landscape.

In a parcours of specially-commissioned performances, theater pieces, concerts, installations, films, and works-in-progress, steirischer herbst '18 asks questions about the new soft fascism that does not exclude hedonistic individualism and consumerist spirit; the roots of the unlikely alliance of fascism and liberalism; current (mis)use and appropriation of left-wing artistic strategies by the right wing; and the political potential of popular and vernacular art forms. As always, the core program will be accompanied by a diverse range of projects developed by local institutions. Together they present a map of multiple wishes and new proposals for how to consider and counteract the present political moment, and how to enter into crucial debates and confrontations about the intersection of the political and the aesthetic.

The core program of the 51st edition of steirischer herbst is curated by a curatorial collective that includes Ekaterina Degot, Director and Chief Curator; Henriette Gallus, Deputy Director; Christoph Platz, Head of Curatorial Affairs; Övül Ö. Durmusoglu, Katalin Erdödi, and Dominik Müller, Curators; David Riff, Curator for Discourse; Jill Winder, Editor-in-Chief; Birgit Pelzmann and Johanna Rainer, Assistant Curators; and Georg Schöllhammer, General Advisor. The new visual identity is created by Grupa Ee, Ljubljana, and a new publication series is designed by Mevis & Van Deursen, Amsterdam.

The program of steirischer herbst 2018 will be presented in May.

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