

## **MY ULLMANN** **Living Kineticism: Pictures, Performance, Art in Architecture**

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MAK – Press and PR

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### **Press Release**

Vienna, 16.4.2024

### **Press Conference**

Tuesday, 16.4.2024, 10 am

Futuristic, colorful, fashionable, idiosyncratic, and aesthetically complex in form and content—such is the artistic cosmos of Maria Ullmann (1905–1995). “My,” as she signed herself, was a leading representative of Kineticism, a fascinating yet little known art movement of early 20th century Vienna. After completing her training at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts, My Ullmann created an impressive oeuvre—kineticist pictures, graphic and textile design, stage sets, costume design, furniture, interior design, wall decorations, and building art—at a number of locations in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The MAK is dedicating the first solo exhibition in Austria to this uncompromising pioneer of 20th century art: *MY ULLMANN. Living Kineticism: Pictures, Performance, Art in Architecture*.

The exhibition—for which it has been possible to obtain works on loan from prominent Austrian museums and private collections as well as hitherto unexhibited works from the artist’s extensive estate—traces My Ullmann’s artistic career in six chapters. Photographs and documents illustrate the creative energy and temperament of this unceasingly non-conformist artistic genius.

As research for the exhibition has revealed, My Ullmann’s oeuvre uses a wealth of materials and artistic strategies. At the early age of 16, My Ullmann resolved to apply for the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts, famed for its experimental approach to art, where the young artist was inspired above all by the teachings of Franz Čížek.

Čížek championed a completely new technique of intuitive drawing and painting as well as a sensitivity to rhythm and movement. Music, theater, dance—even rhythmical gymnastics—all found their way into his teaching. He

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introduced his students to Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism as art movements whose freshness was still disconcerting. His relentless pursuit of kinesis and his predilection for dynamism in art found an echo in My Ullmann's own zest for life.

In Čížek's class Ullmann enjoyed the freedom to create completely new visual constellations: crystal formations, zigzag patterns, and curved lines characterize her pictures. Superimposed dynamic forms are intersected by circles and slanting lines or shattered into fragments. Ullmann fills the segments thus created with powerful monochrome colors or lustrous gold and silver. Rhythm, movement, and light thenceforward fundamentally determined her prolific artistic output, that stretched over the next 40 years.

Together with Erika Giovanna Klien and Elisabeth Karlinsky, My Ullmann's originality and creative individualism made her a star of Čížek's class and thus a leading representative of the avantgarde movement known as Kineticism. Yet My Ullmann went a step further and—taking as her cue the Greek word “kinesis” (movement)—strove to unite this special form of Constructivism, located between Cubism and Futurism, in a single composition through the representation of simultaneously occurring dynamic processes (“Head of a Dancer”). She consequently changed her given name Maria to the Latin transcription of the Greek letter “Mu”—in German “My.”

After completing her studies, My Ullmann initially earned a living through commissions for textile and carpet designs from the firm of Backhausen, and through commercial art for Humanic, the furniture company Thonet, and the Austrian National Tourist Office. She soon continued her career, characterized by numerous changes of residence, in among other locations Switzerland, where in 1931 she was responsible for design work at the 1931 Lucerne Religious Theater Festival, as well as creating stage sets and printed materials for the Schauspielhaus Zürich. In Berlin she once again worked as a commercial artist and taught at the School of Textiles and Fashion. Between 1934 and 1940, she was active as stage and costume designer for theaters in Berlin, Leipzig, Münster, Dortmund, and Gelsenkirchen.

After the Second World War, Ullmann worked as an interior designer. In 1959 she settled in Münster, where she opened *MY STUDIO*, specializing in interior design and wall decorations. Many of the works she created in her studio in the 1960s as art in architecture, reminiscent of her earlier kineticist creations, no longer exist. Yet the sheer force of these large-format works can be directly felt in her expressive drafts on paper. In 1975, My Ullmann moved to Constance, where she retired from artistic life and died in 1995, largely forgotten by the world.

30 years after her death, this many-sided artist, who during her life made a name for herself through her determination, self-confidence, and unconventional lifestyle, is being honored with a belated appreciation.



The exhibition and accompanying catalog were realized in collaboration with the Municipal Wessenberg Gallery in Constance.

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](http://MAK.at/en/press).



**Press Conference**

Tuesday, 16.4.2024, 10 am

**Opening**

Tuesday, 16.4.2024, 7 pm

Free admission to the exhibition opening

**Exhibition Venue**

MAK Works on Paper Room

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

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**Exhibition Dates**

17.4.–1.9.2024

**Opening Hours**

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

**Guest Curator**

Barbara Stark, Director, Municipal Wessenberg Gallery Constance

**Curator**

Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Head, MAK Library and Works on Paper

Collection/Archive

**Exhibition Design**

Michael Wallraff

**Graphic Design**

Paulus Dreibholz

**Publication**

*MY ULLMANN. Bilder, Bühne, Kunst am Bau*, edited by Barbara Stark and Lilli Hollein, with contributions by Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Barbara Lesák, Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, and Barbara Stark. German, 160 pages with numerous color illustrations. Municipal Wessenberg Gallery in Constance and MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna/Michael Imhof Verlag, Petersberg 2023. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at [MAKdesignshop.at](https://www.makdesignshop.at) for € 24.

**Accompanying Program**

Details at [MAK.at](https://www.mak.at)

**MAK Admission**

€ 16,50/15,50\*; reduced € 13,50/12,50\*; every Tuesday 6–9 pm:

admission € 8/7,50\*

Free admission for kids and teens under 19

\* Ticket price online



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