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Sonja Gangl  
I borrowed optimism from  
the past  
01 02 2020 — 02 04 2020

Press talk  
31 01 2020, 10 a.m.

Opening  
31 01 2020, 6 p.m.

Catalogue available



→ The artistic work of Sonja Gangl bears witness to an intensive investigation of our mediated and politicized everyday reality. The artist makes our world her motif and, along the way, never fails to notice its many facets. The Austrian artist is known especially for her outstanding naturalist drawings and long-term probing of this medium. With her solo exhibition *I borrowed optimism from the past* at the Künstlerhaus Halle für Kunst & Medien in Graz, Gangl is now opening a new chapter in her artistic oeuvre and devoting herself to abstraction with a comprehensive new production.

Situated at the center of the exhibition *I borrowed optimism from the past* is the series *Supra-Linien* (Supra-Lines, 2019/20). The fifteen large-format paintings created in preparation for the project show graphite-colored hatchings of various thicknesses on a white ground. Her compositions at first seem random, but, upon closer examination, this impression turns into its opposite: the painted motifs in the series go back to pencil and colored pencil drawings that the artist produced during her work on her early, naturalistic picture subjects in order to prepare the drawing material in the sense of testing the thickness and qualities of the pencils to be used—which she calls *Supra-Linien*. As an artistic concept, here, Gangl transfers drawing to the medium of painting in a process of transformation and thus opens up a sort of zooming into the structure of the material.

At the same time, the *Supra-Linien* are inspired by the art-historical model of the Abstract Expressionism of the late 1940s to early 1960s and transpose its political message for today. They are characterized by a marching-in-step with her artistic ancestors, who reacted to the consequences of the Second World War and exile overseas by concentrating on monumental formats, a strong desire for freedom, and an act of creation guided by emotions. In doing so, Gangl borrows not only the optimism of the North American art movement, but also the picture formats of artists like Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko. Each of her paintings thus has a direct reference to a historical masterpiece and again and again raises anew the question of the state of the achievements that were fought for in the field of the arts and society in the mid-twentieth century. With the *Supra-Linien*, the bright light of the show also spotlights one of the fundamental geometrical factors from which a picture is constructed, the line. This continuation of a place (point) always signifies a path, a direction. The exhibition title *I borrowed optimism from the past* already indicates that Sonja Gangl is interested in the path through and view of the here and now.

Drawing and the focusing and reduction to details and the essential that are inherent in it have connected art with science for hundreds of years. It thus comes as no surprise that, for the draftsman Sonja Gangl, the artistic appropriation of reality bears comparison with a study, an examination, or even a dissection. This can also be noticed in works that are not drawings at all: The video installation *Who's Afraid of Flies, Flies and Flies* (2018/2020) in the apse of the Künstlerhaus shows a threefold projection of a black-and-white close-up of a fly. The detailed picture of the insect with its fragile wings and legs is revealed in a strong light-dark contrast. The oversized bodies perform their cleaning process like the polyphonic choreography of a canon: the flies begin at different points in time, never clean synchronously, are never in one line, even though they resemble one another so closely.

With their conceptual methods, Sonja Gangl's works prompt viewers to take a closer look and to focus on what has hitherto been ignored, to recognize differences, and perhaps to think outside the box and break through imaginary boundaries as well. The aura of her *Supra-Linien* that arises based on the reference to history implies a turning to emotions, spontaneity, and a relentless expansion of areas of freedom, but can also be read a plea against limiting these important values. At the same time, the housefly in *I borrowed optimism from the past* is selected as a symbol of diversity and thus serves as a reference to the innumerable possibilities and perspectives, but, by implication, also to the current issues and tasks that determine how we see and hence also how we think. With the past at their back, her flies' flight lines might lead anywhere. In which direction things will go in the future is something that Sonja Gangl intentionally leaves open. She, in any case, takes an optimistic line, the supra-line.

The exhibition project *I borrowed optimism from the past* is aligned to the echo of the Achievement Prize for Fine Arts of the Province of Styria. This award, which goes hand in hand with a 10,000 euro prize, is bestowed once every three years to an artist deserving of recognition for his or her outstanding artistic oeuvre. In the year 2018, this honor was bestowed on Sonja Gangl, whose oeuvre was lauded by the jury for its outstanding contemporary drawing. In the course of this exhibition, a catalogue will be published which features views of individual works and the exhibition at large and texts of Sandro Droschl (KM– Graz), Jana Franze (KM– Graz), Robert Geimer (Freie Universität Berlin), Elsy Lahner (Albertina Wien) und Robert Woelfl (freelance writer, Vienna). Moreover, the online magazine of the venue, KM–Journal, is publishing a video interview with the artist.

Sonja Gangl (\*1965 Graz, lives in Vienna) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna under Markus Prachensky and at the University of Applied Arts Vienna under Ernst Caramelle. Since 2003 she has been a member of the Vienna Secession. Her exhibition *Dancing with the End* (2013–14) was the first solo presentation that the Albertina Museum in Vienna dedicated to a woman artist. Gangl's work has also been shown at numerous other art venues and is known beyond the border of Austria. She has had solo exhibitions in the Studio of the Neue Galerie Graz (1998), at Kunstverein Wolfsburg (1999 and 2000), Museum Moderner Kunst Kärnten (2016), and more than once at Atelier Contemporary in Graz (2009, 2014, and 2019) and Galerie Krobath in Vienna (2015 and 2018). In 2010, Gangl represented Austria at the biennale *Women & Art 2010* at the Sharjah Art Museum in the United Arab Emirates. At the Künstlerhaus, Halle für Kunst & Medien the artist already exhibited her work in 2014 as part of the group show *Words as Doors in Language, Art, Film*. Aside from the Achievement Prize for Fine Arts of the Province of Styria (2018), Sonja Gangl has also been honored with the Prize of the City of Vienna for the Visual Arts (1992), the Art Achievement Prize of the City of Graz (2002), the Promotion Award of the Province of Styria for Contemporary Fine Arts (2004), the BAUHOLDING-STRABAG Art AWARD (2005), the Art Prize of the City of Graz (2008), and the City of Vienna Prize for Fine Arts (2016).

Styrian Government Honorary Prize for Fine Arts

Curator: Jana Franze

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### **Supporting program**

31.01.2020 8 p.m. Ed Foxtrott & Walter Slowfox, DJ Set

05.03.2020 6 p.m. Elsy Lahner (Albertina Museum Wien), *Painting as Big Drawing*,  
lecture

19.03.2020 6 p.m. Peter Geimer (Freie Universität Berlin), *In Praise of the Fly*.  
*Encounters with a Puzzling Insect*

02.04.2020 6 p.m. Sonja Gangl, *I borrowed optimism from the past*, catalogue  
presentation

### **Art education program**

15.02.2020 11 a.m. *Aspects: Sonja Gangl and the fly*, exhibition talk

22.02.2020 6 p.m. Tina Bauer and Lina Gärtner, *Goth and Lovers*, discussion

22.02.2020 8 p.m. Terz Nervosa, *A Night of Goth*, concert

27.02.2020 6 p.m. Sarah Schmidt and Oskar Wlaschitz, *Draw & Drink*, workshop

Press download: <https://www.km-k.at/en/exhibition/sonja-gangl/press/>

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Sonja Gangl, Supra-Linien #05, 2019, photo: Thomas Gorisek.



Sonja Gangl, Who's Afraid of Flies, Flies and Flies (2018/2020).