

# secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession  
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien  
T. +43-1-587 53 07, F. +43-1-587 53 07-34  
office@secession.at, www.secession.at

## Press release

### Delaine Le Bas

#### *Incipit Vita Nova*

#### *Here Begins the New Life / A New Life Is Beginning*

June 30 – September 3, 2023

Galerie

**Preview for the press:** Thursday, June 29, 2023, 10 a.m.

**Opening:** Thursday, June 29, 2023, 7 p.m.

#### **Performance**

Juni 29, 2023, 7.45 p.m.

Delaine Le Bas & Hera Santos & Lincoln Cato

Delaine Le Bas works in a transdisciplinary way: she combines visual, performative and literary practices to create an artistic oeuvre that encompasses all areas of life. In her works she deals with many facets, political as well as private and emotional, which involve belonging to the Rom\*nja people, their history and rich cultural heritage. On the one hand, she uses "classical" forms and techniques, especially textile techniques such as embroidery and appliqué, which, in conjunction with large-flowered fabrics and fantastic imagery, are immediately associated with clichés and stereotypes. At the same time, Le Bas subverts her own decorative aesthetic by openly exploring her struggles, thus defying stereotypical limitations.

In her exhibitions, she stages spaces and creates moods; works and artifacts merge into an overall image. Her approach to materials could also be described as sustainable: she works with all means, pragmatic and inventive, with found objects, painting, film, drawing, embroidery, sculpture and video. Some exhibitions are marked by very personal and biographical explorations, while still others deal with more structural and political issues, such as the social position, discrimination and exclusion of marginalized groups.

The exhibition at the Secession is not the first time that her work has been shown in Austria. The artist has frequently exhibited in Vienna and Graz, several times also as part of the Wiener Festwochen. In 2011, together with her late husband, she created the installation *Safe European Home?* in front of the Parliament, addressing issues such as the Roma Holocaust, racism, displacement, forced nomadism, unequal access to education, insufficient humanitarian rights and their effects, and ultimately demanding rights for all minorities.

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In her feminist practice, the artist Delaine Le Bas has long been preoccupied with extraordinary female figures such as goddesses, visionaries, and witches. She recently installed a giant goddess in the garden of the Maxim-Gorki-Theater in Berlin, transforming the site into a scene of contemplation, encounter, and consciousness-raising, with workshops, conversations, rituals, and ceremonies rehearsing the culture of post-patriarchy. Little wonder, then, that Klimt's mythological visual language in the Beethoven Frieze, and especially the demonized female figures such as the Gorgons, drew her interest: the sketchbooks the artist produced as she prepared for the exhibition include numerous studies rendering her interpretations of motifs from the frieze.

“Like a burial chamber” was how the artist described the room that is now home to the Beethoven Frieze when she came to discuss her plans and saw the Galerie, the suite of exhibition spaces on the underground floor that, unbeknownst to visitors admiring Gustav Klimt's masterpiece, are nestled around it on the other side of the walls. If this spatial proximity between Klimt's frieze and Le Bas' installation is complemented by genuine affinities, that is due not so much to a deliberate response to the earlier artist's oeuvre than to a shared engagement with the great concerns of human existence: in this particular instance, with death, loss, and renewal.

It is surely not an accident that the artist in this exhibition turns to the transcendental religious universe of antiquity, when the bonds between the living and the dead were still palpable, when the threshold between the underworld and the realm of the living could be crossed in both directions—just think of Orpheus and Eurydice. For the artist, who consistently offers critical objections to more or less subliminal tendencies in society and is an alert observer and chronicler of social changes—and especially of intolerance and racism—this work grew out of a personal experience of loss: the death of her grandmother, the person she felt most attached to and her stalwart supporter. *Incipit Nova Vita* is about a caesura, a questioning, a fresh start. In grappling with this subject, Le Bas is attentive to its subtle nuances, as the second part of the title suggests, which deliberately offers two possible translations of the Latin phrase: *Here Begins the New Life / A New Life Is Beginning*.

The installation of the same title is a total work of art composed of paintings, sculptures, architecture, writing, performance, sound, light, and fabrics that extends through all three gallery rooms. For the choreographed movement in three dimensions, the artist worked with Lincoln Cato to develop a formally rigorous scenography integrating numerous objects that straddle the divide between furniture and cult object.

A robust cotton flooring is the unifying formal element connecting the three rooms, muffling visitors' footfalls and sustaining an atmosphere of introspective concentration. The central component serving to organize the spaces are transparent painted fabrics partitioning corridors and separate areas; the most delicate and permeable form of architecture, they are moreover open to the intense play of light and shadows staged by the artist, which animates silhouette-like figures. The paintings on the fabric panels look stenciled; figurative and often repetitive, they reprise a formal characteristic of the Beethoven Frieze, where it is especially evident in the Genii, the benevolent spirits.

As visitors, we follow the artist on a voyage into a strange limbo, a voyage that (if all goes well) leads to self-knowledge: we begin in a room whose walls, lined with silver foil, with each of our steps cast different

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distorted images into the room, as though in a mirror cabinet. Everything is fluid and in constant motion. A figure made of pieces of fabric stitched together and stuffed with hay is a life-size representation of a horse—modelled on the artist's grandfather's horse—while the red fur boots next to it are an enlarged replica of her first shoes. A photograph of the horse and the original baby shoes had a permanent place in the grandmother's cabinet; as biographical references, they now mark the exhibition's—and the voyage's—starting point.

Turning toward the niche on the left, we discover costumes made of white organdy, a favorite material of Le Bas' that is made sheer and unusually crisp by a special treatment. Finished with black paint, the dresses are reminiscences of a performance the artist staged together with the performer Hera Santos on the exhibition's opening night. The middle room is dedicated to chaos and the question: "How can you make art in chaos?" This in turn leads to the question of which function and role, if any, we actually believe art to be capable of in challenging times. In the last room, a long corridor demarcated by painted fabric panels grows narrower toward the far end, where it screens off a separate room we might perhaps describe as a portal to the underworld. Approaching the end of the exhibition, we finally reach the Pythia, the high priestess of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. "Before any pilgrim, or seeker after knowledge was granted an audience with the Oracle at Delphi and ushered into her presence they would be forced to confront and question themselves. The maxim 'Know Thyself' was inscribed in gold on a column on the threshold of Pythia's temple, serving as a warning that wisdom, understanding, empathy and anything remotely resembling peace of mind are unachievable without self-awareness, reflection, and ruthless self-criticism." (Stephen Ellcock in the book accompanying the exhibition)

Delaine Le Bas was born in Worthing, United Kingdom, in 1965 and lives and works in Worthing.

Programmed by the board of the Secession  
Curated by Bettina Spörr

Scenography: Delaine Le Bas with Lincoln Cato  
Soundscape: Justin Langlands  
Film: Delaine Le Bas & Laszlo Farkas

The artist would like to thank Wysing Arts Centre for the residency early 2023 where the majority of the works, photography and filming were created.

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## **Publication**

### ***Delaine Le Bas***

Format: 29,7 x 21 cm

Details: Softcover, 64 pages

Series design concept: Sabo Day

Graphic design: Sabo Day

Texts: Stephen Ellcock, Francesca Gavin (conversation)

Languages: German, English

Ca.40 images

Secession 2023

Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln

ISBN 978-3-7533-0471-7

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication with an essay by Stephen Ellcock in which he exemplifies the spiritual and mythological references in Delaine Le Bas's work and in particular in the installation conceived for the Secession with references from Greek mythology and ancient Egyptian death cults. Francesca Gavin conducted a conversation with the artist in which they discuss the context of the exhibition, the process of creation, and the background of the current works. The book's graphic design plays with numerous motifs from the artist's sketchbooks, which are animated by seers and chimeras, goddesses and mythical creatures, and also feature numerous references to Gustav Klimt's Beethoven Frieze. A silkscreen on the cover, attached with black tape, replaces the dustjacket and is Le Bas's artistic intervention for the book. It is an image of a female torso that happens to look like the Stone-Age fertility goddess Venus of Willendorf and also comes from a sketchbook. Printed by Pippa Parragh of Siebdruckatelier e.U., Vienna.

The digital publication is available for free at [https://secession.at/category/digital\\_publication](https://secession.at/category/digital_publication).

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### Current exhibitions

Hauptraum

**Lazar Lyutakov *1 Million Random Numbers***

June 30 – September 3, 2023

Galerie

**Delaine Le Bas *Incipit Vita Nova.***

***Here Begins The New Life/A New Life Is Beginning***

June 30 – September 3, 2023

Grafisches Kabinett

**Chen Chieh-jen *Worn Away***

June 30 – September 3, 2023

### Publications

*Lazar Lyutakov*

Softcover, dustjacket, 80 pages, EUR 18,00

*Delaine Le Bas*

Softcover, 64 Seiten, EUR 18,00

*Chen Chieh-jen*

Softcover, dustjacket, 56 pages, EUR 18,00

### Permanent presentation

Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

*Beethoven – Painting and Music* in cooperation with  
Wiener Symphoniker

### Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

### Admission

Regular € 12,00 | Students under 26 € 7,50

Seniors 65+ € 10,00 | Free admission for children under 12

### Press contact Secession

Julia Kronberger

T. +43 1 587 53 07-10, [julia.kronberger@secession.at](mailto:julia.kronberger@secession.at)

### Press images

download at <https://secession.at/presse>

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## Delaine Le Bas

### Biografie | Biography

Delaine Le Bas wurde 1965 in Worthing, Großbritannien geboren, lebt und arbeitet ebenda.  
Delaine Le Bas was born in 1965 in Worthing, United Kingdom, she works and lives in Worthing.

### Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl) | Solo exhibitions (selection)

- 2021 *St Sara Kali George*, Worthing Museum and Art Gallery, Worthing, UK  
*Zigeuner Sauce*, Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix, London, UK
- 2019 *Tutis A Rinkeeni Moola, Abri*, Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix, London, UK
- 2018 *Untouchable Gypsy Witch*, Transmission, Glasgow, UK
- 2015 *Say No to Identity Theft*, Gallery8, Budapest, HU  
*Kushti Atchin Tan?*, Galerie Kai Dikhas, Berlin, DE
- 2014 *Local Name: Unknown Gypsies?*, Phoenix, Brighton, UK  
*To Gypsyland, A Studio Practice and Archive Project*, 198, London, UK
- 2012 *O Brishindeskeriatar*, The Cardiff Story, Cardiff, UK
- 2011 *Witch Hunt*, Campbell Works, London, UK  
*Mapping Resistance*, Stiftung Kai Dikhas, Aufbau Haus, Berlin, DE

### Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl) | Group exhibitions (selection)

- 2022 *Beware of Linguistic Engineering*, Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin, DE
- 2020 *The crack begins within*, The 11th Berlin Biennale for contemporary art, Berlin, DE
- 2019 *DE HEMATIZE IT!*, 4. Berliner Herbstsalon, Maxim Gorki Theatre, Berlin, DE  
*FUTUROMA*, Collateral event for the 58th Venice Biennale, Venice, IT
- 2018 *The House of Le Bas Gypsy Couture*, ANTI Athens Biennale, Athens, GR  
*Come Out Now!*, The First Roma Biennale, Gorki & Studio R, Berlin, DE
- 2017 *Scharfstellen\_1*, <rotor> Association For Contemporary Art, Graz, AT  
*Romani History X*, Maxim Gorki Theatre, Berlin, DE  
*NSK State-in-Time Pavilion*, 57th Venice Biennale, Venice, IT
- 2016 *Universal Hospitality (Into The City)*, Alte Poste, Vienna, AT  
*(Re)conceptualizing Roma Resistance*, Hellerau, Dresden, DE
- 2015 *The Invisible Faces Of Europe*, Moderna Museet, Malmo, SE  
*Transmitting Trauma*, Galerie Kai Dikhas, Berlin, DE  
*Love & Loss*, LENTOS Kunstmuseum, Linz, AT  
*Basket Case II*, National Gallery Of Zimbabwe, Harare, ZW
- 2014 *To Gypsyland*, 198 Contemporary Arts & Learning, London, UK
- 2013 *Houses as Silver as Tents*, Zacheta National Gallery Of Art, Warsaw, PL
- 2012 *Reclaiming Identity*, Akademie Graz, Graz, AT  
*9th Gwangju Biennale*, Gwangju, KR  
*Gypsy Revolution: U.K.*, Museum of East Anglian Life, Suffolk, UK  
*Gypsy Revolution*, Cable Gallery, Helsinki, FI  
*Gypsy Revolution*, Kalio Kunsthalle, Helsinki, FI
- 2011 *Reconsidering Roma - Aspects of Roma and Sinti Life in Contemporary Art; Safe European Home?*, Into The City, Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, AT