

# 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

**Mai Ling**

***NOT YOUR ORNAMENT***

September 15 – November 12, 2023

Galerie

**Preview for the press:** Thursday, September 14, 2023, 11 a.m.

**Opening:** Thursday, September 15, 2023, 7 p.m.  
DJ-Set by Hotpotposse, 8 p.m.

Founded in Vienna in 2019, Mai Ling is an artists' collective and association dedicated to facilitating dialogues on experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia, and any kind of prejudice, particularly against Asian FLINT\* (women, lesbian, inter, non-binary, and trans). Rooted in solidarity against patriarchal and racial discrimination, the group offers a space and growing network to give voice to the many individuals affected by such discrimination and foster new forms of collaboration. As an anonymous collective and a multi-hybrid figure, with everyone identifying as "Mai Ling," the group employs a variety of artistic and discursive formats such as performances, texts, videos, sound, installations, talk series, interventions, and protests.

Mai Ling's name refers to an eponymous television sketch from 1979 by the German comedian Gerhard Polt that showcases sexist and racial stereotypes and prejudices against Asian women in German-speaking society. Drawing from this work and addressing present-day issues, Mai Ling challenges the Western heteropatriarchal gaze and confronts racist fantasies that keep reproducing stereotypes about "Asia" and are still deeply embedded in and internalized by society.

In *NOT YOUR ORNAMENT* Mai Ling investigates the racialized and gendered logic of "Ornamentalism"—a term conflating "Orientalism" and "ornamental" that the American feminist scholar Anne Anlin Cheng discusses in her book of that title, which analyses how the European and American imagination has constructed Asian femininity as a hybrid human being and decorative object. Mai Ling challenges such an objectified condition through ornamental and invasive plants. Drawing on the Secession's close relation to the Art Nouveau movement—often characterized by ornamental designs inspired by natural forms, such as flowers and plants—Mai Ling aims to reclaim their agency confronted by the decorative aesthetics that perpetuates the sexualization and dehumanization of Asian bodies within white society.

In this exhibition, the kudzu plant plays a central role in relation to the concept of "stickiness" as an agency of resistance and pleasure. Initially introduced as an "ornamental" plant during the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 in the U.S., and later used in agriculture to prevent soil erosion, the vine is now considered invasive in most of the Western world. Native to East and Southeast Asia and some Pacific islands, kudzu is known for its beneficial properties as a weaving material and as part of traditional medicine and cuisine, with the starch of its roots being used as a thickener and sticky ingredient.

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In their two-channel video installation *Becoming Stickiness* Mai Ling positions themselves and their own journey as one with kudzu—embracing its transformative, sticky, pleasurable, and resilient qualities. As the collective puts it: “Transforming and becoming with kudzu means developing our own abilities to take up space, merge with our surroundings, meander through obstacles, heal our kin, and spread freely. They say kudzu is difficult to eradicate because of its large, tuberous root structures. Let our own roots grow strong together.” The work begins with the search for kudzu, stickiness and pleasure through the gestures of experimenting, cooking, eating, sensing, interacting with, and embodying the invasive plant. It culminates in a collective choreography in which multiple bodies intermingle and ultimately become one with plants, challenging the troubled tensions within the politicised dichotomies between human and object, between decorative and invasive.

In an environment of ornamental plants in soil, the visitors can listen to the many voices of Mai Ling. Unfolding both historical accounts and their individual memories in relation to commodified house plants brought to the Western world, each story exposes the intricate entanglement of ongoing horticultural colonialism, exoticism, and migratory experiences. At the same time, the wallpaper re-appropriates botanical designs for domestic spaces typically seen in the Art Nouveau movement. The group portrait at the end of the exhibition further connects to Mai Ling’s existence being intertwined with that of the ornamental and invasive plants.

Mai Ling emerged as a group from the need for a platform to share experiences collectively. Hence, stickiness as a form of pleasure and fostering a stronger community was at the heart of their activities even before the notion was introduced to their practice.

In order to amplify the many voices involved, their reading room allows not only insights into previous works but access to relevant discourses on collectivity as well as diasporic and migratory communities. By offering guided tours in multiple Asian languages during the exhibition, they create space for informal gatherings and exchange, inviting others to join them on a journey of *Becoming Stickiness*.

Programmed by the board of the Secession  
Curated by Christian Lübbert

Thank you for the support: Gartengestaltung Mag. Roman Fuchs

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## **Publication**

### **Mai Ling. *NOT YOUR ORNAMENT***

Format: 17 x 24 cm

Details: Softcover, 88 pages

Series design concept: Sabo Day

Graphic design: Sabo Day, Rosen Eveleigh

Texts: Anne Anlin Cheng, Mai Ling, Banu Subramaniam, Weina Zhao (conversation)

Languages: German, English

Ca. 80 images

Secession 2023

Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln

ISBN 978-3-7533-0523-3

Mai Ling's first monograph is published on occasion of their exhibition *NOT YOUR ORNAMENT* at the Secession, September 15–November 12, 2023. It includes a conversation between the Asian diaspora association Perilla and the Vienna-based artists' collective Mai Ling as well as an excerpt from Anne Anlin Cheng's book *Ornamentalism* (2019), translated into German by Nicole Suzuki. Artistic intervention: Stick Together, kudzu bioplastic stickers produced in Vienna by Mai Ling and placed on the dust jacket. Each sticker has a different shape and size.

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	<b>SoiL Thornton <i>Choosing Suitor</i></b> September 15 – November 12, 2023
Galerie	<b>Mai Ling <i>NOT YOUR ORNAMENT</i></b> September 15 – November 12, 2023
Grafisches Kabinett	<b>Mykola Ridnyi</b> September 15 – November 12, 2023

### Publications

*SoiL Thornton. Choosing Suitor*  
Softcover, dustjacket, 168 pages, EUR 24,00  
*Mai Ling. NOT YOUR ORNAMENT*  
Softcover, 88 pages, EUR 18,00  
*Mykola Ridnyi*  
Softcover, dustjacket, 80 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

### Press images

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

## Main Sponsor

**ERSTE** 

### Public funding and supporters:

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Kunst, Kultur,  
öffentlicher Dienst und Sport

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Wien** | Kultur

freunde  
der  
**secession**

### Cooperation-, media partners, sponsors:

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## Mai Ling *NOT YOUR ORNAMENT*

### Werkliste | List of works

#### *NOT YOUR ORNAMENT*, 2023

Ortsspezifische Installation | Site-specific installation  
Sperrholz, Kudzu-Biokunststoff | Plywood, Kudzu-bioplastic  
Dimensionen variabel | Dimensions variable

#### *Becoming Stickiness*, 2023

Zweikanal-Videoinstallation | Two channel video installation  
Farbe, 16:9, 2.1 Ton, HD, 25:07 | colour, 16:9, 2.1 sound, HD, 25:07

#### *Dirt Nouveau*, 2023

Ortsspezifische Installation | Site-specific installation  
5 Hörspiele, Tapeten, Erde, Kudzu-Bioplastik, Metall) mit Kudzu (Pueraria phaseoloides und Pueraria tuberosa) mit Alocasia zebrina, Aspidistra elatior, Dracaena sanderiana, Dracaena marginata, Mimosa pudica, Cocos nucifera, Ficus elastica, Alocasia amazonica, Ananas comosus, Alocasia cucullata | 5 audio plays, wallpapers, soil, kudzu-bioplastic, metal) featuring Kudzu (Pueraria phaseoloides and Pueraria tuberosa) with Alocasia zebrina, Aspidistra elatior, Dracaena sanderiana, Dracaena marginata, Mimosa pudica, Cocos nucifera, Ficus elastica, Alocasia amazonica, Ananas comosus, Alocasia

#### *NOT YOUR ORNAMENT (portrait)*, 2023

Digitaldruck | Digital print  
Dimensionen variabel | Dimensions variable

#### *Mai Ling Speaks #2*, 2020

Online-Interview mit korientation | Online interview with korientation  
36:13 min

#### *Mai Ling Speaks #05*, 2020

Online-Interview mit Grace Ly | Online-interview with Grace Ly  
29:16 min

#### *Beautiful Alien Girl*, 2019

Video  
7:15 min

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## Mai Ling

### Biografie | Biography

Mai Ling ist ein 2019 in Wien gegründetes Künstler\*innenkollektiv und ein Verein, der sich dem Austausch über Erfahrungen mit Rassismus, Sexismus, Homophobie und jeder Art von Vorurteilen insbesondere gegenüber asiatischen FLINT\* (Frauen\*, Lesben, inter\*, nicht-binäre und trans\*-Personen) widmet.

Founded in Vienna in 2019, Mai Ling is an artists' collective and association dedicated to facilitating dialogues about experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia, and any kind of prejudice, particularly against Asian FLINT\* (women\*, lesbian, inter\*, non-binary, and trans\*).

### Projekte / Interventionen / Ausstellungen / Screenings / Talks | Project / Intervention / Exhibition / Screening / Talk

- 2023 *Mai Ling Speaks #9*, Talk series with Serena Lee, Aya Momose, and Hyeji Nam, VBKÖ, Vienna, AT  
*Who is Mai Ling?*, Performative Action at Brunnenpassage Theater am Markt, Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Speaks*, Lecture at Site-Specific Art, Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien, Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Kocht: Stick Together*, Performance at school, Vienna, AT
- 2022 *Mai Ling Soup Bath*, Cooking performance and gathering at Vivências, initiated by kültür gemma!, at Kulturhaus Brotfabrik Wien, Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Speaks #8*, Talk series with WILTS Press and Yellow Peril at Belvedere 21, Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Kocht: Eat Dirt*, Performance at Pickle Bar (by Slavs and Tatars), Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Kocht: Eat Dirt*, Performance, Donau Festival, Krems, AT  
*Mai Ling Kocht*, Performance and presentation at RECLAIM! THE POWER OF COMMUNITY, nadaLokal, Vienna, AT
- 2021 *Mai Ling Kocht: Eat Dirt*, Performance, Volkskundemuseum Wien, Vienna, AT  
*Ling's Golden Imperial*, Public Project with MUME, Naschmarkt, Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Kocht (edition: fish)*, Video Screening produced by FRUITFEST, online  
*Mai Ling Dialogues*, Solo Exhibition, Museum of Asian Arts in Nice, FR  
*Mai Ling Speaks #6*, Online talk series with Stephanie Misa and Perilla Zine (Pete Prison IV & Weina Zhao), online  
*Who is Mai Ling?*, Solo Exhibition, Austrian Association of Wom\*n Artists (VBKÖ), Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Kocht 2 Eating as pleasure and protest*, Virtual Performance at CIVA Festival, Vienna, AT and online
- 2020 Artist Talk and Film Screening, the Fluctoplasma Festival, Hamburg, DE  
*Mai Ling Kocht 2 Eating as pleasure and protest*, Virtual Performance and Artist Talk, kültür gemma!, Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Kocht*, Performance at Kultür gemma!, Migrating kitchen, Vienna, AT  
*Mai Ling Speaks #01, 02, 03*, Online Streaming of, Echoraume, Vienna, AT  
*The Beautiful Alien Girl*, Film Screening at the Seoul International New Media Festival, Seoul, KR  
*Online NOT Funny!*, Streaming of a online collective protest (April 6th and 10th), Echoraume, Vienna, AT

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Lecture Performance, the University of the Arts Bremen, DE

*Mai Ling Kocht*, Performance at Raw Matters, Le Studio - Film und Bühne c/o Studio Moliere, Vienna, AT

Guest Presentation, the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, AT

2019 Artist Talk and Film Screening at UNCENSORED: WE ARE SICK OF IT, Blickle Kino Belvedere 21, Vienna, AT

*Neither Black / Red / Yellow Nor Woman*, Group Exhibition, Times Art Center Berlin, DE Public Performance and Video Screening, FriedensBim, Vienna, AT

*Mein Name ist Mai Ling*, Film Screening, Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz, Vienna, AT

*Who is Mai Ling?*, Intervention, the 36|PROJECTCELL, Vienna, AT

**Stipendium | Scholarship**

2020 kùltùř gemma working scholarship, AT

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## Guided Tours

### *Together with Mai Lings*

Mai Ling offers guided tours in several languages.

*Together with Mai Lings* is a series of guided tours that center the voices of artists, cultural workers, collectives, and initiatives of Asian descent based in Austria. Each tour guide will act as a mediator between Mai Ling's artworks and their own artistic practice and lived experiences to offer a unique perspective on the exhibition.

The guided tours are an extension of Mai Ling Speaks, which was initiated in 2020 as a series of talks and interviews connecting the active voices dealing with the escalation of anti-Asian xenophobia.

Max. 20 participants

Admission and guided tour: Free of charge

Meeting point: Foyer of the Secession

For further information, please contact: [kunstvermittlung@secession.at](mailto:kunstvermittlung@secession.at)

## Dates:

### 16. September 2023, 4 p.m.

#### *Together with Mai Lings*

Guided tour with Aki Lee and Virginia Lui  
in Cantonese and Mandarin

### 2023年9月16日 16.00

#### *与Mai Ling一起*

Aki Lee 和 Virginia Lui 将提供粤语和普通话的展览导览

\*免费入场 (最多20人)

### 2023年9月16日 16.00

#### *连同Mai Ling一起*

Aki Lee 和 Virginia Lui 将提供粤语和普通话的展览导览

\*免费入场 (最多20人)

### 23. September 2023, 4 p.m

#### *Together with Mai Lings*

Guided tour with Mika Maruyama and Miwa Negoro  
in Japanese



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**2023年9月23日（土）16時**

ガイドツアー「マイ・リンたちと一緒に」

言語：日本語

担当：丸山美佳、根来美和

\*20人まで入館料無料

**30. September 2023, 4 p.m.**

*Together with Mai Lings*

Guided tour with Cao Thanh Lan

in Vietnamese

**Ngày 30 tháng 9 năm 2023, lúc 16 giờ chiều**

*Cùng đồng hành với các Mai Ling*

Tham quan triển lãm với hướng dẫn viên Cao Thanh Lan

Hướng dẫn tour bằng tiếng Việt

\* Miễn phí vào cửa (tối đa 20 người)

**1. November 2023, 2 p.m.**

*Together with Mai Lings*

Guided tour with Oi Pui Hoang and Suchart Wannaset

in German

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## Communication of Mai Ling in media

### **Anonymity of Mai Ling**

Mai Ling is an anonymous collective in which the identity and number of members are never disclosed.

No personal pronouns (she/he/they/it, etc.) should be used as Mai Ling is a hybrid figure. Use the name 'Mai Ling' when referring to the artist collective or an individual within the collective. Mai Ling could refer to one individual (singular) or in plural form (many Mai Lings).

### **What is FLINT\*?**

FLINT\*: female, lesbian, intersexual, non-binary, trans

### **Resources:**

<https://missy-magazine.de/blog/2020/12/07/hae-was-heisst-denn-flint/>

<https://kritische-maennlichkeit.de/glossar/flint-lgbtiga-usw/>

### **The fluid identity of Mai Ling**

Mai Ling deals with a hybridity of different Asian cultures/identities, and does not represent a single national culture/identity.

### **Crediting Mai Ling**

All works of art should be credited under Mai Ling.

### **Photographing Mai Ling**

Please do not photograph or take videos of the members of Mai Ling and publish them in the media.