

# 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

### JOSEF STRAU

## ***A Turtle Dreaming (... Echoes from an Encapsulated Space Exiled Sounds of Letters Requiring Symphonic Treatment)***

April 24 – June 21, 2015

Press conference: Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 10 a.m.

Opening: Thursday, April 23, 2015, 7 p.m.

Josef Strau's experimental artistic practice developed out of the written word. In his installations he relates texts and objects to each other in manifold ways. On the surface, the texts are characterized by the typographic interplay of printed word and blank space. At another level their distinctive feature is Strau's idiosyncratic style of writing, which nimbly and playfully tracks his stream of consciousness. Oscillating between the meaningful and the meaningless, he interweaves everyday stories and urban scenes with personal revelations and literary motifs.

Both in his exhibition at the Secession and in the accompanying publication, Josef Strau references an old-established motif of literature and film—the artist as dreamer, resembling a turtle, an encapsulated observer and recorder of his urban surroundings. Strau's chosen typology also occurs in Robert Bresson's film *Four Nights of a Dreamer* (1971) and in the short story on which it is based, *White Nights* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. The display focuses on a specific moment in the period during which Strau was preparing the exhibition: The composer Marina Rosenfeld had asked him to write a text for her new album. Together with her and the artist/musician Stefan Tcherepnin, Strau spent several days listening to music and discussing the lives and works of other great American composers. By presenting this as a fictional account, he promotes an idea of creative production at odds with the hustle and bustle that today is often considered as its necessary condition. In the exhibition, fragmentary descriptions and snapshots from this unique period of "romantic" creation appear which Strau experienced in a New York winter.

Josef Strau's exhibition combines various levels of presentation. A retrospective section comprises 91 text posters for previous exhibitions and selected photographic works showing snowy, deserted New York scenes. Added to an interior architecture consisting of partition walls, moreover, there are four walk-in sculptures made from simple materials such as plywood, sheet metal, Plexiglass, and insect screen. Here visitors can listen to music or watch films which were specially edited by Martin Reynolds for this

## **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

exhibition. These sculptures are introverted spaces meant for dreaming and withdrawal, independent from the institutional context within which, at the same time, they function as exhibition spaces in their own right.

*Strau says about his exhibition at the Secession: "It is another exercise in extemporaneous production. The show will contain four exhibitions, although each one of them will not appear executed in the form of its still fictional completeness. They will appear as if abruptly abandoned in mid-production, either by consequence of an interrupted process, or somehow metaphorically, as if the artist had disappeared at one moment during the intense preparation period before his institutional one-person show. This gives rise to a 'romantic' mode of interruption, or also of the compositional form of aleatoric deletions, or rather, a work with such musical or text motives rather than with themes, that determines the form for all the other parts of production presented in the exhibition."*

The ground plan of each sculpture is based on a letter: "J" and "H" from the Latin alphabet, "Я" (Ja) from the Cyrillic alphabet and the Hebrew "י" (Jod). While leaving the literal meaning open, Strau intends this maneuver as a eulogy of letters and writing as a cultural achievement. He says, *"Most of the exhibition relates to contemporary American culture, specifically the modes of how such ideas as the dreamer are conceived and later distributed. (American stands for the US as well as for the Mexican experience). Therefore the letters are containers of sounds, they are the place where one can hear echoes of the influence of another culture. The form is derived from two other cultural environments that influenced the creation of the project. One is the Russian literature and music and another the Hebrew culture that invented early on and stored with great care such narratives as the Books of Prophets, or the description of the interior attitude which, according to the construction manuals for the Feast of Tabernacles, the builder of a sukkah should cultivate."*

Josef Strau is a gallerist, curator, writer, musician, and artist who roams freely between his roles. He writes for most of his own visual arts projects as well as for numerous publications, catalogues, and journals. Recent solo shows were staged at the Renaissance Society, Chicago (2014), the Liverpool Biennale (2014, with Stefan Tcherepnin), House of Gaga, Mexico City (2013, 2010), and at the Greene Naftali Gallery, New York (2012).

Josef Strau, born in Vienna in 1957, lives in New York.

By invitation of the Board of the Secession  
Curator: Annette Südbeck

**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

The artist would like to thank all the participants, in particular Marina Rosenfeld, Stefan Tcherepnin, and Carol Green for their support for the concert; Martin Reynolds and Simone Bader for the film production; House of Gaga and Nora Schulz for their input on the exhibition concept; and the Secession's installation crew for their dedicated assistance especially in the development of the Letter Tunnels.

**Works titles**

Josef Strau, *The Italian Café Echo of the Unanswered Question*, 2015

Josef Strau, *The Snow and the Shadows and the Orchestral Sound and the Piano of Marina Rosenfeld*, 2015

Josef Strau, *The Hudson River and the Echo of the Rhapsody in Blue by Gershwin*, 2015

Josef Strau, *The Balcony and the Sounds of the "Black Robe" Movie*, 2015

All works: Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne, Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, and House of Gaga, Mexico City

**Publication**

An artist's book will be published in conjunction with the exhibition.

Josef Strau

*Dreaming Turtle*

120 pages

Format: 165x222 mm

Texts : Josef Strau

Secession 2015

Distribution: Revolver Verlag

EUR 21,-

**Press images**

Installation views for download

<http://www.secession.at/presse>

## 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

## Contact

Katharina Schniebs  
T. +43 1 587 53 07-10  
F. +43 1 587 53 07-34  
E-Mail: presse@secession.at

## secession

Wiener Secession, Association of Visual Artists  
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Vienna, Austria  
T. +43-1-587 53 07, F. +43-1-587 53 07-34  
office@secession.at, www.secession.at  
Tuesday – Sunday 10 am – 6 pm  
Permanent presentation: Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Hauptsponsor



MehrWERT Sponsoring

Public funding and supporters:



BUNDESKANZLERAMT ÖSTERREICH  
KUNST

Friends of the Secession

The exhibition of Josef Strau is sponsored by Arbeiterkammer Wien.



Sponsor der Ausstellung

Cooperation-, media partners, sponsors:

