

Stefan Bertalan

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Press Release

We are pleased to present an extensive solo exhibition in Germany devoted to Stefan Bertalan (*1930, Răcăștie – 2014, Timișoara), one of the most extraordinary and pioneering Romanian artists. The presentation encompasses several decades of his artistic production, with a focus on the years in Timișoara (beginning 1962) and Sibiu (1982–85) before Bertalan immigrated to Germany with his family (he was able to visit Romania again only after 1989). The exhibition is organized into various chapters that highlight specific pictorial themes, materials, and approaches in Bertalan's practice, relating these to one another from diverse angles.

Stefan Bertalan's artistic work is both research and process-oriented. His central area of interest was nature, in particular the growth of plants, but also the anatomy of animals (insects), the structure of stones, shells and minerals, the topology of landscapes, the movements of clouds and wind, and the description of anatomical bodies and cosmological interconnectedness. To record his investigations, Bertalan worked with various media, especially with drawings, whereby the exhibition turns its attention in particular toward his experimental photographs, actions and happenings in public spaces, as well as performances.

During extended walks in and around Timișoara, and in everyday encounters with the garden next to his studio, Bertalan explored the forms in nature as inspiration for his research and art. The result was a multifaceted cosmos consisting of sketches, journal-style (poetic) notations and mathematical calculations, through which he followed morphological processes – from the seed capsule and all the way to the blossoming and withering away of plants. Bertalan's home was simultaneously a laboratory, studio and gathering place, with an interior characterized by his passion and appreciation for the nature that surrounded him, and a sense of curiosity about it. The artist continued to conduct his experimental observations as a founding member of the group Sigma, which engaged in collective and interdisciplinary work with findings from the areas of cybernetics, information technology, mathematics, bionics and psychology. His approach to nature became the subject of an innovative teaching concept he introduced at the Fine Arts Highschool and the Department of Architecture of the Polytechnic Institute, and was thus able to encourage the students to become actively engaged in a sustained way on behalf of nature. Produced within the same context were a number of actions and happenings, where forms developed from nature were transferred onto formable materials (cables, fabrics, transparent foils) – as a model of perpetual transformation that exemplifies Bertalan's intermedial approach.

Stefan Bertalan was preoccupied with plants that visualize extraordinary geometrical structures, or a certain vegetal resistance, such as the tall sunflower, with its striving toward the light, or the apricot tree, whose branching crown forms a network, or the common jimson weed, with its funnel-shaped blossom in the form of a pentagon. Cauliflower fascinated Bertalan by virtue of its fractal structure, which he analysed on the basis of markings and colours and presented as a work in an exhibition in 1977. All of these works illustrate an analytical interest that was oriented toward mathematical and biological processes, but above all, a subjective sensibility for nature as an ally on equal terms in a universal (art) system, with plants as its agents.

Bertalan's communication with nature on a basis of equality was shaped by the principles of bionics, systems theory, and more particularly by a holistic perspective of the world as a network of indissoluble relationships between lifeforms in space and time. The more closely the artist drew toward the plants, the more clearly he was able to visualize a relation, although he regarded plants as superior to humanity, since they sustain the ecosystem rather than decomposing it. Bertalan began communicating with nature, personifying the plants (like the sunflower in the performance that gives this exhibition its title), until he inscribed himself directly into nature, growing together with it, and finally disappearing with it in exile (self-portrait with potato in its subterranean existence).

In their consistent nonconformity, Bertalan's works are subtly critical, and his life together with plants was pure anarchy. His increasingly noticeable turn toward mysticism and transcendence is equally radical in its conscious withdrawal from the reality in communism. Bertalan's symbiotic approach to nature is still relevant today, and is linked together on a variety of levels with the artistic positions of *Plants_Intelligence*, presented in the atrium of the Kunstverein.

Curated by Anja Casser

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We would like to thank Esther Schipper Gallery, Georg Lecca, Georg Schöllhammer and Ileana Pintilie.

Stefan Bertalan (*1930, Răcăștie, † 2014, Timișoara, ROM) lived and worked mainly in Timișoara, ROM, and from 1986 to 2012 in Öhringen, GER. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts 'Ion Andreescu' in Cluj-Napoca, ROM (today: University of Arts and Design). From 1962, Bertalan himself was professor at the Timișoara Fine Arts Highschool. In 1965, he co-founded Group 111, the first artists' collective for experimental art in Romania; from 1970, he was a member of the pioneering artists' group Sigma. In the same year, he began teaching at the Department of Architecture at the Faculty of Engineering in Timișoara until he moved to Sibiu, ROM, in 1981 and then to Germany in 1986.

At the 46th Biennale di Venezia, ITA (1995), the artist's works were shown in the Romanian Pavilion and in Palazzo Correr. His other most important solo and group exhibitions include:

In Tune With The World, Art Encounters Foundation, Timișoara, ROM (2025, solo exhibition); *Stefan Bertalan (1930-2014), Major Works. A proposal by Bernard Blistène*, Esther Schipper, Paris, FRA (2025, solo exhibition); *Utopia and Research. Timișoara's experimental groups 111 and Sigma (1966-1981)*, National Museum of Arts, Timisoara, RO (2024); *The Picasso Effect*, MARE, Bukarest, ROM (2023); *Lost in the Moment that Follows: The Ovidiu Sandor Collection*, Kunsthalle Praha, Prag, CZE (2023); *Changes*, Mumok - Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Wien, AT (2022); *Things we sense about each other*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, GER (2021); *Parlament der Pflanzen*, Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, LIE (2020); *Ex-East. Past and recent stories of the Romanian avant-garde*, Espace Niemeyer – Siège du Parti communiste français, Paris, FRA (2019); *La Brique, The Brick*, Cărmida, La Kunsthalle Mulhouse, FRA (2019); *The Encyclopedic Palace*, La Biennale di Venezia, ITA (2013); *Ștefan Bertalan*, Muzeul de Artă, Timișoara, ROM (2012, solo exhibition); *The Self-Punishing One*, Mogoșoia Palace, Muzeul de Artă, Timișoara, The Bánffy Palace, Cluj, ROM, and Neuklosterburg, AUT (2009, with Florin Mitroi and Ion Grigorescu).

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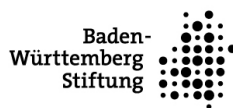


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