

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

Reba Maybury *I Come in Peace*

6.3. – 31.5.2026

Grafisches Kabinett, Foyer, Façade, Beethoven Frieze

Press conference: Thursday, 5 March 2026, 10 am

Opening: Thursday, 5 March 2026, 7 pm

How do you dominate Gustav Klimt?

This was one of the first questions Reba Maybury posed while preparing her exhibition *I Come in Peace*. Maybury is an artist, writer, and political dominatrix whose multidisciplinary practice interrogates the intersections of feminism, sexuality, labour, and power. Her exhibition unfolds over four sites – across the building’s façade, in the foyer, upstairs in the Grafisches Kabinett, and in the Beethoven Frieze space. The artist conceived a site-responsive project, not only in terms of its architectural interventions but also in its engagement with the institution’s history.

Approaching the iconic Secession building today, visitors encounter twelve usernames mounted on the façade. The names were sourced by the artist from online platforms where men publicly review their experiences with female sex workers in Vienna. Executed in the same gold Art Nouveau typeface that already adorns the building, the inscriptions formally blend into the architectural language of the Secession while subtly unsettling it. Their number deliberately echoes the twelve founding “fathers” of the institution. By inserting these digital traces of contemporary transactional intimacy into the monumental surface of the façade, Maybury collapses distinctions between public commemoration, local private desire and the power structures underlying them.

Art Nouveau, with its pronounced erotic charge, has historically been closely bound to the objectification of female bodies, often mobilised as mere ornamental surfaces rather than seats of agency. This aesthetic logic is inseparable from the institutional conditions under which it emerged. The Secession itself was founded by an exclusively male group of artists, whose celebrated visions of modernity relied on gendered hierarchies of visibility and authorship. Although women artists occasionally participated in early exhibitions, they were formally excluded from membership until 1949. These institutional asymmetries form a crucial backdrop to Maybury’s intervention, situating her critique within enduring power structures that have shaped the production, display, and valuation of art.

Operating under the alias Mistress Rebecca, Maybury disperses patriarchal structures and capitalist desire, often by subverting conventional domination–submission dynamics. Grounded in radical feminist thought, her work addresses the commodification of female identity and explores how erotic labour can be reframed as a site of political resistance.

In occupying the figure of the dominatrix, Maybury frequently requires her submissives to confront their complicity in structural oppression by anonymously producing artworks under her instruction. In the foyer, the artist installed a glass ceiling and told one of her submissives to climb on a scaffold and kiss its surface. The glass ceiling metaphorically points to the structural limitations in reaching power for

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

those outside of the male, heterosexual, white hierarchy. With pointed humour and deliberate provocation, the work also references Klimt's *The Kiss* while foregrounding questions of visibility. Enhanced by theatrical lighting, the lipstick traces – often left by women and queer people – remain visible, whereas men's kisses typically do not. Here, Maybury dramatizes the men's kisses for our entertainment.

In the Grafisches Kabinett, twelve piles of clothing are scattered all over the floor. Over the years, various submissives have surrendered their entire outfits to Maybury as part of their sexual-economic contract. For these works named *Used Men* (2021–2026), the artist instructed one submissive man to enter the gallery and remove his clothes until fully naked. He was then directed to put on the garments of other submissive men, one outfit at a time, before undressing again – each cycle leaving another pile of clothing on the floor. In addition, the scents of a variety of the most popular men's colognes are emitted throughout the room.

To this day, the Secession attracts visitors from around the world who come to see Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze*, widely regarded as one of his major bodies of work. For this exhibition, Maybury instructed a number of her submissives to recreate the frieze using paint-by-numbers kits. The resulting images are presented inside an architectural model of the room at a scale of 1:10. By translating the canonical artwork by Klimt, whose models were often sex workers, into a delegated, deskilled process, the work engages questions of authorship, genius, and historical authority. Reflecting on this gesture, the artist writes:

“Klimt after all is a prototype for a male genius and apparently what an artist is supposed to be. I think about Klimt and his friends, the founders of the Secession, their enormously celebrated portrayals of female beauty, heterosexual romance and even pregnancy and their absolute distance from them while being lionized for somehow owning these parts of life. I believe they are still responsible for keeping outdated ideas of romance alive and this can be dangerous.”

Reba Maybury was born in Oxford, UK, in 1990 and lives in Denmark.

Programmed by the board of the Secession
Curated by Haris Giannouras

The exhibition was supported by The Danish Arts Foundation and the Fake Foundation.
Special thanks to Company Gallery and Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi



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

Publication

Reba Maybury

Format: 14,8 x 21 cm

Details: Softcover, dust jacket, 96 pages

Series design concept: Sabo Day

Grafik: Sabo Day, Rosen Eveleigh

Texts: Reba Maybury, Avgi Saketopoulou

Languages: German, English

5 images

Secession 2026

Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln

ISBN 978-3-7533-0989-7

EUR 21

How do you dominate Gustav Klimt? This was one of the first questions Reba Maybury posed while preparing her exhibition *I Come in Peace*. Maybury is an artist, writer, and political dominatrix whose multidisciplinary practice interrogates the intersections of feminism, sexuality, labour, and power. The exhibition is accompanied by a publication featuring a set of instructions for *I Come in Peace* written by the artist, as well as excerpts from psychoanalyst's Avgi Saketopoulou's book *Sexuality Beyond Consent: Risk, Race, Traumatophilia*. The artistic intervention takes the form of lip traces left by one of Maybury's submissives: the artist made him kiss each individual copy.

The digital publication is available for free:



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

Permanent presentation	Gustav Klimt, <i>Beethoven Frieze</i> <i>Beethoven – Painting and Music</i> in cooperation with Wiener Symphoniker
Opening hours	Tuesday – Sunday 10 am – 6 pm
Admission	Regular € 13,00 Students under 26 € 7,50 Seniors 65+ € 10,00 Free admission for children under 12 The entrance is free on every first Wednesday of the month – sponsored by Neuroth
Press contact	Ramona Heinlein T. +43 1 587 53 07-71, ramona.heinlein@secession.at
Press images	download at https://secession.at/presse

Main Sponsor



Public funding and supporters:

 Bundesministerium
Wohnen, Kunst, Kultur,
Medien und Sport



secession
friends

Annual partners:

 **NEUROTH**
BESSER HÖREN • BESSER LEBEN

DOROTHEUM
SEIT 1707



Business
Solutions

Cooperation partner:



Media partners and sponsors:

Beethoven
WIEN/VIENNA


Schrenser
DAS WALDVIERTLER BIER

VÖSLAUER


BRÜNDLMAYER
LA BIÈRE LIÉGÈSE – 031 ERBENICH

DENA



KURIER

