

# Viennese Actionism

Brus, Muehl, Nitsch and Schwarzkogler  
The Hummel Collection

**13 March - 25 May 08**

The exhibition is accompanied by extensive publication, including three essays on Viennese Actionism and reproducing works of this movement from the Hummel Collection.

A seminar on Viennese Actionism will take place on the 28, 29 and 30 April, with the participation of national and international experts.

## Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo

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### Timetable

**1 October - 31 March**  
Tuesday to Friday: 10 - 20 h.  
Saturday: 11 - 20 h.

**1 April - 30 September**  
Tuesday to Friday: 10 - 21 h.  
Saturday: 11 - 21 h.

Sunday: 10 - 15 h.  
Closed on Monday.  
Holidays: Consult with Centre

### Access

Avda. Américo Vespucio nº2  
Camino de los Descubrimientos s/n

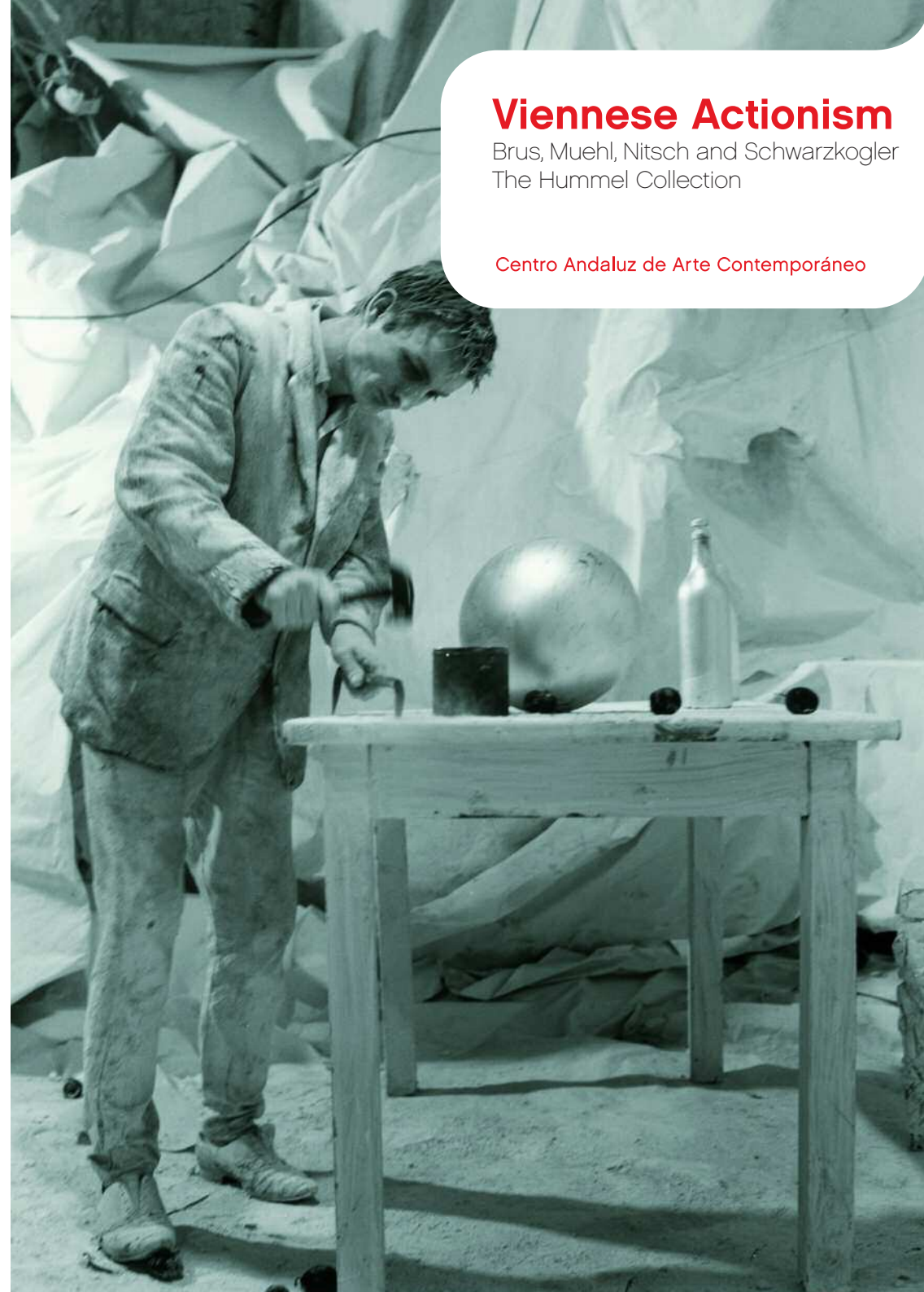
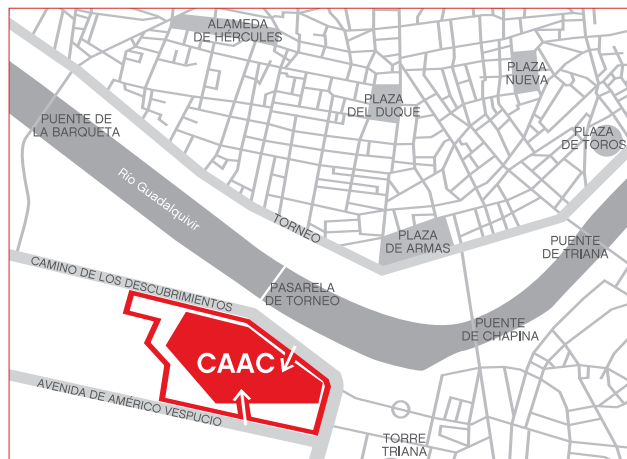
### Transport

C1 and C2 buses

**Tickets sales until 30 minutes before closing**

### Library

Monday to Friday (except holidays): 9 - 14 h.



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The Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo is showing a wide selection of paintings, photographs, films and representative documents of Viennese Actionism from the Hummel Collection, one of the private European foundations specialising in the work of the artists Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, who headed this movement that was intensely active in Vienna from 1960 to 1970, when most of the works on show were created.

From a historic viewpoint, Viennese Actionism should be located at the crossroads of the performative act that shook the world from East to West in the late 1950s. There was a need to make a critical break with the hegemony of North American abstract painting of the New York School and European informalism. The aim was to widen the field of painting out towards the performative space. Doors were opened onto an art of behaviour, in which attitude replaced the object, under the dictates of real time.

For the first time in Austria, the Viennese Actionism were able to create a truly avant-garde movement, using the body as the instrument for a revolutionary artistic and political practice, which was a unique phenomenon in post-war Europe. It occurred in parallel with the North American happening, the International Fluxus movement, the performative orientation of German artists such as Joseph Beuys and Wolf Vostell, together with the awakening of certain neo-Dadaist explosions, such as the Gutai group in Japan, the French situationists and lettrists and other neo-avant gardes.

In Austria, Viennese Actionism represented an aggressive response to the conservative post-Second World War generation in a country where reconstruction was even more difficult, because of the alliance with National Socialism, the severe repression to which it was subjected after the war – with independence and integration not coming until 1955 – and the traditional bourgeois values marked by deeply rooted Catholicism and a lack of avant-garde movements in the early years of the 20th century.

The influence of Freud on Viennese Actionism caused the drive of the forces of the unconscious to run through the subject, using the body as a physical channel and path to liberation. The body took on meaning as an artistic idea and was transformed into a subversive element introducing new energies into direct artistic expression inserted into reality – a manner of abolishing representation and abandoning the dominion of the illusory to act in the realm of the real. Günter Brus wrote in his diaries in 1960: “*My body is the intention. My body is the event. My body is the result.*” All of this in a context of return to the values of art as an immediate experience that should be completed by the spectator and in the framework of the appearance of new media (photography, films and communication media).

The actionists set out on a path concerning the artistic avant-garde which, as in Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty”, cut through the myths, rites and symbolic systems of humanity based on the rejection of contemporary history and embracing the marginality of “a subject in progress” built outside the conventions of the word and language and the “unary subject” it represents. This ideological struggle through the body was made patent by Viennese actionism in its bre-

aking of the chain of signifiers installed in that subject. An instrument useful for this rebellion was the backward look towards the Viennese Secession and its “death wish”: the Vienna of Klimt, Schiele and Kokoschka, of Freud and Wittgenstein. In that rebellion of language they were preceded and accompanied by the radical poets of the *Wiener Gruppe* (1954-1960).

In the light of psychoanalysis, Brus rebelled against all exterior objects and against the body itself, Schwarzkogler did so by sublimating the empire of the senses, Nitsch achieved it by using sacrificial rites and Muehl put sexual liberation into action as a symbol of the subject’s awakening, to liberate him from family, state and symbolic oppression.

The actions were an extension of painting and, at the same time, a liberation of the instincts in their attacks on sex and religion. Irreverent, in their mingling of sex and religion, exhibitionist, by showing in public the intimacy of the body and its functions, and blasphemous, in their use of religious archetypes and their symbols in the opposite sense of Catholic orthodoxy, they had, despite all



Otto Muehl, 46th Action: Military training, 1967

this, a curative, therapeutic aim on both individual and social levels.

In the late 1960s, after their participation in the DIAS (*Destruction in Art Symposium*) in London (1966), their actions became more radical, less intimate, more public and immodest, inaugurating an art of direct action (Direct Art), whose meaning became revolutionary; a direct attack on bourgeois values seeking their destruction. They created Zock (Zealous Organisation of Candied Knights) (1967), whose premises lead to total revolution. They were by this time well known internationally and opted for an art that was political and revolutionary, in line with the new ideological paradigm that prepared the way for May 1968 in France, the student revolts in American universities and the pacifist, psychedelic and communal movements.



Günter Brus, Action Ana, 1964