

Press Release, 15.4.19

steirischer herbst '19
Grand Hotel Abyss

19.9.–13.10.19

Opening days: 19.–22.9.19

Various venues in Graz and Styria, Austria

steirischer herbst is an interdisciplinary festival for contemporary art established in 1968 in a challenging political and geographical context, in a country with many historical skeletons in the closet, in a town right at the Cold War frontier. The festival's new curatorial team started in 2018 by addressing this history and the current political climate in Austria and Europe with an inaugural edition titled *Volksfronten*. The 2019 edition follows suit, delving ever deeper into the disruptive contradictions and uncanny charms of Hapsburgian Europe and their relevance for the rest of the world.

The title of the festival's program this year is *Grand Hotel Abyss*—a striking metaphor used by philosopher Georg Lukács. Lukács described the European intellectual and cultural scene as “a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity. And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments, can only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered.” Lukács's image rhymes with the self-presentation of Graz and the surrounding Austrian county of Styria as a *Genussregion*, a culinary and aesthetic pleasure zone. It is one of many bubbles of sublime gastronomy, wellness and organic comfort arising in times of heightened inequality—places custom-tailored for business travelers and cultural tourists, where praise of heirloom products has creepy crypto-nationalist undertones, and where the abyss of radical social exclusion, economic crisis, and all-out military conflict is lurking just around the corner, approaching in slow motion.

Grand Hotel Abyss takes this situation as a point of departure for a broader meditation on hedonism in times of approaching apocalypse. It looks back to the festival's prehistory in the heady days of the early Cold War—when British officers, including a young John le Carré, took over the city's one actual grand hotel, Hotel Wiesler, and set up their headquarters in Palais Attems, today the office of steirischer herbst. It tells stories about Nazi wellness politics, sexual practices of the future, the impossible choice between fascism and Nazism imposed on 1930s

Tyrol, produce sanctions in contemporary Russia—and fast-forwards to a dystopian future, where the existing cultural institutions of the city are jeopardized to be turned into cafés.

The festival opens on 19 September with an evening-long extravaganza of surprise events, before unfolding across the city for a four-week-long, densely woven curatorial narrative, consisting of performances, stage productions, installations and films by artists from all over the world. As always, the core program is accompanied by a rich and diverse parallel program, presented by the cultural institutions of Styria and the city of Graz. A complete list of artists of *Grand Hotel Abyss* will be made public in June.

Director and Chief Curator: Ekaterina Degot

Concept: Ekaterina Degot and David Riff

Curatorial team: Mirela Baciak, Ekaterina Degot, Henriette Gallus, Dominik Müller, Christoph Platz, and David Riff

Online accreditation for press and professionals as well as Festival Pass sales start June 2019.

Press contact: press@steirischerherbst.at

Professional visitors contact: pro@steirischerherbst.at

Further information on the Festival Pass: tickets@steirischerherbst.at

steirischer herbst Press office

press@steirischerherbst.at

p +43 316 823 007 61