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Ringturm wrapping by Arnulf Rainer – “Veil of Agnes”

Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein is continuing the tradition of covering the Ringturm with large-format works of art with Arnulf Rainer’s “Veil of Agnes” (Schleier der Agnes). Rainer’s work will adorn the facade of the Ringturm this summer from 16 June. The high-visibility art project, set to take place this year for the seventh time, is a declaration of the long-standing connection between Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein and the Klosterneuburg Monastery.



Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein and the Klosterneuburg Monastery have long been bound by partnership. Back in 1824, Gaudenz Dunkler, the provost of the monastery at the time, was one of the founding fathers of Wechselseitige k.k. priv. Brandschaden-Versicherungs-Anstalt, which would later go on to become Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein, the predecessor to Wiener Städtische Versicherung and Vienna Insurance Group. Wiener Städtische has always been a faithful partner, even in difficult times, such as after Austria’s annexation into Nazi Germany, when the church was subject to tremendous political pressure. Today, the path shared by Wiener Städtische and the Klosterneuburg Monastery is reflected in the wide-ranging support of the monastery’s diverse cultural activities.

WIENER STÄDTISCHE WECHSELSEITIGER VERSICHERUNGSVEREIN, MAIN SHAREHOLDER OF VIENNA INSURANCE GROUP

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The Ringturm was designed by Erich Boltenstern. Upon its completion in 1955, it was Austria's first office high-rise and is considered a milestone in Austrian architecture. Today, the Ringturm is a place where people come together in dialogue and is a symbol of Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein's wide-ranging commitment to society, the arts and culture. *"This year's wrapping of the Ringturm pays tribute to the long-standing connection between Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein and the Klosterneuburg Monastery with a colourful work of visual art that depicts the story behind the monastery's founding: Saint Leopold III, his wife Agnes and the legend of the veil. I am delighted to have the internationally renowned artist Arnulf Rainer on board for this project, which gives us the opportunity to highlight the long-standing ties between both institutions so very visibly,"* said Günter Geyer, General Manager of Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein.

Arnulf Rainer's Ringturm covering

His "overpaintings", developed in the 1950s, made the founder of the informal movement in Austria internationally famous and earned him a reputation among his fellow artists around the world. Arnulf Rainer's intense search for new paths in painting and the constant development of new artistic strategies, accompanied by performances and exhaustive volumes of written works, allowed him to become one of the most influential contemporary living artists.

His work "Veil of Agnes" is set to cover the Ringturm in brush strokes that are equally bold and nuanced while blending in manifold transparent overlaps to form an abstract overall image. A vibrant yellow brush stroke that runs down two sides of the Ringturm gives the work a compositional anchor. It negates the building's rigid forms and lets it appear graceful and light.

Since 2006, summers have regularly seen the Ringturm transform itself into an "art tower". The following artists have already had the honour of covering the Ringturm, which has a total surface of 4,000 square metres, in 30 printed mesh sheets measuring around 3 metres in width and 63 or 36 metres in length: Christian Ludwig Attersee ("Don Giovanni", 2006), Robert Hammerstiel ("Tower of Life", 2007), Hubert Schmalix ("Tower in Blossom", 2008) and Xenia Hausner ("A Sense of Family", 2011). Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein has also highlighted its close cultural connection to Central and Eastern Europe in the past by commissioning László Fehér (Hungary, "Society", 2012) and Dorota Sadovská (Slovakia, "Ties", 2013).

The "Veil of Agnes" exhibition

This year marks the first time that the Ringturm covering is to be accompanied by an exhibition. The "Veil of Agnes" exhibition is on display from 17 June to 11 July 2014 and will be opened along with the Ringturm covering on 16 June 2014. The exhibition centres on the original work behind the "Veil of Agnes" motif used by Arnulf Rainer. Selected works from the series "Veil and bow pictures" ("Schleier und Schleifenbilder"), a cycle of abstract paintings from the 1990s, will also be on display, allowing visitors to get an in-depth look at Rainer's creations.

The second part of the exhibition is dedicated to Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein's long-time partner, the Klosterneuburg Monastery. The exhibition takes a look back at the story behind the founding of the monastery, which is celebrating its 900th anniversary this year and continues to be one of Austria's leading religious and cultural centres. The legend of the veil, the leitmotif of this year's Ringturm covering, is the main focus of the exhibition.

The story of the monastery's founding has served as the basis for many artistic historical depictions. The exhibition illustrates this legend with artworks from the monastery's collection.

The cornerstone of the monastery's church was laid on 12 June 1114 after Margrave Leopold III of Austria – who would later become the country's patron saint – voiced his wish that the monastery he founded should have an appropriate house of worship. His generous patronage and the size of the abbey church, which made it the largest in the country at the time, laid the foundation for a religious,

social and cultural centre. The choice of location can be traced back to the legend of the veil: After their wedding, Margrave Leopold III and his new wife, Agnes, were standing on the balcony of his castle on Leopoldsberg when a gust of wind blew Agnes's veil from her head and carried it across the pastures. Leopold sent his men off to search for the veil immediately, but it was nowhere to be found. Then and there, the Margrave promised he would build a monastery on the spot where the veil was found. Nine years later, the Margrave was out hunting. Suddenly, his dogs picked up on a scent and darted off. When the Margrave caught up with them, they were barking at an elder bush. There in the branches hung the Margravine's veil. Leopold III remembered his promise and decreed that the Klosterneuburg Monastery be built at that very spot.

The third part of the exhibition takes a look at the founding of Wechselseitige k.k. priv. Brandschaden-Versicherung-Anstalt 190 years ago. It examines the work of Georg Ritter von Högel Müller and the role of Gaudenz Dunkler, the provost of the Klosterneuburg Monastery at the time. Selected historical documents, such as the insurance company's original articles of association from 1824, are included in the exhibition. Fascinating memorabilia paints a picture of the company's growth, while certificates, insurance policies, deposit books, coin bank clocks and much more bring history to life for visitors. The journey through time returns to the present day with a time-lapse film of this year's Ringturm covering: the veil of Agnes as interpreted by the artist Arnulf Rainer.

The Ringturm is also playing host to YOUNG ART FROM CEE, an exhibition as part of the Essl Art Award CEE 2013, until 6 June 2014. Since 2009, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein has provided support to the winners of the Essl Art Award CEE and has invited one winner from each the eight CEE countries to participate in a group exhibition at the Ringturm. Visitors can enjoy new works created especially for the exhibition by Dan Adlešič (Slovenia), Zoran Georgiev (Bulgaria), Volkan Kızıltunç (Turkey), Kund Kopacz (Hungary), Jelena Lovrec (Croatia), Andra Nedelcu (Romania), Viktor Takáč (Czech Republic) and Zuzana Žabková (Slovakia).

Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein is the main shareholder of the Vienna Insurance Group (VIG) and provides support for the Group's cultural and social activities, with a focus is on enhancing cross-border, intercultural exchange. The emphasis is also on creating an environment in which individual cultures can thrive. Partnerships and initiatives are geared towards supporting the activities of social organisations, especially in the Central and Eastern European countries in which the Vienna Insurance Group has a presence. As the main shareholder, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein is also concerned with key strategic matters within the Group.

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Image caption:

Ringturm covering, summer 2014, Arnulf Rainer – Veil of Agnes

Based on the original from the series “Schleier und Schleifenbilder” (1990s)

Photo and rendering: © Robert Newald/Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein