



22 June 2018

## Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz opens Helnwein's "I saw this" at the Ringturm in Vienna

**An official ceremony to mark the completion of Gottfried Helnwein's 4,000m<sup>2</sup> art installation at the Ringturm took place on Friday 22 June.**

Günter Geyer, Chairman of the Managing Board of Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein, invited Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz to unveil the 2018 artistic wrapping of the Ringturm. Specially commissioned for the covering of the Ringturm, Helnwein's composition "I saw this" takes a stand against war, terror and repression, and forms an integral part of the 100th anniversary celebrations taking place in 2018 for Austria's First Republic.

Speaking about the spectacular installation in the heart of Vienna, **Chancellor Kurz** said: "Gottfried Helnwein's work triggers emotions and in doing so, curbs people's indifference and the instinct to look the other way. Especially in 2018, a commemorative year, this artwork takes on a special significance."

Renowned Austrian artist Gottfried Helnwein, one of the country's most important contemporary artists on the post-WW2 international arts scene, designed this year's covering on behalf of Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein. **Helnwein** commented: "I want to force people to look." In parallel with the artistic wrapping, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein will also be showing a selection of his work at the Ringturm Exhibition Centre.

The host, as well as initiator and champion of the covering, **Günter Geyer**, explained: "We are extremely proud to have secured the services of internationally acclaimed Austrian artist Gottfried Helnwein for the 2018 covering. We were also very honoured to have Chancellor Kurz open this year's installation." The covering of the historic office block on Vienna's Ringstrasse boulevard will be on display until September. "Helnwein's composition is our appeal against war and violence around the world in the 2018 commemorative year."

A number of prominent guests from the worlds of politics, business, culture and the media attended the celebration at the invitation of Günter Geyer, including Mayor of Vienna Michael **Ludwig**; Markus **Figl**, District Chairman of the first district of Vienna; Toni **Faber**, Dean of St Stephen's Cathedral; Johanna **Schwanberg**, Director of the Dom Museum Wien; Peter **Schöber**, Managing Director of broadcaster ORF III; Rainer **Nowak**, editor-in-chief of daily newspaper Die Presse; art collectors Klaus und Friederike **Ortner**; and Marietta **Deix**.

Also on hand were Klaus **Stadler**, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein; Vienna Insurance Group CEO Elisabeth **Stadler**; and Helene **Kanta**, member of the Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein Managing Board.

### Helnwein at – and on – the Ringturm

In tandem with the wrapping of its head office, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein will also stage an exhibition of four works by the star artist at the Ringturm Exhibition Centre. The display includes both motifs on the wrapping: "The Disasters of War 49" and "The Disasters of War 60". Helnwein's "Child 14" and "The Murmur of the Innocents 69" are also part of the exhibition. Entry is free.

## **The work: “I saw this” by Gottfried Helnwein**

On the front of the Ringturm, a blonde-haired girl is holding a machine gun with the Danube Canal in her sights. The rear of the building features an image of a city ablaze before the eyes of a larger-than-life manga character. The background shows people against the backdrop of a wall of flames and smoke several metres high. The two-part composition is a protest against terror and war.

## **The artist: Gottfried Helnwein**

Born in Vienna, Gottfried Helnwein is one of the most outstanding and polarising artists on the international scene. He studied painting under Rudolf Hausner at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna from 1969 to 1973. He has reached a wide audience outside Austria with his hyperrealistic images of wounded and bandaged children. His oeuvre primarily addresses the topics of violence, death, injury and pain. The first exhibition of his work at Vienna’s Albertina took place in 1979, and since then the artist’s home city has played host to a 1985 solo exhibition of his work from 1970-1985, as well as a retrospective staged in 2013. In 1985, Helnwein moved with his family to Germany, where he lived until 1997 before settling in Ireland. He has also been based in Los Angeles since 2002.

## **The Ringturm as a giant installation**

30 printed netting sheets, each around 3m wide and up to 63m long, will transform Gottfried Helnwein’s “I saw this” into a spectacular 4,000m<sup>2</sup> work of art in the heart of Vienna this summer. The two-part composition will be on display facing the Danube Canal and Schottenring until September. The wrapping of the company’s Ringturm headquarters is one of many outstanding cultural projects initiated by Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein. It is one of the largest and most spectacular works of urban art, and a prominent symbol of art in public spaces.

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.

## **If you have any questions, please contact:**

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## **Photos of the event are available at:**

[www.wst-versicherungsverein.at/en/press/11180/](http://www.wst-versicherungsverein.at/en/press/11180/)