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Gottfried Helnwein makes statement against war and terror with 2018 artistic wrapping of the Ringturm

A special anniversary – 100 years since the establishment of the First Austrian Republic – and an extraordinary artist: Helnwein’s work “*I saw this*” will transform Vienna’s Ringturm into an imposing reminder of the evils of terror and repression in summer 2018.

In 2018 it is once again the turn of an Austrian artist to design the wrapping of the Ringturm in central Vienna. Born in the Austrian capital and known for his controversial works, Gottfried Helnwein is making an impassioned plea against violence, terror and fear for the Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein initiative. *“In 2018 – the year in which Austria marks the centenary of the First Republic – we deliberately chose a world-renowned Austrian artist. Gottfried Helnwein is one of our country’s leading contemporary artists,”* explained **Günter Geyer**, Chairman of the Managing Board of Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein. With this year’s artistic wrapping of the Vienna Insurance Group (VIG) headquarters, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein, VIG’s main shareholder, is highlighting a topic to which many people turn a blind eye. *“War, violence and terror are gruesome reality in many parts of the world, and we want to draw attention to this with Helnwein’s imagery,”* added Geyer.

The work: “*I saw this*”

On the front of the Ringturm, a girl with her blonde hair tied back tightly 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 rising high into the air. Specially commissioned for the wrapping of the Ringturm, “*I saw this*” is a two-part composition by Gottfried Helnwein. He sees his work as a visual indictment of terror and violence. *“The steady stream of negative headlines on terrorist attacks and war that confront us in the media only achieves one thing: feelings of helplessness and bewilderment. When art addresses the horrific, the effect is the exact opposite,”* according to **Gottfried Helnwein**. He claims never to have seen a person become downcast after viewing a picture by Hieronymus Bosch or Francisco de Goya. *“Art robs death of its power. The aesthetic transcends and relativises the inescapability of horror,”* in Helnwein’s view.

The artist: Gottfried Helnwein

Born in Vienna in 1948, Helnwein is one of the most internationally significant and contentious artists to emerge on the contemporary art scene since the second world war. He has reached a wide audience with his hyperrealistic images of wounded and bandaged children. Violence, injury, death and pain are the main themes running through his oeuvre. Helnwein frequently borrows stylistic devices from popular culture, which he manipulates and places in totally new contexts. His artistic encounters with Andy Warhol, The Rolling Stones, Rammstein and shock-rocker Marilyn Manson have become legendary. He has also designed sets for numerous theatre and opera productions.

Raised in the Austrian capital, Helnwein studied painting under Rudolf Hausner at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna from 1969 to 1973. His work was first showcased by the city’s Albertina museum in 1979. Six years later he moved with his family to Germany, where he lived until 1997. He then settled in Ireland and since 2002 Los Angeles has been his second home. Helnwein was immortalised in wax by Madame Tussauds in Vienna in 2016.

His art has been shown in museums all over the world, including the **Albertina in Vienna** (1985 solo exhibition of work from 1970 – 1985 and a 2013 retrospective); **Strasbourg Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art** (1987 solo exhibition “*Der Untermensch – Gottfried Helnwein*”, *self-portraits 1970 – 1987*); **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**; the **Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco** (2004 retrospective “*The Child at the Legion of Honor*”); the **State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg** (1997 retrospective); the **Museum Folkwang in Essen/Germany** (1989 solo exhibition) and the **Museo Nacional De San Carlos in Mexico City** (2012 solo exhibition “*Fe, esperanza y Caridad*” / “*Faith, Hope and Charity*”).

The Ringturm as a giant installation

The artistic wrapping of the Ringturm is one of Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein’s numerous cultural initiatives. 30 printed netting sheets, each around 3m wide and up to 63m long, will transform Gottfried Helnwein’s images into a spectacular 4,000m² work of art on the banks of Vienna’s Danube Canal.

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.

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