

PRESS RELEASE

## MARIA LASSNIG

10 June – 28 July 2007, Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

Opening evening 9 June, from 5 p.m.

Maria Lassnig, the grande dame of Austrian art, was born in Carinthia in 1919 and now lives and works in Vienna. She is one of the most significant and innovative painters on the contemporary art scene. Since the early 1950s, her works have appeared in solo exhibitions, including at the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf (1985), the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1994), the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1995), the Kunsthaus in Zurich (2003) and at Hauser & Wirth in London (2004).

After studying at the Vienna Fine Arts Academy, she spent some time living in Paris and New York. From 1970 to 1972 she studied film animation at the New York School of Visual Arts. On returning to Vienna in 1980, she became the first woman professor of painting in the German-speaking countries, holding the chair in this discipline at Vienna University of Applied Arts. She participated in the Venice Biennale that same year. In 1982 and 1997 her work was displayed at the Documenta in Kassel.

Maria Lassnig's oeuvre embraces not only painting, but sculpture, animated film and major graphic output. She had long kept her drawings under lock and key, and only published them in 1997 in 'Die Feder ist die Schwester des Pinsels' [The pen is the sister of the paintbrush], published by Hans Ulrich Obrist. Her life's work has won her many accolades, including the Grand Austrian State Prize in 1988, the City of Zurich Roswitha Haftmann Prize, the Rubens Prize of the Town of Siegen, Germany, in 2002, the City of Frankfurt Max Beckmann Prize in 2004 and the Austrian Decoration for Science and Art in 2005.

At her current exhibition in Zurich, Hauser & Wirth present a group of works: recent, large-format oil paintings in which the artist portrays herself in various moods and physical states. But there is a common theme: observation of the physical presence of the body and what she calls bodily consciousness. The works come across to the observer directly and effectively, as this artist reveals herself intimately and unpretentiously.

"I step in front of the canvas naked, as it were. I have no set purpose, plan, model or photography. I let things happen. But I do have a starting-point, which has come from my realization that the only true reality are my feelings, played out within the confines of my body. They are physiological sensations: a feeling of pressure when I sit or lie down, feelings of tension and senses of spatial extent. These things are quite hard to depict."

So these are not conventional self-portraits. Rather, they visualize an engagement with the body's inner sense, as it comes across in her works 'Hospital' or 'Speaking grille'.

Contrasting colouring and strong body shapes give the works a powerful, even drastic impact. Nevertheless, they reflect fragility. The body portrait 'You or I?' on the other hand works by positioning the body directly to face the observer and this challenging question. The effect is provocative, threatening but, at the same time, ironic and almost humorous.

"If I did not tell people that these are body pictures, they wouldn't know. In fact it is only a belief statement on my part that these pictures must be understood as bodily consciousness. I tell people that it is so, but they cannot see it. In true portrayals of bodily consciousness, they cannot see it. But it is important to me that people should know this, because I think it matters."

For further information and illustrative material, please contact

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OPENING HOURS Tuesday to Friday, 1200 – 1800 hours; Saturday 1100 – 1700 hours  
During Art Basel, the exhibition will also open on Sunday 10 and Sunday 17 June 2007,  
from 1100 – 1700 hours.

NEXT EXHIBITION Rachel Khedoori, 25 August – 13 October 2007