

Maria Lassnig: short biography

Maria Lassnig (1919–2014) is regarded as one of the most important artists of the present day. Over the course of her remarkable career, she created a substantial body of work in the fields of painting and graphics alongside her excursions into (animated) film and sculpture. Lassnig conducted a focused dialogue with her art, which always constituted the pivotal strand of her life.

The key notion which came to characterise Lassnig's work was above all the concept of *Körpergefühl* or *body awareness*: by introspectively discovering the true nature of her own condition, she expressed physical sensations through the use of artistic media. Numerous self-portraits offer evidence of the form of self-analysis to which the highly sensitive artist constantly subjected herself. Since Lassnig has left her mark on a number of artistic developments, she is regarded as one of the founders of *art informel* in Austria and as a pioneer of female emancipation in a world of art dominated by men. Her visionary work has had a great influence on subsequent generations of artists.

Maria Lassnig was born on 8 September 1919 in Carinthia, Austria, where she took her *Matura* school leaving examination in Klagenfurt and briefly worked as a primary school teacher. From 1941 to 1945, she studied painting at the Akademie der bildenden Künste (Academy of Fine Arts) in Vienna. After obtaining the Academy's diploma, Lassnig returned to Klagenfurt, where her studio became a meeting place for artists and writers. She spent much of her time investigating and working on artistic trends in expressionism and surrealism.

With the aid of a scholarship in 1951/52, Lassnig travelled several times to Paris where she discovered *art informel*. Upon her return to Vienna, Lassnig joined the Art Club and the *Hundsgruppe* (Dog Pack) and maintained contacts with writers from the circle of the Vienna group as well as the art scene around the Galerie nächst St. Stephan.

From 1961, Lassnig lived in Paris where her artistic production in the field of painting and graphic pointed to her later work. In 1968, she moved to New York and discovered (animated) film. At the age of 60, Lassnig was awarded a professorship at the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst (University of Applied Arts) in Vienna in 1980. She held the master class for design and experimental theory (with a focus on painting and animation film) until 1989. In 1988, she became the first woman to be awarded the Grand Austrian State Prize for Fine Arts.

From the late 1990s Lassnig turned to the great existential themes with her so-called *Drastische Bilder* (Drastic Pictures). In her later years she achieved international fame and was able to position herself with important solo exhibitions such as the ones she held at the Serpentine Galleries, London, in 2008; at mumok, Vienna, and the Ludwig Museum, Cologne, in 2009; at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich in 2010; at the Neue Galerie Graz in 2012; at the Deichtorhallen Hamburg, in 2013 and finally at the MoMA PS1 in 2014.

The enormous resonance of Lassnig's work was also reflected in her being awarded the international Roswitha Haftmann Prize in 2002 and the Austrian Decoration for Science and Art in 2005. It culminated in her receiving the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale in 2013.

Maria Lassnig died at the age of 94 in Vienna on 6 May 2014.