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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Kulturforum, Neue Nationalgalerie**

Potsdamer Straße 50, 10785 Berlin

Tue + Wed 10am – 6pm, Thu 10am – 8pm, Fri – Sun 10am – 6pm

**Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society**

**The Nationalgalerie collection from 1945 until 2000**

18 November 2023 – 28 September 2025

A special exhibition by Nationalgalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

**Opening:** Friday, 17 November, 7pm

**The art of the second half of the twentieth century is characterised by great contradictions and an enormous variety of media and artistic strategies. At the same time, scarcely any other age has been so marked by division and turmoil, and also by renewal. In light of this, the Neue Nationalgalerie has chosen the title “Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society” for the upcoming presentation of its postwar collection. It shows 163 works by 143 artists.**

The aftermath of Holocaust and war, the subsequent spirit of optimism, liberation movements and the Cold War led not only to social friction but also to fundamental realignments in the visual arts. The titular “extreme tension” refers to the radical 1970 performance by Viennese Actionist Günter Brus, in which he not only pushed himself to his own physical limits, but simultaneously pointed at the intense tensions permeating society, politics and art. The exhibition reflects the Cold War era, with its ideological confrontations between East and West, between traditional art genres and new artistic techniques and media. Fourteen chapters take up central artistic and social themes of the twentieth century, such as the issues of realism and abstraction, politics and society, everyday life and pop, feminism, identity, nature and ecology, and the processual and the performative.

On display are major works from the Nationalgalerie’s collection which have not been shown for a long time, such as Barnett Newman’s “Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV” (1969-70) or Francis Bacon’s “Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne Standing in a Street in Soho” (1967). At the same time, the exhibition expands the view of the turbulent post-war era with works by Judit Reigl and Bernadette Bour, which have not been part of the art historical canon and were hardly noticed until now. The presentation will encompass key works from West and East Germany, Western Europe and the USA, and formerly Socialist countries. Works of art from East and West do not appear separately, but exhibited together. Works on display will come from the art informel movement and American colour field painting, 1970s realism, pop and minimal art as well as conceptual art by artists such as Marina Abramović, Francis Bacon, Lee Bontecou, Rebecca Horn, Valie Export, Wolfgang Mattheuer, Louise Nevelson, Bridget Riley, Pippilotti Rist, Carolee Schneemann and Andy Warhol. The aim is to provide an updated view of the collection, with a particular focus on artistic developments in Eastern Europe. On display are works from the GDR, Poland and the former Soviet Union. Thanks to key loans from artists such as Kiki Kogelnik, Maria Lassnig, Ewa Partum and Cornelia

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Schleime, the proportion of female artists in the exhibition has been increased to 25 percent - an increase of over 50 percent compared to the previous proportion in the National Gallery's collection. The growing inclusion of female artists enables a multi-layered approach to the art of the second half of the twentieth century. It is a major goal to secure these loans for the National Gallery in the long term through acquisition.

“Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society” aims to expand the history of art, to create a narrative of art that also takes into account supposed byways. In the Abstraction / Figuration room, for example, a painting by Judit Reigl (1923–2020), a Hungarian-French representative of Art Informel, meets works by the American painters Adolph Gottlieb (1903–1974) and Morris Louis (1912–1962). An early, semi-figurative, semi-abstract work by Austrian artist Maria Lassnig (1919–2014) hangs alongside a late nude by Pablo Picasso (1883–1973) and a sculpture by Henry Moore (1898–1986). The open sculpture by the Serbian Olga Jevrić (1922–2014) is in dialogue with a sculpture by Karl Hartung (1908–1967) and the paintings by Willi Baumeister (1889–1955) and K.O. Götz (1914–2017).

The current exhibition can only show a small selection of the National Gallery's extensive collection. It is strongly influenced by the historical conditions in divided Germany. Not only does it reflect the different conceptions of art and political value systems that emerged internationally after the end of the Second World War, it also reveals the history of an institution that existed in both East and West Germany. The collections of the two National Galleries, which have been (re-)united since the early 1990s, reflect the art and cultural history of the respective German states in an international context like nowhere else. The exhibition continues the collection presentation “The Art of Society 1900-1945” (22.8.2021–24.9.2023) on the first half of the twentieth century, which questioned the classic narrative of modern art history in the context of political, historical and social phenomena.

The exhibition “Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society” addresses relevant questions about art in the second half of the twentieth century from today's perspective. The opportunity for a contemporary view of the works was also a decisive factor in the selection of works. Overall, the current presentation shows only a small section of the National Gallery's collection of post-war art. Groups of works are also on display at the Hamburger Bahnhof - Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart, including works by Joseph Beuys from spring 2024. The entire collection will not be on display until the opening of the National Gallery's new building.

The presentation is also linked to the long-term project to research the post-1945 holdings, which is generously funded by the Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation. QR codes on the wall labels refer to information texts in the online database, which is continuously updated and expanded. In addition, the publication of the works also takes into account their acquisition history, which is strongly characterized by the National Gallery's multi-faceted history, and provenance information will be added as research progresses.

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In the “Testing out/Testing us” mediation space, visitors explore areas of tension and conflict in art, society and private life. As an open space to linger, participate, read and relax, the space invites families, young people and adults of all generations to become active, share their own experiences and engage with the exhibition. The educational machine “ME DE- ATION EX MACHINA: Automated - critically creative impulses on art” provides postcards that playfully open up new perspectives on the collection. Under the heading “You and the work of art”, for example, you are asked to find a suitable work of art to go with your favorite song. A free audio walk for families and adults offers an unusual tour of the exhibition with historical recordings, sound collages, (street) interviews and acoustic interventions (narrated by Imogen Kogge, among others). More information on the education and mediation program with guided tours, exhibition talks, Ask Me! formats, further training for teachers, workshops for families and schools can be found on the website at [www.smb.museum/nng](http://www.smb.museum/nng).

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by E.A. Seemann in December 2023 with an introduction by Joachim Jäger, Maike Steinkamp and Marta Smolińska. Edition in German and English, 340 pages, 240 illustrations (ISBN: 978-3-86502-514-2), 36 Euro.

Curated by Joachim Jäger (deputy director, Neue Nationalgalerie), Maike Steinkamp (curator, Neue Nationalgalerie) and Marta Smolińska (professor, Magdalena Abakanowicz University of Art Poznań)

Media cooperation: Der Tagesspiegel, Exberliner, monopol and tipBerlin

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