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# KUNST HISTORISCHES MUSEUM WIEN

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## WHY MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART?

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"There has always been good painting and bad painting," wrote Hsieh Ho in 6th century China, "but in art, the terms ancient and modern do not have citizenship."

The primary focus of the Kunsthistorisches Museum is, and will always remain, its historical collections. The museum's decision to strengthen its commitment to modern and contemporary art intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of those collections, to reconsider the context in which individual objects were produced and acquired, and to underline their enduring relevance to visitors today. In short: to gain a more profound awareness of the historical through the contemporary.

The relationship between contemporary art and the great art of the past will always be debated. To open a conversation with history, to seek a natural continuity of art through the centuries even when it might appear both improbable and unpredictable, demands simplicity and scholarship in equal measure.

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It can provoke disagreement and risk failure, but it can also bring great reward.

In recent years, museums with historical collections have increasingly sought ways in which to engage with more recent art, to extend the scope of their exhibition programming in order to challenge and enrich the experience of their visitors. If it remains a primary objective of such museums to show us where we stand in time and place, within the broader evolution of mankind, then a valuable role can be played by the art and artists of today.

"The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves," wrote T.S. Eliot in his 1919 essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, "which is modified by the introduction of the new work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."