

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
T. +43-1-587 53 07, F. +43-1-587 53 07-34
office@secession.at, www.secession.at

Press release

Edi Hila

The Sound of the Tuba

September 18 – November 8, 2020

Hauptraum

Press conference: Thursday, September 17, 2020, 11 a.m.

Please register at presse@secession.at

Open Day: Thursday, September 17, 2020, 2–8 p.m.

free admission

The pursuit of artistic truth is fundamental to my painting practice. The truth, understood as presenting a reality of my surroundings as they exist, is far more important for me than any notion of beauty. (Edi Hila)*

Edi Hila's career as an artist is inextricably bound up with the specific political history of Albania. In the early 1970s, the young artist was barred from exercising his profession, and almost twenty years went by before he was officially permitted to take up art again and exhibit his work. The authorities took exception to *Planting of Trees* (1972), a picture of a group of young people working in a reforestation program. What should have been a perfectly inoffensive depiction was judged to be excessively individualistic and inconsistent with the ideals of socialist realism, and Hila was stripped of his permission to make art.

His "second career" began after the collapse of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania (1944–1990). The works Hila created after the regime change attest to the need to reinvent himself as an artist in utterly changed circumstances, but they also document the upheavals that transformed an entire country and its people. Hila is an astute observer: his pictures are about change, about hope and frustration, about the inventiveness and creativity of ordinary people, about the fight to survive and the struggle for democracy, about social values and aspirations. Architecture and the urban environment provide him with the settings of his scenes. Many works visualize social shifts indirectly, by capturing their reflections in everyday life, in buildings, in the fabric of the city. Working in series allows him to repeat and vary a theme in order to chart it in all its facets while experimenting with different formal and compositional solutions. Earthy tones in harmonious combinations increasingly predominate in his palette; subtle nuances blend into each other and disintegrate the forms, sometimes to the edge of abstraction, lending the pictures a dreamlike and mysterious ambiguity.

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In the exhibition *The Sound of the Tuba*, Hila presents around twenty paintings from different series he has worked on in recent years as well as a small selection from his output of the late 1990s. The presentation traces a historical arc, connecting today's global migrant and refugee flows to the major wave of emigration after the fall of the Albanian regime and politically motivated deportations in the early years of Albanian communism. Juxtaposing historic and contemporary realities, Hila's pictures render the singular features of each as well as surprisingly rich parallels between them, inviting the viewer to reflect on the present situation.

The three-part *Njerëzit e të ardhmës* (People of the Future, 1997) shows different views of an enormous ship. The earliest work in the exhibition, it alludes to the exodus from Albania in the first years after the end of communism. With the hopes and expectations that they had pinned on the collapse of the regime dashed, many Albanians decided to leave their country—often for Italy, across the Adriatic Sea. Created in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, the series *A Tent on the Roof of a Car* (2016) harnesses the metaphor of the tent to reflect on mobility, wrenching social changes, and political crises. The tent as the quintessential basic and mobile dwelling has provided humans with shelter for millennia. Yet its function is ambivalent: the protection it offers has limits, and it is hardly suitable as a permanent home. It is adapted to special purposes that are moreover widely diverse: some tents are designed for recreational use and sold as vacation gear, while others serve as accommodations for refugees and others displaced by emergencies such as natural disasters and wars.

House in Korça, 1945 (2020), finally, is both the artist's most recent cycle and the one that reaches deepest into history. In pictures filled with an air of quiet melancholy, Hila commemorates the violent expulsion of people from their homes, the systematic terror exerted by a brutal regime, and the harsh punishments visited on political opponents and critics. The absence of humans is palpable in the deserted interiors and barren furniture—in the loneliness of the very rooms.

Such desolation has been a conspicuous feature of Hila's art for some time. His early work was populated by human figures and enlivened by narrative scenes, but over the years he has gravitated toward a visual language that registers complex social developments in urban sceneries and buildings. The artist himself has described the role that the latter play in his work as follows: "In my understanding architecture is an expression of society, its mentality, ways of living, and finally the tastes of certain groups in it. Observing the architecture of particular country, one can say a lot about its society."*

Hila's creative process is noteworthy in this respect: the raw material for his works consists not of sketches or drawings but of photographs, which he edits in Photoshop, obtaining a manipulated or altered likeness of reality. This approach suggests that his paintings are not intended as documentation; rather, his subjects are the fruits of extensive reflection.

In a brief preface to *Maquettes*, the artist's book published in conjunction with his exhibition, which presents a selection of such source images, Hila writes about the function of photography in his art: "[...] with the naked eye we see what we want to see and nothing more. This conclusion has affected my artistic practice greatly. By using photography as the basis for creating a piece, the process became more eloquent, one where spontaneity began to take a more prominent role, reading the photograph

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took on greater significance in an effort to discover, consider and interpret all the things that at first glance seem insignificant, in order to reach new creative ground, and one more abstract. Processing the material this way inspired new viewpoints of formal interpretation as well as aesthetic considerations about the work itself.”

Architecture is a central vehicle of meaning in many of his works, and so he devoted considerable attention to the design of his exhibition. In collaboration with Laura Fogarasi-Ludloff and Jens Ludloff (Ludloff Ludloff Architects, Berlin) he has developed an organization of the gallery space based on three large freestanding wall elements that is both subtle and monumental.

* Edi Hila in: <https://blokmagazine.com/psychology-of-balkans-edi-hila-in-conversation/>

Edi Hila, born in Shkodra (Albania) in 1944 and lives and works in Tirana.

An artist's book by Edi Hila will be published in conjunction with the exhibition.

The exhibition program is conceived by the board of the Secession.

Curator: Bettina Spörr

Artist's book

Edi Hila. Maquettes

Format: 21 x 29.7 cm

Details: Swiss brochure with thin gray cardboard cover, 144 pages, ca. 140 illustrations

Concept and text: Edi Hila

Secession 2020

Distribution: Revolver Publishing

€ 33,-

An artist's book, as it is was approached here, includes a kind of explanation as to why it should be seen as a "scale model". As a miniature representation of the work, a scale model has its own particular creative potential. The model represents precisely the time and place of the assembly and disassembly of ideas; the merciless debate within the self unfolds in order to come to the necessary creative conclusion.
(Edi Hila)

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Exhibition talk

Edi Hila in conversation with Edi Muka (critic and curator, Malmö)
Organised by the Friends of the Secession

The exhibition talk was recorded in the run-up to the exhibition and will be available online at the end of September.

Press contact

Karin Jaschke
T. +43 1 587 53 07-10
E-Mail: presse@secession.at

Press images

Installation views are available for download at <https://www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell/>

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Biografie / Biography Edi Hila

1944 geboren / born in Shkodra (Albanien), lebt und arbeitet / lives and works in Tirana.

1967 Studienabschluss an der Akademie der Schönen Künste Tirana. Von 1968 bis 1974 arbeitete er beim albanischen Radio und Fernsehen sowie als externer Dozent für Zeichnen an der Kunstakademie. 1973 absolvierte er ein Berufstraining für Bühnengestaltung beim Fernsehsender RAI in Florenz. In der Zwischenzeit hatte er "Planting of Trees" gemalt, ein Bild, das später im vierten Plenum der albanischen kommunistischen Partei kritisiert wurde. Er wurde auch für die Bühnengestaltung des 11. Radio- und Fernseh-Festivals kritisiert. 1974 wurde er aus dem albanischen Radio und Fernsehen entfernt und zur Umerziehung durch Arbeit in die Laprake Geflügelfabrik geschickt, wo er von 1977 bis 1978 blieb. Nach einer Rehabilitierungsphase begann er 1988 als externer Professor an der Kunstakademie Tirana zu unterrichten. 1991 wurde er Professor für Malerei an der Akademie der Künste Tirana (jetzt: Universität der Künste), an der er bis zu seiner Pensionierung arbeitete.

/

In 1967, Edi Hila graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts, Tirana. From 1968 to 1974, he worked for the Albanian Radio and Television and as an external lecturer for drawing at the Institute of Fine Arts. In 1973, he had a professional training in the field of television scenography at RAI in Florence. In the meantime, he had painted "Planting of Trees", which was later criticized in the Fourth Plenum of the KQIPPSH. He was also criticized for the scenography of the 11th Radio Television Festival. In 1974, he was subsequently removed from Albanian radio and television and sent for re-education to work at the Laprake Poultry Factory, where he stayed from 1977 to 1978. After a rehabilitation period, he started teaching as an external professor at the painting atelier of the Tirana Academy from 1988 on. From 1991 he has been Professor of Painting at the Tirana Academy of Arts, now the University of the Arts, where he worked until his retirement.

Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl) / Solo exhibitions (selection)

- 2018 *Painter of Transformation*, Museum of Modern Art Warsaw;
National Gallery of Arts Tirana (Retrospektive)
- 2017 *Tirana-Versailles*, Galerie Mitterrand, Paris
- 2016 *Mirages of a Boulevard*, Center of Openness and Dialogue, Tirana
- 2013 *Penthouse*, JGM. Galerie, Paris
- 2011 *Year '11*, Zeta Gallery, Tirana
- 2008 *Senza angeli*, Villa Romana, Florenz / Florence
- 2006 *Suburban*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe
- 2004 Galleria delle Arti Del Kosovo, Prishtina, Kosovo
- 2001 Skendi Gallery, Tirana, Albania
- 1998 *Komfort*, National Gallery, Tirana, Albania

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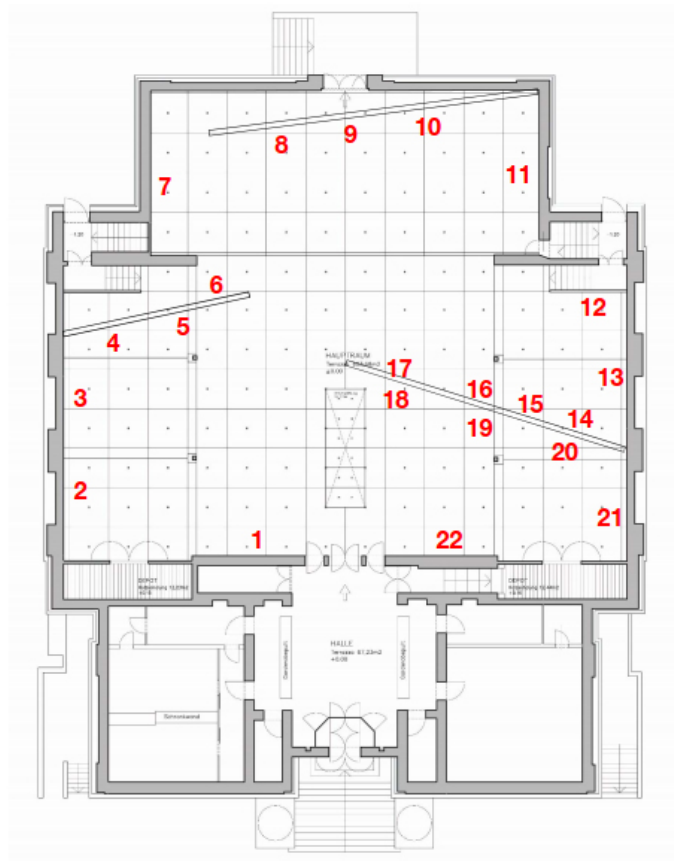
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Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl) / Group exhibitions (selection)

- 2018 Galeria Kalo, Tirana
- 2017 documenta 14, Kassel / Athen/Athens
- 2016 *The Whale That Was a Submarine, Contemporary Positions From Albania and Kosovo*, Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest
A History: Contemporary Art from the Centre Pompidou, Haus der Kunst, München / Munich
- 2015 *Potential Monuments of Unrealised Futures*, AA School of architecture 2015, London
- 2014 *100 Years of Albanian Drawing*, National Gallery of Arts, Tirana
Une histoire, art, architecture et design, des années 80 à aujourd'hui, Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris
Architektur-Biennale Venedig: *Potential Monuments of unrealised Futures*, Albanischer Pavillon / Albanian Pavilion
- 2013 *Critique and Crises. Art in Europe Since 1945*, Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn, Estland / Estonia
The Desire for Freedom, Arte in Europa dal 1945, Palazzo Reale, Mailand / Milan
- 2012 *Critique et Crise. L'art en Europe depuis 1945*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin
- 2010 Liverpool Biennale
- 2006 *Art, Life & Confusion*, October Salon, Belgrad / Belgrade
Interrupted Histories, Ljubljana Museum of Contemporary Art, Ljubljana
- 2005 International Prize Onufri 2004, National Gallery, Tirana
Tirana Biennale 3. *Sweet Taboos*, Tirana
- 2003 *In den Schluchten des Balkan*, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel
Blut und Honig. Zukunft ist am Balkan / Blood and Honey. The Future's in the Balkans, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg
- 2001 Tirana Biennale. *Silhouettes*, Tirana
- 2000 *After the Wall*, Ludwig Museum, Budapest; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin
- 1999 *After the Wall*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm
- 1999 International Prize Onufri 99, erster Preis / first prize, National Gallery, Tirana
Albania Today, 48. Biennale di Venezia, Albanischer Pavillon / Albanian Pavilion
- 1998 International Prize Onufri 98, erster Preis / first prize, National Gallery, Tirana

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Werkliste / List of works Edi Hila



1

A Dog Barking, 2008
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
147,5 x 118 cm

2

Open Door, 2016
Aus der Serie | From the series
A Tent on the Roof of a Car
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
114,4 x 208 cm
Kontakt Sammlung, Wien |
Kontakt Collection, Vienna

3

Icy Tent, 2017
Aus der Serie | From the series
A Tent on the Roof of a Car
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
110 x 210 cm
Kontakt Sammlung, Wien |
Kontakt Collection, Vienna

4

Books, 2019
Aus der Serie | From the series
House in Korça, 1945
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas 88,5
x 110 cm

5

Discovery, 2016
Aus der Serie | From the series
A Tent on the Roof of a Car
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
139 x 112 cm
Kontakt Sammlung, Wien |
Kontakt Collection, Vienna

6

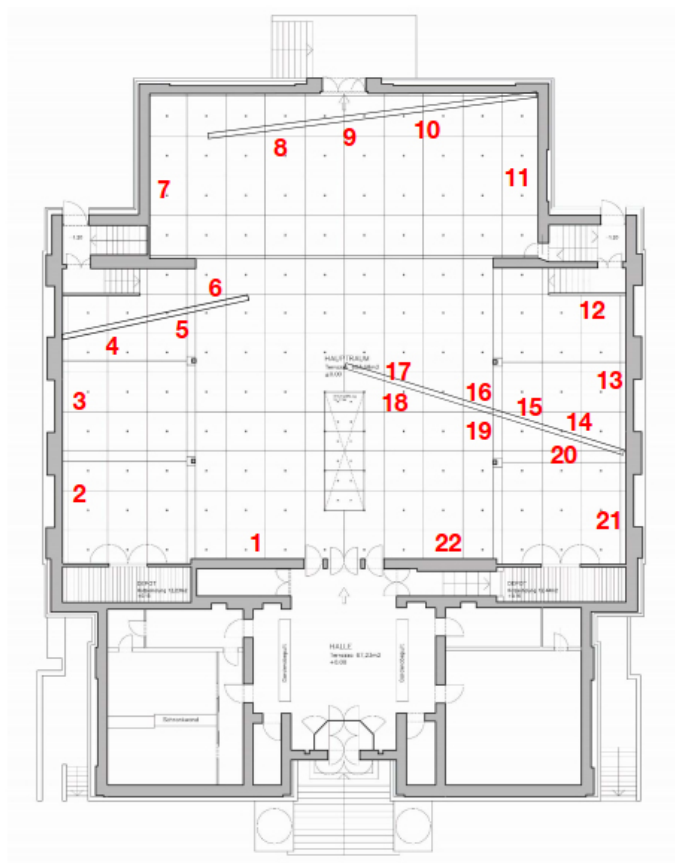
Parachute – Altars, 2008
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
208 x 111 cm

7

Perfume d'un vieux château, 2017
Aus der Serie | From the series
Open Museum
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
102 x 95 cm

8-10

Njerëzit e të ardhmes 1-3, 1997
(*Menschen der Zukunft 1-3* |
People of the future 1-3)
Triptychon | Triptych
Acryl auf Leinwand | Acrylic on
canvas
170 x 200 cm | 170 x 200 cm each



11

Zjarri i zi (Scharzes Feuer | Black Fire), 1998
Acryl auf Leinwand | Acrylic on canvas
206,5 x 198,5 cm

12

Prince of the Lake, 2020
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
128,5 x 168 cm

13

Armures médiéval, 2018
Aus der Serie | From the series *Open Museum*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
103 x 149,7 cm

14

Morning, 2020
Aus der Serie | From the series *House in Korça, 1945*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
103 x 176 cm

15

Lampshade Outside the House (1944), 2020
Aus der Serie | From the series *House in Korça, 1945*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
105 x 147 cm

16

In the Basement, 2019
Aus der Serie | From the series *House in Korça, 1945*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
107 x 154 cm

17

Armoir Rotante, 2017
Aus der Serie | From the series *Open Museum*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
118 x 188 cm

18

Table, 2020
Aus der Serie | From the series *House in Korça, 1945*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
107 x 146 cm

19

Newcomers, 2016
Aus der Serie | From the series *A Tent on the Roof of a Car*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
135 x 238 cm
Kontakt Sammlung, Wien |
Kontakt Collection, Vienna

20

The Awakening, 2017
Aus der Serie | From the series *A Tent on the Roof of a Car*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
114,5 x 190 cm
Kontakt Sammlung, Wien |
Kontakt Collection, Vienna

21

A Tent on the Roof of a Car, 2017
Aus der Serie | From the series *A Tent on the Roof of a Car*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
125 x 220 cm
Kontakt Sammlung, Wien |
Kontakt Collection, Vienna

22

Witness, 2016
Aus der Serie | From the series *A Tent on the Roof of a Car*
Öl auf Leinwand | Oil on canvas
147 x 196 cm
Kontakt Sammlung, Wien |
Kontakt Collection, Vienna

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Association of Visual Artists Vienna Secession
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Exhibitions

Hauptraum

Edi Hila. *The Sound of the Tuba*

September 18 – November 8, 2020

Galerie

Emily Wardill. *Night for Day*

September 18 – November 8, 2020

Grafisches Kabinett

Suellen Rocca

July 3 – November 8, 2020

Artist's books

Edi Hila. Maquettes, 144 pages, ca. 140 illustrations, € 33,-

Emily Wardill. Night for Day, 168 pages, ca. 120 illustrations, € 33,-

Permanent Presentation

Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Beethoven – Painting and Music in cooperation with Wiener Symphoniker

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 2–6 p.m.

Beethoven Special

Saturday, October 3, 4 and 5 p.m.

Tours in German in cooperation with ORF Museumszeit,
please register at kunstvermittlung@secession.at

Dialogue tour

Sunday, October 4, 4 p.m.

Tour through the exhibition of Emily Wardill with Annette Südbeck and
Andreas Ungerböck, ray Filmmagazin (in German)

Curators' guided tour

Friday, October 16., 3 p.m.

Tour through the exhibitions by Edi Hila and Suellen Rocca with
Bettina Spörr and Jeanette Pacher

Nearly missed it?

Sunday, November 8, 5 p.m.

Last-minute guided tour through the exhibitions

Guided tours

Every Saturday at 2 p.m. in German, free of charge, without registration

Admission

Adults € 9,50 / Pupils, students and senior citizens € 6,-

Press images

download at <https://www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell/>

Press contact

Karin Jaschke

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E-Mail: presse@secession.at

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