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Exhibition:

ERICH LESSING.

ANDREW MEZVINSKY.

THE JEWISH MUSEUM VIENNA ON 52ND STREET



EXHIBITION DATES: SEPT 30, 2015 – JAN 03, 2016

OPENING RECEPTION: SEPTEMBER 29, 6PM – 8PM

Austrian Cultural Forum New York

11 East 52nd Street, New York

CURATORS: Hannah LESSING, Danielle SPERA

ARTISTS: Erich LESSING, Andrew MEZVINSKY

New York, September 2015. – The Austrian Cultural Forum New York is pleased to announce two exhibitions touring from the Jewish Museum Vienna: **LESSING PRESENTS LESSING**, works by noted photographer Erich

Lessing, curated by his daughter **Hannah Lessing**; and **A GOOD DAY**, a multimedia installation by **Andrew Mezvinsky** based on **Primo Levi's** account of survival in Auschwitz. Titled **THE JEWISH MUSEUM VIENNA ON 52ND STREET**, the two shows offer intimate insights into Austrian Jewish life past and present, serving as a platform for discussion, experience and confrontation. Lessing and Mezvinsky on display in one exhibition is a vital symbol of the ongoing, thriving cultural bridge building between Austria and the US.

With their work both artists embrace generations, cultures, and traditions, yet they claim very distinct artistic positions; Andrew Mezvinsky is a young Jewish-American artist who was born in Philadelphia. Having travelled the world, Mezvinsky five years ago chose the city of Vienna to be his centre of life and creative work. Erich Lessing fled Vienna for Palestine in 1939, leaving behind his mother and grandmother who were destined for a Nazi concentration camp. Lessing returned to Vienna in 1945 to become one of the most important Austrian and international photographers, as well as a photojournalist for the Associated Press in 1947, a full member of Magnum Photos and chronicler of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising against Soviet occupation.

Erich Lessing achieved renown through his candid pictures of major political moments of his day, with his documentation of the signing of the Austrian State Treaty, now serving as the iconic symbol of the reformation of Austria as a sovereign state after World War II. His famous portrait subjects included the likes of Dwight D. Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle. From the 1960s on he turned his focus to the arts, notably serving as on-set photographer for *The Sound of Music* starring Julie Andrews, which celebrates its 50 year anniversary in 2015.

The **ACFNY** will showcase a personal selection by Lessing's daughter Hannah Lessing also including landscapes in Israel of quasi-biblical dimensions, images of post-war beauty queens, the documentation of daily life in post-war Vienna and sensitive impressions of Jewish customs and ceremonies.

By contrast, American artist based in Vienna Andrew Mezvinsky's work **A GOOD DAY** contemplates a single day in Auschwitz in 1944. Inspired by the Jewish-Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi's autobiography *If This Is a Man*, Mezvinsky depicts Levi's traumatic experiences in the concentration camp, including a chapter titled "A Good Day", that describes a day at the end of winter when the first rays of sun heralded a relief from the cold.

Mezvinsky creates series of drawings, reminiscent of fairy tales, or even the figures of Commedia dell'Arte, which he brings to life in animation. What initially appear as idyllic scenes reveal themselves to be poisoned – arising to depict one of the darkest moments in the history of Europe as the Third Reich expands. Mezvinsky approaches the agony of Auschwitz from various perspectives; addressing the yearning for normalcy in the savage reality of an extermination camp, and reflecting on the basic conditions for human survival. His interacting multimedia exhibition, consisting of an animation film and a series of drawings, also with an interactive component, symbolizes liberation and an interminable will to survive.

On their passage through the main gallery of the ACFNY visitors will have direct influence on the numerous interactive elements in the exhibition as motion detectors control the brightness of the room or influence the scenery in Mezvinsky's drawings.

Christine Moser, Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum New York, is particularly pleased about this cooperation with the Jewish Museum Vienna, and the upcoming exceptional exhibitions coming to New York, under the leadership of its Director, **Danielle Spera**. This partnership will allow for a dynamic meeting point for contemplation and discussion, creating awareness for Jewish history, religion and culture.

OPENING EVENTS

The opening reception for **ERICH LESSING. ANDREW MEZVINSKY. THE JEWISH MUSEUM VIENNA ON 52ND STREET** will take place on September 29 from **6PM to 8PM**, The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of events including film screenings and panel discussions.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Hannah Lessing was born in Vienna in 1963. As a sixteen year old she appeared in the 1978 Emmy Award winning miniseries "Holocaust". She studied at the Vienna University of Economics and Business from 1981 to 1988 and joined an Austrian bank as a member of the management staff in 1990. In 1995 she became secretary general of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism. She looks after some 30,000 survivors, seeking reconciliation for them with the state of Austria. Lessing also heads the Austrian delegation in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. In 2001 she became a member of the Austrian delegation at the negotiations on the Washington Agreement on compensation. She is secretary general of the General Compensation Fund for Victims of National Socialism and the Fund for Restoration of Jewish Cemeteries in Austria. She is also involved in the redesign of the Austrian exhibition at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Danielle Spera was appointed Director of the Jewish Museum Vienna in 2010. From 1978 till 2010 she worked as a journalist, correspondent, reporter, and anchorwoman at ORF-TV Austrian Broadcasting Cooperation. She is the author of numerous books and articles on contemporary art, Jewish topics, and for the magazine NU. Since 2013 she serves as President of ICOM Austria as well as a member of the council of the Medical University Innsbruck/Austria. For the Jewish Museum Vienna she curated several exhibitions including Jewish Geniuses. Warhol's Jews (2012, together with Astrid Peterle), A Good Day. Installation Andrew M. Mezvinsky (2013), The Südbahnhotel – The Faded Days of the Magic Mountain. Photographs by Yvonne Oswald (2014), and Lessing presents Lessing (2015).

ABOUT THE AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM NEW YORK

With its architectural landmark building in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, the Austrian Cultural Forum New York hosts more than 100 free events annually and showcases Austrian contemporary art across the board: visual arts, music, performance, film, literature, architecture, and academic thought. The Austrian Cultural Forum houses around 10,000 volumes in its state-of-the-art library, and enjoys long-standing and flourishing partnerships with many venerable cultural and academic institutions throughout New York and the United States. Visit acfnyc.org for more information.

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