**Merano Arte**

**from April 29 to July 9, 2017**

**WHO IS STILL AUSTRIAN?**

**on show**

On the occasion of commemorating the 700th anniversary of giving the Municipal Regulations to Merano, 5 artists - Nicolò Degiorgis, François-Xavier Gbré, Runo Lagomarsino, Sonia Leimer, Renato Leotta - question themselves on the social and historical changes that have interested the South Tyrolean town.

Merano Arte will host an exhibition titled Who is still an Austrian? from April 29 to July 9, 2017.

On the occasion of commemoration of the 700th anniversary of giving the Municipal Regulations to Merano, the show, curated by Luigi Fassi, introduces the operas of five artists - Nicolò Degiorgis, François-Xavier Gbré, Runo Lagomarsino, Sonia Leimer, Renato Leotta - who question themselves on the social and historical mutations that have interested the South Tyrolean town.

The title of the exhibition draws back to an article - Bin ich ein Österreicher? - on the war newspaper Tiroler Soldaten Zeitung on August 1916. The author is the writer Robert Musil, at the time second lieutenant of the Austrian army and responsible of the Newspaper.

“Am I an Austrian if I have a right to citizenship in Vienna, Graz, Trieste or Trento?” “Futile question” they will reply, “you are undoubtedly an Austrian!” Yet the question is not unjustified at all, since, strangely, the concept of “Austria” has not been expressively fixed by law. Thus, the citizens of that State that should legally be defined as “Austria” do not recognize themselves as “Austrians.” Try to ask a citizen in Galicia, a shoemaker in Carniola, or a lawyer in Bohemia, a school teacher in Vienna, a priest in north Tyrol, and a judge in south Tyrol what they are. You will definitely receive as an answer: a Polish, a Slovak, a Carniolan, a Bohemian-German or a Czech, a southern-Austrian or anyhow an Austrian-German, a Tyrolean, an Italian. Nobody will ever answer your simple question with equal simplicity: “I am an Austrian!” (Sono austriaco? In La guerra parallela, Trento, Reverdito, 1987, p. 23).

The show develops right from Musil’s thoughts - a little over one century from their publication - in order to propose them again today, by entwining stories, questions, and interpretations tied to the social and historical mutations that have interested the town of Merano.

The exhibition has been assembled around the new artworks especially made for this appointment by five Italian and international artists who have been in residency in Merano, guests of Merano Arte. They started a thorough research and a series of projects ideated by exploring the town, its history, architecture, landscape, and social environment.

Multiple perspectives of analysis add one to the other and overlap by giving life to new interpretation paradigms of our times. The project is therefore not just an exhibition on Merano, but a narration that tells the epoch-making changes within European society and the global world, by starting right from the recent history of the town.

The history of Merano can be summarized into a constant search for autonomy. Be in the one pursued by the South Tyrolean territories under the Austro-Hungarian empire and during the Austro-Napoleonic struggle, be in the political confrontation to keep and broaden cultural and administrative freedom after the two World Wars.

The contribution to the history of Merano is the one of a natural cosmopolitism, built on autonomy, multilingualism, the geographic dialogue between north and south, an interaction between the Mediterranean and the Middle European cultures. That is why the history of Merano is permeable with porous borders, determined as it is by its role of Kurstadt (health resort) along the centuries. In an historical moment in which the crisis of the concept of nation-state cannot find a solution in a shared development towards the idea of a democratic supranational union, Wer ist noch Österreichisch? wants to explore Merano’s multicultural history and heritage as a model for deeper thought on our contemporary times.

Artists. Biographical notes

Nicolò Degiorgis (Bolzano 1985, lives and works in Bolzano). After his Chinese studies at Ca’ Foscari University in Venice, he moved to Hong Kong to work, and later to Peking to study. His photographic artwork was born out of a stage at Magnum Photos in Paris, to continue in 2008 thanks to a grant at Fabrica, the communication research center of the Benetton group. He started working as a researcher in the field of migration by the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Studies of Trieste in 2009. He was also granted an artist’s stay by the Bevilacqua La Masa art Foundation in Venice in the same year. He has taught photography at the Free University of Bolzano, member of the curatorial team of Foto-forum Gallery of Bolzano. He has been represented by Agenzia Contrasto since 2009. “Photo District News,” the American review, put him on the list of the 30 top living photographers in the world, and was selected by Museion (Bolzano) as the guest curator for 2017.

François-Xavier Gbré (Lille, France, 1978, lives and works in Abidjan, Côte D’Ivoire.

François-Xavier Gbré earned his degree in Artistic Photography by the Ecole Supérieure des Métiers in Montpellier. His artistic research evokes the architectural language as the witness of our memory and of social changes. François-Xavier Gbré Explores territories and revises their history, as in the case of the legacy of the colonial era redefined by more up-to-date events. Among the many prestigious acknowledgments he has received, especially mention shoot by his opera titled Swimming pool purchased in 2009 by the Centre Pompidou of Paris and now part of their collection.

Runo Lagomarsino (Malmö, Sweden, 1977, lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil and Malmö, Sweden). The work of the artist investigates historiographical, geographical, and mathematical models that have contributed to the colonial control of the world by Western modernity. Lagomarsino research starts from the perspective of comparative analysis by hinting at the possibility of new forms of cultural interpretation. His artworks can be found in prestigious collections, like Guggenheim Museum (New York), Fondazione Morra Greco (Naples), Malmö Art Museum (Malmö), Collection Paulo A. W. Vieira (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo), Nordic Contemporary Art Collection (Stockholm), Coppel Collection (Mexico City), The National Museum of Art (Oslo).

Sonia Leimer (Merano 1977, lives and works in Vienna, Austria) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Her artwork, based on highly fragile contents and materials, expresses the contrast between space and time by investigating the entity of perception, the foundations that set an individual, historical, and medial experience. She won various international awards, among which the Paul Flora Prize in 2011, the Audi Award for New Positions in Cologne in 2010. Among her most recent solo shows: Träger, Artotek Köln, Cologne (2012); Undefiniertes Bauvorhaben, BIG, Salzburg (2013); Bend a bow, MAK Center Garage Space, Los Angeles (2012); Lungo quelle linee, Museion, Bolzano (2013). She has taken part in various group shows: at the Parachute Pavilion in New York (2005), at Galerie ar/ge Kunst di Bolzano, at Museum for Art in Pori, Finland (2010), and at Freies Museum in Berlin (2012).

Renato Leotta (Turin 1982, lives and works in Turin). His artistic research aims at exploring the limits and borders of the bi-dimensionality of the image by using multiple expressive means, often combined by spacing out of a traditional photographic language to video, from painting to the recovery of archival material: different elements that find their common meeting in the study of spatial installations. His works have been shown at various exhibitions, among which the closing exhibit by Fondazione Spinola Banna di Poirino (Turin), Video.it 07 at Careof in Milano, at Accademia Albertina in Turin, and at Teatro Bellini in Catania, 2008; from Guarene to Etna by the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Guarene d’Alba in two editions: 2006 and 2009; Germinal al GumStudio in Carrara, Il raccolto d’autunno è stato abbondante at Viafarini–DOCVA–Careof in Milan, 2009; Non totalmente immemori, né completamente nudi by the Galleria Civica di Monfalcone, NYPh10 at DUMBO Art Center in New York, 2010. In addition to his artistic research he started a curatorial experimentational course in 2008, through the CRIPTA747 project based in Turin.

Title: **WHO IS STILL AUSTRIAN?**

Length of the exhibition: April 29 - July 9 2017

Site: Merano Arte - Edificio Cassa di Risparmio

Portici, 163

I – 39012 Merano

Curator: Luigi Fassi

Opening: Friday April 28, 2017, at 07pm

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