

# Open letter: Demanding transparency regarding the new call for applications for the artistic direction of Kunsthalle Wien

- We ask the representatives of the City of Vienna for transparency regarding the selection criteria and their considerations for a new orientation of the Kunsthalle.
- We demand that the decision about the new artistic director(s) of Kunsthalle Wien in February/March 2023 is made according to transparent criteria. A transparency in which also a renewed application of WHW should be possible and considered.
- We demand an open, public exchange with the artistic community of Vienna about the future of this institution, which is of central importance for the artists and cultural workers of the city.

Dear City Councillor Veronica Kaup-Hasler,  
Dear representatives of the Stadt Wien Kunst GmbH,

It is with great regret and incomprehension that we have learned about the decision made by the City of Vienna and the appointed jury not to extend the term of the Zagreb collective "What, How & for Whom" (WHW, consisting of Ivet Ćurlin, Nataša Ilić and Sabina Sabolović) as artistic directors of Kunsthalle Wien.

WHW has been leading Kunsthalle Wien since 2019. After they were informed that their contract (due to end in 2024) will not be renewed for a second term, WHW reapplied for the position via the open call for artistic director(s). The six-member jury and the City of Vienna found that **none of the applicants met the necessary criteria**. In view of the fact that WHW has been directing Kunsthalle since 2019 and is an internationally respected curatorial collective, such a statement is utterly disrespectful of their work and achievements.

For decades WHW has stood for a socio-politically engaged and socially relevant understanding of contemporary art. The collective is a leading voice in current debates of the international art field and has challenged and enriched the city of Vienna with forward-thinking curatorial concepts and urgent artistic positions. With Ivet Ćurlin, Nataša Ilić and Sabina Sabolović, the local art scene and with it (post-)migrant voices have found important and committed allies and partners in the center of the city.

For many cultural actors and artists, who have been leading political struggles in this city for years, the cooperation with WHW has been crucial and important on all levels, because one does not need to explain oneself: with WHW, questions of power and exclusion are not only considered globally and questioned structurally, the exclusion and marginalization of (post-)migrant and BIPOC artists as well as artists affected by ableism in Vienna does not go unnoticed, their marginal position in this city is criticized and their struggles are supported.

WHW's feminist, non-Western approach has also been reflected in their programming to date. They have supported the work of selected local artists - predominantly critical, post-migrant and queer-feminist positions - with comprehensive solo exhibitions, while in their international group exhibitions, they have focused on globally and regionally relevant issues and movements, with a particular interest in politically engaged reappraisals of recent art history and significant artistic movements.

The curatorial work of the collective is characterized by cross-disciplinary alliances and committed art mediation, which is always conceived and realized in collaboration and critical of discrimination. Building such relationships and alliances that delve deep into the city's social fabric takes time. WHW has pursued this project in the first three years with a hitherto unaccustomed openness, sowed many seeds, and a radical change is palpable.

### **What concept of sustainability is advocated for in the cultural sector if this beginning is now to come to an end?**

We ask ourselves, how did this decision come about? For what reasons was the term of WHW not extended and what new criteria disqualifies them as artistic directors of the Kunsthalle? We wonder where and by whom these criteria were determined? According to which criteria was the jury appointed by the City of Vienna?

### **What new orientation is planned for the Kunsthalle Wien?**

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