

Press Release

Maria Lassnig. Self with Dragon

Hauser & Wirth Hong Kong

26 September 2025 – 28 February 2026

Opening Reception: Friday 26 September 6 – 8 PM



'I step in front of the canvas naked, as it were. I have no set purpose, plan, model or photography. I let things happen. But I do have a starting point, which has come from my realization that the only true reality are my feelings, played out within the confines of my body.'

— Maria Lassnig

The oeuvre of the seminal painter Maria Lassnig (1919 – 2014) covers more than 70 years of intense work between the end of the Second World War and her death in 2014. At the center of her profound research into painting is a unique interest in the relation between awareness and the human body—particularly the artist's body—which Lassnig termed 'body awareness.' Titled 'Self with Dragon,' this is Lassnig's first solo exhibition in Hong Kong. Presenting a selection of paintings and works on paper from 1987 to 2008, the show provides an insight into Lassnig's approach, how she questions perception beyond the visual, how our body senses as a whole and the ways in which language becomes part of such perceptions.

Lassnig first developed her theory of 'body awareness' in the 1940s; in the decades that followed, she rendered her physical and emotional states in arresting visual terms, often portraying herself as fragmented, hybrid or in direct dialogue with abstract shapes, machines and animals.

Anchoring the exhibition is 'Selbst mit Drachen (Self with Dragon)' (2005), which the exhibition takes its title from. Lassnig refers to the reptile-like, usually winged hybrid creature of Western mythology—a dragon—which represents a threat to humankind and bears little resemblance to its East Asian counterpart. The battle against such a dangerous beast can refer not only to external forces but also to internal ones—traits perceived as negative, socially undesirable and repressed aspects of the personality. This is a confrontation that Lassnig has embraced in her art and particularly in this painting. 'Viktory (Victory)' (1992) was painted shortly after a

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motorcycle accident Lassnig had in 1992. The work is marked by the motif of a wide, angular 'V'—a reference to both the artist's posture and the gesture of triumph. Lassnig merges elements within this graphic work, producing a breathing head-body that appears at once vulnerable and defiant, blurring the lines between machine, body and myth.



Several abstract self-portraits in the exhibition move beyond the 'retinal image' of reality, seeking instead to embody a reality that is physically sensed and emotionally resonant. In 'Selbst abstrakt I / Bienenkorb Selbst (Self Abstract I / Beehive Self)' (1993), Lassnig depicts her form as a permeable vessel, filled with pressure and energy, culminating in a head that resembles a traditional beehive, while 'Selbst als Blüte (Self as a Flower)' (1993) is a self-ironic reflection on aging, drawing visual parallels between female anatomy and plant structures, rendered with irony and tenderness.

Despite being known for her large format oil on canvas works, Lassnig's works on paper are intimately connected to her singular approach, translating interior bodily sensations to line and value on the page. She noted in 1992, 'The drawing is closest to the moment. Every moment has only one possibility.'

'Liegende (Reclining Figures)' (2000) and 'Liebespaar (Lovers)' (2003) represent two facets of Lassnig's late paper works: the solitary, interior body and the ambiguous dynamics of relational proximity. Both employ minimal line and color to capture sensations that defy clear form; these bodies in flux invite the viewer to feel rather than decode. This distilled approach continues in 'Mr and Mrs Kliny' (2004) where loosely rendered forms suggest dual figures locked in ambiguous relation.



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The exhibition also features a selection of works in pastel or pencil alone, such as 'Ober und Unterkörper (Torso and Lower Body)' (1990) and 'Die Vielfalt (Diversity)' (2003). These monochrome compositions strip the body down to its barest contours yet remain deeply expressive. Commenting on the significance of her works on paper, Lassnig states, 'Each drawing is a would-be oil painting, for I never repeat any drawing as an oil painting, they are autonomous.'

Press Contacts:

Tara Liang, tara@hauserwirth.com, + 852 9213 6186

Caption and Courtesy:

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Maria Lassnig

Selbst mit Drachen (Self with Dragon)

2005

Oil on canvas

200 x 150 x 2.2 cm / 78 3/4 x 59 x 7/8 in

Photo: Sandro E. E. Zanzinger

Maria Lassnig

Studio Maxingstraße, Vienna, 1983

Photo: Kurt-Michael Westermann

Maria Lassnig

Viktory (Victory)

1992

Oil on canvas

200 x 145 cm / 78 3/4 x 57 1/8 in

Maria Lassnig

Selbst abstrakt I / Bienenkorb Selbst (Self

Abstract I / Beehive Self)

1993

Oil on canvas

125 x 100 cm / 49 1/4 x 39 3/8 in

Maria Lassnig

Selbst als Blüte (Self as a Flower)

1993

Oil on canvas

125 x 100.2 cm / 49 1/4 x 39 1/2 in

Maria Lassnig

Liegende (Reclining Figures)

2000

Pencil and acrylic on paper

69.7 x 49.8 cm / 27 1/2 x 19 5/8 in

89 x 69 x 3.5 cm / 35 x 27 1/8 x 1 3/8 in

(framed)

Photo: Jorit Aust

Maria Lassnig

Liebespaar (Lovers)

2003

Pencil and acrylic on paper

43.8 x 59.8 cm / 17 1/4 x 23 1/2 in

63 x 80 x 3.5 cm / 24 3/4 x 31 1/2 x 1 3/8 in

(framed)

Photo: Jorit Aust

Maria Lassnig

Mr and Mrs Kliny

2004

Pencil and acrylic on paper

65.6 x 47.8 cm / 25 7/8 x 18 7/8 in

63 x 80 x 3.5 cm / 24 3/4 x 31 1/2 x 1 3/8 in

(framed)

Photo: Jorit Aust

Maria Lassnig

Ober und Unterkörper (Torso and Lower Body)

1990

Pencil on paper

44 x 60 cm / 17 3/8 x 23 5/8 in

63 x 80 x 3.5 cm / 24 3/4 x 31 1/2 x 1 3/8 in

(framed)

Photo: Jorit Aust

Maria Lassnig

Die Vielfalt (Diversity)

2003

Pencil on paper

31.5 x 23 cm / 12 3/8 x 9 in

50.8 x 41.8 x 3.5 cm / 20 x 16 1/2 x 1 3/8 in

(framed)

Photo: Jorit Aust