



The Generali Foundation was created in 1988; in 1995, it moved to its new building on Wiedner Hauptstrasse. An important change came in 2007: the decision was made that the Generali Foundation and the BAWAG Foundation would share their staff and infrastructure, starting on 1 January 2008. A service company, called Foundationsquartier GmbH, was incorporated to manage these resources. For the Generali Foundation, sharing its facilities with the BAWAG Foundation means a significant departure from the past; nonetheless, both institutions will seek to preserve their specific identities and operate under their respective independent directors. The Generali Foundation's program of exhibitions and its ongoing scheme of acquisitions remain intact; the collection will continue to expand. The spatial situation merely compels the Generali Foundation to reduce, for the time being, the number of exhibitions to two per year instead of three, as in the past.

The founding director, Sabine Breitwieser, under whose direction the Foundation has created a collection of conceptual art that is probably unparalleled in the world and presented an uncompromising program of exhibitions, found herself unable to support this solution. This caused an uproar in the media and raised massive concerns among artists who had collaborated with the Generali Foundation for years, concerns that the collection and program of exhibitions would be the victims of budget cuts and that the "fundamental question regarding the contemporary social function of art," a question that had heretofore been consistently pursued, would be supplanted by a program "exposed to rather unrestrained pressure to succeed in catering to mass audiences" (S. Breitwieser, in: *Texte zur Kunst* 68, December 2007). That critics express such views constitutes an understandable and important reaction, and is the true function of criticism. The media's rush to judgment regarding what would happen next, a judgment that bases its arguments only in part on accurate information, continues, although its tone has become somewhat less strident since I was offered the directorship.

The time has now come for me and a highly committed team to resume work under the new premises and to continue to build a collection that constitutes a commitment to collecting far away from all criteria oriented by speculation or conforming to the market. The collection as it presents itself today has the feel rather of a museum or an archive, one devoted to the conservation and sometimes even restoration of a specific era: primarily of the post-avant-garde conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s as well as, beyond the latter but in a relationship of exchange and resonance with it, of neo-conceptual tendencies in contemporary art.

Since the Foundation's inception, the Generali corporation itself has been an object of examination in artistic interventions and projects. How are we to understand the fact that a corporation, ultimately itself an "institution in the flow of capital," lent and still lends support to art that consistently criticizes institutions of this very kind? This is one frequently raised question that institutional critique has engaged since its beginnings: does art suffer corruption when it moves within institutions? Where, on the other hand, would its potential for transformation be if art didn't get involved, didn't infiltrate these very institutions? Over the years since the Generali Foundation was created, many exhibition projects have

addressed this critical point under the pretext of institutional critique, though there is in the end no resolution to the contradiction. Reflection on the conditions under which art is made and the sites where it is shown has come to be part of the paradigm of critical art.

The Generali corporation has, as a matter of fact, agreed to engage this process of increasingly acuminated positions, supporting, on the one hand, the idea of a “critical art” and, on the other hand, sponsoring and financing a respectable and probably unique archive as well as collection; a commitment by which Generali stands. This collection’s mission prefers the conservation, collection, and documentation of works—and often entire complexes of works—that do not conform to the mainstream of the reception of art, to the accumulation of big names and capital-investment art.

Given my previous positions—I was not only, for many years, the head curator of an institution of art but also initiated, directed, an authored projects that engaged questions of minorities and discrimination at a Jewish museum, a women’s center, and a project on migrant culture—it can reasonably be presupposed that I am conscious of, and will continue in my work at the Generali Foundation to reflect on, the questions that are here at issue. My research, exhibitions, and publications on the post-avant-garde—on Eva Hesse, Marcel Broodthaers, Tadeusz Kantor, Lee Lozano, Dorothy Iannone, or Robert Smithson—would further argue that I agree with and support the Generali Foundation’s program and will continue to lead it in its chosen direction; one or the other shift of emphasis will naturally result from the fact that I work in a world of discursive contemporaries.

I am, for instance, also and especially interested in works that, although they are understood to be conceptual art in a wider sense, disrupt that school’s classical orthodoxy. In gestures that are as precise as they are anarchical, these works conceive of the constitution of the here and now, of our aesthetic perception, of the world as a political reality and of social space as a shared reality composed of the factual, the imaginative and the abstract, and present these realities to the beholder for renewed debate. Critical or institution-critical art ought not to be seen exclusively in the guise of documentary or factual modes but also in forms of agitation, of poetry, of travesty or parrhesia.

I recognize such explosive power in works that depict modernism in its failure and its utopian energy but also in its hubris, as well as in artistic engagements that extend into fields of anthropology or ethnology, thinking the discourse of the post-colonial in its dimension of cultural critique, as a collision of different systems of culture, tradition, belief, and time.

Sabine Folie
Director
(February 2008)

Addendum January 2010

The cooperation agreement between the Generali Foundation and the BAWAG Foundation, which went into effect on January 1, 2008, is scheduled to expire at the end of 2009.

The arrangement, by which the two institutions shared staff and infrastructure, imposed spatial constraints that limited the Generali Foundation’s exhibition programming to two shows a year. In 2010, we plan to return to our customary three exhibitions a year.