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Claudia Märzendorfer
A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg, 2026

Duration: 13 May – 30 October 2026

Opening: 12 May, 6 pm

Location: Kunstplatz Graben, near Graben 21, 1010 Wien

Curator: Olga Wukounig

There is always an element of transience to the art projects organised by KÖR Wien (Public Art Vienna) on Vienna's Graben, as they occupy the public space only until the onset of winter each year. This year, however, the ephemeral has merged in a very immediate way with the work *A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg* by the Austrian artist Claudia Märzendorfer: drawing on motifs of transience from classical still lifes, part of her monumental yet fragile sculpture will dissolve before the eyes of the opening guests.

Claudia Märzendorfer has been working with ice as a medium since the 1990s, using this ephemeral material to introduce the element of time into her work. At the same time, this transforms each of her installations into a performance; for example, her *frozen records*—vinyl records made of ice—can only be played once. However, the processual aspect is also central to Claudia Märzendorfer's work with other materials.

Commissioned by KÖR Wien, this work juxtaposes the motif of the Baroque vanitas still life – with its cautionary references to excess and waste – with those remnants of civilisation that burden our ecosystem and outlive a single human lifetime. With her choice of title, Claudia Märzendorfer has transformed the quiet work into a powerful statement: *A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg* refers to the title of a book (Graeme Maxton and Bernice Maxton-Lee, 2020), that outlines the far-reaching changes needed to tackle the climate crisis.

Biography

Claudia Märzendorfer, born in 1969, lives and works in Vienna. Märzendorfer studied at the Academy of Fine Arts from 1994 to 2001 and graduated with a degree in sculpture under Bruno Gironcoli. The artist has been working with frozen water since the 1990s. The ephemeral nature of these sculptures adds a temporal dimension to the medium of sculpture. The processual and performative aspects are also central to Claudia Märzendorfer's artistic work with other materials.

The artist has received numerous awards, including the State Scholarship for Fine Art (2010), the Outstanding Artist Award (2014), the Gerhard and Birgit Gmoser Prize for Contemporary Art, Secession Vienna (2017) and the City of Vienna Prize „Preis der Stadt Wien“ (2023).

Solo exhibitions (selection): Neuer Kunstverein Wien (2024/2025), Kunsthaus Mürz (2020), MQ ART BOX (2020), Kunsthaus Wien (2019), OK Linz (2019). Group exhibitions and festivals (selection): „De Sculptura“, Albertina Klosterneuburg (2025), „Touch Nature“, Lentos Kunstmuseum (2025), „Sound of Bethany“, 50 Jahre Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2024), „The Beauty and Diversity“, Albertina Modern (2024), „Sounding Bochum“, Kemnade, Festival für klangbasierte Kunst (2022), „BE SEEING YOU“, Kunstverein Mannheim (2020), „Discrete Austrian Secrets“, Chongqing Galaxy Museum of Contemporary Art/ GCA (2019), „Anchor Zero“, Frey Art Museum Seattle (2015).

Text by the curator

The sculptor Claudia Märzendorfer's art is devoted to the process, to the evanescent and impermanent. One iconic example are her *frozen records* (2005), which she brings out from the freezer during her DJ sets and which, needless to say, can be played only once. Her *music typewriter* (2012) made of frozen ink slowly stains the stack of music paper on which it rests. These performative sculptures illustrate the artist's unconventional approach untinged by commercial considerations. Märzendorfer works with a wide range of ingredients and media; her primary material, however, is time.

On Vienna's Graben, she arranges a still life of bottles, canisters, and sacks—casts taken from plastic containers—on a pedestal resembling a block of ice. The objects' light, satin-matte surfaces are reminiscent of bone or stone. The ceramic casting medium captures the finest details: the delicate grooves on the bottle caps, the raised lettering on containers indicating fill levels or product information. The drapery of the sacks evokes Baroque-era marble sculptures, while the reflective sheen of the base recalls the imitation marble plasterwork known as stucco lustro.

In the style of seventeenth-century vanitas depictions, Märzendorfer enhances her white landscape made of plastic detritus with additional objects associated with earthly existence—in Baroque painting, these were often money, books, or musical instruments—: frozen black ink in the shape of gold bars, shellac records, nuts, pomegranates, peaches, shells, and octopuses that she places in the still life on opening day. In this instance, the “mortal” world literally melts away before the viewers' eyes, leaving behind black markings that will fade and vanish over the following few months. What then remains is the ensemble of bottle, canister, and sack sculptures, frozen in an instant to memorialize the inert nature of their plastic archetypes: it takes four and a half centuries for the material to decompose into microplastics, which will still be an environmental burden. Märzendorfer operates on different temporal levels, which she superimposes in performative fashion. The plastic waste landscape is the backdrop against which the black ice objects act as though in fast motion.

Märzendorfer previously grappled with the vast amounts of synthetics in the world's oceans and the novel plastiglomerate forming out of plastic waste in sculptures and texts in her exhibition *A Blazing World* (2019). Language is another recurring medium for the artist. Borrowed titles for her works often serve her to unlock another conceptual and narrative dimension. *A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg* quotes the 1960s American human rights activist Malcolm X and the title of a 2020 book by Graeme Maxton and Bernice Maxton-Lee. The two writers call for a radical rethinking of how we respond to the climate crisis if we hope to halt catastrophic and irreversible ecological impacts before it is too late. A climate-compliant society, they argue, cannot arise from a system based on short-term profit maximization and constant growth—or in the words of Malcolm X in his fight against racism: “A chicken can't lay a duck egg.” A systemic transformation is needed. By reusing the phrase for the title of her work, Märzendorfer integrates the metaphor as another layer into her performative still life. (Olga Wukounig)

Kunstplatz Graben

In 2010, a new permanent venue for public art was inaugurated on Vienna's Graben, one of the city's most central locations, and has hosted contemporary art every year since then.

Previous projects: Cosima von Bonin (2010), Thomas Schütte (2011), Clegg & Guttmann (2012), Matt Mullican (2013), Axel Stockburger (2014), Julien Berthier (2015), Nevin Aladag (2016), Didier Fiuza Faustino (2017) Monica Bonvicini (2018), Jessica Stockholder (2019), Alexandra Bircken (2020), Lara Favaretto (2021), Hannes Zebedin (2022), Kris Lemsalu (2023), bankleer (2024), Marinella Senatore (2025).

About KÖR Wien (Public Art Vienna)

KÖR Wien (Public Art Vienna) brings contemporary art in all its facets into the city's public spaces, making it accessible for broad audiences. Its remit encompasses temporary individual projects as well as permanent art-in-architecture projects for residential buildings, subway stations, and train stations, city squares, and projects in the field of public commemoration.

You can find information about other KÖR Wien projects at www.koer.or.at/projects

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