

ABOUT MATHILDA

Over a hundred children grew up in the Mühl sect. Some of them have repeatedly tried to make the cooperative and public art institutions aware of their responsibility in dealing with Mühl's art. The protests surrounding Mühl exhibitions at the Museum of Applied Arts Vienna (MAK) or the Leopold Museum Vienna are just a few examples. In 2019, a small group from this generation of children founded the group MATHILDA, partly to protect themselves from individual attacks and partly to be able to act with collective strength.

Today, MATHILDA is a fluid group of contemporary witnesses and artists, of cultural workers and academics, whose work takes as its starting point the experiences of violence and abuse suffered by the children in the Mühl sect.

Although the experiences of the children were legally addressed and made public through the trial of Otto Mühl and his conviction for child abuse and rape in 1991, a consistent recognition of these events has largely been lacking. Since the 1990s, efforts have instead been made — with the involvement of many well-known cultural institutions — to establish Mühl's work on the international art market and to promote him as an Austrian national artist within a canon of Viennese Actionism. And even though the patriarchal and authoritarian traits of his sect and his art are plainly evident, he continues to be described in art historical discourse as a nonconformist and antifascist artist and individual.

Based on the history of violence inherent in his work and the largely affirmative societal response to it, our work aims not only at critically engaging with the reception of Mühl, his sect, and his art, but also at understanding abuse in art — and the abuse of art — as an instrument of power and manipulation.