

PRESS RELEASE

20 June 2007 - Exhibition: Contemporary Art from Latvia

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On Wednesday, 20 June 2007, at 6.30 p.m. the European Central Bank (ECB) will open the 15th exhibition in its series "Contemporary Art from the Member States of the European Union". The focus will be on Latvian works from the collection started in 2005 for the new Contemporary Art Museum designed by Rem Koolhaas, which will open in Riga in 2011. The exhibition will offer the first international viewing of this collection.

Latvian art of the past few decades is closely linked to the country's recent history. During the Soviet era, art was subject to the doctrine of socialist realism; a dialogue with Latvia's heritage from classical modernism or with Western post-war avant-garde trends was – at least at times – largely impossible. With the beginning of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika in the mid-1980s and in the following eventful years surrounding Latvia's gaining of independence in 1991, the situation changed: artists obtained a new freedom which allowed new forms of expression to break through – such as installations, environments and performances – and an open and fruitful dialogue with trends which had previously had not been officially recognised, such as concrete painting and conceptual art.

New ideas and topical, pressing issues were taken up and formulated using impressive metaphors. Religious, spiritual and mythological aspects were incorporated in art, as were comments on the ecological and social situation, the range running from poetic-subtle references to expressive-ironic statements. Many artists combined this with existential questions about own identity, which, against the backdrop of the dramatic transformation processes, can be read as reaching beyond personal experience to touch on the psychological state of society.

History, cultural heritage and the social situation have been and are still important points of reference for Latvian art, enriched and expanded by topical issues such as the enticements of the world of consumption and media, and by the use of new technologies. Today, the art of Latvia exhibits an impressive variety of original, autonomous works, which provide not only a significant contribution to the European cultural landscape but also a remarkable insight into the soul and culture of the country.

The works selected from the museum collection focus both on representatives of the generation of young Latvian artists and on artists who, in the 1980s and 1990s, provided crucial impetus to the new direction of the Latvian art scene. They are complemented by paintings by four renowned artists (Ilmārs Blumbergs, Edvards Grūbe, Helēna Heinrihsone and Ģirts Muižnieks) represented in the collection of Latvijas Banka, the Latvian central bank.

The exhibition has been organised in close cooperation with Latvijas Banka and the Latvian Contemporary Art Museum in Riga. It will be opened by Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the European Central Bank, and Ilmārs Rimšēvičs, Governor of Latvijas Banka.

Duration of the exhibition

21 June to 14 September 2007