



# Charlemagne Palestine

## GesamttkkunnsttMeshuggahhLaandtttt

18/9 – 8/11 2015

**Press conference:** Thursday September 17, 2015, 10 am

**Opening:** Thursday September 17, 2015, 7pm

**Concert:** Thursday November 12, 2015, 8pm

Charlemagne Palestine is a *Gesamtkünstler*. For 40 years he has acted as a musician, composer, performer, visual artist and as such he has been able to question the frames and rules of any medium and language he employs. Avoiding existing definitions is a central point of Charlemagne's practice as well as that of other artists of his generation like Tony Conrad, Jack Smith or Stuart Sherman. Any attempt to place him within the limits of a given category would thus be like trying to catch hold of a fish with one's hands.

The exhibition at Kunsthalle Wien will aim at depicting this schizophrenic practice by embracing all tentacles of this wild octopus and offering a unique portrait of the wide-ranging and complex work of Charlemagne Palestine. It stands in line with recent exhibitions at Kunsthalle Wien that focus on cross-genre artists – such as Tony Conrad, who had a solo exhibition this spring, or Florian Hecker, who will have a major solo show in 2016.

The exhibition will include his early video works, his stuffed animal sculptures, paintings, installations, and book scores alongside other works that have rarely been shown before: an exhibition conceived as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as the title suggests. One of the core pieces of any Palestine exhibition is a piano – a Bösendorfer Imperial – fully covered with stuffed animals; the fetish objects that accompany the artist everywhere he goes.

*GesamttkkunnsttMeshuggahhLaandtttt* is a title that links the art nouveau concept of "Gesamtkunst" and the yiddish "meshugga", which stands for craziness.

Born in New York from Eastern European immigrant Jewish parents, Palestine started to perform as a teenager when he played the bells at St. Thomas Church next to the Museum of Modern Art. He developed his personal cosmology by listening to the ethno music released by Moses Asch's Folkways Records as well as Debussy, Stravinsky, Xenakis, Stockhausen, and Pran Nath. Charlemagne's world can perhaps be viewed as an incestuous affair with dada, futurism, and fluxus filtered through rituals of indigenous people. Since the end of the 1960's he has executed and performed many provocative, unusual, evocative works and happenings. In his early years, he collaborated with choreographer Simone Forti and artists Tony Conrad and Richard Serra, and performed alongside avant-garde artist La Monte Young, and the composers Terry Riley, Philip Glass and Steve Reich. Nevertheless, Palestine always resisted being labelled as a minimalist, opting instead for the term "maximalist." In the 1970's he produced a seminal body of videos consisting of performances made with and for the camera. In these video works, the artist creates an outward articulation of his own internal state of mind by chanting hypnotically, running hysterically, worshipping teddy bears, and drinking cognac. After years of these intense ritualistic, shamanistic music compositions and

performances, his desire to develop visual works started to overshadow his concerns for music. The body of works he produced in the following three decades is therefore marked by the use of stuffed animals that are regarded as shamanic totems and inhabit his paintings, sculptures and installations.

Charlemagne is in some way a “prehistoric” artist, if we define prehistoric as a time with no division of gender, no categories, no barriers, where all things are still interconnected. As a truly “in”-disciplinary artist he makes it difficult for art history to categorize him. *GesamttkkunsttMeshuggahhLaandtttt* will show for the very first time how everything is connected in his comprehensive body of work.

**Charlemagne Palestine** (\* 1943) lives and works in Brussels. He has released more than twenty solo albums and has performed all around the world in the last forty years. His work has been exhibited internationally at public and private institutions including: Venice Biennale, Italy; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Kunsthalle, Basel, Switzerland; Long Beach Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Documenta 8, Kassel; Walker Art center, Minneapolis; Art Institute of Chicago; Centre d’Art Contemporain, Geneva; Musée d’Art Contemporain, Montreal; and Wiels, Brussels. In 2014, he participated in the Whitney Biennial and performed with Simone Forti at MOMA in New York and at the Louvre in Paris.

**Curator:** Luca Lo Pinto

**Concert:** After the official end of the exhibition Charlemagne Palestine will play one of his legendary concerts on November 12 in the exhibition space.  
For registration please contact: [dramaturgie@kunsthalle.at](mailto:dramaturgie@kunsthalle.at)

*GesamttkkunsttMeshuggahhLaandtttt* is co-commissioned by Kunsthalle Wien and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (28/1 – 1/5 2016).

A catalogue accompanying the exhibition will be published by Sternberg Press.

#Charlemagne

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Press release

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