



Schaulager  
at Haus zum Kirschgarten, Basel

## **FRANCIS ALÿS: FABIOLA**

12 March to 28 August 2011

### **PRESS INFORMATION**

Schaulager is breaking new ground by undertaking an unusual project. For the first time we are staging an exhibition outside the Schaulager building, as guests at Basel's most prestigious showroom of *bourgeois* daily life, the Haus zum Kirschgarten, where a unique project by the internationally celebrated artist Francis Alÿs is to be realised: Alÿs will be integrating his collection of over 370 images of Saint Fabiola into this protestant, upper-class domestic environment to create an intervention.

Born in 1959 in Antwerp and resident in Mexico City since 1986, for nearly twenty years the Belgian artist Francis Alÿs has collected images of Saint Fabiola. The portraits are largely the work of amateurs and dilettantes but deploy a consistent iconography in their means of representation: over 370 portraits of a woman in profile, wearing a crimson veil, all similar, yet none identical. The images are all based on the 1885 portrait of Saint Fabiola by the French realist painter Jean-Jacques Henner, the whereabouts of which are now unknown.

Fabiola was a fourth century patrician Roman who despite divorce and remarriage later did such fervent penance that she was welcomed back to the faith and, after her death, sainted. She is the patron saint of the divorced, the deceived, the mistreated and of widows. For years she fell into oblivion, but in the nineteenth century returned to popularity as the protagonist of the 1854 novel, *Fabiola or, the Church of the Catacombs*, by the English cleric Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, a bestseller in its time.

Francis Alÿs acquires his Fabiola portraits in flea markets and thrift shops throughout Europe and Latin America. The works' media are highly diverse, including oil painting, gouache, embroidery, ceramics, images made of enamel or plaster, or, in one case, of seeds and beans. All the works have been left in their original state. The artists, dates and places of origin are largely unknown.

Francis Alÿs has been presenting his collection since 1994. It is never exhibited in conventional 'white cube' gallery. For each Fabiola exhibition he looks for a special location, which must have a historical context, and devises new constellations and forms of presentation. He cunningly uses the collection as a Trojan horse, penetrating and occupying ever more new spaces. Each new historical framework defines the reception and focuses our attention on the image and its altering shapes and forms through various eras and cultures.

Schaulager, an institution dedicated to the storage and maintenance of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation collection and to its innovative use as an active visual-art archive, has now brought this very different collection to Basel.

The Haus zum Kirschgarten, once Basel's foremost town house, is now a museum of extravagant domestic lifestyles. Built between 1775 and 1780, around twenty-five of its rooms now document the prototypical home environment of the nineteenth-century protestant *haut-bourgeoisie*. Unlike the architecture, the fittings are not original, instead partly reconstructed, partly taken from other upper-middle-class houses. Francis Alÿs has now introduced his swarm of images into domestic surroundings for the first time, into this accumulation of historicising displays. The Fabiola portraits may sometimes be distributed sparingly, a miniature on a salon table for instance, or a devotional image in a bedroom; or numerous images may be clustered on the walls.

Through their sheer quantity alone the mass of images develop a creative potency, taking root in their alien environment and exposing its qualities. The galleries of haut-bourgeois residential living at the Haus zum Kirschgarten, otherwise so calm and self-possessed, have now been taken over entirely by the conflict with their intruder, allowing a fascinating dialogue to unfold across social, cultural and religious boundaries.

*Francis Alÿs: Fabiola* is not one of the internationally renowned artist's 'classical' artworks. The mere mass of the collection constitutes an intervention, infiltrating its surroundings to demonstrate the power of imagery and emphasise the strength of faith in the potency of a portrait. A unique panorama of different collections, perspectives and encounters is revealed to the viewer.

Thanks to Schaulager's international collaboration with Dia Art Foundation, New York and the Historisches Museum Basel it has been possible to create a unique exhibition, which can only be seen in Basel.

*Francis Alÿs: Fabiola* is organized by Dia Art Foundation and curated by Lynne Cooke.

In Basel, *Francis Alÿs: Fabiola* is organized and supported by Laurenz Foundation Schaulager. The accompanying catalogue is part of the Schaulager-Hefte published by Laurenz Foundation.

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#### **EXHIBITIONS OF *FRANCIS ALÝS: FABIOLA* TO DATE**

- 1) Curare, Mexico City, September 1994 (ca. 28 images)
  - 2) *Antechamber*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 21 March – 18 May 1997 (integrated selection within a group exhibition)
  - 3) The Hispanic Society of America, New York, NY, 20 September 2007 – 6 April 2008
  - 4) Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 7 September 2008 – 29 March 2009
  - 5) National Portrait Gallery, London, 2 May – 20 September 2009
  - 6) Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia at Monasterio de Santo Domingo de Silos (Burgos), 28 October 2009 – 7 March 2010
  - 7) Haus zum Kirschgarten, Historisches Museum Basel, Basel, 12 March – 28 August 2011
- Next stop: Lima, Peru

#### **DOCUMENTATION OF THE ENTIRE COLLECTION**

Francis Alýs

*Fabiola: An Investigation*

Catalogue published on the occasion of an exhibition organised by Dia Art Foundation, New York (Hispanic Society of America, New York, 20 September 2007 – 6 April 2008)

New York, 2008