Arnulf Rainer Biography (short)

1929 Born in Baden, near Vienna.

1947/48 First exposure to international contemporary art through magazines at the British Council in Klagenfurt, as well as through exhibitions at the French Cultural Institute in Villach and at the Künstlerhaus Klagenfurt. Meets Maria Lassnig.

1949 After passing the entrance exams, Rainer spends one day at the College of Applied Arts and three days at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.

1951 Trip to Paris with Lassnig and a disappointing encounter with André Breton.

Organizes the exhibition Junge, unfigurative Malerei (Young, Non-Figurative Painting) with Lassnig at the Künstlerhaus Klagenfurt; there, under the pseudonym "Zuzlu," he exhibits atomic and blind paintings, as well as so-called nail paintings (empty picture frames hung on the wall).

1953 Creates Reductions (monochrome black paintings with a delineated white remnants), which very slowly evolve into Overpaintings.

Rainer begins work on the Proportion Studies, color collages made of dyed papers created "through parallel shifts."

1954 Galerie Würthle in Vienna (artistic director: Fritz Wotruba) presents the exhibition Proportionsordnungen (Orders of Proportion).

1956 A series of approximately fifteen Crucifixions (overpainted, assembled hardboard panels in various cross shapes) and the first drypoint etchings are created.

The exhibition Comparaisons is held at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris.

1957 In the summer, the exhibition Monochrome Komplexe 1955–1957 (Monochrome Complexes 1955–1957) is held at the Vienna Secession.

1959 Together with Ernst Fuchs and Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Rainer founds the Pintorarium (a crematorium for the cremation of the academy).

Peter Kubelka directs the film Arnulf Rainer, which consists solely of images of black and white surfaces.

Victor Vasarely, Emilio Vedova, Georges Mathieu, Sam Francis, and others provide works to be overpainted.

1960 Galerie nächst St. Stephan in Vienna presents Überzeichnungen und Übermalungen 1955–1960 (Overdrawings and Overpaintings 1955–1960). The Städtisches Museum Leverkusen, Schloss Morsbroich, presents Monochrome Malerei (Monochrome Painting), featuring works by Rainer, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Mark Rothko, Raimund Girke, and others.

1961 Solo exhibition at Galleria del Cavallino in Venice.

1962 Rainer participates in the Biennale Internazionale Grafica in Milan and is featured in the exhibition Comparaisons at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris. First exhibition in Japan at Minami Gallery in Tokyo.

1966 Drawing experiments under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs at the Lausanne University Hospital, which are filmed. The film Künstler unter Psilocybin (Artist Under the Influence of Psilocybin) is produced.

1968 Experiments at the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich involving drawing under the influence of LSD.

First self-paintings (face and hands); Rainer appears in public in downtown Vienna painted in this manner. At the same time, inspired by the facial distortions of "the mentally ill"—as they were called at the time—he creates numerous passport photographs with grimaces in a photobooth.

First major retrospective at the Museum of the 20th Century in Vienna.

1969 Enlarged photobooth photos and photographs taken by professional photographers are overdrawn and overpainted.

1970 Photographs are created of expressive poses, such as hand and arm gestures, kneeling, reclining, and sitting postures, resulting in the series Face Farces and Body Language. Rainer ties his head and body with various rubber bands (Rubber Band series) and pulls stocking masks over his head.

1971 The Hamburger Kunstverein dedicates the first retrospective in Germany to Rainer.

He represents Austria at the 11th São Paulo Art Biennial.

1972 Rainer begins to use new media. His "self-portrayals" are recorded on video and film in the studio.

Exhibition at the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

At documenta 5, Cross Overpaintings and Face Farces are exhibited.

1973 Rainer begins creating gestural hand and finger paintings. He later also attempts to paint with his feet.

Misch- und Trennkunst (The Art of Mixing and Separating) in collaboration with Dieter Roth.

1977 Begins work on the death masks and the major cycles Snake Women, Women's Language, and Women's Frenzy.

The Kunsthalle Bern, followed by the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau in Munich, present the Arnulf Rainer. Retrospective 1950–1976.

Rainer participates in documenta 6 in Kassel.

1978 Rainer represents Austria at the 38th Venice Biennale. The exhibition Linguaggio del corpo includes Self-Portrayals, Gestural Hand and Foot Paintings, Self-Transformations, Ecstasies (Women's Language), Yoga Poses, Entanglements, Death Facies, and Death Masks.

1980 Rainer resumes work on the cross forms, creating Wooden Crosses of various sizes, some with attachments.

Some of the overpainted plaster death masks are individually encased in foam inside wooden crates and painted over: the Valhalla in a Box series. A comprehensive retrospective is held at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin.

Participation in the 39th Venice Biennale in the central pavilion with reworked death facies (Cadaveri series).

Solo exhibitions at the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Whitechapel Gallery in London, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

1981 Rainer is appointed professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and becomes a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin. He becomes the first artist to receive the Max Beckmann Prize from the City of Frankfurt am Main.

1982 Rainer receives a collection of photographs taken after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Hiroshima series is created. This cycle is exhibited at over seventeen venues across Europe. Participation in documenta 7 with a selection of newly created hand and finger paintings.

Solo exhibition at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk.

1983 Continues work on the large wooden crosses and death mask paintings.

1984 In Paris, the Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou presents the exhibition Mort et Sacrifice.

Participation in the opening exhibition of the Castello di Rivoli in Turin.

The exhibition Finger- und Handmalerei 1981–1983 (Finger and Hand Painting 1981–1983) is held at the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.

1985 Drawing on his collection of illustrated books from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which he had been assembling for years, Rainer uses the illustration plates for the series Animalia and Botanika.

1986 The exhibition Arnulf Rainer – Self-Portraits tours the United States, traveling from the Ritter Art Gallery in Boca Raton, Florida to the Grey Art Gallery at New York University, and finally to the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh.

1989 Award from the International Center of Photography in New York.

A comprehensive retrospective is held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and subsequently travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the Historical Museum of the City of Vienna.

1992 Rainer begins work on the series Angel Paintings and Geologica. Under the title Young Cross, the Menil Collection in Houston exhibits approximately forty cross paintings created between 1969 and 1991.

1993 Opening of the Arnulf Rainer Museum in New York (until 1996).

1994 Rainer has round tondos cut from panel boards. Some are coated with a plaster-like substance before being overpainted, into which he scratches textures. This gives rise to the series of Cosmos Paintings.

1995 Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Bolzano: Lucio Fontana – Arnulf Rainer. Oltre la tela.

1997 Rainer returns to hand painting in red, magenta, brown, and dark green on drawing boards, some of which are padded with foam (New Hand Painting).

1998 He reworks greatly enlarged faces by Giotto, Botticelli, and Fra Angelico (the Giotto and Others series), as well as etchings by Camille Corot.

1999 Having always been impressed by Victor Hugo's paintings, Rainer begins to overdraw a series of facsimiles of his works.

2000 Following a series of works on paper on the themes of macro-micro, sky, and ocean, he turns his attention to reworkings of Canova and Caspar David Friedrich.

On the occasion of Rainer's seventieth birthday, a major retrospective is held at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam: Noch vor der Sprache – Even before Language.

2001 Inspired by his exploration of Antonio Canova, he creates the Classicism series.

A comprehensive retrospective is held at the Galleria d'arte moderna di Bologna.

2002 Permanent Rainer Room at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich.

2003 The exhibition Canova-Rainer is held at the Museo Correr in Venice, followed by Arnulf Rainer – Sotto la Croce at the Museo Diocesano d'Arte Sacra, likewise in Venice.

2004 Rainer is awarded an honorary doctorate by the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Münster. He develops a keen interest in Japanese Noh masks, and later also in African and Asian masks. Rainer mounts various masks onto wooden panels to overpaint them. The Essl Collection in Klosterneuburg presents a juxtaposition with works by Antoni Tàpies: Tàpies / Rainer. Porteurs de Secret.

In Taura, Japan, Akira Ikeda Gallery exhibits the Hiroshima Series, acquired by the Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau in Munich.

2006 The Comunidad de Madrid and the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM) in Las Palmas present the exhibition Arnulf Rainer – Dieter Roth, Mezclarse y separarse. Rainer becomes the first non-Spanish artist to receive the Aragón-Goya Prize for his life's work and his artistic affinity with Francisco de Goya. Exhibition of Goya reworkings from the 1980s and from 2005/06 at the Museo de Zaragoza.

2008 To mark its reopening, the Schiller Museum in Weimar presents an exhibition on Victor Hugo, featuring a selection from Rainer's Victor Hugo cycle.

2009 Opening of the Arnulf Rainer Museum in the "Women's Bath" in Baden, near Vienna.

2010 Reinhold Baumstark curates the second exhibition at the Arnulf Rainer Museum, titled Cross – The Cross Can Convey the Meaning.

The Alte Pinakothek in Munich presents Arnulf Rainer. The Overpainter. A solo exhibition is held at the Rogaland Kunstmuseum in Stavanger, and Rainer participates in the Busan Biennale in South Korea.

2011 The Maison de Victor Hugo in Paris presents Arnulf Rainer/Victor Hugo. Surpeintures.

At the Arnulf Rainer Museum, Rudi Fuchs curates the exhibition Lustspiel. News from the Studio. Georg Baselitz / Arnulf Rainer. At the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, both early and new reworkings of Goya's works are presented in the exhibition Arnulf Rainer sobre Goya. In New York, Rainer participates in the exhibition Staging Action: Performance in Photography since 1960 at the Museum of Modern Art.

2012 Rainer paints a series of black arcs and curves on drawing paper, and later on wood. He increasingly photographs his source material (old, partly colored postcards, etc.). Participates in the exhibition Messerschmidt and Modernity at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Helmut Friedel curates two exhibitions at the Arnulf Rainer Museum on the theme of Rainer-Cosmos (Part 2: New, Unfigured and Interesting).

Tate Liverpool: Tracing the Century, Drawings from the Tate Collection; the Museum of Modern Art, New York: Exquisite Corpses: Drawing and Disfiguration.

2013 Rudi Fuchs curates Mario Merz – Arnulf Rainer: Deep Wide [Fragments] at the Arnulf Rainer Museum.

2014 The Arnulf Rainer Museum hosts the exhibition Damien Hirst & Arnulf Rainer. Durcheinander / Commotion.

On the occasion of his eighty-fifth birthday, the Albertina in Vienna dedicates a major retrospective to Arnulf Rainer, which is subsequently shown at the Frieder Burda Museum in Baden-Baden.

2015 The exhibition Arnulf Rainer. Overpainter at the Museum Cobra in Amstelveen is subsequently shown at the Arnulf Rainer Museum under the title Pinselrausch (Paintbrush Frenzy). The artist Markus Lüpertz selects a number of Arnulf Rainer's works on the theme of "body" and supplements them with his own sculptures for the exhibition BILDENDE Kunst (VISUAL Art) at the Arnulf Rainer Museum. The exhibition Rainer Universalis at the Arnulf Rainer Museum features, among other things, a group of "overpainted books" for the first time.

2016 Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Salzburg presents the exhibition Arnulf Rainer. Early Works 1950–1960. The exhibition travels to London in 2017 and to Paris in 2019.

The Sharjah Art Foundation (UAE) presents the exhibition Arnulf Rainer – Towards Overpainting.

2017 Inspired by a treatise by Leonardo da Vinci on painting and its six colors (including black and white), Helmut Friedel designs a room for each color at the Arnulf Rainer Museum in Baden as part of the exhibition The Painter's Colors – Change of Scene.

2018 Woodcuts by Donald Judd and drypoint etchings by Arnulf Rainer are shown in juxtaposition at the Arnulf Rainer Museum: Donald Judd – Arnulf Rainer – Sarah Pichlkostner – Saskia Noor van Imhof. Kanten Winkel Linien Kurven / Edges Angles Lines Curves.

2019 The Albertina honors Arnulf Rainer on his ninetieth birthday with a selection of works from the collection: Arnulf Rainer. A Tribute.

2020 In the exhibition Emilio Vedova – Arnulf Rainer: Titian Looks at the Arnulf Rainer Museum, sculptures by Vedova are juxtaposed with paintings by Rainer.

2021 Galleria Poggiali in Florence presents the exhibition Colori nelle Mani, curated by Helmut Friedel.

In the fall, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Salzburg presents a selection of works from the Body Language series exhibited in 1978 at the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

2022 In the exhibition Arnulf Rainer. Ex nihilo, Galerie Lelong in Paris presents last works from 2015 to 2016.

The exhibition Rose Pink Sky Blue is held at the Arnulf Rainer Museum.

During the 59th Venice Biennale, the Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova presents the exhibition Rainer – Vedova: Ora.

2023 Participation in numerous exhibitions, including at the Albertina and the Leopold Museum in Vienna, the Museum Cobra in Amstelveen, the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, and the Kunsthalle Darmstadt.

Galerie Ulysses in Vienna presents Arnulf Rainer. In the Sound of Color.

2024 To mark Rainer's ninety-fifth birthday in December, the Würth Collection presents a selection of his works from its extensive holdings at Museum Würth 2 in Künzelsau.

The Arnulf Rainer Museum presents the exhibition Arnulf Rainer: Nothingness Against Everything.

Galeria Nieves Fernández in Madrid presents the exhibition Arnulf Rainer: Rot. Blau. Gelb (Red. Blue. Yellow).

2025 Rainer is awarded the Golden Medal of Honor for Services to the Republic of Austria.

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Salzburg presents the exhibition Arnulf Rainer | Landscapes—Goya 1983–1992.

Galerie Lelong in Paris showcases works spanning six decades in the exhibition Arnulf Rainer. Reminiszenz 1955–2025.

The Arnulf Rainer Museum hosts the exhibition Arnulf Rainer & Art Brut.

On December 18, shortly after his ninety-sixth birthday, Arnulf Rainer dies surrounded by his family in Upper Austria.