

BERLINALE 2024 Forum

Review: *Sleeping with a Tiger*

by [SUSANNE GOTTLIEB](#)

20/02/2024 - BERLINALE 2024: Delving into the life of Austrian painter Maria Lassnig with a non-linear approach, Anja Salomonowitz breaks with the traditional biopic while also keeping her subject an enigma



Birgit Minichmayr in *Sleeping with a Tiger*

There is something in the colours that **Maria Lassnig** analysed, mixed and applied to her canvas. Something that they evoke – a feeling, a mood, a message. It is those colours, the self-expression of a female painter in a 20th-century art scene that was dominated by males, that motivated Austrian director **Anja Salomonowitz** to dive into the life and accomplishments of Lassnig. Her movie *Sleeping with a Tiger* has had its world premiere in the Forum section of the 74th [Berlinale](#).

By employing a counter-narrative to the traditional biopic structure, which usually tells of the accomplishments of Lassnig's male counterparts, the viewer is thrown into an eternal cycle of inner and outer struggle, of painting, of reflection, of searching for acknowledgement. Salomonowitz intentionally refuses to establish a

clear anchor in a time or place, arranging episodes of Lassnig's life in a non-linear way. Connecting these scenes to paintings of her early career, and the famous mood pictures of her later days, Salomonowitz herself acts as an art curator. By following her mood and her idea of what works at a particular moment, the view on Lassnig becomes explicitly hers. It never claims to hold any absolute truth. But what she opens up to the viewer is a perpetual circle of recurring themes. It does not matter when what happened, or where. Feelings and emotions transcend life and time.

Birgit Minichmayr plays Lassnig with a strong Carinthian accent and a removed otherworldliness, carrying her from pretending to be a young girl to a woman in her nineties. With one exception where a young actress plays her as a child, and with no ageing make-up on Minichmayr's face, as a viewer, one can only guess by the set design and the costumes in which phase of her life Lassnig is being depicted at any given time. The cycle is plain to see: sit, think, paint, rinse, repeat. While the choice of agelessness allows for some visual anachronism, it also hammers home Salomonowitz's argument of Lassnig's battle with the art scene and herself being one that lasted a whole lifetime. When she finally became famous and appreciated, she could not accept that notion any more, remaining stuck in her old ways.

But it is not only the break with the traditional narrative timeline that sticks out; Salomonowitz once again uses her typical style of merging together scenes depicted by actors, historical footage and interviews. These manifold media, like the short films Lassnig shot herself as an art installation, bring forth a more complex perception of the painter than one expressed merely through paintings alone. When Lassnig breaks the fourth wall, she recites the actual diary entries of her real-life counterpart. Characters like the auctioneer at Dorotheum or the photographer recount meeting her and the interactions they had. It keeps the persona of Lassnig grounded in a historical, real context.

Who can say who Maria Lassnig really was? Everyone has a different story to tell. *Sleeping with a Tiger* may only be one of many approximations. That Lassnig still stays an enigma at the end, a fragment of a puzzle that might need further private exploration, works both in favour of the movie and to its detriment. For those familiar with Lassnig's biography, certain episodes and moments might make more sense; for others, the critical questioning of how the story of a person should be received might keep the viewer too much at arm's length. There is power in Salomonowitz's vision, but one has to be open to diving into a concept that might not provide straightforward answers, or even all the emotions that Lassnig was feeling.

Sleeping with a Tiger was produced by Austria's [coop99 filmproduktion](#).

more about: *Sleeping with a Tiger*



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international title: *Sleeping with a Tiger*



original title:	Mit einem Tiger schlafen
country:	Austria
year:	2024
directed by:	Anja Salomonowitz
screenplay:	Anja Salomonowitz
cast:	Birgit Minichmayr , Johanna Orsini-Rosenberg , Maria Nicolini , Lukas Watzl , Oskar Haag , Josef Kleindienst

main awards/selection

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