Austria, Animation-country without Animation

Seen from the point of view of the classic animation-filmindustry, as well as from the point of view of the big, classic animation-filmfestivals like Annecy, Zagreb or Hiroshima, the Austrian film scene does not offer much of interest.
There is just one small animation studio that produces series for children.
Animated commercials are exeptions, mostly produced only partly in Austria, as there are no professional studios for conventional animation that have a sufficient stock of drawing artists at their disposal.
Animated short films rarely find their way to the competitions of the mentioned festivals.
Feature long animated films do not exist. Neither the infrastructure nor the tax-situation is a convincing argument for production companies to realize conventional animation films in Austria.

A completely different situation applies to the situation of the artistic animationfilm in Austria.
Since the nineteenfifties and sixties, personalities like Kurt Kren and Peter Kubelka used single frame technique in their so called structural films to attack the concepts and narrative techniques of feature film, culminating in the formal radicalism of kubelkas film „Arnulf Rainer" that is finally reduced to a rhythmic sequence of black and white singleframes.
The paintress Maria Lassnig, a pioneer of modern painting in Austria, started to realize her impressive pictorial ideas also in form of animation film in New York in the nineteenseventies.
After her return she etablished a small animation studio in her painting class in vienna, based on the possibility to develop cineastic ideas strictly fromoptical sensations.

Upon the basis of these pioneer works a new generation of filmmakers developed their personal language, whose unusual output brought Austria a reputation as a cineastic creative source.

Their films have been produced mostly by means of public support, produced by the artists themselves with small budgets, for example produced in artistic filmstudios like the one of ASIFA Austria. Then they were promoted and sent to international festivals also by the artists themselves, or with some luck by Sixpackfilm.
During the last years there has been a pleasent development: Young film productions like fopr example Amour Fou in Vienna recognize the potential of such films and produce some of these filmmakers on a professional level with big success, very often in international coproductions.

The usual categorisation, dividing films into experimental-, animation-, avant gardefilms etc. is not a suitable way to cope with these cineastic works.
Experimental and avantgarde-filmmakers, who often do nor agree to these classification themselves, frequently make use of single frame techniques, which makes them part of the classic animation category. On the other hand, animation filmmakers carry out formal experiments and also do not care much about those attached categorizations.

Nowadays, as digital technologies with their rapid technical evolution-ciclesconstantly creates new challenges and possibilities, it is by far out of time to judge animation films only by their technological basis. Animationfilmfestival-regulations that dictate a certain pertcentage of single frame technique to filmmakers should be changed.

The conception of animation film should be understood in a more original way; the soul, the anima that a filmmaker is capable to breathe into his work should be relevant for its artistic importance.

Consequently, this would mean the ideal situation of a complete decategorisation, as breathing soul into a film is basically possible in any cineastic language, irrespective of technical proceedings like the single frame technique.
But as ideal situations cannot be reached and one can only approach them, I plead for an expansion of the usual conception of animation film.

This is what this film program tries to take into account.

It consists of a small choice of successfull artistic films from Austria. Some of which probably would not chosen for the competition of a classic animation filmfestival, though these films even base upon single frame technique and/or more or less related, innovative proceedings and conceptions.
The program follows an approximate chronological sequence to give an overview over various different productions.

In the first film, **Kugelkopf**, by Mara Mattuschka, from 1985, the actress anihillates herself in a short-epic about daily routine. Esthetics full of injuries and bandages, displayed by breathtaking montage and masterly use of music and sound, refers to Viennese Actionism and reminds thus of the Actionism-films of Kurt Kren from the Nineteensixties.

The Man with modern Nerves, a film by Bady Minck and Stefan Stratil , 1988, about the intellectual world of the architect, modernist pioneer and revolutionary of modern living culture, Adolf Loos.
The cinematic illusion of ever-encreasing, extaticly animated movements of a step pyramid, planned by Loos as a city hall in Mexico, serves as a metaphor for his dynamic thought processes.

The drawn animation **Wieder Holung** by Nana Swiczinsky, 1997, convinces by ist cineastic power and it's hauntic rhythm. Nightmares and repetitions of everyday life constantlyalternate or even cause each other. There is no escape from this circle, as the reproduction of the protagonist lead to it's continuation on a meta-level.

I'm A Star!, by Stefan Stratil, 2002, explores the myth of Frank Sinatra by the use of his comicstip-alter ego Frankieboy.
Animation and montage have been synchronized frame by frame to fit perfectly with the sound and form a basic structure around which diverse film techniques and experiments have been deployed. Macro shots, optical distortions, multiple exposures all combine to produce an intoxicating atmosphere, in which Frankieboy's universe is assembled step by step.
There is no linear action; everything spins around the main character's chaotic associations and his fatal love for Ava Gardner. Thereby Frankieboy's contrariness exposes the absurdity of his old-fashioned macho-image.

Outer Space, by Peter Tscherkassky from 1999, is a psychocineastic tour de force. With a special light exposure-technique found footage from a typical horror-B-picture is condensened to a highly intensive filmexperience. Conventional narrative structures are completely torn apart and put togethter again in haunting rhythmic cascades, also using normally invisible film-elements like perforation and optical soundtrack. In some weightless moments the linear filmstructure seems to be abolished.

Copy Shop, by Virgil Widrich, 2001, with ist oscarnomination, various prices and uncountable festivals the bestknown film of this program, strives for an equivalence of content and form. The story of a man, who, to his own dismay, keeps on reproducing himself in his own copyshop, is told by digital frames that have been, printed, photocopied and shot again frame by frame with a 35mm-animation camera.