



*Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman, VPA teachers and founders of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in Boulder, Colorado*

## Fifteen years of the Vienna Poetry Academy

*For fifteen years, the Vienna Poetry Academy has been proving that the art of writing poetry can be learned. The organization, the only one of its kind in Europe, has become a centre for many Austrian and international authors.*

## First Poetry Academy in Europe for 2,500 years

“Where in the world is there a school where young poets can polish their skills with the help of expert teachers? In Vienna, and that’s where it should stay!” This is what former mayor of Vienna Helmut Zilk said in 1995 of the Vienna Poetry Academy, which at the time was just three years old. The Vienna Poetry Academy was founded with the help of the City of Vienna and is proud of the fact that it is the first major poetry academy in Europe for more than 2,500 years. At that time, Sappho, the most famous Ancient Greek lyric poet, established a poetry school for young women in Mytilene on the Greek island of Lesbos.

## From Ginsberg to H.C. Artmann

The academy was modelled to a large extent on the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in Boulder, Colorado, which was established in 1974. Its founders include the famous poets Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman, who are also guest instructors at the Vienna Poetry Academy. For the past fifteen years, writing classes have been taught by international and Austrian authors. The most celebrated Austrian lyric poets are numbered among them: H.C. Artmann, Wolfgang Bauer, Gert Jonke, Roland Neuwirth and Marlene Streeruwitz.



*Masters of the spoken word: Wolfgang Bauer with Falco; a reading with H.C. Artmann*

## “Boulevard of Poetry”

The writing classes given by Falco and Nick Cave caused quite a stir and are still considered highlights in the history to date of the Vienna Poetry Academy. Asian and African authors too, such as Ayu Utami from Indonesia and Waris Dirie from Somalia, have also expanded the intellectual horizons of poetry enthusiasts. Many classes are now held over the Internet. “This academy has no equal anywhere in the world. It is a wide boulevard of poetry, one that words converge onto and where they remain”, said the famous French poet Henri Chopin, who taught a class at the academy in 1993.

## Springboard for young authors

Past and present students of the Poetry Academy are both experienced authors and lay writers; a fifth come from abroad, and the majority are women. For some of them, like Ernst Molden and Isabeella Beumer, attending classes here was a springboard to recognition in the literature and performance scene. A major platform where many Vienna Poetry Academy students have presented their art is the reading marathon “Literatur rund um die Burg” in front of the Viennese National Theatre. This year, the marathon is also the kick-off event for the “kulttour 2007” festival.



*VPA students reading at the 24-hour reading marathon “Rund um die Burg”; Indonesian author and SFD teacher Ayu Utami*

## Literature at the National Theatre

Reading for thirty minutes each, some forty authors will read from their works in a tent. The marathon gets underway at 4 p.m. with Australian author Peter Goldsworthy reading excerpts from his new novel “Maestro”. Other readers include Thomas Sautner, Paul Lendvai, Sabine Gruber and the young Austrian author Linda Stiff, who turns to eroticism at 3 a.m. with her book “Stierhunger”. At 11 a.m., you can also hear the Vienna Poetry Academy students who participated in the classes with Anne Waldman and Siberian poet Sainkho Namtchylak in September.

For more information about the Vienna Poetry Academy, read the [wieninternational.at](http://wieninternational.at) interview with Vienna Poetry Academy director Christian Ide Hintze and celebrated American author Anne Waldman.



*Christian Ide Hintze, founder and director of the Vienna Poetry Academy: “No country in the world is surrounded by so many languages”*

## Wieninternational.at interviews with Christian Ide Hintze and American author Anne Waldman

Wieninternational.at interviews with Vienna Poetry Academy director Christian Ide Hintze and celebrated American author Anne Waldman

### **Part 1: Christian Ide Hintze**

*How did you come to establish the Vienna Poetry Academy?*

On reflection, it goes way back to my school days and my German professor, Mr Swoboda, who talked with great passion about Sappho, although she was not part of the curriculum. What stuck with me was that she was the greatest lyric poet of all time and also ran a kind of poetry academy. The idea remained on a back burner in my brain until I met Allen Ginsberg. He invited me to the Kerouac School. At that time in Europe, establishing an academy for learning and teaching poetry or literature was about the most ludicrous thing you could think of. After fifteen years, the Vienna Poetry Academy seems perfectly normal. Learning from the experience of the Kerouac School made it easier to start something like that in Vienna. Even though a genius doesn't learn, as they say, we resorted to the trick of inviting geniuses, such as Ginsberg, Artmann, Bauer and Anne Waldman. This strategy helped us win the heated debates in the arts sections of the newspapers of

whether you can learn to write poetry.

*In 2007, the Vienna Poetry Academy is celebrating its fifteenth anniversary. How would you summarize where you are now?*

Although in 1992 we could not foresee how important the Internet would become, we were focused on multi-media, even back then. We have an impressive archive with precious recordings of classes and performances. Unfortunately, these old records are decaying and now need to be digitized. The cost of doing this is more than twice our annual budget, but we are hopeful that we will find a way to accomplish this. Our biggest sources of funding are the City of Vienna and the federal government. We are also working hard to set up a university “location” with a view to bridging the gap from practice to academic instruction. We started discussing this when H.C. Artmann and Wolfgang Bauer were still alive; a group of authors is currently focussing on this project. Perhaps something concrete will come of it this year. We regard ourselves as a fighting unit that has hacked our way with machetes into the jungle at many points. We have shown that you can teach not just the theory, but the artistic endeavour.

*The Vienna Poetry Academy is one of the founders of the European Network of Creative Writing Programme conceived by the Prague “Literární Akademie”. Is that correct?*

Through the centuries, literary writing has always taken place in a national setting; for this reason, it seemed logical to set up a forum that went beyond national borders. We have developed joint projects and programmes, we discuss our different experiences; all this takes place once a year in Prague, at the Literature Academy.

*How have the readings by Vienna Poetry Academy students at the “Literatur rund um die Burg” festival been received, and do you have any success stories from former students?*

What makes “Literatur rund um die Burg” special for our audiences is that they can identify with our students, precisely because they are not “professionals”. They have been extremely well received for fifteen years. We have numerous small success stories, many journalists like you who were already writing, or Isabeella Beumer, who has become a star of the performance art scene, or Ernst Molden, who is himself now an instructor at the Academy.

*The Vienna Poetry Academy always focuses particularly on the Viennese School. What is special about this school?*

The reason why we could establish the Poetry Academy in Vienna and not London or Paris has to do with the fact that Vienna is a “secret centre of multilingualism” because of the Danube monarchy. There is not a country in the world that is surrounded by so many languages, and that is what makes Austrian lyric poetry so special. This openness to other languages has a long tradition in Vienna, and we are continuing this tradition at the Vienna Poetry Academy.





*Poetry is news that stays news, says Anne Waldman, world-famous author and performance artist*

## **Part 2: Anne Waldman**

*You have been a guest teacher at the Vienna Poetry Academy several times. What makes the VPA so special?*

The VPA is very much in line with the experimental contemporary poetics, concerning performance and transcending linguistic boundaries. When I worked for the VPA in the past, there were classes in German, English and Spanish. VPA founder Christian Ide Hintze came to the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics and the Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, and he was very inspired by the energy and the performance aspects by Allen Ginsberg and the beat generation as well as the political activism and involvement with other cultures. He felt that something could be carried back to Vienna. The VPA developed very much its own identity, vision and pedagogy, and I feel very comfortable here, I feel connected to many of the students I had over the years. They stay in touch, some come over to Colorado.

It's an exciting vision of what a poetry school could be. I call these projects cultural interventions. In Boulder, we have during the summer the writing program for people outside the university, about 200 of them, and about 80 students all year long and not just students with their own writing, but also studying, reading and writing papers. The emphasis is on original thinking, and we have our archive, which students can use for their own research, tapes of Ginsberg, William Burroughs, John Cage, and anybody in the world can go online to archive.org, scroll to Naropa and log on to many hours of these classes. Even I do this.

*How would you describe the present trends in poetry and its importance in literature today?*

An interesting movement is what we call cross-genre writings. Many younger writers and also of my generation are working with so-called investigative poetics.

I'm finishing an 800-page trilogy called "lovis", an investigative and meditative work on patriarchy spanning 25 years of travelling the world and observing. There is a traditional model of verse, coming to us from the English classics. But there have been many breakthroughs on form, by Gertrude Stein, or James Joyce, being able to meld words in collages and come up with new forms and languages. I'm interested in ethnic poetics from all over the world, like Indonesia, where I worked with the Naropa program. I'm interested in the "orality" of other cultures and re-investigating these forms with a different lens and respect. The parameters of what poetry is have expanded. We talk about ethno-poetics. In the Bosnian poetic tradition there is a particular oral epic poem, style, form, passed on for generations.

To value that for active poets is to make it new, as Ezra Pound said. But there are also endangered cultures and languages, which need to be preserved. An integral part of a poet's work is to investigate, honour and restore these lost treasures. The view is much beyond this English-based form of poetry. But even Shakespeare was a very oral author. So performance is not something new. There is so much more exploration. And also a trend not to be so tied to personal experience, looking at everything from your own perspective. It doesn't have to be the driving motive for a poem. Witnessing and commenting events is good though, I have a performance called "Strangling Dick Cheney". Part of my job is to point things out. Preserving records and archives is also very important, so that future generations can see what kind of artistic work was done, and that we were not just killing each other. It is important to create an infrastructure like the VPA, where poets can come together and work and create.

*Many people write poetry, but are too shy to show it around or even publish it. What would be your advice to them?*

You can work in small communities, show your work around, find some small publishers or do it yourself, but you have to want it. I'm also part of the small press revolution that began in the sixties in the US. Participate in readings and not worry about your future carrier. It's very human to express yourself and your creativity. Join a class, a discussion group, read a lot of other writers. If you are serious about writing, you also have to be a reader. Be familiar with the history and poetry of other cultures.

Poetry is news that stays news.

## Biographies:

### **Christian Ide Hintze:**

Born in 1953 in Vienna's district of Ottakring, lyric poet, audio, video and performance poet, initiator and director of the Vienna Poetry Academy. Teaching assignments in Lesbos, Italy, Cuba, Argentina, Vietnam, Uruguay, Mexico, USA. Publisher of the Poetry Academy series of books and the CD series "sound poetry live". Lives in Vienna.

### **Anne Waldman:**

Born in 1945 in Millville, New Jersey. Poet, performer, professor at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, and co-founder of the Jack Kerouac School for Disembodied Poetics. Director of the Naropa Foreign Studies Programme in Bali, Indonesia. Author of more than 40 books. Lives in Boulder and New York.

[www.naropa.edu](http://www.naropa.edu)

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