The Vienna Actionists—Gunter Brus, Hermann Nitsch, Otto Muehl, and Rudolf Schwarzkoegler—were a group of visual artists in the 1960s who moved from the liberated canvas of action painting into the space of performance art, with its emphasis on the body as both medium and agent. They developed a subversive vocabulary of “actions” to challenge artistic, sexual, and political taboos and repeatedly found themselves in trouble with the Austrian authorities. Renegotiating the audience-spectator relation as an often shocking “contract with the skin,” their work represents an important precursor for today’s performance art.

From the beginning the Actionists cannily used the media of photography and film to document and disseminate art actions that by their nature were ephemeral and subject to police action when conducted publicly. Kurt Kren, a major film artist in his own right, made nine films presenting actions from the years 1964 to 1967, particularly those of the most radical of the Actionist group, Brus and Muehl. MAGS is screening these difficult to find and rarely seen films, and we invite anyone interested to attend.