

Kunstmuseum Bern

Museum of Fine Arts Bern, Hodlerstrasse 8-12, 3000 Bern 7
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Press release

Bern, October 31, 2006

**Exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts Bern: "Six Feet Under" – An autopsy of our relation to the dead
November 2, 2006 until January 21, 2007**

Between not-daring-to-look and being-unable-to-look-away

The exhibition "Six Feet Under" is dedicated to the way we deal with our dead. Violence and death are omnipresent in the media, but direct contact with death is avoided in our culture. Representations of dead people can exert a strange fascination on us: we oscillate between not-daring-to-look and being-unable-to-look-away. "Six Feet Under" illustrates the fact that death is a universal and ancient theme in art. Works are being presented from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts Bern covering various centuries, loans from other institutions and artists as well as works that have been done specially for the exhibition. The main emphasis is on contemporary art from different continents and civilizations – Europe, America, Mexico, China, Japan, Thailand, India and Ghana.

"Six Feet Under" is a saying that has also become the title of a popular American television series as well as the title of this exhibition. The newly awakened interest evinced by art, popular culture and research in death is an indication that this topic is no longer repressed but that a "new visibility of death" (Thomas Macho) has developed, to which this exhibition would like to contribute. There is no culture that has not depicted death, as the works of art from various epochs and continents in the exhibition "Six Feet Under" are witness to. The fear of death and the desire to see and to recognize are regarded as the most important driving forces of human action and thought, they are the origin of human culture. In the specific viewing of (a picture of) a corpse, this perceptual inconsistency comes to a head: we are torn between not-daring-to-look and being-unable-to-look-away. Thus, depictions of the dead often exert an unusual fascination on us.

Exhibition in six chapters

The exhibition is divided into six thematic chapters that make a dynamic juxtaposition of art works possible. The first chapter deals with **Corpses, Skulls and Skeletons**. Artists such as Andres Serrano, Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, Ferdinand Hodler, Karl Stauffer-Bern and Stefan Balkenhol present to our gaze things that we don't like to see and which therefore exert a particular fascination: the dead and rotting human body reduced to its bones – our body, as we will never see it. In the second chapter **Coffins, Graves and Tears**, works of art are shown that deal with burial and mourning rituals. Thus *Kinderbegräbnis* by Albert Anker, in which death is only seen reflected in the body language of the mourners, is juxtaposed to the work by the Mexican artist Teresa Margolles: the body of a stillborn child is immersed in a small, flat block of concrete. The mother does not have enough money for a burial. Coffins by Ghanaian artists are also being shown that were made especially for the exhibition. All of the works presented in the third chapter, **Homages – The Beloved and Honoured Dead**, show the bodies of persons who were close to the artists concerned. Claude Monet's portrait of his dead wife is exhibited as well as a large-format work by A A Bronson depicting his dead colleague Felix Partz who died of AIDS. **The Death of the Artist** has as its theme the finality and radicalism of suicide. The Estonian artist Ene-Liis Semper makes a series of staged suicides. In contrast, the British artist Keith Arnatt stages his own burial in a series of photographs. **Death and Lifestyle** alludes to the New Romanticism of the 1980s. One can find the neo-Roman spirit and the yearning for death in the objects and installations by David Altmjed. The discussion with death by the Japanese photographer Izima Karou is based on the tradition of beautiful dead in Japanese art and literature. In the final chapter, **Afterlife**, the subject is the speculation of what happens after death. In the *Berner Allerseelenaltar* from 1506, the dead are holding a mass for the benefit of the living. The video works by the Thai artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, on the other hand, are based on performances that were staged in morgues excluding the public.

The exhibition is accompanied by a varied programme and a catalogue in German and English.

The exhibition is generously supported by the Foundation GegenwART.

Contact

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Curator / Contact

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Entrance Fee

14.- / 10.-

22.- / 18.- 1 ticket for the exhibition + 1 ticket for a film in the Kino Kunstmuseum

Catalogue

The Exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue: *Six Feet Under. Autopsie unseres Umgangs mit Toten / Autopsy of Our Relation to the Dead*. Kerber Verlag, Leipzig/Bielefeld. Herausgegeben vom Kunstmuseum Bern, mit Texten von Elisabeth Bronfen, Bernhard Fibicher, Matthias Frehner, Susanne Friedli, Thomas Macho, Helga Lutz, Regula Tschumi, Hans Christoph von Tavel. Deutsch und Englisch. 224 Seiten, vierfarbig, 27,2 x 21 cm. ISBN 3-86678-019-2. CHF 58.-

Special Events (most of them in German)

Opening

Wednesday, November 1, 2006, 18h30

(Schriftsteller), **Pedro Lenz** (Schriftsteller), **Markus Michel**
(Schriftsteller), **Michaela Wendt** (SchauspielerIn)

Öffentliche Führungen in Deutsch

Jeweils Dienstag, 19h und Sonntag, 11h

Visite Guidée en français

Mardi, 19 décembre, 2006, 19h30

Guided Tours in English

Tuesday, November 28, 2006, 19h30

Tuesday, January 16, 2007, 19h30

Literarische Führungen mit Michaela Wendt

Dienstag, 14. November 2006 | 18h

Sonntag, 26. November 2006 | 13h

Sonntag, 10. Dezember 2006 | 13h

Dienstag, 19. Dezember 2006 | 18h

Sonntag, 07. Januar 2007 | 13h

Dienstag, 16. Januar 2007 | 18h

Podiumsgespräch: Unser Umgang mit den Toten

Dienstag, 21. November 2006 | 20h

Mit: **Bernhard Fibicher** (Kurator, Moderation), **Maja Zimmermann**
(Pfarrerin am Münster Bern), **Thomas Plattner** (Oberarzt am Institut
für Rechtsmedizin der Universität Bern), **Margarete Bader-Tschan**
(Geschäftsführerin des Bestattungsunternehmens Charona)

Stoub u Äsche – Eine Szene von Markus Michel

Als Einführung zum Podiumsgespräch mit Ruth Schaffer als
Pööggen Änni und Markus Michel als Houzbei-Housi

Podiumsgespräch: Die Toten in Kunst und Kultur

Dienstag, 5. Dezember 2006 | 20h

Mit: **Bernhard Fibicher** (Kurator, Moderation), **Elisabeth Bronfen**
(Autorin und Professorin am englischen Seminar der
Universität Zürich), **Hans Danuser** (Künstler), **Hans Geser**
(Ordinarius für Soziologie an der Universität Zürich)

Literarische Veranstaltung zur Finissage:

Der tote Mensch in der Literatur

Sonntag, 21. Januar 2007 | 11h

Mit: **Bernhard Fibicher** (Kurator, Moderation), **Guy Krneta**

Films in the Kino Kunstmuseum:

Imitation of Life

Saturday, November 4, 2006 | 18h

Monday, November 6, 2006 | 20h30

The Funeral

Saturday, November 4, 2006 | 20h30

Monday, November 6, 2006 | 18h

Tuesday, November 7, 2006 | 20h30

The Trouble with Harry

Saturday, November 18, 2006 | 20h30

Monday, November 20, 2006 | 20h30

Tuesday, November 21, 2006 | 18h30

Songs from the Second Floor

Sunday, November 19, 2006 | 17h

Monday, November 27, 2006 | 18h

Tuesday, November 28, 2006 | 20h30

Corpse Bride

Saturday, December 2, 2006 | 21h

Monday, December 4, 2006 | 21h

Tuesday, December 5, 2006 | 21h

Ultima Thule – Eine Reise an den Rand der Welt

Saturday, December 9, 2006 | 18h30

Monday, December 11, 2006 | 18h30

Tuesday, December 12, 2006 | 18h30

The series of films will continue in January 2007. More
information on www.kinokunstmuseum.ch

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