

## Preface and Thanks

**Matthias Frehner**

I have a wonderful success story to report. It starts in 1979, the year in which the Kunstmuseum celebrated its centenary, when the prevailing mood was one of extraordinary euphoria and optimism about the future. Existing shortcomings were not only identified and proclaimed – they were rectified: the shortage of space by the Atelier-5-Bau, and the venerable institution's insufficient familiarity with the art of its own present through the creation of two acquisitions bodies that enabled rapid, audacious decisions to be made. The Bernische Kunstgesellschaft established the Stiftung für Fotografie, Film und Video ("Bern Foundation for Photography, Film and Video") before the centenary year was out. This bold strategy enabled Kunstmuseum Bern to build up – as one of the first museums in Switzerland to do so – a pioneering collection of New Media art. 1982 saw the complementary inauguration of the Stiftung Kunst Heute ("Foundation for Art Today"), which from then until 2013 devoted itself to building up a collection of contemporary young Swiss art. While the Stiftung Kunst Heute likewise made acquisitions in the sphere of New Media art, it also followed the latest trends in painting, drawing, sculpture and installation art. These two foundations signified a quantum leap forward for Kunstmuseum Bern, whose new relationship with the art of the present day provided Jürgen Glaesemer, the then curator of the Paul Klee Foundation at Kunstmuseum Bern, with the inspiration for the epoch-making exhibition *Die Gleichzeitigkeit des Anderen* ("Simultaneity of the Other, 1987) as well as *Alles und noch viel mehr* ("Everything and Much More Besides", 1985) – ground-breaking statements that assigned contemporary art a fundamentally new role both within the museum's collections and its programme of exhibitions.

The Stiftung Kunst Heute decided from the outset that its acquisitions would be made not by the members of the Board but by a team of experts who were rooted in the contemporary art scene. It was a strategy that proved extremely effective: the majority of the over 300 artworks purchased by the Foundation at the recommendation of the Acquisitions Committee are key pieces in the oeuvre of their respective artists. Seen from today's perspective, however, the Foundation undoubtedly also owed its success to the fact that the President and the members of the Foundation Board were themselves art experts and maintained a constant and lively exchange with the Committee and the artists whose works it proposed to buy. Kunstmuseum Bern continues to profit even today from the friendly relationships that Foundation President Marianne Gerny-Schild and her Board members built up with individual artists. The Foundation's early acquisitions of works by – among many others – John M Armleder, Miriam Cahn, Martin Disler, Yan Duyvendak, Helmut Federle, Fischli/Weiss, Pia Fries, Thomas Hirschhorn, Leiko Ikemura, Josef Felix Müller, Pipilotti Rist, Christoph Rütimann, Jean-Frédéric Schnyer, Studer/van den Berg, Bernard Voïta, Cécile Wick and Rémy Zaugg have assured our Department of Contemporary Art a special relationship with most of these artists when it comes to loans for temporary exhibitions and additions to the collection. For the pieces purchased by the Stiftung Kunst Heute at an early stage in these artists' careers were often the first examples of their work to enter a public collection.

For the Kunstmuseum Bern collection, the Stiftung Kunst Heute has been a magnificent stroke of good fortune. This became abundantly clear with the first public showing of the Kunst Heute Collection in 1995, when the Aargauer Kunsthhaus presented the holdings assembled thus far in the exhibition *OHNE TITEL* ("Untitled"). In 2003 the Foundation took the decision to donate to the Kunstmuseum all the works it had been storing up to that point at its own expense. From then on, all its new acquisitions entered our collection directly. This magnificent body of important artworks from the past 30 years has been a key factor in allowing Contemporary Art to evolve into one of our main areas of expertise. For the lead taken by the Stiftung Kunst Heute has encouraged others to follow in their steps. Thus 1987 saw the establishment of a body with similar aims, the Stiftung Kunsthalle Bern ("Kunsthalle Bern Foundation"), which regularly purchases works from Kunsthalle exhibitions

**KUNSTMUSEUM BERN**

MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE BERNE  
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS BERNE

HODLERSTRASSE 8–12 CH-3000 BERN 7  
T +41 31 328 09 44 F +41 31 328 09 55  
INFO@KUNSTMUSEUMBERN.CH WWW.KUNSTMUSEUMBERN.CH

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SERVICE DE PRESSE / PRESS OFFICE  
T +41 31 328 09 19/44  
PRESS@KUNSTMUSEUMBERN.CH

and places them at the disposal of the Kunstmuseum as permanent loans. In 2005, the Bernese patron of the arts Dr. h. c. Hansjörg Wyss set up the Stiftung GegenwART, which supports our Department of Contemporary Art in a variety of ways, whether via acquisitions or with funding for temporary exhibitions. Unfortunately, however, and despite the most energetic efforts of all concerned, one of the demands voiced around the start of the new millennium by the Stiftung Kunst Heute and fellow champions of contemporary art has yet to be realized: an adequate new display space for the meanwhile vast holdings of contemporary art at Kunstmuseum Bern. The exhibition *In the Here and Now! Swiss Art of the Last 30 Years from the Kunst Heute Collection* will afford contemporary art temporary visibility. It is nevertheless a more than happy coincidence that, while preparations for the show were underway, the Board of Kunstmuseum Bern was able to submit plans to the Bernese authorities for a proposed extension that will bring us an additional 600 square metres of exhibition space.

How does it feel to have been going for 32 years? Time to stop? Just when it is clear beyond doubt that having the courage to pursue an audacious strategy from early on has reaped the highest rewards? It is truly hard for all of us to grasp and to accept that the Stiftung Kunst Heute is being wound up at the very moment of our exhibition *In the Here and Now!*, which is showing a representative overview of its holdings. This decision, which as a former member of the Foundation Board I helped to carry, is a painful one. But when those who have championed and promoted contemporary art for many years – and most especially Marianne Gerny-Schild (President, 1982–2007), Donald M. Hess (member of the Foundation Board, 1982–2005) and Esther Maria Jungo (President, 2006–2014) – express their conviction that it is time to make way for others so that new aspects can be brought into play, that decision is undoubtedly also legitimate. One thing is clear: the Stiftung Kunst Heute pledged itself wholly and completely to the present, took up the cause of a young, still unknown generation of artists and went out on a limb with its early acquisitions. Its commitment to the here and now has today assumed permanent form. The Stiftung Kunst Heute has performed the astounding feat of extracting, out of the immense variety of art today, art that is also relevant for tomorrow. On behalf of the Board of the Kunstmuseum, I would like to express our profound thanks to the Stiftung Kunst Heute for its enormous dedication. These thanks go to all those who have served on the Foundation Board over the years, namely Marianne Gerny-Schild, Donald M. Hess, Ernst Balsiger, Walter Fuhrmann, Anton W. Bürki, Samuel Spreng, Esther Maria Jungo and Manuel Frick, and equally to all those who have brought their expertise so creatively to the Acquisitions Committees, namely Marcel Baumgartner, Bernhard M. Bürgi, Christian Cuénoud, Jean-Luc Manz, Urs Stahel, Theodora Vischer, Jean-Paul Felley, Esther Maria Jungo, Josef Felix Müller, Samuel Herzog, Peter Aerschmann, Alexandra Blättler and Noah Stolz. Our thanks also go to the Schweizerischer Bankverein, later UBS, and to Securitas, whose financial support was central to the Foundation's success.

Marianne Gerny-Schild and Esther Maria Jungo have actively assisted us with the inventory and art-historical appraisal of the works in the Kunst Heute Collection and for this, too, we are extremely grateful. The exhibition *In the Here and Now!* and its accompanying catalogue were conceived by Sarah Merten under the mentorship of Kathleen Bühler and were subsequently realized with the friendly collaboration of Marianne Gerny-Schild and Esther Maria Jungo, for which I extend my warmest thanks to all concerned. I would also like to thank the artists who so readily obliged us with answers to questions about their works and who thereby greatly facilitated the smooth organization of the show. Thanks are also due to the external authors of the catalogue, Gabriel Flückiger, Karin Frei Rappenecker, Anna Friedli, Pablo Müller and Etienne Wismer, who have provided illuminating access to the artworks with their texts.

We were fortunate enough to receive generous support for the creation of the exhibition and this catalogue from the Stiftung GegenwART and its patron Dr. h. c. Hansjörg Wyss. The project was also

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T +41 31 328 09 44 F +41 31 328 09 55

INFO@KUNSTMUSEUMBERN.CH WWW.KUNSTMUSEUMBERN.CH

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T +41 31 328 09 19/44

PRESS@KUNSTMUSEUMBERN.CH

made possible thanks to the commitment of private sponsors who wish to remain anonymous. To all of you, I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks for your confidence in our museum. We are most particularly grateful for our long-term partnership with Credit Suisse and our close relationship with the municipality of Bern, both of which provide sustained support for our activities.

Lastly, I would like to pay tribute to the enormous commitment and professionalism of our in-house staff, who have spared no effort to ensure the successful implementation of the exhibition: René Wochner, Raphael Frey, Mike Carol, Andres Meschter, Martin Schnidrig, Roman Studer and Wilfried von Gunten (Technical Services, Set-up); Nathalie Bäschlin, Philine Claussen, Agathe Jarczyk, Anja Schlegel and Dorothea Spitz (Conservation); Ruth Gilgen, Brigit Bucher, Aya Christen, Christian Schnellmann, Marie Louise Suter and Caroline Stettler (Press and PR); Anina Büschlen, Magdalena Schindler and Beat Schüpbach (Art Education). The present catalogue was produced with the assistance of Katrin Meder and the wonderful team at Kerber Verlag in Bielefeld and Berlin, with graphic design by Marie Louise Suter. To them, too, I would like to express my sincerest thanks.