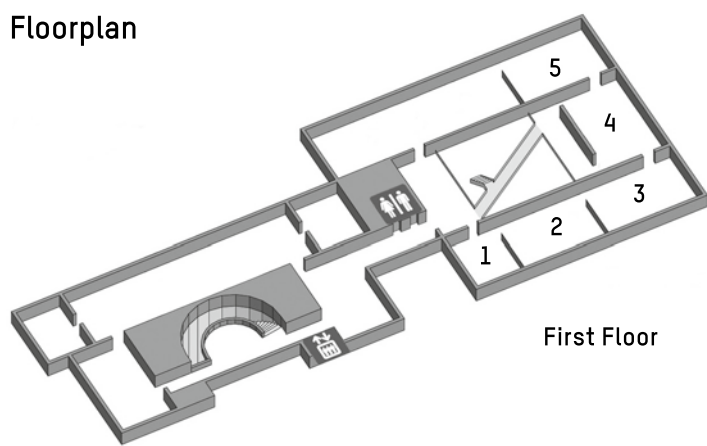


In the Here and Now! Swiss Art of the Last 30 Years from the Kunst Heute Collection

October 24, 2014 – April 26, 2015

Floorplan



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History of Knowledge and World Order

How long does “today” last? What is generally bound to a time span of 24 hours, has continued in the case of the Stiftung Kunst Heute—the Foundation for Art Today—for more than 30 years. From 1982 to 2013, the art purchased by the foundation’s successive acquisitions committees had to be contemporary. The exhibition *In the Here and Now! Swiss Art of the Last 30 Years from the Kunst Heute Collection*, however, does not target a chronologically ordered history of the foundation. Instead, it will be investigating the collection from the perspective of four key topics that are thematically relevant in the present. In adopting this approach, the show will be focusing on art that found its way into the collection from the mid-1990s to 2013. But the works in the presentation will nevertheless span practically the entire period of the foundation’s collecting activities. Thus the oldest piece in the show is dated from 1984, and we are therefore justified in asking whether the “today” of 30 years ago is also the “today” of the now and—as the title of the exhibition underlines—of the here.

No one can extricate himself or herself from history, and thus art objects are unfailingly historical and relevant to the present. We encounter works of art always in the here and now, and therefore we must inevitably ask about their relevance for us. The collection of the Kunst Heute Foundation presents a comparably narrow horizon of some 30 years, which very likely overlaps the lifespan of many of our visitors. Nonetheless, the framework of our lives and contemporary reality has changed noticeably within only a few decades. The mechanisms of globalization have created world-wide and tightly knit communicative, economic and political networks that have long wiped away national boundaries, which in turn are controlled for ideological reasons ever more strongly. Every day we eat and wear consumer goods that are produced all over the world. Also our networks have become completely global now through the rise and expansion of the Internet. But the exponential growth of availability of information and the complexity of today’s world trigger feelings of disorientation. At least it cannot be denied that any diagnosis of the present is certain to mention this buzzword. Therefore, it is all the more important that we learn to relate to the world in which we live and proactively combat our vague feelings of disorientation. How and to what extent do my surroundings affect me, and how do they shape the world around me by influencing my actions and activities? How do my actions affect me and others? And the same question applies to my quiescence. Or, how do I negotiate the world? How does the world negotiate me?

The works that have been mounted together in the exhibition address, from an artistic viewpoint, manifold forms of self-referentiality and provide insights, from different perspectives, into how human beings and the world are entwined. The first section looks into how we view the world today. The second section focuses on the subject and on private space; the third explores our surrounding environments, which are intrinsically molded by the structures we create. The final section then looks into the impact of our actions and activities from the viewpoint of current historiography, investigating what today’s culture can leave behind that is of value to posterity.

Chapter I Room 1 + 2: A Look at the World

The way we perceive what is going on in the world today is determined by mass media, which confronts us daily with images coming from just about everywhere. The increase in the speed of communication might still be a privilege of Western society, but a Western view of the world alone does not suffice to grasp the complexity of global interlacing in its entirety. News information must principally have entertainment quality and is therefore often only fragmentary. What we see are preselected perspectives on things and events, seen through the lenses of cameras and framed not

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only by the standpoints of where the cameramen and women or photographers stand physically, but also by the ideological motivation behind their reportage. Images from the media thus make the world seem closer while also invoking feelings of alienation.

Judith Albert's video *Kein Wasser kein Mond* (No Water No Moon, 2004) provides a wonderfully poetical metaphor for this paradox. From high up we look down through a round lens at gentle meandering watercourses in a verdant landscape. The sparkling reflections of sunlight awaken associations of the night sky with twinkling stars, so that the spheres of above and below begin to merge. **Alex Hanimann** focuses on the world from a very different angle, using two cameras to film polar bears in their enclosures at different zoos in the two-channel video projection *Auch der Eisbär ist ein Problem* (The Polar Bear, too, is a Problem, 2001). The animals are not the problem—as the title of the work suggests—but they reference our distorted image of the harmless, lumbering polar bear and its relevance for animal welfare and climate change, for which it has become a sorry mascot. **Thomas Hirschhorn** points out injustices and abuses in his works. For his series *Collage Truth* (2012), he combined the polished perfection of advertising photography in glossy magazines with images of the ravaged, lifeless bodies of civilian war victims he had sourced from the Internet. The latter we normally do not see in mass media because of censorship. By making them visible in this way the artist underscores what information is kept from us, on the one hand. But on the other, he highlights the protected atmosphere in which we live, where our experience of these horrific scenes is in the safe haven of a museum. How closely consumerism and poverty go hand in hand unfolds before our eyes in Hirschhorn's large-scale installation *Buffet* (1995). In countless collages, Hirschhorn presents both the victims and those responsible for their plights—the political and economic elite, whose interests provoke violent conflicts. **Christoph Draeger** strives to overcome the unbearable feeling of helplessness in his series of photographs *Voyages apocalyptiques* (Apocalyptic Journeys). He began the project in 1994 and it is still ongoing: the artist travels to the places in the world that have become famous on account of the terrible catastrophes that have taken place there. Not surprisingly, he only finds hints at rebuilding, which at the same time are the last traces before complete oblivion sets in. After all, our aptitude at forgetting is enhanced by the continuous supply of new pictures and new catastrophes presented by mass media.

Chapter II

Room 3: Inner Worlds and Subject Formation

Everything we come across and experience, everything we see or hear, where we live and with whom, all leave traces on the map of our existence and constantly shape who we are. Our mental states and convictions are influenced by numerous things—as well as how we can handle or come to terms with them. We are integrated in various social structures, such as family, circles of friends or work environment, and strive to find our place in life.

The short video *Mustafa's Feast* (1999) by the artist duo **Mauricio Dias & Walter Riedweg** gives us an impression of the Islamic Feast of Sacrifice, or Eid al-Adha, as seen through the eyes of the four-year-old Mustafa. Dancingly in imitation of his father and wearing festive clothes, the boy acts out the annual ritual sacrifices of the ram as it is performed by his parent. What the child Mustafa sees as an important occasion in his life seems frighteningly to Western and Christian comprehension, and may be a barrier to social acceptance in these parts. In contrast, **Loredana Sperini** has found a poetic way of expressing the unbearable situation of isolation with her untitled wax object (2007). Differently colored hands and arms cast in wax gesture in various ways but do not interact. The butterflies that have landed on the severed members symbolize the opposite of impaired agency and, at the same time, the ephemeral nature of all communication. In her two videos *Livingroom* and *System 02* (both 1998), **Judith Albert** engages with the existential necessities of sleep or breathing, which are, however, severely restricted by external factors. In fact, the artist attempts to do both under-

water. Likewise the *Frisked Man* (2004, see room 4) in the wooden sculpture by **Katia Bassanini** is not free to move the way he would like to and has adopted his stance under force. With his arms and legs spread out wide, the anonymous and caricature-like figure leans against the wall in a way we know from police controls. In the meantime, **David Renggli** has found out how his bed passes the time when he is at work: it sleeps. In a funny about-face, *While I Work My Bed Sleeps* (2007) reminds us that earning our livelihood as a matter of course in fact radically restricts our lives, so we cannot live them the way we want to. And even private space is not sealed off from public view. In his video *Æil pour æil* (An Eye for an Eye, 2002), **Yan Duyvendak** demonstrates how TV information and images impact our identities in an uncanny way. He did this a year after 9/11 by projecting clips of news readers and politicians on his naked torso and face. We are daily subjected to “impressions,” which we somehow must assimilate or “digest,” as **Pipilotti Rist** illustrates convincingly in her video sculpture from 1993. **Miriam Cahn** addresses this problem in a highly subjective way. Her three paintings *frau oder mann* (woman or man, 1995), *geologie* (geology, 1996) and *tier* (animal, 1998) are based on personal experiences or dreams, remaining indecipherable on account of the artist's enigmatic visual imagery. The painting-installation *Ezra Pound's Last Dream* (1985) by **Pierre André Ferrand** aloofly withdraws into the distance by means of reduction of form and color. The attempt at decoding confronts us with the decisive question: EXIT or EXIST?

Chapter III

Room 4: Acting in Exterior Spaces

The environment we live in is highly diverse but clearly structured. Here it is urban or a village, we can live here and our environment meets all our needs as far as infrastructure is concerned; there it is rural, under cultivation, or is wasteland waiting to be used in some way in the future. Space is a cultural information medium, and social values and representative structures impact how it is shaped and used, leaving their imprint. What we experience as our environment, as a nexus of social, political, and economic relationships, is in the process of constant transformation and must cater to a diversity of interests. Our environment is simultaneously a space for living, transit, leisure and working. Its properties evidence decisions and actions that structurally determine future actions, either making them possible or thwarting them. Works of art, too, can reference such processes.

For example, with his series *Stil* (Style, 1995–2013) **Ian Anüll** debunks the social norms that become manifest in public space. On his travels he predicates “style” to places where we would least expect it and thereby expresses his distrust of normative standards of judgment. In **Claudio Moser's** series *Voyage de nocces* (Honeymoon, 1996–1998), a couple has just entered into the haven of marriage. But the newly weds are currently in transit and absent in the images. The title is evocative of romantic (camera) views that focus on beautiful places, however, the prosaic and uncomfortable looking non-places disappoint our expectations. Three photographs with the title *Paysage ahah* (Landscape haha, 2009) by **Bernard Voïta** visualize the dissolution of clear-cut distinctions between interior and exterior space, with their clever reflections and prints on various materials. They likewise voice the desire for the fusion of nature and civilization. With their installation *Landschaft* (Landscape, 2001), **Studer/van den Berg** underscore the fact that we ultimately live in an environment that is the product of human cultivation and domestication. Accordingly, “nature” takes on the role of representing our desire for authentic reality. However, only the computer is able to satisfy this longing. **Roman Signer's** surrealist object *Stiefel/Eisschrank* (Boots/Freezer, 1996) seems a sinister premonition: will we soon only find ice in the freezer? **Fischli/Weiss** in turn give us reason to hope by restoring the equilibrium we thought is lost. In the series *Equilibres* (Equilibriums, 1985), the artist duo makes us hold our breath in the face of daring balancing acts involving household items, sometimes even including fruit and vegetables, and playfully putting the limits of gravity

to the test. In her large-format wall piece *Quante brave persone* (What a Lot of Nice People, 2007), **Loredana Sperini** reveals her strong misgivings about the unity of reality around us, illustrating the complexity of (spatial) perception by confronting our gaze with fragmentation and reflections.

Chapter IV

Room 5 + Façade of the Museum: History of Knowledge and World Order

The humanities and historiography see events and occurrences in a linear and logical context, and the same is true for science. Historical events are analyzed in terms of their relevance as world affairs and our views are shaped on past and present reality. How we find our place in the world and what occurrences are meaningful in our eyes is largely dependent on our outlook and our explanatory models of the “world,” which is instilled in us from early childhood onwards in textbooks and via tradition. But what events actually become part of our collective memory? For which questions do we search for answers? Who gets the chance to speak and whose voice disappears in the crowd? And who is being spoken to? What becomes a focus of scholarly reception and what add to our social horizon of truths are, in the end, only fragments among many of multifarious realities. Thereby the visible conceals other perspectives. At this point critical scholarship can take a stand and argue from the position of hitherto marginalized voices. Previously blind spots then open up the broad field between fact and fiction. In this regard we can witness that the visual arts are increasingly developing a consciousness for constructions, such as those we find in historiography, and have likewise grown suspicious of singular truths.

Florian Germann enters into the universe of paranormal phenomena with his two sculpture installations from the group of works *Untitled (Der Werwolf von Wien)* (The Werewolf of Vienna, both 2009) and enjoys a sharp dig at the idea of exact, scientific proof. At the same time, he questions the validity of art-based research with sculptures that resemble laboratory experiments. In contrast, **Marco Poloni** does not partake in research but gives in to speculation. He has taken for his artwork the physicist Ettore Majorana, who disappeared in 1938 while on a sea voyage. In a cinematographic video *Majorana Eigenstates* (2008), Poloni has his protagonist circulate in parallel worlds: he moves to and fro between his hotel room and a ship’s cabin smoothly without transition. In Majorana’s field of research, relativistic quantum mechanics, one of his great interests was the principles of parallelism. The split screen refers to this in the video. *Al passaggio della cometa* (As the Comet Flies By, 2006) is a work comprising four parts, in which the artists

Matteo Terzaghi & Marco Zürcher have constructed narratives out of found photographs and additional own texts. Their fictive, poetical anecdotes can be interpreted in many different ways. The photographs one finds in numerous quantities at flea markets or the comet flying past might not be imaginary, but the way in which they are combined and the stories that evolve as a result produce fictions of their own. In his found-footage video *Telephones* (1995), **Christian Marclay** tells the story of the history of the telephone from the perspective of the classic Hollywood film. Using the principle of collage, he has put together numerous scenes from fifty years of cinematic history, and in all of them someone is using a telephone. Seen as a whole, the outcome is highly amusing, ignoring both chronological order and logical narrative structures.

John M Armleder does not only make conjectures about history. He compresses the burden of art history’s legacy into a simplified and untitled painting (1985). Armleder is convinced that today it is no longer possible to create something new in art. His painting conveys this conviction, and it contradicts research that pursues notions of belief in progress, which is ultimately concerned with perpetually gaining new knowledge and insights. Contrarily, **Luc Mattenberger** developed his *Booby Trap* (2010–2011, installed at the façade of the museum) out of the tank of an F-5 Tiger fighter aircraft and the motor of a water scooter. The resulting machine

has lost the function of killing, but still highlights our fascination for military equipment as playthings.

The Collection of the Kunst Heute Foundation: Swiss Art from 1982 to 2013

It took a long time for art museums to accept contemporary art in the same way they acknowledged works of classical modern art. Exhibitions mounting contemporary art were still a novelty in the 1980s, and those focusing on Swiss contemporary art even more rare. Therefore, the Bern art historian Marianne Gerny-Schild, together with patron of the arts and art collector Donald M. Hess, established the Kunst Heute Foundation in 1982 to promote contemporary art and awaken interest in it among the general public—as well as documenting it for future generations. Situated in Bern, the foundation was devoted to accruing a collection of “every newest trend in Swiss art,” according to its stated goals. Its target was to keep in touch with the contemporary art market, and it did this by engaging a purchasing commission consisting of young art historians and artists, and the commissions were chosen anew every few years. The only constraints set for them were that they buy works by artists of their own generation while keeping an eye out for qualities that made them suitable objects for future museum collections. This proved to be a highly felicitous strategy. By being anchored in the respective art scenes over the years, the members of the commissions were able to accrue pivotal works of now-international stars, such as Pipilotti Rist, Thomas Hirschhorn, John Armleder or Fischli/Weiss. However, the success of the whole venture was also due to the fact that the president and the board of trustees were all art experts themselves, and the fact that they constantly cultivated an intensive exchange of ideas with the commissions about recommendations for artists.

In 2003, the entire collection was donated to the Kunstmuseum Bern, including future new acquisitions until the foundation ceased its activities in 2013. Such a path was chosen because, on the one hand, it became increasingly difficult to find funding for the foundation, especially because the Kunstmuseum Bern in the meantime was accruing a collection of contemporary Swiss art too with the aid of further foundations. On the other hand, the whole situation had changed over the years, and meanwhile the promotion of and confrontation with contemporary art had become a matter of course for many art museums. Universities now have professorships especially for contemporary art, and it has asserted itself firmly within exhibition programs and in institutional collecting strategies. The promotion of contemporary art is fostered by federal grants, and, not to be underestimated, private people as well: Swiss and international companies likewise make a major contribution to encouraging future generations of artists through accruing own collections and through awarding prizes or grants.

Active over thirty years and due to its commitment, the Kunst Heute Foundation has played a decisive role in fostering Swiss contemporary art. Swiss art today enjoys an unchallenged international renown—an international standing that its initiators already felt was its due early in the 1980s. With the exhibition *In the Here and Now! Swiss Art of the Last 30 Years from the Kunst Heute Collection*, we are now paying tribute to the legacy and success of the foundation over many years.

INFO

Curator

Sarah Merten

Admission fee

CHF 18.00 / reduced CHF 14.00

Private guided tours, schools

Tel.: 031 328 09 11, vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Opening hours

Tuesday: 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Wednesday through Sunday: 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Public holidays

Dec. 25, 2014 / April 3, 2015: closed

Dec. 31, 2014 / Jan. 1 / Jan. 2 / April 4 / April 5 / April 6, 2015 :

10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

CATALOGUE (in German and English)

Kunst Heute. Die Sammlung Gegenwartskunst, Teil 3 /

The Collection of Contemporary Art, Part 3.

Ed. Kunstmuseum Bern, Kathleen Bühler. With a preface by Matthias Frehner and contributions by Kathleen Bühler, Gabriel Flückiger, Karin Frei Rappenecker, Anna Friedli, Marianne Gerny-Schild, Esther Maria Jungo, Sarah Merten, Pablo Müller and Etienne Wismer, hardcover, German/English, 188 pages, Kerber Verlag Bielefeld, ISBN 978-3-7356-0017-2, CHF 42.00

AGENDA

Öffentliche Führungen

Dienstag, 19h: 11.*/25. November, 30. Dezember, 13. Januar,

10. Februar, 3./24. März, 21. April

Sonntag, 11h: 26. Oktober, 21. Dezember, 5. April

* mit der Kuratorin Sarah Merten

«Früher war alles besser!» Mitglieder der Ankaufskommissionen sprechen in der Ausstellung mit Kunstschaffenden über ihre Werke von damals

Jeweils Sonntag, 11h

30. November

Esther Maria Jungo (freie Kuratorin Fribourg) und Judith Albert

25. Januar

Noah Stolz (Commissaire indépendant Locarno) et Luc

Mattenberger (en français)

22. Februar

Alexandra Blättler (freie Kuratorin, Volkart Stiftung Winterthur

und Gebert Stiftung für Kultur) und Florian Germann

15. März

Urs Stahel (ehem. Direktor Fotomuseum Winterthur) und

Claudio Moser

Einführungsveranstaltung für Lehrpersonen

Dienstag, 4. November, 18h

With the generous support of:

Stiftung GegenwART
Dr. h.c. Hansjörg Wyss



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