

COLLECTION ON DISPLAY:

EXPERIMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mark Dion, Maria Eichhorn, VALIE
EXPORT, Hans-Peter Feldmann,
Raphael Hefti, Mai-Thu Perret, Hito
Steyerl, Victor Vasarely, Cathy Wilkes

29.08.–08.11.2015

The exhibition format *Collection on Display* showcases selected works from the collection of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst.

The current exhibition gathers works that are designed as test assemblies or (pseudo-scientific) experiments, or visualize and contemplate the production and classification of knowledge. Artistic practices work with, and reflect on, new scientific insight, technological progress, the characteristics of highly specialized materials, as well as man's double role as an object as study and researcher. Many of the works on display focus on the significance of the (mimetic) image as a form of exposition and the question of the (re)presentation or (re)interpretation of "existing" utopias. Most of the works are recent acquisitions and all works are on view in the museum for the first time. The arrangement of exhibits from the collection thus becomes an experimental setup that generates a narrative or brings certain perspectives into focus.

An installation by **Hito Steyerl** (b. 1966) that occupies a central place in the show explores the potential of novel visual technologies and the significance of the image in the digital era of hyper-circulation. *HOW NOT TO BE SEEN: A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File* (2013) points up possible ways of going "invisible" under today's conditions of total surveillance. Images, Steyerl argues, are energetic nodes that shape reality as much as they "render" it. The artist presents the results of her documentary research—in this instance, on the exponential growth of image resolutions—using the technologies she comments on while also experimenting with their possibilities.

In *Prohibited Imports* (2003–2008) **Maria Eichhorn** (b. 1962) launches an experiment on the meaning of circulating images. Eichhorn's conceptual and aesthetically minimalist art analyzes how political, economic, and social phenomena function and builds on questions first raised by institutional critique by, for example, calling the rules of the art system in question. For *Prohibited Imports*, the artist mailed selected publications on sexuality, AIDS, and gender issues to Japan. The experiment was based on her hunch that the Japanese customs authorities would censor some of the books now on display in the glass case. And indeed, the officials took sandpaper to the work of the American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe to efface all male genitals. *Prohibited Imports* presents the expurgated pictures side by side with the originals. As the display demonstrates, the very act of erasure, by producing an unintentionally comic effect, highlights what it obliterates. It also illustrates that such censorship is inevitably arbitrary and opaque.

Curator:
Judith Welter (collection
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The works of the Swiss artist **Raphael Hefti** (b. 1978) grow out of experiments with a variety of materials. For example, he investigates physical or chemical processes and uses imperfections caused by accidental or deliberate interventions. His sculptural pieces consist of raw materials that show unexpected behavior after modified, incorrect, or incomplete treatment. Hefti works with manufacturing specialists to implement his experiments, a collaborative element in the making of his art that he regards as integral to his work. *Subtraction as Addition* (2013) is based on such a modified process. Instead of treating the glass panes with a single layer of anti-reflection coating, used to make special glass for the glare-free presentation of art in museums, he had the process repeated numerous times, producing the opposite effect: the glass shimmers with reflections in a whole palette of hues, from dark blue and purple to pink and a soft yellow. A product designed to protect works of art and enhance their presentation by being as nearly invisible as possible is turned to a very different purpose: the layered coatings refract the light, generating a spectrum of colors that shifts depending on the ambient illumination.

The works of **Mai-Thu Perret** (b. 1976) examine experimental social utopias, among other subjects, drawing on a broad range of references including feminist literature, art theory, the history of design, and Soviet propaganda. *The Crystal Frontier* (since 1999) is a plot the artist has devised as a framework for her production: an ongoing narrative about the imaginary women's commune *New Ponderosa Year Zero* in the desert of New Mexico. *The Crystal Frontier* encompasses fictitious diary entries about life on the self-sufficient farm and papier-mâché dolls, as well as abstract paintings and artisan craftwork such as textiles and ceramics the commune sells to support itself. The installation *An Evening of the Book* (2007), originally produced for the Biennale de Lyon, was shot in the gallery The Kitchen in New York: a three-part film—the sections are titled *Holes and Neon*, *The Book*, and *Dance of the Commas*—is projected in on wallpapers featuring constructivist motifs. *An Evening of the Book* is a loose remake of a 1924 agitprop play of the same title with a stage design by Varvara Stepanova. Dancers appear in varying formations to perform basic gestures: a black banner is cut apart, neon tubes are mounted on the wall, ensembles of performers in identical apparel execute simple gestures in moving tableaux vivants. Perret traces the fine line between ritual and mundane gestures and movements. The elements of the set design and costumes point to her avant-garde source as well as the aesthetics of modernist art more generally. Friends and fellow artists interpreted Perret's choreography.

The works of **Hans-Peter Feldmann** (b. 1941) grow out of the artist's encyclopedic interest in the imagery of vernacular and consumer culture as well as high culture. Anthologies of such images he has compiled over the years attest both to prevailing standards and to the tendency of social realities to revert to averages. Feldmann experiments with the discrepancy between reproduction and original and challenges established rules of the consumption and production of art by refusing to sign, date, or certify his works or give titles to his editions. This negation of authorship is evident in the series of *Handabdruck Poster* (undated), an ensemble of ten prints showing the handprints of famous twentieth-century artists, writers, and poets. They come from the papers of the psychologist Charlotte Wolff. In the 1930s she collected and analyzed handprints of famous people including Marcel Duchamp, Alberto Giacometti, André Breton, and other Surrealists. Her research drew wide public interest; the Surrealists themselves found it fascinating as well, and so her analyses of hands were published in the journal "Minotaure" in 1935. Feldmann discovered the handprints at an antiquarian book fair in Leipzig; for his series, he reproduced them in the form of colorful inkjet prints. The piece offers a humorous perspective on handprint reading—a science that surely deserves to be met with skepticism—while the serial arrangement also questions the significance of the artist's signature as a certificate of authenticity.

The sculptural arrangements of **Cathy Wilkes** (b. 1966) experiment with the organization and reconfiguration of ordinary objects with regard to their sculptural and narrative potentials and the interrogation of a modernist formal repertoire. For her fragile installations, the artist assembles numerous fragments to create spatial-pictorial ensembles. Scattered throughout the room, the objects reveal the subtle interrelations that make them components of an installation only upon closer inspection: they seem connected by invisible threads that tie them into a shared system of reference. The enigmatic quality of the arrangement is counterbalanced by the traces of wear on the objects, which seem to carry memories and emotions; quoting cool modernist forms, the paintings and sculptures harbor a poetic element that lends the ensemble a faint modernist aura. Wilkes's art engages with the modernist legacy also by reprising the paradigm of the nimbus that accrues to some forms, though her installations engender this aura not through a depletion of meaning and symbolic force, as in modernism, but instead by charging her materials with personal emotions in the act of meticulous arrangement and the careful selection of the elements, private objects that sometimes hint at her own family's history. The patina these objects have grown over time points not only to the traces of use inherent in them, but also to vestiges of the repertoire of forms, which is informed by historic functions in a variety of contexts.

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VALIE EXPORT (b. 1940) makes art in which she subjects herself to various (social) experiments, sometimes in the form of public performances. Since the early 1960s, EXPORT has studied the construction of socially assigned gender roles and experimented with media including video and, later, film. She treats the human body—often, her own—as an intersection of private and public images of identity. The performance *Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit* was held on Vienna's Kärntner Straße in 1968: the artist Peter Weibel, EXPORT's partner at the time, went down on all fours and she took him on a leash and went for a walk. The action, which had not been advertised, went against all social convention concerning behavior in the public sphere and highlighted traditional gender roles by means of satirical exaggeration. The photographs also capture the bafflement and derision with which onlookers responded to the sexual overtones of this very public power play between the "mistress" and her "dog." The title alludes to the *Mappe der Menschlichkeit*, a brochure with which the Red Cross solicited donations at the time.

The installations of **Mark Dion** (b. 1961) examine how entrenched ideologies and dominant institutions inform our perception and understanding of the history of science and shape the representation of the cultural past as well as nature. His cabinets of wonders and dioramas reflect archaeological, scientific, and other methods of collecting and classifying objects. Dion avails himself of obsolete and, in some instances, questionable techniques from the history of research and questions the role of scientific authority. The diorama *Grotto of the Sleeping Bear* (1997) was first shown in public as part of the 1997 Skulptur-Projekte Münster, where it was set up in a man-made cave by the city's historic ramparts; it showed a taxidermied bear hibernating atop a pile of civilization's detritus. In the reprise of the piece, titled *Grotto of the Sleeping Bear—Revisited* (1998), nothing is left of the bear but the skeleton, presented in a glass case like a prehistoric species in a museum of natural history. The mounted bones are surrounded by foliage and remnants of the implements on which the animal had rested in the earlier version. Dion's art mimics the aesthetic of museums of cultural and natural history; at first glance, his dioramas would fit in seamlessly with such educational presentations. Integrating the bric-a-brac of contemporary life, Dion highlights how it is man who constructs these portraits of nature.

Victor Vasarely (1908–1997) helped launch Op art, in which an experimental investigation of vision and perception was a central concern. Its images and reliefs, which have become part of pop culture, are based on repetitive abstract patterns and shapes and arrays of geometric figures in different colors. Vasarely was interested in optical phenomena and illusions, the spatial effects they engendered, and the dynamic qualities of imagery as well as sculpture. He studied the principles of kinetics and how pictures—his so-called kinetic depth paintings—affected the organs of perception. Vasarely's growing success peaked in the 1970s, when the overwhelming commercial demand for his works led to the uncontrolled dissemination of his editions and multiples. His enormous popularity effectively ended his career, and his work largely disappeared from museum exhibitions. Only recently have museums begun to revisit his art; a major retrospective was on view at Zurich's Museum Haus Konstruktiv in 2014.

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EINE INSTITUTION DES MIGROS-KULTURPROZENT



Hito Steyerl
HOW NOT TO BE SEEN: A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File
2013
Single channel video projection (HD, color, sound) in architectural environment
14 min., Dimensions variable



Maria Eichhorn
Prohibited Imports
2003–2008
Inkjet print framed, wood, glass, books, magazines
14 parts: 43.5 x 69.8 x 3 cm each;
1 part 47.5 x 76.5 x 38 cm



Raphael Hefti
Subtraction as Addition
2013
Luxar coated museum glass
300 x 200 x 3 cm



Mai-Thu Perret
An Evening of the Book
2007
Wallpaper, 3-channel videoprojection (16mm film transferred to DVD, b/w, sound)
Dimensions variable



Hans-Peter Feldmann
Handabdruck Poster
Not dated
Inkjet-print on paper
10 parts: each 75 x 61 cm



Cathy Wilkes
Quarter Moon
2004
Various materials
Dimensions variable

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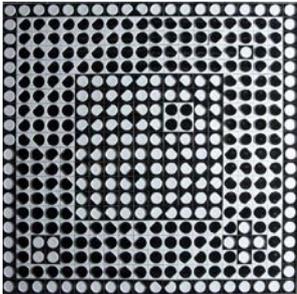
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VALIE EXPORT
Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit
1968/2003
b/w photograph
2 parts: each 79.5 x 120 cm



Mark Dion
Grotto of the Sleeping Bear - Revisited
1998
Plaster, books, porcelain, alarm clock, lantern,
walking stick, hat, spade, axe, cartridge case,
ruler, axle, foilage, glass, wood
105 x 223 x 121 cm



Victor Vasarely
NB 22 Caope
1974
Porcelain enamelled
198 x 198 cm

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