

COLLECTION ON DISPLAY: *RITUALS*

Daniele Buetti, Olaf Breuning, Marvin
Gaye Chetwynd, Douglas Gordon,
Mathilde ter Heijne,
Ragnar Kjartansson, Seb Patane,
Delia Gonzalez / Gavin Russom,
Hanna Schwarz

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The exhibition format «Collection on Display» presents works from the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst's collection in a three-part series of thematic shows titled *Communities*, *Rules and Rituals*. Building on the previous installments *Communities* and *Rules*, *Rituals* explores the social functions of rituals and the significance of ritual performative actions in contemporary art.

Rituals of various kinds can be encountered in almost all domains of life. Rituals of interaction such as formulaic salutations give structure to everyday life; rites of passage mark the transition from one stage of life to the next, for example. What all these rituals have in common is a strong symbolic or transcendental dimension that sets them apart from mere habits. Formally characterized by regularity and repetition, rituals serve numerous social functions: on the individual level, they provide those who take part in them with a sense of belonging and community—also by signaling the exclusion of the outside world. For society at large, they are a concrete and unquestioned medium for the establishment and perpetuation of a social order that rests on deeply internalized rules.

Featuring selected (audio) installations, objects, and videos from the collection, the current exhibition surveys the field of ritualistic performance and broaches a variety of questions: How do rituals relate to tradition and change? To what extent can they be a source of subversive energies that might be harnessed for artistic strategies? The works on display single out functional, substantial, and formal elements, defamiliarizing them and adapting them to their own purposes in order to invite the viewer to reflect on the function and aesthetics of rituals.

The works of **Olaf Breuning** (b. 1970) abound with quotations, draw on the imaginary visual storehouse of a hedonistic society focused on material consumption and fun. The artist fuses manifold cultural references and appropriated material from media as well as elements of contemporary and historic reality in a new visual idiom that manifests itself in installations, photographs, sculptures, performances, drawings, and films. While his sources remain recognizable in the works, they call habits of viewing and interpretation in question, challenging the beholder to see things with fresh eyes. In *Woman and the Dead* (2007), a colorful ceramic and wood sculpture, a skeleton and a girl sit facing each other on a seesaw; she eyes the viewer with incredulous astonishment. The playground game, which revolves around the shifting equilibrium between girl and skeleton, may be taken to gesture toward the passage from life to death, a moment that is strongly shaped by ritual in many cultures.

Curator:
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In the 1990s, **Daniele Buetti** (b. 1956) probed the mechanics and aesthetic principles of the world of consumer commodities and the glamorous surfaces of the fashion industry, devising ways to deconstruct them. *Looking for Love* (1997–2004), a sizable collection of photographic reproductions of illustrations from glossy magazines, is laid out on makeshift tables or pinned to the walls. The artist took a ballpoint pen to the reverse sides of the pages, the resulting impressions appearing like stigmata on the models' otherwise flawless faces and bodies. The abstract ornaments revealed by this technique, the scrawls and brand names of top-selling fashion brands, look as though the models sported tattoos, neo-tribal scarifications, or scarred wounds. *Looking for Love* thus sheds light on the longing for human affection and affirmation that consumerism purports to satisfy, but also on the cult of the body and brand fetishism.

Marvin Gaye Chetwynd (b. 1973) rose to renown with baroque and surreal performances in which she served up visual quotations from art history as well as pop culture with more than a dash of humor. *Walk to Dover* (2005/2007) documents a performance for which the artist and her troupe of performers, sparsely equipped and in skimpy costumes, went on a weeklong trek from London to Dover. The staged march—a playfully absurd peregrination—alluded to a passage in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849). When David, the novel's protagonist, is taken to London and forced into child labor, he decides to run away and try his luck in Dover, where he has an aunt, and so he sets out on the long journey. *Walk to Dover* references the motif of the pilgrimage, an important ritual in numerous religions that articulates the desire for a better life that believers hope to gain through deepened religious feeling or the remission of sins.

Delia Gonzalez (b. 1972) and **Gavin Russom** (b. 1974) work both separately and on collaborative projects. In the piece on display, the artists examine the interplay between architecture and electronic music and how it establishes scenes of creativity and meditation. *No Way Back* (2006) is an expansive sculpture that suggests an emulation of various architectonic tropes: the plain forms and surfaces of the scattered set of columns recalls Greek temples, Shinto shrines, or modernist architecture. Integrated into several of the wooden steles laminated with layers of a glossy black or imitation marble material are self-built synthesizers that play back a repetitive and monotonous track the artists composed for the work. The architecture and electronic minimal music evoke an ambiance that lends the setting the aspect of a ritual site.

Douglas Gordon (b. 1966) often employs the medium of film to test possible new ways of perceiving and interpreting filmic fragments. He uses found footage, placing it in novel contexts or manipulating it by making small alterations. For *Bootleg (Stoned)* (1996), Gordon assembled illegal live video recordings of rock concerts. Enlarged and in slow motion, the amateur footage flickers on the screen in what feels like an endless loop. By removing the soundtrack and slowing down the gestures, the artist creates an abstract rendition of the moment of ecstasy, making *Bootleg (Stoned)* an interrogation of the ritual nexus of star worship, immersion in a community, and the sense of meaning people find in collective experiences.

Mathilde ter Heijne (b. 1969) brings an ethnologist's tools to the study of cultural, social, and political systems in different societies. The series *Experimental Archaeology: Ontology of the In-Between* (2015) consists of oversized sculptural reproductions of motifs from Stone Age figures that blend female and male sexual characteristics. The sculptures were fired with guidance from fire masters and in collaboration with a German ayahuasca community during a full-moon ritual. Ayahuasca—a plant-based brew with psychedelic effects — is traditionally consumed in the Amazon River region as part of ceremonies celebrating a primeval state in which human and animal, woman and man were one until haphazard development pulled them apart. Ter Heijne regards the ritual ceremony as an artistic process and feminist act that lets her explore the political and historical dimensions of gender identities.

Music and creative collaboration are always crucial to the performances and videos of **Ragnar Kjartansson** (b. 1976). Repetition and the density that sound brings to a space are two central principles in the artist's work. The performance documentary *Schumann Machine* (2008) shows Kjartansson and the composer, pianist, and artist Davið Þór Jónsson in tuxedos, smoking cigars and reciting Robert Schumann's *Dichterliebe* (1840), a cycle of songs set to sixteen poems by Heinrich Heine. During the performance, which ran for over eight hours every day for two weeks, the artists took turns sipping champagne or taking breaks. The unceasing repetition of unvarying material and the use of stereotypical insignia of social elites (tuxedos, cigars, champagne) highlight the ritualistic quality of such recitals and points out the absurdity of the conventions that govern them.

The interrelation between music and physical culture as well as the theatrical and ritual function of certain bodily gestures have been recurrent themes in the work of **Seb Patane** (b. 1971). The title of the work on display, *Chariot, Fool, Emperor, Force* (2009), quotes the archetypal figures on tarot cards. The video is based on a quasi-ritual performance of the same title in which a bench serves as the central stage. By combining repetitive music and stereotyped ritual figures, the work

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questions the performative construction of identity. The video is presented in an installation in the gallery space: to view it, the visitors must stand by a replica of the elevated bench equipped with four headphone stations. This setup makes them counterparts of the protagonists in the film, directly implicating them in the process of identity construction, in which the perceptions of others play a vital part.

The films and installations of **Hanna Schwarz** (b. 1975) quote forms and motifs of modernism and minimalism as well as choreographic elements from postmodern dance. *Give* (2010), a film that was originally shot on 16 mm stock, stars a hand performing various gestures drawn from a range of sources. Schwarz interweaves a choreography of manual movements recalling Yvonne Rainer's film *Hand Movie* (1966) with everyday actions our hands perform in connection with money and the exchange of commodities. This conjunction lends brings a balletic sensibility to ordinary gestures whose symbolism is central to ritual interactions—a kind of hidden grammar of community life.



Olaf Breuning
Woman and the Dead, 2007
Ceramic, wood
363 x 174 x 73 cm



Daniele Buetti
Looking for Love, 1997–2004
Color photographs, color photographs on aluminium, 3 tables
ca. 400 x 600 x 370 cm



Marvin Gaye Chetwynd
The Walk to Dover, 2005/2007
Single-channel video on monitor or projection (color, sound)
11:33 min.



Delia Gonzalez & Gavin Russom
No Way Back, 2006
Laminate, aluminum, electronic components, loud speakers, MDF-boards
ca. 180 x 650 x 550 cm



Douglas Gordon
Bootleg (Stoned), 1996
Single-channel video projection on 2 screens (b/w, no sound)
59:51 min.



Mathilde ter Heijne
Experimental Archeology: Ontology of the In Between (L), 2014
Wood-fired ceramic, flight case, perspex, mirror, electrical components
60 x 60 x 70 cm

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Mathilde ter Heijne
Experimental Archeology: Ontology of the In Between; I./J.,
2015
Wood-fired ceramics, flight case, aluminum cupboard, perspex, LED strips, minerals
85 x 60 x 30 cm



Mathilde ter Heijne
Experimental Archeology: Ontology of the In Between; G.,
2015
Wood-fired ceramic, perspex, LED strips
115 x 60 x 80 cm



Mathilde ter Heijne
Experimental Archeology: Ontology of the In Between,
2015
Single-channel video projection (color, sound)
59:29 min.



Ragnar Kjartansson
Schumann Machine, 2008
Performance documentation:
Single-channel video on monitor
52:15 min.



Hanna Schwarz
Give, 2010
Single-channel video on monitor or projection (16mm film transferred to HD video, color, sound)
4:45 min.



Seb Patane
Chariot, Fool, Emperor, Force,
2009
Single-channel video projection (color, sound), wood
Dimensions variable

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