

Press release
Zurich, 27 August 2009

Kunsthau Zürich mounts Switzerland's first solo show of the works of Mircea Cantor

From 28 August to 8 November 2009, under the title 'Tracking Happiness', the Kunsthau Zürich presents the young Romanian artist Mircea Cantor, whose work addresses traces left and deleted by our age of computer communication and electronic surveillance. With his videos, photos, objects and installations, Cantor puts the digital information society to the test in a remarkably lyrical artistic process, and offers the viewing public three new pieces.

In 'Tracking Happiness' Mircea Cantor considers a society that stores ever more personal information. To Cantor's own bemusement, however, despite this proliferation of digitalized data on every possible activity, the process does not leave enduring traces. There is scarcely any traditional written record to remind future generations of the way we lived – nor is there likely to be, since e-mails, text messages, and entire digital databases are all at permanent risk of deletion at the touch of a button or rollout of a new IT system.

NEW FILMS

In a film created especially for the exhibition, Cantor examines the ostensible paradox of an age in which traces are perpetually left and deleted. 'Tracking Happiness', which also lends its name to the exhibition, features a group of women clad in white sashaying in various formations barefoot across fine white sand. As they stroll along, their traces are eradicated by their broom-wielding successors. Brilliantly harsh light blurs the edges of their surroundings into the infinite, and a slightly mystical cast to the tableau makes of the women angelic figures, although the everyday banality of their straw brooms disrupts the impression. The film soundtrack, too, composed by Adrian Gagi, contributes to the somewhat sinister atmosphere, as with each pass of the broom the air of sanguinity seems progressively to diminish. Like a mantra, the same image appears again and again, albeit with subtle nuances, serving to distinguish the women and the various compositions – as if to say that the quest for happiness takes an identical form for all of us, but follows its own course for each individual.

Cantor's 2008 work entitled 'Angels and Satellites', one of his rare paintings, is closely associated with the new film. 'We are told that there are angels watching over us, just as we are said to be under satellite surveillance, in both cases with an eye to making us feel safe and protected. And yet we cannot see these

guardians, neither the angels nor the satellites. So this fictitious painting reveals how worlds are layered, and how faiths and facts can co-exist.' For its part, 'Untitled (The New Times)' (2009) also gestures subtly at the utopia of a new age, one that may bring contentment.

INSTALLATION ON FREEDOM, CONTROL AND MIGRATION

Another work created especially for the exhibition is 'Like Birds on a High Voltage Wire' (2009). Hundreds of spoons of all different varieties, some traditional Romanian wooden implements, are strung on wires within an enormous abacus, with grains of wheat strewn across the floor. Cantor's piece addresses topics such as control, freedom and migration. Many people leave their homelands in search of their fortune and a better life – whether voluntarily or not. In contrast to the image of birds on a wire evoked by the title, however, people are not free to fly across any and all borders. Their movements are strictly circumscribed, as globalization has been accompanied by a systematic re-imposition of borders and a sharpening of visa restrictions in many countries. The pierced spoons thus convey a certain brutality, echoed by the scissors in Cantor's 'Vertical Attempt' (2009), also created especially for the Kunsthau. Although 'Vertical Attempt' lasts only one second, for the artist the video is 'as dense as 'Tracking Happiness'. The boy cutting the water is the perfect image of the way we court the impossible – a kind of disruption of the cyclical 'panta rhei'.

ARTIST'S CAREER AND BOOK

Depending on the context, Cantor works in a range of different media, such as film, video, photography, objects and installations, as well as in ephemeral genres like events and newspaper advertisements. Born in Romania in 1977 and today a resident of Paris, the artist has already had a brilliant career, including solo shows at the Camden Arts Centre (London) and the Centre Pompidou (Paris), participation in group exhibitions at Washington's Hirshhorn Museum and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and contributions to key international events, such as the Berlin Biennial, or the São Paulo Biennial.

The Kunsthau Zürich is hosting Cantor's first solo show in Switzerland, curated by Mirjam Varadinis, who also invited the artist to take part in 'Shifting Identities', the group exhibition she organized at the Kunsthau in 2008. His two new films and artist's book were produced in collaboration with the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach and 'Edition Bewegte Bilder', a joint venture of the Museum Abteiberg and the Rheingold Collection. The book (224 pages, Kehrer Verlag, Heidelberg) presents a collection of images that inspired the artist to create the pieces shown at the Kunsthau, a glimpse at the artistic universe of Mircea Cantor that reprises the notion of 'tracking' by pointing out the traces to be found in Cantor's own work. The publication is slated to be

available as of mid-September at the Kunsthaus shop. A vernissage featuring the artist himself will take place on 11 October, 11 a.m.

Supported by the Dr. Georg und Josi Guggenheim-Stiftung

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich, www.kunsthaus.ch

Opening hours Sat, Sun, Tues 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thurs, Fri 10 a.m.–8 p.m., closed on Mondays.

Admission CHF 14 / concessions CHF 10

Public Guided Tour: Friday, 25 September, 6 p.m.

Private tours for up to 15 people can be booked on +41 (0)44 253 84 84 (Mon–Fri 9 a.m.–12 noon).

Advance sales/arrival by train Switzerland: RailAway/SBB Kombi-Ticket, with 10% reduction on rail travel to Zurich and entrance to the exhibition, at SBB stations and by phoning Rail Service: 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19 per min.). Magasins Fnac, tel. +33 1 4157 3212, www.fnac.ch.

NOTE TO MEDIA

Press visuals can be downloaded at www.kunsthaus.ch

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