

Helmhaus Zürich

1 May – 21 June 2015

 Stadt Zürich
Helmhaus Zürich
Limmatquai 31
8001 Zürich

 Tel. 044 251 61 77
Fax 044 261 56 72
www.helmhaus.org

 Ihre Kontaktperson:
Peter Schneider
Direktwahl 044 251 61 77
peter.schneider@helmhaus.org

De La Fuente Oscar De Franco
BLUECORE
Asia Andrzejka Naveen
TRANSFORMATION

The Helmhaus Zürich has changed – with the help of two young artistic anomalies. In the exhibition *Transformation*, the Zürich artist, Asia Andrzejka Naveen, will do what her title says; she will transform the venue by literally living in and on the premises with several other participants. In *Bluecore*, De La Fuente Oscar De Franco, also from Zürich, has transformed the gallery space into an agency for mental travel. Common to both exhibitions is an uncompromising commitment, which has become a rarity in art – and, in fact, quite generally.

Living in art is an act whose potential significance is tangibly demonstrated in the latest Helmhaus exhibition curated by Simon Maurer and Daniel Morgenthaler. And unforgettably so. The art world rarely produces such singular and exceptional practitioners as the two young artists Asia Andrzejka Naveen and De La Fuente Oscar De Franco. They both expose themselves unconditionally in their exhibitions – selves that are as fragile as they are provocative and forceful. They court risk, alone and in exchange with others. They lay themselves open to the world, no holds barred – and they let the world in, no holds barred. Their commitment to their work commits their audience. These two exhibitions are about the perception of colours and consciousness, of spaces and habits – and above all, about changing perception, thereby inevitably changing the audience as well.

Both artists treat identity as malleable and modifiable. It is moulded and modified in exchange with their surroundings – but also in the seclusion of being alone. Individual and collective are inextricably enmeshed, ceaselessly influencing each other and generating what is known as the ego – which, seen in the mirror seconds later, becomes utterly alien. What is this ego and how does it “make” itself – on the road, on journeys and exposed to the abrasion of the unknown? Both artists are passionate travellers, into and out of themselves, digitally and analog. Their identities are endlessly mobile as if they never need to rest and never need sleep. They make great demands on life: on all the many lives that they live.

Two such idiosyncratic oeuvres not only invite analogies; the contradictions between the two artistic strategies are just as obvious. Asia Andrzejka Naveen does not simply seek the collective; she literally draws it into the Helmhaus, while De La Fuente Oscar De Franco makes us acutely aware of the isolation brought about by technology. Oscar De Franco

burns visual material of primal animals onto USB sticks, while the group around Naveen inscribe themselves into the Helmhaus with collective ideas. And while Asia Andrzejka Naveen and her allies experience “MIRACLES” – which is why the collective has chosen that name for itself – De La Fuente Oscar De Franco has moved into the white rooms of the Helmhaus with his trademark agency “DLFODF” and blithely bows to the laws of the art market by assiduously marketing himself. The Helmhaus has been transformed – into a commune and into a business.

For **Asia Andrzejka Naveen** life is art and art is life. She makes no distinction between the two. That makes her art – horrifyingly?, marvellously? – authentic and cogent. She is the artwork; the people involved are the artwork – and visitors to her exhibitions cannot escape being part of it as well. She has just turned 32 and has already been married eight times. She has wed men, a woman and a god. This plurality of parallel matrimonies works because the artist is well-informed about differences in legal, cultural and religious customs in various regions of the world. Asia Andrzejka Naveen has tested medication on herself, kept a pig as a house pet during the swine flu epidemic, lived in a transit centre for asylum-seekers, has given up all of her belongings and has no permanent domicile. When she travels, she almost never spends the night in a hotel. The only time she did so while travelling through Iran, someone tried to rape her. That never happened to her in refugee camps. She survived a severe earthquake, a volcanic eruption on Java and a lethal blaze in the rain forests of Borneo where she was ordered to evacuate. Between the two Lebanon wars, the Hezbollah arrested her because they believed she was a spy. Born in Winterthur in 1983, the artist studied in Yogyakarta at the Institute Seni Indonesia (ISI), in Hangzhou at the China Academy of Art and in Zürich at the University of Fine Arts. She speaks ten languages in addition to Swiss German, including Russian, Chinese and Sudanese. Asia Andrzejka Naveen is a person who knows no fear. Or rather: a person who abides her fears and confronts them. Her openness and lack of assumption are astonishing.

Her new project *Transformation*, conceived for the Helmhaus, is meant to demonstrate that change is possible. But which changes? Naveen makes works that open up spaces. Who and what fills them, what happens and develops in them is not defined. There are no preconceived objectives or fixed ideas. What happens influences the flow. Process is crucial and, by definition, a process of transformation. Anyone familiar with this artist’s work is aware that she seeks to explore and expand body and mind, and that she does so by using her preferred medium of social exchange. Her objective: to become “conscious of consciousness”, to test intensities. The etymologically indivisible individual takes shape by sharing with others, by communicating and receiving. Those involved expose themselves – and visitors expose themselves as well. The work of art speaks much the way a painting by Picasso speaks – by baring itself so that viewers do not just look at it but are drawn into it, gently at times, more forcefully at others. What comes about is as sensitive as it is challenging and unpredictable.

Five people will be living at the Helmhaus full-time, six others intermittently, working, eating, sleeping and entering into an exchange with visitors. The 11 people who make up MIRACLES – or actually 12 with Amos the dog – represent a variety of biographies and backgrounds: artists, musicians, photographers, two academics, two students of philosophy, a physician and an IT business professional.

There will be a number of formal and less formal events. The exhibition will “live”, change, fill up and empty out again. There will be room for the unexpected and time for routines to become established, for instance, in the form of daily yoga sessions (visitors are welcome). The project is a forum for opinions and points of view, a collection of thoughts and experiences – and ultimately a form of purification.

There are agreements: the persons who will sleep in the Helmhaus are specified; alcohol and illegal substances are out of bounds; smoking is restricted. Everything else is open-ended.

Exhibitionism and voyeurism, the production and stylization of formats like Big Brother have here been broken down into reality. There will be practically no records kept; the moments remain transient and impermanent. For culture critic Tilman Hoffer, Asia Andzejka Naveen's oeuvre shows the "transformative power of experience": "If the ever recurring *Why?* (with variations in pitch, of course) is indicative of profound metaphysical doubt about the renewal and the design of life, then Naveen's project is under the aegis of a serene *Why not?*" And why not, indeed? Naveen tellingly asks herself, "Is stability security?" – and before you know it, transformation is happening, actively and passively. Transformation is the subject matter. It is an infectious phenomenon – a model, an experiment, an adventure that will reverberate well beyond the Helmhaus.

De La Fuente Oscar De Franco's exhibition *Bluecore* is also a phenomenon that reverberates. As widely as the waves made for instance by Charles Darwin or Phileas Fogg. The Zürich artist, born in 1986, is about to return from a journey around the world, following the trail of the father of evolution, Charles Darwin, and Jules Verne's protagonist in *Around the World in 80 Days*. In the course of his travels across the world's continents, Oscar De Franco accumulated several hundred hours of film material. It will now be piled up in the Helmhaus, in the form of data transferred to 3000 USB sticks.

De La Fuente Oscar De Franco has attracted attention with his provocative, borderline performances and video pieces. He used a city of Zürich bus as the setting for his Master of Fine Arts "thesis" at the Zürich University of the Arts. In 2011, at Gregor Staiger Gallery, he staged a ritual that was extremely physical even in the stringent staging of quotations ranging from Gnostic texts to the blockbuster *Avatar*. His current piece, *As Human As Perception Can Be*, funded by Helmhaus Zürich and other sponsors, is his most ambitious project to date. Artistic research can mean time spent sitting at a desk to acquire a PhD. In contrast, Oscar De Franco compares our permanently accessible digital world to the analog universe that is happening outside. He has chosen to follow an almost hackneyed route of research and adventure that offers a spectrum of action for his own work: Phileas Fogg's prototypical journey around the world and Charles Darwin's voyage of 1831 in the sailing boat *Beagle*: in Fogg's case, a world squeezed into a human timeframe – a brief 80 days; in Darwin's case, a cautious description and subsequent evaluation of what he has observed. Oscar De Franco squeezes the world into his camera and into the space of a gallery. In the process, he learns about his destinations. The Cocos Islands, for instance, a stop during Darwin's voyage on the *Beagle*: today Oscar De Franco swims in plastic pollution that has been washed ashore – a phenomenon that not even Darwin anticipated. Phileas Fogg and Charles Darwin were both nineteenth century travellers. And yet their journeys could not have been more contradictory. Fogg's objective is the unilateral conquest of nature through state-of-the-art technology. Darwin gradually comes to the conclusion that evolution is not merely defined by a simple face-to-face of nature and machine, but rather that it is propelled by technology and nature not only as emerging but, ultimately, as merging entities. How right he was: we have become perfectly attuned to our machines.

There is a certain irony at play here. When he journeys, De La Fuente Oscar De Franco relies on unfiltered human experience, which is now under assault, for instance, by the advocates of speculative realism. This currently much vaunted, object-oriented philosophy questions the importance of human perception. And yet aren't its champions compelled to use the object of their research, namely perception, as the very tool with which they question it? Even so, in the course of his explorations, Oscar De Franco observes identities liquefying: between genders – translated into queer artistic strategies; between human and technology – literally filmed nonstop, essentially putting memory into storage on a hard disk; and between human and nature – working with a mask on the Galapagos Islands and taking his cue from the diversity of animals living there as well as from Alejandro Jodorowsky's unrealized film script *Dune*.

Oscar De Franco certainly does not make do with experiencing the world as a placebo although his Helmhaus project references *Blue Placebo*, a work of 1991 by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. The influential American artist spread out a carpet of candies individually wrapped in bluish silver cellophane; Oscar De Franco used bluish silver USB sticks. The candies weigh exactly as much as the artist's since deceased partner; in Oscar de Franco's work, viewers are struck above all by the weight of the accumulated data. Hence, eating one of the candies was almost a Christian ritual while the USB stick that we take a long is not ingested in our bodies but rather in their prosthetic extension – our computers. We now catch viruses not only through our mouths but also through USB ports.

That makes the work a prototypical example of the isolation brought about by our technological devices. Instead of experience shared with others, *Bluecore* is aloof and detached, an exhibition experience that is only completed afterwards and only in conjunction with an electronic device. Moreover, it makes accessible only a miniscule portion of a vast, complex body. We can never see the whole – and what we do see is seen in isolation.

Events

The MIRACLES have put together a dazzling program that promises a wide range of unexpected transformations, for instance, “More Love” which will be the subject of a “Group Debate”, a musical and energetic exploration of “outer space” with **Jaguar on the Moon**, “Reflexionen über die Seele im selbst-technischen Zeitalter” [Reflections on the Soul in the Age of Self Technology] with **Tilman Hoffer**, concerts with percussionist **Tony Majdalani** and the “Egopusher” duo **Tobias Preisig** and **Alessandro Giannelli**, and literary self-experiments with **Felix Philipp Ingold**.

Visitors will also have the opportunity to explore De La Fuente Oscar De Franco's exhibition in a performance and in debate. In “The Last Barrier Rip”, a performance to take place at the opening, the artist symbolically completes his journey around the world. In conversation with aesthetics professor **Alexander García Düttmann** from Berlin, visitors may learn which description of human perception is more stringent – Kant's or that of speculative realism. The **Clubnight** on the same evening will bathe the cool aesthetics of the Helmhaus galleries in colour.

In our **5 o'clock Thesis** series, Daniel Morgenthaler and **Lukas Keller**, director of the Zoological Museum at the University of Zürich, will examine whether evolution stopped with the demise of Charles Darwin. In our second 5 o'clock Thesis, the renowned social psychiatrist and addiction specialist **Ambros Uchtenhagen** will argue that identity cannot be formed without transformation.

In addition to weekly concerts in the rooms occupied by Asia Andrzejka Naveen, **None Of Them** will perform in De La Fuente Oscar De Franco's exhibition as part of the “Music in the Exhibition” series. The two musicians from Zürich chart a no man's land between electronic beats, freestyle rap and psychedelic guitar.

As a special feature, two of our **guided tours** for adults will be conducted in the company of the artists **De La Fuente Oscar De Franco** and **Asia Andrzejka Naveen**. In her beautifully prepared **Workshops**, Andrea Huber gives children playful opportunities to discover works of art.