

Helmhaus Zürich

21 September to 11 November 2018

refaire le monde * PROPOSITION

ARTISTS: URSULA BIEMANN, CLUB LA FAFA, CORINA GAMMA, DIE GROSSE UM_ORDNUNG, A.C. KUPPER, ASIA ANDRZEJKA MERLIN, ROMA JAM SESSION ART KOLLEKTIV, TANJA ROSCIC

While the artists in the exhibition POSITION took a stance expressing their position regarding the world around them and Gianni Motti exposed and exhibited us all in EX-POSITION, the third and final chapter of this trilogy of exhibitions under the banner *refaire le monde* is one in which artists put forward concrete proposals for how the world must, can or may be refashioned: PROPOSITION.

The aims of the *refaire le monde* trilogy are beyond ambitious. But why shy away from such a challenge? Would it be better to do nothing? Art steps up to the responsibility of contributing towards reshaping the world. Art has always confronted crucial questions about the meaning of life and the world at large, rather than letting time simply pass by in a haze of consumerism only to wake up to the shock of its shallow emptiness in the end. By daring to address these big issues, art is always political. Even, and indeed particularly, when it turns inwards to explore the private and personal spheres. For that is precisely where the germ of knowledge and awareness may be found that might prove crucial to the further development of our society. In recent times, art has increasingly engaged directly with our changing circumstances. Its focus has shifted more towards participation than aesthetic pleasure, allowing us to develop new insights together. Of course, that is not entirely new. It follows on from the social sculpture of Joseph Beuys. We now take a sceptical view of the artist's self-aggrandizement as (peerless) seer. In art, traditionally produced by singular individuals, there is a renewed sense of community and craftsmanship in the creation of projects now coming to the fore, often involving conversations and encounters. The results are less about marketable products than about immaterial insights. In the POSITION episode of *refaire le monde*, it is, quite strikingly, the written commission to a migrant that constitutes the actual artwork in Zurich-based artist Raphael Perret's *Five fingers are not equal – by doing they become similar*, art becoming a kind of framed hope. It is in projects such as these that we, as curators, see exemplary pointers towards a future – and fortunately also current – form of action both within the art scene and beyond. Potentially open to all manner of topics, it provides fertile soil for exploring and helping to establish new developments.

POSITION, the first exhibition in the *refaire le monde* cycle, was a declaration of place: the gloomy underlying tone was brightened here and there by a shimmer of hope and the luminosity of perspective. The second, EX-POSITION, cast a strong light on the dual possibilities of self-determination versus constraint. Now, the third, PROPOSITION, clearly illuminates possible paths towards the future. In the first instance, it is about looking more closely instead of looking away: Where do the constraints and restrictions come from? Who is responsible for them? Who profits from them? Who suffers because of them? It is about finding ways to overcome these limitations. That can lead to a reinforcement of other values by asking ourselves what is really important for our own lives, for society, and for the environment. Other values include: increasing awareness about the consequences of our actions – such as the way we treat the environment; strengthening our interest in alternatives to mindless consumption; respecting the needs of others instead of inconsiderate and selfish

wealth accumulation; willingness to take responsibility for a recalibration of the prevailing situation – in order to chart a different course towards the future.

Artists

A.C. Kupper designed the posters and invitation cards for the *refaire le monde* trilogy of exhibitions. The Zurich-based artist and graphic designer found the poster motif for the first exhibition, POSITION, in a local city street (Militärstrasse): the dark, foreboding sight of a manhole cover for a sewer surrounded by guide stripes for the blind appeared to take on the form of the American flag. In the exhibition EX-POSITION, Gianni Motti recycled the motif of the work *Motti for President*. Now, the motif for PROPOSITION features a razor blade. It is an implement of everyday use and not so everyday cuts. It can be used for both beautification and destruction. It is an instrument of change. The dark void at the centre of the blade, which serves to anchor it, harbours the mirage of a pagoda-like temple architectural outline. A cutting foreign policy reaps internally what it combats externally.

And the song we pitch to the oceans is launched back at us: in the very first room, Zurich-based artist **Ursula Biemann**, internationally renowned for the video installations in which she dissects geopolitical issues with razor-sharp incisiveness, beckons us into an underwater world. Her new video piece *Acoustic Ocean* gives voice to a new kind of super-hero in the form of a Sami researcher who uses her scientific instruments to listen to the ocean in Norway's Lofoten islands. There are other voices too: a blue whale, a dolphin, and even prawns and sea urchins. We might do well to listen – after all, some endangered whales are experiencing what it is like to be on the verge of extinction. A fate that we ourselves may face in the longer term if we continue to slash away at our environment. Studies have shown that the less oxygen we have in the atmosphere due to global warming, the more our cognitive capacity slows. Once those oxygen levels fall below the current 21%, there will come a time when we can neither read nor write these lines. In the video *21%* – created in collaboration with performance artist Mo Diener – a contemporary super-sorceress counters this trend by combining cutting-edge equipment with ancient raw materials to bring human aerobiosis into balance with the earth.

In the main room on the first floor, the activism is even clearer. Here *the big re_order* continues: a multi-part project that rails against mechanisms of oppression and stands up for the redistribution of privileges. Initiated by Zurich-based artist **Sabian Baumann** and realized in collaboration with Rahel El-Maawi, Tim Zulauf, Diana Bärmann, Simone Aughterlony, niv Acosta and many other artists, *the big re_order* was launched at the end of May 2018 on Zurich's Helvetiaplatz with performances and a demonstration that headed towards the theatre on Gessnerallee. Helmhaus now presents a film documentation of that evening, with discarded furniture just waiting to be literally *re_ordered* by you, while a pyramid of privileges shows you the privileges you enjoy – and asks you which of them you would be willing to give up. The aim of *the big re_order* is to overturn the prevailing situation, so that a tiny, super-wealthy minority can no longer brutally classify all the others into divided minorities.

Asia Andrzejka Merlin – formerly Asia Andrzejka Naveen – has already re-ordered half the Helmhaus. Her 2015 exhibition *Transformation* involved some ten artists occupying the first floor. During the exhibition, the collective changed its title to *Más Cerca* (More Close). Now, three years later, Asia Andrzejka Naveen is still creating something more akin to framed closeness than art objects. This Zurich-based artist wanders nomadically through the Helmhaus building and the Wasserkirche with her series of Sunday discussions under the title *Brainstorming the Brainwashing*. Getting together and brainstorming about the brainwashing that leads us, among other things, to share too little.

As with the first exhibition in the *refaire le monde* cycle, the third room leads inwards to tranquillity. This inner space, for all its silence, can be loud and tumultuous. As was the case with Pascale Birchler in POSITION, and as it now is with **Tanja Roscic**. Roscic's dreamlike, entrancing, evocative art leads to past eras and hidden rooms, plunges us back into a childhood realm where all the world was a stage of emotionally exaggerated doll-like faces, where we wondered what lay beyond the massive bars, and where such traits as revenge

harked back to mediaeval times of vendetta. What of the past? It permeates the present. Roscic's *Proposition* restores the rights of nature, dreams and emotions, bringing us to a place that has a definitude of its own: warmth, feelings, yearnings. The contrast to the cold and calculating world of business, which is hardly unknown in Zurich, could not be greater. The artist is a medium, her art an oracle, its effects like medicine. Medicine for the business world.

Nowhere is the impact of climate change more starkly evident than where the ice is melting: in the Arctic. The polar ice sheet beneath the feet of Switzerland's climate researchers or Greenland's hunters is now half as thick as it was twenty years ago. This is having dramatic repercussions for the Inuit. Their hunting season is becoming ever shorter, and the diminishing food supply is forcing many of them to move to the capital, Nuuk, where their traditional lifestyle in close communication with nature is replaced by a globalized and less sustainable one. Housed in drably uniform pre-fab buildings, they risk spiralling into depression and alcoholism. In her hard-hitting documentary *SILA and the Gatekeepers of the Arctic*, which will be screened throughout the duration of the exhibition, Swiss film director **Corina Gamma** follows this ecological and social change in Greenland. In the language of the Inuit, *sila* refers to the weather, which, for them, is nature's conscience.

In the exhibition *refaire le monde* * POSITION, visitors met with a group of asylum seekers housed in Hall 9 at Zurich-Oerlikon, and had the opportunity of finding out more about their questions regarding their new world. We intend to build on this in the spirit of continued progression. In the meantime, an association has been founded, **Club La Fafa**, to foster a sense of community between people who, at first glance, might have little in common: migrants and locals. The aim is to achieve a mutually beneficial exchange of experiences, skills and mindsets. Instead of the othering that distances people from one another both physically and psychologically, we are trying to make those differences fruitful so that something new can emerge from them. During the exhibition, one room of the Helmhaus is allocated to Club La Fafa, for discussion, dance, boxing, creativity, cooking, and as a launchpad for other external activities such as playing football together, going to the theatre, visiting various official agencies – and whatever else might arise from that. Anyone interested in participating is more than welcome.

Events

One opportunity to join in activities at **Club La Fafa** will be, for instance, on the days of the association's public meetings, which are scheduled for 4 and 18 October 2018. You can also engage with *the big re_order* project on three **intersectional talks**, to discuss possible directions the project could take after the PROPOSITION exhibition (27 September, 25 October and 8 November 2018; registration required). For **Brainstorming the Brainwashing**, another platform to be continued, Asia Andrzejka Merlin invites you to join her each Sunday to talk about existential questions such as: Why do I think I have to be successful?

While a performance by **Roma Jam Session art Kollektiv** on the opening night revives the old activist slogan Nothing About Us Without Us! (20 September 2018, 6 p.m., Paradeplatz), the main figure in Ursula Biemann's video **21%** will be brought closer in a performance by Mo Diener, who will recreate scenes from the film live. That will be followed by a conversation between the artists and the lecturer/curator **Yvonne Volkart** (26 October 2018). On the opening weekend, filmmaker **Corina Gamma** will give a talk about her film *SILA and the Gatekeepers of the Arctic* (23 September 2018), which is being screened in the exhibition, while **Jeanine Meerapfel**, president of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, will give a Tuesday evening viewing of her 1985 documentary *Die Kümmeltürkin geht* (*Melek Leaves*) followed by a discussion with Simon Maurer about its present-day relevance (30 October 2018).

The **Problem Zone** this time is the entire world: in the Helmhaus series of discussions about the difficulties of creating exhibitions, artists Tanja Roscic and A.C. Kupper talk about making art in a world of hurt (11 October 2018). The **5-Uhr-These / 5 o'clock Thesis**, another

regular discussion format, focuses on a no less topical issue: global warming. Here, Marcel Hänggi, scientific journalist and co-founder of the Gletscherinitiative, gives his views on the assertion that we need to move to zero coal in order to stop global warming (7 November 2018). The question of whether technology is increasingly drawing us into its wake is the subject of a panel discussion on **Big Data** which will include Bruno Baeriswyl, Zurich's cantonal director of data protection, as well as media psychologist Sarah Genner (1 November 2018). In addition, there will be a Saturday workshop with Bla*Sh, the Swiss-German organization Netzwerk Schwarzer Frauen to address racism (3 November 2018).

FLOATING IDEAS: *Rederei*

For 500 years, the Helmhaus, directly on the Limmat, has been a landing stage; a place of arrival, transaction and exchange. Today it is a hub of ideas, views and substance. Now the Helmhaus is launching ***Rederei*** (i.e. talking/chatting – a pun on *Reederei*, which, in turn, refers to shipping) as a new platform for discussion and debate. On three days each week, speakers from a wide range of backgrounds and with diverse life experiences will be attending the exhibition – to talk and float ideas, as it were, with you, about art, and all things related. Sometime between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. (Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays).