

mumok cinema

**Stranded at *Schwimmen-zwei-Vögel***

Film program curated by Yuki Higashino

In the opening paragraph of his fantastically crazed modernist masterpiece *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Irish writer Flann O'Brien wrote: "One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings."

Following this logic, one may say that a good curation can have as many concepts entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the curator. This program of four evenings for mumok cinema will therefore have four themes, each of which will be satisfyingly rich in its own right. Each evening will be divided into two parts. The first will be a collection of works by various artists related to the theme of the evening, and the second will focus on the practice of the guest of the evening, the featured artist if you like.

Evening 1

How art can engage with complex political and economic questions, both contemporary and historical.

Guest: Michael Stevenson

Evening 2

Words and music. Language, with its letters, rhythm, syntax, grammar, and narrative function, as material for art. Also song lyrics.

Guest: Sue Tompkins

Evening 3

Architecture.

Guest: Tris Vonna-Michell

Evening 4

How we give life, and subsequently character, to stuff. In other words, why do we keep hearing the voices of commodities, data, and animals?

Guest: Ann Lislegaard

Each evening is unlike the others. They are all self-contained. Yet, their dissimilarity will not hold for long, as they are compelled to inhabit the same space constructed as the structure of the program. They will start to interact and dissolve into each other. Animals enter architecture and politics begins to rhyme.

Further into O'Brien's book, the same narrator, who is an aspiring writer, states that: "The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required" because: "Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before—usually said much better." I feel that this is a succinct and brilliant description of curation as art practice. Reading this passage convinced me that this book can be a useful model for structuring a curatorial project.

In fact, the structure was the first thing that came into focus in this program. It began as an empty shell, an open architecture, to be filled in with contents. This process was fueled by my desire to address the figure of artist-as-curator, and negotiate the protocols for performing this role. Or, put another way, I wanted to know whether it is possible to disregard the commonly agreed steps in curating, consisting of: decide the concept > select the artists/works > structure the presentation; and still arrive at a good program.

This desire was triggered in part by the nature of the invitation I received from mumok. Aside from the few basic practicalities (location and time), I was pretty much given carte blanche in putting together this program, with a decent budget—including a fee for everyone involved, not to be taken lightly these days—and the organizational support of a large institution. If you are an artist at the stage in her career where I am now, it is a rare luxury not to have to define your concept and map out the expected outcome of a project, say for an exhibition proposal or a funding application, well before any preparation has begun. In a sense, I am exploiting this luxury to its limit by indefinitely delaying the formulation of a unifying concept for the program. As I already mentioned, the structure of the program came first. Then, I selected the works that piqued my interest, or I believe to be important, or I simply love. And finally, I separated them into four groups in order to determine what the works in each group have in common with one another. These groups are not united under the rubric of a singular curatorial voice, and instead, I believe, act as independent unit co-inhabiting the structure that is the program.

The demand for a clearly defined concept often resembles economic or academic performance evaluation today. Clear communication is good for marketing and funding, but does not always benefit an artwork, an exhibition, or a cinema program. Nuance and weirdness should have their place too. I wanted to put together a program which I cannot easily explain what it is *about*. (Yuki Higashino)

Yuki Higashino lives in Vienna. He has recently exhibited at Le BBB centre d'art, Toulouse, Schneiderei, Vienna (2016), Mount Analogue, Stockholm, and Skånes konstförening, Malmö (2014, both with Elisabeth Kihlström). In November 2016 he will present a joint exhibition with Elisabeth Kihlström at Gallery G99, House of Arts, Brno.

**Wednesday, October 5, 2016, 7pm**  
**Each Aspect of Life Is a Thing of Triad**

Politics and economy govern our lives, and art always reflects their systems and structures either directly, as in the portraits of patrons in religious paintings, or indirectly, as in historical conceptualism's adoption of a white-collar labor aesthetic. Artists may use the system they are compelled to work within to their advantage, deploying it to construct their own logic of production that can perform an intelligent rebuke of political and economic circumstances. This can use both contemporary material, as in Martha Rosler's dissection of an issue of *Vogue*, and historical problems, as in comedian Stewart Lee's demolition of Thatcherite economic policy, in order to offer an insightful worldview, to devise a coping strategy, or simply to make something—art—out of the sorry mess society often finds itself in.

The two works by Michael Stevenson presented this evening resemble tapestry weaving, where threads in wildly different colors are put together through a complex procedure to form a cohesive picture. The common motif is the consequences, sometimes improbable, world politics and economy have on lives, and Stevenson shows that the manifestations of this can be found in the most diverse places, while critically considering the role of an artist in narrating such stories. In *Introducción a la teoría de la probabilidad*, for instance, the story of a chance gathering of the deposed Shah of Iran and his family, together with Manuel Antonio Noriega and Patricia Hearst in a small island near Panama City in 1979, with the geopolitics of the USA and Panama in the background, is told through the prism of mathematics. In *On How Things Behave* Stevenson draws parallels between the destruction of the environment and works by hermit-like land artist Manfred Gnädinger, linking an oil tanker spill off the coast of Spain in 2002 with the South Sea Bubble, the eighteenth-century financial crisis caused by speculation. These intricate associations of people, places, and events are woven together with astonishing precision.

Presented by Yuki Higashino, guest: Michael Stevenson

Michael Stevenson lives in Berlin. Exhibitions (selection): VIEWING ROOM, Sculpture Center, New York (2015); *Signs & Wonders*, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2015); Liverpool Biennial (2014); *A Life of Crudity, Vulgarity, and Blindness*, Portikus, Frankfurt/M (2012).

**Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 7pm**

**They Call It Verse-Speaking**

Language has music and music is a language. This simple dictum has given inexhaustible material to poets and composers, but also to artists, particularly since temporality was introduced to art through film, performance, and text. Artists stretch words to their limit, challenge the structure of speech, write songs, and tell stories. And when language became the field for artists to frolic in, their bodies also became important as the medium of their works. Either as tender singing or daring poetry, words have turned the figure of the artist into a valuable carrier and conveyer of possibilities. Leslie Thornton's work, for example, presents a collision between the asceticism of structuralist filmmaking and the intimacy of language, while Cecelia Condit's absurd sing-along is a macabre assessment of consumerism.

I first came across the name of Sue Tompkins as the singer of Glaswegian band Life Without Buildings. I was struck by her percussive style, at once cheerful and forceful, that rhythmically treated words so that the lyrics became ingrained in the beats and codes of catchy rock tunes. And it is remarkable how seamless her transition from fronting a band to performances in galleries feels. It reveals the consistent practice of an artist rather than a break from one discipline and an entry into another. While her performances are founded on her deep understanding of the relationship between language and art throughout modernity, her delivery of lines, with its unique tempo, idiosyncratic syntax, concisely deployed repetitions, and characteristic inflection, shows that Tompkins's approach to art and poetry is profoundly musical.

Presented by Yuki Higashino, guest: Sue Tompkins

Sue Tompkins lives in Glasgow. Exhibitions (selection): The Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow at Glasgow International (2014); *Its chiming in Normaltown*, Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2012). Performances (selection): *LEATHERIN THROUGH THE GRILLE*, White Columns, New York (2014); Scottish Pavilion, Venice Biennale (2005).

**Wednesday, December 14, 2016, 7pm**

**Outwardly a Rectangular Plain Building, Inside Is Composed of Large Black and White Squares**

With its ability to envelop our lives, to record time, to become image, and with its ambition to synthesize disciplines, architecture has always fascinated and confounded artists. In the piece by Judith Hopf, architecture is the site of utter despair, while Aglaia Konrad lovingly and calmly records a building. The history, theory, and language of architecture, and the notes of its frozen music, are both fertile sources and useful models for art making. What concerns architecture beyond individual building also concerns artists: landscape, cityscape, and soundscape, synchronicity and diachroneity, lifestyle and *Stilfragen*, *flâneur*-ing and permanence.

The practice of Tris Vonna-Michell encompasses many disciplines, including experimental poetry, art history, and photography, and it allows an observer to shift her focus from one aspect to another, as though one is strolling through a varied landscape. For this occasion, the focus is on the artist's relationship with architecture. It is often said that Vonna-Michell is a storyteller in the Benjaminian mold. Naturally, if one inhabits a city in the sense of Benjamin, one must engage with the surrounding cityscape. This is what Vonna-Michell does in his digital video piece *Postscript III-V (Berlin)*, which is as much a portrait of Berlin as his own autobiographical reflection. Meanwhile, the synchronized slide

work *A Watermark: Capitol Complex* is a more in-depth examination, through fictional narrative, of a particular architectural project, namely Le Corbusier's building group from Chandigarh.

Presented by Yuki Higashino, guest: Tris Vonna-Michell

Tris Vonna-Michell lives in Stockholm. Exhibitions (selection): Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver (2015); *A story within a story*, 8th Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (2015); *VOX*, Centre de l'image contemporaine, Montreal (2014); Turner Prize 2014, Tate Britain, London (2014).

**Wednesday, January 18, 2017, 7pm**  
**A Curious Offspring Azoic in Nature**

If the success of a philosophical idea is to be measured by the extent of its infiltration and the depth of its anchoring into popular consciousness, Marx's concept of commodity fetishism surely is a strong contender for the top position. The idea that goods can behave as though they have a life of their own, or that they can compel us to behave as though they do, is so entrenched in our minds that it has almost become a commonplace. It explains so many aspects of our lives and culture, from vintage car collecting, HAL 9000, to the uncanny valley of cutting-edge robots and digital animation. In works by Michael Eddy or Elizabeth Price, symbols of capitalism such as credit cards (Eddy) or luxury cars (Price) are presented with their souls. What if an economic system, and the exchange of goods and capital, came to resemble an eco-system? For artists, this means the line between reflection on life and imitation of artificial systems has become blurred.

In Ann Lislegaard's works, digital creatures seem to have already moved into their own universe, the space composed of a networked group of various fictional realms of science fiction, leaving our world, the world that constructed them, behind. In *Oracles, Owls ... Some Animals Never Sleep*, the robotic owl from *Blade Runner* gives disjointed prophecies derived from *I-Ching*. The owl in the film was an exclusive luxury good manufactured by a mega corporation. This is an artificially fabricated creature, initially an imaginary luxury item, gaining independence and imparting its prediction for the future, thereby guiding us; is that the ultimate form of reification? And in *Spinning and Weaving Ada*, the sentient and apparently literate spider pays its homage to Ada Lovelace as though it was embracing an alternative history of computing in which women can freely pursue their scientific calling. The spider is capable of rewriting not only our past, but also our present and future.

Presented by Yuki Higashino, guest: Ann Lislegaard

Ann Lislegaard lives in New York and Copenhagen. Exhibitions (selection): *Paraspace*, Tel Aviv Museum (2015); *What if*, MOCAD – Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2009); *Science Fiction and Other Worlds*, Astrup Fearnely Museum of Modern Art, Oslo (2007); Danish Pavillion, 51st Venice Biennale (2005).