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Exhibition:

[UN]NATURAL LIMITS

JAN 23 - APR 1, 2013

Austrian Cultural Forum New York
11 East 52nd Street, New York



Thomas Hirschhorn, *Resistance-Subjecter*
(2011), Courtesy of the artist & Gladstone
Gallery, NY

**ARTISTS: Desire Machine Collective, Thomas Hirschhorn,
Mathias Kessler, Superflex, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Lois Weinberger**
CURATORS: Dieter Buchhart & Arnaud Gerspacher
CURATORIAL ADVISOR: Mathias Kessler

New York, January 2013 - A new exhibition at the **Austrian Cultural Forum New York** gathers together different artistic reactions to the alienating effects of the unfettered global exploitation of resources, and offers insight into the denial and myopia of current political responses to what increasingly appears to be a perpetual crisis. **[UN]NATURAL LIMITS** focuses on the environmental relays sent back in response to our human activities (or failures to act), while giving voice to various groups, thinkers, and artists who seek to interrupt narcissistic and destructive self-involvements in society.

The exhibition, which was commissioned by the Austrian Cultural Forum's director Andreas Stadler and curated by the Viennese-New York team of **Dieter Buchhart** and **Arnaud Gerspacher**, maintains a deep ambiguity towards the modernist legacies of endless expansion and selective prosperity, as our social and political systems slowly begin to confront the limits of growth and sustainability. Each artist or collective poses a challenge to the perceived limits that condition our understanding of the world: on the one hand, the limited prospect for action, compassion, and change, while on the other, the limitless drive for resources and capital in all its forms. A reversal is necessary: it is compassion that should be limitless.

The show will include an installation by Swiss artist **Thomas Hirschhorn** titled *Resistance-Subjecter* (2011), which was first shown as part of his *Crystal of Resistance* at the Venice Biennial 2011. The bodies of the eight mannequins have seemingly been infested and corroded by 1 million year-old crystals. We are left to guess whether the crystals were produced in the body and stand for a material resisting cultural, economic, social, ecological, and aesthetic habits, or whether the body was produced by the crystals, now hosting them in order to resist the jaded times we live in.

Austrian artist **Lois Weinberger's** *Invasion* (2005/2011) also plays with the limits of the organic and inorganic. The installation consists of a group of mushrooms that climb, protrude, and seem to grow from the Austrian Cultural Forum's gallery walls. The work is a striking confluence of nature and artificiality, though the limits between the natural and unnatural are not as clear as they may first appear: the walls themselves were once organic growths in a forest and the artificial lighting is itself produced by natural sources of energy.

Equally engaged in uncovering the often-arbitrary limits between ecology and the economic functioning of the urban landscape, **Mierle Laderman Ukeles** has been committed to interrogating the social role of art within these processes. Her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* (1969) states that art should be concerned with maintaining life, its systems and environments. In her yearlong performance documented in *Touch Sanitation Performance* (1977-80), Ukeles shook hands with 8,500 sanitation employees, while sharing and documenting their stories, and thereby drawing attention to the ecological underbelly of New York City and its often socially stigmatized workers.

In *Experience Climate Change As...* (2009), the Danish collective **Superflex** advertises a series of hypnosis sessions offered in conjunction with international global climate change summits. The first one took place in 2009 at the UN Global Climate Summit in Copenhagen, and future events are planned through the year 2050. These hypnosis sessions allow participants to experience climate change as a specific animal, in a relatively playful gesture that nevertheless points to the serious relationship between the natural limits of global ecosystems and the seemingly limitless capacity of world powers to defer action due to realpolitik and economic reasons.

The rapacious capacity to excavate natural sites is documented by **Mathias Kessler** in his piece, *Jarrells Cemetery, N37°53.96' W81°34.71'. Eunice Mountain. West Virginia.* (2012). The artist traveled to a commercial surface mining site in West Virginia to document the operation and the local stories mourning the lost landscape, the political situation, and the area's history. Verbal accounts are audible to visitors outside the gallery, before they are confronted inside by a massive wallpaper depicting the carved out hillsides which appear overwhelmingly dry and diseased. In serious irony, the only remnant and survivor in an otherwise lifeless scene is a cemetery, now even more cut-off from the living.

Finally, **[UN]NATURAL LIMITS** includes a documentation of *Periferry – An incomplete Balance Sheet* (2013), a nomadic space for hybrid art practices mounted and maintained by **Desire Machine Collective**. Located on a ferry barge on the Brahmaputra River in India, this project provides a space for experimentation and new media approaches, public and community arts, which are relevant to immediate local concerns and aim at the empowerment of the community and reclaiming the public space, while at the same time connecting with the global.

EXHIBITION OPENING

The opening reception for *[UN]NATURAL LIMITS* will take place on **Tuesday, January 22, 2013**, from **6PM to 8PM**. It will be preceded by an artist talk featuring participating artists Bjørnstjerne Christiansen (Superflex), Mathias Kessler, Mierle Laderman Ukeles (tbc), Lois Weinberger, and the curators. The talk will take place in the auditorium of the Austrian Cultural Forum from **5PM to 6PM**. Admission is free. Due to limited seating, rsvp for the artist talk is required. Tickets are available by visiting acfn.org/event/exhibition-opening-3 or calling (212) 319-5300 x 46.

ABOUT THE AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM NEW YORK

With its architectural landmark building in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, the Austrian Cultural Forum New York hosts more than 200 free events annually and showcases Austrian con-temporary art, music, literature, and academic thought. The Austrian Cultural Forum houses around 10,000 volumes in its state-of-the-art library, and enjoys long-standing and flourishing partnerships with many venerable cultural and academic institutions throughout New York and the United States. The year 2012 marks the ten-year anniversary of the building's construction, and features many special programs and events commemorating this milestone.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Dieter Buchhart is a Vienna-based curator and art theorist with a PhD in art history and restoration (science). The former director of the Kunsthalle Krems has worked as an art critic and author for Kunstforum International and other art magazines. He has written numerous catalogue essays and magazine articles, and lectures frequently.

Arnaud Gerspacher is a New York-based writer, researcher, and curator. He is a PhD Candidate in art history at the CUNY Graduate Center, writing a dissertation on animals, posthumanism, and ecology in art. He has worked at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and taught at Brooklyn College and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

MEDIA CONTACT

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CONTACT, HOURS AND DIRECTIONS

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E, M, 6 Train to 51st Street/Lexington Avenue

Bus:
M 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 to 53rd Street

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