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Media Contact

Maria Simma
Austrian Cultural Forum New York
11 East 52nd Street, NYC 10022
212 319 5300 ext. 203
917 520 0256
msimma@acfny.org

Videorama: Subversion, Absurdity, and Form in Austrian Video Art

From **December 1, 2009 to January 23, 2010**, the Austrian Cultural Forum NY is showing a selection of **videos of Austrian origin** from the 1990s to the present. The **exhibition is on view** at the ACFNY, 11 East 52nd Street, New York, NY 10022. **Admission is free.**

Tomas Eller filmed *Electricnight*, a nocturnal dance of snow caterpillars, in a wintry alpine landscape. In their seemingly choreographed sequences of movements, the machines take on a life of their own. The work conveys an undecided feeling that oscillates between orientation and disorientation, chance and concept, control and powerlessness. Do we control our inventions or does technology control its creator? Like no other medium, the motion picture and the art clip depend on apparatuses and on technological achievements. Video art has become a major artistic discipline due to the rapid technological development in the digital age. Nowadays, there is rarely a contemporary art exhibition that doesn't include video works.

Like many Austrian artists, **Anna Jermolaewa**, **Stephan Lugbauer**, and **Leopold Kessler** question, criticize, and challenge political, social, and cultural conditions of our time and subtly undermine norms. Working on a metaphorical level, Anna Jermolaewa's cynically entitled socio-critical video *The Way Up* shows caged rats in a market in Mexico City. They try in vain to climb up the slippery glass wall to escape – a hopeless struggle for survival. In his documentary *Evoluciones*, also filmed in Mexico City, **Stephan Lugbauer** shows how the street is used to earn a living: in images and interviews, he follows the tragic-comic performances of a father and his two sons who dress as clowns and entertain people sitting in cars stuck in traffic.

Leopold Kessler is interested in the organization of public space and the rules that govern it. In *Privatisiert/Paris*, he takes systemization to absurd lengths: during the day he installs devices on streetlamps and at night uses remote control to switch off the lights. He interrupts and questions infrastructures that appear to serve citizens and that convey the impression of a "safe" self in a controlled and functioning public sphere.

The videos in this exhibition invite viewers to break with paradigms and embrace new modes of seeing as suggested by artists like **Paul Divjak**, **Gerwald Rockenschaub**, and **Thomas Draschan**. In his video *Sonnenland*, Paul Divjak addresses a sensitive subject. He filmed handicapped children, showing the viewer the fine line between documentation and voyeurism via a sociopolitically controversial subject. Rather than violating privacy, his camera captured the direct, playful, and authentic interaction between those involved in the video shoot. Gerwald Rockenschaub's videos are brightly colored geometrical solids set in motion. These dancing forms, overwhelming at first, become agreeably challenging: it is possible to grasp the rhythm of this soundless loop. Thomas Draschan's both sumptuously and precisely composed art is an abundance of found footage resembling shreds from dreams and splinters of consciousness providing the material for a visual overexcitement.

Works by artists like **BitteBitteJaJa**, **Nicolas Jasmin**, and **Renate Bertlmann** are often subversive and absurd in their nature and have a surrealistic or transgressive character. All of them contain surprising moments. BitteBitteJaJa's filmic *Cadavres Exquis Vivants* reference André Breton's surrealist phrase "Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau." Taking turns, and without knowing which segment of film the other has chosen, Roland Rauschmeier and Ulu Braun compose horizontal film fragments as moments of person, plot, and landscape into film portraits. The result is a Frankenstein monster, a true sur-realité that goes beyond the reality of the film. Nicolas Jasmin mixes, loops, rearranges, and constructs a reality behind reality that is anti-contemplative and broken down into visual and acoustic segments. In his works based on found footage, he examines various forms of filmic subconsciousness. Renate Bertlmann penetrates reality with her explicitly photographic eye and her use of blurring. *Shortcuts*, a series of sensual works and dissolves, stages transitions and describes changes and mutations. Her work *Formationen*, which involves latex objects, takes a similar approach.

Moving images can sometimes reveal absurdities far beyond the accepted and draw on the eccentric and the world of outsiders. The pictures shown in **Videorama** go against the tide of the times in a sometimes perfectionist, sometimes trashy way, and often, as in the contributions by **Erwin Wurm, Rudolf Polanszky, and Hubert Sielecki**, evince a definite sense of humor that hits the nail on the head. In *Adelphi Sculptures*, a videographic shuffle through the repertoire of his *One-Minute Sculptures*, Erwin Wurm poses himself in unexpected and funny relationships with ordinary everyday objects. Polanszky creates a cacophony that presents the artist in an orchestral play of dissonances with himself: the self as a split personality that experiments with parallel identities and makes the video loop spin off into infinity like a spiral. In Hubert Sielecki's *Buchfabrik*, the viewer is confronted with many absurd machines, plants, animals, and objects that are connected through humorous, imaginative, and even erotic correlations. The film aptly reflects how our world is filled with odd twists and loopholes that intertwine.

Subversion, Absurdity, and Form in Austrian Video Art presents a sampling of works selected from the larger show *Videorama: Artclips from Austria*, currently on view at the Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna. For this exhibition, three jurors – Massimiliano Gioni, Sabine Himmelsbach, and Ian White – selected 52 Austrian videos from the last decade from the ursula blickle videoarchiv at Kunsthalle Wien.

Participating Artists: Renate Bertlmann, BitteBitteJaJa, Paul Divjak, Thomas Draschan, Tomas Eller, Nicolas Jasmin, Anna Jermolaewa, Leopold Kessler, Stephan Lugbauer, Rudolf Polanszky, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Hubert Sielecki, Erwin Wurm

Special Guest Artist: Balam Bartolomé

Curators: Gerald Matt, Andreas Stadler, and Angela Stief

Exhibition Coordination: Elisabeth Haider , **Exhibition Assistance:** Natascha Boojar, Anne Marie Butler, Fiona Eltz, Anna Gruessinger, Maria Simma

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Videorama Partners:

Austrian Cultural Forum, New York, USA, December 1, 2000 – January 23, 2010

Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, Israel, 2010

Der Kunstverein, seit 1817, Hamburg, Germany, 2010

Galerie Henze & Ketterer, Bern, Switzerland, November 28, 2009 – February 27, 2010

Lalit Kala Akademie, National Academy of Art, New Delhi, India, 2010

MSU Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia, 2010

Museum der Moderne/Rupertinum, Salzburg, Austria, 2010

ParaSite, Hong Kong, China, 2010

Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Peking, China, 2010

Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal, Germany, 2010

Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland, 2010

Publication: A German and English booklet (approx. 60 pp.) with 2 DVDs edited by curators Gerald Matt, Angela Stief, and Gerhard Johann Lischka for Kunsthalle Wien has been published by Benteli Verlag to accompany the exhibition.

ursula blickle videoarchiv: The ursula blickle videoarchiv at Kunsthalle Wien was founded in March 2006. The project is based on a partnership between the Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Germany, the University of Applied Arts Vienna, and Kunsthalle Wien. A public institution whose visitors enjoy free admission, the video art archive not only grants easy access to its works for all those interested in the field, but also provides a research facility for students, art historians, and curators concerned with the medium. Conceived as a digital media library and an academic and curatorial space of practice, the archive offers competent information on the most recent tendencies in video art. Its focus is on contemporary Austrian art from the mid-1990s to the present. The archive provides visitors with a representative survey of Austria's current video production and currently comprises a total of about 2,500 works by 900 artists.

www.ursulablicklevideoarchiv.com