

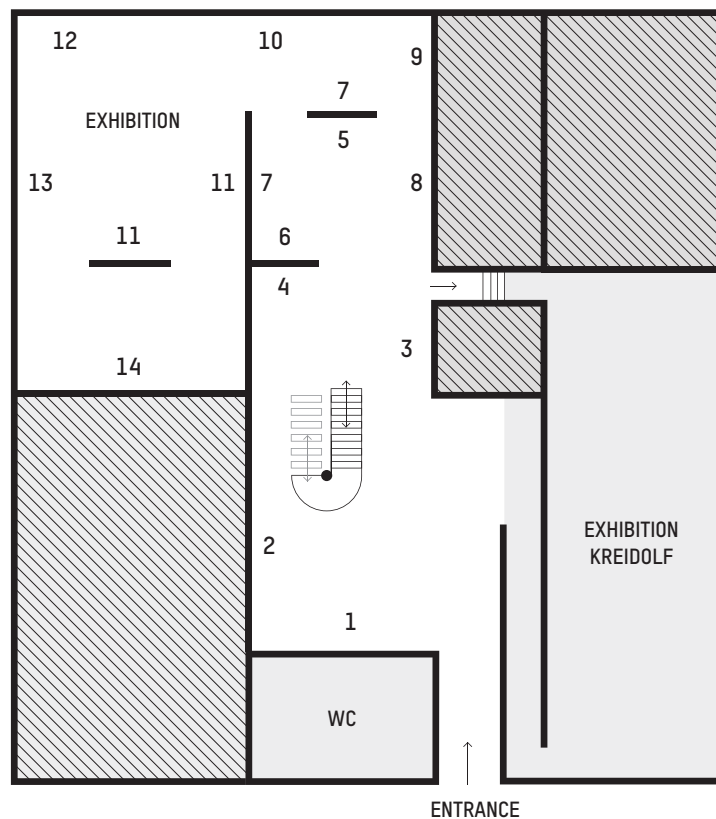
Crazy, Cruel and Full of Love. Works from the Collection of Contemporary Art

12.09.2020 – 14.02.2021

'Crazy', 'cruel' and also 'full of love' are good descriptions of the emotional roller-coaster that many people have experienced during lockdown. Threats to health, illness and death were joined by further existential insecurities: reduced working hours, unemployment and loss of income have created new economic realities, while 'social distancing' has become the byword of the moment. On the other hand one might also have been able to experience greater solidarity, neighbourly help and – out of necessity, as a result of home office working and home schooling – greater communication within the family. People were forced to get by together in a smaller space, limits were placed on the possibilities of distracting ourselves with pleasure and entertainment. This violent and unexpected confrontation with a new reality had positive and negative effects. It sometimes led to greater anxieties, but also to more interpersonal respect, serenity and subjective introspection.

If we view the works from an art collection not only as the expression of a time-specific and individual concept of art, but also as visual and symbolic 'reports on experience' created in three dimensions, examples of extreme emotional states, exciting configurations and powerful experiences of crises can also be found in the artistic work of the last forty years. In our arrangement of works from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern we go on a journey through the contemporary art collection, in search of what each artist can tell us about extreme states or persistently ambivalent areas of tension. The chosen examples lead us from positive to negative feelings, from happiness and love to furious rage and helplessness, from exuberant joie de vivre to a more profound confrontation with transience.

This very emotional roller coaster is addressed in the title of Vidya Gastaldon's painting *Crazy, Cruel and Full of Love*, and now stands as a motto over the whole exhibition. The selected works reflect this and draw on the rich fund of the contemporary art collection and its various associated foundations. While some works are recent acquisitions, there are also some that have never been shown in the last forty years. Consequently the exhibition provides a reunion with hidden treasures as well as shedding light on new ones: crazy, cruel and full of love.



Floorplan
Baseground new building

1: Marina Abramović / Ulay

Marina Abramović/ Ulay, *Modus Vivendi I-IV*, 1984, Polaroids, 4 parts, each 230 x 126 cm

Marina Abramović (b. 1946) und Ulay (F. Uwe Laysiepen, 1943–2020) worked and lived together for twelve years, after meeting on their shared birthday in 1975. They settled in Amsterdam, which became the base for their international artistic activities. In the 1980s they explored the philosophical questions of an ethical life and the inner consciousness. At the same time they rejected the postmodern preoccupation with consumerism and artificiality which marked much of that decade. When they met, they were both already engaged with performance art, a hybrid discipline that combined a variety of expressive forms – such as poetry, theatre, dance and video – into an all-inclusive artistic experience. From now on Abramović and Ulay's work was characterised by extreme concentration and meditative, symbolic actions. In their joint artistic practice they explored what it means to think, to feel, to love, to trust and to fear.

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The title *Modus Vivendi* (way of living) was first used by the two artists in 1983 at a performance in Italy. Ulay moved extremely slowly and uttered evocative phrases such as 'Hear, hear; move, move; touch, touch', lyrically communicating human states such as heaviness, loss, separation or unification. The same title was later given to a series of polaroid photographs, including the four-part work in the possession of the Kunstmuseum Bern. Each of the four life-sized pictures was carefully staged in front of a huge camera in Boston, which was built by the Polaroid Corporation and primarily used for research purposes. It was placed at Abramović and Ulay's disposal within the context of a special initiative by the company. In *Modus Vivendi* the artists rejected the camera's ability to portray outward physical appearances, to create instead a gleaming gold atmosphere in which the human body becomes a symbol freighted with meaning. The dark silhouettes of the two artists recall certain performances in which they appeared against the light as black shapes on a stage. Their slow performances were barely perceptible; spectators only noticed occasionally that the poses had changed, with each new gesture prompting rich emotions and some evoking a particular period of time or culture. Compared to the live performance the four separate Polaroid pictures reflect the limitations imposed by the camera, but it is used symbolically. The multiple structure indicates that while archetypes of male, female and nature may seem to exist separately, they are actually parts of a whole. Ulay adopts a dynamic pose in which he sticks downwards, suggesting both farmer and warrior. The picture visualises the connection between humanity and the land and the active role of man, while in another image Abramović, standing frontally, points like a goddess to earth and heaven. Her dramatic personification as a kind of Mother-Nature-figure interprets the human being as a product of the combination of matter and spirit. A third picture captures an embrace which brings together male and female forces. The fourth, finally, depicts a delicate, ghostly tree, evoking notions of fertility and the relationship between humanity and fragile nature. If the gold background suggests a timeless, almost fairy-tale-like allegory of life, the slender tree and the soulful embrace produce an atmosphere of melancholy.

2: Michael Buthe

Michael Buthe, *Sacherdiosafriccanus* (2001/02), Over-painted photographs on paper, Ed. 5/10, 7 parts, each 50 x 70 cm

Sacherdiosafriccanus (1982) is a portfolio of 7 over-painted photographs. They show the German actor Udo Kier, acting as a 'medium', photographed by gallery-owner Dietmar Werle. The playful portmanteau term 'Sacherdiosafriccanus' refers to the Latin sacerdos (priest), deus (God) or its Spanish form, dios, and africanus (African). Udo Kier, who was for a time Michael Buthe's companion, breathes as an 'African priest-god' in a mysterious ritual which – in order to mark it out as mythical and sacred – has subsequently been painted over by the artist. Michael Buthe (1944–1994) is one of the most glittering figures on the German art scene and was a tireless traveller between worlds. As a participant in Harald Szeemann's legendary exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* in the Kunsthalle Bern (1969), and in *Individual Mythologies of documenta 5* (1972), he belongs to a generation of artists who, as part of expanding the concept of art, turned towards mythical worlds and different cultures. Buthe's work creates a vital narrative atmosphere in which colours, signs and found objects from the everyday worlds of the artist's own and foreign cultures are arranged into mythical symbols and

worlds of play. Colours, signs and forms seduce us into the world of 'Michel de la Sainte Beauté' as the artist – who sometimes appeared eccentrically in a feathered costume – called himself. From the 1970s onwards he lived between Cologne and Marrakesh and was, like his contemporary Joseph Beuys, seen as a wanderer between worlds. His fabric pictures, drawings, assemblages and spatial installations challenge us to go on our travels and open up an internal orient. Many of Buthe's works are conceived in terms of process, they are relics of his installations and rituals, or have been further developed over the years. Given the artist's pictorial language, sometimes opulent, often contemplative or meditative, but always exotic, the question arises of the treatment of the 'oriental' in Buthe's work. His artistic defensive magic against the everyday world of the West, experienced as oppressively rational and violent, is combined with his understanding of the foreign as a component of one's own position. Hence it is from his very personal rituals, signs and stars Michael Buthe carves and paints his cosmology. Not only is it exotic, but it also represents a value system in which spirituality, play and an engagement with unpredictability are presented as resources of what it means to be human.

3: Vidya Gastaldon

Vidya Gastaldon, *Crazy, Cruel and Full of Love*, 2011, Acrylic, oil on canvas, 100 x 180 cm

Transformation as a compositional principle characterises the drawings and sculptures of the French artist Vidya Gastaldon (b. 1974), who lives near Geneva. While drawing was previous her preferred medium, in 2011 she also turned to painting in acrylic and oil. The painting *Crazy, cruel and full of love* is also in a state of constant transformation, on the one hand of mutually interpenetrating transparent layers of paint, and on the other in minute details such as points of light, eyes and organic microforms bustling between earth, sky and sun. With the large sun resplendent in a yellow sky, floating embedded in purple clouds of mist above a bubbling landscape, Gastaldon has painted a homage to the power of heaven. The title elaborates the various facets of the sense of life indicated by the strained grin on the face of the Smiley motif. This innocent and positive symbol, developed for an insurance company in 1963, was in fact appropriated in the late 1980s by the acidhouse movement as a synonym for the party drug ecstasy. Gastaldon's use of the image is complex and extends from a quasi-spiritual, archaic worship of the sun to the variant of the motif informed by drug culture. This suggests that warmth and vitality can now be achieved only through drugs. The artist deliberately avoids adopting a moral position. Even though she comes from the club and comic scene, she is interested in all the expressive forms of the sacred, and pursues it even in its banal and everyday forms. For example she sees the American Smiley simply as a 'cosmic smile' which could even belong to the benevolent Buddha. With these pictorial inventions she attempts to demonstrate the simultaneity of contradictory properties which ultimately either complement one another or are even revealed to be identical.

4: Daiga Grantina

Daiga Grantina, *La Med Fresh*, 2018, Metal, plastic foam, straw, 200 x 120 x 120cm

The sculptures of Daiga Grantina (b. 1985) look like burgeoning bodies. They act as a play of light and colour, but also as a synthesis of nature and cultural artefacts. In the space they release intense effects and a ghostly sensuality. Consequently the works of the artist, originally Latvian and based in France, are a strong new position in abstract art. While growing up and studying in Germany she learned that there is no self-concept of the language which one speaks. She reflected this in her treatment of material; even as a student she undertook experiments in 'squeezing the cohesiveness of material and body, motion and emotion' with the grainy structure of Super-8 film. During a residency in Paris (2012/13) she addressed the projection screen itself and examined the projector beam as a physical 'throw of material'. These early experiments were pivotal moments in blindly feeling out the field from which her material projections 'sprouted'. The progress of her sensitisation to texture and light can be followed in her sculptures. They consist more of air and light than of dense material and are organised from the elements of physical duration and rhythm. In her use of colour, Grantina is influenced by the American artist Jessica Stockholder, particularly her way of using colour as light rather than material. Grantina is inspired by the way in which colour brings out the variety of surfaces, just as textures can be dramatized with light. Her statues have different dimensions, to include the viewer's body and the surrounding space with movement and duration as well as to refer to the potential for movement provided by emptiness. As a result organic and inorganic materials, bodies and spaces are brought into situations in which they can directly affect one another: 'I see size in connection with material indeterminacy, with the élan vital of material, with felt aroma and the memory of bodies. For that reason I don't want to fill or occupy spaces, but instead to chisel out new spaces with spatial effects'

The title *La Med Fresh* is, like the sculpture to which it belongs, itself assembled from a variety of building blocks or materials. The associative combination of words finds a correspondence in the simultaneous properties of hardness and softness, transparency and opacity, density and airiness. Together these form an extraordinary and highly colourful, organically grown form which recalls a gigantic flesh-eating plant. The colours and textures evoke skin and flesh. They alternate between an exotic creature that we are supposed to admire, and a hungry beast of prey which threatens to devour the viewer.

5: Francisco Sierra

Francisco Sierra, *Oylen*, 2012, Oil on canvas, 240 x 195 cm

Francisco Sierra (b. 1977) studied music from 1998 until 2003 and is a trained concert violinist. Independent of contemporary tendencies or short-lived trends he has developed his painterly cosmos full of absurd pictorial ideas while studying on his own. His paintings are remarkable for their technical perfection, the refinement of their subject matter and their realistically painted, cryptic fantasies. These can be sparked as miniatures by pieces of linguistic nonsense, they may use the means of painting to explore the early history of photography, or else, in huge formats, they examine bizarre visual spectacles in almost unbearable close-up. Sierra's works often play with the poles of apparent transparency, which because of the hyperrealist style of the

works looks like an illusion, and total obscurity, since the mysterious subjects can barely be deciphered. Aside from this he is interested in (painted) reflection on conventions such as beauty, quality and good taste. What is it permissible to paint today? The artist plays with preformed opinions and skilfully calls them into question. The very title of *Oylen* is spelt 'wrongly', since it follows the sound but ignores the grammar of 'Eulen', the German for 'Owls'. The gleaming, shimmering surface of the subject calls for all of Sierra's brilliance as a painter, in stark contrast with the insignificance of the original objects – plastic figures found in a souvenir shop in Chile. Several different translation stages were required for the complex approach towards kitsch: first of all the artist made copies of the three owls on the basis of a snapshot – including the reflection of sky and sun on the shiny surface – before going on to depict the model in a painting. At the same time the artist demonstrates great gusto in exploring the boundaries of his compositional freedom of movement by devoting all of his painterly proficiency to this 'unworthy' object, risking the possibility of rejection or misunderstanding. Even though it was only a pretext for the painting, the subject of owls is significant in the present context because they not only embody wisdom – as in the phrase 'bringing owls to Athens' – but are also seen as harbingers of bad news. In antiquity and the Middle Ages they were seen as spreading plague and misfortune, as the handmaids of witches and even of the devil. Small wonder that many people should have wanted rid of the birds. Even in the 20th century living owls were nailed to barn doors with their wings outspread. Many rural inhabitants believed that this would protect their farms from lightning, fire, hail and plagues.

6: Markus Raetz

Markus Raetz, *Playmates*, 1979–80, Collage on plywood, behind glass, oil cloth frame, 2 parts, each 95 x 75 x 2 cm

Every work by Markus Raetz (1941–2020) is always a part and result of a long series of works, within which a theme develops. The fact is that through the constant drawing and experimentation within the context of a given theme unpredictable things occur, and at a particular point in time attain an autonomy and a self-evidence which create the impression that the artist sat down at his desk one day and without any preparation made this or that particular work with the idea associated with it. Markus Raetz has always been interested in movement and change. In 1979, in the weekly magazine *Der Stern*, he found a catalogue of small-format pictures of the countless centrefold girls that have appeared in *Playboy* since 1953. He cuts out the photographs out and lines up the reclining or seated young women below and beside one another in such a way that two complete sequences of movement are produced, somewhat in the manner of the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, which record the various phases of the movement of an athlete. This compositional work results in the collage *Playmates*, which Markus Raetz donated to the Kunstmuseum Bern, shortly before his death, in 2019. The pictures are arranged in a not quite symmetrical T-shape and show the naked women as 'sex objects', but on so small a scale that one has to step quite close up to the work to see them in detail. So one must first reveal one's own voyeuristic interest before one can contemplate the parade of lined-up, lying, standing and sitting bodies. The 'playmates' or 'centre-folds' were the source material that the artist used painting women in erotic positions for several years. Raetz worked on these pictures with the concentration of a calligrapher. The movement of his hand literally absorbs the movement of the girls and leads in the next group of works to erotic depictions of couples.

7: Jean-Frédéric Schnyder

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder

PLEASE, 1967–71, Assemblage, wood on mirror on hardboard, 60 x 60 cm

Herz genagelt, 1968, Star studs and oil on hardboard, 60.2 x 60.2 x 3.5 cm

Herz Holzimitation, 1968, Plastic foil on hardboard, 60.2 x 60.2 x 3.3 cm

Herz Spiegelimitat, 1968, Engraved and chrome-coated brass sheet on hardboard, 60.5 x 60.5 x 5.2 cm

Kapitän, 1973–74, Wine corks, bones, wire and cap, 220 x 47 x 31 cm (Gift from Toni Gerber)

The work of Jean-Frédéric Schnyder (b. 1945) is highly diverse in terms of both media and subject matter. In 1970 he effected the crucial transition from Pop Art and Conceptual Art to a superficially traditional method, intended as a clear rejection of the art business, which had declared painting to be aesthetically and politically dead. As an autodidact Schnyder employs the most diverse expressive forms between realism, symbolism and abstract colour-field painting. At the same time he makes three-dimensional works out of clay, metal and wood, as well as objects such as the *Empire State Building* (1971, Kunstmuseum Bern, gift from Toni Gerber), assembled from Lego bricks, chewing gum, joss sticks, neon tubes and a metal case. Schnyder's relationship with folksy humour and kitsch is often misunderstood as ironic play with the taste of simple people. The interpretations which choose to see his quotations from popular motifs in art as a satire on art snobs are similarly shallow. Schnyder's attitude begins has a deeper origin: he identifies with the artist as craftsman, and at the same time calls every style into question. For this very reason he is forced to address the fundamental problem of what it means to make a picture or a sculpture today. Schnyder does not engage with this issue on a theoretical level, however, but makes it visible in the painting or sculpture itself. Consequently his pictorial objects from the late 1960s onwards are variations on the attempt to make pictures with classical content even without classical technique, by providing the full range of grand emotions with a new form of visualisation unusual in art. He did this using hearts or words cut from reflective foil or brass sheets and further decorated with star-shaped studs. Schnyder operates as a 'bricoleur' (handyman) and draws on the field of culture as a great storehouse which has preserved an immediate directness and authenticity. While the grounds of these pictures merely imitate wood or mirrors, the emotions behind them remain authentic. Trivial culture is at work in his dramatic and playful skeleton made of wire and corks. This jumpingjack could come from a ghost train or a shady sailors' pub. At the same time – like the Mexican death's-head objects of the Día de los Muertos – embodies a serious engagement with death. Schnyder's work becomes the starting point for an endless series of cross-references which extend from the dance of death to pirate films, pulp fiction and dime novels, graffiti and folklore. In this way he pours the great human concerns into a new and more accessible form.

8: Luc Andrié

Luc Andrié, *Affiche, Brousse, Habitudes, Mémoire, Voix*, from the series BRUN, 2012/13, acrylic on canvas, each 130 x 80 cm

Before turning to painting, Luc Andrié (b. 1954) first enjoyed success as a politically committed documentary film maker. Starting

with paintings based on photographic snapshots, in the 2010s he concentrated increasingly on figure studies, as in his series of works entitled BRUN (brown). In these the artist presents himself to the camera halfnaked, sitting or standing with fists clenched, back bent and a changing facial expression. The series is the result of research into physical gestures swinging back and forth between the poles of aggression and vulnerability, rage and sadness, dynamism and peace. Although the images do not refer to autobiographical experiences, the artist uses his own body to engage honestly with the psychical dimensions of these gestures. In this series, Andrié's body emerges out of the undefined background as a dirty, earthy apparition condensing very slowly into a discernible figure. According to angle and incidence of light, however, it withdraws again and remains in an intermediate realm of the invisible. This effect is due amongst other things to the style of painting and the fact that the artist painted over a hundred extremely thin layers of paint over one another to produce an earthy, cloudy iridescence. The painting constantly renews itself in front of our eyes, because the eye constantly tries to force its way through the crepuscular state of the painting, just as we attempt intellectually to identify these men who lack any kind of characterisation through outward attributes. The painting style, which only vaguely hints at physical presence, contradicts the usually predominant representation of masculinity. Instead of strength and solidarity, renewal, transience and dematerialisation are emphasised. As a painter, Luc Andrié is also fascinated by the colour brown, to which many levels of meaning are attached, from earth, nature and the maternal to associations with fascism. He has introduced all of this into his representations and at the same time allowed them to flow into a sensual and aesthetic reflection on physicality and masculinity which prompts reflection on virility, ageing and mortality.

9: Urs Lüthi

Urs Lüthi, *Selfportrait in Two Pieces*, 1977, colour photograph on paper on aluminium plate, 2 parts, each 109 x 108 cm

Urs Lüthi (b. 1947) rose to fame in the 1970s with his self-portraits in which he stages himself as an androgynous creature situated between irony and serious sensitivity. These works are at once brave and hesitant, serious and ironic testimonies to a move into the 'personalisation of art' (Urs Stahel), a conceptual step away from detached objectivity to the embodiment of personal ideas and private relationships. The black and white photographs that the artist made until the mid-1970s show a handsome, sexualised young man who serves as a projection figure, and offers up his emotional testimonies as services to viewers who may be struggling with the same longings, histories and problems. Formally, he dissolves the form of the single picture and introduces the series, the sequence, the diptych, the triptych and hence filmic, narrative modes of narrative. Most of his photographic works from the mid-1970s onwards, on the other hand, forgo the narcissistic in favour of an ever stronger, sometimes almost bold form of irony, of tragicomedy, of slapstick. In this sense the two-part self-portrait is a rejection of the previous celebration of delicate beauty in favour of a laconic confrontation with reality: Lüthi has grown fatter, his hair is thinning (which is why he wears a hat), he sits disgruntled in an untidy bed, like a stage in a hotel room where he has stopped off on a journey to nowhere. What might previously have been taken as the elegant staging of a glamorous rad movie is the sobering confrontation with his own bourgeois status, which inevitably had to follow on from his establishment as an artist. So it also makes sense that in the second part of the diptych he shows the made bed with a decoratively arranged puppet in front of the pillows. The luridly

grinning puppet acts both as a substitute and as proof of bourgeois ideas of habitation. The dual arrangement suggests unmistakably that Lüthi's melancholy gestures are slowly but surely rigidifying into empty poses that he can cope with only by means of caustic irony.

10: David Hominal

David Hominal

The Bridge is Up / Vertical Road, 2008, oil on canvas, 149.9 x 200.7 cm

Two Birds in the Space, 2008, oil on canvas, 2 parts, each 100,7 x 101 x 2.5 cm

The Berlin-based French artist David Hominal (b. 1976) manipulates pictures taken from personal archives, the media or the street. He often isolates the chosen motif and paints it in a single movement, quickly, directly and without retouching. The dynamism and spontaneity of the execution recaptures the energy of the forms in order to free them still further from their original significance, their narrative or ideological function. In the spring of 2008 Hominal had a studio residency in the Belgian port city of Antwerp. Here he produced the two works *The Bridge is Up/Vertical Road* and *Two Birds in the Space*: both depictions which connect with romantic landscape paintings, for example by placing the horizon low in the picture or quoting the melancholy motif of the lonely seagull in the sky. At the same time the artist is interested in how a painting is constructed, and how the conflict between figuration and abstraction may be resolved. In this sense both paintings lead the viewer on a wild goose chase with regard to their emotional content. They are not typical images of longing, but rather deconstruct such pictures via their mode of depiction. *The Bridge is Up/ Vertical Road* shows the open bridge in Antwerp harbour against a strongly coloured night sky. Hominal was fascinated by the way in which an artist such as Jacob van Ruisdael painted the sky in the 17th century, but he himself engaged in an excessive painterly engagement with a sunset estranged by smog and neon light, which bears the marks of industrial overuse – just as *Two Birds in the Space* quotes a red sky with birds, only to render it absurd through the repetition of the same subject in two panels.

11: Miriam Cahn

Miriam Cahn

fremd, 8.12.17, 2017, oil on canvas, 165 x 140 cm

BLAU, 21.01.2017, 2017, oil on canvas, 280 x 225 cm

The two paintings are impressive examples of Miriam Cahn's (b. 1949) current painterly practice, which manifests itself in increasingly furious form, in terms of both style and subject-matter, in a decidedly political attitude. The artist's adoption of painting as a medium occurred relatively late, in 1996. At the time she was forced by a back condition in a new way of working, and escaped the performative routine of drawing her large-format works on paper while lying on the floor. Her style of painting is characterised by bright colours which she applies diluted and in multiple layers. The artist translates her previous compositional style of shades of light and dark into complementary colour contrasts. With her figures and animals she guides the eye to the eyes, the sexual parts or the heart region, and depicts in them the feelings that she feels for people, animals and plants. Cahn's preoccupation with war, after previous groups of works about the Gulf War and the war in Yugoslavia moves to the depiction of the European refugee crisis. As a reaction to that, from

2015 she has produced works which engage with the reaction to 'the others or the other'. The formal preoccupation with the subject is not illustrative, but an approach towards configurations and towards both physical and emotional experiences. In *fremd*, for example, the artist shows a figure which has simultaneous contradictory physical properties such as straight hair, a black face, a white body, male and female characteristics, almond eyes and full lips. In *BLAU* she shows us the drowning men, women and children losing themselves in the infinite blue of the Mediterranean sea. The complex of emotions in which she places the viewer is ambivalent; the paintings are both dramatic in their subject-matter and bewitchingly beautiful in their colours. Asked why as an artist she addresses such sad and difficult themes as racism or the refugee crisis, she replies that she finds it important, specifically as an artist, to take a stand. After all, evil is present in every individual, and one cannot avoid confronting that fact either as an artist or as a viewer.

12: Quynh Dong

Quynh Dong, *The Second Stage of Beauty*, 2014, tulip petals of fired white clay with two-level colour glaze, mass and number of the pieces are variable.

Quynh Dong (b. 1982) was born in North Vietnam and has lived since the age of seven in Switzerland, where she trained as an artist and was awarded several art prizes. As a performance and video artist, Quynh Dong is concerned with the essence of memory and the issue of cultural location. With poetry and humour, her works tell stories of longing, meetings, nostalgia, geographical distance and cultural difference. She is interested in the media transposition and staging of universal emotions such as love, separation, loneliness and longing as well as play with cultural codes, signs and clichés. She came to fame with music videos borrowing from Asian pop culture (karaoke), but also with powerful performances which seem strange in our western world, but which also awaken a regret for the loss of the sense of family in the west and the difficulty of living out traditions in refugee families. Over the last few years narrative has become less important in her work. The theatrical focus has moved away from the actors and transferred to the setting. The stage has become the actual protagonist, while the props developed into ceramic sculptures.

The still life of withered tulip leaves and petals was made in 2014 during a residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Imitating nature, Quynh Dong distributes the glazed ceramic sculptures over the floor as if blown there by the wind. The petals of this iconic flower, which came to Europe from the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century and sparked a huge speculative bubble, look as if they are fading. The artistic form uses a solid material to freeze and thus effectively halt the wilting process. But in its brittleness and fragility the chosen material, ceramic, leaves no doubt about the sensitivity and finality of the processes of life.

13: Martin Disler

Martin Disler, *Fenster zum Nervenfieber*, 1986, oil and acrylic on canvas, 201 x 283 cm

The right half of the monumental painting is taken up with a large head with black eyes, from the sockets of which a thick slime mixed with blood flows, and which seems to embody the window on neural

fever of the work's title. Below the eyes the face cannot be seen. It is covered with cobwebs or spattered with bilious green spittle. On the left edge of the picture, on the other hand, a red figure with a burning head flees lurching from the hideous eye sockets. While the righthand side constructs an oppressive sense of claustrophobia, the blurring towards the left makes way for an explosive energy and seems at the same time to signal an all clear: the window on to neural fever has spat out its victim. The fleeing man has escaped for now. In Martin Disler's (1940–1996) pictorial cosmos all the figures look similar in that they are caught in constant internal metamorphoses, in the course of which they awaken into life and unfold their demonic effect. In his painting the artist represents an ideal of archaic pictorial invention that functions by excluding the rational and unreservedly accepting the emotional. At the same time the painting is constantly transformed from the arabesques of a pleasant dream into nightmarish visions which, like the title of the work itself, allow different metaphorical interpretations.

Painted during a phase in which the artist used more pronouncedly broken colours which, with white streaks, create a blurred effect, the painting is impressive for its atmospheric density and dynamic composition. It is one of the earliest examples in Disler's painterly work in which the painting process is slowed down and the dynamism of the acting figures appears muted. The painterly signs remain cryptic in their symbolism, but they convey the impression of a flood of internal images breaking violently over the artist and bringing him dangerously close to the mental state of an intense nerve fever.

14: Christian Boltanski

Christian Boltanski, *Klagegesänge: die Mahnmale* (aus der Werkgruppe: *Leçon de ténèbres: les ombres*) (1987), 77-part spatial installation: 23 framed photographs, electrical installations and lightbulbs, 242 x 691 x 6 cm

The autodidact Christian Boltanski (b. 1944) has engaged with the subject of memory since his first film 'La vie impossible de Christian Boltanski' (1968). After starting out as a painter, in the 1960s and 1970s he made films and several artists' books. He concentrates as an artist on the systematic reconstruction ('forensics') of his own past. In these works he uses both documentary and fictional elements. Until 1974 the 'archaeology of the private' was at the centre of Boltanski's work. He pursued the questions associated with the reality content of photography and cultural codes or rituals until into the 1980s. For his many installations he began working with legacies and family albums. He enlarges photographs of strangers or old photographs from newspapers so that the faces are abstracted to the edge of the symbolic. In another form, piled-up items or stacked galvanised tins arranged over the faces of people as an occasion for remembering. Usually in darkened rooms Boltanski illuminates the framed photographs with small office lamps or, using candles, makes shadowy figures dance on the walls. Their atmosphere prompts associations with cemeteries, columbaria or concentration camps: places whose theme is death. From 1986 he made several monuments, including the work *Klagegesänge: die Mahnmale*, exhibited here. The artist shows a simple but fragile presentation borrowed from the religious character of an altar. This consists of 23 landscape-format black-and-white photographs of nameless children. They are enlarged until they are blurred, held in metal frames, illuminated with simple chains of lights and connected with one another. The lightbulbs glowing in the semi-darkness create a dramatic atmosphere, leading to

conflicting and alternating emotions. Emblematic of the melancholy that moves through Christian Boltanski's work, the monument is a memorial to thousands of children who did not survive the Holocaust: it is a theatre of memory, an altar to (sacrificed) childhood.

Kathleen Bühler

The exhibition

Duration of the exhibition: 12.09.2020 – 14.02.2021

Opening times: Monday: closed, Tuesday: 10 am – 9 pm
Wednesday – Sunday: 10 am – 5 pm

Holidays: Open on 24., 26. und 31. December 2020 and on 01. and 02. Januar 2021 from 10 am – 5 pm

Public guided tours (in German):

Sunday, 11 am: 13. September, 8. November 2020, 3./24. January, 14. February 2021

Tuesday, 7 pm: 29. September*, 20. October, 17. November, 8. December 2020, 12. January, 2. February 2020

* with the curator Kathleen Bühler

Introduction for teachers (in German):

Tuesday, 6 pm: 20. September 2020

Further offers of art education (guided tours, school classes, workshops):
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/erfahren, T +41 31 328 09 11

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Informationen zum Begleitprogramm unter

www.kunstmuseumbn.ch

Programmänderungen vorbehalten