

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Gesture,

May 24 – August 3, 2014

Laura Bielau, Leigh Bowery / Cerith Wyn Evans, Dominik, Margit Emmrich, Lutz Förster / Chantal Akerman, Till Gathmann, Douglas Gordon, David Hinton, Geumhyung Jeong, Gülsün Karamustafa, Auguste and Louis Lumière, Bruce McLean, Georges Méliès, Gérard Miller / Suzanne Hommel, Karen Mirza and Brad Butler, Banu Narciso, Tibor Szemző, Vangelis Vlahos, Maja Vukoje, Marianne Wex, Anita Witek

Press conference: Friday, May 23, 2014, 11 a.m.

24.5. — 3.8. 2014 **Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart**

Laura Bielau, Leigh Bowery / Cerith Wyn Evans, Dominik, Margit Emmrich, Lutz Förster, Till Gathmann, Douglas Gordon, David Hinton, Geumhyung Jeong, Gülsün Karamustafa, Auguste und /and Louis Lumière, Bruce McLean, Georges Méliès, Gérard Miller / Suzanne Hommel, Karen Mirza und /and Brad Butler, Banu Narciso, Tibor Szemző, Vangelis Vlahos, Maja Vukoje, Marianne Wex, Anita Witek

Di, Do - So: 11 - 18 Uhr
Mi: 11 - 20 Uhr

Schlossplatz 2
D-70173 Stuttgart
www.wkv-stuttgart.de

Gesture,

Photo: Maja Vukoje, 2012; Courtesy: Banu Narciso and Brad Butler, 2014; Photo: Maja Vukoje

Logo: Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, LBSBW

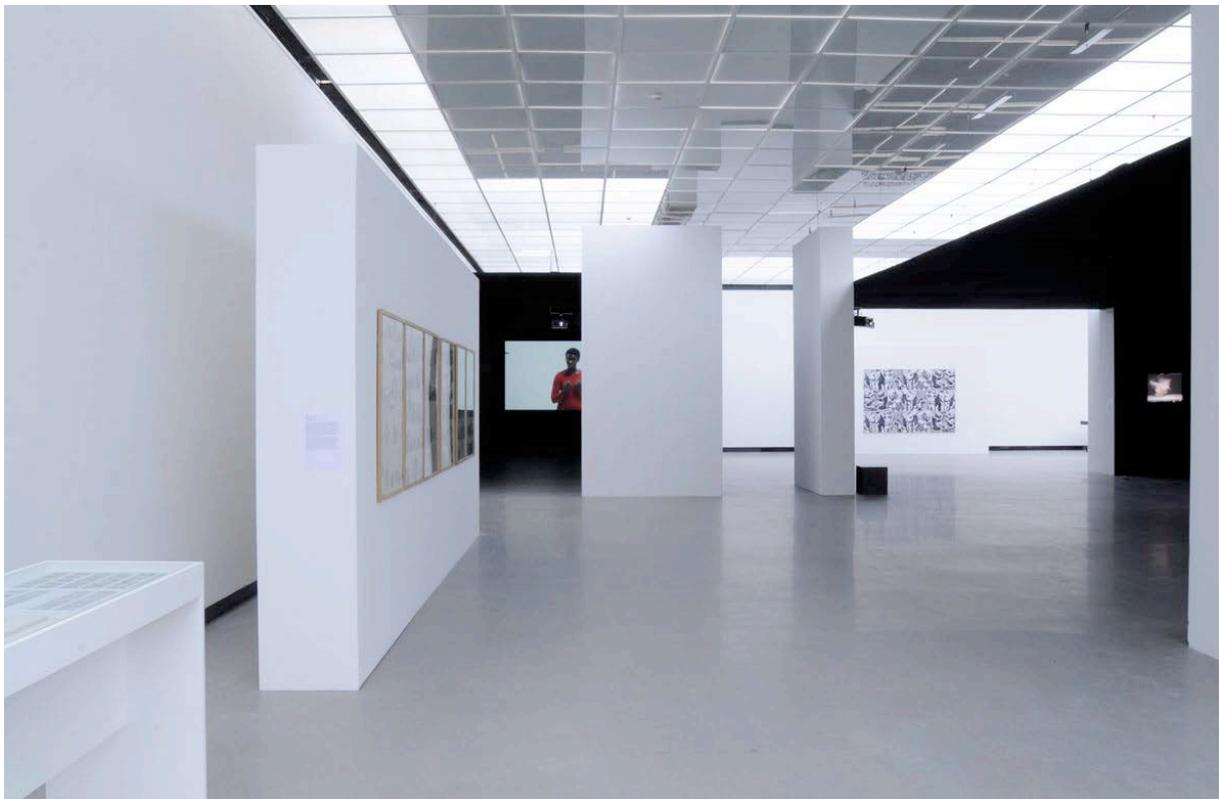
Exhibition view

Architecture and photos: Hans D. Christ



Exhibition view

Architecture and photos: Hans D. Christ



Introduction

Geste à peau

In a raw, whispered voice, Suzanne Hommel describes a session with the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in Gérard Miller's documentary film *Rendez-vous chez Lacan* (2012). After telling him that she wakes up every morning at 5 o'clock—the same hour that the Gestapo came to get the Jews in their houses under National Socialism—Lacan jumped up from his chair and caressed her cheek in an extraordinarily tender gesture. Still today she can feel this touch, forty years later, and Hommel also claims that, though it did not diminish her pain, it precipitated a decisive shift. She understood this touch as a gesture: a *geste à peau* or “gesture of the skin,” with the word Gestapo turned into *geste à peau*—an “appeal to humanity,” as she calls it.



Suzanne Hommel, in:
Gérard Miller, *Rendez-vous chez Lacan*, 2012

Triggered by a touch, the unspeakable here was deferred through a linguistic game. An inability to speak, a linguistic gap was not cured by this gesture, but it was transformed into something different, in a play on words, a joke. It became a gag in the dual sense of the word: as something that according to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben “could be put in your mouth to hinder speech” but that simultaneously references the “actor’s improvisation” through which he “compensate[s] a loss of memory or an inability to speak” (Agamben 2000, 58).

The gesture, as Agamben says, correlates with this overwriting of muteness. It showcases both, the media character of corporal movements and at the same time language as a gappy medium, a speech defect. Therefore, the gesture is “literally a definition of the gag”. It is essentially always a gesture of “not being able to figure something out in language” (Agamben 2000, 58), that “what remains unexpressed in each expressive act” (Agamben 2007, 66).

The Exhibition

The exhibition ***Gesture***, that is on view from May 24 until August 3, 2014 at the Württembergischer Kunstverein approaches the subject of the human gesture from a philosophical, mediatic, and artistic perspective.

It takes up the semiotic and performative character of the gesture, and its theatrical nature. It sheds light on what is enacted and at the same time masked by it: a certain disability to speak, a speech disorder, the inability of humans “to figure something out in language.” Thus, the focus is not so much on the gesture’s potentials of expression, but on the linguistic dilemma it references, on its character of being a gag in the double sense of the word.

At the same time, the exhibition investigates the paradoxes inherent to the gesture: the way it is situated between speaking and being silent, showing and hiding, the conscious and the unconscious, discipline and careening out of control, dancing and tumbling ...

The gesture always implies dynamism and immobility at once. It only ever appears in the interruption of a movement to which it simultaneously points. Inscribed in the gesture in a special way, therefore, are the technical dispositifs of photography and film—interrupting movements, mincing such motion into isolated gestures, and reassembling them. Thus special attention is granted to these dispositifs in the exhibition. Indeed, it was photography (since Marey and Muybridge) and film that started making visible certain ranges of motion as sequences of individual gestures—not to mention the pathos formulas and convulsions, the poses and buffooneries, which we have inherited from photography and early cinema. They witness, as Agamben has stated, the loss of the gesture. “In the cinema”, he writes, “a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss.” (Agamben 2000, 52)

Extending the concept of the “movement image” coined by Gilles Deleuze for cinema, Agamben suggests that today we should generally speak of gestures rather than images: “paintings are not immobile images, but stills charged with movement, stills from a film that is missing ... They would have to be restored to this film” (Agamben 2004, 314). The gesture and the (modern) image both equally would function as a cut—specifically, as a cut “which itself is mobile”—that separates while connecting at the same time between immobility and motion, the topical and the potential, isolation and montage.

In this sense, the isolation of images from their context and their (divergent) rearrangement appears in the exhibition not only as a cinematographic principle, but also as an artistic method.

A further aspect of the exhibition revolves around the question to what extent the regimes of class and gender, as well as the regimes of scientific fields like medicine and their apparatuses, are inscribed in the gesture. What could and would be the politics of the gesture?

Far from aiming to put forward a conclusive theory of the gesture, the exhibition seizes upon a series of theoretical and aesthetic approaches to the gesture that approximate this subject in ways that are rather widely ramified than straightforward. Tying into the project *Acts of Voicing* (2012), which dealt with the political and aesthetic dimensions of the voice, the pursuit in the present exhibition is to fathom the poetics and the politics of the gesture on various levels.

Apart from works by contemporary artists from the fields of visual arts, dance, and performance, the exhibition also presents a series of historical documents, references, and artworks, reaching from Daniel Chodowiecki up to Aby Warburg.

Used literature

Giorgio Agamben, Means without End: Notes on Politics, Minneapolis 2000

Giorgio Agamben, „Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films“, in: Tom McDough (Hrsg. / ed.), Guy Debord an the Situationist International. Texts and Documents, Cambridge und London 2004

Giorgio Agamben, Profanations, Brooklyn 2007

Dates and Credits

Gesture,

May 24 – August 3, 2014

An exhibition by

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curators

Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

Press conference

Friday, May 23, 11 a.m.

Press contact

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Press release and images

<http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/press>

Opening

Friday, May 23, 7 p.m.

Artists's tour, lectures, and performances

Saturday, May 24, 2014

Language: English

2 p.m.: Artists's tour

6:30 p.m.: Lectures + lecture performances by Iris Dessler, Felix Ensslin, Till Gathmann

7 p.m.: Performance by Geumhyung Jeong

Further events

see: www.wkv-stuttgart.de

Entrance fees

5 Euro (3 Euro reduced)

Member of WKV: free of charge

Opening Hours

Tue, Thur–Sun: 11 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed: 11 a.m.–8 p.m.

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

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ProLab, Stuttgart

Works in the exhibition (selection)

(Courtesy, unless otherwise stated: the artists)

Laura Bielau (b. 1981, lives in Berlin)

Color Lab Club, 2007–today

Multipart photo series

Fototaube, 2007; *Man Ray*, 2007; *Labor*, 2007: Niedersächsische Sparkassenstiftung, Hannover

All other works: The artist



Fototaube

In this photo series, Laura Bielau explores the relations between the production sites and apparatuses of photography and body poses. The setting here is among other things a laboratory, which becomes a backdrop for erotically charged nudes in classic pin-up poses and for perfectly arranged still lifes from standard darkroom inventory. Bodies and objects are positioned for the camera, but they also step beyond the clichés invoked here: for instance when the nude models interact with the laboratory instruments.

Leigh Bowery / Cerith Wyn Evans

(L.B.: b. 1961 in Sunshine, Australia, d. 1994 in London; C. W. E.: b. 1958 in Llanelli, lives in London)

Leigh Bowery. Tape Two Day One, 1988

Video documentation of a performance, silent, ca. 50 min.

Copyright: Cerith Wyn Evans

Courtesy: Gary Carsley and Estate of Leigh Bowery



This video documentation filmed by Cerith Wyn Evans was created in the scope of Leigh Bowery's 1988 performance at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in London. Over the course of the five-day event (October 11–15), Bowery performed for several hours each day in a room with *récamière* sofa while daily changing costume. A mirrored pane of glass the size of a shop window separated him from the audience. While the spectators could

observe him through the glass, Bowery himself saw only his mirror image. The nearly one-hour-long, unedited video documentation—the second recording made on the first day—fosters an intimate, real-time-like situation with an atmosphere ranging from sober to melancholic. Bowery only minimally changes his poses in front of, behind, and on top of the sofa and occasionally disappears into darkness. The camera responds in turn with a reformulation of perspective that is both unexcited and steady, repeatedly repositioning Bowery in the picture.

DOMINIK (b. 1981 in Oberkirch, lives in Stuttgart and Naples)

Untitled, 2014

Spray paint on wall

The space-encompassing murals by DOMINIK navigate the boundaries between graffiti tags and calligraphy, poetry and slogans, language and stuttering, sense and nonsense. They directly present the act of “not finding one’s way” in language.



Margit Emmrich (b. 1949, lives in Leipzig)

Die Zeit dazwischen: Dokumente zur Pubertät, 1973–74 / 2011–12

Sixteen-part photo series (eight pairs), 20 x 13 cm each



In her work called *Die Zeit dazwischen: Dokumente zur Pubertät* (The In-Between Time: Documenting Puberty), Margit Emmrich hones in on the self-staging of youth at the threshold between childhood and puberty. The point of departure is an experiment that she carried out in the seventies at a school in Leipzig. She invited groups of students to two photo shoots in the same classroom held one year apart. At both shoots the students were asked to represent themselves in front of the camera at a specifically marked spot. Emmrich herself left the room during the act of photographing after training the camera on the young people and setting the delayed-action shutter release. Nearly forty years later, in 2011 and 2012, Emmrich conducted the same experiment with youth from the same school, maybe even in the identical classroom setting.

Lutz Förster (b. 1953, lives in Wuppertal)

The Man I Love (in *Nelken*, 1982, by Pina Bausch)

Video documentation of a dance solo from *Nelken* (1982) by Pina Bausch. Excerpt from the film *Un jour Pina m'a demandé* (1983) von Chantal Akerman

Courtesy: INA Mediapro, Paris

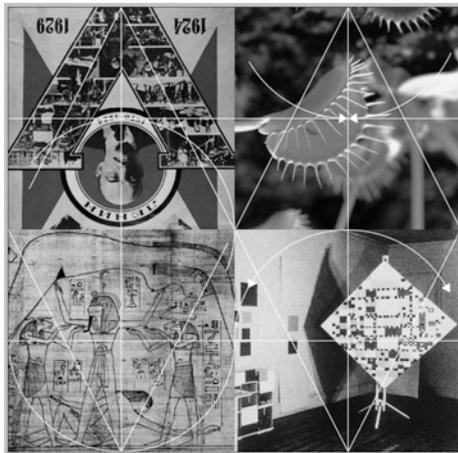


As part of his solo in Pina Bausch's piece *Nelken* (1982), Lutz Förster performed an adaptation of George Gershwin's song *The Man I Love*, integrating sign language and dance. While the song is played, with this rendition sung by Sophie Tucker, Förster interprets it through the gestures of his hands, accompanied by his lips in motion.

Till Gathmann (lives in Berlin and Vienna)

A Dream Comes True, 2008* und *A/B/V (for Institute), 2014

Installation with a video (HD-Video, 16 min) and tables.



The research project is tracing the story and its historical circumstances of the self-taught letterform historian and expert on V, Alfred Kallir (1899–1983). Kallir, born into a Jewish family in Vienna, witnessed the decay of the Habsburg Monarchy, hoped for a career as a violinist in the USA—a shattered dream, which was followed by employments as a manager for the international corporation Witkowitz Steel Works in Czechoslovakia, Amsterdam, and London, where he witnessed (and possibly worked against) the destruction of the company through Hermann Göring's greedy hands. This chapter is closed in 1941 in England, where he finally—inspired by Winston Churchill's spreading of his two-fingered victory sign—drowned himself for the rest of his life in an obsessive but poorly acknowledged research on the genealogy of letterforms and their "hidden meaning."

Douglas Gordon (*1966, lives in Berlin and Glasgow)

10 ms⁻¹, 1994

Video installation

Courtesy: British Council Collection, London



Douglas Gordon's video installation *10 ms⁻¹*—the title refers to the speed at which an object falls under the pull of gravity—is based on silent films of scientific experiments in World War I. The film shows a man in an empty room wearing only his underpants. He falls to the floor after taking a couple of clumsy steps. His repeated attempts to stand up fail miserably. Gordon has created a loop using this short scene. The man continually tries to stand up, but he never succeeds. The scene is also in slow motion. Since the man appears in good physical and almost athletic shape, the viewer is left to speculate that he is suffering from shock, a war-induced neurosis or is under the influence of nerve gas or drugs—or he also could be an actor who is merely pretending a symptom for scientific purposes. The video is projected onto a free-standing screen transferring it into a kind of double „suspense.“

David Hinton (GB)

Snow, 2003

Video, 6 min.

David Hinton in collaboration with Rosemary Lee, courtesy: Illuminations, London



Snow is a composition of historical film fragments ranging from the eighteen-nineties to the nineteen-sixties. People can be seen in snow, on black ice, and in other inclement weather conditions dancing and teetering, elegantly gliding and engaged in slapstick.

Geumhyung Jeong (b. 1980 in Seoul, lives in Seoul)

Record, Stop, Play, 2011

Video, 8 min.



This video revolves around the interplay and superimpositions between a filmed animated object and the pictures produced by the object itself: the head of a doll that is pulled over a camera on a tripod, with the lens popping out of one of the doll's eyeholes. Again and again a third party appears in the mix: the artist interacting with the object and the camera. Set to rhythm by the whirr of the camera, the film oscillates between the various visual and temporal planes of recording and rendition, the filmmaker and the film subject, the one doing the arranging and the subject thereof.

Gülsün Karamustafa (b. 1946, lives in Istanbul)

The Monument and the Child, 2011

Video and photocollage

Courtesy: the artist, RAMPA Istanbul and British Pathé (video), London



The video work and photocollage are part of an overall installation titled *The Monument and the Child*. The collage harks back to a photograph that the artist's father took of her when she was a child. It shows the girl interacting physically with a monument in Ankara, which had been erected in the nineteen-thirties under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. "As a child," remembers the artist, "I grew up under the enormous pressure that this 'monument of trust,' as it was called, exerted on me." The girl in the photo gives a suggestion of extending the giant statue with her bare hands. With a playful gesture, she inverts power relations. The video work, in turn, is based on a document stored in the British media archive called British Pathé, in a film about a child prodigy produced in 1931. The touching excerpt, which the artist has turned into an endless loop, shows a little girl on stage who is trying to dance along a circle drawn on the floor. Yet the dance seems to be more than just desperate floundering as the child attempts to follow the circle as if mesmerized while swinging out again and again. The "successful" movements, by contrast, appear to reflect an unintended "clownesque" caricature of dancing itself.

Auguste and Louis Lumière

(A.L.: b. 1862 in Besançon, d. 1954 in Lyon; L.L.: b. 1864 in Besançon, d. 1948 in Bandol, Var)

***Dans Serpentine*, 1896**

Video, 0:42 min.

Courtesy: Association frères Lumière, Paris



In one of the first films by the Lumière brothers, the so-called *Serpentine Dance* by dancer and choreographer Loïe Fuller was shown, performed on a barren stage. Alongside Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, Fuller counts among the founders of modern dance. The *Serpentine Dance*, which here is performed not by Fuller herself but by an unnamed female dancer, does not follow a narrative or plot. Instead, it focuses on the interplay between movement, a flowing garment with integrated wire, and lighting effects. The velocity of the spinning movement turns the body into a continual vortex that almost dissolves in something of an infinite loop. The stage situation is reminiscent of the experimental arrangements of early photographic and filmic movement research. So as to better convey the light and color effects of Fuller's production—which played with mirrors, light, and other technical means—the film was colored by hand.

Bruce McLean (b. 1944, lives in London)

***Drumstick*, 2012**

Video performance with Adam de la Cour, 16:56 min.

Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin



The video performance *Drumstick* focuses on problems in communication—the act of “not finding one’s way” in language—by taking a downright literal approach. It refers this inability to speak, which is compensated by the gesture, as noted by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Endless lengths of text are strung through the mouths of cardboard characters, with all three featuring the face of the artist. The performance is not only overlaid with subtitles reminiscent of a news ticker but also with an edited compilation of ventriloquist voices from different films, re-enacted and performed by Adam de la Cour. The rhythm provides a steady monotone drumbeat.

Georges Méliès (b. 1861 in Paris, d. 1938 in Paris)

Un homme de tête, 1989

Film on DVD, 1:04 min.

Courtesy: Lobsterfilms, Paris



Georges Méliès, a magician, variety theater artist, theater owner, and pioneer of the cinema of attraction, is said to have invented the stop trick when his camera malfunctioned, thus allowing people and things to disappear. While a traditional magician employs false floors and a series of gestural diversions, the craft of the cinematographic magician involves editing, double exposure, and model shots. Nonetheless, Méliès mimics the gestures of a conventional magician in his filmed magic tricks. In *Un homme de tête* (The Four Troublesome Heads), the artist duplicates his own head by repeatedly severing it from his body, with the head then reappearing from nowhere again and again, until a foursome of heads make music together. To a certain extent, the headless Méliès—more like *homme 100 têtes*—presents the mechanics of filmmaking quite literally. It is similar to a guillotine that severs the head from the torso at such high speed that the cut becomes invisible to the human eye.

Gérard Miller / Suzanne Hommel

(G.M.: b. 1948, lives in France)

Rendez-vous chez Lacan, 2012

Video excerpt, 1:02 min.

Courtesy: Morgane Production, Neuilly sur Seine



In a raw, whispered voice, Suzanne Hommel describes a session with the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in Gérard Miller's documentary film *Rendez-vous chez Lacan* (2012). After telling him that she wakes up every morning at 5 o'clock—the same hour that the Gestapo came to get the Jews in their houses under National Socialism—Lacan jumped up from his chair and caressed her cheek in an extraordinarily tender gesture. Still today she can feel this touch, forty years later, and Hommel also claims that, though it did not diminish her pain, it precipitated a decisive shift. She understood this touch as a gesture: a geste à peau or “gesture of the skin,” with the word Gestapo turned into geste à peau—an “appeal to humanity,” as she calls it.

Karen Mirza and Brad Butler (London)

***Hold Your Ground*, 2012**

HD Video, 7' 57"

Commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella, Courtesy: Waterside Contemporary, London

Hold Your Ground is a companion piece to a larger film work by Karen Mirza and Brad Butler, scripted in conjunction with the author China Miéville. Inspired by the events of the "Arab Spring", and triggered by the artists' discovery in Cairo of a pamphlet of instructions for pro-democracy demonstrators, called 'How to Protest Intelligently', the piece dissects the 'semantics' of the crowd, and the resulting performative 'speech act'. It was conceived as a form of protest in Canary Wharf Tube Station in Spring 2012 against the ongoing political injunction prohibiting any form of gathering or protest in the capital of the banking district.



Banu Narciso (b. 1972 in Turkey, lives in Geneva, Nyon and Zurich)

Untitled, 2014

Charcoal and pastel on paper, 173x98 cm



This drawing by Banu Narciso shows a portrait or a mask that is made up only of hair, of a thick coiffure, as if a face were hiding behind it. As an emblematic reference to the portrait and to female identity, the meticulously depicted hair and curls develop a life of their own, becoming a landscape or cavern, a thicket or curtain.

Tibor Szemző (b.1955 in Budapest, lives in Budapest)

***Invisible Story*, 2009**

Video, ca. 20 Min

This video work is based on the montage of various educational films from the German Democratic Republic about sports and the natural sciences. The segments on sports depict people training to achieve optimal sequences of movement, which is shown through various repetitions, sometimes in real time, sometimes in slow motion, occasionally supported by graphics. The film fragments related to the natural sciences, in turn, are essentially comprised of graphic visualizations and simulations of abstract chemical operations or physical processes. In the audio layer, various musical pieces are heard, composed by the musician and filmmaker Tibor Szemző as an interpretation of the poetic text "The Invisible Story" (1943) by the Hungarian author Béla Hamvas

(1897–1968). Moreover, this audio layer contains excerpts from this text, which revolves around the relations between worldly and otherworldly powers, around the past and the future.



Vangelis Vlahos (b. 1971 in Athens, lives in Athens)

“1981” (*Allagi*), 2007

6 from a series of 22 collages, 75 x 105 cm, each



The project “1981” (*Allagi*), with a total of twenty-two panels, was conceived as a critical rereading of the first nine months of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) administration in Greece in the year 1981, directly following the end of the dictatorship. It is a rereading that ensues along gestures in the media of political, societal, and cultural nature. The collages are composed of photographs and news images that originate from the archive of the right-wing newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* (Free World). They render the material in chronological order like a calendar. Despite—or precisely because of—this strict order, a coincidental, idiosyncratic narrative evolves. The Greek word *allagi* means change. It was the main slogan used by PASOK during the election campaign in 1981. Vangelis Vlahos seeks to reflect on the ambiguity of this term in his work. The exhibition shows a selection of six panels that focus on the first month and the last month of the time period in question.

Maja Vukoje (b. 1969, lives in Vienna)

10 Divas, 2009

Seven from a series of ten paintings, various dimensions, mixed media
 Courtesy: various private collections; Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna

This painting series is devoted to various legendary soul and bolero singers, including Diana Ross and Nancy Sinatra, posing against a blank background. Sometimes they are seen as portraits, other times as close-ups. The artist pays special attention to the gestures, stances, fashion, and diverse formulas of pathos. Some poses seem to be slightly exaggerated. The highly glamorous divas appear almost bodiless, almost spectrally translucent, at times all eyes or hands and face.



Untitled, 2013; 80DD, 2013; Untitled, 2012

Painting, variable dimensions, acrylic and glitter on canvas

Courtesy: various private collections; Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna



In this series of paintings, femininity, glamour, and showbiz are reduced to pivotal fetish objects and elements of body formation: high heels, hat, and brassiere. They have been figuratively painted onto the raw canvas, with their fetish nature simultaneously being inflated by the application of glitter.

Anita Witek (lives in Vienna)

***Before and After*, 2003**

Slide installation with three projections



In *Before and After*, Anita Witek explores the history of the dispositive of photography by focusing on the motif of the photo studio. She has compiled hundreds of pictures on this subject, starting with the inception of photography through to today, which provide the basis of this work. The photographs display myriad arrangements and settings, ranging from opulent scenes to barren cells. The works give rise to telling inferences about the act of posing and the bodily state within these settings, but also about the relations between model and photographer. They are pictures of "photographic scenes of crime" (Witek) that generally remain hidden while still formidably influencing the photographs. Here Witek is concerned with the potential of the non-visible, with what would be seen in each photo were the photographer to have taken a few steps back. Each installation varies in form depending on the exhibition; the installation shown in Stuttgart is comprised of three synchronized slide projections.

Marianne Wex (b. 1937 in Hamburg, lives in Höhr-Grenzhausen)
"Female" and "Male" Body Language as a Result of Patriarchal Structures, 1979
Books and prints



In her large-scale project *Female" and "Male" Body Language as a Result of Patriarchal Structures*, which was created between 1972 and 1977, Marianne Wex investigates how gender becomes inscribed in gestures and posture through over 5,000 photographs. In addition to her own photo studies on this topic pursued along the streets of Hamburg, the artist's collection also encompasses comprehensive found image material that covers a broad historical range. The pictures, accompanied by text, have been mounted onto panels and sorted according to various criteria: arm and hand placements, legs and feet, head and shoulders, etc. Photographs of anonymous passersby, celebrities, or cultural-historical objects all appear in the various series—photos of figures who are more or less consciously posing. Dominating the image sequences is similar body language, which paradoxically makes the pictures seem like stills from a film, but a motionless film. It is quite apparent that the intent is to carve out patterns and stereotypes that are repeatedly also juxtaposed with exceptions. All photographs are numbered, and in the case of famous personages a name is also given, or the source when dealing with found footage. In addition to the panels, Wex has also published a book whose composition essentially follows that of the panels. The exhibition presents the book along with several panel excerpts.