

## Schaf und Ruder / Wool and Water

1 October – 27 November 2016

### THE EXHIBITION

Human beings have always been fascinated by mirrors and their doublings as reflections of what is not visible. Every day we take several prolonged looks or fleeting glances in the mirror or other reflective surfaces and barely think about the medium and the important phenomena and applications associated with it: inverted, depicting, real, imaginary, reflecting, transparent, narcissistic, medical, etc. The mirror is a magic window. The ancient myth of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool, attests to the fascination with the real space between the viewer, water as a life-giving and reflective element, as well as the imaginary or speculative space behind the surface (the Latin word *speculum* means “mirror” and also refers to a diagnostic instrument used in medicine). To this day, this has resulted in numerous psychological and philosophical conjectures centered around the human image or the effects of narcissism on society, even including mass phenomena and psychograms of our “narcissistic society” (Hans-Joachim Maaz, 2012). In addition to referential and aesthetic questions, this exhibition also deals with the reflection of our time and society (1), not least surrounding the disintegrating human image.

Many artists, such as Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, and Dan Graham, have used mirrors since the 1960s and formulated a penetrating view of—and then especially behind—the essence of things and the (im)possibility of knowledge and its representability in models. Space and its conditions have been subjected to sociopolitical examination, and ideas such as transparency, reflection, and projection have applied the social-critical vocabulary of time to art. The individual and the concept of the subject have also undergone a new questioning and a supposed liberation.

Doubling, reflecting, or cloning lead to absurd scenarios. Today’s digital monitoring of the micro and macro worlds is changing the organic composition of human perception. Pictures of people, mummified surfaces of phenomena, contrast strikingly with images without a visible background. Nonetheless, the sensory and intellectual double reference to the world must remain intact. If we want to escape alienation through “social media” and computers, perception must encompass an individual and collective cultural memory. Digitization has led to inflationary streams of images whose re(production) has become uncontrollable. A gigantic multiverse of images spans between codes and physiology, between circuits as well as screens and plotters. Do people today know how they look, what they would dare to dream on the other side of the mirror, and above all, how they are feeling? The reflection has become fragmented, broken, and the dream of a holistic self which it embodies has collapsed.

The exhibition *Schaf und Ruder / Wool and Water* (2) is a spatial experiment with various levels of depiction and asks questions about what art, artworks, work, the world, the self, and its reflections can be as models of knowledge. Behind the mirror, paradoxically a concrete frame of reference opens for our questions about the real and a reality that lies between things. Thus, the exhibition explores knowledge, values, and correlations as a central question and answer in space. It aims to mark an intermediate space, a free space or place for freedom between two things.

### THE WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Against the background of these questions, the exhibition *Schaf und Ruder / Wool and Water* brings together artists in regard to various aspects of their relationship to space and images, the perspective of multiversal reflections or doublings, and references, always in relation to space – that is, viewed from a sculptural perspective. The reference work in the exhibition and for the conception of the show is *Mirror* (1981) by Gerhard Richter, which has been at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf since 1981. This conceptual work by the painter is a clear, consistent model for understanding visual reality. The mirror turns the gaze around; we see

behind us, but if we really want to see what is behind us, we must turn around. An inverted world, just as the print of an image appears inverted. In previous exhibitions here this work served as a reference point for Lacan's mirror stage (3) or imaginary space—concepts that also play a central role in *Schaf und Ruder / Wool and Water*. Following from this, based on space and the genre of sculpture, two central questions present themselves in *Schaf und Ruder / Wool and Water*: how we position ourselves in space, and what relation (or distance) to reality images (and objects) give us. The artists in the exhibition share an interest in spatial and sculptural engagement with these questions, from radical geometric abstractions in the work of **Lili Dujourie** (\*1941, lives in Ghent) to conceptual and realistic examinations in the work of **Rosemarie Trockel** (\*1952, lives in Cologne) and **Reinhard Mucha** (\*1950, lives in Düsseldorf), to a decidedly political attitude and the formulation of a political space in the work of **Astrid Klein** (\*1951, lives in Cologne), the architectural window in the work of **Isa Genzken** (\*1948, lives in Berlin), and finally philosophical problems in the work of **Aron Mehzion** (\*1970, lives in Düsseldorf) and **Mischa Kuball** (\*1959, lives in Düsseldorf). In each case, the question of the materiality of objects and their unclear functionalization plays an important role. **Elaine Sturtevant's** (1924–2014) and **Gerhard Richter's** (\*1932, lives in Cologne) works, by contrast, share an essentially conceptual approach.

**Lili Dujourie's** works, since her first piece from 1967, have conveyed an understanding of problems between form, content, and space, between strict conception and sensual materiality, balance and gravity. Her reinterpretations of themes, forms, and gestures from art history reveal an enormously precise oeuvre in various media. In addition to sculptures, she is showing the wall-sized work *Amerikanischer Imperialismus* (1972–2016), a contemporary commentary on art and politics (in the context of the Vietnam War and the bloody “May Offensive” by the Red Army Faction in Germany), which also formulates an enduring criticism of the superficiality of the perception of both phenomena.

**Rosemarie Trockel** conceived a wall with two works for this exhibition, which oppose one another, so to speak. Personal motifs and references of an I-narrative are interwoven with personal, in some cases private references in *CLUSTER I – Bachelor's Luck* (2015), a 22-part collage set. This is joined by a playful “breathing body” as a counterpart to the ego with the wonderful title *My Generation, No Meat* (2000). Trockel alludes to our desires. The artist presents us with two wish machines in which our desire for knowledge is revealed, as well as the impossibility of gaining this knowledge.

In **Astrid Klein's** sculptural works and neon sculptures, texts and images are interwoven so that a direct appeal to or inclusion of the viewer becomes unavoidable. Her shots in the mirror are the expression of desire and brutal aggression about the inability to compose pictures behind the visible. The act of damaging the likeness simultaneously destroys it and murders the reflected room and the reflected self.

In **Reinhard Mucha's** spatial situation, lived life and the work that maintains it as daily effort become a material and conceptual foundation of past and present, art and life. The examination of this pair is based on knowledge and becomes a mirror of both through the transformation by the artist. Like a kind of signature, Mucha is constantly present in reflections or footstools as a foundation of his work – a gesture of work against the gesture of power. With the words “MÄNNER FRAUEN” (and “ODERIN”), the work not only shows two toilets. The specific arrangement leads to a reflection that shows an impenetrable (modern-day) gender debate and in which the hanging light ironically offers little in the way of illumination. Knowledge is and remains a dream of our existence.

Since Plato's allegory of the cave, form, the shadow of things, has stood for their recognizable essence, which **Mischa Kuball** transforms into another media entity in his light projection. *platon's mirror* (2011) can be seen and experienced in precisely the dimensions of Richter's mirror in its usual location under the stairs at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. A mirror of the world?

In the work of **Isa Genzken**, the reflection of the *Large Window* (1987–88) – an architectural element for a gallery facade in Cologne—becomes the membrane of a reality between interior and exterior and the medium and site of conflict for a disturbed aesthetic state. With this work, Genzken turned against the realized facade design by O.M. Ungers. Her intervention and suggestion for improvement was not realized, but became a prototype of her work as an artist. Its form does not determine its planned function, but deconstructs the conventional one.

In the doubling of the world behind the mirror lies a surprisingly concrete frame of reference for our questions about the real. In **Aron Mehzion**'s works, facets of an endless imaginary space become palpable. His table installations, like experiments, show the intellectual pleasure in the imaginary. Endless thought in the inverted double—in manifold possibilities the symbolic creates its own space that leads us behind the mirrors and back.

**Sturtevant**'s work turns the concept of artistic originality on its head by not creating a single original work, but proceeding purely by appropriation: selective doubling. Her works in the exhibition—copying the most important representatives of Conceptual Art, Marcel Duchamp and Robert Gober – close the loop: Adam and Eve as well as the penis and the vagina are the origin and reflection of the world (or of humanity) and thus also the beginning of narcissism. Or, the crucial question would be, could we live without mirrors?

## 1) REFLECTION OF OUR TIME AND SOCIETY

In the analog age up to the last decade of the last century, in theory and practice – for instance, in films such as “Playtime” (Jacques Tati, 1967) or “Blade Runner” (Ridley Scott, 1982) – the way in which the reflection and doubling of the human being was to be understood as a model of knowledge had crucial effects: as a doubling in pictures, sculpture, or machines, based on descriptions of artificial people and golems, of Kafkaesque doublings of absurd worlds. Gilles Deleuze in particular pointed to these splits in time in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985) as a classification of images and signs: the reflection reveals to us a new, virtual space, it results in a doubling of current and imaginary perception. The mirror is thus a model for both: knowledge and illusion. Models were in vogue especially in the 1980s and 1990s as simplified images of reality (today people prefer to speak of theories or constructions). They were often cited for aesthetic thoughts that turned to the role of art in the public and society, often in connection with studies by the sociologist Richard Sennett on the isolation, disorientation, and powerlessness of modern individuals in the urban environment (for instance, *The Fall of Public Man*). Even today, these questions have lost none of their current relevance. Thus, mirrors can continue to function as the point of departure for central questions and descriptions of states of society and the people who live in it.

## 2) ABOUT THE EXHIBITION TITLE

“Wool and Water” is the fifth chapter in Lewis Carroll’s 1871 novel “Through the Looking-Glass” and “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”. The sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* offers a glimpse behind the mirror (as the formative element of the self). The English title “Wool and Water” was translated/doubled as “Schaf und Ruder” (sheep and rudder) in German. In the phonetic juxtaposition of a-a/u-u as well as in the reflection of the meanings of sheep-wool and rudder-water lies a linguistic metaphor in one of the most fascinating works of literary history. Both books have led to innumerable adaptations and have become an important part of pop culture – most recently through two eccentric fantasy-fable movie adaptations by Tim Burton (2010/2016). Christian Enzensberger, who translated both Alice books into German in 1963, precisely described the dilemma they contain: “Carroll’s books deal with society. ... In the lands that Alice wanders through, people die the deaths of embarrassment and having to remain silent;

people aren't murdered here, but are silenced; and their throats aren't cut, but they are cut off from answering. Alice suddenly finds herself in a labyrinth, in a house of mirrors of proper behavior." (Dieter E. Zimmer, Die Zeit, 2 May 1980) Alice leads us into such a house of mirrors formulated in the exhibition space with Schaf und Ruder / Wool and Water. It has to do with the uncertain intermediate space (the break or gap in reality) that causes us to rethink space and pictures—which, according to the American artist Sturtevant, leads to "a shifting and disturbing mode of thought. There is a loss of balance that demands going beyond." "Wool and Water" is the fifth chapter in Lewis Carroll's 1871 novel "Through the Looking-Glass" and "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". The sequel to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland offers a glimpse behind the mirror (as the formative element of the self). The English title "Wool and Water" was translated/doubled as "Schaf und Ruder" (sheep and rudder) in German. In the phonetic juxtaposition of a-a/u-u as well as in the reflection of the meanings of sheep-wool and rudder-water lies a linguistic metaphor in one of the most fascinating works of literary history. Both books have led to innumerable adaptations and have become an important part of pop culture – most recently through two eccentric fantasy-fable movie adaptations by Tim Burton (2010/2016). Christian Enzensberger, who translated both Alice books into German in 1963, precisely described the dilemma they contain: "Carroll's books deal with society. ... In the lands that Alice wanders through, people die the deaths of embarrassment and having to remain silent; people aren't murdered here, but are silenced; and their throats aren't cut, but they are cut off from answering. Alice suddenly finds herself in a labyrinth, in a house of mirrors of proper behavior." (Dieter E. Zimmer, Die Zeit, 2 May 1980) Alice leads us into such a house of mirrors formulated in the exhibition space with Schaf und Ruder / Wool and Water. It has to do with the uncertain intermediate space (the break or gap in reality) that causes us to rethink space and pictures – which, according to the American artist Sturtevant, leads to "a shifting and disturbing mode of thought. There is a loss of balance that demands going beyond."

### 3) ABOUT THE MIRROR STAGE

In the theory of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901–81), the mirror stage refers to a phase of childhood within which the formation of the self takes place. With this theory, Lacan offers an answer to the question of how self-consciousness is formed and functions in people. It is among his most well-known and influential concepts and was first presented in 1936 under the title "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I." When children between 6 and 18 months old recognize their own reflection in the mirror, they greet it with a "jubilatory gesture." Lacan interprets this delight as the identification of the child encountering itself for the first time in its own image. This encounter is an occasion for joy because the child sees itself completely for the first time in the mirror, instead of "broken into pieces" from the perspective of the body – from which one never sees one's own face and one thus experiences one's own limbs as seemingly separate "partial objects." Only with the self-image perceived in the mirror does the child develop a self-consciousness. Because the self that emerges in the mirror stage is based on an image, according to Lacan it constitutes the essential sphere of the imaginary within the mind. The imaginary is the existence of the subject that is based on the gaze and is central to the identification of the self in and with the environment.

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