

THE SCHIRN HAS CONCEIVED AN INTERNATIONAL GROUP EXHIBITION ON THE INDIVIDUAL'S SITUATION IN TODAY'S SOCIETY WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

INFINITE JEST

June 5 – September 7, 2014

Press preview: Wednesday, June 4, 2014, 11 a.m.

The credo of today's society without boundaries reads "ever faster, ever higher, ever further." In the early twenty-first century, man, oscillating between euphoria and depression, finds himself confronted with the promising opportunities of a global and virtual world as well as the challenge to constantly improve, optimize, and shape his life more efficiently. The exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt on display from June 5 until September 7, 2014 focuses on this phenomenon. Based on works by eighteen contemporary artists such as Maurizio Cattelan, Peter Coffin, Judith Hopf, Andrea Fraser, Claire Fontaine, Alicja Kwade, Ryan Trecartin, and Daniel Richter, it unfolds an image of a present-day world with the individual at its center. The works on display are not aimed at visualizing the contents of the eponymous epochal novel "Infinite Jest" by David Foster Wallace. The show rather explores the various demands confronting today's individual, in which the modes of resistance and the contradictions of a reality often described as lacking any alternative make themselves felt.

Set in the near future, Wallace's novel seismographically records possible results and consequences of an event and fun society that presents itself as a performance-oriented society at the same time. The works of art assembled for the presentation of the same name in the Schirn reveal how the present circumstances' consequences and excesses make man revolve around himself almost without end. Which methods and ways do we find or invent to continually optimize and perfect ourselves in order to fulfil the requirements of modern society? The artworks' subjects span from addiction in its various forms, the localization of the self, depression, and the emptying of meaning to absurdity, irrationality, and virtually deadly irony. Visually and conceptually, the presented works shed light on the meaning of the term "hysterical realism" which has been coined for a certain kind of literature some years ago.

"Expressions like *quantified self*, *body hacking*, and *burnout* are endemic in today's media. Absolute optimization and perfection are required from each individual in the global world around the clock. What about the other side and the consequences of this continuous circling of man around himself? The Schirn wants to dedicate itself to these contemporary phenomena in this year's summer exhibition and provide a terrain for the artistic exploration of such issues," says Max Hollein, Director of the Schirn.

Matthias Ulrich, curator of the exhibition: "There has never been so much I. We incessantly revolve around ourselves. And everything around us also goes on this roundabout. Each individual has to cope with what happens in today's world, has to find his place as a person, or even develop survival strategies for this. The pictures by the artists presented in the exhibition confront us with this endless circling around oneself. They raise questions that concern all of us and play with situations that we can all relate to."

David Foster Wallace's novel "Infinite Jest" does not provide any advice as to how the individual might make heads or tails of the harsh reality of life, the absurd madness of the everyday world, the fast-moving times informed by the Internet, virtual worlds, and the wide range of different channels of communication. His diagnosis of society remains a negative one. Wallace's text is pivoted on images and stories in which pleasure and pain, fun and addiction, religion and

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insanity, the private and the public, dream and reality, seriousness and irony, entertainment and death lie very close together for everybody, marking the hinges of daily life.

Similar motifs are to be found in the works of the eighteen international artists featured in the Schirn exhibition "Infinite Jest." The exhibits reflect connectedness, human relations, and subtle contexts in which the individual is always the foremost focus of attention. The architecture for the show provides each artist with a room of her or his own. The individual spaces are connected with each other in a labyrinthine manner resembling the literary composition of David Foster Wallace's novel. In varied genres of art, such as installation, film, painting, or performance, the artists presented hold a mirror up to both society and each individual. They approach the threshold of a new era in which the "transparent man" lives within a digital social network rather than only using it and in which life has turned into an optimization and experience project.

With his visually overwhelming films and installations, US artist **Ryan Trecartin**, for instance, creates a world that seems to be computer-generated and moves and changes at a tearing speed. As regards "Living Comp" (2011), concentration seems to be almost out of the question; the narrative strands shift continuously as does reality. Quick cuts cause restlessness. The takes resemble shots of modern means of communication such as those made with smartphones. Permanently nervous, blathering figures acting head-on in front of the camera carry the viewer away into their everyday raptures of information, their consumption binges, and drug highs.

Peter Coffin traces an incessant circular movement in his work "Untitled" (2008) on display at the Schirn: a room-filling conveyance system transports a bundle of balloons. The man-made product does not allow a break, knows no exception, and has neither beginning nor end. Usually exposed to free winds, the balloons are destined to move along the same track forever. Yet, suddenly, at a certain point, they come loose and are scattered to the four winds. The actual purpose of the machine remains in the dark.

Maurizio Cattelan frequently features himself as the main character in his presentations. Full of absurd irony, the Italian artist's "Spermini" (1997) renders his portrait as a gene swarm with several heads. The potential for duplication is nearly boundless. The work raises a number of questions: Is genetic research blasphemous? Does man take over the role of God? What happens to human individuality? What about the artist's position in the age of reproducibility?

The Albanian artist **Anri Sala** moves within a similar context with his work "Title Suspended" (2008): two purple plastic gloves slowly rotate on their own axes; thumb and index finger of each hand are outstretched – a contemporary adaption of Michelangelo's vision of the creation of Adam. The scene's actual climax is suspended, though, as Sala does not show us how the fingers touch. Since the plastic gloves of the installation remind us of hospital utensils, the subject of disease and death, of the finiteness of life, comes into play. All is one, and the one does not exist without the other.

Another aspect of the exhibition is dedicated to a more general analysis of the individual in today's culture. The German artist **Daniel Richter**, for example, establishes anachronistic references in his pictures and their titles. Richter, deliberately relating to paintings from the years around 1900 with his motifs, alludes to the fundamental epochal change and the society's entrance into the twentieth century. Familiar social groups like the family were broken up, for instance, on account of the beginning industrialization, and each individual had to redefine his or her place in human society. Richter also refers to the present-day Romantic exploration of the self by employing quotations from art history (e.g. Caspar David Friedrich). As his pictures often evoke the view through a night sight device or a heat-detecting camera, the viewer finds himself confronted with the question how human beings are perceived today: as individuals or as purely biological organisms.

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The artist duo **Claire Fontaine** aims at a reflection of the interdependencies prevailing in today's capitalist society in their three works presented in the Schirn exhibition. "Untitled (The Invisible Hand)" from 2008, for instance, shows the famous Newton's cradle as a desktop decoration of the erstwhile US investment bank Lehman Brothers, which had to file for bankruptcy as a result of those days' far-reaching financial crisis. Its consequences were so massive that they affected the private assets of individuals. By transforming the base of the cradle construction into a tennis court with a net on which the balls move and thus, visually and acoustically, trigger associations with a game of tennis, Claire Fontaine provide an ironic comment on extant economic constructs and relationships.

The **catalog Unendlicher Spaß / Infinite Jest** is a commentary on the exhibition. The essays it contains are reproductions in a twofold sense: they reproduce the idea of the presentation in textual form, and they are reprints. The artistic manifestos also published in the book refer to the included essay by Alex Danchev on the one hand and are a constant companion to early-twentieth-century art on the other. They demonstrate the ever-recurring desire for renewal in a way of their own. (Unendlicher Spaß / Infinite Jest. Edited by Matthias Ulrich and Max Hollein. With a foreword by Max Hollein, essays by Alex Danchev, Lars Bang Larsen, and Matthias Ulrich and short texts by Lisa Beißwanger, Sigrun Galter, Heide Häusler, Katharina Knacker, Carolin Köchling, and Clara Wörsdörfer. German/English edition, 480 pages with 184 color and 42 b/w illustrations, 14 x 22 cm (vertical format), Design: Studioheyhey, Frankfurt; Verlag für moderne Kunst, Nürnberg 2014, ISBN 978-3-86984-093-2, Price: 29 euros (Schirn), 38 euros (trade edition).)

LIST OF ARTISTS: Francis Alÿs, Maurizio Cattelan, Claire Fontaine, Peter Coffin, Lara Favaretto, Andrea Fraser, Karl Holmqvist, Judith Hopf, Ceal Floyer, Josh Kline, Alicja Kwade, Joep van Liefland, Helen Marten, Kris Martin, Navid Noor, Daniel Richter, Michael Riedel, Anri Sala, Ryan Trecartin, and the Kopp Collection.
SPECIAL PROJECT

VENUE: SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, D-60311 Frankfurt. **EXHIBITION DATES:** June 5 – September 7, 2014. **OPENING HOURS:** Tue, Fri–Sun 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., Wed and Thur 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. **INFORMATION:** www.schirn.de, e-mail: welcome@schirn.de, phone: +49.69.29 98 82-0, fax: +49.69.29 98 82-240. **ADMISSION:** 9 €, reduced 7 €; family ticket 18 €; combination ticket also admitting to the "Paparazzi. Photographers, Stars and Artists" show: 16 €, reduced 12 €; free admission for children under eight years of age. **GENERAL GUIDED TOURS:** Wed 19 a.m., Thur 8 p.m., Sat 6 p.m., Sun 3 p.m. **CURATOR:** Matthias Ulrich. **CURATORIAL ASSISTANCE:** Katharina Knacker.

SOCIAL MEDIA: The Schirn communicates the exhibition in the social web with the **HASHTAG:** #infinitejest. **ONLINE MAGAZINE:** www.schirn-magazin.de. **FACEBOOK:** www.facebook.com/Schirn. **TWITTER:** www.twitter.com/Schirn. **YOUTUBE:** www.youtube.com/user/SCHIRNKUNSTHALLE. **INSTAGRAM:** @schirnkunsthalle.

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