

THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT PRESENTS THE FIRST MAJOR SURVEY EXHIBITION IN GERMANY ON SWISS ARTIST UGO RONDINONE

UGO RONDINONE: LIFE TIME

JUNE 24–SEPTEMBER 18, 2022

PRESS PREVIEW: THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 2022, 11 A.M.

The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is dedicating a first major survey exhibition in Germany to Ugo Rondinone (*1964). “LIFE TIME” presents key paintings, sculptures, and video works by the Swiss artist, who is one of the internationally best-known of his generation. In his works, he adds a poetic dimension to everyday things and phenomena. A tree, a clock, the sun or a rainbow – by means of repetition, isolation or reduction, he positions them in new contexts in his typically rather minimalistically arranged spaces, creating atmospheric ambiences. Specifically for the Schirn, he groups around eighty of his works into new constellations and sequences, creating a unique installation that extends along the entire length of the gallery, into the Rotunda, and onto the roof. In response to the location, the artist developed *curved standing landscape with entry door* (2022), one of his monumental *landscape* sculptures made of soil. Further, thousands of pictures of the moon, drawn by children especially for the exhibition, are presented under the title *your age and my age and the age of the moon* (2014–ongoing)—a meditation on the universe.

The exhibition “LIFE TIME” combines essential themes that have shaped Ugo Rondinone’s work for the past thirty years: time and transience, day and night, reality and fiction, nature and culture. Central aspects in the work of the conceptual and installation artist are the principle of the series and the variation of motifs in various media. Works of art emerge from other works of art, each of which are part of a series while forming relationships that transcend individual works within Rondinone’s artistic system. His material observations connect the subjective with the universal and create a sensually aesthetic bridge to things that are not man-made. In his works, Rondinone returns time and again to the iconography of Romanticism, weaving it into a dense fabric of art history, literature, and pop culture. The starting point of his multimedia oeuvre is the transformation of the outside world into a subjective, emotional inner world. He devises experiential spaces in which space and time disappear in the individual rhythm of perception and the viewers themselves become part of the installations and their immersive structures.

The exhibition “Ugo Rondinone: LIFE TIME” is supported by Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia. The children’s project “Schirn Stars” is supported by the Verein der Freunde der Schirn Kunsthalle e.V.

Dr. Philipp Demandt, director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt until June 30, 2022, comments on the exhibition: “Following Ugo Rondinone’s work for many years with great enthusiasm, I am all the more delighted that the artist has accepted our invitation to present his first major survey exhibition in Germany at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. His works have been exhibited all over the world, and his luminous rainbows from New York, Paris, and Shanghai are well known. Now one of these great works shines above the Schirn in Frankfurt. Although Rondinone is one of the best-known artists of his generation, his work, underpinned by a peculiar poetry and grounded in a subjective, quasi-universal phenomenology, invariably remains both fascinating and poignant.”

Matthias Ulrich, curator of the exhibition, remarks on the artist: “Shaped by biographical experiences such as his first partner’s untimely death from AIDS, Ugo Rondinone’s works address existential themes. A fundamental melancholic mood in terms of a universal worldview is found in each of his works. Both the serially applied motif and the structural plan that is reflected in the title, for example, are part of this concept. In addition, there are recurring art-historical references, the

exploration of a variety of media, and a participatory element. It is on the basis of these diverse levels within his art that viewers are inevitably drawn into the maelstrom of Rondinone's cosmos."

LOCATIONS AND WORKS OF THE EXHIBITION

In addition to the main part in the gallery of the Schirn, the exhibition "LIFE TIME" extends to the roof and both the exterior and interior of the Rotunda. Installed on top of the roof, the rainbow *life time* (2019), consisting of two curved words, can be seen from afar. The large illuminated letters that form the title, produced especially for this exhibition, are part of Rondinone's *rainbow* series, which uses poetic word combinations to convey inner moods and timeless truths and, as art in public space, is intended to reach as many people as possible. The rainbows explore themes such as day and night, homosexuality, freedom and tolerance, and, in the case of *life time*, the own lifetime and the enduring presence of a work of art.

Another work that addresses time as an individual phase is displayed at the center of the publicly accessible outer area of the Rotunda. *Flower moon* (2011), a six-meter-high white enameled aluminum cast of a two-thousand-year-old olive tree that dominates the cylindrical architecture of the site, is an expression of an immense period of time as well as a memory that seems insignificantly small in the context of the universe.

Countless images of the moon, painted on black paper by children on behalf of the artist, hang on the wall of the Rotunda's interior circular walkway. The installation's title, *your age and my age and the age of the moon*, alludes to the humble attitude of humans toward the billion-year-old universe and reflects on the moon as a projection surface of dreams, a theme found in German Romanticism. Opposite this, on the outward-facing glazing of the Rotunda's circular walkway, a brick wall is painted in white. The work *bright shiny morning* (2010) only allows light to enter through the transparent joints, interrupting the Rotunda's characteristic view both in and out, and touching on the relationship between inside and outside.

The main part of the exhibition is divided into five sections that extend across the entire gallery of the Schirn. A narrative unfolds that follows the transition from night to day, from darkness to light. The first and darkest room includes works from four series. The clown lying on the floor is part of a group of eight clown figures, collectively titled *if there were anywhere but desert*. (2000–02) after a book of poems by Edmond Jabès, whose individual poems make up a coherent text. These are all casts of actual people. While the other seven figures are named after the days of the week, the clown presented at the Schirn bears the number zero as its title. He wears the mask of Pierrot, considered sad and melancholic, and refers historically to the latter's Romantic phase in the *Commedia dell'Arte*. His passive stance is indicative of rejection, loneliness, or aloofness. The sculpture is surrounded by seven large-scale images of stars from the series *star* (2008–12). As is the case in many of his other works, Rondinone takes up archetypal phenomena in the star images made with sand and stones. The clown and star images are complemented by *zero zany zone* (2019), a black wooden door shutting out the rest of the world and *moonrise* (2003), a mask made of rubber. The latter is informed by masks of the Indigenous Yupik people from Alaska, whose spiritual way of life is based on the phases of the moon.

In the next room, dominated primarily by brown tones, is a work conceived especially for the Schirn. *Curved standing landscape with entry door* (2022) is part of a series started in 2013 of site-specific sculptures made of soil. The monumental wall made of a special mixture of soil follows the curve of the Rotunda's architecture like a vertically tilted piece of natural ground. This, too, reflects Rondinone's basic principles: a piece of the environment outside is brought inside, where reality becomes fiction and nature becomes art. The artist refers to Land Art of the 1960s

and evokes associations with the monumental sculptures by artists such as Richard Serra. Spread across the floor are thirteen seated, life-size figures. The casts of nude dancers, colored in earth tones, belong to the group of works *nude* (2010–11). Averted, self-absorbed, and possessing reduced individual features, they take on an anonymous universal identity, their passive expression reminiscent of Rondinone's clowns. The sacral look and feel of the exhibition space is underscored by the mood of light emanating from three round colored glass windows from 2016, one of which is set directly into the wall of the Schirn, forming a connection to the outside world. They consist of concentric circles with twelve Roman numerals, in keeping with their title, *clock*. Without hands, these time windows have been stripped of their original purpose, but rather convey timelessness and allude to the movement of light and of the earth.

The exploration of the relationship between culture and nature, permanence and transience, inside and outside, continues in the large installation made up of three series in the next room of the exhibition. The five amorphous, gray stone sculptures of the twenty-part series *we run through a desert on burning feet, all of us are glowing our golden faces look twisted and shiny*. (2008) reveal clear references to Classical Modernism such as works by Henry Moore and Auguste Rodin. Loosely based on Chinese scholar's rocks, whose creator is considered to be nature itself, the sculptures establish a connection between the spiritual and the natural worlds. They resemble cloud formations in which each viewer may discover something individual or personal. These works are complemented by the series *diary* (2005–15), black-and-white drawings on canvases primed with plaster. For the most part, they are studies of windows that seem like sketches of actual scenery, suggesting intimacy and privateness. A series of poems written directly on the exhibition walls reinforces these aspects. In contrast to graffiti or wall paintings, which are similar in form, the viewer has to step up close to read the *poems* (2007). In this way, Rondinone creates an intimate situation between the work and the viewer. Here, too, a key aspect of his entire oeuvre is revealed: the effect of a particular atmosphere on thoughts and feelings. Equally impressive is the way in which the wall installation *far away trains passing by* (1991), made of white wooden boards and furnished with a passageway, marks the transition to the next part of the exhibition.

The film installation *it's late and the wind carries a faint sound as it moves through the trees (...)* from 1998 fills the fourth room with blue light. The installation consists of twelve sequences presented on six screens in a continuous loop. This arrangement alone suggests the motif of the endless repetition of everyday human activity, synchronized by the rhythm of the song *Everyday Sunshine* by Fishbone. A woman keeps entering a dark room; a man constantly moves a curtain back and forth—no further context is provided. The imagination of the observer defines the scenery, which remains open in terms of content.

Eight works with the title *pure sunshine* (2012) illuminate the brightest and final room of the exhibition in radiant yellow. Also known as mandalas or target paintings, the circular images that Rondinone began painting in 1992 create the impression of movement with pulsating, vibrating contours, placing them in the tradition of Op Art. They emit light while conveying the sensation of absorbing perception and drawing it inward. Just as this atmospheric motion may be seen as an oscillation between inside and outside, the snow machine *thank you silence* (2005) refers to the ever-recurring motifs of yesterday and today, of day and night, summer and winter. By day, white paper confetti falls quietly and silently like snow; each night, it is returned to the machine so that the cycle can begin anew the next morning. Bronze sculptures in the form of apples and pears, lined up on the floor of the room, belonging to the group of works *still.life*. (2007–13), conclude the tour. They represent a standstill, a frozen moment in a life cycle, underscoring the transience of the individual object.

SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

Ugo Rondinone was born in 1964 in Brunnen, Switzerland, in the canton of Schwyz, and has lived in New York since 1998. His works have been shown in solo exhibitions in many museums and galleries around the world, including the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich, the Kunsthalle Wien, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, the Whitechapel Gallery in London, the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

CATALOG *Ugo Rondinone: LIFE TIME*, edited by Matthias Ulrich, with contributions by Dominic Eichler, Brigitte Franzen, and Matthias Ulrich, and a foreword by Philipp Demandt, director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. German/English edition, 184 pages, 225 illustrations, 31 x 24 cm, softcover, Snoeck, ISBN 978-3-86442-342-0, €35 (SCHIRN), €39.80 (bookshops).

ARTIST TALK On Friday, June 24 at 7 p.m., Ugo Rondinone and curator Matthias Ulrich will talk about the exhibition followed by a book signing in the foyer. Participation is free of charge, tickets can be reserved in the online shop. The number of participants is limited.

SCHIRN SUMMER PARTY The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt invites to its summer party on Friday, July 22, 2022, starting at 7 p.m. The exhibitions “Ugo Rondinone: LIFE TIME” and “Aernout Mik. Double Bind / Threshold Barriers” will be open until 10 p.m. There will also be live music by DJ Sofie Royer and rapper Kay Shanghai. Admission is free.

LOCATION SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt **DURATION** June 24–September 18, 2022 **INFORMATION** www.schirn.de **E-MAIL** welcome@schirn.de **TELEPHONE** +49 69 29 98 82-0 **ADMISSION** €12, reduced €10, free admission for children under 12 **TICKETS** in the online shop at schirn.de/shop or at the Schirn box office **PROTECTION AND HYGIENE MEASURES** Information at schirn.de/en/visit **MEDIA PARTNER** Journal Frankfurt **CULTURE PARTNER** HR2 **CURATOR** Matthias Ulrich, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt **CURATORIAL ASSISTANT** Marie Oucherif **SUPPORTED BY** Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia

HASHTAGS #UGORONDINONE #SCHIRN **FACEBOOK, TWITTER, YOUTUBE, INSTAGRAM, PINTEREST, SCHIRN MAGAZINE** www.schirn.de/en/magazine

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