

THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE PRESENTS THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION OF
CARSTEN NICOLAI TO DATE

CARSTEN NICOLAI

ANTI REFLEX

20 January – 28 March 2005

Press preview: Wednesday, 19 January 2005, 11.00 a.m.

Carsten Nicolai is presently considered to be one of the most important representatives of a generation of artists who are purposefully exploring the points of intersection between art, nature, and science. As a cross-border visual artist, researcher, musician, and producer combined in one person, Nicolai seeks to overcome the division among the senses in human perception and to make it possible to experience scientific phenomena like the frequencies of sound and light or electromagnetic fields with the eyes as well as by hearing and touch. His installations radiate a minimalist aesthetics that captivates visitors with its elegance, simplicity, and emphasis on technology. Following his participation in important international exhibitions like the Kassel *documenta* and the Venice Biennial, the Schirn presents the first major survey, for which the artist, born in Chemnitz in 1965, will produce a series of new works.

Max Hollein, curator of the exhibition: "In his work, Carsten Nicolai combines the scientific analysis and methodology of laboratory experiments with an intuitive search for a new language he may rely on in his work as an artist. He makes use of complex physical processes which he transfers into visual and acoustic signals that can be experienced and understood."

Carsten Nicolai on his attitude towards science: "I like to work under very precise conditions, and scientific research and artistic processes are more or less the same in this regard. People who just follow the prevailing logic behave like machines. Only those who break these laws and do something unexpected break fresh ground. Many famous scientific inventions came about by chance; new discoveries often spring from unexpected moments."

The exhibition was sponsored by Kulturstiftung der Länder and Merck KGaA. Additional support was granted by Schott AG and EAS GmbH.

The coexistence of the acoustic and the visual is a recurrent theme in Carsten Nicolai's work. In the tradition of Ernst Chladni (1756–1827), the founder of modern acoustic science, Nicolai aims at linking different sensory perceptions. In repeatable experimental arrangements, liquids are animated by means of sound signals of different frequencies, for example, which generates waves that ruffle the surface in concentric circles, meet, and join, creating vibration knots and interference patterns. The visual impression of Nicolai's partly large-space installations transforms sound experiences into portraits of frequencies. Resulting from a similar experiment,

the photo series "milch" consists of pictures of different milk surfaces which have been set vibrating by increasing frequencies. While low frequencies create apparently chaotic surfaces, high frequencies form strict rhythmic patterns. The pieces are both visualizations of an acoustic phenomenon and autonomous works of art the effect of which is grounded on an aesthetics of their own. In other works such as "void," Nicolai tries to question our perception and to focus on the life span of sounds by sealing them in glass tubes. This approach reveals an artist who is less interested in exploring the individual object but rather in the relations, the systematic context determined by causal interdependencies. Sounds penetrate space, encroach on pictures and objects, and thus provide the entire presentation with a kind of polyrhythmics.

Again and again, we come upon the principle of polarity: the visible and the invisible, light and dark, the positive and the negative, scientific laboratory methods and metaphysical interpretations of the world. The exhibition in the Schirn confronts two spaces: "reflex" and "anti." While one room is light, the other is almost dark. Visitors forge a link between the two spaces by walking through a passage with a geometric black-and-white silk-screen print wallpaper the eye registers as an accumulation of pulsating fields and visual rhythms. The central element of the space "reflex" is a cubic sculpture of the same name. This sculpture consists of a dodecagonal, three-meter high box; with one side open, it invites the visitor to enter its interior where high-frequency white noise from ten speakers circulates with high velocity. The sound creates the acoustic illusion that a further three-dimensional object must be hidden in the walls of the box. Other works in this section of the exhibition such as "visuelles feld" also involve the viewer. As soon as the visitor walks into the installation he enters the visual field of a CCD camera and thus changes the acoustic signal and interrupts the picture – questioning notions like time, space, and identity. Somewhere else, an "einkristall" (a block characterized by the most regular arrangement of atoms there is and used as a high-quality storage medium in microelectronics) suggests itself as a reference for a complex pattern of nature.

The space "anti" corresponding to "reflex" also contains a sculpture – a uniform black counterpart which, contrary to the former, is no walk-in area. Built-in sub-woofers emit deep frequencies which cannot be heard but only felt and changed by the visitor's touch. Formally, the sculpture refers to a geometrical form in Albert Durer's engraving "Melancholia I" and thus takes up Neoplatonic mathematical and geometrical concepts of Renaissance times which it combines with the contemporary discussion about acoustic dimensions of architecture. The work "funken," which visualizes electricity in the form of sparks coming from the walls, is also based on physical phenomena.

In his work, Carsten Nicolai links different natural phenomena which he incorporates into his language as an artist. The novel, refreshing impression of his works results from the fact that they unfold that vague border area where consciousness and matter merge and the viewer, coming very close to the reality of a both inner and physical experience, is referred back to his own feeling and the essential questions concerning the order of things.

After exhibitions in the Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin (1994), the New York Kunsthalle (1996), the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo (2002), and the artist's participation in international group presentations such as *documenta* (1997) and the Venice Biennial (2001, 2003), the Schirn shows the most comprehensive survey of Carsten Nicolai to date. As a musician, producer, and organizer of events, Carsten Nicolai a.k.a. "noto" a.k.a. "alva noto" has participated in important festivals such as the Sonar Festival (Barcelona 1997), *ars electronica* (Linz 1997, 2000 *prix ars electronica* for digital music), or *transmediale* (Berlin 2000). His label "noton" founded in 1994 merged with Olaf Bender's and Frank Bretschneider's Chemnitz label "Rastermusic" to "raster-noton" which is one of today's most important platforms for minimal electronic music. Due to its uncompromising light-sound networking, the label structure of "raster-noton" again links the visual and the acoustic. Performances by Carsten Nicolai and musical events will accompany the exhibition in the Schirn.

WEBSITE: Additionally, www.antireflex.de will go online with the opening of the exhibition. Reflecting the duality of the real show, this new website enables users to immediately experience the character of Carsten Nicolai's works. Starting from an animated page with optical effects, users can move through the virtual exhibition space and get information on individual works at certain points. The website was designed and realized by Neue Digitale. Agency for Digital Branding, which is also the Schirn's media partner for the exhibition.

CATALOGUE: Carsten Nicolai. *anti reflex*. Edited by Max Hollein, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. With a preface by Max Hollein and contributions by Magnus Haglund and Yuko Hasegawa, as well as explanatory notes on Carsten Nicolai's works. German/English, 200 pages, 140 color illustrations, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne 2005, ISBN 3-88375-891-4, 29 € (Schirn) / 34 € (book store).

VENUE: SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, D-60311 Frankfurt.

EXHIBITION DATES: 20 January – 28 March 2005. **OPENING HOURS:** Tue, Fri–Sun 10 am – 7 pm, Wed and Thur 10 am – 10 pm. **INFORMATION:** www.schirn.de, e-mail: welcome@schirn.de, phone: (+49-69) 29 98 82-0, fax: (+49-69) 29 98 82-240. **ADMISSION:** 7 €, reduced 5 €. **CURATOR:** Max Hollein. **PROJECT MANAGEMENT:** Susanne Modelsee. **SPONSORED BY:** Kulturstiftung der Länder, Merck KGaA. **ADDITIONAL SUPPORT BY:** Schott AG, EAS GmbH. **MEDIA PARTNERS:** Acht Frankfurt GmbH, Neue Digitale. Agency for Digital Branding, plan.F – Das Veranstaltungsmagazin der Frankfurter Rundschau, DE:BUG; u_Spot Kunstmagazin.

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