

Since the opening of the Kunstmuseum Appenzell in September 1998, the art collection of the Heinrich Gebert Kulturstiftung has been significantly expanded through acquisitions and donations. In 2022/23, the Foundation shows a poetic-critical retrospective of two decades of exhibition and collection activities in both houses, the Kunstmuseum and the Kunsthalle. In collaboration with the artists Regula Engeler and Jochen Heilek, Roland Scotti offers a varied journey through a cross-universe in all the rooms of the institution, in which two exhibitions communicate with each other and with the public.

«der welt viel tiefe welten» + collecting | revisited

6.11.22 — 5.3.23

The intervention by Engeler and Heilek — a photographic trace in the Kunstmuseum, an acoustic trace in the Kunsthalle — forms the thread of a multi-layered narrative. The collaboration is dedicated to associations of thoughts and feelings that arise when seeing a seemingly old familiar art collection again: From questions about collection strategies to a discussion of the presumed, and in some cases debatable, qualities of being an artist.

The art narrative is directly linked to the novel *Räuber* (1925/1972) by the author Robert Walser (1858–1956). Engeler and Heilek have examined and paradigmatically updated the «artist novel» in a long-term project in their aesthetic media — film, photography, text work: the «robber» as an outsider, the «robberess» as a creative thief of realities, «robber»/«robberess» as failing visionaries, as no-goods, as border crossers, but above all as an ironic, playful counter-design to some existences that do not want to/cannot dream, conceive or shape a past, hardly any present and certainly no future — who rarely live through «the word's many deep worlds».

Like Robert Walser's ultimately romantic Microgram, which revolves around the inner, outer and in-between worlds of a fractured yet dazzling figure, the interplay between the women artists and the art collection unfolds a kaleidoscopic narrative. The contrapuntal juxtaposition of a concentrated selection of works, Engeler's photographs and Heilek's soundtrack creates

its own nodes — links, entanglements between the aesthetic autonomy of individual artworks, the general history of art from 1900 to the present day — and our horizon. As a subtext, the chronicle of modern art resonates in the fabric: «The forms of art record the history of mankind more fairly than the documents».

The Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle are themselves testimonies, but also witnesses, to the complexity of the dismissive-enthusiastic approach to modern and contemporary art. A chasm that is bridged by this exhibition: a link from mere contemplation to comprehending insight — for «art is rationality that criticises it without evading it»; or to put it more coolly: «In the midst of prevailing utilitarianism, art at first really has something of utopia as the other, excluded from the gears [...], not subjected to the process of reality.»¹

¹ Theodor W. Adorno: *Gesammelte Schriften*.
Bd. 12: *Philosophie der neuen Musik*. 1975, S. 47
Bd. 7: *Ästhetische Theorie*. 1970, S. 87 und S. 461

Publications on the exhibition

«Sammlung», 110 pages with collection inventory
and an introduction by Roland Scotti.
Museum price: CHF 12.–

Regula Engeler, «der welt viel tiefe welten»
86 photographs, texts by Regula Engeler, Jochen
Heilek and Roland Scotti, 96 pages. Steidl/Göttingen.
Museum price: CHF 28.–

Publications and Exhibition are supported by:
– Bertold Suhner-Stiftung, Herisau
– Kulturförderung des Kantons St. Gallen
– Kulturförderung Appenzell Ausserrhodens;
– Innerrhoder Kunststiftung
– Steinegg Stiftung, Herisau
– Hans und Wilma Stutz Stiftung, Herisau
– Dr. Fred Styger Stiftung, Herisau

The tour begins outside. Depending on where you start, you will first encounter Spallo Kolb's *uniform* at the → **Kunsthalle** (KH), accompanied by Erwin Rehmann's *Kugelraum/Strahlkern*. Or at the → **Kunstmuseum** (KMA) you will encounter Kerim Seiler's *Lichtorgel*, George Rickey's *Zwei Linien*, Gottfried Honegger's *Pliage* or Fausto Melotti's *Sonnenauf- und -untergang*. This provides thematic and formal fields that are continued in the interiors. In addition to a focal point of the collection, sculpture, these works represent the range from figuration to kinetics, from constructive to intuitive form-finding, from faith in the future to criticism of civilisation, from rationality to poetry. In the interiors of KH and KMA, Alexander Calder's mobile *Drei flache schwarze Formen*, Miriam Prantl's digital composition *Lichtpunkt*, Andrea Ostermeyer's soft sculpture *Silikonbeutel* and Hans Josephsohn's erotically connoted *Künstlerwerkstatt* expand the finding of form: between craft, object and concept — often charged with existential to rationalist metaphor.

In the → **KMA**, Regula Engeler's *photographs*, exposed and developed directly on the walls, meander through the 10 cabinets, sometimes reminiscent of painting, graphics, graffiti, abrasions — but essentially apparitions from another time, a labyrinth of memories and premonitions: «that this is the space she has not seen, half the world underground, with half an eye somewhere else» (Regula Engeler). Landscapes, superimpositions, buildings, paths, stairs, reflections, thickets, duplications — each picture a plastic event, a surprise, a question, also the question of the possibilities of precise failure: reflected in the works of the collection, which were placed in relation to the creative foray.

In → **Room 1**, compositions and landscapes by Carl Walter Liner, partly images, partly visions. But what is what, where are the homelands, the places of longing? Possibly where *Der Reisende* Melotti's is on his way to. To the temptations of the arts, to the playground of hedonists? Selim Abdullah and Kerim Seiler realise both in → **Room 2**: as a movement into a freedom, as a monument for and against a leisure society.

In → **Room 3**, the search for, or rather the invention of, the middle, the measure, a ratio that is emotionally grounded. Spatial folds, nets, measurements, steel drawings by Prantl, Klaus Schmitt, Frank Badur, James Licini: «The profound is the air» (Eduardo Chillida). Or is the profound to be found in self-reflection or self-expression, as Nesa Gschwend's *Selbstporträts* or Gertrud von Mentlen's *Vergehen* in → **Room 4** visualize? Departure, love, death, Hugo Weber and Gschwend claim in → **Room 5**, are existential realities, stored in works of art — expressions of an inward listening that turns the inner world outward, just as the *Einfache Horcher* by Rolf Iseli internalises the outer world. Fridays that spread endlessly; works that live on and on: Jochen Stenschke in → **Room 6**.

In the → **Annex**, Christian Hörler's response to Chillida's remark: *Stolen an den Stiefeln*, the airspace monitored by Gerold Tagwerker's *scan.portrait*, proof that we and the world are transcendent. And sentimentally exuberant, just as Louis Soutter's *flower still life* in → **Room 7** proliferates into the universally human or Beat Zoderer's *Alte Blaue Rose* ironises

any artistic intention as an irredeemable promise of romanticism, of aesthetics. The intangible, the incomprehensible as the core of art in → **Room 8**, crystalline and bodiless at the same time: *Gemini Green* by Hanna Roeckle. Just to admire, to wonder at, to flatter the eyes, condensed in Wolfgang Nestler's *Vogelei* — pure surface, protective shells. Like Jim Dine's *drinking gowns* in → **Room 9**, which can be stand-ins for the vulnerable body, the wounded soul, but are above all carriers of wonderful, multi-layered colour emulsions. There, in the material, in the handling, being is interwoven and suspended — a calculated but endless space in between: Jonathan Bragdon and Matias Spescha. The *Spiegel an der Wand* by Katharina Büche, the icy blue-pink pigment by Ty Waltinger in → **Room 10** bind the fleeting perception — precisely because they allow for empty spaces, unoccupied areas, just as the «Paradise» — central perspective vanishing point in baroque gardens — opens up a projection space for the spiritual, quite similar in form to the final image of Regula Engeler's filmic choreography.

In the → **KH**, Jochen Heilek opens up a linguistic space on many levels, an acousmatic signal, a depth of perception: women's voices speaking passages from Walser's *Räuber*, unexpectedly in the art café, in the Ringofen (annular kiln), in the art library, on the 3rd floor, upper floor of the old building, constantly in the main hall on the ground floor — there in harmony with a word projection and paintings — the second focus of the collection — by Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Sean Scully, Theodoros Stamos, Stefan Steiner and Markus Weggenmann: «One can see seeing (regarder voir) but not hear hearing» (Marcel Duchamp).

Above all, man | woman could look away here, in the museum-like place, but hardly ever listen away. Every articulated letter, every swallowed syllable, every spoken text becomes a commentary on what can be seen and felt, on what is visually and haptically perceived — a guide to our situation as viewer and actor at the same time: «Eye-catching | temporary» (Jochen Heilek).

Roland Scotti, November 2022

