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Exhibition on contemporary self-portraits

March 10–May 29, 2016

Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

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Germany

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The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is presenting an exhibition with self-portraits by contemporary artists from March 10 to May

29, 2016. The show features 40 international positions in painting, photography, video, sculpture, and performance. Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, including works by artists such as John Bock, Eberhard Havekost, Alicja Kwade, Mark Leckey, Nam June Paik, Pamela Rosenkranz, Rosemarie Trockel, and Erwin Wurm.

What does one expect from a picture that is supposed to be a self-portrait? Strictly speaking, the ingredients are clear-cut. They have been tried and tested for centuries. Artists explore their faces in the mirror and render this experience in a portrait. The modern era spawned countless self-portraitists from whom nothing less than naked self-affirmation was to be expected in their exploration of their self. And today? Artists no longer show their faces to the viewer. They leave self-revelation behind, retreat from view, pursue less direct approaches—and distance themselves from their own self. We often only know that these are self-portraits because the titles tell us so: Imi Knoebel presents a collection of utensils as a *Selbstportrait mit Pappkarton* (Self-Portrait With Cardboard), and Gabriel Kuri a combination of insulating material and a shell. Abraham Cruzvillegas renders personal documents unreadable by overpainting them and calls it a “blind self-portrait,” while instead of portraits, Ryan Gander shows the palettes he allegedly used to paint them. Günther Förg portrays himself descending a stairway without a head, Wolfgang Tillmans shows only his knee, Pawel Althamer nothing but his clothes. Michael Sailstorfer writes his name in uppercase letters, Sarah Lucas nearly kicks the viewer in the face, and Florian Meisenberg lets us take a peek at his smartphone livestream.

“We can safely say today that staged self-presentation has become a mass phenomenon of a culture devoted to making impressions. Artists have responded by developing unorthodox, experimental, and humorous strategies for the purpose of questioning the ubiquity and overcoding of the human image in our media society. They confront us with the mirror. The exhibition takes up the question of the role of staging the self first addressed in the highly acclaimed show *PRIVACY* presented in 2012. Thus the exhibition offers visitors yet another opportunity for critical reflection on their own relationship to the media,” notes Max Hollein, director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

Contemporary self-portraits are ironic, experimental, and deconstructive. The times in which the artist could place himself without irony at the center of attention in a picture are evidently over. And the general conditions governing the production of such portraits have undergone sweeping changes. For the first time in the long chain of tradition, the self-portrait has gained a broad foothold as an everyday cultural technique and become accessible to everyone. Thus as an exclusive product of artistic subjectivity, it is now history. Self-portraiture without the self, portraits without faces, a crisis of representation—the self-portrait has bid farewell to the illusion of reality. Mimesis is avoided, the outer surface concealed. The exhibition traces the iconoclasts of the self on their quest for a contemporary form of self-portraiture.

Dr. Martina Weinhart, curator of the exhibition, explains: “Solidly supported by various philosophical and sociological theories and developments dating back to the '60s and '70s, today most artists still have serious doubts about the representability of the self. The consequences are evident: multiple selves, fractal subjects, nomadic thinking without a subject, difference, fissure, and scattering of the subject in language. Above all, these complex thoughts block convenient avenues of access to self-representation, such as the quest for privacy, autobiography, or psychobiography. All of this shakes the tradition-laden genre of the self-portrait to its foundations.”

Concurrent with the presentation of his work entitled *Out of Office* (2016), Florian Meisenberg has realized a digital art project on the Schirn's [website](#): an intimate self-portrait created from a complex collection of data.

Add the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt on Snapchat: [schirnsnaps](#).

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Press material: www.schirn.de/en/ (texts, images, and films for download under PRESS)

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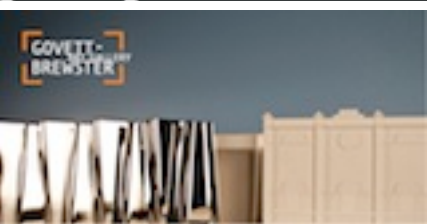
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