

Press Release

Future Light

MAK, Vienna
Kunsthalle Wien Museumsquartier
Off-site Commissions, Vienna

Exhibition Venue MAK Exhibition Hall, MAK FORUM
 MAK, Weiskirchnerstraße 3, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates 11 June – 4 October 2015
Opening Hours Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
 Free admission on Tuesdays 6–10 p.m

How come some features of the old Enlightenment have crept back and are now being revisited in art, activism, and theory? Why now, after just about a century problematizing, questioning and opposing its legacy? Perhaps it is an ever more economized, fragmented, privatized, and surveilled existence where, for instance, taxpayers are forced to compensate for the crimes of financial speculation and the gap between the rich and the poor is rapidly increasing. It now becomes enticing to return to some fundamental notions and phenomena inherited from the struggle for universal emancipation: the light of reason and rationality, the individual subject, and the public sphere. They point to a wish to explore vision from its very basics—as if to try to see anew, to radical transformations of desire and to challenges to ownership and property relations as we know them. And to do so while not losing sight of the future, in the midst of parallax views, in light of the hyper-contradictions of our time. A future beyond pre-emptive and algorithmic forecasting. Art has after all this capacity to function as part seismograph and part sniffer dog, detecting things not yet seen, gelled and shaped in other parts of society, creating new imaginaries. Whether utopian or dystopian, or an unclear mix of the two.

These basic notions in radically mutated forms seem to indicate a future affected by an emerging movement toward a new enlightenment, conscious of the violent heritage of the old one in whose name atrocities have been committed over the centuries. It is post-enlightenment, not as in “radical rupture” but as in “working through” some of its characteristics. This time it is acknowledging the tensions and contradictions of the enlightenment baggage, trying not to give up on the future while being embedded in the current condition of “retrotopia” where the past in general and “memorialism” in particular loom large.

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Thus, three strands of thought and action have crystallized within the framework of *Future Light*: non-penetrating light, the individual subject as reworked by the politics of queer-feminism and its polymorph desires, and the public sphere reconceived through and as commons and commoning. Each strand is taking shape in a different institutional and spatial setting, accompanied by a reader entitled *Future Light* and the mini-symposium *Politics of Shine* (Saturday, 13 June 2015, 2:30–6 p.m., MAK Exhibition Hall; by Tom Holert and Brian Kuan Wood with Céline Condorelli, Metahaven and Natascha Sadr Haghghian), and partly prepared in a closed workshop in October 2013 as well as in a series of public MAK Nite Labs at the MAK.

Future Light: Escaping Transparency

Within contemporary art, rather than the penetrating light that gives clarity and transparency, there is the reflected and refracted light that creates opacity, abstraction, and shadows. It is the light that goes on and off, that does not serve as a searchlight and yet is able to nurture new beginnings. Besides conditioning human visual perception, its new forms—for example the low-power LED light—are having other literal effects on the look and taste of plants as well as the physical and medical conditions of humans and animals. Furthermore, the future remains a point of orientation in many of the artworks. All this is being played out in the group exhibition *Escaping Transparency* at the MAK. Existing paintings, videos, sculptures, and drawings by seventeen artists is making up an installation without walls but with plenty of natural light.

There is a widespread belief today that light will do away with ignorance, power abuse and inequality. This trust in light is not unlike how “enlightening” operated during the Old Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, shedding light on dark corners where irrational beliefs, mysticism and other unruly phenomena hide. In both cases it is a penetrating light which creates transparency and visibility. Today it is put in practice as the light of surveillance, communication and speculation. Transparency is nowadays coming to be seen as a guarantor of many things, for example accountability and trust, and in extension for the free market and the stability of the capitalist system itself. The scholar Clare Birchall calls this “the contemporary transparency assemblage.” She argues that today transparency, through “the fervour for light,” has even become a pan-ideological democratic value which no one can afford to question. Thus, at the same time as “being transparent” remains important in any democratic context—“we have the right to know”—it has taken on some characteristics of a dogma.

All the while, light which creates reflections, abstraction, opacity, and shadow abound in contemporary art. Some of it has migrated into *Escaping Transparency* in the big exhibition space at the MAK. This light is non-transparent, it is refracted and operates obliquely. It is relational light, a

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sort of trickster light, it is light which goes on and off. Uncontrollable and mystical light deployed by and towards affect. It is light as carrier of commercial messages but also more obscure indications as to when something is visible and not. It is the light of reflection and endless reproduction in a condition where being visible is considered equal to being or to existing at all. Here the sun is the ultimate capital and yet no longer for everyone. There are works made of LED lights which affect plants, animals and human alike, whose body clock and hormonal system might change upon exposure. Other works show scenes of withdrawn extremism which are difficult to decode amidst disturbing reflections cast by cut glass. Discrete manipulation of generic and yet functionally determined photographs are accompanied by spatial dividers which allow for unstable transparency affected by both the light in the space and the physical presence of people. Incompatibility, affective manipulation and hyper contradiction in material and aesthetic terms impinge not only on vision but also on how meaning is created, from the bare bones.

Furthermore, a hovering sculpture playing with visibility and invisibility is affecting the very viewing conditions of the exhibition itself. Nearby is an aggressively overlaid image—to the point of abstraction—of a shady 18th century sugar baron and slave owner whose deeds are analyzed in a book reviewed in *The Economist*. Cascades of reflections created by small pieces of painted glass and mirror placed in geometric patterns occasionally shower the surroundings, at the same time as the slowly visible effects of bright light on old book pages partly covered by “an eclipse” can be encountered nearby. Simultaneously, white geometric steel sculptures with brightly painted corners activated by light climb the walls, and chromatic shine comes from a floor based giant bust of an eccentric writer who was preoccupied by humor, chaos, and the new.

There is also the kind of shine which creates aura and magic in humans and objects, including a metal modernist-looking shoe shine stand, reminding us that abstraction lies at the heart of capitalist aesthetics. A number of “magnets for lost shadows” are here to add shadows and reflections to art works in particular art museums in the Gulf region, and projected circles of color demonstrating “simple set relationships” at the core of collective actions are triggered by the movement of the visitors. Then there are the paintings where the paint “withdraws” in to the opaque linen, creating an ambiguous disembodiment reminiscent of screen-based images.

Perhaps Birchall is right when she says that each era gets the transparency it deserves. What that means for a future in which life is more likely to occur on planets with two small suns creating a saturated photosynthesis making vegetation black, is utterly unclear. For now it might be the moment to update the “right to privacy” to “the right to opacity.” We remember Eduard Glissant’s powerful call for the latter, rising from colonial sub-

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jects refusing to be totally knowable and therefore possible to be ruled by the colonizers. Here opacity is not the same as obscurity but simply that which cannot be reduced and contained in order to be controlled.

Off-site Commissions

Today many artistic and other projects challenge the established discourse on the public sphere by precisely reviving the notions of “the commons” and “commoning.” This often happens in response to failures of capitalism and the increasing withdrawal of the welfare state. With **The Report**, STEALTH unlimited together with Stefan Gruber revisit the history of Vienna’s self-organized urban movements in order to imagine an alternative future. *The Report* tells the fictional story of the resetting of some crucial moments in a century of opposing positions, including the “wild” Settlement movement around 1920, the “soft urban renewal” of the 1970s and the 2014 debates around the squat Pizzeria Anarchia. The startling content of the report is set to be leaked in a future only four years ahead, in 2019. The narrative has unfolded through a series of dialogues with contemporary proponents on the urban scene which took place in Vienna in the spring of 2015 and will be presented in printed form on 15 September.

In a new film Marysia Lewandowska is exploring the commons as experienced through the kindergarten as an early testing ground for sharing, belonging, privacy and withdrawal. The project was triggered by the work and life of the Viennese architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000), in which many of the contradictions of the 20th century are played out, and involves the voice of Di Zhang, a young architect in Beijing for whom “the communism of commerce” is a lodestar. Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri are arranging an “unworkshop” around the politics of food and food production, which have been central concerns for the artists in their work on commons and commoning.

The design, research and art studio Metahaven, who have developed the notion of “black transparency”, have co-conceptualized and designed the e-reader **Future Light** and the handout which connects the various parts of the overall project *Future Light*.

Future Light: Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz. LOVING, REPEATING

Theory and practice in the name of LGBT and queerness have for some time reshaped notions of the individual, subjectivity, and desire. If traditional notions of gender rely on heteronormative patriarchal formations of desire, then this linchpin is now being challenged in ways hitherto unseen, affected by synthetic extensions of identity such as hormonal drugs. Under the rubric of *LOVING, REPEATING*, Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz are presenting three film-based works at Kunsthalle Wien. The installations convey filmed performances where the tensions between the

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individual and the collective carry a high degree of theatricality. While curtains and fumes create opacity, glitter and wigs indicate glamour. The characters who feature in these dramas are consciously multi-sided, defying normality, including the law and economy. Neither being entirely historical nor present, they project ahead in a truly anachronistic manner, to new and unrealized forms of enjoyment.

ARTISTS AT THE MAK

Pablo Accinelli (Buenos Aires)
Doug Ashford (New York)
Claire Barclay (Glasgow)
Rana Begum (Sylhet/London)
Elena Damiani (Lima/Copenhagen)
Shezad Dawood (London)
Annika Eriksson (Stockholm/Berlin)
Matias Faldbakken (Oslo)
Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (Tehran)
Ane Hjort Guttu (Oslo)
Tom Holert (Berlin)
Philippe Parreno (Paris)
Amalia Pica (Buenos Aires/London)
Yelena Popova (Moscow/Nottingham)
Walid Raad (Beirut/New York)
Bik Van der Pol (Rotterdam)
Haegue Yang (Seoul/Berlin)

ARTISTS FOR OFF-SITE COMMISSIONS

Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri (New York)
Marysia Lewandowska (London/Hong Kong)
STEALTH.unlimited (Ana Džokić, Marc Neelen)
& Stefan Gruber (STUDIOGRUBER) (Belgrad, Rotterdam, Wien)

ARTISTS AT KUNSTHALLE WIEN

Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz (Berlin)

Curator: Maria Lind, Director, Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm

Funding:



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Ideas for Change

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