

Histories of our Time

On collective and personal narratives

13.9 – 10.11.2019

In a recent interview the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum advocated for more justice in our society, one marked by hate, envy, injustice and egotism, yet also by ignorance and a lack of broad education. She sees a key to greater international justice in strengthening one's own emotions in relation to controversial topics. According to Nussbaum, this emotional openness is created through an engagement with art, among other things.

The exhibition thus unites, on one hand, the major topics of our time, from Brexit to Trump, the distribution of power, migration, surveillance, gender (in)equality, moving personal biographies, to our approach to the world and foreign cultures, etc. On the other hand, the artists exhibiting show us a way through these major, pressing issues; a sensual, emotional entry point can be found to these issues that can help define one's own attitude. The goal of the exhibition is not a comprehensive survey of such topics but rather the possibility of a precise artistic perspective on some selected subjects of great importance to the artists, or an opportunity, given one's own background and biography, to challenge, contextualise and position oneself.

The 13 artists invited from the Basel region, Switzerland and beyond engage with just such questions and histories. Discussing how one's own family history, for example, marked by surveillance, immigration and a new beginning, echoes on for a whole generation (Zoe Leonard); to what extent the rediscovery of already 'rejected' historic pictures might define a different narrative for a country or even a time (William Jones, Sabine Hertig); or how anger as well as bewilderment and powerlessness regarding a country's political alignment and decisions, such as the current Brexit discussions, can clearly be expressed in a few words (Hanne Lippard); and how violence against women and international justice or injustice and lack of freedom can be presented with a high emotional charge, and how the distribution of power and strength is generally between the sexes within a society (Maja Bajavić, Dorian Sari, Artur Żmijewski, Katja Schenker). Other topics include how (art) history has been told to date and how we think of passing it on (Anna Ostoya); and how trained, or indeed ignorant, our view of countries, cultures and the memory of a place is, and how we might nonetheless understand and read the other, the new and the unfamiliar despite the knowledge we lack (Cécile Hummel, Anna Molska, Piotr Uklański).

At the centre of the exhibition lie these diverse artistic tales, personal narratives and engagement with recent history as forms of gaining (emotional) understanding. The exhibition comes about in collaboration with CULTURESCAPES, which this year focuses on Poland, among other partners.

Our extensive programme of mediation and events, with film premieres, a drama presentation, conversations, lectures, discussions, films screenings, tours, activities for families and our participation in Oslo Night can be found in the exhibition flier, as well as at kunsthausbaselland.ch.

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