

The exhibition *Hard to Picture: A Tribute to Ad Reinhardt* focuses on Ad Reinhardt's (1913-1967) largely unexamined work as a published illustrator, which ran parallel to his 30-year career as an abstract painter from the 1930s to the 60s. Featuring over 250 political cartoons and satirical art comics loaned from the archives of the Estate of Ad Reinhardt, New York, it is the largest presentation of this body of work ever exhibited. It is accompanied by *Abstract painting* (1956), one of the artist's minimal "black" canvases, a colour slide show, and a copious number of documents: a travel journal, pamphlets and sketches. It is their third presentation in Europe since the exhibition *Art vs. History* at Malmö Konsthall, Sweden, in 2015 and at EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland, in 2016.

*Hard to Picture: A Tribute to Ad Reinhardt* brings these works into dialogue with artworks by a number of contemporary international artists. The exhibition does not seek to represent Reinhardt's direct influence but addresses, instead, those intricate correspondences within practices and interests – biographical, methodological and conceptual – that preserve the influential ideas established by the American artist almost eight decades ago.

Reinhardt first developed an interest in cartooning as a child, refining his talent for drawing throughout elementary school before earning money for his illustrations in high school. This work-for-hire eventually allowed him to support his studies and career as an abstract painter, thus keeping his painting free of commercial considerations. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, his witty cartoons appeared in wide-ranging American publications, notably the daily newspaper *PM*, the Marxist periodical *New Masses* and magazines as diverse as *Glamour*, *Listen*, and *Ice Cream Field*. These activities were accompanied by his fierce commitment to politics, such as pro-labour rights and anti-war campaigns, that remained vital to his identity as an artist and a citizen. As illustrations for newspaper articles, they dealt with a range of topics from US domestic policies to World War II. In their use of collage techniques, they drew upon a variety of styles and techniques of early 20th century artistic movements, such as Dada, Cubism and Constructivism, and combined hand-drawn elements with cut-outs from 19th century engravings and other printed matter extrapolated from old books, a striking feature never seen in daily newspapers before.

Reinhardt's interest in caricature and visual incongruence resonates with Olav Westphalen's art world and political cartoons that he has produced since the 2000s for publications as diverse as the online resource artnet, the Swedish art magazines *Nu* and *Paletten*, the German newspapers *Die Zeit* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, among others. Inspired by a traditional crossover between fine art and illustration in Germany, his drawings introduce cartoon entertainment into the art world.

Westphalen makes biting jokes directed against order, familiarity and normalcy within the field of contemporary art – a field known to be increasingly self-regulated. They are uncomfortable and outrageous, drawing attention to and directed at the taboos and moral blind spots of the art world, not dissimilar to the deadpan humour Reinhardt used in his art comics. The series of works on paper *A junkie in the forest: doing things the hard way* (2012) – shown in the exhibition – moves into the more dysfunctional realm of comedy: it presents jokes without punch lines that become linguistic or rhetoric tools that turn sort of tragic. They were realised using a “gagmaster”, a device invented in the 1930s for lowbrow entertainment that enabled cartoonists to create jokes quickly by spinning three concentric wheels. Parodying how creativity and satire rely on something akin to algorithms of data analysis to shape fast decision-making, their painterly gestures in red and blue recall informal abstract art, translating high art into low art craft.

Along a similar vein, the works of Judith Hopf adopt the concept of “bricolage”. Her series of caricatural sculptures, *Erschöpfte Vase* (2009-2017), are overturned and emptied of their functionality, fatigued and vacant heads facing the viewer that could be seen as “disinterested spectators”. Her *Untitled (Man)* (2010) series pokes fun in an analogous way: the formal and aesthetic representation of our use of laptops is absurdly restructured. Nonsense is close to outrageousness, and this is what effectively shifts and disrupts the accepted norms and structures of art, leaving the meaning of her works in crisis.

Reinhardt’s critical satire undermined prejudice, instead promoting tolerance, progressiveness and equality in his cartoons. An example is the pamphlet *The Races of Mankind* (1943), initially meant to be distributed to U.S. troops to combat ethnic stereotypes in fascist Europe during World War II, whose provocative depiction of Adam and Eve caused scandal within the government at that time.

Race is at the centre of Kerry James Marshall's works: black pride, beauty, economic disadvantage, societal invisibility, parody. African and African-American traditions are confronted with the pictorial canons of Western art history and contemporary mass media. His prints, *Dailies from Rythm Mastr* (2010), are part of a serial comic-strip produced over two decades. They interweave scenes of teenagers in an African-American inner-city neighbourhood, where lawlessness has reached extreme levels. When superhuman intervention is called for, the protagonist, Rythm Mastr, shows up to teach the young heroes how to unlock their secret powers, which resemble those of the religious deities of the Yoruba African culture. The programmatic title of Marshall’s painting *Untitled, black*, (2012), instead, examines the way we look at abstract colour and large-scale formats as aesthetic reference to the systems of mid-century abstraction championed by, for instance, Barnett Newman and Reinhardt himself. Marshall’s “monochrome” sheds a different light on the

imagery of black, juxtaposing the reduced brushwork and large chromatic expanses of Color Field painting with icons and symbols associated with, among others, the history of the Black Power movement in America. Marshall's painting is confronted with one of Reinhardt's minimal black canvases, *Abstract painting* (1956). In these works, Reinhardt mixed small amounts of colour (red, green, and blue) into black pigment. The chromatic subtlety of these paintings remains such that their effects are nearly impossible to reproduce in print. Rather, these artworks demand close attention from the viewer in person, allowing the colours, tones and forms to gradually emerge over time.

Lili Reynaud-Dewar's installation, *Teeth, Gums, Machines, Future, Society* (2016), is a multi-media installation that explores the political, racial and gender stereotypes that make up one's identity. Elements that on the surface seem rather disconnected are brought together: the city of Memphis (famous for its music scene and site of Martin Luther King's assassination, who supported here a protest by African American waste collection workers in 1968), the iconic rappers' "grillz" (a type of decorative jewellery worn over the teeth), and the renowned essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985: *Socialist Review*) by the socialist-feminist scholar Donna Haraway. The core of the work is a film in which four stand-up comedians discuss these topics, embodying the most pared back type of performance using only their voice. Ideas transit through their bodies and, like their personal debris or the "grillz" used in hip hop culture, become public expressions of their identity, desires and consumption. This film is surrounded by posters and quotes from Haraway's post-humanist thesis whereby only cyborgs can reject all rigid boundaries of a stable identity.

Reinhardt's celebrated slide projections, resulting from colour photographs taken during a series of travels abroad, offered a universal reading of picture-making and art history. Sharing an affinity with George Kubler's book, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962: Yale University Press), the artist juxtaposed artefacts, artworks, and stylistic and architectural motifs in carefully montaged, yet ever-changing sequences, underscoring their timelessness and overlooked affinities. Reinhardt's ground-breaking approach anticipates today's ungraspable flux of images found on the Internet, thanks to algorithms and search engines whose contents are compiled on the basis of the similarities and "tastes" of web users.

To reinforce this perspective, both of Sara Cwynar's photographs in the exhibition result from groups of images that she obsessively collects, archives and reproduces. Digitally manipulated to foreground her interest in photography's power to deceive, their still-life quality is inspired by the aesthetics of antiquated studio photography and the unnatural cleanliness of commercial imagery. Cwynar's video *Soft Film* (2016) looks into the production and circulation of design and

insignificant objects, purchased on the Internet, to explore how, once discarded, they circulate and over time get stuck within economic circuits. The work also focuses with humour on a postfeminist perspective that makes both the sexism and counter-sexism of earlier decades appear dated, even kitsch, just like her digitally-obtained wallpaper, *72 Pictures of Modern Paintings* (2016), where all masterpieces are transfigured.

Reinhardt, in both his artistic work and in his teaching of art history at the university level, never lost sight of the role of education. His celebrated art comics series, *How to Look* (1946-61), focuses exclusively on slow, careful looking. It presents a didactic approach in which Reinhardt satirises the role of “explainer-entertainer”, directed not only at the reader but also at fellow artists. Subverting the pedagogical charts made famous by Alfred Barr, the first director of New York’s Museum of Modern Art, they introduce readers to the “difficult art of seeing.” The popular series appeared in the Sunday edition of PM newspaper between 1946 and 1947 and served as a platform upon which Reinhardt could adamantly defend the growth and understanding of abstract art in America. After this time, Reinhardt published additional art comics only occasionally in the art periodicals *ARTnews*, *trans/formation* and *Art d'aujourd'hui*, among others.

Like Reinhardt, who taught art history most of his life, Luis Camnitzer has worked for decades as an art teacher, cherishing a similar concern in art history as well as art education. His installation, *Art History Lesson no. 9* (2000), follows the path of an art history to be written from scratch, no longer imparted according to the accepted structures, where there is an authoritative relation between teacher and pupil, partly determined by slide shows that define what is good and therefore valuable. In this sense, the piece is a sort of “lesson” that takes the opposite course of art history and does not pretend to give any lecture. Chest, chair, books and stool, ladder, stacked pieces of wood and buckets of paint amassed in the museum's storage, all turn into precarious plinths that, allegorically, highlight the instability and the fugacity of knowledge, always in the process of being built.

In response to an invitation from Mudam Luxembourg, Álvaro Oyarzún has realised, on site, a “map” that explores some of the themes that embody the artistic universe of Reinhardt and his posthumous influences. The works of this artist combine intricate drawings and elliptical inscriptions that he brings together in large, organic compositions. Their dynamic lines recall continents, islands and peninsulas, while the scraps of text evoke the complex representation of information found in an encyclopaedia. However, they have no apparent order and appear fractured, contradictory and historically anachronistic. They are mind maps whose itineraries parallel the crisis of art with that of the artist's personal breakdown.

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