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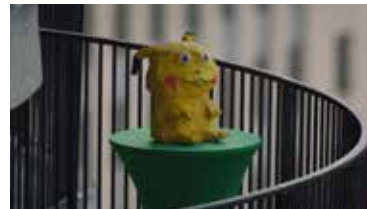
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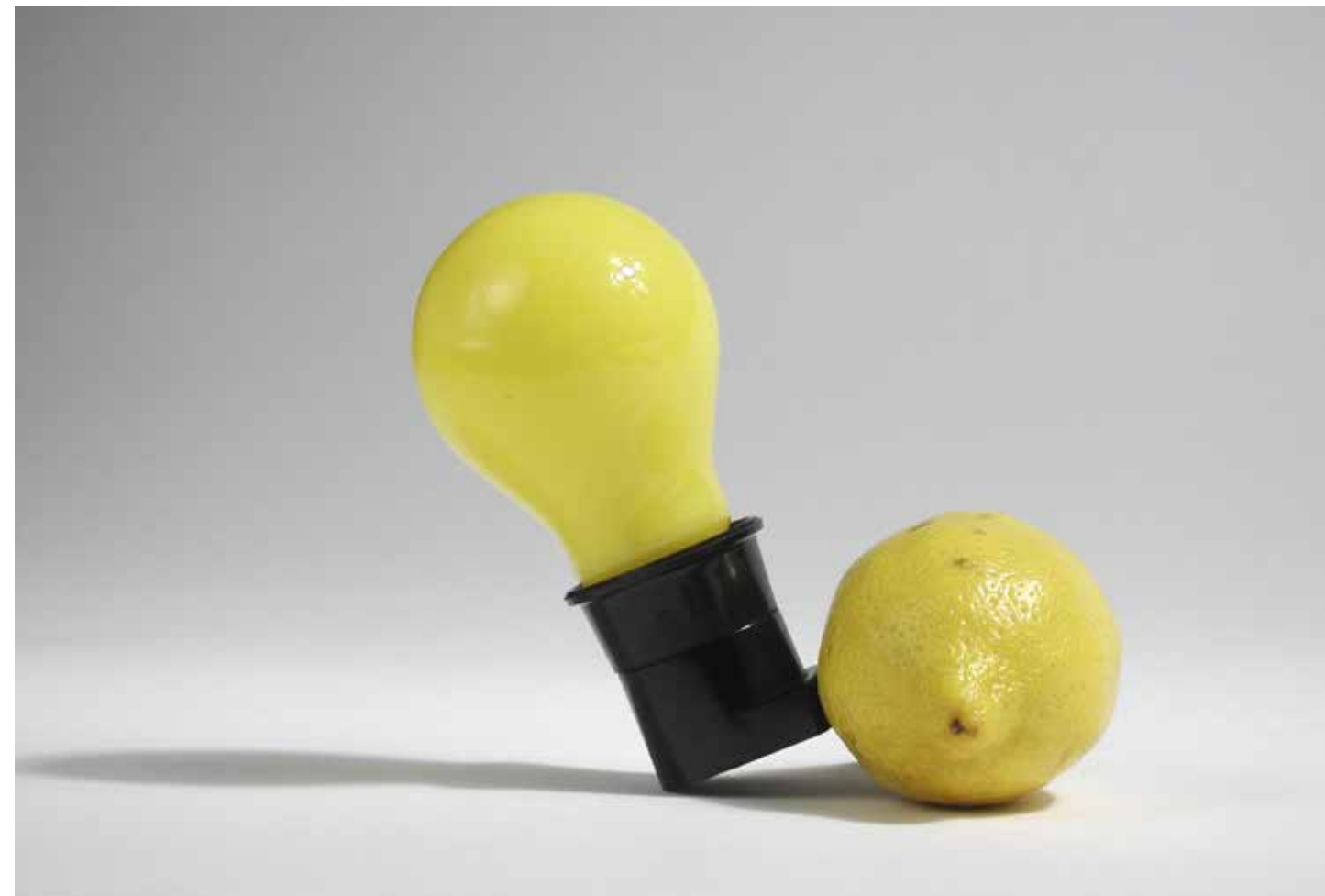


13 “Museum”
MMK, Frankfurt
by William Kherbek

Titling an exhibition “Museum” is nothing if not an ambitious gesture. At a moment when art institutions are being rigorously critiqued and interrogated by a generation of young artists and activists, placing the institution at the heart of an exhibition offers the viewer a timely, if risky, proposition. How does a cultural institution both exhibit and perform itself without succumbing to onanistic navel-gazing? The MMK offers only a brief note as a guide to its expansive tripartite show – one that includes artists as diverse in form and aims as Cy Twombly, Oliver Laric, Adrian Piper, and Jo Baer. I confess this introductory note struck me as unpropitious, not least this rather blasé passage: “Rather than critically questioning the institution, the focus is on exploring its possibilities.” Every institution is entitled to approach an exhibition in its own way, and this focus on the propositional aspect of museums at least ensues from an honest intention, but “exploring possibilities” can cover a number of sins. The overwhelming question for me was whether “Museum” managed to contain the multitudes to which the title alludes.

Among the most impactful works included in “Museum” were those that dealt with the physical space of the museum and the status of place in art. Cameron Rowland’s powerful installation *D37* (2018), composed of objects purchased at police auctions and shown in the gallery’s Zollamt annex, brought the politics of space, display, and vulnerability into intense relief. Jana Euler’s MMK *Triptychon* (2019) deftly wove the physical idiosyncrasies of Hans Hollein’s building into her contribution while posing urgent questions about the gendering of space (urgent even within “Museum” itself, as the show’s more than two-to-one ratio of male to female artists suggests gender

parity isn’t one of the possibilities the show was seeking to explore). Pamela Rosenkranz’s *Sexual Power (Seven Viagra Paintings)* (2018–19) also examined the dynamics of interior and exterior space, her paintings standing amid the detritus of the painterly act: buckets of pigment, gloves, and protective coverings, bringing the “messy” creative process into the white-walled chamber of contemplation. “Museum” also featured contributions from some of the usual suspects of institutional critique, the inevitable Joseph Beuys, as well as Marcel Broodthaers, the subject of one of Douglas Crimp’s – one of the great writers of institutional critique – best essays. Broodthaers’s contribution references his attempt to sell his own institutional creation, the Museum of Modern Art (Department of Eagles), at Art Cologne in 1971. In an age of extractive industry sponsorships and questionable senior staff appointments by notable museums, the work feels bleakly prescient. Several rooms in “Museum” are dedicated to the work of On Kawara, including a glass enclosure set up as a “smoking room” by the artist in collaboration with the MMK in 2002, in which a recording of Kawara’s *One Million Years Past–Future (Reading)* plays to visitors assembled in the purpose-built nicotine refuge. The artist’s meditations on the dynamics of time and futility – and indeed the ironies of institutionally accommodating life-threatening pastimes like smoking – highlight the painful dichotomies that define human intention in the face of time. Museums often sit on the fault lines of preservation and destruction (as A.K. Burns’s nine-channel video *Survivor’s Remorse* (2018) explores in relation to the life of the artist and activist David Wojnarowicz); in creating a space for objects to endure, often ways of life and people can be devalued. Though it is not necessarily the exhibition’s intention to “critically question” the institution, happily the artists included never shied away from doing so.



13 Joseph Beuys, *Capri-Batterie*, 1985. Photography by Axel Schneider. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2019. Courtesy of MMK–Museum of Modern Art, Frankfurt.

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14 KAAREL KURISMAA
“The Old Man and the Musical Score”
Temnikova & Kasela, Tallinn
by Dorian Batycka

“The Old Man and the Musical Score” at Temnikova & Kasela Gallery in Tallinn showcases works by one of Estonia’s most important yet under recognized artists. Spanning nearly five decades of the artist’s career, the exhibition includes several new and reenacted works by Kaarel Kurismaa, whose diverse oeuvre includes painting, animation, public art, stage installations, sound, and kinetic art. As a survey of an artist who defies easy categorization, the show also maps with cartographic intensity the various artistic practices and media that have come to define Estonian contemporary art. Kurismaa’s impact on the country’s younger generation of artists is apparent too, including artists like Katja Novitskova and Kris Lemsalu, for example. His influence is not so much in terms of content, but rather in how conceptual approaches can be put into the service of pop sensibilities. Entering the gallery, one is immediately confronted with a large, freestanding white column supporting several dolls painted white. As in most of Kurismaa’s sculptures, *Amor Pillar in Retrospect* (1973–2019) is made with readymade objects, in this case old celluloid dolls from 1950s Leningrad, which the artist sourced with the help of gallery staff. The work is a recreation of a similar piece Kurismaa created in 1973, a time when he was collaborating with the cult progressive rock group Mess. Though art critics at the time tended to view Kurismaa’s works within the context of Mess’s music, the cognitive dissonance his objects manifested substantially enhanced the ritualistic atmosphere of their performances. Crucially, the exhibition also includes a number of Kurismaa’s collages, works that were made after the initial wave of avant-garde music and art collaborations started to die down in the late 1970s. During this time, Kurismaa’s creative pursuits also began to shift. Toward the start of the 1980s, while Estonia was still under Soviet occupation, Kurismaa turned his attention to animated children’s films, a career path that was not altogether alien to other artists working within the Soviet Union, including Ilya Kabakov and Erik Bulatov, for example, who in addition to working as unofficial artists, made the bulk of their income during Soviet times by illustrating children’s books. This inaugural exhibition at Temnikova & Kasela Gallery’s new space in the Kai Art Center building, located in Port Noblessner, threads together these and others elements of Kurismaa’s diverse practice, albeit in a way that unravels to reveal a sum much greater than its individual parts.

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14 Kaarel Kurismaa, *Reflection of Light*, 1982. Enamel, oil, cardboard. Courtesy of Temnikova & Kasela, Tallinn.
15 Andrew Norman Wilson, $Z = |Z/Z \cdot Z - 1 \text{ mod } 2| - 1$: *Lavender Town Syndrome*, 2019. Video still. Courtesy of the artist and Ordet, Milano.



15 ANDREW NORMAN WILSON
“Lavender Town Syndrome”
Ordet, Milano
by Camilla Balbi

“Something that feels like vision but does something your eyes could never do.” The voiceover of $Z = |Z/Z \cdot Z - 1 \text{ mod } 2| - 1$ (2019) seems to provide the best key to understanding “Lavender Town Syndrome,” Andrew Norman Wilson’s solo exhibition at Ordet, Milan. The Californian artist’s multi-channel video installation dominates the exhibition space, leading viewers into immersive and uncanny universes that challenge their sense of reality. Aspects of the installation run in parallel on a diegetic and formal level, producing complex stratifications of meaning. The artist’s voice guides us through a flow of visions, hybridizing personal memories with social, aesthetic, and metaphysical considerations. The architecture of Marina City, Chicago, and a childhood passion for Pokémon are juxtaposed with theoretical speculations: What happens inside of a Poké Ball, where matter is converted into energy? What remains of bodies, space, and form itself in a condition of absolute virtuality? Such questions are engaged on a formal level in the work; dematerialization takes the form of a technological switch – occurring on three screens of the installation – from traditional telephoto lens to “physically based renderings” (PBR) of materials, eventually reaching “limitless” images that are procedurally generated using fractal software. As the artist continues with his spoken-word reflections, the viewer is enchanted by a series of mesmerizing landscapes. This theoretical framework is enhanced by epiphanies realized in the exhibition design: the physical presence of natural fractal patterns – a display of broccoli for example – suggests mysterious relationships between natural immediacy and technological hypermediacy. Different layers of reality overlap; the borders of the real become blurred. A deep sense of uncanny seems to emerge as an underlying theme of Wilson’s imagery, as do simultaneous impressions of attraction and dismay. A papier-mâché replica of a Pikachu meme (*Pikachu*, 2019) provides a disturbing, gravity-defying figure – a Frankenstein of meaning produced by an incestuous merging of virtual and real. What’s left of human nature in these spaceless worlds, and how does it relate to our existence? As we ponder such questions, the “Lavender Town Tone” – a Pokémon music theme reputedly responsible for causing several Japanese children to commit suicide – starts playing. Wilson is not providing answers, but instead framing a question we can no longer avoid.