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LIFE~BOAT

Through our art interventions in public space we invite residents and visitors to develop another consciousness about their immediate surroundings. For us urban space is the ideal forum for public art as social sculpture; the passers-by are guided and exposed to figurative connections and social networks that may change their attitudes and accustomed points of view. In public space, much like the internet, a general audience can be reached and involved in disputes on aesthetics, culture and politics, beyond the secluded formal arenas of art.

Our art is principally devoted to exploring how the introduction of new media encourages different modes of seeing and experiencing one's surroundings, and how the intrusion of art into the sphere of everyday life exerts psychological influence on urban dwellers. The work has been shaped by interdisciplinary studies of how memory functions in the social sphere and how it is reflected symbolically in the space of the city. We question taken-for-granted categories of cultural identity, cultural transmission, and cultural memory by drawing new links among the arts, sciences and social sciences.



LIFE~BOAT is a show on boats and utopia. It addresses diverse topics through things related to cruising and boating throughout cultural history. It explores our relationship to and obsession with boats and the sea. The physical aspects of the uncontrolled, often dangerous, bodies of water are ever present as they create the psychological need for men to overcome nature's force. Water is a connecting *and* dividing element. The longing to reach an island, a coast, a promised land is stronger than the dangers and the struggle to get there. Therefore, artificial bodies are created in various shapes to carry and protect us. Boats are enlarged versions of our own bodies; they are metaphors for longings and projections where dreams and nightmares fuse into each other and provide telling examples of social and political hierarchies. Boat and civilization are closely linked to images of survival and wars of conquest.

Our goal for LIFE~BOAT is to reposition subjects in new spaces and contexts in ways that not only question dominant masculinist hierarchies and discourses, but also demand dialogues about the very concept of borders within Western cultural institutions, such as



western and oriental, civilized and primitive. Museums are collections of things -- collected memories of civilizations. In LIFE~BOAT, we question their content in relation to contemporary habits of collecting and display in order to restructure and change the role museums play in society. Post-colonial and human rights issues must also be evaluated in relationship to collections and their objects. What moves history? Where is history headed? For Adorno, the art object and the aesthetic experience of the art object contains a truth-content. In this sense an unprepossessed view of the object will create new dynamics between the object and spectator. The object will lose its aesthetic innocence, just as the viewer gains a critical consciousness exploring *the container of memory*.

The conceptual ideas for LIFE~BOAT are based on three major paintings by Watteau, Gericault and Leutze. We have collected and will interpret multiple subjects -- prints and drawings, maps and letters, pictures and sculptures, photos, fiction and documentary films, newspaper clippings, videos and advertisements, ship models and boat relics. Through these objects we encounter elements of familiar places in the most unlikely of territories and discuss cultural conversion in relation to cultural mobility. By using and exposing hidden depots we represent the spherical projection of the geography and physical boundaries of the U.S. and reflect this power to draw political boundaries and thus establish economic influence all over the world. This encounter of naval topics and objects is a *Wunderkammer*, a model of the world en miniature, which exposes cultural hybridity in an abstract kind of travel.



THREE FIGUREHEADS lead through the show: the art collector and supporter Peggy Guggenheim with her admiration for gondolas and Venice; the actress and political activist Marlene Dietrich with her passion for the captain's uniform; the actress Hedy Lamarr, who together with George Antheil invented the Torpedo Guidance Frequency Hopping Device in WW II.



THREE KEY PICTURES are departing points for the show: Watteau's *Embarkation for Cythera* (1719) in Berlin (Charlottenburg Palace), Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) in Paris (Louvre) and Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851) in New York City (Metropolitan Museum). Too precious to travel, their images will be transformed, implying their connection to history and present topics.



Watteau's "Embarkation for Cythera", 1719
UTOPIA / CRUISING / LOVE BOAT



Gericault's "Raft of the Medusa", 1819
DISASTER / BOAT PEOPLE / RACISM



Leutze's "Washington Crossing the Delaware", 1851
POLITICS / WAR / LEADERSHIP



We open the discussion on utopia, drama and politics by questioning these pictures, drawing lines to contemporary issues, to cultural identity, cultural transmission and collective cultural memory. These eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings constitute three symbolic departures in the exhibit:

- (1) Utopia/Cruising/Love Boat
- (2) Disaster / Boat People / Racism
- (3) Politics / War / Leadership

The desire for living in a self-sufficient entity, a fully equipped boat, ready to take off and leave things behind is a universal dream. *Noah's Ark* is a biblical example of a container vessel on a rescue mission, while Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (Basel 1494) depicts all the human virtues and vices, which calls all those who devote their energies to discover strange lands to be among the fools, heading for Narragonia, the island of fools, a desired utopia where they'll find *gold isles and naked people*, but the ignorant passengers of that vessel are stranded in oblivion and don't actually care about the real things in life.



The society of the twenty first-century spends its spare time on cruises modeled on TV series like *Love Boat*, far different from Robinson Crusoe's island where the uncanny encounter with anxiety forces man to action and invention. Today, time-limited nomads are hardly shaken by the unknown. The luxurious cruise liner becomes an island itself, filled with controlled excitement. There is no self-invention other than the question of cruisewear and personal items and the diversity of choice of cabins and classes. Thrilling encounters during a hypothetical shipwreck are simulated in survival TV series like *The Island*, illustrating repugnant ideas about mastering a life in an uncivilized wilderness.

The structure of LIFE~BOAT is based on languages of intervention and on contrasts. We work with dialogs that connect positive and negative aspects of travel through varied geographic and cultural spaces, using pictures and language. The title of the show quotes Hitchcock's movie *Lifeboat*, a propaganda film from 1944 with an emphasis on moral debates where eight



< Max Ernst,
"Seelenfrieden", 1929
(from: La Femme 100 Têtes)

"Fighting Chair"
21th Century >
USA



vastly different people are stuck together in a lifeboat after a shipwreck. The slightly transformed title of our show imposes the relevance of film and media in the exhibition, challenging the spectators' cinematic recollection. It's an ever-changing flow of *close-ups* and *blow-ups*. Visitors will look at *horizons* and stroll around *islands*. Counterparts from different times and cultures cross paths, providing new insights on aspects of societies. The transformation and trans-gression of the obvious makes the obvious look *exotic* and the *exotic familiar*, creating a contemplative, seductive environment which takes the audience on a surprising cruise.