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MUSEUM LUDWIG

PRESS RELEASE

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John Dewey and the New Presentation of the Collection of Contemporary Art at the Museum Ludwig

Press conference:

Wednesday, August 19, 2020, 11 a.m., press preview starting at 10 a.m.

For the third time, the Museum Ludwig is showing a new presentation of its collection of contemporary art on the basement level, featuring fifty-one works by thirty-four artists. The works on display span all media—painting, installations, sculpture, photography, video, and works on paper.

Artists: Kai Althoff, Ei Arakawa, Edgar Arceneaux, Trisha Baga, John Baldessari, Andrea Büttner, Erik Bulatov, Tom Burr, Michael Buthe, John Cage, Miriam Cahn, Fang Lijun, Terry Fox, Andrea Fraser, Dan Graham, Lubaina Himid, Huang Yong Ping, Allan Kaprow, Gülsün Karamustafa, Martin Kippenberger, Maria Lassnig, Jochen Lempert, Oscar Murillo, Kerry James Marshall, Park McArthur, Marcel Odenbach, Roman Ondak, Julia Scher, Avery Singer, Diamond Stingily, Rosemarie Trockel, Carrie Mae Weems, Josef Zehrer

In previous presentations of contemporary art, individual artworks such as *A Book from the Sky* (1987–91) by Xu Bing and *Building a Nation* (2006) by Jimmie Durham formed the starting point for issues that determined the selection of the works. This time the work of the American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) and his international, still palpable influence in art education serve as a background for viewing the collection. The exhibition addresses the fundamental topics of the relationship between art and society as well as the production and reception of art.

Dewey's belief that art is of great social importance is also the basis of the Museum Ludwig's mission to be a lively place for encounters and exchange. It appeals to an audience that is as diverse and numerous as the art it houses.

Part of the current exhibition of contemporary art is an archive presentation that traces John Dewey's life and work and examines his spheres of influence. In addition, the featured artists were asked about their art studies and teaching: What did they learn about artistic work and being an artist while studying art? To what extent has it influenced their artistic practice and understanding

of art? What do they try to convey to their students, or what goals do they associate with teaching art? Excerpts from the artists' responses offer special insight into their work.

John Dewey's thinking and work inspire the selection of the works in the new presentation on various levels: In what ways are individual and social experience distilled in the works? In what form do they expressly or indirectly refer to social developments? What opportunities do they offer for involving visitors?

With the title of her work *Presentation of an Early Representation*, Gülsün Karamustafa underscores her focus on the multilayered nature of conveying and viewing art. In a large-scale reproduction, it shows an Orientalist motif from the sixteenth century based on descriptions by a European traveler: women in European clothing or unclothed are treated like goods by men in a bazaar. Karamustafa confronts the picture with questions that people often pose to her as an artist from Istanbul and which convey implicit assumptions and value judgments.

Art is experience, and engaging with it leads to new experiences: What Karamustafa's work reflects also corresponds to John Dewey's credo. For him, art played an important role in education because artworks convey diverse social conditions in a variety of ways. Trisha Baga's *Mollusca & The Pelvic Floor* from 2018 is another example of this. Visitors can immerse themselves with all their senses in a multimedia installation that leads into a Sicilian grotto, through the artist's cave-like studio, to the Philippines, or into the vastness of the cosmos. Based on her personal experiences, Baga addresses fundamental questions—for instance, on the relationship between body and technology—and allows visitors to experience them in the installation.

Another example is Julia Scher's installation *Security by Julia X* from 1991, a simulated surveillance system with cameras and monitors. The artist involves the visitors in her installation by recording them with surveillance cameras and simultaneously displaying the images on the monitors. Scher has dealt intensively with surveillance technology since the mid-1980s. She is interested in the psychological and sociopolitical effects of the culture of surveillance that is now a part of our lives.

Dewey assumed that a diverse environment continually challenges people and motivates them to further development. He viewed this as the prerequisite for enlightened, self-confident individuals who see themselves as part of democratic processes in a pluralistic society. Because art itself is distilled social experience, it has an important educational role. For this reason, artists such as Oscar Murillo emphasize the importance of Dewey's writings in their work. The installation *Collective Conscience* (ongoing since 2015) appeals to shared responsibility in an immediate, sensual way: the grandstand-like wooden construction not only serves as seating for life-size dolls in work clothes, but also invites visitors to sit down next to them. By doing so, they complete the picture, which stands for a collective conscience and solidarity.

As a pragmatic philosopher who directed his thinking at the social effects of his philosophy, John Dewey's focus from the very beginning was education. He formulates the central role of art in his writings *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Art as Experience* (1934). Dewey is not only known

as a co-founder of the New School for Social Research in New York. Especially in the field of art education, his influence extends from Black Mountain College to the California Institute of the Arts and the Whitney Independent Study Program. Dewey's work also left traces around the world through his travels and stays abroad. He spent three months in Japan and two years in China between 1919 and 1921. In 1924, along with five other international academics, he was commissioned by the Republic of Turkey, newly founded in 1923, to formulate recommendations for comprehensive educational reform, and he traveled the country for three months. He also visited the Soviet Union in 1928. His importance for re-education in West Germany after 1945, a democratic educational initiative by the Allies aimed at denazification, and for primary school reform there is less well known.

The new presentation of contemporary art is supported by the Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst am Museum Ludwig.

Curators: Dr. Barbara Engelbach and Janice Mitchell

The Museum Ludwig will be posting about the exhibition on its social media channels with the hashtag #neupraesentation.

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