

Universalmuseum Joanneum Press

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Where art might happen The early years of CalArts

Kunsthhaus Graz, Lendkai 1, 8020 Graz

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Curated and organised by Philipp Kaiser and Christina Végh for the Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover. In cooperation with Katrin Bucher Trantow and Barbara Steiner, Kunsthhaus Graz.

Exhibition design: studio-itzo: Martina Schiller, Rainer Stadlbauer

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The comprehensive group exhibition presents the legendary founding years (1970–1980) of the American art university 'California Institute of the Arts' (CalArts), which produced numerous well-known artists. The exhibition with the title *Where Art Might Happen. The Early Years of CalArts* opens up a multi-perspectival view of this college: in the exhibition, trends existing in parallel influenced by Concept Art, feminism and Fluxus are brought together for the first time with the school's radical pedagogical concepts.

The exhibition was curated by Philipp Kaiser (independent curator, Los Angeles) and Christina Végh (Director of the Kestner Gesellschaft) and was arranged as a research project in cooperation with the Freie Universität Berlin (Annette Jael Lehmann, Verena Kittel) and metaLAB (at) Harvard, Boston (Jeffrey Schnapp, Kim Albrecht). From July to September 2020 the group show can be seen at the Kunsthhaus Graz, where Barbara Steiner and Karin Bucher Trantow will strengthen the curatorial team and reveal links to Austrian developments.

They have also developed a special spatial concept together with studio itzo.

Free standing wall segments, not fully panelled, interconnect with and provide views through to the various sections of the show and emphasise the links existing between art practices, which up until now had been regarded as separate from one another.

The art university in Los Angeles – a radical higher education model

In 1970 CalArts, an art university founded by Walt Disney in Los Angeles (California, USA) opened its doors. In the early years CalArts developed a radical, trail-blazing higher educational model, which in its inter-disciplinary approach linked up with previous European and American models such as the Bauhaus and the Black Mountain College, equalising the relationship between those teaching and those being taught, and dispensing with a grading system. CalArts assumed a pioneering role with its institutional establishment of conceptual and feminist concepts in the 'Post Studio' professorship held by John Baldessari and the 'Feminist Art Program' professorship run by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago. At the heart of the artistic engagement were social issues that were relevant even then, such as the questioning of authorship, greater flexibility in artistic working methods, or criticism of patriarchal power structures.

Where art might happen. The early years of CalArts

The exhibition is devoted to the first ten years of the art university, bringing together for the first time the teaching concepts represented there with the artistic practices that developed

from them. On show are around 100 works of some 40 artists, including works presented in public for the first time. The historically arranged exhibition traces different situations in which art can arise. This is entirely in the spirit of John Baldessari, who was a leading teacher of the notion that art cannot be taught, but rather situations are to be created 'where art might happen', as he put it in an interview in 1992. Key figures such as Allan Kaprow, John Baldessari, Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro are examined, and their fundamental ideas on Fluxus, Conceptual Art and Feminism. Along with artworks and expertly prepared archival material, oral history interviews with 13 CalArts artists have been filmed specially for the exhibition, who as eye-witnesses offer personal insights into the situation at the time. In this way, the teaching methods, historical context and inter-disciplinary links between the artistic practices are rendered visible in an exhibition for the first time. The *zeitgeist* of the 1970s is also conveyed by stories of legendary pool parties, courses at the college in subjects like 'Advanced Drug Research' and the abandonment of grades and syllabi in everyday college life. Moreover, the interviews reveal the full spectrum of private and inter-personal details.

An inter-disciplinary school

It becomes clear in the show that within the various approaches at the CalArts, cross-media, inter-disciplinary formats were strongly represented in particular. Even painterly positions in the broadest sense adopted elements that play a role in film and performance, as can be seen in the works of Eric Fischl, Ross Bleckner, Lari Pittman or Mira Schor, and others. The inter-disciplinary nature of the university is clear in various artistic practices. This connection between Post Studio and Fluxus was shaped by such key figures as Wolfgang Stoerchle with his conceptual video and performance works, and Stephan von Huene with his kinetic sound sculptures. Links to the Post Studio scene as well as that of the Feminist Art Program can be found in the work approaches of such artists as Ericka Beckman, Mike Kelley, Jim Shaw, Tony Oursler and Carrie Mae Weems.

Publications

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive research catalogue on the initial years at CalArts (published in a German and English edition by Verlag Prestel / Prestel DelMonico, February 2020) as well as a small bilingual companion book with a text about Austrian connections. Moreover, the publication *Tacit Knowledge. Post Studio/Feminism – CalArts (1970–77)* came out at the Spector Verlag, which was edited by Annette Jael Lehmann and Verena Kittel in collaboration with students at the Institute of Theatre Studies at the Free University Berlin.

Artists in the exhibition:

Michael Asher, David Askevold, John Baldessari, Ericka Beckman, Ross Bleckner, Barbara Bloom, Troy Brauntuch, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Klaus vom Bruch, Judy Chicago, Eric Fischl, Simone Forti, Jack Goldstein, Douglas Huebler, Stephan von Huene, Allan Kaprow, Mike Kelley, Alison Knowles, Suzanne Lacy, Daniel Joseph Martinez, John Miller, Susan Mogul, Matt Mullican, Ann Noël, Tony Oursler, Nam June Paik, Stephen Prina, Charlemagne Palestine, Anthony Ramos, Ulrike Rosenbach, David Salle, Miriam Schapiro, Mira Schor, Jim Shaw, Wolfgang Stoerchle, Mitchell Syrop, Carrie Mae Weems, James Welling, Faith Wilding, Christopher Williams, Emmett Williams as well as Richard Kriesche, Margot Pilz and others as guests.