

Timm Ulrichs

Den Blitz auf sich lenken

Opening: June 11, 2010, 4-9 pm

Artist talk Timm Ulrichs with René Zechlin (Kunstverein Hannover): June 24, 8pm

Exhibition: June 12 – July 31, 2010

Wentrup is pleased to present a solo show with works by Timm Ulrichs (born in 1940), one of the most influential German conceptual and performance artists.

Even though Ulrich's oeuvre, created over the past 50 years, has been shown in numerous institutional exhibitions, it is in its breadth only known to a few insiders. The art historical significance of his work is undoubted and has inspired many younger artists. The exhibition at Wentrup is Timm Ulrichs's first gallery co-operation in a long time and contains both historical and newer works.

Already in 1961, Timm Ulrichs called himself the first living *gesamtkunstwerk*, and exhibited himself in a glass box. More than almost any other artist, he has measured, reflected, and positioned the world that surrounds him, including his own body. Influenced by the extension of art to things of everyday life, in the sense of Duchamp's ready-mades and above all of Kurt Schwitters's *Merzkunst*, he puts his own body – as a medium and object of art – into the centre of his work, and since the 1960s he has been describing this radical linking of life, the everyday, and the body with the term 'total art', thus consciously blurring generic boundaries. His works comprises installations, performances, sculptures, multimedia works, and images.

The gallery exhibition is devoted to a thematic complex which might be subsumed under the heading 'Existence and Threat', which also leads us to the core of total art. The installation *Projekt Damokles 1* was originally commissioned for the *documenta 6* (1977). It consists of a steel frame made of girders into which an additional girder is fitted with the aid of a forklift. With the aid of acetelyne burners at the side, this girder is heated, which causes the steel to expand so that it fits neatly into the frame. As soon as the fire goes out and the steel cools down again, the girder shrinks and falls to the ground, where a chair, as a stand-in for the artist, is smashed to bits. Like in the myth of Damocles, fate can turn against us any time. Whereas this installation was only exhibited in 1979 at Sprengel Museum in Hanover, the work *The End* belongs to Ulrichs's better-known works. The installation consists of a photograph of the artist's closed eyelid with its tattoo, mounted on a canvas, as well as a film which first shows a series of 60 'The End' closing shots from various film classics, and then

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the actual tattooing of Timm Ulrichs's eyelid, done in 1981.

Thus 'The End' on his right eyelid will also be the end of the film of Ulrichs's life. Ulrichs himself says the following about this: 'Once the moment has finally come when the curtain falls for good, when my eyesight disappears and my eyes are closed for eternal rest, the pulled-down eyelid will reveal as a last, surprising theatrical coup the final punch line, in my view quite memorable: the "Last Picture Show", presented with a weeping and a laughing eye, with a wink, the final performance of a life and a life performance intended to be spectacular and dramatic.'

How radical Timm Ulrichs is in his treatment of his body is also revealed in his 1977 action *Timm Ulrichs, den Blitz auf sich lenkend* [Timm Ulrichs, directing the lightning to himself]. During a thunderstorm, the artist ran naked across a field, equipped only with a more than 5-meter-long lightning rod, exposing himself to the danger of a deadly lightning stroke. The physical threat to an object is the theme of the installation *Bedrohtes Haus* [House under threat] (2004). Here, for the duration of the exhibition a steel ball attached to a rope circles a glass house. At the end of the exhibition, the electric circuit of the motor that keeps the rope rotating is interrupted, so that the ball slows down and then finally destroys the glass house.

In 1970, Timm Ulrichs's work was first shown in a comprehensive solo exhibition at Museum Haus Lagen in Krefeld. He participated in documenta 6 in Kassel, and his work was presented in numerous exhibitions at, for example, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Centre Pompidou Paris, ZKM Karlsruhe, Museum der Moderne Salzburg, and Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. There are many catalogues and publications about Timm Ulrichs. Until September, the private Museum Ritter in Waldenbuch is presenting a solo show by Timm Ulrichs, and in the autumn, he will be honoured with a double exhibition at Sprengel Museum Hannover and Kunstverein Hannover. Works by Timm Ulrichs are in numerous museum collections.

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