

The Dark Side of the Moon
The Abysmal in Art from Albrecht Dürer to Martin Disler
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**KUNST
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There is no dark side of the moon really. Matter of fact, it's all dark.
Pink Floyd, "The Dark Side of the Moon," 1973

"See you on the dark side of the moon ..." is a lyric from the legendary concept album by the British rock band Pink Floyd, which has remained a best-seller since its appearance in 1973. Thematically, the work revolves around the abysses of being human, around the anonymous power structures to which individuals in today's society are subjected. Beyond the social circumstances in the sense of Mark Twain's quotation "Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody," the dark side of the moon also points to existential dark sides. Both form the crux of this thematic exhibition centered around a unique series of sculptures and large-scale installations by the legendary Swiss artist Martin Disler (1949–1996). These are surrounded by groups of impressive and uncanny works by Damien Deroubaix (*1972), Marlene Dumas (*1953), Mona Hatoum (*1952), Jutta Koether (*1958), Josef Felix Müller (*1955), and others.

The contemporary pieces are augmented with important series of prints by old masters: the *Apocalypse* series by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) and *Les Grandes Misères de la guerre* by Jacques Callot (1592–1635). In his woodcuts, Dürer depicts the apocalypse as the fiery end of days—which, as Johannes Fried recently noted, represents "one of the foremost cultural driving factors" of the Western world. While previously this meant religious or cosmological ideas, today the concept of the end of the world seems to have become almost technically measurable and to be approaching menacingly, with vexing issues such as nuclear threats, climate catastrophes, global migration flows, and others. Hollywood has a special fondness for apocalyptic themes, as in blockbusters such as *Armageddon* (USA, 1998, director: Michael Bay) and *Deep Impact* (USA, 1998, director: Mimi Leder), both of which were fittingly released before the turn of the millennium.

By contrast, in his series of etchings, Jacques Callot depicts the battlefields and horrors of the Thirty Years War, whose drastic portrayal rivals media reports from modern-day war zones in Syria and elsewhere. This opens up a dialogue between old masters and contemporary works spanning centuries and an impressive panorama of social rejection, human abysses, and apocalyptic visions.

Stairwell / Upper Foyer: Martin Disler / FAMED

The extensive group of sculptures by Martin Disler is the conceptual point of departure of *The Dark Side of the Moon*; consequently, it serves as a brilliant beginning to the exhibition. Already in the stairwell, the first figures greet visitors and accompany them like mysterious shadows into the foyer of the darkened upper floor, where several of them have assembled in a ghostly gathering. They are delicate constructions made of wood, metal, and all kinds of found objects haphazardly held together with plaster and bandages. In shape and size, the sculptures evoke human figures in often extreme contortions. The plaster and bandages are reminiscent of breaks and wounds, which themselves contrast starkly with the ecstatic movements that shift with every change in perspective: the figurines begin a kind of visual dance. They simultaneously contain an existential dimension, as Demosthenes Davvetas aptly notes when he states that this was why Martin Disler's sculptures even at first glance can appear to be archaeological finds, evidence of a catastrophe in the distant past, or scars from a recent accident, or even—among other things—like the remains of a future atomic bomb strike.

Indeed, Martin Disler's sculptures deal with the contradictions between Eros and Thanatos, love and death, desire and destruction, as the artist presented them in his exhibition *Das Gedränge der Götter: Der Wucher des Menschen* (1987) in the grandiose Baroque hall of the Palais Liechtenstein in Vienna: "To me this is a frivolous space, a dance hall. I was most fascinated by its volume. I had to use it. I had to create new dancers for this hall, dancers of today above the abyss." (Martin Disler)

Disler's ghostly dance of the dead is illuminated by a single neon work by the Leipzig artist collective FAMED (founded in 2003), which literally translates the exhibition title into a light-based work. By blacking out the front of the irregularly bent neon lights, the artists create a light that only palely reflects off the wall and into the room. The artistic interventions of FAMED are often of an unassuming quality. They could almost be overlooked. And yet, behind their dark side of the moon lies a conceptual stringency and a humor that question art-historical and cultural values with surprising ease.

Room 1: Marlene Dumas / Marcel van Eeden / Thom Merrick

Blindfolded is the title of the twenty-part work on paper and the large-format painting from 2001 and 2002 by the South African artist Marlene Dumas (*1953), who lives in Holland. The lapidary title might call to mind childhood games, but proves to be anything but trivial or even harmless. The pictures evoke images from the media that have now become all too familiar, in which blindfolded prisoners are displayed in front of the camera before their execution. The artist uses pictures from newspapers and magazines as well as personal photographs as templates for her works. She turns the photographically precise portrayal into a decidedly subjective style of painting. Dumas's figures are not specified, and thus they transcend the short half-life of media images. They often appear in an empty space and interact with the canvas, are captured in it and almost provocatively subjected to the viewer's gaze. The artist places the viewer in the role of a voyeur and accessory.

Dumas's frighteningly sober portrayals of people occupy the same room as the unpopulated night cityscapes of the Dutch artist Marcel van Eeden (*1965). His large-scale drawings in oil pastels also make reference to historical photographs, and their tense atmosphere calls to mind the aesthetics of film noir and graphic novels. In the series *The Symmetry Argument* (2015), the artist explores the world of spiritism and occultism. These phenomena gained a certain popularity in The Hague, the artist's native city, in the 1930s, not least due to the return of numerous Dutch civil servants from the Indonesian colonies. The dark views of empty streets might show any place at any time, if the artist had not noted the time and date of the photograph on which each of the drawings is based in scrawled handwriting—almost as if this information had been imparted to him from the hereafter, equally mysterious and born by a heavy premonition of impending doom.

Five worn, "flaming" racing- and car tires and traces of asphalt – the materials used by Californian artist Thom Merrick for his works are every day industrial products or waste. The used slicks, arranged almost randomly standing, lying or leaning around the room are equipped with customary decorative bulbs, that resemble small flickering flames: *Blindgänger* (1993) reminds us of the famous installation *Yard* (1961) by Allan Kaprow (1927-2005). It therefore opens an additional, metaphysical level while addressing the evanescence of our existence.

Skylight Hall: Martin Disler in Dialogue with Albrecht Dürer and Jacques Callot

He called himself "a hunter of visions". He invented his life as a painter through drawing. "ich würde eher ins papier beißen als aufhören zu zeichnen" (I would rather bite the paper than stop drawing)." (Martin Disler) In six lengths of paper, the large-format drawing flows from the ceiling into the room, almost ten meters long and equally wide. The flow of pictures seems almost endless, a chaos of overlapping forms:

“The picture leaves the viewer unsure: the eye feels as if it has wandered into a web where attraction, repulsion, and abysses in its depths can be felt.” (Bice Curiger) With time, the whirl of lines and color fields begins to coalesce into individual motifs: a fragment of a body here, another there, two heads with the tops of their skulls opened, contorted arms, hands, feet, claws ... In one place a thick wedge projects into the white ground, while in another tentacle-like feelers spread across the picture as if seeking to grasp everything. *Die Mauer fließt, der Bongomann ist da* (*The wall flows, the bongo man is here*) is the title of the 1983 work on paper by Martin Disler, which the artist realized for the exhibition *Künstler-Räume* at the Kunstverein Hamburg with the intensity of expression typical of that time. *The Dark Side of the Moon* confronts this masterpiece of 1980s art with excerpts from two famous series of old master prints: Albrecht Dürer’s (1471–1528) *Apocalypse* and Jacques Callot’s (1592–1635) *Les Grandes Misères de la guerre*. Dürer’s *Apocalypse* is among the most important works in the medium of prints. In 1498 Dürer was only twenty-seven years old and had recently opened up his own workshop in Nuremberg. The *Apocalypse* series is not a commissioned work; rather, the confident artist conceived, realized, and published it with great success on his own initiative. In fifteen prints, 9 of which are shown in the exhibition, scenes from the book of Revelations, the last book of the New Testament, are translated into a series of masterfully designed woodcuts: “I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.” (Revelations 6, 1–8) In an era of political and religious turmoil marked by prophecies of the end of days—just a few years before the Reformation—there was a great deal of interest in apocalyptic themes. Dürer’s cosmological ideas about the *dies irae* portray the individual and collective abysses that Disler and his contemporaries formulated for the present day. Jacques Callot’s *Les Grandes Misères de la guerre* (1633), by contrast, seems far more frighteningly current and focused on this world. In his small-format etchings, the artist portrays the battlefields and horrors of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648). The work does not show specific battles, even though the campaign by Cardinal Richelieu to annex Lorraine, the artist’s homeland, to France certainly could have served as a model. In *Les Grandes Misères de la guerre*, Callot does not celebrate the heroic side of war—quite the contrary. Yet he not only shows common citizens as victims of violence, but also the perpetrators: the soldiers who themselves were later imprisoned or lynched or who ended up as crippled beggars. People are hanged on the gallows tree—soldiers as well as civilians, who can only survive by plundering, stealing, or begging.

North Side Hall: Josef Felix Müller

GESCHUNDENE KÖRPER / SPRITZEN / FEUCHTWARME GEFÜHLE
 WURZELN DER STÄMME / ZIEHEN / KNOCHEN ÜBER FELDER
 WEISSES FLEISCH / TASTEN / DURCH DEN FEINEN / NEBEL DER SINNLICHKEIT
 (MALTREATED BODIES / SPRAY / HUMID FEELINGS
 ROOTS OF THE TRUNKS / PULL / BONES OVER FIELDS
 WHITE FLESH / FEEL / THROUGH THE FINE / FOG OF SENSUALITY)

In 1986 the St. Gallen artist Josef Felix Müller (*1955) created four large-scale woodcuts published by Peter Blum under the title *Tasten durch den feinen Nebel der Sinnlichkeit* (*Feel through the fine fog of sensuality*), in which he used a chainsaw and other tools to cut the floor of his studio. The floor fragments were painted over with printing rollers by hand, and the prints were created by walking over the papers. The artist donated the “printing blocks” to the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen. Martin Schwander’s remark in regard to Müller’s sculptures also applies to his prints: “The quickly and impulsively carved surface, a continuum of wide, vibrating faceted carvings that do not allow (anatomical) details to be discerned, as well as the summary and highly typified aspect of the shapes of the bodies attest to the furor with which Müller

approaches his work in his balancing act. The sketch-like quality does not emerge from a stylistic position, but is the expression of the desire to convey the flow and intensity of the inner images without invoking a controlling and form-reflecting instance.” Severed heads and arms, headless bodies, unmoving pairs of eyes, and erect members layered over one another appear to condense into abysmal dream images: “From analysis and indictment of the social conditions of our lives, the artist arrives at an exploration of personal fate and the sources of the powers that—perhaps—direct life.” (Corinne Schatz)

Northeast Room: Raymond Pettibon / Damien Deroubaix / Marc Bijl

“I expect to watch the event from heaven. –President Reagan,” is written in bold letters in black ink above an expanding mushroom cloud, while the text continues on the lower edge of the paper: “IT DISTURBS ONLY THE BAD GUYS, ATHEISTS, HOMOS, COMMUNISTS, DEMOCRATS. NO TRUE AMERICAN IS AFRAID OF IT.” The Californian artist Raymond Pettibon (*1957) refers to a wide variety of pictorial and textual sources in his drawings, ranging from the Bible to literary works, codes of various subcultures, and media reports on current events. However, his work always revolves around clichés of the American way of life, which it combines with text fragments that expand the interpretation of the picture with an intellectual dimension, while also opening up conceptual breaks and gaps in the unbridgeable distance between image and text: “I think that the fragmentary character of the works meant that they could be read differently than a witty remark or a philosophical statement. I was more interested in how I could say something [...] something that somehow loses itself in the middle of the sentence without coming to fruition or fulfillment.” (Raymond Pettibon)

Pettibon’s drawings can in a sense be understood as an iconography of the apocalypse, as a fragmented, distorted reflection of a sick society. In his work, the American dream turns into a true nightmare that has since become almost unescapable in real life.

The French artist Damien Deroubaix (*1972), among others, cites Raymond Pettibon as a model, but expands his imagery to include important European elements such as the art-historical tradition of the dance of the dead or the printed works of Albrecht Dürer. In monumental paintings and large-scale sculptures, Deroubaix presents the postmodern resurrection of this pictorial subject from the late Middle Ages. This macabre dance is combined in a direct and unembellished manner with the formally reduced trash aesthetic of underground cartoons, elements of death metal culture, and the all-encompassing propaganda machinery of the present, which he ties together into striking tableaux of enormous visual power, as in *Die Nacht* [*The night*] from 2007: “The directness and the garish, obscene quality of these pictures not only reveal their own aggressiveness, but protest against the claim of superficial clarity of symbolic systems and the ambiguity of their use in society.” (Ralph Melcher)

The Berlin-based artist Marc Bijl (*1970) uses comparable strategies. Democracy and terrorism are commonly used words that the Dutch artist translates into colorful panels of text and images and thus isolates from any context. In the exhibition *The Dark Side of the Moon*, these panels are presented on a black wall, on which he splattered white bags of paint, as if a protest had moved from the street to the museum. Marc Bijl is fascinated by gestures and symbols of political and social discourse as well as mechanisms of social control, which he augments with signs and symbols of anarchy, punk, and gothic culture. Despite all these social abysses, the artist seems to have something like a shimmer of hope—or, to quote Rein Wolfs: “Marc Bijl is a romantic artist, through and through.”

Southeast Room: Beni Bischof / Jutta Koether / Steven Parrino

“Collapsing image ... collapsing picture ... collapsing monochrome ... collapsing abstraction ... collapsing history ... collapsing meaning ... collapsing structure ... collapsing ideas ...” The New York artist Steven Parrino (1958–2005) made a name for himself with unmistakable compositions: monochrome canvases are removed from the stretcher frame after the painting process and then reattached in a sculpturally altered form. This is not the case in *The What's* (1988), one of the artist's early works, whose monochrome black color is to be understood as a way of dealing with painting as a dead genre. They appear to place Parrino's work in the context of radical painting. However, his work breaks with artistic self-referentiality and is based on an interest in the realities of life like those influenced above all by American underground culture, which provokes the bourgeois order in its radical claims. To the artist, these include the American rock and punk scene, the milieu of motorcycle culture, the dark abysses of occultism and Satanism, as well as underground comics and films. These worlds directly flow into Parrino's drawings: paused comics, scraps of text and fragments of songs, as well as geometrically finely balanced structures or deep-black works on paper whose final form is due to the gesture of destruction.

It resists the idea that it is about failure. “It is about affirming the non-possibility, or what cannot happen, and not about covering up. It is an act of completely giving up to impossibility ...,” says the artist Jutta Koether (*1958), who lives in Berlin and New York, and thus approaches the apocalyptic mood from the other side, so to speak. “Conceptualizations of how we are to continue to resist ...,” is written on one of her paper works, which, presented on black panels, are combined into a sculptural ensemble in the room: *Untitled (Entourage)*, from 2006. In dark tones, finely drawn gestures combine with short, striking statements to create richly nuanced works on paper that range dramatically between private notes and public declarations. The artist, who wrote for the cultural magazine *Spex* for many years, draws her subject matter from the pictorial traditions of art as well as her interest in musical traditions or feminist approaches, which in art encounters an imagery that has traditionally been dominated by males. The St. Gallen artist Beni Bischof's (*1976) unrestrained creative drive manifests itself in drawings, collages, paintings, and large-scale installations. He translates spontaneous thoughts on social and political topics into bizarre and comical messages in words and symbols of disarming immediacy. Neither the banality of everyday life nor the dramas of the political agenda escape his gaze. With pencil, felt-tip pens, ball-point pens, or paintbrushes on paper, he creates comic-like outlines as well as polished black-and-white drawings on dense blotting paper, a selection of which is shown in *The Dark Side of the Moon*. In these works, Beni Bischof processes illustrated structural analyses with pictorial and textual elements from milieus such as gothic culture to create dark drawings of suggestive power.

South Side Hall: Miriam Cahn / Sara Masüger

Until the mid-1980s, the work of the Swiss artist Miriam Cahn (*1949) concentrated on often large-format black-and-white drawings that she made on paper directly on the floor with chalk or pencil, and whose expressivity captures the traces of her performance-like use of her entire body. *Kriegsschiff (Warship)* from 1982 exemplifies this approach. This work symbolizes the inhumanity of war as an anonymous machinery. In an abstract sense, it also stands for patriarchal structures that have shaped society and art for centuries. The male gender is accorded its own group of motifs, which include warships, terminals, skyscrapers, and rocket silos, while beds, torsos, and heads signify the female. Miriam Cahn combines the portrayal of personal experiences of pain, sickness, or death with an uncompromising attention to social conditions. *Untitled* is the sober title of the sculpture made of Acryl, foam, and enamel by Sara Masüger (*1978).

This presents itself as an irregularly shaped wall-like slab, whose shiny black surface shows numerous fractures and an angular opening that offers a view through the work. As one walks around the structure, a powerful form spreads out along the floor into the room. This appears to lend the slender sculpture a solid footing, while also adding an organic form to the “back,” which could even be read as a bodily fragment. With her sculptures—which here also include fragile hanging and wall-based works—Sara Masüger evokes bodies and fragments of bodies, which, in their delicateness, enter into a dialogue with Martin Disler’s ghostly plaster figurines at the beginning of the exhibition.

Collection Room: Mona Hatoum

The exhibition *The Dark Side of the Moon* concludes with an installation of video works by the Palestinian-British artist Mona Hatoum (*1952): *Don't smile, you're on camera!* (1980), *Changing Parts* (1984), *Variation on Discord and Divisions* (1984), and *Measures of Distance* (1988). These are shown on monitors, while the audio track plays on headphones. The monitors themselves stand on tables, in front of which the visitors can make themselves comfortable on chairs—though only physically. After all, this selection of works includes documents of disturbing artistic performances as well as two single-channel works created especially for the medium. The performance *Variation on Discord and Divisions* (1984), for instance, consists of several short scenes in which the artist attempts to clean the floor, only to spread red-tinted water over it. She attempts to cut eyeholes in the stocking fabric of a mask with a long knife. Later she sets the table with plates, then takes out pieces of raw meat from underneath her clothing, cuts them, lays them on the plates, and serves them to the audience. Her pioneering work, which began with provocative performances in the 1980s, blurs the spheres of the personal and the public, just as cultural or political exclusion are always evident in the individual.

Curators: Konrad Bitterli and Matthias Wohlgemuth

Nations Falling
To defeat
Warheads crushing
The Earth below
Cries of hell
Burning flesh
Suffocation
no way out...
Terrorizer, "After World Obliteration," 1989