

Media release
Zurich, 7 April 2022

Kunsthhaus Zürich presents 'Take Care: Art and Medicine'

From 8 April to 17 July 2022 the Kunsthhaus Zürich presents an exhibition of 300 works revealing how the apparently contrasting disciplines of art and medicine reflect physical humanity and the human psyche. It retraces key moments in medical history from the 19th century right up to the present day.

Health is a timeless human preoccupation. Concern with physical well-being in art is as old as art itself. The sensitive body is at once a working tool and object of observation. Taking their cue from works in the Kunsthhaus collection, six chapters examine the productive interplay of sickness and pain, medicine, care and healing through 300 exhibits, over 250 of which are being made available by more than 40 national and international lenders. Early examples date back to the 15th century, while the most recent are works from 2022 produced specially for the exhibition.

EXHIBITION IN SIX CHAPTERS

A large spectrum of media, from drawing, painting and sculpture to video, spatial installation and performance, is on display in this asynchronous and associative sequence. The main focus of the artworks is on physical infirmities. The themes covered include the 'golden age' of medicine, 'plagues and pandemics', 'prophylaxis, complementary medicine and self-healing', 'the diagnostic gaze and the hospital system', 'pharmaceuticals and cutting-edge research', and finally 'patients at the crossroads of the normed and singular body'. Familiar names from the past meet young artists in their twenties who address the broad spectrum and fascinating evolution of the discourse surrounding the sick body.

ALTERNATING EMPATHY AND DISTANCE

The aim of the exhibition initiated and conceived by Cathérine Hug is not to position art as the illustrator of medicine, but to set up a dialogue that advances our understanding of two systems that each constitute part of our society. By interpreting through the senses and intuition, art can play a vital role in helping us to comprehend intertwined systems such as the body and spirit, sickness and recovery, faith and science. Art and medicine are physically immediate and foster empathy – but can also create great distance between those involved.

VISUALIZING AND INTERPRETING

The most obvious aspect linking artists and physicians is the importance that both accord to images, and consequently to seeing. Image-creating processes have revolutionized medicine since the development of the ophthalmoscope and the discovery of X-rays more than a century ago. More recent examples from scientific history illustrate how aesthetic criteria can play a central role in natural science research. The development of the DNA double helix, for instance, for which the biophysicist Maurice Wilkins and molecular biologists Francis Crick and James Watson received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1962, was guided by both scientific and visual considerations. A certain creative, artistic drive is thus at work even in the sciences. It extends back as far as the Renaissance and even the medieval books of hours: in their desire to convey beauty as well as knowledge, figures such as Hildegard of Bingen, Leonardo da Vinci and Andreas Vesalius became the first to depict the inner workings of the human body. The goals of visualizing and interpreting have always united the medical and artistic professions.

MEDICINE VERSUS FAITH HISTORY?

It took a long time for medicine to be accorded the status it enjoys today; meanwhile art in medicine is, even now, not given the importance that it arguably deserves. The Church was inimical to the natural sciences in general and medical research in particular, since the latter, in its espousal of evolutionary theory, questioned the higher, divine world order. A meticulously compiled collection of examples dating from the 19th century – what Ronald D. Gerste has termed the 'golden age of medicine' – and beyond, containing large groups of items from the Medical Collection of the University of Zurich, the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich and the Musée de l'Assistance Publique – Hôpitaux de Paris, presents some aesthetically engaging milestones but also aberrations of medical history. Realia – historical artefacts not declared to be art as such but with a strong visual appeal – are placed in an associative dialogue with artworks. An undoubted high point in the interplay of art and medicine occurs when scientist, physicist or patient and artist are one and the same, as in the case of Andreas Vesalius and Georges Chicotot.

PROGRESSION AND INNOVATION

Events moved rapidly in the 19th century, not only in industry, mobility and communication but also in medicine, with milestones in antisepsis, anaesthesia and, consequently, surgery, epidemiology and diagnostics. As technology advanced, artists became increasingly interested in the processes of visualization in medicine that such progress enabled: iconic examples include the skull X-rays of Claire and Yvan Goll (1927), and Joseph Beuys's ECG in 'Otherwise we'll live without heart' (1965/1974). Improved hygiene, a better work-life balance and breakthroughs in pharmaceutical research along with wider access to medicine

resulted in life expectancy for men and women rising from 64 and 68 respectively in 1949 to 76 and 81 in 2002. Damien Hirst, in his pharmaceutical packaging displays and 'spot paintings', has engaged intensively with the nomenclature of life-improving and life-preserving factors, and in particular with their character as commodities. Titles such as '3-Hydroxy-4-Methoxyphenethylamine' are taken from the product catalogue 'Biochemicals for Research and Diagnostic Reagents'. Medical technology replaces Christian theology; gnosis becomes diagnosis. No work provides a more vivid illustration of the 'demigods in white' symbol than Duane Hanson's deceptively realistic depiction of a doctor during a consultation.

SICKNESS AS A CREATIVITY FACTOR

In recent times, artists have employed medicine as an integral design element, a kind of physiological brush of sensation. 'Medicine as brush' is undoubtedly at its most spectacular in the interaction with the fields of plastic surgery. Artists transform their own bodies into works of art or make deliberate changes to them that can only be achieved through medical intervention. Practitioners such as Panteha Abareshi, Sabian Baumann, Martin Kippenberger, MANON and Veronika Spierenburg also address and interrogate everyday hospital life from the perspective of the 'afflicted', and with regard to social pressure to achieve a 'normed' or ideal body image. In MANON's 'Self-Portrait in Gold' (2012) and Sabian Baumann's '4bein' (2011), this discrimination is countered by a positive gesture of self-empowerment tinged with humour.

PROGRESS RAISES ETHICAL ISSUES

Media attention has focused on ethical concerns, as seen in the global outcry following the misuse of the CRISPR-Cas9 method of gene shearing by the biophysicist He Jiankui. Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer Doudna, whose portraits by the photographer Herlinde Koelbl also appear in this exhibition, received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 2020 for CRISPR-Cas9. Life-sized sculptures of the bodies of people close to Marc Quinn, such as his own child, are made out of the medicines those same subjects have to consume every day, raising fundamental issues about the measures employed to maintain life.

There are also works created specially for this exhibition by Stefan Burger, by RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co), and Veronika Spierenburg. Burger researched the image archive of F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd. in Basel and some of its key figures for its corporate design, including the photographer Onorio Mansutti and the painter Niklaus Stoecklin. The historical material shown in the film is for artistic purposes only, is obsolete nowadays and should not be compared with the current context. RELAX has created an installation about the midwife Adeline Favre and the broader issue of care. Spierenburg, meanwhile, has produced a film essay about her multiple sclerosis and autologous stem cell transplantation that took place in autumn 2021.

The artists on display take us on a voyage of discovery through corporeality, sickness, pain and healing. Or, to put it in the words of another artist represented here, the dancer Anna Halprin whose life was itself shaped by illness: 'The body is living art. Your movement through time and space is art. A painter has brushes. You have your body.'

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue (published by Wienand Verlag, 274 pp., 287 ill.) with new contributions by Vincent Barras, Christoph Becker, Flurin Condrau, Georges Didi-Huberman, Cathérine Hug, Adina Kamien, Nicola von Lutterotti, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Muriel Pic, Linda Schädler and Agnès Virole. It is available in bookstores and from the Kunsthaus shop, price CHF 45.

ARTISTS

The exhibition comprises the positions of 50 artists from the 19th to the 21st centuries, with detours as far back as the 15th: Panteha Abareshi, Ilit Azoulay, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Sabian Baumann, Henri Bellery-Desfontaines, Judith Bernstein, Joseph Beuys, Quirin Boel, Louise Bourgeois, Rachal Bradley, Stefan Burger, Sophie Calle, Sabina Carraro, Georges Chicotot, Didier Clovis, Lovis Corinth, Joseph Cornell, Conelius Cort, Guglielmo Cortese, Josef Benedikt Curiger, Honoré Daumier, Constant Desbordes, Dietricy, Jean Dubuffet, Albrecht Dürer, Nicole Eisenman, Max Ernst, Adolf Fleischmann, Jacques Gamelin, General Idea, Ruedi Gerber, Alberto Giacometti, George Giusti, Claire and Ivan Goll, Michael Günzburger, Christoph Hänslı, Anna Halprin, Barbara Hammer, Duane Hanson, Keith Haring, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Walter Rudolf Hess, Damien Hirst, Ferdinand Hodler, Andreas Hofer, Hanspeter Hofmann, Gottfried Honegger, huber.huber, Cornelis Huijberts, Anna Jermolaewa, Hennric Jokeit, Fritz Kahn, Martin Kippenberger, Paul Klee, Herlinde Koelbl, Alfred Kubin, Jean Lepautre, Herbert Leupin, Lucas van Leyden, MANON, Christian Marclay, Michelle Miles, Shana Moulton, Thomas Müllenbach, Josef Müller-Brockmann, Matt Mullican, Bruce Nauman, Hermann Nitsch, Meret Oppenheim, Uriel Orlow, A. R. Penck, Herbert Ploberger, Maria Pomiansky, Marc Quinn, Marcantonio Raimondi, Arnulf Rainer, RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co), Pipilotti Rist, Ana Roldán, Pamela Rosenkranz, Nelly Rudin, Corinne L. Rusch, Katja Schenker, Talaya Schmid, Kiki Smith, Veronika Spierenburg, Jules Spinatsch, Lucy Stein, Daniel Spoerri, Lucy Stein, Thaddeus Strode, Edmond Suau, David Teniers, Pietro Testa, Oliviero Toscani, Rosemarie Trockel, Luc Tuymans, Varlin, Jan van de Velde, Jean-Georges Vibert, Andreas Vesalius, Lotte Luise Volger, Christine Tien Wang, Johann Conrad Werdmüller, Johann Josef Wickart and Nives Widauer.

Supported by Privatklinik Bethanien.

EVENTS PROGRAMME

Sat 9 April, 5 p.m.

GUIDED GROUP MSTRBTN

Healing Erotic Sound Performance, Talaya Schmid in collaboration with Anu Cato (sound).

With a valid exhibition ticket and for members CHF 4, otherwise CHF 10 / CHF 8 (concessions).

Tue 12 April, 6 p.m.

Innovative leaps in the history of medicine

Podium discussion with Prof. Monika Dommann (University of Zurich Department of History), Prof. Frank Jakobus Rühli (Director of the Institute of Evolutionary Medicine IEM, University of Zurich), and Prof. em. Jakob Tanner (University of Zurich Department of History), moderated by Damian Christinger.

With a valid exhibition ticket and for members CHF 4, otherwise CHF 10 / CHF 8 (concessions).

Thu 28 April, 6 p.m.

Sickness in art – sick bodies, wounded souls

World première of the documentary (2022, Lona media, Berlin, and ARTE) by Nicola Graef on artists and how they have handled their own illness, followed by a conversation with director Nicola Graef, artist Veronika Spierenburg and curator Cathérine Hug, hosted by Kunsthau Vice Director Christoph Stuehn.

Admission free, no reservation required.

Wed 25 May, 6 p.m.–8.30 p.m.

Breath Made Visible

Screening of the documentary (2009, ZAS Film AG, Zurich) by Ruedi Gerber on the healing power of the dance of Anna Halprin, followed by a conversation with the director.

With a valid exhibition ticket and for members CHF 4, otherwise CHF 10 / CHF 8 (concessions).

Thu 2 June, 6 p.m.

Unlearn The Body

'Criptonite Ableism Bingo' performance evening with Edwin Ramirez and Nina Mühlemann (Zurich) as well as Panteha Abareshi (Los Angeles), in collaboration with Charlotte Matter, Virginia Marano and Laura Valterio, 'Rethinking Art History through Disability' research group, University of Zurich.

With a valid exhibition ticket and for members CHF 4, otherwise CHF 10 / CHF 8 (concessions).

Sun 12 June, 11 a.m.–12.30 p.m.

DermARTologie

Discussion on a panorama of skin ailments in art, with Prof. emer. Günter Burg (former director of the Department of Dermatology, Zurich University Hospital) and Dr. med. Michael Geiges (curator of the Museum of Wax Moulages USZ/UZH, medical historian at the IEM, consultant dermatologist) and Kunsthaus curator Cathérine Hug. Accompanying the launch of the book 'DermARTologie. Das Inkarnat'. Part of Zurich Art Weekend.

CHF 4 with a valid exhibition ticket and for members, otherwise CHF 10 / CHF 8 (concessions).

Sun 12 June, 4.30 p.m.–6 p.m.

What is normal? Dialogue guided tour

With artist Sabian Baumann and Kunsthaus curator Cathérine Hug. Observing biopolitical problem areas and overcoming the normed body. In association with baederkultur.ch and Zurich Art Weekend.

CHF 39 / CHF 29 concessions (incl. admission), CHF 15 members.

Thu 23 June, 6 p.m.–7.30 p.m.

Self-determination, empowerment and sexual health

A tour of the exhibition with Marc Inderbinen, psychologist at Aids-Hilfe beider Basel and Elena Grignoli, art educator at the Kunsthaus Zürich

CHF 39 / CHF 29 concessions (incl. admission), CHF 15 members.

Wed 29 June, 6 p.m.–7.30 p.m.

Anatomical wax models – an art of impression and expression

A conversation with anatomical wax model maker Sabina Carraro, conservator and restorer at the Museum of Wax Moulages USZ/UZH and the Medical Collection IEM/UZH, and Eveline Schüep, art educator at the Kunsthaus Zürich

CHF 39 / CHF 29 concessions (incl. admission), CHF 15 members.

Public guided tours in German take place on Wednesdays at 6 p.m. and Sundays at 11 a.m. A guided tour in English takes place on Sat 21 May at 1 p.m.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthhaus.ch

Fri–Sun/Tue 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thu 10 a.m.–8 p.m. For public holiday opening see www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Admission: CHF 23 / CHF 18 (concessions and groups). Free to visitors under the age of 17.

Advance ticket sales: www.kunsthhaus.ch

KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

Zurich Tourism, tourist information office in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, info@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com.

CONTACT FOR THE MEDIA.

Media releases and images to download as well as an overview of dates for media briefings can be found at www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/medien-bereich/media-corner/. For further information, contact: Kunsthaus Zürich, Kristin Steiner, kristin.steiner@kunsthhaus.ch, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 13