



Berlin, June 8, 2022

Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin

Balance

10 June 2022 – 9 October 2022

EXHIBITION TEXTS

To achieve a state of perfect balance, one must walk the tightrope between success and failure. If this feat is skillfully mastered, the ideal of weightlessness seems to be within reach; if one wavers, balance is soon lost and the fall becomes inevitable. During this tightrope walk, therefore, the risk of falling is ever-present, and often it does not take much to tip the scales. As the opposing forces have to be continually balanced out, equilibrium is never complete. The works presented in the exhibition *Balance* show individuals and societies struggling to strike the right balance, and also reveal how easily the equilibrium of a system can be upset by shifting forces.

The historical focus of the exhibition is on the period from the late 1960s onwards, when the coordinates in many areas of society underwent major shifts. The integration of individuals into the social fabric became less binding, leading to an increase in personal responsibility and greater scope for individual creativity. In the economic realm, continuous growth in the cross-border movement of goods and capital was the dominant goal. Among other things, this created an imbalance in the use of natural resources and the distribution of global income. In rooms headed *Gravity*, *Position*, *Weight*, *State* and *Balance*, the exhibition explores different aspects of these societal balancing acts, ranging from questions of form to pressing political issues.

The presentation includes works from the Marx Collection and the Collection of the Nationalgalerie, as well as a number of loans, by Leonor Antunes, Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Ross Bleckner, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Dan Flavin, Günther Förg, Douglas Gordon, Andreas Gursky, Keith Haring, Donald Judd, Gülsün Karamustafa, Anselm Kiefer, Imi Knoebel, Jeff Koons, Mark Lammert, Inge Mahn, Robert Rauschenberg, Ugo Rondinone, Ulrike Rosenbach, Salomé, Sturtevant, Fiona Tan, Cy Twombly, Kawita Vatanajankur, Raul Walch and Andy Warhol.

Gravity

From a physical point of view, every balancing act presupposes the effect of gravity, but in the brief moment when a body seems to be hovering weightlessly in space, this fact is easily forgotten. The works by Ulrike Rosenbach and Anselm Kiefer in the first room of the exhibition illustrate this in-between state in all its fragility. In *Dance for a Woman*, Rosenbach dances alone to the tune of the circular waltz *Ich tanze mit dir in den Himmel hinein* (I'll Dance With You Into Heaven). The lightness and grace she demonstrates in her solo performance is brought to an abrupt end when she falls to the ground. Opposite this work is Kiefer's sculpture *Shechina*. The title is borrowed from a Hebrew word that denotes the presence of God in the world. In Kiefer's work, the mantle of a wedding dress embodies this spiritual force, although here it is pierced and threatened.

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The figure at the centre of Kiefer's relief work *Lilith by the Red Sea* also oscillates between spiritual force and destruction. According to legend, Lilith was Adam's first wife, but she refused to be subservient to him; in a rage, she left him and fled to the Red Sea. With its themes of banishment and murder, the story of Lilith highlights the price she paid for seeking personal freedom and social equality.

Position

Our upright position in the world depends on the complex interaction of many different sensory perceptions. Along with our senses of sight, touch and depth sensitivity, balance organs located in our inner ears are primarily responsible for our physical equilibrium. Only when these succeed in processing the various perceptual stimuli within a fraction of a second do we become aware of our position in space, and are therefore able to maintain our balance when we move. Visual stimuli can support or disturb the perception of balance. Ugo Rondinone's painting, for example, illustrates how blurring makes it difficult to focus on a particular spot, and in this way draws attention to the process of looking. The relationship between form, space and viewing position became the central concern of Minimal Art in the 1960s; artists explored issues such as the varying effects of symmetrical and asymmetrical arrangements, and the confrontation of different forms and colours. While the symmetry of the exhibited works by Donald Judd and Günther Förg gives the impression of a static, contained situation, the staggered and offset elements in Dan Flavin's and Imi Knoebel's works demonstrate the dynamism of a partially imbalanced arrangement. In her sculptures, Leonor Antunes often channels historical figures who – due to their gender or social background, for instance – received little acknowledgment for their achievements during their lifetimes, such as the Bauhaus designer and textile artist Michiko Yamawaki or the architect Hilde Weström. By incorporating formal or material elements from these practitioners' works, Antunes draws attention to their struggle to establish their position in the art world and in wider society.

Weight

The idea of balance quickly comes to mind whenever two elements, properties or actions are compared or contrasted. Whether it is a matter of weighing souls, administering justice or presenting economic theories, the symbol of a set of scales is often used to create symmetry and thus unity between two weights. The very nature of a scale, however, means that the balance is always in danger of being upset, so any impression of unity or stability is only temporary. Establishing a balance between two (or more) weighted forms is the main theme in the second room of the exhibition. In Inge Mahn's sculpture, the tilted column fragments refer to the forces inherent within every situation of carrying or load-bearing. Painters also have to balance out the formal elements in their compositions. In the works by Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly, the various components create a tension-filled equilibrium, not only in terms of their form, but also of their materiality. The struggle between two formal elements, on the other hand, is central to the paintings by Mark Lammert and Georg Baselitz. On the opposite side of the room, wrestling and balancing forces are represented by two figures in the works of Salomé and Francesco Clemente. Along with Clemente's work, Ross Bleckner's painting *Middle*

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Sex of Angels alludes to the inner turmoil that can result from being situated between the gender poles.

State

How can a state of balance be established when more than two forces are involved? One possibility is offered by the 'steady state' phenomenon. A system is considered to be in a steady state when it is simultaneously stable and dynamic: the input of mass and energy is equal to the output. Any major disruption of this exchange process can inhibit the functionality of the system. The balance of ecosystems, for example, is threatened by events such as earthquakes or global warming. Andy Warhol's painting *Fate Presto* focuses on how the media stoked fear with apocalyptic portrayals of conditions following an earthquake in Italy. Fiona Tan's video work *News from the Near Future* also deals with threatening natural forces, and at the same time highlights the part humankind plays in destabilising ecosystems by depleting natural resources and releasing harmful substances into the environment. A 1972 report commissioned by the Club of Rome, entitled *The Limits to Growth*, criticised economic policies that endangered the quality of life of future generations. Such criticism is also expressed by artists through their works. The paintings by Keith Haring, Enzo Cucchi and Clemente, for example, reflect how humankind is becoming increasingly alienated from nature. Raul Walch's video work *No One To Follow* makes it clear that even now – 40 years after the critical report was published – the balance of nature is still not at the forefront of economic and political decision-making.

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Balance

Economic systems are another field in which notions of equilibrium are brought to bear. A balanced economy is one in which the supply of goods corresponds to the demand for them. Although the process of supply and demand is fundamentally dynamic – as the stock market activities referred to in the works of Andreas Gursky and Rauschenberg show – quantities and values generally return to a state of balance. The commonly used accounting term 'balance sheet' also derives from the Latin *bilancia* (= 'scales'). A balance sheet provides information about a company's financial condition by comparing its assets and liabilities. Although social and ecological factors increasingly have to be taken into account, Warhol's paintings and Rauschenberg's *Booster* still have a topical relevance with their critique of society's obsession with self-optimisation. And while the works on show by Sturtevant, Jeff Koons and Kawita Vatanajyankur address a variety of sociopolitical themes, they are united by the observation that physical weakness has no place within a meritocracy. Imbalances caused by political strategies or economic policies can induce attempts to establish a new social order. Joseph Beuys's utopian vision of a social sculpture, Warhol's depiction of communist symbols, and Douglas Gordon's reference to the anthem *The Internationale* all allude to these forces for change. Gülsün Karamustafa's *Monument for the 21st Century* and Warhol's *Mao*, however, indicate that former revolutionaries must also be continually confronted with the question of balance.

Marx Collection

Major works from the Marx Collection at the Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin form the basis of the exhibition *Balance*. The

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Marx Collection is closely bound up with the history of the Hamburger Bahnhof. Originally built as a train station and later developed into a transport and engineering museum, the Hamburger Bahnhof was comprehensively remodelled in the 1990s by the architect Josef Paul Kleihues. With the addition of a large hall on the east side of the building, it reopened in 1996 as a museum of contemporary art, presenting works from the Nationalgalerie collection. Erich Marx began building his collection in the 1960s and initially focussed on assembling outstanding groups of works by Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly and Andy Warhol. The scope of the collection was later expanded with the acquisition of major works by Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi and Jeff Koons, among others. The first museum presentation of the Marx Collection was at the Neue Nationalgalerie in 1982. Temporary exhibitions at the Hamburger Bahnhof highlight different aspects of this diverse collection and present its holdings in dialogue with works drawn from the Collection of the Nationalgalerie. Since Erich Marx's death in 2020, his family has continued the cooperation with the Nationalgalerie in accordance with his wishes.

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