

PRESS RELEASE

# PHILIPP FÜRHOFFER: PHANTOM ISLANDS

12 MAY TO 5 NOVEMBER 2023

Collection of Contemporary Art

Press preview: Friday, 12 May 2023, 9.30 am

**Frankfurt am Main, 3 April 2023.** Illusion and the questioning of reality are key motifs in the oeuvre of artist Philipp Fürhofer (born 1982). At the interface between installation and painting, his works depict complex pictorial worlds. From 12 May to 5 November 2023 the Städel Museum is presenting a solo exhibition with altogether 16 pieces by Fürhofer, including a site-specific work. In the rooms devoted to the museum's contemporary art collection, the artist will stage a mystical jungle landscape in which nothing is as it seems to be. Sunsets and tropical forests shine out at the viewer from paintings and light boxes, their slowly pulsating light creating an enigmatic atmosphere. With a work conceived especially for the show, he moreover reacts to the architecture of the place: a curtain nearly six metres high echoes motifs from the seemingly paradisiacal landscapes around it. The visitors are invited to step through the curtain and take a look at what is behind.

Fürhofer's exhibition title *Phantom Islands* is an allusion to once-mapped islands whose existence was later refuted. The romanticism of Fürhofer's forests and beaches prove similarly deceptive. Scratched-open layers of paint reveal the question as to the existential mutual influence between human being and nature, between the capitalist civilization and its ongoing destruction of its own habitat. With pop-culture references, the artist calls attention to humankind's constantly growing desire to control itself and its immediate surroundings in times of upheaval and uncertainty.

Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum, comments: "Philipp Fürhofer's artistic devices are illusion and the questioning of reality. In his art he focuses on the human being and nature. Transcending the canvas medium, he develops a contemporary answer to Romanticist painting. Fürhofer's works challenge us to reflect on the world we live in and address the urgent matters of our time."

"By adding and subtracting layers of paint and working with mirrors and light, Philipp Fürhofer creates a sheer infinite interplay between human being and nature, utopia and dystopia. The rhythmically swelling and subsiding light of his light boxes reveals

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humankind's fragility as part of the natural cycle of life", adds Svenja Grosser, curator of the exhibition.

### The exhibition

In Fürhofer's works, nature presents itself as a place of the longing for perfection and the continuation of the ecosystem for all eternity. Many of his works are distinguished by a cyclical narrative structure ranging from growth to decay. His light boxes, in which the swelling and ebbing light reveals various sceneries, are a case in point. With his motifs the artist activates our pop-cultural visual memory, for example by processing picture postcards, idyllic landscape images, film posters and the like and has them reappear in his works in abstracted form.

The work *Phantom Island* (2023) forms the **centre of the exhibition**. It enters into dialogue with the exhibition space and its architectural elements, including the prominent columns. The lengths of vinyl depict a gloomy natural landscape that is also reminiscent of Romanticism's melancholy imagery. Through reflections on the mirrored wall behind (John Armleder, *Mosaic Mirror Wall Piece*, 1991–2012), slogans like "Sexy" and "Forever Young" appear, set pieces from the vocabulary of a world shaped by capitalism.

A key element of Philipp Fürhofer's art is light. In this context, X-ray images play a decisive role. **Light boxes** of the kind used for medical purposes serve the artist as picture supports. At the Städel Museum he is presenting five works consisting, for the most part, of one or more acrylic glass boxes, spy mirrors and LED tubes. Thanks to his use of controller boxes, the works take on a processual dimension: the painting gradually appears as the light brightens over the course of a few seconds, only to disappear again a moment later. The dramatically coloured jungle paths in works such as *Fluids* and *Bypass* (both 2023) initially hold the promise of faraway and supposedly carefree worlds. When the light fades, the motifs on the front of the acrylic glass box come into view, revealing human veins, ribs, neurons and the like. Now the reflective effect of the built-in spy mirror dominates, and with it the image of the beholder—whose reflection disintegrates again when the light returns.

In his **paintings** as well, Fürhofer embeds the human being, in all their mortality and vulnerability, in the midst of nature. Contrary pictorial realities unite and pose the question as to the seeming versus the real. An ambiguity emerges between the supposed perfection of nature and the human urge to optimize. In *Ersatzwelt* and *Burning* (both 2022), for instance, the artist has employed a complex layering process to create dystopian images combining a tropical sunset with a sky brightened by a forest fire. Elsewhere he has layers of paint burst open to reveal threatening

scenarios behind a seemingly peaceful world, as in *Carbonization* (2022). The consequences of the Anthropocene become visible in *Ohne Titel* (2022): idyllic seascapes and seaside landscapes break into pieces that disperse like floes of ice, exposing images of supermarkets and advertising slogans. Traces of paint define the surface of the work as such and cause the painterly natural scenery to disintegrate along with the hopes attached to it. Fürhofer's paintings turn out to be illusory constructs: nature's peaceful eternity is devoured by ulcerations incised in the work's surface.

**Philipp Fürhofer** (born in Augsburg in 1982) lives and works in Berlin. From 2002 to 2008, he studied at the Universität der Künste / College of Fine Arts in Berlin, in his final year as a master pupil of Hans-Jürgen Diehl in painting. His oeuvre spans the mediums of painting, installation and object art. Solo presentations have taken place at, for example, the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt in 2017 and the Augsburg Kunstverein in 2016, group exhibitions featuring his work at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in 2022, the Künstlerhaus Dortmund in 2016 and elsewhere. Fürhofer's encounter with the theatre director Hans Neuenfels during his studies was seminal for his stage sets in the world's most prestigious opera houses, works which have won him numerous international awards. He has moreover carried out designs for exhibitions such as *Du bist Faust* (Kunsthalle München 2018) and the retrospective *Thierry Mugler Couturissime* (Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal and Kunsthall Rotterdam 2019, Kunsthalle München 2020).

## **STÄDEL INVITES PHILIPP FÜRHOFFER**

### **Live event with the artist, music & drinks**

On Friday, 12 May 2023, curator Svenja Grosser will talk with Philipp Fürhofer about his exhibition *Phantom Islands*. Short guided tours offer visitors an opportunity to discover the Städel Museum's Collection of Contemporary Art and learn about exciting links to the artist's works. The evening is rounded out by drinks and a DJ set.

Tickets cost 5 Euro and are available in the online-shop at [shop.staedelmuseum.de](https://shop.staedelmuseum.de). Remaining tickets at the box office, doors open at 6.30 pm; the event begins at 7.00 pm.

The STÄDEL INVITES event series takes place in partnership with BMW on the occasion of exhibitions by selected contemporary artists.

**PHILIPP FÜRHOFFER: PHANTOM ISLANDS**

**Exhibition dates:** 12 May to 5 November 2023

**Curator:** Svenja Grosser (Deputy Head of the Collection of Contemporary Art, Städel Museum)

**Project manager:** Maja Lisewski (assistant curator, Collection of Contemporary Art, Städel Museum)

**Location:** Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

**Information:** [staedelmuseum.de/en](https://www.staedelmuseum.de/en)

**Visitor services:** +49(0)69-605098-200, [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de)

**Opening hours:** Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays, 10.00 am – 6.00 pm; Thu 10.00 am – 9.00 pm

**Special opening hours:** For up-to-date information on special opening hours, please visit

[staedelmuseum.de/en](https://www.staedelmuseum.de/en)

**Tickets and admission:** Tickets can be booked online at [shop.staedelmuseum.de/en](https://shop.staedelmuseum.de/en). Tue–Sun + holidays 16 EUR, reduced 14 EUR, admission free for children under 12; groups of at least 10 persons who would normally be charged the full admission fee: 14 EUR per person. Groups are required to book in advance by contacting +49(0)69-605098-200 or [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de)

**Catalogue:** An accompanying exhibition catalogue is being published by Hatje Cantz. Edited by Svenja Grosser, with texts by Philipp Demandt, Philipp Fürhofer, Svenja Grosser and Christine Lemke-Matwey. In German, approx. 120 pp., approx. 50 ill., 23 x 28 cm, hardcover, approx. 34 EUR

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