

PRESS RELEASE

UGO RONDINONE. SUNRISE. EAST.

EXTENDED UNTIL 9 JUNE 2024

Städel Garden

Frankfurt am Main, 28 June 2023. This summer, grotesque creatures will welcome visitors to the Städel Garden. The Swiss conceptual and installation artist Ugo Rondinone (b. 1964) transforms the prominent hill above the Garden Halls into a strange landscape. For his group of works *sunrise. east.*, Rondinone assigned a head with characteristic, highly reduced facial features to represent each calendar month. Larger than life and cast in shiny silver aluminium, the massive, two-metre-high sculptural heads are reduced to their facial expressions: With mouths agape, they gaze from small eyes, from friendly and naïve to sceptical, from surprised to eerie. They evoke a wide range of associations, from ritual masks and ghosts to the visual language of comics, emoticons, and memes. Visitors to the Städel Garden are invited to come face to face with all twelve creatures – and thus every month of the year – and to experience the various joys, adversities, and emotions of an entire year in fast forward.

In addition to sculpture, Ugo Rondinone's oeuvre encompasses various media such as painting, video, and installation. The artist is especially well known for his works in public space, which he has been creating since the 1990s. In the spirit of 'art for all', he aims to reach a wide audience with his characteristic outdoor sculptures. In his poetic and conceptual works, Rondinone explores the contradictions of life, creating a dialogue between artificiality and nature, culture and society, eternity and transience.

Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum: "The works by the artist Ugo Rondinone touch and speak to everyone. His sculptures have already been shown in cities such as Paris, New York, Rome, and Miami, and even in the Nevada desert. It is a real pleasure to now be able to present his works in the Städel Garden – in the very heart of Frankfurt. The Städel Garden is the museum's most prominent collection space. Rondinone's works fit in perfectly, because they underline our approach of making art fully accessible to the public."

Svenja Grosser, curator of the exhibition, adds: "With his clear formal-aesthetic visual language, Ugo Rondinone elevates reduced forms, elements, and lettering to works of art. He works in recurring series, which he develops continuously over decades

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and which include *sunrise. east*. They are an invitation to the viewer to pause for a moment in the hustle and bustle of everyday life.”

Fundamental questions about human existence and the duality of nature and culture are at the heart of Rondinone’s work. In the artist’s visual cosmos, everyday phenomena and appearances are transformed into existential, philosophical possibilities for reflection. Many of the themes in his work can be traced back to personal experience, such as individual and universal notions of time. With the twelve-part group of works *sunrise. east.*, Rondinone negotiates a central and simple concept of the cyclical recording of time: He assigns one month of the year to each of the heads arranged in a circle and names the sculptures accordingly, from *sunrise. east. january* to *sunrise. east. july* to *sunrise. east. december*. Rondinone allows artificiality and naturalness to merge in the figures. Cast in aluminium, their silvery colour simulates the dew that forms in the morning and is enlivened by the light. Rondinone’s fingerprints are also visible on the surface of the sculptures – evidence of the multi-part production process. The artist modelled each head with clay on a polystyrene core. The concrete bases on which the sculptures stand are casts of weathered barn wood, the grain of which is visible in the concrete.

Taking up Rondinone’s recurring motif of the mask, *sunrise. east.* evokes associations with totems in archaic cultures, in particular the monumental and legendary Moai stone heads of Polynesian Easter Island. The circular presentation of the group of works in the Städel Garden is also reminiscent of the legendary stone complex of Stonehenge. Despite their mythical appearance, Rondinone’s aluminium heads have a caricature-like quality that refers to the inner world of the visitors, addresses their emotions, and transfers the sculptures to the present.

Many of Rondinone’s ideas and approaches to linking nature, mythology, and everyday moments have proved formative for subsequent generations of artists. While the sculpture of the 2000s is characterised by an explicit artificiality, since 2003 Rondinone has been reflecting on classical materials such as clay and bronze in his group of masks. With an archaic form and a haptic that reveals the work process, he translates cultural and art historical phenomena into the twenty-first century: a unique and meditative visual language that seems to find an echo in current artistic positions.

Ugo Rondinone was born in 1964 in Brunnen, Switzerland. He studied at the University of Applied Arts Vienna before moving to New York in 1997 and continues to live and work there to this day. His works have been presented in solo exhibitions at, among others, the Storm King Art Center, New York (2023); the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Geneva (2023); the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2022); the Tamayo Museum, Mexico City (2022); the Petit Palais, Paris (2022); the Scuola Grande San Giovanni Evangelista di Venezia, Venice (2022); the Belvedere, Vienna

(2021); the Berkley Art Museum, Berkeley (2017); the Contemporary Arts Center Cincinnati (2017); the Bass Museum of Art, Miami (2017); the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2016); the MACRO, Rome (2016); the Carré d'Art, Nîmes (2016); the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); the Secession, Vienna (2015); the Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2014); the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (2013); the Whitechapel Gallery, London (2006); and the Centre George-Pompidou, Paris (2003). In 2007, he represented Switzerland at the 52nd Venice Biennale.

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Exhibition dates: 28 June to 5 November 2023 – extended until 9 June 2024

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

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

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

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