

PRESS RELEASE

MUNTEAN/ROSENBLUM

MIRROR OF THOUGHTS

3. MAY TO 1 DECEMBER 2024

Contemporary Art Collection

Press preview: Friday, 3 May 2024, 9.30 am

Frankfurt am Main, 28 March 2024. The two artists Markus Muntean (b. 1962) and Adi Rosenblum (b. 1962) have been working together since the 1990s. In their primarily painterly oeuvre, they impressively combine their identities to create *one* artistic signature. The Städel Museum is dedicating a solo exhibition in its Contemporary Art Collection to the artist duo, featuring a video work and eleven large-format paintings – including two new works – whose settings are places of transit: shopping centres, airport terminals, hotels, or offices. Immersed in their own thoughts, the young protagonists stare intently at their smartphones or gaze into the distance, are in motion or look out at the viewer with boredom or irritation. The work of Muntean/Rosenblum fluctuates between the influences of past art periods and contemporary pop-cultural phenomena. While their compositions are firmly anchored in the pictorial memory of art history, referencing well-known masterpieces from the Renaissance to Modernism, their figures are taken entirely from the present. They stem from an image archive established over many years, fed by photographs from lifestyle magazines, the Internet, and their own photo shoots. The artist duo uses this rich pool of images as a basis for creating peculiar scenes through the medium of painting: Set against anonymous urban backdrops, the dramatically arranged young people look like isolated extras in a contemporary stage play. Strange and at the same time familiar in their composition, the paintings reflect an atmosphere of lethargy and indifference. It is a painful yet liberating moment that marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood – a state of limbo. As if looking through a magnifying glass, Muntean/Rosenblum address central themes of our time: the ambivalence of human existence, the growing insecurity of the individual, and a pervasive sense of transience.

Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum: 'With their interlinking of past and present, the works of the artist duo Muntean/Rosenblum fit perfectly into the Städel Museum's collection, which spans more than 700 years of art. As a museum of pictures, we focus on painterly positions with regularly changing exhibitions in the Contemporary Art Collection and thus follow how painting expands, redefines itself,

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and breaks new ground across epochs. The art of Muntean/Rosenblum epitomises this borderline and tightrope walk of painting in contemporary art: drawing on photographs, they create surreal, collaged paintings at the interface between conceptual art and figurative genre painting.'

Svenja Grosser, Head of the Contemporary Art Collection and curator of the exhibition, adds: 'Non-places underpin Muntean/Rosenblum's working principle, which is primarily concerned with the possibilities of figurative painting. The artist duo's decision to draw their motifs from an archive and to abandon their respective identities in favour of a joint signature already poses a challenge to painting, namely the lack of authorship. The concept of non-places is the logical extension of these considerations. As Muntean/Rosenblum take great care to deprive their works of a thematic statement, the viewer is challenged in his or her own perception: What does one want to see? How does one interpret the scene? What is real and what is not? The painting unfolds in this field of tension, between these poles, and is thus perhaps even closer to abstraction than to figuration.'

The pictorial worlds of Muntean/Rosenblum oscillate between reality and illusion. While the scenes in their paintings appear to be coherent at first glance, certain details reveal that they could never have taken place in this way: the looks and actions of the people portrayed deviate unnaturally from one another, overlap, and do not fit into the depicted situation. This effect results from the process of creating the paintings, in which material from the artist duo's image archive is first combined into a digital collage and then transferred to the canvas. The artist duo rarely stretches the canvases, which can measure up to five metres in width, on frames, but instead pins them directly to the wall. The reference of their compositions to important works of art history is sometimes more, sometimes less obvious, for example through the use of concrete motifs or subtle allusions, such as the use of central perspective as the greatest achievement of painting since the Renaissance.

Muntean/Rosenblum's depictions are not to be understood in terms of photorealism. The framing with a white border, similar to a comic strip, further emphasises the illusionism of painting as a 'window to the world'. In the lower part of the paintings, succinct quotations from literary works by authors such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Deborah Levy, Rebecca Solnit, and Virginia Woolf open up a further, fascinating level, which, however, does not establish a direct link between image and text and thus denies any reliable approach to interpretation. Instead, it invites the viewer to fill and expand the space created with his or her own thoughts and associations. The title of the exhibition at the Städel Museum is taken from the work *Untitled* ("The earth is literally a mirror ...") (2019). It is a quotation from Saul Bellow's 1970 novel *Mr Sammler's Planet*: 'The earth is literally a mirror of thoughts. Objects themselves are

embodied thoughts. Death is the dark backing that a mirror needs if we are to see anything.'

The places of transit, as they appear in the works in the exhibition *Mirror of Thoughts*, are also referred to as non-places. According to the French anthropologist Marc Augé, they have neither an identity of their own nor a specific history or relationship. They harbour a certain ambivalence, which is reflected in the concept of the works. People who spend time in airports, waiting rooms, tube stations, hotels, or offices, enter into a contract – for example, when they buy a plane ticket. They lose their status as individuals and become guests, passengers, or customers.

The young people in Muntean/Rosenblum's paintings also have no identity. They have been erased in the working process: deprived of their original task, they are not assigned a new action in the new pictorial context either. For example, the posture of the central figure in *Untitled ("What lies ahead ...")* (2023) does not fit into the situation at the airport. In the works of Muntean/Rosenblum, inconspicuous details suggest a transformation from individual subject to pure object. The emergency exit sign in *Untitled ("To hope is dangerous ...")* (2023), for example, is addressed to every person who sees it, and the ATM in *Untitled ("It's the tragedy of ...")* (2016) also communicates equally with everyone. An enigmatic hotel scene in *Untitled ("To go wrong ...")* (2010) shows the extent to which the resulting anonymity can be associated with loneliness. Although the two figures are in a private space, there is no personal relationship between them. With the open-plan office in *Untitled ("Nothing fixes a thing ...")* (2010), the artist duo provides a fitting stage for the objectification of the human being, who here becomes a mere employee without a personality.

Muntean/Rosenblum's oeuvre also includes performance and video art. The film *This Is Not An Exit* (2017, 3:13 min.), presented in the exhibition, tells the story of how much strength and effort it can take to develop and shape one's own identity. On an abandoned building with its modern architecture, the artist duo stages two parkour runners who at times appear serious and exhausted. They can be seen during breaks or shortly before their actual activity, accompanied by a specially composed, repetitive soundtrack that reproduces fragments from Gertrude Stein's novel *The Making of Americans*. Published in 1925, the story focuses on the history and development of American families and individual personalities, making the point that a person's identity is determined not only by their individual characteristics, but also by the relationships and connections they have with other people.

Markus Muntean (b. 1962 in Graz, Austria) and Adi Rosenblum (b. 1962 in Haifa, Israel) have been collaborating since 1992 and live in Vienna. Their work has been presented internationally in solo exhibitions, including at the Albertina, Vienna, Austria (2022); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Kraków, Poland (2018); the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, A Coruña, Spain (2018); the Parkview Museum, Beijing, China (2017); the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany (2007); and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, León, Spain (2006). The artist duo is represented in numerous collections, including those of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, León, Spain; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Kraków, Poland; the Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, Germany; the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel; and the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, the Belvedere 21er Haus, the Albertina, and the Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna, Austria.

STÄDEL INVITES MUNTEAN/ROSENBLUM

Live event with the artist duo, with music & drinks

On Friday, 3 May 2024, the curator Svenja Grosser will talk to the artist duo Muntean/Rosenblum about their exhibition *Mirror of Thoughts*. Short guided tours invite visitors to discover the Contemporary Art Collection and its exciting connections to the works of Markus Muntean and Adi Rosenblum. Drinks and a DJ set by Philipp Priebe round off the evening.

Tickets cost 5 euros and can be purchased online at shop.staedelmuseum.de.

Remaining tickets available at the box office. Doors open at 6.30 pm; event starts at 7.00 pm.

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

MUNTEAN/ROSENBLUM. MIRROR OF THOUGHTS

Exhibition dates: 3 May to 1 December 2024

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

Project Coordinator: Maja Lisewski (assistant curator, Contemporary Art Collection, Städel Museum)

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

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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/visit.



Tickets and admission: Tue – Fri: €16, reduced €14, Sat, Sun + holidays €18, reduced €16; every Tuesday from 3.00 pm €9; free admission for children under 12. Groups of 10 or more (non-concession adults): €16 per person. All groups are required to book their visit in advance by contacting us at +49 (0)69-605098-200 or info@staedelmuseum.de.

Catalogue: The exhibition is accompanied by a bilingual (German/English) catalogue published by Verlag für Moderne Kunst and edited by Svenja Grosser, with a foreword by Philipp Demandt and an essay by Svenja Grosser, c. 114 pages, €32.

@staedelmuseum on social media: #staedel on Instagram / YouTube / TikTok / Facebook / LinkedIn / STÄDEL STORIES: For more stories and background information on the collection and the special exhibitions, read, watch and listen to [stories.staedelmuseum.de](https://www.staedelmuseum.de/stories) (in German)