

Frieze

An Exhibition in Vienna Examines the Promises of the 1990s

From the first steps of the internet to vibrant raves, 'Time Is Thirsty' at Kunsthalle Wien aspires to create a 'temporal mash up'



'Time Is Thirsty', 2019, installation view, Kunsthalle Wien; photograph: Jorit Aust

Is this the end of the party? In Kunsthalle Wien's cavernous exhibition space, electro music throbs and lidless glass jars line the room's perimeter, as if drunk from and then abandoned. Clothing, photographs, posters and paintings hang on walls or are arrayed sparsely around a splatter of turquoise glitter on the floor, like vestiges of a recent blowout.

In 'Time Is Thirsty', curator Luca Lo Pinto aspires to create a 'temporal mash up' – to quote the exhibition text – between the years 1992 and 2019. This mission is neatly encapsulated by two eye-level works, hanging side by side near the entrance, which frame the show's time span: On Kawara's *Sept. 19, 1992* (1992) and Xavier Aballí's *29.Okt.2019* (2019). Why 1992? Not only was Kunsthalle Wien founded that year, but the Cold War had just ended, the signing of the Maastricht Treaty rendered palpable the optimism for a new Europe, and the internet had begun taking baby steps into the mainstream. Yet, while the works in 'Time Is Thirsty' were all made between 1992 and 2019, most are temporally unmoored. Ann Veronica Janssens's *Untitled Blue Glitter* (2015–ongoing) spread across the floor, is recent, yet here it seem like a colourful remnant from an early-1990s Love Parade festival in Berlin. And like hangovers, pain is perennial. Mounted high on the walls, Georgia Sagri's oversize stickers, whose titles – *fresh bruise, open wound and deep cut* (all 2018) – encapsulate their depictions, emphasize pain's timelessness.

Some works are pegged to bygone trends: Lutz Bacher's *Untitled (Denim)* (1992) comprises an oversize



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pair of Levi's 501 jeans, stuffed to stand upright. Nearby, Anna-Sophie Berger's *Time That Breath Cannot Corrupt* (2019) – three lace coats soaked in mud and left to dry on the floor and walls – recall items of clothing trashed and tossed aside at a 1990s rave. Willem de Rooij's mannequins – including *3-Part Tracksuit (Jacket, T-Shirt, Pants)* and *Tracksuit, Size XL* (both 2015) – model 1990s-style sportswear in a range of blues. Hung at intervals on the walls are works such as Mladen Stilinic's *Utezi (Weights)* (1992), a small white canvas with two tiny weights balancing on its upper edge (an allusion, perhaps, to the then-ongoing conflict in former Yugoslavia and to eastern Europe's uncertain future), as well as news articles from 1992 about Rodney King, an African American man beaten by police in Los Angeles, whose assault was captured by a bystander with a video camera. While police brutality caught on film may now be commonplace, back then it was not.

Some elements of the show cannot be viewed at Kunsthalle Wien: Maurizio Cattelan's *Tattoo Collection* (1992), for instance, a series of tattoo designs by the artist, exists as body art on its subjects. Likewise, the late Felix Gonzalez-Torres's poster in Gothic German script, *Untitled (It's Just a Matter of Time)* (1992), appears on billboards throughout Vienna. Originally referring to the AIDS crisis, the slogan now takes on new, and no less urgent, meanings.

The exhibition text contains the rather odd disclaimer: 'It's hard to describe an exhibition, any exhibition. This one in particular.' But that seems to be Lo Pinto's point: he wants the show, at least in part, to prompt visceral reactions via nonvisual senses. As well as the playlist composed by Peter Rehberg and electronic music duo Vipra (I recognized some Aphex Twin), there's also a faint odour permeating

the space: the slightly acrid smells of areas just east and just west of Vienna (*East_1989, West_1999*), re-created by Norwegian artist Sissel Tolaas. It's less the 'teen spirit' of Nirvana's eponymous 1991 hit and more stagnation meeting possibility.

In his essay, Lo Pinto asserts that, since the 1990s, 'there is seemingly nothing culturally significant that hasn't existed before'. I beg to differ, but these contemporary and historic works, combined with old news clips and sensory stimuli, certainly provoke dyschronia and a sense of unease, especially in those, such as myself, who were young adults in 1992. Back then, we looked for our first jobs amidst geopolitical ruptures and rode the early neoliberal tide – triggered during our adolescence by the policies of leaders such as US President Ronald Reagan, among others – without yet being entirely conscious of it. In 1992, a naive optimism was in the air, a feeling of being wild, free and hopeful amidst the ruins of failed ideologies.

Low down on the gallery wall, in old-school digital lettering, are the words 'Merry Christmas' – emulating the first text ever sent, on 3 December 1992 – while towards the back hangs a framed copy of Dorothea Lasky's poem 'Why I Hate the Internet' (2016), which paints the fear, solitude and consumerism induced by our 24/7 companion and surveillant. This year, I will have been using the internet for exactly half my life. The party's long over.