

SANS BLAGUE / NO JOKE

THE MATTER OF HUMOUR IN CONTEMPORARY ART



MAX AND IRIS STERN
INTERNATIONAL
SYMPOSIUM
10

FRIDAY
APRIL 1
AND
SATURDAY
APRIL 2
2016

Demonstrating a sense of humour is without doubt a necessary attitude these days. Humour has always found a particular echo in art, moreover, and resonates even more strongly in contemporary art. Comedy, whether it involves mockery or parody, gives us permission to laugh, but our laughter can make us uncomfortable and uneasy: it is used in such an ambivalent way by artists that, with some works, we often don't know how we should laugh. Concealed beneath the mask of buffoonery lies a permissiveness that tolerates dissidence—as if humour laid claim to one of the essential properties of art, namely creating areas of freedom. Areas where it is still possible to express an opinion on the state of today's world and cast a critical eye with complete impunity.

Humour in the realm of the arts can thus be a manifestation of lucidity as much as an unruly force for addressing human failings and vices. Through laughter, it is easier to hold prejudices up to the mirror and offer resistance to established forms. The possibility of transgression remains associated with pleasure, after all, and it is likely this predisposition toward disobedience that attracts the public, but it also puts people off when the humorous dimension eludes them. Humour, it is said, only has meaning when it is shared.

In this symposium on the matter of humour, the Musée will probe the ways it is expressed and how it is handled by artists. For if humour evolved into a consumer product in the last century and even became a paying proposition with the emergence of cultural industries, its use by artists has been similarly transformed since the beginnings of modernity. Like comedians, visual artists act as observers of society. And it is certainly their respective abilities to imagine society in a different way and reveal its laughable side that bring them together.

Sans blague / No Joke will shed light on new forms that have emerged recently, including experimental comedy, which falls somewhere between performance art and stand-up. It will further examine what is happening in the social sciences, and in art history in particular, since humour has been established as a research topic and become a subject of interest shared by numerous curators, generating a host of group exhibitions over the past two decades. This will also be an opportunity to hear different voices, of artists and comedians, discussing their particular use of humour, which can be deployed as a device prompting commitment and provocation, while elsewhere it becomes an act of language, ever associated with performativity. J.B.

FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 2016

4:30 p.m.

REGISTRATION

5:00 p.m.

OPENING REMARKS

John Zeppetelli, Director and Chief Curator
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

Louise Richer, Director, École nationale de l'humour

Julie Bélisle, Cultural Activities Co-ordinator
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

5:15 p.m.

Alain Vaillant, Professor of French literature, Université Paris-Ouest
and Director, Centre des sciences des littératures françaises
Artists' Laughter

Moderator: **Dominic Hardy**, Professor, Department of Art History, UQAM

7:30 p.m.

Stand-up Night

Organized with the École nationale de l'humour and featuring sets by
Philippe-Audrey Larrue-St-Jacques, *Les épatantes aventures
radio-romanesques* (Pierre-Yves Roy-Desmarais, Alexandre Forest
and Coco Belliveau), Casey Jane Ellison and Fred Dubé, with emcee
Christopher Hall.

SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 2016

10:00 a.m.

INTRODUCTION

Julie Bélisle, Cultural Activities Co-ordinator
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

10:30 a.m.

Humour as Research Topic

Moderator: **Alain Vaillant**

Gregory H. Williams, Associate Professor and Director of Graduate
Studies, History of Art and Architecture, Boston University
Comic Mistranslation: Martin Kippenberger's Travels

Dominic Hardy, Professor, Department of Art History, UQAM
Art History and Visual Satire: Toward an Un-disciplinary Approach

Julie Dufort, Lecturer, École nationale de l'humour and PhD candidate,
Department of Political Science, UQAM

Some Thoughts on the Boundaries between Humour, Art and Politics

12:00 p.m.

LUNCH

1:30 p.m.

Humour in Critical Discourse and Curatorial Practices

Moderator: **Emily Falvey**, art critic and PhD candidate, Department of
Art History, UQAM

Anna Dezeuze, Lecturer in Art History, École Supérieure d'Art et
de Design Marseille-Méditerranée
The Deadpan Inertia of the Body/Sculpture

Ruba Katrib, Curator, SculptureCenter, New York
Slapstick, Technology and Contemporary Art

Miriam Katz, independent curator and contributor to *ArtForum*
The Transformative Power of Comedy

3:00 p.m.

BREAK

3:30 p.m.

Stand-up as an Art Form

Moderator: **Mark Lanctôt**, Curator, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

Michael Portnoy, artist
*Dropped Jokes, Broke Jokes, Pause Jokes, Tone Jokes,
Jokes that Strangle Each Other to Sleep...*

Casey Jane Ellison, artist
*Thank Me Very Much: A Guide to Laughing Everywhere
with Casey Jane Ellison*

Mélanie Couture and **Fred Dubé**, comedians
Creating Comedy: Practice and Intentions
Discussion moderated by **Louise Richer**, Director, École nationale
de l'humour

This symposium has been organized by Julie Bélisle, Cultural Activities Co-ordinator, and Mark Lanctôt, Curator at the Musée, to coincide with the presentation of the exhibitions *Ragnar Kjartansson* and *Ryan Gander: Make every show like it's your last*. Special thanks go to Cécile Jauneau and Xinxin Zhao, interns at the École du Louvre, who contributed to the research.

A Stand-up Night, organized with the École nationale de l'humour, will be held on Friday, April 1, at 7:30 p.m.

**The talks will be given in either French or English.
Simultaneous translation service will be available.**

Cost

**\$25 – regular
\$15 – students and MACarte holders**

Space is limited. Advance registration is strongly recommended. To receive full details on symposiums and lectures at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, simply add your name to the mailing list for the e-newsletter, at www.macm.org

Since 2006, the prestigious international symposiums held by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal have been named the Max and Iris Stern International Symposium. From the time the Musée was founded in 1964, Max and Iris Stern contributed significantly to its growth by enriching the Collection with many gifts, including works by Hans Arp, Paul-Émile Borduas, Emily Carr, John Lyman and Jean Paul Riopelle. The goal of this annual event is to make the latest research of today's leading thinkers accessible to the public. These scholars work in a variety of fields, such as art history, aesthetics, sociology and literature. Through this commitment, the Musée wishes to foster a greater understanding of contemporary art and pay tribute to Max and Iris Stern by carrying on their vision on the international scene.

Le Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the École nationale de l'humour would like to express their gratitude to the Caisse de la Culture for its support.

Ryan Gander
*A lamp made by the artist for his wife
(Sixty third attempt), 2015*
Courtesy the artist and Johnen Gallery
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