

The final “Höhenrausch” in paradise

Fragrant love poems, a garden of mirrors with cherry trees, an artificial flock of birds as a tree of memory, a growing artwork of artificial fertilizer, and fans ecstatically singing songs by Madonna: over 40 international artists transform the final HÖHENRAUSCH into an earthly paradise, creating a space for individual dreams. Glimpses behind the facades of commercial illusions and the artistic departure into an uncertain future ensure the necessary paradisiacal aeration.

Curators: Martin Sturm, Rainer Zendron

The eighth edition of HÖHENRAUSCH will also be the final one. Since its premiere in 2009, when Linz was European Capital of Culture, this popular and unusual exhibition series has succeeded in introducing contemporary art and cultural themes to a wide audience. Hundreds of artworks were specifically chosen, erected, atmospherically installed, or newly produced for the location. The event featured world-renowned artists as well as newcomers and established talents from the regional and Austrian scene. Since the beginning of HÖHENRAUSCH, over 1.3 million visitors have stepped, ascended, climbed, and strolled over the unique parcours: from the art spaces in the OÖ Kulturquartier up to the very top of the lookout tower with panoramic views; from historic attics via catwalks, paths, and bridges to the Passage Linz and the top of the car park.

After eleven demanding years, the wood structures on the rooftops, including the tower, have reached a respectable age and would have to be completely renovated next year. Parts of the route had to be closed down already this year. This represents a physical watershed moment that is fully in keeping with contemporary art's constant drive for change, departure, and innovation. So after this year's paradisiacal conclusion, it is definitely time for something new in 2022.

Like in Paradise...

.....is the title of this year's HÖHENRAUSCH. This exhibition, curated by Martin Sturm and Rainer Zendron, stages and reflects dreams, moments of happiness, and the attempt to comprehend paradise as a guiding vision of our life in the here and now.

But it is this very “paradisical” exaltation of our everyday life, which we conjure with such longing, that raises doubts: paradise as a grand utopian vision of an ideal world is a thing of the past. Modern-day paradises are rarely projected into a distant future; rather, it is expected that can be summoned and consumed right here and now. The question that remains is what we think of when we rhapsodize about these earthly paradises: Are they simply a state of contentment “within us”, as Adalbert Stifter once noted, or a collective, ecstatic rapture like in a fandom? Is paradise in our consumer-oriented society something one can buy or that simply falls into one’s lap? How does it look and feel?

For some it means a dream holiday in the Caribbean, but for others the Smokers Paradise at the shopping centre or the swinger club across the street. Paradisical can also mean sitting in one’s own backyard. Or in times like these, simply a return to normality: *“How are things going in paradise, Governor?”*, asked a prominently placed newspaper headline in March, when the first easing of restrictions was announced in the province of Vorarlberg.

In any case, the simile “**like** in paradise” confirms that we can speak only of *moments* of bliss and not of a permanent condition. The paradisical in this mortal world appears as a “projection surface” (Tex Rubinowitz) for the various desires and visions that depend on social circumstances just as they do on individual conceptions of happiness.

The exhibition “Like in Paradise” is a collection of works from over 40 international artists who explore paradisical ideas, conditions, and attributions with humour, delight, and a critical eye. They approach this theme from various sides and pull all the registers—there is truly no other way to come to grips with this scintillating and contradictory concept. Their paradises are colourful, garish, and black and white—they are playful, astute, humorous, but also sarcastic and sad; they are hyperrealistic and abstract; they are in equal measure sensuous, insightful, visionary, poetic, and obscure.