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## OUT OF MIND

The mind has never been so scientifically and technically observed as in today's world. Neuromarketing centres spread across the world gather data through functional magnetic resonance imaging machines to scan the mind and 'read' our thoughts. Films such as "Le scaphandre et le papillon" ("The Diving Bell and the Butterfly"), 2007, or "Inception", 2010, have created big screen dialogue about how the mind functions and what happens to its untapped powers. How much information can we really process or remember? Does the world enable us or force us to live more than one life? Are parallel universes a trend in popular culture, film and writing, or are they how we actually cope? *Out of Mind* is a statement of the times we are living.

*Out of Mind* surveys works from 13 photographic artists, who explore extraordinary circumstances in unusual ways. Their themes evolve around innovation, obsessions and eccentricity.

The presented works follow the documentary tradition, some of them are staged or computer generated. The artists employ various techniques and processes: ambrotypes (photographs on glass), film and music, analogue and ink jet prints.

Throughout the history of culture, dressing up and wearing costumes have provided means for transmitting the subconscious. Chinese artist Maleonn creates a comic tomato-headed time-traveller banked on the Irish coast. The artist was in Ireland during a residency programme, but he created a fantasy figure that is more than a global traveller. Influenced by narrative cartoons and even hand-coloured post cards, his art is a multi-layered nonsense, or a theatrical farce of a cultural faux pas. Is the 'tomato king' a bully, an insecure forgotten warrior, a madman, or the bringer of peace? In any case, Maleonn stages pop-culture with wit and drama. New Yorker Phyllis Galembó's colourful portraits of revellers and festivalgoers in Africa are a documentary collection but they are no less extravagant or fantastic. Galembó has photographed handmade carnival and performance costumes throughout Africa and Haiti primarily, and also Halloween 'maskateers' in the United States. Her large-scale colour photographs show the ingenuity and fantasy that go into the celebratory tradition. Thorsten Brinkmann combines elements of gestures and lighting akin to the 15<sup>th</sup> c. Venetian portraits, with a variety of found props and textiles to create his costumed historical satires. For all we know, they could be still-lives and not portraits, but our mind automatically reads them as eccentric beings of elegance and influence.

Classic self-portrait has no place in *Out of Mind*. After seeing work from Arno Rafael Minkinen, you may wonder if his brain itself is the camera. His self-portraits embrace life, risks and natural elements and they are unfathomable in their execution: meditative, clever, comic, and physically breathtaking. No cutting and pasting, no wasting time, but having time, for needed time. His photographs are the key moments, which metamorphose his performance art into the surreal. Martin Liebscher's world is a sardonic and masterfully executed campaign of self-obsession, made up of hundreds or even thousands of self-



portraits in one image. Liebscher's one-man show is derivative from the paintings of Pieter Brueghel the Elder or Hieronymus Bosch, as one-genre setting conveys the diversity of contemporary life here, too. Each scene within the big picture carries a surprising detail, each face has something to say about the state of the world: the artist, the receiver, the promoter, the drunkard, the aggressor, the businessman, the comic and the observer. Levi van Veluw's head is his scribble pad: inked marks, patterns, hair, dots, which he painstakingly draws like a ritualistic camouflage. The common medium of teenage classroom messaging before 'texting' evolves into an uncanny series of fragility, bestiality and despair.

"How much of a freak exists inside each of us?" was a question posed to me by the festival directors before forming *Out of Mind*. *Le Freak*, an important disco era hit by Chic filled dance floors with rockin' fans. Photographer James Mollison was inspired by music too, not the dance floor but the 'look' fans create before going to a concert. The work quintessentially reveals our modern day obsessions for gods and goddesses of music bands. It is a humorous sociological study of how people religiously cling to another mindset in search for self-identity. Photographer Gosbert Gottmann, on the other hand, has been collecting less spectacular subjects, namely, ordinary marathon runners. By photographing thousands of runners over 14 years, he has made his commentary on the obsession and stamina related to sport. His portraits stir, frighten or bewilder, and in doing so they exaggerate the contradiction of success achieved through suffering and addiction.

Two positions in *Out of Mind* ponder youth. Carolle Benitah's appropriated photographs from her own childhood family album, and then embroidered patterns and symbols, like birds, flowers or strands of hair, into the photographs. Are we witnessing secret thoughts of the minds of those in the photos, or her re-occurring memories, or what is now in her mind about what was then? Justin Maxon's multiple-exposures of childhood themes of innocence remind us of another time and place, but they are recent photographs. Through the use of multiple exposures they are almost hallucinations of a paradise, dreaming of laughter, beauty, being alone, loved and forgotten. Susan E. Evans, like Benitah and Maxon, renders the powers of invention as she explicitly manipulates her works. She has used an antiquated photographic process of printing onto glass to extend a haptic fragility to an otherwise virtual world of characters. Each small portrait first appears like a polished up 19<sup>th</sup> century treasure, and at the same time they are a frivolous mixture of avatars: ninja turtles, elf-king, Suzy-Wong, Dracula and professor, wanted and available, dead or alive.

In the short film *Le Dernier Cri*, a 1960's suburban home aesthetic is the backdrop for the typical suspense that always lurks in Erwin Olaf's works. Working as an artist and for clients, he uses interiors that are hand-constructed with minimal digital refinement, as are his models and actors. In *Dusk and Dawn*, a split screen simultaneously shows two family worlds around 1900. The details are exquisitely rendered and the anxiety slowly builds. Birth, death, a dream turns to nightmare. Olaf invents elaborately staged photographs and videos to create fantastic and ironic series, whereas Horst Stein sets up rudimentary staged settings with local friends and neighbours. Like in a satire on mid-life crisis, a man unemotionally holds a self-made weapon in front of a mediocre painting that has been used for target



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practice. Can this be a statement that painting is dead or that the photographer is the model's next victim? Who is to determine cultural models? Who is allowed to censor? All in all we are confronted with an unsettling tragic-comic statement on innovation, morals, victory and art.

All the artists' works in *Out of Mind* open their mind to illusions and curious narratives. Most of them explore extraordinary versions of portraiture to illustrate the mental drive. With the underlying theme of identity, the works displayed here delve into circumstance mixed with fantasy. Like a show master's wave of a hand, each series illustrates a form of enchantment – the unknown and its uncertainty, amazement, bewilderment and seduction.

As a visitor to this exhibition, you just might change how you look at yourself, while I listen to The Contenders, a southern US band singing "Lean on your mind, and rest your mouth a while."

**Celina Lunsford**  
OUT OF MIND  
Curator