

GROUP EXHIBITION SURREAL SURROUNDINGS

KÖNIG MEXICO CITY

6 FEBRUARY – 8 MARCH 2024

We are pleased to announce the opening of KÖNIG MEXICO CITY, the fourth location of KÖNIG GALERIE and the first on the American continent. Situated in the heart of La Condesa, the gallery comprises various exhibition spaces across two floors, including a garden, and in addition to its rotating exhibition program, the new venue will also host artist residencies. KÖNIG MEXICO CITY's inaugural exhibition, SURREAL SURROUNDINGS, is dedicated to the Surrealist heritage of Mexico, a country that had a lasting influence on Surrealism, and by extension, modern art, and builds on this tradition with its continued relevance for contemporary artists today. The spiritual power of Mexico – its nature, along with its volcanos and rich Aztec History – attracted European Surrealists like Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, José and Kati Horna, Gordon Onslow-Ford, Esteban Francés, Wolfgang Paalen, and Alice Rahon, who followed in the footsteps of Surrealism's founding figure, André Breton. In Mexico, these European émigrés mingled with local artists like Frida Kahlo, Lola Álvarez Bravo, and Gunther Gerzso, who were already incorporating dreamlike imagery into their canvases.

The Surrealists held to the belief that one could express the truest mechanisms of thought via the unconscious. Initially, the most important aspect of the unconscious mind was desire, which they felt was central to humanity: the authentic voice of the inner self and the key to understanding human nature. Dreams, childhood, madness, non-Western art, and chance operations became central to discovering the irrational in the art of the Surrealists. In Breton's 1924 foundational text for the movement, "Surrealist Manifesto", the French poet called for a new kind of art and literature powered by unconscious feelings and dreams, realms refreshingly far removed from the harrowing realities of World War I and its aftermath – astonishing parallels to the realities of our own present. Given these important historical connections, SURREAL SURROUNDINGS brings together artists from around the world to pay tribute to Mexico's Surrealist legacy and unique contemporary art scene.

The first-generation Surrealist, Max Ernst, created many works where the snake appears as a symbol for original sin, referring both to Adam and Eve and the eternal nightmares that followed. In Christianity, the Book of Genesis is paradigmatic for establishing humanity's relationship with the deceiving and evil serpent from the Garden of Eden. In this exhibition, the Hungarian sculptor Zsófia Keresztes replaces snakes with worms, which resemble their biblical predecessors. She creates sculptural works and installations out of a combination of materials that straddle identities both virtual and real. These are often finished in pastel hues of light blue, beige, coral, and pink, adding to their appropriation of actual and imagined bodies. In recognition of her capacity to transform sites and contexts into imagined worlds of part-objects and bodily attachments, Keresztes was chosen to represent her native Hungary at the 2022 Venice Biennale.

The Danish Artist Jeppe Hein fractures, inverts, and expands perspectives in his artworks. The bench in the exhibition overturns reality, while Hein references the reflective properties of thought and dreams in his speech bubbles. Presenting a confluence of art, architecture, and technical invention, Hein's practice often employs mirrored surfaces, like those seen in the speech bubbles, which engage and unwittingly include the viewer. From his investigations of architecture, communication, and social behavior in the urban space, a series of bench designs was born under the shared title, Modified Social Bench. The bench designs borrow their basic form from the ubiquitous park or garden bench but are altered to various degrees to make the act of sitting a conscious physical endeavor. With their modifications, the benches transform their surroundings into places of activity rather than sites of mere rest and solitude. Similarly, Surreal spaces are created by German artist Andreas Schmitten, who invents works that often traffic in optical illusions. For example, sculptures that at first glance look like porcelain are in fact made of bronze and sprayed white, creating environments that look like a futuristic dream. Anselm Reyle approaches his foil and stripe paintings as well as sculptures with the inclusion of found objects, which have been removed from their original function, altered visually, and recontextualized. Remnants of consumer society, discarded materials, symbols of urbanity, and industrial change play a central role in Reyle's oeuvre.

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Calle Yautepec 111
Col. Condesa, Alcaldía Cuauhtémoc
06140 Cdmx, Mexico City, Mexico

OPENING HOURS

Tue – Fri 12 – 6 pm
Sat 12 – 4 pm
& by appointment

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OTHER KÖNIG LOCATIONS

König Galerie (Germany)
König Telegraphenamt (Germany)
König Seoul (South Korea)

Monira Al Qadiri crafts luminescent recreations of oil drills, which she coats in pearloid colors and then mounts on the wall as sculpture. A series of 3D-printed sculptures coated with iridescent automotive paint, similarly, embodies the unnerving potency of oil drilling and its attendant culture. Removed from their industrial context, these sculptures hang magically on the wall and become futuristic objects in their own right. Al Qadiri's interpretation of the Gulf's so-called "petro-culture" is manifested through speculative scenarios that take inspiration from science fiction, Arab soap operas, Gulf War-era pictures of burning Kuwaiti oil fields, traditional melancholic music, pearl diving, and the aforementioned machinery of oil drilling. She has looked to the symbolic aspects of oil, creating supernatural works that relish in the magical transcendence of the Gulf landscape – notably, its vast interior deserts and oyster beds that feed the ancient practice of pearl diving in the Persian Gulf – in tandem with the mechanisms that aid oil extraction.

The German artist Karl-Horst Hödicke is known for his practice of executing paintings of everyday subjects in an immediate and inherently expressive style all his own. For this exhibition, three of his kitchen paintings are included, which make use of surrealist perspectives. Hödicke, a pioneer of German Neo-Expressionism and New Figuration, along with Georg Baselitz, Jörg Immendorf, and A.R. Penck, was also one of the main protagonists of the New Savages or "Junge Wilde" movement in 1978, which arose in the German-speaking world in opposition to established minimal and conceptual strategies.

The mystical and esoteric aspects of spirituality were of special interest to a group of female Surrealists whose work blossomed in Mexico under the autonomy they enjoyed in their new home. Varo, Carrington, and Horna became something of a trio in 1940s Mexico City; they all made work inspired by pre-Columbian mythology, tarot, alchemy, astrology, and the occult. Diego Rivera made Paris his temporary home between 1909 and 1921, where the celebrated muralist amassed an impressive collection of Aztec artifacts, which he consistently incorporated into his work. Rivera and his friend's enthusiasm for pre-Columbian art reflected the turn-of-the-century Mexicanidad movement, which saw Mexican artists celebrating their indigenous roots in a rejection of colonial influence.

KÖNIG MEXICO CITY celebrates its arrival by honoring the transatlantic exchange of art and artists that this vital metropolitan hub has played host to over the last century of cutting-edge artistic practice and continues to do so today. SURREAL SURROUNDINGS pays tribute to the important points of confluence and contact that converged in the Mexican capital while also gesturing to the city's continued relevance for contemporary art in the ever-changing present. We are delighted to open our doors with this unique group show, an homage to Mexico City, as well as a glimpse of what is to come.

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