

KW

Enemy of the Stars
20 May – 6 August 17

Enemy of the Stars:

Ronald Jones in dialogue with David Hammons, Louise Lawler, Helmar Lerski, and Julia Scher

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Opening: 19 May 17, 7 pm

‘Part of the motivation behind my work is to make it look legitimate immediately, to make it look like “art of the museum” from the first start. I want to get as close to the center of the culture as possible, by beating the game of legitimizing culture. I imagine my work like a computer virus that slips in as if it were meant to be there. That is why a highly refined presentation is so crucial.’—Ronald Jones

The exhibition *Enemy of the Stars* reflects and expands upon Ronald Jones’ practice. Following his show at the Grazer Kunstverein in 2014, which presented works to the public for the first time since Jones’ withdrawal from practicing an artist in the mid 1990s, the exhibition places crucial work by Jones in close dialogue with peers working at the same time, such as David Hammons, Louise Lawler, and Julia Scher as well as with a series of historical works by photographer Helmar Lerski. The show aims to open up a critical dialogue on how political ideas relate to biography, text relates to form, and identity relates to the notion of the subject.

American artist and critic **Ronald Jones** (born 1952, US) gained prominence in New York during the mid 1980s by using disparate formal and minimal languages to explore history as a medium. Through juxtapositions of historical events, innovations, discoveries, violence, and fear, he investigates the complex interrelation of events as they define our perception of ourselves and the world—often through connecting seemingly unrelated occurrences. The relationship between the modernist code and the codes of power is a persistent theme in his work. Jones’ works question the perception of minimalism and design by introducing didactic methodologies to undermine our understanding of autonomy. The reconsideration and repositioning of the political, social, and economical value of “the object” has become quite topical in recent contemporary art production. Therefore, revisiting some of Jones’ pioneering works is a necessary step toward continuing this debate within the current political climate. Fear has increasingly become a factor that has influenced society over the past years due to increasing acts of violence that have caused xenophobic behavior to rise.

The title of the exhibition is taken from *BLAST*, a short-lived early 20th century literary magazine of the Vorticism movement in Great Britain, which was partly inspired by Cubism. The movement was announced in 1914 through a manifesto published in the first issue of *BLAST*. Written by provocateur Wyndham Lewis with the assistance by Ezra Pound, the manifesto consisted

primarily out of a long list of things to be “Blessed” or “Blasted.” “Enemy of the Stars” was the title of a play published in the magazine, intended to provoke audiences through contradictions, clashing colors, and internal inconsistencies.

The façade of KW is covered by an enormous banner, which—although bearing no text—demonstrates its importance through scale and design. The blue and white modernist design of the banner references *The Hague Convention* of 1954, which was the first international treaty dedicated to the protection of cultural property in the event of an armed conflict. By referencing the blue and white, as the agreed-upon sign of for cultural property, Jones marks the façade of the institution as the site for the expression of cultural heritage.

Jones’ unique relationship between content and form are exemplified in his sculptures from 1988 that appropriate Jean Arp and Constantin Brâncuși’s sleek and elegant aesthetic, displaying sublime beauty in the form of amorphous bronze shapes poised on wooden pedestals. The work *Untitled (DNA Fragment from Human Chromosome 13 carrying Mutant Rb Genes also known as Malignant Oncogenes which trigger rapid Cancer Tumorigenesis)* turns out to be magnified cells relating to cancer and the HIV-virus, making us intensely aware of the body by turning sensory perception into a voyeur of death. The work *Untitled (Core of the Human Retrovirus: Human T-Lymphocytic Virus Type 1 which contains Protein p25, the RNA which carries the Virus’s genetic information, and the Enzyme Reverse Transcriptase, which enables the Virus to make DNA corresponding to the Viral RNA)* from the same body of work references the structure of the single-stranded virus, a parasite that targets a host cell. The well-crafted objects in exquisite materials like etched glass, bronze, and beautifully finished woods are meant to elevate our consideration of the events in question.

Jones’ works engage in linguistic, political, and aesthetic considerations and often take overtly abstract physical form, such as in the work *Untitled (Peace Conference Table Designs by The United States and South Vietnam, 1969)*, an installation consisting of seven tables based on the drawings that had been proposed between North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam—which we know as the Viet Cong—the United States and South Vietnam. The works are witness to debates between the parties involved that took place at the center object (the table) used for their negotiations. By appropriating this information and scaling it down to the size of an average kitchen table, Jones takes these charged political subjects and presents them to the viewer in the most recognizable way possible. *Untitled Floor Tile (Interrogation room used for the detention of Stephen Biko from September sixth through the eight, 1977.*

Room 619 of the Sanlam Building, Security Police Headquarters, Strand Street, Port Elizabeth, Cape Providence, South Africa) is a wood relief that references the South African anti-apartheid activist Biko, who was part of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s, and who was detained, tortured by state security officers, and subsequently died as a result of the repressive nature of the apartheid government. The wooden relief, which is shown in the exhibition, consists of African ebony wood, used by the British in South Africa during the 19th Century, which is paired with a wood known as “pink ivory.” This type of wood is not only sacred within Biko’s African tribal traditions but is also explicitly illegal to export from South Africa. The work both describes and inherently expresses a violation—and is thus designed as an explicit and deliberate act of illegal exploitation in itself.

Museological didactics are instrumental to Jones’ practice and often appear in the titles to his works, which are worded in great length and detail to avoid any alternative reflective analysis or interpretation. In this way, Jones confronts the autonomy of the work, questioning its status and function. One example is *Untitled (This trestle was used to hold bodies in the morgue at Friendship Hospital in Beijing, China. Bodies of students and workers involved in the non-violent democracy movement were taken to Friendship Hospital after they were massacred in Tiananmen Square by the 27th Army of the People’s Liberation Army on Sunday June 4, 1989. Balanced on top of the trestle is the Jarvik artificial heart, developed by Dr. Robert K. Jarvik and others at the University of Utah. In 1982 Dr. Barney Clark, a Seattle dentist, received the first Jarvik heart at Humana Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky. Following Clark’s transplant, three other men received the Jarvik heart at the Humana Hospital. In each instance, the artificial heart was meant to permanently replace their diseased hearts. Eventually, the bodies of all four men rejected the artificial heart, which resulted in their deaths. The artificial heart is sold by Symbion Incorporated for \$22,000)* and is presented in the main hall.

The mercury mirrors spread throughout the ground floor confront us with a blurred image of ourselves in addition to portraits of officers that served in the British Army during the period of the Spanish Inquisition. The work *o.T.* revolves around the Spanish Inquisition, which aimed to maintain Catholic orthodoxy in the colonies and territories, achieving this end through brutal methods. Also part of the works are military buttons placed in front of the decomposed mercury mirrors, linking them with stories of different figures associated with the torture and execution that took place in the local tribunals of the Spanish Inquisition.

Another work by Jones titled *o.T.* consists of a series of ceramic vases filled with flowering plants, such as ivy,

spathiphyllum, bromelia, and anthurium—all poisonous and highly toxic to humans. The vases are based on a design by Albert Speer for the study of Hitler’s office in the new Chancellery in Berlin, on Voßstraße.

Juxtaposed with these works by Jones is a selection of specific works by other artists underlining the various themes addressed within Jones’ practice.

In KW’s main hall, a series of 75 photographs by Swiss photographer and cameraman **Helmar Lerski** (1871–1956) are on display. The photographs are part of a series titled *Metamorphosis*, which presents a total of 140 photographic close-ups of a young man’s head, produced on a terrace in Tel Aviv circa 1935. Using numerous mirrors, Lerski transforms his model, the construction draftsman Leo Uschatz, into a variety of different figures, turning Uschatz’s facial expressions into sculptural landscapes of light and shadow. Contrasting the classic definition of the portrait with a longing to probe the potential identity of the presented, Lerski’s photographs mimic the epoch of the silent film. The elaborate use of light, the intimate closeness to the face, the short burning lens, and the large negative format lend the photographs an exceptional sculptural quality.

American artist **David Hammons** (born 1943, US) is one of the most influential artists of his time. In the 1980s, he rose to prominence for works that reflected the landscape of New York City: Stones covered with hair, basketball hoops suspended high on telephone poles decorated with bottle caps, and performances including his sidewalk sale of snowballs, which are displayed on a blanket in perfect order. Part of Hammon’s contribution to the exhibition is to include an artwork by Agnes Martin as a way of underlining the notion of representation and transference.

Louise Lawler’s (born 1947, US) work draws attention to the condition of art by exploring the nature of its presentation and by interrogating the institutional framing devices which do not merely inflect or effect, but transform the artwork and its meaning. *Homeopathic* (2013–15) reflects both a work by Christian Boltanski as well as a work by Gerhard Richter—both of which investigate the site of seeing and examine the seeing of sight. Interruption, cost, memory, transaction, pain, and distance—all come between the one seeing and the thing seen. Lawler’s acknowledgement of this disturbance often results in reflections and glints that appear on the surface of the work. This can also be said about *Silent Night* (2011–13), which depicts the façade of a museum with a work by Ellsworth Kelly (1923–2015) at night, resulting in a sinister tableau of light and shadow.

Julia Scher (born 1954, US) incorporates video surveillance with computer security devices. In the ground floor, monitors are spread throughout the

exhibition space as semi-architectural installations. In *Occupational Placement*, produced originally in 1990 for the Wexner Center for the Arts, Scher juxtaposes sequences from live, permanent security system cameras, temporary cameras as well as pre-recorded videos—so called “fake feeds”—which overlay images with vaguely uncanny texts. By exposing the nature of video policing, in which judgments, verifications, and identifications are made about the monitored subject, Scher’s work explores the complex formation of subjectivity and identity within the realm of surveillance. She exposes the nature of video policing as a regime of regulation in which our identities are always generated by others’ descriptions of who we are.

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Opening Hours

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm
Thursday 11 am–9 pm
Closed on Tuesday

Admission

8 €, reduced 6 €
Annual Ticket – KW Lover* 50 €, reduced 35 €
Combined Day Ticket KW / me Collectors Room Berlin
10 €, reduced 8 €
Admission free on Thursday evening from 6–9 pm

Guided Tours

KW offers free guided tours through the exhibitions during regular opening hours. For further information on tours for large groups (over 10 people), please contact Katja Zeidler at kaz@kw-berlin.de or +49 30 243459-41.

Colophon

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