

KunstHausWien Museum Hundertwasser

PRESS INFORMATION

Mika Rottenberg. Antimatter Factory

27.02. – 10.08.2025

KunstHausWien



Mika Rottenberg, *Cosmic Generator*, 2017 (film still) © Mika Rottenberg, courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

In Mika Rottenberg's *Antimatter Factory* the world is full of absurdities: a finger protrudes out of a wall, people sneeze meals onto a table and plastic mushrooms grow out of logs. Born in Argentine in 1976, the artist, who grew up in Israel and today lives in New York, critically and humorously examines hyper-capitalism and its social and ecological consequences in her surreal, kaleidoscopic visual worlds. With this exhibition the KunstHausWien – a museum of Wien Holding – is responding to the urgent need to rethink resources, consume less and live in more sustainable ways, a line fully in keeping with its positioning as a museum devoted to art and ecology.

Exhibition Concept

With the exhibition *Antimatter Factory* the KunstHausWien is presenting an extensive insight into the multifaceted work of Mika Rottenberg. The show features her best-known films and installations from the years 2003 to 2022, a selection of kinetic, in part interactive sculptures with surreal functional and



material compositions from the years 2020 to 2022, as well as her most recent work group, the *Lampshares* from 2024. These works combine carved bittersweet vines and reclaimed plastic that Mika Rottenberg molds, extrudes and presses into sculptural forms.

Connecting Science and Art

The title of the exhibition, *Antimatter Factory*, refers to the name of a research department at CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research in Geneva which has been conducting experiments on antimatter. Mika Rottenberg partly filmed *Spaghetti Blockchain* (2019) at CERN, weaving together the complex processes of particle acceleration with seemingly mundane yet intricate human labor, with which the artist challenges perceptions of value, energy, and interconnected systems.

Mika Rottenberg creates worlds of fantasy which vibrate with a seductive sensuality and an irritating logic. From a Marxist perspective – which is very much tongue-in-cheek – and focusing on the human body, she examines the prevailing conditions of capitalist production and the value of labour. From a pearl farm to a large Chinese wholesale market specialising in cheap plastic goods and the production of ready-to-eat meals – Rottenberg’s works disclose the grotesque mechanisms of global supply chains, industrial manufacturing and work harnessed solely to profit, while showing up the ruthless exploitation of humans and resources. With a humour that is once absurdist and disarming, the artist illuminates our ever-increasing alienation in a hyper-capitalist world and reminds us of the urgent need to disengage from these structures.

Questioning the boundaries between reality and fiction runs like a golden thread through Mika Rottenberg’s film installations. People and things appear to be set in motion, while space and time, past and future blend into one another. The people in her films are involved in various activities: they sneeze steaks, rabbits, lightbulbs or even whole meals on tables and plates; they moisten hair, feet or buttocks; they sit amidst plastic goods or glittering garlands, waiting for customers. Rottenberg’s multifaceted work can be understood as a mirror reflecting our globalised age, an age “in which nothing disappears anymore and everything is amassed through frenetic archiving” (Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, 2009).

Capitalism, Production Processes and Human Labour

In his book *Stoffwechselfolitik* (2024), the sociologist Simon Schaupp has recently shifted focus onto the interaction between nature and working



conditions: the more extensively nature is made utilizable, the more extreme its rebound effects on the working world. Here Schaupp draws on Karl Marx, who described work as “society’s metabolism with nature” – through work societies access and appropriate nature, changing it in the process, and generating waste products which then re-enter the cycle.

In Rottenberg’s work human labour is the motor of an unbridled growth that exploits both humans and nature. Her social surrealism offers a different way of looking at the complex metabolisms of our age. The works appear to be without any fixed spatial orientation points like above and below, inside and outside, and it is precisely this that enables them to capture the contradictory nature of the 21st century, characterised by global supply chains, digitalisation and ecological upheavals.

The exhibition Mika Rottenberg. Antimatter Factory is a cooperation of the KunstHausWien with the Museum Tinguely in Basel and the Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg.

Supported by Hauser & Wirth



Statements & Quotes

Gerlinde Riedl, Director KunstHausWien: “Social and ecological exploitation, overproduction and the wasting of resources: while resignation is on the rise throughout society in the face of all the global challenges, Mika Rottenberg takes on the most pressing issues of our age with a provocative wink. It is art like this that, by initiating a shift in perspective, bluntly shows us the hollow futility of global consumerism, while at the same time its absurdity and illogic has something extremely liberating about it.”

Sophie Haslinger and Barbara Horvath, curators:

“Mika Rottenberg’s works are captivating due to their visual seductiveness and absurdist, disarming humour. Her film and sculptural installations invite viewers to enter a world where reality and fantasy melt together, while she illuminates the absurdities and complexities of capitalism, labour and globalisation.”

Mika Rottenberg about her work: “My work is about this magical and often exploitative process of producing ‘value’ through harnessing energies. Matter, especially plastic, has a lot of trapped energy in it.”

“I love thinking about materials and environments as sentient beings, as things we form relationships with.”



Works Featured in the Exhibition

Videos and Film Installations

The film *NoNoseKnows* (2015) shows the everyday work routine of a woman dressed in business clothes who is able to produce ready-to-eat meals solely by sneezing. Simultaneously this scene is connected with a different reality, one that documents the arduous work performed at a pearl farm in South China – at a long table female employees insert tissues from donor oysters into shells. The sounds made by the woman in the office causes a young Chinese worker to turn a crank that motors a ventilator positioned in front of the desk in the office. The generated wind blows pollen into the face of the employee, triggering an allergic reaction – the sneezing.

The office employee produces meals no one will eat, whereby her lengthening, reddened nose mirrors the defence mechanism which prompts the formation of the pearls. In turn, the poverty of the Chinese female workers contrasts starkly with the value of the pearls they sort for the market.

In a surreal manner Mika Rottenberg sheds light on the processes of global production chains and alienated, feminised labour, which entwine repetitive office work and manual labour performed by the precariat in the Global South.

In Mika Rottenberg's work people – above all women – are reduced to their productive body parts and functions. Their labour power, their time and even their reflexes are broken down into isolated “resources” which are optimised and monetised. Humans are turned into the fragmented instrument of a hyper-capitalist system.

In video works and installations like *Time and a Half* (2003), *Sneeze* (2012), *Lips (Study #3)* (2016/2019), *Finger* (2019) and *Ponytail (honey blonde)* (2022), this dissection of the self is modelled as a pleasurable state. All the utilisable parts of the body are very busy: the finger spins around, hair bobs up and down, the parted, bulging lips vaporise or squirt fluids, the tongue wags, the long, polished fingernails tap the counter. The gaze of the visitors is guided through holes and tunnels, leading it to penetrate into subterranean or behind-the-scenes parallel worlds.

In *Cosmic Generator* (2017) we are taken on a journey through a narrow tunnel system, lit by flickering lightbulbs, which connects the Mexican border town of Mexicali with a wholesale market in the Chinese city of Yiwu. There the saleswomen sit, barely discernible amidst the glitzy garlands, plastic flowers, blowup items and children's toys. The sheer superfluity of cheap goods creates an eerily exuberant and simultaneously oppressive atmosphere. The impassive facial expressions of the women mirror the routine of a working day where



there is hardly anything to do: sit in front of the computer, nod off, peer into the mobile.

The film is inspired by the large Chinese community in Mexicali and its tunnel – meanwhile closed off – to the neighbouring US city of Calexico. With simple jump cuts, the film bridges distances and dimensions, and can thus be understood as an allegory of the global flow of goods, senseless consumerism and the bondage of people to fixed places.

Inspired by her time as artist-in-residency at the antimatter research department of CERN, Mika Rottenberg developed the video installation *Spaghetti Blockchain* (2019), which shows matter in highly diverse forms – as wobbly coloured silicon cylinders, as multicoloured plastic particles recalling atomic models, as foam or as spaghetti, which are blended with marshmallows and compounded into a three-dimensional model.

These materials are dissected, melted or set in motion. Seemingly incongruous worlds are concatenated kaleidoscopically, amongst them film shots of the CERN data centre and antimatter factory, the experiments ATLAS and ISOLDE, Tuvan throat singers and a potato farm in the USA. The video explores the exchange and interaction between energies, objects and people, links the microscopic with the macroscopic and allows matter to wander through time and space as if by magic.

Kinetic Objects and Sculptures

Mika Rottenberg's **kinetic objects** (2020-2022) are made of recycled materials and sculptural elements which are then assembled into nonsense machines. These machines perform a specific task in several unnecessary and complicated single steps. Some of the sculptures require human assistance to be set in motion – arms are needed to turn cranks, legs to push pedals. While all this activity has no practical use whatsoever, observing the machines perform is to cause amusement.

With these works Rottenberg investigates the discrepancy between human labour and machine production, making it a direct experience. And even if the result is something as trivial and useless as a rotating, coloured pompom, then she is pointing out the absurdity of using energy in this way.

In her most recent works, the *Lampshares* (2024), Mika Rottenberg explores once again the absurdities of capitalist production and the unusual qualities of materials. Whereas her montaged film worlds often present closed cycles of production and consumption, with *Lampshares* the artist seeks to create a genuine closed-loop economy by processing used plastics and utilising the vines of invasive twiners from the neighbourhood around her studio.



For Mika Rottenberg, plastic embodies capitalism like no other material. By working with and creating new, seemingly organic works out of plastic, she is in a way revitalising and rehabilitating the material. In the *Lampshares* it rematerializes in strange mutations, like mushrooms springing out of the ground. It almost seems as if globally scattered microplastic has metamorphosed into a mycelial network that brings forth new, luminous sporocarps – bodies that release the sunlight absorbed in the material and give off light. A DIY station in the exhibition space enables visitors to build their own sculptures out of recycled plastic.



Biography

Born in Buenos Aires in 1976, Mika Rottenberg grew up in Israel before moving to the USA in 2000. There she studied at the School of Visual Arts and Columbia University in New York. In 2019 Rottenberg was awarded the Kurt Schwitters Prize, in 2018 the James Dicke Contemporary Artist Prize of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. In recent years the artist's work has been presented internationally in a series of solo exhibitions, amongst others at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2022), the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (2021), the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto (2020), the Sprengel Museum Hannover (2020), the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2019), the Kunsthaus Bregenz (2018) and the Palais de Tokyo (2016). Mika Rottenberg lives and works in New York.

Online catalogue, *Antimatter Factory*

The exhibition is accompanied by an online catalogue that through a playful navigation based on the artist's aesthetics presents the pivotal themes of her work. Along with views of the exhibition from the three partner institutions, the Museum Tinguely Basel, the KunstHausWien and the Lehmbruck Museum Duisburg, the catalogue features excerpts from video works as well as interviews and texts by Chen Qiufan, Heather Davis, Hsuan L. Hsu, Gunn Khatri, Barbara Latacz, Filipa Ramos, James Taylor-Foster, Mahyad Tousi, Mika Rottenberg and Roland Wetzl, and is supplemented by biographical and bibliographical information.



Programme accompanying the exhibition

Opening evening: Wed 26.02.2025, from 5:00 pm

Artist Talk

Mika Rottenberg in conversation with curator Barbara Horvath

Wed 26.02.2025, 6:00 – 7:00 pm

In English

Public Tours for Antimatter Factory

Sun 23.03.2025, 11:00 am

Sun 27.04.2025, 11:00 am (in Austrian sign language)

Sun 25.05.2025, 11:00 am

Sun 22.06.2025, 11:00 am

Sun 27.07.2025, 11:00 am

Film Screening: REMOTE

A film by Mika Rottenberg & Mahyad Tousi

Fri 07.03.2025, 6:00 – 7:30 pm

Urania Kino, Uraniastr. 1, 1010 Wien

Original with English subtitles, 91 min, shown in cooperation with VHS

Wiener Urania

Curators' Tours

With Barbara Horvath

Sat 22.03.2025, 3:00 – 4:00 pm

With Sophie Haslinger

Thu 08.05.2025, 6:00 – 7:00 pm

Future Talk: Climate x Change

Plastic and the Consequences

Thu 10.04.2025, 6:00 – 7:30 pm

Kinder-Ferienspiel: Fantastic Plastic Eater

Mon – Wed 14.04 – 16.04.2025

10:30 – 12:00 am & 1:00 – 2:30 pm

In cooperation with WIENXTRA



Workshop: Noodle Factory

With the Saliva collective

Sat 17.05.2025, 2:00 – 5:00 pm

German and English

Tickets available at the online ticket shop

Tour: In Dialogue

With the transformation psychologist Irina Nalis

Wed 04.06.2025, 6:00 – 7:30 pm

Tickets available at the online ticket shop

Repaircafé

Rethinking old clothes

Sat 08.08.2025, 3:30 – 7:00 pm

In cooperation with the neighbourhood centre 3, Wiener Hilfswerk

Participation is free

Please register here

Garage Project Room

Plastic Matters

27.02- – 25.05.2025

In cooperation with Precious Plastic Vienna and FANTOPLAST, workshops on recycling plastic are held at regular intervals in the Garage Project Room. The focus is to work on the circular processes involved in recycling and share information on plastic and its properties as a material. Under the motto “Long live plastic”, participants gain a greater awareness for the multifaceted impact of plastic pollution, while a shift in perspective is proposed: from seeing plastic as nothing but a waste product towards appreciating it as a valuable resource.



General Information

Title of the exhibition: *Mika Rottenberg. Antimatter Factory*

Curators of the exhibition: Sophie Haslinger and Barbara Horvath

Opening: 26.02.2025, 7:00 pm

Run: 27.02. – 10.08.2025

Opening hours: daily from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm

Website: www.kunsthausewien.com

Facts & Figures

KunstHausWien. Museum Hundertwasser

Untere Weißgerberstraße 13, 1030 Wien

Tickets and opening hours

Daily from 10 am to 6 pm

Full price ticket: 15 EUR

Annual ticket: 29 EUR

For more information on prices: [KunstHausWien Ticketshop](#)

More press information and press photos are available at: [Presse – Kunst Haus Wien. Museum Hundertwasser](#)

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