

Esther Hunziker

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HI THERE. Large black letters meet the visitors. This address is familiar, particularly from spam emails, chatbots or vlogs, an informal greeting directed from an unknown person to an unknown receiver. 'Hi there, is there anybody out there?' This quest for interaction with unknown others, out there, is what engages Esther Hunziker in her work. In this work she creates a relationship between huge, unknown extra-terrestrial forms and fully terrestrial, everyday 'alien-like' structures of being foreign in and around us.

The artist leads visitors through a new series of works that fill the whole lower floor of the Kunsthaus. Here opposites such as the unknown and the familiar, the near and far, the intellectual and the physical or the mechanical and the organic collide.

With a large overview of printed pages in the first space the artist allows us insight into a personal chain of associations, in which she brings together widely varying and decentralised sources to form a comprehensive collection of material on the topic of 'alienation'. In these she looks for connections to estrangement within and around us — for social estrangement and isolation in the age of networked, digital communication, as well as unfamiliar, foreign alien forms and ideas. Here the Marxist theory of alienation meets young YouTube streamers' flow of emotions, illustrations of

meteorite impacts contrast with images of anonymous laboratories, research approaches from exobiology are mixed with texts from anonymous chatbots, narcissistic selfies relate to artefacts from unknown specimens, or photographs of her own sketches bump into standardised stock photography... The foreign meets the well-known; the puzzling meets the identifiable.

"For years the scientific project SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) has been searching space for extra-terrestrial signals" says the artist, "and they have the same problems we do — the mass of noise. How can you recognise relevant signals when all the frequencies are blocked?" The mass of noise can be sensed in the second gallery. Object-like beings can be seen on six monitors, all of them speaking at the same time. Their bodies are like stone formations or strange meteorites, while their language is human, banal and quotidian. It is a babble of voices from original audio tracks on real video streams, texts from real people, who point the cameras to themselves and express their feelings, which they share online at any time with anyone and no-one in particular. Esther Hunziker borrows these 'feelings' from the nonstop stream of global networks and gives the language new bodies. She calls her hybrid beings 'specimens', so-called scientific paradigms, which she conserves and presents as 'foreign' objects on the monitors.

In the age of digitalisation Hunziker comes decisively to terms with how reality and fiction intermingle ever more, how identities appear to be interchangeable and can always be compared with others. This is the virtual exhibitionism of the online subject reflected in the vloggers' spoken texts — the continual search for the 'online I', for belonging 'in the world'. We are all tourists who find ourselves in a place, without being from this place, in a kind of transit-space, in a kind of transit-time.

– HI THERE! (IG)

Esther Hunziker (b. 1969) is artist, media designer and teaches digital media at the Institut Kunst in Basel. Numerous exhibitions and festival showings nationally and abroad since 1996. She studied video at the Schule für Gestaltung SfG, Basel.