Kunsthaus Bregenz
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KUB 2019.01 | Press Release

Ed Atkins
19 | 01 – 31 | 03 | 2019

Press Conference
Thursday, January 17, 2019, 11 am

Opening Reception
Friday, January 18, 2019, 7 pm

Press photos for download
www.kunsthaus-bregenz.at
Ed Atkins is one of the most distinctive and important artists of his generation. Following on from major exhibitions at The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Serpentine in London, Castello di Rivoli in Turin, and the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, among others, Kunsthau Bregenz presents Atkins’ first exhibition in Austria, and his largest solo presentation to date.

Atkins is an artist who makes videos, writes and draws, developing a complex and deeply figured discourse around definition, wherein the impossibilities for sufficient representations of the physical, specifically corporeal, world – from computer generated imagery (CGI) to bathetic poetry – are hysterically rehearsed. Atkins’ works often centres on an unidentified figure, a kind of surrogate for the artist, who is animated by Atkins’ own performance. The figure is to be found in situations of everyday despair, anxiety, frustration and pitch comedy.

Atkins’ works are steeped in sentimentality. Sadness, beauty and transformation occur with the speed of paranoiac thought. Striking images, familiar musical phrases or poignant pleas are cut, ruined or denied at the last minute. Traces of profound affection and interrupted empathy linger. It is such sensation that makes Atkins’ works so striking; an artificial realism and romantic lushness that models feelings often inexpressible in real life.

On the ground floor of KUB, the multiple-channel video work Safe Conduct confronts visitors with a lunatic burlesque of airport security instruction videos. A grimly comic dance for one escalates in time with the mechanical mania of Ravel’s Bolero. Safe Conduct is a carousel of protocol, of rendered bodies, abattoirs and metal detectors. The title conjures a parlance of spocious administrative directives; an exceptional state-administered document that affords protection to the carrier, as well as the autobiography of the Russian poet, Boris Pasternak, also titled Safe Conduct.

Old Food, a body of works that expands with each iteration, sprawls across the first floor. Here, Atkins
transports us to a pseudo-historic world of peasantry, bucolic landscapes and eternal ruin. Characters weep continuously, their lives devoid of dramatic redemption; a looping piano motif haunts the space; crowds of people plummet while credits roll; and inedible, impossible sandwiches assemble and collapse in lurid advertisements. Countless costumes from the Bregenzer Festspiele and Vorarlberger Landestheater’s wardrobes are on display in the manner of their storage, hemming in the audience, underscoring the absence of bodies and the ways in which history is attempted dramatically redeemed, through mythologising, fictional romanticism.

The video works on the upper floors of KUB push the exhibition into a more nocturnal, dream-like place; a more domestic kind of life is worried into animated paranoia. Repeated across multiple projections, Hisser cowers. We encounter our protagonist in his Ikea-choked bedroom during a never-ending night, suspended as he is in a disastrous, fugue-state loop of loneliness and confusion from which there is only one horrifying means of escape. Above that, on the top floor, the paean to lost love, dementia and digits, Happy Birthday!! peters out, stops, and starts again. Like everything in Atkins’ exhibition, media is made metaphor: videos repeat themselves as if their memory were painfully short-term; CGI figures cry and plea, even as the source of their upset is lost forever.

In both its presence and iconic architecture, Kunsthau Bregenz provides the ideal setting for Ed Atkins’ artificially generated realism. Produced exclusively using CGI, everything in Atkins’ exhibition is understood as fake: nostalgia, history, progress, authentic life, identity.
Ed Atkins (born 1982, United Kingdom) lives and works in Berlin and Copenhagen.


An anthology of his texts, *A Primer for Cadavers*, was published by Fitzcarraldo Editions in 2016, and an extensive artist's monograph from Skira was published in 2017.

In early 2019 Ed Atkins will have exhibitions at K21, Düsseldorf, and Kunsthaus Bregenz. His novel, *Old Food*, will be published in November 2019.
A comprehensive catalogue is planned to accompany the exhibition by Ed Atkins at Kunsthaus Bregenz. Designed in close cooperation with the artist himself, the monograph will closely examine the works on display in Bregenz, as well as situate Atkins within the broader cultures of contemporary art, literature, and digital representation.

Edited by Thomas D. Trummer, Kunsthaus Bregenz
Essays by Thomas D. Trummer, et.al.
Graphic design: N.N.
German | English
Softcover, 21 x 26.5 cm, approx. 160 pages
Date of publication: April 2019
Price € 42,-

KUB Online-Shop
www.kunsthaus-bregenz.at
Exclusive special editions for Kunsthaus Bregenz are produced in close collaboration with the artists and their chosen materials.

For Kunsthaus Bregenz Ed Atkins has materialised what was once immaterial. A purple doublet with white ruffs – as sported by the boy protagonist in Atkins’ *Old Food*, and which previously only existed as a computer generated object by Daniel Magyar and sold at TurboSquid – has been made into a set of unique editions in collaboration with tailor Stephanie Wladika. Perfectly and perversely making manifest what was a photorealistic digital ghost, *Young Doublet* is an exquisite, conceptually profound artwork that distills Atkins’ *Old Food* into one unreal, desperately sad costume, scaled for a child who does not exist, from a history that never happened.

**Ed Atkins**  
*Young Doublet*, 2019  
Limited edition of 25 copies + 5 A.P.  
€ 5,800 incl. 10 % VAT, plus postage, packaging, and customs duties

**KUB Online-Shop**  
shop.kunsthaus-bregenz.at
The billboards on Bregenzer Seestraße, the busiest street in the city, are an integral part of Kunsthaus Bregenz program. In 2019 they will return to their original form and extend each exhibition in Kunsthaus Bregenz into public space.

On the six KUB billboards Ed Atkins presents a selection of flat-pack patterns for several key objects from his computer animated videos. Stretched out like paintings or sheets of flayed skin, these huge image files make up the surface, variously, of a computer generated brain, a peasant’s boot, a soiled shirt, a severed ear, a roast turkey, and the bloody interior of an eye. These images deconstruct the unreality of Atkins’ videos, displaying a strange, sterile constitution to his computer generated 3D world, in forensic, painterly detail. In Atkins’ video works these figures tell scary, prophetic stories not only about our present; they allow the future to happen even now in Kunsthaus Bregenz.
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Kunsthaus Bregenz would like to thank its partners for their generous financial support and commitment to culture.