

## Thomas Zipp

### A Primer of Higher Space (The Family of Man revisited)

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An installation at Kunsthalle Gießen

Opening: August 31 st 2018, 7 pm

Duration: Sept 1st – Nov. 18th 2018

Curated by Nadia Ismail

The work of Berlin based artist Thomas Zipp analyses the contradictions of modern subjectivity. With his spacious installations he questions the relationship between the individual and the crowd, the self and the collective. By deconstructing conventional systems of values and scientific models he opens the field up for new questions.

For the Kunsthalle Gießen Thomas Zipp has developed a complex installation that, at irregular intervals, will become a stage for performances. The exhibition 'The Family of Man' that opened in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and entered the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2003, forms the installation's point of departure. The exhibition's aim was to promote intercultural understanding. The then head of the photography department at MoMA and curator of the exhibition, Edward Steichen used the promise of photography's universal language in order to promote people's understanding of each other, to break down prejudices and to overcome the boundaries between classes, religions and ethnic groups. 'The Family of Man' was subdivided into 32 themes, for example work, love, faith, birth, family, children, war and peace, these were then presented in over 500 relevantly arranged photographs. Amateur photos hung homogeneously alongside works by renowned artists, thus formally supporting the idea of equal cooperation. The emotional power of the exhibition also intended to depict the unique diversity of various forms of humanity that would be destroyed in the event of a nuclear war, which furthermore took the then global situation into account.

At the Kunsthalle Gießen 'The Family of Man' undergoes a new interpretation. Thomas Zipp merges the once separate themes and combines the complex facets of life into a multimedia installation.

By building a small housing settlement, the artist, born in 1966 in Heppenheim in South Hessen, creates a world in which the visitor can move around on a scale of 1:1 through the supposedly banal lives of various people. One enters their kitchens, looks into bedrooms, peeps through doors, observes people in their everyday lives and, last but not least, takes a glance into the human abyss. Although seemingly connected by the familiarity of the everyday, the individual lives of each person undermines a uniform image of society. For Thomas Zipp, this fragility of collective agreements and conventions consistently comes to the fore.

For years the artist has collected private photos from estates that now flow as projections into the exhibition and allow the stations of a foreign life to pass by. With this the former Städel student, now a professor himself at the Udk in Berlin, celebrates everyday life as well as psychological predispositions and delusional constraints, he traces them and unmasks obsessions that were sometimes carelessly and unsuspectingly or even knowingly cultivated.

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When sold, often at flea markets, once private pictures become public and at the same time lose their individual and emotional significance. But by being embedded into the context of an exhibition, they regain their original importance, attached, however, to a shift in meaning. The artist makes a selective choice of pictorial impressions from a strange life and with it directs its moral evaluation. As the viewer rejects certain images they also judge their creators and their lives. Zipp subtly undermines the idea of harmonious coexistence that was propagated in the MoMA exhibition in 1955, thereby creating room for reflection on social norms and judgements of 'right' and 'wrong' that are based on them.

Following his characteristic method of working, Zipp also combines individual elements from earlier works into the installation at the Kunsthalle Gießen, thereby forming a new 'gesamtkunstwerk'. Even though the medium of painting forms an essential aspect of his oeuvre, he reacts directly to the exhibition space and dispenses entirely with classical panel painting. The temporal context over which the spatial installation takes place remains unclear. With an armada of twelve rockets with their camouflaged tips protruding upwards and a delicate tractor transporting another missile instead of the harvest, the artist refers, on the one hand, specifically to the threatening shadows of the Cold War, against the background of which the New York exhibition took place. On the other hand, the missiles are a universally and globally readable symbol of technological progress and of the willingness of individual states to impose their own interests by force if necessary. Here fear serves as an engine for armament. Instead of painting the classic canvas, Zipp painted the outer shell of the rockets, whose strict geometrical black and white surfaces are reminiscent of the Russian avant-garde, but also of similar military camouflage paintings during the first half of the 20th century. He disguises their inherent violence with beauty.

Even the exhibition's main title 'A Primer of Higher Space' refers to the sculptural spacial setting. With this the artist addresses a treatise from 1913 in which the American architect Claude Fayette Bragdon reflects on the 4th dimension. Located between mysticism and mathematics, it is not thought of in terms of the spacial but follows the principle of growth and understands it as change.

As the rocket is able to overcome spatial boundaries and therefore turn the former idea of progress into a reality, Thomas Zipp processes Bragdon's theory of the 4th dimension as performance. His houses are inhabited at irregular intervals by real people who occupy the difficult-to-recall rooms that are in groups of varying sizes and constellations.

Thomas Zipp transforms the Kunsthalle into a world in which temporal and spatial dimensions are abolished and the past, present, future, and the possible are condensed into an artificial world.

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*Thomas Zipp (\*1966 Heppenheim, lives in Berlin)*

*is one of the most important German artists of our time. He studied painting at the Städelschule in Frankfurt and the Slade School of Fine Art in London. He taught at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Karlsruhe and the Universität für Angewandte Künste in Wien. Since 2008 he is Professor at the Universität der Künste Berlin.*

*His oeuvre, in addition to painting, includes a wide variety of media such as installation, drawing, sculpture and performance.*

*Zipp exhibited, amongst others, at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel, the Biennale di Venezia, the Berlin Biennale für zeitgenössische Kunst, the Tate Modern London and the MCA Chicago. His works are represented in various public collections, for example in the Berlinische Galerie, the Lenbachhaus Munich and the MOCA Los Angeles.*

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#### Supporting programme to the exhibition

##### Art education in individual conversations with

##### Ida-Elena Schulz and Tatjana Wild

conversation in English and Romanian languages on request

free entry

Thursday: 2 – 4pm

13.09., 27.09., 11.10., 25.10., 08.11.

##### Saturday, extended opening hours: 5 – 7pm

08.09., 22.09., 06.10., 20.10., 03.11., 17.11.

##### Kunst und Kaffee mit Fabian Stein

Anmeldung unter [kunsthalle@giessen.de](mailto:kunsthalle@giessen.de)

Eintritt: 2,50 Euro

30.10.2018 15:00 bis 16:30 Uhr

(weitere Termine folgen)

##### Kuratorenführung mit Dr. Nadia Ismail

Termine: 17 – 18 Uhr

09.10., 07.11.

Alle Informationen unter [kunsthalle-giessen.de](http://kunsthalle-giessen.de)

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A bag designed by Thomas Zipp can be bought for 15 Euro in the Kunsthalle.

edition / 100 pieces