

JOHN SANBORN: Notes on Us
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Exhibition organised by Kunsthalle Praha.

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The opening of *Notes on Us* launches a new exhibition format focusing on selected works from the Kunsthalle Praha collection and their broader contextual framework. The collection features a broad range of works from different practices of Czech and Central European art, as well as numerous international works. The first project in this series will present, for the very first time in the Czech Republic, the work of John Sanborn (1954, Huntington, New York, USA) who has been one of the prominent figures in American video art since the late 1970s.

At the outset of his career, John Sanborn worked closely also with Nam June Paik, the Korean-American artist regarded as

the founder of video art, and with video artist Kit Fitzgerald. His early activities were associated with the New York avant-garde space The Kitchen. Sanborn's specificity lies in his ability to connect the art world with the pop culture milieu, and his emphasis on high technological sophistication and post-production, which ties in with his work on music videos for MTV and collaborations with Hollywood and Silicon Valley. His works have been presented in various museums and video festivals around the world. In 2022, ZKM in Karlsruhe held a retrospective exhibition for Sanborn, *Between Order and Entropy*.

Sanborn's contemporary video installations are based on collaborations with prominent

performers, dancers, and composers. They echo the artist's passion for storytelling as well as his interest in topics that resonate throughout society. Both of the displayed works *V+M* (2015) and *Mythic Status* (2015–2016) reinterpret myths and figures from Graeco-Roman mythology. His monumental 9-channel video installation *V+M* takes as its subject the iconic story of Venus and Mars. The artist deliberately transcends the traditional heteronormative code of the ancient tale's version in order to reflect the multicultural and gender-diverse image of today's society. Through his work, he demonstrates the positive transformative power of love to unite and reconcile despite differences and conflicts. For the series of four

digital video portraits, *Mythic Status*, in which performers with fluid gender identities style themselves as gods and goddesses from ancient mythology, Sanborn reflects the idea of equality of human identity and recognition of all its forms. Both works are about opening up to otherness and particularity, but also about discovering who we are, what we are like, and how our own nature resonates in our relationships – and can thus be seen as one of the contributions to the theme of human identity. They represent the author's individual reflection or observations about ourselves.

Barbora Ropková, Curator