



A celebration of difference, love, and ancient mythology. Kunsthalle Praha presents the work of American videoart pioneer John Sanborn

PRAGUE (21/2 2024) — From 1 March to 3 July 2024, Kunsthalle Praha will host the first-ever solo exhibition of John Sanborn's work in the Czech Republic, titled *Notes on Us*. Sanborn initially rose to prominence in the experimental video art scene of the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, he contributed to the heyday of MTV's music video aesthetics and later to the contemporary boom of digital art in Hollywood. Visitors will have the chance to see his monumental nine-channel video installation *V+M* (2015), which is part of the Kunsthalle Praha Collection and thematizes the mythological story of Venus and Mars. Together with a series of four digital portraits titled *Mythic Status* (2015–2016), these works explore themes such as love, self-love, and fluid gender identity. These immersive large-scale projections will bring to life the walls of Gallery 3.

"I think Sanborn's poetic interpretation of contemporary topics through the language of mythology and the dynamism of music and movement can be engaging and accessible for a wide audience," explains exhibition curator **Barbora Ropková**, who is also Collection Curator at Kunsthalle Praha.

Inclusive collaboration as well as cultural and gender diversity have always been essential to Sanborn's work. As he describes: *"I'm like a sponge that absorbs and uses various elements borrowed from language, gestures, sounds, and images."* Characteristic features of his style include radical editing, effective rhythm, work with associations, and dynamic use of music. Sanborn's mentor, friend, and collaborator was Korean artist **Nam June Paik** (1932–2006), a seminal figure in video art.

"Sanborn was never an activist artist, yet all his videos from the first decade of his career were made in collaboration with women and celebrated what we can now call difference. Already in his early work, one of his main interests was interpersonal relationships, which naturally blended with his passion for storytelling," elaborates Ropková, offering insight into the content of Sanborn's art.

His work regularly features his friends and performers from the LGBTQ community. It thematizes topical issues related to life in the USA at the time, such as multiculturalism and the AIDS epidemic. *"Each one of us has the will, means, and opportunity to change our part of the world. It begins with me, and I'm passing it on to you. Let's go change it together,"* urges Sanborn, whose art deals with topics similar to those addressed by the young generation of contemporary video artists, while remaining distinctive in its optimism and poetic qualities.

The video installation *V+M* (2015) was first exhibited at the Videoformes international festival in Clermont-Ferrand, France, where it was specifically designed for the space of a Baroque chapel. Subsequently, it was shown at the Camerawork festival in San Francisco and recently featured in Sanborn's 2022 retrospective at the ZKM Karlsruhe. "*Sanborn translates poetic stories from classical mythology into a contemporary social context, where gender has become diverse and fluid. I therefore consider the main message of his work to be a belief in equality and openness towards difference, which can be a great inspiration for viewers,*" explains Barbora Ropková, concluding her reflections on one of the most important figures of contemporary video art. The exhibition at Kunsthalle Praha will mark the first presentation of Sanborn's work in the Czech Republic and will be personally introduced by the artist himself.

John Sanborn

Notes on Us

1/3 2024—3/6 2024, Gallery 3

Curator: Barbora Ropková

John Sanborn (born 1954, Huntington, New York) is one of the prominent artists associated with the American video art scene of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as a key figure of American video art in general. He extensively collaborated with The Kitchen, one of New York City's leading avantgarde art spaces. He also participated in the Whitney Biennial (1981, 1983) and in performances at the Centre Pompidou (January 1984). In 2022, the ZKM Karlsruhe hosted his retrospective exhibition titled *Between Order and Entropy*. Sanborn's work is included in the collections of renowned institutions worldwide (MoMA, New York; Tate Modern, London; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York; Kunsthalle Praha, Prague; LACE, Los Angeles; Walker Arts Center, Stanford University, Stanford, California; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires; INVIDEO – A.I.A.C.E. Milano, Milan; New York University, New York; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge; Academy of Media Arts, Cologne; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Fundació "la Caixa", Barcelona; Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg).

Kunsthalle Praha is a new space for art in the centre of Prague, founded by the Pudil Family Foundation as a non-governmental, non-profit platform for linking the Czech and international art scenes. Kunsthalle Praha was created by converting the Zenger Electrical Substation, built in the 1930s, into a modern gallery space for short-term exhibitions, cultural events, and innovative educational programmes. Kunsthalle opened its doors to the public on 22 February 2022 with the major multi-media exhibition *Kinetismus: 100 Years of Electricity in Art*, curated by art theorist Peter Weibel and chief curator Christelle Havranek. With a total floor space of 5,687 m², Kunsthalle Praha includes three large gallery spaces, a design shop, a bistro, and a café with a historic terrace. The Kunsthalle Praha building won the main prize of the 2022 Grand Prix of Architects — National Architecture Award. In 2023, it was nominated for the 2024 Mies van der Rohe Award – the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture.

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