

Press release

Robert Wilson Video Portraits

Prague, November 12, 2010

Jiri Svestka Gallery is announcing the new exhibition by American artist Robert Wilson, showing videos from the VOOM Portrait series. A large selection of the video works by the famous theatre director and stage designer will be on show from 13th November 2010 until 22nd January 2011, portraying celebrity actors and writers, such as the Princess of Monaco, Johnny Depp, or Winona Ryder.

Robert Wilson (born 1941 in Waco, Texas) is an internationally acclaimed American artist who is considered the worldwide leading vanguard theatre director. His stage productions count among the most revolutionary while Wilson is seen as visionary in connection to his theatre work. With his ground-breaking stage designs Wilson changed the world of theatre like no other before him. The opera *Einstein on the beach* in collaboration with renowned composer Philip Glass caused a sensation when premiered in 1976.

In Prague's National Theatre, Wilson directed *Fate (Osud)* by Leoš Janáček to critical acclaim in 2002. This year, he staged Janáček's *Kat'a Kabanova* while this season will see another piece directed by Wilson in Prague: The famous Karel Capek's utopian drama *The Makroupoulos Case* will be premiered on the 18th of November 2010 at the Stavovske Theater under Wilson's direction, coinciding with the Robert Wilson show at Gallery Jiri Svestka.

During his 40-year career as a theatre director and stage designer Wilson regularly provoked the art world first with his architectural works and later with videos, which are shown across the world at leading museums and institutions. Wilson started his celebrity video portraits in the 1970's with Louis Aragon among others. In this work, Wilson creates surreal and often very theatrical scenes, referring partly to biographical details of the actors or cultural cross-references: Johnny Depp is posing with fur coat and hat as the female alter ego of Marcel Duchamp as photographed by Man Ray in 1921 (Johnny Depp, 2006). The staging of *Caroline of Monaco* is based both on a painting by John Sargent and a film scene by Alfred Hitchcock (*Princess Caroline*, 2006). Wilson hereby uses dramatic light and shadow effects as well as music by famous composers. Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven are to be heard in this series together with lyrics by Tom Waits or T.S. Eliot. Elements from pop culture, fashion, design and media find their way into his work in the same way as opera, literature and classical dance.

Other video portraits such as *Jeanne Moreau* use classical portrait paintings as a reference, where Wilson collages the famous actress' head in the 16th century painting *Mary Queen of Scots* by Nicholas Hilliard. Meanwhile, Wilson is not only portraying celebrities. In the video *Ivory* (2006) he recites a text on Hamlet with the image of a black panther looking quietly into the camera. Another fascinating animal portrait is that of a porcupine set against the background of a star-spangled sky (*Boris*, 2006). His work captures different personalities in a poetic way while adding a surreal element.

The series of VOOM Portraits can be seen as a continuation of classical portraiture translated into new media. As Wilson comments on his video work: "A man from the street, an animal, a child, superstars, gods of our time" (Robert Wilson), the series is a reflection of both personalities under media attention as well as contemporary technological possibilities. Similar to what Van Dyck expressed as a court painter in the 17th century, the video portraits by Robert Wilson stage personalities of our time with today's media.

Wilson's video portraits were shown widely in institutions around the world, such as the important German museum Center for Art and Media (ZKM), Karlsruhe that dedicated a solo exhibition for Wilson's video works this May. Finally, the artist is still expanding his series of high definition video portraits and also looking for interesting commissions. As such, he produced a video portrait of the Swiss entrepreneur and art collector Luc Hoffmann.

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Robert Wilson
Video Portraits

November 13, 2010 – January 22, 2011

JIRI SVESTKA GALLERY
Biskupsky dvur 6, 110 00 Prague 1
Czech Republic
Phone: +420 222 311 092
gallery@jirisvestka.com
www.jirisvestka.com

Opening hours: Tue – Sat, 11am – 6pm and by appointment

The gallery will be closed from December 24, 2010 till January 3, 2011

Robert Wilson CV

- 1941 Born in Waco, Texas
- 1963 Moves to Brooklyn, where he studies painting with George J. McNeil, and architecture with Paolo Soleri
- 1965 BFA in architecture from the Pratt Institute
- 1969 First major works: King of Spain; The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud
- 1976 Premiere of Einstein on the Beach in collaboration with Philip Glass
- 1984 Produces CIVIL warS: A Tree Is Best Measured When It Is Down, selected for the Pulitzer Prize
- 1986 Directs Hamletmaschine by Heiner Müller
- 1992 Directs Alice with Tom Waits
- 1993 wins Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale
- 2004 residency at the television channel LAB HD, where he begins his video portraits (VOOM Portraits)
- 2006 A documentary entitled Absolute Wilson is dedicated to the artist by Katharina Otto-Bernstein

VOOM Portraits were produced in collaboration with VOOM HD Networks.

Exhibited at (selection):

- 2007 Paula Cooper Gallery / Phillips de Pury & Co., New York
Ace Gallery, Los Angeles
Ekaterina Foundation / Triumph Gallery, Moscow
Museo D'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina, Naples
- 2008 Sesc Pinheiros, Sao Paolo
- 2009 Nation Museum of Singapore, Singapore
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg
- 2010 Galerie Thomas Schulte, Germany
Center for Art and Media (ZKM), Karlsruhe