

Catharina Szonn THE END IS HIGH

Mai 2 – 31, 2025

Opening: Mai 2nd • 6 – 10pm

Opening hours during Sellerie Weekend: May 3 – 4 • 3 – 6 pm

Interim opening hours: May 17, 2025 • 3 – 6 pm

Finissage: May 31, 2025 • 3 – 6 pm

The open mouth – especially as an expression of a scream – ranks among the most powerful visual motifs in art history. It embodies fear, pain, ecstasy, anger, or rebellion, often beyond the limits of verbal articulation. Its depiction fluctuates between psychological introspection, existential expression, and social allegory. In the tension between inner experience and outward representation, the scream becomes the visual focal point of the unspeakable. Depictions of extreme emotion can already be found in antiquity – for example, in the anguished facial expression of Laocoon. However, it is only in modernity that the scream evolves into an autonomous form of expressing existential experience. Edvard Munch's famous painting *The Scream* (1893) marks a key iconographic moment: the figure, frozen in a moment of inner disintegration, conveys through the wide-open mouth a feeling of collective alienation and psychological overwhelm in the age of industrialization. Since then, the open mouth has become a recurring motif for artists who explore the limits of human experience. In Francis Bacon's work, the scream deforms the human face into a grimace – a reflection of traumatic post-war experience. His screaming pope paintings, especially „Pope II“¹, form the visual reference point for Catharina Szonn's installation „THE END IS HIGH“, created at zqm.

The central protagonist of the scene is an industrial whipping machine, originally used in a bakery. It is mounted on an elevated, white-lacquered metal stool, whose geometric lines closely resemble the throne depicted in „Pope II“. Contrary to Szonn's usual practice, the machine has been stripped of its function: the whisk has been removed and replaced by a screen that plays a looping video. The film, accompanied by 1970s music and original sound recordings, connects the tangible real space of zqm with a kind of dreamscape or mental realm (perhaps from the perspective of the machine itself?) filled with (pop-cultural) references to music, film, and art history. It opens up a grotesque, humorous dimension, reminiscent of a psychedelic drug trip: one sees a pink-glittering space-probe heart-bed on the moon, upon which a faceless, gold-clad robot woman lounges; sweet, colorful heart-bears that give voice to the silent scream of a wide-open mouth; the bakery mixing machine standing sadly in the rain; the iconic mask from the blockbuster *Scream*. These scenes are interrupted by text panels displaying fragments of poetry. They read like an inner, chaotic monologue – filled with self-reflection, critique of rationality and societal constructs, alienation, and the search for meaning in a complex world. Can the word – the (out)cry – still generate genuine understanding in this overproduced flood of information? Has existence itself become so estranged through over-analysis and imposed societal norms and structures that the individual can still be heard at all?

¹ Francis Bacon, „Pope II“, 1951, Öl auf Leinwand, 199,30 x 137,50 cm, Kunsthalle Mannheim: <https://digital-classroom.kuma.art/de/francis-bacon-pope-ii-e-learning>

Not only is the video structured in multiple dimensions of image and word, but in „THE END IS HIGH“, zqm itself is divided into multiple material layers assembled in the spirit of collage. In addition to the objet trouvé and the video, the walls of the nearly square room are covered in stretch film. Behind the machine, several LED panels run along the floor. Each element displays a quote from Winfried Menninghaus' treatise „Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Emotion.“². These revolve around the aesthetic, cultural, and symbolic problematization of the mouth – especially the open mouth – in classical and modern art. Here, the mouth is analyzed as an ambivalent zone between inside and outside, between expression and disfigurement, between desire and disgust.

„THE END IS HIGH“ resembles a dream protocol at the threshold between inner and outer world – an associative echo of the scream, sometimes whispering, sometimes raging. Oscillating between trash and tragedy, irony and seriousness, the open mouth becomes not only a symbol of a suppressed voice, but also the site of questions that art does not answer – but keeps open.

– Miriam Jesske

Catharina Szonn (*1987 in Großenhain) studied at the Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach, the Iceland Academy of Arts in Reykjavik, and the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Her expansive installations poetically explore the relationship between human and machine, progress and transience. The boundaries between philosophical inquiry, text, and language-based expression are fluid in her work. Her pieces have been shown in various exhibitions, including Kunstverein Konstanz, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Kunstverein Hannover, the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück, Haus der Kunst in Munich, and Museum Goch.

Thanks to: Nazlı Moripek, Richard Szonn, Christina Szonn

² Menninghaus, Winfried: Ekel, Theorie und Geschichte einer starken Empfindung, Suhrkamp, 2002