

Gazes Out of Time

Perspectives on the Collection I

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27 March 2021 – 24 April 2022, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen

What can the pained gaze of Lucretia, painted around 1530 by Cornelis Bazelaere, tell us today? Gazing at himself in the mirror in 1917—the year before his death—Ferdinand Hodler continues to look searchingly at us today. Gazes are also central to new media: in photographic self-portraits, Manon and Urs Lüthi paraphrase social roles and at the same time take up the classical tradition of reflection in self-portraits. Videos by Candice Breitz, Sylvie Fleury, and Roman Signer analyze contemporary attitudes toward the body and the position of the individual in modern society.

Gazes bridge eras, as is evident in this time of exuberant communication through images. Coming from the past, they can create presence. They communicate within the artwork, determine directions, establish relationships, and thus construct spaces that point inward as well as outward. They confront us with stories of the past or focus directly on events today.

Without following a chronological sequence, and far from physiological, anthropological, or art-theoretical discourses, the exhibition *Gazes Out of Time* brings works from the collection from different eras into new constellations where eyes roam and gazes meet—both into and out of pictures, from the icon of Christ Pantocrator to Federico Barocci's early Christian martyr, Auguste Renoir's Impressionist painting of a young child, and portraits from contemporary photography and video art. The gaze as a language and a form of energy becomes a perspective on the collection, the leitmotif of the selection. *Gazes Out of Time* brings well-known as well as little-known works from the museum's collection into new constellations and playfully follows the theme of the gaze through the centuries in a variety of artistic techniques and media.



“If looks could kill . . .” The power of the gaze is proverbial. We instinctively look for the eyes of people we encounter—or consciously avoid them. The gaze is the most direct, most effective form of communication. Art has always understood that. The eyes in portraits or other representations of people attract our gaze, and we involuntarily follow the direction of their gaze. At that moment, an exchange has begun between the picture, the viewers, and the artist. Gazes tell and confront us with stories. Or they are aimed directly at today’s viewers, make eye contact, mediate, ask questions, encourage dialogue.

Curators: Lorenzo Benedetti and Matthias Wohlgemuth

Gazes from the Studio

Backstage: The studio is the place where artists look, search, glimpse—or, as Picasso put it: “I do not seek. I find.” Large studio windows, models, and visitors point to the fact that this is where inside and outside meet. In the studio, ideas arise, thoughts develop, and artistic creation begins. The creative gaze meets the work for the first time. This is also where this exhibition begins, and our gaze joins it.



Reflected Gazes

Self-reflection in self-portraits: Artists face themselves, present themselves in different poses, as an artist with a brush and palette or dressed in a bourgeois suit, thoughtful, existentialist, domineeringly frontal, representative, exalted, frivolous . . . Their gaze is doubly directed: into the mirror and also toward those who are standing in front of the picture, looking at it. It is the artists themselves who communicate directly with us. Their gaze becomes their personal signature.



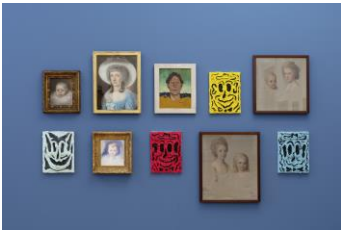
Gazes at Colleagues

Artists look at artists: As a counterpart to the self-portrait, they portray colleagues. They view each other with keen attention: friend, partner, competitor? Unlike self-portraits, these portraits are filtered through a second gaze. It expands the constellation into a triangle and opens a visual dialogue between the artist, the subject, and the viewer.



When Gazes Meet

A dialogue with pictures of people: Portraits serve to commemorate and represent. Often the subjects seek eye contact with the viewer. From post-Byzantine icons to the “icons” of the present, gazes mark presence. They use a nuanced language and send out messages by looking at us: head-on or evasive, self-confident or shy, challenging or doubting, rejecting or longing . . . The gaze directed at us is the artistic invitation to an encounter between the subject and the viewer.



Returned Gazes

Communication in pictures: Whether in biblical stories, historical events, or social gatherings, gazes continually cross or meet within the picture and explain the scene. They indicate directions and outline spaces; they create relationships. Sometimes a direct gaze out of the picture draws us viewers into the events.



Close-up Gazes

Focus in the picture: Books, flowers, and skulls are classic objects of concentration, contemplation, and meditation. In reading, the gaze finds an immediate echo, while in contemplation its focus becomes blurred. At times the gaze concentrates on the object in the subject's hand, and at others it embodies the gesture of melancholy, indefinite and inclined. The distance of the gaze is short and remains in the picture, but the subject's thoughts roam freely.



Sidelong Gazes

Focus beyond the frame: The face is turned away, and the eyes are averted from the viewer. We see them, but they don't see us. A figure shown in profile or in ecstatic rapture allows the gaze to transcend the boundaries of field of view and pictorial space. Our gaze is not returned; we remain excluded from direct communication. The directed gaze and its dynamics suggest a world outside the picture and lead our gaze back into real space.



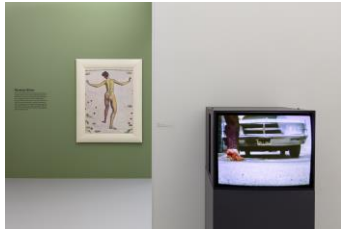
Absent Gazes

Disturbance of the dialogue: Shaded, covered, closed off—the eyes in the picture refuse to meet our gaze. Or, conversely, the subject's gaze remains permanently denied: it disappears, or is already empty. The communication between the gaze from the picture and our gaze into the picture is disturbed, interrupted, or ended.



Gazes from Behind

Step into the picture: The exhibition ends with the figure in the picture turning his or her back to the viewer. In this moment, we are in the same position as the figure looking into the depths of the picture. There the view opens into a landscape—unless it is blocked by the rear wall of a telephone booth. The eyes of the figure in the picture remain invisible; our gaze does not meet them. But the two match each other, and we see the same thing.



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