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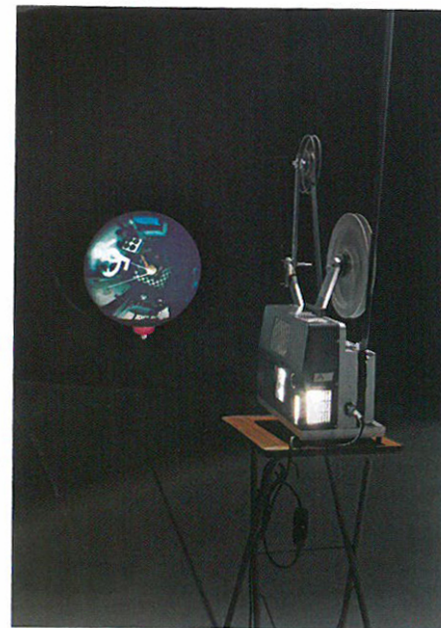
ZÜRICH

Klaus Lutz

MUSEUM HAUS KONSTRUKTIV

The Swiss artist and filmmaker Klaus Lutz's universe was a dense mind-scape, full of imaginary creatures and objects, some of them realistically rendered, others more diagrammatic, fantastical, or stylized. The protagonist of his art and films is an individual who confronts the world's absurdity by being equally absurd but ceaselessly vigilant and disciplined. In Lutz's last film, *Titan*, 2009, he is the eccentric little everyman who enjoys undertaking hallucinatory voyages into a surreal outer space while keeping an eye on life on the ground. Played by the artist, this Chaplinesque figure runs, flies, and somersaults in the air over an unnamed metropolis, looking funny and vulnerable.

The narratives in Lutz's films, as well as his works on paper, are often nonlinear and elusive. Helping decode his imagery, which includes biographical referents and documentary footage, and illuminate the making of his works, this superb retrospective exhibition, "In the Universe," curated by the director of the Museum Haus Konstruktiv,



Klaus Lutz, *Vulcan*, 2004, 16-mm film, projector, balloon, salad strainer, music stand, sound, 2 minutes. Installation view.

Dorothea Strauss, also included all kinds of props and objects, as well as photographic documentation of his apartment/work space, taken after his death in 2009 by Hans Danuser, and Frank Matter's 1999 documentary film, *The Beauty of My Island—Shooting Klaus Lutz*, which provide a direct insight into Lutz's way of working.

Born in 1940, Lutz started making 16-mm films only in 1985, initially in his native Switzerland; but the most original of them, such as *Caveman Lecture*, 2002, *Vulcan*, 2004, and *Titan*, date from after he relocated to the United States in 1993. Working as director, cameraman, performer, set designer, and costume designer, Lutz produced them in his small apartment in Manhattan's East Village, which he turned into a miniature studio. While he continued to make exquisite drawings and prints throughout his career—some used in his films, others often arranged in long strip installations—film enabled Lutz

to break with the static nature of pictorial representation and, perhaps more importantly, insert himself into his works as a performer.

In the era of digital manipulation and high-tech special effects, Lutz's silent analog films, with their handmade look, may seem old-fashioned, but they are highly inventive and visually multilayered, enriched by the use of double and triple exposures, a wide variety of lenses, and rear projections. Because of their fantastic qualities and retro feel, Lutz's films have been compared to the silent films of Georges Méliès, while their montage-style editing evokes Dziga Vertov and Sergey Eisenstein as well as Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique*. The results are playful and seemingly effortless—especially when projected onto floating balloons suspended in a dark space, as in this show.

The universe of Lutz's art and films reflects the breadth of his interests in all kinds of art, as well as in literature. In his drawings, copper engravings, and drypoints, one might detect the influences of Kandinsky and Klee, two artists he admired early in his career. But to develop his distinctive graphic style, which he considered to be a complex pictographic system of signs with symbolic signification, Lutz studied Chinese and other ideographic scripts with great attention. And as the critic and curator Martin Jaeggi notes in the exhibition catalogue, an equally significant impact on Lutz's imagination and artistic process was exerted by the texts of Robert Walser, the charismatic Swiss writer admired by Franz Kafka and Walter Benjamin. Walser's linguistically adventurous, fairy tale–like stories, which he wrote in microscopic, precise pencil script on scraps of paper, inspired Lutz to develop his own visual language and endow it with an equally uninhibited sense of fantasy.

—Marek Bartelik