

Open-Ended

Gallery texts in large-format letters

Open-Ended

Flight CA949 to Paris is ready for departure ... We wish you a pleasant journey.' Airport announcements echo through the corridors of the museum. *Airport*, a sound installation by Chinese artist Zhou Tiehai, creates an imaginary airport where Shanghai is the departure point for flights to major cities in the art world, such as London, New York, and Venice. Tiehai transforms the museum corridors into a waiting area, situated between 'ready for departure' and actual take-off.

Between old and new

An airport is a place of transit, a border area between origin and destination. Such a place of transition – neither here nor there – is what is known as a *liminal* space. Liminality is a term from anthropology. It refers to the intermediate phase of 'rites of passage' around, for example, adulthood, marriage or death, when the old status or situation has already been left behind and the new one has yet to be acquired. This phase on the threshold is uncertain, ambiguous and disorienting. At the same time, this 'in-between' also offers opportunities for new insights and creates space for change.

Transitions

Open-Ended brings together a selection of works that depict a transition. They evoke an in-between space in various ways. The artworks form a passage between a beginning and an end point, or take you on a journey from A to B. As is the case with rituals, a transition takes place. The works are in progress, they invite you to take action, or they lead to new perspectives and (notional) movements. On that threshold between the familiar and the often unknown, they challenge you to cross a boundary physically, mentally or symbolically.

End-of-year rituals

Open-Ended is fitting for this time of year; the winter months are all about reflecting on the past and looking ahead. For centuries, in the dark days around the winter solstice (21 December), people have celebrated the slowly returning light. A faint beginning of new life, which blossoms in spring. During this period, various cultures in the northern hemisphere mark the end of an old phase and the beginning of a new one. These transitions have traditionally been accompanied by rituals, ranging from elaborate ceremonies to minor customs. However, rites are less prominent today; their role has perhaps been partly taken over by art.

Life and death

Made of rattling bones and blood-red ropes, *Bone Curtain* may horrify you. The curtain hangs from wall to wall: you have to walk through it to get to the other side of the room. Serbian artist Marina Abramović and German artist Ulay force you to cross a threshold. The artist duo created *Bone Curtain* after a trip through India. Abramović found that death is a natural part of everyday life in Indian culture, in contrast to the taboos that often surround this theme in Western societies. *Bone Curtain* marks the boundary between life and death and makes the inevitable transition physically tangible. It is both symbolically and literally a confrontation with the unknown and the terrifying.

To the test

Between 1976 and 1988, Abramović and Ulay worked together intimately. During those twelve years, the two travelled the world creating performance art; works consisting of actions performed by the artists, often in front of an audience, using their own bodies as the medium. In their performances, Abramović and Ulay put their physical and mental endurance to the test. They run towards each other colliding violently and hit each other in the face, or they sit opposite each other in silence for hours or even days on end. In extreme exercises in trust and mutual dependence, full of pain and discomfort, the duo

deliberately pushes boundaries. Not only their own, but also those of the audience, who are confronted with these extreme actions.

Interruption

Using floorboards from his studio, Austrian artist Franz West has created a space in which visitors can take a seat. The installation *Clamp* contains several sculptures and benches. The walls are covered with pages from telephone directories of the region of the Kröller-Müller Museum. Originally, *Clamp* also included a working landline: visitors could dial a number and strike up a conversation with whoever answered. This referred to the moments when West, working in his studio, was interrupted by a phone call. An interruption that set his thoughts on a different track, allowing the artist to look at his work with fresh eyes.

People and sculpture

West's oeuvre revolves around participation. For him, sculpture is functional and interactive. He creates, for example, wearable sculptures – *Paßstücke* – that you can put on and move around in. The often strange, unwieldy shapes force you to temporarily adopt an awkward posture and push you out of your comfort zone. West makes people a part of his sculpture; for a moment you find yourself in another reality. His furniture pieces, which are simultaneously art objects and functional items, are an extension of this. When placed in an exhibition, for instance in front of a painting, his chairs and benches create a place to linger.

New insights

In *Clamp* you also become temporarily integrated into the artwork. It functions partly as a theatre; once you cross the threshold, you are 'on show'. West invites you to spend some time here. From the benches you can take in the surroundings, which are full of visual stimuli. This state of calmness induces a mood of contemplation, a different kind of consciousness. Nowadays, the telephone numbers on the walls are outdated and mobile phones mean we can almost always be 'interrupted' in our activities. You can still make calls in *Clamp* – who knows who you might reach – or just relax, perhaps this will lead to new insights.

For German artist Charlotte Posenenske, art must be radically democratic and accessible. Her sculptural works can be installed by anyone. Posenenske invites your participation and transforms the exhibition space into a place to play. *Partition Walls*, a modular work that matches the colour of the walls and appears to be part of the museum architecture, is also an invitation to take action and thus become part of the work. By moving the hinged doors, you can continually reshape the exhibition space. Infinite variations are possible, meaning that *Partition Walls* is never finished and remains open and undefined. This artwork is changeable, temporary and constantly evolving.

Bruce Nauman redefines what constitutes sculpture.

A Cast of the Space Under My Chair and Platform Made Up of the Space Between Two Rectilinear Boxes on the Floor are sculptures that materialise the negative space between and underneath objects. The objects themselves – a chair and two boxes – are absent. At first glance, the shapes do not prompt any recognition. In fact, Nauman sows confusion about what you are looking at. These are works that, like the sculpture *Untitled (Model for Trench, Shaft, and Tunnel)*, require imagination to comprehend. Only then can you identify the actual physical objects and grasp what you are seeing.

No destination

Untitled (Model for Trench, Shaft, and Tunnel) is a continuous passageway with no destination. The work revolves around the disorienting and frightening effect of the endless curve, which means you never know what lies just around the bend. This sculpture by American artist Bruce Nauman is a scale model of an underground tunnel system. Although it is not actually passable, the artist compels you to imagine the perilous situation of this series of curved tunnels beneath the earth's surface.

Oppressive

Nauman's oeuvre, which includes videos, spatial installations, sculpture and neon works, is poetic, sometimes hilarious, but almost always oppressive in nature. His often absurd works initially make you laugh, but quickly become unpleasant and alienating. In his filmed performances, he repeatedly performs peculiar tasks, as if trapped within these actions. In addition to using his own body as the basic material for his art, Nauman also focuses on the observer's body. For example, he creates 'corridors': narrow passageways that visitors have to squeeze through.

Imaginary discomfort

In *Untitled (Model for Trench, Shaft, and Tunnel)*, Nauman allows you to experience a physically uncomfortable situation on an imaginary level. Like his other models for buried shafts and trenches, this scale model has never been realised. Even so, the artist initiates a process in your mind and makes that cramped position almost tangible. The drawings – sketches of this sculpture and of two similar works in other collections – which depict the passageways and the course of the tunnels, reinforce this effect.

In limbo

The boulders in *Suspended Stone Circle* by Australian artist Ken Unsworth float magically in a constellation above the ground. It is as if they have escaped gravity and are moving upwards. Despite their actual mass the 103 river stones appear weightless. The work seems to defy the laws of nature, creating the impression that something supernatural is occurring. For Unsworth, *Suspended Stone Circle* is about transcendence, moving from the conscious to the unconscious and from the material to the immaterial. With this 'machine for thought, introspection and meditation', in which the stones are in limbo, the artist hopes to elevate the observer to another level too.

Balance

In the 1970s Unsworth created several works in which he raised found river stones with carefully knotted steel wires. At the same time, he created performances in which he used his own body as a medium and sculptural element. In these temporary, theatrical installations, he himself hangs precariously wedged between beams or propped against a wall. A tense balance that also characterises *Suspended Stone Circle*.

Sublime experience

Unsworth uses simple materials derived from nature and gives them structure. By aligning the stones precisely and allowing them to float in perfect balance, he creates an enigmatic image. With *Suspended Stone Circle*, the artist creates a field of tension, and not only literally in the interplay of forces between the stones that hold them in place. It is also palpable in the fear that the weight could fall at any moment. With this monumental constellation that defies gravity, Unsworth evokes awe for the grandeur of nature. An almost sublime experience that inspires admiration but also fear.

Ritualistic act

In 1984 British artist Richard Long created three circles on this wall using mud from the River Avon in his hometown of Bristol. He made them by hand in a repetitive, almost ritualistic act, similar to cave painting. Gravity caused the wet mud to seep down during the creative process.

Human trace

Long typically uses nature as a material in his work. He brings it into the museum, as he does here, or leaves an unmistakable human trace on nature. The artist is renowned for his numerous, often lengthy treks to remote locations, which he documents in photographs or drawings of the routes on maps. Using whatever is available – stones, soil, twigs – he ‘draws’ lines, spirals and circles in the landscape, geometric patterns formed by human hands and reminiscent of prehistoric monuments. Long bends nature to his will by imposing order on it. But it is a temporary structuring; left to the elements, his markings will disappear again, with which Long emphasises the power of nature.

Different world

The process of creating A.R. Penck's wooden sculptures is a contest of strength between the artist's aggressive energy and the resistance offered by the material. Penck attacks a piece of wood with a chainsaw or hatchet, shaping it into a rough, unpolished sculpture. *Kopf* is reminiscent of a totem pole. *Der Geist von L.*, which translates to 'The Spirit of L.', also seems connected to the spiritual realm and to commemorate something or someone. Penck created it in 1980, the year he was virtually forced to leave East Germany and ended up in Cologne, West Germany. It was a completely different world from the totalitarian (art) environment of his homeland, where the authorities constantly thwarted his 'deviant' work.

Universal communication

Der Geist von L. is painted with symbols that Penck also uses in his paintings and drawings. In his quest for a universal, timeless visual language, Penck developed a system of signs that he borrowed from different eras and cultures, drawing on prehistoric cave paintings, ancient ritual practices and hieroglyphics, as well as mathematical and technical symbols. In this way, Penck creates a new, elemental form of communication in his art.

Steady progression

The word 'entrance' appears on a black screen, which fades to white until the word 'exit' appears and the screen briefly turns black again. Meanwhile, the sound distorts and a clear tone transforms into a loud static noise.

George Brecht's *Entrance to Exit* evokes a transition that everyone experiences differently: is it about an entrance and exit in a space, or is the artist referring to the steady passage of time and the transience of human existence?

Event scores

Entrance to Exit is the film adaptation of Brecht's Word Event (1961), which consists of a card with the text 'exit'. Word Event is one of his 'event scores'. These works of art are like compositions that the reader can perform; not sheet music with notes, but cards with words that tell what should be played. The textual instructions in Brecht's 'event scores' are often minimal or enigmatic; he leaves a precise definition open to interpretation. Thus he keeps the performance of his works open and unspecified. Everyone is free to interpret them as they see fit and in different ways. Although the later *Entrance to Exit*, as a film, has a more closed and defined form, Brecht still maintains this aspect of different conceivable meanings.

