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Heji Shin

December 8, 2018 to February 3, 2019

Press Conference: Friday, December 7, 2018, 11 am

Opening Reception: Friday, December 7, 2018, 6 pm

Heji Shin is a New York-based German-Korean photographer. She works commercially on projects such as fashion shoots as well as in the—no less commercial—art world. Shin became known, amongst others, for her images commissioned by the American fashion label Eckhaus Latta and for *Make Love*, a much-discussed sex education book for teenagers, as well as for the image series *#lonelygirl* and *Babies*.

Heji Shin's photography raises—from a variety of perspectives and with great audacity—the question of intimacy. At the center of intimacy sits always trust, something that is today called into question on all sorts of levels (think of fake news, misuse of data, skepticism towards experts, etc.). Yet intimacy is the fulcrum between our body and the public sphere, capable, at turns, to protect or expose us. Currently undergoing a reevaluation in the context of social media, it is a momentous subject of crucial importance. It has become a global battleground and a site of profound upheavals and confusion. Once again, we face the challenge of the “difficult business of intimacy” (Virginia Woolf), in other words, there is a need to fundamentally readdress the complex question of intimacy. This is the trajectory of Shin's image production; her photography is a demand to face this task. Yet at the same time, it proceeds with seeming equanimity and casualness. This, however, is precisely what defines the caliber and provocative potential of the work: its calm exposure of what is deeply stirring.

At Kunsthalle Zürich, Heji Shin presents two new bodies of work: portraits of Kanye West and a series of X-ray self-portraits with a dog.

Kanye West is an American musician, producer, designer, and international pop star who calls himself a genius. He polarizes audiences due to his political views and scandalous appearances—some see him as a genius, others consider him to be a megalomaniac. Many, especially visual artists admire his prolificacy. According to Heji Shin, it is not just those we love who deserve admiration. The artist has met Kanye West on several occasions and also accompanied him to Uganda. It was on that trip that the image of West with his daughter North on his shoulders was taken. The further nine portraits are the result of a 10-minute photo shoot in Los Angeles. The portraits were printed on paper, scaled up to billboard format, and applied directly to the wall. Thus, the exhibition shows West „larger than life“—both with regard to his work and his media presence. Despite all this, his “self” remains, of course, inaccessible, because the work's seeming intimacy is illusory and its familiarity artificial. This individual's staging ultimately is nothing more than the staging of the medium of photography itself.

In her series *X-Rays* by contrast, Heji Shin let herself, together with specifically cast dogs, literally be scanned down to the bone. The X-ray images show the innermost structure of the bodies in their purest form. In a world concerned almost exclusively with outward appearances, these self-portraits appear to convey an illusive veracity.

With special thanks to Heji Shin and Galerie Buchholz and additional thanks to Galerie Bernhard and Reena Spaulings Fine Art. Images courtesy of Heji Shin and Galerie Buchholz.

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