

# The Museum of Modern Comedy in Art (MoMCo) – A Proposal

The majority of current, contemporary art is comical, either knowingly or unwittingly. It is comical, because it is paradoxical. It traces back its roots to the modern, European avant-garde, to a motley crew of rebels who were aggressively anti-academic and anti-traditional and who radically upended the prevalent notion of what art did. But somehow, even though it makes little sense, these radical transgressions have become academic standards.

At the core of any categorical upheaval or innovation lies something that is constituted very much like a joke: a fundamental, often sudden, reframing of a given situation and its accepted interpretation. Once the king has been seen naked, he will never appear fully-dressed again.

The modern avant-garde is commonly understood as a series of heroic deeds and daring departures driven by masculine rigour, discipline and dedication. In stark contrast to this militarist narrative, the Museum of Modern Comedy in Art (MoMCo) posits that the avant-garde could be understood as a series of semi-funny or outright unfunny jokes, with art history serving as the set-up and each avant-garde move as the latest punch-line. Many of these comedic manoeuvres were too specialised, far-fetched or simply too clumsily constructed to be funny. Nevertheless, it is precisely these moments of dysfunctional comedy that seem to have generated a multitude of radically new propositions.

MoMCo is dedicated to highlighting, researching and mediating the hidden, comedic aspects of modern and contemporary art, because we feel that these operations are worth being salvaged from the otherwise outdated project of modernist expansion. While the classical notion of reckless, avant-garde bravado has been largely debunked, not least for its implicit sexism and open Eurocentrism, the underlying comedic mechanisms deserve re-examination. They still have the potential to profoundly reframe art, reality and our perception of ourselves and the world.

MoMCo takes this to be both an important historical mission and a contemporary responsibility. We believe that significant change does not primarily issue from reason, logical thinking and morality, but rather from puns, misunderstandings, pratfalls, faulty logic, visual rhymes, and childishness. To understand these operations and their historical role more fully might help artists and viewers to shake off the academic fatigue spreading throughout the current field of contemporary art.

MoMCo aspires to act on three, interconnected planes: as an art historical institution amending the record on seminal avant-garde achievements; as a collection of modernist art works; and as a curatorial initiative, hosting temporary exhibitions, dedicated to tracing the complex, often veiled genealogies from comedic avant-garde operations to important, contemporary works.

For this first exhibition, MoMCo is presented in the form of a conceptual map and a series of didactic figurines depicting key-moments in bona fide art history.

Furthermore, MoMCo is proud to present *Resuscitations*, its first temporary exhibition of contemporary art, comprising video works by Agnieszka Polska (PL), Roe Rosen (IL), Sally O'Reilly (UK), Gernot Wieland (AT/DE), and Olav Westphalen (DE/US). *Resuscitations* has been jointly curated by Project Arts Centre curator Livia Páldi and MoMCo founder Olav Westphalen.