

HUMOROUS, DIRECT, INTERACTIVE: THE SCHIRN IS PRESENTING A LOCATION-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION BY MONSTER CHETWYND IN ITS PUBLIC ROTUNDA

MONSTER CHETWYND **A CAT IS NOT A DOG**

MARCH 3 – MAY 29, 2023

PRESS PREVIEW: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2023, 11 A.M.

The art of Monster Chetwynd (b. 1973) interacts directly with the public. The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is presenting a location-specific installation by the artist in its public Rotunda from March 3 to May 29, 2023. Chetwynd achieved fame with her exuberant and humorous performances using handmade costumes, props, and settings. Her works are often absurd and full of joie de vivre; they refer to popular culture or iconic works from art history. With her installation in the Rotunda of the Schirn, the artist is reacting directly and playfully to the conditions of the freely accessible location. She is positioning three of her monstrous *Heads* in the Schirn Rotunda and having visitors enter the roofed-in space through their open mouths. Here Chetwynd is referring at the same time to a motif from the Christian pictorial tradition: the “Hellmouth” or Gateway to Hell. Moving through the passageway thereby opens an alternative space to the real outside world. Entering the three monumental sculptures *Il Tetto* (2017), *Hell Mouth 3* (2019), and *Cat Head and Toxic Garden* (2022) permits an experience of space that differs from everyday life. Sustainability and participation are essential elements of Chetwynd’s creative activity; in the Schirn, the artist makes existing sculptures tangible in a new, location-specific form. The choice of materials and the processual nature of her working method can also be understood as a critical commentary on consumer society.

The exhibition “Monster Chetwynd: A CAT IS NOT A DOG” is supported by the SCHIRN ZEITGENOSSEN, with additional support from the British Council.

Dr. Sebastian Baden, director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, notes: “Monster Chetwynd is without doubt one of the most important performance and installation artists of our time. Her art invites interaction and makes use of humor as a means of social change. With her installation, Chetwynd directly involves the public by making them cross into the Schirn through the open mouths of her *Heads*. Her art is direct, and can also be understood in this respect both as an invitation and as a democratic statement.”

Katharina Dohm, curator of the exhibition, says of the artist: “Monster Chetwynd breaks with the traditions and conventions of the art world in a highly original and humorous way. With the repeated changes to her artist name, she questions gender and the relevance of authorship and signature. Her art unites elements of popular culture with iconic moments of cultural history in an effortless and approachable way, focusing on questions of sustainability through the reuse of existing materials. In a relaxed manner, Chetwynd undermines concepts of value and consistency and lets the public perceive familiar objects in a subversive and alternative light.”

Monster Chetwynd’s performance and installation art is based on a multitude of influences from film and television, literature, antiquity, art history and philosophy, and even musicals. The artist combines elements of pop and high culture in a casual manner. Thus, the title of the Schirn exhibition “A CAT IS NOT A DOG” is a play on the popular musical *Cats*, but also on the eponymous film and on its critique, such as the humorous documentary *Why Is Cats*. The three

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monumental sculptures placed in the Rotunda take up the motif of the Gateway to Hell, among other things. As a passageway or entrance, this motif was also appropriated in *Sacro Bosco* near Bomarzo, an Italian sculpture garden from the sixteenth century, or in the artist Niki de Saint Phalle's *Tarot Garden* in Tuscany, as well as in today's amusement parks. Chetwynd's performances are often improvised and are realized together with amateur actors and friends. The inclusion of other people in the creative process is of central importance here. For the installation in the Rotunda of the Schirn, the performative moment also functions as the conceptual impetus. The visitors engage directly with the three monstrous *Heads*, as they enter the Rotunda through the creatures' oversized mouths. Since 2005 the motif of the head has occurred in Chetwynd's art in various forms and functions. *Cat Head and Toxic Garden* (2022), the gigantic head of a cat, was initially designed and realized for the exhibition "SurréAlice" at Musée D'Art moderne et contemporain in Strasbourg, which examined how the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll has inspired surrealist artists. The surface of the monumental sculpture, which is some 5 meters high, consists of jute, coconut fibers, and cardboard and is supported by a wooden construction. The two *Heads Il Tetto* (2017) and *Hell Mouth 3* (2019) also consist of simple materials like cardboard, wicker, and cloth and were on view in earlier exhibitions, in some cases in different forms. In the Schirn Rotunda, these existing monumental sculptures were reconstructed and modified to adapt them to the location. For Chetwynd, the changes which leave their mark on the materials during the process of dismantling and rebuilding form an essential component of the work. Through this recycling and new presentation, the artist gives her works the opportunity to continue to develop their form. This approach contradicts traditional ideas that art objects are, by definition, unique creations. Chetwynd's repeated changes in name—from Spartacus Chetwynd to Marvin Gaye and finally to Monster Chetwynd—reflect a strategy of undermining the usual rules of art.

Monster Chetwynd (b. 1973 in London) lives and works in Zurich. In 1994, she earned a bachelor's degree in social anthropology and history at University College London, and she completed studies in 2004 at the Royal College of Art with a master's degree in painting. Her most recent projects are two commissions at the Gloucester Road underground station, London, and at Mount Stewart on the Isle of Bute, as well as a film for Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw. She has performed and exhibited her works internationally at various venues, including Migros Museum, Zurich (2022); Konsthall C, Stockholm (2021); De Pont, Tilburg (2019); Villa Arson, Nice (2019); a winter commission for a work on the facade of Tate Britain, London (2018); CCA Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow (2016); Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen (2016); and Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2016). In 2012, she was the first performance artist to be nominated for the Turner Prize.

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Contemporary positions have previously been presented in the Rotunda of the Schirn by artists such as Amna Elhassan, Carlos Bunga (2022), Caroline Monnet (2020), Karla Black (2019), Maria Loboda, Neil Beloufa (2018), Philipp Fürhofer, Lena Henke (2017), Rosa Barba, Peter Halley (2016), Heather Phillipson, Alicja Kwade (2015), Andreas Schulze (2014), Yoko Ono (2013), Bettina Pousttchi (2012), Barbara Kruger (2010), Eva Grubinger (2007), Jan De Cock (2005), Ayşe Erkmen, and Olafur Eliasson (2004).

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VENUE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt am Main **DURATION** March 3 – May 29, 2023 **ADMISSION** free of charge **INFORMATION** www.schirn.de **EMAIL** welcome@schirn.de **TELEPHONE** +49.69.29 98 82-0 **CURATOR** Katharina Dohm **ASSISTANT** Fanny Bengsch **SUPPORTED BY** SCHIRN ZEITGENOSSEN **ADDITIONAL SUPPORT** British Council

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