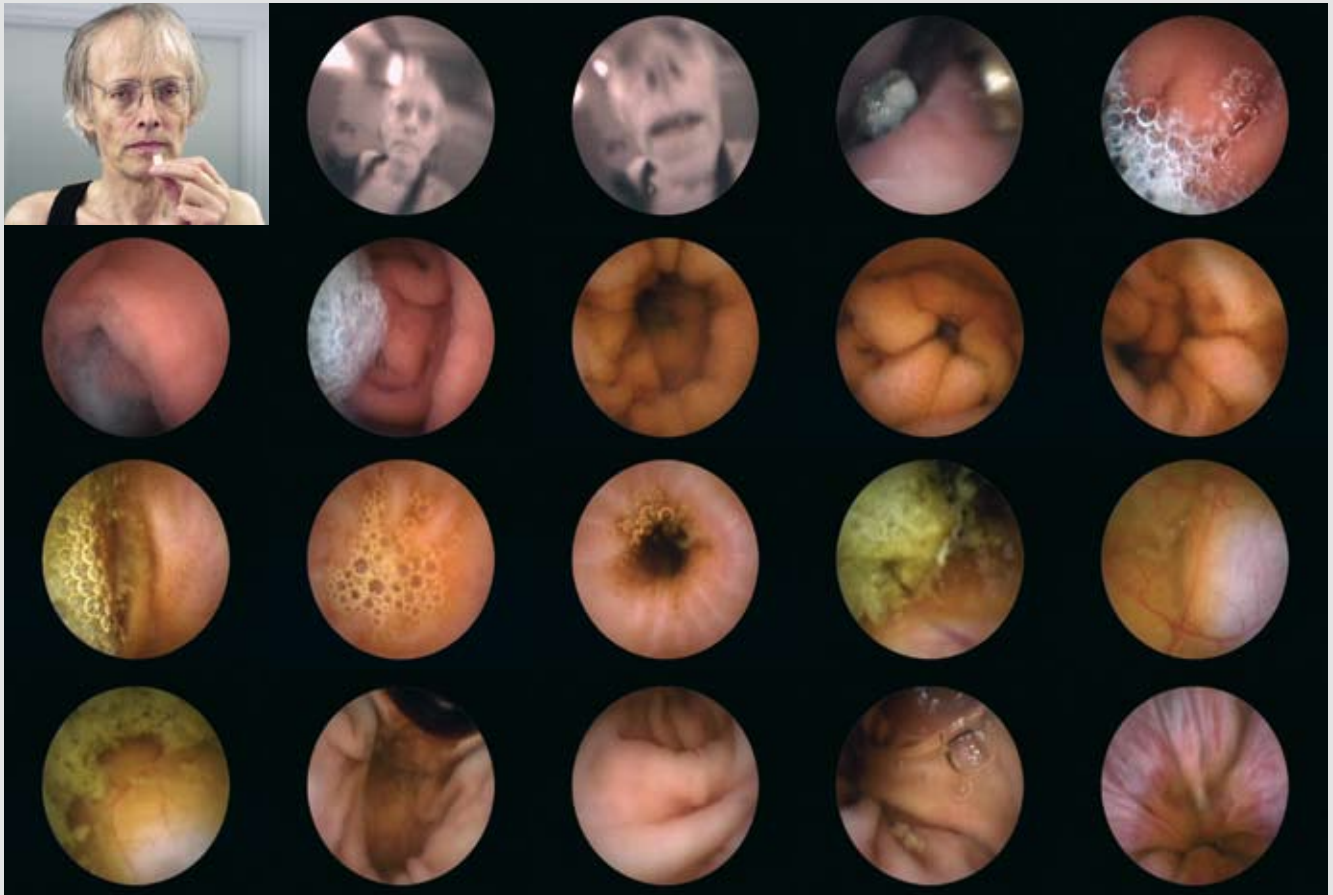


Essay

A Journey Inside

A look at the body's interior in post 1960 art



*Timm Ulrichs,
An Endoscopic Journey
Color video, silent, 86 minutes 42 seconds
Idea: 1971; Realization: 2004*

Timm Ulrichs: "I swallow a tiny camera that documents its journey through my digestive tract. Swallowing and excreting the recording device marks the beginning and end of the introspective-autobiographical movie."

Actual recording time: 9 hours.

Gurgling, smacking noises emanate from the video booth separated from the exhibition room by a black curtain. Out of curiosity, a couple of visitors stick their heads in before bravely disappearing into the darkness. The reproduction of this intimate situation is intentional. Behind the curtain is a projection of a journey into the body's interior made by artist Timm Ulrichs (*1940). Those daring to venture inside are met with the circular projection of a forwards movement in a dark abyss that is both mysterious and threatening. To realize this introspective-biographical work, Ulrichs swallowed an endoscopic camera enclosed in a capsule which documented the trip through his digestive tract. Ulrichs first thought of this 86 minute color movie back in 1971. However, the technology required did not exist at the time. The capsule endoscopic procedure that is used for medical diagnostics has only been around for a few years.

"Images were unearthed that no travel guide has been able to offer, no Baedeker can explain."

Timm Ulrichs

Medical imaging procedures have made it possible to fulfill mankind's desire of looking into the body. Until the discovery of invisible electromagnetic radiation (x-rays) by Wilhelm Konrad Röntgen, the body was a type of black box. If you wanted to learn more than just the exterior image of a person, you had to dismember the body. However, until the time of the Renaissance, looking into the human body entailed considerable risks. If artists wanted to study the anatomy of people, they were forced to sneak into execution sites in the middle of the night and abscond with the remains of the hangman's work. Even Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) is rumored to have participated in such illegal autopsies. Art historians have come across an entry in his diaries that confirms these suspicions: "And if you are interested in such things, maybe you are restrained by nausea. And if this doesn't stop you, maybe you are inhibited by the fear of being with the oppressed, dissected and horribly mutilated dead...".

Even later, after autopsies became an accepted part of research, it was primarily the corpses of those sentenced to die that made it to the operating tables of doctors.

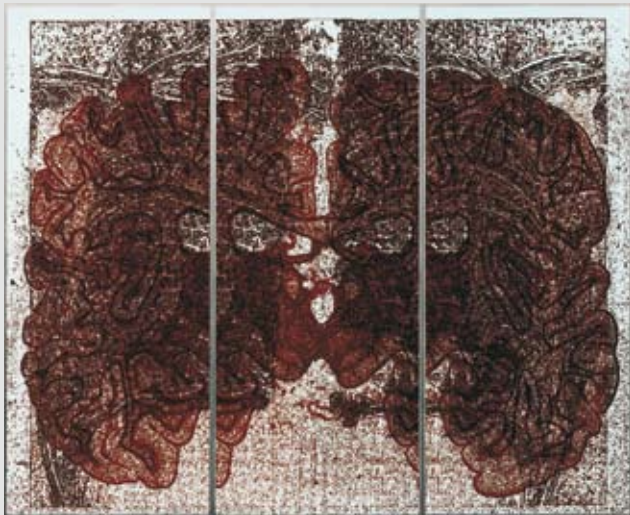
The discovery of imaging procedures in medicine also had a profound effect on art. There has been a great deal of interest in natural science methods since the late 1960s as the body moved to the center of artistic activities following socio-political developments. With new art forms such as body art, happening and performances, artists strived to eliminate obsolete moral ideas. Used as artistic material, the naked body became a political tool to make public what was once private. In the beginning, the performances and actions dealt with being satisfied with your body and your sexuality. This changed in the 1980s when the interests of artists began focusing on the dangers to the body caused by diseases.

Timm Ulrichs, who gives us an intimate look at his insides in his work "Looking through me – an endoscopic journey" (2004), has been working on bodily related actions since the late 1960s. In "Checked Baggage" (1975-1987), he was x-rayed like a piece of luggage on a conveyor belt at an airport. He later exhibited the photographic findings.

Many artists use x-rays as a metaphor to question the credibility of images. In her work "Global Lines II" (1997), photographer Katharina Sieverding (*1944) shows an x-ray of her lungs onto which she projects a section of her brain. This work initially irritates the observer as it is not possible to clearly distinguish the images. As the daughter of a radiologist, she knows how problematic it is to interpret x-rays. With her work, she not only challenges the visual habits of the observer but also criticizes the truth of medical imaging procedures. Felix Droese (*1950) stated his criticism somewhat more radically when he used thick brushstrokes to write "Everything's a lie" (1990) on two x-rays.

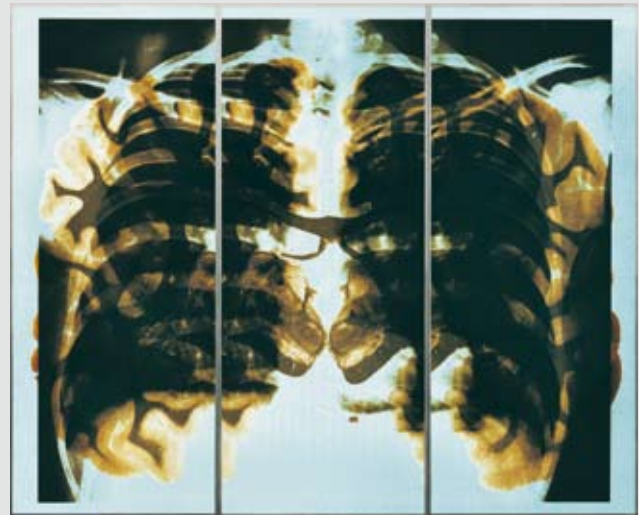
Like an animal, an endoscopic camera attacked the body of Lebanese artist Mona Hatoum (*1952). She arranged the images of a gastroscopy and colonoscopy

Essay



© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008 © Photo: Klaus Mettig

*Katharina Sieverding,
WELTLINIE I, 1997, AIDIA Process,
Acrylic, steel 300 x 375 cm.*



© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008 © Photo: Klaus Mettig

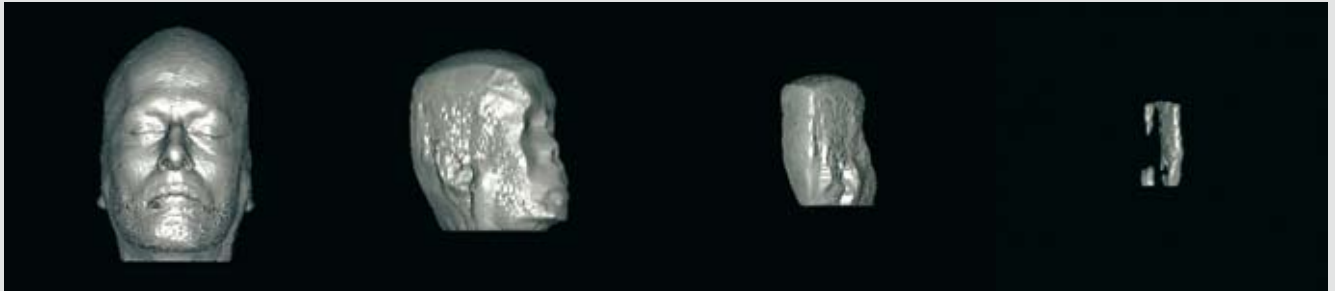
*Katharina Sieverding,
WELTLINIE II, 1997, AIDIA Process
Acrylic, steel 300 x 375 cm.*

to create an impressive film, "Corps étranger" (1994). The camera initially probed her naked body until it entered an opening and continued its journey inside. In the beginning, the film shows close-ups of her sensory and sex organs which are later replaced with images of the organ walls and mucuous membranes. "I wanted," explained Mona Hatoum, "my work to show how the body is examined, attacked, injured and deconstructed by scientific eyes."

Artists who show their insides in exhibitions always launch a debate, of course, about what is public and what should remain private. Australian performance artist Stelarc (*1946) has probably been the most radical in his work. He declared his stomach an exhibition room for his work "Stomach Sculpture" (1993). He swallowed a 50 x 14 mm capsule combined with a control unit. Inside his stomach, the capsule unfolded to reveal an 80 x 55 mm sculpture that buzzed, peeped and emitted light signals. Everything was recorded using an endoscopic camera.

Images from medicine have always had a particularly fascinating effect on artists. Jean-Michel Basquiat's (1960-1988) drawings were influenced by Gray's Anatomy Textbook. His mother gave him a copy of this American benchmark of medicine in 1968 while he was laid up in a hospital following a traffic accident. Recently, new imaging procedures in medicine have become increasingly important in addition to the pictures in books. In particular, magnetic resonance images (MRI), in which the body is examined and recorded slice by slice, fascinate many artists. This technique inspired Timm Ulrichs to create his film "Journey to the Center of Me" (1987) which is based on the reconstruction of an MRI of his skull.

Marilène Oliver (*1977) used an MRI to measure her entire family. Her 192 x 50 x 70 cm portraits from her "Family portrait" series (2001) comprise 92 equally spaced Plexiglas plates stacked on top of each other. Each of them contains a medical image transferred using the screen printing technique. Although this technique enables you to look at the core of a person,



© YG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008

*Timm Ulrichs,
Journey to the Center of Me; 1995/97; black and white movie, silent, 7 minutes 53 seconds
3D digital visualization of the lowest point of the head of the artist using automatic segmenting and volume rendering (ray casting) based on a magnetic resonance image and fixation of the calculated markers on the scalp using tattoos.*

the pure addition of the images cannot reproduce the wholeness. The human body appears in her sculpture only as a dim gray silhouette.

Medical images are produced to convey knowledge about people. However, with the development of new techniques, specialists and amateurs alike are fascinated by the brilliance and beauty of the images of the mysterious inner world. As an "artist in residence," British artist Heather Barnett visited many hospitals and medical facilities to explore the duality of scientific knowledge and the beauty of medical images. She used microscopic images of her own cell structure as a template for her "Cellular Wallpaper" series (2000) to develop wallpaper patterns. The most intimate secretions of her body such as a cervical smear, blood and sweat are examined microscopically and enlarged for decora-

tion. Heather Barnett thus presents existential questions about the origin and meaning of human life that, in the end, cannot be answered through medical images but only philosophically.

Timm Ulrichs, who has dealt with the exploration of people in his artwork his entire life came to the following conclusion:

"The deeper we look into ourselves, the more we sink in our physique and psyche, the more mysteriously, abysmally, eerily and strangely we appear to ourselves and we realize what we are: a foreign body."

Timm Ulrichs

Dr. Cornelia Gockel

Born in Düsseldorf in 1963, she is an art critic and lecturer of art history. As a scientific assistant, she teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and as a guest lecturer at the University of Newcastle (UK).