

*Eerily beautiful*

Innsbruck

Jun 06–Sep 13 2025  
Opening Jun 05, 18–20:00

What happens when the familiar becomes estranged, when the everyday begins to shudder and twitch, and the harmless casts a shadow? With *eerily beautiful* the viewers are led to the precarious edge where the eerie reveals itself. Through an ensemble of painting, sculpture, installation, and photography, the exhibition illuminates the liminal space between humor and horror, play and disruption. It draws on concepts of the uncanny as described by Sigmund Freud and taken up in contemporary art by artists such as Mike Kelley. The focus lies not on superficial effects, but on subtle dislocations that unsettle familiar images. Humor is not excluded—on the contrary, it often emerges as the nervous laughter that accompanies the uncanny: a deeply personal sensation, shaped by social context.

*Hi, Sunny:* Thilo Jenssen's painting from the year 2022 opens an ambivalent gateway: the fragmented, distorted laugh of a smiley face that offers a friendly greeting—or is it pulling a grimace? With a minimalist gesture, the image evokes associations with pop iconography and digitally mediated emotions like emojis. It's an expression that teeters between euphoria and exhaustion.

Kerstin von Gabain's works intensify the impression: in a wooden crate on the floor, the neon piece *rotten apple* (2024) glows—an all-too-literal rotten promise, embedded in wood shavings that resemble an almost institutional preservation measure. *Shelter for beasts* (2024) shows a black birdhouse from which a thin latex loop protrudes—like a tongue, an antenna, or a loosely dangling signal caught between protection and threat.

The Grady twins from the film *The Shining* (1980) appear with bold directness in Maria Brunner's large-format gouache titled *Dream within a Dream*. They are arranged like ornamental decoration around a dressing or psyche mirror—almost as if one were not looking at one's own reflection, but rather through the mirror, directly into the darkness beyond. *The mirror image, in which the subject perceives itself as a direct reflection of its real form, thus remains an act of imagination—and a disconcerting experience.* 1)

Clegg & Guttman's commissioned portrait confronts the viewer with a cultured man who appears to proudly present his collection of African NOK masks. But the scene begins to tilt: the self-staging, the colonial undertone, the stiff suit—all of it feels just a bit too perfect, too staged, too masked.

In contrast, Carmen Brucic's large-scale vanitas still life *Ein weißer Strahl schießt vom Himmel und löscht diese Komödie aus* (2008) resists immediate deciphering: layers of images and photographs obscure the subject, creating distance. Masking—this time in an ideological sense—is taken up directly by Thomas Feuerstein. In his drawing *MARXIAN ALIENATION* (2018), created using coal he produced himself, the faces of Margaret Thatcher and Karl Marx—once political adversaries—merge into a phantom that gazes from within history: recognizable, yet elusive—ghostly, like an ideological echo.

In Franz West's oeuvre, the *Lemuren*—anthropomorphic, figurative sculptures—occupy a distinctive place. The titular spirit beings from Roman religion, known as *Manes*, were considered ghosts of the dead who had not received a proper burial or had committed wrongdoing during their lifetimes. Like many of West's other series, the *Lemuren* combine humor with peculiarity and uncanny traits. They not only draw on aesthetic traditions of the grotesque and the ugly, but also point to the psychological dimensions of the uncanny, as analyzed by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay *The Uncanny*. Freud begins with the double meaning of the German word *heimlich*—oscillating between the familiar and the concealed—which, in a paradoxical reversal, returns in its opposite: the *unheimlich*, the uncanny. The final note—or rather, a flickering echo—once again comes from Thilo Jenssen.

His painting of a deserted elevator lobby is based on an AI-generated image, which was first transferred onto the canvas as a digital contact print and then manually reworked. The result is a space in suspension—functional yet estranged, like a stage for something that no longer seems entirely human.

1) Babette Richter, in: Maria Brunner. Nebenplanetchen Galerie Capitain und Forum Agathe Nisple, Köln/Appenzell 2002.