

DAS MINSK

KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

INTERPLAY NO. 6 WOLFGANG MATTHEUER AND DAN NAMINGHA

"The moon is risen, beaming,
The golden stars are gleaming
So brightly in the skies;
The hushed, black woods are dreaming,
The mists, like phantoms seeming,
From meadows magically rise.

How still the world reposes,
While twilight round it closes,
So peaceful and so fair!
A quiet room for sleeping,
Into oblivion steeping
The day's distress and sober care."

"Der Mond ist aufgegangen" (The Moon has Risen), 1779
(Text: Matthias Claudius, Melody: Johann Abraham Peter Schulz)

In DAS MINSK's cabinet, Noah Davis's *Painting for My Dad* (2011) is shown alongside an INTERPLAY featuring two night scenes by the painters Wolfgang Mattheuer (1927, Vogtland – 2004, Leipzig) and Dan Namingha (1950, Arizona).

In the exhibition series INTERPLAY, I juxtapose artworks—often from very different contexts—in order to produce interactions outside of the "canon." It's as if the artworks are musicians, meeting briefly in a small jazz club to make spontaneous music, even if they may not have known each other beforehand. They play together, though not necessarily seeking harmony, but perhaps in search of a challenge. Inspired by Tina M. Campt's concept of "listening to images,"¹ my aim with INTERPLAY is to confront artworks with one another in order to find out what happens between them if you just listen carefully. Creating INTERPLAYS between the works offers the freedom to proceed intuitively, perhaps even speculatively, beyond art-historical "facts," and to enable dialogues that then unexpectedly open new perspectives.

The INTERPLAY between Mattheuer and Namingha depicts the night in two different settings, once in the vicinity of Leipzig and once in New Mexico. The night, which belongs to everyone and no one, comes and goes at different times everywhere. When it gets dark, we're reminded that once again another day has passed and a new day will soon begin. The transition between night and day captivates with its colors; the night lets the stars twinkle and the moon shine. Just as the night conjures sleep,

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it can also be marked by sleeplessness, nightshifts, or nightlife. The night has always been a subject of art—whether in the form of contemplative landscapes with distant horizons as in Romanticism or in the excessive party scenes of Expressionism.

The artist Wolfgang Mattheuer was born in Vogtland, worked in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and remained in Leipzig until his death. Mattheuer's work was in the tradition of the Leipzig School in the former GDR. With over twenty-five works, his paintings and sculptures form the largest group in the Hasso Plattner Collection, directly after Claude Monet.

The soundtrack to Mattheuer's painting comes from the title. It is the famous lullaby "Der Mond ist aufgegangen" (The Moon has Risen), a slow melody that radiates confidence and security.² Anyone familiar with the song can easily imagine the melody in their head. But the work is full of irony, showing how the headlights of a car shine brighter on the horizon than the rising, cloudy moon sung about in the lyrics.

The protagonist of the song, the moon, is outshone by a car's high beams. The lights of a city are visible in the background. Mattheuer thus breaks with the romanticism of the scenery and elicits reflections on how technology and artificial light are often opposed to the rhythms of nature and disrupt the peace of the night. Mattheuer remarks: "Technology constantly surrounds us, it belongs to our life. . . . I find many ideas for paintings in the sudden, at times violent collision of nature and technology and human attitudes toward it. To me, this tension seems significant to our time, it shows the complexity of our present."³

Dan Namingha's painting *New Mexico Night #4* (2008) depicts a very similar scene of a hilly landscape with the moon. But the nature appears to be untouched and of almost surreal perfection. Namingha was born in Keams Canyon, Arizona, and is a member of the Hopi-Tewa community. He has worked as a painter and sculptor for forty years and is a prominent representative of Native American art in the United States. His works often depict his immediate surroundings and testify to an unwavering respect for the Earth and its resources and for the spirit of his ancestors. "The thought is pretty simple. Either we sink or we float. We have a choice. And that's what some of the elders said, we have a choice. We can go in a direction that is environmentally destructive. Also based on human rights, throughout the world, how each culture, how each country, how they sometimes will pick on another country and abuse the people from that particular place. We do have a choice,"⁴ Namingha explains in a lecture about the Hopi prophecies and once again illustrates the deep connection between humanity and nature.

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Both artists chose the same subject, albeit geographically very far apart—as far as the Vogtland is from New Mexico. The artists chose a similar perspective and an almost identical composition. In both cases, we are looking at hilly landscapes with the moon at the center of a sky that isn't entirely black—a sky in transition between day and night or night and day.

If we don't only consider the INTERPLAY between Mattheuer and Namingha, but also add Noah Davis's *Painting for My Dad* and attempt to "listen" to all three night paintings in the cabinet, we can perceive that the scenes seem immersed in an uncanny silence, far removed from the noise of modern life. Contemplation of nature is the focus here, very much in keeping with the spirit of Romanticism. Various light sources, both natural and artificial, are available: moon, stars, car headlights, street-lamps, or a handheld oil lamp. Only in Davis's painting is a single person depicted from behind, as in the renowned works of Caspar David Friedrich. He holds a lamp in his hand while gazing into a starry sky in the distance. Which light sources do we carry with us and within us to illuminate the way for ourselves and for others in the darkness? Which artists should urgently be highlighted in order to gain visibility and representation?

Paola Malavassi

1 See Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). The exhibition series INTERPLAY is dedicated to the scholar Tina M. Campt.

2 Other artists have also taken up this famous lyric, most recently the conceptual artist David Horvitz (b. 1982, California) with the work *Lullaby for a landscape* (2017) with forty-two tempered aluminum alloy chimes tuned to the notes of the lullaby.

3 Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Äusserungen: Texte, Graphik* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1990), p. 36.

4 Dan Namingha during a lecture at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico: "Dan Namingha: MIAC Living Treasure," YouTube video, March 25, 2016, 54:52 min., uploaded by Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TphZpqFXbTk&t=2989s> (accessed August 19, 2024).