

# Philipp Timischl “Reality is the worst-case scenario” at Heidelberger Kunstverein



Philipp Timischl “Reality is the worst-case scenario” at Heidelberger Kunstverein, 2022. Photo: Lys Y. Seng

What happens when we define reality increasingly on the basis of experiences generated for us by the media? How are our perceptions of our surroundings and our understanding of social status, personal identity and sexuality changed by constantly checking these aspects of life against mass media content?

These are the questions addressed by Philipp Timischl in his work, for which he processes personal experiences and relates them to a range of mass media themes and genres. One example is the LED sculpture *Kim and Kourtney FIGHT over Work Ethic* (2021) featured in the exhibition that combines fake fur and spray paint with a clip from the series “Keeping up with the Kardashians”. In the chosen scene with Kim and Kourtney, the two millionaire sisters are arguing about their work ethic: while one wants to make her mother proud, the other counters that she’d rather be a good mother herself. By reducing the playback speed of the video by half, the individual statements in the exchange take on an extraordinary presence and an absurd poetry. The focus is on the appropriation and interpretation of social codes and the rules of what passes for good taste, marking the individual’s position within society and determining whether they are included or excluded. Timischl’s work often highlights the subtle boundaries of bourgeois culture by willfully breaching or playfully transgressing codes considered or claimed to be legitimate.

The exhibition centers on the premiere of the spectacular new LED sculpture *Reality is the worst-case scenario, LA to NY (Austin)* (2022). The work is based on short video sequences, edited together with extremely fast cuts, that were shot over several weeks during a road trip across the United States by the artist and friends. The large-scale video wall was designed by Timischl to fit the exhibition space at Heidelberger Kunstverein, confronting the viewer with a complex montage of highly diverse, overlapping information. Matching the fast cut style, the landscapes and urban / suburban settings are accompanied by snatches of the travelers’ conversation and songs from the radio.

On a second synchronized screen, Timischl also shows maps showing the travelers' progress, like the display of a navigation system. In other words, more information than can be absorbed by visitors, forcing them to choose between multiple elements of text, image and sound. The fragmentary conversations touch on many and varied themes, a seemingly endless range, in some cases arbitrary and highly condensed: death, life and gas prices; religion, friendship and Beyoncé; intensive livestock farming, unpaid work and the weather. While Beyoncé sings: "I was here, I lived!"

By playing with this excess of information, Timischl initially suggests we are seeing real footage from a stereotypical road trip across the United States. As we watch, however, we begin to wonder whether this reality may have been faked, since the work contains a surprising number of coincidences: one of the people in the car tells of not being given an internship because she didn't show enough interest in it, while on the radio Usher sings, "get that money, money, money." Or can it be chance that the car is driving through an oil field in Texas when the group realizes they've run out of gas again?

Once sensitized to such phenomena by Timischl's work, even the most fleeting scrap of image or sound suddenly seems to be at least potentially contrived, a reality shaped by the media. But must something be untrue just because it might be a fake? Or is this contrived quality precisely what makes reality believable today?

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