

Ztohoven. Media Reality

Opening: 29 May 2008, from 8pm
 Filmscreening: 29 May 2008, 8.30pm
 Exhibition runs from 30.05.-28.06.2009, Sat & Sun 2-6pm
 Additionally open: 26.06.2008, 8-11pm

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In their work, for the most part interventions in public space, the Prague based artist collective Ztohoven (a wordplay from the Czech *z toho ven* – get out of it, but also *sto hoven* – a hundred piles of shit) question the credibility of mass media and advertising. Among their better known works, they covered the pedestrian figures on Prague traffic lights with stencils showing limping, reclining, drinking or urinating figures.

In their action *Media Reality*, which is shown in original form at *Art Laboratory Berlin*, Ztohoven added images of an atomic explosion to a live broadcast of a panoramic landscape from the Krkonoše Mountains on the Czech weather channel ČT 2. The purpose was to initiate a debate on the manipulation of television images. The channel pressed charges of malicious dissemination of false information for the purpose of damaging the public peace as well as destruction of property.



Media Reality, 2007, videostill

At the same time as the first court case Ztohoven received the 2007 Prize for New Art NG 333 from the Prague National Gallery for *Media Reality*, the first time the new prize was awarded. The president of the National Gallery, Milan Knizak, explained the decision for Ztohoven: "They have broken out of the regular scripted art space into the public sphere with the goal of confronting society in a provocative way."¹ This clearly shows the range of perceptions that judged the action from juvenile prank to constructive and provocative art action. Ztohoven clearly cite the influence of Orson Welles 1938 radio play of H.G.Wells *War of the Worlds*

Ztohoven themselves explain their action in the following terms: "We are not a terrorist or political group, our purpose is not to intimidate or manipulate society in the very same way as we witness in everyday real life or media. Regardless of the intentions, whether political or those of market, companies, or global corporations which secretly manipulate and exert pressure on their products and ideas through every channel possible upon the human subconsciousness. Even the slightest intrusion into this system or appeal on pure human intellect, and its ability not to be worked upon, is in our opinion harmless in a democratic country. For this reason the artist group Ztohoven intruded on the public premises of our capital, Prague, a few years ago and managed to poach this advertisement territory in principle as well as the advertisement itself.

On the June 17, 2007 our group invaded the media and television territory and intruded and poached its truthfulness as well as its credibility. We pointed out the possible confusion of the media presented picture of our world for the real one. Is everything that our media such as newspapers, television, internet offer on daily basis real truth or reality? It is this idea that our project introduces to general public; as a sort of reminder to everyone. We truly believe that the independent territory of television, governed by public law, is the kind of media which can handle such a thing even at the cost of self impeachment. Let it be this kind of appeal for our future and reminder to all forms of media that the truth must be presented at any cost. We are grateful for an independent media and an independent territory for society."²

As well as the actual video *Media Reality* showing the television footage altered with an atomic explosion and court documents, *Art Laboratory Berlin* will present the German premiere of the film *On Media Reality* (45', Czech with English subtitles) by Vladimir Turner, a documentary about the legal and artistic aftermath of the action with until now unshown images and interviews with representatives from Czech television, journalists, scholars as well as members of Ztohoven.

Sandra Frimmel

¹ <http://www.culturecuts.net/shortlist/2008/02/media-reality-by-ztohoven.html>

² http://www.ztohoven.com/cz/medialni_realita