



Notes on Us
John Sanborn
at the Kunshalle Praha
Featuring the works
V+M (2015)
and
Mythic Status (2016)

February 29, 2024
to June 3, 2024

Notes on Us | John Sanborn | Kunsthalle Praha

John Sanborn | *Notes on Us* | Curator: Barbora Ropková

Kunsthalle Praha hosts the first-ever solo exhibition of John Sanborn's work in the Czech Republic, titled *Notes on Us*. Sanborn initially rose to prominence in the experimental video art scene of the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, he contributed to the heyday of MTV's music video aesthetics and later to the contemporary boom of digital art in Hollywood. Visitors will have the chance to see his monumental nine-channel video installation *V+M* (2015), which is part of the Kunsthalle Praha Collection and thematizes the mythological story of Venus and Mars. Together with a series of four digital portraits titled *Mythic Status* (2015–2016), these works explore themes such as love, self-awareness, and fluid gender identity. These immersive large-scale projections will bring to life the walls of Gallery 3.

Inclusive collaboration as well as cultural and gender diversity have always been essential to Sanborn's work. As he describes: *"I am a sponge, absorbing and notating bits and pieces of language, gesture, sound and image – moving and otherwise..."* Characteristic features of his style include radical editing, effective rhythm, work with associations, and dynamic use of music. Sanborn's mentor, friend, and collaborator was Korean artist Nam June Paik (1932–2006), a seminal figure in video art.

"Sanborn was never an activist artist, yet all his videos from the first decade of his career were made in collaboration with women and celebrated what we can now call difference. Already in his early work, one of his main interests was interpersonal relationships, which naturally blended with his passion for storytelling," elaborates Ropková, offering insight into the content of Sanborn's art.

His work regularly features his friends and performers from the LGBTQ community. It thematizes topical issues related to life in the USA at the time, such as multiculturalism and the AIDS epidemic. *"Each one of us has the will, means, and opportunity to change our part of the world. It begins with me, and I'm passing it on to you. Let's go change it together,"* urges Sanborn, whose art deals with topics similar to those addressed by the young generation of contemporary video artists, while remaining distinctive in its optimism and poetic qualities.

The video installation *V+M* (2015) was first exhibited at the Videoformes international festival in Clermont-Ferrand, France, where it was specifically designed for the space of a Baroque chapel. Subsequently, it was shown at the Camerawork in San Francisco and recently featured in Sanborn's 2022 retrospective at the ZKM Karlsruhe. *"Sanborn translates poetic stories from classical mythology into a contemporary social context, where gender has become diverse and fluid. I therefore consider the main message of his work to be a belief in equality and openness towards difference, which can be a great inspiration for viewers,"* explains Barbora Ropková, concluding her reflections on one of the most important figures of contemporary video art. The exhibition at Kunsthalle Praha will mark the first presentation of Sanborn's work in the Czech Republic.

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V+M | JOHN SANBORN

Music by THERESA WONG | 2015 | 9 channel video and sound installation

The story of Venus and Mars fascinates poets and philosophers as a mythic example of the balance between opposing energies – beauty and brutality, order and magic, and grace and strength. But the traditional version of the story is lacking in truth and the veracity of real life.

V+M is a retelling of their story that goes beyond the heteronormative code by featuring pan-gender versions of Venus and Mars, in order to get to the essences that describe the balance of power in relationships, the nature of myth making and the origins of desire. If you move past the obvious – you discover what brings us together – and what forces us apart.

V+M operates on an intimate, emotional level, but also addresses the scale of archetypes that influence current culture, for better and worse. We find **V+M** in politics, fashion, and war. We are fascinated by the duality they represent and we find ways to both adhere to, and defy convention in order to model their love in our own lives.

V+M invites the viewer to get lost in the natural laws that govern this story, filled with sensual stimulation - but at the same time, insists you pay attention to the gestures, sounds and feelings of this reimagined couple and their story. The dance movement is intense and carnal and the text is a blend of street slang and poetry. The music is founded on the arcane character of the cello, but mixes in urban electronics, and contemporary sound design to orchestrate, in operatic terms, the vibrant personalities of Venus and Mars.

There is a contemporary but eternal lesson here, not stated explicitly but embedded into the style of storytelling and the abstraction of the installed work. The scale is intended to be felt by the body as well as absorbed by the mind. The work combines elements of grace, power, rules, rigor, magic and the ability of video to visualize alternate philosophies at play.

V+M returns to the eternal themes of power, myth and desire.

[play an excerpt from V+M at the Kunsthalle Praha](#)

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V+M is designed to be a video fresco, covering 9 walls with a revised story of the eternal couple, Venus and Mars, but with gender a modifier to the intimate relationship between people in love. The work is projected over 3 coves, like the head and arms of a chapel, distanced so that you cannot stand in one place and see the entire work, but are compelled to move around the space, sharing details and aspects of *V+M* in order to assemble your own version of this myth as it relates to contemporary life.



Tvá tvář je mapou tvých prožitků.

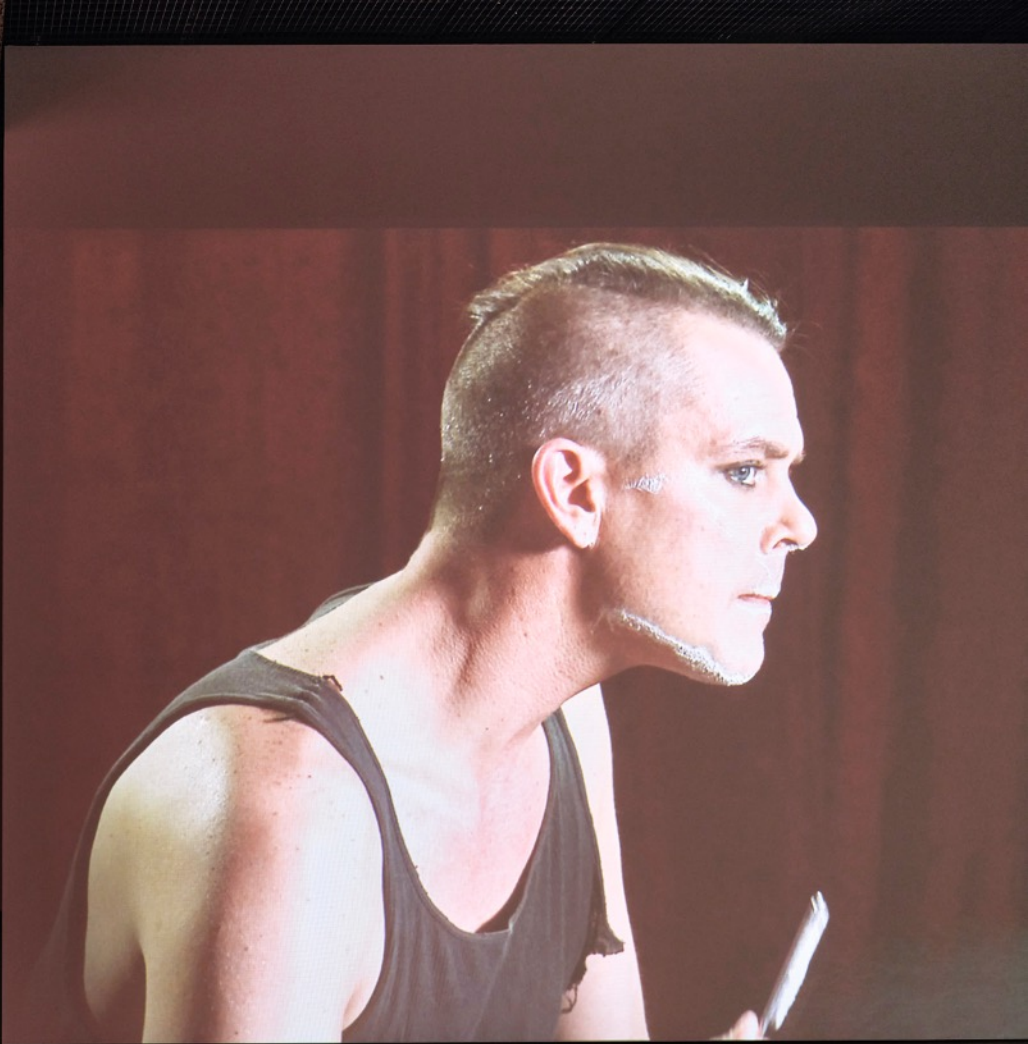


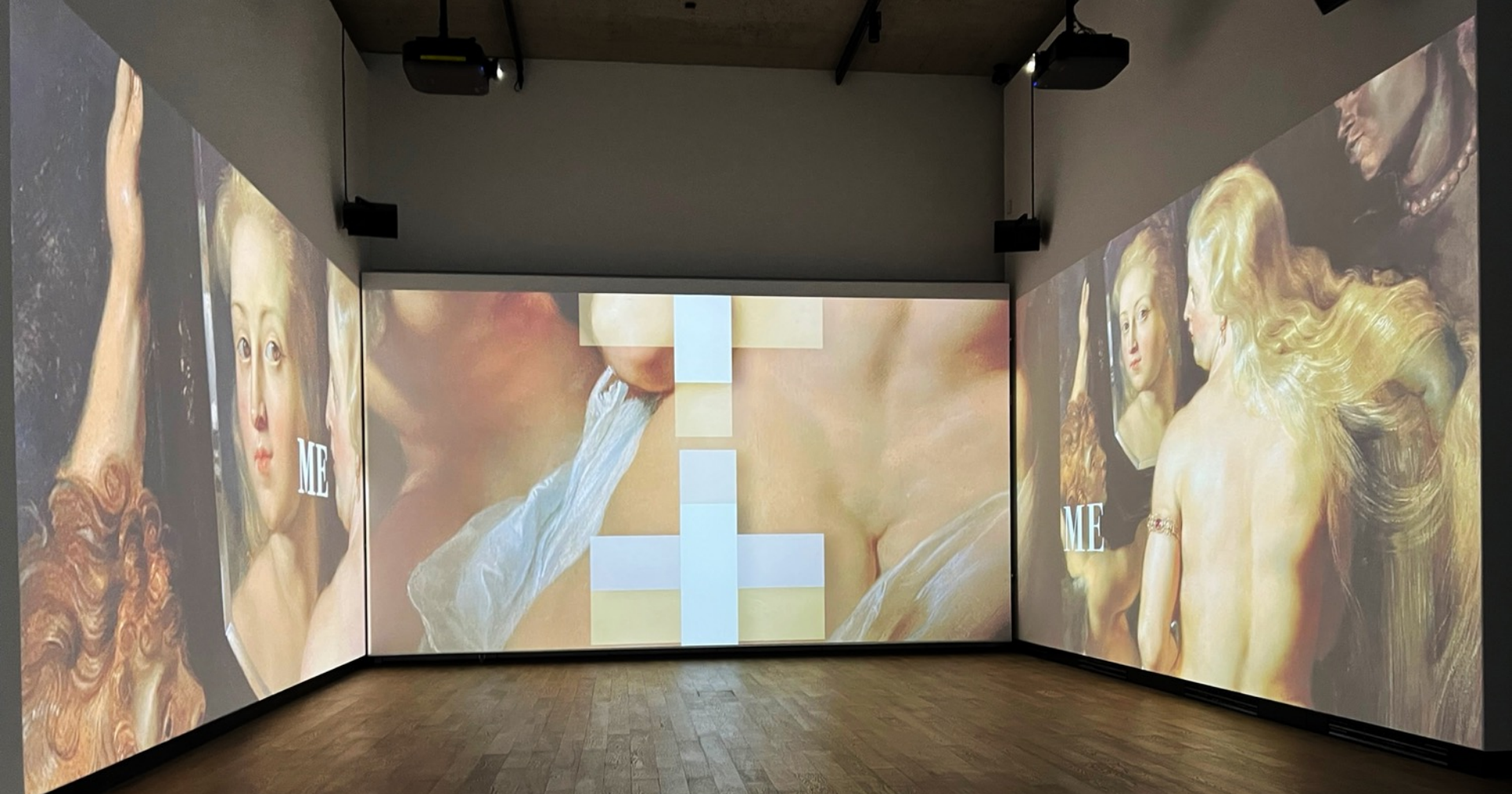


AMBITION LUST RAPTURE LIBIDO MANIA

DESIRE

BURNING WITH A NEED TO POSSESS
WITHOUT BOUNDRY OR FEAR
YOUR HEART'S DESIRE
UNDERSTANDS EVERY
EMOTION YOU FEEL





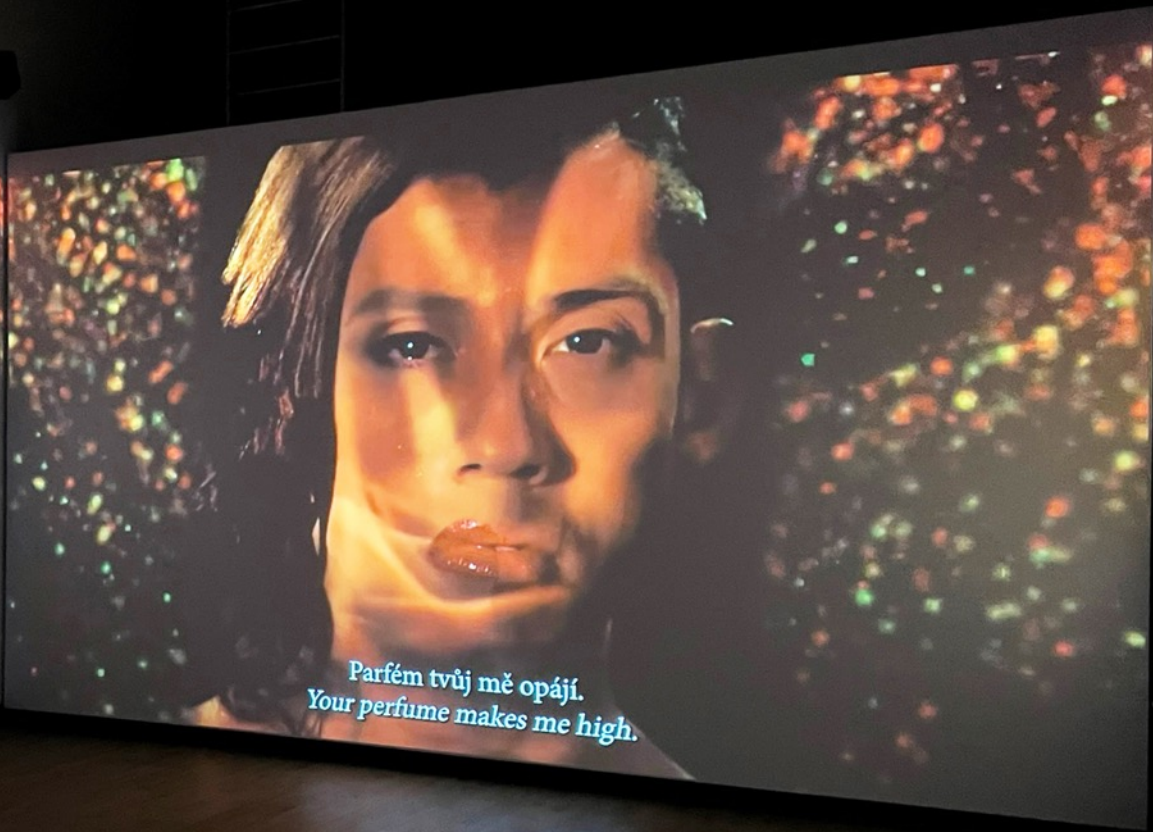
V+M | John Sanborn | Kunsthalle Praha



A MILLION
DEATHS
IS HISTORY

Každé tělo je nezbytné.

I WANT TO
BURN WITH



Parfém tvůj mě opájí.
Your perfume makes me high.



Chci být tím kamenem, který držíš v ruce.

CHAQUE PARTICULE
DE MATIERE
ATTIRE LES
AUTRE PARTICULE



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V+M | John Sanborn | Kunsthalle Praha



právě svět

V+M | John Sanborn | Kunsthalle Praha



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V+M | John Sanborn | Kunsthalle Praha



T...hybu, v pohybu i zůstane.

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Mythic Status | JOHN SANBORN a series of 4 portraits

Video portraits of new gods for a New Age; as contemporary gender queer warriors create versions of themselves as appropriate mythic figures by infusing their own personalities and agendas with the attributes of allegorical characters. The result is a transformed mythology, with refreshed relevance for our modern age, where redefining one's gender approached the territory usually reserved for God.

We revise our relationship to the divine and to the act of creation as we refashion ourselves - challenging traditional standards and evolution - on a foot race whose finish line is epistemologically informed self-definition.. No longer satisfied with a binary or imposed gender, the freedom to transform often comes with a weighty burden – but results in liberation – not only for the courageous protagonist, but for humanity.

If consciousness is identification and existence is identity; then the gender warrior hero exhibits god-like powers - as perception and objectivism exemplify a fresh reality.

gods - save us all.

Apollo

performed by Jiz Lee, 2015, HD video + sound, 1080 X 1920, 11:43

Hercules

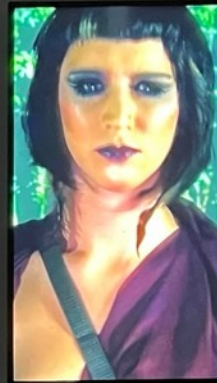
performed by Ramses Rodstein, 2016, HD video + sound, 1080 X 1920,10:12

Atalanta

performed by Adi Lockheart, 2015, HD video + sound, 1080 X 1920, 9:50

Nyx

performed by Jasmine Infiniti, 2016, HD video + sound, 1080 X 1920, 12:10



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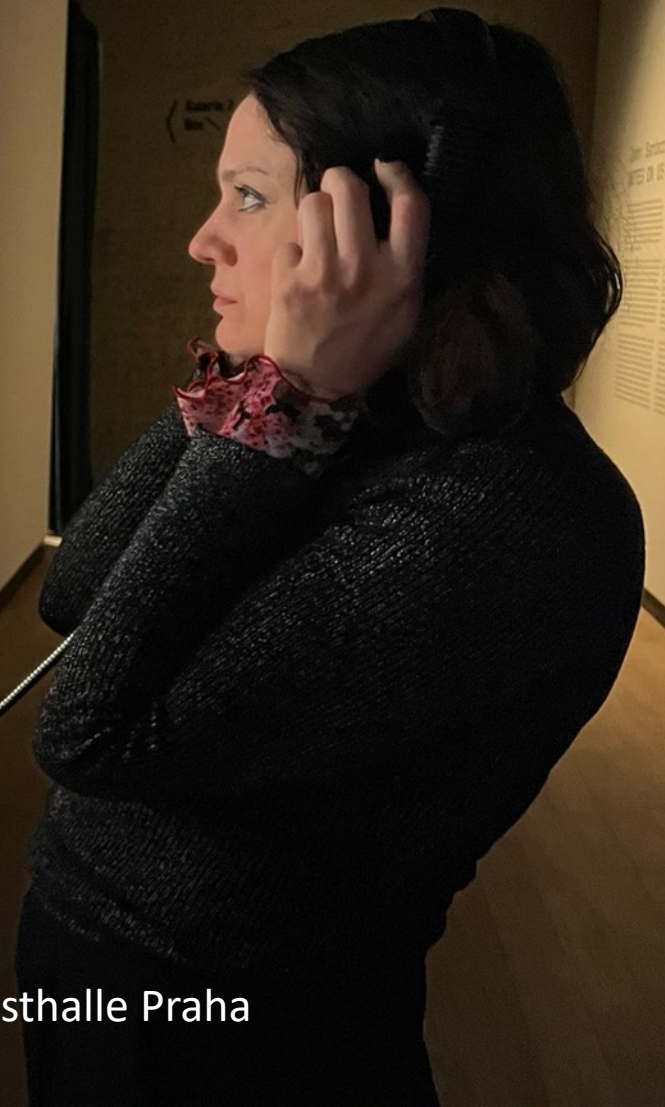
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