

Michael Najjar | Biography

In his artwork Michael Najjar takes a complex critical look at the technological forces shaping and drastically transforming the early 21st century. Najjar's photographic and video works exemplify and draw on his interdisciplinary understanding of art. In his artistic practice he fuses art, science, and technology into visions of future social structures emerging under the impact of cutting-edge technologies.

Born in 1966 in Landau, Germany, Najjar attended the *bildo Academy of Media Art* in Berlin from 1988 – 1993, where he was trained in the practices of conceptual and interdisciplinary art. During this time he immersed himself in the visionary theories of media philosophers such as Vilém Flusser, Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard which have markedly influenced his later work.

Working in distinct series, since the mid-nineties Najjar has embraced different genres of photography using a wide range of technological approaches. He has expanded conventional ways of addressing the medium by pushing the traditional limits and reforming our understanding of photography. His work continually interrogates the relationship between reality and its representation in the technical image. His practice addresses the fundamental question of what reality means in an increasingly virtualized and simulated world. In his digital composites layers of information coexist seamlessly while indexical reference to reality is relinquished in favor of an image of its own artistic value. The monumental scale of Michael Najjar's prints coupled with their enormous richness of detail envelops viewers, stimulating their visual senses and creating a truly immersive experience. They are a pure medium of reflection - in the double sense of the word. Michael Najjar has the fascinating ability to transform complex high-tech issues into artworks which not only address the scientific issues but also the formal and aesthetic questions inherent in the technical image.

Najjar's work is grouped in thematic series. The variety of themes covered ranges from transformation of global megacities through compaction of information networks ("netropolis" 2003-2006), depictions of the human body transformed by biogenetic intervention ("bionic angel" 2006-2008) and virtualization of financial markets with smart algorithms ("high altitude" 2008-2010) to the future of the human species through space exploration ("outer space" since 2011). The performative aspect of his artistic practice has shifted into sharper focus since the start of his "outer space" series. In his earlier series the artist climbed to the tops of skyscrapers, and scaled Mount Aconcagua, one of the highest mountains in the world in a perilous expedition lasting several weeks; for his current space series he has now become one of Virgin Galactic's Pioneer Astronauts and will soon be flying into space on board the privately owned SpaceShipTwo. Once more, the artist will be exposing himself to extreme experiences and testing his mental and physical limits in highly complex technical environments. Such borderline experience informs his unique photo and video artworks. Najjar uses his own body as a performance medium – the artist as space (ad)venturer.

For the past 25 years Najjar's work has been subject of prominent solo and group shows at international institutions. Harald Szeemann exhibited his work in 2004 in "The Beauty of Failure / The Failure of Beauty" at the Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona. His work formed part of the 2006 Venice Biennale's 10th International Architecture Exhibition, the 9th Havana Biennale 2006 and the 2007 Convergence Biennale Beijing. In 2008, a large-scale, overview was presented at the Museum for Contemporary Art GEM in The Hague. In 2011 he participated in the milestone exhibition "Atlas – How to carry the world on one's back", shown at the Museo Reina Sofía, the ZKM Museum for Contemporary Art and the Deichtorhallen / Phönixhallen Hamburg. In 2015 he was a selected artist at the ZKM | Globale where work from his current "outer space" series was shown in the groundbreaking exhibition "Exo-Evolution" curated by Peter Weibel. In 2017 he participated at the 7thth International Moscow Biennale curated by Yuko Hasegawa.

Najjar has also exhibited at the following national and international museums, institutions and galleries: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing; Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing; Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Seoul; National Museum of Science, Taipei; Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; Science Museum, London; Museum of Art, Tucson; Berman Museum of Art, Philadelphia; New Media Art Institute, Amsterdam; FORMA International Centre for Photography, Milan; Museo Palazzo del Monte, Padua; Centre pour l'image contemporaine, Geneva; Museo DA2, Salamanca; Centro de Arte Contemporaneo, Málaga; Museo Es Baluard, Palma de Mallorca; Academy of Arts, Berlin; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Kunsthalle Hamburg / Galerie der Gegenwart, Hamburg; Deichtorhallen - International Museum of Photography, Hamburg; Marta Museum, Herford; Edith Russ Site for Media Art Oldenburg;

Works by Michael Najjar form part of museum, leading corporate and private collections across the world, including the ZKM Museum for Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Museum Deichtorhallen Hamburg; Gemeente Museum, The Hague; Centro de Arte Contemporaneo, Málaga; Museo Es Baluard, Palma de Mallorca; Museum Susch, Switzerland; Smithsonian Air & Space Museum, Washington; Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA), Luxembourg.

In 2018 and 2019 Michael Najjar was twice nominated for the world's most prestigious photography award, the "Prix Pictet". His work regularly features in a broad array of international publications.