

Jessica Craig-Martin

Earthy Delights

Opening, 2nd June 2023, 6 – 8 pm
Exhibition, 3rd June – 26th August 2023

In her exhibition Earthly Delights, the American artist Jessica Craig-Martin lays open the absurd world of the rich and beautiful. This world reveals itself not only as a source of amazement but one that also appeals to the voyeuristic side of our interest in the human condition. In her photographs, the artist systematically delves into the world of high society, where eating and drinking behaviour are just as important as gender roles and ritual celebrations. She turns their paraphernalia and social customs into a rich vein of subject matter for her artistic exploration.

The resulting world, which Craig-Martin has been photographing for decades, is one of great diversity. Her images show us its noble luxury products (such as diamonds, designer accessories, and haute couture fashion items), as well as the consumer products in demand by this crowd – for example its rare cigars, caviar, and oysters. But she also captures intangibles: the air kisses of the ladies and the staffs busy serving them – both typical motifs seen in Craig-Martin's oeuvre. Documented photographically, all of these individual parts come together to form an overall picture full of decadence and excess, featuring specific curious moments translated by the artist into powerful pictorial compositions. In the tradition of Henri Cartier-Bresson, this native-born American understands how to capture the decisive moment, perfecting the balance between coincidence and composition and presenting us with glimpses into the party life of the über-rich – scenes that could have been dreamed up by a humorist.

The evolution of the photographic presentation of exclusive milieus like that of the super-rich goes back to the advent of paparazzi photography in the 1950s and 1960s, when this type of – mostly intrusive – snapshot photography afforded a curious public a peek into the secretive and glamorous world of celebrities. Using a technique that succeeds by means of spontaneity and precision in equal measure, Jessica Craig-Martin extends this pictorial universe, penetrating the occult cosmos of the world's well-to-do with her camera to bring to light the nocturnal commotions at gala events, exclusive dinner parties, and late-night affairs. For the most part, though, Craig-Martin sets a limit to the degree of visibility she will afford her subjects by anonymising them, which leads to an enticing interplay between secrecy and transparency. This invariably makes her images work on several different levels. The evident humour in many of these photographs also gives them an especially compelling edge, and this is particularly reinforced by the titles she has given them. Almost every picture conceals encoded allusions to intellectual, political, or popular culture contexts.

Page 1/2

Ian Davenport

Mirrors and Light

Opening, 2nd June 2022, 6 – 8 pm
Exhibition, 3rd June – 16th July 2022

One of the key works in the exhibition Earthly Delights is the image entitled Triangle of Sadness (Happy Endings), New York from the year 2023. This photograph shows a young blonde woman at a party feeding an oyster to a man from a silver tray on the table in front of them. The gaze of the gentleman, evidently older than she is, is ravenously fixed on her, the image thus playing into the cliché of the model and the millionaire. Here, the classic beauty in her gold lamé dress and red lipstick presents an absurd contrast with the man, whose lurid leer suggests that even this surfeit of pleasure, attention, and money would never be enough to satisfy his hunger. The image is both fascinating and irritating at the same time. This 'triangular relationship' between the woman, the man, and the oyster is an expression of lust, luxury, and beauty, encapsulating in a single image the earthly pleasures of high society. In this context, the title Triangle of Sadness can be read as a critical commentary on its superficial 'pleasures.' However, Craig-Martin is also playing here with the title's ambiguity and might also be alluding to the film of the same name by Ruben Östlund, a cinematic work that also parodies the elite and all their absurdities.

Another striking work in the exhibition is the eponymous work Earthly Delights. It shows perfectly pedicured feet with pink nail polish on a lush green grass. The image seems perfect as an advertising campaign for female self-care products. This desire for flawless beauty, Craig-Martin titles as earthly pleasures. However, perfect beauty is just as unnatural as the greenness of the lawn that the photographer shows in this work.

The exhibition Earthly Delights is notable for its timeliness and ingenuity. Taken as a whole, it conveys the artistic work of Jessica Craig-Martin in all its diversity.

Born in 1963, when Jessica Craig-Martin enrolled at New York University she chose at first to study art history and anthropology. But she also took courses in photography at the city's prestigious International Center of Photography. Alongside her artistic work, Craig-Martin also worked for five years as a photographer for American Vogue. Her works now are represented in many large collections such as those at the the Guggenheim Museum in New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine, to name just a few. Her works have also been seen in solo exhibitions at large institutions such as the MoMA PS1 in New York, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid and the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt am Main.

Craig-Martin is currently working on a memoir of her childhood growing up in the art worlds of London and New York, and tales from the field as a party photographer covering many of the world's most finically lubricated events for Vogue magazine. The book is titled I Regret I'll be Able to Attend and will be published next year by Penguin Random House.

Jessica Craig-Martin lives and works in New York.

Gwendolyn Fässler
Justine Krämer

Page 2/2