



Press Release

On Nervous Grounds. Between Delusion and Reality

May 9–September 27, 2026

Exhibition tour and press lunch on Thursday, May 7, 2026, at 11 am

Exhibition opening on Friday, May 8, 2026, at 7 pm, followed by a party

In a world at a tipping point, where the desire for the destructive and ruinous is once again being celebrated quite openly, reality seems to be increasingly perceived through the filter of one's own emotions. Political and social tensions are plunging people into a collective state of nervousness and vulnerability. On the threshold between delusion and reality, between the self and the external world, the exhibition explores those moments in which contradictory emotional experiences arise.

On Nervous Grounds uses selected works from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg to demonstrate how art has created spaces of emotional resonance from the 1970s to the present day. The focus is on works that address emotional states, evoke them themselves, or have emerged from a specific emotionality. The exhibition invites us to reflect on what touches us emotionally or throws us into inner turmoil. Thus, without interpreting reality, the exhibition approaches our highly emotionalized present.

With their unique potential to raise existential questions and to capture or generate intense and extraordinary moments, the works on view encourage us in a special way to reflect on our own emotional experiences. They make it immediately apparent that feelings are not purely subjective and neutral in nature but are in fact closely linked to social and political orders as well as our own values, experiences, and imaginations. The various artistic strategies also reveal how emotions can be deliberately evoked, directed, and amplified, but also controlled, manipulated, and suppressed.

According to the sociologist Eva Illouz, most emotions are a dialogue we conduct with the world. But how can such a dialogue be consciously initiated, and how can an emotional state be made visible? The artist Ariel Reichman engages intensively with human vulnerability and, through his interactive light installation *I AM (NOT) SAFE*, has found a way to give expression to individual feelings. At the same time, the light of the changing LED lettering points out that emotions are always fleeting and unstable.

The works on view by the artists Heinkuhn Oh and Sylvain Couzinet-Jacques remind us that emotions are mostly social in nature. They generally relate to other people or to one's own self and manifest with particular intensity especially in times of existential change. The two artists

offer insight into the emotional state of a young generation that feels isolated and disconnected in the face of societal militarization or a perceived lack of prospects. Their works make us compassionate by evoking empathy.

Not only real situations, but also fictional or imagined ones can trigger intense emotions. The photographically staged realities of Cindy Sherman and Jeff Wall are composed in such a way that the unease of the depicted scenes is transferred to the viewers: The stylized moments, reminiscent of familiar film scenes, create an inner restlessness. The installations by Rebecca Horn and Mithu Sen leave even more room for the viewer's own imagination. Far removed from our usual horizon of experience, they appear particularly excessive, theatrical, and, at the same time, sensually poetic. In this way, they generate a strong emotional tension and simultaneously make ambivalent feelings tangible.

However, emotions are not merely an expression of vulnerability; they are also a way of dealing with it. Through radical and often ecstatic actions, artists such as Christian Falsnaes and Gilbert & George not only create unsettling situations but also expose themselves to unfamiliar experiences within their performances and consciously make themselves vulnerable. Half a century ago, Jürgen Klauke already challenged this vulnerability by transcending gender categories and traditional notions in his art.

On Nervous Grounds. Between Delusion and Reality presents newly acquired works by Christian Falsnaes, Kapwani Kiwanga, and Jürgen Klauke within the context of the collection for the first time. In the exhibition, the works enter into a thematic dialogue with those by Sylvain Couzinet-Jacques, Gilbert & George, Douglas Gordon, Rebecca Horn, Olga Koumoundouros, Maix Mayer, Heinkuhn Oh, Ariel Reichman, Mithu Sen, Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, and Jordan Wolfson.

To accompany the exhibition, a booklet with extensive texts on the individual artistic positions is being produced for visitors.

Curator: Elena Engelbrechter
Curatorial Assistant: Linus Jantzen

Opening Hours:

Tuesday through Friday, 10 am–6 pm
Saturday, Sunday, 11 am–6 pm
Holidays, 11 am–6 pm

www.kunstmuseum.de
www.kunstmuseum.de/veranstaltungen/

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