

Vontobel sponsorship prize for young contemporary photography 'A New Gaze' is awarded to Dongkyun Vak

- Award to be presented at an exhibition of the artist's work at Vontobel's premises in Zurich in spring 2021

The South Korean artist Dongkyun Vak has been named as the winner of this year's Vontobel sponsorship prize 'A New Gaze 3' in recognition of his work on the topic 'Responsibility in the Anthropocene age'. The sponsorship prize for young contemporary photography, which Vontobel awards biannually, is accompanied by CHF 20,000 of prize money. The winner will be able to hold his own exhibition in the premises of the Swiss investment manager in Zurich in spring 2021. The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication created by the award-winning Swiss designer Teo Schifferli.

After North America and Africa, 'A New Gaze' is now focusing on contemporary photography in East and Southeast Asia. Together with an expert team of 30 people, young artists from the region were invited to submit an idea for a project on the topic 'Responsibility in the Anthropocene age' – an age in which man had a significant impact on the earth. We know that many of the changes occurring on our planet are caused by humans. As time passes, we are increasingly aware that nature and civilization are now inextricably linked. Our understanding of the fatal harm that we have already inflicted on the planet must motivate us to fundamentally alter our behavior. In 2000, the recognition of this new situation prompted scientists to adopt the term 'Anthropocene' to describe the new earth age that has begun: This term refers to a new era in which the impact of humanity on the earth is greater than the geological effects on the planet.

In December 2019, the Art Committee – together with the two experts Gwen Lee (Director and Co-Founder of the Singapore International Photography Festival) and He Yining (Chinese curator and writer focusing on urban and rural photography) – examined the projects submitted by 55 entrants from 10 countries. The jury decided to award the prize to Dongkyun Vak, who was born in 1992 in Seoul (South Korea), where he still lives and works.

"Dongkyun Vak is a young artist who uses the medium of photography to explore the relationship between reality and photographic imagery. We were impressed by his idea of investigating the impact of technology on our visual environment, as well as by his clear visual language and flawless aesthetics. He is thus attempting to show the visibility of the Anthropocene far away from environmental catastrophes," stated Axel Schwarzer, Chairman of the Vontobel Art Committee.

For 'A New Gaze 3', Vak will devote his attention to the tense interplay between man, nature and technology. "To assume our responsibility towards the environment, our everyday life is being shaped by increasingly innovative technologies as well as by environmentally friendly designs, such as electric vehicles or air purifiers. The invisible force behind these changes is technology, which appears to be both the cause and the solution to the environmental challenges of the Anthropocene," commented Dongkyun Vak.

This dichotomy is also reflected in the aesthetics of his visual language. It mirrors both the captivating and the disconcerting aspects of the environment shaped by new technologies. In his visual world, for example, even living creatures appear like artefacts whose lives have been stolen from them.

'A New Gaze 3' will be curated by Luisa Baselgia from the Vontobel Art Collection and Urs Stahel, founder and former Director of the Winterthur Museum of Photography. A publication designed by Teo Schifferli will also be issued.

Previous winners of 'A New Gaze' are Eva O'Leary (*1989, US) with 'Concealer' and Kelvin Haizel (*1987, Ghana) with 'Babysitting a Shark in a Cold Room – Comoros Encounters'.

Further information is available on our website.

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