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Nayeri, Farah. "Doing Justice to the Art of Bruce Nauman." *www.nytimes.com (The New York Times)*, 12 June 2018.

The New York Times

When a retrospective devoted to the work of Bruce Nauman opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1995, the art critic Robert Hughes wrote in a *Time* magazine review that "no show was ever noisier."

"Go in, and you hit a wall of sound, all disagreeable: moanings and groanings; the prolonged squeak of something being dragged over a hard surface, like a knife on a plate; repetitious rock drumming," Mr. Hughes wrote. Still, the critic said, Mr. Nauman was, "beyond much dispute," the "most influential American artist of his generation."

Nearly a quarter-century later, one of the two masterminds of that retrospective — the curator Kathy Halbreich — has organized another one, which opened in March at the sprawling Schaulager museum in the Basel, Switzerland, suburb of Münchenstein. It travels in October to MoMA and MoMA PS1. "Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts" displays some 170 works in a wide variety of media — from neon to drawings and sculptures to sound installations, videos, holograms and 3D imagery — several coming from the Schaulager's own holdings.



"Leaping Foxes," an installation that Bruce Nauman made on site at the Schaulager museum in the Basel, Switzerland, suburb of Münchenstein. Credit Bruce Nauman/2018, ProLitteris, Zurich. Photo by Tom Bisig, Basel

The exhibition's venue in Switzerland was an obvious partner, because there is "no mega-museum that has the collection that the Schaulager has, and the resources appropriate to doing justice to Bruce's work at this point in his career," said Ms. Halbreich, who now runs the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation but will continue acting as a MoMA curator and adviser to the director through the opening of the Nauman show in New York.

The 1995 retrospective, featuring some 60 works and also staged at several other United States and European museums, was widely praised, but it was also criticized for being "almost too brutal to bear," Ms. Halbreich recalled. "The show was animated by a lot of sound, a lot of blazing lights, a lot of sculpture that demanded a certain set of actions and didn't permit others."

This time, "I really wanted to create a different choreography, one that wasn't quite as unrelenting," she explained. "In the last 25 years, it's safe to say that what would have been characterized as anger has taken

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on a different emotional temperature: Maybe now the melancholy or wistfulness that was always there, the disappointment in human behavior that was always there, has taken a more primary position.”



Mr. Nauman's "Eating My Words" from the portfolio "Eleven Color Photographs." Credit Bruce Nauman/2018, ProLitteris, Zurich. Photo by Nathan Keay/MCA Chicago

The Schaulager retrospective looks back on a full five decades of Mr. Nauman's career, yet much of it is current.

Brand-new works include an installation that Mr. Nauman made on the spot: "Leaping Foxes," a pyramid of animal sculptures hanging upside down. The creatures are made of the polyurethane foam that's used in taxidermy, and each one is "a strange mutated form — not a real animal, something else, yet you do recognize it as an animal," said Heidi Naef, the Schaulager's chief curator, who also worked on the show.

Another recent piece is "Contrapposto Studies, i through vii" (2015/2016), a revisiting of the artist's 1968 "Walk With Contrapposto," in which he filmed himself walking awkwardly in a position used in classical Greek sculpture. The newer installation, a set of seven video projections with sound, has him walking in



Mr. Nauman's 1967 installation "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign). Credit Bruce Nauman/2018, ProLitteris, Zurich. Photo by Tom Bisig, Basel

contrapposto again — but this time, through digital manipulation, the images are both positive and negative, chopped in half, etc.

“Nauman has always been a contemporary: He’s always reacting to his surroundings, the times he lives in,” said Ms. Naef, noting the artist’s consistent engagement with cutting-edge technology. “A lot of artists, especially in their late work, start repeating what they’ve been doing before. They’re not really reacting to how the world has changed.”

Mr. Nauman was born in Indiana in 1941 and spent his childhood moving from state to state with his father’s job as a General Electric engineer. Initially a student of science and mathematics at the University of Wisconsin, he switched to studying art in California, graduated in 1966 from the University of California, Davis, and focused on sculpture, performance art and film. Within a few years, the young artist had joined the prestigious Leo Castelli gallery, and by 1972, he had his first solo museum show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, an exhibition that traveled to the Whitney Museum of American Art the following year.

Around the same time, the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation in Basel began acquiring Mr. Nauman’s work and has continued to do so, making him the most consistently collected artist in its collection. The collection is housed at the hangar-sized Schaulager, which was inaugurated in 2003 and offers more than 46,000 square feet of exhibition space.

The foundation had tried for years to get Mr. Nauman to agree to a retrospective, Ms. Naef said, but for a long time, “he wasn’t interested, wasn’t willing.”

Ms. Halbreich said the artist took time to reboot after the last career survey. “In the past, it has been very difficult for him to look backwards and immediately forwards once the retrospective is over,” she said. “There’s a period of being stuck, I guess.”

“We do forget how emotionally taxing it is for an artist, even one who agrees to do this, to spend two or three or four years being asked about his past and having to take a journey through things that have already been made, rather than focusing on work to be made,” she added.

The artist hardly went unnoticed in the last couple of decades. In 2004, he produced a sound installation for the monumental Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London — one of the most high-profile commissions in the art world — and in 2009, he won the Golden Lion representing the United States at the Venice Biennale. The prize was awarded for works including the sound sculpture “Days,” which consisted of two parallel rows of speakers playing voices that shouted the days of the week in random order.

What Ms. Halbreich found while putting together the new retrospective was the consistent quality of Mr. Nauman’s work.

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A video installation by Mr. Nauman at the Schaulager museum, part of the show "Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts." Credit Georgios Kefalas/Keystone, via Associated Press

"There are artists who make good work throughout their career, but good isn't great," she said. "Bruce makes great art from graduate school to yesterday.

"For a curator, the biggest trauma in making a Bruce Nauman exhibition is having to leave things out," she added. "There are many more Bruce Nauman exhibitions to be made."