

**BPA// Exhibition 2023**

KW Institute for Contemporary Art

25.11.2023–07.01.2024

# Amid the Alien Corn

**Johannes Büttner** Laura Helena Wurth **Grayson Earle** Doug Bierend  
**Heyon Han** Helen-Sophie Mayr **Sebastian Jefford** Nicholas Tammens  
**Ida Lawrence** Norman Musung **Maness** Raoul Zoellner  
**Simone Miné Koza** Doireann O'Malley **Bassem Saad** Maxi Wallenhorst  
**Tian Guoxin** Hannah O'Flynn **Jasmin Werner** Fabian Schöneich

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# Johannes Büttner

The world we live in is determined by economic transactions and there seems to be a single rule: the market will take care of it. This suggests that an invisible hand brings supply and demand into harmony. It sounds amiable at first, balanced, yin and yang. But within the market's grasp are human beings, with all their longings, hopes, and fears, which are difficult to reconcile with the logic of supply and demand. Because this belief in something quasi supernatural, which has everything in its hand, leads these longings, hopes and fears to be caught up in a promise of salvation. A promise of salvation that someone can turn into profit, producing an economic surplus value, which then generates new longings elsewhere and so on. If the planet were not being destroyed in the process and the exploited subjects beginning to revolt, this could perhaps continue for all eternity: The end of history?

Johannes Büttner takes up this idea of an ending and creates narratives that take the story further. He focuses on a core moment in our society with the (superficially simple) question: What does labor mean today?

He gives shape to the search for the answer to this question in video works, installations, and sculptures. In *The Factory* (2020), for example, he recruited people who offer their work on the platform Fiverr and paid them to tell him what their personal utopia would look like, the perfect life, the one everyone is supposedly striving for. In collaboration with digital workers from China, Indonesia, India, Nigeria, and Tunisia, he created a sci-fi film whereby the conditions under which people work today are questioned. These are workers in the so-called gig economy, a new way of organizing labor that transcends time and space and connects supply and demand across continents and time zones. However, political scientist and sociologist Colin Crouch views even the term as deceptive: "It implies an analogy with the shows or gigs organized for . . . entertainers who perform events at various locations." While those offering their services on Fiverr always remain in the same place, it is only their services that can be accessed everywhere.

If you think at first that there is an unpleasant imbalance here—between Büttner who sits in the comfortable West and the gig workers who do not—you are absolutely right. But Büttner reacts to this imbalance; part of the work is to be confronted with these facts. This imbalance is reflected in every single transaction we make when we buy clothes or order things on the internet, but it is rarely faced openly. To circumvent the cycle Büttner pays the workers directly, so they don't have to fork over twenty percent to the platform.

Nevertheless, the question keeps coming up as to whether it is actually okay to exploit gig workers even further, even more shamelessly, as performers, by not only purchasing but also exhibiting their labor. Büttner already posed this question in 2017, when he gave a lecture-performance about the Neal Stephenson novel *Snow Crash* (1992),

a cyberpunk dystopia in which people who deliver food too slowly are executed. At the time of Büttner's lecture-performance, the cities of Germany were first blushing with the pink jackets and backpacks of Foodora drivers. The dynamics of the city were changing. In addition to workers trudging from their homes to the office and back and parents transporting their children to daycare, there were now cyclists hitting the streets at breakneck speed with a very different mission: to deliver food to other people as quickly as possible. At the climax of his lecture-performance, Büttner ordered several portions of Pad Thai—a small homage to Rirkrit Tiravanija, who declared the experience of eating together to be art—which were then carried into the room by Foodora drivers in pink uniforms. The social sculpture made possible by an unsocial market united people over food, but the drivers had to move on quickly. Keep delivering. To avoid a doubled exploitation, Büttner initiated conversation with the drivers via the internal chat function of the Foodora app. The function to tell the driver which floor you live on can also become a moment of solidarity. This is further expressed in the work *Platform* (2022) made in collaboration with Steffen Köhn. It is a short film in which the functionalities of the gig economy are used to turn against it—the gig economy only works by means of maximum networking. In *Platform*, the chat function of a computer game is used by gig workers and riders to organize the revolution.

In the exhibition at KW, Büttner shows excerpts from a new collaborative work: *GOLD*. Together with documentary filmmaker Julian Vogel, he is currently working on a direct cinema portrait of an elementary school friend who lives a very different life than they do. Telling stories is what somehow unites the three of them: Vogel through documentaries, Büttner through art, and his old friend through crude conspiracy narratives and alternative healing methods. In the protagonist's narrative, fact and fiction blur—perhaps a point of similarity between his and Büttner's work.

To accompany the excerpts from the in-the-works film stands a sculpture modeled after a "medbed," a fictional medical device from sci-fi films that can cure any illness. In the world of the protagonists of *GOLD*, medbeds are reality and there is an answer to every question. The idea that you have to endure, that there are some things you can't understand and that some diseases leave no way out, has no place. Medbeds, according to the conspiracy narrative, are kept under lock and key by a "satanic elite" to enslave people.

There it is again: the promise of salvation through the belief in invisible forces guiding society. Such a belief is blind to the suffering and destruction that comes into the world through capitalist competition—higher, faster, further. Simple answers to complex questions; it is always the individual alone who is responsible for success or failure.

Through collaborative works, interaction with workers, and experimentation with distribution mechanisms and economic structures, Büttner's works reflect on alternatives to the status quo. The resulting

sculptures and video installations are porous, permeable, and resistant. Their presumed carelessness stands in stark contrast to the smooth presumed perfection of the market. They are the breaking points where chaos, and the unpredictable, can take root. These works are not created in a vacuum. Never alone. Here, too, Büttner is always dependent on other professional workers. On people with whom he enters into various forms of exchange.

Because "no man is an island," and everything is always connected to everything else.

Translation by Zoë Claire Miller

**Johannes Büttner** wanted to be a garbageman, carpenter, advertiser, or wrestler as a child. In 2023, he was an artist-in-residence at Los Angeles in Günsterode, Germany. In 2024, he will travel, with a scholarship from the Hessische Kulturstiftung, to research libertarian ideology and Free Private Cities.

**Julian Vogel** has made documentaries, such as *TILMAN IM PARADIES* (2011) about a john who falls in love with a prostitute, *PALAST* (2013) about a housing project, and *BILDER VOM FLO* (2016) about his best friend's deceased father. His most recent work, the trilogy *EINZELTÄTER* (2023), portrays survivors of the right-wing terror attacks in Munich (2016), Halle (2019), and Hanau (2020).

**Laura Helena Wurth** was born in Berlin and is an author and critic. She regularly writes about contemporary art and architecture for newspapers and magazines and works for *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*. She is co-founder of the project space FKA SIX, which explores the theme of contemporary ruins in a shopping mall, and she publishes the magazine *One to(o) Many*, together with Louisa Hölker.

**Poster** Johannes Büttner, Studio, 2023  
Courtesy the artist

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Text by Laura Helena Wurth







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# Grayson Earle

## Thin Blue Lines of Code

Video games are unique as a creative medium. Beyond simply representing or commenting on aspects of the world, which they most certainly do, the most sophisticated examples often aspire to *simulate* it in rich detail. This is typically for the sake of more immersive and compelling play, but like all simulations, they are often instructive in unexpected ways.

Modern video games organize tens of millions of lines of code and the work of hundreds of creative and technical experts to recreate vast, complex settings awash in interactive possibilities. Rockstar Games—the studio behind smash hits like the *Red Dead Redemption* and *Grand Theft Auto* series—specializes in creating massive, lifelike environments where the storyline serves as a scaffolding for the player to chart their own course through fully realized cities and geographic regions. Sometimes, a certain worldview or politics is deliberately coded into the game. At one point in *Red Dead Redemption 2*, for example, players may stumble into a torchlit meeting of the Ku Klux Klan, culminating in a slapstick routine in which an initiate accidentally sets himself on fire and dies attempting to burn a cross. The general message of the scene is clear and agreeable: white supremacy is bad, its advocates represented as the the worst of humanity. Sometimes though, a glint of political or social insight wends its way into the code seemingly without a conscious agenda, raising questions about the world that is being simulated.

The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May 2020 triggered a nationwide expression of rage and repulsion over systemic police violence and racism. Like many millions of others, Grayson Earle felt moved by the politically and emotionally charged protests that erupted in the streets as part of a broader, ongoing struggle for justice and accountability. An artist and activist working in the medium of software and video games, Earle sought catharsis in this moment by turning police violence back on the police, if only symbolically. To that end, he began digging into the code of *Grand Theft Auto V*.

The game essentially simulates the city of Los Angeles, where police violence is an integral part of gameplay (not to mention of everyday life in the real-life city). Normally, police will pursue the player only if they flout the law too brazenly, though there are no laws in the game per se. There are rules and mores in what amounts to a code of conduct, which players are enable and indeed encouraged to violate purely for entertainment. There is also a large modding community devoted to subverting them, making *GTA* do unexpected things by upending the game's social and physical rules and expanding the range of possibilities into the absurd. For instance, one can add jetpacks to cars, submerge the entire city in water on a whim, or move through the simulated world as SpongeBob SquarePants. With the right skills, it is trivial to generate any combination of character types and compel them to fight. With one exception.

Seeking to orchestrate a cathartic scene in which the police bludgeoned one another, for once, Earle soon encountered deeply rooted code that sets police apart as the sole type of non-player character that won't fight its own class. The exact same commands that could without exception initiate combat between a mail courier, a pizza-delivery driver, a clown, or any other combination of a vast range of potential characters, failed when put to a pair of police officers. Instead, like two magnets of matched polarity, the officers instantly ran in opposite directions. Or one would simply target another bystander for violence, while the other officer watched; as Earle notes, this is reminiscent of the officers who stood by and held space for Derek Chauvin as he suffocated George Floyd.

This discovery shifted the intent and point of interest for Earle's project, which ultimately took the form of an open question: Why won't cops fight each other? On one level, it's a technical inquiry from someone trying to reprogram a game to achieve a particular result. But for Earle—whose other projects include a video game that offers players the chance to launch bankers out of a cannon and into prison cells, and a cryptocurrency mining app that quietly collects money to pay off prisoners' bail funds—it is also a broader political question. In a highly sophisticated simulation of an urban environment, and in a supposedly subversive game that encourages crime and violence as a necessary part of gameplay, why and how do familiar structures of power and authority emerge?

The resulting artwork traces the artist's inquiries into this question and shows the results of his efforts. We see Earle's computer desktop as he runs through various absurd scenarios in pursuit of the desired result, culminating in a waterfall of uniformed officers raining from the sky and promptly running in opposite directions as he presses on the keyboard in frustration. On another screen, Earle's modifications of the code scroll alongside his questions to the modding community about the coding quirk that protects cops from themselves.

In online forums, Earle asked other modders why they thought there might be such "hardcoded relationship groups," a term that could describe a police union as easily as a programming category. Occasionally, the questions resonate among the modders. "True," wrote one, connecting the behavior of police in *GTA* with their own life experience. "They are driving faster than speed limits, unnecessarily using emergency lanes, [because] they are above the laws."

While this piece deliberately takes on a naive voice in asking why cops won't fight each other, the question has an obvious answer in the game and in the real world. In both cases, the police play a particular role within the overarching system, and their relationship to one another is going to be very different than their relationship to everyone else. For gameplay, that makes perfect sense. It's up to us, as citizens, to determine whether it makes sense outside of the game.

**Grayson Earle** is a contemporary artist and activist from the United States. His work deals with the role that digital technologies and networks play in protest and political agency. He is known for his guerrilla video projections and is a member of The Illuminator, a guerrilla video projection collective, and for his project Bail Bloc, a computer program that posts bail for low-income people.

**Doug Bierend** is a writer based in New York's Hudson Valley. He writes with a special interest in science, technology, interactive media, food systems, degrowth, biodiversity, and general subversiveness in pursuit of a more just and equitable world.

**Poster** Grayson Earle, *Why don't the cops fight each other?* (video still), 2022  
Courtesy the artist

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Text by Doug Bierend



# LSPD

The elements of the game which are immutable reveal the underlying political assertions of the simulation.





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# Heyon Han

Tuning in to an episode of *FDOYA*, one is met with a feverish dystopia that comes across as uncannily familiar: soundtracked by a distorted and down-pitched version of the K-pop song *Pick Me*, the corresponding choreography of a hundred synchronized dancers gradually emerges from a muted grey haze. Equally militant in demeanor, a group of digital zombies stumbles across well-known streaming platforms, reaching for future superfoods and their nutrition facts. Digestible Pokémons flee from a gigantic fork as an enigmatic testimony pops up in the subtitles: “There’s the cruelty that we cannot handle, and the generosity we cannot digest. These conflicted feelings support our fandom for the future. Future that doesn’t owe you anything”—abbreviated to “FDOYA”. This linguistic equation hints at a dichotomy inherent to capitalism: a cruelty, manifested in exploitation and inequality that is juxtaposed against the allure of consumerism—a generosity available only to those positioned to indulge within its confines. Hoping to escape the imbalance, one seeks refuge in a future that holds the promise of progress. But, as written in the fine print on an instant soup peel-off lid visible at the beginning of the episode: “The future is already here, it is just not very evenly distributed.”

Throughout her artistic practice, Heyon Han recurrently integrates this equation and draws additional analogies from its premise. Her sculptures, crafted from materials reminiscent of a techno-capitalist environment, are often paired with videos. These predominantly showcase elements of Korean culture or K-pop, mirroring the dense audiovisual saturation Han experienced during her upbringing in Busan. The motifs described at first arise from Han’s installation, *Future doesn’t owe you anything* (2017). It opens with a title sequence, assembled from the abbreviation of the work’s title—FDOYA—and the previously cited instant soup peel-off lids. Within her work *The mowing devil; In flavour future* (2019), Han revives this particular title sequence for the installation’s accompanying video. Hence, the two videos evoke the semblance of a mini-series. Within its second episode—*The mowing devil; In flavour future*—symmetrically mirrored noodles float through the darkness, all set to the reversed strains of, yet again, the song *Pick Me*. The installation poses a tempting question: What if the future came along in the shape of a shiny package of conveniently prepared noodles? As peculiar as this analogy may seem, it is apt: much like a prepackaged meal rushed out of the microwave, the future is unevenly liquified, swiftly consumed and just as quickly forgotten.

As one delves deeper into Han’s body of work—the peeling back, layer by layer, of translucent surfaces, products of both ancient and new technologies, blends of organic and synthetic materials, and tactile textures set against digital imprints—a web of intricate global and self-echoing connections emerges, hinting at unseen details still waiting to be discovered. In her new work, *Flipping hands* (2023), one encounters Han’s analogy of capitalism and its alluring promises of a

better future manifested in alienated K-pop songs and instant noodles, among other snacks—again. While past works included references to the artist’s South Korean background, this piece distinctively deploys the universally popular format of Korean drama productions as its core source of inspiration. Being part of the global Hallyu, or Korean Wave, K-drama is as much a cultural phenomenon as it is a commercial one. Intrigued by how seamlessly the genre seems to meld traditional values of Confucianism, such as collectivism, harmony, and tradition, with the capitalist drive for individualism, competition, and progress, Han started to investigate the dynamics of this lucrative alliance. In *Flipping hands*, she distills and reconfigures her observations, yet again triggering feelings of disorientation and uncanny familiarity: perfectly crafted pottery twisted like instant-noodle tendrils into symmetric pieces of furniture aligns in a living room-like environment. *Flipping hands* references a tactic for which K-drama is notorious: product placement. Numerous shows adopt a live strategy, enabling swift adjustments of storylines and production, both tailored for product integrations and to deliver a captivating audience experience. Consequently, characters are stripped of their complexity to swiftly slip into roles supporting optimal product showcasing. Transformation narratives serve this dynamic particularly well: initiating the protagonist from humble beginnings, they embark on a journey, encountering an array of purchasable luxuries, including cosmetics, fashion, and design, among other commodities. As they continue on their adventure, they are met with increased societal recognition, attribution of their newfound beauty, and an exponential growth in happiness.

Within the scope of her research for *Flipping hands*, Han employed artificial intelligence technologies to generate promotional imagery for fictional K-dramas. Among the results, the artist identified not only aesthetic but emotional and narrative patterns as well. Inherently manifested within the K-drama genre, these patterns seemingly correspond to the collective consciousness of the audience, given the astonishingly authentic renderings delivered by AI. This congruency indicates a dramatic shift between the demand and supply of K-drama, with the latter increasingly beginning to shape the former. Alongside this imbalance, a striking visual symmetry prevails throughout the AI-generated content, hinting at a comprehensive desire for a balance, extending beyond visual to narrative and even social structures, which the audience seems to nurture. As K-dramas often revolve around class struggle, wealth gaps, family dynamics, and societal pressures, the genre’s narrative arcs and character development appear to conjure a surface underneath which societal symmetries and asymmetries play out. Empathizing with the characters and their struggles, viewers might even recognize corresponding dynamics in their own lives. However, considering the overwhelming dominance of capitalist endeavors within K-dramas, the question arises as to what is being reflected back to the audience. Whereas societal conflicts are embedded within the

series, they tend to function more as a supportive structure, given the negligible space they are granted for contemporary depictions or for the processing of their complexity. Instead, the audience is confronted with commodified characters that strive for plain symmetry through alignment and resolution. Eventually, the flip side to K-dramas’ sparkling generosity is fully expelled into reality, where it remains a cruelty unspoken of.

*Flipping hands* suggests a re-prioritization of the silenced counterpart hidden in the shadows of K-dramas. Han calls on the ability to recognize symmetry within non-linear and unconventional narrative patterns and social structures. Fostering the aim of a cultural flip, the artist encourages the challenging of societal asymmetries, and their inherent injustices, in order to shape a more equitable society. Yet, an unsettling question remains: How can the concept of a flipped culture be translated into tangible actions for societal transformation beyond traditional capitalist norms? And besides, who can claim not to enjoy the consumption of a shiny snack, time and time again, especially as they come along packaged as aesthetically pleasing as K-dramas are? Eventually, pleasure may be eating itself.

**Heyon Han** is a South Korean artist based in Berlin. She studied fine arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Nuremberg, Germany, and at the Hongik University in Seoul, Korea. Her work was recently shown in a group exhibition by Goldrausch Female Artists Project at Haubrok Foundation in Berlin, and at the 2019 Pixelache Festival, titled “Breaking the Fifth Wall,” in Helsinki, Finland.

**Helen-Sophie Mayr** is a research trainee in the Department of Culture and History of the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg municipality office in Berlin. As such, she works as a curator at Galerie im Turm as well as at Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, where she co-curated the exhibition series *Viewing Copy* at KinoKiosk, showing ten video works between 2023 and 2024. She studied curating art at Stockholm University and museology in Würzburg.

**Poster** Heyon Han, *The mowing devil; In flavour future* (film still), 2019, HD video collage, sound, 2:33 minutes  
Courtesy the artist

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Text by Helen-Sophie Mayr





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# Sebastian Jefford

In conversation with Nicholas Tammens

**Nicholas Tammens:** When I first started looking at your work, I was reminded of the work of the American artist Paul Thek. Of course, there is the material association to be made between your use of Plexiglas and Thek's *Meat Pieces* (1965–66)—where Plexiglas boxes often encased visceral reproductions of the artist's own body in states of decay—but also his infamously lost work, *Tomb* (1967), which we often call "Death of a Hippie", where Thek transformed his own body into an effigy of a counterculture and its demise. I think of both works, because in yours I see a fascination with anthropomorphism and human-like figures, be they corpses, gods, or costumes; perhaps they are empty vessels for veneration, pity, or the projection of potential. It's completely subjective. What I'm certain of, is that the use of the box and the anthropomorphized figure suggests types of containment—what led you to these forms and the associations between them?

**Sebastian Jefford:** It's interesting you bring up Paul Thek; his work was very important to me at art school, although I made very different work at the time. Now I don't look at him much at all, and yet I can see all these relationships that you mention. I've always admired him for his multifaceted, experimental approach.

I've used Plexiglas boxes in very specific ways in the past, in the vein of architectural models of staircases. But more recently I've been making ones that look as though they straddle different potential functions—a ballot box, a donation or suggestion box, a terrarium or container for transporting small animals, a reliquary, or an educational learning tool. I think it's interesting to make an object's function less knowable, perhaps even to suggest it's been repurposed, especially in today's climate where uncertainty seems to be a dominant cultural malaise. What to do with it? Initially these works only had drawings of bog bodies embedded into them, which I had been looking at for the way they're preserved in peat, an ancient but now lesser-used fossil fuel. This reference soon became too restrictive and I realized I was naturally looking at images of empty animal costumes or recumbent effigies to use for drawings as well. What connects them is that they all seem to be like an empty shell, whether it's one that idealizes an individual or one that may have once offered an escape into another state of mind. The futile attempt to inhabit the consciousness of an animal, perhaps. The clash of these very different figures seems to generate something of the indexical as well.

**NT:** I think it was exactly this emptiness that I was interested in; with all these "people" there is no subjectivity, either it was evacuated or they're waiting for some kind of animation. The box formally implies something similar . . . in English we have the expression of "unpacking" something, and with boxes, of course these modular vessels imply packing and unpacking. What meaning are you packing into

it? What can we unpack from it? Of course, these are rhetorical questions that such a form asks us and that your work flirts with in different ways. Afterall, you use the box as a frame for these drawings of other "empty" vessels. But what I wanted to know more about is the presence of technique, not only in your drawings, which are almost photorealist, but also these tablet pieces that sit between sculpture and painting. You had mentioned to me in conversation that there is a specific way that you make these?

**SJ:** It's this packing and unpacking that is exactly what I'm trying to get to, in a way. For years I was obsessed with the act of reconstruction, in an archaeological or historical context, the idea that objects or remains lying underground get dug up, dusted off, and reanimated, or that copies are made and used "as they were back then." Gaps and holes in history, landscape, archaeological objects, or knowledge become a kind of space to project, to speculate, to engage in a form of world-making. Usually, it's an approach used to glean knowledge of and intimacy with the past, but I was more interested in the potential for error, misinterpretation, or even downright fiction. When does an object become useful for building a dubious or questionably idealized past, and just how elastic or malleable is this thing, how much stretching can it take before it snaps?

The tablet works that you mention developed out of these lines of thinking, but the process itself led me far away from consciously trying to embed these ideas into the work. The way I make them is hyper-specific, involving pressing various objects, textures, sometimes scribing images, into flat planes of plasticine. These surfaces are then cast in polyurethane foam, painted, and intuitively arranged around a separately made carved form. A kind of "dressing up" of a blank. They're attached together with plastic snap fasteners, the kind of you find on garments. I want them to give the sense that they were hastily applied, as though to plug some kind of exponential growth of whatever is inside, but also that they might offer the potential of a constant rearrangement, as though the hidden contents are highly unstable and subject to constant change.

**NT:** The images in your tablet works, and indeed in your larger paintings as well, speak to another way of packaging: graphic design and the packaging of information. These days, it would be more appropriate to use the term "communication design" which in itself implies its functionality and place within our now overly technologized lives. I point this out because this "world-making" that you mention on the side of the viewer is in fact already predetermined by the technology and the forms that they encounter as a user. Here we get to an interesting crossover between the artist, as someone who engages with the world of symbols, and the designers of user interface (UI) or user experience (UX) that we encounter almost unconsciously; these are

two versions of communication design that are in some ways quite different yet mutually codependent, with UI being the development of the graphics and interfaces of digital space and UX being the development of how it is experienced. I see that there is an attraction to these forms of design in the compositions of the paintings, and perhaps, more generally, an attraction to how formal logic shapes the viewer's experience—does that sound right to you, or am I projecting my own fantasy on the work?

**SJ:** It's interesting that these works seem to speak to you in relation to UI/UX design, which is in itself inescapably technological and, dare I say, contemporary. When I first started working on the paintings, I was making a conscious reference to a natural history book from the 1960s called *The Living World of Animals*, which was my dad's from when he was a kid. The book is filled with diagrams, photographs, and microscopic images. It's abundant with diagrammatic illustrations of cells, internal organs, different kinds of furs, migration patterns, the list goes on. It seems to present a top-down view of the "animal kingdom," a very human perspective of a removed observer. It's a visual language that is used to communicate an idea of certainty, with an air of supposed neutrality that masks a sense of authority. In these works, I've tried to deform or debase these visual languages that feel so familiar and embedded. If we can imagine visual or object languages are like bricks, I want to take the brick and turn it back into clay, into an unstable or unpredictable state that might better describe our time. Now I suppose UI or UX is a dominant mode or form through which we navigate the world, a new kind of brick to grind down into a new kind of clay.

**Sebastian Jefford** is a Welsh artist working in Berlin. He graduated from the Royal Academy Schools, London, in 2017. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Living World of Animals* at Gianni Manhattan (Vienna) and *Sentiment, Sediment* at Galleri Opdahl (Stavanger).

**Nicholas Tammens** is a writer and curator living in Berlin.

**Poster** Sebastian Jefford, *Irreconcilable differences* (detail), 2023, polyurethane foam, acrylic paint, plastic snap fasteners, Plexiglas, wood, cardboard, insulation foam, PVA glue, 140 x 200 x 35 cm  
Courtesy the artist

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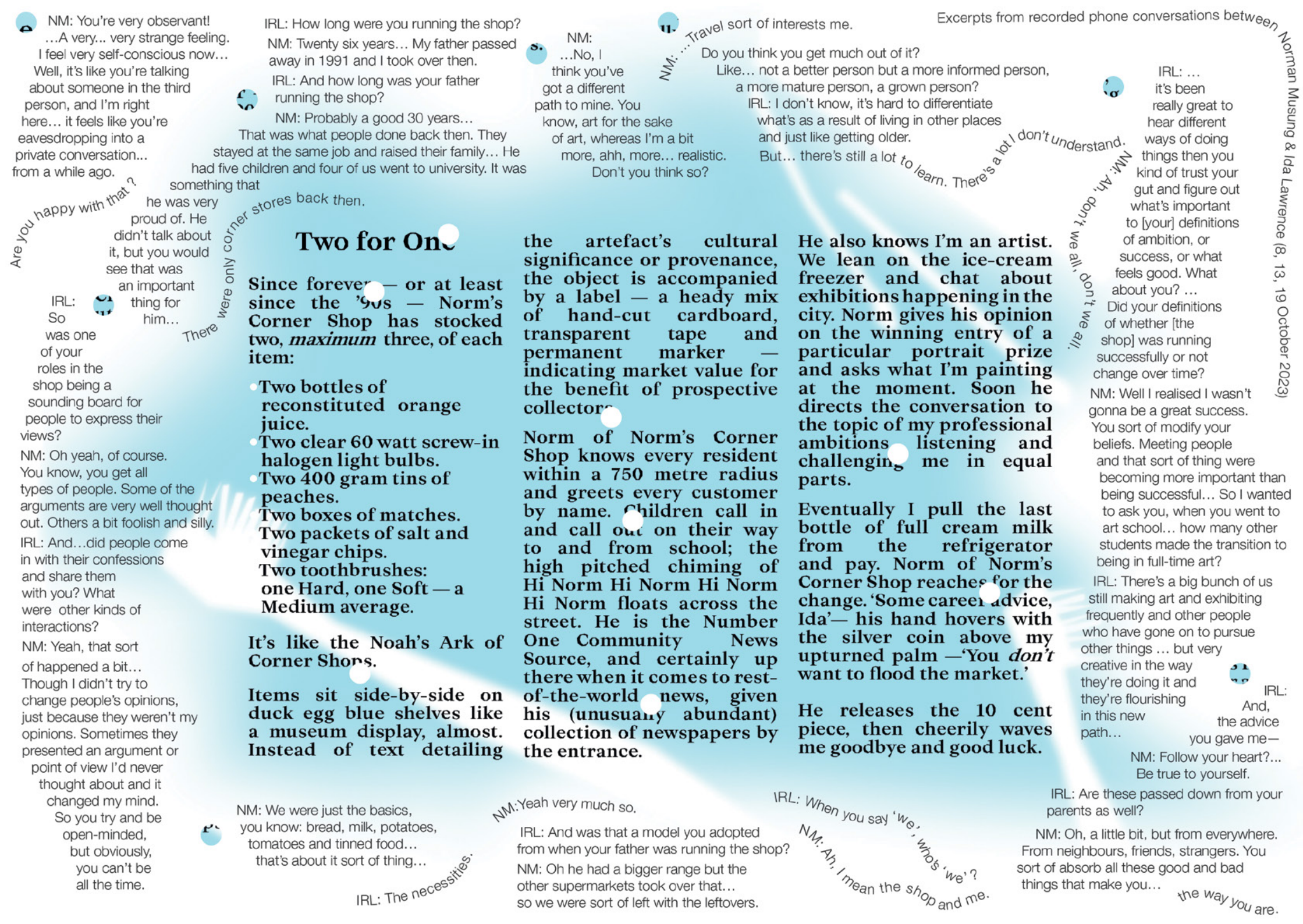
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# Ida Lawrence



**Ida Lawrence** lives in Berlin and often wanders to Indonesia and Australia via her painted stories. Her solo show, *Basa-Basi / Chit-Chat*, was exhibited by ISA Art Gallery at Art SG 2023, while her tallest tale was painted on the eight-by-fifteen meter wall at Urban Spree, Berlin, in 2020. She is a recipient of the Marten Bequest Scholarship for Painting and is cooking up a publication called *Loose Translations*.

**Donia Jornod** is a transmedia artist born with the premises of the internet. She currently lives and works in Zürich. Her work focuses on the perceptible limits of reality through the human body, which she understands as an echo of a political state.

**Norman Musung** ran a corner shop in inner-city Sydney, Australia, between 1991 and 2017. The opening hours were 6 am to 7 pm on weekdays and 7 am to noon on weekends. Since retiring, he enjoys cycling, eating lunch at cafés, and travelling.

**Collage (this page)** Donia Jornod (excerpts from *Two for One* story by Ida Lawrence and excerpts from recorded phone conversations between Norman Musung and Ida Lawrence) 2023, digital collage. Courtesy the artist

**Poster** Ida Lawrence, *Two for One* (work in progress, detail), 2023, acrylic and oil on polycotton canvas, painted wall. Installation: 328 x 470cm; diptych: 180 x 120 cm each. Courtesy the artist  
 Photo: Eric Bell





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# Maness

## Paradisi

It's backbreaking to be dressed as a bird on a Sunday morning—especially around S-Bahnhof Hermannstraße in Neukölln, facing the pressing midyear heat in a 3D-printed bird-head costume, with plastic claws hot-glued to your shoes. Maness is an artist and he's the one wedged underneath this voluptuously feathered construction—a hybrid between himself and a bird of paradise—which will stay painfully misplaced in an un-staged setting of public transportation and monumental modernism for the following twenty minutes. Watch *Paradisi* all the way to the end and witness tragedy clearing way for glimmers of hope in one of the most hopeless junctions of inner-city Berlin.

Wildlife in this metropolitan traffic zone of millions is predominantly reduced to pigeons and other colorless birds scavenging plastic bags for leftovers. They inhabit the gaps between anti-bird spikes on the steel beams of train stations and peck around trash containers. For some of us, they are parasites, birds of hell. For none of us are they birds of paradise. There is nothing paradisiac about Berlin either. It is ancient swampland that has been covered with cement and asphalt and encircled by the tracks of the Ringbahn, which carves a swath through the drained soil around inner-city Berlin and marks a line between the low and high cost of apartment rents.

Maness moved from one swamp city to another. The studio in which he meticulously assembled the props for his production is in the hinterland just outside of the ring—two hundred meters from S-Bahnhof Hermannstraße, but 9,720 kilometers away from his hometown, Mexico City.

While he was working on *Paradisi* we came together in his studio. Maness has hosted such occasions plenty of times. *Paradisi* is a direct response to the choreographic courting to which he inevitably feels obliged during studio visits. We had tacos on the same table that appears in the first scene of his video. Some levels below us, the magical realism of day-to-day practicalities unfolds in its usual banality, too many unpaid cars hunting for too few parking lots while too many artists fish for too little funding. But in his studio, it seems like none of this can touch you. This protected preserve is just far enough removed to enable the metamorphous collision of fact and fantasy that we sometimes weave together when we allow ourselves to not function for a day. It's discomfoting to walk out from these dreamy fabrications and confront a ruthless reality.

Especially on S-Bahnhof Hermannstraße—a bleak transit zone. Here, paths collide while we follow the infrastructure that was laid out for us—walkways, train tracks, asphalted roads. Some people commuting work tough jobs in order to feed their families, some have no jobs at all. The mood isn't ecstatic. It's odd to be dressed as a bird on S-Bahnhof Hermannstraße because this was never meant to be a

stage. Neither was the tiny traffic island in the middle of a vast traffic-scape on Innsbrucker Platz—the next station of the trip Maness is taking us on in his costume. Below him, six lanes of Stadtring traffic run through a tunnel of the A100. No bird of paradise should exist here—it's modernist megalomania that grew out of an extreme enthusiasm for non-stop traffic and a general disinterest in mental peace. This is not paradise. But does anybody know how to get there? The algorithms don't. Google Maps suggests that "paradise" is a storage space in Leinfelden-Echterdingen that was converted into a massive brothel, but the epic frescoes of Catholic chapels tell another story. According to biblical accounts, Paradise is an orchard of pleasure and fruits from which our ancestors got expelled. Since then, we live in exile, near circle lines, embedded in six-lane traffic, facing the hardship and burden of trying to answer existential questions that our intellect confronts us with. The biblical lesson is simple—eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, gain critical thinking abilities, and suffer for the rest of your existence. Whether it's biblical command or modernist masterplans that restructured the land of wild pigeons into walkways and roadkill zones, you are expected to simply follow and function. Try to make sense of your life and you eventually face the hardship of finding yourself dressed, unpaid, as a bird that is trying to process the absurd tragicomicity of everything around it.

The fact that Maness has to control the movement of the beak on his bird-head costume via a makeshift spoon-and-clip construction that is operated with his mouth, doesn't make things less precarious. As viewers we see none of this. On the contrary, it almost looks like elaborate, kinetic technology, a flawless bird-human hybrid trying to make itself serviceable in front of a Gründerzeit building on Schöneberger Ufer. Maness doesn't take us on an arbitrary route; instead, he follows stations that have had an impact on his life ever since coming to Berlin. This building used to house Esther Schipper, a renowned gallery where Maness earned his income for years, working as an art handler. But now he's a bird and the banks of the canal on the other side of the street hold a special offering for him—a tree branch—an object of immense insignificance so worthy of being preserved for anyone who oversaw it.

Maness crosses the river on Potsdamer Brücke to seek access to a silent, static marvel—a modernist temple which preserves the relics of high culture, a monumental post-war museum, a recourse to the Bauhaus tradition that was discredited as degenerate during the swampland's darkest time—the Neue Nationalgalerie. It's a structure of steel and glass that seems intimidating, antiseptic, and distressingly hostile to bird life. Indeed, for any bird of paradise, being inside it would mean to circle through a death trap—the floorspace in front of the massive glass sections that were constructed to propagate the magnanimous guidelines of a free society would be lined with birds in exotic colors that crashed into the see-through enclosures of this hermetically sealed cage.

In a manner of reverence and deep respect, Maness offers his stick to the Nationalgalerie and enacts an incantatory courtship dance. None of this has any effect, the lifeless machine doesn't reply. Access remains denied, the generous offer ignored. The institution operates on strict opening hours. The security guards who unlock the entrance are still outside of the Ringbahn swath at this hour of the day. Way worse, the decision makers operating in the depths of the institutional machine room might forever stay out of reach. It's hard not to feel deflated if even your best isn't good enough.<sup>1</sup> The parody hurts.

Being an artist means scanning documents, replying to emails, ordering supplies, and avoiding phone calls—it's a fully professionalized practice, as exotic as most other entrepreneurial undertakings. Few are in it for a career; prospects are flimsy. It's a metamorphic condition in which you eventually distort the prescribed vision of the world until you yourself turn out to appear just as distorted to people outside of your massive bird-head at times.

On Kottbusser Tor this reality-check hits. Trying to join a flock of pigeons it becomes obvious that Maness is not a bird, he's a hundred times bigger than them and decorated with spray-painted props. As he tries to join them, they immediately fly away. This is the low point. If it wasn't for the rose on the bench that he finds in the last part of the video, it would be a tragic ending. Thankfully it isn't. Instead, his floral trove revives his enthusiasm, inspiring him to scheme another courtship dance. He descends into the U-Bahn passageway, which leads to the tunnels beneath the asphalted swampland. A cent-piece of optimism prevails as the screen fades into black. As long as the 3D-printed beak of the bird with the spoon-and-clip construction can still peck, it will return, perhaps with something that can be enshrined to outlive its own existence in this anti-Paradise.

**Maness** (Andrés Mora Balzaretto) is a Mexican artist based in Berlin. He studied at La Esmeralda and the Cinematographic Training Center in Mexico City. He has exhibited with Studio Beta in Berlin and is currently working on the production of his upcoming film, *Narrenschiff*, scheduled for release in 2024.

**Raoul Zoellner** grew up in Berlin, studied at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam, and is director of the Boros Foundation (Berlin). He explores various forms of art mediation and has been working in this field for institutions including KW Institute for Contemporary Art and the 12th Berlin Biennale.

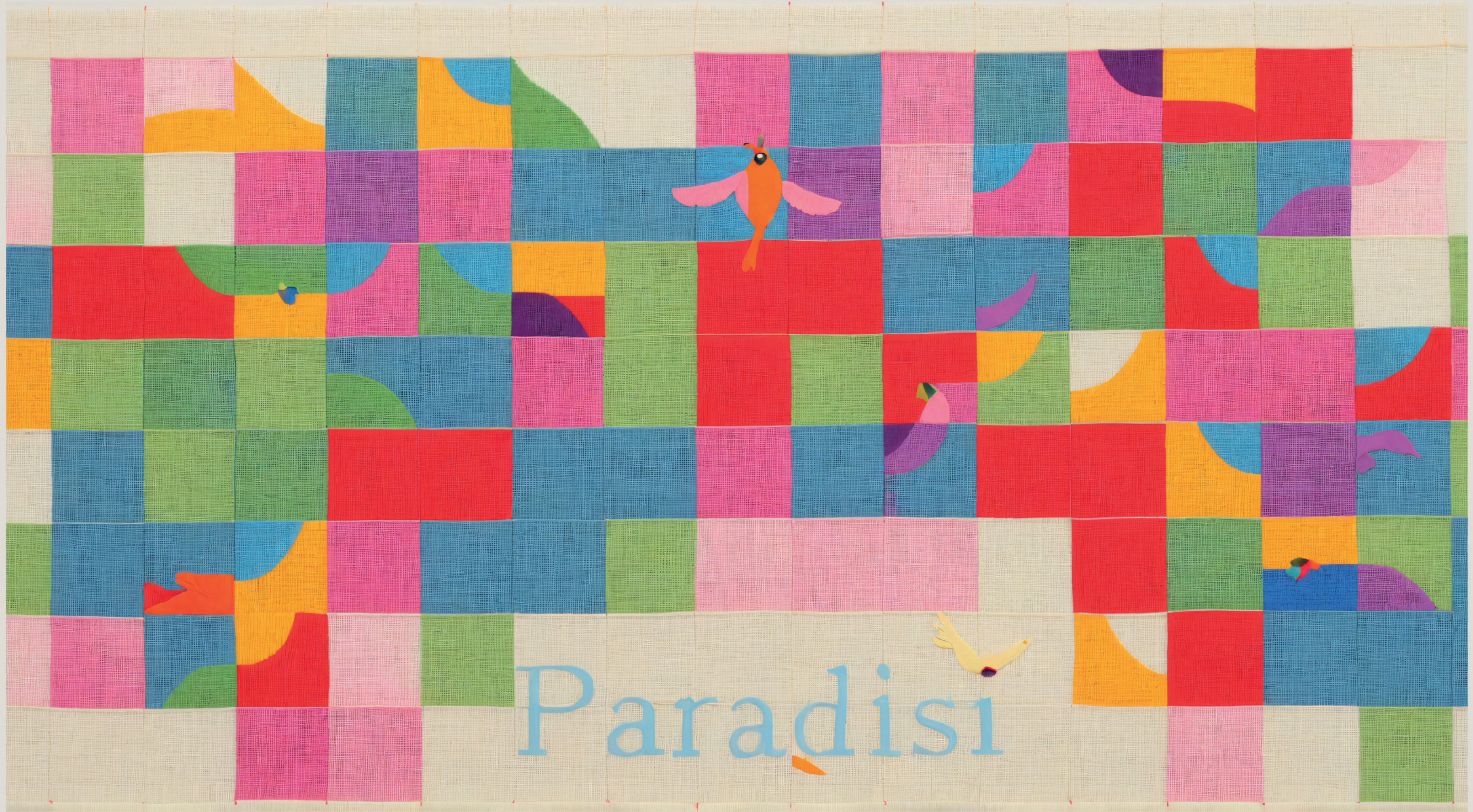
**Poster** Maness, *Paradisi*, 2023, digital embroidery  
Courtesy the artist

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<sup>1</sup> David Attenborough in *Our Planet, Episode 3: Jungles* (2019), discussing a bird of paradise that unsuccessfully enacts a courtship dance and leaves little impression on its female audience.





Paradisi



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KW Institute for Contemporary Art

# Simone Miné Koza

## Delta (Δ)

Δ (2023) is a three-channel video installation by Simone Miné Koza. Each monitor displays a 3D-animated composition of geometrical shapes orbiting themselves. We're introduced to a fictional species, called "profiles," synthetic organisms made of geometric code derived from humans' data. One by one, the profiles unveil their source code to the viewer, in the form of a series of portraits. Each screen offers a glimpse into a plastic image of Generation Δ, the last human-like generation to live on Earth, within a polluted, nest-like cityscape enveloping its young inhabitants in hyper-tech ruins.

The human-like characters are seen uploading their distilled lives into the hovering geometries. Their clothing, assemblages of underground subcultures from bygone eras—Gothic Lolita, Cyberpunk, Cosplay—are emblematic of shifting identities in the post-human epoch. These digital familiars, oscillating between pet and prized possession, makes one wonder: Is this narcissism, or an act of self-preservation? Generation Δ are perhaps not saviors of the planet but archivists of their legacies.

Δ can be interpreted as a rejection of traditional, centralized understandings of identity and time, an exploration of possible existence beyond rigid structures, as well as an invitation to imagine a world beyond fixed identities and linear timelines. The blue color that serves as a background on each monitor refers both to Microsoft Windows' start-up screen and its blue screen of death, indicating technology's ability to re-start, giving humans a chance to reset and start anew. Life, as reflected in technology's impermanence, is cyclical—marked by periods of death and rebirth. While the characters are balancing in the space of Bardo, waiting endlessly for Godot, the profiles have transitioned out of the material waiting room.

Simone Miné Koza's use of this trope compels us to reflect on the transience, along with the potential, of our digital legacies. What if the characters are longing for a digital upload of consciousness itself? If Generation Δ is the last human-like generation, the work confronts us with the theme of eternal return, the idea of transferring consciousness into a digital form, signifying a quest for immortality, a liberation from the cycle of biological birth and death. The characters' desire to shed the confines of the physical by moving into a realm of digital consciousness, can at the same time be paralleled with queer desire for non-normative forms of existence. The synthetic "profiles" derived from personal data, then, critically reflect and give a new direction to the othering of queer identities in societies that often reduce identities to mere categories, or data points. The juxtaposition of underground scenes in Δ references the politics of visibility inherent in queer cultures, where marginalized identities constantly navigate the tensions between subversion and assimilation.

For Simone Miné Koza, becoming geometrical expresses a desire to transcend the shackles of human form and perhaps to finally be

released from the illusions of freedom offered by subcultures rendered meaningless in an era submerged in frivolous excesses. If mathematics is a technology for experiencing the infinite, the sacred, and the spiritual, the longing to become geometric, to become a "body without organs," appears as a quest for diffraction, in Karen Barad's sense. The shift from the organic, the malleable and transient, to the geometric—representing the fixed, the constant, and the eternal—pertains to an entanglement of desires and anxieties deeply embedded in contemporary thought. Thereby, the wish to break free from archaic cultural notions, as well as from subcultures that have defined, confined, and at times eventually restricted us, might be seen as a commentary on how systems of identity are becoming obsolete.

Are we, in essence, the sum total of our data? In a world where our digital footprints often carry more weight than our physical ones, Simone Miné Koza's play on this duality is both haunting and revelatory. It's here that the title of the work, "Delta", resonates. Delta signifies change and difference in mathematics. Generation Δ, in this technofuturistic vision, embodies the shift from natural to digital legacies. The assertion is clear—instead of cementing their presence on a dying Earth, these individuals choose to immortalize themselves.

Enveloped in a disconcerting blend of pulp vulnerability and existential dread, Δ is a reflection on the anxieties and aspirations of a generation on the cusp of two worlds. In its opaque rendering, it subtly plays with the complexities of gender identity, both material and digital, virtual and actual (with these terms becoming more and more vacuous), while interrogating notions of legacy in an era of ephemeral and increasingly fluid dopamine-induced transactions. For those of us who recognize themselves pondering their place amidst the galaxies of data, images, and extraction on a planetary scale, Δ could be a digital catharsis. It's a timely meditation on where humanity might be headed, as it stands precariously at the crossroads of annihilation and evolution. Thus, "Delta" is a reflection on bodies without organs, the web of artificial intelligences, and on the ever-looming cataclysms of our times.

**Simone Miné Koza** is a French-Japanese video artist based in Berlin. Her practice revolves around her fascination for the science fiction genre and her experimental approach to motion graphic design. With an iconography filled with pop culture references, she invites the viewer to explore hyper-technological worlds.

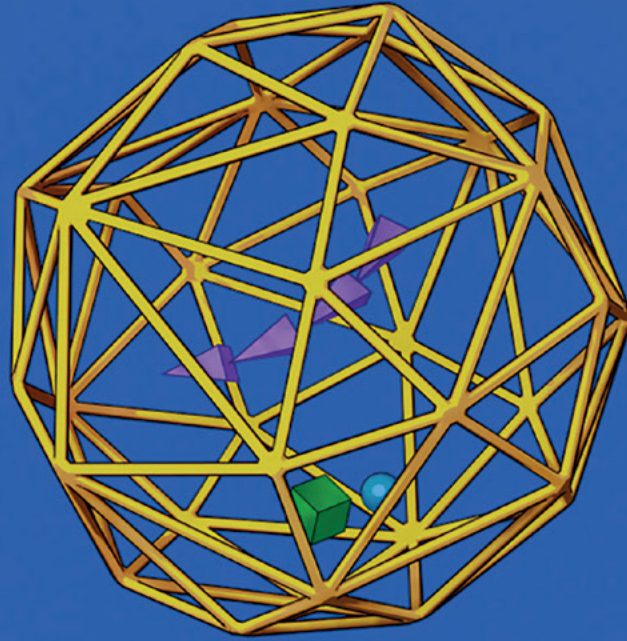
**Doireann O'Malley** is a multidisciplinary artist based in Berlin. They studied at the University of Ulster (Belfast), were professor of gender and space at Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien (2021–2022), and are currently guest professor at the Zurich University of the Arts. O'Malley received the Berliner Förderprogramm Künstlerische Forschung (2020–2021) and was a BPA// participant in 2019–2020.

**Poster** Simone Miné Koza, Δ (video still), 2023, three-channel video installation, 8:10 minutes, 2023  
Courtesy the artist

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Faint, illegible text is visible throughout the page, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the paper. The text appears to be technical or scientific in nature, possibly related to the diagrams shown.



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# Bassem Saad

Fate is not not a prison. The double negation is intentional: fate is not simply a prison because there are people inside a prison and people not inside a prison. Both subsets of people make up a city. Not everyone inside the city who feels the weight of fate is in prison.

Fate is built, unequally, like an anthill or a system of subterranean tunnels. It is often traversable and sometimes escapable. There are no absolutes in fate. Or maybe fate is not the anthill itself but the air surrounding it, not the tunnels themselves but the soil into which they have been dug. Maybe the anthill and the tunnels are a kind of fatelessness, which may be carved out of fate. In any case, both provisions and weapons may be smuggled in the tunnels.

There are people inside the settler-colony and people in a besieged strip of land by the sea. Both subsets of people make up a population separated by apartheid. They are all outside of Germany: some by atrocious historical downstream, some by ancestral lineage, some by choice, some by passport regime. What's undeniable is that Germany appears in this paragraph. Germany is inside Europe.

The two lenticular prints from the series *Suppose that Rome is not a human habitation* (2022–ongoing) depict prisons at the peripheries of Berlin and Marseille, alongside related sites and objects. The walls of the Tegel Prison accompany a city dweller as she walks towards the Flughafensee lake, after arriving by train at Holzhauser Straße U-Bahn station, to take a swim on an August afternoon. The city dweller-swimmer is a fiancée, or a teacher, or sex worker, or any other “hanger-on of the capitalist class,” or anyone whatsoever who lives in Berlin and is not in prison. As for the shoe with the slide-out drawer in its sole: it sits among a minor composition of other objects confiscated from prisoners at the Baumettes Prison in Marseille. The objects are in the collection of the MUCEM, the Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean, also pictured. The objects were absolutely not fated to end up in the anthropological museum while the prisoners to whom they belong are still in prison. No, neither the objects nor the prisoners were fated to end up where they currently are.

*Fateless* (a work-in-progress) functions as an open rehearsal for a film. It attempts to make tangible the city as an object neither reducible to its geographical location (Berlin) nor to its historical timestamp (the present, roughly)—which is to say, as the actually existing city as we move through it every day, with its screaming contradictions, mute compulsions, and unbearably literal prisons. This city, everyone knows, is populated by a set of strange characters. In fact, to call them “strange” risks downplaying how fundamentally the city depends on them too, how the city inhabits *them*. They know that the city sits atop a system of tunnels, populated by the Ghosts of Christmas Yet to Come and not just of Christmas Past.

Among these figures you would find a security guard, an angel, someone in line at Ausländerbehörde, or even fear itself. A city dweller walks by a solidarity march, wags a finger, yells: “TERRORISMUS!” One

of the ghosts haunts a cruising site for fun. The tourist is disappointed as the city's realness crushes her fantasy, only to later reveal an impossibility she could never have dreamt. One wouldn't be mistaken to think, “Wait, this is so Berlin,” or “So 2023”; *Fateless*, however, attempts to rehearse these figures as they defy descriptors, beyond their seeming status as NPCs (a “non-playable character” in a game that cannot be inhabited by the player). In this sense, in the spirit of both reality TV and dialectics, the film sets out to stage an antagonism between the city's allegorical inhabitants. Some puns, high-concept misunderstandings, and trauma plot twists ensue. A particular kind of character work explores how it is that the tightropes of a psychological person, symbol, allegory, and non-playable character are tread. The promise of the city is not that our fates are all connected, it's that they are not. It is not the shared fate of the city's figures that paves a way out, but the way in which they try to escape it.

**Bassem Saad** is an artist and writer born in Beirut. Their work explores notions of historical rupture, spontaneity, and surplus through film, performance, and sculpture, alongside essays and fiction. Saad's work has been presented and screened at the Museum of Modern Art (New York), CPH:DOX Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, Triangle-Astérides centre d'art contemporain (Marseille), Busan Biennale, and Transmediale (Berlin). Their most recent film, *Congress of Idling Persons*, received a special mention in the New:Vision award category at CPH:DOX 2022.

**Maxi Wallenhorst** is a writer and lives in Berlin. Their recent essays have been published in *e-flux* and *Texte zur Kunst*.

**Poster** Bassem Saad, *Suppose that Rome is not a human habitation #1*, 2022, tri-image lenticular print mounted on alu-dibond  
Courtesy the artist

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SURPLUSED

URCHIN

IDLER

PROSTITUTE

MERCENARY

MAID

MURDERER

GE-  
FANGEN  
-EN  
GE-  
WERK  
-SCHAFT  
BUNDES  
-WEITE

NICHT  
TRENN  
-BARE

THERE IS  
A WAY OF HISTORY  
FROM THE OUTSIDE OF THE  
ORDER THAT IS AN INSIDE

BUT WHAT DO I KNOW

DEATH  
OR  
SOME PIERCING  
PRINCIPLE

ONLY TIME  
WITHOUT  
ITS STREETS



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# Tian Guoxin

**sunshine gold, oriental red, hayward green**

On June 27, 2023, a video started circulating on Chinese social media showing the prime minister of New Zealand next to a Zespri kiwi promotional stand in a mall's luxury import food court in Tianjin. After introducing a kiwi sample into his mouth, a Chinese journalist stretches out a microphone towards him and asks: "Does it taste of home?" The prime minister swallows the piece of kiwi, and answers: "It tastes as good as at home."

猕猴桃 [míhóutáo]: Chinese gooseberry (literally: macaque peach, due to monkey's appreciation of the fruit)

奇异果 [qíyìguǒ]: Kiwi (literally: strange fruit, a homophone of kiwi fruit)

It was the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and leaving the house to stroll the supermarket aisles had become a kind of luxury. The combination of boredom and global panic had made me develop the habit of reading the tags of items sitting on the shop's shelves, trying to understand how all these products moved across the globe in the middle of a social standstill. On one of these days, I walked over to the kiwi shelf. This is when I realized Zespri sells their kiwis by the piece, while other brands determine their price by the kilogram. I wasn't sure why. Once I got back home, I sat in front of my laptop, and started searching kiwis on the internet. All my life, I had been convinced that 猕猴桃 [míhóutáo], Chinese gooseberry, and 奇异果 [qíyìguǒ], kiwi, were different fruits. Yet, in my mind, they both tasted exactly the same. I suddenly remembered the red heart kiwi my mother once bought for me. On my next shopping trip, I look for it but can't find it.

"I just think it looks beautiful."

I am in the search of a book by British plant "collector" Ernest Henry Wilson, published in 1913: *A Naturalist in Western China*. The pdf is nowhere to be found. Three of the original copies are stored in libraries across Berlin. I request one online. Ernest Henry Wilson traveled to China in 1899 to take indigenous plant specimens to introduce to the European market, returning to England with some 906 plant species. One of the many seeds he collected was from the 猕猴桃 [míhóutáo] plant, which he gathered in Sichuan. On his way out of Sichuan he stopped over Yichang, a city with an embassy around which foreigners gathered and with whom Wilson shared some of the seeds. Four of these 猕猴桃 [míhóutáo] seeds were given to M. Isabel Fraser, the principal of Wanganui Girls' College in New Zealand. The specimens that Wilson took with him happened to only make staminate flowers, which meant that all the 猕猴桃 [míhóutáo] plants he planted

back in Britain grew fruitless. There, the 猕猴桃 [míhóutáo] plant was to become a decorative garden plant, appreciated for its leaves and climbing abilities. This was not the case for the seeds that reached New Zealand. Initially, the fruit proved challenging to cultivate due to a lack of technical knowledge. For the next fifty years, the plant was continuously cross-bred until it became what we know it as today, the familiar green Hayward, named after the orchard owner who first crossed it. This new fruit was more sweet, stable, and edible, and therefore began being commercialized. Its initial name, Chinese gooseberry, was dismissed as unfit for good marketing. In 1959, Turners & Growers Ltd. renamed the fruit kiwi, after the island's indigenous animal of the same name, due to its hairy resemblance, thus rebranding the fruit as a New Zealand icon. Today, all New Zealand kiwi fruits are marketed under the brand name Zespri.

I suddenly remember the first 奇异果 [qíyìguǒ] my mother ever brought home. She said she bought it from an exotic fruit import store, and that it came from New Zealand. It was expensive. This must have been around the year 2000, when China joined the World Trade Organization and foreign products started flooding the Chinese market. Imported green and golden kiwis started appearing in all major cities, where the new middle class accumulated. Chinese farmers realized it was becoming impossible to compete with the imported fruit. Taking back this market was to become a national project. A team of scientists started crossing industrially produced 猕猴桃 [míhóutáo] with its wild varieties, in search of a new super fruit. This is how 红心猕猴桃 came into being: a Chinese gooseberry with a red heart. The new product's red beauty was to become a tool to fight back the expansion of strange fruit. Color and taste followed economic changes.

The government, following the Poverty Reduction Policy, established a development plan for the valleys close to my town. It introduced both the new fruit and the technology necessary to grow it industrially in the area to improve its economic state. I called my mom and asked her to go have a look at the orchards. She later sent me a message on WeChat, letting me know that she had missed the harvest by some days. I tried to catch it myself instead.

Wuhan's Chinese Academy of Sciences currently transfers its red heart míhóutáo 红心猕猴桃 plants to an Italian company for 20,000 euros per year. The product is advertised in Europe as the original Chinese 猕猴桃 [míhóutáo]. The company entered the Chinese market with this fruit in 2009, which it now sells as back as strange fruit 奇异果.

Two days before the harvest, I got a message from the technician at the orchard. At the end of September 2022, I flew to Bologna to get to Faenza. The red heart kiwi 红心猕猴桃 is the last harvesting job of the season. While I looked at the cargo being driven away, I wondered if it will be sold by the kilogram or the piece.

**Tian Guoxin** was born in Sichuan, China, and lives and works in Berlin. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts Nuremberg in 2021. She has worked collectively as part of the artist collective Pibao Gongsi. She has recently exhibited at Galerie Der Künstler\*Innen (Munich), Kunsthalle Baden, and with the rubbles of old palaces (Berlin).

**Hannah O'Flynn** is an artist, researcher, and curator from Barcelona. She currently runs with the rubbles of old palaces, a cultural research space in Kreuzberg, Berlin. Her work examines human and non-human relationships to dominant structures of oppression and the long histories of organizing against them. O'Flynn is a graduate of the Kingston School of Art and holds an MA from the Dutch Art Institute.

**Poster** Tian Guoxin, 论斤论个 *per kilo, per fruit*, 2023  
Courtesy the artist

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Text by Hannah O'Flynn







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# Jasmin Werner

## Send Money Fast

Rarely does an artwork respond to political conditions as concisely as Jasmin Werner's *Send Money Fast* (2023), on the facade of KW Institute for Contemporary Art. It involves prefabricated cassette roller shutters installed on the ground-floor and first-floor windows of this well-known art institution, with the logos of Ria, Small World, and Western Union emblazoned on the painted shutters. These companies offer money transfer services or remittances, commonly referred to as payments, that can be made by migrants to family members and acquaintances in their home countries. While the German Bundestag debates how to reduce the "attractiveness of our welfare state [Sozialstaat]" to accommodate fewer asylum seekers in the future, the finance minister suggests blocking remittances to countries of origin.<sup>1</sup> Werner, who lives and works in Berlin, critically engages with the architectures of power, focusing on the often-invisible structures that keep the gears of our capitalist world spinning. With *Send Money Fast*, she directs her gaze towards financial flows and indirectly towards migration movements.

On a fourth painted roller shutter, we find the "Admiral", a butterfly belonging to a migratory species that travels over long distances due to overpopulation and climate change; these are some of the same causes responsible for human migration. Additionally, there is the exploitation of resources that inevitably leads to precarious living conditions for civilian populations, forcing them to flee from their countries, referred to as Herkunftsländer origin countries in Europe.

In its political relevance, *Send Money Fast* reminds me of artwork by groups like New York-based Group Material, which used advertising spaces for some of their works and exhibitions, placing artworks (as advertisements) in newspapers or on billboards while actively engaging with people in their neighborhood. They connected art with political activism. I also think of the work of Belgian artist Guillaume Bijl, who, since the 1970s, has transported the interiors of establishments—like driving schools, supermarkets, bedding stores, or waiting rooms—from public spaces into art institutions and galleries, thus deliberately questioning the relationship between art and capitalism.

Werner's work is a critically ironic exploration of a digital financial infrastructure that we see daily, in large cities especially, and that is crucial for only a portion of the population yet vital for the survival of those who rely upon it. After all, it involves billions flowing through remittances to family members, making those payments existentially important. Werner collaborated on her installation with Berlin sign painter, Dawid Celek. Celek, who offers his services as a painter and graffiti artist for various businesses and individuals on eBay, hand-painted a series of roller shutters of mobile phone shops in Moabit, where the artist resides. Celek is originally from Poland and employs several Polish workers in his painting business for proj-

<sup>1</sup> "Lindner will Überweisungen in Heimatländer unterbinden," *Spiegel Politik*, Oct. 6, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/gefluechtete-in-deutschland-christian-lindner-will-ueberweisung-in-herkunfts-laender-blockieren-a-e34395b7-1180-4566-bc26-31139c8ac336>.

<sup>2</sup> "Migranten schicken mehr Geld in Herkunftsländer," *Mediendienst Integration*, Feb. 11, 2022, <https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/migranten-schicken-mehr-geld-in-herkunfts-laender.html>.



ects in Berlin, Germany, and Poland itself (which is one of the largest corridors for remittances).<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, *Send Money Fast* encourages us to consider financial flows beyond the realm of art. In a hyperconnected, globalized world, the butterfly effect<sup>3</sup> can often be observed where local events have global repercussions. The thesis of British professor Ian Goldin, who teaches at the University of Oxford and co-authored *The Butterfly Defect* (2014) with Mike Mariathan, delves into the growing gap between systemic risks and their effective management. He demonstrates how the new dynamics of turbocharged globalization have the potential and power to destabilize our societies. To prevent this process in the long term, we need more solidarity. As Goldin asserts, if individuals want to win, we all must win.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The butterfly effect is a phenomenon in nonlinear dynamical systems where small changes in initial conditions can lead to unpredictable long-term effects, as in Edward N. Lorenz's famous example that asked whether the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil can trigger a tornado in Texas.

<sup>4</sup> "Dieser Professor redet Klartext über Ungleichheit und gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt," *change Magazin*, Dec. 13, 2019, <https://www.change-magazin.de/de/professor-ian-goldin-redet-klartext-gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt>.

**Jasmin Werner** is a German artist working in Berlin. She received her Meisterschüler from Peter Fischli at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste - Städelschule, Frankfurt, in 2016. She recently exhibited at Kunstverein Hannover and, in 2024, will have solo exhibitions at the Kunsthall Thy (Denmark) and Galerie Guido W. Baudach (Berlin).

**Fabian Schöneich** is a curator and the founding director of CCA Berlin – Center for Contemporary Arts. He was curator of Portikus in Frankfurt from 2014 to 2018 and worked as an assistant curator at Kunsthalle Basel and Kunstinstituut Melly (formerly known as Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art) in Rotterdam.

**Poster** Jasmin Werner, *Send Money Fast* (work in progress), 2023  
Courtesy the artist

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Western Union

WU

Money Transfer



BSR

Western Union

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Money Transfer