

kunsthalle wien

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**DO
NOTHING,
FEEL
EVERYTHING**



Tom Seidmann-Freud, sketch for an endpaper In memory of Aviva Harari (Seidmann), Tom's only daughter, 1922–2011. Courtesy Tom Seidmann-Freud's grandchildren: Amnon Harari, Ayala Drori, and Osi Gevim

Cover image: **Yesmine Ben Khelil, *Untitled*, 2020**



Rahima Gambo, *Waiting in the woods (III)*, from the series *Tatsuniya II*, 2019 Courtesy the artist and Tatsuniya Art Collective

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I have tried to show elsewhere
that the work of mourning
is not one kind of work
among others.

Tony Cokes, *Testament A: MF FKA K-P X KE RIP* (video still), 2019 Courtesy the artist, Greene Naftali, New York, Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles, and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York

DO NOTHING, FEEL EVERYTHING

Like you, we have been trying to make sense of these last two years, which in turn has made us want to make sense of the years that came before—maybe to even dare to read and reflect on what has happened in a different light. What we already know is that our physical and mental well-being is not an individual matter anymore. It's clear now that we were sharing a state of insanity before we even knew we were insane. Our physical and mental health can only but be influenced by external factors and mechanisms related to the neoliberal demands that structure our lives. The act of “making sense” feels permanently delayed. Every crisis, every catastrophe, every threat is instantly overridden by another. This state of constant emergency, often translated into apathy and exhaustion, makes passing through coherent stages of emotion impossible. In this sense, *Do Nothing, Feel Everything* is, first of all, an acceptance of this impossibility.

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from a commercial for tampons, except that the original slogan read: “Do Everything. Feel Nothing.” This promise of numbness is more than symptomatic of our times, but what we want to express through the inversion of the slogan—apart from demanding a different pace of life—is a need for a different kind of space and time frame, in which it might be possible both to feel intensely and to process the emotional impact of what we witness around us, following the temporality of the “never-ending end of the world.”

Myriad notions, comments, experiences, concepts, words, and lives to be found in *Do Nothing, Feel Everything* speak of and with insanity, madness, paranoia, and other similar mechanisms commonly used to exclude. To guide you through these concepts and their history, we'd like to offer you the following lines of thought.

When we started to work on this exhibition, one train of thought led us directly to madness and its relation to art history. The mad, the genius, was somehow always celebrated, but under the condition that such people would also bear the role of the “outsider.” If we think about Art Brut, for instance, it is still designated as “outsider” art.

The idea of “outsider” and “insider” art might seem, today, for certain people, an obsolete one. Yet, it still holds meaning if you consider the politics of access within the art world. Of course, as cultural workers and artists, our relation to those politics can only be paranoid because they are based on hegemonic power dynamics. In this

exhibition, however, we focus on art practices that distill substances from the objects of a culture—even a culture whose sworn desire has been to reject them. In that sense, these practices are reparative because they reveal a will to reassemble something that will never be what it once was or what it could have been.

These notions of the “paranoid” and the “reparative” are informed by the work of gender and queer theorist **Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick**, and in particular, an essay titled “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You.” For us, it was an important reference that allowed us to think about paranoia as a form of resistance and of repair as a coping and survival mechanism. It helped us make sense of what it means to make art while being an outsider of what we call “art history,” and to make sense of what it means to work toward a change that you don’t believe will ever actually happen. In other words, the back and forth between these two epistemological systems—the reparative and the paranoid one—offers a way to navigate an understanding of insanity as the coexistence of contradictory knowledges within one mind. A paranoid reader, for example, is concerned with gathering information and tracing links in order to make the hidden visible. Yet to consider paranoia as a form of knowledge is not about proving what we already feared we knew but rather knowing that we are seen differently and that we see differently. This epistemological shift from normative patterns of thought is, of course, the repair that we are seeking to address through this exhibition. Healing is not about fixing what hegemonic culture has deemed broken or finding ways to make “broken things” function according to the society we currently live in. Rather, healing is, first of all, a process of soothing and bearing, but also of choosing *how* to soothe and to bear.

While going through **Sedgwick**’s work, we were introduced to psychoanalyst **Melanie Klein**’s theory of positions. **Klein** describes our earliest stages of psychic life, as infants, as a time when we are undergoing constant psychological development that alternates us between a “paranoid” position and a “depressive” one, which is part of successful cognitive development. We’ve found this theory helpful in understanding the conditions of repair. One of the most interesting aspects of **Klein**’s concept lies in how she sees the paranoid position, always in the oscillatory context of a very different possible one.

It is exactly this oscillation that we were interested in while working on the *Do Nothing, Feel Everything* exhibition. It also might be the reason why we were particularly drawn to the children’s book: a medium that collapses darkness and the promise of light into one another. Childhood is very present in the exhibition, represented through several artworks and media, and this fascination developed organically while we were shaping the show. We believe it is related to looking at what cognitively conditioned us as children as

something latent, something possible: Everything we need is already there before we start playing the game. Childhood is a moment when knowledge comprises not only what is *known* but also the articulation of the *unknown*.

The works in this exhibition examine and present a wide range of affects, ambitions, and risks. Nevertheless, they are all attached to a project of survival—one that is as phantasmagorical as it is real. It is this coexistence of contradictory knowledges within oneself that is the only plausible path toward the bearable. In **Sedgwick**’s words:

Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did.

Do Nothing, Feel Everything thus looks into art practices that understand insanity as a common condition and as a dynamic form of knowledge with something crucial at stake—art practices that, through careful bruising, find ways to soothe and to bear.

— Laura Amann and Aziza Harmel
Curators



Yasmine Ben Khelil, *Tout devient rose ... 3* [Everything Becomes Pink ... 3], 2020
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Maïa Muller, Paris

LAILA BACHTIAR

Born in 1971, lives and works in Vienna (Austria)

EXHIBITED ARTWORKS

Ein Baum
[A Tree], 2010

Elefant
[Elephant], 2003

Ente [Duck], 2003

Der Fuchs
[The Fox], 2013

Ein Hase
[A Hare], 2010

Katze [Cat], 2009

Ein Wolf
[A Wolf], 2016

© gallery gugging
Courtesy Hannah
Rieger Collection

Zahnbürste
[Toothbrush],
2005

Courtesy gallery
gugging and
private collection

Born into a family of musicians, **Laila Bachtiar** started drawing early on, and her passion was recognized and fostered at the special education schools she attended. In 1990, she began visiting the House of Artists in Gugging once a week and eventually became the first artist-in-residence and female artist to practice there. Since 2003, **Bachtiar** has been working in the open studio located next door to the museum. While her art has been mostly viewed through the lens of Art Brut—an umbrella term for “raw art” coined in 1949 by painter **Jean Dubuffet** to describe the work of perceived outsiders to the art system—these types of categories have become increasingly questioned in recent years.

Instead, **Bachtiar**’s meticulous drawing method can, for instance, be understood in relation to Abstract Expressionism: working from memory, she systematically outlines a motif to create a grid-like framework of shapes, which she then fills with her signature pencil crosshatchings, which often cover the entire picture plane. The works presented in *Do Nothing, Feel Everything* show the animals that populate **Bachtiar**’s drawn universe as well as her ever-evolving technique. Earlier works like *A Duck* (2003), *A Cat* (2009), and *An Elephant* (2003) are rendered in or accentuated with bright colors,

whereas her later works explore the nuances and possibilities of working exclusively with pencil: *A Wolf* (2016), *A Rabbit* (2010), and *A Fox* (2013) unite distinct lines with hatching in shades ranging from a soft light gray to almost black. Only rarely does **Bachtiar** portray people or objects, like in *A Tree* (2010) and *Toothbrush* (2005), which she creates using the same drawing principles. The artist signs all her work with her first name and digits, which, rather than a date, are personal points of reference to a systematic code that only the artist knows.



Ente [Duck], 2003 © gallery gugging. Courtesy Hannah Rieger Collection.
Photo: DETAILSINN FOTOGRAFIE/detailsinn.at

SOPHIE CARAPETIAN & JAKOB JAKOBSEN

Sophie Carapetian, born in 1979, lives and works in London (UK) / Jakob Jakobsen, born in 1965, lives and works in Hospital for Self Medication

EXHIBITED
ARTWORK

***Social Crisis!
Mental Crisis!
(REFUSE!):
Listening Booth,***
2021

Sophie Carapetian's artistic and research work analyzes art's "labor turn" in relation to postcrisis austerity. Alongside organizing communist art and poetry events for the last fifteen years, she's been compiling *The Art Labour Compendium* (2006–)—a long-term mixed-media project spanning images, flyers, films, books, sculptures, and pamphlets. **Carapetian** shares her interest in the social and political conditions of art production with **Jakob Jakobsen**. **Jakobsen's** practice is characterized by self-organization and the construction of a number of autonomous institutions, such as the Copenhagen Free University, Hospital Prison University Archive, and Hospital for Self Medication, as well as the foundation of a union for young artists and curators and an activist television station.

In April 2020, **Carapetian** and **Jakobsen** decided to start producing a podcast series titled *Social Crisis! Mental Crisis!* At a time when few people knew what it meant to isolate or to have their social ties severed and be left to their own devices, the artists felt that especially those affected by mental illness had relevant experiences to share. By creating a platform for them to do so, the podcast gives rare voice to the "patients" instead of the so-called "experts."

Carapetian and **Jakobsen's** podcast conversations are based on a shared critique of capitalist and neoliberal practices—a critique that regards normativity and relentless demands for productivity and optimization as part of a structural problem, and hence places the responsibility to change things not on the individual but on a society that is failing many people. The conversations take place on Zoom, are only lightly edited, and comment on ongoing developments of the current global health crisis.

In the episodes of *Social Crisis! Mental Crisis!*, the two artists openly share their experiences of being institutionalized and medicated while discussing coping mechanisms, severe doubts about the psychiatric services currently available to the average person, and the legal frameworks within which they operate. They also touch upon the social perception of mental illness and the complications of organizing and resisting while being mentally ill—bringing "communist perspectives on mental health" to the table. They are regularly joined by other comrades, such as artists, sex workers, poets, scholars, and activists, to discuss sensitive and often ignored topics including suicide, apparatuses of exclusion, the social effects of psychotropic drugs, disability and dependencies, and hospital hierarchies.

At the same time, they develop or debate other forms of organization and care for those affected by mental illness and compile alternative recommendations on how to deal with isolation,

such as "weaponizing one's illness" and recognizing "the revolutionary potential in all that is disabled," because "Capitalism is the illness and Communism is the cure."



TONY COKES

born in 1956, lives and works in Providence (RI, USA)

EXHIBITED
ARTWORK

**Testament A:
MF FKA K-P X KE
RIP, 2019**

Courtesy the
artist, Greene
Naftali, New York,
Hannah Hoffman,
Los Angeles, and
Electronic Arts
Intermix, New
York

Tony Cokes's unmistakable practice is one that undermines, inverts, and samples visual and textual components and turns them into forms that upend the common perceptual habits of a culture usually dominated by images, or, as critical theorist **Kodwo Eshun** puts it, **Cokes's** work involves “listening in the mode of looking in the key of reading in the mode of watching in the key of hearing.” The artist’s primary goal is to produce uncertainties and to apply pressure to what we think we know, plunging our established categories of understanding into crisis and provoking epistemic panic.

Bringing together theory, journalism, dance, rock and indie music, video art, karaoke, and screen savers, **Cokes's** works speak of the relation between sound, vision, and politics. A central element of his installations is quoted text, delivered in a precise rhythm and presented in bold colors borrowed from modernist color schemes. These words are sustained by rich and atmospheric sounds that produce a powerfully sensory and emotional response in the viewer.

In *Testament A: MF FKA K-P X KE RIP* (2019), **Cokes** quotes from a eulogy for cultural theorist **Mark Fisher** delivered by **Eshun** at Goldsmiths, University of London, in 2018,

one year after **Fisher's** death. The commemorative speech is visually translated into bold yellow and purple text slides and features a soundtrack by electro musicians **Burial**, **Parson**, **Shackleton**, and others. The audiovisual work mourns the death of **Fisher**, who taught in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, and who, through his writings, criticism, blog posts, music mixes, and essays midwifed, empowered, and nurtured myriad subcultures, movements, and scenes, ranging from futurism, to feminism, to accelerationism, while engaged in a mortal and unending struggle with depression that cost him his life. What could be called a pop eulogy begins as a festive commemoration and ends in a call to continue thinking, rethinking, and thinking otherwise with and through the many legacies of **Fisher**—a legacy that is testament to the pleasure and enjoyment of engaging in such thought.

M called it
a “secret sadness,”
that lurks behind
the 21st Century’s
forced smile.

At the loss
of a dear friend

Testament A: MF FKA K-P X KE RIP (video stills), 2019 Courtesy the artist, Greene Naftali, New York, Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles, and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York

HENRY JOSEPH DARGER

1892–1973, lived and worked in Chicago (IL, USA)

EXHIBITED
ARTWORK

Untitled,
unknown date

Courtesy Karin
und Gerhard
Dammann,
Switzerland

Henry Joseph Darger's extensive oeuvre was only discovered shortly before his death in 1973. The self-taught artist and recluse is believed to have begun creating his epic tale *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion* in the early 1930s, which has by now become a fixture in the canon of so-called outsider art.

His idiosyncratic epic on good versus evil—known in short as *In the Realms of the Unreal*—comprises more than 15,000 typewritten pages and about 300 watercolor and collage illustrations, some of which are double-sided and feature panoramic scenes reminiscent of ancient scrolls or cinematic shots. Without any formal training, Darger resorted to using a large collection of cutouts from magazines and newspapers to make his images. He glued these into old phone books and then made his hand-drawn illustrations by tracing on top of the found images, as well as from photo enlargements that he used to adjust the sizes of his collected materials. The main characters of Darger's complex storyline are the Vivian Girls: seven brave sisters who are the princesses of a Christian land and who fiercely engage in a revolt against the child slavery imposed on their world.

Darger's depictions of the saga include whimsical and idyllic scenes filled with beauty and bliss alongside brutal and violent battle scenes filled with horror and torture. The girls are drawn either wearing adorable Victorian dresses or—another oddity of Darger's iconography—stripped naked and featuring male genitals. The drawing included in *Do Nothing, Feel Everything* also expresses this ever-present ambiguity: a group of six charming and endearing Victorian girls can be seen in stark contrast, though their eyes are missing and only black holes stare back at us.

Darger's own biography is filled with tragedy, dysfunction, and abuse: At age four, his mother died, and at age eight, his father was moved into a Catholic mission home, and Henry was sent to a Catholic boys' home. Upon his father's death, Darger was moved around orphanages and eventually institutionalized in an "asylum for feeble-minded children"—a result of his heart "not being in the right place," meaning he was a regular masturbator.

Eventually, Darger became a janitor in a Catholic-run hospital in Chicago. He remained a devout Christian throughout his life, going to mass five times a day, and he maintained only one—yet decade-long—friendship, which was more likely a love affair, with William Schloeder. As a



Untitled, unknown date Courtesy Karin und Gerhard Dammann, Switzerland

fervently religious homosexual, it seems not unlikely that escapism through storytelling and art-making was a way for Darger to give expression to a complex personal psychology that must have been in significant conflict with many other aspects of his social context and life.

While many questions about his oeuvre and life remain unanswered—such as the seeming gender fluidity of the Vivian Girls; Darger's possible queer-ness; and his understanding of gender roles, sexuality, and

human anatomy (to use some contemporary terms)—it may be more fruitful and pleasurable for viewers to simply indulge in Darger's unknowable universe, approaching it without judgment but rather curiosity toward the emotional ambiguity that his work elicits. Such a reading is perhaps also encouraged by Darger himself, as expressed through the two possible endings he devised for the Vivian Girls' epic: one making it a tale of tragic loss and defeat and the other of triumphant victory.

PATRICIA DOMÍNGUEZ

Born in 1984, lives and works in Chile

EXHIBITED ARTWORK

Green Irises, 2019

Commissioned and produced by Gasworks, with support from Lazo Cordillera, Fundación Engel, Fundación AMA, and SCAN

Patricia Domínguez's practice straddles the line between ancestral knowledge, myths, and rituals and modern-day technology and digital culture. Bringing together experimental research on ethnobotany, healing practices, and the corporatization of well-being, she focuses on how neoliberalism perpetuates colonial practices of extraction and exploitation. Her work is closely linked to activism as well as storytelling. The interactive publication *Gaiaguardianxs* (2020), for instance, documents three years of research and narrates a personal journey through water-related conflicts in Latin America. **Domínguez** explains her use of fiction as “parallel to the language of plants or that of dreams. A nonverbal, complex language, with multiple layers, temporalities, and references.”

Combining a multiscreen video installation alongside a series of altars and totem figures, the installation *Green Irises* (2019) offers a cybernetic take on ancestral healing practices. Carefully arranged offerings of flower petals and medicinal plants are meant to exorcize the “corporate effects” of capitalism on the body: aloe vera, to relieve dry eyes from working in front of a computer all day, and rose of Jericho, believed to absorb harmful radiation from Wi-Fi networks. Acting like totems, striped business shirts printed with digital

motifs reference the striped patterns of Indigenous vessels. At the heart of the installation, the video *Madre Drone* [Mother Drone] (2019–2020) recounts the encounter of a woman-serpent and a robot in a dreamlike, cosmic annunciation, illuminated by lights akin to the laser pointers used by Chilean student protestors to blind spy drones. Two bright green irises watch over the installation's landscape like surveillance cameras: scans of **Domínguez's** eyes, reflecting her own rootedness in the Chilean neoliberal system and addressing the colonial traces in her DNA.



Green Irises (detail), 2019 Installation view Patricia Domínguez: *Green Irises*, Gasworks, London, 2019. Photo: Andy Keate

RAHIMA GAMBO

Born in 1986, lives and works in Abuja (Nigeria) and London (UK)

EXHIBITED ARTWORKS

Hadiza and Ruth play "In and Out," from the series *Tatsuniya*, 2017

Ruth playing "In and Out," from the series *Tatsuniya*, 2017

Waiting in the woods (I), from the series *Tatsuniya II*, 2019

Waiting in the woods (II), from the series *Tatsuniya II*, 2019

Waiting in the woods (III), from the series *Tatsuniya II*, 2019

Courtesy the artist and Tatsuniya Art Collective

"Can we walk as a response to this?" asks multimedia artist **Rahima Gambo** in the face of trauma and suffering. Where language fails or doesn't suffice, the artist turns instead to walking as a practice. In 2019, she founded the mobile artist-run space A Walk Space to explore the interdisciplinary intersections of "moving image," a term she prefers to "photography" and "film" due to their violent colonial history in Africa. As a Black woman, notes **Gambo**, her relation to the camera can thus only be paranoid.

When asked to report on the female suicide bombings of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria in the mid-2010s as a photojournalist, **Gambo** describes how she "fe[lt] a void in linear photographic language to capture these horrific incidents." She thus developed *A Walk* (2019) as a narrative, mobile, and open-ended mechanism that has no beginning, middle, or end. More than a video, *A Walk* explores the artist's environment in Maiduguri, Lagos, and Abuja, as well as Marrakech in Morocco, in what **Gambo** terms a "psychogeographical cartography" that fluidly moves between photography, drawing, moving image, and sculpture. She describes her technique as a slowing down of time—as the "idea of holding the frame and, yet, things move in that frame."

Dwelling at the limits of photo-journalism, *A Walk* is a fragment of a wider practice that includes visiting sites of Boko Haram attacks in Maiduguri. At the Shehu Sanda Kyarimi government school, which was closed from 2013 to 2015 following a terror attack, **Gambo** photographed ten of its pupils after leading a seven-day storytelling workshop there. The workshop and the resulting series of images, titled *Tatsuniya* (2017)—a Hausa word that translates to "tales for children"—intend to go beyond traditional linear narrative approaches to addressing the students' traumatic memories. By simply holding space for creative expression and encouraging curiosity, **Gambo** draws on the motto of **Trinh T. Minh-ha's** film *Reassemblage* (1983): to not "speak about" but rather to "just speak nearby," contrary to the conventions of ethnographic documentary film. Some of *Tatsuniya's* images document the expressions of its young female protagonists in a very personal and intimate manner, while others seem almost abstract. Such images, including those of *A Walk*, encourage us not to address a wound head-on but rather to circle around it, to digress, and to pivot back to it.



Rahima Gambo, *Hadiza and Ruth play "In and Out,"* from the series *Tatsuniya*, 2017 Courtesy the artist and Tatsuniya Art Collective



Rahima Gambo, *Doing Lalle in a classroom,* from the series *Tatsuniya II*, 2019 Courtesy the artist and Tatsuniya Art Collective

YESMINE BEN KHELIL

Born in 1986, lives and works in Tunis (Tunisia)

EXHIBITED ARTWORKS

New Flesh
(Untitled), 2017

Courtesy the
artist

*J'ai quelque
chose à te dire*
1, 2, 3
[I Have
Something
to Tell You 1, 2, 3],
2020

*La sensation du
soir est profonde*
[The Evening
Sensation
Is Deep], 2020

*Tout devient
rose ... 3, 5, 7*
[Everything
Becomes Pink
... 3, 5, 7], 2020

Untitled, 2020

Untitled, 2020

Courtesy the artist
and Galerie Maïa
Muller, Paris

In her works, **Yesmine Ben Khelil** interweaves fact and fiction and uses collage and drawing to dissect the power relations surrounding representational images. She uses materials that purport a particular truth, such as schoolbooks, and by appropriating them creates new contexts and stories that juxtapose collected snippets from these sources with her own texts and drawings.

The series *New Flesh* (2017) is part of a larger body of work that interrogates the complex relationship between different periods of history and the images that emerged from them. **Ben Khelil's** research highlights bodies and objects in mutation, images inhabited by enigmatic forms, and characters who are victims of hallucinations. *New Flesh* takes as its point of departure a 1912 ethnological study by **Lucien Bertholon** and **Ernest Chantre** that used craniometry to classify people from different ethnic groups in North Africa in a bid to, ultimately, justify French colonial rule.

The series *Everything becomes pink, over there, in the twilight* (2020) uses **Guy Maupassant's** book *La vie errante* [The Wandering Life] (1890), which traces the author's journey from Paris to Kairouan in Tunisia, to further probe images of Tunisian culture and its ghosts of representation.

Maupassant's exoticist descriptions of the magnificent sky and landscape are set against the racist prejudices of the time, and in particular his disappointment in the women he meets on his journey. He describes them "as beautiful and ardent, and yet [...] ignorant of our tender caresses. Their simple souls have remained strangers to our sentimental emotions, and their kisses, it is said, do not inspire the dreams of true love."

Ben Khelil imagined that another account of these encounters could emerge. If the kisses of these women didn't give birth to the "dream of true love," perhaps, then, they knew how to give birth to something else? Through the drawings, bits of images, and snippets of objects and sentences, a story takes shape—one of women linked to the sun, to the light, and to the twilight sky by a supernatural power. Infused with the rays of the setting sun, the women travel through time, crossing eras and undergoing metamorphosis until they become kinds of divinities—protective, threatening, and unpredictable all at once.



Tout devient rose ... 6 [Everything Becomes Pink ... 6], 2020 Courtesy the artist and Galerie Maïa Muller, Paris

STANISLAVA KOVALCIKOVA

Born in 1988, lives and works in Dusseldorf (Germany)

EXHIBITED
ARTWORK

Misty (Foggy),
2017

Courtesy Gerber &
Stauffer Fine Arts,
Zurich

In **Stanislava Kovalcikova's** paintings, human figures and their perceptions take center stage. Her portraits of nude female bodies explore themes like race, power, virtual space, and figurative form. Drawing equally on the works of canonical artists like **Giorgione**, **Titian**, and **Diego Velázquez** and her experience as a nightclub bouncer, Kovalcikova creates collage-like compositions that have been described as embodying contemporary iconoclasm.

Dedicated to a friend and nightclub coworker from East Africa, the painting *Misty* (2017) references the reclining nude, one of the most prevalent motifs of art history—from **Titian's** *Venus of Urbino* (ca. 1534) to **Édouard Manet's** *Olympia* (1863)—and turns its compositional principles on their head. The depiction of skin is one of **Kovalcikova's** central concerns, and it functions as a narrative device: “I paint skin color as a kind of outer shell, the face is the story, and the skin color is the voice telling it. Sometimes it evokes heat or burning, dryness, sometimes coldness and ice, rain and snow.” The artist translates this allegorical dimension to the canvas by using multifaceted materials in complex processes that may take months to complete; for any given work, she might have, for instance, “worked with latex, dyed the canvas with black

powder, then drew with ink, then took down the latex parts, then dyed [them] three times.” Her process is a deliberately slow one, tinkering with paintings for years, adding layer upon layer of paint, which often results in a dusky color palette. In *Misty*, too, the muted shades and sharp contrast between the lights and darks evoke an uncanny, haunting atmosphere suggestive of dual personalities and inner demons, offering a model for a paranoid reading of art history.



Misty (Foggy), 2017 Collection of Thomas Stauffer, Zurich. Courtesy Gerber & Stauffer Fine Arts, Zurich

NIKLAS LICHTI

Born in 1980, lives and works in Vienna (Austria)

EXHIBITED
ARTWORKS

*Appropriate
Sentiment*, 2019

*Concrete
Quarterly*, 2020
With support
from Diana Duta,
Adam Grey,
and Tomas Rydin

Flat Baroque,
2019

Gore Capitalism,
2019

Ingwer & Sellers,
2019

*International
Gothic*, 2019

Courtesy the
artist and Galerie
Emanuel Layr,
Vienna

Niklas Lichti fuses issues of mental health, artistic writing, and publishing in his multimedia practice. Literary self-descriptions of artists provide the starting point for his video works, drawings, and installations. One of these is *Life*, the autobiography of sixteenth-century Italian sculptor **Benvenuto Cellini**. The book constructs an image of the artist as “highly self-sustained, fucking full of himself, toxic, and deeply invested in the idea of artistic genius,” as Lichti puts it, and thereby places the burden of creating a meaningful life on the individual. Lichti examines how such notions of solipsistic genius translate into capitalist concepts of individualism and self-actualization and, in turn, shape the stigmatization of mental health issues, particularly in the media.

In the video *Concrete Quarterly* (2020), a crudely shaped head narrates experiences of depression, isolation, and the inability to write, as it ponders, for instance, the possibility of “turning your symptoms into friends.” *Flat Baroque* (2019) contrasts references to naturalist **Henry David Thoreau’s** *Walden* (1845)—a sort of bible for aspiring solitary geniuses—and the postwar fixed-currency system Bretton Woods with images of a dance party, set to the tune of an Estonian rune

song. In both works, Lichti uses historical approaches of self-representation and digression as a means of storytelling.

The installation *Pee Zee II* (2019) plays on the notion of cultural capital and the pressure to performatively display one’s tastes, habits, and intellectual capacities. Books are assembled and amended with drawings and props—such as a pair of glasses and a syringe filled with THC oil—to create the wall pieces *International Gothic*, *Appropriate Sentiment*, and *Ingwer & Sellers* (all 2019).



Ingwer & Sellers, 2019 (above)

Appropriate Sentiment, 2019 (below)

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna. Photos: readsreads

OPOKU MENSAH

Born in 1992, lives and works in Accra (Ghana)

EXHIBITED ARTWORKS

Me Maame Nwi
(my mother's
hair), 2017

The Nights Table,
2017

Multimedia artist **Opoku Mensah** often gathers inspiration from his own memories to inquire into modes of representation, particularly through the taste, smell, and texture of food. Notions of warmth and hospitality play an important role in his practice, but these themes are, at times, subverted to address issues of race, coloniality, and domesticity. Photographic works like *Houseboy* (2016), *Birthday Party* (2015), and *Mysterium 2* (2015) stage scenes reminiscent of works by the old masters in their light direction and motifs of, respectively, a domestic scene, a still life of a feast, and a pietà, but here they are enacted by PoC protagonists—a Black body posing as a plated roast poignantly symbolizes the historical and contemporary degradation of the Other.

The mixed-media installation *Resting Place* (2017) constructs an intimate room out of three carefully assembled artistic objects that double as furniture fragments and walls, each made of joined recycled cracker wrappers mounted on aluminum tubes. By exhibiting the installation without its fragile walls, *Do Nothing, Feel Everything* transfers the work's space into the larger context of Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz. Visitors are invited to enter into what **Mensah** calls a “habitat in which the space breathes and engages comfort and intimacy.

A special place for meditation and a place for memory.” His furniture-objects are imbued with personal history: for example, the night table is sealed in a coat of used chewing gum collected by **Mensah** during a difficult personal journey, which acts like a protective barrier for the piece of furniture, which is a symbolic treasure of his past. The curtain was woven by the artist from synthetic hair extensions during the years he waited to be reunited with his mother.



The Nights Table, 2017

SHANA MOULTON

Born 1976, lives and works in New York (USA) and Santa Barbara (CA, USA)

EXHIBITED ARTWORK

The Pink Tower, 2019

Courtesy Galerie
Gregor Staiger,
Zurich and
Crèvecoeur, Paris

Shana Moulton uses video, performance, and installation to playfully reflect on practices of wellness and self-actualization. Performing as her alter ego, Cynthia, who is desperate for meaning and spirituality, the artist tries out all sorts of routines such as Pilates, reflexology, bubble baths, healing potions, and crystal healing to seek relief from the anxieties and ailments of an accelerated, capitalist world. But the resulting improvements don't seem to go beyond quick and often trippy fixes, with Cynthia spiraling back into self-doubt and stress.

Moulton has been developing the ongoing body of work *Whispering Pines* (2002–) since her studies at art school. She describes it as “trying to be honest about how contemporary society is affecting my psyche and my behavior.” The bright and colorful aesthetic of the short videos’ sets and props deliberately crosses over from Pop Art into kitschy New Ageism but is also imbued both with a touch of uncanniness, reminiscent of **David Lynch**’s eerie movies, and a Vaudevillian sense of comedy.

Cynthia is also the protagonist of *The Pink Tower* (2019), an installation modeled on the types of building blocks used at Montessori schools, with embedded video screens displaying scenes of self-actualization

and self-healing. While working in Santa Barbara in California, **Moulton** found inspiration in the town’s namesake Christian saint. According to legend, Saint Barbara was incarcerated in a tower and ultimately killed by her pagan father for converting to the Christian faith. **Moulton** equally relates the motif of the tower to the fairy tales of “Rapunzel” and “Sleeping Beauty,” as well as the modern-day office setting, where an adjustable standing desk literally lifts Cynthia to new heights.



The Pink Tower, 2019 Installation view *The Invisible Seventh is the Mystic Column*, Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, 2021. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich. Photo: Alex Blair

TOM SEIDMANN-FREUD

1892–1930, lived and worked in Vienna (Austria) and Berlin (Germany)

EXHIBITED ARTWORKS

Buch der Hasengeschichten
[Book of Hare Stories], 1924

Die Fischreise
[The Fish Journey], 1923

Courtesy
University Library
of Technische
Universität
Braunschweig

Several scans of
Tom Seidmann-Freud's sketches
and drawings from *Die
Fischreise* [The
Fish Journey],
1923

In memory of
Aviva Harari
(Seidmann), Tom's
only daughter,
1922–2011

Courtesy Tom
Seidmann-Freud's
grandchildren:
Amnon Harari,
Ayala Drori, and
Osi Gevim

Despite its seemingly cheerful genre, the work of children's book author, painter, and illustrator **Tom Seidmann-Freud** profoundly reflects on themes of trauma, depression, and gender. Born **Martha Gertrud Freud**, the niece of **Sigmund Freud** grew up in a well-to-do Jewish family in Vienna, until they moved to Berlin when she was fifteen. It was then that she took on the name Tom and began occasionally dressing in men's clothing. In 1921, after studying art with a focus on Art Nouveau illustration in London, Berlin, and Munich, she married the writer **Yankel Seidmann**. Together the couple founded the small children's book press Peregrin—Latin for “stranger” or “from another country.”

Just a year later, **Seidmann-Freud's** beloved younger brother **Theodor** drowned in a lake close to Berlin. The shock of this loss was life-changing and becomes palpable in *Die Fischreise* [The Fish Journey] (1923), the book **Seidmann-Freud** was working on at the time. It follows the young Peregrin into a dream in which a fish takes him to an underwater utopia where children never go hungry and everybody gets along. Moving away from the *Jugendstil* ornamentations of the time, **Seidmann-Freud** increasingly favored a minimalist drawing style in line with the emerging New Objectivity: geometric shapes, straight lines,

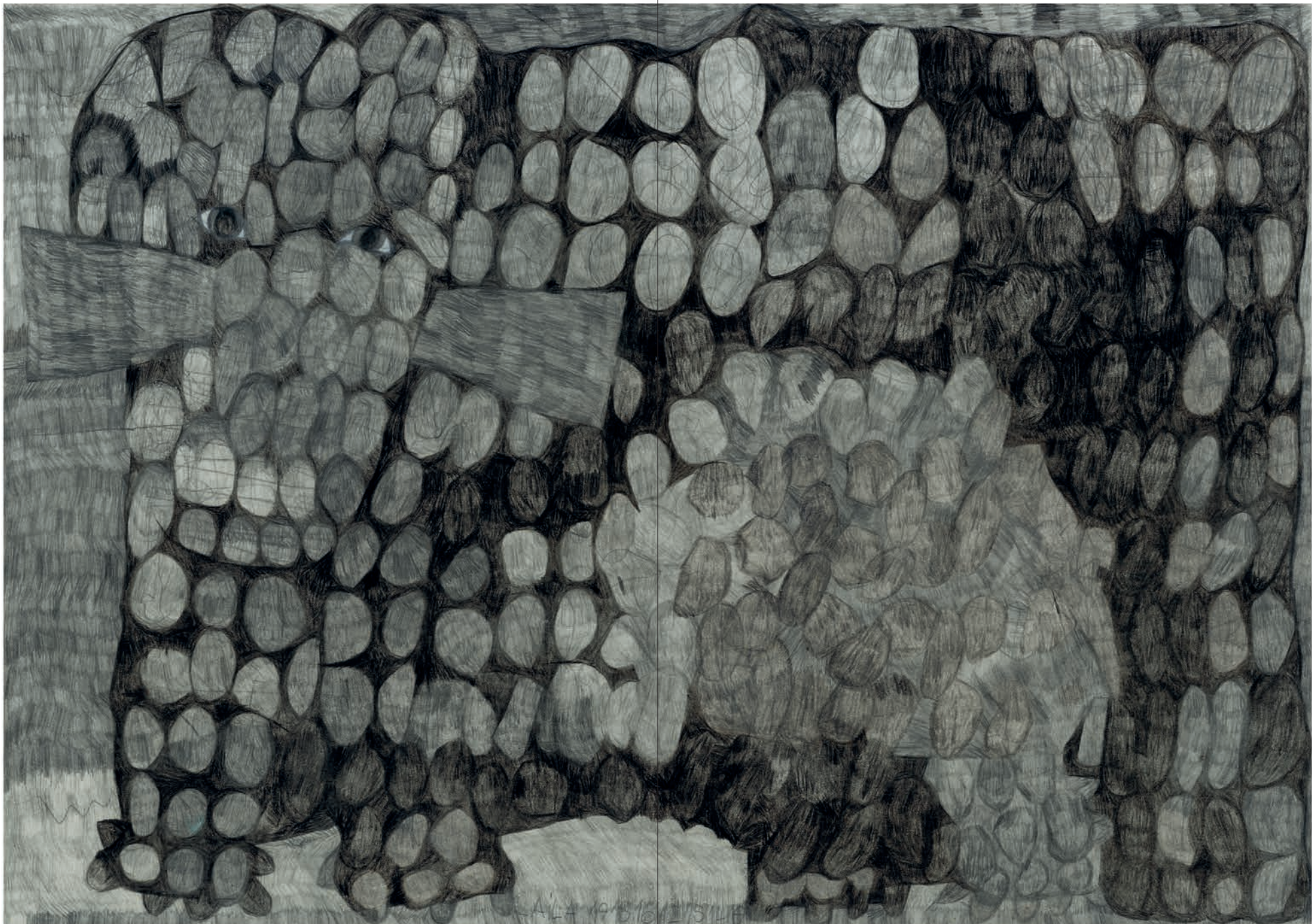
and soft yet bold colors that appear almost transparent.

As **Seidmann-Freud's** children's book career progressed, her characters' sense of androgyny became more pronounced. She went on to publish books like *Buch der Hasengeschichten* [Book of Hare Stories] (1924) and *Das Wölkchen* [The Little Cloud] (1910), characterized by dark, symbolic echoes of the subconscious. Her pedagogical books were interactive and introduced children to the practice of reading in a playful way. *Spiel-fibel* [Game Primer] (1930) was praised by philosopher **Walter Benjamin** as “the rare union of the most thorough mind with the lightest touch.”

Meanwhile, the **Seidmann-Freud's** second publishing house, Ophir, founded in collaboration with the Hebrew poet **Hayim Nahman Bialik**, began to falter. As the family's financial problems loomed large amid the economic crisis that would become the Great Depression, **Yankel Seidmann** died by suicide in October 1929. Overcome by grief, **Tom Seidmann-Freud** took her life just four months later. She was 37 years old.



Die Fischreise [The Fish Journey] (images from children's book), 1923



Laila Bachtiar, *Ein Wolf* [A Wolf], 2016 © gallery gugging. Courtesy Hannah Rieger Collection. Photo: © gallery gugging

Now we have sickness in common.
Now we have enclosure in common.
Now we have exhaustion in common.
Now we have loneliness in common.
Now we have social distancing in common.
Now we have longing in common.
Now we have paralysis in common.
Now we have uncertainty in common.
Now we have empty shops in common.
Now we have poverty in common.
Now we have the madness in common.
Now we have survival in common.
Now we have an inadmissible present in common.
Now we have the police in common.
Now we have our chains in common.
Now we have a struggle in common.
Now we have inequality in common.
Now we have nothing in common.

Hospital for Self Medication

SOPHIE CARAPETIAN & JAKOB JAKOBSEN IN CONVERSATION WITH SILVIA FEDERICI: On Witches! Communist Perspectives on Mental Health

podcast
transcript, 2020,
Broadcast 7 from
the radio series
Social Crisis!
Mental Crisis!

Jakob Jakobsen: Sophie, we have a guest today.

Sophie Carapetian: No, not a guest—Silvia is not our guest. This is a meeting.

JJ: We have a meeting with Silvia Federici, and it is a big honor to, actually, be here with you. And the reason why we invited you is, of course, you are a good friend, but also we have been talking about mental illness for a long time. And then we somehow got to talk about how mental illness was framed within earlier times, like before modernism, before capitalism, even.

And then we thought about witchcraft: like how that, in a way, could contain the same kind of characteristics that today are used [to talk] about the mentally ill. [...]

Silvia Federici: Yeah, you know, there are many, many connections. There are many connections. I think the broadest one—perhaps the broadest is to say that the history of European society, European social and cultural forms and responses to people's problems and the social situation: it's a punitive history. Europe comes out of it. It's a punitive society that has emerged from it. Oh, I don't want to go much into detail. But it does emerge out of the combination of a military system, the Roman and the Germanic, and so on. And so you find the ... And then, of course, Christianity. Christianity grows into

this very punitive, militaristic, exploitative—like slavery: slavery is fundamental to the history of Europe.

Before the Atlantic slavery—and I think this fram[ing] is really important to understand how illness has been approached—and then the whole question of witch-hunting, and the connection between the two. You know: why mental illness, as well as other illnesses, for example, leprosy, were always seen as a sign of God's punishment. Were always seen as a sign of a vice of the person and never understood in a connection with problems that the society itself has caused.

So this dynamic of blaming the victim as always being present—there is a continuity. And I think this is one of the connections also between the treatment of mental illness and the question of witch-hunting, because: Who were the witches? Particularly in the first phase of the witch hunt in Europe. The late fifteenth, sixteenth, early seventeenth century—the witch is the poor little campesino woman. [...] She obviously is a figure of an exploited person and lives often alone. She is an older woman. So she is a figure that is mentally, socially, emotionally disturbed. Because of the bitterness of exploitation, she's always presented as cursing. She is represented as a disturbance in the community.

Clearly, the better-off—those who took advantage of the expropriation of land that comes with the beginning of capitalism—fear her. [They] fear her, even though she is objectively not powerful: because she is poor, she is old, and she often lives alone. Nevertheless, they attribute to her—and this I think is another link with the question of mental illness—they attribute to her the supernatural power, right? She has all this amazing power. She can kill you just by looking at you [laughs]. You know: the evil eye, the famous evil eye. And so it is the representation, that externalization, this fear of the witch and what is imputed to her: all these evil spirits hiding in her body and in her soul, this very evil soul. Satanic, demonic. It's a representation of the fears of the population around [her].

SC: And so, Silvia, to take some of what you have said, the thing to talk about [in] the current moment and the crisis, and the last couple of years. So I've seen processes that I think are similar to witch hunts play out on the left.

SF: Yes.

SC: So, the thing that I've noticed is quite often that the witch hunt takes the form of what it says it opposes. So, it opposes gendered violence and it becomes gendered violence. It becomes like the symptom that it's trying to attack. It becomes that thing. It becomes hysterical or it becomes like a mass nervous breakdown

of some type. And all the time it is pushing for a single figure to attribute it to. But, in the end, it becomes a mass phenomenon; it becomes its opposite.

And so I'm wondering, to ask you: In your research, have you come across historic[al] phenomena that say they're one thing, but they do the thing that they're opposed to? I'm not putting it very well. Because you are, I mean ...

SF: Yeah, in other words, that the ... Well, I put it in terms of blaming the victim. That's one aspect of it.

SC: Yeah.

SF: This society is actually producing the pathology, or the problem, or the anxieties, and then, in fact, is blaming them as basically faults of the population that are displayed. This is now, to me, one of the main, main things. It happens to women, and I'm talking about the present. So, the whole failure is still there, but in relation to violence. Children ... there is now a kind of demonization of children. In fact, when you look beyond Europe, actually, children are being demonized. In Africa, for instance, there is now a new profession of the exorcist, who is going around ...

And the problem that a society has created with children, for instance. [For] children now, there is no money for them and there are no resources. Adults have no time. Adults are super stressed. The families are really places of tremendous, tremendous tension. So the children are reflecting that. But instead of acknowledging the situation, instead of acknowledging what is taking place, we have now these new phenomena of the increase of mental disorders among children.

In the United States, more than eight million children are now, from age four on, taking a variety of pills throughout the day.

SC: Yeah.

SF: The effect of these pills nobody knows. Against depression, against hyperactivity—you name it.

So, imagine the left. The left has never confronted these amazing developments of a whole huge population of children who have now been classified as mentally problematic. How [has it] happened? Why should it not be a political issue? Why should it not be a political problem?

Obviously, these children are now being targeted, and they're becoming basically a new source of profit for the pharmaceutical companies. But the issue is not being politicized.

Same thing with older people, even that I know. We have all these dementia, Alzheimer, et cetera, et cetera. All this mental illness today has become the explanation for everything. Mental illness has become a kind of a code where a lot of problems that society has created [are] now being, in effect, occulted, and [are] not being really addressed, and on the contrary [are] being turned into a source of profit.

SC: So can I ask you ... I mean, I completely agree with you, and Jakob and I have been always discussing mental health in terms of trying to move the frame from the individual responsibility to a social responsibility.

SF: Right!

SC: But given what you've said, do you see revolutionary potential? Do you see space for revolutionary organizing around mental health? Because, to me, it's very difficult to organize around mental health.

SF: Right. I think, you know, I think it has to be. It has to be, because today that is one of the most widespread conditions. In reality, it's not any longer something that affects a limited number of people, with different gradations. For example, anxiety, not being able to sleep, with different gradations. There is a mental upsetness that is now affecting a very large level of the population. For example, the amount of pills, of antidepressant drugs, that are being sold in the United States is astounding. And it's beginning even earlier than four years of age. And this, of course, goes hand in hand with the continuous increase in the number of suicide[s] [of] young people, old people, people of all ages. Including women, and they normally are the ones that are more ... I guess, because they have so much responsibility, they are the ones who are not so inclined to kill themselves.

But there's a clear image. [...] There is a major issue. Now, the issue is: What is the program? What is it that we propose? I think it's important to revisit what happened in the 1960s. In the 1960s, the campaign centered on deinstitutionalization, like in Italy, [Franco] Basaglia, et cetera. And it was very important, the attack on the mental asylum, the attack on those forms of exclusions.

But I think that what this was missing—and here, again, I go back to the question of reproduction—what was missing was the creation of an alternative. Right? And what we are seeing, for example, in the United States is [that] the closing of the institution has actually led to a lot of people being completely stranded. Not to really have anything, to have other structures that [...] have replaced the mental asylum, but also have replaced normality, because normality is what is driving us crazy. Normality is what is actually upsetting us and creating a life where we are continuously fighting with the breakdown. Which is

really what is happening now on a day-to-day basis for many people. Always fighting, because you have so many responsibilities, and so on. But that, I think, is the issue today. The issue today, on one side, is to rewrite the question of mental illness and move it away from the biologizing expert, because there's always a biological expert. I mean, of course, even the question of the evil eye had an element of truth. Right? [Because] when people feel targeted, we become sick.

SC: But also, like, if you're stressed ... Like, I have stress-triggered illness. I have schizoaffective, and last year, I had a very bad breakdown, and I was in a psychiatric ward under something that is called a section, which is a legal category, which means that you can't leave. You can't leave—you are stuck. Right?

And there were certain ... To get out of this fucking ward, I had to agree to take this antipsychotic medicine. I had no other choices. And in the end, I have to ... I have to submit to the law of psychiatry. But the thing is, like you said, there were no alternatives for me at all. There was nowhere else to go. I was trapped. I hold psychiatry with a very deep suspicion.

SF: Mm-hmm.

SC: You know ... but I don't know ... In my experience in the wards, everybody in the psychiatric wards was traumatized. Everybody had had a really tough life. People were poor and bouncing off the walls. But we all have to submit to the law of psychiatry, which is that we take medication.

So now I'm on very, very high medication. Jakob and I have discussed last week how much it's a problem. But I just ... What I'm thinking about organizing and taking action and resisting ... I don't really ... It's very difficult because, in the psychiatric wards, you're only in there for, let's say, between three weeks and six months. Most people. Some people are there for like 20 years. But [for] most people [it's shorter]. So there's a transient element. And then the whole kind of problem is that the blame is placed, as you said, on the individual, not the social fabric. And there was no questioning about: Why are you in there? Why you are traumatized? And so it makes it really difficult to know how to [and] where to organize. Right? Like—how?

SF: Yeah. To me, well, I think that the question ... Perhaps because of the condition you just described, it's particularly difficult to organize around the issue of mental illness. At the same time, I think the issue of mental illness is on a continuum with a whole set of issues that have not, until now, really been addressed on the level of mass politics. They've been addressed by limited groups of people, but not on the question of mass politics. And they are connected, to me, with the question of reproduction. There's an amazing, amazing

crisis going on today with old age. And I could spend days talking about the massacre that is going on now in the nursing home. It's an announced story. The massacre was going on before. Reports about physical assault, even sexual abuse, malnutrition, mistaken medications were rampant. Rampant! This is why I call them concentration camps. The nursing home paid [for] by the state—a concentration camp. That's what I call them.

SC: I also call the psychiatric ... When I was in the psychiatric ward, I could see it exactly like that. I remember thinking, "Oh, ideology and history says that we fought fascism and we won. But look at these fucking institutions, all kind of like concentration camps." Psychiatry is experimenting on people. They don't know what the fuck they're doing, really, with these fucking pills.

SF: Exactly. The story with the children that I'm telling you, you know, they are now ... You go to public school and, at lunchtime, you have somebody who goes around with a big bottle of pills and the children have to flip their tongues to show that they are taking the pill, because of attention deficit.

SC: Yeah. Ritalin.

SF: Yeah, for attention deficit. So now you have all these children drugged up, and then they [governments] are making the war against drugs. So these are really fundamental, fundamental issues, and they're not being dealt with.

And I think this is the organizing. The organizing to me around mental illness is making its connection with a whole other set of problems that are affecting the majority of people. They are not affecting only a limited category. They are really affecting the majority of people. And they have to do with creating—with two sides, on one level. One is: What are the causes? We know what the causes are. And dealing with the causes, which are very broad causes from exploitation, lack of housing, anxiety, anxiety about money, the precariousness of existence. The precarious of existence and the cruelty of everyday life. Everyday life is really cruel for most people.

And then, on the other hand: How do we organize when people become sick and when people need help? How do we organize an alternative structure? An alternative structure for everybody, not only for the people who are particularly affected by it, but for everybody? Because in one way or another, we have all been affected by it.

I'm thinking—I'm 79. I'm already thinking I'm going to commit suicide the moment that I cannot be self-sufficient, because I don't want to end up in a nursing home and [be] tied to a bed. This is what is happening now. People are dying of big sores on their bodies because

they are being tied to their beds and they live in their excrements. What kind of society is this?

What kind of society is this? And everybody knows it. I have on my desk—because I'm writing something now about it again—piles of documentation from the last ten years. It is not that this is unknown. And also the decision that I've made—this is the struggle. And I really fault the radical movement, including the feminist movement, that has not really taken up this issue in a very serious way, like thinking of the children's issue of mental illness, the issue of people that are homeless in the street. Unless we deal with these issues, what are we talking about? What are we talking about, changing society? What are we talking about, a better world?

SC: But also there's this weird thing where, on the left, there are some romantic notions and understandings of ... very superstitious understandings of mental illness.

SF: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SC: And they are quite ignorant understandings. And they feed into a kind of romantic understanding of a mentally ill subject. And they actually don't really deal with the material of what it is to be mentally ill or have this illness diagnosis. I found from my personal experience, as someone who has a schizophrenic disorder, that when people are confronted with my illness, actually they freak out, because they have this romantic idea of mental health. And actually, if you have a really severe mental health problem, it's quite unpleasant. It's not ... it's not a romantic thing. It's very, very difficult. I feel quite frustrated about this kind of romanticization that doesn't deal with the *matter* of being sick.

SF: Mm-hmm.

SC: Conversely, my illness also gives me some perspective on the failures of care on the left and things like that.

SF: Yeah.

SC: Also, the thing is, as well, with the witch hunts, to bring it back to that: I just think that the drive is to face gendered violence and confront it. But it just reperforms it endlessly. Because—I don't really understand: it's a strange thing that is happening across society currently, where things are presenting themselves as left, and they're right.

I think like ... it's happening ... You know, like Donald Trump is a fucking hero of the workers. Here in London, we had the Second World War victory celebration, and all these people go out [for it]: they're not left, but they go out on the street to celebrate the defeat of fascism. But

they are all nationalists, right? So we have this strange thing where everything has been doing the opposite of what it's saying. And I think this is maybe the new thing, like it's a new ...

SF: Yeah, well, the nationalism skews working-class solidarity. And I think that's another thing that the radical movement has not faced. What it has meant, [the] Second World War. I mean, in this Second World War, seventy million people were killed. And those seventy million were primarily not people who were managing capital in the country; they were the workers, they were proletarians, they were campesinos, they were peasants. So, seventy million people.

That was, in many ways, the tomb of class solidarity—people killing each other. And we haven't really, in a way, completely dealt with that at all. And I think in the story of women—this is also coming through the question of violence against women. I mean, in the United States, the statistics are astounding. Every four seconds, a woman is physically assaulted, under normal conditions. Now, everybody knows that, in the home, women are tremendously at risk, and children are at risk because pedophilia is also rampant.

So those issues ... Why, you know, with all the radical movements that we have ... And actually there's a lot of reports—and this is true even now, from different places—[there are reports] of violence against women *within* the left, *within* the radical movement. I was in Italy a few months ago, and this was happening, and people didn't want to talk about it.

SC: They don't. Because the men don't want to throw the left, and they have an investment in patriarchy. My experience in ten years of class struggle every day is that the amount of gendered violence that I have been subject to is just un-fucking-believable. I'm very angry about it.

It structures the left, it structures the relationships on the left. And people ... You know, like, I have comrades who might quote you, Silvia. They quote you and they know your work, but they then perform gendered violence all the time. So I'm really interested in the splitting apart. When people say that they are left, but they behave right. They say that they're feminists, [but] they behave misogynistically. To me, there's this splitting apart.

And I wonder also ... The internet with its screen and its surface, it allows this kind of breakage, or it catalyzes the breakage. But I mean, on the left, my experience being an active organizer and fighting for my fucking life and my friends—you know, other people's lives—is that the misogyny is very, very extreme, and violent.

SF: Well, I know that there's a lot of it. And the worst part is when it's [being] justified. And [people say]: "No, we don't talk about it,

because otherwise, we give power to the opposite side. We give power to the government." Et cetera, et cetera. And I think that many people are unfortunately accepting that [argument]. And this is happening in every country. These are the kind of things that we need to fight against. And I think there is a strong interest. Certainly, I know a lot of women are fighting around, you know ... For instance, a woman that I am in contact with in Italy has written a very powerful piece that now we want to translate to English, precisely on this issue, in response to attacks on women who wanted to denounce rape on the side of comrades against a woman that took place in Italy.

So, all of these are connected. I think they are connected. And going back to the question of mental illness ... Also the great, profound ignorance, not acknowledged between the relation between the body and the mind or the soul. It is this *other thing* that is being so misrepresented, misnamed. There is a tremendous issue which is not recognized. You know, I'm always amazed, I'm very interested. For years and years and years, I have been very interested. I'm very ignorant, but I'm very interested in and marveling about this connection between our flesh, our body, the organization of what we call the body, and this *other*: the soul, the mind. And I come to the conclusion that despite all this pride in Western science, there is a profound ignorance. Some of the most basic things cannot really be accounted for, whether it is the formation of dreams, what is this language, whether these ... You know: How do we function? What is this whole organization of our body?

That, I think, generates all kinds of misconceptions, fears, on the issue of mental illness. And so much is imputed to character, so that the mentally ill person becomes a person who is responsible for what they are doing.

JJ: Silvia, maybe also to return to the witch hunt: we talked about the mechanisms of marginalization within the witch hunt and also maybe comparing it with the mechanisms of the marginalization of the mentally ill. I don't know whether you can comment on that?

SF: Yeah, absolutely! Because it takes many forms, right? One form, of course, is institutionalization. So the witch is arrested, she's put in a tower. And the mentally ill today are placed into an asylum or a ward, if not a traditional asylum. But then there are many other mechanisms in everyday life like that.

In the case of the witch hunt, often [it] was spelled out, for example, in the churches, in the sermons, in the edict that the king or the municipal government would publish. They would isolate the witch. They would tell people not to congregate around her. They would tell people to denounce and to isolate [her]. [And] the treatment itself—the violence and the treatment would also have an isolating effect. But

then there were all these mechanisms on a day-to-day basis that you see very well in the villages. The villages that throughout the Middle Ages had a very, very strong, rich collective life.

And slowly, what begins to happen is, then, when the woman appears, people move away. When the woman appears, the party stops. Right? She's not welcome at the door. There is fear, there is unease. So there's this mechanism. People don't sit next to her in the church. All these mechanisms of social exclusion are, in fact, then creating in the person the kind of rage and anxiety which then is accused [of them]. "Ah, you see, this person is crazy." But she's crazy because she has been isolated.

SC: This is 100 percent right. This is completely right. And it really speaks to my experience as someone who has really severe breakdowns. My breakdowns are very, very deep. And, you know, I go completely clinically insane. The thing that I ... It really does speak [to me]. What you're saying is really spot on.

I just wanted to draw you a little bit from what you were saying before, was you started to approach the area of responsibility. So, in my experience, when I go into a breakdown, I think it's like being possessed. You don't have control of your brain anymore. You can't control your thoughts. It's like a possession, right? And I try to explain it to people after it happens. So I use two things: [it's] like possession, but also like when you're dreaming and everything is moving and changing. Inside you have your voice, but outside is completely strange. And you don't ... you can't interpret the world anymore.

I partly think that breakdowns could be talked about in terms of a failure of interpretation. But the thing is, responsibility ... So in law, there is a category where they cannot prosecute you because you are mentally ill, right? This is a question of responsibility.

SF: Yes.

SC: This is individualized and it's about blame. And it's about the individual. Could you speak a little bit about that before you go?

SF: The question of responsibility is fundamental. It's a way of not also wanting to take collective responsibility. I've not seen ... It's ignorant in terms of what is taking place. It's coming from a history and a culture of impunity. Something goes wrong, it is your fault. Everything is individualized. And so immediately if something is going on, there is an original sin. There's still a mentality that reads people's behavior from the point of view of an original sin, of inclination instead of a tendency to interpret [it] in the most positive way, in the way that is most positive and enhancing for the person. It is interpreted in a way that is most punitive and is most degrading. And that,

I think, is a profound cultural ... that, you know, from the moment that we go to school, from everything around, in college—it's *that*. Right?

It's the breakdown of the collectivity. It's the breakdown of the collective. Because when you don't see the relationship between yourself, your body, your being, with that of other people, then the sickness of the other person, you don't see it also as part of your role. And therefore the mechanism of exclusion is fossilizing. Because individual responsibility needs a profound connection between making the person individually responsible and then the activation of the mechanism of exclusion. Because then, although you didn't do it—you just, well, push it out! The idea, the metaphor, of the "rotten apple"—it is the mechanism of exclusion. And so, of course, the problems that are generating the unhappiness, the unease, the mental breakdown, are constantly reproduced and constantly treated in ways that never offer a way out. Never an alternative.

SC: Capitalism is completely nested in this structure and this ideology. Patriarchy as well. There is a real investment in reproducing this type of structure and the ideology that places this kind of individual responsibility bullshit.

SF: Yeah, well, one of the themes of my work has been to show that capitalism is not only the production of money, wealth, et cetera—it is the production of inequalities. That that production of higher inequality and so on, in the division, is as fundamental as any of the directly economic structures of the system. Without that, they couldn't have this massive, massive global exploitation, massive, massive destruction of resources, and continue to be able to prevail.

JJ: Thank you, Silvia. It's been very nice to speak to you.

SF: Yeah, same here, Jakob. Same here, Sophie. A big hug.

Social Crisis! Mental Crisis! is a series of conversations on Communism and Mental Health in times of pandemia between the artists Sophie Carapetian based in London and Jakob Jakobsen based in Copenhagen: <https://socialcrisismentalcrisis.tumblr.com/>

This transcript has been lightly edited for publication.

MICHAELA KISLING, TILL MEGERLE & ARTJOM ASTROV: *Guiding Lights*

Michaela Kisling, Till Megerle, and Artjom Astrov will give a concert/performance within the framework of this exhibition. Date and location will be announced on our website www.kunsthallewien.at as well as our social media channels.

Guiding Lights (2021) is a series of three videos released by the music label Serious Serious and made together by **Michaela Kisling, Till Megerle, and Artjom Astrov**. The videos coexist and interrelate, activating each other in a thrilling narrative that is woven between the sound, the people, the drawings, and the cinematography. By merging their work, **Kisling, Megerle, and Astrov** distort and amplify emotion as they treat the music band as a formless entity reaching a level of feigned nebulosity.

The formlessness of the band is also defined, or more precisely undefined, by its means of production and its politics of desire, entangling labor with domesticity and experiences of clubbing. The hybridized aftermath could be an acknowledgment of what it means to continue making music or art, or simply to continue working when everything is mediated by the value-form and hence represented as abstractly equivalent to everything else. It is precisely this realism that transforms itself into an epic saga. The whole becomes a genre exercise in which disparate ingredients share an emotional immediacy.

The video series is the outcome of a deep “hanging out” that is neither predetermined nor random. To hang out deeply isn’t merely a genre of music but a form of labor that embodies inexplicable sounds, intimate or sometimes banal situations, and carefully assembled visuals. One could think of these videos as tracks that would form one song—a song that is shaped by the constellation of the voices of the three protagonists and the kind of exteriorization and meaning that they commonly convey.

There is a tender feeling in each of these three videos, and just as you stop to wonder where it might be coming from, along comes the dark undertow.



Guiding Lights, 2021

PUBLIC & EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The following offers an overview of our programming for the exhibition, with more to be confirmed. We warmly invite you to visit www.kunsthallewien.at, as well as our social media channels, for regular updates and further details about our public program for *Do Nothing, Feel Everything*.

OPENING

Thu 18/11 2021, 7 PM
Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz

TOURS

Free admission!

CURATORS' TOURS

The exhibition's curatorial team discusses topics thematized by the works presented in the show and shares behind-the-scenes information about them.

Dates will be announced on www.kunsthallewien.at

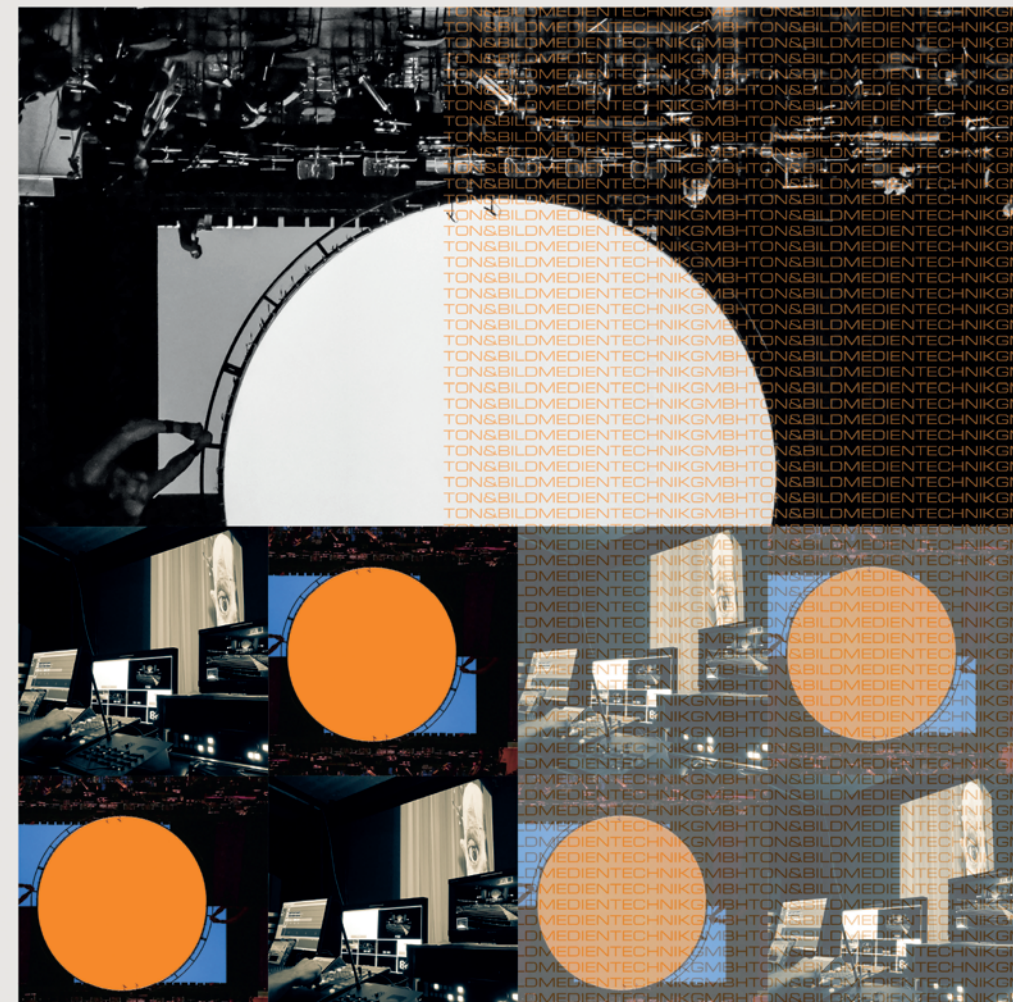
ART INFO

Tue 7/12, 21/12 2021;
4/1, 18/1, 1/2, 15/2 2022, 5 PM
With: Wolfgang Brunner,
Andrea Hubin, Michael Simku

On six Tuesday evenings throughout the exhibition, you can discover the works together with our art educators and discuss the context and backgrounds of the exhibited works. (Event in German)
Also free of charge

PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOLS

Kunsthalle Wien offers an extensive program for schools. For information and to register, please contact vermittlung@kunsthallewien.at



Konzeption, Planung und
Umsetzung von Bild, Ton
und Licht.

für
Kunst & Kultur
zum Niederknien.

LIST OF ARTISTS AND WORKS

Laila Bachtiar

Born in 1971,
lives and works in Vienna (Austria)

Ein Baum [A Tree], 2010

Elefant [Elephant], 2003

Ente [Duck], 2003

Der Fuchs [The Fox], 2013

Ein Hase [A Hare], 2010

Katze [Cat], 2009

Ein Wolf [A Wolf], 2016

© gallery gugging
Courtesy Hannah Rieger Collection

Zahnbürste [Toothbrush], 2005

Courtesy gallery gugging and private
collection

Sophie Carapetian & Jakob Jakobsen

Sophie Carapetian, born in 1979,
lives and works in London (UK)
/ Jakob Jakobsen, born in 1965,
lives and works in
Hospital for Self Medication

*Social Crisis! Mental Crisis! (REFUSE!):
Listening Booth*, 2021

Courtesy the artists

Tony Cokes

Born in 1956,
lives and works in Providence (RI, USA)

Testament A: MF FKA K-P X KE RIP,
2019, HD video, color, sound, 35:22
minutes

Courtesy the artist, Greene Naftali, New
York, Hannah Hoffman, Los Angeles, and
Electronic Arts Intermix, New York

Henry Joseph Darger

1892–1973,
lived and worked in Chicago (IL, USA)

Untitled, unknown date

Courtesy Karin und Gerhard Dammann,
Switzerland

Patricia Domínguez

Born in 1984,
lives and works in Chile

Green Irises, 2019
Installation and video

Commissioned and produced by
Gasworks, with support from Lazo
Cordillera, Fundación Engel, Fundación
AMA, and SCAN
Courtesy the artist

Rahima Gambo

Born in 1986,
lives and works in Abuja (Nigeria)
and London (UK)

Hadiza and Ruth play "In and Out,"
from the series *Tatsuniya*, 2017

Ruth playing "In and Out,"
from the series *Tatsuniya*, 2017

Waiting in the woods (I),
from the series *Tatsuniya II*, 2019

Waiting in the woods (II),
from the series *Tatsuniya II*, 2019

Waiting in the woods (III),
from the series *Tatsuniya II*, 2019

Courtesy the artist and
Tatsuniya Art Collective

Yasmine Ben Khelil

Born in 1986,
lives and works in Tunis (Tunisia)

New Flesh (Untitled), 2017

Courtesy the artist

J'ai quelque chose à te dire 1
[I Have Something to Tell You 1], 2020

J'ai quelque chose à te dire 2
[I Have Something to Tell You 2], 2020

J'ai quelque chose à te dire 3
[I Have Something to Tell You 3], 2020

La sensation du soir est profonde
[The Evening Sensation Is Deep], 2020

Tout devient rose ... 3
[Everything Becomes Pink ... 3], 2020

Tout devient rose ... 5
[Everything Becomes Pink ... 5], 2020

Tout devient rose ... 7
[Everything Becomes Pink ... 7], 2020

Untitled, 2020

Untitled, 2020

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Maïa
Muller, Paris

Stanislava Kovalčíková

Born in 1988,
lives and works in Dusseldorf (Germany)

Misty (Foggy), 2017

Courtesy Gerber & Stauffer Fine Arts,
Zurich

Niklas Lichti

Born in 1980,
lives and works in Vienna (Austria)

Appropriate Sentiment, 2019

Concrete Quarterly, 2020

HD video, 20:20 min

With support from Diana Duta,
Adam Grey, and Tomas Rydin

Flat Baroque, 2019

video on tablet (*Flat Baroque*), 3:46 min
music Peeter Vähi, Whitelight

Gore Capitalism, 2019

Ingwer & Selters, 2019

International Gothic, 2019

Courtesy the artist and
Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna

Opoku Mensah

Born in 1992,
lives and works in Accra (Ghana)

Me Maame Nwi
(*my mother's hair*), 2017

The Nights Table, 2017

Courtesy the artist

Shana Moulton

Born in 1976,
lives and works in New York (USA)
and Santa Barbara (CA, USA)

The Pink Tower, 2019
Installation and video

Courtesy Galerie Gregor Staiger, Zurich
and Crèvecoeur, Paris

Tom Seidmann-Freud

1892–1930,
lived and worked in Vienna (Austria)
and Berlin (Germany)

Buch der Hasengeschichten
[*Book of Hare Stories*], 1924

Die Fischreise [The Fish Journey], 1923

Courtesy University Library of
Technische Universität Braunschweig

*Several scans of Tom Seidmann-Freud's
sketches and drawings from Die
Fischreise* [The Fish Journey], 1923

In memory of Aviva Harari (Seidmann),
Tom's only daughter, 1922–2011. Courtesy
Tom Seidmann-Freud's grandchildren:
Amnon Harari, Ayala Drori, and Osi Gevim

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kunsthalle wien GmbH

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THANK YOU
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their gratitude to all participating
artists, lenders, galleries, authors,
translators, editors, and the team of
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After its debut in **kunsthalle wien**, in
spring 2022 the exhibition *Do Nothing,
Feel Everything* will travel to its next
stop—Kunsthalle Bratislava.

PUBLISHER
kunsthalle wien GmbH

TEXTS
Laura Amann (introduction and
artwork descriptions)
Sophie Carapetian & Jakob Jakobsen
in conversation with Silvia Federici
(podcast)
Aziza Harmel (introduction and
artwork descriptions)
Kathrin Heinrich (artwork descriptions)

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All images are courtesy of the artists
unless otherwise indicated.



Tom Seidmann-Freud, sketch for an endpaper In memory of Aviva Harari (Seidmann), Tom's only daughter, 1922–2011. Courtesy Tom Seidmann-Freud's grandchildren: Amnon Harari, Ayala Drori, and Osi Gevim

ARTISTS:

LAILA BACHTIAR

SOPHIE CARAPETIAN

& JAKOB JAKOBSEN

TONY COKES

HENRY JOSEPH DARGER

PATRICIA DOMÍNGUEZ

RAHIMA GAMBO

YESMINE BEN KHELIL

STANISLAVA KOVALCIKOVA

NIKLAS LICHTI

OPOKU MENSAH

SHANA MOULTON

TOM SEIDMANN-FREUD

Free admission!

Tuesday–Sunday 11 AM–7 PM

Thursday 11 AM–9 PM

FOR PROGRAM UPDATES:

www.kunsthallewien.at

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#donothingfeelev everything

kunsthalle wien

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