

MI IDAMI

A performative exhibition in four acts

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Aerobics/5

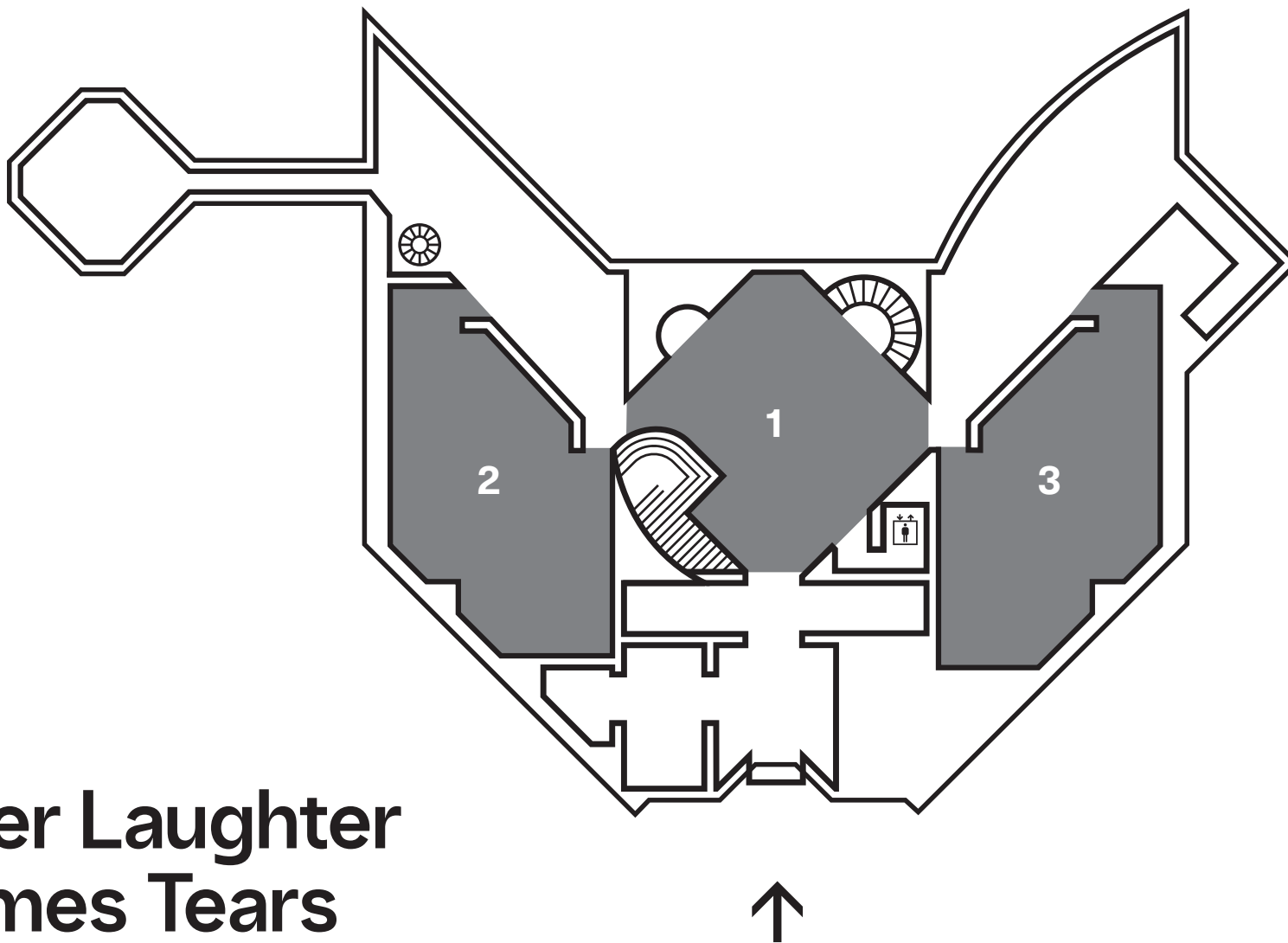


After Laughter Comes Tears

13.10.2023 — 07.01.2024

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Curators

Joel Valabrega and Clémentine Proby

Assisted by

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Exhibition design

Matilde Cassani Studio

(Matilde Cassani, Leonardo Gatti, Cecilia da Pozzo)

Caro: a thing of softness pillow by Alessandro Cugola and Joseph Rigo

Level 0

- 1. Grand Hall
- 2. East Gallery
- 3. West Gallery

The exhibition

After Laughter Comes Tears is an experimental exhibition dedicated to performance, and the second edition of the Mudam Performance Season launched in 2021. Conceived as a 'performative exhibition', *After Laughter Comes Tears* will feature the work of thirty-four artists working across the mediums of performance, installation and video. Titled after the 1964 track 'After Laughter' by American soul singer and songwriter Wendy Rene, the exhibition mimicks a theatrical narrative, unfolding in four acts, beginning with a prologue and ending with an epilogue. By considering moving image and installation as much as the exhibition and its scenography as performative objects, *After Laughter Comes Tears* proposes to expand the definition of performance. Simultaneously, it grounds the medium of performance within the museum, which traditionally hosts it as an occasional and timed utterance.

The exhibition takes as its starting point the feeling of stasis and anger that defines this later stage of capitalism endorsed by most societies. It is framed by the anxieties of a generation facing a climate crisis, welfare states trampled and failed by neoliberal policies and the rise of xenophobia and far-right parties across the globe, partly fuelled by fake news spreading on- and offline. Adopting the humorous, and at times, dramatic tone that is characteristic of theatricality and embracing the ambiguity that exists between those states, *After Laughter Comes Tears* unfolds through a narrative that speaks to and of bodies, politics and their fraught relationship under capitalist systems. The works of emerging artists, in dialogue with more established ones, consider the crisis of care and deeply entrenched notions of normalcy, aiming to make visible and thereby question standardised approaches to social and biological norms.

The exhibition includes sensitive content that may not be suitable for all audiences.

Is laughter the best medicine to soothe despair?

Humour – and at times, cynicism – is a characteristic feature of contemporary internet culture, which uses memes and gifs as producers of a brand of humour tapping into our shared sense of sarcasm. Drawing from the ironical tone that we identify as being that of a disillusioned generation, as well as from a long history of satirical resistance, the exhibition sets a stage for play with the tensions and frictions inextricably linking comedy and tragedy. Tragicomedy is also a popular theatre genre, circling back to the roots of performance as a discipline. It evokes a sense of drama and the expression of feelings, a rollercoaster of emotions animating the body. Facial expressions and bodily reactions linked to fear, exhaustion, rage, disgust, affection and pleasure – feelings that merge and coexist within each one of us, are expressed differently according to personal and collective histories. Like humour, they are not just intuitive, individual reactions, but rather depend on social and cultural contexts.

With this in mind, *After Laughter Comes Tears* intends to explore how our bodies and minds react and cope with the drama we are currently living through. What is capitalism doing to them? Are self-care and self-help the only answer? What is considered healthy, who is considered beautiful? Which bodies are celebrated, which ones are made invisible? What bodies are cared for and who provides that care? How do those who have been neglected look after themselves? The artists participating in the exhibition all have an idiosyncratic way of approaching notions of care and normativity, acknowledging the body as intrinsically political and as part of the collective. They will consider the relationship between body and mind, and with benevolence as much as wittiness celebrate the abject

of our flesh, embrace exhaustion and contemplate eroticism.

To resist a conventional approach in display, *After Laughter Comes Tears* creates a dynamic exhibition space, changing through time to offer a variety of experiences to the visitor. During the exhibition, the works will also be activated via performances or via an active participation of the visitors, encouraged to leave aside the passive role that is too often expected of them in cultural institutions. The public will therefore get the central part in a collective thinking process brought about by a broad performance programme that can be consulted at the end of this booklet.

Prologue

X steps into the Grand Hall of Mudam, in Kirchberg, Luxembourg. It is a foggy autumn day, typical of the season in Central Europe. A decadent, yet pleasing smell of roses reaches X's nostrils.¹ Ahead, an inflatable arch stands as a sentinel, playfully beckoning, 'Welcome'.² Searching for the entrance to the first gallery, X looks up to see a strange ventilation system, resembling twisted umbilical cords, running along the majestic limestone walls of the museum.³ Intrigued, X moves to take a closer look but stumbles over a yellow 'Wet Floor' sign that displays a mysterious message hinting at the slippery slope of existence.⁴ Although they are alone under the monumental glass cathedral, X somehow senses an evaporated presence.⁵ Perhaps it is a ghost? The air seems heavy with the weight of past moments. A distant voice pierces the apparent tranquility of the place – anxious, insistent: 'Look! Look! Look!' – and this is where it all begins.⁶

with
Cem A.
Lukáš Hofmann
Ghislaine Leung
Marie Munk
PRICE
Dorian Sari

¹ PRICE

I Try My Tongue (sequences), 2022
The Interesting, 2023

PRICE (b.1986, Rio de Janeiro) creates encounters between performer and audience, characterised by theatrical aesthetics and soundscapes that incorporate the artist's voice and body with references from pop, fashion and internet cultures. He is interested in the ways that authenticity and affect are manufactured by performers and seeks to dismantle these as artificial, simultaneously unmasking and re-claiming them. For the exhibition's *finissage* PRICE will present *I Try My Tongue (sequences)* (7 January 2024), a performance in which the artist's technique of 'tonal plasticity' challenges 'the performative force of language'. In the performance, PRICE's vocal and technological experiments with English phenomes challenge language-based hegemony. PRICE's work will also feature in the exhibition in the form of a scent installation titled *The Interesting*, which can be read as an expanded performative gesture, exploring themes of trace and memory. PRICE's 'scentscapes' of decomposing roses will be diffused throughout Mudam's Grand Hall. To create the scent, PRICE worked with the Marseille-based alternative perfumery house In'n'out Fragrances, which was founded by Niklaus Mettler in 2016 with an ethos of 'uncomfortable luxury' to 'create scents that inspire people to find beauty in their daily surroundings'. By using the scent of a decomposing rose, rather than presenting the odour of a fresh bloom, PRICE plays with the ubiquitous symbolism of the flower, allowing its connotations of romance and beauty to become ambiguous and hold deeper meaning. In the past, PRICE has used this scent to punctuate performances, the perfume held in open glass vessels that act as extensions of the artist's body. The scent lingers as a trace of his presence, becoming a mysterious protagonist of his work.

² Ghislaine Leung

Arches, 2021

Score: A white inflatable welcome arch in all available rooms

Ghislaine Leung (b. 1980, Stockholm) is a conceptual artist based in London. In a subtle, often poetic and intimate way, Leung interrogates art-world institutions and has described her work as 'constitutional critique', through which she investigates 'how we internalise institutions and constitute, in bodily terms, their written and legal industrial design'. In recent exhibitions, Leung has pointed to the intricate networks of interdependency and contingency that allow artworks and exhibition spaces to exist. *Arches* illustrates this both metaphorically and literally. A set of white, inflatable arches that read 'WELCOME', the work is blown up only during the museum's opening hours and collapses every day after the visitors have left. Inflatables of this kind are normally brightly coloured and used to communicate uncomplicated enthusiasm, for instance as outdoor advertising or decoration at children's birthday parties. Leung's bleached and slowly collapsing sculptures welcome visitors to the museum in a way that questions the authority and authenticity of institutional messaging.

³ Marie Munk

Big Energy, 2021

Marie Munk (b. 1988, Aarhus) is an interdisciplinary artist based in Copenhagen working with sculpture, installation, video and performance. Munk's practice focuses on how technologies have shaped and characterised our behaviours and our bodies. The artist creates fictional realities bordering on sci-fi and humorous phantasmagoric storytelling about a 'familiar present and an uncertain future'. Munk's ambivalent installations are at once disgusting and grotesque, familiar

and humorous. She creates works that playfully urge the viewer to reflect on our relationships with our bodies and societies.

Munk's work evokes a post-apocalyptic world reminiscent of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985), but with mirth and humour. The installation *Big Energy* is an immense pipe that connects all the environments of the exhibition – instead of a real ventilation system, however, we find a slimy, multi-coloured silicone umbilical cord that cannibalises corners, ceilings and walls. Inspired by the concept of data-ism, theorised by historian Yuval Noah Harari in *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2016), Munk looks at how digital technologies – which operate on infinite amounts of data, immaterial consumption and algorithms – leave traces in our societies and our bodies. This massive immersive installation depicts a glitching normality in which the human body merges into technological devices.

⁴ **Cem A.**
Sticker Vendor Comes to Mudam, 2023
Floor Piece, 2023

Cem A. is an artist who describes his practice as exploring 'topics such as survival and alienation in the art world, often through a hyper-reflexive lens and collaborative projects'. He is best known for his Instagram project @freeze_magazine, an account of 'homemade art memes for the pretentious VIPs' that he founded in 2019 and which has gained considerable popularity. A play on the establishment publisher and art fair Frieze, @freeze_magazine uses the classic format of text on non-sequitur images from popular culture, applying meme trends to satirical observations about art-world politics and celebrities. The culture and technology critic Mike Pepi has written about Cem A.'s work, noting that: 'If many in the art world have

the growing sense that their institutions are failing and, along the way, failing them, such meme accounts provide both affirmation and comedic relief.' In addition to providing ironic humour and parasocial empathy, Cem A. also works to critique hypocrisy and systemic abuses of power in the industry. At Mudam, Cem A. presents *Floor Piece*, an installation that replicates the yellow caution signs used by public institutions, replacing the usual 'wet floor' message with texts he composes 'to imitate the linguistic landscape of art spaces and question the hegemony of signs that we assume to be neutral'. For the opening, the artist will also be presenting a performance entitled *Sticker Vendor Comes to Mudam*, a collective interaction in which Cem A. applies temporary tattoos featuring memes to the bodies of museum visitors.

⁵ **Lukáš Hofmann**
Long story short., 2023

Lukáš Hofmann (b. 1993, Prague) is known for his live works, which unfold over extended periods of time. In contrast, Hofmann's newly commissioned work for Mudam, *Long story short.*, embraces brevity and dynamism, blending disciplines of performance art, theatre and music. This collective performance delves into the elusive concept of authenticity, encouraging viewers to ponder the ever-shifting line between reality and artistic interpretation. It builds on Hofmann's previous work *Incarnate* (2022), which examined the mythical and virtual structures that dominate our lives. Correspondingly, *Long story short.* is a prominent chapter in Hofmann's evolving narrative of power, an overarching theme woven through his live works. Guided by the artist's personal perspective, the performance adopts a tragicomic approach and becomes a mechanism for exploring the intricate nuances of wealth,

love and violence. Hofmann imbues each of these concepts with symbolism and references to popular culture. Within this abstracted realm, money transcends its material nature, transforming into an intangible and abstract force that underpins the fabric of society. Love, an enigmatic and potent force, reveals itself to be both an exhilarating intrusion and a transformative infection that leaves an indelible mark on those who bear witness to it. The weapons wielded in this ethereal domain remain hidden, yet are a haunting reminder of the unseen powers that silently shape our lives. *Long story short.* presents a succession of evocative and fleeting tableaux, orchestrated in direct response to the geometric grandeur of Mudam's Grand Hall. Each scene is crafted to reflect the pervasive flatness of representation that is prevalent in contemporary society. Simultaneously, Hofmann highlights the roles of framing and distortion, which can either grant visibility or obscure essential truths.

⁶ **Dorian Sari**
Look!, 2021

Dorian Sari (b. 1989, Izmir) is an artist working across sculpture, installation, performance and moving image. Sari is known for creating fictional narratives born from his acute observations of public reactions to contemporary politics and social movements. In these narratives, the artist uses humour to question cultural norms and hierarchies, employing a vocabulary that stems from mass media and personal histories. *Look!*, first presented in the context of Sari's solo show *Post-Truth* at Kunstmuseum Basel, takes as its starting point 'the hierarchy of pain', a phrase coined by the German philosopher Carolin Emcke to describe how social problems are not taken seriously until their economic impact is made clear. Sari combines this concept with an observation that our perception

of linear time has changed because of technological accelerationism. As Sari states, 'A genocide scene on TV has the same time and space as a toilet paper commercial.' This idea of pain experienced in a collapsed time frame is the point of departure for *Look!*, in which a person is hopelessly trying to get the attention of the camera operator to show them something urgent. Running for approximately three-and-a-half minutes, the video is a study in tension and anxiety expressed by the body of the performer, whose facial expressions, restless movements, perspiration and extreme salivation are all futile attempts to get the cameraman's attention. The work acts as a metaphorical gateway, revealing the multifaceted nature of perception. With *Look!*, Sari challenges the viewer to consider the layers of subjectivity that shape our understanding of the world.



Lukáš Hofmann, *Into the Unknown*, Moderna Museet, Malmö, 2021
Photo: Iryna Drahun

Act 1 – Sick, sad world

Making their way to the East Gallery of the Museum's ground floor, X's steps resonate on slick metal plates placed on the floor. Red plastic strips hanging from the entrance stick slightly to their bare arms as they walk through, evoking the back of a butcher shop or a portal to an unknown dimension. Inside, the gallery is covered with fluffy pink carpet. Although dark, the place is dimly illuminated by the soft and eerie glow of projectors and monitors. Two fawns, standing on their wobbly legs, seem to be waiting for a phone call.⁷ CNN is broadcasting extraordinary news on a TV.⁸ At a similarly high-speed pace, hospital bracelets flash urgent messages across a screen.⁹ Moving on, X is confronted by disturbing cartoon characters singing a sick, sad song.¹⁰ Turning around, they notice a classical sculpture laying on the floor, observing its own technological reflection.¹¹ A mosaic of images, emotional metaphor of the world, glares from three large screens.¹² A mysterious beauty occasionally arises. Slowly, some of the films start to turn off.

with
Panteha Abareshi
Omer Fast
Guan Xiao
Isaac Lythgoe
Diego Marcon
Shinuk Suh

⁷ Isaac Lythgoe

I don't remember anything you said to me last night, 2022

Isaac Lythgoe (b. 1989, Guernsey) studied painting at the Royal College of Art in London, yet his current work focuses primarily on sculpture. Lythgoe creates his works entirely by hand in a laborious and skilled process using a variety of sometimes unusual materials. Lythgoe belongs to a generation whose childhood and adolescence were shaped by dystopian science fiction films, and has since seen those fictions transform into reality. Lythgoe's disquiet at this development is expressed in his observation that 'CEOs of big tech companies shouldn't watch Spielberg films'. The artist is fascinated by the aesthetics of futuristic horror, as seen in films by David Cronenberg, the *Matrix* trilogy, and the *Terminator* franchise. He gives his work a perfect finish, akin to cinematic props made by a set designer. The title of Lythgoe's work *I don't remember anything you said to me last night* hints at the impossibility of communication. Lythgoe often works with horrifying versions of popular children's book characters including Peter Pan and Pinocchio. In this piece, Lythgoe turns his attention to Bambi, the young deer immortalised by the 1942 Disney film. Here, two young deer face each other in a tense posture, with facial expressions like Roswell aliens (the extra-terrestrials whose spacecraft supposedly crashed close to the New Mexico town of that name). Between them stand two telephones in complementary colours, hinting at an incapacity to break out of a vicious cycle of communication. *I don't remember anything you said to me last night* can be read as a general metaphor for the polarisation so widespread in many areas of contemporary life.

⁸ Omer Fast

CNN Concatenated, 2002

Omer Fast (b. 1972, Jerusalem) is best known for his moving-image works, shown in single or multi-channel installations. Weaving together documentary material and fictional scenes played by well-known actors or anonymous characters, Fast uses high-tech equipment, 35 mm cameras and found footage. His works revolve around topics like society, history, war and death, often using interviews. Omer Fast questions narrative structure and linear time to interrogate film-making as a medium for story-telling.

CNN Concatenated, a single-channel video Fast made over two decades ago, not only marks the technological shift from low- to high-definition video, it also underscores how much our perception of media has been shaken by the explosion of 'alternative facts', fake news, troll factories, social media and Artificial Intelligence. The work is composed from a ten-thousand-word database of clips of CNN news anchors, including Christiane Amanpour, Wolf Spitzer and Tucker Carlson. The video presents several chapters of rapid monologues, addressing the viewer in a tone that oscillates between aggressive and suggestive. It gets under the viewers' skin by using threatening language and delving into the conflicting desires and fears of a thoroughly mediated American identity. The fast flux of talking heads seems to reveal the frightening subtext of televised news – the true message that conspiracy theorists always knew was there – culminating in the phrase: 'Anything that carries a history is dangerous.'

⁹ Panteha Abareshi

NOT A BODY, 2022

Panteha Abareshi (b. 1999, Montreal) is a multidisciplinary artist who makes work about their experiences with chronic illness and disability caused by their sickle

cell zero beta thalassemia, a genetic blood disorder resulting in chronic pain that increases with age. Abareshi's artistic gestures often use their own body as an object and material to discuss subjects ranging from the medicalised violence experienced by people with disabilities and mental illness to the sensual and sexual lives of disabled bodies, and the experiences of Black and brown women. *NOT A BODY* is a video from Abareshi's series of works *THIS IS NOT A BODY*, in which the artist deliberately withdraws representations of their body in favour of more abstract and symbolic representations of their corporeal experiences. In the video, medical wristbands that are usually used to make a body quickly legible to the infrastructure of a hospital are marked with texts that represent a human experience beyond bureaucratic definitions. A series of wristbands flash across the screen, each an avatar of the artist's body, some with official messages in large print, such as 'LATEX ALLERGY' and 'DNR' (do not resuscitate). Most of the wristbands, however, bear hand-written subjective descriptors: 'A losing battle', 'a wounded animal', 'a fetish', 'a handful of sand slipping away', 'a needless aggression', etc. With *NOT A BODY*, Abareshi advocates for reclaiming space within systems of categorisation and control for the complicated nuances of an embodied existence.

¹⁰ **Diego Marcon**
The Parents' Room, 2021

Diego Marcon (b. 1985, Busto Arsizio) works primarily with film and video, and also produces sculptures, drawings and installations. Marcon's video work combines stylistic devices from different genres – including horror films, musicals, cartoons and dramas – to create strikingly dissonant moods and feelings. *The Parents' Room* is a looped film of about

six minutes, combining computer-animated images with human actors. The actors' faces are distorted by silicon masks. Marcon's figures are reminiscent of stop-motion films, although their movements remain fluid throughout.

At first, the film appears to depict a quiet scene – a man is sitting on a bed beside his sleeping wife, on a peaceful winter morning; the ground has been freshly covered with snow, and a blackbird's song is soon joined by the sound of a woodpecker. This early lull is deceptive. Initially, the unease is intangible, but it is soon made shockingly concrete as the man's song begins to lament the murder of his wife and two children, and his subsequent suicide. Marcon conjoins the apparently incompatible: the protagonist's infinite cruelty, its banality depicted as harmless and the apparently peaceful surroundings. In doing so, the artist not only manages to make a highly effective horror film, but also sheds disturbing light on the tragic – and often secretive – reality of domestic violence.

¹¹ **Shinuk Suh**
The Perfectible Body, 2020

Shinuk Suh's (b. 1988, Seoul) sculptural practice is invested in the dissection of structural ideologies. Using Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as having a material existence representative of the 'imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,' Suh's work delves into his personal experiences of ideological enforcement. Having grown up in South Korea in a strict Christian family and served the country's mandatory military service, Suh confirms that 'Korean society, my family background, religion and education are powerful forces, so the "ideal" human image is still suppressing me.' Suh's multi-media sculpture *The Perfectible Body* encapsulates this vulnerability of the human condition to

overarching forces of technology, capitalism and cultural ideology.

Central to the work is a bust of the Renaissance figure *David* (1501–04) by Michelangelo, the ubiquitous contemporary reproductions of which continue to confirm its status as representative of both a male physical ideal and western cultural supremacy. This is further reinforced as the bust rests upon, and is surrounded by images from, the work's titular book *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development* (Kenneth R. Dutton, 1995). Suh's attention to stereotypes of masculinity is longstanding; he recounts: 'Since I was a child, I was obsessed with the obligation that "men should be men". I was treated as a strange person when I was a little bit "out" of the ideal male image which the school, army, and society wanted.' He also notes how the notion of the 'perfectible' is reinforced by the capability of contemporary screen technology, which leads us to 'crave images that are more beautiful than they really are'. The artist makes use of his signature techniques and materials to indicate the fault lines in these ideological structures. The bust is bisected by a mirror, suggesting the violence of a layered hierarchy of value, and veined with cut wires, suggesting an embodied reliance on technology that is literally mirrored in the adjoining screen. Between the 'reality' of the sculpture and the 'fiction' of the screen twists and example of the silicone hand often found in his work, explained by Suh as representative of 'the human body which is being passively moved by an external force to describe a human being overthrown by the dominant logic of the society.'

¹² **Guan Xiao**
Just a Normal Day, 2019

The Beijing-based artist Guan Xiao (b. 1983, Chongqing) makes sculptures, videos and installations. Guan Xiao's sculptural work is characterised by its

combination of objects from different cultural contexts: for example, she makes bronze casts of tree roots, polished according to Chinese tradition, combining these with mass-produced plastic objects, as well as signs and logos from the online world. Her work thus illustrates the contrasts and contradictions in a number of historical and economic contexts, while never losing its poetic, absurd undertones. This is also the case with her video works, which are often made to be shown on three screens, as in *Just a Normal Day*. To make this and similar works, Guan Xiao used excerpts from YouTube videos to create a visual composition that expresses sensations and feelings. The images here follow each another like fragments from an inner monologue about death, life and lust; about religion, self-love, technology, longing and terror, presenting different perspectives on the infinitely small and the infinitely large. Short sentences, like scraps of thought, merge with noises, melodies and musical fragments to form a stream of impressions that can be regarded as metaphors for an overall emotional and philosophical approach to the world. The metaphor, according to Guan Xiao, is 'in a way, the only way for us humans to understand or grasp the world'. The artist's work addresses the poetry of this metaphorical impressionism. She describes it like this: 'I see life and/or narratives as made of pieces that we pick up. [...] Often the things we contain in ourselves are phenomena such as smells – atmospheres of a present that might not be our present moment. [...] When I assemble footage, or make metaphors, the body's sensation helps me: sound, smell, and touch build up images in my head.'

Act 2 – Crisis mode: on

Suddenly the lights start flickering. 'Is it a glitch', X asks themselves? No, it's the start of a new act. On three large screens, a digitally rendered female body is hindered by an artificial skin swelling around her.¹³ In fact, X notices body parts popping up all over the gallery, even on the floor, in a rectangle that could have been the stage of a crime scene.¹⁴ A large projection shows two naked bodies touching each other oddly,¹⁵ and on the other side of the room a cupping session has gone wrong.¹⁶ A visceral tension is palpable. From a corner, someone is confronting X with a series of uncomfortable questions.¹⁷ Taking a step back, their gaze is attracted by the soothing vision of a landscape outside the window. Looking down, they see a tent that looks like a shelter from the surrounding predicament.¹⁸ A choir of uncertain voices coming from a group of anthropomorphic figures wearing bright orange jackets seem to call X to participate in an emergency meeting.¹⁹ Crisis mode is on. Lights start flickering again, signifying the end of the second act.

with
Kate Cooper
Stine Deja
Ndayé Kouagou
Chalisée Naamani
Agnieszka Polska
Jean-Charles de Quillacq
Artur Żmijewski

¹³ Kate Cooper

Symptom Machine, 2014–19
(*Infection Drivers*, *Symptom Machine*, *We Need Sanctuary*)

Working with computer-generated images (CGI) Kate Cooper (b. 1984, Liverpool) produces videos that complicate the objectivity of virtual bodies in relation to the fleshy potential of our physical selves. Inextricably linked to the precise and machine-driven methodologies of digital production, Cooper's works appropriate, construct and subvert images manufactured for commercial distribution that use CGI technologies to essentialise structures of capitalism.

These battered and exhausted digital images present the body ambivalently, as both communicator and site of conflict. Throughout the artist's work, we are presented with a surrogate with which to navigate the contemporary infrastructures of capital and technology that demand total participation. *Infection Drivers* (2018) presents a body in battle with itself: a computer-generated woman wears a translucent suit that constantly inflates and deflates, evoking exaggerated stereotypes of gendered bodies. Similarly, in *Symptom Machine* (2019) an injured woman struggles to perform physical feats, crawling to the end of a conveyor belt, mirroring the idea that these digital surrogates can perform labour on our behalf. Through the use of CGI technology, the artist also challenges accepted understandings of the body's limitations. Her avatar gets tired, sick, bleeds and is bruised. In *We Need Sanctuary* (2016), the idea of sickness as a way to refuse the labour involved in the optimisation of the self are carried out within an environment of cleaning and care. Cooper approaches the creation and manipulation of these CG bodies with a logic informed by the choreography of the virus within a body's sanctuary sites – vulnerable areas, such as

the central nervous system, where antiviral drugs cannot easily penetrate.

Cooper's figures take on different roles: acting as givers of shelter and invisibility; bodies that can perform resistance, be subjected to violence, and yet carry on essentially unscathed, rebuilding themselves to endlessly repeat and perform their labour. Their condition disrupts their original glossy quality, unveiling a new promise. 'I'm exploring the performativity of disease as a potential blueprint for reimagining strategies of self-care,' says Cooper. By picturing women unable to achieve goals, find physical comfort, or conduct feminised labour, Cooper also speculates about how capitalist forms of image production could be appropriated and deployed as weapons against exploitative labour – ultimately inviting us to consider whether these computer-generated 'bodies' might contain new forms of political potential and self-care.

¹⁴ Jean-Charles de Quillacq

bébé, 2023
The Stand-In, 2019

Jean-Charles de Quillacq (b. 1986, Parthenay) fancies the relationship between his work and his audience as being intimate, even erotic, by incorporating his body into his installations, sculptures, performances and films. Thus, he likens certain aspects of his artistic practice to sex work. His body merges with and blends into his sculptures through the sensual act of casting limbs – often his own – or the inclusion of bodily fluids like his sweat and sperm. Quillacq favours fairly crude techniques and mainly uses toxic epoxy resin, which puts his health at risk. For this exhibition, Quillacq's installation, *bébé*, comprises a set of five sculptures – feet, legs and parts of a fragmented body, as well as a container filled with several

dozen bottles of shower gel. Laid on a plastic tarp, the arrangement evokes the forensic examination of a crime scene. Could this be the body of the artist – used, abused and objectified by the art world to the point of dismemberment?

Over the course of several afternoons, the interactive performance *The Stand-In* is taking place in a room separate from the main exhibition. Quillacq, donning a mask, makes himself available for six minutes to individual visitors, who can demand anything of him. In exchange, the artist takes a plaster cast of each visitor's nose. These noses will accumulate over the course of the exhibition, as keepsakes of fleeting encounters between two bodies, partially obstructed or made anonymous by the cumbersome prostheses that covered their faces, rendering the bodies of both parties that much more significant. Here, Quillacq once again puts forth the metaphor of the artist as prostitute, while inviting visitors to take an active role by addressing and even acting upon the artist – sticking their nose in his business, as it were.

¹⁵ **Artur Żmijewski**
Temperance and Toil, 1995

Artur Żmijewski (b. 1966, Warsaw) is a Polish artist and film-maker whose work has considered the vulnerability of the human body to socio-political violence, as well as the capacity for art to effect real-world change. Żmijewski's videos often document experimental scenarios navigated by participants whose physical presentation may lead to them being perceived as on the margins of society. For instance, his past works have portrayed people with amputations, concentration camp survivors with tattoos and deaf-mute children. Although his videos appear to be unadulterated footage documenting spontaneous action, Żmijewski uses techniques of montage to reveal emotive

narrative structures. *Temperance and Toil* is one of Żmijewski's earliest works, in which the artist is beginning his exploration of the malleability of the human body as a metaphor for the alienation of the self that results from societal trauma. The video records a nude woman (the video artist Katarzyna Kozyra) and man (Żmijewski himself, in a rare on-screen appearance) as they manipulate each other's bodies – pushing and pulling their skin, pressing themselves together in ways that de- and re-form them. Although physically intimate, their movements are not gendered or sexualised, but rather inquisitive and abstracted. A sense of absurdity pervades the video, as bodies become unfamiliar landscapes when stripped of normative modes of interaction.

¹⁶ **Agnieszka Polska**
Fire Cupping, 2009

Agnieszka Polska (b. 1985, Lublin) works with moving images, creating animated videos based on individual photographs, and also creates sound works and short films. Polska's interest focuses on archival material, simple images hitherto ignored, moments that went unnoticed by history or art history, unfinished beginnings and abortive projects. Polska has created a body of works with this approach, including *How the Work is Done* (2011), her film about a 1956 student strike at the Kraków Art Academy, *Sensitization to Colour* (2010), which uses photographs to restage a 1968 exhibition of performances by the artist and activist Włodzimierz Borowski, and *Garden* (2010), a film about a fictional visit to the garden of the Polish artist Paweł Freisler, who has disappeared from public life. In addition, Polska has created poetic reflections on a number of dead or forgotten artists, who she depicts as living on in an afterlife (*Future Days*, 2013), as well as dreamlike animated sequences that harken back to surrealist animation from the early decades of the twentieth century.

Fire Cupping belongs to the latter group. The film begins as a straightforward depiction of a series of cupping glasses being put in place, but then takes an unexpected turn: a series of sounds emerge from the cupping glasses, followed by flames. Using found images and simple, moderately paced animation, Polska manages to create an atmosphere that is both poetic and disconcerting, punctuated by surprises.

¹⁷ **Ndayé Kouagou**
Will you feel comfortable in my corner?, 2021
4 dogs and a plum, 2022

Ndayé Kouagou (b. 1992, Montreuil) is an artist and performer whose practice interweaves text, performance, video and textiles to explore experiences of otherness, unease and vulnerability as they interact with structures of power, privilege and legitimacy.

Originally a writer, Kouagou's works derive from short texts he has written on his phone's Notes app. The artist expands these notes into longer soliloquies, which he delivers live or performs for the camera, dressed in brightly coloured, fashionable ensembles. This braiding of text, performance and sleek self-presentation is informed – aesthetically and strategically – by the contemporary forms of coercive communication found in commerce and social media. 'Advertising has taught me how to make text attractive' says Kouagou, 'It's the nature of our age, sadly image is stronger than text [...] it's a question of form.'

Will you feel comfortable in my corner? was originally presented as a performance, but in this iteration Kouagou's physical presence is transmitted through video; 'my wish was for the viewer to feel like they were having a one-to-one intimate conversation with the character in the

video'. This desire to intimately address the viewer aligns with the narrative intention of the work, which urges the viewer to question their experiences of and with otherness. Beginning with the question, 'Where can I feel comfortable in this changing world?' Kouagou prompts a consideration of who experiences safety and belonging, under what conditions, and whether it is possible to bridge systemic ideological gaps in order to foster solidarity.

¹⁸ **Chalisée Naamani**
Maison sac à dos ou Habit(acle), 2020

In her work, Chalisée Naamani (b. 1995, Paris) engages with the fabrics and images with which we adorn our bodies, and behind which we sometimes hide or find shelter. The artist sees clothes as casings for humans. They can denote a person's class and generation; they bear codes and histories; they are social, cultural and even political interfaces. Through her baroque lavishly installations – in which smartphone snapshots by the artist and others, culled from Instagram, are superimposed with patterns from luxury iconography and the Persian culture she was raised in, along with religious objects and tourist souvenirs – Naamani plays with the stream of images that surrounds us and informs our lives.

For *Maison sac à dos ou Habit(acle)*, the artist's research extends to architecture. The interior and exterior surfaces of a children's play tent have been redesigned with the collages of images and found patterns characteristic of Naamani's practice. With its shoulder straps, this house – like a snail's – can be carried on one's back. Inside the portable dwelling are smartphone-shaped cushions displaying self-help mantras – 'Good clothes open many doors. Go shopping' – and fleece charms of Parisian monuments such as the Arc de Triomphe and the Notre-Dame

cathedral. While amusing and visually appealing at first glance, this backpack house references a unique social context – the domestic seclusion brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic – and, through prints of Instagram posts, the Black Lives Matter movement, which went global after George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis in 2020.

As the artist puts it, the tent 'symbolises the constant negotiation we engage in between the self and the cultural environment we exist in, personal and spatial shifts, and the ghostly presence of the virtual world'.

¹⁹ **Stine Deja**
Assembly, 2022

Stine Deja's (b. 1986, Træden) work is interested in the effects of late capitalist commercialisation, self-care rhetoric and the impact of modern technology on human bodies and experiences. Operating between physical and virtual representation, her sound and sculptural installations are highly mediated spaces of anxiety and irony. Deja's sound sculpture *Assembly* is one of the works in this exhibition that depicts a communal gathering in the face of crisis. The artist has noted that the work started as 'a cacophony of anxious voices [...] I started imagining a post-catastrophic situation, where people gather at an assembly point to assess what has just happened'. *Assembly* depicts a group of figures huddled in a circle, expressing both solidarity and vulnerability; their intertwined arms provide support to each other while their welded metal form locks them in an obviously inward-facing posture. Deja's trademark use of saturated colours and ready-made fabrics is applied here to the group's 'Safety Orange' jackets – a high-visibility hue often used for emergency rescue clothing. With anthropomorphised speakers for heads, the figures cannot see or hear, and are only

able to haphazardly chorus a perpetually questioning and reassuring refrain: 'Are we going to be ok? We're ok. Are we going to be ok? We're ok...' While *Assembly* at first seems to advocate for solidarity in the face of crisis, the group's inability to reach a consensus or meet the emergency head-on is perhaps a more critical indictment of the myopic perspective engendered by reliance on insular collective structures of power.



Stine Deja, *Assembly*, 2022.
Courtesy of the artist | Photo: the artist

Act 3 – Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera*

Exiting the East Gallery, X once again passes through a red portal, their pace echoed by the metallic floor. Crossing the Grand Hall, they are guided towards the West Gallery by the peculiar ventilation system.³ On a screen hanging above the second entrance, X notices that Act 3 is starting. They rush inside, eager to see the story unfurl. The room looks familiar yet different, carpeted in yellow. A black leather beanbag with a Virtual Reality headset arouses their curiosity.²⁰ They let themselves fall on the comfy seat with a sigh, embarking on the virtual journey. Further, on a split-screen monitor, two women in glamorous outfits lounge by a pool.²¹ Around a column, some seats call for yet another break. 'Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera.' * While resting for a bit, X spots a tiny projection on the opposite wall, surrounded by bottom-shaped pillows. Another woman is kneading a large mound of dough²² that looks weirdly similar to the ruin-like salon furniture²³ nearby. In the centre of the room, a bathtub is filled with a black substance.²⁴ Approaching it, X spots a pair of zombie hands looming in the dark. Shifting their gaze, they are confronted by a monumental projection depicting work-out exercises scored by the beat of an overpowering melody.²⁵ On an adjacent monitor, people are hula-hooping on New York's rooftops.²⁶ Some of the films have faded to black and the lights have started to flicker in a familiar cue. By now X knows what to expect.

*Heaven helps those who help themselves.

with
Monira Al Qadiri
Christian Jankowski
Taus Makhacheva
Sidsel Meineche Hansen
Mika Rottenberg
Julika Rudelius
Mungo Thomson

²⁰ Sidsel Meineche Hansen *NO RIGHT WAY 2 CUM*, 2015

Sidsel Meineche Hansen's (b. 1981, Ry) research-based practice uses digital animation and sculpture to investigate the automatising of sex and the role of virtual bodies in the gaming and 3D Adult Entertainment industries.

Informed by cyber- and post-human perspectives, the artist is interested in ideologies that infuse the rapidly expanding production and use of digital imagery. Specifically, Hansen's work looks at virtual reality as a further extension of a capitalist reality which is, along with automation, informed by patriarchy. The readymade character that features in *NO RIGHT WAY 2 CUM* is a stock 3D model called EVA v.3.0. Sold by the online 3D graphic library TurboSquid, it is an anonymous and hypersexualised template for the female body, to be incorporated into any CGI animation scenario. Hansen describes her work with the EVA v.3.0 model as 'an attempt at hacking the virtual pornographic body' by considering how virtual bodies and post-human sex expose industrial interconnections between capital, gender and technology. *NO RIGHT WAY 2 CUM* contributes to a lineage of queer and feminist sex activism, referencing the art-advocacy film *Nice Girls Don't Do It* (dir. Kathy Daymond, 1990) that sought to de-stigmatise the experience of women who ejaculate when they orgasm. Hansen was further galvanised to make *NO RIGHT WAY 2 CUM* by a 2014 UK law that banned British pornography producers from representing sexual practices such as squirting. Her animation is experienced via a VR headset – it is a site-specific and situational artwork that positions itself in the context of the tech industry's production of pornography. As a medium for feminist sex activism, the animation (which is driven by a game engine)

depicts the virtual character EVA v.3.0 masturbating until drops of vaginal fluid spell out the title of the artwork in the viewer's visual plane.

²¹ Julika Rudelius *Forever*, 2006

Julika Rudelius (b. 1968, Cologne) has pursued her method for over twenty years, quietly observing specific people – how they behave and what they say. Rudelius's videos do not normally allow us to hear her questions. This turns the replies given by her interviewees – whether young fashion victims, identical triplets, or political interns in Washington – into a kind of monologue. The result has an immediacy that places the viewer in the position of an addressee, creating a close bond of proximity between spectator and subject. The people in Rudelius's videos often make highly intimate revelations, raising the question of boundaries and their possible transgression.

This is the method used in the video *Forever*, in which Rudelius interviews five American women, who she says she chose 'for their beauty'. The artist asks them about looks, privilege, happiness and other abstract values; other topics discussed include inner beauty and old age. Rudelius shot the interviews next to swimming pools in expensive mansions and encouraged the women to photograph themselves with a Polaroid camera. What these women say and how they present themselves reveals much about how they think others perceive them and how they perceive themselves. The gaze of Rudelius's camera is both revealing and empathetic. The eternity invoked by the title may be thwarted by beauty's temporality, but *Forever* does more than reflect on external appearances. Above all, Rudelius's video reflects on the spectator's gaze, their prejudices, their open-mindedness and how they position themselves in relation to what they see.

²² **Mika Rottenberg**
Dough, 2005–06

For nearly twenty years, Mika Rottenberg (b. 1976, Buenos Aires) has been producing videos and associated installations. The central theme of her work is the commodification of the (female) body, and of human relations in general. Rottenberg ascribes the origin of these works to her 'reading of the texts of Karl Marx'. However, she stresses that it was not so much the Marxist analysis of working conditions that fascinated her, but rather Marx's depiction of the internalised devotion he perceived in some women's work: 'It was a poetic, beautiful and abstract moment', says the artist. The style Rottenberg has developed in her videos is marked by emphatically artificial and poetic imagery, which she describes as 'social surrealism'. Her empathetic interest in the non-standard, the flawed and the incomplete finds expression in the humanistic and even feminist gaze of the protagonists, whose sensual, intensely palpable physical presence often forms a central element of her work. Similarly, the decor of her cinematic works often has a DIY charm, seemingly shaped by decay or by proletarian life.

Dough, an earlier work, expresses Rottenberg's 'spiritual Marxist' attitude through her hierarchical representation of women's work within a production process. Here, the working conditions, the physical exploitation, the alienation inherent to the division of labour and the work's overall meaning all feed into an apparently coherent metaphor, but one which is marked by its own inner logic of absurdity. The religious and symbolic significance of 'dough' in Western history can hardly be overstated. In Rottenberg's video, real sweat and genuine effort are required for the dough to be produced, but it ends up being processed according to the new religion of capitalism: it is

portioned up and vacuum packed, formed into a product of unsurpassable banality.

²³ **Taus Makhacheva**
ASMR Spa, 2019

Taus Makhacheva (b. 1983, Moscow) is a multi-media artist based in Dubai who makes moving image, performance, sound and sculptural work that she describes as exploring 'the restless connections between historical narratives and fictions of cultural authenticity'. A descendant of the Avars, an ethnic group in the Republic of Dagestan, Russia, Makhacheva's work often questions authoritarian or essentialist narratives of art history by reworking archival research in unusual performative settings. For example, the artist's signature work *Tightrope* (2015) is a video depicting the famed Dagestani tightrope walker Rasul Abakarov as he repeatedly traverses a canyon carrying reproductions of artworks important to the history of visual art in Dagestan.

The work *ASMR Spa* develops this way of working by bringing attention to works of art while exhibition visitors participate in the unique experience of an ASMR spa. ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) is a euphoric physical reaction to auditory and visual stimuli that has inspired a genre of online videos designed to trigger this reaction using soft, repetitive sounds and movements. A popular genre of ASMR videos features narratives of the listener receiving personal care, including beauty treatments. These techniques are also used by off-camera specialists who bring digital intimacy to life by combining ASMR triggers with physical therapy. Makhacheva's *ASMR Spa* invites visitors into an installation of ruin-like sculptural fragments (created by artist Oleksandr Kutovyi) in which they can receive a thirty-minute 'Signature Sculptural Facial' while hearing about artworks by Frida Kahlo, Joseph Beuys and Rachel Whiteread that

have been damaged, lost or destroyed. Makhacheva's artistic intention is mirrored by this work's inclusion in the exhibition: to 'bring the lost back into life' by providing visitors with a moment of empathy and care while urging them to consider the vulnerability inherent to structures of history, objecthood and memory.

²⁴ **Monira Al Qadiri**
Deep Float, 2017

Monira Al Qadiri (b. 1983, Dakar) makes time- and installation-based works about the history and contemporary manifestations of 'petro-culture' in the Gulf region. Al Qadiri uses strategies of speculative fiction, pop culture and autobiography to investigate the political, economic and cultural contexts of petroleum. Her subversive practice considers oil as a vector for desire, consumption and toxic dependence. The artist's sculpture *Deep Float* encapsulates this exhibition's ambivalence between tragedy and comedy, as the work could be interpreted as a person drowning in a tub of petroleum or as a winking reference to the swamp monsters from classic horror films such as *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). In fact, *Deep Float* represents Al Qadiri's research into the ancient therapeutic practice of bathing in petroleum. First recorded in the twelfth century, the purported healing powers of a crude oil found in the Naftalan region of Azerbaijan have historically been associated with relief from skin and joint ailments such as psoriasis and rheumatism, as well as claims of increased virility. In the twentieth century, large sanatoriums were built to accommodate an influx of tourists from Russia, eager to bathe in Naftalan's oil. Although EU and US health regulation bodies have since warned that exposure to Naftalan oil can have a carcinogenic effect, these baths continue to be a popular spa treatment in Azerbaijani resorts. This contradiction

prompts a consideration of what current forms of 'self-care' may be considered toxic in the future and who is profiting from those we practice today, though already aware of their potential to harm.

²⁵ **Mungo Thomson**
Volume 2. Animal Locomotion, 2015–22

Mungo Thomson (b. 1969, Los Angeles) grew up in the seventies and eighties and describes himself as a prototypical member of Generation X: 'half analogue, half digital'. The dawning of the digital age saw the arrival of the personal computer and the internet, leading to the dematerialisation of many areas of life. Thomson's artistic work also frequently addresses this phase of transition. From an early age, he was interested in analogue technologies, archives and picture collections. His video project *Time Life* (2014–ongoing) was laboriously created over a prolonged period, extending into the present day. The films in the project present illustrations from the Time-Life Books series, shown in rapid sequence. The Time-Life Books imprint was very popular in the United States of Thomson's youth: the books offered access to encyclopaedic knowledge and were regularly mailed to subscribers, totalling around 2,500 published volumes over four decades.

Thomson's project imagines these books being scanned by a high-speed robotic book scanner, the type used by universities and tech companies to archive libraries, and proposes such a device as a new kind of filmmaking apparatus. *Volume 2. Animal Locomotion*, the second of eight in Thomson's current film series, features illustrations from the twenty volumes of Time-Life's series on 'Fitness, Health and Nutrition', published between 1987 and 1989. The rapid sequence of stop-motion images, running at eight frames per second, shows relaxation exercises for

physical mobility, strength and endurance training. Thomson's video is reminiscent of a similarly-titled book on the movement of animals, produced in the late nineteenth century by Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), the inventor of chronophotography. Thomson's images are synchronised precisely with the soundtrack *Clockworks* (1974), a piece by the computer music pioneer Laurie Spiegel. This synchronisation, along with images of exercises performed at the office desk or on the bus on the way to work, reminds us that this perfected athletic self-optimisation also – and perhaps above all – serves the rhythms and requirements of the working world. Here, human bodies undergo something like objectification; they form part of the means of production and must be kept in good condition.

²⁶ **Christian Jankowski**
Rooftop Routine, 2008

Christian Jankowski (b. 1968, Göttingen) is known for his subversive, surprisingly funny yet deeply serious moving-image works. Beginning in the early 1990s, Jankowski drew attention with his video *The Hunt* (1992), which showed him hunting food with bow and arrow in a supermarket. Later the artist described his practice as 'working within the framework of collaboration'. He focused on collaborative performances, filming carefully calibrated interactive scenarios, using non-actors to convey stories about history, politics, society and art.

Rooftop Routine was originally organised for the 2007 iteration of the performance art biennial Performa in New York. At first glance, the video looks like a YouTube tutorial for using a hula hoop. Set in New York's Chinatown neighbourhood, the video evokes old aerobics videos and the performance art happenings of the 1970s, scored by a catchy Taiwanese pop song from the 1980s. Jankowski asked

his neighbour, as well as more than two dozen dancers positioned on rooftops, to 'let loose, relax and contemplate nature', against the urban backdrop of the Manhattan skyline. The poetic imagery is not devoid of irony, however, as a pigeon is the only glimpse of nature in the video. That said, for a brief moment, the artist succeeds in creating a joyful yet ephemeral network across the otherwise anonymous rooftops of the Big Apple.



Monira Al Qadiri, *Deep Float*, 2017
Courtesy of the artist & KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin/Seoul | Photo: Eric Bell

Act 4 – Tears dry on their own

What was previously visible in the gallery has vanished into obscurity. A cyborg mother figure has materialised, a baby equipped with climbing gear floating by her side.²⁷ X turns around, now facing a gracious creature whispering a tale.²⁸ A similar softness arises from a red square on the other side of the gallery, that depicts perfectly manicured hands inventing a new sign language.²⁹ X is now surrounded by three industrial machines moving in a robotic choreography as they pump shirts full of air.³⁰ Exhausted yet joyful, they make X smile. On another monitor, blood is dripping down a woman's leg.³¹ Ominous, yet somehow appealing, the atmosphere triggers reflections in X's mind. Two light boxes are filled with shiny waste.³² Close by, a woman gesticulates in a video shining with purple light.³³ Tears are drying on their own. The end is around the corner.

with
Pauline Curnier Jardin
Jesse Darling
Anna Franceschini
Jacopo Miliani
Sin Wai Kin
Martine Syms
Cajsa von Zeipel

²⁷ Cajsa von Zeipel *Mommy Crane*, 2022

Cajsa von Zeipel (b. 1983, Göteborg) makes sculptures informed by sci-fi aesthetics that speak to the bodily agency of women in a contemporary culture in which biology and technology are evolving together. The artist describes her figures as either 'sisters or warriors' – they are erotically and conceptually provocative, as they inject hints of body horror and the transgressive aesthetics of queer and kink culture into tropes of the hyper-sexualised e-girls von Zeipel witnessed as a club kid in Stockholm. Her larger than life-sized sculpture *Mommy Crane* depicts a woman bent by the weight of her multiple offspring, whose body has mutated into a technologically upgraded, multi-nipple feeding machine. The mother figure is made of silicone sculpted over support structures including styrofoam, fibreglass casts of von Zeipel's friends' bodies and fragments of male and female mannequins. With a maximalist aesthetic, many other materials are affixed to the figure, including glass eyes, tooth veneers, a masturbation glove and a GoPro head mount. The work evokes such diverse artistic reference points for female beauty and sexuality as Greek marble statuary and Hentai figurines. The feeding apparatus that links the mother and children alludes to Manga tropes of body/machine hybridisation, but it also recalls artistic traditions of the *Madonna Lactans* – religious iconography of the virgin Mary nursing the baby Jesus. Von Zeipel propels this motif of the heavenly nourishing mother into a contemporary reality, to point at the ways that a woman's worth is still inextricably linked to her body's sexual and procreative use value.

²⁸ Sin Wai Kin *The Story Cycle*, 2022

Sin Wai Kin (b. 1991, Toronto) is a multimedia artist who came to prominence in queer club culture, where they experienced drag as being 'about blowing up gender and identity completely'. In their video and performance work, Sin embodies heightened forms of many aesthetic traditions, ranging from 1950s Hollywood to Cantonese opera, and beyond. While Sin's range of characterisation confronts conventions of gender and race, they describe 'binaries and categories' as a larger field of inquiry, investigating 'how to move through them and how to represent that reality is not one thing or the other, but both and everything'.

The Story Cycle is characteristic of Sin's use of speculative fiction as a storytelling mechanism through which to disturb entrenched systems of identity construction. Commissioned by and filmed in Somerset House, a neoclassical palace-cum-cultural complex in central London, the artist uses the architecture as a metaphor for conscious and unconscious structural systems. In the video Sin portrays three characters: a news reporter who provides the narrative drive of the film and was created by Sin to contemplate the technology of storytelling and two clowns, who represent either side of an internalised false dichotomy. 'Authenticity is a rehearsed performance' is the central dialogue of the work, which seeks to represent the permeable boundaries between storytelling, fantasy, performance and reality.

²⁹ **Jacopo Miliani**
Deserto, 2017

Jacopo Miliani (b. 1979, Florence) is a visual artist based in Milan. His practice addresses performance as an expanded methodology that investigates the connections between language and the body. Slowness, repetition and precision are three key terms to describe Miliani's aesthetically charged moving image work, *Deserto*. Using the movement of two hands and a subtle voiceover (without revealing the face or identity of the performer), the artist considers the power of language and communication in our society by reflecting on the invention of a new common language that adopts multiple and queer identities.

Using the desert as a metaphor for something that never takes a final shape as it is in constant movement, the work questions the politics of language and the body. Miliani uses the desert as a symbolic reference to two iconic films, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968) and Stephan Elliott's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). Terence Stamp appears in both films – as a mysterious guest and as a transgender woman, respectively. Neither character conforms to conservative societal norms of sexuality and gender. *Deserto* uses these films as a starting point for Miliani's voiceover narrative, in which real and fictional identities disappear, dismantling the existence of fixed roles. Through the juxtaposition of the voice and the visual presence of an invented language, *Deserto* takes the form of a litany.

³⁰ **Anna Franceschini**
All Those Stuffed Shirts, 2023
JET SET, 2019

In *All Those Stuffed Shirts*, Anna Franceschini (b. 1979, Pavia) delves into a profound exploration of the human-

machine relationship, reflecting on the English idiom 'stuffed shirt' as a metaphor for pompous conservatism. Franceschini's work is a complex and hybrid apparatus that evokes the aesthetics of a mechanical ballet, as ready-made machines for drying laundry become a chorus. This amalgamation stimulates contemplation of the ever-evolving connection between humans and machines, prompting us to ponder the boundary between the natural and the artificial. As the installation blurs the line between visual devices and tactile sensations, it draws attention to the role of the body as an instrument of desire, urging viewers to reflect on their own embodiment and engagement with technology. The installation is made of a series of bodies, embodying a duality between states of performance and pure exhaustion, as the mechanical devices oscillate between moments of animated vitality and complete stillness. Franceschini fosters empathy for these ambivalent machines. *All Those Stuffed Shirts* can be seen as a film without a film, an enthralling screenless animation that comes to life through kinetic sculpture and performance. Franceschini's artistic approach reimagines cinema through different means, highlighting the interconnectedness of various disciplines. As we witness the resonant dance of the machines, we are invited to consider the delicate balance between innovation and obsolescence – between progress and the consequences it entails.

³¹ **Pauline Curnier Jardin**
Qu'un sang impur, 2019

Pauline Curnier Jardin (b. 1980, Marseille) describes herself as 'a thwarted anthropologist, a wanna-be witch, a profane devotee, a poet and a butcher'. Her films, installations, performances and drawings use strategies from ethnography and fantasy to challenge

archetypal representations of women depicted in canonical narratives, from myth to contemporary cinema. Curnier Jardin's work *Qu'un sang impur* takes on a patriarchal society that discards post-menopausal women as they no longer hold sexual or procreative value. In the film, women take on a stereotypical male role of voyeur – as they observe men, their joyful desire is represented by floods of menstrual blood. Curnier Jardin initially conceived of this work as a remake of writer Jean Genet's only film, *Un chant d'amour* (1950) – a classic of queer cinema set in a prison. Just as the self-love and homosexual love experienced by Genet's prisoners is constrained by the violently voyeuristic architecture of the prison and its guard, the women in Curnier Jardin's film have lived under the bodily and erotic oppression of patriarchy, and what Curnier Jardin describes as 'the endless reproductive loop'. Curnier Jardin celebrates the women in *Qu'un sang impur* who, freed from their statues as sexual objects, can express erotic power and inhabit their bodies on their own terms.

³² **Jesse Darling**
Reliquary (for and after Felix Gonzalez-Torres, in loving memory), 2022

Spanning sculpture, installation, video, drawing, sound, text and performance, Jesse Darling's (b. 1977, Oxford) practice brings to light and deconstructs the arbitrary and violent systems perpetrated by the institutions of late capitalism. Shaped and marked by those structures, bodies are at the center of his reflection.

Originally commissioned by Palais de Tokyo as part of *Exposé-es* – an exhibition dedicated to the intellectual, political and artistic legacy of a generation of artists affected, if not wiped out, by the AIDS pandemic – Darling's work is entitled *Reliquary (for and after Felix Gonzalez-*

Torres, in loving memory). It is comprised of two vitrines filled with scrap and relics salvaged from institutional presentations of works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, such as candies or bits of beaded curtains from famous installations such as *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991), or *Untitled (Chemo)* (1991). Darling introduces this work as a love letter to Gonzalez-Torres, whose work is so closely and personally bound to AIDS crisis, and to all the other unknown queer mentors Darling and his peers never had the chance to meet.

Displaying the remains in a typically museal apparatus, with light coming from behind, the artist forces the institution to celebrate (what is typically considered) waste, and to recognise their melancholic beauty. In this way, Darling questions which bodies, objects and artworks are discarded, and how – and by whom – value is attributed in a society run by consumerist and patriarchal values.

³³ **Martine Syms**
Notes on Gesture, 2015

Referring to the range of artistic media she uses, Martine Syms (b. 1988, Los Angeles) once called herself a 'conceptual entrepreneur'. Syms's work, which encompasses film, installation, performance, writing and drawing, is characterised by humour and social commentary and the critical exploration of narrative technique. Syms is also a musician, author and publisher, and has directed two feature films. The artist often focuses on questions of Black identity and the human experience in the United States, which she examines from a number of perspectives, frequently using mass media as a mirror. In her video *Notes on Gesture*, Syms draws on a catalogue of gestures and facial expressions, whether spontaneous or staged, that relate to African American women. Syms's video presents looped

memes in staccato rhythms, reminiscent of emoji-style GIFs, as well as elements from YouTube and TikTok. These are performed in front of a purple background: this is an allusion to *The Color Purple*, the 1982 novel by Alice Walker. The work's title echoes the 1992 essay of the same name by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, while the video refers to *Chirologia: Or the Natural Language of the Hand* (1644), a treatise on the universality of human gesture by the English doctor John Bulwer. As the video proceeds, we see the artist and actress Diamond Stingily perform a series of specific gestures, expressions and movements; Syms explains that they refer to 'famous, infamous and unknown African American women'.



Sin Wai Kin, *The Story Cycle*, 2022 (still)
Commissioned by Somerset House, supported by the DCMS and Arts Council through the Culture Recovery Fund | Courtesy of the artist

Epilogue

In a haze, X stumbles toward the exit, the world spinning around them. But the exit isn't an escape just yet. Overhead, large banners dangle from the ceiling, each displaying statements that call out to X with an urgent plea.³⁴ One seems to scream: 'HUMAN EXTINCTION WHILE WE STILL CAN'. The words etch into X's mind as they make their way home, a haunting refrain of a visit too singular to forget.

³⁴ Chris Korda

Church of Euthanasia Banners, 1995/96

Chris Korda (b. 1962, New York) is a multidisciplinary artist who delves in such fields as environmental activism, techno music and software programming. In 1992, inspired by a dream and already deeply worried about the then-looming ecological disasters that have come to pass in the ensuing decades, Korda co-founded the Church of Euthanasia (CoE) with Robert Kimberk. An antinatalist activist group focused on population reduction as a solution to the environmental crisis, the CoE was acknowledged as a non-profit educational foundation by the state of Delaware and received tax-exempt status as a religious organisation. The church's doctrine consisted of one unconditional commandment: 'Thou Shalt not Procreate', and four pillars: suicide, abortion, cannibalism and sodomy. Korda and the CoE followed Dadaist strategies of absurdist transgression, in a tone that countered the rising evangelical voices of America's 1990s culture wars and the individualist capitalist consumerism of the time. Their subversive strategies played off of religious and political propaganda by using sermons, protests, appearances on television shows, infomercials and dance music. The banners in this exhibition were used in several public actions by the CoE during the 1990s. They show the radical urgency Korda and her followers felt at the time.

Performance programme

12.10.2023

Cem A., *Sticker Vendor Comes to Mudam*
Lukáš Hofmann, *Long story short.*
Taus Makhacheva, *ASMR Spa*

13.10.2023

Taus Makhacheva, *ASMR Spa*

14.10.2023

Taus Makhacheva, *ASMR Spa*
Lukáš Hofmann, *Long story short.*

29.10.2023

Ndayé Kouagou, *4 dogs and a plum*

03 + 04 + 05.11.2023

Jean-Charles de Quillacq, *The Stand-In*

09 + 10.12.2023

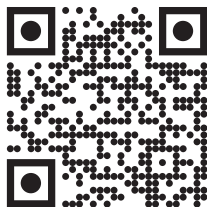
Taus Makhacheva, *ASMR Spa*

17.12.2023

Anna Franceschini, *JET SET*

07.01.2024

PRICE, *I Try My Tongue (sequences)*



Full programme on
mudam.com

The artists

Cem A.
Monira Al Qadiri
Panteha Abareshi
Kate Cooper
Pauline Curnier Jardin
Jesse Darling
Stine Deja
Omer Fast
Anna Franceschini
Guan Xiao
Lukáš Hofmann
Christian Jankowski
Chris Korda
Ndayé Kouagou
Ghislaine Leung
Isaac Lythgoe
Taus Makhacheva
Diego Marcon
Sidsel Meineche Hansen
Jacopo Miliani
Marie Munk
Chalisée Naamani
Agnieszka Polska
PRICE
Jean-Charles de Quillacq
Mika Rottenberg
Julika Rudelius
Dorian Sari
Sin Wai Kin
Shinuk Suh
Martine Syms
Mungo Thomson
Cajsa von Zeipel
Artur Żmijewski

The publication
After Laughter Comes Tears

Published by Mudam and Lenz Press, this publication accompanies and complements the exhibition. It will include images and commissioned texts on the artists' works, installation views, and a conversation between the curators of the exhibition and the editors of the publication. The book follows the structure of the exhibition, with a prologue, four acts and an epilogue which each sample excerpts from a range of theory, fiction and poetry that inspired and substantiate the themes of the exhibition. Widening the spectrum of the traditional catalogue, each artist was given a 'carte blanche' – an invitation to contribute to the book on their own terms.



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