Herbst ´25

Himmel und Hölle #1

A research art periodical at the dawn of the Night Era

Tiflis —— Berlin —— Paris

Kimono-shirt. Cotton.
Sewn and hand-dyed
by the artist.
Detail.

Herbst ′25

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Tiflis — Berlin — Paris

H&H Verlag

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Contents

Night is not less wonderful than day, it is equally the work of God; it is lit by the splendour of the stars and it reveals to us things that the day does not know. Night is closer than day to the mystery of all beginning.

Nikolai Berdyaev. The New Middle Ages (1924)

Editorial introduction

The Night falls first in the East

“All signs and proofs show that we have passed the historical daytime era and entered the night-time era.” This was written a hundred years ago, but could just as well be said today. In 1924, the Russian religious philosopher in exile, Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), published the essay *Novoe Srednevekovie* (The New Middle Ages) in Berlin. In view of the Russian Revolution and the First World War, the essay signalled a dramatic break between epochs: a transition from the rationalism of the modern era “to an irrationalism, or better, to a super-rationalism, of the medieval type.” Resonating with the apocalyptic mood of its time, the text proved an immediate success and was soon translated into major languages, including German, French, English, and others.

While Berdyaev did not mean a literal return to the Middle Ages, he argued for a step forward into a new medieval age, one that would draw on the accumulated human experience of past epochs. Despite the era’s prevailing anxiety and fear of the present, he remained optimistic about what the new period might bring. “The Middle Ages was not a time of darkness, but a period of night <…> Night is not less wonderful than day; it is equally the work of God. It is lit by the splendour of the stars and reveals to us things, elements, and energies that the day does not know. Night is closer than day to the mystery of all beginning.” In his essay, the philosopher anticipated a green economy — one returning to nature and an artisanal mode of production — as well as a shift from nation-based societies towards a more universal, spiritual fraternity: seemingly mediaeval concepts and practices reimagined. Yet the overtly religious framework of his essay somewhat diluted his otherwise insightful vision.

A novel wave of neo-medievalist sense of time resurfaced again towards the end of the twentieth century, particularly in political thought. Meanwhile, the Italian scholar Umberto Eco (1932–2016) became perhaps the most prominent observer of this revival in literature and culture — notably through his essays "Dreaming of the Middle Ages" and "Living in the New Middle Ages" (both 1986).

This research-based art periodical argues that a neo-medievalist trend has emerged within the domain of contemporary art. The core evidence for this speculation lies in a recent development, which some critics and curators trace back to the mid-2010s. As yet, it lacks a generally recognised international name. In the very east of Europe, it is known as *aggregator art*. The term derives from content aggregator websites, which gather exhibitions, artists, and works that largely represent and promote this novel aesthetic. Among the oldest and best-known online platforms are ofluxo.net (since 2010), kubaparis.com (since 2013), aqnb.com (2012–2022), tzvetnik (2016–2023), saliva.live (since 2017), Tired Mass (since circa 2019), and others.

At first glance, aggregator art appears to be a material, object-based, figurative (but not realist) visual practice with an often evocative sense of medieval I sensibility — kustar-like, handicraft, and artisanal in its aesthetic — despite its frequent use of contemporary materials and technologies such as 3D printing. Its subject matter is often hermetic, esoteric, alien, gothic, dark, or pop-folkloric, and frequently echoes the logic and aesthetics of video games — arguably a form of folklore

in the digital age. This trend is often linked with contemporary philosophical theories such as Speculative Realism and its subset, Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), Cyberfeminism, or discussed in the frameworks of the Post-Anthropocene and Post-Apocalypse. Some commentators view it as revolutionary; others dismiss it as reactionary, citing a perceived formalism and a lack of overt critical or political engagement.

This art periodical will explore this trend and its discursive dimensions — including protagonists, exhibitions, settings, habitat, texts, sources, events, manifestations, vocabulary, and so on. It will also test whether the most original and "neo-medieval" quality of aggregator art lies in its morphology. One might argue that its mature examples represent an amalgamation (the alchemical connotation is deliberate!) of "applied" and "fine" art properties within a single work or installation — to such an extent that neither category fully exhausts nor defines the perception of the work as a whole. (One of the most common mediaeval examples of such an amalgamation is, perhaps, the icon painting.) In his provocative book *The Invention of Art* (2001), American cultural historian Larry Shiner demonstrates that the accepted conceptual and institutional divide — or, in his terms, the Great Division — between decorative and fine arts was a radical invention of the modern era. The establishment of academies, public exhibitions, museums, and the emergence of art theory (aesthetics) gradually cemented this distinction by the end of the eighteenth century. Aggregator art, then, seems to echo a time when no conceptual division existed between applied

and fine arts, nor was such a division practical or meaningful for the production and perception of art.

Of equal interest to us is the broader field of collateral contemporary art practices that resonate with aggregator art, expand its immediate context, and bear a neo-medieval resemblance: an interest in magic and occultism, noise music, folklore, the cult of death, cloth-making, lacework, tattooing, among others.

Unsurprisingly, this new art trend is often at odds with the modernist white cube, let alone with museums. It favours instead pop-up shows in unconventional settings: shop windows, clubs, shelters, catacombs, garages, abandoned sites, forests, and, of course, churches — the principal public art space of the medieval era.

Lastly, this novel trend in art appears to align with broader technological and socio-political developments of our time — developments that, in many ways, echo our imaginary Middle Ages: green energy, neo-feudal corporate structures, mass migration, epidemics, and wars.

Hence, methodologically, this research-based art periodical will operate at the intersection of contemporary art, art history, literature, history, game studies, philosophy of art, social, political, and migration studies, the natural sciences, the green economy, and related fields. By following the young protagonists of these new developments in art, the periodical aims to situate their practices and narratives within a broader and timely social, technological, and aesthetic context — at the dawn of the Night era.

Full inventory of possible rubrics

(fixed order)

I. Absentation
II. Interdiction
III. Violation
IV. Reconnaissance
V. Delivery
VI. Trickery
VII. Complicity
VIII. Villainy / Lack
IX. Mediation, the connective incident
X. Beginning counteraction
XI. Departure
XII. The first function of the donor
XIII. The hero's reaction
XIV. Provision or receipt of a magical agent
XV. Spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance
XVI. Struggle
XVII. Branding, marking
XVIII. Victory
XIX. Liquidation
XX. Return
XXI. Pursuit, chase
XXII. Rescue
XXIII. Unrecognized arrival
XXIV. Unfounded claims
XXV. Difficult task
XXVI. Solution
XXVII. Recognition
XXVIII. Exposure
XXIX. Transfiguration
XXX. Punishment
XXXI. Wedding*

* Vladimir Propp. *Morphology of the folktale* [1928]. Trans. by Laurence Scott. 2d ed., rev. and ed. Austin: University of Texas Press. 1968

Artist questionnaire

1

Do you experience a sense of the apocalyptic now? If so, how do you deal with it?

2

What (new) materials do you prefer to work with, and why?

3

Do you play video games? If so, which ones — and do they influence your work or thinking in any way?

4

Are you familiar with the difference between applied and fine arts? Does it matter to you?

5

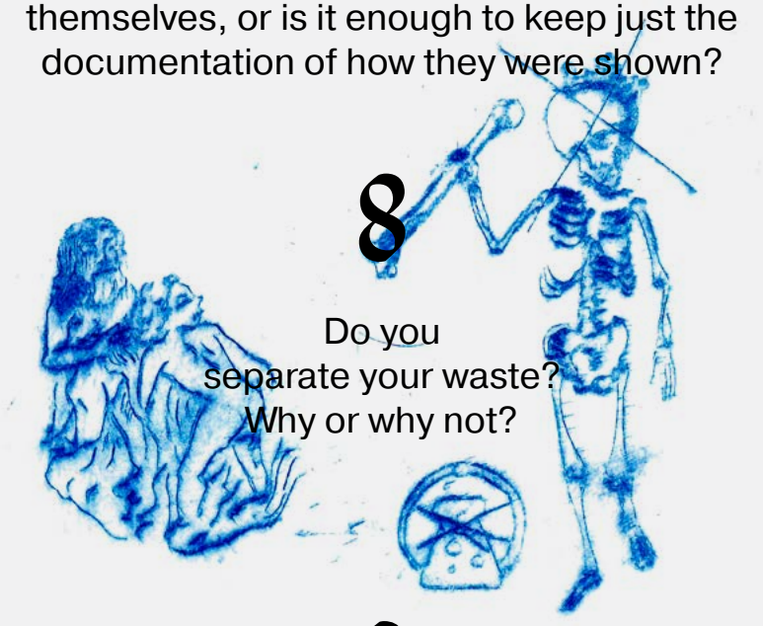
Do you rely on any theoretical texts to support or frame your art practice?

6

Do you create works entirely by yourself,
or do others (including machines)
sometimes play a role?

7

Is it important for you to preserve the artworks
themselves, or is it enough to keep just the
documentation of how they were shown?



8

Do you
separate your waste?
Why or why not?

9

Do you find any contemporary medications —
like ibuprofen, antidepressants,
antihistamines, and so on — helpful for
your wellbeing?

10

Himmel oder Hölle?

In conversation with sarazinzambinella

Tiflis, various locations, August 2025

Text: Andy Shab

Andy Shab: This project has rather tricky choreography, which is perhaps worth briefly recalling. It all began in St Petersburg in 2021, when I had already been absorbed for some time in the phenomenon of aggregator art — with its often distinctive neo-mediaeval sensibility and morphology. While trying to find a relevant infographic for the project, I juxtaposed the outlines of a medieval basilica with those of the German street game *Himmel und Hölle* (known as *hopscotch* in English and *klassiki* in Russian). Their visual and semantic proximity remains striking — I still wonder which one inspired the other.
So I approached you with the proposal to collaborate on a series of exhibitions on the phenomenon of aggregator art. You seemed to me a promising co-curator: though you clearly have nothing to do with that particular art trend, you are, in my view, just as much an outsider to any dominant strand of contemporary art. You are skilled in traditional artistic techniques such as painting, drawing, and sculpture, while engaging with contemporary nature-philosophical questions, as if in an alchemical process. In short, that made you a perfect candidate for the role of trickster or hooligan, and an antidote to my more academic curatorial approach.

Anyway, that initial idea didn't materialise for reasons beyond our control — like many other things in recent years, and perhaps for the better. An art periodical now seems to me a more relevant and promising format through which to frame and examine the project's core focus, which remains the aggregator art scene. We now collaborate with someone closely associated with it — the artist Pavel Polshchikov. He and I approach the same subject from slightly different

perspectives, which I see as an advantage. But to begin our conversation, I wonder — how much has your perception of the aggregator art scene changed since then?

sarazinzambinella: I do indeed prefer to move within my own orbit and am not anyhow involved in the aggregator art scene. But as often happens in contemporary culture — and perhaps in philosophy — one first learns about a phenomenon through references to it. For instance, I now notice echoes of what has already taken place on aggregator platforms appearing in established spaces such as art fairs and high-profile galleries. Here and there, I've come across new qualities and properties — paradoxical, synthetically artificial objects. I can recognise the methodologies, but the syntax is quite different. When the syntax shifts, the form affects you in a different, new way. In short, I encounter signs of a broader assimilation, even though I know the original source only loosely — mainly thanks to you. This seems to suggest that aggregator art has achieved a certain critical mass, that it has already earned a reputation appealing enough for established artists to flirt with its aesthetics or exhibition strategies. I don't find all of these developments equally convincing, but some do feel genuinely transitional.

ASh: It is, in fact, in response to this recent development that my curatorial take on the subject of aggregator art has shifted towards a more research-like approach. Hence, an art periodical rather than a series of exhibitions. Since it is research-like, the defining feature of this periodical becomes its attempt to situate the aggregator art scene within the

broader context of roughly the past two decades. Perhaps the easiest way to explain — and justify — this ambition is to turn to examples from art history. The 1910s and 1920s, for instance, saw numerous avant-garde and modernist movements and groups, many of which had their own publications that effectively represented them on the art scene and market alike. The size of our periodical, incidentally, corresponds to that of *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* (1912). And then, decades later, we art historians begin to contextualise these movements within a broader artistic and social milieu — or, in other words, to restore to these supposedly autonomous art movements their original and meaningful context. To avoid such gaps, *Himmel und Hölle* therefore seeks to hold both aggregator art and its context in focus, relating them within its pages.

The most immediate context, predictably, includes the broader field of collateral art practices — those not directly connected to aggregator art, yet resonant with it, expanding its aesthetics, neo-medieval sensibility and its apocalyptic or dystopian mood. This issue, for example, features the clothing practice of the artist Greht [see the rubric *Branding*]. Yet the context also encompasses the broader socio-technological and cultural frameworks through which the neo-medieval most prominently manifests itself today. Hence, we cover areas such as green energy, the pandemic, video games, aesthetic theory, migration, or the intriguing recent phenomenon of the rehabilitation of witch-hunt victims. Is there anything you would like to add to that?

sz: I like this idea of an expanding universe. It makes perfect sense and offers more points of entry into the project. For instance, returning to the question of novel syntax in aggregator art, I think we need a rubric focused on language and linguistic studies — more specifically, one dealing with machine language, artificial intelligence, and ChatGPT. I even have a candidate in mind to contribute to this rubric. For quite some time, my friend, the artist-linguist Kuku, has been exploring connections between word roots across different languages and constructing a kind of modern Tower of Babel…

ASh: Can we commission him for the first issue to explore how the concept of Night changes across different languages?

sz: Absolutely. That's precisely what he's doing. Moreover, one of his long-term projects concerns the word *kalъ*, *kolas* — meaning "black." As I mentioned, another of his ongoing research threads explores a moment of linguistic rupture that can be interpreted as the "night of humanity" — the time when we ceased to understand and hear one another. Kuku usually visualises his findings through graphic drawings, tracing galaxies and constellations of words, roots, and morphemes. I don't think these graphics will need any explicit commentary or explanation. After all, at night we move by touch: we rely on our senses, our imagination — in short, we become hypersensitive. But I have a question for you in return: is aggregator art a talkative practice? Does it like to comment on itself, or is it more of a thing-in-itself? My personal impression is that this art has developed a kind of immune response — it has inoculated itself against critique. You either accept it or move on.

ASh: It does tend to be a self-contained art practice.

sz: Well, then that makes it akin to artificial intelligence. Of course, we still need a prompt to render this communication both possible and meaningful. Yet it's already clear that AI is increasingly becoming a self-sufficient entity — a kind of *thing-in-itself*, operating with growing autonomy. But this discussion of language has just prompted me to suggest one more rubric! What naturally comes with language is mental health. For quite some time, I've been absorbed by the genre of personal diaries written by early twentieth-century cultural figures — Konstantin Somov, Mikhail Kuzmin, Ilia Zdanevich, among others. Yet of particular relevance now is Vaslav Nijinsky. I suddenly realised why his speech excites me so deeply: although the syntax remains intact, it hovers on the verge of schizophrenia. There's a striking difference between how mental health issues were approached then and how they are understood today — especially with all the possibilities offered by Big Pharma. If we're speaking of broader contexts, this area must certainly be taken into account. It's bound up with language — with speech and deformation, but also with that horizon of energies you mentioned earlier. Big Pharma has undergone a major transformation and become enormously powerful over the past fifteen years, particularly in the pharmacology of mental health.

ASh: But do you also consider the various antidepressants or even ibuprofen, which doctors now prescribe to treat all kinds of problems? I find the folkloric, almost fairy-tale dimension

of contemporary tablets rather fascinating — they have come to function as a kind of magical agent in their own right.

sz: Absolutely. Big Pharma covers various areas, including painkillers, metabolic control, weight loss, and antipsychotic drugs that help humans calm down. Pharmacology is indeed a kind of alchemical practice. Yet, by “pharma,” I mean a precise and entirely legal instrument — the construction of an impossible device on a micro level, one that can correct the genome, with zones of action sometimes exceptionally delicate, on the scale of atoms. These tablets have changed the world, though not always for the better. Some synthetic opioids, for instance, had severe long-term side effects: they were initially highly effective, but addiction and uncontrolled prescription led to many deaths. Ozempic is yet another contemporary drug enveloped in speculation and myth. Registered as a medication for weight loss, it operates on the level of metabolism, yet popular imagination attributes to it the power to prolong cellular life and resist decay. Whether or not this has any biological basis is secondary; what matters is how such myths shape our faith in pharmacology as a path to immortality. In short, Big Pharma remains a deeply ambivalent and mysterious phenomenon, retaining its almost magical potential. This rubric will be my contribution to the notion of non-living matter as a powerful force.

ASh: And it seems, then, that the most fitting rubric for the pharma theme would be *Provision or Receipt of a Magical Agent*. Turning to the question of rubrics in our periodical: I very much liked your idea of avoiding conventional, overly

explicit categories by introducing a processual and playful element into their structure. Eventually, we decided to draw on Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). This choice resonates with *Himmel und Hölle* on many levels: Propp's material has a medieval provenance; his ideas later became foundational for the video game industry, which is equally relevant to our periodical; and, last but not least, fairy tales themselves have inspired several aggregator artists. Practically speaking, Propp's model also provides a comprehensive structure of thirty-one narrative functions with fixed positions, which we employ metaphorically as rubrics. For instance, the final narrative function *Wedding* conventionally implies a "happy ending."

As Propp himself notes, not all functions appear in every tale — some tales are shorter, others longer — so each of our issues will feature a different set of rubrics, though always arranged in the same fixed order. We also plan a final print publication of *Himmel und Hölle*, which will bring together all thirty-one rubrics, accompanied by selected material from the nine PDF issues. It remains intriguing for all of us to see what this concluding assembly will ultimately look like. What is distinctive about our use of Propp's model in the periodical is that the main protagonist is not a single, specific figure, but the aggregator art scene as a whole. In this sense, the contextual rubrics function as various obstacles, factors, counter-heroes, villains, or general conditions that shape, confront, collaborate with, facilitate, or simply frame the protagonist's agenda across the nine issues. But I do remember that your first reaction to my suggestion of using Propp's model was a bit sceptical…

sz: Indeed, what puzzled me at first was that in Propp's nomenclature every function presupposes an actor — a living agent. There is always some kind of action, someone imbued with life, full of inner vitality. But what about non-living matter as a powerful force? In fairy tales, subject–object relations are often completely blurred, much like in dreams: you may hear a voice without knowing where it comes from or to whom it belongs. And, you know, even aggregator art objects — inanimate matter, after all — seem to demand a certain objectivity and agency. To my mind, then, on the pages of our periodical, Propp's nomenclature can be read not only through the lens of heroics but also through inanimate actors. This nomenclature can also be understood as a means of spatial unfolding or extension, rather than linear storytelling.
It resembles a spine or chord with segments that can fold in, unfold, or twist around themselves — in short, a structure that allows for syntactic play. In a similar spirit, we've avoided the conventional sequential numbering of issues and instead let their order be determined by the logic of the game.

ASh: Interestingly, until you sent me the link, I hadn't realised that there's another game — the origami fortune-teller *Himmel oder Hölle* — which shares a similar name with the street game. So, we use this fortune-teller game to determine the sequence of issues in our periodical: 1 3 5 9 2 6 7 4 8. This nonlinear, "jumping" order better reflects the logic of the street game itself.

sz: And again, both the street game *Himmel und Hölle* and a medieval basilica are spaces one moves through in different

ways. But *adivinador de papel* — I prefer the Spanish name for that fortune-teller game! — is already closer to the realm of impossible structures and geometries, since it is a dynamic, two-to-three-dimensional object in itself. So, in a way, we're extending our agenda into the world of non-living matter and impossible, non-linear forms.

ASh: Good. We're also interested in hearing what the artists whose works we feature in our pages think about their own practice and the cultural and social contexts that inform it. In particular, our questionnaire touches on the traditional division between applied and fine arts. Given your fluid artistic identity, I'm curious how you relate to this conventional art-historical dichotomy?

sz: At an early stage of my artistic formation, it was indeed important for me to distinguish and reflect on the semantics of a work — on the logic and properties underlying such categories, and on what makes a work gravitate toward the decorative. At that time, I understood this much like the distinctions between literary styles, methods, and types of texts. Now, however, I find myself inclined not to recognise design as design. Instead, I have adopted the method of *ostranenie* — the Russian term for defamiliarisation or estrangement — as [Viktor] Shklovsky understood it. For me, the applied art object is often an object of unknown nature and purpose, one that immediately provokes a series of questions. Take, for instance, the samovar: for Tolstoy, it was a banal, everyday object, but for a contemporary person, it appears as an astonishing structure. What is it?

One might guess, since it has the form of a vessel or a flask, but at the same time, it is a rather monstrous construction. Many objects from the applied world can be perceived in this puzzled way, especially when their function is hidden or obscured. And, you know, with such an attitude, ordinary things sometimes appear more sublime — purer art, even — than certain conceptual artworks that persistently and dogmatically insist on being perceived as such.

ASh: I wonder what prompted this shift in attitude?

sz: Various things. I remember that at some point I became fascinated by the well-known construct of writer–book–reader, and by the moments of acquiring and losing identity within it. How does a work emerge *for me*? And then comes that moment when I hand the work over to the viewer — at which point neither the work nor the viewer needs me any longer. [Daniil] Kharms' concept of the "right order of things" also comes to mind. For example, if you buy a vase, it will inevitably seem to require a nightstand, and then a lamp to illuminate it, and so on. Kharms says: no, that's not the right order of things. The right order would be something like this — if you have one iguana, you need, say, five more. There's a certain poetisation in that. Within functional relationships between things, there is less poetry — and, after all, it's all rather subjective. Who decided that a vase must be illuminated? Perhaps it's better to perceive it by touch. But when you have five iguanas, you simply have no questions left. There's a lot of absurdity in this concept, but also a great deal of wisdom.

Back when I was absorbed in these kinds of thoughts, our everyday material life was still not so far removed from the 1920s world of Kharms. Today, however, more and more people prefer to live in artificial, virtual spaces, where the need for a conventional order of things seems to fade away. There, a different kind of physics and navigation operates — dictated by a machine syntax that no longer obeys the logic of our old, Euclidean geometry. This virtual world is already a kind of atonal, completely non-linear structure. Perhaps this is the right order of things now. After experiencing the artificial world, one may begin to feel a sense of ostranenie toward our dense, material reality. Once you've inhabited the written code, you inevitably start to perceive the physical world differently — extrapolating the logic of machine language onto it. The ontology of the house, in which the fireplace carries only one specific meaning and the nightstand another fixed one, no longer exists in that strict sense. That's why, I think, strange, fabulous objects begin to enter our everyday life — objects that no longer obey the laws of physics or the logic of the household world.

Aleksandr Plusnin — Disaster

An archival case study

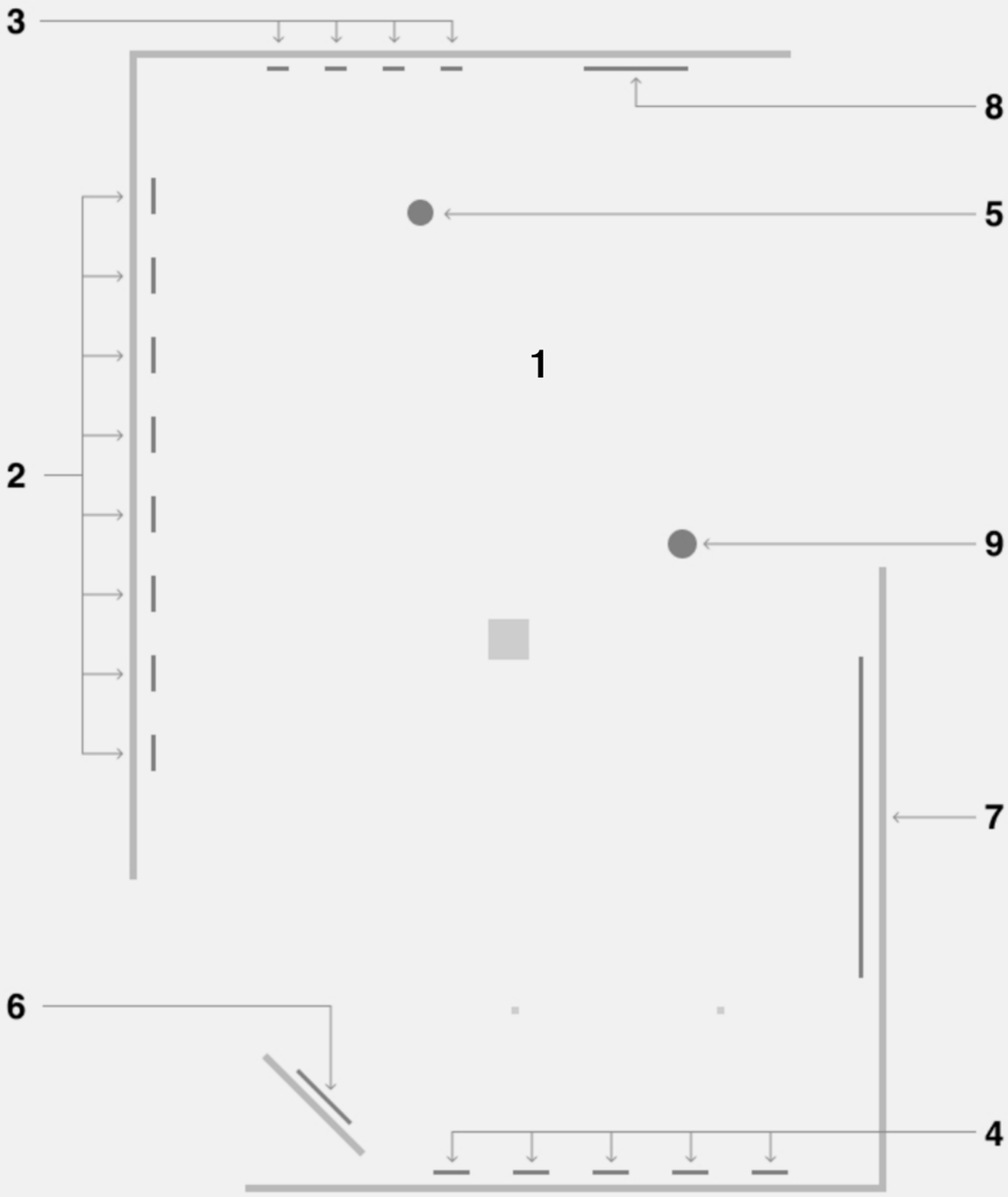
Popoffart Gallery, Moscow
14 September — 20 October 2016

Text: Andy Shab

Volcano Bezymianny (“Unnamed”). 2016.
Granite, engraving. 49.5 × 49.5 cm.
Photo: Alexander Minchenko.
© Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

Disaster: floor plan

1. Sound: *Vladimirsky Central* by Mikhail Krug. 1998. Eight-times extended temporal augmentation.
2. *Cyclones* series. 2016. Wood, graphite.
3. *Stars* series. 2016. Engraving.
4. *Volcanoes* series. 2016. Engraving.
5. *Exterminator*. 2015. Sculpture.
6. *Son of ceiling*. 2015. Sculpture.
7. *Predator*. 2018. Sculpture.
8. *Medusa*. 2016. Sculpture.
9. *Sphere*. 2016. Sculpture.



Himmel und Hölle

Disaster. Installation view. 2016. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

Disaster. Installation view. 2016. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

Himmel und Hölle

WEDDING

Aleksander Plusnin's first solo exhibition in an institutional setting, *Disaster*, bore a rather straightforward title with a double purpose. It was meant to be self-ironic — "You know, you feel that way when you're a young artist and it's your first solo show" — yet also ambitious in the scope of questions it sought to address. In the end, the exhibition proved a formative moment not only in Plusnin's artistic development but also for the emerging aggregator art scene in Russia. It was with this show that the project Tsvetnik (2016–2023) took off in late autumn 2016, soon establishing itself as an influential international aggregator platform. Last December, we met with the artist in Paris to retrace the story and to discuss the aesthetic and social factors that shaped its impact.

Disaster, curated and arranged by the artist himself, unfolded in a spacious white cube. The minimalist setting accommodated several series of graphic and sculptural works, evenly distributed and lit in an egalitarian manner, with generous space surrounding each group or object. Perhaps a little too precise and measured for a "disaster." Yet the latter, somehow, was already in the air. The colourless, humanless display was enveloped in a looped soundtrack — *Vladimirsky Tsentral* (1998) — which the artist had slowed down eightfold, beyond recognition. This chanson song remains widely associated with Russian prison culture and the criminal underworld, but, slowed down, "it sounds absolutely abstract, almost like dark ambient." Visitors continuously heard it, with no clue as to what the sound actually was.

Soundtrack for the exhibition *Disaster*, 2016.

“I wasn’t really part of any subculture, but I did pick up some of its aesthetics. That was just part of my youth — growing up in a Siberian industrial city in the ’90s. Outside, you’d constantly hear *Vladimirsky Tsentral*, while in my tape player there was black metal. I also played video games myself — and even worked for a while in the gaming industry. But that aesthetic never fully defined my practice.”

Medusa. 2016. Steel chain, plasticine. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

The display avoided any single centre, featuring only two sculptural objects visible from every vantage point: a metal pole, covered by the artist with grey plasticine and transformed into a kind of ritual object, and a dark, negative sphere made from a basketball turned inside out. Together, they seem to evoke an impossible standstill between human and natural forces — a tension that preoccupied all the other works displayed on the walls.

Sphere. 2016. Rubber (a basketball turned inside out). Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

All that denotes the human is ephemeral and site-specific. Thus, the two striking sculptural reliefs consist of chains affixed to the wall and fatefully covered with grey plasticine — the artist's signature material — making it impossible to move them without complete destruction. Bearing the traces of human touch, they evoke a black-metal aesthetic, a gothic mood, a horror flashback, and a kind of neo-tribal communication. Likewise, the third sculptural object — hanging from a wall-mounted pull-up bar — seems to have lost its functional innocence, eroded by unidentified natural forces embodied in plasticine.

Son of ceiling. 2016. Steel (ceiling pull-up bar), plasticine. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

And all that denotes nature is solid and serial. One of the graphic series depicts erupting volcanoes from around the world — including, for instance, one in Buryatia named after the famous Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin. “Did you know he was a geographer early in his life and explored the East Siberian Mountains?” The works are engraved on granite and draw directly on the artist’s five years of experience making memorial gravestones in a cemetery in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. “Back then, I made over a thousand portraits of the dead. It was my summer side job during art school.”

Volcano Kropotkin. 2016. Granite, engraving. 49.5 × 49.5 cm.
Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

Another series of eight graphite drawings on wooden panels may look like abstract, dynamic compositions — centrifugal and centripetal flows of some elusive energy. Yet the images carry a documentary dimension: they are based on actual NASA meteorological satellite photographs of hurricanes, such as the infamous Katrina, that have struck various parts of the world in recent years. This view from above on natural disaster was rendered in graphite on specially made wooden panels, traditionally used as supports for Orthodox icons.

“They made this specific square format for me. The panels were crafted from linden wood, chosen for its softness — almost like that of paper, unlike birch, which is much harder.”

The artist also envisioned the possibility of joining the eight hurricane panels into one large black square, somewhat reminiscent of a Chinese puzzle.

Typhoon Emily. 2016. Wood (icon board), graphite. 50 × 50 cm. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

The third series seems to bridge the natural and the human worlds. It consists of wood engravings featuring wind rose motifs — diagrams traditionally used by meteorologists to provide a concise overview of wind speed and direction at a given location.

S2. 2016. Wood (icon board), engraving, acrylic. 31 × 27 cm. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

Disaster. Installation view. 2016. Photo: Alexander Minchenko.
© Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

So, how would you contextualise this show in Moscow at that time?

“I remember that, at the time, we were quite frustrated that people generally didn’t care much about how contemporary art exhibitions were presented or documented. Things that now seem obvious — the importance of professional photography, making horizontal shots that work better on screens and for applications, proper lighting, thoughtful layout and design of promotional materials — all that was still very new in Moscow. It may sound naïve now, but we simply didn’t know how to do certain basic things. For instance, how to write a CV, that an artist could have a business card, a website,

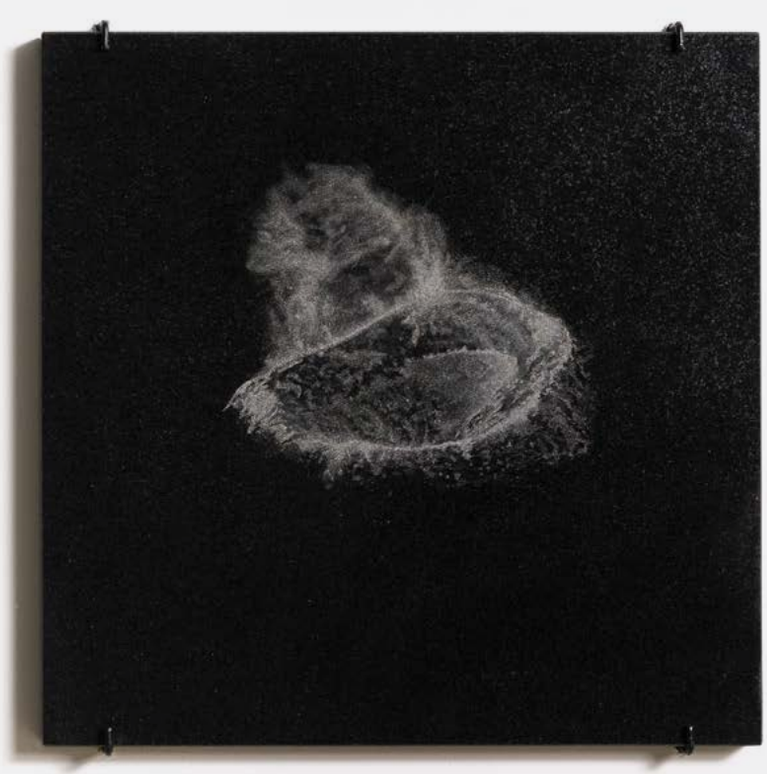
Volcano Etna. 2016. Granite, engraving. 49.5 × 49.5 cm. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

or an Instagram account — or that we should have one. We wanted to look different, to act more professionally. We knew how things appeared on platforms like OFluxo or KubaParis, and so presentation and documentation became our way of distancing ourselves from the old-school way of doing things. It was a generational shift. And, to be honest, documentation sometimes also helped artists elevate their exhibitions — to make them look cooler and more coherent than they actually were. It was also crucial because so many of the works were ephemeral. Exhibitions would disperse, pieces would be sold or lost, and the documentation was the only thing that remained."

Typhoon Andrew. 2016. Wood (icon board), graphite. 50 × 50 cm. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

Was Object-Oriented Ontology relevant to you at that moment?

“I was and still am open to discussing it, but I never tried to intentionally integrate such theory into my work or texts. In fact, we were tired of curatorial writing that quoted trendy French theorists — Deleuze, Lacan, and so on — on every possible occasion. So instead, we either skipped texts entirely, letting the works speak for themselves, or used dark poetry, fragments, or arty writing simply to set the mood. This approach later became quite typical for what we now call aggregator art.”



Volcano Akademiya Nauk (“Academy of Science”). 2016. Granite, engraving. 49.5 × 49.5 cm. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

But aesthetically speaking, what felt particularly new, fresh, or striking about your show — what made it feel like it contained the essential ingredients for launching an aggregator art platform?

"I was totally on the same wavelength with Vitaly and Natalya, who later went on to found Tsvetnik. I think one reason the show stood out was that it brought together several elements that later became characteristic of aggregator art. Of course, we didn't define it that way then, but intuitively we felt we were articulating a new language. The show was also Instagrammable, considering the predominance of square

Typhoon Aik. 2016. Wood (icon board), graphite. 50 × 50 cm. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery.

formats. Though, to be clear, I wasn't thinking about Instagram at all while creating the works — it was still a minor thing back then, but growing rapidly, along with accessible high-speed internet in public and private spaces. So it was really the coincidence of several factors: technological, aesthetic, and curatorial. We had sensed something, realised it, and began to move further in that direction. It worked quickly because the exhibition was clear, coherent, and minimalist — it focused all attention on the works themselves and their shared mood. In other words, it wasn't just about critique; it was about showing *how* things could be done — without a big budget, but with serious forethought."

Medusa. 2016. Steel chain, plasticine. Photo: Alexander Minchenko. © Image courtesy of the artist and gallery. Detail.

Memorial to the victims of the witch trials in Bernau

Photo: Andrei Slovolitov

Himmel und Hölle

Memorial, Bernau

In 2005 the artist and glass designer Annelie Grund initiated and created the first witch-trial memorial in Eastern Germany, installed beside Bernau's historic executioner's house. The sculpture consists of two rusted steel stelae, each bearing a fractured glass wing symbolising pain and vulnerability. It commemorates twenty-eight victims — twenty-five women and three men — accused of witchcraft and executed in Bernau between 1536 and 1658. Grund discovered their names and stories in the town chronicle. Historians believe that many more people in Bernau may have been denounced and executed as witches than the official records show. Local debate over the wording of the monument's inscription led to a simple final text: "Accused of witchcraft, tortured, killed." Supported by the municipality and private donors, the memorial was conceived not only as an act of historical remembrance but also as a warning against renewed intolerance and persecution of those who think or live differently.

(Based on an article by Katrin Bischoff, originally published in *Berliner Zeitung*, October 2005.)

Memorial, Bernau

VILLAINY / LACK

Himmel und Hölle

Memorial, Bernau


Mutter Westphal 1617
Gürgen Crone 1618
Emerentia Flöricke 1618
Orthie Meermann 1619
Dorothea Hellwieg 1620
Catherina Schultzen 1620
Dorothea Schlüens 1620
Balthasar Kluge 1620
Barbara Habedanck 1620
Margarete Dünnemund 1620
Margareta Wegener 1620
Albrecht Rolle 1620
Margarete Hentzen 1621
Anna Hentzen 1621
Anna Mund 1621
Elisabeth Mund 1621
Anna Stechow 1621
Catherina Sellcho 1621

Memorial, Bernau

Editor’s picks — Autumn ’25

LICHTAUS LICHTAN, Installation view, St. Matthäus-Kirche © Kristina Nagel, *Untitled*, 2024. (Altarbild) / © Lukas Heerich, *It was always you*, 2025 (Stiefel) / © Guan Xiao, *Which one is your sword?* No. 2, 2023 (Skulptur im Vordergrund). Photo: © Leo Seidel

St. Matthäus-Kirche
Kulturforum Berlin
Until 4 January 2026

Ju Young Kim, *Waterline under the water*, 2025. Flugzeugfenster und Bleiglasfenster, 210 × 60 × 55 cm. Leihgabe der Galerie max goelitz, Image Courtesy of the artist and max goelitz Gallery.

LICHTAUS LICHTAN

In **LICHTAUS LICHTAN** (Light Off Light On), the works of twelve contemporary artists are embedded within the architecture of St Matthäus-Kirche, entering into dialogue both with one another and with the church’s permanent artworks. The unifying thread is an exploration of transitional, liminal, and threshold states, with light functioning as a guiding metaphor for orientation and insight. Highlights include Kristina Nagel’s altarpiece, Lukas Heerich’s decontamination boots, Norbert Schwontkowski’s streetlamp reimagined in an interior setting, Ju Young Kim’s airplane–stained-glass window, and Leiko Ikemura’s external light-and-sound installation that lends the church a beating heart.

ALBERTINA Museum
Vienna
Until 11 January 2026

Vincent van Gogh. *Skull of a Skeleton with Burning Cigarette*, 1886. Oil on canvas. 32,3 × 24,8 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

GOTHIC MODERN: Munch, Beckmann, Kollwitz

Gothic Modern brings modernist works from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s into direct dialogue with medieval art, showing how artists of the period drew strength from the emotional intensity and expressive forms of the Gothic. Rather than framing modernism solely as a break with the academic tradition, the exhibition reveals how many artists turned to pre-academic models to explore themes of suffering, identity, and existential crisis. By juxtaposing modern paintings, prints, and sculptures with Old Master works, it highlights the central role that medieval imagery, techniques such as woodcut and stained glass, and the raw, inward gaze of Gothic expression played in shaping new artistic paths.

Julia Stoschek
Foundation Berlin
Until 3 May 2026

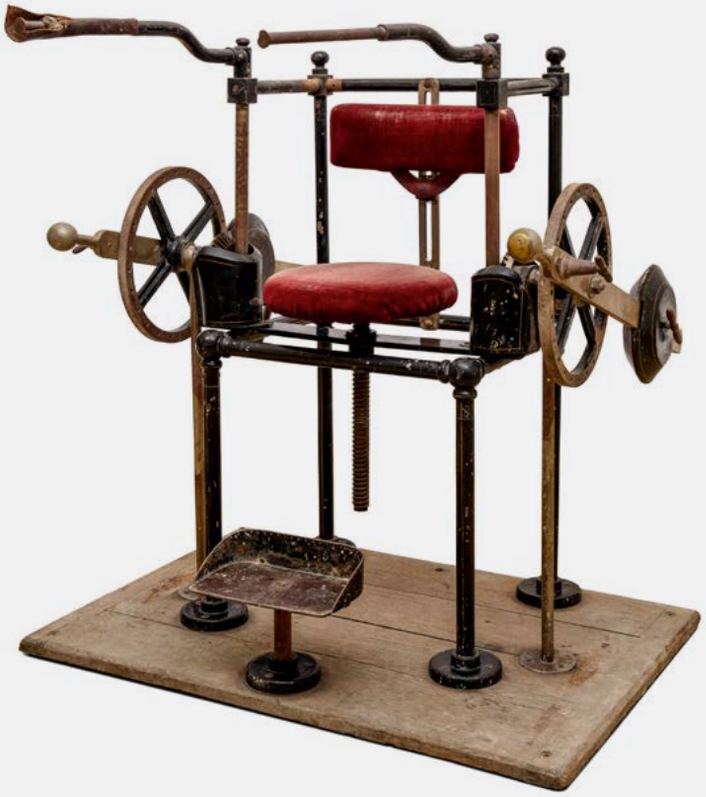
Mark Leckey. *Carry Me into The Wilderness (Icon)* 2022. Collage, gold leaf, acrylic on foamboard. 41 × 42 × 2 cm. Unique. Image Courtesy the Artist and Cabinet, London. Private Collection, Berlin

Installation view, MARK LECKEY: *Enter thru medieval wounds*, Julia Stoschek Foundation Berlin. Photo: Alwin Lay.

MARK LECKEY: Enter Thru Medieval Wounds

Enter Thru Medieval Wounds suggests a striking evolution in the practice of British artist Mark Leckey, mirroring the technological and social turbulence of the past two decades. Whereas his early, now-iconic video essays — most notably *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999) — were densely populated documentary portraits of rave and youth subcultures, his recent work turns toward abstract and largely deserted urban environments, perceived through a fluctuating lens of the digital and the physical. Combining video-game aesthetics with the solitude of a saint in an icon painting, *Carry Me into the Wilderness* (2022) may offer insight into this shift. It reflects the artist's renewed interest in medieval iconography and its theological implications, and marks a rediscovery of the outside world after the COVID-19 lockdown — an encounter he approached with recalibrated visual and social sensibilities.

Leopold Museum
Vienna
Until 18 January 2026



Zander’s Tool, c. 1895 © amicably provided by the Nemetz family & At the Park Hotel, Baden bei Wien. Photo: Thomas Magyar Fotodesign

Himmel und Hölle

HIDDEN MODERNISM

The Fascination with the Occult

Hidden Modernism revisits the lively networks of occult, theosophical, and life-reform movements that flourished in Vienna and Central Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. At that time, rapid industrialisation, advancing science, and a sense of spiritual exhaustion fostered a widespread interest in mysticism, Theosophy, bodily renewal, and utopian visions of a “new humanity,” while also giving rise to more ambivalent and darker strands. The exhibition situates these historical quests within a broader cultural framework, showing how their themes echo today — though contemporary fascinations with the esoteric are shaped less by industrial modernity than by ecological anxiety, apocalyptic moods, and a renewed search for meaning beyond materialist narratives.

Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin
Throughout the season.

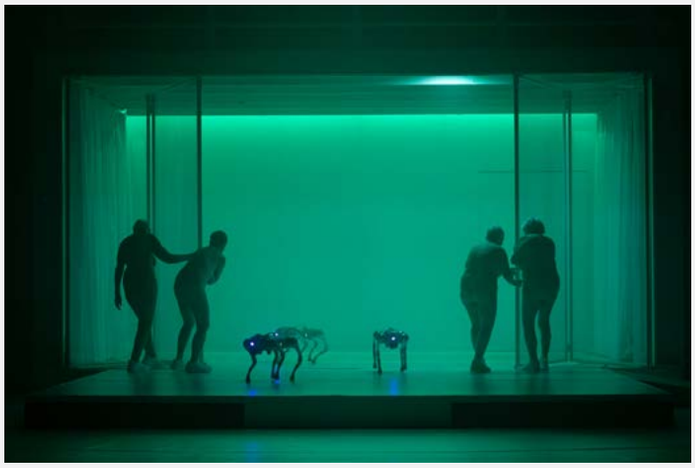
THE WORK by Susanne Kennedy and Markus Selg. Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin. Laurie Young, Damian Rebgetz, Suzan Boogaerdt, Bianca van der Schoot. Photo © Moritz Haase

THE WORK by Susanne Kennedy and Markus Selg. Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin. Suzan Boogaerdt, Bianca van der Schoot, Toni Maercklin, Adriano Henseler, Marie Rosa Tietjen, Laurie Young. Photo © Moritz Haase

THE WORK by Susanne Kennedy and Markus Selg

THE WORK is the latest theatre piece by Susanne Kennedy (direction) and Markus Selg (scenography). It functions first as a striking visual installation, oscillating between material and virtual worlds, but also as the setting for an immersive performance in which visitors move through the unfolding action directly on stage. The work turns the idea of a retrospective inward, treating the artist’s own life as something to be continuously “worked on.” At its centre is Xenia, an artist nearing death while preparing a casting session for one of her projects — a moment during which her life, her practice, and her sense of control begin to unravel. The production reflects on what it means to revisit one’s work while still living it, blurring the lines between biography, creation, and finality.

Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin
Throughout the season.



A Year without Summer. Florentina Holzinger. Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin. In the photo: Bärbel Warneke, Renée Eigendorff, Brigitte Ulm, Sue Shay. Photo © Mayra Wallraff

A Year without Summer. Florentina Holzinger. In the photo: Born in Flamez, otay onii, Sue Shay, Luz de Luna Duran. Foto © Mayra Wallraff

A YEAR WITHOUT SUMMER Florentina Holzinger

A Year Without Summer loops the present moment back to 1816 — the original “year without summer,” when the eruption of Mount Tambora plunged Europe into cold, ash, and unease. The production draws a pointed parallel to Mary Shelley’s storm-darkened months by Lake Geneva, where she conceived Frankenstein and the experiment that would spiral into ruin. Here, Florentina Holzinger and her ensemble probe contemporary obsessions with longevity, self-optimisation, health rituals, body modification, and the seductive promises of medical and technological enhancement. Artificial intelligence, robotics, and bioengineering coalesce into a modern myth: a world in which the urge to improve nature drives it to the edge of distortion.

Himmel und Hölle

Editor’s picks

Deutsches
SchauSpielHaus
Hamburg
Throughout the season.

Vampire’s Mountain, by Philippe Quesne,
Deutsches SchauSpielHaus Hamburg.
Martin Zamorano, Samuel Weiss,
Sachiko Hara, Sasha Rau.
Photo © Martin Argyroglo

VAMPIRE’S MOUNTAIN Philippe Quesne

What will vampires do in the post-Anthropocene? They will migrate from the forests to the mountains. There, they will immediately notice that the jagged peaks resemble their own fangs. They will read the classics — especially those that concern their kind. They will play snowball fights with mixtures of snow and sand. They will parody expressionist vampire films. From time to time, they will stumble upon human remains, toy with the bones, and try on the humans’ strangely charming clothing. They will hum arias from Purcell’s operas, struggling to recall the words. They will frighten one another, playfully. In short, they will idle. Blood will be scarce, reserved only for medicinal use. And even for them, the last night is already rising just beyond the mountains.

In conversation with Pavel Polshchikov

Paris, various locations,
December 2024

Tiflis, at sarazinzambinella’s house,
August 2025

Text: Andy Shab

Andy Shab: I was keen to invite you to serve as an advisor to the editorial team of *Himmel und Hölle* for several reasons. One is generational: in my curatorial projects, I make a point of engaging professionals from younger generations. This strategy allows both the project and its participants to escape a generational ghetto — conceptually as well as aesthetically. Another, perhaps more obvious, reason is that you are closely associated with the aggregator art scene. An additional advantage is that you entered contemporary art with an academic background and habits, including the ability to maintain a critical distance from your own practice. I'm aware that you prefer the term "art of platform." Nevertheless, this periodical uses the more common and handy term "aggregator art." So perhaps we can begin with a straightforward question: how and at what point did you become involved in it?

Pavel Polshchikov: For me, there were essentially three shows that drew me into this new aesthetic and receptive experience, becoming highly formative — first as a viewer and later as an artist. One of them was *Better Don't Touch It* (ISSMAG Gallery, Moscow, 2019), curated by the Krasnodar-based *Plague curatorial group*, which I still regard as the best in the field. An assortment of elements and fragments — hairs, chains, tentacles, a dark space lit only by red and blue lamps — created the atmosphere of a stereotypical horror-film car crash: night, rain, wet asphalt, a deserted road, a murder. At some point I realised that I understood the work without reading any accompanying text — indeed, there was none — and that this immediate experience had a far greater potential

and a higher degree of aesthetic autonomy, leaving a lasting impact on me.

Another mind-blowing experience was Vitaly Bezpalov's *Salt Seller* (2019). It was hosted and curated by Ilya Smirnov at his short-lived but momentous art space, Money Gallery. Again no accompanying texts. The exhibition shifted between different realities and media: from a tiny storeroom with blood-stained tiles and a wooden totem sculpture, it extended into the outside world with a Salt Seller–doorman, a Mercedes showing a video piece, the full moon, and the cold November streets of Moscow. Bezpalov's works are, in one way or another, all concerned with trauma and violence in Russia, which persist and manifest themselves in diverse forms and materials.

And finally, the group show *lump* (FSS, Moscow, 2019), which I only saw online. It marked a significant concentration and manifestation of early aggregator art aesthetics in the Russian context. At that time, the movement often drew on the visual codes of young subcultures, pulling them into the field of contemporary art: chains, metal structures, rucksacks, tentacles, tribal references, and the like. And all this took place in a novel setting: the works avoided the walls and hung suspended in the air, reinforcing the sense of strangeness and uncertainty. The Plague group was also largely behind the exhibition. It looks straightforward now and, perhaps, too homogeneous; it would not be as absorbing for me today as it was back then. The presence of such elements is now steadily declining on the platforms. But this is how it started: it was

fresh, explosive, and heavily criticised by the art tusovka.

ASh: So, autumn 2019 was when it all began for you. You got to know the key figures of the new trend quite quickly — and all this happened just on the eve of the COVID pandemic.

PP: The pandemic, in fact, marked the point when I turned from viewer into producer. In the winter of 2020, KubaParis began publishing home-based art projects. I decided to give it a try. Three days after submitting, I received notice that my project *No Place to Hide from Sacred Danger* had been accepted and published on their platform. From then on, things moved very quickly. By 2021, together with fellow artists and friends Slava Nesterov, Misha Goodwin, and others, we were confident enough to run our own artist-run space, IP Vinogradov: when you control the exhibition space, you also control the discourse. Once established, the core of IP Vinogradov included Misha Goodwin, Sasha Lemish, Natasha Perova, Kirill Mikhailin, Anton Kushaev, Slava Nesterov, and myself. By the time IP Vinogradov dissolved, due to our migration, it was already a recognisable brand.

ASh: It is noteworthy that you chose to create a physical artist-run space rather than, say, a platform, as a way of controlling discourse. What was the immediate context, the scene you and your fellow artists were either engaging with or pushing against, when you developed your aesthetic positions and exhibiting strategies?

PP: Interestingly, the leaders of Moscow Conceptualism — from Kabakov to Collective Actions (Monastyrsky and colleagues) — continued to dominate the scene even into the early 2020s, albeit more as a vintage reference point. Even major contemporary art schools such as Bakstein's ICA, BAZA, and the Rodchenko School seemed to support this paradigm. They are canonical, and indeed significant, figures. However, I don't believe this art can still serve as a source of inspiration in the twenty-first century. So the more immediate point of irritation shifted to their distant followers — a generation of artists from the first half of the 2010s, labelled "The New Boring" (Novie Skuchnie), whose non-spectacular art relied heavily on research-based practices and can largely be described in terms of post-conceptual art. Arseniy Zhilyaev is a well-known example.

As for my own position, the more I became engaged with contemporary art, the more I realised that I was drawn to what is extralinguistic — not something conveyed by retelling. The core idea of a work should not be explained or exhausted through commentary. There is something objective and immediate in the work itself that changes your perception of the world and reassembles a situation. The work, I believe, is more objective than the historical context around it. It's hard to pin down, but I think an art object should work right here and now, with a vibe of immediacy. Hence I gravitated towards art that placed its emphasis on formal and material qualities — on how it functions visually and plastically — rather than on the research behind it. Art should be understood without crutches. Of course, some need and use them, but I did not

want to make art that relies by default on such crutches, such as research-based art. To me, there is little point in producing an object when you might just as well write an article instead.

ASh: I'd perhaps add here the not-so-rare phenomenon of the accompanying curatorial text that reads like a horoscope — completely abstract, non-binding, generic, interchangeable, and so vague that it loses meaning yet still manages to sound profound and relevant.

PP: Good point. On the other hand, I also see this deliberate reduction of text as both a risk and a potential weak spot. The absence of text can sometimes imply a lack of forethought — a missing reflection on what one is doing, and why. I can easily imagine many developments within this art drifting toward the opposite end of the spectrum: a decadent, world-weary, and pessimistic tendency that denies everything that came before, lacking both intellectual ambition and creative vision.

ASh: Returning to your criticism, I actually know quite a few remarkable artworks that rely on research-based practices. But I wonder how you see the relation of aggregator art to post-internet art, which is certainly closer to it in terms of media and general vibe, yet often depends on research-based methods. Take, for instance, Hito Steyerl.

PP: Post-internet art certainly has significance for aggregator art. You might even say that aggregator art is post-post-internet art. We are all familiar with the practices of its major figures — Timur Si-Qin, Hito Steyerl, and Jon Rafman, among

others. It's also worth remembering that the earliest platforms — such as Ofluxo, KubaParis, and AQNB — featured publications of post-internet art. Yet there is a general sense that the movement has passed its heyday, with the 2016 Berlin Biennale marking its peak. In any case, I believe aggregator art is more dystopian. Metaphorically speaking, if post-internet sculptures and objects happily coexisted in a new universe, aggregator art is that same universe after a nuclear apocalypse. In post-internet art there was an idealistic enjoyment of technology: 3D printers, wide digital screens, slick plastic printing technologies. Aggregator art, by contrast, signals that everything is bad and dark. It is more pessimistic, more angry in its vision and approach. It's about disappointment in modern times, in the world. It is art that, without words, implies on both a formal and material level that it was created in a dark age. That has long been my sense of this art — and one of the key reasons I find your project so appealing and resonant.

ASh: To oversimplify, one might also say that their aesthetic operations move in opposite directions. Post-internet art often seeks to draw material from the virtual, digital world into the real one — doing so in an explicit and reflexive manner — whereas aggregator art tends to work the other way round: exhibitions are first created in physical space and only after appear on online aggregator platforms. In this sense, one key aspect of aggregator art's originality lies in how it relates to space, especially the white cube.

PP: I believe that post-conceptual, post-internet, and “biennial” types of art generally approach the white cube as an ideal, abstract, purified laboratory — a perfect space for displaying lab-based experiments to be perceived without disruption. Aggregator art, by contrast, approaches the white cube as a material object consisting of four walls. Works in such exhibitions often engage with the non-ideal aspects of the space — its shortcomings, unevenness, holes, peculiarities. One might, for instance, place something behind a plinth, in a hole, or on a sill, to animate or enter into formal dialogue with a feature of the space. At this point the modernist white cube falters; it fails to remain ideal. Aggregator art responds: this is not an ideal space but a real one, with its physical dimensions, peculiarities, and inaccuracies. It is never neutral. And of course, the displayed works of art do not exist autonomously but within a landscape of other works. The boundaries between space and work are spectral. In short, you can only put aggregator art on a wall if you remain conscious of that wall’s specificity. Of course, we’re speaking of an ideal situation; in practice, things are rarely that strict, though the overall pattern does tend to hold.

ASh: In line with this logic, a not uncommon strategy in aggregator art exhibitions is to consume and completely subjugate the white cube space by various means — the colour of the walls, lighting, and the like. Jack Evans’s *Fear of the Dark* (Soup gallery, London, 2023) comes to mind as an apt example.

Jack Evans, Installation view of *Fear of the Dark*, Soup gallery, London, 2023. Image courtesy Jack Evans & Soup Gallery, London. Photo: Peter Otto.

Jack Evans, Installation view of *Fear of the Dark,*
Soup gallery, London, 2023.
Image courtesy Jack Evans & Soup Gallery, London.
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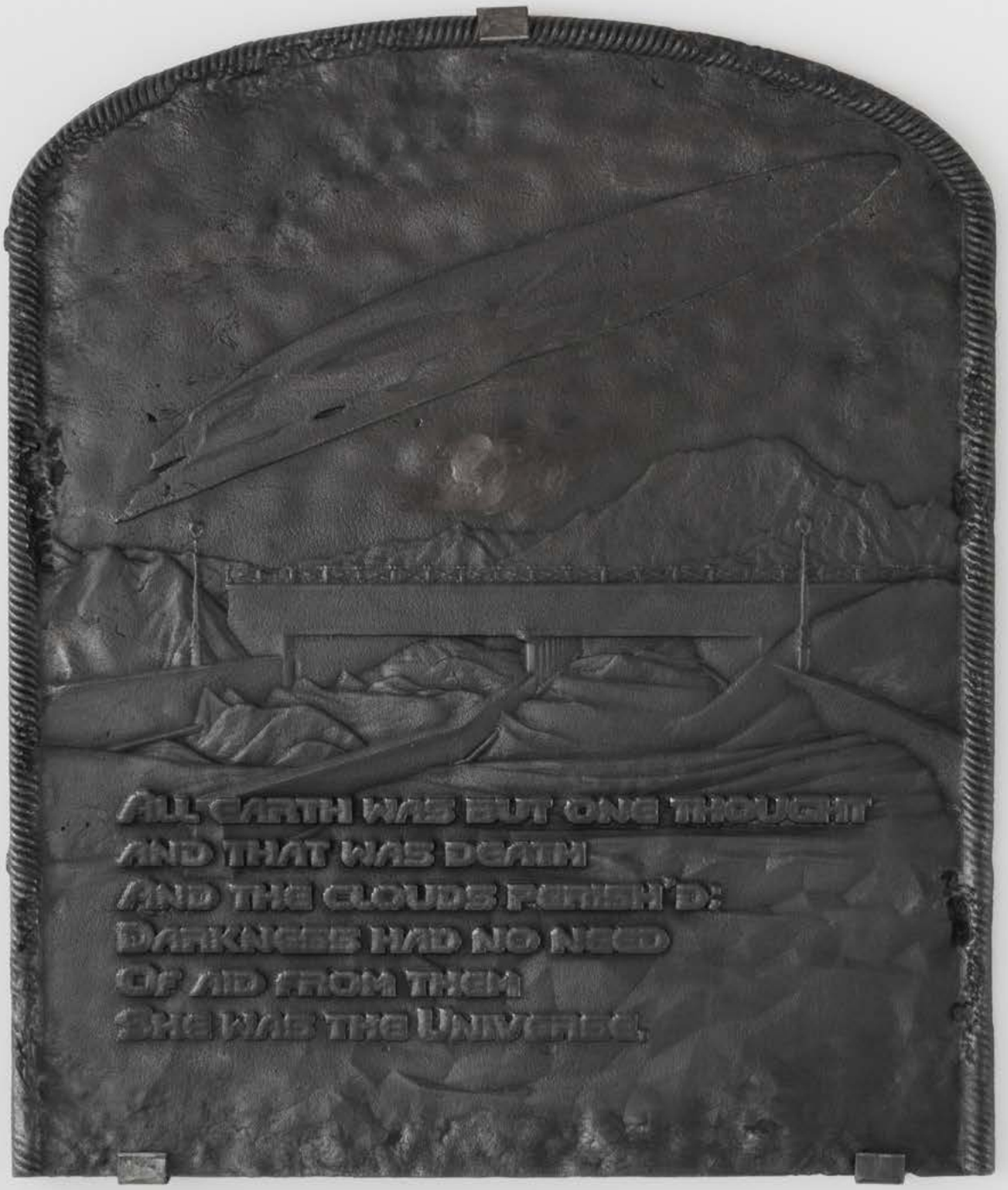


Himmel und Hölle

PP: It is indeed. Other good cases can be the shows *Philosofas – Quo Vadis Bae?* (2020) by the art group Kotz, 04.) *I'm Not A Girl, Not Yet A Woman* (2024) by Athen Kardashian & Nina Mhach Durban, or the very recent project *Alpine XP* (2025) by Theo Ellison and Tarzan King. To this we should add off-site shows, which are equally common and popular among aggregator artists. In contemporary art, exhibiting beyond the gallery is nothing unusual; yet aggregator art is particularly tied to rethinking what an exhibition space can be, deliberately loosening this notion in favour of new artistic dimensions. These may include forests, a cat's house, a mobile phone screen, catacombs, churches, abandoned houses, resorts, or even illegal locations. For instance, the artist Tobi Keck, featured in this issue, curated the group show *Big Fundus* (2021), which has become a canonical example of the off-site. I am also fond of *Psyopd* (2021), a one-day show by Perce Jerrom presented as part of the project Scatological Rites of All Nations.

ASh: This radical questioning and erosion of the conventional, neutral exhibition space is, to me, quite symptomatic in light of an art-historical fact: it was precisely the invention of the secular public art exhibition that greatly facilitated the major division between the applied and fine arts in eighteenth-century Europe. But does aggregator art exist beyond the exhibition? One striking and genuinely novel feature of aggregator platforms is that they only publish documentation of exhibitions — that is, art in specific settings and relations. It is never about single, autonomous works.

PP: Moreover, the importance of intermediality — the relationship between artworks and space — becomes even more pronounced and clearly articulated in the photographic documentation of exhibitions. Such documentation should convey a peculiar sense of the space through its constituent elements. Photographs are edited in Photoshop in a specific way to achieve the desired effect. Almost half of the images typically show details of individual works or fragments of the display, emphasising its fictional scenography and the way the elements connect — including through texture — simply by being there. Paradoxically, the exhibition in real life may turn out to be less engaging, coherent, or appealing than its online documentation. I have personally encountered this several times, and I see it as a problem — a shortcoming of the platforms. Yet, the online documentation and presence remain central to this kind of art.

ASh: It is interesting that you place such ultimate emphasis on the novel way this art is represented on online platforms, rather than on the character of the new aesthetic itself. My own curatorial, as well as art-historical, interest lies in what I perceive as its novel morphology. To be sure, I first encountered this aesthetic through online platforms such as Tzvetnik, O FLUXO or KubaParis. Yet not everything they post strikes me as innovative or as what I would consider aggregator art in the narrow sense of the term. Still, these platforms have become the sites of the highest concentration of mature works that demonstrate this original morphology — a kind of neo-medieval amalgamation of “applied” and “fine” art properties within a single work. If we think large-scale,

I actually have in mind a variety of artists and works — such as *FAKE ESTATE* (2022) by Anna Uddenberg, *Metempsychosis: The Passion of Pneumatics* (2024) by Ivana Bašić, *Aeroplastics* (2024) by Ju Young Kim, as well as the practices of Jürgen Baumann or Nina Hartmann — and, in fact, some of your own installations, among many others. And then does an art piece have to be published on an online platform to be fully qualified as aggregator art? Perhaps that is something worth exploring here: to what extent this novel morphology has been shaped by the online platforms themselves, alongside other factors.

PP: Surely, one of the most distinctive aspects of aggregator art is its understanding and effective use of contemporary media and social networks for self-promotion. Aggregator art is about photographing — because our reality itself is about photographing. I'm not saying this is the highest form of aesthetic production; it is simply one form of it. But, to my mind, this art at least reflects its position within the media reality of today's world. It understands how contemporary media works, and this reflection operates not at the level of declarations or texts, but at the level of form — at the level of how media themselves function. To my mind, biennial, research-based, and post-conceptual art reflect everything except reality. For me, to favour greater aesthetic autonomy is to be more realistic, to better reflect the zeitgeist — reality with all its contradictions and possibilities. The process of photographing, for instance, a hook covered in mucus or paraffin in one's garage and posting it on a platform reflects today's reality far more truthfully. It is more honest — and it is accessible to everyone.

ASh: What also seems to come with this is a liberating — democratic and egalitarian — drive, institutionally speaking.

PP: Exactly so. Some people experience this art live, in physical space, but the majority encounter it online — on a platform. This is quite specific to this kind of art practice. Thanks to social media — Instagram above all — young artists no longer need to belong to a gallery to reach their audience. One doesn't need a physical institution; one can simply simulate a space. The whole point of online platforms is to show that the existing infrastructure and hierarchies no longer work. The process becomes more horizontal, less mediated by traditional experts and gatekeepers. Artists can make statements and take positions independently, beyond institutional frameworks. Thanks to the Internet, online platforms, and especially their Instagram accounts, you can reach far more people than with a show in a conventional gallery — even when producing work in a garage or cellar. What's more, you become more immediately integrated into an international context. That was the case with IP Vinogradov: very quickly, around forty per cent of our audience was outside Russia. And it works the other way round too — as an artist or group, you can easily join international platforms simply because, in the end, everything is published online.

ASh: How far would you say this is an anti-market art movement? I ask because of the often experimental and ephemeral character of aggregator objects — works created only to be documented and published on online platforms.

Anna Uddenberg, Installation view of *FAKE ESTATE*, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, 2022. Photo: Thyago Sainte.

PP: There is definitely an anti-institutional fervour, but no one would actually mind selling their art. Thanks to social networks, aggregator art is a genuinely egalitarian movement — but hardly an anti-capitalist one. However, a real problem with selling is that, in aggregator art, it is often unclear where the artwork actually ends. Ideally, none of the objects within an exhibition is autonomous: they only exist in connection with the surrounding space and with each other, together creating a strange receptive situation. You could, of course, sell a single object, but you could hardly sell that unique perceptual experience.

ASh: What is the relationship between aggregator art and perhaps the most autonomous genre of all — painting — which is a space of its own? Is the medium of painting alien to this trend?

PP: It's true that painting isn't very common in this context, but it's certainly not alien either. Apart from their often liminal subjects, the painters who show their work within aggregator art frequently create strange, elaborate frames. A painting then becomes a material, three-dimensional, sculptural object with its own spatial characteristics. It often engages physically and sculpturally with the floor, walls, and ceiling — at once careless and analytical. Besides, as you said, there are indeed many artists — painters included — who share or reflect the sensibility of aggregator art while not being methodologically part of the movement.

ASh: Aggregator art is often tied to new philosophical trends such as Speculative Realism (SR) and to its subset, Object-

Ivana Basic, Installation view of *Metempsychosis: The Passion of Pneumatics*, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, 2024. Photo: Stefan Korte.

Himmel und Hölle

Oriented Ontology (OOO). From the inside, as an artist, how relevant are these theories to you?

PP: I think I know how to answer that question. In Russia, there really was a craze for these texts among those who made aggregator art and wrote about it. Eugene Thacker's *Horror of Philosophy* series (2011–15), Ben Woodard's *Slime Dynamics* (2012), Graham Harman's *Object-Oriented Ontology* (2017), and others — all circulated widely. But I think that strong connection is particularly a Russian phenomenon. Many of these texts started to appear in translation in the mid-2010s — just as the trend itself was beginning to emerge there. The dystopian, apocalyptic atmosphere of these writings indeed resonated indeed far more with our art than, say, the texts of Benjamin Buchloh and other established academic authors. I also think Harman's thought and aggregator art share a common opposition to language and narrative as universal explanatory tools. I've read most of the major texts — but that's just an academic habit of mine, coming from my education. Many of my colleagues absorbed these ideas intuitively; they were in the air — fresh, handy, and relevant enough to describe what we were doing. Still, Speculative Realism and OOO don't cover the full diversity of the movement. For some artists, Cyberfeminism provides a much more significant framework. And, tellingly, there has never been a single manifesto that sets out the principles of aggregator art.

ASh: At the same time, I have a strong sense that aggregator art has reached a convincing critical mass — in terms of both

the diversity of its forms and practices and the growing number of platforms that promote it. This development may also suggest that the trend has reached its peak and may gradually decline as it becomes increasingly mainstream. This very understanding prompted me to conceive this research-like curatorial periodical, which aims to identify representative, mature examples and to reflect on their aesthetic commonalities, original morphology, genealogy, and connections to the wider world. You have already outlined some key aspects of your aesthetic position, but I wonder if there is anything you would like to add?

PP: Aggregator art places its entire emphasis on the visual side of the artwork — its material reality and its direct, sincere perception. It's all about the immediate physical impact of the object, even when it exists only as documentation. In short, it is an object-oriented art. The key thing is that it should be strange — a little liminal. The full picture should never be complete. What unites these works is the technique of showing, the focus on form, on how it looks. This is not narrative art; it doesn't tell stories. It often carries a trace of emotion, desire, or attraction. It affects you. The art object must be strange — slightly frightening and alluring at the same time — bearing the imprint of its time, and therefore appearing to have a certain significance. It flickers between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible.

ASh: Or, perhaps, morphologically speaking, one might say that it flickers between "applied" (familiar, functional, everyday) and "fine" (conceptual, abstract, even hermetic

in its inaccessibility) art properties within a single work or installation — to such an extent that neither category fully exhausts nor defines the perception of the work as a whole. This enclosed, recursive structure — in which applied and fine art properties continuously loop, or fold back, into one another — may, in fact, be one of the reasons why such art proves so resistant to textualisation, to verbal explanation.

PP: Well, that's your take on aggregator art. I see you have a somewhat narrower and more specific kind of art in mind than I do. But that's precisely what would be interesting to clarify here, on the pages of this periodical.

ASh: We are concluding our wandering through the Paris art scene at DS Galerie, with the exhibition *Chambre d'échos, Chapter I* (27 November – 21 December 2024). The main point of interest here is the work of the art duo Youri Johnson. I find it resonant — and, in a way, expanding the notion — because his small-scale objects amalgamate many of the ideas and formal elements more commonly found in large-scale aggregator art works.

PP: They have actually been well known in our circles for quite some time. For instance, they were among the earliest — if not the very first — to use a soldering iron in their art practice, which spans sculpture and objects. They discovered this tool for art and revealed its potential; today quite a few artists are using it. You can also see here cards from the tabletop game *Magic: The Gathering* (1993). Once again, a narrow slice of popular culture — this strange fantasy card game, played a lot in my childhood — has been drawn into

contemporary art practice. Youri Johnson have often incorporated such found objects with a dark energy and vintage aura, treating them seriously rather than as a postmodernist joke. These pebbles, shards of glass, chains, pendants, spikes, pieces of old wood, thorned flowers, soldered metallic fragments — though in miniature — all resonate strongly with the aggregator art aesthetic.

ASh: The hand-made, craft-like character of their works, with their strange folk, esoteric, and occult aura, also invites speculation about the shared neo-medieval sensibility of aggregator art. And I do not mean only those cases in which this sensibility is expressed explicitly, as is particularly evident in the practice of the French art duo Xolo Cuintle. Why do you think it so often has that feel?

PP: That's a good question, because I've never really thought about it in that way. For me, it was always a kind of self-evident world I lived in. As I said, perhaps it comes from the general dystopian nature of today's times, a pervasive sense of anxiety. I suppose, like any art, aggregator art seeks out similar forms in the past, with comparable characteristics and atmospheres, thereby tracing its creative genealogy and legitimacy. And it does so in an effort to represent contemporary qualities of time more effectively than the dominant cleaned-out, emasculated, laboratory aesthetic, with its rational, balanced, and conceptual pretensions. Aggregator art often draws emancipatory potential from marginal, aesthetically narrow, and youth subcultures. For instance, if we're talking about tabletop games, another influential example with a distinct

neo-medieval aura is *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974). It had an enormous influence on the video game industry and even inspired a specific music genre to accompany the game. This was hugely significant for teenagers of the 1990s, myself included. So these kinds of sources bring their own autonomous visual language, rooted more in popular than high culture. What unites us, though, is the commitment to strangeness — to art that has an immediate, objective effect here and now, without intermediaries such as explanatory texts. To be sure, the apparent neo-medieval vibe is not a shared source for all of us, nor does it mean that any of us are necessarily fans of the actual Middle Ages. Not at all. Strictly speaking, it is not the historical Middle Ages, but rather our contemporary fantasy of it — filtered through sci-fi, esotericism, industrial and post-industrial music, games, kabbalah, and similarly semi-dark practices, including marginal modernisms like Hilma af Klint (1862–1944). It is a wholly imaginary universe, at once a form of escapism and an artistic strategy for increasingly dark times.

Xolo Cuintle, *Twelve Petal Flower & Shell to the Twelve Petal Flower*. 2022. Power Outlet Series, earthenware, (2x) H 8 × L 8 × P 1,5 cm. Photo: Grégory Copitet.

Xolo Cuintle, exhibition view of *Current Upcoming Past*, Galerie Chloe Salgado, 2022. Photo: Grégory Copitet.

Xolo Cuintle, *Post Gebrüder Thonet N°7028*. 2021. Wood, concrete, metal, 214 × 162 × 15.5 cm. Photo: Valentim Vie Binet.

Xolo Cuintle, exhibition view of
Chloroplast Machinery, CAP Saint Fons,
2025. Photo: Valentin Vie Binet.

Himmel und Hölle

Xolo Cuintle, *Six Feet Under,* 2024. Aluminium, wood, stoneware, copper, concrete, H 137 × L 90 × P 40 cm. Photo: Valentin Vie Binet.

Xolo Cuintle, exhibition view of *Fondale*, curated by Caterina Taurelli Salimbeni at L'Air Arts, Paris, 2023. Photo: Valentin Vie Binet.

Riddle

A visual puzzle by srazinzambinella

Which Big Pharma product is hidden here?

(See the answer on the next page.)

Himmel und Hölle

Answer:

$C_{13}H_{18}O_2$

The transformation of the Ibuprofen chemical formula ($C_{13}H_{18}O_2$) into an elaborate, symbolic tableau offers a concentrated cultural critique of modern pharmacology. The image functions as a diagram in which molecular components represent market forces and human conditions.

The choice of the pink background — mimicking a sweetened children's suspension — serves as a palatable veil, smoothing over the immense industrial complexity and gravity of the pharmaceutical process and framing chemical power within the deceptive simplicity of consumable ease.

At the structure's centre lies the hydrogen-based 'Fantasmagorial Head' (H_{18}). This figure is the patient, the universal body of suffering. The incorporation of the 'eternity' symbol (8) suggests that the need for pharmacological intervention is viewed not as a temporary condition but as a persistent, monetisable fixture of the human experience.

The act of consumption is mediated by the carbon 'Eye' (C_{13}). This ocular component represents the twin forces of conscious suffering and commercial scrutiny. The 13-shaped tear highlights the emotional and financial burden of pain, suggesting that the industry's gaze is fixed less on the molecule itself and more on the profitable market for its relief.

Finally, the oxygen ‘Owls’ (O_2) stand as watchful guardians. These figures symbolise the forces of centralised control — whether regulatory bodies or corporate patent holders — that sequester the proprietary knowledge of the formula. They confirm that the path to wellness is managed, restricted, and overseen, placing limits on the accessibility and distribution of chemically derived relief.

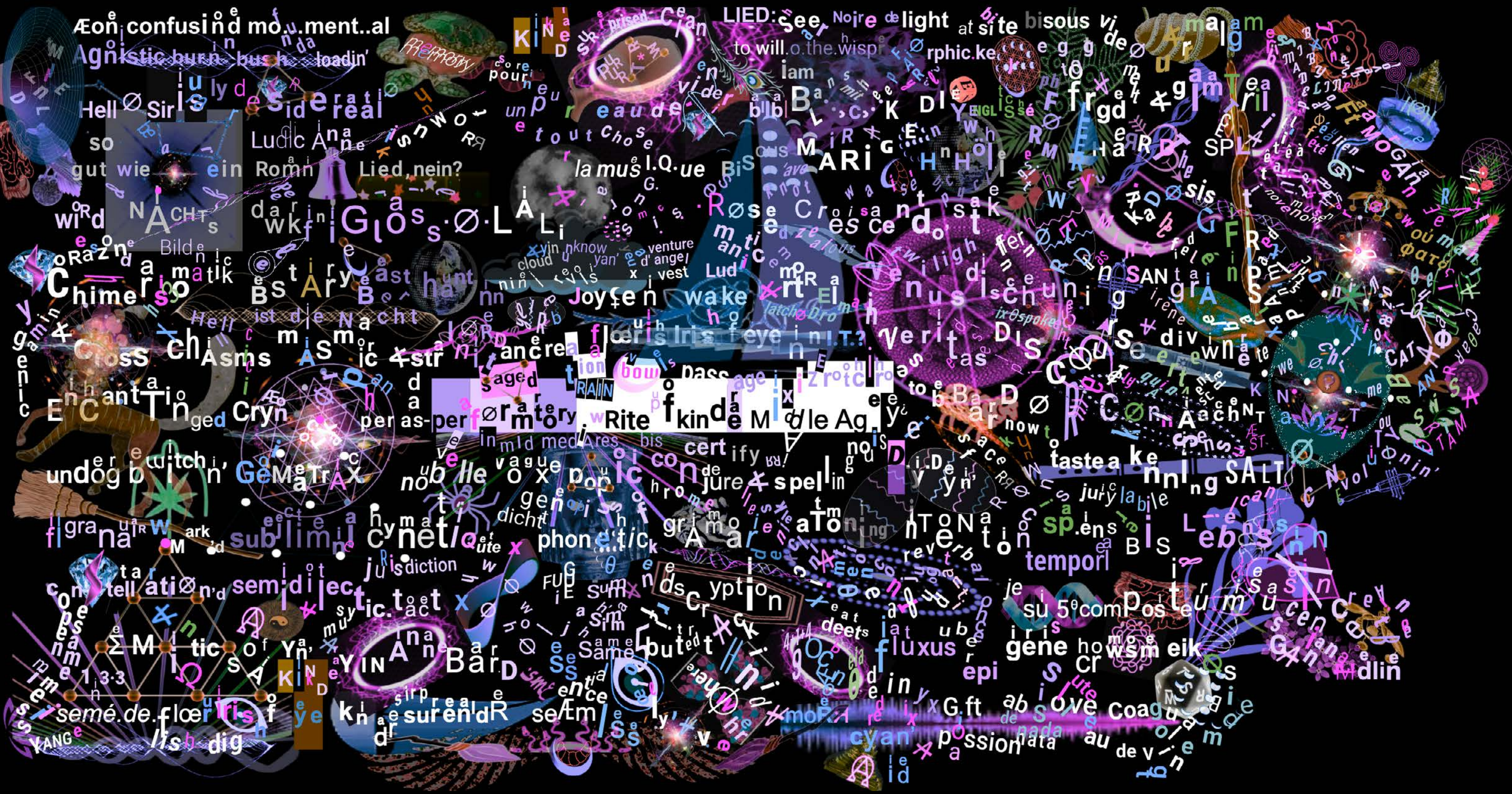
The resulting composition is a concise allegory for the managed human condition: the market sweetens the delivery of pain relief, but the formula itself is guarded by those who watch, monetise, and control.

SZ

Ibuprofen is a widely used non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) known for its combined analgesic, antipyretic, and anti-inflammatory effects. It became firmly established on the global market in the 1990s, when it entered international circulation on a large scale and rapidly became one of the world’s most commonly used over-the-counter pain medications. Today, it is taken to relieve headaches, muscle and joint pain, fever, and a wide range of inflammatory conditions, and is valued for its generally favourable safety profile at standard dosages. However, prolonged or excessive use can irritate the stomach lining, impair kidney function, or increase cardiovascular risks, particularly in vulnerable individuals.

GlossØLÀlia

The artist-linguist thus·sang·kukushka visualises the concept of Night through different languages.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Artist Greht's sustainable wardrobe

Images courtesy of the project Shok and the artist.

Many thanks to the Shok project,
and to Kseniya personally.

Greht, seasons ’20–’23

Stickers for the Telegram messenger. 2018, 2020. Gel pen, watercolour. Images courtesy of the artist.

So far, the artist Greht is known primarily for graphic works and sculptural objects made from recyclable, natural materials. He created these clothes and wardrobe pieces over the 2020–23 seasons. Working exclusively with natural fabrics, some items are entirely sewn by the artist, others are extensively reworked (combining two or three existing garments), and a few are simply hand-dyed. In the artist's words: "The visions of these things surfaced over time, like seeds swept by the wind and finding a way to grow in stone." The clothes were available for a time through a collaboration with the independent clothing shop Shok, founded in 2020 by Kseniya Matskevich and Elizaveta Vitkovskaya, but otherwise remain largely unknown to the wider public.

Greht, seasons '20–'23

Hood–chaperon.
Cotton.
Sewn by the artist.
Front and right
views

Belt bag. Leather. Sewn by the artist. Front and back views.

Skirt. Cotton.
Sewn by the artist.

Top. Cotton.
Reworked
by the artist.

Himmel und Hölle

Tank-top dress.
Cotton.
Sewn and hand-dyed
by the artist.

Shirt. Cotton.
Reworked by
the artist.

Trousers. Cotton.
Reworked by
the artist.

Trousers. Cotton. Reworked by the artist. Front and back views.

Trousers. Cotton.
Reworked by
the artist. Detail.

Himmel und Hölle

Trousers. Cotton.
Reworked and
hand-dyed by
the artist.

Dress. Cotton.
Sewn by the artist.

Dress. Corduroy
cotton. Reworked
by the artist.

Hood–chaperon. Wool felt. Sewn by the artist. Right and left views.

Wooden vase.

T-shirt. Cotton.
Sewn by the artist.

Top. Cotton.
Reworked by
the artist.

Top. Cotton.
Reworked by
the artist. Front
view.

Skirt. Cotton.
Hand-dyed by
the artist.

Light leather
shoes. Sewn by
the artist.

T-shirt dress. Cotton.
Sewn by the artist.

Skirt. Cotton.
Sewn by the artist.
Front and back
views.

Dress. Linen. Sewn
by the artist.

Dress. Linen. Sewn
by the artist. Detail.

Greht, seasons '20–'23

Bag. Cotton canvas. Sewn and hand-dyed by the artist, with an acrylic design.

Bag. Cotton canvas. Sewn and hand-dyed by the artist.

Bag. Cotton canvas. Sewn and hand-dyed by the artist, with an acrylic design. Front and back views.

Clothes hanger. Wood, metal. Carved and assembled by the artist, with hand-drawn details. Front and back views.

Clothes hanger. Wood, metal. Carved and assembled by the artist, with hand-drawn details. Front and back views.

Clothes hanger. Wood, metal. Carved and assembled by the artist, with hand-drawn details. Front view.

Clothes hanger. Wood, metal. Carved and assembled by the artist, with hand-drawn details. Front and back views.

The currency of the severed head: a retrospective

sarazinzambinella's graphic novel on revolutions, unravelings, disenchanted objects, monsters, and the revived dead

Himmel und Hölle

The Currency of the Severed Head: A Retrospective.

The current age, where the case of Ed Gein can be appropriated as source material for a drag performance the figure worn as a cut-off face mask in a one-man show, may be perceived as fundamentally miserable.
Yet, to understand this phenomenon, one must invoke a deeper retrospective. We must check the theological spectacle of the Cephalophore and, perhaps more pointedly, the sordid historicity of Samuel Russell's display of Oliver Cromwell's head at local pubs.
The thread binds this spectacle is the currency of the severed head, a token whose value has shifted across the centuries.
The Cephalophore - Saint Denis walking with his head in hand - represented the miraculous: a relic of spiritual triumph over physical death, a defiance that validated faith.
The head was a divine concentrated vessel, a promise of eternity.
Two millenia later, Oliver Cromwell's head, first impaled as a brutal political warning against republican regicide, fell to become something less noble. When it was passed around by the actor Samuell Russell, it transformed into a gothic curio, an object of low-capitalist morbid fascination veiled as a "pity display".
The "pity" Rusell advertised was a thin veneer over sheer, desperate enterprise.
Picture him in the reeking gloom of a Claire Market alehouse, the year perhaps 1775.
The table is sticky with spilt porter.
Russell, unwrapping the flannel, held the raw
unmediated weight of history. The onlookers
paid not to the pity the Protector, but to participate
in a collision of the sacred and the profane,
a dark sacrament funded by copper coins.
The dried relic was a petrified idea of the
republic. It was not a sign of eternal life, but
the guarantee of political mortality —
an ideology hollowed out, waiting to be
secretly buried.

To be continued...

Academic announcements

Editorial Note

The following excerpt is taken from an open call for contributions published on *Copernico. History & Cultural Heritage in Eastern Europe* in early November 2025. The call introduces a new thematic focus on medievalisms in Eastern Europe, spanning popular culture, historical representations, and contemporary political instrumentalisations. The deadline for submissions is 15 December 2025. The full announcement is available on the Copernico website.

Call for Papers:

The Fascination of the Middle Ages. Tracing Popular Medievalisms of Eastern Europe

“The Middle Ages are everywhere” – this dictum by Horst Fuhrmann, long-time president of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, coined in 1997, remains as relevant as ever. But what role has Eastern Europe played in shaping modern understandings of the period?

Whether in film, video games, or social media, strikingly “exotic” images of knights, castles, kings, crusades, and monasteries are omnipresent. The boundaries between popular formats that convey knowledge about the medieval past and fictional portrayals drawing on stereotypical images of the Middle Ages are often blurred. Yet, it is clear that these representations usually rely on a highly specific, predominantly Western European conception of the era. Eastern Europe, when it appears at all, is often depicted as a vague, stereotypically “backward” space. In this context, the new thematic focus of the Copernico portal sets out to explore how Eastern Europe’s medieval history has been represented and received.

Research on medieval reception and (neo-)medievalism is relatively young and has developed differently in the anglophone and German-speaking contexts. These fields

continue to define their place within — or alongside — established medieval literary and historical scholarship. Despite fluid boundaries between the terms, we consider it useful to distinguish between medievalism (Mittelalter-Rezeption in German) and neo-medievalism. The former follows Leslie Workman's classic definition of a "continuous process of the recreation of the Middle Ages." Here, the historical epoch itself remains the focus. Neo-medievalism, in Umberto Eco's sense, refers instead to a hybrid construct that merges historical, mythical, and fictional elements.

Examples of medievalisms range from Walter Scott's works and English graphic novels to 19th-century art and architecture, and on to today's popular images of the Middle Ages in films, video games, social media, and re-enactments. Neo-medievalism, by contrast, encompasses pop-cultural phenomena such as HBO's *Game of Thrones* — inspired by the Middle Ages, yet fundamentally fantastical. Such formats often reproduce a narrow, largely Western European image of "the" Middle Ages — this is true even for the Polish phenomenon of Geralt of Rivia from the *Witcher* series, created by Andrzej Sapkowski.

This upcoming thematic focus will centre on the broad appropriation and reinterpretation of medieval motifs, events, and historical figures in and from Eastern Europe, from the 19th century to the present day. How is the medieval period represented and instrumentalised across different media? Which events, figures, and themes are given priority? What roles do exoticisation, stereotyping, or orientalism play?

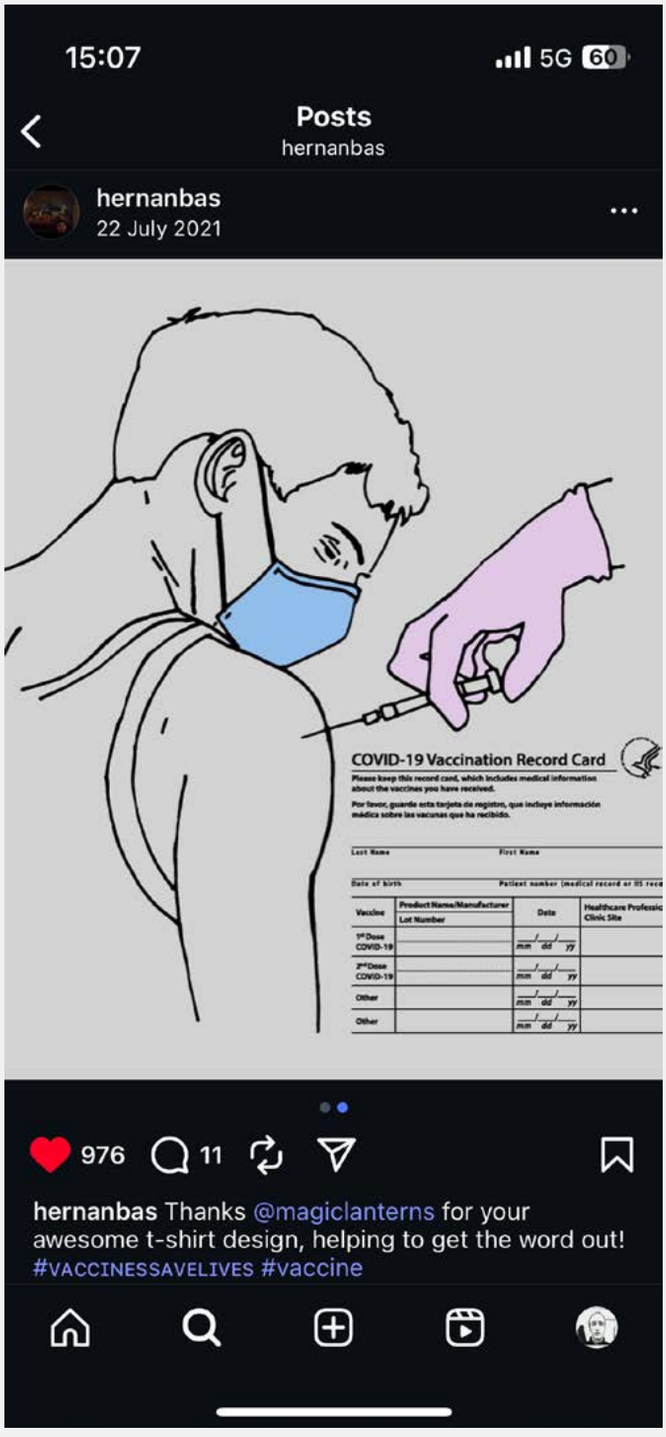
The thematic focus seeks to explore both media and cultural productions from Eastern European countries and representations of the region in Western and global popular culture.

[…]

Originally published as: Sven Jaros, Igor Kąkolewski & Gleb Kazakov, “Call for Papers: The Fascination of the Middle Ages. Tracing Popular Medievalisms of Eastern Europe”, *Copernico. History & Cultural Heritage in Eastern Europe* (13 November 2025). URL: https://www.copernico.eu/en/link/6915da4e26e197.12228244 (2025-11-22)

A COVID-19 vaccination campaign posters, 2021

Screenshots from the artist Hernan Bas’s public Instagram account, July 2021.



Between Zos and Kia

A rubric by the artist Pavel Polshchikov

This rubric is devoted to the exploration and reappraisal of the work of Austin Osman Spare, with particular attention to the boundary between artistic creation and occult practice. Each issue considers how Spare's distinctive visual language and magical philosophy unsettle conventional categories and open new readings at the intersection of aesthetic form and esoteric function.

Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956) was an English artist and occultist whose work uniquely fused visual art with magical practice. Early in his career he was hailed as a prodigy — even described as a successor to Aubrey Beardsley for his elegant line drawings. Influenced by late Symbolism and Art Nouveau, Spare experimented with forms of automatic drawing long before Surrealism formalised similar ideas. Yet his practice evolved on the margins of mainstream modernism, diverging sharply from the conventions of the established art world.

He developed an idiosyncratic system of sigil magic and esoteric philosophy, expressed through his drawings and paintings. His technique of *sigilisation* — the transmutation of a written desire or intent into a pictorial symbol (sigil) — became both a spiritual and an artistic exercise. Yet Spare did not treat sigils as mere occult instruments; he approached their creation as an artistic act, inseparable from drawing and design. For Spare, the sigil was a "monogram of thought" — a unique emblem born from a phrase or wish, crafted into a visual form capable of speaking directly to the subconscious mind.

“Sigils are the means of guiding and uniting the partially free belief with an organic desire,” he wrote, “a mathematical means of symbolising desire and giving it form that has the virtue of preventing any thought or association on that particular desire … from escaping the detection of the Ego.” (*The Book of Pleasure*, 1909–1913)

Spare’s fusion of sigils and art was little understood in his time. The surreal juxtapositions and private symbolism in his work did not fit neatly within the prevailing movements. What was once regarded as a limitation can now be recognised as Spare’s distinctive strength: he was working in an interdisciplinary zone of his own making, decades ahead of his time in treating mystical systems of symbols as legitimate artistic content.

Although Spare died in relative obscurity in 1956, his influence has grown considerably in the decades since, extending across both occult practice and the art world. His legacy became foundational for the emerging *Chaos Magic* movement: occultists such as Peter J. Carroll and collectives like *Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth* explicitly drew upon Spare’s technique of sigilisation, transmitting it to a new generation of magicians — many of whom were also artists and musicians.

The first issue offers to try a simple, accessible exercise in sigil creation. This basic method offers a direct, hands-on introduction to Spare’s approach — grounding intention in visual form through intuition.

Script for basic sigil-making process:

1.

Write your intention. Begin with a clear, affirmative phrase that expresses your desire or goal.

2.

Remove all repeating letters from your phrase, so that each character appears only once.

3.

Extract the remaining letters. Arrange the unique characters in a single row.

4.

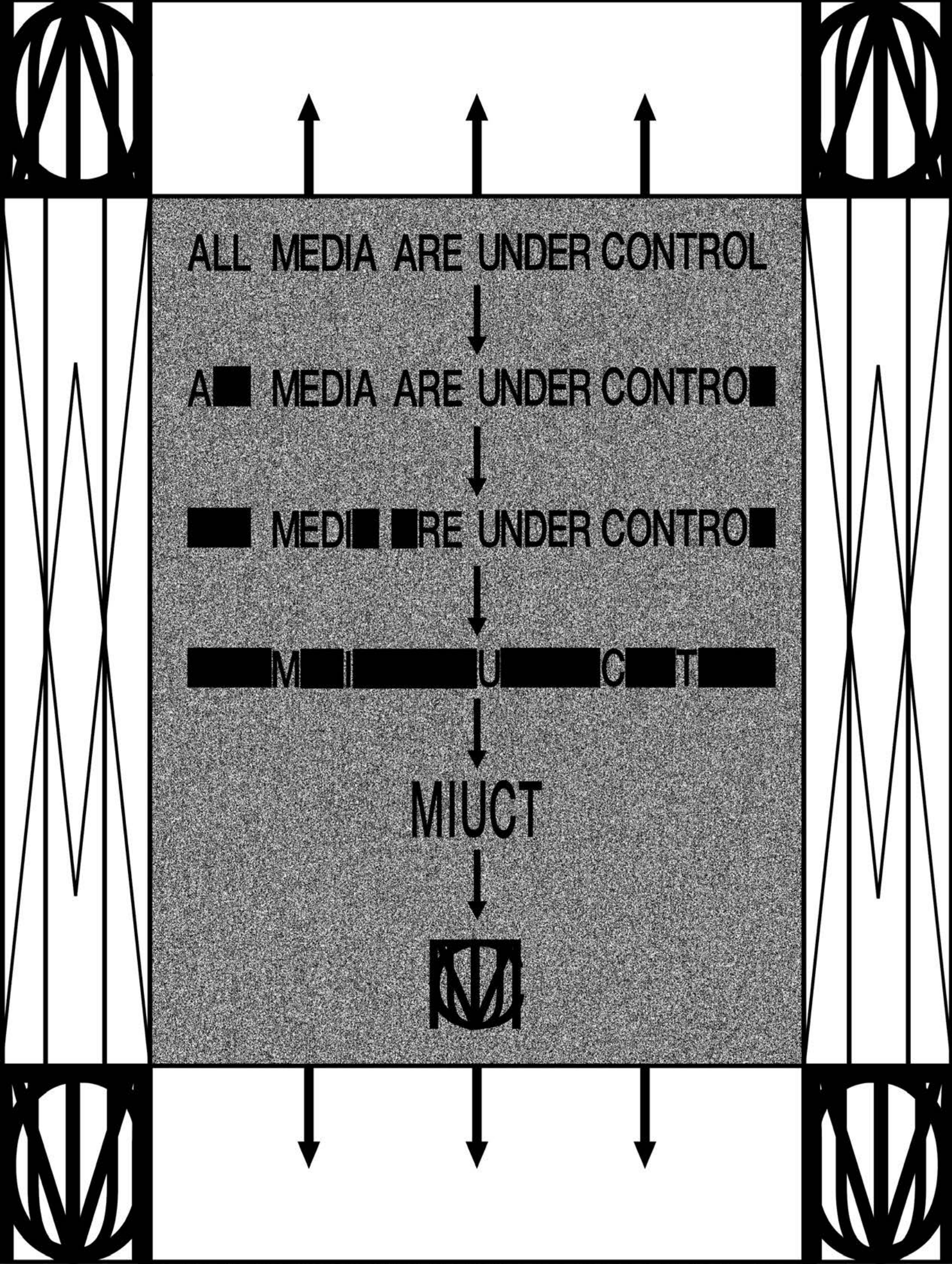
Overlay the letters intuitively to create one or several abstract glyphs, focusing on aesthetic flow and balance rather than legibility.

5.

Merge symbols from multiple phrases if necessary. If working with several intention phrases, create a glyph for each and then fuse them into a final composite sigil.

6.

Modify the final symbol freely. Let your intuition guide you: simplify, distort, or embellish the shape until it feels complete and charged with meaning.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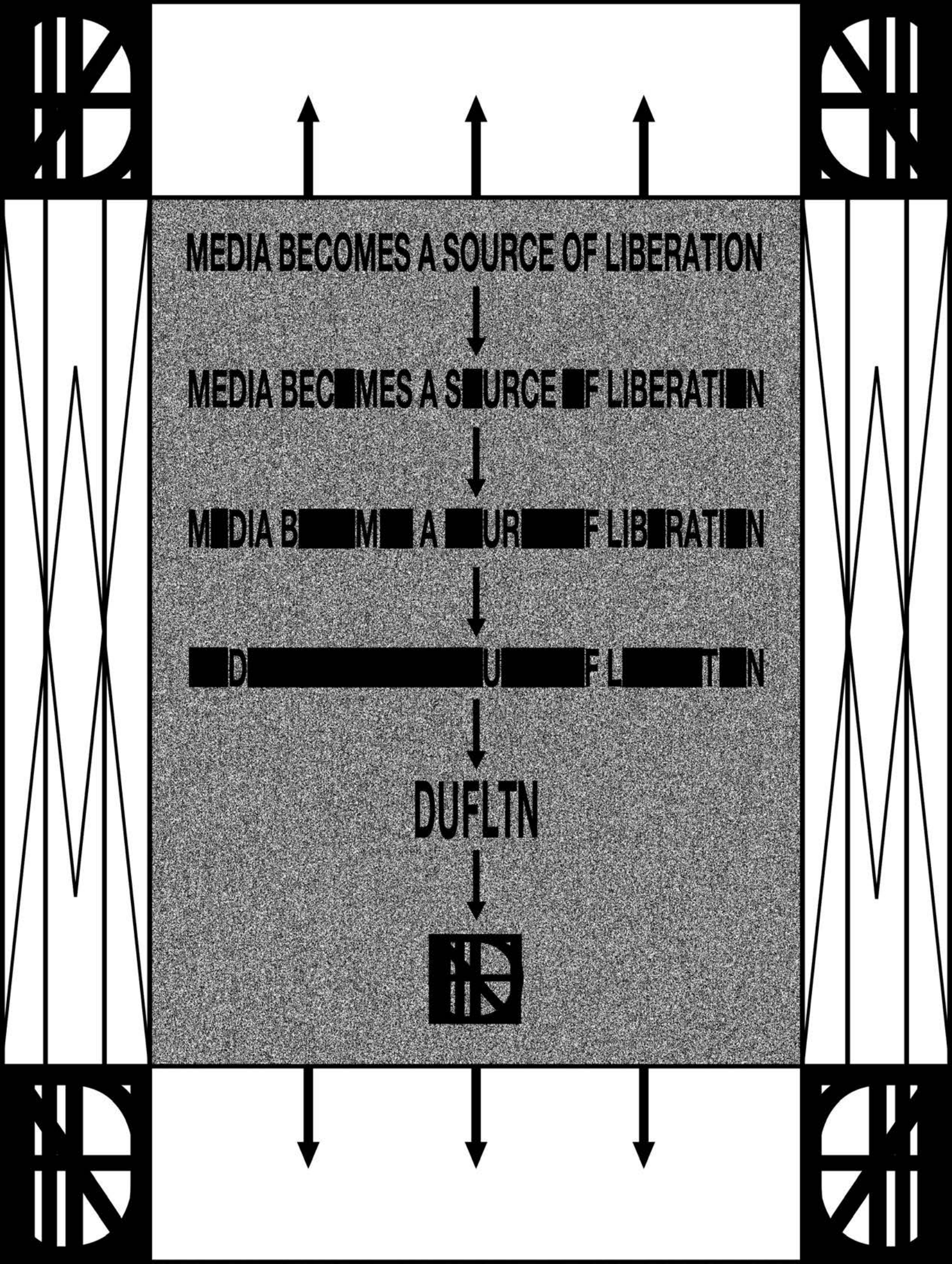
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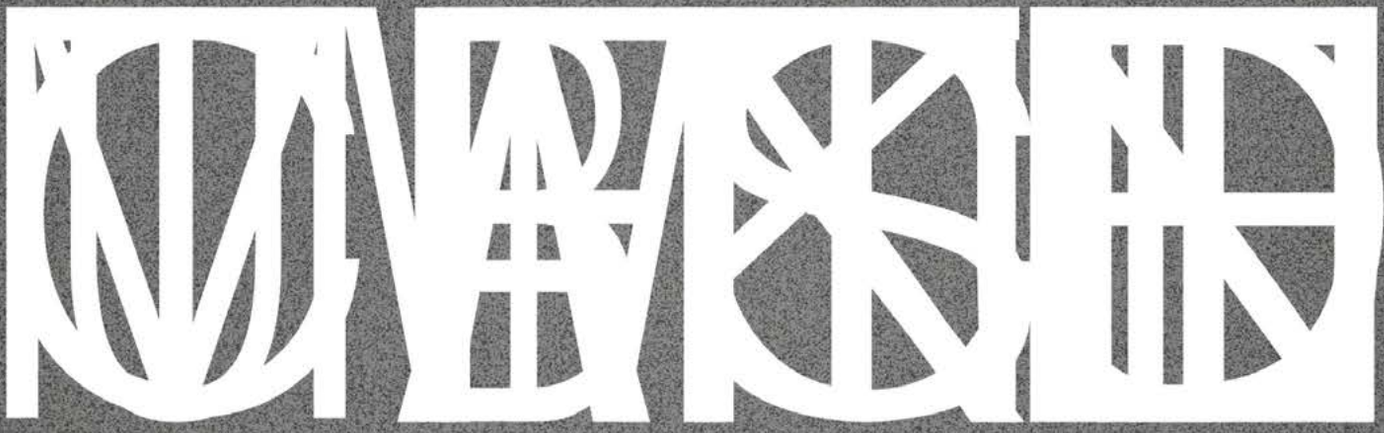
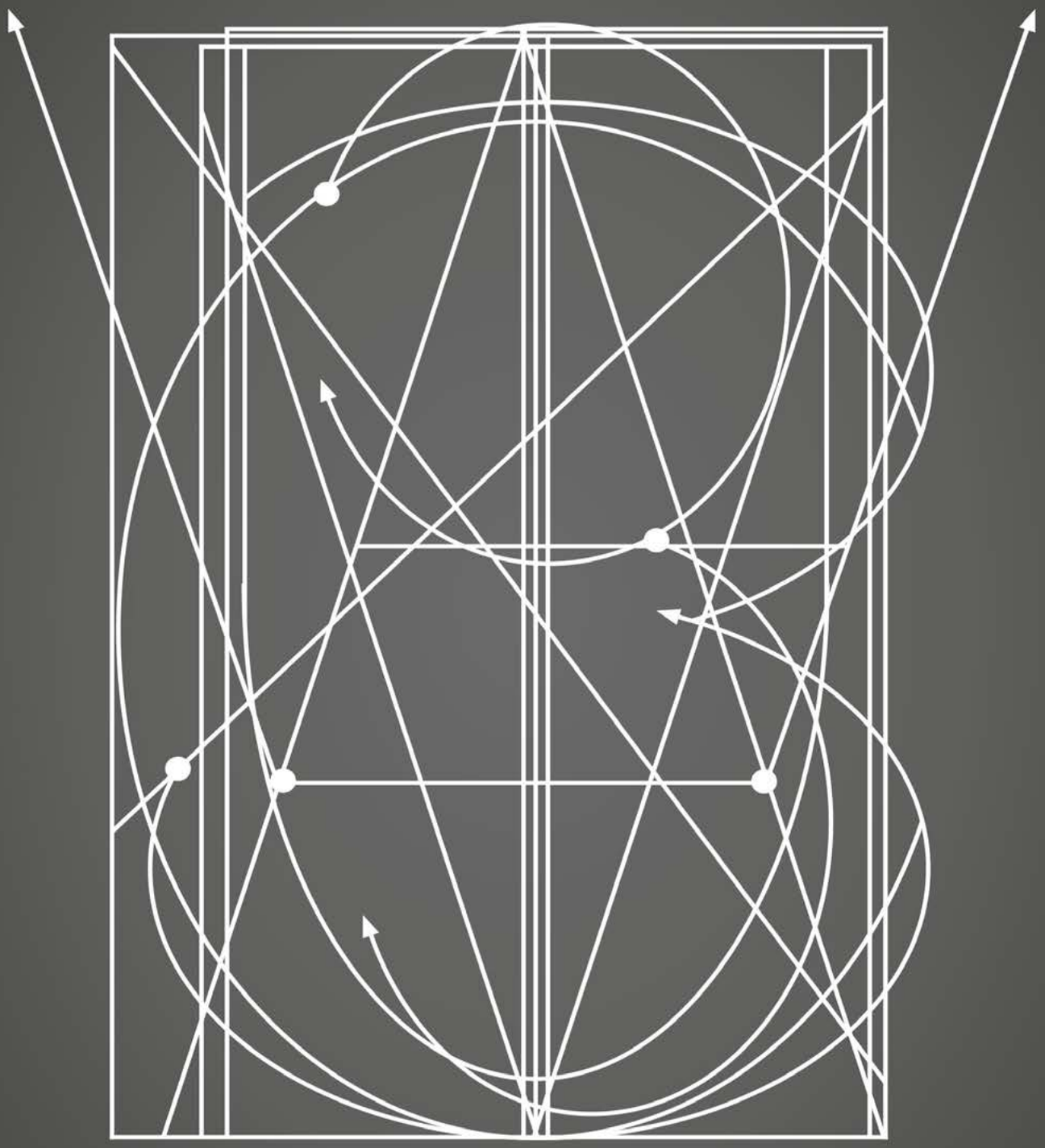
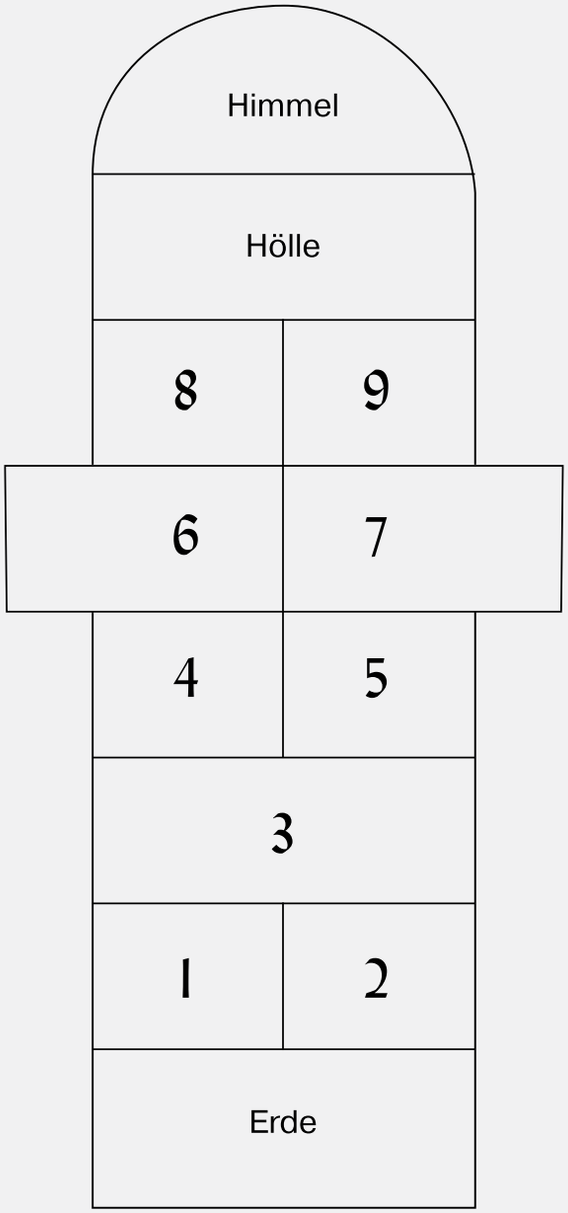




Himmel und Hölle — rules of the street game



DIFFICULT TASK

Although the name varies across German-speaking regions, *Himmel und Hölle* is the German version of the outdoor game known as *hopscotch* in English and *классики* (klassiki) in Russian. The player throws a small stone or marker into a numbered field drawn on the pavement, then hops through the sequence on one foot, retrieving the stone on the way back and balancing between fall and ascent. The final squares — *heaven* and *hell* — mark the symbolic transition between danger and reward, a child's game mirroring life's passage through trial and transcendence.

The most common version of the rules is as follows:

1.

Draw the playing field on the pavement: a vertical sequence of numbered boxes (usually 1–9), some arranged singly, others side by side as “double” squares — a simple chalk geometry leading from earth to heaven. In the *Himmel und Hölle* variant, the first box is *Erde* (earth), the last is *Himmel* (heaven), and the one before last is *Hölle* (hell).

2.

Erde is the starting box. *Hölle* is forbidden — the player must skip it and may not land there. *Himmel* is the final “safe” box, a place where one may briefly rest with both feet before turning back.

3.

Choose a marker: a small flat stone or similar.

4.

Throw & hop: throw the marker onto box 1; hop the course on one foot, using two feet only on the paired “double” boxes; skip the box with your marker; turn at the top and return. Pick up the marker on the way back without losing balance. Errors (on a line, wrong box, losing balance, etc.) end your turn.

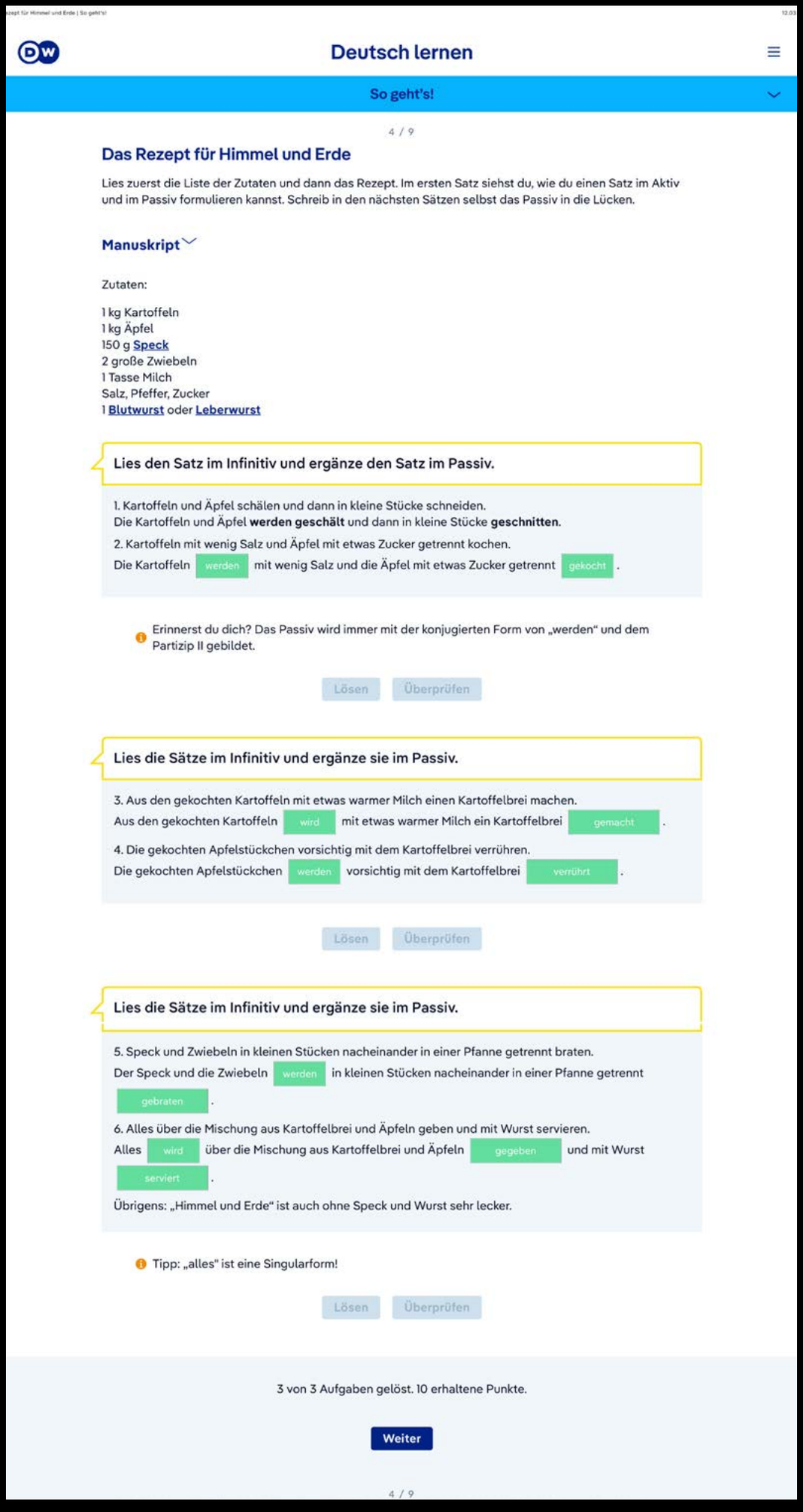
5.

Advance: next turn, throw to box 2, then 3, and so on. First to complete all boxes wins.

Recipe for Himmel und Erde

The traditional Rhineland dish from western Germany, *Himmel und Erde* (“Heaven and Earth”), combines ingredients from “above” and “below”: apples from the trees (*Himmel*) and potatoes from the soil (*Erde*). Known since the eighteenth century, the dish is also often written *Himmel un Ääd* to reflect the local dialect. Typically, mashed potatoes are blended with stewed apples and served with blood sausage (*Blutwurst*) or fried onions. The harmony of sweet, earthy, and savoury flavours transforms this humble peasant meal into an allegory of unity — heaven and earth reconciled on a plate.

P. 142
Screenshot from the Deutsche Welle educational website Deutsch Lernen, the page “Das Rezept für Himmel und Erde” (learngerman.dw.com).



Deutsch lernen

So geht's!

4 / 9

Das Rezept für Himmel und Erde

Lies zuerst die Liste der Zutaten und dann das Rezept. Im ersten Satz siehst du, wie du einen Satz im Aktiv und im Passiv formulieren kannst. Schreib in den nächsten Sätzen selbst das Passiv in die Lücken.

Manuskript

Zutaten:

1 kg Kartoffeln
1 kg Äpfel
150 g Speck
2 große Zwiebeln
1 Tasse Milch
Salz, Pfeffer, Zucker
1 Blutwurst oder Leberwurst

Lies den Satz im Infinitiv und ergänze den Satz im Passiv.

1. Kartoffeln und Äpfel schälen und dann in kleine Stücke schneiden.
Die Kartoffeln und Äpfel **werden geschält** und dann in kleine Stücke **geschnitten**.

2. Kartoffeln mit wenig Salz und Äpfel mit etwas Zucker getrennt kochen.
Die Kartoffeln werden mit wenig Salz und die Äpfel mit etwas Zucker getrennt gekocht.

Erinnerst du dich? Das Passiv wird immer mit der konjugierten Form von „werden" und dem Partizip II gebildet.

Lösen Überprüfen

Lies die Sätze im Infinitiv und ergänze sie im Passiv.

3. Aus den gekochten Kartoffeln mit etwas warmer Milch einen Kartoffelbrei machen.
Aus den gekochten Kartoffeln wird mit etwas warmer Milch ein Kartoffelbrei gemacht.

4. Die gekochten Apfelstückchen vorsichtig mit dem Kartoffelbrei verrühren.
Die gekochten Apfelstückchen werden vorsichtig mit dem Kartoffelbrei verrührt.

Lösen Überprüfen

Lies die Sätze im Infinitiv und ergänze sie im Passiv.

5. Speck und Zwiebeln in kleinen Stücken nacheinander in einer Pfanne getrennt braten.
Der Speck und die Zwiebeln werden in kleinen Stücken nacheinander in einer Pfanne getrennt gebraten.

6. Alles über die Mischung aus Kartoffelbrei und Äpfeln geben und mit Wurst servieren.
Alles wird über die Mischung aus Kartoffelbrei und Äpfeln gegeben und mit Wurst serviert.

Übrigens: „Himmel und Erde" ist auch ohne Speck und Wurst sehr lecker.

Tipp: „alles" ist eine Singularform!

Lösen Überprüfen

3 von 3 Aufgaben gelöst. 10 erhaltene Punkte.

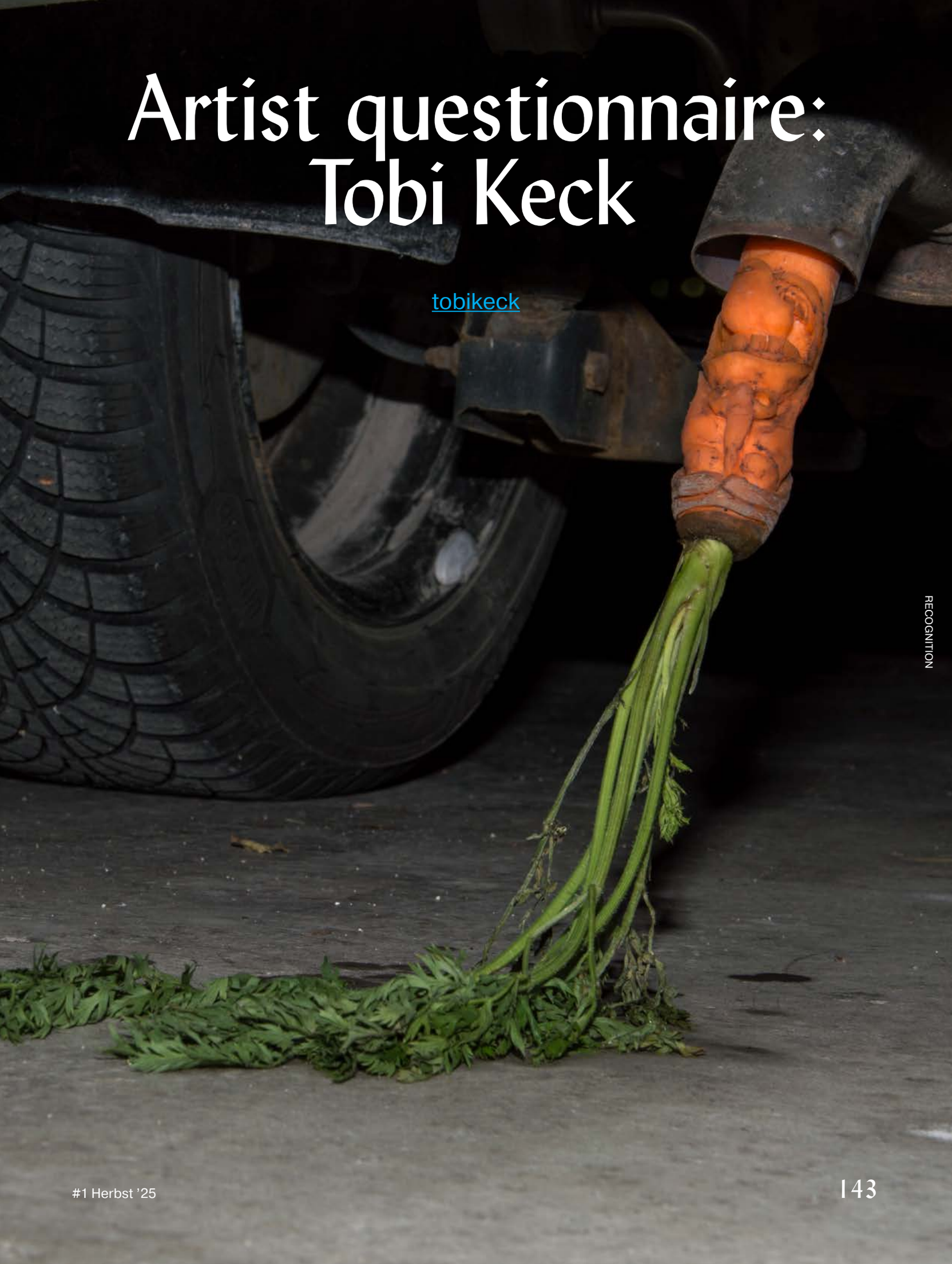
Weiter

4 / 9

SOLUTION

Artist questionnaire: Tobi Keck

tobikeck



1. Do you experience a sense of the apocalyptic now? If so, how do you deal with it?

Who doesn't? The human world sucks big time right now, and many things seem to be going straight downhill. I can be more than happy to live in a country where I mostly feel economic stress — for now. I have no idea what to do other than try to stay sane these days. I often feel paralyzed, though. The only thing I can think of is to deliver something to the audience that gives them a moment of wonder, joy, and distraction, maybe with a slight taste of constructive irony. I don't know if that's noble. But it's the only thing I can offer that I seem to have the emotional energy for. After all, I am always happy to tell people that I am a solid optimist. I don't even know why. But I am quite sure that pessimism is just pointless.

2. What (new) materials do you prefer to work with, and why?

Probably the only “new” material I work with is aluminum tinfoil. Aluminum is amazing. And it’s alien. It wouldn’t exist in this form without humans. It isn’t meant to be, so to say. And since its production is a super toxic and problematic process on many levels, it obviously better did not. In general, I am super lazy when it comes to technology. I’m not really interested in sophisticated technology as a protagonist in my work, either. So, in most of my stuff, I’m fine with common materials such as vegetables, glass vessels, plaster, stone slates, coins, timber, or whatever I think is necessary for a new art piece or installation. Using the usual is also a kind of statement, I guess. Material is message and emotion. Oh, and there were two times, tho, when I made an art sticker set on Telegram… if that’s considered a material?

inhale/exhale. 2025. Image courtesy of Tobi Keck + VG Bild Kunst, Bonn

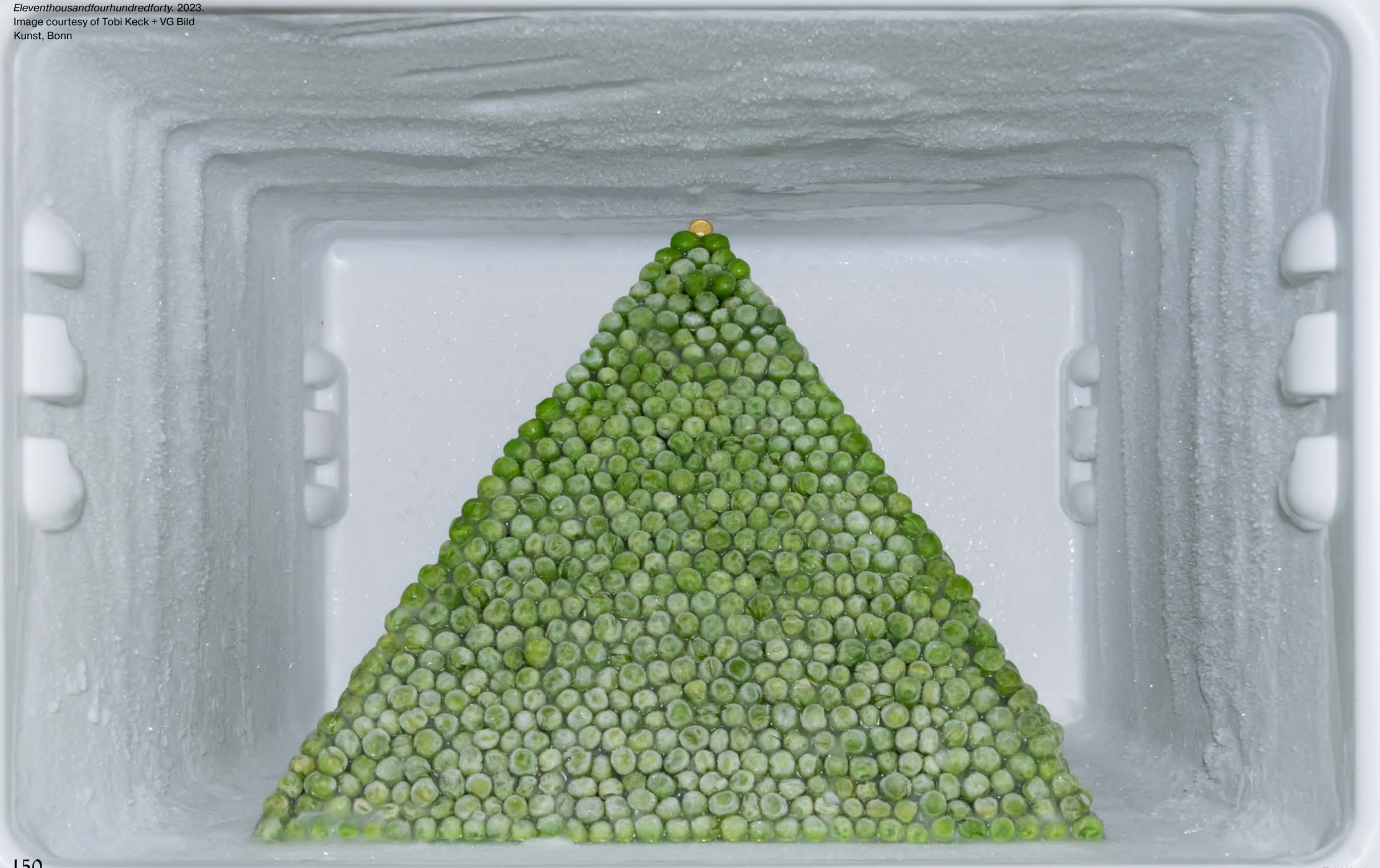
3. Do you play video games? If so, which ones — and do they influence your work or thinking in any way?

No, I don’t. I just don’t have the time. But in my childhood and early adolescence I used to play a lot. Born in 1987, I am a kid of the Nineties. Super Nintendo games like *Secret of Evermore* or *Mortal Kombat*, of course *Ocarina of Time* on N64, and some computer games like *Blood*, *G.T.A.*, and above all *Diablo II* have had a crucial impact on my aesthetic senses. Along with music, movies, and TV series… books not so much. Many years ago, still during art academy, when I first realized the actual weight of all these pop influences, it really felt like coming home. Knowing your position within the overall chaotic crowd of artists is so precious. Like — okay, now that I know what I‘m all about, I can do whatever!

Lurer. 2022.
Image courtesy of
Tobi Keck + VG
Bild Kunst, Bonn

4. Are you familiar with the difference between applied and fine arts? Does it matter to you?

This difference is quite a Middle-European thing, as far as I understood from art history and modern philosophy. I heard that in Eastern Asia, for example, this distinction between what is so-called applied art and what's "high art" doesn't really exist at all. But I'm afraid it's in my head, too. So it does matter to me. The question of what reason or use an artifact was made for affects the way I read it. I can't help it. But: I love the idea of a hybrid. Whenever I did something that also had some kind of practical purpose, I had so much fun trying to give it the best of both qualities. A couple of years ago, I produced a little walkway made out of concrete slabs with cast vegetable faces on them. The fact that they weren't just art pieces but also something you could walk on made me really happy. It may seem banal, but that very circumstance lifted the work to a new level of reality for me. The work really got in touch with the viewers. And thus, the viewers also became users.



Eleventhousandfourhundredforty. 2023.
Image courtesy of Tobi Keck + VG Bild Kunst, Bonn

5. Do you rely on any theoretical texts to support or frame your art practice?

I do read art theory, but I don't consider it very much of a basis for my work. It's more that I love to find out about phenomena that also show up within my own interests and thoughts, to feel a little bit of companionship with other people thinking about topics in common. For example, when I first heard about Mark Fisher's statement about a drastic shift in how we perceive time in the digital era and how the past is more and more haunting the present, I was totally stunned. It all made so much sense. If I had to sum up my art in one single term of interest, TIME would be the main theme. Reading Fisher's thoughts about how the past is taking over because of its mere omnipresent archived evidence really made me both joyful and fearful at the same time. Learning about such a valuable hint as to why the past feels so close and why nostalgia seems to be everywhere is just amazing. But also, it's pretty frightening when you think of the past becoming more relevant than the present or even the future. Because the past is empty and silent and has all the meaning of a discarded old paint can, as spooky Stephen King once put it. As I said before, I really have a thing with time going on. So, if you wanna freak me out, feel free to send me some book recommendations about that topic.

Carrot shelf. 2024. Image courtesy of Tobi Keck + VG Bild Kunst, Bonn

6. Do you create works entirely by yourself, or do others (including machines) sometimes play a role?

I'm a craftiman. In fact, I'm a professionally educated and certified industrial mechanic. I did that right after middle school, by the age of sixteen, but I couldn't stand the normie world there, so I ran away after finishing that apprenticeship to become an academic hunger artist instead of having a nice, solid, old-fashioned kind of income xD. What I'm trying to say is that I enjoy creating things very much. Of course, sometimes I also need the help of machines, if what I want to do needs to look like an industrial product or if it's the only possible way to make it — like water-jet cutting or something. My laziness with hi-tech and my limited production budget usually keep me working with my own hands. Oh, and of course I had garden spiders spinning webs for me. I gave them lots of flies, and they were released back into nature after the job. Always watch your karma ^^

Spirit. 2024.
Image courtesy of
Robert Schittko +
VG Bild Kunst,
Bonn

Himmel und Hölle

7. Is it important for you to preserve the artworks themselves, or is it enough to keep just the documentation of how they were shown?

Oh yes, it is important for me. I enjoy building crates, haha. Preservation and making an artifact last is part of my artistic quest. Since forever, I've been fascinated by archaeology. I stepped into an art museum for the first time when I was about twenty-one! Before that, I only knew history museums, old churches, graveyards… and flea markets. I'm sure you can see why my approach is so much about time and decay. Still, besides the material aspect, I think art is not art yet before the process of communication takes place. After releasing something to the public, the artwork is no longer owned by the artist, which is great. As an artist, you do your best to place visual references, choose a subject, and give it a title to guide the direction of what you want to say. But the audience will probably turn it into whatever they see and interpret in your absence. Most importantly: they will finally turn the object into art by paying attention and dedicating time to it. And documentation is, of course, crucial to make more people see and reflect on the subject. For me, feature blogs on social media did a priceless job of making exhibitions and works much more visible and relevant to a global audience. Offsite exhibitions, for example, wouldn't have been possible without their intentional focus on documentation.

GAME OVER. 2018. Image courtesy of Tobi Keck + VG Bild Kunst, Bonn

8. Do you separate your waste? Why or why not?

Yes, I do. Maybe not perfectly, but I try to, at least. And since I appreciate material very much, I don’t like the idea of just throwing everything into the same big incinerator. Be aware of the value of things. No thing is for free.

9. Do you find any contemporary medications — like ibuprofen, antidepressants, antihistamines, and so on — helpful for your well-being?

I‘ve never been prescribed serious medication by doctors. But let’s say, experimenting, adjusting, or expanding my consciousness is not an unknown thing to me. In the end, I guess real well-being tends to happen the sober way.

10. Himmel oder Hölle?

Something else ;)

inhale/exhale. 2023. Image courtesy of Tobi Keck + VG Bild Kunst, Bonn

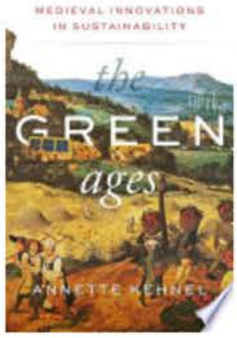
Book review

Patrick Meehan — review of Annette Kehnel's
The Green Ages: Medieval Innovations in Sustainability (2024)

Originally published as Patrick Meehan, "Review of Annette Kehnel, *The Green Ages: Medieval Innovations in Sustainability*," H-Environment, H-Net Reviews (October 2025), https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=61829 .

H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Annette Kehnel. *The Green Ages: Medieval Innovations in Sustainability.* Brandeis University Press, 2024. 352 pp. $35.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-68458-243-3.



Reviewed by Patrick Meehan (Dartmouth College)

Published on H-Environment (October, 2025)

Commissioned by Daniella McCahey (Texas Tech University)

In *The Green Ages*, medieval historian Annette Kehnel seeks to problematize, deconstruct, and ultimately replace the metanarrative that positions modernity—and especially modern economics—as the telos of human progress. She asserts that since its invention in the nineteenth century, this narrative has rationalized the voracious excesses of resource exploitation that drive our planet's ecological crises, disguising them as the necessary price of progress. "Nature has handed us the bill for those two centuries of merciless exploitation and our division of the planet into 'us' and 'them' has caused wholesale destruction" (p. 15). Kehnel provocatively frames this lively book as one small effort to break this grand narrative by rethinking its antithesis: that is, the idea that the "premodern" is synonymous with all the ignorance and misery from which capitalism has supposedly freed us. She aims to "expand our imaginative horizon" of what is possible in our future by looking to the past (p. 7).

Four thematically organized chapters ("Sharing," "Recycling," "Microfinance," and "Minimalism") develop a broad array of case studies of premodern European economics. Examples range from classical Athens to eighteenth-century Alsace but come mostly from the high and later Middle Ages (circa 1000-1500). Geographically, they mostly cluster around modern-day Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, with a few detours to France and the Low Countries. Kehnel contends that if we can "stop arguing about whether things used to be better or worse, and consider instead that they might simply have been different," premodernity can teach us profitable lessons about sustainable living (p. 21). Overall, *The Green Ages* offers a thoughtful, innovative, and hopeful vision, even if Kehnel's interpretations sometimes stretch the limits of plausibility.

Importantly, Kehnel does not advocate a return to the good old days. "No one who knows even a little about the Middle Ages will want to go

back there" (p. 7). Her point, rather simply, is that by dispelling the twin myths of modernity-as-progress and premodernity-as-backwardness, we can expand the limits of what we believe to be possible. In fact, many of Kehnel's examples are meant to show that it is possible to apply premodern principles of sustainability within a paradigm that values profit as the primary motive of economic life. In other words, Kehnel does not argue that we have to tear everything down but that changes in how we think and relate to one another (and, for that matter, to the planet) might hold the key to devising solutions to our ecological crises. Even if twenty-first-century capitalist economies are inescapable, there are still ways of making them more sustainable.

The book's case studies range from some of medieval history's most heavily trodden topics (like monastic economies and the communal principles underlying them) to subjects that were new to me, a medieval historian (for example, the section about fishing on Lake Constance). There is likewise a range in their effectiveness. At its best, *The Green Ages* assembles fascinating research from respected scholars, to which Kehnel adds her own observations and takeaways. Take, for example, Lake Constance's fishing industry in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which appears in the "Sharing" chapter. Here, Kehnel outlines what historian Michael Zeheter has framed as a classic case of a commons: No single governing body held a legislative or economic monopoly over the large body of water, which was instead shared by a number of towns, rural estates, and monasteries that operated according to different economic and legal paradigms.[1] Contrary to Garrett Hardin's theory of the "tragedy of the commons," the lake's fishermen formed their own cooperative rather than allowing the fish populations to succumb to rampant competition. They devised—and evidently adhered to—an extensive system of regulations and licenses that governed everything: materials (nets, rods, traps, etc.), location, seasonality, and so on. Thus, the fishermen became the authors and enforcers of their own practices of sustainability. Kehnel emphasizes that this success story did not arise from some idealistic, premodern connection to nature, however. It was, instead, a practical matter. The fishermen understood that failing to share and self-regulate would have disastrous consequences. In the fragility of the aquatic ecosystem, the fishermen recognized the fragility of their own profits and livelihoods. Survival, in other words, was contingent on cooperative and sustainable practice. What could be a more appropriate lesson for today?

Although Kehnel draws a number of insightful lessons across the book's case studies, nearly all of them suffer from one major flaw, which we might call the problem of scalability. Put simply, *The Green Ages* never satisfactorily acknowledges that the premodern world was simply a much less populated place. Systems like Lake Constance's fishing regulations or a paper production chain based on recycled textiles may have worked on the scale of hundreds, thousands, or perhaps even, at premodern Europe's greatest scale, millions of people—but billions? Kehnel repeatedly demonstrates how interconnected and mobile the premodern world was, contrary to conventional images of medieval life as static; but is it really fair to compare premodern connectivity to twenty-first-century global economies? When describing the sustainable practices of Alpine pastoralism, for example, Kehnel acknowledges that skeptics might point out that such "cooperative economies ... are best suited to local, settled, stable, long-term communities of a manageable size ... which renders the model unfit for a modern, connected, global, and highly mobile world" (p. 64). She counters that medieval people were more connected and mobile than typically thought but pointedly does not engage the matter of communities' "manageable size."

In another memorable example, Kehnel introduces us to late medieval Italy's *monti di pietà* (mountains of pity): urban banks that amassed "capital used to fund charity in the shape of loans

to the poor" (p. 147). Kehnel frames the monti as premodern microfinance institutions (MFIs). Funded by city elites, they "enabled people to take out loans on affordable terms, and sought only to cover their costs, not to make a profit ... extending small loans to people on the margins of society" (p. 172). Kehnel makes a compelling argument that the monti offer an instructive illustration of how a society's elites can establish sustainable institutions that provide financial services for poorer people. Although these elites did not have to substantially give up their own wealth, Kehnel writes that they were moved by charismatic Franciscan "influencers" who preached eloquently about the social responsibility of the wealthy to the poorer members of their community (p. 155). Kehnel goes into great detail about the practical workings of the monti, arguing that they disprove the myth that the world of finance was opened to society's poorer members (including women) only with the advent of capitalism. The point seems to be that such thinking could be applied to MFIs today. But Kehnel does not engage with the question of how the thinking behind an institution so fitted to the demographic, cultural, political, and economic makeup of late medieval Italian cities could be scaled to the twenty-first century. Nor does she reflect on how we might think about the monti vis-à-vis modern systems of public welfare and private philanthropy—a missed opportunity, perhaps, at a moment when state welfare structures in Europe are straining under the pressures of rising populations, soaring premiums, and so on. This is not to say that Kehnel's observations are invalid. But the book's failure to confront the critical issue of the premodern world's vastly smaller scale struck me as its most glaring and problematic oversight. At the very least, it would be illuminating to hear Kehnel's thoughts on the matter.

The book's wide variety of case studies also brings its share of more minor issues. Some examples are significantly more developed than others in a way that can seem arbitrary. Lengthier segments, such as the coverage of late medieval and early modern forestry practices in the upper Rhineland (chapter 2) and the description of the paper-making process (chapter 3), tend to overwhelm with specific details such that the overall point is difficult to follow. Furthermore, Kehnel does not always clearly explain the reasoning behind her choice of case studies, which—across more than two thousand years of history—can leave the reader a bit disoriented.

These critiques notwithstanding, *The Green Ages* is a bold and thought-provoking book that invites us to look at premodernity—and, therefore, modernity—in new and exciting ways. Kehnel is an authoritative yet affable guide who makes even abstruse topics like Franciscan theories of market value approachable to readers who are unfamiliar with or totally new to the period. Kehnel often speaks directly to the reader, sharing her distinctive vision and posing conversational questions. The book's accessibility should make it a delightful book for teaching, especially in courses focusing on environmental studies, premodern history, or even economics. Either as assigned reading for students or as a rich source for instructors to find engaging course material, it promises to sustain lively and timely class discussions. In sum, Kehnel prompts us to rethink our relationship to the premodern past with questions that are sometimes profound (can profit-motivated economies be ethical?), sometimes whimsical (were mendicant friars the "influencers" of the Middle Ages?), and always imaginative.

Note

[1]. Michael Zeheter, "Eine Tragödie der Allmende? Die Bodenseefischerei 1350-1900," in *Wirtschaft und Umwelt vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Gegenwart: Auf dem Weg zu Nachhaltigkeit?*, ed. Günther Schulz and Reinhold Reith (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), 133-52; and Michael Zeheter, "Managing the Lake Constance Fishers, ca. 1350–1800," in *Conservation's Roots: Managing for Sustainability in Preindustrial Europe, 1100-1800*, ed.

Abigail P. Dowling and Richard L. Keyer
(Berghahn, 2020), 154-77.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-environment

Citation: Patrick Meehan. Review of Kehnel, Annette, *The Green Ages: Medieval Innovations in Sustainability.* H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. October, 2025.

URL: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=61829

Refugee Photobooth

by Maresiy Ivashchenko

L’atelier des artistes en exil
6 rue d’Aboukir, Paris

26 April 2024

In my art project, logistics were simplified.
Hierarchies were flattened.
I built a photo booth —
a booth with no line,
no prerequisites.
Anyone who needed a photo got one.
Anyone — from a global celebrity
to a mad-mad human being.
They all got what they wanted.
A picture was taken.
A note was given out.
The air smelled of nutmeg and perfume.

Refugee photobooth


I ♥ PARIS

Refugee photobooth


Maresiy
Ivashchenko
aa
WEDDING

Himmel und Hölle


Refugee
Photo Booth
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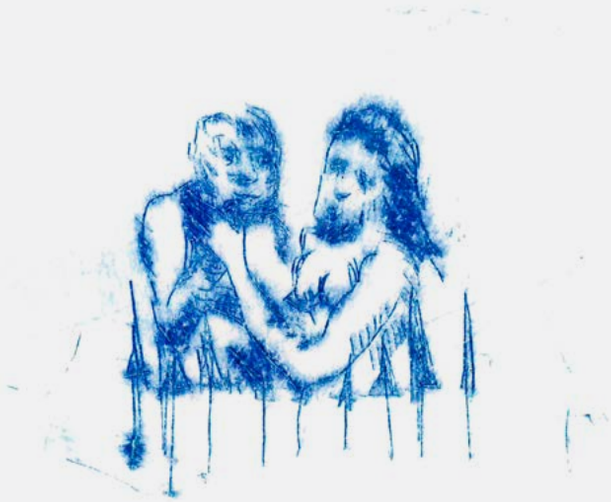

Following the protagonists of the international aggregator art scene, this research art periodical examines their often innovative exhibiting strategies, artistic forms, neo-medieval sensibilities, and post-apocalyptic moods, situating these practices and narratives within a broader aesthetic, social, and technological landscape — at the dawn of the Night era. Methodologically, the publication positions itself at the intersection of contemporary art, the history and theory of art, game studies, as well as social, political, and migration studies, alongside discussions of the green economy and adjacent fields.

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Greht.
Hood–chaperon.
Cotton. Sewn by
the artist. Detail.

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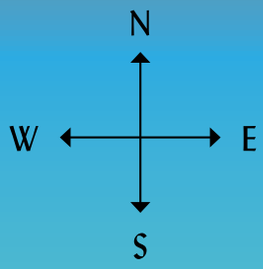

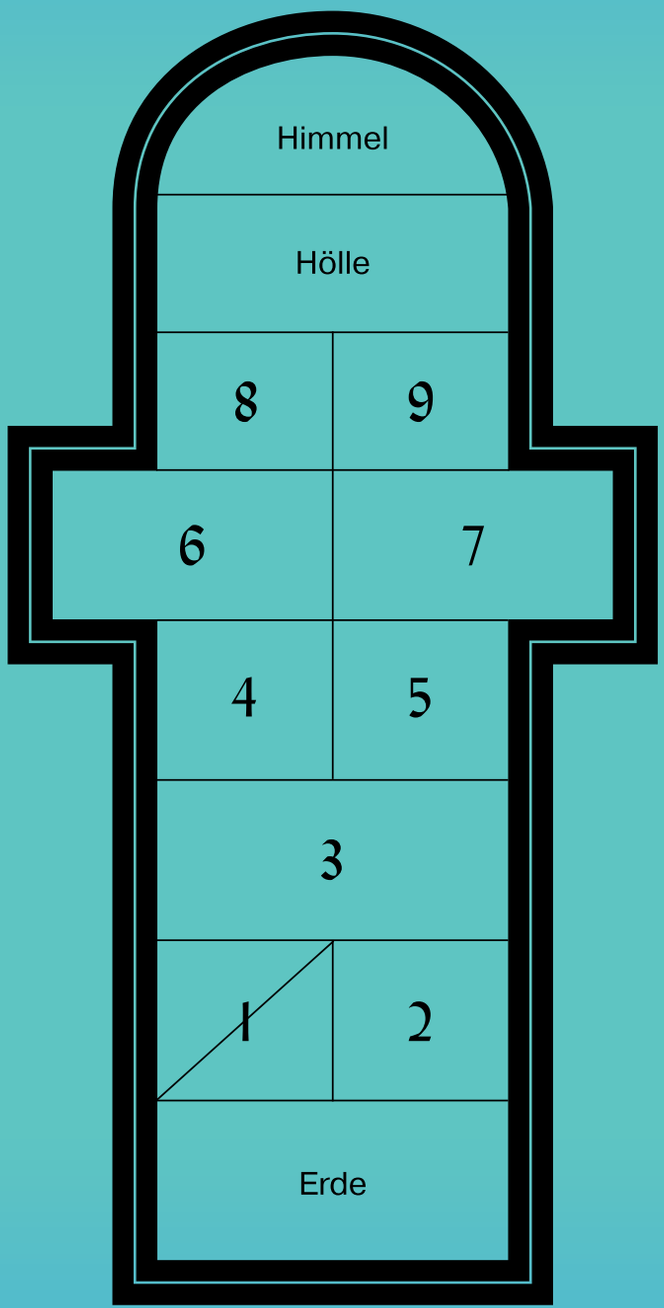

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