

MEDIA INFORMATION

PERFORMING THE BORDER

Group exhibition, pop-up shop with Iranian underwear, and artist talk

Opening: TH 01 06 2017, 7:00 pm

Duration: FR 02 06 2017 – SA 22 07 2017

PRESS TOUR: WE 31 05 2017, 10:00 am

**PRESS and
IMAGE MATERIAL:** www.kunstraum.net/en/press

Artists: Monira Al Qadiri (KWT), Halil Altindere (TUR), Francis Alÿs (BEL), Ursula Biemann (CHE), Tiffany Chung (VNM/USA), Julien Creuzet (Martinique/FRA), Khaled Jarrar (PSE), Leon Kahane (DEU), Eva Leitolf (DEU), Hana Miletić (HRV), Anahita Razmi (DEU), Martin Krenn/Oliver Ressler (AUT), Christoph Schlingensief (DEU), Hito Steyerl (DEU), Wermke/Leinkauf (DEU), Clara Wildberger (AUT), Miao Ying (CHN)

Curators: Jana J. Haeckel, Petra Poelzl

Talk with: Jana J. Haeckel, Petra Poelzl, and artists from the exhibition
FR 02 06 2017, 5:00 pm

Border controls. Border fences. The nation-state as a place of longing for numerous politicians and their constituents. Over the course of the so-called refugee crisis a guarded mindset marked by conservation, isolation, and defensiveness has become noticeable among the population. The enticing promises of globalization – for instance, the elimination of country borders or the disappearance of national identities – appear to have become obsolete, and not only in Europe. Also on the other side of the Atlantic the US President is contemplating how to fulfill one of his most important election promises of building a wall to Mexico. The border is a hotly contested site – for real and symbolic politics manifest along it. In the exhibition “Performing the Border” the Kunstraum Niederoesterreich showcases highly topical but also historically grown border scenarios in which the complex field of national, ethnic, social, digital, and sexual identity becomes a realm for experiment.

Performing the Border is conceived as a reflection on contemporary political and social upheavals. Upheavals which have already become evident since the beginning of the twenty-first century and tempt us to fall into a frozen state of powerlessness in the realization that the promise of free, self-determined movement in our globalized, digitalized, and “borderless” present only seems redeemable by a small, privileged part of society.

In this world, where the idea of democracy we were brought up with has become porous, the selected artistic positions create a space of political negotiation, a place for self-inquiry and search for possibilities and strategies to break open an everyday we take for granted. They articulate perspectives of reflection, analysis, and dialogue – and also resistance. What they share is an inherent skeptical-analytical core, which is capable of generating new realities and transformation models and imagining potential solutions.

The artists featured in the exhibition remind us that now it depends on each of us to draw conclusions from the past and to venture forth toward future visions. They call for our complicity, to leave behind the moment of being in-between and not only imagine and test solutions but put them into practice as well.

Artistic Positions

In *Loop* **Francis Alÿs** focuses on the notorious US-Mexican border in Tijuana. The artist dedicated his production budget for an exhibition in San Diego to a seemingly absurd flight around the globe, which is both a critical and poetic metaphor for crossing borders, national identity, and the internationally jetset art world. With their floral patterns, cloud-like shapes, and soft materials, **Tiffany Chung’s** meticulously researched cartographic drawings appear sweet and inviting at first glance. Only upon a second, more analytical look do the complex relationships and the true motive – the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria – become clear. Between animism and big data, **Julien Creuzet** develops a narrative and visual space of possibilities in his multimedia work, which transforms cultural traumas and the perspective of the observer, the outsider, into lyrical autonomy. Nature – be it the sea, the forest, or its creatures – is revoked all innocence: it is subjugated to civilization, and the humans within are anything but innocent.

The photographic-documentary series *Postcards from Europe* by **Eva Leitolf** is a precise, research-based examination of Europe’s external borders and sites of right-wing violence, which operates beyond journalistic populism and eye-catcher aesthetics.

Clara Wildberger presents two large-format portraits from the series *Selamse* in which the young photographer investigates the proliferating tourism from the Middle East in the mountain town of Zell am See. The sculpture ensemble *Kolona* by **Hana Miletić** is inspired by the current economic crisis in Croatia, the homeland of the artist, and connects her personal history with collective memories. **Monira Al Qadiri** experiments with traditional gender roles in *Abu Athiyya* (Father of Pain). She created a fantastic music video in which she performs a song of lamentation by the famous Iraqi singer **Yas Khodhor** and dramatizes his complex, mystical contents.

In the project *Do Fard* **Anahita Razmi** opens a temporary shop for Iranian label underwear, which she herself imported from Iran to Europe. The shop – which is open for the complete duration of the exhibition – actively engages in the debate around the economic sanctions prevalent in Iran. **Miao Ying** explores the “outside” and the “inside” of the “Great Firewall of China”. Miao’s *Chinternet Plus* is a parodistic response to the most recent official plan of the Chinese government: “Internet Plus”. Its aim is to strengthen a faltering economy through advanced digitalization.

Leon Kahane’s *Afrique Citoyenne No. 13, Aventure Mortelle* presents the photographic documentation and reproduction of the same-named comic book published in Senegal by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. In an extremely one-dimensional visual language, the issue explains the dangers of immigrating to Europe and aims to stop people from setting forth on this “deadly adventure”. In his music video *Homeland* **Halil Altindere** accompanies the Berlin-based Syrian rapper **Mohammad Abu Hajar** on his way from fields riddled with landmines in his home country to Oranienplatz in Kreuzberg. In *Symbolic Threats* the artist duo **Wermke/Leinkauf** documents the reactions of American media to one of their latest urban interventions: Two giant white flags were secretly hoisted on the Brooklyn Bridge, which triggered outbursts and speculations of terrorism in the media. The compilation of these TV reports investigates a politics of fear in the age of Trump and Brexit and holds a mirror to current media reports oriented upon sensational news and the dissemination of fear. At the same time, the work’s echo in the international media illustrates the effectiveness of artistic interventions.

Khaled Jarrar, an artist who grew up in Ramallah under Israeli occupation, also employs a similar site-specific and performative approach. During the US election campaign, he set off on a road trip along the US-Mexican border to forge a ladder from pieces of the border fence and installed it there as a symbol of common dialogue.

These works are contrasted by a cluster of historical video works, which address the topic of the border around the turn of the millennium. In **Ursula Biemann's** groundbreaking video essay *Performing the Border*, which lends its title to the exhibition, the Mexican border town Ciudad Juarez, a center of global high-tech production, serves as an example to discuss the situation of female workers. Video footage produced on site, interviews with the women, TV documentary material, and police reports create a multifaceted image of the border as a discursive space, describing both the surveillance strategies of the companies as well as the claiming of alternative spaces between (female) subjectivity and capitalism.

The documentary of **Christoph Schlingensief's** art project *Ausländer Raus!* (directed by **Paul Poet**), by contrast, bluntly uncovers the deeply rooted nationalism of the Austrian population, who were invited to "vote out" foreigners exhibited in a container in Vienna's city center in the year 2000. In the 2001 video *Border Crossing Services* by **Martin Krenn** and **Oliver Ressler** this theme is addressed through conversations conducted in Germany and Austria with politically engaged immigrants and representatives of the political left, which are ordered into four sections for analysis and critique: "Who is allowed to migrate?" "Celebrating and excluding", "About border crossing services", and "Against racism". **Hito Steyerl's** video essay *The Empty Center* observes the architectural and political changes of Potsdamer Platz in Berlin over a timeframe of eight years (1990–1998). The history of the site exemplifies that immigrants and minorities were always needed to establish a powerful heart of the "national mainstream". In return, Steyerl's film gives a voice and history to those who continue to be marginalized and invisible in this social mainstream.

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Image material: <http://www.kunstraum.net/en/press>

Opening hours:

Tuesday–Friday, 11:00 am – 7:00 pm, and Saturday 11:00 am – 3:00 pm

Free entrance