

Rendering Refusal

Exhibition

15 Feb – 28 Mar 2021

Refusal renders hope visible. It demands that the conditions for hope emerge and flourish. Wilfully signifying possibilities of deviation, refusal speaks to denied histories and subjectivities.

Hope resides in small spaces, in slivers and in cracks. It is shaped – often under pressure – by desires and ambitions and can negotiate histories, cultures, political spheres, and planetary conditions. Acting as a resource that enables individuals and communities to persist, hope can offer visions of prosperity, security, and redemption to those who seek or need it.

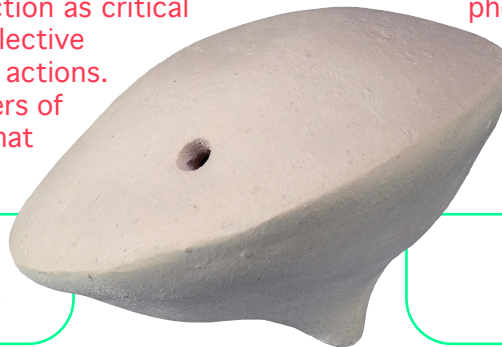
Although appearing divergent, when brought together, hope and refusal can conspire. They can refute the logics of existing orders and function as critical lenses for sustaining collective values, approaches, and actions.

Offering partial renders of socio-political realities that

misalign with the status quo, *Rendering Refusal* explores what can emerge from saying no. In an attempt to broaden perspectives on long-standing political conflicts and to shape futures from contradiction and difference, the works in the exhibition suggest responsibility for plurality and materialise what is often muted, erased, or made fugitive. Working with strategies of non-compliance and negation, the artists present small acts of domestic rebellion, create anti-monuments to myths, imagine failure as progress and manoeuvre between systems of governance. Presenting strategies, proposals and interventions, *Rendering Refusal* addresses moments of metamor-

phosis, intimacy, and vulnerability, seeking transformation, regeneration and change.

*Kunstraum
Kreuzberg/Bethanien*



*Betonhalle
silent green*



Greetings from German Federal Cultural Foundation

transmediale is one of the most important media art festivals internationally. The German Federal Cultural Foundation has been funding it since 2004. The 2021–22 festival edition is a response to Covid. There is nothing more challenging for a public festival than a lockdown. At the same time, people are spending more and more time in front of private computers. The digital has become common property. Even more, it is a tool that seems to fully determine our everyday lives in the pandemic world. It is high time to speak out against the speed with which digital modernity is turning our lives upside down. High time to stop time. With this year's festival theme, *for refusal*, transmediale is saying stop; this is a year to reflect on what art can mean in the digital space, how participation and political engagement come alive, how the exchange between science, education,

and art succeeds – and what role a media art festival that refuses to follow the status quo of current technological acceleration plays.

The German Federal Cultural Foundation thanks the new artistic director of the festival, Nora O Murchú, and the entire transmediale team for their joy in experimentation and their courage to seek out new places in Berlin during Covid times, daring the maximum dissolution of the festival time – all this under a title that is called *for refusal*, but actually means: “Everybody joins in”!

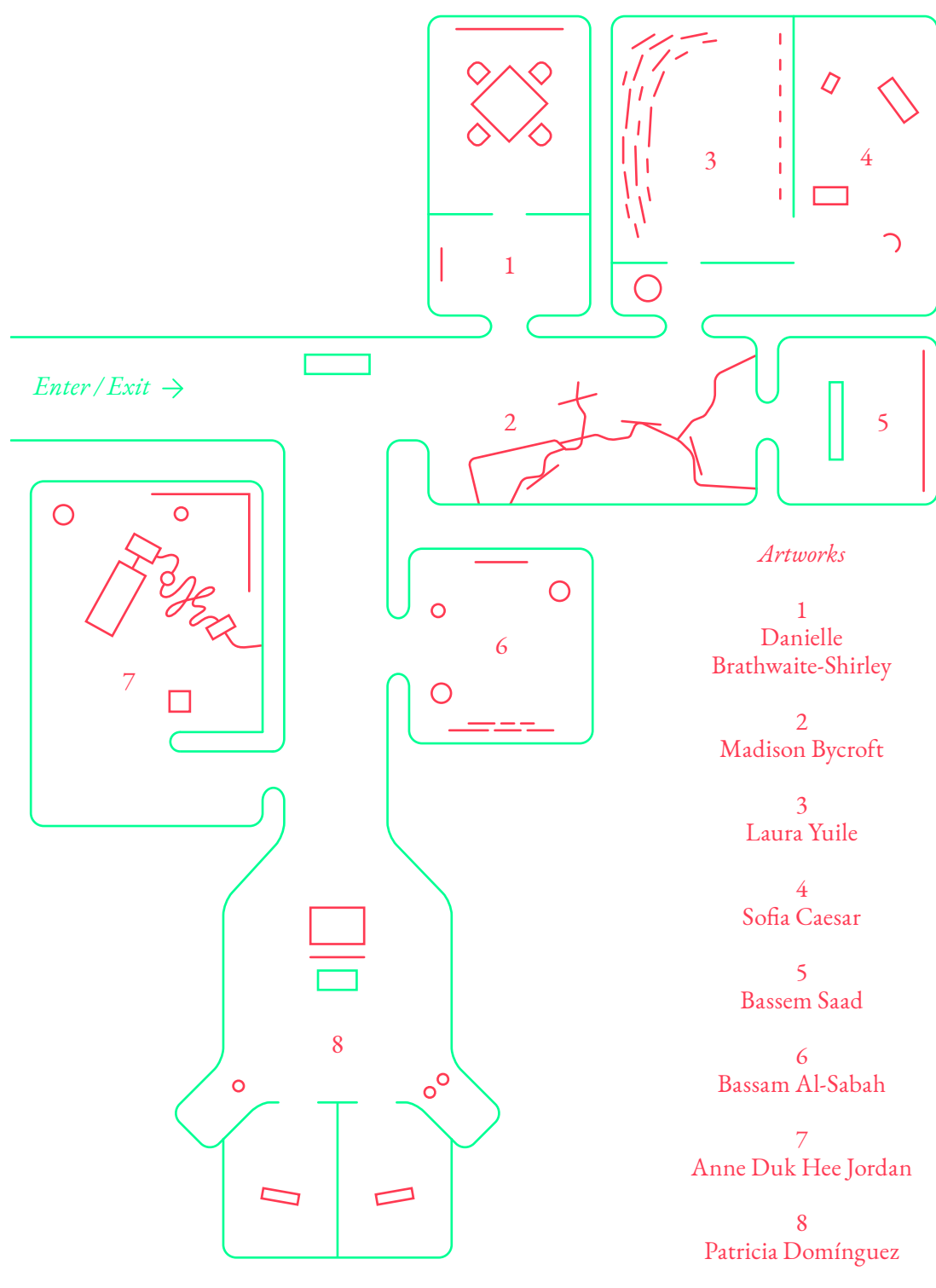
Hortensia Völckers
Vorstand / Künstlerische Direktorin

Kirsten Haß
Vorstand / Verwaltungsdirektorin

Artsformation

transmediale's 2021–22 exhibition *Rendering Refusal* is the project launch for our cooperation project Artsformation. It's the starting point for several cultural events in the framework of Artsformation unfolding over the year. Artsformation is a research project exploring the intersection between arts, society and technology, and aims to explore how the arts can help lead society towards more sustainable digital futures in Europe. The cooperation project

launched in autumn 2020 and is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. More information [here](#).



1 Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley

I Can't Remember a Time I Didn't Need You, 2020
Installation

Set in a city that has been overtaken by an unprecedented fog, *I Can't Remember a Time I Didn't Need You* is an immersive adventure game exploring the complex relations between cultural representations, surveillance, and the everyday experiences of Black Trans people. Infrastructures of bureaucracy and monitoring permit and restrict access to the game, forcing users to reconsider their own identity and sense of belonging. In this immersive adventure, Brathwaite-Shirley focuses on grieving, remembrance, and hope for the experiences of Black Trans people,

creating an archive that centres and upholds their right to life.

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley is an artist working predominantly in animation, sound, performance, and video games to communicate the experiences of being a Black Trans person. Spurred on by a desire to record the “history of Trans people both living and past”, their work can often be seen as a Trans archive, where the experiences of Black Trans people are stored for the future.

Thanks to Weise7 for technical collaboration.
The work was co-commissioned by QUAD.

2 Madison Bycroft

Ruses and Refusals, 2019
Video Installation, 60'

Portraying a series of characters who resist representation, *Ruses and Refusals* samples an array of images, language, and references from history, pop culture, mythology, cinema, and art history in an aesthetic of kaleidoscopic excess. The film gathers a motley crew of anti-heros: Buster Keaton, Julian of Norwich, the Greek figure of Thetis, the philosopher Diogenes, a blobfish, a fox and a beaver, a satyr, and a “very hungry lady”. Their techniques of resistance vary – some perform non-expression, while others withdraw, placing themselves in a future out of

frame. Together they play with their own characterisation, loitering out of shot and refusing to stay still.

Working with video, sculpture, and performance, Madison Bycroft's current interests extend into forms of reading and writing, expression, and refusal. Exploring the politics of illegibility and anti-portraiture through the language of resistance and fugitivity, they question how ‘sense’ is framed by historical contexts, bias, and structures of power.

With the kind support of the Bureau des arts plastiques of the French Institute and the French Ministry of Culture.

3 Laura Yuile

Heavy View, 2020
Installation

In her work *Heavy View*, Laura Yuile collects outdated and malfunctioning TVs and other electrical items, grouping them in constellations of overlapping pop-up windows similar to a computer desktop while pebble dashing their screens. This cheap architectural render is imbued with all the associations of suburbia, which the artist employs as both a ‘white-noise’ and an urban camouflage. Yuile's intention is to make these salvaged objects disappear and to create an opportunity for them

to exist as something else. *Heavy View* is a project that developed out of the artist's consideration of technological and architectural obsolescence; the failed utopia of modernist social housing, and the rapid waste generated by unfashionable or unrepairable devices.

Laura Yuile's multidisciplinary practice explores the entanglements between domestic and urban space through matters of community, sustainability, and obsolescence, and the effects of globalisation and technological development.

4 Sofia Caesar

Workation, 2019
Video Installation

Workation (prata) 2'17" | *Workation (cama)* 3'27" | *Workation (papel)* 3'42" | *Workation (rede)* 3'07" | *Tired Mobiles (Exhausta)*, 2019

Workation loops four self-portraits of the artist reclining while at work across four screens of increasing size: a smartphone, a laptop, and two LCD monitors. The screens rest on cushions and carpet, in a yellow space between office and beach. In the four videos Caesar holds a smartphone, where viewers can see the initial stock images Caesar retrieved from googling the contradictory term “workation”, showing “flexible” individuals subsumed by the productive forces of capitalism. Caesar is shown in a hammock, at the beach, in bed, and on an idyllic balcony, but rather than relaxing, she misuses these places of leisure as working sites, which also become “material” for her art. *Workation* presents an embodied critique of the demands for 24-hour

availability, or “remote presence”, that modern technology enables – and instead meditates on collective exhaustion.

Rooted in dance practices and somatic therapies, Sofia Caesar's work evokes physical states between activity and passivity, labour and rest, movement and pause. Acknowledging the intimate effects of technology on our bodies and minds, as well as the physical demands of productivity, her installations often summon stillness, slowness, and repose. Her practice spans the relationship between the Latin American avant-gardes, the role of the contemporary artist, and the aesthetics of leisure as appropriated by international tech corporations.

With the support of the Flemish government and the Flanders Department of Culture, Youth and Media.

5 Bassem Saad

Congress of Idling Persons, 2021
Film, 30'

Congress of Idling Persons features five interlocutors who play themselves and greater fictions amid broader trans-historical narratives. In the shadows of recent world-historical events, artist and writer Bassem Saad, DJ and translator Rayyan Abdel Khalek, musical artist Sandy Chamoun, writer Islam Khatib, and organiser Mekdes Yilma examine a cartography of protest, crisis, humanitarian and mutual aid, migrant labour, and Palestinian outsider status. Punctuated by the late Arab Spring and the Black Lives Matter revolts of 2020, as well as by the Beirut port explosion, the film weaves through transhistorical constants, from collective rage to

mutualism, propelled by the speech and acts of its performers. With this work, Saad asks: If a group action is a riot and not a revolution, then who films it? If four is a riot, is it also a congress?

Bassem Saad is an artist and writer born on 11 September and trained in architecture. His work explores objects and operations that distribute violence, pleasure, welfare, and waste. Through video, sculpture, and writing, he investigates and records strategies for manoeuvring within and beyond present systems of governance.

The work was commissioned by transmediale with the support of the Martin Roth-Initiative.

6 Bassam Al-Sabah

Fenced within the silent cold walls, 2018
Film, 12'29"

Familiar Scenes That Refuse To Stay, 2019

Fenced within the silent cold walls features a recreation of the artist's former home in Iraq, to which his family are unable to return. As the camera moves through the derelict house, digital images begin to escape from a forgotten TV and computer screens, and materialise into living forms. These forces surge out in utter destruction, invading the domestic realm. A voice introduces itself as Al-Sabah's grandmother who describes the burning of sentimental objects in the home before fleeing, leaving everything behind but her photographs. Reflecting on this childhood memory as an adult, Al-Sabah weaves imagery pulled from cartoons

dreams and moods that subside in a few weeks, 2019

with paintings of his family portraits, deconstructing the links between fantasy and reality, the hero and the everyday, and make-believe and fact.

Across video, painting, sculpture, and textiles, Bassam Al-Sabah's work aims to convey visions of war, resistance, and exile. His artwork projects political meaning on to Arabic-dubbed anime cartoons, broadcast across the Middle East since the 1980s. Concerned with how memories of the past are continually revised to meet the present, the reworked animations make space for historical trauma and queer possibility to intersect.

With the support of Culture Ireland.

7 Anne Duk Hee Jordan

Atmospheres of Breathing, 2020
Installation

Staying With the Trouble, 2019, 10'54" | *Don't Panic*, 2020 | *Singing Saw*, 2018 | *I Am So Ashamed*, 2020 | *Sea Cucumber*, 2020

Taking evolution and adaptation as her primary themes, Anne Duk Hee Jordan imagines visions of post-Anthropocene futures through strange lifeforms and mechanical breathing machines. Presented as a complex system, *Atmospheres of Breathing* explores fantastical ecological networks of animated immaterial beings, where even the most microscopic of elements are made visible. Her constructed organisms combine sculptural, biological, and technological elements, between the human and the nonhuman. Micro and macro video footage shows the cocoon of a monarch butterfly, a shame-faced crab,

and an inflated sea cucumber as they become entwined in a ludic environment. The machines operate according to a 4-7-8 breathing pattern based on yogic pranayama – an ancient technique for meditative breathing.

Transience and transformation are central themes in the work of Anne Duk Hee Jordan. Through movement and performance, she builds motorised sculptures and creates edible landscapes. Her installation opens up dialogues between natural phenomena, philosophy, and art, and shifts focus away from humans to non-human ecologies.

8 Patricia Domínguez

Madre Drone, 2020
Video Installation, 20'51"

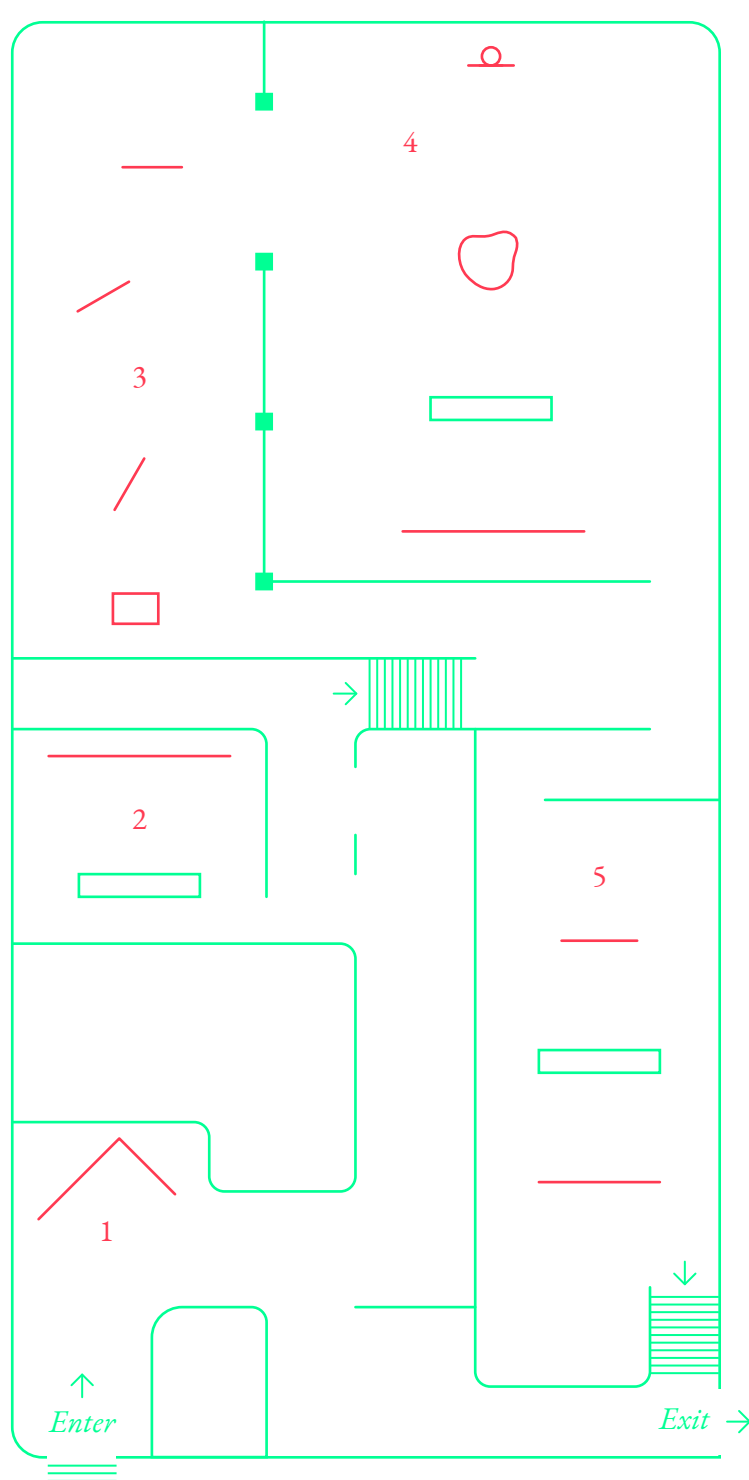
Multi species offerings, 2019 | *Yerbateras*, 2020 | *A.C.A.B.*, 2020 | *The Blind Toucan*, 2020

Inspired by the spread of wildfires in Bolivia as well as social protests in Chile in 2019, *Madre Drone* questions technological state surveillance through a story of multi-species resistance. The installation merges myths, symbols, and rituals with ideas of extraction, cultural appropriation, and natural destruction due to industrialisation. Domínguez's video and totemic sculptures take the fragments of a broken world and propose new configurations for living in a strange reality in which plants neutralise robotic energy, drones cry, and toucans have been blinded by fire. Beyond the destructive forces of

colonialism and its legacy, Domínguez proposes a healing space where viewers might live, like plants, in the cracks of post-modernity.

Patricia Domínguez explores healing practices that work against colonial-capitalist extraction and appropriation. Grounded in her ongoing research into ethnobotany in South America, her artwork invites viewers to envision possible futures for both humans and plant life, creeping out of the cracks of (post)modernity.

Commissioned by CentroCentro (Madrid) and produced by Residency Kiosko, (Bolivia) and Galería Patricia Ready (Chile).



Artworks

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1 Eli Cortiñas

Not Gone With The Wind, 2020
Video Installation, 9'

In *Not Gone With The Wind*, Eli Cortiñas explores the politics of images and their impact. Made from a collage of found sequences taken from Hollywood cinema, television series, advertising, Ted Talks, and YouTube videos, the film critiques the reinforcement of toxic stereotypes and misleading historical narratives. In this era of fake news, Covid-fuelled conspiracy theories, and global political uprisings, Cortiñas rightly asks “who owns the narrative”? and suggests that to save the future, one might have to reassess the past. With her meticulous selection of moving image sequences and quotes, Cortiñas

refers to the current regime of ideas, and reveals how fear and mass media’s complicity reinforces hegemonic policies.

Eli Cortiñas’ video works are based on existing material that she selects based on her fascination with the work of auteur directors such as Buñuel and Truffaut. Refusing traditional filmic devices, such as linear narrative, the Cuban-descendant artist distorts footage to question the construction of hegemonic narratives around gender, race, and class.

Text written by Elise Lammer.

2 Sung Tieu

Memory Dispute, 2017
Video Installation, 22'42"

Investigating shifting economies within the use of toxins in past and contemporary Asia, *Memory Dispute* captures a remote rainforest in central Vietnam, an area heavily attacked by napalm during the Vietnamese American war. Ghostly images of an ecosystem now irrevocably altered become a metaphorical study when contrasted with captions meticulously documenting the process of a skin whitening treatment prevalent in Asia. An acid fluid is applied onto the body to separate two skin layers, allowing the first layer of skin to be entirely peeled off. Mapping the disparate and converging lines between napalm and that of an acid skin peel,

Tieu traces how rapid economic growth, communication, and cultural exchange alter subjecthood in contemporary Vietnam.

Sung Tieu’s work operates at the intersection of her personal experiences, global history, and cultural incursions of dematerialised art traditions. Her practice addresses Post-Cold War histories and the diasporic experience of unfixed temporal and spatial certainties. Through her lens, she upsets the status of truth and foregrounds the ways evidence is manipulated to serve socio-political agendas and reinforce imperialist violence of physical and psychological nature.

3 Jennifer Mehigan

Creamatorium, 2020
Mixed Media

Creamatorium combines sculpture, image, and text to explore the grave as a space for creative expression under colonial rule in Ireland, contrasting it with English approaches to garden design in the 17th and 18th centuries. Guided by the necropastoral and the subterranean – where death lives – ‘strange meetings’ happen between the artist, her friends, North Belfast horse mythology, the soil, the dead, and the internet.

With a background in floristry and graphic design, Jennifer Mehigan combines clichés of contemporary self-help literature with queer Irish histories and the violent poetics of abstraction. Her often multi-disciplinary installations are grounded in a framework of painting, beginning as images that morph into text, sound, smell or taste.

4 Natasha Tontey

The Epoch of Mapalucene, 2021
Video Installation

Wa'anak Witu Watu,
2021, 24'37"

In the Indonesian province of North Sulawesi, the stone-revering Minahasa were organised according to the gift economy of Mapalus, which was based on volunteerism, kinship with nature and mutual aid. According to native cosmology, the first person ever to exist was a woman who gave birth through a stone. With the presence of colonialists from the West and their interactions with the locals, the Minahasans evolved to a stone-based exchange system that was informed by a mixture of their ancient spiritual beliefs and the Christian-influenced capitalist ideas. *The Epoch of Mapalucene* explores the dynamics of Minahasa worldview

The Epoch of Mapalucene,
2021, 14"

through the perspective of digital culture, speculating on its potential for imagining an alternative society based on a reciprocity that brings together animate and inanimate realms.

Natasha Tontey is an artist and graphic designer based in Yogyakarta. She is interested in exploring the concept of fiction as a method of speculative thinking. This investigation brings forward the fictional account of the history and myth surrounding ‘manufactured fear’ and looks at how it determines the expectation for the future.

The work was commissioned by transmediale with the support of the Martin Roth-Initiative.

5 Larry Achiampong

Relic Traveller: Phase 2, 2018–2019
Video Installation

Pan African Flag For The Relic Travellers' Alliance (Motion), 2018

Relic 3 is part of Achiampong’s ongoing project – *Relic Traveller: Phase 2* – a multi-disciplinary multi-site piece that builds on themes of lost testimony, fallen empire, and displacement by deconstructing the architectures of colonialism. The work considers the current socio-political climate, contrasting a rise of nationalism in the West and tensions around Brexit to the African Union’s passport programme, which aims to open borders across a unified Africa. The project imagines a future in which the West declines and the African Union becomes prosperous, harmonious, and responsible for shap-

ing the planet’s future. *Relic 3* picks up from *Relic 2*, detailing a migrant worker’s struggles as they try to live in a hostile, alien environment.

Examining his communal and personal heritage, particularly the intersection between pop culture and the postcolonial position, Larry Achiampong crate-digs the vaults of history. His work examines constructions of ‘the self’ by splicing audible and visual materials of personal and interpersonal archives, offering multiple perspectives that reveal entrenched socio-political contradictions in contemporary society.

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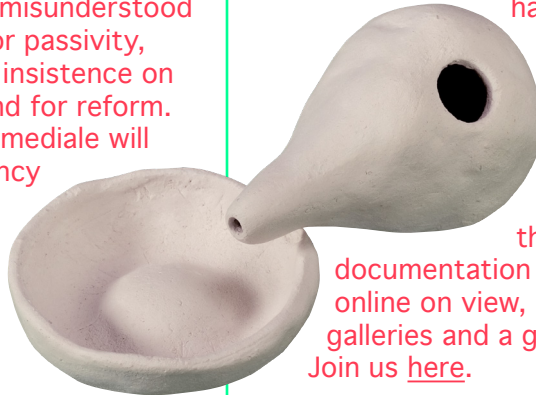
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A Year-Long Festival

transmediale 2021–22 *for refusal* has been redesigned as a year-long event taking place online and in-person throughout Berlin. Easily misunderstood as a gesture of inaction or passivity, refusal can equally be an insistence on an alternative or a demand for reform. The 34th edition of transmediale will examine the political agency of refusal and its generative possibilities. Read more [here](#).



Almanac for Refusal

Unfolding over the course of the year-long festival, transmediale's new digital platform [*Almanac for Refusal*](#) brings together a collection of browser-based artworks; films, photo-essays, texts, images, and podcasts. Inspired by almanac traditions, the collection will update at the end of each lunar cycle, and explores the material, technological, and cultural aspects of refusal.

Proxy Visits

Due to lockdown restrictions, physical access to the exhibition is currently not allowed. In light of this, transmediale has created a digital visiting programme – *Proxy Visits* – to explore the exhibition. In addition, there is extensive documentation of the exhibition online on view, including image galleries and a guided video tour. Join us [here](#).



Imprint

transmediale e.V.
Gerichtstraße 35, 13347 Berlin
www.transmediale.de

Artwork descriptions

Nora O Murchú, Lorena Juan,
and the artists

Translation

Elisa Barth, Anja Schulte

Copy editing

Maeve O'Neill, Hannah Gregory

Editorial coordination

Anna-Lena Panter

Graphic design

The Laboratory of Manuel Bürger
(Manuel Bürger, Simon Schindele)

Exhibition architecture

Sebastian Kite