



Art as Connection

23 October 2021 – 9 January 2022
Aargauer Kunsthhaus, Aarau

In reaction to the upheavals resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, *Art as Connection* takes the form of an experimental and open exhibition based on a collective development process. The artistic contributions were developed in a collective discourse and in close collaboration with the artists. The works did not necessarily emerge from this crisis, but address already existing political, social and artistic questions that have been intensified and reinforced by the far-reaching challenges of the past year.

The pandemic has more clearly exposed existing problems and deficiencies in society and given them a new urgency. As a consequence of this emergency we were repeatedly and directly confronted with questions about isolation and exclusion, suspicion, illness and death, the value of solidarity and community. Even though, or precisely because, we were driven into isolation in order to combat the pandemic, it has become clear that we are bound together in an ever closer network of relationships, and that this kind of crisis can only be dealt with communally. Art offers us the opportunity to create connections of this kind. *Art as Connection* addresses our connectedness on different levels.

In order to offer different perspectives of this unusual time and meet uncertainty with openness, the curatorial team of the Aargauer Kunsthhaus developed the exhibition in a close and deliberately collective discourse with the invited artists. Their contributions to the exhibition appear in different formats – from 'classic' artistic works, such as a series of drawings, or an installation made of clay objects, via events to very open, process-based settings. With a few exceptions, the artists involve additional protagonists, and rely heavily on collaborative networking. In the course of the project, colleagues from various different departments of the Kunsthhaus also became involved. The communal, connective aspect is also important with regard to the public. Many of the artistic contributions

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require the active participation of visitors, or invite the public to join in.

Several of the contributed works assume the form of meeting rooms, inviting us to linger. The possibility of coming together physically with other people for any length of time has become a privilege over the past few months. The need for social exchange in real space is currently great, and its necessity for society undisputed. Alongside the engagement with art, the exhibition *Art as Connection* offers an opportunity to spend time in a structured environment where one is also able to affect that art and exchange ideas about it.

The educational project *Connection Nest* also relies to a great extent on the element of connectedness and community. The museum public is invited to add its own voice to the multivocal experiences of the crisis, and to enter into dialogue. Which (art) object, which painting, which personal object prompts a feeling of connectedness? What can console, nourish, help and provide support in uncertain times? The public is requested to submit a photograph of that (art) object, along with a brief statement, by email or post. The contributions are continuously incorporated by the artist and art educator **Laura Arminda Kingsley** (b. 1984 in Columbus/USA, lives in Zurich) into a video work that is shown in the exhibition.

The artists and their contributions

Sabian Baumann (b. 1962 in Zug, lives in Zurich) is showing the walk-in installation *Signes et Sentiments* (2021). Modelled from unfired clay, lifesized hands hang from the ceiling in two attitudes - outstretched and clenched into a fist. Their positioning as well as the nearness or distance between them produces a variety of human gestures. The work addresses the complex spectrum of expression and activity of the human hand. The work could be seen in terms of the pandemic: on the one hand everyday contact was missing, on the other there were various political manifestations, such as the Black Lives Matter demonstrations and the women's strike, which collectively addressed the persistent political deficiencies in our society, not least during the pandemic. But it would be a mistake to reduce the work to this, because *Signes et Sentiments* goes beyond this interpretation.

Aside from his* own artistic work, which includes drawings, objects, videos and installations, Baumann is also increasingly involved in collaborative and trans-disciplinary projects.

In 2013, together with the artist and curator **Karin Michalski** (b. 1966 in Frankfurt am Main/DE, lives in Berlin/DE), Baumann developed the exhibition concept *An Unhappy Archive* inspired by the political concepts and figures of Sara Ahmed and other feminist-queer theorists (first installed at Les

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Complices*, Zurich), which was concerned with the politicization of individually experienced negative emotions. Referring to the concept of vulnerability, used in public discourse around the Covid-19 pandemic to identify so-called vulnerable group, *An Unhappy Archive Part II*, newly conceived for the Aarau exhibition, will take a critical look at the issue of the vulnerable body - in order to break the connection between vulnerability and supposed passivity, and create space for the utopian imagination of a rebellious future. With contributions from Paloma Ayala, Dafne Boggeri, Criptonite, Thirza Cuthand, Mîrkan Deniz, Feeltank Chicago, Ayoung Kim, Naomi Rincón Gallardo, Teatro da Vertigem, Sabian Baumann and Karin Michalski (in collaboration with Ann Cvetkovich).

Mîrkan Deniz (b. 1990, stateless, lives in Zurich) is making, for the first time, an extensive series of drawings for the exhibition. The 300 freehand drawings are minimalist in form, and consist entirely of black lines and different-coloured planes. In these, Deniz is addressing the themes of surveillance and the drawing of national frontiers - which suddenly became relevant to everyone during the pandemic - by means of abstract representation: the drawings show military posts that were built along the borders of Turkey and Syria, Iraq, Iran and Armenia, and which run through Kurdish settlement areas. These posts can be recognized by their architecture on Google Maps. Deniz picks up this reduced form of representation and thus also refers to the subversive use of new imaging techniques.

The project *Nous Sommes Partout (We Are Everywhere)*, conceived and produced by **Dreams Come True, Hichmoul Pilon Production and the collective anthropie** and originated in French-speaking Switzerland in 2020, is being carried on in the Aargauer Kunsthaus. A locally rooted version is being realised within the context of *Art as Connection*. To achieve this, an editorial group is producing and collecting texts by activists from the region, which will finally be presented in the form of a participatory performance. The public will be invited to a collective reading in French and German on 8 January 2022, at which they themselves will be able to have their say about the reading of the collected texts. With contributions from numerous anonymous individuals; Mikele; Faris; Oshose, Janko and Z; an activist from the R Collective, which works to obtain residence permits for people in exile; Samba; Truc' Ondine; D'jin Undurraga' AL; Loïc Valley; Amani Collective; a collective for the defence of the rights of sex workers within the context of the feminist strike and the women of the canton of Vaud; Hêvi; Elena and Rina; Les composteuses; El.; C. (more to follow).

Clare Goodwin (b. 1973 in Birmingham/GB, lives in Zurich) is known for her hard-edge, constructed paintings and ceramics, large-format murals and works on paper, which stand on the border between abstraction and figuration. In 2020 she began a new series of works entitled *Object Furniture*, consisting of several hand-made and hand-painted objects in wood that recall domestic furniture. These are usable objects that also exist purely as art objects. During the first Covid-19 lockdown Goodwin produced a special corona-related edition called *Distant Lounge* (2020) dealing with the unsettling social distance rules and isolation to which we still have to adhere today. For the Aargauer Kunsthaus Goodwin will design an environment that focuses on 'home', the place we've all been forced to spend much more time than usual during the pandemic. Inspired by her

*Aargauer Kunsthaus

collection of interior design books and her own lived experience, Goodwin reinterprets the physical and emotional relationship we have with the place called home, revealing personal fictions and narratives.

Hemauer/Keller (Christina Hemauer, b. 1973 in Zurich, and Roman Keller, b. 1969 in Liestal) have been working together since 2003. The cultural response to the climate crisis has been at the centre of their collaborative work since the beginning. In 2006 they heralded post-petrolism, the age after fossil fuels. Using different media such as film and photography - whether in installations or in book form - and a variety of different approaches, since 2014 they have focused on, among other things, the colours of the sky as altered by human intervention. For *Art as Connection* they are working on a presentation to show their most recent research.

Thomas Hirschhorn (b. 1957 in Bern, lives in in Paris/FR) returns repeatedly in his work to complex political and social themes, and does not shy away from controversial content. In the outside area of the Aargauer Kunsthaus, with his installation *Can I Trust You*, Hirschhorn will create a precarious and at the same time an affirmative presence in the public space (Opening on 27 November, until 19 December 2021). The artist identifies the Covid-19 crisis (and the melting of glaciers) and the way in which we deal with it, both collectively and individually, as the starting point of his work. The installation emanates a decidedly desolate aesthetic, since the crisis has taught us that we must learn to take nothing for certain or for granted. Hirschhorn wants to encourage us with his work to accept and affirm 'the precarious'; not to agree with everything, but to say yes to today, to the indeterminate, the uncertain, the unstable.

RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) (Marie-Antoinette Chiarenza, b. 1957 in Tunis/TN, and Daniel Hauser, b. 1959 in Bern, live in Zurich) have worked as a collective since 1983. The ending '& co' in their name refers to all kinds of cooperations with people: sometimes other individuals are part of the art works, sometimes they are only involved in the process of the work's creation, according to the context of places and themes. For *Art as Connection* RELAX take up a theme that has acquired a greater public during the pandemic: the everyday work and the working conditions of care staff. Basing the work on their many years of artistic engagement with questions of the economy of care and provision, with *HEALTH COMPLEX* RELAX is showing a new multi-media installation of video and photographic works.

The works of the multi-disciplinary artist **Romy Rüeegg** (b. 1983 in Zurich, lives in Zurich and Berlin/DE) make previously inconspicuous things visible and attempt to rethink places with targeted performance- or installation-based interventions. In her project for the *Art as Connection* exhibition Rüeegg engages with the question of the power structures of the artistic production of knowledge and canon formation. In her new edition of the *Wunschbibliothek* (Wishful Library) she invites various artists to take part in a piece of collective historiography. The starting point for the *Wunschbibliothek* is Rüeegg's examination of the police photographs of members of travellers in the Aargau State Archive. At the centre of the experiential space produced for the exhibition is the political entanglement of racialization, land ownership and the associated privileges and means of access to energy resources.

With contributions by: Amal Alhaag, Mohamed Abdelkarim, Noor Abuarafeh, Jasmina Al-Qaisi, Cana Bilir-Meier, Lamin Fofana, Maria Guggenbichler, İpek Hamzaoğlu, Samia Henni, Suza Husse, Maria Iorio, Chantal Küng, Jasmina Metwaly, Miwa Negoro & Yamu Wang, Maria-Cecilia Quadri, Tina Reden, Kerstin Schroedinger together with Cannach MacBride, Pascal Schwaighofer, Emma Wolf-Haugh.

Gregory Stauffer (b. 1980 in Yverdon, lives in Biel/Bienne) works in and between the fields of dance, performance and sculpture. He experiments in situ, taking the body as an intuitive subject standing in a relationship with its environment. For *Art as Connection* Stauffer will set up an exhibition space as a room for dance and movement. For an hour once a week the room will turn into a club. The setting plays with elements of clubbing introduced into the museum environment. The music mixes are produced by musicians from Aarau and the region. The room offers an opportunity to experiment, to sweat, to draw strength and let go and establish a connection with one's own body in the physical space. Stauffer is also presenting a potential project: a publicly accessible chamber in the Rathausgarten, warmed by the heat of the adjacent crematorium, which serves as a space for meditation and as an intermediary between life and death.

Max Treier (b. 1974 in Laufenburg, lives in Baden) has made a video installation in which he draws attention to the creative process involved in works by various artists. He is not interested in the full process leading to the completion of an artwork. Instead he explores the gaps, the interstices or the moment before something happens: the brief moment before the painter makes her brushstroke, or the reflection that occurs during artistic research. His installation is complemented with a fragmentary documentation of spaces in which art is created or exhibited, such as studios or museum spaces.

Rolf Winnewisser's (b. 1949 in Niedergösgen, lives in Ennetbaden) contribution entitled *KAMMER DER FRAGEN* (CHAMBER OF QUESTIONS), a large-scale installation, explores the network of answers produced in the course of the artistic process, carrying it and allowing it to progress. The artist, who grew up in Lucerne and has lived in Aargau since 1993, took part in *documenta 5* in Kassel in 1972 and had a solo exhibition, *split horizon*, in the Aargauer Kunsthhaus in 2008, sees himself as a medium of sensory and cognitive forces that pass through him. The starting point for his work lies in the shocks connected with his experiences between the past, the present and anticipation of the future. The structure of the installation connects existing and new works by the artist with the history of the museum, the current exhibition and the question of the anthropological task of art. Two guided tours with the author Carlo Sauter will attempt to open up *KAMMER DER FRAGEN* and render it accessible for communal discussions. In a zine workshop during the exhibition, booklets - in text and image - will be printed once a week, addressing the aspect of connection and containing contributions by various artists.

Curatorial team Aargauer Kunsthhaus

Katharina Ammann, Yasmin Afschar, Silja Burch, Simona Ciuccio, Bassma El Adisey, Bettina Mühlebach

Documentation

Rather than a classic exhibition catalogue, a publication will be devoted to the process of preparation for the exhibition as well as the exhibition itself, such as discussions, statements, sketches and situations.

The current extraordinary situation will be documented both with reference to social and to individual experiences, and at the same time we will examine the possible artistic and curatorial strategies through which art can be produced, exhibitions realized and a sense of community established under these unusual conditions.

Thanks

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Preview for the Media

Friday 22.10., 11.00 a.m.

Tour of the exhibition with Katharina Ammann. Information and booking: christina.omlin@ag.ch

Events

Various events are being planned, and will be adapted to the current situation. Please check details on our website www.aargauerkunsthaus.ch before your visit.

Aargauer Kunsthaus opening hours

Tuesday - Sunday 10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m., Thursday 10.00 a.m. - 8.00 p.m.
Closed Monday

Holiday opening hours

Boxing Day 26.12.2021 10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m.
Monday 27.12.2021 10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m.
New Year's Eve 31.12.2021 10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m.
New Year's Day 1.1.2022 10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m.
Christmas Eve 24.12.2021 closed
Christmas Day 25.12.2021 closed

Images for the media

Images are available to download from our website www.aargauerkunsthaus.ch
> **Medien**. Please note picture credits.

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