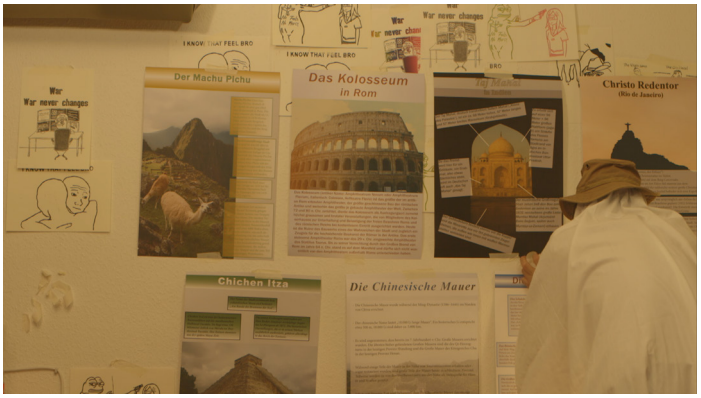
PORTFOLIO

- selected works -

Johanna Maj Schmidt

WE MUST BE MISTAKEN, in progress

A Film by Charlotte Ruppert & Johanna Maj Schmidt
based on a concept by Johanna Maj Schmidt



Video stills, raw material (in progress), 2021

Video stills, raw material (in progress), 2021

Video stills, raw material (in progress), 2021

The film "We Must Be Mistaken" captures the abyss between two different lifeworlds: while politically conscious, middle-class feminists are envisioning a more equal world, two frustrated incels ("Involuntary Celibates"; men, who supposedly stand no chance with women due to their biological features and hold misogynist views) are producing cynical internet-memes in defence of the "freedom of speech". Before the two worlds are introduced, two "itinerate priests" have a conversation about the effects of digitalisation on society. They share the mission to unsettle fixed algorithmic pathways as they are wandering around between online worlds that are increasingly drifting apart. The two itinerate priests are looking after one world each and they support their fosterlings with their wisdoms from time to time. Whereas the feminists reflect their political struggle, their relationships to each other and to men in conversations and songs, there is less communication on the side of the incels. Their feeling of being victims of a "derailing" female desire brings them together. On the side of the feminists, the evolution of mankind is re-defined in a seminar: tadpoles turn into a pissing, putti-like young boy, transforming again into a topless bouldering young man, who is claimed to end as the "homo computicus". The presentation upsets the feminists and their mood is only brightened by the visit of a stripper in a hotdog costume. As the hotdog stumbles and falls down, one of the feminists is taking care of him, nursing him tenderly with ketchup and mustard. In a very personal speech, one of the other feminists vents her frustration about the fact that her friend fell prey to a whining sausage. Despite her knowledge of thousands of years of structural discrimination, she is taking on a onesidedly caring/submissive role. Later, she admits in a private moment (by reciting Brecht's "Barbara Song") that even though, on a cognitive level, she should love caring, feminist men, according to her patriarchally structured desire, she prefers a type of man, who does not ask kindly but just takes what he wants... After one of the incels produces uncountable analogue memes with lino printing and both of them are watching a stream on twitch together they receive unexpected guests. Two young women with udder-bellies seek the absolute attention of the men and make themselves vulnerable, but are completely ignored by them. Thereafter, the incels shown outdoors, running across different terrains. There, they meet one of the itinerate priests, who encourages them to believe in real love. As the incels do not react to his motivational speech, the itinerate priest sneaks into one of their rooms and puts up posters of the Seven Wonders of the World, trying to inspire them to go on analogue journeys. Unsuccessfully. In the end, both itinerate priests amplify the atmospheres of the respective worlds. While one of them is getting drunk and desperately annoyed, the other itinerate priest is rowing a rubber boat towards the sun set. He had found a machine gun in the room of the incels and taken it with him. The film ends with the complete drifting apart of the two worlds and even their respective itinerate priests, who initially had expressed their hopes in the potential of digitalisation to bring people closer together.

EINE EINSTELLUNG ZUM REICHTUM
RICHNESS IN A SINGLE SHOT, 2021-ongoing

Installation view, Villa Esche, Chemnitz, 2021

While, back in the days, the social status and economic success of a person/family was exhibited publicly in representative rooms, today, privacy seems to be more important. Wealth is not talked about. Wealth is, as it seems, a taboo. Johanna Maj Schmidt invites participants from all over to look for a person in their social network, whose house/flat represents wealth the most in their view and ask them for film recordings from inside their place. The videos are filmed in a single shot and with mobile phones. So far, the growing collection comprises silent views into private properties from Berlin, Bogota, Bologna, Le Mans, London, and Vilnius.

BOY WITH HANG, 2021

Schmidt & Ruppert

Solo Performance, Villa Esche, Chemnitz, 2021

A young man in a ghillie suit, a camouflage suit used by the military, is moving across Villa Esche and the surrounding garden. Equipped with a folding stool, he is settling in different places within the exhibition. While seated, he is playing the hang, a percussion instrument, which was invented in 2000, that emanates soothing sounds.

Performer: Andre Schmidt

MY HAPPINESS DEPENDS ON YOU, 2021

Schmidt & Ruppert

Video still, Rencontres Internationales Paris-Berlin, 2021

As a doubled figure inspired by Dolly Parton, the performers are sitting on an inbuilt flatscreen that shows a streaming video of a multiplayer online shooter game by Dr. Disrespect. Dressed in wedding gowns with wavy-blond long-haired wigs, eccentric makeup, and grotesquely big fake boobs (female monstrosity), the performers are holding begging bowls, which are usually used for the collection in churches. Once in a while, they are shouting "My happiness depends on you!" (from Dolly Parton's song "Jolene") hauntingly in chorus, starring at the audience intensely/fury-like/expectantly. If the Heroic traditionally claims a singularity by the self-sacrifice of one individual, strong (man) for the sake of an ideology, a (feminist) response to the emphasis on the outstanding hero, would be a reversion to interdependence. Against this backdrop, the sentence "My happiness depends on you" could be seen, positively, as an anti-heroic preaching or, negatively, as voluntary submission, hinting at the ambivalent relationship between dependency and independency. A short video based on My Happiness Depends On You was part of Rencontres Internationales Paris-Berlin 2021 (video archive).

I WAS THE REASON YOU ARE IN THE WORLD, 2020

Schmidt & Ruppert

Performance, HGB Rundgang, Leipzig, 2020

Dressed in functional/comfortable everyday clothes and with huge light pink udders on their bellies, Schmidt & Ruppert sing a adaptation of Kate Nash's song "Nicest Thing". They perform it amidst drawings, paintings, and sculptures. The lyrical self of the text literally finds her voice regarding her romantic fantasies. Driven by the desire to be her beloved one's only love object for ever, in Schmidt & Ruppert's interpretation, she blusters herself into a more and more narcissistic-authoritarian attitude.

STARDUST WALK OUT, 2020

Public sculpture, Baden-Baden, 2020

A square-shaped sculpture/carpet made of slippers from 4- and 5-star hotels of Baden-Baden. Passers-by are invited to walk around in them in the public space. The work negotiates questions regarding the relationship between private and public life in a place that is known as a retreat for rather wealthy tourists. Stardust Walk Out was realised as a collaboration between Jan-Luca Ott, Johanna Maj Schmidt, and Stefania Smolkina as part of "Conditions of a Necessity", which took place at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden in 2020.

DER UNDIPLOMAT, 2019

Installation view, LOFFT, Leipzig, 2019

"Der Undiplomat" (the "undiplomat") leans against the wall, showing a hybrid, messianic/threatening creature (something between queen and sheep) in an archway, surrounded by an "exotic"/vulnerable environment and a proto-state emblem. Next to the painting, there are two rolls of paper with digitally printed texts describing two different types of undiplomats: both types always immediately find the weak spots, both types of undiplomats put their finger in the wound, but while one of them twists it and thereby creates more chaos, the other one creates focus by putting her finger in the wound. In its former configuration, the undiplomat can be seen as a prototype characteristic of a vulgarizing and derailing time (maybe a Trump kind of figure). In her latter version the undiplomat is also a heroic-uncompromising role model: she confronts herself with weak spots and removes superfluous bullshit, targets problems directly.

THE NEW VERTICAL, 2018

Published in PaperWork, Issue 3

The New Vertical

'What the Anus has got to do with the Trousers' is a Brazilian saying. People commonly use it when one thing has got nothing to do with another thing:

1. Anus
2. Trousers

'What the Anus Has Got to Do with the Trousers' was also the title of a collectively planned exhibition. Yet, some of the artists involved in the exhibition wanted to withdraw their works because they regarded the title as unpoetic. Some of them said they immediately had to think of shit in the in-between:

1. Anus
2. Shit
3. Trousers

If poetry is something that leaves you behind with wondrous encodings, the saying surely does not count as poetry; yet, if the poetic is understood as something that concerns the relations between things, as something that unfolds between things, the clash of anus and trousers can be categorized as poetic, not least because there will always remain an in-between, in which spaces of thought might open up:

1. Anus
2. Space of Thought
3. Trousers

CRYSTAL PALACE GROUP, 2015

Performance, Crystal Palace Park, London, 2015

Four "promoters", dressed in Victorian costumes (referencing the "original spirit" of Crystal Palace) and with a brassard bearing the original design of the Chinese communist flag, are travelling to Crystal Palace Park via Overground. After reaching Crystal Palace Park, the performers set up their corporate-style promotional site and start distributing flyers that are announcing a new development project at Crystal Palace Park. When asked about their costumes they refer to their role as promoters for the Crystal Palace Group, without disclosing any further information about the project or the rationale behind their outfits. Members of the public are redirected to a website advertised on the flyer, which is permanently "Under Construction". Throughout the performance, a looped soundtrack, appropriating a promotional video by the Argentinian real estate company Faena, fills the public space with a seductive sound. The performance connects the Victorian imperialist project with the surreality of the present spirit of capitalism, which is capable of incorporating conflicting ideologies (as in the case of China capitalism + communism). The superficial engagement of the promoters with the project they advertise smoothes over any attempt at questioning the contradictions inherent in their costumes. "Crystal Palace Group" was a performance that took place in 2015 between New Cross and Crystal Palace Park, London as a collaboration between Athanasios Anagnostopoulos, Jacquie Rosenbach, Michelle Salomons, Johanna Maj Schmidt, and Florence Stencel-Wade.

UNTITLED, 2018 (selection)

Untitled, marker on paper, 21x29.7, 2018

GREY IN GREY, 2017

Published in Archipelago, Issue 4

When my grandfather taught me how to swim he stood next to me and held my abdomen so I could move my arms and legs on the surface of the water mass without feeling the gravitation. Before I was able to swim, I had dreamt how my body was swimming. My arms and legs found a common rhythm and started to move forward calmly in transparent water.

As I was able to swim without my grandfather's support I spent many summer afternoons with a friend in the centre of the lake, trying to dive as long and as deep as possible. The deeper we got down the darker and colder turned the water and the more we felt the pressure on our ears and eyes. Whenever we got back to the surface we recharged our lungs floating on a voluminous inflatable mattress that started to smell plasticky in the heat of the glaring sun. We rested on the flat surface until we could not bear the light anymore. Then we went back down. Only when the sun was about to set we started to paddle back to the shore. Taking the first steps on firm ground made my head swim. Before leaving the shore, we deflated the air that had filled our giant mattress into the evening breeze.

When philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering.

I recently went to an exhibition, which encircled the issue of boundaries. Most of the pieces showed liquidity, waves or the sea. The exhibits conveyed a vertiginous feeling. Maybe it was a light form of naupathia. But I think that the opposite was the case. What caused my uneasiness was that the idea of water had become solid. – Some weeks later, I learned about Hegel's owl of Minerva, which only starts to move after dusk: “Only one word more concerning the desire to teach the world what it ought to be. For such a purpose philosophy at least always comes too late. Philosophy, as the thought of the world, does not appear until reality has completed its formative process, and made itself ready.” – As topical perspectives on water merge and turn into an image that seeks to reflect reality, it can only be known. It paints its grey in grey. Metaphor is always delayed.

Surrounded by what I regarded to be solidified water, I got impatient. As any kind of impatience, my eagerness rested on the idea of a time lag: The image of water was merely expressing something that had already crystallized. I could not see it as anything but a manifestation of an abstract thought related to a given process. Against the backdrop of the global flow of capital and increasing flexibility, mobility, precarity and porosity, the image of the liquid might still be able to reflect an analysis of this time. It is a sad, unnerving image though because it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known.

In order to gain some distance to my impatient perspective on the exhibits, I tried to focus on water for its own sake, asking myself how it would possibly reveal itself as l'eau pour l'eau. It would come into view as an element that existed long before humans could relate to it in mediated ways. Its potential to nurture or dehydrate plants, animals, and humans, carve out stone and let islands or even continents would leave an uncanny feeling.

With a more detached gaze, I returned to the image of water, to its solid shape in the mediated present. It stayed current but could not point beyond mere reflection. Perhaps, I thought, it belonged to the “cold stream” that Ernst Bloch identified as the unmasking of ideologies and the disenchantment of metaphysical illusion. The cold stream comprises the useful analysis of economic conditions and the resistance against ideological deception as implied in Marxist materialism. Yet, according to Bloch, there is a “warm stream” of Marxism as well, which refers to the hope that underlies all liberating intents, the goal towards which all disenchantments are undertaken.

When philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering.

GAMING LANDSCAPE #1 & #2, 2020-21

Gaming Landscape #1 & #2, acrylics & oil on wood & cardboard, 120 x 85cm, 2020-21

In her paintings, Johanna Maj Schmidt explores atmospheric qualities of fictional spaces. She tries to capture atmospheres of places that only appear in the process of painting, which lie at the boundary between outer and inner reality. The emerging landscapes result from a speculative tracing of actions that might have occurred in those places.

THE PLURAL TEMPORALITY OF THE PRIMITIVE, 2016

Lecture Performance, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 2016

Starting from "Santhal Family", the first modernist sculpture in India and the specific relationship to primitivism characteristic of the Contextual Modernism at Santiniketan where it emerged, the lecture performance moves on to ask what the notion of the Primitive might mean in the context of globalisation. The outdated notion of "the Primitive" might remind us of the unevenness that only seems to be erased on the surface of the globalised world. Further, it raises the question if the Other of a global self might refer to epistemological alterity (different ways of knowing), rather than to real people(s) – as the notion of "the Primitive" suggested. The lecture is accompanied by a Powerpoint presentation, which starts off in a formal way, summarizing the text, then begins to move further away from the content, and finally turns into image-based metaphors, disrupting the lecture poetically. The Plural Temporality of the Primitive was a lecture performance based on my MA thesis I realised in collaboration with Katie Pickerell. It was shown at the Fine Art department of Goldsmiths University of London and at a Postgraduate Conference on Comparative Political Thought at SOAS, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, in 2016, as an attempt at experimenting with diverging forms of knowing within different (disciplinary) fields.

Johanna Maj Schmidt

Johanna Maj Schmidt (*09.02.1992) is an artist & researcher based in Leipzig.
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EDUCATION

Since 2018	PhD candidate in the post graduate programme “Rightwing Populism – Authoritarian Developments, Far-Right Discourses, Democratic Responses”, Universities of Leipzig & Co logne
Since 2017	Fine Art, Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst, Leipzig; currently Expanded Cinema Class (Clemens von Wedemeyer)
2015 – 2014	MA Art and Politics, Goldsmiths University of London (Distinction); Intercollegiate Student at the MSc Programme Comparative Political Thought, SOAS, London
2014 – 2010	BA Politics, English-Speaking Cultures, Performance Studies (First), University of Bremen
2012 - 2013	Exchange Student at Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Cracow

SHOWS/EVENTS

2021	Outside the Box Gala, Conne Island, Leipzig
2021	Plateau, 17. Lindenow Festival, Plateau.Evji, Leipzig
2021	Grabeland (Future Splendors), KGV Buren, Leipzig
2021	Was das Gespenst nicht kennt - Specters of the Afternoon, Villa Esche, Chemnitz
2021	Rencontres Internationales Paris-Berlin
2020	Conditions of a Necessity, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Baden-Baden
2020	KBK Routine, HGB, Leipzig
2019	1937 - 2017: Von Entarteter Kunst zu Entstellter Kunst, HGB Gallery, Leipzig
2019	Tod und Verzweiflung, HGB, Leipzig
2019	Screening- & Lesungsevent, Kino in Bewegung, mit Karlheinz & Angela Steinmüller & Ann Cotten, Schmochtitz/Bautzen
2019	Final Draft / Drift, 15. Lindenow Festival, Westpol Airspace, Leipzig
2019	Research Exhibition #2, HGB Gallery, Leipzig
2019	Research Exhibition #1, HGB Gallery, Leipzig
2019	Am Nerv der Demokratie, 5th Soundcheck Philosophie Festival, LOFFT, Leipzig
2018	3rd NSK Folk Art Biennale, Trbovlje, Slovenia
2018	Glam Slam! 2, Cabaret Voltaire, Athens
2018	Rundgang, HGB, Leipzig
2018	Performer, MdbK @Excercises for a Monument (Carsten Saeger), Leipzig
2017	DOCUMENA - ΔOKOYMENA, 6th Athens Biennale, Athens
2017	Queer-Indigenous Catwalk @The Transit of Hermes: The Athens-Kassel Ride (documenta14), Athens
2017	Press Conference: Heart & Sword Division – Waiting for the Barbarians, 6th Athens Biennale, Athens
2016	Lecture Performance, Goldsmiths University of London, London
2016	Lecture Performance, SOAS School of Oriental and African Studies, London
2015	Crystal Palace Group, Performance @Crystal Palace Park, London
2015	The Show Don't Tell Show, The Bussey Building, London
2013	OUTNOW Festival, Bremen
2012	Freiland-Festival, Kulturzentrum Schlachthof, Bremen

TALKS/PUBLICATIONS

2021 "Meme-Warriors und Attentäter – Heldenbilder in extrem-rechter Internetkultur", lecture as part of a series of presentations on the Halle synagogue shooting, Halle
2021 "Saving Heroism in the Online Sphere – The Heroic in Far-Right Internet Memes", Online Conference for Research on Male Supremacism and Right-Wing Studies, Institute for Research on Male Supremacism & Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies, University of California, Berkeley
2021 "Remember the Fallen – rechte Selbstironie in den 'Meme Wars' und das Verführungspotenzial von Anti-PC-Humor". In: Freie Assoziation. Zeitschrift für psychoanalytische Sozialpsychologie, 23 (1 + 2), 112-116.
2020 "Altering Heroism – A Psychosocial Inquiry into Rightwing Internet Meme Culture", Online Working Group, Center for Right-Wing Studies & Institute for Research on Male Supremacism", University of California, Berkeley
2020 "'When You're Telling Your Grandkids All About the Meme Wars You Fought in...' – The Invention of Online War Stories", Webinar of the SLA Committee on Language and Social Justice, American Society for Linguistic Anthropology
2020 "Maybe the real Reich was the friends we made along the way. Sehnsucht nach kameradschaftlicher Solidarität und Brüderlichkeit in den 'Great Meme Wars'", Online Conference, Universities of Munich, Tübingen, Cologne & Leipzig
2018 "Alt-Knight'? – Die neue Rechte im Spannungsfeld zwischen dem 'Heroischen' und dem 'Post-heroischen'", Colloquium for Political Theory, University of Bremen
2018 "The New Vertical". In: PaperWork Magazine, http://www.paperworkmagazine.com/, London.
2018 "Kopfsprünge. Zwischen Nomadentum und Sesshaftigkeit – Ein Brief". In: Lagaay, Alice/Seitz, Anna (Eds.), Wissen Formen. Performative Akte zwischen Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kunst. Erkundungen mit dem Theater der Versammlung. Bielefeld: transcript.
2017 "Weltkulturerbe oder Idolatrie? – Die Zerstörung von kulturellem Erbe im Irak durch den IS". In: Polylog, Zeitschrift für interkulturelles Philosophieren.
2017 "A Show of Hyper-piety? – IS' Destruction of World Heritage and the Outcry of the International Public", Performance Philosophy Conference Ethos, Ethics, and Ethnography, University of Prag
2017 "Grey in Grey". In: Archipelago, 4, 41.
2016 "Worlding Heritage – The Politics of Objects", Internationale Jahrestagung der Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie Kraft, Macht und Gewalt der Bilder in interkultureller Perspektive, University of Vienna
2016 "The Plural Temporality of the Notion of the Primitive", Postgraduate Conference New Directions for Political Thought, SOAS University of London
2015 "Worlding Heritage – The Politics of Objects", Postgraduate Conference, Political Theory at the Margins, Oxford University

MEMBERSHIPS

Since 2019 Member of the artist-run initiative Kino in Bewegung/Cinema in Movement (http://kinoinbewegung.de), Leipzig

SCHOLARSHIPS

Since 2018 PhD Scholarship, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
2011 – 2015 Scholarship, Heinrich Böll Foundation
2012 – 2013 Erasmus Scholarship

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