

PORTFOLIO

- selected works -

Johanna Maj Schmidt

WE MUST BE MISTAKEN, 2022



Installation view, Galerie KUB, Leipzig, 2022

Performative 4-channel video installation.

worlds do not directly encounter each other.

While some are longing for a world without inequalities, others are sharing cynical internet memes in defense of the “freedom of speech” and their patriarchal power position. A conflict arises between two echo chambers/filter bubbles, even though the characters from both

We Must Be Mistaken was realised in collaboration with Charlotte Ruppert with whom I have been writing and directing, and many other artist and writer friends & acquaintances from Leipzig, NYC & London.



Video stills, We Must Be Mistaken, 2022

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 net-

work, 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.

WE DID NOT KNOW WHAT WE MEANT WHEN WE SAID WE, 2021



Installation view, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 2021

We did not know what we meant when we said we. We were invited to come together and produce a work of art, collectively. Collectivity was believed to be desirable and revolutionary. We were expected to become a collective. How to create if you have different visions of collectivity and art? We decided to hand over the task of becoming a collective to an Aqua-Aerobics

coach. She agreed with enthusiasm...

We Did Not Know What We Meant When We Said We was a collaborative project by a group of students of the Expanded Cinema class as part of the exhibition "Conditions of a Necessity" at Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

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 exhi-

bition. 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 lit-

erally 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

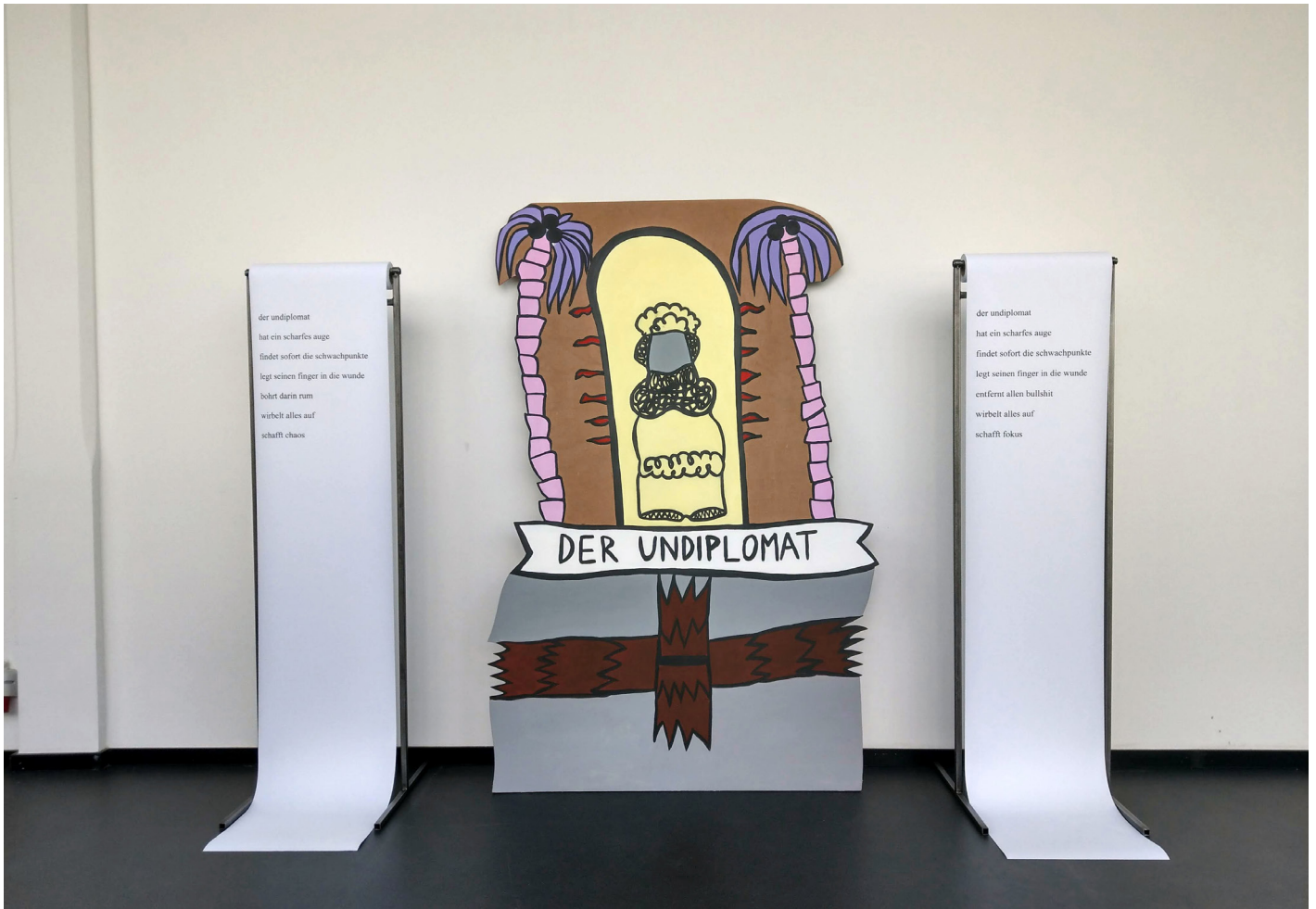


Public sculpture, Baden-Baden, 2020

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 a collaboration between Jan-Luca Ott, Johanna Maj Schmidt, and Stefania Smolkina as part of “Conditions of a Necessity - The Gathering”, which took place at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

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 un-

diplomat 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 smooths 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.

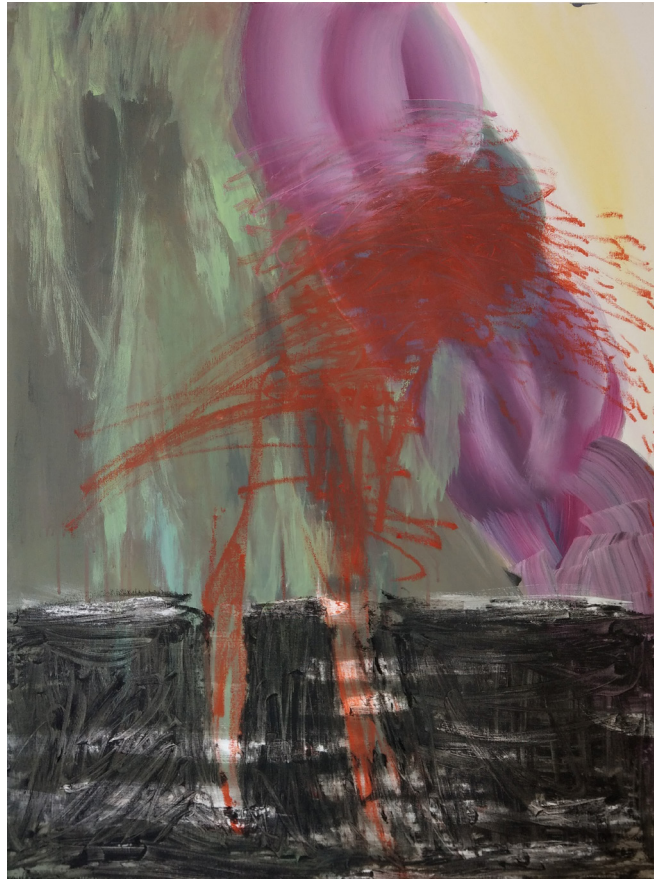
Surrounded by what I regarded to be solidified water, I got impatient. As any kind of impatience, my eagerness rested on the idea of a time lag: The image of water was merely expressing something that had already crystallized. I could not see it as anything but a manifestation of an abstract thought 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 met-

aphors, 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.

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