

Arcadia Missa ï

JAN VORISEK  
PRESS

# 032c

## Jan Vorisek's Devotion Strategy

January 31, 2024  
CLAIRE KORON ELAT

### Desire can be deceiving, even manipulating.

And at worst, it is fatal – either physically or cerebrally. When something you desire actually stops you from thriving, you have fallen into the trap of cruel optimism. Coined by American cultural theorist Lauren Berlant, cruel optimism describes a socio-political and psychological system in which people are unable to detach from unattainable reveries. These fantasies include seemingly realistic goals, such as upward mobility, job security, and social and political equality, that turn out to be romanticized aspirations. But people choose to remain cemented to these swindling fantasies despite the clear evidence that the neoliberal and capitalist societies we live in cannot uphold such promises. So, cruel optimism is only able to exist and persist because our political system upholds a climate where such false desires thrive – and are even necessary to preserve the system.

Artist Jan Vorisek's work is devoted to such systems and hierarchies, their changeability and disintegration. Using sculpture, installation, performance, and sound, he works with material arrangements that temporarily transform the architectural conditions of exhibition spaces. One room of his recent solo exhibition "Edge, Hour, Substance" at Kunst Museum Winterthur, Switzerland, was occupied with a colossal, pitch-black structure reminiscent of a foreign, otherworldly body – malignant intestines that could belong to a malignant creature – or a fetish room. Titled *Devotion Strategy pt. 2 (braced version)* (2023), the pneumatic sculpture created a labyrinthine structure inside the exhibition space, thereby establishing its own spatial and thematic system within the given network of the institution. Vorisek's work disrupts existing dramaturgies and orders of exhibition space that can be transferred to the order of political and social apparatuses. The sculpture's optic adjacency to fetish objects further evokes questions of (forbidden) desires and pleasure, but also of shame and repulsion – similar to Berlant's bittersweet fantasies. Having been part of the set of Ottolinger's Autumn/Winter 2022 show, the sculpture itself changes between systems, traversing through economic and thematic structures and industries. In this interview, Claire Koron Elat talks to Vorisek about devotion, being a public amateur, and the commodified system in which art takes place.



Jan Vorisek, 2022. Photo: Rob Kullisek.



**CLAIRE KORON ELAT:** Your work often tackles contemporary forms of consumerism and the social, political, and economic systems that are tied to them. In the video *Dog Cloud* from 2021, for example, you appropriate the entertainment industry in the same way one would appropriate found objects or mass-manufactured detritus. Why are you interested in consumerism, entertainment, and the like?

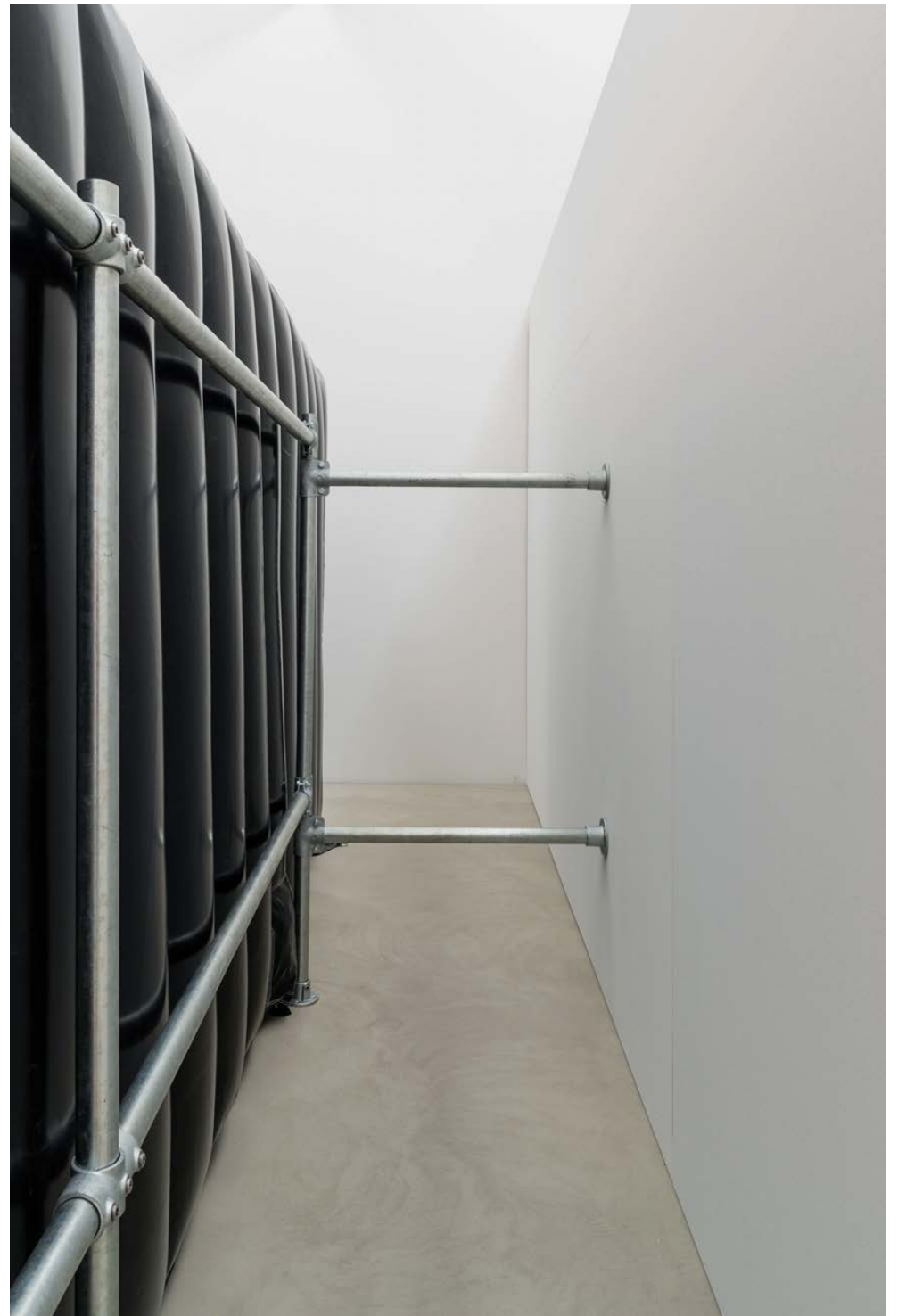
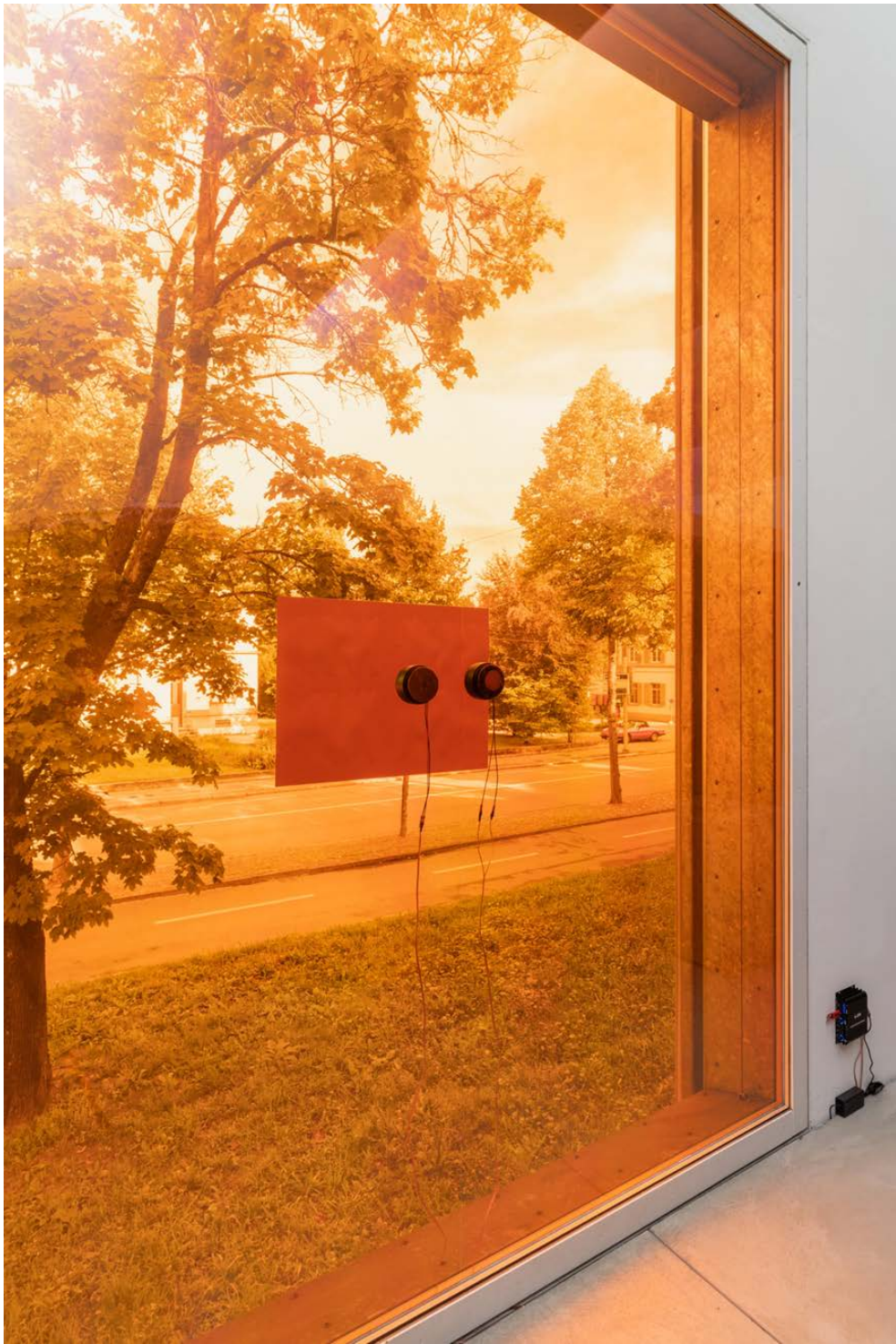
**JAN VORISEK:** *Dog Cloud* was produced in Los Angeles during lockdown in 2021 for an exhibition at the Swiss Institute, New York. I found a video advertisement production company and hired them off the internet without any existing script. Once we signed the contract, they flooded me with questions in order for them to begin with production – so I had to write a story, develop characters, and choose a location. I was interested in the service of a production company as a readymade as well as the meaning of Los Angeles as place of production. The whole project felt like reverse engineering filmmaking, appropriating a site of production and myself performing the role of a director as a public amateur. I also wanted to see if it would be possible to use the differently aligned goals between the production company and my position as artist; the diametrically opposed ambitions between a company that normally makes high budget productions for clients such as Nike or IKEA and the artist who uses poor materials. The company wants to then do an “artistic” video, while the artist wants to commission a professional grade looking product. I was interested in this intersection of goals, and I wanted to see if it would possible to use “misunderstandings” as “medium.”

**CKE:** Do you relate the idea of the public amateur specifically to *Dog Cloud* or to being a multimedia artist in general? After all, you’re a quasi-amateur in every field, at least in comparison to artists who, for example, only do painting, and are extremely specialized in one thing. You’re also a DJ.

**JV:** It’s accepted for artists to make these grand promises and at same time totally failing to deliver them. There is a poetic resonance in that vulnerability and amateurism.

Yeah, I do DJ, I also host concert and club nights. I see myself more as an organizer. Preparing a DJ set starts with researching music and organizing it into playlists, hosting nights has a similar approach. It starts with research and then the question comes about how to make that mix of people and music happen. I also find it important to have an artistic practice that is informed by interests that go beyond what the art world offers.





Installation views of "Devotion Strategy pt. 2 (braced version)", included in "Edge, Hour, Substance" at Kunst Museum Winterthur, Switzerland, 2023. Photo: Gunnar Meier.

**CKE: Commodification and consumerism are not only limited to how products are consumed, but also include how you consume art, which can arguably also be considered a product. How do you want your work to be consumed?**

JV: By being experienced. Preferably in person and with a certain degree of autonomy. It is important that the substance of the artwork is not dominated by content imposed on it. And autonomy is related to collectivity. In the collective, there are different views and experiences that are then projected onto the art, so my work is not subject to only a single reading. There is a tension with art institutions, which are designed to convey content, but often fail to do that, for example, when the descriptions of art works are too literal, and the information is practically superimposed onto the work. I think that is a problem of institutions. By over-explaining everything, they negate the agency of the visitors.

**CKE: When you design your exhibitions, does them being photographable play a large role? The exhibition basically has to become an image that can circulate online.**

JV: I studied in the photography department at art school. In that sense, I can't shake it, but images are always a starting point. These image-ideas then manifest into exhibitions, which are documented and become images again. There is this circularity, but also a discrepancy. Since all these forms exist independently, they have their own functions. But I try to prioritize the actual exhibitions, rather than getting overly concerned about how images circulate online.

**CKE: The installation *Devotion Strategy* (2023), which is part of your show at Kunst Museum Winterthur, is an inflatable structure that collapses at night when it loses access to air. How do you relate this to political and social structures that similarly collapse once certain constituents are suddenly missing?**

JV: It's about questions of temporality and how to measure such a collapse. I would say that collapse is a loop. The work *Devotion Strategy* functions like a lung that breathes in and out – for me, this is an analogy to systemic breakdown, which is in constant repetition.

**CKE: The work was also previously used as the set of an Ottolinger show. Did this more commercial context change the way you perceive the work?**

JV: For me, collaborating with Ottolinger was a quite fun and intuitive. I love the antithetical deconstructed punk spirit; Cosima [Gadient] and Christa [Bösch] have a deep understanding of contemporary culture, music and art, and know exactly how to engage with other artists. I was interested in that moment of crossover and letting the work break out of its normal context to exist in a parallel reality as catwalk.



Installation view of *Thousand Years of Poor Connection* (2022), included in "Edge, Hour, Substance" at Kunst Museum Winterthur, Switzerland, 2023.

—Photo: Gunnar Meier.



Installation view of *i give back to the landscape, the vomits of experience*, included in "Edge, Hour, Substance" at Kunst Museum Winterthur, Switzerland, 2023. Photo: Cedric Mussano.

**CKE: The word devotion, which is part of the work's title, also tends to imply a sexual and/or religious connotation. And the massiveness and color of the work evoke fetishes. What types of fetishes are addressed in this piece?**

JV: I like to set up different paths in my work, full of traps and dead-ends. Standing in front of the installation, it's like a big picture with an entry in the middle. Once you enter, it becomes a space. In turn, this space triggers responses oscillating between visceral reactions and cerebral analysis. There is not a single string to resolve the meaning completely. It's more like a perpetual machine, spiraling in and out of control.

I'm interested in the fact that obsessions are irrational. The room of *Devotion Strategy* evokes very different reactions. Some people feel comforted, others claustrophobic.

There is a sort of dramaturgy as you walk through the object but there is no climax. So, for me, it's more latently sexual.

It's also a play with references. I've always imagined that entering the installation is like being inside the intestines of an alien from science fiction. Architecturally, you're reminded of a pavilion though. The work is almost like a readymade. It's an inflatable object, and as soon as the air is out, it's like a dead body. I like to use a minimal aesthetic, since what the work constitute might be quite the opposite of minimalism and full of ideas and references.

**CKE: Then there is the actual fetish called vorarephilia, which is the erotic desire to consume or be consumed by another person or creature. So, consumption (also in a monetary sense) can be a fetish too.**

JV: If you think about the intestines reference, it's as if the work digests you – you go inside and then outside again. The work devours you.

What consumption and fetish have in common is that they're turned on by irrationality. Our consumption is irrational; fetishes are irrational. Economies are irrational. The stock market is actually dependent on moods and economic language is filled with psychology. So, the irrational is a territory of capitalism, but since nobody can control irrationality, it might also be a tool to find a way out of a neoliberal system.



Installation view of "Edge, Hour, Substance" at Kunst Museum Winterthur, Switzerland, 2023. Photo: Gunnar Meier.

**CKE: The show also includes a sound intervention; speakers are placed in a hollow space in-between the window to the exhibition and a second window to the outside world.**

JV: That's a very intuitive work. It's about investigating, appropriating, and altering exhibition architectures. The way you usually encounter artworks is supposed to be redefined through my work. And the appropriation of a pre-existent architecture emerges from a certain efficiency: work with what's already there / make your problems your solutions. Since it's site-specific, it is also ephemeral.

**CKE: In some of the rooms, you can distinctly hear the museum's ventilation system. Although you previously told me that this wasn't intended, it has still become a component of the show. Particularly, when you think about noise, sound, and music. How does the "real" sound intervention interact with the "accidental" sound intervention?**

JV: For me, there are ambitions and ambience. One is controllable, ambition, and the other is not, ambience. At the same time, they influence each other.

After the show opened, visitors started noticing the sound in the last room of the air ventilation system, and there was the question whether it was a sound installation. If there were only paintings in the room by someone who only does painting, no one would make this conclusion. But since ambient, noise, and drone are part of my works, I embraced this assumption, claiming it as my work. I find this white noise quite calming; that exact random frequency is so banal and yet so transcendental.

Credits

Text

CLAIRE KORON ELAT



# PLASTER

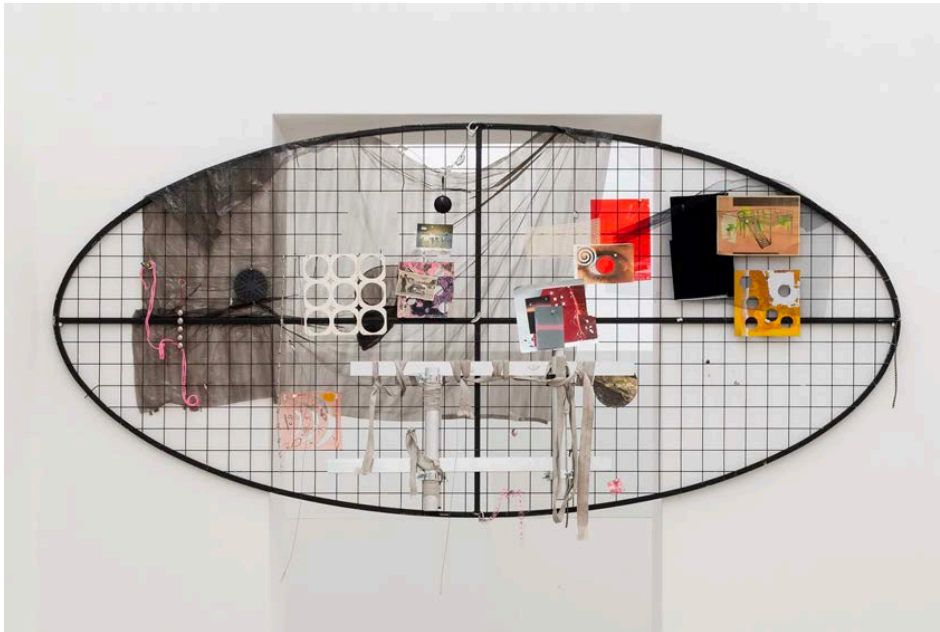
## Jan Vorisek on his maze of angst

29/10/23

4 min read

Words: [Sofia Hallström](#)

The Swiss artist Jan Vorisek adapts space and sound to produce unsettling,



Broken cable ties, styrofoam, packing and insulation materials are examples of objects used to create the dystopian cityscapes or spaceships found in on the sets for early sci-fi films such as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). "I like the subtext in the production of early sci-fi movies, that the vision of a broken future is crafted from old packing material, a future projected on trash – ironically waste and consumer culture is what makes our world decay and slowly turn into

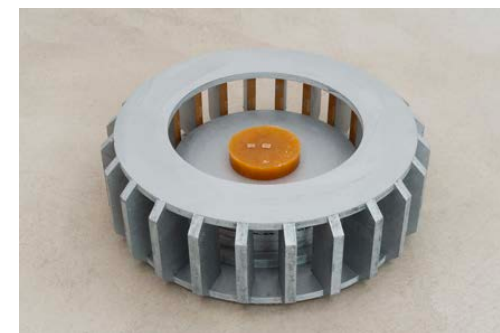
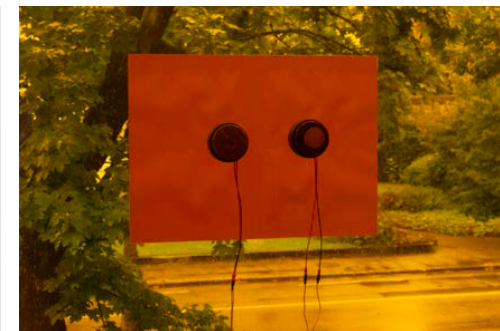
a dystopia," says Jan Vorisek, walking me through his institutional show 'Edge, Hour, Substance' at the Kunst Museum Winterthur in Switzerland. "My work is driven by something subconscious." He explains as the sound of a drone reverberates, becoming heavier as the final room approaches where *Devotion Strategy* (2023), an inflatable jet-black plastic maze occupies the space. The maze refers to an ancient symbol of the stomach and the digestive system as a place of fear. "I tried to make claustrophobic, membrane-like corridors, setting up traps or dead-ends." The maze evokes etymology; in German, "Enge", the etymological root of "narrow" means both "Angst" and "fear". And in that sense, Angst is also related to "Kummer"- "sadness" which means to care for something. "I'm interested in this desire, an ambiguous spectrum between repulsion and attraction." The space is lit by an orange-tinted window from which two modular synthesiser speakers are attached, picking up resonant sounds. "My interventions are site-specific: the window has been turned into a speaker. The sound carries the audience through the space."

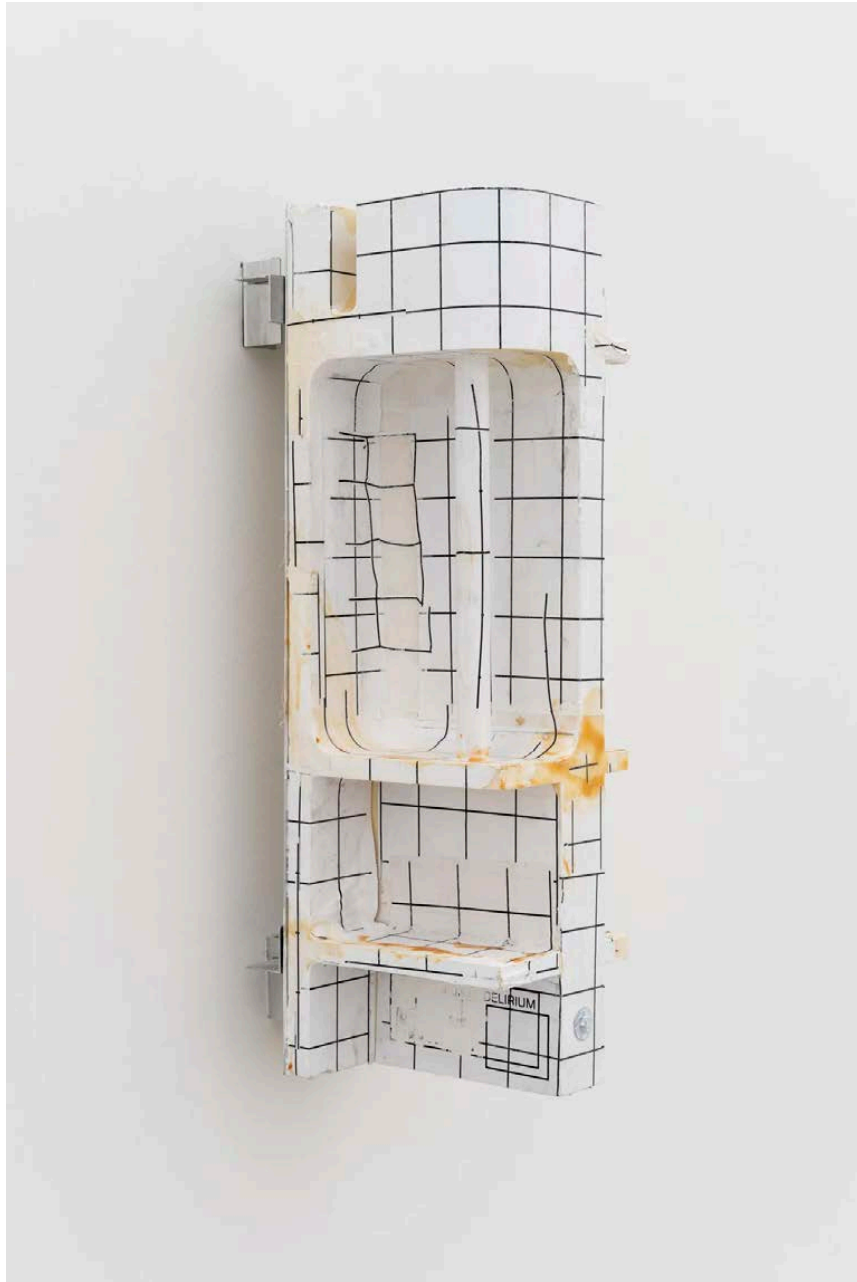




I first met Vorisek at one of the House of Mixed Emotions (or H.O.M.E) club nights, an event that he co-hosts with artists whose practices focus on electronic music and visual art. He explains that music, club nights and gatherings automatically inform the reading of the work, playing with notions of time, space and occupation. "With sound, you can go very esoteric in terms of the frequencies, playing with how things are tuned: frequencies of the universe, good and bad frequencies, transcendental frequencies. There's a lot of ground ontologically with sound." Vorisek's affinity with experimental music resonates in his process: sampling different materials, modes and models according to his mood, research interests and the historical and architectural context of where the work will be presented. "When I make assemblage, I question, 'what would the noise of the production and lifecycle sound like?' I pick objects according to the sound that the materials would make. Something made out of ceramic makes a very different sound to a plastic object."

Working across sculpture, installation, sound and performance, Vorisek's work is consistent in its use of found objects, industrial materials and site specificity. Describing presentations of his work as a "dramaturgy," his works are architectural narrations, enabling a metamorphosis of a space. Spanning five rooms of the museum, Vorisek explains that the sequencing of each work in 'Edge, Hour, Substance' is in tune with the space of the museum's modular wall system. Even transitional spaces such as corridors and windows are utilised, heightening the audience's viewing experience, "I made this corridor to elongate a passageway from one room to another, to enhance a sense of theatricality." Transforming the traditional museum setting and whilst doing so, dismantling the hierarchies of exhibitions, production and display, the immaterial is the focus for Vorisek, "each corridor is a score for a different sound piece."





The disintegration of systems and structures is most evident in the recurring fragmentation and reconstruction of shape and material. The grid is one recurrent motif, as shown in *Anatomy of delusion* (2023). “With the grid, the human brain is wired to make connections to mapping, but at the same time it’s very glitchy.” The grid is a starting point for exploring a continuum, ranging from its association to “architectural planning, Superstudio [the Italian design collective], and as a formal device for painting landscapes and finding perspective.” Breaking down its rigidity conjures new characteristics, of porosity and transparency, with a capacity to act as a barrier. Other works reference remnants of a previous time, “the floor models remind me of communist subway stations in Prague when I was a kid.”

Examining each object, it is difficult to determine what is made, what is found, what is copied and which objects have been sampled. Their transient nature is not static, rather through the simple disruption of the static by the continuous, their identity remains dynamic. Such is Vorisek’s way of working: “You take a sample and you add something onto it, each object is an accumulation of effects and affects, each station adds another reverb or delay.” The continuous ruptures of each structure, environment and material allude to the signs marking a systemic breakdown – a sign of our times.

# la Mobilière

## Jan Vorisek reçoit le Prix Mobilière 2023

Jeudi, le 26 Janvier 2023

Le Prix Mobilière 2023 a été attribué à Jan Vorisek pour la variété de son œuvre dans des domaines aussi divers que la sculpture, l'installation, la performance et la musique expérimentale. Créé en 1996, le Prix Mobilière est le plus ancien prix d'encouragement décerné chaque année par une compagnie d'assurance suisse à un ou une jeune artiste.

«Il est assez rare qu'une personne active sur la scène de la musique et du clubbing se fasse parallèlement un nom dans l'univers de l'art», déclare Hans Ulrich Obrist, curateur et directeur artistique des Serpentine Galleries London, également à l'origine de la nomination de Jan Vorisek au Prix Mobilière.

Outre la sculpture, l'installation et la performance, Jan Vorisek (né en 1987 à Bâle, vit et travaille à Zurich) a fait de la musique expérimentale un autre terrain d'exploration et n'hésite pas à intégrer des sons dans ses œuvres. Ce co-fondateur du label de musique House of Mixed Emotions (H.O.M.E.) a également à son actif la venue, à Zurich, de quelques-uns des meilleurs DJ de la planète. La passion de Jan Vorisek pour la technique constitue le lien entre ses créations de musicien et son travail de plasticien.

L'artiste a su convaincre le jury du Prix Mobilière par la diversité de son œuvre. Dorothea Strauss, présidente du jury, déclare à son sujet: «Le jury a été séduit par la forte intensité qui se dégage de ses créations, notamment de ses vidéos. C'est un langage artistique à la fois très contemporain et magique. Nous avons été fascinés par l'alternance entre espaces urbains et espaces intimes. Jan Vorisek est un véritable artiste polyvalent!»

Dans le cadre du Prix Mobilière, sept curatrices et curateurs suisses proposent chacun une ou un artiste, un jury professionnel choisissant ensuite la lauréate ou le lauréat parmi les personnes nominées. Le prix est doté de 30 000 francs. La Mobilière profite du salon artgenève qui se tient actuellement pour y exposer les œuvres de tous les artistes nominés.

The logo for La Mobilière, featuring the text "la Mobilière" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. The "la" is smaller and positioned to the left of "Mobilière". The text is set against a solid red rectangular background.

## Jan Vorisek receives the 2023 Mobiliar Prize

Thursday, January 26, 2023

The 2023 Mobilière Prize was awarded to Jan Vorisek for the variety of his work in fields as diverse as sculpture, installation, performance and experimental music. Created in 1996, the Prix Mobilière is the oldest encouragement prize awarded each year by a Swiss insurance company to a young artist.

"It's quite rare for someone active in the music and clubbing scene to make a name for themselves in the art world at the same time," says Hans Ulrich Obrist, curator and artistic director of the Serpentine Galleries London, also at the origin of Jan Vorisek's nomination for the Prix Mobilière.

In addition to sculpture, installation and performance, Jan Vorisek (born in 1987 in Basel, lives and works in Zurich) has made experimental music another field of exploration and does not hesitate to integrate sounds into his works. . This co-founder of the music label House of Mixed Emotions (HOME) also has to his credit the arrival in Zurich of some of the best DJs on the planet. Jan Vorisek's passion for technique is the link between his creations as a musician and his work as a visual artist.

The artist was able to convince the jury of the Prix Mobilière by the diversity of his work. Dorothea Strauss, president of the jury, says about her: "The jury was won over by the strong intensity that emanates from her creations, especially her videos. It is an artistic language that is both very contemporary and magical. We were fascinated by the alternation between urban spaces and intimate spaces. Jan Vorisek is a true all-rounder!"

As part of the Prix Mobilière, seven Swiss curators each propose an artist, a professional jury then chooses the winner from among the nominees. The prize is endowed with 30,000 francs. La Mobilière is taking advantage of the artgenève fair which is currently being held to exhibit the works of all the nominated artists.



“Skin” structures show the slippages between desire, communication, and its failures.”



Jan Vorisek’s cerebral interiors unfold like high intensity melodramas before the viewer. Both familiar and seeped in unease, the labyrinths laid out by the artist in his choose-your-own-adventure style installations consist of multiple pathways and outcomes.

Exploring ideals of intimacy, desire, and romance while simultaneously evading tenderness, his theatrical illusions presented in industrial materials create a barrier between tangible connections. These materials, like latex and PVC, typically indicative of safety and protection, within the context of the claustrophobic yet expansive interior space constructed by Vorisek now instead give the notion of danger and anxiety. There is a sterile anticipation of mess, of imminent and calculated destruction on the horizon, chaos and gore within a contained space like a finely laid kill room. The feeling of peril paired with sterile sexual desire evoked by materials like the black polyester in the artist’s 2020 installation, *Devotion Strategy*, at Kunsthaus Glarus creates a deviant clublike atmosphere that elicits Berghain, and is inspired by the artist’s former life as DJ. He navigates the thin line between desire, shame, and repulsion through materials and illusion, highlighting how the spaces we inhabit are inherently a manipulation of both. These sturdy yet semi-permeable cell/skin structures show the slippages between desire, communication, and its failures.

*No Sun*, presented at the Swiss Institute last year, was the first institutional solo exhibition in the United States by Vorisek. Composed of new works in an acid yellow-hued fever dream, he used sound and noise as a means to mediate information. Vorisek works across sculpture, performance, and sound to create site-specific, intense bodily experiences that interrogate our relationship to space and each other. Tugging at the strings of collective memory by drawing from narrative tropes, his films in the exhibition are soap operas that can be followed through the collective unconsciousness of viewers. Like the rest of his work, they are feedback loops that require engagement from the outside to produce output. WORDS BY HANNA GIRMA



JAN VORISEK

THEATRICAL ILLUSION

On view at Arcadia Missa, London, in summer 2022, the work of Zurich-based artist Jan Vorisek (Swiss, b. 1967) intertwines sculpture, performance and sound to create autopoietic, site-specific installations that examine formal hierarchies through the distortion and delineation of space. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ARCADIA MISSA, LONDON.



Jan Vorisek, *Devotion Strategy*, 2020, oxford polyester, blower, stools, metal, glass table, lamp, assemblage, dimensions variable.

GLARUS

## Jan Vorisek

KUNSTHAUS GLARUS  
Im Volksgarten Postfach 665  
March 15–August 23, 2020

Jan Vorisek often mobilizes the aesthetics of his work as a DJ and promoter in his performances and static output. In this exhibition, “Collapse Poem,” the artist offers zones of security and release with dual room-filling installations that are related like the techno cousins Berghain and Lab.Oratory.

*Devotion Strategy* (all works cited, 2020) is a slick black inflatable labyrinth that fills the ground-floor gallery. The tight corridors and thick smell of plasticized barriers elicit both fear and a desire for an undistanced encounter.

A rear resection in this fetish bouncy castle reveals *Exercise in Isolation*, an embedded first-person shooter-style video that offers viewers a

seamless entryway into an impossible maze of back alleys, tunnels, and subway cars.

Upstairs, *Memory Hotel* is a more capacious arena, bathed in filtered red light and constructed from easily transgressed, low stacks of pale-orange construction bricks arranged to mimic cityscapes, seating, and the implied codes of built society. Flickerings of global urban reality appear in *Palinopsia*, a video washing the room in dense electronic tracks. Its titular hallucinatory effect is illustrated in the vibrant beckoning of *The Man with the Laughing Hand is Dead*, a green bulb housed in a hanging iron light fixture. Sculptured out of wood from a mini-arboretum, it is the only defined space with a roof in the show, but still it lacks a floor.

Vorisek’s main concern throughout is the delineation of space, and the anxiety and satisfaction it can arouse. In the title of the exhibition, Vorisek suggests a desire to bridge the sensations and motifs of temporalities and various imagined locations. The elemental transitions in lighting, sound, and the structures associated with nocturnal pleasure infuse these typically sun-drenched mid-century galleries with an erotics and fervency. With his kinesthetic formulation of interiors, Vorisek stages the ways in which activities on the fringe maintain their architecture, physically and psychologically, when emptied during the day. And, until recently, longer than that.

— Mitchell Anderson

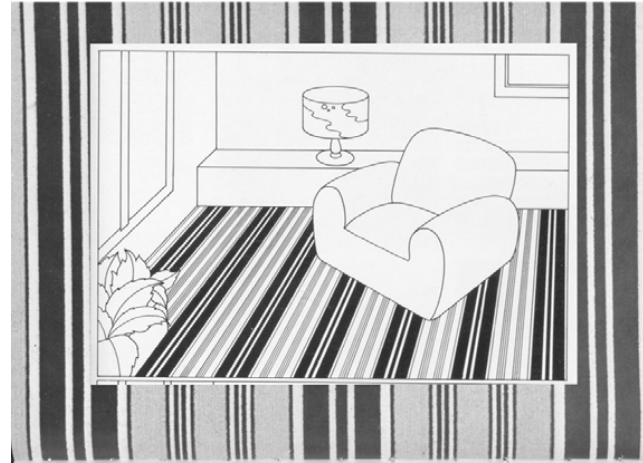
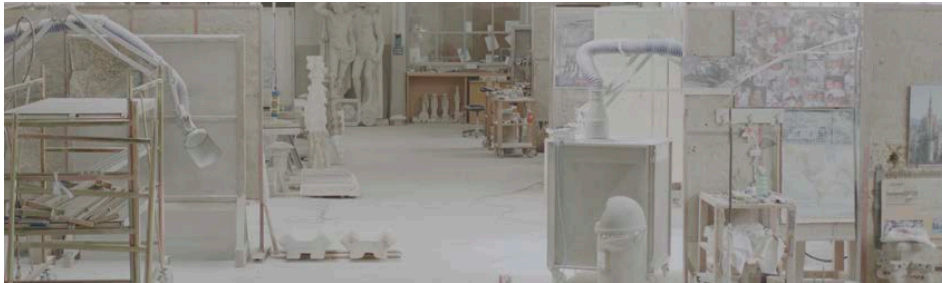
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# FRIEZE

## Critic's Guide: Geneva

Ahead of Artgenève this week, a round-up of the best shows in the Swiss city

BY ELISE LAMMER IN CRITIC'S GUIDES | 23 JAN 17



Jan Vorisek, 'Total Fragmented Darkness', 2017.  
Courtesy: Hard Hat, Geneva

Jan Vorisek, 'Total Fragmented Darkness'

### **Hard Hat**

*20 January – 13 March 2017* Possibly the smallest gallery in Geneva, Hard Hat is also one of the city's most notorious. Founded in 2004 by John Armleder, Lionel Bovier, Christophe Chérix, Balthazar Lovay and Fabrice Stroun, it's currently run by curator Denis Pernet. Since its inception it has uncovered an astonishing number of successful artists. For his inaugural solo exhibition in Geneva, Zurich-based artist and musician Jan Vorisek proposes a new site-specific installation consisting of objects found at flea markets, bought in shops or recycled from previous exhibitions. Like samples, they are reassembled and modified according to the artist's mood and research interests. Selected for their material, sonic or visual qualities, the elements are later carefully arranged, connecting the artist's previous installations while subtly announcing what's to come.

*Main image: Massimo D'Anolfi and Martina Parenti, Infinita Fabbrica del Duomo, 2015, film still; included in Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement 2016. Courtesy: Montmorency Film*



While the walls of Westminster Abbey are collapsing stone by stone over numerous heads, the seismographic tremors are precisely mirrored by the same fluctuations in the brain of a man who is lying in a London hospital bed: "I promise you, the moment they kneel to pray, I will bring the whole edifice down on their unworthy heads." The man able to summon up the butterfly effect who – as judge, jury member and executioner – causes cathedrals to collapse and, simply by directing his thoughts, confronts with a day of reckoning the susceptibility of what is manmade to catastrophe is named John Morlar, a writer and amateur telekinetic in the mystery thriller *The Medusa Touch* from 1978, directed by Jack Gold.

Brains such as that of John Morlar, just as is the case with amoebas, social or psychological networks, are often described as complex systems shrouded in mystery. In this context, the promising adjective complex often functions like a cheap placebo that is not up to handling the bluff but turns out to be a blind spot.

Jan Vorisek is committed to a quite unique, indecipherable complexity of artistic autopoiesis, of the self-development and -preservation as well as the disintegration of systems which are not recognizable as such at a first glance. His assemblages, environments and performances expressly maintain the impermanence of objects, events and structures which acquire their actual identity only through their structural decay: an identity which is not identical with itself. This self-willed, poetical cybernetics of observing systems is oriented towards inconspicuously established networks whose inner operations only come to light when a crash has occurred – just as is the case with our own resilient capabilities and vulnerabilities.

"The more systematically a person proceeds, the greater the impact upon him of chance occurrence."<sup>1</sup> Niklas Luhmann's skepticism already issued a promise: The unity and externality of the abstract entity we call society is deceptive; it allows no place for innocence. The subsystems of which it consists possess their own logic and speed, even evincing a system-inherent ignorance against the external impositions arising from the moral and ethical standpoint of do-gooders. But what happens in the case of possible scenarios of leverage, after the tipping point has been reached? The inferno caused by human metabolism sometimes implies a collision with the supposedly-dead sublime, which is said to be capable of awakening within us the sentimental wish to become a better person. Every shivering thrill of danger draws forth something more from our reserved attitude in the moment when we feel threatened, close to annihilation.

Vorisek's milieus sometimes present themselves to viewers like a concealed behavioral experiment which sets that mixed feeling in motion. It is a matter of an unnatural neural excitement permeated by desire and slowly-emitted, fear-induced perspiration, an as-if experience of the sublime with a potential for morphing. This is also more or less how one experiences Vorisek's pneumatic, dungeon labyrinth-like padded cells (*Devotion Strategy*, Kunsthauus Glarus, 2020) which is made of pitch-black PVC "to be taken home, inflated and folded together once again," such as is frequently hawked by event websites, and inside of which one here encounters such items as table furniture covered by net fabric and supporting a luminous fortune-teller ball. As is wellknown, it is only a short step from the sublime to the ridiculous, just as from sublimity to violence. There arise the faint stirrings of a state of awe with a psychological character of martyrdom, where the fetish becomes not only an aesthetic but also a "movement of things"<sup>2</sup> which transforms us into the bottom of our own creation. By means of speculative samples of the impermanent, we are kept in a cheerful mood by this feeling which, not only in the area of the actual object but – similar to a monstrous, undead object-libido going by the name of *Iamella*<sup>3</sup> – may also be found in its unavoidable entanglement with history and with fate: in the predictable, repeated ruin of a body made of plastic and subsiding into itself, a discarded snake slough which, when the air pump is turned off, lies limply for a moment as if dead. When the visionary architect Sir John Soane built the Bank of England, he commissioned Joseph Michael Gandy in 1830 to depict the building in the way it could appear in the future after suffering the ravages of time. The result was a bird's-eye perspective onto a Pompeian skeleton

of broken columns and moldering heaps of bricks which, at a first glance, seems like the bizarre testimony provided by a pre-Victorian ruins porno. "The interior will reveal itself to you like a meat pie with no crust," commented Gandy in the description of his drawing with a quotation from Gil Blas by Alain-René Lesage. In that picaresque novel, a flying devil conveys the protagonist over the rooftops of a city in order to open his eyes to the human folly unfolding down below. Into his drawing, often known as "The Bank in Ruins, Gandy not only injected a sense of threat in the face of one's own

death, undergirded by a rational paranoia, a dread of our own ultimate downfall, but he also summoned up the capitulation of a system in the present instead of reserving that downfall for a future date. This Bank, which may be found both in ruins and under construction, metastasizes the game of chance; in a certain sense, its substance is always in a state of ruin. Thus the next Black Friday will never be as predictable as was the previous one. "Welcome to the desert of the real" (Slavoj Žižek).

Vorisek's habitats often seem to become reified in a supernatural state somewhere between status quo ante and status futurus. Their substance dwindles away like that of 'The Bank in Ruins.' The same is true with his alarming, light-bathed 3-D floor plans and pyramidal towers made of superimposed or riskily stacked bricks which threaten to collapse at any moment, where excavation sites are transformed into construction sites as well as moving in the reverse direction (*Collapse Poem*, Kunsthauus Glarus, 2020). In contrast to what is for us today a not atypical tendency towards the status quo, a current term for describing the cognitive distortions of comfortpreferring persons who are inclined to simply leave things as they are, Vorisek's states poised between form and anti-form silently proclaim the act of overcoming to be a possibility. Just as the Metabolists deemed change to be the actual constant of their structural plug-in capsules, one has the impression in these minimalistic space capsules, initially forced like an invader into another territory, of finding oneself to be in a floating tank in which stress is not reduced but increased. This effect which, instead of burn-out management, promises low-level alarmism also accompanies Vorisek's performances, with their echo of bruitism. There composition collapses in the moment of performance and produces the noise promised in John Cage's 4'33" when what is found comes to be manipulated, vibrates and echoes; when the whip is snapped in order to accelerate spinning metallic tops (*Whip Drone*, since 2015). The interlocking of conscious action and unconscious stimulus is sometimes reminiscent of automatic writing. Just as the principle of the Exquisite corpse (*Cadavre Exquis*) synthesizes cause and effect into perturbing meshworks, here the corporeal replaces the compositional, the spontaneous the structural, thereby catapulting the Fluxus-inspired performative art of Marginal Consort or Group Ongaku into the year 2020.

The tools used by Vorisek, which do not arise from a robocalypse – here one thinks, for example, of a mirroring metallic sphere mounted on swiveling wheels or an electrically powered, garishly shining lantern with an entrancing, rotating balance bike pattern in *Gabo-Atmo* – frequently prove to be less functional than their material character would suggest. They instead bear witness to a certain longing for a lack of construction and disappear after their utilization, or they break back into that out of which they were originally assembled: into individual pieces "[like] an art of non-selection [...], whereby the material [...] takes on a form in its own languages before grammar has imposed its laws upon it."<sup>4</sup>

One could almost conclude that in many of Vorisek's open-source and open-ended assemblages, this inclination towards the open and abrupt, indeed this perverse delight in continuous decay conceives of power less in the sense of empowerment, not as something proceeding from deficits. No, power is not normalizing, hierarchical and prescriptive here but instead, as the appropriative potential of divergent lifestyles, proceeds from an inherently dynamic self-management and –guidance in opposition to a supposedly civilized herd mentality.

In contrast to the life of free citizens and the satisfaction of their modest needs through utilization, Aristotle already despised chrematistics as the usurer's unnatural trade, whose source he identified in the invention of money and the ensuing decline of bartering into merchandizing. "Money stinks. Money has an anal character. Money perverts everything that can be perverted."<sup>5</sup> As the



smallest common denominator of all human relationships, the heart and brain of our system of exchange can be said to comprise the largest possible area of what is human. And this means as well that there is the threat of a modern Back to the Future or even of barbarism.

Such a spawn of chrematistics can also be found in the bartering exchange of old material on the desert planet of Jakku under the control of the unprincipled Crolute boss Unkar Plutt. Here where remains of junk and droids from the spaceship-cemetery of the planet are traded for food rations in order to live hand-to-mouth, a precarious struggle prevails in the form of bartering. Whoever engages in forbidden exchanges or disputes the rights of the “blob fish” must bargain with Plutt’s group of thugs. Instead of socializing, these sorts of bartering ceremonies, not so alien to creatures such as ourselves; present as they are as a source code on the streets, in communal life, indeed in the individualized superman – where exploitations of oneself and of others go hand in hand –, can desocialize. Here the drive to profit maximization inherent protect me from what I want is sometimes based less on the actual possession of things than on the humiliation of one’s opponent through an assertion of superiority which, in spite of money as an expression of potency, never achieves satisfaction. Kurt Vonnegut’s novel *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), written in a cloak-and-dagger operation, takes place over 43 years between the Second World War and the Third Great Depression; in it, the New England aristocrat Winston Niles Rumfoord plays God’s double.

After its publication, *The Sirens of Titan* was often denounced as a “senseless” book that was said to conform to no genre and to mock science fiction. None of its supposed explanations can be taken at face value. Because in fact, *The Sirens of Titan* demystifies the mythical aura expected of most science-fiction books, which meanwhile have come to long to be anointed as the purveyors of the scientific facts of a future version of the optimized present. There where rocket scientists send letters to HG The War of the Worlds Wells to express thanks for the next inspiration, where computer scientists feel the urge to pursue mental what if scenarios that are even more radical than science fiction and coincidentally come up with deep-learning networks for recognizing patterns, the dystopia of the place which we call our Earth seems long ago to have been carved in stone. Simmering there are moist fantasies of colonization and astro-futurism in which the world would finally be relieved of the pressure of humanity, because “limitless growth that made him the world’s richest man is incompatible with a habitable Earth.”<sup>6</sup> Just as Vonnegut dissects every genre, Vorisek’s (de-)materialized brainchildren, in their existence oscillating between resilience and vulnerability, defy the stereotyped tumbler-toy fantasies of a quasi-religious Turing machine with which the universe is deemed to be completely describable.

Instead of offering to observed and observer the customary consolable/inconsolable imaginings of a prophetic engineer who may very well harbor doubts about the technical complexity of the next step, they derive aesthetic productivity from the trend to major accident without consequence which is no longer familiar with a specific place, moment or culpable individual. In so doing, they prefer to leave us in the dark too often rather than too seldom – with the slender ray of hope that, casually exploring the terra incognita of ourselves in order to maybe recognize it, not only with no control but ultimately also completely without significance in a higher order of things, we are like bugs in amber – according to the motto: “The only catastrophe that everyone understands is the catastrophe that no one survives” (Peter Sloterdijk).

Because that’s how things are:

“Hello babies. Welcome to Earth. It’s hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It’s round and wet and crowded. On the outside, babies, you’ve got a hundred years here. There’s only one rule that I know of, babies – ‘God damn it, you’ve got to be kind.’”<sup>7</sup>

1 Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Physicists*, appendix: “21 Points to the Physicists,” here point 8, Zurich: Diogenes (1998).

2 Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy* (1867), vol. 1, in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, Berlin: Dietz (1988), p. 89.

4 Hélène Cixous, *Weiblichkeit in der Schrift*, Berlin: Merve (1980), p. 20.

5 Aldo J. Haesler, “Irreflexive Moderne. Die Folgen der Dematerialisierung des Geldes aus der Sicht der tauschtheoretischen Soziologie,” in *Leviathan*, No. 21 (2001), p. 191.

6 Caroline Haskins, “Jeff Bezos Is a Post-Earth Capitalist,” in *Vice* (10 May 2019), [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/3k3kwb/jeff-bezos-is-a-post-earth-capitalist](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3k3kwb/jeff-bezos-is-a-post-earth-capitalist) (viewed on 21.July 2020).

7 Kurt Vonnegut, *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater or Pearls Before Swine*, London: Vintage Publishing (1992), p. 79.

## *Frieze New York Presents Global, Cutting-Edge Art*

By LOUIS LUCERO II MAY 4, 2017



Jan Vorisek, featured in the Frame section of solo shows, created "Terrace" in 2016 from mixed media. The Swiss artist's work is filled with technological elements and draws from traditions including performance, installation and sculpture, among others. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Bernhard

### **Found Art**

[Galerie Bernhard](#) of Zurich is also presenting a hometown artist, Jan Vorisek, whose work is shot through with technological elements.

Mr. Vorisek's creations are the descendants of disparate artistic traditions: performance, installation and sculpture, among others. His assemblages, pieced together from used and found materials, have a way of breathing life into their constituent parts. (Sound-emitting devices provide an added jolt of vivacity.)

Although there is not much digital work among the 2017 Frame presenters, Mr. Proctor pointed to the Vorisek works as representing an interesting kind of hybrid, with their integration of sound, sculpture and notation.

"There's a kind of kinetic aspect to it," he said.

# e-flux

**Kevin Aeschbacher, Ramon Feller, Nelly Haliti,  
Sophie Jung, Jan Vorisek/Anina Troesch:  
Unmittelbare Konsequenzen**

Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen

December 6, 2016

*Unmittelbare Konsequenzen* (Direct Consequences) is an exhibition that can take on a different form at any moment and which places the immediate at its heart. It focusses on the performative, the playful and the process-oriented bringing together various positions of young Swiss art. The contributions encompass temporal, spatial, material and social structures, whereby the transitory and mobile remain the focal points: moments where forms become affects, elements are animated, steering processes emerge and the coincidental can develop—despite the use of traditional genres such as painting or the inclusion of objects. Kevin Aeschbacher, Ramon Feller, Nelly Haliti, Sophie Jung and Jan Vorisek with Anina Troesch are appearing at Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen with performances, interactive works and installations.

**Jan Vorisek** (\*1987 in Basel, lives and works in Zurich) and **Anina Troesch** (\*1987 in Emmental, lives and works in Emmental) are putting together a place and time-specific work with an open outcome. In performative practice over the duration of the exhibition they develop a body of work that will be extended or reduced. They want to enter a kind of feedback loop that is dependent on various factors such as weather, the news or personal events.

*Unmittelbare Konsequenzen* presents multisided works from current Swiss art in which solid forms and truths are bid farewell. The artists' contributions should be seen as processes in continual transformation—as mobile conglomerates of subjects, objects, associations and mechanisms whose elements reciprocally animate each other and in the process celebrate the ungraspable and ephemeral.

The Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen is supported by St.Gallen City Council, Kulturförderung Kanton St.Gallen, Swisslos, Migros-Kulturprozent, Martel AG. The educational programme is made possible by Raiffeisen and Kulturförderung Appenzell Ausserrhoden.

# e-flux

## Jan Vorisek's "Rented Bodies"

Julia Moritz

January 29, 2016



Jan Vorisek, *Rented Bodies* (detail), 2015. Mixed media, dimensions variable. All images courtesy of the artist and Galerie Bernhard, Zurich.

**Galerie Bernhard, Zürich**

December 12, 2015–January 23, 2016

Usually we're the ones falling into tables. At the opening of Zurich-based artist Jan Vorisek's first Swiss solo show at Galerie Bernhard on that dark December eve, it was tables that were falling into us. Ouch! And there we were, right in the middle of his ideas, in *Rented Bodies* (2015), the exhibition's eponymous installation. Or rather, the tables were right in the middle of us, who loiter around at gallery openings, fetching beer from the fridge to the tables. Yet these tables aren't tables. They're Art: dysfunctional mostly, too little, too pretty, too fragile. Or do they seem so just in contrast us being too awkward, tall, dysfunctional all the time, all over the place? It's this ambiguity that unites us and the tables, in a system of rent, time, and labor on loan from each other, to perform our respective functionalities at the gallery opening, or failing by falling. And so we see much more than tables: *Rented Bodies* is a whole set of fragile sculptures, 100 percent design products, sampled from gift shops, collected from thrift shops, shop windows, and workshops, meticulously arranged and re-arranged into an environmental assemblage that explores every nook and cranny of the gallery, kinetic and yet barely moving.

Usually Vorisek's sculptures resound. This quality of his work may be described as an arrested means of performance—repercussing, reverberating, resonating. Consider, for instance, the metal spinners the artist bought during a residency in China: whip them hard with a lash (as he did for his 2015 performance *Whip Top Drone* at Forde, Geneva) and they'll make a gnarly, nearly hallucinatory, vaguely technoid sighing sound. At home in techno culture (as in the series of club nights he organizes with Mathis Altmann and Lhaga Koondhor, called H.O.M.E. [House Of Mixed Emotions]), here, the artist takes his work a step further, unleashing it from all use, keeping the sound to himself, and presenting something more: crumbling boxes of plywood and Plexiglas, sparkly beads, bright white display pads, a lot of metal (not techno)—and still all that resounds. Live in your head (as they say). Traces of fancy, traces of home—like the one we pay rent for, or which we fancy not to, which we may share, with its things, and people.







Usually writing about work or showing work remains work, after all. Both replete with materialist theory—layers of labor woven into and in between letters, or the delicately dialectic bits and pieces that make up Vorisek's body of work. This show makes a difference. It escapes. It offers the possibility of escape. From what? Take a look at the air-shaft opened in the gallery ceiling, a black square next to neon lights. It's the escape hatch. Actually, it's a black hole, sucking up whatever is thrown into it. Well, for a moment (it might also just suck things into some other place). It's a wormhole, more precisely. A loop hole, perhaps. Or rather: a loop whole. A quintessential place of Vorisek's installation, where things are, where they are not, where they seem to be, linger, or limbo, and loop on, and on, and in and out of some (not any) body, unusual in tumbling, into tables, that turn, that dance, and keep turning. It's this very system of rent, of metabolism, in metal, and love. A system of conversion: of interchangeability as agency as such.

**Julia Moritz** is an art historian currently employed as Curator of Theory at Kunsthalle Zürich. Her most recent independent work includes the "Young Girl Reading Group Show" at artgenève (January 2016).





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