Debt
Annual Exhibition 2024

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Grand Hall

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SALZBURGER KUNSTVEREIN

Debt
Annual Exhibition 2024

Debt is a broad concept that can be examined from various perspectives, including its emotional, social, historical, and economic dimensions. Symbolically, it represents any form of imbalance. It can also be understood as the distortion of a promise. Contemporary society is shaped by promises—of security, community and care—often dictated by economic contracts, historical injustices and societal expectations. Debt functions both as an 'investment in the self' and as a mechanism closely tied to control and discipline, as well as to responsibility, obligation and guilt. Between the fragility and persistence of the (power) structures that bind us together, the exhibition responds to the topic of debt in its material—largely sculptural, using a variety of materials and approaches—written and spoken forms.

Artists: Gleb Amankulov, Benjamin Hirte, David L. Johnson, Tammy Langhinrichs, Artur Schernthaner-Lourdesamy, Miriam Stoney, Magdalena Stückler, Frank Wasser

Curator: Hana Ostan-Ožbolt-Haas

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Hana Ostan-Ožbolt-Haas (she/her, b. Slovenia) is an art historian, independent curator and writer. From 2019 to 2023, she was director of the ULAY Foundation, where she was responsible for various (curatorial) projects related to issues of the artist's legacy. A selection of her recent curatorial projects includes exhibitions at SOPHIE TAPPEINER (Vienna, 2024), Gregor Podnar (Vienna, 2024), Schauraum MuseumsQuartier Wien (Vienna, 2023/2024), Sector Gallery 1 (Bucharest, 2023), Eva Kahan Foundation (Vienna, 2023), HOW Art Museum (Shanghai, 2022/2023), Georg Kargl Fine Arts as part of the Curated by Festival (Vienna, 2022) and Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, 2020/2021). Ostan-Ožbolt-Haas is a contributor to Artforum and her writing has been published in Frieze and ArtReview. She recently held a visiting professorship at die Angewandte, University of Applied Arts Vienna. She lives and works in Vienna.

Debt
Text by Hana Ostan-Ožbolt-Haas

Repaying is a duty, but lending is an option?

> A man may surely claim his dues:
> But, when there's money to be lent,
> A man must be allowed to choose
> Such times as are convenient![1]

Such is a passage from Lewis Carroll's poem, 'Peter and Paul'—a lengthy, rhymed narrative about two characters who are bound together through *debt*. This loaded term and broad concept can be examined from various perspectives, including its emotional, social, historical, and economic dimensions.

What is debt, in its most elementary sense?
A promise of repayment. The concepts of *promise* and *value* are at the heart of the creditor-debtor relationship. Friedrich Nietzsche describes it as 'the oldest and most personal relationship there is'—a relationship in which 'person met person for the first time, and measured himself person against person'.[2] According to him, the vital task of a community or society has been to produce individuals capable of making promises—those who can stand as guarantors for themselves within the creditor-debtor dynamic, capable of honouring their debts. This entails constructing a memory for the individual, one that secures the ability to keep promises. Such a memory involves the production

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[1] The poem, 'Peter and Paul,' in chapter 11of Lewis Carroll's novel *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889), contrasts a whimsical fairy tale with serious social commentary. Characters engage in discussions about religion, philosophy, and morality within the context of Victorian Britain. The book can be accessed via Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/620/pg620-images.html
[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 45.

of a conscience. It is, therefore, within the realm of debt obligations, Nietzsche argues, that subjectivity begins to take shape.

Debt is closely linked to temporality: one who keeps a promise assumes the role of being answerable for their future—a future that is always unpredictable, no matter how near or distant. If debt points to the absent (the what is not), it simultaneously holds potentiality (the what could be): the insufficiency inherent in the lack carries within it an active potential, unfolding through both possibilities and impossibilities. It was exactly such potentialities that interested me when selecting the artists and their works for the exhibition.

What is debt?
A 'perversion of a promise', according to David Graeber.[3] Contemporary society is shaped by promises—of security, community, and care—and it is often governed by economic contracts, historical injustices, and societal expectations. The economic aspect of debt—financial debt—is an inescapable, daily reality for many working under the precarious conditions of the art world: those living from one honorarium and commission to the next, barely staying above zero. Who, then, is privileged enough to be able to operate as part of a system that is so classist?

With declining wages and pensions largely deferred until later in life, access to credit and personal investment portfolios have been proposed as a tool, a form of investment in the self, which can compensate for changing social and economic conditions. The right to (higher) education, housing, forms of social protection, and social services has been redefined as a privilege that is conditional on the acceptance of credit and private insurance. Debt, therefore, operates as a mechanism intrinsically

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[3] David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), 391.

linked to control and discipline—it organizes social life and intensifies mechanisms of exploitation and domination between the owners (of capital) and the non-owners (of capital). Additionally, deficit spending forms the foundation of all modern nation states.[4]

Debt is such a charged word, since it is situated in the field of morality, between one's responsibilities, obligations, and feelings of guilt. Both obligation and guilt, as 'the common condition of those who feel they are in debt', can, according to Nietzsche, be traced back to the very materialistic idea of debt itself.[5] It is the German word *Schuld* that captures this duality, encompassing both meanings: the moral concept of *Schuld* (guilt) originates from the tangible notion of *Schulden* (debts).

As the curator of the members' exhibition, I encountered a clear asymmetry between myself and the nearly three hundred artists who applied to the open call.[6]

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[4] Through public debt—the amount of money governments owe to external (foreign governments or international financial institutions) or domestic creditors—entire societies become indebted. In Austria, the discussion about managing public debt and financial instability is a major topic of concern. In October 2024, the newspaper *Der Standard* reported, under the title 'Excessive Debt: How Will Europe Punish Us if We Flout the Rules?', about the fact that 'Austria's incoming government will have to consolidate between two and three billion euros a year in order to meet the requirements of the EU debt pact. Those who break the rules must pay the penalty. But there are also loopholes.' András Szigetvari, 'Zu hohe Schulden: Wie straft uns Europa, wenn wir auf die Regeln pfeifen?', *Der Standard*, October 17, 2024. Translation by author.

[5] Elettra Stimilli, *The Debt of the Living: Ascesis and Capitalism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2017), 138; see also Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 161.

[6] Although I had been part of juries before, I had never been the sole person involved in the selection process for an open call with so many applicants. A significant number of artists responded to my open call textual prompt, in which I invited a brief response (maximum 150 words, in English or German)

Symbolically, debt represents any form of imbalance.
To what extent, then, can it be argued that the concept of *debt* is the essence of it all?

Ontological debt entails a fundamental indebtedness inherent in the very nature of human existence (we owe and are owed simultaneously); it is incurred by the very act of being born into the world. Here, our existence is not self-sufficient but shaped and sustained by various—familial, social, cultural, and ecological—reciprocal relationships. Debt is, therefore, also about recognizing the contributions of past generations and the interdependencies with those yet to come.
Between the fragility and persistence of the (power) structures that bind us together, the exhibition responds to the topic of debt in its material—largely sculptural, using a variety of materials and approaches—written and spoken forms. Performative readings, as part of the opening event and on another evening over the course of the exhibition, are an integral part of the show's narrative.

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to the following question: "How does the meaning of debt—on a personal or societal level—relate to your work?" The artists provided meaningful, intimate reflections that gave me much to contemplate and that also somehow framed the show. My lengthy selection process was a privileged experience, albeit it one accompanied by feelings of responsibility and guilt—knowing I could have curated thirty very different exhibitions in response to the topic. I hope—and, to an extent, feel obliged—that future collaborations will emerge from this experience, especially with the artists I was unable to work with on this occasion. The artists who applied invested their time and resources into their applications, yet were not selected, leaving them in a state of both debt and being owed. To what extent do I owe them?

Debt. Annual Exhibition 2024
Floorplan & List of works

19

5 6 7 8   12

4   11

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13

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17

2   1   15   14
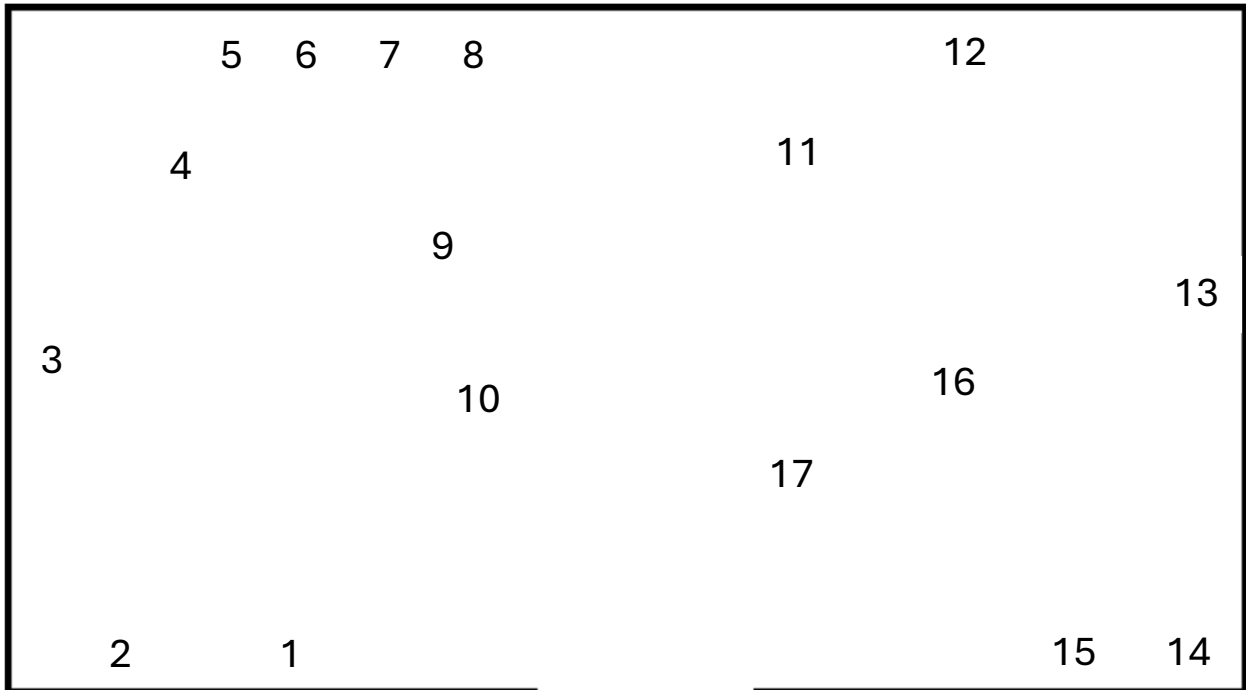
18

1
David L. Johnson, *Snow*, 2014, HD video, 8 min 49 sec, sound, courtesy of the artist and THETA

2
Benjamin Hirte, *Cover*, 2024, Carrara marble, 95 × 95 × 3 cm, courtesy the artist & Layr, Wien

3
Gleb Amankulov, *Display on Demand*, 2024, Leather left overs from local factory production, found metal wire, marble napkin holders, wooden easel of beginning of 30ies, 4 wooden legs from day bed Kovona of 30ies-40ies, leather military leggins of WWI

time, metal towel holders, part of iron cast Christmas three holder from pre-WWI, small wooden corner, old found footrest out of wood, two metal shelf holders, 5 leather belts, small found ceramic piece, small wooden shelf in the shape of two books, various sizes, courtesy of the artist and Commune Gallery.

4
Frank Wasser, *Lectern (From One State to Another State)*, 2024, 18.3 kg of sawdust from a sanded down museum lectern contained with an industrial dust bag, contained within a suitcase, 77.5 × 55 × 33 cm, courtesy of the artist. Performance: 13.12. 21:00 and 28.01. 19:00

5
David L. Johnson, *Loiter (Joseph)*, 2024, removed standpipe spike, 48,3 × 29.2 × 16.5, courtesy of the artist and THETA

6
David L. Johnson, *Loiter (Corey)*, 2024, removed standpipe spike, 44,5 × 30.5 × 15.2 cm, courtesy of the artist and THETA

7
David L. Johnson, *Loiter (Aaron)*, 2024, removed standpipe spike, 29,2 × 27.9 × 21.6 cm, courtesy of the artist and THETA

8
David L. Johnson, *Loiter (Seror)*, 2024, removed standpipe spike, 34.3 × 30.5 × 19.1 cm, courtesy of the artist and THETA

9
Magdalena Stückler, *limited endlessness*, 2024, screen print on canvas, 160 × 15 × 5 cm, courtesy of the artist

10
Magdalena Stückler, *limited endlessness*, 2024, screen print on canvas, 245 × 159 cm, courtesy of the artist

11

Tammy Langhinrichs, *ohne Titel*, 2022/2024, wool, mixed farbric, fiberfill, 25 × 130 × 230 cm, courtesy the artist & Elektrohalle Rhomberg

12

Benjamin Hirte, *Spender*, 2024, drinking fountain, marble, various materials, 97 × 30.5 × 45 cm, courtesy the artist & Layr, Wien

13

Miriam Stoney, *du sourd, du teigneux, de la grisaille*, 2022/2024, series of six colour prints, courtesy of the artist. Performance: 13.12. 21:00 and 28.01. 19:00

14

Artur Schernthaner-Lourdesamy, *Corner Gesture*, 2024, MDF, USB, electronics, 6 modules, variable size, courtesy of the artist

15

Benjamin Hirte, *Dress*, 2024, Carrara marble, 94.5 × 94.5 × 3 cm, courtesy the artist & Layr, Wien

16

Gleb Amankulov, *Cover II*, 2024, metal table legs, front door out of nutwood of the Austrian wardrobe from 60's, ceramic figure of a duck, two glass plugs, small decorative glass vase, T-shirt with A1 logo, 125 × 141 × 125 cm, courtesy of the artist

17

Benjamin Hirte, *Shrine*, 2024, Red Sandstone, plastic, lacquer, 124.5 × 81 × 65 cm, courtesy the artist & Layr, Wien

18
In the Ring Gallery
Artur Schernthaner-Lourdesamy, *Fragments (Stored Together)*, 2024, copper, steel, 8 pieces, variable size, courtesy of the artist

19
At back entrance to the right
Artur Schernthaner-Lourdesamy, *Harbour Story*, 2024, paper, 29.7 × 21 cm, courtesy of the artist

Texts on the individual works

Gleb Amankulov

Gleb Amankulov has developed a distinctive working ecology, responding to precarious ways of living and art-making. His sculptural objects, ranging in size from small hanging works to large-scale installations are temporary, site-specific arrangements. They are composed of borrowed and found items, including second-hand furniture, utensils, and interior design pieces, often sourced at low cost from flea markets or online marketplaces. Frequently, his arrangements incorporate materials and objects discovered on-site, within the institution or premises hosting the exhibition. Created for a specific occasion—that of an exhibition—Amankulov's works are dismantled after their display. The components are then "restored" to their original state: returned to friends, sold, or given away to colleagues or strangers through online platforms. This approach renders his works, such as ***Display on Demand (2024)*** *and* ***Cover II*** **(2024)** inherently unstable; while the works can be re-created, they exist only in continually changing variations. Amankulov's method reflects critically on the economics of art production, its commodification and fetishization, while also addressing the demands placed on artists to remain mobile and adaptable. A nomadic artist, as well as a nomadic cultural worker in general, embodies a mode of working that is resourceful and flexible—to be too bound (*indebted*) to someone or something is a limiting factor.

But to create with less, to reuse, is also to be driven by curiosity for the archaeology of the everyday; by questioning the formal or historical significance of the objects he employs, Amankulov considers the shifting contexts in which these items reappear or acquire new meaning.

Gleb Amankulov (*1988 in Minsk, BLR) lives and works in Vienna, Austria.

Benjamin Hirte

The question of power dynamics in public space and social housing has been one of the central concerns in the genesis of Benjamin Hirte's practice. Employing a sculptural vocabulary that operates on the margins of meaning-making, Hirte unsettles the boundaries between fine and applied arts and reformulates the role and iconography of familiar objects through processes of decontextualization, rescaling, and abstraction. His sculptural objects often mimic functional devices and elements of everyday architectural structures or they resemble ideological artifacts—fragments or ruins with unclear or forgotten purposes—conjuring the spectre of ideas from the past haunting the present. The two marble wall pieces, *Dress* **(2024)** and *Cover* **(2024**), blend industrial and figurative elements, while evoking the appearance of memorial plaques.

In the context of the Salzburger Kunstverein, Hirte's red sandstone work, *Shrein* **(2024)**, features a rustic front wall with a deliberately rough texture, as if echoing the architecture of the building's exterior. The red sandstone used in *Shrein* originates from regions along the Main River, including Frankfurt, Heidelberg or Mainz; its texture and color closely resemble the red brick walls typical of these areas, reinforcing a connection to their architectural heritage. The back side incorporates small slots inspired by the shapes of watch displays commonly seen in storefront windows. While the central elements of the front wall extend outward, the back features recessed vaults, creating an interplay of positive and negative forms.

Spender **(2024)**, a fully functional water fountain with a marble base, features water flowing in a continuous loop. Its design recalls drinking fountains typically found in public or semi-public spaces, where water is offered to the public or customers. The lower stone section adopts a surreal quality, mirroring the urinal- or sink-like shape of the upper part. However, the use of marble

elevates the piece, lending it a sacral, almost ritualistic quality. This highlights how many sacred forms originate from functional objects and customs.

Benjamin Hirte (*1980 in Aschaffenburg, DE), lebt und arbeitet in Wien, AT.

David L. Johnson

David L. Johnson's practice focuses on questions of public space and the urban environment—particularly in New York City—as a site increasingly shaped by hostility and privatization. His ongoing series of sculptural objects, *Loiter* **(2020–present)**, involves the ongoing, illegal removal of different forms of hostile architecture from public spaces. This includes elements like metal spikes attached to benches, steps, or standpipes to prevent people from sitting or seeking shelter. Johnson recontextualizes these spikes as sculptures, exhibiting them at approximately the same height as their original installation.

The history of loitering and vagrancy laws in the United States dates back to the 17th century, rooted in the "Slave Codes" and later evolving into the "Black Codes." These laws were tools for white slave owners to control and oppress Black individuals, regulating public and private gatherings, leisure, and rest under the threat of imprisonment, torture, or death. Such laws were instrumental in sustaining the extractive system of racial capitalism. The influence of these laws, combined with other discriminatory forms of legislation such as the "Ugly Laws" that targeted disabled individuals in public spaces, persist materially and legally today. *Loiter* acts as an ongoing antagonism to some of these material forms. As Johnson notes, "this ongoing removal effort reflects the unpayable debt and reparation that these structures—physically and ideologically—aim to suppress."

The video *Snow* **(2014)** shows a maintenance worker sweeping snow in front of a commercial building during a blizzard. Inside the building's lobby, real estate developer Edward Minskoff and contemporary artist Jeff Koons inaugurate a sculpture of a red balloon dog. The video's focus moves between these two scenes until Minskoff and Koons exit the building, walking to a car parked directly in front.

David L. Johnson (*1993 in New York, US) lives and works in New York, US.

Tammy Langhinrichs

The work on view *Untitled* **(2024)** and the practice of Tammy Langhinrichs in general, engages with questions of identity attribution in relation to cultural constructs of meaning and memory. An essential component of this artistic exploration is textile, particularly fashion. Textile, as a material, is inherently visual and thus already imbued with various codes. The artist identifies these codings, which intertwine personal and cultural experiences and memories, as crucial to the work. Through a critical examination of form, fabric, and the gendered associations of craft practices, the works on display address broader questions of socialization and belonging.

For Langhinrichs, the concept of debt is understood beyond its financial definition, representing a deeper emotional and social burden. This perspective points to experiences of dissonance and guilt that arise when navigating spaces perceived as distant from familiar values. Through a slow and deliberate engagement with textiles, there is an attempt to resist the accelerated pace of the art market. In this sense, the practice aims to reframe debt as a space for continuous, self-determined action—a space where an alternative logic can emerge.

Tammy Langhinrichs (*1995 in Hamburg, GER) lives and works between Salzburg, AT and Hamburg, GER.

Artur Schernthaner-Lourdesamy

The artistic practice of Artur Schernthaner-Lourdesamy spans compositions, performances, and installation strategies, often responding directly to the spaces where he exhibits and resulting in site-specific outcomes. His work frequently operates within explicitly collective structures and collaborations. Responding to the open call and the theme of Debt, Schernthaner-Lourdesamy wrote: "Guilt as a feeling. Something I resist—instinctively yet deliberately—mostly through explanation, derivation, the urge for causality and results. To the point where guilt itself becomes something abstract to me. Something that I neither want to make tangible nor perceptible, whether through memory or narrative. [...]"

Displayed on two windowsills in the hallway of the Salzburger Kunstverein, *Fragments (stored together)* **(2024)** comprises eight small sculptures made of copper and steel, directing the viewer's gaze outward. Originally created and exhibited as part of a previous exhibition, the pieces underwent a transformative process during storage: galvanic corrosion. Formally, the work evokes a fictional train station scene. For Schernthaner-Lourdesamy, in relation to *Debt*, the railway track symbolizes a potential site for grappling with the concept of guilt. Such a place, where one waits, confronts individuals with a recurring choice: to let it pass or to board. He associates this moment with a sense of freedom, as actions in this context are seemingly freed from consequence—the train departs regardless of whether one boards or not. The scene suggests an invitation to endure guilt and to remain in the present, embracing the ambiguity of inaction. While the work invites reflection on personal agency and guilt, it also leaves unspoken the fraught historical connotations of Austria's past. Schernthaner-Lourdesamy acknowledges the grotesque irony of describing boarding a train as an act of free will. *Harbour Story* **(2024)** exhibited in the Salzburger Kunstverein cellar, near to a window, also focuses on a space of transition.

In the exhibition space, ***Corner Gesture* (2024)** features remains from a larger work originally shown at brut Wien. Deliberately placed in a corner, these objects continue to consume electricity and emit noise, despite no longer fulfilling their intended purpose, contributing to a fully-functioning artwork entity. Schernthaner-Lourdesamy draws attention to the banality of this act: artistic production is dependent on material and energy, the process of creation inherently consumes resources.

Artur Schernthaner-Lourdesamy (*2001 in Vienna, AT), lives and works in Vienna, Austria.

Miriam Stoney

Miriam Stoney primarily works with text to explore the architectures of 'selfhood' and the belief systems that shape us. As part of her expanded writing practice, Stoney often works collaboratively and incorporates sound, found objects, and projected images into performances and installations. Her book **Debt Verses (2022**) examines the relational, monetary, moral, and creative dimensions of debt and indebtedness. Drawing from ancient and contemporary narratives, trivia, popular culture, and psychoanalytic and critical theory, the book, written from the perspective of the Fortune Teller, tells a story of articulations, (mis)understandings, and intuitions about debt. Stoney explores how debt is a kind of curse (such as a fortune teller might issue), and how credit and debit are fundamental organising belief systems. While the book itself is not physically on display, Stoney will give a shorter performative reading at the opening, followed by a full reading of the book later in the exhibition's run.

Corresponding to *Debt Verses* and its genealogy is a series of six colour prints, titled ***du sourd, du teigneux, de la grisaille (2022/2024)***. The images are enlarged crops from photographs taken in environments Stoney inhabited particularly during the writing of the book. The work serves as an autobiographical counterweight to *Debt Verses*—an undifferentiated plenum of banal existence through which her words were filtered and organized into poetic chromatism. Stoney refers to the work as a demythologizing of the 'writing self' while acknowledging the richness and diversity within the greyness of everyday life. This greyness, she suggests, contains myriad realities, and in attempting to see everything at once, a kind of muted and scabby quality emerges. In the context of debt, the work *du sourd, du teigneux, de la grisaille* explores incommensurability: none of the greys are the same, even though they are all *grey*.

Miriam Stoney (*1994 in Scunthorpe, UK) works and lives in Vienna, AT.

Magdalena Stückler

In her primarily sculptural practice, Magdalena Stückler addresses questions of norms, systems, and standardized measurements, as well as themes of efficiency and functionality. Her works often transition from two-dimensional to three-dimensional forms, originating from drawings or patterns. By exploring the space between socially constructed opposites—activity and passivity, excess and deficiency, presence and absence—her works often draws on architectural thinking or techniques from the textile industry. Stückler also reflects on the issues of waste material and efficiency, integrating them into her form-finding process, as exemplified in her project ***limited endlessness* (2024).**

The process behind *limited endless* (2024) began with two small sketches that served as templates for creating wooden boxes. Using these drawings, Stückler calculated how many individual pieces could be cut from a plywood sheet while minimizing waste. She then translated this cutting template into full scale using canvas and screen printing, resulting in works (including the rolled piece) that measure 2500 x 1250 cm—the standard size of the plywood sheets from which the wooden parts were cut.

The *lines of limited endless* (2024) were screen-printed in multiple stages rather than all at once, with each X shape gradually forming through the layering of various lines. This method mimicked the drawing process, repurposing the screen-printing technique that is traditionally used for reproduction and duplication.

Magdalena Stückler (*1996 in Neunkirchen, AT) lives and works in Vienna, AT.

Frank Wasser

Shifting between the roles of artist, writer, and educator, Frank Wasser's work spans performance, installation, and text. His practice engages deeply with issues of institutional power, authorship, and the politics of art production. In his performative lectures, Wasser often blurs the lines between teacher and student, artist and audience, transforming the pedagogical encounter into a site of critical engagement and collective inquiry.

As part of *Debt*, Wasser will present two versions of his performance **Split (Zero-Hour Fragments)**, based on his book of the same name, which was written entirely on a smartphone between 2013 and 2018 while Wasser worked zero-hour contract jobs at universities, museums, and art institutions in London. The nameless protagonist in the text is identified only by the many name badges he is required to wear. *Split* is a juxtaposition of observations, fictions, and confabulations from within the institutions that sustain, control, and propagate the flow of capital and culture through living bodies. Each fragment traces the protagonist's deterioration under the pressures of industrial action, leading to illness, debt, and eventual death.

In his work **Lectern (From One State to Another State) (2024),** displayed in the exhibition space, Wasser salvaged a lectern from the auditorium of Tate Modern, where he had once delivered lectures, after it was rendered obsolete during a renovation. He stored the lectern in the studio for three months and exhibited it as part of his PhD exhibition, before meticulously sanding it down into dust in preparation for this exhibition. The lectern was sanded down (the process took ten hours) during Wasser's lunch breaks at Goldsmiths, University where he currently works as a lecturer in Fine Art. The resulting 18.3 kilograms of dust was then transported from London to Vienna in a suitcase by plane where it was questioned for a total of six hours by customs in both countries who refuted the status of the contents as materials for the construction of a work of art. Within a confabulation of conflated contexts, the

work underscores the precarity of artistic labour and the invisible processes involved in sustaining a practice.

Frank Wasser (*1989 in Dublin, IE) lives and works between London, UK and Vienna, AT.