

## *The Myth of Normal. Chronic Contradictions*

09.05.-30.06.2024

[EN]

*The Myth of Normal. Chronic Contradictions* showcases a group exhibition conceptualized in collaboration with Kunstverein Hannover. This exhibit is intricately paired with Kunstverein Hannover's sister exhibition *The Myth of Normal. Of Competing and Conceding*, both exploring the standards of 'normalcy' in health and societal expectations inspired by the insights of Dr. Gabor Maté, a renowned expert in the study of trauma. Complementing the performance series *When the Body Says Yes (Or Maybe)* co-produced by the two Kunstvereine explores the nuances of ability.

**Artists:** Cat Chong, Jeamin Cha, Itamar Gov, Perel, Benoît Piéron, Marianna Rodziewicz, Finnegan Shannon, Anastasia Sosunova, Julischka Stengele, Imogen Stidworthy, and Julia Zöhrer.

**Performances:** Benoît Piéron and Perel.

**Curator:** Mirela Baciak

**Curatorial assistance:** Temitayo Olalekan

In collaboration with Kunstverein Hannover.

**Performance Program *When the Body Says Yes (Or Maybe)***

**Performances *Absenteeism* by Benoît Piéron and**

***Re(v)ul(v)ulation* by Perel**

Co-produced by Salzburger Kunstverein and Kunstverein Hannover

Co-curated by Mirela Baciak and Christoph Platz-Gallus

**Salzburger Kunstverein**

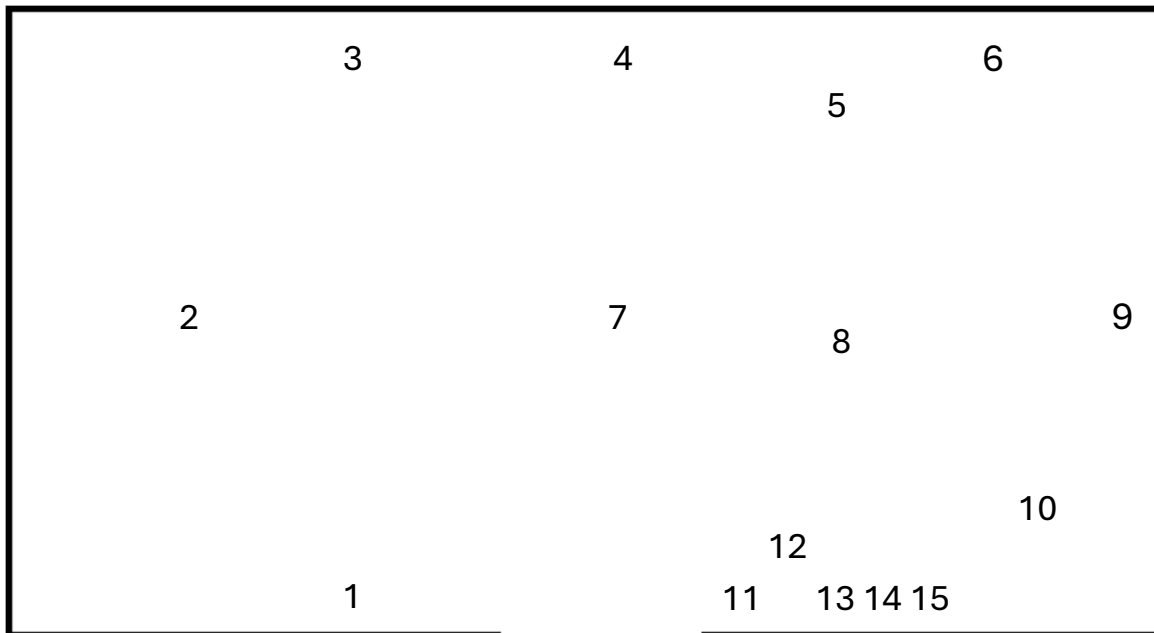
**25.05.2024, 16:00**

Kunstverein Hannover

**31.05.2024, 16:00**

Kindly supported by *Artis* and *L'Institut français*.

## Floorplan & works



1  
**Marianna Rodziewicz**, *How I (Don't) Sleep (Overthinking)*, 2024, 2D graphic print, 100 x 60 cm, courtesy of the artist and Pola Magnetyczne Gallery (Warsaw, Poland)

2  
**Itamar Gov**, *The Nursery*, 2023, metal, wood, papier-mâché, muslin, acrylic, jute, and cotton ropes. Courtesy of the artist and Zilberman Gallery Berlin/Istanbul/Miami.

3  
**Marianna Rodziewicz**, *Pleasure Belt I*, 2024, 3D printed object, 36 x 31 x 16 cm, courtesy of the artist and Pola Magnetyczne Gallery (Warsaw, Poland)

4  
**Jeamin Cha**, *Ellie's Eye*, two-channel video installation, 2020, FHD video, 11 min, color/sound, courtesy of the artist

5  
**Cat Chong**, *When Health Becomes Available*, 2024, collection of 15 poems, courtesy of the artist

6  
**Marianna Rodziewicz**, *In My Stomach*, 2024, 2D graphic print, 100 x 70 cm, courtesy of the artist and Pola Magnetyczne Gallery (Warsaw, Poland)

7

**Itamar Gov**, *Olympia CER.810*, 2023, metal surgical table, plaster, wax. Courtesy of the artist and Zilberman Gallery Berlin/Istanbul/Miami.

8

**Benoît Piéron**, *Ko.u.r.ê.os*, 2024, mannequin with Benoît Piéron's measurements, used hospital sheets, 35 x 22 x 160 cm, courtesy of the artist and galerie Sultana, Paris

9

**Anastasia Sosunova**, *Placebo Waterfall I, Placebo Waterfall II, Placebo Waterfall III*, 2024, zinc, aluminium, each 102 x 172 x 4 cm, courtesy of the artist

10

**Marianna Rodziewicz**, *Her Claws*, 2024, 3D printed object, 25,5 x 30 x 9,5, courtesy of the artist and Pola Magnetyczne Gallery (Warsaw, Poland)

11

**Julischka Stengele**, *Schamlos*, 2018 / 2020, sound, speaker: Franziska Schindler, 2 min 23 sec, courtesy of the artist

12

**Finnegan Shannon**, *Do You Want Us Here Or Not—Chaise longue 2*, 2021, plywood, paint, foam, fabric, fabric paint, 110,5 x 190 x 68,5 cm, courtesy of the artist. Production: Jack Brennon, Julia Eichler, Finnegan Shannon, Mikael Fransson, Patrick Keaveney, Zabotka S. Palm, Daniel Sarvari

13

**Julischka Stengele**, *Das Ding*, 2020, sound, speaker: Franziska Schindler, 2 min 31 sec, courtesy of the artist

14

**Julischka Stengele**, *Self-Portrait on Triangle*, 2009 / 2024, view camera polaroids, wall paint, 11,5 x 14,5 cm bzw. 42 x 37 cm, courtesy of the artist

15

**Julia Zöhrer**, *Curtains of Salubrity*, 2024, fabric object, 300 x 600 cm, courtesy of the artist

#### **At Studio Space:**

**Imogen Stidworthy**, *Iris [A Fragment]*, 2018, two-channel video, stereo sound, 14 min 46 sec, courtesy of the artist & AKINCI

## Text on the individual works

In alphabetical order

### **Jeamin Cha, *Ellie's Eye* (2020)**

We see our world, this being our most contemporary activity. Two consecutive fragments of Cha's video essay circle around the 'eye': the anatomical eye of a dog and the data-processing eye of an AI counsellor, both named Ellie.

The work reveals a tenacious desire, which is synonymic to an ineffectiveness in vision, desire, and ineffectiveness, both, necessitate the presence of a progressively systemic supplementation found in technology aiming at a psychological penetration of our world, worlds.

Jeamin Cha's video essay investigates the lacuna of vision, the space between sense and perception. The imaging discovery lends to a scientific construction of our vision, to inaccurately deduce that what we see is what we see, albeit, what we sense is not what is perceived.

The Human's limitation in seeing the world as it is, yet the capitalist system seeks to attain superhuman capabilities. Through five fragments, the film strings together in a circle the dissonance in our speculative rationale.

Dogs and AI are dependent on us, we teach both to recognize our human behavioral patterns. They see the world as we wish it to be seen, our singular objective sight.

*Ellie's Eye* challenges us to reflect on our mechanisms and structures of seeing, as an objectifying and image-defining stimulus that alienates the total subject and beckons us to reconcile the fragment with the whole.

**Cat Chong, *When Health Becomes Available* (2024)**

Cat Chong's poems, collectively titled *When Health Becomes Available*, serve as a poignant reflection on the medical industrial complex and daily life, particularly highlighting the challenges faced within systems of healthcare.

Referencing personal concerns, these poems touch upon the collapse of healthcare institutions within the UK, the emergence of long-term effects from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing struggle for disability justice.

Chong's literary technique evokes understanding through fragmented language. By rejecting the constraints of grammar and lexicon, they break the essence of theoretical discourse as it intersects with lived realities.

The placement of the poems on the floor as stacks of paper evokes the weightiness of medical prescriptions and administrative processes, emphasizing the bureaucratic hurdles often encountered in accessing healthcare.

The audience is encouraged to take these poems, resulting in the gradual disappearance of the stack throughout the duration of the exhibition. Overall, Chong's series serves as both a critique of the existing healthcare structures and a call for collective reflection.

**Itamar Gov, *The Nursery and Olympia (CER.810)* (2023)**

Two works by Itamar Gov *The Nursery* and *Olympia (CER.810)* interrogate the implications of treating the human body and mind as areas for technological conquest and perfection.

Thirty-three identical brains, crafted from plaster dipped in wax, are presented on a metal surgical table. Their display blends clinical detachment with culinary aesthetics, while visually soft and almost translucent, these brains are fundamentally stone-like. Gov's strategic overcrowding of the brains within the installation amplifies the tension between the ideal and the real, the organic and the artificial.

At the same time, it plays with the fact that the brain as the most central organ of thought and identity unlike any other part of the human body cannot be replicated or replaced. The work draws on themes from the story of Frankenstein and E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman," where the character Olympia represents an artificially created ideal that is both compelling and grotesque.

Next to *Olympia (CER.810)*, we can see twenty elements suspended from the ceiling, their forms ambiguous and multivalent. These objects, varying in length from one meter to one hundred eighty centimeters, evoke a range of imagery from cocoons poised to birth new life to mummified corpses suggesting decay.

The work titled *The Nursery* simulates a moment frozen in time—a liminal zone that is neither purely a beginning nor an end but a continuous process of becoming and/or deteriorating. The installation's setup, with ropes connected to the walls through metal rings, implies human intervention. This display also reflects on the industrial manipulation of biological processes, akin to silkworm farms transforming natural entities into commodified products, emphasizing the theme of exploitation inherent in the capitalist system.

*The Nursery* and *Olympia (CER.810)* draw inspiration from historical contexts where the pursuit of technological and scientific advancement led to ethical breaches, as illustrated by the story of Clara Immerwahr and the tragic consequences of her husband's work on chemical weapons, Fritz Haber.

**Benoît Piéron, *Ko.u.r.ê.os* (2024) and *Absenteeism* (2024)**

**Performance *Absenteeism* 25.05. 16:00**

Benoît Piéron's artistic practice is rooted in his personal experiences of illness and the complex dynamics of waiting and uncertainty that accompany it. Through his work, Piéron interrogates the ways in which sick bodies are treated by both the medical system and society at large. In our exhibition, we present two distinct works by Benoit Piéron: a mannequin entitled *Ko.u.r.ê.os* tailored to his own body measurements, which deviate from conventional norms, and a performance piece titled *Absenteeism*.

*Ko.u.r.ê.os* serves as a tangible representation of Piéron's exploration of the medical perception of his body. In crafting this mannequin and utilizing used hospital sheets, Benoit confronts the medical industrial complex's tendency to impose rigid standards of bodily perfection, particularly highlighting the challenges faced by individuals with atypical body measurements.

Benoît Piéron's new work, *Absenteeism*, echoes remarks from his school reports and hints at a deeper exploration of presence and absence through the non-muscular perspective. In *Absenteeism*, Piéron delves deeper into his personal journey with illness, inviting the audience to participate in a reading of a text that offers a glimpse into the intimate struggles and triumphs of living with illness, transforming it into an act of survival.

**Marianna Rodziewicz, *How I (Don't) Sleep (Overthinking); In My Stomach; Pleasure Belt I, Her Claws* (2024)**

Marianna Rodziewicz's series of digital collages and sculptures explore the boundaries between affection and fear, intimacy, and estrangement. She draws inspiration from her upbringing and surroundings, where judgment and scrutiny were prevalent, to navigate themes of bodily deformity and eroticism.

By abstracting and recontextualizing familiar objects and body parts, Rodziewicz invites viewers to reconsider their preconceptions and engage with the nuances of bodily forms.

The titles of her works carry a playful tone, reflecting her desire to inject levity into her creations while avoiding overt solemnity. One notable piece, *Pleasure Belt*, which borrows its title from an erotic toy, confuses its intended purpose, symbolizing both empowerment and constraint.

Another work, entitled *How I Don't Sleep* offers a subjective exploration of intimacy. At first glance, the juxtaposition of a deformed body with the stone-yet-slimy-like cold background creates a sense of unease and dissonance. However, upon closer inspection, it appears as a tender embrace evoking feelings of closeness and affection.



**Finnegan Shannon, *Do You Want Us Here or Not—Chaise longue 2* (2021)**

*Do You Want Us Here or Not?* as a series of benches and chaises longues is Shannon taking a proactive approach to address the issue of the un/availability of spaces for rest in the public. The convergence of texts and objects designed for rest creates a thought-provoking situation that aims to convey the struggles that dis/abled people are facing in the everyday.

In the exhibition space, the blue chaise longue with the soft-toned yet persuasive text message *READY TO PUT MY FEET UP. REST HERE IF YOU AGREE* invites you to take a position. Do you agree to sit down, dear Reader? Are you ready to re-position yourself?

The statement reminds us of the artistic style and boldness of Barbara Kruger's works. Here Shannon's work is specifically intended for display/action in semi-public spaces such as museums/art structures, where certain protocols of behavior are expected to be followed.

The artist is forcing us to ask ourselves where we are (sitting) in the practice of accessibility within art institutions. And in this re-siting of disability comes a critique of ability.

*Disability exists because we are largely complacent in allowing ourselves and society to perpetuate a world where disabled people are marginalized and oppressed by attitudinal and systemic barriers to access.* (Lydia X. Z. Brown, *Disability in an Ableist World*, 2014)

**Anastasia Sosunova, *Placebo Waterfall I, II, III* (2024)**

Central to Sosunova's artistic practice is the exploration of symbols, narratives, and beliefs, often tethered to her personal experiences and the socio-political landscapes of Eastern Europe. Through her work, she is probing questions of faith, authority, and ideological conditioning. Her series *Placebo Waterfalls* presented within the exhibition epitomizes her investigation into the placebo effect and its manifestation in medical treatments.

Comprising three imposing pieces, the artwork fuses saline solution-etched zinc plates with oil-based intaglio varnish infused with holy water. The saline solution, with its scientifically measurable impact and close resemblance to bodily fluids, becomes a metaphor for the placebo—a placeholder for expectation and belief. Through a controlled process of oxidation, Sosunova orchestrates chemical reactions, guiding the formation of intricate patterns on the plates reminiscent of cascading waterfalls.

Embedded within and next to the plates are offset lithography prints on aluminum. These are small engravings that draw from a diverse array of sources, including historical texts, contemporary imagery, and personal anecdotes. These engravings expand the discourse surrounding the artwork, revealing the ways in which belief systems intersect and evolve over time.

**Julischka Stengele, *Schamlos* (2018 / 2020); *Das Ding* (2020); *Self-portrait on Triangle* (2009 / 2024)**

In her practice, Julischka Stengele delves into the realms of power dynamics and violence, addressing pressing issues at the intersections of ableism and capitalism, patriarchy, and gender. Rejecting the superficiality of individualized beauty discourse, Stengele's works serve as a critique of societal norms and power structures that oppress and marginalize.

Within the exhibition Stengele presents three distinct explorations into the body and/or its constriction within the societal gaze: two audio works, *Schamlos* and *Das Ding*, and an in-situ collage *Self-portrait on Triangle*.

*Das Ding* elucidates the objectivity that the body of the artist is squeezed into, the monotone narrative voice points at the frigidity of the health and care apparatus. *Schamlos* is a resounding rebuke of the shame our narrow-mindedness fosters about bodies we think of as non-conventional. A similar cold tone voices out the piercing rigid stares the artist's body is expected to fit in, however, Stengele affirms to be unashamed.

The politics of normative biology have imposed on us a solemn and somber memory of the past. Stengele digs into this past and its symbolism coupled with a personalized story: *Self-portrait on Triangle* is the reactivation of a thought-to-be-over distant past, alluding to the personal in the historical, a polaroid portrait depicts a subjective way of seeing oneself.

Doing so in a manner that articulates a gesture of belonging and a citation through the pink and a black triangle, once reductive geometry of national socialist destructive categorization of queer bodies, to now assume a banner for continued militancy that reevaluates our social values. Stengele evokes the numbness of this powerful perception of others that attempts to define and categorize identities with dictated agencies.

**Imogen Stidworthy, *Iris [A Fragment]* (2018)**

Imogen Stidworthy's practice explores the ambiguity that lies within the boundaries of language. Her work exposes the limited perspective that these barriers create.

*Iris [A Fragment]* features a Swedish 'therapist,' Iris Johansson filmed between Dahab, South Sinai (Egypt) where Johansson lives and works for several months each year, and her home in Fagersta (Sweden). Johansson talks about a specific moment of self-perception, where her father brings her to a mirror, while what is reflected to her is a black hole.

Johansson is on the autistic spectrum, she had a non-linguistic relationship with her environment until she was twelve, existing in a mind-out-of-body space that she named the 'Real reality.' This exercise with the mirror was her father's endeavor to connect her with the 'ordinary reality'. She would later train herself to adopt neurotypical behavioral patterns by studying people around her and actors on the cinema screen, performing their expressions and gestures for extended periods in front of her mirror.

Imogen's work explores different modes of being in others and ourselves through the story of Iris. The work instigates a space of consternation, even uncertainty, as typical mechanisms of perception fail, nonetheless expanding on new ways of experiencing and understanding the consequent environments they constitute.

Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (in: *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Shambhala, 1992), wrote that "this inseparability between a particular way of being and how the world appears to us, tells us that every act of knowing brings forth a world."

**Julia Zöhrer, *Curtains of Salubrity* (2024)**

Julia Zöhrer's piece, *Curtains of Salubrity*, delves into the dynamics of medical spaces, particularly focusing on the symbolic significance of curtains within these environments. Within medical practices, curtains often serve as a boundary between public and private spaces, marking the transition from individual to patient as one undresses behind them.

As both an artist and a clinical receptionist, Zöhrer prompts us to consider how we navigate these sterile structures and the anxieties they evoke during medical visits. The anxieties associated with medical encounters may stem from the constraints of time and communication, as patients often feel pressured to articulate their health concerns within limited appointments.

Zöhrer's triptych offers a visual narrative of the historical evolution of medical treatments, depicted through meticulously drawn illustrations on the curtains. From childbirth to surgery to moments of injury and death. Through these intricate drawings, Zöhrer invites viewers to reflect on their own encounters with healthcare, whether through personal experience or cultural depictions.

The title, *Curtains of Salubrity*, draws attention to the concept of salubrity, referring to conditions that promote both physical and mental health. Despite the numerous references embedded within the curtains, they remain symbols of cleanliness and sterility, reflecting the clinical environment in which they are situated.

**Perel, *Re(v)ul(v)ulation* (2024)**

**Performance 25.05. 16:00**

In *Re(v)ul(v)ulation* Perel invites the audience to explore the space of mourning in a nonlinear, nonbinary way. They ask what it means to perform in the drag of a recently deceased relative, and whether the line between the living and the dead is quite so fixed.

*Re(v)ul(v)ulation* is a play on many words and meanings. The title of the performance serves to insert the vulva into the idea of revolution, both in terms of political change and in terms of turning, revolving, and existing in an endless cycle of birth and death. Also, through ululating, using the voice to wail, mourn, and shout with joy.

What happens when ideas of femininity collide with a queer body that does not identify with them? How can the audience be witness to this shapeshifting as a form of mourning and letting go? Furthermore, what do these collisions of the feminine mean between mother and child in the face of personal and political violence?

Perel recognizes that the family traumas and estrangement they survived were part of a legacy of internalized shame and ostracization, passed down through generations that endured diaspora and genocide.

Speaking to a disjointed family history, Perel seeks to lay to rest the dysfunctional coping mechanisms of misogyny and ableism that their mother and relatives believed to be sources of safety.

The performance ritual of *Re(v)ul(v)ulation* eventually turns the Kunstverein into a space of devotional liberation to dance out and sing through grief and rage. To mourn for what we had and what we lost, or what we never had and wished we did. To look at what we hold in our bodies from previous generations, what we no longer wish to hold, and what we wish to honor, all as acts of love.

## Biographies

**Jeamin Cha** (\*1986, Busan, Republic of Korea) is an artist based in Seoul whose practice spans film, performance, installation, and writing. Cha's work deals with the relationship between the psychological, emotional, and physical. She approaches the reality of individuals through processes of field studies and notes personal interviews of hard-to-articulate experiences. She is also interested in preserving unknown areas that are gradually shrinking as technology advances.

**Cat Chong** (\*1997, Christmas Pie, UK) is a poet, publisher, PhD student at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, where their work considers the intersections between genre, genderqueerness, disability, and chronic illness. They're a graduate of the Poetic Practice MA at Royal Holloway and editor at Osmosis Press. Their work has been featured in publications across the UK, Singapore, the US, and Canada. Their debut collection *712 stanza homes for the sun* was published in 2023 by Broken Sleep Books while their second collection, the serial poem title *Dear Lettera 32*, was recently published by Permeable Barrier in February 2024.

**Itamar Gov** (\*1989, Tel-Aviv, Israel) is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice consists of sculptural and spatial installations, as well as graphic and video works. Addressing the intricate relations between history, ideology and aesthetics, his projects explore various forms of personal, collective, and institutional memory. Since 2010 he has been living in Berlin, Paris, and Bologna, where he studied cinema, history and literature.

**Perel** (USA) is an interdisciplinary artist whose work is centered on disability and queerness as they relate to care, consent, sexuality, and personal and historic trauma. Their work includes performance, installation, criticism, and curatorial projects and utilizes choreography to examine power exchange between the artist and audience.

**Benoît Piéron** (\*1983, Ivry-sur-Seine, France) was born with meningitis, and treated for leukaemia as a kid. In the 1970s and 1980s, 4,689 people with haemophilia and other bleeding disorders were infected with HIV and hepatitis viruses using contaminated clotting factors – Piéron was one of these people, and whilst he did not become seropositive, his body became more political. Four years ago, he returned to the hospital with a cancer which went into remission. Far from the romantic heroism of the usual metaphors of illness, Piéron places himself in a grey and joyful zone and deals with illness and its consequences in his art.

**Marianna Rodziewicz** (\*2001, Warsaw) combines the real world (traditional media, such as drawing or sculpture) with the digital world (digital 3D objects, VR spaces and AR technologies). In her artistic practice, drawing from autobiographical experiences, Marianna focuses on human as an individual embedded in society. She raises the issues of objectivity and subjectivity. She looks for the relationship between human being and reality, talking about the relationship with space, other people, nature, and self.

**Finnegan Shannon** (\*1989, US) is a project-based artist. They experiment with forms of access that intervene in ableist structures with humor, earnestness, rage, and delight. Some of their recent work includes *Anti-Stairs Club Lounge*, an ongoing project that gathers people together who share an aversion to stairs; *Alt-Text as Poetry*, a collaboration with Bojana Coklyat that explores the expressive potential of image description; and *Do You Want Us Here or Not*, a series of benches and cushions designed for exhibition spaces.

**Anastasia Sosunova** (\*1993, Ignalina, Lithuania) is a visual artist based in Vilnius. Her multidisciplinary work combining video, installation, sculpture and graphics grows from personal histories and their entanglements with broader cultural, economic, and spiritual structures. She graduated from the Vilnius Academy of Arts with a BA in Graphic Arts and an MA in Sculpture.

**Julischka Stengele** is transdisciplinary artist, writer, curator and educator based in Vienna. A post-studio artist, Stengele's practice is project based, genre-crossing, multi-medial, formally diverse and thematically broad. Specializing in performative, site-responsive and conceptual formats, Stengele enjoys to create situations, atmospheres and get-togethers as a form of art.

**Imogen Stidworthy** (\*1963, London, UK) uses the voice as her main preoccupation. In her work, she approaches the voice as something sculptural, a spatial material which we apply to locate ourselves physically and culturally. She is based in Liverpool and Amsterdam.

**Julia Zöhrer** (\*1992, Gmunden, Austria) is an austrian artist who studied fine arts at Art University Linz from 2012 to 2018. Her exhibitions took place in Vienna, Berlin, Salzburg and Passau, amongst others. The artist lives and works in Linz.