

59TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA
BIENNALE ARTE 2022
AUSTRIAN PAVILION

ARTISTS:
JAKOB LENA KNEBL AND ASHLEY HANS SCHEIRL
CURATOR:
KAROLA KRAUS
COMMISSIONER:
FEDERAL MINISTRY OF ARTS, CULTURE,
CIVIL SERVICE AND SPORT

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59. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali





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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Soft Machine*!

It was William Burroughs who, in the early 1960s, in his eponymously named cut-up novel, described the human body as a 'soft machine', constantly besieged 'by a vast, hungry host of parasites'. Meanwhile, the 'soft machine' has morphed into a cyborg-age body cipher. In narratives and in reality, humans and machines often merge in surprisingly new, sometimes critical ways. In this way, they drive discourse. With their exhibition *Invitation of the Soft Machine and Her Angry Body Parts* Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl playfully and humorously make various facets of contemporary body discourses resonate. Knebl and Scheirl transform the Austrian Pavilion in the Giardini into an open stage that invites the audience to explore the 'spaces of desire' staged by the Viennese artists. In this temporary staging, the two unfold their artistic universe with paintings, sculptures and photographs, through textile works, writing and video, to a fashion collection and a magazine. The *Soft Machine* materialises in the form of a literal 'exhibition being' whose individual parts merge into an organic, living whole. The pavilion is transformed into an inviting, 'heterotopian' space where art, performance, design, fashion and architecture come together in exciting, ironically humorous, futuristic hybrid forms.

Karola Kraus
Curator of the Austrian Pavilion



FOREWORD

The Biennale Arte in Venice is the most extensive international exhibition of visual art and, at the same time, a living space in which to engage actively with the current international art discourse.

The years of the Covid-19 crisis have made us painfully aware of how important it is to enable people to enjoy a living, sensory experience of art in the social and individual context.

I am delighted that Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl will be presenting their *Invitation of the Soft Machine and Her Angry Body Parts* at the Austrian Pavilion with their accustomed ingenuity in the Biennale year of 2022. Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl have demonstrated on many occasions that they are capable of staging the relevant issues of our time in an exciting and surprising way. Questions of social identity, artistic expression and formal stringency are negotiated in a self-reflective, open-minded and exceedingly humorous manner.

By way of experiment, Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl elaborate a sensory space, overgrowing the strictly symmetrical Austrian Pavilion with artefacts from a range of different disciplines: Painting, photography, stage design, fashion, sculpture, and performance are put at the service of art so as to delight the visitor's eye and offer a wealth of possible experiences.

An extensive education programme is also provided to familiarise art enthusiasts with the artistic universe of Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl.

I am pleased that, in addition to Venice, there will be a branch of the exhibition in Vienna, which I warmly invite you to go and see.

I would like to thank the curator Karola Kraus for her prudent selection and great commitment in mounting this exhibition, and wish the artists every success and visitors an inspiring time.

Andrea Mayer
Austrian Secretary of State for the Arts and Culture

For all information on the award procedure of the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Civil Service and Sport, the selection statement as well as the budget, visit www.labiennale.at.
The call for entries for the competition to conceive and realize the Austrian contribution to the 2024 Biennale Arte will be announced in June 2022.



CURATORIAL-ARTISTIC CONCEPT

JAKOB LENA KNEBL AND ASHLEY HANS SCHEIRL INVITATION OF THE SOFT MACHINE AND HER ANGRY BODY PARTS

Curator Karola Kraus is presenting Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl in the Austrian Pavilion at the 2022 Biennale Arte, two artists whose works are characterised by numerous links between art, performance, design, fashion, performance, sociocultural phenomena, and architecture, thus focusing on current discourses of global relevance.

Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl develop stage-like installations, entitled *Invitation of the Soft Machine and Her Angry Body Parts*, in which they unfurl their entire artistic cosmos – from paintings, sculptures, textile works, photographs, text, and video to a fashion collection and a special magazine. These hybrid ‘spaces of desire’ upset conventional notions of museum presentations and shake up the hierarchies of art and design, of high and low. The artists deal with the mechanisms of identity construction, in which desire and sensory experience play a major role. They construct multilayered dynamic spaces, in which the viewers themselves become actors and may expand their horizon through curiosity.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS' WORK

From dandy to camp to bohemian and counterculture, from flamboyantly staging the self to being the solitary, introverted romantic: At least since the invention of modernism, artists have had a role to play within the operating system of art. These social role allocations are always also attached to gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, and status. Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl have set up their stage within the coordinate system of this construct that employs desired as well as forced identities, undermining it – and rehearsing their own play by mixing up systems and producing hybrids that deal with the identities of styles, media, materiality, contexts, aesthetics, and movements throughout the history of art and design. Instead of indoctrinating their audience, the artists want a human exchange at eye level: a joyous sensory invitation to join them in their journey to utopian spheres, thus making alternatives imaginable.

The jumping-off point of Jakob Lena Knebl's spatial strategies is often a photographic staging that puts the body as well as constructions of identity and desire in relation with sculptural objects and spaces both material and social. With this approach, she creates three-dimensional – at times walk-in – installations, settings, and dramatisations that connect the private with the public sphere. The installations often see the juxtaposition of different aesthetics, media and materials in an intense atmosphere. Knebl takes her references from the histories of art and design as well as the movements that have connected the two fields.

Ashley Hans Scheirl's artistic practice began in the late 1970s, for which she has employed a multitude of different media. She*he went on to dedicate the next twenty years to the moving image. With more than fifty films and the transgender cult classic *Dandy Dust*, Scheirl has been one of the pioneers of the queer movement in the arts. Since the mid-1990s, painting has taken centre stage, a type of painting that viewers experience as installations – which is to say in its incorporation of architecture, contexts, objects, video loops, and, not least, by the way the visitors move through them.



Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl work on solo projects and as an artist duo. Most recently, they presented fiery three-dimensional settings at the Lyon Biennale and at Kunsthau Bregenz. They have been invited to put on a solo show at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2023. The two artists share a deep interest in the ways in which identities are constructed and deconstructed. Analogous to the deliberate, active say in the development of their own personalities, their artistic work calls into question the identities of media, styles, disciplines, and gender constructs, which are set in motion, hybridised, transformed, and (de-)contextualised through 'trans-...operations'. In the process, two generations – as well as two different approaches – are merged.

THE INSTALLATION AT THE AUSTRIAN PAVILION

Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl focus on the structural conditions of the Austrian Pavilion's symmetrical architecture, which is both divided and connected by a colonnade. Each of the two main spaces bears the mark of one of the two artists. While the two individual positions remain distinct, they are also in conversation with each other. Thus the various materials, modes of operation, symbols, and forms appear to oscillate between the two presentations and are duplicated and mirrored. The side pavilions earmark the artist duo by way of a reflecting illusionist spatial situation.

Jakob Lena Knebl's expansive installation elude clear-cut classifications. It displays the artist's current interrogation of the 1970s, especially the sociopolitical issues and the history of art and design of that decade, and reflects their potent influence on the present day. Key aspects in this context include identity and the possibilities of its transformation, the places of its staging, and the question of co-producers and mechanisms of exclusion. The scenography of Knebl's work in the pavilion is dominated by opulence. A sci-fi landscape extending the length of the pavilion's rear wall sets a surreal scene that appears at once utopian and dystopian. It is framed by a steel structure inspired by the architecture of the Centre Pompidou. Life-sized hybrid sculptures of ceramic, leather, fibreglass, textiles, and steel that challenge the arbitrary dividing line between art and design share the exhibition space with visitors. Classical craftsmanship is combined and interwoven with polyurethane casts based upon digital, 3D printed models.

Ashley Hans Scheirl's installation is a walk-in self-portrait as a painter. A red velvet curtain is pushed aside by the artist's painted hand. As in a theatre proscenium, we see a staggered arrangement of flat pieces of scenery that at the same time make up the layers of this fold-out painting. As we enter, two different-sized eyes regard us from the rearmost wall with an ambivalent emotional expression. Above is a white, long-haired pubic mound, from which an oversize tube runs into the room. It ejaculates a clear yellowish 'liquid' into the room, leaving a puddle beneath the curve of a long hairstyle. From atop a shaggy hill, medicine-spewing tank guns are trained covetously on a shiny chunk of gold. An angrily gaping mouth adorns a living-room wallpaper from the 1970s. Behind it, a piercing ring is thrust through a cloud-shaped sky. Turning around, high above the entrance, the visitor sees a cushioned anus excreting a golden worm of paint into the room.

The two artists' joint installation is characterised by a dynamic juxtaposition and intertwining of different, seemingly paradoxical spaces, styles and pictogramme-like symbols that all seek to garner the visitors' attention with their own particular devices. The visitors, in turn, become protagonists in this piece, setting the scenery in motion with their bodies.



PUBLICATION / MAGAZINE SOFTMACHINE

For the publication, which will be available at the Biennale and distributed by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl have conceived a glossy magazine entitled *Softmachine*. Adopting various retro-styles from the history of graphic design, the magazine as a medium offers the opportunity to contextualise the complex artistic approaches and, at the same time, to share the stage with designers, theoreticians, sponsors, and production partners. In addition to texts, it will also feature interviews on current discourses and photo spreads that afford insight into the dazzling and profound intellectual worlds of Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl and their inspirations.

THE TEXTS

The theoretical and spatial-artistic references within the *Soft Machine* are presented in detail in the introduction by art historian **Susanne Neuburger**. In it, she also references the pavilion's architecture: 'The layout of the pavilion provides symmetry, if not a mirror image. This will play a role in the two adjoining rooms and then when the duo repeatedly refers to each other in poses or accessories and separates again just as the main rooms are divided: Knebl on the right, Scheirl on the left.'

'My art is "trans": transgender, transgenre, transmedium,' says Ashley Hans Scheirl. 'Painting is at the centre; at the same time, it's about the dynamics between the media.' For Scheirl, art is a means of change. 'It's about the search for identity and the tinkering with oneself.' **Guilherme Pires Mata's** contribution deals with how Scheirl's installation could be read as 'an allegory of an obscene libido whose imaginary is transformed into an instrument of critique of political and economic obscenity.'

Knebl's photographs in which the artist seems to metamorphose into a living piece of Chesterfield furniture or a Mondrian canvas exude a kind of transformation magic that helps penetrate the object-fetishist core of our late capitalist culture. The image of furniture becoming a figure was also the radical basic idea behind **Hussein Chalayan's** legendary clothing series *Afterwords* (2000), inspired by stories of flight and migration, which probably became the most famous work of the British-Cypriot couturier and artist. Chalayan had designed furniture covers that turned into clothes and furniture that could be transformed into suitcases. 'Because I see clothing and the body and fashion in the same way as an artist might look at their medium,' Chalayan says in an interview with **Monica Titton** in the magazine.

With *Soft Machine*, Scheirl and Knebl selectively evoke the aesthetics and indeed the democratic freedom spirit of the 1970s, the decade whose emancipatory cultural legacy is now being appreciated in a new way. The Centre Pompidou in Paris, opened in 1977, which Knebl cites in her work, may serve as an example of the solidity of these ideas: The technical functions of the building are turned inside out in a revolutionary way that is as transparent as it is visible from afar. 'Knebl cites the famous building', writes **Thomas D Trummer**, director of Kunsthau Bregenz and curator of its 2020/21 exhibition with the two artists, in his text, 'with the triple pipe but also the interior design of these awakening years, the intense colours and unusual contrasts, psychedelic effects and the *horror vacui* of pop.'

The past serves Knebl and Scheirl as an instrument to aim at the present. The *Soft Machine*, as the author and curator **Attilia Fattori Francini** sees it in her text, 'takes the counterculture experience as an inspirational moment of protest, liberation and mass distribution of radical ideas' – like a programme installed on its hard drive.



Today, the question of emancipation through art, society and subversion poses itself quite differently again. 'We need utopian places where we feel safe(r), seen and happy,' writes **Lisa Holzinger** of Sisters, the Viennese queer-feminist art and culture association, who filled in **Markus Pires Mata's** *Softmachine Questionnaire* along with Tony Renaissance, Enesi M. and Voiler.

By disclosing its artistic source code, the *Soft Machine* also invites participation. For 'the knowledge of these artistic codes, knowing the alphabet of art in the so-called digital age', as **Gerald Bast**, principal of the University of Applied Arts Vienna, where Jakob Lena Knebl is a professor, writes in his text, 'is at least as important as the knowledge of the function of codes used to produce algorithms, because only the knowledge of the existence and the function of such codes allows social participation.' The irony, humour and serious play in the art of Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl keep the *Soft Machine* on course. They act as big parentheses to bring together things that at first seem irreconcilable in an aesthetic of contradictions in a way that is both inviting and surprising.

The email exchange with the historian of religion and 'amateur flower gardener with a creative urge and revolutionary zeal', *Barbara Urbanic*, also printed in the magazine, is about the political element of gardening. In today's era of climate change, gardens become revolutionary plots – a huge inspiration for the two artists. Another formal source of inspiration: camouflage. As a special case of floating patterns in industry, military, fashion, and activism, this method is explored by Daniel Kalt, author and editor at the Austrian daily newspaper *Die Presse*, in his contribution.

The publication, which represents a mix of glossy and counterculture magazine, acts as an expansion of the pavilion. As Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl put it, 'It was important for us to work with a format that allowed us to incorporate other voices, our broader environment, and our current interests.'



ARTIST AND CURATOR BIOGRAPHIES

JAKOB LENA KNEBL, born in Baden near Vienna, in 1970, worked in elderly care for ten years before studying Fashion under Raf Simons at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and Textual Sculpture under Heimo Zobernig at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She was a senior artist at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and has been a professor of Transmedia Art at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, since 2021. The jumping-off point of her spatial strategies is often a photographic staging that puts the body as well as constructions of identity and desire in relation with sculptural objects and spaces, both material and social. With this approach, she creates three-dimensional – sometimes walk-in – installations, settings and enactments that are characterised by different aesthetics, media, materials, and intense atmospheres. She takes her references from the histories of art and design as well as the movements that have connected the two fields. In 2017 Jakob Lena Knebl was awarded the Austrian Federal Chancellery's Outstanding Artist Award in the category Fine Art. In her show *Marcher sur l'eau* at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva, Jakob Lena Knebl created a dialogue between exhibits from the museum collection and her own installations.

ASHLEY HANS SCHEIRL, born in Salzburg, in 1956, studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and received her*his MA in Fine Arts from Central Saint Martins College in London in 2003. From 2006 to the beginning of 2022, Scheirl held a professorship for Contextual Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Scheirl's artistic practice began in the late 1970s, for which she*he has employed a multitude of different media. She*he went on to dedicate the next twenty years to the moving image. With more than fifty films and the transgender cult classic *Dandy Dust*, Scheirl has been one of the pioneers of the queer movement in the arts. Since the mid-1990s, painting has taken centre stage in her*his practice, a type of painting that viewers experience as installations – which is to say in its incorporation of architecture, contexts, objects, video loops and, not least, by the way the visitors move through them. Ashley Hans Scheirl took part in the documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens in 2017 and was awarded the 2019 Austrian Art Prize in the category Fine Arts by the Federal Chancellery.

Jakob Lena Knebl is represented by the galleries Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna, and Loevenbruck, Paris, and Ashley Hans Scheirl by the galleries Crone, Berlin/Vienna, and Loevenbruck, Paris.

KAROLA KRAUS, born in St. Georgen, Black Forest, in 1961, is an art historian. In 1991 she became director of the non-commercial exhibition space Kunstraum Dater and worked on several international exhibition projects, including managing the contribution to the German Pavilion of the 47th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia for Katharina Sieverding, in 1997. From 1999 to 2006, she was director of Kunstverein Braunschweig and later director of Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden. Karola Kraus has taught at the University of Freiburg and the Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe and has participated in numerous state and private jury panels. In October 2010, she became director of mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien. She is vice president of the Roswitha Haftmann Stiftung, which acknowledges excellence in fine arts and awards Europe's highest-paying art prize.



COOPERATION WITH PHILEAS IN VIENNA

For the first time, the Austrian Pavilion in Venice will also be present in Vienna throughout the summer with a presentation in the new exhibition space of *Phileas*. Located in the heart of the city on the historical Ringstrasse, the space will open in early May 2022 with funding support from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service, and Sport.

In this one-of-a-kind collaboration between the Austrian Pavilion and *Phileas* – A Fund for Contemporary Art, Jakob Lena Knebl and Ashley Hans Scheirl continue their efforts to use their work as a means to offer a space of resonance to as wide an audience as possible. In their works the artists consciously explore educational methods that are intended to enable a low-threshold entry point.

The exhibition showcases the work of Knebl and Scheirl alongside that of their students at the University of Applied Arts (Transmedia Art class) and the Academy of Fine Arts (Contextual Painting class). The exhibition of the students' works, selected and installed by Knebl and Scheirl, will be rotated several times during the exhibition's run, in keeping with the collaborative strategy pursued by the artists for their project in Venice.

An extensive programme of public events will take place in Vienna, accompanying the Austrian Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale, with additional funding from the City of Vienna.

SELECTED EVENTS

24th May 2022

Film screening of *Flaming Ears* at the Filmmuseum Vienna, followed by a Directors' Talk.

8th June 2022

Opening of the second group of students from the University of Applied Arts (Transmedia Art class) and a talk with author and historian Philipp Sarasin.

5th July 2022

Opening of the third group of students from the Academy of Fine Arts (Contextual Painting class) followed by a live concert in collaboration with SISTERS.

ABOUT PHILEAS

Phileas is a philanthropic organisation based in Vienna that seeks to strengthen the voice of Austrian and Austrian-based artists on the international landscape through collaborations with museums, biennials and arts institutions.

Phileas publishes artist monographs, supports educational initiatives, and runs an active Visitor Programme that invites international curators, art critics, and museum groups to Austria year-round to visit artists' studios, museums, galleries, and foundations.

At their new location on Opernring, *Phileas* will present an ongoing exhibition programme, bringing selected projects co-produced by *Phileas* at museums and biennials around the world (often in collaboration with the Austrian Federal Ministry) back to Austria. While many of these international projects are of great importance for the Austrian artists involved, they often remain largely unknown to the local public because of the geographical distance involved.



In addition, the new location will also serve as a hub of all *Phileas* activities – a place for public events and research into contemporary art in Austria, and as the organisation’s office.

Phileas is funded by the annual contributions of its members, who accompany the development of its projects from studio to exhibition. Additional funding is provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Arts and Culture, the City of Vienna, and several organisations and corporations.

For more information about the activities of the organisation *Phileas* – A Fund for Contemporary Art, please see: www.phileasprojects.org



TEAM

Exhibition

Invitation of the Soft Machine and Her Angry Body Parts

Commissioner

Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport

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Fantintrasporti, Kunsttrans, Transdanubia

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in cooperation with *Phileas*
www.phileasprojects.org



MAGAZINE
SOFTMACHINE

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Karola Kraus

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Daniel Kalt, Guilherme Pires Mata, Markus Pires Mata,
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Printed by
Artbook Verlag, Munderfing
Artbook is an imprint of Aumayer Druck und
Verlags Gesellschaft m.b.H. & Co KG

Print run
5,000



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