H3K

Haus der elektronischen Künste Basel

How much of this is fiction.
23.03.2017 – 21.05.2017

Group show in coproduction with Framer Framed, Amsterdam and FACT | Foundation for Art and Creative Technologies, Liverpool. Curated by Annet Dekker and David Garcia in collaboration with Ian Alan Paul.

Ruben Pater (NL)
Exhibition Design

Ruben Pater's exhibition design shows his ability to create original and accessible visual narratives, designed to illuminate complex geopolitical issues. Typically, his methods combine public research with visual storytelling to create new relationships between journalism, media art and design.

For the exhibition, Pater connects the works and gallery spaces by using words from the vocabulary of post-fact politics. He does so in the form of words written on pillars that prompts the visitor to contemplate the ways in which the exhibition might be read, or misread.

Pater's design emphasises the two different zones within the exhibition. The first, with black painted walls, further establishes the *Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History* as a work fiction through a theatrical framework and careful use of colour. The second, white painted space, *The Newsroom*, is a more historical examination of ways in which artists and activist have used fiction to unmask power and propose alternative futures by hacking and subverting the language and protocols of established media platforms.

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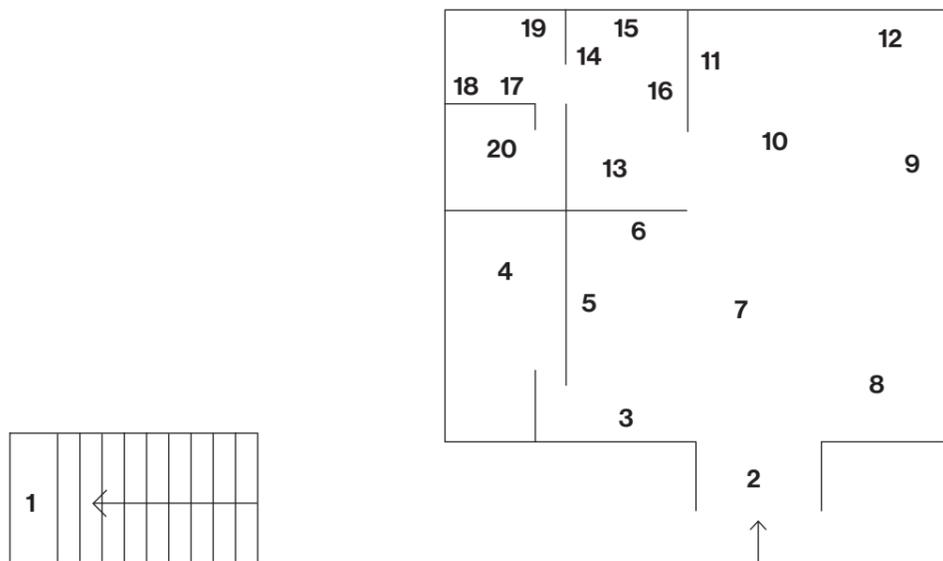
How much of this is fiction. focuses on politically inspired media art that uses deception in all its forms. At the heart of the exhibition is the desire to address one of today's most urgent political issues: the radical shift in the boundary between fiction and reality in public discourse, in a world increasingly governed by 'post-truth' politics. How much of this is fiction. shows the artist as 'dark jester', as trickster, using a variety of hoaxes, hacks and ruses to reveal the hidden workings of power structures and the possibility of alternative futures.

Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History

1 **Robert M. Ochshorn** (US)
A Little Bit More Stable, 2015

Interplaying with *Tactical Recollections* is Ochshorn's work *A Little Bit More Stable*. The source material for the film, a promotion for video stabilisation software that has been commercialised from military applications, depicts the stabilisation of home movies and implies a similar steadying influence on the lives of would-be customers.

2 **The Yes Men** (US)
Share the Safety, 2016

On 22 June 2016 a new online store, Share the Safety, was announced. It said that 'the revolutionary online store takes its cue from other "buy one, give one" retailers, and customers of ShareTheSafety.org will have the pleasure of knowing that for each handgun purchased, one will be donated to an at-risk American citizen in the urban center of their choice'. The site is presented as an initiative of the NRA (National Rifle Association) in the US, in collaboration with arms manufacturer Smith & Weston. The site caused an outrage, but investigations revealed it as a hoax from The Yes Men, playing of similar trends in marketing and business, as well as obvious hints to the shooting in Orlando and the response and attitude of the NRA.

3 **Superflux** (IN/UK)
The Drone Aviary, 2015

The Drone Aviary is an investigation of the social, political and cultural potential of drone technology as it enters civil space. Through a series of on-going installations, films and publications, the project aims to give a glimpse into a near-future city with 'intelligent' semi-autonomous, networked, flying machines. The installation includes a film introducing a family of five drones and an accompanying narrated editorial by Warren Ellis. The film hints at a world where the 'network' begins to gain physical autonomy, moving through and making decisions about the world, influencing our lives in opaque yet profound ways. A speculative map highlights where physical and digital infrastructures merge, as our cities become the natural habitat for 'smart' technologies. With the European Commission working towards a basic regulatory framework for the civil use of drones, these near future scenarios are becoming more and more plausible, but are they desirable?

4 **UBERMORGEN** (CH/AT)
Torture Classics, 2010

For *Torture Classics*, UBERMORGEN commercially market the seminal tunes used in sonic interrogation (or torture by music), bringing together a collection of chart-topping tracks from the 'golden era of Torture Music': the 2000s and 2010s. Reportedly utilised in 'enhanced interrogations', UBERMORGEN present music from Top 40 hits to TV theme-songs repeatedly used by prison guards, military prisons and detention centres as part of their interrogation practices. Viewers are presented with an infomercial for a compilation featuring over 60 sweet and painful torture hits, including Metallica, Britney Spears, Falco, Tanya Tucker, Bruce Springsteen, Twisted Sister, the Meow Mix and more.

5 **Arabian Street Artists** (EG/DE)
Homeland Is Not A Series, 2015

In 2015, the popular television series *Homeland* was looking for artists to apply 'realistic' graffiti to their sets, which were supposed to make the backdrop seem like a Syrian refugee camp. The commissioned artists, The Arabian Street Artists, took the opportunity to critique their employer and portray their discontent with the series' political message by painting satirical and damning phrases in Arabic — such as 'Homeland is NOT a series' and 'Homeland is racist' — that nobody on the Homeland team seemed to notice. That is, until an episode that aired worldwide in October was watched by viewers who could read Arabic. Within days, the political prank became an international media sensation. The final documentary —produced in collaboration with Field of Vision (the online filmmaker-driven platform created by Laura Poitras, AJ Schnack and Charlotte Cook) — explores the rationale behind the project.

6 **HeHe** (DE/UK)
School of Rebellion, 2017

School of Rebellion depicts a revolt of school children in the Parisian suburb Tremblay. Tremblay is one of the suburbs which is often depicted by the media as a suburban dystopia rife with excessive police presence, burning buses and deteriorated residential bars. In reality, the new College Pierre de Ronsard (where the revolt takes place), is a school which is comfortably installed in a residential environment and differs greatly from the hyped media fantasy that haunts the collective imagination. For this project HeHe wants to reveal the artifice and falsehood that the media perpetuates. Working with the college students, they recreate and replay scenes of disorder: an aesthetic appropriation of a myth. Supported by simple filmic means and the use of special effects, they create a stage which depicts the air of rebellion.

7 **Morehshin Allahyari** (IR)
Material Speculation: ISIS, 2015 — 2016

While vast amounts of objects, sculptures and monuments are destroyed throughout history with different rationales, the destruction by ISIS in 2015 spawned a renewed concern to cultural heritage. In *Material Speculation: ISIS*, Allahyari creates a practical and political possibility for artefact archival, while proposing 3D printing technology as a tool for both resistance and documentation. *Material Speculation: ISIS* includes a flash drive and a memory card inside the body of each 3D printed object containing images, maps, pdf files, and videos, detailing the artefacts and sites that were destroyed, as time capsules for future generations to discover. The 3D printable files are in the process of being archived and made available online to download and be used by the public. As such the project goes beyond metaphoric gesture and critiques the digital colonisation of Middle Eastern cultural heritage by many Western 3D companies.

8 **Christoph Wachter and Mathias Jud** (CH)
*Zone*Interdite*, 2006 — ongoing

*Zone*Interdite* is an ongoing project which was launched in 1998. It caused massive media attention by revealing the children's prison in Guantánamo, the prison camp in Bagram or Camp Bucca in Iraq. *Zone*Interdite* (French for "restricted military zone") collects pictures and datas from military areas, which are shown on the website www.zone-interdite.net. It also allows the viewer to download and navigate the restricted terrain through virtual reconstruction. The project encourages to reflect on virtual representations of restricted terrains and it challenges our imagination and our ability to perceive independently.

9 **Coco Fusco** (US)
Operation Atropos, 2006

In July 2005, Coco Fusco took a course to learn techniques about extracting information from captured prisoners. Fusco together with a group of women took a course led by former US military interrogators and subjected themselves in immersive simulations of Prisoner of War (POW) experiences to show what hostile interrogations can be like and how members of the U.S. military are taught to resist them. *Operation Atropos* is a documentary about the interrogation and POW resistance training which the women underwent. The video shows the process of being a prisoner of war — being ambushed, captured, strip searched, thrown in a pen and subjected to several interrogations. The documentary includes interviews with the interrogators that shed light on how they read personalities, evaluate interrogatee's reliability, and use the imposition of physical and mental stress strategically. More fundamentally, the film shows how interrogators rationalise what they do and how they imagine both themselves and their enemies.

10 **!Mediengruppe Bitnik** (CH)
Delivery for Mr. Assange, 2013

Julian Assange has been living at the Ecuadorian embassy in London since June 2012. In early 2013, !Mediengruppe Bitnik sent a parcel to the WikiLeaks founder. The parcel contained a camera which broadcast its entire journey through the postal system live on the internet. The images captured by the camera were transferred to the artist's website and commented through their Twitter account in realtime. The installation on display presents the Twitter feed on one monitor and the live camera images from the parcel on the other monitor. The artists have described *Delivery for Mr. Assange* as a SYSTEM_TEST and a Live Mail Art Piece.

11 **Ian Alan Paul** (US)
Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History, 2012 — ongoing

Guantanamo Bay, or Gitmo as it is usually referred to, is one of those places that doesn't seem to exist. No one really gets to see the place, as reporters' and other visitors' experiences are carefully shaped and guided by U.S. authorities. *The Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History* (GBMAH), an imaginary museum that speculatively exists in place of the prison, draws its power from this resonance: if Gitmo exists because of one fiction, perhaps another can close it?

12 **Ian Alan Paul** (US)
The EU Bird Migration Authority, 2013

The EU Bird Migration Authority is a fictional agency created while Ian Alan Paul was participating in an artist residency at the Homesession project in Barcelona, Spain. The work acts as an investigation into the politics and ethics of the policing of human migration, and also explores the conceptual divide between human and animal migrants. Much of the materials used in the project are repurposed/remixed media from the Frontex (the EU border agency) archives.

The Newsroom

13 **Maia Gusberti** (CH)
how much of this is fiction., 2014 — ongoing

Gusberti's work and interest focuses on the relationship between image and imagination: questioning the image as a projection surface, or as a trigger for (or repository of) collective and individual imaginative spaces, be they urbanistic, political or social. By intersecting realities with their imaginary alternatives, and by examining these interstices, Gusberti excavates and exposes the dynamics of a social fabric, driven by the urge to find links between a personal and general social relevance. *how much of this is fiction.* is an illuminated neon sign. Depending on the context and the time of day, this statement of light can be read and interpreted differently: as a subtitle for its environment, a spatial commentary, a hanging question or an assertion.

14 **UBERMORGEN** (CH/AT)
[V]ote-Auction's 27min. on CNN "Burden of Proof", 2000

In 2000, at the peak of the worldwide media and internet hype, UBERMORGEN.COM launched a large-scale action of 'media hacking' during the Bush vs. Gore US presidential elections. The artists adopted the domain name voteauction.com and revamped it into a website in which American voters had the opportunity to sell their vote to the highest bidder.

15 **Paul Garrin** (US)
Man With a Video Camera, 1988

A rather accidental set of circumstances placed media artist Paul Garrin right in the middle of what became known as the Tompkins Square anti-gentrification riot on 6 August 1988, holding a video camera. Recording the events while besieged by police officers, Garrin managed to get the tape aired on different news channels, documenting and exposing police violence, and sparking the 'camcorder revolution' in Garrin's words. Documentation of his camcorder activism featured on major US news channels in 1988, three years before the recorded assault on Rodney King.

16 **Paolo Cirio** (IT)
Daily Paywall, 2014 — ongoing

In the project *Daily Paywall*, tens of thousands of articles were appropriated from the websites of Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, and The Economist through hacking their paywall systems. The artist then redistributed the pay-per-view articles for free and offered to pay readers and writers of the news articles. Readers could earn one dollar for responding correctly to quizzes about featured articles, and journalists were invited to claim compensation for their writing. Donors could offer any amount to crowdfund the system. This circular economic model aims to monetise pirated content in exchange for informing the public about socio-economic issues. The featured articles were used in an offline version of the project with 1,000 print copies distributed as a free paper available in custom newsracks and bookshops throughout New York City.

17 **Julian Oliver and Danja Vasiliev** (NZ/RU)
Newstweek, 2011

Newstweek is a device for manipulating news read by other people on wireless hotspots. Built into a small and innocuous wall plug, the *Newstweek* device appears part of the local infrastructure, allowing writers to remotely edit news read on wireless devices without the awareness of their users. While news is increasingly read digitally, it still follows a top-down distribution model and thus often falls victim to the same political and corporate interests that have always sought to manipulate public opinion. *Newstweek* intervenes upon this model, providing opportunity for citizens to have their turn to manipulate the press; generating propaganda or simply 'fixing facts' as they pass across a wireless network. As such, *Newstweek* can be seen as a tactical device for altering reality on a per-network basis. The exhibition presents a video documentation of this device.

18 **Matthieu Cherubini** (CH)
rep.licants.org, 2011

rep.licants.org is a web service allowing users to install an artificial intelligence (bot) on their Facebook and/or Twitter account. From keywords and by analysing content and activity, the bot attempts to simulate the presence of the user, and improve it by feeding their account and creating new contact with other users. Social networks are the first medium to show statistically the social prowess of a person (e.g. number of friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter). For many users, reaching the expected success can become a time-consuming and difficult task, especially when human factors such as shyness, introversion or feelings of worthlessness are present. Due to an unexpected high number of subscriptions (more than 5'000) and complaints from Facebook, the project had to be shut down in 2014.

19 **Robert M. Ochshorn** (US)
Tactical Recollections, 2017

Through his online project RMOZONE, Robert M. Ochshorn develops media interfaces that enhance human perceptual and expressive capabilities. *Tactical Recollections* is a representation of an online 'living archive' for Tactical Media's present, past and future (tacticalmediafiles.net). Interactive visual timelines are used as a starting point for current conversations between long-time Tactical Media practitioners, with transcripts from these dialogues giving contemporary voice to past actions.

20 **The Yes Men** (US)
Does The Right Thing, 2004

On the 20th Anniversary of the Bhopal Catastrophe, BBC World News invited a representative from the company responsible to appear live on their program. The representative did agree to speak – but as it happens he was not really from Dow Chemical. The man, who called himself "Jude (patron saint of the impossible) Finisterra (earth's end)" was an activist from the media pranksters known as The Yes Men. When the live broadcast happened, it became the number one news story of the day globally, first as a real announcement from Dow, and then as a report on the hoax.