

HEIDELBERGER KUNSTVEREIN

Pressemitteilung

We hereby inform you about our upcoming exhibition:

Ndayé Kouagou: Dogs will be Dogs

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 3, 2026, from 6:00 PM

6:00 PM: Opening with sparkling wine reception and introductory speeches

7:00 PM – 10:00 PM: Bar Blau (Drinks & DJ set)

Exhibition Duration: September 4 to November 15, 2026

The Heidelberger Kunstverein is extraordinarily pleased to present **Dogs Will Be Dogs**, the second institutional solo exhibition of French artist Ndayé Kouagou in Germany. At the center of the show is the expansive, three-part new production **Heaven's Truth** (2026), an international co-production in collaboration with the renowned Collezione Maramotti (Reggio Emilia).

Exhibition

"Is it better to be hated by one person or by three?" What at first glance sounds like a concise social media hook reveals itself in Ndayé Kouagou's new production **Heaven's Truth** as an unvarnished analysis of a present in which ethical and moral responsibility is sacrificed to the pursuit of social capital.

In the hall architecture of the Heidelberger Kunstverein, the artist spatializes a fable centered on four characters stylized as dogs—Pudding, Pimpim, Puhda, and Pochi—whose volatile web of relationships serves as an exemplar of subtle mechanisms of exclusion and the logic of resentment. Spanning a length of nearly thirty meters, the spatial installation unfolds as a walkable storyboard: as visitors move through the space, their physical movement edits together the individual image and video sequences distributed across kiosk-sized monitors and life-sized Dibond cutouts.

When the narrative finally transitions before an absurd heavenly court—where a judge, embodied by Kouagou but driven by his own career ambitions, decides on admission into heaven—the physical act of waiting before the court becomes directly tangible for visitors.

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Kouagou meets his audience precisely where public life largely takes place today—and where it is simultaneously compromised through the commercial-ideological sieves of algorithms: in the high-frequency surface aesthetics of platform economies. Yet behind the seemingly relaxed narrative and pop-cultural accessibility of Heaven's Truth lies a complex, almost neo-Brechtian parable on the model-like enactment of societal behaviors. Kouagou forcefully demonstrates how political discourses surrounding inclusion, diversity, and solidarity threaten to shatter against a widespread inability to feel empathy for the suffering of others.

Can one deny empathy to a character whose act of revenge is directed against a community that has excluded them all their life?

Ndayé Kouagou combines contemporary post-Internet aesthetics with a deep cultural-theoretical genealogy. In the spirit of Saidiya Hartman's speculative fabulation and Édouard Glissant's philosophy of the *Droit à l'opacité* (the right to opacity and opacity), the work undermines the Western imperative of absolute transparency: the masking of the performers with puppy-play leather masks asserts a form of existence that is present without submitting itself to voyeuristic exposure. Complemented by subtle disruptions in the performers' dress code—referencing Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry ("almost the same, but not quite")—the authority of hegemonic legal and power structures is exposed as frequently generating merely the illusion of neutral justice while ultimately securing postmodern zones of impunity for the privileged.

With the monumental, five-meter-long language object "WOOF!"—the barking of the dog that evades the linguistic compulsion of the court—the exhibition reaches that physical and legal threshold where all bureaucratic judgment systems and transparency requirements ultimately collapse. Heaven's Truth does not demand passive reception; instead, it pulls viewers onto the bench of the accused and the jury alike—into the weight of an unresolved personal responsibility that cannot be relieved by any court or system.

This spectacular new work in the exhibition is complemented by the artist's earlier video works *A Message For Everybody* (2025) and *A Coin Is a Coin* (2023).

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About the Artist & International Co-Production

Ndayé Kouagou (b. 1992 in Paris, where he lives and works) is currently among the most defining and widely discussed voices within Ultra-Contemporary Art. His interdisciplinary practice emerges directly from language: his sardonically fragmented texts, spoken by his performative alter-ego (featuring the characteristic post-synchronization by actress Salber Lee Williams), form the core of works that expose the instability of digital and interpersonal communication. By cleverly subverting the rhetoric of social media and digital "gurus," he creates a productive disorientation that conceals existential questions of truth, vulnerability, and power behind playful artificiality.

Kouagou's works have been presented internationally at renowned institutions and biennials, including Frac Île-de-France (Paris), Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin), WIELS (Brussels), the Liverpool Biennial, Manifesta 14 (Prishtina), as well as the Athens, Sharjah, and Sonsbeek biennials.

The Heidelberger Kunstverein is extraordinarily proud to present *Dogs Will Be Dogs*, the artist's first institutional solo exhibition in Germany. The production of the new works on display was supported by **Collezione Maramotti** (Reggio Emilia) in collaboration with **Heidelberger Kunstverein**. Following its second premiere in Heidelberg, the co-produced work will be shown in the autumn at the renowned **Lyon Biennale**.

(The production of the new works on display was supported by Collezione Maramotti in collaboration with Heidelberger Kunstverein.)

Press Contact & Press Material

For press accreditation for the press preview, interview requests (with the artist Ndayé Kouagou as well as curator Søren Grammel), high-resolution image material, and further press materials, please contact:

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Link to press materials and images: [PRESSE \(public folder\)](#)