

# Do you hear us?

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Date

**15.10.2021**  
**30.01.2022**

Location

**Roma**

**Istituto Svizzero**

Information

**An exhibition on silence, noise,  
and listening with:  
Mohamed Almusibli  
Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz  
Miriam Cahn  
Nina Emge  
Nastasia Meyrat  
Dorian Sari  
Hannah Weinberger**

Category

**Art, Group exhibition**

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The experience of the pandemic has changed our perception of the world. Thinking back to the weeks of the lockdown in Rome, I particularly remember the change in the soundscape. The metropolis fell silent, and in this silence I heard other things: the squawking of hungry seagulls (which, I've read, dine on restaurant leftovers in urban areas) and the drone of police helicopters overhead. In the spring of 2020, things became noisy in the cities that had shut down. The Black Lives Matter movement and social protests in Belarus and Poland showed us once again that many voices still remain unheard, and that many people are silenced by violence. Silence, noise, and listening always have a social, even a political dimension.

The group exhibition *Do you hear us?* at Istituto Svizzero in Rome takes a closer look at these aspects. The title asks a question and implies a polyphony, a “we”, a collective. The invited artists belong to different generations and explore this multifaceted theme with new works developed especially for the exhibition as well as with existing artistic works. They ask questions and prompt us to listen, but also to look. Because *Do you hear us?* deliberately presents not only sound works, but also works drawing on a wide range of media, in order to create a space for multisensory possibilities of perception.

But let's linger on the silence for a moment. “Silence,” writes Salomé Voegelin, “not as the absence of sound but as the beginning of listening as communication.” In silence we begin to hear, we begin to listen, and a space of communication opens up. It makes sense to distinguish between hearing as an acoustic, passive sensory perception coupled to the sound waves in the air, and listening as a conscious, active process that requires attention and a willingness to do so. “Hearing,” notes composer Pauline Oliveros, “happens involuntarily, listening, on the other hand, is a voluntary process that produces culture through training and experience.” In the context of the exhibition *Do you hear us?* I also think of listening as a political practice, which, as Lucia Farinati and Claudia Firth describe it in their publication *The Force of Listening* (2017), is rooted in the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and 1970s: in the process of political participation, listening must be considered as important as speaking. Listening can be a powerful political act that shifts power structures and the relationship between speakers and listeners, creating space for new voices and narratives. In this sense, it is only natural that being silent can also be a political gesture, and sometimes a gesture of resistance – just as silencing someone is an act of violence. It is therefore paramount that we continue to consider which voices we are listening to, and how we can listen to those voices that risk being drowned out in the noise of the contemporary world.

The prelude to *Do you hear us?* is formed by three series of drawings by **Miriam Cahn**, created in 1980. The works are drawn on paper in rapid pencil strokes, and are called by the artist *schweigende schwester* (silent sister). We see human heads, sometimes with their eyes wide open, sometimes with their mouths agape. A figure covers its ears, or dark matter pours out of its mouth. With these A4-sized images, which are as moving as they are harrowing, the artist addresses the suicide of her sister, who took her own life at the age of 20. As part of this exhibition, they also tell of the connections between silence and the necessity of listening. Even independent of the title it is clear that the drawn figure is female, and that she is opening her mouth very wide. That leaves it up to us to listen, especially to voices like these. For Miriam Cahn, art is always also a path to resistance, a means of raising one's voice.

In the next room, we are welcomed by a voice. It is a voice that comes from a giant ear. Let us tilt our ears to the ear, which has been installed on the floor. Like *antibodies* is the title of this work by **Nastasia Meyrat**. The artist also writes, linking various theoretical approaches and strands in her texts. Here, for example, she addresses Pauline Olivero's method of “Deep Listening” as active listening. She also considers approaches from “Glitch Feminism”, which describes the moment of error (“glitch”) in a high-tech culture as an opportunity for pause and resistance. The words “Are you listening?” resound through the room, we are invited to sit down—and really listen. The voice, which sometimes distorts through an echo effect, reflects on the political act of listening, asking which voices and consequently which bodies we listen to. It describes the antibody as a gesture of resistance (against the virus, but also against social norming), which creates new moments of silence and listening in self-defence. The repeated question “Are you still listening?” also points to the fact that new, utopian ideas—as they ring out at us from the ear—often require particularly attentive listening.

**Nina Emge** develops sound works and installations in her artistic practice. For this exhibition, she developed the new, two-part work, *Not In Use (microfon stand 1-5)*, which are installed both indoors and outdoors. The five sculptures are also microphone stands, the speakers are ready, the cables laid—but the microphones, of all things, are missing. So we can raise our voice, but it remains unamplified, perhaps unheard, contained in the exhibition space, in the imposing rooms of Villa Maraini. With her work, Nina Emge also addresses the institution behind the exhibition, the notion of art that has been decontextualized in the exhibition space, and questions which voices are represented and/or heard at all in Central European cultural institutions. Perhaps the window opening onto the garden is an indication that this boundary—between inside and outside, between the institution and the world around it—could also be crossed. From the outside we hear an almost dreamlike electronic soundscape, intermixed with birdsong. The audio work titled *Interpretazione II di “audio dissuasore per volatili dall'Istituto Svizzero”* is based on sounds normally heard from loudspeakers in gardens, used as a kind of acoustic barrier to drive away flocks of starlings. Together with the producer Kombé from the Swiss label and collective *Somatic Rituals*, Nina Emge has taken these samples and added other sounds to them from old synthesizers. The piece also reminds us of the dominance of exclusionary and silencing mechanisms in our society.

*I Hear Them Coming For Me* is the title of the video installation by **Mohamed Almusibli**, which he developed especially for this exhibition. Shot with a GoPro camera, his footage shows different perspectives on people who are dancing—both traditional Middle Eastern dances and contemporary moves, the likes of which can be found on social platforms like TikTok. On the central screen we read a dialogue between two people; in the corner we see *Cassette-Bar (orange)*: a cassette holder installed as a sculptural object. Inner voices (perhaps in our heads) and ghosts are what drive Mohamed Almusibli in this work, accompanying questions of how memories are preserved and how migrant voices are heard. The dancers

remain voiceless as they float through the space, but it is through their movements that they communicate. Meanwhile, the cassette tapes preserve the voices of singers from the Arab region, perhaps from a distant homeland.

In the magnificent staircase of Villa Maraini we can hear voices, whispering. Maybe we should stop, and try to listen more carefully. The sound work *whispering* by **Hannah Weinberger** consists of found footage from television shows, such as *Big Brother* (yes, it still exists!), which in the late 1990s was the precursor to so-called reality TV, allowing viewers to vicariously participate in the lives of other people through installed cameras and microphones. The participants' whispers reflect their attempt to escape this acoustic surveillance—an almost absurd task, considering that this is the underlying concept of the show. With her work *whispering*, however, Hannah Weinberger does not intend to formulate a cultural critique, but nudges us to think more widely about voice surveillance, and secret, perhaps forbidden and suppressed speech. At the same time, it could be said that the artist—a former fellow of Istituto Svizzero—is making a tongue-in-cheek comment on what it is like to live together at Villa Maraini, where people can often be found discreetly whispering somewhere behind a corner or in the stairwell.

**Dorian Sari** has filled the next exhibition space with black balloons. With his work *Breakneck*, he addresses the ways of speaking and listening that take place on social media. Fake news and hate speech on the Internet have been shaping public debate for some years now. Those who shout the loudest or write the most aggressively will be heard. At the same time, debate often takes place in insular echo chambers, stifling any dialogue between dissenters. The bulging balloons artfully evoke these digital bubbles. They challenge us to listen carefully to those voices outside our own bubble, which are so easily overheard in the continuous buzz of social media.

The video work *Silent* by **Pauline Boudry** and **Renate Lorenz** begins with silence. Musician Aérea Negrot stands mutely in front of many microphones (the setting is reminiscent of that of a press conference) at Oranienplatz in Berlin, where refugees camped in protest from 2012 to 2014. All that we hear is traffic noise and the sound of birds chirping. The musician performs John Cage's music piece *4'33"* from 1952—a seminal work in New Music. In it, John Cage instructed musicians not to play their instruments for the entire duration of the composition. In this way, he sought to draw attention to silence as a formative element in music, and show that all sounds, including random ambient noises, are part of a composition. In the second part of the video, the musician raises her voice, performing a song that was composed especially for this work. In *Silent*, Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz bring together a number of topics that are relevant to this exhibition. They remind us that silence can be a powerful gesture of resistance, while the act of silencing is always accompanied by violence. They also show us the importance of creating a space where everyone can raise their voice, where all voices can be heard, and where we ask together, again and again: Do you hear us?

Gioia Dal Molin, October 2021

On 15 and 16 January 2022, a workshop and a listening session with the collective *one's own room* (OOR) from Zurich (CH) and guests will take place within the context of the exhibition *Do you hear us?*

## Biographies

**Mohamed Almusibli** (b. 1990, lives and works in Geneva/CH) is an artist and curator based in Geneva, where he runs the project space Cherish. His work is distinctly interdisciplinary, using his own or found texts for installation, sound, and video works as well as performance. His own writing is often the result of personal poetic anecdotes that find their way into a common space through questioning and depicting our shared human emotions, beliefs, and values. Mohamed Almusibli's work could therefore be seen as political, albeit on a personal level.

**Pauline Boudry** and **Renate Lorenz** have been working together in Berlin since 2007. They produce installations that choreograph the tension between visibility and opacity. Their films capture performances in front of the camera, often starting with a song, a picture, a film, or a score from the near past. They upset normative historical narratives and conventions of spectatorship, as figures and actions across time are staged, layered, and re-imagined. Their performers are choreographers, artists, and musicians, with whom they engage in a long-term conversation about the conditions of performance, the violent history of visibility, the pathologization of bodies, but also about companionship, glamour, and resistance. Their recent work, *Moving Backwards*, featuring choreographers/performers Latifa Laâbissi, Werner Hirsch, Julie Cunningham, Marbles Jumbo Radio, and Nach, premiered at the Swiss Pavilion of the 58th Venice Biennale. Their works have been shown in Europe and beyond.

**Miriam Cahn** (b. 1949, lives and works in Stampa/CH) has shown her works internationally, with significant solo exhibitions at Palazzo Castelmur (Stampa, 2021); Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing (2020); the exhibition *I AS HUMAN* at Kunstmuseum Bern (2019), which travelled to Haus der Kunst, Munich (2019) and Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2019); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2019); Kunsthaus Bregenz (2019), among others. Miriam Cahn has participated in numerous group exhibitions in Tokyo, Dallas, Washington D.C., Tel Aviv, Dublin, Berlin, Bonn, among others. She has been the recipient of notable awards, including the Oberrheinischer Kunstpreis (Offenburg), Basler Kunstpreis, Käthe-Kollwitz-Preis (Berlin), Ströher Preis (Frankfurt/Main), and the DAAD grant in 1985. In 2022 Cahn will be awarded the 14th Rubens Prize from the city of Siegen. Her works are included in renowned collections, including at the Museum of Modern Art (New York), Tate Modern (London), Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid), Kunstmuseum Basel, Museum for Modern Art (Warsaw), Rubell Collection (Miami), and Pinault Collection (Paris). She has recently exhibited at Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Copenhagen. The exhibition titled *ME AS HAPPENING* will be shown in a new iteration at the Power Plant in Toronto in autumn 2021. Additionally, Palais de Tokyo (Paris); ICA Milano, and MAN (in Nuoro, Italy) will be presenting solo exhibitions in 2022.

**Nina Emge** (b. 1995, lives and works in Berlin/DE and Zurich/CH) often examines organic forms, sound, and its effect in her practice. In addition, questions around the concept of listening play a central role. This is evident, for example, in her research and archival work, her installations and drawings, and in the often collaborative working and creation processes of her works. As a DAAD Fellow, Nina Emge is an active member of the Transnational Sound Initiative. Her works have been shown at Les Complices\* in Zurich, Les Urbaines in Lausanne, Shedhalle in Zurich, Kunsthalle Zürich, and other national and international project spaces.

**Nastasia Meyrat** (b. 1991, lives and works in Lausanne/CH) received an MA with honours from HEAD Geneva University of Art and Design in 2015. In 2021, she showed her work at Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts of Lausanne, during the show *Jardin d'Hiver #1* curated by Jill Gasparina, and at ICA Milano, among others. In 2020 she was invited to exhibit in Marseille for Manifesta 13. She was a resident in 2019-2020 at Istituto Svizzero in Rome. In 2018-2019 she co-directed Tunnel Tunnel, a project space in Lausanne. Meyrat was selected in 2018 for the Kiefer Hablitzel Prize and her work was exhibited at the Swiss Art Awards that same year. She was an artist-in-residence with the Davidoff Art Initiative in 2017 in the Dominican Republic. In 2015, she exhibited her work in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, after a residency with the Ghetto Biennale. That same year she exhibited at the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts of Lausanne and was selected for the New HEADS – Fondation BNP Paribas Art Awards prize, concurrent with the group exhibition *GET OUT*, curated by Latifa Echakhch.

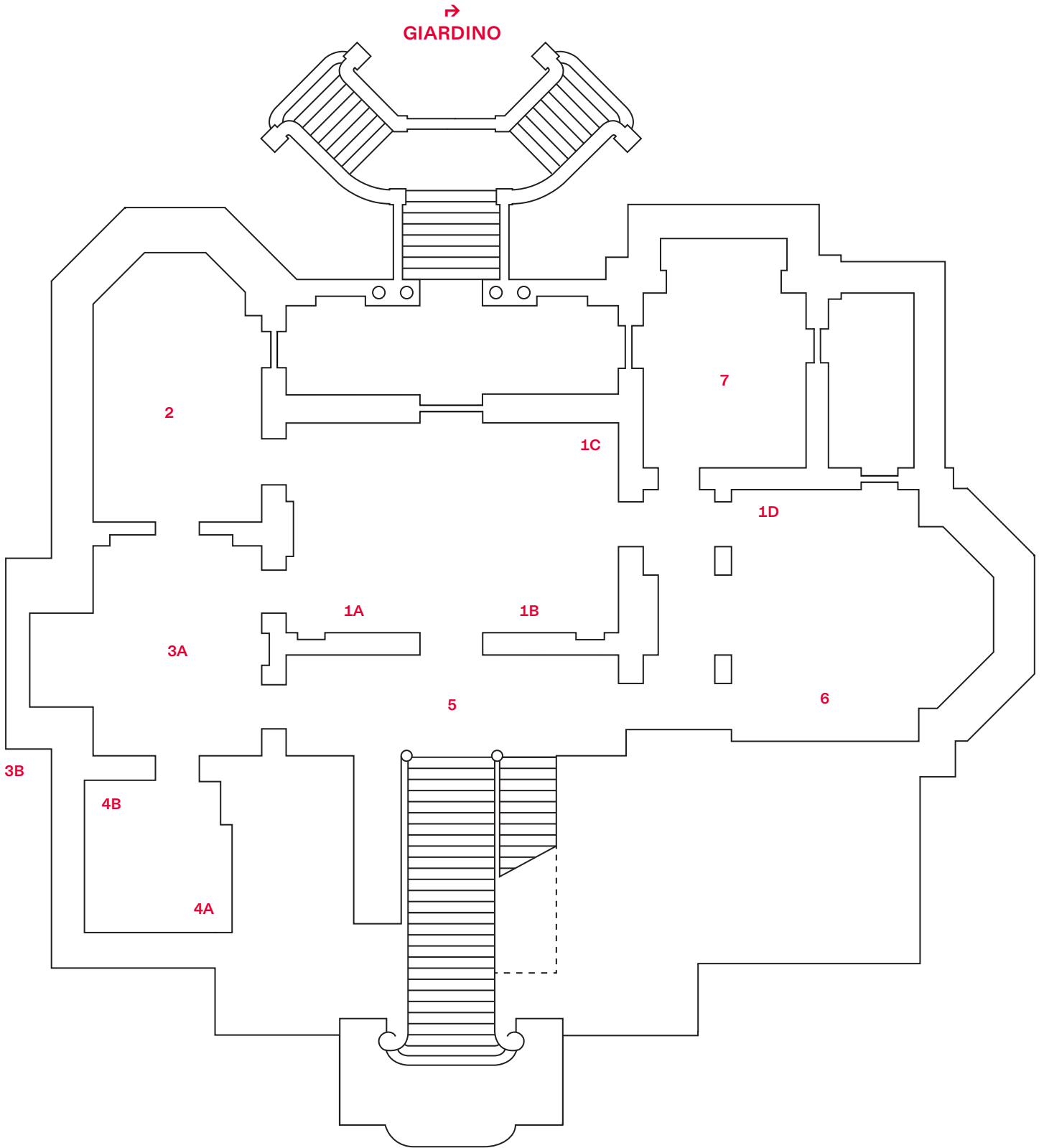
**Dorian Özhan Sari** (b. 1989, lives and works in Basel/CH) obtained an MA in Visual Arts at Institut Kunst Basel in 2018, after studying at HEAD Geneva University of Art and Design and at Paris-Sorbonne University. He was awarded the Manor Kunstpreis in 2020, the Kunstkredit Basel and the Swiss Art Award in 2019, and several other prizes and scholarships. He was a resident at Akademie der Künste in Berlin in 2020 and at The BAR Project and La Fondazione Lac O Lemon in Italy in 2017. He has shown his work in many group and solo shows in France, Turkey, Spain, Germany, Brazil, and Switzerland. Born in Izmir, Turkey, he is represented by Wilde Gallery (CH) and Öktem&Aykut (TR).

**Hannah Weinberger** (b. 1988, lives and works in Basel/CH) graduated from Zurich University of the Arts in 2013 with an MA in Fine Arts. Collaboration and participation are hallmarks of Hannah Weinberger's practice. Her work draws on the potential of sound and the properties of spaces to facilitate collective encounters or to assign a performative role to the audience. From 2011 to 2013 she co-directed the space Elaine in the courtyard of Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart. She presented solo exhibitions at Centre d'Art Contemporain Geneva; Kunstverein Braunschweig; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin; Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof; Kunsthaus Bregenz; MIT List Center for Visual Arts, Cambridge; FriArt, Freiburg; Swiss Institute New York; Kunsthalle Basel. Her work has also been exhibited internationally, at Vleeshal Middleburg; Copenhagen Contemporary; Okayama Art Summit; Manifesta 11, Zurich; Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo; Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; Lyon Biennale; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Kunsthal Charlottenborg; Kunstverein München; Kunsthaus Glarus. Since 2016 she has been a lecturer at the Institute of Art, Academy of Art and Design, Basel; since 2013 she has been on the board of Kunsthalle Basel.

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**1A**

Miriam Cahn  
*schweigende schwester* (1980)  
Pencil on paper  
Installation: 21 × 220 cm

**1B**

Miriam Cahn  
*schweigende schwester* (1980)  
Pencil on paper  
Installation: 27 × 370 cm

**1C**

Miriam Cahn  
*schweigende schwester, freundliche köpfe mit haaren* (1980)  
Pencil on paper  
Installation: 21 × 187 cm

**1D**

Miriam Cahn  
*schweigende schwester* (1980)  
Pencil on white paper  
Installation: 21 × 190 cm

**2**

Nastasia Meyrat  
*Like antibodies* (2021)  
Plaster, Sound  
110 × 50 × 67 cm

**3A**

Nina Emge  
*Not In Use (microfon stand 1-5)* (2021)  
Iron, XRL cables, microphone holder, mixer, 4 speakers  
Various sizes

**3B**

Nina Emge  
*Interpretation II of "audio dissuasore per storni dall'Istituto Svizzero"*  
by Kombé (Somatic Rituals) (2021)  
11:24'

**4A**

Mohamed Almusibli  
*I Hear Them Coming For Me* (2021)  
Four channel video installation

**4B**

Mohamed Almusibli  
*Cassetten-Bar (orange)* (2021)  
Plastic  
18 × 14 × 16 cm

**5**

Hannah Weinberger  
*whispering* (2021)

**6**

Dorian Sari  
*Breakneck* (2021)  
Rubber balloons, various sizes

**7**

Pauline Boudry & Renate Lorenz  
*Silent* (2016)  
Installation with HD, 7:00'  
Performance: Aérea Negrot  
Music by Miguel Toro and Aérea Negrot  
Director of Photography: Bernadette Paassen  
Sound: Felix Andriessens  
Make-up: Nuria de Lario  
Color Correction: Matthias Behrens (Waveline)  
Sound Design: Rashad Becker