Renée Green
Inevitable Distances
23 October 21 –
9 January 22
“That is why, above all, we have to have our secret language. We must create this language. It is high time we did. We are too old a people not to. We can. We must. So that we shall make love with words and not fear being overheard.”

– Ama Ata Aidoo

Since the late 1980s, Renée Green’s multifaceted practice has imagined and expanded the ways in which art surfaces and gives form to underwritten histories, collective memory, and circuits of cultural exchange. Her output is distinct for its many forms: it moves fluidly between writing, large-scale installations, film, photography, printing, digital media, and sound work, as well as, in her early and lesser-known works, painting and collage—all of which are represented in *Inevitable Distances*. This exhibition is the largest presentation of Green’s work since 2010, spanning multiple floors of KW and daadgalerie with whom this project has been collaboratively produced. Green’s practice continues to trace and interrogate the power of culture and its entanglement with other structures—language, knowledge, and constitutions of selfhood—while at the same time indicating other ways of being and becoming. *Inevitable Distances* is read through and with histories, including Green’s own biography, weaving together representations of thought and life developed over the past thirty years.

Adapted from a phrase by the cultural theorist and political activist Stuart Hall (1932–2014), the exhibition’s title indicates the work of reflection, the contexts from which the source of those reflections emerge, and the routes through which those reflections travel—key inquiries in *Inevitable Distances*.

Green’s work initially came to prominence in the early 1990s and circulated within the social and political flows between the world and the Americas—a concept that includes the United States, Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean, and one which exists in Europe’s various imaginings and projections. Her practice contains a continuous meditation upon these places, their intertwined histories and categories, in an effort to think and visualize the relays of power differently.

The works on display come from a wide spectrum of the artist’s oeuvre. Some of Green’s earliest works are presented or restaged here for the first time—including *Edmond Laforest* (1988), *Acknowledge Your Sources* (1989), and *Sites of Genealogy* (1990)—revealing her ongoing interest in juxtaposing symbols and stories in order to bring the past within touching distance of our present and, in doing so, reanimating and reconfiguring what we might think we know. At the same time, the wide circulation of more recognizable installations like *Commemorative Toile* (1992–1993) and *Mise-en-Scène* (1991) have come to exemplify a practice attentive to questions of authority and how it is exercised through visual, aural, and written means.

Given this alertness to histories’ expressions and omissions, *Inevitable Distances* materializes out of, and touches upon, crucial moments that have shaped collective memory and cultural expressions in our current world: the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; the ensuing age of multiculturalism; the arrival of and shift to digital networks; and, in the Western art sphere, a “new internationalism” within the interconnected hubs of Berlin, Cologne, New York, and California—all places where Green lived and continues to move through.

In both this show and accompanying book, *Inevitable Distances* places Green’s artworks into speculative and, at times, fictional constellations. The KW exhibition begins with *Idyll Pursuits* (1991), where viewers are invited to see along multiple sight-lines—spatial and temporal, actual and imagined.
At the center of this installation is a photographic detail of one of Ansel Adams’ iconic mountain summits, encircled by exploratory travel itineraries that undercut intrepid narratives of discovery and adventure, while the viewing device—offered in the guise of a telescope—has been substituted with a kaleidoscope. Here, as often in Green’s work, vision does not move in straight cartographic lines, but is refracted and re-patterned into other ways of seeing. This kaleidoscopic approach to perception is also visible in Übertragen/Transfer (1997), a room-based installation that explores European imaginings of contemporary United States, in particular, as perceived by people of complex German descent based within the US; while the gridded presentation of Metonymies (1984) reveals Green’s preoccupations with dream configurations and montage, swinging between depictions of violence and desire. These early gouaches indicate the artist’s attraction to the serial and cinematic form, an interest also expressed in other later works present in KW: Secret (1993/2006/2010), Code: Survey (2005/2006), and Space Poem #2 (Laura’s Words) (2009/2011).

Across the exhibition, distinct biographies tessellate in different formal configurations: The combine painting Edmond Laforest is titled after the Haitian poet and botanist who protested colonial violence through his emblematic suicide; or, in ED/HF (2017), an elliptical film portrait of Green’s friend, the German filmmaker Harun Farocki, whose life, at times, intersects with her own biography. The artist’s ‘world tour,’ with its ambulatory and sensorial movement through public spaces, is recalled and retraced between the double presentation of her videos Slow Walking in Lisbon (1992), and Walking in NYL (2016). Elsewhere, there is a painted collage shown publicly for the first time, Friday 13, 1981 (1981), wherein the persona of a young artist holds aloft a placard and assesses her viewer with a scrutinizing and deadpan gaze. Sites of Genealogy (Fear, Flight, Fate; Matrix; Loophole of Retreat) appears in numerous sites throughout the KW building, and includes the artist’s typed-up, date-stamped diaristic recollections alongside the chapter titles of Harriet Jacobs’ Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861) and details from Richard Wright’s 1940 edition of Native Son. Originally developed as a year-long work-in-progress for PS1 Museum, New York, before the institution was fully renovated and became a part of MoMA, Sites of Genealogy has been reconfigured anew for KW; a sprawling installation distributed across interstitial and secluded spaces: the cellar space (Fear, Flight, Fate), the stairwell (Matrix), and the 3rd Floor gallery (Loophole of Retreat).
While some of Green’s work bends around the peripheral areas of KW, at the heart of the exhibition is *Import/Export Funk Office* (1992–1993). This installation began from the merged personal ephemera of Green and her friend, the writer and critic Diedrich Diederichsen—then the editor of *Spex*, a Cologne-based music magazine. Drawing upon Green and Diederichsen’s friendship and shared, but also differing, cultural references, *Import/Export Funk Office* traces the global dispersion, translation, and commodification of hip-hop culture and its relationship to African diasporic cultural forms and life. It comprises over 25 hours of video and audio tapes, books, flyers, magazines, and photographs, as well as displaying wall plaques that bear hip-hop and US slang terms and their idiosyncratic German translations, which are then read aloud in English by German speakers. In its media abundance, the work transforms itself from a mere repository of information about its subjects (among them, Diederichsen, Joe Wood, Greg Tate, Arthur Jafa, George Lipsitz, B+ (Brian Cross), Medusa, Andrea Clarke, Ingo, and many others) into a complex portrait of a nascent network culture. Such portraiture was made explicit when the work was later transposed to CD-ROM, as *The Digital Import/Export Funk Office* (1996). Created in collaboration with the University of Lüneburg, the CD-ROM’s liner notes, as well as its colorful navigational icon, are also present in *Inevitable Distances* as a print, becoming a precursor to the website version of *Code: Survey*, an accompanying element of *Code: Survey*’s physical public art structure situated in downtown Los Angeles, a commission by California’s Department of Transportation. This layered website is now made accessible via KW’s website.

Green’s prolific output is undoubtedly polymorphous and complex, and yet it is often characterized by an intrigue with recurring formal display devices: grids and color-coding, obscuring detail through systematized organisation, as much as taxonomical access to knowledge; triangles that indicate serialized histories of time and pinpoint geographical spaces, while also providing enclosure; and shifting works, like *Space Poem #2* and *Code: Survey*, mutating from physical forms to print to digital form—spanning three, two, or multiple dimensions. In KW, these works have been recombined, reactivated, and restored to present three decades of sustained investigation into the distribution of art and ideas between individuals, as well as communities that might be geographically dispersed, all along pointing to a poetics of ongoingness.

*Inevitable Distances* considers how these material histories are braided with stories of migration and legacies of displacement. Veiling access to a singular or iconic history, the exhibition, refuses discrete or possessive approaches to knowledge. It chooses instead to point to the contingency and precarity of thinking and knowing—whether meaning is intimately built between peers, information stored on multiple devices and interpolated by them, or encountering ideas seeking to evade capture. Like Green’s practice, *Inevitable Distances* unfolds through continual displacements, indicating the encounters and distances travelled in an artist’s life journey.

— Mason Leaver-Yap
Public Program

The Berlin Sessions:
Talk between Renée Green and Iman Issa
28 October 21, 8 pm
In English

Curator’s tour with Sofie Krogh Christensen
7 November 21, 2 pm
In German
As part of Museum Sunday Berlin

Focus tours
17 November, 1 December 21, 5 pm
Prior registration via mediation@kw-berlin.de

Curator’s tour with Mason Leaver-Yap
5 December 21, 2 pm
In English
As part of Museum Sunday Berlin

Public tour with German Sign Language
11 December 21, 2 pm
Prior registration via mediation@kw-berlin.de

Inevitable Distances is accompanied by a book of the same name, co-published by DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program, Hatje Cantz Verlag and KW. Designed by Carolina Aboarrage, the publication includes contributions from the artist Renée Green, Kathrin Bentele, Howie Chen, Emma Hedditch, Katherine McKittrick, Taylor Le Melle, Ima-Abasi Okon and others, and is edited by Mason Leaver-Yap. It will be available from the KW Bookshop in early 2022.
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Thursday 11 am–9 pm  
Closed on Tuesday

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Free admission to all visitors on Thursday evenings  
from 6–9 pm and during Museum Sunday Berlin

Tours with KW Guides  
During regular opening hours, visitors of KW can  
participate in short introductions to the exhibitions by  
the KW Guides. Please reach out to our staff at the  
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Public guided tours  
Saturday, in English: 30 October 21, 13 + 27 November  
21, 11 December 21, 8 January 22, 4 pm  
Sunday, in German: 21 November 21, 9 January 22  
(Museum Sunday Berlin), 4 pm  
Admission: included in exhibition ticket. Participation  
only after prior registration with Museumsdienst Berlin.

Museumsdienst Berlin  
Tel.: +49 (0)30 247 49 888  
Mon–Fri: 9 am–4 pm  
museumsdienst@kulturprojekte.berlin

Hygiene measures  
In accordance with the applicable standards of the  
State of Berlin, comprehensive hygiene measures have  
been taken to protect visitors and staff. The total  
number of visitors permitted into each floor of the  
exhibition is limited and depends on the current  
regulations. Updated information will be available on  
our website. Wearing a medical mask is obligatory  
during your stay at KW. We ask you to observe the  
cough and sneeze etiquette; disinfectant dispensers  
are available for you at the entrance.

Please only visit KW if you feel healthy. We look  
forward to your stay!

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