

# KW

**Renée Green**  
***Inevitable Distances***  
**23 October 21 –**  
**9 January 22**



Renée Green  
*Inevitable Distances*  
23 October 2021 – 9 January 2022

“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



Renée Green, *Edmond Laforest*, detail, 1988;  
Courtesy Collection of Marguerite Steed Hoffman;  
Photo: Kristian Laudrup

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.



Renée Green, *Sites of Genealogy: Loophole of Retreat*, installation view, PS1 Museum, New York 1990; Courtesy the artist and Free Agent Media; Bortolami Gallery, New York; Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne/Munich; Photo: Tom Warren

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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto: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](mailto: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.



Renée Green, *Import/Export Funk Office*, installation view, mumok, Vienna, 1992–1993; Courtesy the artist and Free Agent Media; Bortolami Gallery, New York; Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne/Munich; Photo: mumok / Stephan Wyckoff

KW Institute for Contemporary Art  
KUNST-WERKE BERLIN e.V.  
Auguststraße 69  
10117 Berlin  
Tel. +49 30 243459-0  
info@kw-berlin.de  
kw-berlin.de

### Opening Hours

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm  
Thursday 11 am–9 pm  
Closed on Tuesday

### Admission

8 € / reduced 6 €  
berlinpass holders 4 €  
Free admission to visitors up to and including 18,  
Friends of KW and Berlin Biennale, and  
KW Lover\* cardholders  
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 ticket counter. Participation is free of charge.

### 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!

### Colophon

Curator: Mason Leaver-Yap  
Assistant Curators: Kathrin Bentele, Sofie Krogh Christensen  
Public Program and Outreach: Linda Franken  
Head of Production: Claire Spilker  
Technical Management: Wilken Schade  
Head of Installation, Media Technology: Markus Krieger  
Installation Team: KW Installation Team  
Registrars: Monika Grzymislawska, Carlotta Gonindard Liebe  
Education and Art Mediation: Katja Zeidler, Duygu Örs  
Press and Communication: Natanja von Stosch, Marie Kube, Janine Muckermann  
Text and Editing: Mason Leaver-Yap  
Interns: Franziska Dommers, Margarita Hermann, Orphée Ibrahim, Lisa Kirchhoff

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The exhibition *Renée Green: Inevitable Distances* is produced by KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, in collaboration with Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (CH), where it will be presented in 2022.

### ARTS OF THE WORKING CLASS

Mediacoperation: Arts of the Working Class



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