

**JAMES GREGORY ATKINSON**

**6 Friedberg-Chicago**

11 December 2021 – 13 March 2022

# DORTMUNDFR

The contemplation of time can be thought of as a dance that fast-forwards and rewinds physical memory, thus enabling a turnaround and a return, an assurance of words and sounds, a re-sensing of loneliness or solidarity, of energy, sweat, images, gestures and bodies. James Gregory Atkinson's artistic practice emerges through time-based media and considerations arising from his involvement with film, photography, performance, dance and music, in the production of his own images and the examination of external images appropriated as objets trouvés.

In his first institutional solo exhibition, Atkinson illuminates a neglected part of African-American–German history on personal, social and political levels. Along with his specially produced video *6 Friedberg-Chicago*, which was filmed in the former US Army base in Friedberg, Atkinson presents a non-linear archive of texts, images, objects, multi-media sources and eye-witness accounts relating to Black soldiers in Germany and their children born here. The archive was developed in collaboration with the art historian Mearg Negusse and the sociologist and political scientist Eric Otieno, and enables a different reading of history that allows users their own interpretations in the sense of a 'counter-memory' (Hal Foster).<sup>1</sup>

In this first part of the exhibition Atkinson meanders associatively through decades of German history, fast-forwarding and rewinding time, zooming in and out from the personal to the global. He brings his own biography into dialogue with other biographies as an ideal intergenerational community of contemporary and historical personalities: from the Prussian military musician Gustav Sabac el Cher (1868–1934) to the singer Marie N'gar (1930), the actor Elfie Fiegert (1946), the German heavyweight boxing champion Charly Graf (1946), the writer Ika Hügel-Marshall (1947), the actor Günther Kauffmann (1947–2012), the footballer Jimmy Hartwig (1954) and the artist Marc Brandenburg (1965). Themes here are the constructed perception of Black masculinity, fetishisation, fear and sexuality.

<sup>1</sup> Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse' in *October* 110, 2004, p. 4.

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ÖFFNUNGSZEITEN:

DIENSTAG-FREITAG 13-18 UHR

SAMSTAG UND SONNTAG 11-16 UHR

BANKVERBINDUNG:

SPARKASSE DORTMUND

IBAN: DE37 4405 0199 0001 0781 00

BIC: DORTDE33XXX

GEMEINNÜTZIGER EINGETRAGENER  
VEREIN VR 3313

AMTSGERICHT DORTMUND

TEAM:

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LINDA SCHRÖER (KURATORIN)

VORSTAND:

DIPL.-KFFR. MARION EDELHOFF (VORSITZENDE)

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(STELLV. VORSITZENDER)

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Aside from historical references – to the Rhineland children,<sup>2</sup> for example – for the most part the archive contains material about the children of Afro-American US soldiers born from 1946 until today, mainly in Hesse and south-west Germany. The year 1952 plays a special role in that it was the year the first generation of several thousand Black ‘occupation children’ entered the school system. This prompted a nationwide debate about basic attitudes, as can be heard in an audio file in the exhibition, and led to the film *Toxi*, which describes the fate of a Black child who is unwanted by 1950s German society and finally taken to the United States by her African-American father. But the archive also documents solidarity between the US civil-rights movements, Black soldiers in Germany and German political activists, exemplified by East Germany’s support for Angela Davis, but also by various activist groups in West Germany, such as the Black Panther Solidarity Committee or the magazine *Voice of the Lumpen*, published by KD Wolff in Frankfurt am Main.

In the back part of the exhibition Atkinson presents his video *6 Friedberg-Chicago*.<sup>3</sup> It was filmed in Ray Barracks, a former US Army installation in Friedberg, where the artist’s father was stationed. The video shows a group of 17 young men whose fathers had also been stationed in Germany. Their movements, choreographed by Josh Johnson, and the video’s aesthetic allude to music clips – for many born in the 1990s their first access to artistic expression through pop culture. The strong images of the video are contrasted by the soundtrack, a lullaby that builds a bridge to the archive. It is a newly interpreted adaption of the title music to the film *Toxi*, now performed by the queer harpist Ahya Somone: ‘Ich möchte so gern nach Hause gehen / Die Heimat möchte ich wieder sehn / Ich find allein nicht meinen Schritt / Wer hat mich lieb und nimmt mich mit / Ich bin so verlassen / Und hör kein liebes Wort / So fremd sind die Gassen / Warum kann ich nicht fort?’<sup>4</sup>

Curated by Rebekka Seubert

<sup>2</sup> Sons and daughters of soldiers from French colonial troops who were born during the occupation of the Rhineland in the 1920s and systematically persecuted and compulsorily sterilised as so-called Rhineland bastards during the ‘Third Reich’.

<sup>3</sup> The title refers to the feature film *I Berlin-Harlem* (Lothar Lambert, 1974), which structured the thematic work on the archive and will be screened at the Kino im U as part of the exhibition’s accompanying programme.

<sup>4</sup> ‘I do so want to go home / I’d like to see my home country again / I can’t take a step on my own / Who loves me enough to take me along? / I’m so lost/ And hear no kind word / The streets seem so foreign / Why can’t I leave?’

# DORTMUNDER KUNSTVEREIN

*James Gregory Atkinson (\*1981 in Bad Nauheim) studied with Douglas Gordon at the Städelschule, Frankfurt, and has received scholarships and residencies at the Villa Aurora, Los Angeles (2016), the Jan Van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht (2017), and a studio grant for New York from the Hessische Kulturstiftung (2018).*

The end of the exhibition will be marked by a catalogue published by Spector Books. Both exhibition and catalogue are part of the 'Catalogues for Young Artists Award' from the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen and Halbach Foundation.

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Das Rahmenprogramm wird freundlich gefördert durch:

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UND KREATIVITÄT

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Die Produktion des Films wurde freundlich gefördert durch:

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GOETHE  
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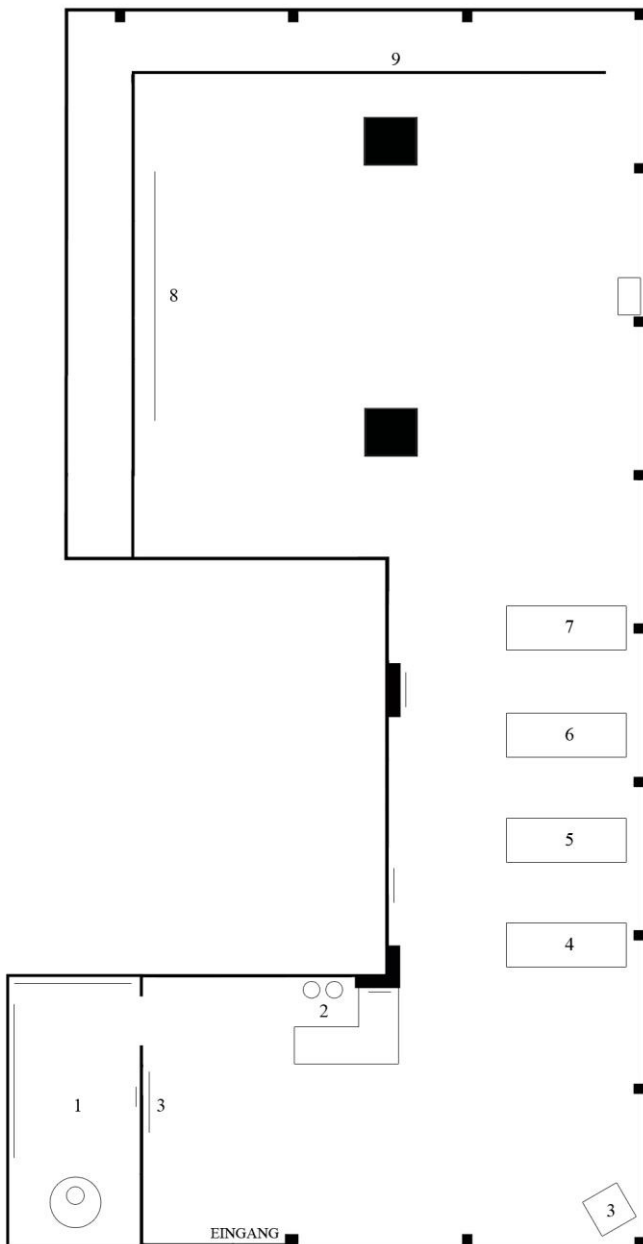
VA·  
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1. *Preußisches Liebesglück*, 2021  
photography, graphic, throne, audio 54 min in loop
2. *CST/CET Office*, 2021  
two wall clocks, photography, counter
3. *Frohe Zuversicht*, 2021  
Film 0:45 min in loop, painting on waxed paper (2020)
4. *Zeitkapsel Transformer*
5. *Zeitkapsel Weltproblem*
6. *Zeitkapsel Whity*
7. *Zeitkapsel BBC*
8. *6 Friedberg-Chicago*, 2021  
4K video with sound, 6:16 min in loop
9. *Your Job in Germany*, 2021

***By courtesy of***

Brandy Albrecht, Marc Brandenburg,  
Pietro Draeger, Konstantin Feiertag, Maria Hoehn,  
Philipp von Külmer, Ika Hügel-Marshall,  
Kai Matussik, Lisbet Tellefsen, Tyrown Vincent,  
Universitätsbibliothek Dortmund, Germanians  
Mannheim (Sabrina und Marvin Kuhn),  
Stadtarchiv Mannheim, Archiv des Hamburger  
Instituts für Sozialforschung

***Cordial thanks to***

Irmgard Atkinson, Charly Graf, Marion Kraft,  
KD Wolff, Jürgen Draeger, Lothar Lambert,  
Randolph Ochsmann, Michael Götting,  
Julia Grosse, Yvette Mutumba, Alexander G.  
Weheliye, Philipp Khabo Koepsell,  
Frank Schoppmeier, Friedel Schmoranzer,  
Juliana Tott, Paula Kommoss, Ruth Rosenfeld  
Graphic design: Markus Alasović