

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
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Press release

EBB & Neil Beloufa

Pandemic Pandemonium

June 29 – September 4, 2022

Hauptraum

Preview for the press: Tuesday, June 28, 2022, 11 a.m.

Exhibition talk: Neil Beloufa in conversation with Axel Stockburger, Tuesday, June 28, 2022, 6 p.m.

Opening & Garden party: Tuesday, June 28, 2022, 7 p.m.

You have to play to fully experience the exhibition! Please buy your required game ticket* at the ticket desk or in our shop to support the project of this exhibition's creators by playing. It's about being part of something and having fun—plus you can win art!

Screen Talk, *Cheat Island*, *Console of Quiz*, *Press Key Port*, *Hand of Vengeance*, *Tax Haven Roulette*, and *Souvenir Shop*: these are the various stations of *Pandemic Pandemonium*. In fact, the whole exhibition is a kind of walk-on game board: the visitors move from zone to zone, gathering information and clues for the quiz questions and small challenges to be solved at the “gaming machines” where they can try their luck and—with a little dexterity and steady nerves—even win genuine works of art. No need to be scared! The game is humorous and parodic, with the answers hidden in the sixteen episodes of the video installation *Screen Talk*, and paying a visit to *Cheat Island* could be prove helpful, too, though those who do might find themselves in an ethical dilemma afterwards.

For visitors who are more interested in crypto art, the exhibition offers them an opportunity to colorize the digital template *Hand of Vengeance* to their liking. They can then buy the picture in the form of an NFT (non-fungible token) and stash it in their personal crypto wallets.

The exhibition is an immersive installation comprising videos, sculptures, animated objects, interactive elements, home-built gaming consoles, and works of digital art. A characteristic feature of Beloufa's shows is that they mix existing and new works, recombining diverse elements in a scenario that is designed to be confusing rather than conveying an unequivocal message. His work alludes to tendencies in society and politics, to social inequality, venture capitalism, and the crypto economy, to an internet dominated by algorithms and concentrations of power in the physical and virtual worlds. At the same time, the exhibition

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toys with the utopian and visionary ideals behind Web3—the self-empowering vision of an internet without power centers and the possibilities it opens up for *everyone*.

In *Pandemic Pandemonium*, Beloufa continues his insistent interrogation of the art field, its institutions and formats, media and technologies, capacities and limitations. He is known for his critical stances, experimental openness, and ongoing search for alternative solutions as well as his preference for collective practices. Over the past more than two years, the pandemic with all the complications it has caused—numerous exhibitions had to be canceled or postponed—has prompted many artists to shift their practices to a more sustainable footing; some, Beloufa among them, have explored creative alternatives in the digital virtual universe. Turning to playful interactive formats (gaming) and studying crypto art and phenomena such as NFTs, he has expanded his collaborative field and recently founded the production company EBB, which describes itself as follows:

“EBB& is a node and platform for the distribution of cultural experiences and products specializing in the use of Web3 solutions: blockchain, NFT, and new community tokenization projects ...” (see the website at ebb.global).

In *Pandemic Pandemonium*, Beloufa and EBB intertwine at least two themes or plot strands to bridge the gulf between the real-world exhibition gallery and the seemingly endless virtual universe. One is the subject of the pandemic and the reality of (global) pandemic management; the other is the exploration of novel forms of community that have emerged from Web3 projects in the centerless internet based on peer-to-peer structures.

The question of the pandemic looms largest in the work *Screen Talk*, while the artist’s engagement with aspects of the crypto economy that are contentious even as some hype them as visionary and utopian comes to the fore in the three “Master Hosts” and the NFT station *Hand of Vengeance*.

Screen Talk, with which the exhibition opens, actually dates from 2014: a parody of trashy soap operas originally titled *Home Is Wherever I’m with You* with a plot about a global pandemic (!), the hunt for a cure, ostensible personal sacrifices and crises, and interpersonal communication restricted to computer screens. In the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, these “screen talks” became common reality for many of us. That also made the work newly relevant to Beloufa, and he worked with EBB to adapt it under the title *Screen Talk*. The film became a series of mini-episodes, to which they added programmed interactive elements to turn them into an online game that ran as a web-based application during the (actual) pandemic and the lockdowns but was also presented at festivals like the 2020 Steirischer Herbst, which was held solely in the digital domain.

The Master Hosts—Host A (blue), Host B (yellow), Host C (red)—are animated interactive sculptures that each come with a dual identity: they exist as objects in real space and as complex cryptological constructions. After the scanning the associated QR code, the visitors can take control of the hosts and make them talk through an input screen (on their smartphones) and text-to-speech software. They also operate their own Twitter and Discord accounts and are, at least in theory, designed as DAOs (Decentral Autonomous Organizations), which puts them squarely at the heart of the crypto cosmos.

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For Beloufa and EBB, expanding their sphere of activity into digital realms is not an end in itself but a choice motivated by the need to reach audiences, and young people in particular, where they are—and they are more likely to be gaming online than at an art exhibition.

Pandemic Pandemonium is based on *Digital Mourning* (Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2021–22) and is an enlarged version of the exhibition first presented at Clearing, Brussels (2022).

Neil Beloufa was born in Paris in 1985 and lives and works in Montreuil.

*The proceeds from the ticket sales cover the production costs of the prizes (original silkscreen prints). Visitors should not hesitate to approach the young attendants in the show, who will be happy to assist them.

Get online access to *Pandemic Pandemonium*, an NFT game by EBB & Neil Beloufa, available on objkt.com.

Programmed by the board of the Secession
Curated by Bettina Spörr

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Current exhibitions

Hauptraum

EBB & Neil Beloufa *Pandemic Pandemonium*

June 29 – September 4, 2022

Galerie

B. Ingrid Olson *Elastic X*

June 29 – September 4, 2022

Grafisches Kabinett

Lieselott Beschorner *Im Atem der Zeit [In the Breath of Time]*

June 29 – September 4, 2022

Artists' books

B. Ingrid Olson. 323, open thread binding, 328 pages
323 images, € 26, 40

Permanent presentation

Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*
Beethoven – Painting and Music in cooperation with
Wiener Symphoniker

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission

Adults € 9,50 | Students, seniors € 6,00 | Free admission for children under ten

Press contact Secession

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Press images

download at <https://www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell/>

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Biografie / Biography Neil Beloufa

Geboren / born in 1985 in Paris FR, Neil Beloufa lebt und arbeitet/ lives and works in Paris FR. Er studierte an der / He studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris; École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; California Institute of the Arts, Valencia ES; Cooper Union, New York US; und / and Le Fresnoy–Studio National des Arts Contemporain, Tourcoing FR.

Preise und Auszeichnungen (Auswahl) / Prizes and awards (selection)

Er war nominiert für / He was nominated for the Prix Marcel Duchamp, Paris FR (2015); Artes Mundi, Cardiff UK; Nam June Paik, Essen DE (2016). Er wurde ausgezeichnet mit dem / He was awarded the Meurice Prize for Contemporary Art, Paris FR (2013), Audi Talent Award, Paris FR (2011) and the Agnès B. Studio Collector Award, Paris FR, 2010.

Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl) / Solo exhibitions (selection)

Digital Mourning Hangar Bicocca, Milan IT (2021); *Global Agreement* Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt DE (2018); *Les Inoubliables prises d'autonomie* Palais de Tokyo, Paris FR (2018); *Projects 102: Neil Beloufa* Museum of Modern Art, New York US (2016); *Soft(a)ware* K11, Shanghai CHN (2016); *Hopes for the Best* Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin DE (2015); *Counting on People* Institute of Contemporary Arts, London UK (2014); *Hammer Projects: Neil Beloufa* Hammer Museum, Los Angeles US (2013).

Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl) / Group exhibitions (selection)

May You Live in Interesting Times 58th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale IT (2019); *Social Factory* 10th Biennale of Contemporary Art Shanghai CHN (2014); *Meanwhile, Suddenly and Then* 12th Biennial of Contemporary Art Lyon FR (2013); *The Encyclopedic Palace* 55th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale IT (2013).