

Daphne Ahlers

*Hum*

15 September - 28 October 2023

Daphne Ahlers' exhibition is comprised of two new bodies of work: the *Klingeltableaus* (2023), a series of doorbell panels, and *Hum* (2023), which is the first sculpture in a proposed series currently known as 'work-babies'. Humming is typically a continuous noise, a sustained activity. For Ahlers, the hum conjures a feeling of harmony, from high to low, macro to micro: standing for the low pitch hum of the universe, the drone of machines, to the buzzing of flies, or the wordless song of a parent lulling a baby to sleep.

Ahlers' use of *Klingeltableaus* is in keeping with her ongoing engagement with quotidian and utilitarian objects, often dressing these items up in the service of transforming them into something rarefied or ornamental. Inspired by her own ambivalent curiosity towards personality types, and the pseudo-scientific psychic drive urging us to self-diagnose ourselves and categorise others, each of these doorbell buzzers have been labelled with a reference to various temperaments, personalities, and psychological archetypes that might be used to express, assert, or constitute one's sense of self. In contrast, Ahlers has included a single panel that gestures towards the science of quantum mechanics. Removed from their everyday functional setting and installed in the gallery, the inviting glow of each illuminated button becomes a fantasy gateway: one press of the finger might generate a portal to another life or way of being. Some of these buzzers have been re-covered with makeshift, handmade labels, implying the fickle changeability in human behaviour and our lighthearted desire to reinvent or understand ourselves through the lens of pop psychology identities, or the discourse we might draw out from a horoscope. As Dua Lipa wrote under a recent selfie post on her Instagram profile, "Yesterday I found out I'm actually a Gemini rising... someone unpack that for me."

On a crimson red carpet, Ahlers has laid *Hum*, which consists of a lifelike 'reborn' doll. Made from silicone, the synthetic plasticity of the doll alludes to the malleability of selfhood, representative of a developing consciousness. The baby presents pure potential, a blank canvas, whereas the buzzers with their various categories and groups are regimented and predetermined. Within the domesticated, spatial politics of the exhibition, *Hum* becomes an intermediary for the concepts of desire, imagination, and play. As explored in the work of Donald Winnicott, it is in the instinctive and experimental nature of an infant's play that reality and fantasy can become productively and necessarily blurred.

Through the process of making this body of work, Ahlers was interested in riffing on the state of infancy, comparing it to the currently burgeoning industry of artificial intelligence. The baby is a symbolic cipher for the state of inception. The reborn doll was purchased on the Internet after succumbing to numerous YouTube videos and adverts for reborn sellers, prompted by the way her algorithm changed when postpartum. Nicknaming the doll her 'work-baby' (a riff on the concept of the 'work spouse'), and humorously differentiating it from her own live child—the doll is utilised as a readymade object. For Ahlers, the existence of this work baby also expands the concept of mothering, requiring her to tend and care for it within the realm of creative labour and artistic practice, actions which are made overt through the sweet tenderness of the miniature fly costume. Cocooned in its costumed swaddling, Ahlers has used a basic cotton muslin toile. Typically associated with the fabric one would use to make a pattern for a garment, in addition to being used for cloths and nappies, the toile signals that it is a prototype. The motif of the large, floppy wings also signifies metamorphosis, generating further fantasies. Adorned with the material motif of nascency, the loaded energy of this baby hums with future potential.

Text by Philomena Epps

Daphne Ahlers (b. 1986 in Hamburg, Germany). Lives and works in Berlin.

Selected solo exhibitions:

*Die Würflerin*, 2022, Kunsthhaus Glarus, Switzerland; *Spinelessness*, 2022, Sandy Brown, Berlin; *Depressions*, 2020, Sundy, London, UK; *Bloomers*, 2019, *Schiefe Zähne*, Berlin, Germany; *Die Langstreckensängerin*, 2019, Halle für Kunst Lüneburg, Germany; *Rinnen*, Neuer Essener Kunstverein, 2018, Essen, Germany.

Selected group exhibitions:

*Daphne Ahlers, Leda Bourgogne, Evelyn Plaschg und Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo)*, 2022, Kunsthalle Bremerhaven, Germany; *non-player character*, Kunstverein Schwerin, 2021, Germany; *Core*, 2021, Sandy Brown, Berlin, Germany; *The Vapours*, 2020, Kunstverein Bamberg, Germany; *A House Is Not A Home*, 2019, Fri Art, Fribourg, Switzerland; *Beyond Seduction*, 2019, *Come Over Chez Malik's*, Hamburg, Germany; *Here, here - das ich und alles andere*, 2018, Braunsfelder Collection, Cologne, Germany; *Authentizität. Das authentisch Unauthentische*, 2017, Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg, Germany; *Solo Cose Belle*, 2017, Galleria Acappella, Napoli, Italy.