

Press release

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***symbiotic beings* | Natacha Donz , Rindon Johnson, Haroon Mirza, Justin Urbach**

13 March – 4 May 2024

The exhibition *symbiotic beings* with Natacha Donz , Rindon Johnson, Haroon Mirza and Justin Urbach explores a complex harmony of organic and human-made systems. In their works, biological, botanical or celestial structures merge with synthetic and industrial elements and materials. These connections illustrate that even seemingly contradictory elements can be in a mutually beneficial relationship. At the same time, the group exhibition explores the question of whether and how technology and nature can coexist, presenting symbiotic processes and transformative potentials in the works of four artists who work on the threshold between biological and social structures, the physical and the fictional, the analog and the digital.

Natacha Donz 's large-scale canvases from the series *Ghost Gun* abstractly reference corporeality and its potential vulnerability. *Ghost Gun V* (2024) depicts clusters resembling enlarged microorganisms such as cells or viruses, overlaid with a transparent film. This resembles technical plans of firearms that are publicly available as open source files and whose license-free, 3D-printed kits can be reconstructed as "ghost guns". The artist thus poses questions about physical fragility, violence and protection, while the various layers combine to form a symbiotic body that unites these supposed contradictions. Using an airbrush technique, she achieves atmospheric, luminous color fields on which small, organic forms appear, painted with meticulous delicacy. These can be reminiscent of light reflections, drops of water, sparks of fire, explosions, or body cells under a microscope. In this way, her works combine the aesthetics of media-based, digital images with ecological issues.

In contrast, Rindon Johnson's three-part wall work *This canon fodder is no bother* (2023) made of white nubuck leather reflects on the relationship between animals and humans and their socio-economic interdependencies. With red and blue chalk the artist generously traces the number sequence 1-20 in blue paint, using a childlike handwriting style. Johnson emphasizes, through his leather works, the recognition of the agency of animals and questions the ethics and sustainability of profit-driven interests associated with animal products. The human interaction with the animal environment depicted here is not characterized by a symbiotic exchange but rather by one-sided exploitation, viewing the animal as a capitalist commodity. Johnson extends this approach in his leather works to address identity-political and classist themes such as practices of racist exploitation. The poetic titles raise additional questions regarding autonomy and power. Johnson's reflections always start from the possibilities and quality of language as in *Magnificent Drain: ok pretend you don't have a nose, or ears for that matter, or anything really, and pretend you're flying and you're not a bug, you're you, and you hit a windshield and it doesn't feel like you're splattered across it, rather just becoming a part of it, either way it's fine because you couldn't hear it or smell it and I think, no I know, that would be the worst part, right?* (2023) and find their influence in the form of titles that accompany the works like poems. They are an essential part of the work, eluding clear readability through the artist's subjective impressions and deliberate ambivalences.

Like Natacha Donz , Haroon Mirza also combines seemingly contradictory components in his works. At the center of the large-format triptych *After Lofoten (Solar Powered LED Circuit Composition 47)* is a canvas that serves as a mounting surface for an electronic circuit powered by the energy generated by the two outer solar cell panels. The central composition of copper

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wires, LED strips and an LED matrix on which a flickering candle lights up is reminiscent of an erupting volcano from which a fine cloud of ferrofluid – a liquid that reacts to magnetic fields – spreads across the picture surface. The crystalline, broken surfaces of the solar panels create the impression of constellations in the night sky and the applied synthetic resin turns them into painterly surfaces inspired by galactic images. In addition, his series of works *Electro Etchings* (2017) shows organic structures of stimulating substances such as fungi and sugar, which he transfers to the copper circuit boards using electricity.

Justin Urbach's light box *FIBER NERVE* (2024), similar to *After Lofoten (Solar Powered LED Circuit Composition 47)*, plays with light, and it shows an analog photograph of a man standing in front of large video billboards in Times Square in New York. The oversized screen above the building facade glows like an orange-hued sky, and the dramatic underside view of the figure resembles a film still. The work illustrates the mutual interpenetration of a hybrid world in which digital image production, the urban metropolis and the human body are fused together on a daily basis. In *FIBER I and II* (2024), Urbach transfers the same motif onto steel and handmade paper using laser engraving and UV printing. These appear like analog representations of screens, or afterimages of visual stimuli, with which he examines questions about mediality, transformation processes and hybridity.

Recent solo exhibitions by **Natacha Donzé** (*1991 in Boudevilliers, CH) took place at the Kunst(Zeug)Haus in Rapperswil-Jona (2022), the Musée des Beaux-Arts in La Chaux-de-Fonds (2021), and Unit110 in New York (2018). Her work has been shown in group exhibitions at MCBA in Lausanne (2023), Kunstmuseum Appenzell as part of the Vordemberge-Gildewart Fellowship (2023), CAPC Bordeaux (2022), and Hagiwara Projects in Tokyo (2021), among others. Natacha Donzé received the Swiss Art Award in 2023 and the Kiefer Halblitzel Prize for Young Artists in 2019.

Rindon Johnson (*1990 on the unceded territories of the Ohlone people) is invited to the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia curated by Adriano Pedrosa. In September 2024 Johnson will present his largest solo exhibition to date at the Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai, China. His work has been shown internationally, most recently as solo presentations at Albertinum, Dresden (2022), Sculpture Center in New York (2021), the Museum of American Art in Washington (2021) and the Julia Stoschek Collection in Düsseldorf (2019).

Haroon Mirza (*1977 in London, UK) received the Silver Lion at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011, the Zurich Art Prize in 2013 and the Nam June Paik Art Center Prize in 2014. His work was recently presented at the Islamic Arts Biennial, Jeddah (2023), the Lille3000 Triennale (2022), and the Liverpool Biennial (2021). The artist has had solo exhibitions at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2019), Ikon, Birmingham (2018), Museum Tinguely, Basel (2015) and New Museum, New York (2012), among others.

Justin Urbach (*1995 in Munich, DE) studied time-based media and photography with Julian Rosefeldt at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and was awarded the Erwin and Gisela Steiner Foundation Prize in 2023 for his graduation project *Fractal Breeze*. His work has most recently been exhibited in group shows at the Goethe Institut in Paris (2022), the Haus der Kunst in Munich (2022), the Millenium Film Workshop in New York (2022), the DOCK 20 Collection in Hollenstein (2022) and the Kunstverein Marburg (2019).

For further information please contact:

Alexandra Chizhevskaya | alexandra@maxgoelitz.com | +49 (0) 89 89063944