

# Sam Vernon

## *Alter-Reservoir*

Kunsthaus Hamburg  
9 March – 12 May 2024

Sam Vernon creates dynamic visual worlds oscillating between the historical and the personal realm. Her site-specific installations are often based on intensive research into the art spaces for which she develops new projects. Turning a critical lens on institutional history, she engages in questions of representation, particularly with regard to labour, gender and cultural diversity. Recurrence is a central element of her practice. The artist scans, prints and copies her own drawings and gouaches alongside found footage, which she assembles into new, large-format wall collages. Based on multiple reproductions of the motifs in black and white, the original images are rendered almost unrecognizable. From this form of abstraction emerges a play with identity; the depicted loses its explicit attribution. Instead, information and stories overlap and disappear again. They remind us where we have come from and show us where we are.

Sam Vernon's first solo exhibition in Germany is a collaboration between the Kunsthaus Hamburg and the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Programme, where the artist holds a scholarship for the year 2023/2024. Specifically for the project, she developed the installation *Alter-Reservoir*, a comment on the fate of the institution. Faced with long-pending refurbishment measures and the expansion of the neighbouring music hall, the exhibition venue is about to be relocated. In her new work, the artist makes reference to Édouard Glissant's concept of "trembling" (*tremblement*). It describes a state of incertitude, similar to that in which the Hamburg centre for contemporary art finds itself. Both the date of the move and the new location are as yet unclear.

Sam Vernon is quite familiar with the challenges involved in changing quarters; she has already moved more than 30 times and is about to do so again after completing her scholarship. Against the backdrop of this personal experience, she combines autobiographical elements with historical artefacts in her large-format photomontages, in this case, exhibition posters, objects, filed artist portfolios and documents from the Kunsthaus inventory. She understands the process of speculating over those forgotten ephemera as an attempt to illustrate archival history, creating meaning and connection to place. She alludes to the temporality of existing and forgotten, but also emergent objects as alternative memory or image repositories. *Alter-Reservoir*, a term Vernon employs to describe her personal image stock, focuses primarily on labour practices: occupation, social action, administration, maintenance, storage, archiving. Collaborative work has for a long time been a defining feature of the site where the Kunsthaus Hamburg is located today. In the former flower market hall, workers originally sold flowers, fruit and vegetables. It is in the light of this context that the question arises as to how urban planning interventions and their realization affect the urban context, their users and social relationships.

**Sam Vernon** (\*1987, Brooklyn, USA) studied painting and printmaking at Yale University and at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Her work has been exhibited widely, including at the Museum of African Diaspora, San Francisco, California African American Museum, Los Angeles, G44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, Toronto, Seattle Art Museum, Brooklyn Museum, New York City and the Queens Museum, New York City.

Curated by Anna Nowak (Kunsthaus Hamburg) and Melanie Roumiguière (DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Programme)

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