

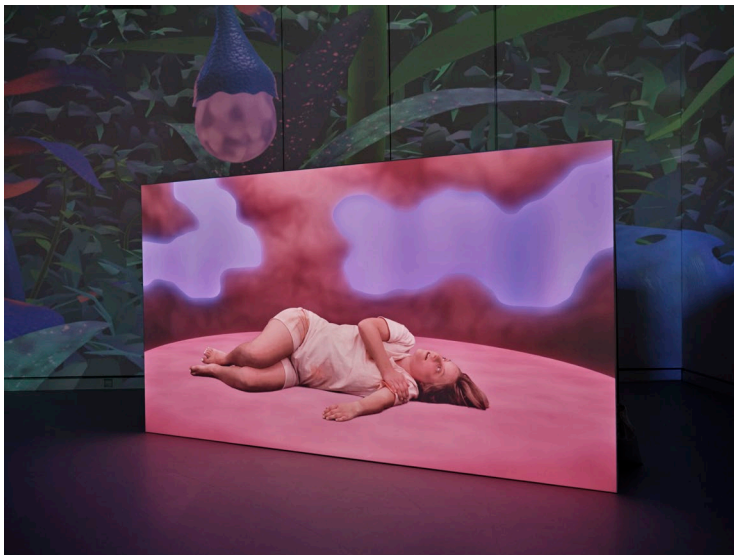
**PRESS RELEASE**

**melanie bonajo**  
*School of Lovers*

**Philipp Gufler**  
*Dis/Identification*

**08/03 – 16/06/24**

**melanie bonajo**  
*School of Lovers*



Installation view melanie bonajo: *School of Lovers*, Kunsthalle Mainz, 2024: melanie bonajo, *School of Lovers*, 2023, HD Video (38:46 min), in collaboration with Theatre HORA Zurich. Scenography in collaboration with Théo Demans. Courtesy of melanie bonajo und AKINCI. Photo: Norbert Miguletz.

The *School of Lovers* is a cross-genre art and education project realized by melanie bonajo, Daniel Cremer, and Yanna Rüger in collaboration with the inclusive Theater HORA. On the basis of this new project, Kunsthalle Mainz is presenting a series of additional works by melanie bonajo that address questions of relationship and touch, research and learning.

What kind of school teaches you what you always wanted to know but no one told you in real life? What kind of school addresses the issues that are related to sexuality and safety? These are a few of the questions that prompted Yanna Rüger, Daniel Cremer, and melanie bonajo to team up with the Theater HORA ensemble and embark on a journey of de- and re-schooling. In the course of it, they

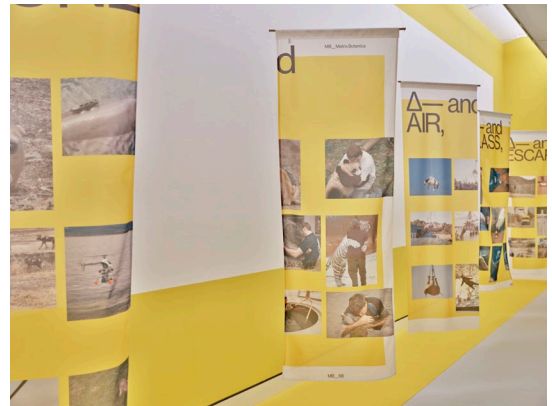
together shed light on the crystal of intimacy in all of its facets. The outcome of their travels is an immersive installation space that develops on the basis of melanie bonajo's video piece and likewise sets the scene for workshops and a play (directed by Daniel Cremer & Yanna Rüger).

Performers from the HORA ensemble have become experts on their own desire and, as fantastic teaching avatars, are able to impart knowledge and sensual experiences on the subject of love, intimacy and sexuality. A humorous, sensitive, empowering, genre- and gender bending experience that speaks to people with and without disabilities.

Zurich-based Theater HORA is one of Switzerland's best-known independent dance, theater, and performance groups. Since 2003, Theater HORA has also been a (cultural) workshop for people with so-called "cognitive impairments". melanie bonajo (they/them) is an artist,

filmmaker, sexological bodyworker, somatic sex coach and educator, cuddle workshop facilitator and activist. In their videos, installations and photographs, often in collaboration with groups and communities, melanie bonajo explores questions of how we coexist, the erosion of intimacy, and isolation in an increasingly sterile, technological world. The immersive installation was designed together with the scenographers of Touche Touche.

In addition to *School of Lovers*, the two video installations *TouchMETell* (2019) & *Progress vs Sunsets - Re-formulating the Nature Documentary* (2017) are on view in Mainz. In both works, children are the protagonists. In *TouchMETell* children between the ages of six and eight playfully explore how they experience their own bodies and physical contact with others. Viewers, children and adults alike, are invited by the artist to think and talk about intimacy, their boundaries and their body awareness. The film *Progress vs. Sunsets* illustrates how our relationship with nature has changed through the popularisation of amateur nature photography and film on the internet. The work, shown in an installation developed with Théo Demans, is the second part of a trilogy that explores extinction and the threat posed to endangered groups by the development of techno-capital, but also extinction in an abstract sense, the extinction of feelings and forms of thought. Through the eyes and voices of children, complicated issues come to the fore in a seemingly effortless way: animal rights, biopolitics, dwindling resources, ecology, anthropomorphism and the impact of these ethics on human desires, emotions, emotionality and sentimentality towards 'the other'.



Installation view Kunsthalle Mainz: melanie bonajo: *School of Lovers*: melanie bonajo, *Progress vs. Sunsets, Re-formulating the Nature Documentary*, 2017  
HD video (48:20 min). Scenography in collaboration with Théo Demans. Courtesy of melanie bonajo and AKINCI. Photo: Norbert Miguletz.

***School of Lovers* on tour, with Theater HORA, Daniel Cremer & melanie bonajo:  
Sa 25/05:**

In the wake of the performance and the film, which both premiered in December 2023 in Zurich's Shedhalle, the voyage of exploration on which the *School of Lovers* embarked has continued. At the end of May, all the participants will meet up again in Mainz to join with the local audience for a weekend and thus to take a further step down the path to a global school for love for people with and without disabilities:

**2-6 pm Workshop with the Theatre HORA**

(registration until 15/05 at [mail@kunsthalle-mainz.de](mailto:mail@kunsthalle-mainz.de))  
Costs: 20 euro / 10 euro reduced

**5 pm Screening of the video work *School of Lovers***

following discussion with the performers from Theatre HORA, melanie bonajo, Daniel Cremer & Yanna Rüger  
Costs: included in admission

**8 pm Performance: Daniel Cremer *The Miracle of Love – Das Wunder der Liebe***

Costs: 15 euro / 8 euro reduced

The exhibition is being kindly supported by Kultursommer Rheinland-Pfalz and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

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## Biography

**melanie bonajo** (they/them/theirs) studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and completed residencies at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunst in Amsterdam (2009-10) and at the ISCP in New York (2014). melanie bonajo represented the Netherlands at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022 with 'When the body says Yes'. bonajo worked with a curatorial team consisting of Orlando Maaïke Gouwenberg, Geir Haraldseth and Soraya Pol. The scenography for her immersive installation 'When the body says Yes' was developed in collaboration with Théo Demans. Solo exhibitions: FOAM, Amsterdam (2016), Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt (2017), Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht (2018). 'When the body says Yes': FOMU, Antwerp, BE (2023); KUMU Tallinn, Estonia (2023/24); IMMA Dublin (2024), Ireland; Pori Museum Finland (2025) and 'Progress vs the (m)other', Kunstpalais Erlangen, Germany.

## **Philipp Gufler** ***Dis/Identification***

Images and histories of queer life both today and in the past are at the heart of Philipp Gufler's artistic oeuvre. Key persons in history, developments and incisive events from different periods all enter into dialog and tell an intersectional queer story. Gufler comes across his source material in historical archives, newspapers, radio and TV, and his reference points originate in literature and the aesthetic practices of the LGBTQI+ movements, in queer theory, and in Pop culture. Gufler reflects on these in film essays, but also in performances and pictorial objects, in paintings on mirrors or



Installation view Philipp Gufler: *Dis/Identification*, Kunsthalle Mainz, 2024: Philipp Gufler, works from the *Quilt* series, 2018-2023; Courtesy of the artist, BQ Berlin and Françoise Heitsch. Photo: Norbert Miguletz

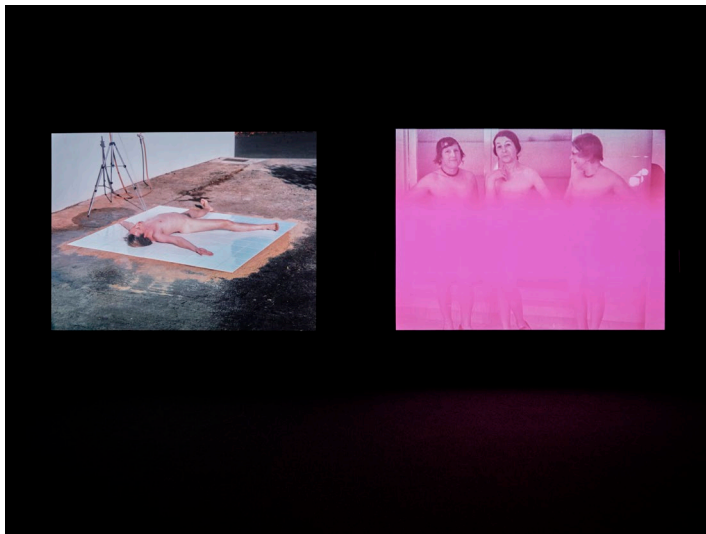
silkscreened fabrics (the quilts as he calls them, that today feature 53 different textiles and are dedicated to queer people, movements, and places). In his largest solo exhibition to date, starting with a new video installation entitled *The Beginning of Identification, and its End* Gufler offers a survey of his creative output of recent years.

Gufler's works often involve an invitation to an encounter: Visionary, courageous, controversial personalities are the protagonists of his artistic projects. For example, there's lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who in 1867 was the first person to publicly demand the repeal of the laws against homosexuality; or the artist Paul Hoecker, co-founder of the Munich Secession, who was forced to resign from his professorship at the Munich Academy of Art due to a portrait of Madonna for which he is said to have portrayed a young sex worker. We meet feminist and sexologist Charlotte Wolf, who in the 1930s was involved in the Surrealist circles in Paris, or the Munich-based artist Cosy Piéro, who until 1980 ran the popular meeting place *Bei Cosy* and with whom Gufler shared a long friendship. And does the name Lana Kaiser even ring a bell? The Pop phenomenon of the Noughties is known to most people, contrary to the wish of the singer, primarily as Daniel Küblböck. Moreover, Gufler is interested in the beginnings of the AIDS crisis in Germany and the persecution of queer individuals during National Socialism. He frequently engages in oral history research and collaborates with experts. Currently, he is working with Munich-based historian Alfred Knoll, who for many years has been researching the fates of queer prisoners at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site. As a member of the "Forum

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Queeres Archiv München”, archiving, documenting and mediating lie at the heart of Gufler's work as well as his artistic practice, which includes video installations, textile works, objects, and prints as well as curatorial and discursive projects.



Installation view Kunsthalle Mainz: Philipp Gufler: Dis/Identification: Philipp Gufler, *The Beginning of Identification, and its End*, 2024, Two-channel video installation (19 min). Courtesy of the artist and BQ Berlin. Photo: Norbert Miquletz.

Gufler is not interested in writing the “hi/stories of heroes”. His approach always leaves scope for the dark sides and the controversies. His focus is on identification but also on “disidentification”, on the limits of queer categories of identification, something Gufler highlights in his latest video installation *The Beginning of Identification, and its End*, which is being shown in Mainz for the first time. The captivating film collage and the performance by Gufler himself in juxtaposition to it (an endurance experiment modeled on a performance by artist Ben d’Armagnac in front of the Brooklyn Museum back in 1978) emphasize the thin line between visibility and vulnerability, between emancipation and distancing, for example when he

edits statements by far-right homosexual politicians like Alice Weidel or Pim Fortuyn into the collage. Queer emancipation, Gufler seems to say, cannot be seen in isolation from other political struggles.

The exhibition will coincide with the publication of the first monograph on Philipp Gufler, with texts by Karolina Kühn, Louwrien Wijers, and Yasmin Afschar.

The exhibition and the catalogue are being kindly supported by Mondriaan Fonds and the Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach Foundation under its support prize „Catalogues for Young Artists“. *The Beginning of Identification, and its End* (2024) was produced with the kind support of the city of Munich, Launch Pad LaB, Mondriaan Fonds and Sound & Vision.

### Biography

**Philipp Gufler** (\*1989 in Augsburg) lives and works in Amsterdam and Munich. He studied at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich and participated in the residency programmes De Ateliers in Amsterdam (2015-17), Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in Maine, USA (2019), Delfina Foundation in London (2021), Launch Pad LaP in Champagne-Mouton, France (2023) and Schloss Balmoral in Bad Ems (2023). He has been an active member of the self-organised Forum Queeres Archiv München since 2013.

His most recent solo exhibitions include the following: Brandhorst Fall Commission, Museum Brandhorst (2023), Unterwerfungen, Kunstraum der Leuphana Universität, Lüneburg (2022); Autoerotismus, Kevin Space, Vienna (2020); It is getting alive, BQ, Berlin (2020); Pleasure Pain, Marwan, Amsterdam (2019). His works have been shown in the following group exhibitions: To Be Seen. Queer Lives 1900 - 1950, NS-Dokumentationszentrum, Munich (2022), Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead, Part III, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2023), Sweat, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2021), Andere Geschichten, Dirkje Kuik en Philipp Gufler at Centraal Museum, Utrecht (2020), Love and Ethnology at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2019), Masculinities at Kunstverein Düsseldorf (2019), At Cosy at Rongwrong, Amsterdam (2017) and Videonale. 15 at the Kunstmuseum Bonn (2015). His artist books include: Projection on the Crisis

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(2014/2021), I Wanna Give You Devotion (2017), Indirect Touch (2017), Quilt #01-#30 (2020), Lana Kaiser (2020), Cosy at Cosy (2023) and A Shrine To Aphrodite (2023). He co-curated the exhibitions Exzentrische 80er: Tabea Blumenschein, Hilka Nordhausen, Rabe perplexum and Kompliz\*innen aus dem Jetzt at Lothringer 13, Munich, Kunsthaus Hamburg and Galerie Nord | Kunstverein Tiergarten, Berlin and organised the exhibition Substitutes at W139 in Amsterdam.

We gladly provide further images on request. Please contact us for more information.

Find continuously updated information on the exhibitions and the accompanying programme on our website [www.kunsthalle-mainz.de](http://www.kunsthalle-mainz.de)