

HALF-LIFE

KATRIN HORNEK AND BRODY ALBERT

GARAGE EXCHANGE VIENNA—LOS ANGELES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2024 — SUNDAY, DECEMBER 08, 2024

VISITING HOURS: SATURDAYS & SUNDAYS, 11:00 AM — 5:00 PM

MACKEY APARTMENTS GARAGE TOP GALLERY, 1137 S COCHRAN AVE, LOS ANGELES, CA 90019

The half-life of plutonium-239 is 24,100 years.
This whale lived approximately 11 million years ago.
The life expectancy of a tortoise is 80–150 years.
The house is now abandoned.

Half-Life whiplashes timeframes from the prehistoric past, to an unknown distant future, taking resolve in the present. In this exhibition, Katrin Hornek and Brody Albert utilize research-based processes to make poetic works analyzing natural histories, real estate, and nuclear geographies. Both artists weave together these threads drawing connections to the proliferation of property development in Los Angeles with the city's military industry and the collisions that this entailed.

In *testing grounds (A ghost that cannot be laid to rest)*, Hornek positions turtles as messengers to convey the social and environmental toll of the testing and use of nuclear weapons in hundreds of detonations since 1945, followed by the push into civilian use through the "Atoms for Peace" project. Originating around 144 million years ago, turtles keep a record of this nuclear activity in their shells, making them representative of geological and contemporary human history. Using text messages, voice recordings, and videos, taking the form of handheld turtle sculptures, these conversations meditate on the lasting impacts of nuclear fallout.

Incorporating a local site into the messenger archive, The Santa Susana Field Laboratory, outside Los Angeles, was a particular focus for Hornek. This site was a leading research and development facility for many of the technologies used in the pursuit of space

travel and nuclear research, for example, the first commercial civilian reactor built in the U.S. during the Cold War. Through accidents and mismanagement, radioactive material (including plutonium-239) was released into the air, contaminating the soil, groundwater, and Los Angeles River. This caused statistically higher cancer rates in the surrounding communities. The facility closed operations in 2006 and there is an environmental remediation effort taking place, though it is insufficient for the needs of the site. Activist groups such as Parents Against SSFL have been working to inform the surrounding communities about the exposure to the site's toxic contamination and fight for a full cleanup to background level.

For his piece, *Elysium*, Albert considers "Mixocetus-Elysium," a fossil from a baleen whale that lived around 11 million years ago, when present day Los Angeles was in the ocean. It was discovered in 1931 in Lincoln Heights while a plumber was digging to irrigate a planned orchard. As a long term Lincoln Heights resident, Albert often investigates the material histories of his context, creating a non-linear layering of narratives. Lincoln Heights was the first suburban neighborhood in Los Angeles and provided a template for private property and later industrial development, including military and aerospace manufacturing.

In the Mackey Apartments Garage Top Gallery, a sculptural recreation of the whale skull is presented at the threshold between interior gallery space and

the exterior balcony. It is topped with black thistle and sunflower seeds, transforming it into a bird feeder. The fossil-specimen-as-bird-feeder brings new functionality and life into the skull, entangling it with the present-day local population of birds.

Half-Life explores the complex interconnectedness between American imperialism, property development, and the larger geological context of the land itself. The result the viewer is left with is a moment of presentness. The surreal abandoned roomscape is the setting to ruminate on the multitudes of destruction and displacement. Listen to what the turtles have to say.

Katrin Hornek lives and works in Vienna. She studied Performative Art and Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Her work playfully engages with the strange paradoxes and convergences of living in the age of the geologic Anthropocene, where the effects of capitalism, colonialism, and extractivism are written into the body of the earth. Both her artistic and her curatorial practice assert an understanding of the entwinement of nature and culture, implicitly arguing for more complex formulations – most recently, at *Secession, Vienna* (2024), *ar/ger Kunst, Bolzano* (2021), *Kunstraum Lakeside, Klagenfurt* (2021), the *Riga Biennale* (2020), *Hysterical Mining at Kunsthalle Wien* (2019), and *I: project space, Beijing* (2018). She teaches at the University of Applied Arts Vienna (Department of Site-Specific Art) and is a member of the interdisciplinary research group *The Anthropocene Commons*. She was awarded the *Msgr. Otto Mauer Award* (2021), the *Studioprogram of the Federal Ministry for Arts* (2020-2026), the *Austrian State Scholarship for visual arts* (2017) and the *Theodor Körner Award* (2013).

Brody Albert lives and works in Los Angeles. He holds an MFA from University of California, Irvine (2016), and a BFA from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA (2011). Albert is the


Associate Professor of Sculpture at Chaffey College and the co-director of the experimental publishing imprint, OHPAPERS. Selected exhibitions include *Shapes from The Extramundane* with Sara Ellen Fowler, Soldes, Los Angeles (2024), *Empty Except for the Ghost*, Hunter Shaw Fine Art, Los Angeles (2023); *Wavelength*, TIMES Museum, Beijing (2022), *Built In*, Neutra VDL, Los Angeles (2021), *We Are All Guests Here*, Bridge Projects, Los Angeles (2021); *Strata*, Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena (2018); *Nonlocal*, Access Gallery, Vancouver (2018); *Exit Strategy* with Sara Ellen Fowler, River Gallery, Los Angeles (2017); *Solids*, Contemporary Art Center, Irvine (2016); *Open To The Public*, VACANCY, Los Angeles (2016).

ABOUT GARAGE EXCHANGE

Garage Exchange seeks to foster relationships, conversations and collaborations in the arts between Los Angeles and Austria. In order to expand the cultural exchange at the core of the Artists and Architects-in-Residence program, The Austrian Federal Chancellery, and the MAK Center invite Austrian and Vienna-based alumni residents to collaborate with L.A. artists and architects of their choosing at the Garage Top at the Mackey Apartments for the Garage Exchange Vienna-Los Angeles exhibition series.

Half-Life is curated by Seymour Polatin, Exhibitions and Programs Manager with Brian Taylor, Program Associate, and Maeve Atkinson, Education and Engagement Manager.

This exhibition series is made possible by The Austrian Federal Chancellery with additional support from the Austrian Consulate General Los Angeles.

 Federal Chancellery
Republic of Austria

 Austrian
Consulate General
Los Angeles