

Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff
German Theater 2010-2020
05.09 – 08.11.2020

German Theater 2010-2020 brings together ten years of work by two central figures of the Berlin art scene of the last decade. The photographs by the American Berlin-based duo Max Pitegoff and Calla Henkel discuss the changes in a city that captures the imagination of a generation torn between bohemian life, communal ideals and gentrification.

CONTACT
Sacha Rappo, comm@fri-art.ch, 0041 26 323 23 51
Fri Art Kunsthalle, Petites-Rames 22, Case Postale 582, CH-1701 Fribourg



Biography

Calla Henkel (born 1988, Minneapolis) and Max Pitegoff (born 1987, Buffalo) had solo exhibitions at the Kunstverein Hamburg (2018), the Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2016), and The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015). Their work was included in group presentations at Manifesta 13, Marseille (2020), the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2018), the Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2016), the 9. Berlin Biennale (2016), Kunsthalle Wien (2015), UCCA Beijing (2014), Artists Space, New York (2013), and Kunsthalle Bern (2012). They have been guest professors at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung in Karlsruhe, the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam; the NYU Berlin; Politecnico di Torino, and have been working since 2016 as mentors at Berlin Program for Artists. Their work is in the collection of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Geneva.



Portrait of Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff

Caption of the first page image:

Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, "Your term 'space' is the exact right term. There's a redefinition of space happening. Nobody really knows what's going on. We went through the same thing in the 60's and 70's and all of a sudden in the 80's we had a new space. The 70's were probably the most pessimistic time I've ever experienced, the 70's were just horrible."* (Backbend over couch at US Ambassador's Residence in Berlin, Germany), 2016

Ten years of work reassembled for the first time

The survey exhibition on the first decade of work by American Berlin based artists Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff takes place in Fri Art Kunsthalle Fribourg, from September 5 to November 8, 2020.

German Theater 2010-2020 assembles over fifty works produced by the artists during the last decade. Shown for the first time together, they reveal the consistency of a practice as well as an engagement with photography by artists of a new generation.

Next to photographic series, the exhibition pays tribute to the collaborative aspect of the artists' practice and includes a significant selection of works realized with their artist peers. Next to the exhibition, a monograph catalogue designed by Dan Solbach Studio (Berlin) coedited by Fri Art Kunsthalle will be launched in March 2021. This publication will be the first general look at their practice. *German Theater 2010-2020* is curated by Nicolas Brulhart and guest curator Fabrice Stroun.



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Times Athens*, 2012

Since ten years, Calla Henkel (*1988, Minneapolis) and Max Pitegoff's (*1987, Buffalo) artistic work consists in the parallel running of a rigorous practice of photography and a grounded engagement in the cultural fabric of the artistic community of Berlin and beyond. The artists gained recognition through gestures that includes the running of venues as sites of socialization (Times Bar, TV in Berlin), the writing and staging of amateur theater pieces with friends (New Theater, Grüner Salon at Volksbühne), and exhibition making (Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin; Berlin Biennial; Cabinet, London; Kunstverein Hamburg; Witte de With, Rotterdam).

The intricating of life and work, the raw experiments with their environment and the photographic form challenge and nourish each other. Their oeuvre stands as an important document of an era. It reflects on the aspirations of a generation torn between an ecstatic sense of the possible and its permanent capture by a new layer of digital economy. Their intense involvement with the art scene of Berlin installed them as singular protagonists in the artistic landscape of a city that emerged as an international hub for contemporary art and a fertile environment for the new service economy.

Their work can be perceived as an allegory of the historical moment where gentrification and precarisation form both sides of the same coin.



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Times Athens*, 2012



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Nudes In Tanya Leighton's Storage*, 27 April - 30 June 2013

Exhibition content

The exhibition in Fri Art is structured around successive rooms that assemble series of photographic works produced by the artists between 2010 and 2020. The whole building is dedicated to the exhibition. A special room, midway through the exhibition, will present paratextual material related to the theater work, co-productions and the community of artists Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff associate with. The exhibition also welcome the creation of new benches by the artists as well as an original new series of photographs, presented in the basement of the building, relating to the transformation and homogenization of Berlin's architecture.

The Photographic Series

A curated selection of Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff's most emblematic photographic series forms the core of the exhibition. The artists reinvest the medium to negotiate some of its key terms anew in a historical moment dominated by the internet, gentrification, and emotional exhaustion. Their creative use of analog photography allows them to play with a variety of styles associated with it: the documentary, the amateur and the commercial. Frequently, elements of the image indicates traces of the present moment. The photographs often portray people obliquely, in part or obscured. They often focus on the objects, spaces and material agencies surrounding them, infrastructures that discretely modulate the desire and aspiration of the social subject. Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff negotiate astutely the conceptual and material legacy of the captured image and its codes, questioning our beliefs and the affective exploitation of the image under the dominant grip of our attention economy.



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Times Athens*, 2012



Installation view, Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *The Downer*, Berlin, 2020

Apartment III (2014)

The *Apartment III* series was produced at the time when Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff became interested in the way photography can be used “theatrically” as a site of projection and as a tool to both present and conceal. They took photographs of friends’ apartments in the style of Airbnb images – pictures of private apartments that are “exposed” to

a public and costumed for the camera. These photographs present the viewer with a clear task: to evaluate the space. It becomes a backdrop or a set for viewers to project themselves into, relying on an ingrained image-judgment system that is integral to websites like Airbnb.



Left: Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *They make it clear that their hospitality is not to be confused with generosity. The keys for Pontus, a business student visiting from Munich, are left at the Portuguese ceramic shop next door. This is standard procedure, this is simply a matter of funding the theater*, 2014

Right: Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Their labor meetings are held by accident, if at all, in the Irish Pub at Schoenefeld Airport. A central place for the decentralized they joke, sipping tomato soup with plastic spoons*, 2014

Times Athens (2012)

Times Athens, a series of photographs Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff took of themselves in Athens in February 2012. The series was spurred by ongoing conversations overheard at the bar about the means of artistic livelihood in Berlin, paired with an ostensibly bottomless pining for the next city with cheap studio space. In a time when German-enforced austerity measures against Greece hardened, Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff framed their project against the backdrop of Athens as the symbolic birthplace of European democracy.

Looking for hotels that advertised rooms with a view of the Acropolis or the Hellenic parliament, they gained access to these prized vantage points by passing themselves as fashion photographers from Berlin.



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Times Athens*, 2012

Receipts (2013)

One room in the exhibition is dedicated to a photographic series depicting artists, all friends of Henkel and Pitegoff, doing their taxes. If these artists are recognizable at all, however, it's only through the works' titles, for instance *Marlie, Berlin, Spring 2013* and *Yngve, Berlin, Spring 2013*, as each are represented only by the edge of their shoulder or the tip of their elbow leaning over a table. The focal points of the images are the tables themselves, which are littered with receipts,

ticket stubs for airplanes and trains to places like Basel, empty coffee cups, and pastry crumbs. Warm lighting lends a serene ambience to an otherwise frustrating and quite literally taxing activity. Through these images, Henkel and Pitegoff home in on the precarity of a project-based lifestyle and the evolving ennui of everyday logistics that comes with being an artist in a rapidly gentrifying city.



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Nicolas, Berlin, Spring 2013*, 2013



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Marlie, Berlin, Spring, 2013*, 2013

The selection of photographs from the *Machine II* (2017) series show people reading German newspapers at the Bierhaus Berlin, a pub that has been open continuously 24/7 for the past thirty years. In 2017, the artists had their studio in the pub's backroom. The series also comprises photographs of Washington D.C shot on the weekend of the firing of former FBI Director James Comey. The texts carved into the federal building's limestone facades read like a scripted dialogue between architecture, the buildings' inner workings obscured and further abstracted through language.



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Cut 3, Band 3* (US Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington DC), 2017



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Cut 3, Band 2* (*Bild, Bierhaus Urban*), 2017

Spree (2016/2019)



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Spree (Wilhelmine-Gemberg-Weg)*, 2016/2019



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Spree (Michaelbrücke II)*, 2016/2019

Glasses (2014/2020)



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *not yet titled* / glasses, 2014/2020



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Stack 1*, *New Theater*, 2014

Bars, Theater and the Community

Between 2010 and 2020, Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff ran various venues that became central to the growing international artistic community of Berlin. At Times Bar (2011-2012), a bar which was operated in collaboration with Lindsay Lawson, artists were invited to hang their work above the counter while the space was open, thus turning the patrons into an audience for the act of installation.

A hectic production of plays done in collaboration with other writers, performers, musicians of their generation were performed at the New Theater in Berlin-Kreuzberg, a venue Henkel and Pitegoff were in charge of between 2013 and 2015, and during their residency at Volksbühne, Grüner Salon, in 2018. The plays themselves use realist satire to comment on the living in a gentrified city. They reference decadent cabaret and musical in the best tradition of German theater, or anti-theater.

New Theater and Grüner Salon challenged art to work in interdisciplinarity, in the vein of the amateur, and outside of professionalized channels of exhibition. It aimed to be a site of self-inspection and renewed self-presentation within a highly professionalized Berlin art community.

Since 2019, the artists relocated to Potsdamerstrasse 151 to open TV, a new bar hosting performance and music evenings. The bar has become a stage for the artists' most recent video production, a sitcom that will air in various bars in cities where the artists are exhibiting this coming year (Marseille Manifesta; Fri Art Kunsthalle...).

The program of the bar can be found on: www.t-v.city.



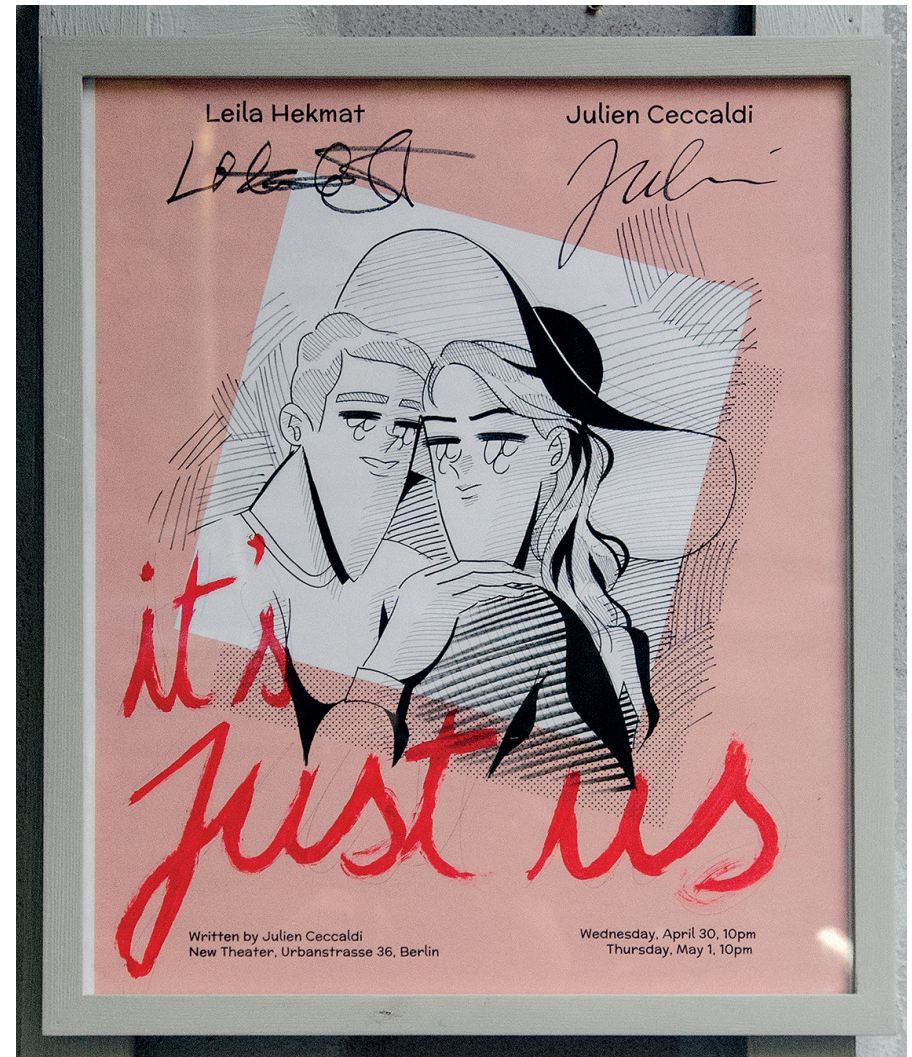
Poster from New Theater

Some collaborators and artists at the New Theater (writing, sets and actors):
Patrick Armstrong, Vittorio Brodmann, Julien Ceccaldi, Skye Chamberlain, Simon Denny, Mia Goyette, Georgia Gray, Leila Hekmat, Lena Henke, Yngve Holen, Karl Holmqvist, Klara Liden, Matthew Lutz-Kinoy, Tobias Madison, Kaspar Mueller, Emanuel Rossetti, Lucie Stahl, Tobias Spichtig, Megan Francis Sullivan, Jean-Michel Wicker, Dena Yago, Maximilian Zentz Zlomovitz

In the exhibition in Fri Art, one room is dedicated to the social aspect of the artists' practice, mostly through a presentation of their theater activity and the building of communities. Rather than presenting archives of events that were made to be experienced live, the material on display consists of paratextual production, often created by colleagues and friends. Theater posters, trailers of pieces, theater backdrop form a corpus that animates the exhibition space. They construct the image of an art scene at a given time, testifying for the collective dimension of its production, of its existence.



Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff, *Paradise*, 2020. TV show



Poster from New Theater



Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff, *Farming in Europe*, theater play (stage), 2013. Backdrop painting by Vittorio Brodmann

Exhibition Benches

Six new benches will be produced by the artists specially for the survey exhibition. Connecting the minimalism with standardized homogenic environmental design, the benches enact the crossroad of the functional and the sculptural. They resonate with a practice situated within social and exhibition spaces, underlining the ambiguity of the semi-public state of the exhibition space. Covered with ceramic tiles, the sculptures act as supports for social and economic interactions. They manifest the attention given to mobility and body circulation, yet have an open function. They serve as seats for the visitors, but may as well be activated and serve as platforms or as stages.



The first monographic publication to this decade

The survey exhibition will give birth to the first monographic catalogue dedicated to this decade of works. The publication will be divided in three main chapters; photographs reproductions, a critical apparatus, the theater play scripts. It will be richly illustrated with color reproductions, accompanied by an in-depth interview of the artists conducted by Nicolas Brulhart and Fabrice Stroun and an introductory text by guest writer and curator David Bussel. It is designed by Dan Solbach, and co-edited by Fri Art Kunsthalle. It will be launched in March 2021.



Recent monographic catalogues produced by Fri Art. From left to right: Gene Beery, *Life!*, 2015, (ed. Fri Art Kunsthalle, Mousse Publishing) and *The Anti-Museum*, 2017, (ed. Fri Art Kunsthalle, König Books London), winner of the «Most Beautiful Swiss Books» Award in 2017.

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