

Six artists lay down trails in the Artists' Bar at Cabaret Voltaire, leading in various directions. The exhibition “The Red Herring” named after the English expression for a false or misleading clue, plays not only with distraction but also with ambiguity and the expectations we place on contemporary art and the historical birthplace of Dada. This site is visited daily by tourists, the art scene, and random passersby – some hoping to discover treasures from the last century, despite the space undergoing modifications over time. The artists' traces deliberately steer away from straightforward interpretations but always lead back to Dada, to the history of the site, to their own artistic practices, and to the concepts linked with the idea of an art tavern – both generally and in relation to this specific place: the Cabaret Voltaire was founded in 1916 on the upper floor, known as Holländerstübli of the Dutch Dairy, a meeting spot where beer and wine were served and where the old sailor Jan Ephraim occasionally offered fish, as newspaper ads from 1915 in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* attest.

The Dadaists opened the Cabaret Voltaire during the First World War, initially as the “Künstlerkneipe Voltaire” – artists' tavern Voltaire –, as a space for artistic and intellectual exchange. The exhibition background recalls the atmosphere of this same venue, as seen in a 1940 photograph. Presumably, the interior was even more rustic in the 1916 tavern; it remains unclear to what extent the “Swissness” of the working-class and entertainment district at time interacted with the internationality and diversity of the Dadaists and the owner. Today's Artists' Bar embraces these references and expands them with contemporary practices and questions. This is reflected not only in the diverse works of the artists but also in the carved words and phrases on the wooden structure – a common characteristic of taverns and historic sites, stemming from the desire to leave a mark behind. Here, banal statements sit alongside serious thoughts and demands, much like a social media feed where everyday life and politics coexist problematically side by side. The works and inscriptions will remain until the summer of 2025. Who knows what the world will look like then at this place, which once stood as a symbol of resistance against militarism, authoritarianism, and war and advocated for international solidarity as well as new societal and artistic forms.

Camille Lütjens, Carlo Travaglia, Elena Barmpla, Ice Wong Kei Suet, Laura Nan and Stéphane Nabil Petitmermet are currently completing their master's degrees at the Zurich University of the Arts. The Dadaists themselves were also in their early twenties when they founded the Cabaret Voltaire – some still students, while others, such as Sophie Taeuber-Arp, were already affiliated with the institution now known as ZHdK. In its aim to integrate emerging artists at the beginning of

their careers alongside established and historical figures, the Cabaret Voltaire has invited these six up-and-coming artists to collaboratively shape the Artists' Bar, reinterpreting it through their individual practices while echoing the history of the site.

Camille Lütjens

Camille Lütjens explores the complex interplay between authenticity and deception, as well as legacy and expectation, in her series *Spam Junk Dialog* and the work *Bar Sign (Kunst Kneipe Voltair)*, while always reflecting on the medium of painting itself. The series *Spam Junk Dialog* features tavern chairs whose wooden surfaces are adorned with image transfers of postcard motifs from the lives of Dadaists. These faded images evoke memories of a bygone era, depicting, for example, Sophie Taeuber-Arp's childhood home or the gravestone of Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in Ticino. Overpaintings in a Dadaist collage style incorporate motifs, inspired by the Dadaists Jean Crotti, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Francis Picabia and Kurt Schwitters, emphasizing the fragility of memory and transformation. A striking red “491” playfully references Picabia's “391,” which appears frequently in his drawings and alludes to the art journal *291*. Each backrest becomes a wall for a painting reflecting a past era, while each chair serves as a starting point for new communication.

Bar Sign (Kunst Kneipe Voltair) humorously plays with the bar's name and the arrangement of the letters, with the missing “E” evoking an airline logo (“kneipe volt'Air”). A painted note reading “take a break” in trompe-l'œil style references the neon signs of trendy cafés with their seemingly empty phrases, which can take on double meanings depending on emphasis, inviting visitors to take a break in the tavern. On the back of the work, deliberately staged errors in the canvas stretching suggest an appearance of authenticity – a subtle nod to the staged intimacy and genuineness of art.

Carlo Travaglia

Carlo Travaglia combines his exploration of Christian themes and spirituality in *Rito decimo (Alexander Immanuel)* while highlighting the lesser-known religious side of Hugo Ball, co-founder of the Cabaret Voltaire. The depicted deer head refers to the representation of the deer found in certain Christian traditions, as the reincarnation of Christ after his return and triumph over sin.

Next to the animal head is a quote from “Flight Out of Time,” Ball's diary-like work, which begins with a reflection by Augustine. Text fragments rendered in ash from this work are embedded in the deer's nose. These visib-

le and invisible citations refer to Ball's spiritual journey from anarchist and anti-capitalist ideas, as well as from Nietzsche inspired nihilism, to Christian mysticism and Catholicism. Influenced by Church Fathers such as Augustine, Ball found in religion a source of moral and spiritual renewal. For him, art became a bridge to the invisible, an expression of the spiritual crisis of modernity, and a path to inner contemplation.

Travaglia chose soap to cast the head, an unconventional material that also references Ball's description of Dada as "the finest lily soap in the world" in his Dada Manifesto. The sculpture further draws on the rustic aesthetics of Swiss pub culture, where animal heads traditionally adorn walls as trophies and symbols of triumph over nature or as references to local flora and fauna.

With his sculpture, Travaglia creates an intricate depiction of themes such as purification, sin, and faith, where chaos and order, structure and devotion converge – a blend that cites both Dada and Ball's spiritual legacy.

Elena Barmpa

Elena Barmpa's works operate as an interplay of language, materiality, aesthetics, and space. Embracing the poetic, paradoxical essence of Dada without directly quoting it, the work develops a language that defies categorization. The narrative thread unfolds through three sculptures and two manifestos, engaging in a loose dialogue. Her native Greek language, traced and decoded in material and technique, is integrated into the sculptures mostly as marble fragments.

These fragments frame wings at the entrance that evoke Hermes, Nike, or Eros, resting beneath an ambivalent metallic shape that resembles a sun. Near the staircase, we meet a different pick-up on the same sun symbolism. This time complemented by traces of ash and smoke marks, indicating more of a burn or an afterglow. The recurring sun motif refers both to archaic symbols and C.G. Jung's concept of libido as life energy. Inside the tavern, on a wooden table, the third work consists of leather circles with burned-in alchemical symbols, tarot motifs and characters, reminiscent of fortune-telling ephemera or beer coasters, inviting personal narratives. Barmpa's sculptural approach reflects the structure of her poetry; her sculptures combine and contrast materials – marble with wax, metal with ash – in a way that mirrors the interwoven references and rhythm of her verses. By juxtaposing opposites and tensions, she opens a space for ongoing narratives, free from dogma, echoing Tristan Tzara's statement: "I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things and in principle I am against manifestos, as I am also against principles" (Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918"). This approach is not a refusal but an invitation on constructing new meanings and scoring oxymora, a conjunction of contradictory terms.

Ice Wong Kei Suet

In her conceptual work *Condition Check on "The Red Herring"*, *Artists' Bar at Cabaret Voltaire*, Ice Wong Kei Suet explores various traces within the Cabaret Voltaire. With a background in contemporary art conservation,

the artist employs the process of condition checking – a method typically used in collection care and art logistics – to examine and reflect on the space, the objects created by her peers, and her own body. This process creates a close and caring connection between her and the elements of the space, enabling her to uncover the stories embedded in these objects, spaces and bodies, and to make care and attention tangible through an artistic practice.

Wong Kei Suet also connects to the tradition of maintenance performances, particularly the accentuation of invisible care work behind the display in an institutional context. Her presentation incorporates elements of conceptual art, embracing its affinity for copies, bureaucratic displays, and meticulous, obsessive repetitions, all of which are evident in her detailed reports. The reports serve as definitive evidence of the current moment, offering an enduring documentation to guide forthcoming decision-making and interpretation. Parts of the work are performed; the opening is marked by a three-hour performance during the vernissage.

Her work also engages in dialogue with the expectations and questions visitors bring to this historic site, such as inquiries about the events of 1916 and their legacy. The patina on the walls, bearing traces of different eras, illustrates how norms and forms have evolved over time – and invites reflection on the role of institutions and the responsibility of preserving cultural heritage. Through her careful examination and report, the traces of the historical space become the central protagonists.

Laura Nan

Inspired by her shared Romanian heritage with the Dadaists Tristan Tzara and the Janco brothers, Laura Nan explored the interior design of traditional Romanian taverns. These taverns were often arranged like parts of domestic spaces or even located within a home. Porcelain plates, framed by intricate embroidery, frequently adorned the walls, with patterns varying by region – for instance, the embroidery from Moinești, Tzara's hometown in the Moldavian region, is known for its vivid colors.

Laura Nan pondered how such souvenirs might have found their way into an international tavern, existing in an environment that rejected borders and nationalist thinking. Rather than simply displaying traditional crafts, Nan created her own interpretation. Her work is not merely an engagement with Dada and the migration experiences of its members but also a reflection on her own history and the meaning of home as a feeling and a place. For Nan, home is closely tied to childhood memories and summers spent in her grandmother's village, which is a common association for many generations sharing a similar heritage. In Zurich, she explores what it means to adapt to a new place while integrating elements of her original home. Her work is aptly titled *Granny Isn't Dead, Granny's Just Transforming*.

Instead of using traditional ornaments, Nan opted for crocheted beadwork in black, white and gold, with highly abstracted floral designs that create a connection to all regions of Romania. This approach references the modernist pursuit of reduction as a universal

language and geometric clarity, as seen in the works of Sophie Taeuber-Arp, merging craft with art.

Stéphane Nabil Petitmermet

Grapevine by Stéphane Nabil Petitmermet references the historical “Dada Hair Tonic” advertisement by the Bergmann & Co. company, which was present in Zurich at the time of the Cabaret Voltaire’s founding and is considered a possible origin of the name “Dada.” The painting deliberately plays with the colors and design elements of the original advertisement, while simultaneously questioning the function of publicity as a seductive and intrusive form of communication aimed at creating consumer desire.

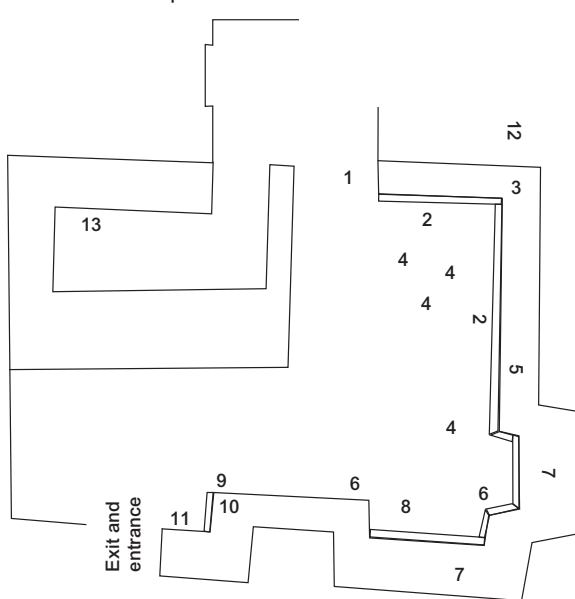
The decorative nature of the pattern is intentional, pointing to its origins as product advertising. However, by omitting brand names and slogans, the promoting logic is subverted, creating a new artistic context. The painted motifs are no longer generic; instead, each element becomes something unique, part of an artisanal oil painting. At the same time, the method of repetition reflects the avant-garde intent to challenge authenticity and singularity.

In this way, the painting oscillates between bourgeois conceptions of art, everyday consumerism, and subversive gestures. The pattern and repetition not only reference Dada but also draw on the tradition of patterns in Arab art, which is of particular interest to the artist, who has Lebanese roots. In Arab art, patterns often symbolize infinity and the divine. The title *Grapevine* refers to the expression “Hearing through the Grapevine,” a nod to the gossip surrounding the origin of the word Dada, and also plays with the rich symbolism of the grape, frequently associated with paradise and abundance. In the bar setting, however, the hair tonic bottle nestled among hair vines is more likely perceived as a liquor bottle.

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Künstler*innenkneipe / Artists' Bar



Erdgeschoss/Ground Floor

Glossary of the individual exhibits

1
Camille Lütjens
Painting
Bar Sign (Kunst Kneipe Voltaire), 2024
Oil on canvas
40 x 155 cm

2
Collective work
Wooden structure with scratchings
Bathroom Poetry, 2024
Wood
162 x 510 x 48 cm

3
Carlo Travaglia
Sculpture
Rito decimo (Alexander Immanuel), 2024
Glycerin casting with burnt fragments from Hugo Ball's "Flight Out of Time"
58 x 30 x 20 cm

4
Camille Lütjens
Chair series
Spam Junk Dialog, 2024
a) *Spam Junk Dialog (Trogen)*
b) *Spam Junk Dialog (Pirmasens)*
c) *Spam Junk Dialog (Lago Maggiore)*
d) *Spam Junk Dialog (cimitero di San Abbondio)*
Photo transfer, oil and lacquer on wooden tavern chairs
Each chair: 81 x 47 x 43 cm

5
Laura Nan
Sculpture series
Granny Isn't Dead, Granny's just transforming, 2024
Bead crochet and beads on plates
Each sculpture: 19 x 32 x 6 cm

6
Stéphane Nabil Petitmermet
Painting
Grapevine, 2024
Oil on wood
Left: 230 x 143 x 1 cm
Right: 231 x 104,5 x 1 cm

7
Collective work
Fish lamp
The Red Herring, 2024
Plexiglass and LED lights
Left: 59 x 88 x 1.5 cm
Right: 55 x 83 x 1.5 cm

8
Elena Barmpa
Series on tabletop
Untitled (from the Fortune-telling series), 2024
Leather, metal
Dimensions variable

9
Elena Barmpa
Manifestos
a) *Manifesting Manifesto: as seen through a crystal ball*, 2024
b) *Manifesto Grande: on suns, heat, temporalities, and the unbearable*, 2024
Paper
A3

10
Elena Barmpa
Sculpture and installation
Triple gaze, 2024
Marble, horseshoe nail, resin, metal
Dimensions variable

11
Ice Wong Kei Suet
Folder with condition report
Condition Check on "The Red Herring", Artists' Bar at Cabaret Voltaire, 2024
Mixed media (performance, condition reports printed on A4 paper, red binder)
Folder: 32 x 29 x 6 cm

12
Elena Barmpa
Sculpture and installation
Heat Haiku, 2024
Marble, birthday candles, matches, metal, graphite, wooden panels
69 x 66 x 34 cm

13
Collective work
Cocktail
Cherry Cherry Ephraim, 2024
Cherry Heering, dry sherry, tonic, Angostura, Mezcal, Red Band Original
Dutch quality (fish fruit jellies)

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Künstler*innenkneipe/
Artists' Bar

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