



(2003)
**Caroline Bourrit, Emilie Guenat,
 Kunsthaus Neverländ, Mai-Thu
 Perret**
15.02–13.04.25

This exhibition is part of CAN's 30th anniversary program.

Guided tour, Saturday 08.03.25, 2pm.

The artists and curators would like to thank the CAN team, Aurélie and Vanessa, Nicolas Eigenheer and Coline Houot, Julian Thompson and all those who have contributed to make CAN what it is today.

With the support of the City of Neuchâtel, Republic and Canton Neuchâtel, Loterie Romande, Famille Sandoz Philanthropic Foundation, Ernst & Olga Gubler-Hablützel Foundation et Georg und Josi Guggenheim Foundation.

The year 2025 marks CAN Centre d'art Neuchâtel's 30th anniversary, and to open this new program, the curatorial team has imagined an exhibition based on a particular moment in the art center's history: the year 2003.

2003 is a void in the CAN archives: no trace of an exhibition, no project, no accounts, nothing. Or almost nothing... One of the few remaining references to that year is an article in the March 18, 2004 edition of "Le Courrier" newspaper, announcing the reopening of the art center after a one-year sabbatical. The article noted that "all CAN staff worked on a voluntary basis"; according to the director at the time, Jean-Pierre Huguet, this "explains why we took a break last year.... We were all very tired." This sudden suspension of all activity due to general exhaustion challenged the current team.

The invitation to artists and curators Caroline Bourrit, Emilie Guenat, Mai-Thu Perret and the Kunsthaus Neverländ team was therefore as much introspective as it was entertaining, the idea being to draw inspiration from this breach in the past to imagine a work, a scenario or a particular approach linked to this past situation.

The exhibition *(2003)* was constructed as a dialogue between the guests around CAN's necessarily incomplete archives. This exchange of ideas calls into question the way we conceive our own history, the way we construct our memory and the choices we make today to tell our own story in the future, between what we agree to record for posterity and what we forget or deliberately choose not to tell.

0 Emilie Guenat
Energy cleansing / CAN / 2025, 2025¹
On the 8th of February 2025, an energy cleansing was carried out in all areas of CAN.

1 Mint green armchair
used at the CAN reception

2 Exponit BB paint^{II}
used on the CAN walls

3 Kunsthaus Neverländ
Paradise (2003, the year of organised silence), 2025^{III}
photographic montages and poster

Caroline Bourrit
Mesurer l'instant, 2025^{IV}
video editing, 5'38"

The artists and CAN
(2003), 2025
postcard, 250 pieces

4 Wooden chair repaired with black gaffer tape, beige cushion
used around the CAN office table

5 Caroline Bourrit
Tenir le vide, 2025^V
black and white slide film

I Archive: documents

II Blaise Parmentier, *Uriwave*, 2016
Archive: *Tomber sous le vent*, 22.02–10.04.2016

III Archive: report 2020-2025

"There are archives that are lost by accident, and others that are deliberately erased." Georges-André Lozouet, Spokesman for the Neuchâtel police force.

At the end of 2020, the Kunsthaus Neverländ (KN) was commissioned with a daring mission: to understand why the year 2003, at the Centre d'art Neuchâtel (CAN), remains submerged in orchestrated amnesia. Thanks to the support of Pro Helvetia and various investment banks wishing to remain anonymous, and the meticulous work of some twenty specialists - archivists, artists and historians - the truth is emerging beneath a thick layer of varnish.

This truth, however, is not revealed without resistance. In the course of their research, the KN teams discovered that, in 2003, there was a desire for history not to be written. After close contacts with the Neuchâtel police and an in-depth examination of the few remaining traces, a disturbing fact emerged: the CAN premises had been used to produce methamphetamine on an industrial scale.

Imposed silence: between crime and art

Far from being a simple institutional oversight, the absence of archives from 2003 seems to have been the result of a systematic desire to erase all traces. This emptiness is now interpreted as the symptom of a radical misuse of the premises: a contemporary art center transformed into a clandestine drug-making laboratory.

1. Physical evidence:

- Detailed views of the remaining cantonal police archives suggest the presence of advanced chemistry equipment, carefully concealed in the CAN spaces.
- Certain objects, such as the mysterious "restes orange" attributed to Fabrice Gygi, take on a whole new meaning in the light of these revelations.

2. Cryptic testimonials:

- Collaborators from the period speak of "experimental" practices in CAN's basements and main premises, under the guise of artistic projects.
- Postcards and slides found on site show ambivalent scenes, oscillating between traces of artistic performance and chemical documentation.

An art project or a cover-up?

The revelations surrounding 2003 are not limited to a criminal scandal. They raise fundamental questions that remain unanswered:

- Can art be an alibi for unspeakable practices?
- Where does institutional legitimacy end when the artistic framework is manipulated?
- Was this drug trafficking intended to finance the excessive lifestyle of the CAN management (plane tickets to Malé, vacation souvenirs and luxury perfumes were seized during the police investigation in 2003-2004)?
- And, above all, why such silence?

"2003 is no longer just a forgotten year. It becomes a tipping point, where the real and the imaginary merge." Christopher B., Director of Kunsthaus Nerverländ

IV SMPTE color bar test pattern, CAN inauguration video
Archive: *Is it Nice?*, 12.03–14.05.1995

V Archive: unknown, note accompanying the slide film

Standing with your hands 30 centimeters apart, you look at the gap between them. Carefully, you lift it up, your arms suspended. The void has settled, it takes up all the space. The glass circumvents its limits, bearing witness to the lack: the tangle of nothing and expectation, a potpourri of absences. The eye is lost in the oscillation of an image. Inside, everything that happens when nothing happens. The void overflows into a floating world, and in the hollow of your hands, the possibility of a breathing.

6 Mai-Thu Perret
27 Canal Street/Year of the Goat, 2003^{VI}
collage and gouache on paper, framed
courtesy of the artist

7 Model of the exhibition rooms
used to set up CAN exhibitions

8 Light therapy lamp
used by former CAN team member Marie Villemin and current CAN team member Martin Jakob

9 Ashtray bin^{VII}
stored in the CAN attic

10 ERREX shelf
used for the CAN archives

11 Emilie Guenat
Archiving 2025 / CAN / 30 years, 2025^{VIII}
disposable cameras

12 Caroline Bourrit
Résonner l'oubli, 2025^{IX}
stereo soundtrack, 35'28"

13 Table
used by the CAN team from 1995 to 2017

Emilie Guenat
Portrait / CAN / (2003), 2025^X
Weekly meals

14 Caroline Bourrit
Dépouiller le manque (2003), 2025^{XI}
Binder of newspaper articles

15 Green foam protection, orange tarpaulin and strap^{XII}
unused

16 Floor plan in French
used in the CAN exhibition (2003)

17 Floor plan in English
used in the CAN exhibition (2003)

VI Archive: email of 14 January 2025

Mai-Thu made this drawing while she was living in New York when she attended the Whitney Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art. With two friends, Fabrice Stroun and Daniel Baumann, she organized a series of exhibitions in her apartment at 47 Canal Street (the address on the drawing). This drawing was intended as a layout for a poster to advertise this series of exhibitions. In the end, the poster was never produced, nor did the exhibitions actually take place. So this poster is also a fiction in itself. The image in the center represents an old bourgeois interior and not a real image of Mai-Thu's apartment in which these exhibitions should have taken place, it is also pure fiction, a fantasy. This image is taken from the review *Tiqqun* which was a French-Italian post-Marxist anarchist philosophical review, published in two issues, in February 1999 and October 2001. The topics covered in the review's articles include anti-capitalism, anti-statism, situationism, feminism and the history of revolutionary movements of the late twentieth century, in particular May 1968 in France, the Italian Years of Lead and the anti-globalization protests of the late 1990s and early 2000s. This drawing therefore bears witness to exhibitions held in 2003 that did not really take place, or at least not in public.

VII Jonathan Monk, *No Smoke Without Fire*, 1997
Archive: *Anything by the Smiths*, 27.03–24.05.2015

VIII Archive: contract dated 8 January 2025

IX Exhibition video soundtracks
Archives: *Is it Nice?*, 12.03–14.05.1995 / *Mayday*, 14.11–22.12.1999 / *Land of Crystal*, Mai-Thu Perret, 18.11.2001–20.02.2002 / *Markus Kummer*, 07.11–18.12.2009

X Archive: contract dated 14 February 2025

XI Archive: (2003), 15.02–13.04.2025

XII Archive: unknown (supposedly *Fabrice Gygi / Claudia Schmid*, 27.03–11.05.1997)

