

WELL

BEINGS

valentina  
Karga

*Well Beings* is the name of artist Valentina Karga's installation, which confronts us with feelings of guilt, anger, and fear relating to the climate crisis. Climate anxiety — a chronic fear of environmental collapse — is becoming increasingly common. It can lead to nervousness, sleep disorders, panic attacks, and depression. A huge range of 'anti-stress' products promise relief: weighted blankets, body warmers (heat packs), and hug pillows are designed to alleviate stress disorders and soothe fears about the future. These products form the starting point of the exhibition, in which Valentina Karga interprets everyday 'self-care' products in her own unique way. She arranges her *Well Beings* as a spatial installation of textile sculptures and drawings. The shape and design of these works are inspired by small prehistoric idols made of marble and clay that Valentina Karga found in the antiquities collection of the Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe. Idols are ancient figures of abstract entities, mostly hybrids of humans and animals. These figures not only represent an important cultural heritage; they also symbolise the primeval connection between humans, animals, and nature. Using natural and recycled materials, the artist has created textile sculptures in the form of figures, shapes, and seating landscapes.

Contrary to what we might initially expect, we are only peripherally confronted with dramatic images of climate catastrophe in this exhibition. *Well Beings* is a warm space that approaches the topic with care and places people — community — at its heart.

29.03. – 31.08.2025

PREHISTORIC POSTHUMANS:  
A VISUAL STORYTELLING

Film, 12:26 min., 2023

In the 1970s, Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (1921–1994) interpreted small clay figurines from the Neolithic period as ‘earth goddesses’. Her research was based not only on archaeological finds, but also on folklore, mythology, and linguistics. Many of Gimbutas’s colleagues interpreted these depictions of bodies with oversized breasts, buttocks, or vulvas as fertility symbols, but she saw them as signs of a larger belief system invoked by prehistoric Europeans to make sense of the world. In this short film essay, Valentina Karga links the work of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas and draws a connection to her own speculative research on ‘Prehistoric Posthumans’: once upon a time, a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature was possible — and perhaps it is still possible today.

MURAL

Earthen pigments, charcoal, 2025  
24 × 3 m

Spanning almost 25 metres, the long wall opposite to the museum garden holds a mural by Valentina Karga that combines images of prehistoric idols with images of flood disasters in Greece and Germany. The paintings are inspired by the writings of the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas and her interpretation of the ‘Earth Goddesses’, and by the research of the scientist Panu Pihkala, who is concerned with understanding the emotions we feel in response to ecological crises such as climate change, and at the same time exploring the ways in which these emotions could be valuable to our lives (The Process of Eco-Anxiety and Ecological Grief, 2022). The mural is accompanied by bizarre clay creatures by the artist Ida Vaculková from the museum’s collection — four ceramics that symbolise the connection between man and nature: a woman on a donkey, an ‘earth goddess’, a strange horse and a leaf from a lily tree.

IDA VACULKOVÁ

Ceramics from the Kunstmuseum Bochum Collection

WOMAN ON A DONKEY

White clay glass, 1961

HORSE (CARNIVAL MASK)

Red clay, 1961

A LEAF FROM A LILY TREE

Smoked glass-ceramic, 1965–1970

UNTITLED

Ceramic, 1960s

IDA VACULKOVÁ (1920, Uherské Hradiště–2003, Uherské Hradiště) was a Czech ceramicist and sculptor. She primarily drew inspiration for her forms from antiquity, from the oldest myths of archaic art. In the early 1990s, the Kunstmuseum, then under the direction of Dr. Peter Spielmann, dedicated a comprehensive exhibition to her. Several works by the artist were consequently added to the museum’s collection, including a large number of ceramic pieces depicting surreal hybrid creatures. The world of nature, animals, and plants appealed to the artist. Using bizarre forms, she created poetic metaphors in an attempt to define the place of humans in nature and their environment. The ceramic works are instinctively reminiscent of prehistoric figures. Clay is and has always been the primary medium for the earliest human creativity and is also the main material used by Vaculková. Ceramic art was considered an important visual art form from prehistoric times through antiquity to the Renaissance and the Baroque period. It was not until the nineteenth century that ceramics were excluded from the fine arts; for a long time, they were labelled with the somewhat derogatory term ‘decorative arts’. Ida Vaculková held the opinion that art should accompany people throughout their everyday lives — an approach shared by Valentina Karga, who has selected four of Vaculková’s ceramic works from the Kunstmuseum collection for the exhibition and juxtaposed them with her *Well Beings*.

PSYCHOANALYSIS CHAISE LONGUE

Chaise longue, cotton, natural dyes, foam, wood, 2023  
2 × 1 × 0.8 m

The upholstered seat of this distinguished *Psychoanalysis Chaise Longue* is shaped like a prehistoric idol: with outstretched arms and a broad upper body, it provides support for you to immerse yourself in the unconscious. Psychoanalysis — a range of therapies that can be traced back to Sigmund Freud and are centred on the subconscious mind — has been a chosen method for treating problems such as depression and anxiety since the nineteenth century. Patients lie on a couch and talk while psychoanalysts listen to them. The *Psychoanalysis Chaise Longue* does not require a psychoanalyst. Take a seat!



### WEIGHTED BLANKET, 2023

Weighted blanket: cotton, natural dyes, sand, mattress, 2023

Studies have shown that weighted blankets can be helpful in relieving anxiety by supporting emotional and physical regulation. Weighted blankets can provide a feeling similar to a human hug: the gentle pressure exerted by one of these blankets on the (human) body can calm the nervous system and lower the heart rate. This weighted blanket features patterns inspired by various prehistoric idols.

### PLUSH PREHISTORIC POSTHUMANS

Cotton, natural dyes, wool, 2023

Dimensions variable

A series of miniature prehistoric idols from the antiquities collection of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (Hamburg) serve as the inspiration for these large and small, hand-sewn and dyed plush idols. Cuddly toys are known to reduce feelings of stress in children (and adults) and are consequently also used in the therapeutic treatment of anxiety and depression.

### DOOMSCROLL

Video, 16:57 min., 2023

News about climate change runs in an endless loop on the oversized mobile phone display. 'Doomscrolling' refers to the habit of consuming terrible news via social media, which draws phone users into a spiral of constantly refreshing negative information about global tragedies, disasters, and crises. Studies have linked this behaviour to increased feelings of anxiety. At the same time, the sheer flood of negative news relating to climate change leads to a kind of denial of reality, inertia, and exhaustion.

### HUG SOFA

Used sofa, cotton, natural dyes, foam, 2023

3x1x2 m

The *Hug Sofa* is a comfortable place to sit and watch *Doomscroll*. The repurposed and recycled sofa has been reupholstered with natural cotton and coloured with plant-based dyes, such as eucalyptus leaves collected by the artist in her home town in Greece. Attached to the sofa are sewn elements reminiscent of statues and images of prehistoric idols. It remains unclear whether they can be considered as entirely human, or whether they are part of a much more complex entity... Anyone who takes a seat on the sofa falls into the embrace of this hybrid being.



Female idol (Hama type), first third of 2nd millennium BC, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, public domain, online: <https://www.mkg-hamburg.de/object/mkg-e00131557>

### BODY WARMER STATION

Heating pads, table, microwave, 2023

Heat therapy is a traditional method of pain relief. Here, a microwave and a series of small body warmers are available for your use. The cloth sacks filled with grape seeds represent fragments of prehistoric idols or their entire bodies. If you like, you can heat one of them in the microwave and carry it around the exhibition with you...



Phi idol, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, public domain, online: <https://www.mkg-hamburg.de/object/dc00125674>

### GROUP HUG, 2023

Cotton, natural dyes, carpet, 2023

Ø 4 m

Collective experience ideally encourages collective action. In *Group Hug*, you can relax on hand-sewn cushions — individually or in the company of others. The oversized cushions are scattered in a circular area, a space that is symbolically free of hierarchies and open for exchange. The cushions were coloured with dyes derived from plants such as logwood, eucalyptus, and common madder on natural cotton. Their shapes represent the body of a prehistoric phi idol from the artist's homeland, Greece. In Valentina Karga's speculative fiction, these prehistoric idols are promises of a world in which nature and culture, humans and non-humans coexist in harmony. A new,

collective body emerges from the abstraction of these figures, which have been fragmented and disassembled so that they are no longer bound to a single body.



Phi idol, late 15th/14th century BC, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, public domain, online: <https://www.mkg-hamburg.de/object/doi00126277>

ADAPTATION

Film, 116:09 min., 2023

In the video installation *Adaptation*, Valentina Karga and her colleagues play a live-action role-playing game (LARP) that tells a non-verbal story about climate anxiety in three chapters: (I) ‘Climate Anxiety’; (II) ‘Adaptation’; and (III) ‘A New Way of Existence’. LARP is a popular form of role-playing game in which the participants themselves physically adopt the role of a character and improvise a story together. In *Adaptation*, the protagonists imagine a new way of approaching the dysfunctional coexistence between humans and nature.

Valentina Karga in collaboration with:

Polyxeni Angelidou (choreography), Nina Runa Essendrop (LARP design), Lukas Grubba and Sarah Pech (film and editing), För Künkel (costumes), Junya Fujita (sound), and HFBK Hamburg University of Fine Arts students (players): Maren Stocklów, Anna Stapelfeldt, Inga Zhaivoronska, Ben Bakhshi, Alex Bruk, Tolani Abayomi, Oskar Bruheim, Zheming Li, Mo Walker, Mu-Heng Tsai, Rosa Thiemer, Yuting Chen, Folke G. Matthes, Priyanka Sarkar

VALENTINA KARGA (b. 1986 in Chalkidiki, Greece) oscillates between the disciplines of art, design, architecture, and research. Her work combines elements of sociopolitical praxis with experiments that challenge existing social and physical frameworks in the fields of energy, the economy, and sustainability. She works across different media and often invites an audience or community to literally complete her works. Sometimes real alternatives to the infrastructures and institutions that structure our reality emerge through dialogue and the DIY-style construction of prototypes. This is what she calls ‘art as simulation’. She is a founding member of Collective Disaster, an interdisciplinary group that works at the intersection between architecture and society, and starts a new role as professor at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design. She previously worked as a professor at HFBK Hamburg University of Fine Arts.

EXHIBITION AND MUSEUM TEAM

ARTIST  
Valentina Karga

CURATOR  
Julia Lerch Zajęczkowska

DIRECTOR  
Noor Mertens

DEPUTY DIRECTORS  
Eva Busch, Julia Lerch Zajęczkowska

EXHIBITION MANAGEMENT  
Jennifer Braun

EXHIBITION INSTALLATION AND JOINERY  
Andrea Grun, Jörg Mertens, Muhamet Beqiri, Frank Hellwig, Fion Pellacini

TECHNICAL SERVICES  
Erwin Golze

COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK  
Leonie Böhmer, Clara Stolz

GRAPHIC DESIGN  
Bart de Baets and Sandra Kassenaar with Kai Udemä

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME  
Eva Busch

ART EDUCATION  
Kerstin Kuklinski, Shasti (Andara Shastika)

ADMINISTRATION  
Frank Schorneck, Tim Quiter, Marie Kristin Hilger

VOLUNTARY SOCIAL YEAR (FSJ)  
Sara Manshöfer

APPRENTICE  
Marie Kristin Hilger

EVENTS  
Anja Schrader

ARCHIVE GRAPHICS AND DRAWINGS  
Peter Abramowski

BUILDING SERVICES  
Thomas Vieth, Uli Barnbeck

MUSEUM TICKET OFFICE AND CAFÉ  
Nicole Brandenburg, Arne Krauß, Zoja Morina

SUPERVISORY STAFF  
Anna Hanelt, Jolanta Hinzmann, Nicole Kaufmann, Astrid Liebert, Thorsten Menzel, Ahmet Methnani, TanjaMordau, Ewa Obst, Jörg Pfaffendorf, Helga Sklorz, Maxim Wagner

FREELANCE ART EDUCATORS  
Finnja Giesberts, Georgette Issa, Dr Elisabeth Kessler-Slotta, Nathalie Litzner, Alicia Madloch, Agnes Motz, Chiaki Nakaune, Alla Zhyvotova

*Well Beings* was previously on display at the Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (2023) and the Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken (2024/25). The exhibition is supported by: