



Basement Art Assembly Biennial

BAAB_Issue 00

Curated by Ilaria Marotta and Andrea Baccin

September 10–November 06, 2025

Basement Art Assembly Biennial (BAAB) is a non-profit organization founded by CURA. and conceived to make a glitch between the institutional dynamics of the art system, and an underground and experimental world, which alludes to the freedom to define new worlds.

Conceived and curated by Ilaria Marotta and Andrea Baccin, founding directors of CURA., in dialogue with an Advisory Board composed of Nicolas Bourriaud, Jean-Max Colard, Simon Denny, Anthony Huberman and Lumi Tan, BAAB_Issue 00 is set within the limited confines of Basement Roma—a liminal and self-sustaining exhibition space, founded by CURA. in 2012—, and is intended as a moving organism, a performing space called to change over time, until it becomes a single body and a choral and collective experience. The first draft of a “self-styled biennial” thus presents itself with its own limitations and questions with respect to an ever-changing world, in which to nurture a new critical thought, and activate energies, connections, experimentations, languages, and a new sense of community. In an era in which everything tends towards overexposure, Basement Art Assembly Biennial invites us to change perspective and look downwards because “underground is the new institution.”

BAAB_Issue 00 is intended as a political act that outlines, highlights, and reveals. The assembly, as a contemporary agora, means debate, exchange, common sense. It is a site of meaning read in the controversial relationship between theater and manifesto, or the act of making visible, highlighting, manifesting. It is the moment in which the passage from being in an individual form to being in a collective form occurs.

Like every shared moment, the ritual is marked by the repetition of the event, hence a biennial, which allows the necessary time to consolidate, regenerate, retake shape, through a normal cycle of refoundation of the group: new art tribes—as Achille Bonito Oliva would call them—that in addition to intellectual affinities are nourished by sociality, by being together and by a collective regeneration.

The list of participating artists includes: Davide Balula (1978), James Bantone (1992), Cecilia Bengolea (1979), Hannah Black (1981), Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley (1995), Vittorio Brodmann (1987), Claudia Comte (1983), Jeremy Deller (1966), Gina Fischli (1989), Gina Folly (1983), Calla Henkel (1988) / Max Pitegoff (1987),

Carsten Höller (1961), Karl Holmqvist (1964), David Horvitz (1988), Than Hussein Clark (1981), Mark Leckey (1964), Nyala Moon (1992), Valentin Noujaïm (1991), Puppies Puppies (Jade Guanaro Kuriki-Olivo) (1989), Selma Selman (1991), Tobias Spichtig (1982), Nora Turato (1991), Women’s History Museum (Mattie Baringer, 1990 / Amanda McGowan, 1990).

The Public and Performing Program includes: Cecilia Bengolea (1979), Alessandro Cicoria (1982), Crack Reading Club (since 2021), DIS (since 2011), Francesco Urbano Ragazzi (2008), Invernemuto (Simone Bertuzzi, 1983 / Simone Trabucchi, 1982), Ilaria Mancia, Lily McMenemy (1994), Michele Rizzo (1984), Selma Selman (1991), Martha Kirszenbaum (1983).

The Rotating Works Program includes: Elisabetta Benassi (1966), Diego Gualandris (1993), Lorenzo Silvestri (1999), Nicola Pecoraro (1978), Gianni Politi (1986).

A social dinner called to involve the community of participating artists, around a cooking session, will conclude the exhibition.

The exhibition is accompanied by a newspaper published by CURA. which includes texts by the curators, Nicolas Bourriaud, Anthony Huberman, Lumi Tan, Jean-Max Colard, with work descriptions edited by Costanza Paissan. A second chapter of the newspaper will be published at the end of the Public Program and will collect documentation of all the interventions. Guided Tour

BAAB was born out of an ongoing conversation about basements with Anthony Huberman, now artistic director of the John Giorno Foundation in New York. The idea of a “basement biennial” came from those discussions and developed alongside his own research into underground spaces.

We’ve actually been based in basements since 2009. Our first space was a mix of editorial office and exhibition space in Via Nicola Ricciotti. In 2023, we moved here, into this former garage basement, which we restored after years of abandonment. Being in a garage also connects us to the history of art in Rome—from Kounellis’ horses at the Attico in 1969 to Bonito Oliva’s *Contemporanea* in the underground parking of Villa Borghese in 1973. As Huberman writes in his text for the exhibition, being “basement-based” is a state of mind. He reminds us that basements aren’t usually

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made for people—and that’s exactly what makes them spaces where anything is possible.

The two main themes of this edition can so be summarized in the title of our text: Underground Assemblies and New Tribes. The idea of “tribes” connects us to another important exhibition by Achille Bonito Oliva, *Le tribù dell’arte, The Tribes of Art* (2001). On the other hand, the idea of the “assembly”—seen as a kind of contemporary agora—speaks to the need for new spaces where we can come together, share ideas, and exchange experiences. In today’s world, including the art world, which often leans toward individualism, we believe it’s essential to create moments of connection and community. These gatherings can help shape a new kind of sociality—one built around shared values, creativity, and collective energy. That’s what we mean by “new tribes.”

The artists in this biennial are connected in different ways—through friendships, common experiences, shared media or languages, or through curatorial threads we’ve been exploring for years. Many of them are artists we’ve worked with before, and we’re excited to bring them together again here.

Artists have always shared spaces—studios, exhibitions, and sometimes... bars. From the Cedar Tavern in New York to the Mudd Club, bars have often been places where important artistic communities have formed. We’re now at the Times Bar in Berlin—a space created by Calla Henkel, Max Pitegoff, and Lindsay Lawson between 2011 and 2014. It became a hub for the local art scene and a meeting point for many artists in this exhibition, like Vittorio Brodmann, Tobias Spichtig, Lily McMenamy, Karl Holmqvist, and Simon Denny, who’s also on our Advisory Board.

That spirit of community and collaboration continues today—some of those artists are back, joined by others connected to Basement Roma. This will come to life in the Public Program, through a rotating series of works that move through the space, creating an ongoing exchange.

The theme of the agora—as a space for exchange and dialogue—brings us back to the idea of theater as a place of expression, of protest, and of self-declaration. Like a public square, it’s a space where the personal becomes political, and the private becomes public. It’s where we shape ourselves in relation to others, where we explore the open boundaries between the self and the collective.

This is something we see clearly in Hannah Black’s work *Politics (7 Color LED Display)* (2023). The piece invites us to reflect on how each person’s position—both physically and socially—shapes their experience of the world, and their ability to act politically within it to create change. Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley’s site-specific work (2025) focuses on the diversity of Black trans experiences, challenging the social structures we live in today. She creates a collection of powerful, reactive images as a direct response to recent anti-trans laws and the rise of far-right movements around the world. The viewer is not just a passive observer—they’re invit-

ed to engage, to question what they see, and to reflect critically on the images and the stories they tell. Puppies Puppies, known for taking part in the last Venice Biennale, also addresses Black trans rights. Her work here takes the form of an awareness campaign—using a gallery wall, posters for the public to take home, t-shirts in the shop, and billboards in public spaces. She clearly references the work of Félix González-Torres—known for his emotionally charged conceptual art—bringing it into the present and connecting it to trans rights today. Using a different tone, trans artist Nyala Moon explores trans marginalization in the U.S. Her short film *How Not to Date While Trans* (2022), first shown at the Whitney Biennial, uses humor and comedy to replicate a kind of dating reality show where she talks about rejection, isolation, and loneliness—mixing personal experience with broader reflections on gender identity. James Bantone drives the theme of the body as an image shaped by the dynamics of cultural reification and commodification, and highlights the blurred boundaries between the interpretative codes of the observer and the work. *Child’s Play 02* (2022) is a rag doll which was dismembered and sewn back together, and which in its fragile being displays its nudity in a childish yet allusive manner, playing with the ambiguity of the posture, featuring oversized clothing and counterfeiting the human figure. The 3D animation *Bestiaire* (2019) by Cecilia Bengolea also explores the idea of a fluid and changing body. In this work, the artist’s body goes through many distortions, creating a kind of catalog of imaginary creatures. The piece is inspired by Jorge Luis Borges’ research on fantastic animals and the idea of expanding the self. It explores the open boundaries of transformation and the possibility of becoming something else. Nora Turato’s work explores the complexities and contradictions of contemporary culture, using language and codes as her tools. Her voice becomes a performative instrument that formally channels how we express ourselves and communicate. For the piece shown at BAAB, part of her new body of work, Turato presents an audio installation that focuses on non-verbal expression, leaving behind written text. Through deep sighs and fast breathing, the work explores conflicting energies—anxiety, calm, and ecstasy—creating an immersive environment where the audience can connect with the artist’s emotions. Language also plays a central role in the work of Karl Holmqvist. Words, repeated or remembered like patterns, take on new meanings beyond their definitions. For the Basement Art Assembly Biennial, the walls are covered with posters displaying the text of Holmqvist’s latest publication, *Berlin Trilogy PART I*. This piece reworks lyrics from artists like David Bowie, Lou Reed, and Nina Hagen, among others, to comment on the state of the world today. The result is a wall of thoughts—a backdrop where repeated phrases may echo in the minds of viewers. In the cinema section of the exhibition, the role of music and dance as spaces of collective freedom, cultural identity, and social resistance is explored. The film *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999) by Mark Leckey celebrates the energy of British youth subcultures from the 1970s to the 1990s, using experimental editing to convey the raw power of a collective phenomenon that defies categorization. With *Everybody in The Place* (2018), Jeremy Deller retraces the history of acid house and

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rave culture in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s, presenting them as forms of collective catharsis and resistance to political and economic change, through archival footage, oral histories, and historical context. Cecilia Bengolea, in *Shelly Belly Inna Real Life* (2020), explores Jamaican dancehall as a universal and community-based language, shaped through an immersive experience between Kingston and Bog Walk. In *Pacific Club* (2023), Valentin Noujaïm tells the story of the iconic nightclub in Paris's La Défense district, frequented by members of the Arab diaspora, as a place for building identity and resisting urban marginalization. Music and rituals are also at the core of *Elvis and Tina (Wedding)* (2025) by Selma Selman, a video footage that anticipates the main themes of the artists' artistic practice: collective experiences, rituals, and the cultural codes of the Roma community, to which the artist belongs—often existing outside traditional social norms. Shot in an amateur style and shown on an old hantarex, the video documents her brother's wedding—a day of celebration, intimacy, and community, marked by shared food, music, and dance. Far from folkloric nostalgia or stereotypes, the work reveals cultural identity as a dynamic and transformative force, capable of generating new perspectives and interpretations.

Finally, in the *Sonorama* 'room' in the space, curated by Ruggero Pietromarchi, three musicians (Dr Pit, CCL, Car Culture) have created themed playlists for the Times Bar, designed to accompany different moments of the day.

On the counter of the *Times Bar*, a small ashtray full of cigarette butts by Gina Fischli suggests the feeling of a busy bar or a lonely, stressed smoker. In her work, even trash becomes emotional, bringing back memories and personal images.

A small painting by Vittorio Brodmann, made during his residency at the Swiss Institute in Rome, is placed in a quiet, suspended corner. We chose to show it here as a connecting point between the works of Cecilia Bengolea and the Women's History Museum (WHM). Brodmann's painting gives a feeling of stillness and dream, where human and animal worlds live together. Like Bengolea shows transformation, here there is peaceful coexistence. The work of Women's History Museum also talks about the relationship between humans and animals, especially through anthropomorphism—giving human qualities to non-humans. The artists, who are also fashion designers, want to reshape the female figure, freeing it from cultural and social exploitation. Women's and animals' bodies are often treated like products. WHM creates hybrid, symbolic characters using old clothes, found objects, and fabric scraps. These materials tell many stories and bring new meanings. Clothes become political and identity symbols, showing resistance and transformation.

Claudia Comte created a big wall painting for the show, like a stage backdrop. It shows a digital-style natural landscape, painted directly on the wall. Wavy lines move like separate identities that later come together as one collective body.

The portraits by Tobias Spichtig show a group of fluid, hybrid characters that live in the space and create a new idea of coexistence. The artist paints friends and people from the underground scene, celebrating their unique and diverse identities. Carsten Höller's *Pill Clock* marks time by releasing one small blue-and-white pill every three seconds. The pills fall on the floor during the exhibition, and visitors can even take one with water. It creates a connection between artwork and public, and a sense of trust. Davide Balula also invites the audience to participate with a special cocktail, made in collaboration with the Rome Sustainable Food Project at the American Academy in Rome. The drink is made with wild plants—like chicory, valerian, fennel, and fig—fermented and mixed with vodka. It is offered freely to visitors, as a gesture of sharing and trust. Balula also presents the performance *Screaming Humans* (2018–2025), where a loud, collective scream suddenly happens in the space. It is both shocking and emotional, expressing a shared feeling and marking time inside the exhibition. In the spirit of a joyful experience, Gina Folly's installation *Your heart is a museum* (2024) features 19 shiny metal spheres of different sizes, originally designed as toys for big cats and scattered across the space. As in much of her work, Folly transforms everyday objects to reveal their hidden poetry. The arrangement suggests movement and invites playful, dynamic interaction with the space.

To support this idea, Than Hussein Clark created director's chairs for visitors to use. Normally, these chairs have names of film crew members. Here, they are covered with magical, whispering texts from English and French songs, and repeat the name Ryan Murphy, the American TV producer known for his camp versions of queer stories and characters. Audience is also called to entering the space by bringing a plant. David Horvitz's project *Make a Garden Everywhere* wants to transform the ramp in a common garden made of plants. The artist invites visitors to bring a plant and to increase this common garden composed of a community of plants.

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