

Galerie für Gegenwartskunst, E-WERK

Nile Koetting, *Powerhouse*

21. September – 9. November 2025

In his solo presentation *Powerhouse*, Nile Koetting explores the mental structures of the optimisation society and electricity as its material basis in the age of techno-capitalism.

Modernity focuses strongly on what is possible, future and the yet not realised. This attitude has shaped thinking and action – first in Western society, and now in global society. The capitalist economy in particular thrives on the idea of growth and constant optimization. In our digital, AI-driven world, this drive for growth and acceleration seems to have reached its peak. Today, the limits of this growth logic are becoming abundantly clear, as evidenced in environmental destruction, climate emergency and exhaustion.

Nile Koetting understands *Powerhouse* as an 'energetic intervention'. With this term, he refers to his artistic method of using light and objects to create spaces for experience and reflection. With energetic intervention, the artist also highlights the exhibition venue: E-Werk, a former power station turned into a cultural centre that now supplies the city so to speak with artistic energy. E-WERK's historic control panel from 1902, which schematically depicted the city's former power supply infrastructure, appears fragmented in various of Koetting's works. In the drawing *interior 2* (10) in Gallery I, for example, the compass rose of the E-WERK control panel appears, applied by the artist's drawing robot. Animated photos of the E-WERK panel were used for the large video *control panel* (29) in Gallery II.

In the two exhibition rooms, Nile Koetting creates two different atmospheres that relate to each other like day and night or positive and negative. Comparable to the Impressionists, the artist uses impressions as an aesthetic means of representing our time. Through his choreography of impressions, he wants to capture and reveal the unconscious mental structures and often forgotten material foundations of our society that is fixated on growth and optimisation.

Gallery I

In the above-ground space, Nile Koetting works with light and bright impressions. A light atmosphere prevails here, enhancing the seductive power of the surfaces of his cute objects. Pastel colours, plexiglass and beige tones dominate. The colours are coordinated and appear harmonious at first glance. By presenting the exhibits in bright light, Koetting creates a distance that encourages reflection.

1 self optimization

At the entrance to the exhibition, visitors are greeted by a computer terminal and confronted with the theme of performance optimisation and surveillance. The fake machine, built by the artist himself, seduces us with its delicate mint green colour, rounded edges and humanising feet, intuitively drawing us into logging in and thoughtlessly entering the world of electronic data and functions.

Koetting deliberately mimics Apple's design language, which was consciously developed to control the interplay of technology, desire and everyday intimacy. By disappointing our intuitive desire with the fake object, Koetting triggers a shift that leads us to reflect on the seductive surface.

In preparation for *Powerhouse*, Koetting had a consulting firm review his artistic work to date for potential optimisation on the basis of a fictional future scenario.

In the video of **self optimisation** the consulting firm's analyses and findings are recorded as text messages and visualized as a target path from today to tomorrow in the form of a 'double diamond model' diagram.

The tutorial style, iMessage-inspired design and cosmologically oriented timeline make the technocratic instructions appear intimate, personal and easy to implement. The friendly interfaces downplay the disciplining power that these instructions exert over our behaviour.

2 kiosk / 7 self check in

Digital portals also appear in Koetting's pastel drawings. In **self check in** (7), for example, they stand side by side in the shimmering light of a sketchily, golden-brown landscape. they appear lined up in the shimmering light of a sketchily, golden-brown landscape. On closer inspection, the surroundings reveal themselves to be smog or a sandstorm. As the bearer of a latent threat, this veil of colour refers to the environmental damage caused by digital technology. With the impressionistic fog, Koetting also captures the function of the terminals as interfaces. As opaque windows, they conceal the actual machine layer and its filter and control mechanisms. In the green-blue image **kiosk** (2), the terminals seem to develop a life of their own or even explode as refusing to perform their task of controlling and optimisation.

9 Solar Settlement architecture model / 33 Heliotrope architecture model

Koetting understands his artistic practice more as a think tank than a production house. By collaborating with other disciplines, he aims to explore new ways of thinking and develop ideas for solving today's problems.

Koetting's exhibition *Powerhouse* features two models of pioneering solar architecture projects by Rolf Disch from Freiburg. The model of the **first solar settlement (9)** is placed in Gallery I on a light blue island in the middle of the room. The model of the futuristic looking **heliotrope (33)** can be seen in Gallery II. For the artist, these models of the pioneering projects from the mid-1990s are historical examples of a new way of thinking that outlined future scenarios for the challenges of that time. They embody for him also the optimism of the mid-1990s, when people still believed in the possibility of a better future.

To create future scenarios for today's challenges, Koetting collaborated with a professor at Kyoto University in Japan for the Freiburg exhibition. The professor developed a filter technology that binds CO₂ from industrial plant exhaust air with cobalt and releases it back into the environment in a purified state. Together Koetting and the professor then developed the recovered CO₂ powder into pigment that Koetting uses as artistic material.

6 interior I, 10 interior 2

The artist applied the created CO₂ powder pigment in his drawings *interior I* and II. In *interior I* (6), he translates the view from the living room of Rolf Disch's Heliotrop in a sketchily manner. The brown pigment used contains highly toxic CO₂. It was extracted from the exhaust air of a soybean oil production plant. The field of view of Koetting's drawing is based on an archive photograph displayed in the lower gallery in the work *air 2* (17).

In *interior 2* (10), Koetting traced a human skeletal structure from the markers of a digital motion capture system using jade green CO₂ powder. As the artist's alter ego, this avatar embodies a performance-optimised being that has transcended biological and mental human limitations. Numerous other variants of the artist's alter egos are present in the exhibition: a 3D-printed miniature skeleton kit *wrong focus*, 5 lies on a Plexiglas cover in Gallery I. In Gallery II, the figure assembled from such a kit sits exhausted in a designer chair *artist and turbin* (34). The figure is exposed in an illuminated Plexiglas box that rotates continuously.

3, 4, 11, 15, 19, 28, 31 red dy

In *Powerhouse*, Koetting displays also six pages of colouring book partially painted over with CO₂ powder. They feature the cartoon character Reddy Kilowatt. The artist purchased these

pages on eBay and hung them deliberately low for small visitors. These colouring books were published by electricity companies in the 1960s as promotional material to boost electricity consumption. They were distributed to children. The Reddy Kilowatt character was created in 1926 by Aston B. Collins, Sr. for the Alabama Power Company (APC) as a humanised promotor of electricity. It was widely used to market electricity in the USA and worldwide until 1998. The small Reddy Kilowatt pin in **time to time** (22) in Gallery II belonged to the artist's grandfather, who worked in a power plant in the USA in the 1960s.

8 / 35 element

The plastic brackets in **element** also have biographical references. On the one hand, they highlight the importance of solar cycles in Japanese culture, and on the other, they allude to the artist's Japanese origins. These cheaply mass-produced items are used in Japan to hang futon mattresses out in the fresh air every morning. In Gallery I, they are stacked up, whereas in Gallery II, they are loosely arranged in front of the large video work (36).

Gallery II

In Gallery II, we find ourselves immersed in the world of an industrial-era power plant, albeit filtered with a computer game aesthetic. It is almost dark here. Only flashing LEDs (*tamago* 25; *overflow* 30; *illumination* 31), fake skylights (23; 27) and the shower of sparks in the videos (29; 36) generated by gaming software illuminate the rooms. Through the interplay of light and shadow, Koetting succeeds in capturing the often overlooked material basis of digital technology and its growth logic as powerful impressions.

14 world tour

In Gallery II, visitors are greeted by another fact terminal **world tour** (14). The video uses moving map display software to show the locations of art and cultural centres that were formerly power stations around the world. For the artist, these centres raise the question of what function creativity and art have today. Do they merely serve consumption and capitalist overproduction? Or can they still stimulate thought and self-reflection? Are they still capable of developing new ways of thinking and future scenarios in the continuation of modernity?

17 air 1, 2; 21 air 3; 24 air 4; 26 air 5

Next to the terminal there is a showcase **reddy** (15), which is typically used in factories to display announcements or safety regulations. Koetting has transformed similar showcases into shadow-casting windows. He has inserted monochrome photos into these cases, which he created from images of air-polluted skies in Asia. As a result, rather than offering

beautiful sceneries, as one might have expected, his windows confront us with air pollution caused by ever-increasing CO2 emissions.

The artist has attached small photos from Rolf Disch's archive to the monochrome surfaces. In ***air 1*** (17), the photo of the heliotrope is set against a sulphur-yellow background. In ***air 2*** (17), the photo from the living room of Disch's Heliotrope's appears. Against a dove-blue background hinting at pollution, the photo offers a glimpse of the clear sky of the Black Forest, contrasting thus with Koetting's polluted views.

Another window, ***air 5*** (26), shows a photo of the kitchen in Rolf Disch's solar settlement. In this photo, the kitchen appliances catch the eye. Since the economic boom of the 1960s, such devices have become increasingly numerous in households. Much to Reddy Kilowatt's delight, they have constantly driven up electricity consumption.

23 sky (dawn), 27 sky (morning)

The sky and sunlight as essential resources for physical health, mental vitality and emotional well-being are explored in ***sky (dawn)*** (23) and ***sky (morning)*** (27). Koetting uses artificial lights that simulate indoors sunlight and the infinite expanse of the sky. Such panels are used in offices without daylight to create the natural atmosphere that is known to enhance work performance. Koetting places these panels on the floor contrary to their functional use. These works raise questions about the extent to which natural living conditions on the planet can be recreated artificially after their destruction.

20 unhinged, 18 powerhouse sound design

A shadow-casting wheel ***unhinged*** (20) spinning endlessly on the floor in Gallery II is reminiscent of automated assembly lines operating 24 hours a day in the service of prosperity and investors. The minimalist sound installation ***powerhouse sound design*** (18), created in collaboration, offers an abstract exploration of actual playlists in Japanese factories. To increase the productivity of the workforce, classical music, among other things, is played there. Koetting's sound installation reveals the mechanisms of manipulation that accompany the logic of capitalist production, as well as the subliminal violence associated with it.

29 control panel

For the 4-channel video ***control panel*** (29), the artist uses photographs of the E-WERK historic control panel. They are animated by a gaming software and altered with filters. As a result, a constant flow of the geometric lines out of switch points is created in the video.

Acting as allegories, they highlight electricity as the often forgotten lifeline of techno-capitalist society.

Our techno-capitalist society in particular is completely dependent on energy supplies due to its increased consumption. Without electricity, digital infrastructure such as data centres, networks and servers, as well as automated production, payment systems and traffic control systems, would collapse.

36 *multitasking mirage*

The impulse-driven society of technocapitalism, which relies on sensory overload as the currency of success, is captured in atmospheric impressions in three-channel video ***multitasking mirage*** (36). We are constantly bombarded by words from the Reddy Kilowatt song popping up frantically, while staggering showers of sparks that spill into the room, creating breathtaking light impressions.

In the style of Apple's animations, Reddy Kilowatt's words appear so quickly that they are impossible to understand. This style is currently very popular. It is used on YouTube and in advertisements to flood people with sensations.

In the lyrics, Reddy Kilowatt presents himself as a tireless servant, full of energy and reserves of strength, who does many things at once to keep capitalist production and its corresponding consumption alive. As a tireless multitasker, Reddy Kilowatt is another alter ego of the artist who is also expected to perform all sorts of tasks.