

Calla Henkel & Max Pitegoff
PARADISE

Over the three years that they ran *TV Bar* in Berlin, Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff used the bar as a set to film an episodic series called *Paradise*. *TV Bar* was always intended to have two lives: one fictional and one public, both relying on the same infrastructure.

The series *Paradise* takes place in a fictional, eponymous bar in 2023 and follows a group of bartenders as they navigate an absent boss who wants the bar to function as a newsroom. Henkel and Pitegoff selected the year 2023 as a near future — one they could move toward through a blend of speculative fiction and approximate truth. Christmas lights appear. The leaves turn green. The narrative becomes part documentation and has no choice but to follow the queasy timeline of the actual bar. It had always been their intention to close in or around 2023, when the chosen future became the present.

Paradise is about labor and performance, and how much one has to give away while working. The bartenders are all forced to read text from a teleprompter to customers, complying with their chronically out-of-touch boss's hopes of using the bar to spread his own language. When the texts become unhinged, the bartenders decide to take control, but it never quite works out. Instead, the story unfolds through their coping mechanisms — the places the bartenders retreat to in their minds to stay sane. It is a drama about narrative ownership and the struggle to make things in terrible times. It isn't until the bar gets shut down that the bartenders in *Paradise* begin using the space as they wish, and a complicated collective unity emerges.

In reality, Henkel and Pitegoff had intended to hand over *TV Bar* to their employees when they finished filming *Paradise*. However, the company that owns the building on Potsdamer Strasse is in the process of selling it and does not believe the new owners will want a bar, thus refusing to renew the lease. Out of curiosity, Henkel and Pitegoff asked what they thought the new owners would prefer in the space, to which they replied, “an insurance agency.” This is now the ending of *Paradise*.

Paradise is shot on 16mm film and shown with subtitles. The work exists somewhere between photography, theater, and long-form poetry. The actors are all friends of the artists, *TV Bar* employees, or people who drifted into the bar's orbit. Previously, while *TV Bar* was open, *Paradise* was shown only in other bars, looping on small monitors without sound. In its projected version, it is accompanied by a soundtrack by artist and musician M. K. Frøslev, a former bartender at *TV Bar*.

Calla Henkel (born 1988, United States) and Max Pitegoff (born 1987, United States) have collaborated for more than a decade, exploring the creation and management of venues as social and collaborative artistic spaces. They founded the *New Theater* in Berlin-Kreuzberg (2013–2015), developed the performance program at the Grüner Salon of the Volksbühne (2017/2018), ran *TV Bar* — a bar, performance space, and film studio in Berlin-Schöneberg (2020–2022) — and currently run the *New Theater* in Los Angeles.

Courtesy Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin

PARADISE,
2020–2022

Film 16 mm transféré en vidéo HD avec son, 81 min 42 s.

Episode 1: Josef & Tara, 2020, 23:14 min.

Episode 2: Margarite & Tennessee, 2021, 19:42 min.

Episode 3: Jess & The Neighbor, 2022, 18:34 min.

Episode 4: The Bartenders Weren't Alone, 2022, 20:12 min.

