

About the artists

Hiba Ali is a producer of moving images, sounds, garments, and words. They reside in many time zones: Chicago, Toronto and Eugene. Born in Karachi, Pakistan, they belong to East African, South Asian and Arab diasporas. They are a practitioner and (re)learner of Swahili, Urdu, Arabic, and Spanish languages. They work on two long term art and publication projects: the first being an art-based PhD project that examines womyn of colour's labour, and architecture of surveillance as it exists within the monopoly of Amazon (corp.) and the second being a series of works that addresses music, cloth, and ritual practices that connect East Africa, South Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula in the Swahili-Indian Ocean region.

Simon Denny lives and works in Berlin, Germany. He makes exhibitions that unpack the social and political implications of the technology industry and the rise of social media, startup culture, blockchains and cryptocurrencies, using a variety of media including installation, sculpture, print, video, and NFTs. He has also curated blockchain art exhibitions. In 2016 he co-founded the artist mentoring program BPA// Berlin Program for Artists and has served as Professor of Time-Based Media at The Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg (HFBK) since 2018.

Sophia Oppel is an interdisciplinary arts practitioner and researcher interested in examining digital interfaces and physical architectures as parallel sites of power. Oppel deploys transparent substrates—glass, mirror and the screen—as a framework to consider the paradoxes of legibility under surveillance capitalism. Oppel received a Masters of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto in 2021, and a BFA from OCAD University in 2018. She has exhibited locally and internationally.

Yuri Pattison's practice connects and materializes the intangible spaces between the virtual and physical through video, sculpture, installation, and online platforms. It explores how new technologies such as the digital economy and online communication have shifted and impacted the systemic frameworks of the built environment, daily life, and our perceptions of time, space, and nature. Solo exhibitions include the engine, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2020-21); trusted traveller, Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen (2017); and user, space, Chisenhale Gallery, London (2016). Selected recent and upcoming group exhibitions include Radical Landscapes, Tate Liverpool; Post Capital, Kunsthäl Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2022).

Eva Pel is a visual artist based in Amsterdam. Pel's work has dealt with the role of power and control in contemporary society and has taken many different forms, from sculptural interventions to photographic research and publications. She studied Urban Geography at the University of Amsterdam and at the School of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles. She finished her degree with the thesis Skateboarders exploring urban public space: Ollies, obstacles, and conflicts. Also she has a master's degree in Artistic Research from the KABK, The Hague.

Coralie Vogelaar is an interdisciplinary artist who combines social science, such as behavioral studies, with the artistic imagination. Vogelaar investigates the relationship between human and machine by applying machine logic to the human body and vice versa. Her work manifests itself in the form of performances, video, and multimedia installations, for which she works together with experts from various disciplines including data analysis, choreography, and sound design. She is an alumnus of the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. Her performance Emotion Recognition from an Algorithmic Point of View was featured in The Most Iconic Works of 40 years V2 - Lab for the Unstable Media. In 2021 she was nominated for the Prix de Rome.

About the authors

Barbara Cueto is the digital curator at C/O Berlin, an institution dedicated to the exploration of lens-based media. She is also a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam, where she is researching blockchain as a tool for radical imagination and its collateral effects in the notion of value. Her projects are at the intersection of contemporary art, new technologies and activism. She is an alumna of de Appel Curatorial Programme in Amsterdam and she holds a MA in Arts Management from the University of Maastricht, and a BA in Journalism from the Complutense University of Madrid.

Bas Hendrixx is Curator of Participation and Engagement at KANAL - Centre Pompidou in Brussels. He is the former curator of P/////AKT, in Amsterdam, and he was the artistic director of Art on Paper at BOZAR in Brussels. He curated exhibitions and programmes for institutions such as BOZAR, the ULAY Foundation, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Garage Rotterdam, Skulptur Bredelar, de Appel arts centre, and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Hendrixx is the co-editor of Authenticity?: Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-Digital Age (Valiz, 2017). He is currently working on Queer Exhibition Histories, an anthology of texts to be published by Valiz in 2023.

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TERMS & EXPECTATIONS

An essay by Barbara Cueto & Bas Hendrixx

Hiba Ali
Simon Denny
Sophia Oppel
Yuri Pattison
Eva Pel
Coralie Vogelaar

October 20—December 10, 2022

Although somewhat aloof from their rural surroundings, distribution centres and server farms are the sites where the internet becomes visible. Their vast and boxy architecture does not reveal much, if anything, of their interior activity. The underlying distribution chains remain somewhat ambiguous: any information about internal processes, technologies, and working conditions are sparse and fractal. This infrastructure, which determines the supply of food, fashion, and entertainment, materializes digital structures of control within our physical surroundings. Distribution centres and server farms punctuate our landscape with architectures that resemble their non-human nature—like an algorithm encoding bias, these buildings remain black-boxed to us humans. Nevertheless, they are tacitly transforming the topographies of human interaction, from urban labour to cityscapes. Even the traditional function of rural areas, connected to nature and the harvest of crops and herd cattle, is altered. They now share space and resources with vast distribution centres—those operated by companies such as Amazon, Ebay or Alibaba—which bypass long-established commercial networks that were altered at the dawn of the internet.

The exhibition resembles a fulfillment centre, where undelivered parcels wait alongside artworks, which expose the human scale of global logistical networks. For example, in Yuri Pattison’s video

outsourced views, visual economies (2013—2014), one can see a series of footage of apparently unconnected locations. The short videos are taken by Amazon Mechanical Turk workers, who perform assignments that either cannot be completed by a computer or for which human labour is still cheaper than developing an AI solution. These jobs are not only repetitive and low paid, but they also erase the worker, who is anonymized, making their labour invisible. These glimpses into workers’ lives intend to humanize the networks of production that often go unseen. Coralie Vogelaar’s performance *Arranging, Moving, Rotating, Packing* (2022) reveals the extreme lengths of logistic centres’ efficiency and productivity. These facilities use bin packing algorithms to configure the most compact way of arranging items within a parcel. In Vogelaar’s performance, dancers attempt to replicate these configurations with their bodies, painstakingly trying to accommodate the versatility of an algorithm that lacks human dimension.

Terms & Expectations considers human labour as a by-product of the interconnected non-human network of production and consumption. Simon Denny’s *Amazon Worker Cage* shows a model the artist made of a 2016 Amazon patent for a human cage, a metal enclosure that would transport Amazon warehouse workers around the premises, allowing factory works to integrate with machinery. The image shows a prototype of an unrealized blue-

print, complete with the numbers referencing the intellectual property of the patent around it. As philosopher Byung-Chul Han states, “No revolutionary mass can arise from exhausted, depressive, and isolated individuals.”¹ Labour conditions for distribution facility workers and delivery staff are often dire. Amazon, the self-proclaimed “most customer centric company in the world,”² applies libertarian principles, impeding staff unionization and workers’ rights. As the labour community grows, artist, filmmakers, and writers respond. Recent texts such as Ken Loach’s 2019 film *Sorry We Missed You*, the award-winning film *Nomadland* (2020) by Chloé Zhao, and Heike Geissler’s 2018 novel *Seasonal Associate*³ critically engage with workers’ experiences at these facilities. In need of an additional source of income, Geissler, a freelance writer and translator, takes a temporary job at an Amazon Order Fulfilment Center in Leipzig. Here, she is quick to learn that time is a commodity and every minute is monitored. Employee training, walks to the lunchroom, restroom breaks, and punch-out time are all controlled. While the repetitiveness of the labour renders each day on site alike, staff attempt to make shifts more bearable by learning which work desks offer better entrance and exit times, or tend to process easier cargo, and which supervisors are more lenient. The same notions reverberate in Hiba Ali’s *we are all living: workers liberation as environmental justice* (2020), an interactive 3D environment depicting the predatory practices in warehouse and the

toll on its workers.

Terms & Expectations explores these, at times dehumanizing, conditions and the corporate chase toward fully automating distribution chains. These systems alter our surroundings, fabricating a new, more-than-human *umwelt*. Eva Pel’s sculptures, titled *Happy Boxes* (2021-ongoing), are replicas of shipping boxes distributed by famous European online retailers like Zalando and Hema, as well as Amazon. The doppelgänger parcels have tracking labels that reveal the origins of their journey through the non-human landscape defined by supply-chain routes. Pel’s heavy wooden boxes aim to camouflage between disposable cardboard boxes, raising questions about the consequences of the growing number of online retail giants and their tangible effects on the environment. *An Infinite Loop in the Virtual Plaza* (2019/2022) continues inquiry into the materiality of distribution networks, this time interrogating the functionality of empty architectures. In this work, artist Sophia Opiel maps the parallels between seemingly innocuous public architecture and “user-friendly” digital interfaces. The sculptural installation and video explore supposedly neutral spaces, such as airports or plazas, whose designs are optimized for Western neoliberal productivity and the surveillance of buyers-to-be.

This exhibition is part of a longer investigation related to the political, social, and ecological affects of the digital infrastructures that influence

our everyday lives. An earlier exhibition, *The Dutch Savannah* (2018),⁴ paid attention to the role of water as a fundamental yet usually overlooked component of the infrastructure that supports the internet. At InterAccess, *Terms & Expectations* continues that investigation and reveals the presence of digital infrastructure on land, and the subtle ways our landscapes are changing to adapt to digitally-driven distribution chains. In this way, the exhibition explores politics and aesthetics of these infrastructures, whose extractivism not only depletes natural resources, but also modifies social life.

Notes

1. Byung-Chul Han. “Why revolution is no longer possible”, *openDemocracy*, October 23, 2015. Translated by Erik Butler.
2. About us (n.d). Amazon: <https://www.aboutamazon.com/about-us>. Accessed October 14, 2022.
3. Heike Geissler, *Seasonal Associate* (New York: Semiotexte, 2018).
4. See: *The Dutch Savannah*, an exhibition at De Dominjen, The Netherlands, in 2018. Curated by Barbara Cueto and Bas Hendrikkx.