

Denise Ackerl

2016-2024



Artist Statement:

- As a queer-feminist performance artist, I often play with the ‘benign’ and overtly feminine reading of my embodiment to address different forms of power imbalances, socio-political issues and disrupt notions of authenticity.
- Often my works cannot be (immediately) identified as art because I operate in a space of ambivalence between different disciplines which is owed to my inter-disciplinary background between art, philosophy and economics. It is always research based and occupies a space between the artistic and academic.
- By using green screen technique I often place my feminine read body into male dominated spaces and play with the scale of my body to create a multi species perspective.
- In many ways I engage and ‘seduce’ my audience in playful interactions, providing access to difficult subjects but leave space for a multiplicity of positions and ambivalence in the narratives.



Marx, Engels, Mermaid Photo: Elektra Stampolou, Berlin, 2022



Trans-Species Embodiment – How to become ‘mermade’ ?

Current practice-as-research project

Inspired by Donna Haraway’s notion of the cyborg as a link between the human and non-human, in my current practice-as-research project (since 2023) I explore trans-species embodiment *through performing ‘mermaiding’*, the moving and posing with a mermaid tail.

My intention is to destabilise an anthropocentric ‘world view’ and existing species and gender boundaries by understanding this body as a form of **queer intelligence**. In my research, my tail acts as an interface between myself and the material world, that I use for data collection from which I develop different forms of presenting and encountering this intelligence including storytelling, spoken word, talks, movement practices and practices of nonhuman interpellation.

Together with moving image work, I create an ambivalent body; neither human nor animal nor mythological but a potential unknown category of its own that breaks with binaries and a nature/culture distinction.



Is this Mermaid Naked ? Raw Matters Vienna, 2024 Photo: Barbara Mair

Is this Mermaid Naked ?

Raw Matters, Brunnenpassage, Vienna, 2024

Live-Performance, ca. 15min

Excerpt: <https://vimeo.com/1049429340>

The performance navigated fluid boundaries between species, feminine identities, and the audience's gaze on the mermaid body.

Inspired by Jacques Derrida's 'That Animal That Therefore I Am' lecture, I invited viewers to confront their own gaze and its implications, as they look upon a 'naked' body that is both familiar and alien. Inspired by 'traditional' Viennese Cabaret, the performance shifted between auto-biographical anecdotes mixed with moments of satirical ambivalence, for example when talking about my dating life as a mermaid.

Structured in 4 parts, each addressed nakedness from a different angle; philosophically, aesthetically, emotionally and anatomically. Through a layered portrayal of the mermaid as both subject and object, such as the trial of 'mermaid' Life-drawing poses, the reciting French philosophy and the falling in love with the Danube river.





Tentacular Diorama, Collaborative Project, KUBUS EXPORT, 2024



Tentacular Diorama

KUBUS EXPORT, Vienna, 2024

Installation and Performance, Collaboration with Erika Farina

Sound by Manuel Bachinger

Ca.10min

The project was inspired by feminist philosopher Donna Haraway's concept of *tentacularity* (2016), which she uses as a metaphor to emphasize the complex, non-linear, and interwoven relationships that define life on Earth. The tentacle, as a figure, suggests a web of interconnected lines, movements, and flows that extend beyond human-centered modes of understanding the world.

The installation, mimicking an educational museum display, also known as a diorama, invited the visitors into a speculative multispecies landscape placed in a big glass cube, called the KUBUS EXPORT, along the borders of two districts, the 8th and 16th in Vienna. In this space, boundaries between species, territory, and kinship were fluid and reimagined. Through the combination of soft sculptures and performance, it challenged traditional notions of separation and binaries, encouraging viewers to explore new forms of interconnectedness and relationality.

In the opening performance, I moved as mermaid, across the diorama and interacting with other multispecies beings; soft sculptures made by textile artist Erika Farina.

Using the palms of my hands and two contact microphones attached to them, I sensually explored their surfaces and textures, producing an eery otherworldly sound when touching them, forming kin and relationships.





Mermade Talks

PSi London (UK) & IFTR Manila (PH)

2024

Live-performances

In 2024 I was presenting my practice as research at various performance centred conferences. In this format, my focus was to combine theory with practice, allowing myself to literally 'inhabit' the otherness that I was discussing through the mermaid body, thus transforming the lecture into an act of lived inquiry.

While presenting my 'mermaiding' research and works such as *Looking for Iara* (2023) and *Mermade Outer Space* (2023), I transformed into my mermaid shape on stage. The 'transformation' is one of the most vulnerable moments of my practice when in public, hence my intention was to give the audience a visceral and aesthetic experience of what it means to embody a being that is both familiar and otherworldly and challenge their gaze upon the body that is presenting.



After getting in contact with humans

Unlovable Creatures, Video Still, Collaborative Project Media Lab Matadero 2024

Unlovable Creatures

Collaboration Project 'Synthetic Minds' LAB #03

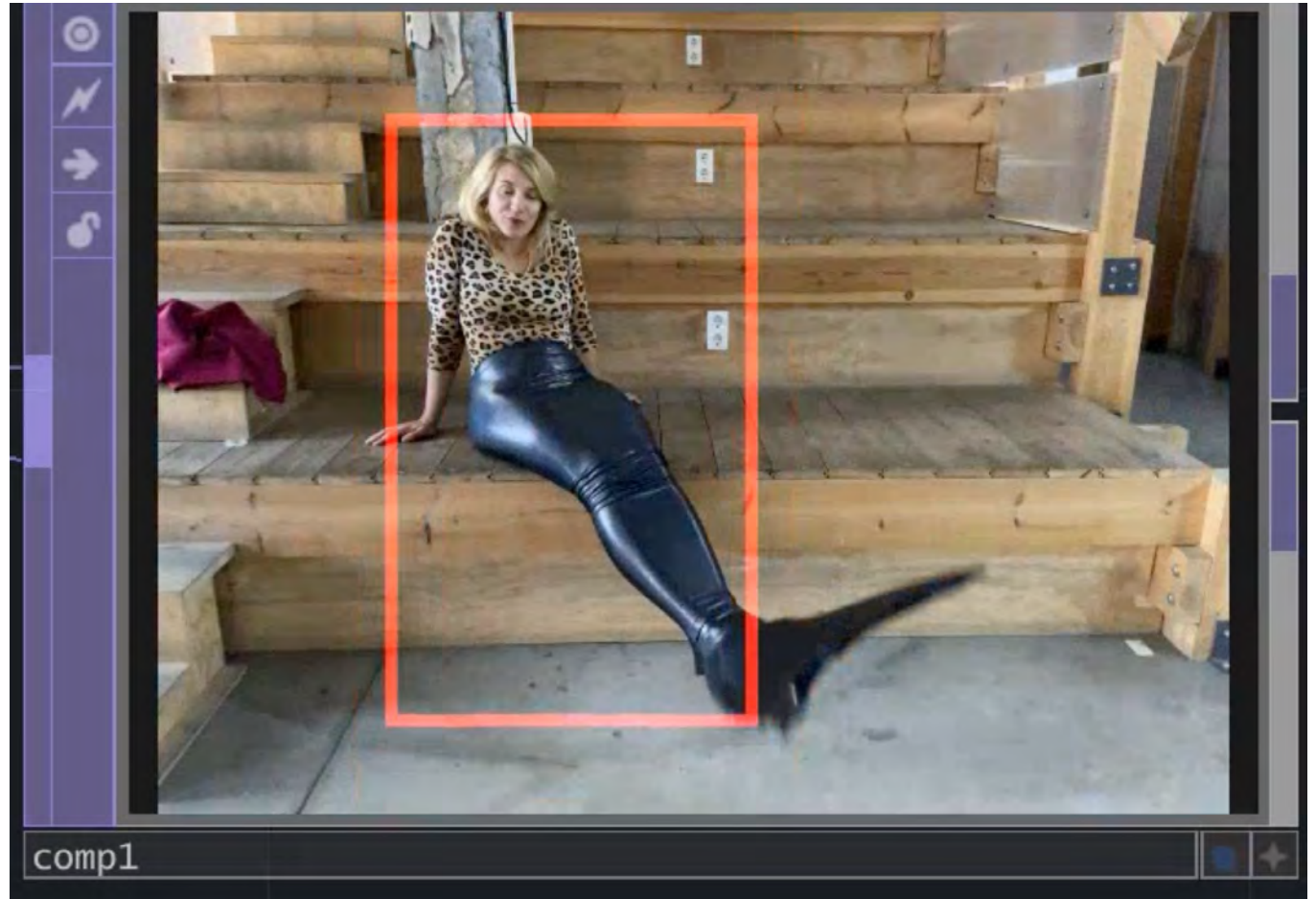
Media Lab Matadero

Human collaborators: Lorena García, Rocío Palacín, Owen McAteer, Laura Hernández and Sutanuka Jashu

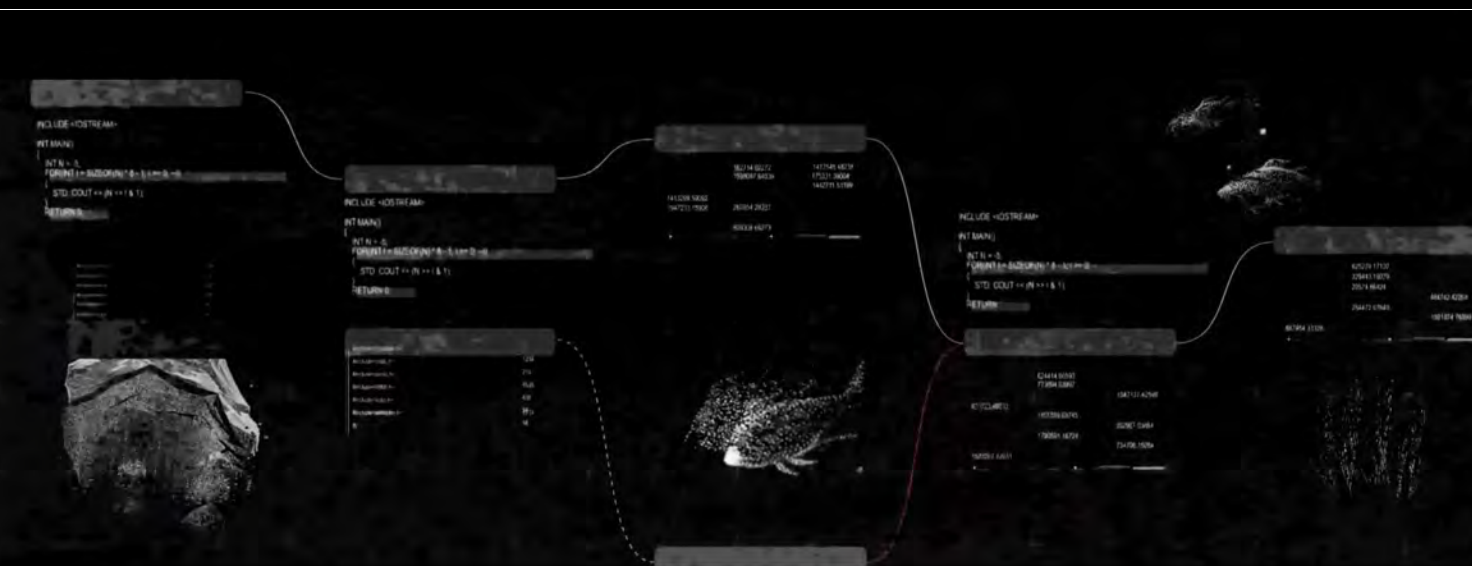
AI collaborators: ChatGpt, Stable Diffusion

<https://vimeo.com/921974278?share=copy> PW: Creatures

The *Unlovable Creatures* project, as part of my trans-species research, was produced at the Collaborative Prototyping Workshop within the Synthetic Minds Lab #3, a 3-week residency at the Media Lab Matadero. Created by using motion capture, stable diffusion and Houdini, the video tells the story of a meeting of non-human intelligences in mythological form and from the perspective of AI. My role focused on developing the narrative and performative data generation, which we converted into visual material for the video using motion capture and prompts. With the mermaid representing a mediating intelligence between humans and non-humans, our work combines the themes of posthumanism, transhumanism, xenofeminism, mythology, ecology and oceanic intelligence.

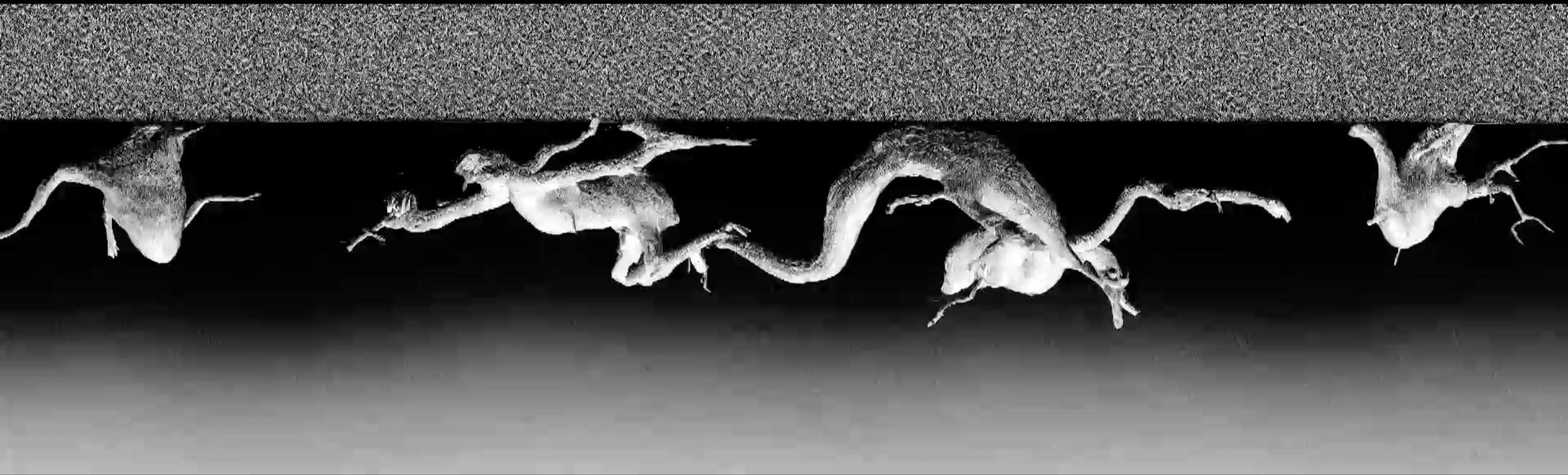


Mermaid Body Motion Capture 2024 by Owen McAteer



Team Members *Unlovable Creatures*:

- Lorena Patricia Garcia Espino is a peruvian programmer and filmmaker interested in the research and mediation of experimental, expanded cinema and new audiovisual media with a transfeminist, decolonial and interdisciplinary approach. Her projects were exhibited at IDFA DocLab, New Images, Matadero and other festivals in Latin America and Europe.
- Sutanuka Jashu, an Indian artist, explores the dynamic interplay between artistic ingenuity and technological innovation as a visiting student at Harvard University. Her work features on platforms such as WASA Kenkomi (2022), Architizer (2023), Ars Electronica Founding Lab (2023), and Foreign Objekt (2024) @archsutanuka
- Rocío Palacin Rotbarg (she/they) is a queer Latinx data scientist who has been working on diverse topics such as innovation, sustainability, natural resources, and gender. She collaborated in Bioleft, an open source and collaborative platform for the genetic improvement of seeds in which family and organic producers from Argentina participated; and works with open and citizen science and sustainable business projects.
- Owen McAteer is a creative coder and generative artist, who uses code to create animated digital art and interactive installations. With a minimalist style, his work focuses on movement and flow to discover the hidden beauty in numbers. He has also been published as a guest writer in Make:magazine.@motus_art
- Laura Hernández is Madrid native and passionate about innovative technologies and promoter of triple bottom line companies: economic sustainability, regeneration of the planet and well-being of all living beings.



Unlovable Creatures, Video Still, Collaborative Project Media Lab Matadero 2024
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OZ2x5PjSKfFV_23AzNKGJKUieq0eldCQ/view



Looking for Iara

[LABVerde Residency Speculative Ecologies](#), Amazonas Brazil

Video work, ca. 12 min, 2024

<https://vimeo.com/denisea/lookingforiara?share=copy#t=o>

Produced during the LABVerde research residency in the Brazilian Amazonas, this work critically explores the slogan ‘Stop the legends, lets make money’ which was used by the Brazilian Interior Ministry in the 1970s to propagate the economic exploitation of the area. For many within the Indigenous communities, the ‘legends’ are an important part of the forest preservation and a mode of passing on knowledge; which is constantly under threat with the ongoing destruction of the Amazonian forest and the denial of land rights.

In the work, I am telling a queer love story where I look for another mermaid (legend), Iara, which is part of Tupi and Guaraní people’s ‘story tellings’. The style of narration is soothing and naïve, while interweaving the eco-social histories of Lower Austria and Amazonia including the plans to build hydro power stations in the 1980s; at Balbina close to Manaus (BR) and at Hainburg right by the Danube river (AUT); while both faced civic resistance, the one in Austria was never built, but the Brazilian dictatorship went ahead with their plans at Balbina and killed the entire forest in the area and displaced the Waimiri Atroari people. In the video, as I move through different locations in the Amazons and Austria, I connect various human and non-human beings through the mermaid body.



Looking for Iara 2023, Photos: Ingrid Weyland

A Mermaid's Tale

Performance [@aphrodisia.events](https://aphrodisia.events)

Libelle Vienna, April 2024

<https://vimeo.com/953478862>

In this spoken word performance, lying on a pool table in a club designed for 'public' intimacy, I performed an adoration to my beloved tail; exploring of self-love, transformation, and the celebration of bodily otherness at queer sx positive event.

In this performance, my tail became a symbol of queer femme identity— while being an emblem of beauty and a signifier of my departure from 'human' norms.

I speak to the audience with reverence, detailing my relationship with my tail as a source of power, desire, and belonging, drawing parallels between my embodiment and the queer experience of embracing and celebrating differences. I was leading up to a sensual experience within my own skin and invited the audience to discover their own mermaid potential. This tail, I now embrace as the very core of my identity, while departing from my cis-white able bodiedness.

In this way, the performance serves as a celebration of queer resilience, turning self-adoration into an act of empowerment and self-determination, inspiring the audience to love and affirm all parts of themselves unapologetically.

No video recording was possible but a sound recording of the text is available (see vimeo link).





Mermade Outer Space

Video-performance in collaboration with Eleni Danesi and pollinations.ai, ca. 4min
Part of Mermadeness research project presented at Martian Chronicles Residency at Latomaieo Project, Leonidio Greece
April 2023 <https://vimeo.com/819157940>



Mermade Outer Space

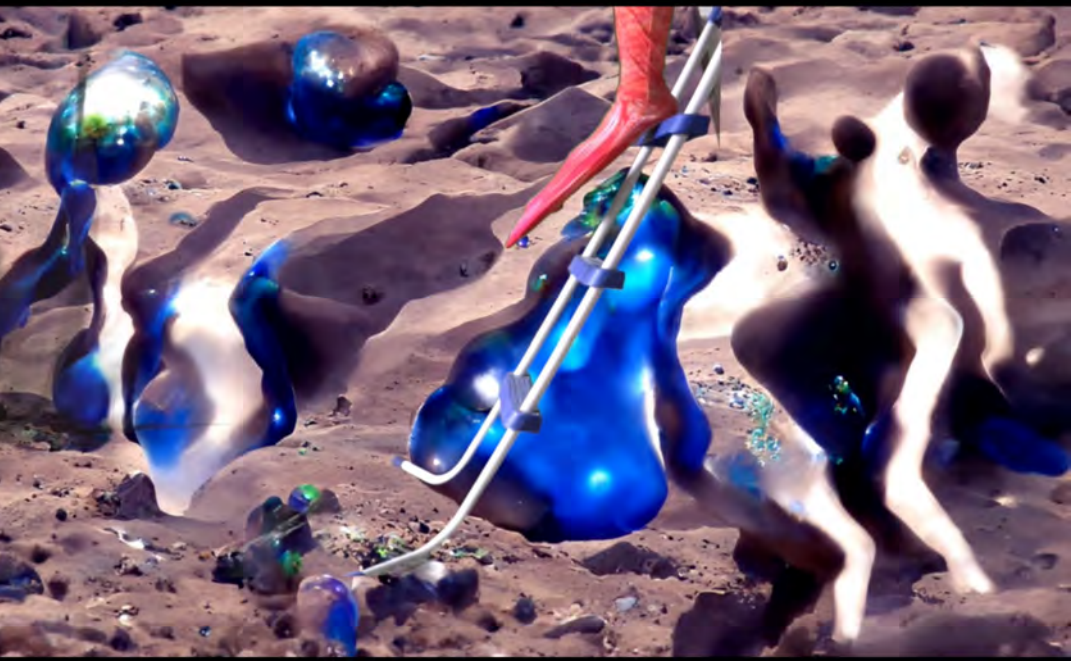
Video-performance in collaboration with Eleni Danesi and pollinations.ai, ca. 4min

Presented at [Martian Chronicles Residency](#) at Latomaieo Project, Leonidio Greece, April 2023

<https://vimeo.com/819157940>

This video-performance was a contribution to the Martian Chronicles residency at Latomaieo Project in Greece, Leonidio. It was themed 'dreaming of eco-realities' - how to overcome separate states between human bodies and their surroundings in the context of a village in Greece, Leonidio, where tourism is steadily increasing. The video itself raises questions around otherness, dominance and colonisation based on Arturo Escobar's notion of the *Pluriversal* (2020) as he writes 'Moderns occupy a space and Nonmoderns inhabit it' (p.26).

In the video I as mermaid, travel to outer space on the quest to find water, as resources on earth are becoming scarce due to mismanagement. First, I sent a message to the residency participants on earth from the space ship, showing my (non-fish) upper body and discussing gossip around the science fiction film *Dune* (2021 remake). Then I exit the space-ship with my mermaid-tail first into an environment created by pollinations.ai. I look for water resources and evidences of other species, as a mermaid who already represents otherness in the human context. By the end of the video a shell appears, becoming a space of comfort in my quest.





Danceministerium Berlin
'Picturing Democracy' exhibition
installation, Berlin
Photo: Katerina Sysova

Danceministerium Berlin

‘PICTURING DEMOCRACY’ Fersh AIR residency, Berlin,
2022

Project explained: <https://vimeo.com/780142461>

In my project for this residency themed ‘PICTURING DEMOCRACY’ (funded by Stiftung Berliner Leben), I [explored the dance floor](#) and city as a place of freedom of movement in the context of democracy. The dance floor was considered both a physical and a metaphorical space that included the studio and the formerly physically divided city of Berlin.

In numerous micro performances I addressed formal borders between states and informal forms of movement restrictions such as gender, sexual orientation and taboo professions such as sex work. Globes, disco balls, maps and a green screen dance floor in the studio space, were central objects and means of deconstructing and reconstructing borders and restrictions. This resulted in the production of several music videos [recorded in public space](#) and [green screen montages recorded in the studio](#).

Live-Performance, *Picturing Democracy* opening, Berlin





Video still Moon Tango, part of Danceministerium Berlin, 2022



Video still *You Don't Own Me*

You Don't Own Me

Music video, ca. 1min, part of [Danceministerium Berlin](https://www.instagram.com/p/CiHUMC1o39e/)

July 2022

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CiHUMC1o39e/>

You Don't Own Me, is a music video to the song *You Don't Own Me* by SAYGRAZE (feat. G-Eazy) addressing the problems caused by the German Prostitute Protection Act passed in 2017. In the video, a pair of high heels with open lips, are strutting across the Reichstag to the song that was played loudly during a demonstration of sex workers and those in solidarity protesting against this law on 4th June 2022, International Whore's Day, along Bülowstrasse. The video is both entertaining and educational.



Video still *The Power ?*

The Power ?

Music video , ca. 1min, part of [Danceministerium Berlin](https://www.instagram.com/p/CiM1N8-OJFm/)

September 2022

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CiM1N8-OJFm/>

When the G7 (formerly G8, Russia was excluded in 2014) summit took place in Berlin in 2022, the representatives of the 7 'most powerful' nations in the world were male and white and Europe was facing an Energy crisis because of their dependence on Russian Gas Supplies. *The Power* is a green screen video montage to the song by the same name by SNAP! (1990) from their album *World Power*. The video itself follows the aesthetic of an Instagram-typical outfit-change montage, including a 'lap-dance' on the G7.



Kunst muss Riechen!
(Art Must Smell)
Exhibition Invite DENISEUM,
May 2020

DENISEUM

Spring/Summer 2020

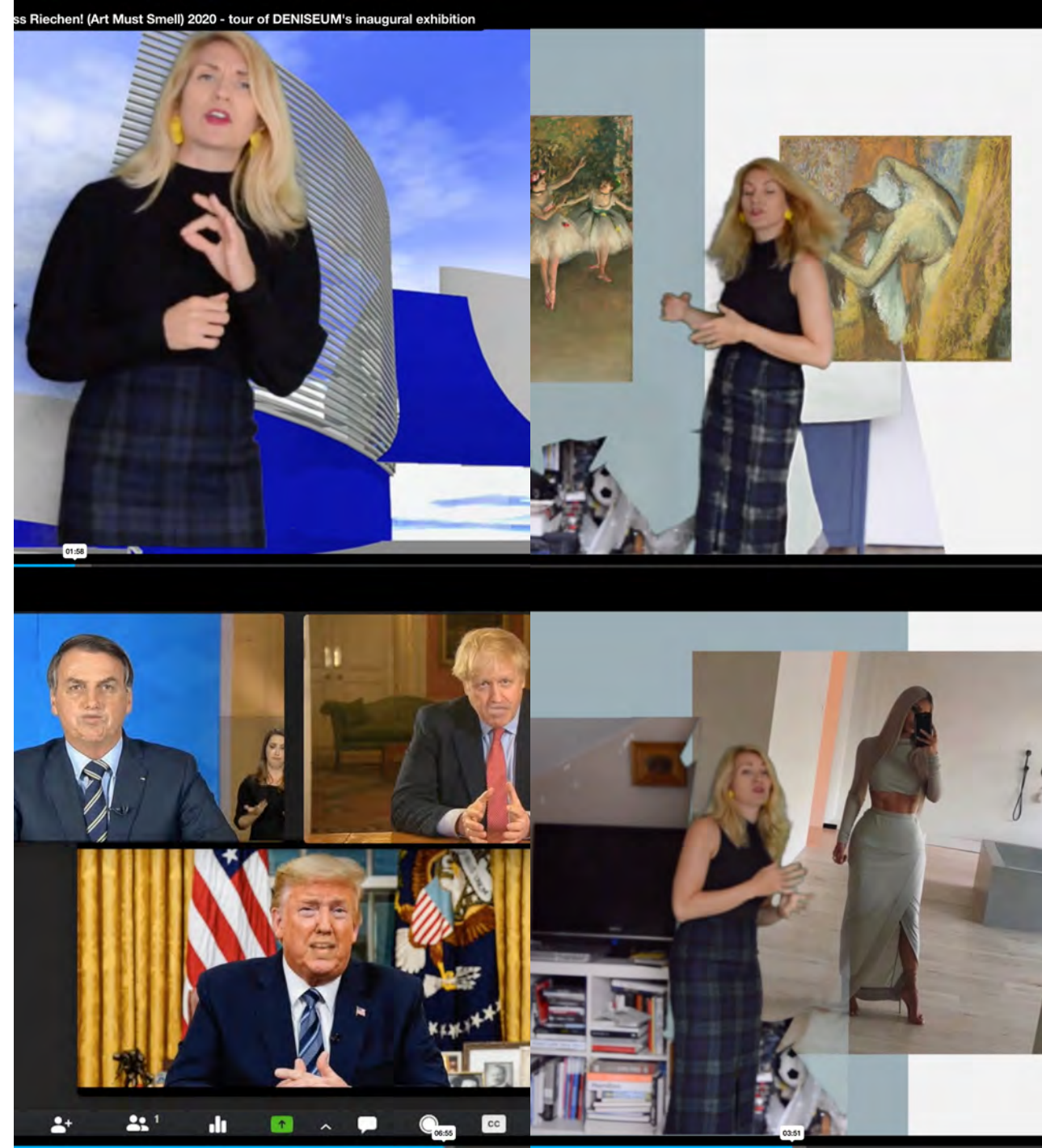
<https://www.dackerl.net/about-3>

Virtual Guided Tours :

<https://vimeo.com/denisea/deniseuminauguration?share=copy>

DENISEUM was created during the first lockdown in spring 2020 when all art and culture institutions were closed; recorded in my living room with Green Screen technique, I created two guided tours through 'my own' museum. Each tour reflects on the political conflicts present at the time of recording in Spring/Summer 2020. In its potentially 'clumsy' montage aesthetic, the DENISEUM reveals itself as a DIY museum responding with the sudden necessity to construct all kinds of infrastructures from the own home. DENISEUM owes its visual identity to a design for a Guggenheim Museum in Helsinki, which was never implemented after a dispute over funding.

In addition to its virtual dimension, DENISEUM reached its visitors with printed toilet paper gifts by post.





DÉNISEUM, *Am I front or am I backstage ? Invitation*, 2020

DENISEUM VIRTUAL GUIDED TOUR 2 *AM I FRONT OR AM I BACKSTAGE ?*

Guided Tour 2 : <https://vimeo.com/denisea/deniseumbackstage?share=copy>



Dominic Cummings, Downing Street Rose Garden, 30th May 2020, source: the guardian



Guided Tour *AM I FRONT OR AM I BACKSTAGE* Invitation DENISEUM, July 2020

In the name of the DENISEUM
I want to thank you for joining its grand opening and the exhibition tour of

“Kunst muss riechen!”

(Art must smell!)

in May 2020

Please consider this responsible sourced sheet of toilet paper, a limited edition of 200
4-ply-sheets, a small thank you for your attendance and we hope to smell you in the future
at the DENISEUM.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Denise Albrecht", written in a cursive style.

PS: Check out our gift shop at deniseum.org



*The Burned
Phallus*
Live-Performance,
Freud Museum
London
2020

The Burned Phallus

Live Performance, ca. 15 min @ Freud Museum London
Part of the [*You Burn Me*](#) event for International Women's day 2020

In this 'academic' talk as part of a performance event at the Freud Museum London, I presented a 'Freudian' analysis connecting feminism(s), cigarettes and contemporary theories of re-emasculatation in the context of Austria's debate on the smoking ban.

Using printed A3 images in a show and tell presentation, I build upon the premise that the cigarette became a signifier for emancipation for American women in the 1920s as spinned by Freud's own nephew Edward Bernay's, using Freud's theory of Penis Envy (German: Penisneid) for this PR stunt. I create a hypothesis to explain how this has resulted in a delayed smoking ban in Austria in 2019 where the cigarette has become a contemporary symbol of re-emasculatation, a 'penis', for threatened masculinity that needed to be 'defended' and causing the right-wing party's opposition to the ban who was eventually overruled.





Mars Interview 2019, Video Still, Performance/Video/Installation in Women On the Moon

Klaipeda (LT)/Mars (Outer Space)



Mars Interview 2019

Video installation, ca. 13 minutes

Klaipeda, Lithuania

September 2019

<https://www.womenonmoon.org>

<https://vimeo.com/358530115>

I produced *Mars Interview 2019* for the *Women on the Moon* exhibition, a feminist investigation of new space age which I co-curated and co-organised with my colleague Laima Kreivytė. It was launched in Klaipeda's Cultural Communication Centre, a town close to the Russian border in Lithuania, in September 2019. The exhibition was timed with the 50th anniversary of the moon landing. In June 2019, NASA announced their intention to send the first woman to the moon by 2024. In the mean time the focus from white male dominated NASA and privately owned space travel companies such as Elon Musk's SpaceX has shifted from the Moon to 'conquering' Mars.

During my online research on the moon landing I predominantly encountered conspiracy theories claiming up until today, that the moon landing never happened and that it was filmed in a studio (by Stanley Kubrick).

After an interview reflecting on the current issues on Earth, I stage my pregnant landing onto the Mars surface, filmed in my living room.



Exhibition view *Woman on the Moon*, 'Mars Interview 2019 Life-size' and 'An Offer You Can't Refuse' (2019) by Egle Grebliauskaite



Mars Interview 2019, Video Still, Performance/Video/Installation in Women On the Moon

Klaipeda (LT)/Mars (Outer Space)



STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE IN POST-FORDISM: A FEMINIST PERFORMANCE PERSPECTIVE

Over-identification with Benign Evil

Practice-based PhD Project (2015 – 2019)

<https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/19971/>

The central concern of my practice-based research project was how to create resistance from a feminist perspective by exploring and developing strategies in performance art. This resistance was aimed at the current economic and political conditions of post-Fordist production, in which an increased precarity of the workforce is accompanied by a shrinking autonomous political sphere and regressive gender politics, led by ‘sexual decoys’ (Eisenstein, 2007).

Central to my investigation was the exploration of over-identification where the performer overtly affirms the position of the subject of critique instead of articulating an open direct critique. In various talks (see TAP Talk series below) and speeches such as my series of resignation speeches recorded during a residency at the British School of Rome (MEAD award) after Brexit in July 2016, I explored how to deploy and transform this strategy effectively from a feminist perspective, to create an agonistic space as the location for resistance and disrupt rather than harmonise contradictions within post-Fordism.

Resignation speeches, British School of Rome, MEAD residency July 2016

<https://vacanzeromane2016.tumblr.com>



TAP talk series, "Meet MONA" @ *Feminist Futures* symposium, Central Saint Martins, 2017, Photo: Iona Wolff



TAP talks

Live-performance series

UK, Germany, South Korea

2017-2019

<https://taptalks.tumblr.com>

Over the course of my PhD I performed a variety of academic talk borrowing from the famous TED talk format, and calling them TAP talks (Technology Art Performance). Each talk presented a new form of AI offering a replacement to human tasks such as giving birth (EIVA), finding love (DEAN) and thinking creatively (MONA). At the Feminist Futures symposium in July 2017 held at Central Saint Martin's School London, I presented a form of Artificial Intelligence called MONA, the Multiple Online Navigation Application. The audience was mainly art students and MONA's function was to overcome the gender bias in the art market by thinking and producing creatively instead of artists. MONA's visual was a collage of Mona Lisa's smile and my inserted lips. I presented MONA by performing the so-called Turing test with the AI, live in front of the audience, bringing 'her' to life making the audience question if 'she' really exists.

"Meet MONA", recorded @Feminist Futures seminar, Central Saint Martins, July 2017 <https://vimeo.com/233548047>

"Meet MONA" @ Feminist Futures symposium, Central Saint Martins, 2017, photo: Iona Wolff

G(j)estekunstner talk



***A quantitative analysis on
sardines & the relationship between
paradise***

Invite
G(j)estekunstner
Talk @ Bergen
Public Library,
2016



G(j)estekunstner Talk

Live performance, ca. 20 minutes

Public Library in Bergen, Prøverommet, Norway

2016

In this performative talk, that played with the Norwegian word for performance artist (Gestekunstner) and the word guest (Gjest) in its title, I was presenting my experience during my residency at AIR Bergen in Norway. The talk was part of an organised community performance night held in the public library.

The residency at AIR Bergen was hosted in a former sardine factory with a view on the Fjord. I had a huge studio available just to myself for 4 weeks. Within this massive amount of space, I was encountering news items on my laptop on how refugees were housed like 'sardines' in a former Berlin airport. While I was discovering Bergen as a city, I came across a suburb called *paradis*, the Norwegian word for paradise. In the talk, I was combining all these different narrative strands into one. This included the fact that in my home country Austria, where immigration numbers got more and more restricted, a popular tourist location among wealthier Arabs is a place called Zell am See. It is rumoured to be so popular due to its resonance with the description of paradise in the Koran.