

# PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, 25 May 2021

## **ANNA EHRENSTEIN . TOOLS FOR CONVIVIALITY**

C/O Berlin Talent Award 2020

**C/O Berlin** presents the exhibition **Anna Ehrenstein . Tools for Conviviality** from **May 29 to 02 September, 2021**, showcasing the winner of the **C/O Berlin Talent Award 2020** at the **Amerika Haus**, Hardenbergstraße 22–24, 10623 Berlin. Due to corona restrictions, no exhibition opening will be held.

Enormous gold bitcoins fall against the background of a shimmering swimming pool, as a young man surfs nonchalantly through the image on one of the gold coins. Wearing a batik t-shirt, he strikes a cool pose with his sunglasses pushed up, always ready at hand, as he flies through the digital golden rain. The German-Albanian media artist Anna Ehrenstein creates futuristic visual worlds that she sites in surreal mise-en-scènes. Ehrenstein draws on the digital utopia of global connectivity, selecting motifs such as bitcoins, drones, and VR goggles that appear in her collages like foreign bodies. She consciously employs a Photoshop aesthetic in her works, deliberately countering the conventional art history narrative of photography as a documentary medium.

*Tools for Conviviality* is a multimedia project that weaves together a complex installation from 360° videos, photographs, collages, as well as printed fabric and acrylic sculptures. Ehrenstein's title references the book of the same name by Austrian-American philosopher Ivan Illich, who criticized the Western idea of progress back in 1973. Illich argues that the tools of technological innovation subjugate us rather than making our lives easier. Now smartphones, social media, and virtual reality claim to offer a cross-national global network. Ehrenstein's work calls this supposed utopia into question. With a very light touch, she uses digital media and communication technologies to encourage viewers of her visual worlds to reflect critically on stereotypes and the ways in which they are represented in media.

Moreover, the multiperspectival approach offered by *Tools for Conviviality* also queries the European view on ways of living in West Africa. In the exhibition, the classically external perspective of documentaries is replaced by a collective method of on-site oral and visual research, in which local creatives are involved as coproducers. During extended physical and virtual stays in Dakar, Anna Ehrenstein visually approached the worlds of the local artists and cultural actors Saliou Ba, Donkafele (Mandé Mory Bah and Thibault Houssou), Nyamwathi Gichau, Lydia Likibi and Awa Seck. The Senegalese capital attracts a large number of young creatives due to its cultural significance and the loose visa regulations of the country. The collaborators, working in the fields of fashion, design, writing, translation and spiritual healing, migrated from Benin, Guinea, Gambia, the Republic of Congo and Kenya to the booming metropolis in order to establish a new existence.

Ehrenstein's multimedia project is surreal and makes conscious use of glitches, such as visual turbulences and distorted effects that, in combination, question the suppo-

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sedly factual basis of documentation. Enabling as it does a plurality of readings, the jury felt the work ideally fit with the topic of “New Documentary Strategies” for which the C/O Berlin Talent Award is bestowed. For her lively, multifaceted, and visionary approach, the artist receives a cash prize of 7,000 Euros and will be honored with a solo exhibition at C/O Berlin: *Anna Ehrenstein . Tools for Conviviality*. An accompanying publication will appear on the occasion of the exhibition, published by Spector Books (edited by Dr. Kathrin Schönegg on behalf of the C/O Berlin Foundation) with texts by US theoretician Emily Watlington, who, together with Ehrenstein as Artist, received the C/O Berlin Talent Award 2020 Theorist.

**Anna Ehrenstein** (b. 1993, AL/DE) investigates the exchange of people and objects in the digital age. She studied photography and media arts at the Fachhochschule Dortmund and completed a postgraduate program in media with Mischa Kuball and Julia Scher at the Kunsthochschule für Medien. Her works have been featured in international group exhibitions including ‘Situations’ at Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2019), the photography festival Les Rencontres d’Arles (2018), and the Triennale for Photography in Hamburg (2018). C/O Berlin will present her first institutional solo exhibition. Ehrenstein has been nominated for several prizes and recently received a DAAD grant for a research project in Bogota, Colombia. Anna Ehrenstein lives in Berlin, Cologne, and Tirana.

**Emily Watlington** (b. 1993, US) works on contemporary media arts and feminist ethics. She studied art history (BFA) and completed a masters in architecture studies (SMArchS) from the History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture and Art program at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Watlington spent 2018/19 in Berlin with a Fulbright fellowship for journalism and currently works as an assistant editor at Art in America. Her texts have been published in exhibition catalogs, anthologies, magazines, and newspapers, such as *Art in America*, *Hyperallergic*, *Haunt Journal of Art*, *Frieze*, *Another Gaze*, *Mousse*, *Art Review* and *Spike Art Magazine*. Emily Watlington lives in New York.

**C/O Berlin Talent Award** is awarded each year in the categories of art and theory to two individuals under thirty-five years of age. The award carries a cash prize for both winners as well as a solo exhibition and an individually designed publication. A joint artist talk rounds off this union of theory and practice. Artists are nominated for the award by a committee of international experts. Theorists may apply during the open call. Our curator Dr. Kathrin Schönegg heads the C/O Berlin Talent Award.

Since 2020, the C/O Berlin Talent Award has been made possible by the Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung.

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C/O Berlin Talent Award 2020

**Exhibition** 29 May–02 September 2021

**Opening Hours** daily . 11:00 a.m.–08:00 p.m.  
**Admission** 10 euros . reduced 6 euros  
**Organizer** C/O Berlin Foundation  
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