

AMITAI ROMM





Amitai Romm's work is linked to specific or context-reflective art practices. Thinking about the secular yet esoteric symbolic space of exhibitions and how they mediate experience. And to think more broadly about the functions of such institutions in relation to other contexts and environments (knowledge production, scientific research and natural ecosystems mediated by technology).

The initial research leading to this exhibition began with an interest in the morphology of the parabolic shape as it appears in both biology and technical systems. Especially in relation to commercial satellite technology as an emblem of a specific social imaginary of communication and information processing. Romm was also interested in the physical properties of the parabolic shape, which concentrates wave signals at a focal point (electromagnetic waves, light, sound). In an exhibition context, an object designed to effectively receive and transmit signals becomes expressive.

The works in the exhibition are based on a research project begun around 2021, which explores the hybrid relationships that can occur between plant life, sensors, data collection processes and our human bodies. These works have been developed in dialogue with practitioners from various scientific research sites on ecosystems and climate modelling.

The first iteration of this series was presented at *Hum*, Amitai Romm's solo exhibition at Spike Island, Bristol, in 2022. The works in the exhibition were made with materials and signals from a mature beech forest in Sorø, East Sealand, Denmark. The forest is home to the ICOS (Integrated Carbon Observation System) station in Sorø. This is an environmental survey system established in 1996 as part of an international effort to collect climate data from forests around the planet. The artist found this station interesting because it focuses on a local and specific ecosystem, whilst the systemic changes it documented have profound impact everywhere on earth. But which imaginative capacities does this kind of sensation demand from us?

Graft marks a further development and level of abstraction and/or figuration for this system. In its current configuration, the works move away from their parabolic origins along different imaginative paths in search for a new skin.

left

Graft
2022

Plant fibres, paper pulp, PETG plastic
180 x 180 x 40 cm

following

Installation views from *Graft*, at Veda, Florence (IT), 2023







(top)

Phantasy
2023

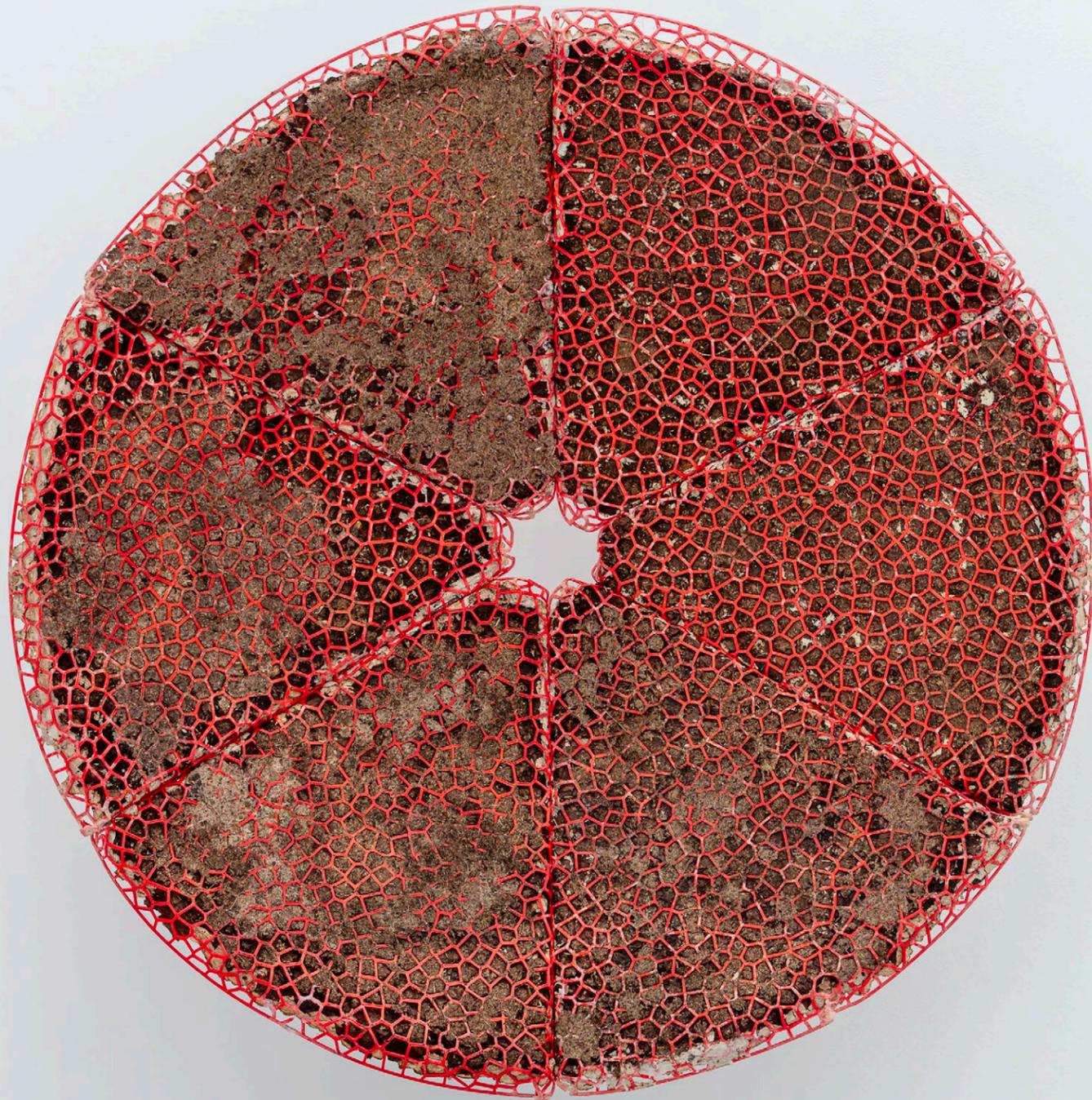
Polyester plate lithography on Arches Velin BFK Rives®, ballpoint pen, plastic, beeswax
10.5 x 23 cm

(right)

Graft
2023

Plant fibres, paper pulp, PETG plastic, dibond
240 x 150 x 50 cm





AMITAI ROMM uses scientific approaches and techniques to think broadly about our natural environment and surroundings. In *Hum*, his first solo exhibition in the UK, Romm explores how nature is mediated by technology, speculating on the hybrid relationships that can be formed between plant life, sensors, data collection processes and our own human bodies.

In the centre of the gallery are two colossal speakers emitting a sub-acoustic drone. Their vibrations are based on near real-time data transmitted from a climate measuring station based in a mature beech forest in east Denmark that produces one of the world's oldest continuous datasets of carbon sequestration. Romm's installation, *Hum* (2022), recodes the station's raw data into sound waves that are played at around 10Hz: lower than our ears can decipher but powerful enough for our bodies to sense.

Laying and hanging around the speakers are five sculptures, collectively titled *Graft* (2022), that gently quiver from the inaudible tremors. Made from a 3D-printed mesh structure based on a Voronoi diagram, they are clad in coarse handmade paper made from by-products including decomposing plant fibres (from the forest) and shredded confidential documents (from Spike Island). Taking the shape of parabolic satellite dishes, they are also what Romm refers to as "non-communicative objects", both familiar and unclassifiable as antennas or listening devices.

Thinking expansively about how we consume and interpret data, *Hum* casts a critical view on the systemisation of our natural environment and encourages us to think differently about our impact upon it.

left

Graft
2022

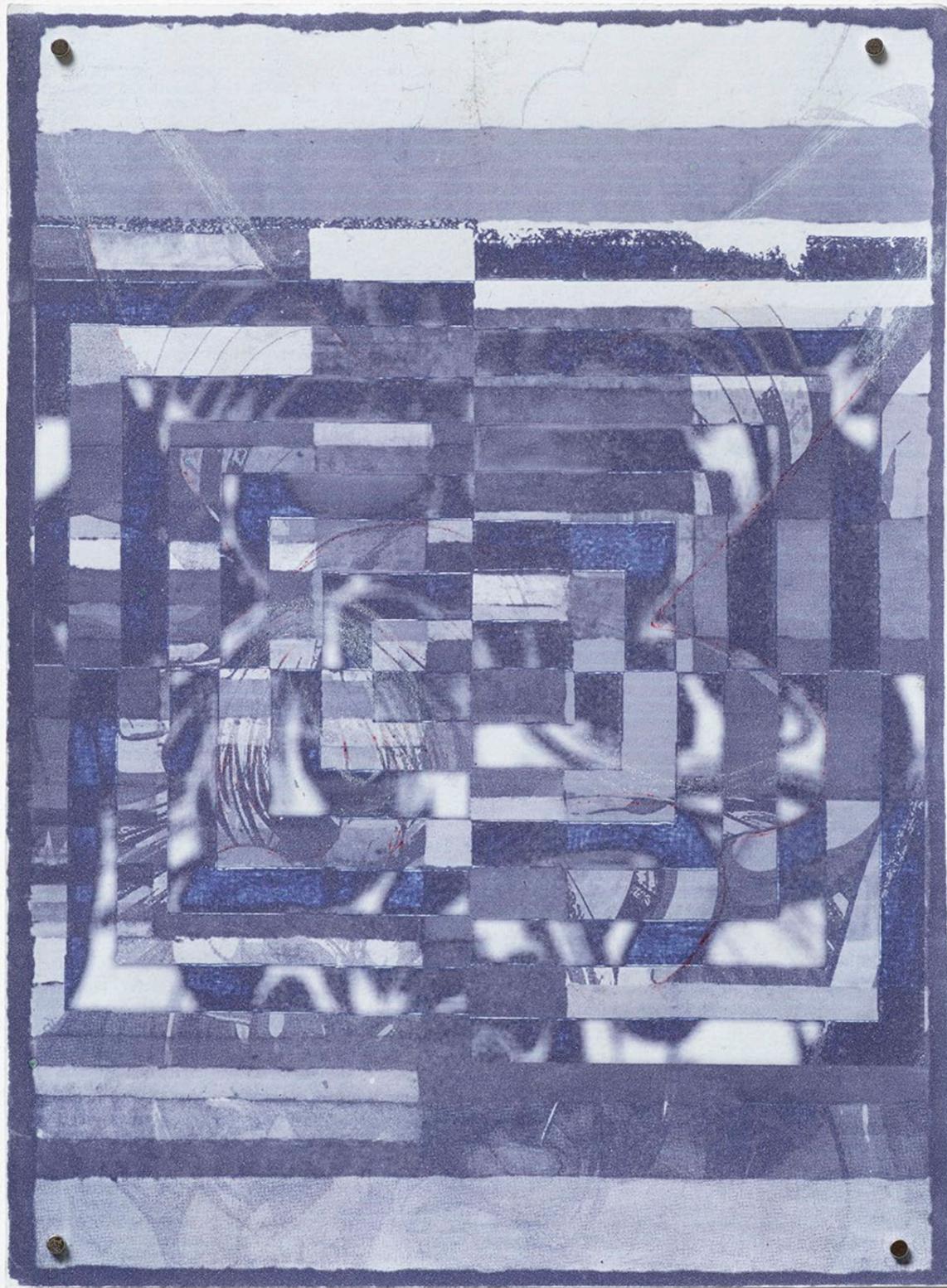
Plant fibres, paper pulp, PETG plastic
180 x 180 x 40 cm

following

Installation views from *Hum*, at Spike Island, Bristol (UK), 2022







left

Angel
2018

Inkjet print and pencil on paper
20 x 15 cm

following

Installation views from Arc Eye, at Bianca D'Alessandro, Copenhagen (DK), 2021





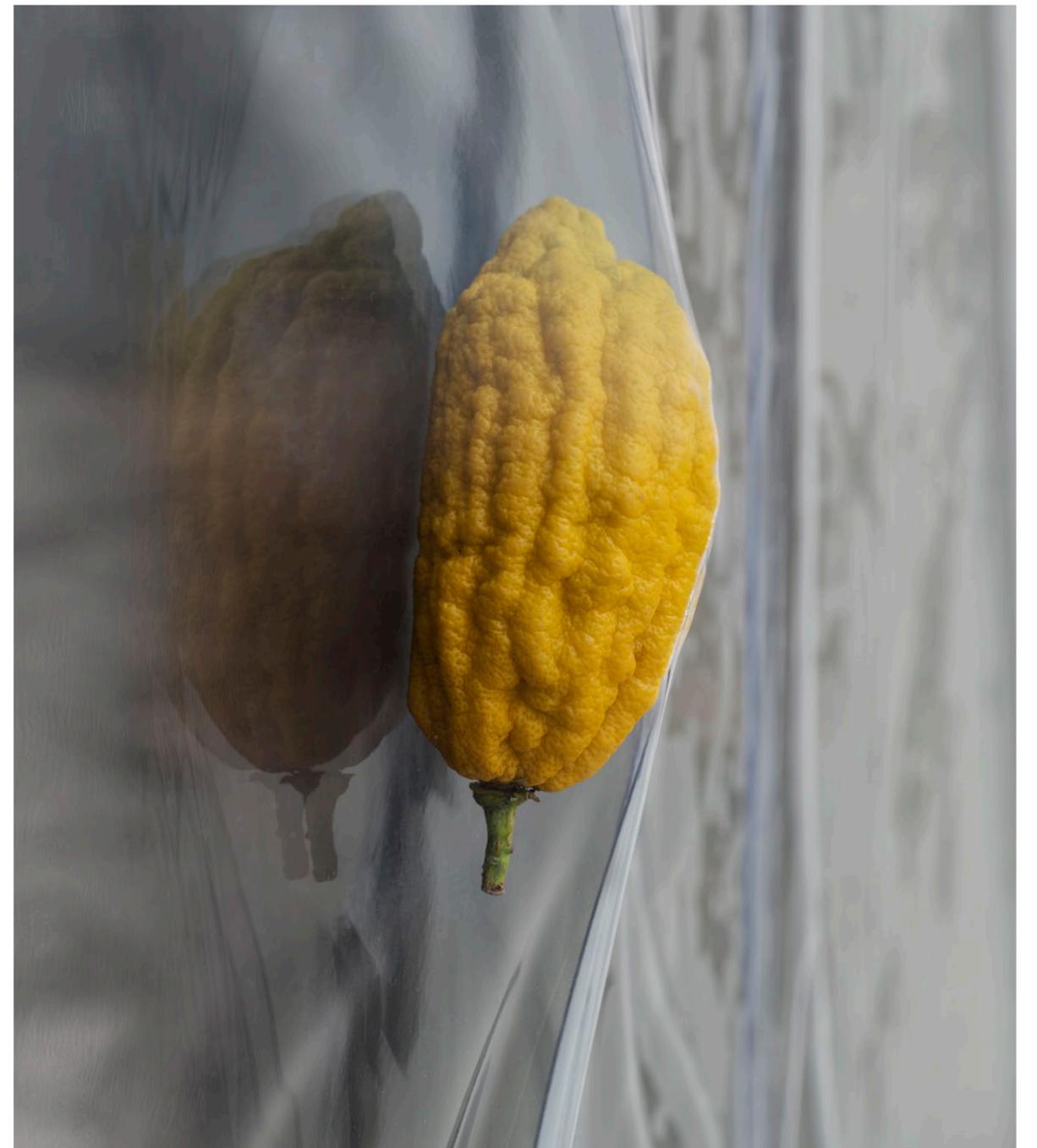
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Installation views from *Macula Lutea* at Veda, Florence (IT), 2019



Keeper: A small vacuum pump, attached to the main gallery space window. It keeps a single Citron fruit suspended behind PVC, forming an enclosure with no space or air. The assembly sustains a tension between what is on display and what meets the eye.

Keeper
2019
Variable dimensions
Citron fruit, plastic, vacuum pump, tubes and fittings

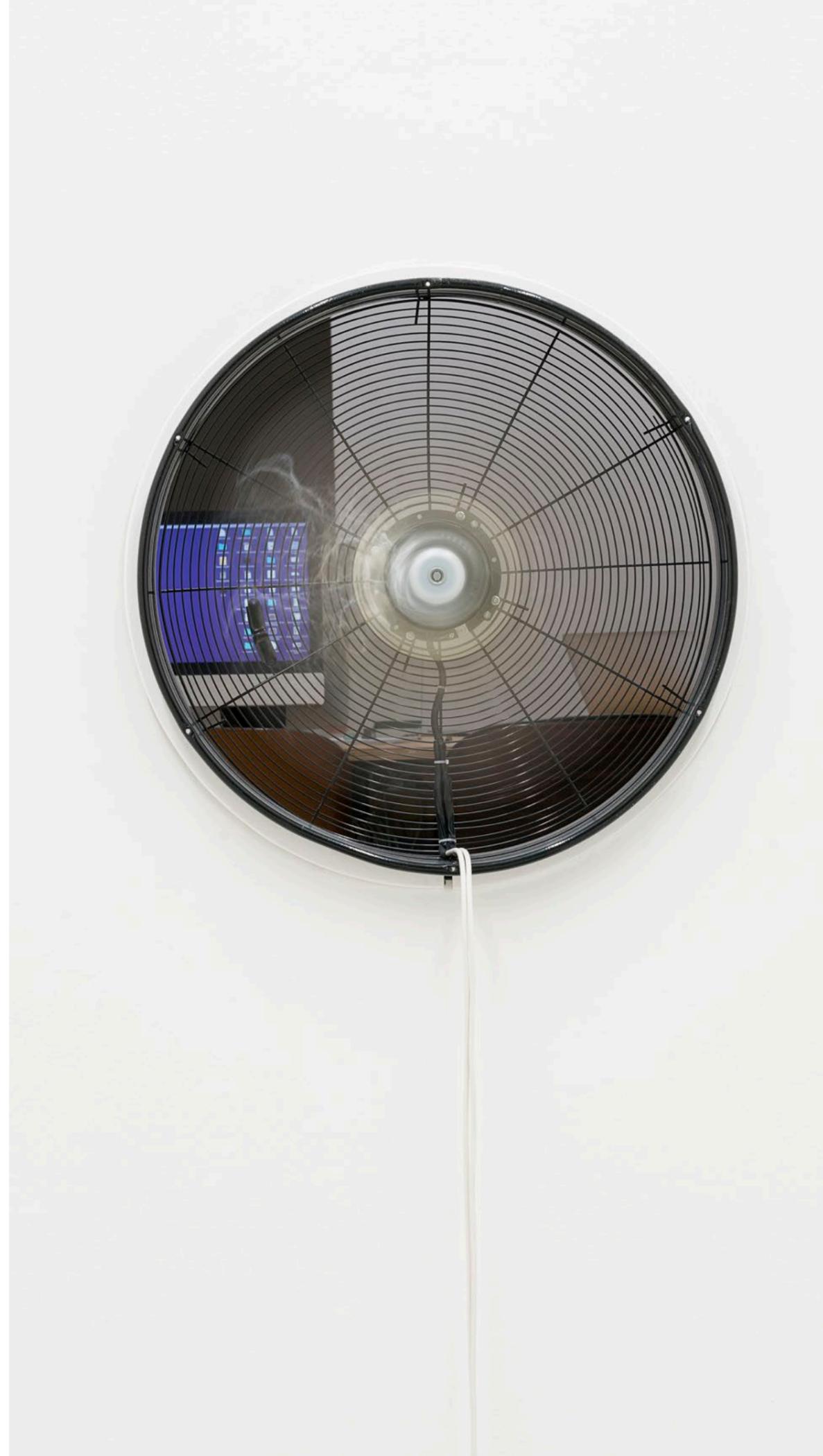






Dispenser: A modified industrial ventilator with blades made of brittle glass, installed in the rear wall between the exhibition space and its back rooms and office.

Dispenser
2019
60 ϕ x 30 cm
Axial fan, voltage regulator, glass



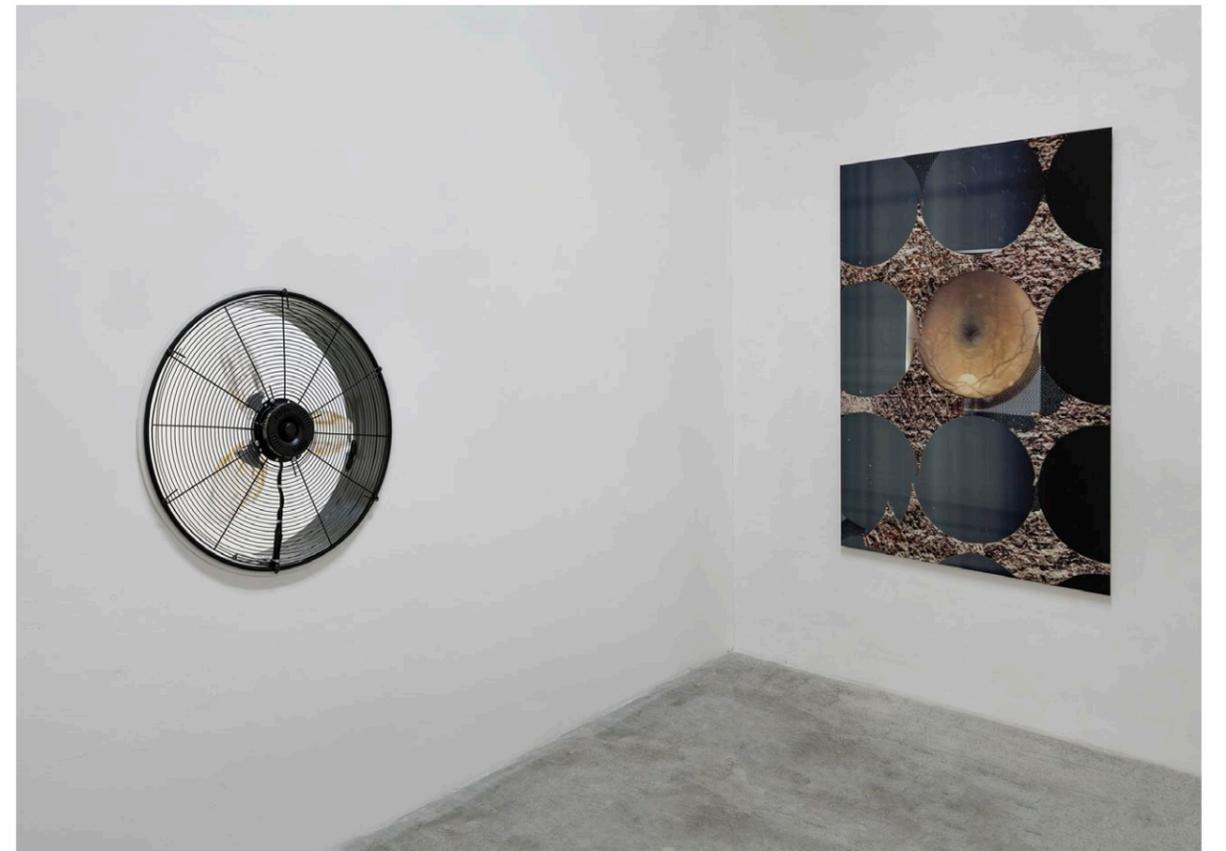
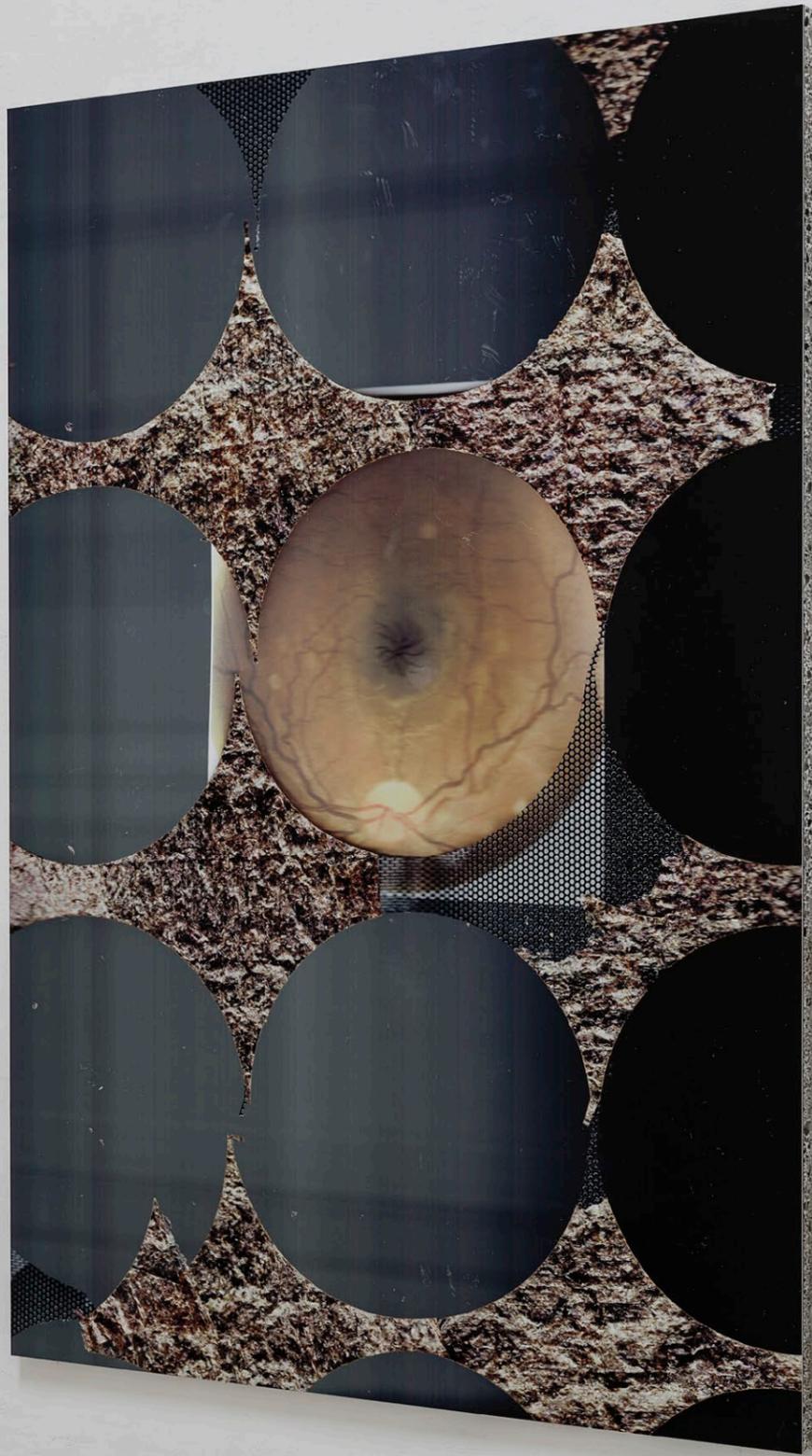


(right)

Analyst (5)
2019
20x29 cm
Laserprint, pencil, ink and oil pastel on paper
Mounted on dibond and aluminum foam

Analyst: A semi-fictional character, in search of a perfect skin. Immersed in a civilizing ritual to keep the world in check, seeking to eliminate inconsistencies and construct a ground from which to begin and end. Of course it slips, the surface becomes a field, the ground does its dizzying thing.





Permeable Boundaries
2019
110x162 cm
Inkjet print on paper
Mounted on dibond and aluminium foam

Amitai Romm sets out to investigate, but in the end is happier getting lost. He plays on the idea of the golem—significant but unthinking—to ask fundamental questions about art, technology, and agency. What results is a collision of fancy and utility, speculation and science that is by no means ironic, but always playful.

Just before we said goodbye, Amitai Romm recommended I read what Gershom Scholem once said about golems. At that point we had been speaking for hours, yet the golem became a key to Romm's work that I had to discover on my own. Scholem, I found out, was one of the twentieth century's foremost scholars on Jewish mysticism, and the golem—like Frankenstein's monster—can be understood as a kind of beta version of a human, which may be created by humans themselves, but, as Frankenstein's example also warns, not without some risk. In 1965, Scholem agreed to make the inaugural address at the installation of Israel's first computer only if it be named Golem No. 1. It was. Golems are obedient, but they perform their tasks literally. That is, they are animate, but somehow not alive. Computers are the golems of our time—obviously—and Scholem was the first to name the beast.

At Kunstmuseum Bonn in 2018, two bundles of fabric lay on the floor for observation as part of Romm's installation ILOVEWITHNOLIMITATION (Circadian Rythm). One was reminiscent of a mummy: dark green fabric wrapped tight and garnished with a pink bouquet of incense. The other was more sprawling, its abject limbs draped in delicate beige knits. Water coded with protein to make it smell like human sweat fed into the bodies through PVC tubes, and with the resounding quiet of both beginning and end, leaked back out onto the floor.

The gallery suffered some damage.

Through the ages, golems have connoted anything from hope to despair. In the case of Romm's lumps of clothing, it is unclear whether the transfusion of salty liquid is lethal or invigorating. Their slow leakage is an inquiry into how objects become significant, rather than what exactly they signify. Via Scholem, there's also a consideration of our relationship to machines. Philosophically, to try to spark life like fire from banging two stones is to play God. It's an act of hubris. Practically, it is a potential threat to our own mastery; it is vital that our creations remain, like golems, without agency, tragic and stupid. Romm enchants this familiar debate—by now mostly associated with problematics around Artificial Intelligence and algorithms—with the unbeatable drama of ancient spirituality and folklore. In Bonn, his presentation was like a scene from the book of Genesis or a verse out of Homer, yet with a sci-fi thriller twist, thriving on the tension between technology and superstition. Another kind of golem crops up in drawings and small photogravures throughout Romm's practice. In his hat and coat he looks like a detective, or a bureaucrat—a cog in some machinery—except reptilian, as if skinless or melting. In Human Security System (2018), he closely examined a round object inside a Perspex case. A year later at VEDA in Florence, the object of scrutiny was clearly a lemon. In the text that accompanied that exhibition, titled Macula Lutea, Romm named him the Analyst: "In search of perfect skin. Immersed in a civilizing ritual to keep the world in check." The lemon in question was an etrog, one of four types used during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. For the rest of the year it is just another fruit, but in the days leading up to Sukkot, its value increases exponentially as the hunt commences for the finest, most aesthetically perfect specimen. In the art world, value is created on similar terms: framed by the ritual context of the exhibition, with great volatility from one moment to the next, and exclusively on the basis of something like belief—both in the magic touch of the artist, and in the art system as the sanctioned purveyor of auratic objects.

The Analyst pretends to be an agent of rationality, but is blindly absorbed by the absurd allure of the lemon—that's what makes him a golem. So, according to the golem logic of art, since the lemon is valuable, it should be exhibited and preserved. And there it is, squeezed against the windowpane, vacuum packed between two sheets of plastic, shrivelling, flattening into an image. It is a reductive idea of what art is, of what an exhibition is, that displays the seams of its own construction. As Romm wrote in the same text, "Of course it slips, the surface

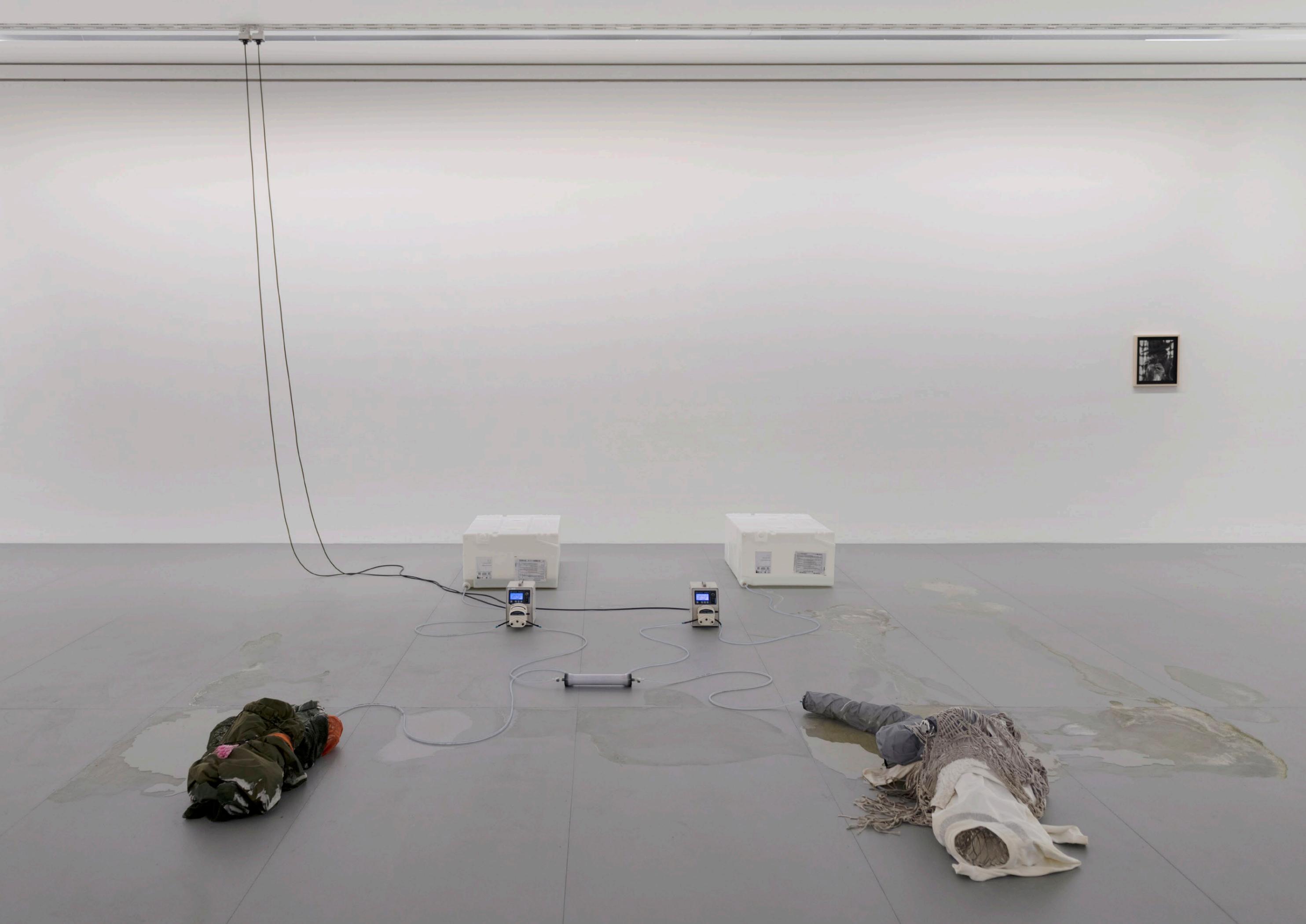
becomes a field, the ground does its dizzying thing."

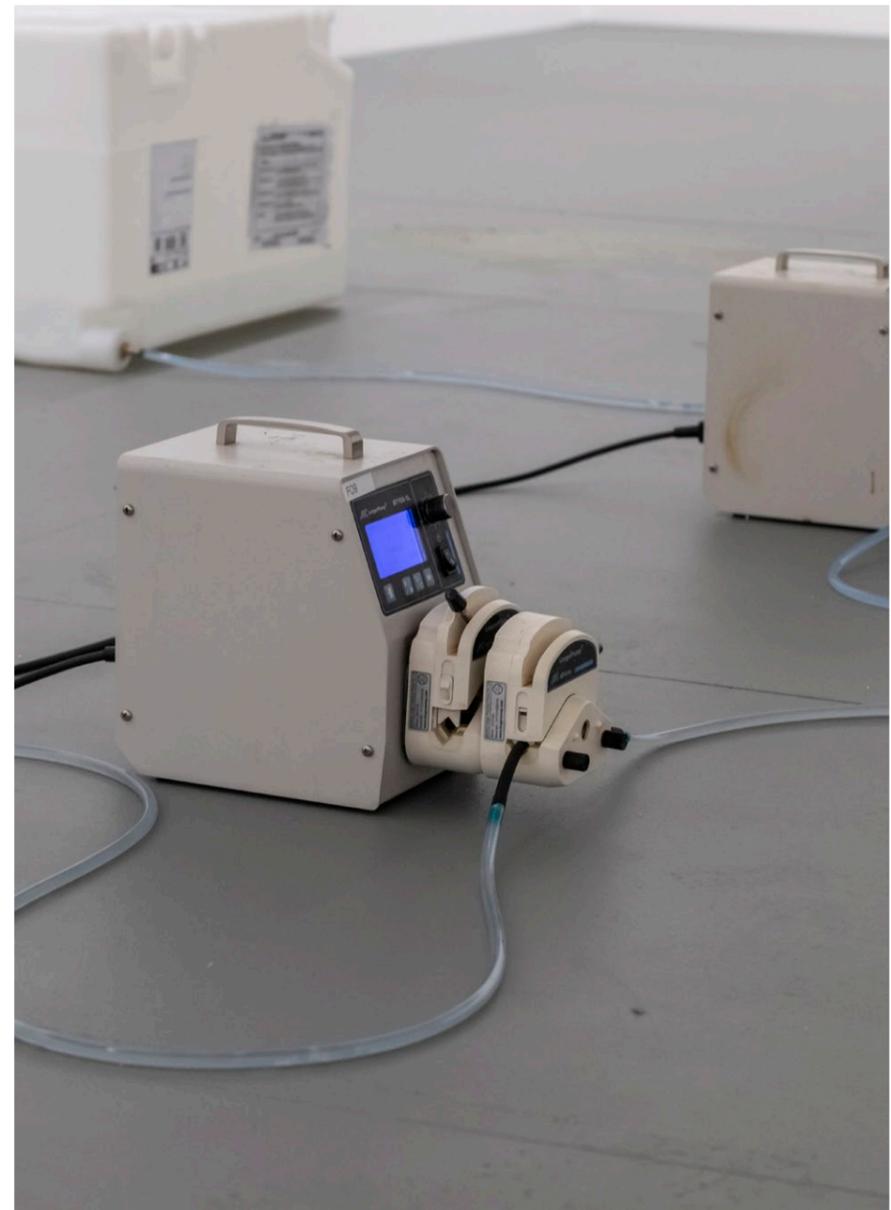
While the Analyst only has eyes for the one thing he's been employed to find, art is all about inadvertent concomitance—the useless attachment, the poetic side effect. But for Romm, this naivete—say, taking a metaphor literally, or faith for science—is a useful starting point. In 2016, Bianca D'Alessandro in Copenhagen hosted an almost invisible exhibition by Romm: a DIY compass of magnets and laser discs, visible as silhouettes through a tarp stretched across the skylights. Again, the underlying impulse was to deliberately mistake the exhibition for a useful format, turning the gallery space into an orientation machine, to see what else might be revealed in the slippage. On the wall was a drawing of a mermaid, as if ripped from the pages of a notebook belonging to a sailor lost at sea. What this fragment of narrative suggested is that Romm's compass was not meant to help you stay on track, but rather carefully designed to let you drift off. In this world, we get to be golems for a moment, searching without agency, finding without reason.



following

Installation views from Dorothea Von Stetten Art Award at Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn (DE), 2018





ILOVEWITHNOLIMITATION (Circadian Rythm)
2018

Water tanks, PVC tubes, laboratory pumps, Aquaporin Inside forward osmosis filter, fabrics, clothing, stainless steel,
tapwater, salt, L-histidine monohydrochloride monohydrate, sodium dihydrogen orthophosphate dihydrate
variable dimensions



Parable
2017
Steel, neodymium magnets, flexicalymene trilobites
variable dimension



A LIBRARY OF SPHINCTERS

Chris Fite-Wassilak

Have a breathe in.

Let the mingled molecules of nitrogen, oxygen, argon caress your nose hairs, slip under your epiglottis and tickle the cilia that line your trachea on the way in. Maybe follow one floating pair of atoms, as they drift further into the fluvial outreaches of your lungs, cross over the alveoli wall and hitch a ride on a red blood cell into your arteries. The other, unneeded molecules are ushered back the way they came.

Notions of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are easily theorised, obsessed as we are with the workings of our own heads. Though the thin skin that covers our muscles and tendons is, if flattened out, up to two square metres worth of pulsing fabric; the combined routes of the bronchi of our lungs can have a surface area of up to seventy-five square metres. Which is to say that: an area of us around the size of a tennis court is constantly exposed to the air and elements, incessantly absorbing and exchanging materials. Life is simply, on one level, a thinly delineated set of molecules, filtering and sorting what’s needed from its surroundings in order to cultivate the conditions for existence. Humans are merely another permeable sac, punctuated at either end by muscular sphincters admitting and ejecting atoms.

The work of Amitai Romm is, broadly, a designation of systems. Rooms of sorted materials, sifted and organised into plastic and Styrofoam, matter redistributed to see what entity might emerge. Romm’s work has called on commercial distribution methods – shipping containers and packing materials that move parcels of food and goods; parabolas that echo satellites dispersing information signals – as well as sensory distribution methods, from spices and manufactured scents to drawing and art itself as a means of systemisation. In his work is the repeated question of how we have distinguished one thing from the other over time, and what is at stake when we do so. Whether using the stars or GoogleMaps to choose walk one direction rather than another, or choosing to ingest one plant or another, each choice is an incremental step in reconstituting what our body and our mind is made up of. Can a system ever be said to be fully independent, to have a life of its own?

At the centre of his installation at the Kunstmuseum Bonn is a circulation system, pumping at rhythmic intervals, where a liquid that approximates human sweat is drawn by osmosis through a filtration system. What emerges, through fragrant, cloth-bound appendages, is something approximating water. Ancient Sanskrit texts suggest purifying water by passing it through sand or coarse gravel; this system relies instead on a thin biotech membrane and household spices.

What leaches through those boundaries is, hopefully, the right molecules. A body is defined, as such, by what it is not. Any number of human habits – our diets, our disgusts and aversions – might be considered logical extensions of such a dynamic, though it would seem we’ve developed our own twists to that tale. The conception of cleanliness is a relatively recent take on what’s considered permissible to pass into contact with our body; in some contexts, dirt and rot are anathema, things to be rinsed away and disappeared. In others,

they’re a replenishing mud bath and restorative probiotic. ‘If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt,’ the anthropologist Mary Douglas noted, ‘we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place.’¹ Immaculacy is only a matter of context.

Douglas, of course, didn’t provide a precise source for her supposed ‘old definition’; notes of hers point towards Philip Dormer Stanhope, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield, as the source of the idea, though no scholar has been able to find such a record. Henry John Temple, the third Viscount Palmerston, was found to have addressed the British Royal Agricultural Society in 1852 using a similar phrase: ‘I have heard it said that dirt is nothing but a thing in a wrong place.’² It would seem hard to believe that theories of dirt originated with 18th and 19th century English gentry (but perhaps appropriate to their pursuit of notions of segregation and distinction); though it remains a matter of hearsay, an elusive whisper. The idea of dirt as a matter out of place is itself without a place. That might be part of its threat, as a notion that can shift, permeate and transform any supposed order; defined only as a thing that doesn’t belong it might determine what belonging is.

It recalls the way writer, poet and translator Anne Carson, in describing Jean-Paul Sartre’s examination of slime in *Being and Nothingness*, summed it up succinctly as a ‘crisis of contact’³. The viscosity of slime, for Sartre, is repulsive because of the threat of permeability, that it might stick to you, and then drag everything else in with it and in turn invade your consciousness: ‘The horror of the slimy is the horrible fear that time might become slimy, that facticity might progress continually and insensibly and absorb the For-Itself which exists it.’⁴ Like the ever-growing alien mass of *The Blob* (1958), terrifying because it makes no distinction of boundaries, has no discernable taste for one matter or another: all is absorbed and turned to goo.

Placement and permeability, then, might to be bases around which we might approach Romm’s work. Materials, categorised into various containers, then placed into a system of select transaction, the specific crossing over, between a permeable boundary. It suggests the dynamic the formation of a body, a synthetic life form, that has yet to find its own skin or outside. We are witness to its first exchanges, its first sputtering breaths. The telling point might be when this body then wants to reach out and touch us. What right do humans, as just an organised library of sphincters, have to repel from any such touch? The crisis of contact is happening constantly, and the future lies in how each of us in turn embrace it.

Now, have a breathe out.

¹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London: Routledge, 1966, page 44.

² Anon., ‘The Royal Agricultural Society’, *The Times*, 21169, 16 July 1852, p. 8.

³ Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, page 41.

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, London: Methuen, trans. Hazel E Barnes, 1957, page 611.



left

Untitled
2017
Ballpoint pen on paper
21 x 15 cm

following

Installation views from *Hibernation* at Tranen, Gentofte Main Library, Hellerup (DK), 2017



Influencer Sarcophagus 2
2017
Steel, polystyrene, neodymium magnets, acrylic glass, acrylic mirror,
UV heating lamp, blue poppy seeds
60 x 40 x 50 cm







(right) *Influencer Sarcophagus 4*
2017

Steel, polystyrene, neodymium magnets, acrylic glass, acrylic mirror, UV heating lamp, computer hardware fan,
stainless steel, whole cinnamon, ground cinnamon
200 x 40 x 30 cm



left

Skin
2016
Photogravure
34 x 24 cm

following

Installation views from *How shall the sea be referred to* at Bianca D'Alessandro, Copenhagen (DK), 2016





Blind/Compass (1 and 2)
2016
Tarp, ropes, water, laserdisc, neodymium magnets
355 × 200 cm and 300 × 200 cm



Parable (1-2)
2016
Steel
150 × 150 × 30 cm each



following

Installation views from *Bubble Metropolis* at Vermilion Sands, Copenhagen (DK), 2019
with works by Calder Harben, The Otolith Group, Allan Sekula and Noël Burch





CURRICULUM VITAE

AMITAI ROMM

Born 1985, Jerusalem
Lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark

EDUCATION

2009-2014 MFA The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Visual Arts.
2011-13 Akademie der Bildenden Künste Vienna.
2007-09 Jutland Art Academy.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2023 Graft, Veda, Florence
2022 Hum, Spike Island, Bristol
2021 Arc Eye, Bianca D'Alessandro, Copenhagen
2019 Macula Lutea, VEDA, Florence
2017 Hibernation, Tranen, Gentofte
2016 How shall the sea be referred to, Bianca D'Alessandro, Copenhagen
you may cycle the layers without alteration, Møen44, Askeby (with Jean Marc Routhier)
2015 SHELSTERS, Garret Grimoire, Vienna (with SQ)
Exfoliation, V4ULT, Berlin
2014 Alloy, TOVES, Copenhagen (with Jean Marc Routhier)

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022 Adesso no, NAM, Florence
Urd, Fabrika CCI, Moscow
2021 Tutto comincia da una interruzione, Gitti and Partners, Milan
Dansk Kunst Nu, SMK, Copenhagen
Bubble Metropolis, Vermillion Sands, Copenhagen
2018 New Qualia Hotel, Bianca D'Alessandro, Copenhagen
Dorothea Von Stetten Award, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn
2017 Let's see, Where were we? In the Pit of Despair, de Ateliers, Amsterdam
Mediated Matter, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen
2016 Forårsudstillingen, Den Frie, Copenhagen
Tongue, Bianca D'Alessandro, Copenhagen
Spooky Action at a Distance, BUS Projects, Melbourne
2015 Plowing Solids, New Galerie, Paris
Espressive Earth, TOVES, Copenhagen
2014 FAMILY; IMO Projects, Copenhagen
White on White, 68sqm, Copenhagen
HOOKS, CJCH Pavillion, Prague
2013 Ayizen, KBG, Vienna
Lounge, Ve.sch, Vienna

SELECTED GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

2019 Annemarie Nielsen og Carl Niensens Legat
2018 Niels Wessel Bagges Kunstfond
2017 Grosserer L.f. Foghts Fond
Preben Siigers Foundation
Ragnvald og Ida Blix' Foundation
2014-2017 The Danish Arts Foundation
Den Hiemlstjerne-Rosencroneske Foundation

FAIRS

2020 Solo presentation, Paris Internationale, Paris
2019 Solo presentation, Frame section, Frieze New York
2017 Solo presentation, LISTE, Basel
2016 CODE, Copenhagen

RESIDENCIES

2020 Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
2018 The Danish Institute, Rome
2017 Cité des Arts, Paris
The Danish Institute, Athens

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2021 Kristian Vistrup Madsen "Animate Inanimate", Mousse Magazine
2020 Mud Muses, ed. Lars Bang Larsen, Koenig Books & Moderna Museet
2018 Dorothea Von Stetten Kunstpreis 2018 Kunstmuseum Bonn Wienand
2017 Chris Fite-Wassilak "Future Greats". Art Review January
2016 Travis Diehl, "Amitai Romm and Jean Marc Routhier". Artforum, 28.05.16

COLLABORATIVE WORK

Primer
www.primer.dk

Primer is a platform for artistic and organizational development. It is located in the headquarters of Aquaporin, www.primer.dk a global water technology company, in Kgs. Lyngby, Denmark. Primer instigates thematic projects that take place across multiple formats. The work centers on the convergence of climatic, scientific and technological developments and their societal effects, both present and future.

Curatorial Projects (selected)

2022 Antarctica from Space. Emily Jones with Marika Hibo Farah, Maja Pedersen, Cecilie Reshide Møller, Union for Open Vocalism, Lucas Melkane and Mandus Ridefelt. Artistic development, performance series and concert

- 2019 DK 179913. Emil Rønn Andersen. Artistic development, solo exhibition
- 2019 The future hides that it hides nothing. Samuel Butler, Inger Christensen, Lav Diaz, Barbara Heinzen, Sotirios Levakos, Paul Graham Raven with Ferhat Karaca and Fatih Camci, Louis Scherfig, Jay Springett, Andrei Tarkovsky, Susanne Ussing, Pierre Wack, Mi You, H.C. Ørsted, Ocean of America and The Pacific Institute. Multiple format programme
- 2019 Strata. Kristine Kemp. Solo Exhibition
- 2018 Ripe. Nanna Abell, Franciska Clausen, Cecilie Skov, Helmut Völter, The Pacific Institute, Anne-Françoise Schmid. Exhibition
- 2018 Life Without, Michala Paludan, Artist Placement Group, Susanne Ussing and Carsten Hoff. Exhibition
- 2017–18 Synthetics. Curated by Søren Andreasen. Charlotte Johannesson, Dora Maar, Karl Otto Götz, Ben F. Laposky, Morten Jakobsen, Nürnberg Chronicle, Lea Porsager, Herkules Segers, Rembrandt, Sidsel Meineche Hansen, Till Mycha, Jakob Jakobsen. Exhibition
- 2017 Dead Reckoning. Fredrik Tydén, Reza Negarestani, Kristine Kemp, Berit Hjelholt, Ib Braase, Karl Sims, Magnus Thorø Clausen, LACMA. Exhibition

Diakron
www.diakron.dk

Diakron is a studio for transdisciplinary research and practice. We establish collaborations across disciplinary backgrounds and institutional frameworks. Our own backgrounds are composed of experiences from artistic practices, curatorial practices, social sciences and graphic design.

Exhibition Contributions

- 2021 Bodies of Water. 13th Shanghai Biennale, Power Station of Art, Shanghai (with Emil Rønn Andersen)
- 2021 Nothing Makes Itself, ARKO Art Center, Seoul, South Korea (with Emil Rønn Andersen)
- 2019 Mud Muses, Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Network Initiatives (selected)

- 2022 Strategic Development Series #3, Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, International network on art and emerging technology
- 2022 Strategic Development Series #2, Medicinsk Museion, Copenhagen, International network on art and emerging technology
- 2020 Strategic Development Series #1 Moderna Museet, Stockholm. International network on art and emerging technology
- 2018 The 21st Century Institution, Serpentine Galleries and Primer. Event on emerging technology and art

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Graft – photo by Flavio Pescatori
Hum – photo by Dan Weill
Arc Eye – photo by Malle Madsen
Macula Lutea - photo by Flavio Pescatori
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Trilobite closeups - photo by IDOART.DK
Hibernation - photo by David Stjernholm
How Shall the Sea Be Referred to - photo by Jan Søndergaard
Bubble Metropolis - photo by Kevin Malcolm

VEDA