



## **Helmhaus Zürich**

14 February–6 April 2014

### **!Mediengruppe Bitnik – Delivery for Mr. Assange Christian Waldvogel – unknown**

**One exhibition floods a large space in the Helmhaus; the other offers access to one of the world's most carefully guarded places. Helmhaus Zürich presents two separate exhibitions by artists from Zurich, each with a spectacular take on life's realities. Christian Waldvogel has poured a nutrient broth on an area of 150 square metres. In the course of the exhibition budding growth will appear, as it once did when the world was young. !Mediengruppe Bitnik have reconstructed Julian Assange's office at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. The founder of WikiLeaks has not left the Embassy since June 2012. The collective gives the lie to any claims that art shows no interest in the NSA surveillance scandal.**

!Mediengruppe Bitnik and Christian Waldvogel, the one a collective, the other a single artist, are both from Zurich and both makers of art that draws insights and creativity from ordinarily alien disciplines. Christian Waldvogel (born 1971) is an artist known for his involvement in the sciences. He is particularly interested in our view of the universe and the possible existence of other inhabitable planets. Since 2011 the artist has been co-chair of the Topical Team Arts & Science at ESA, European Space Agency.

Several events during the exhibition will include talks by scientists: microbiologist Judith Blom will speak on 1 March 2014, astrophysicist Ben Moore on 19 March 2014.

Like Waldvogel, !Mediengruppe Bitnik (Carmen Weisskopf, born 1976, Domagoj Smoljo, born 1979) exploit – and also critique – the technological potential of our times. As Internet artists of the first generation, !Mediengruppe Bitnik are acutely aware not only of the web's utopian and democratic potential but also of its usefulness for surveillance. This is demonstrated by their strolls through a city, where they tap into the wireless signals of surveillance cameras in order to survey the surveyors. Thanks to whistleblower Edward Snowden's revelations, Internet artists must resign themselves to total anti-utopian surveillance – or they boldly confront it, like !Mediengruppe Bitnik at the Helmhaus.

On 8 March 2014 !Mediengruppe Bitnik will speak with other artists about the potential of art under total surveillance.

### **World Spaces**

"Delivery for Mr. Assange" and "unknown" are two independent shows at Helmhaus both based on the artistic strategy of using – and abusing – technology and the incorporation of expertise from non-art fields into their art projects. The exhibitions have something else in common as well: they reveal unanticipated world spaces and life spaces. In a new

installation, Christian Waldvogel transports us to a still young planet, to the earth three million years ago. A primordial broth covers the entire floor of a large gallery at the Helmhaus. In the course of the exhibition, algae-like cyanobacteria will begin growing there. These extremely tough organisms convert carbon dioxide into oxygen, which contributes to making the atmosphere of a planet habitable. Visitors will move about in a glass-encased room in order to prevent contaminating the experiment. They will perceive the process of growth through the increasing intensity of colours in the nutrient pool: a floor painting, weekly renewed by cyanobacteria.

In their first solo exhibition in Zurich since “Opera Calling” at Cabaret Voltaire 2007, !Mediengruppe Bitnik have recreated a room that represents an individual’s entire universe: the study at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London which WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has not been able to leave for one and a half years. The artists visited Assange in London several times and have reconstructed the details of his study – a vital constituent of his living space – from memory since they were not permitted to take any pictures inside the Embassy. Assange’s scope of action has been severely curtailed physically, for if he were to step outside of the Embassy, he would be arrested by the British police posted around the entire building and probably extradited to Sweden or the United States. In contrast, his study has become an internationally known control centre of WikiLeaks and a world-renowned symbol of the influence total surveillance has on our lives – and on our bodies.

### **World Stories – world history**

Not only do the two exhibitions give us access to spaces that we can otherwise enter only in our imaginations; they also supply the world stories related to these world spaces. In the case of !Mediengruppe Bitnik, it is a highly global story, told as rapidly as the unfolding events related to the NSA revelations and the struggle for freedom of information. In the case of Christian Waldvogel, it is a universal story unfolding so slowly that it cannot even be told within the duration of the entire exhibition.

In 2013 !Mediengruppe Bitnik constructed their own “Postdrone” and sent it to Julian Assange: a parcel containing a cell phone camera that took pictures through a hole in the cardboard and uploaded them on a public website every 15 seconds. Edward Snowden’s NSA revelations demonstrate that there are essentially no means of communication left that are not under surveillance and filtered – unless something is sent the supposedly old-fashioned way, that is by snail mail. !Mediengruppe Bitnik took advantage of the fact that a secrecy act is still in place for conventionally mailed letters and parcels. Their “Postdrone” represents one of the last surviving forms of uncompromised communication with one of the arguably most intensely surveyed people in the world. For their exhibition “Delivery for Mr. Assange”, !Mediengruppe Bitnik used the visual material registered by the “Postdrone” to tell the story of the parcel’s journey to the Ecuadorian Embassy in videos and photo prints – and with it, the story of a reality under surveillance.

Christian Waldvogel, who has regaled his way through outer space and space time in various exhibitions at home and abroad, has once again sent things into orbit in his world history presented at the Helmhaus. In the first room – and chapter – the random movement of melting candles creates spherical planets of coloured wax, thanks to a device that Waldvogel modelled after equipment that simulates zero gravity. While the planet’s surface is simulated to scale in the large gallery, with wet, primordial broth covering the floor, true to reality, the third room presents the last chapter: a monumental, metal planetarium, in which the wax planets will be placed one after the other upon materializing in the first room. Like

the story of the primordial broth, this last chapter, though steadily and substantially progressing, will be far from finished by the time the show closes.

### **Publications**

The narrative structure of the two presentations is echoed in the publications. For the exhibition by !Mediengruppe Bitnik, Echtzeit Verlag in Basel publishes Daniel Ryser's description of the "Postdrone's" journey in a fast-paced textual visualization in which the journey itself resonates. Christian Waldvogel has also committed his tale of the origin of planets and the first budding of life to a publication, questioning specialists on specific aspects of his universal narrative. In an essay on the relationship between art and science, curator Daniel Morgenthaler looks into the potential of both approaches to generate world spaces.

!Mediengruppe Bitnik's book will be launched in conjunction with "Art under Mass Surveillance", a kind of symposium on 8 March 2014. Christian Waldvogel's book will be launched at the "5 o'clock thesis" with astrophysicist Ben Moore, 19 March 2014.

Daniel Morgenthaler, Curator

### **Events**

#### **Performance by Christian Waldvogel**

Saturday, 1 March 2014

##### **Extravehicular Activity**

Christian Waldvogel prepares planets in a laboratory tour, launches them into orbit and steps into the primordial broth.

2 p.m.: Input by Judith Blom, PhD, microbiologist at the Institute of Plant Biology, University of Zurich

3 p.m.: Performance by Christian Waldvogel

#### **Workshop and Talks with !Mediengruppe Bitnik**

Saturday, 8 March 2014

##### **Art under Mass Surveillance**

!Mediengruppe Bitnik will speak with invited artists about a critical approach to technology, the supposed freedom of the Internet and the potential of art after Edward Snowden.

12–6:30 p.m.: Workshop with Julian Oliver and Danja Vasiliev, authors of the "Critical Engineering Manifesto"

7:30 p.m.: Talks by !Mediengruppe Bitnik and Julian Oliver (in English)

Book launch: *Delivery for Mr. Assange/Ein Paket für Herrn Assange*, Echtzeit Verlag, Basel in cooperation with :digital brainstorming, a series of events organized by Migros Cultural Percentage

## 5 o'clock thesis

Curator Daniel Morgenthaler and guests talk about the show:

Wednesday, 26 February 2014, 5 p.m.

**“Wer nichts zu verbergen hat, hat nichts zu befürchten”**

with Felix Stalder, PhD, Prof. of Digital Culture and Theories of Networking at the Zurich University of the Arts

Wednesday, 19 March 2014, 5 p.m.

**“There’s a planet for each of us”**

with Christian Waldvogel and Prof. Dr. Ben Moore, astrophysicist and cosmologist, University of Zurich (in English)

Book launch: *Christian Waldvogel – unknown*, Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, Zurich

## Music in the Exhibition

For this exhibition, Juliana Müller has organized two extremely technological performances in keeping with the work of the current exhibitors:

Friday, 28 February 2014, 8:30 p.m.

**Superterz feat. Simon Berz and Koho Mori-Newton**

The Zurich Electronica formation produces a tight weave of techno sounds and pulsating beats.

Tuesday, 18 March 2014, 8:30 p.m.

**Stephan Wittwer**

The Zurich musician plays the computer and combines synthetic sounds with live transformations of his own older improvisations.

## Tours

A variety of tours are available with the artists, Daniel Morgenthaler and art historian Kristina Gersbach. On Thursday, 27 March 2014, Daniel Morgenthaler will speak with Bruno Baeriswyl, Commissioner of Data Protection from Zurich Canton in the exhibition. The “Helmaus”, a mouse that has been luring children into the Helmhaus since June 2012, was invented by the artist Yves Netzhammer and is now looked after by the artist Anna-Maria Bauer. Pictured on the invitation card, the Helmaus leads young visitors through the exhibition in the company of kindergarten teacher and photographer Andrea Huber.

## The exhibition is supported by:

Institut für Pflanzenbiologie der Universität Zürich

:digital brainstorming, Migros-Kulturprozent

MRI – Medizinisch-Radiologisches Institut Zürich

ALWO-SMA Spezialmechanik AG

GS Gitterrost + Bauteile AG

Kanya AG

Glas Mäder AG

Sika Sarnafil AG