

Audio Guide to SAVVY Contemporary's exhibition

RAUPERNIMMERSATTISM. THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY AS CONSUMED SOCIETY OR THE MYTH OF ENDLESS PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION.

Hello, my name is Kate Brehme. I am an independent curator and arts educator with a disability. Today, I'm going to take you on a tour of the exhibition RAUPERNIMMERSATTISM: THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY AS CONSUMED SOCIETY OR THE MYTH OF ENDLESS PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION.

The exhibition features the work of 18 international artists and activists that confront the endless consumption of our societies and the affluence many hold at the expense of other people's poverty. It was composed as a result of ten months of research into challenging structural inequalities and standing alongside positions of vulnerability.

This audio guide is my response to the exhibition. During a time when many of us are restricted to our homes, it invites the exhibition into our homes and encourages a sensorial experience, if you wish to have one. This might be a bit different from other audio guides that you've heard before. Firstly, I'm going to attempt to challenge the structural inequalities of the art world by doing this audio guide in *crip-time*. Author Alison Kafer describes *crip time* as, and I quote: "flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires re-imagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of 'how long things take' are based on very particular minds and bodies. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, *crip time* bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds." So, for me, rather than attempting to talk about every single artwork, which would create a very long, and potentially inaccessible listening experience for you, I will give a basic visual description of the exhibition space, and then visually and thematically describe a few of the artworks that resonate most strongly with me. That means, that the descriptions and responses to these artworks will be personal and definitely subjective.

The audio guide can be experienced in *crip-time* too. You can pause it at any time, slow it down or speed up it, make it louder or make it quieter, depending on what your body needs. You can listen on your own or with other people, but it is designed to be listened to at home. It will last around 15 minutes so you might want to sit or lie down somewhere comfortable, and you can close your eyes if you wish. Let's begin.

The SAVVY gallery is a rectangle shaped building perched right on the corner of 2 adjacent streets of Gerichtstraße and Reinickendorferstraße, in Wedding – Berlin. We enter at the very corner of the building, the two sides of the building that we approach from the street are flanked in windows, letting sunlight flood the gallery space. There are no windows on the two opposing far walls, creating a darkened bunker effect as we walk towards the far wall. The floor, ceilings and far walls are concrete, and there are 11 concrete pillars in a grid pattern that suspend the double storey heighted ceiling. The space is echoey and cold. There are 16 artworks on this level, and another 7 in the basement space below. The works comprise of installations, photography, film and sound pieces.

The first work that I am drawn to is on the left and is by the artist Sarah Entwistle. There are metal rods around 60 cm long, that look like they have been pulled out of set concrete. They look like the kinds of rods you would find at a construction site, and are loosely bound together by red tape, like a material that you might also find at a construction site to hold something together. These objects are lying on top of a sort of steel structure (a bit like a coffee table), with a sheet of metal that's cut in a semi-circle and a sheet of red glass that's almost transparent. Also on top of this table we have what looks like red erasers, some other circular red, flat objects, perhaps used for sanding something, another object that looks like an orange rubber band that looks quite worn and dried. In the middle of the tables surface is an orange glowing light bulb. Lying on the ground next to the table is a tube or cylinder about 50 cm high, again, in front of that, some round flat circles that look like they're used for sanding machine. And there's also a strange metal object, a wedge shape standing on its side, with a red cable, running through it. There's a rectangle shape of tiny perforated holes embedded near the top corner of the this wedge. It's rusted, like all the metal objects here, as if they've been sitting here for a long time. These objects contrast with a tapestry that is suspended above it – a long vertical rectangle of soft, wool-like material about 2 meters long, created by artist Kebira Aglou. But at the same time, these objects belong together – the colours and shapes woven into the tapestry in a composition of geometric forms, correspond with those of the objects sitting underneath – rusty reds, and grey lines that look like the steel rods.

Can you find an object in your immediate environment that resembles the **surface** of this material? Feel free to press pause while you look for something. Can you touch it? Can you run your fingers over its surface? How does it feel? Is it soft? Does it tickle, or even itches or irritates your skin? Is it warm? Does it comfort you?

Coming back to the artwork and I reflect on its title: “An architect and his wife arriving in his own rather large aeroplane”. I begin to think about airports and aeroplanes, and the debris they leave behind, that takes decades, maybe even centuries to decompose. Something that perhaps we are all too aware of now that COVID 19 has slowed the speed and frequency of global air travel. Is there less waste in the world as a result?

It makes me think too about my own body, and how it oscillates between mobility and immobility. The privilege of having a body that is able to travel internationally, and often has to, in order to gain ongoing paid employment as a curator or arts educator. And the reality of what that travel costs my body – exhaustion, swelling, pain. Is that sustainable? Do you have these problems too, dear listener?

Moving away from Sarah Entwistle and Kebira Aglou’s work, in front of me on the ground is a rectangular grey plinth about 1.5 meters long. On it sit an array of about 100 tiny terracotta sculptures. They’re small, not much bigger than a 2 euro coin, they are mostly round in shape, but they are also misshaped. It’s as if they used to be spheres but were then pressed with a thumb into something else. You can see the thumb prints if you look close enough. They are almost like delicate flowers or molluscs. They sit about one centimetre apart from each other, and together, they look like a herd of tiny little animals. But the clay also makes them look sturdy looking. We can see on a small TV monitor next to the plinth, these objects lying near some rocks on the shore of a beach. We realise that they’re shape is the result of being pressed into the crevices and cracks of these rock formations, and thus, are that moment of impact frozen in time. The work is called “ An Endless Work” and at first, my thoughts stray to how each of these objects is a marker of time and production, part of an endless loop of work expected of so many of us in a neoliberalist society. However, reading about the work reveals that the artist Yasmin Bassir began making these forms in 2016, and still does, as a daily act of creation. Each form, despite the repetitious nature of its making, will be in some minute way, distinct from the next, and is seen by the artist as a symbol of both being and loving.

Around the corner, in Anton Kats’ work “Vostok 7” – a radio-film, the protagonist, the first woman in space, Valentina Tereshkova, is an anti-hero who tells us to Inhale and exhale, throughout her 30 minute long story about a spaceship that hasn’t been built yet. She talks about dementia, losing one’s mind, leaving one’s body, and the exploration of space. The footage shows 7 white outlined illustrations

of space suits and space station equipment, the result of artistic research at the Russian State Archive of Scientific-Technical Documentation in Moscow. These illustrations are superimposed onto footage of an old seemingly abandoned house in the woods, captured through one single, winding camera shot. As the camera creeps slowly through the doorway of each room, we see a new image. Dream-like synthesized tones carry us through the story and the building, interspersed with bursts of jazz music played on an acoustic guitar and radio static.

Dear listener, can you hear music where you are right now? What is the soundtrack to this moment you find yourself in right now? Or perhaps you're urged to find an object in your immediate environment that creates a sound or a rhythm that expresses how you feel today. You might want to try tapping, hitting or drumming with your fingers on another object to get just the right sound. Again, feel free to press pause while you look for something to try out your own sounds.

There is a lift, but I make my way carefully and slowly downstairs via the stairs, so that I can get closer to Juan Pablo García Sossa and Daniela Medina Poch's work "Papel Soberano", an installation of a blanket of handmade paper stitched together and suspended from the ceiling and the bannisters of the stairwell. Up close I notice banknotes woven into the pale pastel coloured and fibrous paper, the work expressive of the hyperinflation of currency in Venezuela and the subsequent humanitarian crisis that has ensued since.

The basement is smaller than the space upstairs. It is colder and darker. My attention is drawn to Cinthia Marcelle's work on the wall to my left. Entitled, "Leitmotiv, Fonte 193, Cruzada, Confronto, and Automovel" it features a large video projected onto the entire back wall of the basement. In the video, a traffic jam lines the roads of a highway. People start to get out of their cars and begin to push them along the highway. Moving slowly, these cars creep along, while the sound of car horns and engines steadily increase. On a smaller television monitor, we see another traffic scene. This time, at a crossroads, fire jugglers standing in a line along a zebra crossing hold up the traffic as they perform tricks with their enflamed torches. One can almost smell the fuming car oil and gas. I wonder, have these emissions reduced since COVID 19 swept the planet?

What about you, dear listener, what kind of scents fill your immediate environment? Feel free to press pause while you contemplate. Take a deep breath in through your nose. What kind of smell is it? Sharp

and acidic? Earthy? Is it a faint or a strong smell? Is it a pleasant smell and does it bring you comfort? Or is it unsettling? Does it remind you of anything or anyone?

In Samira Hodaei's work "Sofreh Any-More", we find a small wooden tray about 2 meters by 2.5 meters, several rice sacks are draped across half of the tray. It looks as if it's stitched together, dipped in thick, black oil, which has dried and stiffened the material, and then perhaps stencilled with some kind of gold stamp. It's lying on top of some black, grainy dirt, in which what look like white seeds or fertiliser have been sewn in. Growing out of the dirt is a bed of soft and fine grass, growing at about 8 cm long. Next to the wooden tray is a little black, metal watering can. Hanging a few cm above the tray, suspended from the ceiling is another kind of draping material, again painted or dipped in an oily black substance. It's stiff and hard, hanging there, but not moving. The hanging material is a tablecloth, referencing a peaceful protest in Iran, where Iranians laid empty tablecloths in the streets to symbolize their inability to feed their families and highlight the workers' poor economic conditions, despite the oil money the country receives.

It is upon experiencing this final work that led me to ponder the central premise of the exhibition, to challenge structural inequalities and stand alongside positions of vulnerability. I sit down on the chair positioned in front of the video and contemplate other contradictory scenarios where despite a country's wealth, the yawning gap between affluence and poverty impacts on human bodies and lives. I think about a recent report I read written by the European Disability Forum, that described the link between disability and poverty. Often, the barriers people with disabilities face when seeking employment can lead to poverty. And similarly, the barriers that poverty present can result in a lack of medical or wellbeing care, and thus, disability. 28.7% of persons with disabilities living in the EU are at risk of poverty. A number which will likely grow in the aftermath of the COVID 19 pandemic. The report highlights how EU countries have largely failed at reducing poverty faced by persons with disabilities, especially in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. In all EU countries, persons with disabilities are more likely to be poor and unemployed than persons without disabilities. They also face extra costs from living in a society that is not adapted to them. Here in Germany, where I live and work, and where SAVVY is based, 31.2% of people with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, higher than the EU average. It suggests that while Germany, typically considered to have well-developed social protection systems, are actually not well adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities in reality.

I head back upstairs and with my last bit of energy I return to Yasmin Bassir's terracotta forms. I notice how the gallery spotlight illuminates these unique forms, these creations whose differences have been lovingly preserved and presented. The work fills me with a sense of hope, that despite the structural inequalities that render life so hard, that there is a platform for difference and otherness, and that these are qualities that are cherished and loved.

Thank you for joining me and listening. If you have been lying down or have had your eyes closed for this session, you might want to take your time to readjust to your surroundings once you've opened your eyes and take care sitting or standing up again.

About your tour guide:

Kate Brehme is an Australian born Berlin-based independent curator and arts educator with a disability. She has worked internationally on a variety of projects, exhibitions and events and since 2008 runs Contemporary Art Exchange, a curatorial platform providing professional development opportunities for emerging and young artists. Her research and project themes include place and cultural identity, labour and work, globalisation, disability and socially engaged practices. Since moving to Berlin from Scotland in 2012, Kate continues to produce Contemporary Art Exchange projects and lectures for both the Master Education in Arts programme at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam and NODE Center for Curatorial Studies in Berlin. In 2017, together with Dirk Sorge, Jovana Komnenic and Kirstin Broussard, Kate co-founded Berlinklusion, Berlin's Network for Accessibility in Arts and Culture striving to make Berlin's arts and cultural scene more accessible for artists and audiences with disabilities.

www.berlinklusion.de