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MARIO PFEIFER

2008–2017



POINT OF NO RETURN
(2017)



Point of No Return is a synonym for former slave ports along the Atlantic coast, where thousands of slaves were sent to the Americas, without hope to ever return. The former slave traders' island in Badagry near the border of Benin carries this name. The video reconsiders the island as well as the megapolis of Lagos today: A seemingly ideal fishermen colony at the former slave trader's island as well as a vast growing city – marked between micro economy, colonial hegemony, liberal exploitation and massive corruption – appear on screen.

The images are framed with conversations from some of the last remaining direct descendants of returnees from Brazil. Portrayed in their homes, which had been built after Brazilian designs, members of the families Martins, Augusto and Lawson talk about their ancestors' return, the celebration and later the decay of Brazilian culture in Lagos during the past decades. Each protagonist tells their personal story to urban and economic aspects that altered the Brazilian Quarter's architectural, social and political pattern through the modernization of Lagos, in which economical, social and religious impacts led to the decay of this cultural heritage.

Point of No Return documents some of the last premises of the community, its memories and the physical manifestations of the Brazilian Quarter. Drone footage depicts the massive growth of the urban environment, and how it threatens the quarter. Imagery produced in the National Library of Lagos looks at different publications such as the culture magazine "Nigeria" from the 1950s, when the Brazilian Architecture of Lagos blossomed, and the results of the English and Portuguese colonial economies were celebrated.



Mario Pfeifer

Point of No Return

2017

4K Video, color, stereo, 30 min

Produced by Aderemi Adegbite

Nigeria / Germany



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In between each chapter of the two-channel-video installation a music video connects those historical debates with the present condition. *Point of No Return* is also the title for General Pype's – a legendary dancehall musician in Nigeria – latest song that addresses the history of slave migration in the 17th century from Africa's west coast to the Americas. The imagery depicts the Brazilian Quarter as well as the former slave traders' island Badagry. Pype's lyrics call for an end of contemporary slavery and connects protest movements from the USA and Brazil to those currently taking place in Nigeria. The music video's visuals depict Pype as somebody symbolically imprisoned, freeing himself through his speech, his artistic expression.

Dancehall has been described as a hotspot of cultural, economic and political struggle, and is a synonym for the cultural exchange from the Americas to the West coast of Africa. Dancehall was once founded as a musical counterculture against the elites in Jamaica, and spread globally.

General Pype in collaboration with visual artist Mario Pfeifer follow this trait with *Point of No Return*, emphasizing the political message through a music video production.

The combination of both an essayistic approach through image production and the production of a music video, *Point of No Return* aims to speak to a larger audience across generations.

A cultural heritage can only be protected, discussed and analyzed if following generations share knowledge and interest. Thus *Point of No Return* addresses the dynamics of knowledge production, preservation and distribution crossing genres, formats and styles to lighten up a debate on migrating culture and the threat of capitalism to minority cultures.

Dancehall ist mehr als die bloße Antwort auf hegemoniale Macht, sie reproduziert und vermittelt ebenso Machtverhältnisse. Die Dancehall-Kultur ist das, was Pierre Bourdieu als ein "Feld kultureller Produktion" bezeichnet. Als solches ist sie ein Raum, in dem die symbolischen Unterscheidungsmerkmale geschaffen, aufgelöst und verstärkt werden, die die Machtverhältnisse in einer gesellschaftlichen Hierarchie aufrechterhalten. Da die Dancehall-Kultur eine der primären Ausdrucksformen darstellt, mittels derer die schwarze Unterschicht Gegenideologien, Gegenidentitäten und eine subversive Praxis konstruiert hat, liegt ihr ein transformierendes, antihegemoniales Potential zugrunde.

(N. C. Stolzoff, Die Politik der Dancehall-Kultur, Der Black Atlantik, HKW, 2004)



ON FEAR AND EDUCATION,
DISENCHANTMENT
AND JUSTICE,
PROTEST AND DISUNION
IN SAXONY / GERMANY*
(2016–)

*ÜBER ANGST UND BILDUNG, ENTTÄUSCHUNG UND
GERECHTIGKEIT, PROTEST UND SPALTUNG
IN SACHSEN / DEUTSCHLAND

It's all not so simple, unfortunately. Right-wing, centrist, left-wing populism, the post-factual era, disunited and manipulated societies—it feels like an apocalyptic downward spiral, but apocalyptic moods are unhelpful. Disunion is unhelpful. The fact is: What agitates some today fills others with serenity and courage. Where emerging forms of government trigger some people's flight instincts, others believe they are represented at long last. Where elaborate critique runs out of oxygen, unheard voices swell to a new volume. But it may well be that in the end everyone will feel like they have been taken for a ride. A sharp swing to the right? Leftist resistance? The rationality of the center? Caught up in old political schemata and systems of belief, people across the mental spectrums ignite lines of conflict within the public spirit that awaken demons of antagonism.

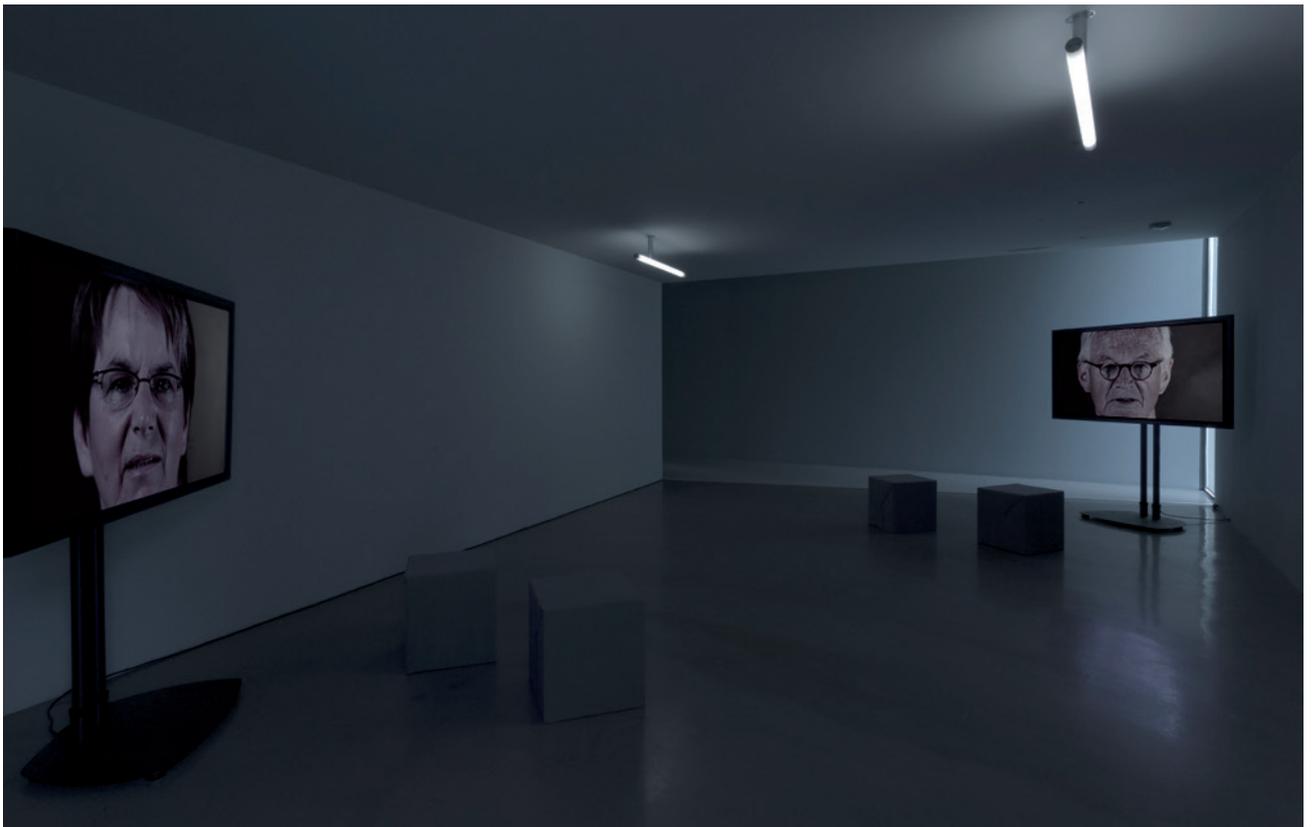
Mario Pfeifer chose a different path. He conducted interviews with nine people, giving them the room to speak. Each is asked the same questions, each is allotted the same media space and time. The speakers remain anonymous, their functions unspecified, but the viewer quickly gathers: most of them are from Saxony, they helped found Pegida, they are a trade unionist or the mayor of a small town, a concerned businessman or a critic of Islam, a psychoanalyst or a conflict researcher. All of them earnest people who share their understandable thoughts on German society today with the camera, telling stories of their disenchantments and insights, their involvements and their hopes for society. No agitation, no populism, and instead people who speak intently and calmly.

What to make of what they say? You won't know until you listen. Reasoned political opinion—not always easy to come by—is a genuine attainment of focused attention. To watch means to follow the speaker's thoughts and think for yourself. For nine hours, face to face. No Like buttons, no Twitter shortcuts for arguments that take time, no rapidly tuning in and out again as you zap through (un)congenial worldviews and opinion templates. Mario Pfeifer constructs a democratic space out of the time of unabridged speech and the succession of perspectives that, in this instance, defy alignment with a simple polar antagonism. His film is a contribution to political education and the search for consensus in the face of intensifying speechlessness and isolation, at a time of increasingly brutal contentions over reality and more and more irrational dialogues.

Pfeifer's project would seem to draw conclusions from the observation that the aspirations to greater solidarity behind leftist politics and artistic critique are manifestly losing traction and at worst even fuel rather than check processes of social disunion. Because leftists and artists tend to ignore, or fail to take seriously, what is going on beyond the islands on which their lives are lived and their beliefs widely shared? Because they champion openness and plurality of opinion but never spell out what that would mean? Because we have lost sight of the fact that a polity must listen to itself in order to work through the full extent of its internal differences and understand its potential fracture lines?

"On Fear and Education, Disenchantment and Justice, Protest and Disunion in Saxony / Germany" was commissioned by Kirska Geiser for Mario Pfeifer's solo exhibition at the GALERIE FÜR ZEITGENÖSSISCHE KUNST Leipzig, which closes on January 8. Pfeifer's film will be on view indefinitely at KOW. The complete material may also be found on the projet's WEBSITE [www.aboutnow.info]

– Alexander Koch



Mario Pfeifer

On Fear and Education, Disenchantment and Justice, Protest and Disunion in Saxony / Germany
4K video, 546 min, 2016–

Exhibition views Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016



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On Fear and Education, Disenchantment and Justice, Protest and Disunion in Saxony / Germany
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Exhibition views Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016

Video stills, 2016



CORPO FECHADO
(2016)

Corpo Fechado is a recently produced 4K Video Installation in São Paulo, Brazil focussing on societal conditions in relation to spiritual and religious practices in the megapolis.

Constructed in three episodes and three interludes the video introduces the practices of :

Christavao Chrystal – a healer who treats with extraterrestrial forces that have never incarnated on Earth, curing societal diseases such as depression, anxiety, etc with the goal to help people to develop themselves as better human beings in order to improve a global situation to live together in a more sustainable and caring way. The energy he uses to heal originate from five entities living 195 billion light years away, in a parallel galaxy. The video animation documents the energy travel by using up-to-date scientific and mathematical patterns to illustrate what “science” knows today about the universe and our galaxy.

Tata Katuvengeci, a leader in the afro-religion Candomblé in the tradition of the Congo-Angola Bantu culture who combines socio-political and religious practices in a Terreiro in the outskirts of São Paulo addressing issues of racism, oppression, and institutional neglect. He practices an accumulation process to re-install the purest forms of Candomblé which originated from West-African Nations during the slave trade over the Atlantic in the 16th century.

Makumba Cyber is a post-religious manifest written by Xarlô that addresses our contemporaneity through a digitalized, immaterial representation - from the the state of nature to a new state under the white flag of peace. Makumba Cyber originates in the tropical rainforest and departing to the Latin American Memorial in São Paulo through a journey of social and political crisis to which the manifesto invokes a new way of human engagement to save the planets's prosperity.

The episodes are interconnected through interludes that introduces sites of production of religious objects. Here chain and hand-produced objects are manufactured and distributed globally for believers of all major religions, on the junction of labour, market and faith.

Corpo Fechado is a video installation situated between documentary and fiction, between reality and belief, between social realism and philosophical prediction in the age of media and tradition.

Each Episode was produced in collaboration with the practitioner – both to represent core ideas of the practice and ideology but also as a critical reflection on the societal condition we live in through the lens of faith. Each Episode ends with the URL under which the practitioner can be reached, grounding a viewer that the seen and heard has a body to consult with, what is been shown on screen is mere a reality than fiction.



Mario Pfeifer

Corpo Fechado
2016

4K Video installation, color, surround sound, 47 min

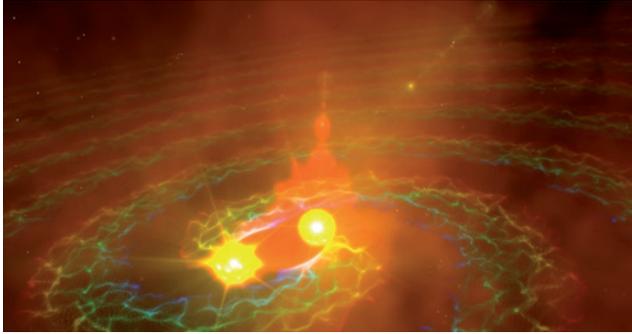
Exhibition views Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016



Mario Pfeifer

Corpo Fechado
2016

Exhibition views Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016



Mario Pfeifer

Corpo Fechado
2016

4K Video installation, color, surround sound, 47 min

Video stills



#BLACKTIVIST
(2015)

Three Afro-American rappers pose as jihadists in front of a flag evocative of the IS. They're shooting a beheading, a bound hostage kneels before the camera: Barack Obama. It fades to videos of bombs exploding in a desert. Should Obama be made to atone for his drone wars in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen? Or, as other video excerpts suggest, should he be held accountable for the fates of Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin and every black US citizen murdered by police brutality that he, as the first black president of the USA, was somehow unable to prevent? The rap-jihadists get started with the machete and...

It's no wonder that the music video *Blacktivist* by the Brooklyn rap group Flatbush ZOMBIES, uploaded on the 11th of September 2015, became an internet sensation. The play count is over 2.6 million by now. It's optimized for shock value. Social critique, violence, stylish outfits, jazz infused rap and references to the history of black activism in the USA all come together in the video.

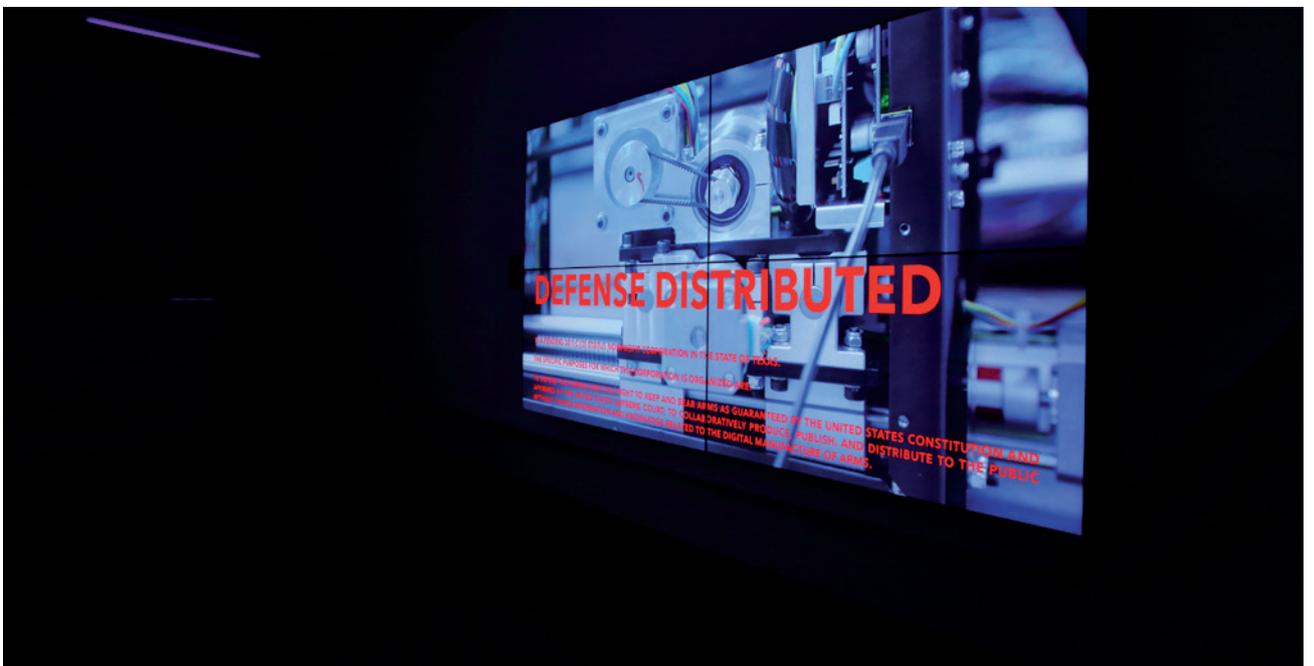
But *Blacktivist* isn't only a music video, it's also one of the three parts in Mario Pfeifer's two-canal video installation *#blacktivist* (2015). For the first time in Europe, it will be on view at ACUD in Berlin. A (white) German artist collaborating with a New York rap group to produce a music video that meets the standards of the best clickbait but also functions as part of the artist's work – it just hasn't been done before.

Pfeifer unfolds the *Blacktivist* video in his installation and supplements it with two more layers. On one layer: interviews with the rappers from Flatbush ZOMBIES where they distance themselves from filthy rich rap moguls (It should not make you comfortable that you made a billion dollars this year off of fucking music and endorsements, but you don't give nothing to the neighbourhood). On the other: documentary footage showing how you can print your own handgun with freely available files from the Wiki Weapon Project. No background check required. All you need is access to a 3D-mill.

Diverse contemporary American discourses collide in the installation – from social justice and racism to weapon legislation and the war on terror – producing a misleading impression of cacophony. At least it seems like the audio channels of the parallel videos have been composed to subtly fade into each other at points so that the shrill metallic noises of the milling machine (on the right) doesn't interrupt the rap track (left) at all but rather doubles as its percussion. Coincidence or by design? The question stays open, much like the question of whether *#blacktivist* can be understood as a commentary on the artform of rap itself.

Either way, you could feel reminded that rap – like DJing, B-Boying and Graffiti, one of the four pillars of Hip-Hop culture – was originally a pacifying artform. It developed in the Seventies as the bloody gang wars in the Bronx, fought with pistols and knives, were coming to an end. From then on, they fought with rhymes, words were the weapons. That the rappers who sung about guns and murder would go on to become the most successful, seems at once logical and paradoxical, but also that there was always the "conscious" who in turn criticised this. How do the Flatbush ZOMBIES position themselves in relation to the spiral of violence? You'd have to watch *#blacktivist* to the end...

– Jan Kedves



Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist

2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Video still

Exhibition view Ludlow38, New York



Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist

2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Exhibition view Ludlow38, New York

Exhibition view Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016



Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist

2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Video stills



Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist

2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Video stills



Mario Pfeifer

#blacktivist

2015

4K Video 2-channel-installation, color,
surround sound, 05:18 min

Making of / production stills



Mario Pfeifer

Blacktivist - EP Vinyl Edition

Musical score written and produced by
Flatbus ZOMBIES, New York, USA, 2016





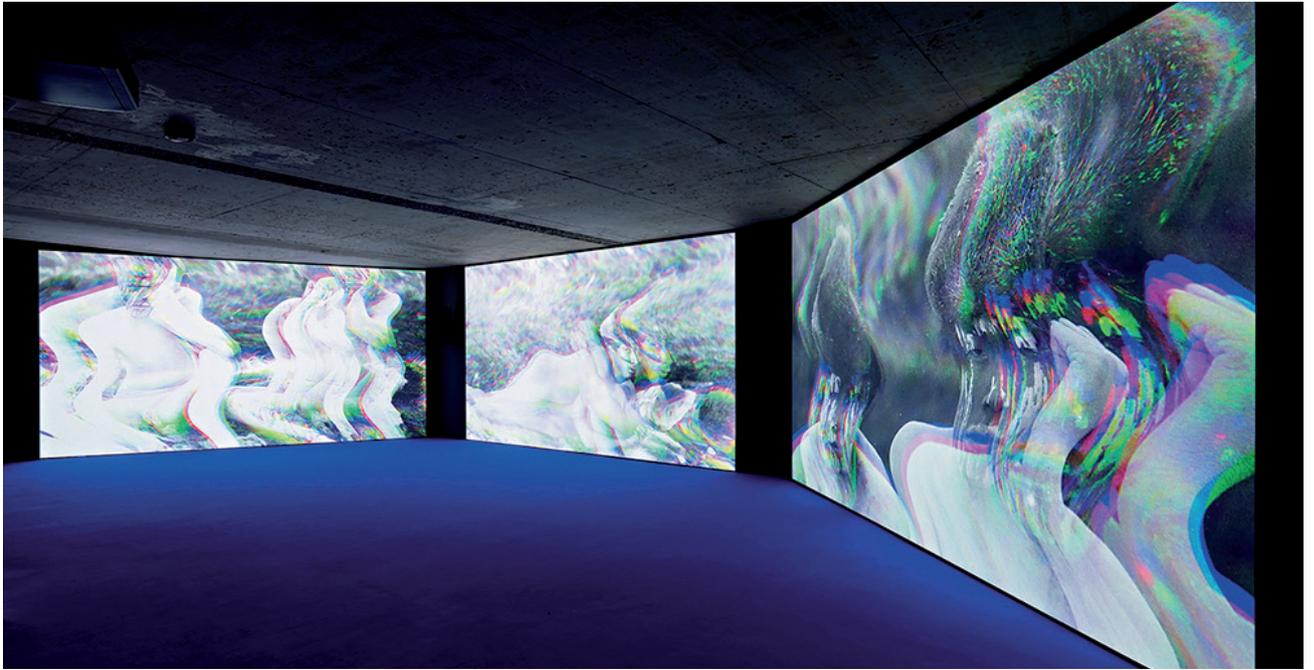
APPROXIMATION
IN THE DIGITAL AGE
TO A HUMANITY
CONDEMNED TO
DISAPPEAR
(2015)

Techno music plays at the far end of the earth. Squid gyrate to a strobe light, the crab industry runs like clockwork, and real men earn their peers' respect when their fish traps are full. The sunrise is as breathtaking in Patagonia as it is in the Panoramabar in Berlin's Berghain nightclub. Using luscious colors, rousing rhythms, and meticulously paced cuts and transitions, Mario Pfeifer's "Approximation", a three-channel video installation, caters to contemporary aesthetic preferences with brilliant images shot using high-resolution 4K technology. The footage was captured at the outer margin of the inhabited earth, a place where people sometimes fall over the edge and disappear. This time it is Tierra del Fuego's natives who may or may not still exist. Pfeifer captured them on camera – or did he? What the three projections in KOW's basement gallery show is not a documentary, but a way of seeing. The exhibition presents a new perspective on one of the planet's most ancient and remote indigenous people: the Yaghan, who are in the process of dying out.

Formerly aquatic nomads, the Yaghan first settled the southernmost tip of South America thousands of years ago; most of them now live in Villa Ukika, a housing project set up by the military near Puerto Williams on the island of Shunuko in 1954. Not much is left of their culture. Decades ago, the Chilean government brought them churches, schools, wage labor, and an ethnological museum to make sure they understood how they would henceforth live their lives. Scores of international teams of anthropologists have been visiting to take final photographs of the remaining Yaghan, record their voices, and take DNA samples. They trace the image of a culture that has held still for the cameras as long it has been frozen in time. And the Yaghan play along. They make a livelihood of being holdovers from the past. The present? Development? No, nothing. Defying this rearview-mirror mentality in Cape Horn's backyard, Mario Pfeifer has painted the portrait of an indigenous community in the here and now: it is disappearing not on the periphery but in the very center of the world, where global colonialism and capitalism swallow it up.

Pfeifer worked on site for four months, adopting a participant observer's perspective to film the indigenous people as they live today. In stupendous and sometimes hypnotizing images, he has created an aesthetic model that runs counter to the conventional templates of anthropological and documentary representation. Pfeifer's exploration – in the language of mathematics, to "approximate" is to forego exact solutions in favor of useful results – is an anti-representational project that blows ancient dust off the Yaghan's shoulders. "Approximation" yields episodic cross-sections of their living conditions today, accompanied by a techno soundtrack that smooths their transition into audiovisual immateriality. The fish cannery and the nightclub, everyday life and nature: everything is uploaded into the global culture industry's data streams, where it must seem as strange to international audiences as to the natives themselves. Pfeifer transposes local culture into a new register, releasing it from the antiquated hardened image of a community disfigured by its submission at the hands of modern civilization, and lending it a contemporary face.

Pfeifer showed the members of the world's southernmost people digital copies of photographs of their forebears taken by the German missionary and anthropologist Martin Gusinde around 1920; pictures they had never seen on an electronic device before. The video shows them swiping and zooming through the images on an iPad, identifying relatives and reconstructing lineages that dissolve in the soundtrack's rhythms. The New York-based musician Kamran Sadeghi also used the Yaghan's elegiac dirges, which Gusinde recorded in 1923 for his digital compositions. Pfeifer's "Approximation" is based on research and collaborations with various partners in Chile, Germany, and the United States. A book documenting the project will be published by Sternberg Press in 2015. An editioned album of Sadeghi's music will be released during the exhibition's opening. Approximation will be presented concurrently in the German Competition section at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen.

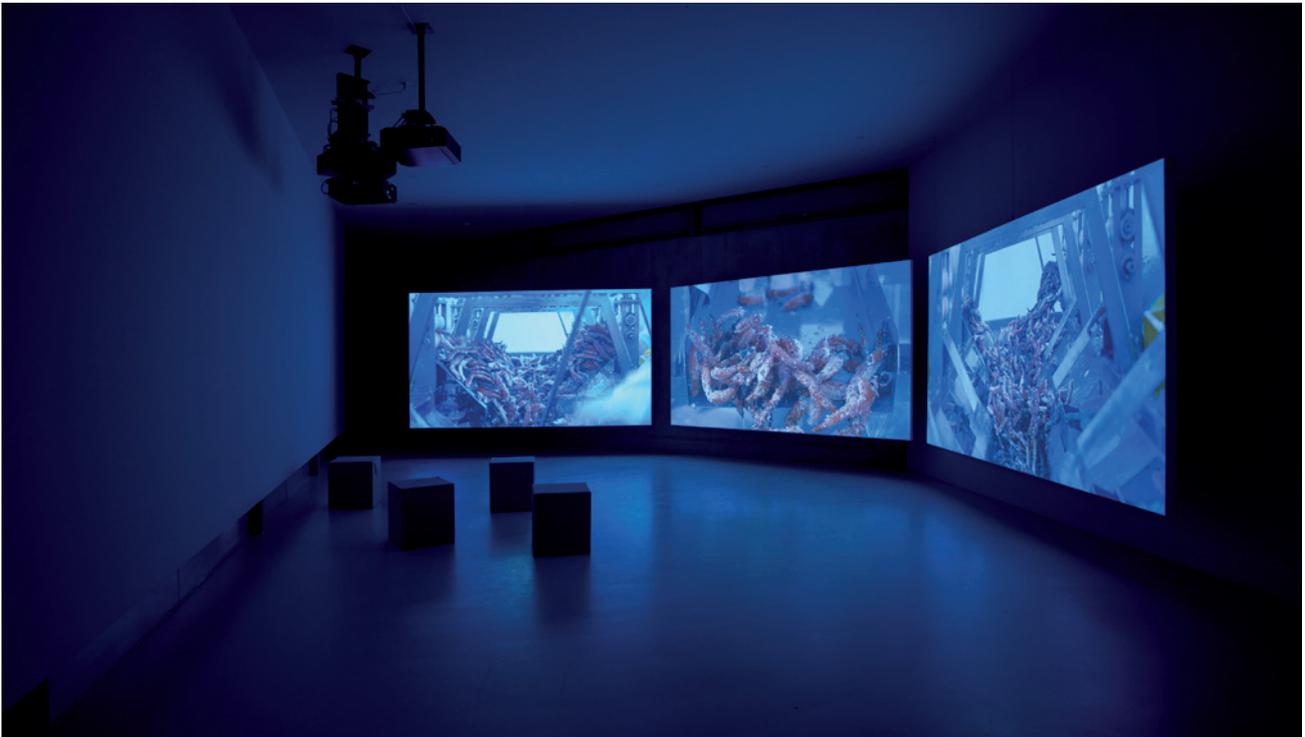


Mario Pfeifer

Approximation in the digital age to a
humanity condemned to disappear,
2014 / 2015

4K Cinema 3-channel-installation,
color, surround sound, 26 min

Exhibition views KOW, Berlin, 2015



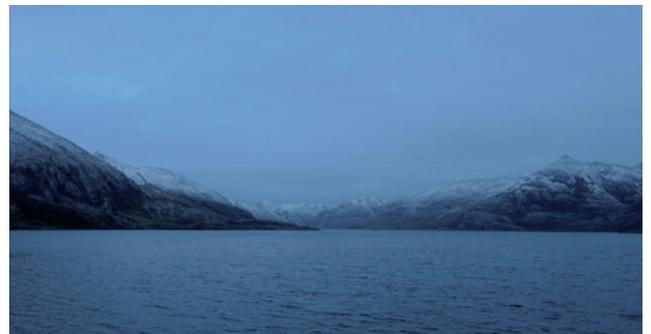
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Exhibition view, Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2015

Exhibition view, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2016



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