

**Württem
bergischer
Kunst
verein
Stuttgart**

Something in Space Escapes Our Attempts at Surveying

February 22 – May 4, 2014

Press conference: Friday, February 21, 11 a.m.

Charbel Ackermann, Francis Alÿs, Ricardo Basbaum, Samuel Beckett, Lysann Buschbeck, Peggy Buth, Olga Chernysheva, Juan Downey, Susan Hiller, Yao Jui-Chung, siren eun young jung, Šejla Kamerić, Rabih Mroué, Uriel Orlow, Manuela Ribadeneira, Bill Spinhoven van Oosten, Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor, Ester Vonplon



Introduction

Short Version (Long version: see end of this document)

From February 22 to May 4, 2014, the Württembergischer Kunstverein is showing the exhibition *Something in Space Escapes Our Attempts at Surveying*. The title has been borrowed from the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The exhibition spotlights several aspects of the convoluted topic of space. It collects the works of nineteen international artists from the sixties till today who approximate this topic from very different vantage points. They focus on general phenomena, as well as on the social, political, imaginary, or aesthetic constitution of space.

Besides iconic works—such as Juan Downey’s video installation *Video Trans Americas*, which will be shown for the first time in Germany in its entirety, or Samuel Beckett’s teleplay *Quad I and II*—the exhibition presents works by young artists like Ester Vonplon, who explores the living space of a Roma family, or the artist duo Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor, reflecting the politics and poetics of space shifting between game and the struggles of distribution.

Space appears to be the most familiar thing surrounding us. We would not think of doubting that space reflects the place we are situated, nor could we imagine anyone or anything without space. But what concurrence leads to us imagine ourselves together in space? Is space divisible? And what does it mean that space presupposes a number of (social, aesthetic, political, technical, physical, mental . . .) agreements that we are only able to fragmentarily survey because “something in space escapes our attempts at surveying”?

The works in the exhibition range from fundamental questions about the phenomenon of space—for example, the relativity of space and time as is dealt with in Bill Spinhoven van Oosten’s intriguing time-space machine *It’s About Time* or in Olga Chernysheva’s endless passages through train compartments—to political contexts like the annexation of space as a basic motive for state-building. Šejla Kamerić and Manuela Ribadeneira refer to this subject in their ironic wall objects featuring a shirt (Kamerić) resp. a knife (Ribadeneira).

Other artists appropriate the purportedly objective methods of assessing space (diagrams, maps, etc.) to introduce radical subjectivization. The spectrum ranges from subjective diagrams (Ricardo Basbaum) to collectively produced dream maps (Susan Hiller), to even a grotesquely enhanced geographic survey of the “axis of evil” (Chabel Ackermann).

A number of works take up the contradictions and conflicts of marginalized human habitat, such as that of the homeless (Francis Alÿs) and the “stateless” (Ester Vonplon) and also queer living spaces (Peggy Buth). While these places with their microstructures may be capable of providing home and protection, their presence as marginalized zones still puts them at the mercy of violent attacks.

The loss of the right to space is thematized in the exhibition by citing political changes in systems, neocapitalist urban development, and the spatiotemporal suppression of traditions. Moreover, various works touch on motifs of travel, which are explored as odysseys among spaces, times, cultures, political manifestations, and mythological projections.

The exhibition is on show in the “Vierecksaal” of Württembergischer Kunstverein. The space is a veritable white cube with sides measuring 36 m x 36 m (4.5 m high) with no columns or partitions. One parameter connected with this is that, on the one hand, this stringent em quad architecturally develops a three-dimensional storyboard based on the constellations

involving the theme and the artworks while, on the other, the architectural formation of the individual elements is derived from the spatial requirements of the artworks themselves. The result is a system of space which disintegrates into different segments, all constantly prompting different constellations, but which is precisely not geared to a homogeneous meta-narrative which focuses the survey on a viewpoint. Even in this seemingly so stringent quad of the exhibition space, the following applies: *Something in space escapes our attempts at survey.*

Works in the Exhibition

Courtesy (unless otherwise noted): the artists

Charbel Ackermann (born Switzerland, lives in London)

The New Geometry, 2003 – 2006

Installation with twenty drawings, one panel, banners



The installation *The New Geometry* by Charbel Ackermann takes the “axis of evil” dictum and surveys this abstruse construction using various different geographic and physical methods. Attaining visibility through the ironic exaggeration of his investigation are divergent factors that have been ignored in official political contexts, for example when, in the picture *Axis of Evil Mostly in the Dark*, the lack of access to electricity in the so-called “rogue states” is emphatically highlighted.

Francis Alÿs (born 1959 in Belgium, lives in Mexico City)

Sleepers, 1999 – 2006

Slide installation with eighty 35mm diapositives

Courtesy: David Zwirner Galerie, New York



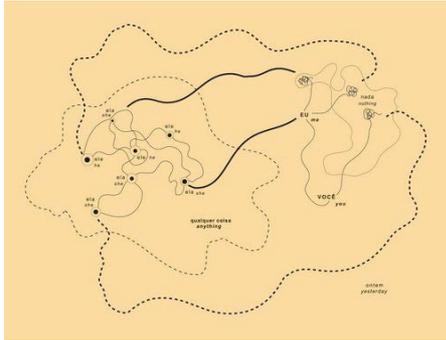
In his slide installation *Sleepers*, Francis Alÿs aligns the camera perspective to the level of the homeless people and dogs that sleep on the streets of Mexico City. The highly voyeuristic gaze is trained on this extremely precarious situation, which is at once peaceful and gracious. While the act of sleeping reflects a moment of highly intimate and private tranquility, and also the ultimate state of defenselessness, the surrounding public space points out how intrinsically available human shelter is no longer guaranteed for everyone.

Ricardo Basbaum (born 1961 in São Paulo; lives in Rio de Janeiro)

Subjective Space, 1990 – 2014

Six wall diagrams

The work contains six wall diagrams built around Ricardo Basbaum's longtime me / you series, which he started in 1990.

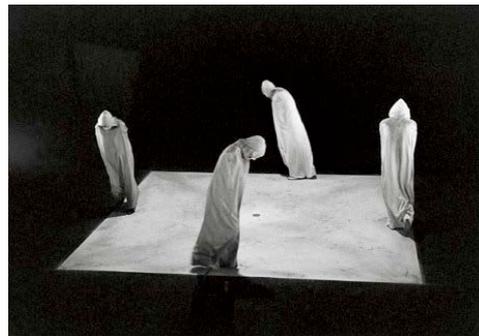
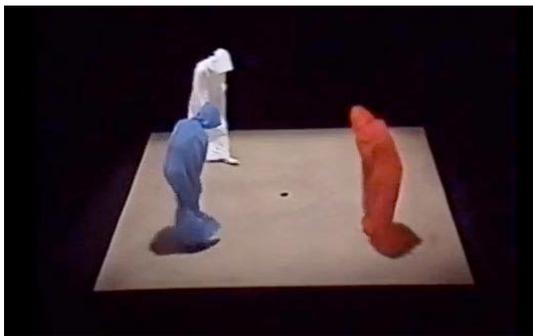


"I always develop the diagrams around the pronouns 'me' and 'you': all my diagrams are related to this relationship: the 'subject' (me) and the 'other' (you) – but this 'me' is not myself, the diagrams are not self-biographical. The me/you pronouns are addressed to the viewers, opening up spaces where h/she can locate him/herself. Thus the diagrams always show a kind of me/you game, reinforced by the presence of other words that stress issues of time, space and action ... It's a kind of mental or psychological game, that relates to what the situationists used to call 'psychogeography' ..." (Ricardo Basbaum).

Samuel Beckett (born 1906 in Foxrock, Dublin, died 1989 in Paris)

Quad I and II, 1981

Video; performers: H. Foron, J. Hummel, C. Knupfer, S. Rehe; production: Süddeutscher Rundfunk
 Courtesy: Suhrkamp Verlag, SWR



The absolute space of the quad, that is, of the squared stage, and the precisely defined diagonal courses of the four protagonists establish the choreographic pattern of the television production *Quad I and II*, which was realized by Beckett in Stuttgart in 1981. The performers are confined to this abstract space of absolute nature to the point of exhaustion. The exterior is a black hole, a state of nothingness, whence the protagonists first appear and into which they later vanish again.

Lysann Buschbeck (born 1976 in Dresden; lives in Berlin and Dresden)

Glas splintern (Shattering Glass), 2011

Video, color, sound, 3'



The video *Glas splintern* (Shattering Glass) displays autobiographical characteristics in the broadest possible sense. When in 1997 the artist Lysann Buschbeck moved to the socially unstable Hecht district of Dresden, an empty apartment in the immediate vicinity had been recently appropriated by youth. The artist started accompanying the youth with her camera, a process that spanned numerous years. The video shows Maise, a protagonist in the photo series, while being filmed for several minutes through a life-sized pane of glass that she is holding in her own hands while standing in the light of a lantern along a nocturnal street. She looks into the camera, and then past it, with a bored countenance before ultimately tossing the pane onto the ground: the glass shatters.

Peggy Buth (born 1971 in Berlin; lives in Berlin)

***Superparadise*, 2013**

Work in progress; twenty-part photo/text tableau, pinboard with research materials

The photo/text tableau was produced in the scope of the Werkleitz Festival 2013, Halle

Courtesy: Peggy Buth and Klemms, Berlin



In *Superparadise*, Peggy Buth photographically hones in on the Nollendorf neighborhood of Berlin, which since the nineteen-seventies has established itself as a vibrant queer utopia. This queer spatial appropriation and the related visibility—that is, the act of occupying visible realms—has also turned the neighborhood into a hub of homophobic violence. Having created photomontages for various sites that often display a doubling of the people shown—suggesting a spectral, spatiotemporal shift—Buth combines them with texts on the concrete incidents of violence against homosexuals. However, the pictorial and textual content share no direct correlation. Manifesting in this piece is the paradox that a space which has been occupied and appropriated in order to negotiate free relations is simultaneously a catalyst for excesses of violence. It likewise follows that this utopian space, in the gesture of appropriation, is misunderstood as being non-shareable.

On a pinboard Buth displays additional research materials on homophobic violence worldwide.

Olga Chernysheva (born 1962 in Moscow; lives in Moscow)

***The Train*, 2003**

Video, black-and-white, 7' 30"

Courtesy: Galerie Diehl, Berlin



The video *The Train* shows a train ride somewhere in Russia. Beggars, musicians, and other travelers stream toward the camera, which slowly pans from the last railway coach to the front. The interior space of the train has

remained unchanged over time, and it is here that those who were forced into mobility after the collapse of the Soviet Union now congregate.

Juan Downey (born 1940 in Santiago de Chile; died 1993 in New York)

Video Trans Americas (V.T.A), 1976

Fourteen-part video installation, black-and-white, sound, outline of the American continent

Courtesy: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia, Madrid

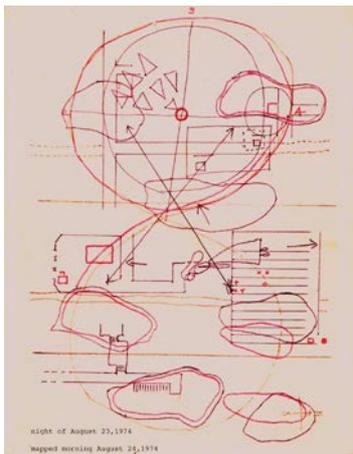


Between 1973 and 1976, the artist Juan Downey created an utterly iconic, space-consuming installation called *Video Trans Americas* about the odysseys between various places, times, cultures, political manifestations, and mythological projections. Based in the twentieth-century urban center of the West, New York, the artist embarked on a journey to his home country of Chile. In this fourteen-part video essay, the travel journal format is interwoven with gestures of the documentary, which are fragmented in terms of both image editing and the staging approach adopted in the exhibition space. The journey is associated with the desire to localize oneself through the process of travel. This is a desire that was abruptly cut off on September 11, 1973, when General Augusto Pinochet bombarded the palace of the socialist president Salvador Allende with the support of the United States. As Juan Downey notes: "I shall never, never, never forgive!"

Susan Hiller (born 1940 in the USA; lives in London)

Dream Mapping, 1973

Documentary reconstruction



In the summer of 1973, Susan Hiller extended an invitation to participate in a collaborative dream action that was to take place in a field that displayed so-called "fairy rings." These are elevated circular surfaces that come about due to special underground conditions or plant growth. The fairy rings are associated with diverse mythological narratives. In Hiller's action, they marked those zones where participants could go to place their dreams. The group had already met ahead of time for a dream seminar where different cartographic methods for capturing dreams or dream landscapes were discussed. These jointly developed methods provided the foundation for sketching maps of one's dream experiences and contrasting them with those of other participants.

Yao Jui-Chung (born 1969 in Taipei; lives in Taipei)

Roaming Around the Ruins, 1991–2011

The Civilization Built by Skeleton, 1991–2011; *Quiet on the Western Front*, 2003–2011; *Gods & Idols Surround the Border*, 1991–2011

Multipart, extended photographic documentation, black-and-white



As perhaps one of the most prominent themes in art, roaming involves aimlessly yet intently moving toward something, exploring a phenomenon and “roaming around” it, until it presents itself with all its contradictions and at the same time with its precise relation to reality. The over three hundred photographs from the series *Roaming Around the Ruins* by the Taiwanese artist Yao Jui-Chung, of which a strongly reduced selection is shown in the exhibition, roam around the current source of conflict in Taiwanese society. This has spanned the structural change from classical industrial production to a service economy and the economically determined suspension of the military confrontation with China. The artist’s target in traveling through the representational spaces of this conflict are desolate military and industrial complexes and also deserted amusement and religious parks. Besides references to failed investments in the auspicious new entertainment industries, the latter refer to the circumstance of global warming having significantly heightened the power of typhoons in the region. This has caused certain coastal regions to lose their status as potential building land.

Roaming Around the Ruins is thus a far cry from any semblance of romanticized ruins.

The Mosquito Project: Mirage: Disused Public Property in Taiwan, 2010 – 2013

100 digital prints from a series of about 400

The Mosquito Project is directly associated with the artist’s *Roaming Around the Ruins*. As part of his research work, Yao Jui-Chung encountered ruins scattered around Taiwan, most related to misguided investments made by the state. Since it proved impossible for one person alone to document the sheer multitude of these ruins arising from the atmosphere of corruption and effusive “new town development projects,” the artist made the documentary process the subject of a seminar at Taipei National University of Arts. The title *The Mosquito Project* alludes to the warm and humid climate of Taiwan, which turns the ruins into an ideal hotbed for mosquitos.

siren eun young jung

Act of Affect, 2013, 15:36’, **Act of Affect, 2013**, 19:28’, **Lyrics I, 2013**, 2:39’ (loop), **Lyrics II, 2013**, 6:12’ (loop), **Lyrics III, 2013**, 3:21’(loop)

Five-part video installation, color, sound



siren eun young jung describes a very specific approach to certain transformations that structure microsocial communities while simultaneously offering the potential for new appropriations of reality. Through different layers of time and narration, the artist follows actresses who have devoted themselves to traditional Korean *Yeosung Gugeuk*, a popular song and dance theater where even the male roles are played by women. The absolute nature

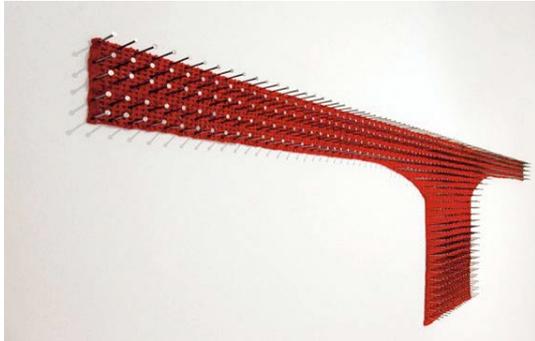
of the temporary switch of gender as played out on the stage, which influences both the act of speaking and physical expression, likewise engenders a radically shifted relationship with everyday space beyond the stage.

Šejla Kamerić (born 1976 in Sarajevo; lives in Sarajevo and Berlin)

Measure, 2012

Installation, red cotton (mesh shirt), steel nails

Courtesy: Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin



The wall installation *Measure* features a red mesh shirt that is spanned with hundreds of nails at a height of 59 cm and a length of 240 cm.

Rabih Mroué (born 1967 in Beirut; lives in Beirut and Berlin)

The Pixelated Revolution, 2012

Installation, video, fine art prints, wall text

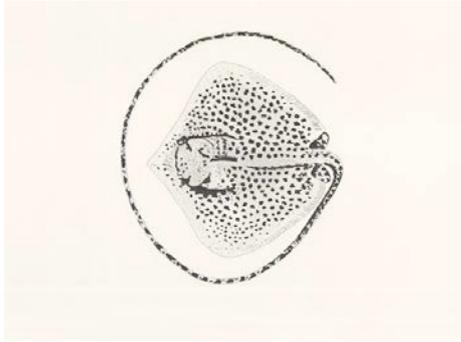


The video installation *The Pixelated Revolution* by Rabih Mroué, based on the eponymous performance, makes reference to a video created in the context of the ongoing Syrian conflict that the artist found on the Internet. The video appears to have been taken by one of the rebels who at the very moment of camera/eye contact with a sniper is shot by the same individual. The video abruptly ends with a black screen and with the rebel calling out that he has been hit. All certainties dissipate in the unprecedented spatial and mediatic densification emerging between the act and its recording, between the site or the reality of the events and the site or the reality of the beholder, as well as between the perspectives of rebel, camera eye, gun barrel, and beholder. To the point of exhaustion this question remains open: What did we actually see in this conflict situation spatially conveyed through media?

Uriel Orlow (born in Zurich; lives in London)

The Short and the Long of It 14.0, 2010–2014

Installation: *Anatopism*, slide projection, eighty-one slides, 2010; *The Bitter Lake Chronicles*, twenty-one pigment prints on Hahnemühle paper, painting; *Lessepsian Migrants*, series of twenty-three drawings, 2011; *By Way of IllustrationFig. (Nationalisation)*, one-channel video, pigment print.



The installations of Uriel Orlow usually deal with constellations of various different works that are interwoven through space and time, touching on many historical events. Of relevance here is not so much the simultaneity of the events, but rather their grotesque intensification—yet without culminating at a dramaturgical pinnacle. For example, the Six-Day War in 1967 between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, which was followed by an eight-year closure of the Suez Canal, provides the framework plot for a pan-national enclave that arose amidst this multilateral conflict situation. The acts of war caused fourteen transport ships to be stranded in the Suez Canal. The crews on the ships set anchor at the so-called Great Bitter Lake and founded the Great Bitter Lake Association (GBLA). The constitution of this micro-community of states was not impacted by Egypt's national annexation of the Suez Region, nor did the macrostructure of geopolitical conflict parties notice that the GBLA Olympics was carried out in right smack in the middle of their territory. And if that was not absurd enough, the Bitter Lakes were in the middle of a geobiological exclusion zone for a special kind of migration named after the developer of the Suez Canal, Ferdinand de Lesseps: the Lessepsian migration, where unusual aquatic species (and other organisms) move into the Mediterranean Sea from their native Red Sea habitat.

Manuela Ribadeneira (born 1966 in Quito, Ecuador; lives in London)

Hago Mío Este Territorio (I Claim this Territory as Mine), 2007

Installation with engraved knife



This work is made up of an illuminated pocketknife that has been rammed into the wall at eye level. Etched into the blade of the knife is the mirror-inverted sentence "Hago Mío Este Territorio" (I Claim this Territory as Mine). It is the immaterial reflection of lighted writing on the wall that first makes the text readable.

Bill Spinhoven van Oosten (born 1956 in Velsen; lives in Hengelo)

It's about time #2, 1992

Interactive installation, clock, monitor, camera, computer



An oversized, frame-like clock is positioned in the exhibition space, rotating steadily on a vertical axis. At the end of the room the clock reappears in a live projection of data, though here distorted from a circular shape into a Möbius strip. The exhibition visitors experience a similar transformation upon entering the room. In the projected image they appear as mere smudges or are dissolved in spirals. Their likeness only becomes stabilized when they are standing still. Bill Spinhoven van Oosten, who counts among the first protagonists of interactive art, engaged in a simple but effective manipulation of the camera image based on Einstein's theory of relativity: the pixels that are distributed across the X and Y axes are merged at a minimal lag in time. The artist developed the program for this image manipulation in the late eighties himself.

Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor (M. V. born 1968; F. T. born 1974; live in Bucharest)

Rite of Spring, 2010
Video installation, 7'51"



The video *Rite of Spring* follows children who are playing on the streets, dotted with cotton-like poplar seeds, of an unnamed European city. The game requires nothing more than a half-functioning lighter and these extremely flammable seeds. One by one, the children torch the various threads of white poplar-tree fluff, which extinguishes just as quickly as it blazes up. Clinging to the urban surfaces, each fire lights up the contours of the sidewalk, the rubbish, or the tufts of grass projecting up through the asphalt. A plurality of interpretive possibilities is engendered by the camera frame, the sheer concentration on this incredibly economical play activity, and the firestorm *en miniature* that spreads out across the urban periphery.

Land Distribution, 2010
Installation, variable dimensions



The installation *Land Distribution* is comprised of thin iron bars and brown video magnetic tape that mark a sequence of evenly staked out fields in the exhibition space. Videotape is used by the rural population of Venezuela for demarcating the plots given to them by big landowners facing political pressure from the plots of their neighbors. The artists have also liberated this obsolete material originating with the entertainment industry from its earlier utilization context. In the picture of cordoned off claims, a series of allusions rises up about the new and old conflicts surrounding the distribution of space and ownership. Such conflicts were common in postsocialist countries (here generally moving from collective to private ownership) or in the course of neoliberal forms of expropriation. At the same time, it references the sculptural and spatial program of Minimalism, or the

utopia of at least brief duration, indicating that the medium of video would contribute to a democratization of mediatic space.

Ester Vonplon (born 1980 in Schlieren, CH; lives in Chur / and Castrisch, CH)

Wenn das Wetter nicht mehr kaputt ist, werden wir spazieren gehen:

Rahovec / Orahovac – Kosovo, 2006–2008

Photographic series, inkjet prints, black-and-white

Es gibt nicht mehr Sonne: Rahovec / Orahovac – Kosovo, 11/2007

Series of Polaroids



A stateless Roma family living in Kosovo, which the artist Ester Vonplon has followed photographically for many years now, had no choice but to settle at a NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) base due to the turmoil surrounding the formation of new states in the area of former Yugoslavia.

Rahovec / Orahovac – Kosovo, Spring 2008

We spent hours playing soccer in the fields outside of town or aimlessly strolling across the hilly landscape. While thus engaged, the children told me the story of the masked men who attack the town at night. They taught me to dance and sing. When dusk came, the women with families invited me into their homes for a cup of mocha coffee. They divined my future. A sweet man, many children, jewelry . . . an important message. Today I still visit and photograph the same family in the small divided town, which is protected by KFOR troops. The newly founded state has not favorably impacted the situation of minorities in this country. They did not celebrate. Regardless of who assumes power—now, in the past, or in the future—the situation will barely improve for these people (Ester Vonplon).

Dates + Credits

Something in Space Escapes Our Attempts at Surveying

February 22 to May 4, 2014

Presse conference

Friday, February 21, 2014, 11 a.m.

Presse contact

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Press images and press folder

<http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/press>

Opening

Friday, February 21, 2014, 7 p.m.

Artists' tour

(including the presentation of the Artic Magazine)

Saturday, February 22, 2014, 2 p.m.

Artist Talk with

Susan Hiller

March 19, 2014, 7 p.m.

Curators' tour

Wednesday, February 26, 2014, 7 p.m. (jour fixe for artist members)

Wednesday, March 12, 2014, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, April 9, 2014, 7 p.m.

Sunday, May 4, 2014, 4:30 p.m.

Free tours

Every Sunday, 3 p.m.

For information on further events, see

www.wkv-stuttgart.de

An exhibition by

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curators

Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

Supported and sponsored by

Kulturamt der Stadt Stuttgart

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Pro Lab

Admission

5 euros / 3 euros (reduced) / members free of charge

Exhibition reader

3 euros

Opening hours

Tues., Thurs.–Sun.: 11 a.m.– 6 p.m.

Wed.: 11 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Curatorial Statement

Space seems to be the most familiar thing around us. Neither would we doubt that space denotes where we are, nor could we imagine any other, anything different without space. But what do we perceive when we say space? What agreements lead us to imagine ourselves together in a space? And is that which we perceive as space in fact the same space that someone else perceives? Is space divisible? Or is it the relation of parts which we assign to it? Space would seem to presuppose several agreements of which we can only survey certain parts, for *something in space escapes our attempts at survey*. Nonetheless, objects are arranged and aligned in changing constellations in space. It becomes describable by dint of the position of objects in relation to each other, that allow us to apprehend space as a system of events, actions and interactions of social agents, apprehensible as something which we produce and by which we are produced. It remains the paradox of the production of space that we all partake in the action of its creation, but that we organise our relationship to space in the societal process primarily by means of certain orders, rituals, laws, processes of surveying and mapping. Subjective histories and travelogues which were once the foundations upon which to survey the world have become absorbed into these processes. Accounts of the value of land, the value of "natural resources" or inexhaustible riches were, after all, the starting point for the appropriation and dispossession of space, with their logical equivalent being the act of its administrative, technocratic and cartographic seizure. Today, statistical, evaluative and diagrammatic visualisation has become absolute. In every individual survey and every isolation, the diagram reveals the logic of an entire system of encodings such that the unworldly simplifications of complexity morph into naturalistic representations. What they conceal is their ideological directedness and thus their function with regard to processes of inclusion, exclusion and the formation of territorial hegemonies and legally constituted spaces such as nation states. Space and its representation is thus, at the same time, a field of political conflict in which the focus is on occupying visibility and thus on the occupation of space by aesthetic practices and appropriations between utopian draft, imagination, fiction, poetry and desire.

The exhibition *Something in space escapes our attempts at survey* sets out to spotlight a number of aspects of this convoluted topic. The approximately twenty artists brought together in the exhibition make use of all media, from drawing to installation, photography and video. The focus of the various pieces is on work on the visibility of objects in space, their position in relation to each other, and their artistic methods, that seem to go against the grain of given forms of representation. The artists consider different artistic terrains, in which psycho-historical experimental set-ups are equally inherent as practices which, by means of fictionalisation, demonstrate the absurdity of the folkloristic documentarism of the mass media. In the works, space always appears as a choice, as a certain perspective and artistic stance on the mechanisms which analyse space as territories defined by social control, split up into administrative hierarchic zones or dominated by geopolitical hegemonies. The artistic methods appropriate the means of other disciplines such as cartography, submitting them to radical subjectivisation in order, by means of grotesque over-exposures, to subject the ideological deposits in the techniques of world management to a critical and alternative revision. This involves self-empowered reoccupation of space as much as romantic irony, which, through its temporary claim to universality, reveals the impossibility of absolute space. At the same time, there is an incredible number of spaces which refuse to be visible, whose denizens are at home in secret society structures such as the military complex or who imperceptibly infiltrate the spaces of global streams of data which have meanwhile come to defy any description other than metaphor. Again and again, it is artists who thwart this division of accessible and forbidden spaces.