

Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst

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# LANGUAGE FOR SALE

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Harun Farocki, Noline van  
Harskamp, Stefan Panhans,  
Elemér Ragályi, Peter Rose,  
Kim Schoen, John Smith

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# LANGUAGE FOR SALE

The international group exhibition *Language for Sale* puts nonsense at its center. Laced with humor, the exhibited works engage with rhetorical and linguistic moments of transition—a change marked by the increasing appearance of nonsense language.

The show was inspired by Kim Schoen’s newly commissioned work *Baragouin* (2021). Having explored the topics of nonsense and repetition for years, Schoen premieres this most recent experimental installation—named after the French term for “unintelligible jargon”—as part of *Language for Sale*.

Rhetoric as persuasive public language and its current crisis is also a focus of the other works in the exhibition. Rhetoric—which can simplify the complex, which we use to inspire and influence others—is a difficult performative genre. Political rhetorical culture is currently undergoing profound changes, witnessed in today’s speeches and communiqués. Several pressures on rhetorical culture are changing the climate of speech: from distrust in politicians, to the deterioration of attention spans, to anger-driven social media use. But it is the decline of institutions of open debate and of access to longer argumentative forms that have ushered in the most profound change in political communication: the transforming role of the lie, morphing from a secretly used weapon into an openly used tool of propaganda.

*Language for Sale* tracks several ideological changes from the 1970s up to now, demonstrated through the use of public language, and looks at the performative challenges that speakers try to overcome to master these transitions.

Elemér Ragályi’s documentary film *Szónokképző iskola* (Speakers training course), made in Hungary in 1972, follows a course preparing public speakers to lead funeral ceremonies. In the context of the exhibition, Ragályi’s film acts as a keystone because of its sensitivity toward the hardships and comical possibilities of rhetorical situations in a complicated and shifting ideological context.

Another documentary work that examines educational courses as a way to investigate shifting times and the comical possibilities of unintentional nonsense is Harun Farocki’s short documentary *Die Schulung* (Indoctrination 1987). It looks at a five-day seminar designed to teach executives and managers how to “sell themselves” better. Merchants have always aimed to sell something, but only through the marriage of psychology and modern capitalism did the idea of selling oneself emerge—helping to usher in neoliberalism.

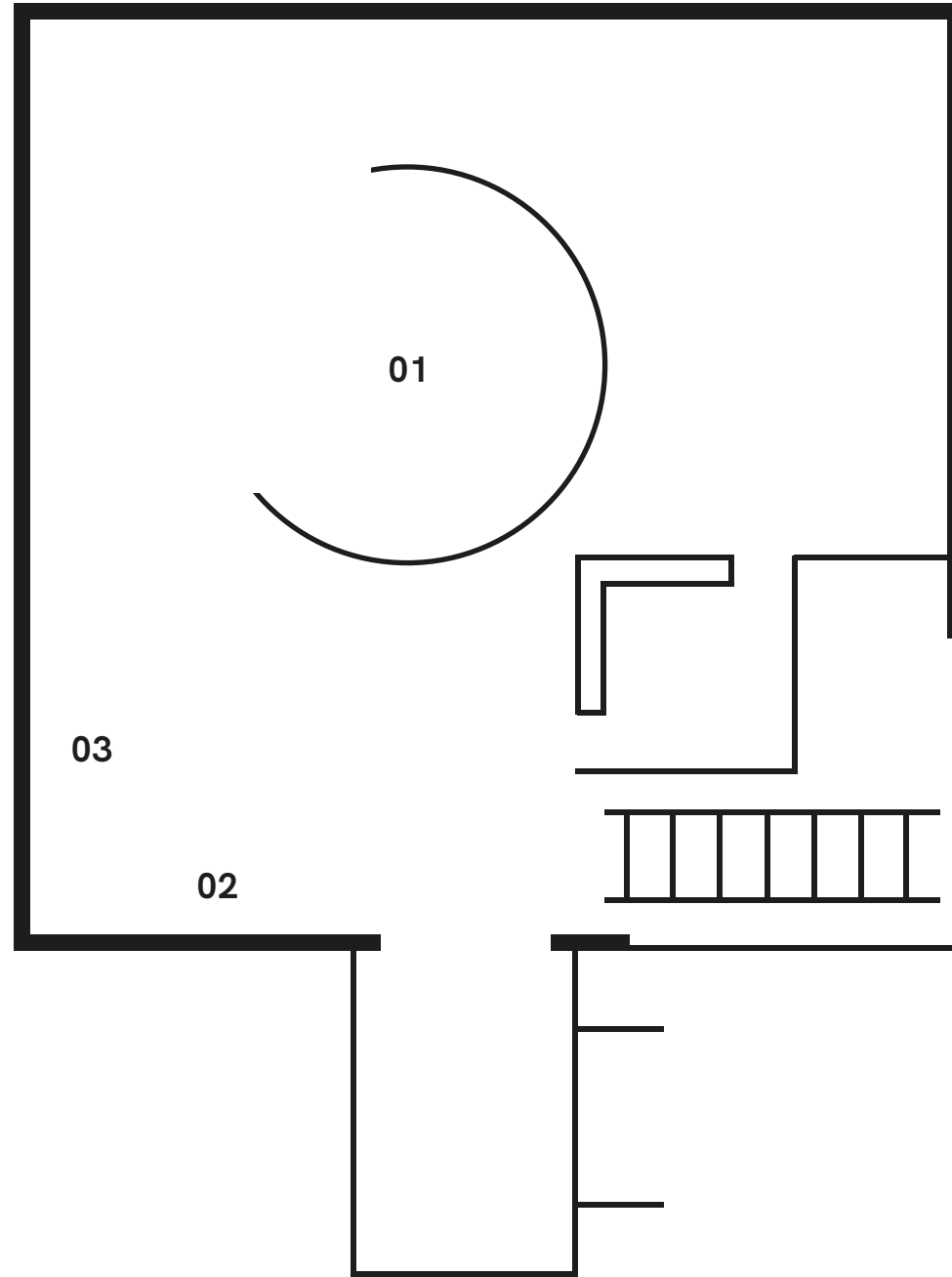
Peter Rose’s video *The Pressures of the Text* (1983) elaborates on the boundary between meaning and meaninglessness in art-related speech and critical writing. It integrates direct address, invented languages, ideographic subtitles, sign language, and simultaneous translation to investigate the feel and form of sense-making, that is to say, the shifting boundaries between meaning and meaninglessness. A parody of art- or crit-speak, educational instruction, gothic narrative, and pornography, *The Pressures of the Text* has also been performed as a live work in the US and Europe.

Stefan Panhans makes elaborate video pieces whose sets are worked out in meticulous detail while their protagonists’ actions are kept to a bare minimum. In *Sieben bis zehn Millionen* (Seven to ten million, 2005), a young man sporting hip-hop headwear and a fur-lined hood stares into the camera while performing a hysterical staccato monologue.

John Smith’s *Steve Hates Fish* (2015) ridicules one of the newest inventions in language softwares, the automatic translation using artificial intelligence. Filmed directly from the screen of a smartphone using a language translator app that has been set to translate from French into English, the artist deliberately confuses the software by instructing it to interpret the English signage in a busy London shopping street—with hilarious results.

The ever changing status of the dominant language of global exchange—that is, the English language—is at the center of Nicoline van Harskamp’s video *English Forecast* (2013) and the “Massive Online Open Course” project *Englishes Mooc* (2019 –). *English Forecast*, presenting a performance and interactive media piece commissioned by Tate Modern, London, follows a team of four actors reciting what van Harskamp has identified as the possible future sounds of the English language. *Englishes Mooc* is an online course developed for young art makers and their audiences. It wants them to stop measuring their English along a ‘native’ standard in the international realm. When adapted according to the needs of its users, new varieties of English can emerge. The project helps to develop practical skills towards this with pre-recorded lectures and with a platform for live discussion.

Kim Schoen was the 2019 recipient of the Media Art Grant from the Foundation of Lower Saxony at the Edith-Russ-Haus.



**01**  
**Kim Schoen**  
**BARAGOUIN**

2021  
 Site specific installation, 1 channel HD video projection, photo prints on Alu-Dibond, artist book, mixed media

The artist shows for the first time her new experimental installation Baragouin, named after the French word for “gibberish”. In Baragouin, the artist gives voice to objects she filmed in a sculpture shop in Los Angeles. There, imitations of sculptures were sold whose origins range from Buddhism to Rococo and Neoclassicism to Modernism. Schoen assumes that international trade produces its own lingua franca and stages a “nonsense opera” in which the copied sculptures seem to “speak” in voices that refer to the origins of their presumed originals.

**02**  
**Kim Schoen**  
**CONSIDER THIS SCRIMMAGE**

2018  
 1 channel HD video  
 6:17 min

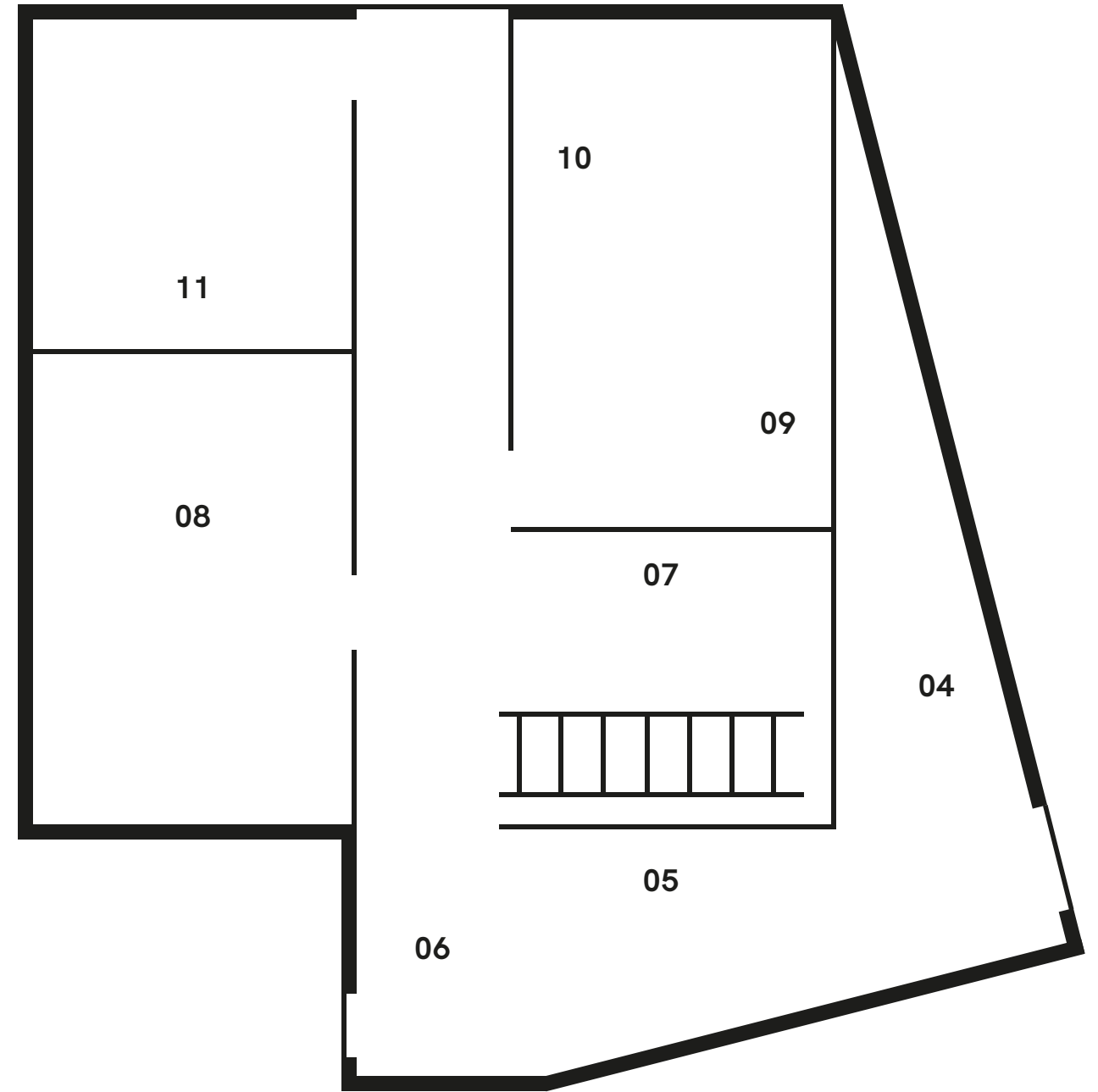
Part of a long-running experiment with language, Consider This Scrimmage by Kim Schoen takes on another cadence of language: the argument. The seriousness of conveying information, the male voice, the attempt to persuade built and destroyed on the stage of persuasion, the silences, the stuttering, the jargons, the gibberish, the interjections, the non-interference, the twisting of categories, the obfuscation, the posturing, the awkwardness of silence and the darkness of silence. In addition to the improvised language, the music in the piece is also improvised by members of the experimental music group Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop in Berlin.

Through “speed” etudes on the cello and spontaneous fugues on the piano, the musicians reflect how the speakers in the play act, sometimes carried away by the tempo of the words, sometimes arguing with themselves.

**03**  
**Kim Schoen**  
**THE HORSESHOE EFFECT**

2014  
1 channel HD video  
6:30 min

In *The Horseshoe Effect*, the speaker's spontaneous generation of speech jumps erratically through her knowledge base and imagination.



**04**  
**Peter Rose**  
**THE PRESSURES OF THE TEXT**

1983  
 Hantarex, 1 channel SD video  
 17:02 min

*The Pressures of the Text* integrates direct address, invented languages, ideographic subtitles, sign language, and simultaneous translation to investigate the feel and form of sense, the shifting boundaries between meaning and meaninglessness. A parody of art/critspeak, educational instruction, gothic narrative, and pornography, it has been performed as a live work at major media centers and new music festivals in the US and Europe.

The piece was written, directed and delivered by Peter Rose; co-directed by Jessie Lewis; with sign language and ideographic symbols by Jessie Lewis; and with English simultran by Fred Curchack. The work was featured in the 1985 Whitney Biennial.

**05**  
**Stefan Panhans**  
**SIEBEN BIS ZEHN MILLIONEN**  
**(Seven to Ten Million)**

2005  
 1 channel HD video projection  
 5:25 min

The face of a man wearing an orange and red chequered hip-hop cap and thick fur-lined hood stares at us with piercing blue eyes and stubbles from the front, constantly, almost aggressively.

Sweating and in a kind of hysterical Staccato and a cool mixture of slang one is more familiar with from music videos, he tells us about how he goes about buying a certain high-tech hardware which is not further identified.

With almost sectarian, preacher-like vividness he speaks about the exhausting work of consumption, the daily confusion and the paranoid moments in today's shrines of consumption. Via the meticulous, obsessive, nightmarish search for a product, he becomes completely caught up in the attempt to attribute something mystical, almost pseudo-religious, to making a purchase decision.

**06**  
**Kim Schoen**  
**QUICK CHANT (Bon Marché Weather)**

2009  
 Hantarex, 1 channel HD Video  
 2:34 min

In the early text „Bon Marché Weather“ (1911) by the American writer, publisher and art collector Gertrude Stein, the smallest dialogical variations are played out in the manner of her „insistent“ experiments. It is performed here by a cattle, car and truck auctioneer.

**07**  
**John Smith**  
**STEVE HATES FISH**

2015  
 1 channel HD video projection  
 5 min

Filmed directly from the screen of a smartphone using a language translator app that has been told to translate from French into English, Steve Hates Fish deliberately confuses the software by instructing it to interpret the English signage in a busy London shopping street. In an environment overloaded with information the signs run riot as the restless software does its best to fulfil its task, looking for French words to translate in places where there are none.

08

**Elemér Ragályi**  
**SZÓNOKKÉPZŐ ISKOLA / SPEAKERS**  
**TRAINING COURSE**

1972  
 1-channel SD video projection  
 24 min

Elemér Ragályi's documentary film *Szónokképző iskola* (Speakers training course), made in Hungary in 1972, follows a course preparing public speakers to lead funeral ceremonies. The film reveals the contrast between the real human emotions involved in such events and the painful inadequacy of the social celebrations that were hastily invented to replace traditional, mostly religious ceremonies in socialist Hungary.

Director: Elemér Ragályi  
 Camera: Ferenc Grunwalsky  
 Production manager: Lajos Gulyás  
 Producer: Balázs Béla Studio

09

**Nicoline van Harskamp**  
**ENGLISHES-MOOC.ORG**

2020  
 Interactive video installation, online terminal

*Englishes MOOC* is a digital art project that takes the form of a Massive Open Online Course or MOOC. You can sign up for the pilot of *Englishes MOOC*. Once you've signed-up you'll receive a download link with a detailed course outline. The subject of this MOOC is the English language that is used as a medium of expression, mediation and education in art practices around the world. The aim of the course is to emancipate art makers, art audiences, and the wider public from having to measure their use of English along native-like standards in the international realm. *Englishes MOOC* wants to raise historical and theoretical awareness of English usage and to help develop practical skills towards making new varieties emerge.

10

**Nicoline van Harskamp**  
**ENGLISH FORECAST**

2013  
 2 channel HD video  
 60: 49 min

In *English Forecast* the artist attempts to predict the future of the English language. Van Harskamp has researched how English, one of the world's most used cross-border languages, might evolve in the future. In the Performance Room four actors, each with a different native language, perform this possible future of English. Van Harskamp addresses the power of the spoken word, questioning the many cultural factors affecting the English language.

11

**Harun Farocki**  
**DIE SCHULUNG**

1987  
 1 channel SD video projection  
 44 min

A film about a five-day seminar in which executives learn how to sell themselves better. The manager course teaches basic rules of dialectics and rhetoric, trains body language, gestures and facial expressions.

**Harun Farocki**

January 9, 1944 born in Nový Jicin (Neutitschein), born in Nový Jicin (Neutitschein), at that time Sudetengau, today Czech Republic. 1966 – 1968 Admission to the just opened Berlin Film Academy, DFFB. 1966 Marriage with Ursula Lefkes. 1968 Birth of the daughters Annabel Lee and Larissa Lu. 1974 – 1984 Author and editor of the magazine *Filmkritik*, Munich. 1998 – 1999 *Speaking about Godard / Von Godard sprechen*, New York / Berlin. (Together with Kaja Silverman). 1993– 1999 Visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley. 2001 Marriage with Antje Ehmann. Since 1966 more than 100 productions for Television or Cinema: Children's TV, Documentary Films, Essay Films, Story Films. Since 1996 various solo- and group exhibitions in Museums and Galleries. 2007 with *Deep Play* participation at documenta 12. Since 2004 Visiting Professor, 2006 – 2011 full Professorship at the Academy of Art, Vienna. 2011 – 2014 longterm project *Labour in a Single Shot*, together with Antje Ehmann. July 30, 2014 died near Berlin.

**Nicoline van Harskamp**

In her recent works, Nicoline van Harskamp (b. 1975, NL) uses varieties of internationally-spoken English to propose a future shaped by the ubiquity and constant evolution of the language, and its inevitable divergence from hegemonic norms. Devised with actors, students, and sometimes linguist, van Harskamp's performative actions (such as *English Forecast*), plays (*A Romance in Five Acts and Twenty-one Englishes*), documents and video works bring out the correspondence between content and the aesthetic framework in which it comes into force.

Van Harskamp's recent presentations include *Englishes* at BAK Utrecht, KunstWerke Berlin, Extra City Antwerp, Kunstraum London, and BMW Tate Live Performance Room. She took part in Sydney Biennale, Eva International Limerick, Manifesta 9 Genk, Gothenburg Biennale, Bucharest Biennale, and exhibitions at Witte de With, CAAC Sevilla, Kadist Paris, Rotor Graz, FRAC Lorraine, and Clark House Bombay. She is the winner of the 2009 Prix de Rome, and holds teaching positions at Sandberg Institute Amsterdam, and Kunstakademie Münster. The artist lives and works in Amsterdam, NL.

**Stefan Panhans**

Stefan Panhans is an artist living and working in Hamburg, Berlin and elsewhere. He predominantly works with video and photography. His artistic research undertakes a kind of mental archeology of contemporary hypermediatization and digitalization and its effects on our minds and bodies as well as its power relations. Furthermore It negotiates phenomena like increasing everyday racism, celebrity worship, stereotypes and postcolonial diversity issues. Selected awards and artist residencies:

Research Fellowship Akademie für Theater und Digitalität, Dortmund (with Andrea Winkler), 2020; innogy VISIT Award, Essen (with Andrea Winkler), 2019; Grant for Media Art of the Foundation of Lower Saxony at the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art, 2017; Bremen Award for Video Art #22, 2014; Sommerfrische – Residency Stipend, Bad Gastein, 2014. Selected solo shows: HOSTEL, HMKV, Dortmund (with Andrea Winkler), 2020; Stefan Panhans – HOSTEL 1&2, Edith Russ Haus für Medienkunst, Oldenburg, 2018; A Gallerina's Dream, Galerie im Turm, Berlin (with Andrea Winkler), 2017; Sundowner #12, Neue Nationalgalerie (Terrasse), Berlin (with Andrea Winkler), 2016. Selected group exhibitions and projects: Expanded Cinema – From Abstraction to Algorithm, TABAKALERA International Centre for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastian, 2020; Something Between Us, Kai10, Düsseldorf | Kunsthalle Nürnberg, 2020; First Person Plural, Electronic Media Art Festival 2020, Osnabrück; Dreams & Memories, imai videolunge, NRW Forum, Düsseldorf, 2020; »Speaking Images«, Fluentum Collection, Berlin »Addis Video Art Festival«, Addis

Ababa, 2019; »Nico - Wir kann die Luft so schwer sein an einem Tag an dem der Himmel so blau ist«, Institut für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2019; »Fuzzy Dark Spot – Videokunst aus Hamburg«, Deichtorhallen | Sammlung Falckenberg, 2019; »Refracted Realities - Videonale.17«, Kunstmuseum Bonn, 2019; »Transhumanism – Festival International d'Art Vidéo 2019«, Casablanca; 2018; 35th Kassel Documentary Film and Video Festival, Kassel, 2018

**Elemér Ragályi**

Elemér Ragályi (b. 1939 in Rákosmente, Budapest) is a Hungarian cinematographer, director and actor. From 1957 to 1968 he worked as a cameraman, production manager and laboratory assistant at Mafilm Studios, Hungary, and studied at the Budapest Film Academy Színház- és Filmművészeti Főiskolas/Academy of Drama and Film, Faculty of Film and Television with György Illés until 1968. 1969 saw his first feature film as a cameraman with the drama *Sziget a szárazföldön*. From 1988 onwards he worked internationally, especially in Hollywood, and was responsible as cinematographer for films such as *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Jakob the Liar* and *Anne Frank*. Selected awards include. Hungarian Film and TV Critics Prize (1970, 1976, 1979, 1981, 1984 & 1987); Béla Balázs Prize (1974); Montréal Prize for Camera Work (1979) for *Szabadíts meg a gonosztól!*; Merited Artist (1980); Honored Artist (1985); CableACE Award (1990) for The Josephine Baker Story; Emmy Award (1996), ASC Award nomination (1997) for *Rasputin*; Emmy Award nomination (2001) for *Anne Frank*.

**Peter Rose**

Since 1968 Peter Rose has made over thirty films, tapes, performances and installations. Many of the early works raise intriguing questions about the nature of time, space, light, and perception and draw upon Rose's background in mathematics and on the influence of structuralist filmmakers. He subsequently became interested in language as a subject and in video as a medium and generated a substantial body of work that played with the feel and form of sense, concrete texts, political satire, oddball performance, and a kind of intellectual comedy. Recent video installations have involved a return to an examination of landscape, time, and vision. Rose has been widely exhibited, both nationally and internationally, having been included in shows at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Biennial, the Centre Pompidou, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Film Society at Lincoln Center, and the Rotterdam International Film Festival. He has been awarded fellowships by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Pew Foundation, the Independence Foundation, and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and is fond of writing descriptions in the third person.

**Kim Schoen**

Kim Schoen (b. 1969, Princeton) lives and works in Los Angeles and Berlin. She received an MFA from CalArts in 2005, and a Master of Philosophy from the photography department at The Royal College of Art in London in 2008. Her work in photography and video installation has been shown at numerous institutions and galleries worldwide, including the Los Angeles Museum of Art (LAMO), Young Projects (Los Angeles), Moskowitz Bayse (Los Angeles), LM Projects (Los Angeles), The California Museum of Photography, LAXART, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, MACRO (Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma), BAM (New York), The South London Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery, MOT International (London), Museo de Arte Moderno y Contemporaneo (Spain), Archive Kabinett (Berlin), Kunstverein Springhornhof, and Kleine Humboldt Galerie (Berlin). Her work was recently acquired by LACMA, and has been written about in Artforum, X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly, The Los Angeles Times, Mousse, and Art in America. Schoen has



lectured at Otis College of Art & Design, Goldsmiths, CCA, The Royal College of Art, and The School of Visual Arts and has published her own writing on repetition and photography—“The Serial Attitude Redux”, “The Expansion of the Instant: Photography, Anxiety and Infinity”—along with various text works in Tolstoyevsky from Book Works, and E.R.O.S. Press, London.

### John Smith

John Smith was born in Walthamstow, London in 1952 and studied at North-East London Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art, after which he became an active member of the London Filmmakers Co-op. Inspired in his formative years by conceptual art and structural film, but also fascinated by the immersive power of narrative and the spoken word, he has developed an extensive body of work that subverts the perceived boundaries between documentary and fiction, representation and abstraction. Often rooted in everyday life, his meticulously crafted films playfully explore and expose the language of cinema.

Smith’s solo exhibitions include Fine Arts, Sydney (2019), Alma Zevi, Venice (2017), Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin (2017, 2015, 2013, 2012 and 2010); Kate MacGarry, London (2016); Wolverhampton Art Gallery (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art, Leipzig (2015); Centre d’Art Contemporain de Noisy-le-Sec, Paris (2014); The Gallery, Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle upon Tyne (2014); Figge von Rosen Gallery, Cologne (2013); Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover (2012); Turner Contemporary, Margate (2012); Weserburg Museum for Modern Art, Bremen (2012)

Major group exhibitions include ‘Migrating Worlds: The Art of the Moving Image in Britain’, Yale Centre for British Art, Connecticut (2019); ‘Face It!’, Kunstmuseum Ravensburg (2019); ‘As Seen on Screen’, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2019); ‘Double Takes’, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, Ohio (2019); ‘Journeys with The Waste Land’, Turner Contemporary, Margate (2018); ‘Age of Terror: Art Since 9/11’, Imperial War Museum, London (2017-18); ‘Between Film and Photography’, FOMU Museum, Antwerp (2017); ‘After the Fact: Propaganda in the 21st Century’, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich (2017); ‘Found’, Foundling Museum, London (2016); ‘Double Act: Art and Comedy’, MAC, Belfast (2016); ‘Invocable Reality’, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2014); ‘The Reluctant Narrator’, Berardo Museum, Lisbon (2014); ‘Constellations’, Tate Liverpool (2013-14); ‘Image Counter Image’, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2012)

John Smith lives and works in London. His work is held in the collections of Tate Gallery; Arts Council England; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Sztuki, Lodz; FRAC Île de France, Paris; Kunstmuseum Magdeburg; Ella Fontanals-Cisneros, Miami; Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Ferens Art Gallery, Hull.



## impressum

### Production:

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