



v.l.n.r.: **UBERMORGEN**, *PMC Wagner Arts He Thiel*, 2023, courtesy of the artist; **Johanna Müller**, *Who the f\*\*\* is Karen? (don't show feelings)*, 2022, Filmplakat, courtesy of the artist; **Giulia Essyad**, *Preserve and Cherish this pale blue Bot, the only friend I ever had*, 2021, Photo: Michael Giesbrecht, courtesy of HEAD and Michael Giesbrecht

## UBERMORGEN, Johanna Müller, Giulia Essyad Swiss Mediaart – Pax Art Awards 2023

13.01.-10.03.2024

### Opening Day: Friday, January 12, 2024

- 11 am: Guided tour for the media with the curator and artists
- 7 pm: Exhibition opening

The exhibition «*UBERMORGEN, Johanna Müller & Giulia Essyad. Swiss Media Art – Pax Art Awards 2023*» is presenting a selection of works by award-winning artists in the form of three concurrent solo exhibitions. The 2023 Pax Art Awards' main prize has gone to the artist duo **UBERMORGEN**, who have been producing pioneering work in the field of net art since the 1990s and continue to create compelling works, ranging from conceptual to activist, but always involving a critical approach to society and the prevailing system. **Johanna Müller** and **Giulia Essyad** have also been recognized by awards. The two artists use their respective practices to research the functioning of capitalist platforms on the internet, probing the algorithmic control of content, self-expression on social platforms, as well as embarking on in-depth explorations of internet subculture – both use their works to permeate the furthest corners of the web, returning to the exhibition space with the phenomena they have discovered.

Curator: Marlene Wenger

## UBERMORGEN

The **UBERMORGEN** duo have been expanding the field of net art since the 1990s and are continually exploring the new possibilities that the internet presents. **UBERMORGEN** address the logic of the internet as a marketplace and networking machine in their works, while making interventions in political and social discourses. The artist group recognized at an early stage that the internet was a promising medium for art. From their very first projects, such as «Vote Auction» (2000), they began ushering political issues onto the net, not only drawing attention to social injustices, but also creating potential spaces for political action. This historically important work has been purchased by the Art Foundation Pax and is also on display in the exhibition.

The duo makes astute use of branding and marketing strategies, in communicating their anti-authoritarian approach to generating media attention. Such specific issues as intellectual property, originality, and artificial scarcity have again become increasingly significant in recent years due to the hype surrounding NFTs, demonstrating how important it is that **UBERMORGEN** and other artists of their generation have contributed to a well-informed critical discourse. In response to media attention around NFTs, the duo created one of the first PFPs (Picture for Profile) on Tezos. Such profile images, found on social media, are used to signal both status and affiliation to a particular group. The graphically pixelated aesthetics of **UBERMORGEN**'s «Dicks» (2021) that are generated as PFPs, refer directly to CryptoPunks by the artist collective Larva Labs – the first and still most successful PFP to date – addressing the crypto scene's male-dominated bro culture and the problems it entails.

**UBERMORGEN**'s exhibition also includes the new work «Happy Dystopia», which plays with the recognition that the world's complex problems cannot all be solved simultaneously, while some cannot currently be solved at all. Conceived as a web-based quarterly report employing the vacuity of corporate diction and slogans, the work «PCM Wagner Art» (2023) for example adopts strategies of culture jamming in parodying capitalist enterprise culture.

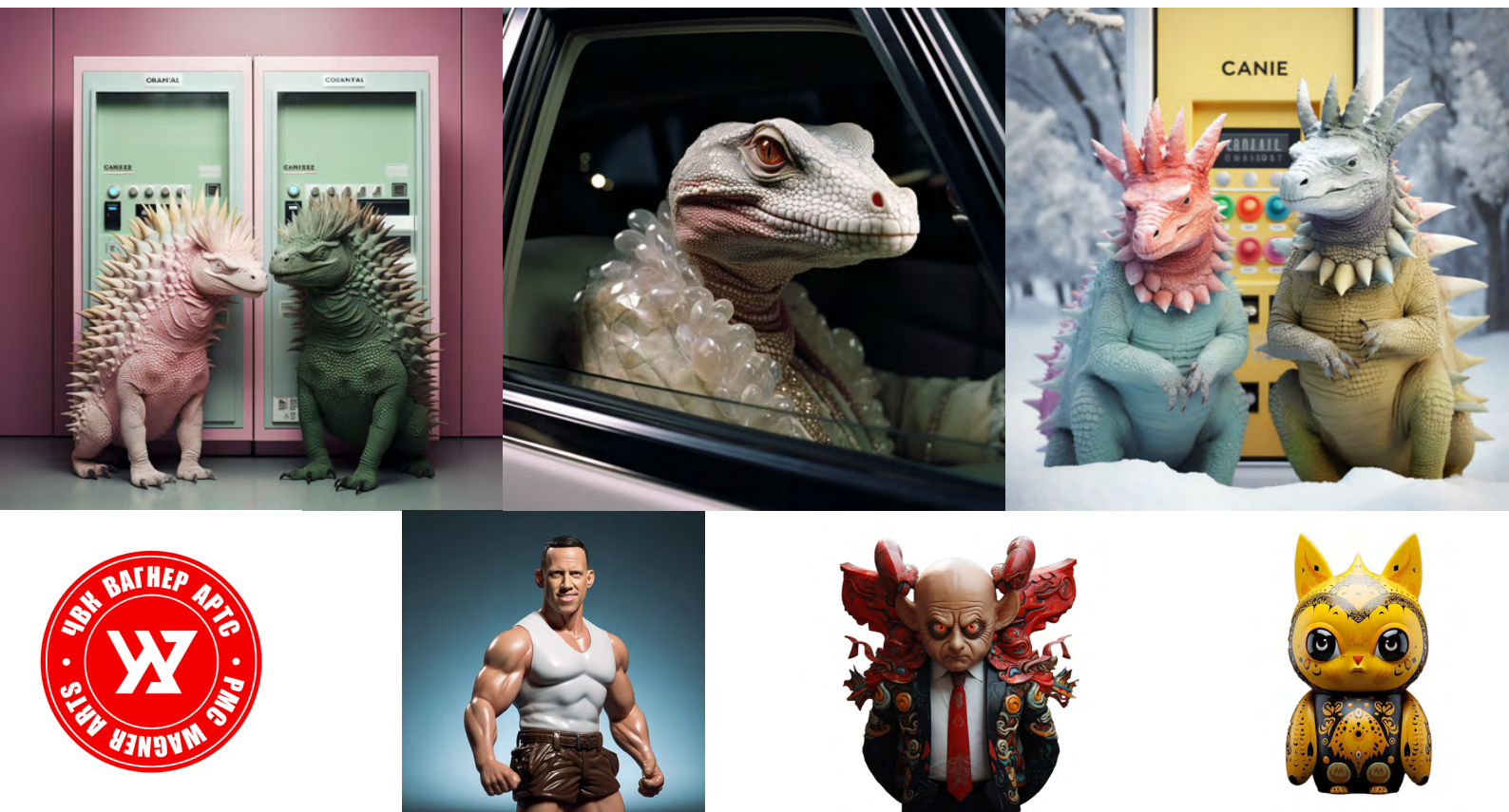
The artist group **UBERMORGEN** consisting of **Luzius Bernhard** aka **etoy.HANS**, **etoy.BRAIN-HARD**, **hans\_extrem**, **e01** (\*1971) and **Maria Haas** aka **lizvlx** (\*1973) was founded in 1995. The two have taught at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, the University of Art and Design in Offenbach, and the University of Kassel. In 2021 they were awarded the LUMEN Gold Award for their work «UNINVITED» made in collaboration with Nye Thompson. Since 2023, the duo has held the Chair of Digital Arts at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna.

**UBERMORGEN** are receiving the Pax Art Awards 2023 main prize of 30,000 Swiss francs.

**Website:** <http://ubermorgen.com>

**Instagram:** @ubermorgen\_com

v.l.n.r: **UBERMORGEN**, *Happy Dystopia (Two Stegosaurus & the Vending Machine of Joy; untitled; Two Stegosaurus at the Dispenser)*, 2023; *PMC Wagner Arts (Logo Red; He Thie., Prigibo., Sad Infrastructure Chicken)*, 2023, courtesy of the artist





v.l.n.r.: **Johanna Müller**, *Who the f\*\*\* is Karen? (don't show feelings)*, 2022, Poster & Film Still, courtesy of the artist

## Johanna Müller

**Johanna Müller** describes herself as an internet flâneur, exploring how we move and behave in online spaces. She sees in the attitude of the flâneur an active means of reframing and re-contextualizing content, as evidenced by her work in a wide range of media, encompassing video, installations of object assemblages, and performance. Müller's work employs a distinctive analysis of phenomena resulting from a networked, increasingly complex digital culture, yet one permeated by surveillance. While the work *«What If I Was Wrong About What Jesus Looks Like»* (2021) explores the phenomenon of the «walled garden», a controlled, closed system for managing user behavior, other works such as *«Who the f\*\*\* is Karen? (don't show feelings)»* (2022) examine the culture of memes. In describing the importance of skills in internet navigation and literacy, the works are a metaphor for the ways in which the internet functions. Müller's approach is exemplary of post-internet art, in that it transcends merely surfing the web. Her works adopt such aesthetics and defining elements of Web 2.0 as pop-up windows, CAPTCHA tests, and Google searches, which serve to guide, disrupt, and steer our «journeys» through the internet, becoming symbols of how the internet, in its algorithmic structure, works.

Two new works are being presented in the exhibition, *«In Invalid Credentials»* (2024) is a conversation with a chatbot that is staged on an oversized play carpet. The bot's assistance is ineffective, the user is caught in a loop of error messages with no prospect of solving the problems. The state of being lost, feelings of disorientation despite smart AI assistants and chatbots, and our communications with the machines around us that are frequently «lost in translation», are recurring subjects in Müller's work. *«Lost in Hidden Hills»* (2024) likewise concerns an unsuccessful search, this time for the Kardashian family home in California. The archaic soundtrack of trombones increases narrative tension, yet viewers wait in vain for the climax of discovery.

**Johanna Müller** (\*1990) completed her Master of Arts in Art Education at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) in 2019. In 2021 she was awarded a studio residency in Paris. In 2022 she received a grant from the Canton of Zürich and in 2023 a development award from the city of Winterthur for her work *«Who the f\*\*\* is Karen? (don't show feelings)»*.

**Webseite:** <https://johannamueller.net/>  
**Instagram:** @joftan\_aliasjohannamueller

## Giulia Essyad

**Giulia Essyad** researches representations of the human body utilizing the media of video, photography, sculpture, poetry, and performance. Her own body serves as a point of departure for digital manipulations in which she slips into the role of a science fiction character or stages herself in the style of a viral internet trend. Essyad's work is centered on stereotypes of beauty and their deconstruction, a recurring element being the color blue applied to the body as a symbol of alienation and otherness. It is a cosmos in which the blue skin of the indigenous figures in James Cameron's blockbuster film *Avatar* as well as the Indian deity Ganesha serve as role models. Blue blood, formerly associated with notions of nobility, but today employed as an awkward trope in advertisements for hygiene products, is appropriated by Essyad in such works as *«Blue Period»* (2020). The photograph depicts the artist standing in a pool of blue paint running down from her crotch. Such a gesture is simultaneously a parodic reference to the art historical canon as well as an unmasking of motifs employed in commercial advertising. The triptych *«blueberry.inflation.v1.2»* (2021) addresses a meme, involving the character Violet Beauregarde's transformation into a blueberry in the film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. The internet has turned the scene into a viral phenomenon, a fetish engendering worldwide copycats. In Essyad's work, metamorphosis can be read as a means of reclaiming the body that counters the ideals of perfection prescribed by consumer society. It is also a tribute to fans who celebrate the opulent body in all its erotic and pleasurable aspects.

For the exhibition, Essyad has created a new work that utilizes inflation literally: an inflatable female figure filled with balloons not only mimics «blueberry inflation», but also appropriates the rubber doll, and in doing so empowers representations of the self. The light box photographs in the shape of church windows in Essyad's *«Under the Pink»* (2023) demonstrate the dissolution of her own body into a virtual flickering – a transparent, shimmering haze of virtual materiality pervading differing parts of her body. As a memento mori and mirror for a wide variety of fantasies, the female body becomes a symbol situated between religious icon and profane, everyday advertising image.

**Giulia Essyad** (\*1992) studied at Ecal in Lausanne and HEAD in Geneva. The artist was a recipient of the Swiss Art Awards 2023 and awarded the Kiefer Hablitzel Prize in 2021. In 2020 the Pro Helvetia Residency enabled a stay in Bengaluru, India.

**Giulia Essyad is receiving one of the Pax Art Awards 2023 for promising young artists worth 15,000 Swiss francs.**

**Webseite:** <https://reseau-dda.org/fr/artists/giulia-essyad>

**Instagram:** @oth3r.nature

**Giulia Essyad, *blueberry.inflation.v1.2*, 2021, courtesy of LALD**



**Art Foundation Pax / Pax Art Awards**

The **Pax Art Awards** have been presented annually since 2018. These groundbreaking prizes for digital art, awarded by the **Art Foundation Pax** in collaboration with HEK, recognize and promote media-specific practices of Swiss artists either using media technology in their works or addressing its impact. Half of the prize money is used to purchase a work for the Art Foundation Pax collection, the other half to support the artists in developing a new work that will be presented in a joint exhibition the following year. The **Art Foundation Pax** is an independent foundation for the promotion of digital and media-based art in Switzerland and is supported by Pax.

**Website:** <https://www.artfoundationpax.ch/>

**Instagram:** @artfoundationpax

The exhibition has been organized in collaboration with:

**Information:**

HEK (House of Electronic Arts)  
Freilager-Platz 9, 4142 Münchenstein/Basel

**Opening times:**

Wed-Sun, 12 noon-6 pm  
Admission: 12 / 8 Swiss francs (concessions),  
Happy hour: Wed-Sun, 12 noon-1 pm, free admission to the exhibition  
Guided tour through the exhibition: every Sunday at 3 pm

**Special opening times:**

Museum night 2024 «Handshakes and Selfies»  
Friday, January 19, 2023, 12 noon (6 pm)-2 am

Further information: [www.hek.ch](http://www.hek.ch)

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**About HEK (House of Electronic Arts)**

Located in Basel, HEK is Switzerland's national competence center for all forms of art expressing themselves through, and addressing, new technologies and media. HEK's interdisciplinary approach provides a wide audience with insights into art produced in differing genres that is involved in discourses relating to art, media, and technology. In a diverse program of exhibitions, small festivals, performances, and concerts, HEK's program dedicates itself to current social issues and concerns as well as technological and aesthetic developments. In addition to event and exhibition activities, HEK is also deeply involved in methodologies of collecting and the conservation of digital art.

HEK is supported by the **Christoph Merian Stiftung**, the **cantons Basel Stadt** and **Basel Landschaft**, as well as the **Swiss Federal Office for Culture**.

**Instagram:** @hek\_basel



**Discord:**



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