

## PRESS RELEASE

### Ilana Harris-Babou – *Wholesome Fun*

Kunsthaus Hamburg, October 2 – November 28, 2021

Curator: Katja Schroeder

With *Wholesome Fun*, Kunsthaus Hamburg is hosting **Ilana Harris-Babou's** first institutional solo exhibition in Europe, which will be presented in tandem with her solo show *Tasteful Interiors* running from August 16 through November 5, 2021, at ICA @ UTC in Chattanooga, USA.

In her video works, collages, and sculptures, Harris-Babou combines humor and a keen critique of society, revealing racist structures and social discrepancies in the mirror of western hegemonic consumer and media culture.

In this context, she adopts the language of popular advertising formats on Youtube and Instagram, in which companies develop their brand image and mostly members of the younger generation enact their consumerism as a lifestyle in the everyday sphere, capturing their cooking or DIY activities on camera. Here, the self-empowerment of the Do-It-Yourself concept becomes a paradigm of self-optimization, propagating efficiency, performance, and would-be good taste in addition to practical tips.

The artist usually presents her video works as spatial installations in combination with small-format sculptures or collages. The absurdity of dysfunctional household utensils, often made of pottery, and her self-ironic performances (sometimes in collaboration with her mother) mock the logic of a morally and aesthetically optimized lifestyle. With works such as *Reparation Hardware* (2018) or *Human Design* (2019), she establishes an interconnection between the obsessive aestheticization of contemporary consumer society that levels all inequalities through a purportedly 'authentic' design, and the trauma of colonial history, which continues to shape the reality of many African Americans. Beyond the American context, however, many parallels can be found in the artist's works to European conditions, in which both structural racism and the privileges of individual social groups are deeply anchored in everyday life.

In her most recent works, *Decision Fatigue* and *Leaf of Life* (2020), Harris-Babou addresses the boom of the wellness industry and its promises of salvation. In doing so, particularly in the multi-channel installation *Leaf of Life*, she makes reference to the narratives of conspiracy theories, health gurus, and evangelical nationalists. She constructs an imaginary reality “where the tropes of wellness culture are disrupted by the healing potential of Black self-determination.” The work conflates fictional elements with stories of personal and collective loss, as well as the deficiencies of the (American) healthcare system. Moreover, the pandemic has revealed the blatant injustices that define healthcare systems around the world. The artist created this work last year against the backdrop of the presidential transition and the countless Covid-19 deaths in the United States. It is therefore not only dramatically timely, but simultaneously explores the issues of health, care, and truth as matters linked to skin color, privilege, and prevailing narratives.

**Ilana Harris-Babou** (\*1991, Brooklyn, NY) has exhibited throughout the US and Europe, with recent solo exhibitions at ICA @ UTC (Chattanooga), Jacob Lawrence Gallery (Seattle), The Museum of Arts & Design and HESSE FLATOW (New York). Other venues include CCA Wattis Institute (San Francisco), Queens Museum (New York), Istanbul Design Biennial (Istanbul), Kunsthall Charlottenborg (Copenhagen), Whitney Biennial (New York) the Jewish Museum, SculptureCenter, the Studio Museum in Harlem. She holds an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University, and a BA in Art from Yale University.

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