

Daniel Hopp

Fictional Healing

28 March – 24 May 2026

Places of transit such as train stations or public squares are sites where social divisions may become particularly visible, for example, Leopoldplatz in Berlin or the area around the Drob Inn, a contact and counselling centre providing drug consumption rooms not far from Hamburg Central Station. Addiction, homelessness and acute survival strategies collide here with urban mobility, shopping, art and culture. Daniel Hopp's first institutional solo exhibition at the Kunsthau Hamburg picks up on precisely these points of crystallisation. Departing from personal experiences, he developed an exhibition project that combines artistic practice and social participation.

At the centre of *Fictional Healing* is a multi-part film installation that draws together perspectives and biographies from Berlin, Hamburg and Munich. The work is based on interviews revolving around an open question posed to people affected by addiction or temporary homelessness: What film scene would you create if you had the opportunity? In collaboration with the protagonists, Hopp translates their imaginations, dreams, fantasies and memories into documentary and (docu-)fictional scenes. More than forty people have actively participated in the project – the artist's friends and confidants, alongside contacts established in the course of his work. The film scenes were created collaboratively from contributions of those involved, taking shape over time in a broad scope of narrative forms. The multiplicity of stories arising from the process aims at subverting widespread stigmatizing narratives associated with addiction.

Selected short films allow us to delve into individual life stories, creating a sense of closeness to the narrators and introducing new images of care. One of the films is dedicated to Hopp's childhood friend, Toni, who lives in Munich's Mettensiedlung. Together, they trace his fascination with extraterrestrials and his yearning for "alienation" – leaving Earth behind and no longer being perceived as a stranger. With a sense of humour and exaggeration, scenes featuring masked characters similar to orcs from fantasy films draw parallels with experiences of addiction while challenging images associated with social marginalization. In this context, disguise not only enables alienation, but also the temporary discarding of identity. It creates a safe space in which attributions become invalidated and new self-images can be tried out. Consciously breaking with viewing habits and established mechanisms results in a space for self-empowerment and collective imagination.

The underlying approach of protection and play is continued in a further step: based on experiences of the participants, selected personal stories were reinterpreted by both amateur and professional actors. Representation thus becomes a form of appreciation; the focus shifts from the person affected to the story itself, lending it presence without appropriating it. Interspersed behind-the-scenes sequences break up the performance to reveal the collective work process along with given transitions between lived experience, staging and representation.

The exhibition architecture echoes the spatial situation around the Drob Inn through the use of upended fences, conveying a sense of their oppressive presence. A metal star, inspired by the Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, commemorates Herby, who passed away while the film was being produced. Thus, the front of exhibition hall transforms into a profane space, echoing the everyday realities faced by people suffering from addiction in a fragmentary yet humorous way. The rear section, by contrast, is designed as a stage: a large-format video projection creates a space of transformation, dramatic narrative and aesthetic exaggeration. The monumental spatial architecture is complemented by large-format, AI-generated images carrying forward motifs from the participants' narratives – such as Ahmend's memory of a pastor's warm embrace or Saskia's image of a girl in the dark. The films and visual arrangements condense into an immersive

experience, borne by a soundscape that unfolds across the entire hall and turns the space into a resonance chamber. Boundaries become negotiable: between precarity and bourgeois life, between inside and outside, between the Drob Inn and the Kunsthaus, between artistic engagement and social work.

In addition to infusing the filmmaking process with his own biography, Hopp has also made a personal letter written to him by his grandfather accessible as a direct testimony on the outer wall of the exhibition space. At the age of 30, he began his studies at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg; his life story remains closely linked to the theme of addiction. Today, he draws on this in his relationship-oriented artistic processes, which see art as a space for recognition – a realm where new perspectives and possible modes of action can be explored.

The exhibition highlights social issues and reveals how reality, documentation, collective imagination and cinematic fiction can become intertwined – resulting in a work that is both touching and unsettling, and raises questions about responsibility, representation and participation. The accompanying programme foresees a gala evening which will be documented on film. The proceeds will be donated to the youth welfare organisation Suchtprävention (Addiction Prevention), a social act that underlines the exhibition's social responsibility and participatory approach.

Curated by Anna Nowak

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