

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 while subverting widespread stigmatizing narratives associated with addiction.

Through dialogue with people affected by addiction and partially homelessness, Hopp translated their imagination, dreams, fantasies and memories into film scenes. The multi-part video installation *Fictional Healing*, produced in Hamburg, Berlin and Munich, depicts this process, in which fiction and documentary become inextricably intertwined. 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, evolving over time into a multiplicity of ever-changing storylines.

To briefly interrupt the cycle of procurement in which many of the participants are caught up, Hopp bought some of their time and invited them to take part in his project. Their conversations started off with the question: What film scene would you create if you had the opportunity? Ultimately, they staged the respondents' imaginations together. The participants enacted scenes, in which they played themselves or a possible version of themselves. The characters are therefore neither completely fictional nor entirely true to life. The artist's own position—he also appears in the videos—was not left untouched by this dialectic. The attempt to create distance from one's oneself through the construction of a character only served to reveal one's own entanglements. Based on the assumption that identity, desires and self-images are not fixed but form themselves through social and imaginative processes, it becomes clear that fiction is not the antithesis of reality, but its prerequisite. Desires, roles and narratives are not merely enacted, but actively brought into being, which creates space for shifts. Drawing on therapeutic practices such as psychodrama or schema therapy, this approach makes apparent that change occurs less through insight than through action. By acting something out, it may become effectual. The title *Fictional Healing* thus describes not healing in the classical sense, but a movement: a tentative renegotiation of relationships to one's own self that arises from enactment – unstable, contradictory and open.

Resulting from this process, four short videos were produced for the exhibition, each documenting one interview. They create a sense of closeness to the narrators and introduce new images of care. One of the films is dedicated to Hopp's childhood friend, Toni. Together, they trace his fascination with extraterrestrials and his yearning for "alienation" – leaving Earth behind and no longer being perceived as a stranger. Based on these conversations, AI-generated images, which are displayed on large-format panels in the exhibition, were created to illustrate motifs from the participants' stories – such as Ahmed's memory of a pastor's warm embrace or Saskia's image of a girl in the dark. For the film *Fictional Healing*, which is at the centre of the exhibition, selected personal stories of the participants were further 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. In another video, scenes featuring masked characters similar to orcs from fantasy films exaggerate and thereby expose widespread images associated with addiction. 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.

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 brass 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, the large-format video projection of the film *Fictional Healing* creates a space of transformation, dramatic narrative and aesthetic exaggeration. Within the monumental spatial architecture, 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 practice and social commitment. Part of the accompanying programme is a performative gala evening. Its proceeds will be donated to Jugendhilfe e. V., the supporting institution of Drob Inn Hamburg – a charitable gesture that underscores the exhibition's social responsibility and participatory approach. Both the gala and the exhibition opening will be documented on film to become part of *Fictional Healing*, which is conceived as an ongoing project.

Hopp's own life story is closely linked to the theme of addiction. At the age of 30, he began his studies at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg. 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. His 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.

Curated by Anna Nowak

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