

Francesca Bertin

I WISH – YOUR BREATH, 2025

Colloquially, the “cat lady” is viewed as an eccentric, independent woman who would rather care for her cats than for children or a partner. This culturally and historically patriarchal archetype has an accordingly negative connotation. Francesca Bertin’s (b. 1985 in Venice, IT) humorous, process-driven 16mm experimental film *I WISH – YOUR BREATH* examines this figure’s emancipatory potential. In its paradoxical nature as an animal that is both domesticated and independent, the cat becomes a vehicle for these explorations. The animal is also a reference to feminist forerunners such as performance artist Carolee Schneemann, who repeatedly depicted the cat as a symbol of non-human closeness, female autonomy and objective witnessing.

In loosely connected filmic miniatures, Bertin shows four people and a cat in spatially separate domestic scenes. These private settings are consciously kept ambivalent; they are simultaneously spaces of retreat and a stage for desire, home to control and chaos, to isolation, boredom and community. Through rhythmic repetitions, fragmentary overlaps and symbolic escalations, the protagonists’ seemingly banal acts are condensed, shifting the atmosphere into the dreamlike and surreal. The film’s sound is not synchronized. As an independent element continuously shifting in relation to what is seen, the score adds a disorienting element that unsettles the imagery and produces a sense of discomfort in the viewer. The artwork builds on an irregular rhythm, a reference to the non-linear trajectory of feminist emancipation; it mirrors liberation not as a concluded process, but an ongoing negotiation. Like the cat, the analogue filmic material refuses total subjugation. Surface, light and editing are not smoothed out, rather, they are used as a malleable artistic element, also leading Bertin to reflect on the unruliness and the technological necessities of her chosen medium. *I WISH – YOUR BREATH* is a poetic study of care, isolation and dependence – between human and animal existences, between artist and medium.

Maxime Chabal

Story of the Eye, 2025

In 1886, the first edition of Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s canonical work of early sexology titled *Psychopathia sexualis* was published. The treatise analyzed hundreds of case studies of what were considered sexual abnormalities and perversions. Originally published for a professional audience, the compendium soon became widely known as a work of popular science. A significant number of people recognized themselves on its pages, where their identities and yearnings were represented and accessible. This intersection of restriction, voyeurism, desire and resistance is the point of departure for Maxime Chabal’s (b. 1996 in Paris, FR) artwork *Story of the Eye*.

The installation’s central element resembles the interior of an anatomical theatre – specifically, the Gustavianum in Uppsala, Sweden. Experts and laypeople alike once observed bodies being dissected here. At the same time, the octagonal structure made of steel braces recalls a panopticon, an architecture strongly associated with dominance and surveillance – giving the ambivalence of looking and being looked at a doubly significant formal expression. In his collages, Chabal connects case studies from *Psychopathia sexualis* to materials from other sources and time periods. The history of both Western medicine and architecture illustrates that not only bodies, but sexuality and identities, too, were institutionalized and stigmatized. By appropriating architectures and disavowing scientific logics in favour of a simultaneity of past and future, the erotic and the absurd, violence and tenderness, the artist undercuts these dominant narratives. Chabal counters “objective” categorizations with the always elusive subjectivity of human desire, and with the body’s fundamental permeability.

Wassili Franko
[DevLog], 2025

Wassili Franko (b. 1992 in Lviv, UA) draws on his longstanding, intensive examination of 3D technology to develop a distinctive artistic language. He considers his detailed digital modelling processes a form of sculpture. Although his raw material data based, various analogue adjustments are required to produce its desired base format. But what happens to the artist's understanding of himself and his practice when these processes can be outsourced to artificial intelligence? When designs and images that were once created via meticulous manual processes require only the input of a simple prompt? In a tone both essayistic and autobiographical, the video work *[DevLog]* methodically engages these questions.

Throughout his grant year, Franko has documented his working processes in diaristic recordings. In a digital material study of sorts, he places various surfaces, programmes, tools and media side by side. Screens serve as stages for invisible trajectories. Code becomes a form of concrete poetry. Images develop, change, and disappear again. Form emerges from the process, elevating that which is generally open and unforeseen to an artistic event. Throughout the year, Franko delved deeply – and playfully – into “vibe-coding”, a process through which artificial intelligence is used to generate a functional code with the help of natural language. Following intuition over logic, he developed different tools. His intensive work with AI-powered systems inevitably leads to a close examination of AI itself. Bordering on the absurd, Franko's cyclical generation of machines that generate other machines contains a reflection on his own humanity. The fundamental difference between the way human and algorithmic intelligences exist in time is a central insight here. For while the artist can reference memories and experiences, AI only exists in the moment of its use, trapped in an eternal present without a past or a future.

Katharina Kohl
ROSWITHA, 2025–ongoing

Clothing is an essential method of constructing social and individual identity. Not only is it a way of shielding the body from view and from the elements, it is also a symbolic form of communication. The clothes we wear are exposed to the outdoors and at the same time, they are in close contact with our bodies, an intimate part of our lives. Katharina Kohl's (b. 1956 in Treysa, DE) multipart installation *ROSWITHA* invokes various states of dress and undress. Using historic, personal and documentary references, the artist negotiates questions surrounding patriarchal violence, exploitation, solidarity and resistance.

The installation's central element is a sobering, methodical documentation of the femicides committed so far in Germany in 2025. A series of wall works consisting of a deconstructed cardboard ring binder marks the dates and locations of the individual murders, as well as the victims' ages. The detached, paper-thin binder linings are part of the composition; the “undressed” cardboard covers recall the vulnerability of the affected bodies. This theme is further reflected in a pile of clothing previously torn apart by women who work in the textile industry as part of a performance. Here the artist draws from a scene in the Old Testament: In a gesture of grief and protest, Tamar, the daughter of David, tears her clothes after being raped by her half brother Ammon. An unworn, handmade shirt from the estate of the artist's grandmother offers a contrast to the binders' cool objectivity and the heightened emotions of the textile shreds. Ghostly white, the garment carries the traces of all those who artfully crafted it. It emphasizes the longstanding connection of clothing and textiles with women's history, which brings up positive associations with solidarity and craftsmanship, as well as with exploitation and violence. *ROSWITHA* makes women's stories visible from various perspectives while illuminating their connections to the longstanding patriarchal and misogynistic structures at the root of their invisibility.

Lila-Zoé Krauß

Dream VI: [Station 161], 2025

The 19th century marked the advent of the institutionalization of modern psychiatry. Psychiatric illnesses were designated as such for the first time, and were increasingly being treated clinically. These shifts brought with them a new understanding of what were considered mental and nervous illnesses that attributed major significance to the category of gender. The theatre was crucial to the medial dissemination and popularization of these ideas throughout this time period. Lila-Zoé Krauß's (b. 1994 in Alice Springs, AU) multimedia installation *Dream VI: [Station 161]* draws thematic and visual parallels between concepts of the theatrical and of *madness*; the artist sheds a critical light on the institution of psychiatry on the one hand, and reflects the structures of postmodern self-representation on the other.

The work is a continuation of the multimedia opera project *[After her Destruction]*, in which the auto-fictional character Girl travels her own mind and finds herself in a slipstream of imagination, eroded boundaries and emancipation. *Dream VI: [Station 161]* builds on the view of a mentally ill figure in the form of Girl's mother, MOW (Manic Old Woman). Krauß stages the psychiatric ward as a place where constructs of normativity and reality are called into question. The theatre presents a similar dynamic: Strategies of empowerment and deterritorialization are consciously implemented to disturb an existing order and to imagine an alternative one. But *mad* people, actors and actresses are not the only ones performing. "All the world's a stage", wrote William Shakespeare in *As You Like It*, an analogy American sociologist Erving Goffman took up in his thesis that "we are all actors". Goffman portrays the social world as a stage on which people perform roles for the public. By blurring the lines between the pathological and the normative, the artist interrogates and destabilizes socially accepted strategies of subjectivation, as well as the power relations at their core.

Nina Kuttler

The Mighty Rush of Gloom, 2025

As an astronomical event, a total solar eclipse can be explained simply: For a brief moment during the daytime, the moon moves between the Earth and the sun, and its umbra, or core shadow, falls across the Earth and darkens its surface. The rhythm of day and night is temporarily disrupted, the temperature tangibly decreases and the sky looks strange. Such an event naturally provokes intense emotions in those who witness it. Historically, solar eclipses were associated with the apocalypse. But even in 1999, when a phenomenon of this type could last be observed in large parts of Europe, it triggered both positive feelings and existential fears. This field of tension between rational thought and affect in the face of awe-inspiring natural phenomena is at the centre of Nina Kuttler's (b. 1993 in Kassel, DE) video and sound work *The Mighty Rush of Gloom*.

Visually, the artwork takes up the high contrasts of an eclipse; dazzling light alternates with a deep darkness. The artist creates a narrative net of both documentary and fictional elements, connecting historical observations with eyewitness accounts of the 1999 solar eclipse, and with the contemporary psychic burdens posed by changes to the environment resulting from climate change. Astonishment, wonder, and a loss of control are some of the reactions felt both then and now. The cultural and psychological impacts of such transformations to our atmosphere, be they momentary or long-term, can only be guessed at. By blurring the lines between rational understanding and emotional experience, *The Mighty Rush of Gloom* traces the fragile balance between the human need for control and overwhelming power of nature.

Ruxin Liu

Mainstream People, 2025

What is the mainstream and how do I situate myself within it? Starting from this question, Ruxin Liu (b. 1997 in Jiangsu, CN) initiated a discussion group in the spring of 2025. Together with Liu, six selected participants – all of whom are queer people of Chinese heritage who were socialized female – met regularly, both in person and online. Once per week they discussed the personal, social, cultural and political implications of the “mainstream”. Liu documented these meetings on film and assembled them into a video installation titled *Mainstream People*.

The organization and implementation of workshops examining negatively connoted feelings and marginalized perspectives is a core element of Liu’s artistic practice. An interactive, playful approach fosters exchange and creates temporary communities. Working from the assumption that each person has an individual voice that will be heard thoughtfully and with respect, a space of collective care is intended to emerge around the participants. In *Mainstream People*, this means both a collaborative examination of the term “mainstream” and its meaning in different linguistic and cultural circles, as well as an intimate outlet for processing subjects related to belonging, expectations, traditions and normativity both within a majority white, heteronormative society as well as in participants’ own communities. Disappointment, misunderstandings and strategies for adaptation are discussed. The video fulfils a dual function by giving participants a feeling of visibility and self-empowerment on the one hand, and permitting external people to become part of the discourse on the other – initially as observers, and later by participating in a workshop open to all, in which the video’s subjects are explored further with a new group of people. In dialogue with other participants and with the voices from the video, a space for mutual learning and solidarity opens up.

Katja Pilipenko

Media Curtain, 2025

In his critique of the “transparency society”, cultural theorist and philosopher Byung-Chul Han hypothesizes that the dominant paradigm of unrestricted visibility has led to a reversal of power relations: Transparency no longer serves truth and freedom; it has instead become a tool of optimization and control. Social media has had a decisive influence on this transition. A “digital panopticon”, it encourages a radical self-exposure in its users that is perceived as voluntary, while the actual structures upholding the system remain entirely invisible. In her mixed media sculpture *Media Curtain*, Katja Pilipenko (b. 1989 in Moscow, RU) engages with this (in)transparency’s layers and ambivalences.

Designed as a wall, the large-format work is an optical overload. Over twenty smartphones show video fragments chosen by the artist at random playing on loop. They document the fitful scrolling of content found on various publicly accessible Instagram profiles, tracing the perceptual experience of algorithmic feeds and referencing invisible data collection at the same time. The two-minute videos are, however, blurred by a translucent barrier. The desire to sharpen the images by straining the eyes to make out their contents is deliberately withheld. Uniformity and overstimulation via algorithmically driven media content and the often incomplete form in which its users process information is heightened to the extreme.

Although the sculpture’s materials are entirely industrially produced, they display an astoundingly organic quality. A cybernetics of the body emerges in which digital, technological and anatomical systems start to intertwine. Like a membrane, the milky Plexiglas panel encloses the screens fixed to the wall behind it; the black cords running between the two layers recall veins or a delicate bone structure. Rather than openly criticizing the transparency paradigm, *Media Curtain* aesthetically undercuts it. An abstract, almost painterly game of light and colour emerges in place of porosity and information. By creating a

pictorial space that gains depth precisely through its partial opacity, Pilipenko offers a visual counterproposal to the ideology of unconditional visibility.

Sohorab Rabbey

Deep Down the Elbe, Up Above the Teesta, 2025

As facilitators of trade and discovery that form borders and sustain life, rivers have played a significant part in the development of human civilization. They are living archives, carriers of history both physical and metaphorical. On the one hand, they bear witness to geological, ecological and cultural change, while on the other they convey personal experiences and intergenerational knowledge, evoking memories of both positive and traumatic events. For the installation *Deep Down the Elbe, Up Above the Teesta*, Sohorab Rabbey (b. 1994 in Dhaka, BD) interweaves the narratives of two channels that have also shaped his own trajectory.

The two titular rivers – Hamburg’s Elbe and the Teesta, which rises in the Indian part of the Himalayas and flows into Bangladesh – meet in Rabbey’s temporary architecture. The tent-like construction of textiles and found organic materials invites visitors to reflect collectively on transportation networks and material histories that become visible via waterways. The artist dyes the textiles using industrial waste, mud and sediments from the Elbe riverbed, as well as indigo, a natural dye. While the waste materials highlight ecological ruptures caused by human interventions, indigo recalls a range of colonial continuities. In Bangladesh, indigo was cultivated as an agricultural crop and shipped to Europe in large amounts under British and Dutch colonial rule. Hamburg’s port and the Elbe both served as transportation routes for this “blue gold”. The indigo monocultures enforced by colonial governments led to famine in numerous agricultural communities, creating intergenerational traumas. Rabbey adds a further dimension to the draped, partially stitched together textiles that points to the potential of regeneration and repair. Parts of the fabrics are covered with sprouting edible seeds; found pieces of driftwood are reconnected. *Deep Down the Elbe, Up Above the Teesta* honours the overlapping of geological, historical, political and material phenomena. Rather than negating existing realities in favour of alternative scenarios, Sohorab Rabbey rearranges them in speculative and poetic ways.

Kristina Savutsina

in pain / in relation, 2025

Intimacy refers to a state of deep emotional, physical or psychic closeness. Kristina Savutsina’s (b. 1989 in Riga, LV) video work *in pain / in relation* engages with the processes of negotiation at intimacy’s core, as shaped by social, personal and physical dynamics. The artist from Belarus reflects on intimacy as a practice that requires trust, but also the courage to lose control. It can grow voluntarily or as a result of external circumstances, such as a person’s need for physical care. As a form of embodied experience, intimacy is often expressed in fleeting in-between moments: In looks, words and touches, including impulsive acts of defence.

Visually, the work begins with fragments from earlier film projects – diaristic, autobiographical documentations of daily life, reenactments and research videos. Savutsina interweaves this filmic material associatively with sound recordings of her and an intimacy coordinator, as well as other grantees, discussing the intimacy. While the coordinator talks about different ways of choreographing, producing and organizing intimacy, the conversation with the artists unfolds from personal experiences with pain, illness and healing. Beginning with physical life experiences, they share some feelings and stories while keeping

others to themselves, an interaction that serves as a catalyst for immediate human connection. A field of resonance opens up, a moment of personal and collective affinity. The collage of sound and image allows intimacy to ebb and flow with tentative pleasure. The process crystallizes not only the private, but also the political implications of closeness: Who has permission to be openly vulnerable and who is met with empathy when they do so is often determined not only by personal, but also by social factors. By making visible this not-neutral aspect of intimacy, *in pain / in relation* reveals power dynamics in relation to the self and to others. At the same time, intimacy shows itself as a potentially subversive practice capable of challenging established social roles and boundaries – particularly when it eludes definition or enables alternative ways of relating to one another.

