

Press release 10/05/2021

Technoshamanism

09 October 2021 – 06 March 2022
HMKV Hartware MedienKunstVerein
at the Dortmunder U, Level 3
Soft opening: Friday, 08 October 2021, 17:00–22:00

Abstract

Taking the figure of the shaman cultivated by Joseph Beuys throughout his career as its starting point, the exhibition focuses on “technoshamanistic” artistic positions today. The artists in question not only regard shamanism as a technology in its own right, but also use other (speculative) technologies to seek out shamanic energies. Many of the iconic tropes that Beuys utilized to heal and transform society, cultivate a spiritual connection with the environment, and overcome the power and logic of capital are now also deployed by contemporary artists who update his strategies and questions for the digital age. The exhibition takes place as part of the anniversary program “beuys 2021. 100 years of joseph beuys” of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Artists:

Morehshin Allahyari (New York)
Joseph Beuys († Düsseldorf)
Mariechen Danz (Berlin)
Anja Dornieden & Juan David González Monroy (Berlin)
Lucile Olympe Haute (Paris)
knowbotiq (Berlin)
Sahej Rahal (Mumbai)
Tabita Rezaire (Cayenne)
Jana Kerima Stolzer & Lex Rütten (Dortmund)
Transformella (aLifveForm fed and cared for by JP Raether) (Berlin)
Suzanne Treister (London)
Anton Vidokle (New York)

Curator:

Inke Arns (HMKV)

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NEUSTART KULTUR
Stiftung Kunstfonds
Kunststiftung NRW
Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des
Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen

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Stadt Dortmund / Dortmunder U
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beuys 2021. 100 Jahre Joseph Beuys

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Press release

”In Search of Healing a Planet Destroyed by Capitalism, Colonialism, Industrialization, and Neoliberalism”

Back in 2017, the art critic Tess Thackara asked in *artsymagazine* ”Why are shamanic practices making a comeback in contemporary art”? It is precisely this remarkable development that is the focus of the international group exhibition *Technoshamanism* at HMKV Hardware MedienKunstVerein. The exhibition takes place as part of the anniversary program ”beuys 2021. 100 years of joseph beuys” of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

In the exhibition curated by Inke Arns, aspects of shamanism are the connecting element between Joseph Beuys and contemporary (media) artistic positions. However, the exhibition not only places current ”techno-shamanistic” artistic positions in a context with Beuys, but identifies ”techno-shamanism” as a phenomenon that is becoming virulent in parallel in various places around the world - for example, in Brazilian ”tecnoxamanismo,” for which Joseph Beuys is not a reference point at all.

The movement of *tecnoxamanismo* began to emerge from around 2003 in the context of the Free Software and DIY movements in Brazil. Its members include people interested in DIY culture as well as indigenous activists, hackers, producers, scientists, permaculturists and others. This strongly decolonial movement is based on the idea that shamanism is a conglomeration of technologies ranging from profound ancestral knowledge about the material and immaterial essence of nature to processes of purification, recycling, restoration and ”healing” (including, in a broader sense, alchemical healing) that permeate the cosmos in all its complexity; as well as on the fact that, in a confluent movement, material technologies (such as electrotechnology) are also a way of experiencing ecstasy and a material expansion of shamanism to another language, to another level. Or also that the unification of or tension between these realms merges and transforms fields of knowledge that have been separated throughout the course of history: the profound knowledge of the ancestors (”ancestrofuturism”) and science in general.

The starting point of both activist ”tecnoxamanismo” and artistic techno-shamanism is a deep disillusionment with our present. In the (post-)industrial age something has broken apart through toxic capitalism and potentiated extractivism, which the artists presented in this exhibition hope to reassemble (or ’heal’) through the use of ”techno-shamanistic” practices and rituals. The fragmentation of our deeply divided societies is to be countered, for example, with new forms of coming together and gathering. Techno-shamanism is looking for radical alternatives to Western rationalism and individualism, for example through new alliances with non-human actors. The artists presented here - and this connects them with the Brazilian ”tecnoxamanismo” - are not concerned with the search for individual spiritual transcendence (for the purpose of self-optimization), but decidedly with the possibility of social transformation.

Positions in the exhibition

Although many artists do not directly identify with the figure of the shaman, they are united by an interest in ritual, folkloric practices, alternative forms of spirituality or altered states of consciousness - and a belief in the possibility of social transformation. The twelve positions in the exhibition can be divided into **four major thematic fields: Alchemy/Metallurgy, Cosmology, Ecology/Artificial Intelligence and Non-Human Actors.**

Alchemy/Metallurgy

While Joseph Beuys used materials such as felt, grease, copper, honey and gold, referencing their function as energy stores, artists today are concerned with the rare earths and metals that are used in gigantic digital infrastructures (such as data centres or smartphones) and whose mass-scale mining has devastating ecological consequences. The Swiss artist group **knowbotiq** (Yvonne Wilhelm, Christian Hübler), for example, investigates the global circulation of gold in *Swiss Psychotropic Gold, the Molecular Refinery*. Up to 70% of the gold traded worldwide is refined in Switzerland. Since in the process of refining everything "dirty" ("blood gold") is eliminated and neutralized, the artists attribute psychoactive effects to the precious metal. **Transformella** belongs to the **aLifveForms** (fictional identities and hysterical-subversive drag characters) that artist JP Raether takes care of. Transformellae lifelines are dedicated to biotechnical and socio-political reproductive technologies - they talk about in vitro fertilization, wet nurses, the global market of human reproduction, "ReproReality" and the coming "Reprovolution". In a huge light blue "shrine" in the center of the exhibition, we witness an "alchemical" forking, the bifurcation of lifelines and the emergence of Transformella cinis. This is about the carbon cycle as a central element of all life.

Cosmology

The surveying of the earth, by means of which algorithms are now used to track down more and more potential deposits of mineral resources, is the subject of knowbotiq and **Mariechen Danz**. Maps of the earth and the sky play a central role in the sculptures, installations and vocal performances of the Irish-German artist. Using anatomy, biology, geology, geography, meteorology, and astronomy, she explores various forms of knowledge and argues for un-learning and un-mapping. By transferring supposedly objective knowledge to the human body and its organs, by establishing a connection between microcosm and macrocosm, Mariechen Danz emphatically formulates the need for a new form of cartography that reintegrates the human body (or bodies) into its 'world view'. In her video installation *Mamelles Ancestrales*, **Tabita Rezaire** travels to the stone circles in Senegambia, West Africa, which were created between 300 BC and 1600 AD. Are they petrified brides, burial sites, ancient observatories, ceremonial sites, spirit places, or energy sources? In view of today's striving for (private) conquest of space, this preoccupation with the stone witnesses of an ancient African megalithic civilization is of great topicality. For the British artist **Suzanne Treister**, too, aggressively invasive agendas of governments and the private space-industry (the US billionaire Elon Musk on Mars) as well as transhumanist ideas of Silicon Valley are the starting point. In her series *Technoshamanic Systems - New Cosmological Models for Survival*, she presents

”microcosmic, non-colonialist plans for a techno-spiritual imaginary of alternative visions of survival on Earth and habitability of the cosmos.” Treister calls for a transmutation of human consciousness toward a ”new terrestrial and interplanetary paradigm” – by means of ”unifying art, spirituality, science, and technology through hypnotic visions of our potential communal future alongside those of possible extraterrestrial entities or civilizations.” **Anton Vidokle**, in turn, devotes his film trilogy to Russian cosmism, which was a central driving element for Soviet space travel. This movement in the early 20th century called for immortality for all – and the resurrection of all the dead. Death was to be overcome by scientific and technological means. Russian cosmism stands for a special, materialistic variety of techno-shamanism.

Ecology/Artificial Intelligence

Ecology and Artificial Intelligence each enter into their own connections in the works of Jana Kerima Stolzer & Lex Rütten, Sahej Rahal, and Lucile Olympe Haute. Based on the history of the Ruhr region and the West Rhine open-cast lignite mining, **Jana Kerima Stolzer & Lex Rütten** imagine a science fiction narrative about the future of the earth. The planet’s raw materials have been completely exploited, the earth is uninhabitable and mankind has emigrated into space. The earth is maintained by intelligent machines and infrastructures as a museum. Everything is monitored by a drone, through whose eyes and ears we see and hear our legacies on Earth. Indian artist **Sahej Rahal**, on the other hand, interweaves artificial intelligence with shamanic creatures in his *finalforest.exe* project. As a masked figure wanders through a seemingly endless tropical forest, a cybernetic ritual unfolds before our eyes. Finally, **Lucile Olympe Haute’s** *Cyberwitches Manifesto* thinks spirituality, politics and technology together and creates ”#magicalresistance” from these elements. It not only calls us to use social media for spiritual and political rituals or smartphones and tarot cards to contact spirits, but also pleads for the development of our own DIY technological infrastructures independent of the ”Big Five” (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft, GAFAM for short) – and thus quasi for an autonomous technoecology.

Non-human actors

The fourth theme running through the exhibition is non-human actors: animals or mythological figures play a central role in the works of Morehshin Allahyari, Anja Dornieden & Juan David González Monroy and Joseph Beuys. In **Morehshin Allahyari’s** VR work *Kabous, The Right Witness and The Left Witness*, a powerful female djinn sits on the chest of the sleeping person and leads them into a hamam, a public bathhouse, where the stories of four generations of women (the grandmother, the mother, the artist herself, and her imaginary monstrous daughter) are told. It is about motherhood, war, childbirth and the possibility of epigenetic trauma passed from generation to generation through DNA. **Anja Dornieden & Juan David González Monroy** observe Indonesian monkey tamers and their dancing, masked macaques. As soon as the puppet mask is put on the monkey, it acts as a medium to put the spectators in a trance. This hypnotic effect is reinforced by audiovisual flicker effects – one of the instruments of techno-shamanism described by Verena Kuni in the exhibition magazine. And **Joseph Beuys’** encounter with the coyote in the New York

gallery René Block in the action *I like America and America likes Me* (1974), which is documented in the exhibition as a video, is one of his most important shamanistic actions. The fact that Joseph Beuys is not mentioned first but last in this list is no coincidence. It is due to the fact that the contemporary artistic positions do not want to (and should not) be seen as Beuys adepts. Beuys with his (not unproblematic) "shamanism" stands here rather on an equal footing as one among many artistic positions that integrate elements of shamanistic practices and cosmologies into their work. The current interest in "shamanism," however, is not due to Joseph Beuys, but is part of a global search for radical alternatives to Western rationalism and individualism, and for ways to heal a planet that has been destroyed by capitalism, colonialism, industrialization, and neoliberalism-in short, by what one associates with the modernity of the Global North.

The information about the exhibited works is written in **German Plain Language** in the exhibition.

On the occasion of the exhibition, a **richly illustrated magazine** will be published by Verlag Kettler in mid-November 2021, documenting the exhibition comprehensively (€10.00 in the exhibition, €18.00 in bookshops). In addition to a detailed introduction by Inke Arns, it contains an article by U.S. author **Erik Davis** (author of *Technosis: myth, magic + mysticism in the age of information*, 1998), translated into German for the first time ("Secret Earths/Re-Animism"), as well as an article by Swiss art historian **Verena Kuni**, who systematically describes and analyzes the "tools of techno-shamanism." The magazine is published **bilingually (German/English)** and also contains texts in **Plain Language**.

The exhibition *Technoshamanism* is accompanied by an exciting **program of events**.

Public tours through the exhibition *Technoshamanism* take place every Sunday at 16:00 - alternating respectively on site and online.