

MUSEUM FRIEDER BURDA BADEN-BADEN

PRESS RELEASE

TRANSFORMERS

Masterpieces of the Frieder Burda Collection in Dialogue with Artificial Beings

December 10, 2022–April 30, 2023

Machines have less problems, I'd like to be a machine, wouldn't you?
Andy Warhol



Jordan Wolfson, *Female Figure*, 2014, animatronic sculpture, 182.9 x 73.7 cm,
Studio Jordan Wolfson © Courtesy the artist, David Zwirner, New York, Sadie Coles HQ, London

Rarely has a museum been so full of life: numerous masterpieces from the Frieder Burda Collection—timeless works from the rich cosmos of art history—are juxtaposed with artificial beings including avatars, dolls, robots, and animatronics. In this exhibition experiment curated by Udo Kittelmann, visitors circulate in the midst of this conspirative constellation. We invite you to ask these human machines questions and to follow the discourse on the competition between traditional and future art techniques.

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Participating artists: **Louisa Clement** (b. 1987 in Bonn, Germany, where she lives and works), **Ryan Gander** (b. 1976 in Chester, UK, lives and works in London), **Timur Si-Qins** (b. 1984 in Berlin, where he lives and works), and **Jordan Wolfson** (b. 1980 in New York City, where he lives and works).

Created at a time when the technological and social role of the electronic mass media was not yet comparable with its presence in the twenty-first century, artists such as Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, and Gerhard Richter “transformed” the traditional expectations of painted works. Considering the tension between the past and the present, we ask how the museum concept and the reception of art will change in the future if the artworks are no longer static and historical, but alive. After all, progress is being made in the automatization of life and the transformation of our social worlds. Prophecies of artificial intelligence are taking the lead and paving the way for humanoid beings. Humans are encouraging the creation of perfect beings—putting themselves in the situation of being on the verge of being replaced.

The artist Louisa Clement created copies of herself in her three robotic beings, which she calls “Representatives.” Jordan Wolfson astonishes us with Female Figure, a mobile and masked android. Ryan Gander’s computer-animated robot mouse invites us to listen carefully. Timur Si-Qin’s Transformer series confronts nature and the nonhuman. All four artists belong to the “post-internet generation, and in Baden-Baden their works are juxtaposed with Jackson Pollock’s expressive “drip” paintings, Georg Baselitz’s painting Sieben mal Paula (Seven Times Paula), and Gerhard Richter’s legendary Kerze (Candle), among others. Both their biographies and their works reflect the increasingly data-based living environments—a nightmare or fantastical belief?

The exhibition Transformers is a daring experiment in which the Museum Frieder Burda is transformed into a hybrid, visionary test arrangement. Artificial beings were “invited” to the museum as guests who critically inspect the historical paintings and sculptures in the collection. This creates new rooms of experience. The fictional aspect is a conspirative dialogue situation that presents a “what-if” scenario of a radically transformed future. This brings the museum to life, and we come one step closer to the world of technology.

*In the words of **Udo Kittelmann, curator and artistic director of the Museum Frieder Burda:** “Our aim is to revive and radically challenge the concept of museums. With this exhibition of traditional artworks and artificial beings, we are conducting a daring experiment. It is basically the logical continuation of the idea of performance using technological means, with animatronics and humanoid robots as guests.”*

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The Individual Artists:

Louisa Clement

Die Repräsentantinnen (The Representatives)



Louisa Clement, Repräsentantin, 2021 © Courtesy die Künstlerin und Cassina Projects, Mailand; Foto: Louisa Clement

Louisa Clement creates intriguingly realistic copies of herself. Her three Representatives, all produced in 2022, have become guests in the presentation of works by artists including Georg Baselitz, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter. Created by means of a 3D scan, these avatars have silicone skin and metal skeletons. Each of them has a chat box implanted in their body, which uses artificial intelligence to conduct conversations with people using natural language.

The speaking dolls have the potential to learn over time as they grow into the role of their creator, and their sophisticatedly erotic charm makes them equally unapproachable and accessible. Clement's "human machines" are intelligent and communicative "apparatuses of influence" that can imitate human expressions and pique their desires—yet are unable to satisfy them. The artist comments, "Every work contains a piece of me, and you give it away in each work." In fact, artificial beings of this sort, which are now mixed in among us, always carry a trace of life in their inanimate state.

Ryan Gander

I ...I...I



Ryan Gander, I I I ..., 2019, Sammlung Harm Müller-Spreer © The artist/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2022, Image courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin; Foto © Andrea Rossetti

"Children are microcosms of the perfect audience . . . They do not have the cultural baggage that adults have, and they are not intimidated when they are wrong . . ." This is a statement by the British artist Ryan Gander, who used a recording of his then nine-year-old daughter as the voice for his animatronic sculpture of a white mouse. It is a high, childish, stuttering voice that strings together phrases: "Of course, in one sense, then." Small, helpless, still unable to express itself clearly—the viewer senses that the mouse has something important to say, but it is simply unable to articulate it.

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In his artistic work, Gander immerses himself in the flow of life; he chooses seemingly random objects, changing them and giving them a certain coolness and humor. He challenges language and knowledge to link the everyday with the mysterious. Viewers should carefully listen to the mouse's words to understand what it is whispering and to become aware of its emphatic personality. This computer-animated robot mouse, which first saw the light of day in 2019, has long since become a star of the international art world. In this room, the artificial mouse begins a dialogue, or a confrontation, with the still life of a simple candle, painted in 1982 by Gerhard Richter.



Timur Si-Qin

Untitled (from the series *Mainstream*), 2011 Timur Si-Qin, *Untitled*, 2011, Privatsammlung © Courtesy the artist and Société, Berlin; Foto: Société, Berlin

The exhibition title *Transformers* was inspired by the eponymous American sci-fi action film from 2007, which in turn was based on the popular series of toys that is still being marketed all over the world. The film plot centers on a race of intelligent extraterrestrial machine beings on the planet Cybertron that have the ability to transform their bodies into other forms. Following a period of coexisting on their planet in harmony and ruling together, they separate into two factions, the good Autobots and the bad Decepticons, and engage in a civil war fighting for control of the entire universe.

In 2011, Timur Si-Qin created a series of framed pictures, entitled *Mainstream*, based on the martial design of the posters for the film *Transformers*. Differentiating between “destroy” and “protect,” he overlaid the posters with plant leaves of various forms, sizes, and types, emphasizing the supposed dissociation between the concept of nature and the nonhuman. Following this thesis in the twenty-first century, the questioning of the difference between the technological and the organic is long overdue, a difference that was once fundamental and is now only symbolic. The artist comments, “I see no division between ‘popular culture’ or ‘commerce’ and the natural world. I always think about how our everyday lives are completely saturated by advertising, and it’s wonderful that they more or less follow the same principles as the leaves: after all, they grow to occupy every usable space from which they can derive energy.”

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Jordan Wolfson
Female Figure, 2014

Jordan Wolfson, Female Figure, 2014, Studio Jordan Wolfson © Courtesy the artist, David Zwirner, New York, Sadie Coles HQ, London; Foto: Markus Tretter, Kunsthaus Bregenz

„My mother’s dead, my father’s dead, I’m gay. I’d like to be a poet. This is my house.“ Jordan Wolfson wrote the lines of a monologue for his intriguing robot Female Figure while on his way to downtown New York. The artist, who was born in New York in 1980, is known for his insistent and disquieting works in various media and a rich variety of formats that investigate the conditions and strategies of art, technology, and mass media.

The artist comments, “Female Figure embodies the tension between subjective and objective, between titillation and repulsion. It’s my interpretation of (my own) masculinity. It is also about violence and questions of (my) sexuality. I thought about the idea of myself as an author of a fiction in which what the sculpture says is true is actually not true—isn’t me. But, of course, it is true, and it is me.” Accompanied by Lady Gaga’s “Applause” and Paul Simon’s “Graceland,” Wolfson’s uncanny and manipulative figure encourages the viewer physically and emotionally. With intellectual and artistic precision, it ultimately shows us how technology infiltrates and burdens our sense of perception. To a certain extent disreputable and shameless, yet purposefully erotic and emotionally seductive, the sculpture also serves as a metaphor for a depraved time.

Our media partner: **arte**

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Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Open on all holidays

Closed on 24 and 31 Decembre