

Henrike Naumann

Re-Education

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SculptureCenter

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Re-Education

Henrike Naumann: Re-Education is the first exhibition in the United States by Berlin-based artist Henrike Naumann. Naumann's installations of furniture and design objects are composed as scenes that ask pressing and enduring questions: What is the relationship between design and ideology? How should one read the politics of design? Inflected by her own formative years growing up in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and then a unified Germany, Naumann's work often considers the social transformations initiated by Western consumer capitalism as it reached former socialist states and ideas of the "good life" that have arisen globally (if unevenly). Naumann contends with the many side effects visible today: Millennial bourgeois consumerism, socioeconomic discontent, antagonistic orientations to political power, and virulent extremism. Her installations function as case studies in lingering cultural moments, unresolved kitchen table politics, and design's capacity to reconcile or reignite the past—positioning the viewer as both a captive in an oppressive system of global production and a free agent of consumer taste.

Naumann's exhibition references two phenomena: first, the deployment of anti-fascist "re-education" programs developed by Allied Forces to reestablish a footing for democracy in West Germany after World War II; and second, the later, implicit, self-"re-education" after 1989 of those living in former socialist states, such as Naumann's native East Germany. For Naumann's post-1989 generation, "re-education" happened through an imported, American pop culture and increased consumer agency—in essence, the GDR entering Western history through retail and media. At SculptureCenter, Naumann's work uses found objects to test received ideas and expectations of the democratic "West," as well as the fraught idealism and amnesia expressed in the norms of certain contemporary design principles. Throughout the exhibition, Naumann uses furniture not just as exemplary, standalone design objects, but rather as sculptural elements to be recombined and reconfigured into new forms and semi-narrative juxtapositions.

Rustic Traditions, 2022, scaling SculptureCenter's gallery wall, is a barricade of furnishings and repurposed farm equipment emerging from Naumann's research into uses of furniture and decor in government offices. In preparation for this exhibition, and stemming from her broader artistic research on the aesthetics of everyday extremism, she focused particularly on furniture's use as a defensive barrier during the United States Capitol attack of January 6, 2021. Viral imagery of the insurrection depicts some rioters in horned fur

hats stalking the Capitol's neoclassical halls, and others trespassing in the offices of Congressional leaders. *Rustic Traditions*, taking the silhouette of the Capitol dome with its steeple-like "Statue of Freedom" displaced by a pitchfork, dramatically reiterates an instance in which the neutral-feeling authority of state design intersected with a radically divergent political and aesthetic imaginary.

Picking up on this difference and looking at the United States as an interested outsider, Naumann's work uses found and purchased furnishings that reflect an enduring "rustic" sensibility in American interior design. *Horseshoe Theory*, 2022, is a large-scale display of chairs organized in a critical parody of the dubious political theory of the same name, a model developed in Germany in the 1930s and revived in the 1990s to define the political center and to treat far left and far right extremisms as equal threats to its order, as if they were the two ends of a horseshoe bending toward each other. Expanding on a meme ("HORSESHOE THEORY of Chair Design and Function") that traveled in online design circles via Instagram user @northwest_mcm_wholesale circa 2021, Naumann's work both indulges and challenges this scheme, organizing a survey of seating options that are included to evoke specific ideological positions.¹ Some are particularly familiar (a replica of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's "Hill House" chair, a design icon reframed by its inclusion in the film set of *American Psycho* (2000), stands in for a brand of neoliberal "hedonism") while others play on genres and types (a plush recliner for "male chauvinism," for example). Still others are one-of-a-kind and handmade, as in chairs made of bone and horn that veer toward "oppressive traditionalism." Though rustic construction and earthy tones abound, Naumann sourced the furniture primarily from the greater New York City area, conducting a study of a widespread desire for rural signifiers, even in the largest city in the United States. Well-suited for an age that is both hyper-aware of political identifications and wary of misreading aesthetic cues, Naumann's work prompts viewers to engage in a conspiratorial questioning about the deeper natures of the objects that define our daily lives: is there such a thing as a libertarian stool, a communist bench, or a neoconservative armchair, and are they sold in different stores?

Naumann's idiosyncratic survey of chairs, challenging superficial ideological signs while at taking the meanings imparted by aesthetic decisions dead seriously, orients itself toward a wall-relief work titled *Radical Centrist*, 2022. As a political model, horseshoe theory reinforces the desire for the power of the center, though what feels like "center" shifts constantly. Beyond its use as a diagrammatic shape, Naumann's "rustic" framing resurfaces the horseshoe's material textures—the steel of an actual horse's shoes, conjoining

1. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CTr-gFLFzTU/>

industrial metals and beasts of burden—alongside their use as a lawn game. (The press image representing the exhibition depicts the former U.S. President George H.W. Bush playing horseshoes with former Russian President Boris Yeltsin at the White House during a milestone visit in 1992 that marked a reopening of U.S.-Russia relations and proclaimed the “End of the Cold War.”) Naumann picks up on this symbolism to characterize the horseshoe as an object of compromise and soft diplomacy that also crystalizes an American nostalgia for a simpler rural past, or a heyday of industrialization and progress. These are broad and problematic ideals that overwrite histories of settler colonialism, enslavement, oppression of indigeneous populations, and class/labor dynamics, especially in the context of an American ruralism. Alluding to these omissions, Naumann’s *Radical Centrist* wall text is framed by bone-colored drapes evoking an economical dress sewn from curtains in *Gone with the Wind*, the ur-epic of romantically defanged racial and political violence, as well as an incident in which former President Donald Trump was criticized for demanding lavish gold drapes for the Oval Office (though they were also used by the Clinton administration). Naumann’s work walks into these relational judgments of aesthetics and what they reveal about the “center” as a position of power, and “power” as the definition of the center (as described in a 2018 e-flux podcast with writer Masha Gessen, a scholar of autocracy among many other subjects).²

In the rear gallery, a “Man Cave” of sorts, the exhibition includes a selected survey of Naumann’s video works made between 2012 and 2022, on view in an installation hearkening to an even more distant rustic lifestyle. Some have speculated that the hit children’s television show *The Flintstones* (first airing in the US on September 30, 1960, and then in West Germany on July 1, 1966) is not set in the past, but rather in a post-apocalyptic future in which humanity has continued to structure society around patriarchal capitalism despite a near total loss of advanced technology. Naumann’s Flintstones-inspired room (complete with a window cutout modeled on the bathroom window of Dick Clark’s home—surprisingly only one of many *Flintstones* houses in California³) explores prehistoric themes and their relationship to popular culture and statecraft, as seen in video works like *The Museum of Trance*, 2021, which offers an archeological origin story of German trance music, and *Die Monotonie des Yeah, Yeah, Yeah*, 2020, which excerpts from children’s cartoons like *The Flintstones*, Marxist educational programs, and economist Milton Friedman’s TV-series *Free to Choose* (1980) to consider the political rhetoric of labor and the free market after the opening of East Germany’s economy. Lessons are explicit and implicit in these popular

2. <https://www.e-flux.com/podcasts/406720/masha-gessen-on-how-to-survive-an-autocracy>

3. <https://www.ideashomegarden.com/architecture/flintstones-style-house-in-malibu>

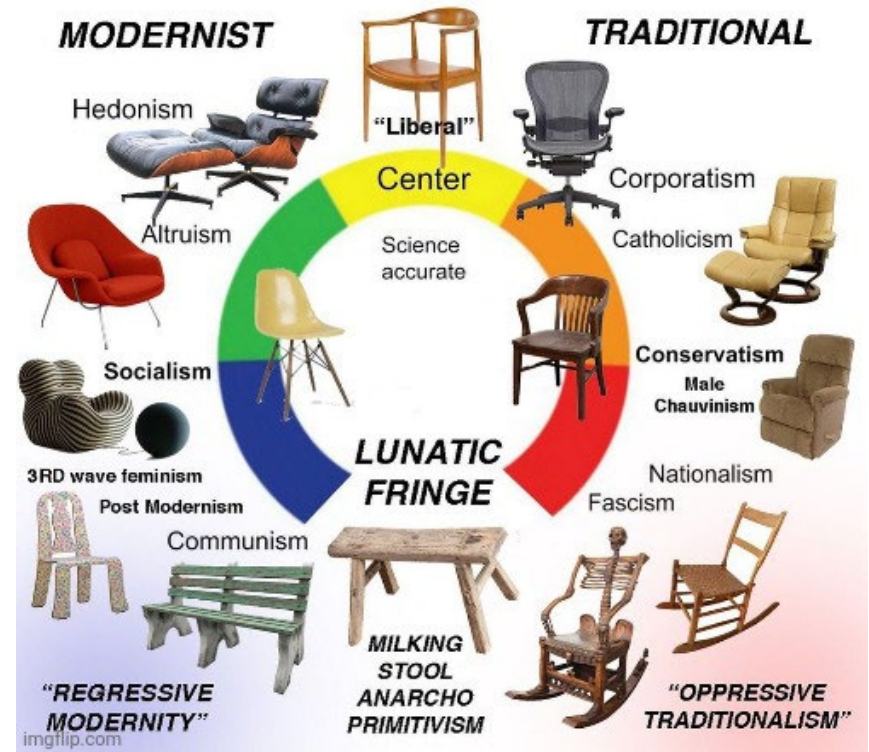
media; in the *Flintstones*, for example, dinosaurs are conscripted as both laborers and machines. Returning to the U.S., as Svetlana Boym has posited in her 2001 book *The Future of Nostalgia*: “Dinosaurs are ideal animals for the nostalgia industry because nobody remembers them. Their extinction is a guarantee of commercial success; it allows for total restoration and global exportability. Nobody will be offended by improper portrayal of the dinosaur, not even animal rights activists...The dinosaur is America’s unicorn, the mythical animal of Nature’s Nation. Paleontology and fossil archeology was a parallel to classical archeology. While the Renaissance in Europe occupied itself with unearthing its classical heritage, America’s renaissance at the end of the nineteenth century (and thus the beginning of American global prominence) needed a prehistoric heritage—to outdo Europe in scale and age.”

Reframing dormant Cold War-era geopolitical conditions and slicing through sometimes obscure displays of political extremism, *Re-Education* opens a new consciousness of how “the West,” too, lives among the ruins of twentieth century ideologies that were exported and reimported by U.S. power over the last several decades—now especially visible to a generation born just as the Cold War drew to a close. Critically addressing the conditions and sentiments of domination that have calcified during this time, Naumann’s work picks apart the signs and symbols of what might be referred to as a “white identity politics,” from her exploration of domestic terrorism in 1990s Germany to her assessment of recent political extremism in the United States. With deadpan humor, Naumann’s exhibition considers how current and subsequent generations “re-educate” themselves by participating in an ever-changing economy, conforming to aspirational design conventions, or, conversely, lurching toward the fringes as a supposed political “center” and its cultural referents expand and contract under different conditions and across time.

Henrike Naumann’s (born 1984 in Zwickau, former German Democratic Republic; lives and works in Berlin) work reflects socio-political problems on the level of interior design and domestic space and explores antagonistic political beliefs through the ambivalent aesthetics of personal taste. In her immersive installations she arranges furniture and home decor into scenographic spaces interspersed with video and sound work. Growing up in Eastern Germany, Naumann experienced far-right ideology as a predominant youth culture in the ’90s. Therefore, she is interested in the mechanisms of radicalization and how they are linked to personal experience. Although rooted in her experiences in Germany, Naumann’s work has addressed the global connectivity of youth cultures and their role in the process of cultural othering. Solo

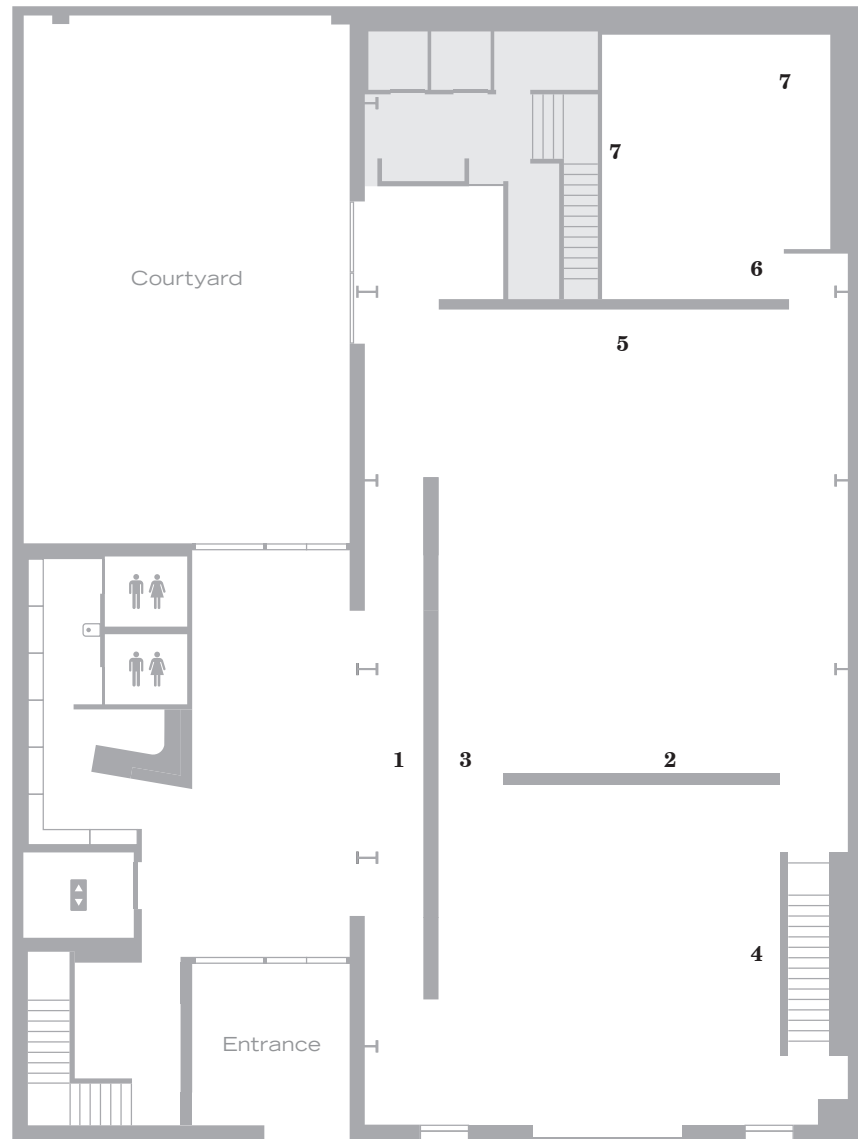
presentations of Naumann's work have been presented at Kunsthaus Dahlem, Berlin (2021); Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig (2019); Belvedere 21, Vienna (2019); Kunstverein Hannover (2019); Chemnitz Open Space (2019); KOW Berlin (2019); Galerie im Turm (2018), Berlin (2019); and Museum Abteiberg (2018), Mönchengladbach (2016). She has participated in group exhibitions at documenta fifteen, Kassel (2022); Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (2021); Ural Biennale, Yekaterinburg, Russia (2021); Pinchuk Art Center, Kyiv, Ukraine (2021); Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2021); Kunsthalle Mannheim (2021); Seoul Mediacity Biennale, South Korea (2021); Wanderausstellung des Goethe Institut (2021); Wanderausstellung des Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) (2021); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2020); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2019); and MMK, Frankfurt (2018), among many others.

HORSESHOE THEORY of Chair Design and Function



Credit: @northwest_mcm_wholesale

Works in the Exhibition



Ground Floor Plan

Ground Floor

- 1 *Re-Education*, 2022
Benjamin Moore “Bone White” (OC-143), relief lettering in SculptureCenter typeface c. 1940s
Dimensions variable
 - 2 *Horseshoe Theory*, 2022
Wayfair “Stonehenge” bench, brown plastic folding chair, faux bois chair with bone faux fur, Adirondack-style 1990s high chair, Shaker one-step stool, Charles Rennie Mackintosh “Hill House”-style chair, walnut faux fur chair, Staples “Westcliffe” bonded leather computer chair, kneeling chair, rust brown recliner, antique horn chair, antique child’s rocking chair, bone chair, milking stool
Dimensions variable
 - 3 *Radical Centrist*, 2022
Benjamin Moore “Bone White” (OC-143), relief lettering, white IKEA curtain rods, bone-colored “Hilton” satin curtains, bone-colored ribbons
Dimensions variable
 - 4 *Iron Curtain*, 2022
Benjamin Moore “Wall Street” (CSP-20), Home Depot “From Plain to Beautiful in Hours” rusted steel tiles, rusted hardware, “handmade spiked bat primitive decor” from eBay, “primitive rustic sickle” from eBay
Dimensions variable
 - 5 *Rustic Traditions*, 2022
Benjamin Moore “Capitol White” (CW-10), relief lettering, federal-style furniture, pitchforks, rakes, shovel, hammer, rock, rusted chain, “Original Marble–U.S. Capitol Steps 1865-1995” bookends
Dimensions variable
 - 6 *Welcome to Bedrock*, 2022
Benjamin Moore “Bleeker Beige” (HC-80), *The Flintstones*-style television set, *The Flintstones*-style window with monitor, rocks, contemporary stone-age items from eBay, Craigslist, and New York’s stoops and flea markets
Dimensions variable
 - 7 **Video Retrospective**
(descriptions and credits follow)
- Television Set
Triangular Stories (Terror), 2012
Triangular Stories (Amnesia), 2012
Das Reich, 2017
Die Monotonie des Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, 2020
Evolution Chemnitz, 2020
- Window
Fun 2000, 2018
Tag X, 2019
Museum of Trance, 2021
Proto Nation, 2021
- All works courtesy the artist

Video Retrospective

If furniture undergirds Henrike Naumann’s artistic practice, her video works, in turn, often serve to animate the objects, narratives, events, and figures they evoke. Integrated into Naumann’s installations, her video works typically play on TVs or monitors that reflect their generic environs, blurring the line between fact and fiction. In turn, these works draw viewers into larger themes that continue to inflect Naumann’s practice. The video works on view here were made between 2012 and 2021 for both cathode-ray tube monitors and digital flatscreens, reflecting the changing mediation of domestic space. This selection in particular picks up on themes that resonate with Naumann’s newly-produced *Re-Education* exhibition at SculptureCenter, including youth culture and radicalization, the use of archaeology and prehistory in modern national or political identity, and visions of state power expressed through consumerism.

Please be aware that much of Naumann’s video work deals with the prevalence of the aesthetics of fascism, especially in recent German history, and may be disturbing to some viewers. Descriptions of the content and uses of this imagery in each video work follows below.

Television Set

Triangular Stories (Terror), 2012
VHS transferred to digital video
(color, sound)
15:24 minutes

Structured as a violent slice-of-life film shot in first person, *Triangular Stories (Terror)*, 2012, acts as a semi-fictionalized reconstruction of the early days (circa 1992) of the far-right terrorist group the Nationalist Socialist Underground (NSU). The film follows three characters based on the three officially identified members of the NSU—Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt, and Beate Zschäpe—as they meander through the East German city of Jena, filming acts of vagrancy and vandalism on a camera stolen after violently assaulting an electronics salesman. A constant tension between youthful ennui and insidious racist ideology permeates the film, as the trio

oscillates between flirting and play fighting with each other, rehearsing Nazi slogans, accosting civilians, and spraypainting Swastikas, gesturing towards how a politics of hate can simmer just below the surface of the mundane, threatening to violently burst forth at any given moment.

Triangular Stories (Amnesia), 2012
VHS transferred to digital video
(color, sound)
15:24 minutes

Triangular Stories (Amnesia), 2012, the companion to *Terror* in Naumann’s *Triangular Stories*, runs parallel to its Nationalist Socialist Underground-focused counterpart, although with numerous points of subtle contact and overlap. A group of three teenagers drink, smoke, and take ecstasy in an Ibiza club

called “Amnesia” in 1992 (the year of the NSU’s formation, as well as mass anti-migrant demonstrations in Germany, which led to the abolishment of the right to asylum). Even in the idyllic setting of the Balearic Islands, ideological specters rear their head, with the trio at one point taking a group photo, substituting the cue to smile (“cheese”) with “Hitler.” Akin to *Terror*, *Amnesia* takes up themes of late-millennium youth culture, and its relationship to hedonistic individualism, where the horrors of history re-emerge as (purportedly) de-fanged, ironic jokes.

Credits for *Triangular Stores (Terror)* and *Triangular Stores (Amnesia)*

Beate: Janina Stopper
Bianca: Eva Vuillemin
Böhni: Maximilian Klas
Sven: Florian Lenz
Uwe: Michel Diercks
Dave: Jan Dose
Electrical salesman: Henning Ohlendorf
Passerby: Stefan Heitzmann
Wheelchair user: Moritz Löwe
Cameraman Mike: Daniel Carsenty
DJs: Bastian Hagedorn, Casper Leander Andresen
Dancers: Anja Langer
Bartenders: Sigi Rotzler, Alexander Katzmann, Janina Grauel
Clubgoers: Alex Forge, André Sicuro, Cäcilia Pohl, Clemens Villinger, Clare Cooper, Conrad Villinger, Dalia Vann, Florian Ritter, Hannah Josephine, Hannes Böttger, Ina Hildebrandt, Inez Harbauer, Joshua Ford, Julia Boxler, Lara Wehrs, Lena Moritzen, Leon Barth, Leonardo Franke, Lovisa Bergman, Luise Baumgarten, Madlen Stange, Marielle Kleyn Winckel, Max Stützer, Miriam Welk, Oliver Wolff, Philipp Wenning, Ramin Rachel, Ruby Mai, Stefan Weyreder, Thomas Drerup, Tobias Gärtner
Production Manager: Zsofi Lili Kovacs, Veronika Janatkova
Recording Manager: Sebastian Scheinert
Floor manager: Uta Giegengack
Director: Henrike Naumann
Assistant Director: Bastian Köpf
Script/Continuity: Clemens Villinger, Ingmar Stange

Script/Dramaturg: Bastian Köpf
Camera: Daniel Carsenty
Lighting Technician: Simon Ermisch
Production Design/Costume Design: Henrike Naumann
Production Design Assistant: Thomas Drerup
Costume Design Assistant: Dalia Vann
Set Building: Nele Jakob, Clemens Villinger, Hannes Böttger, Stefan Weyreder, Loretta Meyer, Marcello Kaiser, Simon Wiese, Conrad Villinger
Construction Installation: Nele Jakob, Stefan Weyreder, Joseph Naumann, Clemens Villinger, Micha Vogel, Simon Ermisch, Yasmim Pinheiro Assade, Antje Böttger, Alexander Pohnert
Hair & Make-up: Luise Baumgarten, Tobias Gärtner
Mixing: Valentin Finke
Original audio: Malte Eiben, Jerome Huber
Editing: Philipp Wenning
Music: Bastian Hagedorn
Vocals: Inez Harbauer, Bastian Hagedorn
Photography: Roman Kutzowitz, Stefan Weyreder, Nele Jakob
Catering: Olivier Witzkewitz, Antje Böttger, Clemens Villinger
Production management: Anya Grünewald
A production by Film University ‘Konrad Wolf’ Potsdam-Babelsberg

Das Reich, 2017
Digital video (color, sound)
13:21 minutes

Das Reich observes the signing of the Unification Agreement at the Kronprinzenpalais in Berlin in 1990, which united East and West Germany into a single state. Disputing this political shift is the Reichsbürgerbewegung, a cluster of far-right interest groups, who argue this treatise is in violation of the 1949 Basic Law, and in effect, that Hitler’s German Reich has never ceased to exist. News excerpts pertaining to German Unification are interlaced with dialogue reflecting Reichsbürgerbewegung ideology which visually flicker in and out on each other, troubling the ability to read where the

conspiracy theories begin and history ends. Interspersed throughout are ancient cultural artifacts that have been re-mobilized for white nationalism, including Norse runes and a convicted Reichsbürger terrorist dressed in druidic garb.

Editing: Henrike Naumann

***Die Monotonie des Yeah, Yeah, Yeah*, 2020**

Digital video (color, sound)
8:48 minutes

Some have speculated that the hit children's television show *The Flintstones* (first airing in the US on September 30, 1960, and then in West Germany on July 1, 1966) is not set in the past, but rather in a post-apocalyptic future in which humanity has continued to structure society around patriarchal capitalism despite a near total loss of advanced technology. In Naumann's *Die Monotonie des Yeah, Yeah, Yeah*, a stone age television set plays a variety of children's cartoons, Marxist educational programs, as well as excerpts from economist Milton Friedman's TV-series *Free to Choose* (1980), speaking to the ideological shifts that took place in East Germany in the 1990s with the opening up of the nation's economy after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Spliced together, and sometimes even layered upon each other, each video clip espouses the virtues of labor and the free market—sometimes to extreme detriment of the worker, as is the case of dinosaur enslavement in *The Flintstones* and the neglect experienced by retired work animals in the Brothers Grimm's *Town Musicians of Bremen*. The film's title is a quote from the East German communist politician Walter Ulbricht who was bemoaning pop music's intellectually stymying effect on the population ("yeah, yeah, yeah" being a sarcastic impersonation of the Beatles) further gesturing towards the way in which cultural production can become a fraught ideological battleground.

Editing: Nik Mantilla
Dramaturgy: Lara Wehrs

Music: Bastian Hagedorn

***Evolution Chemnitz*, 2020**

VHS-C transferred to digital video
(color, sound)
15:25 minutes

Naumann uses video to visually unpack the dense, multi-layered revolutionary history of the East German city Chemnitz, which was called Karl-Marx-Stadt between 1953 and 1990. All filmed on location at Chemnitz's Hotel Elisenhof, five different men from five different time periods (beginning in 1919) loiter, fidget, and ramble in their rooms before the film gives way to a shot of the large Karl Marx bust in the city center. Speaking to Naumann's interest in the historical baggage and conflicting ideologies that can be found in any singular object or locale, the figures present in the film represent a large range of subjects, in terms of both time and ideology. Beginning chronologically in 1919, the film opens with a worker holding several sticks of butter, a scene which refers to a food crisis that took place that year in which grocers were hoarding supplies in order to drive up prices—an event which culminated in a protest and a subsequent violent police crackdown. The second scene, set in 1945, shows a Soviet soldier as he pulls apart his hotel bed, and demarcates a territory within the hotel room, allegorically evoking the divvying of the German state after World War II. Following from this is footage set in 1992 of a Treuhand agent (a "Trust agency" responsible for dealing with post-Berlin wall privatization of the people's owned East German industry) on duty in Chemnitz. Like the Soviet soldier, he re-arranges the room to suit his own tastes, reinforcing the parallel between the organization of the room and the organization of geography. The hotel room scenes culminate in 1998, this time focused on a member of the Nationalist Socialist Underground as he lays low from the police. He anxiously looks out the window, meanders about, and plays with the room's furnishings before barricading himself into his room. Breaking from the hotel room, the film shows a series of

monuments built during the communist era, one of which was the site of a fatal stabbing in 2018 at the Chemnitz City Festival, which ended in massive far right riots.

Actor: Dirk Lange
Editing: Ekaterina Reinbold
Music and Sound Design: Bastian Hagedorn

Window

***Fun 2000*, 2018**

Digital video (color, sound, subtitles)
5:23 minutes

Fun 2000 is a bifurcated video with two concurrently playing sides. The left hand side shows 3D-rendered architectural spaces of the Hanover Expo 2000 (an iteration of the World Expo that was announced shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall) over which clip art symbols (found on an old Expo 2000 CD-Rom) flit in and out. On the right hand side, a still image of a related installation creates a temporal disjunction. Over tracking interior shots, pieces of dialogue speak to both the privatization of East German people's owned industries, as well as workers issues like massive layoffs and job precarity. Using the financially and intellectually disastrous Hanover Expo 2000 as an object of enquiry, Naumann continues her use of archeological techniques to explore events of the not-so-distant past.

Editing: Henrike Naumann
Music: Bastian Hagedorn

***Tag X*, 2019**

VHS transferred to digital video
(color, sound)
7:38 minutes

Tag X opens with surveillance-esque footage of crowds and pedestrians at Berlin Alexanderplatz taken from an elevated angle, mixing contemporary pictures with recordings made by the

East German secret police (Stasi). Simultaneously, a male voice speaks of a society that has changed suddenly and unpredictably. It becomes more and more unclear whether the voice is talking about his experience of 1989 in East Germany or prompting the need for a Doomsday prepper-like community to resist and survive in the face of societal transformation today. Occasionally, this surveillance footage is broken by videos of masked people brandishing menacing metallic weapon-like objects. The film loosely follows evidence of a 2018 plot uncovered by the German government and media outlets through which a network of military and police agents had organized themselves around a sergeant major who went by the online pseudonym "Hannibal." This organization's members, who had prepared themselves with weapons and training, were ostensibly planning to seize power in an event they referred to as "Day X."

Narrator: Andreas Anke
Dramaturgy: Aljoscha Bergerich
Montage: Ekaterina Reinbold
Sound Design: Bastian Hagedorn
Archive material: Die Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für Stasi-Unterlagen (BStU)

***Museum of Trance*, 2021**

VHS-C transferred to digital video
(color, sound)
17:00 minutes

Museum of Trance acts as a fiction of techno-archaeology. The film opens with two people being led into Bunker (a notorious former Berlin techno club and now site of the Boros art collection) by iconic trance producer Mark Reeder. Upon entry, the trio discovers a tablet marked by mysterious runes. The two techno archaeologists then proceed to scour the landscape for various objects before assembling them into an altar-like object under the Autobahn, ending in a dance session activating the tablet. In line with Naumann's practice of connecting seemingly distant temporalities and geographies,

the Autobahn as a visual motif links this fictional origin of Berlin trance, and its associations with a liberated European youth culture, to techno producers in Detroit—a city whose former financial wealth was born out of car manufacturing and whose Black music scene invented techno. The references to archeology and the use of techno as a tool for German cultural diplomacy, represented through the image of a door from the Berlin club Tresor (which is now held in the controversial ethnographic museum “Humboldt-Forum”) brings up conversations surrounding whiteness, the Othering of Black techno historiography, and European identity through a fictional techno-ethnography.

Direktè Espirityèl (Spiritual Director):
PapaDa
Trance Archaeologists: Jan Baszak,
Emilie Palmelund, Mark Reeder
Editing: Nik Mantilla
Soundtrack: Bastian Hagedorn

Video retrospective texts by Leo Cocar,
Project Curatorial Assistant

Rustic Americana: A Tour through the New York School of Interior Design Library

Leo Cocar, Project Curatorial Assistant

“Rustic American” design occupies an ambiguous space within the grander scheme of American design history, sitting in a niche part way between the modernist ethos of truth-to-material and a predilection towards the ornate, as embodied by pre-20th century schools of furniture. It is perhaps this in-between state that has encouraged a particularly vigorous connoisseurship among designers, furniture dealers, and decorators engaged in the grand metaphors of the “natural,” the “organic,” the “primitive,” and the “folk,” to say nothing of the complex dynamics that are fundamentally intertwined with this design tradition, from colonial erasure to illusory formal constructions.

Ralph Kylloe, a collector and historian, defines “Rustic Americana” as “...items made of twigs, logs, sticks, roots, tree stumps, or branches, and occasionally animal horns and antlers.” His books on American rustic furniture design include *Rustic Elegance*, *The Rustic Home*, *Hickory Furniture*, *Cabins and Camps*, *Cabin in the Woods*, and *The Log Home Book*. Historically, this school of design, if it can be so formalized, gained popularity in the mid-1800s, propelled by a nostalgic yearning for objects reminiscent of the world before its transformation by the Industrial Revolution. What began as a necessity (that is, the need for furniture to address a dearth of domestic infrastructure) became a form of object-based counterculture, standing in opposition to mass mechanical production. Less than a century after the steam engine’s invention in 1765, Michael Thonet (1796–1871), a German-Austrian cabinetmaker, would profoundly transform the landscape of furniture making with the invention of machinery that harnessed steam pressure in order to bend beech wood into curved forms. So-called “bentwood” furniture was light, inexpensive, and massively popular: the “Thonet chair” designed in 1859 sold over 50 million pieces by 1930. Thonet’s work thus forms a basis of serial furniture making today. By contrast, William Morris (1834–1896), a 19th century English textile designer, poet, and artist associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, thought of the era marked by the Industrial Revolution as a “devilish capitalistic botch and an enemy of mankind.” For thinkers like Morris, the Industrial Revolution produced both poorer quality goods and worsened

conditions for workers. It follows then that the British Arts and Crafts movement to which Morris belonged echoes many of the motivations found in American Rustic: an interest in a pre-industrial period, marked by pared-down, hand-crafted designs, and references to the environment.

Although Morris was aiming directly at industry and furniture making, his stance was emblematic of an overarching 19th century enthusiasm for naturalism, which can be read as a response to the dire conditions of the city with its crises of dense slums, disease, and child labor. Authors like naturalist John Burroughs (1837–1921) and the poet, philosopher and essayist Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) marked a return to inquiry into the Arcadian. In visual culture, painting had long taken up rural America as its subject (in works by the likes of Asher B. Durand and Thomas Cole), collapsing geography with national identity. Conceptually, rustic furniture and design were meant to connect the maker or owner back to the natural world, a yearning partially borne out of the rapid urbanization that took place in America following the Civil War. Within an American context, rustic design, through its proximity to the idea of “nature,” embodied an almost divine tendency, through its opposition to the “evils” and “artifice” of the city: Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) once stated that farmers, through their close relationship to the land, were the “chosen people of God.” Some 19th century writers took a similar stance, with William Murray (1840–1904), a.k.a. “Adirondack Murray,” an American clergyman and author who, through his texts, popularized the Adirondacks as a leisure destination, writing on the notion that nature, not prayer, is all that is needed to experience God.

Rustic forms of architecture offer further context. The “Adirondack” style, which can be situated primarily in northern New York state, was developed between 1870 and 1930, and like much rustic furniture construction, married readily available local materials with the tastes and abilities of the maker. As Harvey Kaiser, the one-time University Architect at Syracuse University, chronicles, Adirondack lodges or “camps” were built as summer vacation homes by their wealthy owners. The theoretical impulse of these buildings, with their rough hewn log frames embellished by stone elements, can find its origin point in writing by figures like Andrew Jackson Downing (1815–1852), a landscape designer and writer who advocated for architectural constructions based on truthfulness to the nature of the material with an emphasis on function. Indeed, “Great Camps” followed this line of thought but in an exaggerated sense. The buildings were placed in rural locations, difficult to reach and sometimes surrounded by “tens of thousands” of acres of private reserve land. According to Kaiser, the architects of the Great Camps were less motivated by public acclaim than by “personal satisfaction in taming a hostile environment and creating a civilized mode of living exclusively by one’s own means.” The

Santanoni Reserve, for example, was built for a wealthy urbanite—in this case Albany banker Robert Pruyn (1847–1934). Constructed in the late 19th century on a 13,000-acre plot, the complex was composed of 45 buildings made out of 1,500 logs (much of which was built with locally sourced birch) as well as a fully functioning farm. In practice, Santanoni Reserve was both a reflection of its environment and a self-sustaining estate thanks to its farm and workshops. However, the camp had seventeen staff bedrooms, suggesting that Santanoni—like many of the other Great Camps—was not a space in which to “rough it” but rather “play peasant.”

Interior design texts take note of interiors decorated with Indigenous artifacts, as well as peeled logs and animal skin rugs. The tendency to decorate such homes with Indigenous artworks, which, for the decorators equalled rusticity, speaks to a larger historically or temporally located form of fantasy, derived not only from the faulty equating of Indigenous cultural material with European ideas of primitivism but in the very idea of mastery over nature. Indeed, much of the American colonial project has historically been hinged on the idea of *terra nullius*. This term, which translates to “nobody’s land,” gestures towards an ideological framework that has been historically mobilized to justify colonialism, arguing that Indigenous peoples occupied a lower rung of civilizational development, thus justifying Euro-settler expansion. Rustic design leans into this fantasy, conjuring up the (false) image of the pioneer settling in an untamed wilderness. The illusion of ease and naturalism was a repeated motif; for example, wealthy owners constructing a lodge in the Adirondack style would use log construction for the walls, despite it being labor intensive and more costly than standard construction techniques. In short, this aspect of the rustic style was built on a sense of privileged and labored romanticism despite referencing far more humble roots.

The impetuses found in Adirondack design can also be found in Rustic design as a whole. Rustic design embodies a contradictory ethos in that it contains the semblance of rugged, independent naturalism, while being inefficient and costly in reality. Furthermore, it has become a market in and of itself. As Arthur Thiede and Cindy Teipner note in their book *American Log Homes* “...houses being built from logs today are anything but primitive.” Indeed, American Rustic cabins are part of a billion dollar industry, with thousands built every year under the supervision of trained architects and builders. If the historical idea of rustic log cabins was one of independence and necessity (which has now been overtaken by an efficient market), Rustic furniture is much the same: what appears to be a crude stick chair is really an object constructed by a complex economic chain of buyers, sellers, and producers that is ultimately purchased solely for the veneer of outdoorsman aesthetics (rather than an actual reflection

of the buyer’s lifestyle). A cursory glance under the search “rustic furniture” reveals a plethora of standardized models, that although handcrafted and even aesthetically aged, are undoubtedly produced with the same Fordist factory logic as any other piece of mass produced furniture. Overall, much rustic American furniture operates within a framework of “back-to-nature” nostalgia and an aesthetics based on a performative naturalism. In his book *The Rustic Cabin*, the aforementioned dealer Ralph Kylloe bemoans modern technology, arguing that computer screens, “processed food” and “mindless” television stifle our ability to communicate. For Kylloe, rustic (cabins) speak to a sort of fundamental human nature, which is located in “...huts and shacks made of stone, sticks and logs.” Aside evoking a modernity versus tradition debate, Kylloe argues the organic nature of log (or wood) construction evokes freedom, and even eroticism, stating “The sensuous curves of logs are erotic in their own right.” Some authors, Kylloe included, have argued that one of the driving forces behind the Rustic style was one of rebellion - the naturalistic, unadorned elements of Rustic design stood in opposition to the ornate aesthetics of Victorian furniture, and in a sense, contributed to the American nation-building project by collapsing the environment with design and standing apart from Old World sensibilities.

Ali Hanan, author of *Modern Rustic: Natural Ideas for a Contemporary Lifestyle and Natural Interiors: Using Natural Materials and Methods to Decorate Your Home*, continues along the same train of thought. Waxing poetic about rustic style as a “way of living” rather than an aesthetic, she argues that an “ache for the country” speaks to an “...instinctive, almost primal...” human drive. For the author, a yearning for the rustic and pastoral is almost historically cyclical, returning during moments of socio-political upheaval. Hanan points to Marie Antoinette and her entourage’s ornate cabin getaways where they played “pretend-peasant” in order to live out “faux-poverty” fantasies. In the American context, Hanan speaks to cycles of consumerist interest in artificial materials, which are then followed by newfound enjoyment of the rustic. This cultural loop has played itself out in various forms over the centuries, but Hanan makes argues that a “back to nature” desire often coincides with moments of revolution—for example, the transition from the new materials of the postwar period into a the socio-political subversion via a particular “back to nature” ethos of 1960s counterculture. Kylloe follows the same thought pattern, suggesting that “...rustic furnishings, and often their makers, have always been—by choice—outside of mainstream society.” Simultaneously, much rustic design is a fantastical extension of design traditions born out of circumstances that no longer exist. If early iterations of rustic furniture were reflections of the environment (whatever materials are around) and the maker’s skill (or lack thereof),

what does it mean to purchase rustic design in the 21st century? What does it mean to produce rustic design in the 21st century? What kind of politics or acts of (purported) resistance are now taken up under the umbrella of the rustic?

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Henrike Naumann Artist Talk

Wed, Sep 28, 2022, 6:30–8pm

On the occasion of her first exhibition in the United States, join artist Henrike Naumann at SculptureCenter for an artist talk on her new exhibition *Re-Education* and her recent work. The program is introduced and moderated by exhibition curator Kyle Dancewicz, Deputy Director, SculptureCenter.

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