

# Institute of Contemporary Arts

## *Honey-Suckle Company: Omnibus*



2 October 2019 – 12 January 2020

*Omnibus* is the first survey of the work of Berlin collective Honey-Suckle Company (HSC), bringing together key moments of the group's twenty-five-year history.

Founded in 1994, HSC identify themselves as a movement, built around an ongoing series of fluctuating and ephemeral interventions within fashion, music and art. The collective emerged from the post-reunification and pre-Internet cultural and social contexts of Berlin, defined by underground techno and squatting scenes.

HSC derive their name and ethos from homoeopath Dr Edward Bach's honeysuckle flower remedy. According to Bach, the plant's properties help one to learn from past experiences and re-establish a sense of trust in the future in order to feel grounded in the present.

*Omnibus* and its accompanying programme present HSC's work as an evolving communal and holistic methodology. While committed to the dissolution of individual authorship, the group exist as a composite of differing philosophies and subject positions. Having worked largely outside the mainstream art system, HSC members have generated their own structures within which to produce and circulate work, including the project spaces galerie berlintonkyo (1996–99) and Neue Dokumente (2003–4); the event series Eva's Arche und der Feminist (2001–10); and the periodical *freier – Magazin für Befindlichkeit* (2003–14).

In the first decade of their work, the collective often drew on historical archetypes of alternative living and collectivity; particularly those attached to movements centred around youth and newness. The collective emphasised the stylistic character of these philosophies, both in their singular aesthetics, and in the slippages of ideologies and values they accrued over time. Living and working within a city in a state of extreme political and economic transition, HSC embodied the precarious potential of such alternative collectivity. In antagonism to the concept of history as linear, *Omnibus* treats the objects and epochs of HSC's work as unmoored in time; free agents to be reapplied in the present and future.

Across the ICA's Podium and Upper Galleries – and the in-between spaces of its canteen and corridors – *Omnibus* encompasses the collective's clothing, performances, happenings, installations, objects, photographs, music, films and publications.

*Omnibus* is conceived by current Honey-Suckle Company members Peter Kišur, Nina Rhode, Simone Gilges, Nico Ihlein, and Lina Launhardt; with contributions from former members Zille Homma Hamid, Gregor Hylla, Frida Korn/ÜtOrYt, and Fritzi Palme; and ongoing collaborators, musicians Eleni Poulou and Konrad Sprenger.



The ICA Podium combines two theatrical scenographies as environments for the presentation of existing and re-constituted works: a terrain that suggests a site of ruin or excavation, or perhaps a dystopic sci-fi landscape; and the tiled interior of a public toilet. While the landscape suggests elongated geological time, the bathroom carries nostalgia for a specific era of underground clubs and alternative exhibition spaces. The two 'zones' bring together work principally spanning from 1994–2003, a time during which HSC adopted the format of the fashion collection as an armature around which to build discrete worlds of styling and communal ritual.

Between 1994–97, the group produced several maximalist collections of clothing, made using duct tape, photocopied images, plastic toys, stuffed animals and computer parts, and worn by HSC members and collaborators during performances and in their everyday lives. The collections were presented through street performances, May Day demonstrations, and happenings, installations and parties in artist-run spaces such as galerie berlintokeyo, Frisör and St. Kilda's Trips Drill, and documented in Hi-8 videos and Super 8mm films.

The group's happenings – such as *Transformation Station* and *Interactive to Play With* (both 1996) – emphasised an ecstatic collective creativity that embraced transition and permeability, reflected in the use of cellophane inflatable bubbles as stages for performances. These presentations intersected with the production of music in collaboration with cult Berlin musician Captain Space Sex; aligning visual and sonic excess in groups such as Synthetic and Batterie ON/OFF.

In parallel to these actions – which spliced anti-fashion and performance – photographic series such as *Real Time Spasm – Fuck the Sugarsystem (It's Easier to Make a Hole Than to Build a Pole)* (1998), demonstrate

the interweaving of image and style as a political tool. Part performance documentation, part fashion shoot, the images capture intertwined, gender-fluid bodies as surfaces to be played upon; while also being inscribed as sites of consumption, sickness and healing.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, HSC's engagement with the communal and the subcultural led them towards early 20th-century examples of collective utilitarian production, particularly the Bauhaus and Russian avant-garde; the influence of which fed into installations, clothing, films, performances and photo-shoots. In works such as *NEU WEST END* (1999), *NEUBAND* (2000), and *ODESSAU* (2001), the clothed body is again central, with figures dressed in sculptural garments inspired by Kazimir Malevich and Oskar Schlemmer's designs, combined with prosthetic bumps and ill-fitting appendages, and framed within constructivist architectures.

The installation *NEUBAND* comprises a group of sculptural 'players', assembled around a guitar, drum and keyboard. Each player takes a different form – from mannequins dressed in Malevichian costumes to anthropomorphic structures made from found materials. *NEUBAND* was made in collaboration with musician Konrad Sprenger, whose work has developed around the production of mechanised instruments and the use of algorithms to generate complex rhythmic patterns. *NEUBAND* includes a self-playing guitar and a mechanical shruti box (a traditional Indian harmonium-like instrument) that generate resonant pulses and drones of sound, creating a meditative sonic space distinct from the freneticism of earlier HSC musical configurations.

While *NEUBAND* exists as an installation, it has also been activated in other contexts as a performative 'ensemble.' In the photographic series and film *ODESSAU*, shot in and around Walter Gropius' Bauhaus building in Dessau, *NEUBAND* appears on an auditorium stage, suggesting a hybrid and ad-hoc relationship to modernity, while acknowledging the influence of the design school it sits within. The film centres on figures who move through the building's corridors, stairwells and exteriors, clothed in garments designed by HSC in response to an image of the Red Army Faction's Gudrun Ensslin in her Stammheim Prison uniform.

A voiceover reads passages from Austrian author Ingeborg Bachmann's short story *The Thirtieth Year* (1964), in which a young man ruminates on his past and future. Bachmann's post-war writing addressed the ongoing existence of imperialism and fascism in human relations, and history as a force that configures the self. The film's spoken passages articulate a state of becoming, weighed down by what has come before, and the need to look 'where the morality of the whole of history is made, because there is no morality in history itself.'

The ICA Upper Galleries are predominantly dedicated to interweaving bodies of work produced by HSC between 2003–7, but begin with the group's most recent work. In *Rainbow Press Page 4* (2019), a hologram is projected above a ceramic vessel, depicting HSC members performing a parodic dance, costumed in baroque outfits made from Brexit-headlined British tabloids. Utilising the collective's bodies as sites of social mirroring, the work appears as a return to the excessive adornment of HSC's earlier work. The dance, however, is removed from the 'underground' social worlds that HSC once inhabited, instead taking place in a spectral, dream-like space.

The early 2000s marked a turn from the alternative productivism of HSC's earlier projects, towards the conflicted social and cultural space of collective healing and renewal. The group looked towards the early 20th-century German-Swiss *lebensreform* ('life-reform') movement, which promoted a back-to-nature lifestyle; the romantic idealism of which was later co-opted by extreme nationalistic ideologies. In HSC's photographic series *Eaude* (2005), enigmatic black and white images convey a sense of harmony between the human figure and nature, and simultaneously an aura of decay. In a number of images, a group of six long-haired, androgynous figures clothed in one interconnected flowing robe mirror the collectivity of HSC themselves. Posed as if in mid-movement, the figures suggest a reverie of collective action. *Eaude* suggests a mode of yearning for renewal that takes on seemingly mythic, ceremonial proportions. As a counter-influence to *lebensreform*, the photographs layer the aesthetic of Butoh – the Japanese 'dance of darkness', that, in its controlled motions implies a trance-like state.

In the room-scale installation *Non Est Hic* (2006), the human body is present only through the layered recording of voices. Swathes of earthy-toned, diaphanous cloth hang from and between rudimentary metal architectures, creating soft divisions of space and plays of light. Shafts of sound, stemming from within the layers of cloth, are generated through recordings of HSC members singing in a range of harmonious and disharmonious tones – a collective reaching for oneness which falls in and out of sync. Produced in collaboration with Sprenger, the randomly generated ebb and flow of tones produce a spatially ethereal, meditative dimension, embellished through audible ‘cosmic static’ and ‘sighs from the beyond.’ The work’s title (which translates to ‘It/He is Not Here’) speaks to an absence, and the embrace of a borderless and indefinite reality.

The final work of *Omnibus*, *Materia Prima* (2007), reaches both an end point and a new beginning to this project of collectivity through the dissolution of image, object and space. Built within the architecture of the ICA, *Materia Prima* comprises a physical structure as a container for a zone of nothingness – the haptic, visible world dissolving into an edgeless, auratic space. Where once, HSC experienced a collective consciousness as an excess of identity, in *Materia Prima*, it is rendered as a form of shared liminality. As the group proclaimed in their 2011 ‘time text’, which announced a temporary cessation of their collaboration: ‘We will be left with a void!’ – a double-edged statement of distress at the emptiness following the loss of the ‘we’, and the potential within the ‘void’ as a corporeal experience of transcendental boundlessness.

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*This exhibition is an introduction to Honey-Suckle Company.*

*Between 1994 and the present day, Honey-Suckle Company have developed a novel holistic healing method.*

*Honey-Suckle Company gives all human beings the opportunity to attain a natural state of wellness, amply protected from ailments of the body and mind.*

*Honey-Suckle Company is a natural healing method without side effects that can be learned by any aspiring practitioner.*

*Due to its effectiveness, over the past few decades, it has become a highly popular form of human-administered treatment.*

*This exhibition sheds light on some of the treatment's techniques and methods.*

*(Adapted from Dr Bach's Original Flower Remedies)*



Time doesn't exist.

2019

**OMNIBUS**

2016

spiritus

We are all one.

Rosasprieh

Kunstverein Braunschweig

Healing music

Nohe Noshe

OMNIBUS = for all from all

new dimensions

A mysterious, chaotic source material,

in which contradictory components fiercely conflict,

progresses slowly into a state of complete harmony.

2007

2014

Der Fall

**Materia Prima**

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN NOTHINGNESS IS EXHIBITED? (p. 253)

Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof

2006

**NON EST HIC**

*Kunsthalle Basel*

Bearing witness to a time = begetting time.

2005

**OHN END**

*Eaude*

*Cubitt Gallery London*

(nothing is here anymore/  
he is not here)

dissolution, infinity,

chaos

"HONEY-SUCKLE IS LUXURY"

Hurdy-gurdy Raum

'so last season'

his story is history  
my story is mystery  
our story is company



2003

**Esverde**

QUIET IS THE MILLENIUM  
OF SHADOWS, ALL MIRRORS  
ARE COVERED.  
THE WORLD IS FREE FROM  
THE REASON OF VIEW AND  
REALISATION.

Das dreissigste Jahr

from the shadow into the light

2000–2002

**ODESSAU**

*Künstlerhaus Stuttgart*

The entropic processes of disintegration  
were replaced by the

possibility of bifurcation points,

of the leap of systems into a new order.

FIN

imaginary couture house

it is essential to understand oneself as participant,

as an agent of a history constantly re-creating itself –

to actively beget time.

He wouldn't like to be up above,  
but he is glad that everything is  
continuing up above,  
because above is also below,  
so everything is continuing all  
round, since it cannot be halted.

1999/2000

1999

**NEUBAND**

*Sonar Festival Barcelona*

**NEU WEST END**

*children of Berlin, MoMa PSI*

Jil Sander+emotional economic observations

couture show

concert

installation

motorquitar

Allergy Room

Eva's Arche und der Feminist

Neue Dokumente

freier: Magazine for the Mental State

beginning of internet age

Konrad Sprenger  
Each artwork was curated with a soup and a live-act



Neon for a better crack

HSC3D

1st Berlin Biennale

Fuck the sugarsystem

Pirat TV

galerie berlintokeyo

Generation YPS

Jugendstil

transformation station

1994-1999

OST-BERLIN

PROTECT CHILDREN:

youth movement

tape your own identity

Raumfahrpunk

outfits are rotating galleries

sample the world

PROFESSIONAL IMPROVISATION

Real Time Spasm

permanent performance

It's easier to make a hole than to build a pole

Turn of the Millennium Science Fiction

Bomb the Cabbage

interactive to play with

Fashion is Dead

Electronic Kids

Batterie On/Off

Dr Bach flower remedy

Honey-Suckle:

learning from the past and living in

the present with a view to the future.

Reconstruction of an imaginary moment.

Dissolve the divide between nature and humans.

DISSOLVE TO CONTINUE

Lina Launhardt

Lilly of the Valley

KC Sletcher

Fritzi Palme

Zille Homma Hamid

Paul PM

N. Pleasure

Nico Ihlein

Sim Gil Güllek

Eleni Poulou

Captain Space Sex

Frida Korn

Gregor Hylla

Petr. S Kisur

‘Only something that is in constant movement, permanently reinventing itself, escapes the numerous procedures of inclusion and exclusion that the Western World has invented to discipline the individual. Something that permanently redefines and redesigns itself, disappearing and resurfacing where no one expects it to, evades the rigid structures of the regulating technologies of dominance. Something that doesn’t remain the same becomes difficult to identify and therefore difficult to capture, to control.’

**HONEY-SUCKLE COMPANY**

Nothing exists outside of Love.

Making peace with the biography.

Thoughts shape reality.