

Beyond a Certain Point There Is No Return

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A collaboration between A Tale of A Tub and Tlön Projects

NATALIE BALL, ELMGREEN & DRAGSET, SOPHIE CALLE, JULIAN CHARRIÈRE, DORA GARCÍA, NIKLAS GOLDBACH, NADIA GUERROUI, DAVID HORVITZ, EVA KOŤÁTKOVÁ, PERE LLOBERA, JILL MAGID, MOUNTAINCUTTERS, GARETH MOORE, OTOBONG NKANGA, AMALIA PICA, WILFREDO PRIETO, ROSE SALANE, VITTORIO SANTORO, MARTINE STIG

Guest curator: Katia Krupennikova

The exhibition *Beyond a Certain Point There Is No Return* marks the third edition of an annual collaboration between A Tale of A Tub and Tlön Projects and presents a variety of artworks selected from the *imaginary collection* of Tlön Projects. This imaginary collection is formed by the convergence of selected artworks from various international private art collections, whereby Tlön Projects aims to generate access to artworks which otherwise would have been largely shielded from public access.

Taking its title from an aphorism by Franz Kafka — “Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached.” — the exhibition puts into conversation artworks by artists from different regions and generations.

Though titled with Kafka’s aphorism, the exhibition touches on the writer’s heritage only tangentially. Instead, it spins around the urgency to seize and make visible the “point of no return,” which has been overwhelming the world in the recent years, from pandemics to wars to climate change. The term has many evocative senses and associations. Originating from air navigation, where it designates the situation of an aircraft no longer having enough fuel to return to its point of departure, the “point of no return” signifies a critical juncture, an irrevocable change, the impossibility to maintain or to restore the previous situation. This point is itself often something evasive and difficult to grasp. When did the point of no return occur, and how can one recognize it? Or do we only really become aware of this momentous turning point after the fact, in its aftermath of its inevitability?

Beyond a Certain Point There Is No Return revolves around a crisis of awareness and a crisis of action. The artworks in the show are brought together in search of spaces and temporalities that refer to this evasive and difficult to seize point, which manifests itself more through absence than presence. They sense moments when political, social or personal catastrophes become irreversible, or when the pressure of change, even when not fully recognized, can no longer be avoided. The visitor is invited to pass through and touch upon memories, gestures and expressions, in spatial relations, architecture, the body, and the unconscious, via subtle presences, traces and quantum entanglements.

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The durational performance by **Dora García**, titled *Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years*, unfolds within two planet-like circles on the ground floor of A Tale of A Tub. On this stage, three times during the course of the exhibition two performers will be asked to maintain eye contact with each another for as long as possible. The tension of continuous eye contact brings them into a relationship of interdependency and intimacy. This simple yet very intense situation serves to encourage regrouping and to propose a physical introduction to the point of no return: at some point eye contact becomes impossible as the circles are not concentric. The eye contact breaks off, and the performers must start over.

Sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman coined the term “liquid modernity,” to designate that state of perpetual recreation and fluidity that characterizes modern life, and the volatilization of social forms which were once solid. *Friction* by **Nadia Guerroui** epitomizes this liquid relationship between time, space, material, and gaze. A site-specific intervention into the ground floor of the exhibition space, the work blurs the boundaries between foreground and background and between the artwork and its environment.





Eva Kořátková's distinctive artistic practice, inspired by surrealism, illustrates dreams and deals with anxieties mainly experienced by children, elderly people and animals — the vulnerable members of society — to indicate the fragility of the subject faced with modern institutions and structures. She often deals with psychological themes, theatricalized situations, and embodied fantasies. Four pieces are on display from the series *Controlled Memory Loss*, where the artist explores the idea of “being at home.” The situations symbolically presented in these works — appearing as games with the surroundings — show the possibilities of structuring a place or inhabiting it, but also of resisting the context in which one finds oneself. Kořátková's claustrophobic photograph *30 Minutes Under the Bed* suggests a peculiar strategy for staying in control by using a closed space as an anchor in a moment of mental meltdown.

Amalia Pica's *Catachresis* sculptures are made with objects whose elements refer metaphorically to parts of the human body, i.e. the tongue of a shoe, the teeth of a saw, the legs of a table—in this case the piece is titled *Catachresis #14 (eye of the needle, neck of the bottle, eye of the potato)*. Catachresis (from Greek κατάχρησις; “abuse”) is a literary term meaning a semantic misuse or error. Between linguistic slippages and an odd materiality, Pica's object collages are full of interpretive possibilities. A stretched string, an empty Coca Cola bottle and a potato may refer to a slip or short-circuit between alienation and intimacy, ignorance and care, abundance and poverty, extraction and climate change, colonialism and culture, taking and giving, guilt and apology.

Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial* (1914–1915) is a twisted journey of law and guilt, which may be read as the self-trial of the main character, Josef K. Arrested one morning to his surprise, he is finally executed without any explanation. **Vittorio Santoro's** work *Expire (Josef K's Relation Diagram to 17 of the Characters in F. Kafka's The Trial)* is a wall installation consisting of wire, two lightbulbs, and a diagram sketched in pencil. The diagram follows the chronologically ascending numbers 1 to 17, and the resulting design appears as a code to be cracked or deciphered. As the subtitle of the work indicates, these numbers represent seventeen of Josef K.'s personal encounters during his legal quest; the work proposes a mapping of these relations that is sharp and enigmatic, like Kafka's prose.

Casper Westrik a work by **Pere Llobera** is a small broken porcelain vase mounted on a cigar box. It is named after a person with whom the artist maintained loose contact. Once Llobera received a box containing a broken vase, with a note from Westrik suggesting that he turn it into a work of art. Faced with this challenge, Llobera attempted to reconstruct the vase with glue. The artist later discovered that Westrik was in a mental institution, giving the restored object a new meaning — a portrait of a broken mind.

Incomplete Object (Anatomy of an Absent Body) by **mountaincutters** is another kind of fragile and precarious creation. An old child's chair is carefully balanced on three small glass wheels, with a fourth being slightly offset. The empty seat evokes the ghostly presence of an absent body, though the chair, in its new configuration is unable to hold a body anymore.

When **Wilfredo Prieto** left his native Cuba for the first time, for a residency on the Caribbean island of Curaçao, he put a plant in a wheelbarrow filled with soil and took it as his companion on a five-kilometer walk. *Paseo [Walk]* is a documentation of this simple and moving performance.

Gareth Moore's *Reminder (Vancouver)* is a fragile and evocative sculpture of a shoelace on which are hung various small objects and materials, copper wire, wood, metal, artificial leaf, cork, stone, bone, cloth, rope, feather. It appears as a kind of talisman or ritual object. The artist often works with unorthodox or discarded materials, and blurs the lines between everyday activity and art. As he puts it, “I like having a very fragmented art practice, of art that exists in a more dissipated or invisible manner.” *Reminder (Vancouver)* recalls something of the major artwork which preceded it, Moore's large-scale outdoor installation for DOCUMENTA (13), *A place, near the buried canal* (2010–12). Moore lived for two years in the Karlshausen Park in Kassel, where he gradually built a pension in which lodging could be booked, a water source, an outhouse, a kiosk, and a temple, as well as a number of sculptures. Operating within its own logic, with its

own working hours and rituals, *A place, near the buried canal*, provided areas of tranquility and retreat, shifting the experience of time and space.

David Horvitz's *All the Time That Came Before This Moment* is a sound installation that repeats the titular phrase in 30 minutes intervals. It recalls the conventions that govern one's experience of time. What standards does one use to measure the passing of time based on their background, education, cultural upbringing? What practices and beliefs consolidate a unified idea of time? How can one untune their subjective experience of time, disregard the long list of modern social and scientific conventions that articulate us in synchrony? What has changed when this moment broke the continuity of time?

Social Consequences I: Segregation, Encroaching Barricade, Entangled, Endangered Species, Rationed Measures, Intertwined is the first part of the *Social Consequences* series by **Otobong Nkanga**. The collection of drawings illustrates cause-and-effect scenarios and interdependencies between capitalism, colonialism, extraction, climate change, patriarchy, religious dogmas, and domestic violence. In a manner akin to a Rorschach test, the colors, shapes and connections that Nkanga puts on display evoke a variety of individual and collective meanings and responses.

Natalie Ball, a member of the Klamath Tribes, a Native American Indian Nation, refers in her series of sculptures *When I Go Missing* to kidnappings and murders of indigenous women. The moment of absence embodied here points to forced disappearances and the gradual extinction of the community: a transition from beauty to horror, fertility to void, from life to death, existence to obscurity. *When I Go Missing, Sundial* is a human-sized figure constructed from leather, porcupine fur, deer fur, wood, metal, and cloth.

“On Monday, February 16, 1981, I was hired as a temporary chambermaid for three weeks in a Venetian hotel. I was assigned twelve bedrooms on the fourth floor. In the course of my cleaning duties, I examined the personal belongings of the hotel guests and observed through details lives which remained unknown to me. On Friday, March 6, the job came to an end.” *The Hotel, Room 47* is part of **Sophie Calle's** project *The Hotel*, composed of photographic and written accounts of her interventions into the lives of unsuspecting guests in a Venetian hotel. The absent occupants described in *Room 47* are a family of four — two parents and two children—as revealed by their four pairs of slippers. From their passports she discovers that the parents are a married couple from Geneva and she copies out four postcards one of them has written; words on one of these hint at problems within the family. Calle's surreptitious investigations evoke detective work, spying, surveillance, and voyeurism, *looking* in its most fascinating and problematic forms.

Rose Salane's *Person 16-20, Person 31-35, and Person 51-55* consists of a multifaceted investigation into the history of lost items. Salane collected rings that were lost and found throughout the New York City Subway in 2016 and stored in Metropolitan Transportation Authority. She purchased the rings at auction, and in collaboration with a biology lab she researched their qualities to extract potential traces of mitochondrial DNA. She further hired an intuitive reader to search for psychic information around these objects and asked a pawnshop to estimate their values. By doing this the artist set up a sort of a quantum archeology, archiving not only objects and their values, but also emotions, sensations, connections, and thought-fields.

A large molten rock stands in glass vitrine. It is an artificially made geological representation of the “past” of our digital present, mined not from the earth but from technological devices. *Metamorphism XXI* by **Julian Charrière** was made by melting down a massive amount of iPhones, hard drives, and other digital detritus in a pit with molten lava. Once it had solidified, all that was left of the original technology was their precious rare earth metals: a material manifestation of our digital-immaterial civilization.

In *Broken Clock* from the series *Powerless Structures* by artist duo **Elmgreen & Dragset**, the fractured timepiece, one half lying on the floor, seems to evoke the fracturing of time itself, or the absurdity of relying on the clock as a measure of time. Their simple artistic gesture amputates the function of the mechanical timepiece.



Front de Seine, a development in the district of Beaugrenelle in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, south of the Eiffel Tower, is another kind of powerless structure from the past which failed to find its place in the future. Built in the 1970s as a part of Georges Pompidou's project to modernize the city, the district includes about 20 towers reaching nearly 100 meters of height built around an elevated esplanade paved with frescos that can only be perceived from the heights of the towers. In this dystopian architectural setting **Niklas Goldbach** has staged *HABITAT C3B*, a film whose characters are trapped in a public space, behaving like animals out of a cage. Lonely and cold inhabitants of the space are all men, presumably office clerks. Dressed identically, they seem to be in control of this space and at the same time they look powerless.

What does it mean to observe and to be observed? How to live one's life as a fake, to be invisible and yet at the same time more present and more in control than anyone else? Over three years artist **Jill Magid** conducted interviews with employees of the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Office (AIVD). These conversations took place in bars and non-descript public places, and were meticulously recorded by Magid in her notebooks. The works in the show are from the artist's *Kosinski Quotes* series – *My Sensitivity* and *Vaulting* – consisting of passages from the novel *Cockpit* (1975) by Polish-born writer Jerzy Kosinski, whose protagonist is a former member of a mysterious government agency living a life free from identity – describing in a sense the methodology of the artist.

For her research based photo installation *Cauchy Horizons*, **Martine Stig** studied the visual vocabularies of over thirty-five western science fiction films: she noted and categorised all the moments when a vision of the future was staged. Inspired by these observations she decided to make an attempt to photograph the future. As case studies the artist chose the cities of Tunis, Shenzhen, Athens, and Geneva, where turbulences in politics or the economy, or influence of CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research and the largest physics laboratory in the world) were tangible, there futures uncertain. Walking the streets of these cities Stig employed the medium of analogue photograph to implement the visual language of sci-fi cinema: circles, double exposure, scaling, etc. Finally she combined views of architecture and images of everyday shapes, mixing the photo reportages from the four cities into one narrative. The “Cauchy horizon” is a term from physics which describes the point where determinism breaks down and the past no longer determines the future. Physicists have argued that no observer could pass through the “Cauchy horizon” point because they would be annihilated.

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