

# IMPORT PROJECTS

KEITHSTRASSE 10 / 10787 BERLIN

## Press Release

THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ISLAND

### ARTISTS:

Julieta Aranda  
Mohamed Azzam Axza  
Goldin+Senneby  
Daniel Keller  
Antti Laitinen  
Mariyam Omar  
Bik Van der Pol  
Alexander Ponomarev  
Andrew Ranville  
Antoine Renard  
Nicholas Roberts

### CURATOR:

Elena Gilbert & Nadim Samman

### VENUE:

#### IMPORT PROJECTS

Keithstrasse 10  
10787 Berlin

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16.05.-20.07.2013

OPENING TIMES  
THURSDAY-SATURDAY  
12-18 H  
AND BY APPOINTMENT

x

**VERNISSAGE  
15TH MAY**

**FINISSAGE  
20TH JUL**

**7-10PM**

Just as John Donne reported his discovery – that ‘no man is an island, entire of itself’, but ‘a piece of the continent, a part of the main’ – so Thoreau announced that, the smallest stream is a Mediterranean sea’. In the particular, macro potential is revealed. Since Plato, through Defoe and Swift, via Gauguin, and in the work of numerous contemporary artists the island figure has been employed to negotiate relationships between the real and the imaginary, utopia and dystopia, selfhood and otherness, centre and periphery. This exhibition charts the topography of this intellectual archipelago – interrogating the possibility of isolation in the 21st Century.

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Since Plato, through Defoe and Swift, via Gauguin, and in the work of numerous contemporary artists the island topos has been employed to negotiate relationships between the real and the imaginary, utopia and dystopia, selfhood and otherness, centre and periphery. This exhibition charts the topography of this intellectual archipelago – interrogating the possibility of isolation in the 21st Century. Just as John Donne reported his discovery – that ‘no man is an island, entire of itself’, but ‘a piece of the continent, a part of the main’ – The Possibility of an Island surveys the strange connectivity between islands and mainlands, green-zones and battlefields, tax-havens and street corners, private fantasy and collective unconscious.

*For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God help thee, push not off from that isle, for thou canst never return!* – Herman Melville, Moby-Dick.

*The settlement always includes within itself what it nominates as its other. “Isolated” is an urban concept. It is a product of the city. To leave the map behind is a uniquely urban fantasy. It is those at the center of the pattern who talk the most about escaping it. But their escapes are usually just extensions of the pattern, demonstrations that the city knows no limit’* – Mark Wigley

*‘[i]nside the dense web of distributed networks, it would appear that everything is everywhere – [there is] little room between the poles of the global and the local. Biological viruses are transferred via airlines between Guangdong Province and Toronto in a manner of hours, and computer viruses are transferred via data lines from Seattle to Saigon in a manner of seconds’*  
– Eugene Thacker & Alexander Galloway

*‘[the question as to whether to construe ever-increasing entropy pessimistically or not] depends on the importance we give to the universe at large, on the one hand, and to the islands of locally decreasing entropy which we find in it on the other. We ourselves constitute such an island of decreasing entropy and [...] we live among other such islands’* – Rudolf Arnheim

*‘Just as the boatman sits in his small boat, trusting his frail craft in the stormy sea that is boundless in every direction, rising and falling with the howling, mountainous waves, so [...] the individual man calmly sits, supported by and trusting the principium individuationis’* – Arthur Schopenhauer

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### ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES:

**Julieta Aranda** (b.1975) was born in Mexico City and currently lives between New York and Berlin. Her practice deals with a range of themes including the idea of a “poetics of circulation”, the politicized subject or the possibility of a politicized subjectivity, perception of time, and one’s power over the imaginary. Projects take the form of printed media, installation, video, and community organizing. As co-director of e-Flux with Anton Vidokle, she developed the projects Pawnshop (currently in Beijing), and e-flux video rental, which started in the e-Flux storefront in New York in 2004 and has traveled to more than fifteen venues worldwide. Her work has been exhibited internationally in venues such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (2009), Kunstverein Arnsberg (2010), MOCA Miami (2009), Witte de With (2010), Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2007), 2nd Moscow Biennial (2007), MUSAC Spain (2006), and the VII Havana Biennial (2000).

**Mohamed Azzam Axza**, studied fine art at Lasalle, Singapore, in the early 1990s. His practice encompasses visual media, sound and music – and his works are some of the most process oriented and open-ended among his contemporaries. Often blurring the boundaries between art and life, Azzam consistently maintains his position on the very edge of what constitutes ‘art’ in the Maldives.

**Goldin+Senneby** (since 2004) is a framework for collaboration set up by artists Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby; exploring juridical, financial and spatial constructs through notions of the performative and the virtual. Their collaboration started with The Port (2004-06); acting in an emerging public sphere constructed through digital code. In their more recent body of work, known as Headless (2007-), they approach the sphere of offshore finance and its production of virtual space through legal code. Looking at strategies of withdrawal and secrecy, they trace an offshore company on the Bahamas called Headless Ltd. A ghostwritten detective novel continuously narrates their investigations. Solo exhibitions include: I dispense, divide, assign, keep, hold NAK, Aachen (2012); Standard Length of a Miracle, CAC, Vilnius (2011); The Decapitation of Money, Kadist, Paris (2010); Headless. From the public record, Index, Stockholm (2009); Goldin+Senneby: Headless, The Power Plant, Toronto (2008). Group exhibitions include: The Deep of the Modern, Manifesta 9, Genk (2012); The End of Money, Witte de With, Rotterdam (2011); The Moderna

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**Daniel Keller** (b. 1986). Studied at The Art Institute of Chicago (US), Städelschule Frankfurt (DE) and at The University of Arts, Berlin (DE). His wide-ranging output as part of AIDS-3D addresses a myriad of issues at the intersection of culture, technology, economics and politics. He has exhibited at The New Museum, New York, (2009), Based In Berlin (2011), DLD Conference, Munich, (2012), 3rd Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, (2012), Made in Germany Two, Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover, (2012) Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen, (2012) and Crawford Art Gallery, Cork (2013).

**Antti Laitinen's** (b.1975) work reappraises the heroic ethos and underlying notions of the artist in performance art, frequently deploying a humour that arises from a meeting between impossible and incommensurate elements. Laitinen graduated with an MA from the Helsinki Art Academy in 2004. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts, Gateshead, UK; Exprmntl galerie, Toulouse, France; and Scope New York. Group exhibitions include La position de la Terre, The Rhinelander Contemporary Art Center, France; Beauhemia, NETTIE HORN, London, UK; The Faraway Nearby, White Box, New York, USA; Male Stuff, Peri, Turku, Finland and Gallery Signe Vad, Copenhagen, Denmark; 4th Triennial of Finnish Art, Kunsthalle, Helsinki, Finland; Nordisk Panorama (18th Nordic Short & Documentary Film Festival), Oulu, Finland; What is Live Art in Finnish? Muu galleria, Helsinki, Finland and upcoming exhibitions at Gallery Emil Filla, Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic and Kerava Art Museum, Finland.

**Mariyam Omar** was born in the Maldives in 1980. Her practice focuses on exploring the idea of acquiring a sense of emotional perseverance or control in a repressive regime. Her previous body of work mainly consists of paintings and installations. Untitled Works, her first solo exhibition was held at the National Art Gallery in Maldives in 2011. She has exhibited in group exhibitions in different countries including the Bangladesh Biennale in 2008, Puducherry Blue in India, and the Art of Change Commonwealth Women's Exhibition organized by Kambani Arts exhibited at the Royal Commonwealth Society's Commonwealth Club Gallery in London in 2011. Her most recent group exhibition was the XOPI Exhibition of Public Inquiry of public inquiry & expression concerning the events leading up to, during & preceding 6/7 February 2012, it was held at Male' City Hall in August 2012 after the Coup.

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**Bik Van der Pol** are based in Rotterdam and have worked collectively since 1995. Their work explores art's potential produce and transmit knowledge, through cooperative research methods and the creation of platforms for various kinds of communication. Recent solo shows and projects include *Are you really sure a floor can't also be a ceiling?* ENEL Award 2010, MACRO museum, Rome (2010); *It isn't what it used to be and will never be again*, CCA Glasgow (2009); *I've got something in my eye*, Marie Louise Hessel Museum/CCS Bard, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY(2008); *Nomads in Residence/No.19*, a mobile workspace for artists, Utrecht (2003, with Korteknie Stuhlmacher architects). Recent group shows include: *The Future of Pumphouse*, Pumphouse gallery, London (2011); *We are Grammar*, Pratt Institute, New York (2011); *Learning from Vancouver*, Western Front, Vancouver (2010); *Portscapes*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2010); *Street of Sculptures*, Bijlmer, Amsterdam (2011/2012); *A Retrospective Future*, CAC VOX, Montreal (2011); *Living As Form*, Creative Time, New York (2011). They curated *Too late, too little, (and how) to fail gracefully*, Kunstfort Asperen, [ww.kunstfortasperen.nl](http://ww.kunstfortasperen.nl) (2011).

**Alexander Ponomarev** (b.1957) graduated from the USSR Nautical Engineering College in 1979, following a period at the Orel Art School. He is an Officier d'Arts et de Lettres (France) and a member of the Russian Academy of Arts. In 2007 he represented Russia at the 52nd Venice Biennale, and in 2009 docked his hand-made submarine, *SubTiziano*, on the Grand Canal as an Official Collateral Project of the 53rd Biennale. In 2012 he represented the Ukraine at the 13th Venice Biennale of Architecture. His works are in major public collections worldwide including the Centre Georges Pompidou, FNAC (Fonds National d' Art Contemporain), France, State Russian Museum, (St Petersburg), the Collection of the Great Duchess of Luxembourg, National Museum of Singapore, and the University Jaumel, Castellon de la Plasa (Spain).

**Andrew Ranville**, born 1981 in Michigan, USA, lives and works in London, United Kingdom since 2006, receiving his MFA from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2008. Ranville's work describes the relation of the body to space inhabited, interacted with, and navigated. His installations, sculptures, architectural interventions, photographs and films explore ideas related to site-specificity as well as the viewer's interaction with the work. The balance between the formal and functional aspects of the work often elicits those interactions, and are realized using ecologically sensitive methods which communicate ideas of sustainability and resilience.

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**Antoine Renard's** conceptual projects involve a set of gestures, processes and appropriations. His work aims to deconstruct the mechanisms of consumption, creatively enacting possible methods of abstractions within a bio-economic frame. From the cultivation of a large indoor field of toxic 'visionary' plants (Spiritual Substances\_2012) to a set of free fall experiment on the flying possibilities of a piece of raw meat (MEAT DROP\_2010/2012), Renard's ecology of production embraces the paradoxes of a contemporary society torn between it's wish for freedom and spirituality and it's systematic establishment of addictive infrastructures and technologies. He is currently shortlisted for the 58th Salon de Montrouge (Paris, FR), and is invited to be part of Parc St-Leger Art Center residency program »LaGrandeOurse« (Nevers, FR). Recent exhibitions and contribution include More or Less, WcWgallery (Hamburg, DE), The Firm at X Marks the Bökship London (with BrokenDimanchePress), Osmosis, Altes Finanzamt (Berlin, DE) and Campus, a project initiated by the curatorial office Lattitudes (Barcelona, ES).

**Nicholas Roberts** is a British artist currently based in Berlin. His practice takes as its starting point the operational practices of design, architecture and advertising. Drawing on standard modes of production used in these fields, as well as modes of fabrication used in the working environment, Roberts deals with the social concerns of artistic production within the gallery environment - the discrepancy between tradesperson and artist, and the role of the artist as a bridge between the gallery environment and the physical space of everyday life. Colour and form, set within a spatial context and with the scale and immediacy of advertising, are used to redirect, control and confuse the orientation of the viewer, and draw attention to the discrepancy between the metaphoric content of a work and its physicality as an object - the scars of the labour of its fabrication. Roberts' work is often site specific and project based, to be destroyed upon completion of the exhibition.

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### SELECTED ARTWORKS:

Goldin+Senneby's **Headless at Regus** (2010) is a closed film screening documenting the artists' investigation of an offshore company in the Bahamas called Headless Ltd. The film, entitled *Looking for Headless*, was commissioned by the artists through their characteristic practice of 'outsourcing' and created by Kate Cooper and Richard John Jones. Goldin+Senneby's work addresses practices of withdrawal and secrecy in contemporary financial capitalism. On display at Import Projects is an A0 poster announcing the screening of the film which will take place at a Regus Business Center in Berlin - an off-site contribution to the exhibition.

Antti Laitinen creates performances that are documented through photography, video or objects. Combining a search for identity and a poetry of the absurd, Laitinen pushes his limits (both physical and mental) in quest to discover the wild Nordic landscape, often devoid of any human trace. **Growler** (2009) is a video documenting an action in which the artist removed a large block of ice from a lake, keeping it safely frozen as winter turned into spring. He then returned this iceberg to its place of origin, towing it across the warm waters in a rowboat until it eventually melted.

Alexander Ponomarev's **Maya: A Lost Island** (2000) is a video work in two parts. One screen shows Ponomarev scratching away at a paper map, removing all symbolic trace of the eponymous land mass. It is erasure performed in a perfunctory manner. The second video documents the realization of this gesture on a massive scale - footage capturing the Northern Fleet of the Russian Navy deploying maritime flares to make a real island, in the Barents sea, completely disappear. The action is an incredible counterpoint to the individual performance. Ponomarev's project draws a veil of smoky artifice over a place whose name signifies delusion.

Andrew Ranville's **Future Island** (2009) is a takeaway installation/sculpture consisting of a sapling housed in a planter-box, to which a boat anchor was attached. The tree itself was of a variety that thrives in a flooded environment. The potential buyer of the work is given instructions to pitch it into a canal or similarly unnatural body of water. The fast-growing plant will then absorb nutrients through its specially designed box and, aided by the anchor, put down roots. If left alone for long enough it will grow into an island. The implicit challenge of *Future Island* is to colonize existing spatial determinations with new realities. The exhibited print constitutes the instruction for *Future Island's* use.

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Andrew Ranville's **Rabbit Island** project is a utopian outpost of practical desire. Comprising just 90 acres of undeveloped land surrounded by 31,700 square miles of water in Lake Superior, Michigan, Rabbit Island is a utopian attempt to colonize our imaginations: an international artist residency foregrounding self-sufficiency and context-specific material engagement. Rabbit Island residents must achieve their goals through humble means. Most importantly, their goals must shift – be recalibrated – by their new home. With only the most essential tools from the old world available, artists must attempt to tease meanings and take suggestions from the landscape, to work with it rather than impose their own will fait accompli. The Rabbit Island project draws upon the castaway genre in Western literature while partaking of the influential 19th Century American author Henry David Thoreau's neo-pioneer vision of an isolated, anti-consumer lifestyle.

The man who would become known as the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, preached renunciation of industrial modernity and pursued it through murderous means. Kaczynski would borrow from Thoreau's architectural example when constructing his notorious hermitage and bomb-making workshop by hand – a cabin in rural Michigan. Though he refused to attach himself to the telephone, water or electricity lines that were only a few miles away, he kept his mailbox on the nearby road – utilizing the postal network to distribute his terror and get his neo-luddite manifesto published in national newspapers. Berlin based American artist Daniel Keller obtained **Kaczynski's hand-made backpack** and other accoutrements from a recent FBI auction. Their inclusion in this exhibition frames, amongst other things, a paradox at the heart of Kaczynski's enterprise. Namely, that – in the words of one critic – 'the ideology of his cabin was actually constructed in the urban milieu. The settlement always includes within itself what it nominates as its other. "Isolated" is an urban concept. It is a product of the city. To leave the map behind is a uniquely urban fantasy. It is those at the center of the pattern who talk the most about escaping it. But their escapes are usually just extensions of the pattern, demonstrations that the city knows no limit'.

Nicholas Roberts' **Tahiti** (2013) is a site-specific wall painting referring to Gauguin's idealization of Tahiti and its inhabitants, which placed fictions of the noble-savage and sensuous exoticism at the heart of nascent Modernism - a signal example of its colonial enterprise.



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## ABOUT IMPORT PROJECTS:

IMPORT projects is a nonprofit curatorial initiative founded in 2012 by Anja Henckel and Nadim Samman. Hosting exhibitions, performances and symposia, IMPORT provides an experimental platform for contemporary cultural production and debate, primarily exploring the intersection of technology, personal identity and community. While physically operating out of Berlin, IMPORT engages global concerns.

## CURATORS BIO:

**Elena Gilbert** is an American-German artist and curator based in Berlin, Germany and Bordeaux, France. Since 2010, she has worked with e-flux on a number of projects such as Kopfbau at Art Basel 2011, time/bank at DOCUMENTA13, and Agency of Unrealized Projects with Hans-Ulrich Obrist at daad galerie Berlin. She has recently exhibited and curated shows in New York, Germany, Greece, India, Maldives, and France. She is a grant recipient from the Graham Foundation in support of a forthcoming project Tending Neo-Provincialism. She is currently an associate curator for the Maldivian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale with support from the Danish Art Council.

**Nadim Julien Samman** read Philosophy at University College London before completing a doctorate in art history at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. He has written for publications including Third Text, The Art Newspaper, Art review, Contemporary, Asian Affairs, Art India, Artchronika, Erotic review, Naked Punch, Under/current and WestEast. In 2011 he was Co-curator of One of a Thousand Ways to Defeat Entropy – an Official Collateral Project of the 54th Venice Biennale, and in 2012 he curated the 4th Marrakech Biennale with Carson Chan. He is a member of the international Association of Art Critics (AICA). He is currently an associate curator for the Maldivian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale with support from the Danish Art Council.

[www.import-projects.org](http://www.import-projects.org)