

Close Encounters PR | Press Release  
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Sofia Hultén, *Grey Area*, 2001. Video, 9 min. loop. Courtesy Sofia Hultén and Daniel Marzona, Berlin

## **MIMICRY—EMPATHY** **GROUP EXHIBITION**

March 12 — June 5, 2022  
Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille  
Produced by Fræme (Marseille)  
Curated by Susanne Bürner

**Caroline Achaintre (FR), Armin Alian (IR), BLESS (AT, DE), Ulla von Brandenburg (DE), Susanne Bürner (DE), Berta Fischer (DE), Wiktor Gutt / Waldemar Raniszewski (PL), Sofia Hultén (DE), Annette Kelm (DE), Jochen Lempert (DE), Alexandra Leykauf (DE), Sonya Schönberger (DE), Anika Schwarzlose (DE), Daniel Steegmann Mangrané (ES/BR), Vera von Lehndorff / Holger Trülzsch (DE).**

**MIMICRY—EMPATHY. The upcoming Fræme exhibition at the Friche la Belle de mai in Marseille gathers the work of eighteen international artists around the question of the construction of the self between experienced and fantasized realities.**

**Fræme (Marseille)** is pleased to invite Berlin-based German artist **Susanne Bürner** to present a large group exhibition featuring artworks in various forms (among other media: photography, video, sculpture, installation). As an evolving form of the Mimicry—Empathy project initiated in 2018 at the Lajevardi Foundation in Tehran

(Iran), the exhibition, which will take place at the Friche la Belle de mai in Marseille, France, from March 12 to June 5, 2022, addresses and questions the emotionally sensitive areas of mimicry as survival strategy.

### **From mimicry to empathy: a balance between visual adaptation and emotional engagement.**

In biology, mimicry implies a mostly visual adaptation to a different life form, which could be beneficial in some situations and, ultimately, secure survival.

In his Essay "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" however, Roger Caillois suggests that contrary to popular belief, animals blend into their surroundings not to protect themselves, but rather out of a mythological desire to dissolve into the world. It is this balance between an utilitarian purpose of becoming another and the emancipation from this very purpose that is being discussed via the works of the exhibition.

These mechanisms are not only practiced by animals but play into various social phenomena. The artworks in the exhibition Mimicry—Empathy confront these strategies of adaptation and the idealized forms of life they are aimed at.

The evolution of mimicry requires a certain degree of empathy an essential element for understanding the system into which one wishes to integrate. The success of visual assimilation thus depends entirely on the extent to which one engages with the thoughts and strategies of the counterpart, often blurring the boundaries between imitator and model. A process of questioning the original essence inevitably takes place.

*"Openness to the other, who both resembles oneself but is not oneself, represents a crack in our love for illusion. Indeed, unveiling this misunderstanding and the lure inherent in our narcissism, which prompts us to mistake ourselves as the other, is the very trap of the "screen-ness" that replaces the artefact. The photographs, paintings, installations, and films in the exhibition Mimicry—Empathy are at once catapults that provoke a meeting, the here-and-now of a slip, of the raising of a curtain, all on the cusp of taking flight after a light fall, or a real tear." Marie de Brugerolle, extract from "PRELUDE : Devant le rideau....je me tiens" text written for the publication Mimicry—Empathy.*

### **Transformation — the essence of mimicry**

The process of mimicry involves transformation in relation to or in exchange with others to conform to a particular image which is considered advantageous. The works in the exhibition Mimicry—Empathy are more concerned with the process of transformation itself than with the aspired image, and thus address identity formation through multiple experiences of imitation. It is in the transformative experiences of the individual within a group and in genuine mutual empathy that the potential for change in society ultimately lies.

As teenagers playfully test their identity in different group affiliations, the visitors are invited to discover variations of the self in the mirror of the exhibition.

### **MIMICRY—EMPATHY, a project in various appearances**

While we are accustomed to seeing faces as the key to understanding a person, this intimate search of the self finds its allegory in the object of the mask. Oscar Wilde, however, claimed: *"Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth"*. Masks allow us to become other people and yet they reveal the wearer. They are alias and original at the same time. The Mimicry—

Empathy project is itself multifaceted and includes exhibitions as well as presentations, workshops and film screenings that address different local conditions and respond to the respective venues. As such, Mimicry-Empathy 2018 began with an exhibition at the Lajevardi Foundation (Tehran) and a public programme of film screenings, lectures and workshops. Many works in the exhibition dealt with surfaces, in demarcation to the outside world - first order (skin) and second order (clothing, fabrics). The exhibition was supported by the IFA, the Austrian Federal Chancellery, the Institut français, the Polish Embassy and the Adam Mieckewicz Institute in Warsaw.

An eponymous publication, released in Berlin on January 15, 2022 (ed. Susanne Bürner), includes archival images and pictures from the exhibition at the Lajevardi Foundation in Tehran, as well as interviews and texts from various fields such as art theory, psychology, and biology.

The book contains texts by: **Roy R. Behrens**, professor of art and researcher emeritus at the University of Northern Iowa (USA); **Marie de Brugerolle**, art critic (Lyon, France); **Roger Caillois**, writer, sociologist and literary critic (France); **Johan Hartle**, director of the Academy of Fine Arts (Vienna, Austria) and **Gohar Homayounpour**, psychoanalyst (Tehran, Iran) as well as talks with former CIA agent **Jonna Mendez** (Washington, DC, USA) and independent curators **Anne-Sophie Dinant** (Bordeaux, France) and **Amirali Ghasemi** (Tehran, Iran).

Mimicry as a process of concealment and adaptation experiences an unexpected topicality in the COVID-19 pandemic through the wearing of masks and finds an echo in the book in the reference to facial recognition techniques.

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMME**

The exhibition in Marseille will be punctuated by a public programme including a series of film screenings curated by Anne-Sophie Dinant and Amirali Ghasemi, as well as workshops and artists' presentations. More details to be announced shortly.

## **SUSANNE BÜRNER'S BIOGRAPHY**

Susanne Bürner (DE) is an artist based in Berlin. Over a wide range of subject matter, she explores the psychological dimensions of images, directing the viewer's attention to questions of presence and absence, as well as to the projection of the viewer herself. Architecture plays a key role in her work as the human attempt of structuring space and society, as a method and attempt of ordering life.

The project Mimicry—Empathy was developed in 2018 from her artistic practice as an exhibition at Lajevardi Foundation Tehran and has since then been constantly evolving. It negotiates topics such as mimicry, camouflage, deception, adaptation, empathy and identity in exhibitions, screenings, workshops and in a publication which has been published in 2020.

Susanne Bürner's work has been shown extensively at locations including the Los Angeles Filmforum, CAPC Bordeaux, Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin, Hygiene Museum Dresden, Kunstraum Kreuzberg, South London Gallery, Fotomuseum Winterthur and others. She curated exhibitions and screenings at Galerie Giti Nourbakhsch Berlin, L40 Berlin, Videonale Bonn and Lajevardi Foundation Tehran.

## **WHAT IS FRÆME?**

Since 2001 as a resident of la Friche Belle de Mai, Fræme creates, develops, and implements contemporary art production and distribution systems. By articulating its

activities around two dynamics, the professional career of artists as well as the exploration of the different meeting points between artwork and audience, Fræme initiates several experiments led by artists and the public, so many projects in which creation is part of a vector of individual and collective expressions.

The association deals with the production of exhibitions, events, and artwork, nationally and internationally while engaging with the regional scenes, it is also a major actor of the art market with the international contemporary art fair Art-o-rama. Fræme is supporting artists through a multi-partner residency program, the publication of monographic books, and has been undertaking an active approach in cultural rights for many years, deploying a wide range of arts outreach activities and cultural projects for all.

#### **LINKS:**

**[DOWNLOAD THE ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES](#)**

**[HD IMAGES AVAILABLE FOR THE PRESS](#)**

**[READ THE PUBLICATION ONLINE](#)**

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#### **PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

##### **MIMICRY—EMPATHY**

Exhibition dates: 12 March – 5 June 2022

Opening on the 11th of March 2022, 17:00 - 22:00

Venue: Tour Jobin, 4<sup>th</sup> floor

Friche la Belle de Mai, 41 rue Jobin, F-13002, Marseille

Produced by **Fræme** (Marseille)

Curated by **Susanne Bürner**

Partners: Friche la Belle de mai, Goethe Institut

Supported by: IFA (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), Bundeskanzleramt (Autriche), Ambassade des Pays-Bas en France, Behörde für Kultur und Medien Hamburg, Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur - Ministère de la Culture, Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Conseil Départemental des Bouches-du-Rhône, Ville de Marseille

Networks: Plein sud, PAC

#### **PRESS CONTACTS**

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