



# ~~total refusal~~

March 14, 2024 - April 25, 2024

**Opening Reception:**

March 14, 2024, 6-8pm

**GALLERY HOURS:**

Mon. - Thurs.: 10am - 6pm  
Frid. - Sun.: By appointment

For Press Inquiries and  
appointment viewings,  
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**Goethe-Institut New York**

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The Goethe-Institut New York is pleased to present the first New York City institutional solo exhibition of the filmmaking collective Total Refusal. Founded in 2018, the pseudo-Marxist media guerrilla group of artists, researchers, and filmmakers upcycle the resources of mainstream video games to create political narratives in the form of videos, interventions, performances, and lectures.

The artists of Total Refusal are keen onlookers of our world and the derivative products of our society. Video games, as cultural objects, are rich artifacts that hold up a mirror to reflect the values and social realities of the cultures that produce them. In the videos presented in this exhibition, Total Refusal probes the presentation and re-presentation of our world as mediated through the experience of digital mapping (*Superwonder*, 2021); walks the viewer through a Tom Clansy-based post-apocalyptic New York City on a casual historical tour punctuated by bullets and night-stalkers to reveal the invisible history of this built environment (*Operation Jane Walk*, 2018); and investigates the hard-coded labor of NPCs (non-player characters), the gendered roles of traditional societies, and Sisyphean repetition without relief or respite, recalling the ethos of late-stage capitalism (*Hardly Working*, 2022). Total Refusal uses the contemporary mainstream video game as a didactic tool to unveil and subvert the contingencies of human perception, culture, environment, and sociality, thereby revealing the potentialities of alternative ways of being.

*Curated by Zachary B. Feldman with curatorial assistance by Olivia Al-Slaiman.*

The artist, researcher, and filmmaker collective Total Refusal (Susanna Flock, Adrian Haim, Jona Kleinlein, Robin Klengel, Leonhard Müllner, Michael Stumpf) appropriates contemporary video games and writes about games and politics to reveal the political apparatus beyond the glossy and hyperreal textures of the video game medium. Their work has been celebrated with more than 50 awards and honorary mentions, such as the European Film Award, Best Short Direction Award at the Locarno Film Festival, the Diagonale Film Award for the Best Short Documentary, the Contemporary Visual Arts Award of Styria and the Vimeo Staff Pick Award. Total Refusal's work has been screened at over 250 film and art festivals including the Berlinale, Doc Fortnight at MOMA New York, and the Locarno Film Festival, and has been exhibited at various exhibition spaces like the Architecture Biennial Venice 2021, the HEK Basel, and Ars Electronica Linz.

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**Susanna Flock** (b. 1988, Graz) lives and works in Vienna as a visual/media artist. She graduated at the University of Art and Design Linz (2015) and at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (2017), Austria. Flock works in the field of video and video installation and focuses on internet phenomena. Recently, she was awarded with the Cité internationale des arts residency of BMKÖS (2024) Pixel, Bytes and Film residency (2020), Viktor-Fogarassy-Price (2019), the Rote Fabrik residency Zurich (2019), start-scholarship for media arts Austria (2018) and with a fellowship at Akademie Schloss Solitude (2018). Joined Total Refusal in 2020.

**Adrian Jonas Haim** (b. 1991, Vienna) does film and politics in Vienna and elsewhere. Studies of Political Science & Experimental Game Cultures at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Involved in various writing, music and art projects with a focus on marxism and ideology in cross media culture. Former editor at MALMOE Zeitung, programmer for film series on politics of remembrance (Filmclub Tacheles, Vienna Jewish Filmfestival, This Human World Filmfestival). Joined Total Refusal in 2020.

**Jona Kleinlein** (b. 1993, Stuttgart) lives and works in Vienna and focuses on various aspects of film, video games and installations. He studied at the Nordland College of Art and Film in Lofoten, Norway. Kleinlein works as a filmmaker in various projects. Joined Total Refusal in 2020.

**Robin Klengel** (b. 1988, Graz), lives and works as an artist and cultural anthropologist in Vienna and Graz. He researches, writes texts, gives lectures and courses and makes films in the field of artistic-scientific research of urban and digital spaces. He studied cultural anthropology in Graz and Berlin. Since 2021 he is co-chairman of the interdisciplinary art and culture space Forum Stadtpark in Graz. He co-founded the collective in 2018.

**Leonhard Müllner** (b. 1987, Graz), lives and works in Vienna as a visual artist and media researcher. He studied Visual- and Media Art in Linz, Leipzig and Vienna and recently finished his PHD in Game Studies / Game Art. He co-founded the collective in 2018.

**Michael Stumpf** (b. 1985, Wels), studied Philosophy in Vienna as well as Media Culture and Art Theories in Linz (unfinished). His research interlaces a background in phenomenology with media and culture semiotics, analyzing the relevance and operating mode of popular cultural tropes. He works as an artist, designer and coder. Stumpf co-founded the collective in 2018.