

James Gregory Atkinson, *6 Friedberg-Chicago*, 2021, (Film Still) © James Gregory Atkinson.**3 Lieder für Marie Nejar**
JAMES GREGORY ATKINSON
January 14 - March 19, 2026**EXHIBITION OPENING**

January 14th, 2026
at Goethe-Institut New York

GALLERY HOURS

Monday-Thursday
10am-6pm

PRESS INQUIRIES

and appointment viewings:
program-newyork@goethe.de

The Goethe-Institut New York is pleased to present **3 Lieder für Marie Nejar [3 Songs for Marie Nejar]**, a solo exhibition by artist **JAMES GREGORY ATKINSON**. The exhibition showcases both new and older works, primarily presented as installation, video, sound, and archival material developed over the past five years.

Featuring a vinyl record, a film, an archival time capsule, two clocks, and a series of three historical celluloid negatives, the exhibition is the latest in a series of works wholly dedicated to the life and legacy of Marie Nejar—the last known Black survivor of Nazi Germany.

The film *6 Friedberg-Chicago* (2021) is set at the decommissioned Ray Barracks, a former U.S. Army base in Friedberg, Germany, active from 1945 to 2007, where the artist's father was once stationed. The protagonists of the film are sons of African American soldiers who served in Germany, exploring a familial and historical connection. Adopting the stylistic imagery and posturing of R&B music videos, the film mobilizes popular visual language as a form of a fugitive archive. The barracks emerge as a deeply entangled postwar contact zone between Germany and the United States, where personal memory, military presence, and Black diasporic experiences intersect. The film's soundtrack features harpist Ahya Simone performing the *Toxi-Lied* („Ich möcht' so gern nach Hause geh'n“), originally recorded by Afro-German actress and singer Marie Nejar for the film *Toxi* (dir. Robert A. Stemmle, 1952), which dramatized the experiences of some of the first children born to Black Allied servicemen and white German mothers.

Around the same period, Nejar was active as a teddy-bear-toting “child star,” performing across German-speaking countries under the stage name Leila Negra. The record compilation that gives the exhibition its name features three songs from Nejar's discography, transposed for harp and re-recorded with Simone at Berlin's Klosterruine in 2023. It includes *My Curly-Headed Baby*, composed by George H. Clutsam and later translated into German (*N*wiegenlied*) by Wilhelm Henzen, first recorded by Paul Robeson in 1930, and published in German by Bruce Low in 1949. Nejar's 1954 version reflects both a troubling transatlantic cross-pollination of racist ideologies and the pioneering reclamation of cultural narratives by Black German artists—a legacy that continues in this exhibition and beyond.

Continuing a concern that Atkinson has foregrounded since 2021, the exhibition juxtaposes new renditions of Nejar's songs with the broader cultural conditions in which they emerged, while tracing their resurgence in contemporary Afro-German and African American biographies amid fractured transatlantic modalities of cultural exchange and mutual influence. Atkinson's primary motivation remains an achronological and ongoing archival practice that relies on iteration, layering, and juxtaposition—within and beyond the time capsule—to reveal biographical and personal points of entry into significantly broader histories of Germany and the United States.

Text by Eric Otieno Sumba
Curated by Zachary B. Feldman
Curatorial assistance by Liz Köhnke

ARTIST BIO

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In his research-based exhibition projects, artist **JAMES GREGORY ATKINSON** combines social and political history with autobiographical perspectives to examine the absence of Afro-German experiences within established narratives of race, identity, and nationality in Germany. By integrating documents, objects, oral histories, bodies, places, and performative practices into a living, shared archive, he reimagines memory, experience, and knowledge as relational and dynamic, with each element functioning as a historical carrier. Situated within a lineage of post-conceptual artists, Atkinson approaches the archive as a site of self-determination and a locus for critiquing power, engaging communities and significant sites through participatory methods that bring historical and contemporary experiences into dialogue, reflecting their coexisting and interwoven temporalities.

This exhibition is made possible with the generous support of Hessische Kulturstiftung and the Friends of Goethe New York.

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