



BOUNDARIES

MEMO AKTEN

Curator: Walter Vanhaerents
Project advisor: Dominique Moulon
Choreography and dance: Katie Peyton Hofstadter
Music: Rutger Zuydervelt
20 Apr. – 24 Nov. 2024
Open: 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Closed on Tuesdays

Chiesa di Santa Maria della Visitazione
Fondamenta Zattere Ai Gesuati, 30123 Venice
Vaporetto stop: Zattere

Admission free

Vanhaerents**ArtCollection**

Memo Akten. Boundaries

The Vanhaerents Art Collection is pleased to announce its exhibition *Memo Akten. Boundaries*. On view from 20 April through 24 November 2024 at the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Visitazione, the exhibition will premiere a new digital video animation by multidisciplinary artist, musician and researcher Memo Akten. Curated by Walter Vanhaerents with the assistance of Dominique Moulon, it is the third major presentation by the Vanhaerents Art Collection in Venice, following *Heartbreak Hotel* and *The Death of James Lee Byars. Zad Moultaqa in Dialogue*, which was part of the Collateral Events program of *La Biennale di Venezia, 58th International Art Exhibition* (2019) and attracted just under 130,000 visitors.

Memo Akten (b. 1975, Istanbul, Turkey; lives and works in Los Angeles, United States) is one of the leading figures in new media art. Experimenting with emerging technologies since the early 2010s, he is best known for creating digital installations and interactive environments that address issues of perception, cognition and identity. Akten's works often destabilize constructs and power mechanisms that underlie processes of sensory perception and identification. Drawing inspiration from both personal experiences and recent discoveries in various scientific fields, the artist argues for new forms of subjectivity that acknowledge diversity and otherness, and establish meaning through dynamic and empathetic relations.

Commissioned by the Vanhaerents Art Collection especially for this occasion, *Boundaries* is a digital animation video with accompanying soundscape, created through the use of generative artificial intelligence and custom code. As indicated by its title, this work revolves around barriers, borders and demarcations; more specifically, it envisions boundaries less as lines of division but more as permeable zones that allow to connect with what lies beyond. Making no *a priori* distinctions between the things we often perceive as mutually different or incompatible, *Boundaries* shifts from the molecular to the cosmic and back, elegantly blending visuals that borrow from the everyday and the transcendent, the natural and the virtual, the organic and the inanimate ... Adding further layers, its complex meditative soundtrack interweaves various artistic genres and cultural connotations.

Memo Akten: "In essence, this piece is about boundaries—those imaginary, fluid barriers. The imaginary boundaries between ourselves and our environment, body and soul, the material and the immaterial. Yet, boundaries are merely constructs of our human mind. We are not separate from the universe; we are not even in it—we are integral parts of its fabric. Just as waves are manifestations of the ocean, we are manifestations of the universe. And while we are subatomic waves dancing in cosmic quantum fields, we also dance at the macroscale. We dance to express ourselves, to connect with each other, our environment and the 'divine'. We dance to experience union with the universe directly. *Boundaries* aims to induce a contemplative experience, encouraging us to reflect on these ideas."



Memo Akten, *Boundaries* [exhibition view, simulation], 2023-24. Image: copyright the artist

Through its open-ended narrative and its dream-like intermingling of images and sounds, *Boundaries* invites multiple viewings and interpretations by the audience. For the artist himself, this project holds a very particular significance and meaning. Having witnessed first-hand the growing polarisation in his native Turkey and the current political antagonism in the United States (the artist also studied in the United Kingdom during the divisive times of Brexit), Akten has become increasingly concerned with contemporary ideologies that undermine mutual solidarity, social cohesion and democracy. With *Boundaries*, the artist seeks to counteract these narratives that brand the Other an adversary, calling for symbiosis and synergies through dialogue, even between organic and synthetic life forms.

Created especially for this exhibition, *Boundaries* engages with the cultural history of Venice. To be presented in the chancel of the Santa Maria della Visitazione, Akten's work with its continuous upward motion of pictorial motifs, set in radiant tones, evokes associations with *The Assumption of the Virgin*, the iconic altar painting by Titian, one of the masters of the Venetian School. In addition, *Boundaries* also subtly but thoughtfully hints to the minor arts and displaced communities that have been living at the heart of the city for centuries. Particularly, the patterns of stylised delicate flowers in this work can be seen as a reference to Jewish communities, which traded their textiles on the island of Giudecca as early as the 1350s. As Akten's project pays homage to the creative spirit of social groupings that have often been overlooked or forgotten, this exhibition at the Santa Maria della Visitazione, which overlooks the Giudecca Canal, gives further weight to the association.

Technical fiche of the work

Memo Akten

Boundaries (2023–24)

HD digital animation video on LED screen with accompanying soundscape
dimensions variable (in this exhibition: 900 x 400 cm)

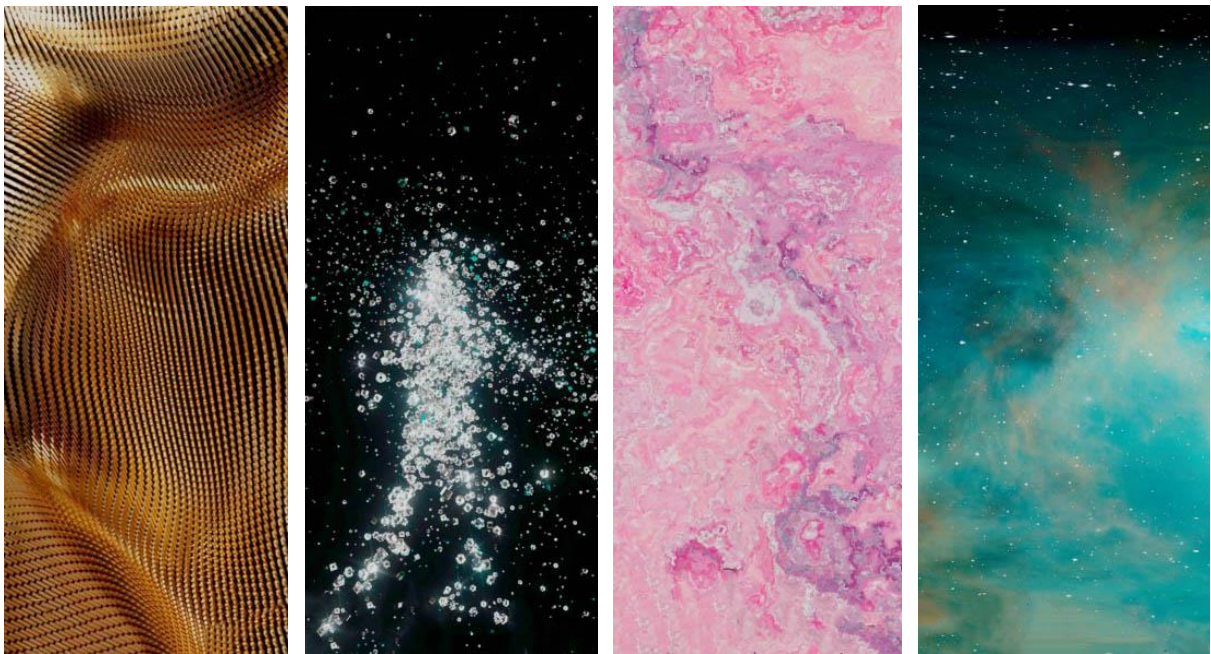
duration: 9 min.

ed. 5 + 1 A.P.

commissioned by the Vanhaerents Art Collection

music: Rutger Zuydervelt

choreography and dance: Katie Peyton Hofstadter



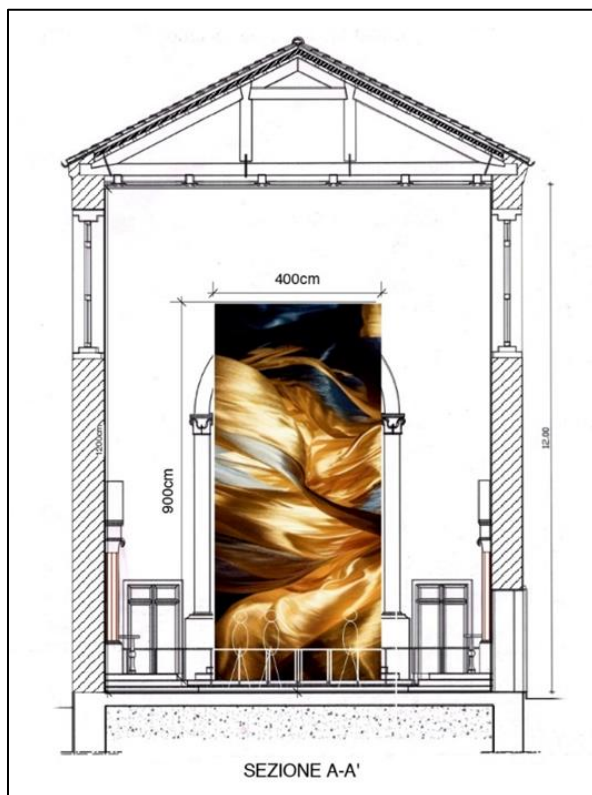
Memo Akten, *Boundaries* [production stills], 2023-24. Images: copyright the artist

Santa Maria della Visitazione



The exhibition *Memo Akten. Boundaries* takes place at the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Visitazione, which is located in the Dorsoduro district on the banks of the Giudecca Canal. Architecturally, this early Cinquecento aisleless church is best known for its refined Lombardesque facade and its wooden panelled ceiling, with paintings depicting the Visitation by the Virgin Mary as well as numerous saints.

The church is easily accessible by vaporetto and within walking distance of the Gallerie dell' Accademia and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. Since 2008, the church has been used regularly as a site for exhibitions. *The Death of James Lee Byars. Zad Moultaqa in Dialogue*, organised by the Vanhaerents Art Collection, was presented here in 2019.



Memo Akten's work *Boundaries* is positioned on the longitudinal axis of the church's interior (the line where materiality and spirituality meet according to Christian belief). It is presented on a LED screen of 9 by 4 meter, extending from the tiled floor of the chancel nearly all across to the arched ceiling. As such, *Boundaries* takes on a monumental presence, enlivening the exhibition site and allowing for a direct and immersive experience.

Memo Akten

Memo Akten (b. 1975, Istanbul, Turkey) is a multi-disciplinary artist, musician, and researcher, currently based in Los Angeles. He creates speculative simulations and data dramatizations to investigate the intricacies of human-machine entanglements; perception and states of consciousness; and the tensions between ecology, technology, science and spirituality. For more than a decade, his work has been exploring artificial intelligence, big data and our collective consciousness as scraped by the Internet, to reflect on the human condition; drawing connections between intelligence in nature, intelligence in machines, perception, consciousness, neuroscience, fundamental physics, ritual and religion. Akten writes code and uses data-driven design and aesthetics to create moving images, experimental animations, sounds, large-scale responsive installations and performances.



Memo Akten received his PhD from Goldsmiths University of London, specialising in creative applications of artificial intelligence (deep neural networks), and in this field he is considered one of the world's leading pioneers. He is currently Assistant Professor of Computational Art at University of California San Diego (UCSD). He is a frequent keynote speaker on topics involving art, science, technology and culture.

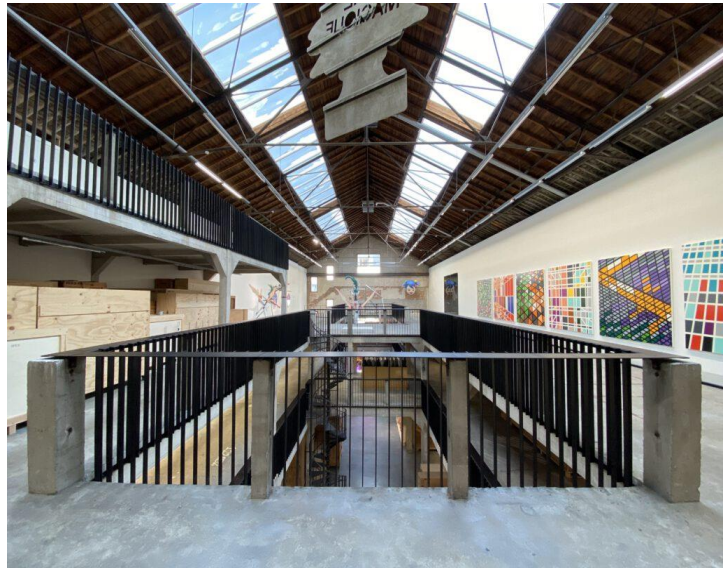
Akten received the prestigious Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica for his work *Forms* in 2013. His work has been shown internationally at venues such as The Royal Opera House (London), ZKM Centre for Art and Media (Karlsruhe), Max Ernst Museum (Brühl), Sonar Festival (Barcelona), Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai Ming Contemporary Art Museum, Mori Art Museum (Tokyo), File Festival (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro), Ars Electronica (Linz), Australian Centre for the Moving Image (Melbourne); and at exhibitions such as The Grand Palais's *Artistes & Robots* in 2018 (Paris), the Barbican's *More than Human* in 2019 (London) and the Victoria & Albert Museum's landmark *Decode* exhibition in 2009 (London), amongst others.

Akten's work is held in numerous public and private collections around the world, and has been featured in many major publications, as well as a number of books. He has collaborated with celebrities such as Lenny Kravitz, U2, Depeche Mode and Professor Richard Dawkins; and brands including Google, Apple, Twitter, Deutsche Bank and Sony PlayStation. He has served as mentor and jury member on numerous international awards, residencies and conferences such as SIGGRAPH, Ars Electronica, and Google Arts and Culture.

Vanhaerents Art Collection

The Vanhaerents Art Collection, a non-profit organisation founded in 2006 by Walter Vanhaerents and his children Joost and Els, is located in Brussels, occupying an industrial building of 3,500 square meters in the vibrant Dansaert district.

At its core lies the collection that Walter Vanhaerents has amassed over the course of five decades and that now ranges among the most significant private art collections worldwide.



Showcasing the vitality and diversity of contemporary art, the collection spans from the 1970s to the present, featuring works by both established artists and emerging talents, in various mediums—painting, sculpture, installation, video, photography ... The collection includes iconic works by Ai Weiwei, Matthew Barney, Christian Boltanski, James Lee Byars, Katharina Fritsch, Rashid Johnson, Barbara Kruger, Paul McCarthy, Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, Bruce Nauman, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Sterling Ruby, Ugo Rondinone, Cindy Sherman, Lorna Simpson, Rudolf Stingel, Bill Viola, Danh Vo, Christopher Wool, Franz West, Haegue Yang ...

Stemming from its desire to make art accessible to a wide audience, the Vanhaerents Art Collection has staged multiple large-scale exhibitions at its Brussels headquarters. These exhibitions each highlighted different aspects of the collection and ran for three years (*Disorder in the House*, 2007–10; *Sympathy for the Devil*, 2011–13; *Man in the Mirror*, 2014–17). Concurrently, the project space of the Collection was host to a diverse program of solo exhibitions; these were organised in close collaboration with the artists involved (David Altmejd, Philippe Parreno, AES+F, Tomás Saraceno ...). In 2018, the Vanhaerents Art Collection began experimenting with more innovative ways of exhibiting via the format of an open storage, offering visitors a unique, immersive art encounter and resulting in the acclaimed group exhibitions *EXH#01*, 2018–20, and *EXH#02*, 2021–23.

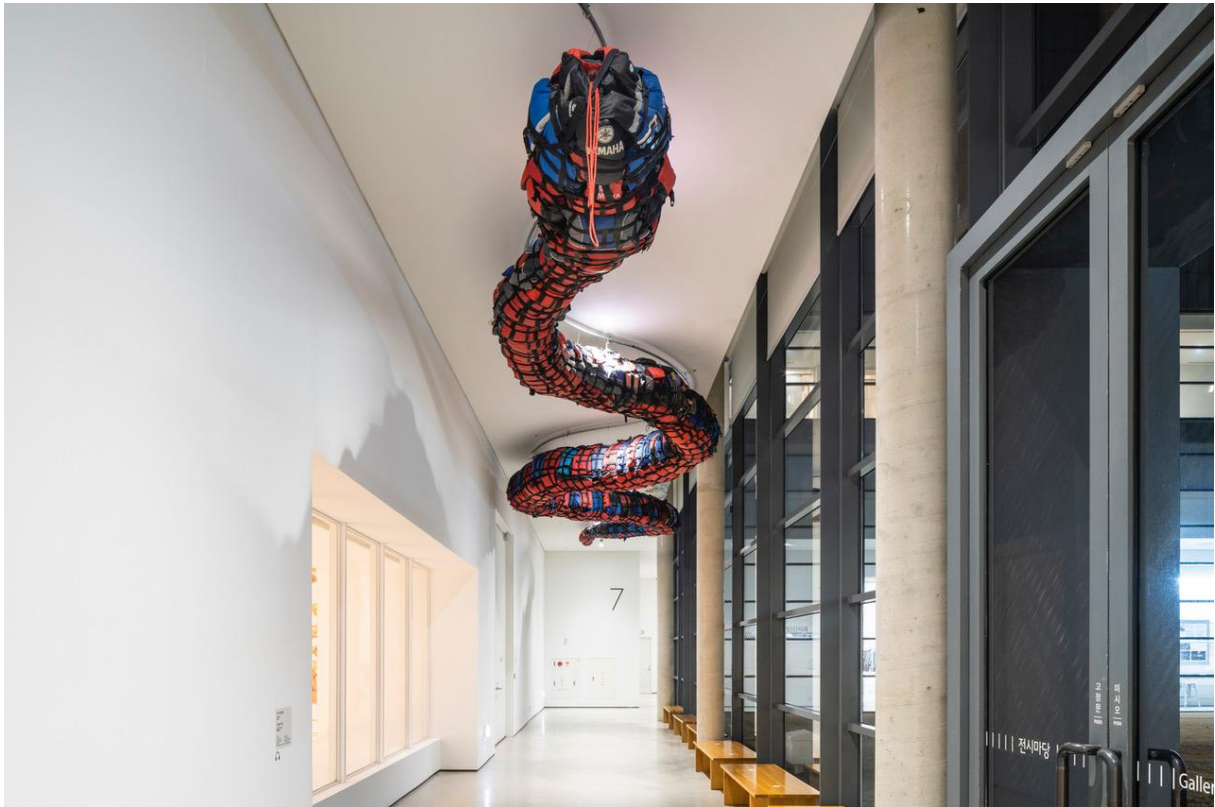


The Vanhaerents Art Collection has organised several exhibitions abroad. In 2015, it staged *Heartbreak Hotel*, its first major exhibition outside Belgium, in Venice at Zuecca Project Space. The follow-up, *The Death of James Lee Byars. Zad Moultaqa in Dialogue* in 2019, was part of the Collateral Events program of *La Biennale di Venezia, 58th International Art Exhibition*. Presented at the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Visitazione, it was one of the Collection's most successful exhibitions to date, attracting just under 130,000 visitors.

From October 2023 through January 2024, a selection of works from the Vanhaerents Art Collection was on view at the 6,500 square metre space of Le Tripostal in Lille, France, under the title

Au bout de mes rêves. This exhibition, curated by Walter Vanhaerents and Caroline David, drew over 110,000 visitors.

VIEWING DEPOT EXH#03 – The Year of the Dragon



Ai Weiwei, *Life Vest Snake*, 2019. Copyright the artist

Opening on 24 April at the Vanhaerents Art Collection in Brussels, *EXH#03* is the third major presentation, highlighting recent acquisitions and seminal works from the collection, all in the unique setting of a viewing depot. Drawing inspiration from the Chinese calendar and astrology, this 2024 exhibition aptly finds its thematic core in the zodiac sign of the dragon, symbolising creativity, curiosity, confidence and generosity. Associative in nature, *EXH#03* brings together large-scale works that fuse aesthetic innovation with emotional directness and intensity. One of the focal points in the exhibition, spanning the full three floors of the Vanhaerents Art Collection, is Ai Weiwei's haunting installation *Life Vest Snake* (2019), which seamlessly intertwines traditional Eastern iconography with poignant reflections on the contemporary refugee crisis.

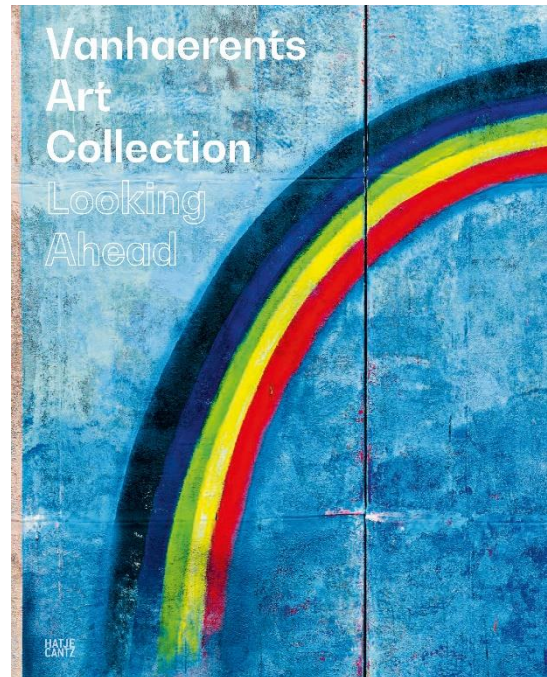
EXH#03 is curated by Walter Vanhaerents together with his children Joost and Els.

With works by: Ai Weiwei, Alvaro Barrington, Amoako Bofo, Dominic Chambers, Alexandre Diop, Urs Fischer, Antony Gormley, Jeff Koons, Paul McCarthy, Gillian Wearing, Franz West, Kennedy Yanko ...

Looking Ahead

In the summer of 2023, Hatje Cantz published *Vanhaerents Art Collection, Looking Ahead*. This richly illustrated book explores the history of the Vanhaerents Art Collection and chronicles all of its exhibitions since 2007. Highlighting more than a hundred major works from the collection, this publication is a testament to the spirit of the Vanhaerents family and their passion for new and forward-looking art.

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Practical and contact information

Memo Akten. Boundaries

20 April – 24 November 2024

Chiesa di Santa Maria della Visitazione

Fondamenta Zattere Ai Gesuati, 30123 Venice

Vaporetto stop: Zattere

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Press kit and visuals are available for download here: [[link](#)]

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