

HMKV

Hartware MedienKunstVerein

EN
WORK DESCRIPTIONS +
FLOOR PLAN

**THESE
PARADISE
MACHINE**

**NIKLAS
GOLDBACH**

**EXTENDED
UNTIL
1 SEPTEMBER
2024**

16
11 AUGUST 2024

Niklas Goldbach – *The Paradise Machine*
16 March – 11 August 2024

An exhibition by HMKV
Hardware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund



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✉️ @hmkv_de
www.hmkv.de

Curator: Inke Arns
Texts: Inke Arns
Translation (EN): Patrick Boris Kremer
Copy editing: Anne Fries (DE), Alexandra Cox (EN)
Design: Ten Ten Team, Dortmund

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Architecture as a ‘paradise machine’ is the main theme of Niklas Goldbach’s first major survey exhibition in Germany. The ambivalent relationships between utopia and dystopia play a central role in his works.

Into the Paradise Machine (2022) takes us on a journey through the artificial paradises of Center Parcs, a chain of holiday resorts with locations in various European countries. It combines video footage with excerpts from the diary written in 1943 by the Dutch Center Parcs architect Jaap Bakema during his internment in the German deportation camp Royallieu-Compiègne in northern France.

The exhibition design developed by the artist is itself inspired by the architecture of the Center Parcs. The photographic series *Permanent Daylight* (since 2013), which shows utopian/dystopian architectures from across the world, is presented on the interior walls of the bungalows.

In *1550 San Remo Drive* (2017), Goldbach visits the house in Pacific Palisades commissioned by the German writer Thomas Mann in 1942 while the latter was in exile in California, and in *A Date With Destiny* (2019), he travels to California’s Salton Sea, once a ‘miracle in the desert’ but now an ecological disaster.

The exhibition brings together video and photo works from the past ten years alongside three major new works produced especially for this exhibition.

Niklas Goldbach (b. 1973 in Witten, Germany) works with video and photography. He lives in Berlin.

CURATED BY INKE ARNS (HMKV)

Video installation, 18:00 min, 2017

1550 SAN REMO DRIVE

1

1550 San Remo Drive was filmed in February 2017 at the Thomas Mann House in Pacific Palisades, California.

The video explores the house the German writer commissioned in 1942 while in exile in the U.S. Goldbach combines images of the uninhabited house (shortly before its refurbishment) with quotes from Mann's diaries (1940–43). These are completed by quotes from the architect of the house, JR Davidson, and adverts by real estate agents marketing the house as a potential 'teardown' (without the slightest mention of Thomas Mann). Eventually, it was bought by the German government for US \$13.25 million in November 2016. At the time of the sale, the house was not heritage-listed.

The quotes from Mann's diaries, which comment at length and somewhat pedantically on the planning and construction progress, symbolise the privilege of life in exile. In 1942, Europe was in the midst of the Second World War, Germany had just attacked the Soviet Union, and the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust were stalking the continent.

Video installation & lecture performance,
55:00 min, 2022/23

INTO THE PARADISE MACHINE

2

Into the Paradise Machine (2022) takes us to the artificial paradises of Center Parcs, a franchise of holiday resorts with locations in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France and England. Since its establishment in 1967, the company has been offering families a 'second home for a short holiday in the countryside'. The resorts are a fusion of Dutch modernist ideals and Catholic moral conservatism and are firmly targeted at traditional family structures.

Shot using various film techniques and at different times of the day, Goldbach's video focuses entirely on the design of the sprawling bungalow complexes, which all share a similar spatial arrangement and an identical style, and on their integration into the different areas of vegetation. The images have been edited to a hypnotic soundtrack by Schneider TM.

We hear excerpts from the diary of the Dutch architect Jacob ('Jaap') Bakema (1914–1981), whose architectural firm Van den Broek en Bakema was responsible for the design of the Center Parcs bungalow complexes. Written during his time as a prisoner in the German deportation camp Royallieu-Compiègne in northern France in 1943, the diary reveals Bakema's strategies of survival and coping, while providing insights into his views on natural philosophy, architecture and society.

TODAY ON LUMEN 2000



3

Piet Derksen (1913–1996), the founder of the Center Parc franchise, was not only one of the richest Dutch men but also a very devout Catholic. In 1980, he set up the Levend Water (Living Water) foundation, whose aim was to ‘spread the gospel in accordance with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and inspired by the Catholic community within and outside the Netherlands’. Through another foundation, named Getuigenis van Gods Liefde (Testimony of God’s Love), he was also involved in philanthropic activities. Derksen was a great admirer of Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa and the American nun Mother Angelica, to whom he provided financial support for her staunchly conservative Eternal Word Television Network. ‘Lumen 2000 TV Magazine’, a programme funded by Derksen’s foundations, reported extensively on the projects he supported worldwide. In his found-footage video, Niklas Goldbach has compiled the beginnings of the various episodes so as to convey a sense of the global work of Derksen’s charity empire, which was destined to reach its peak in the year 2000.

THE WORLD



4

The World is an artificial archipelago located off the coast of Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, whose construction began in 2003. It consists of 300 islands that are arranged in the shape of a world map and can be seen from space. The islands, which can only be reached by boat or helicopter, were destined for development with hotel complexes and luxury villas and subsequent sale to millionaires. However, the global financial and real-estate crisis of 2007 brought construction to a halt. Today, the man-made archipelago is sinking back into the sea.

Shot in long, almost meditative takes, Goldbach’s video references key motifs of German Romanticism. A solitary figure looking out over a vast landscape symbolises the insignificance of man in the face of nature. However, in light of the sinking archipelago, we are compelled to ask ourselves whether it stands for humankind contemplating its own demise.

Video installation, 19:04 min, 2019

A DATE WITH DESTINY

5

A Date With Destiny was filmed during one day in holiday resorts along the Salton Sea. With a surface of nearly 1,000 square kilometres, it is the largest lake in California – and the site of an ecological disaster.

The lake was created by accident: In 1905, a dam on the Colorado River burst, continuously pouring water into the Salton Basin desert valley for two years. This resulted in the formation of a lake 70 km long and 30 km wide. In the 1950s, developers began promoting the area as the Salton Riviera, a ‘miracle in the desert’. Hotels, yacht clubs, apartment blocks and schools sprang up on the shores of the sea, which became a holiday destination for the rich and famous. In its heyday, the Salton Riviera attracted 1.5 million visitors a year, making it the most popular tourist attraction in California.

As the lake is landlocked, it has registered repeated cases of oxygen deficiency, salinisation and mass fish die-offs, partly due to the high levels of fertiliser contained in agricultural effluents. As a result, it is slowly drying out, leaving behind a highly contaminated landscape. Clouds of toxic dust from the lake are exacerbating the already high incidence of respiratory diseases in Southern California, and on some days the stench can be smelt in Los Angeles, some 240 km away.

2-channel video installation, disco ball,
approx. 40:00 min, 2024

PARADISE NOW

6

Paradise Now travels to various large-scale construction projects in Vietnam and Cambodia that all promise utopia. The first is Ho Thuy Tien, a 50-hectare water park that opened in 2004 just 8 kilometres outside of Huế, the former imperial capital of Vietnam. To this day, a huge, walk-in dragon sculpture, built to the tune of three million Euro, stands in the middle of a lake in the now abandoned park. The second location is Bokor Hill Station near Kampot in Cambodia, where the Sokimex Group has been building hotels, restaurants and a golf club on ruins from the French colonial era since 2008. The Thansur Bokor Highland Resort Hotel opened in 2012, and the entire mountain plateau is to be redeveloped over the next few years, with plans including the construction of an entire city (Bokor City). Other filming locations include a disco in Phnom Penh, temples in Sóc Trăng, the Premium Beach Club Kep West and the former prison island of Côn Đảo.

19 archival pigment prints on fine art paper,
framed, each 75×50 cm, since 2013

PERMANENT DAYLIGHT

7

This long-term photographic project, begun in 2013, currently consists of more than 450 photographs taken at various locations around the world. The images show places shaped by people, their historical traces or the first signs of their future materialisation/dematerialisation. However, they are resolutely devoid of human presence and emphasise the bedrocks of our societal formations. The photographs are presented in fixed sequential groups, which produce essayistic associations among them.

Photographs from *Permanent Daylight* are presented as series in the bungalows of the exhibition *The Paradise Machine*. The project's title refers to the expression 'the kingdom on which the sun never sets', which has been used in various iterations throughout history to describe global empires so big that there was always at least a part of their territory that was in daylight.

Digital print, each 119×84 cm,
12-part series, 2024

A STATE OF HAPPINESS

8

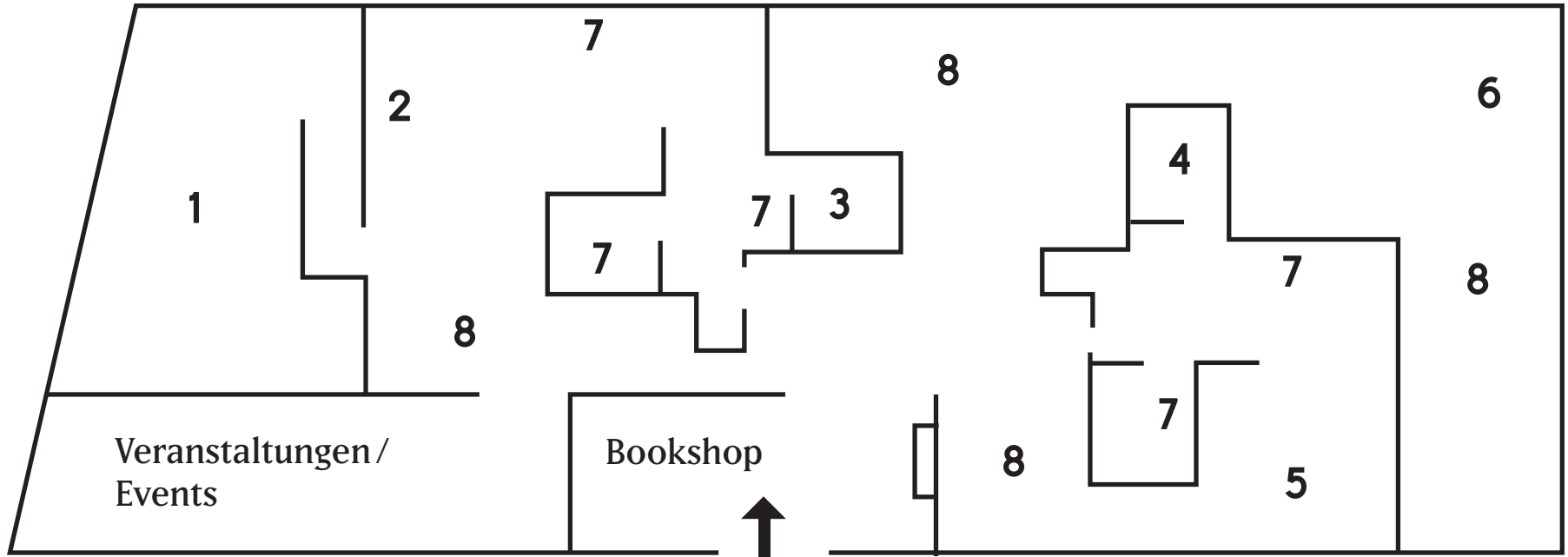
The starting point for these posters is a series of images depicting make-believe subtropical bathing landscapes in various Center Parcs. These artificial paradises are laid out beneath large daylight domes, hermetically sealed off from the outside world. They inspired the artist to conduct a thought experiment: How would Artificial Intelligence process these images? What would the 'natural' spaces look like in which it embedded these man-made landscapes? All the motifs within the pink frames are 'real' bathing landscapes, while everything outside the frames was calculated by AI. Both spaces, inside and outside the frame, are artificial paradises. These posters are displayed on construction fences outside the bungalows. They appear to advertise the construction of further recreational and holiday resorts: 'A State of Happiness' – which is, in fact, an advertising slogan used by Center Parcs in 2007.

16. MÄRZ -
11. AUGUST 2024

THE PARADISE MACHINE

NIKLAS
GOLDBACH

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Eingang /
Entrance