

PRESS RELEASE (9 September 2009)

Announcement

Art and Law III

SEIZED

Critical Art Ensemble / Institute for Applied Autonomy

Art Laboratory Berlin is pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition SEIZED (October 3 – November 15, 2009) by Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) and the Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA) as the third part of our series *Art and Law*:

Press Preview: October 1, 2009, 11am

Opening: October 2, 2009, 8pm

Artist Talk: October 4, 2009, 4pm

**Film Screening of *Strange Culture* (directed by Lynn Hershman Leeson, 2007):
November 2, 2009, 19.30pm with following discussion**

The opening of our exhibition SEIZED takes place in an artistically and politically frenetic time. Berlin has just been energized by the Artforum and other art fairs, we are asked to elect a new Bundestag (national elections are taking place) and the public ceremonies of the German Unification Day are upcoming. Our project fits into this area of tension: As an art exhibition it brings up questions about artistic freedom of expression and governmental repression, reflects about the interdependency between politics and business and presents artistic strategies, which try to undercut this. America, country of freedom, was the setting for the events which underlie this exhibition. It shows that it is not self-evident for artists, even in a democracy, to criticize the structures of power and to publicly take a firm stand.

The exhibition SEIZED deals with the FBI raid on the home of CAE member and art professor Steve Kurtz in Spring 2004 and the four year law case that followed. In May 2004 Steve's wife Hope died entirely unexpectedly because of an undiagnosed heart defect. Emergency responders from the Fire Department who answered Kurtz's call saw a chemistry laboratory, which was part of preparations for an upcoming show, in the couple's house. The Fire Department found this suspicious and informed the FBI. During the three-day-raid the authorities not only confiscated Kurtz's computers, archives, artworks and a set of books he was using for research on his upcoming book project, but also his wife's corpse. Steve himself was interrogated for 22 hours with the aim of charging him with "bioterrorism" and even murder. Later the charges were changed to "wire and mail fraud", which finally, in 2008, was dropped due to all evidence of a crime being "insufficient on its face." In their installation *Body of Evidence* the artists turn the perpetrator-victim-relationship upside-down. As the FBI had stolen their artistic material, they, in return, confiscated the debris left behind on Steve Kurtz's lawn by the FBI agents - pizza boxes, Gatorade bottles, hazmat suits and biological sample bags, as well as written notes and a single cigar butt. The exhibition's curators Regine Rapp and Christian de Lutz write about this in the exhibition catalogue:

„The display of the notes and papers which the federal agents wrote during their raid resembles a strategy of counter-appropriation in which CAE and IAA convert those objects left behind as "evidence" for their own investigation. All in all, this turns the 'case' inside out and subverts the power structure. The items confiscated are exchanged for items left behind, which in turn form the basis for the exhibition. In a strange act of reciprocity, the

artists are able to invert the whole investigator/perpetrator system. The blank space created by the seizure of CAE's artworks is filled by the debris of the state; and with this the absence of the seized objects is made more tangible."

Besides the complex installation *Body of Evidence* the exhibition documents works and performances by CAE, on which Steve and Hope were working just before the raid, such as *Free Range Grain* (2003-2004) or *Molecular Invasion* (2002-2003). In addition, **Art Laboratory Berlin**, in collaboration with the **arsenal – institut für film und videokunst e.v.**, will present the film *Strange Culture* by Lynn Hershman Leeson, at the Arsenal Cinema, followed by a panel discussion. The film documents the events of May 2004 and their aftermath.

An exhibition catalogue will be published.

If you have any questions or wish material about the exhibition, please contact Pamina Gerhardt (responsible for Press and Public Relations):

presse@artlaboratory-berlin.org

For further information about Art Laboratory Berlin, Critical Art Ensemble and the Institute for Applied Autonomy as well as for images of the exhibition please also visit our website:

<http://www.artlaboratory-berlin.org/html/eng-press-current.htm>

http://www.artlaboratory-berlin.org/html/eng-press-current_cae_images.htm

ARTLABORATORYBERLIN

Prinzenallee 34

13359 Berlin-Wedding

www.artlaboratory-berlin.org

Opening times: Friday – Sunday, 2 – 6pm and by appointment

Free entrance

Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) is a collective of tactical media practitioners of various specializations including computer graphics, software, wetware, film/video, photography, book art and performance. CAE was founded in 1987 and has produced a wide variety of projects for an international audience at diverse venues ranging from the street, to the museum, to the Internet.

CAE is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2007 *Andy Warhol Foundation Wynn Kramarsky Freedom of Artistic Expression Grant* honoring two decades of distinguished work, and has been invited to exhibit and perform in many of the world's cultural institutions—including the Whitney Museum and the New Museum in NYC, the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington D.C., the London Museum of Natural History, the ICA London, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, der Volksbühne in Berlin, ZKM Karlsruhe, El Matadero in Madrid, Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil in Mexico City and many more.

The Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA) was founded in 1998 as an anonymous collective of engineers, designers, artists and activists united by the cause of individual and collective self-determination. Toward this end, the IAA has produced numerous projects under its flagship initiative, *Contestational Robotics*. These include several tele-operated robotic graffiti writers, *I-See*, which gained worldwide media attention as a web-based navigation service to help users avoid surveillance, and *Terminal Air*, an installation and website that visualizes the movements of airplanes believed to have been used in the CIA's "Extraordinary Rendition" program.

The IAA has won numerous awards for its work, including the 2000 *Prix Ars Electronica Award of Distinction* and several *Prix Ars Electronica* Honorable Mentions; and a *Rhizome New Media Fellowship*. The collective's work has been exhibited in museums, galleries, and public spaces internationally, including ZKM Karlsruhe, the World Information Organization in Amsterdam, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, and Mass MoCA among others.

Strange Culture documents the surreal nightmare of internationally-acclaimed artist and professor Steve Kurtz which began when his wife Hope died in her sleep of heart failure. Police who responded to Kurtz's 911 call deemed Kurtz's art suspicious and called the FBI. Within hours the artist was detained as a suspected "bioterrorist" as dozens of federal agents in Hazmat suits sifted through his work and impounded his computers, manuscripts, books, his cat, and even his wife's body. The film *Strange Culture* stars Tilda Swinton, Peter Coyote, Thomas Jay Ryan, Josh Kornbluth and Steve Kurtz, and was shown in the 2007 Berlin Film Festival "Biennale".

Lynn Hershmann Leeson is a filmmaker and new media artist who has been awarded the *Siemens-Medienkunstpreis* award from the ZKM Karlsruhe, as well as the *Golden Nica Prize* at the 1999 Ars Electronica.

ART LABORATORY BERLIN was founded as a non-profit organisation in autumn 2006 by an international group of art historians and artists. As a noncommercial art space ART LABORATORY BERLIN was established as a platform for projects concentrating on the border between visual arts and related artistic and scholarly fields on an international level.

The main focus of interest is the exhibition and placement of contemporary visual art that interacts with other creative fields, (former series have included "Art and Music", "Art and Text" and "Art and Science"). Each of these points of interaction are represented by a series of three or four diverse exhibitions. Our goal is to explore the manifold approaches of interaction and interconnection between these genres. ART LABORATORY BERLIN's current exhibition series is "Art and Law".

ART LABORATORY BERLIN is also interested in supporting contact between artists and the public as part of our exhibitions. To improve a better understanding of emerging and experimental art, we include public discussions with artists and curators. Additionally our program includes lectures, film screenings and workshops.

The current co-directors of ART LABORATORY BERLIN are: Regine Rapp (art historian, curator) and Christian de Lutz (visual artist, curator) Responsible for press and Public relations is Pamina Gerhardt (art historian).

For more information please contact Pamina Gerhardt:
presse@artlaboratory-berlin.org