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*it's coming
through
the
air*

HOMA ARKANI

ELEN BRAGA

GARY FARRELLY

WILLIAM LUDWIG LUTGENS

WOBBE MICHA

SANDRINE MORGANTE

JIVAN VAN DER ENDE

ANYUTA WIAZEMSKY

SNAUWAERT

DAVIDE ZULLI

vormgeving affiche: Irma Janssens

vormgeving brochure: CC Zwaneberg

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It's Coming Through the Air

(EN)

There is something in the air: movements and visions that threaten free thinking, criticism, culture, and solidarity are on the rise. Governments that silence critical citizens – through violence, impenetrable bureaucratic smokescreens, or simply by refusing dialogue – form a danger to democracy. In many European countries, (extreme) right-wing parties provide the heads of government. In the United States, Donald Trump began a second term in office, despite a conviction for criminal offenses. Although democratically elected, these leaders hold views that could be deemed undemocratic, for example regarding press(freedom) and the judiciary, or that are discriminatory and repressive in nature.

Several sharp voices, such as Rosan Smits and Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, discern a worrying pattern towards authoritarianism. They (independently) discuss how extremist ideology can become normalized when certain political parties are voted into a democratic government, and how they threaten to dismantle the foundations of democracy, such as freedom of the press and the rule of law, from within.

The propagation of alternative truths that push polarization and preferably also undermine critical voices in one fell swoop is among what Smits identifies as typical instruments of authoritarian movements: "Every fascist uses propaganda to stir up hostile thinking and disrupt public debate. (...) Journalists, artists, and academics, among others, can be the sand in the propaganda machine with their critical thinking skills".[1] *It's Coming Through the Air* brings together nine contemporary artists who examine political society from personal perspectives, question dominant narratives, and take socially critical stances.

Alternative truths

'Post-truth' was elected Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries in 2016. The concept represents a society in which truth is the subject of discussion – a discussion that is really about power. In their book *De Waarheidscrisis* (*The Truth Crisis*, 2025), Martine Prange defines 'post-truth' as an "epistemological crisis of democracy" characterized by "circumstances in which objective facts are less important than emotions in the forming of public opinion (...) not because the truth has become irrelevant, but because the impression is created that anyone can speak the truth." [2]

Who determines the truth? The fact that truth is open to discussion, and the consequent increase of misinformation, are symptoms of a time when populism is gaining power. "The facts have become mere opinions," says Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, who followed the course of European and American politics for two years for his columns in the newspaper *De Morgen*. [3] He adds: "Extreme right-wing populism flourishes in a world where truth has shattered into a cacophony of opinions, because in such a climate the most extreme voices effortlessly drown out every nuance." [4]

In a long-term project, **Homa Arkani** explores the symbolic, political and collective meanings of hair. The painting *Unexpected Answer* (2025) echoes *La réponse imprévue* (1933) by Belgian surrealist René Magritte. The hair in Arkani's painting forms a portal, reinforced by the arched rounding of the frame. It suggests a veil toward something soft, intimate, but also questions, like Magritte, the perception and knowledge of what lies behind the merely visible. What is hidden between the dark folds of what is shown? As an Iranian artist, Arkani views the concealment or politically symbolic revelation of hair as an analogy for how authorities politicize facts and truths. What is hidden, who has access to seeing (or knowing), and who determines our perception of reality?

In her latest works, Arkani reflects on the pivotal moment – an as yet unattained metamorphosis – in which we find ourselves. In the eye of the storm, it is still unclear what the world looks like at the other end. In *The Old Rattle*, the ground around an organic portal is strewn with unopened shells and an old rattle, which represents a role similar to that of a vanitas motif in historical still lifes: a symbol shifting between subconscious memory, playfulness, and warning.

In her analysis of totalitarian regimes, Hannah Arendt discusses how essential a sense of abandonment (of not-belonging) is to them. "(It) is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial revolution and have become acute with the rise of imperialism at the end of the last century (...) To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others (...)." [5] She emphasizes the importance of dialogue and community for affirming individual identity and a moral framework (which are therefore also interconnected). She calls this "common warrant" "(...) the common sense, men (sic) need in order to experience and live and know their way in a common world." [6]

It is beautiful that Arendt describes morality as "knowing their way". In his works, **Davide Zulli** makes tangible an intrinsic existential link between identification and orientation—between belonging in a physical environment and belonging in a common world. In the series *A Piece Here and There (like a disrupted cadaver)* (2026) he cuts up old land and road maps into random rectangles. He then stacks these on top of each other from large to small. This gesture is ironic, because it mimics the artificiality of rigid national borders, while simultaneously rendering them completely useless by aestheticizing them in a kind of absurd confusion. Who determines where borders lie, how the country to which individuals attach their cultural and national identity is demarcated? The interdisciplinary sculpture *Identification* (2025/2026) also approaches identity as a fundamentally fluid concept, to which an entire bureaucratic structure is attached. The physical environment in which we find ourselves determines identity parameters. It is not just about where we are, but who we are.

Gary Farrelly's work zooms in and out between political contexts and their personal, emotional impact. The Irish artist, living in Brussels, often paraphrases bureaucratic methods and aesthetics to examine institutional power relations. In seven postcards, dependent on the postal services to reach their destination in the exhibition, he exposes a distorted parallel between, on the one hand, moments of state crisis in Ireland—periods in which "economic mismanagement, social conservatism, brain drain, corruption and political violence" ran rampant—and, on the other hand, government investments in hosting the Eurovision Song Contest, represented by the groovy, flashy designs of the stages. A globally popular event, branded as a celebration of diversity and art, is in fact a cog in a (geo)political machine,

intended to make a huge audience emotionally forget one truth (the weight of an economic crisis, the neglect of urgent social problems) and allow another (winning and organizing the Eurovision Song Contest inspires national pride) to dominate. According to Hannah Arendt, "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist." [7] Historian Timothy Snyder does not mince words: "Post-truth is pre-fascism," he wrote in 2021. "When we give up on truth, we concede power to those with the wealth and charisma to create spectacle in its place. Without agreement about some basic facts, citizens cannot form the civil society that would allow them to defend themselves." [8]

Displays of power

In the five chapters of the video series *Echoes of Protest - A Conversation in 2050* (2025) by **Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert** each have a recognizable link to our present; from the pro-Palestinian protests in Europe to the Kurdish freedom movement in Turkey. Objects that were present at peaceful protests bear witness. A balaclava dissects the ban on completely covering one's face (in France) after being worn by an undocumented sex worker, worried about being recognized and targeted while protesting. A travel passport questions the built-in bias of human rights: as an enlightened principle, they are not free from the traces of colonialism and class hierarchy. Legally, every person has the right to organise a protest - practically, a European passport is mandatory to formalize the demand with a local government. An iPhone recounts how a state and its law enforcement agencies are expected to allow every peaceful protest by principle and facilitate it safely. The objects that stayed behind until 2050, however, have seen things unfold differently.

The series was commissioned by human rights organization Amnesty International and was prompted by their report on numerous violations of the right to peaceful protest in 21 investigated European countries: from making it particularly difficult to apply for a demonstration permit, to banning demonstrations in certain locations, and unnecessary police interventions, fines, and arrests. "Amnesty International's research shows that many state authorities (...) respond to peaceful protests by cracking down on those organizing and participating in protests. This includes through the passing of repressive laws, the establishment of onerous procedural obligations,

the imposition of arbitrary or discriminatory restrictions, racist policing and the use of unnecessary or excessive force against peaceful protesters, arbitrary interferences including the arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment of protesters, as well as the increasing use of invasive surveillance technology.”[9] The report expresses particular concern about “(...) a worrying pattern across Europe (...) where public assemblies organised to express solidarity with the Palestinian people have been banned and/or disproportionately restricted; (...) and protesters also reported excessive use of force and arbitrary detentions.”[10] According to the study, disproportionate police violence is becoming increasingly common in European countries.[11]

Jivan van der Ende integrates a typical police station into the exhibition space with the title '*Waakzaam en Dienstbaar*' (*Vigilant and Serviceable*), the motto of the Dutch police. The installation is activated during a performance in which Elena Op 't Eynde embodies the archetype of The Policeman in an ironic manner. Where lies the boundary between protection and threat? Where does safety end and abuse of power begin?

In his text in the accompanying publication *Geseponeerd* (2025), curator Bas Hendrikx describes precisely the ambiguity with which The Policeman and his performance raise questions about “(...) accountability, but also about manipulation, subjugation, and the display of power. The public call to end police violence stands in stark contrast to the fetishization of authoritarian force of far-right politicians. By playing with the aesthetics and codes of authoritarianism, Jivan van der Ende questions the underlying structures of power and control and asks who, ultimately, is in control? The one who serves, or the one who is served?”[12]

The videos on two screens on the desk depict the exchange between Van der Ende and Op 't Eynde during the compilation of the publication. Apart from a few objects suggesting an association with power display (a stamp, a barrier tape), the worktables are covered with collage materials and reproductions of works intended for the book. Op 't Eynde, who designed the book, draws an analogy between the policeman and the transfer of control between artist and graphic designer. On the one hand, there are instructions, but on the other, the artist relinquishes control and power. The performance instructions establish a link between police power on the one hand and the manipulation or censorship of

images on the other.

The works of both Elen Braga and Sandrine Morgante relate to the impact of images and the associations they evoke. **Elen Braga's** tapestry *Winter in Germany* (2026) taps into the associative collective memory. The black and red color combination and the silhouettes with long black coats throw us back in time and evoke visual codes of Nazism from the 1930s and 40s, even if unintentional. A radio, also in tufted wool, brings together public speeches by authoritarian leaders – from Mussolini to Trump. The excerpt from the world-famous German Schlager *Ich bin wie du*, which provided the title for her recent solo exhibition at Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, adds a lighthearted note but also reflects on societal hierarchy. Who is like whom? Are we all equal because we are all human?

Sandrine Morgante's publication and silkscreen prints are dedicated to a particular period in Belgian history, namely the splitting of the University of Leuven into a Dutch-language section and a new, French-language section between 1966 and 1968. What began as a rather nationalist wave (with the slogan "Walloons out") grew into the birthplace of a radical left-wing movement that showed solidarity with the labor movement and later shaped the parties PVDA and PTB ("Bourgeois out"). What went down in history as student protests was about much more than the language used in higher education: it was also about class struggle, democratic citizenship, and the accessibility of education for all layers of the population. Morgante draws primarily from an archive of the initially conservative magazine *Ons Leven*, which was hijacked between September 1966 and March 1967 by a pirate editorial team of Marxist anarchists. One of Morgante's prints highlights the quote: "Il n'y avait pas de médias alternatifs, quelqu'un a eu l'idée de mettre la main sur ce journal réactonnaire." Their interventions bear witness to the immense importance of choice of words, colours, and graphic design for disseminating a political message.

Critical Awareness

Wobbe Micha's *Columns, Revisited* (2010/2026) consists of a series of sculptures clad in a layer of aluminium. The columns don't all twist in the same direction, yet this increases the load-bearing capacity of their structure. In the past, Micha sometimes presented himself as a columnist—as a tongue-in-cheek way of representing the driving forces

behind his artistic practice. The English word 'column' not only refers to an architectural element, but also to a short, opinionated article in written media in response to current events. In the press, it is a space for criticism and the exchange of opinions, analogous to art as a platform for criticism and reflection. Additionally, his screen-printed watermelon seeds on financial newspapers, feature bricks, which may refer to a work culture involving seasonal workers in the construction industry, or could evoke associations with out-of-hand confrontations (is a brick thrown to build or to destroy?). The newspapers rest on a Euro pallet, a carrier of imported goods from distant locations and, therefore, of a globalized economy.

The propagation of alternative narratives by populist parties goes hand in hand with the slow dismantling of a critical civil society, often under the guise of unavoidable economizations. This is just one way in which right-wing voices convince centrist and even left-wing policymakers to follow their line of thinking. Prange speaks of a "war against the truth" based on "a shocking anti-intellectualism, because critical thinking, higher education, art and culture are supposedly 'hobbies' for the 'left-wing elite', rather than the basis of a democratic and civilized society. (...) Everything that is vulnerable - refugees, the homeless, the sick, novice lecturer-researchers without permanent contracts, animals, artworks, rare university collections, small-scale study programs - must be removed, shut down or reduced to beggary in the current perverse austerity policy." [13]

The new work by **William Ludwig Lutgens** responds to an article that has been hiding in his personal archive for years. In 1933, the Belgian Dutch-language weekly ABC devoted an entire issue to the threat of a new war. Besides an article on new weapons and instruments of war, an "anti-fascist exhibition in the Handelsbeurs in Ghent" is mentioned. [14] Less than a year after Hitler's accession as chancellor, the impact of Nazism and its violent interventions reverberates throughout Europe.

Truth be told: this anti-fascist exhibition was part of a larger plan by the Socialist Party to find new momentum after several disappointing elections and to oppose to the recently founded Flemish nationalist party Verdinaso. In addition to artworks, a fairground, a play by a concentration camp survivor, and documentary photographs of Nazi terror were also on display at the Handelsbeurs. Artists, among whom Frits Van den Berghe historically became the most famous, responded to a palpable

ideological threat with an unmistakable artistic statement. In December 1933, the exhibition traveled to Brussels.[15]

Smits warns against the hesitation to label the politics of Trump, Putin, Orbán, Meloni, or Wilders as 'fascist' today. "Precisely this idea, that the term is exaggerated, is characteristic of how fascism works. Fascism thrives on the normalization of what was formerly extremist. (...) But when the threat is undeniable, it is too late. Anyone who thinks that 'things won't get that bad here' becomes the passive accomplice of the opposite." [16]

The exhibition *It's Coming Through the Air* takes its title from the song *Liberation Frequency* (1998) by the Swedish hardcore punk band Refused. The abstraction and openness to interpretation fit the elusiveness of these times. It's in the air. Many feel it, others deny it. Some describe it as a growing dark cloud, others consider it a passing storm. You cannot quite put your finger on it, but there are signs. At the cradle of authoritarian regimes stand a normalization of extreme ideas, a growing populism, an aversion to complexity, and a hostility toward culture. As a counterweight, informed criticism and respectful dialogue are forms of care for our democratic society. The exhibition advocates for contemporary art as an indispensable critical lens in times of 'post-truth' and as "sand in the machine" of polarization.

Could it be the sounds of liberation
Or just the image of detention?
We want the airwaves back
We want the airwaves back

Tamara Beheydt, August 2026

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IT'S COMING THROUGH THE AIR

Homa Arkani, Elen Braga, Gary Farrelly,
William Ludwig Lutgens, Wobbe Micha,
Sandrine Morgante, Jivan van der Ende,
Anyuta Wiazemsky Snauwaert, Davide Zulli

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curator: Tamara Beheydt

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2220 Heist-op-den-Berg

De tentoonstelling is vrij te bezoeken

Ma & Vr 9-16u

Di & Do 9-12u

Woe 9-20u

Za 10-17u

Zo 14-17u

