



PRESS RELEASE AND EXHIBITION TOUR

Propaganda – Flooding the Zone with Shit – It’s About Money, Stupid!

14 November 2026 – 7 March 2027

Press Preview: 13 November 2026, 11 a.m.

Opening: 13 November 2026, 6 p.m.

Featuring the artists: Joshua Citarella (US), Ben Grosser (US), Ganslmeier & Zibelnik (DE/NL/SI), Playfool (Daniel Coppen, UK, and Saki Maruyama, JP) and Oguz Sen (DE)

In collaboration with the Institute for Democracy and Civil Society (IDZ Jena), and the Research Training Group “Aesthetics of Democracy” at the Goethe University Frankfurt and TU Darmstadt.

Curated by the team of the Frankfurter Kunstverein

Propaganda in the “post-truth” era is loud, fast and emotional. A battle for minds is raging, both offline and online. A debate centred on competing world views: ideas of who belongs and who is excluded, who we believe ourselves to be and who we want to become, and ultimately who exercises power over whom. Images, memes and codes create a sense of belonging and convey political convictions, often before these become recognisable as such. What emerges in digital communities has an impact far beyond our screens: in public debate, on the streets and at the ballot box.

With every technological development, propaganda finds new ways to reach us. In traditional mass media, the few speak to the many. On social media, anyone can produce, circulate and amplify content. Yet algorithms decide what becomes visible. With generative AI, machines enter into direct dialogue with individuals, communicating in personalised, continuous and adaptive ways. They pick up on individual beliefs, fears and needs, and they can amplify them through feedback loops. This new technology is inexorably taking root in our everyday lives and society, changing how we communicate, think and act.

With the exhibition *Propaganda – Flooding the Zone with Shit – It's About Money, Stupid!*, the Frankfurter Kunstverein examines how propaganda operates under these new conditions, how political convictions take shape and which economic interests influence their dissemination.

Flooding the zone with shit is a strategy of authoritarian populism. Deliberately inundating the public with provocations, controversial topics and unfounded speculation undermines fact-based discussion and journalism and dominates the public agenda. Scandals and an endless stream of new outrages capture public attention. This spectacle, staged through the media, can be exploited politically. As people increasingly encounter different images, events and narratives, the shared foundation on which public debate can take place also becomes fragile.

Attention is both an instrument of political power and a business model – *It's About Money, Stupid!* – and digital platforms make money by targeting specific users with advertising and paid messages. Money helps determine which messages gain reach. Those who control the infrastructure through which attention is distributed shape the conditions of public visibility. They help determine which reactions are rewarded and which content circulates. Propaganda, political power and economic interests are closely intertwined.

How, then, do we encounter propaganda today? Which images, strategies, codes and techniques are used in the battle for people's convictions and opinions? Who determines which narratives prevail? Which voices benefit, both politically and financially?

The exhibition brings together artistic investigations and scholarly perspectives on these questions. The seven invited artists have worked intensively on propaganda and online subcultures for years. They examine how political affiliations form, how emotions are mobilised and how power becomes embedded in technologies and everyday habits of seeing.

Propaganda – Flooding the Zone with Shit – It's About Money, Stupid! offers a snapshot amid rapid change. The exhibition reveals mechanisms that often remain hidden in our daily media consumption and creates a space in which to question their effects together.

Once again, the Frankfurter Kunstverein ventures into subjects that have the potential to spark disagreement and debate. We all share a sense of being overwhelmed and a fear of the future, yet this is no time for retreat or passive anxiety.

EXHIBITION TOUR

The exhibition opens with a **large chronological display**, spanning antiquity to the present day. The Frankfurter Kunstverein team developed this 18-metre-long timeline with advice from Martin Renz, Luna Vega and Robert Thyssen of the **Research Training Group "Aesthetics of Democracy"** at the Goethe University Frankfurt and TU Darmstadt. It charts key stages and turning points in the history of propaganda through dates, images and short descriptions of major publications, the media and technologies that drive it, as well as whistleblowers.

Frankfurt-based artist and activist **Oguz Sen** engages with the architecture of the Frankfurter Kunstverein across several levels. *Immer ist Jetzt ist Hier* is the title of the series created for the exhibition, which comprises four elements: a cube with a volume of 18 cubic metres that visitors can enter, a cylindrical sculpture 3 metres high, graffiti on the building's stairs and a spatial installation of political banners. At its centre is the cube installation *Immer ist Jetzt ist Hier*, I. Sen

builds a room within a room and pastes layer upon layer of political posters onto its exterior walls, combining them into new visual configurations through controlled tearing. His materials are posters from the archives of German history, from the 1920s through the pre-war period to the present day. The artist is interested in the changing aesthetics and symbols of right-wing propaganda created for audiences in public spaces. His artistic techniques are *décollage* and freehand spray painting. Sen takes an anti-elitist stance towards art. His best-known paintings were created on the streets of his city. They serve as monumental political statements: the portrait of Alan Kurdi, the young refugee boy who drowned, in Frankfurt's Osthafen, and the 27-metre-long memorial mural beneath the Friedensbrücke commemorating the victims of the racist attack in Hanau in 2020.

The exhibition hall on the right of the first floor is dedicated to the artist duo **Ganslmeier & Zibelnik**. The artists investigate the growing infiltration of fascist codes into popular social media trends. In the exhibition, they present their latest work, *Repeat After Me*. Over several years, they have immersed themselves in an unsettling visual investigation of hundreds of TikTok channels. They observed how people drift from self-improvement trends towards online spirituality and extreme hyper-individualism. And they reviewed content and identified patterns. The work *Bereitschaft* addresses young men's current desire to restore a masculinity they believe to be under threat. A political message of the New Right presents itself as seemingly apolitical: "become strong", "take control", "be a real man". Ganslmeier & Zibelnik present their findings in diagrams reminiscent of forensic analysis. They reveal what is hidden and trace the branches and connections between online channels and content creators that only painstaking research can uncover.

Ben Grosser is an artist, programmer and researcher, and was a professor of new media at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Grosser exposes invisible power structures by analysing programming code, interface designs and affirmation algorithms until their manipulative power becomes apparent. The work *Redaction Poetry of Andreessen's Techno-Optimist Manifesto* will dominate the walls of the large hall on the left of the first floor at the Frankfurter Kunstverein. The manifesto was written by Silicon Valley software developer and billionaire investor Marc Andreessen. His rhetoric, indeed his entire manifesto, seeks openly and unabashedly to normalise an extreme world view. For this Big Tech entrepreneur, unrestrained acceleration, technology and the supremacy of markets are inevitable developments necessary to secure growth.

In Frankfurt, Grosser also presents his latest work, *Lux Affirma*. In this piece, visitors interact with an AI language model using a keyboard. *Lux Affirma* deliberately diminishes the questions and answers while amplifying, to the point of absurdity, the praise and prompting that surround a typical ChatGPT response. The artist applies his characteristic method of interface simplification: reducing the user interface to its fundamental operating mechanisms so that these become tangible in their essential form.

Grosser understands the interface as the language and form of the conversation itself, rather than as buttons, windows or skins. In today's chatbots, these are central to the design and business models of technology companies. They accustom users to a reciprocal conversation in which the human perceives the machine as an equal. This anthropomorphic interface is intended to create attachment and familiarity. The longer we remain engaged, the more transparent we become – *It's About Money, Stupid!*

To bring key aspects of the interplay between politics and economics into the public space of the exhibition, we invited macroeconomics expert and political economist **Robin Jaspert**, a doctoral researcher in the Research Training Group "Standards of Governance" at the Goethe University

Frankfurt and a journalist for the political magazine *Jacobin*. He has produced graphics for the exhibition showing the growing divergence between corporate profits, labour and wages, and contributed a more detailed discussion of the arguments to the catalogue.

Playfool is a London-based artist duo comprising Daniel Coppen and Saki Maruyama. On the third floor of the Kunstverein, they present their latest work, *[OP]erator*, a delicate interactive sculpture consisting of 101 smartphones and a laptop. Each smartphone runs an X account (formerly Twitter), is equipped with a SIM card and is connected to the internet. And a central input station stands within the semicircular arrangement. *[OP]erator* is both a work of art and a functioning bot farm.

A bot farm is a centralised network of automatically controlled accounts. Through coordinated posts, likes, comments and shares, such a system can simulate activity on a mass scale, artificially amplifying reach, attention and the impression of public approval. Bot farms generate automated campaigns and are strategically deployed worldwide to distort political debates, influence elections and deepen social divisions.

At the Frankfurter Kunstverein, visitors step into the semicircular arena of mobile phones, type into the centrally positioned smartphone and experience how their post spreads within seconds, generating entire sequences of discussion through automated dissemination. They witness in real time how a flood of messages emerges, subsequently swelling into a cacophony of voices in the space.

Playfool compellingly transforms something designed to operate in secret into an aesthetic work of art that can be experienced through the senses. Their installation illustrates how digital systems manufacture synthetic crowds, making artificial content indistinguishable from posts by real users.

We invited the **Institute for Democracy and Civil Society (IDZ Jena)** to develop content for the exhibition with us. The resulting exhibits are striking: an immersive VR installation exploring the connections between tech oligarchs, politicians and donations to political parties; a glossary of terms, codes and symbols used in far-right online communities; and two newly-produced films about phenomena that have gone viral – the song “L’Amour Toujours” from the provocative video filmed on Sylt, and “Stolzmonat” as a right-wing counter-trend to LGBTQ+-friendly Pride Month. We would like to thank Ann-Kathrin Benner, Maik Fielitz and Harald Sick of IDZ Jena, as well as journalist Rina Wilkin.

The final room of the exhibition is dedicated to **Joshua Citarella**. He is regarded as one of the foremost chroniclers of so-called “extremely online” culture. For years, he has investigated how young people on Instagram, TikTok and 4chan drift into radical niche ideologies through memes, irony and algorithms, and in 2026, the European Parliament invited him to present his research. Since 2024, he has expanded his artistic practice by hosting *Doomscroll*, an internationally influential podcast channel in which he interviews artists, content creators and avant-garde thinkers of the New Left.

Following *Greenland – Not for Sale – Kalaallit Nunaat Forever*, the Frankfurter Kunstverein turns to the next chapter in a cycle of political exhibitions with *Propaganda – Flooding the Zone with Shit – It’s About Money, Stupid!* In autumn 2027, Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn will present a major new work with us. Entitled *Paradox Parc*, it examines the mechanisms of the economy of desire in an age of profound loneliness.

The Frankfurter Kunstverein is permanently supported by



For further information, please visit our website www.fkv.de/en/presse.

Press Office of the Frankfurter Kunstverein: presse@fkv.de +49 69 219 314 30