

CONTEMPORARY IDENTITIES

International Art Magazine

Mona Azadian | Melis Eres | Thorsten Groetschel | Markos Kampanis | Fatima Khalid | Ramzi Mallat
Aleksandra Mir | Grit Reiss | Nina Röder | Lisa Tiemann | Luca Arfini | Lauren Lee McCarthy



ISSUE #30 SEP. 2026

Art is not about delivering a message
but about creating an experience.

Olafur Eliasson



EXCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITY

For Artists Featured in
ContemporaryIdentities Magazine Only

Virtual Artist Residency

Application Deadline
15 October 2026

www.nexusartspace.com

info@nexusartspace.com

EXCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITY FOR CONTEMPORARYIDENTITIES FEATURED ARTISTS

Virtual Artist Residency

Collective Memory: Shared Histories and Living Narratives
Nexus Artspace, in collaboration with ContemporaryIdentities Magazine, is pleased to offer an exclusive opportunity to artists whose work has previously been published in the magazine.

Selected artists will be invited to participate in a fully sponsored, six-week Virtual Artist Residency.

The residency explores collective memory — how personal and shared histories are formed, carried, transformed, remembered, and sometimes erased.

Collective memory emerges where individual experiences, family histories, cultural rituals, migration, language, archives, loss, and imagination intersect. It is constantly reshaped over time and can become a space for identity, resistance, nostalgia, rupture, care, and re-imagination.

Participating artists are invited to reflect on these ideas through their own artistic practices while engaging in dialogue with artists from different cultural and geographical backgrounds.

Throughout the programme, artists will take part in weekly online group meetings and discussions, receive one individual mentoring session, and develop or contextualize their work in relation to the residency theme.

The programme will conclude with a curated virtual group exhibition presented by Nexus Artspace.

Duration:

29 October – 3 December 2026

Online | 6 sessions

Final Presentation:

Curated virtual group exhibition presented by Nexus Artspace

Who Can Apply:

This call is exclusively open to visual artists, sculptors, photographers, video artists, and sound artists whose work has previously been published in ContemporaryIdentities Magazine.

Please submit:

10–15 recent artworks

CV

Short bio

Artist statement

A short motivation statement of approximately 150–100 words explaining your interest in the residency and its theme

Please send all materials to info@nexusartspace.com.

Participation Fee:

Fully sponsored by ContemporaryIdentities Magazine.

There is no participation fee for selected artists.

Application Deadline:

15 October 2026

This sponsored residency is part of the collaboration between Nexus Artspace and ContemporaryIdentities Magazine, supporting artistic exchange, dialogue, and the development and presentation of contemporary artistic practices.

CONTRIBUTORS

Art Writers:

Ivan Bissoli
Anna Guillot
Sophie Kazan
Lenka Piper
Zoltán Somhegyi
Brajan Vojinović

Editors:

Sara Berti
Elham Shafaei

Artificial Intelligence Editor:

Fabio Gamberini

Art Director:

Soheil Hosseini
tehranstudio.art

Layout:

Fariba Rahdar

Front Cover:

Luca Arfini, The color of the quiet series,
2026

Media Consultant:

Emad Pournasiri

ARTISTS

6 **Mona Azadian**
By: Lenka Piper

8 **Melis Eres**
By: Ivan Bissoli

10 **Thorsten Groetschel**
By: Brajan Vojinović

12 **Markos Kampanis**
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

14 **Fatima Khalid**
By: Lenka Piper

16 **Ramzi Mallat**
By: Sophie Kazan

18 **Aleksandra Mir**
By: Anna Guillot

20 **Grit Reiss**
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

22 **Nina Röder**
By: Anna Guillot

24 **Lisa Tiemann**
By: Brajan Vojinović

26 **Interviewed Artists:**
Luca Arfini

30 **Artificial Intelligence:**
Fabio Gamberini
Interviewed:
Lauren Lee McCarthy



EDITORS' NOTE

Welcome to the September issue of ContemporaryIdentities.

With each issue, we aim to create a space where different artistic practices, critical perspectives, and contemporary concerns can meet. This edition brings together artists and writers whose work reflects the complexity of the present while opening new ways of thinking about how we see, interpret, and experience the world around us.

We are particularly pleased to feature Luca Arfini, an Italian multimedia storyteller based in Amsterdam. Through photography, Arfini brings science, social issues, and human moments into focus. Constantly experimenting with new visual forms, his practice seeks to spark change while creating authentic stories that resonate beyond the image itself.

The issue is further shaped by the thoughtful contributions of our writers and critics. We extend our sincere thanks to our board member Zoltán Somhegyi (Hungary), as well as Ivan Bissoli (Italy), Anna Guillot (Italy), Sophie Kazan (UK), Lenka Piper (Czech Republic), and Brajan Vojinović (Serbia). Their reflections and critical perspectives add depth to this edition and continue to broaden the conversations at the heart of ContemporaryIdentities.

We are equally grateful to Fabio Gamberini, editor of our Artificial Intelligence section, whose interviews continue to explore the evolving relationship between creativity and technology. For this issue, he speaks with Lauren Lee McCarthy, one of the most significant and influential artists working at the intersection of contemporary art, technology, and performance.

An artist, programmer, and professor at UCLA Design Media Arts, McCarthy is also the creator of p5.js. Her work has been presented internationally at the Barbican Centre, Ars Electronica, SIGGRAPH, and IDFA. Her achievements include the Golden Nica at Prix Ars Electronica, the IDFA DocLab Award, and a United States Artists Fellowship.

We would also like to thank all the artists, writers, contributors, and collaborators whose work and commitment have made this issue possible. Together, their contributions create a space for encounters between different ideas, disciplines, and ways of seeing.

We hope this issue invites you to spend time with the works, discover unexpected connections, and encounter perspectives that remain with you beyond these pages.

With warmth,
Elham Shafaei & Sara Berti



Longing to grow II, 2024, Digital photograph, Self-portrait, Variable dimensions

Mona Azadian is an architect, garden designer, educator, and artist whose practice brings together her interest in nature, ecology, and sustainable design. These concerns are particularly visible in her recurring motif of the tree, which becomes a point of connection between human and non-human life. In Mona's work, the tree becomes more than a natural element: it functions as a symbol of connection, coexistence, and ecological awareness. Her artistic practice resonates with her earlier project "Being Like a Tree," in which she explored ideas from environmental philosophy and ecology. Her works invite us to reconsider our relationship with nature not simply as a matter of sustainability, but also of emotional and cultural connection.



Woman, Life, Freedom, 2022, Variable dimensions, Performance: KIMVI



Becoming Landscape, 2025, Digital photograph, Self-portraits, Variable dimensions



Fried Egg on Avocado Toast, 2024, Resin, polyurethane foam, acrylic paint, silicone, 20x20 cm

"What is real? How do you define 'real'?" Morpheus's iconic question in *The Matrix* permeates the entire sculptural inquiry of Melis Eres, who explores three-dimensional matter by turning food into a powerful vessel for conceptual reflection. The skilful use of resins, clays, and synthetic materials allows her to emulate organic forms and freeze them in time, challenging the viewer's perception in a visual interplay between simulacrum and reality.

While the hyperrealism of *Fried Egg on Avocado Toast* decodes contemporary pop culture through the celebration of comfort food, works like *A Study on Vietnam's Food Culture* transfigure matter into an anthropological dimension, the visual memory of a collective heritage. In this convergence of plastic rigor, industrial materials, and textile gestures, Melis Eres's practice becomes a cathartic act: an observation of everyday life that elevates the ephemeral into permanent sculptural form.



A Study on Vietnam's Food Culture, 2025, Resin, ceramic clay, bamboo, acrylic paint, wood, 100x100 cm



A Cat's Fancy Dinner, 2023, Resin, clay, silicone, acrylic paint, 20x20 cm



Am Rand, 2026, Oil on canvas, 120x160 cm

Thorsten invites us on a consciousness provoking adventure through his photorealistic paintings, in which he examines the nature of reality and the ways in which we perceive it. By introducing unsettling and disruptive elements, he creates a trigger for reconsidering the familiar and questioning our perception of the everyday.

Focusing on mundane scenes, Thorsten interconnects different elements of reality with different modes of perception, oscillating on the borderline between the familiar and the unknown. Where does reality end, and what lies beyond it? His paintings open up a borderline space in which perception is something that can shift, or reveal unexpected possibilities. He introduces the potential of embracing more of reality, and life itself, by embracing a phantasmagorical approach to perception. Rather than

escaping reality, he seems to suggest that we might encounter more of it by allowing the abstract to enter our field of vision. By mapping reality's possibilities, the artist lays bare the essence of the unknown.

Although there is an atmosphere of horror in his paintings, there is also a sense of choice: the possibility of choosing a path forward, meaning learning to perceive both sides of a duality rather than accepting one as true and the other as false. In this sense, the paintings become an instrument for perceiving beyond good and evil, as a means of looking past fixed oppositions and toward a reality that is more ambiguous and expansive.



Weltall, 2026, Oil on canvas, 100x70 cm



Einwurf der Wirklichkeit, 2023, Oil on canvas, 140x200 cm



Tavros Notes, 2018, Acrylic, charcoal and collage on paper, 120x270 cm

Markos Kampanis is an artist-researcher. Not only in the sense that he has developed a deep interest in diverse techniques and materials of painting that allows him to work across many genres and forms of expressions, including traditional icon painting and church murals too, but also because he is pursuing research about his chosen subject-matters through his artworks, and especially through the processes while creating them. In the work titled Tavros Notes for example we can see how he experiments with new methods in order to recreate the aesthetic essence of architectural ruination with pictorial means, and through new approaches to the technique of collage. His visual notes of the decaying locations are



arranged in a larger ensemble, and the individual pieces contain several layers, thus representing the fragmented state of the individual parts while also re-creating the impression of the entire site. A similar approach is further developed for his other series dedicated to Odyssey, where Markos Kampanis created maps that are at the poetic edge of real and imaginary spheres, inspired by the travels of the ancient hero. In both cycles of artworks then, facts and fantasy, memory and emotions are blended to stimulate new readings of the well-known motifs.



Odyssey Maps II, 2024, Acrylic and collage on wood, 120x150 cm



Odyssey Maps III, 2022, Acrylic and collage on wood, 120x150 cm



Dragons of Control, 2025, Gouache and engraving on copper leaf applied to Museum board, 76x56 cm

At first sight, Fatima Khalid's paintings appear to depict characters and scenes from the centuries-old Persian epic *Shahnameh*. A closer look, however, reveals details that disrupt the traditional imagery of these miniature paintings. Surveillance cameras and drones unexpectedly enter the carefully composed scenes, reframing mythic archetypes within the realities and anxieties of contemporary life. The figures are rendered with remarkable precision, matched by the intricate patterns and ornaments of the backgrounds. Yet, almost



Where Monsters Watch Back, 2025, Gouache and engraving on copper leaf applied to Museum board, 53x37 cm



A Promised Land, Never Promised, 2025, Gouache and engraving on copper leaf applied to Museum board, 74x54 cm

unnoticed, a camera may emerge from the surrounding colors, much like the technologies of surveillance that have become part of your everyday environment. Fatima's colorful and meticulously detailed paintings reward sustained looking. Their beauty initially invites us into the world of Persian miniature painting, while their contemporary interventions gradually introduce a sense of unease, reminding us of the technological forms of observation and control that increasingly shape our lives.



Not your martyr, 2023, Glass, 144x144x33 cm, LDF 2025 at V&A South Kensington, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK, Courtesy of the artist

Drawing on the layered visual and cultural landscapes of the SWANA region, the multidisciplinary artist Ramzi Mallat transforms familiar symbols into evocative reflections on belonging, loss and collective experience.

Not Your Martyr (2025) is an installation of 260 colourful moulded glass forms resembling traditional ma'amoul cakes, that are enjoyed by people of all faiths. It is a counter-monument for the victims of the 2020 Beirut Port explosion and holds tenderness and trauma in an uneasy balance.

For Atlas of An Entangled Gaze (2026), commissioned to mark the 100th anniversary of Leighton House, the artist suspended over 7,500 blue Syriac evil eye charms within the Arab Hall. Mallat reframes questions of representation, cultural projection and agency within a site historically shaped by Western fantasies of the East. He says, "I'm interested in ... engaging with heritage not as something fixed in the past, but instead as an active force shaping our present and future."



Details of Not your martyr



Atlas of an entangled gaze, 2026, Ceramic and metal, 400x100x100 cm. Exhibited at Leighton House
© Ramzi Mallat. Image courtesy of the artist



Some of Aleksandra Mir's assistants pose in front of a work at Space Tapestry: Faraway Missions, Tate Liverpool, June 23–October 15, 2017, Image courtesy of the artist

Aleksandra Mir is a Swedish-American artist born in Lubin, Poland. She lives in London and is known for her conceptual works, which bridge the fields of art, science and history. She studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York in the early 1990s and went on to study at the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research, specializing in cultural anthropology. She is distinguished by her large-scale, anthropological relational projects and her dynamic approach, centered on archival research, oral history and fieldwork. Mir's projects offer a personal interpretation of cultural myths and historical events relating to popular culture; they often draw on unexpected combinations, such as religious iconography linked to NASA imagery and symbols of space travel. His work reflects on events that encompass the human quest – predominantly characterized by masculinity – transforming or deconstructing them into a wholly personal imaginary world. Her works often involve friends, or even people she encounters by chance,



First Woman on the Moon, 1999, Video still. Tate Collection, presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery. Courtesy of the American Acquisitions Committee 2012

in provocative and playful subversions of social norms: in relation to mass tourism, for example, in works such as "Life is Sweet in Sweden" (1995) and "Pick Up (Oh Baby)" (1996), which documented women's reactions to recordings of catcalls directed at female passers-by in Copenhagen's main square. She promoted women's emancipation and, in "New York Feminism" (1996), supported all-female music groups. One of her best-known works, "First Woman on the Moon" (1999), staged a female moon landing by transforming a Dutch beach into the lunar surface with the support of the local population and heavy machinery: against a backdrop of billowing industrial smoke, a pink-and-blue sky and the sound of bongos, Aleksandra Mir, dressed in an elegant white gown and holding the American flag, scaled the slope of a lunar landscape made up of sand dunes and improvised craters to become the first woman on the Moon. It was precisely the performance "First Woman on the Moon" that marked the beginning of Mir's exploration of space.

Aleksandra Mir's artistic practice ranges from drawing to collage, from performance to public projects, combining intellectual rigor with a strong visual impact. These works, which feature in international museum collections, are now available as high-quality prints in limited editions, offering collectors a rare opportunity to acquire a work by one of the world's most widely exhibited contemporary artists.



First Woman on the Moon, 1999, Video still. Tate Collection, presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery. Courtesy of the American Acquisitions Committee 2012



On top of mystical mountain (Spákonufell), 2024, Photograph

In the carefully staged photographs by Grit Reiss, we find a figure in different contexts, diverse situations and dissimilar postures. Despite all these differences however, there is one feature that is common in all the works of the series: the head of the figure is covered by some added elements. This solution hides the actual identity of the figure, but soon we realize that it is not what counts. We do not need to know whether she is a model or a self-portrait of the artist. What is more important is precisely the element with which the face is covered, because it will be this item that brings us closer to the core of the pieces. These objects on the head, the references they carry and their connection to the natural or built environment hosting the figure



Looking forward while the pandemic, 2021, Photograph



Die denkerin, 2022, Photograph

all bring in further keys. One image reminds us of Rodin's Thinker, another questions the efficiency of modern communication tools and whether they can replace actual, physical connections, while a third image re-visits an old Icelandic legend of Pordis, thus paying tribute to a legendary figure. Through these experiments we can see how many different "profiles" the figure can get, and – more importantly – how many important references and questions can be thematized with the help of a singular addition.



Darkness in which I swim, Self-portrait, 2022, Courtesy the artist

With its visual language that is at once melancholic and ironic, Nina Röder's photographic work, collected in the photo book "Bath in brilliant green", offers a subtly unsettling poetic perspective on various forms of powerlessness and loss. Over a fairly long period of time, by bringing together portraits, human bodies, landscapes and details of nature, the artist explores 'metaphors of abandonment and letting go'.

The images, often taken in the dark, depict cold, one might say 'marble-like', human bodies, frequently in a performative interplay with the surrounding natural world; bodies that convey a sense of unease, questioning the meaning of human existence. These are images that simultaneously depict natural structures and plant-based artefacts, such as fragments of seaweed or thistles, interpreted in a



Bath in brilliant green, Published by Kehrer Verlag, 2018. Courtesy of Koobook Archive, Italy



Bath in brilliant green, Published by Kehrer Verlag, 2018. Courtesy Koobook Archive, Italy

form that is at times unnatural and bizarre, yet always exquisitely alluring.

The leitmotif that creeps in is the theme of the masculine and the feminine, which appears and disappears with subtle and ironic discretion. One might venture to suggest that the story to which Röder unwittingly alludes in the book – though her intentions are probably elsewhere – the story that nonetheless serves as a common thread in “Bath in brilliant green”, echoes the subtle interplay between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Nina Röder’s photographs were taken in Italy, Iceland, Ireland, Spain and France over a period of five years. From the point of view of narrative structure, the book effectively captures, amongst other things, the different chromatic atmospheres of these countries.

“Bath in brilliant green” was published by Kehrer Verlag in 2018.



States of Adjustment, Exhibition view, 2026, Photo by: Evgenia Levin, Courtesy of SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY & (AV17) GALLERY, Berlin & Vilnius

One of the things that makes Lisa Tiemann's sculptures so enigmatic at first glance is a certain play between tension and ease. Deciding to remain in the process of finding equilibrium, rather than reaching it, is one of the reasons why her work leaves space to further explore ideas of balance and composition.

Playing with the physical logic of every material she uses—ceramic, steel, paper, rubber, and textiles—she makes obstacles such as gravity, shrinkage, elasticity, weight, and chance into collaborators, fun playmates. There is a trigger for noticing a space-time continuum in each of her works, giving something of a primordial tone to the objects she creates. Raw and monumental in expression, her „States of Adjustment“ functions as a barometer of change, growth, the exchange between life and death—the circle of life.



States of Adjustment, Exhibition view, 2026, Photo by: Evgenia Levin, Courtesy of SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY & (AV17) GALLERY, Berlin & Vilnius



Couple XXIV, Glazed ceramics, paper maché, 2020, Photo by: Evgenia Levin, Courtesy of SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY & (AV17) GALLERY, Berlin & Vilnius

The artist establishes a situation, but the final relationship between the elements is negotiated with the material itself. Gravity pulls, rubber stretches, textiles yield, paper folds, ceramic contracts. What appears to be a composed object is therefore also the record of a negotiation between intention and resistance.

What is particularly attractive to notice is the inevitable play between unity and duality: the point of synthesis that establishes the equilibrium she paradoxically tries to avoid. Tiemann's compositions find their equilibrium in movement, in the sense of flow and tension between material, form, and objectivity.

Luca Arfini



The color of the quiet series, 2026

CI: Please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your background and your journey into photography and visual storytelling.

LA: I am Luca Arfini, an Italian photographer and visual storyteller living in Amsterdam. With a background in journalism and science communication, storytelling has always been central to my work. I turned to photography around 2 years ago to explore stories differently, focusing on atmosphere, emotion, and unpredictability instead of words. Besides my work, I am currently completing an MA in Photography at Falmouth University.

CI: What were your earliest creative influences? Were there particular experiences, places, artists, or images that shaped the way you see the world?

LA: Living in various countries and meeting people from different cultural backgrounds has significantly shaped my perception of places, belonging, and change. In photography, Luigi Ghirri has been a key influence, particularly his focus on everyday landscapes, subtle color, and seemingly ordinary moments. Additionally, I draw inspiration from travel, cinema, and the small details we often overlook.

CI: How would you describe your current artistic practice, and how has it evolved over time?

LA: My current practice focuses primarily on analogue and instant photography, which allow me to work more

slowly and intentionally. I'm drawn to the physicality and unpredictability of film and instant photography, and to how they encourage me to observe more carefully before taking an image. Increasingly, I'm moving away from digital photography and exploring how these slower processes can tell stories about memory, belonging and everyday life.

CI: Could you introduce us to The Color of Quiet and explain how this body of work began?

LA: The Color of Quiet examines the concept of the "in-between": the space bridging past and future, tension and reassurance, uncertainty and transformation. It started with photographs of everyday places that appeared somehow suspended or transitional. Over time, these images evolved into a reflection on how we perceive and adjust to uncertainty.

CI: The title The Color of Quiet suggests a relationship between color, silence, and emotion. What does "quiet" mean to you within this project?

LA: To me, quiet doesn't always signify peace; it can also represent tension, anticipation, and uncertainty. In this project, quiet is a pause, a suspended moment where change happens, but what comes next stays uncertain.

CI: What role do color, light, composition, and atmosphere play in communicating the ideas behind the series?

LA: Color is central to the project, particularly soft and pastel tones that evoke an initial sense of reassurance. I use natural light and simple compositions to create a sense of stillness, while small details introduce subtle tension. I like the contrast between visual softness and emotional uncertainty.

CI: How do you select the places, subjects, and moments that you photograph? Is your process primarily intuitive, carefully planned, or a combination of both?

LA: I usually begin by walking out with my camera without necessarily knowing what I



The color of the quiet series, 2026

will find. I might have a general idea or question, but while I'm shooting, I rely on intuition. I'm attracted to certain colors, light, spaces, or small details that grab my attention. The more analytical part of the process happens afterwards, when I edit and arrange the images.

CI: What personal experiences, thoughts, or emotions are reflected in *The Color of Quiet*?

LA: Having lived in different countries, I'm familiar with the feeling of being between places and phases of life. Change brings excitement, but also uncertainty and a need for reassurance. The project connects those personal experiences with a broader sense of living through a period of constant social, political and environmental transformation.

CI: How does *The Color of Quiet* connect with the wider themes explored throughout your current photographic practice?

LA: It aligns with my broader interest in transition, belonging, memory, and daily life. Across my projects, I focus on what happens between fixed states: how a city becomes home, how places evolve, and how identities are expressed through everyday moments. *The Color of Quiet* explores these themes in a more atmospheric and subtle way.

CI: Are you currently developing any new projects, exhibitions, publications, or collaborations that you would like to share with our readers?

LA: I'm working on "*The Business of Being Ourselves*," a Polaroid portrait project focusing on queer individuals in their everyday work lives. It aims to showcase them in ways that differ from typical representations of the queer community, emphasizing the extraordinary within the ordinary. Additionally, I continue developing "*Travel Postcards*", an analogue project that explores travel, memory, and slowness using postcards to highlight quieter, often overlooked moments of travel.



The color of the quiet series, 2026



The color of the quiet series, 2026



The color of the quiet series, 2026

Interview with Lauren Lee McCarthy

By: Fabio Gamberini



Saliva Retreat, Lauren Lee McCarthy, 2024, Exhibition view of the Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement 2024, A Cosmic Movie Camera, at Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève. Scenography conceived by FormaFantasma. Film directed by David Leonard. Image credit: Mathilda Olmi © Centre d'Art contemporain Genève

We are particularly pleased to have the opportunity to interview Lauren Lee McCarthy, one of the most significant and influential artists working at the intersection of contemporary art, technology and performance today.

Artist, programmer and professor at UCLA Design Media Arts, McCarthy is also the creator of p5.js. Her work has been presented internationally at the Barbican Centre, Ars Electronica, SIGGRAPH and IDFA. Among her major recognitions are the Golden Nica at Prix Ars Electronica for *SOMEONE*, the IDFA DocLab Award for *LAUREN* and a United States Artists Fellowship.

Her practice is deeply personal and performative: rather than simply observing the effects of technology on our lives, McCarthy often places herself at the center of the experiment, turning her own presence, relationships and experiences into artistic material.

FG: In *LAUREN* (2017), you became a human smart-home assistant, observing participants and anticipating their needs. What did the work reveal about the boundary between surveillance, attention and care?

LM: *LAUREN* questioned the line between a gaze of surveillance and a gaze of care. Many of the

same actions can describe all three: watching someone closely, learning their patterns, anticipating what they might need. What changes is the relationship, the intention, and who has control. By having a person perform the work of a surveillance system, it made visceral the tradeoffs we are making when we surrender our privacy and intimate spaces.

FG: In *Follower* (2016), you turned the idea of having a social-media “follower” into a physical experience, with participants followed by a stranger for a day. What interested you in transforming a familiar digital behavior into something real, intimate and potentially unsettling?

LM: With *Follower*, I was interested in the tension between wanting to be seen and feeling like our privacy is constantly being taken away. Online, we are watched and tracked in ways that are often opaque, without really knowing by whom, when, or for what purpose. *Follower* offered a version of that relationship on your own terms: you chose to be followed, you knew it would happen for one day, and at the end you received a single photograph taken of you. Ultimately, my works are intended to create space for people to grapple with these tensions themselves, rather than resolving them or prescribing a particular way to feel.

FG: In *Surrogate* (2021), you turned your own experience of pregnancy and motherhood into an artwork, involving your body and your child in an experiment with technology, monitoring and control. How did bringing such an intimate experience into your artistic practice change your relationship with the work — and with yourself?

LM: *Surrogate* began with a speculative question: what if I carried a baby for someone else and gave them the ability to monitor and control my body through an app? But as we tried to actually make it happen, the questions became very real: about consent, reproductive technology, bodily autonomy, and who gets to make decisions about a body and a future child. The work became much more personal through that process, but I never wanted it to simply be a story about me. I wanted my experience to open a space for other people to consider their own feelings about reproduction, and the increasingly complicated role technology plays in how we make families.

FG: Your practice moves between performance, technology and social experiment. Where do you locate your work within contemporary art today?

LM: My work is grounded in performance, though it takes



Hysterical, Lauren Lee McCarthy, 2023, Cinematography by Gabriel Noguez



Surrogate, 2023, Installation and performance at Data Relations at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne curated by Miriam Kelly. Image credit: Casey Horsfield, courtesy of Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.



Surrogate, 2020–2024. Installation view: Data Relations, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia, 2023, Photo credit: Casey Horsfield, courtesy ACCA Melbourne

many forms, including software, installation, film, and image. I see it in a lineage of endurance and feminist performance practices that use the artist's own body and life as material, while also engaging with contemporary questions around surveillance, network culture, and our increasingly technological relationships. I'm interested in intimacy, labor, identity, and control, and in subverting the systems that structure these things. Technology is one material within that practice, rather than the thing that defines it.

FG: Your performances often extend human presence through cameras, networks and code. How has technology changed your understanding of the body and presence in performance?

LM: I'm looking at the human labor hiding inside our machines, the people we pretend aren't there. In my work, I often take on this role - stepping inside the machine, embodying the algorithm, trying to understand what it means to suppress one's humanity in service of automation. When we look at Mechanical Turk workers, content moderators, or virtual assistants, we see people asked to become machine-like, interchangeable components. By performing as these systems myself, I create moments where the facade cracks. These moments of breakdown reveal urgent questions: What happens when we treat humans as computational resources? Who builds these systems and who bears their cost? How might we design differently, in ways that celebrate rather than erase human presence?

FG: You created p5.js to make creative coding more accessible. Do you see building tools and communities as part of your artistic practice?

LM: I do. I spent nearly a decade leading the development of p5.js, and one thing I learned is that access isn't something you solve once. Our understanding of who the tool was for and what they needed was constantly expanding as new people joined the community and brought different perspectives. I also think there's real power in artists making our own tools, rather than simply accepting the technologies that companies give us. Toolmaking gives us a way to question the assumptions built into existing systems and propose different values, ways of working, and possibilities for what technology could be.

FG: You explored surveillance, artificial assistants and algorithmic relationships long before the current AI boom. Has reality caught up with your work?

LM: In some ways, but I don't really think of those works as being about technology or predicting where technology would go. They were about what it feels like to be a person at a moment when technology is increasingly mediating our relationships. I started with situations that confused or made me anxious, like dating, hosting a party, or moving in with someone, and used technology to push those situations somewhere more extreme. What has changed is that many of the tensions the works were playing with have become much more ordinary. AI is now embedded in everyday life, but the underlying questions are still very human: how do we connect, how much control do we want to give up, and what kinds of relationships are we creating for ourselves?

FG: As a professor at UCLA Design Media Arts, you teach a generation for whom AI and code are becoming ordinary creative tools. What do you most want to transmit to young artists?

LM: I want students to see technology as something they can question and shape, not just something they have to adapt to. With AI especially, it's easy to become focused on mastering the newest tool or producing a particular kind of output. I'm interested in helping them develop their own questions, values, and ways of working, and to understand the systems and relationships behind the technologies they use. The tools will keep changing, but that capacity to look closely, question assumptions, and imagine alternatives is much more durable.



Anyone home?, 2024. Exhibition view from AI and the Paradox of Agency at Bildmuseet, 2026. Courtesy of the artist and Bildmuseet. Photo: Malin Grönborg



LAUREN. 15. 2024, Exhibition view "What can I do for you?" curated by Thierry Fournier, Photo credit: Maud Levavasseur / Le Lieu Unique, Nantes, France



Exhibition view I Heard Talking Is Dangerous curated by Jakob Schäfer, Photo credit: Eike Walkenhorst





Installation view of Lauren Lee McCarthy, *LAUREN: Anyone home?*, 2024-2026. Performance-based installation with custom-designed, networked smart devices (cameras, monitors, microphones, lights, speakers) with PVC structures, scrim, windows, bed, seating mats, clothing, and video, with sound. Site-specific dimensions. Courtesy of the artist as installed in Technologies of Relation, North Adams, MA (on view beginning February 21, 2026). Photo: Kaelan Burkett courtesy of MASS MoCA.



LAUREN Portable, 2023, Installation and performance at What Models Make Worlds: Critical Imaginaries of AI at Ford Foundation Gallery curated by Mashinka Hakopian and Meldia Yesayan. Design in collaboration with Ben Evans James. Image credit: Sebastian Bach, courtesy of Ford Foundation Gallery



SOMEONE, 2019, Performance created for Refiguring the Future at 205 Hudson Gallery, NYC curated by Heather Dewey-Hagborg and Dorothy R. Santos. Installation at Japan Media Arts Festival 2020



WHO OWNS THE CULTURE NOW?

ART SUMMIT 2026

Who shapes culture? Who funds it? Who gets access – and who gets to decide what comes next? Art Voyage returns with the second edition of its annual cultural summit, Who Owns Culture Now?

Location: Pillar Hall, Olympia Way, London W14 8UX

Date: 27 November 2026

Time: 9:00 – 18:00

30+ Voices. One Day. Five Panels. One Defining Question.

At a moment of rapid change across the cultural sector, Who Owns Culture Now? brings together 30+ artists, curators, museum and gallery leaders, collectors, philanthropists, cultural entrepreneurs, researchers and emerging voices to explore the forces shaping culture today and who will influence what comes next.

Across five panels, a keynote and curated roundtables, hear directly from leading voices on cultural power, access, funding, philanthropy and global exchange. Beyond the stage, dedicated networking opportunities create space to meet speakers and fellow cultural professionals, exchange perspectives and build meaningful new connections.

Building on Art Voyage's 2025 Echoes of Migration Summit, the 2026 edition opens the conversation wider.

Be part of the conversation. Meet the people shaping it.

Early Bird Tickets Now Available

Book early and secure your place while Early Bird tickets are available.

Book directly via luma.com/v/2aavjt, or email info@artvoyagebiennial.org.uk and our team will arrange your reservation.

Find out more on the Art Voyage Biennial website: artvoyagebiennial.org.uk

Partners & Supporters

AWITA

LYNX

ART | KŌRERO

ArtTactic®

CONTEMPORARY
IDENTITIES
International Art Magazine



www.contemporaryidentities.com
info@contemporaryidentities.com
[www.facebook.com/ ContemporaryIdentities](https://www.facebook.com/ContemporaryIdentities)
Instagram: contemporary_id