

*after the butcher* – Ausstellungsraum für zeitgenössische Kunst und soziale Fragen  
Spittastr. 25 – 10317 Berlin

Press release

Vebjørn Hagene Thoe and Stephan Mörsch  
*Sharing as Caring no.7: The end of the nuclear power age?*

– Artistic reflections on the complex realities of nuclear presence –  
curated by Miya Yoshida

“The bomb isn’t in your background. It is in your body. And mine...  
We are radioactive already, and the war hasn’t even begun.”

(*The End of Imagination*, Arundhati Roy)

After the Fukushima catastrophe in 2011, the German government declared a shift in its energy strategy to pull out of nuclear power by 31 December 2022. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine shook up the European energy market and the lifetimes of the last three active nuclear power plants – Grohnde, Grundremmingen C and Brokdorf – was extended until 15 April 2023. The vision of the future has been changed due to political, economic and technological turns, and predicting the future has become even harder.

At this volatile historical junction, *Sharing as Caring<sup>i</sup> no.7– The end of the nuclear power age?* was invited by *After the Butcher* to realise its seventh exhibition in the series. The exhibition presents newly produced art works by Norwegian artist Vebjørn Hagene Thoe (Lofoten, Norway) and Berlin based artist Stephan Mörsch. Both artists deal with the current issues surrounding nuclear power and raise a fundamental question: *How does nuclear presence manifest itself before it emerges as nuclear power?*

Thoe and Mörsch trace the nuclear presence back to its origin: uranium mining in Niger with its complex problems: post/neocolonial structures, exploitation, regional destabilisation, poverty, violation of human rights and a torn-up landscape. These are all the consequences of global power politics and the resulting conflicts, such as those between Russia and United States of America with the NATO States and China.

Taking a motherly as well as a spiritual approach to the land, Vebjørn Hagene Thoe wove a 2.5m long tapestry reflecting the landscapes of uranium mining in Arlit, situated in the Sahara Desert in northern Niger. The artist presents the tapestry with a sculpture shaped like nuclear power plants but made of coconuts barks from the African continent. With her figurative sculpture and a little suitcase with the burial clothes, Thoe also extends her care to the marginalised Tuareg people, who reside in the area. Her installation highlights life – of both the living and the dead – those who were and still are exposed to radioactive materials, extractivism and racism.

Stephan Mörsch scrutinised the available images of the landscapes surrounding two uranium mines, Somair at Arlit and the Akouta mine at Akokan, the twin city of Arlit as well as of the scenes of the demonstrations against the mining company Areva, today renamed as Orano, the two governments – Niger and France – and foreign armed forces staying in the country. In the scale of 1:10, Mörsch reproduces placards, political slogans, flags, barrels filled with sand as roadblocks, guarding huts at the mines, and signs standing by the road in the middle of the desert. His miniature sculptures prompt us to take a closer look at the details and reveal uranium production as the site of power negotiation by different agents of the postcolonial structure.

Presenting an artistic investigation into the topic of nuclear power, the exhibition questions the concept of "clean energy" as it is repeatedly suggested to us by the economy and politics. Nuclear presence is everywhere in daily life, not only in energy, weapons and space development, but also in transport, medical treatment, forest research, photosynthetic production and many others. By connecting nuclear power to the uranium mines in Niger, Thoe and Mörsch remind us of the facts behind nuclear presence and urge us to pay close attention to the hidden forces. Their works call to mind that nuclear power is inseparable from the relations to colonial heritage, human rights, global capitalism and the ensuing power struggles, and most importantly that the discussion on nuclear power cannot be seen in an isolated way as the energy policy of individual states.

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<sup>i</sup>*Sharing as Caring* is a project to reflect the current conditions of nuclear presence on a planetary scale. Taking the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe as its starting point, the project set out as a series of small format exhibition in 2012 by Miya Yoshida and has been experimenting and seeking a form for the intimate link between the political, economic, psychological and personal desire to deal with the issue. (see [https://miyayoshida.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/HDKV\\_SAC-Zeitung\\_Screen.pdf](https://miyayoshida.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/HDKV_SAC-Zeitung_Screen.pdf))