

PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, Dec 20, 2022

KAROLINA WOJTAS . ABZGRAM

C/O Berlin Talent Award 2022

C/O Berlin presents **Karolina Wojtas . Abzgram**, showcasing the work of the C/O Berlin Talent Award 2022 winner from **January 28 to May 4, 2023**. The **opening** takes place at C/O Berlin on **Friday, January 27, 2023, at 20:00** in Amerika Haus at Hardenbergstraße 22–24, 10623 Berlin.

“When *Abzgram* raises questions, it is certainly not with the intention of provoking clear responses.” – Matthias Gründig, winner of the C/O Berlin Talent Award 2022 – *Theorist*

A child stands in a hallway, with their face turned towards the white wall. Their navy-blue neckerchief evokes a school uniform. On the left is a wide-open door. Does it lead into a classroom? Are we seeing a child at play, turning around at any moment to look for hiding classmates, or are we observing a disciplinary situation? The picture is not unambiguous.

Polish media artist Karolina Wojtas (b. 1996) never shies away from ambiguity. Even the meaning of the work’s title *Abzgram* raises questions. Is it an invented word, left open to interpretation and associations? Or is it the name of a game whose rules we do not know? Wojtas does not appear to heed rules and boundaries, at least not in her photographic practice. In her project, steadily developed since 2017, the emerging artist breaches every conceivable rule of photography through offbeat compositions, oversaturated colors, blur, and her aggressive use of flash. There is no sense of harmony.

The complex multimedia work comprises videos and a confusion of photographs, some found and others staged by Wojtas. She prints these photos onto various materials, which transform exhibition spaces into room-sized installations. Wojtas invites visitors to interact with the objects in space, in arrangements that resemble reenactments, and thus transport themselves back to the world of childhood. Thus, there are chairs that cannot be sat on, and elements such as the periodic table that have been taken—or rather, alienated—from a school context and mashed up with her photographic works in a surreal manner.

Wojtas’s exhibition design encloses the classroom in a bleak fence that intentionally evokes a penal institution. Upon passing through the fence door with the inscription *Szkoła* (Polish school), one hears instructions on how to behave according to the “Classroom Entry Procedure”: stand still, do not touch each other, keep your hands by your sides, look straight ahead. The artist responds with caustic irony to the rigid Polish school system, which imposes rules on children with streaks of militarism. Wojtas finds a creative and sometimes biting form of criticism in particular with regard to the patriotic-nationalist tendency of current Polish politics.

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She counters the order, control, and discipline of everyday school life with a world of images and experiences based on kitsch, play, eccentricity, and nonsense. Does renouncing silence and discipline as a form of respect enable creativity and experimentation?

From the perspective of the jury, Wojtas's artistic strategy is a perfect interpretation of the theme of *New Documentary Strategies*, which is the C/O Berlin Talent Award's focus. The artist receives a cash prize and is honored with a solo exhibition at C/O Berlin, *Karolina Wojtas . Abzgram*. A catalog will accompany the exhibition, including work by Matthias Gründig, winner of the C/O Berlin Talent Award – *Theorist*. The book is published by Spector Books, Leipzig, and edited by Dr. Kathrin Schöneegg on behalf of C/O Berlin Foundation.

Karolina Wojtas (b. 1996, PL) draws from the imagination of children and transforms this material into room-sized installations. She studied at the Institute of Creative Photography in Opava, Czechia, and the Film School in Łódź, Poland. She was nominated for the reGeneration Prize (Musée d'Elysée) and Plat(t)form (Fotomuseum Winterthur), and was awarded the ING Unseen Talent Award 2019 in Amsterdam. Her work has been shown at Fotofestival in Łódź (2021), the Kraków Photo-month (2020), and the Noorderlicht International Photo Festival (2020).

Matthias Gründig (b. 1989, DE) studied history of art and visual arts (BA), followed by history of art and film studies (MA) at Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena. From 2015 to 2022, he taught theory and history of photography as an assistant lecturer at Folkwang Universität der Künste Essen. Since August 2022 he has been working as an independent photo historian and curator and is currently completing his PhD thesis on photographic portraits as commodity and currency. Gründig has co-edited several exhibition catalogs as well as a special issue of *PhotoResearcher* on the subject of photography and play (2017). His work has previously been published in journals including *History of Photography*, *Fotogeschichte*, and *EIKON*, among others.

The **C/O Berlin Talent Award** is awarded yearly in two categories, *Artist* and *Theorist*, to individuals under the age of thirty-five. Both winners receive a cash prize, as well as a solo exhibition for the artists and an individually curated publication for the theorist. Proceedings are rounded off by an artist talk from both winners on the ties between theory and practice. Artists are nominated for the C/O Berlin Talent Award by a committee of international experts. Theorists can apply through an open call. The C/O Berlin Talent Award is headed by curator Dr. Kathrin Schöneegg.

Since 2020, the C/O Berlin Talent Award has been made possible by the Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung.

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Exhibition Jan 28 – May 4, 2023
Press Tour Jan 27, 2023 . 11:00
Opening Jan 27, 2023 . 20:00

Opening Hours Daily . 11:00–20:00
Admission 12/8 euros
Organizer C/O Berlin Foundation
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