

Mondo cane

A group show curated by Ryts Monet
March 11 to May 9, 2025
Afro-Asiatisches Institut, QL Galerie
Leechgasse 24, 8010 Graz

Mondo cane is an Italian documentary film from 1962, directed by Gualtiero Jacopetti, Paolo Cavara, and Franco Prosperi. Not only did the film give its name to the genre, but it also launched the mondo movie subgenre, a pseudo-documentary style that became particularly popular in Italy during the 1950s and 1960s, the years of the Italian economic miracle and post-war boom.

The film focuses on the customs and practices of different cultures, presenting itself as a window to the world where viewers could “travel” to remote and unexplored places, while remaining comfortably safe in their own domestic bubble.

This genre of documentary has often been criticized for the excessive emphasis placed by the filmmakers on the more grotesque and macabre aspects of the cultures portrayed. While stimulating curiosity, the images presented also aroused fear and detachment in the audience. The extreme sensationalism of the scenes, combined with a sense of exoticism, generated a sense of safety and superiority in the public, further increasing the distance between the viewer and the events depicted.

The artworks in this exhibition cover a wide range of topics and media, each telling stories from different places across distinct continents. What unites the artists is the desire to share a narrative and engage with the present. Unlike the 1962 film, the artists aim to create an empathetic bridge with the observer, drawing a line between space, history, and the present. The places explored by the artists and shared through their works no longer appear distant, and the initial sense of estrangement gradually fades. The works invite the audience to look with new eyes, breaking down distances and familiarizing with what initially seemed far away. In this process, the sense of insecurity and fear disappears, while a deeper connection with the other grows.

Ryts Monet

1

Wendimagegn Belete

Future history: An Untold Legacy of Ethiopian Resistance

Video projection, Amharic, 1 hours 20 minutes

2017

Courtesy the artist

Most people are unaware of the Ethiopian origin of the Rastafarian religious movement and the fact that this movement is connected to the Italian fascist occupation of Ethiopia (1935–1941). The term “Rastafari” is, in fact, an Ethiopian word composed of the prefix “Ras,” which in Amharic means “Head” or “Chief,” followed by “Tafari,” which was the given name of Emperor Haile Selassie before his coronation. It was Tafari Maconnèn who successfully led the Ethiopian resistance movement against the fascist occupation. This liberation movement had a huge impact on the African community and the diaspora, and it became a source of inspiration for anti-colonial movements and civil rights struggles around the world.

This extraordinary experience of resistance and freedom has often been overlooked by Western history, whose Eurocentric narratives have sought to obscure the facts and downplay its cruelty. The people depicted in *Future History* by Wendimagegn Belete are the direct witnesses of that resistance, survivors of one of the most brutal European colonial occupations. In 1935, by the will of Benito Mussolini and under the command of General Badoglio, Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia with extreme violence, using banned chemical weapons and perpetrating large-scale massacres. Despite the disparity in resources, the Ethiopian resistance fought with extraordinary courage, driving the Italians out and leaving an indelible mark on the history of anti-fascism. Through his work, Belete gives a face to the protagonists of this story. The long-form video project, which was shortened for the *Mondo Cane* exhibition, presents the direct testimonies of Ethiopian patriots, unmasking prejudices and colonial distortions. Each interview represents a valuable fragment of a collective memory that risks being lost, especially considering the advanced age of the veterans. An important aspect of the video is its choice to forgo subtitles, allowing Amharic to stand independently, as the artist declared that he is “*resisting the colonial notion that non-Western languages must be translated for global consumption.*” This decision invites viewers to engage with the film on an intuitive, sensory level, experiencing history through the intellectual sovereignty of the language itself. Beyond its historical value, *Future History* has a strong educational and political significance: it not only preserves a fundamental legacy for new generations of Ethiopians but also reaffirms the central role of Ethiopia in the global history of struggles for freedom. Wendimagegn Belete’s work is an act of cultural resistance that restores dignity and recognition to a people whose history has often been marginalized, while offering a universal reflection on the value of memory, justice, and solidarity.

2

Ryts Monet

Buscando Al Comandante (Looking For The Commander)

video in Cuban Spanish with English subtitles 20’45’’

and silkscreens (from a series of 50, each accompanied by a 3-peso banknote) 52 x 70 cm each frame
2022

Courtesy of the artist

Buscando al Comandante originates from a trip that Ryts Monet took to Cuba in February 2022, shortly after the island reopened to tourism. During the stay, the artist reflected on the Cuban economic crisis, analyzing its causes and its impact on the progressive decline of socialist ideology.

The causes of the Cuban economic crisis are manifold: the intensification of the U.S. embargo, the closure of tourism due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the abolition of the dual currency system introduced by Fidel Castro in the 1990s. The system, which included the Convertible Peso (CUC) for

tourists and the National Peso (CUP) for Cuban citizens, was dismantled in December 2021.

The elimination of the CUC led to a reorganization of prices, benefiting the tourism sector and disrupting the local market, especially in more frequented areas.

At the heart of the work is one of the most emblematic banknotes of Cuba: the 3-peso note, featuring the face of Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Due to the crisis and inflation, this banknote lost all purchasing power, becoming unusable even in local markets, and nearly disappeared from circulation.

The core of the work is a participatory action carried out on February 28, 2022, in Havana. With the help of a local collaborator, the artist involved a Cuban citizen in collecting 50 of the 3-peso notes, in exchange for a 10-euro note.

The work consists of a video documenting this search for the 50 3-peso notes and a series of 50 screenshots, each accompanied by one of the original banknotes collected.

Through this symbolic exchange, *Buscando al Comandante* explores the contradictions between ideology and economic crisis, highlighting how material reality and political conditions influence social dynamics in times of instability. Ryts Monet’s work reflects on the dynamics of exchange and power hierarchies, questioning how crises can redefine economic and social structures. With a critical approach, the artist creates a dialogue between historical memory and contemporary reality, challenging the relationship between past and present.

6

Ryts Monet

Wish you were here

Postcards in 15 x 10 cm format each, metal display, stamp, donation box for Gaza
2025

‘*Wish you were here*’ is a common phrase found on postcards, usually with a positive connotation. It is used alongside images of special and beautiful places, with a clear message: despite the beauty of the location, it would have been even more meaningful if the recipient had been there with the sender. In this project, however, the phrase takes on a different meaning. The buildings depicted no longer exist as they appear in the image, as they have been reduced to piles of rubble due to the recent attacks by the Israeli army on Gaza*, which have affected not only the civilian population but also places of worship, markets, schools, hospitals, and homes. The phrase, therefore, expresses a different desire: the desire to restore those places from their current state of destruction to the condition shown in the postcard.

Visitors can purchase one or more parts of the work, offering a minimum contribution of 5 euros per item, which they can place directly in the donation box. The proceeds will be directed to an organization involved in the reconstruction and support of Gaza**.

Buyers can also stamp their postcard with the designated green stamp. Their action will contribute to the desire to restore these places to their former state, a gesture that is not only economic but also an act of collective awareness.

*The current state of the depicted site is visible through the QR code on the back of the postcard, at the top right.”

** At the end of the exhibition, all accumulated funds will be donated to the following nonprofit organizations: *Un Ponte Per (Water for Gaza)*: <https://unponteper.it/en/campagna/water-for-gaza/>
Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières - MSF): <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/msf-operations-gaza>

4

Lisl Ponger

Phantom Fremdes Wien

Film, 27 min

1991 - 2004

Courtesy of the artist

At the dawn of the new millennium, French anthropologist Marc Augé defined contemporary metropolises as *city-world*, vast urban agglomerations that gather and synthesize cultural diversity from across the globe. This phenomenon mirrors what he termed the *world-city*, a revisitation of McLuhan's *global village* concept, where instant communication and increasing ease of travel have shortened distances, creating a global reality in which physical and cultural borders are becoming increasingly fluid.

It is precisely this tension between the contraction and expansion of the world that lends extraordinary intensity to Lisl Ponger's work, *Phantom Fremdes Wien*.

The piece employs a language reminiscent of ethnographic documentary filmmaking, a genre to which *Mondo cane* (1962)—albeit with different intentions—owes much of its existence. However, whereas *Mondo cane* explores various cultures by traveling across the world, Lisl Ponger captures global diversity within the urban microcosm of Vienna.

Between 1991 and 1992, the artist conducted a study, systematically documenting, with a Super-8 camera and an analog recorder, encounters, celebrations, and rituals of different communities residing in Vienna. In the 27-minute film, her voice-over guides the viewer through the city's various districts, narrating events such as a Turkish wedding, the national holiday of the Ivory Coast, and the Thai New Year. The result is an immersive journey that reflects the complexity and cultural plurality of the Austrian capital.

The *foreign phantoms* brought to light in Ponger's work are symbols of resistance, manifestations of a past that resurfaces and intertwines with the present. The piece prompts reflection on how cultural identities endure despite globalization's inevitable push toward homogenization.

3

Melissa Peritore

Sementeryo

Photo series:

60x40 cm x 6 elements: digital photograph, Fujicolor Crystal Archive photo paper mounted on Dibond

100x70 cm x 6 elements: digital photograph on photo paper

2014 - 2018 - 2024

-

Video: '9.55'

2024

Courtesy of the artist

Melissa Peritore, an Italian-Filipino photographer based in Vienna, lived for several years in Manila, where she carried out significant photographic research exploring important aspects of Philippine society. For *Mondo cane*, the artist returned to Manila to complete the photographic series *Sementeryo*, which had been interrupted in 2020 due to her forced return to Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Sementeryo* focuses on the North Cemetery in Manila, a Catholic cemetery that is home to a community of around 6,000 residents. Some families have lived here for generations, driven by extreme

poverty to settle among tombs and mausoleums, transforming the cemetery into a true village. Over time, this community has made the environment surprisingly welcoming, reorganizing it in total self-management and integrating well-maintained green spaces, commercial activities, and even recreational areas.

Melissa Peritore's work investigates the traces of daily life and contrasts within this space, exploring the relationship between the community and the space they inhabit, between the presence of the deceased and coexisting with them. In addition to the photographic series, the work includes a video of about ten minutes*, which captures fragments of daily life in the cemetery, and a map of the North Cemetery, on which Peritore has manually marked the presence of commercial activities, restaurants, and gathering spaces. This approach offers a broader and more nuanced view of a place that, though dedicated to the memory of the deceased, has become a context for active and resilient life.

* The video can be viewed through the link in the QR code.

5

Mileta Prodanović

Proud to be...

Digital print on fabric, 70 x 130 cm

2002

Courtesy of the artist

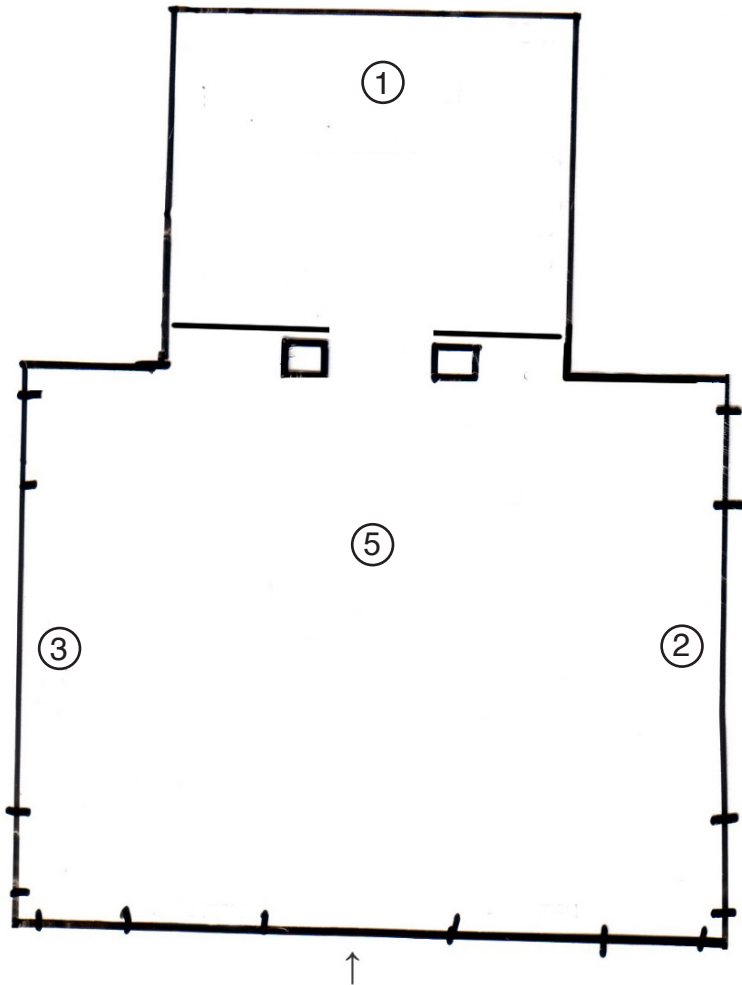
Mileta Prodanović's triptych *Proud to be...* (a 2002 silkscreen on paper) has been adapted for this exhibition in a fabric print format, positioned high up, where it dominates both levels of the exhibition space with its presence. This deliberately minimal and dispersed setup evokes the atmosphere of informal places for popular gatherings, such as village festivals or the interior of a pub.

Proud to be... combines the visual immediacy of advertising graphics with a sharp, ironic critique of contemporary social, political, and cultural dynamics. Created using digital collage techniques and a photographic aesthetic, each element of the work represents an image of a flag affixed to the storefront of an American shop. The storefront, which consistently appears in all subjects of the series, was photographed by the artist during his stay in New York, a period marked by great instability and strong American patriotism, right after the attack on the Twin Towers.

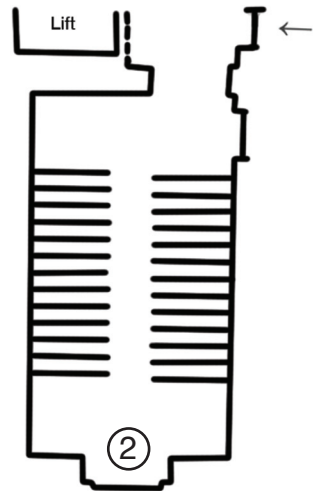
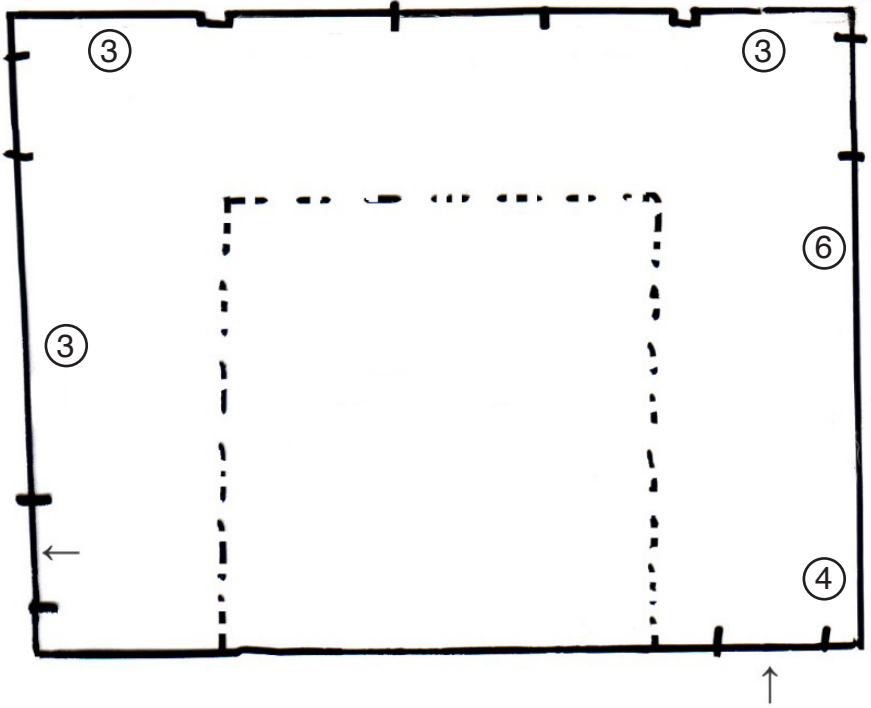
Prodanović connects the post-9/11 "American spirit" with the "spirit of Serbia" in the 1990s, highlighting the similarities between American patriotism and the populist events that marked his homeland. Serbia went through a period of strong political transformations, also marked by the Kosovo War and the heavy NATO bombings (which took place without the consent of the UN Security Council).

The United States, through NATO, Serbia, and the Albanian population of Kosovo are the main protagonists of the war. Each of these subjects is represented in the triptych, articulated through three key elements: the flag, a symbol of identity and national sovereignty; the eagle, a symbol of strength, beauty, freedom, and imperialism, which appears on the flags of both Serbia and Albania, and is easily associated with the United States as well; and finally, the phrase *Proud to be...*, which repeats unchanged across the three elements of the series.

The strength of the work lies in its repetitiveness and uniformity across the three elements, which progressively empty the original meaning of the identity symbols represented. The nationalist and identity message, seemingly clear at first glance, is gradually deconstructed. The repetition transforms familiar symbols into something alienating, exposing the artificiality and lack of authenticity of these values.



- 1 Wendimagegn Belete
- 2 Ryts Monet
- 3 Melissa Peritore
- 5 Mileta Prodanović



- 2 - 6 Ryts Monet
- 3 Melissa Peritore
- 4 Lisl Ponger

Wendimagegn Belete (b. 1986, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) lives and works between Addis Ababa and Oslo. He completed his bachelor's degree in fine arts at the AAU Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Ethiopia, in 2012. In 2017, he earned an MA in Contemporary Art from the Tromsø Academy of Contemporary Art and Creative Writing in Norway. He is a multidisciplinary artist whose work explores the complex interplay of culture, memory, identity, heritage, spirituality, and epigenetic inheritance—a form of memory transferred across generations in unconventional ways. He works across diverse mediums, including installation, moving image, painting, photography, textiles, and found objects.

Ryts Monet (b. 1982, Bari, Italy) lives and works in Vienna. He completed his bachelor's degree in Visual arts and a Master's in Visual communication both at the IUAV University of Venice. Since 2022, he has been an official member of the Vienna Secession.

Ryts Monet's art research focuses on the production of images as a way to explore cultural frictions, monuments, and symbols of power. He is particularly interested in contemporary and late 20th-century history, with an emphasis on the expansion and crisis of historical ideologies. His practice often incorporates pre-existing materials, such as postcards, stamps, banknotes, as well as digital content, newspaper articles and other found objects.

Melissa Peritore (b. 1984, Busto Arsizio, Italy) is a Filipino-Italian photographer currently based in Vienna, Austria. She graduated in photography from the Bauer Institute in Milan (2007) and works with both digital and analogue photography, as well as collages.

Through her research, she examines cultural perceptions while challenging Eurocentric views of time and culture. Her work invites viewers to question their gaze, confronting cultural intersections in an ever-evolving world. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in solo and group exhibitions.

Lisl Ponger (b. 1947, Nürnberg, Germany) lives and works in Vienna. Her work is concerned with stereotypes, racism and the construction of the gaze at the interface of art, art history and ethnology in the mediums of photography, film, installation and text material. She is the curator of MuKul, the (fictitious) Museum of Foreign and Familiar Cultures which organises exhibitions in cooperation with various institutions.

Mileta Prodanović (b. 1959, Belgrade, Yugoslavia) lives and works in Belgrade. He graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade in 1983 and obtained a master's degree in 1985. He later specialized at the Royal College of Art in London (1989–90) and earned a Doctorate in Fine Arts from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade in 2009. His academic career culminated in his role as Rector of the university in 2018–2019.

Active in the art scene since the 1980s, Prodanović has exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions across Yugoslavia and Europe. His participation in the Yugoslava pavilion at the 1986 Venice Biennale stands as a significant milestone in his career.

His artistic practice spans different media, including painting and writing. Since 1983, he has published prose, essays and journalistic texts. His work often navigates themes of history, national identity, and socio-political dynamics, engaging with both personal and collective memory.