



#11

NEW FEARS is a gallery for dance, performance and transdisciplinary arts, representing both Berlin-based and international artists. For each episode NEW FEARS invites two artists for a residency, which culminates into a public event. The process is accompanied by a writer, whose output together with visual documentation manifests a resulting publication.

NEW FEARS #11 marked a specific moment in the history of the project, as the Basisförderung-funding for July Weber was not extended, which allowed them to keep the space alive in the last years, and in this time had over 150 artists participate in many various events. It was an unforeseen and uncertain situation and quite possible that the space had to close. As per usual, two artists were invited to have a residency, but this time join forces with the alternative celebration format—BABYCAKES, which combines underground club culture with contemporary performance art. The two artists were musician Leonard Elser (as part of the artistic duo Angel Rider) and performance artist Amissa Verstraete (aka Shy), who both embedded their artistic work into the format of BABYCAKES and the architecture of a club space alongside many, many other artists. Jenny Ames aka Artwife was invited to write a text not only in response to the two artists in residency, but to the entire event and its complex implications. Fotodocumentation by July Weber.



Eye holes and pigtails swish from aerial hoop suspensions.
Wiping tears with lollipops and misapprehensions.
Fritos as fingernails, crunching down as R.E.M. sings.
These are a few of my favorite things.

Mixed audience reactions about cat piss in Edeka.
Pomegranates, twisting wrists, chaos ma' Dabke.
Double-faced beauty plays the flute and sings.
These are somewhere over the rainbow things.

Babycakes falling out of miniskirts, slipping with pleasers.
Give me something to crush (on) frznte pole teasers.
Bobblehead cubicide, sticky mummies, and g-strings.
These are a few of my favorite things.

When the dooms scroll.
When the mass media hypes.
When I'm feeling sad.
I simply remember my favorite things.
And then I don't feel so bad.

Pillow fights soundtracked by jpeg and cute angel rider.
Oscar-winning performance by a psychotic lipstick biter.
Witnessing live birth pushed under vaginal hamstrings.
Bring that ass over let that coochie breathe things.

Jesters consuming commercial fries in unconventional dramatic ways.
Bad bitches on acid, open crotches, leaf blowers blaze.
Schubert, Deva Schubert is a bloody household name.
These are a few of my favorite games.

When the dooms scroll.
When mass media hypes.
When I'm feeling sad.
I simply remember all the babycakes things.
And then I don't feel so bad.

Kinetic sculptures turn into toxic prosthetics.
Countdown spasms and tentacles keep us all copacetic.
Oops I did it again, pierced you with my wolverine laser hands.
El miedo es asfixiante El extractivismo es violento lands.

Resonata: the crowd shrieks and shrills.
Blue whip cream cake ass and blue velvet feels.
Kulshedra symbolically burns the roof down (and the occupation)
These are the things I want to take on vacation.

When the scrolls doom.
When mass media hypes.
When I'm feeling mixed.
I simply remember my newest fears.
And then I don't feel so transfixed.

(Babycakes at Panke 19th November 2023)



These lyrics have been adapted from the song, „My Favorite Things“ from the 1959 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, The Sound of Music. Each line of the lyric represents a one-minute performance by one of forty artists who were invited to perform the fifth rendition of BABY-CAKES, marking a momentous ending chapter to NEW FEARS Gallery and its event series Babycakes, as we now know it, anyway.

Each artist has in one way or another passed through the doors of the gallery’s space in Berlin’s Wedding over the past three years. The telegram channel with its 801 subscribers boasted a “fresh and breathtaking DJ line-up, a pillow-playland, live musical acts, swinging goddesses and a fool’s dinner. With over 40 artists throwing themselves into a 1min-performance-marathon.”

“Here are the brave contestants, who will take this challenge, embrace our short attention span, and serve us on 19.11 @ Panke Culture with a 1min performative present.”

7pm BLOCK:

Chartreuse, Robin, Burcu, Judith, Isu, Constanze, Chill, Rachell, Asya, Thomas, Dasniya, Mia, Deva, Hurricane, Elvan, Elena&Kekik, Heinrich, Marta, Jpeg, Harman, Iga, Shedra

9:30pm BLOCK:

Rocio, Kinga, Dominique, Miel, Konsti, Josephinex, Michela, Matilde, WET, Timothee, Isabel _das teufelchen, Jo, Blathin, Juli, Aaron, Shar, Matias, Hassandra, I7lemoja, Karol, FRZNTTE, Andrius&Mina

BABYCAKES on this particular Sunday was in many regards, an epic musical, a colorful display of emotional pageantry with underlying social messages of courage, the belief in doing what is right, and unashamedly being true to oneself.

In a musical, the idea that each song serves a purpose within the piece, is to propel the story and characters forward in pursuit of that which they desire. The characters in each song need a reason to act, and this reason is rooted in their desires. The characters desire something, and their desire motivates them to take steps towards getting that something, and we see these actions play out in the characters' songs.

To represent the relationships and emotional dimensions of the characters, let's define "desire" as "a diffuse, continuous force that gets channeled into (or displaced onto) the constitution and expression" of one's object of desire (Cameron and Kulick #627)

Set in Austria on the eve of the Anschluss in 1938, the Sound of Music (1959) does not overlook the complexities citizens faced at the time and establishes a clear political stance through their depiction of the antagonists and protagonists, who make, through its dramatization, choices to sacrifice status, comfort, security, and potentially their own and their children's lives to stand up for what they believe is right. (Wagener)

There is a unique intensity in the motivations and desires that the BABYCAKES performers radiate through their offerings. The expression of that desire and motivation in the performances makes each artist's character on stage vulnerable and deeply human to its audience. At the same time, the magic of the endless one-minute montages and the creativity put into the costumes and props make the artists seem like superheroes enacting a narrative within a futuristic art underground pop playground.





Emphatically, the Sound of Music underscores the significance of music in our lives. Research in fields like music therapy has extensively explored the therapeutic benefits of music, emphasizing its capacity to enhance quality of life. The musical's portrayal of music as a unifying force amidst adversity reflects its profound ability to evoke strength, solidarity, and love even in the most challenging times. (Wagener) The same goes for the significance of sound in rave culture. Perhaps this is why the babycakes format was introduced to showcase music as significant to a collective art experience as the performative content for its ability to foster dance culture while bridging the gaps between performer and audience.

During the era when the Sound of Music was created, the mainstream psychological focus was predominantly on illness and disorders rather than on aspects such as wellness, resilience, and emotional recovery. It wasn't until four decades later that positive psychology gained widespread scholarly recognition. A fundamental display of positive psychology is the practice of gratitude to get oneself through anxiety or depressive ridden times, a concept encapsulated in the iconic song, "My Favorite Things". (Wagener) Though gratitude is now a contemporary commonplace wellness term, it's hard not to feel overwhelmed by a grateful collective experience generated from the babycakes that fell on this Sunday; grateful for the autonomy to use our bodies as mediums, grateful we can gather, grateful we can express and celebrate our shared mixed feelings and return home safely.



So BABYCAKES, Is this the end or is it only the beginning?

Is the baby now forcibly launched into the real world of capital? Will it be eaten alive? Is this the end for the little engine that could?

Let's recap when July—the powerhouse workpony arrived fresh on the scene at Ziegersgtr 11. We (Iga, Miel and I) had already been working out our systems for six hours, united by one of those rare Berlin early f&f Sunday parties, one sticky-hot Berlin summer day. “The gallery (New Fears) will probably close, we didn’t get renewed for funding :(I want to throw a closing babycakes party and I’m gonna invite all of the artists who passed through New Fears to contribute something. But what, what can we do!?!?!?!?”

We all started naming off ideas and not even 30 seconds in, July screamed out “I have it! Let’s make live performances play out as if we were viewing them on our screens like Instagram stories but we’re playing them in real life - and we do 1-minute performances, adopting Instagram’s 60-second viewing time limit... and—we’ll have like 50 artists and they perform 60 seconds each and it will be like scrolling through Instagram! Mua hahaha hahaha!”

Doomscrolling dopamine culture and its affects

Doomscrolling refers to the habit of endlessly scrolling through social media or news feeds, consuming negative or distressing content, often related to disasters, crises, or other troubling events. This behavior has become increasingly prevalent in today’s digital age, fueled by the constant stream of information available at our fingertips.

Doomscrolling can have several negative effects on mental health and well-being. Firstly, it can lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, and even depression as individuals are bombarded with alarming news and images without a break. This constant exposure to negative information can overwhelm the brain and contribute to a sense of helplessness or hopelessness about the state of the world.





Additionally, doomscrolling can be addictive due to its impact on the brain's reward system. When we encounter shocking or emotionally charged content, our brains release dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward. This dopamine release reinforces the behavior of scrolling and seeking out more negative content, creating a vicious cycle of consumption.

The prevalence of doomscrolling is further exacerbated by the algorithms employed by social media platforms, which are designed to keep users engaged for as long as possible. These algorithms prioritize content that elicits strong emotional reactions, often favoring sensational or inflammatory material over more balanced or informative content. As a result, users are more likely to be exposed to negative news and sensationalist headlines, feeding into the cycle of doomscrolling.

To combat the negative effects of doomscrolling, it's important to attend curated events like BABYCAKES instead and consciously seek out positive and productive content. By taking control of our digital habits and prioritizing self-care and togetherness, we can mitigate the harmful effects of doomscrolling and foster a healthier relationship with each other.

I think for July, BABYCAKES was merely designed to satisfy that constant longing for something wild to happen at every turn of the party's interior corner, though they very well knew they could not always snap their fingers and have that instantly appear (like TikTok or Instagram so numbingly satisfies), but they never stopped trying. And if that can't happen, they would invent ways to trick our stimuli into some kind of hyper-pop mode to force us to firework our feelings out.

For July it is important to understand this platform as a playground that is curated and framed to a certain extent and in this way provides a vision, boundaries and agreements, but that it also leaves enough space for things to emerge in the moment, to adapt and integrate unexpected elements. And this was only possible by collaborating very close with Joana Lucas and Jose del Palo, forming an organizational core-group, that is built on friendship and enthusiasm for bringing together interesting and unusual combinations of artists and spaces. This core-group also provides enough stability to always invite more different artists to join, to come and go, as we know it from the Berlin freelance art-scene - fleeting, always shifting and still a temporary family. A commitment and dedication doesn't have to exclude spontaneity and playfulness and BABYCAKES and many other formats related to the NEW FEARS gallery constantly question these aspects and try to juggle with them in a creative fruitful way.

„What is more serious than kids at play?“

I was there when July opened NEW FEARS, a gallery for performance art in Wedding, and before that Pollution - a mixed-use dance studio space half buried underground. COVID made them restless, and so they tried hard, very hard every weekend to make a community gathering... enticing people to eat pancakes, DJ, perform, set up markets, provide services, dance in windows, and make fight clubs but with dancing instead of fighting.

NEW FEARS was named (and a name is everything in the personalized manifestations it ends up embodying). I've maybe heard July say this line out loud 500 times "I want to make a party that's really, really, cute, always on Sunday, and starts during the day and doesn't go too late, and I want to call it °BABYCAKES°"

They then showed me a YouTube link to this track called "Baby Cakes" by 3 of a kind (2004) and started singing along to the lyrics:

Baby cakes
You just don't know, know
How I, I
I like it down low, low
(because everything starts with a song)



I laughed, “OK yeah sure, why not, do it.” It’s only now do I realize what ‘babycakes’ truly represents. It’s all of the individuals July has encountered on their journey through this liminal queer oasis sector of the galaxy. The role of the artist in the gallery is not complete without July asking them to perform or provide multiple services in multiple different ways pushing them to perfect their multiple array of talents. The artists go into their fears and then pop out as freshly baked little cake which audiences get invited to sprinkle, adorn, spread frosting over, and then eventually pull apart to expose oozy gooey fillings to ultimately become devoured. It’s essentially every artist’s dream except perhaps some cultural institutional settings can’t provide this... but in a party setting there’s a lot to play with.

The artists of NEW FEARS and its subsidiary BABYCAKES became a family and these were in their essence immersive dramatic family gatherings. It is a party specifically stemming from and celebrated by the dance and performance art scene... each party had a plethora for the senses to feast on with juicy DJ lineups transmuting experimental pop and bouncy beats to hungry hot gogo dancers. It’s been a far cry from Berlin nightlife which is known for its dark disorienting dungeon techno.

This night of 40 performances was particularly ambitious, and grand. The limits July themselves didn’t know they could logistically pull off. What’s beautiful about babycakes is that when it used its funding, it was never to boast any kind of high-tech or grandiose atmosphere. When you have the right talent, you don’t need to do that much except to compensate them generously for their time (what they ought to be owed). The funding went to what was always and forever should be the point of funding.

NEW FEARS culminated into what seemed to foreshadow the final shade of what this phrase feels like as a fleeting feeling suspended in time. A moment in time when freedom of expression in Germany was under siege, and a moment in history we all wish could unsee. A moment where the most primal and barest feelings need to be unleashed into a collectivized outpouring. Culture will never be free from that inherent capitalist agenda, and so the subtitle and ultimately the theme for the affair was to unleash mixed feelings. Lyrical themes include humanity, the Earth, drugs, psychosis, greed, fear, suffering, society, annihilation, human consciousness, and the collapse of civilization—In other words, Mixed Feelings.

The room appeared as if everyone in each row were one foot taller until the people in the final row had their heads touching the ceiling. There were outbursts of synchronized laughter, screaming, cheering, snapping, and moments of dead silence. We were all experiencing the same extreme spectrum of emotions while being gregariously blessed with rapid hard-hitting entertainment. We did not even have time to anticipate the next act... there was more than enough dopamine to supply any neurodivergent brain (like driving in our Mario karts and hitting a super mushroom one after another). How much more excitement can we intake? It doesn’t stop. 30 minutes feels like a 4-hour musical theatrical amusement park ride.

Once we hop off the xylophone having travelled the spectrum of each diverse feeling. The resulting dissonance persists until the suspended note resolves by stepwise motion into a new consonant harmony of tenderness. Tenderness is the virtue of our times, it is our new fears.

Written by Jenny Ames aka Artwife aka Undercover Maniac



