

## SHELTER FROM THE STARS

Idle Hands (Sophie Ballmer & Tarik Hayward)

October 4, 2025 to February 7, 2026

Kunstraum Kreuzlingen

(Exhibition in the basement)

Since Antiquity, fountains have been both sources and surfaces: they gush forth as promises of fertility, or unfold as unstable mirrors in which one seeks a shimmering truth. Western history has burdened them with multiple functions: Christian fons vitae, baroque machines where domesticated water asserted princely power, sculpted mirrors in Versailles, and finally, a radical detour in 1917, when Fountain became an overturned, mute urinal. Each era has projected onto them its relationship to flow, control, and collective destiny.

The sculptures presented here summon this long memory. At first glance, they resemble fountains: masses of disparate objects, precarious volumes evoking both construction and ruin — a suspended worksite. Sinks, doors, tiles, windows, or fragments of furniture rise up like the layers of a disrupted domestic landscape. These assemblages rest in vast retention basins, contemporary pedestals containing a dark, unsettling substance: used motor oil.

From a distance, one might think they perceive a trickling. But up close, it's clear that no flow circulates. The blackness is too dense, too smooth: it absorbs light, muffles visual cues, making it impossible to tell whether the surface is moving or not. In this perceptual paradox, these "fountains" align with Duchamp's legacy, as though the promised vitality had been withdrawn.

This blackness is not merely an absence: it reflects a contemporary abstraction that seems to circulate without ever being grasped, absorbing all information and rendering reality opaque. The fountains thus become metaphors for the invisible flows that govern our time: data streams, financial flows, energy currents — always out of scale, always elusive.

The only movement comes from elsewhere. In the semi-buried, darkened room, flat screens display a video: a fairground carousel spinning horizontally, painted in the colors of *The Matrix*. Teenagers stand on it, swaying, stumbling, seeking a precarious balance between falling and staying upright. This ride, both archaic and futuristic, reenacts the impossible equilibrium of contemporary generations, suspended between legacy and vertigo.

Heirs to a twentieth century saturated with paradoxes, they try to stand on a machine of entertainment that offers no stability. The video is not experienced as a

direct present, but as a deferred transmission: the image flow is already mediated. It reflects in the pools of oil, animating the sculptures from a distance. The carousel seems to give a spectral movement to the immobile fountains. Each black screen mirrors the retention basins: same black surfaces, same opaque mirrors, same promises of submerged images.

The only voice that pierces the installation is that of the artists' daughter, a thirteen-year-old girl singing in a high-pitched voice: *I'm calling you*. This call, fragile and insistent, attempts to reawaken a frozen present. As if the younger generation were trying to stir the material, to breathe life into it.

The materials used in the fountains come from the artists' garden: a self-build site initiated over ten years ago, a house inherited and reimagined as a utopian terrain. This site is both intimate and political, familial and collective, ruin and promise.

Finally, the very architecture of the room heightens the ambivalence. The windows have been removed and replaced with a simple heat-shrink plastic film, almost invisible. From this semi-darkness, natural light filters in obliquely, revealing not horizons but a weathered, monumental retaining wall. The room becomes a contemporary cavern: a subterranean space where one contemplates not the clarity of gushing water, but the darkness of opaque flows.

These fountains do not flow: they absorb, reflect, entrap. They summon the history of a triumphant motif of Western art, only to reveal its negative counterpart today: no longer sources of life, but opaque basins; no longer eruptions, but inertia; no longer joyful eternity, but compulsive acceleration and paradoxical stagnation.

Sophie Ballmer & Tarik Hayward, 2025