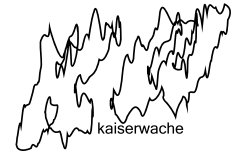


Jason Hirata

Vergeltung

Oct. 22–Nov. 30, 2025



There is one main gesture, which is backwards: we pay the audience. Well first, they pay us their attention and then we pay them back for it. Iija is in charge of the repayments and gives them out complete with a note for your records.

After that, everything else is extra.

- 1) There are two wooden sculptures that were constructed in Basel. They look like shelves and work like shelves. That is their purpose—they accumulate things.
- 2) There is a recipe for refried beans, printed on a business card.
- 3) On top of all this there are decorations on the wall.

Having extra stuff helps because you can ignore it. That way you know for sure when you're focused on something important.

- Jason Hirata

The preparations for this exhibition began with a consideration of the audience of Kaiserwache—specific people at a specific place. But how specific can we really get? Technically, isn't audienceship open to everyone? Isn't the online viewer, or even the person who doesn't attend the show, still relevant to the conversation, precisely because their different kind of presence, or absence, helps define what the show is? In the same way, the other side of the audience—that is, the art space and the artist—must also be understood as a kind of fiction, which can be narrated in different ways. Viewed from this perspective, the rationale behind the exhibition's decisions becomes more comprehensible, I would say.

The exhibition flips the usual roles in the exchange of monetary for aesthetic value. In *Vergeltung*, the audience is highlighted as a provider of artistic experience and is remunerated for their service of attendance and attention. Visitors are transformed into workers acting in the artist's stead. They operate as his representatives and receive payments drawn from Jason's fee for his work on this exhibition. These (re)payments are documented through invoices issued to Kaiserwache and form part of the exhibition's documentation. The amount paid is decided on a case-by-case basis and is limited to the artist fee. These transactions constitute the focal gesture of the exhibition. The remaining elements are considered by the artist as extras—excess that paradoxically redirects attention to the payback. The extras in *Vergeltung* include two *Accumulators*, a refried beans recipe (frijoles refritos) in business card format, and a decorative element.

The *Accumulators* are part of Jason's ongoing series of shelf-like wooden structures. They are made to accumulate things without a predefined method or specified purpose. They simply gather materials—even if only dust, as in the first piece that greets visitors to the exhibition. The second can be understood as a "private" *Accumulator*, one that I use myself. Originally, both hung in my home, and I tried to follow Jason's instruction, to use them casually, without overthinking. The first attempt resulted in an empty *Accumulator*, but soon a natural function from my everyday life emerged: since I regularly visit exhibitions and bring back numerous exhibition texts, handouts, and papers of the sort, the second *Accumulator* became their repository, along with personal notes on the shows.

The refried beans recipe (frijoles refritos) extends the exhibition's logic of exchange and

redistribution beyond the immediate installation. Sharing a recipe points to other forms of value—for example care, visible in the preparation and sharing of a meal. I understand this work as a gesture in which Jason, in effect, offers a home-cooked meal on top of the remuneration. The recipe is presented both as a framed print and as a business card for visitors to take away; in its dual form, it bridges the private and the institutional.

The decorative element is explicitly not defined as an artwork, yet it employs the logic of Duchampian transmutation of ordinary objects into art. If artists can, through attribution, define what counts as art, they can also perform the inverse, bringing non-art into being. But the fact that it is not an artwork does not mean it is not work. Here, labor is obscured by the mechanisms of artistic value systems—those internalized systems that give art special attention in relation to non-art. Thus, the work is declared decor, something not deemed worthy of further mention.

Vergeltung means retaliation in German: a morally justified form of punishment. The word conjures the image of a pan scale that, once tipped to one side, swings forcefully back the other way. This principle of balance can also be applied to structures of work and consumption in the cultural sector: although these systems often appear separate, *Vergeltung* complicates their separability by recasting the audience, the consumers, as workers owed their due pay.

- Ilja Zaharov

About the artist:

Jason Hirata (*1986 in Seattle, USA) lives and works in New Jersey, USA. He completed his BFA in Photography at the University of Washington in 2009. Recent participation in exhibitions include: Hamlet, Zurich (2025); The Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College (2025); Fluentum, Berlin (2025); Fanta-MLN, Milan (2024, 2022, 2021); ensemble, New York (2024); Regards, Chicago (2023); Simian, Copenhagen (2023); Billytown, The Hague (2023); Museion, Bolzano (2023); Ulrik, New York (2022); The Wig, Berlin (2021); and Theta, New York (2021). Concurrently with the opening of *Vergeltung*, his work is on view at the Fanta-MLN booth at Art Basel Paris.

About Kaiserwache:

The name Kaiserwache carries a historical irony. The building's proximity to Kaiser-Joseph-Straße and Kaiserbrücke—named after Emperor Joseph II's visit to Freiburg in 1777—points to the city's imperial past. The bridge itself was once adorned with bronze statues of historical figures such as Henry V and Frederick Barbarossa. During World War II, these statues were removed with the intention of melting them down for war production—a plan that was ultimately never realized. Due to high transportation costs, the statues remained unused after the war. To this day, the empty niches remain visible—just steps away from Kaiserwache.

Beyond this historical dimension, the building's original function as a public restroom adds another layer—perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to the throne of the king. The Art Nouveau structure has seen a turbulent past: damaged in both World Wars, used as a refuge for drug users in the 1980s, and evolving into a well-known cruising spot in the 1990s. Traces of this history remain visible—graffiti, phone numbers, and explicit inscriptions, which have been consciously preserved as artifacts of the site's unofficial past. Today, the building is under historical preservation and serves as an exhibition space since 2021.

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