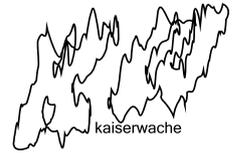


Brain in a Pipe

February 08–March 15, 2026

CAConrad, Jan Domicz, Gina Folly,
Germaine Koh, Devin T. Mays, Sean Morel

organized by u



It's easier to think of u through the summation of its activities rather than as a thing or a person. Although technically organized by Sean Morel, and clearly tethered to him, it seems to me that u crosses the threshold of being merely an alias or alter ego. Instead, u emerges through collaboration and is situated in between things and people. u finds its existence in the relationships between Sean, the artist and curators that come into the fold, the objects that materialize, and also the viewers' responses. In this sense, u is a shared name—u is you. In this context, I read Sean's description of u as "an element of language; it preexists us and accrues meaning through interaction"¹ as a reference to the potential of art to do justice to everyone involved in the artistic process, and in doing so to establish a profound solidarity.

u also stands as an example of a DIY culture among exhibition makers and artists who grew tired of a certain kind of inertia that comes with exhibiting at institutional or commercial spaces. Their volition and drive to produce, to actualize their excitement for making something and presenting it to the world, exceeded the timely manner of operations and opportunities available to them. On top of that, especially if you are interested in experimental exhibition making, the problem becomes apparent. How could you break the mold without breaking with the structures of the sanctioned spaces? Where with all that surplus energy? It must materialize somehow.

Why not make your own mold, open a project space? As u states itself, "project spaces are quite easy."² All you need is your bedroom, your basement, or whatever. You can go to a library or a public park and put on a show by an artist you recently discovered online, immediately fell in love with, and felt compelled to reach out to after scouring the web for their email address.

Get your friends to the park—that's your local audience. If you want the show to cross borders, take your camera with you and share images online—there's your international audience. There is a distinctive enthusiasm and optimism and accessibility in u's approach to exhibition making that seeks to infect its audience: anybody can do it!

(No doubt, the ethos of u also resonates with Kaiserwache, which is why it felt only right to invite u, to reverse the tables for once and have a heart-to-heart, from one project space to another.)

u approaches the concept of a project space by rethinking its physical boundaries. Instead of a fixed location, u constructs micro-exhibition spaces out of clear packing tape, small, light weight, transparent cuboids designed to be shipped affordably. These shippable galleries are sent to collaborators around the world. Upon arrival, the recipient can choose to physically intervene in the micro-space or leave it untouched. Often, the object itself serves as a catalyst for a deeper dialogue regarding the expanded (or perhaps compressed) idea of an art space, and what commitment to a shared project might entail. What is foregrounded is not the insistence and permanence of the space, but the moment of contact it initiates. The gesture of invitation establishes a temporary commons, one that exists only through participation, response, and importantly a reciprocal appreciation of one another as art practitioners.

For "Brain in a Pipe," u turns away from the tape spaces to engage with Kaiserwache's unique architecture and derelict infrastructure. The title recalls u's exhibition at the

Southern Alberta Art Gallery, which offered free exhibition titles up for grabs; one such prompt was “brain in a jar.” This title was adopted and adapted for Kaiserwache in reference to KW’s omnipresent but defunct plumbing. All these pipes lead somewhere—and also lead somewhere within KW itself.

While the most visible traces of the past appear in the Art Nouveau ornamentation, and in its defacement through graffiti, this is not necessarily where the building’s history resides. Perhaps it is embedded instead in the plumbing infrastructure: water in, waste out, heat dispersed, bodies briefly accommodated. Since here lie the reasons for its existence, or at least its birthright. In this logic of circulation, in the movement of energies, we might need to look more closely. It is here that the brain of the operation “Kaiserwache as public toilet” could be located. Matter was once meant to flow through these channels and no longer does. What remains? Is the brain still lodged in the pipes, as the title suggests?

With no heating and no running water, no ventilation, the building becomes in the winter essentially a walk-in freezer. Inhospitable to visitors, it once again refuses comfortable use even for exhibiting. For this reason, KW usually entered a seasonal break. Yet, u was drawn precisely to this condition, to the possibility of subverting cycles of habitation. What does it mean to exhibit in the off-season? The works in this show do not warm the space, nor do they restore any of its previous functions. Instead, one might say, they align themselves with this arrested metabolism.

- Ilja Zaharov

¹ press release for “diary entry 5” by u at Southern Alberta Art Gallery / Maansiksikaitsitapiitsinikssin Centre Village Mall, Lethbridge, 2022

² “artist talk,” slideshow of scanned prints, 5 minutes 37 seconds, 2022

About the artists:

CAConrad (*1966 in Topeka KS, USA) lives and works in New York City. CA's bio states, emphatically, that "they have worked with the ancient technologies of poetry and ritual since 1975"; they have since compiled a substantial and influential body of work. CA is known for especially their SOMA tics, which are ritualized, performative writing exercises designed to break habitual thought patterns and open new perceptual and emotional registers. Poetry, for them, is inseparable from lived experience and embodied practice. Their poetry has been widely published and translated into multiple languages. Their latest book is "Listen to the Golden Boomerang Return" (Wave Books/UK Penguin, 2024). In 2022 they were awarded the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize for lifetime achievement. They teach at Columbia University in New York City and Sandberg Art Institute in Amsterdam. Along with their writing and rituals, CA also presents their language works in object form in art exhibitions. Previous shows include: Institute for Contemporary Art & Transfer, Hamburg (2025/26); Gallery 51, North Adams MA (2025/26); Champ Lacombe, London (2025); Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson (2025); and Phenomenon 5, Anafi, Greece (2024).

Jan Domicz (*1990 in Opole, Poland) lives and works in Warsaw. He first studied Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Poznań, before continuing his studies at Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main, where he graduated in 2015. He has received grants from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Poland) and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. Domicz is an artist working primarily in video, objects, and installation. His practice revolves around the deliberate misplacement of objects and architectural elements to create new meanings and point our attention at the oddness of things. His works often engage with the architectural context, transforming spaces through interventions that play with perception, art-world codes, and the language of simulacra. He has previously exhibited at venues such as: Wschód, Warsaw (2026, 2024, 2018); Stooze Fine Arts, Berlin (2025); JIL, Warsaw (2025); Miejski Ośrodek Sztuki, Gorzów Wielkopolski (2024); Salon 75, Frederiksberg (2023); ECHO, Cologne (2023); FORM, online & Wageningen (2022); and Neuer Essener Kunstverein, Essen (2022).

Gina Folly (*1983 in Zurich) lives and works in Basel and Paris. She graduated with a MFA at ZHdK, Zurich in 2014. She was awarded the Manor Art Prize Basel in 2023. Her practice encompasses photography, sculpture and installation. Folly's work explores the connections between humans and the wider environment with humor and subtle critique. Her works emphasize care and attention in everyday relationships, revealing how these needs can turn obsessive or tragic under contemporary pressures. She works with simple, everyday materials, creating reduced yet thoughtful forms that make her art both accessible and reflective. She has previously exhibited at institutions and galleries including Capitain Petzel, Berlin (2026); Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2025); Basement Roma, Rome (2025); Swiss Institute, New York (2024/25); CAC Synagogue de Delme, France (2024); FANTA-MLN, Milan (2024); Centre d'édition contemporaine, Geneva (2023); Kunstmuseum Basel (2023); and Tonus, Paris (2022).

Germaine Koh (*1967 in George Town, Malaysia) lives and works in Vancouver, Canada. She obtained her MFA in 1993 from Hunter College in New York. Koh is an artist and curator, currently teaching art history and theory at the University of British Columbia. In 2023 she won the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. Koh's work explores the poetics of everyday life. She employs a wide variety of materials, from found or discarded objects to purchased everyday items, transforming them into conceptual, participatory, and often environmental artworks. Many of her projects invite audience engagement or collaboration, emphasizing play and emergent behavior as forms of learning and problem-solving. Works like "Call" (a public telephone connecting strangers), "Knitwork" (recycling garments into evolving objects), and "League" (community-created games) exemplify her interest in social interaction and the creative potential of ordinary materials to transform social relations. Her past exhibitions include: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver (2026); Gibson Art Museum, Burnaby BC (2025); Griffin Art Projects, Vancouver (2025); 601Artspace, New York (2025); Nanaimo Art Gallery, Nanaimo BC (2025); Salt Spring Arts Council, Ganges BC (2024); National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2023); and Simon Fraser University School for the Contemporary Art, Vancouver (2023).

Devin T. Mays (*1985 in Detroit) lives and works in Chicago and Houston. Mays graduated with an MFA from the University of Chicago in 2016. He is currently an assistant professor of art at Rice University, Houston. In his practice Mays probes the in-between of things. This intermediary space isn't anything clearly definable. Working across sculpture, installation, performance, and photography, he often presents materials as they are, with little physical transformation. Through subtle rearrangement, repositioning, and sonic interventions, his practice seeks this strange space between everything and nothing. In this spirit, he describes his work as a place where things become "Things." His previous exhibitions include Artists Space; New York (2025); Good Weather, Chicago (2025); Regards, Chicago (2025); The Power Station, Dallas (2024/25); Martin Janda, Vienna (2024); The Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, Chicago (2024); F, Houston (2024); Galerie; Sweetwater, Berlin (2024); and Baader-Meinhof, Omaha (2023).

Sean Morel (*1987, Calgary, Canada) is an artist, curator, and art consultant, currently based in Black Diamond (Diamond Valley), Alberta. He is a 2027 MFA candidate at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. Over the past decade, Morel has maintained an active studio practice while also organizing exhibitions of other artists' work in a wide range of spaces—from garden sheds, abandoned barns, and renovated garages to commercial galleries. He managed the exhibition space 67 Steps in Los Angeles (2017–18) and since 2019 he organizes u's projects in Diamond Valley (previously Calgary). Morel is currently constructing a purpose-built project space on his property in Black Diamond. His artistic practice includes drawing, collage, and sculpture. The work often begins with observations of everyday situations or encounters; from these, Sean gathers materials that are then transformed or reconfigured into arrangements that at first may appear abstract but do convey these moments on a less immediate level. Morel's artistic work has been exhibited at venues such as: Parapet Real Humans, St. Louis (2025); Leighton Art Centre, Millarville (2025); Chris Andrews, Montréal (2025); Badlands Art Department, Drumheller (2023); Bad Water, Knoxville TN (2022); Bel Ami, Los Angeles (2019); and Balice Hertling, Paris (2018).

Recent presentations with u include OHCE-ECHO, Vancouver (2025); Backrooms, Kunsthalle Zürich (2024); Chris Andrews, Montréal (2024); Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge (2022/23); Wschód, Warsaw (2022); and Bel Ami, Los Angeles (2019).

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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