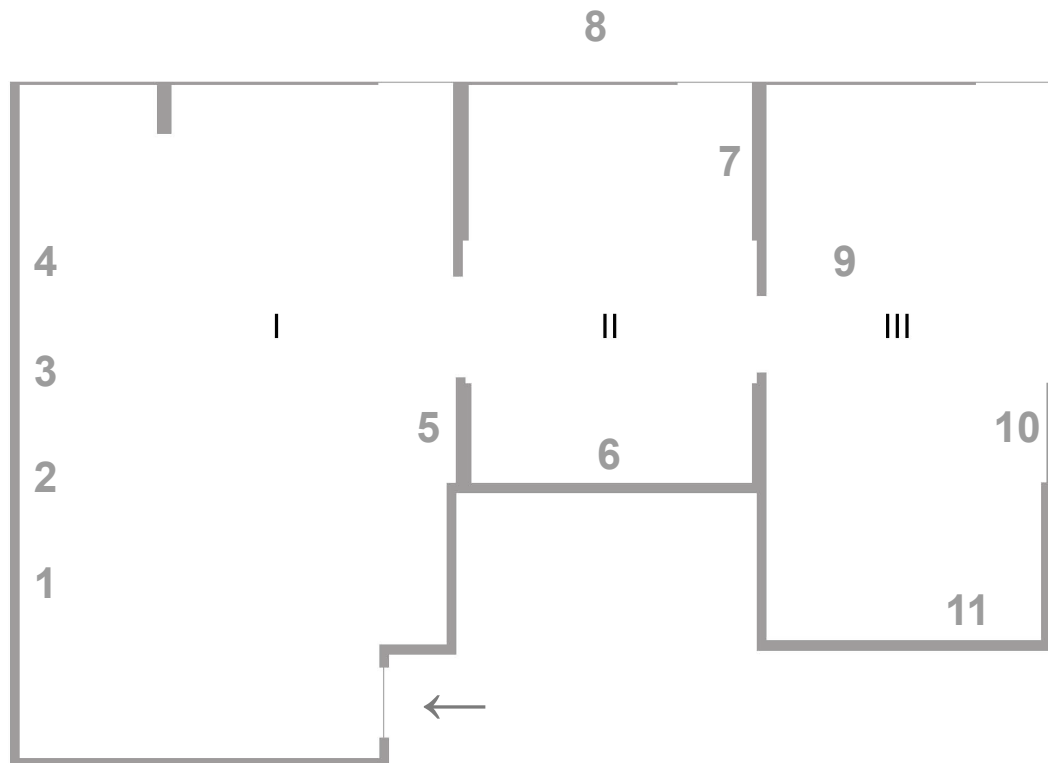


Drama Kings

Opening on Sunday 21. September / Exhibition until 5. October 2025

with a text by Erell Le Pape and Mina Achermann and an introduction by Divided Studios.



I

1 | Drama Series (*To be, or not to be*) I

2 | Drama Series (*To be, or not to be*) II

3 | Drama Series (*To be, or not to be*) III

4 | Drama Series (*To be, or not to be*) IV

5 | Letter one
engl. translation can be found in the last room

II

6 | Drama Series (*To be, or not to be*) V

7 | Untitled
Letters that have never been picked up by the recipient.

8 | Grand Opening/Grand Finale
Performance with Liam Rooney

III

9 | Untitled
Lock cylinder with five out of seven keys

10 | Letter two (*end of conversation*)
engl. translation can be found in the last room

11 | Untitled
Previous signs reinstalled at their original hanging height

Halmet would not have been possible without the great mental and consulting support by: Paul Rechsteiner, David Bircher, Tania Stöcklin, Julia Hegi and Antonia Truninger and all our dear friends.



Drama Kings is an exhibition by Divided Studios
With kind support by: Stadt Zürich Kultur und Fachstelle Kultur Kanton Zürich

It has been exactly one year since we, as Divided Studios, took over the space and programme at Hamlet. At that time, Hamlet had been existing for almost six years and had a long history with numerous exhibitions and events, a loyal audience and a steadily growing inventory – valuable resources that were thus passed on to a new team for the second time. One year ago, however, we also took on shared responsibility for an ongoing project that was shaped by established power relations and an organizational structure that had begun to crumble before we could even start with our work.

This exhibition is built around two letters. The second remains unanswered. What remains invisible in the exhibition are months of uncertainty, during which our attempts to engage in dialogue were ignored or put off with empty promises, while our financial situation at the time didn't even allow us to cover the costs of the current exhibition. Reasons that led us to start writing letters.

The problems we were facing were not new – neither for Hamlet, nor for the art scene, nor for the cultural sector – as capitalist and corrupt mechanisms spread through all areas of our society. Through an encounter in May this year, we were also reminded of the structural nature of such problems. We met Erell in a restaurant in Basel. At the time, she was co-curating an off-space in Geneva and she had gone through experiences that showed almost uncanny parallels with our story.

Hardly any of these stories go public. They do not fit into the small art scene, which relies on the intertwining of personal and professional contacts. Oftentimes, efforts to resolve the problem internally remain unsuccessful, leaving at best a few half-truths circulating as rumors. And so, things continue on as before.

The continuation of this space and its exhibition programme is only possible thanks to the great support of a few individuals, the solidarity of our community and some lucky coincidences – but not without tiny but visible traces: Hamlet became Halmet.

This is no ordinary exhibition. It is more of a moment of coming together, a grand opening of an off-space that has actually been in existence for seven years. It is a personal exhibition closing the chapter of Hamlet on Dörflistrasse while simultaneously opening a new one. It is also an exhibition dedicated to projects that, unlike this one, were not fortunate enough to continue and are forgotten before anyone has the chance to ask why.

The Geneva off-space had to close its doors.
We invited their former curators, Erell Le Pape and Mina Achermann, to write a text.

Introduction by Divided Studios

MADONNA CAPITALISM

(text translated by the authors from the original bilingual French-German version)

THE PLACE

UNDER THE GLASS CEILING

THE FIGURES

THE ZEALOUS

MADONNA

MADONNA'S CHILD

PAPER GIVERS

THE ZEALOUS

The Zealous worked ceaselessly.

They moved through the house like a fleeting breath. Their wings made no sound. They barely fluttered, translucent, so delicate one could almost believe they did not exist. Yet it was them who held the house together. The walls stood firm because their fingers smoothed them, the floors shone because their knees polished them. There was no choice: the cleaning was imposed on them, erasing the traces of others. Elsewhere, some Zealous were creating or building. But in this house, there was only obedience: invisible chains tied them to the walls. The Zealous kept it alive: they repaired, organised, carried, invited, accompanied, soothed. They did so tirelessly, as if pulled by invisible threads.

The Zealous worried ceaselessly. They worried about the bills, the house, the walls that needed repainting, the floor that constantly required fixing. They repaired, polished, assembled, filled gaps, joined pieces, carried, endured, smoothed, soothed. They tended to the satisfaction of their guests, wrapping them in the little paper they were given, folding cradles, crowns and carpets. They had learned to calm any flicker of discontent with their softest voice. Thus, they said yes, of course, no problem, immediately – dissolving themselves and surrendering in succession.

The Zealous listened to everything: sighs, tongue clicks, the rustling of jackets. And every sound entered them like a blade that did not cut but left a mark. They became absorbing surfaces. They oriented their bodies towards others until they lost themselves in that orientation.

The Zealous had no centre. They had been placed at the front, like plastic figurines rocking on a dashboard. Small articulated dogs, shaken by bumpy roads, ready to take the shocks. And when a shock came, it was them who yielded. Their bodies cracked to protect those of others. No one saw the fracture. They said they were committed, passionate, that they loved it. Passion – that gentle word to express exhaustion.

They were drained from every orifice. Slowly, methodically. An invisible liquid drained from them until they became dry. They were rewarded with polite thanks, shiny like small crowns placed on decayed teeth – with the brilliance of a symbol and the stench of a lie.

The Zealous were not individuals. They were a form of labour that no one dares to name. They held the space, they held the community, they held life – and it was precisely for this reason that they remained invisible.

The Zealous did not notice that in the walls they patiently painted and in the floor they diligently repaired, new holes were being perpetually made. Centuries passed. And after a thousand years, the Zealous began to lose their strength. They lost more and more of what they had never owned in the first place and yet held so dear. Gradually, they dried out from within, and their wings turned all grey.

MADONNA'S CHILD

Madonna's Child appeared as a messianic figure. Their body moved, draped with names and concepts like icons: Fanon, Butler, Lorde, Mbembe. Words poured from them like polished gems. An intersectional feminist, an anti-paper activist, and a brilliant decolonial thinker. With credible commitment and lucid language,

Madonna's Child spoke up against repression and for redistribution. Those who listened saw themselves reflected in their speech like in a dark water mirror. They believed they had found a passage.

But what they did not suspect was that Madonna's Child had started to lie before breathing, had promised before understanding. And what they did not suspect either, was Madonna's Child's love for paper. Madonna's Child took paper from the house and slowly stuffed it into every pocket of their long robe, which had many pockets, tucked it under their arms, and pinned it into their hair. Every few days a little more: crumpled papers, promises, residencies, funding. The paper covered them like a second skin. They were caught in a rush. They did not really know what to do with all that paper, and their pockets were already very full. So they began to drape the paper around their words.

Yet they repeated the same words until those words had no resonance anymore. They performed the same actions until they became like a dream. After a thousand years of paper greed, Madonna's Child became trapped in repetition and their words lost weight. The words turned to dust, fine powder falling from their mouth, covering the floor. They spoke continuously, and the more they spoke, the more the void grew around them. They had learned the logic of the field: theory as capital, critique as currency. From the outside, they were a figure of hope. Others listened because they saw their own desires reflected. Madonna's Child knew how to form a community with words, but it was a community balanced on the fragile surface of language.

MADONNA

Madonna's Child had become insatiable, lost in paper greed. But Madonna, as the loving mother that she is, shielded her child, drawing them under her long robe. Madonna spoke gently, with a soothing benevolence. Madonna smiled. Always. A smile painted with a fine brush, laid like varnish over ruins. She masked the fissures, covered the shards. This gesture, repeated, had become her vocation: maintaining the illusion of continuity. She was a feminist mother, outwardly emancipated, inwardly weary from endless mothering. Yet, for her reputation, she held the pose – expecting gentle self-sacrifice from herself as from others. The space under her robe was taken – but to those who devoted themselves with diligence, she offered her hand, with the promise of light and recognition. The Zealous remained without rights, but they received small signs, tastings of tenderness.

THE PAPER GIVERS

The paper givers loved paper. They loved to sign it, file it, pass it on. They believed certain papers were sacred, storing them in vast underground archives so that other men – their enemies – could not access them. They lived in glass towers full of archives. They loved paper, not as matter, but as symbol. Paper was not a tool but a bureaucratic body, made of stamps, signatures, and checkboxes. For them, paper was like capital: an instrument of order, administration, and control. They distributed it sparingly, measured, just enough to keep the house standing, never enough for it to emancipate itself. They were the discreet hand supporting the system. They knew that dependence is more effective than prohibition.

THE GLASS CRADLE

Under the glass ceiling of Madonna Capitalism are those who surrender themselves in order to be noticed. Their energy is slowly drained by a softly violent system, where any form of real participation or emancipation is politely rejected. It comes wrapped in gentle exploitation, lulled by a rocking benevolence, almost maternal, exhausting the Zealous without frontal violence but with a moral varnish. Such a system does not rely on money but on cultural capital: those who are passionate enough attain recognition and visibility. Reward doesn't come in form of money, nor in rights or security, but in dim thanks and the promise of light. A promise that flatters, envelops, and quietly exhausts the bodies and souls it cradles.

The system relied on a false equivalence: giving = being recognised. But this recognition never opened the way to rights. It only led to repetition. The glass shone, smooth and intact, and every attempt at emancipation bounced off it. Beneath the glass ceiling, everything was covered in an exhausting sweetness. No blows, no threats: only constant wear, a belief that devotion would one day be rewarded, even though that same

devotion was the source of exhaustion.

The system spoke a soft language. It never said no; it said “just a little more.” It did not strike; it rocked. It did not censor; it applauded. Applause was its most effective weapon, muting voices more efficiently than silence.

It worked on a simple principle: transform energy into visibility, visibility into recognition, recognition into dependence. Pierre Bourdieu would have called it cultural capital. Lauren Berlant, cruel optimism. Sara Ahmed, affective debt. Three names for the same logic: wearing down bodies through the promise of light. We call it Madonna Capitalism.

Thus the Zealous continued. Their bodies faded, their wings crumbled. They mistook gratitude for participation, recognition for freedom, visibility for justice. Centuries passed. Madonna’s Child got caught in repetition. Madonna kept smiling, always, and the Paper Givers locked their archives. Under the glass ceiling, the Zealous played musical chairs. They ran, they spun, the music continued. When they finally paused, the chair had disappeared. The glass remained intact. Transparent, shiny. But if one pressed an ear against it, one heard something: no blow, no cry, but a rustle. The sound of paper tearing slowly. Perhaps a fissure?