

KUNSTHALLE
BASEL

BACK WALL

JUDITH KAKON
⌘

18.9.2020—
15.8.2021

Open on your computer the leading word processing software or the most popular search engine, and on the screen, you will encounter a frame of grey. Cold, artificial, and yet unobtrusive, a color between mouse and cement, it shrouds every smart phone and personal computer display, which is to say, it has become ubiquitous in our daily lives. It is precisely this digital screen grey that Judith Kakon has chosen as the backdrop for her new artwork, ⌘, sited on the exterior rear wall of Kunsthalle Basel. She takes as her title a sign that denotes an unspecified currency, first encoded for computers in 1972. Standing in for the absent information normally provided by a specific currency symbol (such as \$, €, or £), ⌘ typically acts as a typographic placeholder and thus expresses any or all possible monies, great or no value at once. The artist disperses the icon, along with the percentage symbol (%) and the words ESTATE, REAL, TRUST, PRIME, GAME, EMPIRE, and the numeral 2020, across the grey wall.

These symbols and terms seem to float as if on a giant digital screen; otherwise frequently conjoined terms, like “real estate” or “prime trust,” appear here decoupled from one another. The terminology Kakon uses is derived from today’s global realty trade and the turbo capitalist circulation of currency that accompanies it, yet each of the characters making up the words is written out in a graphic adaptation of a 15th century font, rendered in the sort of wrought iron one might find on an old-fashioned gate, fence, or balcony railing.* The artwork thus collides references to the digital, currency, and financial trading with an ancient font and the evident craftwork of hand-worked metal. It is a sculptural installation that invites decryption.

Perhaps it is the “2020,” appearing among the other terms and signs, that most tellingly exposes the artist’s intentions. It locates the project in a particular year of uncertainty, in which the repercussions of late capitalism’s cruelty have been achingly on display. Revealed is the power that builds real estate empires, collects rent, and evicts—and guards the shuttered gates and fences of sharply delimited territories and borders.

A changing display of cellophane-wrapped wilted flowers (always already at the end of their life) is tucked each week between the lettering and the wall, as if to mourn loss or commemorate the fallen without it being clear just who has died or what exactly is being memorialized. This performative gesture, turning Kunsthalle

Basel's back wall into a contemporary *vanitas*, layers Kakon's project with a peculiar poignancy. The starting point for so much of the artist's work—and Ω is no exception—is a keen observation of the urban environment around her, an unpacking of the politics implicit in the everyday forms and signs found within it. It is thus not by chance that the artist conceived her artwork in relation to the public space from which it is visible, which is to say, in proximity to high-end real estate brokerage firms, several private banking headquarters, and Freie Strasse, a pedestrian shopping street whose perpetuation of free market exchange is on full display. Here, Kakon presents a quietly mordant reflection on the circulation of currency and care, conveying how the ravages of financial speculation—for which the private accumulation of wealth, capital, and property seems merely a game—impacts the lives of many.

Judith Kakon was born 1988 in Basel, CH; where she lives and works.

Judith Kakon
 Ω , 2020
Steel, cut flowers, plastic sleeves
Dimension variable
Courtesy of the artist

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*Kakon's iron elements are drawn from a typeface conceived in cooperation with designer Ronnie Füglistner, who created a sans serif adaption of 15th century lettering. The source-script consisted of geometric roman capital letters authored by Damianus Moyllus. The original drawings for Moyllus's lettering are found in Jan Tschichold's *Das Alphabet des Damianus Moyllus*, published by Bucherer, Kurrus & Company, Basel (1971).

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find a selection of publications related to Judith Kakon.

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