

PRESS RELEASE

One of the two scenarios feared

Michael Runkel

04.07. – 17.07.2025

Opening: 4 June, 2025, 7:00 pm

the people is excited to invite you to the first solo show of German multidisciplinary artist Michael Runkel.

The first impression, when looking at Runkel's show, installed in the one-room gallery, is like looking into the past and the future at once. The room-filling installation transforms the exhibition space into what looks like the command centre of a sealed-off, technical environment. The artist gives no indication of the functions of the technology on display or the wider context in which this room exists. All you know, you know through interior design:

Ornament-free desks and chairs, control panels, flat screens, steel doors and angular neon lights convey a sense of well-established working routines with high standards of stability, durability and ergonomics. The technology is either too old or too advanced to be identified. Yet, there is something about the room that is strangely familiar. The rectangular shapes, the monochromatic textiles and – most

iconically – the layout that organises desks and equipment around one central chair facing the only window, appear old-fashioned. They ring with an echo, a sense of déjà vu of the technologies that saved the world and fulfilled humanity's wild dreams of freedom and adventure in all the space utopias – or dystopias – of last century's TV culture. Past futures, slightly outgrown. Somewhat downscaled and faded compared to modern catastrophes the room seems a place of trusty familiarity more than anxiety. As a design choice for dystopia, this might not be a bad one. Captain Kirk and his successors always made it back home, after all, and the *Orion* crew had more happy endings than bad ones...

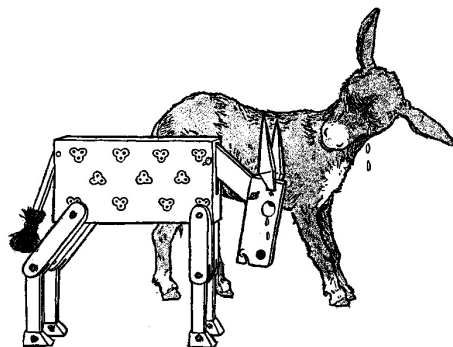
Still, the room radiates a sense of unease. Other than the anticipated bodies of a visiting art audience, no human personnel inhabits the functional furniture. Doors are visible but do not open, chairs are set up for work but remain empty. Their absence brings darker narratives to mind, not of adventure but of lone survivors who end up out of time and place and with no agency to return to where they came from. A shift in mood that is not caused by what you see but by when you

see it. Rather than the spaceship set up and ready for a Future still to come, we might be looking at this scenario as Future Perfect, as remnants of whatever caused the people these workspaces were built for to pack up and leave.

Runkel's installation is a multilayered narrative, full of small details that take some time to discover and decode. Moving through this carefully crafted storytelling, you might realise, there is one weak link in this preview of the show. A detail really, that might pass you by: That painting on the wall is not a painting. What would a painting do in such technical surroundings? It is a steel-framed window, and behind the thick security glass, a shark slowly gliding by in the dark blue backdrop. Not deep space then, but deep water. The rest may still apply.

This exhibition is co-curated with Mathis Walter. This text was written by Johanna Schäfer

Michael Runkel (1980) is a trained carpenter and a self-taught artist. Since 2015 he works at the sheltered atelier *Malwerkstatt* and is a member of a mixed-abled performance group.



the people

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