Press release

FEAR
Art in the Age of Anxiety

Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Mandy El-Sayegh,
VALIE EXPORT, Harun Farocki, Ron Mueck,
Arnulf Rainer, Niki de Saint Phalle, Oksana Shachko,
Daniel Richter, Minh-Lan Tran, Günther Uecker, Banks Violette

Curator: Oona Doyle

7 November 2026—6 February 2027
Opening Saturday 7 November 2026, 3—6pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Pantin
69, avenue du Général Leclerc, Pantin, France



Banks Violette, *Mirror Wall*, 2007. Steel frames, steel tracking, laminated mirror glass, steel rods, hydraulic and electrical components. 250 × 960 × 300 cm (98.43 × 377.95 × 118.11 in). © Banks Violette

This exhibition brings together artists whose practices react to a climate of fear and anxiety, fuelled by external and internal conflicts. Anxiety can be defined as a feeling of unrest, an internal alarm signalling a possible, invisible danger. The word derives from the Latin *angere* (‘to squeeze’ or ‘to choke’), which describes a tightness in the throat or chest. The artists on view seek to materialise this invisible feeling. They use dangerous objects, expres-

sive gestures, nocturnal colours – ranging from blacks, cold silvers and splashes of reds, while also playing with staging and iconography.

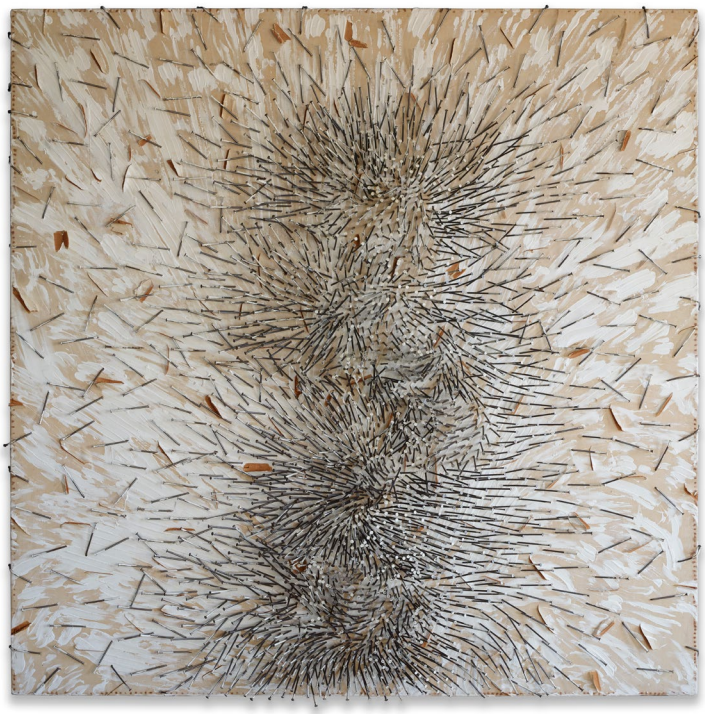
Certain artists investigate how materials become a surface of projection for ambient fears. As the menace of global conflict drives economies towards militarisation, **VALIE EXPORT** transforms organ pipes into missiles, exposing how a material used as a spiritual conduit can be weaponised for destruction in her installation *Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb on Me* (2023). **Harun Farocki**'s video work *Inextinguishable Fire* (1969) reveals how scientific innovation and industry can be quietly steered towards destruction. The work demonstrates how, during the Vietnam War, the Napalm bombs were produced in factories where deliberate division of labour



VALIE EXPORT, *Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb on Me*, 2023. Acoustic installation, 25 galvanised organ pipes, 13 wooden organ pipes. Dimensions variables. © VALIE EXPORT / Adagp, Paris, 2026

meant that workers were detached from the lethal consequences of their work. **Daniel Richter**'s painting *Duisen* (2004), meanwhile, renders visible the 'surveillance eye'. He paints a crowd of what could be at once ravers, protesters or refugees in fluorescent hues drawn from those of infrared imagery techniques typically used by the military.

Günther Uecker used nails as paint. He turned potentially aggressive materials and vehement gestures – axing



Günther Uecker, *Weißer Schrei (White Scream)*, 1990. Nails and white paint on canvas on wood, incised. 200 × 200 cm (78.74 × 78.74 in). © Günther Uecker / Adagp, Paris, 2026

and hammering his canvases – into rhythmic, meditative compositions. The canvas becomes a vulnerable surface at once punctured and shielded, a site of both violence and protection. There is a biographical thread to Uecker's gesture; as a teenager, he nailed the doors and windows of his home shut to prevent Red Army soldiers from assaulting his mother and sisters. The title of his explosive painting *White Scream* (1990) conveys the idea that fear can manifest itself physically through sound. One cannot help but relate this to Edvard Munch's *Scream* (1893): the epitome of the expression of anguish. In both works, the figure projects anxiety onto its surrounding environment. The notion of screaming reemerges in **Banks Violette**'s *Mirror Wall* (2007), a multi-panelled installation that gradually breaks under pneumatic pressure, resulting in shattered glass that reflects a broken reality. Inspired by death metal and how it gives voice to destructive forces and dark thoughts, Violette infuses pristine industrial shapes associated with minimalism with a sense of disaster. He stages them like crime scenes or the aftermath of a concert.

As it unfolds across the gallery, the exhibition charges the space with a sense of theatricality. Many of the works on view – including those by **Niki de Saint Phalle** and **Minh-Lan Tran**, as well as both EXPORT and Uecker – are the physical result of a performative process and, in the case of **Oksana Shachko**, of political action. Several of the artists employ staging to immerse the viewer in a dramatic atmosphere, inviting a cathartic release. **Ron Mueck** presents *Havoc* (2025), an installation of ash-coloured dogs that he hand-



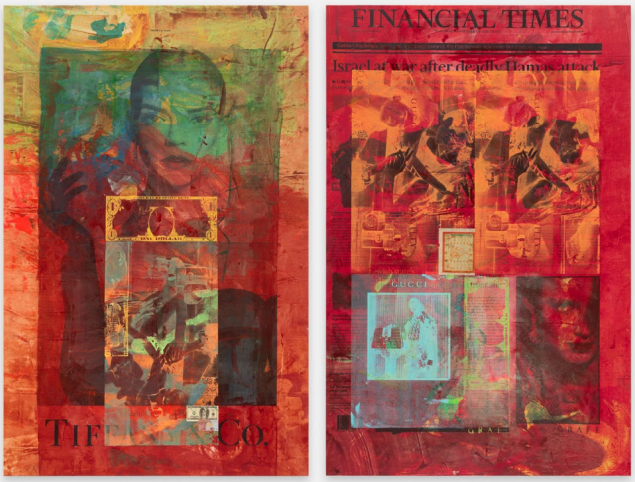
Georg Baselitz, *Zero Ende*, 2013
Patinated bronze, 94 × 348 × 91.5 cm (37.01 × 137.01 × 36.02 in). © Georg Baselitz

carved and hand-painted. With their monumental scale and snarling expressions, they tap into visceral, ancestral fears while also evoking the aggressive dynamics of contemporary geopolitics. Surrounded by **Arnulf Rainer**'s monochrome *Overpaintings* (1956–71), **Georg Baselitz**'s 2013 sculpture *Zero Ende* darkens the atmosphere with a sense of doom. Both artists addressed the lingering psychological trauma of the Second World War. Baselitz's double-skulled form, encircled with rattle-like rings, serves as a *vanitas*, confronting the viewer with their own inescapable mortality. Carved from a single tree trunk with a chainsaw before being cast in bronze, the work retains its rough saw cuts, its scarred surface exposing trauma as an active, open wound. In his *Overpaintings*, Rainer covered his own works and those of others with slow, dense brushstrokes – cancelling past art, while also seeking spiritual release beyond the surface. The resulting abyss echoes Theodor Adorno's words: 'To survive reality at its most extreme and grim [...] Radical art today is synonymous with dark art; its primary colour is black'.[1]

To generate viral engagement, certain media outlets exploit the adage: 'if it bleeds it leads'. Amplifying ambient fear, they trigger what Hans Rosling termed our 'dramatic instincts'. Uecker's page from the newspaper *Die Zeit* (c. 1999), pierced with a field of nails, emblematises this media culture. **Mandy El-Sayegh** approaches newsprint as both material and subject – particularly the *Financial Times* for its pink 'flesh tones' and its stature as the 'British version of the "ground" of global economic objectivity'.[2]

She sheds light on the violence of media feeds, where real world horror cohabits with seductive advertising and celebrity spectacle. Through the intensity of colour – with red and green washes of paint and holographic effects, notably drawn from banknotes – and repeated imagery, she conveys the emotional impact of this particular contemporary experience of consuming information.

Threat permeates the exhibition's vocabulary of motifs, from **Joseph Beuys**'s grenade to the machine guns



Mandy El-Sayegh, *Burning Square (Double page spread #1)*, 2024
Oil and acrylic on canvas with collaged and silkscreened elements and joss paper. Each panel. 227 × 147 cm (89.37 × 57.87 in)
© Mandy El-Sayegh

1 Adorno, Theodor W., *Aesthetic Theory*, 1970, in 'Black as an Ideal'.
2 Marshall, Piper, 25 Questions with Mandy El-Sayegh, *CURA.*, no. 30, Winter 2019.



Ron Mueck, *Havoc* (detail), 2025
Mixed media, dimensions variable. © Ron Mueck / Adagp, Paris, 2026

found in works by both EXPORT and **Oksana Shachko**. Denaturalised and turned into artworks, these menacing objects are disarmed, pacified; stripped of their function to become objects to look at. Yet their threatening potential is not entirely erased; instead, it is redirected towards symbolic and expressive ends, turning instruments of fear into vehicles for expression or resistance.

In line with his concept that 'thought is form', Beuys made *Handgranate* (c. 1970) with paper and string: an intellectual grenade designed to trigger an explosion of consciousness rather than physical destruction. As art historian Caroline Tisdall wrote in 1979, Beuys 'believed that real revolution doesn't happen with iron and gunpowder, but through the ignition of human creativity and consciousness.'[3] In *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969/1994), EXPORT appropriates the machine gun – from a symbol of male aggression – into a feminist tool, defying the viewer's gaze to regain radical agency. In her watershed performance, EXPORT entered a cinema with her trousers cut at the crotch to substitute cinematic fantasy with the reality of a female body. Adopting the visual tactics of urban guerrillas, she then fly-posted this image, related to this performance, across Vienna to provoke the city's conservative postwar establishment. Similarly, **Niki de Saint Phalle** used a rifle as her paintbrush in her *Tirs* of the 1960s, shooting at assemblages filled with paint to make the canvas bleed: a strike against patriarchal society. Exiled to Paris as a political refugee, artist and activist **Oksana Shachko**, one of the founders of the Femen movement, drew on her training as an icon painter to make what she called 'counter-religion icons'. She subverted their visual codes to critique religious and political dogma and protest for women's rights. **Minh-Lan**, meanwhile, approaches resistance through the body rather than the image. She recently researched Buddhist self-immolation as an act of revolt. To create *Apologies* (2026), she used a *fu chen*, a Daoist martial arts soft weapon, treating the surface as an arena of spiritual and political resistance.

Across the exhibition, fear is countered with courage. In several of the works on view, instruments and symbols of fear or violence are alchemised into systems of defence, resistance and repair. Art is not just a pleasant, aesthetic experience, it holds the power to express, to confront terror, to stand up for ideas. As Beuys stated: '[art] has to be developed as a weapon.'

3 Tisdall, Caroline, Joseph Beuys, exh. cat., The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1979, pp. 273–275.

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