



AKSIOMA
Institute for Contemporary Art
Ljubljana

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PRESS RELEASE

Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana in collaboration with NOME and Disruption Network Lab, Berlin presents:

Jacob Appelbaum

SAMIZDATA: Evidence of Conspiracy

Solo Exhibition

aksioma.org/samizdata

Curated by Tatiana Bazzichelli

Aksioma | Project Space

Komenskega 18, Ljubljana

20 January – 19 February 2016

Opening hours: TUE-FRI 12 pm – 6 pm

Exhibition opening: Wednesday, 20 January 2016 at 7 pm



Photos available for free download:

<http://www.aksioma.org/press/samizdata.zip>



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Jacob Appelbaum

SAMIZDATA: Evidence of Conspiracy

In recent years, the story of Wikileaks and, later on, the “Snowden Affair” made us familiar with the character of the whistleblower: a person, typically working for some state apparatus, that for some reasons chooses to drop out of the organization she is working for and to circulate information that, according to the rules of that apparatus, should be kept secret. But if traditionally whistleblower have been paired to spies, characters such as Chelsea Manning or Edward Snowden stand out for their ethical motivations, for their belief that keeping that information secret is something that can damage the life of a modern democracy, and for their faith in the role of another important player in the life of a modern democracy: the press.

Demonized, presented as criminals, jailed or often forced to seek for asylum in other countries, whistleblowers are part of the small yet powerful army of people - investigative journalists, activists, hackers, videomakers, artists - who are fighting for social justice and civil liberty, and against the limitations of freedom coming from mass surveillance and censorship.

A computer security researcher, an independent journalist and a hacker, **Jacob Appelbaum** knows many of these people, and often collaborated with them.

Jacob Appelbaum's exhibition *SAMIZDATA: Evidence of Conspiracy* is focused on a series of portraits of some of these people: Bill Binney, Laura Poitras, Glenn Greenwald (with David Miranda), Julian Assange, Sarah Harrison and Ai Weiwei. Six colored infrared photos shown as cibachrome prints, using analogue surveillance film to portrait people who are uncovering surveillance itself. As the artist explains in an interview with Tatiana Bazzichelli, “color infrared... is a sort of expired aerial surveillance film that is processed and produces slides that have a little more information than you might otherwise have, and a little less information in other ways. [...] From the perspective of the subject matter, that is the people themselves, and their critique of surveillance and the loss of liberty, I think that is a really nice touch to use surveillance films to critique surveillance culture. In a world of digital surveillance, re-purposing analogue aerial agricultural surveillance film for portraiture of people that are exposed to surveillance seemed the appropriate medium [...] Kodak ceased production on this film years ago. There is one person who buys old stock of this film and cuts it down to something smaller and then resells it again. I bought a bunch of this film, but it is rare, so I use it just to take a few pictures of a few people, and I don't waste it.”

The choice of an obsolete, yet highly connotated, medium for shooting goes hand in hand with the use of Cibachrome, a printing process now almost disappeared, that gives the image a physical depth and dimension not possible with other techniques.

As Kate Young properly notes, this technical choice has something to do with the tradition of samizdat referenced in the title: DIY-produced documents and publications that, in the Soviet Union in the late Fifties and later, were passed hand-to-hand to circumvent censorship – under threat of heavy punishment. The word “samizdata”, which actualizes samizdat with a reference to “data”, “is about information that people get in trouble and risk legal consequences for sharing it, talking about it, and reporting on it.” (Appelbaum) Circulating this information, the portrayed people became public enemies for some, and modern heroes for others. With his portraits, which are - first and foremost - private, intimate tributes to a group of friends, not initially conceived for exhibitions or displays, Appelbaum is also attempting to say that they aren't either criminals not heroes, but “regular people, normal people, working at things that they love and making a very positive impact on the world.” (Appelbaum)



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The exhibition, curated by **Tatiana Bazzichelli** and is realized in collaboration with the NOME Gallery in Berlin will also feature the sculpture *Panda to Panda* (2015) realized by Appelbaum in collaboration with the chinese visual artist and dissident **Ai Weiwei** and commissioned by the New Museum in New York and Rhizome. The two artists met in Ai's studio in Beijing and stuffed cuddly toy panda bears with public, shredded N.S.A. documents that were originally given to Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald in Hong Kong by the whistleblower Edward Snowden. Inside each panda, they also placed a micro SD memory card containing a digital backup of the previously published documents. The project's title, "Panda to Panda," is the synthesis of two terms created by dissident cultures. The slang term for the secret police in China is "panda," which is a censorship-evading Mandarin homonym: "national security" sounds like "national treasure," a.k.a. the panda. Like the red lanterns Ai hung under every surveillance camera the government installed outside his studio, "Panda to Panda" playfully acknowledges and rejects state power.

Jacob Appelbaum is a post-national independent computer security researcher, journalist and photographer. He is a core member of the Tor project, a free software network designed to provide online anonymity. He also trains interested parties globally on how to effectively use and contribute to the Tor network, enabling people to have agency, while informing, researching and writing about surveillance and privacy. *SAMIZDATA: Evidence of Conspiracy* is his first solo show, but Appelbaum has collaborated so far on specific projects with outstanding artists, including Laura Poitras, Ai Wei Wei and Trevor Paglen.

Tatiana Bazzichelli is Artistic Director of the Disruption Network Lab, an on-going platform of conference events on art, hacktivism and disruption at Kunstquartier Bethanien in Berlin. Former Programme Curator at transmediale festival in Berlin from 2011 to 2014, she initiated and developed the year-round 'reSource transmedial culture' project. She was Post-Doctoral researcher at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, as part of the Centre for Digital Cultures, and the Institute for Culture and Aesthetic Digital Media, Faculty of Cultural Studies (2012 - 2014). In 2011, she received a PhD degree in Information and Media Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Aarhus University in Denmark. In 2009 she was a visiting scholar at the H-STAR, the Human-Sciences and Technologies Advanced Research Institute of Stanford University in California. She wrote the books: *Networked Disruption: Rethinking Oppositions in Art, Hacktivism and the Business of Social Networking* (DARC Press, Aarhus University, 2013); *Networking: The Net as Artwork* (Costa & Nolan, Milan, 2006 /DARC Press, Aarhus University, 2008), and co-edited with Geoff Cox *Disrupting Business: Art and Activism in Times of Financial Crisis* (Autonomedia, New York, 2013). Active in the Italian hacker community since the '90s, her networking project AHA:Activism-Hacking Artivism won the honorary mention for digital communities at Ars Electronica in 2007. She has organised several exhibitions and events, such as *SAMIZDATA* (2015), *Networked Disruption* (2015), *HACK.Fem.EAST* (2008), *Hack.it.ar* (2005), in Berlin, Rome, and other European cities. She was born in Rome and since 2003 she lives in Berlin.



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Production of the exhibition: Aksioma - Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana, 2016

Artistic Director: Janez Janša
Producer: Marcela Okretič
Executive Producer: Sonja Grdina
Assistant: Katra Petriček
Public Relations: Urša Purkart
Technician: Valter Udovičič

In collaboration with [NOME](#) and the [Disruption Network Lab](#), Berlin

N O M E



Event is realized in the framework of *Masters & Servers*, a joint project by Aksioma (SI), Drugo more (HR), AND (UK), Link Art Center (IT) and d-i-n-a / The Influencers (ES).



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