

Conversation Pit

CURATED BY MARINA PINSKY

20.08—11.09, 2022

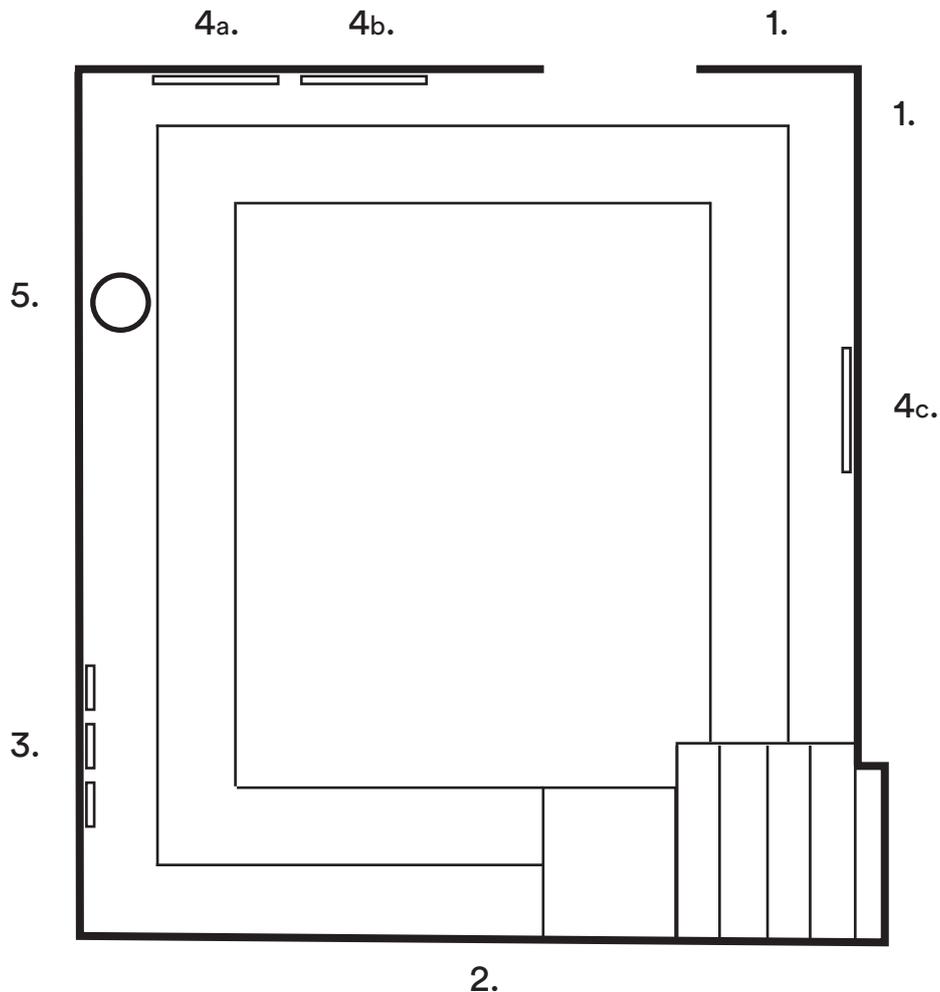
Recently, in the New York Times, an article claimed the resurgence of the ‘conversation pit’ — a soft and sunken living room structure synonymous with the 1960s and 70s. If it is true that the conversation pit is making a comeback, we want to know: what is it about this particular relic of mid-century design that speaks to the current moment? The article makes the suggestion that the conversation pit is an antidote to an atomised society: conversation pits mean face-to-face interaction, unmediated by screens and satellites. But this neat, quasi-conservative, back-to-the-good-old-days thinking sits uneasily against the article’s other key observation: that is, conversation pits are mostly consumed as images. Indeed, the lush colours and geometry seem to circulate seamlessly via social media platforms. Our own design process for this exhibition began the same way: a stream of drooled-over images traded back-and-forth over phone screens. Desire thinly veneered as research.

Together, these two observations suggest the conversation pit as a curious kind of hybrid object, both a physical rejection of contemporary communication technologies and a virtual space remotely inhabited via the very technologies it would seem to refuse. Is a conversation pit better to look into or to look out from?

This exhibition began as a plan to build a full-scale, useable model of a conversation pit in the tiled space of Winona, to test the online and offline dynamics of this architectural feature in contemporary Brussels. Gradually, that hollow form got filled up with contributions from artists who lent or fabricated works for the setting. By happy coincidence, many of these works were collaborations. The invitations also turned into a program of talks, readings, and concerts that will take place in the coming weekends. It got filled up too, or will, with the slumped and lounging bodies of visitors. Put basically, the pit is a container in which to collectively experiment with how those elements will collide and interact and (ideally) generate pulsing, hallucinatory conversation.

The works included oscillate similarly between the onsite and the remote. The red vinyl pattern which covers two walls was sent as a vector graphic by [Jim Isermann](#), from his chosen home in Palm Springs, California. For decades, Jim has been making radically decorative work that traffics between minimalist aesthetics and the functional utopias of design. [Nina Canell and Robin Watkins](#) sent their work as a sound file to be played through the pit’s quad sound system. On September 2, we will sit and listen to it together. [Shirin Sabahi](#)’s work is a window vinyl from an iterative series, scaled to fit Winona’s street-facing window. What appears as decorative, abstract geometry is in fact derived from patterns of tape used to secure windows from bomb blasts or earthquakes in unstable environments. [Simon Denny](#) lent us a set of custom postage stamps, produced collaboratively with the stamp designer [Linda Kantchev](#), each of which commemorate one of the companies that in 2016 (the year of the work’s making), were designing the infrastructures and vectors of decentralised currency trading. [Miles Huston](#)’s work takes the form of a set of remote-viewing tools. On three paddles are three altered reproductions of paintings by [Arnold Clapman](#) produced for Paul Lafolley. Clapman’s paintings are themselves reconstructions based on descriptions of an earlier set of paintings by the Boston artist Richard Upton Pickman, who (Pickman) claims to have based them on live drawing sessions with a number of demon children living in the sewers under Boston’s North End. By holding the paddles at arm’s length and staring at the three coloured dots for 30 seconds, viewers can summon spectral hallucinations of Clapman’s now-destroyed paintings of Pickman’s lost works. In contemporary architecture, the stakes of the there-and-not-there dilate along axes of supply. What is remote can be brought closer. [Brianna Leatherbury](#) arranged her contribution as a set of dispatches of non-functional buttons from Amazon which will gradually populate the space of Winona over the course of the show. Of all the artists included, only [Cecilia Bjartmar Hylta](#) worked on-site, installing a discarded and inverted steel bollard from the streets of Brussels as a subtraction from the volume of the pit’s structure.

The experiment of the exhibition will be cast against the next 4 weeks of its showing. As an experiment, its aims are open ended, its metrics for success or failure unclear. Life gets lived below floor level.



1. Jim Isermann
Untitled (P.S. I love you), 1998.
Vinyl decals. 40cm x 40cm repeating pattern.
 2. Shirin Sabahi
Window Sessions (Rue Van Meyel 49, 1080 Bruxelles), 2022.
PVC film applied on three window panes. 141.5 x 247.5 cm.
 3. Miles Huston with Arnold Clapman
Monster (Asmodeus), 2022.
Monster (Oriens), 2022.
Monster (Astaroth), 2022.
Laser print on paper, grey modelling cardboard, wood.
 4. Simon Denny with Linda Kantchev
 - a) *Digital Asset*, 2016
 - b) *21INC*,
 - c) *Ethereum*, 2016.

Custom designed postage stamps on mounting board. 42 x 59.4cm.
 5. Cecilia Bjartmar Hylta
Bollard, 2022.
Found bollard. 57cm (height) x 17.5cm (base diameter).
- Brianna Leatherbury
The Machine, 2022.
Amazon Dash buttons. Evolving installation.

PIT PROGRAM:

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| 26.8.2022 | Reading by Benedikt Bock |
| 27.8.2022 | Simon Denny Boardgame Night |
| 02.9.2022 | Nina Canell & Robin Watkins Listening Session |
| 03.9.2022 | Sex Negativity Reading Group |
| 09.9.2022 | Reading by Maru Mushtrieva |
| 10.9.2022 | Concert by Lawrence |