

Press Kit: Land and Soil. How We Live Together

Land and Soil

How We Live Together

November 29, 2025 – April 19, 2026

K21, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Press Preview: November 27, 2025, from 10 am at K21

Press Conference: November 27, 2025, 11 am

Speakers:

- Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen and curator of the exhibition
- Janina Stanton-Mohr, Deputy Head of Communications of the German Postcode Lottery
- Kolja Reichert, Chief Curator K21
- Annika Schank, Head of Education

K21

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Living, owning, preserving, and sharing – An exhibition at K21 explores the question of how equitable coexistence is possible today

Land and Soil

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Press Preview: November 27, 2025, from 10 am at K21

Press Conference: November 27, 2025, 11 am

Opening: November 28, 2025, 7–10 pm

With works by: Havîn Al-Sîndy, Maria Thereza Alves, Asche Lützerathi (otherhosted by Sybling – JP Raether & Sarah Friend), Joseph Beuys, AA Bronson, Johannes Büttner, Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (Congolese Plantation Workers Art League, CAPTC), Liu Chuang, Simon Denny, Jan Dibbets, Nir Evron, Simone Fattal, Ximena Garrido-Lecca, Jef Geys, Robert Gober, Dor Guez, Andreas Gursky, Christopher Kulendran Thomas, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Richard Long, Boris Mikhailov, Gordon Matta-Clark, Lutz Mommartz, Grace Ndiritu, Simone Nieweg, Chris Reinecke, Ugo Rondinone, Thomas Ruff, Lin May Saeed, Shimabuku, terra0, Ron Tran, Franz West, Alex Wissel

K21

The exhibition *Land and Soil. How We Live Together*, on view at K21 of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, focuses on the ways in which we live together as human beings. It addresses themes such as war, displacement, flight, and the destruction of nature, but also reconstruction and regeneration, housing, cultivation, ownership, and sharing. The exhibition invites visitors to envision possibilities for a just and sustainable future. For the first time, an exhibition extends across the entire K21 and the adjacent Ständehauspark, also focusing on the ground on which the museum stands—both geographically and historically. Drawing from the building's parliamentary past, thirty-four international artists and collectives explore various forms of resource management, ranging from Indigenous economic practices and collective ownership to utopian blockchain projects.

Earth, coal, lotus silk, pine needles, chocolate: The exhibition goes back to basics in terms of materials and forms. It appeals to both the senses and the mind. *Land and Soil* takes us to Brazil, Korea, Congo, Japan, the United States, China, Peru, Vietnam, Iraq, Sri Lanka, the Middle East, and back to Germany. It traces the fantasies of libertarian pioneers who want to found their own states or conquer Mars. And it looks at an important basis of industrial prosperity in the Rhineland: coal. Several works deal with the history of coal mining. On the last day, a performance by **Asche Lützerathi (supported by JP Raether)** takes visitors to Hambach, Europe's largest open-cast lignite mine.

Self-Governance: Freedom 500 Years Ago and Today

The focus is on the question of self-governance. Five hundred years ago, at the dawn of letterpress printing and financial capitalism, German peasants rose up against privatization and an increasingly opaque network of responsibilities and taxes. **Alex Wissel** questions the legacy of the German Peasants' War in wall drawings of peasant protests then and now. Under the glass dome of K21, **Ugo Rondinone** presents hundreds of gilded tools that his grandfather forged after he, an Italian immigrant in New York at the end of the nineteenth century, could only afford a small plot of land. Next to this, in a video installation by Maria Thereza Alves, Indigenous agroforestry agents explain how they manage a forest area in the Amazon the size of Brandenburg without support from the Brazilian government. Their methods show how growth is possible for all living beings when the synergies of nature are harnessed.

Grace Ndiritu has nature appear in a protest march in which participants wear animal and plant costumes. Tapestries depict historical demonstrations for land rights and women's rights. Meditation cushions are arranged around a photograph depicting a meeting between the *Artist Placement Group* (1966–89) and representatives from Düsseldorf's business and administrative circles at the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle in 1971.

In the same year, also in Düsseldorf, **Chris Reinecke** and **Lutz Mommartz** occupied Gustaf-Gründgens-Platz in front of the Schauspielhaus to protest against politicians turning a blind eye to rack-renting. Mommartz's film, *Mietersolidarität* (Tenant Solidarity), features Reinecke delivering a speech against speculation with "land and soil." In addition to Reinecke's protest posters advocating "Tenant Solidarity," her satirical designs for self-built settlements and vegetable beds in the Hofgarten, Germany's first public park, which opened in 1769, are also on display. In Ständehauspark, opposite K21, **Havîn Al-Sîndy** is rebuilding a room from the loam house in which she grew up in the autonomous Kurdistan Region in Iraq. Loam houses are one of the oldest and most widespread types of construction. They are literally built from the ground on which they stand. Meanwhile, **Ximena Garrido-Lecca** transforms basic elements of huts, such as those built by internal refugees on the coast of Peru since the 1950s, into sculptures made of copper—the raw material whose mining has impoverished the Andean population.

In his three-channel video installation, **Liu Chuang** also looks to the mountains, in this case in Southeast Asia, where mountain peoples are losing their autonomy after thousands of years. Liu Chuang compares mountain peoples to blockchain miners who, in search of cheap energy, migrate across the country with the seasons like migratory birds. The utopia of self-governance without a nation state is also explored in an expansive video installation by **Christopher Kulendran Thomas**. Members of the Tamil diaspora question the legacy of the Tamil war of independence in Sri Lanka, which was crushed in 2009, and seek alternatives to the conflicts of the present driven by questions of identity.

On a former palm oil plantation in Congo owned by the Unilever Group, the utopia of self-governance is becoming a reality: Here, the self-taught artists of the collective **Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise** (Congoese Plantation Workers Art

League, CATPC) are reworking the legacy of colonialism in sculptures made of clay. The sculptures are 3D-scanned, cast in chocolate, and sold on the art market. With the proceeds, CATPC has so far re-naturalized twenty hectares of land and built a local museum. In 2024, CATPC exhibited in the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale. Thanks to the first digital restitution via blockchain, CATPC obtained a loan from the Richmond Museum of Art in Virginia of a wooden figure of the Pende people, which was created in 1931 in connection with an uprising against Belgian colonial rule in their area. The figure depicts a violent Belgian officer and is also on display in *Ground and Soil*. In a hand-drawn map, CATPC provides a global picture of exploitation and commodity flows.

An Assessment of Blockchain in Art

Blockchain technology plays a role in many of the works on display. *Ground and Soil* is also an assessment of this important trend in art over the last fifteen years. It becomes clear that while blockchain has given rise to new ideas of collective ownership and decentralized management of goods, state structures are now mostly being used again to implement them. **terra0**, for example, manages a forest biotope in Brandenburg via blockchain and German association law, and has done pioneering legal work in coordination with the taxation authority. With *Sybling*, **Sarah Friend** and **JP Raether** are designing a care community of associations and limited liability companies that aims to overcome individual ownership. **Simon Denny** translates digital real estate offers in metaverses into landscape paintings. And **Johannes Büttner** travels with his camera to Liberland, a self-proclaimed cryptostate between Serbia and Croatia that issues a passport and a plot of land for \$10,000 in Bitcoin. There, Büttner encounters appropriations of the concept of freedom in libertarian thinking, as it is spreading in the crypto scene, in Silicon Valley, and most recently in governments in Argentina and the United States: There, freedom means liberating the markets from the state, even by authoritarian means. In a conversation documented in the catalog, Büttner, Alex Wissel, and Lyndal Roper, a historian from the University of Oxford, compare concepts of freedom and apocalyptic thinking at the time of the Peasants' War and today.

Wars Then and Now

The new dimension of violence that emerged in the religious wars of the sixteenth century is depicted in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Triumph of Death*, in which skeletons chase down humans. A detail from the painting is reproduced on a twenty-meter-wide canvas hanging above the piazza of K21. It comes from *Alex Wissel's* stage design for *Eisenfaust*, a Götz von Berlichingen interpretation directed by Jan Bonny at the Schauspiel Köln, and complements the aforementioned wall drawings. The scene is reminiscent of today's wars. **Dor Guez** presents a pressed specimen of khubeiza, a mallow variety that grows in the Levant and is eaten during famines because of its high nutritional content, as is currently the case with Guez's relatives in Gaza. **Boris Mikhailov's** photographs highlight the social disparities that have emerged in Ukraine since it gained independence. And in a new film by **Nir Evron**, the soil itself recalls the Nazi war economy and its experiments with substitutes made from coal and Kazakh dandelions under forced labor. Amidst all this, **Lin May Saeed's** portrayal of the "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus," who were put into a two-hundred-year sleep by God to protect them from Roman persecution of

Christians, conveys a sense of profound calm and patience. Furthermore, in this depiction, animals and humans are part of an equitable community.

K21 and Its History as a Parliament Building

The exhibition bridges distant realities of life while consciously situating itself within Düsseldorf's economic and artistic history, with artists such as Havin Al-Sindy, Joseph Beuys, Andreas Gursky, Simone Nieweg, Chris Reinecke, Thomas Ruff, and Alex Wissel. The exhibition also deliberately locates itself in the place where it is held. The former Ständehaus on the Kaiserteich was the first parliament building constructed in the Rhineland. Its historicist Neo-Renaissance architecture, like the Peasants' War, dates back five hundred years to the origins of today's knowledge system and economic order. Built between 1876 and 1880 according to plans by Julius Raschdorff—who later became the architect of Berlin Cathedral—the Ständehaus served as the Prussian provincial parliament, where representatives of the estates discussed regional issues. From 1949 to 1988, it was the seat of the North Rhine-Westphalian state parliament. After extensive renovations, the building reopened in 2002 with an iconic glass dome and became a museum for international contemporary art belonging to the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. The Ständehaus also continues to serve as a representative building for the state government.

Catalog

K21

Designed by Studio Pyda and published by Hatje Cantz, the exhibition catalog offers a multifaceted introduction to the politics, biology, and economics of land and soil. In addition to presentations of the artists and their works, the catalog contains essays, conversations, and astonishing statistical graphics.

Land and Soil. How We Live Together, edited by Susanne Gaensheimer and Kolja Reichert, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2025, Authors: Dirk Böttcher, Johannes Büttner, Paula Gioia, Olaf Grawert, Doris Krystof, Sebastian Peter, Kolja Reichert, Lyndal Roper, Ced'Art Tamasala, Alex Wissel, 136 pp., ca. 50 colored illustrations, ca. 20 infographics, in German and English, Price: 24,- euros

Curator: Kolja Reichert, Chief Curator K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

Curatorial Assistant: Sebastian Peter, Assistant Curator

Research Assistant: Isabelle Tondre, Assistant Curator

The exhibition is supported by the German Federal Cultural Foundation and the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

Free admission on Friday afternoons!

Participants in the German Postcode Lottery make free admission possible every Friday from 3 to 6 p.m.

“The exhibition Grund und Boden invites us to reflect on what connects us as a society: the living spaces we create together. Through our support, we aim to make this special exhibi-

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tion accessible to as many people as possible – and help ensure that art continues to create places for dialogue, togetherness and shared perspectives. Free admission on Friday afternoons thus becomes a visible symbol of participation and openness.”

Meira Schmidt, Deputy Head of Charities Deutsche Postcode Lotterie

Media partner of the exhibition
Monopol

Media Partner of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

Supported by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of
North Rhine-Westphalia

Opening

Friday, November 28, 7 pm / K21 / free admission

We cordially invite you to the opening of the exhibition at K21.

Speakers:

- Susanne Gaensheimer, Director Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-
- Janina Stanton-Mohr, Deputy Head of Communications, Deutsche Postcode Lotterie
- Kolja Reichert, Curator
- Annika Schank, Head of Education

K21

DJ-Set afterwards with FILAR

Sneak Peek: Preview for Young Adults

Fri, November 28, 4 – 5.30 pm

Admission free with student or pupil ID

Limited number of participants

Even before the official opening, students, trainees and pupils (from secondary level II) will have the opportunity to experience the exhibition. This time with the artist Havîn Al-Sîndy. The event will be held in English.

Action days

Three action days invite you to explore—critically, solidarily, and artistically—central dimensions of coexistence and to ask how we can think about and shape land and soil differently.

#1: ACT

Action day in conjunction with the exhibition Land and Soil

November 29, 2025 | 11 am – 6 pm | K21 Düsseldorf | Free admission

Colonial Continuities – Global Justice – Alternative Economies

Three action days invite you to explore—critically, solidarily, and artistically—central dimensions of coexistence and to ask how we can think about and shape land and soil differently. The focus of this first action day is on alternative forms of economic activity, global supply chains, and cultures of remembrance.

PROGRAM – Discussions, Actions, and Ideas for a More Just Future

11 am–4.30 pm: Market of Opportunities: Exchange with associations and initiatives

11 am–2 pm: Permanent Red: A Holistic Reading Group. A workshop on land and protest with the artist Grace Ndiritu

Workshop in English. Participants must be 16 years of age or older. Limited number of participants. Registration required.

11.30 am –1.30 pm: Learn, Dig, Build: Members of the Congolese Plantation Workers Art League (CATPC) and other artists featured in the exhibition in conversation with the curator Kolja Reichert (the conversations will be held in English) (in Salon 21)

12 noon – 4 pm: Open upcycling workshops for children aged 3 and up, families, and adults

11 am – 4.30 pm: Clothing swap party: Bring three items, take three items

2 pm and 3 pm: Guided tours of the exhibition and postcolonial city walk

4.30 pm: Reading with Sinthujan Varatharajah: *to all the places that lie behind us*

Additional participants:

FEMNET e. V. | Fairtrade Town Düsseldorf | Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie Düsseldorf | Düsseldorf Postkolonial | and many more

#2: LIVE

Action day in conjunction with the exhibition *Land and Soil*

February 7, 2026 | 11 am–6 pm | K21 Düsseldorf | Free admission

Neighborhoods – Urban Design – Living Spaces

The focus is on fair forms of housing and solidarity-based living spaces for people, animals, and the environment—accompanied by artistic perspectives, urban visions, and political demands.

PROGRAM – Discussions, Actions, and Ideas for a More Just Future

11 am – 4.30 pm | Marketplace of Possibilities

Local associations and initiatives present their work.

With the Alliance for Affordable Housing, MOBILITEA, and many more.

11 am – 4.30 pm | Clothing and Goods Donations for People Experiencing Homelessness

Donations of well-preserved clothing, tents, fleece blankets, shower gel, and deodorant sticks are warmly welcomed.

A current list of needed items will be uploaded soon.

In cooperation with Gutenachtbus Düsseldorf.

11.30 am – 1 pm | Panel Talk: Dialogue Lab “Ground Worlds” (in German)

A scenic discourse between science and art with a musical intervention.

With Hannah Schragmann et al. Moderated by Dirk Böttcher (brand eins).

12 pm – 4 pm | Open Workshop for Children and Families

Caution: Construction Site! With artist Johannes.

12 pm – 4 pm | Open Workshop for Adults

Here and Gone – or How We Move the City

With Kawthar El-Qasem, lecturer in Building Culture, Academy of Cultural Education.

2 pm & 3 pm | Guided Tours (in German)

Through the exhibition Land and Soil.

2 pm – 4 pm | Walk: A City for Everyone? (in German)

With cultural worker Eva Busch.

3 pm – 5.30 pm | Workshop for Adults (in German)

Dirty Democracies – Soil as a Multispecies Community

A workshop by Club Real and Organism Democracy e. V., featuring a guest appearance by the purple sulfur bacterium and the fire ant.

4 pm | Film Screening: Soldaten des Lichts (in German)

Germany 2025, 108 min.

A film by Julian Vogel and Johannes Büttner.

Additional participants:

Garather Kinderparlament | MOBILITEA | Bündnis Mobilitätswende | Gutenachtbus Düsseldorf | Club Real and Organismendemokratie e. V. | and many more

#3: PLANT

Action day in conjunction with the exhibition Land and Soil

April 18, 2026 | 11 am – 6 pm | K21 Düsseldorf | Free admission

Ecosystems – Agriculture – Urban Gardening

Something new is emerging between concrete and wasteland: urban ecology, collective gardens, sustainable urban development.

PROGRAM – Discussions, Actions, and Ideas for a More Just Future

12 noon–4 pm: Open workshops for children aged 3 and up, families, and adults

11 am–4.30 pm: Market of Opportunities: Exchange with associations and initiatives

11 am–4.30 pm: Young plant exchange

12.30 pm: Panel discussion with N.N. and the curator Kolja Reichert

2 and 3 pm: Guided tours of the exhibition and city walk

4.30 pm: Film

Additional participants:

VHS Biogarten | NAJU NRW | Psychologists for Future | and many more

Further information and detailed program: <https://www.kunstsammlung.de/en/exhibitions/land-and-soil>