



Perve Galeria presents

Flowing Upstream

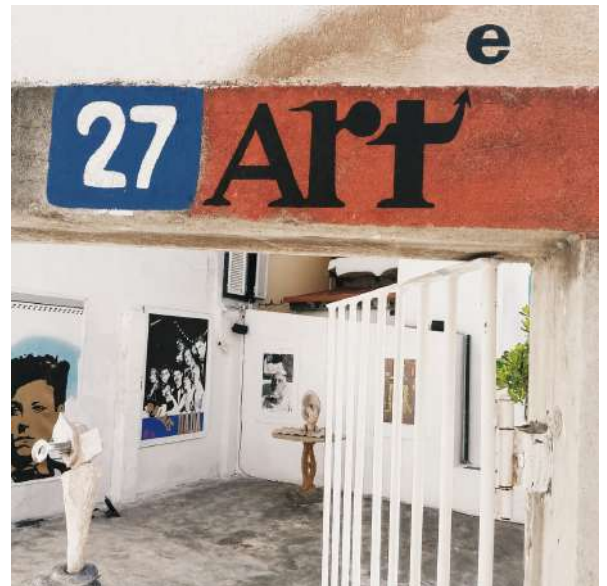


a project by Martin Wöllenstein
in collaboration with Supreme Masqueraders Society

Curated by Carlos Cabral Nunes

16 - 21 June 2026

Hall 4.U, Congress Center, Messeplatz 21, Basel



Casa da Liberdade - Mário Cesariny, Perve Galeria and 27ARTE, Alfama, Lisbon

Perve Galeria

Founded in Lisbon in 2000, Perve Galeria is one of Portugal's most established contemporary art galleries, recognized for its commitment to artistic excellence and intercultural dialogue. Over the past two decades, the gallery has developed a distinctive international programme that brings together artists from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, fostering new perspectives on contemporary artistic practice.

Guided by the concept of global art, Perve Galeria promotes works that engage with themes such as identity, memory, history, migration and social transformation. Through exhibitions, publications, research initiatives and collaborations with institutions around the world, the gallery has played an important role in expanding the visibility of artists whose practices contribute to a broader and more inclusive understanding of contemporary art.

With a particular focus on the Portuguese-speaking world and its global connections, Perve Galeria represents both established and emerging artists working across a wide range of media, including painting, sculpture, photography, installation and new media. Its participation in major international art fairs and cultural projects has further strengthened its reputation as a platform for dialogue, discovery and exchange.

Today, Perve Galeria continues to build bridges between cultures and artistic communities, championing contemporary art as a powerful means of reflection, connection and global engagement.



Martin Wöllenstein, *Flowing Upstream* (detail), 2026

Flowing Upstream

There persists, within contemporary art and culture, the illusion that value is a stable category. What we call “waste” is little more than matter whose meaning has been declared extinct. *Flowing Upstream* emerges precisely at the moment this illusion begins to unravel. Not merely as a poetic gesture, but as a structural inquiry: what if waste (or what we casually designate as rubbish) is not the end of a cycle, but rather evidence of an obsolete way of thinking?

This project finds its origins in the Ankos festivities of Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana—one of the largest and most vibrant carnivalesque systems in West Africa, where thousands of costumes are produced each year through collective labor, associative forms of organization, and profound social and human investment. Once the celebrations have ended, these objects are swiftly stripped of their status, sometimes resold, dispersed, or simply discarded as refuse. What remains is not mere absence, but a failure of recognition and valuation: a rupture in the mechanisms through which material and symbolic value is assigned.

Over a period of three years of research, collaboration, and fieldwork, Martin Wöllenstein, together with the Supreme Masqueraders Society, SE-HuB Ghana, and Nnobia Space, worked with hundreds of these abandoned costumes. Not to preserve them as archival records for posterity, nor to treat them as simple objets trouvés. Rather, they were dismantled and reassembled according to a different and distinctive logic - one that understands fragmentation not as loss, but as a dynamic structure rich with potential.

The project does not “reuse” waste in the conventional language of sustainability. Instead, it reconfigures the conditions of its legibility and legitimacy. The costumes cease to function as carnival attire and become constituent modules within an immersive spatial system: artistic, narrative, and laden with possibilities for meaning. Through deliberate processes of assemblage and patchwork, they are transformed into textile architectures in which what was once ephemeral becomes inhabitable and, by extension, timeless.

The installation takes the form of an immersive labyrinth in which orientation is no longer automatic but produced and induced through movement itself. The notion of walls as devices that divide space ceases to exist. Instead, mutable partitions generate space. The visitor no longer occupies a position outside the work, but becomes an integral part of its shifting field of relationships. Perception becomes fluid and unstable, just as the categories that organize it become increasingly ambivalent: inside and outside, subject and object, utility and excess, and, more profoundly, the boundaries separating art, ecology, ornament, and celebration.

Within this context, performers activate situations rather than narratives. Their actions draw upon carnivalesque aesthetics of transformation. Camouflage, mimicry, disguise, role reversal, and subversion understood not as theatrical devices, but as social operations capable of temporarily suspending fixed identities.

What is at stake here is not representation, but reformulation and transmutation: the continuous transformation of one thing into another, without any visible conclusion.

At its conceptual core, *Flowing Upstream* proposes a simple yet far-reaching premise: what we call waste is not an inherent condition of matter, but the product of a particular field of valuation. The project therefore addresses not the management of textile waste, but the assumptions that produce waste as a category in the first place.

Value does not reside within objects themselves. It emerges through the relationships that societies establish around them. What becomes visible, useful, desirable or obsolete depends upon the structures through which those relationships are organized. *Flowing Upstream* intervenes precisely at this level, proposing reconfiguration rather than accumulation as a mode of transformation - reflecting one of humanity's most intimate aspirations: the longing for permanence through gestures, words, and actions.

The project operates at the intersection of sustainability and imagination. Its ambition is not simply to improve existing models of reuse, but to imagine different conditions through which value itself may emerge within an art form.

The very act of transporting these materials from Ghana to Basel via the Rhine further intensifies this proposition. This gesture is not merely a symbolic inversion, but a material reorientation of flow itself. Historically, that river functioned as one of Europe's principal infrastructures for industrial circulation. Here, that logic is reversed: what travels is not the surplus of extraction, but the remnants of collective celebration, repositioned and assembled as generative matter for new narratives and new forms of discourse.

This inversion is not nostalgic but structural. It reveals that flows are never neutral, but always encoded within systems of valuation - particularly artistic and symbolic ones.

From this perspective, an alternative understanding of material life and the natural cycles of lived experience may emerge. Nothing, at the scale of human existence, is ever truly complete. Little, if anything, is entirely exhausted. Matter endures, retaining its capacity for reconfiguration. These costumes preserve traces of human labor, choreography, and authorship, even as they are dismantled and transformed into another visual architecture. Their transformation is operational: a displacement in what they are permitted to become.

Ultimately, Flowing Upstream proposes that carnival (indeed, all carnivals) is not an event but a method for destabilizing established orders, inverting hierarchies, and revealing reality as a temporarily stabilized configuration of relationships.

Within this framework, value is neither discovered nor preserved; it is produced through reorganization.

To move upstream is not to resist the flow, but to interrupt its direction and imagine the possibility of another system.

Were this the project's sole achievement (so brilliantly conceived by this wonderful and promising young Swiss artist, Martin Wöllenstein) it would already be remarkable. Yet the poetic beauty of his gesture (the one he has dared to undertake) extends further, far beyond that. Beyond questions of sustainability, materiality or value, it touches something older and more fundamental.

It is called ART, just as it has been since humans first made it.

It is something akin to one of our distant ancestors descending into a cave (like the old ones in Santander, Spain) and leaving behind a mark - a hand full of paint pressed against a stone. A simple gesture, perhaps.

Yet within it resides the same irrepressible desire that animates this project today: to transform matter into meaning, to carry something of ourselves beyond the limits of the present and to leave a trace that survives the passage of time.

Carlos Cabral Nunes, *Curator and Director of Perve Galeria, Lisbon. June 2026*



Martin Wöllenstein, *Flowing Upstream*, 2026



Martin Wöllenstein, *Flowing Upstream*, 2026

Martin Wöllenstein

Martin Wöllenstein (b. 1991, Germany) is an artist and media facilitator whose practice spans installation, video, photography, and collaborative research. He studied Fine Arts at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle under Prof. Andrea Zaumseil, completing his diploma in 2016 before pursuing postgraduate studies. His artistic development was further shaped by periods in Istanbul and at the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in Havana, Cuba, where he co-founded the VIVA art collective.

His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Sinop Biennial and the Havana Biennial, and explores collective production, shared authorship, and socially engaged forms of artistic research. In 2023, he co-founded Nnobia Space in Takoradi, Ghana, a design education initiative inspired by the Akan principle of reciprocal cooperation and dedicated to supporting emerging artists and designers through collaborative learning.

The photographic works presented here were developed during the artist's years in Cuba and reveal an early engagement with the visual and spiritual imaginaries of Afro-religious traditions. Exploring themes of collective memory, ritual, and cultural transmission across the African diaspora, these images anticipate concerns that continue to inform his recent research in Ghana and West Africa, where communal forms of expression remain central to his practice.

Artist Statement

“Flowing Upstream” is a multidisciplinary exhibition project that uses discarded costumes from West Africa’s largest carnival—the Ankos Masquerade in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana—as its primary material. Each year, more than 10,000 costumes are handcrafted by different masquerade associations for the festival. After the event, many of these costumes are discarded or resold.

In collaboration with Ghana’s largest masquerade club, the Supreme Masqueraders Society, hundreds of discarded costumes were dismantled and reassembled into patchwork textiles. In the exhibition, these textiles function as modular, mobile walls, forming an immersive architectural maze. The version presented at VOLTA is a smaller iteration of the original installation, which is ten times larger in scale.

“Flowing Upstream” proposes carnival as a model for thinking. Here, carnival is not understood as spectacle, but as a space of transformation, trickster energy, and the temporary suspension of fixed identities and hierarchies. It dissolves roles, blurs boundaries, and opens up possibilities for reimagining and renegotiating power relations.

By transporting discarded carnival costumes from Ghana to Basel via the Rhine, the project reverses the dominant direction of textile waste flows between the two continents. It establishes a circular model in which waste is transformed into art, acquiring new value, meaning, and function, while the revenues generated are redistributed among all participants.

The project exemplifies both material circularity and collaborative ethics in artistic practice. It highlights the transformative power of imagination in reshaping systems and advocates for structural change by addressing asymmetries in waste and resource distribution, as well as their implications for environmental justice.

“Flowing Upstream” forms part of a long-term artistic research project developed in close collaboration with artists, artisans, and communities across West Africa and Europe. Key collaborators include the international artist collective Nnobia Space, SE-HuB Ghana, and the sustainable fashion brand Impari.



Martin Wöllenstein, *Flowing Upstream*, 2026

Project Credits

Artistic Direction:

Martin Wöllenstein

https://www.instagram.com/martin_woellenstein

www.martinwoellenstein.com

Main Cooperation Partner:

Supreme Masqueraders Society, Ghana

<https://www.instagram.com/suprememasqueraders/>

Textile Design & Production:

Teddy Abakah Ansah (Emoji Designers Group)

Supreme Masqueraders Society

Fashion Design:

Jana Heinemann (IMPARI) - https://www.instagram.com/impari_moda/

Styling:

Michael Zett - https://www.instagram.com/zett_michael/

Videography:

Mahdi Hosseingholi - <https://mahdipictures.ch/>

Sound Composition:

Ntshepe Tsekere Bopape (Mo Laudi)

https://www.instagram.com/mo_laudi/?hl=de

<https://soundcloud.com/the-mo-laude-project>

Performers All:

Timoteo Tango - https://www.instagram.com/tim_tango/

Linda Douglas Abbe - <https://www.instagram.com/xlindadouglas/>

Quetzal Santiago - https://www.instagram.com/quetzal_santiago_/

Rosemary Cortés - <https://www.instagram.com/rosmycol02>

Chiara Viscido - <https://www.instagram.com/chiarvis/>

David JongSung Myung - https://www.instagram.com/david_js_myung/

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Project Management Ghana:

Romeo Addai-Boateng Akoto (Supreme Masqueraders Society)

Project Partners:

IMPARI https://www.instagram.com/impari_moda/

Social Entrepreneurship Hub, Ghana - <https://www.instagram.com/sehubgh1/>

Nnobia Space - <https://www.instagram.com/nnobia.space/>

Perve Galeria - <https://www.instagram.com/pervegaleria/>

Curator:

Carlos Cabral Nunes

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Refugio - La Isla en Peso series, 2015

Photography printed on Hahnemuehle Photo Rag paper, A.P. 1/2

30 x 40 cm

Ref.: MW014

At **Photo Basel 2026**, Martin Wöllenstein presents a selection of photographic works that explore the relationship between place, perception, and memory. Through carefully composed images, his practice offers a thoughtful and poetic perspective on contemporary visual experience. Martin Wöllenstein is participating in the fair as part of the presentation by Perve Galeria.



Martin Wöllenstein, *Flowing Upstream* (detail), 2026



Martin Wöllenstein, *Flowing Upstream* (detail), 2026

Credits

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Project supported by:

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The team would like to thank to all the people involved in the making of this project including Lee Cavaliere, Francesca Starling & Emily Bunn

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Ref.: CT_178

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