

VILLA STVCK

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Utopia

Chicks on Speed & Collaborators

October 18, 2025 to March 1, 2026

Curators: Xabier Arakistain & Chicks On Speed (Alex Murray-Leslie, Kathi Glas, Tina Frank & Leslie Johnson)

In 1995, Alex Murray-Leslie and Melissa E. Logan, both students at the Münchner Akademie der Bildenden Künste (Munich Academy of Fine Arts), participated in a painting competition: one painted, the other wrote slogans and created collages. Together, they gave themselves a name and founded a performance art collective: Chicks on Speed.

By the turn of the millennium, the collective had developed its own artistic practice, drawing on influences from radical twentieth-century art movements such as Dadaism, Fluxus, Situationism, and queer feminism, and transcending the disciplinary boundaries of the time. Their first project, the legendary “Seppi Bar”—inspired by the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich—led them, in collaboration with the techno club Ultraschall and DJs and producers from the electronic music scene in Munich and Vienna, to develop their first sound collages.

The exhibition takes a journey through almost thirty years of Chicks on Speed’s work. The curators and core members of the collective for this exhibition are Kathi Glas, Tina Frank, Leslie Johnson, and Alex Murray-Leslie. Other contributors include Anat Ben-David—a long-time member and influential artist in Chicks on Speed’s films, performances, and music—Sophia Efstathiou, Christopher Just, Jeremiah Day, Alina Belyagina, Serge von Arx, Kängela Tromokratisch, Unnur Andrea Einarsdóttir, Wolf-Dieter Grabner, Gerhard Potuznik, Ramon Bauer, A.L. Steiner, Douglas Gordon, Kai Knappe, UKRAiNTV, Roman Dziadkiewicz, and Alex Posada.

Staged at the exhibition will be Chicks on Speed’s expanded cinematic works, collection of 300 costumes made by Kathi Glas, screen-printed textiles made with Johnny Dogday, scenographic paintings and banners and archive of Objektinstruments – self-made wearable-tech musical instruments and sound sculptures invented by Logan, Murray-Leslie and collaborating technologists and artists, along side their series of six interactive iPad apps are displayed – made in conjunction with the ZKM Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, and technologist Jens Barth.

These include the Andy Banana app which takes a playful twist on art and technology by turning a vocoder microphone into the form of a banana, blending humour with iconic cultural references. And the High Heeled Shoe Guitar app – the culmination of a decade of Alex’s PhD in artistic research into high-heeled shoes as instruments, aimed at challenging societal notions of femininity and the dominance of male guitar solos, Chicks on Speed presents the ultimate version of the High Heeled Shoe Guitar app, which allows players to manipulate sound effects, perform the instrument on an iPad, or even explore augmented reality and telematic hybrid performances.

There’s also the Spray Paint app, which transforms drawing into a sound-generating experience, allowing users to create colourful, abstract visuals while simultaneously producing unique sounds based on the spray action. Different colours and spray cap sizes generate varying audio effects, merging visual art with music creation in an interactive, multisensory experience. And Lips, which transforms audience members into active performers, inviting them to sing along with the band’s track ‘Vodka and le Rock n Roll’, Using augmented reality, the app captures the user’s face and overlays isolated lips from the Chicks on Speed members, syncing with the live performance.

Utopia presents a piece of contemporary history, coinciding with the release of the new album HEAR&NOWtopia and the box set HEARtopia (Gronland Records, October 17). Since their founding, Chicks on Speed have initiated technological art projects such as their archive OBJEKTINSTRUMENTS, their own record

VILLA STVCK

label, and other curatorial initiatives. In addition, they have created music, paintings, sculptures, collages, films, textile designs, critical costumes, body art, performances, artistic research, and educational workshops.

Chicks on Speed is a queer feminist art-music collective founded in 1997 at the Münchner Akademie der Bildenden Künste by Alex Murray—Leslie (core member and current artistic director of the group, Professor of Digital Performance at the Trondheim Academy of Fine Art) together with artists Melissa E. Logan and Kiki Moore. From the outset, their art collective project functioned like a synthesizer: a comprehensive artwork that transcended genre boundaries through artistic research, activism, critical fashion design, textile design, DIY graphics, innovations in computer-aided shoe design, object instruments (self-made musical instruments), dance, pop music, performance, and StreamArt.

Its origins date back to 1995, when Murray-Leslie, along with Munich-based artists Karl Fritsch and Lisa Walker, founded the underground Seppi Bar. The Seppi Bar hosted underground exhibitions and parties, inspired by the Zurich Cabaret Voltaire, where Dada artists once gathered and performed. At the same time, Murray-Leslie collaborated with Peter Wacha (aka Upstart) at the legendary Munich nightclub Ultraschall, where he worked as a bouncer and curated live art events and interior media installations. Early works by Logan, Moore, and Murray-Leslie, such as "I Wanna Be A DJ...Baby!," portrayed the group as "fake DJs" smashing vinyl records while playing a pre-recorded sound collage, accompanied by a Fluxus-inspired DIY "box set" containing a T-shirt, a cassette, a paper plate, and a fake interview. This early blend of performance, provocation, and media parody laid the foundation for Chicks on Speed's multidisciplinary practice. Together with Peter Wacha and Juergen Söder, they founded the label Chicks on Speed Records, releasing music by Le Tigre, Kevin Blechdom,

Planningtorock, Gustav, Ana da Silva (The Raincoats), DAT Politics, Anat Ben-David, Angie Reed, and the influential Girl Monster compilation, curated by Murray-Leslie.

Although Chicks on Speed collaborated with PEACHES! in the 2000s... Having achieved cult status as catalysts of the electroclash movement, Chicks on Speed and Miss Kittin gained further recognition through their collaborations with Karl Lagerfeld, ORLAN, Douglas Gordon, Jeremy Scott, A.L. Steiner, and Princess Francesca of Habsburg (TBA21). Their political activism has always been rooted in feminism. The group has also collaborated with Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. Chicks on Speed's interest lies in non-linear artistic research, which is reflected in their live performances, each a rigorous blend of experimental sound, pop music, and multimedia experiments.

Among their most important solo exhibitions are the current touring exhibition *UTOPIA 2024–28*, which began at the Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló (EACC), as well as previous exhibitions at Milani Gallery Brisbane, ArtSpace Sydney, Institute of Modern Art Brisbane, RMIT Design Hub Melbourne, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Kunstraum Kreuzberg (2010), CAC Vilnius (2007), Kunstverein Wolfsburg (2004), and Kunstraum Innsbruck. Their group exhibitions include *Kiss Unsovereign Bang Unsovereign* at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum and *Switch On the Power* in Vigo, Spain, as well as earlier projects such as *XMas*, *Sell-Out*, and *ChicksTV*. Chicks on Speed have participated in the Australian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale, the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Vienna, the Turner Prize Retrospective at Tate Britain, and MoMA New York, and have also collaborated with the Centre Georges Pompidou, the TBA21 Collection, and the Yvon Lambert Gallery in Paris.

Current members of Chicks on Speed include long-time collaborators Kathi Glas, an artist and critical costume designer who performed with her sewing machine as a musical instrument on stage in 2000, and Tina Frank, a live data visualization artist and co-founder of Mego Editions, as well as Leslie Johnson (visual artist), Kangelia Tromokratish (drag activist), Sophia Efstathiou (artist and philosopher, founder of IDEOBICS & The Mind-Gym), Liz Dom (music video producer), Roman Dziadkiewicz (artist, member of the StreamArt collective UkrainaTV), Alina Belyagina (choreographer), art students Mimmi Fever and Tor-Ada Solberg, set designer Serge von Arx, and Dr. Kate Tomas, the witch of Chicks on Speed.