

Kommando 52, solo show at NOME Gallery in Berlin.

November 15th, 2024 – February 1st, 2025

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday: 1-6 pm

Opening: Friday, 15th November, 6-9 PM

Address: Potsdamer Str. 72, 10785 Berlin, Germany

Webpage of NOME Gallery: <https://nomegallery.com/exhibitions/kommando-52/>

Press Release

NOME is pleased to announce *Kommando 52*, the gallery's third solo exhibition featuring Italian artist Paolo Cirio. The exhibition showcases Cirio's cross-media project, *Resurrect*, which addresses anti-militarist, anti-fascist, and anti-imperialist themes by reanimating controversial figures from neo-colonial wars using artificial intelligence.

The series features four historic mercenaries from France, Germany, Belgium, and the United Kingdom, respectively Bob Denard, Siegfried Müller, Jean Schramme, and Mike Hoare, who were active in the Congo in the 1960s. The project *Resurrect* explores these characters using extensive research as a means of experimental storytelling and a creative form of anti-war activism. In the deep fake videos, the protagonists speak in their original voices, sharing reflections on their lives and actions generated through artificial intelligence. By utilizing archival photos and videos, along with their writings and biographies, Cirio gives these figures a new life as reanimated repentant soldiers. The project includes ten videos which are spread online on social media and available on the project website Resurrect-Mercenary.com. Cirio infiltrated online communities with these mercenaries' videos.

The exhibition's title refers to the infamous Kommando 52, a German mercenary force that, along with other paramilitary groups, was part of a coalition of Western countries committed to maintaining control over mineral-rich regions in Congo after its independence in 1960. Some of these mercenaries later became warlords, participating in various coups and military operations over subsequent decades. Despite their sordid histories, many are still regarded as war heroes, with their myths perpetuated in online communities, action movies, and history books. By using artificial intelligence to reanimate these figures, *Resurrect* repurposes history and infiltrates contemporary cultural narratives. The project explores the ethical implications of identity theft, the freedom of speech challenges posed by AI, and its impact on cultural storytelling. These forgotten figures should be remembered; thus, the project questions how and why they should be included in history.

Moreover, this project refers to the ongoing conflict in the Congo, still driven by mercenary forces, resulting in millions of deaths and fueled by colonial interests in the mining of rare minerals used in high-tech industries, including Artificial Intelligence. Cobalt and coltan are primarily extracted in Congo, where illegal mining controlled by mercenaries fuels a brutal conflict. Today, most smartphones and computers contain these minerals, which are smuggled out of Congo. In this project, Artificial Intelligence is haunted by the ghosts of bloody neocolonialism and extractivism.

Paolo Cirio (b. 1979, Turin) has exhibited at major international institutions including Foam Museum, Amsterdam; Fondazione Prada, Venice; Fundación MAPFRE, Barcelona; Fondazione Modena Arti Visive, Modena; Kunsthalle Wien; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; Tate Modern, London; BOZAR, Brussels; Vancouver Art Gallery; MIT Museum, Cambridge; SMAK, Ghent; C/O Berlin; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; ICP Museum, New York; MoCA Sydney; ZKM, Karlsruhe; and MAK, Vienna, among others. His work has additionally been presented at international biennials, including the 12th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea; Warsaw Biennale, Poland; Sydney Biennial, Australia; Media City Seoul, South Korea; Strasbourg Biennale, France; and the Göteborg Biennial, Sweden.