

L'Harmonie du Personnel

A solo show from Annika Kahrs

06-06 → 23-08-2026

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*"I took a deep breath
and listened to the old brag of my heart.
I am, I am, I am."*¹

L'Harmonie du Personnel is both the title of Annika Kahrs' first solo exhibition in France and that of her latest film, shot at the Peugeot Archives in Hérimoncourt in the Pays de Montbéliard with the musicians of the Harmonie de Sochaux in the spring of 2026. These few elements already offer some clues to an artistic practice that has, for several years, situated itself at the intersection of the visual arts, music, and a situated approach through which the artist, with a sort of irreverent elegance, breathes new energy into specific places or situations.

Since 2024, Annika Kahrs has been exploring the role of brass bands in Europe within various political, social, industrial, and demographic contexts. The project in Montbéliard brings this research to a close, taking the form of a trilogy of films brought together here for the first time.

*"With an ounce of bloody hope left.
They can knock out a bloody good tune. matter?"*²

In Annika Kahrs's work, music and sound function both as subjects and as pretexts. Subjects because they are omnipresent in her films, installations, and performances. Pretexts because they are the vehicles or instruments through which she brings together different communities, memories, histories, and societal codes each time: "in that sense, music can function as a kind of metaphor for social or political structures³."

La Banda (2024) follows the parade of an intergenerational orchestra in the Italian village of Olevano Romano. In the film, the musicians perform an experimental parade through the alleys, streets, and squares of their village. This procession reveals a shared complicity among the musicians and their deep emotional connection to their home. The work also reflects the importance of musical practice within rural communities deeply affected by demographic changes.



1-In Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, 1963.
2-Quote from *Brassed off*, scenario and filmmaking by director Mark Herman, Channel Four Films, Miramax Films, Prominent Films, 1997.

EXCERPT FROM THE FILM *LA BANDA*, ANNIKA KAHRS, 2024.
DURATION: 22MIN. PRODUCED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
COMMISSIONER FOR CULTURE AND THE MEDIA (BKM), AND
RAUM FÜR KUNST HAMBURG EX. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND
PRODUZENTENGALERIE HAMBURG.

Les Fanfares (2025), filmed in Sion in the Swiss canton of Valais, features an ensemble composed of members from various groups. By reworking scores⁴ inspired by their usual repertoire to give them a more experimental form, the newly formed collective delves into the intimate yet complex relationship that musical ensembles have long maintained with local political parties in this region of Switzerland. At the same time, this work draws parallels with the equally complex dynamics of political positions and their influence on our daily lives.

Music, then, serves as a revelation of the invisible patterns that structure our spaces and ways of life. For it is not simply a matter of involving professional and amateur musicians, but also of showing how these forms "take root in specific communities"⁵ and are an expression of a specific context and its influence on people.

When invited to work in Montbéliard, Annika Kahrs was therefore primarily interested in the region. She explains: "a place will spark my interest if it provides more questions than answers, and if it is undergoing a process of transformation – no matter what direction this will take it in"⁶ This moment of transformation, which she also describes as "potential," is what the Pays de Montbéliard is currently undergoing. Starting from the exhibition venue itself, the 19, Crac, located in a former Peugeot repair shop dating from the early 20th century, she thus chose to focus—in contrast to her two previous films—on the working-class communities that developed in connection with the local industrial history and, more specifically, on a company marching band for the third installment of her trilogy.



"There is no art without criticism."

Indeed, in the Montbéliard region as elsewhere, large companies encouraged social and cultural engagement to foster a sense of community among their workers and present a different public image of their operations. The creation of a marching band was part of this broader initiative. The Harmonie des Automobiles Peugeot association was founded on May 13, 1930, under the leadership of Ernest Mattern, technical director of the Société des Automobiles Peugeot. The founding objective was to "provide a setting for cultural enrichment for employees and to enhance the brand's image through events combining prestige and musical excellence." This band has had an epic and prestigious history marked by the presence of prominent conductors and musicians in its ranks. Known today as the Harmonie de Sochaux, it continues to offer multi-generational music education thanks to the determination of a few individuals. Freed from the mission of corporate communication and visibility, it is now exploring other avenues for development and thus supports the potential for transformation that characterizes the region as a whole.

3-Excerpt from the interview with the artist for the exhibition. Cahier du 19, Crac.
4-The composer Louis d'Heudières, a longtime collaborator of the artist, is usually the one behind these new scores.
5-Quote from Jeremy Deller about his project Acid Brass which began in 1997 as a collaboration with the the Stockport-based Fairey Brass Band and the composer Rodney Newton who created all the brass arrangements. Deller saw a connection between the Historical worker brass band form and the acid house from Detroit as "two authentic forms of folk art rooted in specific communities".
6-Interview with the artist in the Annika Kahrs, OFF SCORE catalog, an exhibition on view at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin from November 2025 to May 2026. Interview conducted by Philipp Lange.
7-Quote from Lawrence Weiner. The American artist shares with Kahrs a sense of humor as well as a certain conception of the score. In Weiner's case, this takes the form of protocol-poetry.

The choice of the title, *L'Harmonie du Personnel*, refers to the ensemble's history, but it also deliberately departs from it by no longer specifying the company's name, instead focusing on the group that is now breathing new life into it. The film presents the ensemble in the context of a former factory now converted into an archive. At once scattered and united, the ensemble appears in various scenes accompanied by props, objects, documents, photographs, a car, sheet music, and musical instruments. The performers' bodies embody various situations related to music, but also to work, learning, and discovery. Tasks that might be perceived as absurd are carried out with profound seriousness, while more serious tasks are performed with a kind of joyful absurdity. These shifts between harmony and disruption create a work that is both humorous and critical.

EXCERPT FROM THE FILM *LES FANFARES*, ANNIKA KAHRS, 2025, DURATION 1:23 MIN.
PRODUCED BY THE BIENNALE SON, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PRODUCER/INTERVIEWER ELI HANIN



"Language tells us nothing about what we have no words for."⁸

In her work, Annika Kahrs does not view the role of music as communicating emotions or a message. Rather, it is about creating a listening experience that, by extension, becomes "an act of composition."⁹

"By questioning performance practice, space/time structures and hierarchies of reception, new realms of possibility are opened up for musicians, actors and audience members"¹⁰ Thus, virtuosity gives way to spontaneity, to individual and collective expressions that in turn generate "open interactions"¹¹ and open the door to emancipatory forms of experimentation with other potentials.

Unlocking the potential of a place, a community, or a situation can only be achieved through hypotheses. Music and the medium of video thus offer the artist a unique method: that of play in all its imaginable forms and interpretations. Her works are conceived as scores in which interpretation, improvisation, structure, chaos, and repetition make visible and audible the awkwardness, doubt, discomfort, vulnerability, joy, and curiosity. What emerges from the body of work is a fragile humanity that takes on the qualities of gentleness and humor despite the often jarring or serious subjects raised by the history of the places that transpires through the image. Within this collective dynamic thus captured, each work reminds us that "groups are not entities endowed with a predetermined essences, but tumultuous relational processes that exist only through their own contestation and negotiation—ongoing processes, made up of uncertain, fragile, controversial, and constantly evolving bonds."¹²

Annika Kahrs' work thus captures the hum of the world with wit and generosity. The Work invites us to listen deeply, allowing us to "see and hear life as a great improvisation— [to] stay open to the world of possibilities for interplay in the quantum field with self and others—community—society—the world."¹³

**Adeline Lépine,
Exhibition curator**

8-A phrase inscribed on the wall of Eva Lootz's sculptural and sound installation, *Lágrimas negras* (1997), addressing the exploitation of landscapes and the destruction of ecosystems. Since the 70's ecofeminism is addressing the link in between worker bodies exploitations and nature resources exploitations.

9-In John Cage *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Wesleyan University Press, 1961 « The act of listening is in fact an act of composing ».

10-From the exhibition text *Annika Kahrs. OFF SCORE* by exhibition curator Ingrid Buschmann. Op. cit.

11-Interview of the artist in the cahier du 13a Op. Cit.

12-In Ethan Philbrick, *Group Works – art, politics, and collective ambivalence*, Forham University Press, New York, 2023.

13-In Pauline Oliveira *Quantum Listening – Sounding the margins*, 2010 first edition. ignota.org, 2022

Annika Kahrs' exhibition was made possible thanks to the support of Pays de Montbéliard Agglomération through the project Les couleurs de l'agglo for the production of the film L'Harmonie du Personnel, and IFA - Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen for the production of the exhibition; the Plan Fanfare program of the DRAC Bourgogne-Franche-Comté for its support through the close collaboration between composer Louis d'Heudières and the Sochaux Wind Band; and the Liebelt Stiftung in Hamburg for the entire project. The film L'Harmonie du Personnel also benefited from the generous hospitality of the Centre d'archives de Terre Blanche / Fonds de dotation Peugeot pour la mémoire de l'histoire industrielle in Hérimoncourt.



EXCERPT FROM THE FILM L'HARMONIE DU PERSONNEL, ANNIKA KAHRS, 2026. DURATION : 22MIN.
PRODUCED BY THE 19, CRAC. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PRODUCENTENGALERIE HAMBURG.

→ TO GO FURTHER

Annika KAHRS (born in 1984 in Achim, Germany) lives and works in Hambourg and Berlin.

Annika Kahrs is a visual artist working with installation, video and performance. Her research and the subjects it addresses always involve sound or music in their entanglement with social or political issues, and in connection with professional or amateur performers. She holds degrees from the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg and the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna.

Her work has been recognised and supported through grants and awards on several occasions, including the Villa Aurora, VILA SUL, Max-Pechstein-Förderpreis, Stiftung Kunstfonds and the George-Maciunas-Förderpreis. In recent years she has been in residence in Rome, Tokyo and Istanbul; her works have been exhibited both nationally and internationally, notably at the Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin; the 5th Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art; the Bienal Internacional de Curitiba; the Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art; and the Biennale Son de Sion.

Annika Kahrs is one of the artists selected for Manifesta 16 Ruhr in 2026 and is represented by Produzentengalerie in Hamburg.

<http://www.annikakahrs.com/>

Conversation with Annika Kahrs

Adeline Lépine : The first project we worked on together in 2022 began with recording the otherworldly sound of our then-rental car. Your artistic work is often described as a collaborative practice with musicians ; but i'd like you to tell us why you work with music and, more specifically, what sound in general brings to you as a so-called "visual" artist.

Annika Kahrs : Generally, I work with sound, music, and musicians because I genuinely love it ! But my work is primarily about people and how they relate to one another through music and sound, perhaps even more than about music itself, even though the musical aspect always plays a key role. Music always says something about different systems. In order for it to exist, musicians follow certain structures, whether notation, agreements, or other forms of communication. Even in improvisation, one usually relies on rules or shared signs. Music is therefore a social practice, a form of interaction in the rightest sense. For me, music is not only a medium, also in an artistic sense, but a way as well of understanding how people relate to each other. I am interested in music as a composition, but even more in the moment it is produced, in the negotiations, misunderstandings, and agreements that emerge while making sound together. In that sense, music can function as a kind of metaphor for social or political structures. Sound has the ability to connect bodies, spaces, and time in a very direct way, and I often use this in my work. Even though music is often central, the works are not purely musical. The visual part plays an equal role. My pieces are built through performative approaches and focus on moments in which people, places, and situations come together in open encounters. In a way, you could say that my team and I stage performances that are then condensed into films or video installations.

AL: Another aspect that often comes up when discussing your work is your collaboration with people or individuals who aren't artists. I know that your desire to become an artist stemmed from an encounter when you were a kid, even though you didn't grew up in an artistic community. Can you tell us what interests you about amateurism and interdisciplinarity?

AK: I think what interests me is the specific knowledge that exists within different groups and professions, and how it can be revealed and translated into an artistic context. By working interdisciplinarily, I try to create situations in which different systems of knowledge meet and influence each other. Professional musicians, scientists, factory workers, or people who have never performed before all bring very different ways of understanding a situation. I work both with professional musicians and performers, but quite often also with amateur groups. It really depends on the context and on the communities we encounter in different places. But I am particularly interested in working with amateur groups. They are often self-organised and sustained through a great deal of voluntary effort. I feel that it is less about perfection and more about the reasons why people come together and what holds them together I also have a certain soft spot for imperfections that appear in these situations. They reveal a kind of beauty that feels very human to me. They make visible the complexity of being together and allow each individual to shine within the collective in a very distinct way.





EXTRAIT DU FILM LES FAUVES, ANNKA KAHRS, 2025. DURÉE : 22MIN. PRODUIT PAR LA BIENNALE SPIL, CO-PRODUIT DE L'ARTIST AND PRODUCER ENGALERIE HAMBURG.

AL: What I really appreciate about your work is its collaborative nature. You often work with the same people to make your films (Louis d'Heudières for the music, for example, but also the same crew members on set) and you seek out partners in the communities where you're filming to help produce them.

Can you tell us more about this collaborative aspect? How does it come together, and also, perhaps, what do you think it brings to your work?

AK: Collaboration is at the core of my work, but it happens on different levels. There are long-term collaborations, for example with Louis d'Heudières, the composer I work with, or with my film and sound team, where a shared language has developed over time. This allows us to work very precisely, but also intuitively. At the same time, each project involves new collaborators who are closely connected to a specific place or context. These encounters are just as important. They bring in local knowledge, histories, and sometimes also resistance or doubt, which can shape the work in unexpected ways. The concept of the performances and Louis' compositions is often developed from within these groups, drawing on their histories, their contexts, and their specific abilities. The projects usually unfold over a longer period of preparation, but the actual filming often takes place in a very short and intense moment, mostly in one day. It is often only in that situation, when everything comes together, that I begin to fully understand the work itself. The performers interpret, react, and translate the material in their own way, and this process becomes part of the piece. What this brings to the work is a certain openness. The piece is not fixed beforehand, but develops through the people involved. In that sense, the work always reflects the group that produced it.

AL: When I saw some of your works and performances in Berlin as part of your solo exhibition at the Hamburger Bahnhof (between November 2025 and May 2026), I was also struck by the prominent role that humor and popular culture play in your work. These dimensions sometimes appear to be obscured in the commentary about your work, whereas it is here, it seems to me, that the full richness—both generous and political—of your work resides. Do you think you could tell us about these dimensions?

AK: For me, humour is a very important entry point, also for myself when I am developing a scene. It helps me to imagine situations and pushes me forward, because I become curious to see how they will actually unfold with the performers. Perhaps humour functions in a similar way to music, in the sense that it can reach the viewer quite immediately. It is difficult to hold back a reaction. And it allows for a certain lightness, but at the same time it can carry complexity. In my work, I try to create different levels of access. There is one level that can be experienced directly, through watching, listening, and feeling without needing much background knowledge. But at the same time, there are other layers that relate to the specific context, to histories, or to social and political structures embedded in the situation. I am interested in how these layers coexist. The work can be entered from different points, and what unfolds depends on how much one wants to engage with it.

AL: To conclude, could you share a few thoughts on the film *L'Harmonie du Personnel*, which was produced here and is central to the exhibition? In what ways did the specific context of Pays de Montbéliard and the collaboration with Le 19, Crac shape this project?

AK: *L'Harmonie du Personnel* is very much shaped by its specific context, both historically and socially. The project is rooted in the Harmonie de Sochaux, a brass band that is closely connected to the history of Peugeot and the industrial development of the region. This background was not something I wanted to illustrate directly, but rather something that unfolds through the people, the music, and the situations we created together.

The development process was quite interesting because I had to understand the industrial structure of the region, the past of the group, their wishes for the future, and their worries. I had to understand their sonic identity, but also the musical connection of the past to Peugeot and the disconnection of the present. In doing that, I could develop the different parts of the film that reflect these intertwined relations.

That is why the film is structured in four parts, each approaching this complex relationship from a different angle. It begins outside, with a Peugeot car being pushed by the choir while the band responds to its horn, a slightly chaotic, humorous parade that immediately sets up both the history and a certain irreverence towards it.

The second part is staged inside the archive, where the musicians begin to explore old photographs, scores, and company documents. It becomes a kind of living encounter with the past.

The third part grows out of that: a young choir member begins to sing in the archive stacks, and gradually others join, until what started as a quiet melody builds into a collective chant.

The finale brings everyone together to perform Louis' composition in uniforms we've made ourselves.

I had noticed that the band had put aside their official uniforms when the company withdrew its financial support. During the development process, I made a small survey asking how they would imagine their new uniforms, and from their answers we designed the colors, the scarves, and the ribbons. The logo that was created for this project is also the result of their answers and ideas.

For me, this project was very special: getting to know this very specific context, but also the strength and willingness of this orchestra to continue making music as a group. I think the finale captures this well, and I hope they will continue play music altogether for a very long time.



EXCERPT FROM THE FILM *L'HARMONIE DU PERSONNEL*, ANNKA KAHRS, 2026. DURATION : 22MIN. PRODUCED BY THE 19, CRAC. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PRODUZENTENGALERIE HAMBURG.



EXCERPT FROM THE FILM *LES FANFAIRES*, ANNKA KAHRS, 2026. DURATION : 22MIN. PRODUCED BY THE 19, CRAC. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PRODUZENTENGALERIE HAMBURG.

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