

Pharmakon

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Mike Kelley, Wood Grain #9, 2003. © Mike Kelley/ADAGP, Paris (2026).

With Mathis Altmann, Nina Beier, Marcel Broodthaers, Chiki, Cosima von Bonin, Roberto Cuoghi, David Douard, Ana Viktoria Dzinic, Mimosa Echard, Félix González-Torres, Andrew J. Greene, Wade Guyton, Pierre Huyghe, Brook Hsu, Dana Lok, Mike Kelley, Jean-Luc Moulène, Amy Sillman, Haegue Yang, Heimo Zobernig.

— *pharmakon* (φάρμακον) / 'fɑ:r.mə.kɒn/ n. — *in ancient Greece, a thing that is simultaneously a remedy and a poison, whose effect is determined by context, dosage, or use.*

Across literature, cinema, advertising, and visual art, the color green has never settled on a single meaning. This exhibition brings together works that explore the emotional and symbolic reach of green, revealing a color marked by contradiction, ambivalence, and transformation. Initially associated with harmony, balance, and the regularity of everyday life, green was recommended by Goethe at the end of the eighteenth century for the interiors of apartments, where it was meant to soothe the eye and stabilize the spirit. Ironically, the pigments used for wallpaper in this hue were extremely toxic, fashioning a poisonous décor whose effects proved malignant to all who were exposed.

Like the Greek *pharmakon*—at once remedy and poison—green resists moral certainty. It signifies growth and toxicity, healing and contamination, promise and threat. Its meaning is not inherent but contingent: determined by dose, context, and proximity. Green does not resolve contradiction; it sustains it.

Historically, green possessed a unique and troubling quality: it was a chemically unstable color. While relatively easy to produce, it proved extremely difficult to fix, and the artificial substances used to stabilize it were often toxic—turning green into a veritable poison. Much of its symbolism has grown out of this instability. Green represents everything that moves, shifts, and changes. It is the color of chance, play, fate, fortune, and luck, presiding over tables where money, cards, and the future are put at risk. Carrying both good and bad luck, youth and corruption, innocence and decay, it embodies uncertainty, transformation, and becoming.

These contradictions resonate strongly in cultural representations. In Gustave Courbet's *The Oak at Flagey* (1864), green conveys the sacred, enduring presence of nature—grounded, alive, and seemingly eternal. In stark contrast, the unsettling greens of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) evoke contamination, danger, and spiritual desolation. Green may appear as a sign of protection and fortune, as in the mystical Green Knight of Arthurian legend, or as a symptom of illness and decline, as in Edvard Munch's haunting *The Sick Child* (1885–86). Within consumer culture, it oscillates between the promise of freshness and renewal and the warning of toxicity or artificiality. It is the color of money and envy, yet also of growth and rebirth.

For *Pharmakon*, the exhibition assembles a transgenerational group of artists—living and deceased—whose works approach green as a field of forces rather than a chromatic attribute. Here, green functions as an unstable material and an agent of disturbance, unsettling distinctions between nature and artifice, care and danger, seduction and threat. Rather than offering a definitive reading, the exhibition allows its indeterminate zones to surface—where meaning remains unresolved and color operates less as a symbol than as an experience.