

## Collection

By Duncan Mackenzie

*Pier Review is proud to present Bad at Sports' own Duncan MacKenzie in conversation with art collectors Josh Rogers and Lesley Weisenbacher, and Scott Hunter. In the following excerpts MacKenzie interrogates the impulse behind collecting artwork and discusses a few types of Chicago Bears.*

## Josh Rogers and Lesley Weisenbacher

**DM:** I brought you guys back because I wanted to talk about collecting. I wanted to have a conversation that was a little more thoughtful and a little less sort of reverie oriented. And I wanted to do something that we could cleanly transcribe a chunk of for a paper project that we're doing with Expo Chicago this year.

How do you guys think about your collection? You choose to collect as a couple, which I like a lot.

**JR:** That's an internal debate occasionally. Are we really collecting as a couple or does one of us have an addiction and possibly has a tendency to buy art without consulting his better half?

It's important to be aware of not becoming a hoarder. That's a bit of a battle that goes on in our house.

**LW:** Where's the line between hoarding and collecting, that's an interesting question. Maybe one that requires some self-reflection.

**DM:** Your house is beautifully installed.

**JR:** Except for all the extra paintings lying around.

**DM:** Only one or two. One is propped against the wall with one propped up on it.

**JR:** There are also like two more in my closet right now, actually. Two or three. One friend, a dealer, Jordan Goodman, has said that he's of the opinion that I should only collect one or two pieces a year.

He has some good arguments behind that, but there's also a dynamic where part of collecting is about being involved in the art world, right? And it's about getting out and going to openings and talking, becoming friends with artists, wanting to understand what the art is about, being engaged in the ecosystem. For us, that is a big part of the fun. If you're out and seeing a lot of art, it's only natural that you're going to want to make more than just two purchases in a given year.

The other important part of our collection is that we want to actually try to help, or advance the art scene in our city. Particularly for emerging artists. It's more fun to get to know them and feel like you did something good for someone, as opposed to buying one piece a year at auction. I feel like you miss out on a lot of the fun parts of art collecting if you just treat it like it's a com-

modity or an investment.

**LW:** Once you've started it's hard to stop. But then, it opens an interesting door, right? When we were first starting to collect, there was one large piece in our place and every single time we had people over, they would be drawn to this piece. —Instantly we were not talking about traffic on the Kennedy, or the weather; it was a great launching pad into a fun evening and richer, more fun discussions, too.

**DM:** You don't want to talk about the Bears?

**LW:** I am pretty excited about the fall season starting here, but that's a whole different thing.



Illustration by Clay Hickson

## Scott Hunter

**DM:** So Scott, you have a huge collection, and you are one of those collectors who likes to live surrounded with every square inch of the place covered with new kind of adventures to roll down visually.

**SH:** You frame it so beautifully for me! Wow, I like that! I'm actually very tied to this idea that what is best about my home is the visual adventures that you are allowed to take. Each piece is evocative of a moment of me discovering it, and then it becomes actually an interesting task of how is this piece going to interact with and engage with the other works in the collection.

**DM:** How would you characterize the collection?

**SH:** I'm an eclectic collector across media. I particularly appreciate painting and works on paper with less of an emphasis on photography,

only because I studied photography for a really long time and ultimately didn't want to focus on that as a particular area. I was more interested in what I could learn from other media.

**DM:** I so wanted you to say because it's too easy.

**SH:** Well, you know, I can't say that photography is necessarily too easy if you're willing to actually kind of go down the avenues of things like concrete photography or abstraction and structuralism. Most people aren't. Don't get it!

**DM:** Wait, that's not a photograph of the Chicago Bears? It would be actually kind of cool if it was one, with lots of blood in it. Like actual Chicago Bears actually eating something.

**SH:** There you go, but then again, I hang around with a lot of the Chicago Bears, and I kind of see that all the time. And we're not talking the football players!

The key is that I'm most engaged by contemporary work right now, and with the fact that I live in Chicago and there are a number of really incredibly talented emerging artists. That ultimately became what I wanted to put my emphasis on with building a collection. I started initially with a stronger interest in outsider work, and it comes from being a psychologist and having actually a lot of experience with expressive therapies and being intrigued by that.

What ultimately worked for me was seeing how you can dovetail a lot of what is being thought about now by young artists with some of these earlier emphases on outsider and folk experiences as a way of challenging themselves to use what they've learned and then to step back from it. So that is another key element.

**DM:** It's funny because we're doing this surrounded by your collection, and it is cacophonous, right? It's interesting to think through what are the things that bind the works together as a collection, because they hang very well together. But it doesn't—the focus isn't legible.

**SH:** You know, I think in some ways the kind of consistent glue is that for the majority of the works there is a mentorship that's taken place either through training here in Chicago or through representation in Chicago. As a result, there is this acknowledgment of individuality and the hand. Even in the sculptures, even in the videos that I collect, there is an incredible element of the personal and the uncertain.

Some of the work is definitely by mid-career artists here. Definitely Richard Hull, I would say that, Ann Craven, Bill O'Brien definitely, David Noonan, but people like Zack Buckner are really, kind of, hitting their stride right now. So as a result, these are representations of a practice that's emerging across time, and for me that allows the work to situate actively because it's representing this talent at this time, but it's not a definite setting for these artists. If that makes sense.

Read more at [www.badatsports.com](http://www.badatsports.com)



Francis Alÿs *Lada “Kopeika” Project*. Brussels—St. Petersburg 2014 In collaboration with brother Frédéric, Constantin Felker, and Julien Devaux Commissioned by MANIFESTA 10, St. Petersburg With the support of the Flemish authorities

## MANIFESTA 10 // SAINT PETERSBURG

By Anastasia Karpova Tinari

Manifesta, The European Biennial of Contemporary Art, began in the aftermath of the Iron Curtain to form a bridge between the East and West. The nomadic exhibition has finally crossed into Eastern territory on its twentieth anniversary, taking up residence in no less a venue than Saint Petersburg’s fabled Hermitage Museum. The General Staff Building, masterfully renovated to become the new home for the museum’s five-year young contemporary department, serves as the main exhibition venue. The airy, unadorned halls in the space provide a marked contrast to The Hermitage’s history-laden baroque Winter Palace, where select Manifesta projects infiltrate the permanent collection.

Unlike previous iterations organized by curatorial teams, the tenth iteration of Manifesta 10 was placed in the capable hands of Kasper König, who introduced a primer on contemporary art throughout the Hermitage in favor of imposing a pointed conceptual statement. The resulting exhibition is diverse but intuitively coherent. Over fifty exhibited artists range from formally concerned Ann Veronica Janssens and Joëlle Tuerlinckx; abstract painters Olivier Mosset and Otto Zitko; politically engaged projects by Boris Mikhailov and Wael Shawky; to pillars of post-war art Bruce Nauman, Joseph Beuys, Katharina Fritsch, and Wolfgang Tillmans.

In the central General Staff exhibition, five soaring halls with large-scale installations provide an axis. Timur Novikov, a leader of Saint Peters-

burg’s ’80s and ’90s underground avant-garde, gracefully occupies one hall with a small retrospective of his textile compositions *Horizons*. Unable to secure fine art materials as a non-official USSR artist, Novikov instead used everyday materials such as cloth and window treatments. Large color-field panels inhabited by isolated, lyrical elements such as a sun or tiny penguins in an arctic landscape, the *Horizons* are particularly effective in their expansive installation.

Thomas Hirschhorn’s visually-arresting five-story installation *ABSCHLAG* appears to become part of the General Staff interior with the façade removed. Fallen rubble exposes six Communist-era “Komunalka” rooms, which are realistic save for the Constructivist paintings hung within each interior (a hard-to-secure loan from the Russian Museum). In this city of façades, and with Russia’s current political murkiness, *ABSCHLAG*’s domineering size does not overshadow its poetic, multilayered meaning.

Dutch artist Erik van Lieshout’s more comical—but no less metaphorical—project in the adjoining hall investigates a quirky tradition of the host museum: the Hermitage cats, introduced by the mouse-weary Empress Elizabeth I. The felines have borne witness to political ups-and-downs: the good days of imperial rule, when each fat cat had an assigned caregiver, the hard times of the Soviet era, and the 900-day Leningrad siege when the cats perished. Numerous Manifesta 10 artists paid homage to The Hermitage and Saint Petersburg itself, but van Lieshout wins the prize for intimate knowledge of the museum’s foundation and staff after spending two months in the basement decorating the cats’ quarters.

Manifesta 10 features a surprising number of formally minded artists for a biennial born of political crossfire, having withstood calls to boycott Russia from Western LGBTQ and pro-Ukrainian activists. König intentionally invited several aesthetically focused artists in response to “a lack... in the current Russian art scene.” Political messages crept in. Abstract painter Olivier Mosset presented large “ready-made” monochromes, only weeks later remarking that his chosen colors are a nod to Pussy Riot. Surprising everyone, on the last day of installation Otto Zitko digressed from his signature unending line, inserting his first figurative work—a quote of Käthe Kollwitz’s “No More War.”

Painting runs heavy throughout the exhibition. In the Winter Palace, König replaces the installation of Matisse with canvases by robust female painters Marlene Dumas and Nicole Eisenman. Originally intended for this space, Maria Lassnig’s small-scale retrospective instead occupies its own hall in The General Staff due to her passing this year.

In the Winter Palace, gallery-wide presentations make a stronger impact, than individual works minimized by the labyrinthine galleries filled with Rembrandt and Van Dyck. Intelligently installed projects by giants like Gerhard Richter and Katharine Fritsch are too subtle for unacquainted visitors—and König’s pairing of Louise Bourgeois with Giovanni Battista Piranesi, a starting point for his curatorial concept, is a side-note in the Ancient Galleries. A notable exception is Susan Philipsz’s sound installation, a 12-channel piano recording that floods the Hermitage’s immense former entry stairway—reveling in the space instead of hiding in it.

Another exception is Francis Alÿs’s project, *Lada*. Led by his youthful dreams of an escape from bourgeois society, the Belgian artist convinced his brother to drive their Lada to the USSR, but engine failure quickly impeded their ambitions. As his Manifesta contribution, Alÿs finishes the journey by driving to Saint Petersburg in a new Lada, and crashing into a tree in the middle of the Hermitage’s iconic Winter Garden. For the most part, the Russian public missed the poetic undertones of the work, instead disapproving of vandalism on the museum’s hallowed grounds.

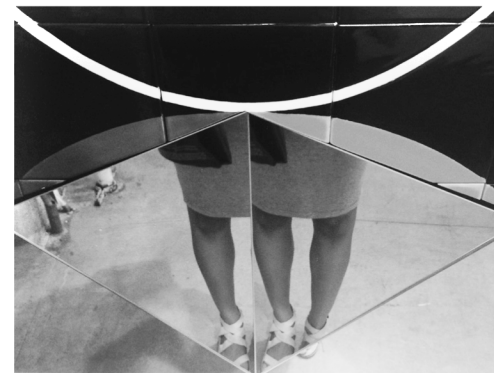
Russia itself seems torn—having begun the journey to a free society, but finding unexpected bumps difficult to navigate. Classically trained eyes find even the most established artists’ work within Manifesta 10 both challenging and shocking. At a critical time when neo-conservatism is palpable in the host country, Manifesta’s organizers chose to engage in open dialogue rather than disengage through boycott, offering an optimistic glimpse of hope that East and West will not destroy delicate bridges.

*MANIFESTA 10 at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg runs through October 31, 2014*

## A RETREAT INTO THE CHICAGO OF EXPO

By Britt Julious

For perhaps the first time ever, EXPO Chicago felt like a “place to be” and a “thing to do.” This writer was quite shocked to find the aisles overrun not just with budding art enthusiasts and art school kids finding themselves in the works, but with everyone else. You know, the people we neglect to consider when measuring the success of an art fair. These aren’t the big spenders and thank goodness. It’s always refreshing to be around the folks who don’t think of art in terms of appreciated value, but instead because it’s pleasurable and necessary and vital to fulfilling their lives.



“Hey, can you take a photo of me?” a young man asked. We were both standing in front of a pole of black silhouettes that highlighted “Shaq Loves People” an uber-populist exhibit the basketball superstar curated for the Flag Art Foundation that had been making more than a few folks scratch their heads.

“Of course,” I replied, not realizing this situation would play itself out at least two more times.

And as I continued walking throughout EXPO, what I kept seeing (and enjoying) was the “play” between the audiences and the works. If you are wondering how “everyone else” interacts with art, it is with the sort of enthusiasm, curiosity and glee that is missing in the frenzy and fever of most art events’ opening nights.

Many people I later identified as Chicagoans offered quick smiles at the massive Harold’s Chicken sign on display at the RETREAT satellite exhibition. The work is part of a larger exhibition at the Valerie Carbery and Richard Gray galleries. Curated by Theaster Gates, RETREAT is an exhibition of works created by all-black artists.

If you are just visiting or are a native Chicagoan, it is worth making a quick trip to the galler-

ies located in Chicago’s John Hancock to view the show. Perhaps more than any other “white box” at the fair, RETREAT’s presence was a welcome reminder of the city where it all is taking, a diverse and rich and homey city made for both glitzy, global art fairs and a quick, cheap meal we can all enjoy.

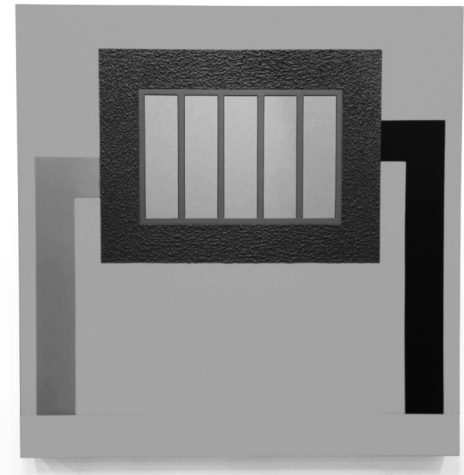
## T AROUND TOWN



Valentina Zamfirescu with her work *Assurance #2 (System Based on Numbers From Medical Bill From Dec. 27, 2012)* 2013, in ArtSlant’s Booth #103 curated by Manus Groenen.



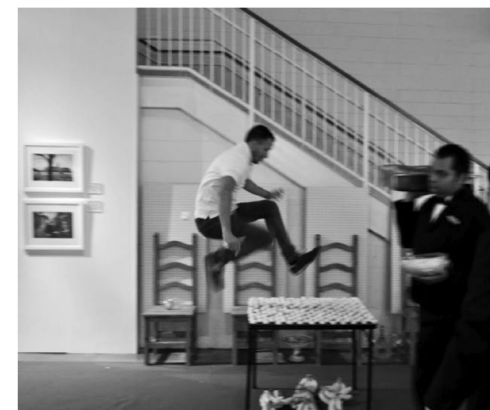
Gallerist Ian Gray and exhibiting artist Bethany Collins at *RETREAT*, an exhibition organized by Theaster Gates and presented by Black Artist Retreat, Valerie Carberry Gallery and Richard Gray Gallery on Saturday.



*Reign* by Peter Halley at Galerie Forsblom Booth 419. Photo by Oscar Arriola.



Katherine Trimble’s transcendent performance on Friday in *Waiting for the Train*, Selina Trepp’s animated installation at the historic Tudor style Comfort Station in Logan Square



Alberto Aguilar leaping as part of his art therapy with Alex Cohen for *By the Horns* at the vernissage Thursday night. Photo by Meredith Weber.







**ENDURING MATERIALS – PERFORMA**

Rashid Johnson's *Dutchman* At  
Red Square Baths  
By Caroline Picard

We gathered in the lobby of a recently renovated bathhouse at 1914 W Division Street in Chicago's Wicker Park. The time was 11:00pm. Upon arrival, everyone received a large bottle of water, a bathrobe, sandals, and a locker key—though standard fare for any public bath, it isn't typical theater attire. Yet this was the obligatory uniform for New York-based artist Rashid Johnson's audience. We gathered to see his rendition of *Dutchman*, the historic 1964 play by Amiri Baraka, an indisputable forefather of American literature. Commissioned by Performa for its original debut at a New York bathhouse last November, Rashid's cast reconvened for a second time in the artist's hometown Chicago this fall. In the lobby, Johnson explained that this particular Division Street bathhouse had personal significance. During grad school, it was a place he regularly came to decompress and reflect. His studio assistant reminded us that the higher one sat the hotter it was, and to please drink water when we felt it necessary. Down the stairs we went thereafter into the men's portion of the establishment until our assembly arranged itself on three tiers of wooden bathhouse benches, already sweating in the deep dark of a

sauna. Johnson took the stage only once in the beginning of the work, standing before the massive great oven to throw two cups of water into the dark pit it contained. Above and behind his head, a sign in all capital letters reminds bathers to add water with caution, lest it get too hot.



Rashid Johnson's *Dutchman*, a Performa Commission. Photo copyright Paula Court, Courtesy of Performa.

The actors take the stage. Clay (Kevyn States) enters first. He reads the newspaper—a current issue of the *New York Times*. Lula (Tori Ernst) then walks on with a purse. With her bathrobe almost closed, a red bikini peers out nonetheless. Everything in the two act play occurs between these two characters—Clay, a 20 year-old black man, and Lula, a 30 year-old white woman—as they ride the New York subway. Each ac-

tor sits on facing benches, and the rest of the audience fills out the rest of our narrow, cramped quarters. Like a vampy character out of Tennessee Williams play, Lula aggressively goads her costar to his breaking point. She knows his type, she claims. She proves it, mocking his predictability, guessing the names of his friends, and the habits of his parents; mercilessly, she chaffs against his own sense of place in mainstream America. She mocks him for wanting to be a Black Rimbaud, casting racial slurs with stunning expertise, infusing the air with a sexual charge as unpredictable as it is inescapable. Clay is mild mannered by comparison. Levelheaded even. Honest. He tends to give people the benefit of the doubt. Observant of social cues. He is the middle class black man and she belittles him for it, driving the history of slavery into his heart like a stake. “Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by,” she says—and on and on relentlessly, to such an extent that when he finally responds in kind, he unearths a latent rage so confusing as to destroy any sense of self he'd previously assumed. As though to further embody the extent of Clay's crisis, Lula, knifes him to death in the final moments of the play. She plans to throw his body outside without consequence while the rest of the audience—all of us sweating unbearably where we are stacked like sardines in the cramped/dim/hot box—watch silently like indifferent commuters.

**CLASSIC COLUMN** by Amber Renaye

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**DIENSTAG ABEND //**  
**INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTISTS**  
By Heather Findling**There is No Truth in Order**

“*There is no truth in Order.*” This statement best encapsulates the underlining theme of dienststag abend (translated to Tuesday evening), an artist collective based in Vienna, Austria and led by artists Ludwig Kittinger and Fernando Mesquita. The experience alone of interviewing these two artists could easily be linked to the intentional spontaneity and affable quality that emanates from their processed-based and impulsively planned performances. Our rendezvous included a set meeting on the patio at the Jugendstil influenced Café Rüdigerhof in Vienna's fifth district. Protected by a canopy of overgrown trees, our conversation seemed a performance in itself, moving from one table to the next in order to find that perfect spot sheltered from the drizzling of rain on a humid albeit cool summer Tuesday evening. Finally committing to a large and dry picnic table, drinks were served and a detailed summary of past project successes, adventures and disappointments resulted. The artists revealed an insightful and refreshing foundation to their aesthetic belief system, which avoids some of the very things that being apart of the contemporary art world can consume an artist with—like an overemphasis on who you know, and how far they can take you, as well as the excessive (and at times exhausting) amount of theory and historical referencing used. Instead, dienststag abend relies on an interest in producing thought-provoking performances that are inviting and honest, with a natural and at times unfinished dialogue taking place between artist and audience. Themes of collectivity and friendship dictate the somewhat planned, somewhat unprompted happenings that in the end devalue order—creating a more truthful experience.

**Heather Findling:** How did the idea for *dienststag abend* start? And why did you choose

the particular day and time of Tuesday evening?

**Fernando Mesquita:** After a six week show, Martin Vesely, who was running Ve.Sch at that time, decided to open this artist run space (Ve. Sch) one more day a week and invited us to program it. We agreed on Tuesdays, from where dienststag abend (Tuesday evening) comes... and continuing the same process as we did before in our exhibition.

**Ludwig Kittinger:** It came out of a show we had together. After our quite conventional opening, we decided to let things loose for the remaining time of it and wanted an exhibition-in-progress. We invited others to intervene as they chose. Later on, we created the name dienststag abend, suggesting nothing specific in particular, but indicating a get-together on a Tuesday evening.

**HF:** Do you consider the audience to be just as much an artist as you are in these collaborative interactions? Or do you feel you can still maintain some control in what occurs at these events?

**LK:** I think the roles switch at times. With the approach of non-regulation, we at times become the audience ourselves and the former passive subject, the spectator, turns into the active part. Who is then artist and who not is less important, it's more about a mechanism and possibly making the spectator an active agent, not by script, and giving space for a communal performance. Control is a concept so I don't know....also depends on the controlled ones... leading to division... so I suppose we are more interested in decontrol anyway.

**FM:** Back when we had the project running in Ve.sch, close to 70 artists were invited, and whenever we asked them to participate, what was vital for us was that we would interfere as little as possible - and in fact we never did - in the artists choices of what to do or what to show. What we always asked for was this; bring your ideas that are waiting to come into existence, and take the chance during this evening to try them out. One can only imagine how many different approaches we dealt with and witnessed in the changing roles of audience/artist. The nature of each project was defined

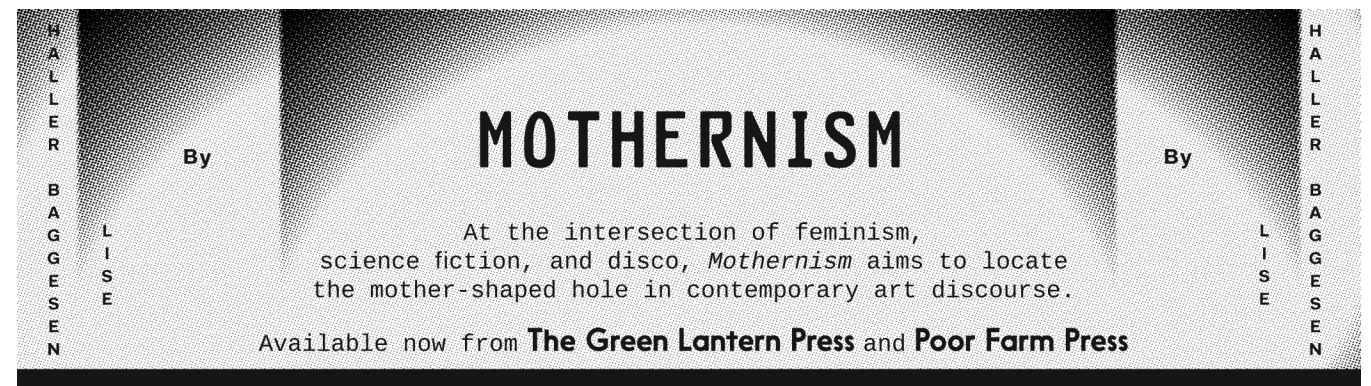
by the way in which the one involved perceived her/himself—dienststag abend doesn't need to have necessarily the component of interaction with the audience. We try often, indeed, to break with what is considered to be “standard” - how to do and how to show. There is a kind of passivity or fixed notion in the way of presenting a group of artists, and here is where we somehow tried to make the work process-oriented. Or, according to the nature of the works themselves, which is an influent characteristic of dienststag abend, the audience and artist can, or not, interchangeably move their role and positions.

**HF:** Why do you feel it's important to push away from the ‘typical’ notion of the contemporary art world, one that is filled with heavy theory and the idea of worthiness? What do you feel is worthy in contemporary art and how have you dealt with, or broken away from, this in the collective?

**FM:** I would say filled with theory, heavily—dienststag abend since the beginning had an Ad hoc approach. I tend to believe that all of us involved have their own theoretical background and use it to hers/his best needs or conveniences. Not in Ve.Sch, nor in our attempts on a dienststag abend abroad, did we have a clear picture of what would happen or how the space would look like in reality—so one of the main positive points is that we usually go for a project without knowing from where to start and how it will end, constantly challenging that same theoretical background.

**LK:** I wouldn't like to speak about worthiness in relation to art, even in general, the term contains too much evaluation or judgment and too little real observation of things, there are too many quick conclusions based upon that what others have said before, often provoking quite sudden breaks to any relation or flow. And to talk about contemporary art many times is just talking about a symptom and not the cause. It's a highly specialized field and it still follows the same mechanisms as the prevailing general socio-economic system in which it is based and functions.

*Read the rest of this interview on THE SEEN, [bit.ly/dienststag-abend](http://bit.ly/dienststag-abend).*





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