

The symposium *Critical Fabulations of documenta* is about the gaps, omissions, and suppressed histories in the narratives surrounding documenta. Rather than treating these absences as deficits, it understands them as productive starting points for rethinking its history. At its core are those voices, images, and narratives that have been marginalised, overlooked, or never fully made visible in the official histories of the exhibition. Instead of seeking a linear or complete account of documenta, the symposium asks how we can work with ruptures, contradictions, and gaps. What kinds of knowledge, storytelling, and curatorial practices can emerge from them?

Drawing on Saidiya Hartman's concept of critical fabulation, the symposium brings together art historical research, archival practice, curatorial work and storytelling. Hartman suggests that the gaps in historical tradition be taken as a creative starting point, countering the silence of the archive with a critical fabulation. Critical fabulation offers a way to question dominant narratives and to experiment with alternative forms of historiography and curatorial practice. The aim is not to close gaps definitively or to produce counter-histories as complete corrections. Instead, it focuses on the conditions under which history is told, remembered and made visible.

The symposium will address geopolitical tensions, institutional narratives, and the mechanisms of global (in-)visibility that have shaped the history of documenta. It considers questions of absence and non-participation, overlooked political contexts, unrealised exhibitions, and alternative historical possibilities. At the same time, it explores how museums, archives, and exhibition institutions themselves can become sites of speculative and fictional practice: spaces in which the past is not only reconstructed but also reimagined in the present. Following Saidiya Hartman, the symposium seeks to not only imagine what was, but also what could have been.

*SYMPOSIUM

*9-10 JULY 2026
→FRIDERICIANUM
FRIEDRICHSPLATZ 18
34117 KASSEL

CRITICAL FABULATIONS OF DOCUMENTA

The symposium explores the gaps in the history of documenta – not to fill them, but to activate their critical and imaginative potential.

PROGRAM

JULY 9, 2026

6–6.15 pm

Welcome and Introduction

Prof. Dr. Liliana Gómez
(documenta Institut Kassel)

6.15–7.45 pm

Keynote: *Aesthetic Utopias and the Politics of Imagination*

Prof. Dr. Nikita Dhawan
(TU Dresden)

Moderation: Luisa Standop
(documenta Institut Kassel)

8 pm

Buffet for conference speakers

JULY 10, 2026

10–10.15 am

Welcome and Introduction

Prof. Dr. Liliana Gómez
(documenta Institut Kassel)

10.15–11.45 am

Panel 1: *Absent Others: The Cold War and Beyond*
Moderation: Luisa Standop
(documenta Institut Kassel)

Prof. Dr. Nora Sternfeld
(HFBK Hamburg):
Something Didn't Feel Right. A Retrospective View from the Future

Prof. Dr. Matteo Bertelé
(Ca' Foscari Venezia):
An Elephant in the Room? The Soviet Union at documenta in the Sixties and Seventies

11.45 am–12 pm

Coffee break

12–1.30 pm

Panel 2: *The Trouble with 'Global': Frictions, Gaps, and Ghosts at documenta*
Moderation: Laura Flórez
(Universität Kassel)

Dr. Nadia von Maltzahn
(Orient-Institut Beirut):
Interrogating the Global through the (non-)Participation of Lebanese Artists at documenta

Prof. Dr. Charlotte Bank
(LMU München):
Global In/Visibilities since documenta X (1997)

1.30–2.30 pm

Lunch break

2.30–4 pm

Panel 3: *After the 100 Days: Institutions Between Myth, Crisis, and Reinvention*
Moderation: Mateo Chacón Pino
(HafenCity University Hamburg/
documenta Institut Kassel)

Dr. Andreja Hribernik
(Kunsthaus Graz):
The Unfinished Institution: Working with Fiction and Speculation

Dr. Matthias Mühling
(Lenbachhaus München):
Was von 100 Tagen übrig blieb... The Remains of 100 Days... documenta and the Lenbachhaus

4–4.15 pm

Coffee break

4.15–5.45 pm

Panel 4: *On the Unfinished Project of documenta humana*
Moderation: Defne Kizilöz
(Kunsthochschule Kassel)

Prof. Dr. Fabienne Liptay
(Universität Zürich) and
Prof. Dr. Dorota Sajewska
(Ruhr-Universität Bochum):
documenta humana – a posthumanist fabulation

5.45–6 pm

Coffee break

6–7.30 pm

Roundtable: *Whose Stories, Whose Voices? Archives, Absences and Critical Fabulations*
Moderation: Prof. Dr. Liliana Gómez
(documenta Institut Kassel)

Prof. Dr. Nikita Dhawan
(TU Dresden)

Prof. Dr. Nora Sternfeld
(HFBK Hamburg)

Dr. Matthias Mühling
(Lenbachhaus München)

Andrea Linnenkohl
(documenta und Museum
Fridericianum gGmbH)

8 pm

Dinner for conference speakers

The symposium is organised by Prof. Dr. Liliana Gómez and Luisa Standop.