



MUSIC

BEHIND THE DECKS: **HELENA HAUFF**

by [Alex Brzezicka](#)

A hard-edged visionary, DJ and producer, dares to show us her soft spots, shares secrets of new releases and personal techno-spirituality.

Helena Hauff features in our new series featuring creatives operating in the shadows, behind the decks, curtains and scenes. It's time for the most exciting DJs, producers and directors to take the front seat they deserve. Right under the spotlight.

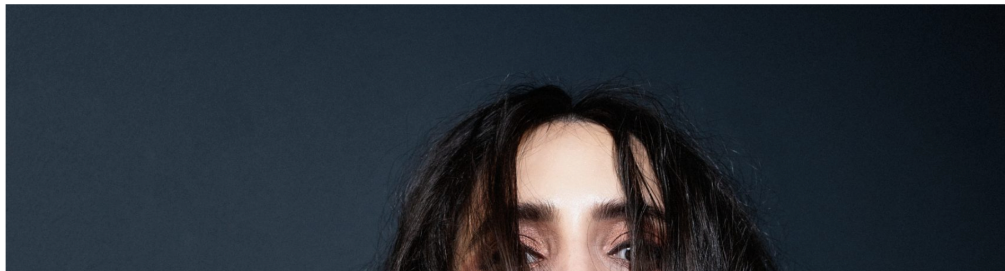
Helena Hauff sits sipping coconut water on a couch in Paris, about to play at VISIV, innovative techno meets technology, metaverse and NFTs event. It's massive and the circumstances seem fitting as she's a one-person electronic powerhouse with the potential to either make you sway in a trance-like state or blow your brains out on the dancefloor. Spinning acid, electro, EMB and post-punk, she's a genius-like standout on the scene, spilling dark secrets of her psyche. It's best illustrated in her 2015 album *Discreet Desires*. The dimension Helena drags us into is set in a post-apocalyptic, industrial zone. There, the dull mass has to fight for a taste of Eden in either hard-hitting beats, affection or shotgun-speed hedonism.

Since her debut in 2013 with *Actio Reactio* and ex-residency at Golden Pudel Club in Hamburg, Helena became an epitome of exclusively analogue, inclusive experience. She experiments with stripped-down techno, industrial influences and a reconstructed disorder. Coming from an art and science background, Helena perfected the art of dismembering, reshuffling and rewriting audio particles in a strictly personal way. Though, there's nothing systematic about this method. Hauff breaks through the backbones of any track or genre to serve it in a fluid state. It easily leaks into any mind eager to accept the challenge. After all, she played all over the world including the techno-mecca, Berghain.

We meet Helena at the European crossroad in France to talk about living with ladybirds, her first club experience and her restless drive for creating. There's nothing more satisfying than talking about shared obsessions and we're definitely obsessed with Helena Hauff.

How do you feel about performing at VISIV tonight?

I'm really excited about it. It's a huge venue. I love the way it looks and the production. It looks really cool. It's gonna be fun. I've never played back-to-back with Blawan. I think it's gonna be cool.





The theme of the event is revolving around art and technology. There'd be no techno without technology. Since the merge of those two is more and more tangible, what direction do you see it heading?

That's really interesting because I have never actually done anything like this. I'm super excited to see what it's gonna end up looking like, and what the actual NFT is gonna be. It's interesting because there are so many ways of approaching that and so many things that you could do with it. At the same time, this whole world is really, really new. There are still so many gaps in this and we know, okay, there have been like a few NFTs gone crazy and sold for lots of money but then what is it actually that people want? What are they going to be interested in? It will be nice to see a whole techno party being some kind of Metaverse event and see if there is some kind of interaction with people.

It could be the beginning of something completely new. Do you plan to incorporate it in future projects?

Well, we'll see. It's quite difficult to do for the normal club promoter or for the normal event. That's not feasible. We can't just create our own Metaverse or NFTs. There is so much technology and knowledge involved behind that that not everybody's got access to at the moment but it's perhaps something that in the future becomes more accessible to smaller events or promoters. Whether that's something people want, I don't know. If I get the opportunity again, I might want to explore it in different ways again but we'll see.

We just have to wait for the future. Going back a little bit to the past, sometimes when discovering another realm, musical or any other, there's a sudden feeling of 'eureka'. It hits you so hard you can't walk away. You explore it. I've heard you come from a rock background. Do you remember the moment when you fall for electronic and techno music?

I was always in love with electronic music since I was very young. I just didn't know that it was called electronic music. It was just around. I was watching TV and there was 'The Love Parade' being streamed. There was electronic music there but I didn't know it was a genre. Most people listen to music not really genre-specific. They just listen to everything and do not really think about it much. I was really drawn to those kinds of electronic sounds. At the same time, I was really into guitar music. When I was about 10 years old, I started recording music onto cassette tapes. It

was a mix of all sorts of genres. It was, in a way, the start of my DJ career because what I was doing was mixing music together. There wasn't like one specific moment that I can pinpoint to say, okay, that's the beginning or that's the one that changed everything. Maybe the first time I went to a club.

Do you remember that?

I've been to a couple of clubs before but it wasn't electronic music events. Let's put it this way: it was just like random discotheques. Then I remember in 2007 there was some kind of warehouse techno party, somewhere in Hamburg. A friend of mine was doing some photography for them so he said 'Do you want to come in?'. I was like 18 at the time. I loved it. I want to do that.



You are one of the most exciting and innovative DJs, dare I say, worldwide, yet it feels like your work stands completely outside of what everyone else does. Where do you place yourself in that scene with the new talent emerging since already an icon to so many, me included?

Thank you. Oh, now I'm embarrassed. I don't know I always just... It sounds so cheesy but I always followed my heart. Just did what I really enjoy doing. I'm into a lot of different genres when it comes to electronic music as well. I like the hard techno but also the dreamy electro. I tried to combine all the things that are into my sets and give little hints of what I like. It makes it unique because I really put my own self into it. I don't necessarily like to follow the rules so much, the rules of techno 'has to be like this or it has to be like that or you can only play one type of techno in your set'. I like to play different types and vary in speed, play slower and play faster. Eclectic, I guess. A lot of people seem to like that. There are a lot of people that don't like that either which is fine. I never really stopped doing that. I fit in different categories. I do fit on the bigger stage, but I can also play in smaller clubs where people are playing really wild, eclectic mixes of music. It's probably a good thing.

It's difficult to pinpoint genres anyway.

I never quite understood that because music is so exciting. It's sad to just cut out whole genres of music from your life. It sounds bizarre to me.

Are you working on anything right now?

I finished an album together with two friends of mine that we started in the second lockdown. We shut ourselves into a studio and we recorded an album. Not sure when it's coming out, kind of have a label for it to come out. That's exciting. It's a little project. It's the first time I've worked with two people together and recorded a whole album. One of them is a guitarist that comes from a rock background which is really interesting.

That sounds exciting. Can you like tell me a bit more about it?

It's a little bit more dark wavy, new wavy, a bit more punk. A little bit of techno and electro elements. It's something that you can definitely listen to at home but also on the dance floor. That's always a good thing. I'm excited about that. Then also this year or next year, I might release an EP by myself.

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WE FEEL OUR BODIES."

Do you know where you want to go with that?

Um, no but I've got a name. My last EP was called 'Living With Ants' because in the house where I lived there were ants coming through the floor. It was a fucking nightmare. They were absolutely everywhere all the time. I had to spray vinegar everywhere to kill them and then like a week later, they would come through the floor again so I called it 'Living With Ants'. I moved flat really recently. The first day I was in my new flat, I opened the window and there were like 50 ladybirds flying through a window. I was like, 'oh my god what is this! They were everywhere in the room. I left the window open so they could go outside. When I came back, they were all dead lying on the floor. It's so bizarre. I've got no idea what happened. I came back to my new flat and there were all the dead on the floor. I was like 'Jesus Christ I came from a flat living with ants and I moved up in the world and am living with slightly posher ladybirds. It never happened again. Now every now and then there is an odd ladybird flying in but they don't die immediately. I've got no idea what happened.

That's so strange especially since ladybirds should be a symbol of good luck.

I love them. They're so cute, right? I was like 'oh this is so beautiful'. It's gonna it's probably gonna be called "Living With Ladybirds" now. That's that story.

It's a bit of an upgrade from ants.

It's an upgrade from ants. It was a bit of a sad story actually that they passed away so quickly.

The circle of life.

I suppose so.

Talking about stranger things, sometimes when in the middle of the rave, I get the feeling like there's unspoken magic in the air as if people are leaving their rage or suppressed emotions on the dancefloor. Do you perceive it as a form of a ritual, an almost religious-like experience?

Humans have always needed that in their lives. We're the only animals that dance and are able to hear a melody as a melody. It's quite interesting. It's very archaic. It's animalistic as well in the way we feel our bodies. It's a very sexual thing. A lot of the dance music, because it's so repetitive, it's very physical music. It's all about the body and the movement. When you think about those kinds of rituals that humans would have produced, they were always involved in trying to create some sort of a trance. That's what techno does a lot. It's definitely music that makes you forget about the real world and takes you into some kind of trance. Into a different brain state. You can really tell, especially when it's longer events that are going on for hours and hours and people are dancing for hours. You really dance yourself into this world and change your perception of reality a little bit. It's a nice thing to do.



That sounds very accurate. When playing live you can access a special kind of power to move the crowd, let them release their emotions or escape the real world for a while, how does it feel like, being able to do it?

It's amazing. I mean, there are some nights where you don't feel it, and it feels like a job for whatever reasons, sometimes maybe you're just being tired, sometimes with technical issues so you have to work really hard to make it work but when it's good, it's fantastic. You feel like one with the crowd. You feel this energy and this adrenaline rushing

through your body. It's such a great joy. I think that's why I'm doing this because it's a bit addictive.

It's like a passion, obsession kind of realm. When you're into anything creative you need to have that kind of drive.

You have to be quite an obsessive personality to get into DJing and producing music. I have told that story in interviews before, but I studied fine arts for a short period of time in my life. My professor said to us, she would stop doing art immediately because the art world is just really annoying and she's pissed off with it. You don't make a lot of money unless you're really lucky. You meet a lot of horrible, annoying people. She hated it but she said, she just can't stop because she cannot stop making art. She just feels this urge to make and create art. It's something that's part of her. She just simply can't stop. She said, 'if you don't have that don't fucking study art'. As it turns out I was like 'of course, I have that'. I didn't have that at all about art. I didn't know what she meant, because I didn't know what that feeling was until I got into music. Then I was like, 'oh, that's, that's what she was talking about'. You just can't stop. It's always there. You feel like you have to create. You have to do things. You're just completely obsessed with it.

I can relate. It's very lucky to know that you have that thing.

I don't know, it's also fun to not have that but then maybe do something else. Some have normal jobs, have a hobby and have normal lives. There's nothing wrong with it. I don't think you're missing out if you don't have it either. If you don't feel it, but if you feel it, then yeah, go for it. I think that's the only way to do it. Because then you're never going to be disappointed if it doesn't work out because you simply have to do it. If it does work out for you and you get successful, it's a bonus. but it's not the goal. I think that's quite important. You have to be really, really honest to yourself about that because it's not easy to realize what that means and what that is.



You talked about your teacher being against the art world. Did you ever feel like that about the techno/music scene?

There are definitely things that I don't enjoy. Sometimes it's the lack of sleep or the travelling. I really enjoy travelling but then at times when it's complicated or a really early flight and you haven't had any sleep then it's a pain in the ass. But it's a job. I'm getting paid so it's fine. I'm getting paid for waiting around at airports a lot, for example. Of course, there are negative things in everything. For me personally, I would say the positive things definitely outweigh the negative. I do really enjoy it. If I didn't, I will probably stop. But I noticed in lockdown that it's better to do this than not to do.

How was it for you?

I found it really depressing. It was very long. We had this one winter where it was... Most things were short for like eight months. The winter was extremely long and very dark. It was just frustrating. It felt like it was never going to end and actually at that point I stopped making music as well. I didn't go to the studio anymore because it didn't feel like I had anything interest in me to get out. Not nice, but glad we're kind of out of it. Half out of it.

What are you looking forward to this year?

Let me think. These are always the worst questions. What's happening in my life? I'm really excited about summer because I want some sun and light. It's been winter for too long. I'm looking forward to a lot of the summer festivals. I have really missed that. I'm also looking forward because the clubs in Germany have been shot for so long. Most of them are only really open for like a month. This is since 2020. That's two years. I'm really looking forward to playing in some nice small clubs in Germany. I've been playing lots of clubs in England because they decided Covid is over a long time ago. I'm excited to play clubs in Germany, like Bergheim for example. That's something.

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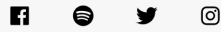
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