

Edited by Stephanie Buhmann

BERLIN STUDIO CONVERSATIONS

TWENTY WOMEN TALK ABOUT ART

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INTRODUCTION

It was humbling and pleasantly surprising when upon its release in March 2016, the first volume of this ongoing interview series, *New York Studio Conversations – Seventeen Women Talk About Art*, received enthusiastic, widespread support. That initial book not only inspired three different exhibitions and accompanying panel discussions at the Shirley Fiterman Art Center at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in New York (2015), the Macy Art Gallery at Teachers College at Columbia University, New York (2016), and the Indiana University of Art and Design in Columbus, Indiana (2017), but it subsequently entered the collections of numerous international research libraries. Within a few months, a second printing was announced. All of this encouraging feedback has helped to spark this second volume. At the urging of my Berlin-based publisher The Green Box, I eagerly shifted my focus to artists based in this dynamic city. My gratitude goes out to Anja Lutz for offering invaluable insight into the overall selection of interviewees.

As with the prior volume, *Berlin Studio Conversations – Twenty Women Talk About Art* aims to provide an intimate look at a vast range of artistic practices. Here, philosophies and intent vary as much as the choices of medium, which span painting, sculpture, drawing, multi-media installation, video, photography, and sound-based work. Certainly, not everything can be covered, and yet what the reader of this book will be able to gather is that there are myriad ways to make or think about art today. As we are forced to maneuver through globally challenging times, art can be both outspoken and referential to current events; it can examine social structures and the human condition at large; it

can be focused on the everyday or on transformative events; it can be rooted in the present or aim for an altogether different sphere, where time is fluid and therefore any issues associated with it are pliable as well. With an eye on variety, all of these conversations aim to capture particular moments in time. Rather than wishing to address each oeuvre at large, they focus on current projects, thoughts, and ambitions. In that, I hope that these interviews will prove to be a valuable primary source for those studying any of the featured artists in depth.

“My work marks my way of dealing with and processing information that would otherwise traumatize me. It would be much more difficult for me if I didn’t get to make my work”, ponders Cornelia Renz, while Alona Rodeh says: “My work comes from the world, and the world has an impact on my work. That is naturally political, because the streets are filled with politics.” Annette Hollywood puts it as follows: “What is personal is also always political. As an artist I work within a certain system, whose boundaries I constantly brush up against.” Bettina Blohm clarifies: “I think that my works are about the world and its various aspects as it is seen through my temperament.” To Alicja Kwade, “the work is about perception and questions how we perceive things and why we do so in a certain way. It explores how reality is being measured and defined.”

Despite their compelling differences, all of the artists included in this book regard themselves as part of a rich tradition. To some, this means to remain in dialogue with artists and movements of the past. For others, it is about uncovering and visualizing glimpses of history through their work. Still, what is evident in all of these conversations is that artists not only possess a keen eye for their surroundings, but that they often succeed in developing a language that can formulate things that are otherwise too elusive to articulate verbally. This language is not about exact definitions, however, but rather about measuring

a temperature. Artists are often able to grasp something that many already sense is in the air, but which has yet to manifest in concrete form.

In fact, language as an abstract concept looms large in many of these interviews. “I intend my works to articulate for others the very experience of alternatives, of the abundant possibilities of life, of agency, of being able to choose”, states Katharina Grosse, which echoes a sentiment expressed by Su-Mei Tse: “What I do is to create little stages for human emotions, which will not be shown overtly.” When recalling her formative years, Jorinde Voigt reflected: “I didn’t have any language for what is inside of me, not at all. It’s not something I learned. Over time it occurred to me however that that is just as real as what is happening on the outside and around me.”

In many cases, the development of a specific technique, as well as the discovery or understanding of a particular material aided in establishing this kind of unique language. To Franka Hörnschemeyer, who has worked extensively with sheet rock, “material is something that consists, of course, of matter but mainly information.” Angela Bulloch, who gained critical acclaim with her multi-media sculptures in the 1990s, muses that the “digital language was certainly liberating and new territory for me when I was a young artist.” Meanwhile, it was after “trying to get rid of the texture of the canvas and any hint of a brush-stroke” that Astrid Köppe started to develop her unique vitreous enamels. Favoring ink on paper, Tara Mahapatra explains: “To me, drawing represents a particular way of thinking. If I draw a concept I have to be able to imagine it. Sketching clears up ideas for me.”

Overall, many of the artists share a drive to avoid repetition. Birgit Brenner stresses: “I don’t care about trends or strategies; I have to surprise myself and nobody else.” This rings true for Svenja Deininger as well: “I will only focus on what I’m

interested in and that means on things I don't already know." Friederike Feldmann formulated something similar as follows: "It is my ambition to not repeat myself – for my own sake. If it's not challenging, I won't do it." In addition, many of the artists discussed the need for preserving a level of high concentration, which to some also implied a certain level of solitude. Cornelia Schleime explains: "If you want to go deep, you can only focus within yourself and not on the outside. If I tried to be current or fashionable, I would be afraid that I am leaving this inner place."

Sense of place is another overarching theme throughout the following pages, albeit addressed from very different angles. Monika Grzymala, who creates site-specific spatial drawings, reflects: "When drawing is applied to space, it becomes something else. That's when I can get in touch with myself and it pours out ..." Susan Philipsz, who works with sound in various contexts and installations of incredible scale, clarifies: "Usually, the space comes first. I search for something, a hook, which can be the architecture, the acoustics, or the history. More and more it's about the history of a place."

The making of art can be a lonely profession and many of the artists included in this volume admitted to fleeting moments of doubt, when the fear of how the work might progress or whether what had been made thus far had true merit could be paralyzing. As viewers, we don't get to witness these private struggles and often forget that to share one's work with a public audience always means to invite criticism as well. When asked about how she has faced this kind of exposed position during her long career, Elvira Bach shared a thought that should encourage many: "You have to be able to live with and know how to handle both negative and positive criticism. Certainly, as soon as a work leaves the studio, you become vulnerable. You have to believe in yourself. And I guess I always did, and never lost that conviction."

As in *New York Studio Conversations – Seventeen Women Talk About Art*, this book is accompanied by a portrait photograph of each artist, most of which were yet again taken by Frankfurt-based artist Laura J. Gerlach. I am pleased to have them accompany each dialogue. Furthermore, this publication has once again been organized chronologically, meaning that the text leads the reader from the most recently conducted studio conversation to the earliest. Though I had pondered structuring it conceptually or thematically, I found that the flow seemed natural as is. No position is like any other and yet, the current sequence of interviews ensures both a sense of eclecticism and continuous rhythm. After a while, thoughts by different artists seem to correspond with each other, either contrasting or accentuating previously made statements.

It is important to note that each of these conversations developed spontaneously. Most of them were conducted in German, my native tongue, and it was a pleasure to be able to translate so many interesting concepts into English, the language I have used for most of my professional life. Although current or upcoming exhibition projects often marked a launching point, I never arrived with a list of prepared questions. Due to that approach, each interview contains an element of improvisation; questions prompted answers that subsequently inspired further questions. As a result of this method, the conversations remained fluid and led into surprising directions, allowing for a spontaneous quality that remains preserved in the transcribed and edited texts. There is much to gain in the exploration of the different ways that we can see the world, absorb its mysteries, and reflect on humanity. Though the streams of thought collected here can merely embody fractions of a staggering mosaic, it is my hope that they will inspire further discussions, research, and the joy of looking at art in depth.



CORNELIA RENZ

MARCH 28, 2017
NEUKÖLLN, BERLIN

WORKING WITH THE LAYERING OF ECLECTIC IMAGES, YOU HAVE DEVELOPED A PARTICULAR TECHNIQUE OVER THE YEARS.

True. It is an important aspect of my work that it incorporates an assorted selection of found images. I frequently employ collage, although you don't necessarily realize this right away. This is due to the fact that I use acrylic glass. I will paint on the back of the front panel, as well as on the front and back of a second panel. Both are lined up behind one another and backed by a final, white foam board, on which I don't draw. The latter simply allows all of my marks to gain clarity. Finally, a white frame made of Polyethylene holds everything together. The result is consciously artificial and rooted in the world of plastics. Meanwhile, my preparatory studies are made on the computer; I will source or scan various images and use Photoshop to collage them.

YOU RECENTLY OPENED AN EXHIBITION AT GALERIE TORE SÜSSBIER ENTITLED *IT'S OK* [MARCH 24 – APRIL 25, 2017].

This exhibition marks the first time that I have created an installation, which involves a large wallpaper. I had previously tested a

similar idea in a smaller project space, but this time it's an official introduction. I sourced its motif from a comic strip. In a way, I've applied my overall approach to my work to how I conceived the exhibition space. My artworks are very colorful and dense in information; they are figurative and rich in associations. All of them seem to tell many different stories at once. At Tore Süßbier, the figures anchor the artworks, while the collage was extended into space through the huge wallpaper, which measures about 2.5 x 7 meters. Two large artworks are set against this animated backdrop, albeit slightly askew. Everything has to fit together in the end, and I'm happy that the installation worked out exactly as I had envisioned it.

HOW DID THIS INTEREST IN EXTENDING YOUR WORK INTO SPACE AND TO WORK TOWARD A THREE-DIMENSIONAL CONCEPT DEVELOP?

I'm not a classical painter and gave up the more traditional materials of paint, brushes and canvas a long time ago. Instead, I use markers, which I fill with pigments that I mix myself. Though I will use some solid shapes, most of my compositions consist of many built-up lines, which can be either long or dotted. In the past, everything developed within a set picture frame and as a result, I wasn't interested in space at all. Only recently have I found it increasingly exciting. Then, about two years ago, I started to set my works against sections on walls that I had painted black or silver. I can't really tell you what my original motivation was; I just suddenly had the urge. I think I simply realized that I could play as much with space as with the work itself.

IN ADDITION, YOU ALSO ENGAGE THE VIEWER IN A DIFFERENT WAY. RATHER THAN PRESENTING AN OBJECT THAT INVITES THE AUDIENCE TO BE STUDIED UP CLOSE, YOU CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT. IN FACT, YOU ESTABLISH A CERTAIN ATMOSPHERE, AND BECAUSE OF THAT YOU OFFER A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE.

Exactly. It's almost as if you can physically enter the picture. I find that fascinating, especially as it is also a very new experience for me. It allows me to increase the complexity of my already multi-layered compositions. In this installation, both the artworks and the background are dense, enabling me to hide images that address explicit brutality and sexuality, for example. In a way, they become camouflaged. At first glance, you cannot detect the stranger aspects of my visuals as they are embedded in many ornate details.

SEXUAL IDENTITY, BRUTALITY, AND CARNAGE HAVE BEEN ONGOING THEMES IN YOUR OEUVRE. DO THE WORKS IN *IT'S OK* CONTINUE ALONG THESE LINES, OR WERE THEY INSPIRED BY ANY SPECIFIC EVENTS?

It's a little bit of a mixture. There certainly is a continuous contemplation of power structures and the many different roles you can find in society. I ponder why we accept things as being (or having the right to be) a certain way. How do we justify inequality or the status quo with the simple argument that something has always been like that? Why do we expect women and men to behave according to these preconceived notions? Even though these subjects are now more widely discussed, there still is this lingering understanding of some things as being "natural". In fact, you can see that these old concepts of gender roles are reasserting themselves. In the United States and after Trump's election, we suddenly witness a new heated debate about abortion for example, and the question whether women should be allowed to control their own body. One would have thought that this issue had long been settled. Another important theme in my work is sexuality and stereotypes of gender. From the beginning, I have explored the notion of a loss of innocence. There are many visual stereotypes associated with innocence, such as a small blond girl with blue eyes. I am curious why the loss of innocence refers to something sexual. Why isn't there a shared

understanding that at a certain age, a human being can decide between right and wrong, and why don't these decisions primarily refer to violence? In many cultures, it is more acceptable to depict violence and aggression than sex. Why is that? These are some of the questions that have shaped this particular installation, as well as its title.

IN FACT, YOU LITERALLY INTRODUCE THIS IRONIC TITLE, *IT'S OK*, INTO THE INSTALLATION AS A VISUAL COMPONENT.

Yes. There are two works, which contain large speech bubbles with these exact words. It is one of several references to Roy Lichtenstein in my current body of work. In addition to speech bubbles, I further employ small dots. They evoke Lichtenstein's compositions of pulp comic book and magazine images, in which he referenced the Ben-Day dots printing process. However, I don't use the dots with any sense of mechanical precision. Instead, I provide them with a handmade quality. In one of my compositions in this show, there is an ongoing battle between tanks. One can't decipher it at first, and has to step back a little in order to see it. There are two figures in the foreground that stem from a weapon testing site in Nevada. They are puppets that seem somewhat forlorn, standing in the sand, while one utters: "It's OK." Here, I'm questioning why we tolerate the explicit depiction of violence and why we accept it as a political tool. The other work that incorporates the speech bubble shows two Afghan children playing. There are several photographs on the Internet, which show boys playing with toy machine guns. However, at first glance, their weapons seem real. In this particular image, which I have used several times already, both boys are armed, but one is holding a machine gun to the head of the other. I had to abstract this image, as it is too much for me even when working with it, and so I replaced their heads with those of horses, for example. These boys are playing that they are killing each other, but "It's OK."

HARKENING BACK TO LICHTENSTEIN'S INFLUENCE ON YOUR RECENT WORK, I AM WONDERING WHETHER YOU ARE ALSO TRYING TO REACH BACK TO THE ERA OF THE 1950S THROUGH 1970S THAT WAS SIMILARLY TROUBLED?

Lichtenstein is important to me for two reasons. For one, I consciously cite the graphic techniques that influenced his oeuvre and which indicated a movement away from the handwritten script. For a long time, my lines were derived from illustrations that I found in books on anatomy. Traditionally, these are woodcuts and so you have that particular Sgraffito. In the beginning, I tried to translate these woodcut prints into etchings and color images thereafter. That's how I arrived at developing my technique of working on acrylic glass. I'm interested in the fact that Pop Art questioned authorship in art and considered de-personalization and seriality. It took the individual's hand out of the gesture. Still, I might cite Pop Art, but I nevertheless make everything by hand. Secondly, I'm interested in simple phrases and slogans, which Lichtenstein used as well. This fascination goes back to about five years ago, when I completed my fellowship at Villa Aurora in Los Angeles. I was thinking about how the US and the former Soviet Union had each slowly lost their status as an international super power since the Wall had come down in Germany in 1989. I found that one could feel a sense of insecurity in the US about that even then. I began to wonder what happens when such a status dissolves? The Cold War had represented a clear structure of the world and it had been the cause for a steady race of arms, which in turn carried much of the world's economy. In Germany, we experienced the question of identity in another way. After the reunification, many were wondering whether an undivided Germany could again pose a threat within Europe. In other words, all these different countries still have to redefine themselves and it is hard to tell what direction this might take. There is so much uncertainty and

I believe that's the reason why people respond to simple slogans again. Due to globalization, the world has become too complex, everything has been scrambled, and I am trying to make my own sense of it. That's why these simple phrases like "It's OK" have become such meaningful elements of my work.

YOU MENTIONED THAT YOU ARE FINDING YOUR IMAGES, WHICH YOU THEN COLLAGE ON THE COMPUTER. ARE THERE ADDITIONAL SOURCES TO THE INTERNET?

I studied in Leipzig and I would describe myself as a figurative artist. So in that sense, human anatomy was an important subject. As mentioned, I studied books on anatomy, but I was especially interested in medical illustrations that depicted the body while being cut open. That interest deepened and I soon looked at how women and men were portrayed. In addition, I use a lot of press images and pictures of the many international conflicts of our time. Another big field is advertising and I find myself increasingly sensitive to logos and scripts.

IT SOUNDS THAT EARLY ON YOU WERE DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM DEPICTIONS OF THE HUMAN BODY AS AN OBJECT, BE IT AS A MEDICAL SUBJECT OR AS SOMETHING THAT CAN BE CATEGORIZED. THIS REMINDS ME A BIT OF YOUR INTEREST IN WHAT IT MEANS TO TAKE THE INDIVIDUAL GESTURE OUT OF ART. HOW CAN YOU DETACH A SENSE OF INDIVIDUALITY FROM THE HUMAN BODY?

One of the books that were very important to me was a guide for field medics from 1935. It discussed how operations could be performed during combat without the availability of traditional medical equipment. It was an incredibly ambivalent sourcebook for me. On the one hand, the book was clearly written in preparation for World War II, which was still four years away back then. However, the pretense was that it simply wanted to educate in case the worst should happen. On the other hand, there was an entire chapter on racial hygiene, proving that the book's philosophy was a product of the Nazi era. In the end, it was

a collection of instructions to help soldiers in the field and to bring them back to a stabilized condition so that they could fight even further. All of the illustrations in this book were incredibly graphic and rendered with crisp lines that are characteristic for woodcut prints.

IT SOUNDS LIKE THE HUMAN BODY IS BEING COLDLY ASSESSED AS A FUNCTIONAL OBJECT, A BIOMORPHIC MACHINE.

Yes. I found it incredibly moving that this book was trying to illustrate something that is impossible to capture. How do you reconstruct a destroyed human body that has been turned into a mass of open flesh, broken bones, and blood? And how do you depict such a subject with crisp lines so that the image can serve as a manual for a true operation? I became very interested in the discrepancy between the actual subject and how it was being depicted. It also marked my initial inspiration for continuing with this particular technique and to create the kind of plastic world I mentioned before. Today, photographs would accompany this kind of manual.

IN OTHER WORDS, IT WAS THE CLARITY AND PERHAPS STERILE QUALITY OF THESE LINES THAT STRUCK YOU?

Yes. I wanted to use the same kind of clean depiction for things and subjects that are ambivalent and which are far from clearly delineated. Instead, these are messy, not rational or enlightened and yet, we are somehow struggling to translate them into images. To find my own language took a while and it happened almost by chance. It was when working on a commission project for Kunst am Bau, that I discovered that if one draws on the non-absorbent acrylic glass, one could get an incredibly sharp line. When I found that out, I immediately knew that I had discovered my material of choice.

BY USING PIGMENT MARKER ON ACRYLIC GLASS, YOU WERE ABLE TO TAKE THE NOTION OF A PERSONAL AND INTIMATE GESTURE OUT OF THE LINE.

True, and I liked this cold way to draw. Everything else, such as the use of multiple panels and the mounting against foam board happened naturally thereafter. I also liked the artificiality of this technique, as it reflected the gap between my subject and the general attempt of rendering it artistically.

YOU HAVE USED THIS TECHNIQUE FOR MANY YEARS AND IN THAT TIME YOUR AUDIENCE HAS BECOME MUCH MORE USED TO VIEWING INFORMATION ON FLAT SCREENS. THOUGH YOUR WORKS ARE NOT LIT UP FROM WITHIN, THEY EASILY RELATE TO CONTEMPORARY COMPUTER AND PHONE SCREENS. YOUR SURFACES ALSO UNITE AN ARRAY OF INFORMATION WITHIN A COMPLETELY FLAT FORMAT.

Even though I will now watch something on my computer from time to time, I didn't have television for years. I'm originally from Bavaria, where I was drawn to the many Baroque churches early on. Especially the mosaic glass windows resonated with me and I am still intrigued by the incredible color that these can produce. In addition, one often finds glass sarcophagi in these churches, which house various relics, such as fragments of a skeleton or an ornate garment. One day, I looked at my own works and thought that it was reminiscent of these religious objects. My works also encase macabre information within sheets of glass. Still, you are definitely correct that my works also relate to our contemporary flat screens. In both cases, all the information is behind glass and in that it also appears somewhat distant; a lot is happening but we view this from a somewhat remote perspective.

IT MUST BE EMOTIONALLY CHALLENGING TO REPEATEDLY DEPICT DISTURBING THEMES IN YOUR WORK. DO YOU FIND THAT YOUR PROCESS IS CATHARTIC OR IS IT DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH THESE SUBJECTS ON A DAILY BASIS?

That's a very interesting question. I don't think that someone has ever asked me that. Usually, I am blamed for confronting the viewer with subjects that are blatantly disturbing. It's also

interesting, because honestly, I can't even watch movies that have any traces of crime or violence in them. It doesn't matter that I know that they only use fake blood in those films. Meanwhile, my work doesn't weigh me down in any way at all. That even applies to my last body of work, which is called "Good. Evil. Pfui." and which is particularly intense. It originated during a residency in Bad Ems, which embodies a lost world of sorts. In the past, Bad Ems used to be a stately bath used by kings and emperors; today, it is just a sleepy town. While there, I realized that so much was happening in the world. ISIS was at its height in the sense that all these decapitation videos were circulating on the Internet and the massacre at the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris had just occurred. It was too much to bear if I wouldn't have had the chance to do something in response to these terrifying news. My work marks my way of dealing with and processing information that would otherwise traumatize me. It would be much more difficult for me if I didn't get to make my work.

SINCE YOU ARE DEALING WITH CURRENT EVENTS AND VARIOUS ISSUES THAT CONTINUE TO INFLUENCE US, DO YOU THINK OF YOUR WORKS AS DOCUMENTS OF OUR TIME?

Yes, I do think of my works in that way. Furthermore, I don't consider myself only a figurative painter, but a realist. I couldn't focus on abstract questions in a world where so much is going. It's less of a conscious decision than it is a product of what interests me in life.

DO YOU VIEW YOUR WORK IN CONTEXT WITH OTHER POLITICAL ARTISTS OF THE PAST, OR THOSE WHO DEPICTED THEIR TIME CRITICALLY? I AM THINKING OF THE *NEUE SACHLICHKEIT* [NEW OBJECTIVITY] AND THE ARTISTS OTTO DIX OR GEORGE GROSZ, FOR EXAMPLE.

Max Beckmann, another member of that movement, is one of my idols. I also like Dix and Grosz, as well as artists from earlier periods in time, such as Francisco Goya. However, I do have a

problem with that term “political art”. I am more comfortable with describing my work as realistic. I am a committee member and one of the two speakers of the Berufsverband Bildender Künstler Berlin [Association of Visual Artists Berlin]. That’s political work to me in the sense that I have particular ideas and try to realize them. To me, politics is what happens on the political stage. Art belongs to its own field. In that context, realism describes art that considers daily life and the world around us, and which to me is my natural focus.

DO YOU HAVE A CLEAR VISION OF HOW THE VIEWER SHOULD APPROACH YOUR WORK? IT CERTAINLY HAS TO BE STUDIED CAREFULLY FROM A CLOSE DISTANCE TO TRACE THE FACETED DETAILS AND YET, SOME ELEMENTS APPEAR CLEARER FROM AFAR.

That really sums it up. To me, the ideal viewer is somebody who will bring a considerable amount of time to study the work and who will be open to whatever it is that he or she will find. It takes time to both read my work and to see what kind of questions it might prompt. I don’t have a problem if someone deems my work horrific, but it can’t be studied in a rush. At first glimpse, my works seem to be very loud and eye-catching, but that’s just scratching the surface. To me, it is less important that viewers like my work than how much time they spend with it.

IN A WAY, YOUR WORK OFFERS THE VIEWER THE POSSIBILITY OF TAKING A PAUSE, TO STUDY AND REFLECT ON SOME OF THE DARKEST ASPECTS OF OUR TIME. WE ARE CONSTANTLY BOMBARDED WITH INFORMATION, BUT IN YOUR HANDS IT BECOMES FINELY DELINEATED, DISTILLED, AND FROZEN IN TIME.

Exactly. That’s also why everything is easily decipherable in my work. When people ask me for the meaning of some specific details, I tell them that all the answers are in front of them; they are spelled out in the work. I also try to avoid explaining my personal interpretation of things and instead, I rather point at the sources for my imagery. It is important to me to invite the

audience to come to their own conclusions and to form their own opinions.

ARE THERE WORKS THAT ARE ESPECIALLY PERSONAL FOR YOU, OR ARE THERE COMPOSITIONS IN WHICH YOU MIGHT EVEN INCLUDE PERSONAL REFERENCES?

The most recent works are usually the most vital to me. In the current exhibition, “Fair Play” (2017) is my absolute favorite. Another work that is rather meaningful to me personally is called “Der Hengst” [“The Stallion”] (2011). Sometimes my opinion depends on the technical aspects of a work or the fact that what I wanted to show is really coming across. This applies to “l’origine et la fin du monde” [“The Origin and the End of the World”] (2009) and “Incroyable + merveilleux” [“Unbelievable + Wonderful”] (2008). The latter is a triptych that focuses on the French Revolution and how it went from an idealistic vision of freedom, fraternity, and equality to a place where the guillotine and perversion ruled. Though this work is several years old, I do think of it as current again, especially after the Arab Spring. There are works that regain significance and then there are others that I used to like more.

ARE THERE PARTICULAR PROJECTS OR COMPLEX EXHIBITION CONCEPTS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE REALIZED? IN THE BEGINNING YOU MENTIONED THAT YOU ARE INTERESTED IN EXPLORING SPATIAL INSTALLATIONS, FOR EXAMPLE.

Yes, there are two concrete things. I also work with graphite on paper and I would like to see these works contextualized in an exhibition with my drawings on acrylic glass. In addition, I have an idea for a series of short video works and I would like to use them to increasingly explore space, pushing further off the wall.



FRIEDERIKE FELDMANN

MARCH 12, 2017
NEUKÖLLN, BERLIN

YOU ARE CURRENTLY WORKING ON TWO UPCOMING PROJECTS, INCLUDING AN EXHIBITION AT KUNSTSAELE BERLIN.

Kunstsaele Berlin consists of two exhibition spaces at Bülowstraße, which are managed by two large collections. That's where *Streich und Strich. Wilhelm Busch und Ich* [*Stroke and Line. Wilhelm Busch and I*, April 28 – June 25, 2017] will be shown.

HOW DID YOU ARRIVE AT THAT THEME?

I recently worked on a series of drawings entitled "Lookalikes" that referred to or were inspired by other exemplary works on paper from different periods of art history, ranging from the Renaissance to Christopher Wool, among others. I was less interested in the subject of these works than I was in how they were drawn. I was trying to evoke that sensibility and to gain inspiration from that.

YOU WERE STUDYING THE GESTURE OF THE LINE AND THE INDIVIDUALITY OF THE MARK?

Exactly. That was my starting point. The result is a peculiar mixture of what I see and my own handwriting, which stems

from a completely different context. That led to a series of portraits and because these always develop in the same way and are based on the same motif, the inherent differences become very apparent.

IF YOU THINK OF DRAWING AS A FORM OF PERSONAL HANDWRITING, WHICH POSITION SEEMED THE MOST NATURAL TO YOUR OWN?

That's how I arrived at Wilhelm Busch, in whose work I have been interested for a long time. Busch didn't only illustrate stories, but had actually intended to become an artist, and there are incredible drawings in his oeuvre. While working on the "Lookalikes", I found an interior study by him, which was probably my favorite work within that series. So this year, I started to explore Busch's drawings further, resulting in a series of large-format drawings, which I titled "Das Große Album" ["The Large Album"]. I think that you can sense in these works that they go back to Wilhelm Busch.

ESPECIALLY THE WORKS COMPRISED IN "THE LARGE ALBUM" SEEM TO MANIFEST AS A SYMBIOSIS OF HANDWRITING AND DRAWING. THERE IS A SENSE OF FLUIDITY IN THE GESTURE, WHICH SEEMS VERY CLOSELY RELATED TO WRITING.

That was exactly the root of the project. I started to think that I would like to exhibit both original works by Busch and some of mine, which draw from his better-known, humoristic work. It isn't easy to find originals however, and in my search I discovered that the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett owns seventy drawings by Busch. I had corresponded with Andreas Schalhorn, who is a curator there, and made an appointment at the study center to see them in person. They are tiny, about 6 x 7 cm, and made in pencil. They are quite surprising as one usually only knows the images after they have been worked on and printed as copper-plate engravings. The Kunstsaele has three exhibition galleries and the idea is that one of them will feature works by Busch,

that I will get to show my work in another, and that I will develop a wall painting for the third.

THESE PENCIL DRAWINGS BY BUSCH ARE CHARACTERIZED BY A SENSE OF LOOSE SPONTANEITY THAT ONE DOESN'T USUALLY ASSOCIATE WITH HIS ENGRAVINGS. HOW DOES THE FORMAT OF YOUR WORK RELATE TO THEM?

My works are fairly large. They measure 102 x 72 cm, which is almost poster size. I enlarged them in the process, in order to get closer to Busch's line. Meanwhile, we will provide magnifying glasses so that visitors can look at Busch's originals in detail. It will also echo the experience I had while examining these works carefully in the study center.

YOU ALSO CHOSE A DIFFERENT KIND OF MATERIAL. INSTEAD OF PENCIL, YOU ARE USING A BLACK MARKER.

Correct. I get my markers in a graffiti shop. They are refill pens that can be filled with pigmented ink.

WHAT WILL YOUR WALL PAINTING ENTAIL?

It will be temporary and placed in a space that has the feeling of a typical 19th-century salon, including a stucco ceiling.

IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE THAT FIRST YOU SHOW SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN PRESERVED OVER TIME, AS WELL AS WORKS THAT HAVE BEEN DIRECTLY INSPIRED BY THESE HISTORIC DRAWINGS, BEFORE OFFERING A DECISIVELY CONTEMPORARY POSITION THAT IS TEMPORARY AND CAN'T BE PHYSICALLY PRESERVED. YOU ARE FOLLOWING SOMETHING THAT HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME WITH SOMETHING THAT WILL HAVE TO SUCCUMB TO IT.

That's well summarized. That's how I thought about it as well. The concept for this wall painting is sparked by Wilhelm Busch's last story, "Maler Klecksel" (1884). It is a rather autobiographical work by him. The protagonist is a painter, who is enjoying considerable success. After he reads a bad critique of one of his exhibitions however, he goes to the editor of the newspaper to confront him. That leads to a physical argument between the

painter and the writer, during which a table is used as both a weapon and shield. It goes back and forth. In a way, the table becomes the tool that stands between the two men. I already used this theme last year for *Spööldeel*, a two-person exhibition with the artist Alexander Wagner [Oldenburger Kunstverein, November 18, 2016 – January 29, 2017]. In comparison, the composition will be tighter in Berlin so that the tables will look even more animated. I am currently working on a dramaturgy for these table-inspired forms.

DO YOU PONDER HOW THE AUDIENCE MIGHT BE LED THROUGH THE EXHIBITION, ALTERNATING BETWEEN HAVING TO CLOSELY APPROACH CERTAIN WORKS TO STUDY THEM AND VIEWING A WALL PAINTING THAT IS LARGER THAN LIFE FROM AFAR?

Yes I do, and because doors connect all the rooms in this case, I can plan ahead more easily. I can decide within which room the exhibition should start. I will show the wall painting in the room that is in the center so that one can dive from painting into two drawing rooms.

HOW MUCH ROOM DO YOU ALLOW FOR INTUITIVE VIEWING? WILL YOU HAVE VIEWERS ENCOUNTER THE WALL PAINTING WITHOUT KNOWING THE ROOT OF ITS CONTENT?

At first, the viewer will probably not even realize what the forms are based on. It will appear completely abstract.

YOU CAREFULLY PLAN THE COMPOSITION OF THE WALL PAINTING ON YOUR COMPUTER. DO YOU ALLOW YOURSELF TO MAKE SPONTANEOUS ADJUSTMENTS ON SITE?

The shapes that evoke cutouts have to be set by the time I start. That's why it takes me so long to develop the overall dramaturgy and decide how the forms should be distributed within the space. I either work with large stencils or I will tape off these sections myself. I use very large brushes, and the actual painting and brushstroke can vary while I'm there. However, I will also determine the color before I start. I would like to stress the *Biederkeit*,

the uptightness, of the room, and so I will use a shade of brown. In addition, there is a parquet floor, which already comes in a different shade of brown.

I WOULD IMAGINE THAT AT THIS SCALE, YOU HAVE TO BE ENGAGED WITH YOUR ENTIRE BODY TO MAKE THIS WALL PAINTING. IT DIFFERS GREATLY FROM HOW YOU APPROACH YOUR DRAWINGS.

It's completely different, even though there is an aspect of drawing in the wall painting as well. The table-inspired shapes of the stencils remind me of silhouettes and in that they are all about borders and crisp delineations.

MANY OF YOUR WORKS, ESPECIALLY THOSE EVOKING CURSIVE WRITING, SEEM TO HINT AT A RIDDLE, CREATING THE ILLUSION THAT THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING TO DECIPHER. THE SAME APPLIES TO THE TABLES IN YOUR WALL PAINTINGS, WHICH CAN EASILY BE READ AS NONOBJECTIVE.

Perhaps it is easiest to explain it in regard to the writing paintings. In these works, I employed writing as an image. The fact that it seems to have some hidden interpretation was a device to stress the picture as picture. In these, writing was free of any meaning. **YOU WERE NOT COMMENTING ON HANDWRITING AS A VANISHING FORM OF EXPRESSION FOR EXAMPLE OR AS AN EXTENSION OF INDIVIDUALITY?**

No. Even though that is a side effect of course, it wasn't the driving idea. I arrived at handwriting through the context of painting, where it reflects authorship. I also have a strong curiosity for other kinds of handwriting, which ultimately led me to look at my own. In general, commentary is something that doesn't interest me at all. I think right now we see way too much of it in art; art is supposed to comment on or have something to say about all sorts of questions and problems. To me, that makes a lot of it boring and predictable.

DO YOU VIEW YOUR ART AS A FORM OF HANDWRITING OR AS A LANGUAGE?

To answer that I have to go back a few steps. I didn't study art, but rather stage design, and when I started to paint, my first big series was a collection of watercolors. There were 150 pieces total, each in the DIN A5 format. I called them "Sammlung Feldmann" ["Collection Feldmann"]. Culling from catalogues, postcards and other representations of art, I basically made bad copies of photographs and prints of artworks. The only rule was that they couldn't be older than 30 years, my own age at the time. It was a way to gain some insight into what was being made at the time. It was a form of educating myself. From the beginning, I realized that there was plenty of room for interpretation by simply trying to copy something and without searching for any meaning. It was about looking and translating, as well as observing how my own hand was interpreting things. It's always a combination of hand and head, which is hard to describe in words and which only becomes possible in the process of doing something. Another early work along these lines was called "Feldmanns Tischbewegungen" ["Feldmann's Movements of the Table"]. I had a photo of a very simple, wooden kitchen table against a rather neutral background. I gave a copy of it and some watercolors to fifty people I knew, asking them to render it as closely as possible.

I AM SURE THAT EVERYONE MUST HAVE PERCEIVED THE IMAGE DIFFERENTLY AND EVEN IF EACH OF THESE FIFTY PEOPLE HAD BEEN ABLE TO COPY THE IMAGE PERFECTLY, YOU STILL WOULD HAVE ENDED UP WITH DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS.

Yes. You can imagine how many different versions I received in the end, all of which tried to match the exact color and forms. Partially due to inability and partially because each individual deemed another aspect of the work important, there was immense variety. It was fantastic. These projects inspired me to explore art by others. The fact that painting has such an extensive history and is part of a long tradition is exactly why I

like this medium so much. It makes for endless comparisons and it is within the context of this huge archive that you can easily tell if something new is being created or not. It's much harder to pinpoint that when working with a newer medium, such as film.

BECAUSE OF THIS TRADITION, PAINTING STILL MANIFESTS AS A LANGUAGE THAT IS EASILY ACCESSIBLE. IT IS PART OF OUR CULTURE AND HAS HELPED TO EXPRESS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD FOR CENTURIES. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE TRAINED IN ART OR ART HISTORY TO BE ABLE TO ACCESS PAINTINGS OR TO BE ABLE TO READ THEM.

Our viewing of pictures always entails both the reading of the image and a search for meaning. You rarely ever just look at it. In my works I take the meaning away, because it is not about that at all.

THAT ALSO RELATES TO ONE OF YOUR EARLIER BODIES, IN WHICH YOU DEPICTED VARIOUS ORIENTAL CARPETS.

That work dates back to the mid-1990s and it followed "Sammlung Feldmann". I was searching for a motif, even though it really is about doing something, which will then lead you to finding things. So I invented a game in that I picked a different motif each day, it didn't matter if it was derived from photography, print media or observation. I made a painting every day and it was incredibly laborious in the beginning. After twenty days or so, I came across a commercial carpet catalogue with all these little pictures and I knew that I had found my subject. I shrunk down each carpet's size to a DIN A4 format, but I used a lot of oil paint, which ultimately made the texture of the paintings thicker than the carpets were themselves. First, I used brushes, and later I used my hands as well. It was a wild way to work with the material. Up close, it looked completely informal, but from afar you could tell that it was a carpet that was being depicted. I used wooden supports, but later I became unhappy with the four corners and started to apply oil paint directly onto the wall, as

well. Those works were temporary and became about the material of paint.

IS THERE A MOST DIFFICULT STEP IN YOUR PROCESS? IS IT THE FINDING OF A MOTIF?

I don't know if a most difficult step exists. Perhaps, I would call it the most insecure one, which happens when a new work is just emerging. I usually work in larger series and the moment when I start to separate from one body of work and first fall into a hole, almost like it was in the beginning, is certainly challenging. That experience of not knowing how the work will progress is something that artists have to go through repeatedly. That is usually followed by a phase of experimentation. There is a lot of trial and error and a lot of what's being produced is just garbage. To me, that stage when you don't know what form your ideas will take is certainly the hardest to bear. Usually, there's a vague thought or wish in regard to how I would like it to progress, but I'm not sure about the form. It is the most insecure but also the most exciting step.

I WOULD ASSUME THAT IT ALSO TAKES LOTS OF PATIENCE AND TRUST IN YOUR ABILITIES. DO YOU USUALLY LIKE TO BE ALONE DURING THAT TIME OR DO YOU INVITE COLLEAGUES TO DISCUSS WORKS IN PROGRESS?

During the trial and error phase when everything is still primarily in my head, I always work alone. Then, when there's something to show I will occasionally invite others in order to receive some feedback.

WHY DO YOU CHOOSE TO WORK IN LARGER SERIES? IS IT TO EXPLORE A CONCEPT IN ITS VARIOUS FACETS? OR ARE THE DIFFERENT WORKS A PART OF A LARGER SEARCH?

Both. My wall paintings always reflect my ambition to have painting respond to a particular space. So in that case, there are as many variations as there are spaces to paint. I find it exciting to discover how different that inherent relationship can be. To

me, that is more stimulating than to paint a canvas. But even in the case of the latter, I believe it is hard to depict all the formal possibilities of a thought in one work. In fact, I will work until I don't have any more questions. It would be unimaginable for me to tackle the same question over and over.

ARE THERE WORKS THAT ARE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO YOU OR WOULD THAT ALWAYS BE AN ENTIRE SERIES?

The work that I am currently working on is always the most important to me.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU ARE ANCHORED IN THE PRESENT?

Yes, absolutely. It is my ambition to not repeat myself – for my own sake. If it's not challenging, I won't do it. There was a clear break in my work around 2005. Before then, I had continued to paint various motifs ranging from the carpets to Baroque interiors, including the Amber Room, and the bedroom of Marie Antoinette. All of these were painted with thick oil paint or silicon. There were also Baroque altarpieces. All of these works referred to 18th-century art or earlier. Then, I was invited by the curator Michael Glasmeier to participate in the exhibition *50 Jahre / Years documenta 1955 – 2005* [Kassel, September 1 – November 20, 2005]. I was one of twelve contemporary artists, who were asked to make a work in response to one of the past twelve installments of documenta. As a painter, I was invited to respond to the first installment of documenta, which had basically been a painting exposition [*documenta*, July 16 – September 18, 1955]. So I started by studying painting of the 1950s, which until that point hadn't interested me at all. I tortured myself with that for an entire year until I was able to access it. Ultimately, it was incredibly enriching and led to a major shift in both my technique and understanding of what it is that I'm doing. Within a year, I went from thickly layered paintings to the flat surface.

IT'S INTERESTING THAT IT WAS AGAIN A SELF-IMPOSED LEARNING PROCESS THAT LED TO FINDING YOUR VOICE. EVEN THOUGH

IT HAD A DIFFERENT IMPACT, THIS PROJECT'S INTENSITY SEEMS TO RELATE TO YOUR FIRST BODY OF WORK, "SAMMLUNG FELDMANN".

It is the exploration of another kind of art, but it also marks an exploration of my own. In that particular case, I was largely focused on Abstract Expressionism. I tried to evoke clichés of gestural painting, which already pointed in the direction that would lead to handwriting. The results were works that looked like gestural paintings at first, but which upon closer inspection revealed that the actual gesture was left empty as negative space. What was painted was the space around it. First I used canvases for this body of work and later I used the wall. In those cases, the wall was the empty space. It was a good way to incorporate the wall into the work. In 2006, I used this concept for an exhibition at Barbara Weiss Gallery [*Friederike Feldmann*, June 6 – July 22, 2006]. I painted the edges of the gallery walls with a red brush, however it looked as if the walls had actually been red and were painted with a large white brush.

THESE WORKS PLAY WITH OUR PERCEPTION OF NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE SPACE, AS WELL AS WITH OUR CONCEPT OF TIME. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT CAME FIRST.

Exactly. I became increasingly interested in the edge. I later made a wall painting for the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, for which I painted everything black at first [*Leichtigkeit und Enthusiasmus; Junge Kunst und die Moderne*, June 20 – October 25, 2009]. I established a black ground and then I added white, working from the edge inward. That process felt sculptural, as if chipping away at something. I even used very fine brushes to evoke lines that would have been made by the single hairs of a brush.

IN THE END, WHAT REMAINED OF THE BLACK WALL LOOKED LIKE A SPONTANEOUS AND QUICKLY PAINTED GESTURE, REMINISCENT OF VARIOUS ARTISTS OF THE ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST MOVEMENT, SUCH AS FRANZ KLINE OR DAVID SMITH, FOR EXAMPLE.

Of course, Abstract Expressionism was a movement that almost entirely consisted of men. I liked to take up this theme as a woman and to paint it much larger and in reverse. Furthermore, I enjoyed using a fine brush to create the illusion of a gesture and to comment on this concept of spontaneity, which is so often employed in relation to works of that era, which I would think, were hardly ever spontaneously made at all. It was my ambition however to reveal how the work was conceived as soon as it was being studied up close.

YOUR WORKS FROM THAT TIME WERE TEMPORARY AND DIDN'T LAST LONGER THAN A FEW MONTHS. WAS THAT A PAINFUL THOUGHT TO PUT SO MUCH EFFORT INTO SOMETHING THAT IS FLEETING?

I thought that it was a beautiful thought, as not everything can be made for eternity. There is a limited amount of time when you can view the actual work; afterwards, only a photo remains.

DOES THE WISH EXIST TO CREATE A PERMANENT WALL PAINTING FOR A SPECIFIC SPACE?

No, not really. That would imply that there would be one ideal space for my work and that's definitely not the case. Each space changes the appearance of the work. I like to work in a space with lots of doors and windows as much as I do in one that doesn't have any.



SUSAN PHILIPSZ

MARCH 11, 2017
SCHÖNEBERG, BERLIN

ALTHOUGH YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH SOUND INSTALLATION FOR YEARS, YOUR ORIGINAL BACKGROUND IS IN SCULPTURE. AT WHAT POINT DID YOU REALIZE THAT SOUND COULD BE A MEDIUM TO EXPRESS SOMETHING SCULPTURALLY?

When I was practicing sculpture as a student at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee (1989–1993), I already started thinking about the physicality of producing sound and what happens when you project sound into a room. I became very aware of my inner body space and started thinking about it more as a sculptural experience, about what happens when you breathe, when your diaphragm moves to project sound. I used to sing as well, so it was while I was singing that I really became aware of the sculptural aspects of sound and how it can define a space. I was contemplating how to fill a room with sound and its architectural concerns. From then on, I considered introducing sound into my sculptural installations, something that intensified when I was studying for my Masters in Belfast. In addition to the architectural concerns, I also began

thinking about the emotive and psychological effects of sound and song.

WERE YOU HIGHLIGHTING THE INDIVIDUALITY OF THE ARCHITECTURAL SETTING BY EMPLOYING SOUND TO CREATE A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE IN A SPECIFIC SPACE?

Yes, that's how it developed. Early on, when living in Belfast, I was focused on working in public spaces, especially as there weren't very many commercial galleries or museums then. I was involved in an artist-run gallery at the time, but I was more interested in exploring these abandoned spaces that you could find all over Belfast. So my work with sound and public spaces coincided. From the beginning, I was very concerned with putting sound into a space, where you might draw attention to its architecture, acoustics, or atmosphere. I was singing and recording my own voice.

TO WORK WITH SOUND IN AN ABANDONED SPACE IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM PERFORMING MUSIC FOR AN AUDIENCE. IN A WAY, ONE COULD ARGUE THAT YOU WERE PURSUING A MORE PRIVATE APPROACH TO SOUND DEVELOPMENT. WOULD YOU CONFIRM THAT YOU WERE CREATING SOUND FOR YOURSELF AT FIRST, PERHAPS AS A WAY TO INTERACT WITH A SPACE?

Yes. When I work with my voice, I tend to keep the recordings dry; I don't try to make them sound any better in postproduction by adding reverb, for example. Even back then, I really wanted my voice to sound like an ordinary or disembodied one that could belong to anyone. In addition, I meant to create a sense of solitude. For instance, when I did my one and only live performance, which was staged in a Tesco supermarket in 2004, I sang over its public address system but you couldn't see me.

WHILE YOUR VOICE MUST HAVE FELT OMNIPRESENT DURING THAT PERFORMANCE, YOU KEPT YOURSELF REMOTE.

Yes. Even though the supermarket was huge, I was in a small room with a microphone, three floors up. In other words, even

though it was a live performance, it featured a disembodied voice. I chose to sing these melancholy pop songs in the first person. I pressed a little button and downstairs one would instantly know that an announcement was forthcoming because of the ding-dong-dong. However, instead of something official, I chose to sing songs in the first person on themes of longing and sympathy by Nirvana, Radiohead, and The Velvet Underground, among others.

WERE YOU RECORDING THE REACTIONS OF CUSTOMERS IN THE SUPERMARKET OR HOW DID YOU DOCUMENT THE PROJECT?

The BBC was actually working on a documentary about Beck's Futures at the time and this project was part of that. They had a proper film crew and they were filming some of the reactions of the people. So it was much better documented than I would have done myself, even though I've become much more on top of my documentation by now. In the footage, it was quite amazing to hear the ambient sounds of the supermarket, especially as you're normally not aware of whom you're standing next to; you're just focusing on your shopping. Then, all of a sudden, you're engaged in your surroundings. That's been something that I've been interested in since the beginning. You might just happen upon the sound in a public space unexpectedly or perhaps, you're waiting with anticipation. In both cases, it is in the moment you experience the sound that you become very aware of the space that you're in. It heightens your sense of self, of the room, and the person you're standing beside.

HOW MUCH DO YOU CONSIDER THE AUDIENCE'S MOVEMENT THROUGH THE SPACE WHEN YOU CONCEIVE A SOUND INSTALLATION? IS THIS SOMETHING THAT PLAYS A PART IN YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS OR IS THAT AN ELEMENT THAT COMES IN ONLY WHEN THE WORK IS UP AND RUNNING.

Sometimes it is impossible to test what the work will even sound like until it is installed. In the case of "Study for Strings", my

contribution to *documenta 13*, for example, I could only imagine how the work would sound in that public space, Kassel's main train station [June 9 – September 16, 2012]. In fact, I was wondering whether it would be completely lost there. I had wanted to use this very large open space at the train tracks and the sound was to come from a distance. I made the work here in the studio, wondering what would happen once it became surrounded by all the different ambient noises. I was truly relieved when everything fell into place. In addition, the work was inspired by and gained so much from that particular context.

DID YOU PICK THE TRAIN STATION SPECIFICALLY FOR YOUR PIECE OR DID CAROLYN CHRISTOV-BAKARGIEV, THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF *DOCUMENTA 13*, ASSIGN YOU THE LOCATION?

I proposed the space, saying that I would love to work there. She agreed and it was quite exciting and nerve-wracking. After that, I went to Kassel and spent some time in the train station, standing at the platform's end, looking out into the distance. I had worked with the themes of distance and separation before and so I thought this was something I wanted to explore as well in this particular work.

DID YOU GO BACK WHEN THE PIECE WAS INSTALLED TO SEE HOW PEOPLE REACTED TO IT OR DID YOU PREFER LEAVING THE WORK ALONE AT THAT POINT?

We were there for the opening days and I also went back later for some proper documentation of the piece. People were really moved by the work, which was quite surprising unless you understood that the composer Pavel Haas had been interned in Theresienstadt [Terezin] in Czechoslovakia. In the summer of 1944, the Nazi government had taken the Danish Red Cross on a tour of that concentration camp, which was documented in the propaganda film "Terezin: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area". You can see Pavel Haas and his orchestra in that film, performing "Study for String Orchestra", which he had

composed there in 1943. After the filming had finished, Haas and most of the orchestra were deported to Auschwitz where they were killed. Although the scores for the composition were lost in the camp, the conductor Karel Ančerl (1908–1973) survived the Holocaust and reconstructed the composition after the War. This story is just tragic, but a lot of visitors of *documenta 13* did not know about it. Still, they felt moved. In my work, I took the score apart before piecing it back together again in the end, but only with two of the voices from the entire orchestra of 24 instruments. The result sounded quite discordant and broken. It didn't sound beautiful as a lot of the music was taken out of it.

IT GOES BACK TO WHAT YOU DESCRIBED AS CAPTURING AN ATMOSPHERE. VIEWERS DON'T NECESSARILY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE HEARING OR ANYTHING ABOUT THE HISTORY INVOLVED AND YET, THEY CAN SENSE THE FEELING OF THE OVERALL CONTENT THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE YOU PROVIDE.

Yes. It was so interesting for me to learn that from people who experienced that particular work. I think it's partially because of the feelings I mentioned before, separation and distance. If you had followed the tracks around a corner, you would have come to a rail factory, which had been the first labor camp and a place where tanks were being built during the War. That factory was the reason why Kassel was so heavily bombed. So there is this menace just around the bend, but you wouldn't know it when looking out into the hills, listening to the birds. It's shocking to scratch the surface to reveal all of that history.

IN A WAY, YOUR WORK PROVIDED A TWO-FOLD EXPERIENCE. THERE IS AN INSTANT, SENSORY ENGAGEMENT, AND THEN THERE IS A DEPTH OF HISTORY THAT CAN BE EXPLORED THROUGH THE WORK.

There certainly is the possibility for a layered experience. Sound is visceral and you respond to it immediately according to how it works spatially, sculpturally, and to how it resonates within

your body. It's something that you cannot help. Then, when you become inquisitive of what this particular sound is or what that specific conversation was based on, you can go deeper into it. Meanwhile, the public space comes with its own ambient sound that can interfere with the installation. That especially was the case with "Lowlands" (2010), an installation I originally made for the International Glasgow Festival of Visual Art [*winning Philipsz the prestigious Turner Prize that same year*]. I recorded my singing of "Lowlands Away", a sad 16th-century Scottish lament, and projected it underneath three local bridges leading over the Clyde: George V Bridge, the Caledonian railway bridge, and Glasgow Bridge. Because the urban context was really gritty, with water, trains and people overhead, it was hard to be completely taken away or enter into a state of reverie with the work. Different things were happening simultaneously and fighting each other and so you remained grounded in the present moment.

PERHAPS, PRESENT AND PAST WERE CLASHING, BUT YOU ALSO HELPED TO TRANSPORT A SOUND AND EMOTION OF THE PAST TO A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT. THE SAME APPLIED IN 2000, WHEN YOU WERE INVITED TO CONTRIBUTE A PIECE TO MANIFESTA 3, IN LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA. YOU RECORDED A VERSION OF THE OLD SOCIALIST ANTHEM "THE INTERNATIONALE" AND PLAYED IT UNDER A PUBLIC WALKWAY.

It's true that sound and particularly song can be a trigger for memory. People have strong associations with the human voice, especially when it is unaccompanied. Of course, a lot of people know the song I used in this particular piece, but it's usually associated with many people and a crowd. I used to sing it at demonstrations, for example. However, when it's just a lone voice it suggests other things; it's a lament to something that's past and yet, it's ambiguous. By putting it in a particular context, it evokes new meaning and allows for a new way of seeing a place. As a result, it has a whole new life.

DOES THE IDEA FOR A WORK ALWAYS START WITH A SPACE OR DO YOU ALSO KEEP A NOTEBOOK WITH THOUGHTS THAT EVENTUALLY CAN MATCH UP WITH A SITE?

Usually, the space comes first and I go and have a look and find something that draws me in. I search for something, a hook, which can be the architecture, the acoustics, or the history. More and more it's about the history of a place. Berlin is an incredible city for that and it has been an inspiration living here. It's just so full of history.

ANOTHER RECENT PROJECT THAT EXPLORED A PARTICULAR SLICE OF HISTORY WAS YOUR SHOW AT KUNSTVEREIN HANNOVER [SUSAN PHILIPSZ: RETURNING, DECEMBER 10, 2016 – FEBRUARY 26, 2017]. WAS IT THE FIRST TIME YOU EMPLOYED VINYL IN YOUR WORK?

No, I've used vinyl before. For that particular exhibition, I created four new works, one of which involved vinyl records. I was fascinated when I learned that vinyl was invented in Hanover. The first vinyl presses were made and mass-produced there. Emile Berliner (1851–1929), who invented the Gramophone and gramophone records, was born there. In fact, after Berliner migrated to the United States, he founded the United States Gramophone Company (1894), The Gramophone Company in London (1897), Deutsche Grammophon in Hanover (1898) and the Berliner Gram-o-phon Company of Canada in Montreal (1899). I thought that was incredible. Meanwhile, the space of the Kunstverein is rather tricky in that it has a very long reverberation time, making for lots of echo. That can be quite problematic and challenging if you work with sound. Furthermore, all the rooms are interconnected in a big circle. So the first thing you want to do is to just pace around in a big loop. In other words, the concept for this show was inspired by both Hanover's history in vinyl and the unique architecture of the exhibition space. I named it "Returning" after the title of a film that I made way back in 2004 shortly after I came to Berlin.

MEANWHILE, THE OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE EXHIBITION WERE SALT AND TEARS.

Yes. For example, the vinyl record installation was based on seven tones. I recorded seven tones by rubbing the rim of a filled wine glass, whose water level determined the pitch. The tones made up a melody called “Lachrimæ or Seven Teares” by John Dowland (1604), which was really famous in its time. I had each of the tones made into a clear record, playing them together at the same time. So you could hear a little bit of the tune if you were familiar with it. Suddenly, all the arms of the record players would lift up, which produced a unique sound, as well. It was like a little ballet. I also made these salt paintings, for which I had soaked canvas in salt over a long period of time. This left a residue of salt on them, which to me referred to salt and tears. I was really happy with how it all worked within that space.

IN THIS CASE, YOU HAD A THEME THAT INSPIRED MANY OF THE WORKS ON DISPLAY. HOW DO YOU CHOOSE YOUR MEDIUM AND DECIDE THAT SOMETHING SHOULD BE TRANSLATED INTO SCULPTURE, INSTALLATION, AND SOUND?

It’s a lot about spending time in the space. In the case of that exhibition, I had to think about how all the different pieces could work together. Because you couldn’t contain any of the sound, everything became married and had to work together. I hadn’t intended to make so many new works, but in the end the place itself was so inspiring. For example, I was allowed to work with a historical synagogue organ that survived the Reichskristallnacht [Night of the Broken Glass] and which has been housed in the Villa Seligmann in Hanover since 2011. The organ had been repaired and returned to its original state by the organist and conductor Andor Izsák, who let me make recordings of it in situ. The organ itself produced the sound manually by pumping the bellows, and you could really hear all the creaks and the breath.

THAT WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME YOU HAD WORKED WITH INSTRUMENTS THAT HAD BEEN DAMAGED, EITHER BEFORE OR DURING WORLD WAR II. IS THAT AN ONGOING INTEREST OF YOURS?

Yes, it’s true. In fact I’ve been working on a series of war-damaged musical instruments over the past few years and I included one example in that exhibition. It was the latest war-damaged musical instrument, which was a shofar. A shofar is an instrument that’s used in Jewish ceremonies and which is an actual ram’s horn. A Jewish family had hidden that particular instrument under coal during the War in order to keep it safe. Nobody knows what happened to that family but the shofar was found under this pile of coal and it had been completely flattened. The person who now owns it allowed me to make recordings from it, and of course it’s never going to sound as it once did. Nevertheless, I was still able to produce sound. And that was the case with all of the damaged musical instruments that I have worked with. All of them were wind or brass instruments, meaning that they required the human breath to be played. So from the very first example on, which was a bugle with a bullet hole through it that I recorded at the Schlossmuseum Sonderhausen, these damaged instruments now require even more breath than usual. Of course, you’re never going to make music with these instruments again, but they can still produce some very interesting and evocative sounds.

I KEEP THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU SAID EARLIER WHEN TALKING ABOUT YOUR INSTALLATION IN KASSEL. YOUR WORK EMBODIES THE WISH TO REACH INTO THE DISTANCE, PERHAPS TO BUILD A BRIDGE TO THE PAST. THESE INSTRUMENTS ALLOW YOU TO REACH INTO THE PAST, NOT ONLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE BECOME HISTORIC ARTIFACTS, BUT BECAUSE THEY WERE ONCE IMBUED WITH LIFE AND PHYSICAL ENERGY, SUCH AS LIVING BREATH.

Yes, I am thinking about distance and separation. Some of these musical instruments are very old, going back to the

Crimean War or the Battle of Waterloo, for example. It's like breathing life back into them. In 2014, I made a work called "The Distant Sound" in Scandinavia. It spanned the entire West coast of Scandinavia from Denmark through Sweden and up to Norway. It was my biggest installation, entailing around 600 kilometers of coastline around the Øresund and the North Sea. "The Distant Sound" referred to the sound that you hear, as well as to the "Sound" as a body of water between two landmasses. Looking out into the water, I imagined that the sound would come from afar and the only way to achieve that was to transmit it by radio. One of the partners was Grimeton Radio Station and in the end that was the heart of the project. We transmitted the sound out to these small islands that are common along the coast. These sounds would call across to one another from a distance. You experienced it from the land as you heard it from the sea.

MANY OF YOUR WORKS, NO MATTER HOW ELABORATE, ARE MEANT TO BE TEMPORARY. IS IT POSSIBLE TO TAKE THE IDEA OF A WORK AND RE-CONTEXTUALIZE IT WITHIN ANOTHER SPACE? OR DO YOU SEE EACH INSTALLATION AS A UNIQUE AND FINITE PROJECT?

That's something that I've been thinking about a lot recently. People have asked me how I would envision a retrospective of my work, for example, and whether I would have to show works in their original locations. I think in the end, there are other ways one could do it. We could find new public spaces, which would provide a new context and give the work a new life. People often say to me: "Of course, it won't be as good as it was in its original location." However, if you think about it, the original location is here in my studio, where I make the work. "Lowlands" for example is associated with the bridges in Glasgow, but it was first shown at Isabella Bortolozzi Galerie in Berlin, which overlooks the canal into which Rosa Luxemburg was thrown after being murdered in 1919. I was also thinking about Anna Livia

Plurabelle, a character in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, who also embodies the river. That was the original context. So it's interesting that people often cannot imagine that a particular work can be presented anywhere else, but then you find another location and it works equally well, if not better. For me, it's also nice to show a work in a contained room, which allows me to regain the intimacy that I lose when I put things out into an open space. When I showed "Study for Strings" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York soon after Kassel, it was without the ambient noise. Suddenly, you could hear again how a bow is drawn across strings, the breath, and creaks. I enjoy working in both types of spaces.

DO YOU HAVE AN IDEAL LOCATION OR FANTASY SPACE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK WITH?

I do. Of course, you also have to be invited, but if I'm in a city and I see a unique space, I remember it. I would really like to do a project that involves all the train stations along the elevated Stadtbahn in Berlin. Some of them have very interesting histories, such as the Friedrichstraße station. Until 1990, its departure hall, which was built under East Germany's SED regime, was a border crossing from the GDR to West Berlin. Because it was the scene of so many painful farewells, Berliners dubbed this modern steel-and-glass construction the "Palace of Tears". I would like to do an exhibition, entailing all stations, where you would just hop on and off trains to see it. I had this idea right when I moved to Berlin, but didn't know anyone. I've been talking to different people ever since and hope I can realize it someday. You have to get some backing and weight behind you. In the UK, I have worked with the London-based Artangel, for example, an organization that has produced various art projects in unexpected places for over 30 years. It can really help when you try to realize something ambitious, but there isn't a similar organization here in Berlin.

WHEN DOES YOUR WORK PROVE THE MOST CHALLENGING? DO YOU EVER RUN AGAINST A WALL AND REJECT A CONCEPT OUTRIGHT?

That doesn't happen very often. Sometimes people might invite me to come and respond to a place, which I don't find particularly inspiring.

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU SEE YOURSELF ENGAGED IN DIALOGUE WITH A SPACE RATHER THAN THAT YOU ARE PROJECTING A CONCEPT ONTO IT.

When I was invited to contribute something to the Münster Sculpture Projects [June 16 – September 30, 2007], it was hard to find a space because it's such a pretty town. I often tend toward places that are kind of forlorn or which have an abandoned feeling about them. I discarded my first idea and choice of location, because I knew instinctively that it just wouldn't work. Kasper König was one of the three curators that year and he had really liked my first concept. When I decided against it, he sulked about it for months. However, the work "The Lost Reflection (Das verlorene Spiegelbild)" (2007), which I finally produced for him for that exhibition is still there. It was installed at Torminbrücke, a rather ugly brutalist bridge where people usually don't spend much time. When you look across the water, you see people looking back at you, making it seem like you are looking at your own reflection. I titled the piece after E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Story of the Lost Reflection* (1815). In it, the central character has lost his reflection to the evil courtesan Giulietta and her enchanted mirror. This tale is also referenced in Jacques Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1851) and I recorded the barcarolle from this work. The latter is set in Venice and depicts Giulietta and Niklaus. I sang both voices, alto and soprano, and recorded them on two separate tracks. As a result, it seemed as if the voices were calling to each other across the water. I'm in a duet with myself, in call and response. The work is permanently installed in Münster

and I'm delighted that the city wants to keep it. Now, it's on a timer and plays each Sunday, on the hour.

BONNIERS KONSTHALL CURRENTLY FEATURES A COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION OF YOUR WORK, WHICH ALSO COMPRISES A NEW FILM [SUSAN PHILIPSZ: LOST IN SPACE, FEBRUARY 22 – MAY 7, 2017].

The film was funded by the Konsthall and it was exciting to have a proper crew and cinematographer. The exhibition was inspired by the Swedish composer and conductor Karl-Birger Blomdahl (1916–1968). Blomdahl wrote an amazing opera called *Aniara* in 1959, which is based on a poem by Harry Martinson. It is about this failed mission to Mars after people are trying to flee Earth because it has been damaged by environmental destruction and nuclear war. 8,000 passengers enter an enormous spacecraft, the *Aniara*, en route to Mars, but it veers off course and they're doomed to drift aimlessly until they die. The opera is very progressive and eclectic. Blomdahl also worked with twelve-tone, something I'm interested in, as I have deconstructed other twelve-tone compositions in the past. In this case, I took apart a composition by Blomdahl and have each of the twelve tones come from its own speaker. This time I decided to film one of the tones, the C tone. I chose it because it's the very first one you hear in the opera. It is played in sequence by a violin and it sounds like a coded message. In fact, it is Morse Code for S.O.S. *Aniara*. It gradually builds up and other instrumentation is coming in. It's a very full and complex opera, but it begins with just this C tone. My film "A Single Voice" (2017) depicts the violinist in a darkened space and the camera is orbiting around her as she's listening for the C tone. She's also looking at the monitor and waiting in anticipation for the tone to come. She's really concentrated. You might not fully understand musically what it is, but then she's having a conversation with the other tones that are around her. Each of the tones comes from a separate speaker. Together, they're placed around the gallery, but again, they seem to be coming from a distance.



ELVIRA BACH

MARCH 11, 2017
KREUZBERG, BERLIN

YOU KEEP WORKS FROM VARIOUS PERIODS AND OF DIFFERENT MEDIA ON DISPLAY IN YOUR STUDIO. YOU APPEAR TO BE SURROUNDED BY YOUR HISTORY. DOES YOUR WORK ALWAYS BUILD ON WHAT CAME BEFORE?

I would rather say that it's always about the work in the present moment. I am immersed in one piece at a time and when it's completed, I move on to the next. It's a continuum and over time, something new happens or a new idea occurs. What I am most interested in is staying with it, to always paint. Of course, my work has changed over time, but I always stuck with my overarching theme: the woman as center of attention.

IN FACT, YOU HAVE DEPICTED WOMEN IN ALL THEIR FACETS, AT DIFFERENT AGES AND STAGES IN THEIR LIVES. DID THESE DEPICTIONS USUALLY COINCIDE WITH WHAT WAS GOING ON IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE? YOU DON'T MAKE SELF-PORTRAITS, BUT DO YOUR SUBJECTS REFLECT ANY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FOOTNOTES?

Everything and especially my personal experiences have influenced my work. To me, my life and work are one. For example,

when I became a mother, motherhood became a theme. Everything that has moved me, that I have seen and lived through, has found its way into my work. Even though I don't paint self-portraits, there must be some features in my subjects that can be traced back to me, simply because I am the one who painted them.

DO YOU HAVE A CERTAIN ROUTINE IN ORDER TO START WORKING? IS YOUR DAY STRUCTURED IN A PARTICULAR WAY?

No, I am in the studio regularly and it is important to be here. I don't necessarily grab the brush right away. Instead, I might start by looking at what I did the day before for a while. I like to be surrounded by everything and work without distraction or any interruptions. I can only work when I'm alone. I don't always have all my works out and occasionally I have many canvases turned to face the wall. However, even then, I am surrounded by it, standing in the center.

YOU HAVE PAINTED IN VARIOUS FORMATS AND ARE COMFORTABLE WITH WORKING VERY LARGE. IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU TO GO BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN DIFFERENT SIZES, WHICH DEMAND A DIFFERENT PHYSICAL ENGAGEMENT?

I prefer to work large.

THAT ALLOWS THE FIGURE TO BECOME LARGER THAN LIFE AND TO TAKE ON AN ALMOST ICONIC PRESENCE. THIS IS ENHANCED BY THE FACT THAT THE FIGURES ARE USUALLY CONTRASTED WITH A SIMPLIFIED BACKGROUND. MEANWHILE, THEY ARE LOOKING AT THE VIEWER DIRECTLY AND WITHOUT HESITATION.

Yes. I want to elevate the figure. I'm not that concerned with the background or perspective, for example.

WHEN DID YOU BEGIN TO FOCUS ON THE FEMALE FIGURE AS YOUR CORE SUBJECT?

It was around 1979. I had been painting the clothes I was wearing and one of the earliest paintings from that period is called "Zwei Tage in violetten Gummistiefeln" ["Two Days in

Purple Rainboots"] (1978). Soon after, these works led to the figurative paintings. I just found the figure somehow.

"ZWEI TAGE IN VIOLETTEN GUMMISTIEFELN" MAKES THE VIEWER WONDER WHETHER IT RENDERS A PARTICULAR DAY IN YOUR LIFE. IT WAS RAINY AND PERHAPS SUMMER, WHICH MIGHT BE INDICATED BY THE STRAWBERRY. THE LATTER IS AN IMAGE YOU HAVE USED REPEATEDLY. DO YOU ASSOCIATE SOMETHING SPECIFIC WITH IT?

The strawberry connects me to my happy childhood. I still benefit from that beautiful time in my life; I still draw from the colors and memories of those days. I grew up in the countryside with fruit and flowers abundant. In fact, I was born in the time of the strawberry harvest. My family owned strawberry fields and my aunt sold them, as well as cherries, plums, and apples at the green market in Frankfurt. These fruits provided the colors I grew up with.

WHEN YOU STARTED PAINTING YOUR CLOTHES, DID YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WERE STUDYING YOURSELF IN SOME WAY?

In fact, it was a time when I almost viewed myself as if on exhibit. From my studio in the Oranienstraße, I would go to the Café Exil, a bar at the nearby Paul-Lincke-Ufer in Kreuzberg, which was a popular hangout for artists at the time. The Café Exil was a forerunner of the Paris Bar. Karl-Horst Hödicke and Markus Lüpertz would be there, among others, and they played great music. It was a place to meet each other after work and without having to arrange anything. I would wear whatever I liked, showing some skin, and just stand at the counter by myself without any friends nearby. I felt it was like showing myself as I was from top to bottom. It wasn't about being perceived as an object and nobody talked to me in a weird way. I just observed what kind of impression I was making. That was the beginning of my figurative work.

THAT'S INTERESTING THAT THE MOMENT YOU STARTED TO OBSERVE

YOUR OWN IMPACT ON OTHERS IN A CROWD LED TO MAKING PAINTINGS OF STRONG, CONFIDENT AND ASSERTIVE WOMEN.

I'm not sure if I thought of these women I painted as particularly strong. In a way, you can also become strong through weaknesses. However, it was a means to gather experiences, which in turn informed my paintings.

NOT LONG AFTER, IN 1982, YOU WERE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN DOCUMENTA 7 BY ITS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR RUDI FUCHS [JUNE 19 – SEPTEMBER 28, 1982]. THE EXPOSITION HELPED TO ESTABLISH YOUR NAME INTERNATIONALLY. WHAT LED TO THIS EXPOSURE?

Earlier that year, I was participating in an exhibition at Jes Petersen in Berlin. Soon after, along with five other Berlin-based artists, I was invited to stay at Altos de Chavón, an artist residency in the Dominican Republic that was still under construction then. We were among the first to be invited and so we were able to see how the studios were built. We stayed for three months and it was an incredible time. One day a telegram arrived. A yellow piece of paper, which I almost didn't take seriously: "Am inviting you to documenta when are you back? Best wishes, Rudi Fuchs." Other members of Die Jungen Wilden [The Young Wild Ones] like Salomé were also included. It was the international breakthrough. I ended up showing some of the paintings I made in the Dominican Republic at *documenta 7*.

DID YOUR TIME IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC FURTHER IMPACT YOUR SENSE OF COLOR?

I felt that my sense of color was confirmed. The colors I saw there, as well as the music and people I encountered, had a great impact. I had the feeling that I left a piece of myself there; a part of myself remains in the Dominican Republic. I also felt vindicated in the sense that I seemed to be on the right path. In the mid-1980s, I started traveling to Africa and especially to Senegal, which moved me on an even more profound level. I

discovered West Africa through my husband, whom I had met in Berlin. Like the Dominican Republic, Africa had an instant pull and I had the impression that I have something to do with that particular place. I think you can detect that special connection to both the place and its cultures in my work.

YOU JUST MENTIONED MUSIC. HAS IT BEEN A STEADY SOURCE OF INSPIRATION? DO YOU LISTEN TO MUSIC WHILE PAINTING?

Yes, as soon as I get to the studio, I put on music and I play it very loud. I listen to Blues, Soul, and Rock 'n' Roll. Particularly Blues and Soul move me very much and even more so recently. I used to listen to other stuff, too. In the 1980s, my studio used to be across from SO36, a music club that still exists. I only had to cross the street to go to a concert and listen to some of the new Punk bands, for example. That was fantastic, but ultimately I'm mostly drawn to black music.

ARE THERE PARTICULAR WORKS IN YOUR OEUVRE THAT ARE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU AND WHICH YOU KEEP FOR YOURSELF?

Yes, I do. Those are usually works which in retrospect marked an epiphany of sorts. "Sophisticated Lady" (1982) and "Nachteule" ["Night Owl"] (1981) are two paintings that I would never have parted with, for example. In "Nachteule", you see the woman showing the insides of her hands; she is without an alibi and has nothing to hide. To me, both of these works marked a beginning, when everything fell into place. I was able to develop a lot from then on and so they remain especially important.

IN OTHER WORDS, THEY POINTED INTO A NEW DIRECTION.

Exactly, and I could never paint them quite like that again. They belong to a certain place and time.

ARE THERE PAINTINGS THAT CANNOT BE RESOLVED? DO YOU EVER ABANDON A COMPOSITION, FOR EXAMPLE?

No, I always continue and paint until I am content. After that, I start a new painting right away. If I do take a break, it's only for a few days or a week at the most. Then, I will continue from where

I left off. If I have a new idea at that moment, I will just weave it into the work in progress rather than starting something new. It's really about doing. I don't ever sit in the studio wondering what I could possibly paint.

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOUR DECISIONS ARE MADE WHILE PAINTING. YOU DON'T APPROACH A CANVAS WITH A CLEAR IMAGE IN MIND OR DETERMINE WHAT THE WOMAN SHOULD LOOK LIKE OR WEAR BEFOREHAND.

That's true. Of course, I run into challenges and in those cases, the process simply takes longer. Sometimes, I will take pictures of the work while they are in progress. I will take them home and look at them over night. That kind of distance enables me to see a lot. It helps me to gain some clarity about what's not working in the actual painting. Occasionally, it's just a minor thing that doesn't fit and which I didn't recognize as a problem while standing in front of the work. Oftentimes, it would even be easy to just leave the painting as is, but something inside me tells me that it's not quite as it should be. It could be due to color or form. But even the smallest change can alter the entire painting.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT WORKS FROM THE PAST, DO YOU REMEMBER YOURSELF AT THAT TIME, MEANING THE PERSON YOU WERE THEN? OR DO YOU LOOK AT THEM ANEW AND MAYBE EVEN AS IF SOMEBODY ELSE HAD PAINTED THEM?

All of my works are certainly rooted in their specific time. In my studio, I have stacks of old works on paper. I never took them seriously until I recently looked at them and saw them with completely different eyes. I found them successful and I was very happy about that. Still, it can also work the other way. A little while back, I saw one of my old paintings somewhere and I thought that there was something that didn't work. It's rare, but it does happen. Nevertheless, I will always stand behind my work.

THERE ARE CERTAIN SYMBOLS AND IMAGES THAT HAVE RECURRED

IN YOUR WORK OVER TIME. IN "DIE ANDERE EVA" ["THE OTHER EVE"] (1984), FOR EXAMPLE, YOU USED THE SNAKE AS A PROMINENT PROP; IT DOESN'T WRAP AROUND THE FEMALE FIGURE BUT RATHER IS DRAPED AROUND HER SHAPE LIKE A STOLE. HERE, EVA ASSERTS HERSELF, GRABBING THE SNAKE WITH DETERMINATION. IN YOUR DEPICTION SHE IS CERTAINLY NOT A VICTIM OF BETRAYAL. INSTEAD, SHE IS IN CONTROL.

This work is one of several paintings tackling a similar theme. All of them were fairly large and I labeled them "Schlangenakte" ["Snake Acts"]. I was able to express a lot with the image of the snake. I didn't have to paint a man, for example, because all I had to say about that I was able to do through the snake. In addition, I was interested in the fact that the snake means different things in different cultures. In ours, it is associated with the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In Africa, the snake is the protector of the house. As a visual image, you can depict it as something that doesn't have a clear beginning or end. I often used snakes as extensions of hair or to wrap the figure in a threatening way.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU ASSEMBLED A PERSONAL VISUAL VOCABULARY OVER THE YEARS? SNAKES, VESSELS, AND CERTAIN ACCESSORIES, SUCH AS EARRINGS, ARE AMONG THE DETAILS THAT CAN BE TRACED IN MANY OF YOUR PAINTINGS.

Yes, these things appear ever so often in my works and they definitely have something to do with me, but it's not that specific. Sometimes, when I listen to other people interpret my work I discover things that I would never have thought of myself. It's fascinating. People come to the paintings with their own stories and from their individual perspective. I like that very much.

IN THAT, A PAINTING HAS ITS OWN AUTONOMOUS LIFE AS SOON AS IT LEAVES THE STUDIO. AT THAT MOMENT, IT BECOMES TRULY INDEPENDENT. THERE IS NO LONGER JUST ONE WAY TO PERCEIVE IT AND IT STARTS TO CHANGE ACCORDING TO EACH VIEWER'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND TASTES.

I also don't always remember everything I painted. The other day, a friend asked me about one of my paintings that involved a baby, among others. I told her that I never painted such a subject. When I looked at the work she mentioned, I discovered that there is indeed a baby in the composition. I painted it when I was pregnant with my first son Lamin. It's an example how life impacts the work, but that it's not always conscious.

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORKS AS DIARISTIC?

No, I wouldn't. I think of them as telling different stories from life, however. I believe that you can only paint a baby, bottle, and bottle warmer, if you've experienced that yourself. Why would you paint that if you don't have kids? I think my works largely gathered attention because I painted women differently than my male colleagues. As a woman, I know so much about them and have a different perspective. I made them the center of attention and didn't frame them with lots of other things or stories.

DO YOU ASSOCIATE CERTAIN NARRATIVES WITH THE WOMEN YOU PAINT? DO YOU IMAGINE THEM AS HAVING A CERTAIN AGE, LIFE, OR CHARACTER?

No, I don't. I just paint what moves me and how I can understand it from my point of view. Once, I observed a woman wearing a burqa with a man who was looking at his cell phone the whole time. I pulled my own scarf down and put my glasses on to try to experience something similar in my way. I also work with fans and disguise.

DO YOU MAKE SKETCHES OR DO YOU DRAW DIRECTLY ON THE CANVAS?

I don't make preparatory studies. I do have sketchbooks that I carry with me to take note of ideas that occur to me outside the studio.

YOU WORK IN VARIOUS MEDIA, RANGING FROM PAINTING TO PRINTS AND SCULPTURE. DO YOU GO BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN

THESE DIFFERENT FORMS OR DO YOU CONCENTRATE ON ONE FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME?

Though I see myself primarily as a painter, I do enjoy the challenge of working with different materials. I also have made things in the past, for which I was being criticized then. I created some ceramics for Rosenthal, for example, a German porcelain manufacturer. I was told that an artist shouldn't do that or shouldn't make as many graphic works in order to remain free. But I didn't care and in fact, I had a lot of fun doing these projects. When I work with glass in Murano, for example, I will travel there for a week with my plans in hand and work with professional glass workers on site. During that time, I will not do anything else.

SPEAKING OF THAT PARTICULAR MATERIAL. YOU HAVE WORKED WITH GLASS FOR MANY YEARS. IN THE LATE 1960s, YOU ATTENDED THE HADAMAR SCHOOL OF GLASS ART (1967–1970). WAS GLASS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF INSPIRATION? YOU STILL WORK WITH PRONOUNCED OUTLINES, FOR EXAMPLE, WHICH MIGHT EVOKE THE LEAD THAT BORDERS EACH PANEL OF GLASS.

Stained glass was simply one of the first things I studied after graduating from High School. I learned how to translate a small sketch into a large work of glass. After that, I worked for an entire year for different glass manufactures, but I quickly realized that the medium wasn't fulfilling to me. I felt restricted by it. That's when I relocated to Berlin to study painting at the Hochschule der Künste (Academy of Fine Arts).

YOU GRADUATED IN 1979 AND THREE YEARS LATER YOU WERE EXHIBITING IN KASSEL. YOUR CAREER GATHERED MOMENTUM AND THEN, IN 1984, YOU STARTED A FAMILY, EXPECTING YOUR FIRST CHILD. IT MUST HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT TO HAVE THESE MAJOR LIFE CHANGES HAPPEN ALMOST AT ONCE.

I was already able to live off my artwork when I got pregnant and that's important. I hardly stopped painting; I didn't even take off four weeks. I instantly knew that I would need to preserve my

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free headspace in the studio. So I hired a male sitter, who was with my son from the morning until I returned from the studio at night. I knew that four hours just wouldn't be enough time for me to get settled and start on something. I had to have my head free and was convinced that if I allowed myself enough hours, everything would be OK. Of course, your life changes in many ways. I would come home at night instead of going out. I had to organize everything, but I knew that if I were to take a break, my career would have been over. My second son was born eight years later and I made the same arrangements then again. That's the big rift in society. There are so many women that are very well educated, begin to work, have a child, and then ... oops, a lot of time has passed somehow. It's very difficult and to be honest, I don't envy anyone for that. Still, I included my family whenever I could and I took my sons to as many events and exhibitions as possible.

DID YOU ENVISION YOUR LIFE OR CAREER IN ANY PARTICULAR WAY?

No, I didn't have any ideas about my life. I wasn't intent on having a family and I didn't pursue any particular goals. I let everything approach me.

HOW ABOUT CRITICISM? HAS IT BEEN DIFFICULT TO HAVE YOUR WORK BE PART OF A PUBLIC DISCUSSION?

You have to be able to live with and know how to handle both negative and positive criticism. Certainly, as soon as a work leaves the studio, you become vulnerable. You have to believe in yourself and I guess, I always did and never lost that conviction. I just thought that this is my expression and my voice. This is me and others make other things.



ALICJA KWADE

MARCH 9, 2017
WEISSENSEE, BERLIN

YOU WILL BE EXHIBITING AT THE BIENNALE DI VENEZIA LATER THIS SUMMER [MAY 13 – NOVEMBER 26, 2017]. DO YOU ALREADY KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU WILL CONTRIBUTE?

Theoretically, I should have known and also registered my concept several months ago. However, I do reserve the right to tear down, burn and throw away absolutely everything until three hours before the opening if necessary. My contribution will be a large, interior installation, which will incorporate elements that I have used before, but this time in a more theatrical sense, including new conceptual elements, and creating an evolutionary circle. I will also incorporate the audience into the work. Viewers will not have to act or interact in any specific way, but they will still be an integral part of the work, which overall will consist of several sculptural elements. Each element can only work in correspondence with another, as well as within these various relationships. The work will embrace a new experiment, something that I have always meant to pursue, which is to really use the viewer. It has nothing to do with classic performance, but

rather a sense of repetition. If it works, the viewer will be placed in a rather uncertain space, where I'm trying to confuse his or her concept of time. The work will provide a constant déjà vu experience.

YOU ARE INTRODUCING A STATE OF UNCERTAINTY IN WHICH THE AUDIENCE WILL QUESTION REALITY, WONDERING WHETHER THEY HAVE ALREADY SEEN AND EXPERIENCED CERTAIN ELEMENTS?

Exactly. The work is about perception and questions about how we perceive things and why we do so in a certain way. It explores how reality is being measured and defined. What is reality based on? Is it language, because it names something? Or is it the material with which something is made, is it information about form, or is it the chemical composition? These are contemplations I explore all the time and especially as they are reflected in the eyes of the audience. The world changes, depending on the position of the viewer. I'm interested in these ideas in an evolutionary and philosophical context. Is a tree more a tree than a chair, which is made from a tree? I wonder who decides that and who calls it out, which mechanisms are at play? Hopefully, through this work, which is conceived with a large audience in mind, these questions become relative, as the viewer moves within and in response to it.

IS IT IMPORTANT THAT VISITORS CAN WATCH EACH OTHER DURING THIS EXPERIENCE?

It is my hope that this will happen automatically because of the architectural structure I developed, but I won't know for certain until I see the work installed. The structure will allow for people and objects to disappear and suddenly reappear in different places and in a different form. I will have to see whether it works exactly how I envision it. If it does, viewers will automatically become a part of the work, no matter whether they want to or not.

WOULD YOU GO AS FAR AS TO SAY THAT YOU ARE EMPLOYING A

SENSE OF CHOREOGRAPHY AND PERHAPS CHOREOGRAPHING THE AUDIENCE'S MOVEMENTS?

Yes, a little bit as there is choreography involved in how the different objects relate to each other. For the first time, this work embraces a vertical movement of growth, which indicates time. This creates an illusion that certain objects seem to grow in different places, before they diminish in others. Through the use of mirrors, I will create an effect evocative of animation films that will add another component to the sculpture and which can intensify through the movements of the viewer. The latter will be largely decided by how I establish the overall structure, and in that sense there will be a choreographic element.

YOU ARE CREATING A STATE OF UNCERTAINTY THAT INTENSIFIES AS THE VIEWER MOVES THROUGH THE INSTALLATION AND EXPERIENCES IT FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.

Through the themes of expectation, anticipation, and repetition, I will create a situation in which the viewer will end up doubting his certainty of what has transpired. The installation begins with the main protagonist, a petrified tree that I found and which is about 150 million years old. I am translating it back into its original material of wood, which makes for unusual jumps within the linear concept of time. Because we grow in one direction, we only experience time as going forward. This is not true however and it's a big breaking point, which nobody has been able to really resolve yet. It's a moment I'm exploring and am trying to explain to myself and so I'm aiming to break with this linear approach. Furthermore, I'm trying to use time both as a theoretical and active component within the installation.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A PROJECT OF THIS COMPLEXITY AND WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS? YOU MENTIONED THAT YOU HAD THE WISH TO ACTIVATE THE AUDIENCE AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE WORK FOR A LONG TIME, FOR EXAMPLE. DO YOU HAVE A NOTEBOOK, IN WHICH YOU WRITE DOWN SUCH IDEAS?

First, I have interests. There is something that interests me and I will start to research and read about it and try to understand it. I will pursue a certain direction without knowing where it will lead. In this particular case, the themes were relatively familiar and I didn't have to invent everything from scratch. Rather, I had to find a compositional form and resolve the technical aspects. With the latter I don't mean how to construct things, but the functionality of the installation. At that point I will start building, using a model in a 1:20 format. I think in this case, I built the model about twenty times, trying it out over and over, and destroying it each time. After a while I reach a point when I feel that it works in terms of content and form. I will also think of a certain inner logic, which has to be embedded in the structure. To me, there has to be a logic behind the reason why I use certain numbers for sizes and objects, for example. This is not necessarily important for the viewer, but it is to me and it has to be 100% plausible. I have to know why I'm doing it in this and not in any other way; every step and in its minute detail.

DO YOU MEAN THAT THE MEASUREMENT OF THE DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO OBJECTS IS SPECIFIC AND THAT THE NUMBER OF THAT LENGTH HAS A PARTICULAR MEANING?

Not necessarily, but it is based on a certain logic. It is very rare that there are components that just exist within the work, although that can happen of course. Otherwise, one would go insane. Still, it is important to me so that I am absolutely sure and know why I'm doing something.

DOES YOUR WORK STILL ALLOW ROOM FOR IMPROVISATION AND INTUITION?

Yes, of course. I don't think that creative work is possible without intuition. In a way, it's what motivates you to make art. It would be difficult if not impossible to try to be an artist based on logical calculations. Intuition is also a form of passion. At times, there are certainly formal decisions that are being made, such as when

I decide that something is good as it is, and in no other way. In the end, even the decision of whether I base it on a 75 numeral system or a 33 one is rooted in intuition and in my opinion of that one moment.

DO YOU LOOK AT THE OVERALL COMPOSITION OF THE INSTALLATION ABSTRACTLY AND PERHAPS GEOMETRICALLY?

Absolutely! There are always two levels for me, which have to function together or otherwise everything will fall apart. It would be difficult to just let either the formal structure or the content speak for itself. To me, it is definitely necessary that I am pleased with the overall form of the work and that the observer can enjoy it because everything seems to relate in a harmonious order. Nevertheless, I have my reasons why I work in this particular way and without these I couldn't work at all. It would be impossible for me to just think about form. However, it is when form and content come together seamlessly that I am content with a work.

YOU EXPLORE THE THEME OF EXPERIENCE IN A WIDER CONTEXT. WOULD YOU SAY THAT NOSTALGIA IS AN ASPECT THAT YOU ADDRESS AS WELL? FOR EXAMPLE, SOME OF YOUR INSTALLATIONS HAVE INCLUDED OBJECTS THAT REFLECT A PARTICULAR ERA AND THEREFORE HISTORIC CONTEXT. I AM THINKING ESPECIALLY OF THE KAISER IDELL LAMPS, WHICH THE BAUHAUS DESIGNER CHRISTIAN DELL PRODUCED IN THE 1930S AND WHICH YOU HAVE USED REPEATEDLY. IT IS A LAMP THAT WAS USED ON MANY GERMAN WORK DESKS AT THE TIME.

If nostalgia comes into my work it is simply as a byproduct. I'm not a proponent of nostalgia, by any means. Of course, when I use an object like the Kaiser Idell lamp, I am conscious of its historic and social context. I am aware that it was produced between 1933 and 1942, for example, and I know what happened during that time. I also think about the films in which that object was included and how the audience might read it.

DO YOU USE THAT KIND OF OBJECT BECAUSE OF THIS CONTEXT, OR IS THE LATTER SIMPLY SOMETHING THAT IS ATTACHED TO AN OBJECT YOU CHOOSE BECAUSE OF AESTHETIC REASONS?

I might also choose it because of its context, but that is not the case with every single object I incorporate in my work. On the one hand, I choose it because of its background and the meaning, time, and perception of time that are embedded in it. It is something I can use if I know that I can rely on the fact that it is read in that manner. On the other hand, there are certain codes that everyone can decipher, but which are less specific. For example, one might associate a mint green with the 1920s, which then triggers several associations. Or you will see a combination of brown and orange and immediately think of the 1970s. That is something you can employ stylistically. Meanwhile, it is important to me that one can right away recognize objects for what they are, meaning I will use a lamp that looks the most like a lamp or better, like our perceptions of a lamp. I will use the clock that looks like our most common concept of a clock if you were to imagine it rather than pointing to one. Perhaps, that's why nostalgia comes into my work, because I use design objects that have universal appeal; they are rather minimal renditions of what they are.

MEANWHILE, YOUR WORK DOES INVOLVE AN EMOTIONAL COMPONENT, EVEN THOUGH IT MIGHT BE HARD TO PIN DOWN WHAT PROMPTS IT. YOU HAVE WORKED WITH SOUND, FOR EXAMPLE, WHICH CAN HAVE AN EMOTIONAL IMPACT WITHOUT BEING CONCRETE OR EVEN THAT FAMILIAR. WE DON'T KNOW WHY WE EXPERIENCE CERTAIN THINGS EMOTIONALLY IN THE WAY WE DO.

That's exactly what I mean. It all depends on your perspective. If you think of the 1970s you might have a certain feeling that might even be nostalgic. I think it's interesting to use that. If you hear the ticking of a clock, you will experience a similar sensation and emotional response as 99% of the people who hear the same.

HOW DO YOU USE COLOR? IS IT TO INTRODUCE CERTAIN ACCENTS, DRAW ATTENTION OR IS IT RATHER ARBITRARY? IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT THE TONALITY OF YOUR INSTALLATIONS IS BALANCED?

To be honest, I'm not very interested in color. It's not an attribute that excites me in any particular way. Usually the overall palette happens to be made of the colors that are unique to the objects and materials involved. Copper will be copper, aluminum will be aluminum, and wood will be wood. I also never change things to look differently.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU DO NOT MANIPULATE ANY OF THE COMPONENTS TO CREATE THE ILLUSION OF SOMETHING ELSE.

I want my objects to speak a clear language. I don't want wood to look like metal, for example. If I use wood, I use it for the very reason that it is wood. I don't want it to look different from how it usually looks. If the object is something that I have found, I won't alter it. The authenticity of an object is always more important to me than my desire to change its color. However, when I have an installation such as this one, in which several objects are involved, I will certainly decide whether the copper-colored object should be next to the wooden one. That goes back to my ambition to find a balanced form.

WHAT IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU RUN UP AGAINST IN YOUR WORK? WHEN DO YOU PUSH AGAINST YOUR LIMITS?

In a way, I encounter that all the time. Works such as this one, which you can't see and test until they are installed are certainly challenging. I come up with a concept and I have a model, but I won't really be able to view the work until it is on site. That's certainly emotionally challenging, because I can't test and truly review the work. If I am focused on a smaller work, I can walk around it fifty times and decide whether it is successful in my eyes or whether I need to change something. That's simply not possible in this case. I will assemble it in Venice for the first

time, and that's what it will have to be. I might be able to alter small details, but overall, it is a jump into the cold water. There's no way back. In addition to being very large, the installation is elaborate, work intensive and expensive and so it needs to have a certain weight.

WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT OLDER WORKS, DO YOU FIND THAT YOU PERCEIVE THEM DIFFERENTLY? DO THEY CHANGE IN YOUR EYES AFTER HAVING GAINED SOME DISTANCE FROM THEM?

Very much so. In fact, I can only judge my own work after having gained a certain distance. That is pretty impossible to do at the moment when it is freshly installed for the first time. I am usually very insecure at that stage and undecided, finding the work 50% fantastic and 50% off the target. I certainly don't try to show that, but I am wavering. After a year or several months later, I am absolutely able to judge the work and so my opinion and perception of it does change over time.

YOUR COMPLEX INSTALLATIONS CERTAINLY MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO GAIN THAT KIND OF DISTANCE BEFORE THEY ARE PRESENTED IN THE CONTEXT OF AN EXHIBITION. IT'S NOT AS SIMPLE AS TURNING AN OIL PAINTING TO THE WALL TO REVIEW IT AT A LATER DATE. YOUR WORK IS USUALLY COMPLETE WHEN IT IS INSTALLED FOR THE AUDIENCE. HOWEVER, IN THE CASE OF YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE VENICE BIENNIAL, IT WILL BE THE AUDIENCE WHO WILL COMPLETE THE WORK.

That's right, but it is not just about the object itself; one might also judge the underpinning concept differently after a while. After a year, I might find that the theme was rather far-fetched or that it was absolutely correct and on target. Usually, the simpler something is the better I like it. I don't mean simplified, but rather that there is a direct translation from the idea to form.

IS THERE A WORK OR A BODY OF WORK THAT HAS PARTICULAR MEANING TO YOU AND WHICH YOU THINK OF AS ESPECIALLY SUCCESSFUL?

This is changing and it depends on what I am working on. Still, there are works about which I think that I managed to bring my idea exactly to the point. At this very moment, I would count my "Time Zone" series among them. These works consist of metal rods in the shape of the boundary lines between the Earth's time zones, which I combined and built on top of each other. I did a lot with this idea and although some examples worked better than others, they all reflect something that is not always achieved; I found some information and gave it a material form. In addition, I shifted the perspective we usually have when studying this information. You are looking at a sculpture and not at a map. So that was one case when I thought the work was especially successful, I absolutely back the value-dependency metal board pieces, which are portraying a very short moment of the metal market. Sometimes, it also depends on the space where the work is installed. In 2013, I showed a pendulum at Galerie König in Berlin and that worked very well for me, too. I also think that my sculpture, which shows two lamps holding a mirror, brings the idea to the point. I am also proud of the fact that I used three-dimensional scanners very early on, even though it wasn't evident in the final work. It wasn't my intention to show that I employed this technology, but rather to obscure elements in an unexpected way. That was something that I had to work hard at, because in 2008 that technology was still almost unaffordable and you could only use it minimally. Today, it is something I use all the time.

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK AS PART OF A LARGER STUDY OR DOES IT REFLECT AN ANSWER TO WHATEVER QUESTION YOU HAVE BEEN RESEARCHING?

The work is definitely never meant as an answer, not for others or for myself. I'm also not trying to find a result. To me, my work visualizes the questioning of things that interest me, but rather than leading to an answer this will raise further questions.

IN REGARD TO THESE THINGS THAT INTEREST YOU AND WHICH SPARK YOUR WORK, DO YOU FIND THEM ON THE INTERNET, ARE THEY SOURCED FROM LITERATURE OR VISUALS USED IN FILMS?

They are rarely visual. Instead, visuals are things I discover when researching formal solutions. I do read a lot of nonfiction and use many different sources. I'm not interested in novels at all. I read in fragments and I hardly ever read something from start to finish. Something will interest me and I will look something up, stop, read something else, and maybe google what I have read; I might wonder where the word comes from and what it is made of. It is perhaps derived from a particular science and that will then lead to the beginning of a larger topic. It's not important that I understand it completely or know why the different elements relate to each other in a particular way. The question of why is enough to bring up many others, which become significant. It's a form of multiplication and I try to give that a physical form.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOUR WORK BEGINS WITH A QUESTION MARK?

Yes. I find something curious or strange and I will read up on it to better understand it. In this context, incomprehension or the failing of being able to grasp something is imperative. It is because I don't understand something that I try to explain it to myself. That is what leads to the work.

YOUR WORKS REFLECT YOUR INDIVIDUAL EXPLORATION WHILE ALSO OFFERING AN INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE TO THE VIEWER. HOWEVER, AS YOU PRESENT YOUR WORK IN SPACES THAT CAN HOLD NUMEROUS PEOPLE AT A TIME, THERE IS ALSO THE POSSIBILITY FOR A COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE. ARE YOU INTERESTED IN COLLECTIVE THOUGHT AND GROUP DYNAMICS?

Yes, absolutely. I have worked with certain themes, such as stock market prices, which entail social agreements and socially accepted norms. Why does everybody think that gold is valuable, for example? Where does that come from, who invented it, how was this value system passed on through history, and how

is it continuously taught to younger generations? I am interested in why these kinds of things are anchored in our society and accepted as fact. It's not that the individual would necessarily define it as that important, but society as a whole accepts it. This goes back to what we are taught and how we learn what's valuable and what's not. It's based on a social agreement without which we couldn't live together in groups that count more than 150 people, which is the magical number. In the 1990s the British anthropologist Robin Dunbar proposed that humans could only comfortably maintain 150 stable relationships, for example. **WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR WORK MIGHT ALSO SERVE AS A METAPHOR FOR OUR CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE, WHEN EXTREME GROUPS BLINDLY PURSUE THEIR BELIEFS AND ARE UNABLE TO SHIFT THEIR PERSPECTIVE?**

I don't know, maybe. I am never interested in specific groups or in a specific time. I am concerned with human beings per se. I am curious why human aggressions exist and how groups of people behave and have behaved on this planet. I don't draw from current events for my work, although I certainly pay attention as a private person. It is not my ambition to comment on my time. My interests are more generalized: what encourages us to do and leave certain things, to make agreements or break some. Is this due to hormones, evolution or socialization?



MONIKA GRZYMALA

MARCH 9, 2017
ALEXANDERPLATZ / MITTE, BERLIN

YOU ARE CURRENTLY WORKING ON A PERMANENT INSTALLATION IN SWEDEN.

Yes. As of this coming December, it will be placed in the Uppsala Science Park. The place further involves a new science building called the Hub, which upon completion will provide space for offices, laboratories, and a conference center. Close to the Uppsala University Hospital, the Swedish Medical Products Agency, as well as several other academic and research institutions, it will house companies focused on molecular biology, material science, pharmaceuticals and cancer research, among others. It was a project that was presented to me fairly recently and I am now the only one of the initial artists under consideration. I just returned from proposing my concept to the client, one of Scandinavia's largest commercial real estate firms. They accepted it, and so my contribution will be a sculpture, whose form is based on a double helix. It will be made of acrylic resin and appear very detailed, spanning the atrium from the ground to the glass roof. It will measure twenty-four meters overall. Next

week, I'm flying to Uppsala to meet with the architects and the structural engineers, to go over the calculations due to the work's technical complexities. I will move studios within the building later this year, and this summer I will build the sculpture in my new space in segments.

MANY OF YOUR SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATIONS ARE TEMPORARY. HOW DIFFERENT IS YOUR APPROACH TO A PROJECT LIKE THIS, WHERE THE WORK WILL REMAIN A PERMANENT PART OF THE SPACE?

All of my works have one thing in common: they are site-specific. They are conceived for a particular situation. It's not simply about architecture and it's not about the gesture of dropping a sculpture into a space. Instead, I respond to the invisible energy flow within a space and the axis that occurs, adding a Raumzeichnung [Spatial Drawing] to that. It doesn't matter whether they are made of a lasting or ephemeral material, such as tape. I'm often discussed in the context of tape art, which is incorrect as I work with many different materials. I weave with grass blades from my garden and transform them into spatial drawings not unlike the outdoor project I've conceived for the Dian Woodner Collection in New York. In addition, I work with ceramics, organic, and synthetic materials and furthermore make Washi paper by hand.

DESPITE EMBRACING SUCH A WIDE RANGE OF MATERIALS, ALL OF YOUR WORKS REVEAL A COMMON THREAD.

Roughly speaking, my work of the past two decades has explored the language of line. Within that, there are many variations. A straight line has a completely different impact than a soft, meandering one, for example. I aim to translate a thought into line by hand, drawing a connection between two points.

YOUR WORKS ARE VERY ELABORATE, AS WELL AS EXPANSIVE. DO YOU USUALLY WORK ALONE?

I generally work without assistants and especially when creating

site-specific spatial drawings with tape. I believe that the viewer can physically sense that a single person made the work. I also often make compositional decisions in the process.

HOW MUCH ROOM DO YOU LEAVE YOURSELF FOR THESE SPONTANEOUS DECISIONS DURING THE WORK PROCESS?

I keep it very open in order to not limit myself. Frequently, museums, galleries, and curators ask me to submit a sketch for the intended work. I will quickly draw a plan on a tablet, but won't be too specific. To me, the actual drawing contains a certain truth; I develop it through being engaged with my entire body, and as soon as you have a sketch and set target, you are limited in your creative process. It's not unlike a singer, who can develop a tone from the toes to the belly and throat. To me, line, be it in a spatial drawing or sculpture, is also derived from the various parts of my body. It's how I learned to perceive the world.

WHAT DOES THIS PERCEPTION ENTAIL?

I perceive the world as a sculptor, meaning primarily three-dimensionally, as well as through touch and the movement through space. Drawing was always challenging for me, because the two-dimensional was never enough and I was always reaching for another form of expression. However, when drawing is applied to space, it becomes something else. That's when I can get in touch with myself and it pours out, manifesting in these spatial drawings. I will never correct anything as it is a spontaneous process, but there still is a sense of order. I have to keep myself on my path and in a good disposition. It is like a performance, and sometimes I will be utterly exhausted, sweaty, or I am lacking the tools to reach up to the places, where I want to go. Perhaps technicians on the ground are having a conversation with each other or on the phone, because they forgot that I am there working. If I run into such disturbances, I will try to utilize that energy and incorporate it into the work.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU HAVE TO ASSURE THAT YOU REMAIN IN

A CONCENTRATED STATE AND AVOID AS MANY DISTRACTIONS AS POSSIBLE.

Yes. In fact, a few months ago, I made a list of twelve points, which I consider as a “cooperation manual” of sorts. It states what I need from a museum or gallery to be able to collaborate and work in that concentrated state. These range from what kind of flights and hotels I will need to what kind of ladders and lifts should be on site.

WHEN THESE PARAMETERS ARE GIVEN, YOU CAN BEGIN WITH YOUR PROCESS. DO YOU THEN RELY ON YOUR INTUITION?

I rely 100% on my intuition. The work begins with the first idea I have when entering that particular space. It begins with the first physical step. I have to be absolutely open at that moment. It’s not as simple as saying, “Well, now I’m going to view the exhibition space.” Instead, I go to work. And that is a very serious thing. I have to be able to hear my first reaction to the space within myself, as well as to allow others to develop subsequently. It is about peeling away until you retrieve that initial, still somewhat vague first impression.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU HAVE A PHYSICAL REACTION TO A SPACE?

Absolutely. It is a very strong, physical reaction, which I also have in regard to sculpture and art in general. That is very important.

HOW DID YOU ARRIVE AT SPATIAL DRAWING? DOES IT SIGNIFY SOMETHING ELSE THAN AN INSTALLATION?

It does to me, because installation fulfills another purpose. I arrived at spatial drawing through a conversation with my former professor, the sculptor Bogomir Ecker, with whom I am still close. That was at the Academy in Hamburg around twenty years ago. Ecker had a significant impact on my work. He was the first professor to ask me thought-provoking questions and who responded to what was burning inside of me at the time. Before I enrolled in Hamburg, I had completed my training as a stone

sculptor and restorer. In addition, I had studied at the Meisterschule für Handwerk [Master School for Crafts] in Kaiserslautern for three and a half years. I had wanted to learn how to do physical work and to understand the material of stone. Interestingly, it is not so much about physical strength, and there were many women in those courses. I learned about various casting processes, life drawing, and art history; I also got my license for operating a forklift.

AFTER LEARNING THE CRAFT OF CARVING STONE, YOU WORKED IN SCULPTURE. HOW DID YOU COME TO SHIFT YOUR MEDIUM AND WHAT WAS MISSING?

I was missing abstraction. I had learned how to perfectly render a figure from observation in stone, plaster or clay. So I first worked in representation, creating figures and scenes from my early childhood. Everything was rendered in a scale of 1:1 and colorful. It related to the works of Martin Honert and Pia Stadtbäumer, whom I admired very much at the time. At the Academy in Karlsruhe, I studied with the British sculptor Michael Sandle and Stephan Balkenhol. My figures were arranged within a space and related to each other. Then, I went to Kassel, where I was in Dorothee von Windheim’s class, who is a conceptual artist. During all this time, I was struggling with my work. I felt that despite all these hours that I had spent conversing with my professors about it, I wasn’t getting to the bottom of it. I wasn’t satisfied. I coincidentally came across Ecker’s abstract sculptures and found out that he was teaching at the Hochschule für bildende Künste [University of Fine Arts] in Hamburg. I called him and asked for a work critique. So I drove from Kassel with a truck filled with my sculptures. Because there wasn’t enough space in his classroom, I put together various scenes in the truck, as well as in the hallways and staircase of the HFBK. That’s where we had our conversation. At first, he looked for a long time at these scenes, walked around them and in-between the figures. He then asked

me why I was spending so much time and energy on creating these situations when all I was concerned with was happening between the figures. He suggested that I needed to find another visual vocabulary to express that. He recognized that I was technically very skilled and that I was a good sculptor, but also that I hadn't arrived at myself yet.

YOU HADN'T YET FOUND A VISUAL LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS WHAT YOU WERE REALLY AFTER.

Exactly, and that's when I understood what was missing. I asked if I could study with him and moved to Hamburg a few weeks later.

YOUR DETERMINATION AND WILLINGNESS TO EMBRACE MAJOR CHANGES IS IMPRESSIVE.

I just left my life in Karlsruhe and Kassel behind. My first winter in Hamburg was especially difficult and almost a cliché. My atelier apartment had no heat, and one morning, the milk was frozen on the kitchen table. I developed pneumonia and had my first major crisis. In addition, I also didn't have my work, because I had discarded it all to have a true cut.

YOU WEREN'T CONCERNED WITH KEEPING SOME EARLY WORKS AS A HISTORIC FOOTNOTE?

No. Instead, I wanted a ground zero. So in that cold apartment, while sick and unable to leave, all I had in that moment was a sketchbook. As mentioned, I had always been hesitant about drawing. In general, I feel that drawing has often been treated as a byproduct in art. It is often understood as a preparatory step toward a more elaborate goal. Little has been said about what it actually means to draw, that it is re-awakening the child within you. Children can take a white sheet of paper and use it with joy and without hesitation; they can let a drawing be a drawing without worrying whether everything is proportional or if the line is too crooked. For a child, it's all about whether the moment of drawing is authentic. As an adult, one often approaches drawing

as a skill and something to try. That leaves so much room for self-doubt and you feel like you are on thin ice. One is pressured by one's own expectations. I am a big fan of Josef Beuys' drawings, which to me capture the essence of the medium.

BACK TO THAT WINTER IN HAMBURG. YOU WERE EXPERIENCING YOUR FIRST MAJOR CRISIS AND ALL THAT WAS THERE WAS AN EMPTY SKETCHBOOK.

Yes. Because of my pneumonia, I had difficulties breathing and in addition, I just missed this great feeling of making art. So I began to draw in that book, using fluid materials, such as watercolor and ink. My thoughts were fluid, too and so it seemed adequate. At a certain time, the book was filled, and I just continued on. I was still feeling this incredible push forward and thought that I should just ignore that I had no more empty pages left. I started drawing on my walls and experienced an explosion of creativity. I worked for four days without pause. It was like a trance. For the next critique in class, I invited everyone to my home. Ecker turned to me and said: "Yes, now it is here." I didn't really know what it was or what it was about, and whether they were battle plans, for example. It carried so much information and was telling so much even though it was just an assemblage of layered lines in various colors.

YOU SUDDENLY HAD FOUND YOUR UNIQUE VOICE.

Yes. Also, if you draw with watercolor and ink directly onto the walls, you don't have the possibility of correcting anything. It is what it is. In other words, I couldn't cheat in the process. In that it resembles stone; what's off is off.

YOU EXTENDED YOUR WORK FROM THE SKETCHBOOK TO THE WALLS AND FROM THEN ON, YOU DREW IN SPACE?

It was a logical step to go from the wall drawings into the surrounding space. I bought transparent plastic tubes in the hardware store, filled them with color and let them span a space. It didn't take long until I decided that tape would be a good

material to draw with – on and off the wall; it allowed me to step into the space. In addition, I was able to build entire structures, which were able to carry themselves due to the adhesive. That cannot be achieved with only a few lines. In fact, it takes many, which ultimately form a cocoon in space.

MEANWHILE, A LINE DRAWN WITH TAPE, AS WELL AS ITS BUNDLING INTO LAYERED STRUCTURES, GENERATE A SENSE OF OPENNESS. IT IS LESS CONCRETE THAN A STRAIGHT PENCIL LINE ON PAPER, FOR EXAMPLE.

True, even though tape makes for a readymade line. The final result reflects my overall gesture and my entire dynamic.

EARLIER, YOU COMPARED YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS WITH A PERFORMANCE. HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK OF THE AUDIENCE WHEN YOU ARE MAKING THE WORK? DO YOU ENVISION HOW A VIEWER SHOULD WALK AROUND IT OR DO YOU EVEN ANTICIPATE A CERTAIN CHOREOGRAPHY?

I have to be honest and say that I hardly ever think of the audience in the moment of creation. Because I couldn't begin to imagine what's going on inside someone when they are experiencing my work. Sometimes, I will receive letters from people, sharing their reaction. And it's fascinating. Still, when I'm creating a spatial drawing, I'm only concerned with how I see it. I see my body as a tool that can make that visible. So in that sense, I can't think of the viewer at that stage.

ONE OF YOUR RECENT SPATIAL DRAWINGS INVOLVED REFLECTIVE SURFACES.

For the past year, I have worked increasingly with mirrored surfaces. I recently contributed a spatial drawing to a group exhibition at the Marta Herford Museum, which is housed in a building designed by Frank Gehry [*Der fremde Raum; Angriffe, Verwandlungen, Explosionen*, October 29, 2016 – February 5, 2017]. My work entitled "Raumzeichnung (Der fremde Raum)" (2016) was conceived for a mirrored space. 4 x 4 x 4 meters of one entire

corner, meaning two walls and the floor, were covered with flexible mirror sheets. From there, silver strings extended into the space and met with black tape. However, both connected rather gently. There is a lot of flexibility in how you connect different elements. A spatial drawing can twine into space rather forcefully or just softly touch it; it could also intersect a space, deny and overpower it, even though that hasn't occurred yet. Because of the mirrored components, the viewer was reflected in the work, albeit somewhat diffused. I like this reflective quality very much, which in my eyes adds a sense of mystery.

YOU HAVE WORKED WITH A MYSTERIOUS QUALITY ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, INCORPORATING CHAIRS AND DRIED PIECES OF WOOD INTO YOUR SPATIAL DRAWINGS.

There is always a certain history attached to these decisions. The wooden branches were part of a spatial drawing that I had made during my residency at The Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas ["Colors and Other Site Specifics"] (2008). I only brought a few rolls of tape with me when I got there, knowing that I would spend three months in the High Desert. I had an entire building as a studio on the museum's grounds to myself. In fact, because the museum was only open Thursdays through Sundays, I was pretty much alone half of the week. There were only a few people when I was there and even though we would greet each other on the street, we wouldn't really speak. Besides two crossing streets, there was only landscape, which I treasured very much. Marianne Stockebrand, the widowed partner of Donald Judd, was the director at the time and she lived in a rather lonely house at the other end of the village.

DID YOUR CONCEPT OF SCALE CHANGE WHILE BEING SURROUNDED BY SO MUCH OPEN SPACE?

Exterior space was certainly a subject. It felt almost infinite there. So the question became about how to place or attach something into such a vast context. There is no pressure to produce

anything during that residency, and if you choose to just think for three months you can do that, as well. For the first few weeks, I would just take long walks, which could be a little scary as there are mountain lions, rattlesnakes, and scorpions, among others. As Beuys liked to say: “I think with my knee.” During one of the walks I watched myself go up to Stockebrand’s door, knock, and ask whether I could cut off the branches of the dead, dried trees that had been originally planted by Donald Judd, to use them in an installation. I wasn’t sure how to use them at that point, but to me, they embodied drawings made by nature. She allowed me to cut these trees and so I organized a pick up with a large trailer and started to harvest these skeleton-like trees. I deposited them at the Locker Plant, a building next to the train tracks, where these incredibly long and loud transcontinental trains would pass by at 4 o’clock in the morning. Except for these trains, it would be incredibly quiet, enough so that you could hear your own heartbeat. It was almost unbearable and yet beautiful at the same time. I was happy when I was finally able to begin my installation.

THE REMAINING INSTALLATION VIEWS LOOK STUNNING AND WHAT FASCINATES ME IS THAT YOU CHOSE TO INVOLVE QUITE A BIT OF COLOR IN THIS PARTICULAR WORK.

I started by sawing the branches into the desired size before painting them according to my personal sequence of a rainbow. During the opening at the Locker Plant, there was also paper confetti that I had torn by hand and dyed according to that color sequence. They had a rather ephemeral effect as they collected in front of the building against a large wall made of glass. The desert wind helped to mix the confetti in new ways before carrying it all over the landscape.

BY NOW, MOST OF YOUR WORKS ARE DE-SATURATED. ON WHAT OCCASIONS DO YOU EMPLOY COLOR?

Right, I rarely use color. My early works were very colorful and

often based on the primary colors. That was partially due to the fact that the tape I use came in clear, yellow, red, and blue; it was a little bit Mondrian-esque now that I think about it. However, after a while, I felt that it was just too much color and I started mixing it up. In 2008, I did a spatial drawing for Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver, for which I mixed colored tape with brown packing tape to de-saturate the palette. Also, I like that black and white put more focus on form and in that, it relates to both sculpture and drawing. In that particular combination, it does not matter whether one color appears dominant compared to another, or if one is receding, for example. Instead, you have the black drawing in a white space. In fact, the company, which produces the masking tape I use, started making black tape on my initiative. When I was a student, I was sponsored by that company and after years of working with this material, the marketing department invited me to visit their laboratory and talk to their scientists, whom I told that I loved working with black tape but could only find that shade in the quality I needed in the US and Australia. Now, it’s available in Germany, the front is black and the back grey, and I can tear it by hand.

IT IS A MATERIAL THAT ALLOWS YOU TO WORK FREELY AND WITHOUT INTERRUPTION. WILL YOU BE USING BLACK TAPE FOR YOUR UPCOMING SHOW IN SOLOTHURN, SWITZERLAND, AS WELL [MONIKA GRZYMALA: RAUMZEICHNUNG (SOLITÄR), HAUS DER KUNST ST. JOSEF, APRIL 8 – JUNE 3, 2017]?

Yes, I will. The space is inside a former Baroque church and run by the artist Reto Emch, who invites three to four artists each year to present a solo exhibition. There is still a convent as well, which has moved into a spectacular, minimal concrete building, and its nuns are making liquor from crops in their orchard. It’s an incredible place. The ornate ceiling of the church is painted white and the church windows have clear glass. Inside are several drywalls measuring 4 meters in height, providing a white cube

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feel. I will sleep in that space during the installation and I'm very much looking forward to that.

DO YOU USUALLY TRY TO SLEEP ON SITE DURING THE INSTALLATION PROCESS?

If it's possible, I like to. A spatial drawing demands a certain amount of time to evolve, usually between seven to ten days. I don't think I could hold that level of concentration much longer than that; it's an ongoing act of translating the reactions in your brain into lines in space. It is ideal if I can simply dive into the drawing, because there is also a certain rhythm: one day everything goes well, another badly, and so on. It is the time that I have alone with the work. When I'm finished, I no longer have the feeling that the spatial drawing has anything to do with me. I was simply the vessel through which it was channeled.

I COULD IMAGINE THAT SUCH AN INTENSE PERIOD OF WORK ALLOWS YOU TO EXPERIENCE EMOTIONAL COMPLETION AT THE END.

Yes, I'm finished with the work when it is completed. I will still take some time to document it and take photographs, but I feel satisfied.

YOU HAVE BEEN TRAVELING EXTENSIVELY IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS. IT MUST BE DIFFICULT TO RETAIN YOUR ENERGY FOR SUCH PHYSICALLY CHALLENGING PROJECTS.

I had ten projects in ten months and when I came home in December, I had been traveling all over the world, either installing work, or discussing and organizing projects. When I was back in Berlin I realized that I was utterly exhausted and that I had to be careful. I hardly had been able to just work for myself and without having to show something to anyone. It is a wonderful thing to make art in secret and to only have it in the studio.

DOES IT HURT WHEN YOU SEE YOUR WORKS TAKEN DOWN AT THE END OF AN EXHIBITION?

It doesn't hurt. I always take them down myself and in a way, that's another beautiful moment.



CORNELIA SCHLEIME

FEBRUARY 21, 2017
BERLIN-BRANDENBURG

HAVING RECEIVED THE HANNAH HÖCH PRIZE (2016), WHICH HONORED YOUR LIFETIME ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS, YOU CURRENTLY HAVE A MAJOR EXHIBITION AT THE BERLINISCHE GALERIE [*CORNELIA SCHLEIME: A BLINK OF AN EYE*, NOVEMBER 25, 2016 – APRIL 24, 2017]. IT IS THE FIRST MUSEUM PROJECT THAT BRINGS TOGETHER WORKS FROM VARIOUS PERIODS OF YOUR LIFE. HOW HAS IT BEEN FOR YOU TO SEE EXAMPLES OF YOUR LIFE'S WORK COHESIVELY INSTALLED?

It is important to the extent that I work autobiographically and that there really is no divide between work and life. The impulse for making the work stems from life. To include early works helps to clarify how I handled pressure and especially, political pressure. I think it makes more sense if you can view early work as well.

THE SHOW INCLUDES SEVERAL WORKS FROM YOUR PAST IN THE GDR, WHICH YOU HADN'T SEEN IN DECADES. WERE THERE ANY PARTICULAR SURPRISES WHEN VIEWING THESE WORKS?

Yes. I contacted a photographer, who photographed me during

my performances at the time. These weren't staged for an audience but rather for myself and so the photographs were meant as a record of a reaction to them. You didn't have an audience in the GDR. Instead, I was interested in a larger context, namely how to deal with my aggressions after having been forbidden to travel and even show my work. The performances served as a parable, an image for my desolate inner state at the time, which was based on the fact that I wasn't allowed any freedoms in that country. I always wanted to find such a parable and even my later paintings were never conceived for a recipient. Everything I do, be it performances, painting or writing, manifests as visual diaries and travel diaries. Everything I make is first of all for myself.

DID YOU STAGE THESE PERFORMANCES AT HOME OR IN OTHER PRIVATE SETTINGS?

No, they were occasionally made in the landscape, in Hüpstedt, or somewhere else, anywhere I happened to be. They were made without much preparation and they were very improvisational. They were rooted in the present, and if props were needed I had to find them in that moment. So I contacted said photographer shortly before my current exhibition, because I knew that he had taken all these pictures. However, I had forgotten that I had made these performances including bondage and wrapping myself in yarn around 1982. That was particularly interesting to me as I hadn't known anything about or seen anything related to bondage at the time, due to the GDR's censorship of art history. I wasn't aware of the Japanese artist Nobuyoshi Araki, for example. Today, bondage is everywhere; it's reflected in fashion, and young female artists are showing bondage stories in photography, among others. However, back then I didn't have a clue that bondage was being artistically explored anywhere. To me, the photographs of these performances partially tell of finding myself. They are rooted in my biographical experience. I felt tied up under the GDR regime. I wasn't allowed to show or work, and

after I had founded a Punk band we weren't allowed to perform either. I was surprised to see how early I had explored these feelings through the theme of bondage.

IT IS ALSO DIFFERENT FROM OTHER POSITIONS IN THE SENSE THAT YOU EXPLORED BONDAGE AS A METAPHOR FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RESTRAINT AND WITHOUT A SEXUAL CONTEXT.

It had nothing to do with sex. I also would have wrapped myself in barbed wire. It really stemmed from an existential crisis. I still believe that art, besides its aesthetic impact, has to have an existential reason behind it. Take Lars von Trier, for example, whom I painted and that work is included in the exhibition. His recent film "Nymphomaniac" was criticized for being just about sex and at times even labeled a porno. However, when I watched it I realized that he is concerned with something else entirely. The film is about a person who hasn't really arrived in the world and who has a disposition against her surroundings. The character, played by Charlotte Gainsbourg, can't be integrated or forced into submission. I felt a kinship of the souls there and that's why I painted von Trier.

THIS NOTION OF NOT BEING ABLE TO ARRIVE IN THE WORLD CAN EASILY BE APPLIED TO PARTS OF YOUR LIFE. AFTER STRUGGLING IN THE GDR THERE WAS A BIG CUT IN 1984 WHEN YOU WERE ABLE TO MOVE TO THE WEST. AS YOU WEREN'T ABLE TO BRING MOST OF YOUR WORK WITH YOU, YOU HAD TO REINVENT YOURSELF ON MULTIPLE LEVELS, INCLUDING AS AN ARTIST.

Exactly, although this can also have a positive effect. When I arrived in the BRD [Federal Republic of Germany], I couldn't just walk into a gallery and say: "I'm an underground artist from the East, the painter Cornelia Schleime, but I don't have any paintings." I had to compensate for my loss first and I had to paint my biography anew.

THIS MUST HAVE TAKEN QUITE SOME TIME, WHILE ALSO HAVING TO SETTLE INTO A NEW LIFE IN THE WEST.

It took about one or two years until I had a first group of paintings ready. They were fairly small and detailed, containing small script-like elements, which reflected my fascination with Cy Twombly at the time. I called them “Horizonte-Bilder” [“Horizon Pictures”] and they were rooted in contemplation. I had an interesting experience when a gallerist visited the studio around that time, telling me that she liked the work and would exhibit it, if I could make ten in large. I thought: “Oh my God, that’s how this works. It’s like ordering art.” That one statement led to a cut in my work, because I could no longer paint these pictures. I just didn’t care anymore.

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU TURN TO FIGURATIVE PAINTING AND ESPECIALLY PORTRAITURE?

That was a longer process. After the “Horizon Pictures”, I focused on large paintings of vegetables for a while. My first portraits began after my travels, such as to Turkey, during which I collected postcards that showed how the political leaders of that particular country liked to present themselves. These included Sukarno and Atatürk, for example, and I was particularly interested in their gestural expression. So my first four portraits evoked these postcards, although it wasn’t about copying but rather abstracting the latter. One of these paintings entitled “Der Verräter” [“The Traitor”] is at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Galerie Neue Meister Dresden. It depicts the subject’s ear as being filled with lots of small parts. I was interested in thinking reality further. I stopped after four of these paintings, but I still keep travel diaries, into which I paste postcards that I might later use as a source of inspiration, albeit with a sense of irony and satire.

TO CLARIFY, YOUR INTEREST IS LESS IN HOW A FOREIGN COUNTRY LOOKS, BUT RATHER HOW IT LOOKS AT ITSELF?

It is about that, but I will also make a childlike drawing of a bird I observe somewhere. I made one project inspired by the Natural

History Museum in New York, for example. I took hundreds of pictures of their animal panoramas and assembled them as a large installation. In addition, I painted on top of them, minimally and while allowing parts of the original photograph to remain. So when people viewed these painted images of African animals behind glass, they thought that I must have been on safari. In other words, the covering up through paint provided a sense of reality to what was formerly an artistic, institutional display. Housed inside the museum, where many school classes visit, the context was about education.

DO YOU ALSO COMPARE COUNTRIES OR CULTURES AT TIMES?

I once had the idea to study how differently the wolf is depicted in various cultures. In America, it is often shown while jumping as if in a Walt Disney animation. If you visit our Natural History Museum you find the culture of the Occident, which likes to depict the wolf bent and crawling. My interest is always two-fold; it is inspired by both an analytical and a sensual exploration, although I prefer the latter. The result must be convincing in both aspects. That’s why I couldn’t work conceptually as I don’t want to run after an idea.

YOU MADE THE POIGNANT OBSERVATION THAT IN THE WEST, WHERE EVERYONE HAS THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, MULTITUDES WANT TO BE AND LOOK THE SAME, WHILE IN THE EAST WHERE EQUALITY WAS PROMOTED, MANY WERE INSPIRED TO DEFINE THEIR INDIVIDUALITY IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE. WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK AS AN HOMAGE TO INDIVIDUALITY?

I don’t consciously pay homage to anything. I simply can’t work differently. Through painting, I create my own world, because I can’t cope with reality, whether it entails a dictatorship or freedom. I also can’t handle many people and that’s why I like to retreat and work rather remotely. Perhaps, this is why portraits are so important to me; I communicate with them. They look at me and I influence them by painting on top of them. It’s an

energy field when these eyes look at you. In the West, I saw so many women starting to look similar after undertaking cosmetic surgery and I was wondering why in free societies, so much becomes about assimilation. In the past twenty years, the Internet has furthered this development. So much is available and so much is similar.

IT ALMOST SOUNDS LIKE YOU CONTINUE TO HAVE A PERSONAL DIALOGUE WITH YOUR PAINTINGS, MANY OF WHICH YOU LIVE WITH. DO YOU ASSOCIATE STORIES WITH THEM, FICTITIOUS NARRATIVES PERHAPS? IS THERE AN ASPECT OF STORYTELLING INVOLVED?

No, not at all. In fact, I dive deep into the material. When you see the works in person, you recognize a layer of abstraction. I am concerned with shadows, light, and breaks in the composition. The actual motif is not that important and it does get painted over multiple times. However, there are also biographical references. When my father passed away, I coincidentally read a lot about demands that the Pope should resign because of his Parkinson's disease. I thought that was odd as in Christianity you are supposed to bear the cross. I'm not a realist painter and therefore I couldn't paint my father on his deathbed. So to process my pain I painted the Pope with a pained expression instead. In that case, the work was based on a real person rather than my imagination. It's like I slowly approach a place, where I look for something mysterious, although I don't really know where my search will lead me. If I did know or if I had a clear vision of a work in my head, I wouldn't have to paint it anymore as it is already projected on my inner retina. It's like a laboratory, in which you create a being through painting. That's most important to me.

WHILE STUDYING YOUR PORTRAITS ONE WILL USUALLY DETECT A SENSE OF STRENGTH. EVEN IN PAINTINGS LIKE "EIN WIMPERNSCHLAG" ["A BLINK OF AN EYE"] (2016), WHICH DEPICTS A GIRL LOOKING OUT OF A WINDOW WITH AN AIR OF MELANCHOLY,

WE CAN ALSO DETECT DETERMINATION. HER GAZE IS NOT INTROVERTED, BUT FOCUSED ON WHAT LIES AHEAD, ON THE OUTSIDE, WITH OBVIOUS CONFIDENCE. I WOULD GO EVEN AS FAR AS TO SAY THAT SHE LOOKS READY FOR BATTLE.

I think that's well observed. I often question things and find things superficial, thinking that they don't make sense. I'm not depressed but that still makes for a melancholic outlook. So many of my works reflect this melancholic mood, but it is through painting that I get to a place where I'm ready to battle anything. So that particular painting "A Blink of an Eye" is truly a part of my psyche. The overall mood is contemplative, but during the act of painting I'm destructive and aggressive in that I will paint over a picture and take risks with chemical reactions, using shellac, for example. Because of this, a composition can vanish over night or become completely destroyed. I think that this kind of aggressive confidence transfers onto the subject so that you will find it reflected in the girl's eyes. In addition, there is a surreal element; the birds that you see in the window don't fly by but rather toward her, into the room. There is a transparency between the interior and exterior here and it's how I experience my own life. I derive much inspiration from my dreams, which describe a surreal and irrational world where many different things become connected in the most mysterious ways.

DREAMS ALSO ADD A SENSE OF TIMELESSNESS AS THEY DON'T FOLLOW CHRONOLOGY. THE VISUALS WE EXPERIENCE IN THEM CAN STEM FROM THE PAST, PRESENT, OR SEEM FUTURISTIC.

I could never react in my work to current events, for example, because I would then engage in trying to shape an opinion. However, in painting I need something else than opinion. If you want to go deep, you can only focus within yourself and not on the outside. If I tried to be current or fashionable, I would be afraid that I am leaving this inner place. The only exception I have ever made was in the case of "Bis auf weitere gute Zusammenarbeit

Nr. 7284/85” [“Until Further Good Collaboration Nr. 7284/85”] (1993). It was a series based on my classified Stasi reports, for which I changed mediums. With a strong sense of irony and employing photography, I created scenarios that were inspired by the texts in these files. Usually, when something happens that is rather ominous or hard to take, I won’t react with painting but writing, because the structure is too complicated and in need of a complicated language. In 2008, I wrote a novel called “Weit fort” [“Far Away”], for example. Painting needs something else. It is about halting time so that it is no longer fluid but solidifying. I wouldn’t want to overload the painting with that kind of information, because it needs to exude a sense of mystery.

YOUR PAINTINGS ARE ABOUT SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING, WHEREAS YOUR SERIES “UNTIL FURTHER GOOD COLLABORATION NR. 7284/85” WAS A WAY OF PROCESSING A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE. WHEN YOU LOOKED AT YOUR STASI FILES, YOU FOUND OUT THAT A VERY CLOSE FRIEND OF YOURS WAS INFORMING ON YOU.

That was one aspect. The other was the realization that all of my apartments during my time in the GDR had been inspected. Without my knowledge, members of the Stasi had gone through my laundry and stolen personal photographs from me. In the GDR, one person was in charge of the so-called *Hausbuch* [*House Book*] in each apartment building. They would have a second key for each tenant’s apartment. I was shocked about this Nazi-era Blockwart mentality. There were all these hangers-on, which afterwards claimed that they didn’t know of anything. Only three of the many works in “Until Further Good Collaboration Nr. 7284/85” referred to reports by my former friend Sascha Anderson, but I primarily used those in which this conservative, narrow-minded Blockwart mentality is expressed. One was by the mother of a school friend. You are able to request the names of the individuals who worked for the Stasi under a cover name and I realized that I knew many of them personally.

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE WHAT THAT MUST FEEL LIKE WHEN EVERYTHING THAT YOU REMEMBERED AS REALITY PROVES TO BE FALSE. HOW DO YOU DEFEND YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY WITH CONFIDENCE WHEN SO MUCH OF YOUR HISTORY WAS A MERE ILLUSION?

Yes, that’s what is most annoying about this, although there is also a freeing quality somehow. Everything about my past had to be re-constructed. I remembered a moment with Anderson in the car, for example. He was the singer of our Punk band and we were en route to a gig. As we were driving into the woods, he said: “I think behind us is a Stasi car.” However, both him and the driver worked for the Stasi themselves. Such insanity. When I arrived in the West in 1984, it took me a long time to acclimate. I went to New York and soon after, the Wall came down and all this information started pouring out. In other words, as soon as I had truly arrived in the West, I had to travel back East mentally. The only positive thing about this was that it was a collective experience. Another friend of mine and Anderson’s, Ralf Kerbach, was just as disappointed as I was. I wasn’t alone in my dismay and that gave some warmth.

WERE YOU DONE WITH THIS DARK SUBJECT AFTER COMPLETING “UNTIL FURTHER GOOD COLLABORATION NR. 7284/85”, WHICH IS NOW OWNED BY THE DEUTSCHE BANK COLLECTION? WAS IT ENOUGH TO TURN SOMETHING THAT NEGATIVE INTO SOMETHING CREATIVE?

Yes, I was completely done. I really enjoyed making this work, which is evident I think. In the end, I am resilient. The work also contains some writing, in which I thank the Ministry for State Security (MfS) for their laborious and detailed work in assembling these reports. Art is about processing trauma.

IT IS A VERY PERSONAL FORM OF WORKING THROUGH THAT EXPERIENCE AND A VERY DIFFERENT SOLUTION THAN TRYING TO CONTACT AND CONFRONT THOSE WHO BETRAYED YOU.

To contact people would have been way too much for me. So many people turned out to be involved with the Stasi and I can hardly hear it anymore. Suddenly, the borders were open and people were able to travel, but instead, there was all this whining among former GDR citizens. As a response, I camouflaged myself; I returned from the US wearing a baseball cap and a Chicago Bulls jacket. I re-oriented myself completely in order to not drown in this East-swamp.

ARE THERE SPECIFIC WORKS OR SERIES WITHIN YOUR OEUVRE THAT ARE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Yes, there are single works, which I can't sell, because something happened during the process and while trying to destroy the image so that something completely unexpected emerged. There is something mysterious about them and I sense that they might be important in some ways for other paintings to come. In the Berlinische Galerie, there are three portraits of girls, one with a feather in her mouth, one with a red rose, and one with a leaf. Gerhard Schröder once wanted to buy the girl with the rose ["Untitled", 1998], but I couldn't part with it. These works that I keep are often quiet and rather poetic. "A Blink of an Eye" is another example. In fact, I might like to use it for a cycle of paintings in the future. As mentioned above, that work is very much a part of me. It has nothing to do with the topic and I only feel this while painting.

DO YOU USE COLOR SYMBOLICALLY?

No, not at all. When I paint I don't think much or rationally. I only see color. It's not unlike being a child at play.

DO YOU WORK AT ONE PAINTING AT A TIME?

No, I work on several simultaneously. I will have a painting on the floor and one on the wall, and then switch, for example. I often paint on the floor, because I use a lot of fluid materials, which have to dry.

IS IT DIFFICULT WHEN SEVERAL WORKS LEAVE THE STUDIO AT

ONCE TO ASSEMBLE IN AN EXHIBITION? DO YOU DREAD EMPTINESS IN THE STUDIO, FOR EXAMPLE?

No, quite the opposite. In the case of the Berlinische Galerie exhibition, I was incredibly motivated when the works left. I don't ever experience a crisis in my work. To paint is like eating to me, it is a necessity of life. I struggle with not wanting to exhibit often and not wanting to attend many events. Unlike my son, who is also a painter and who does follow the art scene, I would rather be left alone. I also have a circle of friends, of whom many are not artists. In Brandenburg, I like to show my works to the same six people, who have a reliably clear view of it. My mother, who didn't know anything about art, was also a great judge of my work. Their look is more complex and they are not focused on details, such as anatomical correctness, which is something that other artists might comment on. I'm not concerned with anatomy in that way. Instead, I always listen to the sound and overall atmosphere. People who don't know much about art will also focus on exactly that first; they will comment on the painting's mood, that it seems dark or friendly, for example.

WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR EARLIEST INFLUENCES OR ARTISTS WHOSE WORK YOU ADMIRE?

During my studies in Dresden, Paula Modersohn-Becker was a great role model, especially because of the sensuality in her paintings. I was very much in dialogue with her then. During that time, Dresden was a rather desolate place. There weren't any student parties, no cinema, nothing. During the weekends, one was usually alone. Nobody had a telephone and you hardly met friends. I worked a lot from nature, painting sunsets and nude studies. On weekends, I would go to the Saxon State and University Library, where I found small booklets on Cy Twombly and Arnulf Rainer, but that was pretty much it. When I came to the West, I discovered Van Gogh and Balthus. I also like to look at Dutch still lifes. However, in general I don't look at much else.

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WHEN DO YOU DECIDE THAT A PAINTING IS FINISHED?

At a certain point, I have to turn the work toward the wall. I will leave it like that for a month before looking at it again and decide. It has happened that I worked on some paintings even after they had been professionally photographed. Sometimes, after I have worked with shellac and thought that the work would probably be destroyed, I will come down the next morning and discover that it actually was what the picture needed and that it is now finished. It is about a feeling and I could never release works if I wasn't certain. That's why I can't paint for exhibitions, because it would be too fast for my taste. That sense of inner mystery and psychological impact that I'm after can't be produced on demand; it has to spring from some depth. To be able to judge whether this has been achieved or not, I do need distance and time.



SVENJA DEININGER

FEBRUARY 20, 2017
KREUZBERG, BERLIN

IN YOUR PAINTING PROCESS, EACH STEP LEADS TO THE NEXT. WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU WORK INTUITIVELY?

I don't like the term "intuitive" very much as it is often confused with "unconscious". I believe that intuition is always accompanied by conscious decision-making. That is the combination that interests me. It is the moment when one simultaneously knows where one wants to go and can decide how to get there. In my work, the beginning is always determined as well. In fact, I usually make a complete body of work for each new exhibition, including perhaps just one older work. That means that all of these new works follow a specific concept. Only rarely does one work stand by itself. However, during my process, I will of course focus on one work at a time, contemplating each subsequent step. Some works will move early and much more strongly toward the envisioned destination than others. Still, all of the entailed decisions, even if they are rooted in my subjective impression, are made consciously and rationally; they reflect an entirety of thought. I always work while keeping my original intention

and the possible audience in mind. I don't know whether pure intuition even exists. I like to compare my works to words in a sentence. The latter is never truly complete without the subject, verb, and object, or without a sign at the end, such as the period or question mark.

IN ADDITION, EACH WORD IN A SENTENCE HAS A DIFFERENT WEIGHT AND INTENSITY.

That is something that is very important to me. I like an arch of intensity.

DO YOU RECOGNIZE THE POTENTIAL WEIGHT OF EACH WORK EARLY ON?

There are works that take a very long time, while others come together relatively fast. With some works, I don't know whether they will be complete after two more steps or not. This aspect of time is important to me. Occasionally, I will work on certain paintings on and off for years. Sometimes, works will hang on the studio wall and it will take months until I'm sure that I will not do anything further to them or I will add just one more thing after several months. As the paintings begin to form a sentence they will also start to determine each other and what's needed.

YOU CURRENTLY HAVE TWO COMPREHENSIVE SOLO MUSEUM SHOWS ON DISPLAY, AT THE SECESSION IN VIENNA [SVENJA DEININGER: ECHO OF A MIRROR FRAGMENT, FEBRUARY 2 – MARCH 26, 2017] AND THE NORTON MUSEUM OF ART IN FLORIDA.

It was interesting to work on both of these projects at the same time. The installation at the Secession consists of mainly new works that were conceived for that particular space, including its architectural characteristics. Two days later, the exhibition at the Norton Museum opened, which is mainly comprised of loaned works from the past four to five years. All of these paintings were once created for another context and belonged to different groups of works. By now, most of them belong to various private collections and are standing on their own. However, when shown

together, they again start to engage in a dialogue and perhaps, this quality develops independently from my guidance.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE MEANING OF YOUR PAINTINGS SHIFTS ACCORDING TO THE INDIVIDUAL CONSTELLATION THEY ARE A PART OF?

I think of my works more like words that always mean the same, but which can be assembled into different sentences. These sentences can have a different impact, even if the meaning of the word stays the same. The exhibition at the Norton Museum is called *Second Chances First Impressions* [February 4 – April 16, 2017], reflecting the fact that the works had been made for a different context, but were now becoming part of something else. Interestingly, single works don't behave differently or have another meaning than before. A word such as "silence" will never be loud, no matter what the context. Meanwhile, a period will always indicate the end of a sentence or the beginning of another. Overall, it is important to have some distance to the work. Some works gain in meaning much later and with others, I know their potential right away.

ARE THERE WORKS THAT ARE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU?

The paintings that mark something new or which lead me somewhere else and point into a new direction are always the most important to me.

DO YOU EVER HOLD BACK CERTAIN WORKS, BECAUSE THEY ARE PERSONALLY SIGNIFICANT TO YOU?

I don't really hold anything back, especially as I create works for specific exhibition projects. So the most important works within this context couldn't be missing from the installation. However, there are a few works that I keep. While I'm very informed about art history of the past and what's being made now, I don't reference other artists in my work. Ever so often, I will make something that makes me think that it could also be a Fernand Léger or a Sonia Delaunay, among others. I might ask myself:

“Wouldn’t it be nice if this would end up becoming a Giorgio Morandi?” I title these works, which completely fall out of line, accordingly. I would love to curate a group exhibition with them in the far future.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON HOW THE WORKS WILL BE INSTALLED IN RELATION TO EACH OTHER?

My decisions in regard to the installation resemble the way I work in the studio. I always hang my work myself and as if I was to install a group exhibition, approaching it with some distance. I hardly ever hang a group of works chronologically. Instead, I play with the exhibition space as I would on a picture plane. That determines what’s needed and some works, which I had deemed important before might not end up being a part of the installation while others I had not envisioned to be fit for the exhibition become introduced. I would say that the hanging is the most crucial aspect of the exhibition. Rhythm is important and that’s why I usually favor a rather classical approach to hanging paintings. It is about the relationship between works, as well as between the works, space, and architecture. In case of the Norton Museum, where all works are on loan, the installation and order would have had to change completely if only one collector would have said that a work wasn’t available. It’s not like I can simply replace a missing work with another, because then, the overall intention of the sentence would change. I view each work as a separate entity that just happens to hang next to others.

SINCE YOU PLAY WITH THE EXHIBITION SPACE WHILE YOU ARE HANGING THE PAINTINGS, I WOULD ASSUME THAT MOST OF THESE DECISIONS ARE MADE ON SITE.

True and until now that has always been a possibility. In the case of the Secession, I conceived the exhibition architecture as a reflection of the work, creating openings, dividing and mirroring spaces. I created some doorways for example, which reached from the floor to the ceiling and which had the same width (but

not height) as some of the paintings. Several of the paintings were mirrored as well in the sense that they contained the same point of departure. I rented another studio to be able to work on these in two different spaces. It was interesting to see that despite the common denominator, some of these works developed more figuratively and others more architecturally. I also exhibited several square paintings, which I would turn upside down at a certain point, which initiated an entire new direction during the painting process. I will work with architectural models, but many of these decisions have to be made on site as things change. It’s the same with painting. I will certainly think of three or four steps ahead, but as soon as I take the first, even if it is exactly what I had envisioned, this might lead to something completely different. It’s not unlike imagining a person, who you might wish to meet one day, but you don’t really know what that person will look or be like. There are so many people and yet, you suddenly know that that was the person you thought of when you meet them. You just know it, but you don’t know why you do.

THE CONCEPT OF MIRRORING COMPOSITIONS IS FASCINATING. HAVE YOU WORKED ON TWO ALTERNATIVES OF THE SAME PIECE BEFORE?

I regard each step in the process as initiating a beginning of something new and so I usually don’t repeat steps. However, I once worked on a similar concept for an exhibition structure, which allowed the audience to walk along it. Viewers were able to decide whether they preferred to walk clock- or counterclockwise. This made it impossible to experience the entire group of works within the space; one could only view one after the other. In that case, I worked with a concept of doubles so that at the end, viewers realized that no matter how they chose to walk, the experience was almost the same – like the name “Anna” which reads the same from front to back and vice versa.

AT THE SECESSION, YOU EXHIBIT ONE SHAPED CANVAS. ARE YOU

BEGINNING TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE RECTANGULAR AND SQUARE FORMATS?

It is something that is simply a part of my practice and it is not that new. In fact, I had meant to explore shaped canvases for a long time. I like to play with space as much as with the painted ground. I am interested in the question of where space originates in a painting and when it is that the white ground can evoke depth. At a certain point that led me to incorporate the untreated ground, meaning the raw canvas, into the composition. If you contemplate that step you will automatically begin to think about the space next to the painting as well. I then took my last solo exhibition at Federica Schiavo Gallery in Rome as reason to create several shaped canvases [*Svenja Deininger: Every Something is an Echo of Nothing*, Federica Schiavo Gallery, March 19 – April 21, 2015]. The gallery is located in the historic district of the city and consists of a white cube with a long corridor from which spring two vaulted spaces left and right. The gallery was built inside this historic space, which remains pretty much in its original condition. It's almost like a box within a box. There are hardly any straight lines in the vaulted spaces as everything is rounded. It made sense to work with shaped canvases in that case. In fact, I completed several, but found it rather difficult and was only really satisfied with one. I added a partial frame so that the wall became part of the work.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON YOUR PALETTE? DO YOU EMPLOY COLORS AS INDICATORS FOR CERTAIN MOODS, FOR EXAMPLE?

I can say two things. One aspect is that my works originate in something that bothers or at least is difficult for me, making me want to work with and through it. Along these lines, I've always had difficulties with clear, bright colors, such as the primaries; they will suggest something symbolic, which is something I definitely do not want. Therefore, for a long time, I started with colors, such as bright yellow or red. The application of these

marked the first step. Another aspect is that I like to explore the intersection between abstraction and non-abstraction. If I use certain colors on a canvas, one will have the impression that one stands before something concrete and familiar, even if it is impossible to name. It is a phenomenon that is not only caused by form, but even by color alone. If you take a work by Matisse, for example, and you will see a bed and a shadow, you don't think of the fact that you are seeing color. If you would photograph a detail of this composition, in which you would only see white, crème and a blue line, you would only see white and blue. However, as soon as you step back you will see the bed and its shadow again. I try to show these two different sensations next to each other so that you will see less color than what it is supposed to describe, such as a shadow or if something is wet. The best would be if it could also suggest a sound or smell, which address the two senses that painting can't reach.

DO YOU THINK THAT VIEWERS CAN TRACE SOME OF THE DECISIONS YOU MADE WHEN LOOKING AT THE COMPLETED COMPOSITION?

I believe that one can sense which step came before, even if it ended up being erased entirely. I do sand off a lot of layers, for example. In fact, I believe that if you have a white canvas on which something else had been drawn previously, you will view it differently than one that is untouched.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE CONCEPT OF TIME AND THE ENTAILED EXPERIENCES ARE EMBEDDED IN THE CANVAS?

Yes, that's a big part of the work. It is not about finishing a picture, but rather about the moment when you finish to work on it. In fact, the work does not necessarily have to be complete at that point. Still, it is at that moment in a condition that does exactly what I want it to do. You could also describe color this way. Let's say you would like to describe a natural phenomenon; you would note the day, the location, and perhaps what you had for dinner the night before. You are not only

mentioning the lightning storm and the colors you saw, but also the surrounding facts.

YOU WORK WITH VARIOUS FORMATS, RANGING FROM SMALL TO LARGE SCALE. DO YOU HAVE A PREFERENCE OR IS THERE A FORMAT THAT SEEMS MOST NATURAL TO YOU?

There are formats that I'm more comfortable with than others. It's fascinating how different they are. Several years ago, I worked very large and when I had to face a medium format it was a struggle, because it seemed so small. After that, I worked on large sheets of paper for a long time. When I returned to the canvas, I began by focusing on a format that was a little bit smaller than standard letter size. Though originally these paintings were meant to help describe the works on paper, they became an independent project. In fact, I lost myself in them. I was able to develop a lot through them and many ended up being very complex. I was curious to find out what kind of concentration a small painting can attract in a space, how much square footage it can tolerate, and how small works can communicate with each other in a large, empty space. At a certain point, I started to make larger paintings again to let the small ones appear even smaller in context. I thought of them as excerpts from the smaller compositions, which could enlarge certain details. In other words, the small paintings were complex and the larger ones were simplified and almost monochrome. Over time, the latter have become more independent. Now, there are two fairly new directions within the larger format. There are works conceived to serve a particular role in the context of an exhibition, adding a comma, hyphen, or period, for example. Others are as complex as the small paintings.

BECAUSE YOU INCLUDE LARGE AND SMALL WORKS IN YOUR INSTALLATIONS, YOU ANIMATE THE VIEWER. ONE HAS TO WALK UP TO A SMALLER COMPOSITION IN ORDER TO PROPERLY SEE IT, WHILE ONE HAS TO STEP BACK TO TAKE IN A LARGE PAINTING, FOR EXAMPLE.

That's true and it is something I consciously use. I would like to decide how people walk around a painting or how they walk into an exhibition space. Of course, when you look at a painting up close you will better understand whatever it was that peaked your interest from afar. Meanwhile, you will perhaps see something else that will make you forget why you were pulled in by the work in the first place. That's something that already interested me when I was still focused on photography. If you have a figure in the foreground, but cut it in a way that you won't see the eyes, it will draw less attention. So you can steer the viewer's gaze toward something else first.

DID YOU ARRIVE AT PAINTING THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY?

Not really. I had painted at first, but then I studied conceptual art with Timm Ulrichs at the Kunstakademie Münster [1996–2000]. Meanwhile, I also took photographs. After that, I focused on film for a while before continuing my studies at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with Albert Oehlen [2000–2003]. Still, I really only started painting again after my studies. In fact, I showed a couple of paintings at my thesis exhibition for the first time. Not all the responses were positive. However, in my mind I was going to embark on something new as soon as I graduated from the Academy. In fact, my art history professor was very critical and his parting words were a quote by Hermann Hesse. He said: "There is magic in every beginning", adding "and I don't see that in your case." I still enjoy thinking about that.

DO YOU EVER FEEL PRESSURED TO MEET EXPECTATIONS?

I will only focus on what I'm interested in and that means on things I don't already know. I don't like to repeat myself unless I use it as an aesthetic means. I definitely won't work in series. I have developed various techniques, which really spring from some kind of inability, from something that didn't work before. I don't draw and I don't imagine forms, for example. Instead, I arrive at a certain form after a while. If it works I know it in that

instant, but I wouldn't be able to envision it beforehand. In fact, if I could, I wouldn't be interested in painting it anymore. I only ever know what's missing. That's why I developed these techniques, which if they work, I won't repeat. I want to be surprised.

IS IT DIFFICULT BEING BACK IN THE STUDIO AFTER PREPARING FOR TWO COMPLEX SOLO EXHIBITIONS?

I enjoy that moment immensely when almost everything has been picked up and the studio is significantly emptier. However, there are still about fifty canvases left. These are works that haven't been resolved or in which certain things just didn't work or didn't reach far enough. Some works date back to 2011 and are waiting for the next step. In addition, I still have three more solo shows to think about this year with the next one coming up in June at Galerie Martin Janda in Vienna [*Svenja Deininger*, June 7 – July 22, 2017]. It's certainly not easy to find your way back after these projects and after having spent a week in Miami to organize the show, but it's still a time I enjoy. There is a sense of a new beginning and the overall rhythm of the work is a little bit different. The breathing during the process is different. I will admit that I slept in my studio the past two nights to re-acclimate myself. I wanted to wake up in the morning while being surrounded by the work, before doing or thinking about anything else.



BETTINA BLOHM

FEBRUARY 7, 2017
NEUKÖLLN, BERLIN

YOU WORK IN NEW YORK AND BERLIN, TRAVELING REGULARLY BACK AND FORTH. HOWEVER, EACH OF YOUR STUDIOS IS DEDICATED TO A DIFFERENT PURPOSE.

When I first set up my studio in Berlin in 2008, I immediately thought that I wanted to have a different kind of studio than in New York, where I'm focused on painting and have lots of daylight. My studio in Berlin is smaller in comparison and I only work on paper here. This allows me to concentrate on either drawing or painting for longer stretches of time.

DO YOUR WORKS IN BOTH MEDIUMS STILL INTERSECT OR DO YOU VIEW THEM AS SOMEWHAT SEPARATE, SELF-CONTAINED ENTITIES?

Both the works and thoughts intersect. In New York, I still make small sketches for paintings, for example, to note compositional ideas. As the painting progresses, I keep continuing to sketch. However, in Berlin I focus on independent drawing series. It's my time to think, develop new ideas, play around a bit, and essentially, to open up. This back and forth between working in two different media and traveling between two different cultures

with very different aesthetic predilections has been very good for my work.

YOUR MOST RECENT WORKS ON PAPER COMPLETED IN BERLIN HINT AT GEOMETRY, ALBEIT RENDERED WITH A FREE HAND RATHER THAN PRECISE TOOLS. THERE IS AN OVERALL RHYTHM ROOTED IN SQUARES, VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS. FROM WHERE DO YOU SOURCE YOUR COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS AND HOW DO YOU BRING THEM TOGETHER?

Originally, most of my ideas came from the landscape. In fact, I've been doing landscape drawings for about twenty-five years. So I think a lot of my sense of rhythm stems from there. Meanwhile, I use the grid as a basic structure, against which I set different ideas, be it the combination of two grids or particular shapes, for example.

MANY OF YOUR WORKS PONDER SUCH A PARTICULAR SHAPE, AS YOU CALL IT, IN DIFFERENT VARIATIONS. THE RESULTS EVOKE THEMES OF REPETITION, REFLECTION, AND TRANSITION.

In general, I'm interested in opposites. I often set up two different systems or two ideas that guide the composition in both my painting and drawing. Sometimes it's the same idea, but explored in two different scales. These parameters function like rules, against which I then like to push.

DOES THE SAME SET OF RULES DESCRIBE THE CORE OF AN ENTIRE GROUP OF WORKS, WHICH WILL THEN FUNCTION AS A SERIES?

Yes. I will usually get excited about a certain idea and I will subsequently play around with it, trying to develop different versions.

WHEN LOOKING AT YOUR MOST RECENT GROUP OF WORKS ON PAPER, ONE CAN TRACE A PARTICULAR STRUCTURE. EACH DRAWING IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE INTERPLAY OF SQUARE AND RECTANGULAR SHAPES ON A PLANE.

All of these works are in a vertical format, which is something I haven't really used for a long time. The vertical format always

suggests the figure in some ways, whereas a horizontal format evokes a landscape. I call them "Mosaikformen" ["Transitional Forms"]. In evolutionary biology, *Transitional Forms* define organisms that have characteristics of two different groups of organisms. So let's say birds and crocodiles originally had the same ancestor and hence, that ancestor had characteristics of both species. These new drawings are based on two systems. First, there is a grid made by four sections in height and three sections in width. I then divide that grid further, using a smaller scale. However, I don't draw the grid from top to bottom and left to right. Instead, I draw it in segments so that each segment of the grid begins to move against another. This process is evocative of handwriting and it invites irregularities. These two grids of different scale seem to lean on each other.

IT'S INTERESTING THAT THESE GRIDS SEEM TO BE IN FLUX, WHICH IS A QUALITY THAT'S USUALLY NOT ASSOCIATED WITH THESE STRUCTURES. IN YOUR WORK, THEY ALMOST APPEAR ORGANIC AND LESS ROOTED IN NOTIONS OF PREDICTABILITY AND STABILITY.

That's a very good point. It's kind of quirky and personal. If you think of a city grid, you associate it with a rigid infrastructure. I use it in the opposite way, as something that you can manipulate and that is alive. In addition, I may introduce a curvilinear line that weaves through the composition. If you look closely, you will find that it divides each square in half. I always need to establish some kind of rule or idea. Otherwise, I wouldn't know where to start; it would just be so accidental. I want there to be a certain truth I guess.

THERE IS A STRONG SENSE OF COMPOSITIONAL CLARITY, WHICH BECOMES HEIGHTENED BY THE RESTRICTED PALETTE.

The ground of these works is a light acrylic wash and I use black gouache on top. It is the contrast that establishes the lines of the two grids. The actual line drawing that sits on top is in

white pencil. It appears more fragile and nuanced than the stark contrast of the underlying forms. You can exactly see where this line stops and starts. Meanwhile, the matte, deep black of the gouache is very sensuous. In fact, you can trace every fingerprint on it.

DO YOU FOCUS ON ONE WORK AT A TIME OR DO YOU EXPLORE THESE IDEAS SIMULTANEOUSLY ON SEVERAL SURFACES?

One of the advantages drawings have is that you can work on them quickly and on one after the other. Generally, I will prepare several grounds before starting in charcoal on a group of drawings. If one doesn't work out I will throw it out. However, in painting, I tend to work on at least eight to ten paintings at a time, because you have to wait for each layer to dry. During that stage of having to wait, I will turn a painting around. In general, painting is just a much slower process.

COMPARED TO YOUR PAINTINGS, YOUR DRAWINGS APPEAR AS SOMEWHAT REDUCTIVE. IN FACT, WHEREAS YOUR PAINTINGS USUALLY EMBRACE A RANGE OF COLORS, YOUR DRAWINGS ARE OFTEN BLACK AND WHITE, MONOCHROME, OR LIMITED TO ONLY A COUPLE OF HUES. WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR DRAWINGS ARE MORE SIMPLIFIED IN ORDER TO FOCUS ON THE STRUCTURE OF FORM?

Yes. Drawing is really close to thinking, with the hand doing the thinking in a way. For centuries, painters have worked out compositional ideas or structural ideas in drawing first, before adding color, which is a richer medium.

DO YOU THINK OF COLOR AS ADDING AN EMOTIONAL COMPONENT?

No, it is its own language, like drawing. I think of it as comparable to singing, one has to have a gift for it. I don't like the idea of color adding an emotional aspect, because drawing can certainly be emotional on its own. Expressionist drawings, such as works by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner for example, are very emotional. In contrast, some painting can be rather analytical, such

as the work of Josef Albers. You can certainly play with cold and warm tones and use different colors to evoke certain emotions, but each individual will still experience them differently. Some people love black and others are scared of it. Color has to do with light and I think that different traditions of paintings have developed in countries, because of the light that you find there. The other day, I was looking at the paintings of Richard Diebenkorn, who was based in Los Angeles for much of his life. I remembered how disappointed I had been when I first discovered his work, because his colors seemed so washed out. I really only understood Diebenkorn's palette when I went to Los Angeles myself and experienced how strong the light is there; it fades the colors. Meanwhile, New York has beautiful light and I think that's part of the reason why there's a great colorist tradition there. In Germany, light, except maybe in the South, is not very good. I think that's one of the reasons why Germany has a great tradition in drawing, printmaking, and bookmaking. This certainly informed my decision to make primarily drawings in Berlin, which are reductive in color and line-based.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOUR VISION FOR YOUR BERLIN STUDIO WAS PARTIALLY INFORMED BY HOW YOU EXPERIENCE THE LARGER CULTURAL CONTEXT?

Yes, very much so, even though at first my decision was somewhat impulsive. I had been thinking about a drawing studio for a long time, simply because I can't really focus on works on paper in my painting studio.

IS THIS DUE TO THE FACT THAT FOR YOU, BOTH THESE MEDIUMS DISTRACT FROM EACH OTHER?

It's a good question. I once spent a month at a residency in Upstate New York, called Yaddo, and I only worked on drawings there. When I came back, I right away got myself a big table-top, thinking that I would continue to work on my drawings. It just didn't work. The paintings always took over. For me, both

mediums require a different space, not just physically but also mentally.

THOUGH YOU WERE BORN, RAISED AND STUDIED IN GERMANY, YOU HAVE LIVED IN THE UNITED STATES FOR A LONG TIME. NEVERTHELESS, YOU HAVE ALWAYS KEPT A STRONG CONNECTION TO EUROPE.

I have always visited regularly, perhaps twice a year, as I still have friends and family in Germany. I also show my work regularly here. However, for about twenty years I was predominantly in the US. I would say that I have a certain split in me, allowing me a distance to both cultures.

IN A WAY, YOU NEVER ARE TRULY AT HOME. YOU SIT BETWEEN TWO CHAIRS. IN GERMANY, YOU ARE THOUGHT OF AS AMERICANIZED AND IN THE US YOU ARE CONSIDERED GERMAN.

Exactly. It's very strange. When I first came to Berlin, some Germans even thought that I was an American, who happened to speak German very well. That was an interesting experience.

ABOVE, YOU DESCRIBED YOUR TIME IN YOUR BERLIN STUDIO AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO "OPEN UP" YOUR WORK. HOW HAS THIS AFFECTED YOUR PAINTINGS IN NEW YORK? DO YOU BRING BACK DRAWINGS MADE IN BERLIN TO NEW YORK TO DEVELOP THEM FURTHER OR TO EVEN TRANSLATE THEM INTO PAINTINGS?

Yes, I do and it has really clarified my thought. In general, I think that the linear, the drawing element has become more obvious in my painting. Whereas before, different shapes were described and defined by borders, now they are rooted in line. Color and line are the two main oppositions in my compositions and I try to keep them both independent. I don't use line as a mere outline, but as something that can establish its own structure, and the same is true for color.

YOUR WORK IS ABSTRACT AND YET, YOU HAVE AN INDEPENDENT, REGULAR PRACTICE OF LANDSCAPE DRAWING.

Yes. I have been doing landscape drawings since 1995, always working on site. In Berlin, these are often made while visiting the

city's many cemeteries. First, I went to different parks, but you usually encounter an atmosphere of entertainment there, which runs counter to the quality of timelessness and contemplation that I look for. I especially like a small World War II cemetery close to Südsterne, which doesn't have real graves, but just plates in the ground. These landscape drawings mark a separate group of work, which gives me a connection to the world. I certainly incorporate elements and ideas developed in these drawings into my abstract compositions, sometimes more directly and sometimes less.

DID YOU ALREADY FOCUS ON ABSTRACTION WHILE IN ART SCHOOL?

I went to art school in Munich and like most students tried different things. Basically, right after I finished in the mid-1980s, I came to New York. There, I switched from acrylic to oil, and began painting tree trunks at first. They were very large, telling of human intervention. After that I focused on architecture, figures, and landscapes. However, even as a figurative painter I was always leaning toward abstraction. Then, about eight years ago, my work became completely abstract. I had been resisting this step for a long time, but when I took it, there was a tremendous sense of liberation.

DUE TO ITS HISTORY IN ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM AND THE NEW YORK SCHOOL, ABSTRACT ART REMAINS AN IMPORTANT LANGUAGE IN NEW YORK. IN FACT, I WOULD ARGUE THAT IT IS THE MORE TRADITIONAL ONE. YOU CERTAINLY ARE AWARE OF THE GREAT ABSTRACT PAINTERS TO AN EXTENT THAT IT MIGHT FEEL OVERBEARING; YOU HAVE TO MEASURE UP TO THAT CANON.

Yes, exactly.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU WORK TOWARDS SOMETHING THAT IS ALREADY IN YOUR MIND SO THAT YOU ARE SIMPLY TRYING TO FIND A CONCRETE FORM FOR IT, OR DO YOU DEVELOP VISUALS STEP-BY-STEP AND SOMEWHAT UNCONSCIOUS?

I think it is different for drawing and painting. My painting is very process-oriented, so even though I start with certain ideas, it does develop over time. There is a kind of back and forth between trying to clarify the idea and then sort of messing it up again. Meanwhile, the drawings are more of a one-shot thing. While working on them, I can repeat the same idea again and again, inviting mistakes and slippages. The latter might even bring the work to somewhere completely new and unexpected. I don't have a certain goal, but I do feel that I have developed this language in abstraction that has provided me with a solid plateau. On it, I can move around and clarify things for myself.

WHAT MAKES A WORK SUCCESSFUL AND WHEN DO YOU DETERMINE THAT SOMETHING IS FINISHED?

Well, it's a strange thing with finishing a painting. You never really know whether it is finished or not. Sometimes, I'm really happy with something; however, as time goes on, it gradually gets less interesting. It can also work the other way around in that something that I was unsure of and had turned around suddenly gets really exciting when reviewed on a later date. In general, there will be a sense of resolution and clarity in a painting if I determine that the composition is complete. However, this decision can take months.

DOES THE SAME APPLY TO DRAWINGS OR IS IT EASIER TO ASSESS THEM?

It is similar, but as the drawings are finished faster, the overall process of deciding whether they are finished or not, does not take as long either.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT IT'S EASIER FOR YOU TO DETERMINE WHETHER A DRAWING IS SUCCESSFUL THAN A PAINTING?

I don't know, it is hard to judge your own work in terms of quality. I usually invite other artist friends to my studio when I have completed a new body of work. I like to listen to what they have to say in order to get an outside view. Sometimes, I

will photograph the work in order to look at it on the computer, which allows me a more remote look at it. Distance is important.

DO YOU USUALLY PREFER TO EXHIBIT DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS TOGETHER?

Yes. I do, because it provides a look into the work process. Also, as my works are interconnected, I do believe that my drawings help the viewer to understand my paintings and vice versa. I also like to see that kind of presentation for other artists' oeuvres.

TO VIEW A PAINTER'S DRAWINGS CAN FEEL LIKE STUDYING THE BONES OF THE COMPOSITION. IN ADDITION, DRAWINGS ARE OFTEN VERY PERSONAL, ALLOWING INTIMATE INSIGHT INTO THE THOUGHT THAT IS AT THE ROOT OF OBSERVATION. THINK OF GEORGES SEURAT'S AND VINCENT VAN GOGH'S BLACK AND WHITE DRAWINGS, FOR EXAMPLE, WHICH ARE INCREDIBLY EXPRESSIVE AND YET A DISTILLED CONCEPT FROM THEIR LUMINOUS PAINTINGS. DRAWINGS ARE OFTEN FREER, UNINHIBITED AND PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY RELATE TO HANDWRITING, ARE AKIN TO TAKING NOTES WITHOUT OVER-ANALYZING THE MOMENT.

Absolutely. In drawing, there is very little disturbance between your thought and your hand. It's wonderful. That's also the reason why you can still read something intuitively, even when it is culturally unfamiliar, which in my case might be Chinese calligraphy, for example. Drawing is both intimate and private.

WHAT WORKS BY OTHER ARTISTS ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Well, you go through periods when you look more at certain artists or genres. For a while, I looked specifically at Asian ink drawings. Matisse is important of course and Milton Avery and the Abstract Expressionists. Recently, there was an exquisite exhibition of Philip Guston's grey paintings, which I thought was just tremendous [*Philip Guston Painter, 1957 – 1967*, Hauser & Wirth, New York, April 26 – July 29, 2016]. I also went to Ravenna to look at the mosaics and of course, the Agnes Martin retrospective, which I saw both at the Tate in London and the

Berlin Studio Conversations

Guggenheim in New York [*Agnes Martin*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, October 7, 2016 – January 11, 2017], was very important to me. I also read a lot. All of it enters your thought and your language. In the end, I think of myself as a formalist, to whom ideas, thoughts, and content make a painting. I don't mean narrative content, but abstraction is a language that exposes thoughts about the world just as much as figuration. In the end, that is what really excites me.

DESPITE THIS FORMALISM, WOULD YOU STILL DESCRIBE YOUR WORK AS A QUEST FOR SELF-EXPLORATION? DO YOU VIEW YOUR PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS AS PART OF YOURSELF OR AS BEING INDEPENDENT ONCE THEY ARE COMPLETED?

I think that my works are about the world and its various aspects as it is seen through my temperament. I'm not interested in a personal or even diaristic position. My work is not about my habits, emotions, or about finding myself. However, it certainly embodies my point of view. Though I first paint for myself, I also paint for the world, for whoever might be interested in or connect with the work. Meanwhile, you're part of a long line of artists; you're in dialogue with living artists and those who came before you. This is of utmost importance, because like religion, all great art deals with the crucial questions of who we are as people.



SU-MEI TSE

JANUARY 12, 2017

MITTE, BERLIN

ONE IMMEDIATELY SENSES THE IMPORTANCE OF WORDS AND LANGUAGE IN MANY OF YOUR WORKS. WHERE DOES THIS INTEREST STEM FROM? IS IT PERHAPS ROOTED IN YOUR MULTI-NATIONAL BACKGROUND? YOU GREW UP IN LUXEMBOURG AS THE DAUGHTER OF TWO MUSICIANS, A CHINESE FATHER, AN ENGLISH MOTHER, AND WITH GERMAN AS YOUR FIRST LANGUAGE.

Language as a form of communication is an inspiring topic. It can be a struggle and handicap to grow up with an adoptive mother tongue and while feeling alienated from its cultural roots. It takes time to become familiarized with “your tongue”. German is a very interesting language, in which you can combine words, but it’s only now that I really appreciate growing up with it. Growing up in Luxembourg, my siblings and I designed our language rather freely. It was a mixture of German and Luxembourgish. Even though I don’t think of the latter as beautiful, it certainly can be precise in other ways. I felt comfortable being “in-between” French and German, two such different cultures, but rather nice when you can juggle freely

with one and the other. Overall, it was also a fascinating, yet not unproblematic interplay between Asian and European cultures. On the one hand, there was the Chinese language, which is rooted in pictures and is therefore more abstract. On the other hand, there was the precision of German. Meanwhile, our main base was music.

CONSIDERING THIS BACKGROUND, HOW AND WHEN DID YOU DECIDE THAT IT WAS A VISUAL LANGUAGE, RATHER THAN MUSIC OR LITERATURE THAT COULD MOST NATURALLY COMMUNICATE YOUR IDEAS?

It's difficult to say exactly as it developed over time. In Luxembourg, school is very present in order to teach children all three languages on a high level. In addition, my siblings and I studied music at the conservatory. I wasn't able to do much else outside of these activities and hence, other interests mainly developed after I had graduated from high school and arrived in Paris.

WERE YOU DRAWN TO A SPECIFIC MEDIUM AS SOON AS YOU BEGAN FOCUSING ON VISUAL ART?

At first, I worked pretty isolated and I wasn't really comfortable with technical drawing and the expectation of making sketches throughout the day. However, I always took notes. I would see a situation that I found interesting and I would write down thoughts related to that. I would use words, but also have very concrete images or a sound in my head. The question was how to translate these impressions and it was then, that technical aspects became important. It's not like I had an idea and thought that this would have to be expressed in video or photography, for example. For instance, I find it very difficult to define a work as installation or photography, because to me, these are very closely related. I can't really distinguish the line between them; it has more to do with texture or a moment in time. If I work on a sound, it often is in order to relate to an image.

WHEN YOU REFER TO AN "IMAGE", DO YOU MEAN AN IMPRESSION,

A VISUAL THAT IS ACCOMPANIED BY A CERTAIN FEELING AND ATMOSPHERE?

Exactly. It is something, which appears to me like a flash and at that moment I know pretty precisely what the upcoming "thing" has to look like.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE PROCESS REFLECTS YOUR ATTEMPT TO GET AS CLOSE TO THIS ORIGINAL IDEA AS POSSIBLE, WHILE OVERCOMING THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY THE MATERIALS. WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS TO TRANSLATE THE IDEA INTO A PHYSICAL FORM, WHICH CAN ONLY APPROXIMATE BUT NEVER PERFECTLY CAPTURE THE FORMER?

It is a challenge, yes, because the conceptual and technical path to purity and simplicity is often accompanied by obstacles. In the end, technique should disappear to allow for the focus on the essence of and to feel the radiance of the piece. Until a few years ago, this translation of an idea into a physical form was rather difficult for me. Now, the conceptual phase of the work, when I'm taking my notebook to write down thoughts, is much lighter and emotional. A thousand things will come together and eventually, I decide to grasp something specific and give it a physical form. However, the practical aspect of my work can be a challenge, especially when having to organize and communicate details. My partner, Jean-Lou, is a big help in that regard. It takes a certain mastery of materials, to realize some of these ideas.

WOULD YOU CONFIRM THAT YOU ARE PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN THE IDEA AND THAT ITS TRANSLATION INTO A PHYSICAL FORM EMBODIES THE ATTEMPT TO COMMUNICATE IT WITH OTHERS? FOR THIS PURPOSE YOU WILL ENLIST THE HELP OF OTHERS, WHO ARE SPECIALIZED IN AND HAVE MASTERED THE MATERIALS INVOLVED?

Yes, I work with various people during that process, but especially with my partner, because we know each other well and I don't have to explain much to him; there is trust and the same

aesthetic sense. Often it also has to do with a certain scale and dialogue with the space.

ARE THERE WORKS WITHIN YOUR OEUVRE THAT YOU WOULD CONSIDER MOST SUCCESSFUL? PERHAPS THEY REFLECT IDEAS THAT OCCUR REPEATEDLY OVER TIME OR WERE PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING IN THEIR REALIZATION?

It's a difficult question to answer, but it certainly has nothing to do with the technical aspects of the work. In the beginning, my work was rooted in my experiences in music education and my understanding of music as a unique language. In fact, music signified a language, which I understood well and which I could use naturally and honestly. That's how video works like "L'écho" ["The Echo"] (2003) or "Das Wohltemperierte Klavier" ["The Well-Tempered Piano"] (2001) developed.

DID YOU FOCUS ON A SPECIFIC INSTRUMENT IN YOUR MUSIC EDUCATION?

Yes, on the cello. At first, I separated music from fine arts. I was studying visual art at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, while also playing a lot of chamber music with musicians at the conservatory. Every time I had music exams, I would focus on my artwork. It was in tandem. It's when I was supposed to concentrate on one of them that I needed to reach out to the other as well. Eventually, I started to combine music and art. It also had to do with time. In music, if you want to work on your perfect tone, you have to practice for many hours every day, leaving not much time for anything else. If you are a passionate musician that is something you thrive on, but it wasn't that interesting to me. It meant that I would have to be too focused in one specific direction. I still believe that it is easier to experience extreme emotions, such as true delight through music rather than through conceptual art. Music is an art form that when it is performed on the highest level, can connect deeply and immediately, giving you goose bumps. However, my ideas are derived from images

and textures, contemplating how they can express different emotions that are in constant dialogue. I also aim to create a certain sense of distance, as I am not interested in autobiographical exploration.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE IDEA IS CENTRAL AND MEANT TO RESONATE INDEPENDENTLY WITH THE VIEWER. YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUR WORK AS PART OF A PERSONAL SELF-EXPLORATION.

Even when I have a performative role in a work, I never think of that figure as a representation of myself. Instead, I stand in for a general he, she, or it. Though I intend to express something that is personally meaningful to me, I also try to bring it into a universal context, sharing personal emotions rather than a narration about my life. In some ways, my works reflect my ambition to free myself from the conditioning that I was subjected to during my music education. Along these lines, "L'écho" was very meaningful to me. It's a large video projection, which embodies the interplay between music and breathing in nature. Visually, it references Asian landscape painting. You see a mountainous landscape contrasted with the small figure of a musician, who is turning her back to the viewer. She is playing the cello in response to her own echo, which is the sound that keeps bouncing back to her because of this particular setting. The work is about free improvisation and the composition I'm playing was sparked in the moment. I did not plan anything ahead. Because of the slight delay of the echo, a dialogue could take place.

THIS LAYERED CALL AND RESPONSE BECOMES A CANON.

Exactly. In Chinese painting you often find this kind of contrast between a small human figure and a monumental landscape. In "L'écho", nature answers back in its full grandeur and power, as well as with a rich tone. Meanwhile, the cello is a very natural instrument, especially in how it relates to the human body. The musician embraces it and the tone is very warm and full. I have

to say, it is a tone that remains very influential, especially when I work with wood for example.

YOU HAVE ALSO CREATED WORKS THAT ARE SPARKED BY AND ARE ABOUT MUSIC, BUT WHICH HAVE NO SOUND.

Yes. In 2009, I made “Goldberg Variationen (1955/1981)” in collaboration with Jean-Lou. Glenn Gould’s interpretations and recordings of Johann Sebastian Bach’s composition of 1741 inspired it. Gould first recorded the Goldberg Variations in 1955 when he was young. It is utterly vibrant, full of life and fast. Shortly before he died, in 1981, he recorded it again and it has a very different feeling. It is exaggeratedly slow but deep, mature and wise, taking time for each moment, each note. After years of studying Bach, you feel the connection between both, as if composer and interpreter have become one. I think of Gould as conceptual, because he decided at some point to no longer perform to live audiences and to only strive for perfection in the studio. Control was very important to him and yet, his interpretations are incredibly personal; sometimes you can even hear him singing along. Because of the precision of the recording, every breath of air, every expression of emotion becomes heightened. My work “Goldberg Variationen (1955/1981)” is made of walnut wood, which is very warm. The piece consists of a lot of individual parts that are attached to each other, like the keys of a piano. They reflect the sound waves of the two different recordings.

DID YOU WORK ON THESE SEGMENTS WHILE LISTENING TO GOULD’S RECORDINGS?

I had the recordings in my head and worked with them visually. “Goldberg Variationen (1955/1981)” is evocative of sheet music, tone, and texture. At the same time, it is very quiet and still. It appears very settled as it is laid out on the floor.

WAS THAT THE REASON WHY YOU DECIDED TO HAVE IT VIEWED FROM ABOVE RATHER THAN FRONTALLY? MOUNTING IT ON A WALL WOULD HAVE MADE FOR A MORE TRADITIONAL VIEWING.

Right, it was about creating an opposition. I used something that is very well known or can be listened to if one isn’t familiar with it. There is a distinct resonance and it has stayed with me after having worked on this piece. “Goldberg Variationen (1955/1981)” is about free musical emotion and expression, but translated into a very concrete form and with particular materials.

YOUR WORK AIMS TO MAKE SOMETHING CONCRETE THAT AT FIRST GLANCE SEEMS TO DEFY THAT POSSIBILITY. YOU ARE SPEAKING OF EMOTIONS, SOUNDS, AND SENSATIONS THAT ARE EPHEMERAL, TRANSIENT, FLEETING. HOWEVER, YOU ARE NOT ONLY ATTEMPTING TO PROVIDE THEM WITH A FORM BUT ALSO TO ESTABLISH A LANGUAGE WITH THE HELP OF WHICH WE CAN DISCUSS THEM. YOU ARE CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZING A LARGER EXHIBITION AND SHOWING YOUR WORK IN DEPTH WILL MARK AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT BOTH INDIVIDUAL POSITIONS AND A COHESIVE LANGUAGE.

True. I’m currently working on a large solo exhibition at MUDAM in Luxembourg [*Su-Mei Tse*, Musée d’Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, October 7, 2017 – April 8, 2018], which will then be further presented in some variation at the Aargauer Kunsthau in Aarau, Switzerland, from May to August 2018. In addition, there are currently plans to bring the exhibition to Asia in 2019.

IS THERE AN OVERARCHING THEME FOR THIS PROJECT?

It will be about traveling, both mentally and physically, while using memories and traces from important stages in my life. These are related to geographical places, including in Japan as well as Italy, where I once completed a one-year residency in Rome. These experiences will interact with references I feel close to, and I try to share these emotions in the spirit of a big collage with overlapping themes rather than creating a clear structure. If you look at my notebook, which I published a few years ago, you will see that I’m working on everything parallel. It’s not

necessarily structured in a chronological way. That's why it's hard for me to answer when someone asks me what I'm currently working on. I can easily go back to a work from 2006, if it represents a theme that I'm still developing.

YOUR NOTEBOOKS COMBINE VISUALS WITH WRITTEN IDEAS, OR IN OTHER WORDS, SOURCES OF INSPIRATION AND CONTEMPLATIONS. Writing is important to me, as well as references, such as a sentence, a word or a quote. The reverberation of a word is very poetic, for example. To me, poetry describes something that is hard to grasp. I work much more freely since I no longer feel the pressure to put all my thoughts into one work. Instead, I will focus on one element at a time, expressing it in a work that can remain open. I trust the viewer and don't believe that a work needs to be read in one specific way only.

YOU HAVE REPEATEDLY TALKED ABOUT SOUND. ONE WORK THAT WAS INSPIRED BY ONE THAT MOST PEOPLE HAVE AN IMMEDIATE ASSOCIATION WITH IS "WHITE NOISE" (2009).

Yes, it is based on a specific sound that is very important to me: the crackling that you find in the beginning and at the end of an LP record. It is a sound that has been pretty much eliminated these days, because of this constant search for perfection. However, for me, it is this kind of texture that provides the whole with volume and life. It is also the time, this moment full of expectation before something starts which inspires me.

DO YOU STILL LISTEN TO YOUR MUSIC ON RECORDS?

Yes, sometimes. It has a unique depth of tone. I also like the embedded gesture very much. When listening to records, you are physically engaged. In "White Noise" I was trying to express the state of anticipation that you experience when you have dropped the needle onto the vinyl and the crackling begins. In German, we have this verb "lauschen" or in French "tender l'oreille" which describe a form of intense, concentrated listening. It's difficult to translate. It's about focusing your ear on something with

expectation, while also hinting at an air of secrecy; you have to listen carefully. "White Noise" is a silent piece, which captures this crackling sound visually by giving a form to the specks of dust that are largely responsible for it. Set up on a simplified wooden turntable, you see the record, on top of which white balls of varying sizes appear permanently attached. They reflect the dust particles that one always tries to brush off. In this case they become the center of attention and seem evocative of a planetary constellation.

THERE IS A SENSE OF INTERDEPENDENCY BETWEEN ALL ELEMENTS, WHILE THE SPACING OF THESE BALLS ALSO SUGGESTS A SENSE OF RHYTHM.

"White Noise" certainly reflects another ongoing topic, namely breathing. Back when my father used to practice with me, he always stressed the importance of breathing. If you are tense, no tone or sense of true expression can arise. Breathing is essential and you need it to develop a language that is honest despite the inherent technical challenges.

THIS LANGUAGE YOU DESCRIBE CAN AID IN PAYING HOMAGE TO SOMETHING THAT IS INVISIBLE AND YET, CONCRETE, SUCH AS THE CRACKLING SOUND ON A LP.

True, it is an homage of sorts. It deals with the traces that have left a mark and which therefore become material to work with. When I have a theme that I consider perfect, such as that crackling record sound, I will play with it freely; it also helps if most people already have a memory of it.

FOR SOME, THE MEMORY OF THE CRACKLING SOUND MIGHT BE RATHER EMOTIONAL ESPECIALLY AS IT IS SOMETHING WE CONNECT WITH THE PAST AND WHICH HAS ALMOST VANISHED FROM OUR DAILY LIVES.

Although you just never know what might happen. Think about the Internet, for example, and how because of it, books and the touch of a page have regained meaning, leading to a retrospective

discovery or a new consideration of something that was formerly well known. Books or the crackling sound belong to a particular time that is still within our grasp, not too far in the past; we still have childhood memories of it. It becomes a personal phantom of sorts.

YOU EXPLORED SOMETHING SIMILAR IN “SWING” (2007).

“Swing” is a kinetic sculpture made of regular neon tubes. It’s very minimal in its stylistic rendition, not unlike a drawing. It was shown in several locations, such as in a historically charged room at the Singapore Biennial (2008) or in the staircase of a museum. The atmosphere and vibration of the space are part of the piece, showing the swing moving slowly from one side to the other, like a metronome. There is the illusion of someone just having gotten up and walked away from it, leaving a pulse, an aura. Like “White Noise” it’s a simple object, which triggers memories. The whole work deals with notions of presence and absence.

THESE ARE CONCEPTS THAT ARE AGAIN EMOTIONALLY CHARGED. IT IS INTERESTING TO ME THAT YOU FIND A SIMPLE, POIGNANT AND ELEGANT FORM FOR VERY SPECIFIC IDEAS. YOU HAVE MENTIONED THE NECESSITY FOR THE PRECISION OF BOTH CONTEMPLATION AND ITS EXPRESSION. HOWEVER, YOUR WORK ALLOWS PLENTY OF ROOM FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERPRETATION AND RESONANCE. IN THAT IT EMBRACES FREE ECLECTICISM MORE THAN PRECISION.

I learned about freedom through an interesting course on experimental film, which I took in Paris once. Years later, when I was working on a video, I remembered a film by Stan Brakhage with a perfect sound in correlation with images. I began to research how Brakhage might have worked with the sound in order to keep it so vividly ingrained in my memory. What I discovered was that the particular film I remembered had no sound at all. It was due to the strong images, their texture and rhythm that I had experienced a very personal sound, which was what had

stayed with me. That made me realize that I don’t always have to complete what I want to express or what the work is about. What I do is to create little stages for human emotions, which will not be shown overtly however. I try to keep my work open; I don’t over-analyze and plan my work. In the case of “Swing”, I wanted to talk about a particular feeling of absence by showing it as a simple, white light object. Everyone will experience the result differently; it might evoke sadness or melancholia in some, and happiness in others. That depends on the individual. I am curious about this exchange of different emotions.

WHEN YOU PREPARE A COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION AS THE ONE YOU ARE CURRENTLY WORKING ON, HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT COMBINING DIFFERENT THEMES AND ORGANIZING SUBJECTS?

On the one hand, I am inspired to realize the new ideas that I am currently working on, while going back to previous themes and references. In the past, I thought that I needed to find a common denominator, especially as I was working in different media, such as sculpture, objects, and photography. I thought that this would be necessary to show that a larger theme was being explored. Now that I trust the viewer, I have learned to let go and move more freely. I will just make the works. To coordinate them is like a composition; works that are sparked by a similar theme don’t necessarily have to go into the same room. It becomes a *parcours* or a *salle de lecture*. Notations might come in the form of an object, a picture, or a word, and I will choreograph them in hindsight. The dialogue with the curator who has a more distant view on my work is also of great importance when deciding on how the different instruments could play together. It’s a question of nuances.

IT SOUNDS LIKE A COLLAGE AND I THINK THAT’S A TERM THAT CAN DESCRIBE YOUR VARIOUS EXPERIENCES AND YOUR WORK AT LARGE: IT IS A COMING TOGETHER OF INTERESTS AND MATERIALS ON A SHARED PLANE.

Berlin Studio Conversations

Yes. I try to clarify all these different thoughts that are going through my head – first for myself and then, for others. I have to accept that in order to make them comprehensible, I have to organize them in layers, pluses and minuses. However, one has to also embrace the fact that one cannot understand everything. In fact, this often leads to impressions and sensations that can be much more interesting than what one had originally intended to say. It's this coming together that can lead to an entirely new meaning, not unlike some words in the German language that are made by combining two separate nouns, for example.

THESE ARE BOTH NAMES FOR SOMETHING, AS WELL AS DESCRIPTIONS.

Yes. On the one hand these words are aiming to be precise on the other hand they are descriptive and hence, an approximation. There also is humor in this lining up of different words. In fact, it's important to not take oneself too seriously. Especially if you work with historic references and if your work is conceptual, you need to reintroduce a sense of lightness. You have to make sure that if you talk about breathing, the breath also remains in the work. The work cannot become a forced discourse.



TARA MAHAPATRA

JANUARY 11, 2017
MITTE, BERLIN

ALTHOUGH YOU ARE BASED IN BERLIN, YOU REGULARLY MOVE PART OF YOUR STUDIO PRACTICE TO A NEW CITY FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AT A TIME. YOU ARE CURRENTLY BASED IN BOTH BERLIN AND SOUTHERN FRANCE, FOR EXAMPLE. DO YOU ALWAYS BRING WORKS-IN-PROGRESS WITH YOU IN ORDER TO KEEP YOUR TRAIN OF THOUGHT?

No, I don't, because I don't have any works-in-progress in that sense. My drawings develop in one moment, meaning I will draw until the work is finished. If it is successful I will keep it and if not, it gets discarded, but I can't go back into a previous work to complete it. Each drawing is rooted in one flowing movement. Even if I think that something is missing when I view the work some days later, I wouldn't be able to reach back into this original and very particular energy. It wouldn't have the same harmony and appear out of synch.

YOU SPEAK OF A FLOWING MOVEMENT AND YOU CHOOSE YOUR MATERIALS ACCORDINGLY. YOU USUALLY USE BLACK OR OTHER

INK AGAINST A WHITE GROUND. ESPECIALLY OCHER ALLOWS FOR A SPECTRUM OF SHADES.

Yes, I especially like the range of light that I can get with ocher, which I only started to use fairly recently. It was last year while in New York for several months, when I suddenly wanted a warmer tone. Before that, I had only worked in black and white, as I like the intensity of that contrast very much. However, with ocher you can get various nuances of color, ranging from a light yellow to a dark earth tone. In addition, it is wonderful to draw with color, because you are just full with it afterwards. Now, I like to go back and forth.

IT IS INTERESTING THAT YOU EQUATE COLOR WITH NATURAL ELEMENTS, SUCH AS LIGHT AND EARTH. LIGHT CERTAINLY INTRODUCES ITS OWN SENSE OF MOVEMENT. COMBINED WITH THE ECHOING LINES IN YOUR COMPOSITIONS, THIS MAKES FOR A STRONG SENSE OF DYNAMISM. DO YOU THINK OF YOUR WORK AS CAPTURING TRACES OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE MATERIAL AND YOUR HAND OR DO YOU GIVE IT SYMBOLIC MEANING?

I am trying to visualize a vital force, which the French philosopher Henri Bergson described as *élan vital* in his book *Creative Evolution* (1907). I aim to illustrate it through the use of curvilinear lines and repeating arches, which are bundled into flowing forms and spaces. It is important to me that everything is always in motion.

YOUR COMPOSITIONS DO NOT SEEM CONTAINED WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS OF THE PICTURE FRAME. ONE CAN EASILY IMAGINE THAT YOUR LINES AND FORMS EXPAND FAR BEYOND THE EDGES OF THE PAPER. IN THAT THEY CAN APPEAR AS GLIMPSES OR FRAGMENTS OF A LARGER IMAGE. IS IT YOUR INTENTION TO ALLOW FOR A SENSE OF INFINITY?

Yes, it is, because I am suggesting that everything at all times is part of a larger stream. There is always development in my drawings; I like Goethe's idea that life's elements are in a constant

state of transition and morphing. According to him, this is due to an underlying, universal energy, which he called *Bildekräfte* [*Formative Forces*]. These forces are responsible for creating forms in all their stunning variety. Heraclitus wrote of something similar as early as 500 BC. He said that nothing endures but change: Everything is constantly shifting, changing and becoming something other to what it was before. He insisted on ever-present change as being the fundamental essence of the universe. These are all ideas that I try to capture in my work. My forms originate in the moment I draw them. There is not a preconceived image I follow. Instead, I am interested in describing the process through which forms begin to materialize.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU ALSO TRY TO VISUALIZE TIME, THE TIME IT TAKES FOR THESE SPECIFIC FORMS TO MANIFEST?

Yes. Showing time as duration adds the fourth dimension to width, height, and length. I try to introduce the dimension of time into my work by allowing a glimpse of the time it took to have these forms develop. I use curvilinear lines, for example, which twist around their own axis, unfolding into space. It is a snapshot of a moment and yet, the single lines enable the viewer to gain a sense of the time that was involved in the creative process. If you talk about the themes of becoming and change, you have to include the aspect of time.

DO YOU RELATE YOUR DRAWINGS TO EACH OTHER IN THE SENSE THAT YOU MIGHT VIEW A SUBSEQUENT WORK AS A CONTINUUM OF A PREVIOUS ONE?

Yes. If I draw the whole day, I will hang up the works that I like best at the end. I will review these the next day, after having gained some distance. Then, I start grouping or re-arranging them. It's not unlike composing, but all of these works have to stem from the same workflow.

DO YOU USUALLY SHOW YOUR WORKS IN GROUPS?

I do, especially in order to clarify what my intentions and what

my themes are. I said earlier that I wouldn't go back into a completed drawing on a later date. However, I might see gaps in a body of related drawings and I will continue to make related works if I feel that there is something left to say.

YOUR THEMES ARE UNIVERSAL, BUT DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR WORKS ALSO REFLECT SOMETHING INTIMATE AND PERSONAL, SUCH AS YOUR MOOD AT THE TIME OF MAKING THEM?

They do reflect moods, but not in the sense that they capture my emotional disposition of the day or any particular feelings. In my drawings, I translate my particular sensation of the vital force, and that sensation is very intimate and personal.

WHEN DID YOU START FOCUSING ON THIS CONCEPT?

It goes back to my studies. I had always drawn a lot, but during my education I started to focus on sculpture. However, I became increasingly dissatisfied with the medium as I found it too definitive and concrete. In drawing, I am much freer, especially as my forms are not delineated and have no separation to what surrounds them. My last three-dimensional work was made of soft lead rods, which you could find all over East Berlin after the Wall had come down. Because they were poisonous, they were being removed from the houses. I took some and attached plaster blocks on each end of the rod as heads and feet. I installed them and they measured about two to three meters in height. In the course of several hours, the sculptures started to slowly bend until they suddenly crashed to the ground, bursting the plaster blocks.

YOU INTRODUCED THE ELEMENTS OF TIME AND MOVEMENT TO YOUR SCULPTURE.

It wasn't planned. I made the works, left the studio, and when I came back, the coffee maker was shattered into pieces. So I started making a group of five sculptures and filmed the process. I edited the footage to add a sense of drama. Since then, I continue to make films, occasionally drawing in front of the camera

as well. At times, I have even worked with aspects of animation. I have projected a film onto a wall, for example, and drawn into it in order to explore another layer. In general, I like to exhibit my drawings and films together, also to provide some insight into the creative process and the time it takes.

THE LINES IN YOUR COMPOSITIONS STRIKE ME AS DETERMINED; THEY ARE APPLIED QUICKLY AND WITH FORCE.

Yes, I draw with a lot of momentum, which charges the lines with intensity. The thick bamboo pen that I use, allows me to apply a relatively large amount of ink. My films show how the ink runs from its tip.

BY USING A BAMBOO PEN RATHER THAN PENCIL, YOU GIVE UP SOME CONTROL. ON THE ONE HAND YOU CAN DRAW A PRECISE LINE, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, IT'S HARD TO PREDICT HOW MUCH INK WILL POUR OUT AND ONTO THE PAPER.

I wouldn't call it control, but I have drawn with bamboo pens for so long that I can pretty much predict the amount of speed that is needed for the kind of gestural release and overall purpose that I am after. This allows me to play freely with the medium. However, there is certainly an element of surprise involved as well. I also occasionally use pencils and thick oil pastels, but it is the flowing quality of ink that translates my intentions best. Also, I enjoy it the most. With ink, the line itself flows along with the movements of my hand. Meanwhile, the drips that occur through gesture add an expressive element, which can also indicate a sense of direction to the viewer. To me, some of them seem like remnants of a centrifugal force.

DUE TO THE VARIATIONS IN THE FLOW OF THE INK, YOUR LINES CAN EITHER APPEAR OPAQUE, TRANSLUCENT, THICK, OR THIN, ADDING AN OVERALL SENSE OF THREE-DIMENSIONALITY.

That's true and it reminds me of modeling a sculpture.

SO FAR, YOU HAVE PREFERRED A MEDIUM FORMAT THAT IMMEDIATELY RELATES TO THE BODY; IT IS LARGE ENOUGH TO HINT AT AN

EXPANSE WHILE IT CAN ALSO BE EASILY GRASPED AND CAREFULLY STUDIED.

I actually just started to work on a larger piece and I have ordered several rolls of paper that will allow me to continue that exploration. The works I envision will measure about four meters high, but will be relatively narrow, less than 2 meters wide. I intend to show them in groups of three, perhaps as triptychs.

DO YOU WORK WITH THE PAPER ATTACHED TO THE WALL?

I draw on the ground. This way I can make larger movements with my arm. I'm really looking forward to working at this scale so that new forms and spaces can develop.

SOME OF YOUR DRAWINGS INTRODUCE A HUMAN FIGURE, ALBEIT RATHER ABSTRACTLY. IT IS RENDERED WITH MANY OVERLAPPING LINES, SUGGESTING A VOLUME RATHER THAN OUTLINING A SPECIFIC SHAPE. WHY DO YOU INTRODUCE A FIGURATIVE ELEMENT INTO AN OTHERWISE ABSTRACT COMPOSITION? DO YOU INTEND TO PROVIDE THE VIEWER WITH A SPECIFIC POINT OF ENTRY?

Yes, I do. I am interested in depicting the interior streams and liquidity within the human body. That's why I render it as an open shape in motion. I am not interested in depicting individuals and I don't make any indication of gender, color of the skin, or age, for example. I am also not looking to reflect any personal emotions. Instead, I am focused on the universal experience and an interconnectedness that is shared by all human beings. I feel that I am in constant dialogue with my surroundings; there is an exchange when I enter a coffee shop for example, and people are simply looking up. Also, there is an exchange with the general atmosphere in that coffee shop; I have an effect on it and it affects me at the same time. In general, I don't perceive the body, as you would see it reflected in a mirror, with skin functioning as the border to the exterior. I look at the figure as something that is constantly changing and I try to illustrate this by introducing it into these fluid spaces. To me, the figure is able to indicate a

direction of movement, and I imagine that one could lean into this stream or the other, and let oneself be carried by it. It is not crucial that the viewer understands conceptually what I am after, but it is important to me to convey this sense of motion so that it can be experienced intuitively, perhaps even physically.

IN YOUR COMPOSITIONS, EVERYTHING IS IN FLUX AND YET, THERE IS USUALLY A CENTER OR A HANDFUL OF DISTINCT INTERSECTIONS, WHERE ALL THE DYNAMIC LINES OVERLAP AND GET BUNDLED.

I use this as a device to build tension and to describe a place where the space begins to expand. It is important that the established space responds to something specific. These intersections could be viewed as an atom, molecule, or gathered force. It also could represent the presence of a human figure.

YOU OFTEN CITE LITERATURE AND SCIENCE AS YOUR SOURCES OF INSPIRATION.

I am fascinated by various scientific studies and I have read a lot about quantum physics, which questions Isaac Newton's mechanistic view of the universe. I am curious about how new concepts of the universe can change the generally acknowledged worldview and further, how long it takes for scientists to accept these. Usually, many scientists resist anything radically new and it takes a long time until this kind of information trickles down so that the layman can read about it as well.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOUR EXPLORATION OF INFINITELY MORPHING SPACES AND STREAMS OF ENERGY IS BOTH VISUAL AS WELL AS LITERARY. WOULD YOU CONFIRM THAT YOUR WORK IS NOT INTUITIVE BUT RATHER BASED ON YOUR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH?

No, it is both. My drawing process is completely intuitive. And the subject matter always ponders both, how I perceive my surroundings and how others have described it. I have studied Spinoza in depth, among others, and am curious about the similarities you can find between his views and the many-worlds

interpretation of quantum mechanics, for example. The latter is gaining more and more ground these days among physicists, as it brings some sense back into the seemingly mysterious and nonsensical quantum world with its wave functions. It asserts that there are many universes; everything that could possibly have happened in our past, but did not, has occurred in the past of some other universe. There is the concept that each moment embodies many possibilities of how something can unfold and that in fact each one does – somehow, somewhere. How could one imagine an infinite expansion of these infinite moments, which each person experiences? It's fun to try. The follow-up question is how one could visualize these contemplations on a two-dimensional sheet of paper. When I read philosophical texts I always sketch as well.

ARE THESE SKETCHES BASED ON NOTES OR ARE THEY ABSTRACT VISUALS?

Both. To me, drawing represents a particular way of thinking. If I draw a concept I have to be able to imagine it. Sketching clears up ideas for me, it helps me think things through. I enjoy trying to find a visual interpretation for something that is almost unimaginable and which can't be pictured; I like to put something on paper nevertheless.

ARE THERE ANY ARTISTS OR BODIES OF WORK THAT ARE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Alberto Giacometti has fascinated me for a long time, especially his drawings. I am intrigued by the fact that his spaces and figures have no clear boundaries. They are not delineated and yet, they are not porous either. They are concrete in a unique way. His work reflects how I perceive things as well. It's because his forms and figures reach into their surrounding space that they seem alive and animated.

IS THERE A PARTICULAR PROJECT OR INSTALLATION THAT YOU HOPE TO REALIZE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

I would like to make an installation with the new large drawings in a space with very high ceilings. I would show them together with a film, but this time working with 16mm film rather than a digital camera. I like the aesthetic of film, how it is projected, as well as the fact that film plays with light and dark on various levels. It has a very different presence in an installation.

IT SOUNDS TO ME LIKE YOU ENJOY CREATING A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT MEDIA YOU EMPLOY. YOUR PRINTS HAVE A CLOSE KINSHIP WITH DRAWINGS, FOR EXAMPLE.

I recently completed three series of twenty prints each, called "Metamorphosis Series". I used the etching needle to go back into the black lines of each print in order to bring back the light. This process makes each of these works unique, the image changes slightly from print to print. They reflect my interest in metamorphosis and the possibilities of change.

WHEN IS A WORK ESPECIALLY CHALLENGING OR AT WHAT POINT DO YOU DEEM IT UNSUCCESSFUL?

The biggest challenge is to be absolutely concentrated. It takes a certain kind of aggressive focus to confront the white paper and add the first mark. Meanwhile, you also have to listen to the drawing and follow the line. When I draw it, I see the moment when it manifests, as well as where it is going next. I enjoy that immensely. However, I have to be focused, because otherwise the vitality of the line and the overall intensity is off. Every drawing that I keep must have true harmony at its core. If there is any sense of dissonance or hesitation, I will discard the work.

DO YOU HAVE A SPECIFIC ROUTINE OR RITUAL THAT WILL GET YOU INTO THIS STATE OF COMPLETE CONCENTRATION? DO YOU HAVE TO SIT AND LOOK FOR A WHILE WHEN YOU GET TO THE STUDIO OR CAN YOU GO STRAIGHT TO WORK?

Back in the day, it took indeed longer to become calm. Now it's much faster. I come to the studio and am pretty concentrated.

That's also based on the fact that I have become calmer as a person and happier.

IS THERE EVER A MOMENT WHEN YOU FEAR THE EMPTY SHEET OF PAPER?

No. It's always an exciting moment, which I love. Even though I know the theme I want to draw, it's only while working, that I see how it will translate visually, how the curves will unfold and what the overall form will look like. I will sit with the bamboo pen and ink in front of the paper until I feel an impulse and that's when I begin. It is the beginning of something of which I don't know where it will lead.

ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO, THE MUSEUM KURHAUS KLEVE INVITED YOU TO PRESENT YOUR WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR COLLECTION, INCLUDING MANY WORKS BY JOSEPH BEUYS [TARA MAHAPATRA: *IN THE DARK OF LIGHT*, OCTOBER 10, 2014 – JANUARY 25, 2015]. WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROJECT AND DID YOU CREATE NEW WORKS FOR IT?

In 2014, the Kunststiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen invited me to exhibit at the Museum Kurhaus Kleve on the occasion of their twenty-fifth anniversary. The building is a former sanatorium, where Beuys had his studio for six years. In preparation for this project, I began to research Beuys thoroughly. I found out that he had filled four sketchbooks during his time there, which already contained everything that he would develop further later on. I copied these sketchbooks in the Beuys Archive, following his lines and thought processes carefully. He often referred to Goethe's *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790) and vital forces, for example. Goethe made extensive notes on the growth of plants, speaking of expansions and contractions. For example, growing leaves are always in a spiral form so that all of them can be exposed to the light. I made a lot of drawings inspired by these ideas, showing a spiraling form that expands into space. I'm still working with this concept today. I'm interested in the fact that

this notion of growth and expansion, this *élan vital*, causes the dissolution of stagnant forms. It describes the energy that is the essence of being alive, and I continue to explore its various layers on multiple levels.



ANGELA BULLOCH

JANUARY 11, 2017
CHARLOTTENBURG, BERLIN

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR MEDIUM AS SCULPTURE RATHER THAN MIXED MEDIA INSTALLATION?

Yes, I make physical kinds of works, which have an immediate presence. They are very different from a projected image of a work, a video, photograph, or something digital online. I also make music, although I usually think of that as sculpture as well. Music doesn't have a physical form, but it has a feeling and it fills the space. In fact, it delineates the space and therefore the way you perceive it is very sculptural. Very often my work is made in response to the physical body and I think about how you hear something, how you feel it, how big you are next to it, how you could navigate it, and whether you could enter it or touch it. There are all these negotiations that you have to make in order to handle the work or to engage with it. There's also a very delicate balance between the perceiver and the object. This kind of sculpture is not just an object.

WHEN YOU WORK ON A SCULPTURE, DO YOU ALWAYS TRY TO THINK

OF IT IN THE ROUND OR DO YOU APPROACH IT MAINLY FROM A FRONTAL PERSPECTIVE?

I approach my work from many angles. I think about exhibition making, because I have to contemplate how someone else will perceive it, listen to or hear something, and walk next to it. When I make something, I make it for someone, so I usually use a human scale. That's how I begin.

DO YOU PREFER MAKING WORK FOR A SPECIFIC EXHIBITION SPACE SO THAT YOU CAN TAKE ALL THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS INTO ACCOUNT?

I don't generally make site-specific sculpture. Instead, I make sculptures that respond to a specific context and which can also shift. It's a bit like a musical production. Sometimes the staging is a bit different, but it will fill the situation as it finds it and you have to make it like that every time. It's never exactly the same. I want to escape the art historian's point of view. I want the work to live and I still want to be allowed the possibility of changing or shifting something.

OVER THE YEARS, YOU HAVE WORKED IN VARIOUS MEDIA AND WITH DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGY. HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON WHAT FORM AN IDEA SHOULD TAKE? DOES THAT DECISION COME THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION IN THE STUDIO OR THROUGH PRECEDING RESEARCH?

I have to make those choices at the conception of the work, as those elements have to be determined at an early stage. I often work with text, which I also regard as sculpture. I have worked on a series of rules since 1992, for example. It has been a part of my practice for a long time, but it might take the form of spoken word or graphics; it might be printed or put into a very specific situation, which will change the reading of it entirely. So I'm really dealing with the context itself. This approach is not unlike the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's concept of space in film. Liam Gillick actually used Deleuze's term "any-space-whatever"

for the title of an exhibition at the Guggenheim in New York (2009), which also included my work. Gillick made a piece out of that idea, putting that title onto different objects and hence, playing with it literally. That's an interesting use of a quoted text within different contexts. In my work, I have also taken texts from one place and put them into another, changing the original meaning. If you have something that tells of being in one space and you move it somewhere else, the new context becomes part of the work, wherever that happens to be. It can be rather random. But with the "Rule Series", I'm usually the one who shapes and forms the condition of the piece and determines what, where, and how that gets done. Part of that condition is sold with the artwork however, which will then give somebody else the right to make all sorts of decisions about it. I concede, because I sold the right to represent that work.

IS IT ALWAYS IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT TEXT IS CONNECTED TO MEANING OR DO YOU ALSO CONSIDER IT VISUALLY, PERHAPS AS AN ABSTRACT GESTURE?

If you don't understand the language the text is written in, it will certainly make for a stronger aesthetic or reduce the text to visual matter. I think that text can look great without knowing what it means. Last year, I had an exhibition at the Sharjah Art Museum, United Arab Emirates, which also featured the work of Maria Zeres [March 10 – May 31, 2016]. The exhibition's curator Amira Gad and I came up with the exhibition title, *Considering Dynamics and the Forms of Chaos*, which apparently reads very beautifully in Arabic. Of course, this is something that I would not be able to appreciate, even if I did learn Arabic, but I think that's quite beautiful. It's just beyond my grasp.

HOW WAS IT TO EXHIBIT IN DIALOGUE WITH ANOTHER ARTIST?

Maria Zeres is a painter and her work is very different from mine. For *Considering Dynamics and the Forms of Chaos*, we tried to think of a concept, an idea that was about the negotiation of

ordering, something of a principle that worked very well for both of us. However, the idea for the exhibition came first, and then both of us were selected.

WHAT DOES YOUR PROCESS ENTAIL? DO YOU REFER TO NOTEBOOKS OR DO YOU WORK MAINLY ON THE COMPUTER?

I use different things because a big part of my work is physical structure. First, I think about the overall structure and how the different elements of the work could come together. You can't improvise. You only improvise in shaping colors or moving things a little bit. And you try out sizes, but that's literal. I work quite a bit in 3D modeling, because that's a much easier way of working than making all the calculations myself. Sometimes, I need some help from an engineer to figure out static weights and whether a structure will stand up properly or not. That's one of the things when you work in a virtual world; you don't need to think about whether or not something will stand up, or if it will be too top-heavy and never be self-supporting. It can be that your ideas work in theory but in reality, they don't necessarily fly. There are conditions one has to deal with, such as gravity. It's something I often tell younger artists as well: there's all this thinking and imagining that goes on inside your computer, but if you can't actually get it to stand up in the real world somehow, then it fails. It matters and that's what tests your skill, your perseverance to find a good resolution. Also, if the struggle with gravity fails, maybe there is something to be learned, which you can take in another direction.

I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS THIS SCULPTURE, WHICH YOU HAVE CURRENTLY DISPLAYED IN THE STUDIO. IT IS A STACK OF TWO IRREGULAR, WHITE FORMS, DISPLAYED ON A TABLE AND INVOLVING A LIGHT ELEMENT.

It's from 2015 and relates to a whole group of similar works. I made the designs for the two different forms on my computer and then had these produced in a workshop. However, the

technological side of the work is an entirely different matter. That takes a lot of back and forth with electronic engineers making the hardware, as well as programmers taking my scripted ideas and turning them into a scripted code that speaks to the electronics. Then, everything gets put together, including a very stable and small computer, which has its own not very user-friendly software and can be bought in a store. Finally, I go back to my computer to figure out the programming for the latter. All this needs to happen before you can put it all together. One of the forms is translucent and the other one is not. If I plug the light source in, you will see that the translucent shape will go through a whole sequence of different colors. The solid one remains white, something like an iceberg. The darker the room, the better you can see the effect of the work.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON THE COLOR OF LIGHT, AS WELL AS SEQUENCING?

I make a palette in RGB language (additive light), using the computer, and then I make a program, deciding on a series of changes, shifts, and regularity. I think about how to go from one color to another and whether this transition should be even, hectic, or slow. In other words, I determine the range. All of this has to go into a scripted loop.

IN THIS CASE, THE CHANGES ARE SLOW AND THE COLOR IS SOFTLY FILTERED THROUGH THE TRANSLUCENT MATERIAL USED FOR THE FORMS. WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO EMPLOY LIGHT RATHER THAN APPLYING COLOR TO A SURFACE AND WHY?

It was in the 1980s. It was not because I was particularly interested in color. Instead, I wanted to have something that evolved, changed and went through a shift. I wanted something that could challenge the perception of how something is, was, or appears to be. I had also been thinking about the physical nature of silicon, how it is used for chips inside a computer and the digital world. That's when I sat down and made my own electronic circuit

boards. I started with the chip and tracing the paths from each of the legs on the chip through the copper lines on the board and all the components soldered into it. I had to do it myself, because you couldn't just buy ready-made electronics at the time. It was an intense level of discovery into how things work. Silicon is a material that has gates, which are either open or closed. You can affect it with electricity and then have many of these gates open and close in different sets. That's why you put a silicon chip onto a circuit board, so that the electricity can or can't go through, giving a directive. In other words, my focus wasn't so much on color as it was on the physical property of silicon. I was interested in what's going on inside any computer and how that makes up a language and story.

DID YOU EXPLORE ARTISTS, SUCH AS DAN FLAVIN OR JAMES TURRELL, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN YOU STARTED WORKING WITH LIGHT? Yes, when I started to work with light I was looking at a lot of different conceptual and minimal artists. We are dealing with the material itself from a minimal point of view, but we have a concept about the context and how to handle that. I was certainly interested in the dematerialization of art that had happened in the 1960s and 1970s and a conceptual practice. I think of artworks as gestures, which don't necessarily have to be physical objects. Although I make sculptures, I'm usually going somewhere between an idea and an object, like a pixel. In 2000, for example, I made a "Pixel Box". It was a big, physical object that also belongs to another category. It was an idea, a notion that changed in appearance. On a computer or television screen, each pixel is a tiny, individual dot. Yet, by changing its color, and combining them, you can produce an entire image. However, I destroyed the image and made it into an object, which can change color just like a whole image would if it was a video, for example. I've always worked with digital material and physical material or ideas that are both digital and physical.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU AIM TO BRIDGE THESE TWO WORLDS, THE PHYSICAL AND THE DIGITAL, AND THEIR DIFFERENT CONTEXTS? THE DIGITAL EMBODIES A CONTEMPORARY FORM OF EXPRESSION, WHILE PLASTIC ARTS, SUCH AS SCULPTURE, EVOKE TRADITION.

But a "Pixel Box" is a conundrum, because it's an idea, a notion. A pixel is the smallest element of a picture that doesn't have a physical size; it's simply something on a raster grid that is joined to others. So, if you actually make a physical box and have it function in the same way as one element of a moving picture, you've created a combination that shouldn't really exist. In that sense it's a conundrum.

DO YOU PLAY WITH THE VIEWER'S DISTANCE TO THE "PIXEL BOXES", PERHAPS TO EVOKE THE ZOOMING IN AND OUT OF A DIGITAL PICTURE IN ORDER TO VIEW SINGLE PIXELS? DO YOU USUALLY LIKE TO HAVE THE WORKS BE APPROACHED FROM A FAR DISTANCE, FOR EXAMPLE?

Yes, I do play with the viewer's distance to the "Pixel Boxes", but there is no usual scenario; each occasion brings a different situation. However, I have had the opportunity to work with distance, using a side of a building for example, or a vast industrial exhibition space. In 2008, I had an exhibition at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau in Munich [*Angela Bulloch*, February 16 – May 18, 2008]. The exhibition space was underneath a train station, having the same footprint as a hundred-meter long train station. It allowed for the work to be seen from a large distance and it was also entirely devoid of daylight. That was a great situation for viewing "Z Point" (2001/2004), a large pixel box sculpture that was placed at the end of the space.

DO YOU CONTINUE TO HAVE A SIMULTANEOUS PRACTICE OF WORKS ON PAPER?

Yes I do, although I don't show these much. I also work a lot with the computer.

DO YOU PRINT OUT CERTAIN STAGES OF YOUR COMPUTER DESIGNS, NOT FOR DOCUMENTARY REASONS BUT EXPRESSIVE ONES?

Yes, it can happen during the planning phase of certain projects. However, these printed pages are mainly meant to define where the edge of a form is, for example, or how to cut things and where to pierce them. It's a simple act and it is a bit like drawing.

ANOTHER MATERIAL YOU HAVE EXPLORED IN COMBINATION WITH LIGHT IS FELT.

I made a whole arrangement of a stellar constellation with LEDs. It described a part of the sky called Hercules, which also gave the work its title. I used two enormous pillars of felt that rolled out down the wall and all along the floor. It also had some printing on them. Seen through the felt, the LEDs looked like stars in the night sky. I showed this work in an installation with related works. It took several attempts to plan them. They are like a smattering of stars that has to be figured out from the internal mapping of the universe and I'm taking something from a virtual place.

COULD THESE WORKS ONLY BE SEEN IN A DARK ROOM?

LEDs are pretty powerful and they can handle being shown in daylight.

IN THE BEGINNING OF OUR CONVERSATION YOU MENTIONED YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH MUSIC. DO YOU WRITE ORIGINAL PIECES OF MUSIC OR DO YOU USE EXISTING PIECES THAT ARE MEANINGFUL TO YOU? ARE YOU PERHAPS PROGRAMMING MUSIC?

That's a complicated question. I do play the bass guitar and I have worked with Theremins. Occasionally, I've done a lot of the musical parts for my work. I also have a record label that's called *ABCDLP* and I publish selected musicians or different projects on Vinyl or CD. I always think of programming as something that you do inside a computer to fundamentally underpin a program that is a light installation or some other kind of display. So I'm not really programming music. I use programming to script a story.

WHEN DOES A WORK PROVE MOST CHALLENGING?

It's difficult to say, but I think my text-based works are the most confrontational. There's much more authority in words than in abstract visuals and they also come with a lot of baggage, which can be unpredictable. I recently made a serious piece for an exhibition in Japan called *Development* [Okayama Art Summit 2016, October 9 – November 27, 2016]. The text was long and in both English and Japanese. There were eight motifs in total, which were expanded all over town and were shown in different kinds of places. They appeared on banners, posters, or as wall painting, for example, while located at a soy sauce factory, close to a bus stop or school. The idea of development is somewhat misleading and it can be a very big challenge or a disappointment. It's not something that everybody would agree to and it has a very strong political connotation. Development means that we're not happy with how it is now and that we need things to change. So that's quite a provocation. And I did feel provoked. Last summer, before the show, I had been in Greece, where we went fishing. I had had all these complicated thoughts about the world and history just by being in Greece and then we found out while trying to fish, that there are practically no fish left in the sea. I felt stuck in a parable. The work I contributed was based on rules of sustainable development and in particular on a UN document, called the Rio Declaration. Something the UN Council had discussed in order to figure out how to proceed in the world without destroying it. In general, sustainable development aims at a broader social context and responsibility.

ARE THERE PROJECTS THAT YOU ASPIRE TO OR IDEAL LOCATIONS YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK WITH?

Yes, I do, especially when I find a space which is particularly wonderful for music. Great acoustics are something you only hear when you walk through a space. It's not about how it looks. So I go around with my ears and I find places that way.

YOUR WORKS ARE VERY ECLECTIC. HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT PLANNING AN EXTENSIVE SOLO EXHIBITION THAT BRINGS TOGETHER DIFFERENT EXAMPLES OF BODIES OF WORK FROM DIFFERENT PERIODS? HOW DO YOU RELATE THEM?

I work with a model and I like to talk with people, because I like to think about how other people who know the work might reflect on it. If the space is large enough, the inclusion of earlier works provides a foundation as it attaches everything else to the beginning of my practice. But I think with my work it's pretty easy to do that. It's not like I did something so strange and weird before that it doesn't make any sense now. I think everything is pretty well connected.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST WORK OR THE FIRST BODY OF WORK THAT YOU WERE REALLY HAPPY WITH, REALIZING THAT THIS WOULD BE PART OF YOUR OWN LANGUAGE AND THE BEGINNING OF YOUR OWN PATH?

It was when I was exploring silicon chips and learned how to make my own circuit boards. Understanding what was happening inside the computer opened up the way to take things forward. The technology was a binary language and the negotiations I was making resembled those made in other fields, dealing with power and feminism, for example. Binary languages are compositional elements within other narratives and understanding that these can function in a physical form and as part of a narrative was a big connection for me.

YOU MENTION FEMINISM AND I WONDER IF YOU BELIEVE THAT TECHNOLOGY GAVE YOU A STRONG POSITION, AS IT HADN'T BEEN CLAIMED AS A MALE DOMAIN FOR CENTURIES (UNLIKE SCULPTURE OR PAINTING), FOR EXAMPLE. IN THE 1960S, THIS CERTAINLY APPLIED TO MANY FEMINIST ARTISTS, WHO USED FILM AS A RATHER NEW MEDIUM FOR ARTISTIC EXPRESSION.

Digital language was certainly liberating and new territory for me when I was a young artist. Digital technology provided a virgin

situation. The fact that I could connect it and the complexities of using that language to another language was very liberating. It's not just this technology but also a way of speaking about it and understanding it as this limiting binary way of "0" and "1", "Yes" and "No". It's the moment when you understand that this language is limited that you begin to have freedom. That's when you can avoid the limitations. It's that simple. That's something extraordinary about language and the imagination. It's in our control how we use words to express something more complicated. You can use "Yes" or "No" many times, but then how do they all add up?



FRANKA HÖRNSCHEMEYER

JANUARY 10, 2017
WEDDING, BERLIN

I WOULD LIKE TO START BY DISCUSSING THE SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION YOU HAVE CURRENTLY SET UP IN YOUR STUDIO AND WHICH WILL BE SHOWN AT GALERIE NORDENHAKE LATER THIS MONTH [FRANKA HÖRNSCHEMEYER: IMAGINARY STATE, JANUARY 21 – FEBRUARY 25, 2017].

It consists of metal stud framing and sheetrock. These materials are traditionally used for constructing interior spaces. However, in this work, I have employed them somewhat differently than usual. First, I made modules out of the metal stud framing. These are as large as possible and as stable as necessary so that I can freely arrange them into grid-like constructions of various heights and footprint. This particular construction was conceived for the gallery space at 34 Lindenstraße, where the work will be exhibited. The ceiling structure of that space is characterized by very specific, pronounced parallel beams, which resemble fish bones, a skeleton, or scaffolding. In a way, my work follows these beams. IS IT GENERALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT YOUR WORK CORRESPONDS WITH THE SPACE IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN?

It certainly was the case with this work as the ceiling beams of the exhibition space inspired the construction. In fact I related the beams to the metal stud framing. Suddenly, there is a vertical connection between the two, up and down, which didn't exist before.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE WORK AIDS IN ACCENTUATING THESE DIVERSIONS AND HELPS THE VIEWER TO FOCUS ON THEM. IN A WAY, THE SPACE IS ELEVATED ON A PEDESTAL, OPEN FOR DETAILED EXAMINATION.

These shifts increase due to the fact that I have developed everything first with the computer, which causes its own changes. In addition, I used an old floor plan for the building, which also wasn't quite precise.

HOW ABOUT THE PIECES OF SHEETROCK THAT YOU HAVE STACKED ON THE FLOOR?

These remain on the floor. Sheetrock is an important material to me, and I have worked with it for a very long time. Ever since I lived in New York in 1987 and 1988. It's a material which I used to see there all the time. In general, I am interested in all building materials that we employ to create spaces. I am pretty open in that regard and curious because each building material conveys social information; it tells you a lot about the society which uses it.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY THAT YOU FOUND SHEETROCK EVERYWHERE IN NEW YORK?

I was often walking through the city and there were dumpsters everywhere, which were filled with sheetrock. I was struck by the fact that this material seemed to be in permanent motion; there was constantly people running out of buildings to throw it into dumpsters, trucks arriving to pick them up, or new pieces of sheetrock being carried inside. That made me think about what it means if the structure of a living space is always changing. I found that to be fascinating and it led to my extensive research of

this particular material. Over the years, I have accumulated a lot of knowledge, and I would say that I am somewhat of a sheetrock expert. For example, the sheetrock which I used for this current work was a new product on the market, and it does not have the same quality as the ones I am used to. It breaks easily and the paper comes off faster. In other words, the sheetrock here carries, among others, the social information that it is 10 cents cheaper but also 20% less well made. I am not sure if this would be immediately noticed at a construction site, but I found it very obvious. At first, I was irritated with the material, but then I became curious and wanted to try it out. I am convinced that there is no bad material, as they all contain valuable information. Only a small proportion of the material is matter, the rest is information. In this case, the information which is indicated is that the material is sheetrock; that it is made for building numerous interior walls quickly, and that it doesn't have to be very stable because it will only be used in combination with metal stud framing. In fact, they only make sense together. So when I'm studying a material, every little detail is significant to me.

SHEETROCK IMPLIES TEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION AND HENCE, TRANSIENCE. THE INTERIOR WALLS THAT ARE MADE WITH SHEETROCK ARE BUILT QUICKLY TO DIVIDE A SPACE INTO VARIOUS SECTIONS. IN NEW YORK, THESE COULD BE SUBDIVISIONS IN SMALL APARTMENTS, FOR EXAMPLE, TO TURN A STUDIO INTO A ONE BEDROOM, OR TO DIVIDE A COMMERCIAL SPACE INTO MANY SMALLER OFFICES. NONE OF THESE WALLS ARE BUILT TO LAST 50 OR 100 YEARS.

Sheetrock became a true field of study for me. Perhaps it wouldn't be exciting to anyone else. In New York, it was that temporary aspect that you mentioned, that really interested me, as well as what it tells us about capitalism. People seemed no longer interested in what a space is, its harmonious proportions, and beauty. These principles were expressed in various classical books

on architecture, such as *The Four Books of Architecture* (1570) by Andrea Palladio, which focuses on materials among others. Another example is *The Ten Books on Architecture* (ca. 30-15 BC) by Vitruv, who formulated three prerequisites of architecture: stability, usefulness, and beauty. For centuries, architects have explored these aspects and written about them, but today, they seem of little importance.

YOU MEAN, IN THE SENSE THAT AS SOON AS THE WALL IS PAINTED, NOBODY KNOWS OR CARES ANYMORE ABOUT WHAT IT IS MADE OF UNDERNEATH?

I would assume that most people are content with focusing on the surface. I am more curious about what's underneath. Depth is of deeper interest to me.

DO YOU RELATE A SPACE TO THE BODY IN THE SENSE THAT YOU THINK OF THE STRUCTURE OF A SPACE AS ITS SKELETON, FOR EXAMPLE?

I don't distinguish between body and space. As mentioned before, to me, material is something that consists of course of matter but mainly information. If you think this way, you can look at any kind of material in the same manner. You can explore where it is from, what it is made of, how old it is, its history, and its psychological as well as social aspects. You can go very deep. And I treat the notion of space in the very same way. I believe that there are simply no differences between space and body. Space is body and body is space.

HOW ABOUT THE PHYSICAL PRESENCE OF THE VIEWER? IS THE PHYSICAL INTERACTION BETWEEN THE AUDIENCE AND THE WORK SOMETHING YOU THINK ABOUT WHILE MAKING THE WORK? DO YOU ENVISION HOW SOMEONE MIGHT WALK AROUND THE WORK OR HOW A STANDING FIGURE MIGHT RELATE TO A CERTAIN PART OF THE STRUCTURE?

In the end, it is all about relations. Years ago, in a discussion about material that I had with a friend in New York, he said:

"You are a piece of sheetrock, aren't you?" I thought that this was remarkable, because if I were, I would look at the world differently than if I were a table or something else. This implies that the relationship between a piece of sheetrock which looks at the world, and the person who looks back at it, has an impact on both, and that it also alters their state. As soon as anyone or anything relates to something, the situation is changed fundamentally. Everyone who looks at the work changes it. There is only subjective, individual experience; an objective perception doesn't exist. That's why I think a lot about the question of how and to what extent the observer alters the experiment.

IN THIS WORK, BOTH THE MODULES AND THE SHEETROCK, OUT OF WHICH YOU HAVE CUT NUMEROUS CIRCULAR FORMS, ALLOW THE VIEWER TO FOCUS ON VARIOUS LAYERS. WHAT WAS YOUR THOUGHT BEHIND MANIPULATING THE SHEETROCK IN THIS MANNER?

That certainly has to do with form, but also with the question of what is front and what is back? How can I get from here to there, and how can I switch sides? The title of this work is "Imaginary State". I chose an English title, because its German equivalent seemed to be too limited, and too closely related to the specific mathematical implication. However, "Imaginary State" implies the oscillation between states; it is an in-between state. Something that is and at the same time is not. That's crucial to me. The cutouts in the sheetrock serve as a counterpart to the physical structure. As you walk through the gallery, both the space and the work change due to your shifting focus and perspective.

THE CUTOUTS, AS WELL AS THE OPEN MODULES, ADD A SENSE OF FLEXIBILITY IN PERSPECTIVE, IN THAT THEY ALLOW THE VIEWER'S GAZE TO PENETRATE THE PHYSICAL PARTS OF THE WORK.

I probably wouldn't use the term "flexibility". I would rather say that they allow the space to be divided into different layers, which can be viewed simultaneously.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU WORK WITH GEOMETRIC CONCEPTS?

I prefer the term structure. My works have a certain structure, which develops with the material and the given conditions. However, I am interested in math, and geometry is of course a part of it. Perhaps I'm most interested in cross-sections in the sense of circles overlapping in geometry or holes that both enable and prevent us from looking through a material.

HOW ABOUT COLOR? THE MATERIAL YOU USE COMES WITH ITS OWN CHARACTERISTIC COLOR. DOES IT HAPPEN THAT THE COLOR OF A MATERIAL INTRIGUES YOU FIRST AND THAT'S WHY YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK WITH IT, OR IS IT A BYPRODUCT?

Both are possibilities. The sheetrock I have used for "Imaginary State" for example, is generally for damp spaces and that's why its color is a shade of linden green. First, I had intended to work with acoustic sheetrock, which comes in a deep turquoise. However, I learned that the company has been bought up and this particular material has been phased out. The new company has now reduced the pigment for the paper of the sheetrock as they consider the color too expensive. I found that incredible. In the end, it became a reason to work with this new material. After all, it conveys revealing information. In order to lower expenses, the color was changed and the quality of the components was diminished.

WHEN DID YOU BEGIN TO WORK WITH THE NOTION OF SPACE? WAS THIS YOUR FOCUS FROM THE BEGINNING?

Yes, I have always been interested in space and I've always been curious about how spaces can change me and how I can change them.

DID YOU EVER HAVE THE AMBITION TO DESIGN A SPACE OR WAS YOUR WORK ALWAYS A MEANS TO EXPLORE A PRE-EXISTING ONE?

I'm less concerned with designing a space as a living environment, as an architect would.

YOU MEAN YOU ARE NOT INTERESTED IN DESIGNING A SPACE THAT HAS A DISTINCT FUNCTIONALITY?

I'm intrigued by space on another level, as a structure and especially the space in-between. We notice one side at the expense of paying less attention to the other side. That's what I meant when I was talking about oscillating states earlier. We don't know what's inside this in-between space, which I nevertheless consider information. It's not unlike an atom, which consists of minute particles and a lot in-between, but we don't really know what exactly holds the atom together. One can apply this model to almost everything well. So if you concentrate on this space in between, you get infinite possibilities of understanding the material. That's probably what I do with everything.

HOW IMPORTANT IS DRAWING TO YOUR PROCESS? DO YOU EXPLORE AN IDEA ON PAPER FIRST OR DO YOU USUALLY WORK ON THE COMPUTER BEFORE BUILDING THESE LARGER INSTALLATIONS?

There are two different areas. On the one hand, I work with floor plans when it comes to constructions like "Imaginary State". I have developed my own technique to do this and a computer is the perfect tool for me. On the other hand, there are autonomous drawings made by hand, which revolve around structure.

DO YOU CONSIDER THESE DRAWINGS AS STUDIES FOR LARGER WORKS OR DO YOU THINK OF THEM AS INDEPENDENT WORKS OF ART?

There is a range of drawings. While some stand completely on their own, others relate to different works.

IS THERE AN IDEAL SPACE THAT YOU KNOW OR HAVE IN MIND, IN WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHOW YOUR WORK?

To me, every space is ideal and I'm very passionate about that. It's like the sheetrock that first made me angry because of its poor quality, but later made me realize that it is also unique; it reflects critical changes due to specific modifications that were made, in this case because of monetary reasons.

I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK ABOUT AN EXCITING PROJECT YOU MADE FOR THE HAMBURGER KUNSTHALLE IN 2000, CALLED "PSE 900", FOR WHICH YOU WERE ABLE TO WORK WITH A SPECIFIC SPACE BUT ALSO WITH A COLLECTION OF WORKS BY ANOTHER ARTIST, WHOSE OEUVRE HAS ITS OWN QUALITIES AND CONCERNS: THE SCULPTOR WILHELM LEHMBRUCK (1881–1919).

It was an exhibition that allowed me a lot of freedom from the curatorial department. I was asked to realize a work inside the museum, which was also meant to question the role of the art museum as an institution. I spent a lot of time in the Kunsthalle, exploring the place. It's a museum that consists of two buildings, one for 20th-century and contemporary art and one for art that came before. It occurred to me that the sculptures in the older building seemed to have almost been discarded there and that they felt homeless. I started speaking with the curator about it, and we began discussing the Lehmbruck room, and he assured me that I could even hide some of the Lehmbruck sculptures. He gave me the opportunity to do whatever I wanted. Soon, I discovered that the space had been altered several times since being built in 1869. Especially the modifications to the ceiling and the sidewalls had changed the space dramatically. So I removed the window panes from an artificial skylight that had been added in the 1950s, as well as the walls made of sheetrock. However, I left the studs and the steel construction that was holding the glass panels to remain visible.

DID YOU HAVE TO REFER TO OLD ARCHITECTURAL PLANS TO TRACE THE ALTERATIONS THAT WERE MADE OVER TIME?

I had old plans, but you could also easily see all these modifications on site. It didn't really take much to understand the original intent of the space. You could also see that the meter of space that was lost on each side due to the drywall construction had changed the proportions of the space significantly. It didn't feel right anymore. So I revealed all the different layers of

its alteration over time until I uncovered its original proportions. In the 1950s, for example, people preferred spaces to be somewhat cozy, so the ceiling was lowered. It could also have been an economically driven decision in order to keep heating costs low. Perhaps, one needed space on the left and right for the heaters and so walls were added. These sub-spaces could then also function as storage for chairs. Each decision was based on pragmatic reasons and yet together, they had an incredible impact on the space. To me, one of the most important aspects of this particular work was that its structure reflected these various periods of time and their respective way of thinking. Instead of removing them, I revealed and used them for my construction.

HOW ABOUT LEHMBRUCK'S WORK TO WHICH THAT SPACE WAS DEDICATED? DID YOU STUDY THE OEUVRE OR THE SCULPTURES ON DISPLAY IN ANY PARTICULAR WAY AND IF SO, DID THIS RESEARCH HAVE AN IMPACT ON YOUR WORK?

Yes, I discovered pictures of his studio in the library of the Hamburger Kunsthalle and through the art historian and Lehmbruck specialist Georg Syamken, who supported all my endeavors. I studied how Lehmbruck's works were displayed both in his studio and in the Kunsthalle. I also looked at how forms of presentation had changed since his sculptures were made.

IT WAS AN INCREDIBLE PROJECT AND RADICAL IN ITS OWN RIGHT. YOU NOT ONLY ALLOWED VISITORS TO TRACE THE HISTORY OF THIS PARTICULAR SPACE, BUT YOU ALSO PRESENTED LEHMBRUCK'S SCULPTURES, WHICH ARE WELL KNOWN AND AN IMPORTANT GROUP WITHIN THIS MUSEUM'S COLLECTION, IN AN UNPRECEDENTED LIGHT. YOU ENABLED VISITORS TO EXPERIENCE THESE WORKS ANEW AND HENCE, YOU HELPED TO INITIATE A NEW PERSPECTIVE. HOW DID PEOPLE REACT TO THIS PROJECT?

People reacted very differently. In fact, the various reactions could not have been more radical. Some visitors felt that Lehmbruck's works had never shone as clearly as when embedded within this

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structure. Others were absolutely shocked that one would combine Lehmbruck with materials found at a construction site. However, there is this concept that cement is an artificial stone and many of Lehmbruck's works are made of artificial stone, as well. So I thought that these complemented each other.

HOWEVER, YOU DID NOT CONCEIVE THIS PROJECT AS A LEHMBRUCK INSTALLATION, BUT RATHER AS A CONTEMPLATION OF A SPACE THAT HAPPENED TO BE DEDICATED TO THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION OF THIS PARTICULAR ARTIST'S WORK.

Yes. I did explore his oeuvre and I analyzed the characteristics and history of that space, while adding my own thoughts, as well. I was certainly aware that it was a great responsibility to handle these sculptures and that they would change by being placed into a new context and structure. In addition, Lehmbruck's sculptures are very architectural in that they evoke buildings or spaces, and this was something reflected in my structure.

YOU CREATED THIS WORK IN 2000 AND SINCE THEN, MANY MORE MUSEUMS HAVE INVITED CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS TO EITHER CURATE, COMMENT OR TO INTERACT WITH PARTS OF THEIR COLLECTIONS. SO TODAY, THIS KIND OF BRIDGING BETWEEN ARTWORKS OF DIFFERENT PERIODS AND A RE-CONTEXTUALIZATION OF IDEAS IS PERHAPS LESS DRAMATIC, BUT I CAN IMAGINE THAT YOUR INSTALLATION MUST HAVE MARKED A CHALLENGE FOR THE MORE CONSERVATIVE ART AUDIENCE.

"PSE 900" remained in the Hamburger Kunsthalle until 2006; it had been acquired by the museum. During those years, people relayed to me that viewers continued to react very strongly to the work. However, what was interesting was that it was unpredictable. It didn't matter whether a viewer was conservative or not.

WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR WORK OUTRIGHT AS SCULPTURE?

Yes, as a relationship between materials. In fact, I view myself as material, as well. The relation between entities oscillates, hence you could be a piece of sheetrock looking at the world.



ALONA RODEH

JANUARY 10, 2017
WEDDING, BERLIN

YOU CURRENTLY HAVE A SELECTION OF DIFFERENT WORKS IN YOUR STUDIO, INCLUDING SCULPTURES, PAINTINGS, AND COLLAGES. IN ADDITION, YOU ALSO HAVE AN ELABORATE BRAINSTORM WALL. YES, THESE ARE ALL REFERENCING IDEAS THAT ARE CURRENTLY COOKING. MY MAIN FOCUS, WHICH CONNECTS ALL OF THESE WORKS, IS A PROJECT THAT I'M DOING WITH THE BERLINER FEUERWEHR [BERLIN FIRE BRIGADE]. I'M CURRENTLY JOINING THEM FOR NINE MONTHS, TWICE A WEEK. ONCE A WEEK I DO A WHOLE SHIFT OF 24 HOURS AT THE LOCAL STATION IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD IN WEDDING. ON THE OTHER DAY, I WILL CHECK OUT OTHER THINGS IN THE ORGANIZATION, VISIT OTHER STATIONS, THEIR ACADEMY, AND MEET WITH PEOPLE.

HOW DID YOU APPROACH AND CONVINCe THE FIRE BRIGADE TO TAKE YOU ON AS AN ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE?

There's a place called ZK/U [Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik] in Berlin and they are doing a project that is called Artist Displacement. They have a residency program based on the legacy of the Artist Placement Group (APG), which emerged in London in the 1960s and encouraged artists to join non-cultural

institutions and work in a wider social context. ZK/U is doing the same now with a few artists, providing a scholarship as well. I was snooping around the Fire Brigade before I heard about this program, but when a good friend of mine, who has relationships with both the city and the board of ZK/U, told me about it, it was a perfect fit. The Fire Brigade is quite amazing as they are responsible for all of the rescue and ambulance services in Berlin. They are the first to be called when there are accidents or fires and they do have an ambulance service. So by joining them, I really get to feel urban tourism double and triple. We get into so many different people's homes and many difficult situations of various kinds.

DO YOU GET TO VISIT NEIGHBORHOODS OUTSIDE OF WEDDING?

The fire station is located in Wedding, but they get calls from all around the area. I also just joined a station in Friedrichshain, which is right in front of the club Berghain. Especially on weekends, the station has a lot to deal with in the clubs and the safety in clubs is something that I am interested in. My recent artist publication, *Safe & Sound (Deluxe Edition)* [The Green Box, 2015] focused on architecture and visual aspects of safety. I'm interested in getting a different perspective. I'm about four months in and I'm still in the research phase.

WHAT DOES THIS RESEARCH PHASE ENTAIL IN REGARD TO COLLECTING VISUALS? DO YOU TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS, MAKE DRAWINGS, AND WRITE DOWN NOTES, FOR EXAMPLE?

I take photographs and I write, because I talk to the firemen a lot. Perhaps it would be and feel different, if I knew German perfectly or if I wasn't a woman. I know German, but they talk fast and all the time; I can't always follow.

ARE THERE ANY FEMALE FIREFIGHTERS?

Very few. For the past twenty years however, Germany has really tried to have more female firefighters. Before that it wasn't possible at all. Now they want them, especially for the ambulance

service. In fact, they need women on board for treatment and it helps especially when dealing with Muslim women in difficult situations. But there's still just a few. It's a tough job. Twice a week you have 24-hour shifts when you don't sleep at home and not every woman, if she has a family, can deal with that. However, in my station in Wedding there is one and she's really a part of the team. It doesn't feel strange at all.

DO YOU ALREADY HAVE A SPECIFIC PROJECT IN MIND THAT WILL SPRING FROM THIS RESEARCH OR ARE YOU SOAKING UP THE EXPERIENCE, SEEING IN WHAT DIRECTION IT WILL NATURALLY EVOLVE?

I usually work extremely focused and know exactly what I'm doing. This time, it is different. Of course, things change in the process, but my natural choice would be to work inside a certain situation. In this case, the situation is that the residency format is not based on presenting something in the end. Then again, because I am who I am, I have to do something. But it looks like it's going to be a few different things. For one, I would like to do a publication on the subject of fire that would resemble my previous publication. For the latter I had invited three authors to write articles about something I'm interested in (rather than about my own work). That book further contained six double-sided posters with twelve of my images. It's not a monograph or catalog, but rather an artist publication. I would imagine something similar for this project as well. In addition, I will most likely produce a new video work based on the footage that I shoot during my shifts at the stations. I also might get to do a mural on the wall of a fire station in Kreuzberg, which is a project currently in discussion.

DO YOU HAVE A BACKGROUND IN GRAFFITI AND STREET ART?

No, I don't, even though I've done a lot of works outdoors. I was making art at a young age and I grew up in a rural area so street art was not part of my culture.

I WOULD LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THE PAINTINGS YOU HAVE UP ON THE STUDIO WALL. WHILE ABSTRACTED, THEY ARE STILL CLEARLY INSPIRED BY FIREMEN'S UNIFORMS, FEATURING A COMBINATION OF EMERGENCY COLORS, ESPECIALLY BLACK AND NEON YELLOW.

These hand-painted graphic works are part of a bigger series, which is comprised of twenty-one works. The group was shown at ABC Berlin as one big installation. However, not all of these compositions are based on the clothes of firefighters. Both work wear and high-visibility gear are the inspiration. All the public service workers, such as street cleaners are forced to wear high visibility gear so that they can be seen. However, the reality is that those who wear this kind of apparel are usually not seen; instead, they are seemingly transparent and unimportant. That contradiction is the heart of this project. Despite their abstraction, all these paintings are based on actual designs.

EVEN THOUGH YOUR FORMS ARE STYLIZED IN THAT THEY ARE PERFECTLY GEOMETRIC AND FLAT, THEY STILL SUCCEED IN PROVIDING YOUR COMPOSITIONS WITH A FAINT FIGURATIVE QUALITY. ONE CAN EASILY FIND THE SUGGESTION OF PANTS, FOR EXAMPLE.

It's true that when you dive in, you can start seeing things. They are derived from my ongoing growing collection of safety gear, which is a booming industry.

MEANWHILE, YOU USED THE SAME MEDIUM FORMAT FOR EACH PAINTING.

I think of this format as being related to the body, especially the torso. I painted all of them on an aluminum surface, which I thought fits the content very well. I wanted the group to read like a lexicon or collection. I actually never make paintings and the base of my work is sculpture and installation, although there are always exceptions. For example, I just did this really big site-specific floor piece in Dizengoff Square in Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv is where I'm from and I still go back frequently. The installation

was temporary and involved a square that was slotted for demolition. In fact, it was just destroyed yesterday. I made this work in collaboration with the department that is responsible for street markings and painting. It involved a pattern that was based on the original structure that was already there, in which lines seemed to trace how people walked inside the square.

HOW LONG WAS THIS SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION ON DISPLAY?

It was up for about a week. More than anything it was meant as a gesture to encourage the contemplation of this particular place before it was going to be destroyed. It was about doing something new to it so that one could look at it fresh. That's one example for a lot of the works I'm doing outside the studio, which cannot be seen here.

IN OTHER WORDS, SITE-SPECIFIC WORKS ARE PART OF YOUR REGULAR PRACTICE.

Yes. I also work in different places: in the studio, in both sculpture and printing workshops, and other facilities, where they have the equipment I need. Berlin has so many of these resources, which you can use for a very small fee and I definitely take advantage of that.

WHEN YOU WORK IN LARGER FACILITIES OR JOIN ENTITIES LIKE THE FIRE BRIGADE, YOU ARE USUALLY SURROUNDED BY AND AT TIMES COLLABORATE WITH OTHER PEOPLE. IS COMMUNITY IMPORTANT TO YOUR PROCESS?

Yes, I love working with people. I also make designs for the theater, which is even more collaborative, and I like to involve others in my works, such as musicians. In addition, components of many of my works are produced by others, on whose technical ability I rely. People who have different skills and mindsets than I do can add so much value. Nevertheless, I still need my time alone and in regard to my works, to have the last word.

WHEN DID YOU MOVE TO BERLIN?

I came here in September 2013 for an artist residency at

Künstlerhaus Bethanien, but I knew in advance that I would stay and I'm happy about this decision.

BY JOINING THE FIRE DEPARTMENT IN A CITY THAT IS FAIRLY NEW TO YOU, YOU RIGHT AWAY GET A GLIMPSE OF ITS UNDERBELLY; YOU GET TO SEE VARIOUS HOMES, PEOPLE, AND CIRCUMSTANCES. IS PART OF YOUR INSPIRATION THE EXPLORATION OF UNFAMILIAR ENVIRONMENTS?

It's actually the opposite. Before I came to Berlin, I had been working for many years in Tel Aviv. It was very hard for me to do new work in a place I was less familiar with. In fact, I have to know a place very well in order to do something in it. When you are in a new environment, you are usually focused on obvious differences. You have to get over that stage; you have to pass through these layers, which for the locals are very obvious, in order to get to the interesting stuff. I feel that when you know a place well, it is the little details that really make a difference and these are some of the things that I work with. So the reason for joining the Fire Brigade was to get through these layers of being a foreigner. It's really local, the fire fighters are mainly German, and most of the situations are specifically related to this city. I'm not a "laptop artist" and I would not move again anytime soon. It's too much work to peel off these layers and to find your network. I need to spend most of my time in either Berlin or Tel Aviv. I need stability to work.

DOES POP CULTURE IMPACT YOUR WORK?

Sure. I think I was always fascinated with art that can talk on all levels and also reach a non-art audience. It was one of the challenges that I set for myself after leaving art school: that my work would interest people who are not necessarily interested in art.

YOUR AMBITION IS TO COMMUNICATE WITH ANYONE THROUGH YOUR WORK.

Yes and I think that that's very important in general. I feel alienated by art that talks only about art or itself. I believe that there

are too many things happening in the world for you to have the privilege to discuss art that is discussing art. I feel that I take part in the world and therefore the world comes into my work as well. That's pop in a way. My favorite music to listen to is hip-hop of all kinds and one of my hobbies is gossip news. There are specific people I follow, such as the Kardashians. I'm interested in their tactics and how they communicate through visuals rather than speech. "What is the information that you choose to put out there?" is one of the questions I'm interested in.

YOU MENTIONED THAT YOU WRITE A LOT AND THAT YOU ESPECIALLY LIKE HIP-HOP. TEXT MUST BE VERY IMPORTANT TO YOU.

Yeah, I use it a lot. My sketchbook is mostly filled with words and notes to myself rather than drawings. There's something about writing with a pencil on paper that quite often can get my brain and creativity working. In general, I am very sensitive to text, especially texts about art. It also happened to me several times that I was disappointed in how my works were described by others.

DO YOU MEAN THAT YOU WERE DISAPPOINTED BY HOW OTHERS INTERPRETED YOUR VISION OR HOW THEY DESCRIBED IT?

It was more that I didn't see the point of having a descriptive text accompany the work. I think my works are quite easy to digest and to understand on a superficial level. So I wasn't interested in having them explained or unfolded. It's not that I want to stay ambiguous or obscure; I just think that it's quite clear in many cases. A few years ago, I had a solo show at CCA Tel Aviv, for example. I made a site-specific work of cardboard that measured about seven meters high. It was called "Above and Beyond" (2013) and it looked like a wall and there was natural vegetation integrated, while light penetrated the piece in synchronicity with music that was especially composed for it. Most people, at least in Israel, would recognize the obvious reference to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Instead of an analytical essay, I asked whether

we could bring back a text by philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994). The Western Wall, also known as The Wailing Wall and The Kotel in Hebrew, was conquered by Israel in the war of 1967, along with east Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and what is known today as “The Territories”. In his text, which was written right after the war, Leibowitz – an orthodox intellectual – criticizes what he perceived as the pagan behavior of the Israeli people. Israeli Jews were extremely enthusiastic about reaching the wall, which is in fact only the outer wall of the ancient temple, not even the temple itself. He argued that they should also construct Israel’s biggest discotheque in the newly built square, which should be called “Disco-Kotel”, a place where all the different micro-societies of Israel could come together. So Leibowitz’s text was the one I chose to use; it was directly related to the subject, but it wasn’t about my work at all.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR WORK HAS A POLITICAL COMPONENT TO IT?

As I said earlier, my work comes from the world and the world has an impact on my work. That is naturally political, because the streets are filled with politics. However, my work does not point out what’s good or bad, right or wrong. Having been born and raised in Israel, I know how extremely complicated things are, and there’s no simple answer to what’s right or wrong. I constantly experience this complexity and try to see things from different perspectives, as well as the consequences that stem from years of bad communication. I don’t feel the need to push any opinion to the front, but I do have interest in shedding light on situations, which is a different approach.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT IT IS THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST TO EXAMINE A SUBJECT FROM ALL SIDES?

I don’t have any idea of what an artist should or should not do, but for me, it is about the ability to see things from above. It’s about staying somewhat remote. In the case of the Fire Brigade

for example, I watch and accompany the firefighters, who are the ones on the ground and who have to get involved on a very immediate level. I’ve only joined them for the past four months and I have already seen so much death. Still, it’s not me who touches them. You can imagine what the firefighters must see and have to be in real friction with. As an artist you’re definitely a part of things, but you also often remain on the outside. That’s the quality that can make you see things, which someone inside couldn’t.

AS AN OBSERVER AND INVESTIGATOR OF PLACE, WHAT STANDS OUT FOR YOU IN BERLIN? DID YOU HAVE ANY PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS ABOUT WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE WHEN YOU CAME HERE?

I visited Berlin many times before I moved here, so it wasn’t unfamiliar. What and who keep surprising me the most are the Germans. I had a preconceived idea of their cultural behavior, for example, but it proved to be completely diverse. It’s interesting to see how Germans treat each other; there’s a distance, but they are also extremely helpful and reliable. There are many different layers and also many contradictions to how Germans behave. I’m interested in seeing the various angles of what Germany and Germans are like in 2017.

DO YOU SEE YOUR WORK IN THE TRADITION OF CERTAIN OTHER ARTISTS, WHO CAME BEFORE YOU?

Certainly, but I don’t have a role model or someone I follow. I actually take more from music than visual art. Recently, I learned to play the drums a bit, because I wanted to find out how that feels.

WHEN ARE YOU THE MOST SATISFIED WITH YOUR WORK AND COULD YOU PERHAPS DESCRIBE A PROJECT THAT WAS ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL TO YOU?

My work is complete when an audience is in it. I am the most satisfied when I see reactions that I didn’t expect, when the work becomes something I could not have predicted. Meanwhile,

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predicting how things will evolve is a tool for me; I use 3D models and renderings, various tests and frequent visits to the places I will be showing in; I try to have a good sense of what the work will be like when finally installed. Over time, I have developed this into a skill. Having said that, there is always a gap between what I imagine and the actual outcome. I'm most satisfied when these surprises succeed in making me happy. One project that I found especially meaningful was a work I did for the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion in the Tel Aviv Museum in 2013. Entitled "Neither Day Nor Night", it was a large monumental work in a spacious hall, but also very fragile due to its simplicity and the fact that it had no center. It almost functioned as an atmosphere, made of space. The beautiful thing was that the entrance to the pavilion was free, and there was no museum guard on my floor. At first, I thought it was not the best idea, but then I realized it was perfect. People stayed there for long periods of time and some even came back more than once to see it, dance on its dance floor, or to meditate on it. The installation already dates back four years and when I meet people, some of whom I know and others whom I don't, they remind me of it.



ANNETTE HOLLYWOOD

JANUARY 9, 2017

KREUZBERG, BERLIN

ALTHOUGH YOU ARE A GERMAN ARTIST BASED IN BERLIN, YOUR FILMS HAVE BEEN PREDOMINANTLY IN ENGLISH. IS THERE A SPECIFIC REASON OTHER THAN TRYING TO REACH AN INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE?

I grew up in West Germany and was raised with various products of the American cultural industry, especially in the form of TV series and movies. Though these were dubbed and screened in German, they still belonged to an English-speaking culture. As my work explores pop-cultural phenomena and mass media at large, I prefer using the language of the original context, English or German.

IN FACT, YOU HAVE FOCUSED ON THIS THEME FOR ALMOST TWO DECADES. HAVE YOU WITNESSED CERTAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MASS MEDIA LANDSCAPE THAT HAVE DIRECTLY IMPACTED AND EVEN SHAPED YOUR WORK?

Yes, absolutely. I belong to a generation for whom television as a medium was still incredibly relevant. However, I think that for younger people today it is not as important anymore. In fact, they

hardly watch TV. Most of what they do along these lines can be done with their cell phones. My earlier works, in which I interacted physically with films, reflected my desire to overcome the role of a passive media consumer. I call this “Performing Found Footage” – it’s a strategy that I have used repeatedly in my work in different ways. Today, it seems that the media already offers possibilities of interaction. Any person can access and post film footage or music on YouTube, for example. People have become very interactive with mass media outlets on multiple levels; you can like, forward, or comment on things constantly.

HAS MASS MEDIA BECOME MORE DEMOCRATIC, BECAUSE EVERYONE CAN ENGAGE WITH IT, CURATE THEIR EXPERIENCE AND USE IT AS AN OUTLET FOR PERSONAL OPINIONS?

Yes, I would describe it as a kind of democratization. However, the question is whether it just creates surface rather than depth. It is certainly faster to add your name to an online petition than to be really politically active. It remains to be seen what the lasting effects will be. I feel that a direct political engagement is important. This is why I have been active in cultural politics for years.

YOU JUST MENTIONED SURFACE AND MANY OF YOUR FILMS EXPLORE VARIOUS SUPERFICIALITIES THAT EXIST IN SOCIETY. ONE PROJECT SPECIFICALLY DEALS WITH THE ART WORLD.

It is a feminist stance. What is personal is also always political. As an artist I work within a certain system, whose boundaries I constantly brush up against. I am definitely aware of a glass ceiling and mechanisms of exclusion. That’s why I examine this so-called art world, which I am a part of, trying to define what that actually means. I observe how I work and live within this context.

IS THE ROLE OF THE FEMALE ARTIST A PARTICULAR FOCUS?

Yes, that’s one of my concerns. My work addresses the fact that women still receive less than men, which is a wider sociopolitical problem. In Germany, women still earn less than men, for

example, which is absurd. Furthermore, I explore various power structures, such as dependencies between artists, critics, and curators. I am curious about all of these relationships and how I fit into this context. I conduct my research with a healthy dose of humor, which is essential to keep going.

YOU WRITE A LOT OF YOUR OWN DIALOGUE, INCLUDING RAP LYRICS, WHICH YOU PERFORMED IN THE WORK “SORRY CURATOR” (2008). WHAT COMES FIRST, TEXT OR THE CONCEPT FOR THE FILM?

That varies. I usually avoid artist clichés or rather, I deconstruct them – but in the case of “Sorry Curator”, I was ‘suddenly inspired’ when I woke up early one morning and had this idea of a battle between an artist and a curator. After this initial idea, the text developed really fast. In general I enjoy rhyming very much. It was a work that I developed within a few days. Meanwhile my film “Bigasso Baby” (2014) refers directly to Jay Z’s film “Picasso Baby” (2013) and so it was rooted in my desire to react to that piece. It took a very long time to write that text, which I found very challenging. It deals with the meaning and politics of art production in an ever more commercial and market-oriented system. I found that process very complex, especially as I was also conscientious of me being a white person battling a black rapper in an art form that I had appropriated. However, the wonderful thing about hip-hop is that it allows for transgressing certain boundaries.

DID YOU EXHIBIT “BIGASSO BABY” ALONG WITH JAY Z’S WORK SO THAT THERE WAS A SENSE OF CALL AND RESPONSE?

Yes I did. I projected “Bigasso Baby” onto a large and fat exhibition display as centerpiece of the installation, while Jay Z’s video was shown on a small display screen nearby. The installation further included various research materials referring to the debate around poor pay for performance artists with statements by Yvonne Rainer, for example. Other sources reflected reactions

to Jay Z's video. It became a small archive, which helped to contextualize the project.

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

I just finished a film, which is called "Der Grenzenlose Schlagerwettbewerb" ["Hit Song Contest without Borders"] (2017). It explores the unique historic phenomenon of hit-song [Schlager] cultures in divided Germany. It contrasts Schlager in West and East Germany, the GDR, during the 1950s through the 1980s. I perform and interact with both of these worlds, using old television clips. Through this footage, I examine the influence that the two political systems had on the cultural landscape and this particular genre of music. In the West, Schlager was part of a large industry and driven by its own economic ambitions, but in East Germany it was strictly controlled by the regime. The latter's agenda had been largely defined in 1959 at the Bitterfeld Conference [Bitterfelder Weg], which had aimed to form a socialist national culture by connecting the working class with contemporary artists of all fields. You can find these political ambitions reflected in the music of that time. "Der Grenzenlose Schlagerwettbewerb" consists of a 30 minutes-long film and is part of a comprehensive installation made of newspaper articles, memorabilia, autographed pictures of the singers, and records, among other materials.

IN OTHER WORDS, IN THIS CASE YOU ARE WORKING PRIMARILY WITH HISTORIC MATERIALS.

Yes. Through "Performing Found Footage" and the technique of the greenscreen, my cast and I interact with the historic material. The latter mainly stems from the song contests hosted on TV in 1968 both in West Germany and the GDR. However, I also use all sorts of archival materials from that time. These include some newspaper articles from both sides of the Wall, which covered the same story of a musician, who escaped from the East. The tone of these articles couldn't be more different. While one side

is applauding the escapee as heroic, the other is condemning him as a traitor. I work with these contrasts and contradictions – they drive much of the story.

THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A LOT OF RESEARCH INVOLVED. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING ON "DER GRENZENLOSE SCHLAGERWETTBEWERB"?

The film took a long time, partially because I had to raise money for the music and television rights. Instead of pirating materials I wanted to make sure that everything is covered. In the end, the administrative work took much longer than the creative process. To keep complete control of the project, I even became my own production firm. That required that I had to organize all the financial support myself. Fortunately I received funding from the BKM [Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien / Commissioner for Culture and the Media]. Overall, it took about two and a half years until the film was completed.

DO YOU IMAGINE THE FILM TO ALWAYS BE A PART OF AN INSTALLATION OF MEMORABILIA AND NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS, OR CAN IT STAND ON ITS OWN?

Both. It is a film that could be shown on its own and which does not need any additional context. However, it is also part of an installation, where the film plays in the front room, as if running on a living room TV, while a backroom gathers all the background material. In the film, there is a fictitious artist collective which interacts with the original footage, hijacking the broadcast. So, the backroom functions as their research laboratory.

DO YOU HAVE AN IDEAL FORUM OR EXHIBITION SPACE IN MIND?

Yes, I do have some particular spaces in mind, but nothing has been determined yet. Ideally, it would be a place where this part of German history is of particular interest. Of course, in a way you could argue that this could be anywhere in Germany. I like the idea of an exhibition space with windows so that the outside world can look in. It is somewhat of a living room concept,

meant to also encourage people to visit, who are not that familiar with art. To address an audience that doesn't only consists of highly cultured individuals is one of the reasons why I work with mass media to begin with. I would hope that some people would view the exhibition, because they simply love Schlager music or because they are record fans.

DID YOU COME ACROSS ANYTHING IN YOUR EXTENSIVE RESEARCH THAT WAS PARTICULARLY SURPRISING OR INSPIRING TO YOU? WERE THERE CERTAIN SINGERS, WHOSE STORIES STRUCK A PERSONAL CHORD, FOR EXAMPLE?

I have to say that I found a lot more material than I had space for in the film. There are so many Schlager from the GDR that were not known in the West. However, those few, who made it to the West and were taken on by the record industry there, sometimes also became censored. Lyrics about building new beautiful homes for a brighter future in the GDR, which can be read as so-called *Aufbaulieder* [GDR construction songs] for example, would not be reproduced.

IT'S INTERESTING THAT CENSORSHIP PLAYED A ROLE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE WALL. MOST PEOPLE WOULD ASSUME THAT THIS WAS MAINLY AN ACTIVITY PRACTICED INSIDE THE GDR.

Exactly, although censorship might be too tough a description. However, these were certainly things I noticed. There also are many fascinating stories about musicians on both sides. There were several, who left the GDR for West Germany, but there were also a few who went to the East. One example was the singer Rica Déus, who had an emerging career in the West. She fell in love with another musician and followed him to the GDR in the early 1960s, where she became a Schlager star. Another example is James W. Pulley, who was stationed in West Germany as a young G.I. but deserted to flee to the East. Like Déus he also became a star in the GDR and stayed there. What's interesting is that although he was well known in film and TV, he was still

not allowed to release his own records. The music industry was strictly regulated by the government, which would grant specific licenses. It wasn't possible to just get on a stage and perform.

MEANWHILE, SOME ARTISTS WERE ABLE TO TRANSLATE THEIR SUCCESS FROM THE EAST TO THE WEST. MANFRED KRUG, FOR EXAMPLE, HAD BEEN A SUCCESSFUL MUSICIAN IN THE GDR, BEFORE BECOMING A BELOVED TV ACTOR IN THE WEST.

On the other hand, there were also many performers, who came to the West and soon became forgotten.

WHEN DID YOU DISCOVER FILM AS YOUR PRIMARY MEDIUM?

I came to video after focusing on sculpture, specifically wood carving. It became clear to me that it wouldn't be that interesting to work with a medium that I was already very skilled in. I liked that video was immaterial. In fact, dissolution and immateriality were two themes I was especially interested in at the time. Soon, a curiosity about text developed and I started to make rhymes about my own creative process early on. This was my entry into video as a medium.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR BACKGROUND IN SCULPTURE HAS INFLUENCED YOUR INTEREST IN CONTEXTUALIZING FILM WITH INSTALLATIONS? IN SCULPTURE, YOU CONTEMPLATE THE OBJECT FROM ALL ANGLES; IT SEEMS TO ME THAT YOU STILL GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT ABOUT HOW YOUR FILMS ARE BEING PRESENTED. IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU ON WHAT KIND OF MONITOR YOUR FILMS ARE DISPLAYED OR WHETHER THEY SHOULD BE SIMPLY PROJECTED ONTO WHITE WALLS?

In the beginning, I approached film through performance in the sense that I interacted with selected film footage. In an earlier work entitled "Snowworld" (1998), I entered into a love scene between Catherine Deneuve and Susan Sarandon in the film "The Hunger" (UK, 1983). My performance, which was staged between two projections, reflected my attempt to conquer the screen for myself. On one side, the actual film was being

screened, while a camera recorded my interaction with it and that footage was being projected onto another screen. It was a closed-circuit installation. In that case, it really did matter how the concept could be presented in space and material form. In some early works the old bulbous TV sets, which Nam Jun Paik had used for example, also played an important role. I used them almost like a helmet so that their screens only showed heads, pondering the entry into and departure from the video-world. Yet, technology is in constant flux. In the past, a 4:3 display format was standard and now, it is 16:9. It's almost impossible to find the old monitors. So in a way older films, which were conceived for the 4:3 format are now outdated.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION? DO YOU COLLECT OLD MONITORS SO THAT YOU CAN SCREEN OLDER WORKS IN A MANNER YOU HAD ORIGINALLY ENVISIONED? DO YOU NEED A TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVE?

I have kept some equipment from earlier works when they are a relevant part of an installation, such as the bubble TVs. My works often reflect the medium and its formats, such as the 7" vinyl single in "The Art Song Collection" (2013). The accompanying installation, for which I reinterpreted love songs as art songs on records that are installed inside a reconfigured jukebox, serves as an homage to the analog world; it is also a huge and heavy sculpture in itself. In "Der Grenzenlose Schlagerwettbewerb" I play with the different formats of the old footage. I used footage formerly conceived for the 4:3 format, but turned it into a 16:9 film, every time the different worlds of the GDR and West Germany encounter each other. In those moments, the pictures shift and turn into 16:9. It was a way to both refer to the past and the current moment at the same time. These are all important contemplations for me.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR OEUVRE IN THE LARGER ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT, PERHAPS RELATING IT TO AMERICAN FEMINIST FILMS OF THE 1960S AND 1970S BY JOAN JONAS AND CAROLEE

SCHNEEMANN, FOR EXAMPLE? ARE THERE ANY PARTICULAR SOURCES OF INSPIRATION?

These are certainly works I have gotten to know, although I would name other artists, who were more inspirational to me, such as Laurie Anderson, Andrea Fraser, Valie Export or the Guerilla Girls. Les Reines Prochaines, the Swiss band and women artist collective, who work in music, video and performance were very important to me. Muda Mathis and Pipilotti Rist were early members of that group and certainly sources of inspiration. It is my belief that not everything pours out of oneself or originates within oneself. Therefore, I reflect the artist role in my work and play with the context in which the projects are presented. I showed "The Art Song Collection" (2013) at Galerie Thore Krietemeyer in Berlin, where one room housed only one vitrine. Inside, photo albums from my childhood were on display, helping to explain why I started to collect records. On the one hand, this served as an ironic comment on the concept of the artist as a child prodigy. On the other, it did help inform visitors about my motivations and interests, and influences. Of course, I soak up information all the time and react to it, that's really the core of my work.

IT CERTAINLY ADDS ANOTHER LAYER OF PERSONAL HISTORY. WOULD YOU SAY THAT IN ADDITION TO SERVING AS A COMMENTARY ON SET SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND LIMITATIONS, YOUR WORK ALSO MANIFESTS AS SELF-EXPLORATION? THE FACT THAT IT IS YOU WHO PERFORMS AND INTERACTS WITH OUTSIDE MATERIAL RATHER THAN ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL YOU INSTRUCT, ALSO IMPLIES AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP TO THE SUBJECT MATTER.

It is not diaristic and not spontaneous, especially as the scripts for each project are very detailed and have to be developed over long periods of time. The only work that resembles a diary is "Real Artist Life" (2006), which was conceived as a docusoap. In this project I looked at myself within the art world and vice versa.

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In the beginning, I just saw myself as a placeholder, who still had her own motivations. In “Snowworld”, I wanted to enter into this world of longing that was established through this particular love constellation. However, I also meant to discuss the fact that most of the portrayed love scenes are heterosexual and that what I desire is hardly shown. So in that case, it made personal sense for me to be the performer who interacts with this footage. What is so thrilling about art is that it allows me repeatedly to find out what’s very important to me. “Bigasso Baby” also reflects my wish to critically and personally respond to what is being propagated in Jay Z’s film and so that had to be performed by me. However, there are other projects, such as the film “Hit (By Great Art)” (2011), which examines a particular art world through different characters, such as the collector, the gallery owner, or the shooting star. Here, there are many performers and I only have a small supporting role in the film. My newest project is a mixture of both approaches. I would say that it is the work itself that determines who will be the key performer.

IS THERE A CONCRETE PROJECT, WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE TO PURSUE IN THE FUTURE OR A TOPIC YOU HOPE TO EXAMINE?

I really want to see “Der Grenzenlose Schlagerwettbewerb“ through and am currently thinking about how I would like to present it. I look forward to its completion and to look at everything I have done thus far. I also plan to work on an extensive publication of my oeuvre. I am curious to see what kind of developments I can trace. That being said, I do have an idea for a next project in mind, which would be around the topic of conflict. I am thinking of a sound-art based long film.



ASTRID KÖPPE

JANUARY 9, 2017
KREUZBERG, BERLIN

YOU ARE CURRENTLY PREPARING FOR AN EXHIBITION IN PARIS AT THE GOETHE-INSTITUT [*PARADIGMES INDÉCIS; PIUS FOX, ASTRID KÖPPE, TIM PLAMPER, KATRIN STRÖBEL, FEBRUARY 9 – MARCH 30, 2017*].

I'm preparing in the sense that I am currently thinking about which work I would like to show and I'm also waiting for some feedback from the curators. Though the show will primarily be focused on drawing, it will have a wider approach. The curator thinks that we should also consider my large scale vitreous enamels as an option and I can only agree as I certainly consider them drawings as well. My enamels are definitely not paintings as the entire process is related to drawing. They are usually stenciled, but I make the stencils directly on the enamel surface. I have some self-adhesive paper on a roll, which I will apply to a pre-enameled surface. I will draw on it and cut it out before the enamel material is being sprayed on. I have to work, think, and plan in layers. Every color, every layer needs to go to the kiln to be fired.

WHERE DO YOU WORK ON THE ENAMELS?

I work at an enamel company, which has a metal workshop where they prepare the sheet steel. This entails edge bending, welding, washing, and preparing it for the first layer of enamel, which after being sprayed on needs to dry and then of course go through the huge kiln. You really need a lot of space.

IT'S A VERY INVOLVED PROCESS, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THE SCALE YOU USE FOR YOUR WORK AND THE WEIGHT THIS ADDS. WHEN AND WHY DID YOU START WORKING WITH ENAMEL, PREFERING IT TO ACRYLIC OR OIL PAINT FOR EXAMPLE?

For me, it was actually the only logical step forward from oil painting. I painted until about 2005 and the last pieces I did were much closer to drawing than any of the works that came before. For a long time, I had a fixed, prepared painting in my head and I only had to execute it. It had a background, a middle ground, and a foreground. But my paintings became increasingly drawing-like, especially toward the last two years of that period. I wanted something really clear and I wasn't interested in the background anymore. So what I tried to do was to get rid of it. I tried a couple of things, and it turned out very quickly that just leaving the canvas white was no option, because it left the works to look unfinished. In addition, you can quickly leave stains on a white canvas, which is too fragile a surface, really. I decided to try out some enamel paint for the background, because I wanted to have a sealed surface instead of the raw canvas.

WITH VITREOUS ENAMEL YOUR SURFACE BECAME INCREDIBLY SMOOTH AND DEVOID OF ANY SENSE OF TEXTURE.

Yes, and that really is what I tried to achieve – but in the beginning, I was only experimenting with enamel paint. So I still had the texture of the canvas and the brushstrokes. I didn't like it and thought that it was still too much. I was aiming for a very clean surface of papery whiteness. The thing is, nobody will stumble over the lack of a background in a drawing. It's just white,

because paper is white. That's completely understood. This is exactly what I wanted for my large-scale pieces as well. So when I was trying to get rid of the texture of the canvas and any hint of a brushstroke, I thought that perhaps, I could just pour enamel paint on a sturdier surface, such as wood or metal. One day, I was talking to a colleague, basically thinking out loud – and I heard myself say that perhaps vitreous enamel would be the solution. It occurred to me in that very moment and it just clicked. After that I did my research and ended up finding this company I work with to this day.

IN CONTRAST TO THE WHITE OF A MATTE SHEET OF PAPER, ENAMEL WILL OFFER A SENSE OF SLIGHTLY REFLECTIVE SHEEN.

True, but it didn't bother me at all. To me, the most important ability of enamel is that it can provide me with the clean surface that I want. I can place objects on a sheet of paper in both a very reduced and calm way. The enamel has this immanent whiteness and nobody ever questions it. In fact, white enamel is a very familiar surface, used for most bathtubs or the lids of old kitchen stoves. It's just the most common thing for enamel to be white.

IN THAT SENSE, IT HAS KIND OF THE SAME DEMOCRATIC QUALITY AS PAPER. IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH SOMETHING USEFUL IN OUR DAILY LIVES. IT'S FUNCTIONAL RATHER THAN PRECIOUS.

Exactly and that's also something I like about it. In fact, I like to work with materials that don't imply an art context. I like to explore what you can turn these materials into, give them a new twist. I also like the glossy quality of vitreous enamel, which looks different from every angle. It's something my works tend to do anyway; they evoke this kind of visual dissonance. At my exhibitions for example, viewers look at my work, which seems abstract, trying to find out what's going on and if I'm around, they will tell me what they see, things that I would have never thought of. It's really exciting and refreshing. This principle of looking at things in a different way from different perspectives

and to explore how something changes because of that is very interesting to me.

YOU MEAN WHEN THEY ARE BEING STUDIED FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES AND PERSPECTIVES, CLOSE UP OR FROM FAR AWAY, STRAIGHT UP, AS WELL AS FROM ABOVE AND BELOW.

Exactly. But I also mean from a different angle in your mind. There are a couple of works I've been working on recently that can only be looked at or can only become visible under particular circumstances. I call these almost invisible pieces "Little Ghosts". They are drawings made with petroleum jelly and a fine brush on the insides of the glass panes of custom made, biomorphic box frames. You don't see the actual drawings at all under normal conditions. However, they have these small LED gooseneck lamps that are mounted behind the frame and they end up casting a shadow on the background cardboard that is the actual work.

THE SHADOW OF THE ACTUAL DRAWING IS THE WORK?

Correct and it's only visible when the piece is in a dark room with windows and doors being blocked out. You have to use these two little lamps and only they allow the drawing to cast this strange, glimmering shadow, which looks three-dimensionally.

AS YOU MENTIONED ABOVE, YOUR ABSTRACT FORMS ENCOURAGE INTERPRETATION. VIEWERS TEND TO READ SOMETHING INTO THEM OR TRY TO DECIPHER THEM. WHERE DO THEY COME FROM? ARE THEY SKETCHING FROM LIFE, FOR EXAMPLE? HOW DO YOU DEVELOP FORM?

In most cases, my forms are based on things that I have actually seen and usually, these are very common. I don't really talk about it, because telling where the information came from is like giving the game away. That's also the reason why I never title my drawings or enamels. I don't want people to read the title and go: "Ah. Now, this doesn't look like that."

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU WANT TO PROVIDE A KEY TO A RIDDLE.

It would just be silly if I were to give a really descriptive title. I want people to make up their own minds and they do, all the time. But generally speaking my forms can go back to food, clothing, or a piece of equipment, for example. What I will say is that what often draws me to particular objects is the fact that they remind me of something else at the same time. There is an embedded ambivalence. It's a bit of a game, which has become somewhat automatic by now. I noticed that I look at things through my own personal subjective filter; I begin to see them in front of my inner eye already in the shape of one of my drawings. I already know then how it is going to look in my work.

YOU MEAN THAT YOU SEE THESE FORMS ALREADY HOW YOU WOULD DEPICT THEM ON PAPER OR IN ENAMEL?

Yes. I also know exactly how big they are going to be on the paper, in which position I will depict them, and which material I'm going to use. I just know what it's going to turn into.

DO YOU ALSO KNOW WHICH COLORS YOU WILL USE?

In most cases, yes.

DO YOU USE COLOR DESCRIPTIVELY, AESTHETICALLY, SYMBOLICALLY, OR IN ORDER TO UNDERLINE CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INITIAL OBJECT OF INSPIRATION?

Usually, when I see something that I want to draw, it comes immediately with a color. I will then develop something based on what I've seen. Sometimes I like to give it a rather misleading color though.

YOU TALKED ABOUT THE CLARITY OF YOUR SURFACE EARLIER AND IT IS INTERESTING THAT YOU HAVE A VERY CLEAR IMAGE OF WHAT YOU WANT TO DO BEFORE APPROACHING THE PAPER. YOU GO OUT INTO THE WORLD AND TAKE NOTE OF THINGS THAT ENTICE YOU. YOU'RE NOT SEARCHING THROUGH THE PROCESS OF DRAWING, BUT RATHER DRAW THE RESULTS OF YOUR VISUAL SEARCH.

True. When I sit down to make a drawing, I know pretty exactly what I'm going to get. I mean, not down to every single line,

that's not quite possible, I suppose. But the general outcome, the color, the position, the way it bends, all that is absolutely clear. Also, the way I draw, you can't really correct yourself. I use materials that don't allow room for mistakes or their fixing. Apart from pencil, I mostly work in ink, ink pens, charcoal, and pastel chalk. You can't really erase these materials, because there would always remain a trace.

IN ADDITION, THERE'S A SENSE OF LIGHTNESS IN ALL YOUR FORMS. YOU'RE NOT WORKING WITH OPACITY OR HEAVY LAYERING. AS A RESULT, YOU ACHIEVE AN UNUSUAL TRANSLUCENCE, WHICH I WOULD IMAGINE IS VERY FRAGILE AND ROOTED IN FINE HANDLING OF YOUR MATERIALS.

Absolutely. Especially when I work with charcoal or pastel to create forms that almost seem to have an aura around them, I have to work in a very controlled way. There really isn't much room for correcting smudges. You have to know what you're doing, otherwise you can throw the piece out as it's going to end up badly. The same is true with watercolor. In most cases I luckily just know where the line belongs.

WERE YOU ALWAYS THAT CLEAR IN YOUR THINKING OR IS THIS DUE TO YEARS OF WORKING WITH THE SAME MATERIALS?

It was always kind of clear. Even when I was still painting, I did quite a lot of planning in advance. For example, I would know that I wanted to reveal bits of the former surface by scratching into subsequent layers. I would know that I was going to have a dark layer somewhere, and then later on I could reveal it again through scratching.

ARE THE STENCILS WHICH YOU USE FOR YOUR ENAMELS DERIVED DIRECTLY FROM YOUR DRAWINGS?

Not necessarily. In fact, I have a different sketchbook for the enamels. The drawings in there are completely different from the drawings I have on the wall. They're just very simple pencil sketches. However, sometimes I will have a drawing, which

I think might work well if enlarged and to which the material of enamel could make a contribution or offer a new twist. So every now and then I will end up interpreting a drawing again in enamel.

DO YOU CARRY A SKETCHBOOK WITH YOU TO BE ABLE TO TAKE NOTES OUTSIDE THE STUDIO?

Rarely. Mostly I take notes in my head.

WHEREAS YOUR DRAWINGS HAVE A SOFT QUALITY, THE ENAMELS ARE MORE CONCRETE AND RICH IN CONTRAST. COLORS YOU HAVE USED IN THE WORKS THAT ARE CURRENTLY STORED HERE IN THE STUDIO EMBRACE BLACK, WHITE, AS WELL AS SATURATED REDS AND ORANGES, AMONG OTHERS.

Yes, certainly. You have a bit of a reduced palette in the enamels, just due to technique really. I could order more colors, but I don't feel the need for it, because the enamels are already more reductive than the drawings. In many cases, I feel that black and white is enough. In fact, most of the enamel material itself is half transparent, half opaque.

DOES THE FIRING OF EACH LAYER HOLD SURPRISES?

Yes, every time, because you can't always predict what will happen. I know for example that cadmium yellow and red are bound to do something funny, because of the chemical reactions that happen in the kiln. Unlike other paints, you can't mix enamels; they have to be applied separately.

IN A WAY YOU HAVE TO LET GO OF COLOR THEORY.

Yes in a way. It's just that these enamels contain these heavy metal pigments. Because all the more contemporary stuff just mimics the heavy metal pigments, it's not going to be able to make it through the kiln. The pigments are going to be destroyed because the pieces are fired at more than 900 degrees. Also, the first layer of enamel that is applied to the steel is always a blackish grey. It's not as glossy as later layers. It just properly melts onto the steel and the following layers melt onto that surface.

Meanwhile, the enamel will get darker with every firing. So whenever I want to have a black shape, I use this first layer of enamel.

IN THOSE CASES YOU HAVE TO CONCEIVE FORM IN THE REVERSE. YOU WILL ADD THE NEGATIVE SPACE?

Yes, a lot of the time.

BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO WORK IN LAYERS, EACH OF WHICH REQUIRES A SEPARATE FIRING IN THE KILN, THERE IS A TIME DELAY IN THE WORK PROCESS. THIS SEEMS LOOSELY REMINISCENT OF FILM PHOTOGRAPHY OR PRINTMAKING. YOU DON'T REALLY KNOW THE OUTCOME RIGHT AWAY. SINCE YOU'RE AN ARTIST WHO IS PURSUING A CLEAR IMAGE THE MEDIUM OF ENAMEL POSES AN INTERESTING CHALLENGE.

It does and it's certainly not as predictable, but I always have the impression that the material works with and not against me. It's one of the things that I really like about enamel. From the beginning, I had the feeling that the material and the technique are made for me. The material has some almost organic qualities to it, in the way it reacts in the kiln, and it certainly does some funny stuff now and then. However, I've become pretty good at predicting how it's going to behave and remain curious. Also, if red, orange, and yellow tend to react to each other in surprising ways, I will just use them for pieces in which I am perfectly fine with this wild card. I am actually anticipating it and am quite disappointed if nothing happens.

IN THE CONTEXT OF AN EXHIBITION, DO YOU LIKE TO SHOW YOUR ENAMELS LIT OR DO YOU PREFER NATURAL LIGHT DUE TO THEIR EMBEDDED REFLECTIVE QUALITY?

It's true that the enamels look very different depending on where they are shown and what the light conditions are. I do like that they are glossy and that they appear differently depending on the circumstances. I've made a white-on-white work, for example, where two layers of cream white enamel sit on top of the dark

grey one. Most of the piece is only visible by the edges of the layers. So if you viewed it in a well-lit room with diffused light, you would hardly see anything. It would appear as just plain white. Actually, the worse the light, the better you see this particular work.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU WORK IN SERIES, OR BODIES OF WORK?

No, not really. My drawings are ongoing and everything else is derived from them.

AS MENTIONED BEFORE, YOU HAVE WORKED WITH A WIDE RANGE OF MATERIALS, INCLUDING Q-TIPS, FOR EXAMPLE.

Yes. I made a work that I installed on the wall, for example, which if viewed from the side, looked a bit like a horsetail. It was made of many strands of Q-tips that were glued to each other. I started doing this earlier last year when I was in Malaysia. I had had some Q-tips on the table, because I was doing some watercolors and I sometimes use them for that. By chance, I had two lined up in a row and thought that that looked a bit strange, like little ghostly fingers somehow. I was probably thinking of "Nightmare Before Christmas" or something like that. I started sewing two pieces together, added another one and so on. As I mentioned before, I really like to take a common, everyday material to see what I can turn it into. It's not on purpose in the sense that I look at a material and wonder what I can do with it. Sometimes, a material will just offer itself.

DESPITE THEIR THREE-DIMENSIONALITY, THESE STRINGS OF Q-TIPS COULD ALSO MANIFEST AS LINES. WOULD YOU CONSIDER THESE WORKS DRAWINGS OR SCULPTURES?

They are sculptures, but they are very drawing-like because technically they consist of lines. There are quite a few works that are somewhat in-between drawing, sculpture, and installation. In these works made of Q-tips I'm essentially bundling lines.

THEY RELATE TO YOUR DRAWINGS IN THAT THEY PLAY WITH NOTIONS OF TRANSLUCENCE AND DENSITY. THEY ALSO CONNECT

TO THE ENAMELS IN THAT THEIR APPEARANCE CHANGES DUE TO THE VIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE AND THE SURROUNDING LIGHT CONDITIONS.

They do. What also changes is our perception of the material. When you take an object as commonplace as a Q-tip, you don't necessarily expect it in an art context. I did a little bit of research but couldn't find much. There are probably some bigger installations that might involve Q-tips among other things, but not as a sole focus.

DESPITE ITS SHAPE, THE Q-TIP IS ALSO INTERESTING AS A HYBRID OF ORGANIC AND ARTIFICIAL MATERIALS; IT INVOLVES BOTH COTTON AND PLASTIC.

Yes, and it looks organic, because it's made for an organic purpose, to be used on the human body. It's like clothing, which is organic because it's meant to fit our bodies. I've used a couple of other materials before, which had a similar quality. One involved fake eyelashes, for example. I glued them on fake fingernails, which could be worn. I see these works as connected with each other, because both are originally meant as beauty-related products.

ALL OF YOUR WORKS HAVE A BIOMORPHIC ELEMENT. DO YOU EVER WORK WITH GEOMETRY?

All my work is based on something natural, not necessarily organic, but on something that is naturally growing nevertheless. So in about 98% of the cases, my works are biomorphic.

ARE YOU USUALLY PRETTY CLEAR ON WHAT YOU WILL BE WORKING ON WHEN YOU COME TO THE STUDIO? HOW STRUCTURED IS YOUR TIME THERE?

I usually have something in the making. In most cases, I work on a few drawings at the same time. I'm currently working a lot with watercolor and so I will add a new layer, for example, or put down a first layer that will then need to be put aside to dry. I will end up with three, four, five, six, seven drawings on my table,

which I then start to fully execute one-by-one. However, there's not really a proper plan. I just come to the studio and I know that I will work on these few drawings that are unfinished. In fact, I can get so immersed in a drawing that I don't notice how the hours pass. At some point, I might just notice that my wrist starts to hurt and I realize that I've been drawing for four or five hours. Then I get up and do something else, such as gluing Q-tips to each other. Sometimes I will start with some manual work first, preparing, packing, or sanding something, for example.

YOU'VE TRAVELED A LOT TO MALAYSIA IN THE LAST FEW YEARS. HAVE THESE EXPERIENCES HAD AN EXPLICIT IMPACT ON YOUR WORK?

Definitely. Because most of my work is based on things that I've seen, being in a different environment always has a major impact. When I first came to Malaysia for a residency at the Goethe-Institut in 2010, the visual input was quite overwhelming. I was really excited by the more obvious things then, all these incredible temples, dragons, and fruit I had never seen before. During that year, I had an exhibition first in Malaysia [whitebox@MAP, Kuala Lumpur, 2010] and then in one of my German galleries [*Malaysian Species*, Galerie Arte Giani, Frankfurt/Main, 2011]. It was clearly a major influence on the work and it showed. However, as I kept returning, I discovered the less obvious bits.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU NEED TRAVEL TO CHANGE THE PERSPECTIVE OF YOUR WORK?

It certainly helps. I really like to travel, but it can also be to some random little town somewhere, it doesn't have to be anything spectacular or exotic. I pick up stuff everywhere.

DO YOU HAVE ANY PROJECTS IN THE NEAR FUTURE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO TACKLE?

There's always something. Life as an artist is a challenge. But I'm just always busy and there are a couple of shows coming up. I don't worry so much about the work, because I know that that's

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something I can rely on. I can trust my ability to work. I may have a little crisis every now and then but usually it doesn't last longer than a couple hours, surprisingly.

WHAT WOULD SUCH A CRISIS ENTAIL?

It's the moment when I'm afraid that I'm repeating myself and that there's nothing new. But usually everything will just come around. I know from experience that even if it feels really bad, I will just recover after a couple of hours. There will be a sudden turn or twist in my drawings that I haven't encountered before, and there is always the moment where a new path opens up. This happens reliably and so I really trust my ability to work through crises. There are always new developments in the drawings and I also find other things I'm interested in all the time. In general, my art really happens through work. Of course it also entails a lot of thinking, but in my case not in the sense of deliberately developing a theoretical concept that I then follow to a T. It's more like the works are thinking themselves. They certainly have their own logic. And they have always proven to be going further and further.



JORINDE VOIGT

JANUARY 9, 2017
RUMMELSBURGER BUCHT, BERLIN

YOU WORK ON PAPER, CREATING ELABORATE DRAWINGS IN VARIOUS SCALES. WHY DID YOU FOCUS ON THIS MATERIAL AND WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND?

My roots are in photography and I arrived at notation, because in the end, I would only write down notes on reasons why I would have made a particular photograph. I began to make an analysis of the situation, which I would have captured with the camera. That led to the possibility of writing down choreographic developments and to unfold its various potentials. In the beginning, this process was rather analytical and the most plausible and independent materials for that were pen and paper (DIN A4).

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU STARTED TO MAKE THESE NOTATIONS ON THE STANDARD LETTER SIZE FORMAT USED IN GERMANY. WERE YOUR NOTES THEN OF A TECHNICAL NATURE, REFERRING TO LIGHT EXPOSURE, FOR EXAMPLE, OR WERE THEY PERSONAL AND PERHAPS DIARISTIC?

No. When I was focused on a situation, I would mark positions: where do what kind of people stand, what kind of car is driving

by and how fast, what is the temperature, what is the overall color spectrum, and what are people wearing. My notes on people started in America, stating “blonde”, “blue”, “jeans”, or “sneakers”, for example. They reflected a minimal sociological analysis. **WOULD YOU WRITE DOWN THE NOTES THAT REFERRED TO A PERSON VERTICALLY AS IF TO REFLECT THEIR PHYSICAL SHAPE?**

Yes, these notes were arranged vertically so that one could quickly relate them to the fact that there was a person.

THAT SOUNDS AS IF THE ACTUAL WORDS NOT ONLY CARRIED INFORMATION, BUT WERE ALSO USED AS A DESCRIPTIVE, VISUAL DEVICE.

Exactly. In addition, arrows or measurements for distance further accompanied these words.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT PHOTOGRAPHY IMPACTED YOUR PERCEPTION OF TIME AND SPACE IN THAT YOU PERHAPS WERE USED TO BUNDLING ECLECTIC INFORMATION ON A FLAT PLANE?

No. Photography really only impacted my observation. After that, a lot of other influences became mixed in, especially music, which I had studied seriously before.

WAS YOUR TRAINING IN CLASSICAL MUSIC?

Yes, I had studied cello and some piano. Scoring had an impact on how you can make notations in regard to time. Another influence was film. In fact, while in art school my work was focused on both photography and film. In general, my work is rooted in the overarching question of what that is that surrounds me. I am attempting to observe that from a distance.

DOES YOUR OBSERVATION EXTEND TO DIFFERENT INTERESTS, SUCH AS PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND SURROUNDINGS?

Yes, it embraces various layers and everything that matters at this particular moment. In that it also marks an exploration of consciousness, which is two-fold. It is comprised of all that is unfolding around me, as well as my judgment of it. As I get older, I

increasingly focus on identifying what’s happening inside of me, which is invisible and not necessarily connected to something concrete on the outside. I think of this as a parallel reality to the situation I observe.

IS THIS OBSERVATION OF YOUR INNER SELF, WHICH YOU DESCRIBE AS A PARALLEL REALITY, SOMETHING THAT HAS BECOME CRYSTALLIZED THROUGH YOUR WORK OVER TIME?

I can only speak for myself, but I didn’t have any language for what is inside of me, not at all. It’s not something I learned. Over time it occurred to me however that that is just as real as what is happening on the outside and around me. That started to peak my interest and I began to explore it in depth. It did match up with my original curiosity about sociology, philosophy, and psychology and in general, it all belongs to the study of perception. The question always remains why does one experience something the way one does. In addition, I’m interested in the cross-section where this individual perception intersects with the collective consciousness and cultural circumstances. The individual can already be viewed as one gigantic cross-section with many other elements. I realized that we are made of many different things, which function autonomously while also moving through us. This movement is not just vertical or horizontal, but it even spans different generations and runs parallel with others.

DOES YOUR WORK ALLOW ROOM FOR IMPROVISATION AND INTUITION OR ARE YOUR NOTATIONS ALWAYS LINKED TO A CONSCIOUS DECISION MAKING PROCESS? ARE THERE MOMENTS IN YOUR PROCESS WHEN YOU DO NOT KNOW WHERE THE NEXT STEP WILL LEAD?

I am consciously focused when I work, because I write by hand directly on paper. My work also embraces some craft-based techniques at times, such as the gilding of certain sections or cutouts. These are parts of the work, which I don’t find that interesting to do and so I might use assistants for these tasks. However,

the application of color, which reflects a certain ductus, or the arrangement of certain proportions, which belong to a process that changes me as I'm engaged in it, are something that only I can do. On the one hand, I'm roughly defining rules or a thematic contemplation, on the other hand, I also have to allow room for evocations, which will tell me what's needed next. At the same time, the work as a whole embodies the search for a form of notation that can elevate the process to a possible means of communication. Each work is the result of this exploration.

PICKING UP ON THIS CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION, I AM WONDERING WHETHER YOU WOULD DESCRIBE YOUR WORK AS AN ATTEMPT TO CONNECT WITH THE VIEWER? YOUR NOTATIONS ARE BOTH ROOTED IN FACTUAL OBSERVATIONS, BUT THEY ARE ALSO VERY PERSONAL.

It's really just a visualization of the entire exploration. However, the personal experience, which is a crucial part of the work, can only be made visible through the material, which marks a detour and alters the statement in the end. I use various materials and am conscious of their different abilities, of what they embody and what aspects can be realized through them. I always think of visuals as language. For example, you can work with very transparent mediums and soft corners to describe things that don't have a concrete definition.

HOW DO YOU USE COLOR? IS IT FACTUAL AND ROOTED IN YOUR OBSERVATION OR DO YOU USE IT ABSTRACTLY, PERHAPS PSYCHOLOGICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY?

In regard to color, I use everything I know, my intuition, and at times chance, but always equally. It depends on the subject. It happens that I wake up in the morning and I will envision something very abstract but also concrete at the same time. There is a reason for that, but I don't know it. So I start to examine this experience, wanting to know the answer. I start my research,

which might entail a search for where else the same colors exist. Slowly I can piece it together and define what it is that I saw. I don't care where I get my information from and will use anything available to me, be it the scientific studies on the Internet, my old school books, friends, or something that I encounter on the street.

DOES THIS INTENSIVE RESEARCH PREDATE THE WORK?

No, it is parallel. The work is always also research.

DO YOU WORK ON SEVERAL PIECES AT THE SAME TIME?

I always work in series, mixing small and large formats at the same time. Because each subject has many aspects and there's never one true view of it. It's kind of like "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji" by Katsushika Hokusai [1760–1849]. It also enables me to explore the material in this particular context. It allows me to find out what kind of statement liquid ink could make in this particular situation. For that I have to consider and test all the different parameters, such as how liquid the ink should be, and hence how much water I will need to add. I will then explore this by adding water in different percentages. I also have to find out how fast the ink needs to be thrown against the paper, and what my distance to it should be.

DO YOU WRITE DOWN THESE TECHNICAL NOTES AS WELL?

Yes. When these investigations get more complex, then I will note them on the bottom of the paper and they will become a part of the work. Each new element will be combined with this research, which can embrace several works. However, sometimes, these technical experiments might lead to some works having to be discarded as some might stick to the ground, tear, or because the paper wrinkled in a way so that I can't work on it further. I might also deem some boring or I might have no ideas how to further develop something. The pieces that remain in the end are the works.

YOUR PROCESS IS VERY INVOLVED. IS IT DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO

LET GO OF WORKS THAT ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL? DESPITE OBVIOUS TECHNICAL PROBLEMS, WHAT ARE REASONS FOR YOU TO ABANDON A WORK?

If I have no ideas for a work for several days, I will simply discard it or turn it into postcards. Others I will put to the side. I have some works that have remained there for six years, for example.

DO YOU REVIEW THESE OUTCASTS PERIODICALLY?

Yes, I will occasionally look at them, at times coincidentally, because I'm looking for something else. It does happen then that I will develop some of them further. But it is not a bad thing that they are put to the side.

YOU WORK IN DIFFERENT FORMATS AND SOME OF YOUR NOTATIONS ARE FAIRLY LARGE. THE LATTER REQUIRE A DIFFERENT PHYSICAL INVOLVEMENT THAN YOUR SMALLER WORKS. IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU TO GO BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THE TWO?

For some things you need the larger format in order to make everything you wish visible. Also, some works require specific physical interaction. When you throw something against the paper from a distance, for example, you will need a larger plane. Other things only become visible through repetition, when you show many of them at once, such as a leaf or a tree. I only use a smaller format if it fits what I am testing and can be focused accordingly. However, in a larger format, I can explore things in relation to each other and under various circumstances. You can describe the space where all this unfolds and that is something you cannot accomplish in a small work.

YOU TRAVEL EXTENSIVELY. HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO NOT LOSE YOUR THREAD OF THOUGHT FOR WORKS-IN-PROGRESS. DO YOU BRING NOTES ON SPECIFIC WORKS WITH YOU OR DO YOU WORK WHILE TRAVELING, FOR EXAMPLE?

While traveling, I will either focus on further researching themes that I had been focused on or I will make works that have something to do with the new environment. The latter would have a

format that can fit in my suitcase. Sometimes I will expand on these pieces when I'm back home, but not always. However, if I'm traveling with my child, or if I'm teaching, I will not get anything done.

HOW MUCH DO YOU LOSE YOURSELF IN YOUR WORK WHILE IN PROGRESS? YOUR NOTATIONS REQUIRE ANALYTICAL DECISION-MAKING, BUT DOES IT HAPPEN THAT YOU LOSE A CONCEPT OF TIME, FOR EXAMPLE?

That certainly happens in waves. In addition, my process spans various stages, perhaps seven to eight over a long period of time. The more complex, the more interesting it is to me, because it most resembles a search for truth or what I expect to be true (though "truth" might not be exactly the right word). It's as if one establishes a structure within which one can suddenly understand things so that one realizes various new aspects about it. It's a process of becoming more conscious. As long as you engage in this exchange between contemplation and making, you are completely and solely concentrated on this subject.

WHICH DO YOU CONSIDER SOME OF YOUR MOST SUCCESSFUL WORKS? ARE THOSE THE ONES THAT PROVED MOST DIFFICULT TO RESOLVE OR WHERE THE IDEAS ARE THE MOST LAYERED? WHICH WORKS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND WHY?

There is always one starting point when you explore various possibilities and that is always very personal. You can't see from the outside what these starting points are. The works which reflect a very specific, personal situation are the ones that are most important to me. They are much more than a diary. I will keep those for myself, also because they mark a point of departure. It's interesting to me to find out how I can develop these further and those subsequent works will be the ones to go out in the world. There are other works that succeed in formulating something specific, or which will make me happy or give me courage; these I will often keep as well and I will live with some of them

at home. There are also works that express something that is personally stressful and I will keep those, but I will not live with them. To someone who does not know the content, they won't feel that way, but nevertheless a certain energy with which they were made does carry over.

CAN YOU LOOK AT YOUR WORKS AS VISUAL COMPOSITIONS ONLY OR DOES THEIR CONTENT AND ALL YOUR DETAILED THOUGHTS MAKE THIS IMPOSSIBLE?

I do see it but one could focus a lot more on composition than I do. I don't necessarily think of my works as beautiful, for example. Though some people think of them as compositionally successful it is not what I find interesting about them. I am more focused on what's on the paper, what that does, and how that was developed. I'm curious about how the different elements interact with each other. The works also change dramatically for me over the years, they seem like new work to me all the time. I might see that I noted things in old works that nobody was formulating then.

I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS SPECIFICALLY ONE OF THE WORKS THAT YOU CURRENTLY HAVE IN THE STUDIO. DO YOU HAVE A TITLE FOR THIS ONE, FOR EXAMPLE?

It is called "New Kind of Joy" (2016). It's about the arrangement of seven different areas, each rendered in a specific color. All of these slightly overlap, while revealing various nuances within. At times, they evoke a sense of space and then, they appear completely flat. These are not static forms but describe movement; they are free and spontaneous. They reflect aspects of autumn, such as pumpkins. They describe which one I liked best and which ones had colors that I thought reflected my mood on that particular day. "New Kind of Joy" is part of a series that consists of twelve works total (six from 2016 and six from 2017), which are similar but not the same. There are different formats involved and the palette changes.

IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT A WORK OF A SPECIFIC SERIES IS BEING EXHIBITED IN CONTEXT WITH THE OTHER RELATED PIECES?

If one is interested in the entire spectrum that was investigated, it is important, yes. On the other hand, it is theoretically possible to infinitely expand each theme and so, one work can serve as an example on behalf of the others.

CAN IT HAPPEN THAT YOU WILL GO BACK TO AN OLD SUBJECT OR REVISIT A SITUATION? OR IS EACH EXPLORATION MARKED BY A BEGINNING AND END?

I always think that it's finite, but it does happen that I will revisit something. One theme that recurs regularly is flying.

PERHAPS FLYING IS OF INTEREST TO YOU AS IT PROVIDES A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE: YOU HAVE DISTANCE FROM ANY SUBJECT THAT IS BEING OBSERVED AND YOU CAN REVIEW AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION AT ONCE.

There are various aspects pertaining to flying that interest me. The search for distance in order to gain a good overview of something is certainly involved. But it is in combination with a search for freedom and lightness. I guess I make a work about flying each time I'm feeling really bad.

YOUR COMPOSITIONS DON'T HAVE A CLEAR CENTER. EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE IN CONSTANT FLUX AND IN RELATIONSHIP WITH EVERYTHING ELSE. HOWEVER, SOME OF YOUR WORKS INCORPORATE GILDED, FLAT SHAPES THAT DRAW IMMEDIATE ATTENTION. WHAT DO THESE SIGNIFY?

It started with me kneeling on the paper while working and in some cases the gilded shapes reflect the imprint of my knees. That particular work was called "Inkommunikabilität" ["Incommunicability"] (2014). It pondered what it is that remains when one takes everything away and that is the contact with space. These shapes also indicate a relationship of different proportions. In other works, it will describe the imprint of my hand and convey a sense of pulse.

YOU MENTIONED YOUR MUSICAL TRAINING EARLIER AND MUSIC REMAINS AN IMPORTANT REFERENCE IN YOUR WORK. WERE NOTATIONS BY COMPOSERS, SUCH AS ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG, AN EARLY INTEREST OF YOURS AS WELL?

I only looked at these later on and though they are always interesting to me, they did not influence my work in a specific way.

WERE THERE OTHER IMPORTANT INFLUENCES IN THE BEGINNING?

I was incredibly fascinated with Hanne Darboven. I didn't know why, but it was very strong, though it's not something I'm thinking about at the moment. I especially liked what her work says about the act of writing and how it makes the time it takes visible. When I was in art school, the conceptual artists of the mid-1960s were heroes of sorts. You would make a sketch on paper and present yourself as having a neutral position. I realized that this denial of self was completely wrong. It's about the opposite; through performance, the act of doing, which can't be abstract, a process becomes interesting. I feel that Darboven accomplished exactly that. When you walk through one of her exhibitions, her strings of numbers, be it in Munich or Bonn [*Hanne Darboven: Zeitgeschichten*, September 11, 2015 – January 17, 2016], for example, it's as if you would travel through an early Internet-humming. She obviously felt something about her time, which foreshadowed what was to come and which is what we experience now. She had this consciousness, because she had seen the accounting ledgers at her parents' Darboven coffee firm as a child.

BY COMBINING NOTES ON DIFFERENT IDEAS AND THOUGHTS OF A VARIETY OF THEMES ON ONE PLANE, YOUR WORK SEEMS TO BE VERY MUCH ROOTED IN OUR TIME, WHERE A WEALTH OF INFORMATION CAN BE ACCESSED THROUGH ONE SOURCE: THE INTERNET. AND YET, THE FACT THAT ALL OF YOUR NOTATIONS ARE BY HAND, ALSO PROVIDES THEM WITH A NOSTALGIC QUALITY. YOUR WORK SEEMS TO PAY HOMAGE TO THE PAST WHILE ALSO FEELING FUTURISTIC. DO YOU STILL WRITE A LOT BY HAND IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?

I don't write letters, not with a typewriter nor by hand. I only talk on the phone for a very short amount of time and if I write down a note for myself, it is usually just a word or two. If I have to correct a text, I will only write into it, photograph that and send it back. To me, that's still the fastest and most direct way as I feel that it takes just way too long to use a computer for that.

IT REFLECTS A PERSONAL MARK. IT IS ALSO PROOF OF A SPECIFIC MOMENT IN TIME LIVED.

Exactly. It's real and it tells of a real slice of time that is not repeatable. There is always the insinuation of the awareness that nothing that one is doing can be completely revised or eliminated. I think that's an outlook that's very important, in regard to everything.

IS THERE A PROJECT THAT IS CURRENTLY PROVING TO BE A SPECIAL CHALLENGE?

There are a lot of things going on this year, including an exhibition at David Nolan in New York [*Jorinde Voigt; Song of the Earth*, February 23 – March 25, 2017] and one at the Kunsthalle Nürnberg [*Jorinde Voigt; A New Kind of Joy*, February 23 – May 7, 2017], which includes my project "Song of the Earth", a cycle of drawings, which is inspired by Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908-1909). In Oldenburg, I will show a thirty-two works spanning project on Ludwig van Beethoven's sonatas in a group show [*Sound goes Image – Partitur zwischen Musik und Bildender Kunst*, Horst-Janssen-Museum, February 4 – April 30, 2017]. In addition, I will have works in the Sharjah Biennial 13 [Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, March 12 – June 12, 2017], and the Lyon Biennale [Lyon, France, September 10, 2017 – January 3, 2018], as well as another solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery in London [May 19 – June 24, 2017]. I have four assistants, who help to keep me organized with the exhibition planning and the coordination of logistics, finances and archives. In general, I always challenge myself the most with my current

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theme. I also decided a while back that I will no longer work for exhibitions, but only for myself. What has been completed can be made available for an exhibition, but I don't make art for one.

WAS IT DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO WORK WITH STUDIO ASSISTANTS IN THE BEGINNING?

With the first money I made that was left over, I immediately hired someone to write emails for me and do accounting, for example. You have to have a certain disposition for some of these tasks and sometimes they don't go together with my work. You can't stand on top of the mountain and down in the river at the same time.



BIRGIT BRENNER

JANUARY 8, 2017
NEUKÖLLN, BERLIN

YOU RECENTLY HAD A SOLO EXHIBITION AT GALERIE EIGEN + ART IN LEIPZIG ENTITLED *MARSHMALLOW MOOD* [SEPTEMBER 17 – OCTOBER 22, 2016].

The exhibition dealt with aspects of our difficult time: the war in Syria, terror, refugee crisis, and the mounting pressure from the far right. I had already researched the latter for a while, which is just shocking to me. It was around last spring, when I became increasingly aware. I was in the studio all the time, listening to the radio and they constantly reported that refugee shelters were on fire. So I thought that I should better start to listen carefully to what's being said about the problems involved and the emerging populism. My work became about war and luxury, which I would describe as too much money in too few hands. This concept can also be applied to the refugee crisis, because we have money and could accept plenty of refugees in Europe. I began to wonder how I could show these ideas visually. I'm somewhat of a stage designer. I use color to describe special characters or

the overall situation for example. It makes a difference whether I describe the room of a truck driver or that of a banker.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOUR RESEARCH IS VERY THOROUGH AND EMBRACIVE OF DIFFERENT ANGLES. YOU DON'T TRY TO OBJECTIVELY DESCRIBE A SCENARIO, BUT TO IMAGINE HOW YOUR SUBJECT FEELS.

I'm interested in how a person, my protagonist, who embodies something that I criticize in society, feels. I'm contemplating questions, such as who plays with whom; who talks with whom; how do they live, and how do they act? In that it becomes something of a stage, a film set, or even a story. That's something that is frequently misunderstood. My work never reflects myself and it is never really about me. Instead, I aim to clarify and describe a social situation. I want to bring friend and enemy, as well as interior and exterior power structures into a more intimate context. Donald Trump for example doesn't behave differently from a dogmatic father at home. I explore how I can translate these aspects of power, paralysis, aggression, and counter-aggression into a visual language. After I had researched themes of war, Syria, ISIS, all the injustice involved, I was wondering what I should do with my outsider's perspective. I didn't want to come across as cynical or ridiculous. So for the exhibition at Galerie EIGEN + ART, I decided to use these completely trite images: an ISIS-Toyota, a Heil-Hitler, combat boots, nude women, champagne, and cars, among others. These are images about which everyone has an opinion, no matter if coming from a far right, far left, center, liberal, conservative, green, or whatever position.

YOU EMPLOYED IMAGES THAT CAN FUNCTION AS VISUAL TRIGGERS. IT SEEMS RATHER APPROPRIATE FOR OUR TIME WHEN MOST MESSAGES ARE COMMUNICATED THROUGH ATTENTION-GRABBING SYMBOLS, HEADLINES, AND HASHTAGS.

Yes, it is due to these symbols and with the help of social media

that everyone forms their opinion even when they don't have one. I wanted to present them as large billboards to state that we explain the world to others and ourselves with the help of these six to eight images. That's what people like. Trump and the AFD party [Alternative for Germany] focus on easy answers and solutions. You also find a similar phenomenon in the art world: take a few ingredients, throw the product on the market, and pretend that it's intelligent.

MEANWHILE, YOU WERE ALSO WORKING ON A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PROJECT, INVOLVING THE GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST FRANZ MARC.

It was a distraction and at first I was annoyed to be pulled away from my other research. I also realized that it is difficult for me to work with such historic material. That particular work entitled "Vaterland" ["Fatherland"] (2016) was commissioned by the Haus am Waldsee, Berlin. It will be exhibited in an exhibition that commemorates the centennial of Franz Marc's death during World War I in Braquis near Verdun, as well as one of his most important works "Der Turm der Blauen Pferde" ["Tower of the Blue Horses"] (1913), which vanished in 1945 and remains lost [*Vermisst – Der Turm der blauen Pferde von Franz Marc; Zeitgenössische Künstler auf der Suche nach einem verschollenen Meisterwerk*, March 3 – May 6, 2017]. So I came from researching war and ISIS to thinking about Marc and his masterpiece. However, it quickly became fascinating to see the parallels to our time. The years before the Weimar Republic (1918–1933) were also marked by both the rise of populism and the hopes of some for a more reasonable age. It is painful to see that we are back in a similar place. It will transpire differently, but people simply forget. A postcard from that period, which I thought reflects the manipulation of ideology very well, inspired my contribution. On the front of that card, you have the idealized image of war, the brave soldier and the patiently waiting woman. However, in

the back you find a glimpse of reality, a note sent from the front perhaps, telling of hardship and death all around. I conceived this work not unlike this kind of postcard, adding some darkness. I also wanted to reflect the concept of the light at the end of the tunnel, which is a visual frequently described by people who have been on the brink of death.

IS IT DIFFICULT TO FOCUS ON A CERTAIN SUBJECT FOR MONTHS AND THEN, AFTER THE EXHIBITION IS MOUNTED, YOU FIND YOURSELF BACK IN THE STUDIO, HAVING TO START FROM SCRATCH ON ANOTHER CHAPTER?

I write everything down and I have a file, labeled “beautiful sentences”, in which I keep a lot of these notes. I collect anything interesting that I hear or read. While researching, I will take notes on suggested books and order them later on. During that process, I also often realize that there is something else brewing parallel to that. Sometimes, bodies of work lead seamlessly to the next. After Syria and Franz Marc, I began to explore artificial intelligence and manipulation. From there, I focused on visions of the future and ultimately landed at science fiction. I’m currently working with science fiction images from the 1950s and 1960s, which imagine the future, namely the world around 2000. These images depict robots and aliens attacking human beings, for example, who are still envisioned as intelligent. The year 2000 is almost seventeen years ago and we are still so stupid. I don’t think that the human race can handle freedom and liberal ideas. Somehow we are repeatedly looking for a corset.

THE QUESTION IS TO WHAT EXTENT THESE FORMER VISIONS OF THE FUTURE HAD AN IMPACT. IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGY INSPIRED BY THE IMAGINATION OF WRITERS AND ARTISTS?

It’s interesting that most believed that technology and human intelligence would be much more advanced at this stage. Today, we have a digital world with advantages and disadvantages, but we don’t have space clothing, haven’t walked on Mars or traveled

further. I am also curious about how we imagine the future now, which should be again different. There is this new aspect of self-control, which can be exercised with our cell phones, for example, but which is also accompanied by the sale and manipulation of personal data. I think people have always believed that previous generations were not quite as advanced and that future generations would be even more intelligent than the current one. However, that assumption is blatantly false. I’m interested in that and I am currently working on smaller drawings, which are part of the larger brainstorm.

YOU CREATE LARGE, ELABORATE, AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL PAINTINGS. HOWEVER, DO YOU USUALLY BEGIN WITH SMALL DRAWINGS WHEN RESEARCHING A NEW TOPIC?

Yes, because eventually, I always want to expand the work into the surrounding space. I like the possibility of shifts. When you work with depth, you always work with both the moment when everything works perfectly together and the moment when everything is drifting apart. If you observe my works from the side, it’s a different view entirely; you will see a lot of wires. From the back it’s like a movie set and from the front, it’s like a historic building. I work with one perfect point of perspective where everything seems to align, just to have that fall apart a moment later. To me, it’s a metaphor for our view of the world, which is an illusion. Hard to fathom that we fight and kill each other over illusions. We build up our own reality and believe that signifies truth. However, in the grand scheme of things, our individual life doesn’t matter much, it’s just temporary.

BY CREATING WORKS THAT PROTRUDE FROM THE WALL AND REACH INTO SPACE, YOU CREATE A PHYSICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN VIEWER AND ARTWORK.

I like to attack somewhat but in a way that everything could fall together at any moment. It would be mentally impossible for me to think of creating a bronze sculpture. That would be much too

difficult, not unlike casting your lover in artificial wax after good sex or Snow White in a glass coffin. Even though I like many such works by other artists, to me, the casting with a solid material like bronze would signify the freezing of a perfect moment. I wouldn't know why I should do that and what it should communicate to others. I would suffocate or feel that I lie. I look at my work more like I'm briefly visiting a family, where one argues on Sunday afternoon or where it's boring and silent. Then, I leave and two minutes later something transpires. Or perhaps, we have a conversation and someone nearby is watching and from different perspectives.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU WORK WITH THE CONCEPT OF CONSISTENT TRANSFORMATION, EMBRACING FLEXIBILITY RATHER THAN A FINITE, CONCRETE FORM?

I work with the concept of brevity in regard to the brevity of life, the brevity of perception and the brevity of questioning of perception. In addition, I also always use my work to comment on art, the questions why I make it, for whom, and for whom I don't. I'm also stubborn. Even though some might not believe it, I do know what beauty looks like and how I could make aesthetically pleasing works that would be easy to market. But I don't want to do that, because that wouldn't reflect the feelings I have when I make art or how I see the world. My work is a little bit like walking over not very thick ice, where everything can suddenly vanish and change. There's more risk involved than if I were to walk on cement. I reject to make something that is easily digestible. I feel that art has to be more than a complete, easily labeled commodity.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU CREATE A SPACE WHERE IDEAS CAN BE BOTH PROVOKED AND PROJECTED? DOES YOUR WORK AIM TO INVITE INTROSPECTIVE REFLECTION?

Yes. I think if you create something that everyone likes, you did something wrong.

DO YOU REFER TO OLDER WORKS IN ORDER TO REVISIT PREVIOUS BODIES OF RESEARCH OR DO YOU PREFER TO STAY IN THE PRESENT MOMENT?

I don't often review previous works. Occasionally I will look at some if I happen to experience an extreme moment of doubt, thinking that everything I've done is bad.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU EXPERIENCE SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

I doubt all the time. The serious doubts come maybe twice a year, when I will question what I've made thus far. There are work, which I like more than others, but I don't review them with a chronological or diaristic interest. I do try to figure out what I could have done better and you see where you were free and where you weren't. Sometimes I find things more successful than I remembered and occasionally, I am shocked how extremely inhibited I was, fearful, and that I didn't push far enough. But overall the work is not about trying to figure myself out. Instead, I want to tell a story and all I need for that is good material.

IN REGARD TO PHYSICAL MATERIALS, YOU FAVOR CARDBOARD AND WOOD, AMONG OTHERS, WHICH WE ENCOUNTER IN VARIOUS EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES. WHEN DID YOU START WORKING WITH THEM?

It really started when I had a kid. Before my son, my apartment looked kind of like Dr. Kimble in "The Fugitive". I really didn't have any furniture. I had a bed made of cardboard. Everything I owned I was able to carry down the stairs by myself and fit into my Opel station wagon at the time. I didn't want to be dependent on anyone. I ended up living there for years, but it looked as if I was about to move out at any time. This was no longer possible when I had my child, but I translated some of these feelings into my work. I always wanted to be able to move my work by myself. In that sense, I'm a one-woman-show, who wants to do and try out everything herself. I don't want to run a small business or instruct twenty employees. So materials like cardboard

and wood were easy to handle. In addition, I had already realized during my graphic design studies that if materials became too precious, I would inadvertently damage them. People thought that I had problems with authority, because I always managed to slightly damage the expensive board on which we mounted projects for presentations. Every time I tried to be extra careful, I would end up spoiling it. So I thought I should take advantage by creating something that is already somewhat damaged and allows for mistakes. Nevertheless, I came to cardboard almost coincidentally, but it ended up being a material that I can easily use and manipulate. I can't write, but I do, I can't paint, but I do, I'm not a photographer, but I do take pictures, and I build things although not like someone who learned it as a craft; I employ all these things and that's my freedom. I have also used paper and now, I also like plastic, which unfortunately is rather poisonous when you melt it. Because I aim to push my works into the surrounding space, I need to use materials that can be used to build up layers, but which don't become too heavy at the same time. I like to add until I almost reach an overload and the work almost crashes.

IT'S STRIKING THAT THE COLORS OF CARDBOARD AND WOOD RESEMBLE EACH OTHER. IF VIEWED FROM AFAR, IT IS NOT NECESSARILY DISTINGUISHABLE, WHICH IS WHICH.

This kind of brown-beige is just an awful color and it also provides a sense of sadness. I call that a base depression, on which I like to work.

YOU COULD ALSO SAY THAT IT OFFERS A NEUTRAL LIGHT. HOW ABOUT THE PALETTE OF THE WORKS IN MARSHMALLOW MOOD?

That was the first time I used some pseudo-happy colors, but coming from a cynical perspective. I'm still in that mindset now. Before, I worked in a base depression mode. Marlene Streeruwitz said that true heroism in life is to bare the everyday. That demands true strength. Tragedies, wild sex, death, those are

simply the peaks in life, which is made of 99% routine. That's exactly what I want to show, everyday life, which for me is brown-beige.

THIS SERVES AS A COUNTER POINT TO THE VISION OF LIFE THAT IS PROMOTED IN THE MEDIA. THERE, EVERYTHING SEEMS TO PEAK AND BE EXTREME ALL THE TIME. IT'S A DANCE BETWEEN BLISS AND DEPRESSION, SERVING AS ONE BIG DISTRACTION FROM EVERYDAY LIFE.

Yes. You have to have sex every day, even if you have been married for twenty years. You have to have an amazing body and optimize every aspect of yourself and your life. You are expected to be so many different things and do more than you have time for in life. When you are in the studio, you think you should also go to the movies, to the theatre, visit other exhibition, do sports, you should look better, and read more. However, embodiment of luxury is to follow your thoughts and to step out of that world. I don't join any social media outlets and I don't have Internet in my studio. When I'm here I don't care at all about what's going on outside and I'm content to be by myself. Of course, all of us are subjected to the incredible speed of our age and you can't completely switch that off. But this overcharged sexuality in the media is especially annoying to me.

WHY DO YOU THINK THIS OVER-SEXUALIZATION IS SO PROMINENT IN OUR CULTURE?

The sad thing is that the secret of sexuality is not rooted in nudity. Once I was in Egypt on the beach and I thought that the lightly covered women looked much sexier. Especially if you look at the pop music industry it seems that every female singer has to run around half naked. There is no secret left to reveal and meanwhile, you don't concentrate on what they are singing either. I mean if that's your way to work yourself free it's one thing, but why do all of them have to be semi-naked? Or look at Kylie Minogue, for example. She is in her late forties,

has survived breast cancer, and still has to sing like an innocent teenager. Or Madonna. Why doesn't she sing about the experiences of a woman in her mid-fifties, such as the pain of becoming older and losing your beauty, or about themes that reflect her life experience? Luckily, I don't have to undress when I have an exhibition.

HOWEVER, THE ART WORLD HAS ITS OWN SHARE OF SEXISM. WOMEN ARE CERTAINLY UNDERREPRESENTED IN THE LANDSCAPE OF ART-MAKING AND THEY DO RECEIVE COMPARATIVELY LESS SUPPORT. RECENTLY, THERE HAS BEEN A PUSH TO DISCOVER FEMALE ARTISTS, WHO HAVE ENJOYED PROPER RECOGNITION. IT'S FANTASTIC THAT ARTISTS LIKE CARMEN HERRERA CAN FINALLY BE PAID THEIR DUE RESPECT AT THE AGE OF 100 BY BEING FEATURED IN A RETROSPECTIVE AT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM, FOR EXAMPLE. YET, IT STILL NEEDS AN EXTREME STORY TO HAVE EVERYONE FOCUS ON IT. All artists who don't belong to the Top 100, hope for that big push forward eventually, perhaps at age 80 or 90. I think the biggest lie of all is that good art will automatically prevail. It's more like there are eleven national soccer players and so that it doesn't seem too unfair, three others are invited as well, but it's always the original ones who get to play. Sometimes they invite some girls, but they mainly get to watch from the sidelines. I also believe that it has become a little bit of a sport to re-discover some older artists, who have a large body of work, which offers a lot to sell. It also gives hope to all the less successful artists out there, who dream of becoming famous one day, if they just continue to work hard enough.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR WORKS ARE ROOTED IN TEXT OR WRITTEN INFORMATION?

Words are important to me, but it's not like I try to illustrate a picture. I do believe that texts address another level of reality than pictures. In addition, we become socialized with words and the alphabet in school. Where would we be if all of us had to

paint or draw as much as we had to write? Would most people paint then, but write badly? Words are a part of us and they surround us. They have another power and serve another spectrum. In therapy, you often have to say things out loud to let it out. If you join the anonymous alcoholics, you have to announce to the group, as well as to yourself: "I'm an alcoholic." Words involve another part of the brain than pictures. They belong to two different worlds and they can occasionally contradict or complement each other. To me, what's most interesting is to try to join both these parts. That's why I go back and forth between the two in my process. I will write something, get stuck and make something else. They are like two different weapons; you can shoot further with a gun, but differently with bow and arrow. In addition, texts and pictures also imply a different sensuality.

WHAT WILL BE YOUR NEXT PROJECT?

Soon I will start exploring the mendacity of facades for a project in Middelburg near Rotterdam in Holland. I will buy an old car, a silver Škoda Octavia, which to me represents a middle class that is afraid of slipping further down the scale. It's simply a sad car. Its windows will be fogged up, suggesting people sweating with fear. In addition, I will have two billboard signs, which will engage in a fight between good and evil with one of them pushing the other one down.

IN REGARD TO ART HISTORY, DO YOU SEE YOUR WORK AS CONTINUING A CERTAIN PATH? DO YOU HAVE A CERTAIN AFFINITY FOR A SPECIFIC ART MOVEMENT?

No, I don't. There are certainly works by other artists, which I like very much and which sometimes I wish that I had made myself. I studied in 1990 at the HdK (Hochschule der Künste), now called the UdK (Universität der Künste) in Berlin. Even though my father was a jazz musician, I still came from a rather conservative, normal background. My wish to study art was like wanting to travel to the moon to them and it wasn't up

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for debate. That's why I first started and stopped several other things, such as graphic design, before finally deciding to study art. When I first encountered works by Die Jungen Wilden [The Young Wild Ones] such as K-H. Hödicke, Elvira Bach, or Walter Dahn, it was a revelation. Still, I was light years away from art at that point. I started painting in order to enter the Art Academy and thankfully, my boyfriend at the time broke up with me, so I could pour all my pain into it. However, suddenly there was this painting crash in 1989 at the academies, when painting was completely out and the focus became conceptual art and very rational positions. So I was sitting between two chairs. Conceptual art seemed too dry and archive-heavy to me, and painting was too old-fashioned. I stopped painting and when a friend pointed out that there is a third dimension, I started to expand my work toward the surrounding space. As my longtime gallerist Harry Lybke likes to point out: "Birgit, it's incredible that you made it so far as you basically did everything wrong." I don't care about trends or strategies; I just do what I do and what strikes me. I have to surprise myself and nobody else. If you see a snowy landscape, you want to walk where the snow is untouched rather than where other footprints are.



KATHARINA GROSSE

JANUARY 8, 2017
MOABIT, BERLIN

ON JANUARY 19, YOU WILL OPEN AN EXHIBITION AT GAGOSIAN GALLERY IN NEW YORK [KATHARINA GROSSE, JANUARY 19 – MARCH 11, 2017]. IS THERE AN OVERARCHING THEME OR DOES IT BRING TOGETHER WORKS FROM DIFFERENT YEARS?

No, it's going to be large canvases only, and they are all from 2016.

CONSIDERING THAT MANY OF YOUR WORKS EXTEND BEYOND THE CANVAS AND CAN INVOLVE ELABORATE, SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATIONS, THIS EXHIBITION SEEMS TO EMBRACE A SOMEWHAT TRADITIONAL CONCEPT IN COMPARISON.

I don't think there is a difference in tradition, whether you are working with a space or on a portable surface. Working on the wall is actually one of the first forms of painting if you think of cave painting or the frescoes of the Renaissance, for example. There are also all these forms in which a painting can appear in our urban context and one of them is the portable surface, the canvas. I have always worked simultaneously on canvases and larger projects. I think they embody very different ways

of thinking, regarding how a painting can be made, influence, and be a part of the pictorial surrounding network. I have never shown paintings from a single year before and I've never had a solo show in New York, with portable works or otherwise. I did not want to focus on space-related work, because I had done "Untitled" for *Rockaway!* in New York in 2016 [Fort Tilden, Rockaways, for MoMA PS1, New York, July 3 – November 30, 2016], which was a very big project. It had an enormous reach in the end and a lot of people saw it. With this show, I wanted to move in a totally different direction, where I work with a compressed, small format instead.

IT INDEED MARKS A DIFFERENT DIRECTION FROM LAST YEAR'S ROCKAWAY! PROJECT IN QUEENS, FOR WHICH YOU TRANSFORMED AN ABANDONED AQUATICS BUILDING OR "JUST TWO OF US" (2013), WHICH WAS ALSO INSTALLED IN NEW YORK AT THE METROTECH COMMONS IN DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN. I WOULD ASSUME THAT THE CONCEPT FOR A PAINTING EXHIBITION WILL BE SOMEWHAT UNEXPECTED, ESPECIALLY AS THIS PARTICULAR GALLERY IS KNOWN FOR ITS VAST AND ADAPTABLE EXHIBITION SPACE, ABLE TO HOST MAJOR SCULPTURES BY RICHARD SERRA OR ANSELM KIEFER, FOR EXAMPLE.

That's one of the reasons why I wanted to work with them.

DO THESE CANVASES SHARE A CERTAIN FORMAT?

Most of them are three meters high by two meters wide.

FOR MOST PAINTERS, THAT WOULD DESCRIBE AN ALMOST MONUMENTAL SCALE.

I would say that these paintings are body-related. I mean large would be four by eight meters. I have a couple of larger canvases, but I might not show them. We'll find out when we're there.

WHEN YOU FOCUS ON THIS KIND OF IMPRESSIVE SCALE, DO YOU PREFER TO WORK ON THE WALL OR ON THE FLOOR?

Both.

I WOULD LIKE TO HARKEN BACK TO THE TERM "BODY-RELATED",

WHICH YOU USED ABOVE WHEN DESCRIBING THE SCALE OF YOUR WORK. IT IS A DESCRIPTION THAT TO ME EVOKES HANS NAMUTH'S FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPHS OF JACKSON POLLOCK IN 1950, IN WHICH HE IS POURING PAINT ONTO A CANVAS THAT IS LAID OUT ON HIS STUDIO FLOOR. THE SCALE OF THE CANVAS RELATES TO THE BODY IN THAT IT EMBRACES IT, BUT IT ALSO ANIMATES IT; IT DEMANDS AN INTENSIVE PHYSICAL INTERACTION. IS THIS SOMETHING YOU THINK ABOUT OR CONSCIOUSLY EMPLOY?

I believe that this is something that painting is in general. In fact, it is one of its core ingredients. It is not mediated except for the tool you have; it is not going through a black box, let's say, which transforms your data into a binary code or multiple information systems on a screen. It's something that a single person can do on her own.

IS THE ACT OF PAINTING SOMETHING THAT ABSORBS YOU IN THE MOMENT, OR IS THERE A LOT OF EDITORIAL DECISION-MAKING THROUGHOUT? DO YOU STEP BACK WHILE WORKING ON A COMPOSITION, FOR EXAMPLE, ASSESSING IT LAYER-BY-LAYER, COLOR-BY-COLOR, AND MOVEMENT-BY-MOVEMENT?

There is a lot of decision-making in the process and that is exactly what I find interesting. Acting and thinking are so correlated while you are working. It goes hand-in-hand in a sense. I am not happy however, with the word composition, because it suggests that you have a scheme that you follow in order to achieve a certain visual result, which I don't.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU DO NOT PURSUE A PREDEFINED IMAGE. INSTEAD, YOU WORK FROM MOMENT TO MOMENT, WHICH ALLOWS FOR OPEN-ENDED POSSIBILITIES.

I find it totally fascinating that the things and situations that we experience in life – and that's what I basically also experience in painting, just that it reflects another way of processing this information – change all the time. Therefore, all the different particles that make up our various situations, give us reason to rethink

our paradigms, our ethical or moral decisions, our ways of liking something, needing something, or loving something. There is no reason to stick to the concept of “this is who I am” all the way through, neither for a day, a minute, or your entire life. But what I am very precise about is my starting point. I am very clear about which kind of tools I will use, which thoughts I would like to start with, and the area that I will need in order to get my process going.

IN ADDITION TO TOOLS AND A DESIGNATED AREA, DOES YOUR STARTING POINT ALSO REQUIRE A SPECIFIC CONCEPT FOR THE WORK’S PALETTE? DO YOU ALREADY HAVE A CERTAIN SET OF COLORS IN MIND BY THE TIME YOU APPROACH YOUR SURFACE?

Sometimes, yes. When I work on a specific site, I have to go through a couple of processes beforehand, which are made up of the interaction between and the co-existence of acting and thinking. I will have models of the building, for example, and I will have talks with the curator. In the case of *Rockaway!*, I had a very close relationship with Klaus Biesenbach [Director of MoMA PS1 in Queens, New York and Chief Curator-at-Large at The Museum of Modern Art, New York], who came to my studio to see my work and how I think. I then decided that I would only use three different kinds of red, which would kind of amalgamate into one, as well as white to repaint things and to make the work very luminous. It expanded from there and got to where we started on the site.

DO YOU CONSIDER COLOR AS HAVING A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OR DO YOU PRIMARILY EMPLOY IT TO ADDRESS SPATIAL CONCERNS?

I don’t use the elements that I work with, whether it’s color or anything else, as something to trigger off a specific result. I’m not using red because I think that it has a specific meaning. I don’t think that color has any kind of specificity to it and that’s why I use it. I think color is amazing; it’s not linked to space, to locality,

or to objecthood. It’s not linked to any kind of specific hierarchy. Nobody can tell me that yellow is more important than green, for example. I think color is a lot of things. We can’t really talk about color and what it is. It’s more what it is not and that’s why I think it gives me so many possibilities.

WOULD YOU STILL SAY THAT YOU WORK WITH A SPECIFIC PALETTE? WHILE LOOKING AT YOUR OEUVRE, IT DOES SEEM THAT YOU PREFER A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF SATURATION, LUMINOSITY, AND SENSE OF DEPTH IN COLOR.

Yeah, possibly. I’d say that the most descriptive element probably is the saturation and artificiality of the colors that are all coming basically from the palette of the producer that I buy my colors from.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU NEVER MIX PIGMENTS, FOR EXAMPLE.

No, I don’t. I use a fraction of the range that Golden offers. I have maybe three yellows, three reds, three greens, three blues, a couple of in-betweens, mostly to shift between cold and warm, opaque, translucent, and white, as well as some interference colors, but that’s all.

COMING BACK TO THE PAINTINGS IN YOUR UPCOMING NEW YORK EXHIBITION, DO THEY CORRESPOND WITH AND BUILD UPON EACH OTHER OR DO YOU THINK OF THEM AS INDEPENDENT ENTITIES?

I work on maybe thirty paintings at the same time, and then there is an interference of thought between them. I take things from one painting to another, and I develop a lot of different movements, thoughts, and experiences throughout. Then, very often, I will take up another strand. I might focus on something that I had done previously in the year, and be very complex in terms of the many layers I use in order to find out how I can overcharge. I want to explore how much is then to be left visible for somebody who has no clue about what I had been doing, but who can still kind of make sense of what that was. Sometimes, this develops into utter simplicity that subsequently can go back into

some very complex work. It's a constant back and forth between extremes. In the paintings I did last year and the year before, for example, I was using stencils. However, the stencil making has become very different, very simple. The stencils become filters of sorts that block out the flow, or the spray of the gun. Therefore, I generate shapes, or I actually just generate leftover areas that are not being painted at that very moment.

THERE'S AN ECHOING OF SHAPES THROUGHOUT THIS BODY OF WORK.

There is. Very much so, it's like a resonance.

ARE THESE SHAPES ROOTED IN OR DERIVED FROM SOMETHING SPECIFIC?

They stem from the simplest gesture you use when writing. I draw these scribbles very fast and life size on a piece of cardboard.

DO THESE SHAPES DESCRIBE A NATURAL, INTUITIVE MOMENT?

I wanted to do something very simple, almost instinctively natural or casual, very much like scribbling with a felt pen on the edge of your shoes. In that sense, scribbling is the gesture of the "natural" that I let interfere with controlled principles. The scribble as a casual, even endless forming, links to our knowledge of fluidity. Our embrace of uncertainty catalyzes us to generate different paradigms according to a constant and ongoing evaluation within ourselves and around us. It influences how we look at gender, race, society, or politics.

WHAT MAKES A PAINTING UNSUCCESSFUL? ARE THERE WORKS WHERE YOU FEEL WHATEVER YOU ARE AFTER IS SIMPLY NOT COMING TOGETHER? OR DO YOU ALWAYS WORK ON A PAINTING UNTIL YOU FIND A MOMENT WHERE IT DOES HOLD UP? DO YOU DISCARD WORKS IF THEY ARE UNSUCCESSFUL?

I work until I think there is something coming up, be it clarity or unknown territory. The question is also, I guess, what is success for you, but it can very easily become formalistic. You use color

and then make a certain movement, it might be intuitive, and then there's success. It is as if you were accomplishing something with a specific formal training and quest, as if you were trying to put a puzzle together. This is not really how it feels. It's not like you know what life is and now you do all these things you would need to do to make it seem real. It's not how it works. Of course, what I do when I paint has to do with the history of painting as well, and what others have done thus far. It's like a stream that's flowing by and I put my hands into that stream. I'm never only in that history and tradition, nor am I cut off from it and just living. I might just do something haphazardly, and happen to be in the studio, and I paint what comes into my mind.

TALKING ABOUT ART HISTORY, WHAT MOVEMENTS OR TRADITIONS ARE STILL OR WERE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN YOUR FORMATIVE YEARS? DO YOU SEE YOURSELF SPECIFICALLY LINKED TO A CERTAIN ERA, IDEAS, AND AESTHETICS?

No, I don't. My paintings can land anywhere at any time and so can your thoughts. Therefore, they transform your understanding of every moment from the most intimate to the political. Looking at paintings tells us to understand that things look different every time, even if we console ourselves with being familiar with a revisited situation. It is a simple but powerful move to really feel that everything is different every time. Therefore, we do not need the big solution for once and for all, but we go along most naturally with constant change. On the other hand, I certainly have preferences and I have a certain area within which I tend to work. I do like to look at things that reflect the same thinking that I need for my own work. There is no narration in my work, no language, no quotes and there is no representational rendering. However, what I recently saw and loved when visiting Italy was the "Wedding Chamber" of the Gonzaga Family in Mantua, painted by Andrea Mantegna (circa 1474). I thought it was absolutely inspiring even though there was no spray gun used

[laughs]. But the specific use of the space and its relationship to the painting, as well as the relationship between the paintings to each other, and to the carpentry, are very interesting. While there is a curtain painted on each wall, on two walls, the curtain is drawn. In those cases, you see the painted family and people; you see the landscape and you look outside the window and it's amazing to see how the curtain has to be drawn and how tapestry is suddenly being set aside in favor of painting. I got totally immersed in that world. It does something to your thinking, a rewiring of the brain of sorts. In general, I'm fascinated by any kind of painting that is related to architecture.

IS PAINTING ABOUT TRANSFORMING SPACE?

Yes, and it's about transforming your own perception of space and transforming your thinking.

RATHER THAN BEING ABOUT SELF-REFLECTION OR THE ILLUSTRATION OF CONCRETE IDEAS.

My core interest is in the question of how a painted image can appear in our life. How is it embedded into other existing image systems? A painted image consists of a cluster of layers that triggers our body intelligence in a way that homogeneous surfaces cannot anymore. Every particle of the painting is visible at once. There is no beginning and no end; there is no past and no future. It is entirely about the presence of everything. Painting has been the image generator for the last 300,000 years. That's a long time and so all the images that are coming up now have a strong relationship to painting and the painted image. I would even say that it is the best-developed user surface that we have. Painting has always been linked to power and to the people who have power; it has transported their thoughts, hierarchies, and belief systems. So painting has always been at the pinnacle of the power systems in society. Even though by now, it has become a minor source for image-making, the entire history of image-making is carried on its back. Because it is that kind of

container of hierarchies, power, moral belief and religious systems, I think that it is the worst to talk about the formalities of painting.

WHEN YOU WORK WITH A SELECTION OF PAINTINGS THAT CAN BE CONSIDERED A COHESIVE GROUP, HOW DO YOU CONCEIVE THE INSTALLATION, ESPECIALLY WHEN PLANNING FROM AFAR AS WAS THE CASE WITH YOUR NEW YORK EXHIBITION? IT'S PROBABLY DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, TO LINE UP ALL THE PAINTINGS IN THE STUDIO, SO YOU'RE TRULY SEEING THEM TOGETHER IN THE EXHIBITION SPACE FOR THE FIRST TIME. HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT ARRANGING THEM? IS THAT SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS SPONTANEOUSLY ON SITE, OR DO YOU PREPARE BY GIVING A LOT OF THOUGHT TO HOW SINGLE WORKS RELATE TO EACH OTHER?

That's a great question. I thought that was very difficult, because I don't really work in groups, where you could say: "Aha! This is now finished, and now comes this one." I had two models of the gallery space in different scales and it was a little bit of a process to decide not to do an installation in the first place. Then, we considered how many different thought processes may appear in the show. Now, there will be about eighteen to twenty paintings total.

IT IS PROBABLY DIFFICULT TO JUDGE THE MOST RECENT WORKS, BECAUSE YOU HAVE THE LEAST DISTANCE TO THEM.

Yes, you have the least distance to that work, but you also think that you're the furthest. I also have to say that I've been working for the first time for an entire year in the studio without interruption aside from the *Rockaway!* project. Except for one wall painting, I didn't do anything else. I didn't know that these paintings would end up going to Gagosian, but I knew that I was going to have that year. I had wanted to have a year in the studio again to focus less on outside works and to better understand the differences between the on-site and studio formats. It was not until August, when I thought for the first time that I was really

changing something, and that a change was occurring, which I hadn't had in mind at the beginning of the year. That's when I thought that it would be too bad, if I couldn't show these works.

AS THE WORK DEVELOPED IT BECAME MORE SURPRISING.

Yes, I had somehow exhausted myself over the summer with all these complex, layered, and overcharged paintings. From August on, we started to select single works that showed me simpler ways. So I worked another two months and there was new work, and again, at the third meeting there was new work. In the end, it shifted a little towards the newer work.

DO WE NEED PAINTING AS A MEANS TO SLOW DOWN TIME IN A WORLD OF QUICKLY CHANGING DIGITAL SCREENS AND HEADLINES? IT SEEMS THAT OVERALL, OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS ARE DIMINISHING DUE TO A LACK OF PATIENCE. PERHAPS, PAINTING AS A MEDIUM THAT REQUIRES A LOT OF CALM CONTEMPLATION, CAN HELP US TO RETAIN SOME OF THAT. DO YOU THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS?

I understand a painting as something that travels through us and reconnects our coordination of all the elements including ourselves. Painting allows me the most direct transmission of thinking into action. I develop images of direct, nonlinear, and non-logical energy that generate clusters of compressed emotions. I see my paintings as unmediated prototypes or models of these emotions, devoid of manipulation or interface.

LINEAR TIME DOESN'T EXIST IN PAINTING, CONTRASTING OUR EVERY-DAY APPROACH TO FACTUAL AND NARRATIVE THINKING. IN PAINTING, IT IS DIFFICULT AND OFTEN IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE WHAT CAME FIRST, AFTER, AND LAST. MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER.

As a painter, if that's how your mind is starting to think, a lot of things will suddenly look like that to you. In other words, you will think that narration is just the pastiche, that it's making us believe that we understand the world, that it gives us a certain

amount of security, and a skill to maybe organize everyday operations. But what if that's not true? What if that kind of logic is actually restrictive? Therefore, I think that painting is a very, very interesting component of our ability to think or perceive. I also believe that we are living in a time when we need to understand the public space as a cluster of contradictory elements that become more and more non-negotiable. We have to live with this paradox. I think that narration and logic are tools to make us believe that there is no paradox.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR PAINTING SPRINGS FROM AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT? THAT IT NEEDS TO COME OUT OF URBAN LIVING IN ORDER TO EMBRACE THOSE COMPLEXITIES?

Yes, I think that painting is a cultural technique that comes from some sort of social density. I do it, because I want to be close to somebody else. I want to reach out and want to be seen. I see it as my contribution to society. My core contemplations are: How can a painted image appear in our life? How is it embedded into other existing image systems? A painted image consists of a cluster of layers, which triggers our body intelligence in a way that homogeneous surfaces are no longer able to do. Every particle of the painting is visible at once. It is entirely about the presence of everything.

CONSIDERING THIS CONCEPT OF PAINTING AS A MEANS TO "REACH OUT", DO YOU USUALLY APPROACH A NEW PROJECT WITH CERTAIN HOPES FOR HOW VIEWERS RESPOND OR ARE YOU OPEN TO EVERYTHING?

I have no specific goals in mind, but I do hope that people get a sense of exuberance and freedom and the direct empowerment to uninhibited thinking and sensitivity. My paintings are the direct physical residue of my thinking and visual statements of my individual authority. I intend them to articulate for others the very experience of alternatives, of the abundant possibilities of life, of agency, of being able to choose. I want these paintings

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to be in New York, because the audience has an amazing knowledge of post-war painting. That city is one of the most interesting centers for visual art in the world, if not still the most important one – in the way things come together, how they are shown, sold, and opened up to collectors. How people come together there, exchange thoughts and expect your participation is unique. I enjoy seeing my work right there.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

ELVIRA BACH (b. 1951) was born in Neuenhain, Germany. She studied glass arts at the Staatliche Glasfachschule in Hadamar (1967–1970) and painting at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin (1972–1979). Institutional solo and group exhibitions include the Groninger Museum (2016); Potsdam Museum-Forum für Kunst und Geschichte (2016); Kunstakademie Bad Reichenhall (2013); Oberhessisches Museum (2011); Haus am Lützowplatz (2011); Museum Théo Kerg, Germany (2008); the Kunsthalle Wien (2008); Kronacher Kunstverein, Germany (2006); Kunstverein Salzgitter (2004, 2002); Bayrisches Landesmuseum (2001); and Musée des Tapisseries, Pavillon de Vendôme (1993), among others. She was invited to participate in *documenta 7* in Kassel in 1982. Bach is represented by several galleries in Germany and internationally, including Anna Laudel Contemporary, Istanbul. Bach currently lives and works in Berlin.

BETTINA BLOHM (b. 1961) was born in Hamburg, Germany. She studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich (1980–1984). Recent solo exhibitions include Werner Klein Gallery, Cologne (2017), Marc Straus Gallery, New York (2014), and Amelie A. Wallace Gallery, State University, Old Westbury, New York (2012), among others. Institutional exhibitions include the Kingsborough Art Museum, New York (2017); The Painting Center, New York (2016); Kunsthalle Bremen (2013); International Print Center, New York (2010, 2007); Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2009); and Museum Pfalzgalerie, Kaiserslautern (2007), among others. Her work is represented in numerous permanent collections, including Berlinische Galerie;

Busch Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Städel Museum, Frankfurt; Kunsthalle Bremen; and Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern. Blohm is represented by Galerie Werner Klein, Cologne. Blohm currently lives and works in New York and Berlin.

BIRGIT BRENNER (b. 1964) was born in Ulm, Germany. She studied at the University of the Arts in Berlin, where she was a postgraduate student with Rebecca Horn (1996). Institutional solo exhibitions of her work were held by the Kunsthalle Tübingen (2013); Dortmunder Kunstverein (2011); Haus am Lützowplatz, Berlin (2009); Kunstverein Paderborn (2007); Stadthaus Ulm (2003); and Haus der Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart (2000), among others. Her works are represented in the Federal Collection of Contemporary Art in Bonn; Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg; Sammlung Goetz, Munich; Museum Junge Kunst, Frankfurt; Sammlung im Willy-Brandt-Haus, Berlin; the About Change Collection, Berlin; the Arario Collection, Korea; The Zabłudowicz Collection, England; and the Sammlung Südhausbau, Germany, among others. Brenner has been a professor at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart since 2007. She is represented by Galerie EIGEN + ART in Leipzig/Berlin. Brenner currently lives and works in Berlin.

STEPHANIE BUHMANN (b. 1977) was born in Hamburg, Germany. She received a B.F.A. and Masters in the History of Art, Architecture and Design from Pratt Institute, New York, with Honors (2002). She is a member of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art, the Deutscher Fachjournalisten-Verband, and the College Art Association. She is a contributing editor at *Art-critical*. Her essays and art reviews have been published by a large variety of international galleries, newspapers, and art magazines.

The latter include *Kunst Bulletin*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *ARTPulse*, *Art on Paper*, *Art Papers*, and *Art Collector* and *Art Lies*, among others. She has a regular art column in *Chelsea Now*. Several of her texts have been translated into German and Italian. In addition, she has translated numerous museum catalogue essays, including for the Guggenheim Museum in Venice and Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern (2013). She has received a Kress Foundation Fellowship (2002) and an Archive and Library Stipend from the Arp Foundation (2015). She was a Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation Critic-in-Residence at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in New Brunswick, Canada in 2016. Her first book, *New York Studio Conversations; Seventeen Women Talk About Art*, was published by The Green Box (2016). Buhmann currently lives and works in New York City.

ANGELA BULLOCH (b. 1966) was born in Rainy River, Ontario, Canada. She received her B.F.A. with honors from Goldsmiths College, University of London (1988). Institutional solo exhibitions of her work were held by the Sharjah Art Museum, United Arab Emirates (2016); Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (2012); Berlinische Galerie (2011); Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus & Kunstbau, Munich (2008); The Power Plant, Toronto (2006); De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg, Netherlands (2006); Secession, Vienna (2005); Le Consortium, Dijon (2005); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2003); and Kunsthaus Glarus, Switzerland (2001), among others. In addition, she has participated in numerous institutional group exhibitions, including Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2013); Kunsthalles Wien (2011); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2008); and Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2007). Bulloch was included in the *Freeze* exhibition, organized by Damien Hirst (1988) and was nominated for the Turner Prize

(1997). She was a recipient of the Kunstpreis der Stadt Wolfsburg and the Vattenfall Contemporary Art Prize (both 2011) and she was nominated for the Preis der Freunde der Nationalgalerie (2005). She is represented by Esther Schipper, Berlin; Simon Lee Gallery, London; and Eva Presenhuber, Zurich. Bulloch currently lives and works in Berlin.

SVENJA DEININGER (b. 1974) was born in Vienna, Austria. She studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany (2000–2003) and at the Kunstakademie Münster (1996–2000). Institutional solo exhibitions of her work were held by the Norton Museum of Art, Florida, United States (2017); Secession, Vienna, Austria (2017); Kunsthalle Krems/Factory, Austria, (2012); Bank Austria Kunstforum, Vienna (2011); Wiener Art Foundation, Vienna (2011); Österreichisches Kulturforum, Warsaw (2008); and Forum Austriaco di Cultura, Rome (2007). Institutional group exhibitions include 21er Haus, Belvedere, Vienna (2015, 2012); Flag Art Foundation, New York (2015); University of Michigan Museum of Art (2014); Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Switzerland (2013); and the Wiels Center for Contemporary Art, Brussels (2013), among others. Deininger is represented by Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York; Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna; and Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome and Milan. Deininger currently lives and works in Berlin and Vienna.

FRIEDERIKE FELDMANN (b. 1962) was born in Bielefeld, Germany. Institutional solo and group exhibitions include the Kunstverein Oldenburg (2016); Kunstverein Gütersloh (2016); Verein für Kunst und Kultur am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin (2015); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (2015, 2013, 2009); BBB Centre d'art, Toulouse (2015); Künstlerhaus Palais Thurn & Taxis, Bregenz (2014); Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2013); Kunstwerke Berlin (2013); Brandenburgischer

Kunstverein Potsdam (2013); Prague Biennale 5 (2011); Bundeskunsthalle Bonn (2011); Kunsthaus Dresden (2011); Münchner Stadtmuseum (2009); Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin (2009); Shanghai MoMA (2007); Kunstverein Friedrichshafen (2007); Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin and Frauenmuseum Bonn (2007); Elgiz Museum of Contemporary Art, Istanbul (2006); Kunsthalle Bielefeld (2005); and Kunsthalle Ludwigshafen, Germany (2005), among others. Feldmann has been a professor at the Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin since 2012 and has previously taught at Kunsthochschule Kassel (2008–2012). Feldmann currently lives and works in Berlin.

LAURA J. GERLACH (b. 1980) was born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. She is a photographer, book designer, and author of photography books and essays. She has received degrees in Art History from the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main and in Interior Design from the Rhein-Main University of Applied Sciences Wiesbaden. In addition, she has studied at the International Center of Photography, New York, and assisted Martin Schoeller in his New York studio. Gerlach has exhibited extensively in Germany. The themes and motifs of her projects are rooted in the examination of space, light, and atmosphere, paying particular attention to how both affect the individual within. Gerlach's most recent published photography books include *Staedelschool. Studios.* (Unselde Verlag, 2013, with a preface by Daniel Birnbaum) and *Chez M. Le Corbusier* (FVA, 2014). Gerlach currently lives and works in Frankfurt am Main and Paris.

KATHARINA GROSSE (b. 1961) was born in Freiburg/Breisgau, Germany. Institutional solo exhibitions of her work were held by the Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden (2016); Museum Wiesbaden (2015); Garage Museum of Contemporary Art,

Moscow (2015); Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (2014); Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas (2013); De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Netherlands (2013); MOCA Cleveland, Ohio (2012); Mass MoCA, Massachusetts (2010); ARKEN – Museum for Moderne Kunst, Copenhagen (2009); Serralves, Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto (2007); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2005); Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas (2004); Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (2002); and UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2001). Her work is featured in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; QAGOMA, Australia; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Florida; Istanbul Modern, Turkey; and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Grosse has received commissions for public and private buildings in the US and Europe. Her recent site-specific installations were shown at the 56th Biennale di Venezia (2015) and MoMA PS1's "Rockaway!" program (2016), among others. Grosse is represented by Gagosian Gallery, New York; König Gallery, Berlin; and Galerie nächst St. Stephan, Vienna. Grosse currently lives and works in Berlin.

MONIKA GRZYMALA (b. 1970) was born in Zabrze, Poland. She studied stone sculpting and restoration in Kaiserslautern (1990–1994) and received a degree in fine art from the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg (2001). Grzymala has shown internationally in institutional solo and group exhibitions, including at the EACC Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló, Spain (2016–2017); the Reykjavik Art Museum (2016, 2014); The Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent (2015–2016); Museum for Contemporary Art Siegen, Germany (2015); The Morgan Library and Museum, New York (2013); FRAC Lorraine, France (2013, 2011); Märkisches Museum, Witten (2012); 18th Biennale of Sydney (2012); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010–2011);

TAM Tokyo Art Museum (2010); The Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery (2009–2010); The Academy of Arts, Berlin (2009); The Chinati Foundation/Donald Judd Foundation, Marfa, Texas (2008); Islip Art Museum, East Islip, New York (2006); and The Drawing Center, New York (2005). Grzymala is a recipient of the Otto Retter Award (2014); Boesner Art Award (2013); Index Art Award (2010); The Hans Platschek Prize for Art and Writing (2010); a Young Academy Fellowship (2008); and an Artist Residency at The Chinati Foundation/Donald Judd Foundation, Marfa (2008). She received a DAAD fellowship in New York City (2003–2004). Her work is held in the permanent collections of The Brooklyn Museum, New York; Reykjavik Art Museum; Museum Villa Zanders Bergisch Gladbach; and Kunsthalle Hamburg, among others. She is represented by Galerie CRONE, Berlin and Vienna; BERG Contemporary, Reykjavik, and Eduardo Secci Contemporary, Florence. Grzymala currently lives and works in Berlin.

ANNETTE HOLLYWOOD (b. 1969) was born in Mainz, Germany. She studied at Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig and was a visiting scholar at New York University. Hollywood has been granted several residencies and awards, including by Stiftung Kunstfonds, Bonn (2008); Deutsches Studienzentrum, Venice (2002); and the Prize of the Association of German Film Critics at the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (1999). Her works have been shown internationally in exhibitions and at screenings, including at Künstlerhaus Bregenz (2016); Kunsthalle Osnabrück (2015); Kunstverein Wolfsburg (2014); Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig (2012); National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C. (2011); Oberbeck Gesellschaft, Lübeck (2007); International Biennale of Contemporary Art, National Gallery Prague (2005); the 55th Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin (2005); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York

(2001); Kunstfilmbiennale, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, and at Goethe-Institutes around the world. Hollywood currently lives and works in Berlin.

FRANKA HÖRNSCHEMEYER (b. 1958) was born in Osnabrück, Germany. Institutional solo exhibitions of her work were held by Room in Room, Jüdische Mädchenschule, Berlin (2016); ADN Pfortnerhaus, Fahrbereitschaft, Berlin (2013); Albertinum, Dresden (2011); Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen (2011); Jewish Museum, Athens (2008); Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2007); Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2002); and Kunsthalle Hamburg (2000), among others. She has also participated in numerous institutional group exhibitions, including at Kunstsaale, Berlin (2016); Kunstverein Hannover (2015); Museum Marta, Herford (2011); Hamburger Kunsthalle (2009); Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin (2010); National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul (2002); National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto (2001); Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2000); Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (1999); and Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen (1998). Hörnschemeyer's notable public commissions include "Trichter" in the center of Dresden (2011); Kunstwegen Station, Neugnadenfeld (2011); and Paul-Löbe-Haus, Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin (2001). She received a DAAD fellowship in New York City (1987–1988) and was a Fellow at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds (2006). She is currently a professor of Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts Düsseldorf, Germany. She is represented by Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm and Berlin. Hörnschemeyer currently lives and works in Berlin.

ASTRID KÖPPE (b. 1974) was born in Köthen/Anhalt, Germany. She studied at Braunschweig University of Art, Brunswick, Germany, where she received her diploma (1998) and the honor of "Meisterschüler" (1999). Institutional solo exhibitions of

her work were held by the Young Eun Museum for Contemporary Art, Gwangju-si, South Korea (2011); White Box – MAP, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2010); and Kunstverein Heppenheim, Germany (2010). Institutional group exhibitions include the Goethe-Institut Paris (2017); Hamburger Kunsthalle (2016); Overbeck-Gesellschaft, Lübeck (2013); Centre for Recent Drawing, London (2012); Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2012); Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, Netherlands (2011); Nieuwe Vide, Haarlem (2011); Kunsthalle Recklinghausen (2009); and Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2008). Her work is featured in the permanent collections of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin; Berlinische Galerie; Museum Art.Plus; Kupferstichkabinett, Kunsthalle Hamburg; and the Young Eun Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwangju-si, South Korea. She has attended residencies at the Young Eun Museum in South Korea and, upon invitation by the Goethe-Institut Malaysia, and the Lost Generation Art Space in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She is represented by Arte Giani, Frankfurt; Galerie Carolyn Heinz, Hamburg; Gallery Joe, Philadelphia; Yukiko Koide Presents, Tokyo, Galerie Louis Gedre, Chamalières; and Galerie Michael Sturm, Stuttgart. Köppe currently lives and works in Berlin.

ALICJA KWADE (b. 1979) was born in Katowice, Poland. She studied at the University of the Arts in Berlin (1999–2005) and is a recipient of the Hector-Prize of the Kunsthalle Mannheim (2015); the Robert Jacobsen Prize (2011); a Bremerhaven Scholarship (2011); the Piepenbrock Award for Sculpture (2008); and a DAAD Postgraduate Fellowship in Warsaw (2006–2007). Institutional solo exhibitions of her work were held by the Whitechapel Gallery, London (2016–2017); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2015); Haus am Waldsee, Berlin (2015); Kunsthalle Mannheim (2015); Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (2014); Kunsthalle Nürnberg (2014); Kunstmuseen Krefeld (2013); Oldenburger

Kunstverein (2011); Kunstverein Bremerhaven (2011); and Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2008), among others. Institutional group exhibitions of her work were held by the ARoS Art Museum, Aarhus, Denmark (2017); Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (2015); Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach (2014); Kunsthalle Wien (2014); Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2013); Galerie des Galeries Lafayette, Paris (2012); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012); and at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2011). In 2015–2016, the Public Art Fund commissioned “Against the Run”, an installation in New York’s Central Park. She took part in La Biennale di Venezia, 57th International Art Exhibition, Venice (2017), and Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2016). She is represented by König Galerie, Berlin; 303 Gallery, New York; and Kamel Mennour, Paris. Kwade lives and works in Berlin.

TARA MAHAPATRA (b. 1970) was born in Berlin, Germany. She studied at the University of the Arts in Berlin, where she was a postgraduate student with Katharina Sieverding (2001). Her work has been shown in institutional exhibitions held at the Osten Biennial of Drawing, Skopje, Macedonia (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei (2015/2016); 8th International Video Art Festival, Proyector, Madrid (2015); University of Arts – Art Gallery, Kyoto (2014); Bellegarde Cultural Center, Toulouse (2014); Museum of Modernity, Valencia (2013); Transartfest Art Biennial 2013, Berlin (2013); Art Gallery NGBK, Berlin (2012); and the Art Gallery Kunstnerforbundet, Oslo (2012), among others. She has received several grants, including exhibition funding from the Kunststiftung NRW for her solo exhibition in the Museum Kurhaus Kleve (2014); the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations for her participation in the Biennale Regard Benin (2012), and through the Künstlerinnenprogramm of the Berlin Senate (2010, 2012). Mahapatra currently lives and works in Berlin.

SUSAN PHILIPSI (b. 1965) was born in Glasgow, Scotland. She studied sculpture at Duncan of Jordanstone College of art in Scotland (1989–1993) and earned an MFA degree from the University of Ulster in Ireland (1993–1994). Philipsz’s work has been shown internationally in institutional exhibitions, including Kunsthau Bregenz (2016); Tate Britain, London (2015); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013); Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2014); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2013); K21 Ständehaus, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (2013); *documenta 13*, Kassel (2012); Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2011); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2010–2011); Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State, Columbus, Ohio (2009–2010); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2009); Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2008); and Skulptur Projekte Münster (2007), among others. She has received major commissions including for the Glasgow International (2010); a permanent installation on Governors Island, New York (2014); projects for Sculpture International Rotterdam (2017); Grace Farms Foundation (2015); and Artangel in London (2010). Philipsz’s work is featured in the permanent collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate Gallery, London; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Nationalgalerie, Berlin; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Castello de Rivoli; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Philipsz held a fellowship at MoMA PS1, New York (2000) and was the recipient of the Turner Prize in 2010. She is represented by Tanya Bonakdar, New York, and Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin. Philipsz lives and works in Berlin.

CORNELIA RENZ (b. 1966) was born in Kaufbeuren, Germany. She studied at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig (1993–1998) and in the Masterclass Sighard Gille at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig (1998–2001). Her work has been shown in several institutional exhibitions, including at the Kunsthalle Memmingen (2017); Kunstverein Neu Deli, Germany (2016); Spor Klübü, Berlin (2016); Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Germany (2015); Goethe-Institut Los Angeles and Goethe-Institut San Francisco, California (both 2014); Opelvillen Rüsselsheim (2012); L40 Association for Art and Culture, Germany (2012); Museum Kunstverein Konstanz (2011); Louisiana Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans (2011); Georg Kolbe Museum (2011); Nolde Foundation, Berlin (2010); Brevard Art Museum, Florida (2010); Museum Villa Rot, Germany (2010); Art Museum Solingen (2010); Museum Montanelli, Prague (2009); Museum Kunsthalle Göppingen, Germany (2008); and the Museum of the Berlinische Galerie (2007). Her work is held in the collections of the Museum of the Berlinische Galerie; the Montblanc Art Collection; the KNPZ Collection; the Weismann Collection, Los Angeles; the Randolpho Rocha Collection, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; and the Credit Beaux-Arts, Tokyo. She has received numerous grants and awards, including the Art Cube Artists Studio Grant (2017); Grant of the Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral (2014–2015); Grant of the Else-Saint-Fund from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (2012); Villa Aurora Grant (2011); Fine Art Award of the Schering Foundation at the Berlinische Galerie (2005); Marion Ermer Award (2001); a Grant of the Federal Government of Saxony (1999); a Grant of the Germination Foundation (1998); and the Schüngel Award from Saxon Graphics (1996). Renz lives and works in Berlin and Jerusalem.

ALONA RODEH (b. 1979) was born in Northern Israel. She received her MFA with honors from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem (2008–2009), and completed exchange studies at the Royal College of Art, London (2009), as well as the Vienna Academy of Arts (2002). Institutional solo exhibitions of her work have been hosted by the Grimmuseum, Berlin (2016); Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2014); Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2013); CCA Tel Aviv (2013); and Plug In ICA, Winnipeg (2012), among others. She has held performances at Zachęta National Gallery, Warsaw (2017); Transmediale, Berlin (2016); Sonic Somatic Festival, Florence (2016); the Swiss Pavilion at the Venice Biennial (2011); and the Israel Museum (2016), among others. Rodeh has held residencies including at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2013–2014) and the Austrian Ministry of Culture (2012). She received several grants and awards, including the Israeli Lottery Fund for the Arts (2013, 2014); the Artist Grant (2012, 2014); the Outset Grant (2012, 2013); the Young Artist Prize of the Israeli Ministry of Culture and Sport (2011); and the Artist Teacher Prize of the Israeli Ministry of Culture and Sport (2009). Her temporary public commissions include projects at Dizengoff Square, Tel Aviv (2017), and the Kreuzberg Fire Station, Berlin (2017). She is represented by Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv, and Grimmuseum, Berlin. Rodeh is based in Tel Aviv and Berlin.

CORNELIA SCHLEIME (b. 1953) was born in East Berlin. She studied painting and graphic arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden (1975–1980). In 1981, she was prohibited from exhibiting her work in East Berlin and she moved to West Berlin in 1984. Schleime's institutional solo exhibitions include the Berlinische Galerie (2017); Museum van Bommel van Dam, Netherlands (2016, 2009); Institute of Modern Art, Nuremberg (2015); Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Etienne

Métropole, France (2014); Museum Franz Gertsch, Switzerland (2012); Kurt Tucholsky Literaturmuseum, Rheinsberg (2009); Kunsthalle, Tübingen (2008); Horst-Janssen-Museum Oldenburg & Kulturspeicher im Stadtmuseum Oldenburg (2005); Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2004); Leonhardi Museum Dresden (2004); Museo de Navarra, Spain (2003); Kastrupgardsamlingen, Kastrup, Denmark (2003); Goethe-Institut Krakau (1998); Museum Schloss-Salder, Germany (1998); Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo, New York (1989); and Collective for Living Cinema Inc., New York (1989). From 1989 to 1990, she spent a year working in New York on a PS1 scholarship. She is a recipient of the Hannah-Höch-Prize of the State of Berlin (2016); Gabriele Münter Prize for Women Artists, Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizen, Women and Youth, Berlin (2004); and the Fred-Thieler-Prize for Painting, Berlinische Galerie (2004). She has been a professor at the Kunstakademie Münster since 2005. Her novel "Weit fort" was published in 2008 by Hoffmann und Campe. She is represented by Galerie Michael Schultz, Berlin. Schleime currently lives and works in Berlin and Brandenburg.

SU-MEI TSE (b. 1973) was born in Luxembourg. Institutional solo exhibitions of her work were held by the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Château des Adhémar, Montélimar, France (2014); Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (2011); Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (2009); Art Tower Mito, Japan (2009); Seattle Asian Art Museum, Washington (2008); P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2006); the Casino, Forum d'Art Contemporain, Luxembourg (2006); and the Renaissance Society, Chicago (2005). In addition, Tse participated in the 2016 Setouchi Triennial in Japan, and at the 26th São Paulo Biennial in Brazil (2004). At the Venice Biennale in 2003, she represented Luxembourg and was awarded the Golden Lion for

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Best National Pavilion. In 2009, she was awarded the prestigious Fondation Prince Pierre de Monaco Prize. Tse is represented by Peter Blum Gallery, New York; Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz, Switzerland; and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong. Tse currently lives and works in Berlin.

JORINDE VOIGT (b. 1977) was born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Institutional solo exhibitions of her work were held by Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum for Contemporary Art, Berlin; the Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria (2016); Kunsthalle Krems, Austria (2015); MACRO Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2014); Langen Foundation, Neuss, Germany (2013); Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (2012); Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal (2011); and Gemeentemuseum, The Hague (2010), among others, all of which were accompanied by extensive publications. Major group exhibitions include the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2017, 2013); Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Moscow (2014); Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht (2012); 54th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale (2011); Kunstmuseum Bonn (2010); and the Museum Folkwang, Essen (2008). Her work is featured in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunsthaus, Zurich; The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich; and Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, among others. In 2012, she received the Daniel & Florence Guerlain Contemporary Drawing Prize and in 2014 she was appointed Professor for Conceptual Drawing and Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich. She is represented by David Nolan Gallery, New York; Lisson Gallery, London and Milan; and König Gallery, Berlin. Voigt lives and works in Berlin.

ARTWORKS



CORNELIA RENZ, FAIRPLAY, 2017



FRIEDRIKE FELDMANN, INFO, 2013



SUSAN PHILIPSI, *WAR DAMAGED MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS*, 2015



ELVIRA BACH, *ICH WÄRE SO GERNE IN DEINER NÄHE*
[*I WOULD LOVE TO BE CLOSE TO YOU*], 2016



ALICJA KWADE, *ALLE ZEIT DER WELT [ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD]*, 2015



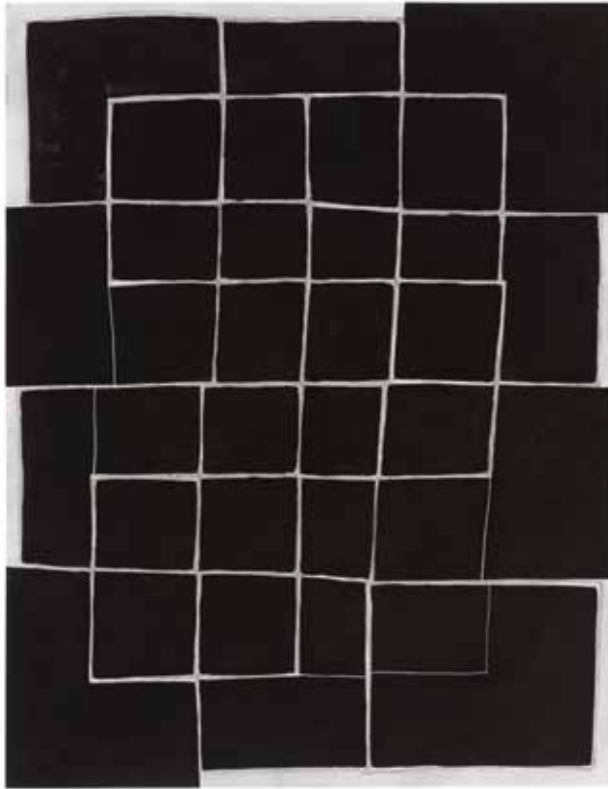
MONIKA GRZYMALA, *RAUMZEICHNUNG (SOLITÄR)*, 2017



CORNELIA SCHLEIME, *UNTITLED*, 1998



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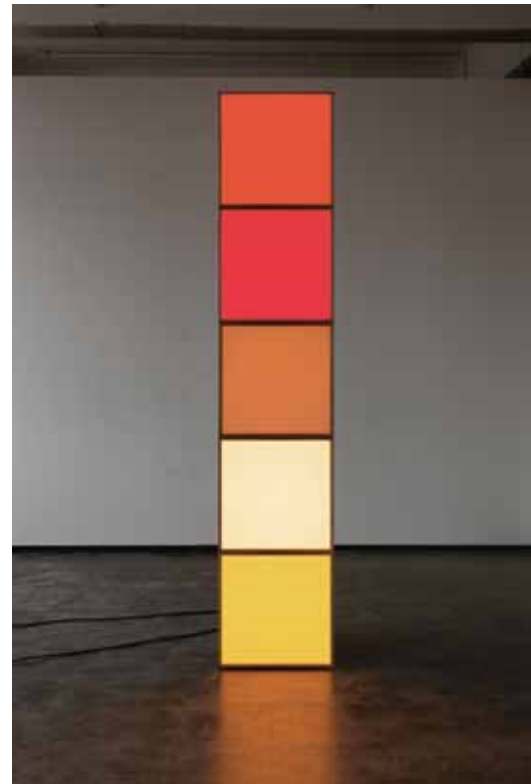
BETTINA BLOHM, *MOSAIKFORMEN*, 2016



SU-MEI TSE, *SWING*, 2007



TARA MAHAPATRA, *STIRRINGS STILL III*, 2016



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ALONA RODEH, *NEITHER DAY NOR NIGHT*, 2013



ANNETTE HOLLYWOOD, *DER GRENZENLOSE SCHLAGERWETTBEWERB*, 2017



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- 172 ALONA RODEH, March 13, 2017
Photographed by Laura J. Gerlach

- 184 ANNETTE HOLLYWOOD, March 14, 2017
Photographed by Laura J. Gerlach
- 196 ASTRID KÖPPE, March 9, 2017
Photographed by Laura J. Gerlach
- 210 JORINDE VOIGT, March 8, 2017
Photographed by Laura J. Gerlach
- 224 BIRGIT BRENNER, March 10, 2017
Photographed by Laura J. Gerlach
- 238 KATHARINA GROSSE, 2015
Photographed by Andrea Stapper
- Artworks**
- 270 CORNELIA RENZ, *FAIRPLAY*, 2017
Pigments on two acrylic glass panels, artist frame
68 x 68 x 2 1/4 inches (173 x 173 x 6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Tore Sübbier, Berlin
- 271 FRIEDERIKE FELDMANN, *INFO*, 2013
Acrylic on wall
Installation view, *WALL WORKS*, Hamburger Bahnhof,
Berlin
Courtesy of the artist
- 272 SUSAN PHILIPSI, *WAR DAMAGED MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS*, 2015
Fourteen channel sound installation
Installation view, Duveen Galleries, Tate Britain,
London
Photograph: Julian Abrams
Courtesy of the artist
- 273 ELVIRA BACH, *ICH WÄRE SO GERNE IN DEINER NÄHE [I WOULD LOVE TO BE CLOSE TO YOU]*, 2016
Acrylic on canvas, 65 x 51 inches (165 x 130 cm)
Photograph: Marion Schult
Courtesy of the artist
- 274 ALICJA KWADE, *ALLE ZEIT DER WELT [ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD]*, 2015
Copper and stainless steel in three parts
78 3/4 x 9 1/2 x 1 3/4 inches;
78 3/4 x 7 7/8 x 1 3/4 inches;
78 3/4 x 12 5/8 x 2 5/8 inches
(200 x 24 x 4.5 cm; 200 x 20 x 4.5 cm; 200 x 32 x 6.6 cm)

- Unique
Photograph: Roman März
Courtesy of the artist and König Galerie, Berlin
- 275 MONIKA GRIZMALA, *RAUMZEICHNUNG (SOLITÄR)*, 2017
Installation view, Haus der Kunst St. Josef,
Solothurn, Switzerland
Courtesy of the artist
- 276 CORNELIA SCHLEIME, *UNTITLED*, 1998
Acrylic, shellac, and asphalt lacquer on linen
57 x 47 1/8 inches (145 x 120 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
- 277 SVENJA DEININGER, *ECHO OF A MIRROR FRAGMENT*, 2017
Installation view, Secession, Vienna
Photograph: Markus Wörgötter
Courtesy of the artist
- 278 BETTINA BLOHM, *MOSAIKFORMEN*, 2016
Gouache, acrylic, charcoal, and white pencil on paper
25 1/2 x 19 3/4 inches (65 x 50 cm)
Photograph: David Ertl
Courtesy of the artist and Werner Klein Gallery, Cologne
- 279 SU-MEI TSE, *SWING*, 2007
Neon sculpture with movement
104 3/8 x 16 1/2 x 8 1/4 inches (265 x 42 x 21 cm)
Photograph: Jean-Lou Majerus
Exhibition view, Galerie Beaumontpublic, Luxembourg
Courtesy of the artist
- 280 TARA MAHAPATRA, *STIRRINGS STILL III*, 2016
Ink on paper, 22 x 30 inches (56 x 76 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
- 281 ANGELA BULLOCH, *STACK OF FIVE*, 2015
Five wooden Pixel Boxes with International
LED DMX Modules, Black Box, cables
99 x 19 5/8 x 19 5/8 inches (250 x 50 x 50 cm)
Photograph: Carsten Eisfeld
Courtesy of the artist
- 282 FRANKA HÖRNSCHEMEYER, *IMAGINARY STATE*, 2017
Metal stud framing, sheetrock
Installation view, Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin
Photograph: Donat Schilling
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin
- 283 ALONA RODEH, *NEITHER DAY NOR NIGHT*, 2013
Plywood, Formica, reflective fabric, lights
Dimensions variable
Sound: 5 min looped; Original music:
Gymnopédie No.1, Erik Satie
Recorded performance: Yuval (Tubi) Zolotov
Musical production: Kalbata (Ariel Tagar)
Commissioned by the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
Photograph: Ta Nisim
Courtesy of the artist
- 284 ANNETTE HOLLYWOOD, *DER GRENZENLOSE
SCHLAGERWETTBEWERB*, 2017
Video stills
Film, 30 min. HD, sound, col/sw, 16:9
Courtesy of the artist and VG Bildkunst
- 285 ASTRID KÖPPE, *UNTITLED (Z16_074)*, 2016
Ink and pencil on paper
11 5/8 x 8 1/8 inches (29.7 x 21 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
- 286 JORINDE VOIGT, *A NEW KIND OF JOY – STUDY (4)*,
2016/ 2017
Ink, gold leaf, oil pastel, pastel, and pencil on paper
55 1/2 x 47 1/8 inches (141 x 120 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
- 287 BIRGIT BRENNER, *MARSHMALLOW MOOD*, 2016
Installation view, Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig
Photograph: Uwe Walter, Berlin
Courtesy of the artist
and Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig/Berlin
- 288 KATHARINA GROSSE, *O.T.*, 2016
Acrylic on canvas, 114 x 76 inches (290 x 193 cm)
Photograph: Jens Ziehe
Courtesy of Katharina Grosse
and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my very great appreciation to the many individuals, who have supported this particular book, as well as the interview project at large.

First, I would like to thank all the artists featured in this publication for sharing their work and thoughts with enthusiasm and generosity: Elvira Bach, Bettina Blohm, Birgit Brenner, Angela Bulloch, Svenja Deininger, Katharina Grosse, Franka Hörnschemeyer, Alicja Kwade, Friederike Feldmann, Monika Grzymala, annette hollywood, Astrid Köppe, Tara Mahapatra, Susan Philipsz, Cornelia Renz, Alona Rodeh, Cornelia Schleime, Su-Mei Tse, and Jorinde Voigt. In addition, I would like to thank their representing galleries and studio personnel, especially Peter Blum Gallery, New York, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig/Berlin, Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna, Gallery Joe, Philadelphia, Galerie Werner Klein, Cologne, Galerie König, Berlin, David Nolan Gallery, New York, Galerie Nordenhake Stockholm/Berlin, Galerie Michael Schultz, Berlin, Galerie Tore Süßbier Berlin, Christiane Bühling-Schultz, Julia Freiboth, Caroline Heinzmann, Natalija Martinovic, Robert Meijer, and Saskia de Vries.

A very special thanks goes to Anja Lutz of The Green Box, Amanda Konishi, Laura J. Gerlach, Jason McCoy, Stephen McCoy Cadwalader, Jennifer Riley, T. Kelly Wilson, Kathleen Kucka, Tara Geer, Anna Torma, Terry Graff, Meredith Briden, the Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation, David Cohen, Glenn Harper, Scott Stiffler, Camilla Hoffmann, Terrell James, Corinna Northe, Maik Brückner, Birgit Wilde, and Christiane Löhr.

Most importantly, my gratitude goes to my family on both sides of the Atlantic, my husband Todd Simmons for his continued love and editorial support, our daughter Paulina McKenzie Blue, as well as to Charlotte Ella Marie and Hans-Günther Buhmann.

This book is dedicated to them.

STEPHANIE BUHMANN
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Berlin Studio Conversations
Twenty Women Talk About Art
Edited by Stephanie Buhmann

Translation: Stephanie Buhmann
Proofreading: Robert Schlicht
Layout: Anja Lutz // Book Design
Design assistant: Corinna Northe
Production: Standartu Spaustuve, Lithuania

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ISBN: 978-3-941644-93-9

Published by

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GREENBOX

The Green Box
Kunst Editionen, Berlin
www.thegreenbox.net