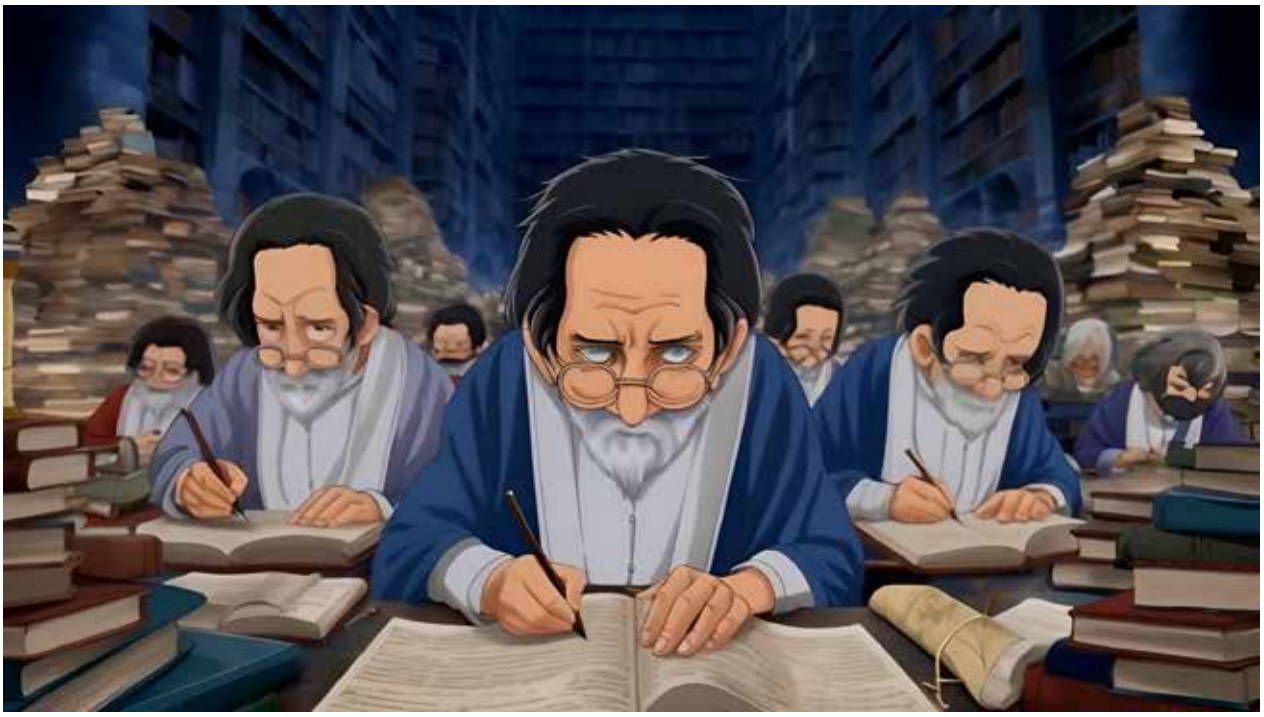
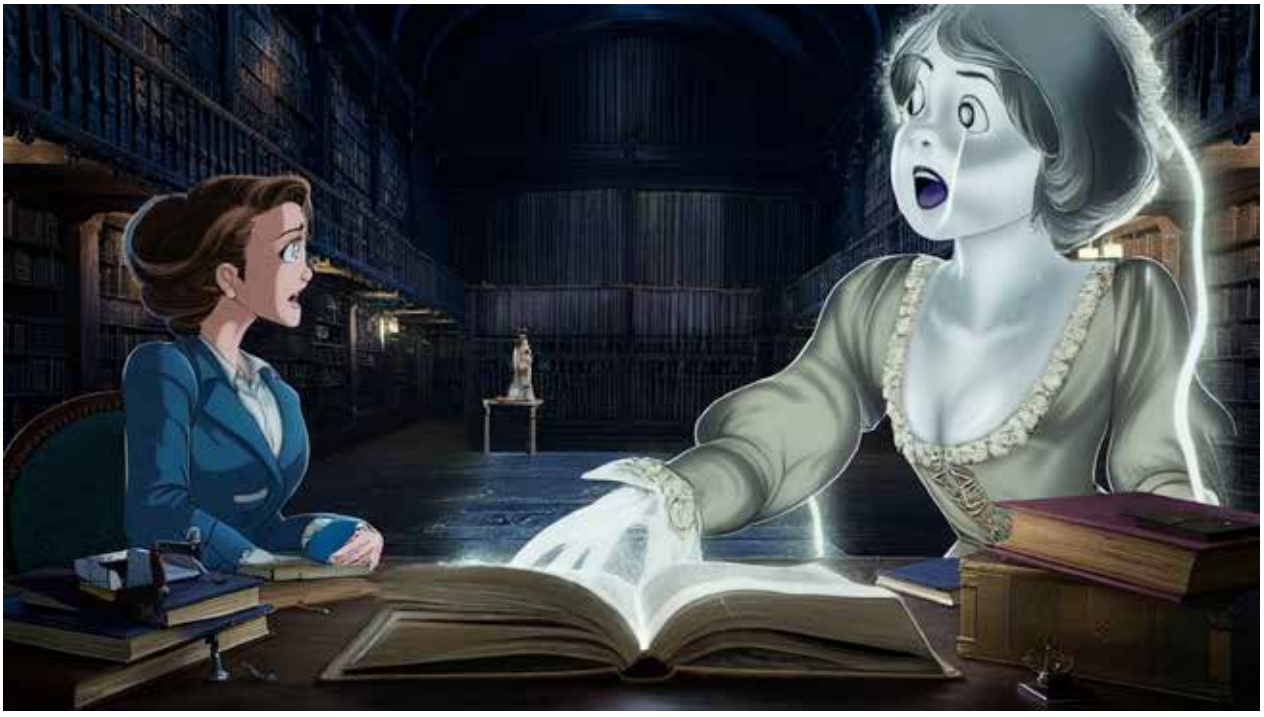
CORDULA DITZ

They Speak to Us in Dreams, exhibition view Kunsthaus Hamburg 2024, photo: Antje Sauer

They Speak to Us in Dreams, Video, 44 Min, 2024



They Speak to Us in Dreams, Video, 44 Min, 2024



They Speak to Us in Dreams, Video, 44 Min, 2024

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They Speak to Us in Dreams

In her works, Cordula Ditz examines how our conceptions of gender roles and identity are shaped, reproduced and reinforced, by the media in particular. She uses found material from the Internet or from books, magazines and films, which she integrates into her paintings and videos in the form of collages and montages. She creates visual worlds that expose their own constructed nature with the aim of reflecting the generation and media representations of norms.

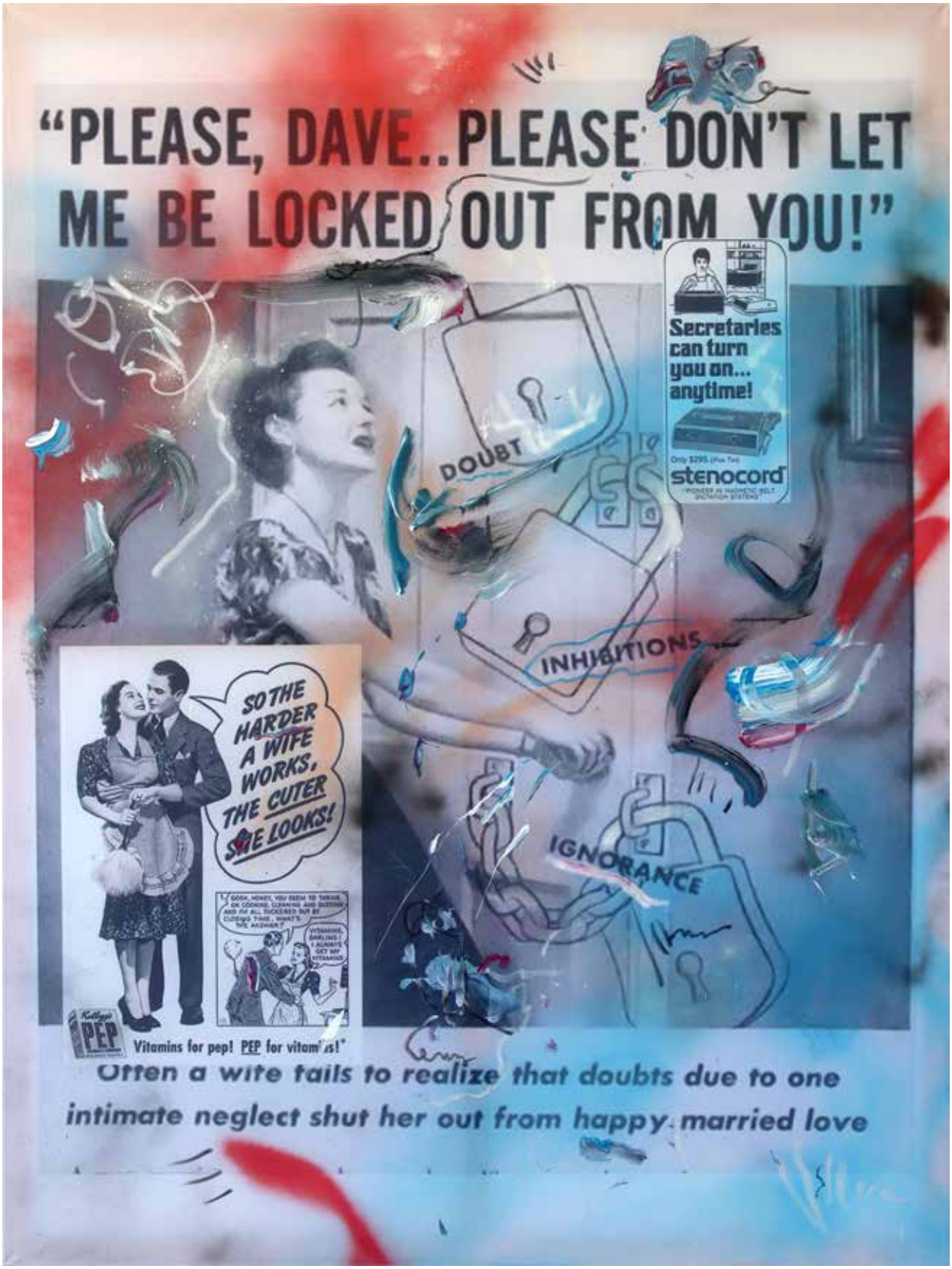
In recent years, the artist has been conducting research into a long-neglected topic: women who pursued artistic careers in the past centuries but have received little attention in art history to this day. As early as 1550, the Florentine art historian Giorgio Vasari published The Lives of the Artists – the first publication to document artists' biographies. Alongside hundreds of male artists, he only mentioned four female artists. Four hundred years later, E. H. Gombrich's standard work The Story of Art failed to provide a single reference to a woman. Even in the 16th edition from 1995, only one female artist is mentioned.

In actual fact, women only occupy a marginal space in recorded history. Their contributions have in part been systematically suppressed in historical records around the world. The vast majority of surviving sources was written by men about men, and this phenomenon subsists in the digital age. For example, in 2023, still only eighteen percent of English-language articles on Wikipedia covered biographies of women, and only around twenty percent of all articles were written by female authors. Based on her research and scientific findings from the field of memory studies, Cordula Ditz produced the 45- minute video and sound installation They Speak to Us in Dreams, being presented for the first time at Kunsthaus Hamburg. Using various AI image generators, she has conceived a fabulous, surrealistic animation about the invisibility of women in art history. In this work, she employs the flawed nature of AI as a form of representation for lost memories which, as a result of the power imbalance between the sexes, have led to the erasure of female artists from our collective memory. They Speak to Us in Dreams tells an art-historical heroines' story: at the beginning of the film, female painters from different eras pursue their vocation. Yet the historiography produced by their male colleagues leads to them gradually disappearing into the mire of oblivion. It is only through the dedicated reformulation of history by young female art historians that, ultimately, a portal is opened through which the women artists are freed, to enter the collective memory for good.

Cordula Ditz draws on numerous historical role models for her animated protagonists, such as Georgiana Houghton (1814–1884), Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) and Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750): Houghten had developed her own abstract imagery around 1865 – more than 40 years before Kandinsky became famous as the inventor of abstraction. Hilma af Klint had likewise adopted her own abstract position years before Kandinsky. However, both found little recognition during their lifetimes. Rachel Ruysch, in contrast, was internationally successful during her time. Her paintings fetched almost twice the price of Rembrandt's, and her works have remained in the collections of major museums to this day. Yet in most art-history books she is not even mentioned. The expansive installation at Kunsthaus Hamburg brings their forgotten biographies back to life. A haunting atmosphere is created in the exhibition hall: a large-format video projection, flickering light hanging from the ceiling, soft whispers emanating from the corners, women's voices whispering the names of forgotten artists from different centuries.

The video work was created with the kind support of ZEIT STIFTUNG BUCERIUS, the Ministry of Culture and Media Hamburg as well as Rudolf Augstein Stiftung.

Kunsthaus Hamburg 25.10.2024 -14.11.2024



Please, don‘t let me be locked out from you, 2024
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

The faces we put on, 2024
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

You are in a beauty conntest every hour, every day, 2024
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

I will never let you down, 2024
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

It‘s Human Nature, 2023, Ausstellungsansicht Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof / Fotos: Fred Dott

EVERY PLAN IS A HOUSE OF CARDS, exhibition view Hyper Cultural Passengers 2023
3 Chanel Video Installation

The Weak Lips of a Woman

Cordula Ditz‘s installation The Weak Lips of a Woman includes trauma yoga, durational dance performances, and a talk by photographer and author Shannnon Taggart. The work is based on intensive research into the origins and developments of Spiritualism and its significance for early feminism in the United States.

Spiritualism began to take shape in 1848, the very year and in the same area of New York State that gave birth to the organized women‘s rights movement with the Seneca Falls Convention. While most religious groups viewed the existing order of gender, race, and class relations as commanded by God, Spiritualism was associated not only with the women‘s rights movement, but also with the abolition of slavery and other radical movements. At a time when no church ordained women and many forbade them to speak in the house of worship, and women were considered merely the property of their husbands or fathers, women in Spiritualism had equal authority, equal opportunity, and held high religious office in equal numbers.

Spiritualism was not a private movement. Many mediums gave lectures in trance under the direct influence of spirits. These trance speakers were the first group of American women to speak publicly before large mixed-sex audiences. It was believed that the nervousness and fragility of women were important qualities to encourage the manifestation of spirit. The sexes were thought to have opposite electric poles. The negative charge of women made them attractive to the positively charged (male) spirits. This gave the female mediums an advantage because only they could receive the messages of the significant male spirits. Thus, they made political speeches under the influence of spirits of such famous personalities as Napoleon, Socrates and Benjamin Franklin. Since it was not they but the spirits speaking through them who were responsible for the content, the women could not be held liable for it. Not very surprisingly, the rights of women were now suddenly very dear to these spirits after their deaths.

Nora Elberfeld is a dancer and choreographer and has been dealing with the effects of yoga and meditation for over 15 years. Throughout her career, she has worked with people who faced special challenges and places, including in psycho-social centers, with prison inmates, or with girls with eating disorders.

Sara Ezzell is an American-Cypriot dancer, choreographer and director. From 2014-2019 she danced professionally with the Saint Petersburg Ballet, the Stuttgart Ballet, the National Youth Ballet and the Hamburg Ballet. She has been working as a freelancer since 2019 and mainly creates and performs new works in collaboration with interdisciplinary teams. These include her creation and performance of Feuervogel in collaboration with the Berlin Philharmonic (2021), her choreography and performance of Pygmalion 4.0 with the orchestra La Festa Musicale in Hanover (2021), as well as two full-length creations at the abandoned sanatorium Grabowsee (2019/2020).

Shannon Taggart is an artist and author based in St. Paul, MN, USA. Her monograph, Séance (Fulgur Press 2019, Atelier Éditions 2022), was named one of TIME magazine’s ‘Best Photobooks of 2019.’ She began photographing in Lily Dale, New York, the home of the world’s largest Spiritualist community, in 2001. Her project evolved into a twenty-year journey that has taken her around the world in search of ‘ectoplasm’—the elusive substance that is said to be both spiritual and material. In this illustrated presentation, Taggart shares stories and images from her book Séance and explores Spiritualism’s connections to art, science, and technology, its relationship with human celebrity, and its intrinsic bond with the medium of photography.

Lisa Torres Luna is a dancer and dance teacher from Yucatan, México. In 2020 she was granted the Eurasia Scholarship which helped her start her dance education at the Contemporary Dance School Hamburg in 2021; before that, from 2019 until 2021 she joined the professional dance company, Cressida Danza as ensemble and with them, she performed in various scenarios around Mexico and also in New York City. Lisa has performative dance experience having participated in Dance Festivals, Art Exhibitions, Videodances, Shortfilms and Street performances along Mexico, USA, Denmark and Germany.

Kindly supported by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Hamburgische Kulturstiftung, and Liebelt-Stiftung, Hamburg.

The Weak Lips of a Woman, exhibition view, 2022,Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, photos Fred Dott

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The Weak Lips of a Woman, Performance, 2022,Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, photos Fred Dott

The Weak Lips of a Woman, Performance, 2022,Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, photos Fred Dott

I don‘t need a cloak to become invisible, exhibition view, 2022, Conradi

I don‘t need a cloak to become invisible, exhibition view, 2022, Conradi

I don‘t need a cloak to become invisible, exhibition view, 2022, Conradi

I don’t need a cloak to become invisible by Paula Kommoss

Cordula Ditz’s newest research publication, I don’t need a cloak to become invisible, brings together over four hundred images selected from the online selling platform eBay. Nearly all are selfies taken by women or photographs of women, who offer what they wear for sale while disguising their faces.The artist transfers images gleaned from online listings from across Germany and the United States into printed matter in form of an artist book.

In its pages, Ditz assembles the found images into collages, that in layout and size come close to that of glossy fashion magazines.The compositions range from the size of a smartphone screen to an entire page. Views of the same clothes from the front, side and back are displayed alongside one another – referencing the way in which a potential buyer may first have encountered the various items for sale, ordered by a swiping tool. By drawing attention to these images in toto, removed from their original context, Ditz’s project approaches a case study of female visibility online. Flicking through the book, a production quirk compresses its illustrated pages, revealing only white pages that are almost blank save for small black captions – the names of the women’s eBay profiles. Usernames like osterhasie, powerpaddy2000, leather poet71327 create a layer of information, offering insights into a seller’s socio-economic background and online identity that precedes their image. It embodies the first choice of individua- tion, and sets a base of identity that goes beyond depiction.

In the vast space of online selling platforms, on first glance these women become invisible, part of a mass movement playing into the economics of selling, image politics and gender roles. With their faces disguised, the viewer’s gaze naturally moves to the bodies captured by the seller’s camera. The posture and poses of the women portrayed often echo traditional body language and body norms. One leg is placed over the other, an arm rests on the hip with a lightly twisted torso, many choose a now-ubiquitous tilted stance, one leg standing and the other leaning.

This popular contrapose was also identified by artist Marianne Wex. In her visual survey, Let’s take back our space: “Female” and “Male” Body Language as a Result of Patriarchal Structures (1979), Wex gathered around 2,500 to 3,000 images of the body language of men and women, as seen in the streets of Hamburg, and in television and commercials, which she then categorized according to a kind of body language topology. Most of the conscious posing is influenced by the omnipresence of media imagery: Wex’s project reveals how our body language is a direct reference to the power relations at stake in our everyday lives – the power relations of gender.[1] Photographing the women in the street puts forward the status-quo in black and white – women waiting at the bus stop, sitting on a park bench or in a room with other people. Once placed next to each other, the restrictive and one-dimensional body language of crossed legs, folded arms and a general tightness of the body become visible. Only when women are amongst other women does their body language relax; they are in not consciously chosen positions with wider stances and loose arms.

In contrast, the reality that Ditz brings together is one of digital culture. Through the means of the artist book, one is immersed in the private reality of selling online – already used goods are offered up on its pages, bringing together only a small excerpt of the seemingly never-ending image flow prevalent on online selling platforms. Here, the creation of an identity has become deeply saturated by the media aesthetic. Nonetheless, a similar dynamic of body language is at play as in Wex’s study. With the intention to highlight the clothes in a promotional way, most of the poses chosen by the women reinforce the patriarchal stereotypes of body language. In this way, the codes documented by Marianne Wex are still present, the main perpetrator and receiver is still male – there is no breaking down of these frameworks. By extension, all of these images are in one sense aimed at the male gaze – yet hold it at a distance. Alongside professional photos of weddings, portraits or themed photo- shoots, a great volume of the photographs depicted here are selfies.

As Mary McGill writes in her essay on the female gaze and selfie culture, “Rather than viewing [selfies] as a missed opportunity to flout convention, it is perhaps more productive to consider how this apparent conformity speaks to the power and complicated pleasures of women’s relationship to images of the feminine, including images of themselves”.[2] Indeed, it might be said that the women gathered together by Ditz are aware of the constructed nature of feminine imagery, and the object-hood of the female body. In turn, they appropriate its protocols and act from a position of power, using tools once-aimed at the male gaze to their mercantile advantage. Coded poses and constructions of femininity are here created for the female or nonbinary gaze of potential buyers. Ditz’s artist book extends this phenomenon further, using images in which the faces of the women are disguised to disrupt the power dynamic of the gaze.The methods by which this is achieved are similar but specific, and range from scribbled-over paint in an assortment of colors, to emojis, flowers and the use of blurring tools to render faces unrecognizable.

Here, the quickening of anonymity becomes visible. Besides their own faces, in rare cases other people in the photos are crossed out in black ink. In one image, a woman posed in front of the EiffelTower covers her face with a pink bow and another person with a big heart.

In this way, the time taken not only to pose but also to edit these images renders the level of engagement, computer and internet skills as well as intent comprehensible to the viewer.The decisions driving

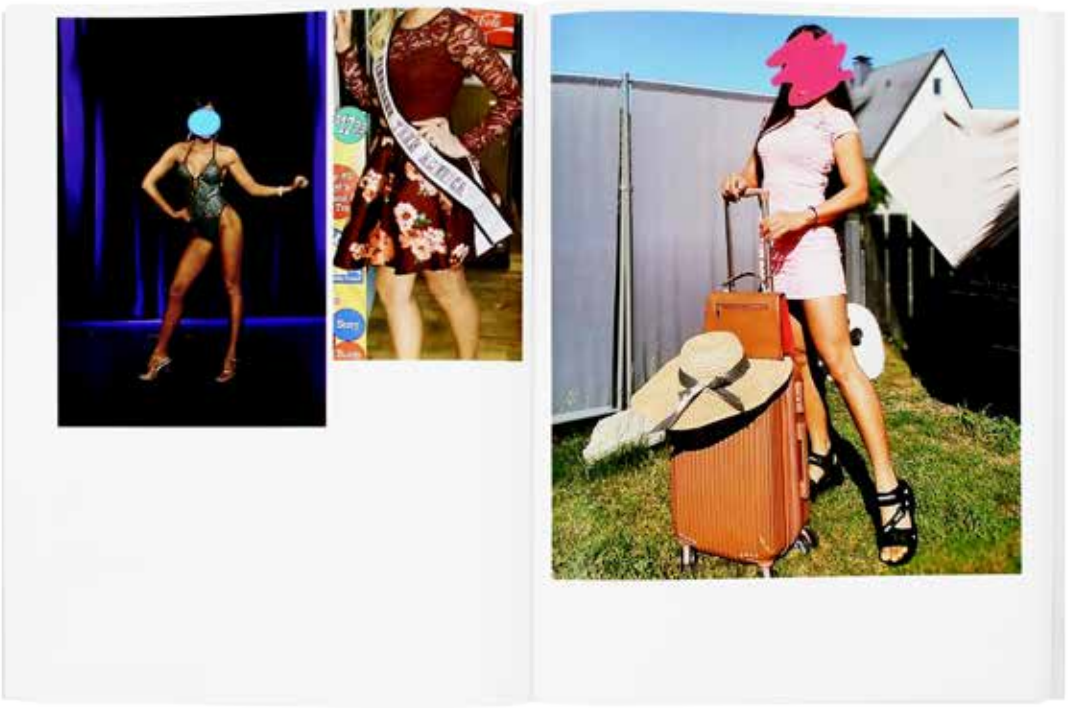
image-selection range from hyper-intentional to random, rendering the women the inde- pendent authors of their own making – tracing the inheritance of the invisible. Furthermore, the scribbling out or choice of Emoji can be read as depictions of various attitudes and emotions towards each woman's own body. With the self removed, then, the act of disguising one's face counteracts the urge to become famous or recognizable – an inversion of the creation of a desirable online identity or influencer model. In most of the selected images, the backgrounds remain untouched or edited by the users, giving a view into an individual's social context and private lives – staged in scenes from changing rooms to bedrooms and driveways. The spectator is invited into the immediate realities of the women – their homes, weddings or even fetishes are shared. At the same time, some women even create more extraordinary surroundings, to show off their items and their bodies in a more attractive light. A dress is presented in the front seat of an expensive car, a decorated staircase and a glass of champagne are turned into the backdrop for a wedding dress, or furniture or props are used to support a specific fantasy.
The title, I don't need a cloak to become invisible is taken from a scene in the first Harry Potter book. Whilst roaming the corridors of Hogwarts late at night – thanks to a coat that makes him invisible – Harry Potter discovers a miraculous mirror. Gazing into the depths of the Mirror of Erised, as it is known, its glass surface makes visible what you most desire. By the mirror's own special charms, one may only see their own longing – and yet the headmaster Dumbledore, who suddenly appears, seems to know all those portrayed desires, stating: "I don't need a cloak to become invisible."[3]
Even though the women shown by Ditz disguise their faces, in some images their desires seem to be- come visible through staged imagery and representative scenography. The women often use mediatized and gendered conventions to portray publicly available versions of themselves.
Ditz's survey attests to a paradox: through the act of anonymization, an individual's desires and attitudes become more visible. In this way, I don't need a cloak to become invisible offers a counterimage of wo- men online, who utilize the act of quickened anonymity as a reappropriation of the self.

1 Marianne Wex, „Weibliche" und „männliche" Körpersprache als Folge patriarchalischer Machtverhältnisse, Hamburg 1980.

2 Mary McGill, How the Light Gets In: Notes on the female gaze and selfie culture, MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture, published 1 May 2018, https://maifeminism.com/how-the-light-gets-in-notes-on-the-female-gaze-and-selfie-culture/ 22. July 2022.

3 J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's stone, London 1997, ch.The Mirror of Erised.

I don‘t need a cloak to become invisible, artist book, 2022



I don‘t need a cloak to become invisible, artist book, 2022

You may not know him but, exhibition view, 2022,Hamburger Kunsthalle, photos Fred Dott

You may not know him but, exhibition view, 2022,Hamburger Kunsthalle, photos Fred Dott

Dieses ist ein Kettenbrief, 2020
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 100 x 70 cm

Ich allein weiss, wer ich bin, 2020
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 100 x 70 cm

YOU MAY NOT KNOW HIM BUT

Cordula Ditz developed the installation “You may not know him but” on the occasion of an exhibition in the historical Bieberhaus close to the main train station in Hamburg as part of MIND the GAP, curated by Sven Christian Schuch.

Based on research into the history of the Bieberhaus, she created an extensive installation, which consists of paintings, light work, palm trees, old radios, a carpet and a video work. The works collage the spirits of different historical epochs, personalities and events with the present. So an accessible space for thought is created.
During her research, Cordula Ditz came across the story of Helmuth Hübener, whose fate is the focus of the work. In 1942 he was arrested during his training in the social administration in the Bieberhaus and later, at the age of only 17, was executed as the youngest resistance fighter by the Nazi regime. Helmuth Hübener was a working class child and part of Hamburg‘s Mormon community. From 1941 onwards, the then 16-year-old administration student secretly listened to the enemy radio BBC and developed around 60 leaflets from it, which he distributed with his two friends Rudolf Wobbe and Karl-Heinz Schnibbe.

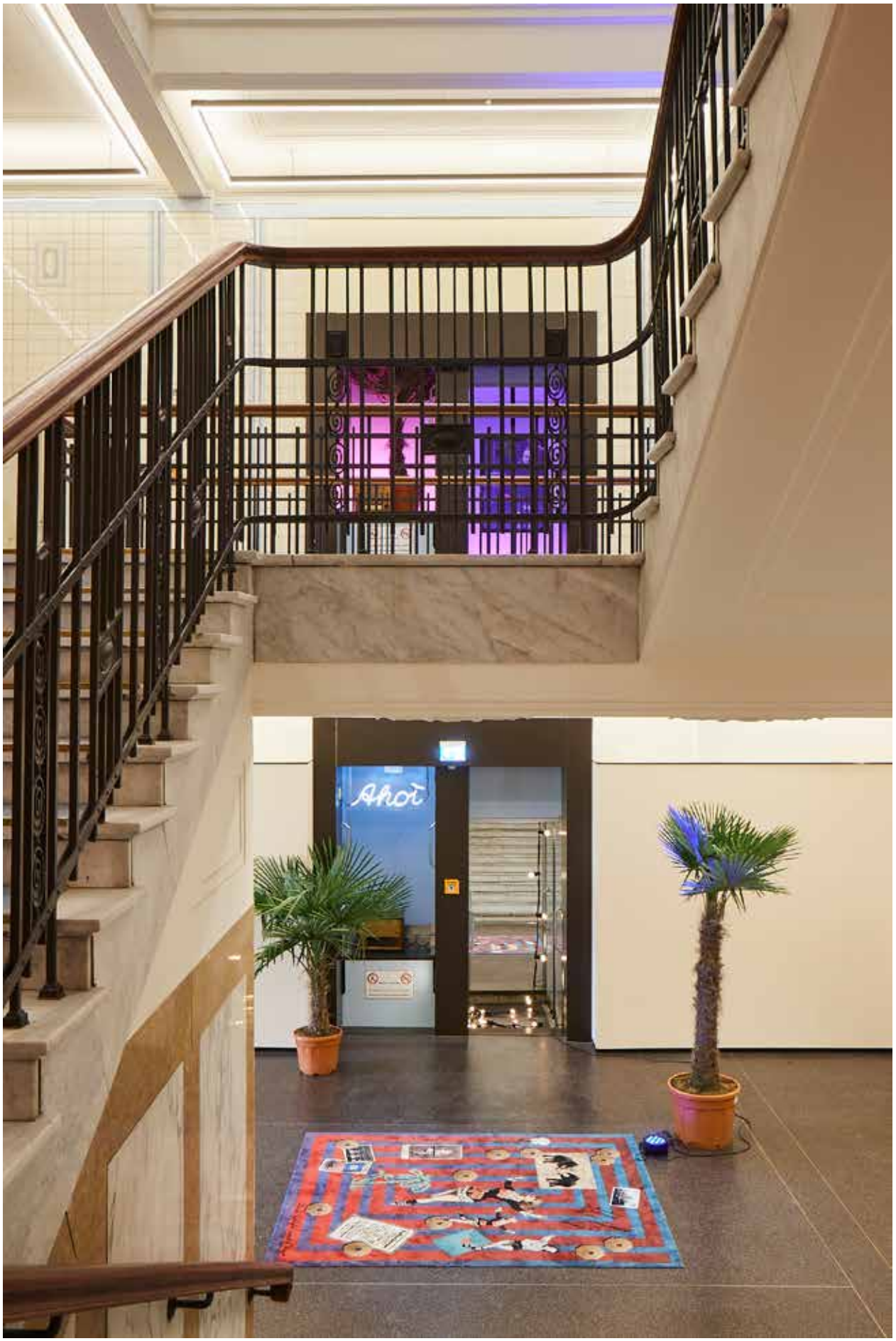
In Germany and in his hometown of Hamburg he has remained largely unknown to this day, in contrast to other resistance fighters such as the Weiße Rose. Only one book in German by Ulrich Sander was published in 2002 by the VVN-BdA. Amazingly, however, you can find numerous English-language videos about him on the internet. The video in the installation is collaged from these found excerpts. The material is from a wide variety of sources: videos of young YouTubers who refer to Hübener as a hero, memories of his colleague Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, animated 3-D visualizations of the history of Hübener produced by teenagers and films by historians from the Mormon community in the American state of Utah. These are juxtaposed with scenes from various film productions of National Socialist propaganda.

These two narratives continue throughout the overall installation. On one hand, the old radios refer to their potential function as a source of information for eavesdropping on enemy radio - just as Hübener used them - they also served the Nazi regime as an important propaganda instrument with the involvement of the entertainment industry. Like the palm trees, they allude to the cafes, bars and variety theaters that used to be located on the lower floors of the Bieberhaus. Places where other teenagers used to entertain themself, while Helmuth Hübener was working on his leaflets just a few floors above.

This is followed indirectly by another motif: the Maria Kunde art salon, which was in the Bieberhaus from 1911 until after the Second World War. The „Friedrichsberg Heads“ by Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, were shown in one of the exhibitions. She was murdered later as part of the Nazi „euthanasia“ program in Dresden. In Hamburg, the admissions to institutions, from which the evacuations to the „euthanasia“ took place, were arranged in the social administration, Hübener‘s place of work.

The neon “Wer lügt (in english: Who is lying” is a quote from one of his leaflets with which he wanted to educate the public about the truth, but which also points to how we deal with media today. The work asks questions about the culture of remembrance in general and the construction and reconstruction of history and our perception of resistance.

Esmeralda Rosenberg, the fortune teller from the local funfair, was invited by the artist. With her wagon she settled on the Hachmannplatz in front of the Bieberhaus for the time of the exhibition. And at the opening she predicted the future of the Bieberhaus in a ceremonial act with the artist.



You may not know him but, 2020, exhibition view Bieberhaus / photos: Volker Renner

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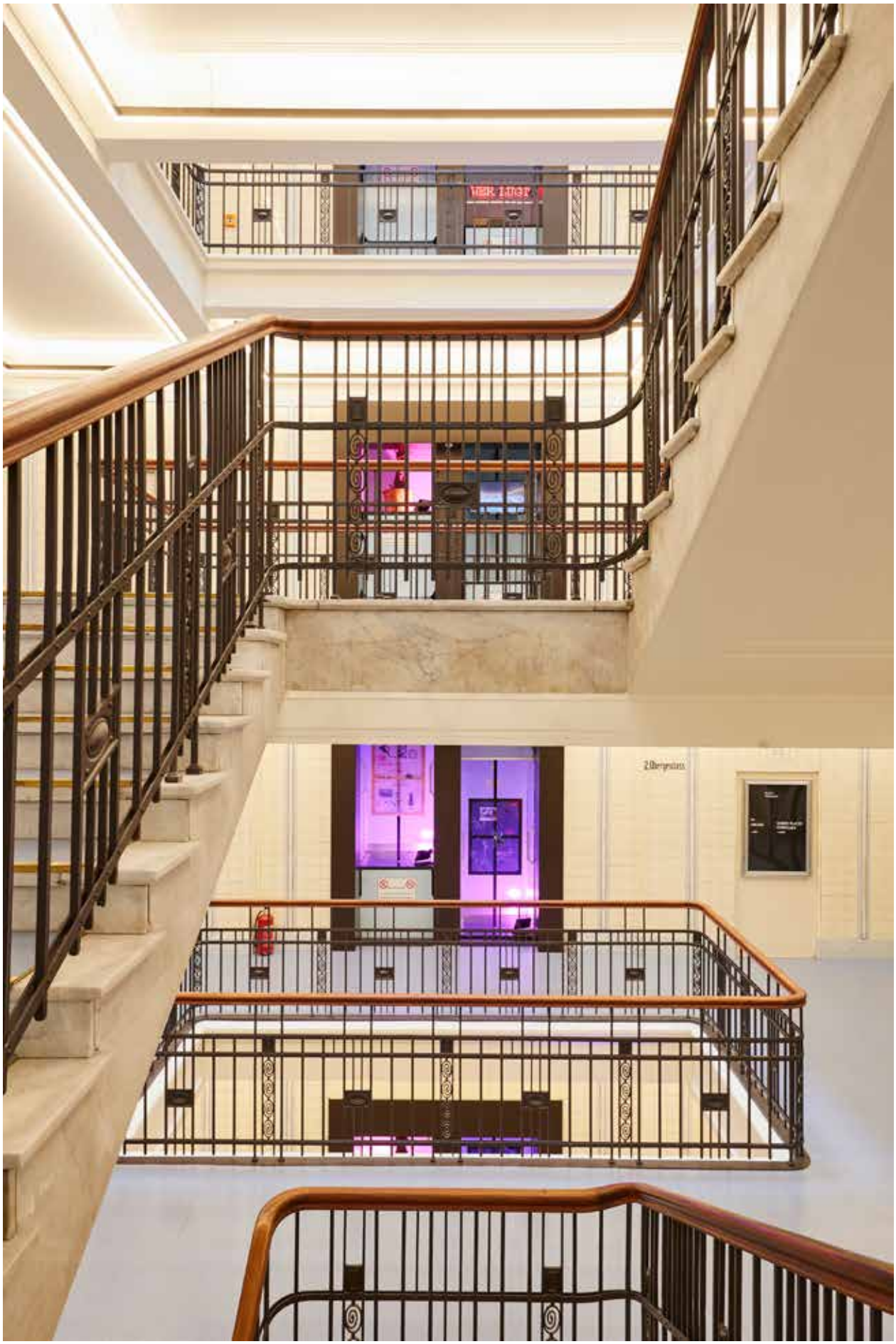

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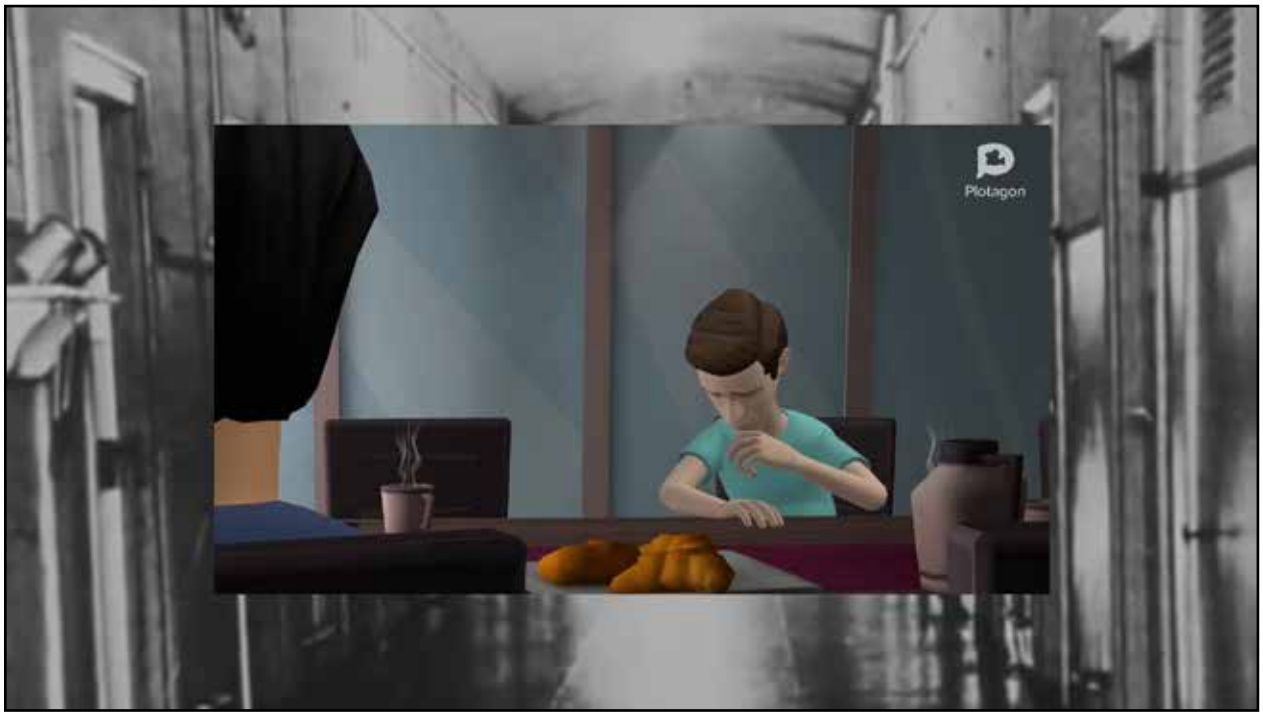
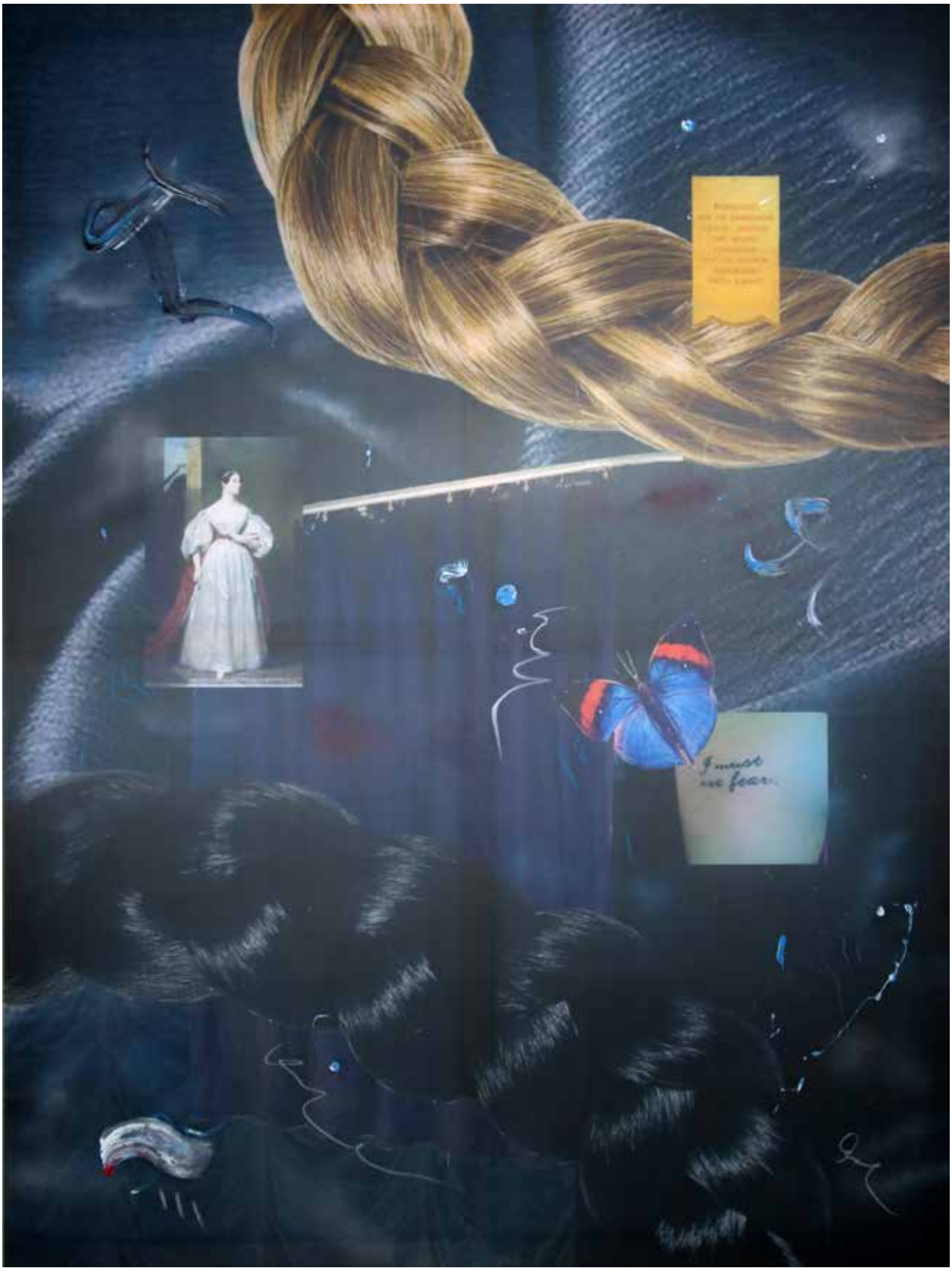


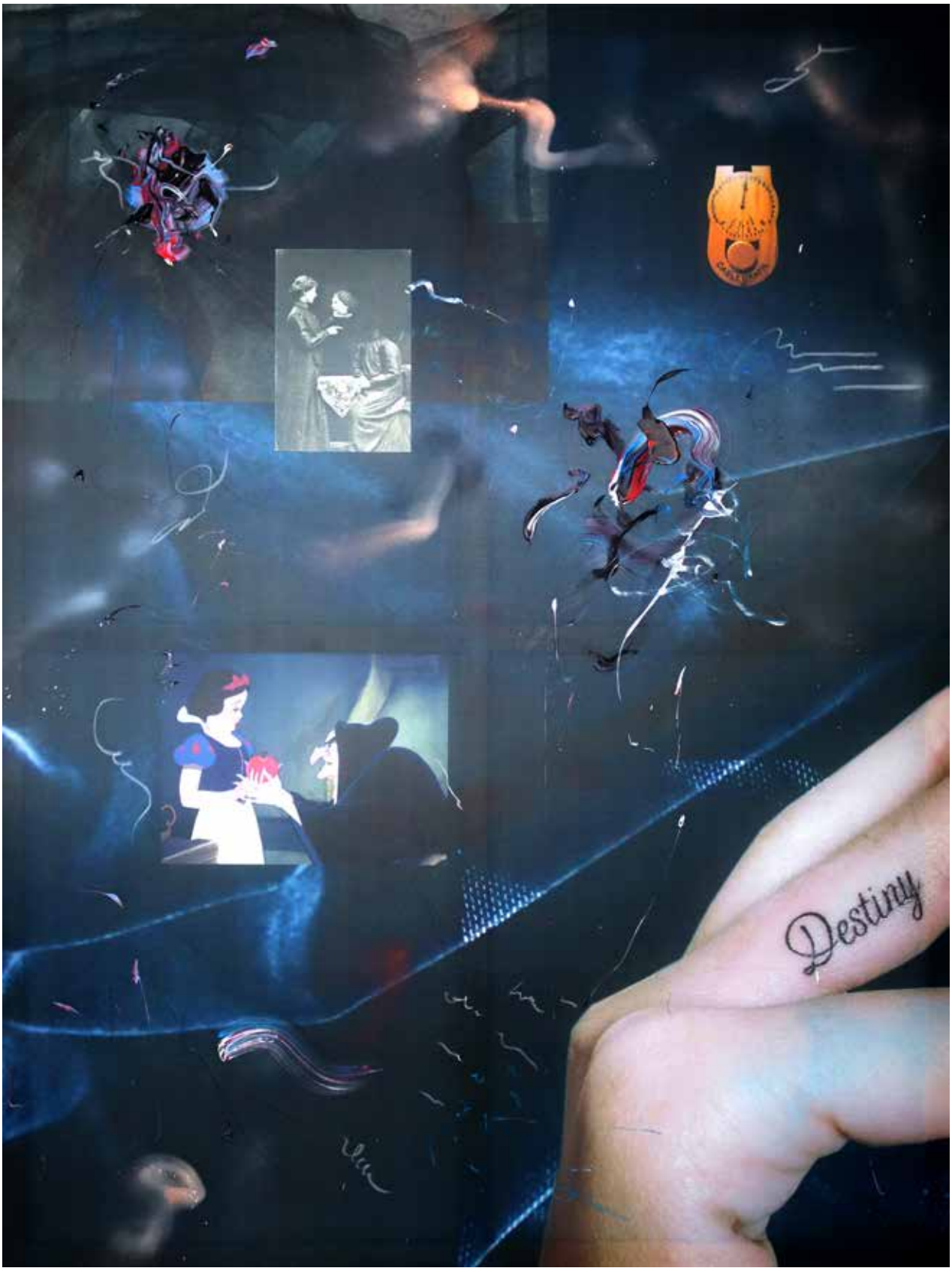
You may not know him but, 2020, Video, 13 Min.

Exhibition view, 2021, Esther Schipper

Trust no one, 2022,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm



Forward out of dakness, 2022,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm



Destiny, 2022,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

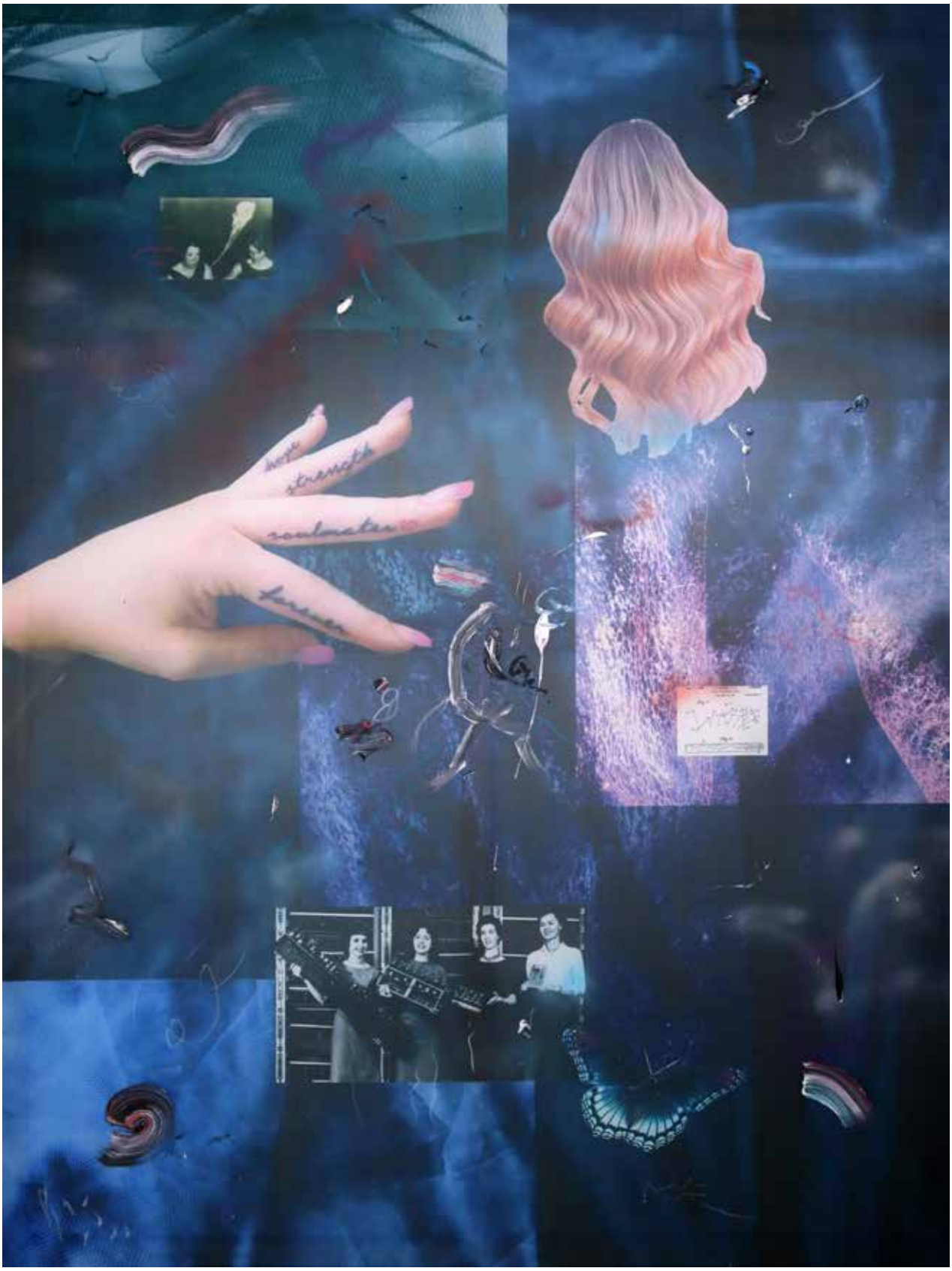
girls will be boys, 2021,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

I'll never be a fool again, 2021,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

A lion sleeps in the heart of every brave man, 2021,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

these are the books a wife should read, 2021,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

i don‘t like to see a woman do a man‘s work, 2021,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm



hope strength soulmates forever, 2021,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

Eternal Love, 2021,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

Your Silence Is Very Disturbing, 2020, exhibition view Kunstverein in Hamburg / photos: Fred Dott

Your Silence Is Very Disturbing, 2020, exhibition view Kunstverein in Hamburg / photos: Fred Dott

Your Silence Is Very Disturbing, 2020, exhibition view Kunstverein in Hamburg / photos: Fred Dott

SILENT ALL THESE YEARS

Tobias Peper

Cordula Ditz's work scrutinizes the ways in which our ideas about gender roles and identity are constructed, reiterated, and solidified—the media play a salient role in this process—and how they inform our conscious as well as unconscious minds. To this purpose, she gathers materials she finds online and in books, magazines, and films and integrates them into paintings and videos in the form of collages or montages. The result is a rich imagery that is open about its genesis and performative nature in order to prompt reflection on media representation and the production of normative codifications.

Running for just under half an hour, the video Your Silence Is Very Disturbing (2019) revolves around women's experience of intersectional and enduring discrimination and how it affects the social conception as well as self-image of what it means to be a woman or a man. Silence, as the title indicates, is a recurrent motif in the work. Ditz has edited a rapid succession of scenes that illustrate silence, the act of silencing, and the loss of one's own voice as well as the self-empowerment that comes with breaking the silence. How powerful voices and their suppression can be is demonstrated by a prominent story that Ditz's work explicitly refers to. On several occasions, she cuts to interviews related to the #MeToo movement, arguably one of the most widely reported phenomena of recent years and one whose impact has been considerable: often communicating through social media, an alliance of women raised accusations of sexual assault and rape, revealing how a sweeping code of silence, upheld mostly by men, has perpetuated the brutal structures that enable violence against women. The movement made international headlines because, in its early phase, many of the women who broke the silence were prominent actresses and the individuals against whom they brought charges were powerful Hollywood players. Rose McGowan, one of its protagonists, makes several appearances in Ditz's video; she was among the first victims to accuse the omnipresent movie mogul Harvey Weinstein of sexual abuse, exposing what had been a well-kept secret for decades. To this day, people all over the world use the MeToo hashtag to give voice to their experiences of sexual harassment and rape. In addition to turning the spotlight on the perpetrators and the structures that emboldened them, they also hope to encourage others to break the painful silence, show solidarity, and build public awareness for the victims.

To sketch the larger nexus of causes and effects of which the #MeToo movement is but a part, Cordula Ditz complements the testimonials of the female victims with footage of prominent men like Matt Damon and others: appearing in talk shows and news reports, they offer oddly clumsy apologies for remaining silent for years or their social media comments on the ongoing debate; we sense their nascent awareness of their own responsibility as indirect enablers. To underscore the less than eloquent delivery of these pleas for absolution, Ditz intercuts the material with excerpts from a commercial for a Japanese apology agency that lets clients delegate the shameful act of expressing regret.

Ditz also includes clips from the political debate that illustrate the negative repercussions that breaking the silence can have. One of them is the so-called Pence Effect. Named after U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, who declared that he would not dine alone with a woman not his wife, the Pence Effect is a paranoid response to the #MeToo debate in which businessmen are urged to do everything to avoid being in a room with a woman without witnesses lest they become "victims" of baseless accusations of sexual harassment. On Wall Street, in particular— in an industry, that is to say, that was male-dominated to begin with—this effect has already demonstrably led to increasing segregation. In a grotesque twist, the struggle against discrimination and violence on one side fuels exclusion and unequal treatment on the other.

Beyond the #MeToo context, Ditz's video repeatedly gestures toward the long and complex history of forms of oppression, picking up, for example, on the discussion of the role of women in religious services as set out in 1 Corinthians, which enjoins them to silence in church. She also notes that society has still not fully reckoned with the history of slavery, and especially with the widespread rape of slaves by their "owners," a historic example that is emblematic not only of the exploitation of an entire segment of the population but also of the brutality of (enforced) silence. Ditz brings these diverse narrative strands together with fast-paced cuts and by mixing and layering her footage, accompanied on the soundtrack by abrupt discontinuities and recurring musical themes. These devices extricate the individual stories from their historical settings and weave them into new contexts, deemphasizing the specific circumstances in favor of an overarching disquisition on the structural mechanisms of power that sustain discrimination, segregation, and the construction of gender roles and identities.

Your Silence Is Very Disturbing not only shows women as victims and accusers of violent men, it also draws attention to the subtler and less readily apparent effects of social standards of masculinity and femininity. Many scenes suggest the unremitting and indeed growing pressure that prevailing ideals of beauty exert, pushing people to strive for an unattainable perfection. The video includes footage about excessive fitness regimens, snippets from infant beauty pageants, and images of tightly laced corsets promising slimmer hips, as well as a recent trend: the beauty industry's appropriation of meditation, originally a spiritual practice. So-called affirmations—a term from the New Age movement, describing positive messages addressed to oneself—are repeated ad nauseam like a mantra. In combination with the right breathing technique and concentration, they are supposed to strengthen the mind and even shape and modify the body. And so Ditz's work features excerpts from meditation instructions that supposedly help the individual lose weight or even give him or her, in short order, a perfectly shaped nose. In reference to this curious inversion of a tradition that originally aimed to enlarge the consciousness and liberate the body, Ditz also created a series of printed yoga mats Why Refuse Happiness (2019). Instead of affirmations aiding in the pursuit of physical self-improvement, however, the mats are emblazoned with quotes from civil rights campaigners, feminists, and other activists—or, in one instance, with a simple "Shhhhh." The objects are a hands-on invitation to reflect on the issues Ditz explores: we are prompted to meditate—literally—on statements such as "Your silence will not protect you" (the American writer and women's and black civil rights activist Audre Lorde) or "Hope will never be silent" (the first openly gay American politician, Harvey Milk). The quotes also appear prominently in Ditz's video, where they are pronounced by heavily made-up

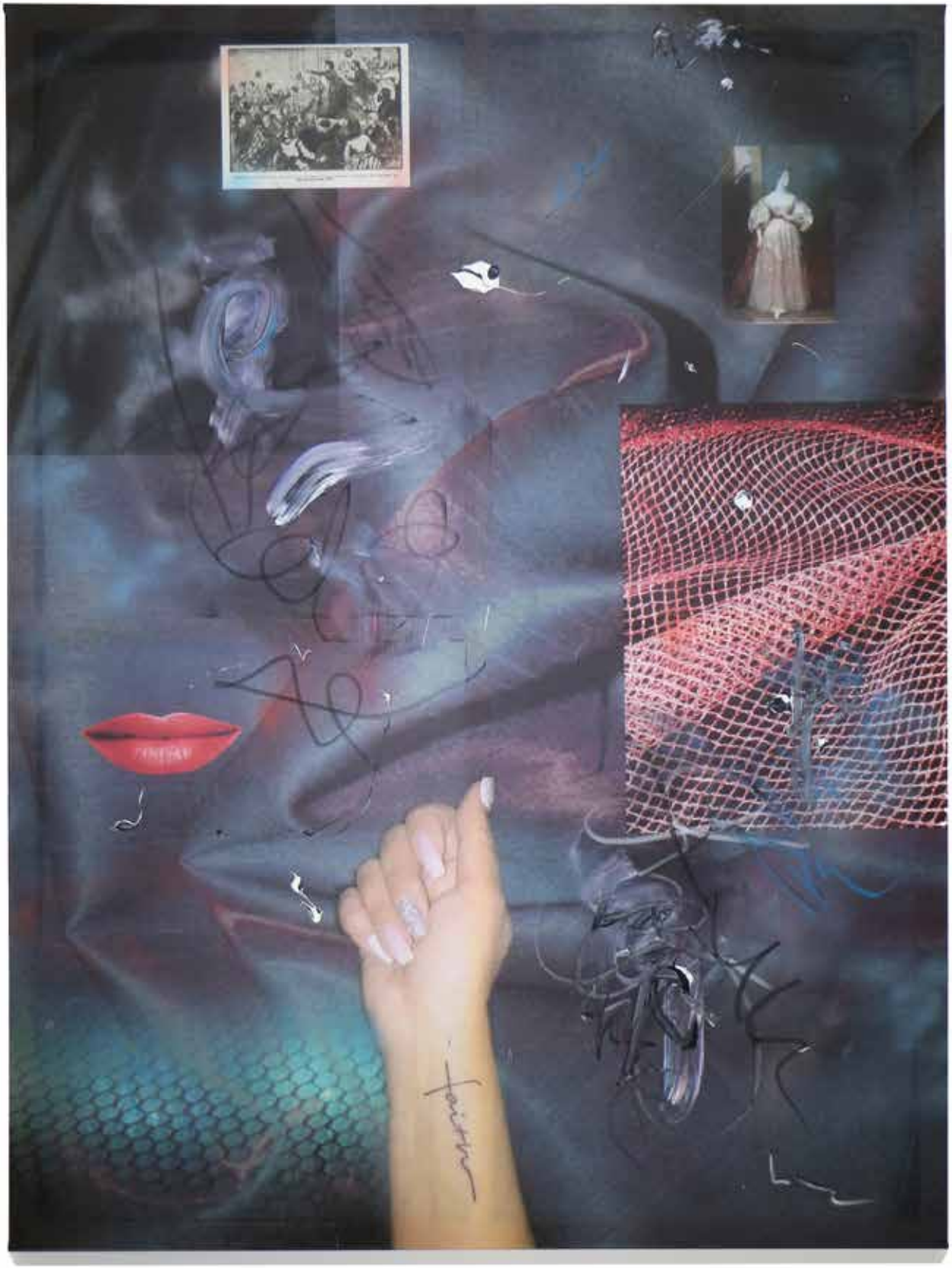
animated pairs of lips—again, the affirmation rite—and function as guideposts amid the torrent of materials. Commenting on what we have seen, they hint at how to make sense of it in a moment of reflection before the video takes off for its finale, in which a group of recognizably upset women prepare an underage bride for forced marriage. After this scene, Ditz's work concludes with a sequence of automatically closing curtains that goes on for several minutes.

The motif of concealing and revealing with covering fabrics has a long tradition in painting. Ditz returns to it in many of the backgrounds in a series of paintings associated with the video. As digitally printed "linings" on translucent flag cloth, they are layered, in a static equivalent of video montage, with found images from books, magazines, and the internet. Pastose paint applied in gestural brush-work balances, consolidates, and accentuates the pictorial collages. These paintings, too, tell stories from the battles of the women's movement, instances of oppression, and normative ideals of beauty—though now with a marked historical emphasis. We encounter the suffragette movement of the early twentieth century; selections from the 1895/1898 Women's Bible; the Swedish painter Hilma af Klint, an early pioneer of purely abstract painting in Western art, whom the art-historical discourse has long neglected in favor of her male colleagues; historic face packs with ice cubes said to rejuvenate the skin; nose correction equipment; and even muzzles that were used to silence women with brute force.

One of the paintings is titled It can do whatever we know how to order it to perform, after a quote from Ada Lovelace, whose photograph also appears in it. The British mathematician is best known for her work on the Analytical Engine, the mechanical computer designed by Charles Babbage. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Lovelace was the first to recognize that such a machine held much greater potential than merely performing calculations and published the earliest written algorithm that could have been carried out by the device. That is why she is regarded as the first programmer in the contemporary sense of the word, although some historians continue to downplay her achievement. The story links up with Ditz's video, where she examines a recent similar episode. The American computer scientist Katie Bouman led the development of an algorithm for imaging a black hole and was a member of the Event Horizon Telescope team that published the first such image in the spring of 2019. A photograph was circulated in which she was visibly thrilled by this milestone achievement, and she attracted considerable media attention. Some commentators described her as the woman who had photographed the black hole, although Bouman never made such a claim or sought the limelight for her own contribution. She subsequently became the target of a smear campaign flanked, especially on social media, by hateful comments that belittled or even denied her accomplishments. While Bouman herself refused to engage, her colleague Andrew Chael went public on Twitter, criticizing the awful and sexist remarks and attacks and emphasizing the significance of Bouman's work on the team. One of the hate posters whose words are read out in the video characterized the episode as a "[...] tale as old as time. Men do all the work and prop up the whole industry but some woman comes along and all of a sudden [...] she takes all the credits, she gets all the fame. It never ends, folks, it never ends." By comparing Lovelace's and Bouman's stories, Ditz's work does not just contradict this proposition but turns it on its head, pointing out that little seems to have changed in almost two hundred years.

Cordula Ditz's works are a summons to pierce the silence, to try to understand it so it can be broken. She uncovers the historic and intersectional structures underlying performative constructions of sex, gender, and identity by assembling their media manifestations in dense collages and montages that draw attention to the complex and unexpected undercurrents beneath the face of discrimination. Filtering stories from the mass media, our collective subsidiary memory, she enables us viewers to share in these experiences, creating an intellectual space in which solidarity and empathy can take root.

Girls are doing all the fellows‘ jobs, 2020,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm



It Can Do Whatever We Know How To Order It To Perform, 2019,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

To Breathe Or Not To Breathe, 2019,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

Early Training, 2020,
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

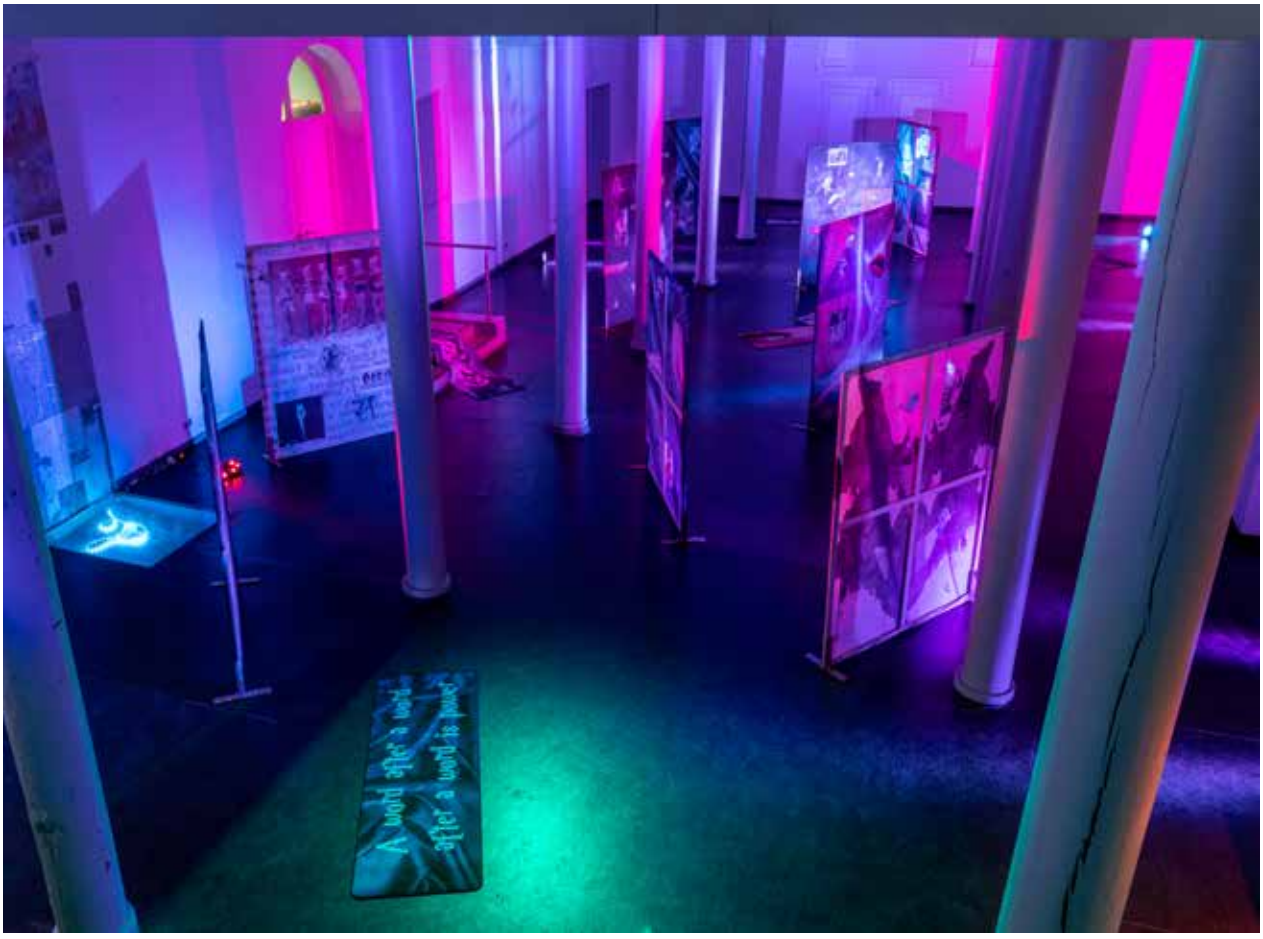
Keep her where she belongs, 2019
Acrylic, spraypaint, oilstick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

Your Silence Is Very Disturbing, 2019, Video, 24 Min.

Why refuse happiness, 2019, Prints on yoga mats, 63 cm x 180 cm

Why refuse happiness, 2019, Prints on yoga mats, 63 cm x 180 cm

Your Silence Is Very Disturbing, 2019, exhibition view / photos: Helge Mundt



Your Silence Is Very Disturbing, 2019, exhibition view / photos: Helge Mundt

Your Silence Is Very Disturbing, 2019, exhibition view / photos: Helge Mundt

TRIP TO THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Painting-Collages by Cordula Ditz

Jens Asthoff

These pictures occupy in-between spaces in more than one respect. Instead of hanging them on the wall, as would be customary, Cordula Ditz sets out the ten large-format canvases on stretcher frames in her new series (all works date from 2019) across the gallery as freestanding and upright panels. The mode of presentation is an open challenge to the illusionism of an imaginary space that panel painting typically constructs. Here, the painting is explicitly also an object, structuring the space around it and encouraging us to contemplate its two sides, to see both a subject and the illusion. Perhaps not coincidentally, the elements collaged on the pictorial surface reveal themselves to possess an oddly spectral presence. Ditz has selected finds from her extensive thematically focused research—photographs, film stills, images from the web, newspaper clippings, reproductions of artwork—and assembled them in digital collages, arranging them on often dark-toned backgrounds in patterned compositions that sometimes hint at a kind of textual collage. These elements seem to float above folds, mesh fabrics, and other textile surfaces, some showing solarization effects. She then had the compositions output by a digital printer onto a semitransparent medium known as flag cloth,[1] and finally mounted the panels on frames. The sheer material makes the pictures diaphanous—in looking at them, one also sees through them. The motifs, constellations of elements held together by an almost surreal iconography, are strangely held in limbo, on the verge of immateriality: instead of being backed, as one might expect, by the canvas and a coat of primer, they shine in the illusionary space of a radiantly dim translucency. The result is a characteristic pictorial depth that, due to the backlighting, brings a film projection or an image on a monitor to mind. While endowing the motifs with saturated presence, the effect also abstracts them to a sphere of dreamlike intangibility.

The artist takes this effect further by enhancing the printed collages with informal painterly interventions. In so doing, she not only broadens the pictorial dynamic, adding an unmediated subjective formal idiom, she also confronts the printed subjects with a different physicality: executed in oil pastel and acrylic and spray paint, the painterly superimpositions stand out from the smooth surfaces of the prints as markedly tactile features but, on the visual plane, are tightly woven into them. Most of them are terse, even minimalist gestures whose cursive rhythms visualize the irrational impulse and suffuses the scattershot distribution of the archival elements with a simulation of immediacy. Such an expressive approach to painting has been an object of interest in Ditz's oeuvre for some time; in the past, it was most evident in large-format abstractions like Don't Complain and Don't Explain (2015), What Else Can I Say, or Nice Girls Don't Have to Show It Off (both 2009), whose roughcast gestural appeal staged an eruption of intuitive arbitrariness. Its conjunction with the medium of collage, however, is novel. "I experimented a lot with automatic drawing or painting," Ditz notes, "which, as I learned during my research, was already the method, for example, of Georgiana Houghton,[2] who painted abstract pictures a full forty years before Kandinsky. I'm also interested in a connection to abstract expressionism and the question of the genesis of such gestures and of gestural expression more particularly."[3] The aspect of an unconscious alloy in expression aligns with other thematic foci of Ditz's aesthetic research, in which she explores historic and contemporary constructions of female identity from a variety of angles. It is worth noting that, in the new works, the fluid-impetuous expressive impulse is born of the wrist rather than the arm, presenting less as physical exertion than as visual commentary.

Take Glittering Jewels That You Never Had: the gestural component, taking the form of a white lineament executed in fairly dry paint and interwoven to form what might be graphic characters looming before a dark ground, seems to gradually sink down under its own weight, not unlike the cloths and fabric in the murky backdrop or the wavy anonymous blond color, a disembodied apparition in the foreground. In the other pictures, too, painting now unleashes peculiar micro-dynamics, its placement often spotty, stainlike, rarely expansive, sometimes concentrated in abstract tangles, as in We Have Been Too Ladylike, and invariably in complex intercommunication with the background motifs. Glittering Jewels, for example, also features a blue butterfly, a motif that has been fraught with diverse cultural codes since antiquity—in ancient Greek, ψυχή (psȳkhē) can mean both "butterfly" and "soul" or "mind." With a reference to Andromeda vid havet (1889), Ditz moreover inserts a quote from the history of painting—an early figurative work by Hilma af Klint.[4] Although this mystic and pioneer of abstraction was academically trained, she virtually never showed her work during her lifetime and left instructions in her will that it must not be exhibited for at least twenty years after her death. In the myth, Poseidon chained Andromeda to a rock on the seashore to sacrifice her to a monster; in af Klint's rendition, far from being frozen in terror, she strikes a pose of self-confidence. Beneath the visual quote, a finger tattooed with the letters "Shhh..." and a long nail projects into the picture from the left; it is unclear whether the word is a stammered "She" or an injunction of silence. The gesture of the pointer is conversely also an expression of exposure, pointing, in this instance, at the cliché of the blonde. In passing, Ditz moreover touches on the subject of nail art—a peculiar code of femininity that surfaces several times in the series, including in It Can Do Whatever We Know How to Order It to Perform and In Your Eyes I See Your Thoughts Surrounding Me. More generally, the hand—present in painting as it is by virtue of the gesture—makes numerous appearances in the series, often in oddly archetypal and severed form. And time and again, the painterly component, though ostensibly so ad-lib, is closely integrated with the motifs; in Why Can't It Become Fashionable, for example, two figurations resemble butterflies like the one in Glittering Jewels. And in To Breathe or Not to Breathe, painting treads quite delicately vis-à-vis an impressively eerie Rorschach visage taking up the entire format. I Walked Around Backwards is the one picture in which painting is more assertively expansive, perhaps to counterbalance two depictions of women with surreally disfiguring beauty masks.

In these and similar ways, Cordula Ditz's painting collages invoke coded visuals between trash and high culture and usher them into new entanglements. One leitmotif in this connection is the crux of visibility—or its absence, of what is repressed (obscured). Read through this lens, the exhibition's title, "Your Silence Is Very Disturbing," conjures up ideas around muteness and concealment—and that something or someone might be hushed up here is a possibility that is

never far off in Ditz's visual universe. Historically, being inaudible and invisible has widely affected and still affects female identity in particular, but it is also a concern with any construction of history and memory. Ditz offers an illuminating clue in this context when she mentions "the model of 'prosthetic memory' introduced by Alison Landsberg, which is central to my work. In the past it's been applied primarily to film. But it's interesting to consider also with a view to the internet how it lets our recollections become intermixed with images, videos, etc. as virtually equivalent sources. To my mind, that has direct bearing on how I gather materials and then amalgamate them with a 'personal' selection and gesture on the surface of the picture."[5]

In a curious detail, Ditz owes that exhibition title to the subject line of a spam email: after rummaging around websites that host so-called "psychic chats" in the course of her research, she received lots of psychic spam, illustrating that she had inadvertently invited the sinister into the safety of her home. Text: Jens Asthoff

[1] Ditz uses polyester flag cloth with a grammage of 110. The material—typical uses include advertising banners—is very finely woven but more permeable to air than other fabrics, resulting in the desired translucency.

[2] The British artist and spiritualist medium Georgiana Houghton (1814–1884) was born in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and later lived in London. She began producing "spirit drawings" in private séances in 1859.

[3] Cordula Ditz in an email to the author, March 30, 2019.

[4] Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) was a Swedish artist and mystic; her paintings rank as early works of abstract art.

[5] See note 3.

HOW TO DISAPPEAR

Lola Mense

Two details in the artist Cordula Ditz's highly condensed printed wall pieces gesture back toward sixteenth-century Great Britain, where a metal device was invented that, for three centuries, would serve to strip women and, later, slaves of their freedom, self-determination, and integrity. The 'scold's bridle,' a kind of iron muzzle made of several braces and a mouthpiece, was used to punish, humiliate, and simply silence 'problematic' women. In Ditz's works, aspects of oppression, impuissance, and loss of control in various forms associated with the stereotype of the helpless woman appear side by side with historic examples of resistance. Depictions of ghostly apparitions point to Spiritualism as practiced in nineteenth-century America, where being cast in the role of the medium capable of communication with spirits helped women raise their voices and publicly address issues of contemporary social and political relevance for the first time. The two hatchets resting on the gallery's floor like props, lending the exhibition space a stage-like aura, are made of glass; their fragility contrasts with their versatile symbolism of force—they, too, may be taken as emblems of the American women's movement. Signifying violence, they recur in one illustration in the large-format pictures. It shows a woman attacking a painting with a hatchet: the suffragette Mary Richardson, who had served six months in prison, is laying into Velázquez's Venus at the National Gallery on March 10, 1914. She will later justify the act as a protest against the arrest of her fellow campaigner Emmeline Pankhurst.

Crossing media boundaries, Ditz's practice investigates the ways in which cultural history conditions perspectives on who is entitled to what and patterns perceptions as well as the strategies of self-empowerment the defeated resort to. At first glance, this strategy would seem to collide with the abstract-expressionist style of the four canvases. Combining fierce sweeping gestures with graphical elements and restrained expressiveness, they counteract the material's subversive determinacy with an airy—though deceptive—lightness. These works are titled Post Automatic Painting and numbered—a contradiction in terms: standardization versus chance. The initial impression of fluent ease gradually resolves into a lived reality increasingly shaped by mechanisms of control that also figures in Ditz's video pieces. Fainting presents a series of women having fainting fits, accompanied by music from hypnosis videos on YouTube supposedly featuring special frequencies that can dispel inner conflicts and the error known as overthinking. The looped video consists of footage samples dating from between the dawn of the moving image and today's digital media imagery.

Film comes to play a special role in Ditz's approach to (pop)cultural history. Alison Landsberg has coined the concept of "prosthetic memory" [1] to describe the way film, as an icon of mass culture, begins to act as a joint between individual and collective consciousness. The dissemination of others' experiences through film expands consciousness—formerly the yardstick of individuality—into a postmodern storehouse of knowledge, primarily through technical interventions of affect transfer. As early as the eighteenth century, art critics argued that the beholder before a painting needed to forget his or her own standpoint in order to assimilate the affects immanent to the work in a performance of identification with the depiction and its intended meaning.[2] Like the cinema with its darkened auditorium, the plethora of shocking information substantiated by visual material that circulates on the internet presents as a logical extension of that virtual fusion with a collective worldview. Blessing or curse?

Ideally, collective memory as analyzed by Maurice Halbwachs[3] strengthens not only our sense of community but also a democracy animated by empathy, one in which the lives—and, more particularly, 'the pain'—'of others' (Susan Sontag) are on our personal agendas. Can artificial or artistic impulses transmitted by this experiential prosthesis help us overcome ostensible dichotomies between self and other, between genders, between ethnic groups? Meanwhile, any collectivity contains the danger of abuses of power: when 'truths' spread by the media and reinforced by their affective impetus become tools of propaganda so that we lose control of our own identities and, more importantly, our moral compass. Whether through critical meta-media engagement or now more, now less authentic physical performances of impuissance and sudden faintness, any loss of control is felt as an instant of personal integrity forfeited. At the other end of the spectrum, the abstract painter must deliberately cast off the burden of civilization that is composure, breaking all social strictures so that his or her genius can achieve unadulterated self-expression. A disconcerting nexus emerges between bourgeois ideas of creative freedom, the deep cuts hewn into the back of a lacerated Venus, the cool and flawless surface of the glass hatchet, and the exhausted media worker who is constantly on air.

[1] Alison Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
[2] See Denis Diderot, in: Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
[3] See Maurice Halbwachs, Das kollektive Gedächtnis, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991.

Hypnosis *how to disappear* (audio, 2018)

(...)

Notice how easy it is to turn down the nervous system to put it at risk nothing to do right now. Notice the trust that your body has with your spirit, nothing to do but relax and let the spirit do the work. Now noticed your energy field can become invisible to disappear very easily and it‘s just a flick of the switch. So when you find that switch you can invent it right now, and it says disappear and it says reappear so you can flick that switch.

And noticed that when you decide to disappear there is no hints of your energy around your aura around your body. You are still in control you are still present, even if it‘s kind of far off out of your body you are still aware of your body but notice the energy just turns off when you flick that switch. Go and try it a couple times you are the inventor so you can make anything happen, and it‘s easy it‘s deciding what you want and doing it.

(...)

How To Dissappear, exhibition view, 2018

How To Dissappear, exhibition view, 2018

The Prolonged Slavery of Women, 2018
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on printed flag fabric, 200 x 150 cm

How To Dissappear, exhibition view, 2018

Handmade glass, 44 x 19 x 4 cm
from the serries *Not fragile like a flower fragile like a bomb,* 2017-ongoing

Fainting, 2017, Video, 3 Min.

I‘M BECOMING A GHOST

Elena Conradi

Two glass hatchets rest on the gallery’s dark wood floor like props. Exuding a faint sense of menace, they lend the exhibition space a stage-like quality. Ontologically speaking, the aesthetic objects made of glass are hybrids: their material bodies are fragile, while their form signals brute force. A versatile symbol adopted by the American women’s movement and others, the hatchet looks back on an extensive cultural history. In Cordula Ditz’s exhibition, it signifies violence first and foremost. The motif recurs in a small illustration on one of the large-format pictures on view. It shows a woman—to judge from her attire, she is an early-twentieth-century daughter of the bourgeoisie—laying into a painting with a hatchet. She is Mary Richardson, a suffragette who has served six months in prison and will later justify her assault on Velázquez’s Venus at the National Gallery on March 10, 1914, as a protest against the arrest of her fellow activist Emmeline Pankhurst.

In a work that crosses media boundaries, Cordula Ditz scrutinizes the perspectives informing the demands and perceptions of history’s underdogs, their strategies of empowerment and the cultural contexts that shaped them. ‘When spiritualism rose to popularity in the United States around the mid-nineteenth century, communication with the other world was described, in keeping with the era’s preference for scientific metaphors, as a kind of telegraphy that required two antithetical poles. The minus pole carried feminine connotations, and so women served as mediums: they alone were thought to be capable of entering into contact with the spirits. Women had hitherto been largely prohibited from appearing before public audiences and giving speeches, but now an opportunity opened up for them to do just that (…) Authorized by the conjured spirits of dead men, they were able to achieve economic success, paint, write, and expound publicly on issues of social and political relevance. In this way, spiritualism not only facilitated distinguished careers such as that of Victoria Claflin Woodhull Martin, the first woman to run for President of the United States and the first to head a brokerage firm on Wall Street; it also paved the way for the women’s movement.’[1]

In contrast with the prints featuring highly condensed appropriated imagery from a variety of sources, the abstract gestural canvases feel positively airy. Diluted acrylic paint in cool hues, applied in a combination of ferocious brushwork, graphical elements, and subdued expression, spread over barely primed surfaces. These pictures bear the title Post Automatic Painting and are numbered consecutively—a contradiction: standardization versus randomness. Post, in this context, points to the paradoxical transformation of everyday life in a society increasingly remolded by mechanisms of control, subjectivity, and post-factual politics. The video Fainting arrays different examples of women’s fainting spells, accompanied by music from YouTube hypnosis videos that promise to resolve inner conflicts and what is called overthinking through exposure to special frequencies. Ditz, who has more than once examined aspects of oppression, disempowerment, and the loss of control through the lens of the peculiar role model of the defenseless woman in cultural history and pop culture, collected footage ranging from the early days of the silver screen to contemporary digital media imagery and compiled it in a loop. From the awkwardly acted slow-motion collapse to the authentic dizzy spell—the pictures illustrate the loss of control as an instant in which personal integrity is forfeited. Composure is the burden of civilization. The abstract painter, however, must deliberately overcome it, casting off all social strictures so that his genius can achieve unadulterated self-expression. A disconcerting nexus emerges between bourgeois ideas of creative freedom, the deep cuts hewn into the back of a lacerated Venus, the cool and flawless surface of the glass hatchet, and the exhaustion of the media worker who is constantly on air.

[1] Sabine Dortschy, Fainting Room—Part 1, Steinbrener / Dempf & Huber, Vienna, 2014 (text modified).

I Never Say Anything At All – Post-automatic painting #3, 2017
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

The Shadows Start to Fall – Post-automatic painting #14, 2017
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

Tremble Like a Flower – Post-automatic painting #5, 2017
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

There Is No Turning Back – Post-automatic painting #12, 2017
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

Better Never Means Better for Everyone... – Post-automatic painting #19, 2017
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

I could Make It All Disappear... – Post-automatic painting #13, 2017
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

So far Away – Post-automatic painting #10, 2017
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

Nolite te bastardes carborundorum – Post-automatic painting #18, 2017
Acrylic, spray paint, oil stick and pencil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

I‘m Becoming A Ghost, exhibition view, 2017

I‘m Becoming A Ghost, exhibition view, 2017

I‘m Becoming A Ghost, exhibition view, 2017

Don‘t Breathe, 2017, exhibition view Cave Detroit

Alone in the dark, 2018, Installation view Il caminetto, audiofile with spoken hypnosis, loudspeaker bulb, printed flag fabric, plastic croissants, fog machine

HYPNOSIS FOR NOT FEELING ALONE IN THE DARK

(...)

Noticed your nervous system might be on overdrive, and you can just dial it down turning it down, letting go of your muscles and your feet and legs hips and torso chest and upper back. Breathing relaxing the arms and the neck, and your scalp and your face and your neck - and tell your body that you are safe everything is fine.

In the present moment there are no problems noticed that right now everything is fine, the brain loves to over-analyse. And tell your body that you love your body and you are here to help, you are here to solve anything. Notice that Comfort relaxation and safety so we can start working on the issue at hand, and you can let your body know that any problem can be solved right now.

So you‘re going to start working on the problem of feeling alone in the dark. So still keeping the body breathing deep and relaxing, but notice the bad feeling right now that your brain associated with being in the dark being alone. Go ahead and noticed that observe it almost like you are in front of you and you are observing yourself and the feelings.

Almost like there is a movie screen and you can observe yourself having those feelings. And notice there might be pain there might be some seriousness right it‘s serious, so what we are going to do is shake it up a little bit. We don‘t want it to be serious anymore we don‘t want it to be painful. So just to get a better view of this issue on this movie screen.

What colour do you see what‘s the colour of this problem of feeling alone in the dark, if you could associate it with a colour. Just imagining it maybe it‘s a little flicker or maybe it‘s not - and let‘s lightning it up a little bit let‘s laugh at it, that might sound strange but we are going to lightning it up and take off this seriousness by just laughing at it. Because we want to like dissolve this energy negative feeling alone in the dark.

Just start to dissipate it dissolve it destroy it, shake it up a little bit it‘s obviously been a stuck energy let‘s get it unstuck - play with it what do you notice when you start to take charge of this negative stuck feeling and dissipate it, dissolve it and destroy it what happens. Is it dissolving is it dissipating, even just a small layer is coming off that that is great. Noticed how good it feels to take charge of this, you have the power to change your feelings about the dark.

(...)

REVIEW, ARTFORUM MAI 2016

Jens Asthoff

A montage of cinematic anxiety-dream imagery, a visual space composed of B-movie and trashy horror footage, Cordula Ditz‘s solo show „Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye“ was dominated by a two-channel video installation of the same title, dated 2016, with its large-format projections, one on a wall, the other on a screen set up in the middle of the room. Rather than tracing the arc of an action, the video unfolds in the mode of free association; one focus of Ditz‘s selection was on stereotypical images of the artist and of femininity. Isolated from their original contexts but still informed by the specific aesthetic of exploitation films, the clips were deftly woven into an absurd theatre of the filmic unconscious.

For *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*, Ditz began with three hundred full-length films, excising scenes the way a sculptor might remove parts of a block, whittling the video down to twenty, then five, then two hours, grouping and regrouping individual sequences until she obtained a final version of just over eight minutes. The process between composition and decomposition in this complex process of reduction informs the structure of the work. „The mass of material I edited at the same time,“ Ditz told me,“ made narrative elements and individual shorelines fade into the background early on, while other aspects - pictorial qualities, motifs - came to the fore.“ Each of the works has its own sound track, which Ditz composed partly out of samples from her sources, partly out of synthesizer sounds. In the exhibition, the sonic fields blended together as a shifting and asynchronous field of interferences.

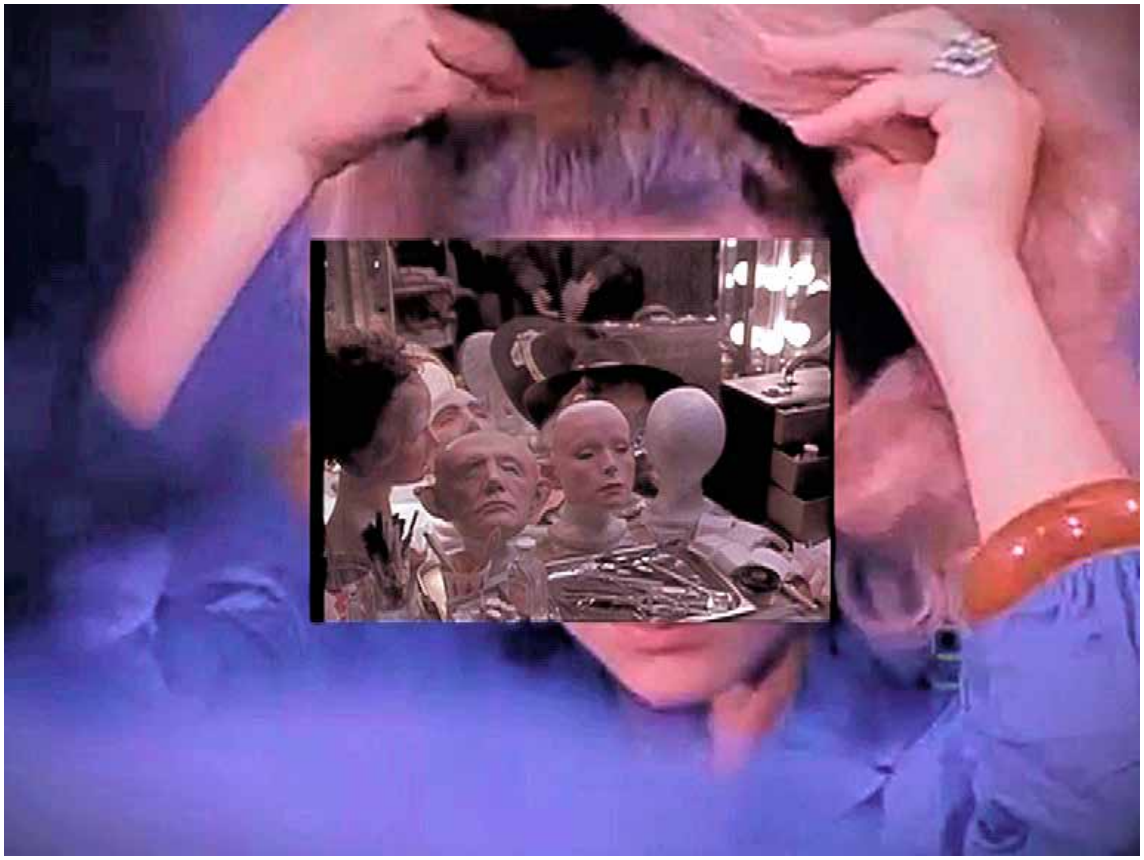
In visual terms Ditz‘s work makes precise reference to spatial constellations. This is evident both in the composition of the films themselves - see, for example, how her editing undercuts, lends rhythmic dynamism to, and remodulates spatial dramaturges present in the source material - and in the arrangement of the works in the gallery, where simple but android choices produced multifocal image spaces. One important element in this regard was *Mirror, Mirror* / *Droopy Emoji (Helpless),* 2016, a work based on a mirror of the sort physical-therapy patients and dancers use to observe and improve their technique. Ditz had the movable object covered with semitransparent reflective „spy foil“ and placed it in the room so that it presented partially overlapping images of both channels of *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*. Depending on one‘s vantage point, the frame captured fragmented pictorial encounters between viewers wandering around the gallery and the works themselves, each appearing either as a mirror image or an actual physical body behind the surface. Ditz‘s ingenious arrangement sometimes made it difficult to distinguish between projection, reflection, and reality.

One Uses her Beauty for Love! One Uses Her Lure for Blood!, 2016, a carpet printed with a collage of women‘s portraits and the titular phrase, turned the floor into a pictorial medium. It‘s color gradient, a spectrum ranging from green to pink, purple, and blue, was not computer-generated; instead, Ditz collaged pictures of polar lights, which appealed to her because of their fairly random distribution of hues, the slight graininess of the photographs, and the subliminal presence of a natural phenomenon. „No random generator can produce the contingency of nature,“ Ditz notes, „and contingency - even flaws - can be crucial to our impression that we are looking at reality as well as our sensation of beauty.“

In a very different way, *Don‘t Complain and Don‘t Explain*, 2015, an unframed, roughly gestural painting in watery grays and blues on two large-format canvases - the horizontal seam clearly visible - imparted a similar sense of incalculable intuition. In contrast to the immaterial projections and the industrial manufacture of the objectsm its tangible physicality conveyed a sense of the artist‘s hand. Its uncovering of an unconscious buried in the expressive register, however, made it an unexpected companion to the video works.

Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye, 2016, exhibition view

Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye, 2016, exhibition view



Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye, 2016, Multi Channel Video, 12 Min.

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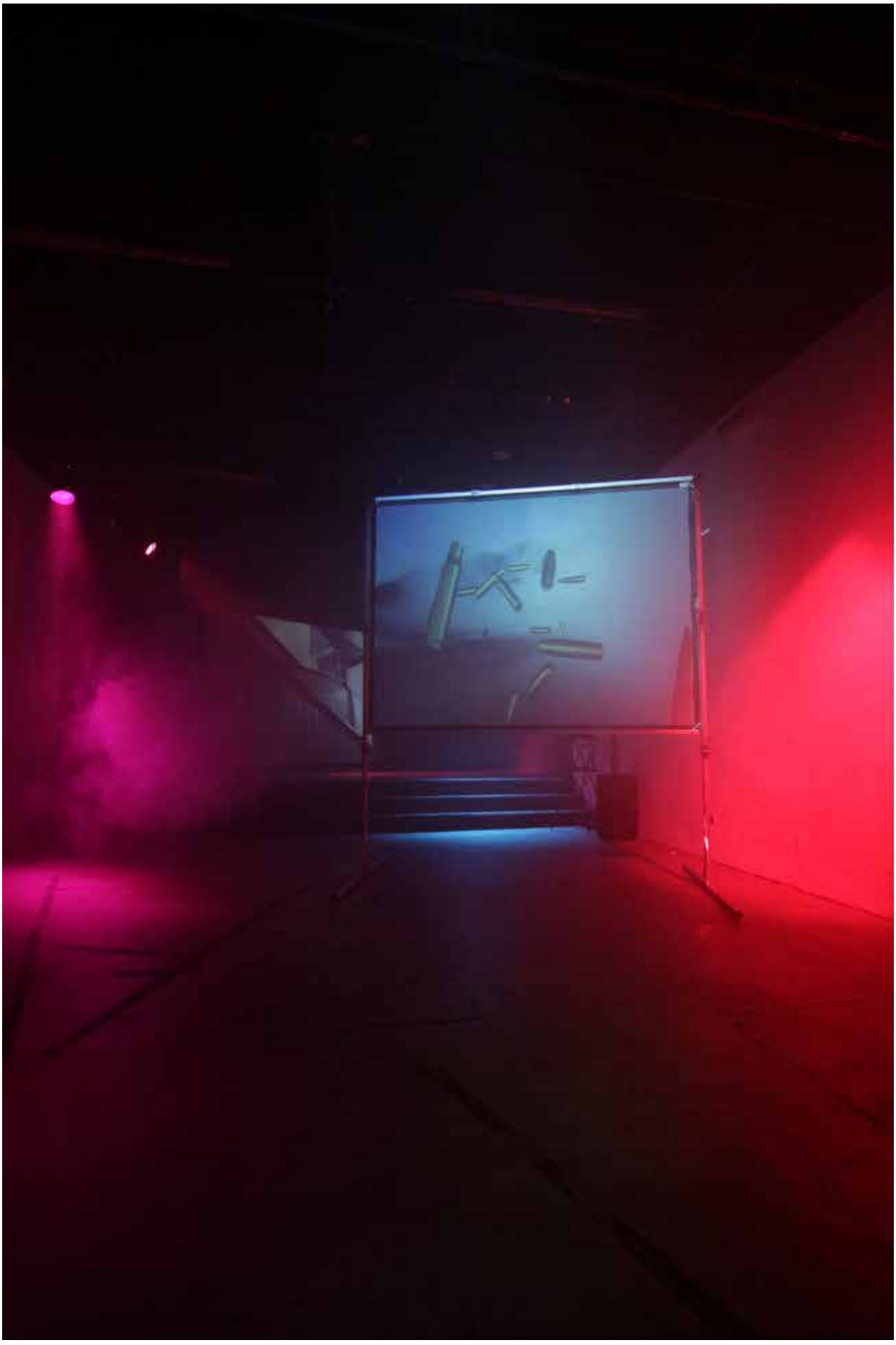
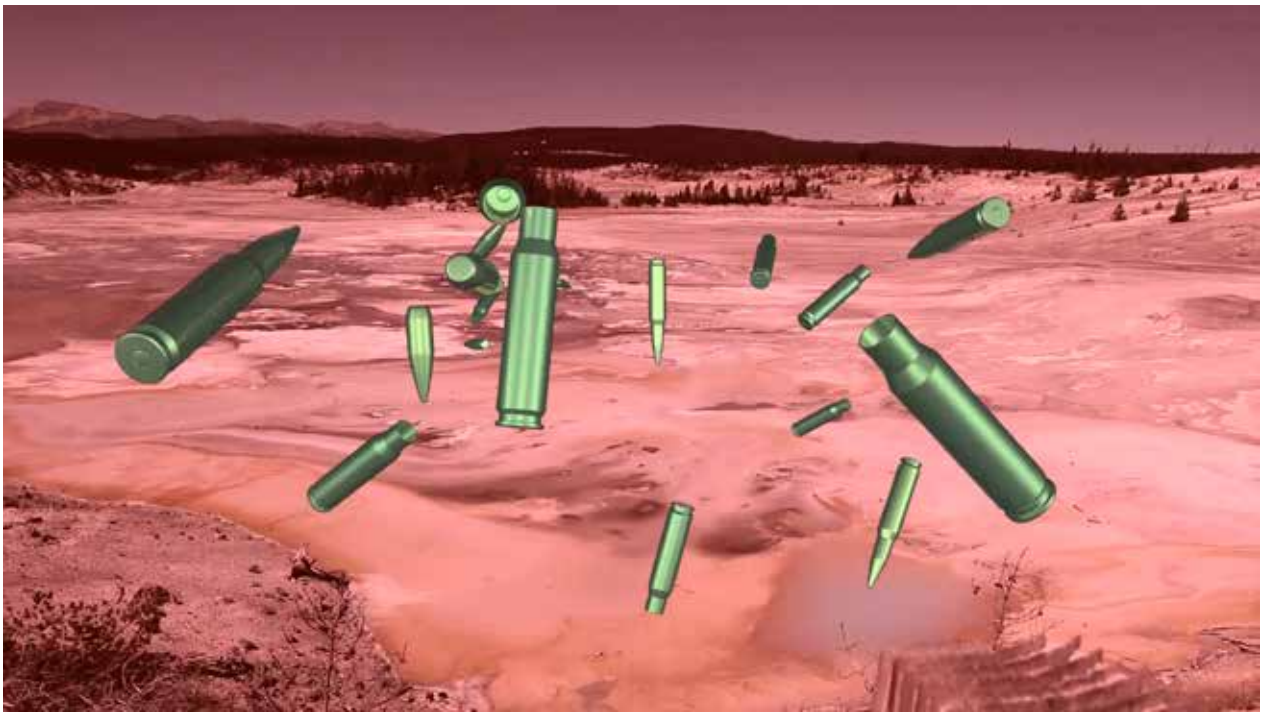


The Gun That Won The West, 2016, exhibition view

THE GUN THAT WON THE WEST

No other gun at the time fired more shots without reloading than the Winchester. The rifle was especially popular with the settlers migrating to the American West and so became known as “The Gun That Won the West.” After the early death of her husband and her only child, Sarah Winchester, who inherited the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, believed herself to be haunted by the ghosts of the victims of Winchester firearms. One medium advised her to move west and build a house for the ghosts of the dead; she was to avoid completing the structure, for she would live as long as she kept the construction work going. So she bought an eight-room farmhouse in today’s Silicon Valley and immediately began work on an ever-growing set of expansions; construction did not cease for thirty-eight years until her death in 1922. By then the original home had been transformed into a labyrinth numbering 160 rooms. It‘s heart was the Blue Room, where she held the séances in which the ghosts imparted the plans for future rounds of construction to her.

The Gun That Won The West, 2016, Video, 12 Min.



The Gun That Won The West, 2016, Video, 12 Min.

YOU‘D BETTER RUN

The starting point of the project is the video series „You‘d Better Run“, which is similar to an archive. In short forward and backward loops it shows horror film actresses on the run. Cordula Ditz extracts sequences from horror movies which are only a few seconds long in which the female victim desperately tries to escape. Afterwards she loops the sequences. Brevity and swift reiteration liberate the movements from their narrative context.
Because of the way these very short moments are staged they are close to modern dance. For this project they will be transferred into a room by a dancer, accompanied by video projections and a newly developed soundtrack for the performance.
The original movements are alienated by the forward backward loop. The result is a complex motion sequence which compresses the role of the gesture as an embodied archive once more.

Performer: Angela Kecinski and Solveig Krebs.

You‘d Better Run, 2016, Performance

A BANKRUPT HEART

Britta Peters

Cordula Ditz is probably one of the few artists who can proudly claim that her solo exhibitions look like group shows. Working in the tradition of appropriation art and reenactment, she avails herself of virtually all media, styles, and devices. The focus is less on the recognizability of her own signature style than on the referential framework in which each work operates. Still, a distinctive aesthetic-analytical approach has emerged that is manifest especially in her works based on existing footage; her choice of subjects, too, orbits around a specific core. More on that later.

Let us first take a quick glance at her exhibition A Bankrupt Heart, on display at Galerie Conradi, Hamburg, in the spring of 2014, in which Ditz combines a two-channel video projection she has just finished and from which the show takes its title, a comparative study of the ghost town Rhyolite in Nevada and Detroit—with Ghost City Already (2014), an enlarged reproduction, superimposed on a color gradient, of a war report about Hamburg that ran in a Detroit daily in 1943. The show also features two shooting pictures, Shooting Drawing Detroit, Glock 1 and 2, and a selection of twenty-four prints from the series Ohnmacht #1–60; both sets were created in 2013. Just listing the works makes it seem that the conglomerate on display makes some sort of cohesive sense—violence appears to be the theme—but in the exhibition the art is aesthetically disparate, the works representing very different techniques and ideas of authorship: on the one hand, a documentary film essay accompanied by a text from the artist's hand, on the other hand, found footage to which material has been added while other elements have been cut, and, between these two poles, the two minimalist works on paper, shot by Ditz herself.

A volume of essays by the French writer Michel Houellebecq in German translation that came out in 1999 bears the title Die Welt als Supermarkt,[1] or "The World as Supermarket," and the phrase seems apposite to this art. Everything is available, everything can be appropriated. The term "postmodern" may be a little worn with use, but in this instance it is exactly right: the point is not to confront the contemporary world with new inventions or a striking signature, it is to recombine what is already there with a view to specific aspects. Yet the postmodern assertion of equivalence primarily concerns the formal range of the artistic articulations. The actual materials they employ, the interrelation between the works on display, mark the point of departure for a focused analysis. The series of prints, a compilation of modified film stills showing women fainting—isolated from the original settings, they appear before black backdrops—names the central motif of this study in its title: it is about Ohnmacht, about powerlessness.

The video installation A Bankrupt Heart compares two "ghost cities"—Rhyolite and Detroit—to explore the political dimensions of powerlessness. The series of women, meanwhile, presents a close-up of sorts. The perspective shifts from the external view of blighted and deserted buildings to moments of impuissance inside the domestic safe zone. Ditz captured stills from various films made between the 1920s and the 1970s, including B movies no one has ever heard of as well as famous works like The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari and Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man, to isolate the pose of the lady fainting and sinking into the arms of her savior. Mounted en bloc, the pictures present the unchanging motif in variation after variation: pretty women clad in ruffled and billowing dresses designed to emphasize their femininity and suggestive of virginity and wedding scenes seem to float in an utter darkness not unlike that in the cinematic auditorium. The large hands or claws that caught them as they fell and now bear them aloft are visible only as negative shapes. The serial arrangement adds a humorous overtone to the work, while the ideological dimension of the theatrical poses becomes impossible to miss.

The motif of the fainting woman, a perennial favorite, especially in combination with a King Kong-style menacing monster, looks back on a long tradition. It was so popular in 1950s moviemaking that it was used to advertise even films in which it did not actually appear: a peculiar fruit of the fear white Americans felt of the emerging African-American Civil Rights Movement. The image of the unconscious woman being carried off represents the culmination both of the anxiety that competition against the "monstrous" other would lead to a loss of power or virility and of the fundamental distrust of the "weak sex" and its unpredictable nature.[2]

For evidence of how deep-seated this distrust was, we can also turn to the history of painting. Swooning women had been in fashion before, well over a century earlier: between 1750 and 1850, artists produced numerous paintings featuring women under the influence of sedatives—see, for example, Henry Fuseli's The Nightmare (1781) and William Hamilton's Celadon and Amelia (1793). Then, too, the proliferation of fainting spells corresponded to a growing fear of strong women. We might mention Empress Catherine the Great, who ascended to the Russian throne in 1762, and Olympe de Gouges, who, in 1791, responded to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen adopted by the French National Assembly by penning an early feminist manifesto, the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen.

The nineteenth century saw the rise of another source of the perceived menace: women's alleged predisposition to hysteria. Derived from hystera, the ancient Greek word for the uterus, this medical term covered a variety of symptoms: epilepsy, nervous ailments, psychological disorders, and abdominal pain. For a long time, the doctors' fantasies revolved around the sexual organs as such. The inner life of the female body struck them as baffling; the uterus was positively scary in its capriciousness, which could be spurred into derangement by abstinence as much as by sexual pleasure. The phenomena that came to be described as hysteric undermined the prevailing ideal of motherhood; women were supposed to seek fulfillment of their desires in caring for their children and not in sex.[3] Meanwhile, there was another, more practical reason why women actually fainted comparatively often before the rise of the reform movements of the early twentieth century: corsets were simply so tightly laced that they left the wearers no room to breathe.

Considered in light of this history, the return of such images in the medium of the cinema, especially in the 1950s, may be understood as a reflection of the anti-emancipation backlash that ensued in the postwar era. Women had taken on men's jobs during the war and in the rebuilding effort, but now society wanted them back in the kitchen. It also makes

perfect sense that the fainting woman faded from the silver screen in the 1970s: the rise of the women's movements as well as new doomsday scenarios such as the environmental dangers first outlined by the Club of Rome in its 1972 report on The Limits to Growth produced their own iconic images. The fear of the identifiable monster was superseded by the dread of an uncontrollably and rampantly proliferating mass.

Adorno argued that the cinema is a "mirror of society," and Foucault and other theorists have expanded on this assessment. Ditz marshals a sizable collection of images to highlight the constitutive role of gender and the contemporary context of the sense of menace that engendered these scenes of powerlessness and helped them gain wide currency. At the same time, she stages a pose of literal suspension, a frozen movement image. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has proposed that the cinema is the paradigmatic site where the gesture, the element of body language in traditionally structured communication, is suspended and put up for renegotiation. As Agamben uses the term, the gesture is not just a physical movement; it is a specific form of mediality, a referential movement that hovers between potentiality and act, between means and end. Gestures, as it were, signal the intention to communicate something or inform someone, but their message remains in abeyance. They serve not only as means of communication, but also appear as a medium in their own right.[4]

This medium quality of stereotyped gestures constitutes the basis also for Ditz's video series You'd Better Run (2010–2013), for which she extracts sequences from various horror flicks that show the female victim's desperate attempt to flee. Like the stills of Ohnmacht #1–60, the looped video pieces with their incessant repetition of the same basic scene reveal the perspective of the imagined male spectator they presuppose and the sexualized dimensions of the sense of power associated with it: the panicked escape turns into a salacious dance.

So the core interest that unites Ditz's different techniques and media—in addition to her critical engagement with existing film-based works, she also creates installations and paintings in large formats—may be described as a gender-conscious analysis of gestures and conventions both of art and of culture more broadly conceived. She uses quotation, serial arrangement, collage, and repetition to efface the differences between high and popular culture, highlighting the shared characteristics of the poses that are at the basis of both. At the same time, by freely drawing on the history of other, formerly "radical," artistic interventions, she subverts the viewer's expectation of another pose: the exhibition of an authentically creative authorial intention.

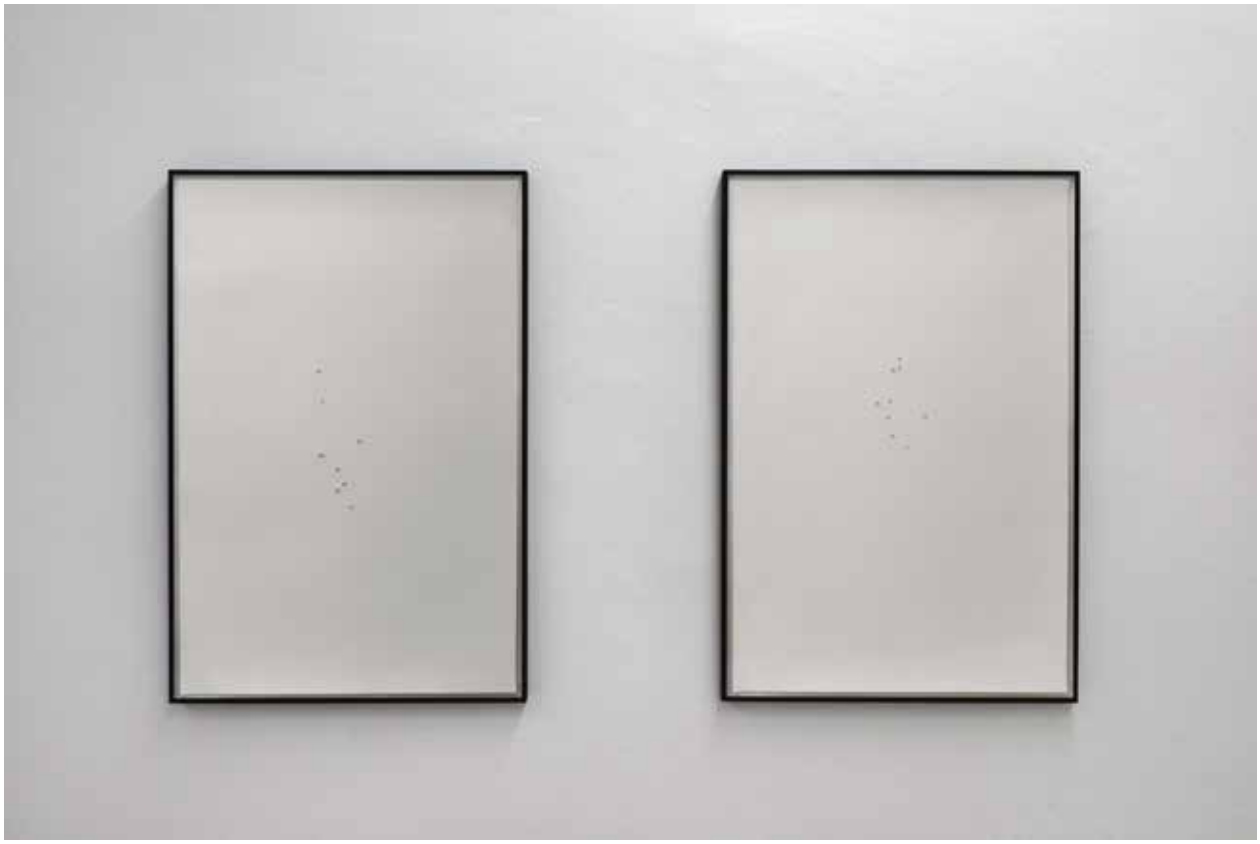
Take, for example, the two shooting pictures Shooting Drawing Detroit, Glock 1 and 2: the act of aiming a weapon at pictures has a long tradition, also in analogy to the "shots" taken with the photo camera. (In 1956, Niki de Saint Phalle first gained renown by shooting at bags of paint embedded in plaster reliefs. Ditz replaces Saint Phalle's paint-bag splash with a pure violation of the surface that may also bring the Italian artist Lucio Fontana's practice to mind.) So the act combines various known postures and thus—also via the indirection of a possible disappointing outcome—refers back to itself: Why was it important to the artist, who was born in 1972, to reenact the original exploit in this form? How did the works come into being, and how are they integrated into the exhibition context? While in Detroit to film for her video essay about the city, Ditz took a local firearms training class; the works on paper document her firing practice. In the framework of A Bankrupt Heart, a show that explores situations of powerlessness on several levels, they illustrate one possible route of self-empowerment. In light of the film-theoretical context hinted at by the Ohnmacht series, they may also be interpreted as a reference to feminist readings of the cinema in which the "armed woman" is a highly charged iconographic set piece: such scenes fracture the regime of the gaze that underlies the cinematic mainstream—the imagined male spectator—and open it up to alternative identifications. Moreover, our very knowledge that this gesture or act has already been performed in the history of art makes us more keenly aware of what it actually says. Their aesthetic qualities aside, the minimalist images thus suddenly appear commensurate to the facts that, one, firearms training is widely available in the United States and, two, even an untrained shooter will hit her mark with frightening frequency.

[1] See Michel Houellebecq, Die Welt als Supermarkt: Interventionen (Cologne: Dumont, 1999), originally published as Interventions (Paris: Flammarion, 1998). The volume includes the French author's collected literary and movie reviews, conversations, and open letters as well as theoretical essays on the role of literature in contemporary society written between 1992 and 1997.

[2] See Achim Geisenhanslüke and Georg Mein, eds., Monströse Ordnungen: Zur Typologie und Ästhetik des Anormalen (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009).

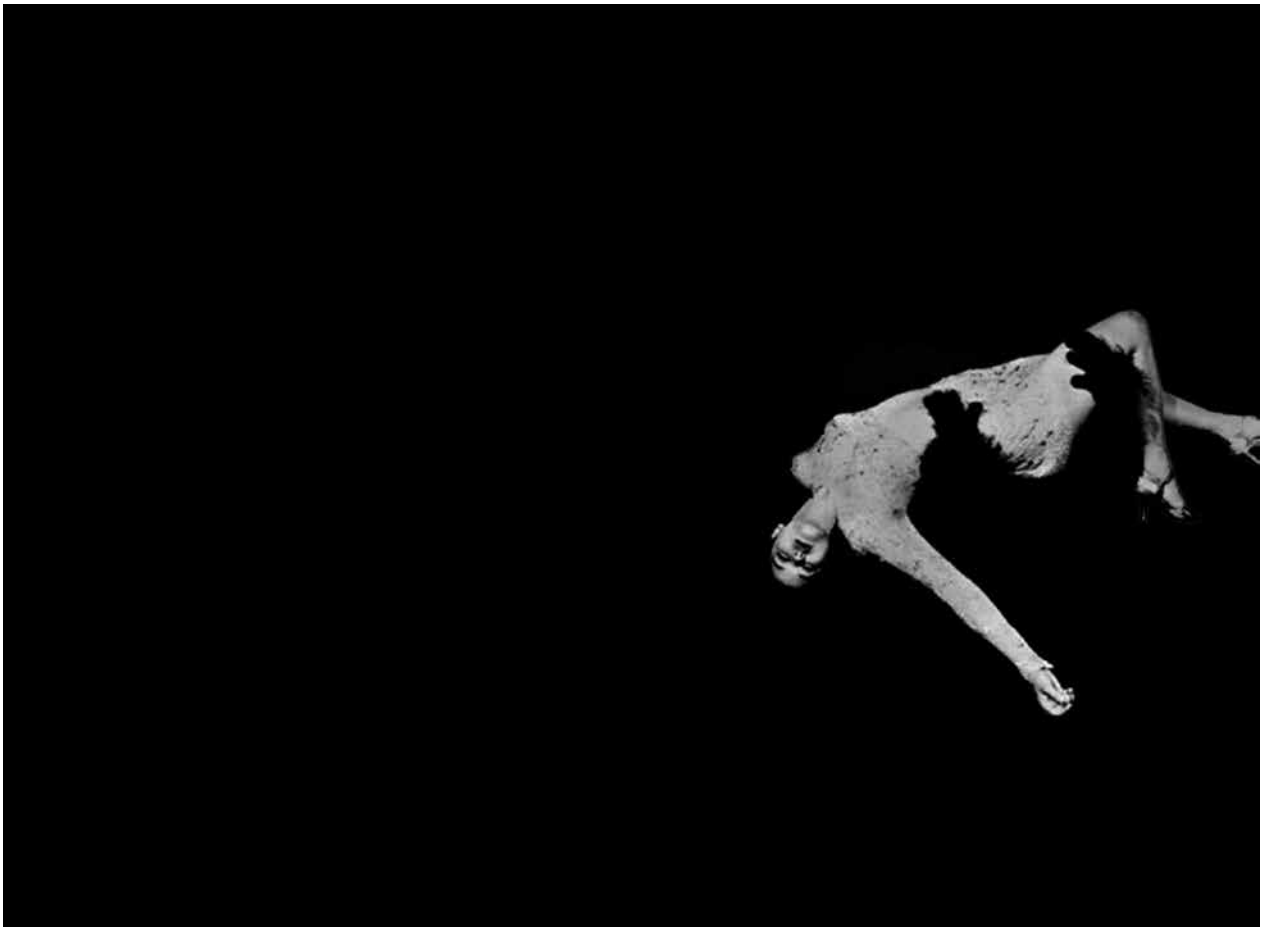
[3] Foucault describes the hysterization of the female body as a "threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed—qualified and disqualified—as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practice, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it; whereby finally it was placed in an organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functioning element), and the life of the children (which it produced and had to guarantee by virtue of a biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education): the Mother, with her negative image of the 'nervous woman,' constituted the most visible form of this hysterization." Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 104.@

[4] Images, Agamben writes, are animated by an "antinomic polarity": "on the one hand, [they] are the reification and obliteration of a gesture [...]; on the other hand, they preserve the dynamis intact." That is why "the element of cinema is gesture and not image," and it may be said that "cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture." Giorgio Agamben, Means Without End: Notes on Politics, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 55–56. The gesture is a doing that is neither action nor production, neither end in itself nor mere means: "The gesture, then, points to the medium and means of communicability itself. A gesture reveals that it is a means and by that same token is not a mere means. It refers to something, but also to itself." See Joseph Früchtl, "Eine Kunst der Geste: Den Bildern Bewegung und Geschichte zurückgeben," lecture, Deutscher Kongress für Philosophie, Munich, 2011.



A Bankrupt Heart, 2014, 2 Channel Video, 16 minutes
Shooting Drawing Detroit, Glock 1 und 2, 2013, Bullet holes in paper

Ohnmacht #1-60, Installationview A Bankrupt Heart, 2014, Galerie Conradi
Ghost City Already, 2014, Archival Pigment Print, 27,5 x 37,5 cm



Ohnmacht #54 of the series Ohnmacht #1-60, 2014, Archival Pigment Print, 27,5 x 37,5 cm

YOU‘D BETTER RUN is a series of video loops that are only a couple of seconds long, showing women taking flight. The more than 20 clips in the installation are the result of examining hundreds of horror movies in search of the gestural image of getaway and fear.

You‘d Better Run, 2013, exhibition view, Kunsthaus Hamburg