



anka helfertová

portfolio
january 2026



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artist statement

I am looking closely at where the hard distinction between nature and culture has taken western societies, with particular interest in the histories of this separation and disenchantment. All culture is born by bodies – intertwined with mineral and non-organic worlds through senses and metabolism. In this light, what are the psychological and emotional roots of the climate crisis?

Through figures that merge human and more-than-human bodies, allowing for subtle erotics, I explore this neglected animal interconnectedness. I combine a strong emphasis on research and fieldwork with precise and slow working with my hands, in and through materials, such as silicone combined with ceramics and charcoal.

biography

I am a visual artist, working in sculpture, photography, installation and writing. Born in Prague, I moved to Berlin in 2010 to study anthropology at the Humboldt-Universität, focusing on East Asia. I have switched to study in the department of Sculpture at Kunsthochschule Berlin Weißensee and stayed abroad at Edinburgh School of Art. In 2018, I completed my studies with a diploma, graduating with a book of theory-fiction 'Drei Gespräche über Materie' and an installation on the unfortunate dominance of vision over haptics. After a brief stay in Basel in 2019, I have relocated to Munich. Since August 2024, I live and work in Berlin again, while also spending time in the rural north-west Bohemia.

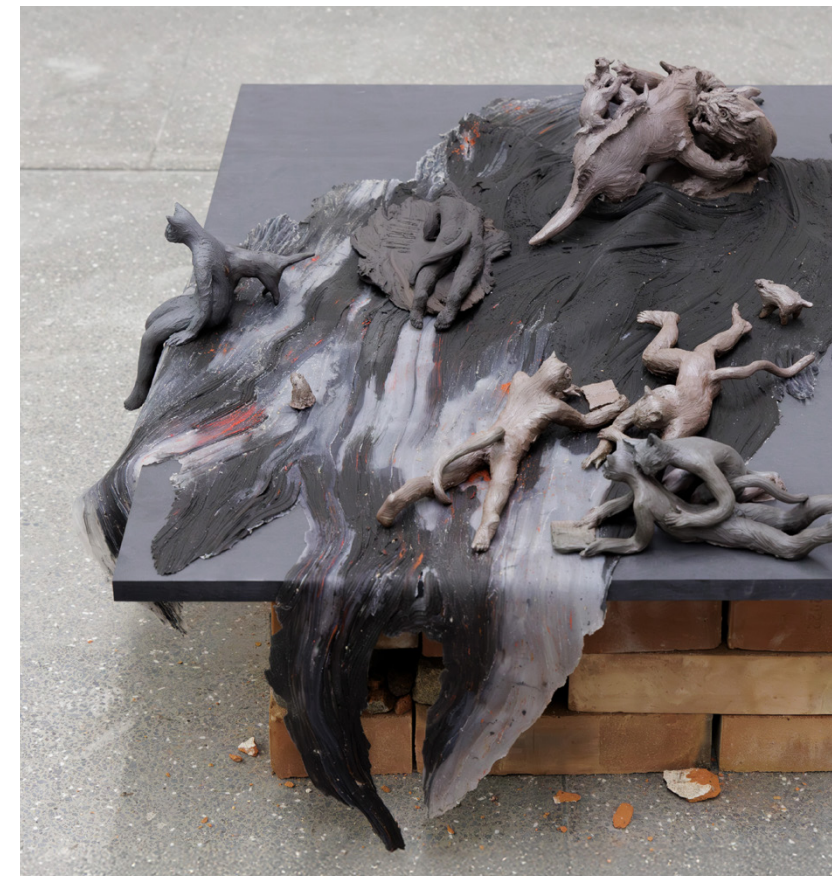
To be in a time of war

Installation, part of the exhibition Animal elegance, at Pracownia portretu in Łódź, Poland, Oct 9th - Nov 7th 2025

The title of my installation comes from a text by Etel Adnan, first published 2004, where she reflects the agony of witnessing the invasion of Iraq - a war taking place physically elsewhere, but its pain seeps into everything.

In this rather intuitive piece I am giving form to the raw immediate experience of living in Germany, a state complicit in a genocide in Palestine. Many masks have fallen recently, and the times we live in are of a violent clarity. The contrast between the interests of the powerful ones and the vast majority of living beings has grown even starker, escalations over escalations. We are standing our ground - how? It includes care, learning, sensing despair's soft long thin tongue flicking from below sometimes. There is a lot to be done and undone.

All photographs by Maciej Luczak, many thanks!





ugly forests and their ghosts

Ongoing research project, artist book in the making

There are multiple strong connections to forests in my family. My maternal grandparents were foresters in South Bohemia, a part of my family on my father's side comes from Šumava/ Böhmerwald and from Sudetenland. I want to address the enmeshed character of this particular highly contested sparsely populated region, on the 'natural border' of what became the western and the eastern Europe. I trace the development of the extractive attitude to land and what got excluded along the way. I am exploring the feral qualities of this particular semi-periphery, the land not as object of inquiry but as an animate subject, where its agency interferes with the human one. How do rational planning and emergent reality intersect in lived experience? Back and forth along different temporalities - of human generations, tree growth, economic calculations, and non-linear ecosystem succession.

The book combines text and visual material in equal parts.

Kindly supported by Erwin und Gisela von Steiner Stiftung.



↑ Four linden trees that outgrew their plastic protective shells, which took about 35 years.
Digitalised analogue photographs, 2024

↑ ↑ A view over the czech-german border, southwards of Falkenberg, Böhmerwald



3



like fountains, like flames

Solo exhibition, Vent Gallery, München-Hohenbrunn, 2023

The exhibition brings together several aspects of my long fascination with fountains, as images of metabolism and squandering of energy, negotiating the conventional north-western distinction between what is alive and what not. With figures of fountains and flames, I want to show how porous the distinction is. Fountains remind us of metabolism, their movement makes us emotional. They are geysers, emulated by humans. According to one line of research on the origin of life, geysers seem to be the very place where self-reproducing cells gradually came about.



↑ Doorkeeper (hey, welcome). Ceramics; 25 × 20 × 20 cm; 2023.

↗ Double-sided flame, detail. Glazed ceramics, silicone, ship rope; 25 × 25 × 400 cm; 2023.

The two-part piece Tearlicker connects the exhibition with weather – when it rains, one of the blue cat-like characters begins to cry. Extreme intimacy in a very dark moment.



↑ → Tearlicker (to traverse the territory of despair, for Katrine). Ceramics, shower tub, tubes, stones and concrete blocs, rainwater; dimensions variable; 2023.



↑ Water collector, on the ground floor, one level above the exhibition space. After the rainwater flows through the sculpture, it is collected in the tub and leaves the exhibition space through the system of tubes again.



greetings from a sick forest

Part of the exhibition Zeug & Cajk, Kunstakademie München, 2024

The sculpture consists of a spruce trunk from a forest my grandparent were taking care of, in South Bohemia, gnawed by the bark beetle, a layer of cracked blue mud and a structure made of ceramics and silicone. As other works of mine shown in the exhibition, 'Spálené roští, Lazio' and the two tiny flames coming directly out of the walls, the piece also refers to the interplay of human intentions and neglect in landscape and the absurd situations that arise.

The exhibition addressed the echoes of surrealist thinking in the practices of the five young artists with mixed czech and german biografies.



synthetic ghosts

Installation, part of the exhibition To the Land, Perlacher Forst, 2022

I use silicone, a highly synthetic and skinlike material, to make those thin, flat beings. Human-made, industrialised environments and their highly synthetic materials are omnipresent – in what ways do they seep into the imagination and continue to act as spectres and metabolised waste in realms the rational engineering mind has not thought of? In this series, I am focusing on the unintended beauty and fascination, reiterating the vibrant colours of warning coloration used by many species to repel or deceive others.



↗ Synthetic ghost III. SFX platinum cure silicone, pigments, in an empty fountain basin; 250 × 35 × 1 cm; 2022.



↗ Synthetic ghost I. SFX platinum cure silicone, pigments; 70 × 35 × 1 cm; 2022.

wombat solidarity

Exhibition and participative activation at the end of a residency at Kunsthaus Bella Martha, Marthashofen, 2023

Through reading as a collective practice, I am asking – what can we learn from wombats about solidarity? In the installation, theoretical literature is used as sculptural elements and sculptures invite to participation.

Text included in the installation:

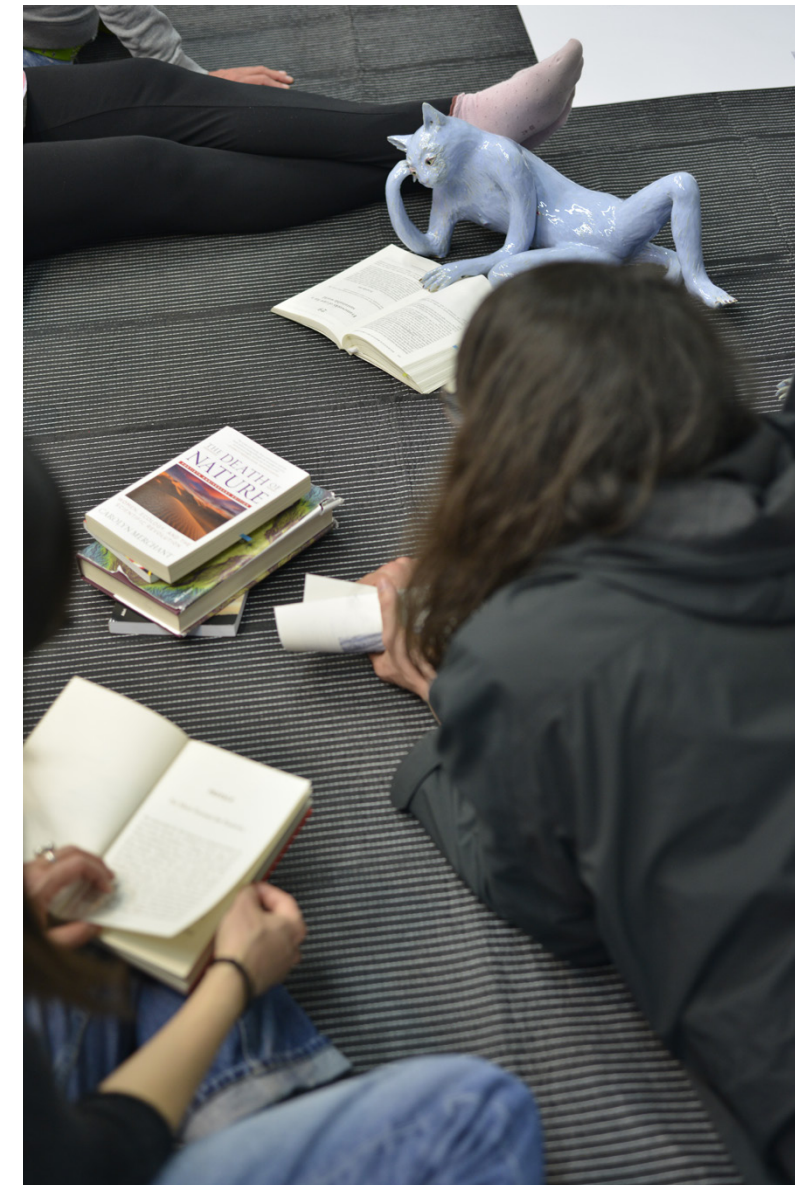
In Australia, in the summer season 2019/2020, the fires in the bush were especially devastating. Wombats have apparently saved lives of many other smaller animals by sheltering them in their large and complex burrows. More than a billion of creatures have been estimated to have died in the fires, but not the ones that were hiding underground.

The news of wombats' kindness circulated wildly in the news and on the social media. Some scientists felt the need to explain to people, that wombats were not really helping other animals: they have done so by chance, they usually build spacious burrows and cannot inhabit them all... the other animals were just squatting in unused space, so to say. Ah, why is this so necessary, for certain scientists, to rush to "correct" our intuitive understanding?

Why is it so important to articulate the idea that the wombats were not really being altruistic, solidary and caring for the neighboring species? It is a strange urge, to exclude animals (and other beings) from the domain of morality. Even more disturbing, I find here an echo of a strict Darwinism, a view that the

basic principle, that drives the life and evolution in the biosphere is competition. As early as in 1902, a Russian anarchist and philosopher Peter Kropotkin has strongly argued to recognize the strict Darwinist approach as wholly anthropomorphic: a reflection of the human society and our own failings, rather than an accurate reading of the more than human situation. The societies of he had in mind were in a place of a rapid development of a world-wide capitalist system, which was (and still is) based on extraction of value from the natural world and from certain human communities. Our insistence on seeing conflict everywhere, Kropotkin pointed out, only becomes more hypocritical, as we continue to disrupt and exploit the habitats and societies of nonhumans for profit. It was not nature's violence, but that of man. Kropotkin insists there is solidarity among animals, and that mutual aid and the joy of shared social life are vital: "an instinct that has been slowly developed in the course of an extremely long evolution". So, mutual aid, an instinct? I like this wording.

To speak of animal solidarity is all but an attribution of human terms and qualities to non-humans. Rather, it is the full acknowledgement that we share a world.





↑ Exhibition view, as shown at Radius, Center for Contemporary Art and Ecology, Delft, NL. 08 March - 18 May 2025

grey garlands

Solo exhibition, Prám Studio Gallery, Prague, 2021

In the installation, two blue coloured beasts dominate the space. They look down at the viewer, who moves among rich suspended paper flower garlands and fountain jets painted on the walls in light ultramarine aquarelle. In the festive atmosphere a text conveys an intimate conversation between an unsettled human being and a fountain. Oh how calming it can be to feel small and insignificant!





here we synthesized something immortal again and it's heavy

Performative activation at the exhibition In To Through Out, Spoiler Room, Berlin, 2020

A garment, an empty wrapping. Made of silicone, this soft, extremely durable anorganic surface feels uncannily familiar, it encloses the body, heaves it down. The material's skinlike qualities together with its resistance to decay prompt an immediate experience of both strength and vulnerability of the body.

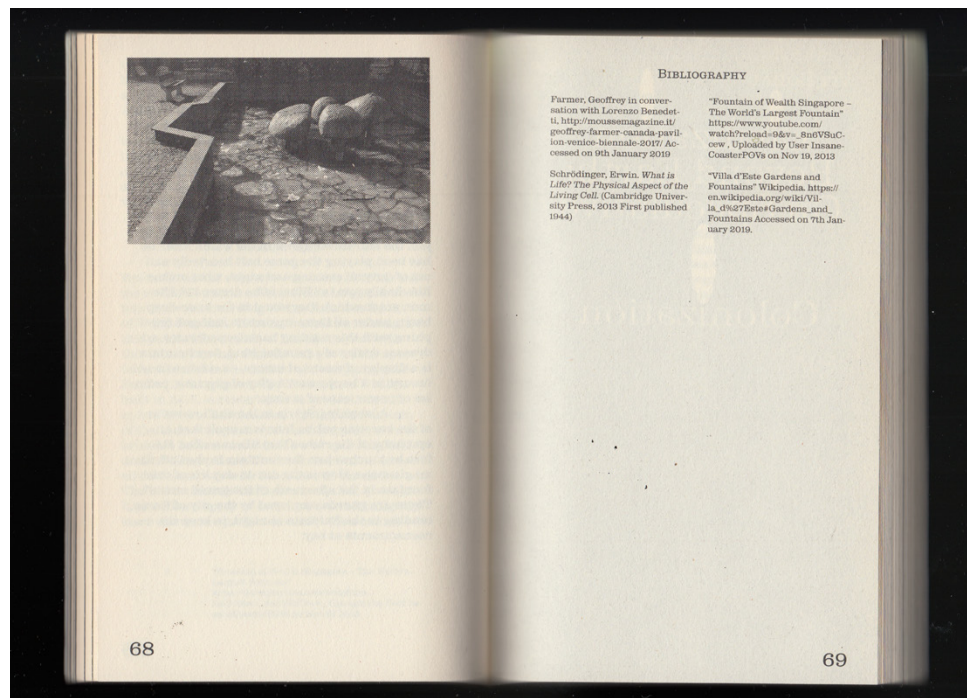
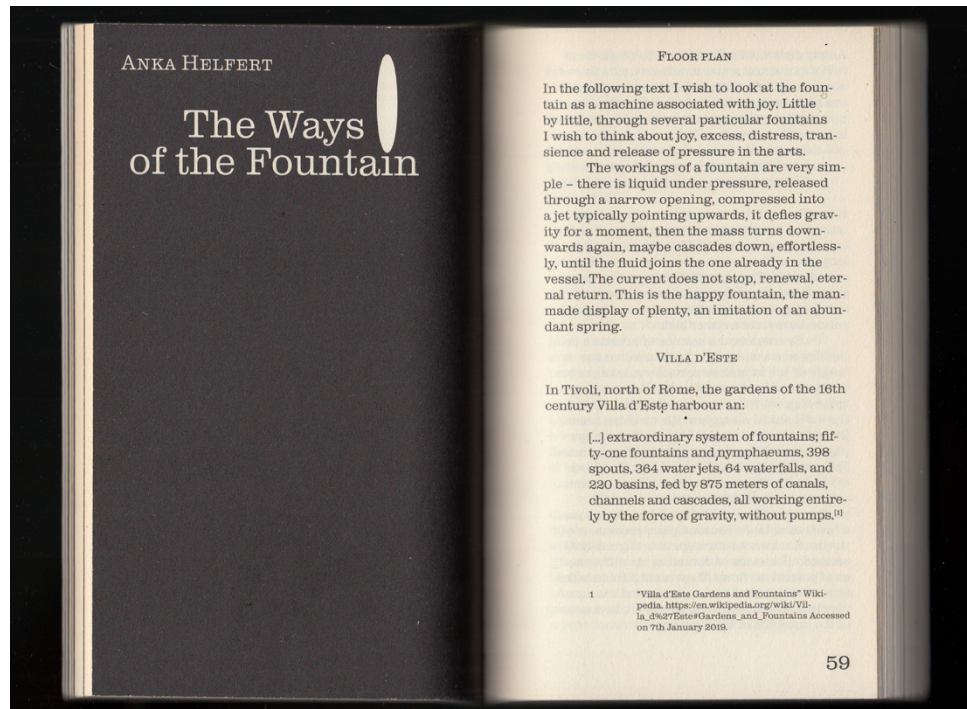




↑ Here we synthesized something immortal again and it's heavy. Performative activation at Spoiler, Berlin.



↗ Exhibition view.



the ways of the fountain

Essay, archive of photographs of various fountains. 2020

„The Ways of the Fountain“ is an inquiry into fountain as principle and emotional mechanism, using several particular fountains to elaborate on different aspects. Published in the reader „Speculative Ruinology“ as an outcome of the programme Class of Interpretation, edited by Václav Janoščík and Boris Ondrejčka, published at the Academy of Fine Arts, Prague, 2020.

