



anka helfertová

portfolio
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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 2025 I live and work between Berlin and Šemanovice, in rural north-west Bohemia.

Exchange and collaboration with others and engagement with the current discourse are vital part of my practice. Currently, I am part of a collective at work between the Czech Republic and Germany, taking care of the interlacing of both cultural scenes. In September 2024 we were hosting a symposium on surrealist thinking, animality and anxiety at Kafkárna at UMRUM in Prague. I also co-host the monthly *feral reading group* at Glitch bookstore in Munich, where we discuss contemporary theory useful for living towards a more just and caring society.

CV

education

2018 – 2019	Meisterschülerin Diploma, with Prof. Albrecht Schäfer, weißensee kunsthochschule berlin, DE
2012 – 2018	Diploma, Sculpture / Fine Arts, weißensee kunsthochschule berlin, DE
2015	Sculpture, Edinburgh College of Art, Erasmus+ exchange, Scotland, UK
2010 – 2012	Area Studies / East Asia, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, DE
2009 – 2010	Studio of Ceramics and Porcelain, UMPRUM, Prague, CZ

selected exhibitions

2025	<i>Parliament of owls</i> , RADIUS, Delft, NL (current) <i>Animal elegance</i> , Pracownia Portretu, Łódź, PL (upcoming) Duo presentation at the gallery The Tiger Room München, DE (upcoming)
2024	<i>Zeug & Cajk</i> , Kunstarkaden München, DE <i>Secret</i> , Klohäuschen Biennale. Curated by Magdalena Wisniowska, München, DE
2023	<i>Papír a film</i> , Galerie AVU, Prague, CZ <i>Like fountains, like flames</i> , Vent gallery, München-Hohenbrunn, DE (solo) <i>Wombat solidarity</i> , Kunsthaus Bella Martha, Marthashofen, DE (solo)
2022	<i>Rainbag</i> , Ausstellungsraum Klingental, Basel, CH <i>To the land</i> , Perlacher Forst, München, DE (outdoor site-specific installations) <i>La Grande bouffe</i> , Lovaas Projects Gallery, München, DE
2021	<i>Was der Hase vom Beton hält</i> , permanent installation in public space, Landsberg am Lech, DE <i>Tearlicker</i> , No Depression Room, München, DE <i>Grey garlands</i> , Prám Studio, Prague, CZ (solo)
2020	<i>In to through out</i> , Galerie Spoiler, Berlin, DE
2019	<i>Manifesto of interpretive class</i> , Meet Factory, Prague, CZ <i>A Dog Barking at a Tree</i> , Garage, Basel, CH <i>Perfekte Zustände</i> , Diplomausstellung der Kunsthochschule Weißensee, Berlin, DE <i>Soft Objects</i> , DUÚL, Ústí nad Labem, CZ
2018	<i>Transenvironmental exercises</i> , Salon Mondial, Basel, CH <i>Whose skin</i> , Diploma, immersive installation, private location, Berlin, DE (solo)
2017	<i>Drei Gespräche über Materie</i> , installation and book-release, Kreuzberg Pavillion, Berlin, DE (solo)

2016	<i>Time and again</i> , Kunstverein Arnsberg, Arnsberg, DE <i>Lob des Schattens</i> , Japanisch-Deutsches Kulturzentrum, Berlin, DE <i>Bad sleep up here</i> , a show in a private flat, Berlin, DE (solo)
2015	<i>White dinner</i> , Edinburgh College of Arts, Scotland/UK <i>versteckte variable</i> , Max-Planck-Institute for Human Development, Berlin, DE

selected collective projects and curatorial work

2024	<i>Má úzkost srst nebo ne?</i> Symposium on surrealist thinking in contemporary art, at Kafkárna, space for art and ecology, Prague, CZ
since 2022	<i>Feral reading group</i> , Reading & study group, monthly, in the queer-feminist bookshop Glitch, Munich, and online, DE
since 2018	Reading group Between uns and Nature, Zabriskie Buchhandlung, Berlin, DE
2019	<i>Tichá 3</i> , Exhibition project, double exhibitions of young artists from Prague and Berlin, CZ/DE (conception, production, curation) <i>COI / Class of Interpretation</i> . Academy of Fine Arts, Prague & TBA21, Wien. CZ/AT

artist residencies

2024	Mustarinda, Research of old-growth fir forests, Paljakantie, FI
2021	Artist-in Residency, Prám Studio, Prague, CZ Werkstätte Peripheral Alliances / Kunstverein München, Inning am Ammersee, DE
2020	Stony connections matter, Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden, UK
2013	Contrabbando, Nida Art Colony, Nida, LT

publications

2020	<i>In to through out</i> . Reader for the group show at Spoiler, Berlin, DE (contribution, editing)
2019	<i>Speculative Ruinology</i> . Interpretation as a Mode of Survival. Academy of Fine Arts, Prag, CZ. Eds.: Boris Ondrejčka und Václav Janoščík (essay contribution)
2017	<i>Drei Gespräche über Materie</i> . Theoretical diploma thesis, khb weißensee, DE (author)
2014	<i>Displace</i> . A Migrating Art Academies compendium of ideas. Ed. Mindaugas Gapševičius, University of Vilnius Press, LT (contribution)
since 2019	occasional writing for the czech magazine A2

stipends / grants

2024	Nomination <i>ars viva</i> 2025 Shortlist Cena Jindřicha Chalupeckého, prize of the Czech National Gallery Project grant: Research for Sad forests and their ghosts, Erwin und Gisela von Steiner Stiftung
2022	Exhibition Grant: Ernst und Olga Gubler-Hablützel Stiftung, Temperatio Stiftung Project stipend: NEUSTART KULTUR – Stiftung Kunstfonds Alumni Stipend: Absolvent:innenförderung Kickstarter, Stiftung Kunstfonds
2021	Grant of the Studio programme of the City of Munich and GEWOFAG Project Grant: Stipendienprogramm des Freistaats Bayern Project Grant: Projektförderung Kultursommer Landsberg am Lech
2020	Emerging artist support programme for the residency, Scottish sculpture workshop, Lumsden, Scotland/UK Project Grant: Projektförderung der MART STAM GESELLSCHAFT – Förderverein der kunsthochschule berlin weißensee
2019	Project Grant: Deutsch-Tschechischer Zukunftsfonds, Förderung Auf geht's (supporting the exhibition project Tichá 3)
2018	SEMP Mobility stipend: internship at Kunstbetrieb AG, Schweiz, CH

community work & associations

since 2019	Member of artist association BBK Berlin
since 2022	Member of the Kunstverein Rosa Stern / Nebyula, München
2022 – 2024	Running a weekly ceramics workshop primarily for young ukrainian refugees and interested others at Svoï e.V., Munich



artist statement

Is matter animate? I understand my practice as thinking through doing, thinking with my hands. I am looking closely at where the hard distinction between nature and culture has taken the western society, with particular interest in the histories of this separation and disenchantment. All culture is born by bodies – through senses and metabolism. Human beings as bodies also emerge from and stay intertwined with the mineral and non-organic worlds. Working with my hands, in and through materials, is a way to address and understand this interconnectedness. In the artworks, however, my human agency rather fades into the background and the surfaces appear grown, organic.

Through figures that merge human and more-than-human bodies, across gender and allowing for subtle erotics, I explore our neglected animal identity. I observe the destructive effects of the western cosmology based on the exceptionalism of certain humans. In the time of living through multiple crises, I want to offer narratives that make the western human feel the ground under their feet. To counter the damage that is already there I am looking for ways to rebind our minds to the material world, which includes all things invisible, latent, withheld, potential, unclear. Playing with potentiality and unequivocal presences precisely as something material and not otherworldly is at the core of my practice. In my sculptural installations I like to use ceramics, silicone, drawing, photography and text.





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.

At the core of Anka Helfertová's artistic endeavors lies a profound exploration of a question that resonates deeply into western consciousness: the inquiry into whether matter is inherently passive, drawing inspiration from the insightful perspectives of Jane Bennett¹. This thought-provoking investigation serves as the guiding thread woven through the artists body of work.

The nuanced exploration of action and vitality in seemingly inert matter becomes the focus of "like fountains, like flames", a rich web of different expressions of moving matter that challenges conventional perceptions and invites into a contemplative space where the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic become blurred.

Along the lines of the profound words of Donna Haraway that "animism is the only sensible version of materialism"² Anka Helfertová extends this discourse to her artistic practice. Haraway's emphasis on the reciprocal relationships between humans and the natural world, coupled with her questioning of human exceptionalism, is an integral part of the artistic exploration. Building on the foundational ideas of "The Companion Species Manifesto"³, Helfertová invites viewers to consider a multi-species relationship in which co-operation with non-human beings is not only encouraged but considered essential. This invitation to a collective consciousness becomes a guiding principle in her work, much like compost, in which different elements mix and transform into something greater.

The compositions featured in "like Fountains, like Flames" predominantly employ ceramics with various glazes, supplemented by diverse materials thoughtfully selected by the artist, contingent upon the inherent nature of the medium. This body of work undertakes an exploration of various manifestations of dynamic matter. Predominantly inspired by the formidable and timeless image of the geyser—waters emerging with unparalleled power from the Earth's depths—the artist engenders fountains in myriad forms. These fountains

encapsulate a spectrum of emotional states, ranging from overwhelming potency to a modest, delicate trickle, thereby crystallizing tangible expressions of nature's vital forces.

The dynamic flow and kinetic movements inherent in Helfertová's sculptural works serve as catalysts, prompting a reevaluation of our comprehension of life and the latent potency residing within supposedly inert matter. Integral to this exploration is the well-established understanding that social bonds are essential for human development, well-being, and survival. Furthermore, the connection humans create with animals and all other living species on Earth is deemed essential to our well-being, echoing Ellen Miles' claim that Nature is a Human Right.⁴

"like Fountains, like Flames" serves as invitation to an alchemical transformation, offering viewers an opportunity to engage with the intricacies of existence and the multifaceted relationships that define our current understanding of the world.

Manuela Hillmann

1 "Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the non-human powers circulating around and within human bodies."

Jane Bennett: *Vibrant matter*. p. 9

2 Donna Haraway: *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. p. 88, p. 165

3 "(...) what happens when human exceptionalism and the utilitarian individualism of classical political economics become unthinkable in the best sciences across the disciplines and interdisciplines? Seriously unthinkable: not available to think with". Donna Haraway: *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*. p. 57

4 Ellen Miles: *Nature is a Human Right: Why we're fighting for green in a grey world*.



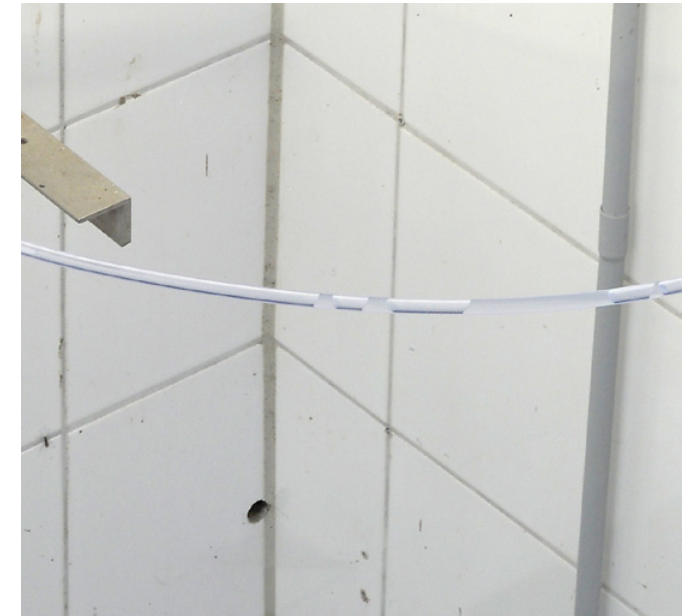
The two-part piece Tearlicker connects the exhibition with weather – when it rains, one of the blue cat-like characters begins to cry. Extreme intimacy in a very dark moment.



↑ → 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.



Another figure you can encounter in the show is a portrait of an animal that can photosynthesize, *elysia viridis*. They are hybrids of another sort, part algae part mollusk, disrupting the neat division of evolutionary kingdoms. They are not born green, they become so only after eating and not fully digesting specific algae, *codium fragile*. Long live endosymbiosis!

← Dancing fountain. Ceramics, wooden plinth; 160 × 60 × 60 cm; 2023.

➤ *Elysia viridis*, double portrait. Glazed ceramic, water, glass; each 50 × 12 × 12 cm; 2023.



greetings from a sick forest

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

As a sculptural output of my preliminary research on the project Sad Forests and Their Ghosts I have exhibited the following work-in-progress: 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. The piece 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

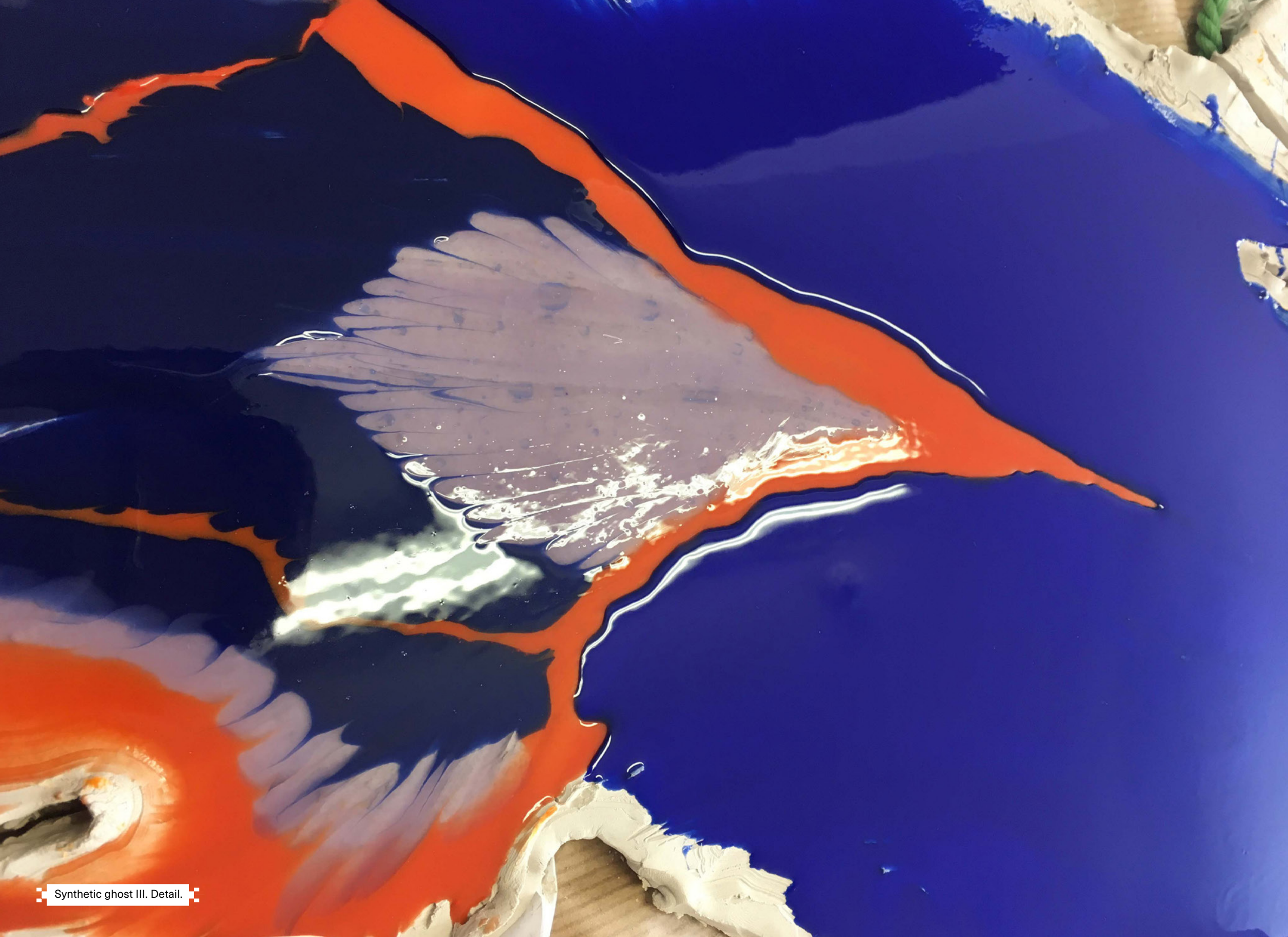
I use silicone, a highly synthetic and skinlike material, to make those thin, flat beings. Human-made, industrialised environments and their highly synthetic materials are omnipresent – in what ways do they seep into the imagination and continue to act as spectres and metabolised waste in realms the 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.



Synthetic ghost III. Detail.

wombat solidarity

Exhibition and participative activation at the end of a residency at Kunstahus 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:

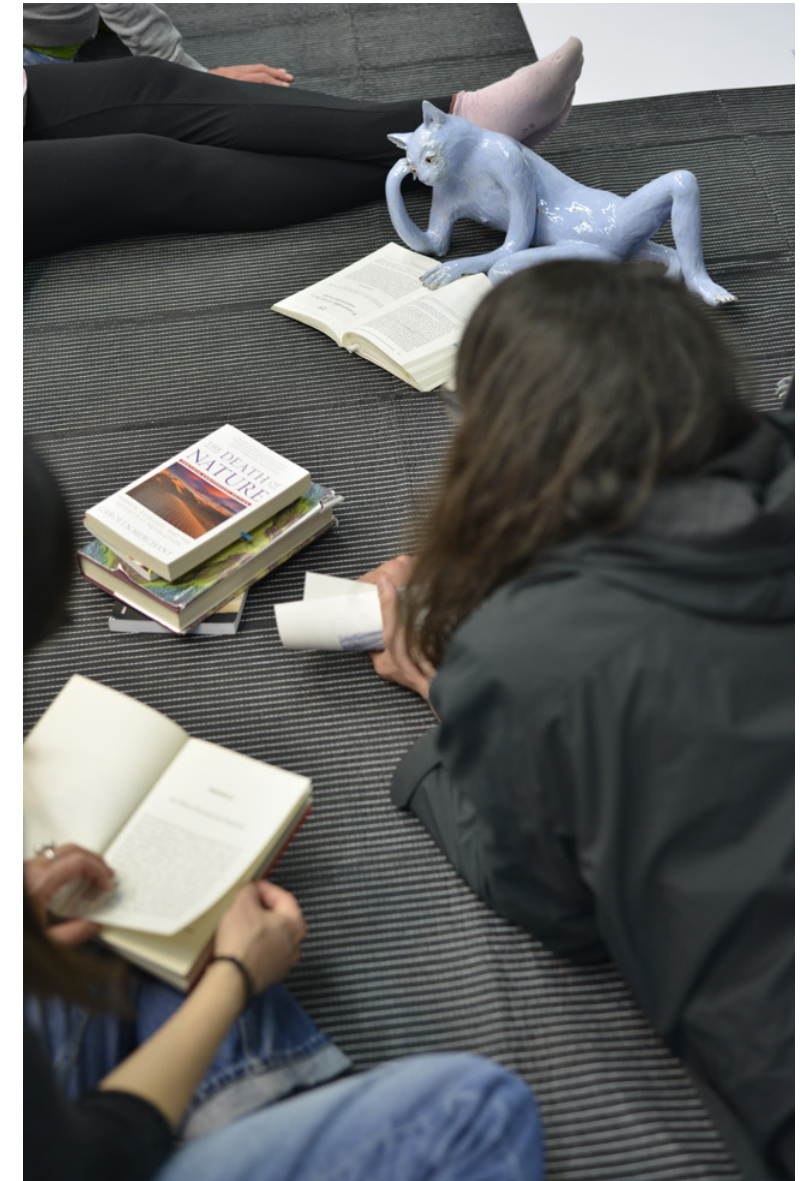
In Australia, in the summer season 2019/2020, the fires in the bush were especially devastating. Wombats have apparently saved lives of many other smaller animals by sheltering them in their large and complex burrows. More than a billion of creatures have been estimated to have died in the fires, but 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.

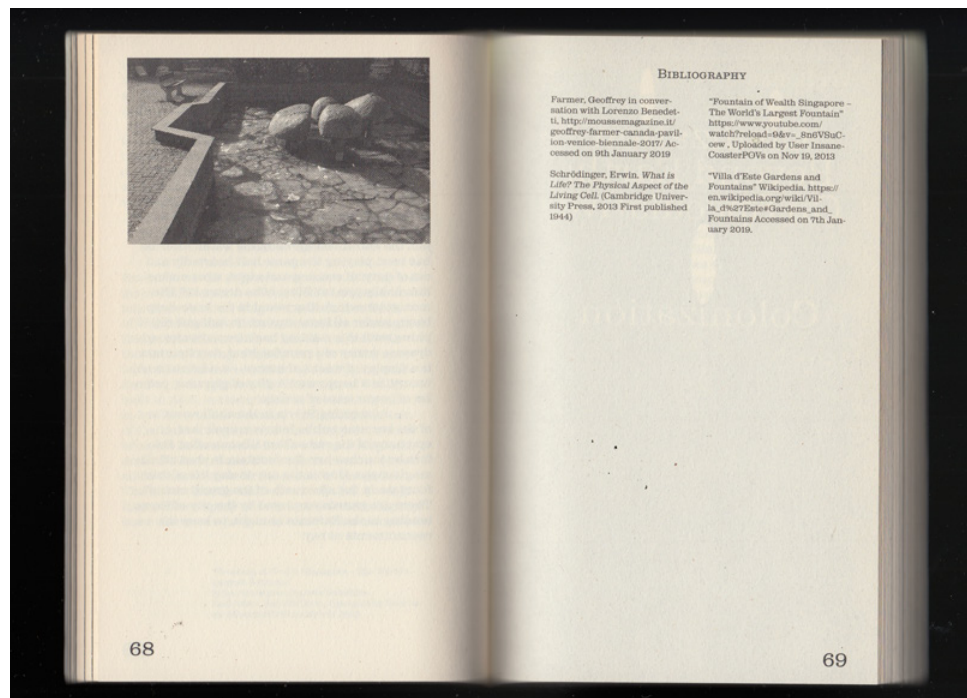
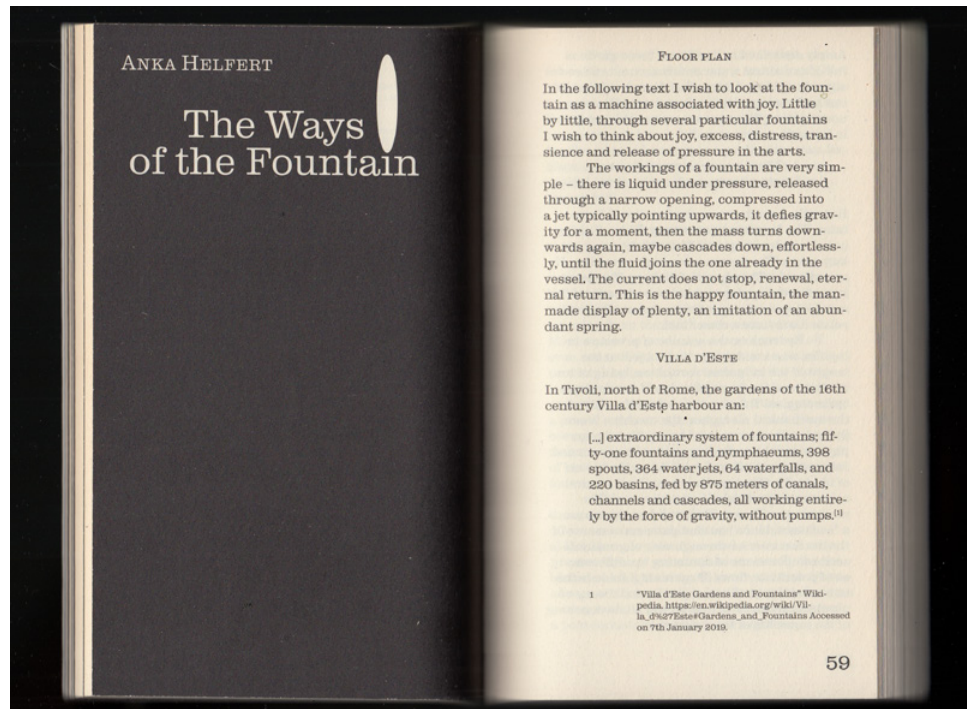


↗ Exhibition view.

the ways of the fountain

Essay, 2018

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



whose skin

Diploma installation, private location, Berlin, 2018

The image on the thin translucent fabric of the paravent shows welding works on tramcar tracks at night. The silicone skins lay scattered around the room.

Text included in the installation:

a landscape, behind a folding screen.
 the function of a folding screen is parting space
 solely for sight.
 if vision is our preferred model of perception and knowledge
 what happened to our eyes as folding screens grew obsolete?
 the eyes, overeating, acquainted with other screens.
 see through
 this soft image
 obscuring vision just the same.
 sink to the floor
 that is a landscape since long.
 this is an exercise in haptics and an invitation to take part,
 troubled intimacy.
 tear resistance: up to 1000 %

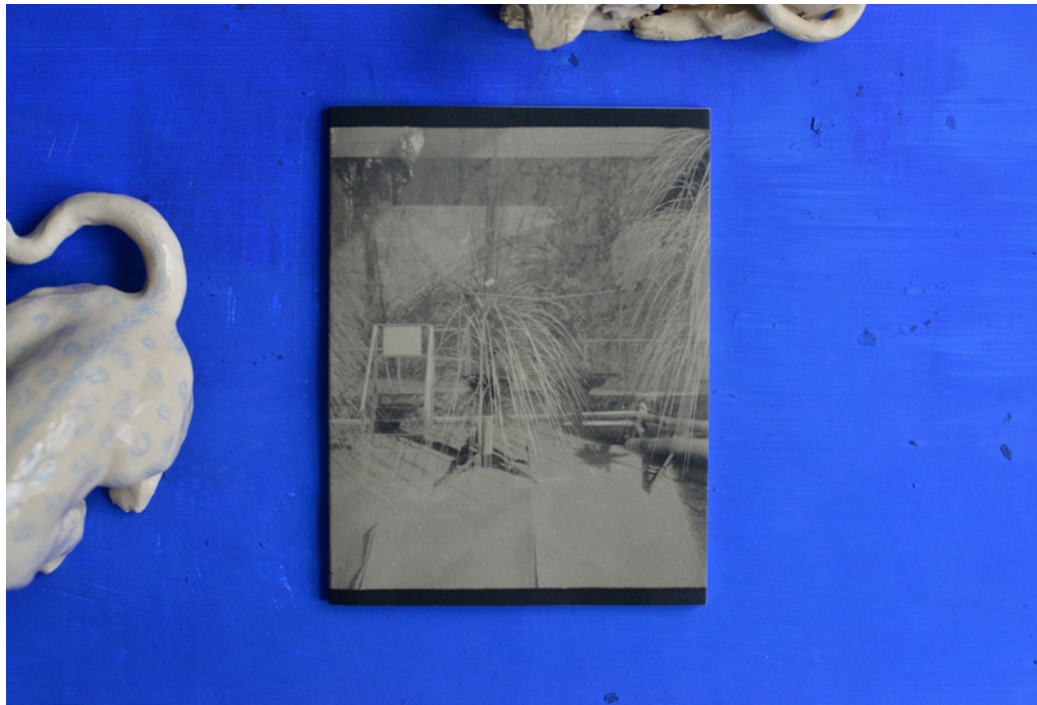




drei gespräche über materie

Publication, theoretical diploma, 2018

Drei Gespräche über Materie (Three Conversations about Matter) is theory – fiction. An engagement with the difficulties of the term *matter*. Impossibilities and history of the concept are addressed in form of a lively dialogue between several, mostly non-human, characters. The narrative part is enveloped in theoretical enrichments as marginalia-footnotes with a life of their own, and is accompanied by photographs.



12 Richard Müller, deutscher Chemiker bei Radebeuler Chemischen Fabrik v. Heyden, über seine Entdeckung: „Allerdings war diese Entdeckung eher ein Zufallsprodukt. Ich hatte im Jahr 1932 die Idee, einen künstlichen Nebel zu erfinden, um ganze Städte damit einzuhüllen, falls es jemals wieder einen Krieg geben würde. Damals gab es ja noch kein Radar. Doch heraus kam immer nur ein schneeweißes Gas. (...) Da entdeckte ich schließlich eine zähe weiße Masse – das Silikon.“

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/silikon>, 20.05.2017

erzähl doch noch wie du entstanden bist, es ist so eine gute Geschichte.

Silikon: *(Es schmeißt sich auf den Bauch und es dauert ein paar Sekunden bis sich das Abprallen beruhigt hat, winkelt die langen Beine an und zieht neckisch die Lippen vor.)*

... ok, aber nur weil es eine gute Geschichte ist. Keine Ursprungsfetischismen hier! Wo man herkommt begründet keine Identität. Ich wurde per Zufall synthetisiert. Seit den dreißiger Jahren hat sich ein deutscher Chemiker damit beschäftigt, einen künstlichen Nebel herzustellen, in dem man ganze Städte hätte verschwinden lassen können – für den Einsatz in einem möglichen zukünftigen Krieg. Damals gab es ja noch keinen Radar. Stellt euch das vor. Allerdings kam bei seinen Experimenten stets etwas anderes heraus, als er gesucht hatte... eines Tages eine klebrige, viskose Materie – ich also.¹²

Erika: Krass.

Bronze: Wunderbar. Du, der Werkstoff der Vervielfältigung der Oberflächen, wie ein Spiegel für das Dreidimensionale, als Zufallsprodukt bei der Suche nach einem Stoff, der die Oberflächen unsichtbar macht.

(Kurzes Schweigen, Bronze schaut in die Ferne.)

A propos Spiegel. Es wissen nicht viele, aber bevor es mit Glas und Amalgam soweit war, wurden Spiegel aus mir hergestellt. Meine blank polierte Fläche... leicht konvex, so dass eine Schönheit auch in einem kleinen Spiegel ihr ganzes Gesicht sieht..

Silikon: Klingt gut. Hast du ja erzählt. Man musste die Spiegel dann recht oft polieren, oder so?

Bronze: *(fällt eifrig rein)*

... ja, war eine großartige Zeit, so viel Intimität mit den Menschen...



Flaschenteufel Flaschentaucher
Flaschengeister Cartesischen
EUR 6,99 Sofort-Kaufen



ruff

Artist book, 2018

A book / ruff collar, hybrid. The form of this outdated garment, so prominent in the fashion of the arising bourgeoisie of early modernity, marks a striking division between head and body. The ruff at hand consists of some twenty meters of finely ruffled silk fabric. The images hiding in the folds are observations of dead-ends of instrumental reason, whose ascent we associate precisely with the early modern period.



Marginal detail from the venetian painting
"Miracolosa guarigione della figlia di Benvegnudo de
San Polo" by Giovanni Mansueti that I photographed
in the Academia. The tamed cheetah on a leash is
one of the few figures gazing directly at the spectator.





protective deamons

*A series of up to date 9 protective deamons.
Various dimensions, since 2014.*

Since 2014 I have been offering to create personalised protective demons. In the often lengthy preliminary discussions with the comissioners, we discuss what protection means, precariousness, the limits of strength and individual agency, and the difficulties of asking for help. I have developed a technique for casting the Daemon objects in which I form the negative mould directly, the positive cast appears last.

