ART

Special Edition

HABENS

CONTEMPORARY ART RUHR

ALJOHARA
AIMEE PEREZ
EIRINI ROUMPI
LESLIE STARK
LIDIA MIKHAYLOVA
ULF KÖNIG
EDMAR SORIA
EFI SPYROU
ANJA SIEBER

ART
Contemporary Art Press

Anja Sieber's Gate of Hell

Transkript of Dante's Devine Comedy after live performances with wire at the Contemporary Art Ruhr in Essen Germany 2012

CONTEMPORARY ART REVIEW

Aimee Perez

USA

I work with human forms – with the gestures and emotions, lives and relationships – that serve as archetypes by transcending the context of their story.Through the exploration of contemporary, religious and biblical themes, I create sculptures that explore spiritual truth and the paradoxical truths of suffering and redemption, grief and comfort. The mediums I use include various types of clays fired at high or low temperatures and surfaced with oxides washes, slips, terra sigillata, engobes and glazes. I have also been known to to add encaustic, wax, metals, glass, and found objects to add layers to a piece. My work has been exhibited in national and international shows as well as museums and is part of several collections in the United States, Australia and Mexico.

Ulf König

Germany

Architecture and sculptures are my passion, trying out a variety of styles. The series "Architecture Criticism" exaggerates my style-changes. Herein I create an "extreme chaotic" deconstructivism, extended by a "subjective" symbolism which might provoke subliminal perceptions. That yields unorthodox, ironic, provocative, multifaceted, critical views. Architecture Criticism" converts real architecture into bizarre chaotic architectural sculptures which leave scope for stimulating associations. The "stripe-constructions" seem to connect, to brace the buildings visible in the underneath photograph. Or do they produce new exceptional spaces, either passible or habitable? To the astonishment of many, however, to the delight of myself the sculptures reveal aesthetics and order even in chaos.

Leslie Stark

USA

My work explores the relationship between reality and imagination, free-form and structure. My process is intuitive, informed by memory and empathic observation of our world. In each layered surface, elements of the ordinary are given new context and meaning, inviting intellectual and emotional engagement with the viewer

I was born and raised in the great Pacific Northwest. My interest in art began at a very young age, drawing illustrations of animals and cartoon characters. In college I studied graphic design, art history, and advertising; then spent 20 years as a singer, studying voice and opera. I am often inspired by music, and find a lot of parallels between art and music, as both embody texture, line, color and harmony in their composition.

Efi Spyrou

Greece

"I've been working in the fashion industry for several years and considering my body as a medium-object. Now, as an artist, I use the same anonymous medium-object to deal with social phenomena – whether this has to do with race, origin, age, sex.In a series of photo-performances my torso is captured in poses – naked but for poetic phrases projected on my back.

Quotes like 'Older Younger', 'Authenticity In Question' and 'Exotic Not Exhausted' relate to my interest in the politics of the art and fashion. My photographic series form a "backdrop to a series of animalesque sculptures" such as "Little Black Bird".

Pictures of human bodies and sculptures are as a whole of a self... a plural singularity.'

Anja Sieber

Germany

My artistic work is based on a "what I hear" during "transWRITing", painting, forming paper objects and doing performances. I transmit art and scientific discourses, world literature, everyday communication.I am fascinated by the possibility space remains to be explored on another occasion – entering with my voice and my body a new room in which poetic, intellectual, commonplace or political thoughts pass directly into an art event. To locate the artistic action in the chosen art context, the performing body becomes the medium. Hands and movements form writing lines. I condense what I write down with various fluid media into complex, mostly illegible line structures that materialise as the message being presented.I allow the material flows to break their path and dry up in a variety of interesting track formations.

Eirini Roumpi

Greece

My work is about interdisciplinarity in the Arts, in other words the idea that performative and visual forms of art tend to be unified, exchanging elements with each other and even creating new artistic hybrids. The interdisciplinary approach applies to me additionally, because of my previous education in Psychology and the way it informs my practice in art.Some of the main ideas that concern me are the overlap between dance, theatre and performance, rituals and symbols, time and the idea of absurdity in existence. Recent work has led me to realize that all these ideas are connected to the one major idea of ''in between''. In case of Time, for example, that was the subject of my most recent project, the in-between essence of waiting, the idea of non-time and non-space ended up being the most intriguing concepts for me.

Aljohara

Belgium / Saudi Arabia

As long as I can remember I have been a woman and artist. Enraptured by techniques, I am a photographer by trade (studied in Belgium) and took courses in medieval painting techniques (inPortugal). I was born in The Netherlands, lived in various countries around the world (eg China) and in October 2017 I came to visit for a short first time Saudi Arabia.

After formalities and settling down, I started to work energetically on my art. Enjoying this vibrant society so much and convinced that Jeddah has all the elements to become the next artist's hub on par with Berlin and the like, I decided half a year ago to close my house in Europe for good andsettle here... as long as The Kingdom is willing to have me, of course.

Edmar Soria

Mexico

I am a wanderer.I like to make up stories about places I have never been and shapes I have never seenand to do so I like to wear and take off different tongues which I have found mostly by chance.

I see myself as a creative that seeks to express his ideas through some languages of art by using and getting advantage from the tools of those languages and expressing the result through different mediums or formats.

My multidisciplinary background guides my creative work and allows me to use and apply tools (technical and theoretical) from math and computer science (in a formal and rigorous way) on this creative process.

Lidia Mikhaylova

Russia

"The inner life of each person is based on energy centers or what we call chakras. These impact our daily lives by either developing or inhibiting our emotional, intellectual, and physical lives.Universe has endowed women with a wonderful gift – the Yoni. In Sanskrit, the word Yoni means female genitalia. Besides being the most feminine part of the female body, it's also the most receptive, and the most sensitive. It truly is the most amazing part of the feminine.In tantra, the Yoni is also associated with the cosmic gate; the gate to the Universe, the Source or the sacred temple; the place from which we all came into this world. Simply put, the Yoni is a mystical, mysterious, powerful, and beautiful place!

In this issue

Anja Sieber 4

Lives in Berlin and Hamburg, Germany
Painting, Installation, Mixed media

Efi Spyrou 38

Lives and works in the United Kingdom
Installation, Mixed media

Ulf König 60

Lives and works in Leipzig, Germany
Mixed media, Installation

Aimee Perez 88

Lives and works in Miami, Florida, USA
Mixed media, Painting

Aljohara 110

Lives and works in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Painting, Installation, Mixed media

Leslie Stark 144

Lives and works in Seattle WA, USA
Installation, Mixed media

Eirini Roumpi 166

Lives and works in Greece
Performance, Installation, Mixed media

Edmar Soria 200

Lives and works in Mexico City, Mexico
Mixed media, Installation, Sound

Lidia Mikhaylova 232

Lives and works in Moscow, Russia
Painting, Mixed media

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On the cover: ***Anja Sieber's Gate of Hell*** *(Contemporary Art Ruhr in Essen Germany 2012)*

Anja Sieber, Galileo's Sidereus Nuncius, Installation, 2014, at art KARLSRUHE, booth ROOT

photo: **Christine de Boom**

Anja Sieber

Lives and works in Berlin and Hamburg

Anja Sieber's Gate of Hell.

Transkript of Dante's Devine Comedy after live performances with wire at the Contemporary Art Ruhr in Essen Germany 2012

An interview with Anja Sieber

An interview by ***Dario Rutigliano****, curator*
and ***Melissa C. Hilborn****, curator*
arthabens.biennale@europe.com

Hello Anja and welcome to ART H*abens*. Before starting to elaborate about your artistic production we would like to invite our readers to visit *https://www.anjasieber.com* in order to get a wide idea about your artistic production and we would start this interview with a couple of introductory questions. You have a solid formal training in Fine Arts and you studied painting at the Akademie für Malerei, in Berlin, and you eventually earned your Master Student of Ute Wöllmann: how did those formative years help you to create your unique attitude to experiment with different media? Moreover, how does your cultural substratum due to your previous studies of Literature and Media Science address the trajectory of your current artistic research?

Anja Sieber: Thank you for the opportunity to present myself in this media. For me, it had always seemed better to study art at a younger age. However, starting later in life as I did, having already been working for many years as a journalist, an editor and as a publisher of books (on the transformation of cultural phenomena through media, by the way!), the advantages in terms of approach are quite different. It had definitely been a teenage dream of mine to attend the famous Städelschule in Frankfurt/M. The 1980s were a tumultuous and exciting time, still marked by the Paris student revolt of 1968 and its anti-authoritarian movement. The documenta 7 included Joseph Beuys' 7000 trees planting action and, as an 18-year-old, I found

Anja Sieber

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I am fascinated by the possibility space remains to be explored on another occasion - entering with my voice and my body a new room in which poetic, intellectual, commonplace or political thoughts pass directly into an art event. To locate the artistic action in the chosen art context, the performing body becomes the medium. Hands and movements form writing lines. I condense what I write down with various fluid media into complex, mostly illegible line structures that materialise as the message being presented.

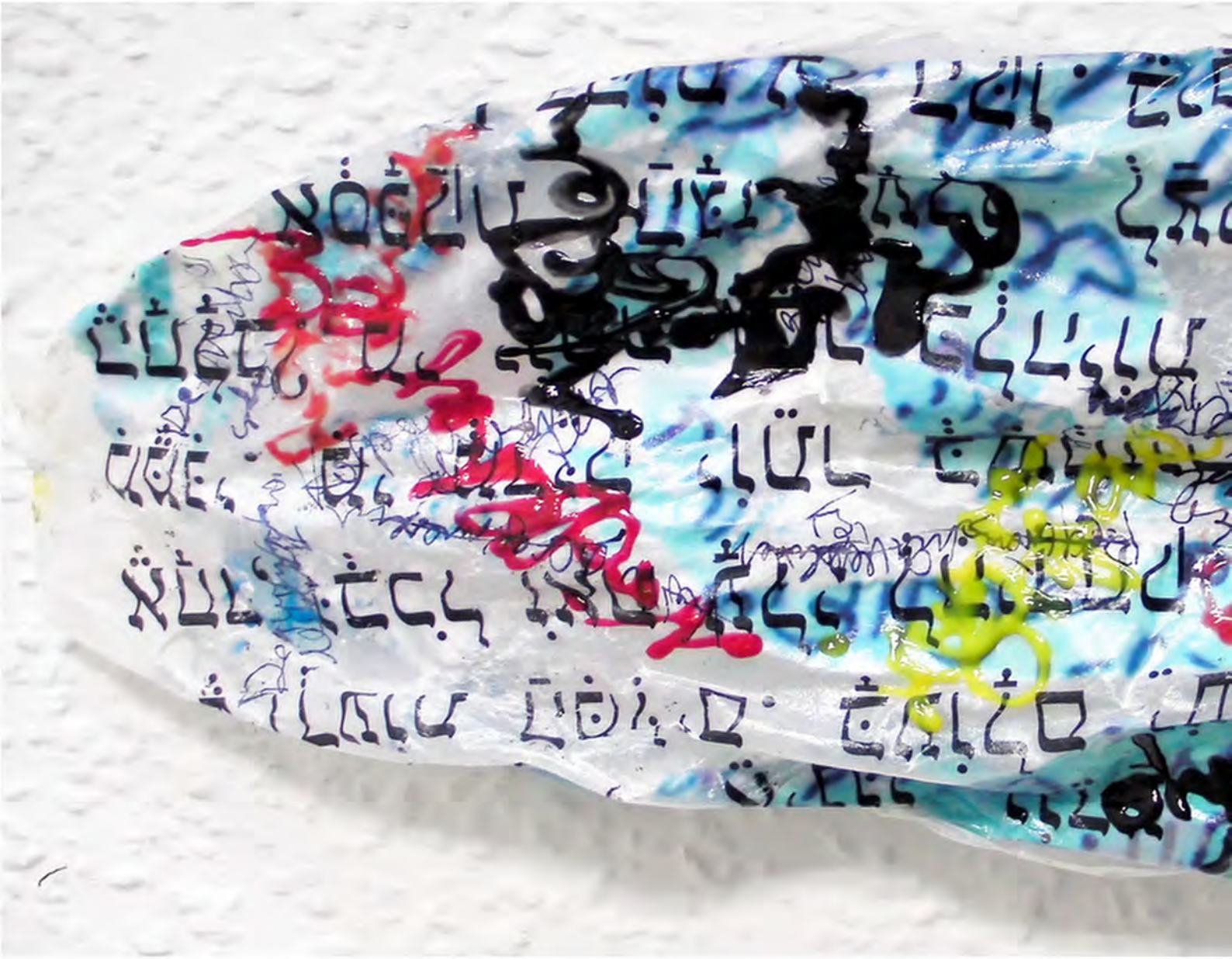
I allow the material flows to break their path and dry up in a variety of interesting track formations.

Anja Sieber is co-curator of the BUNKERHILLGalerie (jointly with Errkaa, featured by Hilldegarden e.V.). In that

myself both confused and enchanted by the Conceptual Art and the New Wild Painters exhibited. All this fuelled my wish to be as free and boundaries-breaking as these artists were. This attitude also determined the intellectual focus of my first studies – Romance languages. I found conventions boring; I was fascinated by new forms of narration in literature and film that made a difference in society. Moreover, in linguistic studies, you dissect every syllable to reveal the theory of signs. So what is a semiotic sign? And how is it transmitted? What is the political core of everyday messages? French philosophers like Foucault and Deleuze made their mark on the study of the humanities at that time. In

show, she included her installation of Dante's Gates of Hell.

2009, when I began my studies of painting at the Akademie für Malerei in Berlin with this educational heritage, a decades-long accumulated readiness for experimentation and a yearning for freedom burst inside me. The Academy's special approach, influenced by Georg Baselitz, favoured this by offering students the option of selecting the techniques, teachers, and means of expressing themselves. But the most important aspects were the weekly reviews of our works. Those meetings in front of all the students stimulated within me a profound self-reflection on my personal artistic development and on the direction in which I was heading. During one of my first meetings in front of the plenum at the



Body of Measured Time, 2010, poems from In One Thousand Days by Galit Seliktar, paper, acrylic gel, ink, 4,33 x 9

Academy, the keyword "writing" was mentioned as an interesting element of my work. (I had used writing to create drawings with blue pen lines.) I was given the task of painting for ten minutes every day for six weeks and writing down everything that came to my mind.

Thrown into the experiment, I freed myself from the dictum "brush" by reading several interesting books on the subject of "The integration of writing into 20th century painting" and began to produce lots of incomprehensible blobs, lines and surfaces. I applied the paint. I started with small pieces of paper and moved on to larger and larger fabric formats. I used my fingers and everything else I could

,84 x 1,18 inches

get my hands on. Acrylic became the glue for garbage, sand, colourful carnival letters, the remains of yellowed signs, etc. I used oil paint, tempera, gouache and watercolours directly from the tube, chalk, charcoal and graphite enabled me to create the scribbled line. I stirred black ink pools into thin webs with the brush handle, squeezing colour out of the corners of plastic bags. The result was a mixture of chaotic lines and textures, so impressive that I later sprayed the largest of them completely with white paint to emphasise only the structures. While I was wildly waving my hands around and muttering the names of writing artists, I kept dipping my brush into the thick paint, thinking above all about the abstract expressionist Cy Twombly, whose huge white scribbles I had stared at in disbelief in the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum in Berlin a few years previously. And so it did not take long before I had initiated a series of experiments to combine painting and performance art with literature and language.

Marked out with such unique visual identity, the body of works that we have selected for this special edition of ART Habens —and that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article — has at once captured our attention for the way they convey sense of freedom and rigorous aesthetics, and in particular for the way you use your visual language in a strategic way to offering an array of meanings to the viewers: when walking our readers through your usual setup and process, would you tell us something about the genesis of your Bind Together Hyperallergic Ideas series?

Anja Sieber: Spontaneous constraints, being in another country, and having a lot of space acted as a strong creative trigger. The special aspect of this series is the fact that it was prompted during my time as an artist-in-residence. In the Jewish district of Zurich, I had a large and more or less empty

Bind Together Hyperallergic Ideas 2, 2019
Mixed Media on Paper, 46 x 33 inches

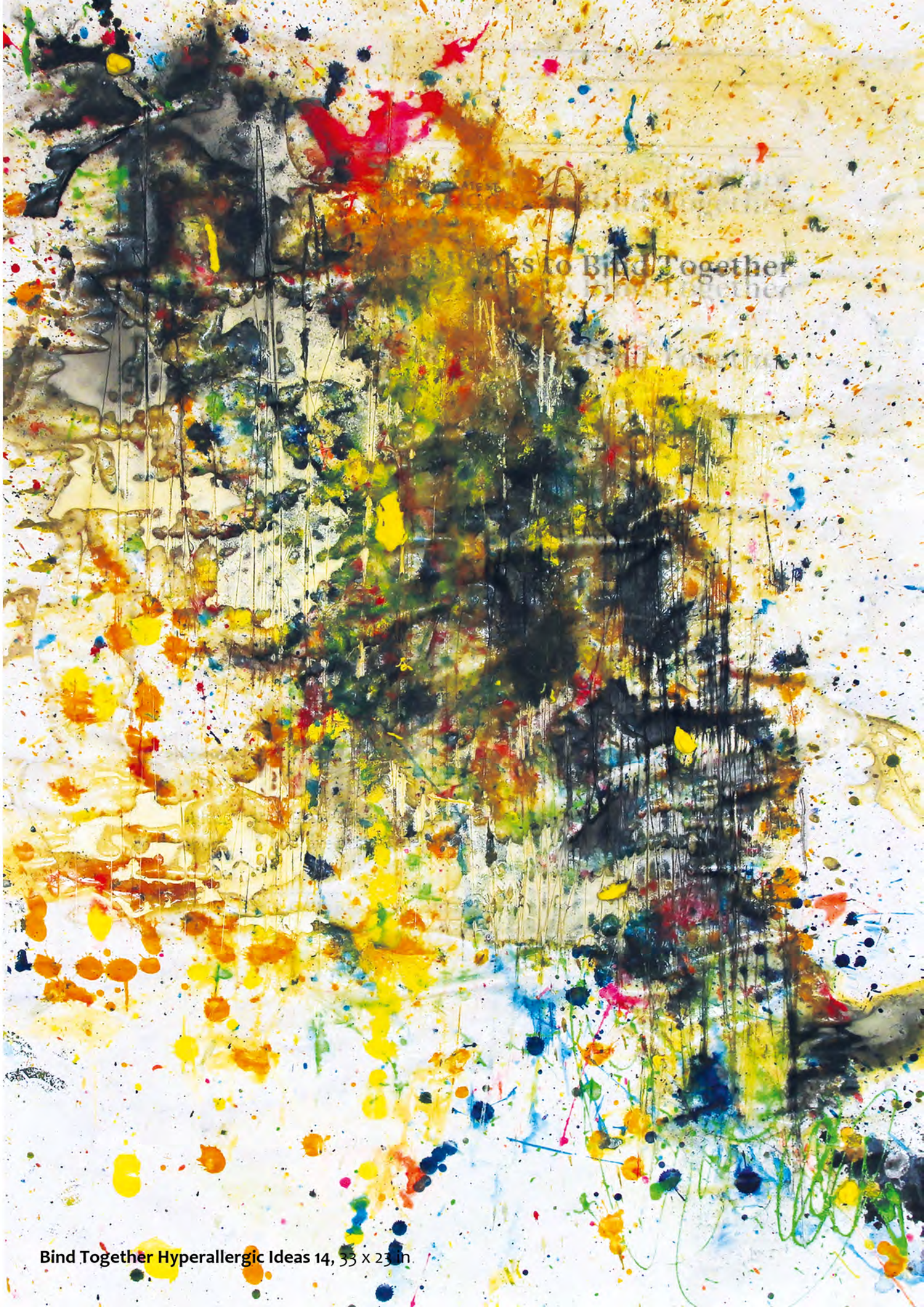
Bind Together Hyperallergic Ideas 3, 2019
Mixed Media on Paper, 46 x 33 inches

apartment all to myself. Apart from the kitchen, there was only a bed, a wardrobe and a chair. This experience taught me that leaving your comfort zone can help to boost production.

The first step was thus, as always, the search for a suitable medium that contains an inspiring subject which can be incorporated into my art. For quite a while, I had been contemplating how best to deal with the global art scene and its media. I chose the New York platform "Hyperallergic – Sensitive to Art and Its Discontents", a self-described "forum for serious, playful, and radical thinking about art in the world today".

I took screenshots of some articles and edited them digitally for my purposes, i.e. I changed the readability beyond recognition. Since the host of the residence was also the owner of a large printing company, several large formats and countless other paper sizes were lying on my floor within a few days.

Bind Together Hyperallergic Ideas 4, 2019, Mixed Media on Paper, 33 x 23 inches



Bind Together Hyperallergic Ideas 14, 33 x 23 in.

Bind Together Hyperallergic Ideas 13, 44 x 20 in

Being Free 1, 2017, Mixed Media on Paper, 36 x 14 in

In general, I need modern colours which dry quickly as part of my approach. The acrylic gel I use creates elastic surfaces.

They stick together strongly and become transparent after drying. I call these results "text skins". In this way, the image-bearing paper is changed into a picture carrier ready for the emotional working process with paint.

I work on the floor all the time, rarely on a wall. I allow the material flows to break their path and dry up in a variety of interesting track formations and reliefs. This process never falls to inspire me anew!

To locate the artistic action in the chosen art context, the performing body becomes the medium. Hands and movements form writing lines. I condense what I write down with various fluid media into complex, mostly illegible line structures that materialise as the message being presented. In this case, I used the words "The Power of Artist's Books to Bind Together Radical Ideas", which I also recited aloud to myself during the painting process.

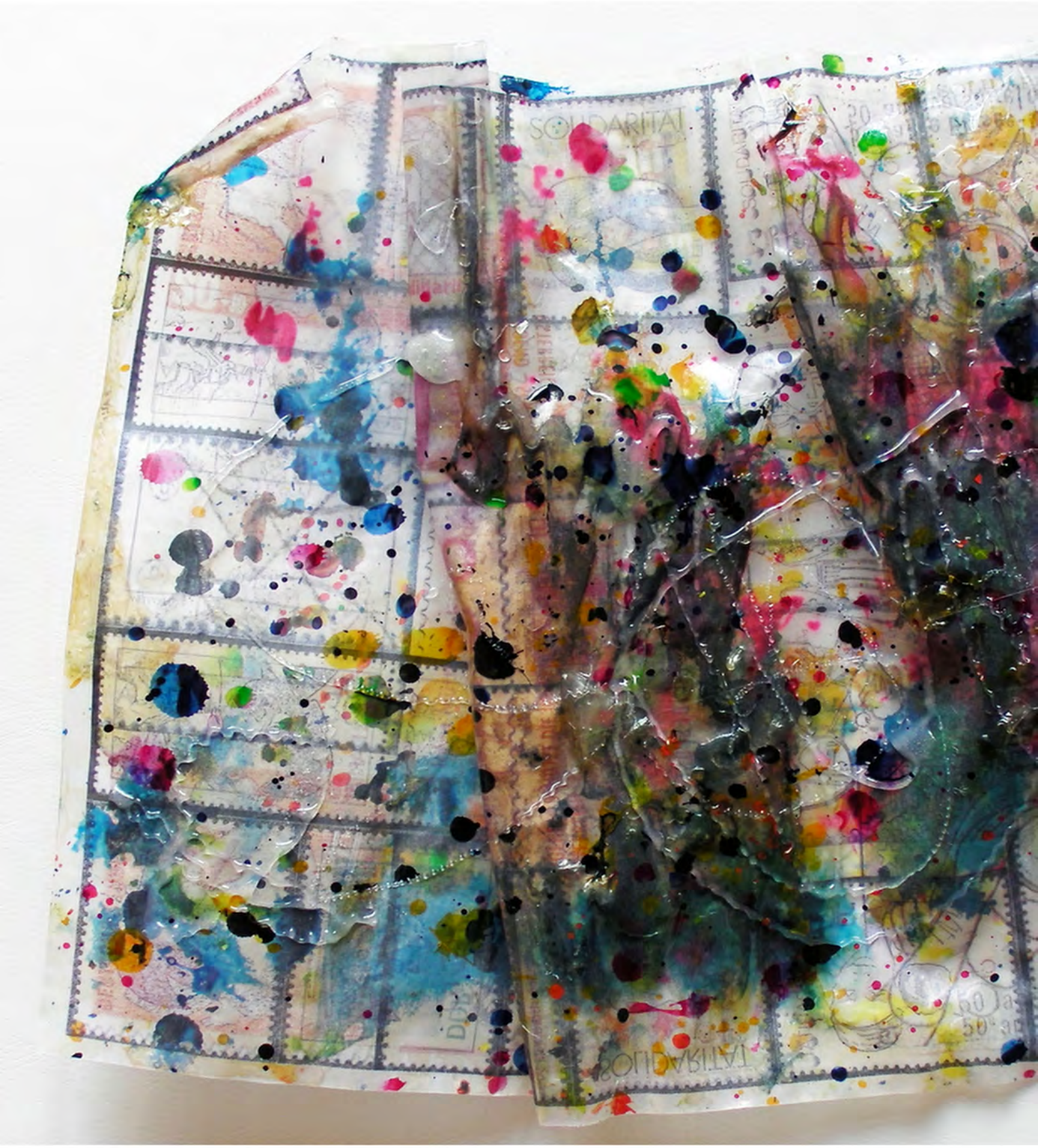
Beneath these superimposed coloured notes, the articles enclosed in gel remain visible, are partly readable, and provide a rectangular and linear counterpoint.

We have really appreciated the way your artworks challenge the viewers' perceptual parameters and we dare say that they could be considered interzones of sensory perceptions. Scottish painter Peter Doig once remarked that even the most realistic paintings are derived more from within the head than from what's out there in front of us, how do you consider the relationship between reality and imagination, playing within your artistic production?

Anja Sieber: A very interesting point of view. I would add a preliminary stage and claim: without a realistic picture in mind, it is difficult to grasp the sensory perception inside and give it strength. I derive this from abstractions of figures and objects,

Rings um uns hoben sich die Leiber a

us dem Stein 1, Transcript of Peter Weiss' The Aesthetics of Resistance, 2011, Mixed Media on Paper, 14 x 20 inches



Solicloud piece 24, 2015, Mixed Media on Paper, 15 x 20 x 1 in

as for example in my series "Outside", and choose the substratum of thoughts for my work to achieve even greater abstraction. Words and the distilled statement itself act as an anchor for me, as well as the framework formed by the typographic lines and blocks. With this point of reference, I connect with the world and, at the same time, include my personal feelings and ideas. By locating the work in a specific context, I place myself into an intellectual sphere I perceive as reality.

Canadian artist Jeff Wall once stated that "a picture is something that makes invisible its before and after." Our perception of reality is informed by imperceptibly interwoven experiences: how does everyday life's experience fuel your creative process? In particular, as an abstract visual artist, do you think that a creative process could be disconnected from direct experience?

Anja Sieber: Isn't it the other way around in processual art – the before and the after remain in the picture? Not only in a material form, but also conceptually. In general, I share Jeff Wall's view that no work of art can be created without everyday perception and always has a perceptible or indiscernible impact on the productive process.

As you have remarked in your artist's statement, you are fascinated by the possibility space remains to be explored on another occasion – entering with your voice and your body a new room in which poetic, intellectual, commonplace or political thoughts pass directly into an art event. We daresay that your artworks not only express your personal vision, but also and especially work as a communication tool that give life to a more general

Pergamon Frieze 2, Transcript of Peter Weiss' The Aesthetics of Resistance, 2012, Mixed Media on Paper, 33 x 46 inc

hes, photo: Daniel Kulle

Solicloud, 2015
mobilé of 100 pieces, altonale art prize competition, Hamburg

Weiss Papers 3, 2016, wire wrapped with paper, 12 x 12 x 3 inches (photo: Daniel Kulle)

interaction with wide audience where everyone can find something new, personal and universal: how important is for you the degree of openness of your artworks and how open would you like them to be understood? Moreover, do you believe that art is universally understandable?

Anja Sieber: Art is subtle. Visual language has a different effect on the viewer than text and speech. Nevertheless, art is of course a form of communication.

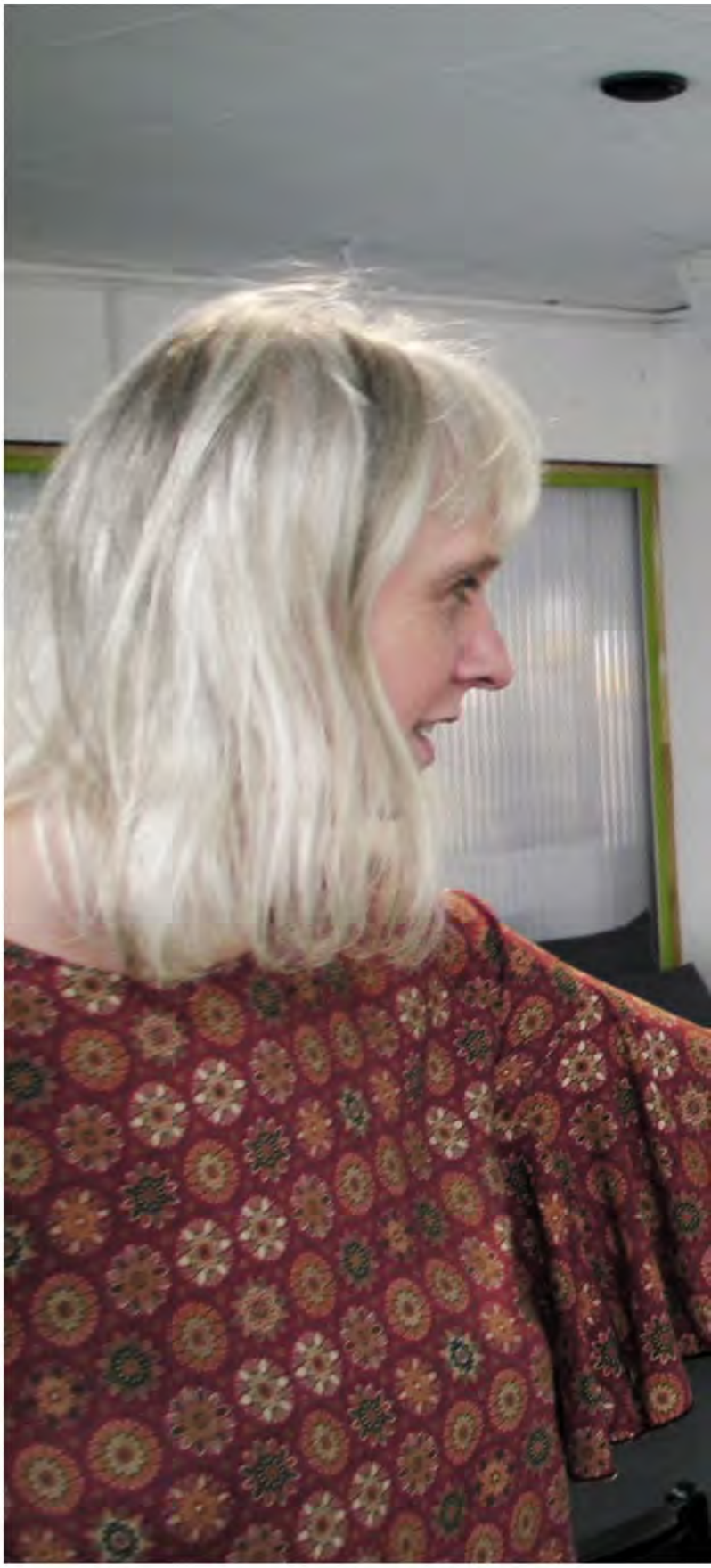
That's why I came up with the idea of going back to medieval manuscripts. I studied the astronomer Galileo Galilei, the Italian poet Alighieri Dante and the French Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot. Since these cultural assets are in the public

Live-Performance with wire transWriting with wire Dante's The Gates of Hell, 2012

Contemporary Art Ruhr in Essen Germany

video still: Birgit Ginkel

domain, I was able to download some digital copies of these old venerable books and use them for my own purposes. In particular, a large wall installation consisting of many round works in different sizes on Galileo's star observations stimulated the interaction with the public. In this case, the universal message of the inherent text addresses the viewer additionally via the "replica" of a planetary constellation. In the meantime, this series is temporarily sold out! As an artist, you must always be "open" to the perceptions of your audience, which frequently deviate from the artistic intention. Most visitors who wander around an art fair do not initially concern themselves with the concept behind a work of art. Either it appeals to them, or it doesn't. The reason my exhibits stimulate communication is often the enigmatic "material": viewers ask if it is ceramics, sheet metal or plastic. The answer "paper" often provokes a conversation. I find visitors' idiosyncratic interpretations and sometimes even suggestions highly enriching, as such discussions remind me of the reviews of paintings in the Academy. But the openness could go much further than that. Imagine what would happen if I started a challenge on Instagram and asked my followers to post their favourite quotes from world literature … A collection of such quotations could be used to create an interesting new interactive project for a touring exhibition ...



As you have remarked once, your practice is based on "what you hear" during transWRITing, painting, forming paper objects and doing performances, and as we

Anja Sieber at Gallery Sui Valet Berlin with How to Pitch to Hyerallergic 7, 2018, Mixed Media on Paper, 98 x 59 inches

Live performance with wire transWRITing the poem On the moon, a smell by Galit Seliktar at open]art[space Pot

sdam 2010 open]art[space Potsdam 2010

noticed in your On the moon, a smell performance, that our readers can view at https://vimeo.com/158450598, your approach highlights the importance of manuality. New York City based artist Lydia Dona once stated that in order to make art today one has to reevaluate the conceptual language behind the mechanism of art making itself: do you create your works gesturally, instinctively? Or do you methodically transpose geometric schemes? In particular, how do you consider the role of chance and improvisation playing within your creative process?

Anja Sieber: In a live performance with aluminium wire, the tension between language and image naturally increases. The voice guides the hand that transforms the words into a sculpture made of wire. The words necessarily become abstracted by the gestural line that is detached from them, which still contains the communicative act – and thus carries meaning.

The video is part of a German-Israeli collaboration from the year 2010. You see me transWRITing the poem "On the moon, a smell" by Galit Seliktar, which is played with her voice in Hebrew and my voice in German via loudspeakers. Since I work with wire and without printed paper, a rectangular box serves as a geometric form. On top it, the "transcript" accumulates and unfolds.

When I am trying out a new technique or material, I often act wildly and freely, without a chosen intellectual concept. In other words: when the sheet is still completely blank, I also enjoy working from instinct and improvisation, as for example in my pure ink overlays in "Being Free". Regarding my tran-

Weiss Papers 8, 2016, Mixed Media on Paper, 12 x 12 inches photo: Daniel Kulle

sWRITings on paper, I combine a conceptual approach with an intuitive expressiveness through the colours.

When exploring edges or shapes, your artworks feature unique combination between sense of freedom and subtle still rigorous sense of geometry — as the

Weiss Papers 4, 2016, Paper, 12 x 12 x 3 inches photo: Daniel Kulle

works from your Weiss' The Aesthetics of Resistance. Moreover, we have particularly appreciated the way they create such enigmatic patterns, communicating an alternation between tension and release. How does your own psychological make-up determine the nuances of tones that you decide to include moment by mo-

Anja Sieber in action as artist-in-residence in Zürich, 2018 (photo: Howard Brundrett)

ment in your artworks and in particular, are there any special states of mind that you need in order to make such decisions?

Anja Sieber: The monumental work about the fascist resistance threw me into a state of rage but also gave me utopian hope. As in the novel, I also find

Since a woman writes me, 2010

wire transcript 1 of a poem by Galit Seliktar, wire, acrylic gel, 7 x 5 x 1 in

Artist-in-Residency Zurich

(photo: **Howard Brundrett**)

certain set frames to psychologically "endure" the historical contexts. I play with lightness and joy as well as with melancholy and consternation. I have not only used the typographic book pages, giving my works a geometric pattern, but also the audiobook version. Thus I was absorbing and interpreting the literary words and fictional content as I was painting.

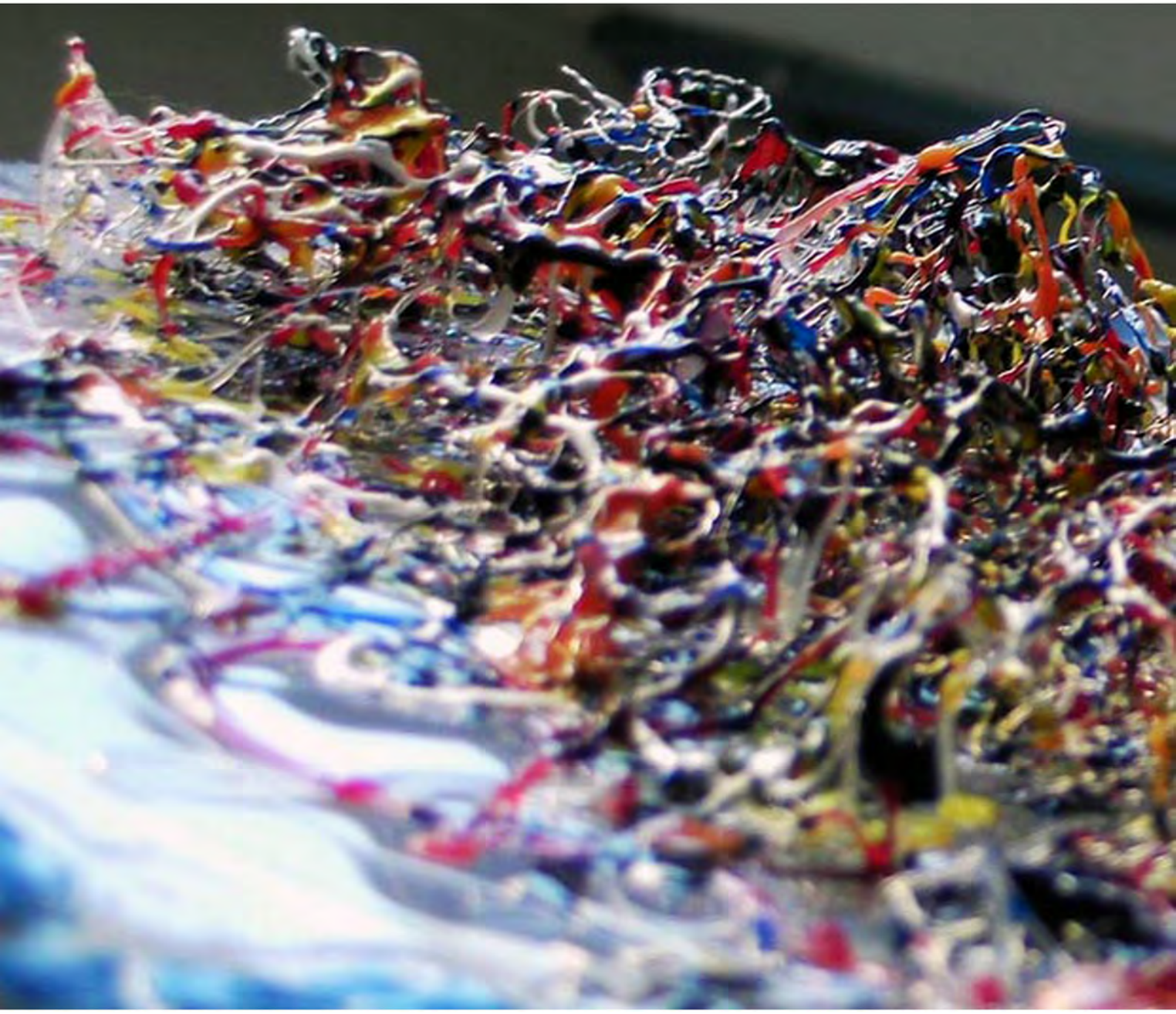
The Weiss series operated in several directions. Here you can also find free watercolour drafts in a hand-drawn rectangle with coloured applied writing. I experimented with blank paper and wire here too.

For my art production I always need the "special" moment. For this reason, I have to imagine an important project and a predetermined exhibition location. Without real-time pressure from outside I often find it difficult to start. When I know where this new idea is taking me, I can proceed. And throughout the process, I have this place clearly in my mind.

You are an established artist: your artworks are in a number of private art collections in Zurich, Berlin and Hamburg, and over the years your paintings have been exhibited in several occasions, including Miami River Art, Art Beijing, art KARLSRUHE, Kunst Zürich and PREVIEW BERLIN: how do you consider the nature of your relationship with your audience? Direct relationship with the viewers in a physical context is definetely the most important one, in order to snatch the spirit of a work of Art. However, as the move of Art from traditional gallery spaces, to street and especially to the online realm — as Instagram — increases: as a co-curator of BUNKERHILL Galerie, Hamburg, how would in your opinion change the relationship with a globalised audience?

Anja Sieber: I believe the pandemic will push artists, including myself, to inevitably market themselves online to a larger extent. Nowadays, more and more apps are tailored to online presence and sales. There are already inventory systems and exchangeable "rooms" in which works of art can be digitally attached to a wall for previews, etc. The collaboration between artist and gallery will definitely change. Both parties will invest more in online sales. Temporary collaborations will be created, giving the artist more independence and bringing new collectors to the galleries. Exclusive contracts will be a thing of the past, new agreements are needed.Even if buyers are given the right to return the acquired work, the personal contact to the artist, which is crucial for so many collectors, will be lost. Therefore, since the beginning of the lockdown, I have invested a lot of time in my Instagram account (see https://www.instagram.com/anjasieber_art). This small-format medium with its many interactive possibilities is currently replacing multiple facets of previous communication. However, as both an artist and a curator, I wouldn't want to miss the direct contact to the art scene, and I still consider a visit to the site essential. A work becomes art by being embedded in a context. This context not only consists of a discourse but also exists through space and the personal encounter. What the Insta community is struggling for is already given here: authenticity.

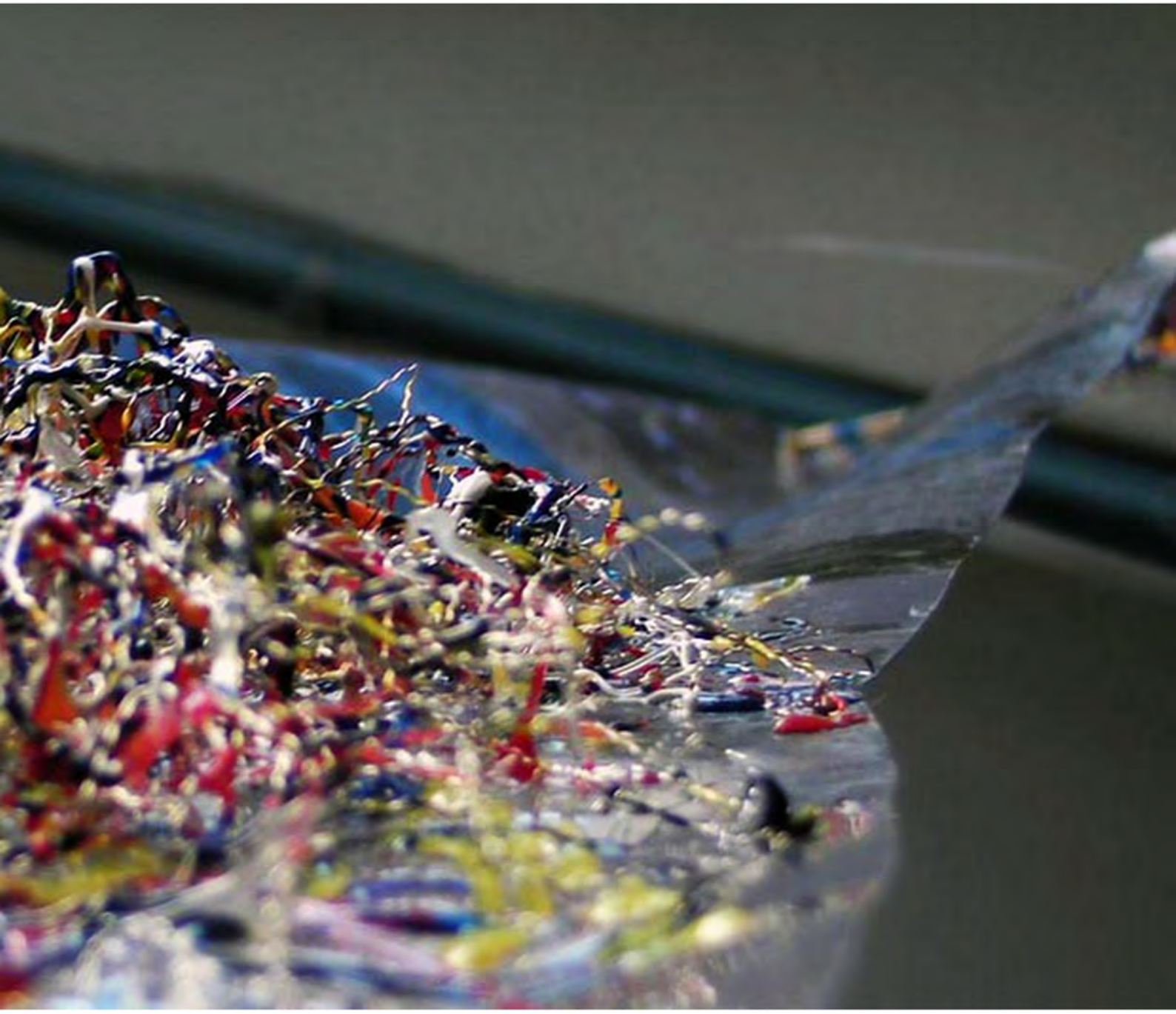
We have really appreciated the multifaceted nature of your artistic research and before leaving this stimulating



Since a woman writes me, 2010, wire transcript 9 of a poem by Galit Seliktar, wire, acrylic gel, detail

conversation we would like to thank you for chatting with us and for sharing your thoughts, Anja. What projects are you currently working on, and what are some of the ideas that you hope to explore in the future?

Anja Sieber: Currently I am very inspired by my expe



riences with Instagram. I could imagine a new series based on this particular media aesthetic and its communication streams. And I sincerely hope that the art market will open up and will offer many new opportunities in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

English editing: Christine House