

Content

ABOUT THE ARTIST	4	SOUND	
WUNDERKAMMER INSTALLATIONS	6	SCULPTURES & INSTALLATIONS	106
WONDER OBJECTS	19	VIDEO / VIDEO-INSTALLATIONS & -PERFORMANCES	116
SELECTED INSTALLATION & EXHIBITION VIEWS	52	PERFORMANCES & INTERVENTIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE	133
CONCEPTUAL & PERFORMATIVE-GESTURE WORKS	72	TEXT BASED WORKS	140
EXPLORATIONS OF TIME & PRESENCE	84	ARTIST CV	145
CONCEPTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY	96	SELECTED TEXTS	148

Curious about

subjective archives	Gesamtkunstwerke	teaching	wonder	tacit knowledge
spatial narratives	Wunderkammer	fragments	artistic research	object biographies
materialities/ immaterialities	searching	the unknowable	alchemy	black mirrors
time (-travel)	idea-objects	inter-	inner world	Nachdenken
Romantic Conceptualism	Progressive Universal Poesie	poeticising	outer world	terra incognita
writing with objects	Jason Dodge	doppelgangers	The Poet / The Artist	invisibility
never	readymade	mistakes	wondering	ink
poetic gestures	the Arabesque	young Yoko Ono	familiar / unfamiliar	returning
chance	physical states	breath	first time sensations	serendipity
if	deliberate foolishness	Magical Idealism	absence / presence	ensouling things
The Wunderbare	Novalis	leaving	Early German Romanticism	now
Friedrich Schlegel	the empty sheet of paper	un-knowing	thresholds	then
wanderings	ordinary / extraordinary	void	Duchamp	unwritten words
past/present/future	particles	finding	(un)translatability	longing
Jorge Luis Borges	poetry	Din A4	Bas Jan Ader	space(s)
here	traces	objetchood	The Arabesque	open processes
finite / infinite	words	Romantic Irony	Atlantis	gaps
there	romanticising	the state of sleep	The Schildburghers	

About the artist

Laura Kuch (born 1980) is a German interdisciplinary artist. Her mostly conceptually-based art works range from objects and installations to sound-works, video and video-performances to interventions in public space. For the realization of her works the artist uses a variety of media and materials.

Her art practice explores the realms between materiality and immateriality, narration/writing and the visual, poetic and prose, presence and absence, process and manifestation/ transformation, microcosm and macrocosm, subject and object, known and unknown, action/gesture and imagination/thought, mind-space and physical space, the conditioned and the absolute.

As a Romantic and artist Laura Kuch is on an ongoing search for wonder and the poetic and investigates notions such as time, language, longing, and the ensouling of things and attempts to make them intelligible for herself and others through a visual-conceptual practice.

Laura Kuch studied Visual Communication at the HfG Offenbach, University of Art and Design, and Fine Art at the Städelschule Frankfurt, Academy of Fine Art where she graduated 2008 as Meisterschülerin of Prof. Tobias Rehberger. She's

currently completing an MPhil in the practice-led Fine Art research programme at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL in London where she's exploring the German Early Romantic's literary and philosophical concepts in and as a contemporary fine art practice.

Laura received several grants and awards is alumna of both the German Academic Exchange Service DAAD and the German National Academic Foundation. Exhibitions include various solo and international group shows, amongst others Galerie Lorenz Frankfurt, Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden, Federal Exhibition Hall of Germany Bonn, The 2nd Moscow Biennale, 4th Gothenburg Biennale, Centre of Contemporary Art Prishtina, Kunsthalle Luzern, Arts Depot London, Museum Sinclair Haus and Wilhelm-Hack-Museum.

Conferences for which she presented papers include: 'Romantic Intermediality', University of Helsinki, 2011; 'Conference on Practice-Based Research in Art and Design', Bauhaus University Weimar, 2011; 'Art as a mode of enquiry', The Ruskin School Oxford, 2012; 'New Perspectives on the Romantic Period', Tate Britain, 2012; 'Wonder in Contemporary Art Practices', University of Newcastle, 2013.

Besides she teaches as a visiting lecturer, works part-time as a school teacher for fine art and gives workshops in relation to her practice.

Über die Künstlerin

Laura Kuch (geboren 1980) ist eine deutsche, interdisziplinäre Künstlerin. Ihre meist konzeptbasierten, künstlerischen Arbeiten reichen von Objekten und Installationen über Soundarbeiten, Video und Video-Performances bis hin zu Interventionen im öffentlichen Raum. Bei der Umsetzung ihrer Arbeiten greift die Künstlerin auf eine Vielfalt an Medien und Materialien zu.

In ihrer künstlerischen Praxis untersucht sie die Spannungsfelder zwischen Materialität und Immaterialität, Narration/Schreiben und Bildnerischem, Poetischem und Prosaischem, Präsenz und Abwesenheit, Prozess und Manifestation/Transformation, Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos, Subjekt und Objekt, Bekanntem und Unbekanntem, Innenwelt und Außenwelt, Handlung/ Geste und Imagination/Denken, gedanklichen und physischen Räumen, Bedingtem und Unbedingtem.

Auf der fortwährenden urromantischen Suche nach dem sinnstiftenden Wunderbaren und Poetischen erforscht Laura Kuch Themen wie Zeit, Sprache, Sehnsucht, das Wundern und die Beseelung der Dinge und versucht diese durch eine bildnerisch-konzeptionelle Praxis für sich und andere begreifbar und zu machen.

Von 2000 bis 2004 studierte sie zunächst Visuelle Kommunikation bei Heiner Blum an der HfG Offenbach und wechselte dann in die Bildhauerklasse von Prof. Tobias Rehberger der HfBK Städelschule Frankfurt, wo sie ihr Studium der Freien Bildenden Kunst 2008 als Meisterschülerin abschloss. Zurzeit arbeitet sie an einem praxisbezogenen künstlerischen Forschungsprojekt

(MPhil in Practice-led Fine Art Research) an der Slade School of Fine Art des University College London. Sie untersucht dabei die Ideen und Konzepte der literarisch-philosophischen deutschen Frühromantik und deren Neubelebung in einer zeitgenössischen, bildnerisch-künstlerischen Praxis.

Laura Kuch hat mehrere Preise und Stipendien erhalten, sie ist Alumna der Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes, sowie des Deutsch Akademischen Austauschdienstes DAAD. Ihre künstlerischen Arbeiten werden seit fast 15 Jahren in Gruppenausstellungen verschiedener Institutionen ausgestellt, darunter: Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, 2nd Moscow Biennale, 4th Gothenburg Biennale, Centre of Contemporary Art Prishtina, Arts Depot London, Museum Sinclair Haus und Wilhelm-Hack-Museum. Zu ihren Einzelausstellungen gehören unter anderem Ausstellungen in der Galerie Lorenz, Frankfurt, und dem Nassauischen Kunstverein, Wiesbaden.

Sie verfasst Beiträge für künstlerische und wissenschaftliche Publikationen, wie zuletzt für den 2017 bei Routledge erschienenen Band „Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice“, und spricht als Referentin auf Konferenzen, darunter: „Romantic Intermediality“, University of Helsinki; „Practice-Based Research in Art and Design“, Bauhaus University Weimar; „Art as a mode of enquiry“, The Ruskin School Oxford; „New Perspectives on the Romantic Period“, Tate Britain.

Neben ihrer künstlerischen Praxis lehrt Laura Kuch als Gastdozentin, unterrichtet in Teilzeit als Kunstlehrerin am Gymnasium und konzipiert Workshops im Bereich schöpferisches Denken und Handeln.



WUNDERKAMMER INSTALLATIONS

"The world has an original ability to be enlivened through me. (...)

I have an original tendency and ability to enliven the world."

"The world must be romanticised. In that way one finds original meaning again. (...)

By giving what is common an elevated meaning, the ordinary a mysterious aspect,
the familiar the dignity of the unknown, the finite the appearance of infinity,
thus I romanticise it."

(Novalis, *Fragments*, 1798)

„Die Welt hat eine ursprüngliche Fähigkeit, durch mich belebt zu werden. (...).

Ich habe eine ursprüngliche Tendenz und Fähigkeit, die Welt zu beleben.“

„Die Welt muss romantisiert werden. So findet man den ursprünglichen Sinn wieder. (...)

Indem ich dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnisvolles Ansehn,
dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein gebe,
so romantisiere ich es.“

(Novalis, *Fragmente*, 1798)



Wunderkammer VIII - ah, but I may as well try and catch the wind
2018, selected wonder objects and hidden speakers playing the sound
of the artist's voice attempting to imitate the sound of the wind

In Search of the Blue Flower

The Blue Flower functions as a metaphor for wonder and the ineffable that can never be satisfyingly described with words. It first appeared in the unfinished novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* by the early Romantic writer Novalis in 1802 and became a central symbol in the literary and philosophical movement of German Romanticism. At the beginning of Novalis' novel the young protagonist Heinrich wakes up from having a dream about a mysterious blue 'wonder flower'. Filled with a deep longing to find it he sets forth on an actual as well as a spiritual journey to become a poet. Yet the Blue Flower remained forever unattained as the novel was never finished due to Novalis' early death.

I have been searching for the Blue Flower for a long time, encountering the world as a Romantic conceptual artist. Once in a while I catch a glimpse of it, inducing me to continue my perpetual wandering despite knowing that truly this flower can never be picked. But where to look for the 'wonder flower' today, you might ask, after the last *terra incognita* on the globe has been explored; after what the sociologist Max Weber called 'the disenchantment of the world' brought about by the Enlightenment and Modernity?

Wonder today, I believe, lies in the poetic potential of the ordinary. What constitutes my art practice is insisting on and pointing out the poetic within the everyday and seemingly familiar things, thereby creating a poeticised or romanticised version of themselves.

As *wonder objects* they become a part of my *Wunderkammer* collection – an object archive of which I am the creator and collector at the same time. *Wunderkammer* translates as wonder-chamber and is the German equivalent to a cabinet of curiosities. The historical *Wunderkammer* collections consisted of a wide range of wondrous natural history objects and artifacts. Presentation and content of the *Wunderkammer* depended on the collector's individual preferences and represented a kind of visual-lyrical interpretation and appropriation of the world. Although the *Wunderkammer* is originally a Renaissance concept, I recognise a very Romantic idea behind it: to wonder and to acknowledge the miraculous is the precondition to discover the poetic within things.

Displayed and (re-)arranged in an ongoing series of *Wunderkammer* installations my *wonder objects* serve as elements of a body of visual-conceptual text. This text evolves in space as if written on a three-dimensional sheet of paper. It's an ever-altering, arabesque narration in a *Wunderkammer* of the now, exploring the question of where and how we can find meaning – even, or maybe especially, within the most ordinary things.

Laura Kuch



Wunderkammer VIII - ah, but I may as well try and catch the wind
2018, selected wonder objects and hidden speakers playing the sound
of the artist's voice attempting to imitate the sound of the wind

Auf der Suche nach der Blauen Blume

Die Blaue Blume ist eine Metapher für das Wunderbare, das Unbedingte und letztlich Unsagbare. Die Sehnsucht und metaphorische Suche nach ihr wurden zum zentralen Symbol der literarisch-philosophischen Bewegung der deutschen Romantik

Ich bin auf der Suche nach der Blauen Blume. Ich suche sie schon lange.

Suche das Wunderbare in der Welt, der ich als Romantikerin und Künstlerin begegne. Sie zu finden ist wie der Versuch den Wind mit den bloßen Händen zu fangen. Und doch halte ich weiter Ausschau nach der lichtblauen Blume, die irgendwo am Wegesrande des Schöpferischen blüht.

Verborgenen im poetischen Potential des Gewöhnlichen liegt das Wunderbare. Auf dieses Potential zu beharren und mich fortwährend über vermeintlich Bekanntes zu wundern, begründet meine künstlerische Identität.

Das Poetische in alltäglichen Dingen aufzuzeigen und diese zu romantisieren, darauf beruht meine künstlerische Praxis.

Als *wonder objects* werden meine künstlerischen Arbeiten zu einem Teil meiner Wunderkammer Sammlung – ein Objekt-Archiv welches ich seit 2010 stetig aufbaue und dabei gleichzeitig als Kuratorin, Sammlerin und Schöpferin agiere.

Zum Inventar historischer Wunderkammern gehörten diverse Artefakte und Naturalien, die beim Betrachter Staunen und Verwunderung hervorrufen sollten. Inszenierung und Inhalt der Wunderkammer richtete sich nach dem

individuellen Gusto des Sammlers und spiegelten eine Form der Weltaneignung wieder.

Auch wenn das Sammlungskonzept der Wunderkammer aus der Zeit der Renaissance und des Barock stammt, erkenne ich darin einen zutiefst romantischen Gedanken: sich zu wundern und das Wunderbare anzuerkennen ist die Voraussetzung dafür, die Poesie der Dinge zu sehen und die Welt (neu) zu beleben.

Meine *wonder objects* sind Ideen-Objekte. In ihnen verschmilzt romantischer Geist mit der Welt der Dinge, treffen Subjekt und Objekt, Materielles und Immaterielles, Endliches und Unendliches aufeinander. Sie sind mein Vokabular, das ich immer wieder neu in den weißen Räumen meiner zeitgenössischen Wunderkammer Installationen zusammensetze, arrangiere und inszeniere. So entsteht eine sich stetig wandelnde, arabeske Narration, hineingesetzt in ein dreidimensionales weißes Blatt Papier.

Ihr Ende? Für immer offen.

Laura Kuch





Wunderkammer VIII

2018, detail



Wunderkammer VIII

2018, detail



Wunderkammer VI

2016, selected wonder objects,

mixed media



Wunderkammer VI

2016, detail

WONDER OBJECTS



In search of the Blue Flower

2010/2016, split crystal ball
9 x 17 x 17 cm



(Looking for)
The promise of a piece of clay
2012, raw clay
26 x 19 x 22 cm



Spaces Untold

2016, walnut, to be thrown into the sea, a lake or a river and exchanged for a new one once a year



What remains

2016, sealed wooden
box containing a brass
sundial and compass
8 x 8 x 8 cm



Aging Darkness
(from the series *Black Mirrors*)

2016, spray paint on corked
glass bottle, not to be opened
before 2058

19 x 8 x 8 cm



The knob for the door to the room
that was and will never be built

2013/2016, brass
5.5 x 5.5 x 5.5 cm



One lost and four found objects
(To Sten, who drowned at sea
or gave up chewing tobacco)

2013, key, engraved tobacco box,
piano key, 10 pence coin, lost
object



Forming thoughts

2016, altered steel spheres
Ø 9 cm and 5.5 cm



Forever Untitled

2014, rock, mirror
Ø mirror 60 cm



All Truths

2009/2016, steel teaspoons
3 x 27 cm



You and Me

2016, two broken and glued
Ikea bowls dropped at the
same moment, Ø each 16 cm



Silence (Conversation Piece)

2014, two used couple watches
with dead batteries purchased
on Ebay



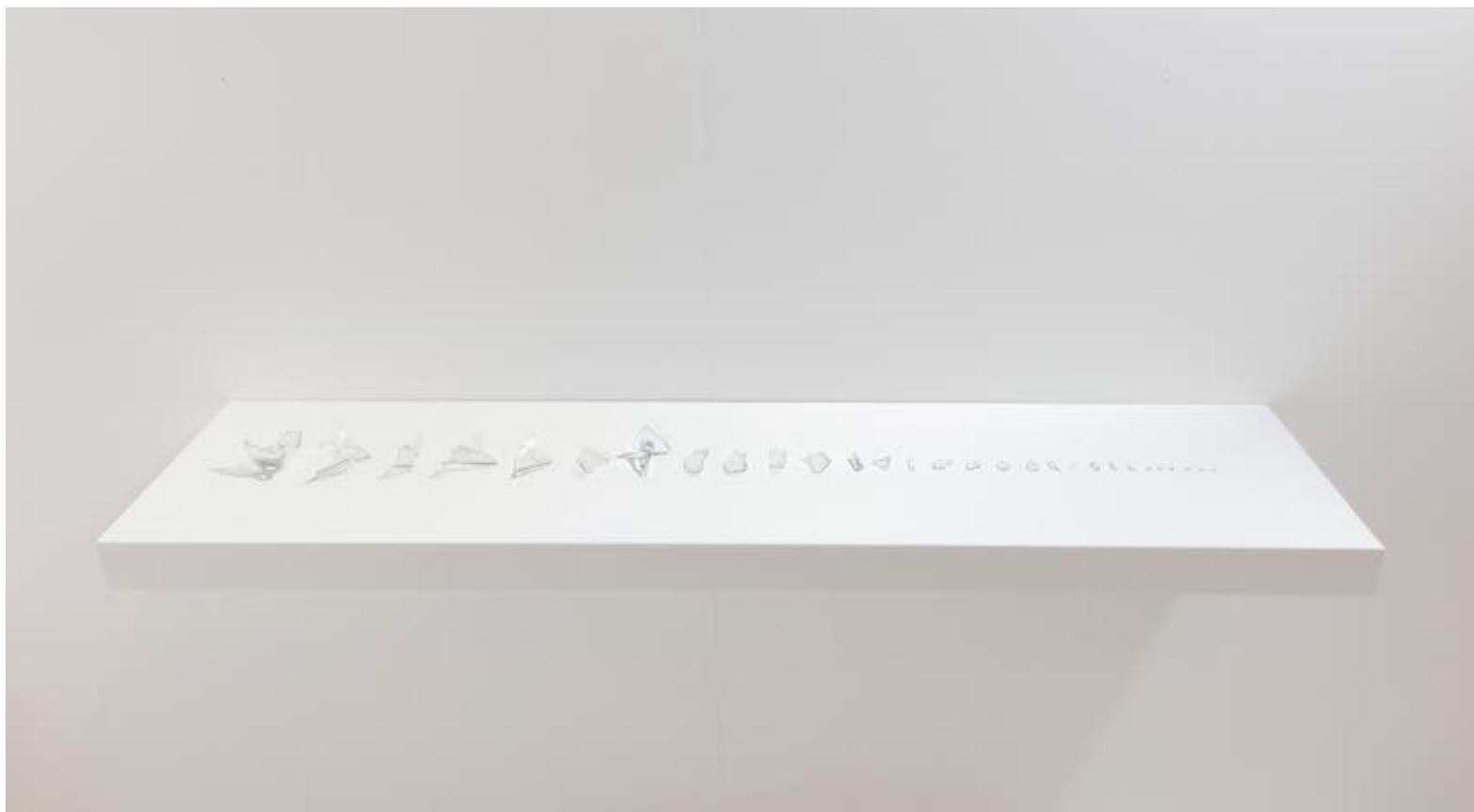
Sculpture for the words
I will never write II
(from the series *Book Proposals
in a Parallel Universe*)

2010, black ink, marble bowl
499 A4 sheets of paper



Saving something
for the way back

2016, tilted hourglass,
black sand, 7.5 x 17.5 x 7.5 cm



Letter to my grandfather
(1927-1996)

2016, shards of a broken
wine glass from the 1920s,
arrangement and dimensions
variable



The First and the Last Page
(from the series *Book Proposals
in a Parallel Universe*)

2015/2018,
ash of a burned sheet of Indian
recycling paper blown out of a
window facing southwestwards
and paper airplane with traces of ash



Writing device for a wall

2011, used pencil, wall
dimensions variable



Object for a poet's desk II
(from the series *Black Mirrors*)

2016, ash of a burned empty sheet of paper, mirror the size of a page from Adolf Grimme's book *Vom Wesen der Romantik* (*About the Essence of Romanticism*) from 1947, hairspray
20.7 x 12.5 cm



Object for a poet's desk I

2014, five blank dice, leather cup
dimensions variable



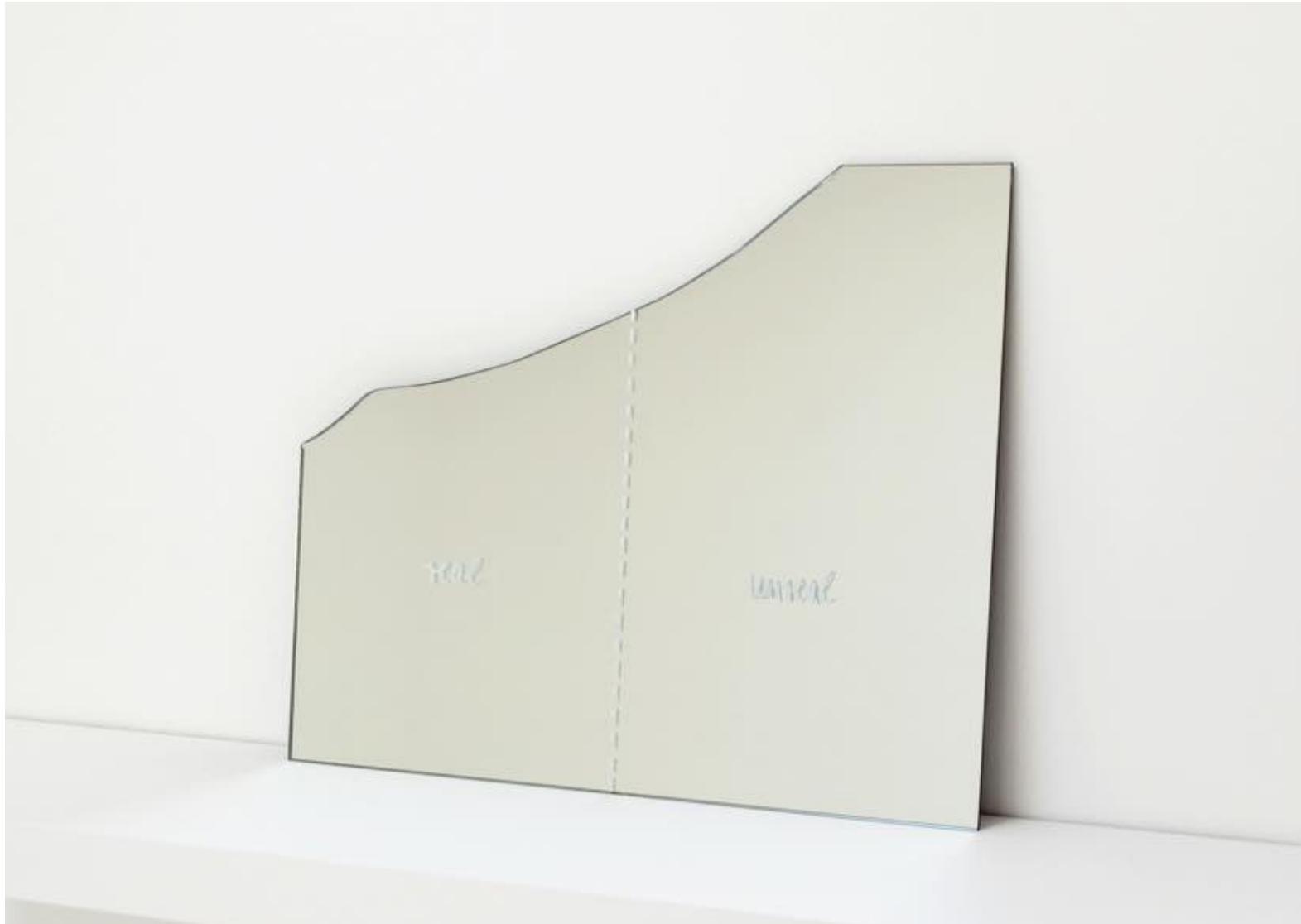
Object for a poet's desk IV

2016, inkjet print on drawing paper
DIN A4



Doppelgangers (for Lena)

2011, used, bent silver-plated forks
21 x 7 cm



Untitled

2014, paint on broken mirror
40 x 50 cm



minor key variations

2011 – 2012, bottle ship shipwrecked with
the attempt to get it out of the bottle;
sea water, sand, time
9.5 x 21 x 7.5 cm



Something I found and had
been looking for for a very long time

2011, stained and faded ancient world
map, 34.5 x 54.5 cm



One and three eggs

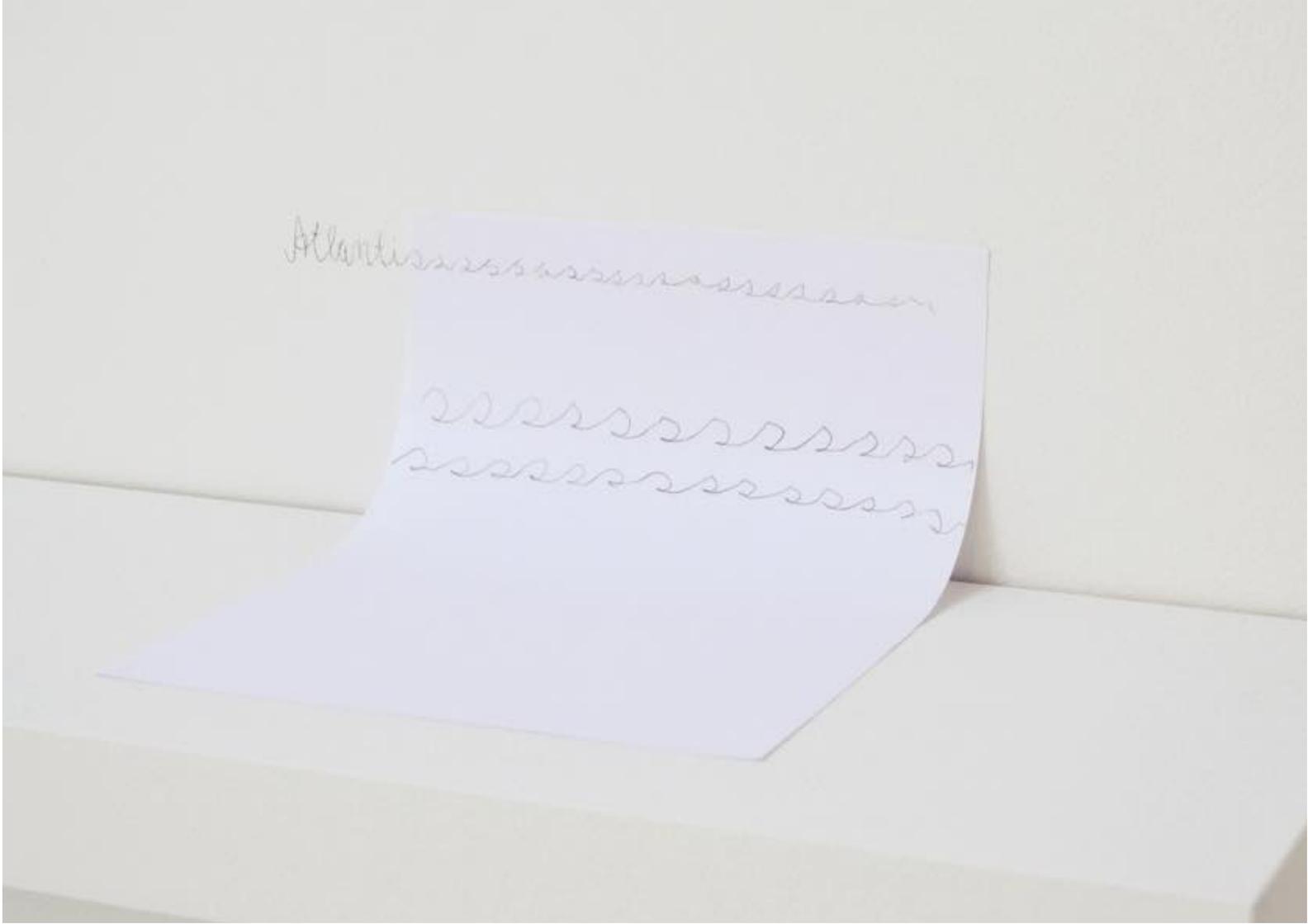
2013, cooked egg, raw egg, and
blown-out egg on ceramic stands

8 x 18 x 4 cm



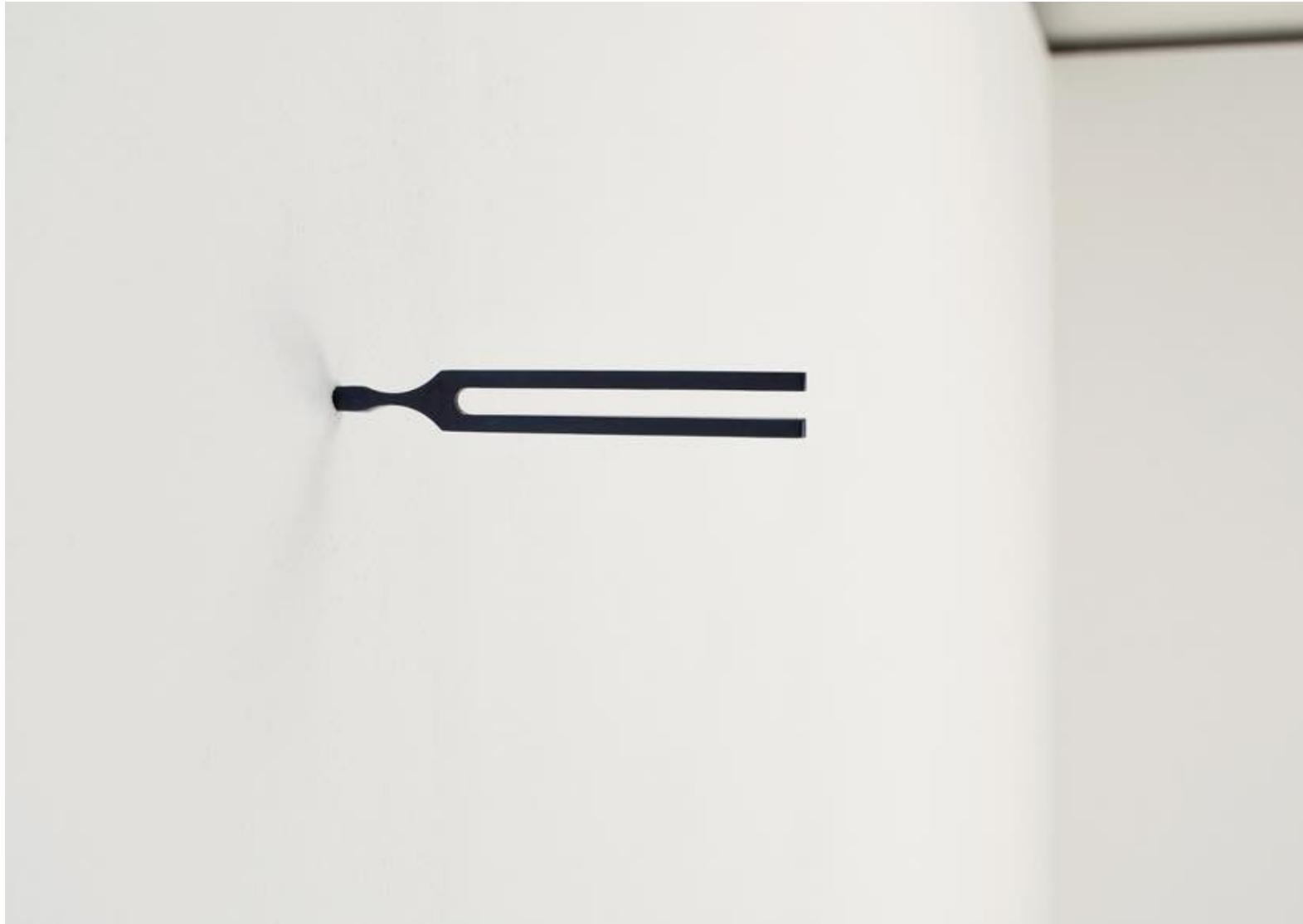
First ever seen by me
(Terra Incognita)

2011/2012, cut and dried fruits,
vegetables and pits in display
cabinet for butterflies
30 x 40 x 6 cm



Untitled

2011, found doodle on
A4 paper, writing on wall



HERE and THERE relations

2009, B-flat tuning fork, wall

*The pitch of the sound generated by black holes translates into the note of B-flat, also B-flat is used for tuning wind orchestras and allegedly it makes alligators bark.



Lyrics for a song

2016, glass, sea water, sand, pencil
15 x 18 x 13 cm



The Other One

2018, framed book page
25 x 25 cm



Variations of Void XII

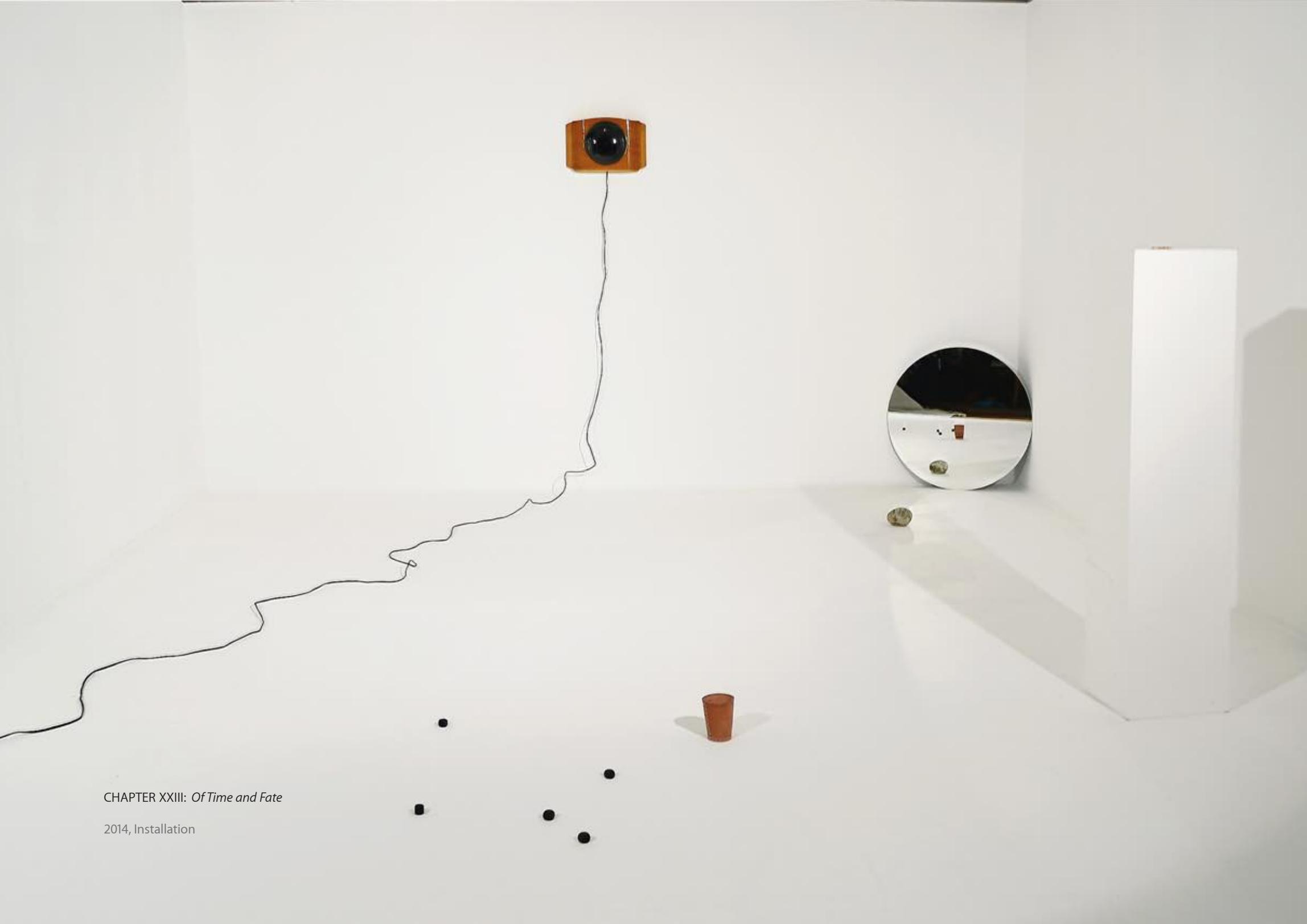
2012, series of prints made with a stamp produced on the basis of an empty file sent to a custom rubber stamp company, passe-partout, 20 x 30 cm



Variations of Void III

2012, series of prints made with a stamp produced on the basis of an empty file sent to a custom rubber stamp company; passe-partout, 20 x 30 cm

SELECTED INSTALLATION & EXHIBITION VIEWS



CHAPTER XXIII: *Of Time and Fate*

2014, Installation



EXPLORATIONS

2009, exhibition view



EXPLORATIONS

2009, exhibition view



Wunderkammer II

201, installation/ exhibition view



In Search of The Blue Flower (Wunderkammer III)

2012, Installation



Wunderkammer I

2010, detail

Wunderkammer I

2010, installation





Without the wall the wind would
have carried the willow into the world

2009, exhibition view



Without the wall the wind would
have carried the willow into the world

2009, exhibition view



Installation view:

Temporary Drawing Machine
(from the series Black Mirrors)

2009, bucket, mix of water and writing ink 'Leipziger Schwarz',
dripping water from the ceiling, lamp, watercolour paper,
clock in a glass crystal hidden in the ink water



Temporary Drawing Machine

2009, detail



Drawings from the Temporary Drawing Machine

2009, each 80 x 60 cm



Exhibition view *ENDE*:

Sculpture for the words

I will never write I

(from the series *Black Mirrors*)

2008, plinth, 40 ml black writing
ink wiped off and renewed each
day over the course the
exhibition, 100 x 30 x 30 cm



Exhibition view *ENDE*:

UNTITLED (from the series Black Mirrors)

2008, dispersed and fixated ash of 42 burned white
A4 paper sheets on a large mirror, 183,4 x 130 cm





Exhibition view *VINCULA*

Doppelgangers II

2012, easels with two resembling oil paintings of a nude female figure standing which the artist discovered in the storage of the UCL Art Museum collection.

One is by Dora Carrington the other by Fanny J. Fletcher



CONCEPTUAL & PERFORMATIVE-GESTURE WORKS



Without the wall the wind would
have carried the willow into the world

2009, pulverized willow drawing charcoal, artist's breath and movement, wall



Please tell me
(Writing device for a wall II)

2018, black crayon held by a wall,
five crumpled sheets of black DIN
A4 paper on which the artist wrote
using the black crayon



Farewell

2009, still from a video of the artist grieving in the dark on bended high glossy photo paper, blank A4 paper sheet held on the wall by a fan's wind, used cotton tissue



Explorer 200

2009, rubber boat inflated with the inhaled wind from the artist's home town in Germany, which was collected by her parents in plastic bags and sent to the artist in London



To the unknown viewer

2011, clay mask from a cast taken from the artist's face while she imagined being looked at by a future exhibition visitor



One hour in the parallel universe
(from the series Black Mirrors)

2010/2012, magnifying mirror
held over a candle during a one
hour meditation then printed on
watercolour paper

Ø mirror 17 cm, print DIN A4



To new worlds

2012, 42 grains of sand split
in half by the artist in the
course of a night, glass slides,
box, 11 x 28 x 13 cm



Cloud Studies (after Goethe)

2011, drawings produced by the artist slipping on watercolour paper placed on her studio floor, framed DIN A4



Mirror Pieces

2011, several pairs of glazed ceramic objects, each produced by the artist using her left and right hand simultaneously



When wishing still helped II
(or: The Frog Prince)

2009, flacons of mystic oil
"Love me" and mystic oil "Good
Luck" thrown at the wall,
paper, pieces of glass



Of all the things I am not aware of

2010 – 2011, framed paper from
the artist's sketchbook, worn
close to her heart at all times while
working on her Wunderkammer I
and II installations

40 x 32 and 36.5 x 26.5 cm

EXPLORATIONS OF TIME & PRESENCE



Right here 20 million years ago

2016, floor, brass disc Ø 20 cm



Now you're here now you're gone

2007, light box with spy-mirror connected to a light barrier
60x50x20 cm

When the viewer approaches the light box, the front
glass turns into an opaque mirror for the split of a second





Device for a time travelling gaze

2011, half transparent curtain dyed
with Tempranillo La Mancha 2010,
Chianti Costa alle Mue 2008, Spät-
burgunder Weißherbst 2007,
Bordeaux Phillipe de Rothschild
1980, Carmignano Cianchi
Baldazzi 1980, 230 x 130 cm
folded to 35 x 35 cm



About three and a half
years of my life

2012 – 2015, artist's hair, nail
Hair length 45 cm



One-Minute-Clock

2011, clay clock-face made by the artist within one minute, clockwork



Human clock
(from the series Black Mirrors)

2011, clock case with speaker,
60 minutes looped audio re-
cording of the artist trying to
imitate the ticking sound of a
clock, 23 x 35 x 7 cm



Untitled

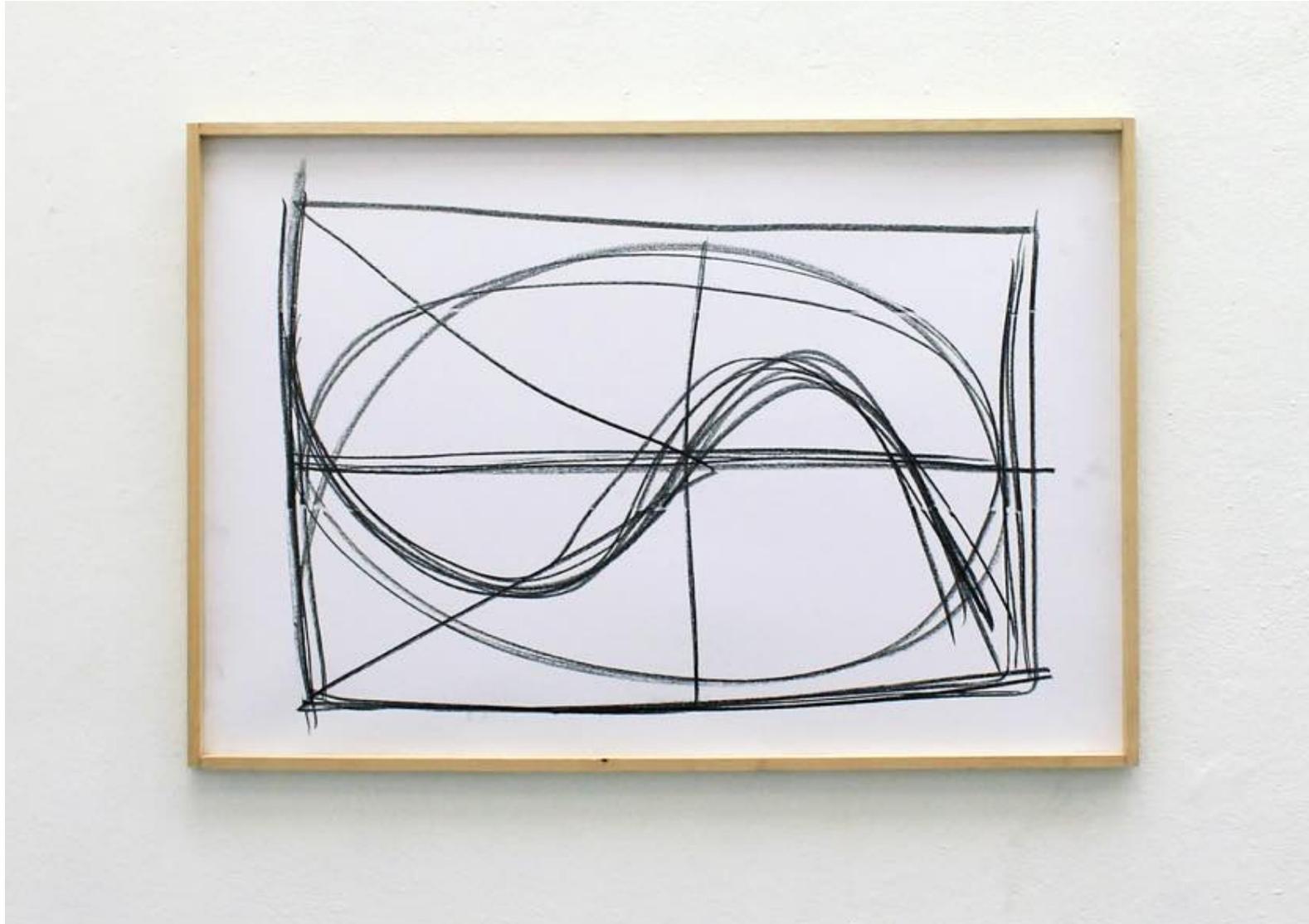
2016, text on convex
rearview mirror glass

6.5 x 29 cm



The past, the present and the future
– upside down

2010, three sheets of A4 transfer paper, nails



TIME STOOD SSSSSSSTILL

2012, pencil, paper, wood frame
50 x 70 cm

Letters of the sentence 'Time
stood still' written on top of
each other, turned by 90 degree



Study about the possibility of being in different places at the same time, in the past, the present and the future

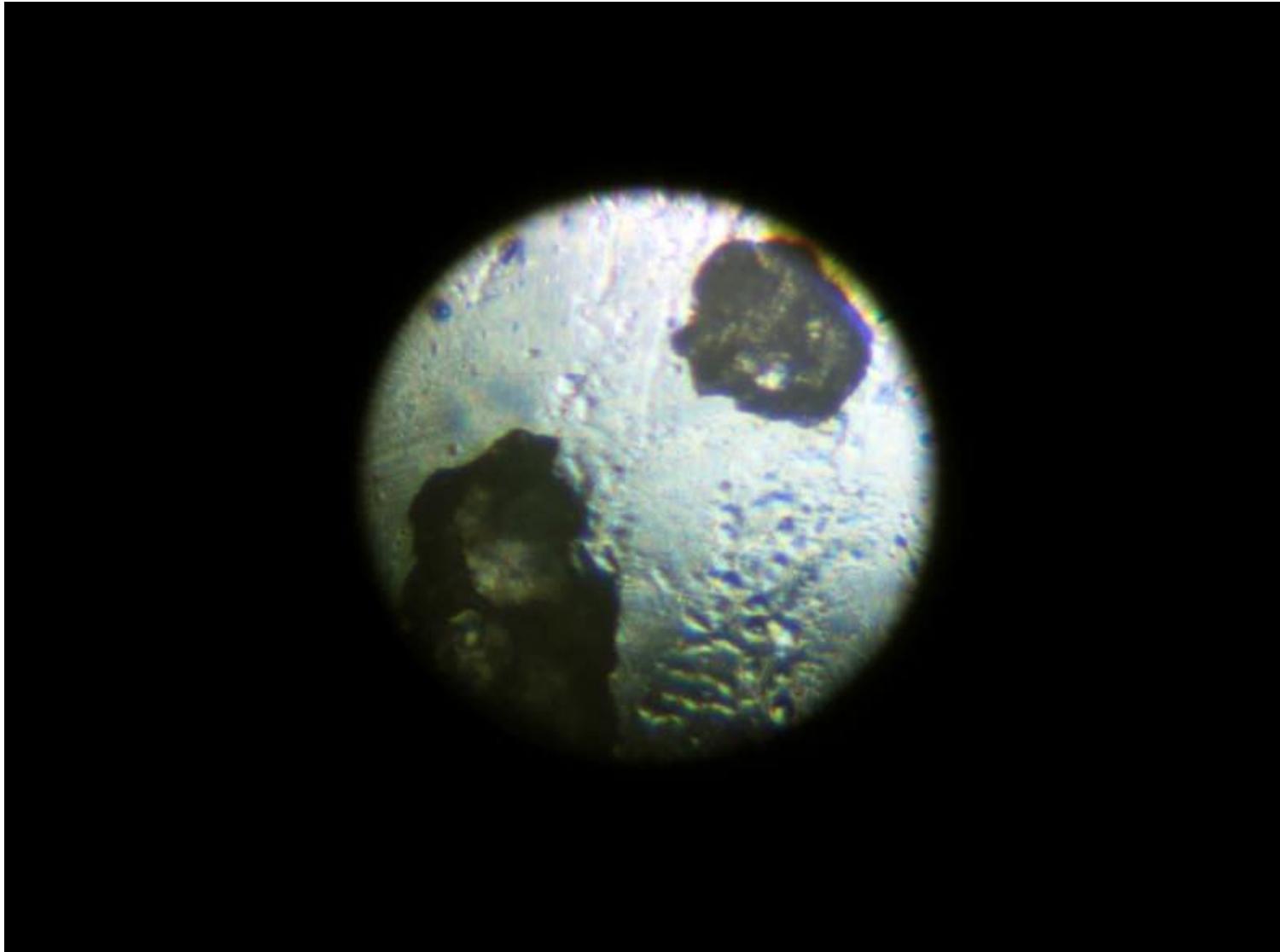
2011, colour print of two merged photographs taken at the same moment in different places – London 11.59 pm, August 12th and Paris 12.59 am, August 13th

CONCEPTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY



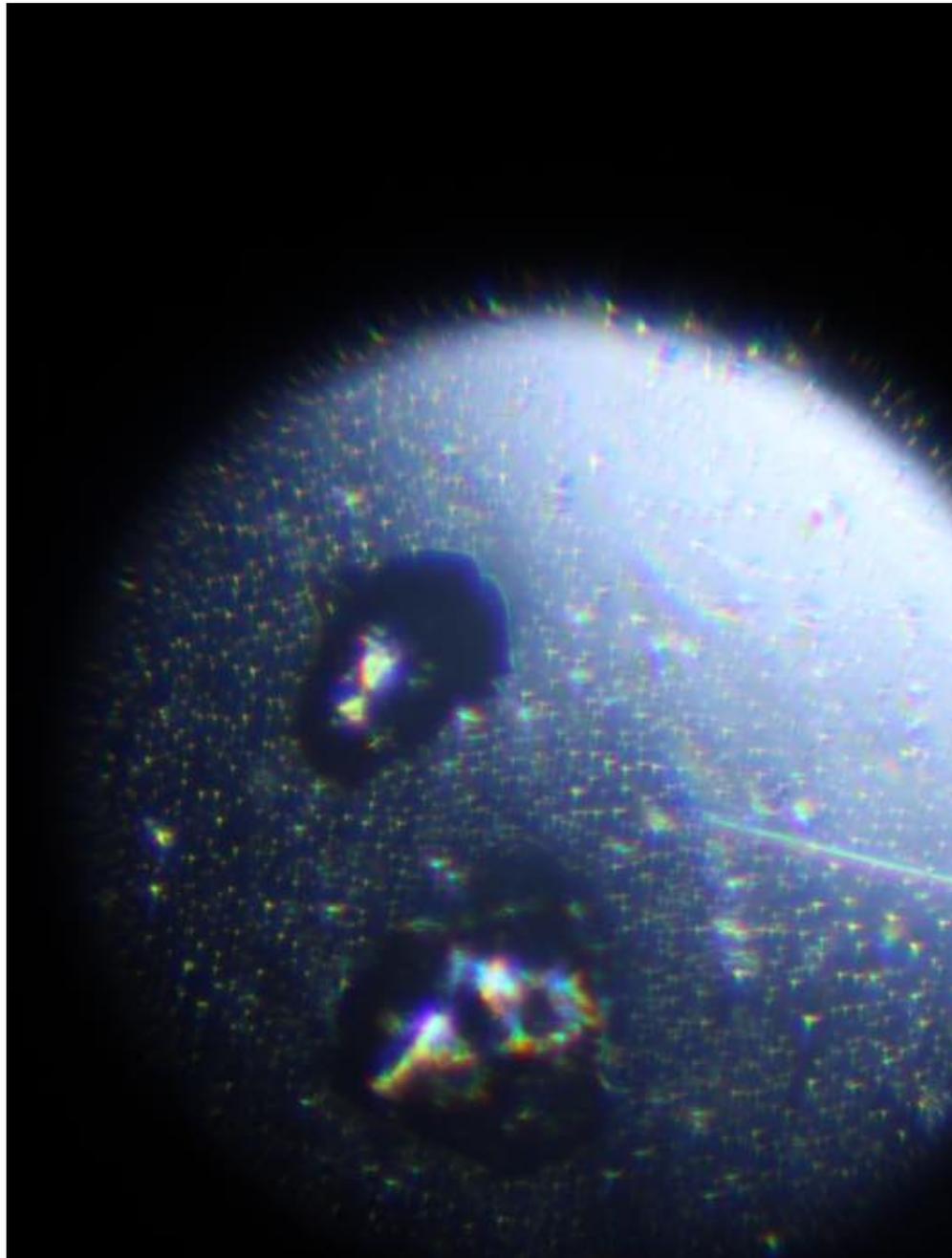
To New Worlds

2018, photographic series of microscopic views of
42 grains of sand split in half in the course of a night



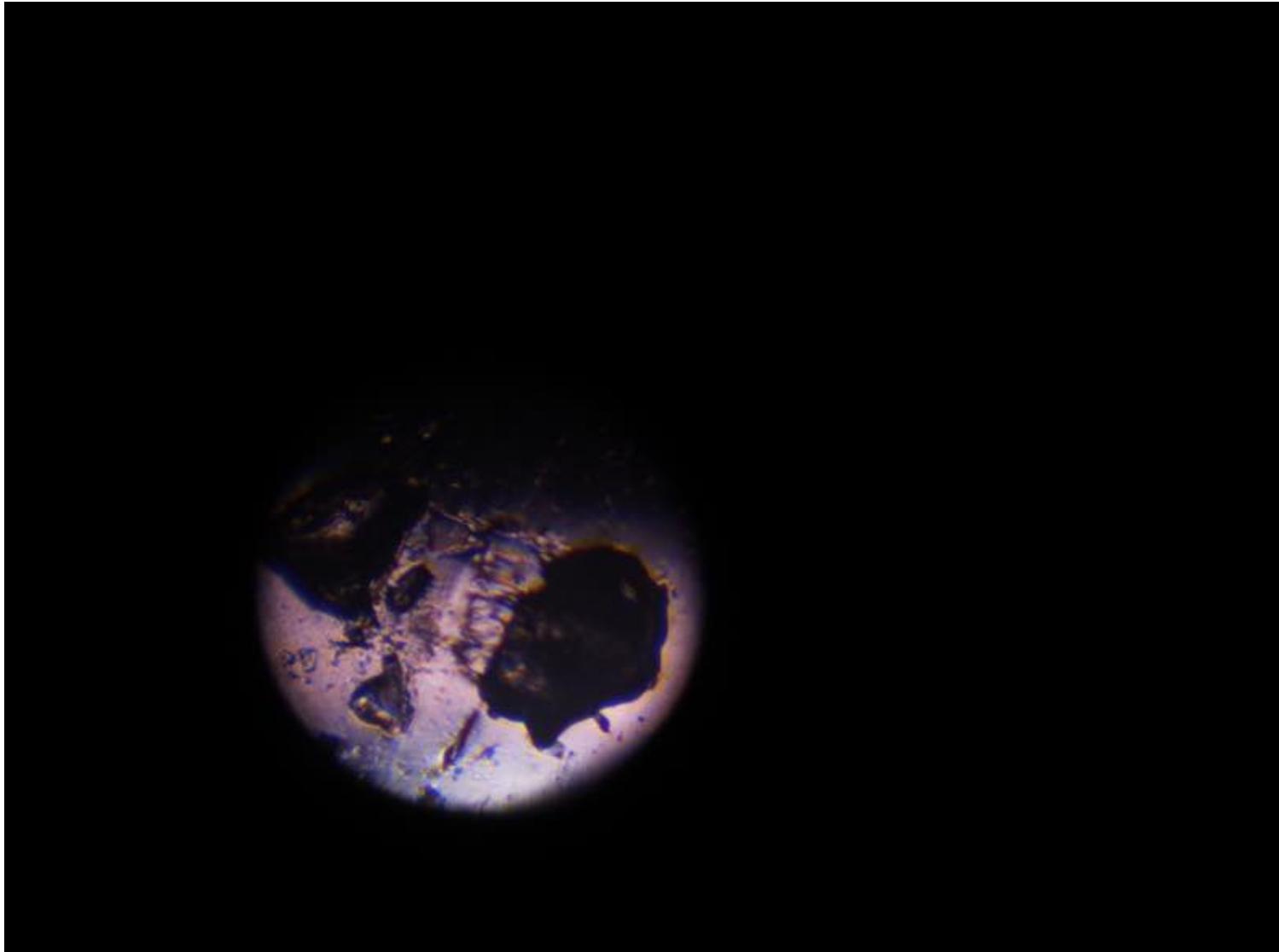
To New Worlds IV

2018, photographic series of microscopic views of 42 grains of sand split in half in the course of a night, c-print, 60 x 80 cm



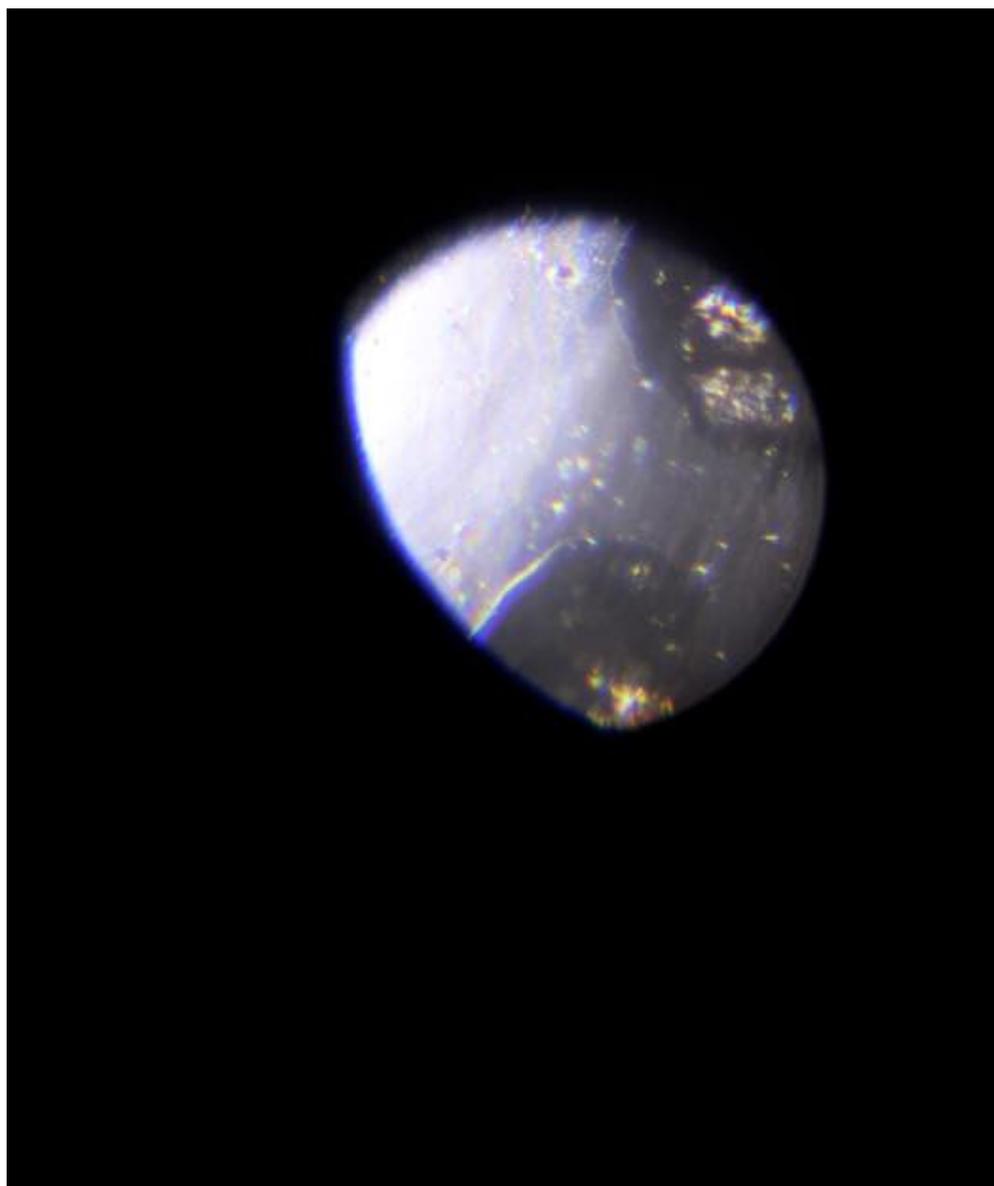
To New Worlds III

2018, photographic series of microscopic views of 42 grains of sand split in half in the course of a night, c-print, 80 x 50 cm



To New Worlds V

2018, photographic series of microscopic views of 42 grains of sand split in half in the course of a night, c-print, 50 x 60 cm



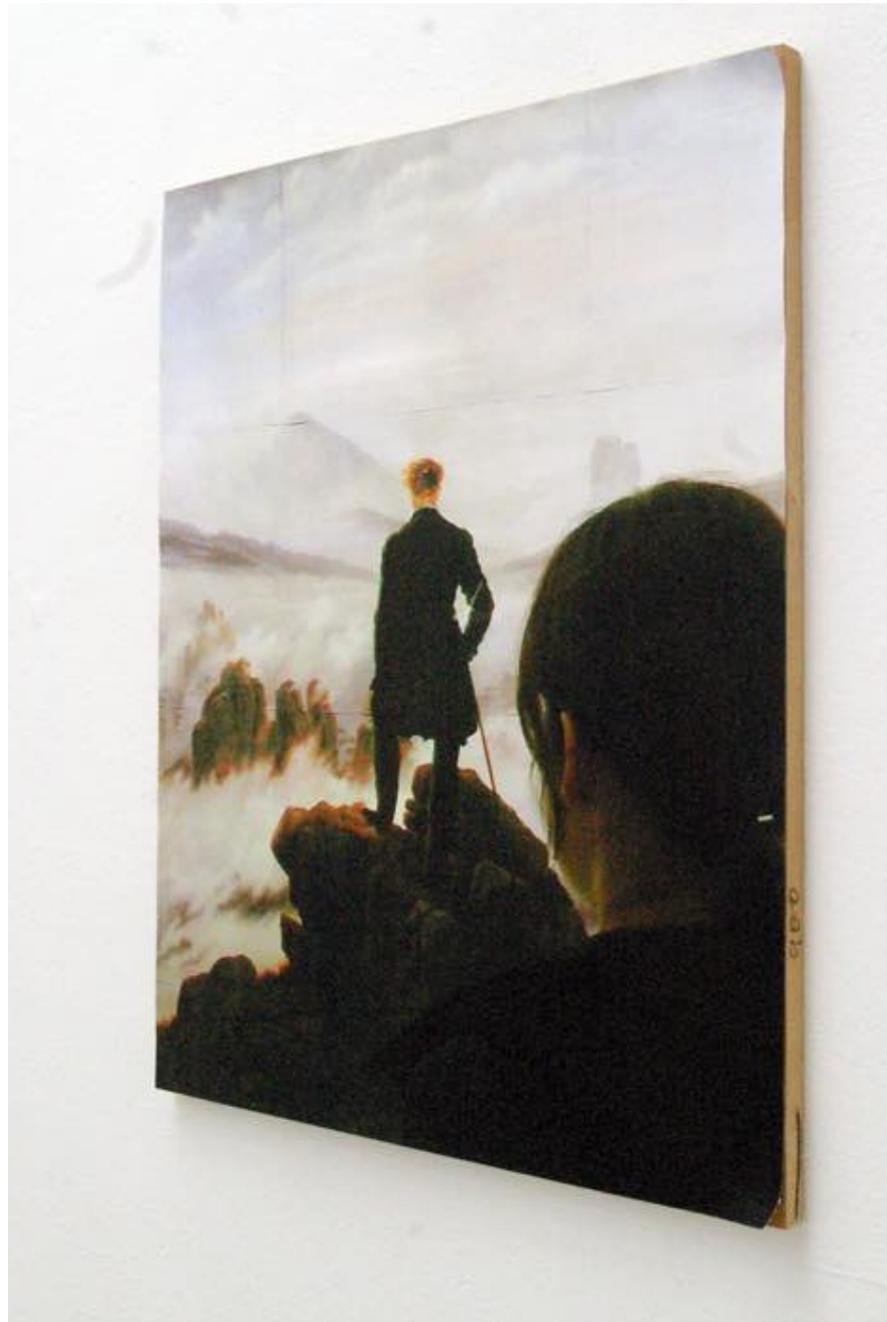
To New Worlds IV

2018, photographic series of microscopic views of 42 grains of sand split in half in the course of a night, c-print, 50 x 60 cm



What Mona Lisa looks at when she needs a break

2011, framed colour print of a photo taken of the background of Veronese's painting *Wedding of Cana* hanging opposite the Mona Lisa in the Louvre
40 x 50 cm



Actually I prefer to do everything on my own

2009, digital print on MDF, spray glue,
double-sided adhesive tape, accidents,
failure, stubbornness, 95 x 75 cm

Photograph, taken and mounted by the
artist, showing her, standing in front
of a makeshift wallpaper of Friedrich's
painting made by herself



Burried Wind Orchestra

2013, colour print on DIN A4
drawing paper

SOUND
SCULPTURES & INSTALLATIONS



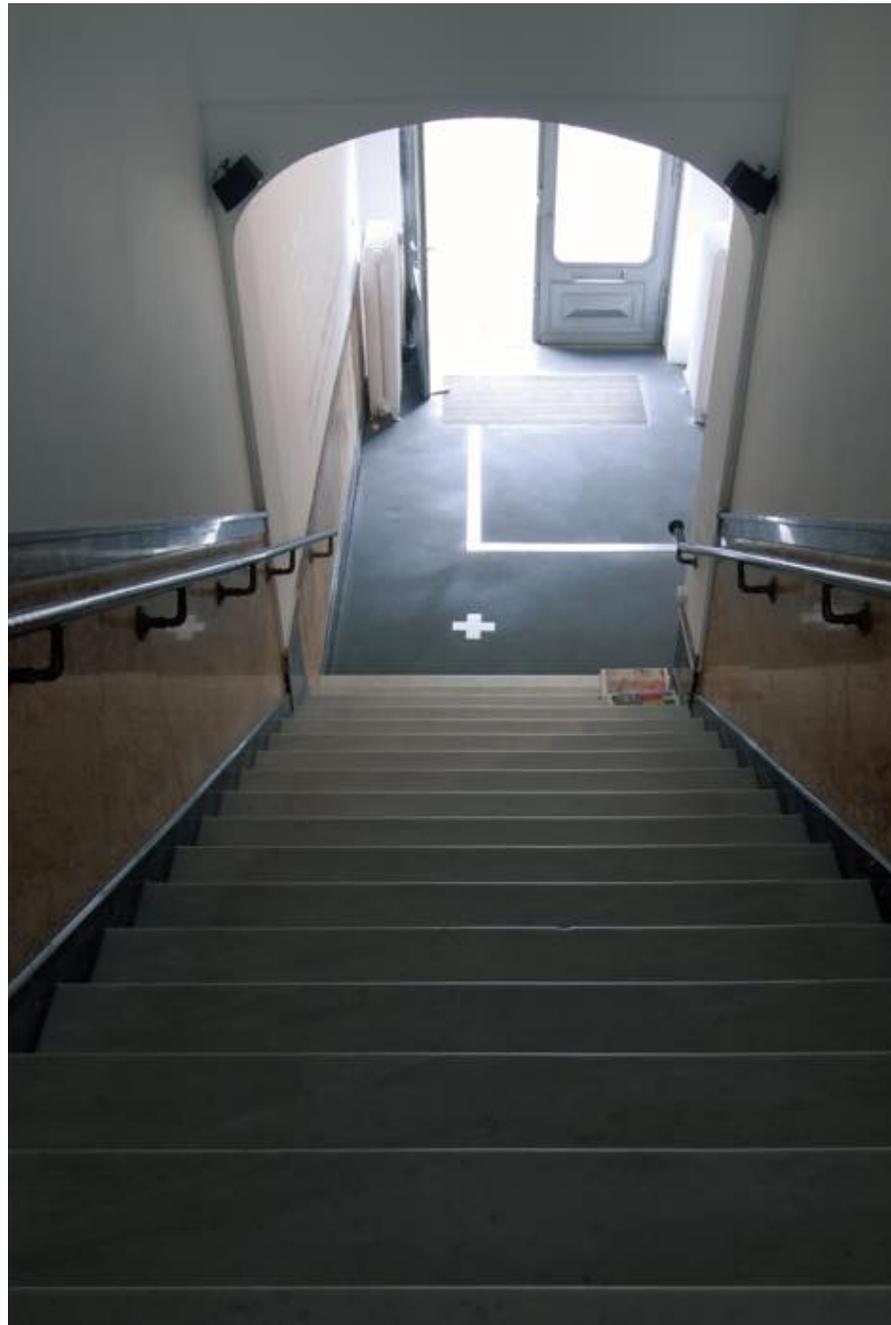
Ah, but i may as well try and catch the wind,
diddy dee dee diddy dee dee diddy dee dee
diddy dee dee dee

2009, rock, stereo unit, speaker directed to
the ground, sound of the artist's voice
attempting to imitate the wind



tell me, tell me (don't tell me)

2007, speakers built into a window frame
playing a looped passage from a Jefferson
Airplane song: "Today everything you want
I swear it all will come true"



one word

2006, active speaker, light barrier, computer

The artist's voice saying the word "never" is played when passing the speakers



ECHO

2008, loudspeaker, microphone, amplifier, delay device, 54 x 55 x 23 cm

The work echoes every word spoken in front of it with a delay of two seconds



Modern art makes me want to rock out

2006, 12" vinyl record & cover, record player, loudspeakers

Looped passage from a song of the band *Art Brut*



Portraits of Young Men (Mama, Mama)

2002, sound installation with hidden speakers

The sound of several young men casually calling for their 'Mama' is played in public space



Marc, 'Gonzo' and 'Jasper'

2002 - 2008, portable CD-player,
speakers behind canvas, each 50 x 60 cm

Sound of three young men casually calling for their 'Mama'



LIFE SIZED SELF PORTRAIT

2006, tripod, speaker, stereo unit

Looped version of the Nirvana song 'Smells like
teen spirit', reduced in its speed by 26 percent
(correlating with the artist's age of 26 at that time)

VIDEO / VIDEO-INSTALLATIONS & -PERFORMANCES



About the impossibility of explaining good and evil

2008, DVD-PAL, 5.19 min looped, mute, projection size 80 x 120 cm

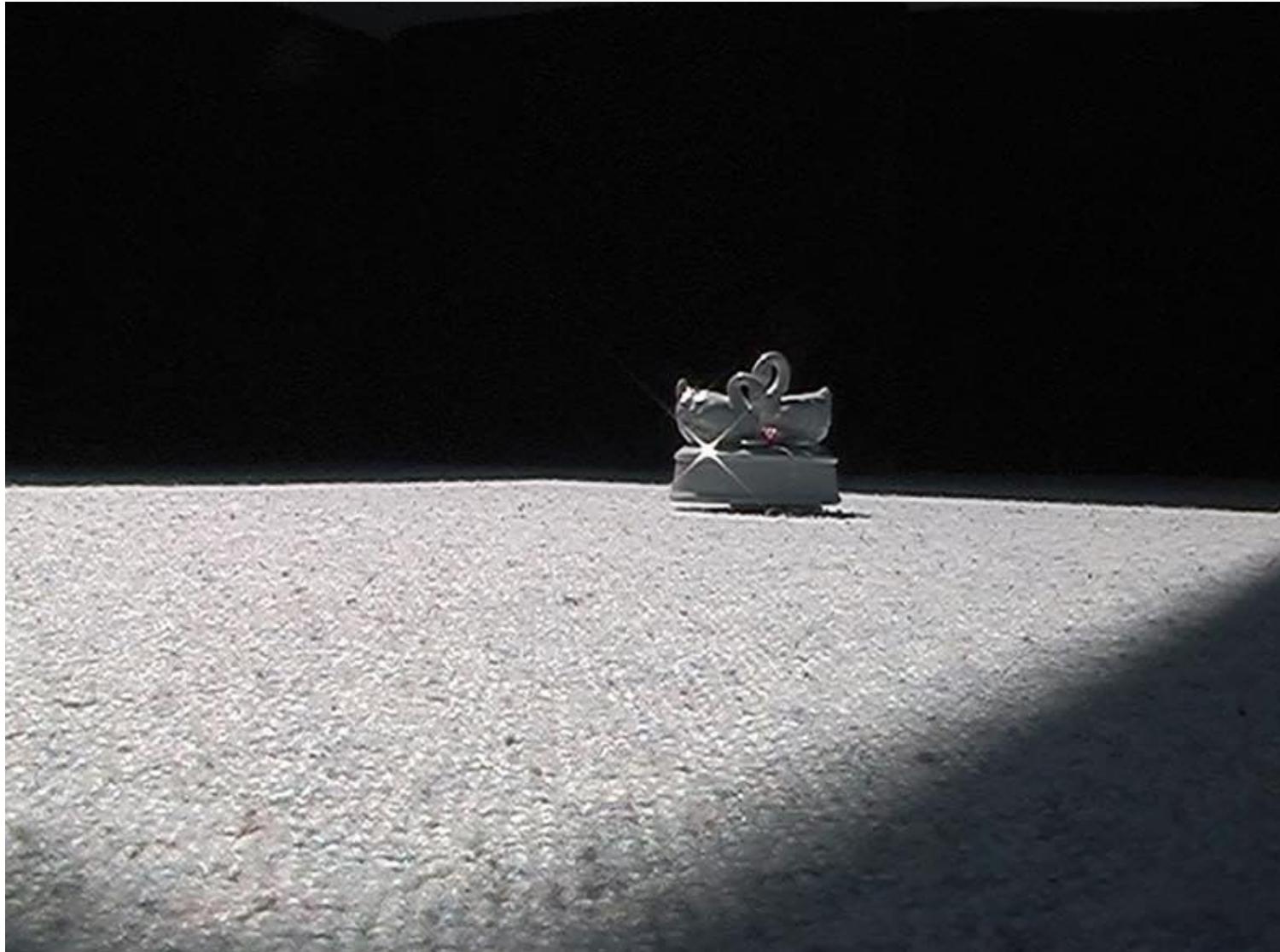
In this video the artist is talking to a candle flame, explaining the concepts of good and evil, but she can neither be seen nor heard. The video solely shows the reflection of the flickering candle on a white wall. It ends abruptly when the artist blows out the candle by an unintended laugh.



two swans a carpet and a tune

2007, DVD-PAL, 3.38 min

A musical clock is turning on a sunlit carpet while playing a tune from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. Now and then the tones are tumbling and the sun is flashing on the porcelain surface. Slowly, a shadow, arising from the movement of the sun is sliding from the edge further into the picture. Eventually the last tones die away and the movement of the swans come to a halt.





Talking about this work for 1 hour 2 minutes and 27 seconds

2007, DVD-PAL, 1h 2min 27s, mute loop

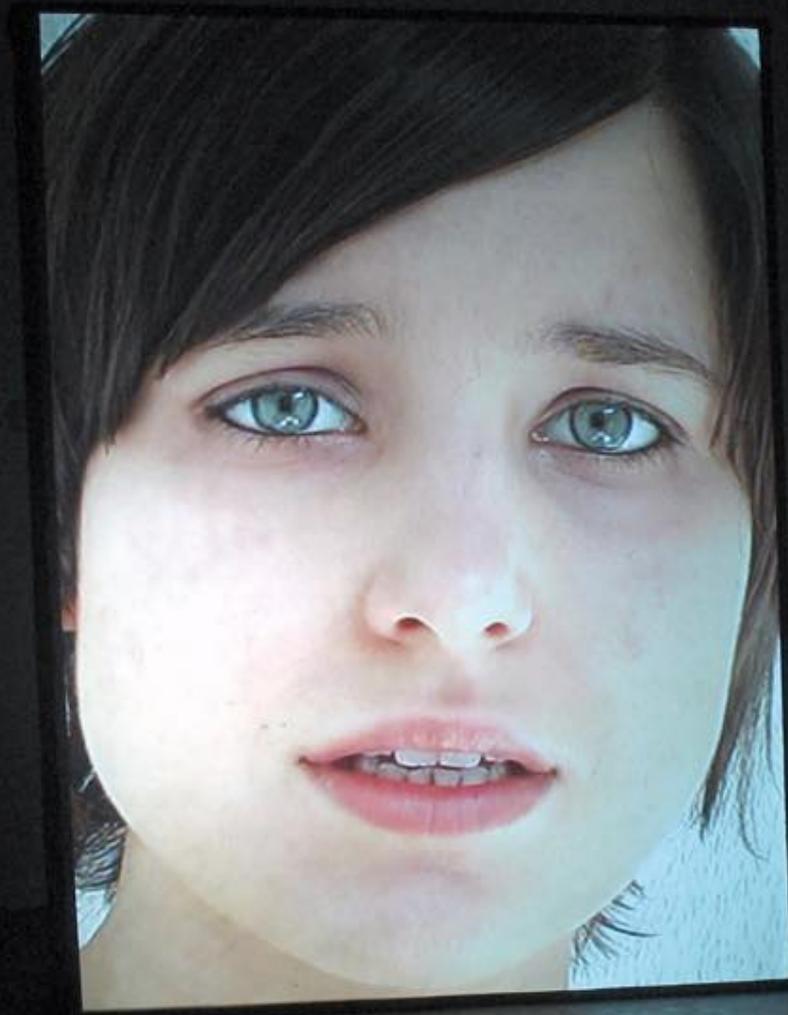
A large video projection shows the artist continuously and intensely talking into the camera for 1 hour 2 minutes and 27 seconds. The video has no sound.











three words

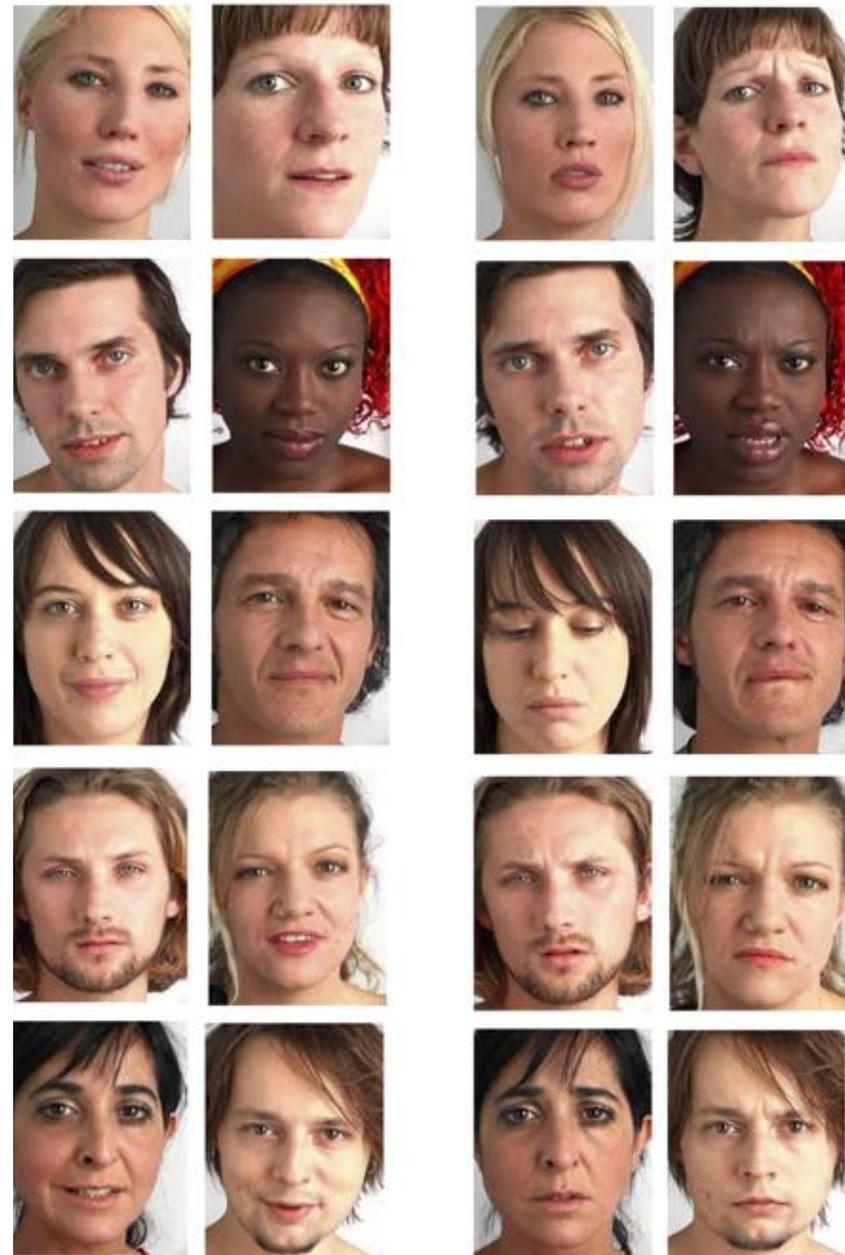
2004/2007, DVD-PAL, 54 min, loop

The video shows the unedited footage of the artist filming herself rehearsing to speak the sentence 'Ich liebe Dich' (I love you) in various moods, thereby falling in and out of the role as an actor



three words (A+B)

2004, two-channel video showing 20 young actors performing the sentence 'Ich liebe Dich' (I love you) in front of the camera. They were told to act as if they were saying it for the first time in a relationship and once more as if they were saying it for the last time, at the end of a relationship



For Grandpa, Dad and Uncle Patrick

2006, Video (DVD-PAL, 2.13 min)

The video shows the artist solemnly reciting the lyrics of the song "Fußball ist unser Leben" (=Football is our life) – a song which was once sung by the German National Team of 1974 and became a popular hit in Germany. While the original song appears in a more or less folksy "beer tent style", the sincere recitation of the lyrics turns it into a classical epic







without words

2003, 3-channel video projection, 11 min 30sec, loop

The video shows various people in the moment before, while and after they scream as loud as they can



two frames a face to frame a face

2003, video installation

(4-6 DVD-players, 4-6 video projectors)

The faces of various strangers suddenly appear on the walls of a room at irregular intervals. The appearance lasts only for the span of two video frames, which is 0.08 seconds

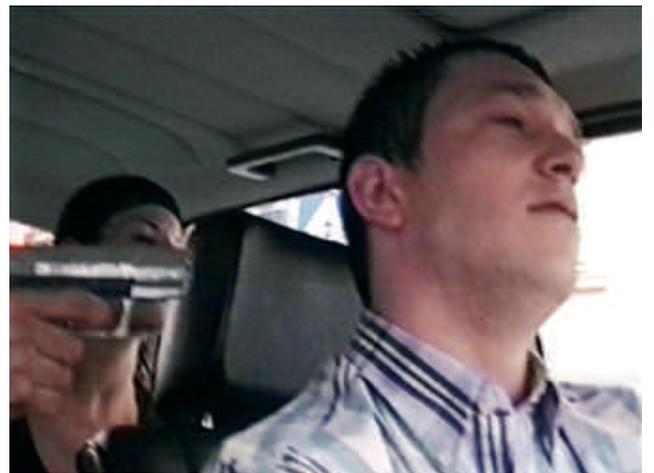
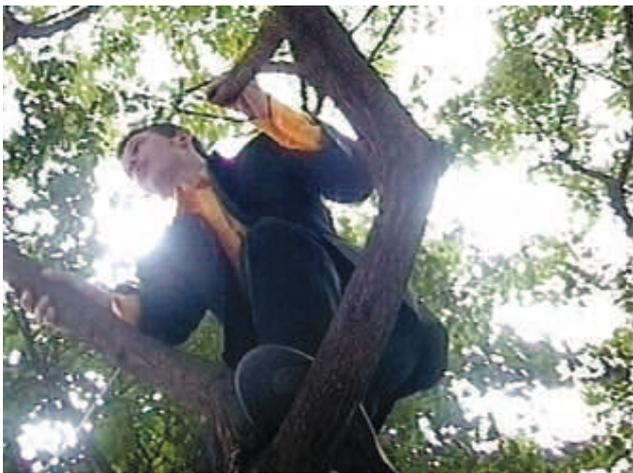
PERFORMANCES & INTERVENTIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE





Dancers in the park

2002, a group of professional dancers performed unannounced in a public park in Frankfurt a. M.





rentaman

For three days the fictive shop rentaman set up business in an abandoned shop in the city of Offenbach and offered to rent different human prototypes to passers-by. The models were hired actors who had been asked to surprise the unsuspecting clients with various interventions once brought out of the shop – ranging from loud declarations of love on the street, relapses into children's behavior, sudden paralyzes of the whole body or dance performances





einszueins

Fictive company that offered clients to swap parts of the life for one day with other people, e.g. their parents, clothes, mobile phones, perfume or pets

TEXT BASED WORKS



Transcendental Me

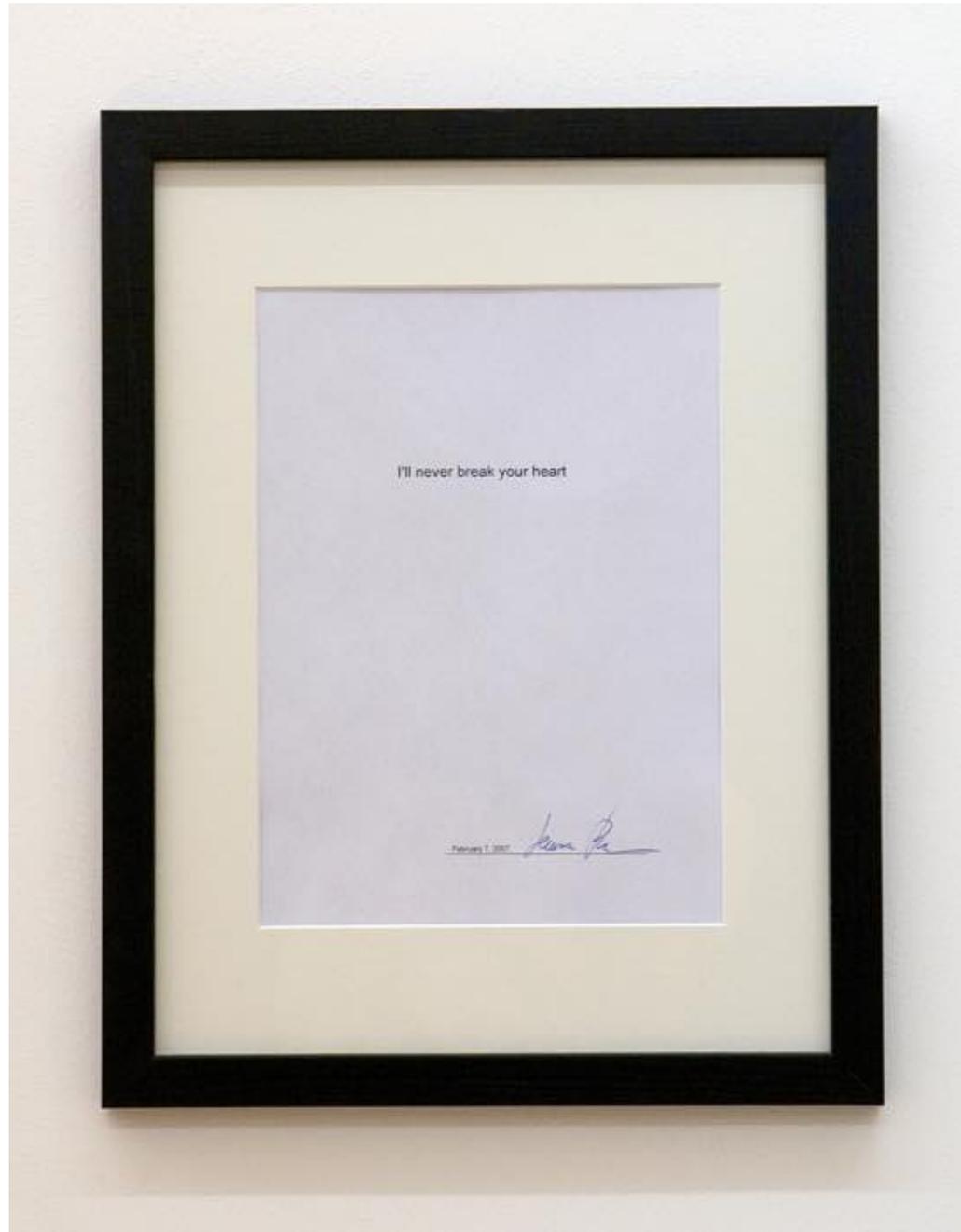
2009, project for the exhibition 'Delocalisation'

Curator Fatos Ustek imitating the artist's handwriting to write 'I was here' on a wall in Skopje, Macedonia – a place the artist has never been to.



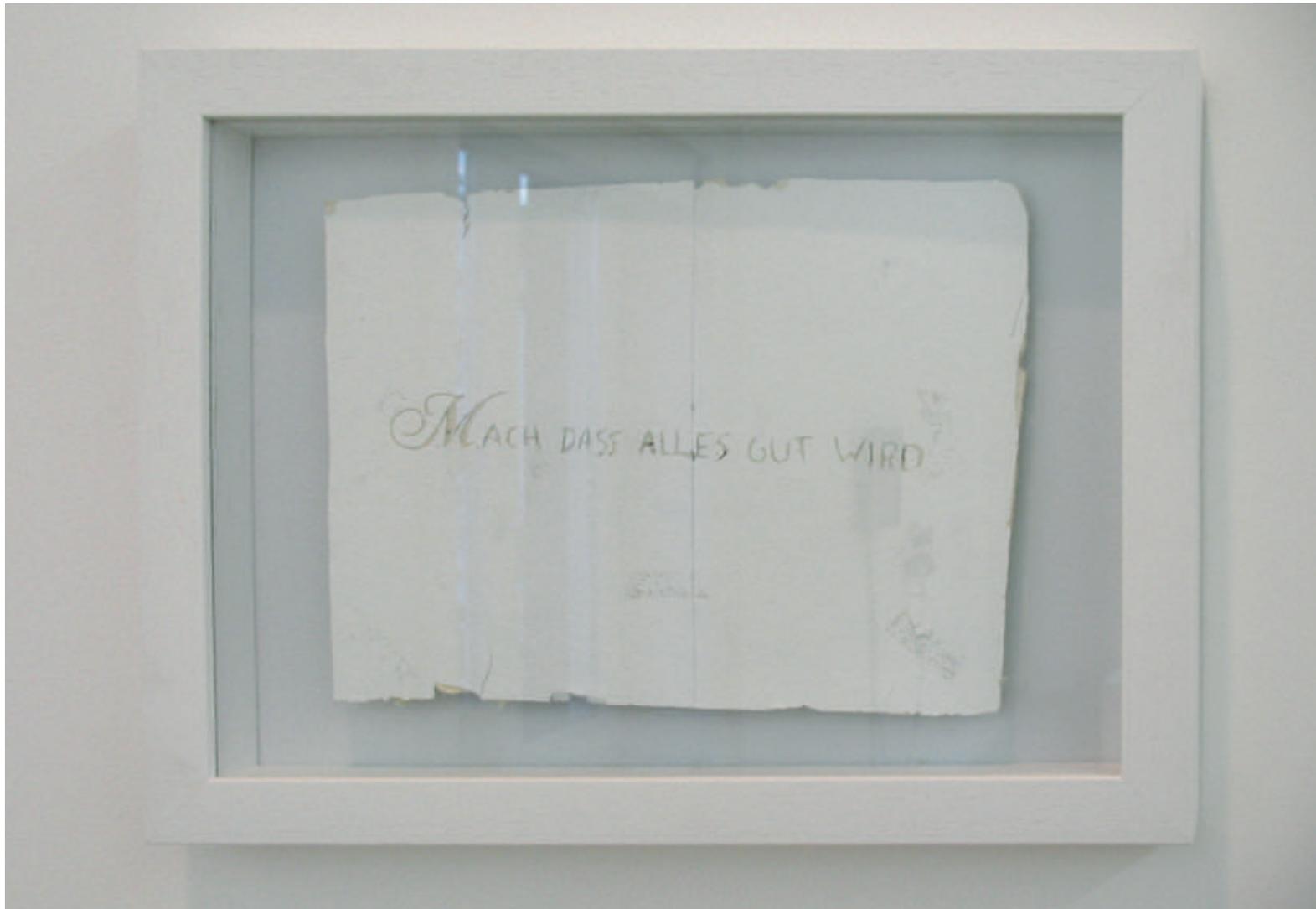
Promises Series

2007, framed contracts containing lines from pop songs,
dated and signed by the artist, each 40 x 30 cm



Backstreet Boys

2007, framed contract
from the *Promises Series*



Als das Wünschen noch geholfen hat
(When wishing still helped)

2007, framed piece of old wall paper,
carved sentence 'Make that every-
thing is going to be alright'

30 x 40 cm

Artist CV

Laura Kuch, born 1980 in Germany

Education

Currently finishing the practice-led MPhil in Fine Art research,
Slade School of Fine Art, University College London

2008 – 2009 Research Development Programme,
Slade School of Fine Art, UCL

2004 – 2008 HfBK Städelschule Frankfurt, Academy of Fine Art,
graduation as *Meisterschüler* of Prof. Tobias Rehberger

2000 – 2004 HfG Offenbach, Academy of Art and Design,
with Prof. Heiner Blum, Preliminary Diploma with distinction

Solo Exhibitions

2018

Wunderkammer VIII - ah but I may as well try and catch the wind,
(in the context of *Radiale 2018*), Kommandantenhaus Dilsberg

2011

Wunderkammer II, Galerie Lorenz, Frankfurt

2009

Without the wall the wind would have carried the willow into the world,
Galerie Lorenz, Frankfurt

2008

oh word, Galerie Lorenz, Frankfurt

2007

Talking about this work for 1h 2min and 27 sec, Galerie Adler Video Subzone,
Frankfurt
Mach dass alles gut wird, Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wiesbaden

2006

Mama, Mama, Laxart Sound Gallery, Los Angeles

Group Exhibitions

2018

Five Trillion Times - The 2nd CAA Printmaking Triennial,

China Academy of Art, Hangzhou

Ungeborenen Elefanten ins Maul sehen oder von der schönen Ordnung der Dinge, Port 25, Mannheim

Deltabeben, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen

Aesthetica Art Prize, York Art Gallery

Zum Anbeißen: Früchte in der Kunst, Museum der Brotkultur, Ulm

2017

Celeste Prize Finalist's Show, Oxo Tower, London

2016

Sünde und Erkenntnis, Museum Sinclair-Haus, Bad Homburg

Vitaminbombe – Früchtebilder von Picasso bis Warhol, Kunsthalle Emden

2015

Reife Früchte und junges Gemüse, Kupfäzisches Museum, Heidelberg

2013

Montez im Exil, The Museum, Leipzig

Wurzeln weit mehr... , Kunstverein Familie Montez

2012

Machines, presented by The Chess Club and Nyx, Old Police

Station Deptford, London

Horticulture, Galerie Lorenz, Frankfurt a. M.

Vincula, UCL Art Museum, London

Making Space, Slade Research Centre, London

2011

COVER, Nachtspeicher, Hamburg

Surplus to Requirements?, Woburn Research Centre, London

2010

Spillage, Woburn Research Centre, London

Ghosts of Dreams Deferred, Stacion – Center for Contemporary Art Prishtina

Seriously....? Exploring sincerity in contemporary film and performance,

University of Hertfordshire, St. Albans

2009

Delocalisation, Press to Exit Project Space, Skopje, Macedonia

Ever Level, Ve.Sch, Vienna 2006

DADAADA, Ada Gallery, London

SIX, Woburn Space, London

Love in the age of postponed democracy, the critical crisis, Kunsthalle Luzern

Seriously....?, Arts Depot, London

2008

Ende 2008, Städelmuseum, Frankfurt

Wortlos, Coma, Frankfurt Eichen

Roland für einen Oliver, Kunstverein Ettlingen

2007

Matters & Memories, 2nd Moscow Biennale, Vinzavot, Moscow

Elena, Laura, Michael & Olli (for Matthew and Barbara), Ladan – The Mobile

Box, 4th Gothenburg Biennale

Haven't we met before?, Atelier 23, Heidelberg

2006

Festival Junger Talente – Schnittstellen, Faire Offenbach

Ersatzbank der Gefühle, Stadtmuseum Halle

Two swans a carpet and a tune, Doppelzimmer Giessen

2005- 2004

Kunststudenten stellen aus, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn

Kunstpositionen, Allgemeine Hypothekenbank Rheinboden AG, Frankfurt a. M.

Project 4.1, Bookfaire Frankfurt a. M.

Festival Junger Talente, Faire Offenbach

Grants and Awards

2018 Delta-Prize, Jury Award

2017 Listed for the *Aesthetica Art Prize*

2017 *Celeste Prize* Project Award

2012 Nominated for the HAP Grieshaber Scholarship, City of Reutlingen

2008/2009 Scholarship of the German Academic Foundation (DAAD)

2008 Marianne-Ingenwert Project Award

2005-2008 Scholarship of the German National Academic Foundation (Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes)

2004 Johannes-Mosbach-Foundation Project Award

Publications

Five Trillion Times - The 2nd CAA Printmaking Triennial, CAA, Hangzhou, 2019

Deltabeben, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum & Kunstverein Ludwigshafen, 2018

Future Now: 100 Contemporary Artists, *Aesthetica Art Magazine*, 2018

Radiale - Kunst im Kreis, Landratsamt Rhein-Neckar, 2018

Celeste Prize, Celeste Network, 2017

Wonder in Contemporary Fine Art Practice, Routledge, 2016

Vitaminbombe - Früchtebilder von Picasso bis Warhol, Kunsthalle Emden, 2016

Montez im Exil, Kunstverein Montez Frankfurt, 2014

z. B. - Practice-Based Research in Art & Design, Bauhaus Verlag Weimar, 2013

Fruchtig - Die Frucht in der bildenden Kunst des 20. und 21. Jahrhundert, Sammlung Dr. Rainer Wild, 2013

MPhil/PhD Research Projects, Bartlett School of Architecture, London, 2011

Delocalisation, Press to Exit Project Space, Skopje, Macedonia, 2009

DADAADA, London 2009

SIX, Slade School of Fine Art, London, 2009

Ende 2008, Städelschule, Frankfurt, 2008

Wortlos, Coma, Frankfurt, 2008

Einen Roland für einen Oliver, Kunstverein Ettlingen, 2008

oh word, Galerie Lorenz Frankfurt, 2008

Biennale's Special Projects, 2nd Moscow Biennale of contemporary art, 2007

Festival Junger Talente - Schnittstellen, HfG Offenbach, 2006

Checkpoint Charly, 4th Berlin Biennale of Contemporary Art, 2006

Biennale's Special Projects, 2nd Moscow Biennale of contemporary art, 2007

Festival Junger Talente - Schnittstellen, HfG Offenbach, 2006

Checkpoint Charly, 4th Berlin Biennale of Contemporary Art, 2006

Ersatzbank der Gefühle, Stadtmuseum und Burg Giebichstein, Halle 2006

Kunststudenten stellen aus, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, 2005

Kunstpositionen, Allgemeine Hypothekenbank, Frankfurt, 2005

Talks & Papers

Visualising Immaterialities Symposium, Faculty of Architecture, University of Innsbruck, 2016

Working Wonder conference, Fine Art Department Newcastle University, 2013

New Perspectives on the Romantic Period conference, Tate Britain, London, 2012

Art as a Mode of Enquiry conference, The Ruskin, University of Oxford, 2012

In search for the Blue Flower: A wandering in space and mind, workshop, EARN European Art Research Network Research Symposium, dOCUMENTA (13), 2012

Practice-Based Research in Art & Design conference, Bauhaus University, Weimar, 2011

Romantic Intermediality conference, University of Helsinki, 2011

Mphil/PhD Research Projects conference, Bartlett School of Architecture, London, 2011

The Wunderkammer, artist talk, Camden Arts Centre, London, 2010

Talking about this work for 1h 2min and 27 sec, artist talk, Arts Depot London, 2009

Two swans a carpet and a tune, artist talk, Doppelzimmer, Gießen, 2006

12 *Wunderkammer* of the Now

In Search of the *Wunderbare*: Romanticizing as a Contemporary Fine Art Practice

Laura Kuch

Wunderkammer translates as *wonder chamber* and is the German equivalent of a cabinet of curiosities. Originally, it described a collection concept from the late Renaissance and Baroque period implemented at the European royal courts and later in the houses of prosperous citizens. The collections consisted of a wide range of diverse natural history objects and artefacts: from stuffed armadillos, Chinese porcelain, exotic shells, cherry-stone miniatures, rare minerals and encyclopedias to alchemical literature and alleged unicorn horns. Presentation and content of the *Wunderkammer* depended on the collector's individual preferences and, as Gabriele Bessler points out, 'were not only disparate collections but visual reflections and lyrical interpretations of an appropriation of the world'.¹ The word *Wunder* (wonder) in *Wunderkammer*, does not refer to the notion of biblical miracles or supernatural wonders but to the idea that these collections were aimed at giving rise to amazement and wonder amongst spectators.

Eventually, in the course of the Enlightenment movement and its demand for specification and rationalization, the *Wunderkammer* became replaced by the museum, aiming at the acquisition of knowledge by scientifically categorizing and examining the objects and specimens.

In my art practice, I am concerned with the question of where and how we can still find wonder today, long after the legendary unicorn trophies have turned out to be only the tusks of the common narwhal and the last *terra incognita* on the globe has been explored, and after what the sociologist Max Weber called 'the disenchantment of the world'² – brought about by the Enlightenment and Modernity? How can we create meaning and knowledge through wonder and how can we explore and appropriate things not by decoding them but by continuously wondering about them?

Wonder today, I claim, lies in the poetic potential of the ordinary. What constitutes my art practice is searching for, insisting on and pointing out, or revealing, the poetic within everyday objects and materials. I'm doing this, for one, by using the *Wunderkammer* as a framing notion that provides an actual as well as a metaphorical space in which

I operate within my research, and, for another, in reference to German Early Romantic concepts.

Since 2010, I have been working on a series of *Wunderkammer* installations (Figure 12.1 Nos. I–IV), consisting of several small artworks I call *romanticized objects* (on which I will elaborate later). Each *Wunderkammer*, when displayed in public, contains a collection of my most recent artworks.³ My project is not to be understood as an investigation of historical cabinets of curiosities, nor as a comparative study of romantic ideas then and now. Although the aesthetics of my first two *Wunderkammer* installations are somewhat reminiscent of the historical model – a chamber-like space, filled with miscellaneous objects – I soon realized that dealing with the notion of the *Wunderkammer* as an artist in a contemporary way does not necessarily require a visual resemblance as the sustainability of the historical *Wunderkammer* is, in fact, its idea of wonder.

Although the *Wunderkammer* is a Renaissance and Baroque concept, I recognize a very romantic idea behind it: to wonder and to acknowledge the miraculous is the precondition to seeing and pointing out the *Wunderbare* in things. The German term (*Das*) *Wunderbare* – or the equivalent adjective *wunderbar* – translates as both wonderful or wondrous, but also miraculous, marvellous, amazing, prodigious or extraordinary. At the same time, the suffix *-bar* in *wunderbar* implies that something either carries wonder or has the potential of wonder.

The notion of the *Wunderbare* was a central subject in German Early Romanticism, a movement formed by a group of young poets, writers and philosophers in the city of Jena at the end of the eighteenth century. The most prominent members were Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg, better known under his pseudonym Novalis. The movement was a reaction to the rational paradigms of the Enlightenment.

The German Early Romantics did not entirely refuse the achievements of the Enlightenment, but declined its absolute belief in reason. They thought pure reason was a one-dimensional approach that left no space for imagination, artistic expression, the poetic and *Wunderbare* and hence prevented what the Romantics aspired towards: to find, as Novalis called it, 'ursprünglichen Sinn',⁴ which translates as original meaning or signification and stands for holistic knowledge, a deeper understanding of life, our inner selves and our relationship to the world and the things within. The Romantics set a dualistic concept of the world against the Enlightenment's realm of reason, which is, that as well as the material world – or as Novalis referred to it in one of his poems from 1800: the world of 'numbers and figures'⁵ – there exists alongside, an infinite, ineffable, *wunderbare* side to all things that needs to be acknowledged and looked out for in order to find 'ursprünglichen Sinn'.⁶

A central symbol for this search in German Early Romanticism is the *Blue Flower*⁷ and the continuous search for it. The *Blue Flower* of Romanticism is a metaphor for the ineffable and the *Wunderbare* that can never be satisfyingly described with words. Maybe this flower can never be picked, and yet (and this is one of the deliberate paradoxes of German Early Romantic concepts) the Romantic longs to find it, setting out on a continuous search, without having a clear definition of what exactly *it* is that he or she is looking for; a wandering with no final destination and no final resolution, but with many things to be found on the way in this attempt to approach the *Blue Flower* and catch a glimpse of it.

The desire to re-enchant (at least parts of) the world and hence being in search of the Blue Flower in a postmodern age to find wonder forms the base of my identity as an artist and hence my art practice. My artworks are no illustrations of Early Romantic concepts. The German Early Romantics' ideas and writings provide for me a constant source of inspiration and are indeed a fundamental and fertile ground for my practice and for myself (two things that are indispensably connected). But they are much more than that to me. They are a tool of constant reflection; a mirror I found (or maybe the mirror found me) and in which I discovered words, that helped me verbalize my own work – and views, that reassured me in my own ideas and guided me to make them grow and blossom. But most of all I recognized myself in that mirror: I AM A ROMANTIC.

Figure 12.2 No. V

I have been wandering
Searching for the *Wunderbare*
Searching for the Blue Flower
for a long time.
I looked for it within a piece of clay
Looking for
The promise of a piece of clay.

Figure 12.2 No. VI a–b

I looked for the *Wunderbare* within some grains of sand
Miniature rocks
that I split in half in search of the inside
And what I found
What I found were the wonders of 42 new worlds

My artworks are what I call *romanticized objects*. They constitute an expression of my romantic perspective and romantic mindset encountering the material world.

Novalis believed that one way to get as close as possible to the Blue Flower, and hence the *Wunderbare*, was through what he called the

'operation'⁸ of romanticizing or poeticizing (he used both terms equally). In 1798, Novalis stated:

The world must be romanticized. In that way one finds the original meaning again (in German this is the 'ursprüngliche Sinn). ... By giving what is common an elevated meaning, the ordinary a mysterious aspect, the familiar the dignity of the unknown, the finite the appearance of infinity, thus I romanticize it.⁹

The finite and familiar are neither negated in this process nor are they replaced by the infinite or entirely transformed into the mysterious and unfamiliar. In fact, the finite, ordinary or familiar and the infinite, mysterious or unfamiliar exist simultaneously within the romanticized.

Romanticizing can take place through a poetic representation of things by the means of poetry and other forms of literature as explored in the early German Romantics' writings, but also, I claim, within a contemporary fine art practice. In my *Wunderkammer*, there are neither dragon's eggs nor magic potions. Instead you will find many objects that at first sight could be mistaken for everyday things. The key to these artworks can be found – in terms of a conceptual art tradition – in the title and the material description (sometimes including information on the processes involved in creating them), revealing that the object has been related to an idea – my poetic idea of it. It has been transformed in the sense that it has become what I would like to claim is its *romanticized version*, allowing for two perspectives at the same time: one, the ordinary and familiar, provided by using everyday objects, and secondly, the elevated meaning, which the artwork offers through a fusion of object and idea.

Being idea-based artworks, my romanticized objects appear (almost magically) often quite completed in my head, like a photograph of a future work waiting to be put out into the world. Rather than in my studio, they evolve in a space in my head – a place I feel I have only fairly limited control over and only little access to. I call this place my *internal Wunderkammer*. It's a kind of *Meta-Wunderkammer*. It's an ever-growing, ever-altering collection of which I am the maker and collector at the same time: This is the place where romanticizing happens.

My artworks can be understood as a kind of snapshot of this internal *Wunderkammer*, which manifests and materializes itself in the outer world, in an actual space, through my artworks. Once they are out in the material world, I reflect, contemplate and write about my artworks and put them in front of what I call *The Romantic Mirror* in order to find out what possible ideas and thoughts they might hold. This process forms an essential part of my practice and is an attempt to retrace and examine my own artworks in order to, amongst others, understand and develop my practice further.

The act of romanticizing itself, however, has happened before that, namely in the moment when my romantic mind encounters the world (of everyday things), when inner world and outer world, subject and object meet and when this encounter sparks wonder in the sense of a poetic idea in relation to the object.

In the following, I am going to define the three key methodologies involved in the act of romanticizing in my art practice. As explained previously, the act of romanticizing itself happens in a place and a way I feel unable to pin down. Hence, when I speak of methodologies of romanticizing I mean to detect which conditions are necessary in encountering the world as a romantic conceptual artist.

To Be in Constant Search of the Blue Flower

This means to be apprehensive and sensitized to the poetic and *Wunderbare* potential of things, even – or maybe especially – inherent to the most common. It means to wander through the world while always keeping a romantic eye on the road.

Figure 12.2 No. VII

When Christopher Columbus landed on the shores of what he believed to be India, he wrote in his logbook that he had found a new world of the *Wunderbare*.¹⁰ Today there are no more blank spots on the map of the world waiting to be discovered and even the surface of the moon carries human footprints. And yet, standing in my kitchen one evening, cutting a pepper open for dinner, I realize I am the first human being laying eyes on its inside:

Things first ever seen by me.
TERRA INCOGNITA.

To Realize, Embrace and Make Use of the *Schöpferische Ich* (Creative-Imaginative I)

Novalis realized: 'I have an original tendency and ability to enliven the world'.¹¹

Novalis and his fellows were highly influenced by philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte's subjective idealism. A central aspect of this was that the absolute and creative-imaginative I enables us, in transcendental liberty, to create the world out of ourselves.

To romanticize hence does not mean to compose a fantasy world through art, full of mysteries and dreams, to which we can escape to from our dull being, reigned by reason. On the contrary, Novalis's call to romanticize the world is a quite life-affirming appeal which I follow within my practice and which is to actively shape the world by creating alternative meanings of things and enlivening them. embracing the

possibilities and power of my subjective-poetic perceptions and ideas of wonder.

Figure 12.2 No. VIII

Two found silver forks with equally bended prongs.
One could have easily mistaken them for being merely two ordinary forks.
But I decided they are much more than that:
They are Doppelgangers I encountered and united.

Figure 12.3 No. IX

A pencil, stuck into the wall?
To me it's a writing device of a room,
Its wall firmly holding the pencil.

To Wonder: Actively and Continuously

'The special usefulness of wonder', Descartes wrote in his book 'Passions of the Soul' (1649),¹² 'lies in its getting us to learn and retain in our memory things that we previously didn't know' (21). But in the following paragraph, he states, 'Excessive wondering can entirely block or pervert the use of reason ... the only cure for that is to ... deal with things that seem unusual and strange not by wondering at them but by examining them' (22).

I believe that the acquisition of knowledge and meaning is possible through an artistic practice that understands active and continuous wondering as a form of examining things; a form of examination that does not mean decoding and does not aim to achieve a resolution or definite answer, but is rather pointing out and underlining the (as yet) wondrous matter of things.

New things can appear wondrous to us due to the sensation of the unknown or as the German writer Albrecht Goes puts it in his book *Das Erstaunen: Begegnung mit dem Wunderbaren* (Amazement: Encounter with the *Wunderbare*): 'All first-times are mysterious' (17). The more familiar a thing is or becomes, the less we tend to marvel about it and forget about the wonders it still carries. On my search for the *Wunderbare* I came across some things seemingly familiar and yet I still wonder about them:

Figure 12.3 No. X a-f

A plinth
A 10 pence coin picked up from the street
A black piano key
A tobacco box engraved with the name Sten Magnussen,
A key
And an object I once lost.



Figure 12.1

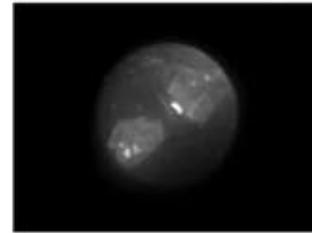
- No. I: Laura Kuch, *Wunderkammer I*, 2010. Installation view.
 No. II: L. K., *Wunderkammer III*, 2012. Installation view.
 No. III: L. K., *Wunderkammer II* 2011. Installation view.
 No. IV: L. K., *Wunderkammer IV*, 2013. Installation view.



VI a



VIII



VI b



VII

Figure 12.2

- No. V: Laura Kuch, (*Looking for*) *The Promise of a Piece of Clay*, 2012. Cut open piece of clay; 30 x 20 x 20 cm.
 No. VIa: L. K., *42 Split Grains of Sand*, 2012. Microscope, sand, 42 glass slides, box, wood board.
 No. VIb: Microscope view from *42 Split Grains of Sand*.
 No. VII: L. K., *Display Cabinet #2: 'First ever seen by me' (Terra Incognita)*, 2011. Cut and dried fruits, vegetables and pits in display cabinet for butterflies, 40 x 30 cm.
 No. VIII: L. K., *Doppelgänger (for Lena)*, 2011. Two bent silver forks.

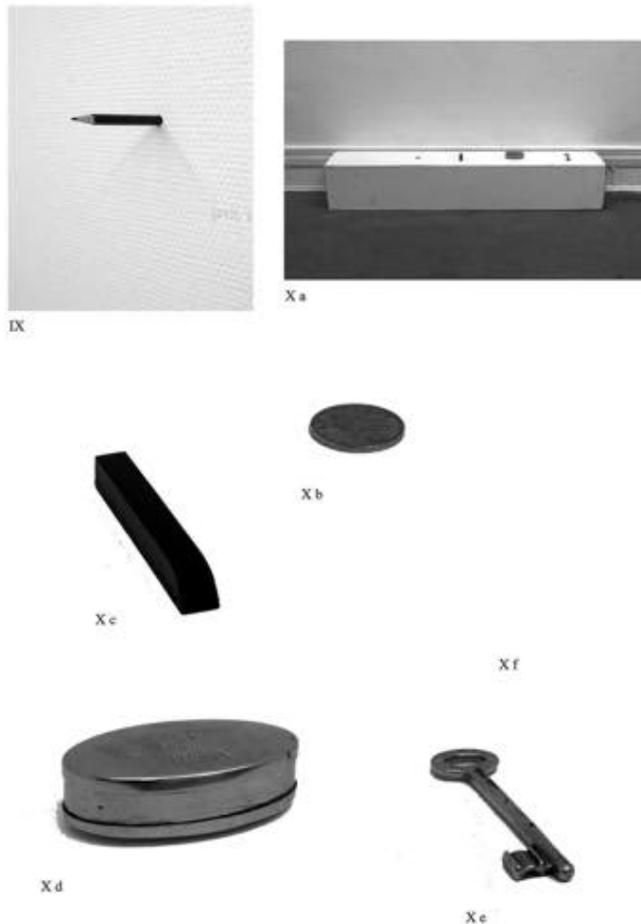


Figure 12.3

No. IX: L. K., *Writing Device of a Room*, 2011. Wall, pencil.

No: Xa: L. K., *One lost and five found objects*, 2013. 10 pence coin, black piano key, engraved tobacco box, key, used plinth.

No. Xb–f: Details *One lost and five found objects*.

What is the coin's biography? Did it travel to China once, or did it sit in some dark drawer forgotten for many years? How many people touched it and who was its last owner?

Did Sten Magnussen drown at sea or did he simply quit chewing tobacco?

Is this the key to the door for a house that was never built?

And where in the world is the object I once lost?

We will never find out, and it's this 'not-knowing' or what I call 'realm of the ever unknown' that allows for wonder and creates a space for imagination that, by each of us, can be filled with infinite possibilities of ideas and thoughts, depending on our individual experiences, hopes, preferences, longing and interests.

Especially in a time like today, where scientific and objective knowledge are habitually accepted as the definite and most validated answer, and where we tend to believe we have access to all knowledge, passively consuming it through the Internet, I strongly believe we should hold this realm of unknown dear. Filling it with our own subjective thoughts allows for insights that lie beyond the functionality or the scientific knowledge of things and rather sheds light on our inner selves, as well as the relationship of ourselves with the things around us, and provides us with the possibility to appropriate the world and create meaning through our own *wunderbare* ideas.

Notes

- 1 Gabriele Bessler, *Wunderkammern: Weltmodelle von der Renaissance bis zur Kunst der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Reimer, 2009), 14.
- 2 Max Weber, Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 155.
- 3 This concept, however, will change in the future as I'm currently working on the idea of curating my *Wunderkammer* objects according to a system of what I call for now subjective-poetic categorization.
- 4 Novalis, and Alfred Kellertat, *Werke und Briefe* (München: Winkler, 1968), 424.
- 5 Novalis, *Werke und Briefe*, 295.
- 6 Novalis, *Werke und Briefe*, 424.
- 7 The *Blue Flower* first appeared in Novalis's novel fragment *Henry of Ofterdingen*, first published in 1802. It is the unfinished story of a young man setting out on an actual, as well as a spiritual, journey to become a poet. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist, young Henry, wakes from having the strangest dream of wandering around a mysterious land until he finds himself standing next to a well:

'What attracted him with all might, was a tall, clear-blue flower, growing beside the well, and almost touching him with its broad, glistening leaves ... there were countless other flowers but he saw nothing but the Blue Flower and for a long time, he gazed at it with unspeakable tenderness. At last, he wanted to approach the flower, when suddenly it began to move and change...'

(*Werke und Briefe*, 146)

Henry then sets out on his journey, filled with a deep longing to find the mysterious *Blue Flower*, or as he refers to it later, the *Wunderblume*, which translates as wonder flower.

8 Novalis, *Werke und Briefe*, 424.

9 Ibid.

10 Karlheinz Barck, *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden, Bd. 6*, Ästhetische Grundbegriffe (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), 735.

11 Novalis, Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, *Novalis Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs Bd. 2* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1981), 554.

12 René Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, version by Jonathan Bennett, presented at <www.earlymoderntexts.com>.

Bibliography

All cited German texts have been translated by the author.

Barck, Karlheinz. *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden Bd. 6*, Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005.

Bessler, Gabriele. *Wunderkammern: Weltmodelle von der Renaissance bis zur Kunst der Gegenwart*. Berlin: Reimer, 2009.

Descartes, René. *Passions of the Soul*, in the version by Jonathan Bennett presented at <www.earlymoderntexts.com> (accessed January 12, 2015).

Goes, Albrecht, and Oliver Kohler. *Das Erstaunen: Begegnung mit dem Wunderbaren*. Eschbach/Markgräflerland: Verl. am Eschbach, 1998.

Novalis, and Alfred Kelleter. *Werke und Briefe*. München: Winkler, 1968.

Novalis, Paul Kluckhohn, and Richard Samuel. *Novalis Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs Bd. 2*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1981.

Weber, Max, Hans Heinrich Gerth, and C. Wright Mills. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.

This text was published in: Brown, Irene; Mieves, Christian (Eds.): *Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice*, Routledge, New York, 2016

Without the wall the wind would have carried the willow into the world

Galerie Lorenz

4 September – 24 October 2009

Laura Kuch is currently researching the subject of Sehnsucht (longing, aspiration, desire) for the unsayable and unattainable, the allegorical search for the Blue Flower of Romanticism in contemporary artistic practice.

Her work is related to a strand of artistic practice recently termed "Romantic Conceptualism" by Jörg Heiser, where the cool character of conceptual art is coloured by the warmth of German Romanticism to heal the crack between the world of reason, of "numbers and figures" (Novalis), and the world of emotion where the miraculous becomes form.

She explores both the idea of longing and its failure that lies within and the problem of language, which in its conventional use, repeatedly fails as an authentic means of expression. Laura Kuch uses a variety of media in her works while keeping them deliberately formally reduced with an almost minimalist aesthetics.

Kuch experiments with the possibilities of turning the prima materia into something more complex and intangible by a kind of alchemical transformation. This transformation can take place by omitting verbal information as in her video work Talking to a candle flame (extinguished by a laugh) or: About the impossibility of explaining good and evil (DVD-PAL, 5.19 min,

2008) where we see the reflection of a flickering candle flame on a white wall, but we can neither see the candle itself nor hear the artist talking – speech gains a new expression and becomes visible in a transformed way which we have to experience and interpret.

A transformation also takes place by a kind of misuse of certain materials, for example when the artist turns a puddle of black writing ink into a Sculpture for the words I will never write (from the series Black Mirrors, 2008) or when she decides to pulverize standard willow drawing charcoal and denies its original purpose by blowing it onto a wet wall as in her work Without the wall the wind would have carried the willow into the world (2009)

Within the conceptual frame of her work, the viewer finds him/ herself hovering between kitsch and true emotion, irony and deeply felt sincerity – and it's exactly this dialectic that characterises Laura Kuch's work.

With her almost laconic gestures she deliberately ignores the conventional understanding and use of objects and materials by insisting on the poetics of their truthfulness and "giving what is commonplace an exalted meaning, what is ordinary a mysterious aspect, what is familiar the impressiveness of the unfamiliar, to the finite an appearance of infinity" (Novalis).

Oh Word

Galerie Lorenz, 28 March – 2 May 2008

In the beginning was the word – in any case in the beginning of all languages. It is the written and the spoken word, with which we express our thoughts, with which we capture emotions and which recalls our memories. One single word alone can carry a whole life as it is shown in Laura Kuch's work *One Word* (2006). "Never" a voice says from a loudspeaker behind a doorframe as soon as one enters the room. Without warning the word invades our ear – and more. Never means never to suffer, never to happen, but also never to achieve and never to experience. Never is finity and infinity at the same time.

Another word enters human life at an early stage and remains a relic of childhood in adult life. For her *Series Portraits of Young Men* (2002/2008) the artist had young men call for their mothers. "Mama, ... MAMA,Maaaaamaa...".....almost naturally the voices of the nearly adult men adopt this child-like gesture. The viewer is disconcerted and touched at the same time because the calls reflect the familiar ambivalence between adulthood and childhood.

Mostly, however, the power of words manifests itself in their combination.

"I love you" are three words, which put together result in one of the most meaningful sentences of the world. Laura Kuch experiments with this sentence in her video work *Three Words* (2004/2007). For almost an hour the unedited video material shows the artist imagining herself in different moods in order to promise the person opposite her an emphatic "I love you". However, she keeps stepping out of her role. Although the admission of acting couldn't be clearer and although one could assume that this sentence is totally worn out due to its stereotype use, Laura Kuch shows us the indestructibility of this great sentence by creating an intimate work which touches the limits of tolerance.

"I'll give constantly all the lovin' you wanted from me. This is my promise to you. From my heart and my soul this is true" or even, "I'll never break your heart" are further promises which the artist gives us. In her work *Promises Series* (2007) Laura Kuch uses lines from more or less tacky love-songs as the basis for contracts which she signs herself. With this she tries something which is doomed to failure, namely to put down something in black and white which no one can promise to keep. And although we know about this, the desire remains that perhaps someone, sometime will assure us that something will be fulfilled, something will never happen or will last for ever.

This desire for a Happy End is the focus of Laura Kuch's sound installation *tell me, tell me (don't tell me)* (2005/2007). From two loudspeakers standing on a windowsill one can hear the looped line "today everything you want I swear will come true" from Jefferson Airplane's hippie-band song which is reflected on a white wall. The almost spherical music is reflected into the showroom from the opposite wall and being immaterial renders as part of the work everything which is in the room or happens in the room. "Today everything you want I swear it all will come true". This promise also remains for ever unfulfilled and we suspect that it must never be fulfilled – otherwise we fall into a tragedy without desires, because what is Man without desires? Like characters from the romantic

period standing at the window projecting their desires to the world at large, the promise echoes from the boxes out of the window, but comes back to us, embraces and consoles us, even though we know about the deceit. As in *tell me, tell me (don't tell me)* we find the principle of repeating words using sound loops from pop culture songs again and again in Laura Kuch's work. This is also used in her sound installation *Password/Shibboleth F* (2005). "Fuck you I won't do what you tell me" reverberates repeatedly from two big loudspeakers. It is the looped clip from the song "Killing in the name" from the band "rage against the machine". In the 90's the song was the hymn of a generation which the artist also belonged to. The words "Fuck you I won't do what you tell me" typify that youth culture attitude which indulges in the illusion of autonomy and which wants to draw a clear line between itself and the conformism of the adults. If the undeniable energy of this line is still noticeable for the listener in the loop's first minutes, it soon gets worn out and becomes a meaningless, an almost ridiculous platitude and even starts to get on one's wick. It is the story of the process of growing up, in which we have to recognize that what we believed in has no lasting meaning and has only become a mere echo of the past.

Laura Kuch also creates literally an echo with the sound sculpture *Echo* (2008), by echoing every word spoken by the viewer.

Like the nymph Echo in Ovid's *metamorphoses*, the work is condemned to repeat everything which is uttered and thus the viewer experiences his/her own voice as a reflection just as alien as Narciss' own reflection in the water.

It is the voice which forms the words and makes them audible. But what happens if someone talks to us and we don't hear the words? In Laura Kuch's video work *Talking about this work for 1 hour, 2 minutes and 27 seconds* (2007) we see the artist holding a one-hour monologue about just this work which we are about to see – but no word can be heard, the sound is switched off. From the intensity of her gestures and her facial expressions one can clearly see that the artist is talking about something which is close to her heart. The work – or rather the artist herself – seems to try to convince the viewer of something or wants to help him/her to understand something. But the information can only be felt by the viewer and not intellectually understood, because he/she is denied a verbal communication.

With a little tongue-in-cheek Laura Kuch plays with the possibilities and the power of language. But in the end it is always a serious game, because she plays with those things which are considered to be the basics of human existence: the desires and the possible failure connected with them, growing up, the confrontation with one's own history and self.

Laura Kuch's deliberately reduces her work both conceptually and aesthetically whilst referencing art history, literature and pop-culture. Her works open themselves to the viewer and guide him/her on an emotional and intellectual level to his/her own experience of being human – and it is the word which provides the bridge.

