

# Portfolio

## Deirdre O'Leary

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## Artist Statement:

What inspires me is the accessibility of the world through our senses and the various ways in which the body with its features and organs reflects its surroundings. Within my practice, I have been investigating the relation of body, space, and language. I work mainly with installation, text, and film and aspire to materialize playfulness while dematerializing space through composition.

# CV

## CONTACT

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Born in Fribourg Switzerland on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1989  
Living and working in Basel Switzerland.

## EDUCATION

- June 2017 Master of Contemporary Arts Practice, HKB, Bern
- 2014 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Academy of Art and Design, FHNW, Basel, Switzerland.
- 2011–2012 The Dresden Academy of Fine Arts, Dresden, Germany
- 2009–2010 Vorkurs, Schule für Gestaltung, Basel
- 2008 Matura, Gymnasium Oberwil, Switzerland

## NOMINATIONS

- Residency at SMAA, 2022 in Sankt-Moritz, Switzerland
- Dedazo Grant, Jeune Création, 2020 enabeling a Residency in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico
- Atelier Mondial Grant, 2019
- Residency at Citée des Arts, Paris from July 2019– January 2020
- Participant at XXIV CSAV – Artists Research Laboratory, Fondazione Antonio Ratti
- Shortlisted for the Kunstkredit Prize from the city of Basel in 2018
- Listed in SIKART, Lexicon on art in Switzerland

## PUBLICATIONS

- HANS Magazin, No.09, Hans Verlag, Sarnen, 2022
- Draisinenrennen, Edited by Benedikt Wyss, 2020
- Causal Loops & Time Squiggles, Edited by Gregorio Magnani and Fondazione Antonio Ratti, 2020
- Drei Figuren, Artist Book, Museum Langmatt, 2018
- Caméléon, Artist Book, with Baptiste Gaillard, 2016

## UPCOMING EXHIBITION

- Interweaving Narratives, Ethnological Museum of Thrace, Alexandroupoli, Greece, October-December 2022  
With Samuel Tschudin, Yota Tsotra, Vassia Vanesi

## PAST EXHIBITIONS & PROJECTS

### 2022

- Rainbag, Ausstellungsraum Klingental, Basel
- Collective ITTO, with Shelley Tootell, Anka Helfertová, Katrine Hoffmeyer Tougård and Robert Lakomczyk, Samuel Tschudin, Soon-Hwoa Jeong
- Artist in Residence at Sankt Moritz Art Academy

## PAST EXHIBITIONS

### 2021

- AMORE, Amore, Basel
- When the subversive stitches, Le Commun, Geneva, curated by Tadeo Kohan, Camille Regli, Gabrielle Boder

### 2020

- REGIONALE 21, Kunstraum Riehen
- Unsubstantial Territory, Duflo Raczy, Bern
- Tout porte a croire que, Büro Basel, Deux Pieces
- Jeune Création, Fondation, Fiminco, Romainville, Paris

### 2019

- A Dog barking at a Tree, Garage, Basel

### 2018

- Draisinnen rennen Dreispitz, Münchenstein/Basel, in collaboration with Sandra Raimann and Museum Tinguely
- There is no Point in being dramatic, Künstlerhaus Dortmund
- Raumfahrt, Museum Langmatt, Baden, Exhibition with Daniel Karrer and Micha Zweifel

### 2017

- Pay Attention Motherfucker, Zabriskie Point, Geneva, curated by Roxane Bovet
- Fluid rings, Victoria Square Project, Athens, curated by Maria Papadimitriou
- Ping-Pong, Basel, curated by Sue Irion
- Mind the Cap, Centre PasquArt, Biel–Bienne, curated by Anselm Stalder
- Nora Longatti, Till Wittwer, Lokal-Int, Biel–Bienne
- Stingray Editions, Ausstellungsraum Klingental, Basel, curated by Kambiz Shafei
- Je trace le contour de mon ombre, juste pour déshabiller, Urgent paradise, Lausanne

### 2016

- All, Die Diele, Zürich, invited by Livio Baumgartner
- Cantonale, Kunsthaus Langenthal, curated by Clare Hofmann
- Cantonale, Centre PasquArt, Bienne, curated by Felicity Lunn
- Beyond the Real, Kunsthalle Basel, curated by Elena Filipovic
- OFF-Line, Zemo Nikozi, Georgia,
- Affaire, Centre PasquArt, Bienne, curated by Anselm Stalder
- Wasserfest, Ausstellungsraum Klingental, curated by Julia Wirxel
- Solo Exhibition, Galerie 3000, Bern
- Ritournelle, Carrosserie, Basel, curated by Deuxpieces
- Juno invites to Patterns of reconciliation, Kasko, Basel

### 2015

- Videoförmig. Kasko, Basel cured by VIA
- Open Studio, RoundaboutLx, Lisbon, Portugal
- Festival.Mov, La Filiature, Mulhouse, France
- Global Super-8 Day, Haus für Elektronische Kunst, Basel, Switzerland

### 2014

- Connecting Spaces, Ausstellungsraum Klingental, Basel, curated by Annina Zimmermann
- Attachment, with Silas Heizmann and Baschi Pfefferli, Basel
- Lebensversicherung, E-Werk, Freiburg, curated by Marcel Oettrich and Yvonne Ziegler

- Crashing at the Neighbours, at Haus für elektronische Künste, Basel curated by Chus Martinez
- Atopie, Flatterschaft, Basel, curated by Lysann Koenig

## PAST PROJECTS

- Embodiment, a Reserach with Villa Vassilieff, Paris
- Snehta, Residency, Athens, 2017
- OFF-Line, Art research Program in Nikozi, Georgia, at the demarcation line to South Ossetia, 2016
- Caméléon, A Publication with Baptiste Gaillard, 2016
- Horrible Things is a Videoclip for the Band Combineharvester, 2015
- Residency at RoundaboutLx, Lisbon, 2015
- Connecting Spaces, Art research Program in the southern Caucasus, in Abkhazia and Georgia, 2014
- Radio ARX Creative expression and media exposure for the inmates of the prison Arxhof, Bubendorf, Switzerland
- In collaboration with Daniela Brugger, Lea Kuhn, Daniel Steiner and RadioX, Basel, Switzerland Realized in 2013

# 5

## Dragon's Orchid (kite)

A light cotton fabric evaporates and flirts with the attempt to reach the sky. The kite is connected to the ground through its tail, stem, tentacle, as we are through our feet.

The dragon's mouth orchid, native to Sicily, is associated with the tales of the river nymphs and their vividness. Gushing and bubbling the stream, rising over stones and moldering branches, she carves her way towards the sea. "You're anybody, everybody, a body of water", she says, pointing towards the four directions. A floating Kyte is as an enlargement of the human body, bearing the capacity to play with and float within the winds. If flow is the ability to grow, to heal, to let go, and to encounter, what line can be drawn between winds and the flow of a current of water? When we speak about the urgency to overcome lethal and extractive sources of power, such as carbon and nuclear energy, and - today more than ever - weaponry, the obstacle is not one of scarcity of energy on our planet, the question to the artist is rather how to transform the forces within the cycle of the living.

*dragon's orchid*  
*mouth tongue lips*  
*bubbling gushing*



*dragon's orchid*

*mouth tongue lips*

*bubbling gushing*

# 8

## Körperbild III, IV

I have been exploring weaving and textile. I've noticed that throughout our cultural histories, there have been close bonds between textiles, language, and the representation of our surroundings. This relationship has significantly influenced my own practice in recent years. It's as if the perception and understanding of the environment is embedded within the process of weaving, thus creating something far more complex and interesting than mere pictorial representation. Körperbild III an IV were exhibited at the artist run space AMORE, in Basel in late 2021.





2021  
KÖRPERBILD III  
WOOL, COTTON,  
PHOTOS: MORITZ SCHERMBACH

2021  
KÖRPERBILD IV  
WOOL, COTTON,  
PHOTOS: MORITZ SCHERMBACH



# 12 Pan

In a doorway you encounter a large lump of coal. A bodiless voice fills the room, recounting her memory of the scent of fire. The audio piece Pan featured in the exhibition In To Through Out at the Aktionsraum Spoiler in Berlin in the summer of 2020. The various works exhibited attempted to materialize transition. The exhibition marked the beginning of the ongoing collaboration of the artists. The sonic representation of visual art was further explored through a collaborative piece for, the Berlin based, [Radio Cashmere](#).





2020  
PAN, AUDIO PIECE, COAL  
PHOTOS: LEONARD MANDEL

2020  
PAN, AUDIO PIECE, COAL  
PHOTOS: LEONARD MANDEL



# In to through out

**L:** I have an idea of where to begin.

You seem to be dealing with the overlap between ideas of the 'natural' and 'unnatural'. Animal and human relationships, human and environmental exchange.

How do you arrive at these meeting points? Are they observed, imagined, generated?

**D:** I think Work always begins with observing, or at least I haven't experienced or interpreted it in any other way. You take notice of something slightly changing, you sense a repetition and start to create to change your sphere. It's an ongoing experience. On one hand whilst observing - you merge fully with what surrounds you, on the other hand you hold your position and bring forth change. I start to translate, what I see into what I hear, or the other way around. This takes place through sensing, being a body and we're one too as we're collectively preparing this exhibition.

**L:** This makes me think of synesthesia (whereby sensory functions trigger other perceived sensory phenomena. Sound seen as light and colour; letters or words that effect orientation). Is there an analogy to be made in art when physical objects are combined with sound? Sculpture always exists in relation to the human body.

How do you view text in relation to sculpture, text in relation to the body?

**D:** I believe sculpture, language, sound are different appearances of the same image or information. The frequency of the image defines the physicality of the work. Once the attempt is made to rearrange structures, narratives, places and languages we could maybe speak about how the physical body of work relates to the conceptual „body“ of work and it's presence in the „realm“ of sound and language.

I grew up in a household where German, English and French were spoken. Therefore I am aware of the fluidity of the spoken language. However, the written language behaves very differently. I find it difficult to find a positive and constructive approach to the written word in the exhibition space. There is a confrontation between the written word, physical and performative articulation. I think I am trying to figure out how it relates to the physical space and even more so how to the body.

Memories and Trauma stay in our bodies and shape our experience of being (in) a body. These can be interpreted as colors, sounds, shapes and can be healed with visual and sonic techniques. I don't think that text - essentially being exterior - can be internalized. My writing practice begins with spoken language. They are fragmented visual observations, images of speech. They are representations of what surrounds me, nourishes me. They're particles of experiences I'd wish to keep or ones I'd wish to let go.

To come back to observation - there is a phenomenon called somatic knowledge - which I stumbled across in Tacita Dean's work. Somatic knowledge suggests that intentions are sent from your body long before they're cognitively graspable. Or in other words, the inner materialization of experience precedes and frames the following actions.

**L:** We've been taught to think of language as a thoroughly human trait.

Could you tell me more about the parrots and Mockingbird?

**D:** The video work Mockingbird was realized in 2016 during the research stay in Zemo Nikozi, Georgia, in collaboration with the Berlin-based artist Till Wittwer and the swiss filmmaker Nora Longatti. The Caucasus Region has a beautiful and rich landscape, an

extreme variety of cultures and languages and is a junction of trade, of ancient and reinforcing empires. The region is permeated with historical and cultural conflicts, which partly go back to the first world war, but are still highly active today. Mockingbird is the story of the police conductor Bezo, who recalls from childhood memory how mockingbirds were once kept. They were caught as chicks and were taught the human language. Mockingbird portrays the loss of language concerning their recent past. The southern flanks of the Caucasus are breeding grounds for thousands and thousands of bird species and are, from an ornithological point of view, incredibly abundant and important. The image of the free-flying, musical living being that moves beyond man-made boundaries and conflicts was important to us.

Later in 2017 I was thinking about the agency of art and creativity and tried to establish a kinship with non-human animals to see if a collaborative creative expression was possible. I worked in a home for homeless parrots, spent some time in their aviary, was considered a prisoner, eyed as an intruder and taken in as an accomplice. Parrots are incredibly expressive; they charm with their feathers, their singing, their speech. They appropriate their world mostly through their beaks, and accordingly, they destroy almost everything that comes into their reach. I translated this experience into an installation called Voliere (Listening to the eyesight is to see) that was shown in the Centre Pasquart in Biel, Switzerland.

Birds surround us playfully. They sound to communicate, to gain orientation and to secure their existence.

If I understood the birds close to my studio, I would probably hear them say: “I am here”, “Are you here too?” Which is kind of funny, because I am here, and you are as well and the reader is too, we’re all here despite being in different places at a different time, which is kind of the magic of language.

**L:** Your practice balances between forms. From what I have understood, you’re preparing a performative work with sound.  
Could you elaborate on that?

**D:** I want to use the exterior of the exhibition space to let a smoke sculpture grow, which will form the setting for a sonic intervention. There is a special strength inherent to the memory of scents, to which, Fire Fall refers. The title of the exhibition In To Through Out suggests transition. One of the many possible ways of looking at and working with transition, is to reframe the location and the agency of the work.

# 18

## To embody a fruit

To embody a fruit reflects in its stillness the dynamics and the accumulation of sensory perceptions. The work consists of an aquarell, a text and a pine-tree.

The writing practice is based on taking notes, framing the surrounding, overlapping, images. Within its focus, the experience is sharpened and gains intensity while remaining unintentional.



# 20

## Ausgleich einer Zwei

Ausgleich einer Zwei was shown at the exhibition “A Dog barking at a Tree” and was installed within a group of trees.

The title of the work refers to the field of tension required to balance two poles, two individuals, two spheres that are connected without becoming one. Life on earth develops and is sustained as a permanent balancing act between contradictory forces. Through tension, form arises and multiplies. Ausgleich einer Zwei becomes, through interaction with the environment, a sound sculpture.

IMAGE 1+2  
AUSGLEICH EINER ZWEI, 2019  
BRASS, GLASS  
PHOTO: DEIRDRE O'LEARY





# 23

## Körperbild I, II

Körperbild I (The Tongue the Blue and the Twins) and Körperbild II (Solar Plexus) are two tufted carpets. I engage with the Körperbilder in an architecture of intimacy.

The work is developed out of a process of giving form and shape to information, memories found in the body. With this experience, the necessity to mirror the body in an object disguised as an article of use became evident. This research is ongoing.

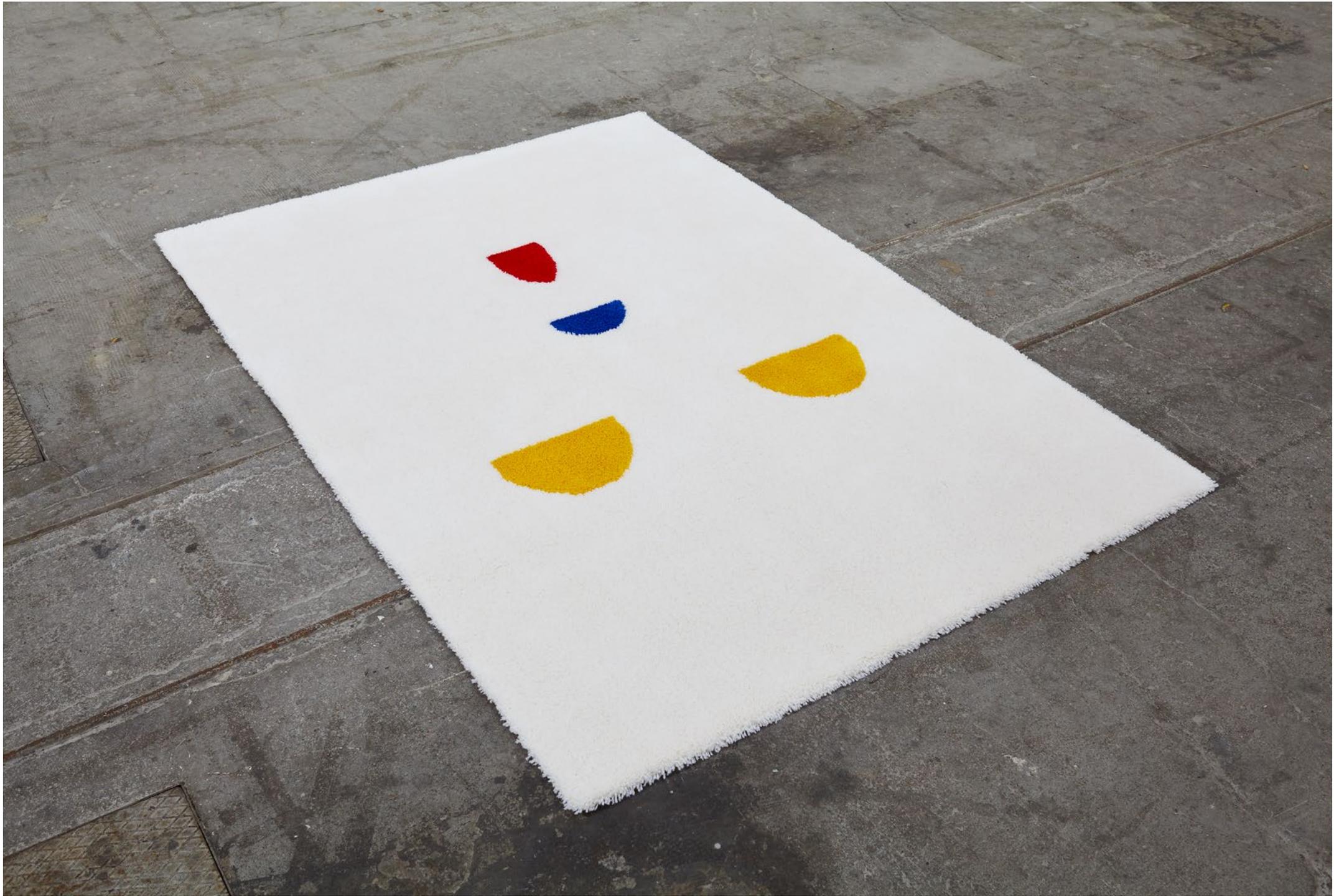
IMAGE 1 + 2  
KÖRPERBILD I (THE TONGUE, THE BLUE AND THE TWINS), 2018  
WOOL, SPACE  
PHOTO: MORITZ SCHERMBACH

IMAGE 3  
KÖRPERBILD II (SOLAR PLEXUS), 2018  
WOOL, SPACE  
PHOTO: MORITZ SCHERMBACH

IMAGE 1 + 2  
KÖRPERBILD I (THE TONGUE, THE BLUE AND THE TWINS), 2018  
WOOL, SPACE  
PHOTO: MORITZ SCHERMBACH

IMAGE 3  
KÖRPERBILD II (SOLAR PLEXUS), 2018  
WOOL, SPACE  
PHOTO: MORITZ SCHERMBACH







# 27

## Muschelkalkwagen

Skating through colored clouds: a procession begins and ends.

Muschelkalkwagen was conceived in collaboration with the curator Sandra Reimann at the Museum Tinguely, Basel for the annual Draisin Derby in Dreispitz, near Basel. Muschelkalkwagen is both a floating stage and a sound piece. The performance expressed the effort of working through the process, embodying the hardship and the magic of art labor.





# 30

## Voliere

### (Listening to the eyesight)

I have worked with birds and discovered their ways of appropriating their world through their beaks, thus destroying through play. I transferred the visual vocabulary of a local aviary, an aviary for homeless parrots, into the exhibition space. The installation is composed of a fan palm leaf, rings of brass and banners with wood printing. The title is recommendation on how to approach a prey in order to achieve a successful hunt.

IMAGE 1  
VOLIÈRE (LISTENING TO EYESIGHT), 2017  
INSTALLATION VIEW (DETAIL), CENTRE PASQUART, BIENNE  
PALMLEAF, WOODPRINT ON PANELS, CORAL, BRASS, PHOTOGRAPHY  
PHOTO: SEBASTIEN VERDON

IMAGE 2 + 3  
VOLIÈRE (LISTENING TO EYESIGHT), 2017  
INSTALLATION VIEWS, CENTRE PASQUART, BIENNE  
PALMLEAF, WOODPRINT ON PANELS, CORAL, BRASS, PHOTOGRAPHY  
PHOTO: SEBASTIEN VERDON







# 34

## From Topography to Play

A group of five glass-sculptures is assembled in the exhibition space of the Kunsthalle Basel. The hand-blown glass sculptures indicate a composed field, in which the interaction of the figures is imagined. The figures embody their titles.

The titles are: I used to walk across the grass green plain of my bed, Catching flying birds with my tongue, Stolen Light, The loss of Mentos and Blue sky like an inkwell, filled half with ink, half with milk.

UNTITLED (TOUCH), 2016  
FROM THE COLLECTION: ACCESSORIES OF DOUBT  
BRASS, FUR

BLUE SKY LIKE AN INKWELL, FILLED HALF WITH INK, HALF WITH MILK, 2016  
BRASS, GLASS

INSTALLATION VIEW OF BEYOND THE REAL, KUNSTHALLE BASEL, 2017  
PHOTO: PHILIPP HÄNGER





FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:  
BLUE SKY LIKE AN INKWELL, FILLED HALF WITH INK, HALF WITH MILK, 2016, BRASS, GLASS – STOLEN LIGHT, 2016, ENAMEL, GLASS – CATCHING FLYING BIRDS, WITH MY TONGUE, 2016,  
GLASS, PLEXIGLASS, STONE – I USED TO WALK ACROSS THE GRASS-GREEN PLAIN OF MY BED, 2016, COPPER, GLASS – THE LOSS OF MENTOS, 2016, COPPER, GLASS



CATCHING FLYING BIRDS, WITH MY TONGUE, 2016,  
GLASS, PLEXIGLASS, STONE

# 38

## Accessories of Doubt

What was once one, has been shattered to pieces and what was ordinary is turned within the process of recreating into the surreal. Fur gloves on a chain and a baseball cap with integrated wind chime form a new set of tools, to engage with what is “Beyond the real”, as the title of the exhibition suggests.

IMAGE 1, LEFT  
THE DOUBT CAP, FROM THE COLLECTION:  
ACCESSORIES OF DOUBT, 2016  
COTTON, GLASS

IMAGE 1, RIGHT  
THE DOUBT BAG,  
FROM THE COLLECTION:  
ACCESSORIES OF DOUBT, 2016  
BRASS, STONE

IMAGE 2  
UNTITLED (TOUCH),  
FROM THE COLLECTION:  
ACCESSORIES OF DOUBT, 2016  
BRASS, FUR

INSTALLATION VIEWS  
KUNSTHALLE BASEL, 2017  
PHOTO: PHILIPP HÄNGER





# 41

## Caméléon

Caméléon is an artist book, composed in collaboration with the Swiss writer and artist Baptiste Gaillard. Two autonomous narrative strands develop simultaneously, side by side. Gradually they infiltrate the surrounding environment. Whereas the subjectivity is being suspended, the landscape becomes a body. This metamorphosis is indicated by the title of the book.

2016  
ARTIST BOOK  
MIDDLE FORMAT PHOTOGRAPHY AND TEXT  
PAPER, SOFTCOVER  
EDITION OF 150, SOLD OUT  
PHOTOS: DEIRDRE OLEARY



# 43

## Puma

In collaboration with the organization Art as Foundation, based in Zurich, a group of invited artists investigated the effects and opportunities of art and creative expression in coping with trauma and the process of reconciliation. In 2014, after a stay in Tbilisi, Georgia we moved on to Sukhum/i the capital of Abkhazia. With the support of the Russian government, Abkhazia had declared independence from Georgia in 1993 provoking a brief war ending in a stalemate situation. Today, under Russian protection, Abkhazia is slowly recovering from this persistent, frozen conflict.

The film Puma was shot in the garden of a decommissioned nuclear research center of the Soviet Union located in the outskirts of Sukhum/i. We enter a dream-like space of intense colors, a space that is composed through the montage of the film, which appears almost more physical than the represented landscape.

To see Puma click [here](#).



# 45

## Inventing an Interval on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2014, 43°0'2N 41°0'1E

The second short film shot during the re-search project in the Southern Caucasus is entitled Inventing an interval on the 8th of May 2014 43°0'2N 41°0'1E. The Abkhasian town of Sukhum/i on the Black Sea was a flourishing holiday resort in Soviet times. Today it is the quiet center of a disputed region; for some, a renegade part of Georgia, for others, the capital of an independent Abkhazia.

The short film was shot in an inactive military Sanatorium built by the Black Sea. The title is the metrical location of the time and place when the images were drawn by light on the celluloid film.

To see the film click [here](#).

IMAGE 1 + 2  
2014  
FILMSTILL  
SUPER 8 FILM, TRANSFERRED TO HD VIDEO

IMAGE 3  
INSTALLATION VIEW CONNECTING SPACES,  
AUSSTELLUNGSRAUM KLINGENTAL,  
BASEL, 2014  
PHOTO: NICK BEZMER





# 48

## Mockingbird

During my second stay in the Caucasus region in 2016, I worked collaboratively with the Artist Till Wittwer and the Filmmaker Nora Longatti. We follow the story of the Georgian policeman called Beso, from Shida Kartli province, who describes his encounter with a mockingbird. It was commonplace to trap young mockingbirds and pierce their tongues, forcing them to re-learn their means of communication and imitate human language.

To see the film click [here](#).

ქერ კიდევ მაშინ დაიჭირა როცა ბარტყი იყო,  
პირდაპირ ბუდიდან ამოიყვანა.

She caught it when it was still little  
- she took it directly out of its nest.



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