R.J.KIRSCH

REANIMATION

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Contents

Preface

Sabine Schütz

The attempt to implement the operating instructions from the series How to Use the World is doomed to fail miserably – entirely in keeping with the intention of their creator, Cologne-based artist R.J. Kirsch, who while still studying painting, took up the topic and which has occupied him again and again in the years since: the exponentially advancing, rapid technological development and the inevitable tendency towards failure that goes hand in hand with it. However, 'progress and catastrophe are two sides of the same coin' (Hannah Arendt). And despite all his artistic criticism of technology, Kirsch always also sees technology, operational or defective, as an inexhaustible supply of motifs and materials for (his) art. From the very beginning, he was interested in all kinds of technically (re-)produced images, not only of photographic origin; admittedly less in their function as image templates, but rather as a trigger and source of ideas for an autonomous world of images that unfolds parallel to the depicted reality, implementing the basic theme according to its own rules and varying it from ever new perspectives. This book enables a thorough examination of the many aspects and manifestations of Rolf Kirsch's work; and it provides vivid impressions of its presentations in museums and galleries. The extensive exhibition in 2022 in the perfectly suited rooms of the PAN Kunstforum in Emmerich, on the occasion of which curator Christiane von Haaren conducted an illuminating conversation with Kirsch, should be emphasised here. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the authors for their interesting contributions to this volume. Kirsch's ironic persiflage of technical guides, the idea of which he took up again in 2010 in the BlueprintS (see the text by büro blau.), is in good Dadaist tradition; we know similar absurd 'mechanomorphic' designs from Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp or Max Ernst. Rolf Kirsch is well aware of the modernist tradition of his art; he has repeatedly referred to the pioneers of the photogram and their experiments with the play of light and shadow. The artist is convinced that 'all technical images are silhouettes'. Since the 1990s, he has drawn inspiration from Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, who is also considered the founder of kinetic art for his 'Light-Space Modulator' from 1930. Kirsch himself began to produce technical images, mostly with the help of devices he constructed himself. The texts by Clemens Ottnad and Peter Gerlach in this book deal with light boxes and the stills generated with analogue video films.

Kirsch's concepts, especially his examination of light and shadow, are based on solid scientific knowledge; his study of the theory of coloured shadows, as presented by Goethe in his Theory of Colours, gradually led him to develop his kinetic light-space installations. He himself understands these as cinematic variations of the photogram. The shadows of colourfully illuminated objects playfully spinning around on a draught unfurl their colourful, animated life along the walls, like abstract films that incorporate the viewer, their movements and shadows, into the artwork. Associations with Alexander Calder's 'Mobiles' or with the self-sufficient – sometimes self-destructive – scrap metal machines of Jean Tinguely are certainly welcome. Spherical assemblages made of obsolete remnants of the technical and electronic throwaway society, the so-called RequisiteN, serve as shadow-makers in Kirsch's 'Raumillusionen'. Fused together beyond recognition by the viscous hot glue, they evoke, despite the psychedelic grace of the dancing images, once again the central motif of his art: the inexorable, in a sense 'entropic' tendency of (not only) technical structures to disintegrate. Comparable to the 'objets trouvés' of the Nouveau Réalistes, new life is breathed into electronic waste: 'Through the artistic act of transformation, the material lost through destruction regains its right to exist in a kind of recycling' (Kirsch) - art as 'reanimation'. From the continuum of aleatorically merging shadow constellations, the artist picks out individual 'snapshots' in order to capture them in their individual form as stills. The same applies to the scripts, small hand drawings that sketch out individual formations until they result in a kind of technoid secret writing. Wilhelm Bojescul's contribution, among others, deals with this. The examination of technical failure, in connection with the phenomenon of 'standstill', as suspended movement, time at a standstill, led to the cycle of paintings RHYTHM OF STATISTICS (Rhythm of Statistics), which is rich in images and ideas, from 2002. These small-format, brightly coloured depictions of vehicles of all kinds involved in accidents triggered controversial reactions from critics and the public alike. However, the accident, as a forced standstill, the sudden non-(longer)-functioning of technology, is its unavoidable, statistically predictable 'emergency'; any cynicism is far from the way it is dealt with. The 'beauty of speed' (see the text by Peter Lodermeyer), which the Futurists so enthusiastically revered, is brutally ended by the sudden and involuntary accident. Unlike Andy Warhol's Disaster series, for example, Kirsch does not focus on the human suffering caused by the accident.

The artist is interested in the damage caused by the force of the impact, the 'deformations as an expression of kinetic energy' (Kirsch). In the present book, Jürgen Raap's contribution, among others, deals with this group of works in detail.

Inspired by the desire to 'examine individual components of such deformations for their artistic usability' and in conscious turn to his actual 'metier', painting, he subsequently moved beyond the still scenically integrated accident scenarios to new series of pictures that enlarge and highlight individual details in a still

life-like manner. The works in the series Collisions (2008) blow up selected parts of the deformed surfaces to larger-than-life formats, 'emancipating' them from their specific technical context.

With the series Monochromes, Folds and Abstracts, he continued on the path from stylised car body damage to painterly abstraction. At the same time, these haptic-looking distortions and crumple zones seem to evoke art historical reminiscences, especially of the realism of the late Gothic period, when the art of painted drapery, which owes much to the illusionistic design of light and shadow, became the benchmark of painterly skill. For Kirsch, it was only logical to take the next step of transferring the painted illusion into reality and elevating the picture surface to a relief by means of real folds, in order to then expose it to the interplay of light and shadow. In this way, a pictorial idea in his oeuvre generates the following one(s) in an organic way, so to speak, and each group of works can become the starting point for a new project.

In view of the range of media and content in Kirsch's work groups and series of images, their inner connection only gradually becomes apparent. And what may initially appear to some viewers to be an incoherent collection of different pictorial ideas turns out to be a conceptual oeuvre of great intellectual rigour and coherence when viewed as a whole. Current media-technological as well as scientific and art-historical references, but above all the skilful and effective artistic realisation of his ideas, make engaging with Kirsch's art an aesthetic and intellectual gain.
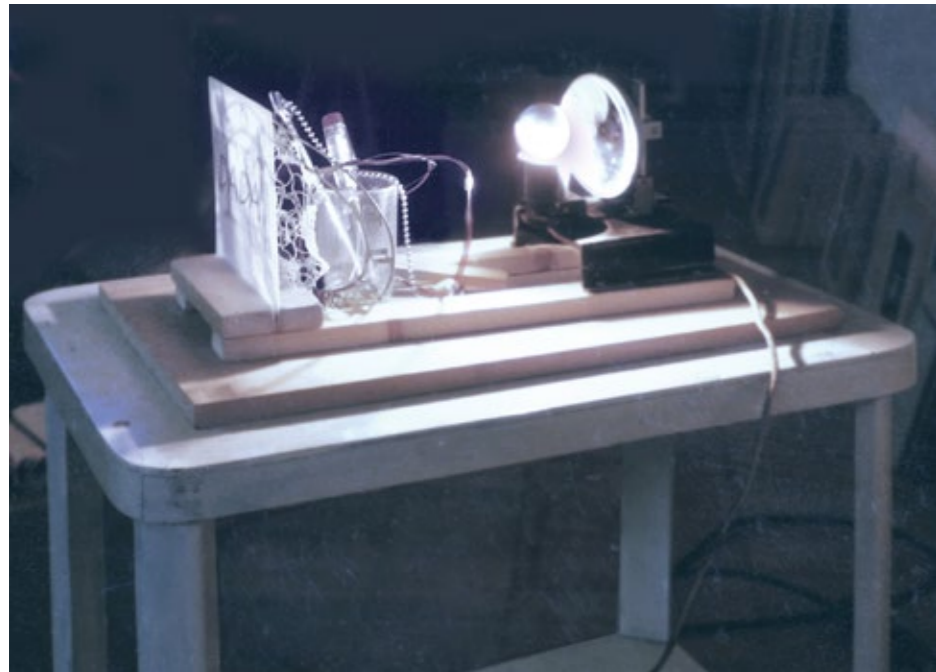
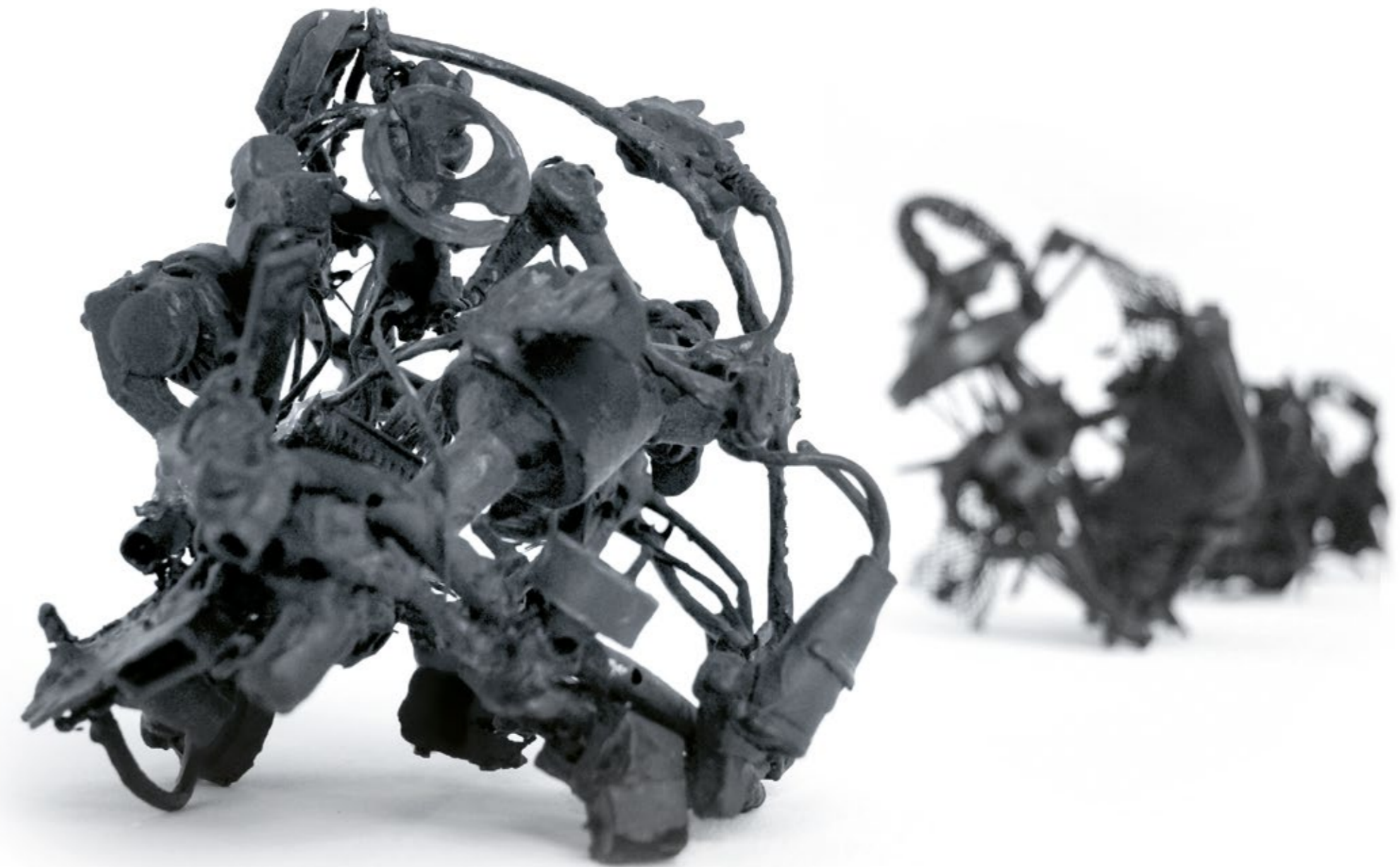*Shadow Experiment, 1998, Studio Sülzburgstraße, Cologne*

MONOCHROME #14, 2021, aluminium sheet, spray paint, approx. 30 x 30 cm

Pedestal: Requisit #20, 1998, various materials, hot glue, approx. 30 x 30 x 30 cm
Wall: CHIFFREN, 2010, ink on cardboard, each 60 x 90 cm

im Vordergrund: REQUISIT #12, 2018, verschiedene Materialien, Heißkleber, ca. 30 x 30 x 30 cm

SCHEMEN, im Vordergrund rechts und links Farb-Fotogramme aus der Serie PRINTS, Installation PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich, 2022

REANIMATION

Peter Lodermeyer

Schemes of coloured light and coloured shadows that move in constant, complicated, overlapping, counter-rotating movements across the wall surfaces, changing, deforming and disappearing in the process, while new formations are already emerging – in every moment of viewing a projection work by Cologne-based artist Rolf Kirsch, the eye is overwhelmed by the task of keeping track of what is happening. No sooner have you grasped one situation than it has already changed. You never enter the same river of light images twice, which appear on the walls of the darkened exhibition space or on circular, backlit screens made of frosted acrylic glass. Nothing is repeated; the elusive, shapeless forms are always new and always different. Their silent movement is immediately fascinating and has an emotional effect that is difficult to describe. It reminds us of children's shadow plays – in fact, the fascination with light and shadow seems to be deeply rooted in the human psyche, as even babies look spellbound at the projections of their children's lamps. However, it should not be overlooked that these works of art are not only composed of the visual effect of the light-shadow forms. Nullus effectus sine causa – the technical setting of Rolf Kirsch's projection art is clearly visible: the light sources – fixed or movable coloured lights – and the co-rotating, bizarrely shaped objects that cast their shadows can be clearly seen. This means that all the technical factors that cause the light and shadow are clearly visible. The relationship between technology and the image itself is thus thematised. These works are the result of the artist's long and intensive engagement with fundamental questions about the nature of the image in our technology-driven world. Seen in the overall context of Kirsch's oeuvre, as it has developed over almost thirty years in ever new attempts, it becomes clear that, despite their installative character, they represent the – provisional – sum of his long engagement with painting and the status of the painted image. Rolf Kirsch's art is to a large extent informed by pictorial theory and conceptually oriented. His painting never served to develop a personal style; his changing stylistic means are much more aligned with his respective questioning of the artistic image. An initial station on the path that ultimately led to the conception of the projection works was the series titled How to use the world from the 1990s. These are image-text works in the seemingly anachronistic medium of the blueprint or cyanotype. The image 'stories' are apparently instructions for using technical devices – but upon looking at them, one soon realises that they are confusing and illogical. This is not surprising, as the artist has manipulated them, mixed different instructions together and mounted the whole thing so skilfully that the breaks are not noticeable. These sabotaged operating instructions can be understood as an ironic take on the experience of anyone who has been unable to recognise pictograms in such instructions and has often been unable to follow instructions that have been poorly translated from other languages. But the works go far beyond this humorous aspect and aim at a fundamental critique of technology, which occupies an important place in the work of Rolf Kirsch. Our fundamentally technical world increasingly consists of objects and functional processes that are incomprehensible and difficult to present. Most technical devices today are black boxes because they have an inner life that only specialists can understand, and they are used without understanding how they work. But the worst-case scenario for technology is always when it fails to function. User manuals are there precisely to get devices that do not yet or no longer work to work. The works in the series How to Use the World get to the heart of this in a self-reflective way, because they are instruction manuals that do not work and therefore require instructions themselves: You have to know (or intuitively grasp) the idea behind it in order for it to 'work' – as a conceptual work of art. The extreme case of non-functioning is the accident. In the series Rhythm of Statistics, Kirsch dealt with recurring events such as car and bus accidents, train derailments, ship accidents, and plane and helicopter crashes. In succinct small-format oil sketches, inspired by press photos, he captured some 150 such accident scenarios between 2002 and 2013 – always bloodless, by the way, without victims or rescue workers, because he is not concerned with the human tragedy, but with the possibility, indeed inevitability, of technical failure inherent in all technology. The French philosopher and critic of modernity Paul Virilio trenchantly described the accident as the actual essence of technical innovation: 'The shipwreck [is] therefore the "futuristic" invention of the ship and the plane crash that of the supersonic aircraft, just as Chernobyl is that of the nuclear power plant'. Accidents are an intrinsic manifestation of technology, as Kirsch's scenes of accidents in sobering succession show. In the Virilio quote, the word 'futuristic' is not meant in an art-historical sense – nevertheless, it should be recalled that Italian Futurism was the first modernist movement to address the connection between art and technology. It is striking that in his 1909 Futurist Manifesto, Federico Tommaso Marinetti prefaces his text with an intro-

duction in which he actually describes a car accident. When he swerved to avoid two cyclists at night, Marinetti ended up in a factory drain. After the car had been pulled out of the mud, he wrote: 'Everyone thought my beautiful "Shark" was dead, but a caress from me was enough to revive it; it has already come back to life, it is already moving again on its mighty fins!' The resuscitation of the technical device is the prerequisite for the manifesto that immediately follows this description and its proclamation of the new 'beauty of speed'. Rolf Kirsch's art is something of an antithesis to Futurism. Movement and speed are Futurist obsessions, their intensification, acceleration, 'is a basic principle of modern society.' Kirsch, in time with the statistics, instead focuses on the truth of technology that we prefer to repress: the possibility of an accident as an abrupt, violent standstill. His oil sketches are still lifes of the damaged technical apparatus, nature morte, dead objects. In the following series, Kirsch drew further artistic conclusions from his deliberations. In the Collisions series, he zoomed in on the dented, deformed vehicles involved in the accident in large-format oil paintings. These works lead to abstraction through their close-up view, which makes it difficult to precisely identify the materials, the forms and their spatial position. Consequentially, the series Soft Impact and Abstracts showed full-frame images of folds and compressions of an unidentifiable material, thus approaching the classical art-historical theme of the drapery. The next logical step was to take the subject of folds out of painting and into real space, using crumpled canvases or deformed tinplate as reliefs in the Folds series. In an analogy to the cultural studies scholar Aby Warburg, who examined details such as fluttering hair and folds in robes for the spiritual energies they contained, one could speak here of the material deformations as the 'pathos formulas' of technical modernism: traces of the kinetic energy released in the impact.

With his sculptural requisites, Kirsch went the opposite way: instead of deforming a rectangular initial form, these whimsical, almost spherical sculptures consist of the assembly of numerous small found objects glued together with hot air glue. They are, according to the definition of Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'bricolages', characterised 'by the use of the remnants of events: "odds and ends", as the English would say, waste and fragments' – in this case electronic waste, cables, plugs, brackets, clamps, spiral springs and much more , debris and broken parts of technical devices that have become inoperable, whose different colours and materials Kirsch has homogenised by coating them with acrylic paint. But how can an artistic spark of life be ignited in these odds and ends, the dead debris,

the technoid plastic waste? Marinetti claims to have revived his crashed car with 'caresses' and, in an outpouring of unreserved enthusiasm for technology, sang the praises of motorised modernity. A century later, Rolf Kirsch has a sobering, dialectical relationship to technology. However, his criticism of technology is not an antagonism towards technology, which is why the props are reanimated using technical means, with rotating LED lights that create what is the elementary 'material' of painting: light and colour. Illuminated in the primary colours of the additive RGB colour space (red, green and blue), the scrap sculptures cast coloured shadows on the walls and, in this application of artistic recycling, create a magical and beautiful light show.

ABSTRACT #15, 2014, oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm and
ABSTRACT #14, 2014, oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm
Exhibition view, PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich, 2022
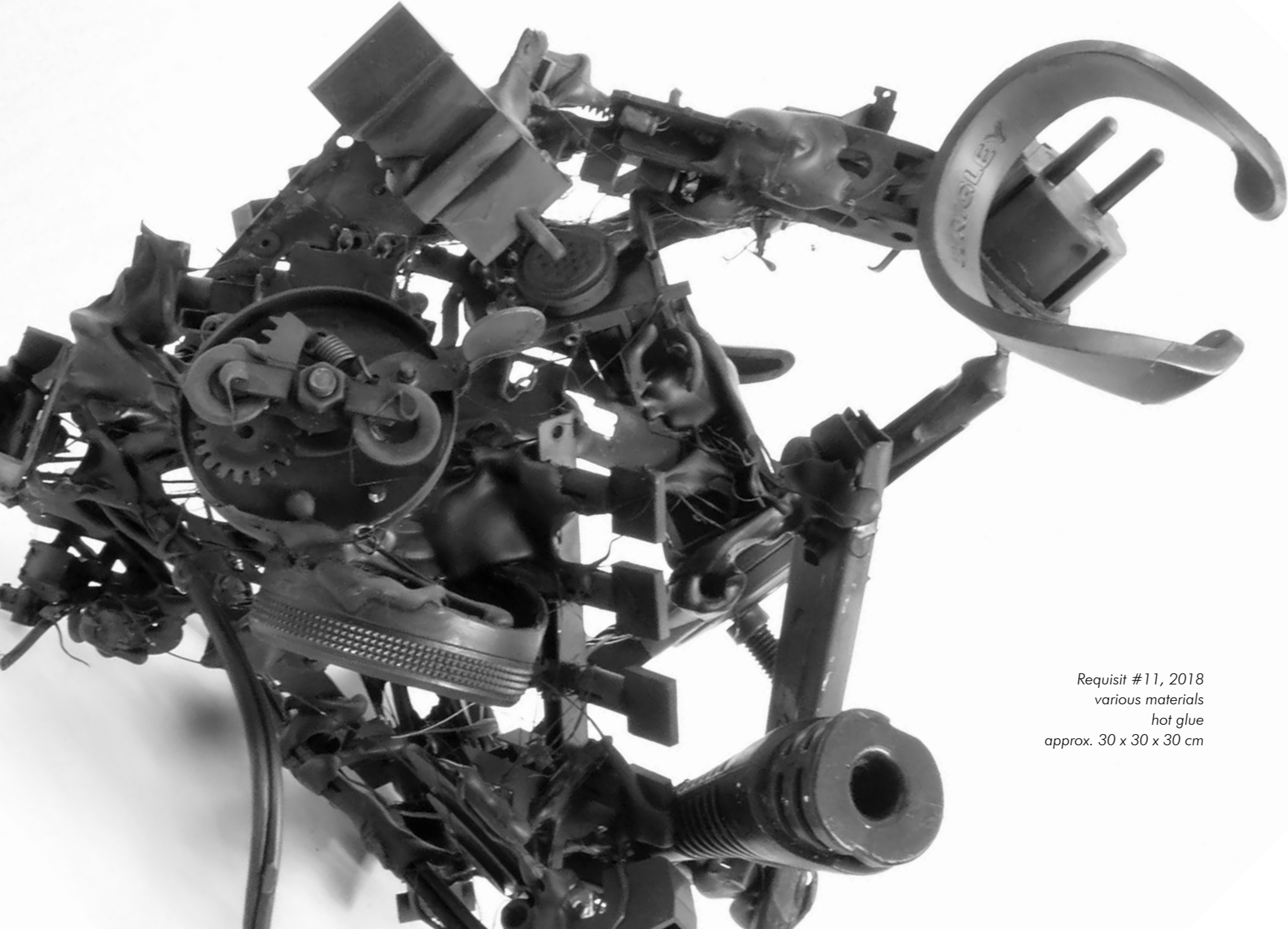
Requisit #11, 2018
various materials
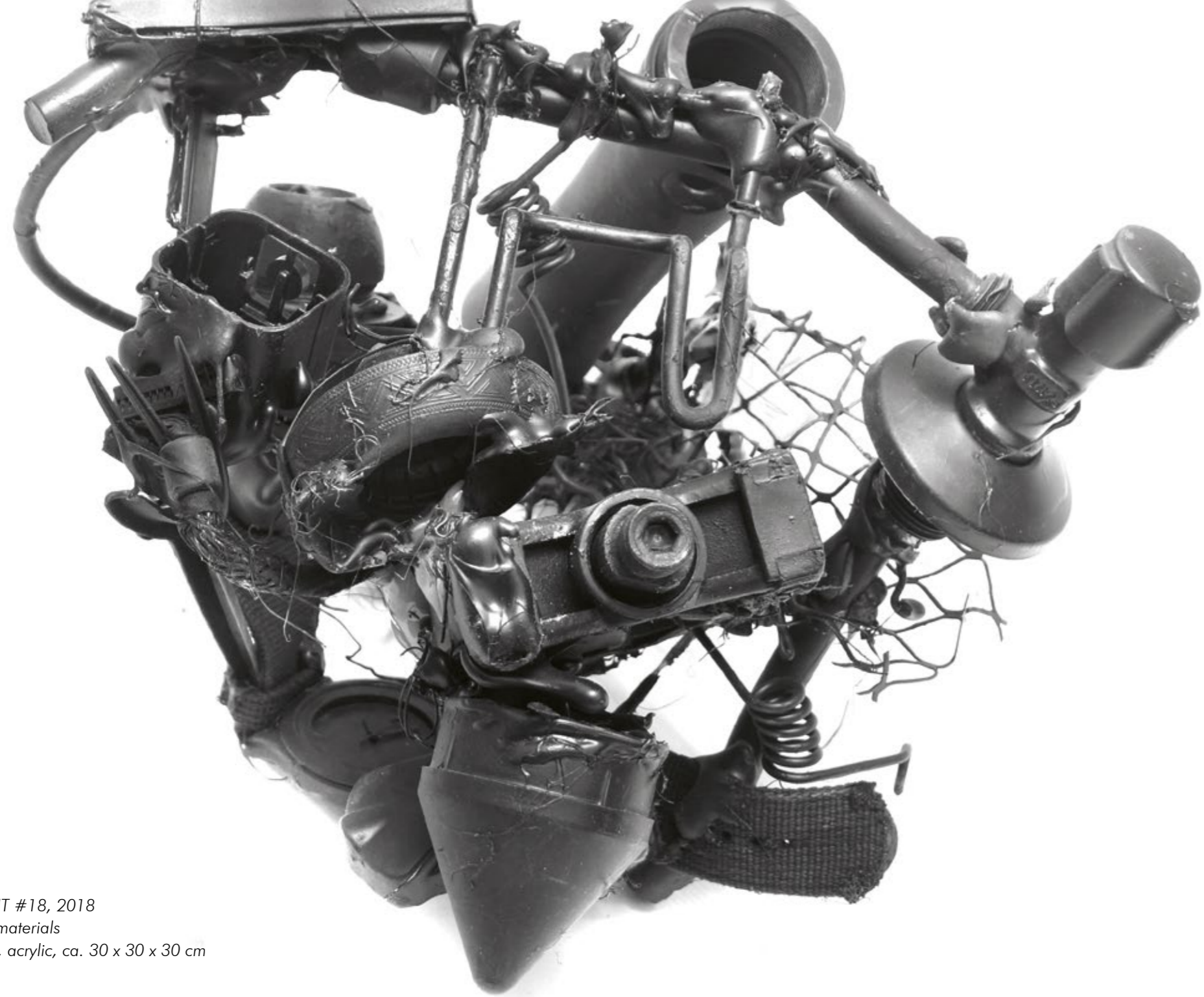*hot glue*
approx. 30 x 30 x 30 cm

SCHEMEN

SCHEMEN, 2021
Installation
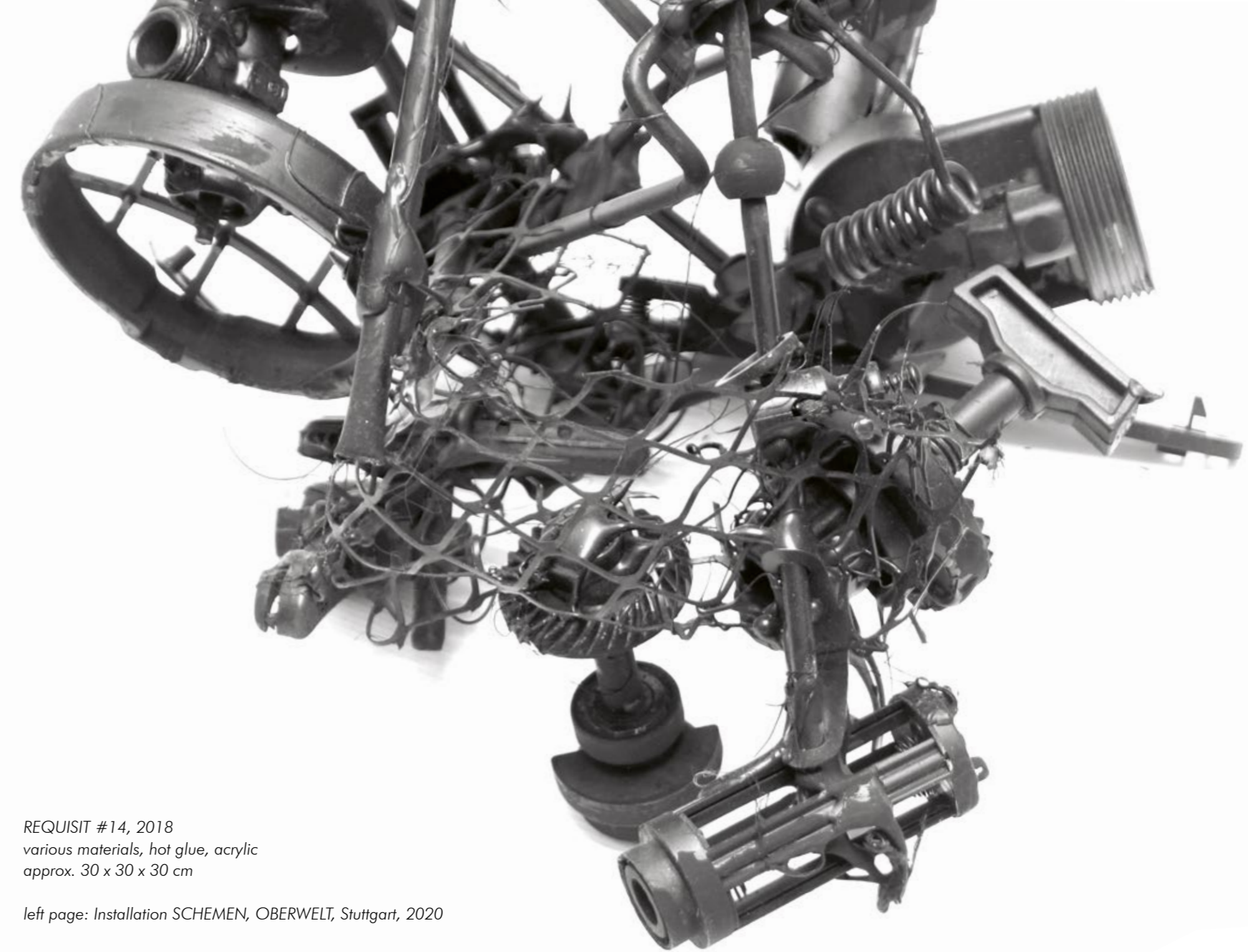PETERSBURGER Raum für Kunst, Cologne

SCHEMEN, 2022
Installation PAN kunstforum niederrhein

REQUISIT #18, 2018
various materials
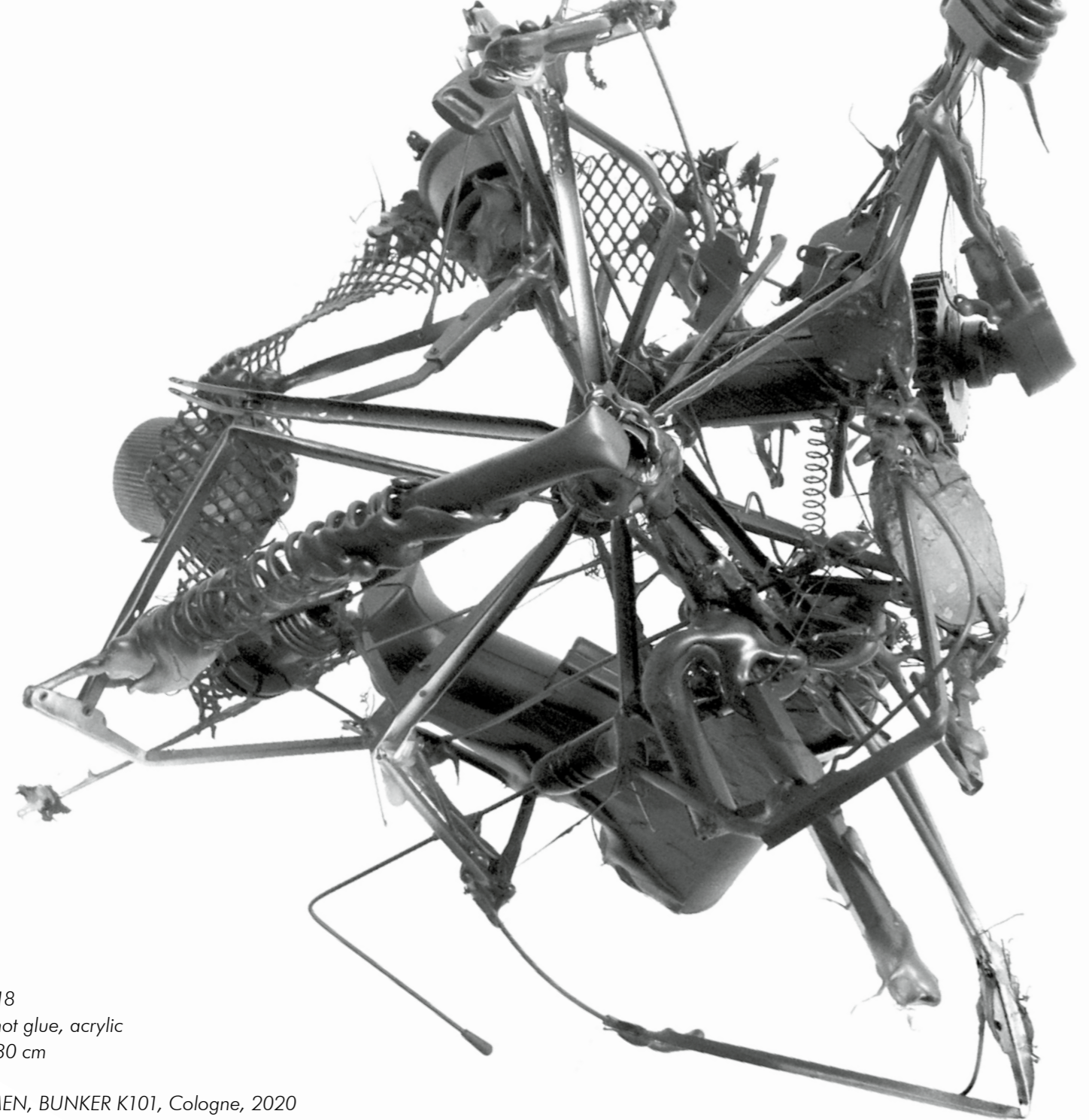*hot glue, acrylic, ca. 30 x 30 x 30 cm*

Installation SCHEMEN, BUNKER K101, Köln, 2020

REQUISIT #14, 2018
various materials, hot glue, acrylic
approx. 30 x 30 x 30 cm

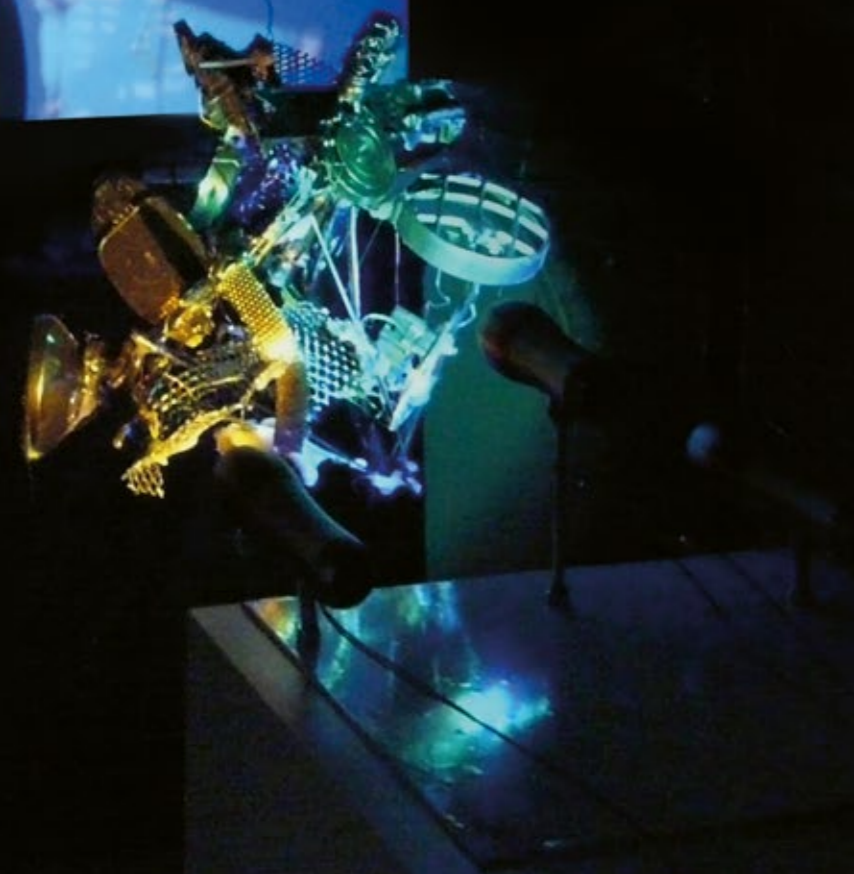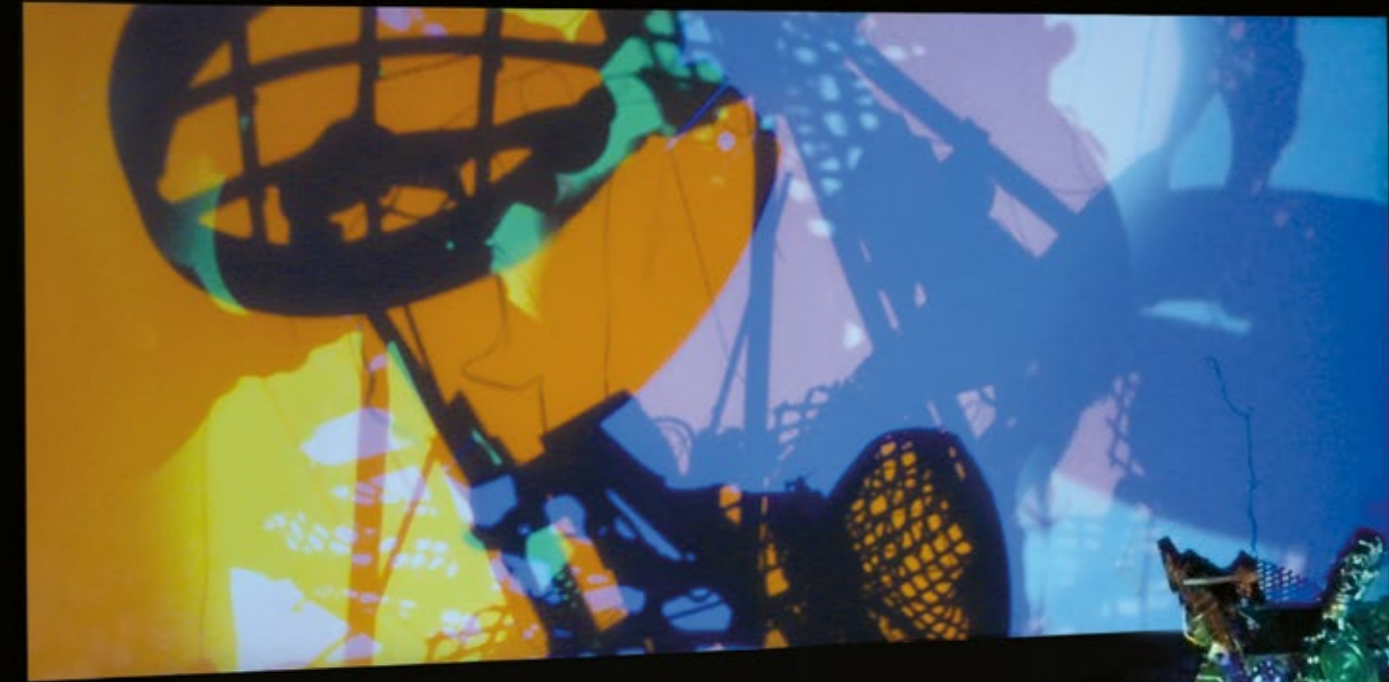*left page: Installation SCHEMEN, OBERWELT, Stuttgart, 2020*

REQUISIT #17, 2018
various materials, hot glue, acrylic
approx. 30 x 30 x 30 cm

right page: SCHEMEN, BUNKER K101, Cologne, 2020

Studio situation, Cologne, 2018

Installation SOUTERRAIN, LABOR Ebertplatz Köln, 2019

Unsafe at any Speed*

Sabine Schütz

In view of the diversity of the images and objects assembled here at the Kunstverein Viernheim – paintings, photograms, blueprints, audios – one might spontaneously think of a group exhibition – if one were not disabused by the invitation card. We are dealing with only one artist, Rolf Kirsch from Cologne. He obviously does not belong to the type of artist who specialises in one form of expression in order to constantly vary and repeat it, if only for the sake of recognizability. On the contrary, the heterogeneous spectrum of his artistic means and methods corresponds to the theme that has motivated and inspired his art from the very beginning: the relationship between media images and visual art, namely painting, which must always be redefined. Formulated in this way, it does not sound particularly new, but is one of the great subjects of postmodern art per se. Kirsch, however, has created a very unique and novel visual language for these 'second-hand images', as he himself characterises his works. They are based on media templates from contexts rather far removed from art, which he appropriates artistically, or one could also say, transforms. Despite his fascination with the world of media images, his gaze always remains critically distanced, and an ironic note is usually involved. In 1990, in the series of pictures entitled Blueprint, the series also includes some works that can be seen here, the bizarre world of operating instructions, circuit diagrams and pictograms in their often helpless efforts to be understood and used - the series is titled: How to Use the World. In 1998, the father-to-be created the series Bettie wächst, which is based on prenatal ultrasound portraits of his daughter. In 2005, he created the series Fremdkörper, black-and-white paintings based on X-rays of objects forgotten in the bodies of patients who had undergone surgery. In 1988, eight years before Google Earth, Kirsch was already responding to the incipient internet presence of the globe with large-format paintings inspired by satellite photos of the earth's surface. Kirsch calls the series Still Life Pictures, still lifes, because the speed and simultaneity of electronic images are deliberately 'decelerated' here by slower and more deliberate media such as painting
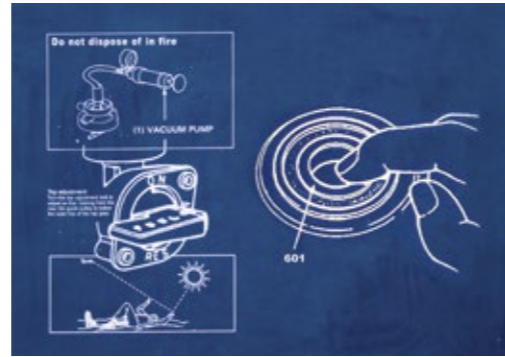
BLUEPRINT, 2010
Cyanotypie, 30 x 40 cm
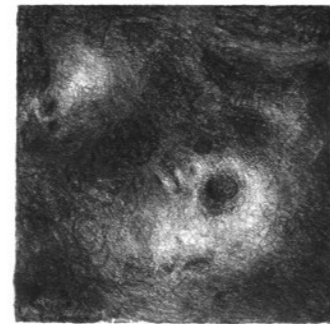
BETTIE WÄCHST, 1998
Graphit auf Bütten, 12 x 12 cm

FREMDKÖRPER, 2005
Öl auf Holz, 25 x 38 cm

and drawing. Even the movement of the earth itself is symbolically stopped. Stillstand (stagnation) is the name of a magazine published by Kirsch that uses texts and images to take a satirical and critical look at the phenomenon of time at a standstill, which is viewed rather sceptically today. Although we increasingly long for time out from the hustle and bustle of working life and have thoroughly learned to mistrust progress, most of us do not trust ourselves to stand still. That could be mistaken for taking a step backwards. Our mentality is still dominated by the saying that a rolling stone gathers no moss. Since 2002, Rolf Kirsch has been working on the pictorial project Rhythm of Statistics, whose seemingly bureaucratic title laconically downplays what it is actually about – the extreme, often deadly form of standstill caused by accidents and disasters. The ship, train, aircraft or road traffic accidents shown here have actually occurred. The photographs were taken from news services on the internet, as were the sober accompanying comments that assign each disaster its own 'biography', so to speak. Rolf Kirsch continues to add new material to his series to this day. The series now consists of around 150 pictures. Some of these horror scenarios, such as the train crash in Eschede, may be familiar to viewers precisely because of their spectacular media coverage. 'Catastrophes as an Iconic Model of Concern' is the name of a research project at Berlin's Humboldt University that asks whether it is actually the images that document the catastrophes, or whether it is not rather the other way around, that events are only perceived as catastrophes through their pictorial representation. These are the kinds of questions that confront the viewer of Kirsch's disaster scenes. With confident painterly gestures, viewed from a distance they appear almost photorealistic, he stages excerpts from shocking internet photo files. Vehicles demolished by the force of the collision are wedged together. Lost fragments of aeroplanes or entire buses bob up and down on seas and rivers, just before they sink; the luxury liner Sea Diamond capsizes violently off the cliffs of an idyllic Aegean island. Crashed aeroplanes lie broken on the ground, while railway carriages look as if they have been carelessly scattered by an invisible Gulliver. The bright colours of the debris give the images an almost surreal cheerfulness. Like still lifes, the fragments fit almost harmoniously into the surrounding landscape. Kirsch's pictures do not describe the events from the perspective of the

SATELLITENBILD #30, 2005, Öl auf Holz, 50 x 50 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2013, Öl auf Holz
25 x 35 cm

gawker. There are no people; neither dead nor injured, neither perpetrators nor paramedics. Nothing burns, smokes or explodes. He also does not ask about the causes of failure, whether human or technical. His painting focuses on the standstill after the always unpredictable – but statistically inevitable – interruption of functional processes due to sudden failure. By capturing the wreckage, his paintings arrest the events that throw everything off track in a painterly way and bring them to consciousness more intensely than the electronic media can. In our minds, we may try to reconstruct the courses of the accidents that have been deliberately left out here or to imagine the human destinies associated with them. But above all, these wrecks, abruptly torn from their accustomed hustle and bustle, leave us perplexed and dismayed. Some viewers have reacted to the series of accidents with annoyance and irritation, as if accidents were not an appropriate motif for the visual arts. Art history itself contradicts this, having already recognised the motif of the shipwreck in the Middle Ages, which then, in the 17th century, became a baroque allegory of the shipwreck of life. From around 1750, European painting is teeming with natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and fires. This history of symbolism ranges from the dramatic shipwreck paintings of the British artist William Turner to the shattered 'Hope' of Caspar David Friedrich; the philosopher Hans Blumenberg has analysed the philosophical and literary aspects of the shipwreck motif in his fascinating work 'Shipwreck with Spectators'.

For the artists of the highly technical 20th century, the disaster of civilisation increasingly replaced the natural disaster. In particular, the car crash – as the inevitable price of unbridled technical progress – became a popular artistic subject. The basic tenor was that failure and the risk of disaster are automatically inherent in all technical products or processes. This was addressed, for example, in the early 1960s by John Chamberlain's car scrap sculptures from the context of New Realism. Oscillating between technological criticism and aesthetics, the compressions and 'tin reliefs' by the French artist César draw their aesthetic quality precisely from the contrast between destruction and abstraction. With his 'Car Crash' and 'Plane Crash' series, which were created around the same time, pop icon Andy Warhol drew attention to the

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2013
Öl auf Holz, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2013
Öl auf Holz, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2013
Öl auf Holz, 25 x 35 cm

growing indifference to the ever more frequent accident reports; in his work, the dead and injured play the shocking leading role. Shortly afterwards, in 1965, a remarkable book was published by Ralph Nader, which denounced the safety deficiencies of American car production and the carelessness in dealing with the dangers. Its title 'Unsafe at any Speed' implies what Kirsch would also subscribe to: only a standstill guarantees safety. This probably was also the intention of Fluxus artist Wolf Vostell when he had a car cast in concrete and placed on the central reservation of Cologne's Hohenzollern-ring in 1969: stationary traffic. All this happened more than 50 years ago. The topic of accidents is still present in art today, for example in the work of Roman Signer, who staged and filmed an accident himself in his installation 'Accident as Sculpture', or the Danish artist Nicolai Howalt, who photographs and aesthetically exaggerates fender benders in his 'Car Crash Studies' as glossy photographs. Rolf Kirsch also increasingly focussed his painterly gaze on individual details, causing his images to gradually approach abstraction. From his series Reanimation, we see here some works that mark the transition to the most recently created Abstracts. Rolf Kirsch wrote about them: 'In the deconstruction of the accident, the vehicles become the protagonists of a real abstraction that is retraced in the painting process.' In the ABSTRACTS, the warped and twisted wrecked vehicles take on a life of their own in an almost classical pattern, becoming prime examples of virtuoso painting. Kirsch once again refers, both ironically and seriously, to traditional painting, which practised and measured its perfection by the example of the representation of textile materials. Velvet and silk, brocade or damask were the ultimate challenges for every painter. The countless studies of robes and drapery in art history, including and especially those by the greatest masters, bear this out. That Kirsch's softly shimmering surfaces, gently modulated by light and shadow, go back to sheet metal fragments from accident vehicles can only be seen if you know the context. Through painterly transformation and reduction, real catastrophes have become abstract aesthetic colour events. Formally, the ABSTRACTS are directly related to the PRINTS series, small-format photograms that seem almost psychedelic in their vibrant colours and dynamics. With PRINTS, Kirsch takes up the photogram technique, i.e. cameraless photography, which was discovered over 150 years ago by photo-

COLLISION #9, 2009, Öl auf Holz, 130 x 160 cm

ABSTRACT #21, 2013, Öl auf Leinwand, 130 x 170 cm

graphy pioneer Fox Talbot and made usable for art in the 1920s by artists such as Man Ray and, in particular, László Moholy-Nagy. Rolf Kirsch has revived the old process by means of colour and movement and expanded its possibilities. The work consists of various components that relate to each other in a complex way: sculpture, photography, projection, video. Once again, Kirsch is exploring the borderlands between electronics and painting, technicality and creativity. The first Requisit sculptures, which form the starting point of the project, were created as early as 1999; they consist of electronic scrap such as cables, plugs, etc., which the artist, like a spider spinning its web, assembled step by step from the inside out, gluing everything with a hot glue gun to form black, almost spherical structures. Their filigree construction makes them appear transparent and light. Kirsch uses these objects to create silhouettes by illuminating them with light sources in the primary colours and projecting their contours onto a background. The works were preceded by intensive study of the phenomenon of coloured shadows, which had already fascinated Goethe and inspired him to write his Theory of Colours. Unlike the classic photogram, in which the exposed object lies flat on the image carrier, it is now in the room, which is incorporated into the image design. In a continuation of the experiment, Kirsch set the light sources (LEDs) in motion using a specially constructed apparatus, which increases the constant variation of the shadow cast. From this process, he in turn filtered out certain images, so-called stills. Once again, a standstill has occurred, removed from the movement of the film and fixed as a single image.

The talk of silhouettes, which is repeatedly heard in his texts, establishes a connection to one of the oldest philosophical myths par excellence, Plato's cave allegory, which he developed more than 2400 years ago together with Socrates in the dialogue 'Politeia'. In an underground cave, people are chained up and can only ever see one wall, on which the shadows of objects are reflected. In Platonic philosophy, these shadows symbolise the reality that can be perceived by the senses, as we see it – inadequately and as a mere copy. If one of the prisoners were to leave the cave, the daylight would dazzle him, and only after a long period of familiarisation would he be able to recognise the objects responsible for the shadows – a first step on the path to understan-

SOFT IMPACT #9, 2012
Oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm

NACHTSCHATTEN #16, 2017, photo edition

ding what Plato calls the original ideas of the intellectual world, which can only be grasped intellectually. Kirsch takes up the metaphor of the silhouette and adapts it to the contemporary context of the virtual world of images. From real events to virtual images to the standstill of painting; from the scrap of consumer electronics to projection and videography to the stilled single frame. In view of the rapidity with which the digital industry is constantly throwing new imaging processes onto the market, it is becoming an important task for art to counter the unleashed technology with phases of reflection and pause.
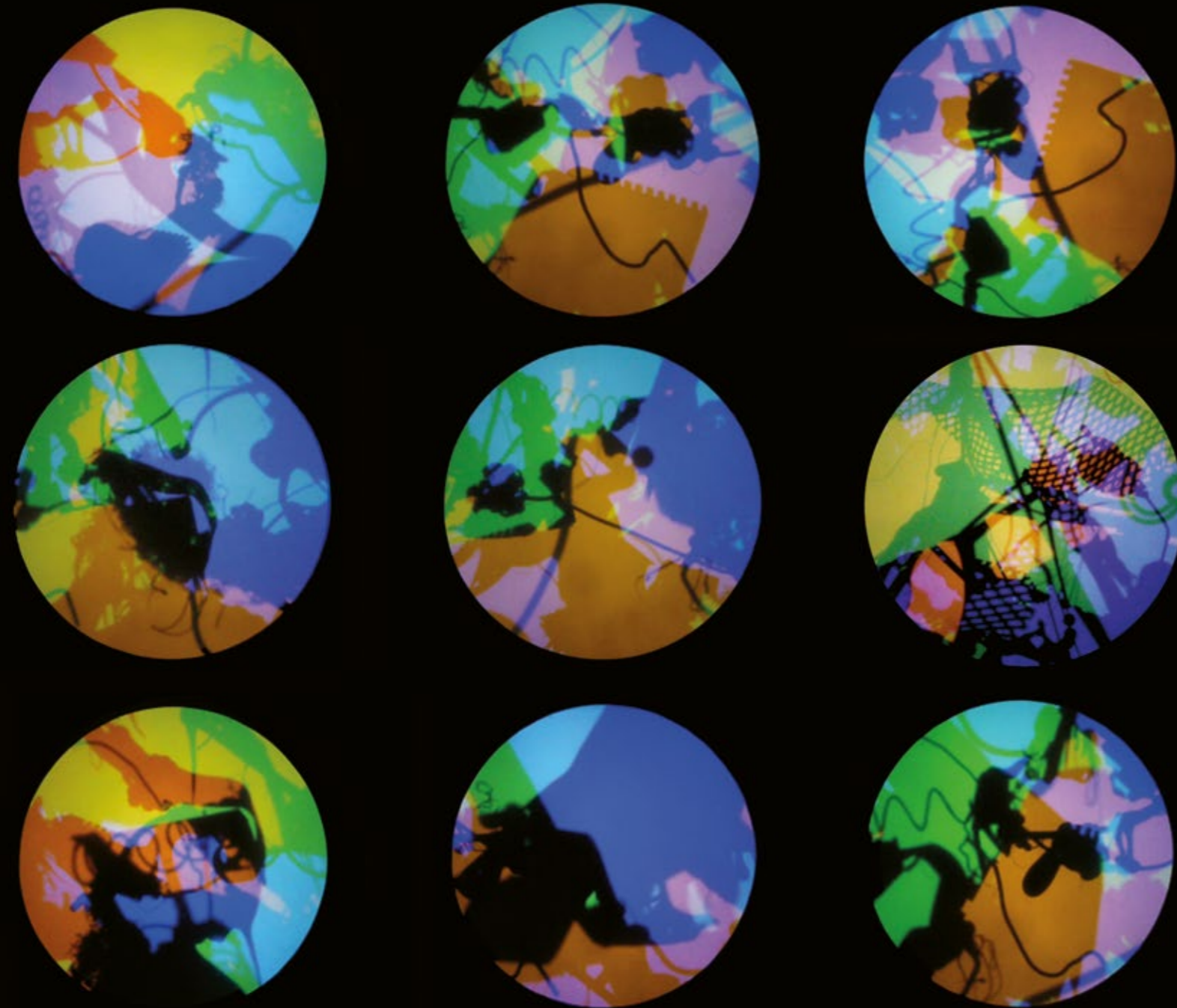

Schattenprojektion im Atelier, Köln, 2020

* Speech given at the opening of the exhibition THE PAINTER IN THE DARK, Kunstverein Viernheim, 2013

REQUISIT #14, 2018, verschiedene Materialien
ca. 30 x 30 x 30 cm

ECLIPSE, 2017, various views, shadow projection on a ground glass screen, Ø 100 cm

PHOTOGRAMS

PRINTS, 2010, Farb-Fotogramme, Ilfochrome, je 21 x 29 cm

PRINTS

Cornelia Hummel

„I proposed to spread on a sheet of paper a sufficient quantity of the nitrate of silver; and then to set the paper in the sunshine, having first placed before it some object casting a wel! defined shadow. The light, acting on the rest of the paper would naturally blacken it, while the parts in shadowwould retain their whiteness. Thus I expected that a kind of image or picture would beproduced, resembling to a certain degree the object from which it was derived."

<div align="right">Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, William Henry FoxTalbot 1839</div>

Technical, virtual images are silhouettes. They are created by applying the principle of the projection of light or the properties of light-related phenomena. In the debate about the relationship between painting and technical image media, the staging of silhouettes has become a central working principle for the Cologne-based painter R.J. Kirsch. In the analogy between painterly gesture and the casting of shadows, the painter gains a key to penetrating the technical process of image production. As early as the 1990s, this resulted in a series of multimedia installations that culminated in the realisation of silhouettes and films. Shadow compositions are created from 30-centimetre-high scrap sculptures, which seem to anticipate the mostly large-format disaster paintings of his current work.

Space, Time and Light

In the 1920s, Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy, fascinated by light as an artistic medium, established the photogram as an independent art form. After 1945, the photogram was further developed by 'experimental' photographers. Kirsch's work fits into this tradition, but also defies expectations that are usually associated with the principle of the photogram: his photograms are filmically constructed, reflect the medial framework of his work, and create a film through the continuous movement of the shadowing objects, whereby each individual image is understood as the output of a cinematic process. They react to the space around them; objects do not lie flat on the paper, but are located in the space in front of the light-sensitive material. And they are created in coloured light. The physics of coloured shadows allows Kirsch to transform his sculptures into fully coloured photograms. The method is as simple as it is astounding. The objects positioned in front of the light-sensitive paper are illuminated by point light sources in the three primary colours. The resulting silhouettes overlap, light, penumbra and umbra create a fully coloured silhouette. Kirsch not only realises his shadow pictures on paper, but also in the new media, expanding the static shadow image into a shadow film, as presented for the first time in the 1999 PHANTOM exhibition at the Albstadt Museum. His PRINTS, film stills, which are presented in various formats as unique digital prints, can also be understood in this context of alternating cinematic and photographic images.

Recycling

When Kirsch now juxtaposes these sculptures and his light works with his damaged paintings in his exhibition project Reanimation, the examination reveals itself from two sides: on the one hand, the viewer looks through the tangle of his sculptures into a shadowy space flooded with colour, and on the other hand, the view is of the surfaces of deformed sheets and rods. In both cases, however, the artistic act of transformation, or even 'reanimation', gives the material that was lost through destruction back its right to exist in an artistic recycling.
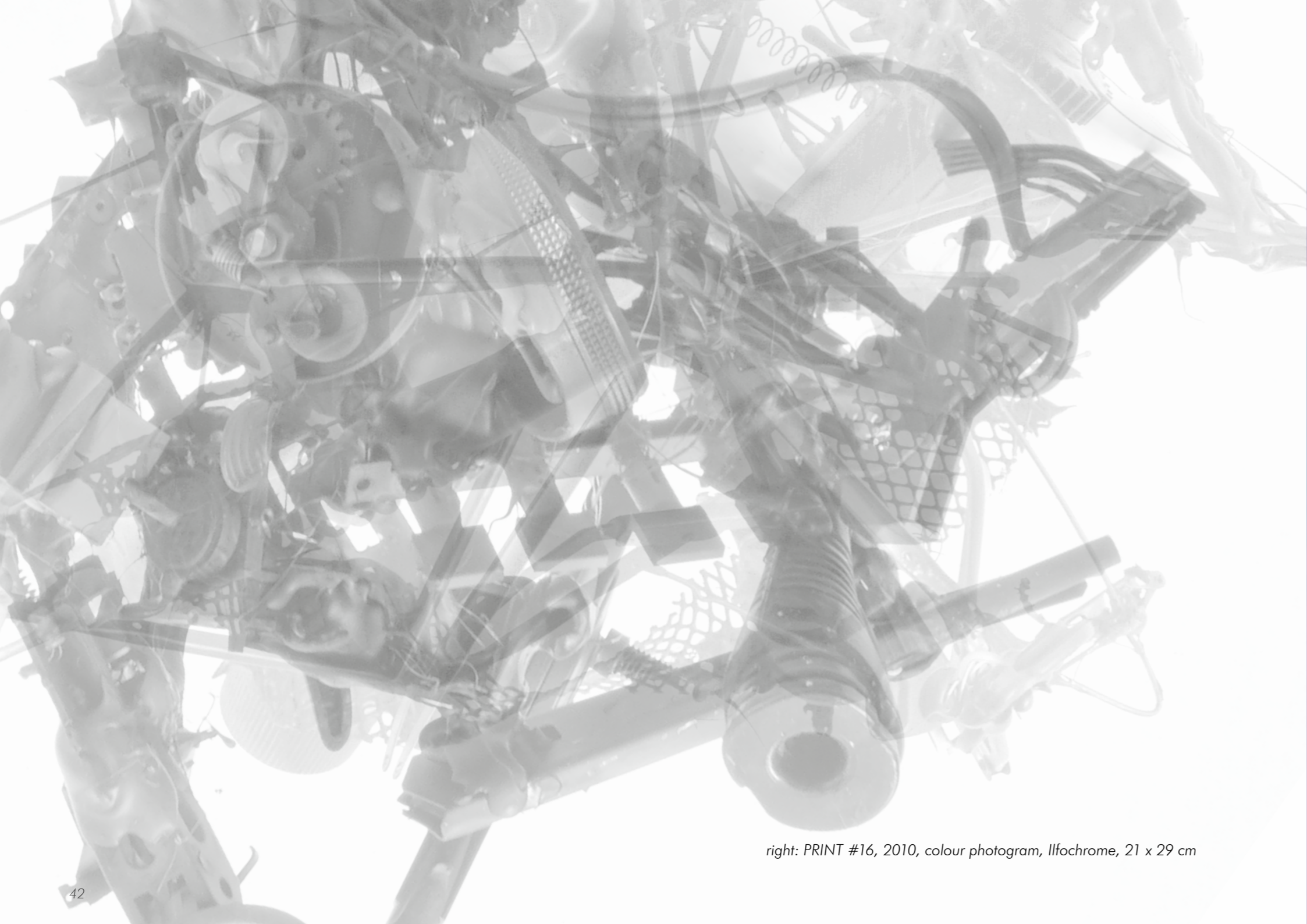
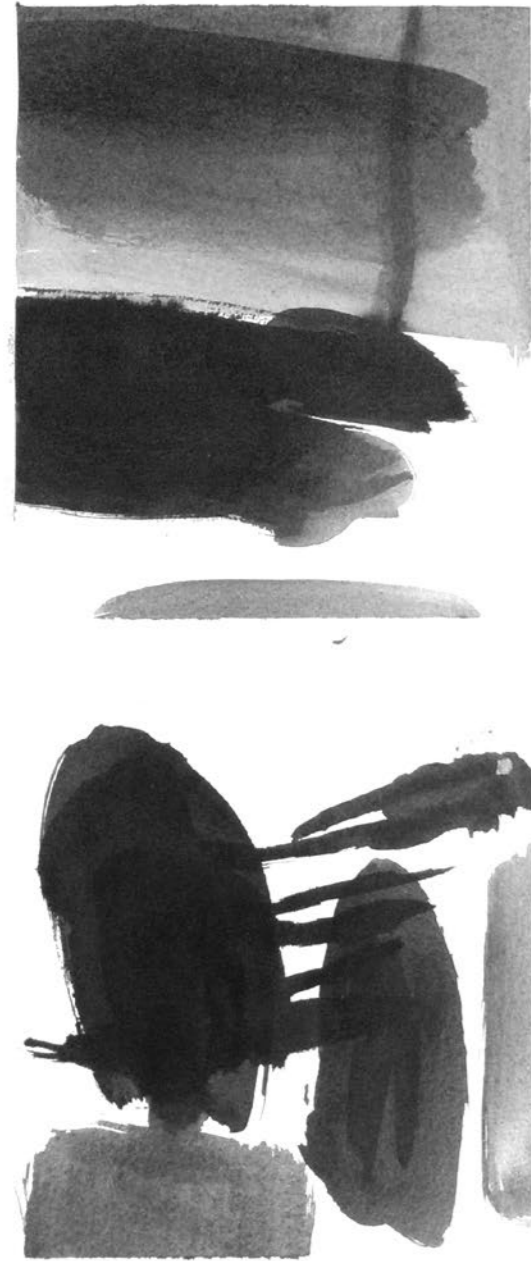right: PRINT #49, 2010, colour photogram, Ilfochrome, 21 x 29 cm

38

40

right: PRINT #65, 2010, colour photogram, Ilfochrome, 21 x 29 cm

right: PRINT #16, 2010, colour photogram, Ilfochrome, 21 x 29 cm

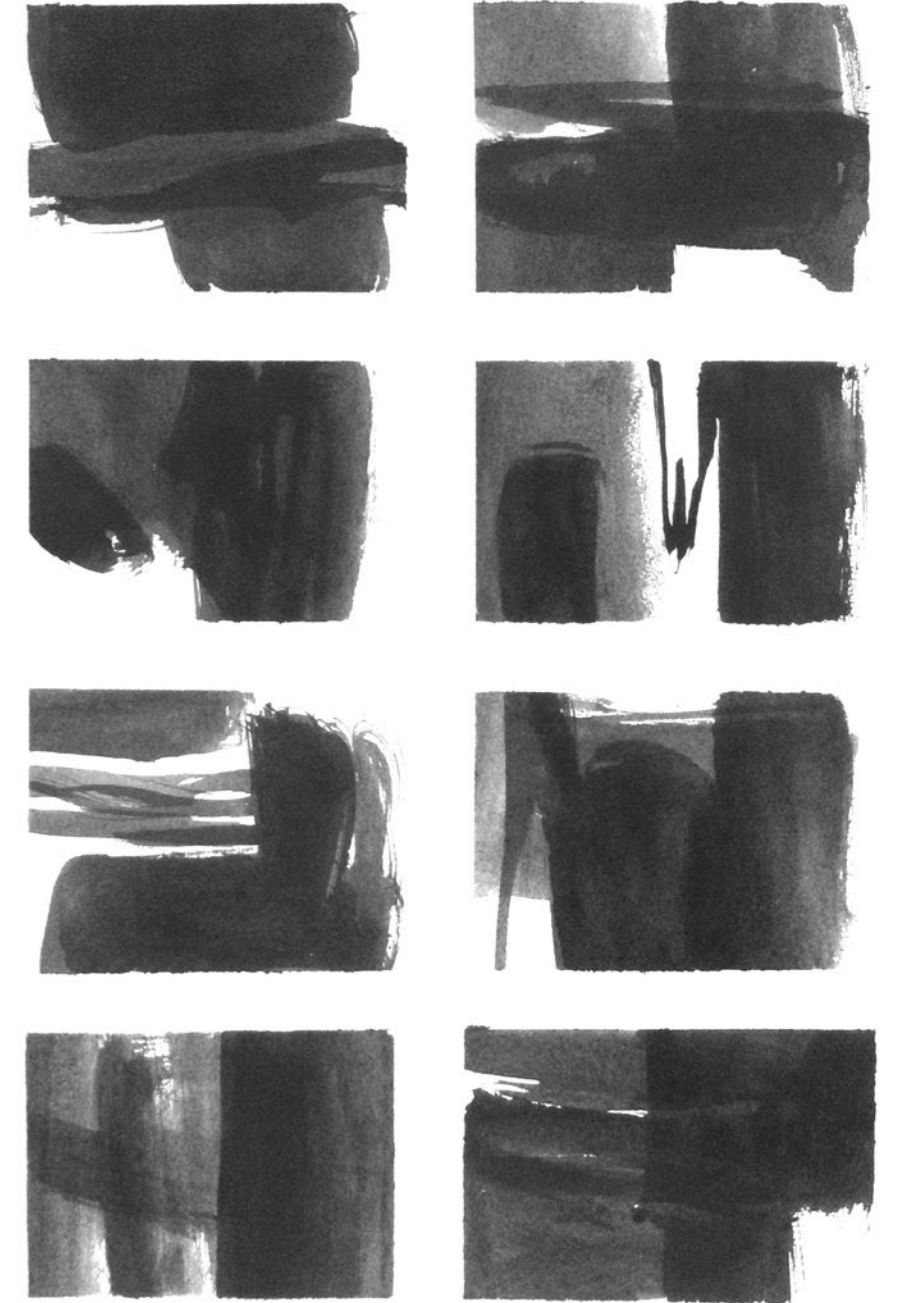*TOPOGRAFIE, 1993, Acryl auf Papier, 40 x 50 cm*

Phantome

Wilhelm Bojescul

Rolf Kirsch is an artist who uses a variety of media to 'paint' pictures. His subject is the relationship between the material and immaterial aspects of the image. The pictures he created in the 1980s were already abstract in form. Later, he developed a quasi-calligraphic formal vocabulary, which initially – reduced to black and white – came very close to drawing, as his work generally involves constant switching between drawing and painting. Following on from this, large-format watercolours were created that emphasise tonal work in a light-dark scale and mark the path to the predominant role of colour that would later emerge. The fleetingness of the moment is already evident here as a design element, which consistently becomes independent in later works.

The picture as action

If the picture as action is already a picture in itself the result of an artistic action, then it makes sense to examine this actionist moment more closely and to thematise it. In doing so, Kirsch starts from the real situations of his artistic environment. Many external factors determine the creation of a picture. The spatial and light situation of a studio; the light and weather conditions in nature: Kirsch consciously creates situations in which pictures can be created, but do not have to be. In this context, a multitude of individual aspects would have to be clarified, some of which will be addressed.

Transitions

If we look at Kirsch's works from the point of view of light and shade, then in terms of colour this is a contrast between light and dark, and also between warm and cold. These contrasts are already present in his early pictures and are particularly evident in his 'calligraphic' vocabulary of forms. The painterly, i.e. colour, aspect appears here through tonal work, whereby the graphic hardnesses increasingly lose themselves in a sfumato, the outli-

TOPOGRAFIE, 1993, Acryl auf Papier, 50 x 40 cm

ne dissolves. These watercolours on cardboard, primarily in a brown-black scale, anticipate the photographs that followed later in their appearance.

Subject and abstraction

When Kirsch stages pictorial actions, he usually uses real objects from everyday life. Examples include TV room antennas, bicycle spokes or ladders. These objects are placed in front of a coloured light source so that they cast shadows. Distortions arise that reveal little of the actual form. The feeling that the image motifs are somehow 'representational', derived from something, is constantly present due to the nature of the shadow. Perhaps it is futile to discuss the relationship between abstraction and object again in this context. In any case, Kirsch's abstraction here is not only the result of subjective-artistic transformations, but also the consequence of physical necessities that we all constantly encounter in everyday life. Abstraction is thus not the real stranger that needs to be understood, but the unknown is revealed as the banal. That shadows are not simply black is something that has been taken for granted in painting since Impressionism, at the latest.

Flexibility

For Kirsch, the flexibility of the image has always been essential. His aim was to resolve the contradiction between pictorial stasis and actionist mobility. The solution was to understand the individual image as a fraction of a sequence and to place it in continually changing contexts. This created connections in space and time. He captures this fleeting moment, which is based on the constant change of light and shadow, in his photographic works, which do not imitate painting. The photographic means used here serve primarily as documentation. The technical effects of photography are not sought, they are conditions that must be accepted. Slight colour differences during development, minimal format changes during cropping, are beyond artistic control and are left as they are. These effects are determined by the medium and characterise, among other things, the materiality of photography.

*TOPOGRAPHY, 1993, acrylic on cardboard, 50 x 50 cm*
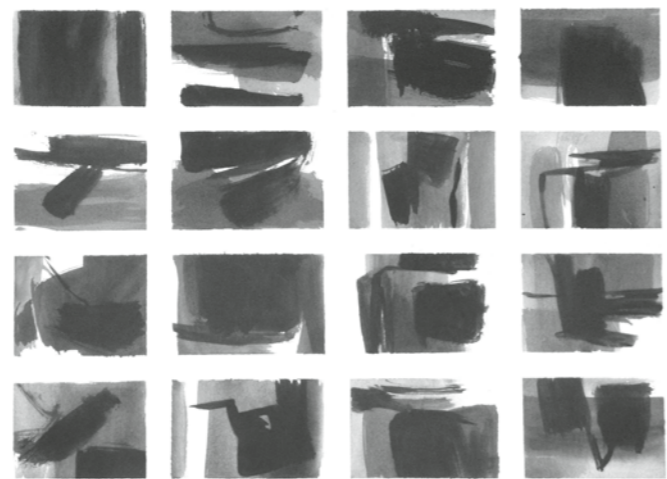
TOPOGRAPHY, 1993, acrylic on paper, 40 x 50 cm

Order and chaos

Considering the relationship between artistic intention and the effect of the works, a dialectical tension between idea and realisation can be observed in the sense that the intended artistic effect is based on a planned approach. However, the individual works convey themselves more as random, sometimes as ambiguous, so that chaos and order as opposites are united in them. Kirsch's work is characterised by a multitude of pairs of opposites that place the work in an ambiguous state. This uncertainty of the image is unsettling and at the same time can lead to a more in-depth examination of individual objects. This 'uncertainty' is designed to be broken down. It is entirely possible to recognise the 'original template' from one form or another. Where this is not clearly the case, it can be done associatively. The objects reveal themselves by overcoming their inhibitions. This is to be discovered or at least guessed at. Determining what the essence of this object really is should be reserved primarily for philosophical consideration.

*STILL V38, 1999, shadow play, photography, 40 x 50 cm*
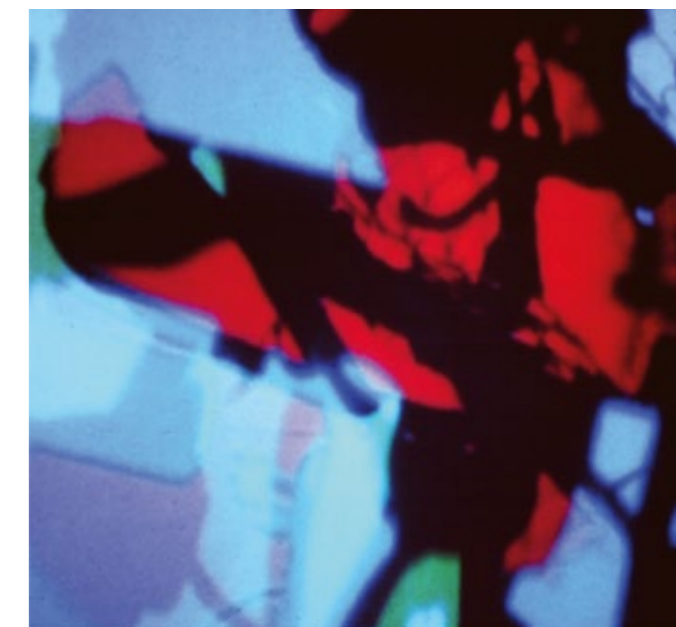
STILL V41, 1999, shadow play, photography, 40 x 50 cm

CHIFFREN

A two-and-a-half-minute video clip contains around four thousand individual images, a number that a painter would struggle to exceed in a lifetime. The technical production of images seems overwhelming. For me, engaging with electronic image media has thus become an artistic survival strategy. It is against this background that the conceptual series Topography has been developing since the early 1990s. The drawings and watercolours from this project are basically to be understood as storyboards for an imaginary film that runs in front of my mind's eye. Starting from simple basic forms, the pictorial world of my painting unfolds into a sequence of individual 'panels'. Following the principle of binary multiplication, two then become four, four become eight, eight become sixteen such individual 'panels' per sheet, until this process culminates in a number of individual pictorial signs that can no longer be determined at first glance. Ultimately, the individual image shrinks to a compositional abbreviation, with several thousand such signs lining up to form tableaux. rjk

SCRIPT, 2010, felt-tip pen on paper, 20 x 30 cm
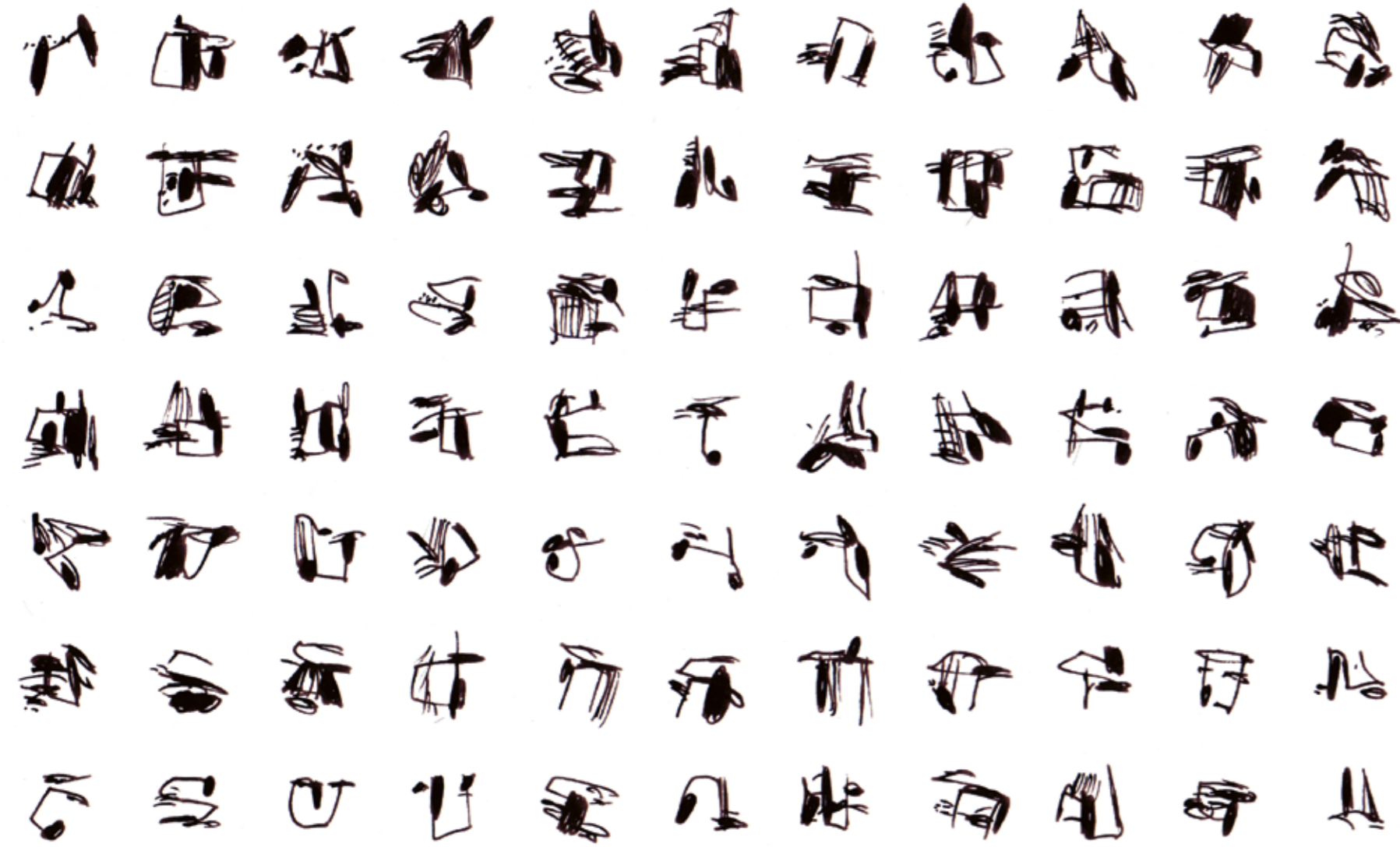
SCRIPT, 2010, felt-tip pen on paper, 20 x 30 cm
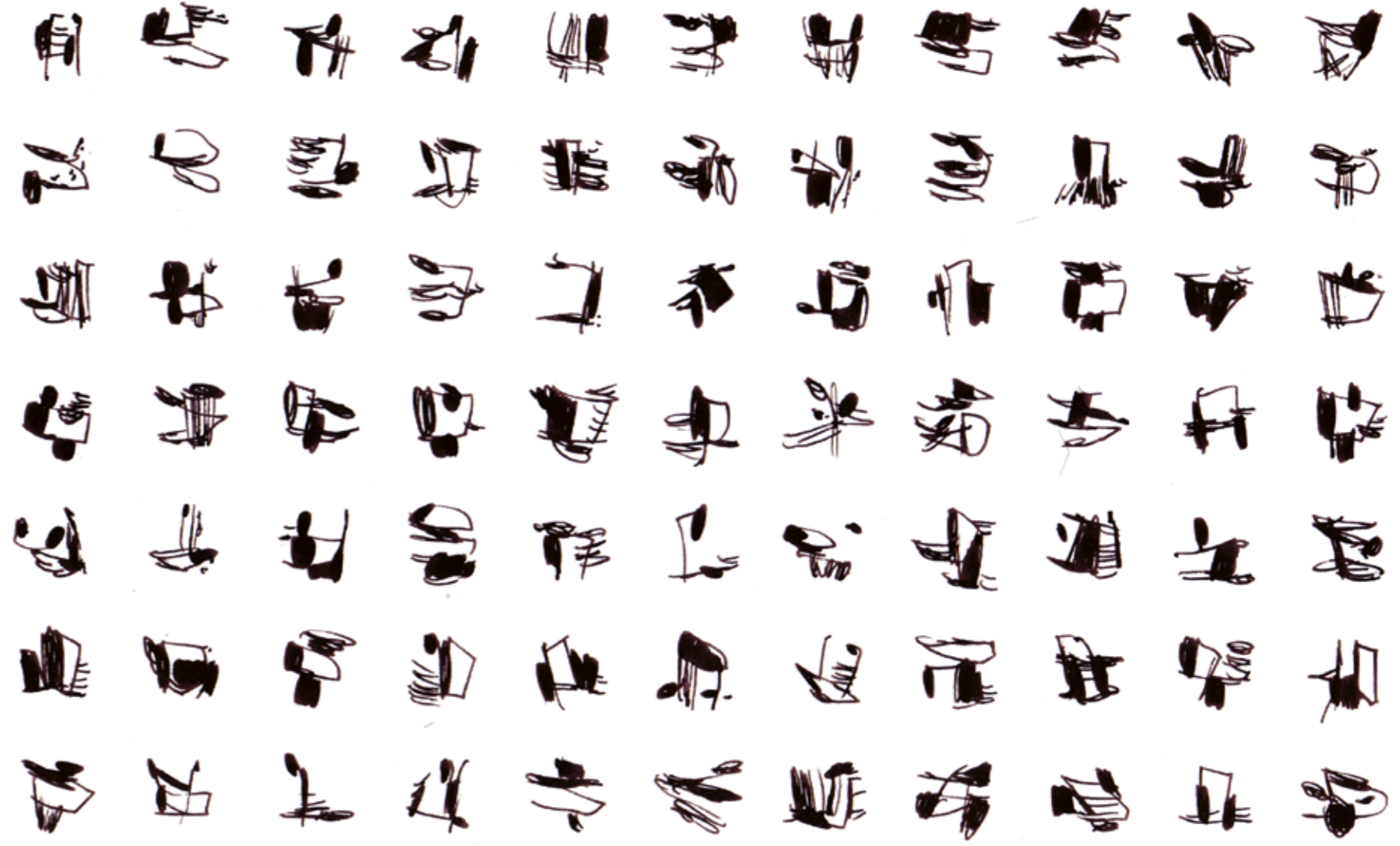
SCRIPT, 2010, felt-tip pen on paper, 20 x 30 cm
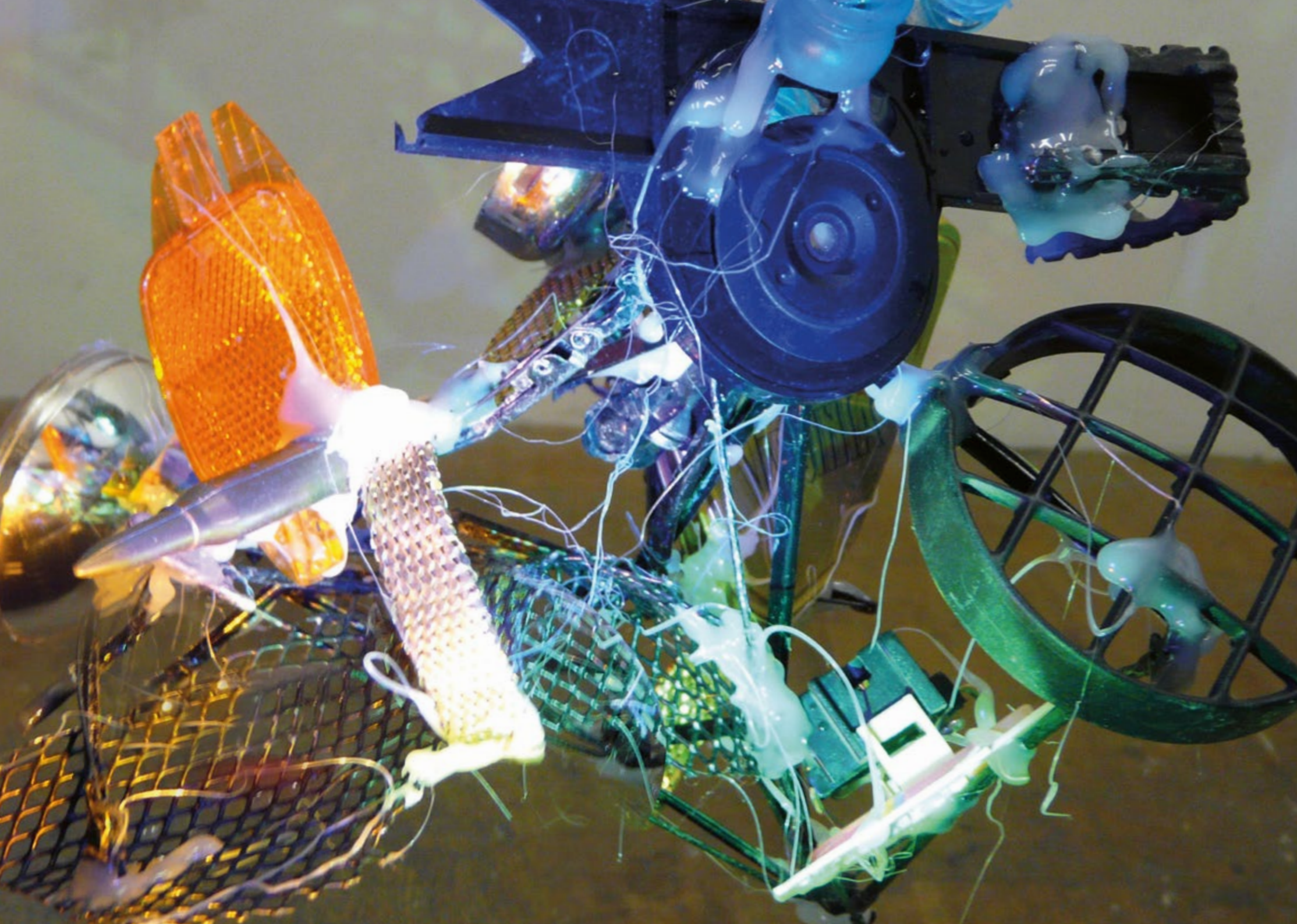
„All technical images are shadow images"

Christiane van Haaren, artistic director of the PAN kunstforum niederrhein, in conversation with R.J. Kirsch, artist talk, 17 April 2022

We are here at the PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich, in your exhibition RE-ANIMATION. The various groups of works that you are showing here are very diverse overall. However, it is striking that there are essentially two groups facing each other here: folded and shadow images. How did you arrive at these topics?

The background is a fundamental examination of technology, actually since my studies. Photography had influenced painting for a long time, and the electronic image processing that was just developing at the time of my studies was a great challenge for me, because it fundamentally questioned my concept of the image, but also because this development brought enormous new possibilities. It was precisely this technical development that made me question painting, and I was looking for a way to respond to it. In this respect, my preoccupation with technology and technically conditioned image media was a first approach. That's how the shadow projections came about, because I saw a kind of interface between painting and the technically generated image. In addition, I was always interested in the malfunction of technology, when technology fails, what happens when technology is disrupted, an accident occurs

.
You studied painting, but do you also explicitly refer to conceptual art? Because I have always worked beyond painting. I wanted to use different techniques and working methods to pursue my content-related examination, i.e. within a conceptual framework. From the very beginning, it would have been insufficient for me to see myself only as a painter.

You started this series of accidents in 2002, which polarised the audience. What do you associate with it?

left: REQUISIT #19, 2018, various materials, raw hot glue, unpainted

Light source, 2020, LEDs, cabling, components

The accidents were a typical example of my preoccupation with the moment of disruption. They are exclusively about traffic accidents, a topic, that is, an everyday event. What interested me as a painter was above all the enormous force with which the kinetic energy deforms the surfaces. I always painted the accidents without the victims, so in preparation for a motif, I 'removed' any bystanders or emergency personnel that might be seen. My main focus was on the warping of the surfaces.

Where do you get the motifs from?

I research the templates for the accident scenes in the media, on the internet or in the press, for example, image databases where you can find detailed information about accidents all over the world.

How do your shadow works relate to your painting?

As I said, the silhouettes are a link for me between traditional painting and the production of media images, that is, immaterial images that I have staged here with very everyday objects. In my work, I have been dealing with the various techniques of media image creation for a long time and in doing so, I have seen that all technical images are ultimately silhouettes that become visible through projection or similar methods. So in a way, the shadow stagings are a continuation of my painterly work in immaterial space.

What is it about shadows that fascinates you so much?

For me, shadows are not just this link between painting and the media. I am also interested in them because of their nature, how they appear and change. Above all, my preoccupation with Goethe's theory of colours has influenced me. In his theory of colours, Goethe also dealt with shadows very intensively. There is even a special treatise on the subject: 'Of Coloured Shadows'. In it, he argues that, for him, all colours are actually a type of shadow. This inspired me a great deal. When I started the shadow works, I initially only worked according to the light-dark principle. But then the colours were added, and increasingly complex projections emerged, most recently these full-colour images, as can be seen in the shadow room.
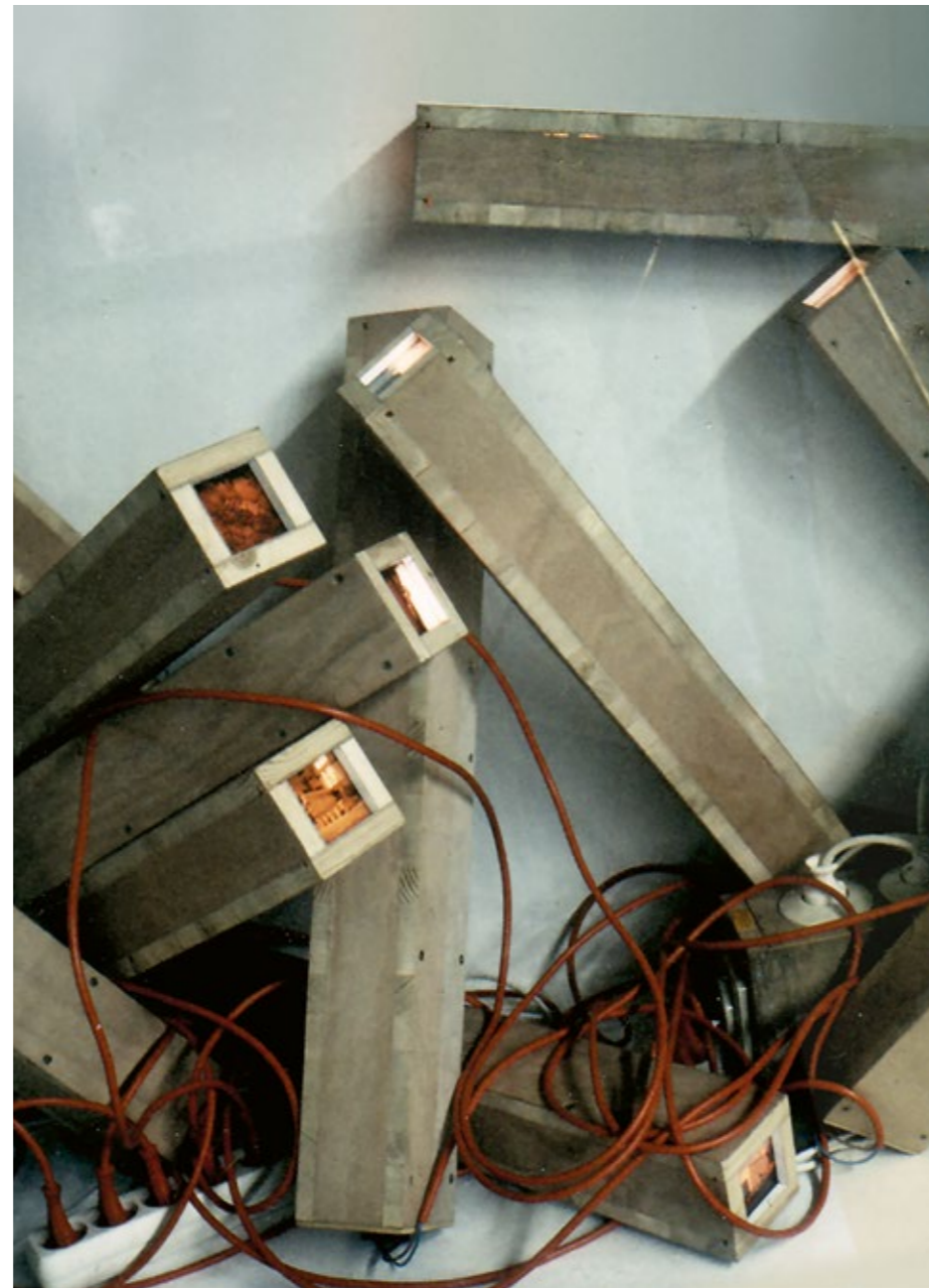
SPERRE, shop window installation, world-famous e.V., ZOB Hamburg, 1990

How did the 'light device' that you use in the installation here come about?

This device is basically a holder for the LEDs that I use there. It provides a simple power supply for the light sources and also makes it possible to rotate them slowly to make the change in the projection even more extensive. Just as the sculptures were created to combine things that I initially held individually in the space to cast their shadows on the wall, and to move them in the space without having to hold them individually. Which became more and more difficult the more complex the shadow projections became.

What fascinates you about wrinkles?

Wrinkles are a very old theme in painting; painters have always practised them and wanted to show how well they mastered their craft. In the accident series, it was of course an aspect that such a traditional motif was suddenly broken in an up-to-date way. Where drapery used to appear in figure paintings, it is now the result of a collision between vehicles. In the further development of the work, I then increasingly detached myself from the events of these accidents. These are basically 'reports' because they all actually happened. I then developed fictitious collisions from set pieces of the existing template material and finally focused only on this element of folds. This is how these large-format paintings came about.

You painted the creased pictures, in a sense the accidents, collisions, and then the abstract ones. What happens for you with the aluminium sheet works?

With the sheets, I actually only took the step into the room, so into the relief. They are, if you will, monochrome pictures, and the folding is implemented as a real folding of the surface. In principle, the large-format folded pictures are also monochrome pictures, except that the folding structure appears to be illusionistic, so to speak. In the case of the metal sheets, the folds are really there and can be felt with the hands, with the sense of touch.
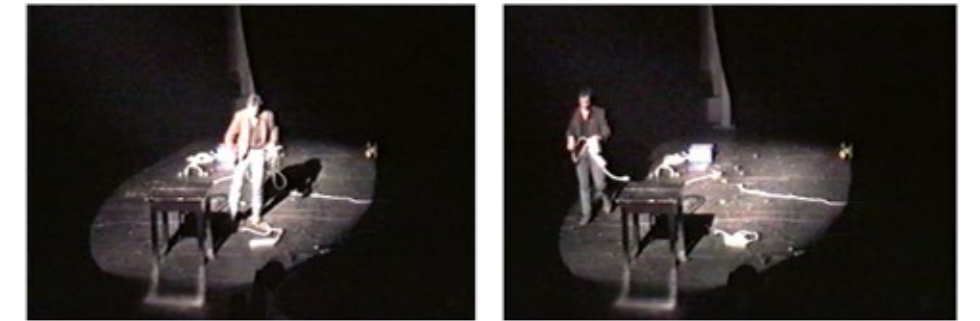
KURZSCHLUSSHANDLUNG, performance, video stills, Urania Theatre, Cologne,

You say that you are intensively concerned with the relationship between painting and the new media. Where are the media in this case, they are not to be found in the exhibition.

Exactly, it has become important to me that my results themselves are not media images, even if they have arisen from an examination of media, that they are in a sense on a different level.

How did you actually develop your shadow images?

It was a process of abstraction, starting from a non-representational way of working, abstract scenarios in which I ran through a very unique complex of forms that I had found for myself, which I staged again and again, thereby driving painting more and more into seriality. In the end, I came up with these almost writing-like abbreviations. These drawings were like storyboards to me. Back in the 1990s, I worked in animation for a while and was extremely fascinated by the working methods used there. Storyboards, layouts, scripts – the very basis of cinematic work – then led me to understand the graphic scenarios as templates, in order to then use these sculptures, as they can be seen here on the pedestals, to stage silhouettes. In addition to the drawings presented here, there are a whole series of other drawings and watercolours that I used to traverse this pictorial space as it became cinematic, in order to explore it for myself. The props always remind me of the 'garbage patches' – clumps of plastic parts, nets or cords that form in the oceans in huge vortices. Discarded material, technical fragments resulting from a permanent crash that is constantly unfolding before our eyes, as if in slow motion.

Your examination of the subject of accidents is based on real events. What is your view on the images of war that are reaching us every day?

That's a difficult question. From the very beginning, I have only ever worked on traffic accidents; images of war were always excluded from this examination. In the middle of the last century, the French philosopher Paul Virilio had dealt intensively with the problem of speed and the nature of accidents. He also said that an accident is, in principle, a part of every technical device. In the 1990s, he founded a museum of accidents in Paris, and there, for example, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center was classified as a traffic accident, which at the time caused fierce reactions. I myself, also influenced by Virilio, actually painted an accident scene in this in-between area, this flight 93 on 9/11, where the passengers provoked a scuffle in the cockpit and as a result the plane crashed. In my picture, you only see the edge of the forest with a hollow in front of it. So the topic of accidents and images of war are sometimes difficult to separate. Or take the crash of this aircraft coming from Barcelona, where a German pilot locked himself in the cockpit and caused the plane to crash. Would that be a traffic accident? It would probably be recorded statistically as such, but it was actually more of a kind of rampage. However, I increasingly detached myself from the realism of the accident images in order to find my way back to my painterly exploration. Also to leave this specific contemporary reference behind me.

*DISPOSAL OF THE NIGHT, 1999, light boxes, each 30 x 30 x 5 cm
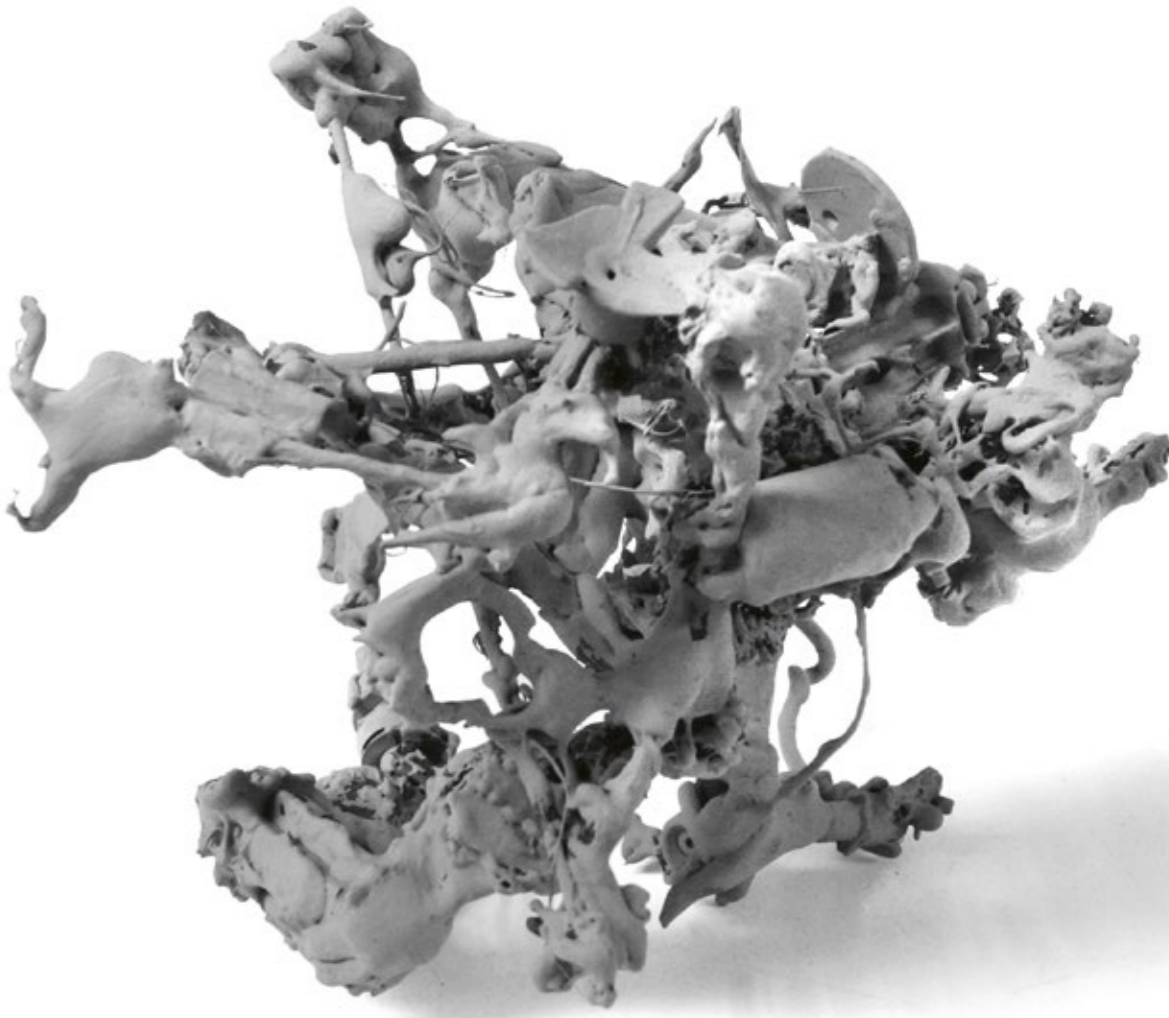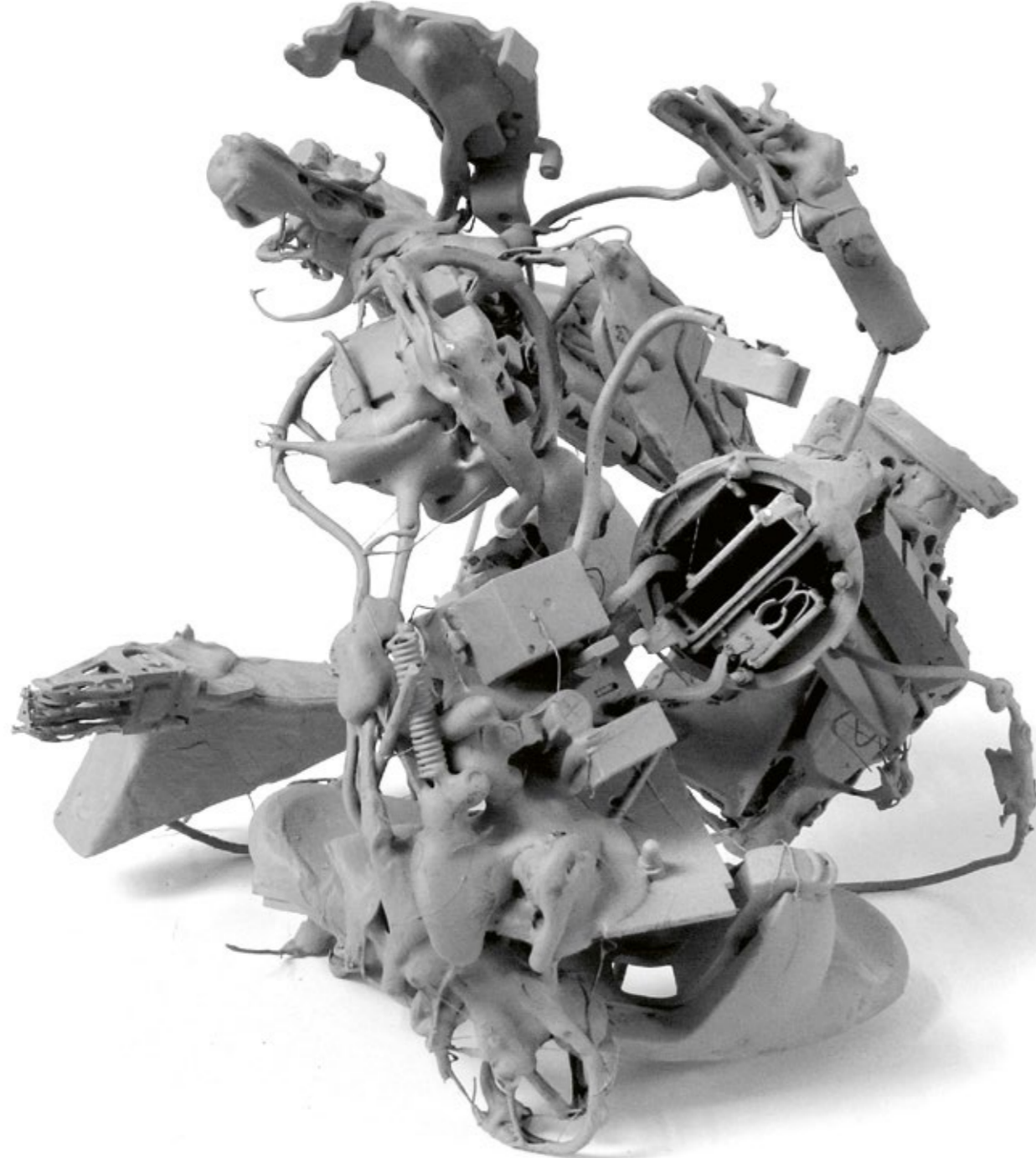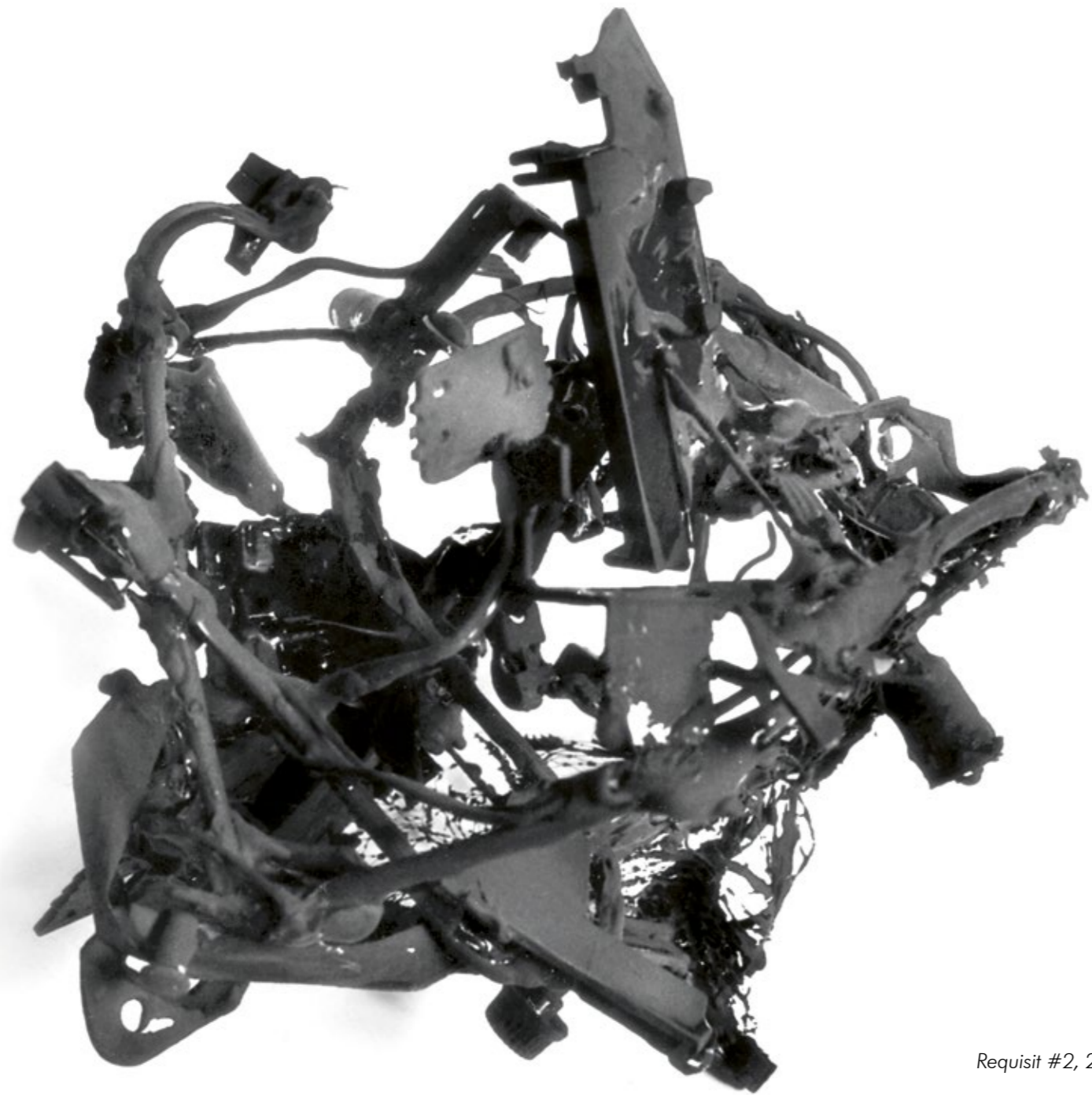Goethe-Institut Brussels in co-operation with the Maison communale d'Evere*

REQUISITES

REQUISITES #7, #8 and #6, 2014-2018
various materials, hot glue, acrylic
each approx. 30 x 30 x 30 cm

Requisit #2, 2002, various materials, approx. 30 x 30 x 30 cm

right: SCHEMEN, shadow projection, Galerie CIRCUS EINS, Putbus, 2018

lichtbar

Clemens Ottnad

The phantom is invisible. The images presented describe natures, states or matter whose existence is assumed to be known, but which cannot be grasped, which are difficult to comprehend. Imagination approaches the phantom. The two-dimensionality of the paper captures the still image of a shadow film sequence, a postcard labelled video still, but in the initial situation in several respects still video, still life. Previous drawing sequences, serial works, 'calli-graphic dialects' illustrate the processal nature of Kirsch's works in analogy to language and writing. Graphic etudes are the preliminary work for the translation of artistic expression into another language.

Flat, square light boxes lying on the floor show individual, still silhouettes. A film is created by mounting several silhouettes. Kirsch examines the physiology of the shadow both with light boxes and with installations such as 'ENTSOR-GUNG DER NACHT' (DISPOSAL OF THE NIGHT) from 1998. And indeed, making shadows visible, 'light-ing' them, disposes of the night. The shadow is the 'night light'. Silhouettes, which create the shadow film, become physically tangible light and point to the metaphysics of light. The speech tool is tech-nology, while the linguistic expression itself remains a light or shadow dialect. The images the artist invented for Phantom do not come from mathematical calculation, fantasy or unconscious activity, but are causally related to the everyday world. Three light sources illuminate objects mounted on a mecha-nism that can move in all directions, while a ground glass screen captures the silhouettes. A video camera mounted behind the screen records these images. Brightly illuminated moving colour segments are the shadow sides of everyday objects. The staging of the silhouettes goes back to the drawings and paintings, which initially guide the application of the technique as a conceptual plan.

The rectangular format and material of the projection plate hanging from the ceiling on thin wires in the middle of the room still refer to the perceptual scheme of the panel painting. The continuity of the silhouettes of the video sequences, which are blended into one another, creates the impression of a


Video projection, Albstadt Art Museum, 1999

ENTSORGUNG DER NACHT (DISPOSAL OF THE NIGHT), 1996, large slide/light bo-xes, each 100 x 100 x 20 cm, Meta Weber Galerie, Krefeld

film. The viewer enters the darkened room in an exhibition situation. He finds himself confronted with moving light painting, a moving illumination created by a continuous video sequence. The source from which the silhouettes are fed initially remains unrecognised in the dark. Intensively glowing colour cells, colour impulses in graphic veins, are constantly changing. The transparency of light and image invites the viewer to enter the projection space and to transcend the museum-like conceptions of perception and ways of seeing. The one-dimensional media reception of commercial film and television images, which encourages passivity, is undermined. The gently undulating bass sounds of the DVD-ROM soundtrack, vibrating in the room, do not accompany a narrated plot, but develop independently as auditory subtitles to the pictorial events. The impression of slowness and constant flow is further enhanced by these spatial sounds: formation, decay, silencing, reformation.

The transformation of non-representational painting into shadow signs, sha-dow images and shadow films is intended to filter an elementary code out of supposed darkness. In free combination, the invented and found signs form a 'canon of basic forms'. It is no coincidence that the system of expression and conceptuality are laid out in parallel to linguistic models; the material and the system of language resemble the immateriality of light and shadow.

The aim and result of this working process is the transposition of painting and dra-wing into electronic media, not a fascination with technology and a world of images generated by random generators. The physiology of light is the starting point for what the viewer encounters in the video installation Phantom, transformed into elec-tronic circuits and processor technology. The technical realisation, however, has nothing intrinsic about it; it does not contain the essence of the images. The DVD-ROM on which the image data is stored takes on the content and design of the otherwise processed papers, canvas and other image carriers, and stores the light and shadow painting in order to reveal it again on the projection screen. The projection surface suggests free floating in the darkened room and allows the projection to pass through the opaque, milky white acrylic disc itself. The observer is thus not forced to experience the moving images exclusively from the front, as they appear on both the front and back of the projection disc.
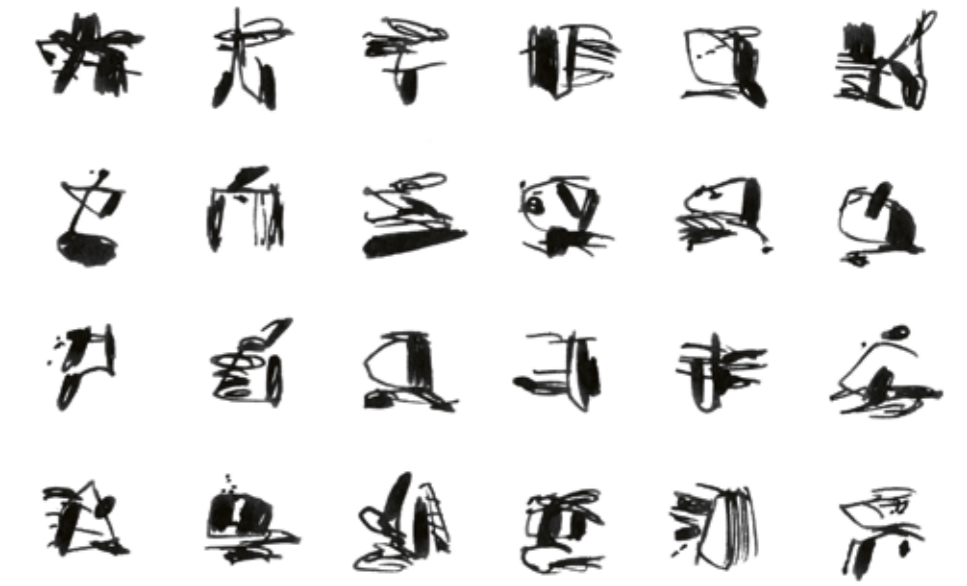

SCRIPT, around 1990, Indian ink on paper, 20 x 30 cm [detail]
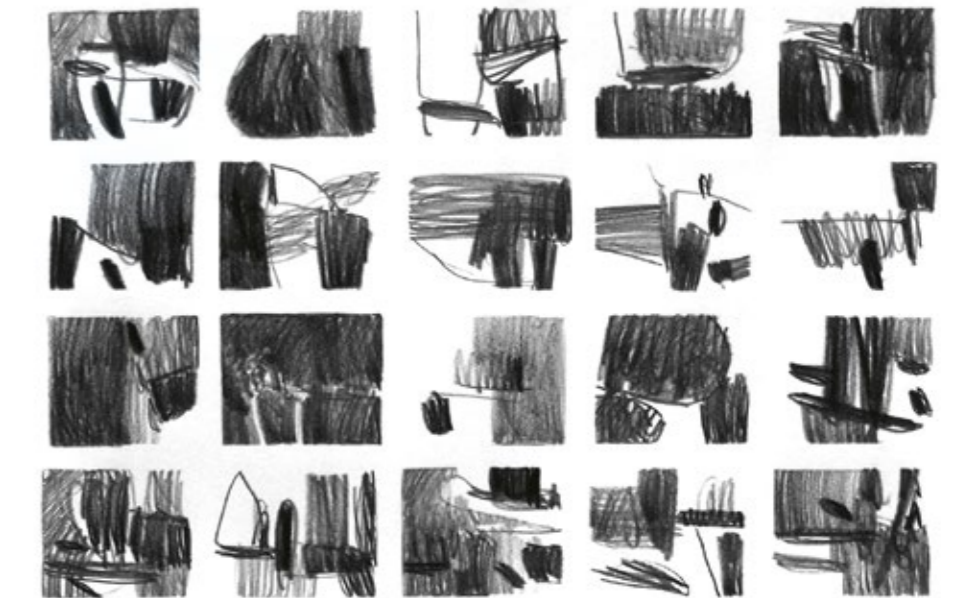
SEQUENCE, around 1991, graphite on hand-made paper, 80 x 50 cm [detail]

The projection takes place on both sides simultaneously and results in a mirror image depending on the location of the viewer. However, the viewer is not able to grasp both sides of the (same) image simultaneously, so that the side that is not seen remains a phantom of what has happened. Only the power of imagination can create an image in the virtual simultaneity of what is perceived in succession; it reproduces two visual moments into one. 'Front' and 'back' are the two transPARENTS of a moving image projection.
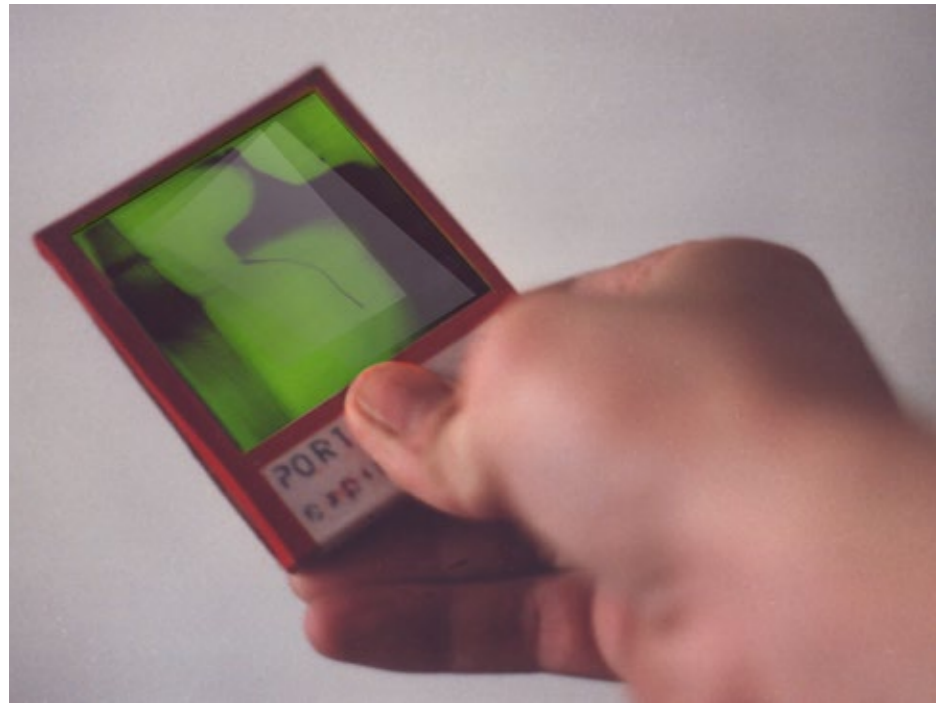
PORTABLE SYSTEMS1995, adhesive film, Perspex, Polapulse battery, slide

ENTSORGUNG DER NACHT, DuMont-Kunsthalle Köln, 1998

STILLS

Peter Gerlach

Stills are frames from an electronic film. They are defined by the size of a predetermined selection of pixels that fill a given image format. The fact that it is a frame that is limited by a temporal limit on two sides means that there is a preceding and a following. But this also points to a degree of arbitrariness in the selection of this section, which the viewer of the respective still cannot perceive, but is only suggested by the title. Or are there traces of the preceding or following parts in the still? We don't usually ask this question about a drawing, a painting, or even a photograph, unless the artist has given us reading instructions in the respective picture. The most familiar forms of such instructions are, for example, cropped figures, the direction of view of depicted figures, or similar reading instructions. Only details staged in this way point the viewer to carefully considered possible continuations of the image beyond its boundaries. In principle, however, every image is a section of a larger context, which the viewer usually recognises from their familiar surroundings and thus involuntarily completes the image in this direction. This applies as long as the image depicts a somewhat familiar environment or at least seems to refer to it. The simplest form of such an involuntary reference can be found in almost every image: its continuation appears as a rapport, a repetition of the same form, which can be imagined as being extended linearly to the left, right, up or down by one unit. Such a rapport could hardly be made out in the video sequence. The less the content of the image is determined by figuration, the more arbitrary the conceivable sequels seem to be beyond the given section. We know this from the art we are familiar with.

However, if we are aware of the technical construction for producing the analogue video films that Kirsch used to create his coloured stills, then a picture produced in about 0.0375 seconds loses everything that we traditionally – admittedly unspokenly – associate with a picture with an artistic claim: the time-consuming toil of technical production – not to mention the time spent learning the technique and the mental conception of the pictorial idea, the inspiration, up to its compositional realisation on a picture carrier. It is a well-known fact

ENTSORGUNG DER NACHT,1994-1999, light boxes, each 30 x 30 x 5 cm, wired

that this period of time has been constantly shrinking since the century before last (since the Impressionists, for example). Under the heading of accelerating production, both painting techniques and materials have accommodated this change. And we also know of a faster wear and tear of aesthetic added value of the respective generation of products in the world of images. If a painter today asks himself what kind of creative potential the electronic media – from analogue video to digital image sequences – have in store for him, then he is confronted with the world of images of a media production, with its abundance of equivalent and thus ultimately indifferent information in current, just-in-time products, which in turn cannot do without recourse to the visual arts. He has to make a subjective decision against this fluctuation between the modes, the different levels of usability, which are each assigned to themselves by the places of their presentation. The decision as to which aesthetic state he selects from the series of sequences he has created is an arbitrary, capricious decision that cannot be justified by anything else. But it is precisely this arbitrary subjectivity that is the genuine proof of an artistic decision.

THE MERRY WAITING ROOM, Rachel Haferkamp Gallery, Cologne, 2003
Closed Circuit Video, performance with moving camera arm

MICROCOSM, Artgalerie 7, Martina Kaiser / Meike Knüppe, Cologne, 2003
Installation/Video-Performance

right page: installation PHANTOM, Albstadt Art Museum, 1999

MONOCHROMES
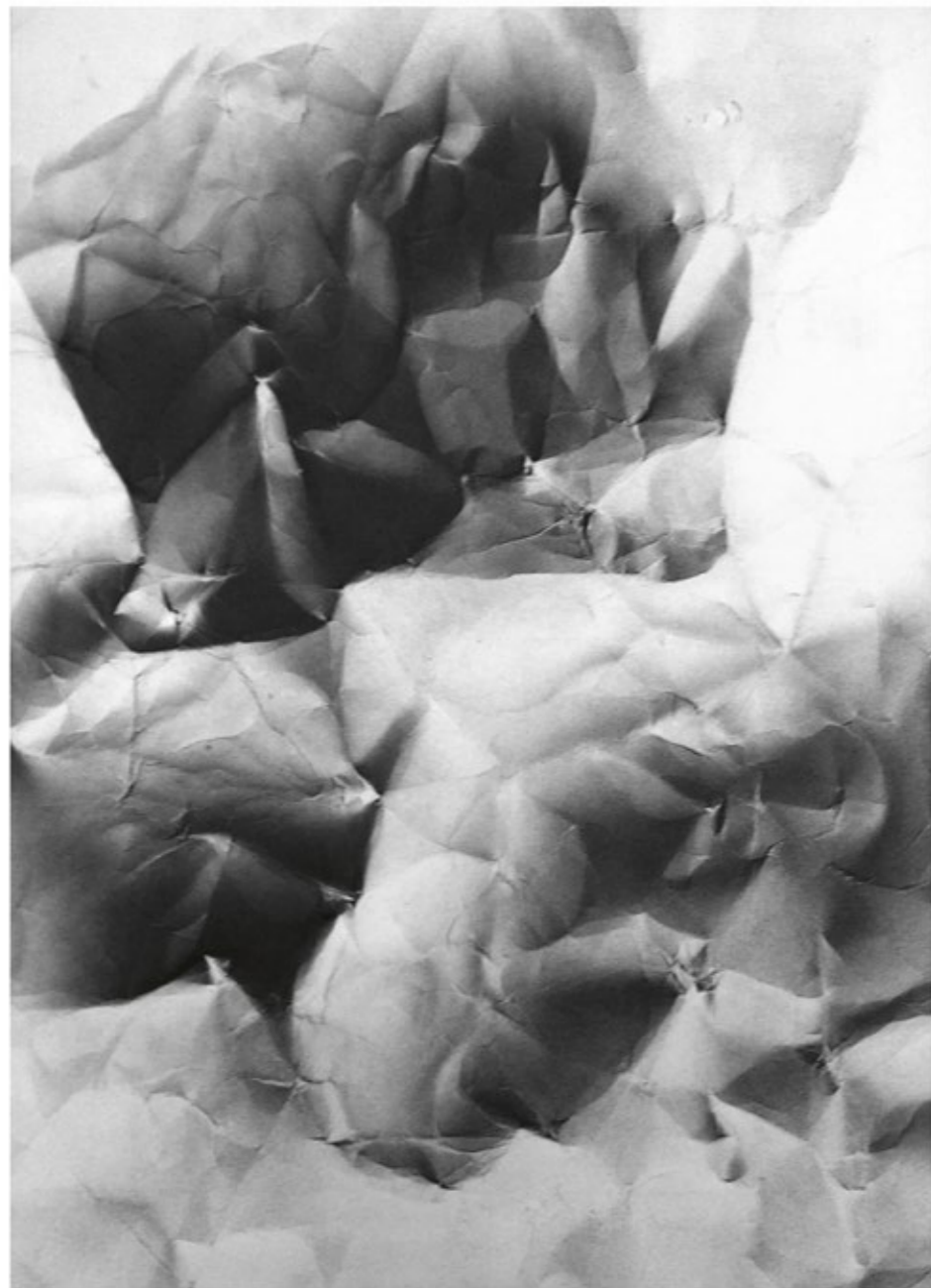
from the series FOLDS, 2015
Spray paint on paper
40 x 30 cm

previous page:
CRUMBLED ROSES, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 70 cm

MONOCHROME # 7, 2021
Acrylic, pigment on aluminium sheet
60 x 60 cm
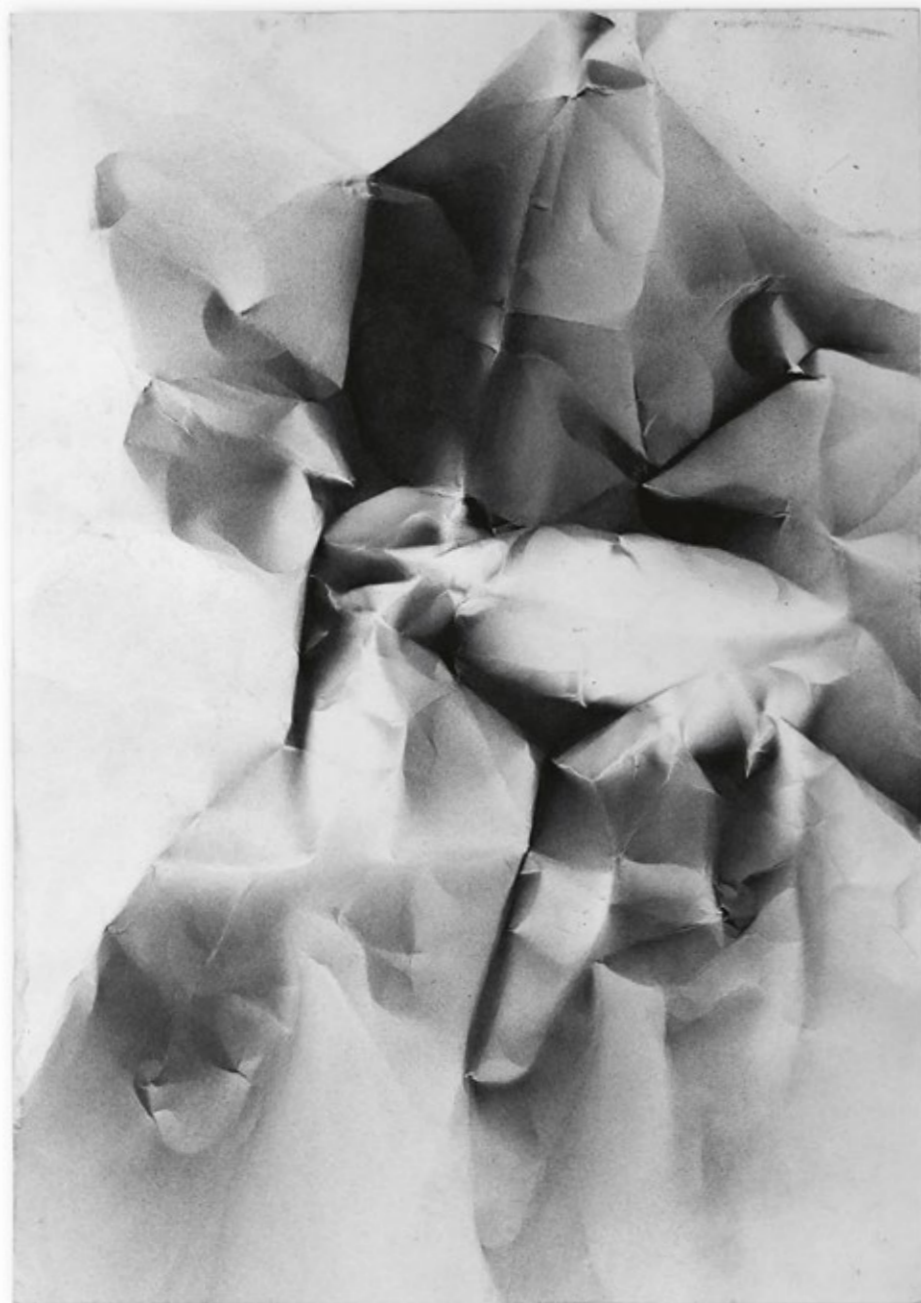
from the series FOLDS, 2015
Spray paint on paper
40 x 30 cm

MONOCHROME #13, 2022
Acrylic, pigment on sheet iron
30 x 30 cm

from the series FOLDS, 2015, spray paint and acrylic on paper, 20 x 30 cm

MONOCHROME # 10, 2021
Acrylic on aluminium sheet
30 x 30 cm

SOFT IMPACT

top: SOFT IMPACT #42 and Soft Impact #43, 2017, oil on wood, each Ø 100 cm
right page: SOFT IMPACT #5, 2014, oil on canvas, 170 x 130 cm

previous page: SOFT IMPACT #34, 2017, oil on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

SOFT IMPACT #4, 2016
Oil on canvas
100 x 70 cm

SOFT IMPACT #20, 2016
Oil on canvas
170 x 130 cm

TRIPTYCH, 2016, oil on wood, each 50 x 50 cm
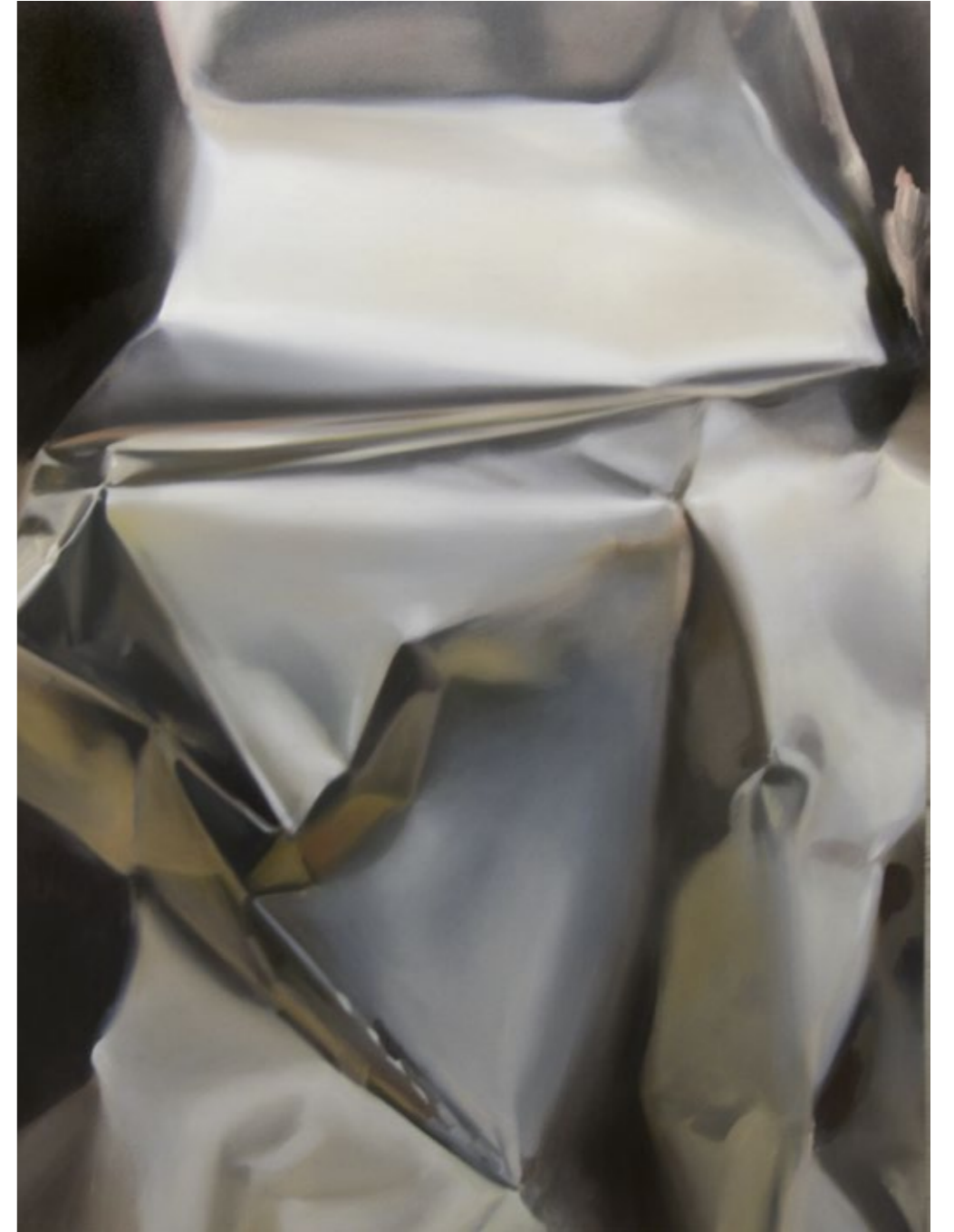
SOFT IMPACT #6, 2016
Oil on canvas
130 x 130 cm

SOFT IMPACT #11 and #10, 2016
Oil on canvas
each 130 x 100 cm

SOFT IMPACT #28, #21 and #3, 2014
Oil on canvas
130 x 170 cm and 170 x 130 cm

SOFT IMPACT #33, 2016
Oil on canvas
160 x 130 cm

SOFT IMPACT #29, 2016
Oil on canvas
130 x 170 cm

top and right: REANIMATION, PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich, 2022

ABSTRACTS

While the works from the series RHYTHM OF STATISTICS usually show a landscape-like view of what is happening, the following works from the series ABSTRACTS depict distortions and convolutions at close range. In the series COLLISIONS (2008-2009), individual components of such deformations are already detached from their real context and become independent pictorial elements. In this respect, the ABSTRACTS (from 2010) represent a continuation and are analogous to the classical fall of the folds.   rjk

ABSTRACT #8, 2009, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm

ABSTRACT #11, 2010, oil on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

ABSTRACT #3, 2009, oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm
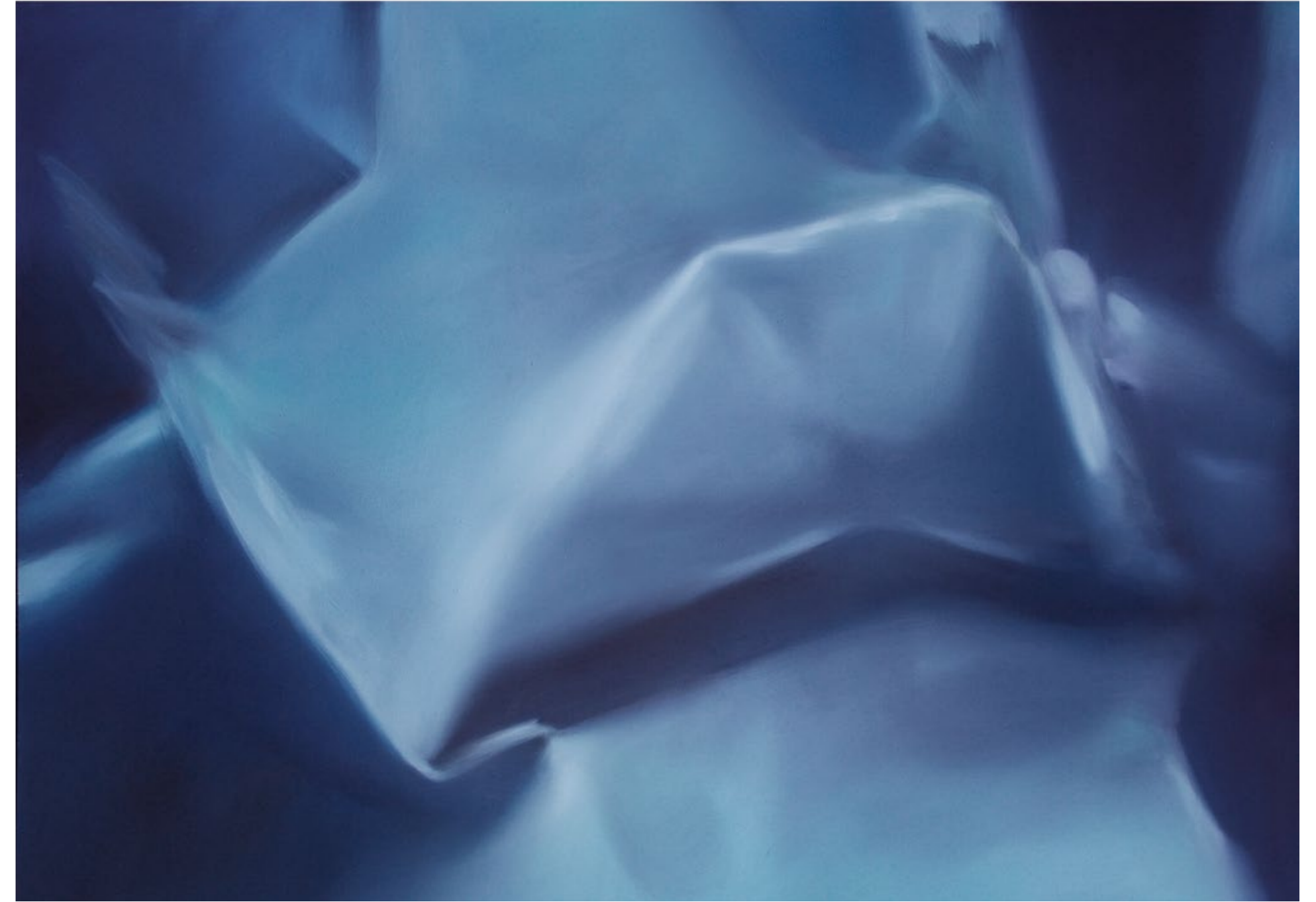
ABSTRACT #12, 2010, oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm

COLLISIONS

right: COLLISION #5, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

previous page: COLLISION #13, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

COLLISIONS #8, #6, #9, #12 and #4 in the exhibition REANIMATION, PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich, 2022

COLLISION #4, preliminary drawing, 2005, charcoal on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

COLLISION #2, preliminary drawing, 2007, charcoal on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

COLLISION #3, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 130 x 170 cm
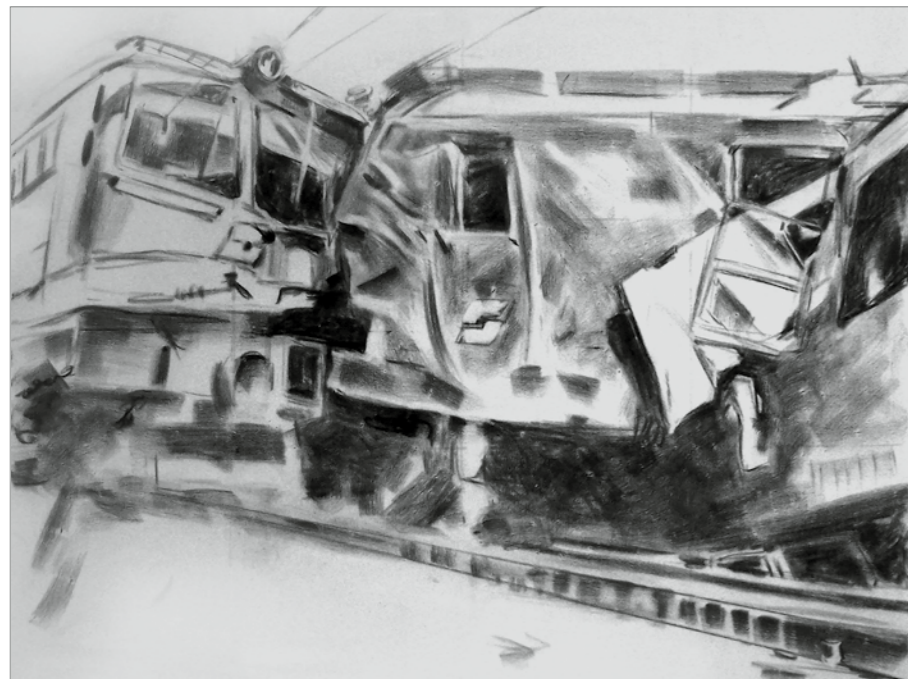
ÖBB, preparatory drawing, 2007, charcoal on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

COLLISION #6, preliminary drawing, 2007, charcoal on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

COLLISION #7, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 130 x 170 cm
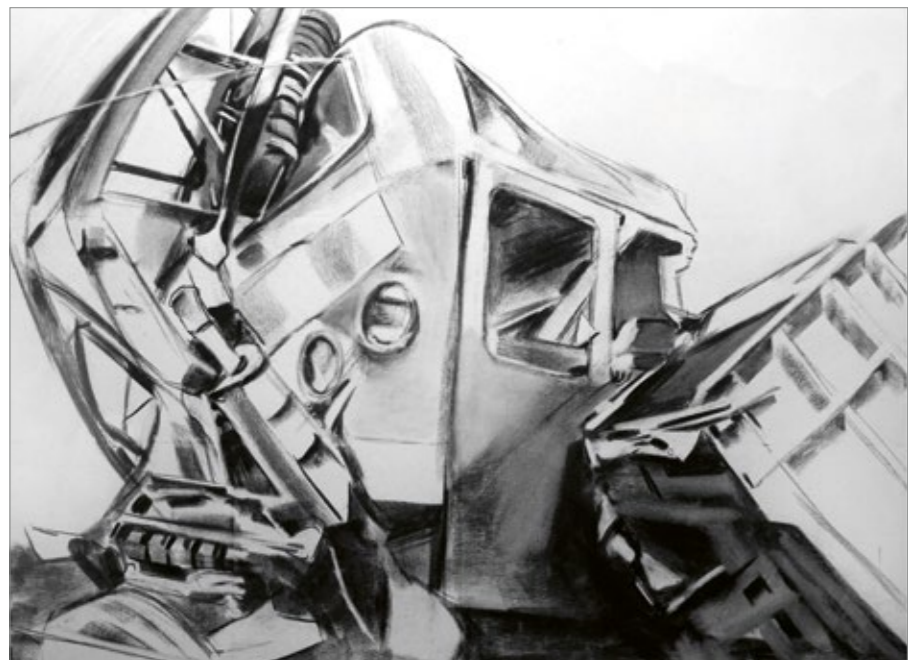
COLLISION #1, preparatory drawing, 2007, charcoal on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

TRANSRAPID, 2007, Charcoal on cardboard, 120 x 160 cm

COLLISION #12, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 130 x 170 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Öl auf Holz, 25 x 35 cm
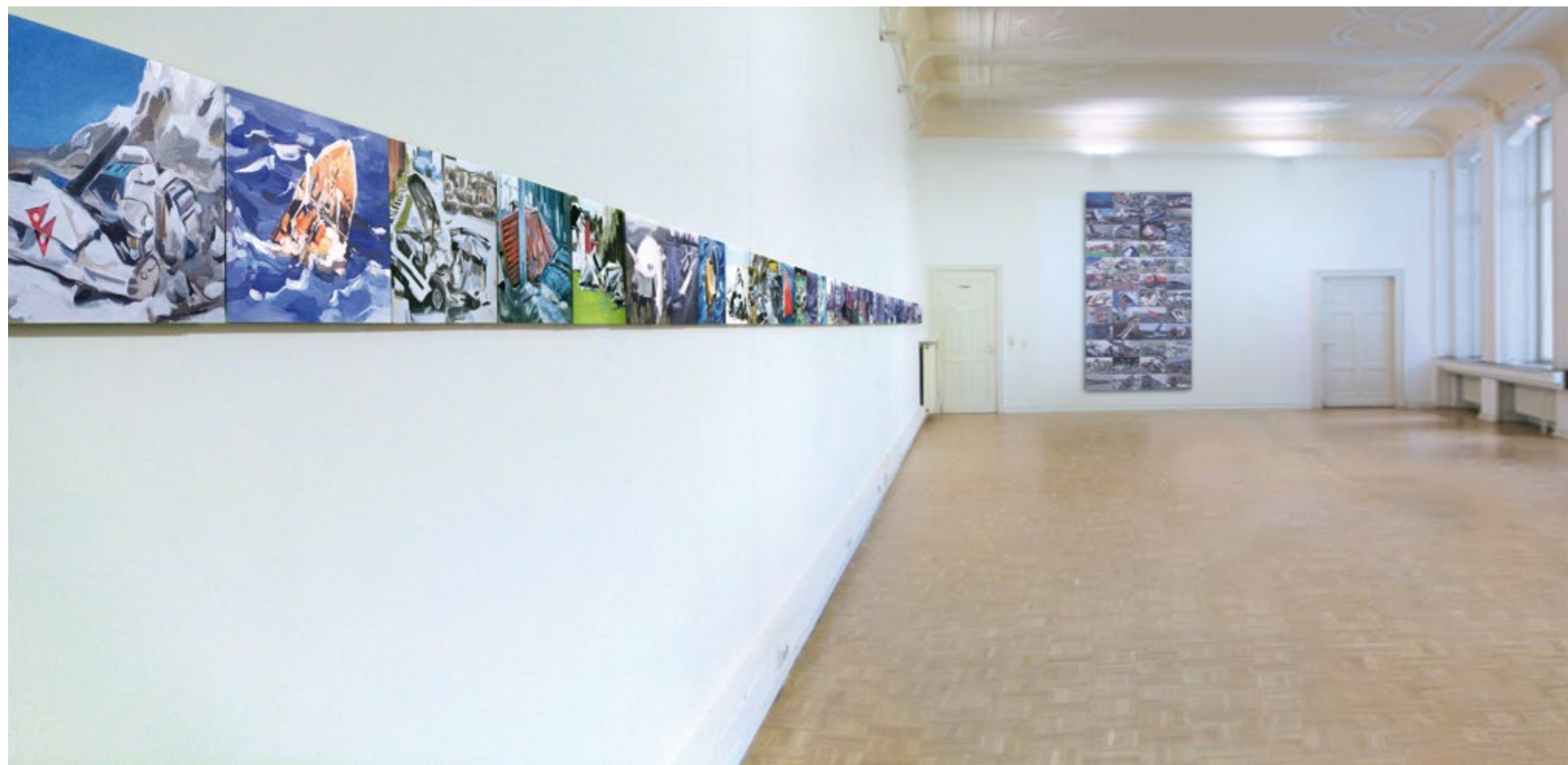
LEERLAUF, Bellevuesaal, Wiesbaden, 2010

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich, 2022

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS

Jürgen Raap

R.J. Kirsch has been working on his series of works RHYTHM OF STATISTICS since 2002. They show pictures of car accidents with dented vehicle wrecks, of shipwrecks with large steamers slowly sinking into the sea or lying on their sides, of railway accidents with overturned locomotives. There is twisted scrap metal piled up in the picture, and you can imagine the immense force with which the destructive energy must have impacted the car body. Or a heavy oil tanker capsizes in the dark, agitated sea; the leaking oil shimmers black and soon spreads over the surface of the water like a large carpet. The metal walls of a Transrapid train are torn apart like a piece of cardboard after colliding with a maintenance car. Aircraft break apart like crumpled matches. A derailed suburban train crashes into the steel of an overhead line mast, which bends under the force. In a similar way, a sturdy boxer suddenly collapses after an extremely painful hit to the stomach: Kirsch's pictures reveal a great deal about the physical processes of plasticity and elasticity, with these subjects quite clearly demonstrating the theory that an object is permanently deformed when the elasticity limit of its material is exceeded by the application of energy. These paintings do not depict simulated crash tests carried out by the automotive industry in an artificial laboratory situation with dummy dummies, nor are they acted-out action scenes from Hollywood cinema. Instead, their visual templates are meticulously researched material on actual accidents, which are referred to in the jargon of news journalism as 'catastrophes' as soon as they reach a certain scale. In the sober language of the insurance industry, these are 'claims', and the premiums that the 'policyholder' has to pay are based on the statistical frequency of accidents, so that, for example, car insurers have graduated their rates according to 'regional classes'.

Although each individual painting in this series, with its precisely applied representational style, can also be understood as an autonomous work that can be viewed in isolation, when ultimately visualised in an exhibition situation, the accumulation of images evokes the RHYTHM OF STATISTICS with

its accumulation of 'damaging events'. However, such a rhythm or a purely mathematical-statistical statement initially reveals nothing about the causes, but only about the consequences of the respective disaster. Kirsch's pictures can only show what happens and how it happens and is captured 'live' in the documentary image, which the painter later uses as a template: it is transferred from photography to painting in a stylistic way. But these pictures cannot explain why a train derails that should not derail. To do that, the explanatory newspaper reports on the image templates are needed as a necessary supplement, although even in such texts, in the dry language of news reports or in those of police reports on the cause of the accident, it is often only vaguely 'assumed' or 'speculated' that it was due to 'human error' or 'technical failure'.

In some of the traffic accidents reported in the newspapers almost every day, both forms of failure are mixed up, for example when an overtired bus driver 'loses control of the vehicle' in a vehicle that is no longer roadworthy and then the physical forces just described release their energies and thus develop their terrible momentum all the way to a collision. The horror and panic of such catastrophes is rooted in the extremely disturbing realisation that, at a certain point, their course can no longer be stopped or controlled by human intervention, despite all the skidding courses for drivers: when the brakes fail, the driver is completely helpless against the centrifugal forces and the effects of Newton's law of inertia. In this respect, Kirsch's pictures also have a metaphysical character, conveying a parable-like message. No matter how hard man has tried to banish the dark forces of fate by endeavouring to control nature and perfecting this control more and more, even in today's age of high technology, he repeatedly experiences how much he is at the mercy of the forces of fate. He often equates accidents with the arbitrary action of a natural disaster because of their unpredictability and uncontrollability, which in the jargon of the insurance industry is referred to as 'force majeure', precisely because it eludes human influence. 'Force majeure": it sounds like a magical-theological paraphrase, as if it meant enraged thunder gods and unleashed demons. 'Human error' – on the other hand, despite its dramatic effects in a specific accident, such a formulation still has a human dimension; it recalls Nietzsche's formulation

MOTO PARK, installation at the Kunstverein Eisenturm Mainz 2015

MOTO PARK, Installation
Kunstverein Eisenturm Mainz
2015

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

of the "humanly all-too-human", which breaks the Faustian tendency towards presumptuousness. Man has tried to construct machines that should work perfectly, or at least more perfectly than man himself. These constructions have produced a technical euphoria and faith in technology, an unbounded trust in the functional efficiency of the vehicle and the infrastructural system. However, the downside of this is maintenance errors and material fatigue, breakdowns and overconfidence in one's own driving or piloting skills, often carelessness and arrogance, or simply poor visibility and 'wet roads freezing over', as it is said in radio traffic reports. The desire to make the inhospitable reality of life more comfortable is what drives the engineering sciences, as is the desire to match the forces of nature with our own human creative powers or even to outwit these forces of nature.

The master builders of the Middle Ages built cathedrals that were supposed to reach for the sky. These architectural monuments were a symbol of man's transcendence to greater things and his approach to the sphere of God. Meanwhile, the engineers of our age construct aeroplanes that reach super-sonic speeds and cars that can travel at 200 km/h and are equipped with navigation systems for those unfamiliar with the area. Opponents of a speed limit on German motorways like to point out that, according to accident sta-tistics, most accidents happen at much lower speeds, and it is often rear-end collisions in traffic jams that produce such images. In the day-to-day work of an insurer, settling pure fender benders dominates, and today, thanks to im-proved safety technology in car manufacturing, the number of traffic deaths in reunited Germany is only about a quarter of the number that was recorded in the accident statistics in 1970 in West Germany alone, namely 16,000 at the time. At first glance, art and statistics actually have nothing to do with each other. Art is known to allow the completely subjective design of pictorial worlds; statistics, on the other hand, is a method of exact empirical recording of facts. Politicians in particular like to refer to statistical evidence when they want to substantiate the accuracy and truthfulness of their assertions. The mathematical value in statistics is assumed by them and their audience to be absolute, which is rather childish, because depending on the point of view, this value is relativised. This is precisely what Kirsch visualises: in the accu-mulation of motifs, the individual event is relativised. From the perspective of

Installation Kunstverein Bayreuth / Kunstmuseum Bayreuth, 2014

the victims or their relatives, i.e. from the point of view of the individual fate, the accident tragedy is an exceptional and extreme case in life. However, this exceptional case paradoxically confirms the rule that driving a car and travelling by train or flying is relatively safe, but measured against the worldwide number of accidents, it is only relative. The sheer volume of Kirsch's series of works points to the totality of such events on a global scale: if you were to count for just one month how often the TV news reports on derailed trains, crashed planes and multiple pile-ups on the motorway, you would probably be very surprised at how such events are part of our everyday lives due to their constant recurrence. But unless we or those around us are directly affected, the news remains abstract and touches us emotionally as little as the 'claim' that a case worker in the insurance industry handles.

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, Galerie Jürgen Kalthoff, Essen, 2008

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, 2002-2013, Oil on wood, 25 x 35 cm

HOW TO USE THE WORLD

2

4x

TURN RIGHT

4a **4b** **4c** **4x** **4d** **4e**

Push Left Control Up.

MOUNTINGS

HOW TO USE THE WORLD, Copy-Montage, 1990
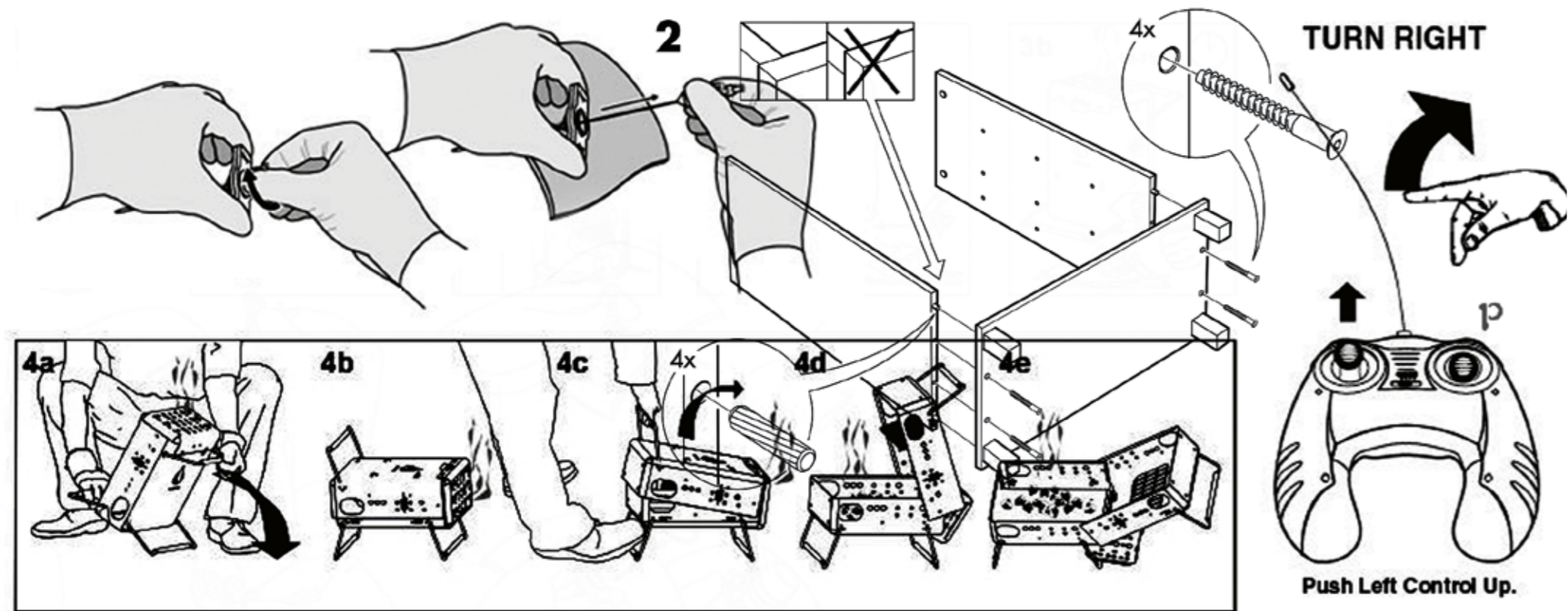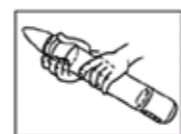
BLUEPRINT

büro blau.

Blueprint is the name of a copying process that was invented as early as 1839 by the English natural scientist John Herschel. Also known as cyanotype, it was the third method of producing stable photographic images, after the daguerreotype and calotype. It is based on the use of iron compounds, which give the end result its characteristic blue tint. Due to its simple mode of application, the blueprint had relatively quickly become one of the most important reproduction processes, especially for architectural plans and construction drawings, until the invention of the photocopy.

Today, the term 'blueprint' is synonymous with any form of technical template, construction plan, and concept, even though the process itself has long since died out, at least for commercial use in science and technology.

It is precisely these kinds of plans, instructions and conceptual sketches that Rolf Kirsch has repeatedly taken up since the late 1990s, retelling them in sometimes absurd picture stories. Entitled HOW TO USE THE WORLD, these collages satirise the often confusing instructions for use or assembly for technical devices of all kinds: 'Compilations from a wide range of instruction manuals, which here undergo a contextual oversizing into a global complex that needs to be handled like a tin opener: ethical responsibility must capitulate in the face of such complexity.' As Jürgen Raap wrote in Kunstforum International, Kirsch's collages do indeed contribute to the obscuring of the general overview, while also celebrating a certain mockery of it.

In the 2006 exhibition Blueprint at the Abel New Art Gallery in Berlin, Kirsch combined his collage-based working method with the medium of cyanotype to create a very special kind of blueprint. These form the background for a series of paintings that are presented in the second part of the exhibition: in the series Alter Ego from 2007/2008, the examination of montage in painting that was already developed in the BLUEPRINTS is extended. The portrait heads, composed of several physiognomic elements, are phantom images, as they are known from police work. But for Kirsch, they point clearly beyond this reference, thematising the availability of human material as a creative mass

aus der Serie FREMDKÖRPER, Öl auf Holz, 2007

that, in the right combination, can constantly give rise to new people. The series entitled Fremdkörper (Foreign Bodies), from 2005, develops in a similar way. A series of small-format paintings show greenish-black 'body cavities' containing impasto forms that are white and glistening as if they have been punched out, symbolically demonstrating their foreignness. The imagery of these works, reminiscent of the documentation of medical malpractice, addresses the plastic situation of cosmetic surgery and performs the implantation parallel to the act of painting. In principle, the painter uses the virtual character of painting here and simulates the positioning of implants in a fictitious abdominal cavity in the paintings. Foreign Body addresses the culture of physical modification and optimisation and already anticipates the virtuality of the phantom head series. It is self-evident that the conceptual design of reality, i.e. the generation of

blueprints for the manipulation of growth processes, requires a precise knowledge of the world.

The works from the series Satellite Images, which round off the presentation at Galerie Abel, focus on the surveying of the earth. Admittedly, the fascination with views of the earth's surface has been exhausted by the multitude of visual offerings to date. Yet the series, which Kirsch has been pursuing since the late 1990s, seems more relevant than ever today. Kirsch's work as a painter has developed in the context of the interaction between painting and media. During the 1990s, this meant an engagement with photography and video. He created a number of installations and performances in which he examined the materiality of technical image media. As early as the late 1990s, in reaction to his experiences with new media, he developed a renewed interest in painting, which reached a preliminary high point in works such as RHYTHM OF STATISTICS (2002), small-format oil sketches of plane crashes and shipwrecks.
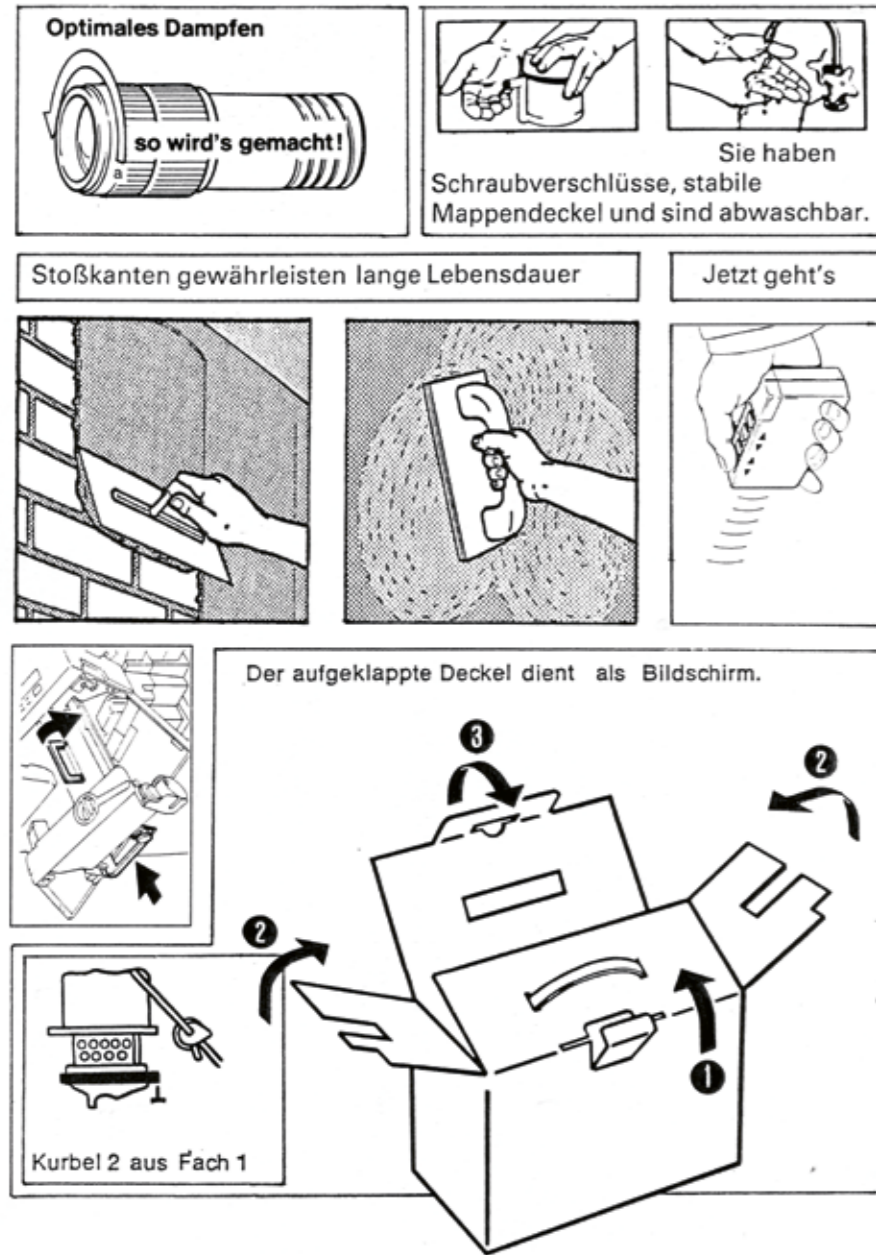
The templates for Kirsch's painterly exploration usually come from concrete contexts of use, in which images are used within the media for information, research or documentation. In his artistic reworking, he starts from the respective nature of the material he has found and stages the documentary as well as reality-creating qualities of his painting. The pictorial worlds embedded in these contexts of use in a 'service contract' are 'brought back' into painting through artistic penetration. In this process, photographic montages serve less as unconditional templates than as scores according to which the paintings are realised.

It is striking in this context that Kirsch's works usually have a high 'real character'. What this means is that, for example, the phantom portraits are not recreated paintings based on models, but can themselves function as phantom images. Similarly, the disaster paintings from the series RHYTHM OF STATISTICS do not simply depict paintings based on press photos, but are themselves reports with corresponding background information about the circumstances and course of the accident. The list of examples could be continued here, including the silhouette photographs and film works from the 1990s, which also do not represent virtual pictorial spaces, but rather shadow documentations of everyday objects.
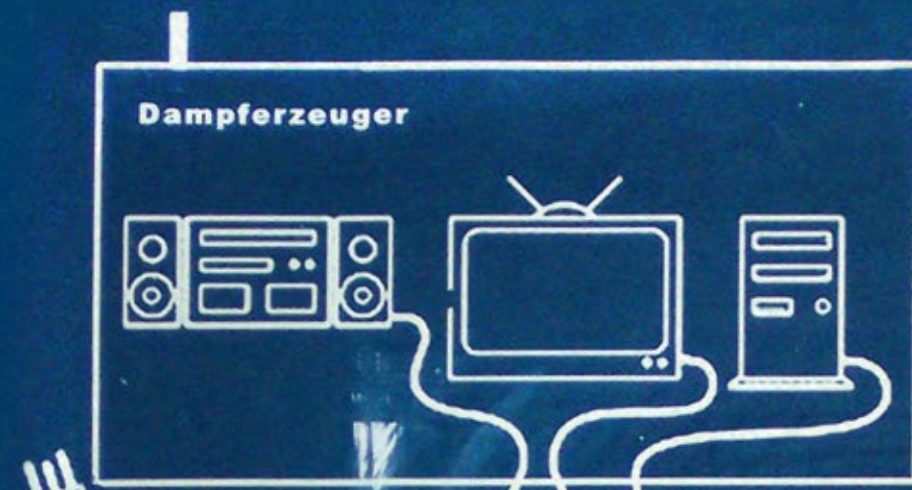

PHANTOM, 2011, Graphit auf Papier, 90 x 60 cm

Optimales Dampfen
so wird's gemacht!

Schraubverschlüsse, stabile
Mappendeckel und sind abwaschbar.

Sie haben

Stoßkanten gewährleisten lange Lebensdauer

Jetzt geht's

Der aufgeklappte Deckel dient als Bildschirm.

Kurbel 2 aus Fach 1

HOW TO USE THE WORLD, Copy-Montage, 1990

This shows a basic feature of Kirsch's artistic approach, which reflects on the thematic context of use of processed image material and transforms it into an adequate pictorial form. X-rays, sonograms, scientific image material in general, press photos of wanted persons or documentation material of traffic accidents form the background for his painterly-graphic examination, in which the means do not serve to illustrate the pictorial worlds under discussion, but instead substitute them.

right:
presentation of blueprints at PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich, 2022

Pages 144 -147:
blueprintS, 2008
cyanotype/blueprint

Dampferzeuger

- vorgespult

TURN KNOB TO ADVANCE FLOSS

-eine 1/4 Umdrehung nach rechts
-großen Knopf auf der Rückseite drücken
-fertig ist die Anwendung

forcierte Krafteinwirkung

VP

FFD

H

RFD

U

Drehen Sie nun langsam die Kurbel im Uhrzeigersinn.

Figure 48

(1) DISC A

(5) JUDDER SPRING

(2) SPRING SEAT

(3) DISC B

(4) DISC A

BAG E (Continued)

(1) RETAINER

HOOKING HOLE

HANDLEBAR WEIGHT

(4) GRIP END WEIGHT

5

Snip converter

(2) SIDE COVERS

GRIP END WEIGHT

BOSS
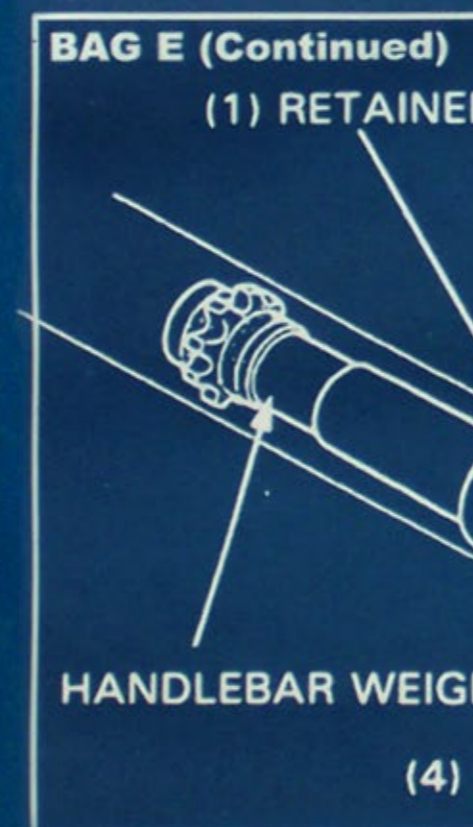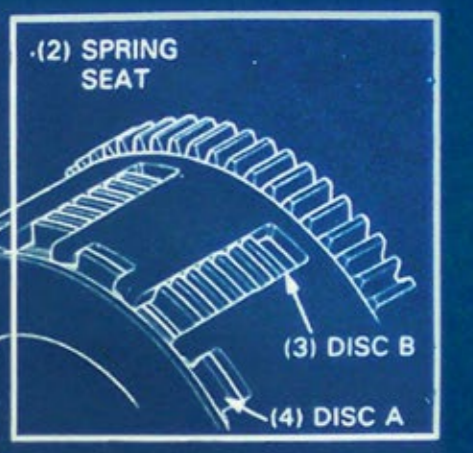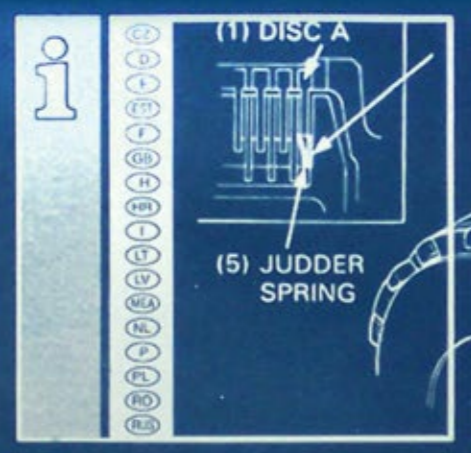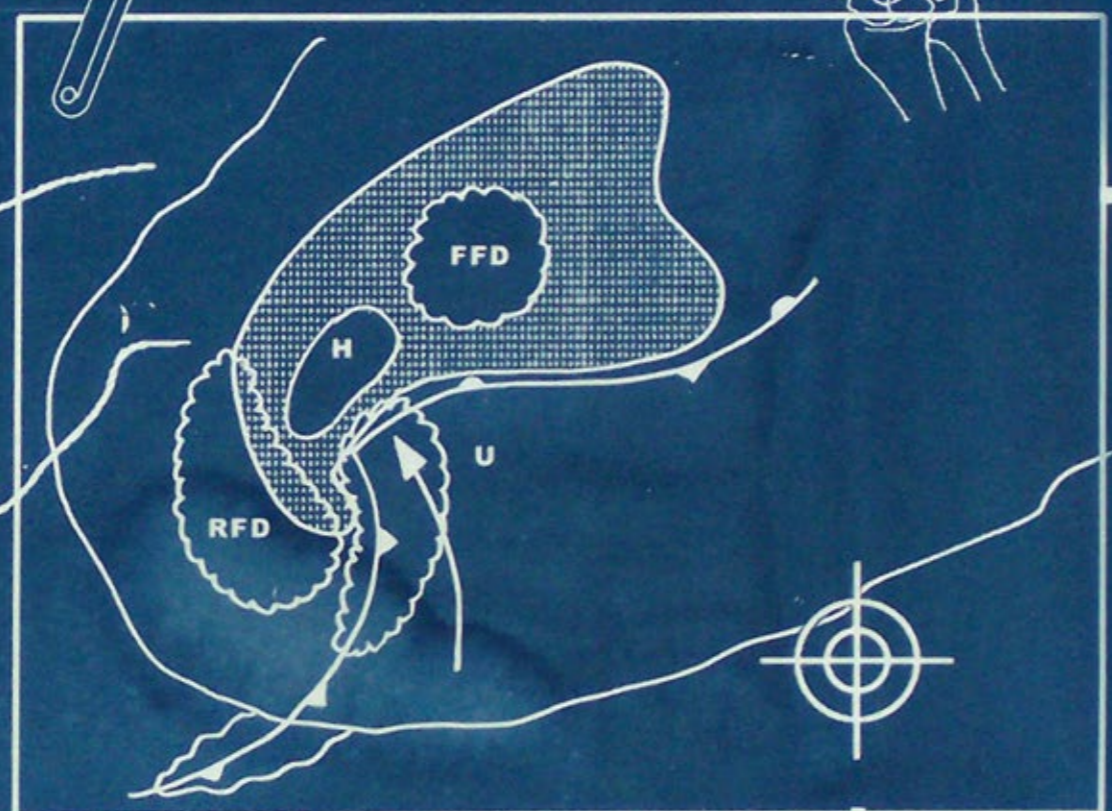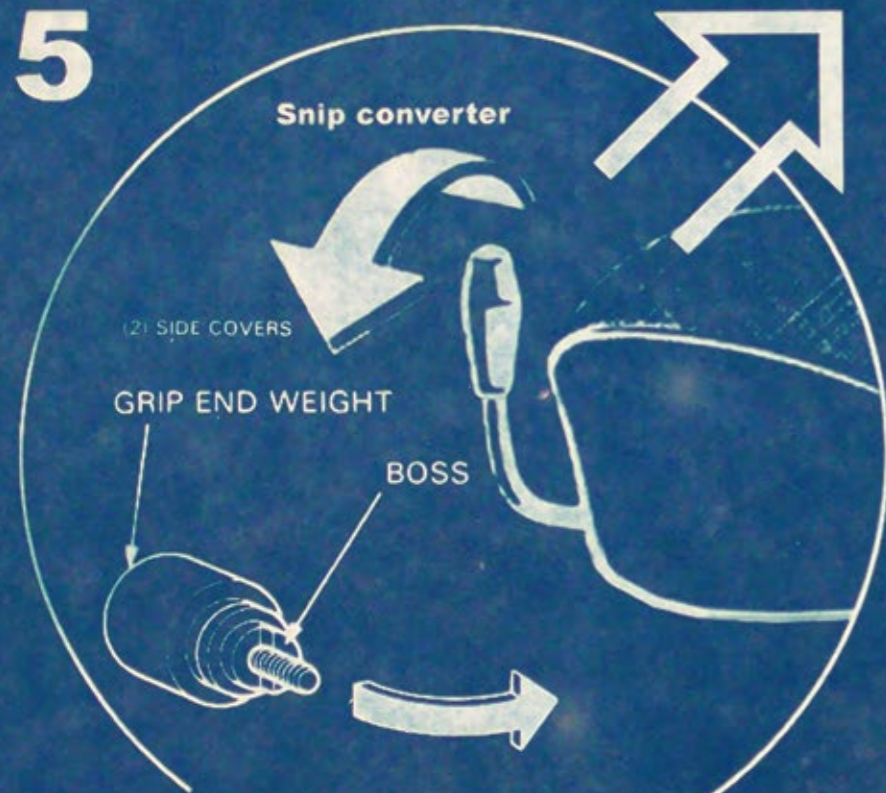
Download a single bzipped HTML file.

PIVOT BOLT

RADIATOR
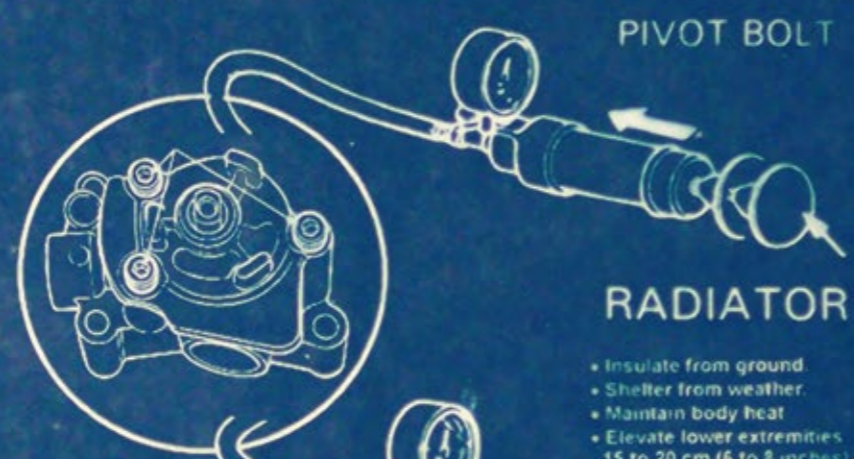
- Insulate from ground.
- Shelter from weather.
- Maintain body heat.
- Elevate lower extremities 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 inches)

KED

(3)

LOWER MOUNT
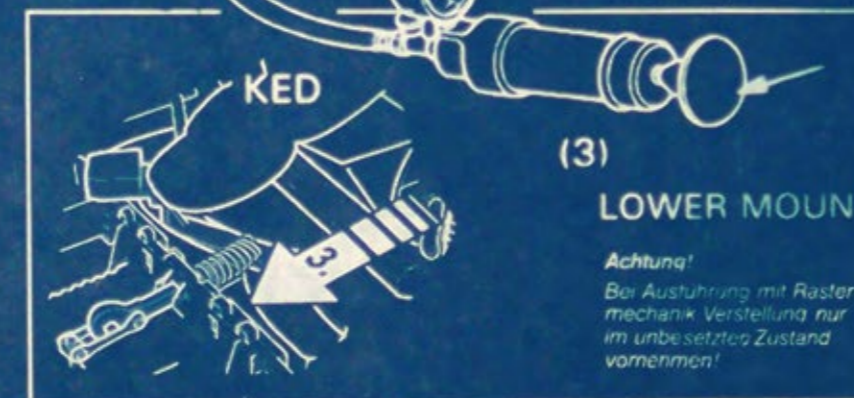
Achtung!
Bei Ausführung mit Raster-mechanik Verstellung nur im unbesetzten Zustand vornehmen!
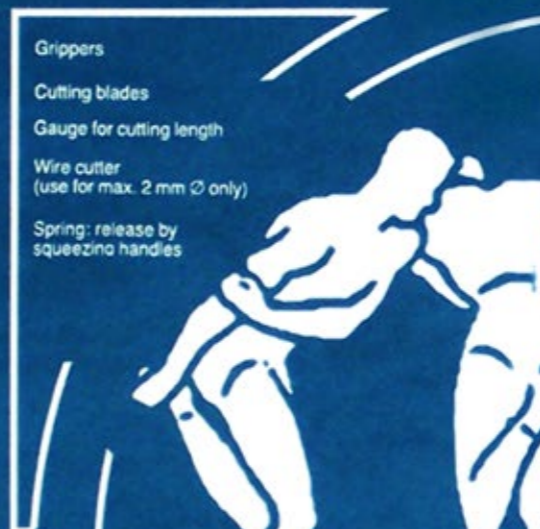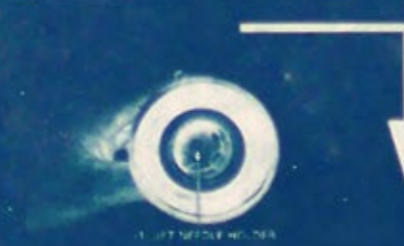
Grippers

Cutting blades

Gauge for cutting length

Wire cutter
(use for max. 2 mm Ø only)

Spring: release by squeezing handles

Para la ST-6400-F del conjunto de platos, colocar de forma que las proyecciones de la palanca queden interbloqueadas con las muescas en la tapa de la palanca.

1. BANDEROLE AUFREIẞEN

2. PACKUNGSLASCHEN AUSEINANDERZIEHEN

Orificio del cable de cambios

Envoltura

Cable interior

Llave de tuercas de 8 mm
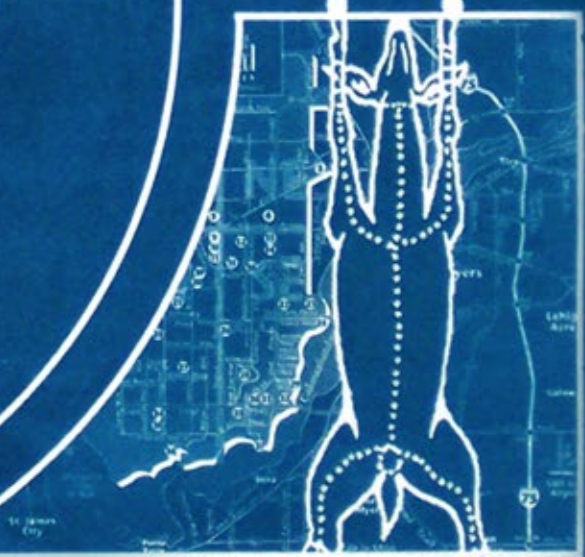
REANIMATION at the PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich, 2022

3.2. - 31.5.2022

Exhibition views

ABSTRACTS #16, #13 und #12

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, REQUISIT, ABSTRACTS
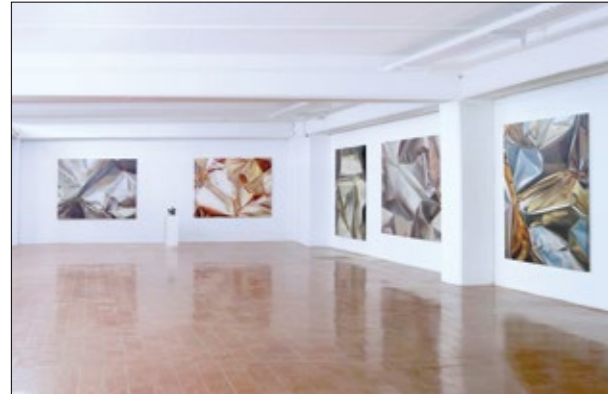
FOLD, ABSTRACT #22

SOFT IMPACT #5, #29, #20, #2 und #33

REQUISIT #4, ABSTRACT #11 und #21

REQUISIT #10, SOFT IMPACT #28, #21 und #3
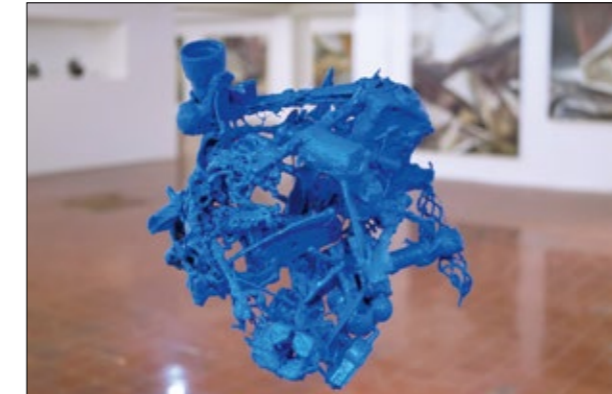
REQUISIT #4

MONOCHROME #10

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS

REQUISITES

RHYTHM OF STATISTICS

BLUEPRINTS

REQUISIT #20
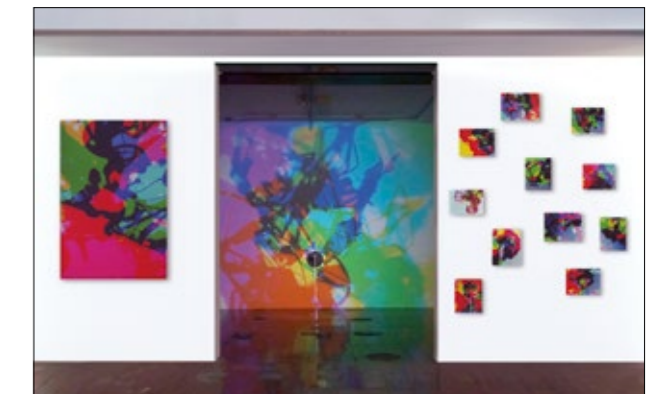
Installation SCHEMEN

R.J. Kirsch

1959 born in Kirchen/Sieg

Studied under Stefan Wewerka,
Daniel Spoerri and Franz Dank
at the
Cologne University of Applied Sciences
(formerly the KÖLNER WERKSCHULEN)

Solo exhibitions

2022   REANIMATION, PAN kunstforum niederrhein, Emmerich
2021   LICHTBILDER, PETERSBURGER Raum für Kunst, Köln
2020   SCHEMEN, K101, Köln
2018   PHANTOME, Galerie CIRCUS EINS, Putbus
       SCHEMEN, PETERSBURGER Raum für Kunst, Köln
2017   GLANZ UND GLORIA, Groupshow, ART Galerie 7, Köln
2015   MOTO PARK, Kunstverein Eisenturm Mainz
2014   PHANTOMS, Meta Weber Galerie, Krefeld
       PHANTOMS, Kunstverein Bayreuth
2013   PHANTOMS, RAUMSECHS, Düsseldorf
       DER MALER IM DUNKEL, Kunstverein Viernheim, Katalog
2012   ABSTRACTS, ART Galerie 7, Köln
2008   REANIMATION, Galerie Jürgen Kalthoff, Essen
       STILL LIFE PIECES, ART Galerie 7, Köln
2006   RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, Galerie ABEL Neue Kunst, Berlin
       RHYTHM OF STATISTICS, Galerie Rachel Haferkamp, Köln
2004   BELL TONE LABORATORY, Pilotprojekt Gropiusstadt, Berlin
1999   Goethe-Institut, Brüssel / Maison communale d'Evere
       PHANTOM, Kunstmuseum Albstadt, Katalog, CD

Double exhibitions

2010   LEERLAUF, Bellevuesaal Wiesbaden, mit Max Scholz
2008   PASSAGEN, Galerie ABEL Neue Kunst, Berlin, mit Bernd Fox
2016   PERIPHERIE, RAUMSECHS, Düsseldorf, mit Eberhard Bitter

Group exhibitions

2022   DIE UNWAHRSCHEINLICHEN, Galerie Smend, Köln
       mit Rainer Aring und Michael Hooymann
2019   SCHEMEN, Galeri1, Parallel Event / Istanbul Biennale
       SOUTERRAIN, LABOR Ebertplatz, Köln,
       mit Bernd Fox und Adi Meier-Grolman
2018   DAS KLEINE FORMAT, RAUMSECHS, Düsseldorf
2017   8+1, Groupshow, Studio Victor Dahmen, Köln
       FERIENGÄSTE, Groupshow, LABOR Ebertplatz, Köln
2014   ZAHLEN PUMPEN, Kunstverein für den Rhein-Sieg-Kreis
2013   OSTRALE, intern. Kunstausstellung Dresden, Katalog
2011   HOT SPOT BERLIN, Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin, Katalog
2010   /+\=X, serialworks studio, Kapstadt, Südafrika
2007   GROPIUS STORIES, Galerie im Körnerpark, Berlin
2005   CARS AND RACES, Galerie Foert / Garanin, Berlin
2004   MIT DEN FÜSSEN ZUERST, Galerie von der Milwe, Aachen
       STATUS QUO, Galerie Murata&friends, Berlin
2003   ZU HAUSE BLEIBEN, Moltkerei Werkstatt e.V., Köln
       THE MERRY WAITINGROOM, Kulturhauptstadt Graz
2001   Sammlung Stadtsparkasse Köln

Fairs

2015   art KARLSRUHE, ART Galerie 7, Köln
2010   sowie 2011 und 2013
       ART.FAIR Köln, ART Galerie 7, Köln
2008   Bridge Art Fair, Miami
2007   FUEL FOR ART, Miami, F.I.T., Berlin
       MACO Mexico City, Galerie ABEL Neue Kunst, Berlin
2006   preview Berlin, Galerie ABEL Neue Kunst, Berlin
2005   2.Berliner Kunstsalon, Galerie NEUES PROBLEM, Berlin
       Kunst Köln, ART Galerie 7, Köln
2004   ART.FAIR Köln, ART Galerie 7, Köln

Scholarships and awards

2021   Corona-Stipendium NRW für das Projekt SCHEMEN
2004   Arbeitsstipendium Haus Schwarzenberg, Berlin
2003   Arbeitsstipendium Pilotprojekt Gropiusstadt, Berlin
2002   nominiert für das Villa Aurora Stipendium
2001   Otzenrath Stipendium, Hausmuseum Otzenrath
2000   Förderstipendium Marli-Hoppe-Ritter-Stiftung
       Förderstipendium Kuratorium ZNS
1991   nominiert für das Peter-Mertes-Stipendium

Performances

2011   SALZSTRASSE, PAErsche / Künstlerforum Bonn
2004   KLINGELTÖNE FÜR GROPIUSSTADT
       Pilotprojekt Gropiusstadt, Berlin
2003   MIKROKOSMOS, ART Galerie 7, Köln
       SALZSTRASSE, Galerie Wolfstaedter, Offenbach
2002   DAS FRÖHLICHE WARTEZIMMER,
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2001   SALZSTRASSE, Projektraum Rosa Luxemburg, Berlin
1997   WASSERWERK, Performance-Festival Oldenburg
1995   KURZSCHLUSSHANDLUNG, Urania Theater, Köln
1993   DER KÜNSTLER IST ANWESEND, KAOS-Galerie, Köln
1987   H, HOTEL DES SEPT SAISONS, Köln

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