

Publication Portfolio

Gabriela Acha

editor | writer | researcher

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As an editorial
manager and
editor

Mudam Guide

To celebrate its anniversary, Mudam is launching a guide in three languages that introduces its history through a concise chronology, highlights 100 works from its collection, and recounts the conception of the building by the eminent Sino-American architect I. M. Pei. An opening introduction by Bettina Steinbrügge, the museum's Director General, sets the scene, followed by an essay by Marie-Noëlle Farcy, Head of Mudam Collection. With this publication, Mudam charts its history while honouring its mission to engage audiences both locally and internationally.

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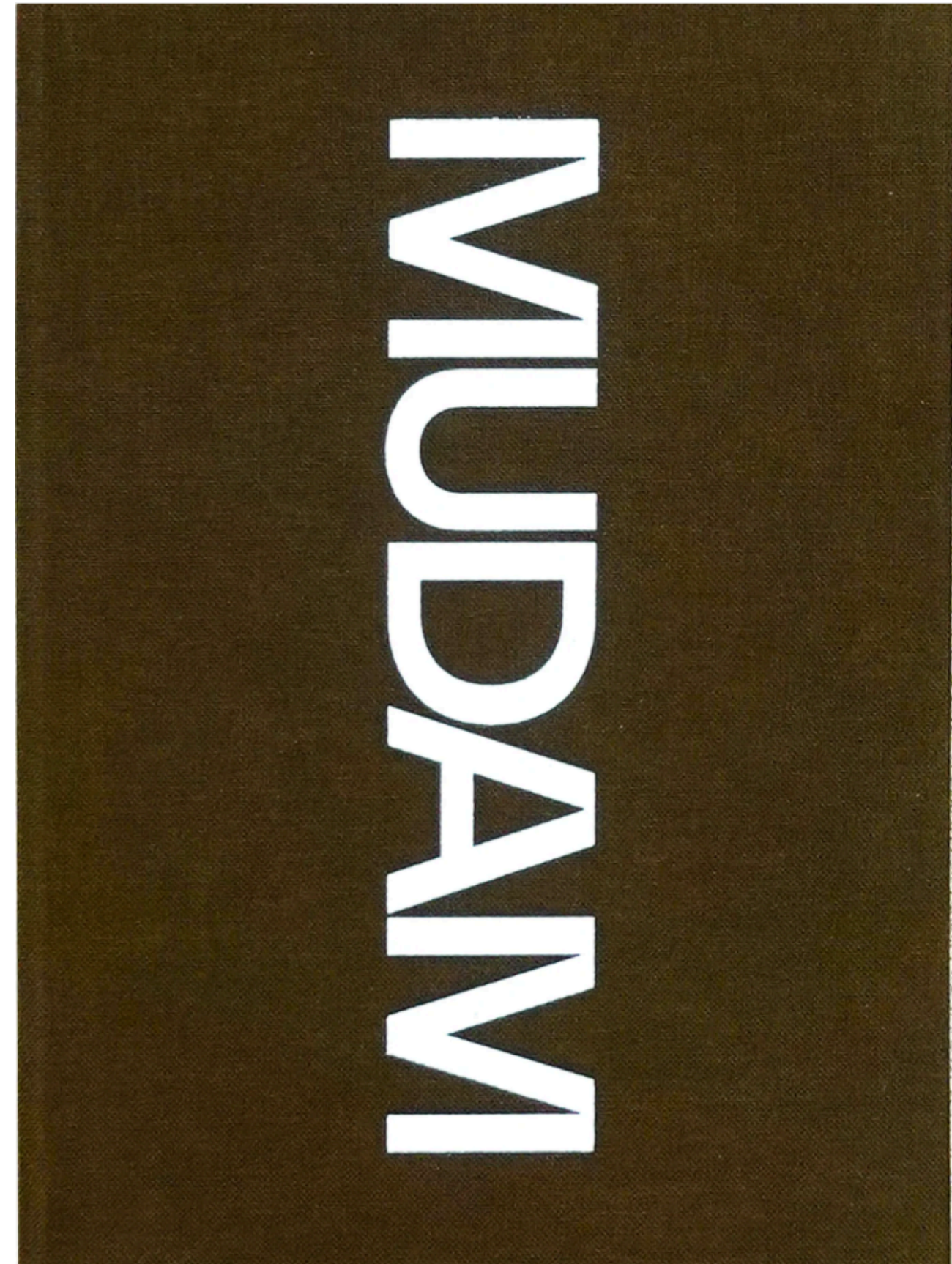
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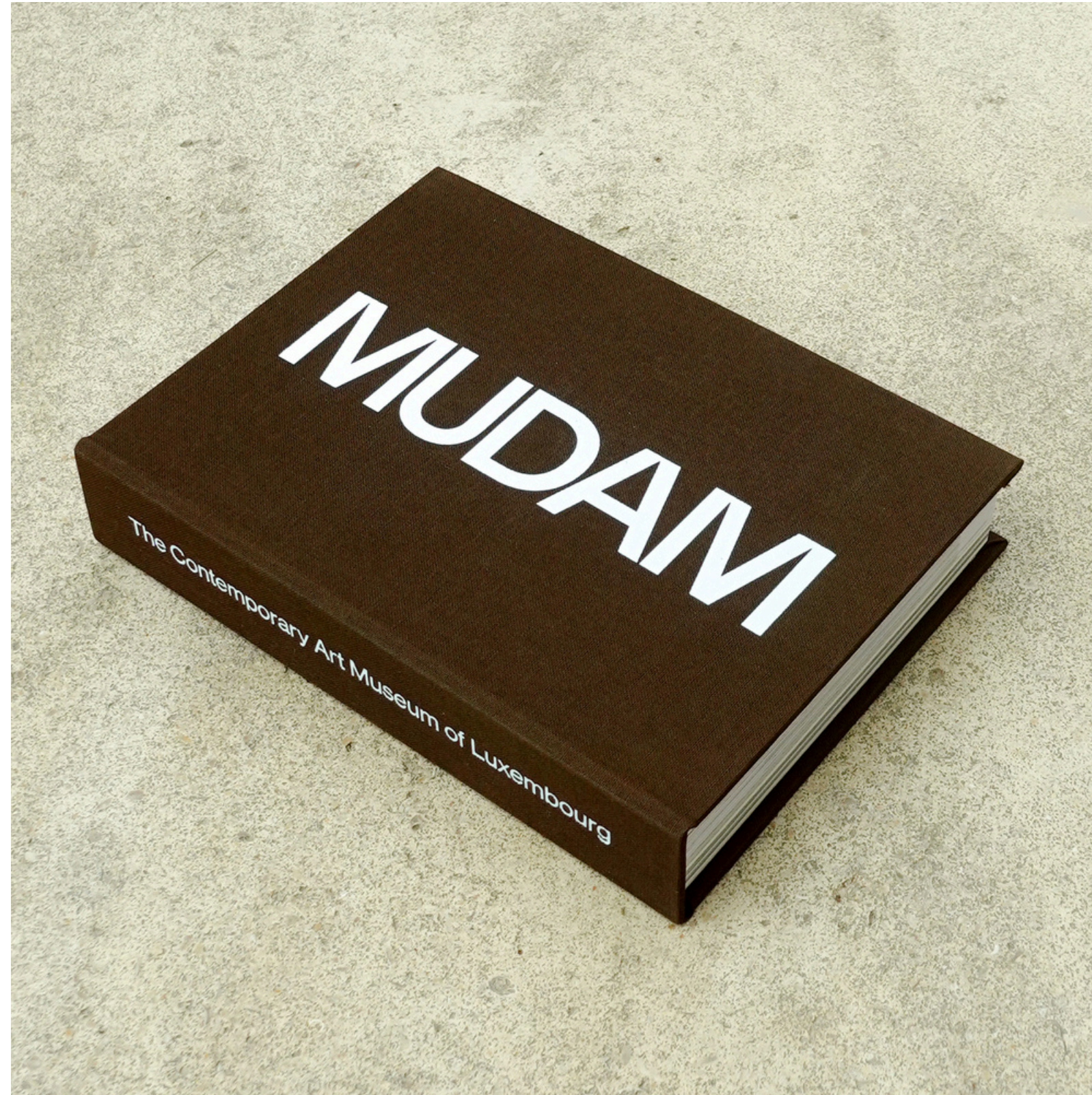
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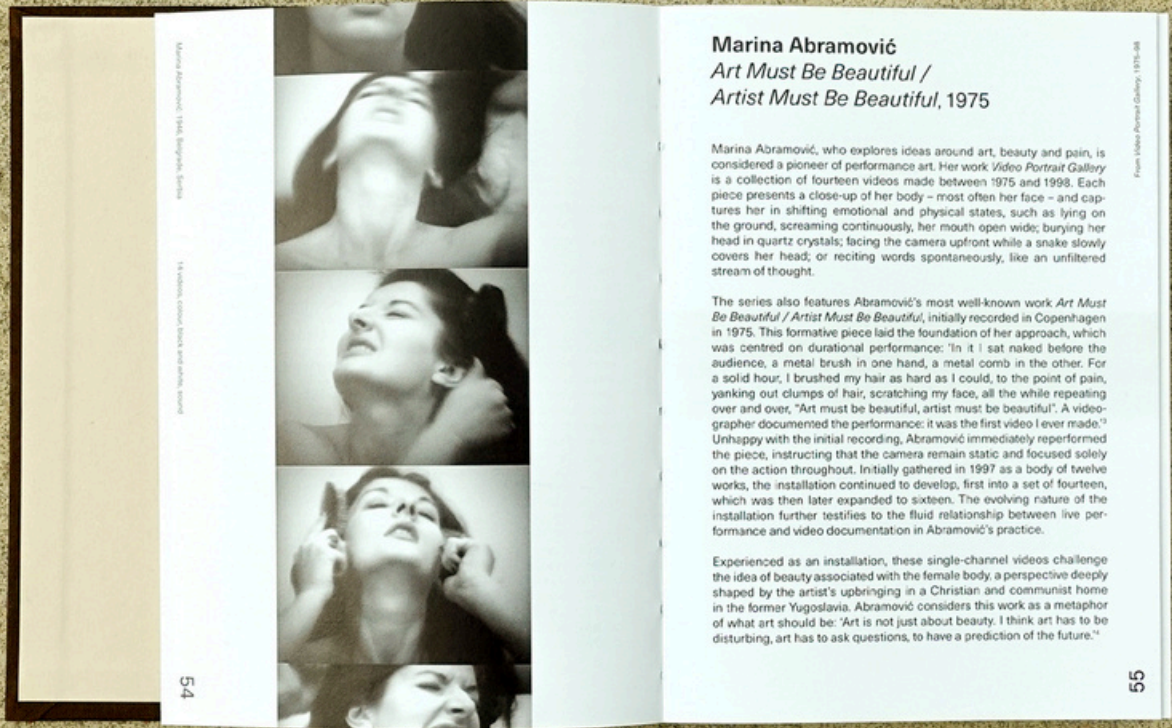
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Marina Abramović
Art Must Be Beautiful /
Artist Must Be Beautiful, 1975

Marina Abramović, who explores ideas around art, beauty and pain, is considered a pioneer of performance art. Her work *Video Portrait Gallery* is a collection of fourteen videos made between 1975 and 1998. Each piece presents a close-up of her body – most often her face – and captures her in shifting emotional and physical states, such as lying on the ground, screaming continuously, her mouth open wide; burying her head in quartz crystals; facing the camera upfront while a snake slowly covers her head; or reciting words spontaneously, like an unfiltered stream of thought.

The series also features Abramović's most well-known work *Art Must Be Beautiful / Artist Must Be Beautiful*, initially recorded in Copenhagen in 1975. This formative piece laid the foundation of her approach, which was centred on durational performance: 'In it I sat naked before the audience, a metal brush in one hand, a metal comb in the other. For a solid hour, I brushed my hair as hard as I could, to the point of pain, yanking out clumps of hair, scratching my face, all the while repeating over and over, "Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful". A videographer documented the performance: it was the first video I ever made.'¹ Unhappy with the initial recording, Abramović immediately reperformed the piece, instructing that the camera remain static and focused solely on the action throughout. Initially gathered in 1997 as a body of twelve works, the installation continued to develop, first into a set of fourteen, which was then later expanded to sixteen. The evolving nature of the installation further testifies to the fluid relationship between live performance and video documentation in Abramović's practice.

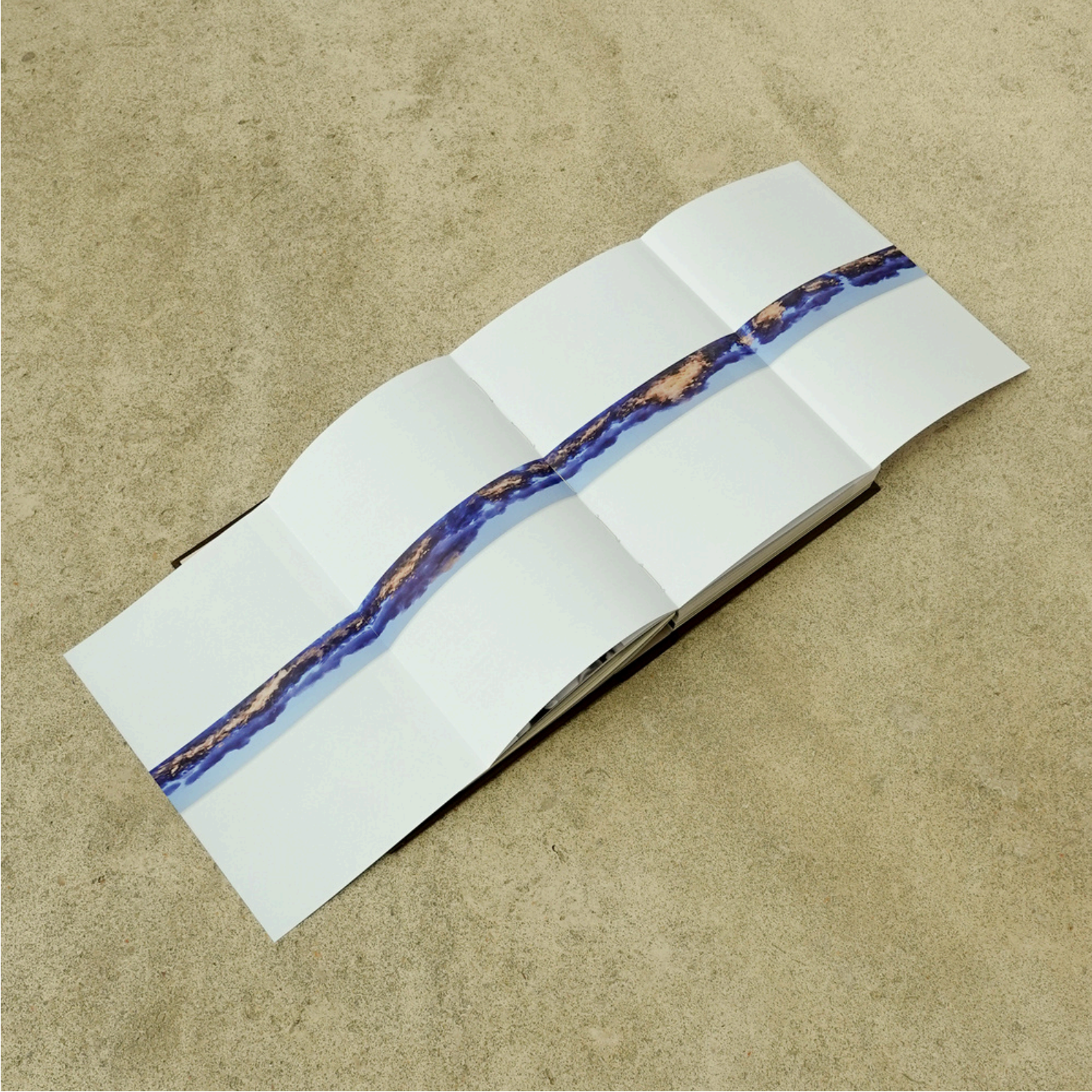
Experienced as an installation, these single-channel videos challenge the idea of beauty associated with the female body, a perspective deeply shaped by the artist's upbringing in a Christian and communist home in the former Yugoslavia. Abramović considers this work as a metaphor of what art should be: 'Art is not just about beauty. I think art has to be disturbing, art has to ask questions, to have a prediction of the future.'²

From *Video Portrait Gallery*, 1975-98

Marina Abramović: 1968, Bergamo, Serbia

Marina Abramović: 1975, Copenhagen, Denmark

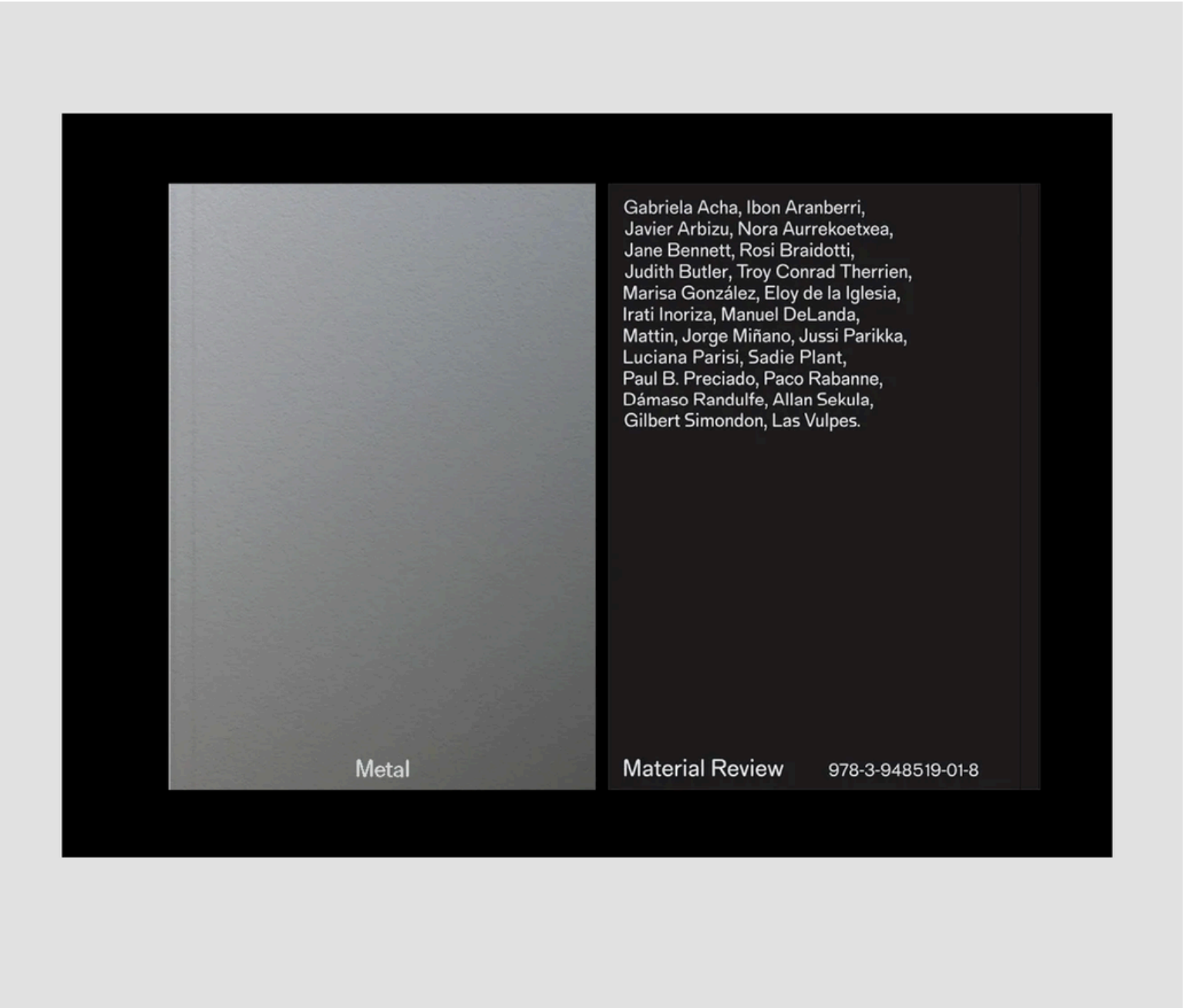




METAL, 2021

Artists and authors review the ethics and aesthetics that emerge from metal as a creative and destructive genre in contemporary culture. The publication starts with a journey through the Basque Country (Spain) as a reference case study—from the decline of its heavy steel industry to the rise of new digital and cultural industries—introducing a radical transition in the imaginaries of metal. A dual logic that emerges from metallurgical processes creates indeed the potential for new tools or weapons, that transform industry, technology, and politics. Is there a radical ideology of metal setting the tone, the shape, or the weight of new affects, identities, languages, musics, or wars?

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Metal

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22. Benjamin Bratton, *Chemistry and Urbanism*, 2014, Fulcrum, 84.

[...] The art historian Aby Warburg has given us an iconographic method for thinking about the transmission and survival of forms through different cultural mutations. In his *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (The Mnemosyne Atlas, 1924-29), Warburg lays out a possible visual history of Europe, made of two thousand images, among which can be found Roman sculptures, maps from different periods, Darwinian diagrams of animal evolution, Renaissance frescos, Christian oil paintings, and photographs from the beginning of the twentieth century. Inspired by this method of visual traceability, one can recognize, and not without terror, a vestige of Jeremy Bentham's model in the original design for the package of contraceptive pills that was marketed after the 1940s. In their internal divergence, Bentham's architectural motifs reclaim their place at another scale: the contraceptive pill is an edible panopticon. Social orthopedics is mutating into pharmacopornographic microprosthetics. DialPak transformed the panopticon into a domestic, portable female hormonal compact.

The panopticon, prefigured by the hospital plans of Bernard Poyet and C. P. Coquéau and by Louis Le Vau's project for a menagerie at Versailles, first emerged as a model of industrial (but not yet penal) architecture, developed in 1786 by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, brother of the naval engineer Samuel Bentham (in fact, it was Samuel who conceived the basic architecture of the building), in response to a commission from the Russian prince Grigory Potemkin.

Originally, the panopticon was an industrial "inspection house" designed to optimize surveillance, control, and worker production in a factory complex. Bentham's architectural structure was based on two concentric rings, with an observation tower at the center of the entire structure and a series of cells ra-

Paul B. Preciado
*Packaging Disciplinary
 Architecture: DialPak
 and the Invention of the
 Edible Panopticon*

diating out from it. Each of these cells had two windows, an external one to let in light, and an internal one facing the surveillance tower. The occupants of the cells were isolated from each other by walls and subjected to the collective and individual (audiovisual) scrutiny of a guard in the tower, which, as Foucault speculates, could have been empty or occupied by the abstract eye of God, which would remain hidden. As pointed out by Christian Laval:

The panoptic is not only the eye of power, a kind of imaginary figure suspended over a splintered and isolated people, but also, in the reverse sense, the eye of the people that must remain constantly focused on the ruling class so that the latter won't betray the interests of the greatest number. This double meaning of surveillance is based on the principle of the goal of generalized transparency. The model of the panoptic has the advantage of combining what is usually thought to be distinct and separate: the most intrusive social control, the free market and the most advanced democracy.[1]

This original design became the model for internment and disciplinary centers built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, centers such as Rahway Prison in New Jersey; national prisons in Dublin, Bogotá, and Cuba's Isle of Pines; and the jail in Matar, Spain, designed by Eiles Rogent. For Foucault, the panopticon isn't just a simple disciplinary device. It's the material model of disciplinary knowledge-power as a form of "social orthopedics";[2] power and its specific modes of knowledge and surveillance materialized in the form of physical architecture (whether of a prison, school, hospital, barracks, or factory) that automates movement, controls the gaze, programs action, and ritualizes everyday bodily practices. In all such cases, disciplinary power is, according to Foucault "exercised through its invisibility. . . and the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the



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EU5
Muntätze
processa, 1960

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Sewing machines
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historia(s)

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Gabriela Acha

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Atoms of matter and bits of information flow in the air, like an atmosphere sustaining an intangible pressure. At a time when human creativity is credited as the dominant—yet destructive—influence on ecosystems of life on Earth, a new digital reality assembled by hyper-technological and financial instruments becomes less solid. A system of stratification emerges to transform the landscape. From the shapes of rivers and mountains to the distribution of minerals, living organisms, and human beings. It is an operation that extends from the deep soil of the Earth to the farthest voids in outer space.

How can the solidity of modern materialist production, that of products, infrastructures and things, evaporate? How can the atoms that make up the material world melt into the air? With their provocative phrase “all that is solid melts into air,” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels evoked in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) an image of the conditions of life in the industrial age of heavy metal machines, steam engines, and smoking chimneys. A transmutation of the solid into the gaseous seems to refer more to a principle of chemical sublimation rather than to a system of capital. A system that, despite its inherent dynamism, runs on heat and pressure, waste, and toxic fumes.

Gabriela Acha, Jorge Miñano

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Agathe Bauer, Issue Zero: Picking Up Promises, 2019

A publication, conceptualized and edited by Gabriela Acha, Romy Kießling, and Maru Mushtrieva, published by TLTRPreß.

The title of the publication series ‘Agathe Bauer’ stands for a broadly misheard hook “I’ve got the power” from a German 1990 Eurodance hit ‘The Power’ by the band Snap!. The hook that turned the song into a hit, came from Jocelyn Brown’s track ‘Love’s Gonna Get You’, but neither her name nor the track appears in the credits. And, here is where Agathe Bauer comes in - a mysterious being who acquires agency through the homophonic misinterpretation of the main hook “I’ve got the power”.

In ‘Issue Zero: Picking Up Promises’ Agathe has an agenda. Nothing could be as it would have been, but she is here to trace the sources of how it has become. Agathe Bauer is here to analyze the capacity of misinterpretation to unveil asymmetric power structures in knowledge systems and by tuning into the social-political, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of it. ‘Issue Zero: Picking Up Promises’ features contributions by Gabriela Acha, [{"CIBELLE"}(CAVALLI)BASTOS)], Lynn Hershman Leeson, Romy Kießling, Markues, Luzie Meyer, Maru Mushtrieva, Claudia Pagès, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, Miriam Stoney, Christine Sun Kim, Eric Winkler, Miriam Yammad, Anna Zett. Conceptualized and edited by Gabriela Acha, Romy Kießling, Maru Mushtrieva.

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AGATHE BAUER
Issue Zero: Picking Up Promises

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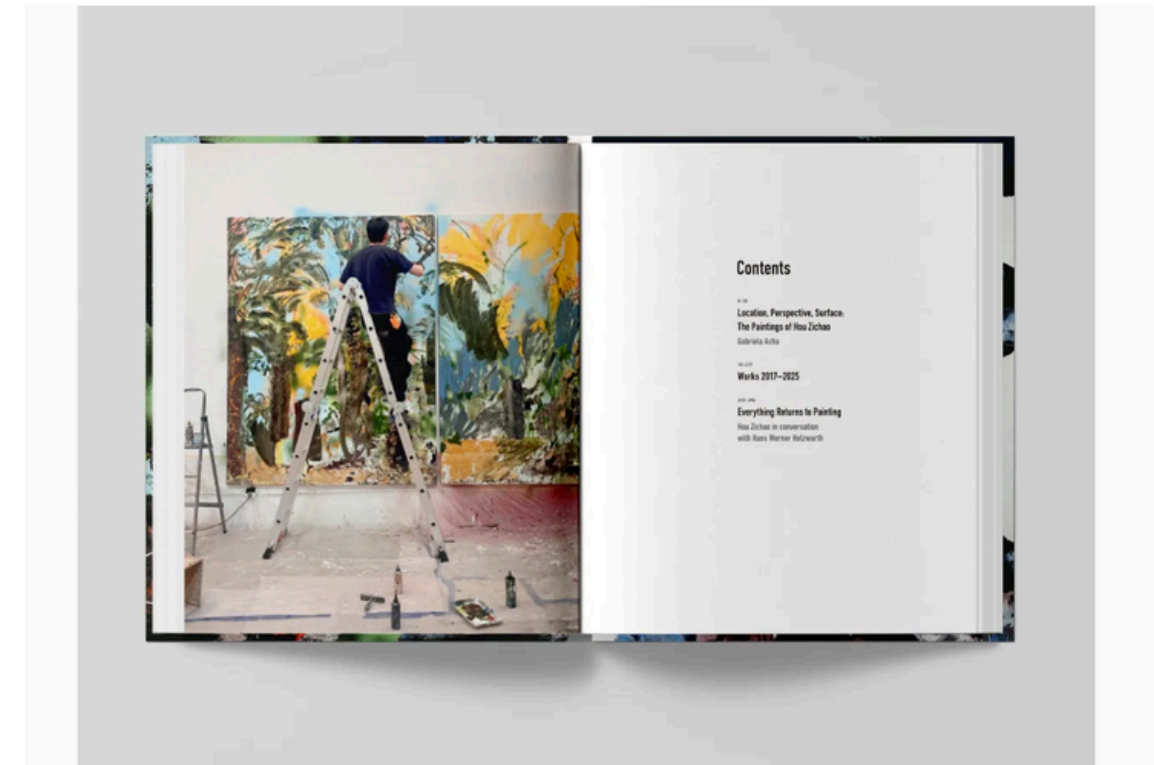
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Kein Witz, No Joke

by Sophie Reinhold, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt

Kein Witz, No Joke is published on the occasion of the same name exhibition at Kunstverein Reutlingen in 2019. It combines paintings and objects by Sophie Reinhold with the “Typewritings” of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt as it was presented in the show. As different as the artists may be, their works share a manic perseverance, precision, and subversive humor.

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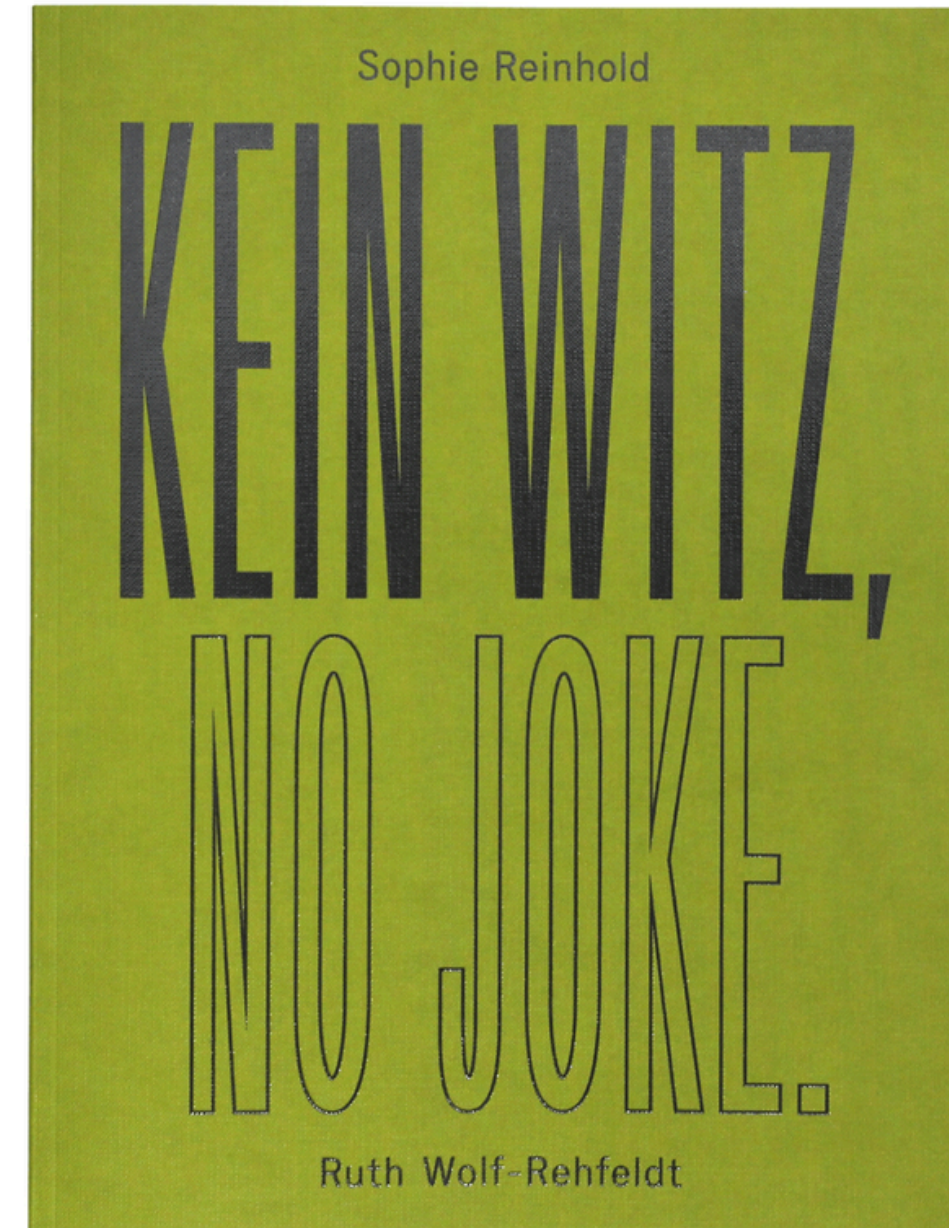
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TACTICAL SEMIOTICS

The most immediate link between Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Sophie Reinhold might be their connection to the Eastern Bloc. Whereas the former spent most of her adulthood in the GDR, the latter experienced the transition between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany as a child. Although the Bloc's socio-political context meant something different for each artist – everyday reality versus reminiscences – it inevitably influenced both their personal and creative choices. The “Wende” was the end of Wolf-Rehfeldt's artistic production and preceded Reinhold's career. The exhibition “Kein Witz, no joke” at Kunstverein Reutlingen presents a selection of works by both artists. Like yin and yang, the works complement each other through their differences, but also through a kind of common spirit. For instance, in order to develop as artists and individuals, they managed to take advantage of what may be called a tactical subversion of their circumstances.

Reflecting on the often-elided distinction between tactics and strategies, the historian, philosopher and linguist Michel de Certeau argues that strategies serve as a defence mechanism against the “invisible powers of the Other” and can only be developed from within established property. Strategies belong to “the scientific, the military and the political sphere”, as opposed to tactics, which belong to the placeless, the powerless, and the dispossessed. The “Other” is often unable to escape or change their position, forcing them to operate tactically. Those positioned as “Other” often require a higher degree of mobility and docility regarding the hazards of time, to be able to seize opportunities the instant they appear. The “Other” needs “a sense of occasion and a conjurer's wit” to turn the weakest into the strongest position.¹

De Certeau illustrates these two positions using the medium of language, and it is also through language that Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Sophie Reinhold twist the laws imposed on them to claim their place and power. Through their devotion to

quotidian tools and motifs, and a personal instrumentalisation of found semiotic signs, they create their own imaginaries. But what they share, beyond any conceptual frame, is a genuine enthusiasm for the labour and craft inherent in their media.

Their individual aesthetics nonetheless differ considerably. The most characteristic element in Wolf-Rehfeldt's work – typewritten characters – consistently appear in her small-scale minimalist works. Reinhold, by contrast, delivers a wide range of scenarios and visual possibilities, ranging from the most histrionic and striking images to more minimalist and discreet ones. From abstraction to hyperrealism, her motifs merge miscellaneous figures from ancient and modern literature and art. In both cases, the “art of interval” – a tactical use of plurality and creativity – leads to rather unexpected outcomes.²

Reinhold's paintings encompass reinterpretations of public signage and allegorical narratives, creating a unique visual rhetoric. Her spectrum of influences and pluralistic approach are certainly connected to her personal and professional background, a fact she only became aware of recently. Her first career choice was perhaps driven by the pragmatic mindset fostered by the GDR's education system. However, one semester as a maths undergrad was enough to convince her to pursue what appealed to her most: painting. Her growing joy in the medium was first encouraged at the Academy of Fine Arts in Leipzig, then later at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, under the supervision of painter Amélie von Wulffen. Wulffen's influence on Reinhold's work is undeniable, but her pictorial spirit is expansive, including highly diverse influences, from Gustave Moreau to Pontormo. Sometimes, her eclectic palette is similar to Cy Twombly's. At other times, the very pale yellows and greens diluted and layered with whites and greys in some works clash with the gaudy oranges and electric blues in others. Reinhold's rather intuitive approach is combined with a tacit rationality, applied to the

realistic details, and reflected in the monotonous, laborious task of polishing and flattening the canvases with her trademark marble powder.

This analytical dimension might also be the impetus behind the recurrent appropriation of quotidian semiotics. “Kein Witz, no joke” at Reutlingen Kunstverein opens with the painting “Gewöhne Dich nicht daran” (Don't get used to it) (2019). As direct as a traffic sign, the phrase – the only motif on the canvas – is an homage to the pamphlets and visual material she received from her uncle, a former advertiser in the GDR. It also urges reflection on the volatility of personal, political and social configurations; as circumstances constantly change, it's best to not get too comfortable in one specific place.

For the series “Untitled” (2019), she appropriates the iconography of a set of public services that aim to maintain social “order”, such as Berlin's public transport company, recycling stations, and police. “Untitled (BVG)”, “Untitled (BSR)”, “Untitled (STOP)”, and “Untitled (POLI)” are radically cropped versions of these companies' logos. Though abstracted on the layered paintings, the symbols are easily recognisable, confirming the power of semiotic communication.

Reinhold's investigation of semiotic communication incorporates a frequent literary and visual resource: allegory. The work “Die Allegorie der vier Jahreszeiten” (The Allegory of the Four Seasons) (2019) is an ode to one of the most recurrent allegorical motifs in the history of painting, as well as to the “work/recreation cycle”.³ Instead of the four seasons, the attributes in each of the four silhouettes represent four forms of labour. The quadriptych shows the evolution from manual to cognitive labour, evoking the passing of time. Today, scientific research actively flirts with the fantasy of immortality and lasting youth. Yet, these projects are not solely concerned with individual profit. Reinhold points to the fact that some corporations offer their female workers egg-freezing services to encourage longer and more intense work performances.⁴ This entails new schemes in the work/recreation cycle, based on heteronormative neoliberal structures.

Addressing a similar theme, “The Allegory of Sink or Swim” (2019) shows an almost invisible forest, from which a heron's head emerges. The evasiveness of the image is countered by the work's title, suggesting a reality in which imminent failure can only

be prevented by meritocratic, competitive labour.

Allegories are found in biblical, philosophical and mythological narratives, but the most popular allegorical form is perhaps the fable. Since time immemorial, the Panchatantra and bestiaries, with their anthropomorphised animals, have served as didactic material, metaphorically conveying life lessons and truths about human behaviour.⁵ Interested in such fundamental behaviours, Reinhold also deploys animal characters in her work. In “Boxing Bunnies” (2019), for instance, a pair of rabbits are embroiled in a fight. “True listening” (2019) depicts an unspectacular scene with an eating child next to a cat. The feline's melancholic gaze is directed towards the viewer, so dramatic, so pure, and so human...

In “Return of the Fool” (2019), a peasant-like rat carrying a bundle is about to happily walk off a cliff. The figure recalls one of the traditional representations of The Fool in the Tarot deck (a representation of collective knowledge). It also recalls La Fontaine's fable “The City Rat and the Country Rat” (adapted from Aesop's “The City Mouse and the Country Mouse”), in which the Country Rat declines fancy urban experiences, preferring the safety and tranquillity of its familiar abode in the country. Reinhold's interpretation of this multifaceted fable evokes the pervasive instability sustaining the cultural sector, but also raises the question as to whether the urban demands of speed, efficiency and aspiration really make individuals better off.

The question of whether progress is necessarily linked to accelerated mass-production was already broached by Isa Genzken's 1992 exhibition “Everybody Needs At Least One Window”. Her sculptures of openings, interiors, and corridors referenced mass-produced modernist public housing, examining its “brutally inhuman and reductive architecture”.⁶ Reinhold cherishes her copy of the exhibition catalogue, as it provided a point of inflection, helping her to refine her own understanding of her work's architecture and its relationship with space. As a tribute to Genzken's exhibition, the paintings “Suite Nr. 1”, 2 and 3 (2019) represent three windows that – unlike Genzken's empty space – open onto different backgrounds: Nr. 1 is an orange-yellow-red gradient, Nr. 2 a black gradient, and Nr. 3 a brick wall. The canvases' vertical sides are asymmetric, creating the impression of a factory building. Following personal logics to shape her canvases, the artist often transcends their

¹ Certeau, Michel de, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press LTD, 1984, p. 42

² Ibid., pp. 43-44

³ Ibid., p. 36

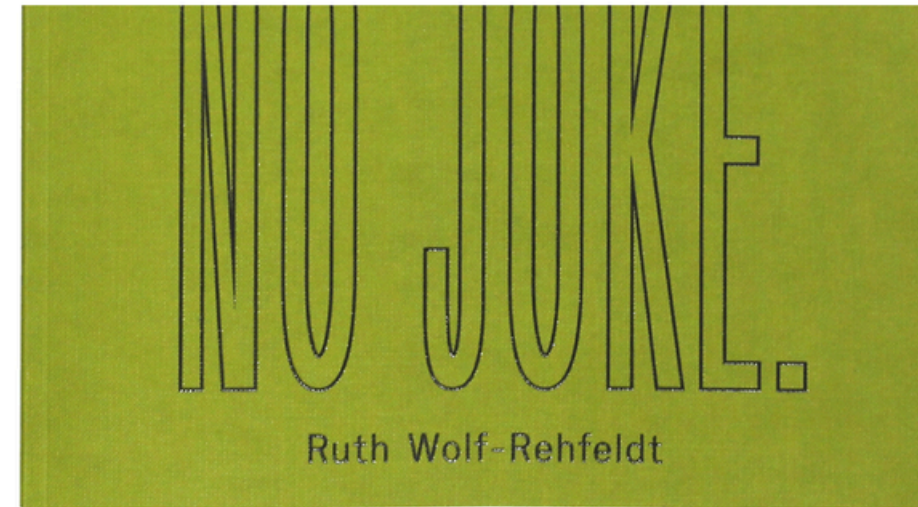
⁴ Tenaglia, Francesco, Loops and Escapes: Sophie Reinhold (Interview with Sophie Reinhold), Mousse Magazine, 2019

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Piqueras Fraile, María del Rosario, *Transfondo político-social en los históricos fondos artísticos de algunos autores de la historia de la literatura*, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2019

⁷ La Fontaine, Jean de, *The City Rat and the Country Rat*, part of *Fables de la Fontaine*, Nabu Press, 1923

⁸ Genzken, Isa, “Everybody Needs at Least One Window”, press text, 1992



Kein Witz, No Joke by Sophie Reinhold, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt

Kein Witz, No Joke is published on the occasion of the same name exhibition at Kunstverein Reutlingen in 2019. It combines paintings and objects by Sophie Reinhold with the “Typewritings” of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt as it was presented in the show. As different as the artists may be, their works share a manic perseverance, precision, and subversive humor.

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Image The Westfälischer Kunstverein in 113 works, © Photo: Hanna Neander

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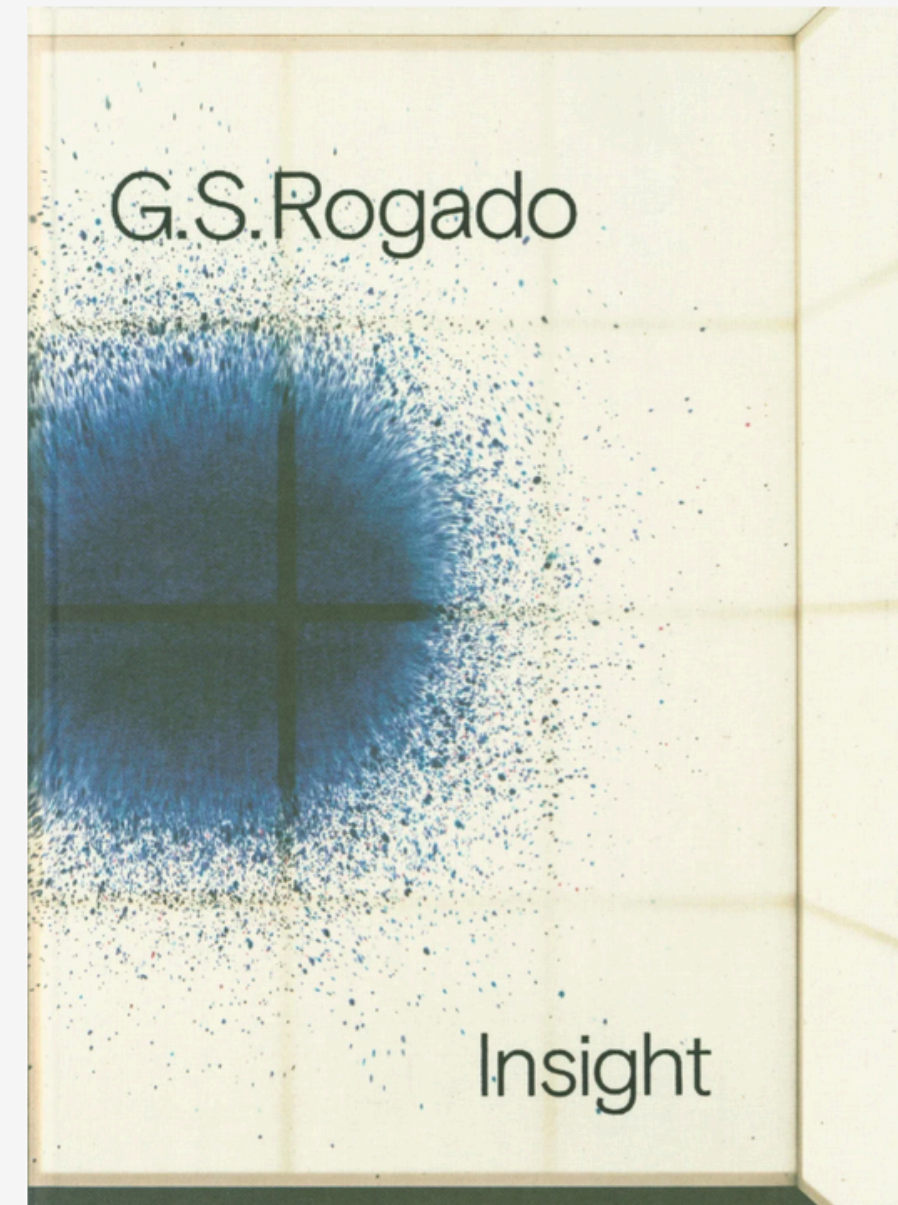
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