

SARAH DOERFEL
SELECTED WORKS & CV



image by Conny Mirbach

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My works deal with temporal and physical transition zones. They expand speculative narratives on base of research in philosophical, medical-historical and scientific contexts.

For beings in constant flux, a clear separation between death and life, past and future, self and environment dissolves. This permeable relationship to (more-than-human) others is central to my feminist understanding of identity. In my sculptures, video works, paintings and installations, I explore such dynamic states, e.g. that of pain-healing or symbiosis-parasitism and border crossings such as those into the interior of the human body in the sense of Marcel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*.

In my workshops, I search with participants for approaches to dealing with grief and death in a post-religious society.

My work has been shown internationally, including at the *Shedhalle* Zurich, the *Museum Hamburger Bahnhof*, Berlin, the *Macro Museo* Rome and the *Kunstverein Munich*. In 2025/2026 I am a fellow of the *Akademie der Künste Berlin/ Junge Akademie*. I have also received scholarships a. o. from the *Stiftung Kunstfonds* and the *Bavarian State Ministry of Science and the Arts*. I studied Fine Art and Photography & Video Art in London and Munich.

Meine Arbeiten handeln von zeitlichen und physischen Übergangszonen. Sie basieren auf Recherche im philosophischen, medizinhistorischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Kontext und breiten darauf spekulative Erzählungen aus.

Für Wesen in ständigem Wandel löst sich eine klare Trennung zwischen Tod und Leben, Vergangenheit und Zukunft, Selbst und Umwelt auf. Dieses permeable Verhältnis zu (mehr-als-menschlichen) anderen ist zentral für mein feministisches Verständnis von Identität. In meinen Skulpturen, Videoarbeiten, Malereien und Installationen erkunde ich solche dynamischen Zustände, z. B. den von Schmerz-Heilung oder Symbiose-Parasitismus und Grenzüberschreitungen wie die ins Innere des menschlichen Körpers im Sinne von Marcel Foucaults' Die Geburt der Klinik.

In meinen Workshops suche ich mit Teilnehmenden Zugänge zu einem Umgang mit Trauer und Tod in einer post-religiösen Gesellschaft.

Meine Arbeiten wurden international gezeigt, u.a. in der Shedhalle Zürich, im Museum Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, im Macro Museo Rom, und im Kunstverein München. Im Jahr 2025/2026 bin ich Stipendiatin der Akademie der Künste Berlin/ Junge Akademie. Desweiteren erhielt ich u. a. Stipendien von der Stiftung Kunstfonds und dem Bayerischen Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst. In London und München studierte ich Freie Kunst und Fotografie & Videokunst.

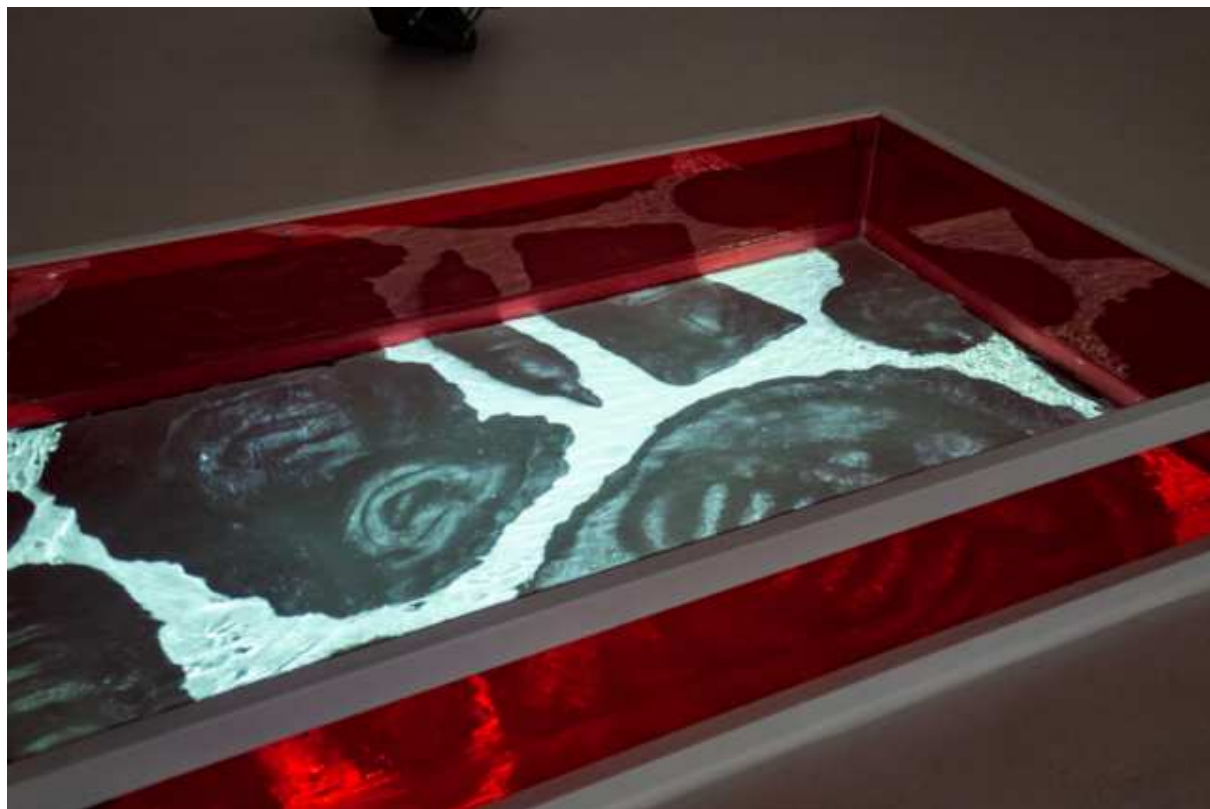
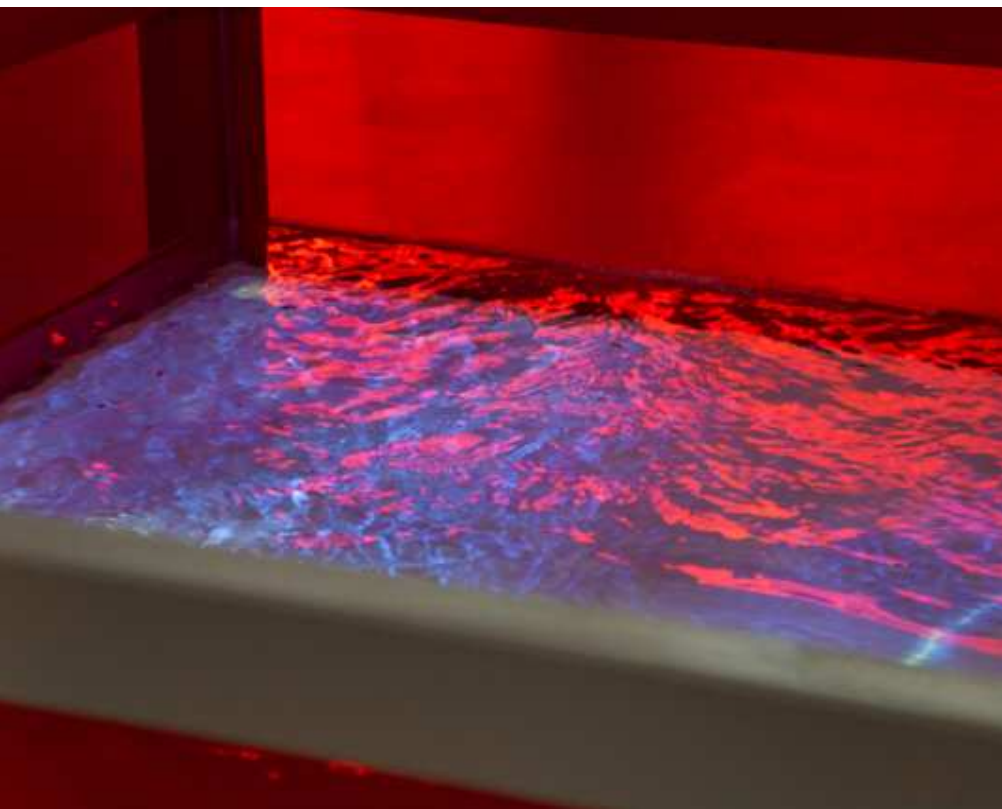
solo exhibition

X-ray (2024)

realised with the support of Erwin & Gisela von Steiner Foundation

X-ray is dealing with the speculative elements in the relationship between humans and their inner bodies. On the one hand, the exhibition examines the early embryonic development. Humans and their vertebrate relatives jump between the millennia of their evolution in the womb and at times develop fish eyes, gill arches, reptilian muscles and a tail. These developmental phases have been known since Darwin and continue to open wide doors to speculation in modern science. The postnatal life form still seems to be negotiable, the future habitat not yet determined. On the other hand, *X-ray* looks at Etruscan votive offerings. In ancient Italy, ceramic casts depicting human organs were sold in front of temples expressing the wish for its healing. Due to the ban on human dissections in Roman antiquity, anatomical knowledge of the inside of the body was severely limited. This resulted in abstract organ offerings that puzzle archaeologists today and spur speculations reaching as far as the offerings being musical instruments.





no day, no night (Etruscan womb) (2024)

video installation

digital video 16:9/ 4' 12" looped, projected onto water in basin made of acrylic glass and wood
170 x 95 x 35cm



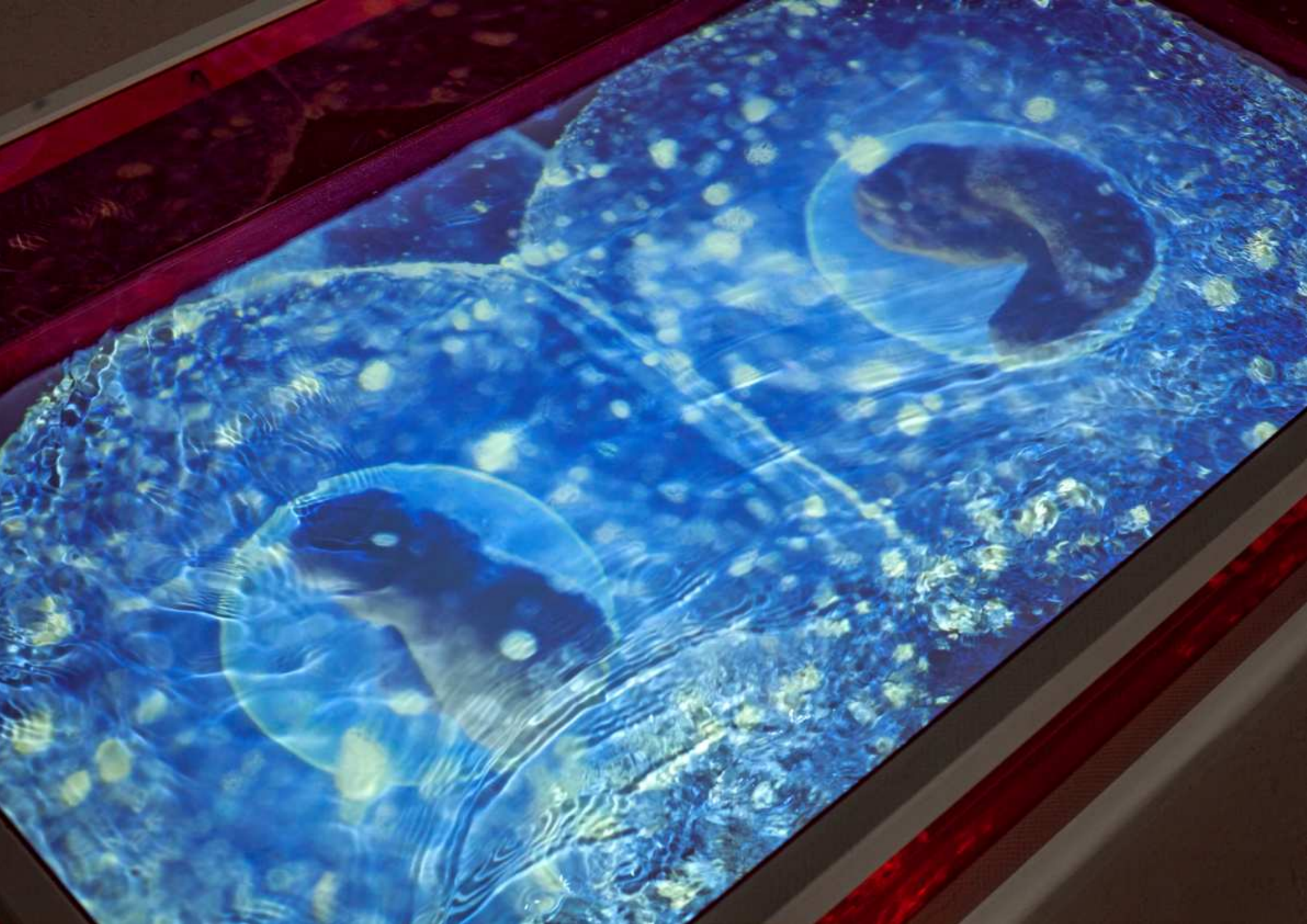
eternal night/ Dotterzentrum (2024)

watercolour on canvas
45 x 60 cm



eternal night/ das Wirbeltier (2024)

watercolour on canvas
45 x 60 cm





eternal day/ large Votive (2024)

sound sculpture
sound 3' 51", micro loudspeaker, ceramic, steel
51 x 41 x 41 cm





eternal day/ intersection (2024)

ceramic, steel
17 x 17 x 97cm



eternal day/ Serum (2024)

watercolour on canvas
120 x 160 cm

soft shell (2023)

watercolour on canvas
120 x 160 cm



Truce (2022)

digital video, 16:9
14' 50"

realised with support of Foundation Kunstfonds/
Neustart Kultur

The video shows how difficult it is to separate symbiosis and parasitism between the earth's inhabitants by taking a look at the complex relationship between humans and medicinal leeches. The worms have been irreplaceable in healing for thousands of years and are currently used as a 'non-sterile medical device' in reconstructive surgery. Leeches have been eradicated in Western Europe, so they are now farmed or imported.

Truce was filmed in Europe's largest leech farm and in activist Ryūki's house. Ryūki founded the *Leechylove* initiative, which campaigns for species-appropriate husbandry after medical use. Their leeches feed on their blood, relieving chronic pain. The community has been living in a close physical relationship of dependence, which Ryūki calls symbiosis.

from the exhibition text by Sarah Johanna Theurer

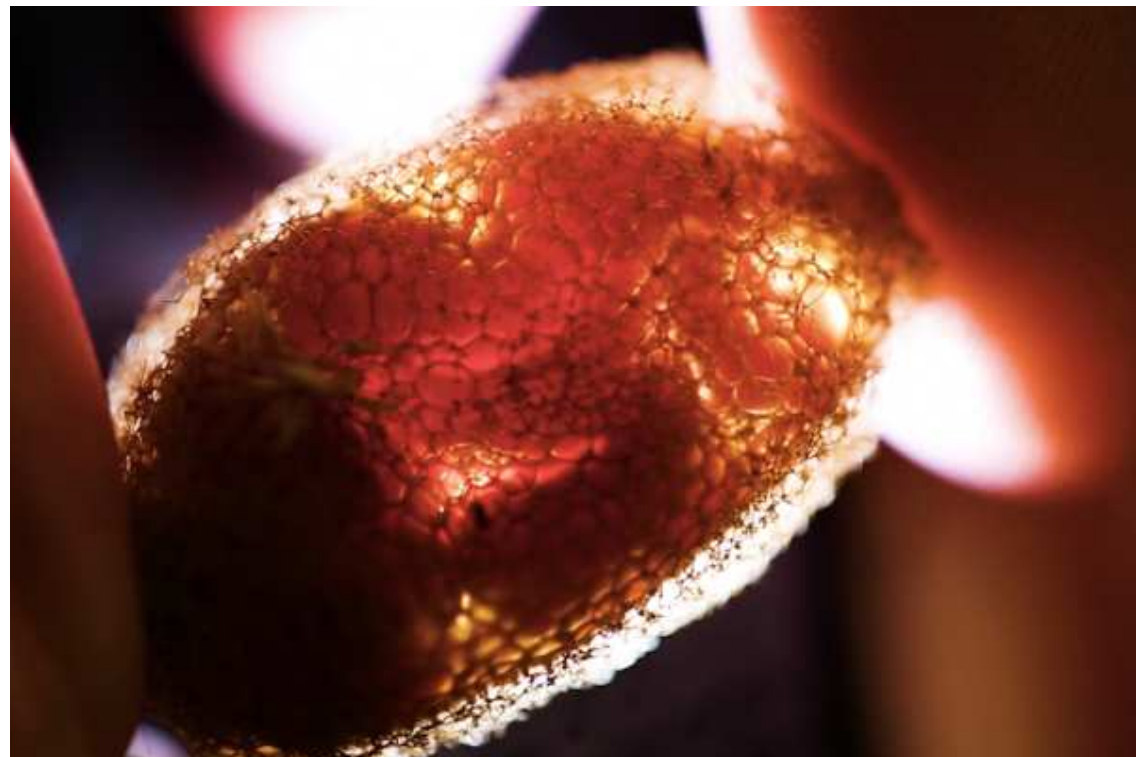
streaming link:

<https://vimeo.com/730996184>

password: sanguis



installation view at *Nurturæl*
Lothringer 13, Munich, 2022





installation view at *Stories of Those Left Behind*
Shedhalle, Zurich, 2024









where I end and You begin (2023)

tarp, ceramics, sound, speakers, camping mat
240 x 170 x 120cm

The tent refers to nomadic lifestyles, but also to a contemporary relationship to nature as a place for self-optimization and recreation. Here, visitors are invited to take a seat on a sleeping mat under the tent roof and listen to the sound piece. It takes us on a bicycle trip into nature. The protagonist sets out on a tour on their own when the discrepancy emerges between the rhythm of urban life and that of the forest, culminating in the transformation into a new being.

text by Judith Hofer









eternal day/ sunset sky (2024)

watercolour on canvas
90 x 120 cm





Colony (2023)

watercolour on canvas
120 x 90 cm

Changing Room I + II (2019/ 2023)

latex, steel, ceramic, the artist's hair
250 x 75 x 75cm and 60 x 60 x 60cm







Pioneers (2023)

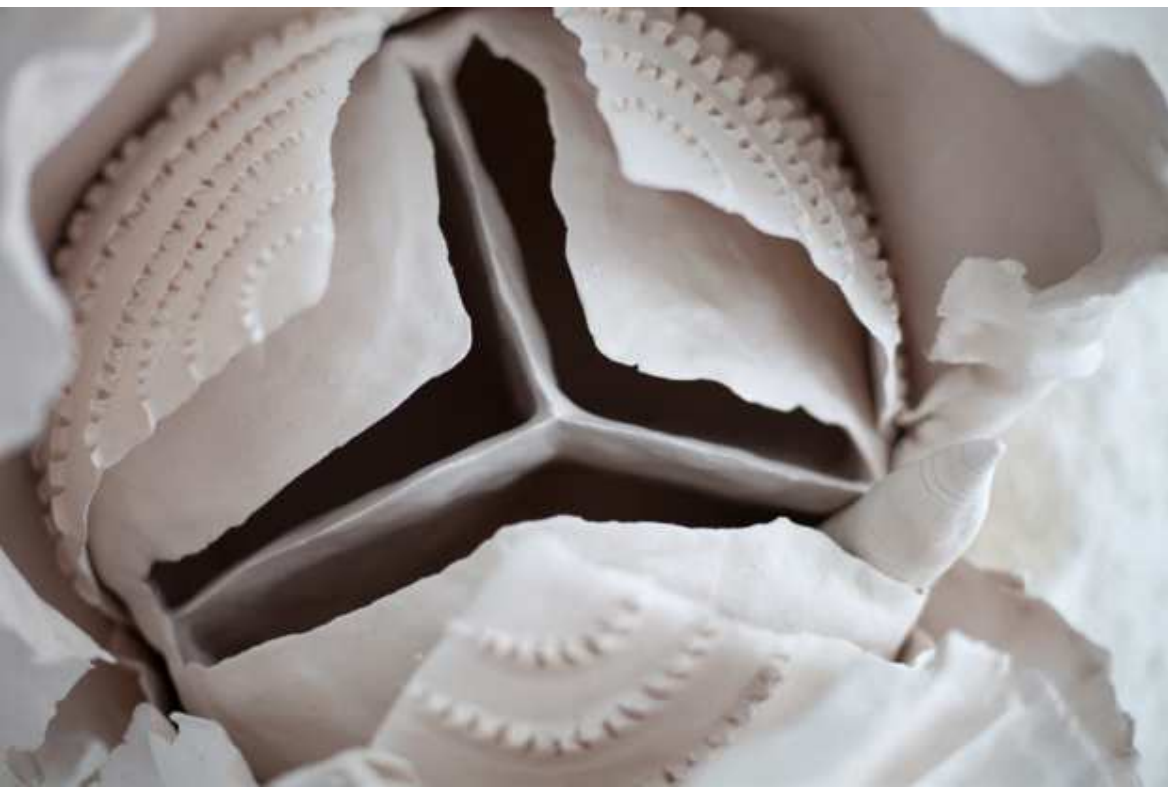
recycled flour, ceramics, paprika powder

4 sculptures between 29 x 27 x 23 cm - 41 x 52 x 45 cm

Pioneers introduce us to a fictional scenario of a symbiotic plant-animal species settling as the first on a newly formed stretch of land. The sculptures appear as cabbages, set in a timeframe oscillating between prehistoric past and post-dystopian future. We encounter a lifecycle from bud, to a courting flower with a phallus protruding from its centre, to the peak of growth and the beginning of decay. The Savoy-like cabbages show characteristics of carnivorous plants with gaping jaws, which enable the species to prey from the air while extracting nutrients from the soil. The white, unglazed clay displayed on dyed flour makes the sculptures seem fragile, while light and shadow create an eerie, immersive quality akin to a Pittura Metafisica painting.

from the exhibition text by Teresa Retzer





FLINT (2024)

watercolour on canvas
45 x 60 cm



Lure Stones (since 2017)

is an ongoing series exploring the relationship between mineral and organic matter, oscillating between life and death. From iron to salt, living beings depend on regularly consuming minerals. Today's funeral industry offers the option of compressing a diamond from the physical remains of the deceased. Commercial harvesting of a medicinal Alpine plant has driven the evolution of camouflage of the species: The once green-yellow plant now grows and flowers in stone grey.



Lure Stone V (2021)

fossilized sea urchin, modelling clay, watercolour
15 x 15 x 15 cm

Lure Stone III (2020)

stone, modelling clay, watercolour, photographic coloration colour
11 x 17 x 15 cm





Fever Suction Line (2024)

watercolour on canvas
28 x 20 cm

thick presents (2021)

ceramic, latex, water, steel, poem

31 sculptures between 18 x 20 x 12 cm - 38 x 68 x 101 cm
on two tables à 4,00 x 0,90 x 0,86 m

In times of great environmental change, new networks of relationships emerge and accelerate the never-stopping process of evolution. Fictitious species struggle in parasitic-symbiotic relationships and become manifest in fossils of the future. The recurring symbol of the tooth summarises these aspects, which can sustain and take life, in its simultaneous function as egg tooth for hatching, chewing tool and weapon to kill.









Autobahn - Tee (2019)

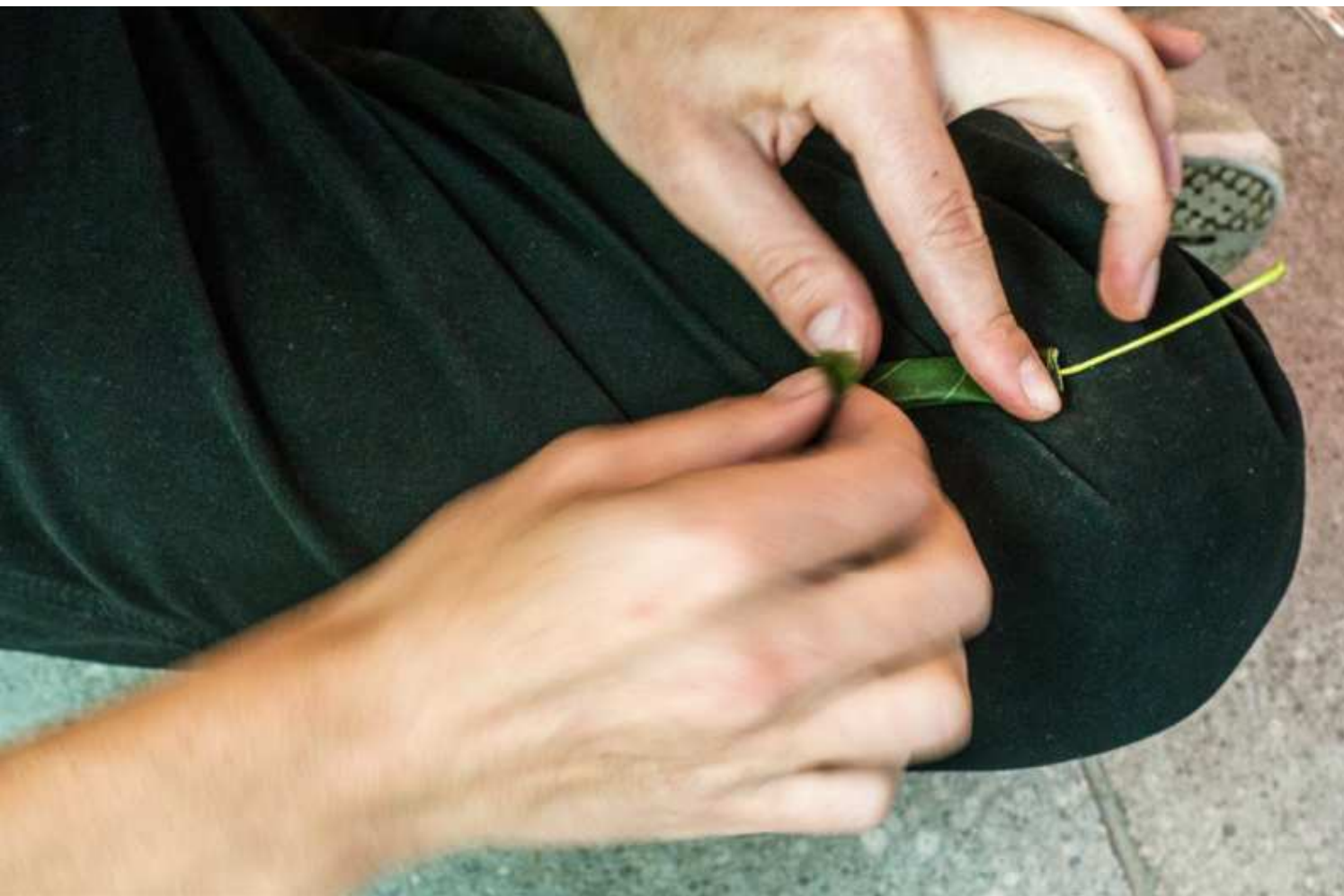
tea ceremony underneath motorway with local wild nettle, dandelion and milfoil leaves

with support of LfA Förderbank Bayern and Akademie Verein Munich



Hotel** for Sleepless Minds (2017)**

site-specific, 27 hrs long performance with leaves from the museum's garden, silver wire
for *Festival of Future Nows*, Museum Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin



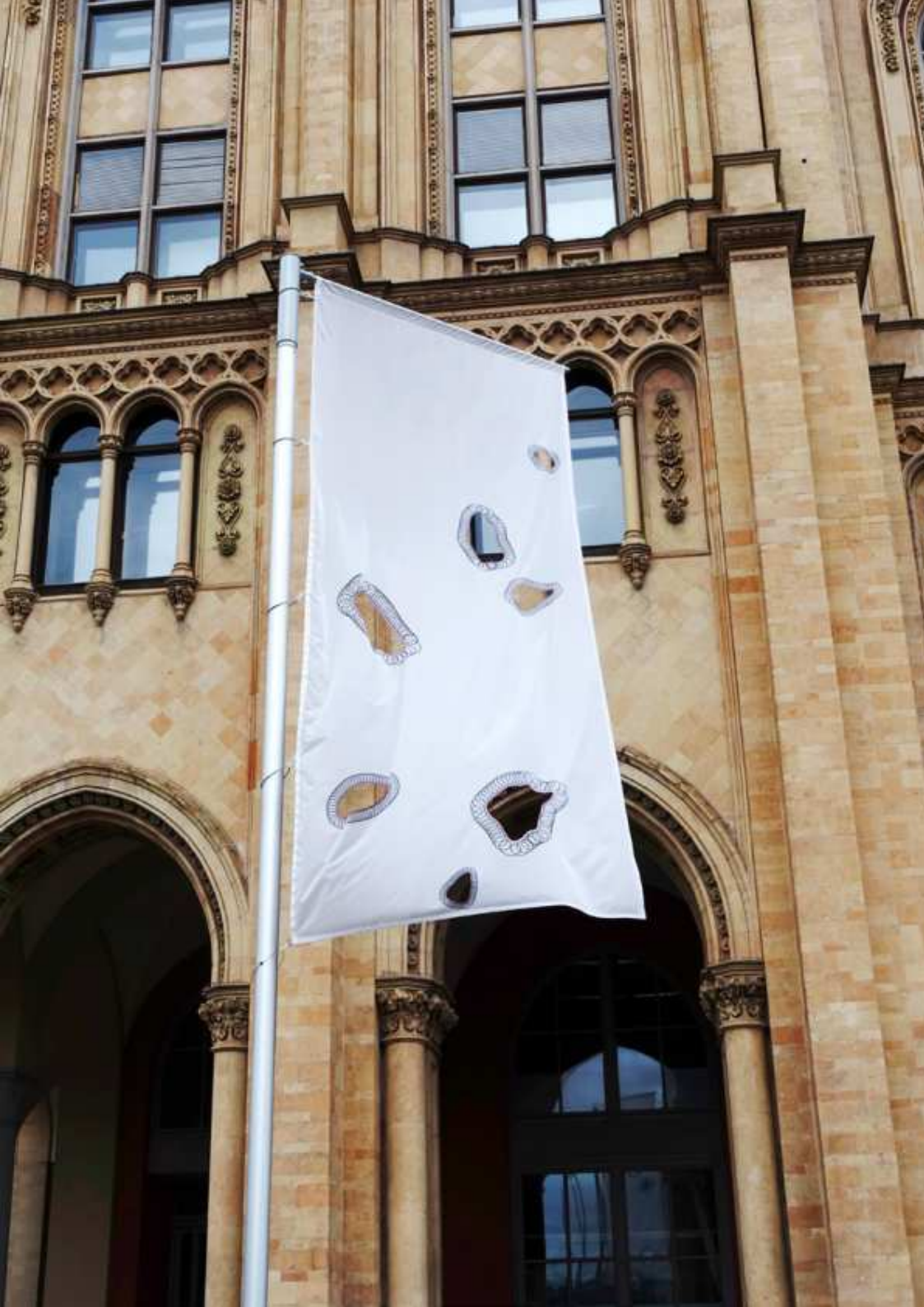


Future Fossils (2022)

hand-harvested Lower Greensand
approx. 25 x 25 x 16 cm each

The material was collected at low tide during a residency at Ventnor Botanic Garden. It was composed on the Isle of White, UK during the time just before the last mass extinction, when dinosaurs still roamed the area and the trees grew, which provide for today's fuels. Greensand is around 100 mio. years old. The shapes are composed of various body features of locally endangered, extinct and potential future species.





fill me out (2018)

prints and cut-outs on textile

3.5 x 1.5 m

realized with support of the Cultural Department of the City of Munich



hollow stems will help us walk (2021)

ceramic, onions, charcoal
30 x 30 x 28 cm

**on the solo exhibition X-ray by Sarah Doerfel
at Artothek Munich, May - July 2024,
written by Magdalena Wisniowska**

The secret lies at the heart of Sarah Doerfel's work, alongside the guts, the lungs and the womb. Curiosity makes us glance inside, in the hope we might see something. We want to know what's there, how the organs work, what is it that keeps us alive. Instead, we see a mess of tissues and blood vessels, body fluids and pus. For the secret is not matter or an object to be discovered. No matter how deeply we cut, it will not reveal itself. In the same way, no x-ray can show us the hidden DNA code, which when transcribed into amino acid chains, folds into protein. No, the secret can only be sensed indirectly, through the symptoms it produces, whispering impatiently at us, "Read the room!"

In her work for this exhibition, Doerfel adopts the position of a symptomatologist, training her clinical eye on the inner body. Together we stand before a shallow red pool and look down at a video projection showing a series of mysterious clay objects being lifted and examined by the archetypal man of science. This is exhibit A, body one, like that described by Foucault at the beginning of the chapter *Open Up a Few Corpses in The Birth of the Clinic* (1). It is the body opened with a sense of excitement and wonder, and more than a frisson of transgression.

The organic objects found inside are recreations of votive offerings such as those recently excavated at the site of the thermal springs at San Casciano dei Bagni in central Italy (2). Here, as in other locations, different cultural artifacts – coins, statues but also these peculiar terracotta representations of internal organs – were thrown into the warm waters of a sacred temple pool in the hope of promoting healing. There they laid buried, perfectly preserved in the mineral-rich mud. What we hear is the distant rattling of a clay ball found inside one of the more indeterminate of the objects, unheard for hundreds of years.

There is however a second body, exhibit B, belonging to anatomical pathology and its study of tissue structures. For Foucault, the process of death – like that of disease – is drawn out across these membranes and their intercon-

nective systems (3). And we no longer die at once, finally, at the end. I do not die – my cells, tissues and organs do, slowly and steadily, heart, lungs, brain. But in death too, we also see the progress of life in reverse, beginning with the zygote and embryo (4). Contemporary science only confirms: stem cells are the last to die, still found alive in the muscles of a 17-day-old corpse (5).

To look down at Doerfel's video, is to see the secret that the corpse holds, emanating from within. The pool, now glowing with blue light, contains frog eggs, and we are shown their embryonic development in the kind of unnatural detail only macrophotography can offer. Here rotating slowly to better catch the light is a spine, there, the external gills. Looking beyond the pool, the watercolour paintings capture similar phylotypic stages of embryogenesis, the moment when all embryos express the highest degree of morphological resemblance and whether human or fish, it all looks the same. We know now that this resemblance is determined by homologous genetic mechanisms, regulated by the oldest evolutionary genes. Phylogeny whispers the secret: these are the molecules of the distant ancestor.

In Doerfel's work, embryogenesis allow us see, not the secret – its code remains unknown – but how life is stilled. We become what we are when development is halted at the critical stage. Looking back, however, we also see the time of endless potential, when we could become anything and everything.

1 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic. An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan (Abigdon: Routledge, 2003), 124–48.

2 See "New Podcast episode! Votive finds from San Casciano dei Bagni – a conversation with Dr Jacopo Tabolli," <https://thevotivesproject.org/2023/10/16/a-conversation-with-jacopo-tabolli/>, accessed May 16, 2024.

3 Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 142–43. See also Gille Deleuze's "Seminar on Foucault, 1985–1986. Part I (Historical Knowledge). Lecture 06, 26 November 1985," trans. Samantha Bankston, <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/lecture/lecture-06/>, accessed May 16, 2024.

4 Foucault, 143.

5 Mathilde Latil, Pierre Rocheteau, Laurent Châtre et al., "Skeletal muscle stem cells adopt a dormant cell state post mortem and retain regenerative capacity," *Nature Communications* 3, no. 903 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms1890>, accessed May 16, 2024.

E D U C A T I O N

2015 - 2021	Fine Arts, Diploma, class of Olaf Nicolai Academy of Fine Arts, Munich
2017	master class of Simon Starling (Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts Copenhagen) cx centre for interdisciplinary studies, Munich
2009 - 2013	Photographic Arts, BA Hons. University of Westminster, London, UK

U P C O M I N G

Sept - Dec 2025	artist residency, stipend and open studios <i>Akademie der Künste</i> , Berlin
May - July 2026	exhibition, workshops and publication <i>Akademie der Künste</i> , Berlin
2026	artist residency, <i>AIRIE</i> , Everglades National Park, Florida, USA

S O L O & D U O E X H I B I T I O N S / S E L E C T I O N

2024	<i>X-ray</i> , Artothek, Munich <i>Capsule</i> , Theory in Practice, Munich
2022	<i>taking back my goodbye</i> , Ventnor Botanic Garden, Isle of Wight, UK
2021	<i>Diplom 2021.2</i> , Academy of Fine Arts, Munich <i>meine drei lyrischen ichs</i> , Kunstverein Munich <i>Festival der (Über)Lebenskünste</i> , Seekult Festival, Friedrichshafen, GER
2019	<i>Object Model Pattern</i> , Empfangshalle Galerie, Munich
2015	<i>Solutions</i> , Galerie Bildfläche, Eichstätt, GER <i>Ränder und Atolle</i> , Ickstattstraße, Munich
2014	<i>Rubbish Collection</i> , Maybe a Vole, London, UK
2012	<i>Every Day You Become More (Rushing)</i> , art in public, London, UK

G R A N T S / P R I Z E S / R E S I D E N C I E S / S E L E C T I O N

2025/ 2026	fellow of <i>Akademie der Künste</i> Berlin/ <i>Junge Akademie</i> for the <i>Berlin stipend and residency 2025/ 2026</i> shortlist <i>Villa Serpentara</i> stipend and residency, <i>Akademie der Künste</i> , Berlin/ Rome
2023	project grant, Erwin and Gisela von Steiner Foundation, Munich
since 2023	member of <i>the Professional Organisation of Fine Artists (BBK) Munich & Upper Bavaria</i>
2022	artist residency, Ventnor Botanic Garden, Isle of Wight, UK international project grant, Cultural Department of the Municipality of Munich grant <i>Bayern Innovativ</i> grant <i>Junge Kunst und neue Wege</i> , Free State of Bavaria shortlist stipend <i>Märkische Kulturkonferenz</i>
2021	grant <i>Foundation Kunstfonds/ Neustart Kultur</i> shortlist <i>Artist Development Programm</i> , EIB Institute, Luxembourg
2020	prize <i>next generation 2021</i> , LfA Förderbank Bavaria
2019	catalogue grant, LfA Förderbank Bavaria, Munich project grant, Akademie Verein, Academy of Fine Arts, Munich
2018	material grant, Oskar-Karl-Forster Stipend Fonds, Munich
2017	shortlist <i>Videodox 02 Award</i> , Biennial for Bavarian Video Art
2013	<i>first class award</i> , BA Photographic Arts, University of Westminster, London
2009 - 2013	international scholarship, University of Westminster, London

G R O U P E X H I B I T I O N S / SELECTION

2025	<i>Spring Broke</i> , Tom Reichstein Contemporary, Hamburg <i>Dress Poetics</i> , Orangerie, Nymphenburg Palace, Munich (exhibition and publication)
2024	<i>Protozone 17: Stories of Those Left Behind</i> , Shedhalle, Zurich <i>with ends in mind</i> , workshop and reading, <i>Undead Matter</i> (London, UK), Shedhalle, Zurich <i>with ends in mind</i> , workshop and reading, <i>Undead Matter</i> , Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London <i>Table of Tone</i> , Center for Art and Urbanistics, part of Berlin Art Week, Berlin <i>Intersections</i> , Nouveaux Deux Deux, Munich <i>Jahresgaben</i> , Kunstverein Munich
2023	<i>Cavernous Shell</i> , Tom Reichstein Contemporary, Hamburg <i>Beyond the Matter</i> , Galerie der Künstler*innen, Munich <i>Après Dessert</i> , A:D: Curatorial, Berlin <i>Fragrant Tissues</i> , Beacon, Munich <i>Painful Tenderness</i> , Hinterconti, Hamburg <i>Desire Paths</i> , Hilbertraum, Berlin <i>Jahresgaben</i> , Kunstverein Munich
2022	<i>Nurturæl</i> , Lothringer 13, Munich artist talk mit Sarah Johanna Theurer (Haus der Kunst), Lothringer 13, Munich finalists exhibition <i>Märkische Kulturkonferenz 2023</i> , Industrial Museum Menden <i>to the land II</i> , art in public, Perlach Forest, Munich <i>Jahresgaben</i> , Kunstverein Munich
2021	<i>Jahresgaben</i> , Kunstverein Munich
	<i>to the land</i> , art in public, Perlach Forest, Munich
2020	<i>Covid 19 Diaries</i> , Lovaas Projects, Munich
2019	<i>Macro_asilo/ Mobile Cinema Reloaded</i> , MACRO Museo, Rome, IT <i>Die Kreuzung als Glücksfall</i> , art in public, Munich <i>Mobile Cinema Reloaded</i> , Nelimarkka Museo, Alajärvi, FIN
2018	<i>Territory of Ready</i> , MaximiliansForum, Munich <i>If your phone doesn't ring it's me.</i> , Metropol Kunstraum, Munich
2017	<i>Quality Time</i> , Kunstverein Munich <i>Videodox 02 Förderpreis</i> , Biennial for Video Art, Galerie der Künstler*innen, Munich <i>Jahresgaben</i> , Kunstverein Munich <i>Festival of Future Nows</i> , Hamburger Bahnhof/ State Museums of Berlin, cooperation of the Institute for Spacial Experiments and the National Gallery for Berlin Art Week
2016	<i>A Tree Is Best Measured When It's Down</i> , Galerie der Künstler*innen, Munich <i>Pasa Página: Days of the Artist's Book in Chisinau</i> , T5 Art Cluster Chisinau, Moldova
2013	<i>MOLT! Speculative Identities</i> , Zona Dynamic, Atelierhof Kreuzberg, Berlin <i>FreeRange</i> , Truman Brewery, London, UK <i>Secret 7"</i> , Downstairs at Mother, London, UK
2012	<i>Heartbreak</i> , Smarty Pants Laundrette, Art Against Knives, London, UK