

Textualised: A Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures

A project about word and image in visual art.

Textualised: A word is worth a thousand pictures

22.08.2018 - 08.09.2018

Exhibiting Artists:

Nina Ansari (IRN)
Nadine Fecht (DEU)
Anna Nezhnaya (RUS)
Curtis Welteroth (USA)
Philip Crawford (USA)
Undine Bandelin (DEU)

Curated by Vanessa Souli

With the support of:

BerlinBlue Gallery, Berlin

Prologue

The exhibition 'Textualised' aims to investigate the relationship between the written word and the visual image in their co-influential existence in visual art. Spoken and written language, a par excellence communicative device we use daily to communicate meaning to each other is examined here as an independent entity, outside the pragmatic context within which it normally occurs. Among the questions that this exhibition poses, the most important is: what do words mean once taken out of their original context and how can language function when used as a visual rather than a linguistic stimulus? Linguistics and aesthetics, two disciplines that are mainly examined as different fields of meaning-making come into dialogue to unveil the multi-faceted relation of words to images – a relation which has been existing for centuries.

From ancient manuscripts to Holy Books to modern comics, words and images have always been mutually inspiring. Moreover, stories and figures of literature have constituted source of inspiration for visual artists for centuries showing this inextricable relationship. As rich and deep as the relationship between words and images can be, this exhibition aims to investigate a small part of their interaction in contemporary art by six international artists. The exhibition opens a dialogue between the visual stimulus and linguistics and how those influence each other when removed from their initial context and concept.

Obviously a word play, 'Textualised' refers to the context that text is creating a new once used in different linguistic and communicative situations than the ones in which it is expected to happen. In this sense, context and text enter a tautological relation where it is difficult to discern and tell apart the context of the image with the context of linguistics and its semantics. Observing this artistic exchange in small formats (e. g paintings, sculptures etc.) as in this exhibition, provides the opportunity for a personal storytelling, independent meaning-making and individualised interpretation. The works selected, all by young contemporary artists of different genders, nationalities and artistic perspectives highlight a modern approach to the topic and open a dialogue between the disciplines of art and language, of visual and textual image. In this exhibition, the focus is to explore contemporary voices and how artists from a wide variety of backgrounds, genders and nationalities,

explore and understand this notion and indeed, how different this implementation can be. One can think of this rich tradition since the first illustrated manuscripts, comics, graffiti to Magritte's iconic epigraph 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', a call to the viewer to rethink the relationship between the signified and the signifier or the way we are used to interpreting the world through language. In contemporary art, artists such as Barbara Kruger, Laurence Weiner, Christopher Wool, Bruce Naumann and Jenny Holzer have extensively explored the power of words and semiotics in the mediation of their message.

The most interesting claim to analyse this exhibition is probably Wittgenstein's assumption – 'the meaning of word is its use'. According to this claim, 'the meaning of a word hinges on its usefulness in context, not its ideal referent outside of all possible contexts'. With this statement in mind, it is interesting to wonder to what extent language is independent of use and to what extent it can be used as a meaning-making mechanism independently. What is important for Wittgenstein how way a word is used, more clearly said, the way a word is used by one or more linguistic groups which means that the way a community uses a specific language is how words acquire their meaning. The question that would naturally come next would be: what if one blends words in a totally different context where the use is no longer manifested by a community of lively speakers but by a static, visual work which already has its own context?

In this exhibition, I am trying to draw a connecting line between the two disciplines and show the ways the text and the written word are being implemented as an artistic tool to intervene in the pictorial domination of visual art. The spectator is invited to explore this relation of verbal and pictorial boundaries and enter the realm of post- structuralist linguistics.

Nina Ansari

(b. 1984, IRN)

Nina Ansari's work comprises of bold photographic imagery, drawing, installation and video. Implicitly influenced by the Iranian political background and its multifaceted history, Ansari composes multi-layered photographic works, where identity in its situational definitions tends to hold crucial place. Her images, often balancing on the black and grey scale narrate emotional situations that address memory as a 'Geotop' for existence and identity-formation. Matters of philosophy interconnected with a socio-geographical awareness are a frequent motif in her work and create intellectually informed landscapes where the 'occidental' enters a dialogue with the 'oriental'.

In the exhibition, Ansari contributes two works; her photographic work shows three magnified blurred Polaroid images serving as a study of the philosophy from antiquity to modern ages. Coming from an experimental series of photographic works that the artist had already realized in 2003, the re-discovery of the work is shaping the ground for its re-contextualisation as an object of the 'present' with an immediate association to the present of the artist herself.

On the back of the neck of the woman, who appears three consecutive times on the picture, one can read the phrase 'Der Körper ist zur Freiheit verurteilt' (EN: The body is condemned to freedom), alluding to the Sartrian theory suggesting that humans are 'condemned to freedom' referring to both the intellectual freedom and corporeal emancipation as a priori given states to the human condition. This idea of freedom comes to be undermined or put under question when one considers the position of the artwork in the exhibition, framed in the central dark gray wall, as if 'imprisoned'. Additionally, the posture of the figure as well as the chromatic choices of the artist implicitly leave a taste of a Self, tormented by emotional

experiences of pain, joy, loss, desire; emotions of a freedom that might have liberating or confining effects.

Facing the photo, the video titled 'Munition' shows the artist writing a poem on the wall. Ansari has composed a poem in English (later translated in French) as an accompanying element for her 'Munition' series of works in 2014. The video recorded as a video performance, only merely allows the spectator to read the poem or understand what is happening. At the closing of the video, the poem is read by a voice in English as follows:

black and white
shadowy landscape
cloud formation
aircraft, explosion, erased in places
memory lost in official history
some see guns, some see faces
enter the depths
of the First World War
a letter
written by a soldier
to his beloved
from the front lines

Nina Ansari, 2016

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URTEIL

DER
MENSCH
IST ZU
FREIHEIT/REIHEI
VERURTEI

MENSC
IST ZU
FREIHEIT/REIHEI
VERURTEI

Nina Ansari

Munition,
.

2015 -2016

Video 8 minutes 1 second

Philip Crawford

(b. 1988, USA)

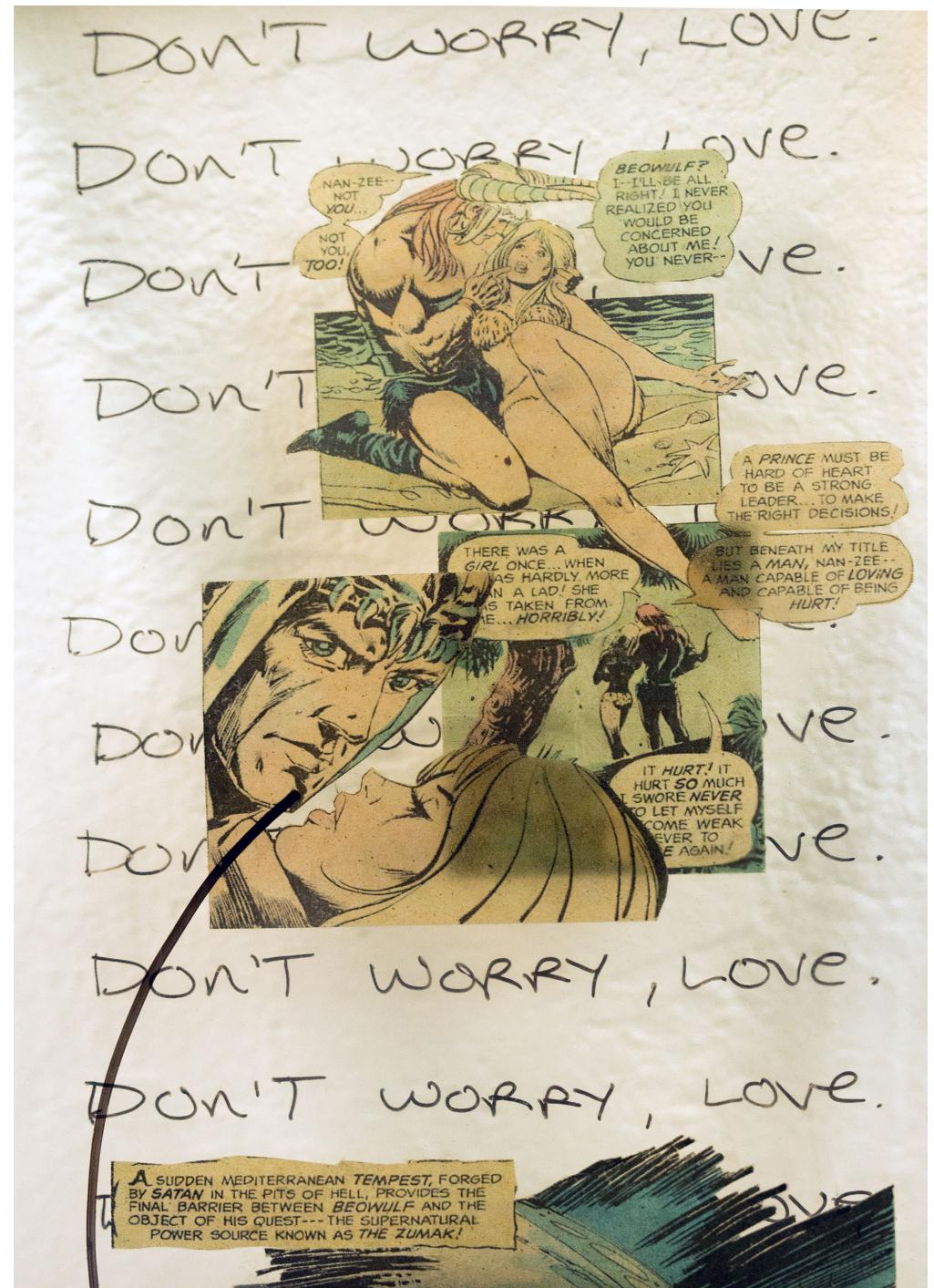
Philip Crawford is present in the exhibition with three works; two sculptures and one collage on aluminium frame. Crawford's work is characterised by the intense visual blending of various elements and materials including comic books, light, and resin. His work has been mainly preoccupied with the topic of heroism and the stereotypical ways the idealised status of male and female gender is manifested in society as a deeply rooted cultural tradition in western culture. He is using collage, drawing and sculpture in an effort to examine the different materials and their possible interactions by creating a blended aesthetic which he embellishes with text in the final touches.

The messages that come through his work are messages of hope and strength, sometimes ironizing the hero and sometimes showing compassion to his endeavours. Through the different layers of work which act as levels of communication, the hero – artist is trying to establish a sort of connection with the audience/spectator, the modern hero who is trying to live up to his or her own ideals.

The way Crawford places text, sometimes asymmetrically in relation to the body of the work is suggestive of the subtle relationship between the written word and the image, where one does not prevail over the other but rather combines and accompanies each other. In his work, text functions as an extra layer of meaning, or better said as an extra dimension; an effort of the artist to create a new reality – interpretation of the story which is inherently

narrated by the materials themselves. In his sculptures, a main observation is to be made; text comes to our awareness as through a lens, making it challenging to read, therefore highlighting the unity and mutual interaction of semiotics and visual art. Semiotics become one with the visual art, presenting themselves however as different meaning-making entities of the work, blurring the boundaries between the 'original story' and the artistic narrative.

we FIGHT
TO STAY
STRONG





Nadine Fecht

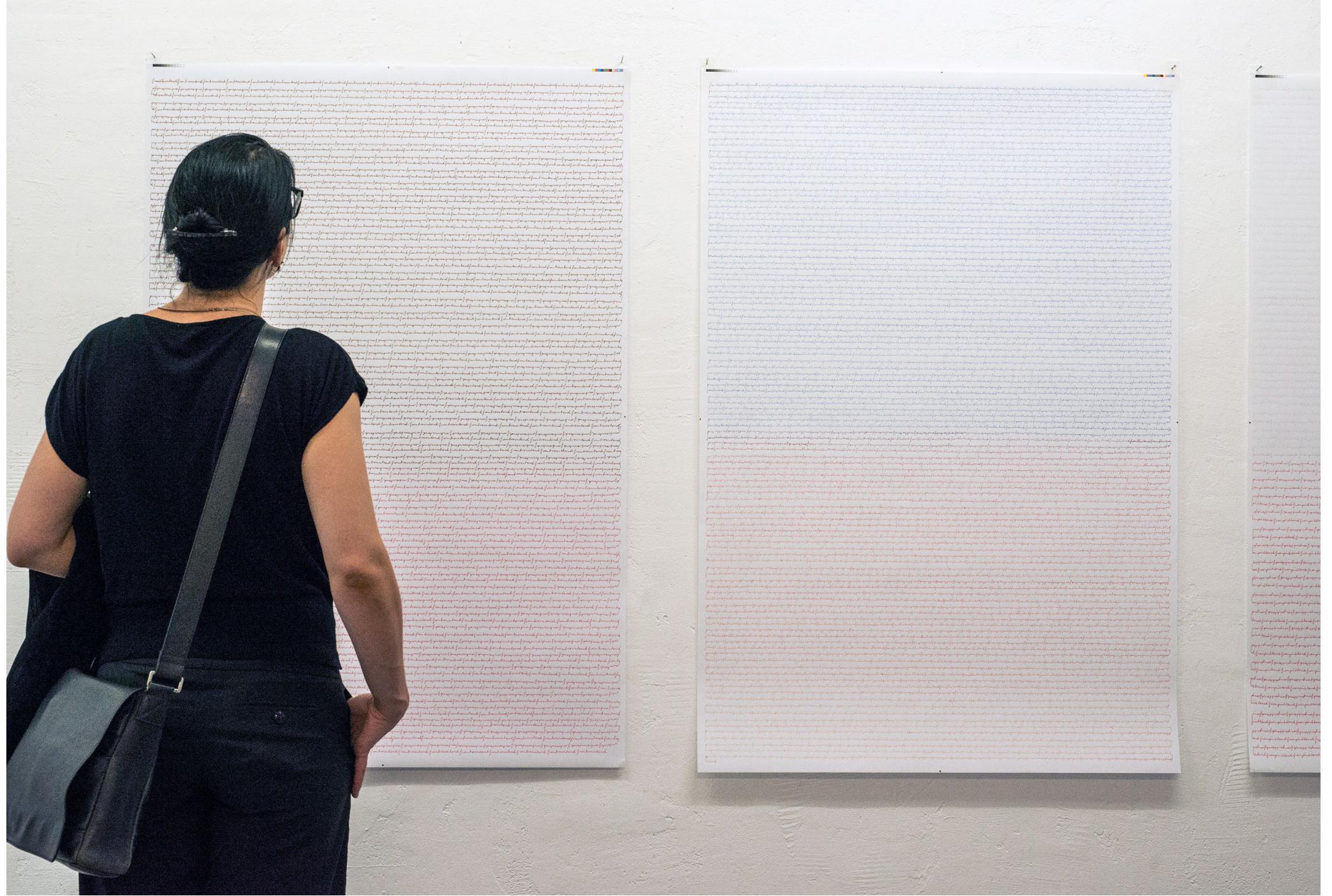
(b. 1976, DE)

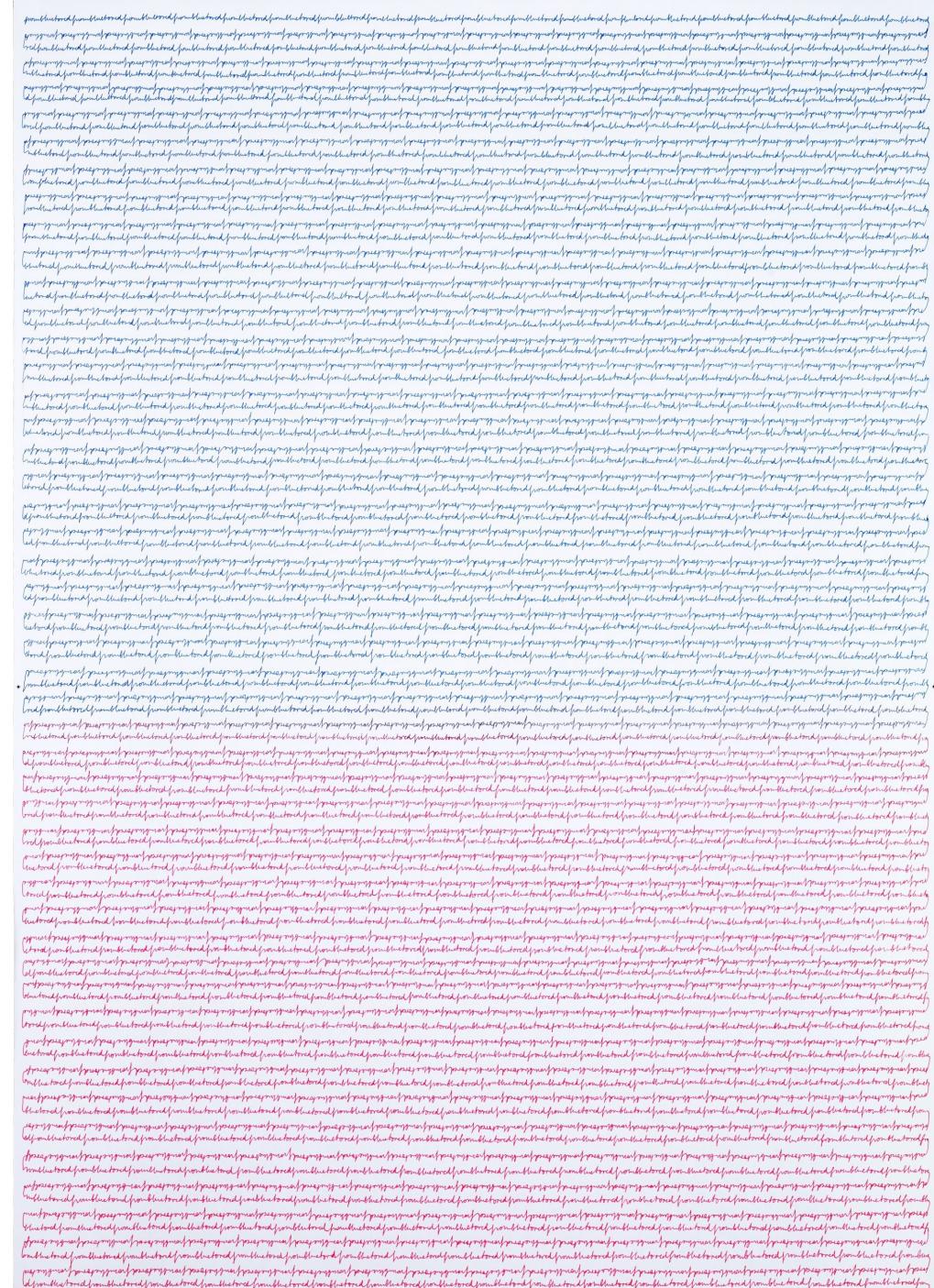
Nadine Fecht's expertise comes primarily from the field of drawing and more specifically, conceptual drawing. Her to visualise different scenes. In Fecht's work, words are the primary material through which the artist composes the aesthetic, conceptual and graphic values of the work and aim to reflect subconscious ways of confronting inner and outer manifestations of the Self in relation to its surroundings. Her oeuvre is a continuous exploration of the mental, emotional and psychological state of the modern human where the continuous struggle is presented in a rather representative way as would the process of drawing these repetitive lines with incrementally changing colours suggest.

The triptych shown in the exhibition forms part of her series 'The Exhausted Self' where the artist focuses her attention on the exhausting ways of 'being', an existential question taking into consideration political and societal conditions of contemporary life. The way the triptych is composed, its detail, the careful architecture of the semiotics, the uninterrupted stream of writing, and the fragility of the medium contribute to the feeling of precariousness of the Self striving for meaning.

The small colour scales that are situated at the top right and left corners of the paper, allude to current political systems mostly as a critique to neoliberalism and Capitalism, systems that have impelled societies to develop relations of mere consumption with natural resources entitled to assimilate the notion of being with that of consuming.

In the three smaller drawings on show, the spectator can observe the same pattern, an almost 'obsessed' need to discover one's self, to find the inner truth and reach catharsis. Drawing repetitively the line 'I am not hysterical', the work is indirectly informing us of the opposite of what we can read; a sort of hysteria is about to break out bringing into mind breathing exercises one takes when close to a panic attack. Bringing form into contrast with content, Fecht devises a way of reanimating an exhausted self that is trying to persuade itself that there is no reason to be hysterical and in this way propels an intellectual journey through text as a self-referential medium of expression.





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Curtis Welteroth

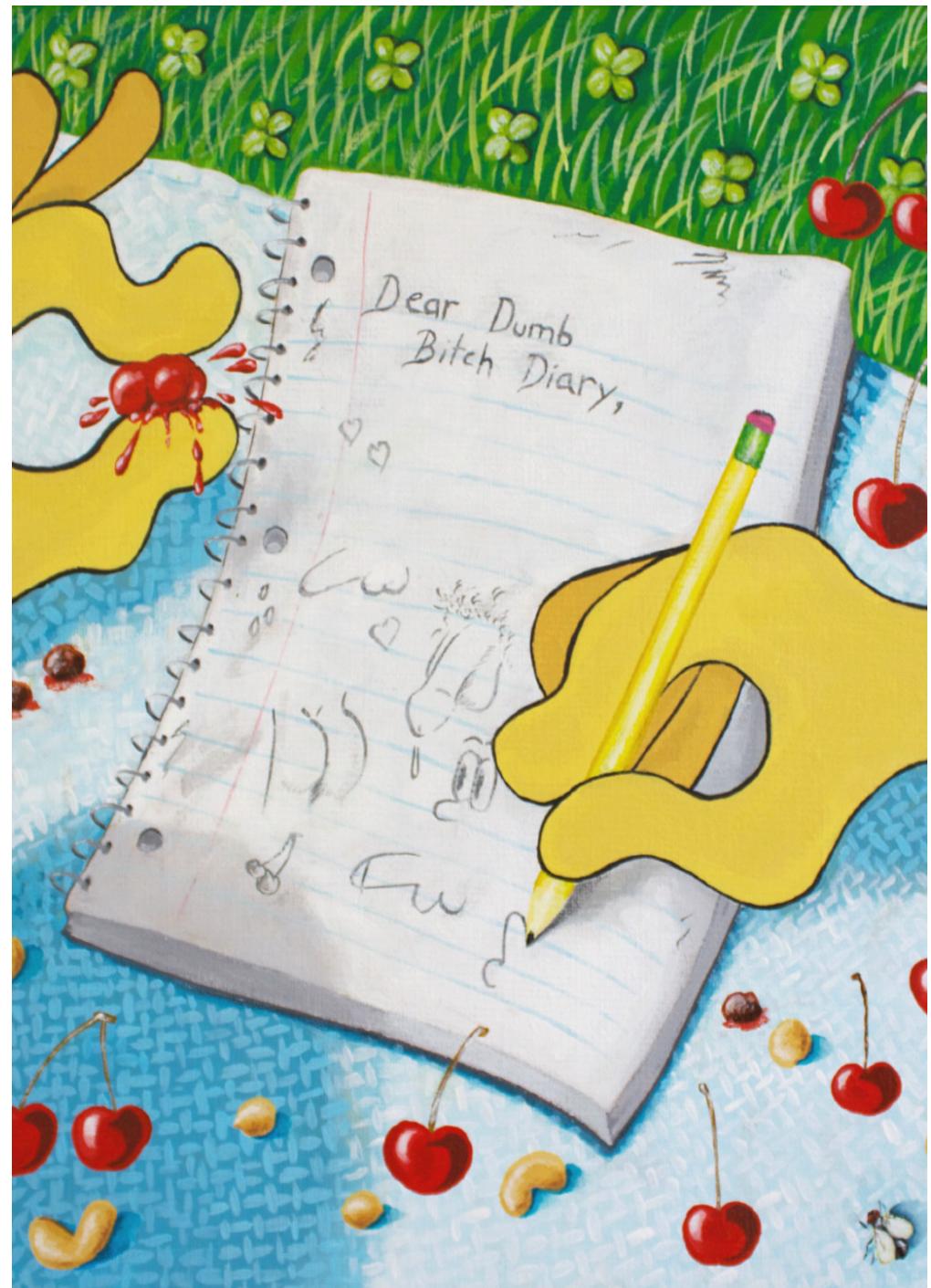
(b. 1994, USA)

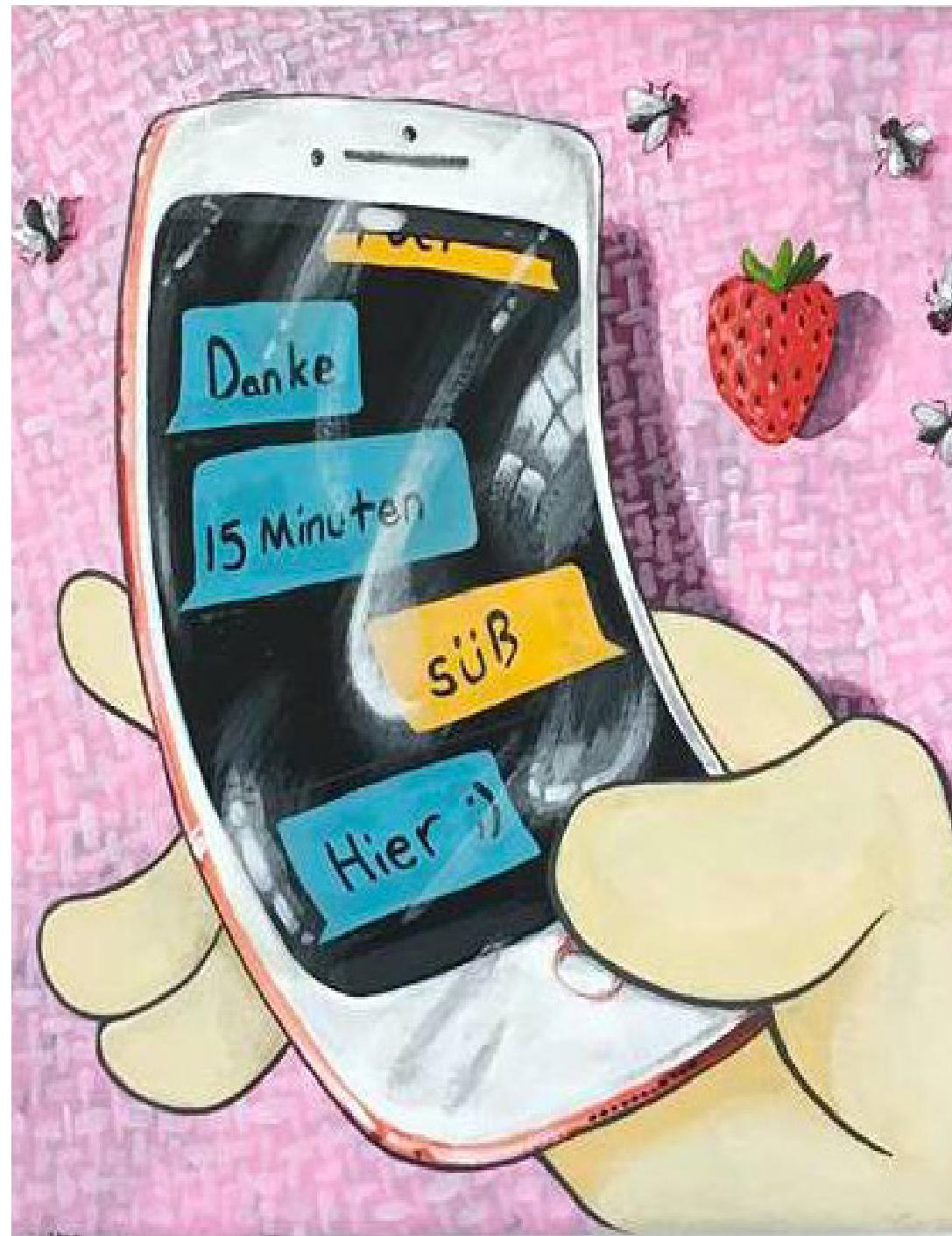
Inspired by LGBTQ politics, Curtis Welteroth composes sexually explicit images that explore taboo sexualities and queerness with an overlay of humour and irony. By incorporating known popular culture motifs in his work in unexpected contexts, Welteroth subverts the traditions of sexuality, sexual taboos and expectations of desire in a manner which is both comic and inquisitive. Like Crawford, Welteroth likes to play with heroic identities often taken from the literary tradition.

The commissioned works of the exhibition examine words in painting in three utterly different scenes which function as 'key holes' through which we can observe the secret lives of the protagonists. Starting with a book, where a small fictive literary story is being narrated in media res, to a diary where phallic symbols are drawn out of obviously -boredom - of the hero, to a snapshot of a chat conversation between two gay men, all three pictures function as a secret voyeuristic journey into the hero's private life.

In his work, words are indispensable narrative vehicles allowing the artist to raise scepticism towards tradition and conservatism. Implemented in a striking and salient way, text in Welteroth's work references earlier revolutionary practises like that of Barbara Kruger or Christopher Wool. His intentionally kitsch aesthetics, playful and vibrant, propose ostensibly cartoon-like scenes where the hidden symbols are to be decoded under close speculation by the visitor.

The more we look at the paintings, the more we can learn about the life and personality of the person and the more we can observe the symbols which lie abundant in the work. Using fruits and wine, the goods we associate the most with pleasure and lust, Welteroth is drawing from the long tradition of art history and academic painting to reinvent visual associations and form his own voice in a fearless, colourful and playful manner. Welteroth's painting style and choice of materials occasionally imitates traditional painterly techniques while his passion for literature and its de-symbolization of social symbols is a distinct recurring theme.





Undine Bandelin

(b. 1980, DE)

Certain photos can describe the life of people as if they were a template – group family photos, class photos, wedding photos, photos of playing children. Yet, these photos can alter their meaning when shown in different contexts. These are pictures of individuals, but at the same time, they appear to be taken from another's life and the sense of individuality becomes blurry. Yet, as recognisable and banal as they might be, in Bandelin's work, the photos are breathing new life through the artistic intervention.

Bandelin's practise in these photographic works focuses on her interest in distorting realities and experimenting with identities which is a common motif in her work. In the over-painted silkscreen prints, the creation of new contexts of meaning is a conscious method of intellectual transformation. The absurdity of being human is being revealed in different scenarios which are always located in the vicinity of reality. The drama does not arise in the plot, but in the interplay of the characters and the exaggerated, condensed, the masked, unmasked or totally erased figures and characters.

By blending the scenes with colors, words and abstract brushstrokes, Bandelin is recreating these memories into artistic experiments, creating new narratives out of the dull, lifeless 'everymen'. The 'Everyman' is transformed into a protagonist in the new scene, turns from being the passive to be observed to the active to be performing with what this transformation can be extended to mean in a political level.

In her series of works, semiotics are implemented as 'subtitles', a way to support the action and build a bridge of communication between the observer and the observed. The homonymous titles of the works make them be presented as small books, or rather as titles of surreal films where one cannot really guess the content.



Anna Nezhnaya

(b. 1987, RUS)

Anna Nezhnaya exhibits two pieces where she explores the universality of meaning and a non-dual perspective of existence. 'Alfa' and 'Omega' letters which stand for the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet implying a sense of immortality and completeness, often associated with the One God in Christian religion. In this example of work, one can soon realise that just two letters can assume themselves as fully independent creations, creating a context by themselves without yielding to the need for explanations.

While A has been associated with a hierarchical distinction and power, Omega refers to an eschatic interpretation of the world, almost a biblical one relating to God as the beginning and end of things. The letters provide the context for the work and its interpretation grounded on historical and religious knowledge and yet at the same non-representatively referring to a post-existential conceptualisation of the world. The circular pattern of the texts is shown as the metaphor for universal love that interconnects every alive being on Earth through its Divine component.

IWANTYOURLOVE is the message to the world/to the person/ to the God; an eternal desire of pure and sincere love as in Agape. Ancient Greeks used seven words to describe love: Agape stands for the unconditional love or divine love. IWANTYOURLOVE is a clear manifestation of that strongest feeling in a quest for an eternal, infinite and unbiased love.

Both works reflect the non-dual structure of existence and the deep need of human beings

to love and be loved. In that state of higher consciousness, the dichotomy of concepts that are traditionally perceived as opposite (start-end, I-other, love-fear) is transcended. Thus, an Apocalypse can be perceived not as an end per se, but as an inevitable process that precedes new creation. After destruction comes rebirth and this is represented by the circular structure of the work.



PLAYAWAY LIFE



1. Nina Ansari
Der Körper is(s)t zur Freiheit verurteilt, 2003
Edition: 3/20
Pigment print on Hahnemühle paper
110 x 140 cm

2. Nina Ansari
Munition
2015-16
Video
Image: Vanessa Souli

3. Philip Crawford
We Fight To Stay Strong, 2017
comic book pages, resin, ink
aluminium light box
10 x 40.5 x 105 cm

4. Philip Crawford
Don't Worry Love (Beowulf #6), 2015
comic book pages, resin, ink
50 x 15.7 x 2.5 cm

5. Philip Crawford
Whoever You Are... (Conan the Barbarian #108), 2015
comic book pages, resin, ink
18.5 x 10 x 3.5 cm

6. Exhibition View
Image: Marc Maria Orsini

7. Nadine Fecht
„autosuggestive Potentiale“ (1 of 3, here: frombluetored), 2015
fading ink on paper
123 x 83,5 cm

8. Nadine Fecht
Study of „hysteria“, 2015
black ink on paper
29,8 x 21 cm

9. Nadine Fecht
Study of „hysteria“, 2015
blue ink on paper
29,8 x 21 cm

10. Nadine Fecht
Study of „JA“, 2017
Oil pen on paper
42 x 30 cm

11. Curtis Welteroth
Untitled (Erotica Novel Excerpt with Allegories, or, Daisy Chains), 2018
Acrylic on Canvas, 30 x 30 cm

12. Curtis Welteroth
Untitled (Dear Dumb Bitch Diary, or, The Cherry Popper), 2018
Acrylic on Linen
30 x 30 cm

13. Curtis Welteroth
Untitled (Hier ;), 2018
Acrylic on Linen
20 x 20 cm

14. Undine Bandelin
Guten Tag, ich habe mich leider verirrt, 2012
Screen printing / mixed media on paper
50 x 70 cm

15. Undine Bandelin
Brillenleute, 2012
Screen printing / mixed media on paper
50 x 70 cm

16. Undine Bandelin
Amok, 2012
Screen printing / mixed media on paper
50 x 70 cm

17. Undine Bandelin
Wer hat Angst, 2012
Screen printing / mixed media on paper
50 x 70 cm

18. Anna Nezhnaya
Alfa & Omega, 2018
Neon in glass tubes
70 x 60 cm
Image: Marc Maria Orsini

19. Anna Nezhnaya
IWANTYOURLOVE, 2018
LED Light
30 x 100 cm

Exhibition Venue
Berlin Blue Art Gallery
Köpenicker Straße 96
10179, Berlin

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Texts and Design
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Marc Maria Orsini

Exhibition Views
Marc Maria Orsini

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