



*JOHANNA STROBEL
SELECTED PROJECTS*

THE MOON IS NO DOOR / BODIES, 2025



The Moon Is No Door, 2025

at Heldenreizer Contemporary, Germany

I am invested in concepts of time and entanglement, and in derivative concepts like change, entropy, connectivity, and information and in how they relate to our socio-ecological world. One specific area of inquiry in my work is knot-making, knots, knot theory, network theory, nets, and networks. Knot making is an ancient craft to build structures, form containers and create decorative objects. **However, knots themselves are no objects but algorithms** applied to string, band, or rope. **Knots form three-dimensional structures from the two-dimensional:** a string, as a line, when made into a knot extends into space in different directions. Connected knots form nets that span space.

The sculptures consist of multiple ceramic parts that are tied together and hung from the ceiling using cotton webbing and metal fasteners. They are made from unglazed white entangled ceramic bands that create nested shapes and are interwoven and connected with cotton webbing. The shapes created are, although ornamental, determined by structural necessities. Though different in property and function, the cotton webbing and ceramic bands can only be told apart on closer look, lending the unglazed ceramics a trompe-l'oeil quality.

Since the material properties and form of the unglazed ceramic ribbons evoke an association with bones, I based the structure of this series of sculptures on the human body – a torso, ribcage, and pelvis. **The bands, through intertwining and knotting, form a bodies in space.**

The sculptures were in part inspired by the title of the exhibition “The Moon is no Door”, a line borrowed from a poem by Sylvia Plath. The moon – a celestial body – symbolizes, among other things, transformation, renewal, the mystical, time, femininity, fertility, spirituality, wisdom, and hidden truths. In my work, the moon is an apple, and the apple is a moon. At first glance, they have nothing in common, except that they are both spheres, and perhaps a vague reference to physics (gravity), as one is an eternal celestial body made of dead stone and the other is earthly, organic, and part of the cycle of all life. However, there are some overlaps in the symbolism of both: the apple, too, is a multifaceted symbol for knowledge, insight, transformation, seduction, femininity, fertility, origin, love, or the heart. Suspended in the chest sculpture, the moon-apple becomes the heart, while in the pelvis sculpture, the apple-moon becomes the womb. It merges or separates, is a sphere, hemisphere, and, as a quarter, a crescent, with a shiny reflective silver side and a matte black side.





Body I, 2025,
Ceramics, cotton webbing, metal fasteners, aluminum leaf,
160 x 30 x 25 cm / 63 x 12 x 10 inches



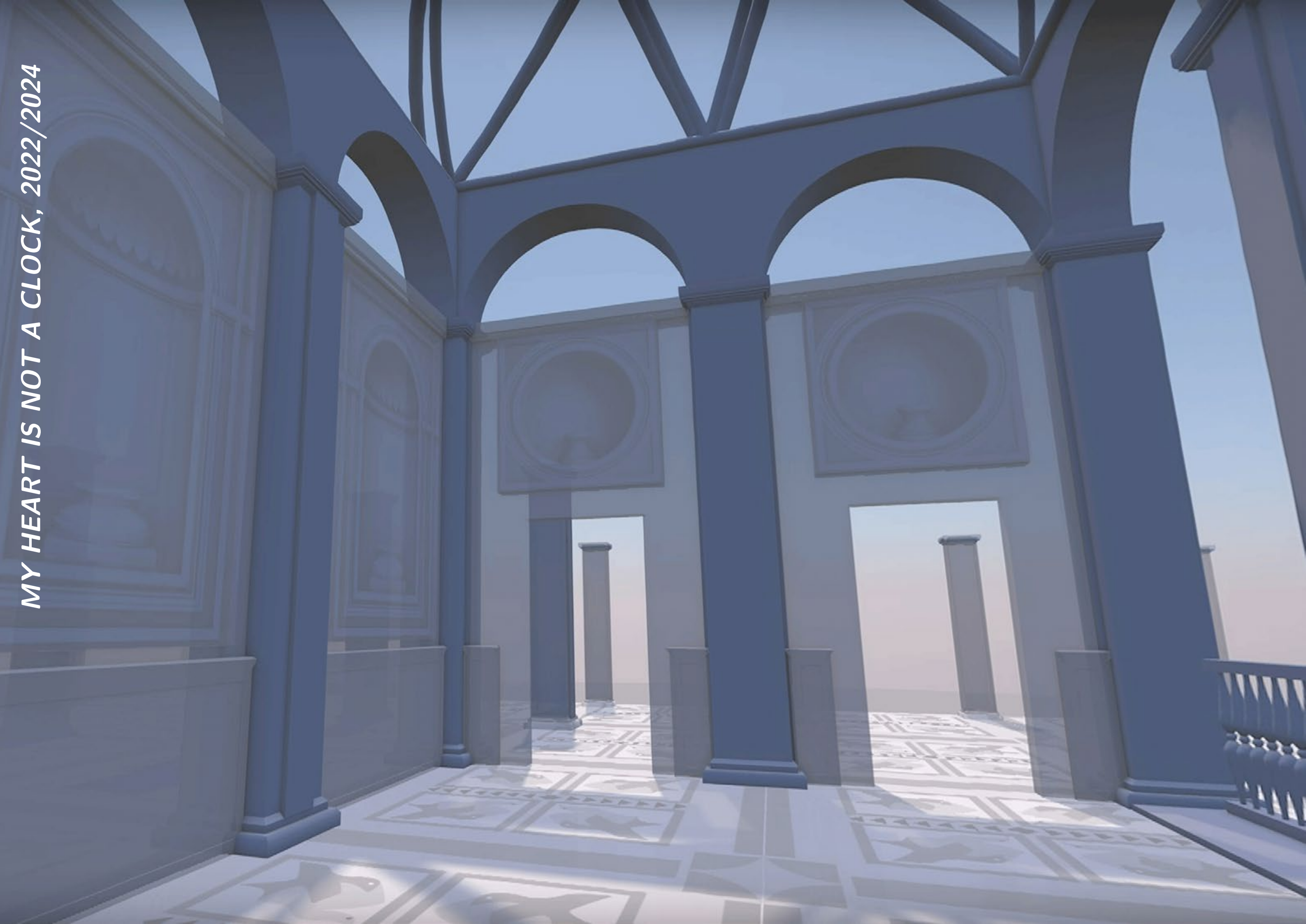
Body II, 2025,
Ceramics, cotton webbing, metal fasteners, aluminum leaf,
95 x 43 x 29 cm / 37,5 x 17 x 11.5 inches



Body I, 2025,
Ceramics, cotton webbing, metal fasteners, aluminum leaf,
107 x 27 x 43 cm / 42 x 10.5 x 17 inches



MY HEART IS NOT A CLOCK, 2022/2024





My Heart is not a Clock, 2024

installation view at Pompei NY

5:28 min, 360 video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1l_BjjYES9M

My Heart is not a Clock (running out) I and II, 2024, ceramics, cotton webbing, plaster, silicone, paraffin wax, fasteners, infrared heat emitter, lamp socket, cable, 56 x 14.5 x 13.5 inches and 60 x 16 x 14 inches, MDF display

The installation consists of a 360 video played on a Oculus go headset, two codependent sculptures and two mdf columns of different heights, one of them used as seating while watching the 360 video on the headset.

My heart is not a Clock (Martha) is an **immersive video**, which, played as a loop, explores philosophical **concepts of circular time** (with the absent being a counterpart to the temporal present like the past is to the future) and the **loss of species through human caused extinction**.

Situated in a stylized version of the **Villa Farnesina in Rome**, a renaissance building which's atrium displays wall frescos showing nothing but empty grey pedestals, the voiceover narration follows the example of the **passenger pigeon's extinction** in the early 20th century. It recounts the death of Martha, the last specimen, as well as the passengers' possible future de-extinction through cloning throughout the circle of time.

The narration is structured and interrupted by an informative description of a bird's blood circulation and a digression into Meta's posthumous terms of service.

Starting out from a starry night, stars form into a sphere and become an MC Escher-inspired bird-shaped pattern that encloses the viewer while the sun rises and the pattern dissolves. Rising from the ashes, the Italian Renaissance villa slowly assembles itself, only to collapse into dust once more. Interlocking and swirling in unison, Passengers flock to the reincarnated site, but disappear moments later. The sun sets and the sphere, which once again manifested around the viewer dissolves into the night sky.





The video is accompanied by two hanging sculptures which create a **circular system**. Both sculptures consist of multiple ceramic parts connected with straps and fasteners. They contain infrared heating elements as well as a mold of a bird and egg respectively.

Together the sculptures function like an **hourglass**: A wax bird is placed in the top part of the first sculpture. The heating element **gradually melts the wax bird**, causing it to drip into the lower part of the sculpture where an **egg-shaped mold captures the wax**. Once the wax egg is removed from the mold, it can be placed onto the sister sculpture and the process is reversed: **the wax egg melts into a bird-shaped mold**. With every iteration some of the wax evaporates, so that in the end just fragments of birds and eggs are cast and remelted until all the wax is gone - **the cycle accelerates until it stops**.

Migratory species like birds are extremely vulnerable to climate change since their life cycles depend on the temporalities of multiple ecosystems. When these shift, the species face dire escalating consequences. The sculptures are fragile and precarious systems that visually reference entanglement, interwoven functionalities, and interdependencies. Their functionality speaks to these accelerating shifting temporal cycles, and ultimately to extinction.

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ceramics, cotton webbing, plaster, silicone, paraffin wax, fasteners, infrared heat emitter, lamp
socket, cable,
56 x 14.5 x 13.5 inches and 60 x 16 x 14 inches

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Time is sensation of direction, 2024,
oil on canvas., 40 x 60 inches



Time is the sensation of causality, 2024,
oil on canvas, 40 x 60 inches



STRING FIGURES, 2024





The sculpture consists of **multiple ceramic parts** that are tied together and strapped to the pedestal using **silicon straps** which are connected to each other using **plastic fasteners**. The main parts of the sculpture are forms of unglazed white entangled bands of ceramics that are nested in each other. Smaller forms are suspended within bigger pieces. Two ceramic birds are strapped to the top of the sculpture and a plant is nested as a heart inside the upper half. The top is filled with water. The shapes created by the ceramic bands and silicone straps are, although ornamental, determined by structural necessities. Different in property and function, they can only be told apart on closer look, lending the unglazed ceramics a trompe-l'oeil quality.

The sculpture developed out of my ongoing research on knots, string figures, networks, connectivity, ecosystems and interspecies solidarity. It speaks to entanglement and connected systems, to interwoven functionalities and interdependencies, and can adapt to the environment it is shown in. This **version for outdoors** functions as a **birdbath** and houses a plant, the pedestal is a **nesting site for insects**, in the hope it might be enjoyed by non- human city dwellers as well and so become a small contribution to a larger system and community.

Detail: String Figures (Bird Bath), 2024, Ceramics, silicone, fasteners, MDF pedestal with wood and ceramic elements , 44 x 16 x 16 inches / 112 x 40 x 40 cm



String Figures (Butterfly), 2024,
ceramics, silicone, fasteners, 13 x 10 x 10 inches / 33 x 25 x 25 cm

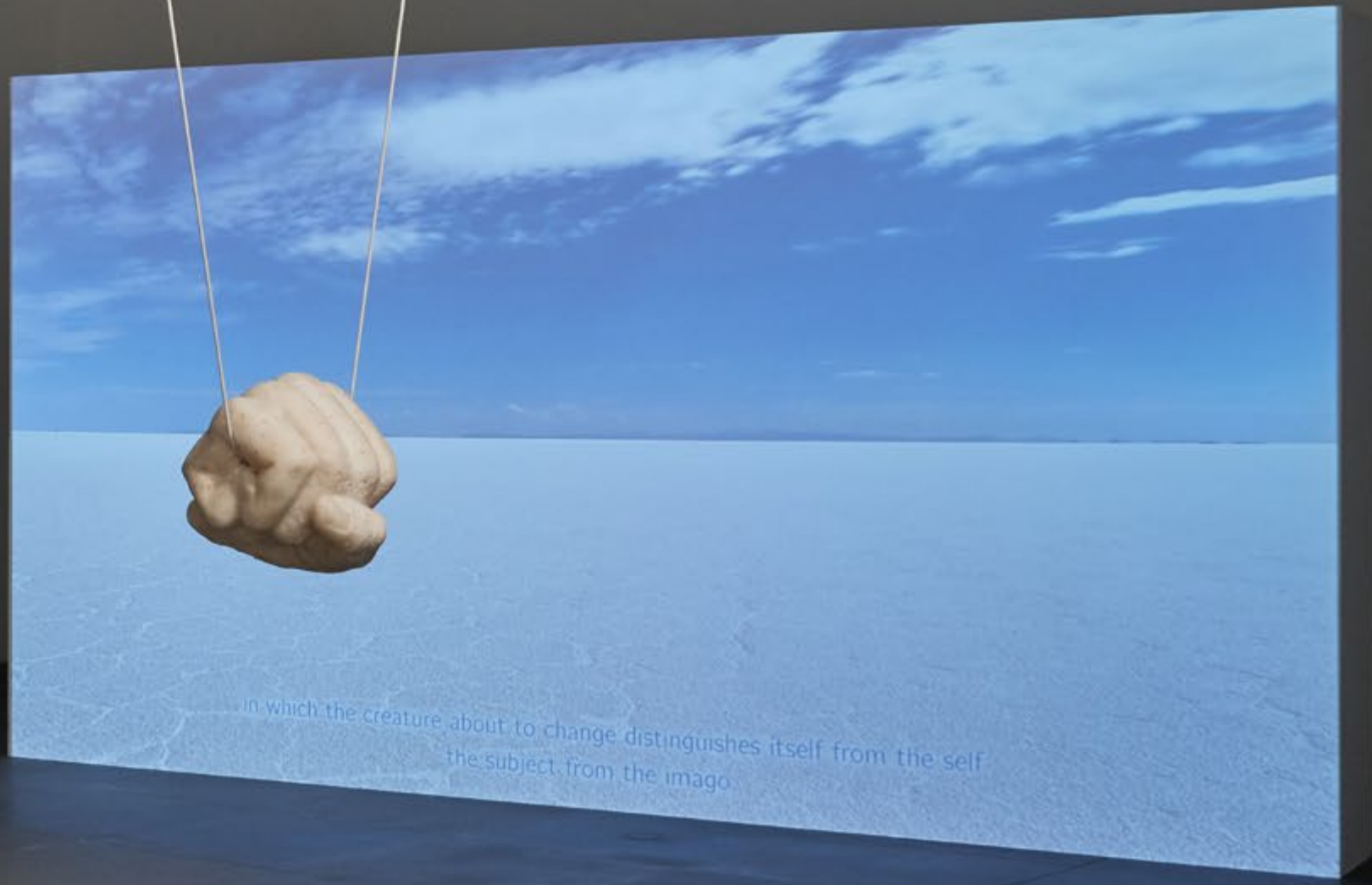


String Figures (Details) 2024,
ceramics, silicone, fasteners, MDF pedestal with wood and ceramic elements



String Figures (Bird's Nest), 2024,
ceramics, silicone, fasteners, 17 x 11 x 11 inches / 43 x 28 x 28 cm

BONNE CHANCE, 2023



in which the creature about to change distinguishes itself from the self
the subject from the imago.





Bonne Chance, 2023

installation view at Neues Museum Nuremberg

2023,

video, 4K, 11:47min

<https://vimeo.com/814440274>

salt, ceramics, paraffin, steel cable, performance, momentum,

6 pieces, each 18 x 18 x 18 inches / 46 x 46 x 46 cm

weekly performative activation

<https://vimeo.com/839086044>

Filmed at the Bonneville Salt Flats, the dried remains of an primeval lake – today, a vast **salt desert**, which serves as a land-speed-record test ground and for mining salt and using my shadow and a butterfly (*Colias philodice*) as motifs, the video explores concepts of the **here and now**, the **there and then**, the **relationship of change and time** and one's own mutable standpoint in a **world that is undergoing devastating changes due to human influences**, and so touches upon the human made climate catastrophe through an intra- and intertextual elliptical narrative carried by a voice-over and sounds generated by a text-to-sound-program as well as animated subtitles.

The video is accompanied by a broken sculpture forming a Newton's pendulum that speaks to moments past.

The sculpture's modules made from **salt** are shaped like **double-sided fists**. Each contains a ceramic core formed like a **knot**. The symbol of the fist speaks to change, a revolutionary force and transformation, while the knot inside is unsolvable, infinite, eternal. Five of the six fists form the **Newton's Pendulum** and break and change every time the sculpture is activated: the cocoon of the salt fists **breaks open** with every swing and reveals the ceramic knot while the salt crust falls to the floor where it remains as a relic of change. The activation is repeated weekly, each time changing the sculpture and movement irreversibly. The sixth sculpture is installed after a greater gap. It is outside the system and cannot be hit by the swinging system. It remains unchanged while it formally indicated the movement.







Bonne Chance, 2023, salt, ceramics, paraffin, steel cable, performance, momentum
, 6 pieces, each 18 x 18 x 18 inches / 46 x 46 x 46 cm

PARA SITE, 2024



Para Site is a site-responsive installation of **interconnected sculptures** made from USB extension cords, plugs, paraffin wax, LEDs, zip ties, micro controllers and mini motors. The installation **examines and forms structures of information and power**, explores entropy, perception, entanglement, interconnectedness, mutuality, and concepts of the ether.



Para Site, 2024, usb extension cords, paraffin, leds, plugs



LOW AFFINITY, 2021



ON HOLD ON, 2019





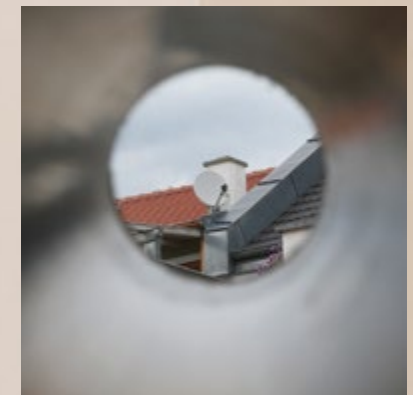
Augenbricks, 2019, ceramics, multiple parts, each approx. 2 x 3 x 8 inches / 5 x 7 x 20 cm

On Hold On, 2019

at Municipal Museum Cham, Germany

For this exhibition I extensively transformed the space. I built **walls in front of the windows** so that **peepholes opened up unfamiliar perspectives** on satellite dishes, distorting mirrors, or an index finger pointing back to the viewer where windows used to be. Trompe l'oeil wall paintings of doors created the illusion of additional rooms.

The museum has **two exhibition rooms**. In one room I showed a **series of paintings** while in the other room, I showed **terracotta multiples** referring to the terracotta floor of the Renaissance building. The terracotta or brick motif is also found on the pillowcases of the museum stools or the curtain through which one of the rooms was entered.





Installation view:
ON HOLD ON, Municipal Gallery,
Cordonhaus Cham, 2019

OBSOLETE REVERSE, 2017





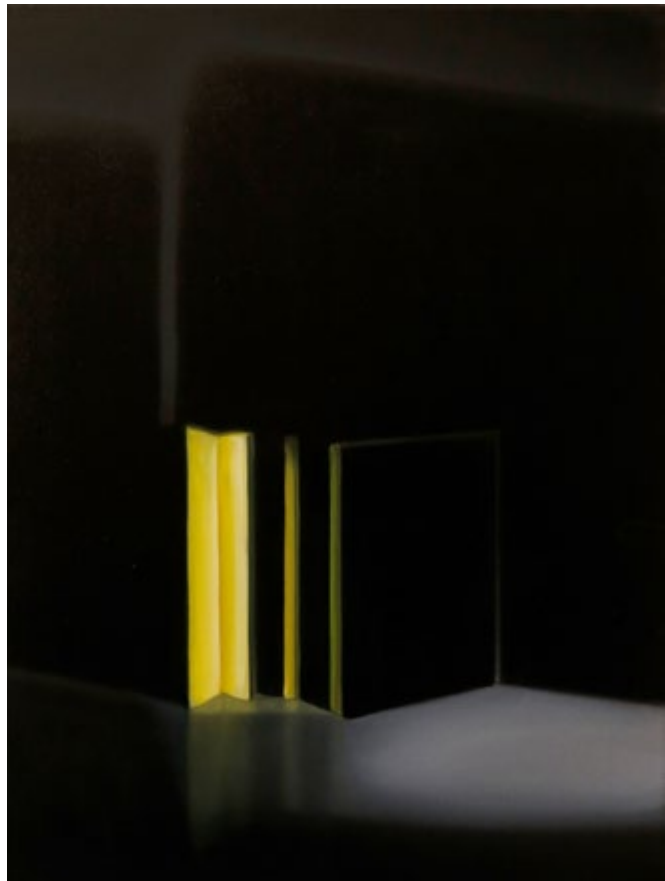
The motifs for this body of work are drawn from a pool of **recurring everyday objects** like fruits, house wares or clothes.

Originating from real objects and products, I first arrange analogue, then digital tableaux, which serve as a basis for my photorealistic paintings.

Through **staging the objects with classical means of painting, banal things transform into carriers of mystical meanings:** A supernatural phenomenon seems to reveal itself in the mysterious glow. Conversely, the supposed mystery – what is to be seen here? – is unraveled by painting as a play with perception: **reality has to be believed, too.** The unknown, the extraordinary is just a result of expectation and only an illusion, which diminishes by realizing that these are still life paintings and therefore inevitable anchored in the **visual culture of their now.**

ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE, 2017





penumbra, 2017
oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches / 60 x 45 cm



solstice, 2016
oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches / 60 x 45 cm



refraction, 2017
oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches / 60 x 45 cm



untitled, 2017
oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches / 60 x 45 cm

