

**ELUSION**  
**Story of a Smuggler**

Alice Dittmar

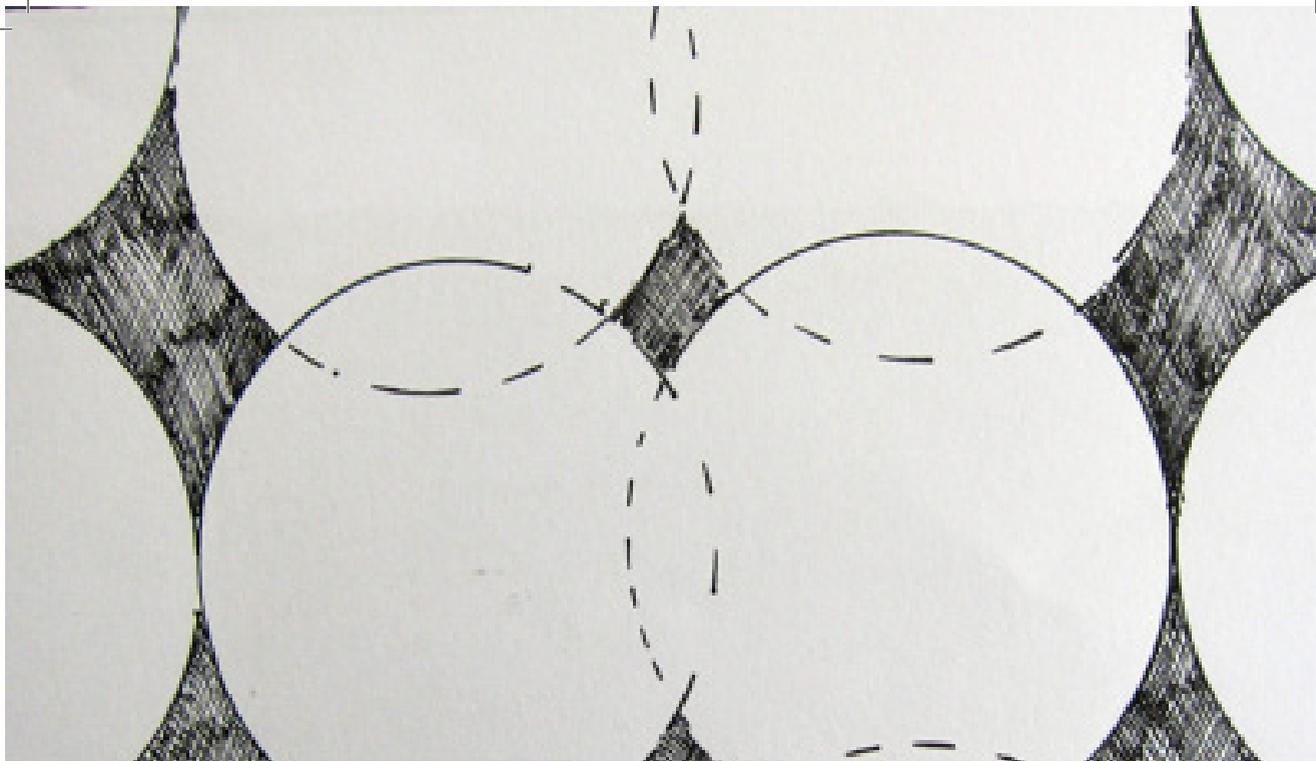
Thanks to

Rodney McDonald, my family and Ann-Britt Dittmar, Ingeborg Habereeder, Mutl and the Kurpo Sauwald, Kerstin Knote, Nora Gantert, Michael Hauffen, Stefan Römer and all participating artists/ protagonists from "Many dots still don't make a line" ("Viele Punkte ergeben noch keine Linie"):

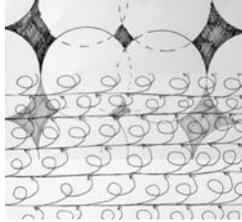
Jochen Becker, Sabine Bitter und Helmut Weber, Echo Ho, Zora Kreuzer, Pia Lanzinger, Monika Mokre, PRINZpod and Barbara Zehnpfennig

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**Story of a Smuggler  
\_Ornament & Emptiness**



*I'm standing there on the Mariensteg, a suspension bridge connecting Upper Austria and Bavaria, and looking over the river and at the horizon, where two tongues of land protrude into the picture from right and left, overlapping each other. The embodiment of a romantically mythical landscape: fog rises up and makes the water, land, and sky non-specific, so that this landscape could be here or somewhere else; just as the somewhere else has come to me/ us at this specific place. Within this very shell – in the Daoist painting tradition – all and nothing is included/ symbolised. In the fullness/ emptiness, beginning and end become one.*

To gain entrance to the academy of art I submitted an artistically theoretical paper on the topic of "The Theory of the Ornament as the Basis of Artistic Activity and as Philosophy of Life" that is on repetitive structures. In the process of writing it, I had become increasingly annoyed by the Western cultural view of the ornament as mere decoration and therefore searched for alternative concepts in other cultures.

"Fullness and emptiness" and "ongoing processes" are essential parameters of ornament theory, as well as of Asian philosophy, fine arts and music. This is how I began to search for the roots of Asian culture.

I turned to the Chinese culture.

*"According to the Chinese view, emptiness is not something vague and non-existent, as one might assume, but an extremely dynamic and active element. Closely related to the idea of the breath of life and the principle of the interplay of Yin and Yang, emptiness creates the actual setting where transformations take place; this is the place where fullness is enabled to fulfill its true purpose. By introducing discontinuity and reversibility into a given system, emptiness allows individual components to overcome rigid oppositions and one-sided developments, thus opening up a possibility for humankind to approach the universe in a holistic manner."*<sup>1</sup>

Soon after arriving in the country, I came to realise that, in Beijing, things are not done in quite the same way as in Europe. Or, to put it in more temporal terms, "the clocks tick differently": "We live day by day," was the information I received from the director of the artists residency prior to leaving Germany. Rules may change from one day to the next, and this was especially true in 2008, just before the Olympic Games. On the ground in Beijing, I realised that this did not only apply to visa arrangements, but to the entire concept of life. Everyone lives in the singular moment, which, at the same time, is part of a chain of sequential, more or less similar moments. Everything can change from one day to the next. You move within a society that is characterised by a temporal and organisational structure that is monochronic while being simultaneously polychronic: *"In the existence of individual beings, time follows a double movement: a linear movement (in the sense*

of a 'changing transition') and a circular movement (in relation to the 'unchanging transition'), which can be presented as follows:

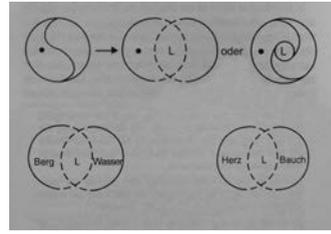
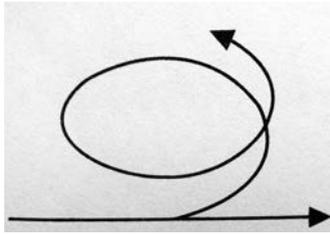


Fig. in François Cheng "Empty and full - the language of Chinese painting", p. 77 and p. 68f.

*At the historical level, too, we can observe time moving in cycles. These cycles (which under no circumstances are to be understood as infinite repetition) are separated by emptiness and follow a spiral movement because they, too, are drawn in by the 'unchanging transition'."*<sup>2</sup>

*In this story, I/ we follow the common thread of a long story in which the motif of smuggling repeatedly appears in variations and under different contexts.*

To this day, I ask myself whether there is such a thing as a structural and content-related correspondence between Chinese philosophy and a philosophy of the ornament (the latter to be understood as a sequence of identical motifs that by no means involve infinite repetition but are, in fact, originals that are lined up with one another over and over again), within a common frame, in constant repetition or infinite sequence, until infinity/emptiness is reached. When I read books relating to understanding Chinese philosophy/ cosmology, I find myself coming across things that are similar to my own perception of the ornament. There are overlaps, but is my concept really equivalent or does it just look similar while being something completely different?

See Nora Ganter's text, p. 12ff in this book.

And, moreover, I ask myself: by tracing the ornament as a structure that traverses/ unites all cultures, am I, from the very outset, conceptualising my work as transcultural? Can I make this claim/ put this up for discussion? At any rate, the structure of the ornamental can be found in all cultures; in China, however, I always had the feeling that it is internalised – and lived out in reality. Of course, we are also familiar with the ornamental element in Europe, but in its merely decorative form and not so much with its performative quality. Maybe the reason why I immediately felt understood in Beijing was the fact that I sensed that I was approaching my personal field of interest. I felt that I had found a new home, which I have been returning to every year since 2008.

<sup>1</sup> François Cheng "Empty and full - the language of Chinese painting", p. 51f

<sup>2</sup> ibid, p. 78

## **Crossing boundaries as an artistic strategy\_ in my artistic practice**

### **2. Denying boundaries in the drawing technique – areal drawing:**

In my works on paper – this term is more appropriate than drawings –, because the latter also touches on/ reaches to the border to paintings: you will hardly ever find linear forms. Instead, I use the drawing pencil to create an area: in much the same way that a sequence of dots forms a line, many fine lines fill/ shape the surface and create a micro-ornament on the format. In this way, my drawing technique creates neither two sides nor an outline – inside and outside – but rather volume: fullness and/ or emptiness, density and/ or atmosphere.

**3.** With regard to content-related motifs, I am drawn to repetitive moments/ atmospheres within the different cultural landscapes through which I traverse. These can also be found in the real world: for instance, in certain repetitive patterns like water reflections or fog, in which land, water, and sky merge.

**4.** The materiality of rice paper, including its transparency and its fibres/ inclusions, determines the artistic action, even though the result may offer reminders of landscapes previously beheld. The fact that the results of this technique evoke associations of landscapes is conclusive, since ink creates a fractal structure on rice paper that can also be found in natural landscapes. This miniature fractal structure on paper conducts itself like the pattern of a stone tile in the way that the tile pattern conducts itself in the tropical rain forest. Only the scaling changes, not, however, the fractal structure itself.

*"In their manifesto the Pond artists wrote: 'Art is a pond and our human existence is based on the carbon-dioxin (!) formula' (Chi she xuanyan, manifesto of the 'Pond Group', 1986). This could be understood as life and the world being relational and in constant flux. Nothing is as it appears, nothing is eternal and individual reality is based on each person's perspective and conditioned through individual experience. In saying this, their understanding of art resonates with the image of a pond in so far as they understood experience of art as diving into life's molecules and sharing its relational qualities."<sup>3</sup>*

To me, landscape is:

1. a metaphor for repetitive structures, that is, ornament, and
2. social/ cultural fabrics/ material quality/ texture.

This results in an appropriately respectful treatment of things and the logic that every small action can have major consequences.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Birgit Hopfener, Journal of Visual Art Practice, Volume 11, Numbers 2 & 3, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> For academic literature, see: Susanne Witzgall and Kerstin Stakemeier (Eds.), "Macht des Materials/ Politik der Materialität" ["Power of Materials/ Politics of Materiality"], diaphanes, Zurich/ Berlin, 2014.

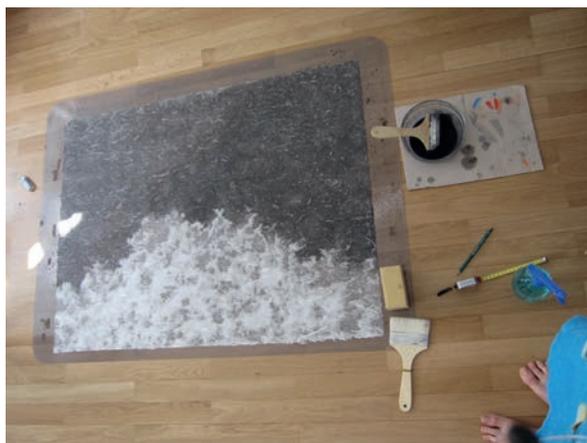
**Way to Hanshan**, ink, ballpoint pen on Chinese paper(collage), 3x220x98 cm, Beijing 2016.



The table lists a set of fractal or fractal like structures, their scales, function and forcing functions.

Fractal Element	Scale (m)	Flux Exchange	Periodic Forcing	Time scale of forcing
Ice crystal/snowflake (abiotic)*	10 <sup>-16</sup> m (molecular)  10 <sup>-3</sup> to 10 <sup>-3</sup> (crystal)	No-flux – molecular – atomic structure	None	Minutes-hours
Mouse lung	10 <sup>-7</sup> to 10 <sup>-3</sup>	CO <sub>2</sub> – O <sub>2</sub> (gas)	Respiration - gas exchange	Seconds
Fish Gill	10 <sup>-3</sup> to 10 <sup>-3</sup>	CO <sub>2</sub> – O <sub>2</sub> (dissolved gas)	Respiration - gas exchange	Seconds
Human Lung	10 <sup>-1</sup>	CO <sub>2</sub> – O <sub>2</sub> (gas)	Respiration - gas exchange	Seconds
Stromatolite*	10 <sup>1</sup>	Nutrient uptake  Gases (?)	Groundwater flow	Days-months
Root System (subterranean)	10 <sup>-1</sup> to 10 <sup>1</sup>	CO <sub>2</sub> (gas) bacterial polysaccharide metabolism – nutrient uptake	Day-night light flux	Diurnal (daily)
Single Tree-Plant (aerial)	10 <sup>-1</sup> to 10 <sup>1</sup>	Photosynthesis  O <sub>2</sub> – CO <sub>2</sub> Exchange	Day-night light flux	Diurnal (daily)
Tree canopy	10 <sup>-1</sup> - 10 <sup>3</sup>	Photosynthesis  O <sub>2</sub> – CO <sub>2</sub> Exchange	Day-night light flux	Diurnal (daily)
Estuarine mangrove colony*	10 <sup>-1</sup> - 10 <sup>3</sup>	Nutrient uptake	Tidal exchange flux	Diurnal (daily)
Cloud formation* (abiotic)	10 <sup>3</sup> - 10 <sup>3</sup>	No-flux	None	Hours

\*Four examples of what I term upward/external forcing – the others are downward/internal forcing except ice crystal and cloud formation which are abiotic but upward scaling – molecule to crystal – crystal to cloud respectively.





Wes Dillman



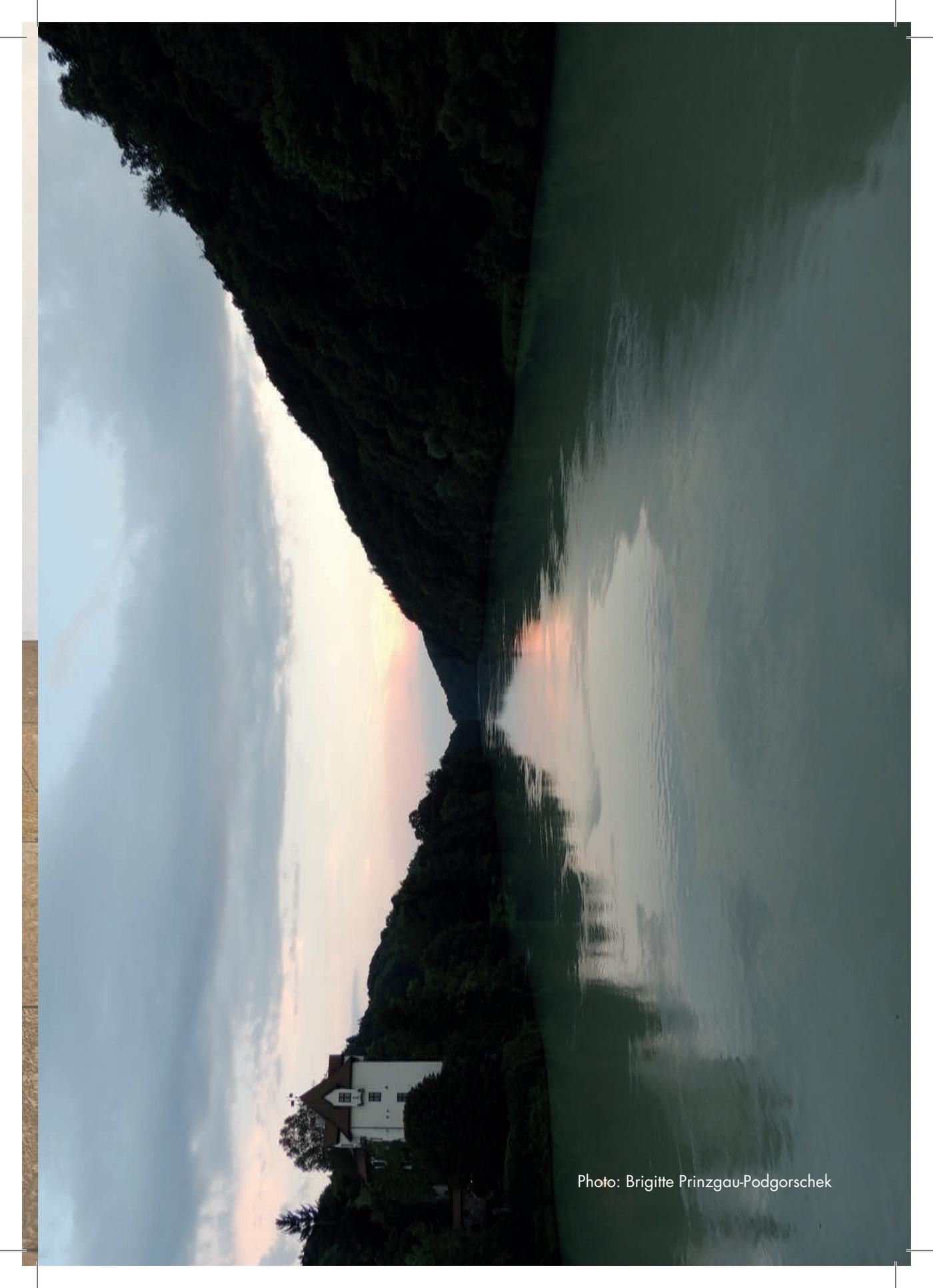
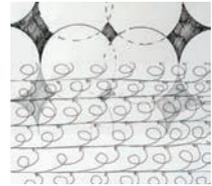


Photo: Brigitte Prinzgau-Podgorschek

*I'm standing there on the Mariensteg, a suspension bridge connecting Upper Austria and Bavaria, and looking over the river and at the horizon, where two tongues of land protrude into the picture from right and left, overlapping each other...*

Repetition/ overlap with chapter\_Ornament & Emptiness



I turned to the Chinese culture.

*„According to the Chinese view, emptiness is not something vague and non-existent, as one might assume, but an extremely dynamic and active element. Closely related to the idea of the breath of life and the principle of the interplay of Yin and Yang, emptiness creates the actual setting where transformations take place; this is the place where fullness is enabled to fulfil its true purpose. By introducing discontinuity and reversibility into a given system, emptiness allows individual components to overcome rigid oppositions and one-sided developments, thus opening up a possibility for humankind to approach the universe in a holistic manner.“*

**7.** In my most recent project “Void Lands”, a collaboration with photographer and blogger Stefanie Thiedig in Beijing, I painted over a selection of her landscape photographs on the subject of emptiness, applying several layers of dense ballpoint pen strokes and thereby creating a monochrome, iridescent mirroring surface. In this way, I succeeded in nearly emptying the respective image of the content depicted (empty landscape) by filling it with an infinite number of small, areal strokes from a ballpoint pen. This act of filling created emptiness – a type of emptiness that in turn carried everything within itself: fullness and emptiness became identical/ dissolved and reflected the surrounding space/ everything/ ourselves. Without originally having wanted it, or foreseen it, our friendly collaboration resulted in that cycle, that logical turmoil, that changes the quality of the work, blends form and content, and makes beginning and end become one.

This special practice of reduction using emptying through filling is “blackening/smuggling”. Even if I am unable to verbalise this process in any other way than as de facto blacking-out/ painting over/ blackening/ disguising or otherwise censoring away what lies “underneath” (picture content/ -carrier).

## Blackening/Smuggling Etymology

Our symposium, in August 2015, is dedicated to "Smuggling":  
Upper Austrian dialect: Schwärzen, English: Blackening/ Smuggling...

### General meaning: 'schwärzen'<sup>1</sup>

1. to make black, to colour; to cover with a layer of blackness
2. (colloquial Southern-German, Austrian) to smuggle

### Etymological meaning: 'schwärzen'<sup>2</sup>

verb 'schwarz machen', Old High German (9th Century), Middle High German 'swerzen'. Also (in Rotwelsch, that is, thieves' cant) 'smuggling'

(18th Century), probably derived from 'to do sth. at night' (thieves' cant 'Schwärze', formerly 'schwerz(e)', 14th Century); 'Schwärzer' smuggler (18th Century). Following this, in modern language: adjective 'schwarz' [black], 'illegal', cf. 'schwarzer Markt', 'Schwarzmarkt', '-handel' [black market, black economy] (since the First World War?), initially 'illegal foreign-currency trade' (perhaps for this reason only known since the inflation period around 1923?), later 'illicit trade in rationed food and goods'. Apparently derived from the German language with the same development of meaning elsewhere: (American) English 'black market' (around 1930?), Italian 'mercato nero' (around 1940), French 'marché noir' (around 1949), Russian 'čěrnýi rýnok' (чёрный рынок); ); see also 'Schwarzarbeit' [black labour], 'schwarzhören' [listen to sth. illegally], schwarzfahren [dodge the fare], 'schwarzschlachten' [slaughter illicitly], 'anschwärzen' verb 'verleumden' [denounce] (17th Century).

### Colloquial meaning: 'schwärzen'<sup>3</sup>

'anschmieren bei' [to do the dirty on sb.]: to denigrate, betray, denounce (in Viennese: 'vernadern').

<sup>1</sup> Source: Duden online, see <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/schwaerzen> (own translation)

<sup>2</sup> Source: (according to Pfeifer) in the Digital Dictionary of the German Language (DWDS) own translation)

<sup>3</sup> Source: German-Austrian "Ostarrichi" dictionary (own translation)



## **Text about my work in “Many dots still don’t make a line”**

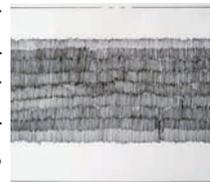
by Nora Gantert (art historian and sinologist, Berlin/ Nuremberg)

*“If you want poems to be innovative in their formulation, do not be satisfied with emptiness and immobility. For immobility exists because everything is on the move and emptiness because it takes in ten thousand places.”<sup>5</sup>*

Boundaries are blurred in Alice’s life and art: is her private life an equal element in her artistic creation, or is it rather the core, origin and starting point of her artistic creation? Just like the national border between Germany and Austria that runs down the middle of the river Inn, the precise borderline in her own work cannot be detected by the naked eye alone. Alice grew up in this border town, with its blurred borderline always before her eyes.



Returning to this place as someone who has travelled far away and presenting her own, very personal work, is something rather special. At the heart of this presentation are four thematic leporellos (accordion fold books) that combine artistic work with her personal path through life. She embeds her own life history in Wernstein’s private “local archive”. The four leporellos with Alice’s story and artistic development stand next to paintings of the city, coats of arms, registration registers, photos, drawings. They are equal, related, invasive. Inconspicuously, to some extent, Alice has smuggled her own story and interpretation into local memory. The texts are free and direct; you get close to the artist and become a conspirator in her smuggling art.



Contemporary nomadism is a much-referenced societal phenomenon that, especially in the world of the arts, refers to the wandering between cities, continents and time zones, whereby the ‘nomads’ always feel as though they are part of a certain tribe: the tribe of travellers, the tribe of those who keep on the move, the tribe of culture producers. Simultaneity is the key to contemporary nomadism. It is possible to be simultaneously a Berliner and to have a studio in Beijing; it is possible to be simultaneously networked over here and over there. Belonging to different tribes is desired and promotes one’s own individual plurality. Alice Dittmar began early to incorporate this way of living into her own life. She lives in Wernstein, Berlin, Perth,

and Beijing, with the latter being the place where her art is created. At the edges and fractures of a nomadic life.

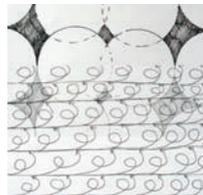
Day-to-day events are processed in works of art and as a result of this way of living, the subject of crossing borders or boundaries reappears time and again.

Transculturality is not applied as a mere concept, but is lived out. No matter where she works, themes such as ornamentation and landscape painting remain important for Alice and function as a compass in her world. Her stays in China have made her include local ideas and materials in her artistic practice.

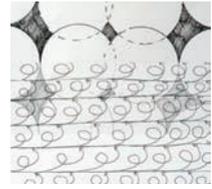


Alice's interest in China was triggered the moment she recognised the ornament as an ancient cultural practice and its significance in different cultural circles. In ancient Chinese art, ornamentation occurs in objects of daily use such as porcelain, bronze, and of course clothing and textiles in general, but frequently it also appears as a decorative element in profane and sacred architecture. In many cases, ornamental forms arise from particular symbols, which are simplified and continually repeated in jewellery and decoration. This is particularly the case in Buddhist painting. The ritual gesture of repetition is an integral part of religious practice. Thus, the act of copying sacred sutras – as a meditative practice of repetition – is one of the most honourable practices of worship.

Forms of various themes are used in traditional Chinese ornamentation: auspicious idiographs and abstract, modified variants of the latter, as well as plants and animals, and waves and clouds, are applied as ornaments and in abstract forms. In scholarly painting the same motifs (for instance, the deer or the pomegranate) are used not as decorative accessories, but as solitary subjects. A piece of landscape painting, for example, would typically not include a decorative braid with a pearl pattern or a Ruyi sceptre braid. However, it would be completely normal to adorn the well of a porcelain plate with images of pomegranates. It is probably safe to say that the act of repetition plays a decisive role in Chinese painting, even if it is more of an inner attitude than something that is actually implemented in ornamentation. In Alice's work, by contrast, repetition sometimes makes a landscape painting or photograph ornamental on its own account, thus connecting two theories that are in actual fact separate.



To this day, it has been the foundation of artistic education in China to learn the practice of painting by copying that is, by repeating models. Within the six principles of Chinese painting established by Xie He (active in the period between 500 and 535) the sixth element is: "approaching the masters by repeating/ copying them"<sup>6</sup>. In this way, an internalisation is sought, an ability to put the subject on paper emptily, that is, without the artists supplying any will of their own. The act of painting becomes "non-action". Paintings arise from the inner attitude of the Daoist "wuwei", the free circulation of breath with emptiness breathing life into the painting. François Billeter understands "wuwei"<sup>7</sup> as unconscious, or rather non-targeted, action, in the way athletes, craftspeople or musicians experience the performance of actions that they have mastered to perfection. The conscious thought of doing something interrupts the flow of action.



In my opinion, the two concepts overlap in the meditative function of Chinese landscape painting and in the sequence of the ornament. Repeating a movement until you lose yourself completely in it is a performative quality that characterises both Chinese landscape painting and ornamentation.

In Chinese landscape painting, the principle of fullness and emptiness is considered the highest good. When the breath circulates and breezes through the landscape, the painting becomes accessible via its "empty" surfaces and the terrain opens up to the viewer as experienceable and alive. The dynamic of a painting arises from the rhythmisation of filled and "empty" surfaces. Guo Xi (before 1020 to around 1090) describes the qualities of landscape painting as follows: „It is [a] generally accepted opinion that in landscapes there are those through which you may travel, those in which you may sightsee, those through which you may wander, and those in which you may live.“<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the highest form of landscape painting is that in which the viewer can "live".

The goal is to reach a balance between unprocessed surfaces and those that are shaped, with the non-shaped surfaces providing the counterpart to the shaped ones. When Alice has a Chinese papermaker join together the natural papers not yet processed for her landscape paintings and then lets the glued areas remain visible, this is to be understood as homage to the principle of emptiness in Chinese painting: the empty space,

the vacancy, is treated on an equal footing with the processed space. About her relationship to her own work she says: *"I love beautiful, fragile things, because they are able to move me. I try to breathe my soul into them; [...]. In return, their breath makes me feel deeply alive. In the optimal case, the viewer is able to feel this, too."*<sup>9</sup> A Chinese painter of the 11th Century could have expressed it just like that or similarly.

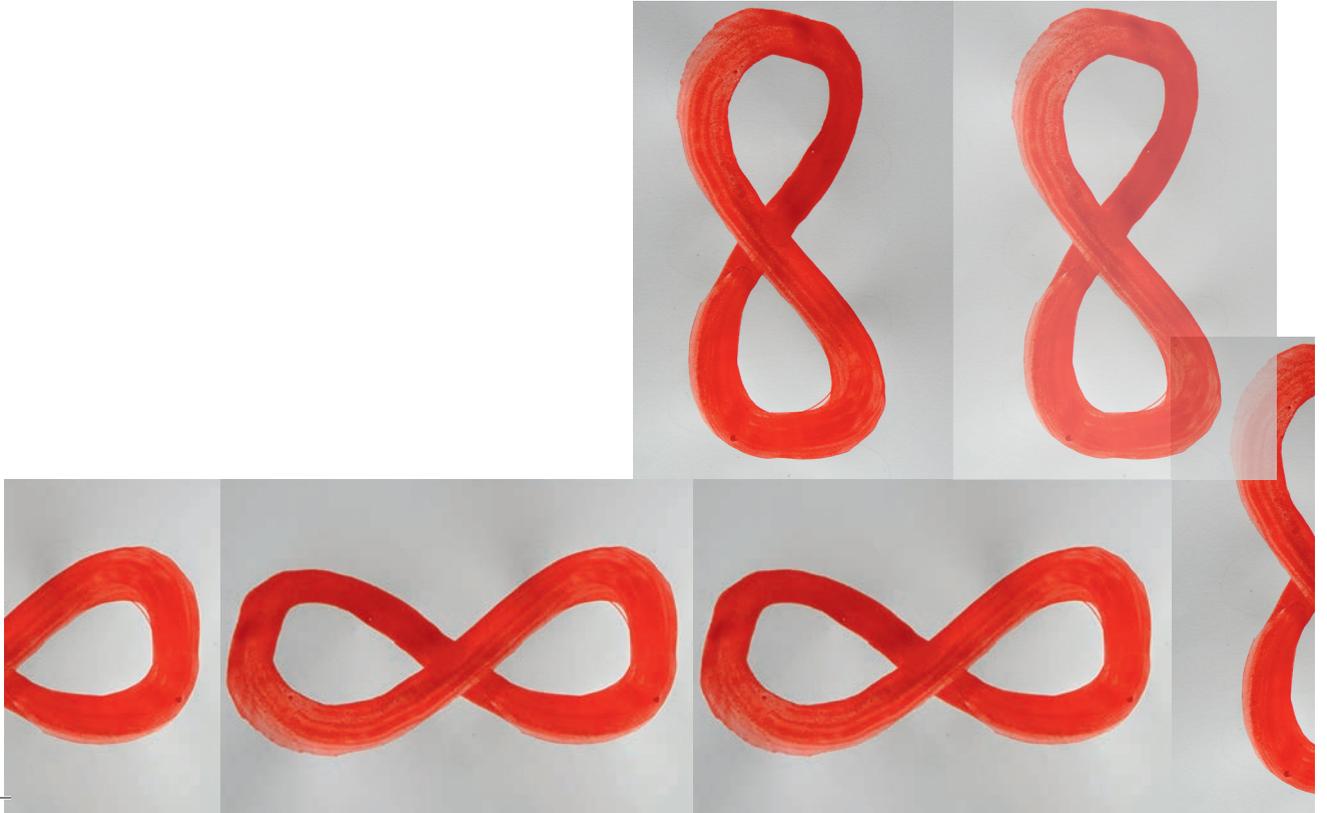
<sup>5</sup> Inscription on a self-portrait by Zeng Mi (born 1935) [own translation], from: *Der Himmel in der Pinselspitze – Chinesische Malerei des 20. Jahrhunderts* [The Sky in the Tip of the Paintbrush – Chinese Painting in the 20th Century], Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne, 2005, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese texts on Painting*, Hong Kong University Press, 2012, p. 39–40.

<sup>7</sup> François Billeter, *Das Wirken in den Dingen*, Matthes & Seitz, Berlin, 2015, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese texts on Painting*, Hong Kong University Press, 2012, p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> Alice Dittmar, *Alice-D in Wonderland*, self-published by Alice Dittmar, 2010, without page numbers.



## Story of a Smuggler \_Biography



## **Prenatal and early childhood**

An act of smuggling was even the necessary prelude to my coming into being: my parents met in 1969, when my father (who was studying psychology at the time) had a side job selling tickets for the figure-skating show "Holiday on Ice" in a fashion boutique in Passau, Germany. He happened to be present when my mother (sweet 17) came to the boutique with her mother to buy a purple coat. To do her customers a favour and to spare them both VAT and the whole bureaucratic export process, the store manager asked my father to smuggle the garment roughly 12 kilometres across the Austrian border and deliver it directly to the house of the Leithner family. The story goes that my mum also bought matching purple boots and a dress, which were likewise transferred secretly across the border to her doorstep. This is how my parents met: smuggling goods across the German-Austrian border, long before the Schengen Agreement. Nine years later, as a result of this first illegal act of smuggling, I was conceived and my parents got married in Wernstein/Inn. On 22 July 1978, I was born in Ried im Innkreis in Upper Austria. As the daughter of Franz Ludwig Dittmar (a German citizen) and Elisabeth Auguste Leithner (an Austrian citizen), I was named Alice-Julia Volke Dittmar and spent the first three years of my life – which are said to be formative in the life of any person – in Wernstein am Inn, a small town in Upper Austria where the river Inn marks the natural border with Bavaria/Germany. The same geographical landscape, where "Schwärzen" (Upper-Austrian dialect for "smuggling") has a tradition and which has laid the foundation for my vocation as a smuggler, both in life and work.

## **Childhood**

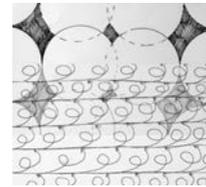
I spent the first three formative years of my life at my grandparents' house in Wernstein am Inn, Upper Austria, until my mother, in a fit of independence, insisted that it was high time for her and my father to move into an apartment of their own in Passau, where my father meanwhile worked as a psychologist for the Catholic relief service 'Caritas' and was earning good money. I attended kindergarten and primary school in Passau and the Maristengymnasium, a secondary school, in Fürstzell, so I was basically socialised in Germany and only spent the weekends in Wernstein with my grandparents and at the riding stables. I commuted in this fashion until I was about 18 years old, shortly before I left secondary school with my Abitur (A-levels).

## **Studies**

In 1999, one year after leaving school, and following several internships, I moved to Munich for the winter semester in order to begin my studies of fine arts and art education at the Academy of Fine Arts. I still suspect that I only got my place at the Academy so quickly because my then professor, Fridhelm Klein, was a fan of Alfred Kubin and had conducted some artistic research in this regard in my home town of Wernstein/ Inn a few years earlier. Of course, I smuggled my background into the conversation during the interviews.

To finalise the academy of art I submitted an artistically theoretical paper on the topic of “The Theory of the Ornament as the Basis of Artistic Activity and as Philosophy of Life”, that is, on repetitive structures...

Repetition/overlap with chapter\_ Ornament & Emptiness



I decided that I wanted to travel to China, which, however, I was unable to do until after completing my studies, first for health reasons, then for time reasons.

### **Beijing/ China, an initial journey\_Part 1**

Then, in 2008, after two years' freelancing as an academically trained painter I had changed to Professor Nikolaus Lang's free class for "Painting and Design for Spaces of Art and the Cultic". I applied for an artist residency at the Red Gate Gallery in Beijing following a tip from a former student colleague of mine, Ma Wen from Xiamen. This marked the true beginning of my life as a smuggler, that is, as someone who moves in between, as someone living in a grey zone bordering on illegality, ever-commuting back and forth and trying to smuggle her way through every situation in life.

### **Beijing/ China, an initial journey\_Part 2**

It all began before I entered China when I described myself as a "tourist" in my visa application: you should never state that you are going to a country in order to work there. And you should never mention the fact that you are an artist, that is, someone with subversive inclinations who is always working wherever she goes and who never remains a mere tourist. As a rule, you should always lie when you apply for jobs or, at least, never tell more than half the truth, prettifying the latter in whatever style is required. For example, I always state that I am an illustrator and tick the box "teacher" when I am asked for my education/occupation. This works particularly well in China, where the profession of laoshi (teacher) is among the most respected.

As soon as I enter the People's Republic of China/ Beijing, I step into another grey area: at this point, the clock starts ticking because the local authorities in Beijing require me to report to the nearest police station within 24 hours. If you are a genuine

tourist, the hotel does all this for you; in the years after 2008, however, when I didn't come to the country as an artist in residence, I usually had to organise my accommodation privately and my landlords were therefore obliged to register me, along with my rental contract, at the nearest police station. Unfortunately, rental agreements in Beijing are only legal if they cover at least six months or a full year. Short-term rent for foreigners is actually prohibited or at least not welcome. To this day, Chinese citizens who provide accommodation to laowei (foreigners) are regarded as suspicious, which is why most Chinese adamantly refuse to rent their accommodation to us. Nevertheless, in the last eight years, I have always found some friend or friendly landlord with good connections to the local authorities who has allowed me to rent for shorter periods of time. At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those people smugglers for letting me live/ hide/ disappear in this interspace.

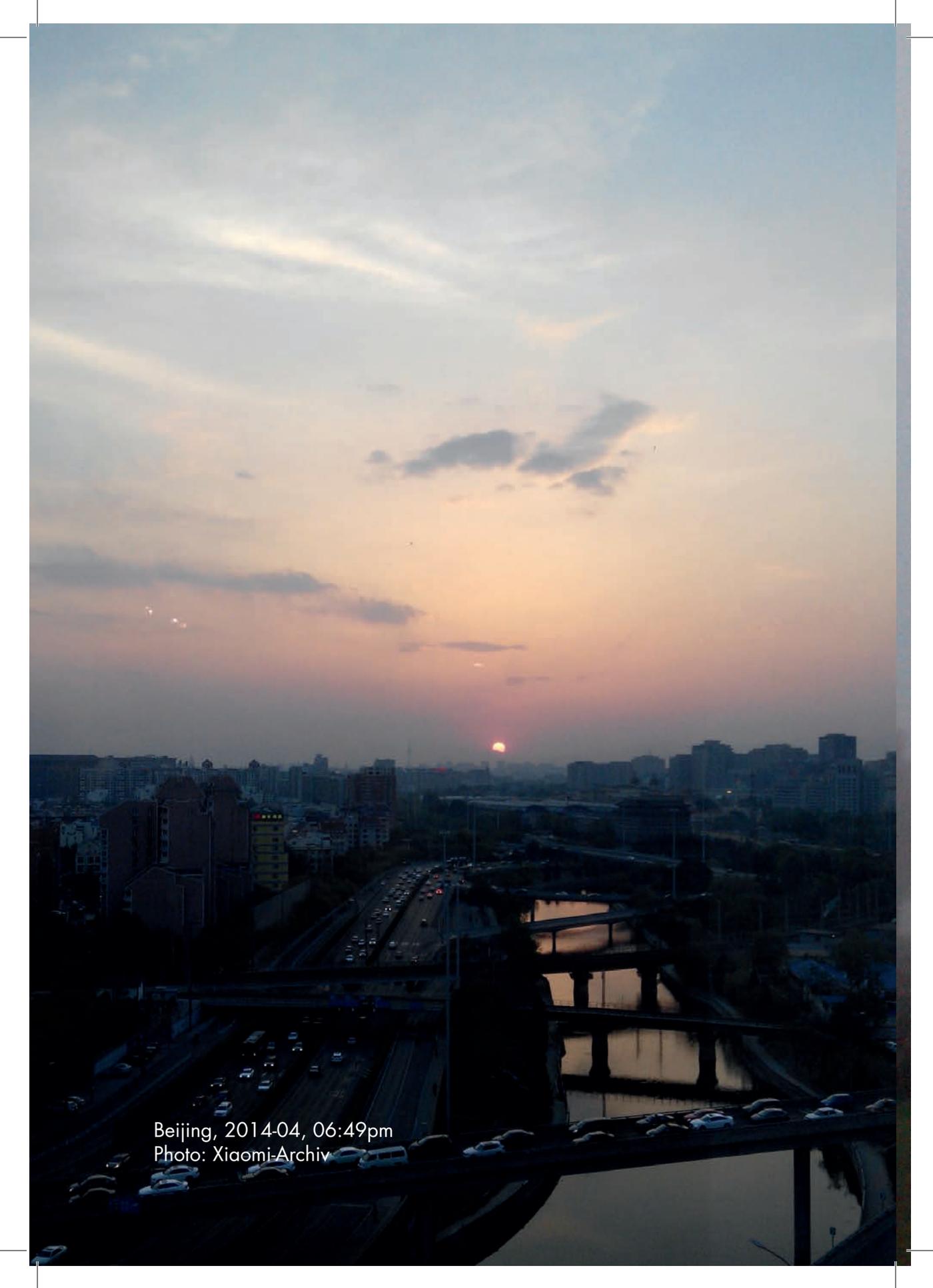
In the years since 2008 it has become increasingly difficult to find an affordable place to stay. Rents rose exponentially as a result of/ following the Olympics, and property sharks rapidly took over and wiped out/ are wiping out large parts of the old city with state approval. "They rip/ped Beijing's soul out", is how many people put it. To give an example, in 2014, in this environment of constant surveillance, I was "forced" to sign a lease for a place in a dump called Dong Ba in the back east of Beijing, the content of which I did not understand due to my lack of Chinese reading skills, but which was an absolute necessity for my police registration. Time and again, I found myself slipping into such semi-legal situations, in which I simply acted "stupid" to be on the safe side; however, from sorry experience I know that the first two weeks of my stays in Beijing are always going to be challenging, with occasional visits from the police to the flat/ studio being part and parcel of the experience, just as happened to me in Dong Ba (2014) and Heiqiao (2016). You need to understand that there are official regulations that must be followed without question, and that the authorities know very well that you are living/ moving in a zone of semi-legality; however, they deliberately ignore this fact because, each New Year, they receive a generous remuneration from the relevant landlords to make the previously impossible become possible. Of course, there are also those who simply wish to help and have made it a matter of principle not to participate in the "foreigners-cause-trouble" nonsense.

In this story, I/ we follow the common thread of a long story in which the motif of smuggling repeatedly appears in variations and under different contexts.

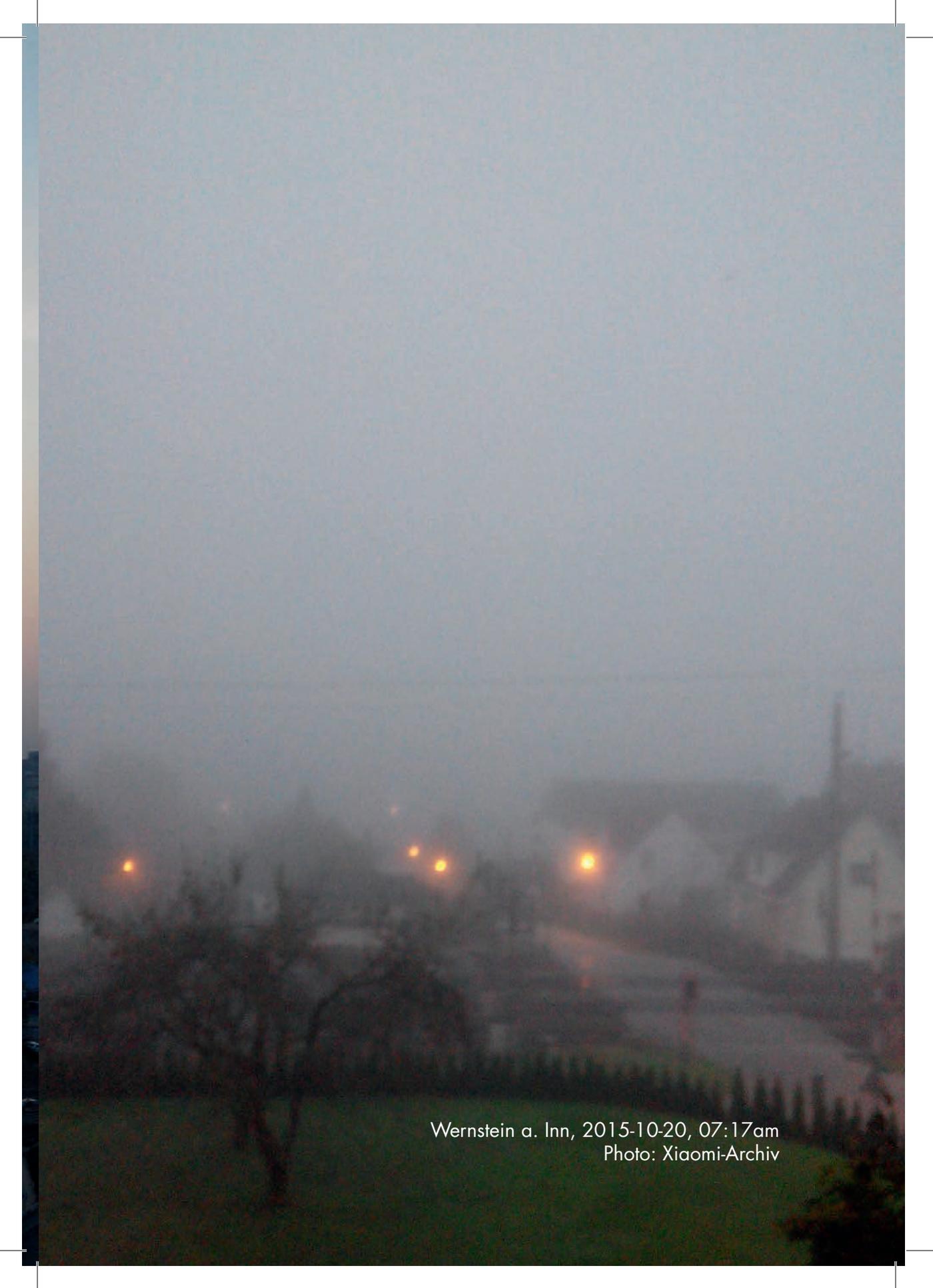
At any rate, the structure of the ornamental can be found in all cultures; in China, however, I always had the feeling that it is internalised and lived out in reality. Of course, we are also familiar with the ornamental element in Europe, but in its merely decorative form and not so much with its performative quality. Maybe the reason why I immediately felt comfortable/ understood in Beijing

was the fact that I sensed I was approaching my personal field of interest. I felt that I had found a new home, which I have been returning to every year since 2008.

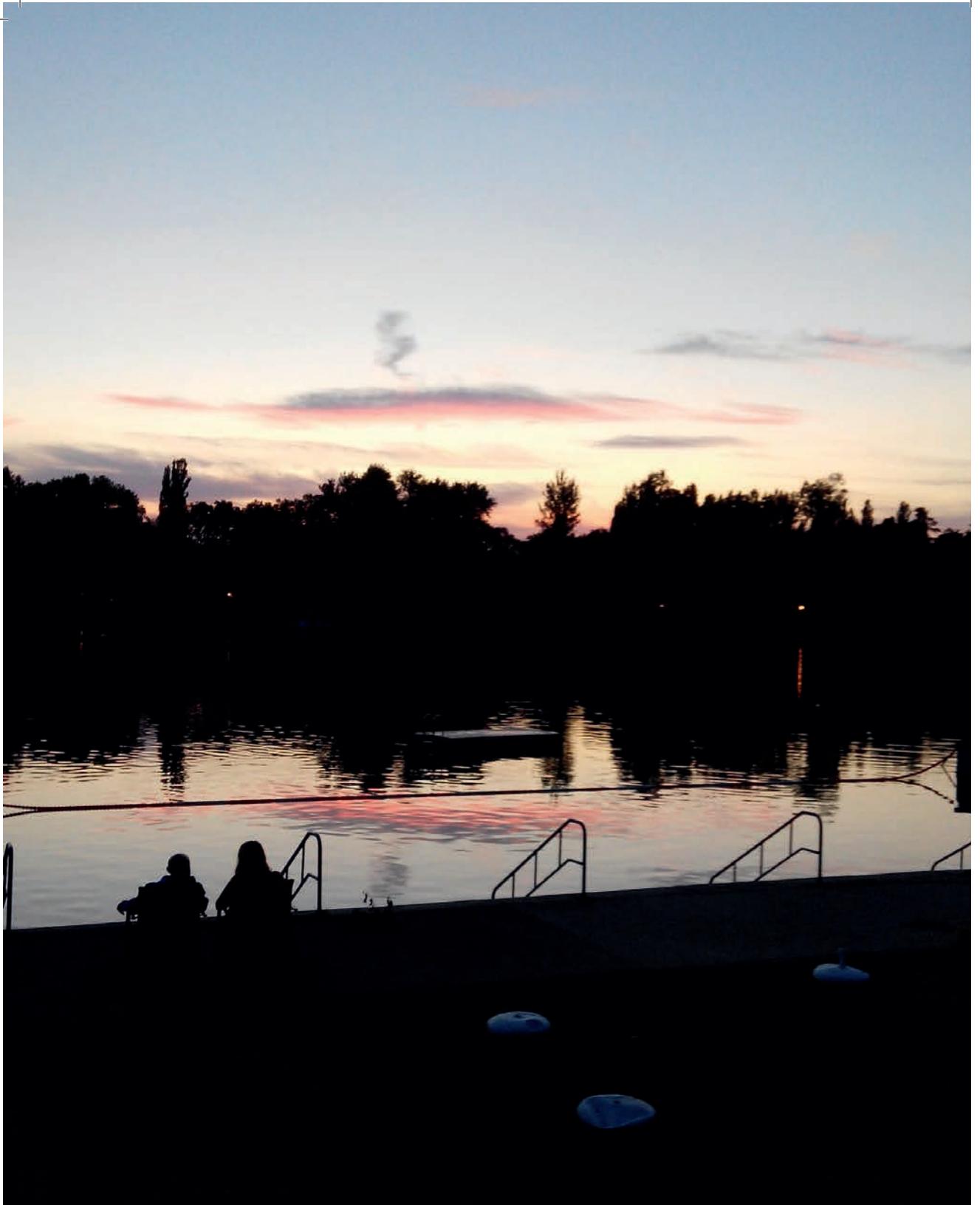
In this feeling of being understood, one thing automatically led to another: I was lucky that the Goethe Institute in Beijing supported my work "My daily Beijing diary". In November 2008, I was invited to return for a lecture and this led to my giving up my apartment in Munich. It would have been impossible for me to earn the rent and finish the catalogue. As a consequence, following my return to Germany in July 2008, I immediately gave notice to quit my old residence and registered myself as living with my parents in Passau and also in Wernstein am Inn in Austria at my grandparents' then-empty house. It was "Welcome back home" – a place to which I had never intended to return, but to which I had been catapulted by necessity as a result of displacement. Besides, in 2008, also in Beijing, I had got to know my present husband, who immediately expanded my horizon by another culture. He is from Australia, which is the reason why, over the following six years, I led a nomadic life between three continents: Europe (Passau/ Wernstein am Inn and subleasing in Vienna/ Berlin) <-> China (Beijing) and <-> Australia (Perth).



Beijing, 2014-04, 06:49pm  
Photo: Xiaomi-Archiv



Wernstein a. Inn, 2015-10-20, 07:17am  
Photo: Xiaomi-Archiv



Berlin-Weißensee, 2015-08-02, 07:04pm  
Photo: Xiaomi-Archiv

## **Berlin and settling down\_**

By 2013 at the latest, although in reality at the beginning of 2012, tormented by fears for the future, I finally became tired of the constant nomadism and, following stays in Vienna and Berlin on a trial basis, I decided to look for an apartment in Berlin together with my sister. I believe I chose Berlin rather than Vienna as my place of residence, because I had been socialised in Germany, but also for insurance reasons. I have always felt comfortable/ free in Berlin: in this creative hub, this city of singles and polyamory – everything is possible. Fortunately, I identify more or less with the socio-political system of the Federal Republic of Germany (especially since 2015) – this is also one of the reasons why, despite obtaining an Australian Permanent Residency Partner Visa in 2013, I never wanted to live in Australia in the long term: against the background of my growing experience in dealing with different cultures and my increasing conviction that peaceful coexistence and togetherness is possible, Australia's migration policy and post-colonialist, Euro-centric and racist-misogynist way of thinking had become increasingly repugnant/ unacceptable to me. Furthermore, no doubt due also to my own experiences, I lack the fear of the other that is currently being so widely evoked here in Germany, and abroad, and that, unfortunately, is finding a sympathetic ear. Over the years, I have developed a plural identity that enables me to adapt to, and communicate with, others.

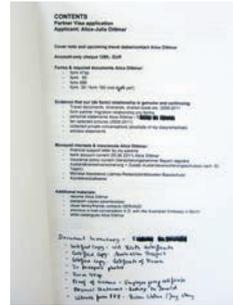
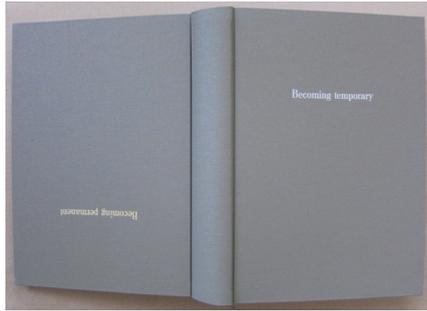
At first, moving to Berlin did not change much. In April 2014, two weeks after moving, I left for Beijing to prepare an exhibition. At the beginning of June, I flew from there to Perth and only returned to the German capital again in the autumn. Confusingly, however, upon returning, I suffered a reverse culture shock: I suddenly realised that I was no longer part of "the scene" in Berlin and felt incredibly lost. For six years, I had lived at a distance and just travelled in sporadically from small Wernstein/ Inn in Austria for exhibitions and lectures. I had not yet built up a network and would have to do so slowly but surely, as I had done over the years in other parts of the world, for instance, in Beijing, although in those places I had enjoyed the bonus of being a foreigner. In Berlin, however, being a stranger is not an asset in itself; and despite my transcultural experience, in terms of market value, I keep being considered as purely German.

I was lucky to fall in love with a Berlin artist with whom I had much in common, as it seemed to me. His bright mind and crystalline beauty still fascinate me to this very day. We began a relationship that unfortunately was doomed to fail (probably because neither of us even considered being in a *ménage à trois*). What I obviously didn't share with him, but with my husband, were my connections to, and memories of, the life "in between"/ the middle: for instance in China, which had become my second home, or Australia with its landscape that had shaped me unavoidably, and for which I had legally smuggled my way

to a residence permit<sup>10</sup> – despite my unfailing dislike of the country’s political situation. I started missing everything I thought would be easy to part with and became very sad. All of a sudden, I found that the whole world that I had built up over recent years – my transcultural project/ concept and ultimately myself as a person was being called into question – for where had it led me, except into a space without footing between three continents...

For years, I had whitewashed my existence in Germany. Now, in 2016/17, it seemed to have reached a degree of legality, since I spent more than 50% of each year in Germany. In previous years, however, this had by no means been the case: I had been able to specify permanent residences, but had travelled a lot and therefore had trouble sleeping, constantly fearing that I would jeopardise my status with the German artists’ social insurance – which only those permanently resident in the Federal Republic of Germany are entitled to. For financial reasons, too, this insurance entitlement is, in reality, a matter of perspective, because my income or profit from artistic activities was hardly sufficient to generate the required minimum profit per year. Each year, a competent tax assistant determined my income in such a way that I achieved the required minimum profit, although my constant travel expenses actually prevented me from doing so. For tax purposes, certain lump sums for stays abroad are specified per country for accommodation, food, etc., which in my case are much lower than those of ordinary travellers. This is why only part of the relevant expenses are considered. This means that the system, which was designed for the way the majority of people lived in earlier times, does not take into account contemporary, mobile individuals like myself and is not equipped to deal with them. The same applies to the structure of my long-standing long-distance relationship.

<sup>10</sup> Even my permanent residency in Oz (2012/13) had been “a kind of fake”. But a successful one, of course! One of the things I have learned is that even the completion of visa documents requires a good deal of legal smuggling: we were required to provide witness statements to prove our relationship was genuine and to get the “witnesses of our relationship” (that is, good friends) to sign them so that they could confirm (in our own words) to the relevant authority that we were engaged in a genuine partnership that was conducted beyond borders. I’m not saying that these statements did not correspond to our everyday reality or were lies, yet we still had to fabricate them ourselves. You cannot expect close friends to undertake such tasks according to the requirements. We slightly distorted the testimony in the direction demanded by the authorities, and were apparently successful in doing so, because, by the end of 2012, I received my partner visa which entitled me to enter and exit Australia freely until 2018.



Furthermore, I generate my income not only through selling artworks. But what does work really mean in cases like mine, where life and art are so interwoven? In the past, I had been so bold as to state “performative activity” on my invoices, until my tax consultant only allowed me to list “freelance activities”, although “performative” would be correct for this aspect of my artistic approach. I feared that my profession as an artist, often pursued with working days of 12 to 14 hours, might end up being classified by the tax authorities as merely a hobby on account of my “excessively low income”. Therefore, I am required to smuggle through life and invent fiction that is acceptable to the system instead of stating everyday facts, otherwise I would fail to meet the bureaucratic requirements. However, what does artistic work mean to 98% of all academically trained artists, whom no one in the arts system remunerates on an hourly basis (alongside the 2% who can really live from their work), if their work is measured in terms of income? And, since we live in a world in which digitisation is rapidly progressing, should we not fundamentally reconsider this very definition of “work” which, since the very beginning, has led to the exploitation of the entire cultural and creative sector? What do these issues mean for our social landscape, especially in cities like Berlin, where supposedly a large proportion of young people live off their work in this particular economic sector – that is, live off fresh air and love alone? The right thing to do would be to go to the barricades together and finally demand a universal basic income, instead of smuggling through life relying on the tricks and shenanigans that our creative minds come up with! In 2016, I experienced at first hand just how much time and energy all this costs, when I ended up at Charité hospital with a dissection of the carotid artery and the resulting ischaemic stroke.

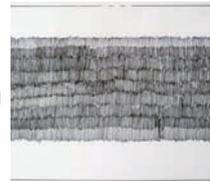
*I'm standing there on the Mariensteg, a suspension bridge connecting Upper Austria and Bavaria, and looking over the river and at the horizon, where two tongues of land protrude into the picture from right and left, overlapping each other. The embodiment of a romantically mystical landscape: fog rises up and makes the water, land and sky non-specific, so that this landscape could be here or somewhere else; just as the somewhere else has come to me/ us at this specific place. Within this very shell – in the Daoist painting tradition – all and nothing is included/ symbolised. In the fullness/ emptiness, beginning and end become one.*

This is how our exhibition project developed:

In autumn 2014, my distant cousin Ingeborg Habereeder (who is a curator in Vienna and at the Egon Schiele Art Centrum in Český Krumlov) and I were sitting in the living room of her house in Wernstein/ Inn in Upper Austria. While enjoying the view of the river flowing past us and of the opposite riverbank that belongs to Bavaria, Germany, we pondered over possible themes for a project involving a group of artists whom we would invite to this border town in order to work thematically here. At that time, I had just moved (back) to Berlin, had fallen rapturously in love, felt I was floating on a bed of roses in the anticipation of a secret affair, and, as part of my own research work, had just read Irit Rogoff's impressive essay "Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality", which touches on essential aspects of my artistic practice.

Against the background of this text, in combination with the scenic and historical background of the town of Wernstein and our current position in Inge's living room, and looking across the border marked by the green river Inn, I came up with the idea of conceptualising and holding a symposium on a subject that was very close to my interest: smuggling. Over the next two years, the story took its course and the idea assumed a concrete shape: "Many dots still don't make a line".

Repetition/overlap see chapter\_Smuggling

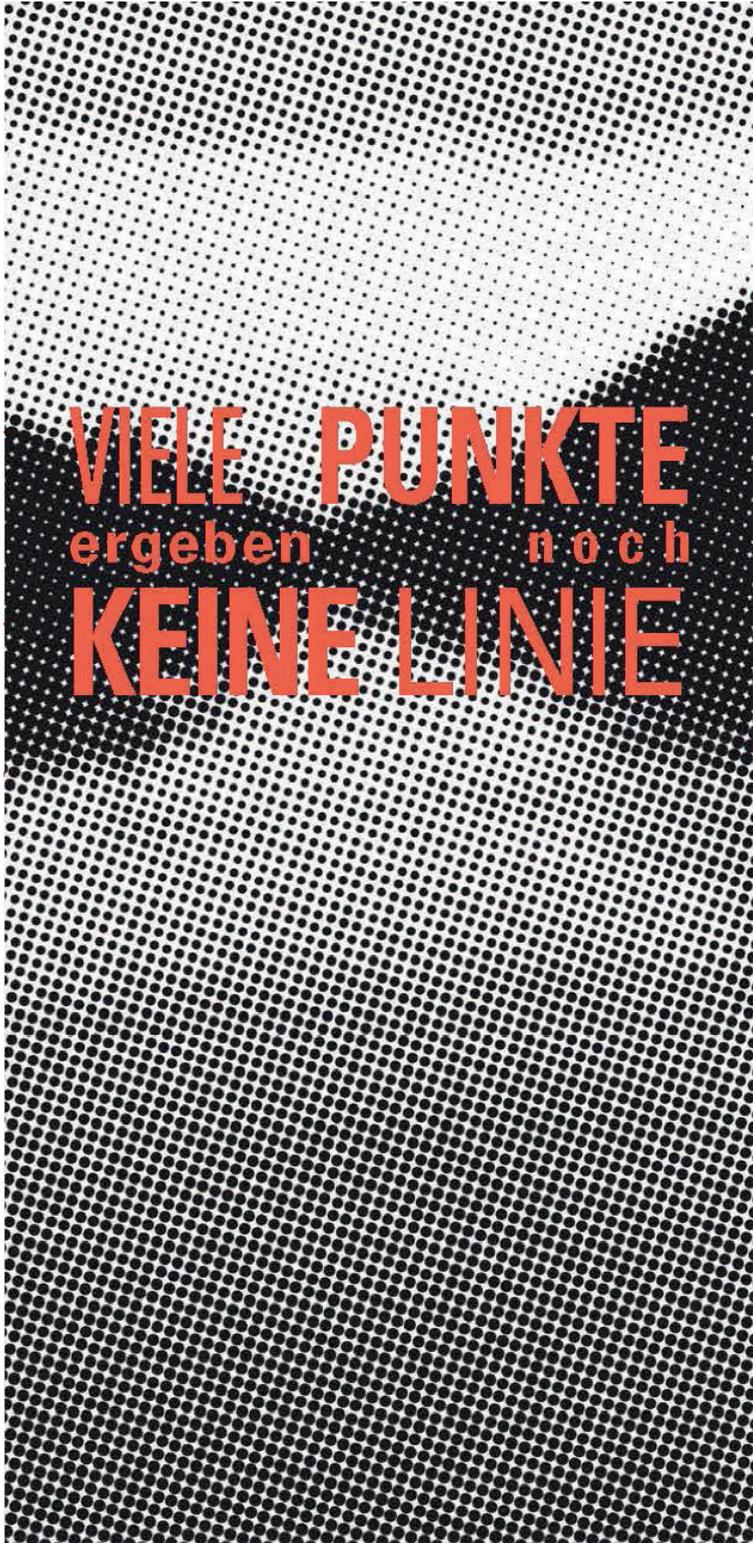


We agreed on a two-day exhibition programme to take place in the border towns of Wernstein and Neuburg/ Inn from 22 to 23 July 2017, during which the individual project ideas (all works in the semi-public space, performances, music) would be presented.

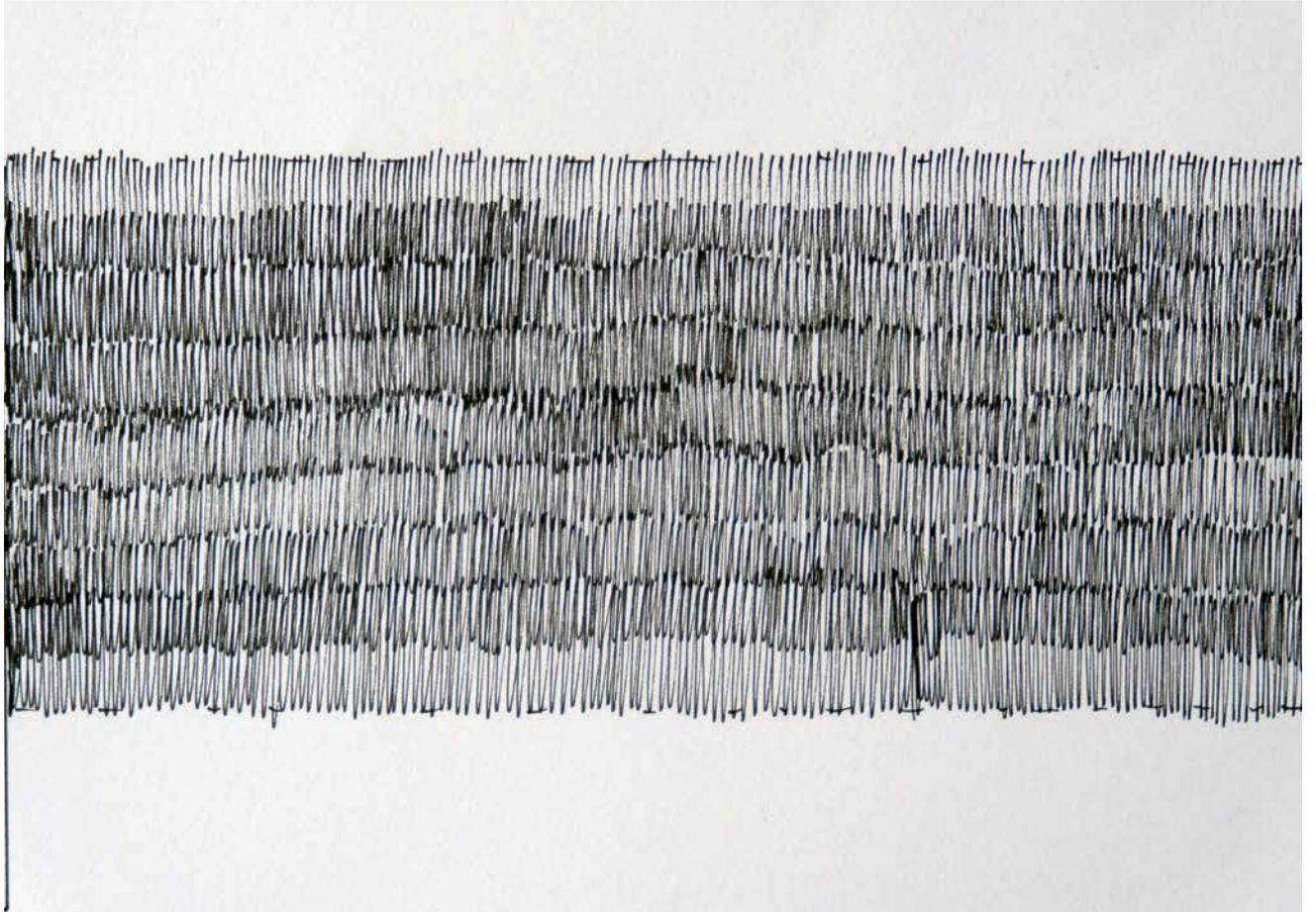
On 24 July 2017, at the conclusion of this programme, we staged a real German-Austrian-Australian wedding, whose protagonists my partner, Rodney McDonald, and I will hopefully be for the rest of our lives.

The wedding act took place adjunct to the exhibition programm; respecting, in the true transcultural sense, the difference/ formal otherness of the events, but nonetheless using the field created by the exhibition, Wernstein and Neuburg/ Inn.

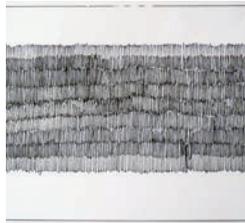
Whoever else will share this theatre with us ultimately remains to be seen...



**VIELE PUNKTE**  
ergeben noch  
**KEINE LINIE**



## Story of a Smuggler \_Smuggling



This marked the true beginning of my life as a smuggler, that means, as someone who lives in between, in a grey zone bordering on illegality, ever-commuting back and forth and trying to smuggle her way through every situation in life. It was only much later that I became aware of smuggling as an artistic practice through Irit Rogoff's essay "Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality", which was recommended to me by an art historian around 2012. In her text, Rogoff defines smuggling as follows: *'Smuggling operates as a principle of movement, of fluidity and of dissemination that disregards boundaries. Within this movement the identity of the objects themselves are [!] obscured, they are not visible, identifiable. They function very much like concepts and ideas that inhabit space in a quasi legitimate way. Ideas that are not really at home within a given structure of knowledge and thrive in the movement between things and do not settle into a legitimating frame or environment. The line of smuggling does not work to retrace the old lines of existing divisions – but glides along them. A performative disruption that does not produce itself as conflict. [...] But what has really interested me in this evocation of a smuggling practice is how it does not breach a line, does not turn into a 'border' in the classic sense, but traces a parallel economy, going over its lines again and again and in the process making them an inhabitation, expanding the line of division into an inhabited spatiality that someone else might also occupy, slip along until the opportune moments comes [!] along to slip over. As an exhibition practice this form of smuggling which traces and retraces the lines of its supposed boundaries of exclusion, allows the curatorial to become a cross-disciplinary field without any relation to a master discipline (art exhibitions enriched by contextual and other materials), to put entities in a relation of movement to one another.'*<sup>11</sup>

## **Beijing/ China, an initial journey\_Part 2**

It all began before I entered China when I described myself as a "tourist" in my visa application: you should never state that you are going to a country in order to work there...

Repetition/overlap with chapter\_Biography



<sup>11</sup> Irit Rogoff, "Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality", see: [http://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff\\_smuggling.pdf](http://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff_smuggling.pdf), p. 4

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p. 5

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 1

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p. 1f

As a smuggler it is important to understand that the system forces you to conceal the truth, while it is well aware of what its members get up to in order to circumvent it. You inevitably become a part of the system, no matter how you position yourself towards it – even as a hermit you are part of the system, namely by dropping out. Don't we all engage in smuggling? In other words, smuggling is basically a tolerated everyday practice in our own societies, and not just in China.

*"...in the same way that smuggled contraband undermines inherited systems of value, it also demands an engagement with the law; to asking [!] how is contraband implicated in systems of law, can these be put to flight, in fact in a broader sense it demands that we ask whether law is, by definition, bound to contrabanding?"<sup>12</sup>*

### **Smuggling\_The Project: Many dots still don't make a line**

I think that in these thoughts of Irit Rogoff regarding smuggling as an artistic and curatorial practice lay the genesis – as far as I'm concerned – of our exhibition project "Many dots still don't make a line", in which the story of myself as a smuggler, which you, as an observer, are currently reading, is one of the artistic works presented.

*Why am I laying down my own story here and making it available to you as a text and as a part of the exhibition? Because my function is that of a silent protagonist; partly intentionally and partly unintentionally, I have become a fluid part of this community (although the role I play never becomes entirely clear); because the narrative of my own experience is the most obvious/ immediate medium available to me for visualisation. Furthermore it allows me to engage in a playful oscillation between the local and the somewhere else, between the present and the past, between these latter and perhaps even a future utopia. Because text brings together time and space.*

On the one hand, Rogoff's considerations helped us find our curatorial concept, on the other, they remain a fundamental part of my own artistic and private existence – which are inseparable in my case. This fluidity concerns myself and my double-function as curator of this entire project, in which I am at the same time and always an artist. For this reason, I have seized on smuggling in Rogoff's sense, as our modus operandi.

*"The term 'smuggling' here extends far beyond a series of adventurous gambits. It reflects the search for a practice that goes far beyond conjunctives such as those that bring together 'art and politics' or 'theory and practice' or 'analysis and action'. In such a practice we aspire to experience the relations between the two as a form of embodiment which cannot be separated into their independent components. The notion of an 'embodied criticality'\* has much to do with my understanding of our shift away from critique towards criticality, a*

shift that I would argue is essential to the actualisation of contemporary cultural practices.”<sup>13</sup>

*‘embodied criticality’*: “Within this shift [“away from critique and towards criticality”, see sentence above] we have had to be aware not only of the extreme limitations of putting work in ‘context’, or of the false isolation brought about by fields of disciplines, but we have also had to take on board the following; [...] the fact that in a reflective shift, from the analytical to the performative function of observation and of participation, we can agree that meaning is not excavated for, but rather, that it takes place in the present. [...]

It seems to me that within the space of a relatively short period we have been able to move from criticism to critique, and what I am calling at present criticality. That is that we have moved from criticism which is a form of finding fault and of exercising judgement according to a consensus of values, to critique which is examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to appear as a convincing logic, to criticality which is operating from an uncertain ground of actual embeddedness [!]. By this I mean, that criticality while building on critique wants nevertheless to inhabit culture in relation other than one of critical analysis; other than one of illuminating flaws, locating elisions, allocating blames. [...] What interests me in ‘criticality’ [...] is that it brings together that being studied and those doing the studying, in an indelible unity. Within what I am calling ‘criticality’ it is not possible to stand outside of the problematic and objectify it as a disinterested mode of learning. Criticality is then a recognition that we may be fully armed with theoretical knowledge, we may be capable of the most sophisticated modes of analysis but we nevertheless are also living out the very conditions we are trying to analyse and come to terms with. Therefore, criticality is a state of duality in which one is at one and the same time, both empowered and disempowered, knowing and unknowing [...]. Philosophically we might say that it is a form of ontology that is being advocated, a ‘living things out’ which has a hugely transformative power as opposed to pronouncing on them. In the duration of this activity, in the actual inhabitation, a shift might occur that we generate through the modalities of that occupation rather than through a judgement upon it. That is what I am trying to intimate by ‘embodied criticality’.”<sup>14</sup>

## **Smuggling/ crossing boundaries as an artistic strategy\_ in my artistic practice:**

**1.** Apart from anchoring my concept in the ornamental – to which the cross-cultural is intrinsic – since 2008, I have been doing my drawing work on Chinese rice paper, which I define as a cultural carrier...

Repetition/ overlap with chapter\_Nomadism & Transculturality



In my work, I cross a few more such micro-boundaries in the way I handle materials and apply visual techniques...

Repetition/ overlap with chapter\_Nomadism & Transculturality



**5.** By assimilating traditional, customary materials, I learned to approach the “other” carefully, nonverbally; by imitating, and listening to the materiality, I began to understand better what sharing means, or how two-dimensionality can suddenly turn into three-dimensionality: I faked the typical small gold inclusions in Chinese rice paper...

Repetition/ overlap with chapter\_Nomadism & Transculturality



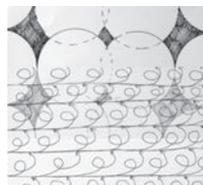
**6.** In more recent works I proceeded in a slightly more subtle manner, so that the difference between imitation and original did not become noticeable...

Repetition/overlap with chapter\_Nomadism & Transculturality



**7.** In my most recent project “Void Lands”, a collaboration with the photographer and blogger Stefanie Thiedig, Beijing...

Repetition/overlap with chapter\_Ornament & Emptiness



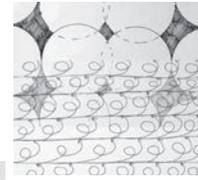
*Becoming temporary*

*Becoming permanent*

## Blackening/ Smuggling Etymology

Our symposium in August 2015 is dedicated to "Smuggling".  
Upper Austrian dialect: Schwärzen, English: Blackening/  
Smuggling...

Repetition/ overlap with chapter\_Ornament & Emptiness



## Smuggling of works

The same applies to the works created abroad which, thanks to the flexible, thin material, remained easily rollable. In this way, my mobile artistic concept enables me to fly from Europe to China, to Australia and back, always carrying along my "paper". Chinese airport employees generally give me a sympathetic look when they behold a foreigner like myself transporting Chinese paper home. In terms of the actual commodity-/ market value of the material, I am certainly moving in a grey area. In China/Australia, each visitor entering the country is required to fill in an arrival form that declares the import of goods above a certain value to be prohibited; and once I have entered the country, I overstep the next line of legality, because I still travel around as a tourist and, despite this status, work with Chinese galleries that, in turn, have to transfer their revenue via Hong Kong to my account in Germany, where I legally declare the amount received as income. From an economic standpoint, the logistical effort does not pay off. Nevertheless, I have been involved with this artistic project for some eight years: I spent years smuggling myself from residency to residency, living in any accommodation, from fancy studio to a mansion, that was either for free or barely affordable.

For years, I had whitewashed my existence in Germany...

Repetition/ overlap with chapter\_Biography



For financial reasons, too, this insurance entitlement is a matter of perspective...

Repetition/ overlap with chapter\_Biography





*By means of these narrative examples I hope to have illustrated the points of view that I used to illuminate the concept of smuggling and how wide we have cast our nets in covering this topic since August 2015. In a process of mutual exchange, and considering the ever-changing Wernstein/ Inn context, we have adjusted the topic in such a way as to enable the created works to be understandable against this background. Considering all this, we can now dock in the present time:*

This is how our exhibition project developed: in autumn 2014, my distant cousin Ingeborg Habereeder (who is a curator in Vienna and at the Egon Schiele Art Centrum in Český Krumlov) and I were sitting in the living room of her house in Wernstein/ Inn in Upper Austria. While enjoying the view of the river flowing past us and of the opposite riverbank that belongs to Bavaria, Germany, we pondered over possible themes for a project involving a group of artists whom we would invite to this border town in order to work thematically here.

At that time, I had just moved (back) to Berlin, and had fallen rapturously in love, floating on a bed of roses in the anticipation of a secret affair, and, as part of my own research work, had just read Irit Rogoff's impressive essay "Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality", which touches on essential aspects of my artistic practice. Against the background of this text, in combination with the scenic and historical background of the town of Wernstein and our current position in Inge's living room, and looking across the border marked by the green river Inn, I came up with the idea of developing and holding a symposium on a subject that was very close to my heart: "smuggling". Over the next two years, the story took its course and the idea assumed a concrete shape.

Less than a year later, in August 2015, eight artists and art collectives were gathered in Wernstein to consider everything that could possibly be classified under the term "smuggling", while consuming good and plentiful food (to quote one female participant: "With each passing day, the belly grows and the brain shrinks"): "human trafficking" was only one aspect among many that we discussed. Even at this stage, we discussed for days whether smuggling was a suitable working topic for us and, if so, why. Alongside our delight in all things subversive, we mainly liked, or were mainly irritated by, the narrative aspect of smuggling: the fact that everyone in this regard either had their own experience to tell, or at least knew of someone who had an experience to tell. Whereby each story, like the topic itself, would oscillate between truth, fiction and myth.

Furthermore, we were attracted by the incredible topicality of "smuggling". It was only about a month later that we realised just how topical our plan had been at that first symposium in August 2015 when the so-called "refugee crisis" erupted in September, radically changing the open-border situation that had been our starting point in "Smuggling I". Suddenly, previously opened EU-borders were being reinstated. Against the background of current events, we as

initiators considered it inappropriate to continue to use “Smuggling” as project title. Consequently, in the winter/ to spring of 2016, we agreed to shift the focus from “smuggling” towards the existing situation and the border (towns) that form the precondition for smuggling, and adapted the title accordingly to “Wernstein & Neuburg/Inn – Border Locations”.

In this way, we chose Wernstein (AT) and Neuburg (DE), both situated on the borderline drawn by the river Inn, as our field and model, one that we had had the opportunity to animate from the highly diverse perspectives offered by each of us or that we had collectively agreed upon in the process from 2014 to 2017.

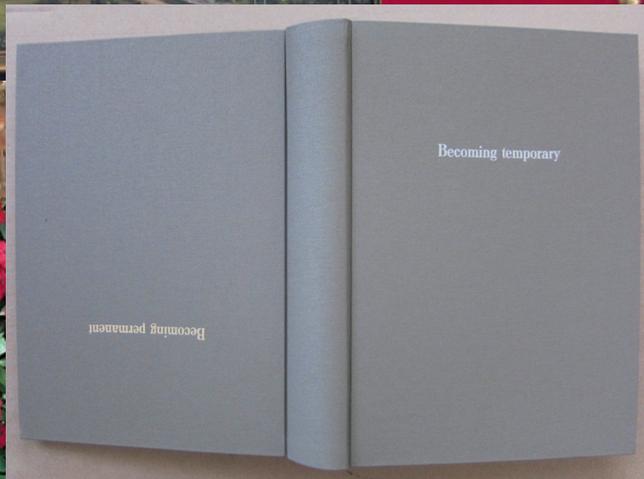
### **Many dots still don't make a line**

As a result, the meeting of the group of artists one year later in August 2016 took place under the new title “Wernstein & Neuburg/ Inn – Border Locations”, and this remained the subtitle of the associated exhibition in 2017. The meetings that took place in 2016 and early 2017 were dedicated primarily to discussing the participants’ individual project ideas that had been conceived over the previous year, with a further focus placed on strengthening the overall group plan as a means of holding everything together in a more comprehensive sense: we agreed on a two-day exhibition programme to take place in the border towns of Wernstein and Neuburg/Inn from 22 to 23 July 2017, during which the individual project ideas (all works in the semi-public space, performances, music) would be presented.

On 24 July 2017, at the conclusion of this programme, we staged a real German-Austrian-Australian wedding, whose protagonists my partner, Rodney McDonald, and I will hopefully be for the rest of our lives.

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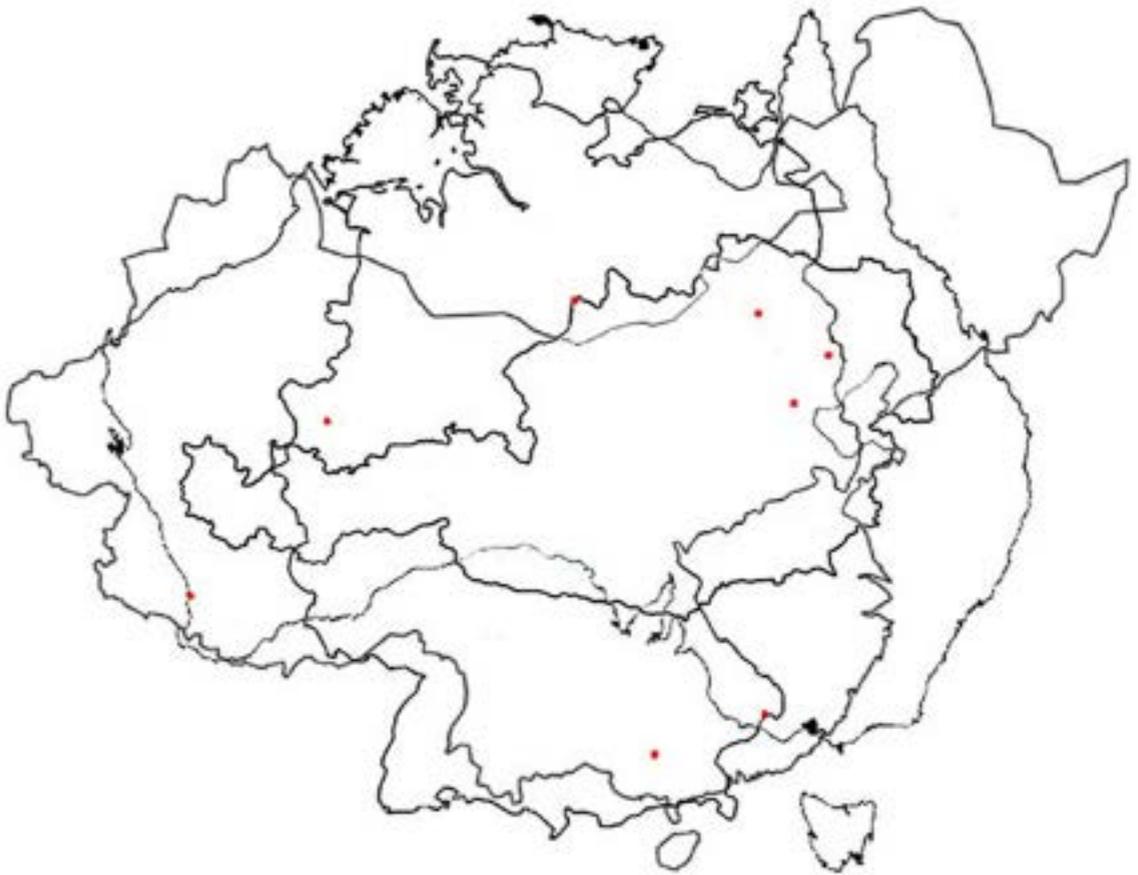
Whoever else will share this theatre with us ultimately remains to be seen...



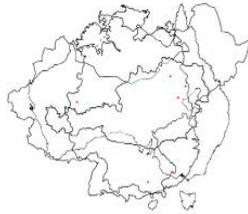




Archive Part 2, installation, Ortsarchiv Wernstein 2017



# **Story of a Smuggler \_Nomadism & Transculturality**



Besides I had got to know my present husband, in 2008 in Beijing, who immediately expanded my horizon by another culture...

Repetition/overlap with chapter\_Biography



### **My nomadism 2009 to 2016**

Nomadism is a concept (and my concept) – the Australian poet, art critic and curator John Mateer put it: “Nomadism is a concept, due to opportunity and necessity” (cf. talk on the exhibition “In Confidence: Reorientations in Recent Art”, PICA, Perth 2013): My commuting between cultures became a project in its own right that I could live out because I had the opportunity to do so and because it simply became a necessity: pursuing my artistic strategy as an in-between against the background of which I kept carrying on my rather traditional artistic activities. After several years of living between cultures, I realised that this had become the real content of my work and that I had to conceptualise the latter accordingly. My art became inseparably interwoven with the concept of movement and the constant, repetitive change of perspectives; over the years, my art refined itself on account of my increasingly targeted theoretical analysis of the theme of **transculturality**.

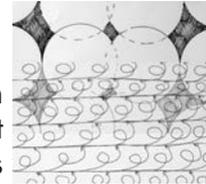
And, moreover, I ask myself: by tracing the ornament as a structure that traverses/unites all cultures, am I, from the very outset, conceptualising my work as transcultural? Can I make this claim/ put this up for discussion?

At any rate, the structure of the ornamental can be found in all cultures; in China, however, I always had the feeling that it is internalised – and lived out in reality...



Repetition/overlap, chapter\_Biography and chapter\_Ornament & Emptiness

According to Wolfgang Welsch's essay "Was ist eigentlich Transkulturalität?" ("What is transculturality?"), transcultural art is a type of art that is permeated by several cultural elements and subsequently respects the single identities, that does not open up dichotomies but transcends boundaries, permeates both sides and, in doing so, follows alternative methods, like those used in Irit Rogoff's "Smuggling".



### **Smuggling/ crossing boundaries as an artistic strategy\_ in my artistic practice:**

1. Apart from anchoring my concept in the ornamental to which the cross-cultural is intrinsic, I have been doing my drawing work on Chinese rice paper since 2008, which I define as a "cultural carrier". This carrier brings the other culture into play in a fundamental manner. Furthermore, I also combine traditional techniques (for example, the craftsmanship of a Chinese papermaker who can seamlessly join several formats into a single large one) with my autodidactic collage technique. I aim to retain the Chinese papermaker's 3 mm overlap (which serves simultaneously as borderline and joint of the two formats) untouched in all its beauty – that is, I do not apply any colour or drawing in this area and stop the ink/ let it dry in time before it approaches this border, while trying to combine this method with my own drawing technique. My principle is to let the other technique exist, while placing my own on an equal footing next to it. I don't really like the dichotomy between myself and the other, but it exists – or rather: this difference always includes a common element too.



**Way to Hanshan**\_\_unfinished butterfly, rice paper 2x65x98 cm  
(left half collaged by a Beijing paper craftsman, right half collaged by me) Beijing 2016



Material: rice paper 4x200x98 cm (joined together by a Beijing paper craftsman applying a traditional technique, roll of around 800 cm)



I cross a few more such micro-boundaries in the way I handle materials and apply artistic techniques in my work. Although every one of these practices is legitimate, while applying or implementing them, a kind of special mystical moment of interaction occurs with a tilting in which the quality of things is reversed and the assignment of roles and origins is no longer clear, just as in clandestine smuggling: subjects blend with objects; the inside blends with the outside...

Carrying the creative process further, I trace the course of the dry edges caused by ink and water. I let myself be guided by the interaction of materials and their logic. This often results in a reversal of the assignment of the subject and the object. The material teaches me thereby transforming me into the object. This act of listening or entering into communication is part of an equal, transcultural and also feminist practice.

**5.** In assimilating traditional, customary materials, I learned to approach the "other" carefully, nonverbally: by imitating, and listening to the materiality, I began to understand better what sharing means, or how two-dimensionality can suddenly turn into three-dimensionality: I faked the typical small gold inclusions in Chinese rice paper by applying real gold leaf onto rice paper. As a logical consequence of this procedure, once I had applied the gold leaf emulsion, I also needed to treat the sticky back side of the paper. In this mimetic process of approaching I simulate something that does not exist. In this legitimate crossing of boundaries, however, a noticeable, albeit quiet and secret upheaval is happening; a change in the quality of the thing is to be observed: an object had emerged from the paper format.







6. In more recent works I proceeded in a slightly more subtle manner, so that the difference between imitation and original became unnoticeable – unless I explicitly point it out. I imitated the bright yellow colourfulness of the purchased rice paper by applying yellow ink layers on white rice paper and combining both types of paper in one format.

In this way, I showed both elements side by side and/ or even made them overlap. Each overlap and collage creates a new dense/ empty landscape. In the joining together of different parts – in the sense of the art-historical definition of collage – a novel meaning and space emerges or it is created through omission and emptiness.

On 24 July 2017, at the conclusion of this programme, we staged a real German-Austrian-Australian wedding, whose protagonists my partner, Rodney McDonald, and I will hopefully be for the rest of our lives. The wedding act took place adjunct to the exhibition program; respecting, in the true transcultural sense, the difference/ formal otherness of the events, but nonetheless using the field created by the exhibition, Wernstein and Neuburg/ Inn.

Whoever else will share this theatre with us ultimately remains to be seen...

Repetition/overlap with chapter\_Biography



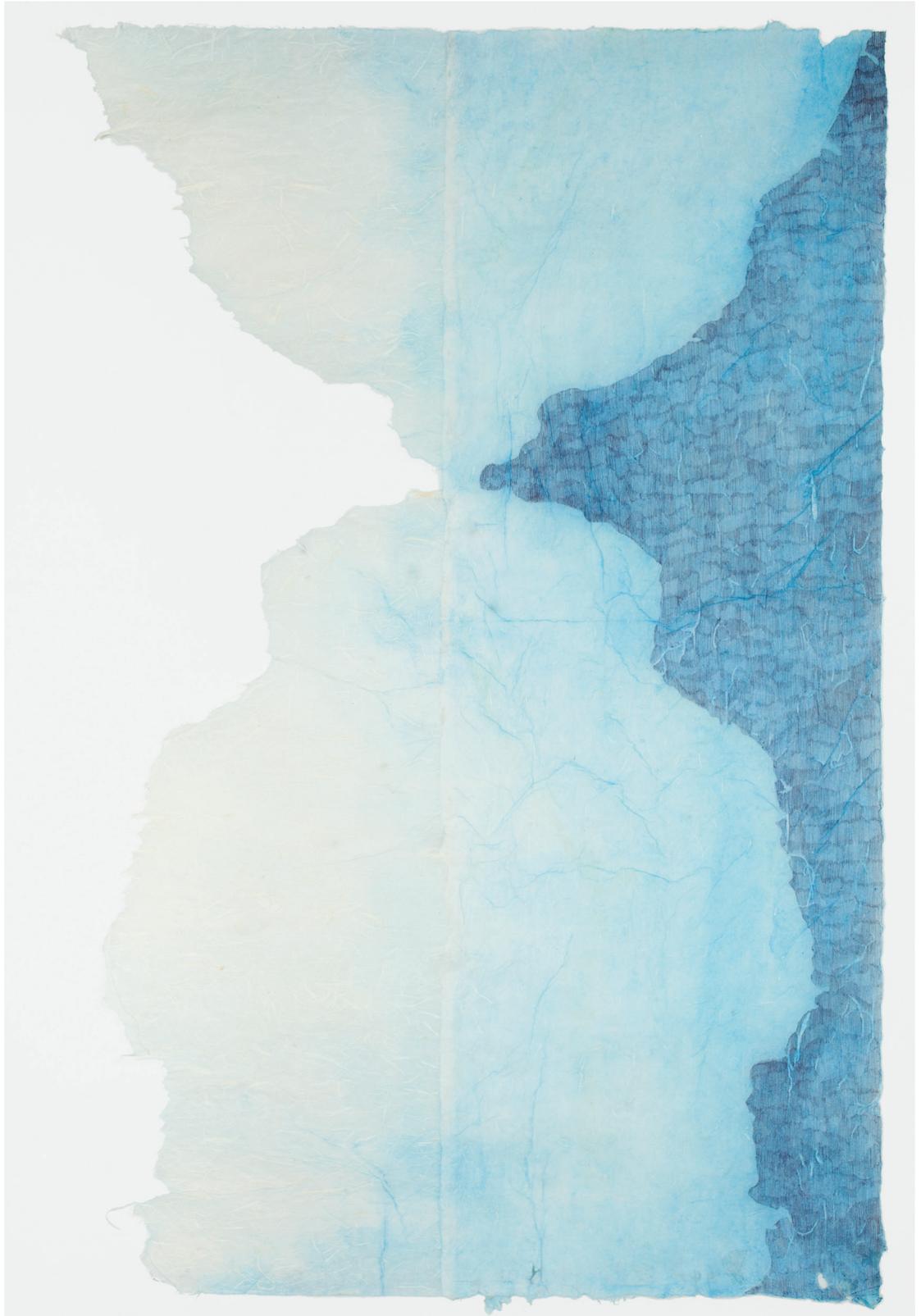
**mirror\_oriental ink**, ballpoint pen on Chinese paper(collage)  
800x98 cm, exhibition view: "New Traditions",  
Palais am Festungsgraben Berlin 2016.

**orange dragon**, ink, ballpoint pen, goldleaf on Chinese paper  
115x80 cm, Beijing 2011.

**(Abb. r) YPG**, ink, ballpoint pen on Chinese paper(collage) 105x80 cm,  
Berlin 2015/ 16.

**empty∞harmony**, ink, ballpoint pen on Chinese paper 105x80 cm,  
Berlin/ Perth 2013.







## **Epilogue**

by Michael Hauffen (artist and art critic, Berlin)

Even as economic forces are driving ever onwards the process of globalisation, political structures continue to be determined by national states, who define themselves through borders. While technology, at the speed of light and in real time, is opening up virtual spaces and facilitating digital communication, national states remain defined by boundaries that refer to geographical spaces. And while cultures are increasingly mixing and intersecting, traversing one another's borders, national states are retreating back more and more into an imagined ideal type based on national traditions that translate the separation between internal and external into the dictates of a norm. The tensions and frictions resulting from these redundant contradictions cause a dialectic of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, generating productive uncertainties and sharpening the attention given to that which demands protection. However, the potential for adaptation, correction and compensation is increasingly being threatened by failure; crises are escalating and time horizons narrowing; the threatened disintegration of viable societal structures is a dominant feature of contemporary experience.

is familiar with the dark sides of national borders because she grew up in a border region. Today she prefers to experience this dynamic – with its opportunities and risks – from the artistic perspective. In avant-garde art, uncertainties, dynamics and frictions are valued. Transgression seems to be a condition of creativity even. At the same time, however, there exists a need for an imaginary order that makes the unbearable bearable, that serves the anti-realism of feelings, and that stabilises the self no later than the point that lies just before its collapse. Therefore, art is always about viable constructs, about identity, and about duration, too. All these aspects can be found in A.D.'s works.

### **Practical Mimesis**

Transgressive subjectivity is formed through nomadic world experience. Artists' trips in this sense have a long-standing tradition, within which the scale stretches from comfortable sightseeing tours to adventurous journeys into the unknown. At an early stage of her self-discovery/ self-invention, A.D. used a scholarship stay in China not just to marvel at the foreign culture, or manipulate it in a consumerist way – say in the sense of adapting exotic motifs – but also actually to inhabit it.

## **Xiang Mei**

It is A.D.'s intervention in Chongqing that perhaps best demonstrates the experimentally interventionist way she has chosen for communicating with the foreign: inspired by well-known historical posters (from Shanghai in the 1930s), on each of which two women can be seen in a suggestively erotic relationship, A.D. created large posters on which she addressed in different variations the subject matter of these figures and interpreted them through drawing and painting. She then put these posters up on a concrete wall near a small market square – a non-verbal form of establishing contact with a community, presenting herself as a subject and demonstrating her sympathy for certain cultural peculiarities.

## **Ink Painting**

Subsequently, A.D. not only turned more intensely towards the medium of drawing, but also engaged in ink painting, throwing herself into a sort of auto-didactic apprenticeship that naturally also required, in addition to practical craftsmanship, the in-depth contemplation of the great masters of this art. She came across the great importance of Chinese rice paper, which is still produced today in manual processes and in a variety of qualities, whereby the aim is to create certain structures that evoke certain aesthetic effects. For example, by mixing harder and softer fibres of different lengths, and in different positions and distributions, the aesthetic effect is steered without lending itself ultimately to being set. The creative potential that falls to coincidence in this process can then be tapped in the final selection process. The purchase of suitable pieces of paper – either from merchants or directly from manufacturers – is from this perspective the first decisive step in the artistic work with this medium, and it goes hand in hand with more or less non-verbal communication with people who have already made intuitive preliminary decisions regarding aesthetic qualities, and who, additionally, are also seeking an exchange with regard to their preferences – and this in itself already provides for both parties a form of aesthetic-communicative productivity. You could also define this as a kind of keynote that anchors art in cultural life, beyond abstract codes.

(In this regard, the following parallel comes to mind: the Chinese language is known for the fact that not only sounds determine the meaning, but also the pitch in which they are articulated. Therefore, even very young children,

who are not yet able to understand the actual meaning of particular sounds, can grasp, and reproduce, the articulation of the speech melody; as a result, Chinese children learn earlier to communicate using verbal rudiments. Julia Kristeva: *The Chinese Woman*)

### **Symmetry**

In a step that follows, ink paintings come into being on such papers. By way of motifs that arise from irregular and unsettled micro-structures that seem to trace the sensual sensation of erotic pleasure, the compositions are split in a way that corresponds to the coexistence of the sexes (along the lines of the Yin and Yang motifs that are ever-present in China) and then developed into abstract landscapes (in the broadest sense) in which symmetrical forms of order provide a kind of architectural principle. At the end of this development there are formations of repetitively mirrored sections of images or textures, which then become – say in wallpaper – a regular wall-filling pattern. An ornamental structure emerges from the original motifs, which, while still allowing pictorial elements to be recognised, entrusts the latter to a completely different visual logic, in which experience of time and space has been suspended and has given way to flat and redundant abstraction. In this mode of perception, which is reminiscent of techno music, the possibility of completely immersing oneself in the pictorial world depends on how the visual parameters are directed – that is, on the dimensioning, arrangement and constellation of individual panels. The installation “Archive Part 1” (2017) marks the point of highest self-referentiality on this line, insofar as the autonomy of repetitive symmetry dominates here and creates a visual matrix which, in turn, creates an interior space that surrounds the viewers. This quality can also be experienced interactively by means of fold-out panels, which are attached to the wall in a movable way, and can be viewed from both sides. While, in this case, the basic element is formed by a motif that is already in itself symmetrical, the similarly constructed installation “Beijing Sky” (2018) demonstrates that a photograph of the Beijing smog-sky is equally suitable for unfolding this very effect – albeit with other connotations.

## **Intervention**

In contrast, another line of A.D.'s work is characterised by the intensification of the practice of intervention in public contexts, as described above. In "Archive Part 2" (2017) set in a local history archive of Wernstein/ Inn, A.D. placed between the existing exhibits a number of her own pieces from different work phases, doing so in a way that could be called minimally invasive, since her pieces did not change the existing structure, but merely settled in quasi-parasitically. What counts for her here is the element of surprise, the subtle break with the given theme. Against the local frame of reference of the local history museum she sets her own processed travel experiences – testament to a process of becoming foreign – to form a subversive contrast that not only negates the localness, but also opens, or even blows, it up. The process of globalisation that is massively perceptible today is channelled/smuggled in as a counterpart to the familiar localness, and in this way corrects the reactive focus on the local identity.

## **Tension**

A.D. presented these last two works in the context of the small festival "Many dots still don't make a line" ("Viele Punkte ergeben noch keine Linie") which she also co-curated. For the festival, she invited a number of artists and theorists to her home town in the border region and thereby unfolded, so to speak, a hand fan of artistic practice with which she identified as an artist. Within this field, she engaged herself on several lines that branch out and cross one another. Some of these lines have been mentioned here; all of them are characterised by a relationship between surface and depth that arouses curiosity and provokes questions. They smuggle irritations into the wrinkles of our reality, and this more than anything makes them a valuable contribution, because the latter requires our full attention.

**Exhibition views** Many dots still don't make a line



**Stop**, Echo Ho, VideoStill: Echo Ho



**Transversala**, PRINZpod,  
Photo: Alice Dittmar



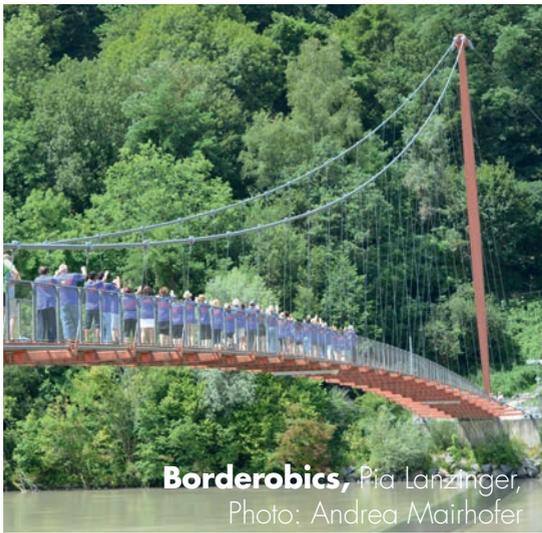
**Utopie Europa - Grenzen u. Möglichkeiten**, Photo: Brigitte Podgorscheck



**Hier und Anderswo - Histories from Somewhere Else**,  
Bitter & Weber, Photo: Brigitte Podgorscheck



**Performative speech** about the art projects,  
Michael Hauffen, Photo: Kerem Halman



**Borderobics**, Pia Lanzinger,  
Photo: Andrea Mairhofer



**Archive 2**, Alice Dittmar,  
Photo: Alice Dittmar



**Border Lights**, Zora Kreuzer, Photo: Zora Kreuzer

