

An aerial photograph of a river system. The water is a vibrant, almost neon green, with large sections of deep red or maroon water interspersed. The river winds through a landscape that appears to be a mix of natural terrain and possibly agricultural or industrial areas. The overall composition is dynamic and visually striking.

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Juni 2022 32. Jahrgang Heft 126
€ 16,50 [D] / \$ 25,-

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PREFACE

This June issue of *Texte zur Kunst*, whose thematic focus was conceived for the first time in the magazine's 30-year history by three guest editors, is dedicated to the politics of memory and forms of ritualized mourning in art and culture. For the German title, we chose the verb *trauern* rather than the noun *Trauer* to signal that we are interested not in an analysis of an ostensibly universal emotion or general state of affairs but in the concrete and diverse practices of engagement with loss and grief as a continual challenge to society. In discussing the potential political dimension of painful and traumatic experiences, the contributions gathered in the following pages aim to draw attention to the transformative powers of grief – formed in relations of violence yet also holding the ability to transcend them. We raise questions concerning the resistant potential of negative affectivity as well as the obstruction and reappropriation of mourning in connection with historical forms of violence.

Judith Butler – who is referenced by several of the contributors – has argued that mourning is always already political, being mediated and structured by normative processes of recognition and projections of community. A divide emerges between those who are publicly mourned and those who are considered ungrievable and excluded from collective mourning. Meanwhile, the experience of loss and vulnerability also reveals the fundamental relationality of the subject, its constitutive dependency on others and other things. Building on – and going beyond – Butler's work, this issue seeks to outline a perspective that enables us to identify forms of agency and resistance in the “zones of ungrievability”: How do individuals who are deemed unworthy of being mourned assert that worthiness? In light of these

concerns, the contributions address questions of loss and working through trauma in the context of racist and right-wing violence and shed light on cultures of memory in film, literature, and visual art.

Combining affect theory with a critique of racism, the sociologist Çiğdem Inan develops the theoretical notion of “dispossessed mourning,” which she applies to the long history of racially motivated victim-blaming in Germany. Her essay discusses affective and political dimensions of mourning and proposes a different form of grief work that not only exposes the structures of denial employed by racists and the Right but also constitutes a site of resistant modes of affect against racist immunization. The writer Cynthia Cruz similarly examines the site of an ungrievable loss, in this instance, of the working class. Synthesizing psychoanalysis and a critique of capitalism, Cruz studies melancholy as the specific form of mourning of a working class whose existence is denied by the hegemonic discourse, and she inquires into possible avenues of emancipation that might be charted from a position of “nothingness.”

Tying in the idea of a depathologization of melancholy, the cultural and media theorist Elena Meilicke picks up on the concept of “prolonged grief disorder,” a fairly recent addition to the psychiatric diagnostic toolset, to ask how the resilience paradigm has come to inform notions of “appropriate” grief. Articulating a critique of resilient mourning, her contribution advocates a deliberately and radically open work on grief as a potentially transformative process. The artist Eliana Otta, for her part, takes the Chicago-based Feel Tank's motto “Depressed? It Might Be Political!” seriously, mapping biographical and political

narratives of depressive states along Greece's austerity policies and Peruvian Indigenous groups' experiences of violence during the government's military crackdown on guerrilla groups between 1980 and 2000.

In her autobiographical book *The Light of the World*, Elizabeth Alexander writes about grieving the death of her partner. Embedding reflections on the role of art in the process of mourning, the book reaches beyond her personal loss, resonating with collective forms of remembering and mourning in the wake of racist violence, as the writer and historian Edna Bonhomme argues in a rereading of the 2015 memoir. Likewise, the artist and writer Njoki Ngumi objects to the kind of expectations that circulate in the debates over the restitution of African cultural assets. Without denying the grief over the loss of objects looted during the colonial era, Ngumi's essayistic intervention shifts our perspective: refusing to be cast, with all Africans, as a perpetually grieving supplicant, she insists on a subject position that reframes the premise of an encounter with the expropriators.

Continuing the work of the decades-long discussions around the restitution of looted cultural assets, a young generation of activists and artists has been raising demands that have yielded immediate changes: Ngumi is a member of the Kenyan artist collective *The Nest*, a key contributor to this year's *Documenta*. The 12th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art's decolonial concept was developed by a team bringing diverse biographical and disciplinary backgrounds to the table. Restitution has long come to mean more than the demand that objects be returned; it includes processes of the negotiation and redefinition of cultures of memory. What can mourning teach us in this context? How can forms – and especially creative forms – of commemoration and recollection be conceived that accommodate the dynamics, process-based quality, and perhaps forever-inconclusive nature of grief? In a roundtable conversation moderated by the scholar and curator Mahret Ifeoma Kupka, the artists Fatma

Aydemir, Talya Lubinsky, Gladys Kalichini, and Henrike Naumann discuss problematic forms of the politics of mourning and memory and challenge us to recognize the transformative role that artistic practices play in this connection.

When we started making plans for this issue, the world was emerging from a coronavirus pandemic that had dragged on for more than two years; the biopolitical management of the worldwide spread of an infectious disease had thrown the intersectionality of capitalist crisis phenomena into sharp relief. Since February 2022, Russia's war in Ukraine has left no doubt about the Russian government's neo-imperialist strategies. These are two fresh events in a long and global chain of ongoing violent conflicts that have caused suffering and grief but also sparked struggles and concrete expressions of solidarity. Both events continually remind us not only that life is precarious and vulnerable but also that the grief in the experiences of pandemic and war is rife with social inequality. We must begin to understand mourning as a process – one that is open-ended and perhaps constitutively incapable of closure. Mourning and the reflection on mourning will remain constant political challenges.

ÇİĞDEM INAN, MAHRET IFEOMA KUPKA,
AND ELENA MEILICKE

Translation: Gerrit Jackson

Diese Juni-Ausgabe von *Texte zur Kunst*, deren Themenschwerpunkt erstmals in der 30-jährigen Geschichte des Magazins von drei Gastherausgeberinnen konzipiert wurde, widmet sich Politiken der Erinnerung und Formen ritualisierter Trauer in Kunst und Kultur. Für den deutschen Titel haben wir das Verb „trauern“ dem Substantiv „Trauer“ vorgezogen, da es uns nicht um die Analyse eines vermeintlich universellen Gefühls oder Allgemeinzustands geht, sondern um konkrete und vielfältige Praktiken im Umgang mit Verlust und Trauer als kontinuierlicher Herausforderung an die Gesellschaft. Wenn wir in diesem Heft die Politikfähigkeit von schmerzvollen und traumatischen Erfahrungen diskutieren, möchten wir vor allem auf die transformatorischen Kräfte des Trauerns aufmerksam machen, die sich in Gewaltverhältnissen bilden und die diese immanent überschreiten können. Fragen nach dem widerständigen Potenzial negativer Affektivität stellen sich uns dabei ebenso wie solche nach der Verunmöglichung und Wiederaneignung von Trauer im Zusammenhang mit historischen Formen von Gewalt.

Für Judith Butler – und auf Butler beziehen sich gleich mehrere Beiträge dieses Heftes – ist Trauer immer schon politisch, da sie durch normative Anerkennungsprozesse und Projektionen von Gemeinschaftlichkeit vermittelt und strukturiert wird. Sichtbar wird die Grenze zwischen denen, die öffentlich betrauert, und jenen, die als Unbetrauerbare von kollektiver Trauer ausgeschlossen werden. Gleichzeitig offenbart die Erfahrung von Verlust und Verletzbarkeit die fundamentale Relationalität des Subjekts, seine konstitutive Verwiesenheit auf andere und anderes. An Butler anknüpfend und zugleich über Butler hinausgehend, versucht das Heft eine Perspektive

einzuschlagen, durch die sich in den „Zonen der Unbetrauerbarkeit“ Formen von Handlungsfähigkeit und Widerständigkeit finden lassen: Wie erobern sich Personen, die als Unbetrauerbare gelten, ihre Betrauerbarkeit zurück? Vor diesem Hintergrund verhandelt das Heft Fragen des Verlusts und der Traumaverarbeitung im Kontext rassistischer und rechter Gewalt und beleuchtet Erinnerungskulturen im Film, in der Literatur sowie in der bildenden Kunst.

So entwickelt die Soziologin Çiğdem Inan in affekttheoretischer und rassistuskritischer Perspektive die theoretische Figur der „enteigneten Trauer“ und bezieht diese auf die lange Geschichte rassistisch motivierter Täter-Opfer-Umkehrungen in Deutschland. Der Beitrag diskutiert affektive und politische Dimensionen von Trauer und zielt auf eine Veränderung der Trauerarbeit, die nicht nur die Verleugnungsstrukturen von rassistischer und rechter Seite offenlegt, sondern auch einen Schauplatz widerständiger Affizierungsweisen gegen rassistische Immunisierung bildet. In ähnlicher Weise thematisiert auch die Schriftstellerin Cynthia Cruz den Ort der Unbetrauerbarkeit des Verlusts, in ihrem Fall: der Arbeiter*innenklasse. In einer Verbindung von Kapitalismuskritik und Psychoanalyse untersucht sie Melancholie als spezifische Form der Trauer einer Arbeiter*innenklasse, deren Existenz vom hegemonialen Diskurs verleugnet wird, und fragt nach Möglichkeiten der Emanzipation, die sich aus einer Position der *nothingness* heraus ergeben könnten.

Den Faden einer Entpathologisierung der Melancholie greift die Medien- und Kulturwissenschaftlerin Elena Meilicke auf. Dafür nimmt sie die relativ neue psychiatrische Diagnose einer „anhaltenden Trauerstörung“ zum Anlass zu fragen, wie das Resilienzparadigma in Vorstellungen

vom „richtigen“ Trauern Einzug gehalten hat. Ihr Beitrag formuliert eine Kritik resilienten Trauerns und plädiert stattdessen für ein radikales Offenhalten einer Arbeit an der Trauer als potenziell transformativen Prozess. Das Motto des Chicagoer Feel Tank „Depressed? It Might Be Political!“ nimmt wiederum die Künstlerin Eliana Otta ernst, indem sie biografische und politische Erzählungen depressiver Zustände entlang der Austeritätspolitik in Griechenland und der Gewalterfahrungen indigener Bevölkerungen im Kontext staatlicher Aufstandsbekämpfung gegen peruanische Guerillagruppen zwischen 1980 und 2000 kartografiert.

In ihrer Autobiografie *The Light of the World* schreibt Elizabeth Alexander über ihre Trauer angesichts des Todes ihres Partners. Eingebettet in Reflexionen über die Rolle von Kunst im Trauerprozess weist das Buch über den persönlichen Verlust hinaus und resoniert mit kollektiven Formen des Erinnerns und Betrauerns im Ausgang rassistischer Gewalt, wie die Autorin und Historikerin Edna Bonhomme in ihrer Neubetrachtung des 2015 erschienenen Memoirs darlegt. Derart verwehrt sich auch die Künstlerin und Autorin Njoki Ngumi in ihrer essayistischen Intervention gegen Erwartungen, wie sie in den Debatten um die Restitution afrikanischer Kulturgüter kursieren. Ohne die Trauer über den Verlust geraubter Objekte während des Kolonialismus zu leugnen, verschiebt Ngumi die Perspektive: Anstatt als Afrikanerin stets trauernde Bittstellerin zu sein, fordert sie eine Subjektposition ein, die die Prämissen einer Begegnung mit den Enteignern neu formiert.

Eine junge Generation von Aktivist*innen und Künstler*innen setzt die Arbeit der seit Jahrzehnten geführten Diskussionen um die Restitution geraubter Kulturgüter fort und stellt Forderungen, die zu unmittelbaren Veränderungen führen: Ngumi ist Mitglied des kenianischen Künstler*innenkollektivs The Nest, das maßgeblich an der diesjährigen Documenta beteiligt ist. Die 12. Berlin Biennale für zeitgenössische Kunst wartet mit einem dekolonialen Konzept und

einem Team mit unterschiedlichen biografischen und disziplinären Hintergründen auf. Restitution bedeutet längst nicht mehr nur Forderung von Rückgaben, sondern schließt Prozesse des Verhandeln und der Neubestimmung von Erinnerungskulturen mit ein. Was kann uns Trauer in diesem Kontext lehren? Wie kann man Formen des Gedenkens und Erinnerns, zumal künstlerische, so fassen, dass sie der Bewegung, dem Prozesshaften und womöglich auch dem Unabschließbaren, das Trauern innewohnt, Rechnung tragen? Das Roundtable-Gespräch, das die Kunstwissenschaftlerin und Kuratorin Mahret Ifeoma Kupka mit den Künstler*innen Fatma Aydemir, Talya Lubinsky, Gladys Kalichini und Henrike Naumann geführt hat, diskutiert problematische Formen der Trauer- und Erinnerungspolitik und fordert, künstlerische Praxis dahingehend als transformativ zu begreifen.

Als wir damit begannen, dieses Heft zu konzipieren, hatte die Welt gut zwei Jahre Corona-Pandemie und damit die biopolitische Verwaltung einer globalen Ansteckungskrankheit hinter sich, die die Intersektionalität kapitalistischer Krisenphänomene in aller Deutlichkeit zum Vorschein treten ließ. Seit Februar 2022 verdeutlicht der russische Krieg gegen die Ukraine die neoimperialistischen Strategien der russischen Administration. Zwei Ereignisse, die sich einreihen in eine weltweite Kette aktueller gewaltsamer Konflikte, die Leid und Trauern, aber auch Kämpfe und Solidarisierungen mit sich bringen. In ihnen wird nicht nur die Tatsache, dass das Leben gefährdet und verletztlich ist, präsent gehalten, sondern auch, dass das Trauern in den Erfahrungen von Pandemie und Krieg von sozialen Ungleichheiten durchkreuzt ist. Es gilt, das Trauern als etwas zu begreifen, das im Prozess stattfindet, vielleicht auch konstitutiv unabschließbar und mit offenem Ende ist. Das Trauern und das Nachdenken über das Trauern werden uns als politische Herausforderung weiter begleiten.

**ÇİĞDEM INAN, MAHRET IFEOMA KUPKA
UND ELENA MEILICKE**

AUSGABE / ISSUE #126
TRAUERN / MOURNING

REVIEWS

PROJECTING OUR ANXIETIES

Adela Kim on Andrea Fraser at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart



"Andrea Fraser: This meeting is being recorded," Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 2021–22, installation view

The racial reckoning ignited by the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 in the United States and beyond prompted an urgent confrontation with whiteness and white people's complicity in the racism that pervades society. Andrea Fraser's most recent work, exhibited in Stuttgart, engages in this reflection, reenacting a group discussion among seven white women on issues of race. The work is one of three video-performance works exhibited; the other two illustrate Fraser's long-standing interrogations of intersubjective and intrasubjective relations. As art historian Adela Kim argues here, Fraser's latest work proposes a turn in the long practice of institutional critique.

How would you feel if you heard a white woman confess that she may have married a Black man to "escape" her whiteness? Or that she hesitates to speak because she "might not be correct"? How about her fearing that she has nothing to offer in dismantling structural racism? As Fraser emphatically performs a discussion among seven white, intergenerational women on issues of race in *This meeting is being recorded* (2021), one might feel anger, frustration, or woe. I can say that for myself, a millennial Asian American woman, the initial emotion was cautious empathy – for I, too, have worried about my ability to be an ally. Then, an overwhelming sense of shame: perhaps I was too aligned with whiteness – something that my

younger self had aspired to, and a mark that has haunted me ever since.

“This meeting is being recorded,” the eponymous exhibition at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, presents Fraser’s long-standing interrogations of intersubjective and intrasubjective relations with three video-performance works: *Projection* (2008), *Men on the Line: Men Committed to Feminism*, KPFK, 1972 (2012/2014), and *This meeting is being recorded* (2021) – her first video work in seven years. Similar to Fraser’s earlier works, such as *Museum Highlights*, the three works are based on laboriously edited scripts. But there are a few departures: unlike the early works’ publicly culled sources, the trio’s scripts are based on deeply private dialogue. In these works, Fraser also stares directly at the viewer the entire time, forbidding their attention from waning. Importantly – and most likely the grounds for the shifts – the works postdate 2007, when Fraser began her involvement with *Group Relations* after her forays into psychoanalysis and Pierre Bourdieu’s socioanalysis.

A brief word on *Group Relations*, a method of studying groups and organizations as developed by the British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion: focusing on the mechanisms of projection and introjection – the extrusion of unwanted feelings and the internalization of desired ones – Bion expanded Sigmund Freud’s and Melanie Klein’s developmental theories to provide group treatment to World War II veterans suffering from PTSD. In recent years, *Group Relations* has gained a certain cult status; people as varied as social workers, art historians (such as myself), and business executives participate in “conferences” that last up to two weeks. The task of such conferences is to convene in small groups and analyze the dynamics that surface, with the “consultant,” a

de facto leader from the conference organizers, occasionally chiming in. Fraser’s exhibition is carefully staged to echo these conferences. For *This meeting is being recorded*, the work’s installation is loosely enclosed by gray drapery, allowing light to flood the exhibition space. Six unadorned gray chairs are arranged in a semicircle, beckoning us visitors to gather. Then, a life-size Fraser emerges on the screen, seated on the same type of chair as her viewers are. Unwittingly, we have entered a *Group Relations* session.

For the following 98 minutes, the women’s discussions course through intergenerational envy; the pretensions and the burdens of nicety among white women; the “gradation of whiteness”; and the fierce commitment to feminism, on the one hand, and the resultant dread that somehow that very cause had conveniently excised issues of race, on the other. Accusations abound – Fraser cries and points fingers, declaring, “I can’t really trust the group,” and leaves frequently, unable to tolerate the tension. This is vulnerability cracked open, its sheer rawness gushing out – all under the “judging gaze” of the recording, as one participant remarks. It is also the stuff that would send any diversity and inclusion officer into a fit of panic, setting off a chain of dialing up the requisite legs and arms of the institutional bureaucracy.

However, as Fraser immaculately enacts the seven women – switching between the requisite “uh”s, the crossing of legs, the husky or the high-pitched voice – a question emerges. Who, indeed, is Fraser? Is she the artist performing the group of women, or is she performing different fragments of herself – the countless projections and introjections that she has made and accrued? By using her own self as the vehicle through which

to enact the projections of the women, Fraser illustrates the *splitting*, to use a Kleinian term, within ourselves: that our self-formation and social structures are forged and iterated in internal and external exchanges.

My status as a coolly analytical art historian, of course, does not exempt me from the projections in *This meeting is being recorded*. The projections among the women are embodied and enacted by Fraser, only to be refracted onto viewers. As Fraser – or not Fraser – speaks directly at me, I yearn to talk back: to say that yes, talking about politics in lieu of race might be a red herring. But, aware of those around me, I mute myself, keeping my face blank instead. This self-modulation, I realize, happens to each viewer in the audience. We introject and project different aspects of the conversation onto each other, like a multiheaded pendulum.

When the work concludes – with the question, “How can we ever get past the history of white privilege, white supremacy?” – a silence pregnant with frustration lingers over the audience. This resultant restlessness is what Fraser’s work proposes as a turn in the long practice of institutional critique. No longer can we naively count on a neat solution, such as the ubiquitous 45-minute cartooned anti-racism training, or accept the Marcusean prophylactic of negative thinking to salvage our ever-diminishing agency in the world of total rationalization. Instead, we must complicate negation not only as a measure of criticality but, per Fraser, also as “a kind of defense mechanism” that represses and ejects unwanted parts.¹ Only by probing our internal and external intersections can we begin the painful process of reintegrating the parts we split off. At the same time, our supposedly forgone agency reemerges as authority, whereby we

authorize ourselves to analyze the unconscious dynamics that arise.

The two other works, located on the lower floor, yield further insight into Fraser’s earlier examinations of our unconscious and social structures. *Men on the Line* (2012/2014) stems from a roundtable discussion between self-identified male feminists, which aired on Southern California’s KPFK radio station in 1972. Engulfed in darkness, we first hear a clip of Judy Chicago speaking on feminism (from the original broadcast), followed by the four men (or Fraser, in baggy pants, her legs spread out) fretting over various concerns related to being a male feminist: for instance, feeling as if women are talking behind their backs. We are jolted into that past as the work concurrently reminds us of the persistence of such rhetoric today. The word “projection” is not uttered once, but project it does. Unlike in *This meeting*, I found myself shutting down – a jarring juxtaposition to another female viewer in the room with me, who found enough hilarity in the men’s statements to laugh. Such a temporal disjuncture attests to the here and now so insistent in Fraser’s work – that at stake is not so much the context or the site specificity of the feminist movement in the 1970s, but how I might address its afterlife through the (un)conscious reactions it elicits in me.

Across from *Men on the Line* is *Projection* (2008), Fraser’s earliest work in the exhibition. Based on a series of intensive psychotherapy sessions that Fraser underwent, the work is a terse interchange between Fraser playing both herself and the psychiatrist. In yet another darkened room, the figures are screened on two channels on opposite ends of the wall, with chairs strategically placed in the center – compelling us to sit in the middle



"Andrea Fraser: This meeting is being recorded," Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 2021–22, installation view

of their exchange and viscerally experience the projections. To those of us in the art world, Fraser's professions are a rarely heard self-flagellating reflection: "I've always been extremely ambivalent about my field, and I made a kind of a career of that ambivalence to some extent. [...] I just don't think I can do it anymore."

Ever so careful to escape the performative cycle of self-apology and self-congratulations, Fraser, in the March issue of this very magazine, noted that even the fact that her works are an "artistic performance – a consciously conceptualized and crafted enactment – is itself a way of defending against the shame of raw exposure."² Maybe. But who doesn't do this? After all, despite sharing only a sliver of my private thoughts in this review, I still added the requisite theory like a dutiful art historian. All out of fear that what I've written might be taken poorly or, worse, that I might be considered a dilettante. And it is Fraser's work, after all, that's prodded me to even acknowledge as much.

"Andrea Fraser: This meeting is being recorded," Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, September 25, 2021–April 3, 2022.

Notes

- 1 Stephanie Cardon, "On the Line: Andrea Fraser Discusses the Personal and the Political," in *Andrea Fraser – Collected Interviews 1990–2018*, ed. Rhea Anastas, Alejandro Cesarco, and Andrea Fraser (Cologne: Walther König, 2019), 395.
- 2 "Sisterhood Revisited Part I: A Conversation between Sabeth Buchmann, Andrea Fraser, and Isabelle Graw," *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 125 (March 2022): 138–39.

IMPRESSUM / IMPRINT

TEXTE ZUR KUNST GmbH & Co. KG

Strausberger Platz 19
D-10243 Berlin
www.textezurkunst.de
Fon: +49 (0)30 30 10 45 330
Fax: +49 (0)30 30 10 45 344

VERLAGSLEITUNG / MANAGING DIRECTOR

Silvia Koch
verlag@textezurkunst.de

VERLAGSASSISTENZ /

ASSISTANT TO THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

Susann Kowal
mail@textezurkunst.de

REDAKTION / EDITORIAL BOARD

Fon: +49 (0)30 30 10 45 340
redaktion@textezurkunst.de

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Maximilian Klawitter
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EDITIONEN / ARTISTS' EDITIONS

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COVER

Design: Anna Sinofzik

GRAFISCHE KONZEPTION / DESIGN CONCEPT

Mathias Poledna in Zusammenarbeit mit /
in collaboration with Bärbel Messmann

LAYOUT

Sebastian Fessel
layout@textezurkunst.de

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Vierteljahreszeitschrift / quarterly magazine

EINZELVERKAUFSPREIS / SINGLE ISSUE

Euro 16,50

ABONNEMENT FÜR VIER AUSGABEN

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION (FOUR ISSUES)

Euro 50,- (zzgl. Versand / plus shipping)

**VORZUGSABONNEMENT FÜR 4 AUSGABEN UND
4 EDITIONEN / SPECIAL ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION**

(FOUR ISSUES AND FOUR ARTISTS' EDITIONS)

Euro 1680,- (zzgl. Versand / plus shipping)

ABOSERVICE / SUBSCRIPTIONS

mail@textezurkunst.de

VERTRIEB / DISTRIBUTION

Texte zur Kunst Verlag GmbH & Co. KG

Strausberger Platz 19

D-10243 Berlin

UST-ID-Nr.: DE 122773787

Registergericht: Amtsgericht Charlottenburg /

Registernummer: HRA 32925

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HERSTELLUNG / PRINTED BY

Europrint, Berlin

ISBN 978-3-946564-24-9 / ISSN 0940-9596

DANKSAGUNG / ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Math Bass, Alice Blackhurst, Klaus Büscher, Iris
Därmann, Tobias Dias, Margaret Ewing, Maximilian
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