

Katharina Wendler in conversation with Aline Schwibbe

Berlin, December 2018

*KW:* Before we talk about your work, I would like to ask you what the title that you have proposed for the exhibition is all about: *A Thousand Names of Something Else*?

*AS:* The title is quoted from Donna Haraway's book 'Staying with the Trouble', that is really inspiring for me right now, as is Donna Haraway generally. She is a very well known feminist theorist whose background however is in natural sciences. Her concept is to create connections between people, but also between humans and animals, humans and machines. In her theories there are no hierarchies. It is also about the fact that many difficulties in our world are caused by us separating everything and looking at everything individually, even though there are manifold connections, for example, between species. She considers technology as relevant as nature and also describes how important it is to use technologies for instance in 'A Cyborg Manifesto' from 1985. From it also originates her much-cited remark "I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess". Above all, in her writings it's about non-hierarchical narratives and narrative strategies, and that interests me. It's just the same with her use of language; how she forms her own terminology. Her thoughts are of course much more complex than what I'm sketching here and also pretty radical, but basically for her it's about establishing connections and relations independently of chronology and hierarchy, which is pretty close to my praxis. *A Thousand Names of Something Else* addresses in a very beautiful way the fragmentariness, but also how we name and describe things, how we perceive our world, how we generate relationships among us, but also among things.

*KW:* *Fragmentariness and forming connections both appear in your work Thunder Shirts (All The Women I Owe This To) (2018), for which you drew and painted on women's blazers, that you then cut into pieces in order to re-connect them and hang them in the exhibition space. This work was produced this year for your solo exhibition at White Pearl Gallery in Prague, right?*

*AS:* Exactly. The blazer is still a blazer and should look like one, but here it appears changed, it has no function any more.

*KW:* *Is the blazer here a substratum, is it canvas?*

*AS:* Yes, but it retains its specific form. Important for me was the connection among and between the pieces, for me the work has first of all to do with relations. It's about the connection within myself, with different fragments of my identity and the awareness that I am not a super functioning cog that always stays the same, but rather splintered (although everything works nevertheless). In my mind it made sense in this work to make fragments of individual people come into contact with each other and form new connections. Each blazer is named after someone close to me. Apart from that, the blazer, above all a white women's blazer, is loaded with all kinds of connotations, for example with powerful or authoritarian positions in male-dominated fields of work.

*KW:* *Or literally, the 'white collar job'.*

- AS: Exactly. In terms of colour, the blazers also form a bridge to the paintings *Fearless Flowers* (2018), for which I painted with white oil paint on white PVC. The pictures have a rather industrial, cold effect, just very white.
- KW: *But through the floral motifs they also seem very feminine, and due to the white-on-white close to the limits of visibility. How do you choose your painting supports, your surfaces? Because in the past you did not primarily paint on PVC but mostly on paper, also on canvas, cloth or even drawn directly onto the wall.*
- AS: First of all I must say that PVC is my absolute favourite material. You can do great things with it, particularly with graphite, and I often find it to be the most suitable for my work. Sometimes I think that I might feel perhaps too comfortable with the material, because I've worked with it for a while now, and that I should step outside my comfort zone. Paper is of course the most obvious material for my kind of work – drawing – and I use it daily. As soon as I draw, make a sketch, I use paper.
- KW: *Your works have something very fragile yet strong about them, are – aesthetically as well as technically – often quite delicate, fine and full of detail; one would like to go up close and look carefully, above all in the works where you work with writing. How do you choose the formats of your works? How do you decide if you want to make it large or leave it as a small sketch or drawing?*
- AS: The sketch is essential; it gives me security. As soon as the sketch is there, the process that follows is actually secondary. Usually I know from the beginning that the big picture following the sketch will probably differ considerably from it. The sketch does contain what I have drawn and depicts something – with me it's always a mixture of abstraction and the figurative – but it's actually much more about something that you can't see in the sketch. I match cerebral things with each other, I have a system, I contemplate something and it somehow makes sense for me to express that in particular forms or surfaces or also words. At the end, through this sketch, I stay at this mental place and from there I can continue. Though it can look completely different at the end.
- KW: *That is interesting insofar as you already put these mental places, your thoughts, on paper. Why then draw them again or transform them, often in a larger format?*
- AS: For me it doesn't feel like "again". It's something very different, something new.
- KW: *I would say that most artists make sketches to document their ideas, but also to resolve questions of composition, to think about format and so on.*
- AS: I'm doing that too. But I am also defining the space in which I find myself for this particular work, and from there I can continue. There also isn't a sketch for each of my drawings; some are simply drawings from the beginning.
- KW: *Your newer work groups increasingly feature writing and language. How did this come about?*
- AS: As I began to draw on PVC, that was for a long time the only thing I did (at that point I was still developing my own pictorial language). Drawing on a "flat surface" was for me very practical, because I was mobile and I could continue working all over the world. The only question was the acquisition of material. As I went to the California College of the Arts in San Francisco in 2016, I

opened up and developed my work further, I experimented with colours for example – although I am still very careful with colours, I just have great respect for them. Later, in New York – I was there for a three months residency – I deliberately chose to get out of my comfort zone and make something new. There I began to work more consciously with language, and to dare trying new formats. Now I'm at a point where I really have a lot of different projects, which all have the aim of moving me out of my comfort zone.

In New York I understood for the first time how important language is for me. Pretty obvious, actually, as I write and draw since as long as I can remember. But with language I always made it difficult for myself, I always thought I would be better at expressing myself in drawing or painting, at communicating very controlled yet free at the same time. In this I move incessantly back and forth between both poles – without the one, the other isn't possible.

*KW: Why is it, that you don't use German in your work, only English? I can somehow intuitively understand the decision, for I often have difficulties with German texts (especially with German song lyrics), but I do however find that German poetry is often very precise and beautiful and functions very well in art such as in the works of Dieter Roth or Bernd Lohaus for example.*

*AS: Because English is not my mother tongue, it's automatically not so close to me. When I express myself, it helps me to feel that I am not too close to the matter, to keep a certain distance. That's what I mean with abstraction: a distance that feels good, that is very comfortable. Through my stays in the USA the language has naturally become more familiar and closer, but still not as close as the German language. In New York I also developed a very exact idea of what I want to do for my diploma project next summer. For this I'm daring to do something I've never done before, to write a script – in English – for a video work.*

*KW: What's your connection to film, to the moving image?*

*AS: Technically, the way that I draw and paint is almost like a multiple exposure. There are overlays, sharpness and blurring, abstract and figurative. The basic idea is always to connect things with each other, that lie somewhere beyond what we would generally describe as reality. Since a while I have been making photographs with a camera (a Minolta XD5), with which double and multiple exposures are possible. This happens directly in the camera, which means I can lay two or more consecutive motifs on top of each other. I already applied the same principle to a Polaroid camera, that is in instant photography, by sealing the output slot and thus exposing the picture twice. I detached the finished polaroids from their frames and subsequently mounted them on paper.*

*KW: I like the idea of how you held the Polaroid captive in the camera to expose it twice. The finished photos show abstract, hardly recognisable, blurred together motifs and colours, reproduced on ultra delicate, fragile membranes. The closeness to drawing is almost blatantly obvious here. These works – but also the other photographs – elucidate how photography in effect initiates your actual artistic process, because the essential only shows itself in the subsequent processing stage, the developing and further working on the pictures.*

*AS: That's right. I scanned the negatives of all photos myself and during that they were also further modified, for example I cropped some motifs. You can also see scratches on the negatives in many photos, which I could have removed, but where I decided in the end to leave them how they are.*

*KW: Did you ever consider drawing on them?*

AS: For me the pictures feel already like drawings. So for now I wouldn't intervene any further.

KW: *How do you choose the motifs and situations you photograph?*

AS: I definitely have recurring motifs in my work, for example hands and feet, certain pieces of clothing or animals. When making double exposures my understanding of time and space plays a role. I'm interested in making visible how it feels to find oneself in more than one place and in different times. Perhaps that has to do with the fact that since ten years I am permanently on the move. This constant change of place has brought me to look for objects and things that can bring me to another place or into another time, into the past or also into the future, but to always connect these with the present.

KW: *Temporality is of course always an issue in the photographic process (the time of exposure, the shutter speed, development time etc.). In your photos you unite different times with different places and give no clues as to how much time lies between the exposures or how far the photographed places are away from each other.*

AS: As the only hint I might perhaps say that the places don't even have to be real; in a few cases, I photographed my computer screen. For me though, that's actually a pretty important place, because I can carry in it several places at the same time.

KW: *Apropos place: do you generally in your work or in exhibition situations perceive dominant and less dominant, stronger and weaker works? How do you solve the problems of heterarchy and non-linearity in space?*

AS: It's important for me that in my work in general and in exhibition situations in particular things can be next to and with one another. Nothing is more important than the other. How one solves that in a space though is a very interesting question, because the works are of course different in their visibility and dominance. Visually dominant works often require some effort already during production; one has to have the courage for that. But I enjoy making things that frighten me. That is everything but easy, but that's how I grow.

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*Aline Schwibbe* (born 1988 in Hamm, lives and works in Berlin) studied Psychology at the University of Cologne (2007-2010), Painting at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design, Halle (Saale) in the class of Ute Pleuger (2012-2017) as well as Fine Art at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague (2016) and at the California College of the Arts, San Francisco (2016-2017). Since 2017 she is enrolled at Kunsthochschule Weissensee in Berlin, studying Painting in the class of Prof. Pia Linz. Exhibitions include Kunstverein Hamm, White Pearl Gallery, Prague, Zukunft am Ostkreuz, Berlin, 131 Hubbel St. Gallery, San Francisco, Gustav-Lübcke-Museum, Hamm, and CCA Graduate Center, San Francisco. Aline Schwibbe was a stipend of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in 2016/17 and at the same time received a scholarship of the California College of the Arts, San Francisco. In 2018 she was a resident at the Summer Studio & Residency Program at NYU Steinhardt, New York.

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*Katharina Wendler* (born 1988 in Hamburg, lives and works in Berlin) is an art historian and exhibition maker. She studied Cultural Sciences, Art Management and Psychology at Leuphana Universität Lüneburg as well as Art History at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and the University of Iceland. From 2013 to 2017 she directed the project space Safn Berlin/Reykjavik and since 2014 has realised and coordinated numerous exhibitions, publications and other projects with German and international artists. She currently works as Chief Curator of the Bauhaus University Gallery and Artistic Associate at the Faculty of Art and Design at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar as well as a freelance curator and author in Berlin.

In early 2018 she initiated the exhibition format *\_\_in conversation with\_\_*, that takes as its goal to bring people into conversation and thus into collaboration. Artists are invited to enter into dialogue and to develop an exhibition from it. The conversations are formulated into texts and serve to accompany the exhibitions as text material. They enable the visitors to develop a deeper understanding of the working methods of the artist and their artworks.

*\_\_in conversation with\_\_* is based on the assumption that artists themselves are best able to provide information about their works, their working methods, their ideas and inspirations. One simply needs to ask.

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## *Exhibition*

Aline Schwibbe

A Thousand Names of Something Else

January 20 – February 9, 2019

Opening: Sunday, January 20, 1-6 pm

Dzialdov, Maybachufer 43, 12047 Berlin

[dzialdov.de](http://dzialdov.de)