

Elsa Stanyer in conversation with Sophia Scherer

Telephone / in person Frankfurt/Main, June 2023

**Sophia Yvette Scherer:** *Dear Elsa, it's nice to exchange with you a second time, after we realized your show *Ungrowing together in 2021 at fffriedrich in Frankfurt am Main*. Back then the show's focus was on your mother's artistic archive, you mostly dealt with her photographic works, partly reinterpreting and modifying them. What has changed for you since then?*

**Elsa Stanyer:** I am pleased that we can have this exchange since our last project. When we did *Ungrowing together* I had just begun to work with the unfinished works of my mother. Now I still use this imagery, while considering it both with and separated from my own works, intentionally blurring the lines of authorship. At the time I was told that the project was too personal and had voices discouraging me from using my mothers work for this reason. There was so much doubt which I projected onto this project, but working together with you on this gave me a lot of reassurance to proceed. I believe this is exactly what is at stake when making the work, and exactly why I continue with this project. During *Ungrowing* I was exploring the overlaps between my mother's work and my own work. I am also exploring the gaps these days. There is a part of me which has the need to develop my own practice independently. Although, my mothers work will always be blended into my work somehow. I think this goes beyond my own consciousness, it was only by chance that someone else mistaked my work for my mothers, and this led me to ask questions. I never grew up seeing or discussing her work, and yet our works were so similar. I had to ask myself why her and I were both drawn to such similar imagery? Not just that, but why did we both end up at such similar points with our practices?

**SYS:** *Which brings up substantial and complex questions on inheritance, biological coherence and how much is already pre-set. I find this a very honest way to let your imagination encounter similar realms. In our hyper-individualized lives, sources and references are often blind spots. For when the drip stops it doesn't seem of importance for you neither to indicate the source of images nor lay out the context of them. What keeps your interest in dealing with archive material, e.g. working with photography that is not yours?*

**ES:** I came to realise that with the images I select, there's an implication of a proximity to something lived and something bodily. That's why I have an interest in working with archival material. It becomes a means of dealing with a visual history, while appearing in a physical present. My practice acknowledges the visceral qualities of materiality, by manipulating it, and thereby mimicking the aging process of a human body, through this process of a subtle deterioration. As a result of this aging process, the work is existing in a space between life, death, and rebirth.

**SYS:** *In the context of the last exhibition, the focus was, next to the mother-daughter relationship, on cyclical states, which describe these transitions of life, death, and rebirth. To what extent do these approaches have an effect in this exhibition, or even delimit each other?*

**ES:** For this exhibition, when the drip stops, my focus is on the shared interdependencies from one human to another, by doing so the works bear witness to a precarity and vulnerability, one which humans are inherently subject to. I specifically focus on how this becomes manifested through grieving, and healing processes. There's a human relationship at the core of that project, and I have now been finding methods to carry this core through a much more ubiquitous lens.

The work is also dealing with a reproduction, whether that be a biological, or mechanical reproduction. There are often repeated motifs in my practice, I would say the use of printmaking is a very direct suggestion of this. This practice already references the idea of something being repeated. My mother's work is inherent in mine. Even when I am not directly using her imagery. There is a shadow of her labour in what I produce, whether that be her artistic labour, or the work in raising me and my brother.

**SYS:** *You explore these interdependencies very silently, which makes them even more emotionally touching and intimate. While you use printmaking as a production and reproduction of existing materials, you also experiment with the materiality of paper a lot, applying methods, liquids, or natural processes to change the material in a certain way. This reminds me almost as an alchemist in a print workshop. How do you decide which substances to use?*

**ES:** I work a lot with printing. Whether that be photo etching, screen printing, or simply ink-jet prints. There is an element of layering happening in this process. One where the paper is being concealed, but also translated into a new surface, one that transmits information. I see it as a gesture of showing while being unseen, or existing in a changed state. The responsive, or rather, reactive qualities of paper interest me. Its qualities to absorb or reject. But paper also bends and moves. It's malleable, and stable. It's funny that you use the word alchemist, this has been said to me before regarding my practice. I am drawn to materials which refuse each other and create an unpredictable surface. This is with the aim of relinquishing some authority of the material process, like leaving etching paper to soak, until it becomes moldy, and printing on this paper, is a way of letting the mold dictate the interaction with the ink and the aesthetics. Which for me, creates tension.

**SYS:** *I remember you experimented a lot with natural rabbit glue, worm shit and carmine pigments made from lice or river water from your hometown in England transported in plastic bottles to Frankfurt. This time you add Blue Bottle flies – I'm intrigued by this name...*

**ES:** That's true, I've used these kinds of materials. There is something which again creates a resistance for me, when I am working with supposedly natural materials, which are in fact highly manufactured, and so far from its natural state. It's also a reference to death. But there's something more to these materials which I am still understanding. It's difficult for me to say exactly what because I feel like there is so much that is forming.

**SYS:** *I find these partly invisible, partly "deformative" interventions very intriguing. Do these "handmade" editing processes become something almost ritualistic for you?*

**ES:** No, it's more of an inquisitive position that I am coming from. I have more questions and few answers (at this stage at least). I am mostly working in a trial-and-error way, and where materials are purposefully (and paradoxically) out of my full control. However, I am still creating an environment which the work responds to, and nonetheless making decisions about other aspects such as the imagery and text elements. Because of that I find the process more playful than ritualistic. I have no idea how most things will be in a physical way until it's done, and even then I'm aware that the work is in a condition which is subject to changing states.

**SYS:** *You've also made a sound piece for the current show, what was your inspiration for that?*

**ES:** I write a lot; this is the most ritualistic part for me. As someone who is dyslexic most of my written works come from what I've heard as opposed to what I've read, as I often feel alienated by reading. I'm usually more interested in how literature sounds than how it reads. I had this thought of a sound piece being able

to touch the other works in the room, as opposed to something written, which to me, in this context, felt more static. There is a fluid quality which comes to mind when I think of how a sound piece functions. This sound piece was originally something I wrote and used in a film I showed in February, at the Städelschule Rundgang, where I study. I cut it back much more. I felt that way it would also be a work which allowed for silence.

**SYS:** *There are often notions of grief in your work containing fragments of the body, but it is not expressed or treated loudly as such, instead you transform into something soft. What does this kind of digestion mean to you?*

**ES:** There's a relinquishing, an acceptance of whatever prevails. It's the only state in which I can find some form of comfort. I am looking at grief as a bodily reaction and process. I have also lived through significant injuries, from my dance background, which temporarily paralysed my legs, and continue to paralyse parts of my memories. That also becomes a grieving process. This feeds into my connection with the imagery, focusing on processes of deformation and recovery, and how one projects onto this based on their own relationship to this.

**SYS:** *So, is the title when the drip stops referring to a specific personal memory?*

**ES:** The title of the exhibition was something I heard once, or words similar, the words just stuck with me. There was something that felt very visual that connected me with those words. Again, I was drawn to the sound, more than anything.

**SYS:** *It reminds me of tears stopping to drip, but at the same time a well whose source dries up.*

**ES:** I was also thinking of an intravenous drip too.

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Elsa Stanyer (\*1997, London, UK) is an artist based in Frankfurt am Main.

Rather than having a fixed practice Elsa Stanyer uses and collects both visual and sound materials, recorded organically and spontaneously, as well as found imagery, stills, objects, printmaking, and her own photography. Her practice uses archival material as a means of processing a visual history, often combined with self-authored texts, readymades, sculpture or sound installations. The act of gathering such materials becomes a process of digestion of not only the imagery that the world throws up and how they are handled, but also a process of digesting the struggle of survival inherent with nature.

Sophia Yvette Scherer (\*1991, Darmstadt, Germany) studied Art and Cultural Management at Karlshochschule Karlsruhe, Art and Image History at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, and Asian Studies/Art History at Kansai Gaidai University in Osaka. Recently she graduated from the Master Curatorial Studies at Goethe University and Hochschule für bildende Künste - Städelschule Frankfurt am Main. She was an assistant at Studio Karin Sander (2017-2021) and worked on projects for MMK Frankfurt (2020), Deutsche Bank Collection, Frankfurt (2017), and currently for Portikus, Frankfurt. Since 2022, she has also been a program assistant for the BPA// Berlin program for artists. She (co-)curated her own projects such as the group exhibitions *OFFFENCE*, Spoiler, Berlin (2022); *Another Dimension* (2022); and the solo show *Elsa Stanyer: Ungrowing*, *fffriedrich* Frankfurt (2021) and was assistant curator of the exhibition *Assembly*, Portikus, Frankfurt (2023). She was also a Fellow of the Julia Stoschek Foundation's Curatorial Research & Residency Program (2021/2022) and co-curated the exhibition project *OUT OF SPACE: DUSSELDORF VARIATION* in Düsseldorf Stadtraum with Junni Chen (2022).

in conversation with is an exhibition format that aims to bring people into conversation and practical collaboration. Artists are invited to enter into dialogue with curators, writers, other artists, art historians, journalists, or scientists and to develop an exhibition from this. The conversations are written down and serve as text material accompanying the exhibition. They enable visitors to develop a deeper understanding of the artists' working methods and their artworks. in conversation with is based on the basic assumption that artists themselves can best provide information about their works, their working methods, their ideas and inspirations. You just have to ask them about it. The project was initiated by Katharina Wendler in Berlin in early 2018 and is hosted in various (project) spaces.

## *Exhibition*

Elsa Stanyer  
WHEN THE DRIP STOPS  
June 30 – July 30, 2023  
Opening: Friday, June 30, 2023, 6–9 p.m.

Open Sundays, 1–5 p.m.

Dzialdov, Maybachufer 43, 12047 Berlin  
dzialdov.de