



kunstmuseum basel

Andrea 22.4.—
Büttner 1.10.2023

english

Andrea Büttner
The Heart of Relations

Since the early 2000s, Andreas Büttner (*1972 in Stuttgart) “images” on such subjects as labour, poverty, shame, forms of coexistence and on the belief systems that have had a far-reaching impact on society, whether religious or secular in nature.

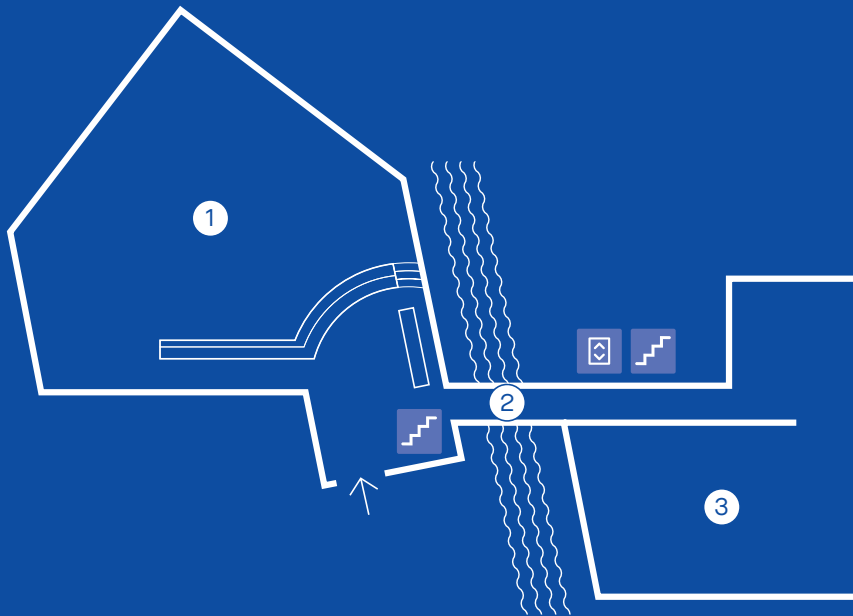
The artist draws on a wide range of media when rendering her themes visible: Originally known for her large-format woodcuts and etchings, she has since broadened her scope to encompass a variety of media, such as books, glass objects, video installations and textiles. Exhibitions of her work may well be characterised as expansive “narratives” that invite viewers to explore more by degrees.

The exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel shows a confluence of distinct narrative lines, such as the benevolence of monastic communal life and that of coercive labour in biodynamic agriculture under National Socialism. In the same vein, Büttner links the representational traditions in public opprobrium with traces of the everyday usage of smartphones, such as the fingerprints left on the devices.

Nominated for the prestigious Turner Prize in 2017, Andrea Büttner read fine art, philosophy and art history at Tübingen and Berlin universities before gaining her doctorate on the subject of shame at the Royal College of Art in London in 2010. She has held a professorship for Art in Contemporary Context at the Kunsthochschule Kassel since 2017. She currently lives and works in Berlin.

GEGENWART

Ground Floor



①

Brown Wall Painting (2006) is the title of Andrea Büttner's space-filling mural that dominates the entire first room of the exhibition. The ribbon of colour, which starts at the baseboard begins to fray towards the top, precisely at the height reached by the artist's outstretched arm. ***With Brown Wall Painting,***

Andrea Büttner introduces an organic hue into the museum exhibition space. In doing so, she achieves two things. Firstly, she links those of her works exhibited here through the brown wall paint used as a backdrop: a small-format graphite sketch, **Untitled** (2020), depicts a stooping figure with a noticeably large pair of hands. Two high-format woodcuts hint at architecture by means of coloured planes. The slide projection, positioned in the space entitled **Kunstgeschichte des Bückens** (2021), amounts to an arrangement of art-historical portrayals of tasks commonly regarded as menial labour (gathering, harvesting, mending, processing, washing, tending to children). Viewed in this light, the brown wall paint introduces to the exhibition space an element of the outdoors, which, in true Western twentieth-century tradition, is otherwise painted in white, sealed off from the outside world and thus allegedly neutral.

②

Passing along the brown-painted wall of **Brown Wall Painting**, the exhibition path continues over the river flowing beneath the building, and past two works from the series entitled **Phone Etchings** (2015). Other exhibits in this series can be viewed at the same space on the building's first floor. For this group of works, the artist rendered visible the smudged traces left by her fingers on the smartphone's display. Here, she enlarged the prints for which she produced colour etchings. The prints' format contrasts with the intimacy of communication, research or image search on the smartphone. By converting the variously coloured graphic prints into large-format, the artist produces monumental images in the tradition of abstract, gestural pictorial art; a form celebrated in Western art history since the mid-twentieth century as being an authentic, gestural expression of artistic inventive imagination. The artist plays with this form of (art) historical authenticity. The traditional use of brush, pencil or chisel as employed by the individual artist has been long-since superseded and thus transformed by the digital design opportunities now available to us. The oily fingerprints Büttner fixes on the display bear witness to her own record of use – a paradox, and with respect to authenticity, something almost impossible to surpass.

③

Andrea Büttner studied art and philosophy. Immanuel Kant's work *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Critique of Judgement), first published in 1790, ranks high in the annals of Western philosophy and aesthetics. In posing the question, What happens to the text if one seriously accepts the images Kant outlines in the above-mentioned work and juxtaposes them with the text?, the artist correlates found images on the Internet with motifs she researched herself in the German philosopher's private library. This resulted in eleven, large-format offset prints featuring the most disparate of images: Anatomical sketches, portrayals of historic feats in mountaineering, internet snapshots, natural forces or idylls. Her primary interest here was to grant the images their due and rightful place in what, in the field of aesthetics, has been of pivotal importance. The images comprise an integral aspect of philosophical argumentation and are not merely the object of aesthetic discourse. This multi-part work is entitled *Images in Kant's Critique of the Power Judgment* (2014).

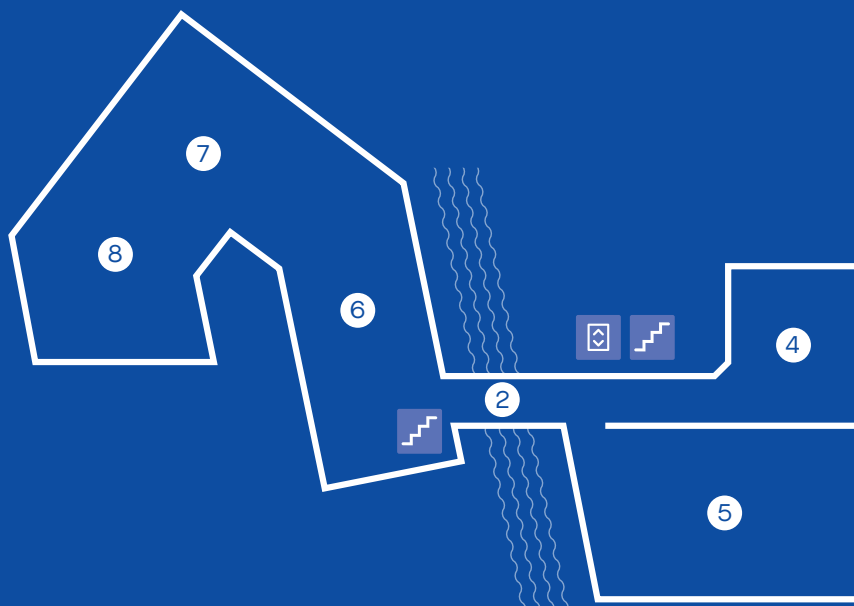
Andrea Büttner frequently works with found images. Through the increase in digitally and publicly accessible image archives, the search for images has become an everyday affair. The mural *Schamstrafen* (2022–2023), recently completed for the Kunstmuseum exhibition, originated when the artist found that the power of digital imagery also revived shaming as a historical method of deterrence. The term "shaming" was adopted in the 2010s in reference to bullying on social networks. Here, the artist, who has carried out extensive research on the mechanisms of shaming, presents a nuanced wall frieze of older and more recent reproductions of such scenes of public shaming in the form of a silkscreen print in fluorescent white paint.

When, as part of her studies back in the 1990s, Andrea Büttner embarked on exploring the subject of art production, the topic of shame was an ever-present theme for her. For, displaying art in public implies exhibiting something of oneself and thus subjecting it to judgement. It was above all at the outset of her career that Andrea Büttner would frequently encounter judgements of her work as being idiosyncratic and thus out of touch with the times. The piece entitled ***Painted Stones*** (2017), which probes an apparently peripheral genre of artistic practice, presents her research on painted stones the material for which she drew from online catalogues, museum websites and auction sites. Assembled in this manner, Andrea Büttner enables the artists involved in painted stones to become part of a group, to which she might possibly belong herself.

When displayed together in one exhibition space, the three model-like sculptures entitled ***Deutsche Bundesbank Dining Room, Rockefeller Dining Room, Corner Mürter House Murnau*** (all dating from 2019) physically reinforce this space of image research.

GEGENWART

2nd Floor



④

The exhibition features several pieces drawn from Andrea Büttner's series of works entitled **Bench** (2012–2018). The benches are both works of art and functional seating for viewers. The pairing of hand-woven textiles with commercially manufactured, multi-functional chests exemplify the artist's

approach, which invariably seeks to identify and shed light on the inherent potential of simplicity. The large scale projection of the video *Little Sisters: Lunapark Ostia* (2012), focuses on the daily work of the order. This video chronicles the artist's conversations with two nuns from the religious community Little Sisters of Jesus, who operate a booth in an amusement park in Rome. Here it becomes evident that these nuns are no less a part of this thoroughly secular community of amusement-park entertainers.

The slide show entitled *The Archive of the Lives of the Little Sisters of Jesus with Circuses and Fun Fairs, Tre Fontane, Rome* (2012) is the order's own photographic archive. The slides portray the sisters at work in completely different spaces. The artist also displays some of the small items she won at the booth of the Little Sisters of Jesus at Lunapark Ostia. She used the blue colour of the nuns' clothing for the wall-hangings. Thus, as hinted at by the fabric's product name, the entire room is decked out in "deep royal blue", a fabric also used to produce workwear.

⑤

What we have here is a touring exhibition entitled *Die gefährlichste Krankheit* (The Most Dangerous Disease) arranged in a central position. Initiated in East Berlin, this exhibition was formerly part of the project "Peace Library – Anti-War Museum." Originating in the early 1980s, the project's initiators, members of the former so-called DDR-Bürgeroppositionsbeuwegung (GDR Civil Opposition Movement), used images of war and peace as a means of to draw society's attention to the destructiveness of war and sought ways of avoiding it. This touring exhibition, presented by Andrea Büttner as part of her solo exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel, addresses what Jewish philosopher Simone Weil (1909–1943) identified as being the greatest danger to humanity, namely, "uprooting." Simone Weil's thought and approach to life was the result of her studies in several fields, including Judaism, antiquity, mathematics, socialism as well as Christian mysticism. The thematic field Büttner frequently addresses in her work centres on approaches to life as are

commonly atypical for Christianity; invariably pivotal to her interests is her fascination with nuns and saints, but no less with secular personalities within highly regulated systems who revolt, and who, while pursuing their dedicated Christian ways of life, have chosen not to withdraw from the everyday concerns of secular life.

The artist produced the wood etchings on display here at different stages of her career; among these were such portraits as ***Dancing Nuns*** (2007), which may well be considered as the artist's readings of constructive protest within highly regimented systems. The wood etchings ***Untitled (Three Kings)*** (2012) and ***Untitled (baby on rock)*** (2018) also depict motifs commensurate with Christian teachings, while at the same time, they simply depict kings and a baby, as witnessed in such works as ***Bush*** (2010) or ***Tent (psychedelic)*** (2012). The latter work may well also be read as symbolic of what Simone Weil referred to as "uprooting."

⑥

Five postcards behind glass are hung on the reverse side of a video booth framed by blue fabric. ***Dachau, Coventry, Groß St. Martin, Plötzensee*** (2017–2019) features various actual places of contemplation. The video work ***Karmel Dachau*** (2019/2022–2023), a large-scale projection placed within the cabin, features "Heilig Blut", a Carmelite nunnery adjacent to the Dachau concentration camp memorial founded in 1964. In this video work, the artist explores by way of conversations with the nuns the complex relations between memory and repression, religion and violence, and the major themes of crime and forgiveness. Occasionally, the artist leaves the camera to the nuns to themselves film their private spheres.

In addition to the video work, the photographic series *Former plant beds from the plantation and “herb garden,” used by the SS for biodynamic agricultural research, at the Dachau Concentration Camp* (2019–2020) was similarly created in Dachau. Here, the artist turns her attention to the overgrown plant beds at the former concentration camp. What the SS used to call “herb garden” is where the Nazis would carry out research in biodynamic agriculture. The photographs direct the eye to the concrete, rectangular foundations of the individual beds. The boundaries show the garden’s conception, carefully designed for the purposes of increased efficiency. Andrea Büttner presents the photographs against the backdrop of the mural *Grid* (2021), which takes up almost the entire exhibition space. The concrete foundations of the beds thus clash with an additional right-angled arrangement.

⑦

When restrictions were placed on individual mobility during the first spring of the Covid 19 pandemic, Germany engaged in a highly divisive public debate on the issue of asparagus harvesting. Should the health of seasonal workers from Poland, Romania and Spain be given greater priority than the availability of regionally harvested seasonal asparagus? These highly contentious discussions on national dishes and inner-European labour migration induced Andrea Büttner to visit asparagus farms in the Berlin area. While there, the artist made sketches of workers harvesting the asparagus, which she then translated into monumental engravings. Reduced to silhouettes, they each depict stooping figures or hands at work with an asparagus knife.

Two tables belong to the series of works on harvesters. One supports a nine-part clay sculpture resembling the furrows of an asparagus field, while the other serves as a display surface for 143 carved wooden asparagus. Büttner commissioned students from a carving school to produce the asparagus sculptures. Each asparagus is a unique piece. In juxtaposing the wood carvings, the artist hints at the connection between the harvesters’ manual labour and works of art. In both instances,

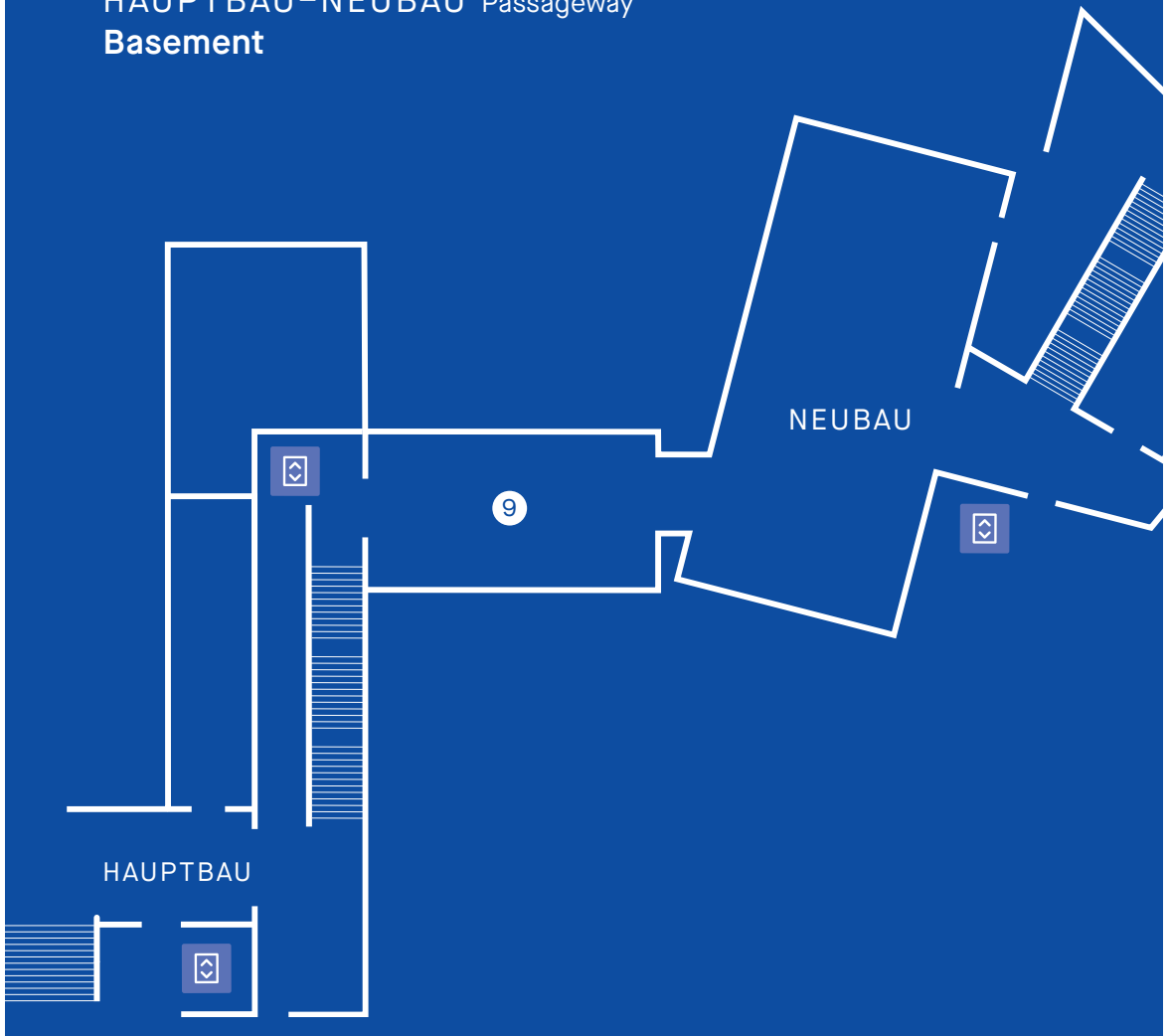
handicraft forms the basis, and in both cases the products are assume a symbolic value: for Andrea Büttner's wood etchings and the wood asparagus, stand for the costly works of art, whereas the asparagus harvest stands for the traditional, seasonally available German asparagus. And yet, the symbolic value does not correspond to the real value. This is clearly illustrated in the debates surrounding the asparagus harvest during Covid 19, characterised as they were by double standards.

⑧

The wood etching **Coins** (2017) is hung on a wall covered with blue fabric. It depicts a dark surface with a handful of loose coins. The blue wall doubles up as the reverse side of one of the two projection screens for the video work **What is so terrible about craft? / Die Produkte der menschlichen Hand** (2019). The point of departure for this video installation features one of the sisters of the religious community Communauté de Jerusalem, who works for the Cologne-based department store Manufactum. Manufactum's corporate concept revolves around the commercialisation of handicrafts, also those artefacts which monasteries produce to fund their activities. Interview sequences show the nun discussing the history of her order and the necessity of securing an income. Andrea Büttner juxtaposes photographs of the church organ bench with shots of Manufactum's high-quality chaise longue, or close-up shots of cleaning products alongside shots of liturgy promising (spiritual) purification.

The tables of the series *Untitled (Wood Table)* (2021) are used to present a selection of the artist's glass objects, as seen in *Vase* (2021–2022). The wooden tables are modelled on those of the dining room at the Carmelite convent in Dachau, while the vases are hand-blown individual pieces. The wooden tables echo Büttner's esteem for monastic aesthetics, while the glass objects establish a link to the artist's preoccupation with organic materials. While these would have formerly been mosses or potatoes, the Basel exhibition shows asparagus and the beds the Nazis used for research on biodynamic soils in the Dachau concentration camp.

HAUPTBAU-NEUBAU Passageway Basement



9

For her exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel, Andrea Büttner has lined with green velvet the passageway between the historic Hauptbau and the Neubau, which opened a few years ago. Against this backdrop and arranged in a central position, is



her series of wood etchings *Beggars* (2015). The monumental portrayals of veiled beggars are invocative of a range of art-historical models, a selection of which she exhibits in the eighty-part slide projection *Shepherds and Kings* (2017). Here, Büttner unites representations of the birth of Christ; in doing so, she focuses not on the protagonists of the Christmas scene, but on the shepherds and kings, namely, as representing rich and poor. To this projection, the artist adds a selection of depictions of beggars by Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), which form part of the Museum's collection in the Fine Arts' Cabinet of Prints and Drawings.

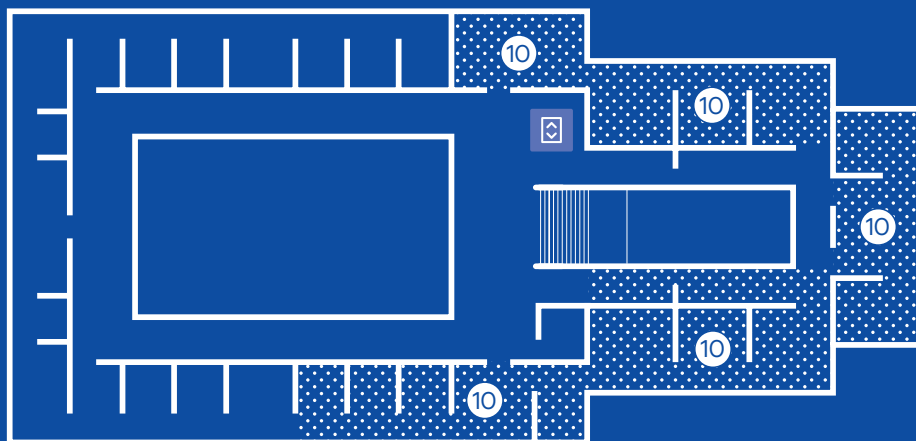
Büttner augments the exhibition with copies historic prints of beggars from the Aby Warburg Institute in London. The artist also includes comments by the institute's staff, together with references to the date of the auction and the auction house. She thus draws attention to the contradictions between their content, namely, portraits of beggars, and their value as determined by the art market. One of the first and few to tackle the task of compiling an art history of poverty was the US American Linda Nochlin (1931–2017). Reproductions of her preparatory lecture notes from 1979–2011 also form part of her presentation.

Placed beside these we see an edition of the *Liber Vagatorum (The Order of Beggars)*, an illustrated book of wood etchings, which first appeared in the early sixteenth century at various locations around Europe. Its purpose was to warn against travellers and beggars and their “ploys.” It warns against “false” mendicants, “false” pregnant women, and “false” artists, thus placing persons soliciting alms under general suspicion of begging under “false” pretences of necessity. Andrea Büttner sees this book as marking a transition, in Europe, from the Medieval Catholic conception of poverty and charity to the Protestant work ethic. In the place of personal almsgiving, the prohibitions on begging and responsibility for the poor then later shifted to the bureaucratically organised social- welfare system of the kind with which we are still familiar in Switzerland and Europe.

HAUPTBAU

1st Floor

Collection 15th–19th Century



10

A selection of Andrea Büttner's series **Bread Paintings** (2011–2016) is on display in the exhibition rooms of the Old Masters, housed in the Kunstmuseum's Hauptbau. These are, small-format reverse-glass paintings with glued-on photographs of breads, rolls or slices of cake. They appear, somewhat unexpectedly, next to the works *Breakfast Still Life* (1679) by Willem Van Aelst, *The Last Supper* by Hans Herbst and Hans Holbein the Younger, or *The Gathering of the Manna* (1480/1500) by a Dutch master. They direct our gaze to the loaves of bread in the particular scenes as if through a magnifying lens. Assuming various functions, at times these loaves form part of the depicted narratives, while at others they symbolise the rite of the Eucharist, and at others still they represent alms for the needy or constitute parts of still lifes. The **Bread Paintings** exemplify the artist's approach, which invariably sheds light on the potential of the simple. In many cases, food is currently available in abundance; it is in challenging this self-evidence that Andrea Büttner's single loaves of bread draw attention to themselves. Bread is the simple foodstuff that connects us – the viewers of today with the viewers of the earlier paintings. By contrast, the single loaves of bread represent the cult of bread as has been cultivated in recent years.

List of Works

<i>Beggars</i> , 2015 9 Woodcuts on paper	<i>Drinking Man</i> , 2010 Woodcut on paper, Diptych	<i>Little Sisters: Lunapark Ostia</i> , 2012 Video, colour, sound, 42 min.
<i>Bench</i> , 2012–2018 Handwoven fabric, wood, plastic crates	<i>Ernte</i> , 2021 Woodcut on paper	<i>Minerva</i> , 2011 HD Video, colour, sound, 5 min. 40 sec.
<i>Bread Painting</i> , 2011–2016 Reverse glass painting with found print	<i>Erntende</i> , 2021 Woodcut on paper	<i>Nun Drawings</i> , 2006–2007 Pencil on sketchbook
<i>Breadpebble</i> , 2010 Woodcut on paper	<i>Erntender</i> , 2021 Woodcut on paper	<i>Painted Stones</i> , 2017 Photography, silver gelatin print, series of 36
<i>Brown Wall Painting</i> , 2006 Interior emulsion paint Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau, München	<i>Former plant beds from the plantation and "herbal garden," used by the SS for biodynamic agricultural research, at the Dachau Concentration Camp</i> , 2019–2020 Chromogenic print	<i>Phone Etchings</i> , 2015 Etching
<i>Bush</i> , 2010 Woodcut on paper	<i>Grid</i> , 2007 Woodcut on paper	<i>Rockefeller Dining Room</i> , 2019 Cardboard, gouache
<i>Coins</i> , 2017 Woodcut on paper	<i>Grid</i> , 2021 Wall painting	<i>Schamstrafe</i> , 2022–2023 Screenprint in fluorescent paint on wall
<i>Corner Münter House Murnau</i> , 2019 Cardboard, oil paint, wood, gouache, paper	<i>I have no works</i> , 2017 Woodcut on paper	<i>Selected images of beggars sourced from auction catalogues in the archive of the Warburg Institute, London</i> , 2015–2016 Inkjet print on paper
<i>Corners</i> , 2017 Woodcut on paper	<i>Images in Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment</i> , 2014 Offset print, 11 pieces	<i>Shepherds and Kings</i> , 2017 Dual slide show with digitalised 35 mm slides; 80 slides per side Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz
<i>Dachau, Coventry, Groß St. Martin, Plötzensee</i> , 2017–2019 Postcards and other printed material mounted behind glass	<i>Images of beggars sourced from auction catalogues in the Photographic Collection of the Warburg Institute, London</i> , 2015–2023 Offset prints on paper	<i>Skizzenbuch Spargelernte in Beelitz</i> , 2020 Pencil on paper
<i>Dancing Nuns</i> , 2007 Woodcut on paper, Diptych	<i>Items from dOCUMENTA 13 installation</i> , 2012 3 bronze shelves, cardboard dioramas, bus stop and nativity scene	<i>Spargel</i> , 2021 Wood, 143 carved asparagus on table
<i>Deutsche Bundesbank Dining Room</i> , 2019 Cardboard, bookbinding linen	<i>Karmel Dachau</i> , 2019/2022–2023 Video, color, sound, 48 min. 13 sec.	<i>Spargelfeld</i> , 2021 Ceramic, 9 parts on table
	<i>Kunstgeschichte des Bückens</i> , 2021 160 analogue 35 mm slides	<i>Tent (psychedelic)</i> , 2012 Woodcut on paper
		<i>The Archive of the Lives of the Little Sisters of Jesus with Circuses and Fun Fairs, Tre Fontane, Rome</i> , 2012 43 analogue 35mm slides

Untitled, 2021
Wood table, replica of tables at
Karmel Dachau

Untitled, 2020
Pencil on paper

Untitled, 2017
Woodcut on paper,
Diptych

Untitled, 2016
Silk

Untitled (baby on rock), 2018
Woodcut on paper

Untitled (Painted Ceiling), 2020
Oil on canvas, aluminium

Untitled (Three Kings), 2012
Woodcut on paper

Vasen, 2021–2022
Hand-blown glass vases

What is so terrible about craft?
/ Die Produkte der
menschlichen Hand, 2019
Double-channel video and
sound installation,
33min. 50 sec.
Museum Abteiberg,
Mönchengladbach

If not further indicated,
the works are in the artist's
collection, Courtesy

- Hollybush Gardens, London
- David Kordansky Gallery,
Los Angeles and New York
- Jan Mot, Brüssel
- Galerie Tschudi, Zouz and
Zürich

The exhibition is supplemented by
a book (G/E) of some 200 illustrations,
which is scheduled for publication
by Hantje Cantz Verlag in June 2023.
The publication was produced in
cooperation with the Kunstsammlung
Nordrhein-Westfalen, which will be
hosting an exhibition by Andrea Büttner
from October 2023.

→ kunstmuseumbasel.ch/shop

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KPMG AG

Stiftung für das Kunstmuseum Basel

Öffnungszeiten / Opening Hours / Heures d'ouverture

Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, St. Alban-Rheinweg 60

Di-So 11-18 Uhr / Tue-Sun 11 a.m.-6 p.m. / Mar-Dim 11 h-18 h

Kunstmuseum Basel | Haupt- und Neubau

Di-So 10-18 Uhr / Tue-Sun 10 a.m.-6 p.m. / Mar-Dim 10h-18h

Mi 10-20 Uhr / Wed 10 a.m.-8 p.m. / Mer 10h-20h

Eintrittspreise / Admission / Prix d'entrée

Erwachsene / Adults / Adultes CHF 16

Ermässigt / Reduced / Prix réduit CHF 8

Tickets → [kunstmuseumbasel.ch/besuch](https://www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/besuch)

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