



ANDREA BÜTTNER

Piano Destructions, 2014/2023

Performance

4-Channel-Video-Installation with Live Concert

Created in cooperation with the Basel Academy
of Music | FHNW

Performances on Monday, June 12th,
and Thursday, June 15th.

Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau

Originally commissioned in 2014 by the
Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts
and Creativity. Produced with the support
of the Goethe-Institute. With kind permission
of the artist and Walter Phillips Gallery,
Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

INTRODUCTION

The performance *Piano Destructions* by Andrea Büttner (*1972) is an imposing work that takes place in the underground event hall of the Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau. The complex performance is realised in collaboration with local partners, principally the Basel Academy of Music | FHNW. It is an integral part of the major retrospective exhibition *Andrea Büttner. The Heart of Relations* (22.4.–1.10.2023), which extends across all three buildings of the Kunstmuseum Basel.

Piano Destructions includes a selection of projected archival material: the video footage shows artists such as Nam June Paik, Wolf Vostell, Ben Vautier, Günter Uecker and others destroying pianos. In response to these scenes of piano destruction, Büttner has nine female pianists playing on nine grand pianos in the formation of a choir, live and in front of an audience. The repertoire of the musical programme consists of works from the Romantic era by composers such as Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849) and Robert Schumann (1810–1856) as well as Fanny Hensel (1805–1847). The Romantic pieces are followed by two parts from the *Vespers for the Blessed Virgin* by the Renaissance composer Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), originally written as a choral work for multiple voices. Monteverdi is part of the programme not least because, as Andrea Büttner noted, “he was the favourite composer of one of the founders of Fluxus, George Maciunas (1931–1978)”. With the two excerpts from Monteverdi’s sacred work transcribed for piano, the artist aims to make the reception of the Romantic compositions more complex: Monteverdi allows for the introduction of aspects such as communal action, collaboration, the interaction of the collective, or polyphony into the notion of aesthetic production and to contrast these with ideas of individual creation and genius.

Piano Destructions is based on Büttner’s extensive research into filmic and photographic material predominantly from male artists from the 1960s onwards who destroyed pianos as part of their practice. As the projections show, the gesture of destruction is rooted in the context of experimental music and performance, especially in the international Fluxus movement, where it was usually conceived as a critical act that expanded the notion of art. The artists carried out a broad range of destructions, burning, dropping, smashing and shattering the pianos.

The piano is a culturally over-determined signifier which can be read historically as a symbol of bourgeois culture. During the 19th century, it carried a particularly strong “feminine” connotation as it played a prominent role in the traditional education of women and girls through piano lessons and rehearsals.

Büttner connects the gesture of repeated destruction in post-war avant-garde with the practice of study and rehearsal, both of which are integral parts of the grammar of musical education. Even though the performance combines “male” and “female” protocols in the same space, Büttner’s focus is not on gender definitions, but on the ways in which forms of behaviour are articulated, how they exert influence socially and how we come to interpret them. *Piano Destructions* reiterates and stages cultural and educational techniques such as domestic piano lessons and the concert in contrast to avant-garde piano destructions so as to touch on cultural codes, their persistence in the present and the political ambivalence embedded therein.

Piano Destructions was originally realised in a two-year collaboration between the artist and the Walter Phillips Gallery/Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in 2014. We are pleased to have the opportunity to present Andrea Büttner’s performance, which has not been shown since then, in the context of the Basel retrospective curated by our colleague Maja Wismer, Head of Art after 1960/Contemporary Art at Kunstmuseum Basel.

Daniel Kurjaković,
Curator of Programs Kunstmuseum Basel

VIDEOS

(Screen 1)

Philip Corner, *Piano Activities*, performed by Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, George Maciunas, Benjamin Patterson, Wolf Vostell, Emmett Williams, two unknown performers, and the audience, *Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik*, Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden, September 1, 1962. Performance © George Maciunas Foundation / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2017.

Ben Vautier, *Fortissimo pour Piano*, Paris, 1971.

Ben Vautier, *Piano Vivacio de Fluxus*, Nice, 1964.

Stan Vanderbeek, *Violence Sonata*, 1970.

George Maciunas, *Piano Piece No. 10 and No. 13*, performed by Ben Vautier, Théâtre de Nice, 1970.

George Maciunas, *Piano Piece No. 1 and No. 2*, performed by Philip Corner, Ben Vautier, Ann Noël, and Eric Andersen, Festival of Fantastics, Roskilde, Denmark, May 29, 1985.

George Maciunas, *Piano Piece No. 10*, performed by C. Dreyfus, Concert Fluxus, Passage de Retz, Paris, 2009.

George Maciunas, *Piano Piece No. 10 and No. 13*, performed by Ben Vautier and others, Concert Fluxus, Multimedia Complex of Actual Arts, Moscow, 2010.

Philip Corner, *Piano Activities*, performed by Philip Corner, Alison Knowles, Benjamin Patterson, Geoffrey Hendricks, Willem de Ridder and Eric Andersen, *Fluxus 50*, Museum Wiesbaden, September 1, 2012.

Gordon Monahan, *Piano Airlift*, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, 1988.

(Screen 2)

Raphael Montañez Ortiz, *Piano Destruction Concert*, Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS), London, September, 1966.

Raphael Montañez Ortiz, *Henny Penny Piano Ritual Destruction Concert 2*, Judson Memorial Church, New York, 1967.

Raphael Montañez Ortiz, Soul Release Piano Destruction, Hommage to Huelsenbeck, 1988.

Raphael Montañez Ortiz, *Piano Destruction Concert: Humpty Dumpty Had a Great Fall*, performed by Raphael Montañez Ortiz and Monique Ortiz-Arndt, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 19, 1996.

(Screen 3)

Performances by George Brecht, Jean Dupuy, Davide Mosconi, and Wolf Vostell for *Pianofortissimo*, Fondazione Mudima, Milan, 1990.

Gerhard Rühm, Friedrich Achleitner, *zwei welten*, 2. literarisches cabaret (Wiener Gruppe), Porthaus, Vienna, April 15, 1959.

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Photo © museum moderner kunst stiftung ludwig wien.

Nam June Paik, *Hommage à John Cage*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark, October, 1961.
Photo: Polfoto.

Philip Corner, *Piano Activities*, performed by Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, George Maciunas, Benjamin Patterson, Wolf Vostell, Emmett Williams, two unknown performers, and the audience, Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuster Musik, Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden, September 1, 1962. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Sohm Archive
© Photo: Hartmut Rekort. Performance
© George Maciunas Foundation / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2017.

Philip Corner, *Piano Activities*, performed during Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik, Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden, September 1, 1962. Gelatin silver print. Photographed by Deutsche Presse Agentur. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, 2008. © 2014 Philip Corner. Performance © George Maciunas Foundation / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2017.

Knut Wiggins, *Rendezvous 1963*, performed by Karl-Erik Welin and Leo Nilsson, Museum for Modern Art, Stockholm, March 6, 1964.

Ben Vautier, *Piano vivacio de Fluxus*, Festival de la Libre Expressio, American Student's & Artist's Centre, Paris, May, 1964.

Emmett Williams, photo collage, 1964/2006.

© The Estate of Emmett Williams.

Günter Uecker, piano action during the opening of *Benagelte Objekte*, Pianohaus Kohl, Gelsenkirchen, 1964.

Raphael Montañez Ortiz, *Piano Destruction Concert*, Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS), London, September 1966.

Annea Lockwood, *Piano Transplants: first Piano Burning*, London, 1968. Photo: Geoff Adams.

Philip Corner, *Piano "Worked"*, 1983.

Al Hansen, *Yoko Ono Piano Drop*, 1984. Photo: Carl Victor Dahmen, Cologne.

Rowan Vince, Tim McKenry, Schumann and the Art of Piano Destruction, 2009.

(Screen 4)

Nam June Paik, *Tribute to Charlotte Moorman*, Seoul NyMax Festival, Anthology Film Archives, New York, November 1, 1994.

Nam June Paik, *Coyote 3*, Seoul NyMax Festival, Anthology Film Archives, New York, November 15, 1997.

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Robert Schumann
(1810–1856)

Sonate für Klavier G-Dur Op. 118
(Drei Clavier-Sonaten für die Jugend), Nr. 1
[Sonata for the Young, No. 1], G major (1853)
I Allegro

Fanny Hensel
(1805–1847)

3 Mélodies für Klavier Op. 5
[3 Mélodies for Piano] (1847)
IV Lento appassionato

Robert Schumann

Kinderszenen [Scenes from Childhood] Op. 15 (1838)
I Von fremden Ländern und Menschen
[Of Foreign Lands and People], G major
II Kuriose Geschichte
[A Curious Story], D major
III Hasche-Mann
[Blind Man's Buff], B minor

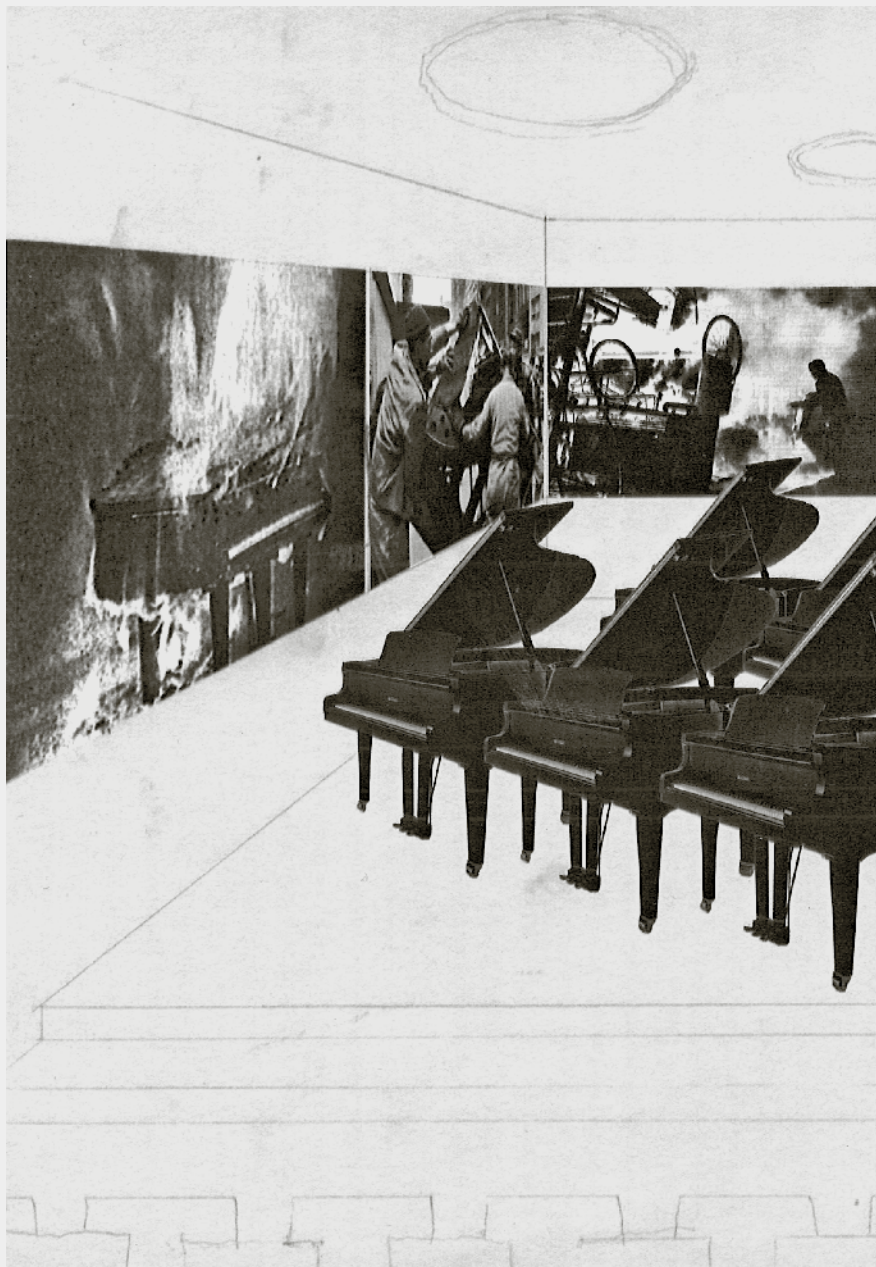
Robert Schumann

Faschingsschwank aus Wien.
[Carnival Scenes from Vienna].
Fantasiebilder für Klavier
[Fantasy pieces for piano], Op. 26 (1839/40)
IV Intermezzo (Mit grösster Energie)
[With the greatest energy]

Frédéric Chopin
(1810–1849)
Nocturne für Klavier f-Moll Op. 55, Nr. 1
[Nocturne in F minor, Op. 55, No. 1] (1843)

Claudio Monteverdi
(1567–1643)
Vespro della Beata Vergine
[*Vespers for the Blessed Virgin*] (1610)
II Psalm 109 “Dixit Dominus Domino meo”

Claudio Monteverdi
“Zefiro torna e di soavi accenti” SV 251 (1632)



Sketch for Piano Destructions, ca. 2001



PIANO DESTRUCTIONS: ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

A conversation with the artist Andrea Büttner
and Maja Wismer, Head of Art after 1960/Contemporary Art
Kunstmuseum Basel

Conducted by Daniel Kurjaković,
Curator of Programs Kunstmuseum Basel

Daniel Kurjaković: The performance *Piano Destructions* is not a framework programme in the conventional sense, but an independent work that is part of Andrea's solo exhibition *Der Kern der Verhältnisse [The Heart of Relations]*. As curator of the exhibition, Maja, how do you see *Piano Destructions* fitting into the larger context of the project?

Maja Wismer: Since the beginning of the 2000s, Andrea has been creating images around themes such as work, poverty, shame and forms of coexistence. Our exhibition seeks to show the different narrative strands in Andrea's work across the three buildings of the Kunstmuseum Basel. *Piano Destructions* belongs to the narrative strand that plays out between cultural imprints, mechanisms of presentation and performing, and traditions of representation in the visual arts. The space in the new building of the Kunstmuseum, which was designed for large events, lent itself to the elaborate performance of *Piano Destructions*.

DK: Andrea, what does it mean for you to revive *Piano Destructions* for Basel some ten years after its original creation in Canada at the Banff Centre?

Andrea Büttner: First of all, it's just really interesting for me to see the work again. After all, I have only seen it—and heard it—once in my life. In the context of the exhibition, I have once again become very aware of the central role art history plays in my work generally. *Piano Destructions*, too, is about making art history in an artistic form.

During my research, I had come across a great number of artists who destroyed pianos—destroyed them again and again—, and in the repetition, the particular action of a 'final ending' in the sense of avant-garde finality became ridiculous. Also missing from the art historical description of Fluxus and this phase of the avant-garde was a gender perspective.

I noticed at the same time that many of my female friends had taken piano lessons and had grown up with this kind of repetition. In *Piano Destructions*, I wanted to put these different repetitions in relation to each other: the repetition of an avant-garde gesture that overcomes the bourgeoisie and the somewhat unheroic repetition associated with the acquisition of musical knowledge and skill.

DK: You once mentioned in passing that the research had been 'positivistic'. Was it really only about a factual protocol of an art-historical reappraisal? Wasn't there also an affective component to it, a certain unease or even resistance?

AB: I'm not sure that I can say anything precise about that. *Piano Destructions* may well express my wish to juxtapose the neo-avant-garde gesture of Fluxus with a different kind of radicalism, which articulates itself as the collective playing of the female pianists.

DK: But you don't just leave it at opposition, do you? In *Piano Destructions*, the two aesthetic regimes of individualised artistic production and forms of collective making seem meant to relate to each other—not least so that the whole thing begins to move for the viewer.

MW: Andrea uses this method in many contexts. She creates associative and multidimensional references. In this respect, I see the juxtaposition of piano-destroying artists with the female pianists displayed in *Piano Destructions* as another example of this method.

DK: Andrea, as part of the preparations for *Piano Destructions*, you rediscovered an early draft collage, a schematic representation of the performance.

AB: The idea for *Piano Destructions* is really quite old, even older than its realisation at the Banff Centre [2014]. The collage was most likely created during my art studies in the 1990s. I applied for funding for its realisation. I found the relevant application dossier, which includes, among other things, descriptions of possible concert programmes. It's amazing how much staying power such projects sometimes require.

I am also reminded that I was in Banff for the first time as part of documenta 13. Carolyn [Christov-Bagarkiev, curator of documenta at the time] had organised a retreat in Banff. I wanted this work to get wider publicity and not remain in the context of the Rocky Mountains and withdrawal. The fact that *Piano Destructions* is now being shown in Basel during a Fair speaks differently again to the themes of withdrawal and publicity.

Piano Destructions is to be situated in yet another context. In Germany in the 1990s, a particular discourse about pop was dominant. It was the main system of reference in which the leverage point for freedom appeared to be located—even if later, this turned out to be a cliché. I think that at the time, I was concerned with a critique of clichéd notions of transgression and freedom. It was necessary to insist on something like non-freedom.

DK: Let's talk about the films from the archives and how they are situated within the context of *Piano Destructions*, especially with regard to gender.

AB: The work includes research into all the video documentation of the history of piano destruction that I could find. There is only photographic documentation of the first destructions. *Piano Destructions* is also a history of video as a medium for documenting performance from the mid-1960s onwards.

I might add something about the issue of gender in connection with Monteverdi. I wonder if, perhaps, the notion of gender is more fluid in baroque music; it is certainly more fluid than it is in modern piano music. In baroque compositions including Monteverdi's, it was often male singers who sang the high registers.

And one more thing: the *Vespers for the Blessed Virgin* was written for San Marco in Venice as a polyphonic sacred work. Accordingly, each grand piano conveys its own voice in *Piano Destructions*. In Monteverdi's work, the spatiality of the music is important: some of the voices of the *Vespers* were positioned on the balconies of San Marco, which meant that the choir sounded across the entire space. The voices called out to each other, as it were. The modulation of the voices, the variations in volume, the echoes—all these contributed to something that is also of great importance to me in *Piano Destructions*: the spatial expansion of the musical experience.

PIANISTS

Rosalía Gómez Lasheras

Born in 1994, Gómez Lasheras studied piano, fortepiano and harpsichord at Utrecht Conservatory and the Basel Academy of Music. She won the YPF Competition in Amsterdam in 2013 and played her debut concerts as a soloist in concert halls like the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Palau de la Música Catalana, Cairo Opera House, Konzerthaus Dortmund and Herkulesaal Munich. She regularly performs with orchestras such as the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, Noord Nederlands Orkest, Duisburger Philharmoniker, Sinfónica de Galicia and Sinfonieorchester Basel. Furthermore, she has been invited to renowned festivals, among them Moscow Meets Friends Festival, Swiss Chamber Music Festival, Wissembourg Chamber Music Festival, Janine Jansen and Friends Festival, Storioni Festival, Musikdorf Ernen and Festival Radovljica. Since 2021, she is Assistant Professor of Chamber Music at the Basel Academy of Music.

Elisa Rumici

Elisa Rumici is an Italian pianist. She has won twenty-five first prizes and numerous scholarships, including those awarded by the Mari Foundation, the Adelsheimstiftung and the Zaczkowski Foundation. She regularly performs in Italy and throughout Europe and has given recitals in prominent concert halls and at music festivals, both as a soloist and a chamber musician. In 2021, her CD "Francesco Marino Piano Works" was published by Diapason Records, and in 2022 the CD "A musical journey" was released by the Swiss label rhein_records.

Molli Szalai

Molli Szalai was born in Hungary in 1999 and started piano lessons at the age of eight. From 2018 to 2021 she studied with Némethy Attila and Rita Wagner at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest. She is currently a second-year Master's student at the Academy of Music in Basel, studying with Zoltán Fejérvári. In addition to several outstanding results in international competitions, she was awarded 1st prize at the Franz Liszt Center Piano Competition in February 2023.

Galyna Gusachenko

Galyna Gusachenko was born in Ukraine. In 2011, she began her studies at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg with Prof. Evgeni Koroliov, and since 2016, she has continued her Master's studies at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln with Prof. Claudio Martínez Mehner. Gusachenko is the recipient of numerous international competition awards and has performed on live broadcasts for WDR and NDR Kultur. She is currently studying at the Basel Academy of Music with Prof. Claudio Martínez Mehner and Prof. Filippo Gamba.

Oleksandra Katsalap

Oleksandra Katsalap is a Ukrainian composer and pianist. Born and raised in Kyiv, she currently lives in Basel. Katsalap is studying for a Bachelor's degree in piano and composition under the supervision of Prof. Tobias Schabenberger and Prof. Michel Roth. Her works have been performed in Germany, Switzerland and Ukraine.

Iliane Luezas

Iliane Luezas is a Spanish pianist active in the field of solo and chamber music. She received her first lessons from Alberto Peralta and Diego Gomelsky in the Music Conservatory of Logroño and completed her Bachelor's degree with honours under the guidance of Noelia Rodiles in Zaragoza. She is currently finishing her Master's degree in piano performance in the class of Filippo Gamba at the Basel Academy of Music.

Hanna Syrneva

Hanna Syrneva was born in Navapolatsk, Belarus in 1996. Since September 2020, she has been studying piano at the Basel Academy of Music with Prof. Tobias Schabenberger. During her studies, Syrneva has participated in and won numerous international competitions in Italy, France, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Germany. She has also attended various master classes with renowned professors. Syrneva's concert performances include appearances in Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Greece and Switzerland.

Mar Valor Navarro

Born in Valencia, Mar Valor Navarro completed her musical education with Juan Lago and Ana Guijarro and high school in Spain in 2018. Between 2018 and 2022, she earned her Bachelor of Music at the University of Music and Dance Cologne with distinction under the guidance of Prof. Claudio Martínez Mehner. Since September 2022, she has been living in Basel, where she is studying for her Master's degree in Musical Performance in the class of Zoltán Fejérvári. She performs successfully both as a soloist and in various chamber music ensembles throughout Europe, particularly in Germany.

Alexandra Kasatkina

Alexandra Kasatkina was born in Moscow in 1997. From 2004 to 2015, she studied at the Central Music School of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. In 2020, she graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in the class of Prof. Natalia Trull. Since then, she has been a student on the Master's programme at the Academy of Music Basel in the class of Prof. Claudio Martínez Mehner and Prof. Tobias Schabenberger. She performs as a soloist and chamber musician in Switzerland and has twice participated in the international chamber music festival and master class "Musica Mundi" (Belgium, Waterloo; 2018, 2019). She also frequently participates as a répétiteur in various opera projects.

ARTIST

Andrea Büttner

(*1972, Stuttgart, Germany) lives and works in Berlin, Germany, and is Professor for Art in the Contemporary Context at Kunsthochschule Kassel. She received a PhD from the Royal College of Art, London, and prior to that studied at Humboldt University, Berlin and Berlin University of the Arts. Her practice connects art history with social and ethical issues, exploring topics such as poverty, work, community, belief, botany, Catholicism and philosophy. Her work is based on thorough research into specific areas or situations and is articulated through diverse formats including printmaking, sculpture, painting, photography and video.

Andrea Büttner's writing has been widely published: Andrea Büttner, *Shame*, London: Koenig Books, 2020; Andrea Büttner and Isla Leaver-Yap, "Re: Andacht zum Kleinen," in *The Assistants*, ed. Fionn Meade, Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2013; Andrea Büttner, "Ideal Syllabus: Andrea Büttner," *Frieze* 152 (Jan/Feb 2013); Andrea Büttner, "Of this I would have been shy not a year ago," in *Dieter Roth: Diaries*, ed. Fiona Bradley, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012; Andrea Büttner, "Inverted Interview # 3" (with Lars Bang Larsen), in *The Responsive Subject: From OOOOOO to FFFFFFFF*, London: Form Content, 2011; Andrea Büttner, "Now I Am Somebody," in *Dieter Roth, Björn Roth: Worktables and Tischmatten*, ed. Barry Rosen, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010; Andrea Büttner, "Inverted Interview # 1" (with Ben Borthwick), in *Soft Shields of Pleasure*, Copenhagen: Space Poetry, 2008; Andrea Büttner, "Do Something that is Easy to Do," *Material* 1, Los Angeles, 2008; and Andrea Büttner, "Scham – Jedes Wort ist eine Blamage," in *Sinnhaft*, Vienna, 2005.

Büttner was shortlisted for the 2017 Turner Prize and is a winner of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women 2009. Selected solo exhibitions include *Andrea Büttner*, Jan Mot, Brussels (2022); *Grids, Vases, and Plant Beds*, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; *Triebe*, Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz, Switzerland (both 2021); *What is so terrible about craft?*, Kunstverein München

(2019); *The Heart of Relations*, Hollybush Gardens, London (2019); *Shepherds and Kings*, Bergen Kunsthall (2018); *Andrea Büttner*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2017); *Beggars and iPhones*, Kunsthalle Wien (2015); *Andrea Büttner*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2015); *Andrea Büttner*, Tate Britain, London (2014); *Andrea Büttner*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2014); and *Andrea Büttner*, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (2013).

Selected group shows include *YOYI! Care, Repair, Heal*, Gropius Bau, Berlin (2022); *Botanical Revolution*, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, *Donation Outset – KW Production series*, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, and *The Roaring Twenties*, Guggenheim Bilbao (all 2021); *Parliament of Plants*, Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, *Smoke and Mirrors*, Kunsthaus Zürich, and *The Botanical Mind*, Camden Art Centre, London (all 2020); *On Vulnerability and Doubt*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2019); 33rd Bienal de São Paulo (2018); *Turner Prize*, Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, UK (2017); *British Art Show 8*, UK touring exhibition (2016); and *dOCUMENTA* (13), Kassel (2012).

Her work is held in the collections of art institutions across the globe, including the Tate, London; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; National Museum Cardiff; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Lenbachhaus, Munich; Kunstmuseum Bonn; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; Hamburger Kunsthalle; Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; Kunsthaus Zürich; Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Alberta; Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia; Museum Abteiberg; Armand Hammer Collection, Los Angeles.

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Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau

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Museum

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Programme

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