

REMEMBER SEPTEMBER

Curated by **Oliver Koerner von Gustorf & Frank Müller**

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Opening

Friday, October 9, 2020, 3 pm – 8 pm

October 10 – November 21

Thursday – Saturday, 12 noon – 6 pm

With Bettina Allamoda, Tabea Blumenschein, Marc Brandenburg, Ursula Döbereiner, Kerstin Drechsel, Carsten Fock, Ogar Grafe, Henry Kleine, Frank Müller, Nikolaus Utermöhlen, Sabina Maria van der Linden, Elmar Vestner, David Wojtowycz, Flora Whiteley

The group exhibition **REMEMBER SEPTEMBER** was inspired by a visit I made with Marc Brandenburg and Ursula Döbereiner to the Dorotheenstädtisch-Friedrichswerder cemetery in Berlin-Mitte shortly after the lockdown. People were not allowed to sit in cafés yet, so we decided to drink our coffee on a bench and visit the grave of our friend, the curator Frank Wagner. There, in close proximity to the burial places of Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel, lies the gravestone of the philosopher Herbert Marcuse, which looks like a 1970s mailbox for the afterlife cast in concrete and on whose lid there is a slogan: Carry on! Herbert Marcuse is said to have written the words “carry on” to Rudi Dutschke, who was seriously injured after an assassination attempt on him. Allegedly, his motto in life was: “Simply carry on!”

Good advice, especially in difficult or even hopeless situations, and not only for the left movement. In this strange, corona-influenced early summer, during which Black Lives Matter protests had been staged in all the major cities in the USA, and the first people wearing tin foil hats and Nazis began to organize resistance against the lizard people, at the beginning of a cultural crisis whose end is nowhere in sight, the idea arose to make an exhibition with artists from the gallery SEPTEMBER, which had been closed for years. The show, the thought was, could be about whether and how people can and should carry on, which they will do anyway, whether they want to or not. Of course, it should not only be about personal and political aspects, but also formal ones. But can they be separated? How have we carried on with our art? What has developed? Where have we gotten stuck? Too many questions. In a time that is developing so rapidly, when everything is superseded in a flash, in which an incredibly open, uncertain future lies ahead of us, which has always been incredibly open and uncertain, it is okay to leave things in abeyance, to cultivate a state of not-knowing, of restlessness. Thus, an exhibition came into being in which the theme of “carrying on” still reverberates, but which actually assembled itself.

The starting point was two delicate, very personal works. **Frank Müller**, my co-curator, has had MS for years. In compensation, he embroiders, a kind of meditation, often after taking a nap. When he found a stool with a built-in stepladder for his private library, he spent months embroidering a piece of fabric with a modern, Anni Albers-like pattern, and then covered the stool's upholstery with it. That, we found, had something to do with carrying on.

This ladder, we thought further, goes with one of the most important pictures that **Nikolaus Utermöhlen**, my first friend in life and the cofounder of Deadly Doris, painted a few years before his death. He died from AIDS in 1996. His untitled painting, created in 1994 (photocopy, acrylic binder, Plaka paint, burlap) was based on a photograph by the American artist Thomas Eakins (1844-1916). It shows a prepubescent, naked boy in front of a river landscape, around which colors light up like sensory impressions. The picture epitomizes vulnerability and nudity, but also vision and departure. We sensed that now a different, yet related kind of sensitivity is needed and that a work must intervene in the space in a visceral and elegant way.

So we asked **Bettina Allamoda** for a contribution. She gave us Hammerblow 2 (2013), a sculpture from her NO GO – The Exorcist series, made of PU-coated polyester, spandex, and a weathered steel pipe. In Bettina's dynamic sculpture, the archaic, the archeological, and industrial-utopian-futuristic maintain a fragile balance. The fabrics with which Allamoda works are psycho fabrics: hysterically functional, expanded to an extreme, stretched over barriers and posts, simultaneously skin and clothing.

This energy meets **Ursula Döbereiner's** new works from the series Scan/Signal Interference (2020). For a few years now, she has been looking for a working method and a production economy that makes targeted use of errors, inaccuracies, and material resistances, drawing potential from differences and disturbances. So up-to-date. The result is a series of digital drawings that Döbereiner makes with scanners. She integrates otherwise unwanted side effects into the process: leaving a white edge, placed on top at an angle, fingers on screen, positioned in the wrong place, flap not closed, smeared surfaces, stripes, dirt, etc. Now she also works with a manipulated hand scanner, with which she scans whole rooms rather than contracts or QR codes. The results are beautiful, black-and-white, picturesque-looking prints, which form a feedback loop of digital and analog, scan and real space, idea and material.

Ursula chose **Marc Brandenburg** as her neighbor. Marc is showing an almost two-meter wide, analog, brand-new drawing of a silver bracelet with the iconic Metallica emblem, which he repeatedly draws in slightly altered drapings and lightings for a series of drawings in order to create new reflections and dark and light areas, and to see how the engraved font changes. Of course, Marc's series plays in its own distinctive way with ideas similar to those in Ursula's works. In memory of the actress and artist **Tabea Blumenschein**, Marc contributed a portrait she drew of him in 2016 in the tradition of August Sander, Künstler Marc Brandenburg, equipped with a psycho bunny, rockabilly skull, and smiley.

As a further drawing and simultaneously sculptural position, we added Superspreaderspiritsuit (2020) by **Ogar Grafe**, an activist shamanic Mother Goddess ritual and show clothing with an embroidered head mask, decorated with an allover of Ogar's texts. The font ornament was applied using blue marker in months of work. Ogar, who as an author and performer is in the tradition of Edith Sitwell, refers in this work to folk art from different regions, to religious traditions, and to the art of mentally ill people. He combines a conceptual practice with autodidactic strategies. At the same time, in a kind of counter-magic his work claims back feminist, progressive, and spiritual ideas that were hijacked by the New Right and the tin foil hat faction in identity debates.

In her drawings, films, animations, and performances, **S.M. van der Linden** examines female role models and the power and representational structures of a capitalist society in which bodies and relationships are mercilessly economized. In doing so, she often works with designs, logos, and illustrations for both fictional products and real projects. The three frames adorned with romantic and erotic motifs were created in 1994 for a book project by Brezel Göring of the band Stereo Total. The planned title was „Der sudetendeutsche Ulysses von Siegfried Bonig“ (The Sudeten German Ulysses by Siegfried Bonig). Pictures of the author were to be mounted in the frames. Unfortunately, the project was never realized and the frames remained empty. Now they are being released on the occasion of the exhibition as a limited edition of prints.

At this point, we decided that the exhibition space would have to be painted in a kind of industrial, psychotic, Imi Knoebel-style manner, perhaps in a rusty red lead orange. But since that dulled the colors in the works too much, we opted for a bright, striking orange that could have come from children's books or from 1960s orange juice packaging. The Spandex Metallica industrial world now had to be joined by other worlds. Two important centers in the exhibition are the works of two artists whose paintings I have increasingly admired in recent years: Flora Whiteley and David Wojtowycz. Both exhibit on white surfaces, a small show within the show.

In her paintings, **Flora Whiteley** investigates how we accommodate our art, our collections, our memories, and our dreams. Flora deploys the visual vocabulary of the avant-garde in modernism, art, films, interiors, arts & crafts, and fashion to create psychologically dense, often theatrical pictorial spaces or still lifes, into which she incorporates aspects of her own biography. In her paintings, horse people from Jean Cocteau's *The Testament of Orpheus* (1959) can be seen dancing around an empty modernist bed; abstract tiles or volcanic rock can light up; and portraits of modernists, including the painter Vanessa Bell, can be immersed in nocturnal darkness. The somewhat frowned-upon idea that art, in this case painting, not only reflects furnishings and decoration, but is itself part of the furnishings, is very much in line with SEPTEMBER's concept. So one will always discover pictures in paintings or mirrors in Flora's art. At the same time, her pictorial spaces are memory spaces. In the spirit of Marcel Proust and Walter Benjamin, her work deals with the impossibility of remembering; the inner, fragmentary reconstruction of the forgotten. Everything always looks like something else.

David Wojtowycz's paintings framed in slats of weather-beaten and found wood initially look emotionally charged and impulsive. In actual fact, they are the product of months of preparation and the result of an active, conscious channeling of intellectual or formal ancestors, of certain cultures, styles, and narratives, which come together in David's paintings. One can imagine David's painting as a radioactive lemonade fountain in the desert of New Mexico, contaminated by Western fears and neuroses. Gushing forth from it are colors, shapes, tastes, and particles of regressive, abstract, expressive paintings by artists such as Roy Oxlade, the late Philip Guston, and Sidney Nolan. The blue-and-white snow colors and the orange-brown tones of patchwork quilts in the

paintings of folk artist Grandma Moses, the sky over dark seas in nineteenth-century painting. Comics, neon colors, the aesthetics of Pacman and early computer games. There is the taste of fruit juice, extinction, and apocalypse. UFO kidnappings, Roswell, Chernobyl, Waco, cults, and sects. 1980s horror movies like Halloween III - Season of the Witch and very real childhood traumas. All of this comes together in David's hybrid painting to create timeless, visionary, indistinct landscapes.

Carsten Fock's untitled pastel chalk drawing, executed in 2020 with a pyramid or prism at its center, is reminiscent of a landscape of light and color. At once macro- and microcosmic, mythical and minimalistically empty, it speaks of transformation and permeability. It is part of a series of fragile and colorful paintings created on the Mediterranean Sea and the Danish coast in which water, sun, vegetation, coolness, and heat merge with physical and psychological perceptions to form inner landscapes. They mark the beginning of a new artistic development that deals intensively with the idea of healing and change, with the inability to simply carry on like this.

The first thing **Kerstin Drechsel** thought of regarding the topic of "carrying on" was one of her latest Ordnungs_Unordnungs-bilder. As in her earlier painting series RESERVE (2001-2005) and UNSER HAUS (2005), Kerstin delves into the lives of others in her series EXIT, from which the larger-than-life painting of a bed filled with teapots (2019) stems. Without portraying the respective people themselves, she observes their intimate surroundings in the most precise manner: the remotest corners of bedrooms or living rooms, arrangements of objects, memories, fetishes, and devotional items that have accumulated over the course of years or decades. In contrast to Flora's work, Kerstin's series is not primarily about remembering, but about the accumulation of material, about obsessive collecting, about holding on to things, arranging, always carrying on. Interestingly, the artist is also producing a growing number of canvases on this theme, which in turn have to be continually ordered and stored. Superficially, Kerstin's series touch on aspects of the Messie Syndrome, or hoarding disorder. However, her paintings' invitation to voyeuristic viewing is coupled with another interest. She is not concerned with denunciation or commenting on social conditions, but with the question of how the controlling gaze is constituted in these "messy" conditions. The fluid boundaries between self-created systems of order, obsessive collecting, and gradual neglect find a formal analogy in Kerstin's paintings in the oscillation between representationalism and painterly dissolution in abstraction.

Henry Kleine's work brother (2020) explores several themes that are latent in the exhibition, such as memory, which echoes from the depths of consciousness, in Henry's words: "From the emotional body, from the aura into the brain, to the retina, to the hand, to the canvas ... as frequency." As for Ursula, in his practice the scanner, image processing, and drawing programs are a kind of extension or prolongation of physical perception. Henry also prints out his paintings and experiments with various materials, in this case PVC mesh, a plastic mesh fabric. He is interested in how the painting disappears in the process, dissolving into pressure marks, micro spots of paint, and grid holes.

Echo, **Elmar Vestner's** 2017 photo series, is named after a mountain nymph in Greek mythology who is punished and deprived of language by Hera, retaining only the ability to repeat the last words addressed to her. Elmar engages with the limitations of photography to capture moments, perceptions, and memories. The painted, covered, scratched or milled surfaces of his photographic works recall chemical reactions or weathering. In some cases, the interventions cover the motifs like a veil. But his pictures of landscapes, trees, and plants from different continents are also about the longing, very physical attempt of an approach, which also takes place through these processes. The actual motif is alienated, destroyed. Paradoxically, however, it also emerges more clearly due to these harsh interventions. Full of poetry, Elmar sexualizes nature, draws analogies between organic structures and human relationships, or "contaminates" the romanticized landscape view with fluids and stains. He is interested in both formal and conceptual composition, which is determined by different degrees of abstraction and figuration, by affect and calculation.

Oliver Koerner von Gustorf