

EN

Painter, performance artist, and sculptor Anne Imhof mixes subcultural references with an almost ceremonial rituality, and an extreme conception of the experience of time with a filmic sense of image construction and framing. *School of the Seven Bells* (2012–15), *Aqua Leo* (2013), and *Rage* (2014–15), to mention just some of her striking live pieces to date, as well as her newly commissioned *Angst*, evoke the gestuality in Robert Bresson's films (in particular his majestic *Pickpocket* of 1959), the coded languages of doormen at the legendary Robert Johnson nightclub in Offenbach, where the artist once worked, and the task-like movements of New York's historic Judson Dance Theater. Borrowing, extending, and revising the terms of each of these references, Imhof uses a combination of meticulously scripted protocols and deliberate improvisation to determine her performers' actions. Dripping liquids, objects with gestural traces, everyday behaviors, the eerie otherness of animals: these bodily and material elements recur in her pieces. The resulting performances "command time," as one critic rightly commented—something that few other artists of her generation do so effectively. And perhaps this is no better demonstrated than in *Angst*, her most ambitious project to date.

Angst, which premieres at Kunsthalle Basel, is an exhibition-as-opera made up of a multi-part performance, a musical composition, paintings, and sculptural elements that are alternately activated or still. The Latin word *opera* means "work," both in the sense of the labor involved and the result produced. Imhof doesn't shy away from the labor implications, using physical exhaustion, extended duration, and poses held beyond the point of easy control. But it is more in reference to "opera" as a monumental cultural tradition, an epic staged art form, that Imhof has conceived of the present undertaking. *Angst* does not, however, reference any known or historical opera; rather, its connection to a notion of opera hinges on its combination of music, text, and image as a durational experience. Also unlike most classical operas, there is no tale being told through language or words, and no stage separating the action and actors

ANNIE IMHOF

ANGST

10.6.–21.8.2016

KUNSTHALLE
BASEL

from the audience. Instead, Imhof turns the capacious upstairs gallery into a strange sort of sports training facility, where over the course of its first ten days, her exhibition-as-opera progressively unfolds through the incremental appearance of its different “characters.” Then comes their incremental disappearance: once the last of them has departed, their actions and inhabitation of the space persist via the continued presence of sculptural elements and paintings.

Descriptions of Imhof’s work tend to focus exclusively on her performances. And it’s easy to see why. They *are* transfixing—peculiar and mesmerizing reflections on human agency, interpersonal communication, power dynamics, and the secret codes that bind them. But the extraordinary charge that makes her work so compelling resides just as much in the way she scripts her intricate choreographies in relation to a cosmos that can only impudently be called a backdrop. Not merely scenography, and also not props for the performances or material traces of its existence (although they sometimes act in those functions, too), her objects are paradoxically both autonomous and operational—standing on their own but also structuring the relationships and movements of performers and viewers.

To speak of *Angst*, one must thus speak of visceral paintings and sculptures, arrangements of light and sound, as well as conglomerations of readymade consumer goods. Leather padded sports mattresses lie at the entrance to the exhibition and in a back room as if waiting for bodies to wrestle, rest, or exercise upon them. A series of elongated, leather-covered punching bags embossed with erotic images and marked with wound-like gouges dangle like uncanny appendages from the ceiling or walls, ever so slightly swaying. A central, resin-lined sculpture serves as a pool, a trough, and a meeting point of sorts for the performers and is filled during the performance with whisky and water. Set into the floor around the edges of the space are shallower troughs filled with milk during the performance, and empty for rest of the exhibition period. Metal rails of the kind that might direct the movement of a factory machine or an attached

livestock animal are affixed to the walls along the threshold between the main space and a backspace. Near them, a polished metal structure that evokes an opera balcony or loge sits as an obstacle; it is an object meant to shift perception and positions, since, depending on which side you stand on, you are either on the “loge” looking out or part of the spectacle to be seen from it.

On the walls, new large-scale paintings made before *Angst* fully existed as such foretell of the movements and gestures that would be part of it. The canvases picture the figures of the Lover and the Clown, their life-size bodies standing, gazing, gesturing, or shaving odd parts of the body (a palm, a navel), surrounded by some of the branded commodities that they wear or use in the performance (Pepsi and Coca-Cola cans, tennis shoes with Nike’s recognizable “swoosh” logo, Merkur Solingen razors). Painted in cold, muted shades, their tones bring to mind bruised or sickly skin, while painted leather patches collaged to their surfaces echo the emphasis on skin elsewhere in the exhibition, as in the animal skin of the punching bags, or the gesture of showing skin in the performance. In the back rooms, three of Imhof’s large lacquered steel and aluminum “scratches” are built from successive layers of paint whose underpainting is revealed through a sgraffito process; it is impossible to look at them without imagining the violent gestures that made the incised marks (one can almost feel the action of a key held firmly in hand as it scratches a car). The smaller, more intimate back galleries house sculptures made from a combination of sporting equipment and swaths of painted leather made into stands for the falcons that figure in the performance. The entire ensemble, at once unsettling and strange, forms a spectacular backdrop for the bodies that circle within it during the performance, while also functioning as a proper exhibition when the living elements are absent.

Imhof’s ephemeral performance marks indelibly the material manifestations of every object in its space—her art gets “used”: spit on, stepped on, handled—and vice versa. But her paintings and objects could be said to have a life before the enactment of the performance,

another during, and yet another after. This phenomenon is intimately connected to Imhof's sense of the image. Originally trained as a photographer, she constructs her objects no less than her performances in such a way that still images are central to their functioning. Her performances are built from a set of mental images, with her performers trained to move from one highly constructed "image" (which takes form, then dissolves) to another. But the transitions from one to the next are unscripted: Imhof's only clear directives relate to the starting points. This way of creating a performance as partly structured and partly improvised is more than a recurrent technique or a methodology—it is the very conceptual foundation of her practice. The crux of her performances lies precisely in this relay between the author and her delegated actors, between authority and sovereignty, between the command of power and the forces that might seize it.

For the period of *Angst*'s performance, Imhof's various characters enact a choreography of cryptic signs and gestures "found" in real life, for instance distractedly looking at the screens of their smartphones, an act so ubiquitous in contemporary culture that one might wonder if it is scripted or a blasé interruption. In other moments, the performers embody and distort the runway walking one might recognize from fashion shows, accelerating or suddenly rendering still the characteristic postures and poses. Throughout, the performers take their places so as to form a pre-determined image, only to undo it by moving to position themselves for the next one. They also use arbitrary measures to determine how long to hold any one pose. Imhof trains her performers to make decisions based on entirely personal criteria: hold a pose until you are bored with it, or move in a certain way until it feels like the appearance of the gesture is pathetic or ridiculous and then push on further past that point. Of course, when one actor does so, his or her decision then impacts the group, shifting the fragile equilibrium that keeps everyone's movements related to the scripted images.

The same possibility for disruption through subjective will is true for the soundtrack. Music resonates in the space, making ref-

erence to recognizable genres such as the march, ballet, or waltz, even when the performance is not activated. But additional sounds, linked to each character as his or her "theme" song, are loaded onto the smartphones the performers hold and control. A performer might press her phone up to another performer's neck, hold it to her own wrist, or cradle it near her navel: there, wireless microphones bandaged to the performers' bodies transmit sounds, echoing them through the space. The soundtrack is thus layered and sometimes even catalyzed by the presence of viewers, who are at once listeners and agents who might inspire the performers to reconfigure the audio. For instance, a given day's performance might supposedly be centered on the Lover, but another character might spontaneously use her smartphone to play the sounds connected to her own character, entirely redirecting in whose hands the piece resides and who it might at any moment be "about."

As is usual in Imhof's pieces, the performances are studded with friends, colleagues, and alumni who trained with such choreographers as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker or William Forsythe. Some of them look like fashion models; some actually *are* fashion models, occasionally walking the runways for the likes of Balenciaga. What they look like is as important as what they wear and how they do what they do. The performers speak recurring, enigmatic lines such as, "I just put my hand up for fun," or "Angst, come on." They have names like the Lover or the Spitter, the Diver or the Clown. But do not expect clear character development or narrative; Imhof's characters are without character, *per se*. They are attitudes or sensations rather than fully rounded psychic beings. Yet they do have particularities. The Diver longs to dissolve into something bigger than herself; the Spitter contains a violence within him, although he is lonely and looking for connection; the Lover (played by two different female performers) is like an empty can of soda, unfilled; the Prophets (played by falcons) are asked about the future but never with words, and the wild birds are meant to portend what is to come. The Clown walks slowly, his body, like the others, sheathed in the cotton and synthetic textures of sports

PERFORMANCE TIMES

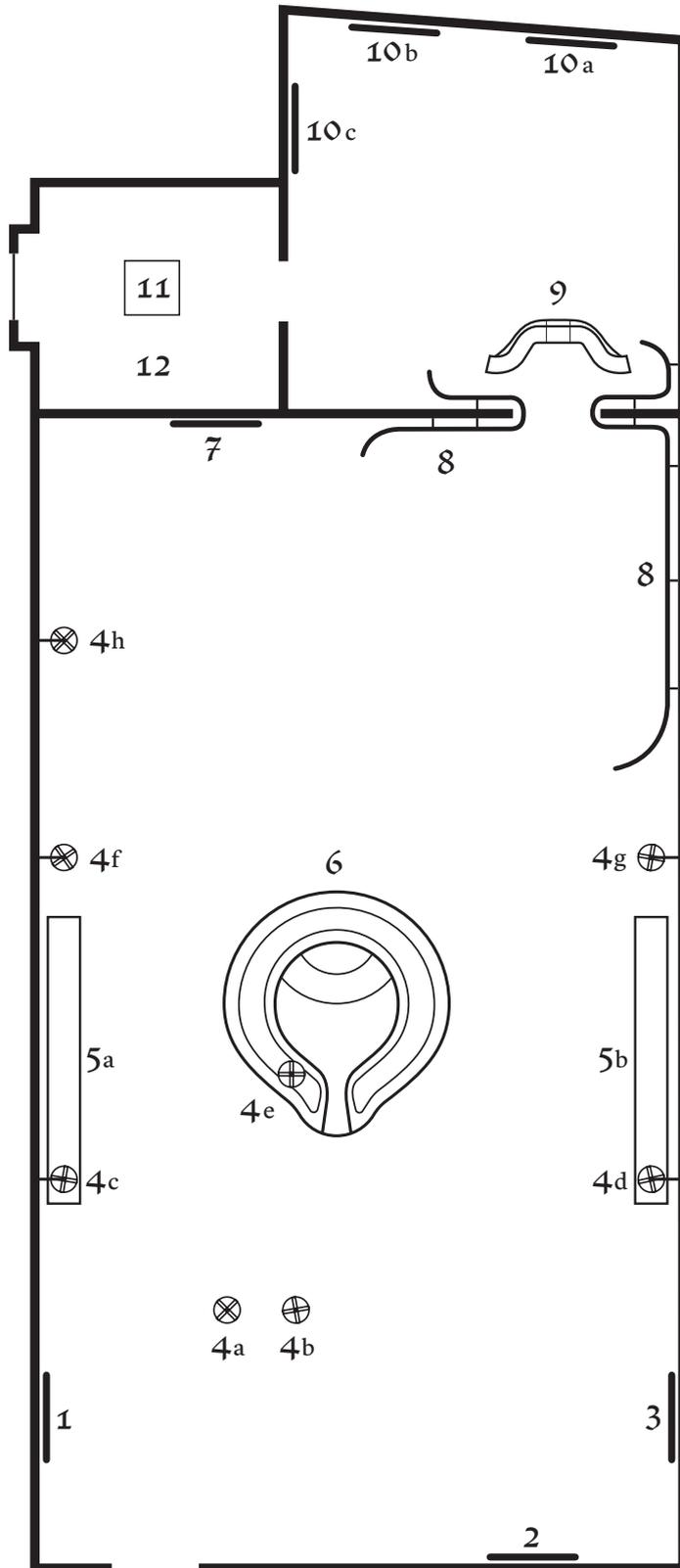
Thursday	June 9	7 pm – 10 pm	Opening with <i>Prelude (Prophets)</i>	
Saturday	June 11	3 pm – 5 pm	<i>The Diver</i>	
Sunday	June 12	3 pm – 5 pm	<i>The Lover</i>	
Monday	June 13	11 am – 2 pm	<i>The Lover</i>	
Tuesday	June 14	11 am – 2 pm 4 pm – 7 pm	<i>The Choir</i> <i>The Clown</i>	
Wednesday	June 15	7 pm – midnight	<i>Act I</i>	
Thursday	June 16	4 pm – 7 pm	<i>The Spitter</i>	
Friday	June 17	11 am – 2 pm	<i>The Spitter</i>	
Saturday	June 18	7 pm – midnight	<i>Return of the Lover</i>	
Sunday	June 19	4 pm – 7 pm	<i>End, 1st of at least three</i>	

- 12** *Mattress III*, 2016
Mattress IV, 2016
Mattress V, 2016
Mattress VI, 2016
 Cotton, foam, leather
 Dimensions variable

- 11** *Untitled (Falcon Stand)*, 2016
 Leather, steel
 134 × 120 × 91 cm

- 10** a *Angst I*, 2016
 b *Angst II*, 2016
 c *Angst III*, 2016
 Aluminum, lacquer paint, steel
 Each 325 × 200 × 5 cm

- 9** *Loge (Angst)*, 2016
 Aluminum
 99 × 220 × 79.7 cm



- 8** *Restraint (Angst)*, 2016
 Razors, stainless steel, titan
 Dimension variable

- 7** *The Lover*, 2016
 Acrylic, leather, and oil on canvas
 300 × 190 × 5 cm

- 6** *To Eau*, 2016
 Resin, wood
 70 cm, Ø 300 cm

- 5** a *Basin I*, 2016
 b *Basin II*, 2016
 Resin, wood
 Each 4.5 × 49.5 × 400 cm

- 4** a *Angst (Black and White)*, 2016
 b *Angst (Black and White)*, 2016
 c *Angst (Reversed)*, 2016
 d *Angst (Hollow)*, 2016
 e *Angst (Ripped)*, 2016
 f *Angst (White)*, 2016
 g *Angst (Cut)*, 2016
 h *Angst (Cut)*, 2016
 Leather, resin, wood
 Each approx. 380 cm, Ø 34 cm

- 3** *The Can*, 2016
 Acrylic, leather, and oil on canvas
 300 × 190 × 5 cm

- 2** *The Navel*, 2016
 Acrylic, leather, oil on canvas, and pencil
 300 × 190 × 5 cm

- 1** *The Lover and the Clown*, 2016
 Acrylic, leather, oil on canvas, and pencil
 300 × 190 × 5 cm

Landing  *Mattress I*, 2016
 *Mattress II*, 2016
 Cotton, foam, leather
 Each approx. 200 × 120 × 5 cm

The works on the Landing and numbered 4 a-h, 6, 10 a-c, and 12 courtesy the artist and Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin

The works numbered 1, 2, 3, 5 a-b, 7, 8, 9, and 11 courtesy the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York

gear (their brands visible: Everlast, Adidas, Gore Windstopper), a single arm rising and finger signaling at a certain moment, as if in a clandestine communication. But who is he addressing, exactly, and for what purpose?

The performers' actions do not tell an actual story, but communicate by working within and around and sometimes even against Imhof's highly codified movement lexicon. Questions of agency and control, power and repetition, illicit transactions and human currency, thread through this piece, as in so many others in Imhof's oeuvre. With their gnomic expressions, affectless speech, and simple movements (gazing, walking, whistling, spitting seeds) executed in either shotgun accelerations or almost painfully slow decelerations, the performers will not necessarily impress you with acrobatic moves or emotional outpourings. Indeed, their deliberate evacuation of the traditional stuff of theater might appear to confirm one critic's characterization of them as zombie-like. That description isn't exactly wrong, but not to wonder about the implications of this is to ignore what Imhof's army of beautiful mutants articulate about our contemporary society and commodity culture—as much through the loaded gestures like navel shaving (symbolically exfoliating one's identity) as through the more banal moves like crowd surfing (symbolically releasing one's body and control to the masses).

The fact that the brands we buy, we are shaped by, and that we are even branded by (Nike, Pepsi, Diet Coca-Cola, Mark1) appear so prominently in *Angst* speaks to this, too. Its portentous title reminds us that that fearful feeling is both a timeless aspect of human nature and perfectly topical at a moment when the daily news point to threats of terror and the very real angst it creates in us. In the end, to watch (which is in some way to participate in) *Angst* is to understand that its critical force accrues as much from the fiercely casual physical precision of Imhof's choreography as from the singular cosmos she constructs. And, like a (zombielike?) body fastened to a restraint track, inexorably connected to it and guided along its rails, *Angst* is thoroughly imbricated in the questions of agency and power that govern it.

It should be said, Imhof does not perform herself in *Angst*. Instead she uses cell phone text messages to comment on the action and send directives while it is taking place. But true to her piece, in which agency is a prerequisite, it is up to the performers to heed her instructions or, simply, ignore them. Power, you see, is in the hands of those who seize it.

Anne Imhof was born in 1978 in Gießen, DE; she lives and works in Frankfurt am Main, DE.

Postscript I:

From its opening on June 9 and then through June 11–19, the various characters of the opera are being introduced progressively. Each day will be different, featuring a distinct part of the whole.

Postscript II:

On June 15, from 7 pm to midnight, *Angst* reaches an epic pinnacle with *Act I*, spread over five hours, with all of its characters, including several live falcons, appearing together.

Postscript III:

Imhof has a predilection for specifying that some of her performances are the “1st of at least X” and sequentially changing the numbers each time the piece is performed. Here it is in her title for the performance on June 19: *End, 1st of at least three*. The promise or condition of there being other versions makes the piece’s potential reproduction, reiteration, and restaging a fact while also acknowledging that each experience of the performance in a particular place at a particular time is unlike another version of it elsewhere.

Anne Imhof
Angst, 2016
with Franziska Aigner, Billy Bultheel,
Katja Cheraneva, Frances Chiavereni,
Emma Daniel, Eliza Douglas, David Imhof,
Josh Johnson, Mickey Mahar, Enad Marouf, and
Lea Welsch

Curated by Elena Filipovic

Music: Billy Bultheel
Dramaturgy: Franziska Aigner
Choreographic assistance: Frances Chiaverini
Production: Laura Langer and José Segebre

The exhibition benefits from the generous support
of Martin Hatebur, the Rudolf Augstein Stiftung,
the Isaac Dreyfus-Bernheim Stiftung, and
Valeria NapoleoneXX.



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FOUNDATION/STIFTUNG

Valeria Napoleone

Angst at Kunsthalle Basel presents the first part of
an opera in three acts, whose later acts will be
exhibited at the Hamburger Bahnhof-Museum
für Gegenwart-Berlin from September 14-25, 2016,
curated by Anna-Catharina Gebbers and
Udo Kittelmann, and at La Biennale de Montréal
from October 19-30, 2016, curated by Philippe Pirotte.
The project is co-produced by Kunsthalle Basel
and the Nationalgalerie - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
supported by the Freunde der Nationalgalerie
with the collaboration of La Biennale de Montréal.

The June 18 performance *Return of the Lover* is a
collaboration with Art Basel's Parcours Night.

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Eliza Douglas, Anne Dressen, Lutz Driver, Ian Edmonds,
Beate & Andreas Florschütz, Sylvie Fortin,
Nadine Fraczkowski, Anna-Catharina Gebbers,
Gian Godenzi, Jeanne Graff, Benjamin Grappin,
Isabelle Graw, Enver Hadzijaj, Judith Hopf,
Nicola Jäggin, Kilian Karrasch, John Kelsey,
Udo Kittelmann, Le Grande SA - Mark1,
Samuel Leuenberger, Mario Lombardo, Dirk Meylaerts,
Christopher Müller, Tomás Nervi, Hans Ulrich Obrist,
Sophie von Olfers, Susanne Pfeffer, Francesca Pia,
Philippe Pirotte, François Pisapia, Jean Marc Prevost,
Stephanie Reuter, Willem de Rooij, Deborah Schamoni,
Sabine Schiffer, Jenny Schlenzka, Fabian Schöneich,
Tino Sehgal, Valerie Sietzy, Marc Spiegler, Zoë Stupp,
Emily Sundblatt, Jürgen Teller, Ilka Tödt,
Henok Tsehaye, and Martin Wenzel

GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German

- 12.6.2016 Sunday, 1 pm
curator's tour, in English
30.6.2016 Thursday, 6.30 pm
guided tour, in English

EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS

- Children's tour *I Spy with My Little Eye!*
14.8.2016 Sunday, 3 pm
A tour and workshop for children 5-10 yrs.
In German, by registration only, contact
kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find
a selection of publications related to Anne Imhof
and her artistic practice.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

Anne Imhof was born 1978 in Giessen (DE), lives and works in Frankfurt/M (DE) and Paris

SOLO SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2016
 - Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin
 - Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin
 - Angst*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland
 - Galerie Buchholz, Cologne
- 2015
 - Reena Spaulings Fine Arts, New York
 - DEAL*, MoMA PS1, New York
- 2014
 - Carré d'Art, Musée d'art contemporain, Projectroom, Nimes
 - Rage I*, Deborah Schamoni, Munich
- 2013
 - Parade, Portikus, Frankfurt

GROUP SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2015
 - Preis der Nationalgalerie 2015, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin
 - Works on Paper*, William Arnold, Brooklyn
 - Our Lacustrine Cities*, curated by Laura Mc Lean Ferris, Chapter NY, New York
 - Do Disturb*, Palais de Tokyo
 - Nouveau Festival*, Centre Pompidou, Paris
- 2014
 - Boom she Boom*, Works of the collection, MMK, Frankfurt, Germany
 - Tes Yeux*, curated by Anne Dressen, 186f Kepler, Paris
 - The Mechanical Garden*, curated by Naomi Pearce, CGP London, London
 - Liste Performance Program, curated by Fabian Schöneich, Basel
 - Abandon the Parents*, SMK Statens Museum for Kunst, National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen
 - Die Marmory Show*, Deborah Schamoni, Munich
 - Pleasure Principles*, Lafayette Foundation, Paris
- 2013
 - Gemini*, curated by Jeanne Graff, Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich
 - Freak out*, Greene Naftali Gallery, New York
 - Mike / Restlessness in the Barn*, curated by Oona von Maydell, with Cosima von Bonin, Jana Euler, Lucie Stahl, Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wiesbaden
- 2012
 - Beautiful Balance*, Kunsthalle Bern, Bern

SELECTED PERFORMANCES

- 2015
 - For Ever Rage*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin
 - Deal, 2nd of at least three* Palais de Tokio, Paris
 - Deal, 1st of at least three* MoMA PS1, New York
 - School of the Seven Bells*, Nouveau Festival, Centre Pompidou, Paris
 - Rage, 4th of at least three*, Kepler 186, Milan
- 2014
 - Rage, 3rd of at least three*, Carre d'Art Contemporain, Nimes
 - Rage, 2nd of at least three*, curated by Fabian Schöneich, Liste 19, Basel
 - Rage, 1st of at least three*, Galerie Deborah Schamoni, Munich
- 2013
 - School of the Seven Bells, 5th of at least four*, Galerie Francesca Pia
 - School of the Seven Bells, 4th of at least four*, New Jerseyy, Basel
 - School of the Seven Bells, 3rd of at least four*, 'Parade', Portikus, Frankfurt
 - Ähjeii, 7th of at least four*, 'Parade', Portikus, Frankfurt
 - Ähjeii, 6th of at least four*, für Basel, MGK Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel
 - Aqua Leo, 1st of at least two*, 'Parade', Portikus, Frankfurt

CHOREOGRAPHED

LAYERS

Anne Imhof won the 2015 edition of Preis der Nationalgalerie for young artists. In this in-depth conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, she talks about her work in performance and introduces *Angst*, an opera in three pieces: the first premiering at Kunsthalle Basel in June, the second in Berlin at Hamburger Bahnhof, and the third in Montreal as part of the Montreal Biennale.

BY HANS ULRICH OBRIST

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

I'd be interested to know with which work your catalogue raisonné might begin.

ANNE IMHOF

Probably one I made *before* I started studying: a duel I staged in Frankfurt's red light district. The piece consisted of a boxing match that lasted for exactly as long as the band I had cast kept playing. That was my first piece, even if I didn't realize it back then.

HUO

Who are the protagonists in your performances?

AI

Some of the people have been around and working with me for several years, and some are new... I also work with some people who used to dance for the Forsythe Company, such as Josh Johnson and Frances Chiaverini, among others. There will be additional people joining for *Angst*, my new piece, who mainly work as models. I also work with Nadine Fraczkowski, an amazing photographer. Together we just did the photoshoot for *Angst*, Bill Bultheel who wrote music for that same piece. There's also Franziska Aigner, who studied choreography with Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and is now completing her PhD in philosophy at London's Kingston University. She has written about my work. It felt important that the first book I'm publishing will have texts in it that were also written from an insider's perspective.

HUO

That's evident, because the writer is part of the work herself. So she isn't so much writing *about* the piece as from within it.

AI

Yes, exactly. The text is well structured: it starts off with her performing and then continues with her thoughts on what she's doing and on Michel Foucault's concept of power. It ends with that quote from Foucault along the lines of: "If power did anything but to say no, do you really think we would obey?" I like that. It will be published in what will be my first catalogue, a publication I am making in relation to *Angst*. *Parade*—my first solo show—was composed of three separate pieces, as well as paintings and drawings. There's *Aqua Leo*, a performance with donkeys that is choreographed like a parade that only has internal movement and never actually gets going. That was also the first piece that was about some concept of potency, a kind of tension that never gets released. Then there's that pickpocket piece, *School of the Seven Bells*, that has batons and guys wearing rings. I like that when the materials are listed in the piece's captions, it says: aluminum, silver, and gold. The other piece is *Ähjeii*, which is a concert I conceived as a prequel to the others. The publication is going to include all of them, as well as *Rage* and *Deal*. *Rage* and *Deal* were not part of the *Parade*

exhibition, but they will be included in the catalogue, since it will be the first published overview of my work. The book will be sectioned into three parts.

HUO

So, chronologically speaking, we could say that the first works were *Ähjeii*, *Aqua Leo*, and *School of the Seven Bells*, then after that came *Rage*, then *Deal*, and now you're about to complete *Angst*. But the beginning of it all was that duel—the boxing match—you staged before you went to Städelschule.

AI

I was about twenty back then.

HUO

That's quite early for such a mature piece. Who was your inspiration at the time?

AI

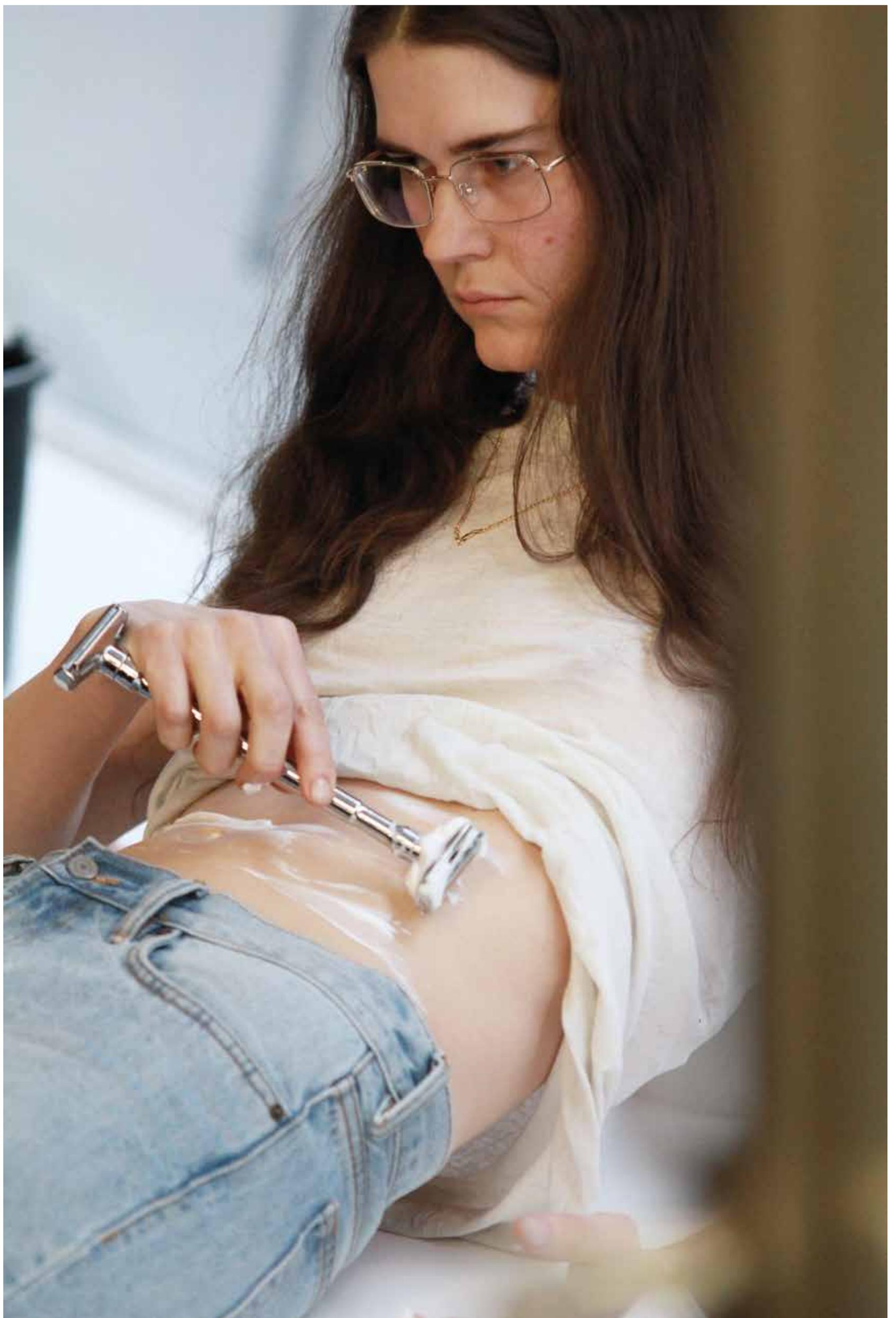
Back then Andy Warhol had an influence on me, but then I moved past that. Giotto and Caravaggio were also important. But I guess there is a difference between thinking about practices or artists and being actually influenced by them. Some of those who had the most influence on me might be the ones I didn't actually like. When I came to Städelschule the classes with Judith Hopf, my professor, and Willem de Rooij, and Isabelle Graw's seminars on painting were all mind-opening. There are as many people who inspire me now. Some of them surround me right now and others are more like artists of previous centuries, ghosts that become your friends and accomplices. Eliza Douglas, my fiancée, is a great artist. Never felt this kind of inspiration being constantly in exchange and aligned with another person. I think I like to look at other artistic work, I was very influenced by poets and music I am listening too. Early Genesis P.Orridge (*DisCIPLINE*). I saw for example lately the spring and fall shows of Demna Gvasalia the new designer of Balenciaga, he is really good with colors and shapes. Back when I started studying photography at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach, I met Nadine Fraczkowski, with whom I started making music and working. We always created certain kinds of situations together that had no exit points or solutions and that weren't staged, and both of us were taking photographs. I still remember standing in that musty university corridor and thinking, this piece is never going to work. These guys will never be able to keep leaning against this wall and just stay there without someone walking past, as if they were a painting.

HUO

Like everyone having their own duration to them—so that the work almost has "opening hours" as opposed to being a performance, as Tino Sehgal might say.

AI

It's more of an image than a situation. These days my works pose some kind of seductive, managed transgression. They are





mainly about identity and constructed out of a very subjective perspective.

I work with a lot of talented people. It's about the thought and how it looks when it leaves the mind.

HUO

And your exhibition *Parade* was when your work found a wider audience, when it became public for the first time. How was it back then—what was that epiphany leading you to the pieces in *Parade*? I'm trying to get to the bottom of it; you are saying it's about potency. Something that is present virtually but that ultimately isn't resolved or fulfilled. Where you think something is going to happen any minute but then it never does.

AI

For me it was about leaving enough room for those who see my work to be immersed and leave enough room for them to create their own narrative.

That is what *Parade* brought together for me: some sort of opposition against performance, ultimately. Reading the reviews afterward left me torn because it was the first time that people were writing or talking about my work. On the one hand I was happy because people were actually framing my work and putting it into context, but on the other hand I didn't necessarily feel comfortable with how they spoke about it. The way I was thinking about my performances was very different; it felt more like layers, on top of one another, like applying oil paint on a surface.

HUO

I noticed it at the Hamburger Bahnhof where *For Ever Rage* was performed—this feeling that there are layers and parallels in the works.

AI

The piece is compressing experience because the images in it are composed successively, which is also what makes it different at times. There are close-ups in the piece, for example, and then there's what's going on in the background, and over time those two perspectives start to blur into each other. Here I willingly relinquish control.

HUO

Tino Sehgal often mentions Einar Schlee, and how important his work was for him. Were you influenced by theater?

AI

No, not that much. But Christoph Schlingensiefel is important and William Forsythe was very present in Frankfurt. Early influences were people like Genesis-P-Orridge, in musical terms at least, or the early work of Matthew Barney. Jean-Michel Basquiat is definitely an influence. Tino Sehgal as well because I worked for him when he did a show in Frankfurt, a Felix Gonzalez-Torres retrospective. Elena Filipovic, with whom I am working on the exhibition *Angst* in Basel, curated a series of exhibitions around and with the work of Gonzalez-Torres and she had invited Tino to co-curate the version in Frankfurt with her. For it, Tino hired art students as the installers to constantly make and unmake the show. And I had been looking for a second job in addition to my bouncer duties at the Robert Johnson club; I was also starting art school, and I didn't yet know Tino's work. At the time, I often felt I couldn't take in too much other art because I felt so preoccupied creatively myself, but it turned out to be such a good encounter with him.

HUO

Which brings us to your drawings. Basquiat was an obsessive draftsman and doodler. And with you there's this drawing element that comes up time and again. Would you say that this is a thread that runs through your practice?

AI

Drawing feels instantaneous and natural to me. It helps me remember things and ideas, like a way of trying to grasp what's really going on. Just getting it out there visibly, onto a two-dimensional sheet of paper, helps me piece things together. In a way I use drawings in the traditional sense, as studies. Maybe what connects me to Basquiat is more a way of seeing

what's there in the moment, an immediacy that comes from the outside.

HUO

But from what I can tell there isn't really something like a master plan with your situations and exhibitions where everything is meticulously scripted. You seem to be leaving it all open. What you call potency—that's left open. So are the drawings perhaps—to paraphrase John Cage—something of an open score?

AI

I suppose you could say that. I use the drawings for the work with the dancers as well. In some ways I make sketches of anything that goes on or that I see. At the same time there is always a master plan.

HUO

And are those drawings taken from sketchbooks? There are some larger drawings on display in the exhibition, too, and if that's where they were from they wouldn't be only just spontaneous but rather a form of research or investigation—or explanation. Are there preliminary sketches or notations, and does some of the work result from them?

AI

Yes. They come before but also after the work. These are spontaneous at the same time, though. Writing and drawing feel the same to me. They're both following the same impulse.

HUO

You write as well?

AI

I do, but nothing I would call comprehensive texts. They are usually not longer than a page and are then applied or scratched on paintings and are recurring in my work, as in the spoken parts of the pieces. Notes small poems and letters mostly, emails I write during the initial phase of a new work. I like to steal words, I'm a thief with words.

HUO

One more question about *Parade*, seeing that that was your first exhibition and had those three parts to it. Did this succession just happen naturally, or was it your idea from the start to have three elements? How did you go from *Ähjeii* to *Aqua Leo* to *School of the Seven Bells*?

AI

Those three pieces existed already, but I wanted a connecting link between the performance and the duration of the exhibition. So *Parade* started with *Aqua Leo* and then finished with *Ähjeii*. There was a rhythm to its duration that left the space in half-darkness with only music playing and the big painting on the Portikus ceiling on display. *Angst* will work across three exhibitions, instead of three pieces under one show. The first act will be staged in Basel at Kunsthalle Basel, the second in Berlin at the Hamburger Bahnhof, and the third in Montreal as part of the Montreal Biennale. For example, in Berlin, Udo Kittelmann is changing the opening hours from day to night to show the image of a tightrope dancer dissecting the *historische halle* mid-air. If I don't have these extended times, then these things, like one big image, can't really be there the way I want them to.

The plan for Basel is a slow buildup of *Angst* until it peaks into the first act of the opera. During the first days of the exhibition, I'll introduce different characters, such as the lover, the choir, the prophet, and the diver; letting them build up, peak and gradually disappear. I've envisioned the space as a display of waste and exclusivity. A loge separates the exhibition rooms in such a way that by entering the main space you, and everybody else, become the spectator of an opera inside a huge balcony that is also the stage. In a sense opera, like painting, has a long but also shady history. To use this, like the way I do, points to the authority of arrogance. I like that.

For the music I've been working with Billy Bultheel, who is composing the sound of *Angst*. Personally, I can only write love songs. There's this figure who keeps returning to me and who is really good at spitting, above all things. In

a Violette Leduc novel, *Therese and Isabelle*—a love story between two women—there's an introductory scene where they meet at boarding school and one of them has this burning hate for the other because she embodies everything the other cannot find within herself. And so she confesses that she is consumed with rage because the only thing she can actually do well is work really hard and... spit. And that's it. In *Angst* there are good spitters at hand.

HUO

There are falcons now for Basel, there were tortoises in Berlin. And the donkeys in Frankfurt, and also the tigers. So that potency we were talking about isn't solely anthropocentric because there are animals involved. How did that come about?

AI

It started with *Aqua Leo*, when I made the decision to include the donkey. The donkey was in fact a mule, and they're usually unable to reproduce, which cuts the bloodline after one generation, against a buildup of society. I like that. Welcome home (without any parents). They curiously also respond to fight-or-flight impulses.

HUO

But it's different from Jannis Kounellis, where the animals become some sort of *tableaux vivant*, because they are part of the choreography in your work...

AI

They almost have that function, although in some ways the donkeys are just there on their own. Their function is to create passages, to function like lines parting the space. Those passages were first widened and then narrowed again. I like it when things happen mostly in the mind and the guys are following a score that is invisible to the viewers. Like in *Deal* where there is a ramp extending across the exhibition space where time passes more quickly at ground level than on the level

above, which slows down movement. And of course that's only in the dancers' heads. Anyhow, at some point that ramp starts tilting and then it shifts toward the audience. I've choreographed gazes and hand movements to create perspective in my pieces. The performers are trained to slice diagonals through space with their eyes. Everything else is composed like an image over time.

HUO

There is this text by Margaret Mead from the 1940s. Even back then already she wrote that exhibitions have been reduced to their visual aspects only—sensually speaking—and that this prohibits a full engagement on the part of the audience. And that this is the reason why people spend so little time in exhibitions. Whereas if you have an event that has sounds and smells and involves all senses, like a Balinese ritual, say, or a medieval religious mass, people will stay. I'm getting the impression that this might be a direction you're going in, also seeing as you have sometimes made the decision to create a gloomy *penombré* in the space. This kind of atmosphere, *entre chien et loup*; neither day nor night, a kind of twilight.

AI

That's my favorite time, when the outlines of things become blurred and the colors become increasingly saturated.

HUO

A lot of the movements in the choreography appear to be about balancing and equilibrium.

AI

Yes, that's quite visible in *Rage*. *Angst* might take this as a departure point, but the images are based on acceleration, attitude, and surface. I want to create images like this, which are abstracted but with figures. Through them I can contradict myself within a single moment.

P. 70 - *Parade: Aqua Leo, 1st of at least two*, 2013, performance at Portikus, Frankfurt/Main, 2013.
Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Nadine Fraczkowski

P. 72 - *Angst*, 2016.
Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Nadine Fraczkowski

P. 74 - *Overture*, 2016, performed at Galerie Buchholz, Cologne, 2016.
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York

P. 75, clockwise from top left - *Restraint*, 2016, installation view at Galerie Buchholz, Cologne, 2016.
Courtesy: Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York

Installation view at Galerie Buchholz, Cologne, 2016.
Courtesy: Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York

(*picnic, lightning*) I, 2016.
Courtesy: Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York

Overture, 2016, performed at Galerie Buchholz, Cologne, 2016.
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York

Overture, 2016, performed at Galerie Buchholz, Cologne, 2016.
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York

Overture, 2016, performed at Galerie Buchholz, Cologne, 2016.
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York

Babydream, 2016.
Courtesy: Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Cologne / New York

P. 78, top - *Deal* (stills), 2015.
Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Nadine Fraczkowski

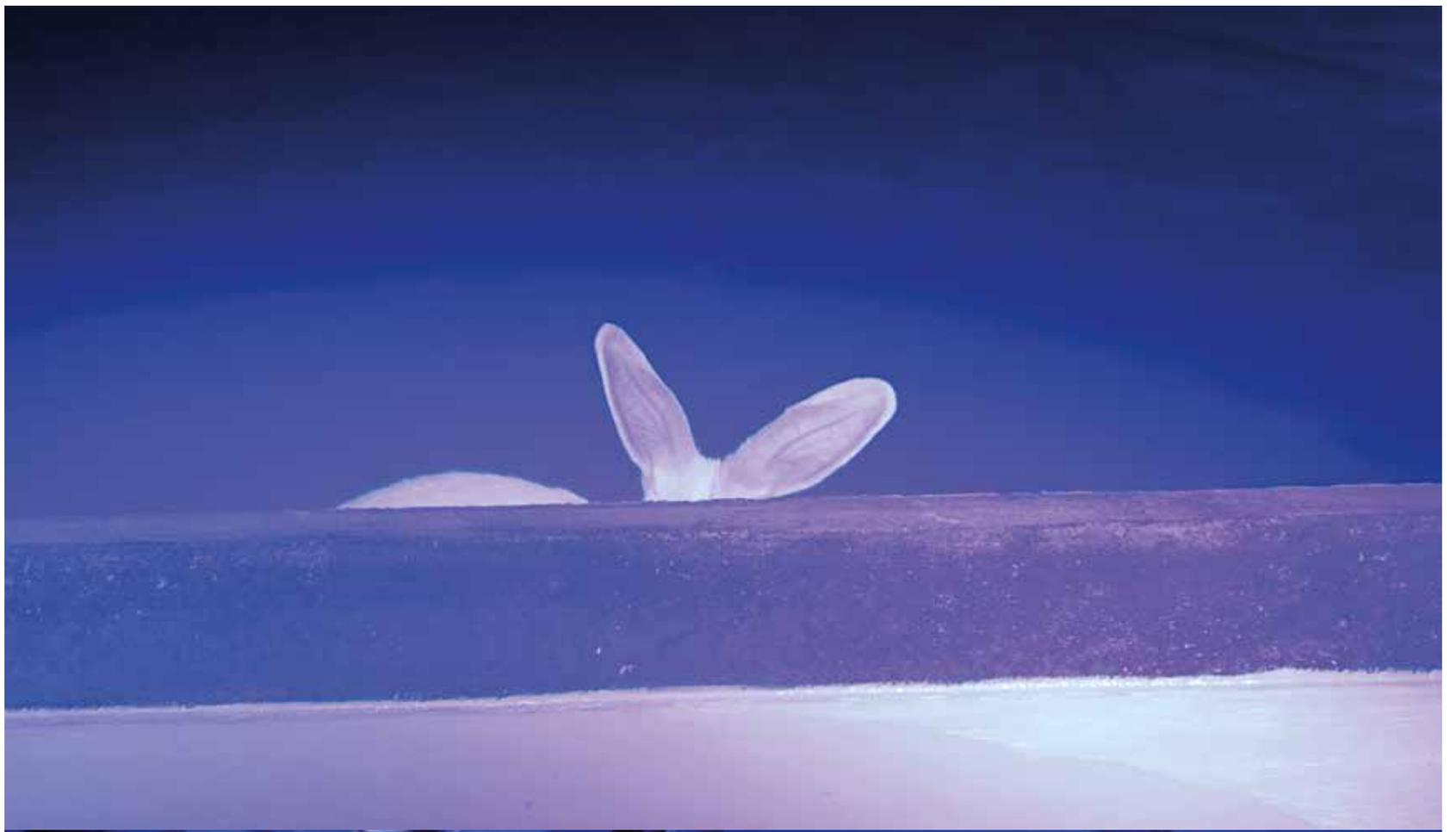
P. 78, bottom - *Deal*, 2015, performance at MoMA PS1, New York, 2015.
Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Nadine Fraczkowski

P. 79 - *Rage 4th of at least three*, 2015, performance at 186f Kepler, Milan.
Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Nadine Fraczkowski

P. 81 - *For Ever Rage*, 2015, performance at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 2015.
Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Nadine Fraczkowski

Hans Ulrich Obrist (1968, Zurich, Switzerland) is Co-Director of the Serpentine Galleries, London. Prior to this, he was the Curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Since his first show *World Soup* (The Kitchen Show) in 1991, he has curated more than 300 shows.

Anne Imhof (1978, Germany) lives and works in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. In 2012 she graduated from the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. Using the language, codes and varied techniques of image making as a point of departure, Imhof extends her practice through different media, combining performance, drawing, film, sculptural work and painting. She is the 2015 recipient of the Preis der Nationalgalerie and will have a solo exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin in September 2016. She will also participate in the Montreal Biennial 2016, and is presenting the first act of her upcoming project *Angst* at the Kunsthalle Basel.





Anne Imhof ha vinto l'edizione 2015 del Preis der Nationalgalerie per giovani artisti. In questa conversazione con Hans Ulrich Obrist, parla delle sue performance e presenta *Angst*, un'opera in tre atti: il primo presentato a giugno presso la Kunsthalle Basel; il secondo e il terzo si terranno, rispettivamente, all'Hamburger Bahnhof di Berlino e alla Biennale di Montreal.

HANS ULRICH OBRIST Mi piacerebbe sapere da che opera faresti iniziare un tuo catalogo ragionato.

ANNE IMHOF Probabilmente da una che ho realizzato *prima* di iniziare a studiare; una specie di duello che ho messo in scena nel quartiere a luci rosse di Francoforte; consisteva in un incontro di pugilato che durava esattamente fino a quando il gruppo musicale che avevo ingaggiato continuava a suonare. Quello è stato il mio primo pezzo, anche se all'epoca non l'avevo capito.

HUO Chi sono i protagonisti delle tue performance?

AI Frequento e collaboro con alcuni di loro da parecchi anni, altri sono arrivati da poco. Lavoro con alcuni ex ballerini della Forsythe Company, tra cui Josh Johnson e Frances Chiaverini. Per *Angst*, la mia nuova opera, si uniranno a noi altre persone, che fanno soprattutto i modelli. Lavoro anche con Nadine Fraczkowski, una bravissima fotografa. Abbiamo appena completato insieme un servizio fotografico su *Angst*; con Bill Bultheel che ha scritto la musica. C'è anche Franziska Aigner, che ha studiato coreografia con Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker e sta completando il dottorato in filosofia al Kingston College di Londra; ha scritto un pezzo critico sul mio lavoro. Mi sembrava molto importante che nella mia prima pubblicazione fossero inseriti anche dei testi scritti dal punto di vista di un insider.

HUO Salta agli occhi, perché la scrittrice stessa fa parte dell'opera. Quindi non si tratta tanto di scrivere *sul* pezzo, quanto di farlo dall'interno.

AI Sì, esatto. Il testo è ben strutturato: inizia con la sua performance e continua con le sue riflessioni su ciò che sta facendo, e sul concetto di potere in Foucault. Finisce con la citazione di Foucault, all'incirca: "se il potere non facesse altro che dire no, credi davvero che obbediremmo?" Mi piace. Lo pubblico in quello che sarà il mio primo catalogo, legato ad *Angst*. "Parade" – la mia prima personale – era composta di tre pezzi indipendenti, oltre a dipinti e disegni: *Aqua Leo*, una performance con alcuni asini, coreografata come una parata che ha solo un movimento interno e in realtà non parte mai; è anche il primo pezzo incentrato su una certa idea di stato in potenza o un tipo di tensione che non trova mai sfogo. Poi c'è il lavoro sui borseggiatori, *School of the Seven Bells*, in cui ci sono le mazze metalliche i e ragazzi indossano anelli. Mi diverte che nell'elenco dei materiali in didascalia si legga: alluminio, argento e oro. L'altro pezzo è *Ähjeii*, che in realtà è un concerto concepito come premessa agli altri. Ora saranno tutti pubblicati in catalogo, insieme a *Rage e Deal*. *Rage e Deal* non facevano parte della mostra, ma saranno inclusi in catalogo, visto che si tratterà della prima panoramica pubblicata sul mio lavoro. Sarà un catalogo in tre parti.

HUO Quindi potremmo dire che le prime opere in ordine cronologico sono *Ähjeii*, *Aqua Leo* e *School of the Seven Bells*, dopo di che viene *Rage*, poi *Deal*, e ora stai per completare *Angst*. Ma all'origine

di tutto c'è il combattimento – l'incontro di pugilato – che hai inscenato ancora prima di frequentare la Städelsschule.

AI Allora avevo circa vent'anni.

HUO È davvero molto presto per un pezzo così maturo. A chi t'ispiravi all'epoca?

AI All'epoca, guardavo molto ad Andy Warhol, poi sono andata oltre. Anche Giotto e Caravaggio sono stati importanti, ma ritengo ci sia una differenza tra la riflessione su varie pratiche o artisti e l'esserne realmente influenzati. Alcuni di quelli che mi hanno più influenzata potrebbero essere quelli che in realtà non mi piacevano. Frequentando la Städel ho trovato illuminanti i corsi con Judith Hopf e Willem de Rooij e i seminari sulla pittura tenuti da Isabelle Graw. Alcune fonti di ispirazione mi circondano proprio ora e altri sono artisti dei secoli passati, fantasmi che diventano amici e complici. Potrei citare anche Eliza Douglas, la mia compagna, una grande artista. Non avevo mai provato questo essere in continuo scambio e in sintonia con un'altra persona prima d'ora. Mi interessano anche altri linguaggi artistici, sono stata influenzata da poeti e musica. Il primo Genesis P.Orridge, ad esempio. Qualche mese fa ho visto ad esempio le sfilate primaverili e autunnali di Demna Gvasalia, il nuovo direttore artistico di Balenciaga, molto interessante come forme e colori.

HUO Come se ciascuno avesse una propria durata nel pezzo – per cui l'opera, invece di essere una performance, ha quasi un "orario d'apertura", come direbbe Tino Sehgal. Ho iniziato a studiare fotografia alla Hochschule für Gestaltung di Offenbach, dove ho incontrato Nadine Fraczkowski, con cui ho iniziato una collaborazione e una relazione. Insieme creavamo sempre un tipo di situazioni che non avevano sbocchi o soluzioni, non costruite, in cui entrambe scattavamo fotografie. Mi ricordo ancora di quando me ne stavo nel corridoio stantio dell'università pensando: questo pezzo non funzionerà mai; questi ragazzi non riusciranno mai a restare appoggiati al muro, a restare semplicemente lì senza che nessuno passi loro davanti, come fossero dei quadri appesi.

AI Più un'immagine che una situazione. In questo periodo noto proprio questo delle mie opere: propongono una forma di trasgressione controllata che seduce. Si incentrano sull'identità soprattutto, e sono costruite a partire da una prospettiva soggettiva. Affido anche ad altre persone talentuose una buona parte del lavoro. Riguarda il pensiero e l'aspetto che assume quando lascia la mente.

HUO Il momento in cui tutto ciò ha trovato un pubblico più vasto è "Parade", dove l'hai esposto per la prima volta. Come era allora – quale epifania ti ha portato a creare le opere presentate in "Parade"? Sto cercando di andare a fondo... tu affermi che trattano il tema dello stato in potenza, quel qualcosa che è virtualmente presente ma che alla fine si risolve o si compie, quando si pensa che da un momento all'altro accada qualcosa che poi non succede mai.

AI Per me si trattava di lasciare abbastanza spazio affinché i visitatori fossero coinvolti e creassero una propria narrazione a partire da un'immagine che non è veramente agita. "Parade" per me ha aggregato, in sostanza, una certa forma di opposizione alla performance. Leggere le recensioni subito dopo mi ha lasciato in preda a stati d'animo contrastanti, perché era la prima volta che qualcuno scriveva o parlava del mio lavoro. Perciò se da una parte ero felice che il mio lavoro fosse inquadrato e inserito in un contesto, dall'altra non mi sentivo necessariamente

in sintonia con il modo in cui se ne parlava. Pensavo alle mie performance in modo molto diverso; mi davano più la sensazione di strati che si sovrapponevano uno all'altro, come le stesure del colore ad olio sulla superficie.

HUO L'ho notato all'Hamburger Bahnhof, dove era rappresentata *For Ever Rage* – la percezione della presenza di vari livelli e di parallelismi nelle opere.

AI Il pezzo condensa l'esperienza, perché le immagini che contiene sono composte in successione, il che lo rende anche diverso, in certi momenti. Nel pezzo, ad esempio, ci sono i primi piani e poi c'è la ripresa di sfondo, e nel tempo le due prospettive iniziano a sfumare l'una nell'altra. Qui rinuncio volutamente al controllo.

HUO Tino Sehgal parla spesso di Einar Schlee e di quanto consideri significativa la sua opera. Tu sei stata influenzata dal teatro?

AI No, non molto, ma Christoph Schlingensiefel rimane importante e anche William Forsythe era molto presente a Francoforte. Le prime influenze sono state quelle di gente come Genesis P.Orridge, perlomeno in termini musicali, o le opere giovanili di Matthew Barney. Anche Tino, perché ho lavorato per lui alla mostra che ha curato a Francoforte, una retrospettiva di Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Elena Filipovic, con cui ora lavoro ad *Angst* Basilea, curava una serie di mostre incentrate sull'opera di Gonzalez-Torres e aveva invitato Tino a co-curare con lei la versione di Francoforte. Tino assunse studenti d'arte nel ruolo di installatori che montavano e smontavano continuamente la mostra. All'epoca io cercavo un secondo lavoro oltre a quello di buttafuori al club Robert Johnson, iniziavo la scuola d'arte e non conoscevo le opere di Tino. Sentivo spesso di non poter assorbire troppa arte di altri, allora, perché mi sentivo io stessa molto concentrata dal punto di vista creativo, ma si è rivelato un incontro molto positivo.

HUO Il che ci porta ai tuoi disegni. Basquiat faceva disegni e scarabocchi in modo ossessivo. Nel tuo lavoro, il disegno sembra affiorare continuamente. Potresti definirlo il filo conduttore presente in tutta la tua pratica artistica?

AI Disegnare mi viene spontaneo e naturale. Mi aiuta a ricordare cose e idee, è quasi il modo per cercare di capire cosa succede davvero. Anche solo il trasporre in maniera visibile, su un foglio di carta bidimensionale, mi aiuta a mettere insieme le cose. In un certo senso uso i disegni in modo tradizionale, come studi. Forse mi collega di più a Basquiat il modo di vedere quel che è presente nel momento, un'immediatezza che viene dall'esterno.

HUO Da quel che posso capire, non esiste in realtà qualcosa di simile a un progetto di massima per le tue performance e le mostre. Sembra che tu lasci qualcosa di indeterminato. Quel che definisci stato in potenza. I disegni sono forse quindi – per parafrasare John Cage – una specie di partitura aperta?

AI Credo di sì. Utilizzo i disegni anche quando lavoro con i ballerini. In un certo senso creo schizzi di tutto quello che succede al momento, o quello che io vedo. Allo stesso tempo esiste sempre un progetto di massima.

HUO I disegni sono presi dagli album di schizzi? Nella mostra sono esposti anche alcuni disegni più grandi, e se vengono da lì non sarebbero solo schizzi spontanei, ma piuttosto una forma di ricerca, di indagine – o di spiegazione. Quindi, esistono schizzi o note preparatorie, da cui deriva una parte dell'opera?

AI Sì. Esistono prima ma anche dopo l'opera, e sono ugualmente spontanei. Scrivere e disegnare per me si equivalgono, seguono entrambi il medesimo impulso.

HUO Scrivi?

AI Sì, ma non quel che definirei testi completi. Generalmente non sono più lunghi di una pagina, come le parti parlate delle performance o i testi che poi applico ai dipinti. Di solito sono soprattutto lettere per la fase iniziale di una nuova opera. Mi piace rubare parole, sono una ladra di parole.

HUO Ancora una domanda su "Parade", poiché si tratta della tua prima mostra e si componeva di tre parti. La loro successione è avvenuta in modo spontaneo o hai maturato fin dall'inizio l'idea di presentare tre elementi? Come sei passata da *Áhjeii* ad *Aqua Leo* a *School of the Seven Bells*?

AI Quei tre pezzi esistevano già ma io volevo ci fosse un elemento di connessione tra la performance e la durata della mostra. Per questo "Parade" iniziava con *Aqua Leo* e finiva con *Áhjeii*: la durata era calibrata per lasciare lo spazio avvolto nella semi-oscurità, mentre la musica continuava a suonare e rimaneva visibile solo il grande disegno appeso al soffitto di Portikus. *Angst* si svilupperà in tre mostre, invece di presentare tre pezzi in un'unica mostra. Il primo atto sarà allestito a Basilea, alla Kunsthalle Basel, il secondo a Berlino, all'Hamburger Bahnhof, e il terzo a Montreal, nell'ambito della Biennale di Montreal. A Berlino, ad esempio, Udo Kittelmann cambierà l'orario di apertura dal giorno alla notte per poter mostrare l'immagine di un funambolo che attraverserà a mezz'aria la *historische halle*. Se non ottengo l'estensione dell'orario di apertura allora questi elementi, in un'unica grande immagine, non possono essere presenti come voglio io.

Il progetto per Basilea è un lento crescendo di *Angst*, e culmina nel primo atto dell'opera lirica. Nei primi giorni della mostra presenterò diversi personaggi: l'innamorato, il coro, il profeta e il tuffatore; costruendoli fino alla formazione completa, poi lasciandoli sfumare via. Ho immaginato lo spazio come una vetrina di spreco ed esclusività, che enfatizza costantemente la superficie. Un palco separa le stanze della mostra in modo che entrando nello spazio principale si diventi spettatori di un'opera da una grande galleria che ne è anche il palcoscenico. In un certo senso l'opera lirica, come la pittura, ha una storia lunga ma anche piena di ombre. Utilizzarla, nel modo in cui uso anche la moda, rivela autorevolezza o arroganza. Mi piace.

Per la musica ho collaborato con Billy Bultheel, che sta componendo la colonna sonora di *Angst*. Di mio, so scrivere solo canzoni d'amore. C'è una figura che mi si ripresenta continuamente, e che è bravissima a sputare, più di ogni altra cosa. In un romanzo di Violette Leduc, *Therese and Isabelle* – una storia d'amore tra due donne – c'è una scena introduttiva in cui le due si incontrano in collegio e una di loro sviluppa un odio bruciante per l'altra perché incarna tutto ciò che non può trovare in se stessa. E quindi confessa di consumarsi di rabbia perché l'unica cosa che sa far bene è lavorare duramente e... sputare. E basta. In *Angst* avremo a disposizione bravi sputatori.

HUO Ora a Basilea ci sono i falchi, a Berlino le tartarughe, a Francoforte gli asini e anche le tigri: quindi lo stato in potenza di cui stiamo parlando non è solo antropocentrico, perché sono presenti anche gli animali. Come è successo?

AI È iniziato con *Aqua Leo*, quando ho deciso di inserire un asino, che in realtà era



un mulo. I muli non possono riprodursi, il che interrompe la linea di discendenza dopo una generazione, va contro l'accrescimento della società. È un aspetto che mi piace. Benvenuto a casa (senza genitori). I muli poi curiosamente reagiscono sia a impulsi di attacco che di fuga.

HUO Ma è diverso da Jannis Kounellis, in cui gli animali diventano una specie di *tableaux vivants*? Perché nella tua opera sono parte della coreografia...

AI Hanno quasi quella funzione, anche se in un certo senso gli asini stanno lì per conto loro. La loro funzione è creare passaggi, fungere da linee di suddivisione dello spazio. I passaggi sono prima allargati e poi nuovamente ristretti. Mi piace quando le cose accadono soprattutto nella mente, e i protagonisti seguono una partitura invisibile al pubblico. Come in *Deal*, in cui una rampa attraversa lo spazio espositivo, e il tempo passa più velocemente al livello del suolo rispetto al livello superiore, che rallenta il movimento. Naturalmente tutto ciò è solo nella mente dei ballerini. Comunque la rampa a un certo punto inizia a curvarsi e poi inclinarsi verso il pubblico. Nei miei pezzi ho coreografato gli sguardi e i movimenti delle mani in modo da creare prospettiva: gli esecutori sono addestrati a ritagliare tracciare diagonali nello spazio con gli sguardi. Tutto il resto è composto come un'immagine, nel tempo.

HUO C'è un testo di Margaret Mead degli anni Quaranta. Già allora lei scriveva che le mostre sono state ridotte al loro

aspetto puramente visivo – dal punto di vista sensoriale – e ciò impedisce un legame intenso con il pubblico. Ecco perché la gente passa così poco tempo nelle mostre. Invece a un evento con suoni e profumi, che coinvolga tutti i sensi, come ad esempio un rituale balinese, o una messa medievale, la gente rimarrà. Ho quasi l'impressione che tu ti stia muovendo in questa direzione, vedendo anche come a volte decidi di creare nello spazio una cupa *pénombre*, un tipo di atmosfera *entre chien et loup*; né giorno né notte, una specie di crepuscolo.

AI È il mio momento preferito, in cui i contorni delle cose diventano indefiniti e i colori diventano gradualmente più saturi.

HUO Molti movimenti della coreografia sembrano incentrati sul bilanciamento, l'equilibrio.

AI Sì, ed è molto evidente in *Rage. Angst* forse parte da questo aspetto, ma le immagini si concentrano su accelerazione, atteggiamento e superficie. Voglio creare immagini come questa, astratte ma con figure, grazie alle quali posso contraddire me stessa nel volgere di un solo istante.