

Portfolio

Urs August Steiner

Urs August Steiner,
(1980*, lives and works in Zurich)
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Education

- 2009 - Master in Fine Arts, ECAL
2011 University of Art and Design Lausanne

2007 Fine Arts, CCA
California College of the Arts, San Francisco

2005 - Bachelor Scenography, ZHdK
2008 Zurich University of the Arts, Zürich

Solo exhibitions

- 2019 Swiss Pavilion - S01E03 Pavilion,
Bombay Beach Biennale, California
S01E02 Defreeze, Nextex, St.Gallen

2017 Super Cool X-1000, Fokus Preis, Kunsthause Glarus
Smoke Gets in Your Eyes, Old Dogs - New Tricks
With Walter Pfeiffer, Dienstgebäude, Zürich

2015 Buster Six, Des Pacio, San José, Costa Rica, CRI
Orbit 2046, MoCA Pavilion,
Museum for Contemporary Art, Shanghai, CHN

2014 Twin Peaks, Grand Palais, Bern
Buster II, Lokal-int, Biel

2013 Some Scream and Some Don't,
Splatterpool, New York, USA

Group exhibitions (selection)

- 2020 Werk- und Auslandatelier-Stipendien 2020,
Helmhaus, Zürich

2019 The Big Rip, Bounce, Chill or Crunch?, Last Tango, Zürich

2018 Heimspiel, Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen

2017 Previous, Blossom, Zürich
Farrago, L'OV, Centre d'art Neuchâtel

2016 Eleven Flags, Sitterwerk, St. Gallen

2015 New Glarus, Kunsthause Glarus
F?!, Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles, USA

2014 Kunstschaffen Glarus und Linthgebiet, Kunsthause Glarus
Catch of the Year, Dienstgebäude, Zürich
The Rest is Noise, Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur

Awards/Residencies

- 2019 Artist residency, Roma Calling, Istituto Svizzero di Roma, ITA
Bursary award, UBS

2018 Bursary award, canton St. Gallen
Research bursary, Pro Helvetia 2016

2016 Bursary award, canton St. Gallen

2015 Artist residency, Pro Helvetia, Shanghai, CHN

2014 Fokus-Prize, Kunsthause Glarus

2012 Artist residency, Residency Unlimited, New York, USA

Collection

Canton St.Gallen

S01E06 Fornever Forget
Venerdì Pomeriggio,
Istituto Svizzero, IT, 2020

right and next pages
Installation with performers
performances 1:30h
circle of sugar

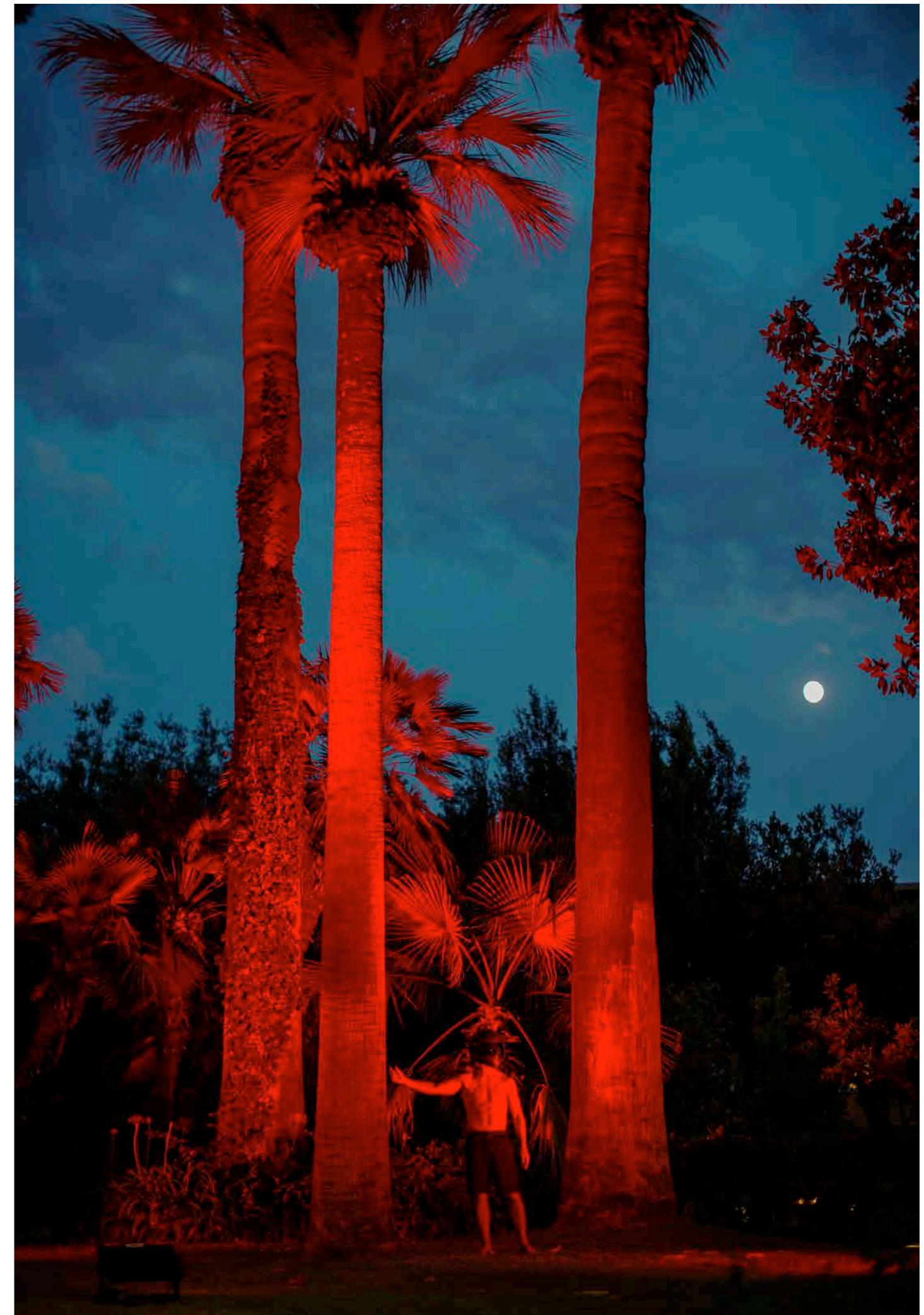
The installation in the Villa Maraini
and its gardens is laid out as a
parcour in which three spatial
sequences are linked together and
thereby a narrative unfolds.

photo: Tommaso Cassinis

Video documentation:

<https://vimeo.com/451105179>

psw: urs





S01E06 Fornever Forget
Venerdì Pomeriggio,
Istituto Svizzero, IT, 2020

Es ereignete sich an einem lauen Sommerabend auf einem herrschaftlichen Anwesen über den Dächern von Rom: Die historische Villa Maraini, die seit 1949 das Istituto Svizzero beherbergt, und die umliegende, idyllisch konstruierte Parklandschaft wurden durch sphärische Klänge, kontrastierende Farben und zwei hybride Figuren geheimnisvoll vereinnahmt. Getaucht in oranges Licht erprobte im Park eine männliche Gestalt mit nacktem Oberkörper und Motorradhelm Annäherungen an eine Palme: sich dagegen lehnend, stemmend, daran anschmiegender, mit Füßen, Armen und Händen tastend. Was zunächst wie Turnübungen anmutete, erweckte bald vielmehr den Anschein, der Mann wolle seinen eigenen Körper an diesem jahrzehntelang gewachsenen Stück Natur neu vermessen. Begab man sich dann in die Villa, traf man dort in einem kühlblau ausgeleuchteten Saal auf eine Frau. Sie trug nebst spärlicher Trainingskleidung ebenfalls einen Motorradhelm und kauerte inmitten eines makellosen Kreises aus weissem Zucker. Allmählich begann sie, sich zeitlupenartig im Perimeter ihrer Zuckerinsel zu bewegen und so Spuren in den süßen Sand zu zeichnen. Es war ein fesselnder Anblick, wie sich die Konturen des Kreisrunds

unter ihren sanft anmutenden Berührungen, die zugleich von höchster Körperspannung zeugten, zunehmend auflösten, während sie selbst mehr und mehr von Zucker gepudert war. Der Parcours führte schliesslich in einen abgedunkelten Raum mit einer Videoprojektion. Aus nächster Nähe hatte die Kamera eine nackte Männerbrust erfasst, in deren rechten Seite ein Schriftzug eingeprägt ist: Fornever Forget. Der Farbton der geprägten Haut erinnerte an das orange Leuchten im Park, und während sich die Brust im Rhythmus der Atmung hob und senkte, verblassten die Buchstaben allmählich. Auch dieses Verblasen wurde - wie der ganze Rundgang - begleitet von diesen spannungsgeladenen, künstlichen Klängen, in die sich zuweilen Vogelgezwitscher mischte, und die einen Thriller, ein Ritual oder eine postapokalyptische Szenarie intonieren könnten.

S01E06 Fornever Forget nennt Urs August Steiner diese performative Szenografie, die sich über zwei Stunden hinweg entwickelte und die auch in eine Fotoserie mit Künstlertext mündete sowie in die Edition eines unförmigen Objekts: Das hand grosse, flache Etwas trägt auf der einen Seite den titelgebenden Schriftzug als Relief, auf der anderen die Struktur einer Baumrinde. War es also Puffer, als die Männerbrust aus dem Video einen Baum gegen sich drückte, war es Vehikel zur Speicherung dieser Begegnung?

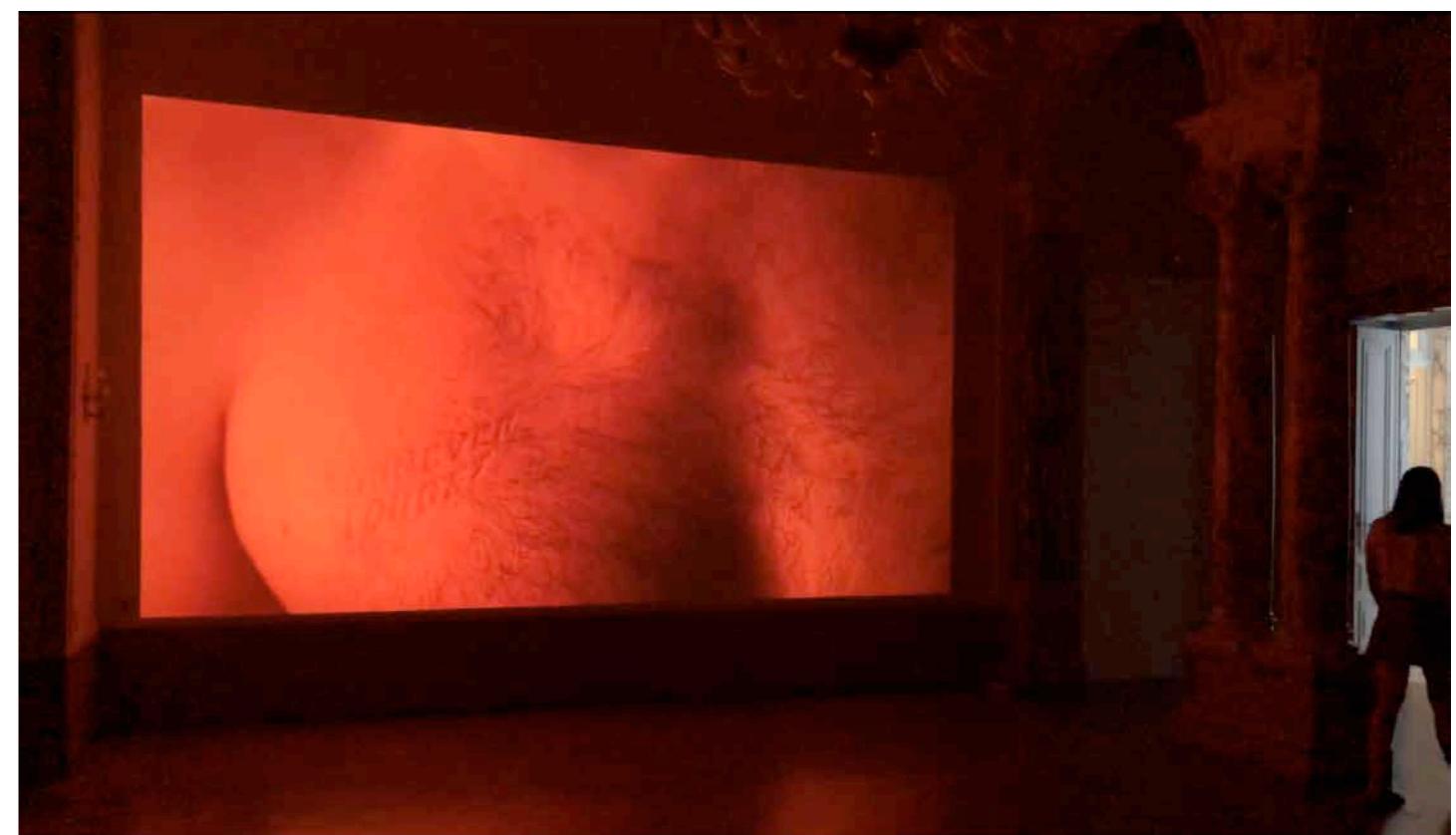
Die vom Gegenstand abgeformte Rinde stammt von jener Palme, die der männliche Performer zum «physischen Zwiegespräch» herausforderte. Der Kreis schliesst sich und legt als Kern dieses vielschichtigen Werkkomplexes Themen wie Berührung und Erinnerung, das Verhältnis von Mensch und Natur sowie die Spuren, die beide gegenseitig aneinander hinterlassen, frei. Nährboden für die Werkreihe war ein zuvor unvorstellbares Szenario: Rom und fast die ganze Welt im Ausnahmezustand, weil ein Virus das öffentliche und bis zu einem gewissen Grad auch das private Leben lahmgelegt hatte - berühren verboten! Als Artist in Residence am Istituto Svizzero in Rom harrte Steiner mit einer kleinen Gruppe von Kunstschaffenden aus in der Villa Maraini und ihrem Park, die beide dem Erfolg eines Tessiner Zuckerfabrikanten um 1900 zu verdanken sind. Ausgehend davon rieselte denn auch die süsse Versuchung in das Projekt ein, das Steiner in dieser Situation erarbeitete: «Gefangen» in der pompösen Umgebung dieses historischen Erbes und zurückgeworfen auf den eigenen Körper stellte sich die Frage, wie unsere Hinterlassenschaften – materielle und ideelle – die Welt prägen, und ob die Haut auch ein Erinnerungsspeicher sein kann für Kontakte, die sie erfahren hat.

Welche Spuren also zeichnen wir in die «Haut» unseres Planeten? Fatale, wir wissen es. Gleichzeitig hat

uns das Virus die Fragilität unserer Existenz vor Augen geführt und die Tatsache, dass die Natur, trotz der durch uns verursachten Narben, am Ende die Oberhand behält. Gegen diese Macht der Natur schützt auch kein Motorradhelm, in dessen dunkel glänzendem Visier sich unser Wunsch nach Absicherung gegen jede Art von Risiko spiegelt. Im Kontext von Steiners Werk transportiert der Motorradfahrer zudem die Verheissung des ewigen Lebens, führte der Künstler die Figur doch in einer früheren «Episode» seiner Arbeit ein, die sich um die Kryonik drehte. Und wird mit dem ewigen Leben auch die Erinnerung zeitlos werden? Derart balancieren die Werke von S01E06 Fornever Forget auf der Grenze von gestern, heute und morgen, auf dem entscheidenden Grat zwischen unendlichem Erinnern und ewigem Vergessen.

Text: Deborah Keller





S01E06 Fornever Forget
Venerdì Pomeriggio,
Istituto Svizzero, IT, 2020

left
installation with Performer
performance 1:30h
circle of sugar

right
video
59min, tone
dimensions variable

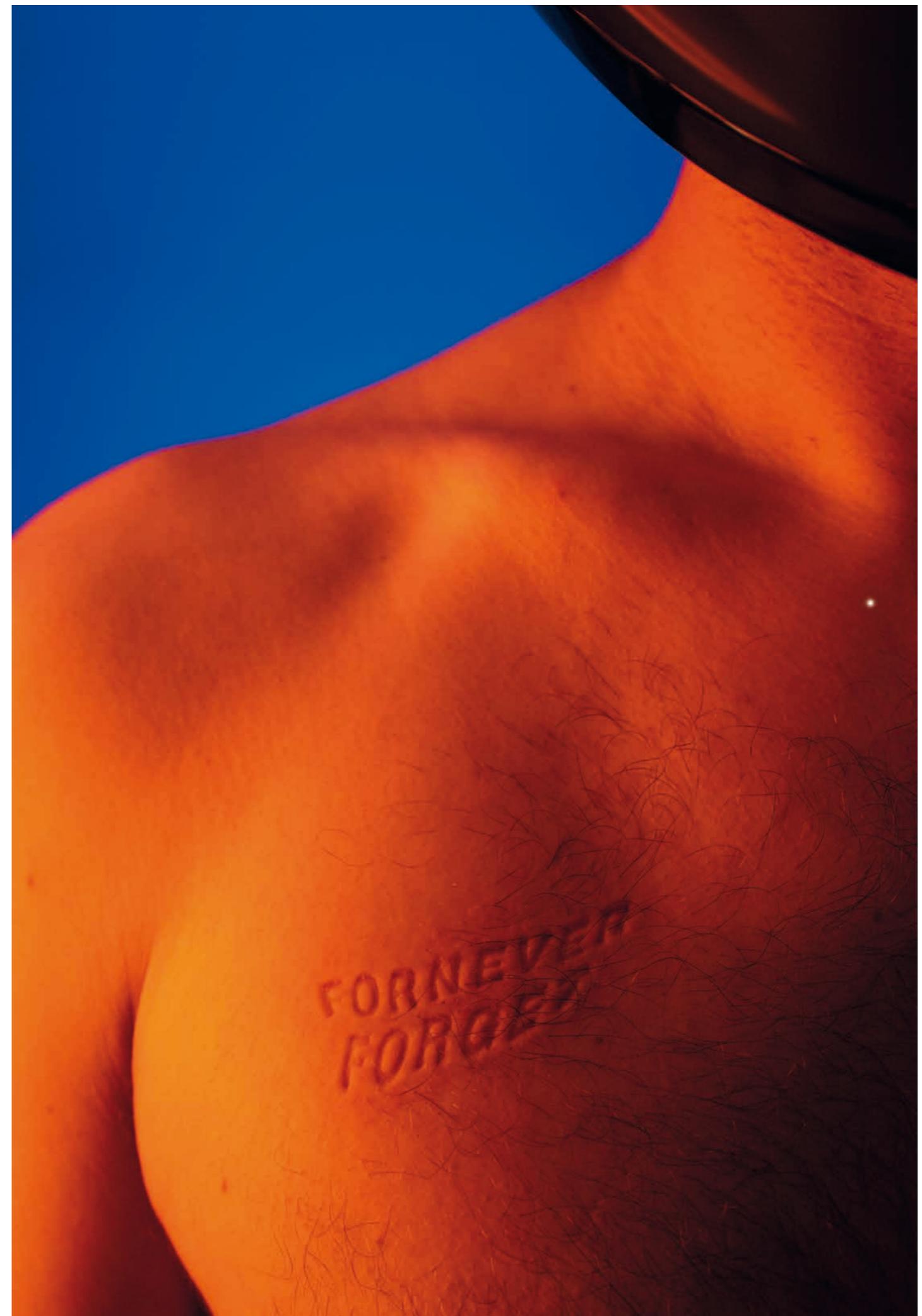
camera: Tommaso Cassinis
sound design: Bit Tuner

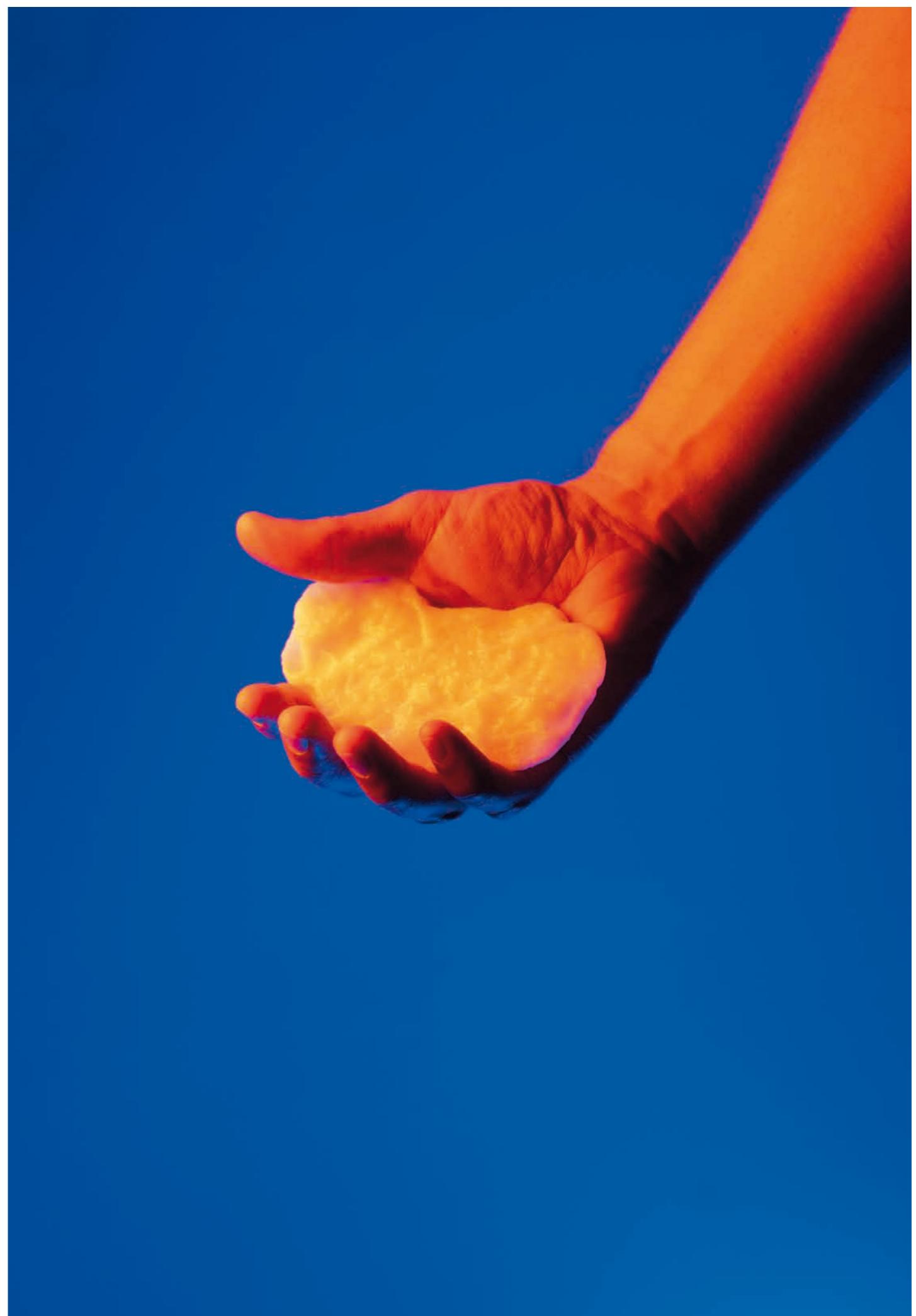
S01E06 Fornever Forget
ORTO, Roma Calling,
Istituto Svizzero, 2020

right and next page
publication
imprint on skin
sculptur, 3d print, 12 x 6cm

The photo series was created for
the publication ORTO, which was
produced in the context of the
artist residency Roma Calling at
the Istituto Svizzero.

photo: Tommaso Cassinis



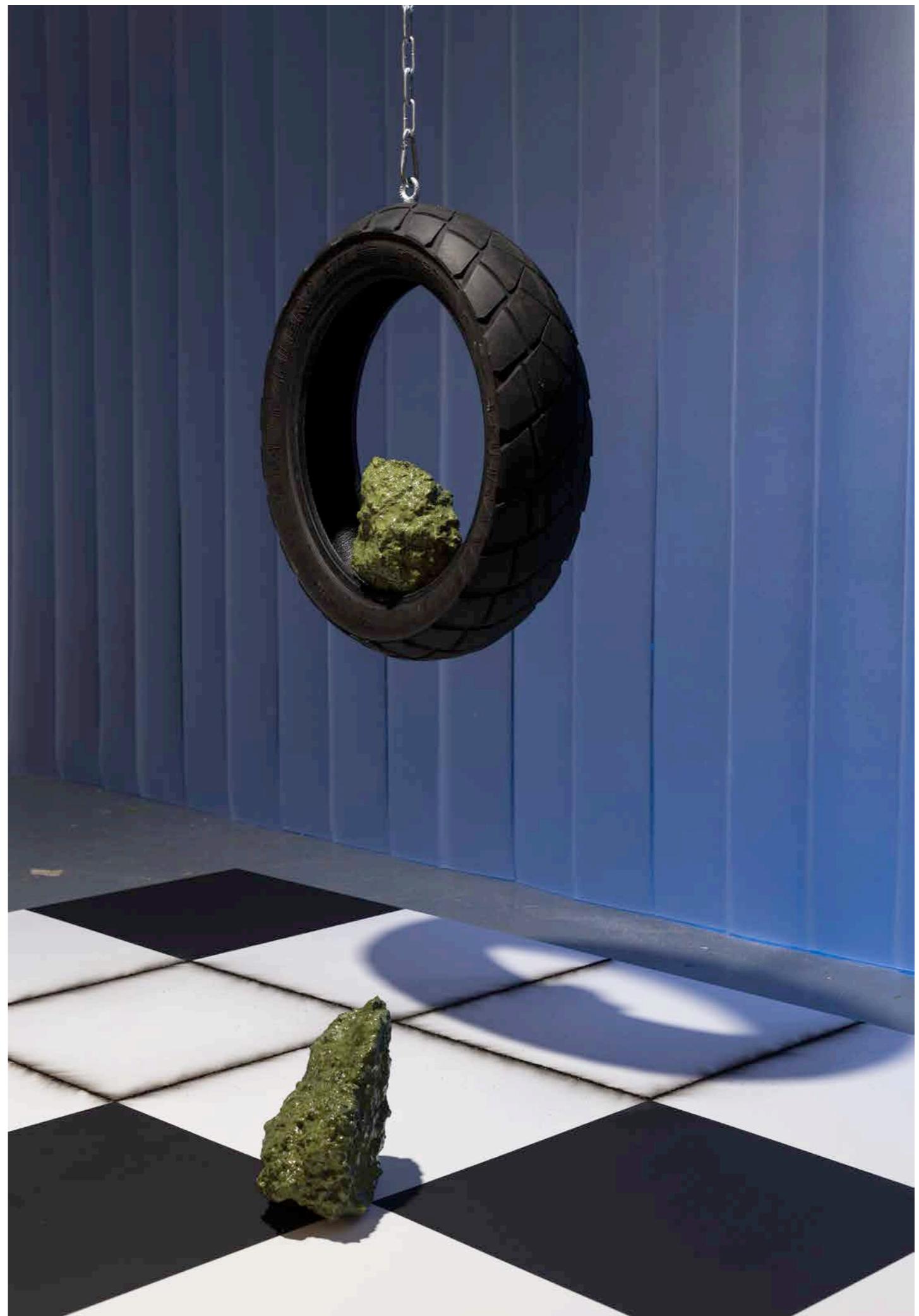


S01E04 Fading
The Big Rip, Bounce,
Chill or Crunch?
Last Tango, Zurich, 2019

right and next page
installation
wall: PVC, metal, stroboscope
stones: Acrytal, chlorella
vulgaris powder
base: fuse on wood, dispersion,
motorcycle tyres, chain
dimensions variable,
(base: 300 x 150 x 9cm)

photo: Kilian Bannwart

The sculptures resemble meteorites and have a green surface with a grainy structure. The color was made by mixing Acrytal, a type of fast-drying plaster, with chlorella vulgaris, an algae powder. The algae is one of 137 microorganisms whose color value is searched for in space by scientists, in the hope of finding potential life on other planets.







S01E04 Fading
The Big Rip, Bounce,
Chill or Crunch?
Last Tango, Zürich, 2019

installation detail

S01E05 Fading
Grosse Regionale,
Kunst(Zeug)Haus
Rapperswil, 2019

right and next pages

Installation

Wall: acrylic paint, fuse

Rocks: Acrytal, chlorella
vulgaris powder

motorcycle tyre, chain

Dimensions variable

photo: Andri Stadler





S01E02 Defreeze
Nextex, St.Gallen, 2019

right
installation
Melting Peak, canister,
aluminium rod,
wire ropes, torque motor
250cm diameter

The leitmotifs of the exhibition could hardly be more contrasting: The sand as an unsteady mass in which our traces demonstratively manifest themselves only briefly, and the circle as a symbol of perfection and infinity. Between these poles, we stomp on shaky feet through the minimalist setting that Urs August Steiner has set up in the art space Nextex under the title S01E02 Unfreeze, in which a multiple interconnected narration soon unfolds.

The code-like sequence of letters and numbers in the exhibition title is easily deciphered in Netflix's age: Steiner apparently presents us with the second episode of the first season of a series. A film series? An artistic series, called Non Crystal*, but whose foundation is closely linked to the cinematic, Steiner often finds inspiration for his work in the analytical deconstruction of movies or TV series. For example, Buster Keaton, a silent film star who is always fond of flickering, initially gave the impetus for Steiner to cast burnt fuses in epoxy resin

to create abstract images. This is process art at its finest, which right at the entrance to the current exhibition in Untitled becomes a striking symbol for the attempt to preserve something that inevitably ends in a certain form.

Thus the thematic spectrum of Steiner's show is marked out: transience versus infinity and the desire to replace the former with the latter. It is a utopia that reaches far back in the history of mankind. In our high-tech world, the belief in its realization is not rationalized away, but rather the fulfillment of the wish seems within reach: cryonics is the keyword of the hour. The possibility of freezing organisms indefinitely and thawing them later is a promising cure for human mortality. Perhaps cryonization could even serve as a corrective for misconduct and strokes of fate - at least that's how Tom Cruise plays it in the film Vanilla Sky, which was decisive for Steiner's examination of the subject. For the first time, the artist developed an installation from this in 2016 at the Kunsthaus Glarus, which functioned as a pilot project for the Non Crystal series.

In the meantime, Steiner has visited the company Alcor Life Extension Foundation in the Arizona desert, where the experiment to overcome mortality has already begun: In stainless steel tanks, liquid nitrogen stores the remains of deceased individuals who want to



resume their lives in the distant future. Their bodily fluids have been replaced by a kind of antifreeze - the "operating function" of the human body is thus ensured by means similar to those of a vehicle in the icy winter. Under the title Melting Peak, two incessantly circling, "bleeding" anti-freeze canisters draw this approach of man and machine into the sand.

In the film Circuit, a similar drawing is created by a round turning motorcyclist, dressed in pitch black, on an abandoned beach, only to level out the scratched circular form with a rake in the second part of the video diptych. Actively blur one's own fleeting trace, or burn it into the world run by means of cryonics? Perhaps human existence, in the face of advancing technologization, will actually be pointed to this question of decision.

Despite the potential immortality in Steiner's exhibition, euphoria may not really arise. Too present, albeit subtly scattered, is the discomfort with the technically prepared forms of life and death in the reduced staging: The motorcyclist takes action against the backdrop of the Salton Sea, a lake around twice the size of Lake Constance, which lies 460 kilometres west of Alcor's headquarters and was once created by a man-made catastrophe. As a stagnant body of water, it has a constantly increas-

ing concentration of salt and selenium - a death sentence for many local fish and bird populations. The helmet of our film hero, which he doesn't take off as an absurdity-enhancing element even when raking, lying in the exhibition room reminds us that in cryonics the head or brain is regarded as the most "good" worth protecting. The heart as the supposed seat of the soul is secondary, as are the remaining organs or limbs, with the conservation of the "control apparatus" of an individual seems to guarantee its future revival. The helmet is embedded on quartz sand, which is also used for glass production - after all, in cryonics, bodies are not "preserved" but "glazed". And above all this one almost smells the smell of an inevitably smouldering fuse...

Deborah Keller
art critic/curator



S01E02 Defreeze
Nextex, St.Gallen, 2019

top
installation
dimensions variable

next page
wall work
untitled, fuses on aluminium
cast in epoxy resin
100 x 160cm

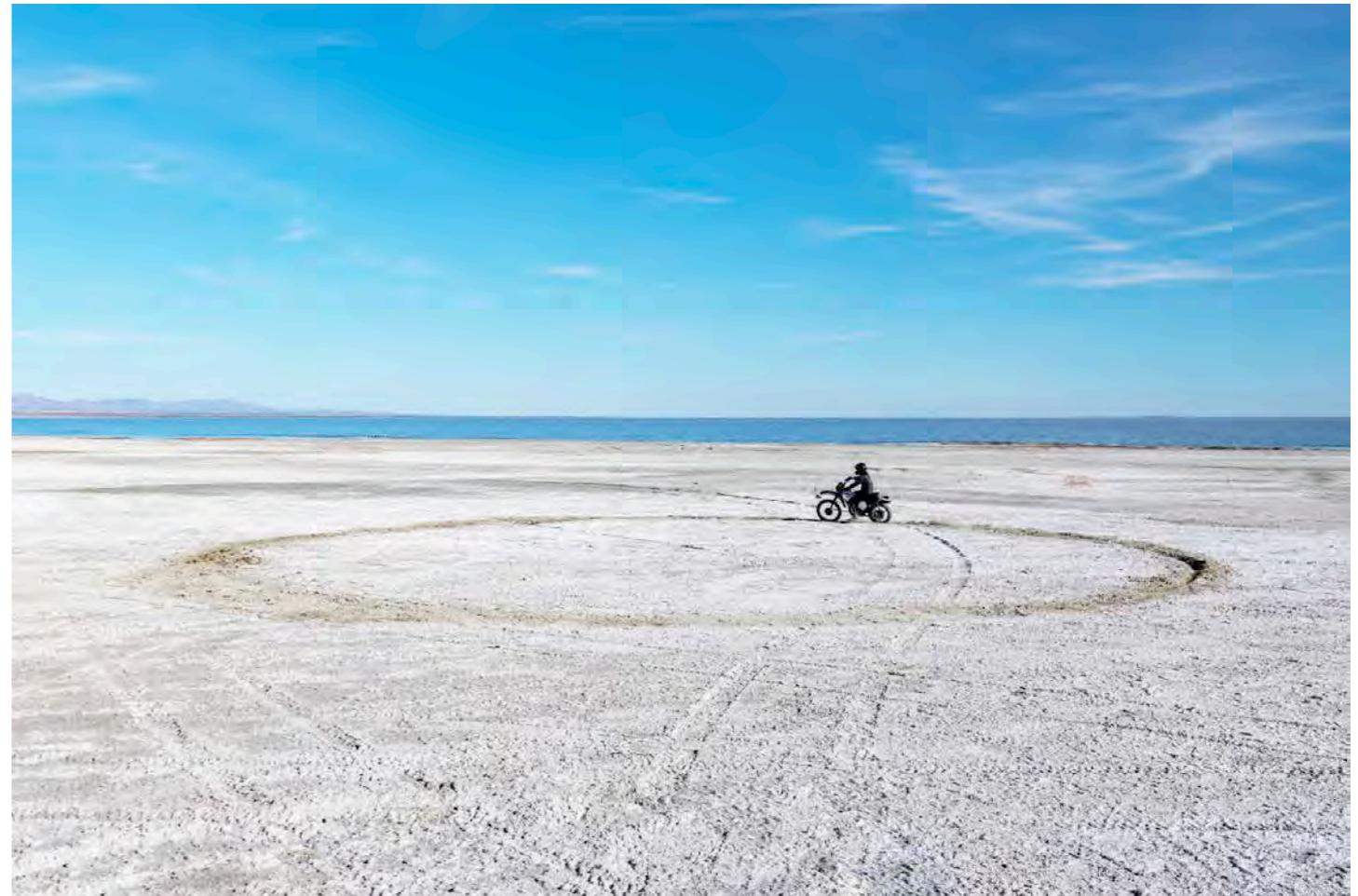




S01E02 Defreeze
Nextex, St.Gallen, 2019

top
installation detail, projection

right
Videostill, Circuit I, 4:55,
Salton Sea, CA
Videostill, Circuit II, 12:00,
Salton Sea, CA

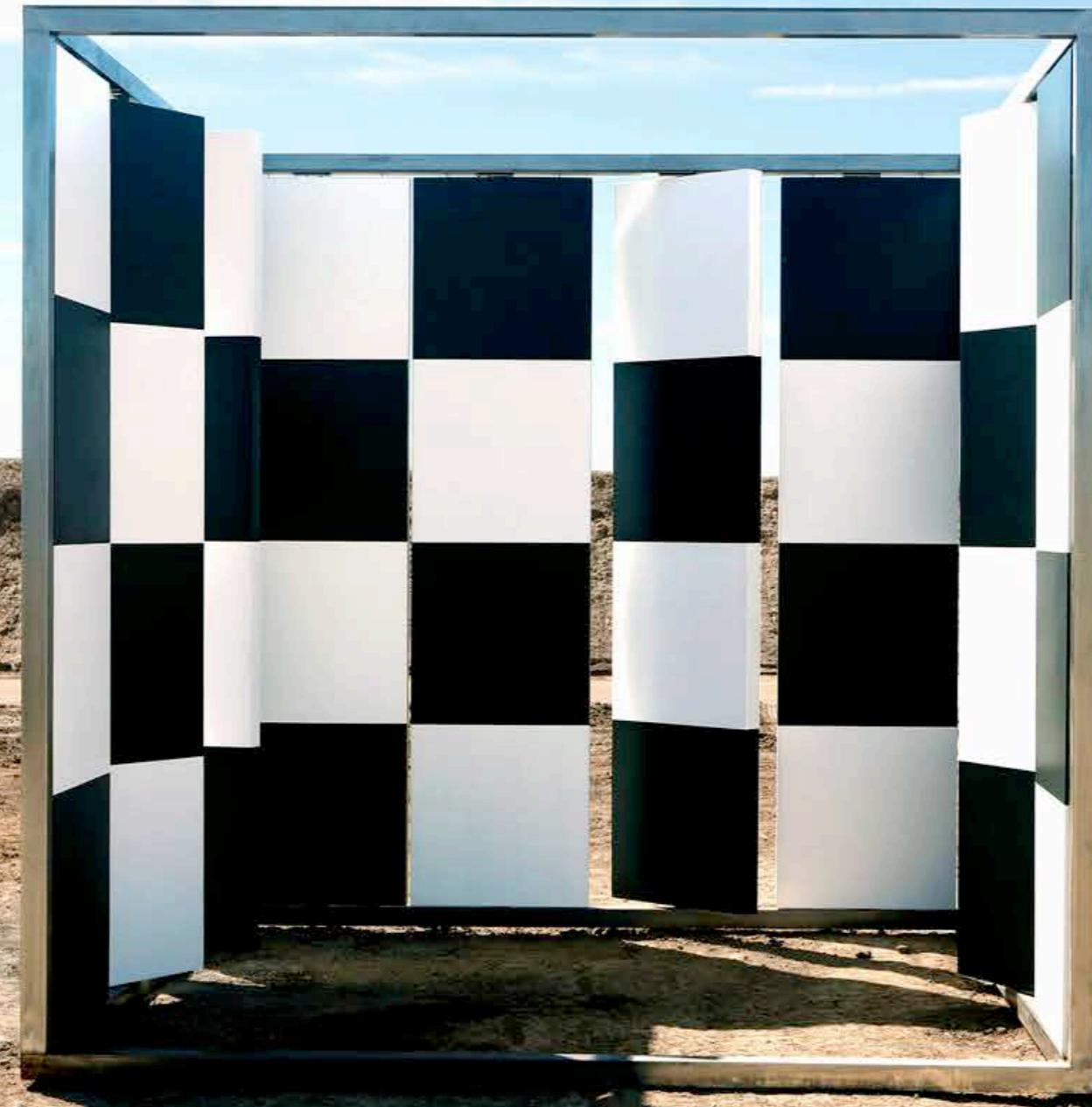


Swiss Pavilion - S01E03 Refuelling
Bombay Beach Biennale 2019
Bombay Beach CA, 2019

this and next page
installation
metal, wood panels, paint
3m x 3m x 3m

Urs August Steiner presents at the Swiss Pavilion at the Bombay Beach Biennale. The kinetic installation, S01E03 Refuelling, is part of his long-term project Non-Crystal. The work explores the paths of science fiction into science laboratories, driven by the desire for immortality. It displays human existence as a race, without accepting bodily limitations. Steiner's work refers to cryonic projects in the Californian desert, where frozen bodies await their resurrection from cold dream states in a distant future.





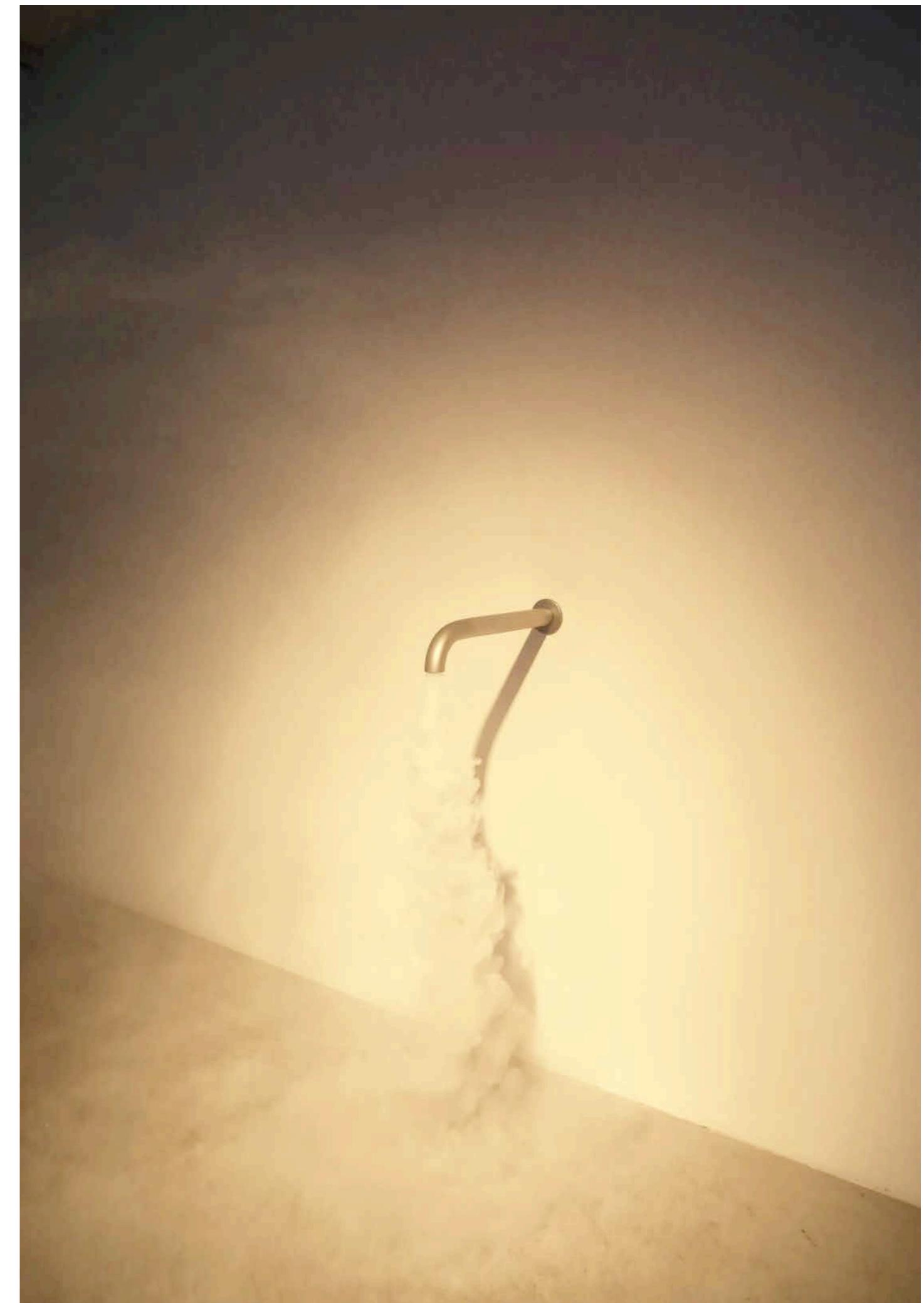
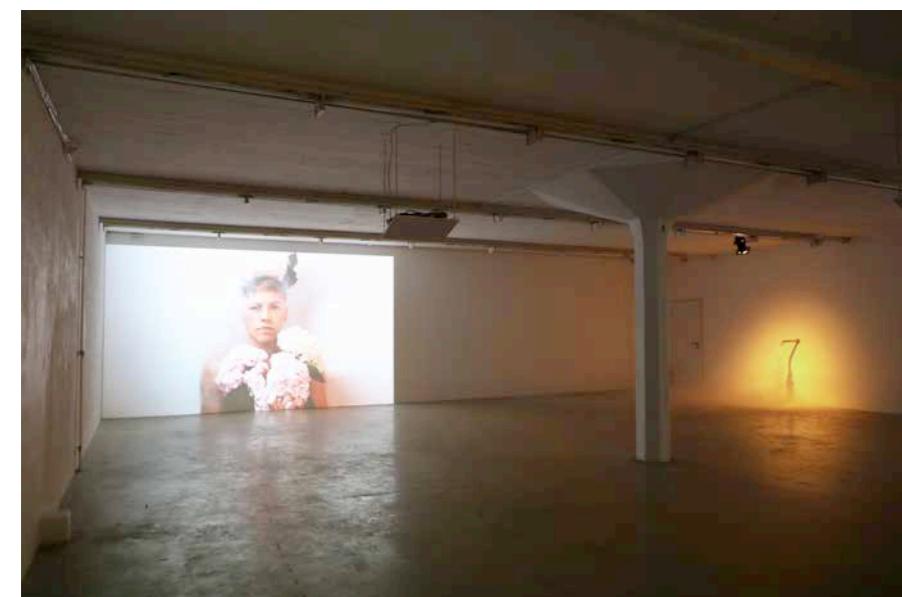
Smoke Gets in Your Eyes
“Old Dogs – New Tricks”
solo exhibition with Walter Pfeiffer
curated by Juliane Wolski
Dienstgebäude, Zürich, 2017

left
exhibition detail
videoloop, Walter Pfeiffer
installation, Urs August Steiner

right
installation, Urs August Steiner
cooled smoke,
gargoyles in chrome steel
variabel dimensions

Old Dogs – New Tricks is designed to be a clash of the generations. In the second edition, Urs August Steiner, born in 1980, invites the 34 years older artist Walter Pfeiffer to put on a joint exhibition. Thanks to his keen eye for colour and form, Pfeiffer was able to capture fleeting glances of the subject - moments of naive, youthful beauty. Pfeiffer freezes these in time using his camera and pen, and allows

us to dream of perpetual youth. As part of the exhibition, which takes place in public office buildings, both artists showcase their collaborative intention to collect and preserve fleeting glances. What brings them together here is the smoke – an ephemeral element that stands for the transience in a poetic way.





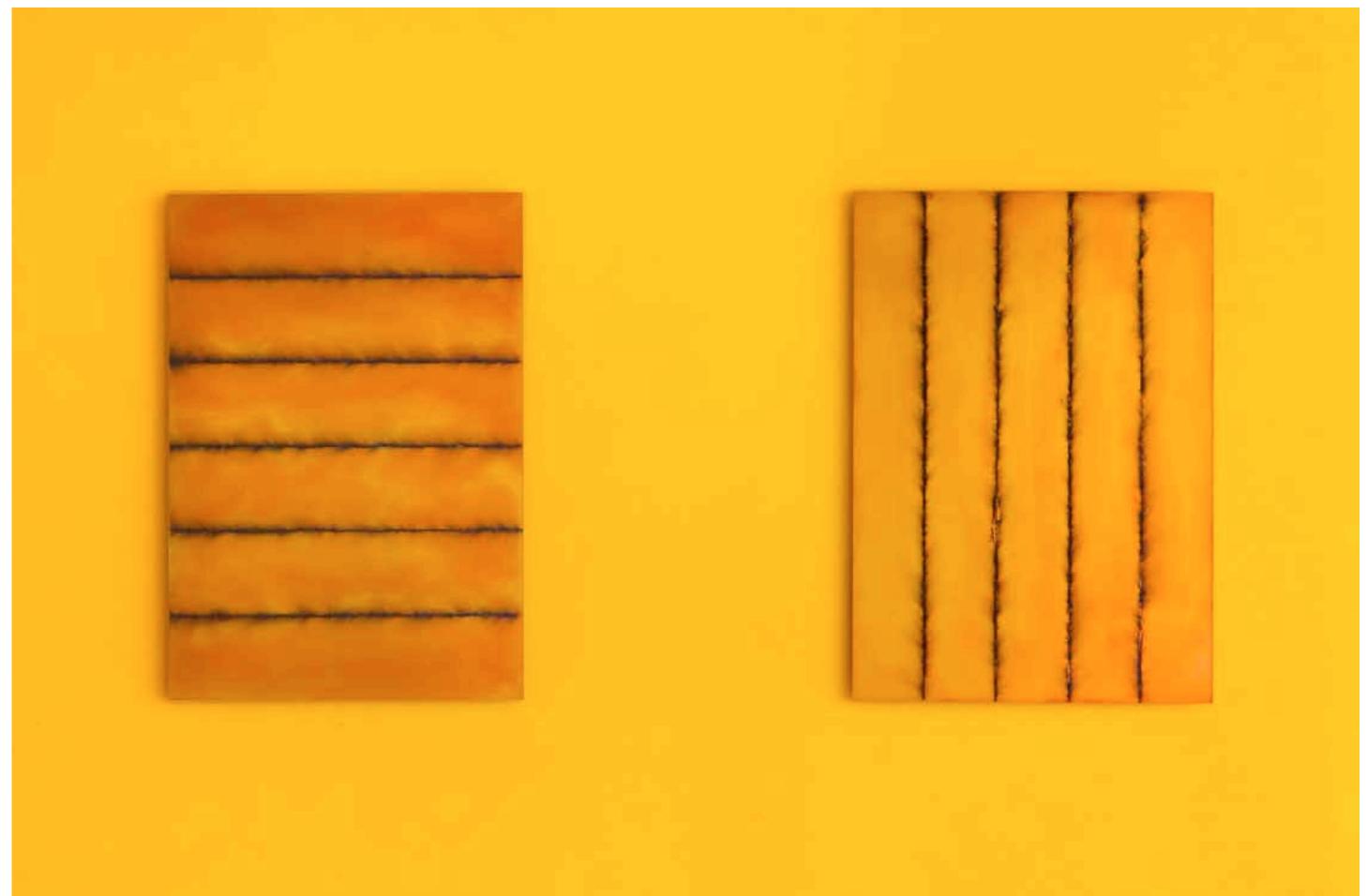
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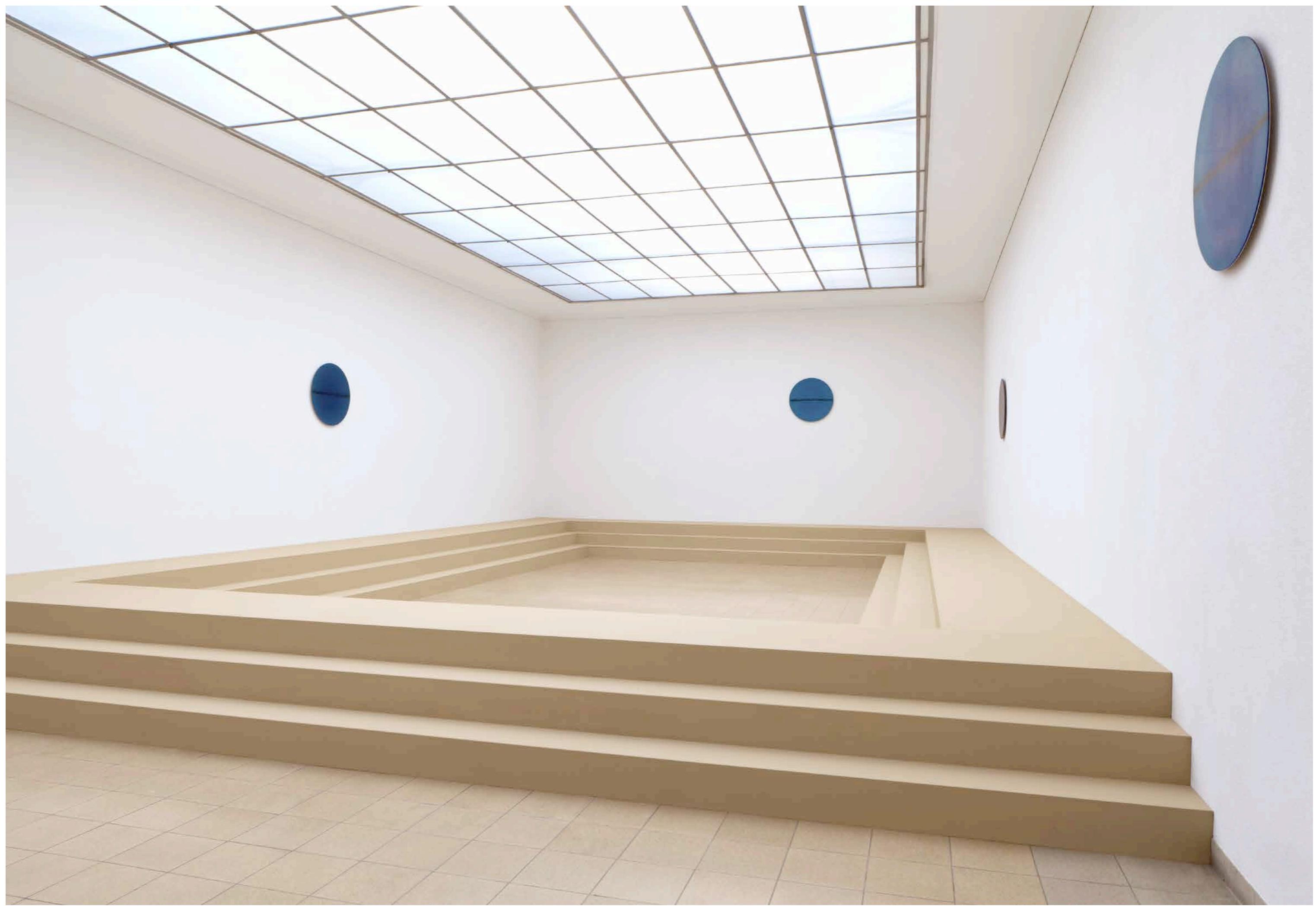
left

collaboration
drawings, Walter Pfeifer
fuse on wall, Urs August Steiner
variabel dimensions

right

wall works, Urs August Steiner
6 x fuse on chrom steel, cast with
epoxy resin
100 cm x 80 cm x 1 cm



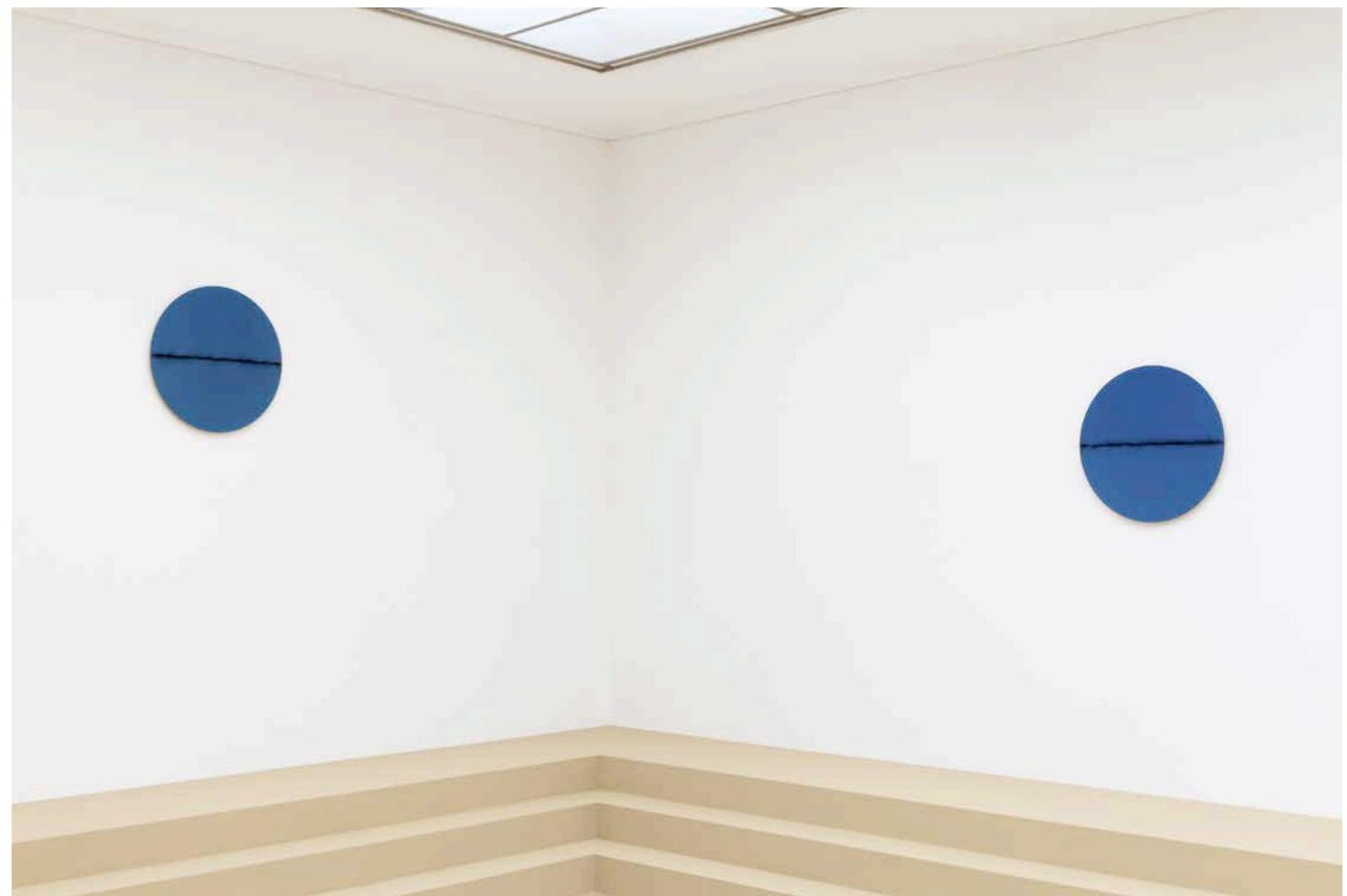


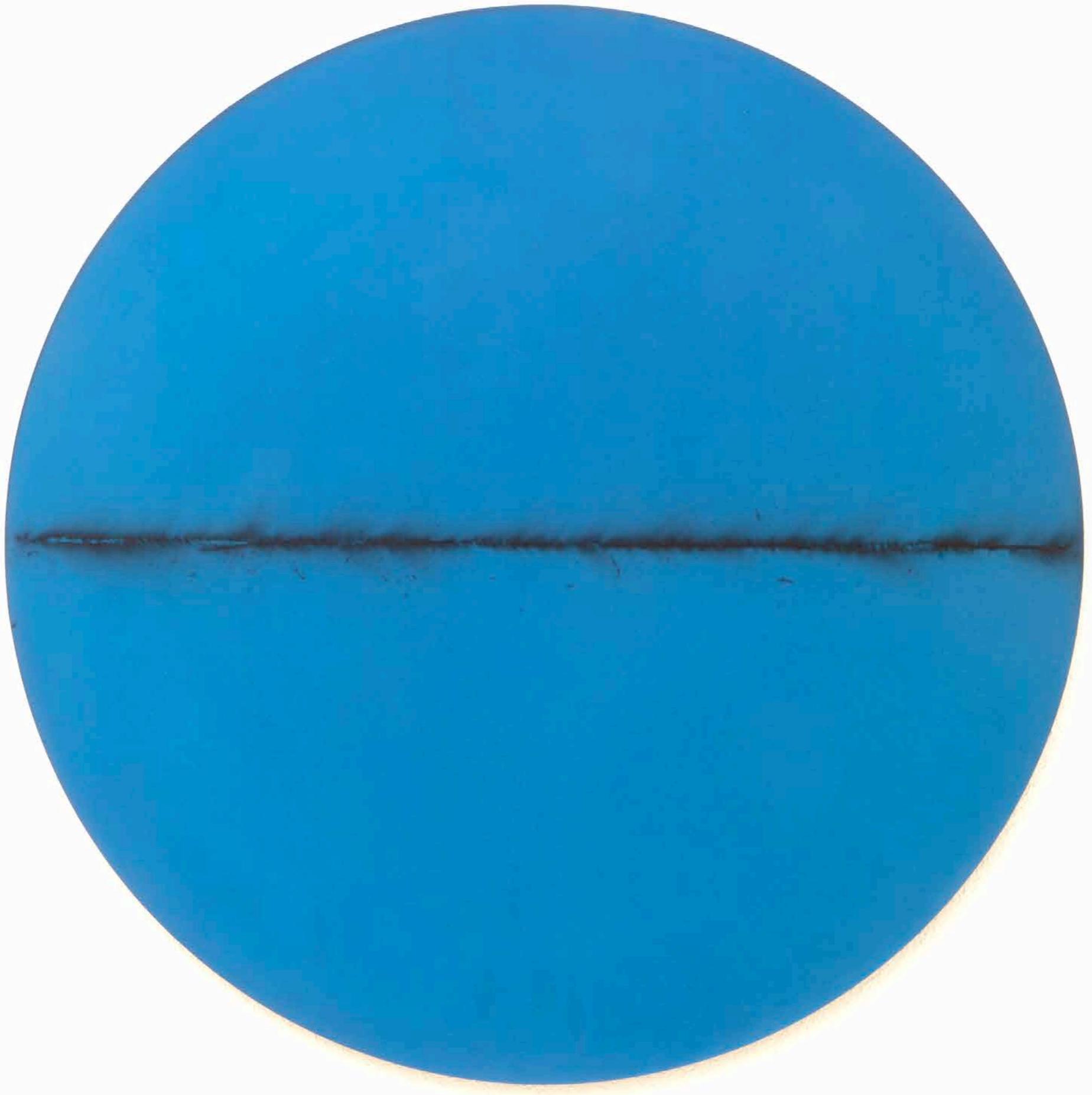
Super Cool X-1000
Fokus Prize, Kunsthaus Glarus ,
Glarus, 2016

this and last pages
installation detail
fountain architecture, wood, acrylic paint
12.5 x 8.3 m,
5 circles, fuse on chrom steel,
cast with epoxy resin
Ø 80 cm x 1 cm

This installation and five wall pieces, specific designed for the Schneisaal at the Kunsthaus Glarus, Switzerland, after I was awarded the Fokus Price, is part of a collection of expansive works, based on pop culture references from film and television. The walk-in, room-filling architecture revolves around the themes of futurology and visions from mainstream science fiction films, and theatrically stages the promise of eternal life. With This installation, I relate equally to the blockbuster Vanilla Sky (2001) from Cameron Crowe and the painting from Lucas Cranach the Elder from the year 1546.

Super Cool X-1000 is an eclectic stage, where visions of the future such as cryonics - the conservation of human life through deep-freezing - meet with the mediaeval idea of the Fountain of Youth.





Happy Landing
Kunsthaus Glarus , Glarus, 2015

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exhibition detail

acrylic paint, fuse on wall

1008 cm x 315 cm

Acryl, chlorella vulgaris, styro-
foam, chain

120 cm x 60 cm x 40 cm

The installation "Happy Landing" in Kunsthaus Glarus consists of a wall object and a hanging sculpture on a metal chain.

The sculpture resembles a meteorite and has a green surface with a grainy structure. The color was made by mixing Acryl, a type of fast-drying plaster, with Chlorella, an algae powder. The algae is one of 137 microorganisms whose color value is searched for in space by scientists, in the hope of finding potential life on other planets.

The wall art deals with a continuation in the Buster series, named for the comic and film director Buster Keaton. Its inspiration came from a scene from the slapstick comedy "Cops" (1922). In this scene, Buster lights a cigarette from the burning fuse of a bomb.

In the film, the lit fuse is structured in a chronological sequence. As soon as a bomb fuse is lit, a foreseeable time period is defined, in which tension increases palpably as the awaited explosion approaches. In the Buster series I have translated this tension into

a spatial model, with zigzag lines and circles. In combination with the marks of the burning fuse, I incorporated a digital glitch into the work.





