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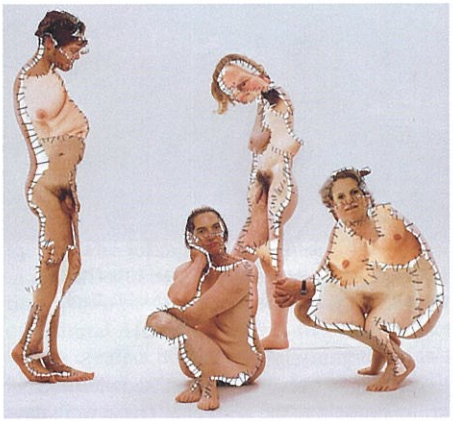
Unzensiert. Annegret Soltau – Eine Retrospektive

Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, 8. 5. – 17. 8. 2025

von Christina Irrgang

Eine ihrer ersten fotografischen Reihen zeigt Annegret Soltau mit einem Faden, der vertikal über ihr Gesicht verläuft. Mit geöffneten Augen blickt sie in die Kamera, senkt ihren Blick, spannt den Faden fortlaufend um ihren Kopf, umfasst damit Hals, Schultern und Brustbereich, webt Lippen, Nase, Stirn und Haare in einen schwarzen Kokon. Dann nimmt die Künstlerin eine Schere, durchtrennt das sie umfassende Ge-



Annegret Soltau, MutterTochterVaterSohn, 2005. Collage, Ilfochrome, vernäht mit Nähgarn (Fotovernähung), 65,5 × 87,5 cm. Courtesy: Galerie Anita Beckers, Frankfurt am Main. Copyright: Bildrecht, Wien 2025. Foto: Fotodesign Hefele.

spinst. Die letzte Aufnahme der 15-teiligen Arbeit *Selbst #1* (1975) zeigt nur noch das Netz, das Soltaus Kopf umwob und aus dem sie sich befreite. Als wandfüllendes Tableau hängt die Reihe im ersten Raum der Ausstellung *Unzensiert. Annegret Soltau – Eine Retrospektive* im Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main. Die Arbeit, die zu den Schlüsselwerken der Künstlerin zählt, fängt den Blick und leitet ihn – entlang von gerade geführten Linien, frei fließenden Fäden, miteinander verbundenen Nähten und assoziativ zusammengebrachten Blickmomenten – durch Soltaus erste Retrospektive, die als Rundgang angelegt ist und einen Überblick über ihr Schaffen mit zum Teil noch nie gezeigten Werken aus ihrem Archiv erlaubt.

Annegret Soltau, 1946 in Lüneburg geboren, schärft mit ihrer Kunst das Bewusstsein für Identität, insbesondere für die Lebensrealitäten von Frauen inmitten gesellschaftlicher und generationaler Gefüge. Familiäre Verbindungen, Schwangerschaft, Mutterschaft und die Verflochtenheit in (institutionelle) Strukturen sind Themen, die Soltau seit mehreren Jahrzehnten zum Gegenstand ihres vielseitigen, aus Grafik, Fotografie, Performance, Video und Installation bestehenden Œuvres macht. In der von Svenja Grosser in enger Zusammenarbeit mit der Künstlerin kuratierten Schau wird dabei deutlich: Mit der künstlerischen Betrachtung ihrer (Lebens-) Themen modifizierte Annegret Soltau auch ihr mediales Vokabular, erweiterte und radikalisierte zwischen Feminismus, Body-Art und Konzeptkunst vor allem ihren Umgang mit der Fotografie entlang jener Aspekte, die sie als Frau, Künstlerin und Mutter umtrieben.

In enger Verbindung mit performativen Aktionen, in denen sie sich oder die Körper von ihr nahestehenden Menschen in Fäden wickelte und die sie fotografisch oder mittels Video dokumentierte, entstanden Annegret Soltaus »Fotoübernähungen«: Porträts, die sie mit der eigenen Kamera oder im Passbildautomaten anfertigte und auf denen sie mit schwarzem Garn »zeichnete«. Linien erweitern und unterbinden so den Blick der Künstlerin, binden ihren nackten Körper in ein räumliches Gefüge ein. Mit ihrer ersten Schwangerschaft und der Frage nach der Zusammensetzung von Identität erweiterte Soltau 1977 ihre Technik um die »Fotovernähungen«, bei denen die Künstlerin Fotografien von sich und von ihrer Familie zerriss und die Fragmente dieser Bilder – vom Kleinformat bis zum überlebensgroßen Abzug – mit schwarzen Fäden zu Collagen zusammenfügte. Die Bezugnahme zwischen Selbst und leiblichem Kind verschärfte Soltau in ihren »Fotoradierungen«, wobei sie Fotonegative durch das Einritzen von Linien bis hin zu Flächen sukzessiv veränderte und zerstörte. Indem sie jeden Bearbeitungsschritt als Foto ausbelichtete, entstanden daraus Bildtafeln, in denen sich Motive wie die schwangere Soltau mit ihrer Tochter auflösen. In den 1980er-Jahren tackerte die Künstlerin Fotografien und Dokumente zusammen; in der Reihe *personal identity* (seit 2003) sind anstelle ihres aus Selbstporträts ausgerissenen Gesichts Ausweisdokumente zu sehen.

Mehrfach wurden Annegret Soltaus Bilder zensiert, etwa, indem sie in Ausstellungen verhängt oder in der Presse als Tabubruch kritisiert wurden. Das Frankfurter Städel machte dies transparent und rückte Bilder wie *generativ – Selbst mit Tochter, Mutter und Großmutter* (1994) in den Fokus, in dem Soltau die weibliche Generationslinie ihrer Familie als Fotovernähung von nackten Körpern vereint. Wie bei vielen ihrer Arbeiten, die beidseitig zu betrachten sind, zeigt das Museum auch dieses Bild freistehend im Raum. Die offene Konzeption dieser Ausstellung spiegelt Annegret Soltaus radikale Freiheit im Denken.

Unzensiert. Annegret Soltau – Eine Retrospektive. Hrsg. von Svenja Grosser.

Mit Textbeiträgen der Herausgeberin und von Philipp Demandt, Sabine Kampmann, Maja Lisewski, Gioia Mattner und Annegret Soltau (ger.).
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Helen Chadwick: Artist, Researcher, Archivist

Leeds Art Gallery, 4. 4. – 2. 11. 2025

Helen Chadwick: Life Pleasures

The Hepworth Wakefield, 17. 5. – 26. 10. 2025

Museo Novecento, Florence, November 2025 – February 2026

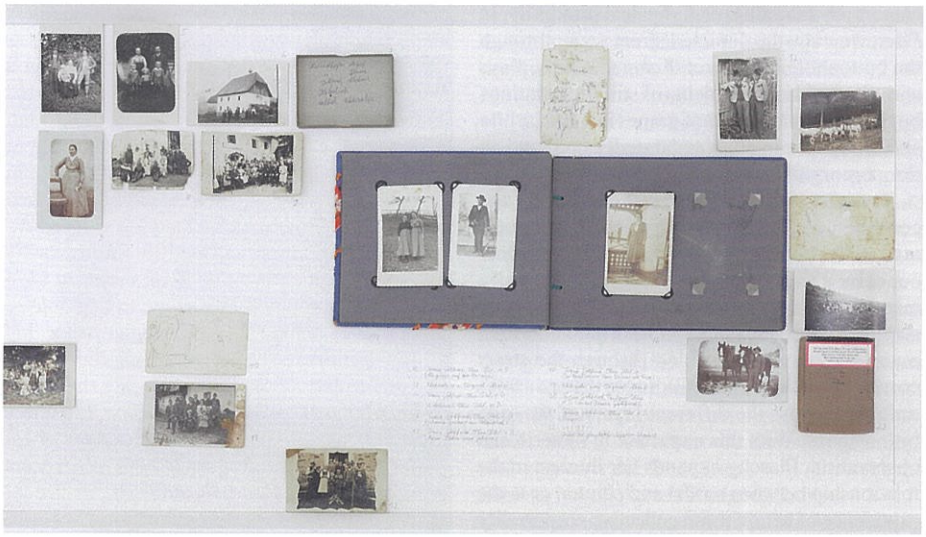
Kunsthaus Graz, March – August 2026

by Francesca Laura Cavallo

The wall is pink and it smells of chocolate. But what is even more satisfying upon entering the exhibition is the sound and sight of the bubbles: air that rises and bursts into thick, dense goodness. *Cacao* (1994), a circular chocolate fountain, has a phallic central column, with chocolate spouting out like a continuous ejaculation. On

Detail from: Helen Chadwick, The Oval Court, 1984–86. Photocopy on paper, 427 × 792 cm. Courtesy: Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Copyright: Estate of Helen Chadwick; Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

the surrounding walls are round photographic works: orchids resting on thick pink paste encircled by gelatinous green, or clusters of white narcissi floating atop soapy water, and sweet peas immersed in blue washing gel. Some ap-



Simon Baptist, From Up in the Valley, installation view at Museum für Geschichte, Graz, 2025. Photo: Museum für Geschichte / Simon Baptist.

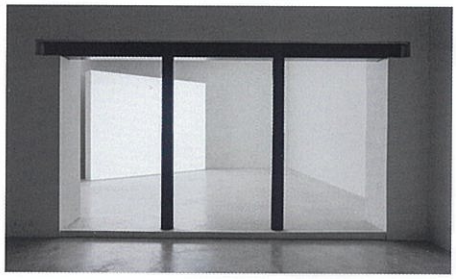
(History Museum) in Graz with his own video works: *Ein Kammerspiel (2021)* (A Chamber Play [2021], 2021), *Ein Kammerspiel (2023)* (A Chamber Play [2023], 2023), and *Gebiet* (Territory, 2025). All were created in collaboration with today's residents of Sankt Lambrecht, gently bringing the subsequent generations of those portrayed by Göttfried into the picture. With *Von oben im Tal*, Baptist ultimately explores how an archive, rather than being a self-contained memory, can also be conceived as a "gathering" (as Steffen Siegel puts it in his text contribution)—as a collectively driven act of engagement.

For Milica Tomić, exhibiting is both a process of research and a call to action. In her solo exhibition *On Love Afterwards* at Kunsthaus Graz, she collaborated closely with curators Andreja Hribernik and Irena Borić to weave works from thirty years of artistic practice together with archival material and ephemera, elaborating on mechanisms of (historical) violence, personal memory, collective responsibility, and present-day systemic critique with impressive density and intensity. The framework was provided by the remembrance project *Aflenz Memorial in Becoming* (2018–ongoing), an alternative memorial that works with soil from Aflenz an der

Still from: Milica Tomić, Portrait of MM, 1999. Video (color, sound), 64′. Courtesy: the artist.

Sulm in southern Styria, where Nazi forced-labor camps had stood just a few decades ago and where fields and single-family homes are standing today. It forms the basis for Tomić's concept of "Investigative Memorialization"—an open, collaborative, and transdisciplinary approach to remembrance that avoids forced reconciliation and instead acknowledges that memorialization can never be a static representation of facts.

The video work lending the exhibition its title originates from a poem by Radovan Zogović, a melancholy reflection on the love of political struggle. *On Love Afterwards* (2003) is a ten-minute montage of conversations that Tomić held with four Yugoslav partisans who were part



James Richards, Negative Hands, 2024. Installation view at Grazer Kunstverein, 2025. Courtesy: the artist; Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin; Sylvia Kouvali, Piraeus / London; and Grazer Kunstverein. Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com.

of the anti-fascist movement during the Second World War. They talk about love and their belief in a better future, as grounded in personal experiences and memories, yet without claiming or defending any truth. Their understanding that liberation is not an accomplishment but an ongoing process shines through, as does the fact that anti-fascist resistance remains urgent.

Milica Tomić "involves" viewers in "perceiving memory as affect and as a political demand upon us," as Elizabeth Cowie wrote in the year 2000 (*Camera Austria International* no. 72, p. 14). Less analytically but equally poignantly, the artist put it thus during her tour through the present exhibition: "Imperial history is one's own, and so the intimate is always political." This became powerfully evident in the video work *Portrait of MM* (1999): while the subjective camera wanders through the streets of Belgrade from Tomić's apartment to her mother's, a conversation between mother and daughter unfolds on the audio track, touching on topics that had been previously left unspoken. Their voices—like their silence—reflect both discord and care. Conflicts are mirrored in the dissonance between external political events and transformation and the inner realities of the post-Yugoslav present. Over the course of the film, their biographies coalesce into an intergenerational archive inscribed by war, which lives on in their identities.

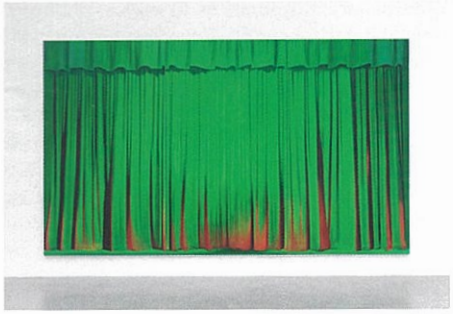
With historical references to optics, photography, and early cinema, *Fevers* at Grazer Kunstverein not only addressed our emotions but also activated a fever-dream-like state of body and consciousness between appearance and disappearance. Curator Tom Engels and British artist James Richards developed an exhibition setting consisting of three rooms isolated from each other by doors, in which three newly conceived, collage-like image and sound works by the artist were shown. In room one, the moving image *Orphan Drift* (2025) appeared in a passepartout—mounted into a freestanding white wall—and triggered at first subtle optical dislocations of spatial perception. The piece draws on images by the photographer Brassaï, who, starting in the early 1930s, documented faces he saw scratched into the walls of buildings in nocturnal Paris. Also fascinated by subconscious perception processes and the morphing of beings from random forms, Richards connects Brassaï's historical photographs with a computer-generated camera movement to create an endless stone landscape of eyes and mouths. In the main vault, the large-scale projection of *Fevers* (2025) followed: a compilation of animations and video sequences that—already manipulated, looped, or inverted—were slowly stretched and distorted further, broken down into fragments of movement (for example, a maggot being devoured by a toad or a bird in flight). More and more, the sequences were turned into patterns that pulsated discordantly with Richards's musical composition. An endless deconstruction ensued in which the body slowly yielded to vision.

Negative Hands (2024), in room three, finally revealed a "paradoxical hyper-clarity" (as the curator noted in the exhibition text) in its reduction to the most elementary state of the moving image itself. Drawing on Tony Conrad's *The Flicker* (1966), here, black-and-white flickering blinds our eyes, and Marguerite Duras's *Les Mains négatives* from 1978, Richards likewise succeeds in allowing us to witness the inexorable dissolution of the image.

It was the minimalist exhibition setting of the Halle für Kunst Steiermark's upper floor, reminiscent of the white cube, that enabled visitors to fully enter the scenes that Louise Giovanelli creates or stages in her paintings. Following a partly hyperrealistic and partly pointillistic style, the young painter transfers her pictorial motifs—which she obtains solely from digital image sources, sometimes smartphone photos, mostly film stills or social media posts—onto

Louise Giovanelli: A Song of Ascents. Ed. by The Hepworth Wakefield.

With contributions by the artist and Marie-Charlotte Carrier, Helenskià Collett, Phoebe Cripps, and Charlie Fox (eng.).
The Hepworth Wakefield, 2025.
84 pages, 21.5 × 28 cm, numerous color illustrations.
€ 37.– / ISBN 978-1-0686373-1-5



Louise Giovanelli, Decades, 2024. Oil on linen, 280 × 380 cm. Courtesy: the artist and White Cube, London. Copyright: Bildrecht, Vienna, 2025. Photo: White Cube / Annik Wetter.

canvas through her expressive use of color. Variously zoomed detail views of two intertwined figures (*Harmony*, 2024), or of a person with their mouth agape and closed eyes (*Entheogen* and *Soothsay*, both 2024), cause the scenes to make us pause, similar to a dream or a blurred memory, not least as Giovanelli leaves us clueless about any context. Particularly impressive were the large-format paintings of curtains—*Scala*, *Decades*, and *Dado* (all 2024)—and the patterns of light cast by differently colored LED spotlights. Giovanelli makes the sculptural fabrics and their surfaces glow in such an intensity that this trompe-l'œil effect sensitizes the viewers' own spatial awareness. For these works, part of ten new paintings created especially for the solo exhibition *A Song of Ascents*, which in Graz has been curated by Marie-Charlotte Carrier and Sandro Droschl, the Manchester-based artist used her photographs of theater basements and working men's clubs as starting point. In doing so, she also recalls the disappearance of spaces of the British working class which were formative for the pop culture of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and well beyond. However, Giovanelli's references are not an expression of nostalgia, but rather attest to her ongoing research into places that offer an escape from an unglamorous everyday life, and the related representations.

With the paintings of Evelyn Plaschg, we turned to the tangible and its appeal through abstraction. To achieve this, the artist draws on her private smartphone camera roll for the paintings. At the beginning of her career, Plaschg mainly altered the photographic source material of herself, friends, and bedrooms with pigments, charcoal, or markers. Now, in the exhibition *Viscous City*, also on view at Halle für Kunst, she features a group of large-scale works created with oil on canvas for the first time—a development that also expanded her previous use of photography. These *Close-ups* (all 2024) are based on snapshots characterized by a highly subjective camera, by cropping, and physical proximity. In *Pass*, we view the depicted street scene through the buttonhole of a jacket. *Fakers*, in turn, plays with characteristic elements of still life paintings, but it depicts the cluster of grapes in black, white, and blue tones in an exaggeratedly bold and anthropomorphic manner.

The narrative was not least carried by the convincing scenography developed with curator Jan Tappe: the large-format canvases were conceived as a "visual continuum"—hung on metal rails placed in the middle of the room and staggered, the lines of sight multiplied on their own. Analogous to walking through the street corridors of high-rise buildings, the paintings unfolded across the different layers of the exhibition space. With this expertise in flânerie and observation, Plaschg expands her interest in the relationship between model and painter, or in the experience of her own and collective corporeality, with a photographic representation of the social fabric of urban space. Although the source material remains intimate, it is not her own; rather, it opens up to a collective sense of the city, its traffic and infrastructure. Plaschg uses her (and our) gaze to locate the body in the city. With a reduced color palette of either blue or red tones, the artist maintains the images' digital origins, while generating tension through the seemingly skin-deep, unfinished or ambiguous. Reaching a peak in *Frosted* and *Immovable Object*, Plaschg's play with abstraction does not exclude but always seeks to remain understood.

Evelyn Plaschg, Permission, 2025; Wet, 2024. Detail of an installation view at Halle für Kunst Steiermark, Graz, 2025. Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com.

June Drevet has been an editor for *Camera Austria International* since 2024.

Evelyn Plaschg:
Viscous City.
Ed. by the artist and Sandro Droschl.

With contributions by Vanessa Joan Müller and Kari Rittenbach (ger./eng.).
Revolver Publishing, Berlin 2025.
112 pages, 21 × 30.5 cm, numerous color illustrations.
€ 22.50 / ISBN 978-3-95763-554-9

Kazuna Taguchi: I'll never ask you

mumok, Vienna, 13. 6. – 16. 11. 2025

by Margit Neuhold

Roland Barthes opens Chapter 34 of his *Camera Lucida* with the words: "It is often said that it was the painters who invented Photography (by bequeathing it their framing, the Albertian perspective, and the optic of the *camera obscura*)." Yet he continues, in disagreement, by saying, "no, it was the chemists." A few lines later, he notes: "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent."[1] Vienna-based Japanese artist Kazuna Taguchi works in and with this multifaceted space between painting and photography, questioning references of our current visual worlds, which destabilize a Barthesian "That-has-been" (ibid.), and investigating scopic regimes. She creates a precise, and at times surrealistic, black-and-white cosmos of images that defies clear articulation; yet, her work often derives from and can be tied back into art history and the related discourses. As an image collector, and through a refined process, she brings together different media-(re)produced images and translates them into paintings, which she then reworks, orchestrates, and photographs in changing scenarios.

Heike Eipeldauer curated this noteworthy exhibition, which is situated on the third basement level of mumok in Vienna, in five consecutive spaces connected by a long corridor that allows visitors to see through the gallery from one end to the other. Upon entering the space, one encounters to the right Kazuna Taguchi's most extensive body of work, *The Eyes of Eurydice* (2019–22), and to the left her most recent group of works, *In Anticipation* (2025). The latter is based on the artist's examination of Lucio Fontana's canonical *Concetto spaziale* (Spatial Concept, 1947–68). Four small-format gelatin silver prints with subtle variations of Fontana's cut image, presented behind glass, are precisely aligned in the space. If the Italian artist attempted to expand the pictorial space by adding the dimensions of time and space through his gestures, Kazuna Taguchi examines additional layers by negotiating the space between painting and photography. She leaves the mediatic referent and the space between the two in limbo by showing the inscribed reflections on the glass of a tripod and on the gallery floor in her precise reproduction of Fontana's work, which in her process of reworking must once have been a photograph. Such uncertainty about the question of the referent—or, more precisely, about the circulation of the image of the referent—reverberates in present-day image perception.

The myth around *The Eyes of Eurydice* unfolds questions of seeing along the lines of longing, the living, and the dead: Orpheus attempts to bring his beloved wife back from the realm of the dead with his song of mourning, which indeed so deeply moves the gods that they allow her to return. Yet, this is only permitted under the condition that Orpheus not glimpse his beloved on the way up—which he could not resist, losing Eurydice forever. Kazuna Taguchi's body of work emphasizes not Orpheus's gaze and its impatient longing, but *The Eyes of Eurydice*. The eyes unfold a way of seeing that is not tangible since it happens within the realm of death. In her work, glances allow image repetitions of textiles, female faces, body fragments, or gestures to circulate: a slender hand opens a coat and holds a fragment of a picture showing a left eye, the eye-

Kazuna Taguchi:
I'll never ask you.
Ed. by Heike Eipeldauer, mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien.

With a foreword by Karola Kraus and the editor and contributions by Elisabeth Bronfen and Heike Eipeldauer (eng.).
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