





## **Biography**

**Olivia Wiederkehr**

**born 1975**

**lives and works in Zurich, Athens and Rüfenach AG**

Olivia Wiederkehr works in the fields of performance, installation and sculpture. With consistency and a love of experimentation, she is constantly finding new ways to translate existential questions into forms that can be experienced by the senses. In doing so, she constantly challenges herself and exposes herself to risks - including the audience. The artist, who studied scenography in Berlin and fine arts in Basel and Zurich, also translates this dynamic into her complex, installative settings. The site-specific space, or rather the location intended for a work, are fundamental parameters that Wiederkehr scrutinises or stages under the sign of the atmospheric. She uses historical sources as well as philosophical texts as a substrate to explore political and social spaces. Her performances, which are often created in collaboration and in dialogue with dancers, mainly take place in public spaces and are located in the field of ephemeral, sculptural monuments. She sees it as a driving force in her work to not just leave thinking in thought, but to evoke it as active action. She is constantly searching for new aesthetic and artistic strategies and dialogue-based possibilities to translate this active attitude into material and physical movement.

Olivia Wiederkehr is an artist with a background in scenography who works across different media. From photography, drawing, video and sculpture, to costumes, choreographed performances and space-filling installations in museum and public contexts. Wiederkehr was born in Schlieren in 1975 and lives and works in Zurich and Brugg. She studied stage design and fine arts in Berlin (KHB) and Basel (FHNW) and completed a Master of Fine Arts in Zurich (ZHdK). She is currently studying on the CAS Writing in Art and Culture programme at the ZHdK (Department of Cultural Journalism). Since 2014, she has been teaching project-based art education in public schools (e.g. "Artist in Residency" in spring 2023), at art colleges (ZHdK) and other institutions (HORA theatre, specialist conferences). She is regularly called upon as an external jury member for art in architecture competitions. She was an active board member of Ausstellungsraum Klingental Basel for many years and co-founder of the Panch Performance Art Network Switzerland. Since 2020, she has been an advisory board member at an art space in Athens. She curates and organises performance events and festivals at irregular intervals.

Since 2017, she has spent several months a year in Athens. The contacts with the art scene in Athens, which were initially established through residencies, have developed into eminently important friendships for her, from whose exchange and dialogue regular joint collaborations and projects emerge.

## COMMON ACTIONS

2023

### PUBLICATION

Softcover bound, 130 pages

The publication *Common Actions* appears as volume 13 in the *Primeur* series of the *Aargauer Kuratorium* by Edition Fink, Zurich

With the publication "COMMON ACTION", I am bringing my content creation process of the past three years on the subject of freedom of action to a brilliant conclusion. I am utilising the Primeur format, which is sponsored by the Aargau Board of Trustees and enables artists to publish their work for the first time, in collaboration with the publisher Edition Fink, Zurich.

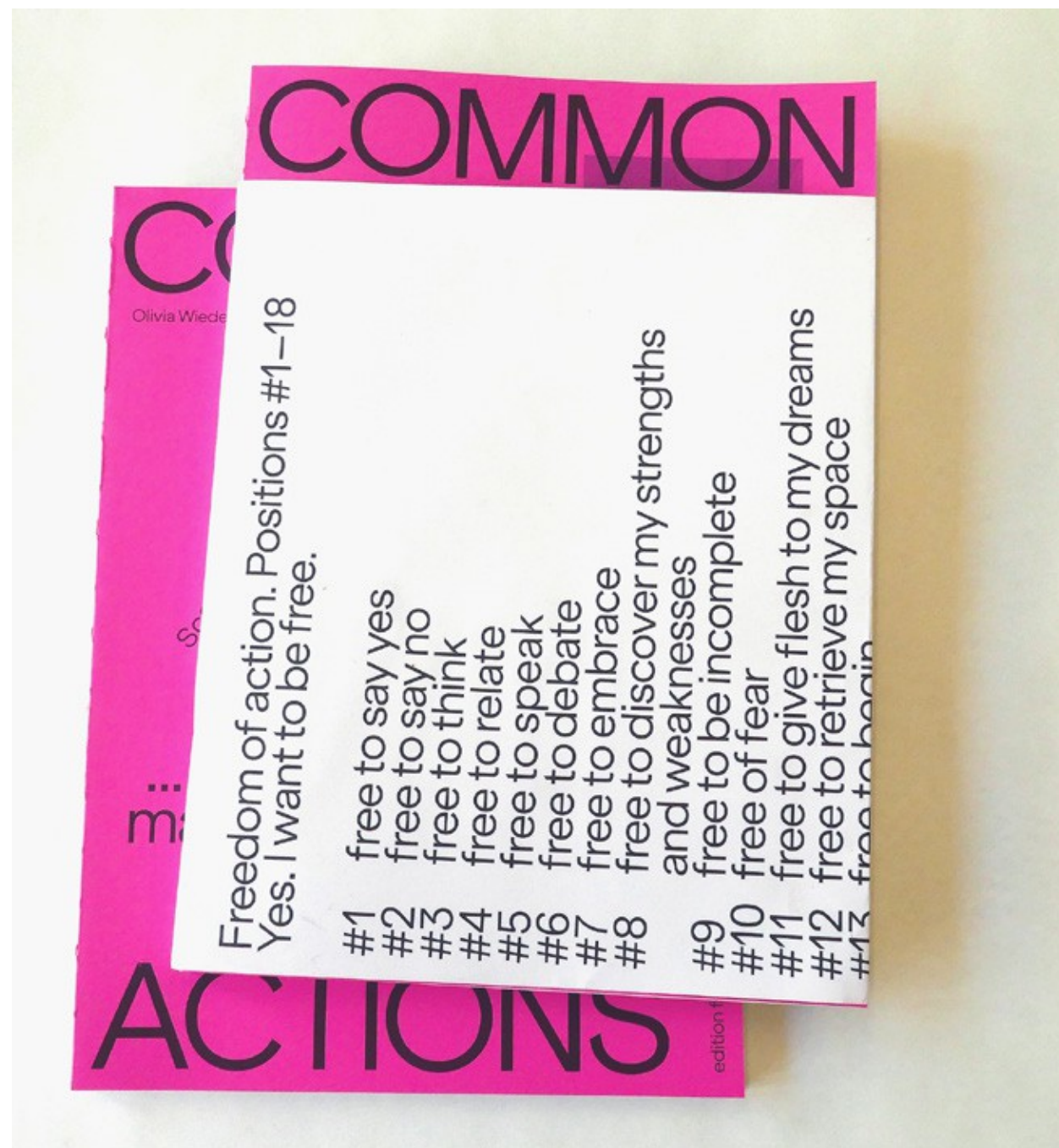
For this publication, I have invited people I have met over the past three years: in Russia, Greece and Switzerland. I asked them to enter into a dialogue with me about the concept of freedom on the basis of this manifesto. My Manifesto of Freedom of Action, with its eight or ten statements, forms the framework and the score for this book. This publication can therefore be seen as a workbook, as a momentary substrate of contributions that have responded to my invitation to react to the manifesto, renegotiate it and think it through further argumentatively.

Concept and editing: Olivia Wiederkehr, Georg Rutishauser; Michael Hübner

Texts: Eva-Maria Knüsel, Irene Müller, Olivia Wiederkehr

Invitees: Alan Alpenfelt, Sofia Bempeza, Renata Burckhardt, Leda Dalla, Theatre HORA, Lysann König, Gitsa Konstantoudaki, Angela Marzullo, Eleni Mylona, Eliana Otta, Tatiana Panajoti, Thomas Peter, Alkmini Petrou Chatzipanagiotou, Rezanova Yulyia Sergeevna, Vasiliki Sifostratoudaki, Manolis Tsipos, Anya Ustyakina, Ira Yakukhnova Graphic design: Studio HübnerBraun, Basel

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## FERN-WEH (THE EPHEMERAL MONUMENT)

2023

GUEST ARTIST SELECTION23

AARGAUER KUNSTHAUS

*Location-specific text work*

*Vertical lettering with 28 verbs (words) applied  
to the outside of the glass front*

"participate" is how the word sequence of the site-specific work begins. A total of 28 words adorn the glass façade of the Aargauer Kunsthaus, creating a poetic choreography that the artist sees as a challenge.

The separable verbs, consisting of a stem verb and a prefix, can be read and combined both horizontally and vertically. Wieder- kehrt thus creates a synthesis of language and architecture. The struts in the window façade serve as a linguistic setting and at the same time as a hyphen between the words. They are frequently used activity words that describe everyday actions: "distract", "wake up", "think", "breathe in".

The poetic sequence of words functions as an ephemeral monument that captures the longing for distance, freedom and transformation, all themes that repeatedly occupy Olivia Wiederkehr in her work. She is constantly finding new artistic means of expression.

The sequence of words on the façade does not end with "auf-hören", but with the verb "an-legen". Here it stands for a ferry that docks in the harbour and at the same time appears as the dominant poster subject. In bright yellow and pink, the ferry cannot be overlooked on the stands of the Kunsthaus and symbolises the transition between worlds and cultures and the associated cultural and geographical peculiarities of language and its challenges. At the same time, the artist links her latest work with the contributions in her first publication "Common Actions". The title of the work, FERN-WEH, refers to Wiederkehr's preoccupation with speechlessness and the associated aspect of pain.



Image credits next page: Timo Ullmann







## L'ODEUR D'UN NUAGE - THE SCENT OF A CLOUD

2023

Villa Bernasconi, Geneva - Lancy

*Festival "Le soleil se lève quand les paupières se ferment"*

*curated by Marie-Eve Knoerle*

*Lecture Performance*

*Duration: 45min*

In this lecture-performance, I talk about my experiences from my research trip to Greece. We humans live in stories, we are history. Where stories are no longer told, it becomes quiet. My interest in social and political networks, their historical origins and geographical features has led me to Greece again and again in recent years. In 2021, I received a travel and research grant from the Aargauer Kuratorium to better understand why painful political experiences can still influence the way we act and think today.

The sculpture "Le Tirez" by the Geneva artist Aurélien Gamboni stands in the centre of the Villa Bernasconi park. His sculpture refers to boundaries that are intangible and yet exist. Using my research material on the prison island of Leros, I set out in search of these fragile lines of connection between the Geneva writer Alice Rivaz, Gamboni's sculpture "le tirez", the Greek writer Elli Pappa, and the exile of the psychopaths on Leros. Geopolitical and biopolitical events from the past and present interweave to create a poetic collage with an unexpected outcome and depth.

The video documentation is [available here](#).

The text is published in full on the website of [Aurélien Gamboni / le tiret](#)









## THE MOMENT OF A MONUMENT

2023

**AIR - ARTIST IN RESIDENCY, RÜTIHOF NEAR BADEN**

*In collaboration with Lea Schaffner*

*site-specific performance with 200 pupils and a sheet of paper (10m x 18m)*

*Duration: 30min*

At the invitation of the Canton of Aargau's cultural mediation centre, Lea Schaffner, video artist, and I moved our studios to the Baden Rütihof primary school in spring 2023.

What is time? Our shared interest spurred us on to organise this six-week residency. How can children between the ages of 5 and 12 think about philosophical topics such as memory, resistance or monuments? The old chapel next to the school provided an introduction to the topic: due to a complete overhaul, the clock in the bell tower was removed along with the clock face - so the time was no longer there. What does it mean to have no time? We explored timeless places performatively, explored slowness with our bodies, practised depicting living monuments and placed visual lines in places of remembrance. With the help of a video camera, we recorded these performative investigations - and incidentally created an archive of the past. These sketches gave rise to the idea of an ephemeral, living monument. A huge 180m<sup>2</sup> piece of paper provided the aesthetic foundation. It took everyone's commitment to set this gigantic, fragile paper in motion. We used the resulting associative acoustics as a dramaturgical arc over the event: gentle stroking alternated with deafening noise as the climax, only to fall silent again immediately afterwards.

Rehearsing the performance in the present - focussing on the future final happening - which would later become a collective memory - a moment of the moment - for all participants, was an intense experience for everyone involved.





## THE STUNTS - STUNT SERIES

from 2007 ongoing

An explanation of this specific group of works

My performances "pink.ponk.loud" or "Stunts No. 1-5" form a separate group of works in my artistic work.

This began in 2007, when I was invited by the Kunsthalle Basel to design a performance for an opening.

There was something liberating and authentic about me singing and dancing in front of over 400 people, celebrating my femininity and my fears, twirling pink polystyrene guitars around me and destroying them all at the end. The audience jeered and applauded enthusiastically.

I then decided to continue these performances and henceforth called this series "Stunts".

In terms of content, each stunt is based on a specific concept that is derived from my everyday life: Thoughts about femininity, art, work, efficiency, insecurity. From this, I create an instruction for myself. Inherent in this score is always the challenge for me to exceed the limits of my own physical ability. I must therefore charmingly overcome my fear in every performance in order to fulfil this task at all - and do so in public.

I design my own costumes for each stunt, with matching make-up and props. The scenographic setting is also very important to me as an aesthetic setting.





## **pink.ponk.slow. (STUNT SERIES) 2023**

**Warteck Areal, Basel**

*Performance in public urban space*

*Colour pigments, rolling board, sound*

*box Duration 30min*

With "pink.ponk.slow." it's the challenge of skateboarding: I can't skateboard. However, part of the score of this happening is that I ride very slowly, to the beat of the music - which makes it all the more difficult to keep my physical balance. The possibility of failure constantly surrounds me. I confront this presumed moment with as much charm as possible and try to embrace it constantly by helping myself to keep my balance with a broom and, incidentally, gallantly blurring the line of pink pigment on the floor that I actually want to follow.

The time frame varies: some stunts are very short. Others take as long as it takes to fulfil the task I have been given. Since the first stunt in Basel, many more have followed: at the Kunstverein Freiburg, Kunstraum Riehen, Gallery Tart Art Zurich, Meinblau Berlin, Warteck pp in Basel.

I really like these happenings.





**PINK.PONK.LOUD.**  
**2022**  
**(STUNT SERIES)**

*Performance Festival 'Perform Pfefferberg', Berlin A  
motor symphony with six motorbikes curated by  
Simon Berz, Timo Ullmann  
15min*

Darkness falls. In a courtyard in the centre of one of Berlin's nightlife districts, I deliberately and slowly swivel two spotlights. A low hum can be heard. It gets louder until it comes to a roaring halt right in front of the audience: six motorcyclists form up in two groups in front of me. Whenever I raise my arms, the engines roar - when I go to the ground with the headlights, they become quieter. The noise is deafening, exceeding the limits of what is bearable. The acoustic pain and physical stench come to an abrupt end when pink pigments are suddenly thrown at me from the crowd. The motorbikes roar one last time and move away.





## THE OPENING (WATERMELON) 2022

*Performance Festival LEGS ATHENS  
Collaboration with Lida Dalla, Erato Trik, Gitsa  
Konstantoudaki  
Bageion Hotel, Omonia Square, Athens  
12min*

Cutting open the plump, juicy water melon is a ritual in Greece that should not be missed at any social occasion that is accompanied by food. It is hard to imagine Greek food culture without the juicy, plump fruit. It is a tonic, refreshment and thirst quencher all in one, packaged as an aesthetically pleasing bomb in a charming green and red colour.

For the overture of the LEGS Performance Art Festival Athens, we - the organisers of this festival, which is taking place for the first time - the opening with this ceremonial act of cutting open and sharing watermelons. As a sensual image for what was to follow over the next few hours: a juicy, plump festival in which more than 50 artists took part and which was attended by more than 600 spectators. A cultural refreshment and strengthening of the Athenian performance scene.





## APPROACH TO A COMMON LANGUAGE 2021

*Video Performance HD*  
30min

Three people wrestle with their costumes on an empty ferry and try to put them and themselves together - over and over again.

Words in Greek, English and Russian are recognisable on the costumes. They are the statements from the Manifesto of Freedom of Action, which we (the dancers and I) wrote together in 2020.

The performance refers to the linguistic struggle between different spaces of experience. Language is always defined geographically, politically or historically. Words have different connotations or are even charged with a different meaning in these limited spaces.

The spark that is present in the possibility of resonating misunderstanding is pain - the tugging and pulling between the linguistic understanding often penetrates deep into the physical understanding and gives space to fears, which in turn can be perceived as a potential force of unrest. Welcoming pain as a transformative force in order to face this challenge together harbours the potential for change. And perhaps this is where a possible transformation of a society and its rituals can take place.

Pathetic? Perhaps. We are working on it. The pain won't let us go.





## YES!NO!YES!NO! - FREE TO EMBRACE

2021

Ural Industrial Biennial, Ekaterinburg, RU

Pro Helvetia Focus on Swiss Performing Arts

*Site-specific performance with five performers Five performances in public urban spaces from Yekaterinburg*

*Duration 60 - 90min each*

Performing Social Rituals was a performance programme at the Ural Industrial Biennale 2021, which was developed with the support of the Pro Helvetia Foundation Moscow.

Rituals are the basis of our everyday life, they influence the social choreography. They are woven into the fabric and create a space of trust. Rituals include hugs, looks and handshakes. We understand rituals to be both situational interactions and complex social scenarios. Our body serves as a medium; it helps us to transmit information and receive signals from other people.





**YES!NO!YES!NO! - FREE TO EMBRACE  
2021**

**Ural Industrial Biennial, Ekaterinburg, RU  
Pro Helvetia Focus on Swiss Performing Arts**

The performance ignites the operationalisation of "yes", "no", in which Olivia Wiederkehr can reveal her preoccupation with active vigilance within the social space. To this end, she has compiled her thoughts into short statements that can be understood as an invitation to an open dialogue about personal freedom of action. These statements are activated on costumes specially made for the Biennale by being carried into the city by the performers: The artist thus creates an invitation in public space to enter into a spontaneous dialogue with passers-by about freedom, closeness and distance. Questions such as: How social is "social distancing"? How has the pandemic reduced or expanded the personal space of each of us? were thus negotiated in the fleeting nature of the public space, in the knowledge that the unknown counterpart is free to decide to accept or reject this invitation to dialogue.





**YES. I WANT TO BE FREE.**  
**2021/2022**  
**POSTER SERIES IN PUBLIC SPACE**

*Version 1 (2021):*  
 Poster series in public spaces in the town of Brugg  
 Graff design: Sarah Parsons  
 in collaboration with Zimmermannhaus Brugg

*Version 2 (2022):*  
 Poster edition of 25 copies.  
 Probstei St. Peterszell, SG Graff's  
 realisation: Urs Althaus

It is no coincidence that YES and NO are at the beginning and end of these statements. In the words YES and NO - this absolute opposite - the human potential of action and creation is revealed to me in the greatest possible reduction: with a YES we open spaces and doors, with a NO we close areas, form boundaries - or vice versa. The statements are the result of an in-depth study of Hanna Arendt's essay "The freedom to be free". Arendt's concept of freedom is political and is based on the idea that with every new thought, a new beginning can be made that is as small as it is radical. By speaking and consequently acting, we are political and have the potential to make a difference.

The statements function as a loose collection that can be expanded at any time. A kind of manifesto (from the Latin "manifestus" = made tangible) that has been created in collaboration with many people and can be understood as an invitation to a joint dialogue. Freedom as a value that conditions and shapes the individual and society in equal measure, which must be negotiated together again and again.

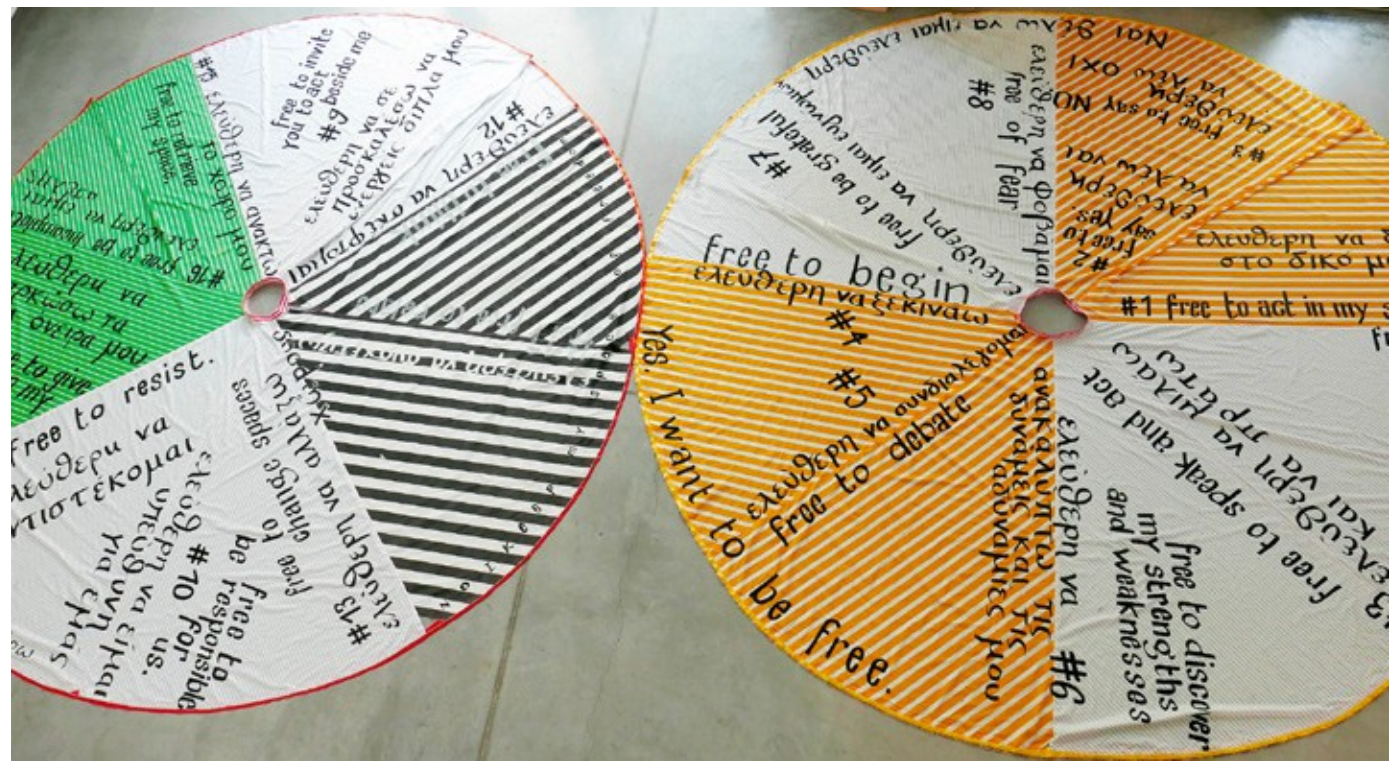




## YellowBrick, Athens (GR)

*Photos: Myrto Apostolidis*

[Video documentation here.](#)









## HOW TO GENERATE WISDOM THE DINNER - HAPPENINGS

ongoing since 2017

Y-Residency, Athens

Kunstraum Aarau (and  
many more)

Performance Happening

120min

I maintain that we all have a lot of knowledge. In order to transform this knowledge into wisdom (which is meant with a certain wink), we need to find time to actively listen to the other person, to understand their point of view in order to be able to respond to it. In times like ours, it is important "that we artists and cultural practitioners form new alliances, actively questioning and repositioning ourselves - as part of society and for the society in which we all live."

A dialogue is conducted in a performative way during a dinner, which takes place in an intimate circle of a maximum of ten people. "How to generate Wisdom" creates a time-based space to generate wisdom together through dialogue on a topic that I have previously defined. There are no recordings of the conversations; the content of the evenings is left to the participants alone. In the knowledge that their content will spread in its very own way - through the future actions of the invitees themselves.

I invite guests - from as many different social, political and economic fields as possible - and thus curate these evenings, but not their conversational outcome.

The format has been held at irregular intervals since 2017.





## THINK WITHOUT RAILINGS

2021

Carpenter's house Brugg

*Installation in the public courtyard*

*Metal, concrete, industrial belts, LED lights, wood, mirror panels, acrylic glass*

The metaphor is borrowed from Arendt's essay and is characteristic of the philosopher's thinking, who did not belong to any school and did not bow to any intellectual constraints. With her installation, the artist endeavours to open up a space for discourse and make it tangible, not only theoretically but also practically. She herself describes this methodology as "finding material figures of thought".

The semi-circular, gold-coloured anodised railing scaffolding - a reference to the precious ability to think for oneself - is only half-built and faces us directly. The unassembled individual parts of the scaffolding are stacked in the centre of a house and are stabilised and fixed by a single long band. The band spans the entire installation and is weighted down at the ends by concrete rings dipped in asphalt paint. Words such as "action" are scattered around the terrain fragments, "Resistance", "idea", "active", "courage", "experience", which are not chiselled in stone but cast in concrete, quote central concepts from Arendt's essay. Our path through the installation leads us past a small fountain that the artist has caused to overflow with her concrete quotes. Just as the pursuit of freedom has always found expression and will continue to do so in the future, flowing water always makes its way. At the same time, freedom of action must be constantly renegotiated and redefined in a society-specific way, which for the artist is reflected in the fluidity of water. (Silke Baumann)





## SUBSTRATE - POSITIONS #1-18

2020

PTTH:// Lucerne

*Metal frame, cotton fabric, Greek olive oil*

This is the third part of the series about your own free space. It is no coincidence that YES and NO are at the beginning and end of my manifesto (from the Latin "ma- nifestus" = made tangible). The manifesto, written by hand in Greek and English letters on two portable skirts, which take their place in the exhibition space like two large-format discs and at the same time restrict movement in the room, are a haptic statement about the space of speaking. When translating the "positions", I realised that there is no gender-neutral narrative in Greek. Our speech is therefore inevitably shaped by the (linguistic) space in which we move; by the structures that cannot be transferred across language borders without a loss of meaning. As space-forming but also space-dividing elements, golden metal railings complement the installation, to some of which taps are attached and buckets of olive oil are placed. Two jackets hang from the scaffolding as if they could be reactivated at any time. Temporarily decommissioned or hung up, they bear traces of past and future actions or refer to current events in Greece.

