

**It's not
a black and white
thing**

but
white
black
not

It's not

by Josefine
Flaig

University of Gothenburg
HDK - School of
Design and Crafts
Crafts, Textile Art

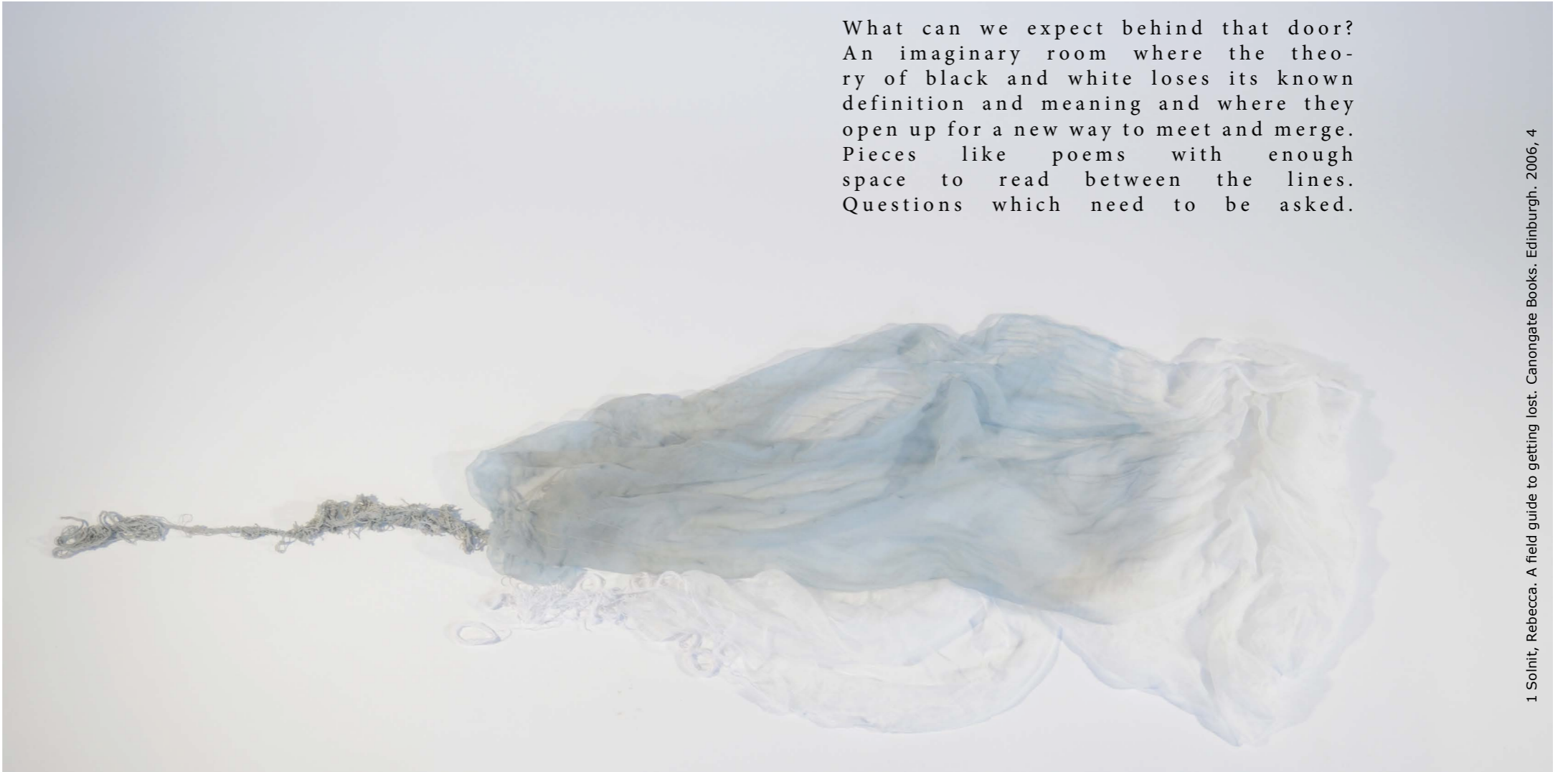
Professor in textile
Anna Tegeström- Wolgers
Tutor
Dan Tommi Hildén
2016

**It's not
a black and white
thing** or

Leave the door open for the unknown,
the door into the dark

Leave the door open for the
unknown, the door into the
dark.¹

What can we expect behind that door?
An imaginary room where the theory
of black and white loses its known
definition and meaning and where they
open up for a new way to meet and merge.
Pieces like poems with enough
space to read between the lines.
Questions which need to be asked.



s	Introduction	09
t	Materials	13
	Process	16
e	Chapter 1: The mess of threads	17
	Chapter 2: Traces	28
	Development of forms	31
e	Chapter 3: A view	38
t	In my room	42
	Conclusion: All together	45
e	List of sources and literature	48
o	Appendix	(53)
U	Documentation of the exposition – Examination and exhibition	78

Where else should I start than with my own start in life?

Trying to remember early childhood memories can be very difficult, almost frustrating, because memories tend to become blurred and fade away. The ones we still can remember stay with us for a reason.

I remember lying in my bed, maybe at the age of five and fearing the darkness I could see around me. At that time I had to share a room with my older sister and in the night, when it was difficult, sometimes even impossible to see, we could still talk to each other. Sometimes, I think it was during the summer times, my parents kept the roller shutters open just a little bit so that some evening light found its way into our bedroom. What I experienced in those evenings was the condition of seeing and not seeing, the shifting of shapes, the fading of colours which resulted in fear. The combination of the shadows I could spot around me and the “darkness conversations” which allowed me and my sister to share the unclear and, therefore, frightening images let my imagination run wild.

Not knowing what possibly could be out there - outside my bed - kept me awake for countless hours.

Nowadays, I am aware that this memory of fearing the dark is a common human experience and all of us have some similar childhood memories. Another widespread childhood experience is the frequently asked question of colour preference. As a child growing up in the nineties in Germany, I was used to answering the question “What is your favourite colour?” not only when meeting a new person, but also in friendship books which were very popular with children.

I remember that my answer was blue, as blue was a good choice, a good colour to have as your favourite. It was mute, “lagom” as Swedes would say. It didn't feel as girlish as pink and most of the other kids also liked it.

If I remember correctly, there was something like a “blue club”, next to a green, yellow and a red one (...) and the admission fee to the fraternisation was a choice of colour; a certain value and preference.

The moment when another person responded “Oh, my favourite colour is also blue!” was extraordinarily binding as it was the moment when you realized that you have something in common.

Strangely the question of colour preference became more and more rare. It disappeared with a certain age and nowadays I am not sure if my answer would still be blue.

My view on colours changed with time and in art school I learned about their heritage, their belonging, their messages and effects.

My early experiences with the issue of darkness and light and the valuation of colours demonstrate an affirmation of current theories.

In this context, the subject of black & white started to intrigue me as a result of questioning my own preferences and works, as well as questioning the idea and theory of black & white/ darkness & light with the resulting problematic view on colours in art, design and social structures.

“(…) some questions are more significant than their answers, and such is the case with this one”²

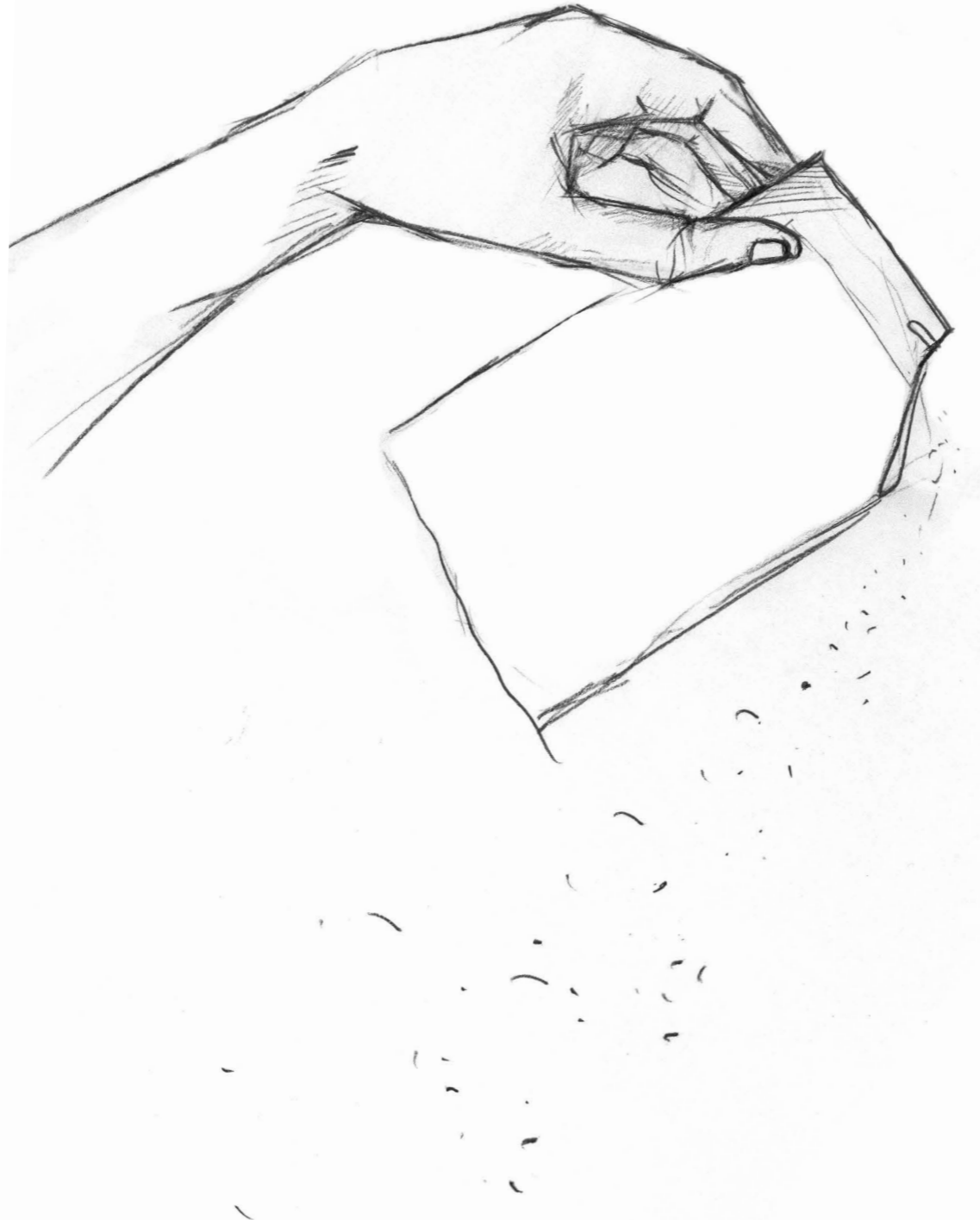
and, therefore, I am not interested in giving a clear answer or image. In and with my artworks I am aiming to invite the viewer – invite to experience, think and question - it could be said that I try to hold the door open - “the door into the dark”.

What can we expect behind that door?

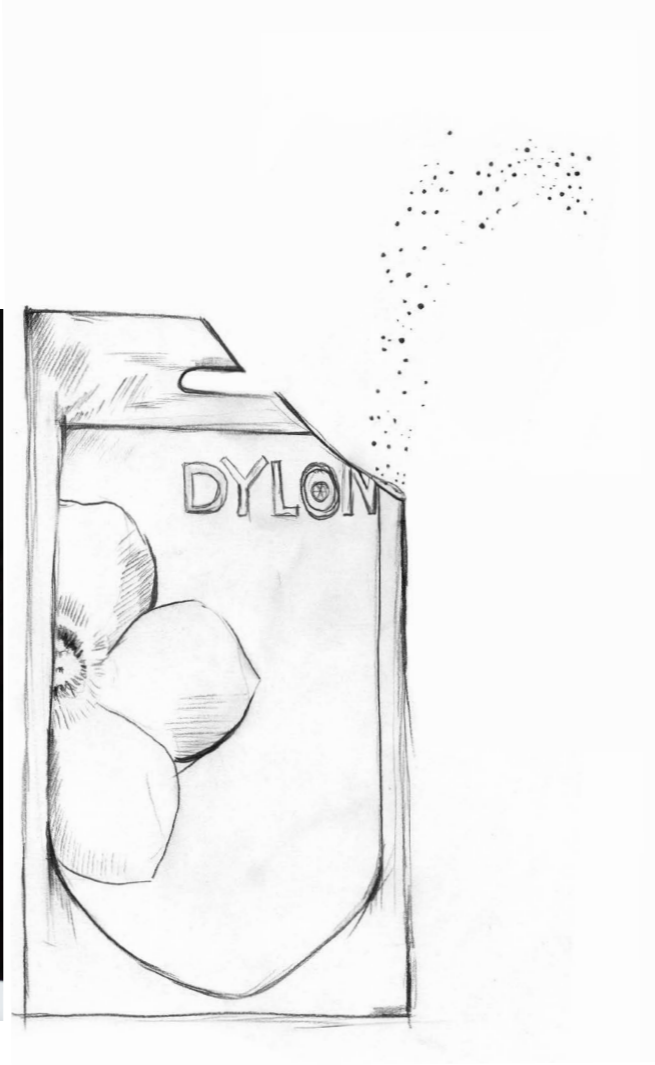
An imaginary room where the existing ideas and theories lose their known definitions and meanings and where they open up for a new way to meet and merge.

Pieces like poems with enough space to read between the lines.

Questions which need to be asked.



Black, is the everything - or nothing?
As white light exists of all the colours,
it is all there - but
what can be found in the black?
I bought this box of black colour, it is
supposed to be the perfect mixed textile
dyeing bath.
On the box, I found instructions
- an explanation of how to get the perfect
black.



Using a ready mixed “velvet black” dyeing bath made me explore the potential of the black colour and by handling the product in different ways, I was able to push the limits of the possible.

Velvet black is often considered as “the perhaps blackest black”³, and by only using this specific and pre-prepared colour, I am aiming to search and create an imaginary room, a room of meeting and merging and imagination.

“I like the difference of materials between the soft fabric & the sort of concrete with its powerful wrinkles, like circles on water & constellations...they are also having a proper conversation, they are not challenging each other but they are helping each other...”⁴

The choice of materials was conceptual and simultaneously experimental.

Opposites like fine and thin materials and more solid and strong substances; cheap and more expensive considered materials; and natural versus man made ones became the basis of my material investigation.

The discussion between the contrary materials is included in the theme and the associated ability to create different layers by using materials such as plastic, silk, plaster (...) refers to the idea of “opening a door” in terms of exploring the different layers of a complex issue.

The central
question of my work leads to a process, not to
an answer and, therefore, the project is a part
off the process and a process in itself.

I named the first period of time “the mess of threads”. The alluded mess is a very visible aspect of the first period, but it also refers to the obscurities at the beginning.

The first phase was a period of experimenting as I took the opportunity to discover different materials such as cotton, silk, paper, plastic, plaster and wood.

Testing various absorbance capacities of the materials resulted in a small collection of sketches.

I started with threads - the beginning of every textile piece. Threads, stitched in ready-made and manufactured textiles. They are becoming a part of the structure and the visible differences are based on the diversity in qualities and hand-craft.

Diverse layers are merging into one, they start to communicate with each other.

The eye follows the lines that are almost straight, almost “perfect”. With perfect I mean machine-made structures as they surround us all the time. The concept behind “almost perfect” is the idea of creating something which appears familiar to the viewer; but at the same time some small details distract the eye and this distraction ought to invite the observer to react on the piece.

The strings seem to be too long for the cloth, they are intruding into it - or do they escape?

This is the beginning, the beginning of the project but also the start of many following procedures. It is the preparation work which has to be done before the fabric meets the velvet black.

The black finds its way, the door is open.

Experimenting the different qualities in fabric and thread, as well as different dyeing temperatures, periods of time and -handling of the dyeing bath leads to different results. Some can be planned, others happen by chance.

The general approach is to dip the fabric-thread pieces with one side into the dyeing bath so that the different black velvet tones start to spread.

I place some light and fragile fabrics on the landscape of plaster.



The created forms communicate with each other, they are “almost perfect” squares. The plaster surface evolves a certain structure which is the result of a certain way to treat the plaster in the mixing and pouring process. A closer look reveals sceneries of form and colour.

The colour has its origin in the usual white of the plaster powder. A careful scattering of coloured pigments forms landscapes of a unknown place.

Fabric threads on plaster and plastic, the layers interdependent and separate at the same time. There is structure and disorder – the development of the mess of threads.

A quilt adrift / abandoned
among iced concrete
as the threads combine
to escape to their
pre agreed fate

(unknown classmate of Marija)⁵



Silk organza and plastic foil, how can they communicate with each other?

The threads find their way through the fabric and plastic, forming new dimensions and connections.

The threads which hold together the individual layers are responsible for the spreading of the pigments and the creation of a gradient.

Threads existing of silk and paper, stretch out into the room and out to the viewer.

As an observer you are entering the room of the piece, or is the piece entering your room? White light shines through the work, which I named “as the threads combine to escape to their pre-agreed fate” and reveals what was hidden in the dark.





Traces

Pursuing the goal to create a selection of pieces which developed out of the working question and which are inviting the viewer to follow their own thoughts and imagination led me to the conclusion that my personal and subjective perception of the work has to be extended.

So
I asked others.

I sent 15 envelopes to friends and family members, containing a close-up photo of my work and a letter in which I asked to “borrow your eyes for a moment”; meaning that they should “take a look at the postcard/ photo which you can find in the envelope and tell me:
What do you see?
What do you think when you look at it?”

With this act I was aiming to clarify how the viewer responds to my work. Being aware of my own closeness to the piece led me to investigate the outside view. As I am influenced by my personal experiences and childhood memories, I became interested in the personal experience of the viewers with their own, individual backgrounds and stories.
The aim to create “Pieces like poems with enough space to read between the lines” resulted in this creative survey and the selected participants who were a mix of friends and family, a mix in ages, professions and interests.
As far as I am concerned, it is neither my responsibility nor my right to interpret the responses. Their reading between my lines has to stand for themselves so that the reader is able to do the same.

This selection exists of quotes from the sent contributions.
The complete compilation of contributions can be viewed at the end and under the section attachments.

It looks like something dark is slowly creeping up on me.
The darkness makes me feel scared and I don't want to become part of it.
(Barbara)

(...)
I think of something obscure.
Of something which wants to connect, but it can't.
I think of something chaotic what tries to order itself, to unravel.
(extract from my Mother's contribution, translated from German)

off the top of my head.
Thoughts combining.
Brain.
Am I my thoughts? Just my thoughts?
Are my thoughts just the effect of the chemicals in my brain and body?
Can I control them? Do they control me?
(...)
(extract from Annika's contribution)

Dark meets Light
Transparent / thin-skinned
Transience (= everything disappears someday)
Everything is connected with each other
(interweaving)
(extract from Janina's contribution, translated from German)

somewhere I feel less comfortable with the object in the front, a part of me wants to destroy it (to rip it apart or burn the fabric), so that it will be liberated.
(extract from Amber's contribution)

I particularly love this single thread going apart since a while,
... Is he exclude?...he is heading to the dark part... alone...Is he lost? Its curves seem quite smooth compare to the others...Is he envious...?..
It seems quite peaceful... confident..
(extract from Mathilde's contribution)



Development of forms

Merging and separate – leaving traces for the viewer to wonder – to think - to imagine
the traces are details
prints of what has been there

The creating of plaster imprints, or plaster casts was a continuation and development of the created body of work with the result that the pieces imply the memories of the earlier used materials.

The developed technique is the method of merging textiles with plaster and the following separation of the materials after the first step of the curing process.

The fabrics, as thin and fragile as they are, create a conversation with the plaster. They are one of a kind and so different at the same time.

A frozen moment - a paused movement- becomes visible in the plaster cast and as the textile work changes the plaster, the gypsum itself changes the fabric slightly.

It is the process of the creation of traces.

I started to investigate the flexibility of cloth compared to the plaster's immobility .

Inspired by the photography of Ishiuchi Miyako and her way of translating the quality of fabrics into photography, I followed my own traces.

The strong connection and interaction between textiles and photography is not only one aspect of my work and working process, it is also the connecting point to the above-named artist Ishiuchi Miyako.

“It is a curious fact that ISHIUCHI has studied textile design. She is familiar with the forms, structures, colors, and fibers that her lenses focuses on.”⁶

Taking pictures gave me the possibility to capture one specific moment, one particular movement. As the imprints , they are referring to something fragile, flexible and tactile while being the opposite.

A memory -an image
Another layer
A captured moment
With a story behind
traces - like poems
with enough space
to read between the lines.





A view

Perspectives

It depends where you stand
If you are close, everything is huge
with more distance things appear smaller
but to the five year old who lays in the dimly lit bedroom the proportions become vague,
different from what you are used to.

Existing of plaster and fabric, merging into each other and forming a new structure which, if you are very close, implies its own universe.

I poured the plaster, freed it and allowed the material to find its own way. The organic form met the straight shape of the fabric and the lines of the strings. The dye finds its way, guided by the threads and it is not up to me to lead it.

The threads do not necessarily soak the black; it appears that they can act as messengers and as the fabric absorbs all the reachable dye, the white stitches emerge. White stitches that caused the colour gradient around them, visible lines which ask to be read. Small details suddenly contain everything, and the eyes follow their tracks, exploring the space in between the lines.

It is an important piece, perhaps even the centre of my work, but with the curing process the piece lost something important. What I am missing is the state of being in the moment, being a process and no clear answer and, therefore, I determine to go back and keep the piece in the process.

As the shapes and proportions of my surrounding shifted twenty years ago, I take the piece and increase its size. I am intending to make the piece several times, for every occasion and every room and one at a time they will be met in the drying process. After their issuing period in which the works of art will dry, I am intending to destroy the pieces on the spot. Not taking the pieces with me gives the process a change to remain and to meet the viewer as the viewer can meet the process itself.

My own work steps start with the threads. Countless hand-sewn stitches are forming a layer, small details which will influence the velvet black dyeing bath. These steps can be planned and prepared in advance, whereas the pouring

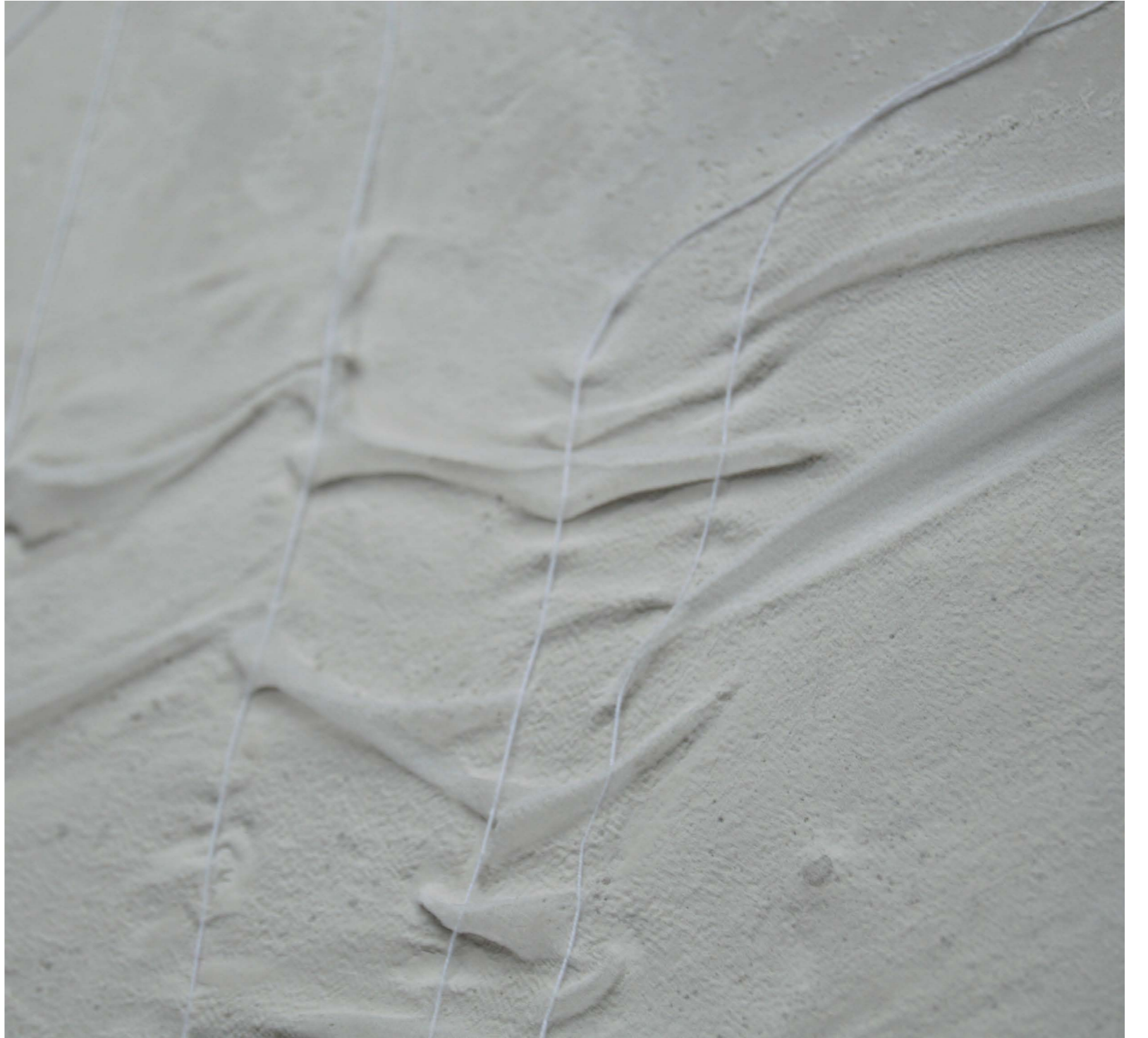
process and the actual fusing of the layers is site-specific and not possible to affect or alter.

I trust the moment, the process with its honesty and I accept my limited intervention.

It is open; open in itself but also open to meet the viewer.

Still wet and in progress, it visualizes the gained knowledge.







All together

Together in the moment- the pieces, the process and the viewer who enters my room.

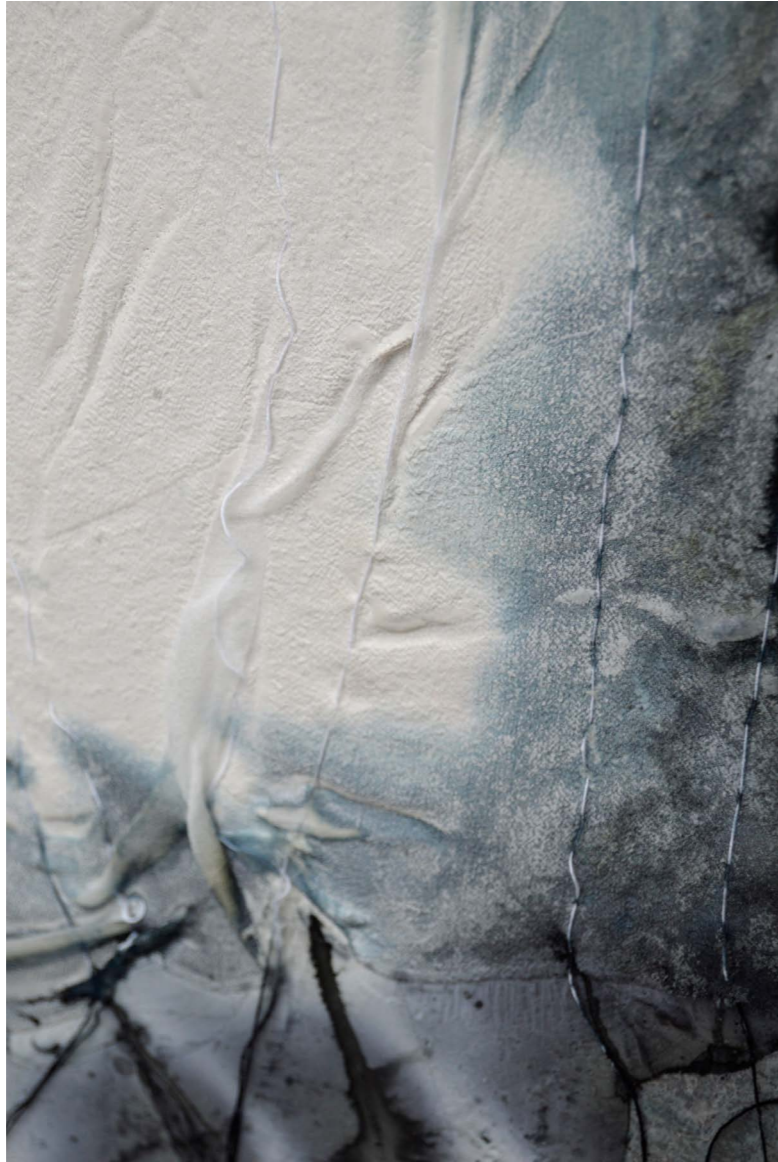
As the postcards reached their destinations and caused responses in written form, the work in itself asks for a collaboration. It is a meeting and the viewer becomes part of the work, one more material or layer.

If I would be asked about my favourite colour again, I am almost certain that my answer wouldn't be blue any more. I admit, it is a beautiful colour and "For many years, I have been moved by the blue at the far edge of what can be seen"⁷. But these edges could be pushed and extended and what I found behind was "Not a black and white thing."

So I guess, my answer would be
black and white,
and everything in between

The "darkness conversations" of my childhood are gone. Maybe that's because my sister and I are going separate ways, but I guess it is more a result of the process of reaching adulthood.

The causeless fear of the dark doesn't follow me any-more and the "darkness conversations" developed into late night talks. For me, darkness became a place of possibilities, a place of honesty and truthfulness. It's " - where the most important things come from, where you yourself came from, and where you will go"⁸.



Change out of process
Even what looks solid and unchangeable
Just a frozen moment
A movement
They seemed to be trapped
in the dim light of a memory
As I said,

It's not a black and white thing

List of sources and literature

Itten, Johannes, Faber Birren(eds.). Itten, The elements of color. Van Nostrand Reinhold Company. New York. 1970

Miyako, ISHIUCHI. Frida by Ishiuchi. RM Verlag. Banco de Mexico. 2013 First Edition

Solnit, Rebecca. A field guide to getting lost. Canongate Books. Edinburgh. 2006

relevant literature

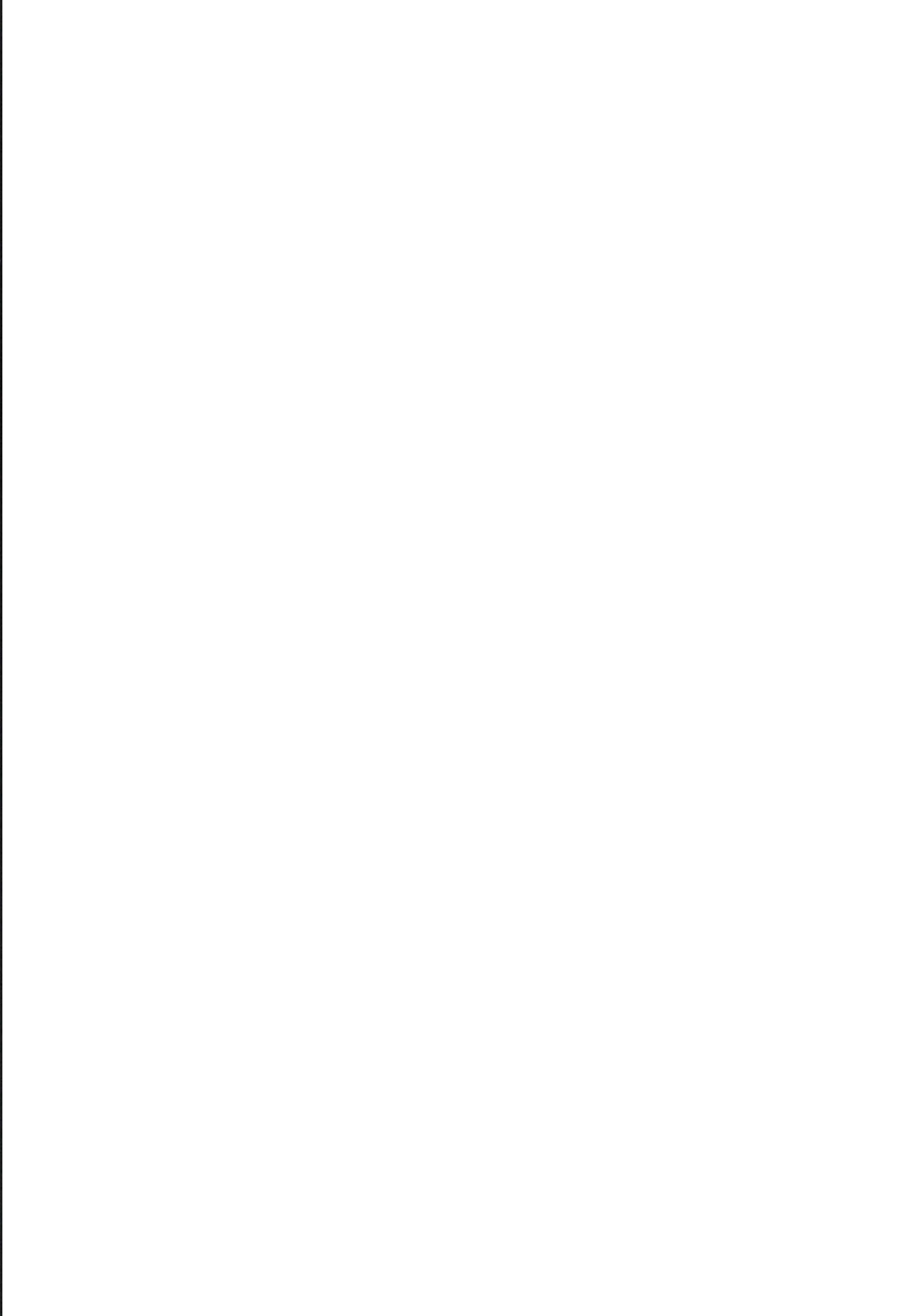
Batchelor, David. Chromophobia. London : Reaktion, 2000

Gage, John. Colour and culture, Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction. Thames and Hudson. 1993

O'Brien, Eileen. Odell Korgen, Kathleen. It's the Message, Not the Messenger: The Declining Significance of Black-White Contact in a "Colorblind" Society. Sociological Inquiry, 2007, 77, 3, 356-382. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-682X.2007.00197.x

T. Sharpe, Deborah. The Psychology of Color and Design. Littlefield, Adams+ Co. Totowa, New Jersey. 1975

Winick, Charles. Taboo and Disapproved Colors and Symbols in Various Foreign Countries. The Journal of social psychology, 1963, 59, 2, 361-368. DOI:10.1080/00224545.1963.9919441





A p p e n d i x

With and in these attachments I would like to give you the opportunity to read the “postcard contributions” in complete length. As I sent two sorts of postcards containing different close-up images, I organized the contributions into two chapters.



It looks like
something dark is slowly creeping
up on me.
The darkness makes me feel
scared and I don't want to
become part of it.

Barbara

Dark meets Light
Transparent / Thin-skinned
Transience
(= everything disappears
someday)
Everything is connected with
each other
(interweaving)

Visually it remembers me of:
river
apron

Janina (translated from German)

Off the top of my head.
Thoughts combining.
Brain.
Am I my thoughts?
Just my thoughts?
Are my thoughts just the
effects of the chemicals in my
brain and body?
Can I control them?
Do they control me?
I think we have greater
power over our body than we
think, truth or thoughts,
It looks like it took a lot of
brain – power to make that
fabric. It's so evenly woven.
I love it.

Annika

I see a piece of cloth,
laying frayed on another
light piece of fabric,
a homogenized one,
it almost could be snow.
It transmits a rather bad
feeling - death, grief, broken,
torn, thrown away.

First, I took a short look at it
and then I laid it aside,
back than I had a picture in my
mind of a bunch of black hair
laying in the rain on the street.

Flo (translated from German)

light fabric
transparent
sewed over
(by hand or with the machine)
dyed

calm
water
sea
weave
beach

Marine (translated from German/ French)

Winter - it is cold -
frozen ice -
everywhere icicles -
peace/silence -
murder by a lake -
victim, a young woman

Friederike (translated from German)

The female breast with its milk
ducts and blood
vessels springs to my mind.

I think of something cold.
Iceland – igloo – ice!
I am thinking of freezing to
death, forgetting,
disappearing.
Thoughts and memories which
disperse.
Dementia – age!

Sibylle (translated from German)

I see an icy landscape
photographed from
somewhere in the sky.
It looks like a frozen river
reaching into the dark sea.
It makes me feel calm.

Barbara



I see an icy landscape
photographed from
somewhere in the sky.
It looks like a frozen river
reaching into the dark sea.
It makes me feel calm.

Barbara

I see cracks in a wall which
 branch out,
 I see a waterfall,
 that falls over rocks.
 I see a river,
 flowing into the sea.
I see water with a jellyfish that
swims and stretches its tentacles.
 I think of something
 obscure.
Of something which wants to
 connect, but it can't.
 I think of something
chaotic what tries to order
 itself, to unravel.

Sibylle (translated from German)

Delta
Freedom
Out into the world

Doro (translated from German)

winter - snow -
a snow covered tree -
with roots - a tree of life -
power and energy
or
a climbing plant on a tree of life
- need of the tree for
surviving

Friederike (translated from German)

huge noodles

Mario (translated from German)

I see a gentle ice landscape with
skating tracks left by children
playing, with a little dark spot in
the corner, where the ice is thin
and where they are not supposed
to go.

It made me think of the joyful
laughter, ice hockey playing
shouts and of sounds skates make
hitting the ice and whooshing by.
It reminds me of both Finland and
the tiny lake I used to run by
daily back home in Ljubljana.

It was very seldom it froze
– except for one exceptionally
cold winter.

I remember standing by it and
enjoying the laughter, the falls,
grandpas with their grandchildren,
boys shooting pucks to their
improvised ice hockey goals.

I enjoyed the smell of ice, the
cold and occasionally a smell of
a fruit tea from a mom's thermal
flask. The image of pure winter
joy stayed with me.

M

Marija

assembly line, structure,
thunderstorm, lightning,
thunder
deaf
the calm before the storm
peace, serenity
disorder merges in order
and and vice versa
classify, subordinate
swirl, tornado

Kathi (translated from German)

A quilt adrift / abandoned
among iced concrete
as the threads combine
to escape to their
pre agreed fate

unknown classmate of Marija

Gloves, precision,
carefulness,
propper treatment,
an octopus, impermanency,
a waiting room.

Life.

Some one's life store
(the threads being the core and
the fabric the days)
wind, fragility/ strength
suspense.

Loneliness, a gold fish
somewhere I feel less
comfortable with the object in
the front, a part of me wants to
destroy it (to rip it apart or burn
the fabric), so that it will be lib-
erated.

Amber

The last contribution is too
extensive to be reproduced in full length.
Therefore, I decided to quote:

First of all, this picture move me
a lot because it's touching in my
abstract emotional side ...
so IMPORTANT to me!
What I see & feel is
changing while I'm turning the
card in front of me ...

I particularly love this
single thread going apart since a
while,... Is he exclude? ...
he is heading to the dark part ...
alone... Is he lost? Its curves seem
quite smooth compare to the
others... Is he envious?...
It seems quite peaceful...
confident...

I like the difference of
materials between the soft fabric
& the sort of concrete with its
powerful wrinkles, like circles on
water & constellations...they are
also having a proper conversation,
they are not challenging each
other but they are helping each
other ...

The confrontation of the colours
talk to me a lot ... They are so
"josefine's colours ambient"

And I don't know why!

I am currently working on a
stenography for a theatre play
where everything is black & white/
transparent & mirrors/ shadows
& lights... its really different but
your universe is feeding me a lot

Mathilde

Thanks to the participants

Bascaules, Mathilde. Eck, Barbara. Eijavec, Marija. Feurer, Friederike. Flaig, Sibylle.
Johansson, Annika. Lachmann, Florina. Merkl, Dorothee. Ohmert, Katharina. Oskam, Amber. Schmidt, Mario. Voelcker, Marine.
Wagner, Janina



Documentation

With my camera I have kept more moments;
the moments of my examination and exhibition.
Two different rooms and the opportunity to invite the viewer to meet and explore my work.
Unfortunately, you are not in that position and, therefore, I can only invite you into the dim light of a memory.











