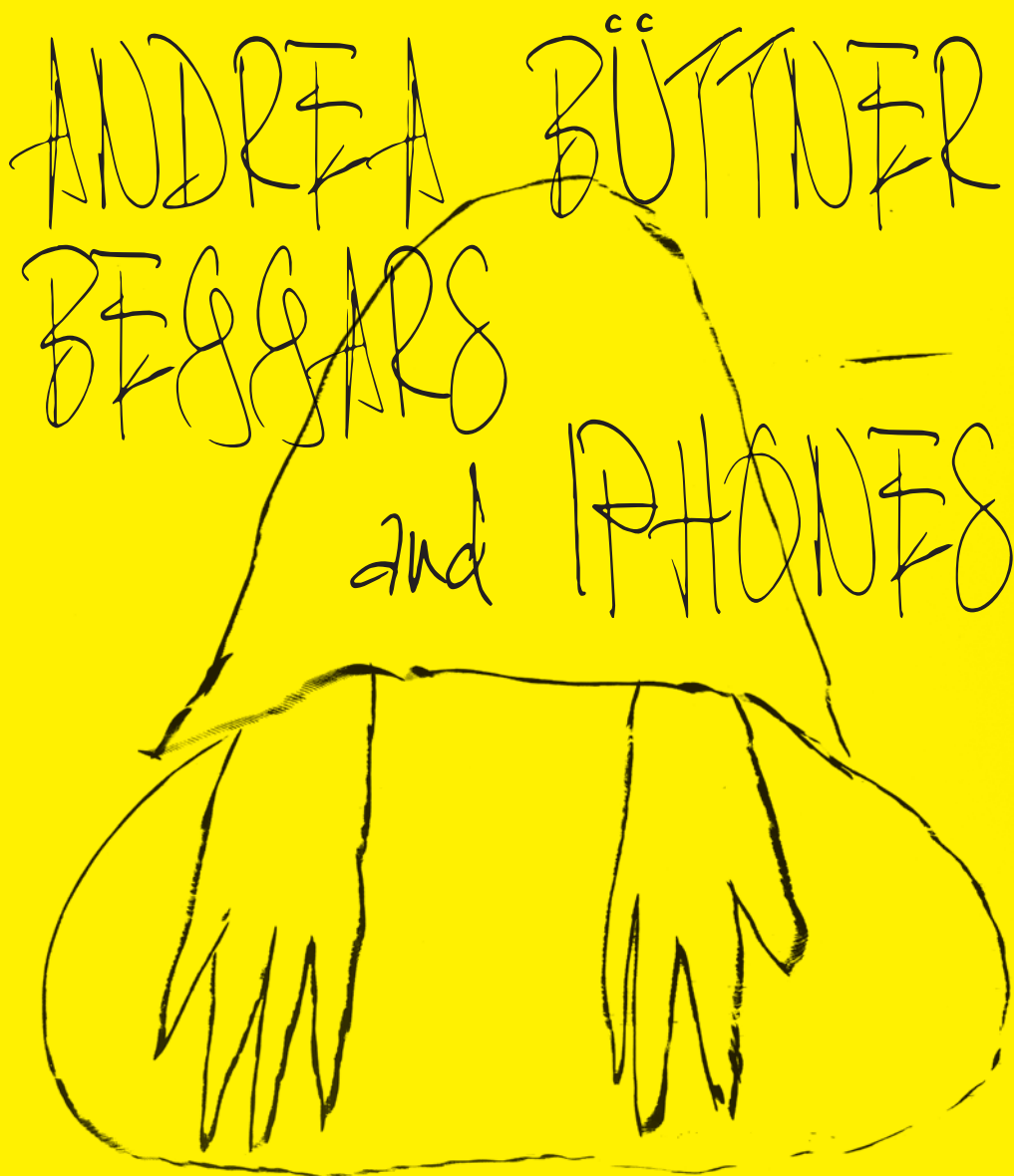


Kunsthalle Wien

Karlsplatz



8/6 – 18/9 2016

Booklet #Beggars

www.kunsthallewien.at

Andrea Büttner

Beggars and iPhones

Beggars is the title Andrea Büttner chose for a series of large-scale woodcuts depicting emblematically reduced frontal views of shrouded figures with downward pointing hands. In these works, Büttner summarises the duality expressed in gestures of pleading – outstretched hands – shame – concealment – in a simple pictorial formula which she presents in different variations. In more general terms, this formula also refers to the relationship between outward expressions, which can be communicated as they are directed at the “public”, and personal feelings and sensitivities, which cannot be communicated as they are only perceived inwardly.

Andrea Büttner is essentially interested in the artistic, and also the philosophical and socio-cultural dimensions of this transitional realm between the meta-personal and the subjective, the visible and the invisible, and between extra- and introversion.

Manually swiping the screens of our mobile phones, an individual, albeit very common “gesture,”

usually remains invisible as an “expression.” Andrea Büttner’s *Phone Etchings* show the personal traces left by her fingers on the touchscreen of her iPhone during various web searches. Greatly enlarged and transferred to the medium of colour etching and created not only with manual and analogue, but also with digital means, these images are reminiscent of informal, and thereby also “gestural” painting. Besides revealing something otherwise barely noticed and, moreover, condemned as an annoying defilement of the smartphone “image” surface, the artist also combines new ways of artistically generating pictures with older, that is to say, traditional techniques and styles by transforming “un-aesthetic” fingerprints into the aesthetics of an artwork created with gestural and pictorial means.

The same applies to her *Beggars*. As woodcuts they represent a traditional, all but forgotten technique, which was not only innovative as a predecessor of letterpress printing, but also played an important socio-political role in earlier times. In the 15th and 16th century, for example, leaflets and pamphlets produced with this technique served the purpose of conveying and circulating ideological and artistic ideas. The *Beggars*’ (graphic) appearance alludes

to a significant art historical example: “The quiet world beyond the shadows suffers. Starved, extinguished, and unnoticed by the world and its newspapers”, Ernst Barlach wrote to his friend and editor Reinhard Piper in 1919, while he was working on a model for his famous sculpture *Verhüllte Bettlerin* [Veiled Beggar Woman (Mercy)]. Andrea Büttner has repeatedly transferred this figure to the medium of woodcut, thus reducing it to its primary form of expression and to the symbol of concealment. However, the “visual formula” found in these woodcuts was not inspired solely by the abstraction of Ernst Barlach’s expressive and realistic formal language, but also by the artist’s ongoing examination of the iconographies of poverty throughout visual art. Extensive preparatory work and intensive research on the history of a given theme followed by a long phase of practical implementation is characteristic of Andrea Büttner’s overall approach to artistic production.

This is also exemplified in a project dedicated to a type of plant that needs almost nothing besides a sufficient amount of moisture to thrive on forest soil and tree trunks, or on the stone slabs of the Solnhofen limestone rocks and the Roman Piazza Navona: from 2010 to 2014, the artist studied mosses

in the natural history collection of the National Museum in Cardiff, as well as other institutions. This endeavour led to her incorporating installations consisting of beds of (initially) fresh moss into her exhibitions. Moss, which usually grows on the ground in the shadows of other plants, is classed as a “lower plant” by botanists and is of little economic value. However, when seen up close and individually, moss can elicit a sheer appreciation of the beauty of nature, defying its (de-) classification as lower. After exhibiting the beds of moss, Büttner gave one of her “moss gardens” to the National Museum in Cardiff to be dried and pressed for conservation. Initially she presented this work under the title *Hidden Marriages* in reference to the reproductive process of mosses which is characterized by an alternation of generations. Now, after several years, these mosses are back in the exhibition space. Fundamentally reduced in colour and substance, they have mutated from vital green to withered brown. Are we aware of the potential dormant in these unremarkable plants presented here as dried up, lifeless “culture”? Some moss species can in fact be revived with the aid of water at any time.

The Stereoscopic slide show from the Whitehouse collection

(*mosses and field trips*) is thematically connected with the “moss gardens”. It shows people in different poses exploring the grass beneath them. Stooping and bending down, sometimes kneeling on the ground, they examine the mosses growing there, which are at first invisible to the viewers of the slide show. Instead they see the protagonists’ physical articulations, alternating up and down movements which express stability, lability, and indifference, rather than shame and humility. The potential to fall and let things take their course as reflected in these movements is a motif which Andrea Büttner repeatedly uses as a metaphor for overcoming and subverting the confinements of form, stability, and authority.

Andrea Büttner’s work, often installed in specific, deliberate arrangements that she herself has conceived, has been shown in numerous leading international art institutions and biennales, as well as *dOCUMENTA (13)* in 2012. As a venue for her first solo exhibition in Austria, Andrea Büttner found the exhibition space at the Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz, with its open relationship to the urban landscape, to be very well suited to implementing her concept of the permeation, or reversal, of customary concepts of interior and exterior, perceivable and invisible.

For *Beggars and iPhones* the artist has developed a special setting. On the outside, the “lost materials” accumulated and discarded during the preparations for the exhibition are revealed, while inside her two- and three-dimensional works are presented as an installation in a classic gallery “cube”. By installing a wall in front of the expanse of glass which links the Kunsthalle’s interior exhibition space to Karlsplatz, Andrea Büttner intentionally obstructs the architectonic concept of the transparent pavilion according to which Adolf Krischanitz planned this structure in 2002. Since early Modernism, “transparency” – an initially socio-political term developed during the time of Enlightenment – has almost always inspired positive connotations in architecture, and is associated with progress, openness, light, democracy, and with the credo that “there is nothing to hide.” This idea and its symbolic manifestation in glass also inspired exhibition buildings such as the Museum of the 20th Century in Vienna (Karl Schwanzer, 1958/62, since 2011 “21er Haus”), and the New National Gallery in Berlin (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1968). However, in our age of long-established media dependency and increasing digitalisation, transparency also has a dangerous side.

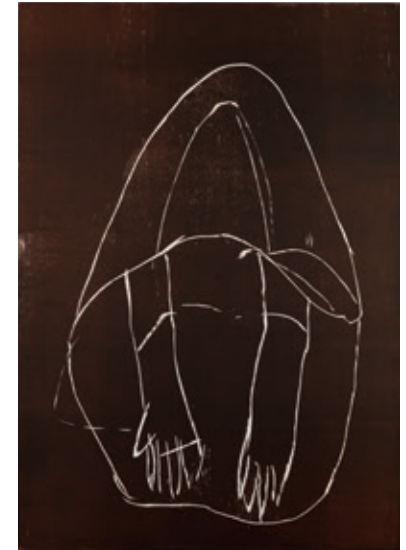
“Why does everything have to be transparent?”, the motivation researcher Helene Karmasin asks: “Not being watched in a protected room which does not become public is actually a fundamental cultural achievement. The alternative is a “Big Brother” scenario of our own choosing, or the submission to puritanical ethics which convey that “God is always watching you.” Andrea Büttner has constructed a closed room within a glass interior as a receptacle for her *Phone* pictures. These works reflect the “medium” smartphone, its connection with the internet, and the concomitant perforation of privacy, thus making the ambivalence of transparency a central topic within the overall exhibition dispositive.

In combination with her interior designs, Andrea Büttner’s spatial assemblages, which at first sight seem quite unremarkable, challenge a plethora of certainties and give rise to just as many questions. The position the artwork occupies between the intimate practice of its production and the public practice of its presentation is only one of them.

Lucas Gehrmann



Phone Etching, 2015, Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016, Photo: Jaka Babnik



Beggar, 2015, Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016, Photo: Jaka Babnik



Moss Garden, 2014, Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016, Photo: Robin Maggs © National Museum Wales



Bread Painting, 2016, Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, © Andrea Büttner, Photo: David Avazzadeh



Hand, 2015, Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, © Andrea Büttner, Photo: David Avazzadeh



Stereoscopic slide show from the Whitehouse collection (mosses and field trips) (Detail), 2014, Courtesy Hollybush Gardens, London and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, © Andrea Büttner / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016, Photo: Harold and Patricia Whitehouse © National Museum of Wales

Andrea Büttner was born in Stuttgart in 1972, and lives and works in London and Frankfurt am Main. She studied art at the Universität der Künste, Berlin, art history and philosophy at the Humboldt Universität Berlin, and earned a PhD at the Royal College of Art in London in 2010. Since 2007 she has realized many international solo exhibitions, at institutions such as Whitechapel Gallery, London (2011), Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (2013), Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Tate Britain, London (2014), Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA (2015), and Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (2016). Andrea Büttner was represented at the 29th São Paulo Biennale, São Paulo in 2010, and at the *dOCUMENTA (13)* in Kassel in 2012. In 2015 she participated in the exhibition *Individual Stories. Collecting as Portrait and Methodology* at the Kunsthalle Wien Museumsquartier.

Beggar (1–2), 2015
Woodcut on paper, 149 x 130 cm / 174 x 125 cm

Beggar (3–9), 2016
Woodcut on paper, 164 x 140 cm / 155 x 125 cm / 136 x 99 cm / 135 x 99 cm / 126.5 x 90 cm / 134 x 100 cm / 155.5 x 125 cm

Phone Etching (1–5), 2015
Etching, 212 x 113 cm each

Hand, 2015
Glass painting on coloured mouthblown glass, 89 x 66 cm

Bread Painting (1–5), 2016
Reverse glass painting, 58 x 46 cm each

All courtesies of Hollybush Gardens, London, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Untitled, 2014
Pressed moss, 9 panels, ca 60 x 40 cm each

Courtesy of the artist and National Museum of Wales

Stereoscopic slide show from the Whitehouse collection (mosses and field trips), 2014
Stereoscopic slides, monitor, 3D glasses
Slides by Harold and Patricia Whitehouse, transferred to digital

Courtesy of Hollybush Gardens, London, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Beggars in the Warburg Institute Photographic Collection, 2016
Xerox sheets mounted on aluminum, 130 x 85 cm each

Courtesy of The Warburg Institute Photographic Collection

Untitled, 2016
Handwoven silk fabric, 3 parts, 168 x 220 cm each

Produced by
Benediktinerinnenabtei
Mariendonk, Grefrath

Courtesy of the artist

Brown Wall Painting, 2006/2016
Interior emulsion paint,
dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

Program

Mon 4/7, 7:00 pm

Andrea Büttner in conversation
with Lucas Gehrman and
Vanessa Joan Müller (in German).

Mon 12/9, 7:00 pm

Monika Knofler, art historian
and former director of the
Kupferstichkabinett, Academy
of Fine Arts Vienna, talks about
artistic printing and reproduction
techniques present in the work of
Andrea Büttner (in German).

Sun 18/9, 2:00 pm

The curator of the exhibition,
Lucas Gehrman, takes visitors on
a tour through the exhibition
(in German).

Colophon

Exhibition

Kunsthalle Wien GmbH

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Nicolaus Schafhausen

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Lucas Gehrman

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Vanessa Joan Müller

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Martin Walkner

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(Los Angeles)

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DER STANDARD



DAVID
KORDANSKY
GALLERY

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#Beggars

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