

Portfolio

Exhibition Views | updated May 23

Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout

Polyphonic Approaches

By Vanessa Joan Müller

A display is a component intended for visualization. It refers on the one hand to formal qualities and forms of presentation, while at the same time structuring the interface between the work and the location in which it is shown. The display is thus a constitutive element within a material space that develops a meaning or allows it to be experienced in a new way. It exhibits, but also puts things up for debate and focuses on the interaction between the object and the subject, the exhibited object and its being exhibited. The display as a mode of interaction plays an important role in the work of Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout, for it links various elements that can be understood as visual arguments to form a dialogical whole, enabling the contextual legibility of what exists. By way of the coexistence and adjacency of works in various media, installation contexts emerge that confront the complexity of our present and place them alongside one another with various perspectives without flattening their difference.

Be it the visual representation of the production of social space, a reckoning with colonial history and one's own family involvement in that history, or the visualization of dates inscribed in a geographical terrain: the works of Eden & Lernout generate an aesthetic space that is always already a political one to the extent that it includes the beholder as an addressee and initiates a positioning. In this spatial dispersion, subjects like the foreign (exemplarily recurring in their engagement with Albert Camus), hospitality, or the contrary directions of tourist and migrant routes across Europe take on a visualization that avoids a facile clarity in favor of a multi-perspectival approach. They are not representative works in the sense that they reflect a reality or make such a depiction the basis of their interpretation or critical analysis. The artistic practice of Eden & Lernout is instead a quite abstract one using form and material, the display of collected objects, or the preparation of language as oral history. It follows previously established instructions, a concept, and serves primarily to visualize complex structures of space and time: the movement of bodies along borders in their historicity and their currency, the inscription of economic processes in large areas or the shift of lines and territories within what we call Europe. This practice processes data, but also compares it with one's own experience of the paths that this data inscribes. In a sense, at issue is an expanded or very free form of a documentary approach that inserts the artistic subject as a statistic imprecision in the data. The installations of Eden & Lernout thus appear as models of experiencing knowledge and as sites of social communication. We could also speak of modular backdrops that create an open stage—in a positive sense that is not precisely defined—for dialogue with the beholders of the works, which for their part speak of reality and its urgencies without limiting themselves to statements of assertion.

A recurring element of these spatial situations are paintings that at first glance recall constructivist compositions and their crystalline color structures. Like a spanned web, lines in increasing density cross the image, which presents itself as a landscape but as such only shows an appropriated representation of reality. Shots from Google Maps are transferred as frottage to the canvas and spread out as geometric-abstract triangular formations. The landscapes selected are real cities and territories, but at the same time emblems of geopolitical involvement and economic, political interests. The Ghawar Desert in Saudi Arabia, for example, presents itself on the one hand as a desert, but at the same time the oil fields found there, the largest on earth, make it a striking expression of the linked implications, from resource abstraction to newly globalized capitalism. The picture o.T. (goma.66.100.13.diptych), created in 2013 as part of research on Congo, is based in turn on an urban landscape of Goma. A grid of streets and corrugated metal roofs forms the geometric starting point for the “overpainting.” Stijn Lernout travelled to Goma in 1991 and witnessed the growing conflicts between the Hutu and Tutsi, a conflict that spilled over from Rwanda to the country known as Zaire at the time (today the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The Tutsi genocide took place in Rwanda three years later, in 1994. The border town of Goma was also seriously affected by the eruption of the volcano Nyiragongo in 2002. These “landscapes” and “city views” are not abstractions of reality, but in fact process metadata that makes them emblematic representations of geopolitical constellations. As visual clusters, they inspire a visual thinking that can be understood as thinking about pictures, but also as thinking with the help of pictures. The use of Google Maps serves to open data structures and thus makes legible complex geostrategies that are not necessarily reflected in landscape spaces but are associated with them. The engagement with political-social issues in space is here directed towards the space as it can be seen in satellite views. In this way, it appears to be real and abstract at the same time and becomes a model of a fundamental approach to complexity by way of its appropriation and defamiliarization. At issue here is not painting, but the representation of select territories beyond the traditional Western concept of the landscape.

By way of such thematic treatments, every exhibition—being publicly accessible—creates a political-aesthetic space. That is to say, the works of Eden & Lernout are always already artistic approaches to the format of the exhibition that they understand as a discursive and viewing space, as a social space of interaction and a space of possibility of imagining abstract and virtual places, analyzing the present and in its potentiality pointing toward things in the future. By bringing subjects to the public by way of various corresponding works and their display, they engage with the context of the objects exhibited and the place of presentation that contextualizes these objects as an expression of the Other and makes them visible—as

an expression and presence of the voice of an Otherness as appears in Jacques Derrida's sketch of various figures of the “foreign” and manifests itself paradigmatically in his distinction between absolute and unconditional hospitality. “Absolute hospitality,” Derrida writes, “requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) . . .” (1)

Against this backdrop, Eden & Lernout's approach to spaces of our own and the foreign, the creation of spatial relationships between ourselves and the Other reveals itself as a constantly new surveying and adjusting of their own economic, social, cultural, political perspective in light of what presents itself as the unknown.

The multi-layered project We Want the World (And We Want It) from 2013 combines various perspectives on the same city, Istanbul. Conversations and interviews with refugees of various origins who have found a temporary home in the city sketch Istanbul from the perspective of those who live in illegality and thus inexorably perceive the urban space as regulated and fragmented. From their descriptions, a text condenses that highlights certain places, outlines territories, and describes the city space as a fluid zone of different encounters. This resulted in a shooting script about the places described by the migrants, which in turn formed the point of departure for the search for the place on site. With the necessarily Western, touristic perspective that the artists take on, this marked an antipode. The selection of photographic impressions was understood as an attempt to visualize both longing and the subjective imagination of migrant experience. That this perspective is not authentic, that it instead reflects a European, if not to say even Eurocentric notion of migration, is inscribed in the project as a contradiction. Making visible the impossibility of viewing a location that is not one's own from a perspective other than the always already touristic and ultimately also colonial perspective: herein lies the potential of the project that is aware of the numerous implications of the subject in the historicity and political reality of a place, a country, and the Global South. The abstraction of the place descriptions present only as text in contrast to the photographic visualization of the topography of the city as experienced by the artists shows the discrepancy in the perception of the “foreign” place as an expansion of one's own world of experience: as a privilege of the gaze.

In the wake of the enduring debates about migration and integration, Eden & Lernout initiated the project Bujrum in 2017. The term bujrum comes from the Turkish and means simply “Go

ahead!” or “You're welcome to join us!” It is a word that has made its way into several other languages, like Croatian and Bosnian. For a period of four months, they used an empty former bar in Vienna' Seventeenth District as a classroom for a German course for refugees that Irena Eden held for three months. It also served as the location for three “banquets” to which participants in the course as well as people from the artists' own circle were invited. What emerged was a flexible space with furniture serving various functions that could be used and designed jointly and was open for learning a language, for getting to know one another, for individual exchange, for what one might call social participation. The banquet as the epitome of hospitality presented foods from various cultures that attested to the mutual influence of countries and regions on one another. They were served on tableware that Eden & Lernout had purchased in 2014 on a trip along the outer borders of Europe from the Bulgarian town of Lesovo to Berlin in six different countries. (The small town of Lesovo is located directly adjacent to the fence along the border to Turkey completed in 2017. Already in 2014, local activists formed a movement to support refugees against arbitrary state power. The picture o.T. (blue.1421.1000.17) works with the data inscribed on this city as a micronarrative of the “Fortress Europe.”) Bujrum combines artistic and social action in a very direct way. It also reflects upon central considerations that play a role in Derrida's exploration of the concept of hospitality. In a European understanding, generosity and hospitality always involve conditions. One must own a space and indirectly also control it to be able to invite guests. Hospitality thus also means a call on new arrivals to abandon their foreignness and thus themselves. Derrida asks, “Must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country? If he was already speaking our language, with all that that implies . . . would the foreigner still be a foreigner?” (2) The right of the foreigner ultimately entails the right to remaining foreign and other. How could a space look where the arrival of the foreigner does not threaten our own? In French, being at home is “être chez soi.” In contrast to the English concept of being “at home,” where the house and being there are directly linked to one another, the French formulation implies that even when one is alone one is “chez soi,” that is, “with” someone and thus also the guest of somebody, and even if that is ourselves. We are never identical to ourselves, but always host and guest at the same time. According to Derrida, only the arriving foreigner makes it possible for the host to truly feel at home. This experience of hospitality is an aporia that is not necessarily negative.

“Without the repeated enduring of this paralysis in contradiction, the responsibility of hospitality . . . where we not yet know, nor will ever know, what that means, [hospitality would have] no chance of passing, of crossing the threshold, of coming, of being welcome.” (3)

In this sense, a term like *bujrum* is an expression of a productive contradiction in which the refugees receive their hosts and were able to jointly develop rules.

The *aporia* as a figure is as a whole a characteristic element of Eden & Lernout’s art, a “perplexity,” or actually rather an “inescapability” or more precisely a “pathlessness”—an inherent difficulty or impossibility that results or emerges when one arrives at different contrary and opposite results. These contrary and opposite results lie quite fundamentally in the perspective taken, which is *per se* different than that of the viewed subject and those involved. Borne by a wanting to know how it looks beyond our own gaze, without wanting to appropriate it, these projects proclaim an openness that is accompanied by the search for a path that can prove to be a dead end. At issue is nothing less than art’s ability to engage with other cultural spaces and practices without making a diagnosis, privileging our own point of view, or proposing a hypothesis: allowing the other to take place and to find a way.

When in *Congobos* (2019) Belgium’s colonial past is explored, this takes place from a perspective in which the biographic overlaps with official history and focuses precisely on those zones where no congruence emerges, but contradictions surface. *Congobos* deals with nothing less than the family history of Stijn Lernout in relation to the history of the former Belgian colony of the Congo, which has only in recent years been truly subject to an extensive, critical examination. Interviews with his own aunts, uncles, cousins, and great uncles and aunts, who lived during the colonial period in the Congo or later in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and grew up there in part, resulted in an installation of videos and frottage that focuses on a place in Flanders.

The center of the project is a large format view of a forest hung on a scaffold of copper bars in the space. The extremely enlarged photographs mounted next to one another recall the rainforest of the Congo in their intense colors and opulent vegetation. But actually, the pictures depict an area of forest near the Flanders town of Geluwe known as *Congobos*. A missionary who had returned from the Congo opened a restaurant named *Café Congo*, thus giving the nearby forest its name. Video shots in two projections show the Belgian forest without commentary over the course of a spring day. On an additional monitor, an interview runs with Lernout’s great uncle Ward Lernout: initially an unsuccessful artist, due to frustration about his social situation in Belgium he became an administrator in the Belgian Congo. After returning in 1961, Lernout became a respected Belgian painter. Small format frottages show portraits of those people who were directly linked to the colonialization of the Congo, its independence, and recent history: from Leopold II to Patrice Lumumba, Che Guevara, Kongo-Müller, and Joseph Mobutu. Micro-history and macrohistory overlap with one another, while the traces of the colonial become visible beyond official representation politics. The oft suppressed interweaving of our own narrative with historical narrative, the inadequate reckoning with the history of colonialism, and the persistence of the historical Congo in

Belgian everyday life stands opposed to subjective embeddedness in it, without giving up embeddedness in *apolyvocality*.

Such a location in a larger heterogenous whole also takes place in *Circle Surface Sun*, a publication project from 2020 on the Global South, where the exhibition took the form of a book presenting a polyphony of voices from the Mediterranean. Authors from Gibraltar, Spain, France, the states that once made up the former Yugoslavia, the Levante, and North Africa wrote in their own language about what they all have in common: the light. Daylight, sunlight, the light over the sea from the perspective of the country in question, of their respective sea is captured and depicted in prose, poetry, and abstract reflection. Photographs of sunbeams sparkling on the surface of the sea taken by Eden & Lernout illustrate this testimony and are just an abstract approach to what Albert Camus calls “Mediterranean thought”: an emphatic plea for the Global South. Roland Barthes called Camus’ philosophy a “solar” one that forms no system, but serves as a tool to find a “life art for catastrophic times.” This idea also repeatedly surfaces in the works of Eden & Lernout, which in their materiality, the combination of various forms of media and textiles and the display as a site of dissemination, are often almost unexpectedly atmospheric, if not sensual.

- (1) Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000). 25.
- (2) *Ibid.*, 15.
- (3) Jacques Derrida, “Die Gesetze der Gastfreundschaft,” in: *Metaphora. Journal for Literary Theory and Media*. EV 3: *Flüchtling*, ed. Martina Süess, 2018. Online version <http://metaphora.univie.ac.at/volume3-derrida.pdf> (last accessed: May 25, 2021). Translator’s note: to our knowledge, this article was only published in German translation; this is my translation of the German.



o.T. (*circle.surface.sun_650.530.380.12*)
Plaster, acrylic paint and pencil on wooden board
65,0 x 53,0 x 38,0 cm
2012

On Modular Stage Sets for Symbolic Spaces of Knowledge

By Florian Waldvogel

Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout develop stage sets, sceneries, displays, architectural sculptures, and architecture. In contrast to 1960s and 1970s art, their work is not about breaking norms or crossing the boundaries of genre but about revitalizing the heteronymous possibilities of art and the negation of the dictates of autonomy.

Taking the concept of autonomy associated with modern art as a starting point and moving beyond it at the same time, they design architectures as a means of public affairs and social communication. They conceive of architectural installations as a form of language, a way of thinking whose material translation of metaphors into form prompts sociopolitical reflection. Architecture serves as a quintessential connection of aesthetics and function, as an open-ended repertoire with fixed rules.

Eden and Lernout’s installations provide frames of reference and orientation that retool or reroot ideas and foster new avenues of perception. They build models whose spatial arrangement generates new horizons of experiencing knowledge. In a playful fashion, their space-related sculptures open up new data structures, the graphic interface of which is open to democratic and anti-hierarchical reception.

With their works, they challenge the concept of the self-contained common body in terms of its unity and homogeneity and invest empty spaces with symbolic expression. The concept of space was first defined as a vessel for objects and only later as concept or configuration space. The invention of perspective revolutionized the way we think and the concept of space accompanying it, thus making new representations possible. In the era of Art Nouveau, spatial thinking and the notion of spatial order were, above all, guided by social awareness. For the first time, space was seen as a whole, allowing for compositions of the interrelated spaces of a harmonious, inseparable whole into spatially economical structures.

At the center of Eden and Lernout’s works, it appears, we find the formulation of a hope, a given spatial fact, the inner logic and structure of which is based on a quest for a productive logical consistency in a coherent relationship. According to Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, interlaced representations of this kind that take possession of space stand as the essential element of art. This means, Eden and Lernout’s works must be understood as an artistic contribution comprising concrete and fictitious realities that open up new ways and views of a knowledge display.

The representational procedures they define form a visual approach to holistic panoramas of knowledge. With their modular stage sets, they depict sociopolitical issues, which are localized in a mental framework, with the aim of sparking a dialog.

These panoramas of knowledge are combinations of basic reference spaces that are captured by analogy to physical space. The artistic trick lies in the fact that these integrated objects are of an abstract nature, which lets the intellectual content of subject matter become visible. This combination of different systems of concepts allows us to take a transdisciplinary approach to social problems and answers. In doing so, these two artists make use of the familiar human concept of space and frames of mind and link them to meaningful spaces of knowledge. This process allows the viewer to link different fields of knowledge and make them intelligible. The challenge for the viewer lies in the metaphorical rendering of common perceptions, of the connection of social references, and the bridging of contexts and their concepts. Often built around aesthetics of reduction, these installations interweave rational, analytical patterns of thought and dynamic complex representations into mental spaces that are in accordance with the human sense of space.

Through combinations of perspectives of natural and fictitious spaces, Eden and Lernout expand the reference spaces of our awareness of place and subject matter. This visual approach makes meta-approaches conceivable and imaginable. In a simple way, their mental spaces illustrate a universal reference system of issues, contexts, associations, coordinates, data, and knowledge and point us to reference spaces we can make sense of in spite of the complexity involved. These are propositions of a holistic view of the world that are based on our everyday perceptions and allow us to engage in flexible observation by example without the need to take a fixed position or perspective.

One of the strong points of Eden and Lernout’s art is that it uses metaphors as a mental transmission belt to weave multidimensional contexts of the physical world into comprehensible configurations. By means of „crossthreads, “they connect real, abstract, and virtual spaces to form a homogenous whole and, thus, link to the contradictions of their materials, media, and conceptual order. Their projects are mental maps of symbolic places, which mark the points where the past and future meet. Thus, meta-societal sets of problems are merged into a synthesis of thought, terminologies, and political views.

Only by overcoming limits of language and thought in this way can we engage in a change of perspective, which generates a graphic navigation process that makes playful perception and understanding of structures and their contexts possible. Eden and Lernout create spaces, which always keep sight of the social dimension. Their transparent and harmonious works are convincingly in touch with reality and striking in their design because their measure is always derived from the human dimension.



o.T. (380.700.180.20)

Plaster, acrylic paint and pencil on HDF board
38,0 x 70,0 x 18,0 cm
2020

From Somewhere in the Mediterranean
Kunstverein Konstanz, Konstanz, DE
2020

„From Somewhere in the Mediterranean“

For their expansive and installative exhibition at the Kunstverein Konstanz, Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout stage set pieces from their current preoccupation with the cultural region of the Mediterranean.

In loser Anordnung zeigen Irena Eden und Stijn Lernout einen Parcours, bestehend aus einer Serie von Zeichnungen, einer raumgreifenden Skulptur aus Stahl und Textil, sowie einer installativen Anordnung von Paletten, Fotografien, skulpturalen Elementen. Die einzelnen Arbeiten bilden ein Gesamtgefüge, welches in seiner abstrakten Anmutung verschiedene Blickwinkel und Deutungsebenen ermöglicht.

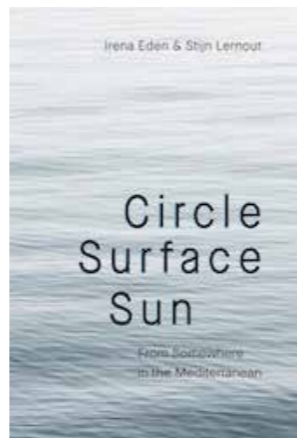
In a loose arrangement, Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout show a course consisting of a series of drawings, an expansive sculpture made of steel and textile, and an installation arrangement of pallets, photographs, and sculptural elements. The individual works form an overall structure which, in its abstract appearance, enables different perspectives and levels of interpretation.

The focus of their pre-occupation is the artist's book „Circle Surface Sun“*, which as an audio work is part of the production: Based on Albert Camus' „Sun Philosophy“, Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout asked 22 authors, all of whom come from one of the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea for a text that deals with or describes the perception of light in the respective countries.

The authors' texts are broadcast by a radio station designed for the exhibition space. A radio enables the reception of the texts spoken by two actors' voices.

*The artist book „Circle Surface Sun- From Somewhere in the Mediterranean“ will be published at the same date, it will be presented in the exhibition and can be purchased there. The creation of the book was also made possible by financial support from the cultural office of the city of Konstanz.





◀ Exhibition Views ▶

From Somewhere in the Mediterranean
Kunstverein Konstanz, Konstanz, DE
2020





„Congobos“ – *the story of a Congolese forest in Belgium*

„What story would you tell a stranger? Your great-grandfather’s, who was a colonial official? (...) Your grand cousin’s, who worked himself to death on a plantation? That of your godfather, who proselytized foreign peoples?“ (1)

The Afro-German curator and editor Yvette Mutumba poses these questions at the beginning of a text on the interdependencies of one’s own family history with colonialism and the overlapping of „one’s own“ and „foreign“. As questions, they show that the processing of one’s personal history is always accompanied by a questioning of one’s own position and its contextualization in a metanarrative.

(1) Yvette Mutumba. 2014. The stories you wouldn’t tell a stranger, Ware & Wissen. Frankfurt: diaphanes: S. 15.

◀ Exhibition Views ▶

Congobos
KUK Gallery, Cologne, DE
2019



In their art-installation „Congobos“ (Eng. Congo forest) Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout put an unpleasant story in the foreground. They address – in a formal visual language using the media of installation, video and large-format frottage works – the interweaving of personal stories of the Belgian and Congolese population, which was intensified by colonialism. In an ethnographic manner, these rarely discussed family references are processed based on the case study of Stijn Lernout's family history. Research using interviews with great-uncles, aunts and cousins who were in the Congo during Belgian colonial rule and an intensive examination of this story, including various literary sources, resulted in a work with both an atmospheric and abstract character.

In a video installation, the artist duo shows several shots of a forest that are spatially linked in their disposition. In addition to the video installation, the large-scale frottage works also refer to the „Congobos“ and show greatly enlarged views of this forest. On a superficial level, one could – also with regard to the title of the work – believe that this is a piece of the Congolese rain forest. In reality, however, they are detailed shots of a forest near Geluwe. The question arises as to what connection this small town in the municipality of Wervik in Flanders has to the Congo. The connecting element is reflected in the naming of the forest. When a Belgian missionary returned from Congo, he opened Café Congo, which led to the nearby forest also being named by that name. Positioned around the video installation, the frottage works take the history of Congolese-Belgian relations to another level. While the video installation and the large-format works on the Congo

forest show the network of relationships between the inhabitants of a small village in Belgium and the former colonial state in an atmospherically reduced way, other frottage works present portraits of people – from Patrice Lumumba, Joseph Mobutu to Congo -Müller and Leopold II – they all play a role in the public perception of the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

With “Congobos”, Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout subtly address the relationship between Belgium and the former colonial territory of the Congo, a history of entanglements and relationships that is often avoided in both political and social contexts. Cross-border relationships and relationship connections are themes that Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout take up again and again, and so the project „Congobos“ fits into this approach to artistic exploration. Here a story is told that pleads for coming to terms with Belgian colonial rule and deconstructs the boundaries of dual categories of “foreign” and “own” through the depiction of family ties.

Text: *Aline Lenzhofer*

Exhibition View ➤

Congobos
KUK Gallery, Cologne, DE
2019





Exhibition Views ➤

We Want The World (And We Want It) / 5 Billboards
 Underground Station (U8) Schönleinstraße
 „Kunst im Untergrund“, nGbK, Berlin, DE
 2013

The performative travel and mapping project *We Want The World (And We Want It)* is based on interviews with refugees from different backgrounds. A period of illegal stay in Istanbul is common to all interlocutors. The descriptions of Istanbul were condensed into a text that offers verbal landmarks in the city and describes it from an illegal perspective. As a script for exploring the city, they became the antithesis of one's own tourist and Western-style view. A selection of snapshots taken on the journey attempts to reflect both the longing and the subjective imagination of migrant experiences.

Text: *NGBK*



Mit fremden Augen (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 03.08.2009, page 49, „München Kultur“)
Favoriten – an Audio Guide Tour through Munich

Young and old men are standing in groups on the sidewalk, discussing, laughing and drinking tea. Shops offer mobile phones and suitcases, fruit and vegetables. It smells like doner kebab and pizza. “Like in Istanbul” some might think in the southern part of the train station. But is that really the case? The audio guide tour „Favoriten” from the Crossing Munich exhibition, which can currently be seen in the Rathausgalerie, takes a very special look at the topic of migration in Munich. With headphones you walk through the city center and hear what immigrants think in Munich and which places in the city are their favourites. It’s about identity and home, about the state capital and about the „Autoput”, the Corridor X, which connects Munich with Istanbul. The artists Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout (both Vienna) wanted to talk to migrants and not about them. They conducted 50 interviews with newcomers, men and women, young and old, Croats, Turks or Austrians. „I’m Bavarian”

First of all, it was about the autoput: „We all share knowledge about this street with each other,” says the audio guide in the town hall gallery right at the beginning. Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout have taken up the journey of the migrants as a common background of experience and as a symbol of the bond with their homeland. „These braggarts, I always throw rubbish out the window because I’m so annoyed with the country and its people,” says someone about the trips through Slovenia; Another railed against the Austrians, who often cause traffic jams on the Autoput in summer with their construction sites: „That’s not normal. These are real business people. They do it so that you need to spend more time in Austria.”

Above all, the tour is a story about the identities of migrants in Munich and how the migrants see their city. So while you stroll through Schillerstrasse, you get a new, different perspective. “Many say that the area around the main train station

is Little Istanbul. But that’s not true at all,” says the man in the ear, „that’s a joke – no people on the street at all! There is no street vending. And you can’t put suitcases on the street in front of your shop, the police will come immediately.”

Others express themselves in a similar way – this has nothing in common with their home countries. However, negative voices about the city as a whole are the absolute exception, it is striking how much most people like living here. Where to go „Absolutely not to the Oktoberfest,” says someone, „it’s always the same, as a Munich resident I don’t go there anymore.” Many also refer to Bavaria: „Do I feel reminded of my home country? No. I’m Bavarian,” an immigrant can be heard saying while standing at Sendlinger-Tor-Platz.

They are fragments with very different perspectives, no attempt is made to tell the one story of migration – which would probably not even be possible. It is a bit irritating at first that all interview passages are spoken by the actors Stipe Erceg and Laura Simon. They create a pleasant and thoroughly authentic mood, but you don’t know whether the interviewee is a man or a woman, a Turk or a Greek, young or old. It doesn’t matter, Stijn Lernout thinks, that was intentional. „We didn’t want to drift into clichés with the original recordings,’ he says, „it should be about the statement.’ The stories would be very individual anyway and not necessarily linked to the countries of origin. But he does see a special feature of the interviews in Munich. The two did a similar project in Berlin – with a significantly different result. „A really serious difference was how positively many relate to Munich,” he says.

The migrants seem to particularly like the places in the city that remind them of their homeland – and these are often different than one might expect. At Stachus and Sendlinger Tor you can hear them raving about how much is going on here, at Marienplatz one even says: „I feel at home here.”

When you stand at the Viktualienmarkt on a sunny afternoon and watch the hustle and bustle, it becomes clear what is meant when the woman in your ear says: „Sometimes you get the impression that you’re no longer in Germany, this

is very special and only exists in Munich – and within Munich you can only say that for this place.” (...)

If you stroll through the city center and listen to the stories of the immigrants while Sonnenstrasse is noisy in the background, there is definitely a connection between what you hear. (...)

„Favoriten. The City Tour” lasts either 55 minutes (path 1) or half an hour (path 2).

Text: *Felix Müller*



Exhibition View ➤

Favoriten
Audioguide, Folding Map
Exhibition „Crossing Munich – Orte, Bilder und Debatten der Migration”
Rathausgalerie München, Munich, DE
2009

o.T. (Neue Sterne für den Prater)
Permanent Installation in Public Space,
Praterstern Underpass, Vienna (AT)
2022

o.T. „Neue Sterne für den Prater“

As the Praterstern area is redesigned and redefined, Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout let something radiantly new emerge and yet remain connected to the name and the historical urban planning idea: Three new stars shine in the underpass and refer in their derivation and shaping to both the past and the future.

Stars originate from vast gaseous nebulae that contract and condense in the universe because of their own mass. It is a process that Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout have translated to a wall painting which, like an inner skin, stretches across the entire underpass and visually expands the architectural space.

In cities, “star” is a name given to nodal points where several traffic axes intersect. Already in the late 18th century, several avenues and boulevards came together on Praterstern. Until 1918, the Northern Rail Station, which opened here in 1838 and is one of the oldest train stations in Austria, remained the largest and most important station of the Habsburg monarchy. Today, the public square still is—above ground and underground—one of the city’s most important transportation hubs, with a traffic circle where seven streets converge, with two subway lines crossing, and with bus, tramway, suburban and regional train stops. An underpass that was built 1954/55 connects Praterstern with the recreational green Prater area.

It is this overall urban situation—the historical as well as the most recent redesigning and the redefinition of the area—and its significance that the two artists relate to. They survey and transfer it into a new dimension, a reflexive system that they use to open up the space and immerse passers-by in a star-studded cosmos of its own.

Die sechsköpfige Jury hat sich am 28. Oktober 2021 für den Entwurf des Künstlerduos Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout entschieden.

Bilder: © Christian Fürthner, 2022





„WIE DAS WASSER AUF DEN BERG KOMMT“

Jean Giono’s 1953 short story “L’homme qui plantait des arbres” (engl. “The Man Who Planted Trees”) provides the point of reference for the collaborative performance project. It is the story of shepherd Elzéard Bouffier who, with the vision of making the land fertile and livable again, plants tens of thousands of trees in the barren and deforested hinterland of the Provence region shortly before the First World War. With the slow revegetation of the land and the reemergence of a biosphere, people start returning to the abandoned villages. The once disrupted cycle of life reawakens.

In cooperation and in artistic dialogue with young people from Floridsdorf—a group of students of the Middle School on Kinzerplatz square and a group from the academic secondary school BG & BRG 21—a performance for the public space that is inspired by the story is developed under the direction of Hanna Binder over the summer semester of 2022. In parallel to the rehearsals, the students learn—in workshops held by the Institute of Silviculture of BOKU Vienna—about botanical aspects with regard to the planting of trees. They also look after tree seedlings on the school campus during the rehearsal period. In conclusion of the project, part of the seedlings will be permanently planted in the 21st district. The project lives through the contribution and collaboration of many different actors.

concept and display:: Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout
 director, dramaturgy: Hanna Binder
 choreography: Alex Bailey, Hanna Binder
 participating schools: BG & BRG 21 und Mittelschule Kinzerplatz
 participating teachers: Anna Gabriel, Emina Petzer, Carolina Schwarzkopf
 project partners: Universität für Bodenkultur Wien, BOKU (Institut für Waldbau: Ass. Prof. Dr. Raphael T. Klumpp)
 realized as part of the call made by KÖR Vienna: „DAS WETTER VON MORGEN“

◀ Performance Views ▶

WIE DAS WASSER AUF DEN BERG KOMMT
 Franklinstraße 20, Public Space
 Vienna (AT)
 2022



„COMMON GROUNDS“

Based on 9 terms and located in 9 districts in Vienna, Austria , the temporary art project „Common Grounds“ aims to question social concepts and explore observations of interaction in an urban context.

FEAR - FRAGILITY - COOPERATION - VICINITY - SOLIDARITY - (LIVING) SPACE - MOVE (ABOUT) - CHANGE and RESISTANCE

These terms are presented and discussed in a discursive form in public space. 25 stackable stools and a mobile snack bar serve as a backdrop.

The ensemble has moved through nine districts of Vienna. Each of the 9 evenings at a different public square or park in the city. Artistic and scientific contributions to the above terms were presented as artistic interventions or scientific lectures. This was followed by a simple meal from the cookshop.

The project created a framework in which the interaction of different professional backgrounds initiated an exchange process. Art, science and society have come together without hierarchy and positioned themselves in dialogue.

For the individual events we have entered into cooperation with:

Thomas Arzt, (Author), Miriam Bajtala (Artist), Hanna Binder, (Actress), Virginie Canoine (Zoologist, behavioral biologist, University of Vienna), Iris Dittler (Artist), Simon Güntner (Sociologist, urban planner, Technical University of Vienna), Christiane Feuerstein (Architect, curator), Niki Kubaczek (Sociologist, activist, publisher), Elisabeth Oberzaucher (Behavioral biologist, University of Vienna) and Kollektiv Weiter (Alexandra Păzgu, Author; Florian Kmet, Musician; Roman Blumenstein, Actor).

◀ Performance Views ▶

COMMON GROUNDS

Public Space
Vienna (AT)
2021



Saloon ➤

Kunst@IHS,
Mural approx. 12 x 4,5 m
2019



Through permutation of existing coordinate systems, Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout formulate aesthetic compositions, objects, and displays. Human conditions —ranging from role allocation, migration, integration, to climate change—serve as a starting point for their work.

At IHS, the artist duo surveyed and plotted the historic Palais Strozzi. Axes in the Salon are extrapolated and translated into overlapping triangular color planes in a large-scale frottage mural. In a pipeline installation further channels alternately consolidate and radiate from nodes with interstices reflecting the Institute's aspiration to provide policy-relevant evidence. The materials in use hint at Eden and Lernout's current exploration of economic and socio-political effects of mining natural resources.

A recurring form in their art is the triangle: the smallest possible network. It enables the creation of open frameworks and relations free of polarization and hierarchies. The results do not prescribe a specific perspective; rather Eden and Lernout's architectonic interventions fathom uncharted terrain and offer vantage points that prompt reconfigured thinking.

Text: *Melissa Lumbroso*



◀ Exhibition Views

ursa major
Public Space
Petzenkirchen / Lower Austria (AT)
2017

„ursa major“

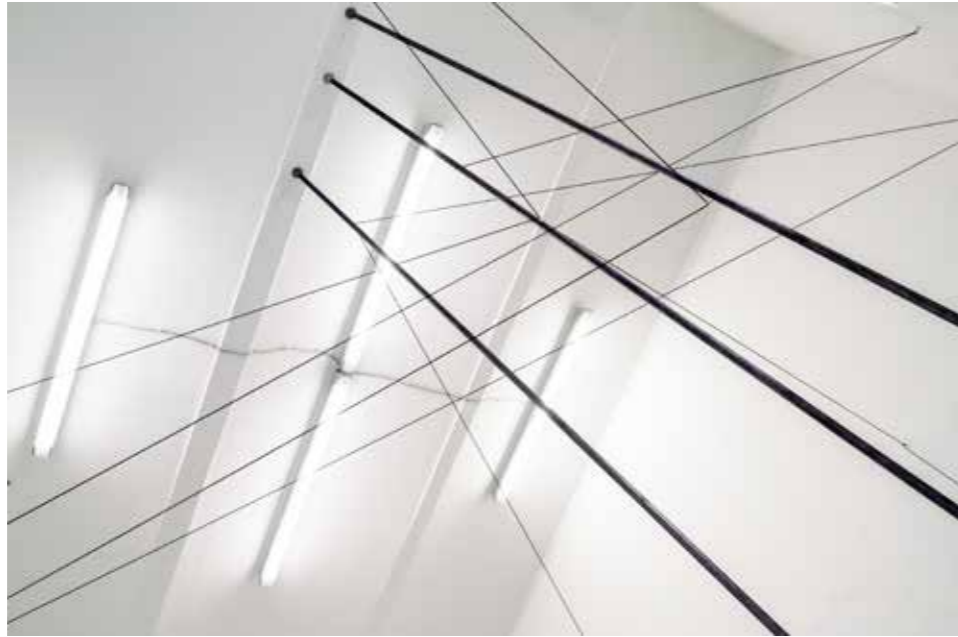
A legend in Petzenkirchen says that a knight once swore that he would build a church if he managed to survive an encounter with a bear in a forest nearby unharmed (Petz is the name of a bear in a fairy tale and kirchen means “church”). However, the name of the town can probably be traced back to the congregation’s founder, Bishop Berengar, who transformed the town into an influential parish in 1014. [1] With their installation Ursa Major , Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout refer to the constellation of the Big Dipper (or the Great Bear) in their project intended to create a communicative space that the community can also identify with. In their work, the constellation Ursa Major is projected onto the newly remodeled main square using 16 complex light columns that they developed together with light specialists. [2] This way, they create a visible connection between this small town in Lower Austria and the macrocosm. Far from indulging in pathos, the result seems gently poetic. The installation consists of metal tubes that are somewhere between four and six meters high. All stand at a slight angle, resembling other spatial structures the artist duo have produced in the past. When the sun goes down, the tilted upper ends of the tubes cast beams of light onto the square that mark the stars that shape the constellation. The light is cool and clearly defined in analogy to the electromagnetic radiation of the stars in the Ursa Major constellation, which serves as an important point of orientation for localizing the North Star in the Central European night sky.

What from a distance by day looks like a spatial drawing in the air is actually the result of many precise calculations. The constellation was first transferred to a field 5x10 meters in size, then flattened on a grid, and finally projected back into the third dimension to define the exact positions of the lights. This process of projection and re-projection is a prime example of how Eden and Lernout prefer to use many different methods. In their works, the two artistic poles of abstraction and communicative practice act as cornerstones of a reflexive system revolving around measuring and transferring. This reflexivity is also apparent in their installation in Petzenkirchen in the double projection that is both method and theme at the same time. The base of each light column is embedded in a concrete circle in which herbs are growing. Attached to three of the light beams are also radial benches that face the main access points of the square. In their exploration of how certain spaces evolve in their works, Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout regard space as a geographic, physical, and naturally a societal idea. As in many of their projects, the installation Ursa Major therefore not only refers to the story of the town’s origin; it is also creates an active space that opens up many opportunities to communicate. As the artists once said, “Establishing this and making the square come alive with and for people is one of the fundamental ideas of the design.” (Cornelia Offergeld)

[1] The name Berengar comes from the Old German bero (“bear”) + ger (“spear”).

[2] Ursa Major is Latin for a large female bear.

Text: *Cornelia Offergeld*



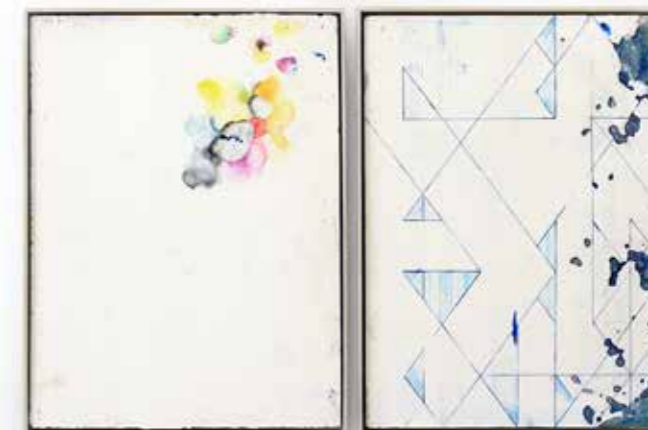
◀ Exhibition Views ▶

Gregor Eldarb vs Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout
 D.U.O. Raum für Kunst, Film und Kommunikation, Vienna, AT
 2016





o.T. (250.180.18)
 acrylic paint, toner and pencil on canvas
 250 x 180 cm
 2018



o.T. (635.482.18_dyptich)
 Plaster, gelatin, acrylic paint and pencil on canvas, dyptich
 63,5 x 48,2 cm each
 2018



o.T. (Sonne_1240.820.15)
 2K paint on powder-coated aluminum, on steel
 124 x 82 cm
 2018



o.T. (circle.surface.sun_300.200.20)
 acrylic paint, toner and pencil on canvas
 300 x 200 cm
 2020



What about our relationship to the stranger and to strangers? What is our attitude towards people who hope to find refuge with us? And how well do we actually know the economic and political context, the distribution of roles and their effects on flight and migration?

The general understanding of hospitality - according to Heidrun Frieze, the „everyday relationship to the other, to the stranger“ (1) - has undergone a clearly noticeable change in recent months in view of the rapidly growing number of asylum seekers. Émile Benveniste refers to the common stem of the word guest (Latin hospes) and enemy (Latin hostis) and thus to the culturally deeply rooted ambivalence that is felt towards the foreign. (2)

So it's a choice we make, how we approach someone, how we look at things, a space of possibility in which we move and take responsibility. The exhibition "Places Named After Numbers" could be described as an abstract compression of this space of possibilities. The pictures, objects and installations by the artist couple Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout do not formulate any fixed points of view, but combine themselves and the themes they deal with to form an open aesthetic and content-related reference system that challenges us as viewers to decide what and how we should see thinking and thus position themselves in this structure. Between painterly abstraction and expansive fragments of everyday life, Eden/Lernout develop a sensitive artistic dialogue about the complex subject matter of migration, political, economic interests and ecological and humanitarian consequences. „untitled (Ghawar 300.190.15)“ The large-format painting is formally reminiscent of constructivist painting: crystalline network formations spread out on the picture surface, sometimes condensing, sometimes fading out. As a "landscape picture", as categorized by the artist couple, it does not abstract our visible reality, but rather reflects what eludes our direct observation: the literal painting ground consists of a satellite image of the Ghawar desert in Saudi Arabia with the world's largest oil fields. Depending on your point of view, it is a photographic image of a desert area or a symbol of global geopolitical interest networks and exploitative power structures. Eden/Lernout use the associative meta-level of the painted network composition, which slides between the viewer and the „actual“ picture, to visually bring the discrepancy between seeing and knowing to the fore.

The currently very controversial international debates about „the understanding of social ties and solidarity, giving and exploit, proximity and distance, territory and borders, private and public space, ethical and moral requirements, political affiliation, citizenship, rights and exclusion, in short: (...) the basics of living together“ (3), shows how emotional,

but above all fragile, the intercultural common property of hospitality is constituted. The erection of border fences on the edges of Europe shows how quickly things can change. Eden/Lernout respond to this fading sense of obligation to selflessly help with the expansive installation Hommage to Angel Kanchev II. On several nested and stacked tables, as one finds at flea markets, stacks of different crockery are arranged as if for sale. For this work, Eden/Lernout made a journey from the Bulgarian border fence to Germany in 2014, a journey that generations of guest workers, migrants and refugees have already made on their way through Europe.

The crockery was collected on the way through the six countries crossing. The laid table as a symbol of hospitality and the care of people is given a presence here in a preliminary stage, the offer of the „material“ that one would need for such an event - we are not invited here, but should take action ourselves. The tables are assembled into a constructive and interrelated but also unstable structure. A plumb bob hanging from the ceiling and penetrating the tables alludes to Jacques Derrida's question in his essay „On Hospitality“ as to whether and which parameter of hospitality is ultimately irrefutable (4). Neither the philosopher nor the artist couple provide an answer, but pass the question on to us. A blacked-out page from Derrida's essay ensures that we don't shy away from it. To make sure that we start the conversation, it asks us a simple question and thus makes us responsible: "What's your name?" .

Text: *Juliane Feldhoffer*

(1) Heidrun Frieze, Grenzen der Gastfreundschaft, Bielefeld 2014, S. 28.

(2) Emil Benveniste, Indo-European Languages and Society, Coral Gables 1973, S. 71

(3) Vgl. Anm. 1

(4) Jacques Derrida, Von der Gastfreundschaft, Wien 2001, S. 112.

◀ Exhibition View

Places Named After Numbers
KUK Gallery, Cologne, DE
2015

The Arab Revolution, which began five years ago in Tunisia, led to upheavals and new beginnings that today extend far beyond the Arab world. Anger at the old regime and a burning desire for political and social change caused people to rebel. This democracy movement also brought about a paradigm shift in local art practice. Artists step into public space and act as actors in civil society.

The exhibition THE TURN shows interventions that took place in post-revolutionary Tunisia in both urban and rural public spaces. In their interest in socio-political issues and their direct social commitment, they stand in the tradition of the „social turn“ (Claire Bishop) of contemporary art history. Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout travel through Tunisia in search of the Écrivains Publics. Also referred to as „advocates for the poor“, the Écrivains Publics write letters of complaint, petitions, motions and everyday correspondence for the citizens. They are masters of writing, but also social and life coaches, with an intimate knowledge of conditions in their cities. Irena Eden and Stijn Lernout have visited the Écrivains Publics at their offices and have asked them to write a text on the current situation on site.

Text: *Christine Bruckbauer*



Exhibition Views >

Écrivain public
(Gruppenausstellung) The Turn
Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Wien, AT
2015



◀ Exhibition View

Circle Surface Sun, Sable
 Exhibition of the Nominees , Paula Modersohn Becker Preis
 Große Kunstschazu Worpswede, DE
 2015

Exhibition View ▶

Circle Surface Sun, Sable
 Poppositions, (with KUK Gallery)
 ING Art Center, Brussels, BE
 2016



Irena Eden * 1974 in Hamburg (DE)

Stijn Lernout * 1972 in Antwerp (BE)

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Artistic Education

2000 - 2004 Muthesius University of Fine Arts and Design, Kiel (DE)

2003 Akademija likovnih umjetnosti, Sarajevo (BiH)

2003 - 2004 weißensee academy of art berlin, Berlin (DE)

2004 Diploma - start of cooperation, Berlin (DE)

Since 2008 Based in Vienna (AT)

Solo (selected)

2022 • Neue Sterne für den Prater, KÖR, public space, Vienna • Wie das Wasser auf den Berg kommt, KÖR, public space, Vienna

2021 • Common Grounds - a project for the public space in Vienna **2020** • Reference to instable conditions III, Parallel Vienna •

From Somewhere in the Mediterranean, Kunstverein Konstanz **2019** • Kunst @IHS, Vienna • congobos, KUK Gallery, Cologne **2017**

• Ursa Major, public space, Petzenkirchen, KÖR Niederösterreich • Solo show, Volta Basel • Solo show, Poppositions Brussels

2015 • Places Named After Numbers, KUK Gallery, Cologne **2014** • Below, beyond, above- a gravity that slumbers, Art Center

Duplex, Sarajevo • Hommage to Angel Kanchev, Zagreus Projekt, Berlin **2013** • Şifr, BAC Art center, Tunis • Vorne Fahrn, nGbK

– public space, Berlin **2012** • Objekt, Ve.sch, Vienna **2011** • Across The Pond, Art Center Duplex, Sarajevo • Flickering Shades

Of Orange And Yellow, MAGAZIN, Vienna **2009** • Circle Surface Sun, Art Center Kunst & Co., Flensburg **2008** • Super Nova /

Visoko, Marstall von Schloss Ahrensburg • Partir avec son chez soi, Art Center das weisse haus, Vienna

Group Shows (selected)

2022 • Numbered, Weighed, Divided, MAERZ, Linz **2021** • Numbered, Weighed, Divided, Schaumbad, Graz • Schau 7, Kunsthaus

Kollitsch, Klagenfurt **2020** • Publication AVE #7, Kunstraum Super, Vienna **2019** • Jahregabenausstellung, das weisse Haus,

Vienna **2018** • The Sarajevo Storage, National Gallery BiH, Sarajevo • Alles, Hochhaus Berlin **2017** • don't call it off-sapce,

das weisse haus, Vienna • The Real Estate Show Extended, Kunstpunkt Berlin **2016** • Schräg bis Vertikal. Herbert Brandl.

Eine Ausstellung im Perspektivwechsel, Kunsthalle arlberg1800, St. Christoph • Paula Modersohn-Becker Kunstpreis, Große

Kunstschau, Worpswede **2015** • Master Builders, Art Center Extra, Schwechat • Eden & Lernout vs Gregor Eldarb, Art Space

D.U.O., Vienna • The Turn, Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Vienna **2013** • On things, On minds, Art Center Schattendorf • In der

Kubatur des Kabinetts, fluc, Vienna **2012** • Brussels Cologne Contemporary, Cologne **2011** • the borders of drawing, Art Center

das weisse haus, Vienna **2010** • Public Idea, ECOC Istanbul **2008** • Crossing Munich, Rathausgalerie München • Nelson Mandela

must be free, Spor Klübü, Berlin

Stipend / Awards:

2023 • Scholarship, City Grant, Vienna • Invited public art competition „BIG | BG Klostersgasse 22, Vienna“ • Invited public art

competition „QUIVID, City Council of Munich | Grundschule Triebstraße, Munich“ • AiR, Young Art Residency Weidlingen **2022**

• Invited competition „Design of the underpass at the Praterstern“, winning design • Competition Entry for the „Climate Call“,

temporary project in Vienna Floridsdorf, realisation, both KÖR, Vienna **2021** • State scholarship, BMKÖS • Project Grant, City of

Vienna **2020** • The artists' residence Herzliya, Tel Aviv, BMKÖS (postponed to 2022) **2019** • City of Munich: invited competition:

Kunst Am Bau **2018** • Cité des arts Paris, Stipend of the City of Vienna • Kunst am Bau, Realisation, Raiffeisen-Leasing, Vienna **2017**

• Art in public space, Lower Austria, Petzenkirchen **2016** • zusammen:wachsen, Project Grant, BKA, Austria **2015** • AiR SoArt,

Corinthia • AiR Arlberg Hospiz 1800 • AiR Galeria Budapest, Stipend of the City of Vienna **2014** • Theodor Körner Förderpreis 2013

• Exhibition Grant „Sifr“, BAC Art center, Tunis: Ifa Stuttgart, Germany and BKA Austria **2012** • nGbK, Berlin, Competition in public

space, realization, art in the Berlin subway **2012** - **2020** • Federal Studio Grant, BKA, Austria **2011** • Project Grant, bm:ukk „We want

the world- and we want it“ 2008 • Stipend Künstlerhaus Villa Waldberta , Projekt Crossing Munich, City of Munich **2008** • Catalog

Grant, Kulturstiftung Stormarn, Sparkasse Holstein **2005** • Artists in Residence, Künstlerhaus Eckernförde

Monographs:

2023 • Common Grounds, Hrsg. Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout, Verlag Schlebrügge.Editor **2021** • In loser Anordnung - In a Loose

Arrangement, Hrsg. Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout, Verlag für moderne Kunst, ISBN 978-3-903572-30-0 **2020** • Circle Surface Sun

- From Somewhere in the Mediterranean, Hrsg. Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout und Kunstverein Konstanz, Verlag Schlebrügge.Editor,

ISBN 978-3-903172-50-0 **2016** • Écrivain public, Hrsg. Irena Eden & Stijn Lernout, Verlag Schlebrügge Editor, ISBN 978-3-902833-

90-7 **2008** • Nichts leichter als das, Hrsg. Kulturstiftung Stormarn der Sparkasse Holstein, ISBN 978-3-200-01212-1

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