

Doris Stauffer
A Monograph

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Foreword

Sitting in Doris Stauffer’s living room in Zurich’s Seefeld, one is surrounded by handwritten notes, documents of her political activities, and her photographs. Right in the middle an artist who, with her more than eighty years, still wants to think with her heart, is still humorous and angry, still smokes and laughs. “i have no desire to accumulate a lot of knowledge. i’m interested in life experience,” notes Doris Stauffer in a journal entry at the end of 1990. The year before, her husband Serge Stauffer had died, who was the central figure in her life and an important point of reference in her work as an artist.

Serge Stauffer also played a role at the beginning of the emergence of this book: On the occasion of the exhibition *Serge Stauffer – Kunst als Forschung* [Art as Research], which was shown in 2013 at the Helmhaus Zürich, curator Michael Hiltbrunner and Simone Koller, one of the two editors of this book, worked on an accompanying publication. While sorting through the material, documents from Doris Stauffer kept surfacing. Fascinated by this unknown universe of images and texts, it soon became clear that Doris Stauffer’s biography unified themes, which would likely be of interest in relation to the development of feminist art, as well as be relevant to a younger generation of artists. Since her work is hardly known today, we mutually decided to create a publication describing her artistic work, the rich collection of documents about her feminist activities, and her work as a teacher and mediator or art.

Doris Stauffer is co-founder of the Zurich Frauenbefreiungsbewegung FBB [Women’s Liberation Movement] and the F+F Schule für experimentelle Gestaltung (today, F+F Schule für Kunst und Design). In the 1950s, after studying under Hans Finsler and graduating with a degree in photography from the Kunstgewerbeschule [School of Applied Arts] Zürich, she became a mother at a young age and worked as a housewife, creating object images on the side. In 1969, her life changed radically: Dissatisfied with the isolation of her existence as a housewife, she began to engage in actions of the FBB supporting feminist concerns, which attracted great attention. At the same time, she created new formats used in her teaching, such as for the “Teamwork Course,” in which she also developed unconventional means of mediating and doing artwork. She continued this approach, and in 1977 the “Hexenkurs” [Witches Course] emerged, a kind of feminist-oriented educational format, designed for and offered exclusively to women.

In Doris Stauffer’s work, private and public, art, education and mediation, and political engagement can hardly be separated. As a housewife and mother of three children, she produced assemblages from discarded household objects, which have a highly subversive potential. As co-founder of the FBB, she engaged in packing clear political demands with a sensual and humorous wrapping. And in her teaching, she did not shy away from sometimes involving her students in feminist actions. When she finally withdrew from her teaching engagements in the 1980s, she occupied herself with baking and selling artistically decorated *Lebkuchen*, a long-cherished dream. The question “what” this activity should be read as, be it as an art project or food production, didn’t interest her.

Since Doris Stauffer constantly documented her teaching in particular, there was extensive image material available to us for the current publication. Another important source was the “family folder,” a collection of letters and notes, as well as drawings and collages, which document communicative exchange within the family. A selection from this stockpile—along with documentation of