RIZZUTOGALLERY
PALERMO - DÜSSELDORF

MARTINA SAUTER

Martina Sauter (1974, Konstanz. Lives and works in Düsseldorf)



Martina Sauter is a German artist who lives and works in Düsseldorf. Her practice lies at the intersection of photography and cinema, two languages that she skilfully interweaves to construct visual spaces charged with ambiguity and narrative tension. Trained as a professional photographer between 1997 and 1999, Sauter subsequently developed her research at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1999 to 2006, in Thomas Ruff's class. In 2006 she obtained the title of Meisterschülerin, the Academy's highest distinction, reserved for its most promising students. In the same year she received the Thieme Art Award. Her three-year apprenticeship as a photographer provided Sauter with a solid technical foundation, which she immediately put to use by entering the class of one of the most influential contemporary photographers. At the Kunstakademie, Sauter absorbed the legacy of the so-called Düsseldorf School - the tradition initiated by Bernd and Hilla Becher and carried forward by artists such as her teacher Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, Candida Höfer and Andreas Gursky - but developed it in a personal direction, in which the formal rigour of the German tradition opens onto the languages of cinema and television.

Poetics and Method - Constructing Ambiguity

Martina Sauter creates images that do not simply document reality, but question its very nature, suspending the viewer in a liminal zone between fiction and truth. The core of her practice lies in creating images that resist any certain classification. The artist combines frames taken from films, television series, music videos and magazines with photographs of settings that she has arranged and photographed herself. The result is a photographic collage in which two visual regimes - the cinematic found image and the authorial photograph - merge on a single surface, generating in the viewer a sense of disorientation and déjà vu.
Sauter never shows terror directly, but suggests it, distilling a powerful sense of suspense: the viewer feels that something is about to happen - or has just happened - yet the image leaves the event unresolved, compelling the viewer to project a personal narrative. The selected scenes are often moments "between two actions", in which a character has just left the scene or is about to enter it.



Laura, 2011.Two-part C-print collage on aluminium, 30 × 28 cm. Edition: 3/3 (3 + 2 artist's proofs)

Interiors and Absent Presence

A distinctive feature of Sauter's work is her emphasis on interior spaces. Her works show rooms, corridors, offices, staircases, curtains and doors: domestic or institutional architectures that become containers for fictional personalities. When human figures appear, they are often fleeting traces, silhouettes or marginal presences; more often they are entirely absent, leaving objects and furnishings to tell a story. These fragmented still lifes are reminiscent, in certain respects, of Italian Metaphysical painting, but are refracted through the lens of contemporary visual culture.

Visual Sources and Collective Memory

Sauter draws on a broad repertoire of visual sources: Hitchcock films, David Bowie music videos, Chinese science-fiction cinema and contemporary television series. These images, taken from the television screen and rephotographed with a 35 mm camera, acquire a particular grain: film intensifies the shadows, creates a nostalgic blur and transforms the television pixel into photographic matter. The gesture is at once citational and transformative: the found image loses its original context and is reactivated within a new composition, becoming material for a collective memory that the artist reinvents.

Technique and Recent Developments

From a technical point of view, Sauter has gradually moved from traditional photographic collage towards more radical experiments: she has begun making incisions in photographic material and inserting fragments into pieces of photographic paper, pushing the medium beyond its twodimensionality. Double-sided works with a cut-out on the reverse - such as Sleep (2017), Smell (2017), x+0 (2018) and Sphere (2019) - open the image plane towards a “second bottom”, in an approach that has been compared to the Surrealist Cadavre Exquis. In recent years, her research has opened towards artificial intelligence and its influence on everyday life, a subject that also runs through her most recent works.

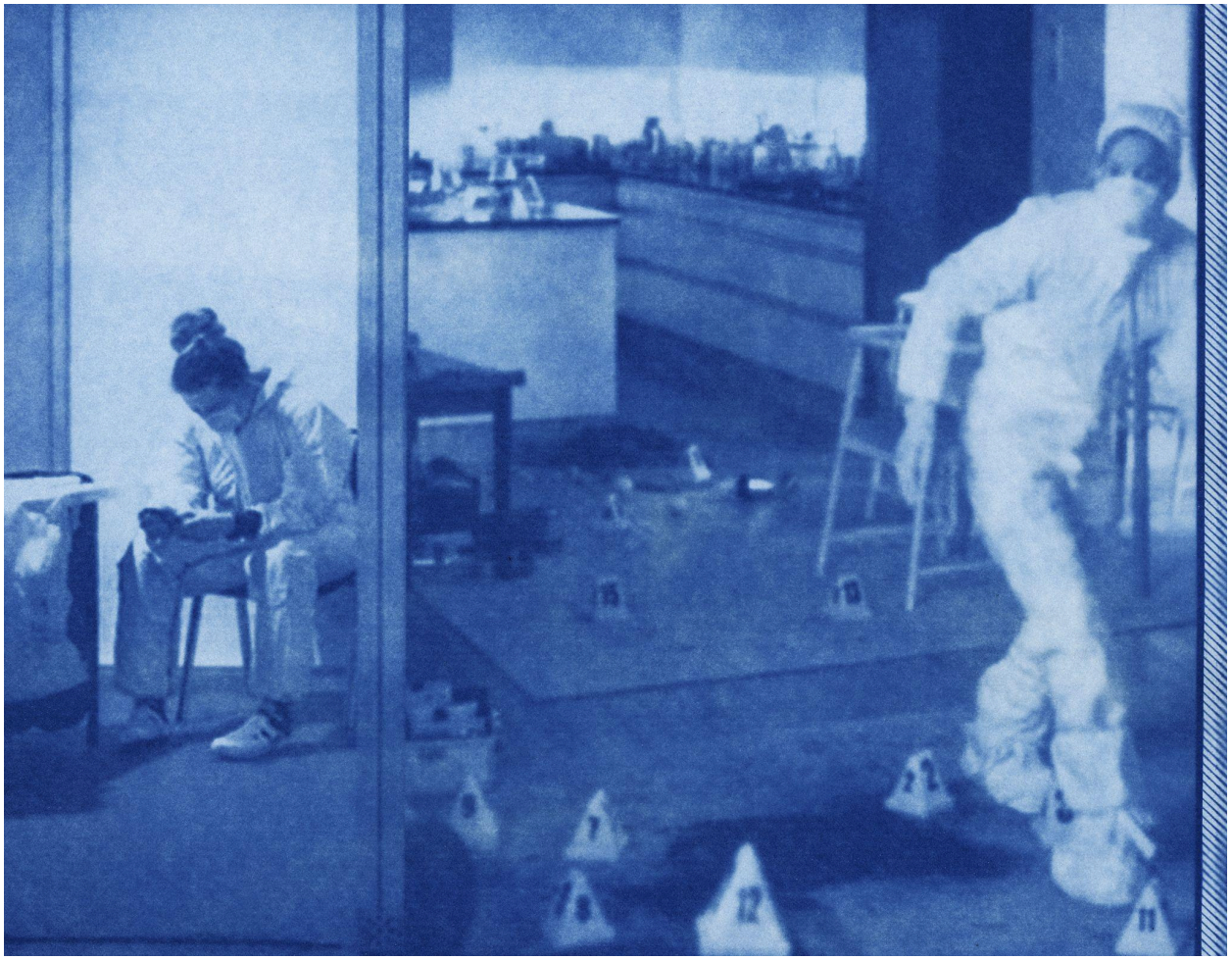


Türen, 2007. Two-part C-print collage behind Diasec, 135 × 120.5 cm. Edition: artist’s proof (3 + 2 artist’s proofs).

News:fiction (2020–2024)

"In March 2020, I began collecting screenshots from the daily press showing empty spaces connected with the Coronavirus crisis. The news images, initially gathered in a scattered way, were subsequently ordered into categories and collected according to these and other established criteria. With the end of the third wave of Covid, I closed the first chapter of the work. I brought the newspaper screenshots collected up to that point into dialogue with frames from a television series. "After some research, for a number of reasons I decided to work with the English television series Fortitude, a mini-series with surreal elements broadcast over two seasons between 2015 and 2018, which shows parallels with David Lynch's Twin Peaks from 1990/91. "The development of the plot and its visual representation show many similarities with the course of the Coronavirus crisis. Here too, an invisible pathogen is the trigger for profound changes in society. In working on the juxtapositions, I found it particularly interesting to observe how journalistic photography and the staged frames from the series relate to one another, and what role is played in this by the collective memory shaped by the media. "The relationship between reality and fiction entered a new relationship here, different from that of my earlier work. The collages, initially created in a purely virtual form, were subsequently developed in an analogue, photographic form, as cyanotypes, revealing their characteristic blue tonality."

— Martina Sauter



nf: day 3.4, 2022/23 (Tänzerin). Inkjet print, framed, 50 × 64 cm. Edition: 1/5 (5 + 2 artist's proofs).

News:fiction is Martina Sauter's most ambitious and complex series, begun at the start of the pandemic in 2020. During lockdown, the artist began collecting images from news reports - screenshots from online news programmes and reportage - and juxtaposing them with frames from the television series Fortitude, which tells the story of a pathogen capable of altering the behaviour of a city's population and provoking conflicts through the psychotic behaviour of infected inhabitants.

The series subsequently expanded to include photographs taken during quarantine: laboratories, operating rooms, empty rooms and mysterious objects. The title itself - *News:Fiction* - declares the programme: to question the different levels of reality and unreality inhabiting the images we consume every day, asking where information ends and staging begins.

The works in the series are made using the historical **cyanotype** process, which produces their characteristic blue tone. The choice of this old technique introduces a reflection on the fragility of the image: a cyanotype print gradually deteriorates if exposed to light for too long, a fate that resonates with the precariousness of the collective memory recorded by the images themselves.

The complete series consists of **35 individual works**. The exhibition news:fiction was presented in 2022 at the Städtische Galerie in Weingarten and, in its second iteration, news:fiction:2, in 2024 at the Künstlerverein Malkasten in Düsseldorf.



nf: day 5.1, 2023 (Fledermaus). Inkjet print, framed, 30 × 42 cm. Edition: 2/5 (5 + 2 artist's proofs).

Serie *NEWS* (2021)

In parallel with news:fiction, Sauter developed the series NEWS, works printed on two layers of paper (InkJet Print on two layers) that explore further the stratification between media image and constructed image.

Serie *MatchCut* (2022)

A photographic series of inkjet-printed collages on aluminium, often in two or three parts. The titles - jemand, den du / MatchCut, 27 / MatchCut and gehört / MatchCut - suggest a dialogue between linguistic and visual fragments, in which the word itself becomes a compositional element alongside the image. The series was presented in a solo exhibition at Mook Gallery in Düsseldorf in 2022.

Serie *The Physiologus* (2019–2021)

Collages with UV printing on film and phosphorescent paper (Nachleuchtpapier): the works glow in the dark, introducing an unprecedented temporal and perceptual dimension into Sauter's practice. The subjects are animals: Uhus 2.1, Insecta 1.2, Pisces 1.1, Hippocampus, Octopus 1.1 and Octopus 1.2. The series introduces the animal kingdom into the discourse on the media image, an aspect that Professor Judith Samen, in her text for the City of Düsseldorf's Förderpreis, described as "an essential aspect" that "expands the work".

Serie *dw:* (2025/26)

Series dw: (2025/26) Sauter's most recent production is the dw: (deep water) series, made between 2025 and 2026. It consists of framed silver gelatin prints. The titles - dw: pool, dw: selfie, dw: party, dw: quarry, dw: snails, dw: phones and dw: office - suggest a reflection on the contemporary world connected to the artist's declared interest in artificial intelligence and its influence on everyday life.



dw: phones, 2025/26. Framed silver gelatin print, 30 × 40 cm. Edition: 1/3 (3 + 2 artist's proofs).

Critical Texts

Martina Sauter's works resemble a theatrical set, whose actors perform not only on the stage but also in front of and behind it. The drama staged here concerns the world of the media and its relationship with reality. It speaks of reality in fiction and fiction in reality and, not least, seeks to question the boundaries between illusion and truth. Characteristic is the visual and conceptual interweaving of cinema and photography. What initially appears as a deceptively authentic and unified illusory space reveals itself, on closer inspection, as a hybrid construct. Frames from classic films—mostly photographed from the television screen —are combined with photographs of settings arranged by the artist herself. These are generally constructed spatial architectures, staged by the artist in the studio as theatrical sets, using wooden walls, decorative wallpaper, curtains, carpets and doors. In the more recent works, cinematic frames are integrated with letters, newspapers and real documents, mounted into the photographic print through almost imperceptible incisions. While the visual aesthetic of the film frame is coarse-grained and blurred, the original photographs contrast through their evident sharpness. Subtle perspectival inconsistencies and enigmatic visual axes are added, generated by the montage of two different iconographic sources. Once recognised, the fracture becomes the starting point for a complex reflection on cinematic strategies. Familiar faces such as Grace Kelly, James Stewart or Kim Novak reveal the artist's sources, which draw inspiration from films, thrillers and cult series by directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Robert Altman and David Lynch, as well as from images belonging to the tradition of 1940s and 1950s film noir. Experimentation with different visual forms of suspense—framing, lighting and editing—essentially raises the question of arrangement: the relationship between space and figure, and the extent to which the staging of space may complete or even condition the idea of a person who is only fleetingly present.

— Astrid Legge

The title News:Fiction provides the first clue to the genesis of Martina Sauter's work. With the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the artist collected news images and placed them alongside screenshots from the television series Fortitude. Fortitude is a British crime series with elements of the mystery genre, filmed largely in Reyðarfjörður, Iceland, and broadcast between 2015 and 2018. According to the political scientist and futurist Dr Isabella Hermann, science-fiction series have a particular appeal when addressing political questions and social criticism. As an example she cites Star Trek, which developed a post-capitalist and gender-egalitarian social vision typical of the 1960s and 1970s. Science fiction looks towards the future, but from the perspective of its own time. Looking back at that fiction means looking at the past and comparing the earlier vision with reality. Did social changes develop as they were shown in the series? The same applies to Martina Sauter's work: the artist looks at a profound rupture in our society and creates images that seem to emerge from a science-fiction novel; embedded within them are images from everyday pandemic culture. If we look at these images now, years later, we see a past that we can hardly imagine any more, similar to a nightmare from which one wakes in fright. Yet the reference to reality in Sauter's work is not incidental: whether it is her son's abandoned ball in the cellar, or a broken disco ball in the village of Ischgl in Tyrol, which made the front pages as a Coronavirus

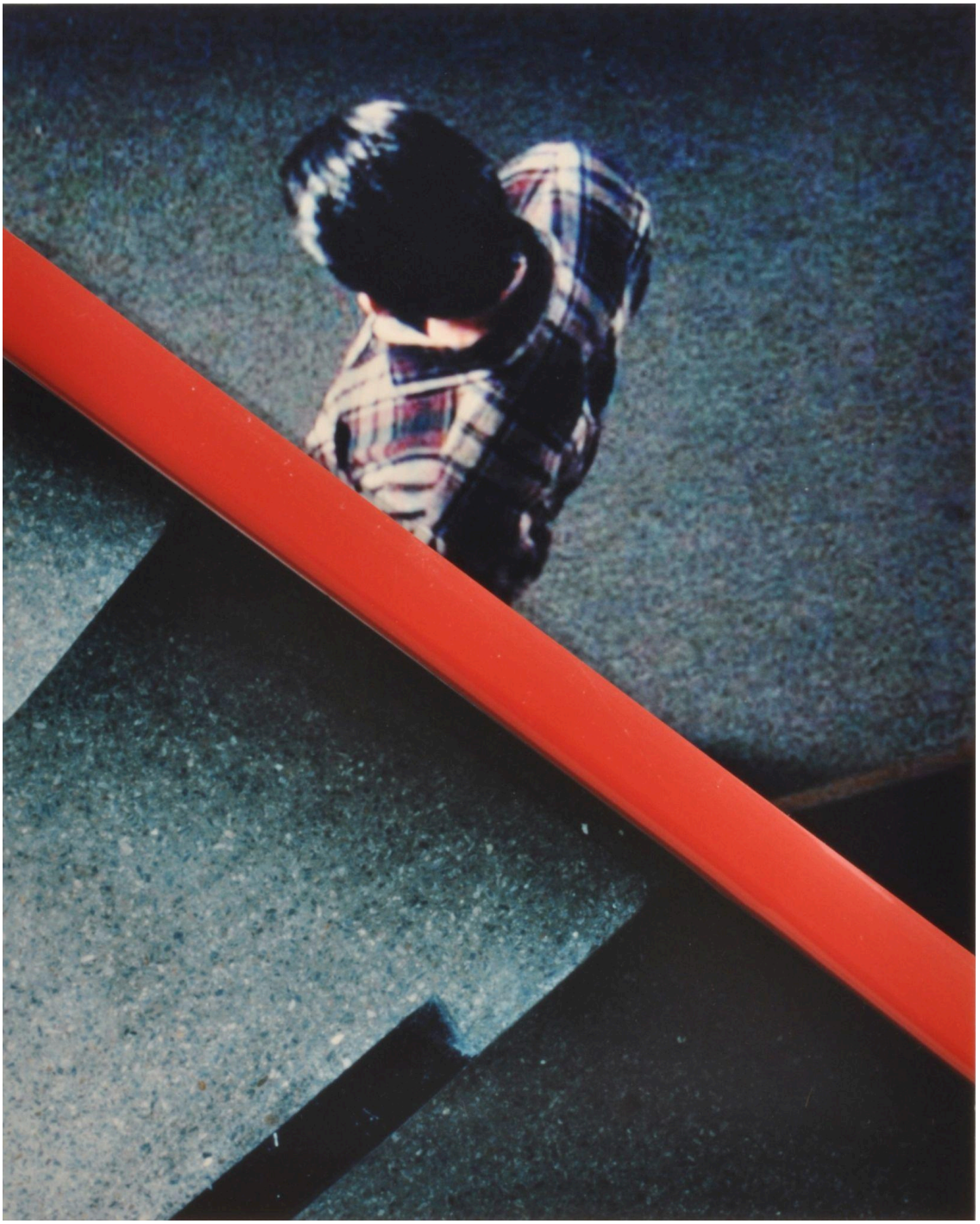
outbreak hotspot, lived reality and serial images of fiction merge into a single unity. The works are made using the old photographic technique of cyanotype. It reinforces the transfigured view of the subjects, while also emphasising a scientific connection. If the developed and fixed paper is exposed to light for too long, it gradually decomposes.

— Bärbel Möllmann

Martina Sauter has developed a rigorous body of work that continually receives attention at an international level. In sophisticated photographic collages, she interweaves fragments of cinema history, found visual worlds and fully staged spatial settings, thereby sensitively addressing the mediality of contemporary images and their hybrid state in a continuous, fluid recombinability. Through the networks of relations composed with other images in her works, new readings emerge. The source images cannot always be traced. Entirely new visual experiences are thus generated for the viewer. In Sauter's constructed visual spaces, the cinematic comes to a halt, is deconstructed and fixed. Fragments of narrative dissolve into chromatic harmonies without entirely abandoning their references. The referents may also be other living beings, or found images of them. The animal kingdom plays a role in Martina Sauter's more recent works and adds an essential aspect to her practice. Visually, the works reveal—to viewers who look with attention and precision —subtle differences in materiality. Rasterisation, grain, the interplay of different degrees of sharpness and fine surface treatments challenge the observer to look closely and lead into a poetic world of images with a sometimes silent tone, in which the flow of time becomes something else.

— Professor Judith Samen, for the Förderpreis der Stadt Düsseldorf

Selected Works























Biography

Martina Sauter, born in 1974 in Konstanz, Germany. Lives and works in Düsseldorf.

Education

1997–1999 — Training as a photographer (Ausbildung zur Fotografin).

1999–2006 — Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Thomas Ruff's class.

2006 — Meisterschülerin under Thomas Ruff.

Solo Exhibitions

2026 — Constructed Memory (with Morgaine Schäfer), RizzutoGallery, Palermo.

2024 — early work, Galerie de Zaal, Delft.

2024 — news:fiction:2, Künstlerverein Malkasten, Düsseldorf.

2022 — news:fiction, Städtische Galerie, Weingarten.

2022 — Match Cut, Mook Gallery, Düsseldorf.

2018 — grünes Zimmer, Galerie Löhrl, Mönchengladbach.

2018 — inverted repeat, Galerie DeZaal, Delft.

2017 — double take, Studio Michael Royen, Vettelschoß.

2017 — Duplications and Differences, Van der Mieden Gallery, Antwerp.

2015 — Split Secret, Scharmann & Laskowski, Cologne.

2013 — between 12 and 12, Galerie DeZaal, Delft.

2012 — Correspondence, Ambach&Rice, Los Angeles.

2012 — L'Autre et son Double, Kunstverein Konstanz, Konstanz.

2012 — stufen und tasten, Kunstverein Bochum, Bochum.

2011 — a riddle of red, Galerie DeZaal, Delft.

2011 — marion scharmann zeigt martina sauter, Marion Scharmann, Cologne.

2010 — shapely shadows and a new apartment, Ambach&Rice, Seattle.

2010 — Räume auf Zeit, annex14, Bern.

2008 — Double, marion scharmann, Cologne.

2008 — Scenes, Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam.

2006 — mur-mur, Galerie DeZaal, Delft.

2006 — you never know the whole story, annex14, Bern.

2005 — kalte Spur, Kunstraum Marion Scharmann, Cologne.

2004 — Osmose, Ateliergemeinschaft Metzgalerie, Koblenz.

2004 — stand by, Implant Art – Temporärer Kunstraum für zeitgenössische Fotografie, Bonn.

Selected Group Exhibitions

2026 — recollected #2, AFF Produzentengalerie, Berlin.

2026 — Reset, Goethe-Institut, Tokyo.

2026 — Realität und Fiktion, Kunstmuseum Hattingen.

2025 — Perspektivwechsel, Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf.

2025 — Provinzglück Festival, UMMfMuB, Kriebitzsch.

2025 — On Photography, Beton Box im Bunker, Düsseldorf.

2025 — Kunst & Liebe, Schloss Achberg, Landkreis Ravensburg.

2025 — The Great Summer of Art, Labor am Ebertplatz, Cologne.

2025 — EUUA, charity exhibition, Weltkunstzimmer.

2025 — Dimensions Variable 7, Kunstraum Reformator, Düsseldorf.

2024 — Countdown – das kleine Format, Malkasten, Düsseldorf.

2024 — Licht und Schatten, NRW-Forum, Düsseldorf.

2024 — String Quintet, Kunstraum Pempelforter, Düsseldorf.

2024 — Die Grosse, Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf.

2024 — Doors, ThePool, Düsseldorf.

2024 — In Abwesenheit, Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf.

2024 — PARANOIA, CC Ter Dilft, Bornem.

2024 — Schichtenfolge, Kunstraum Elsa, Bielefeld.

2023 — Fotografie (durchgestrichen), KUH Kunst und Haltung e.V., Düsseldorf.

2023 — Im Innern, Kunstwerk Sammlung Klein, Eberdingen-Nussdorf.

2023 — 40 Jahre, Emsdettener Kunstverein, Emsdetten.

2023 — Tilt Shift, Darmstädter Tage der Fotografie, Designhaus.

2023 — Charity@Weltkunstzimmer, Weltkunstzimmer, Düsseldorf.

2022 — I’m Sorry, Dave, The Ravestijn Gallery, Amsterdam.

2022 — Düsseldorfer Indie Shorts, Micropopweek, Düsseldorf.

2022 — One of a Kind, The Ravestijn Gallery, Amsterdam.

2022 — Die Grosse, Museum Kunstpalast / NRW-Forum, Düsseldorf.

2022 — Shifting, Ross 31 – Räume für die Kunst, Düsseldorf.

2021 — Light and mind, Galerie Lausberg, Düsseldorf.

2021 — house of courts, Sammlung Dahmen, Düsseldorf.

2021 — The Constructed Image, The Ravestijn Gallery, Amsterdam.

2021 — take a deep deep breath #1, NKR, Düsseldorf.

2021 — TheKitchenHappening21 – die private Küche als Ort der Kunst.

2020 — The Salon Show, The Ravestijn Gallery, Amsterdam.

2020 — When Images collide, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen.

2020 — dimensions variable 6, Düsseldorf Photo+.

2020 — Sweet Spot, Sammlung Dahmen, Düsseldorf Photo+.

2020 — Subjekt und Objekt, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.

2020 — a certain suspense, Galerie 21.06, Ravensburg.

2019 — Another Day in Paradise, Gravy Studio & Gallery, Philadelphia.

2019 — Shared Spaces, Labor am Ebertplatz, Cologne.

2019 — Showroom by HSL, Photoweekend, Düsseldorf.

2019 — RE VISIONS, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich.

2019 — dimensions variable 4, Emsdettener Kunstverein, Emsdetten.

2019 — dimensions variable volume 5, Rottstr 5 Kunsthallen, Bochum.

2018 — Bernd, Hilla and the Others, Huis Marseille, Amsterdam.

2017 — dimensions variable volume 3, Baustelle/Schaustelle, Düsseldorf.

2017 — Film Footage Fotografie, Museum für Photographie, Braunschweig.

2016 — always facing things, arteealtro, Rome.

2016 — christine erhard & martina sauter, plan d, Düsseldorf.

2016 — hello goodbye, Scharmann & Laskowski, Cologne.

2015 — marion scharmann zeigt/shows, Marion Scharmann, Cologne.

2013 — Ruhestörung, Marta, Herford.

Awards, Grants and Residencies

2024 — Stiftung Kunstfonds, grant (Stipendium).

2023 — Merck Prize, Darmstädter Tage der Fotografie.

2023 — Deutscher FotobuchPreis, bronze medal for ONE/TWO.

2021 — Förderpreis für Bildende Kunst der Stadt Düsseldorf.

2020 — Neustart Kultur, funding for abwesend anwesend, Stiftung Kunstfonds.

2020 — Mikrostipendium, Frauenkulturbüro NRW.

2012 — Präsenz vor Ort, Frauenkulturbüro NRW.

2009 — Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg.

2006 — Thieme Art Award, Amsterdam.

2006 — Young Artists on the Road, Aachener Kunstroute.

Teaching

Winter semester 2023/24 — Workshop in analogue black-and-white photography, Kunsthochschule Mainz.

Summer semester 2024 — Teaching appointment, introductory photography course, Burg Giebichenstein, Faculty of Design.

Winter semester 2024/25 — Teaching appointment in photography, Burg Giebichenstein, Faculty of Design.

Summer semester 2026 — Teaching appointment, introductory photography course, Hochschule Mainz.

Publications and Catalogues

2007 — 57 Photographs.

2013 — Tische Türen Tasten, e-book.

2020 — Subjekt und Objekt, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, catalogue.

2020 — When Images Collide, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen, catalogue.

2021 — the kitchen happening 21, Judith Samen, Düsseldorf.

2022 — ONE/TWO — Deutscher FotobuchPreis, bronze medal 2023.

2019 — REVISIONS, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, catalogue.

Public Collections

Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf.

Fondation Bredin Prat, Paris.

Kunstsammlung der Provinzial, Düsseldorf.

Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal.

Museum Kunstpalast / Stadtsparkasse, Düsseldorf.

Private Collections

UBS Bank, Switzerland.

Sammlung Ann und Jürgen Wilde, Cologne / Munich.

aZure collection, Monaco / Zurich.

The Art Institute of Chicago.