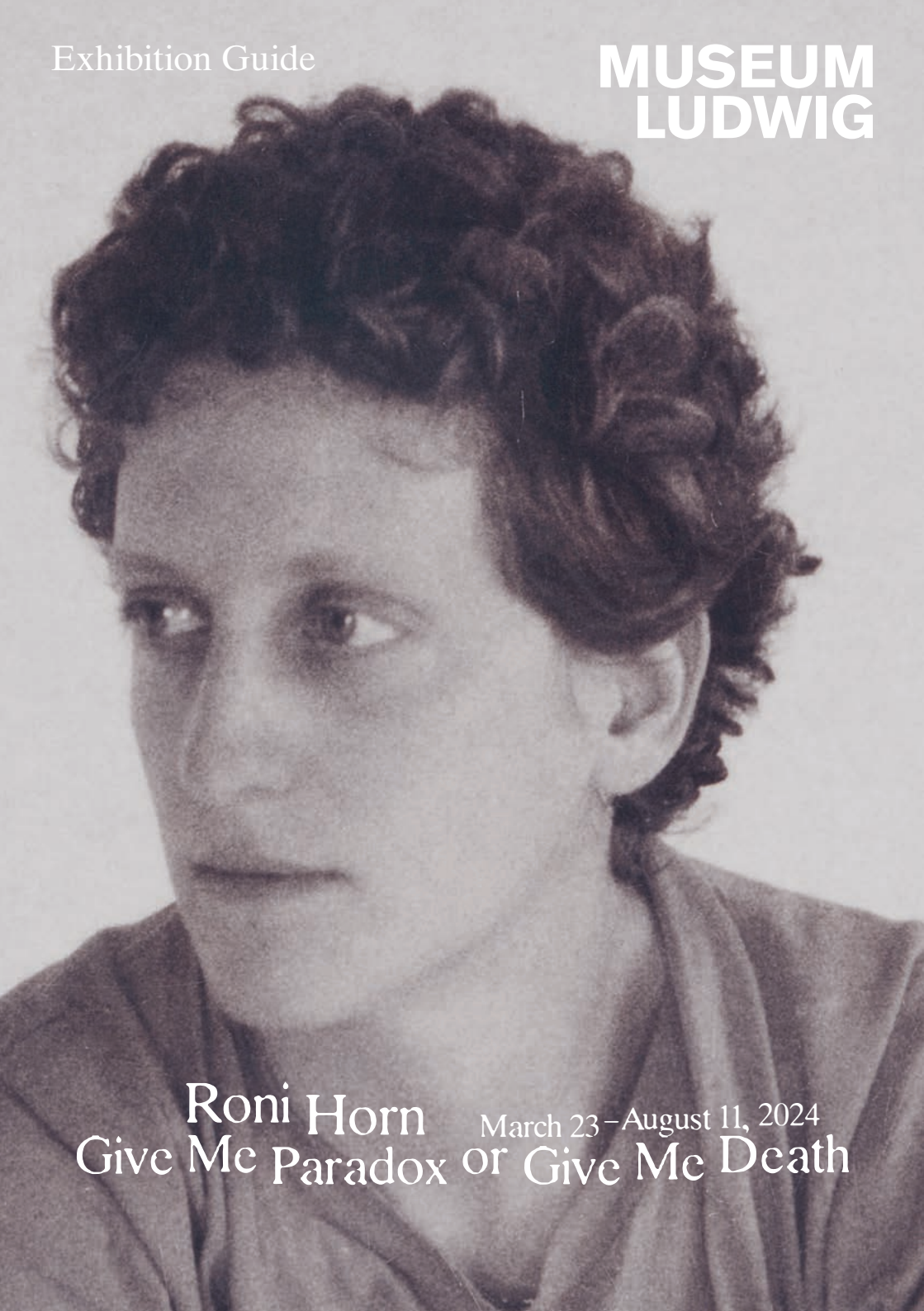


Exhibition Guide

MUSEUM
LUDWIG



Roni Horn
Give Me Paradox or Give Me Death

March 23 – August 11, 2024

Nature

“I’m not sure what I could do that wouldn’t be about the climate, one way or the other.”

—Roni Horn

Give Me Paradox or Give Me Death

The title of the exhibition is derived from a quote by Patrick Henry, an advocate for American independence in the eighteenth century, who concluded a speech with the words, “Give me liberty or give me death!” Roni Horn is more interested in the visual power of the quote than its original context; in her adaptation of the structure of Henry’s famous exclamation, she substitutes the word *paradox* for *liberty*, thus equating the meanings of both terms. For Horn, paradoxes are a way to access ambiguity, a quality in which things may contain their opposites.

“The truth, or the possibility of pure identity is utopic, it is not real.”
—Roni Horn

Identity

„My gender is nobody’s business. It’s something I became aware of as a child. I realized that social conventions were largely based on gender determination, and understood that it was something I couldn’t accept.”
—Roni Horn

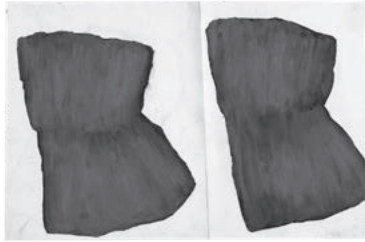
This is Me, This is You

This is Me, This is You consists of ninety-six photographic portraits that Horn took between 1997 and 2000 of her young niece Georgia Loy Horn. The work is installed in two panels of forty-eight photographs each, hung on facing walls. While at first glance it may seem the two panels are identical, they are complementary pieces, consisting of pairs of photographs that were taken a few seconds apart. The work is presented in such a way that the forty-eight pairs can never be seen simultaneously; the viewer's gaze wanders back and forth between the images presented opposite one another. Georgia's range of expressions is varied: she makes faces, adopts a quizzical expression, or looks thoughtful—surprisingly revealing the multifaceted personality of one individual who seems to embody a range of distinct moods and characters. Like several other works by Horn, this piece exists as both an installation and an artist's book.



This is Me, This is You, 1997–2000 (detail)
Mounted and framed C-prints
96 units, each 31.8 × 26 cm / 12 ½ × 10 ¼ in
Grid 1
Photo by Nic Tenwiggenhorn
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024

Drawings



Drawings by Roni Horn depicting abstract forms, often appearing in pairs or doubles, are one of the focuses of the exhibition in Cologne. Drawing has always been an integral part of Horn's work; the artist has compared drawing to breathing, signaling the importance they hold within her oeuvre.

Architect and artist Giorgio Vasari introduced the concept of *disegno* (drawing) in the sixteenth century. He recognized the special status of the drawing in European art theory, viewing drawing both as a technique and a manifestation of the “first idea,” or the overall concept. Horn, too, stresses the central position of the medium in her own practice, stating “the action of drawing, is fundamental to everything in my work. . . . I think of many of the activities in the studio as a form of drawing.”

In the exhibition at the Museum Ludwig, drawings and works on paper are used time and again to highlight specific aspects of Horn's practice. The first large gallery is divided into two spaces; the first presents drawings from the 1980s and 1990s, the second with drawings from 2007 to 2020. For all of these, Horn used pure pigments to capture abstract, partly geometric, partly amorphous shapes on paper. The red, grayish-blue, milky-white, or green forms come across as three-dimensional through the intensity of their colors and fascinate with their encrusted surfaces, which evoke the material's mineral origins. The works were developed by the artist in a number of phases. First, she made between two and four similar drawings—so-called plates. She then cut these up into several pieces and reassembled them so that additional structural

Hamilton Red, 1984–1985
Powdered pigment, graphite, charcoal, colored pencil, and varnish on paper
27.9 × 36.8 cm / 11 × 14 ½ in
Photo by Thomas Mueller

elements in the form of vertical or diagonal lines were created at the joints. The format and dimensions of each drawing developed as it was made. In order to record the various constellations that emerged during the process and their different connecting points, Horn added markings, usually in the form of words, especially on the very large drawings. The large-format drawings, for example, took months if not years to complete. The fine pencil drawings from the series *Untitled (Chambers St.)*, shown for the very first time in *Give Me Paradox or Give Me Death*, were also created over a period of years, between 1971 and 1989. Using thin, jittery lines, Horn created abstract, at times organic-looking forms, that give a sense of volume solely by means of grid structures and spatial foreshortening.



Both series of drawings reward a closer look. While the fine pencil drawings fascinate with their restraint and the delicacy of their strokes, the crusty surfaces of the pigment drawings capture our gaze. While in the smaller pigment drawings comparisons are often prompted by pairs or constellations of three, the all-over structure of the large formats robs the viewer of any clear orientation. Their motifs prompt numerous associations with nature, maps, or other micro or macro formations, but ultimately remain abstract.

Untitled (Chambers St.), 1978–1981
Pencil on paper
19.7 × 21.6 cm / 7 ¾ × 8 ½ in
Photo by Ron Amstutz

a.k.a.



For *a.k.a.*, Roni Horn created fifteen pairs using thirty portraits of herself from all periods of her life. One particularly impressive picture shows the artist with a long, reddish-brown mane of curls against a rocky landscape background. Horn combines it with a portrait of herself as a small child whose similarity to her niece Georgia (see *This is Me, This is You*) is particularly apparent. The abbreviation *a.k.a.* stands for “also known as.” In *a.k.a.* Horn reflects on depictions of gender fluidity, long before terms such as “genderqueer” or “nonbinary” entered public discourse. Horn’s (self-)portraits show a gender nonconforming person, without having to find a word to express this form of existence. The artist shows people as organisms in a constant state of transformation—or, in the artist’s own words, *a.k.a.* contains “the multitude in each of us.” Consequently, the plurality of identity is also reflected in the work’s title. As appearance changes, everything else can change as well. Similarly, external factors reveal little about what is going on inside an individual.

a.k.a., 2008–2009 (detail)
Pigment prints on paper
30 units, each 38.1 × 33 cm / 15 × 13 in
Photo by Stefan Altenburger

Soft Rubber Wedge

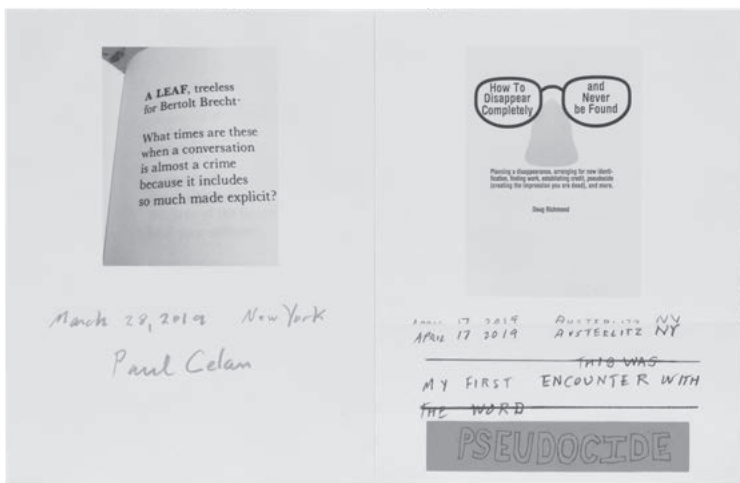
In the late 1970s Roni Horn created a series of sculptures using thin rubber mats that she placed directly on the floor. One of them, *Soft Rubber Wedge*, is displayed in one of the front rooms. The black rubber mat is several centimeters thick on one end and tapers out on the other end until it is so thin that the contours of the ground below are visible. Due to the heavy yet soft material, the surface where the sculpture sits is imprinted on the object, marking its history and creating an identity. In this piece, Horn takes up important characteristics of Minimalism, such as the singularity of materiality and the appearance of surfaces.



Soft Rubber Wedge, 1977
Soft black rubber
4.1 × 304.9 × 40.6 cm / 1 5/8 × 120 × 16 in
Photo by Stefan Altenburger

An elusive Red Figure darting about in the
Venetian darkness; a red dwarf
burning out beyond Saturn;
a nasty gang of runts in red snowsuits
acting out in a North American suburb;
an attractive young Italian
woman dressed in red is stalked by
a lesbian serial killer;
a village girl, the prettiest you can
imagine, in a red velvet hood cut from the
belly of a sleeping wolf ...

The fifty-six two-part pigment prints of the series *An elusive Red Figure* ... are a continuation of the work *LOG* (March 22, 2019–May 17, 2020), an installation composed of 406 drawings. *An elusive Red Figure* ... is a collection of outtakes from *LOG*, as well as original drawings which consist of a collection of quotes, collages, photographs, random comments, notes on news and weather reports, and original texts by the artist. The somnambulist events, photographs, and stories that Horn records in the journal-like entries of this work are frequently just as absurd, surreal, and nightmarish as the “red figure darting about in the Venetian darkness,” the “nasty gang of runts,” and the “lesbian serial killer” in the work’s title. Things she has seen and heard are combined into a humorous and bleak stream of consciousness that tells more about the artist’s sensitivity for all the nuances of everyday life than about the everyday events themselves. *An elusive Red Figure* ... can be interpreted as a self-portrait or a memento mori.



"A leaf, treeless..." • *Pseudocide*, 2022 (detail from *An elusive Red Figure* ..., Suite X)
Paired pigment print on paper
13 ⁷/₁₀ × 21 ³/₄ in
Photo by Tom Powell

Water

“Water is very elusive, it’s more a state of perpetual relation, it offers a complexity that defines identity as a much more open-ended thing. That carries over into all of my work.”

—Roni Horn

Still Water

(The River Thames, for Example)

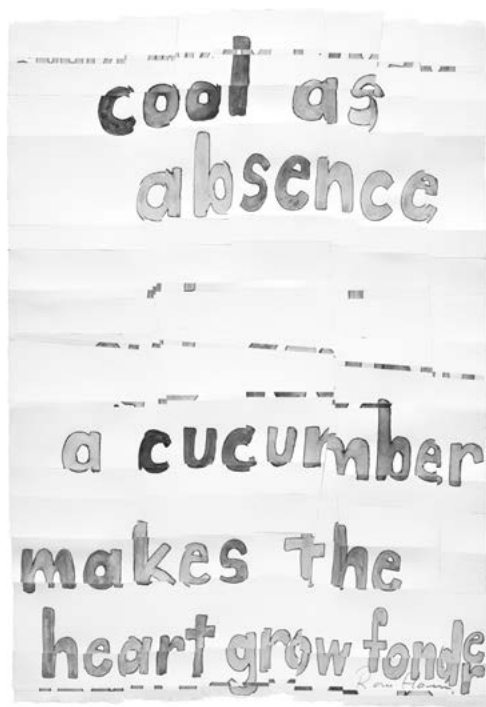
The fifteen-part photographic work *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* shows the surface of the river Thames in London. Roni Horn annotates the photographs, inserting footnotes describing the absurd, and often dark, stories of events that took place there, or making general reflections about people's relationship to water. The footnotes include quotes from pop songs, film, literature, poetry, and texts on suicide, for which the Thames is notorious. The photographs also reflect Horn's penchant for contradictions: the dark river is at once extremely threatening while remaining attractive. Although the movement of the water is frozen in the images, it is still tangible. Water, for Horn, is very hard to grasp; she sees the element as a condition of constant dependency and change. This can also be transferred to Horn's work as a whole. Both topics are united in her statement, "The opacity of the world dissolves in water."



Still Water (The River Thames, for Example), 1999 (detail)
Framed photographs and text on paper
15 units, each 77.5 × 104.5 cm / 30 ½ × 41 ½ in
Photo by Ron Amstutz

Hack Wit

The title *Hack Wit* combines the ambiguous term *to hack*, which means “to chop up” or “to break into a system,” and *wit*, which means “acumen” or “intellect.” In this series, Horn combines two clichés or idioms to create a new expression, cutting drawings into four or more parts and reassembling them like a puzzle. When you read the sentences, you initially feel like you have heard part of the expression before or recognize its original meaning. When you look more closely, you realize they are humorous and bizarre neologisms that playfully deviate from the original meanings. In the wave-shaped arrangement of the sentences, the rise and fall of the individual words seems to set the sayings on paper into motion, imitating the melody of speaking.



Hack Wit—cucumber heart, 2014
Watercolor, pen, ink, gum arabic, and cellophane tape on paper
57.2 × 38.7 cm / 22 1/2 × 15 1/4 in
Photo by Genevieve Hanson

Untitled

(“The tiniest piece of mirror
is always the whole mirror.”)



Untitled (“*The tiniest piece of mirror is always the whole mirror.*”) consists of ten round, semitransparent glass sculptures that are playfully distributed in the exhibition space. The work borrows its title from a line in Ukrainian-born Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s book *Água Viva*.

At first glance, the tops of the colorful objects appear to be water on the verge of spilling over the edge of a basin. This initial judgement could have something to do with the process of producing glass, which involves a liquid hardening into a solid. While the top surfaces of the glass objects are transparent, the bottoms and sides are opaque.

Light plays a key role in the physical encounter with these works; as the viewer circumnavigates each object, the natural light in the space bounces off its top, adding an element of movement to them. And indeed, the impeccably smooth top surfaces of the glass sculptures transforms into a sort of infinite mirror in which the complex interplay between the inside of the sculpture and the surrounding room is activated.

Untitled (“*The tiniest piece of mirror is always the whole mirror.*”), 2022
Solid cast glass with as-cast surfaces
10 units, each 11 × Ø 48 in
Installation view, Centro Botín, Santander, Spain, 2023
Photo by Stefan Altenburger



Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert)

The photographs in the series *Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert)* were created in collaboration with French actress Isabelle Huppert. Roni Horn asked Huppert to impersonate herself playing characters from some of her earlier roles. Horn photographed the actress's face and created twenty sequences of five pictures each. Both versions of the work are installed to form a frieze that wraps around the room with one hundred portraits of the actress, seen expressing a myriad of emotions. As Huppert moves from one role to the next, she repeatedly thwarts any attempt to categorize or grasp her identity, revealing that while identity is legible, it is paradoxically open and impossible to define. The differences between the individual photographs and facial expresses are minimal, enriching the language they speak, which in Horn's opinion captivates viewers through doubt and ambiguity.

Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert), v. 1, 2005–2006 (detail)
Mounted and framed C-prints
50 units, each 38.1 × 31.8 cm / 15 × 12 ½ in
Photo by Doug Parker

No. 859, A DOUBT IF IT BE US No. 1027, MY HEART UPON A LITTLE PLATE

At the end of the exhibition, Roni Horn's interest in language, literature, and poetry intersect in works from the series *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes*. Here, Horn brings poems by Emily Dickinson into the three-dimensional world. The multi-part works in this series reproduce various poems by Dickinson in their entirety; each line of the poem is cast in black plastic and embedded into an aluminum column. On certain sides of each column, the text is entirely legible, whereas on others the words vanish and morph into abstract lines.

The presence of Dickinson's poetry in numerous sculptural compositions by Horn emphasizes a different form of doubling. Dickinson, who was born in New England in 1830, is a key figure for Horn. Although she wrote over 1,800 poems, Dickinson chose not to publish them, living as a recluse and limiting her social life to only a few contacts. Her only interaction with the outside world was through the books in her father's library and her extensive correspondence.



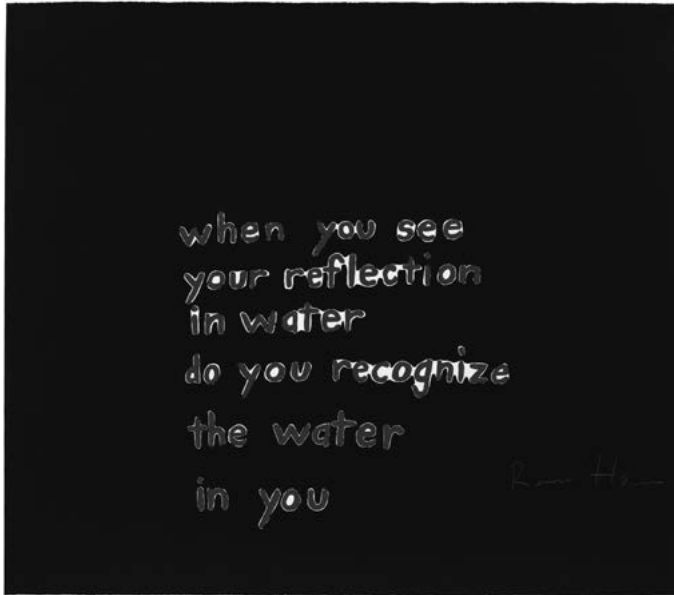
When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes: No. 859, A DOUBT IF IT BE US, 1993/2007
Solid cast plastic and aluminum
8 units, variable lengths: 90.2–162.6 × 5.1 × 5.1 cm / 35 ½–64 × 2 × 2 in
Photo by Genevieve Hanson

Language

“In general language is an important part of my way in the world. Its presence in my life and work is largely cultural. That is, coming from a secular Jewish family, language, education, and learning were all essential and highly valued. So I think this way of working, the incorporation of language throughout the work is natural to me.”

—Roni Horn

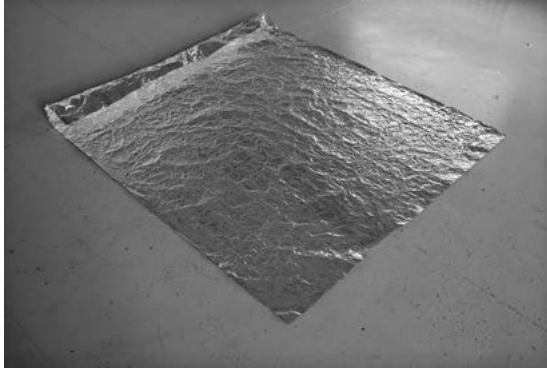
Gurgle, sucks, echoes



The wordplay in the series of gouache works entitled *Gurgle, sucks, echoes* are not mere visualizations of word content or the meaning of the words. Instead, questions such as “When You See Your Reflection in Water Do You Recognize the Water in You?” or exclamations such as “No pronouns” are to be understood as thoughts and memories that Horn gives form to, enabling her to anchor them in her work.

In addition to handling topics that the artist explores and those that motivate her, stories taken out of context such as the short story *An old woman who ...* play a role. Typography reminiscent of printed handwriting, with bright letters that are loosely distributed against a dark background, lends a rhythmic element to the work.

Gold Field

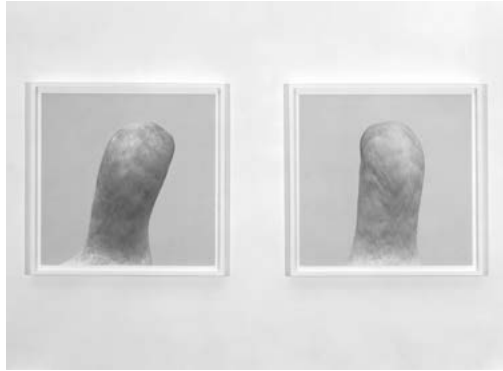


In *Gold Field*, the warm luster of the material draws the observer's attention to the floor.

The sculpture consists of an extremely thin sheet of 99.99-percent pure gold. When she was a child, Roni Horn spent a lot of time in her father's pawnshop, where she was mesmerized by the durability and absolute purity of gold. The jewelry and coins that she encountered in the shop were fraught with connotations. However, in her work the artist treats gold quite differently. She allows the material to assert its sheer spatial presence, opening it to the experiences of individual visitors. The meaning develops in the encounter itself. *Gold Field* also marks the beginning of Horn's friendship and artistic exchange with artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres that lasted until his death in 1996. Gonzalez-Torres encountered this work in 1990 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and was deeply touched. At the time, his partner Ross Laycock was dying of AIDS, and the political and social situation for marginalized groups gave little reason for hope. *Gold Field* represented a shimmer of hope for Gonzalez-Torres, which he described as "a new landscape, a possible horizon, a place of rest and absolute beauty."

Gold Field, 1980/1994
99.99% (4–9 pure) gold foil
0.002 × 124.5 × 152.4 cm / 0.0008 × 49 × 60 in
Photographer unknown

bird



Toward the end of the exhibition, the pairs that are so typical in Roni Horn's work come up again in the series *bird*. Twenty photographs show the heads of ten pairs of taxidermied wild birds from Iceland seen from behind against a white background. Despite the singular form of the title (*bird*), the birds of this series are presented as two-part works, or diptychs.

The composition is reminiscent of studio portraits. The heads of the birds seem at once sculptural and natural. In the artist's book of the series, Philip Larratt-Smith cites the definition of *bird* from the *Dictionary of American Slang*: “

1. A person of either sex, usually a man and often elderly ...
2. Somebody or something excellent ...
3. A young woman ...
4. An odd, unusual person ...
5. A male homosexual.”

Even without knowledge of the nuances of slang, the images seem sexualized, but no less humorous. Birds are a symbol of freedom and represent the element of air like no other animal. Horn's use of comparisons, analogies, and cross-references requires viewers to carefully examine this series.

Program

Thu, April 4, 2024, 6 pm *Late Night Thursday*

Lecture and talk with [OHNE PRONOMEN]

Tue, April 23, 2024, 6 pm *KunstBewusst*

Keynote lectures on Roni Horn followed by a discussion with Petra Roettig and Philipp Hindahl (in German)

Art education

Every Saturday 3 pm *Public tours* (in German)

Every Sunday 2 – 5 pm *Kunst:Dialoge* (in German and English)

Every Sunday 11:30 am – 5:30 pm *Open studio*

A bilingual catalogue in German and English with texts by Yilmaz Dziewior, Zoë Lescaze, Andrew Maerkle, Isabel de Naverán, and Kerstin Stakemeier will be published by Steidl.

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#MLxRoniHorn



Roni Horn, *a.k.a.*, 2008–2009, details

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