

Tanja Boukal

Body of Work 2002–2009

2 Tanja Boukal
Body of Work 2002–2009

Hanging by a Thread
Off Shore
Rewind: Obersalzberg
Rewind: Pablo's Portrait
Abandoned
White Dreams
Where Your Feet Are Standing, ...
For Sale
Zoom Up
Inner Security
Handmade
Let's Make Money
Better Houses
Basel_back
Fraction
Ego is(t)
Market Value

»Vanitas«

Tanja Boukal – Body of Work 2002–2009

4

I have known Tanja Boukal for 10 years now and have had the chance to follow her artistic development within this decade. I was able to observe how she treats new materials which topics are of interest to her the most and in which works they find their way, which materials are used for which topic and in which manner the works are presented. Tanja Boukal does not take the easy way out – the topics she favors are politically explosive. In her choice of material she often not only meets the boundaries of what is possible and those of physical exhaustion, but also those between what is considered traditional and unconventional. Past and present, stone and photography, pixel and stitching images, white and colored – the row could be pursued almost endlessly. Tanja Boukal

loves juxtapositions, the seemingly incompatible. She puzzles over ways of expression which cause astonishment and enable new parameters of perception. Consciously or not, in her latest works Tanja Boukal concerns herself with the phenomenon of time, its diverse appearance, its perception and its fugaciousness. Even though her works do not include classic elements referring to vanitas, the impermanence of human life, luck, success, but also of hope are present again and again. »Off Shore« does not show media images of desperate fugitives, but presents their life threatening situation using little ships made from papier mâché. In the truest sense of the word they “dangle on a string” as do the lives of the fugitives who gave theirs into the hands of ruthless human

traffickers. The white paper ships are as anonymous as their human “freight”. Title and date inside of them are the subtle evidence of the fates of boat people from different origins – 28 ships stand for 28 newspaper articles published within a month. Also the lives of those people who are depicted by Tanja Boukal in her correspondent series of cross stitch images are »Hanging by a Thread« based on media images which we have seen, but noticed only for a short time and forgotten at once ourselves when paging through a newspaper. Tanja Boukal has stitched them pixel by pixel and thus tried to express their anxiety through the time this took. Another pair is formed by the two series »Rewind: Obersalzberg« and »Rewind: Pablo's Portrait«. Buildings steeped in history owned by autocratic and power-hungry

men have been photographed by Tanja Boukal and reworked digitally more or less subtle to revive them and bring back the “good ol’ times”. The buildings, their walls, stones, remainders seem to project what they once got to see: On pieces of shale from the Obersalzberg Adolf Hitler appears as carefree in his private ambience as do the tourists which only receive little information about the history and meaning of the “Eagle’s Nest”. The current ambience of the destination seems to keep up the propaganda of its former proprietors – a seemingly innocent recreation area developed by forced laborers. The transience of wealth and power is also present in the photographs of Pablo Escobar’s finca in Columbia. Tanja Boukal uses old enamel plates to “promote” the former gorgeous residence

and revives it in inconsiderable details. Also here “El Patrón” is still present, his ruinous estate in Columbia being a site of pilgrimage as well as Hitler’s hideaway on the Obersalzberg. Another hulk whose political importance is not evident at first site is the former touristic complex of Ville de Lago Epecúen in Argentina. In Tanja Boukal’s installation the photographs are mounted on veils and thus the complex appears like a ghost town. »Abandoned«- the title says it all: Abandoned by the people which once were abandoned by the politicians and their decision, only the knowledge of the whole story makes it possible to give the feeling of the old glamour of the complex. Time has not only turned the buildings into ruins but also made them visible again. In all of Tanja Boukal’s work the color white plays a superior

role. The color white does not only suggest innocence, cleanliness or perfection but also timelessness. White cannot be classified, includes all colors. In the boxes called »White Dreams« which look like doll houses the artist stages the questioning of personal freedom which is only offered to us seemingly and in whose name a number of social constraints find their way into our individuality. Time stands still and thus lifts the images from a present time to a time vacuum. Only the self-portrait of the artist in the fifth box is colored – a sign for transience and presence. Tanja Boukal also seems to be present in her work »Where Your Feet Are Standing, Is the Center of the World«: a white cast of the artist’s feet – hollow, made from papier mâché – does not only make the artist, present through her feet, to the center of

what's happening, but also her world respectively and puts the (spatial) perception of the world into perspective. Dream and reality, space and time, individual and mass – these juxtapositions also come up in the works in which Tanja Boukal uses toy babies as subjects: they symbolize innocence and airiness as well as vulnerability and tractability. As a mass they become human lemmings (»Zoom Up« / »Inner Security«), try to break free from given tracks or become cloned objects of commerce (»For Sale«). The original is no longer visible; the crocheted giant baby (»Handmade«) reproduces itself as does the artist in her auto-portraits. Original or industry? Individual item or mass? White innocence or timeless clone? Where is the presence in this utopia? While there have been perfect clones, countless baby heads

polished by hand in the older works, now, for some years, there are knitted (or stitched) images which are produced in a time-consuming manner and not only ask for the artist's talent but also her patience. »Let's Make Money« almost became a symbol in this context: planned as a single piece it was highly demanded at an art fair and thus made into a series. *Nomen est omen*. The velocity of the production could not keep up with the velocity of the demand of the art market. The transience of wealth, fame and social presence is evident in »Better Houses«. The installation is composed of knitted wool blankets. They suggest security, offer the feeling of warmth and see to feel at home. The positive feeling, the familiarity with this everyday object is interrupted abruptly as soon as the spectator recognizes the

subject: images of homeless people. They are people lacking every sense of feeling of warmth, a social system in which they would be in good hands. Tanja Boukal has taken photographs of these people and transferred them onto the knitted blankets. Hence the exhibition space indirectly becomes a shelter for homeless; the visitors are confronted with a social sculpture without people. The immediate transfer of the subject enables a direct confrontation; the material and the format are enough of a symbol. »Basel_back«, »Fraction«, »Ego is(t)« und »Market Value« are works in which Tanja Boukal explicitly explores her own body. She does not only use it as an physiognomic object of studies, but also puts it into the conceptual center of numerous works. On the one hand the artist wants

to express (social) forces, concepts and expectations of people in general and herself as an artist in particular, on the other hand she points out the role of women in society: "Self-portraits shed light on the time and the society which are reflected alike in the process of production and promote aspects of the image of the artist, his role and tasks." (Elisabeth Hartung) Again and again Tanja Boukal dismembers her own body and puts it together again. The topic cumulates in the installation »Ego is(t)«: the exact cast of her body, fractured and sectional like a mannequin remains a fragment. The single body pieces are not completed to form a whole but seem to be piled upon each other randomly. Disruption through inner and outer conflicts cannot harm Tanja Boukal – the head

remains raised, supported by a hand, and looks into the dark with vivid eyes. Again the thought of vanitas is present while the artist tries to counteract. Man fights against oblivion, against transience, against time. Tanja Boukal's work adds to it by making this fight visible, questioning his mechanisms thus securing herself a place in the game of life.



HANGING BY A THREAD

12 stiched pictures, 25 x 25 cm each, Vienna, 2008-2010



10 HANGING BY A THREAD

12 stiched pictures, 25 x 25 cm each, Vienna, 2008-2010

Glimpse at newspaper clippings – We have enough problems of our own.

Glimpse at newspaper clippings – stitched pixel by pixel – despair expressed in time.



11





Off Shore

28 pieces, 21 x 5 x 5 cm each, papermaché, Vienna, 2008

Als tote Flüchtlinge vor türkischer Küste -
Agas wird zum Meer des Todes (14.12.2007)



28 minutes of music 14.0000

28 minutes of music 14.0000
28 minutes of music 14.0000

Off Shore

28 pieces, 21 x 5 x 5 cm each, papermaché, Vienna, 2008

14

**Headlines from Newspapers
in December 2007**

83 corps repêchés en une année
Plus de 1500 harraga arrêtés
(31/12/07)

One dead, several missing in
migrant boat accident in Turkey
(28/12/07)

Fallece en Ceuta un inmigrante
marroquí al intentar trepar a un
barco (28/12/07)

Death toll reaches 51 in illegal
migrant tragedy in Seferihisar
(26/12/07)

Griechenland auf der Suche
nach 31 Vermissten (25/12/07)

Coast guard looking for survivors
from possible wrecked migrant
boat (24/12/07)

Death toll rises to 8 (19/12/07)

Another migrant disaster in
Bodrum: Seven dead, one missing
(18/12/07)

1400 Flüchtlinge sind 2007 im
Golf von Aden ertrunken
(18/12/07)

In einer Woche mehr als 200
Flüchtlinge vermutlich ertrunken
(17/12/07)

29 immigrants still missing (14/12/07)

Oran 19 harraga marocains
secourus, 3 morts (12/12/07)

43 tote Flüchtlinge vor türkischer
Küste - Ägäis wird zum Meer des
Todes (12/12/2007)

Über 100 Tote bei Schiffstragödien
mit Flüchtlingen (10/12/2007)

Bouzedjar Dix autres harraga
secourus, un corps repêché
(10/12/2007)

Flüchtlingsboot sinkt bei Izmir
mit um die 50 Toten (10/12/2007)

Partie de la Casamance avec 130
clandestins à Bord : Une pirogue
échoue à Yoff avec 1 mort et 14
blessés graves (10/12/2007)

Una patera con 50 inmigrantes
naufraga en aguas marroquíes
(10/12/2007)

Llega a El Hierro un cayuco con 80
inmigrantes, uno de ellos muerto
(9/12/2007)

8 Tote bei Flüchtlingsdrama
(8/12/2007)

Teneriffa - Flüchtling stirbt nach
Überfahrt (7/12/2007)

Τραγωδία με παράνομους μετανάστες
στην ανατολική Κρήτη (6/12/2007)

10 Tote bei Flüchtlings-
Rettungsaktion vor Spanien
(6/12/2007)

Tres inmigrantes muertos entre
los 91 que han llegado esta
noche en dos cayucos a Tenerife
(6/12/2007)

Au moins deux clandestins
morts après une collision avec
un bateau de la police française
(4/12/2007)

Trois opérations de sauvetage
au large de Mostaganem 23
harraga sauvés, 11 portés
disparus et un corps repêché
(4/12/2007)

Drei Tote Flüchtlinge vor den
Kanaren (3/12/2007)

Rescatado un cayuco con 48
africanos y dos cadáveres sin
rumbo en el mar (1/12/2007)



Rewind: Obersalzberg

8 pieces, different sizes, photo transfer on stone, Vienna, 2008–2009

16





18

Rewind: Obersalzberg

8 pieces, different sizes, photo transfer on stone, Vienna, 2008–2009

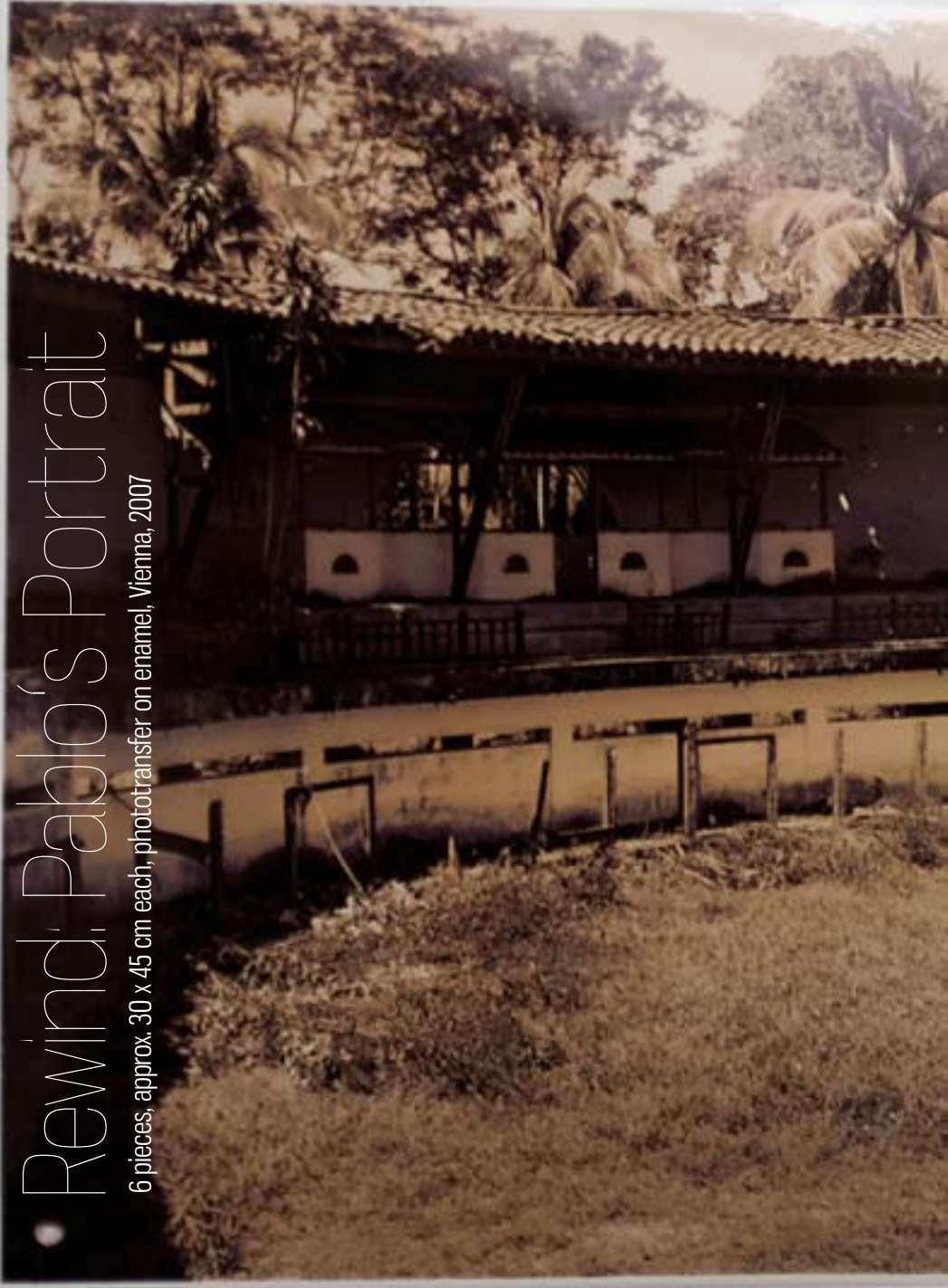
Once the center of private self-manifestation of high-rank nazis,
since the end of the war, people in the area try to white wash this historical place.
New promenades, a golf course, an observation tower
and a luxury hotel cannot hide the facts of history.

The propaganda has been engraved deeply in those walls.



• Rewind: Pablo's Portrait

6 pieces, approx. 30 x 45 cm each, phototransfer on enamel, Vienna, 2007





22 Rewind: Pablo's Portrait

6 pieces, approx. 30 x 45 cm each, phototransfer on enamel, Vienna, 2007

Pablo Escobar is one of the most well known Colombians, even if he is dead since years. He was hated by his enemies within the Colombian state machinery, itself massively linked to drug syndicates – but not the Escobar one. On the other hand he was – and still is – admired by many normal Colombians for his social commitment: building schools and hospitals and creating „jobs“ in Colombia's most successful industry.

Pablo Escobar himself lived in enormous luxury. Within these ruins of a once outstanding finca, the spirit of a weird genius, that proved that a man stays a child all live long, is still around.

The photographs of the original site were enhanced with flashes of the presence, both in a matter of time and in a physical matter. The photographs are presented as prints on enamel in a very old-fashioned way, but produced with the most modern printing technology. This underlines the contradictory correlation of presence and past.

Do you see Pablo's daughter playing in the Jurassic park or just a concrete dinosaur fading away?



23







Abandoned

21 pieces, 100 x 400 cm each, C-Prints on banners, Vienna, 2009

26 Abandoned

21 pieces, 100 x 400 cm each, C-Prints on banners, Vienna, 2009

In November 1985 the water of the Lago Epecuén in Argentina flooded it's shores and destroyed the tourist town of Villa de Lago Epecuén. Because of the waters high concentration of sulphur and salt, life ceased for decades in the flooded areas. It was not a natural disaster, it was caused by human beings. Despite the warnings of the local people, who predicted the catastrophe years before, the politicians did nothing about the problem. The people simply were left alone with it. The photos of the ruins are printed on banners, they are floated dimly as the reminiscences of the real Villa de Lago Epecuén live on only as fractions in the memories of those, who abandoned it 25 years ago.







White Dreams

5 parts, 60 x 29,5 x 22 cm each, wood, plastics, Barcelona / Vienna, 2004–2006

White Dreams

5 parts, 60 x 29,5 x 22 cm each, wood, plastics, Barcelona / Vienna, 2004–2006

30

Freedom! That's the dictum of neoliberalism, since it started its triumphal procession around the world. The historic sisters of freedom, equality and fraternity, were snatched away from it – collectivity and solidarity became unwanted limitations of competition. Taken out of its historical context, freedom means not much more than the freedom, to wage wars in its name (if you're strong enough), to choose you're insurance (if you can afford it) or to try your luck as one-man-enterprise. With a serious cost-benefit calculation the most creative blacksmith will securely find his fortune ... planned individually and not touched by social or political circumstances. In this new „free“ world most of us search for their fortune within a private ideal world, created through consumption. This retreat into the private creates idylls, where the „little“

joys of everyday life can be enjoyed. But these idylls are fragile. Neither the reduction to bourgeois tightness and inwardness nor the nostalgic reference to tradition are able to give back the lost security and self-esteem.

Behind the comfortable life hides uneasiness. In the end it won't be easy to cover the contradiction between ideal and reality. I develop my work along these break lines.

„In a certain way doll's houses reflect the moral attitudes and the military ambitions of a distinct epoch ... only at the surface they are toys, but in a deeper sense they are representatives of their times.“

(Jo Elisabeth Gerken)

My installation consists of several „dollhouses“. These showcases – a form of presentation, which arose in the „Biedermeier“ – keep the ideal within a frame. To hold up the order – even within

this small framework – is only possible with ignorance and self-delusion. The remuneration for this is the utopia, having „accomplished“ something. This idyll palls completely, if all colour is taken away, like freedom without its sisters. White in white, ideal, clean, aseptically. In the end „free“ of colour, variety, life – and „free“ of utopia and dreams.





Where Your
Feet Are Standing,
is the
Center of the World

various sizes, papermaché, Vienna, 2008



33



8 416400 510216

For Sale

various sizes, paper, Barcelona / Vienna, 2004–2006





For Sale

various sizes, paper, Barcelona / Vienna, 2004–2006

Single copies, thousandfold.
meaningless, essential?
Industry.

Recopied, genuine.
Meaningful, dispensable?
Art.



Inner Security

79 x 79 cm, Mixed Media, Vienna, 2003





Zoom Up

79 x 79 cm, Mixed Media, Vienna, 2003



40 Handmade

thread, Vienna, 2007





42 Let's Make Money

56 x 75 cm, wool, knitting needles, sewacryl, Vienna, 2009



43





Better Houses

5 knitted blankets, 100 x 160 cm each, 1 pillow 40 x 60 cm, thread, Vienna, 2007–2008



Better Houses

47

5 knitted blankets, 100 x 160 cm each, 1 pillow 40 x 60 cm, thread, Vienna, 2007–2008



Social sculpture without human beings. Intervention without interference.
Depressing. Beautiful. Or not?



48 Basel_back

420 x 130 cm, wool, Vienna, 2009



50 Fraction

98 x 132 cm, body cast, wooden boxes, silicon, Salzburg, 2002

Fractions of me ...

forced into conceptions and expectations ...

30 x 30 cm scope.



52

Ego is(t)

150 x 120 cm, Installation, Vienna, 2007

Nothing is for sure, but everything is possible
Nothing is possible, but everything is for sure.
Being determines consciousness.
It is inevitable to comply to images.
It is inevitable not to become a stereotype.
It is inevitable to demonstrate initiative.
It is inevitable to assimilate.
It is? ... Ego is(t)!





53

54 Market Value

90 x 72 x 45 cm, epoxy, colour copies, Vienna, 2003

75 Euro ...

my market value ...

... investigated in the red light district of Vienna.





55

Tanja Boukal

born 1976 – lives, thinks and works in Vienna, Austria

Studies

1995 – 1999 **Stage Design** by Jitka Plesz, Wiener Kunstschule, Vienna

1999 – 2002 **Various classes** by Barbara Fuchs, Tone Fink, Jean Silverthorne, Nancy Davidson, Paloma Navares, Wolfram Kastner and Frieda Baranek, International Summeracademy for Fine Arts, Salzburg

Group Exhibitions & Projects (Compendium)

2001 & 2005 **Fotonoviembre**, 6th / 8th International Biennale of Photography, Teneriffa, Canary Islands

2002 **Spazialità condivisa** (Divided Space) at Centro d'Arte Puccini, Florence, Italy

2003 **all about: female sex** at Galerie Academia, Salzburg

2004 **Collection Piramidon** at Piramidon, Barcelona, Catalunya

2004 **emBODYment** at Rathaus, Mainz, Germany

2005 **Heima®t** (Homeland/Art) at Deutschvilla, Strobl am Wolfgangsee

2006 – 2007 **Industry, Paper, Art** at Papiermuseum, Steyrermühl and at Stadtmuseum, Deggendorf

2008 **Qui vive?** Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Moscow, Russia

Individual Exhibitions (Compendium)

2001 **Superficial View** at Galerie Celeste, Vienna

2003 **self[?]secure** at Galerie Vernissage, Vienna

2005 **Selected Works** at Galerie Ephram, Mikulov, Czech Republic

2007 **The Necessity to Have Eyes at the Back of the Head** at the Deutschvilla, Strobl

2008 **Where Your Feet Are Standing....** at Galerie Peithner-Lichtenfels, Vienna

Art Fairs

2008 **Art.Fair 21** represented by Galerie Peithner-Lichtenfels, Cologne, Germany

2008 **Scope Miami** represented by Galerie Peithner-Lichtenfels, Miami, USA

2009 **Scope New York** represented by Galerie Peithner-Lichtenfels, New York, USA

2009 **Scope Basel** represented by Galerie Peithner-Lichtenfels, Basel, Switzerland

2010 **Arte Fiera** represented by Galerie Peithner-Lichtenfels, Bologna, Italy

Scholarships & Studio Projects

2002 Scholarship of the International Summeracademy for Fine Arts, Salzburg

2003–2004 Artist in Residence at Centre d'Arte Contemporani Piramidon, Barcelona, Catalunya

Catalogues & Publications

2001 **Saison 2000/2001** Galerie im Alcatraz, Hallein, Austria

2001 **Fotonoviembre** 6th International Biennale of Photography, Teneriffa, Canary Islands

2003 **all about: female sex** Galerie Academia, Salzburg

2005 **Fotonoviembre** 8th International Biennale of Photography, Teneriffa, Canary Islands

2005 **Heima®t** Tina Teufel, Salzburg

2006 **Industry–Paper–Art** IAPMA

2007 **Works** Catalogue for the exhibition at Deutschvilla, Strobl

2008 **Works** re-edited Catalogue for the exhibition at Galerie Peithner-Lichtenfels, Vienna