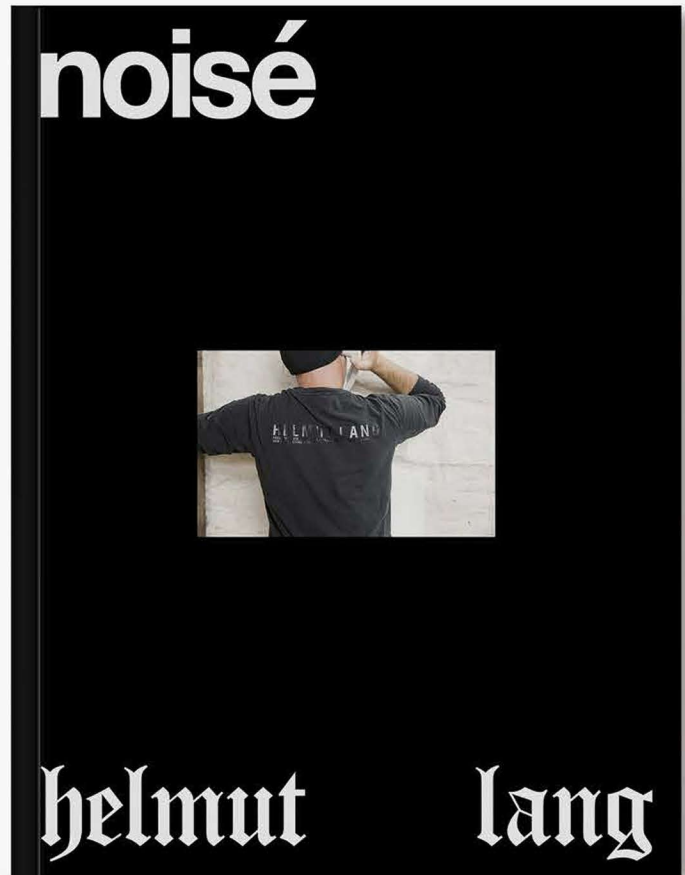
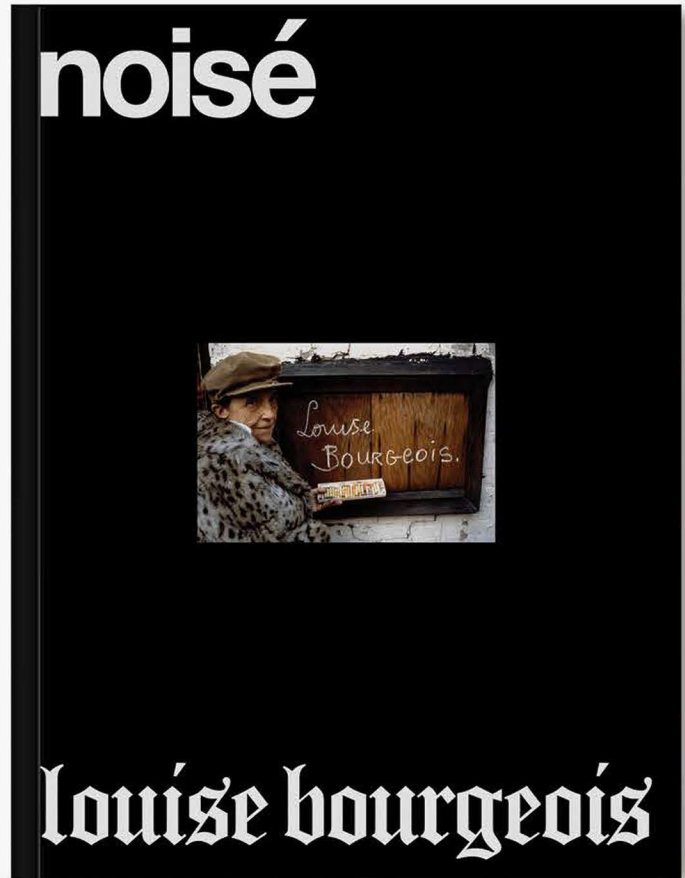
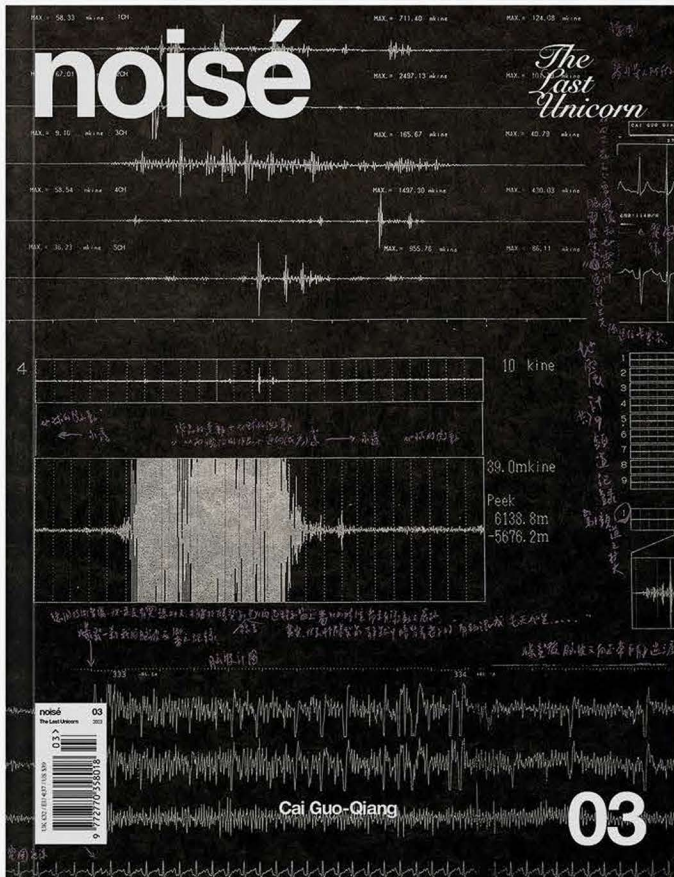


Limited Edition With Two Special Supplements Featuring Artists

louise bourgeois & helmut lang

272 + 64 + 64 pages, exclusive interviews and unpublished images inside



noisé



helmut

lang

**THREE
ONE
ZERO**

helmut lang



— Cities — Stages



ST (Tang Siyu): You've mentioned experiencing two major displacements early in your life, due to your parents' divorce and moving in with your father and stepmother. Can you share some memories from your childhood in Austria?

HL (Helmut Lang): In retrospect, my first displacement was probably a fortunate one—the love of my grandparents and a childhood spent in a high rural mountain valley in untouched nature was strongly formative in a positive way. My perception of it has always been good until recently, when I realized that when displaced in a rural area, it takes a long time to be accepted by the native population of a small village. My grandparents were poor refugees and were dealing with their integration into a new community and struggling to be accepted. Maybe the romantic view I always had was a partial experience and I blocked the hardship out as a temporary protection.

My second displacement—being forced to live with my father, whom I did not know, and a stepmother who did not want me—was traumatic, to say the least, and a repeat of the process of being forced to integrate with all its implications. Unwanted displacements are challenges that can destroy you, or in my case, push you to try hard to gain some reasonable control over your life and strive for a better way forward.

I moved out from home on my eighteenth birthday, the legal age one can do so in Austria. That's when I moved to the center of Vienna, where another world was unfolding for me and I was hoping to be accepted for who I was and not where I came from.

ST: These early experiences were clearly significant, albeit challenging. How have they influenced your creative vision?

This page: Helmut Lang photographed in Vienna, 1992. Photo: © Elfie Semotan.

Right page: Helmut Lang, MRHL_Passport_2_007 / MRHL_Passport_2_006, ongoing, studies for an installation. Courtesy of the artist.

HL: Growing up under simple circumstances and understanding that they're broken up by ornamental events made an imprint on me as a child and it is something I still use.

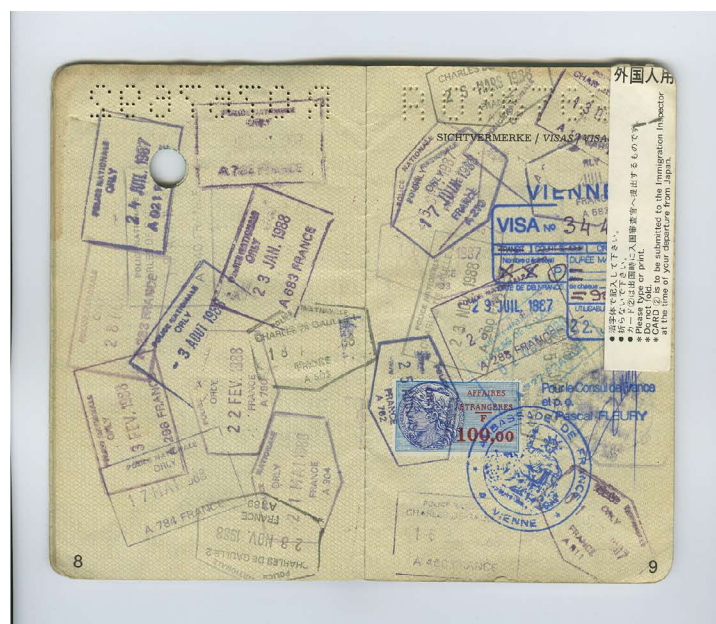
We are the sum of our lives, and all experiences—real or perceived—were important for me to become what I am today and shaped me into a survivor and someone who will not give up. They gave me the tools to create my own world and share it with others.

There is a metaphor that describes one's life as a circle that is laid out from the beginning, and as you go through phases and spirals, we view the same circumstances from different angles.

ST: How has your Eastern European heritage and life in Austria shaped your views on complexity and simplicity?

HL: Coming from a cross-cultural Eastern European family, I never felt typically Austrian. Early on, I realized that simplicity hardly exists in Austria or anywhere. It's often complicated and sometimes enjoyable because of that. If you want to romanticize, you could assume complexity, but that does not apply often.

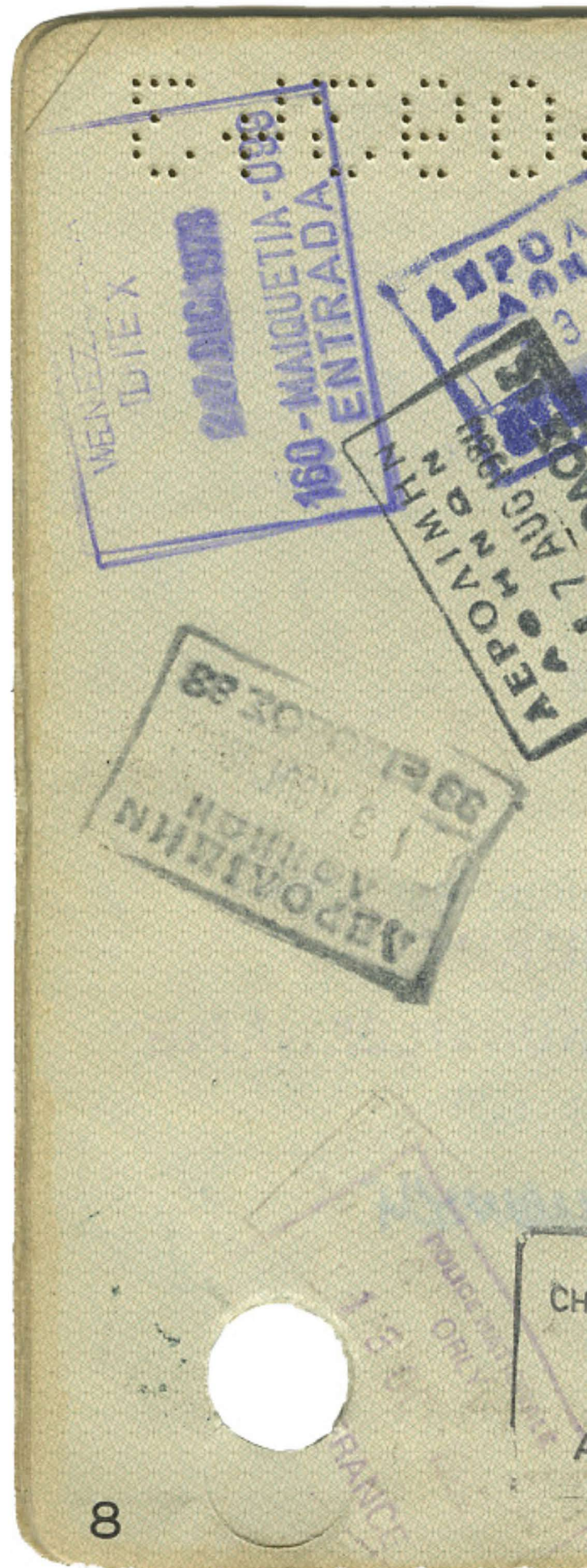
In Austria there is a preoccupation with mortality, a lustful relationship with tension or curbed desire. Freud has much explored but there is much more beneath the surface. Personally, I believe that outstanding efforts for the best or the worst are made by individuals due to their personal circumstances and their ability to deal with them regardless of nationality. It is perhaps not without irony that a Pope declared Austria “the island of the blessed,” while many Austrian artists satirically think it is hell on earth and a haven for ignorance and the bourgeois, at least back then.



The touristic view of Austria is rather the one of the Austrian Empire before WWII, and on the surface, that is not wrong. Around 1900, everything came together at the right moment and the fin de siècle Vienna turned into a creative laboratory for new concepts and ideas in art and design, architecture, literature, theater, music, philosophy, science, and medicine, including the birthplace of psychoanalysis. Nowadays, Vienna is regarded as a birthplace of concepts for the modern world.

The 1930s brought an exodus of the Austrian intellectuals and creatives, and the nation never really recovered from this massive drain and cultural freeze that gripped the spirit of postwar Vienna.

The potential of utter darkness, backwardness, and amiable provinciality eventually became fertile ground for Viennese Actionism in the 1960s, and simultaneously, the emergence of isolated artists who would go on to become dominant figures in the arts, gaining worldwide recognition and influence.



Helmut Lang, MRHL_Passport_3_004 / MRHL_Passport_1_006, ongoing, studies for an installation. Courtesy of the artist.

SICHTVERMERKE / VISAS / VISAS

ΑΕΡΟΔΡΟΜΟΝ
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POLICE AIR FRONTIERES
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POLICE NATIONALE
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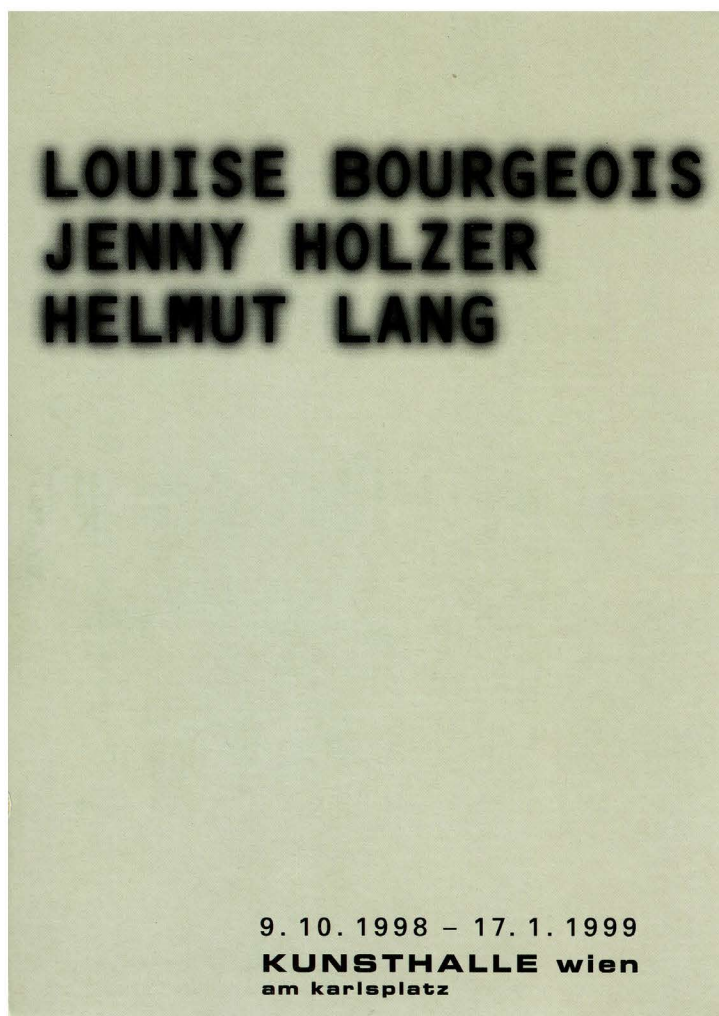
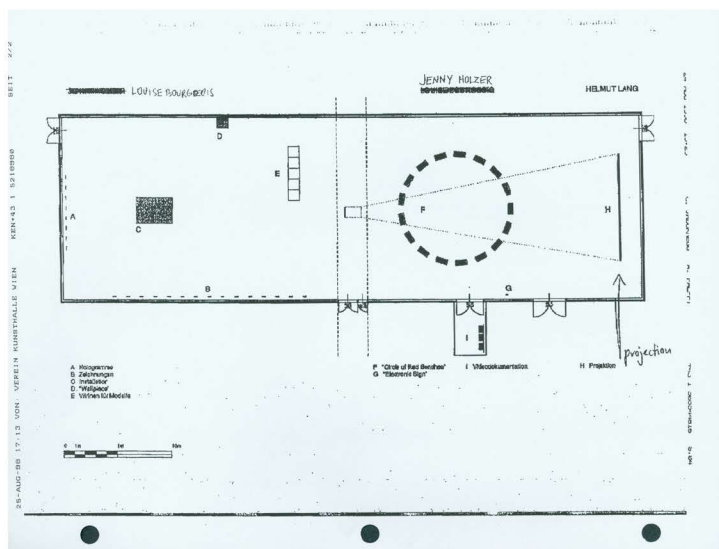
26 DEC 1977
FRANCE
94



Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2022. Mixed media, steel, 24 x 12 x 1 1/4 inches. Courtesy of the artist and von ammon co, Washington DC.



Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2022. Mixed media, steel, 24 x 12 x 1 1/4 inches. Courtesy of the artist and von ammon co, Washington DC.



Up: Floor plan for *Louise Bourgeois / Jenny Holzer / Helmut Lang* exhibition at the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 1998. Courtesy of hl-art and Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna.

Down: Invitation for *Louise Bourgeois / Jenny Holzer / Helmut Lang* exhibition at the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 1998. Courtesy of hl-art and Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna.

I was lucky enough to meet most of them in the '80s and '90s in Vienna, where we all shared a silent common understanding and probably the desire to break out as well.

I think that if you are in an environment like Vienna, it will either silence you or you will surrender or you will somehow find yourself in a counter-movement. Choosing a kind of exile or escape is partly a reaction, an attempt not to be overwhelmed by the local situation. That said, Vienna is fertile ground to train and formulate one's own voice because of its complexity.

ST: You've said that you can't escape traditions and that they become a part of you. Can you talk more about how tradition has shaped you, particularly in your education and outlook?

HL: Traditions did consciously/unconsciously become part of me and my foundational education. I see this as an advantage now, as they weaponized me with a rich knowledge of the past and gave me the opportunity to counteract or continue.

ST: I lived in Beijing until I was 22, a place where the spirit of collectivism is highly valued. Despite this, I often felt out of sync with group activities. Whether it was due to precociousness or heightened sensitivity, I've always sensed that I might be different or special in some way. Did you ever feel a sense of purpose or inadequacy during your childhood?

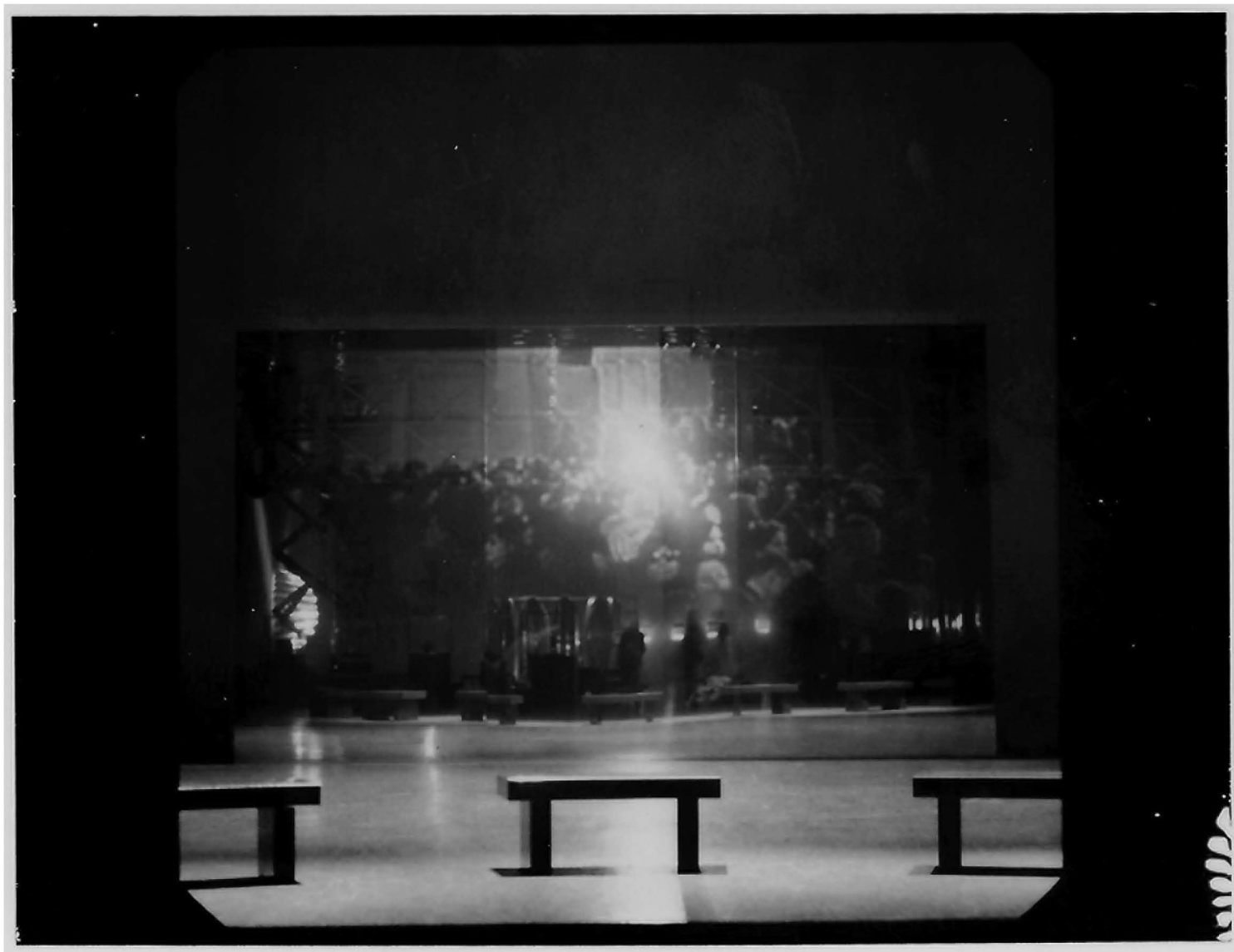
HL: I never thought I was special. Different, yes, also because of the circumstances.

I was brought up to live a life with purpose. It was implied without being talked about. Every life and work seemed equally important.

In my childhood I felt more insufficient than special. Those were not Prozac times, especially the teenage years. It was actually not easy for a long time, really. It wasn't until the late '80s that I felt I could breathe a bit and started to get a break.

ST: You've talked about the importance of a personal approach in your work, and you've mentioned feeling a sense of understanding and reassurance from your relationships with artists like Jenny Holzer, Louise Bourgeois, and Kurt Kocherscheidt. Can you elaborate on how these relationships influenced your own approach to work and life? Coming from a non-photography and non-fine art background, I often find myself questioning whether I'm on the right path, or if such a path even exists.

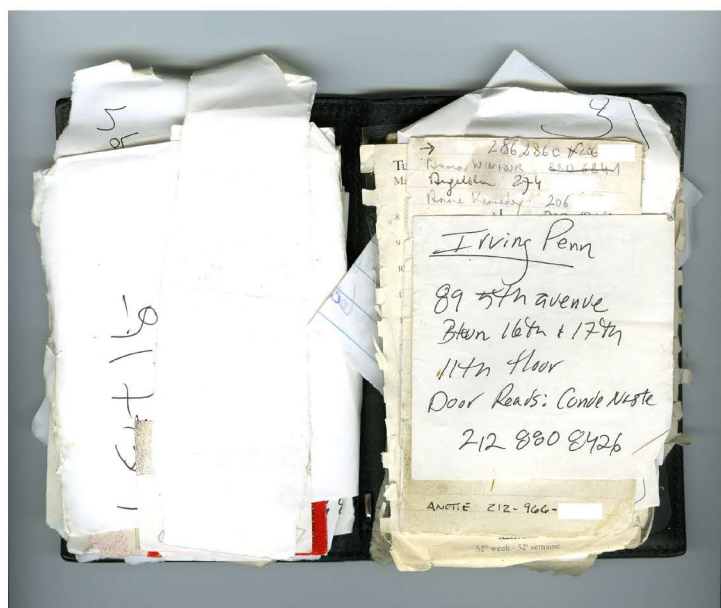
HL: I believe there is no one right way. The only way is the personal approach one takes to start and continue. I have ac-



...there are a number of vectors that coalesce in the installation. The actual place where this all happens is right on the surface of the mirror. The first vector of work refers to the social dimension, which is determined by the exhibition space and the viewers. The second vector refers to the work context of a fashion designer who presents the work and possesses a historical dimension that fades into the here and now of the present collection—the third vector. All three vectors together create a tension within which Lang desires to situate his fashion, as well as his other forms of communication. The dynamics of this tension are in accordance with the dynamics of the work. The greater the forces that operate, and the more these forces are incorporated into the work, the greater the substance will be that feeds the vectors. As Lang once said, “Structures that renew themselves through their own determination have true substance.”

—Ulf Poschardt, 1998¹

Installation view, *Louise Bourgeois / Jenny Holzer / Helmut Lang*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, October 9, 1998–January 17, 1999. Photo: © Adolf Bereuter, courtesy of hl-art and Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna.



cepted that this way is always messy, but that is also part of the pleasure.

Kurt, whom I met early on in Vienna, was reaffirming the way I was approaching my work as I observed how he was working, and later on with Jenny, Louise, and Roni [Horn], it was just in general understood how the procedure of life, love, and work is intertwined and complicated and interesting. We felt familiar, safe, and comfortable with each other, respectful enough to say what was on our minds, and enjoyed each other's company, but also challenged each other in the best sense. We were all concerned about much but not afraid of anything in the end.

With Louise, we shared the soul of Europeans who chose New York to live and work in. She called us both "runaways," although I cannot remember if she meant that geographically or emotionally, or both. We did also share abandonment issues, although we never spoke about it directly and our related history is different.

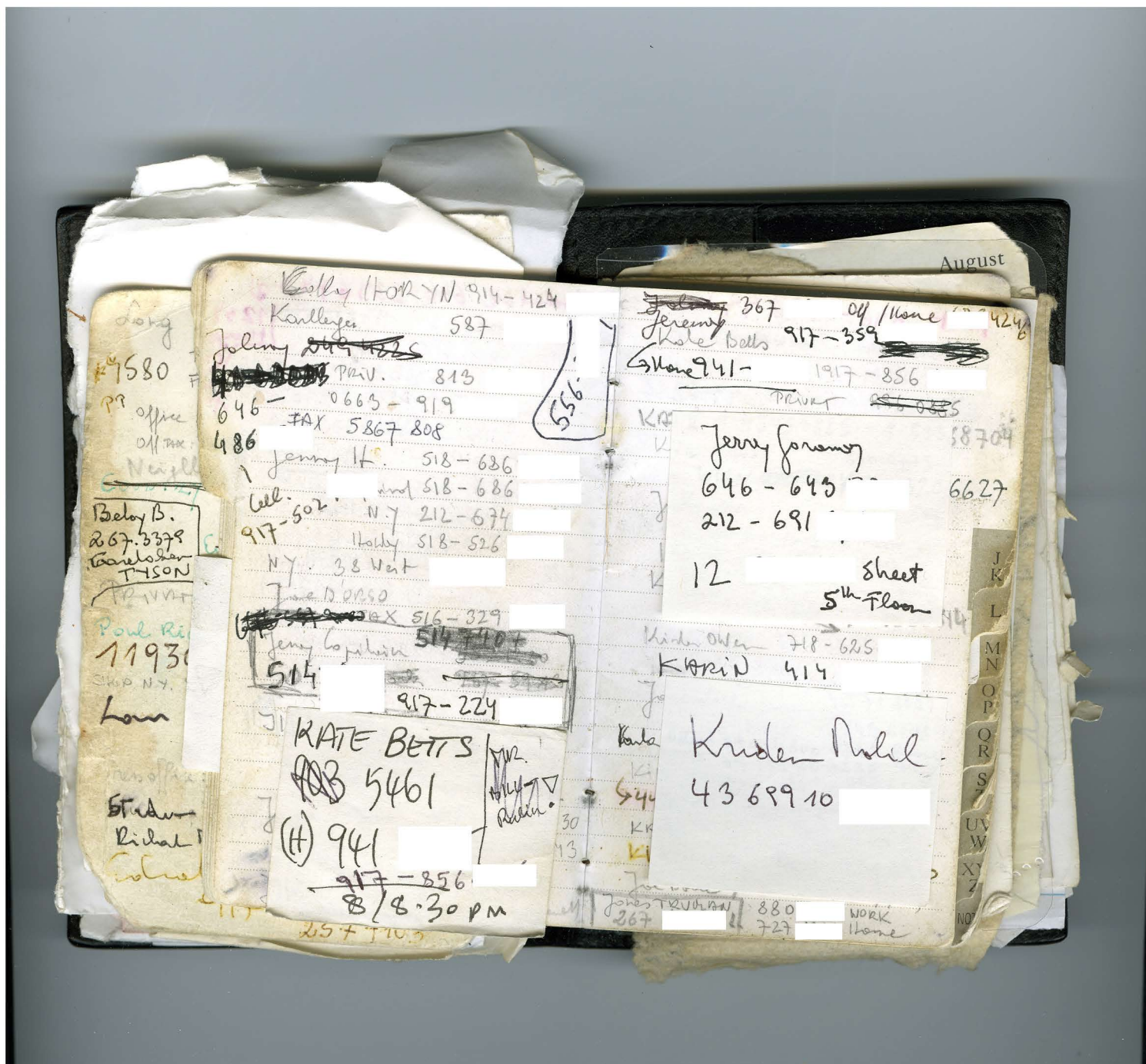
A draft of a speech Jenny gave for an award she accepted for me probably describes a moment in all of our dynamic.

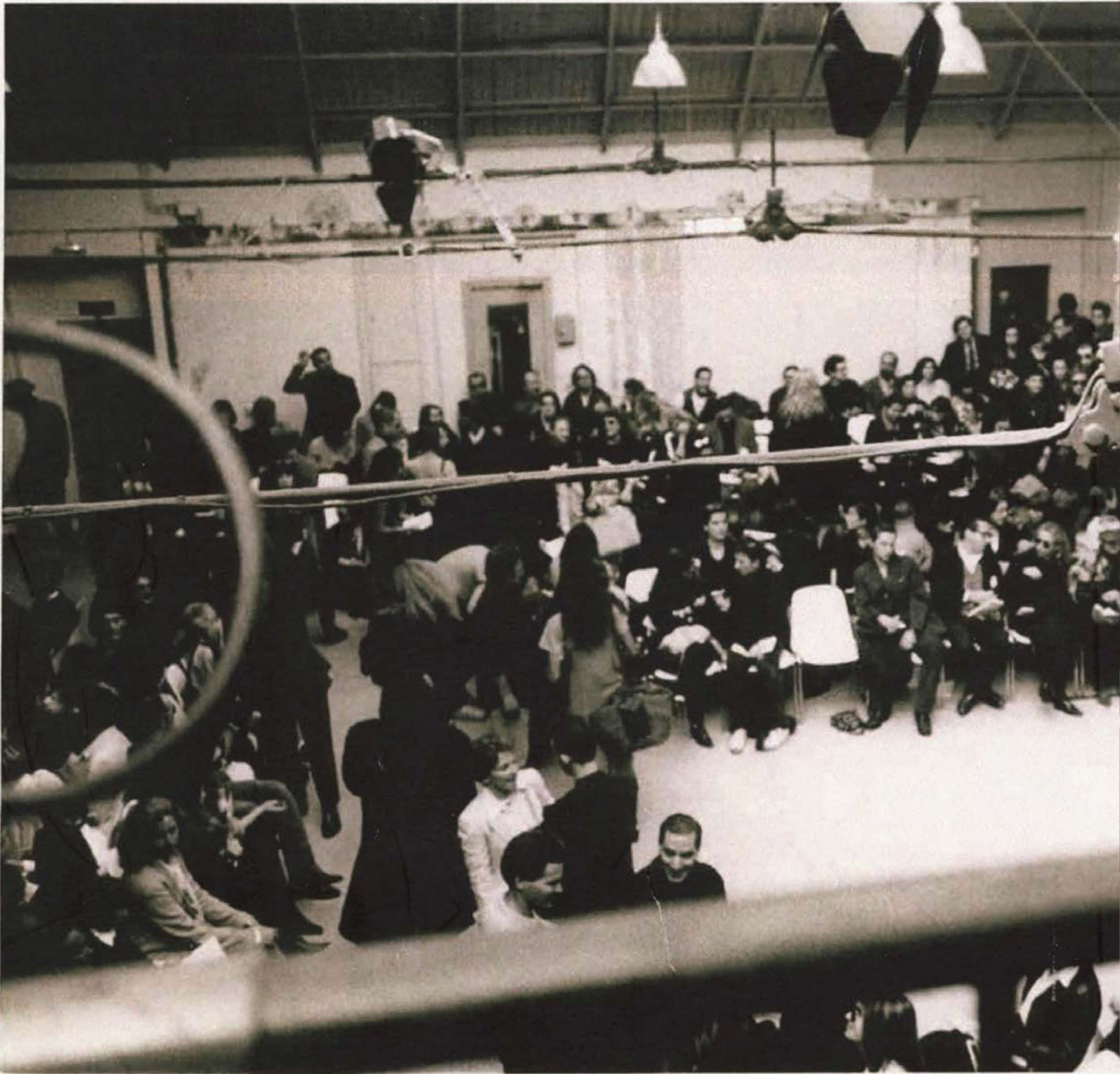
...I MET HELMUT A YEAR AGO WHEN WE WERE MADE AN UNLIKELY PAIR IN THE ART AND FASHION BIENNALE IN FLORENCE. SINCE I KNOW DIDDLEY ABOUT FASHION, AND PERHAPS LESS ABOUT ART, WE FOUND OURSELVES TALKING ABOUT WHETHER TO LIVE, ABOUT WORKING ALL NIGHT, THE POSSIBILITY OF REVENGE, ABOUT LONELINESS, RIDICULOUSNESS AND PERHAPS THEMATICALLY, WHEN PEOPLE TAKE THEIR CLOTHES OFF, AND WHEN THEY ABSOLUTELY SHOULD LEAVE THEM ON. FOR THE BIENNALE, WE TRIED WHAT IS IMPOSSIBLE, SUCH AS TO MAKE THE SCENT OF LOVE GONE WRONG AND TO PROJECT SEX AND GREAT LOSS UPON THE WATER OF THE RIVER ARNO. DURING OUR ADVENTURES, I FOUND HELMUT TO BE VERY SMART, UNEXPECTEDLY KIND, A PERFECTIONIST, BOSSY, FUNNY, DANGEROUS ENOUGH, AND THAT FINE THING, A FRIEND. SO, WITH AFFECTION, VERGING ON LOVE...

—Jenny Holzer, 1997 ²

Up: Helmut Lang photographed in the Paris subway, 1995. Photo: © Glen Luchford.

Down: Helmut Lang, MRHL_Paris/NYC/Vienna_Agenda_012_06, ongoing, study for a wall work. Courtesy of the artist.





Helmut Lang runway setting, Espace Communes, Paris, 1992. Courtesy of hl-art.







This page: Helmut Lang, *front row*, 2009. Urethane resin, marble dust, pigment, 34 x 79 3/4 x 19 inches / dimensions variable. Collection of Dakis Joannou / DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens. Courtesy of the artist. Mural for Helmut Lang DESTE commission, West Village, New York, 2012.



Left page: Dia Center for the Arts Annex, New York, 2000. Courtesy of hl-art.



For over half a century, scarcely a European capital has remained untouched by Vienna's allure. This fascination is at times complicit, at other times tinged with suspicion, for Vienna—a kaleidoscope of influences and brilliance—continually unveils new aspects and pioneers fresh perspectives. As its political and diplomatic influence wanes, the city gives rise to new cultural forces, spanning numerous fields from art to academia, thereby radically and often irreversibly shifting values and paradigms in a movement that transcends its own borders.

This myriad of revolutions and influences persists to this day, with their full consequences yet to be realized.

—Jean Maheu, President of the Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, 1986³



ST: Interviews often skip the 12 years between when you left home at 18 and your first show in Paris in 1986. Are there any memories from that period you'd like to share?

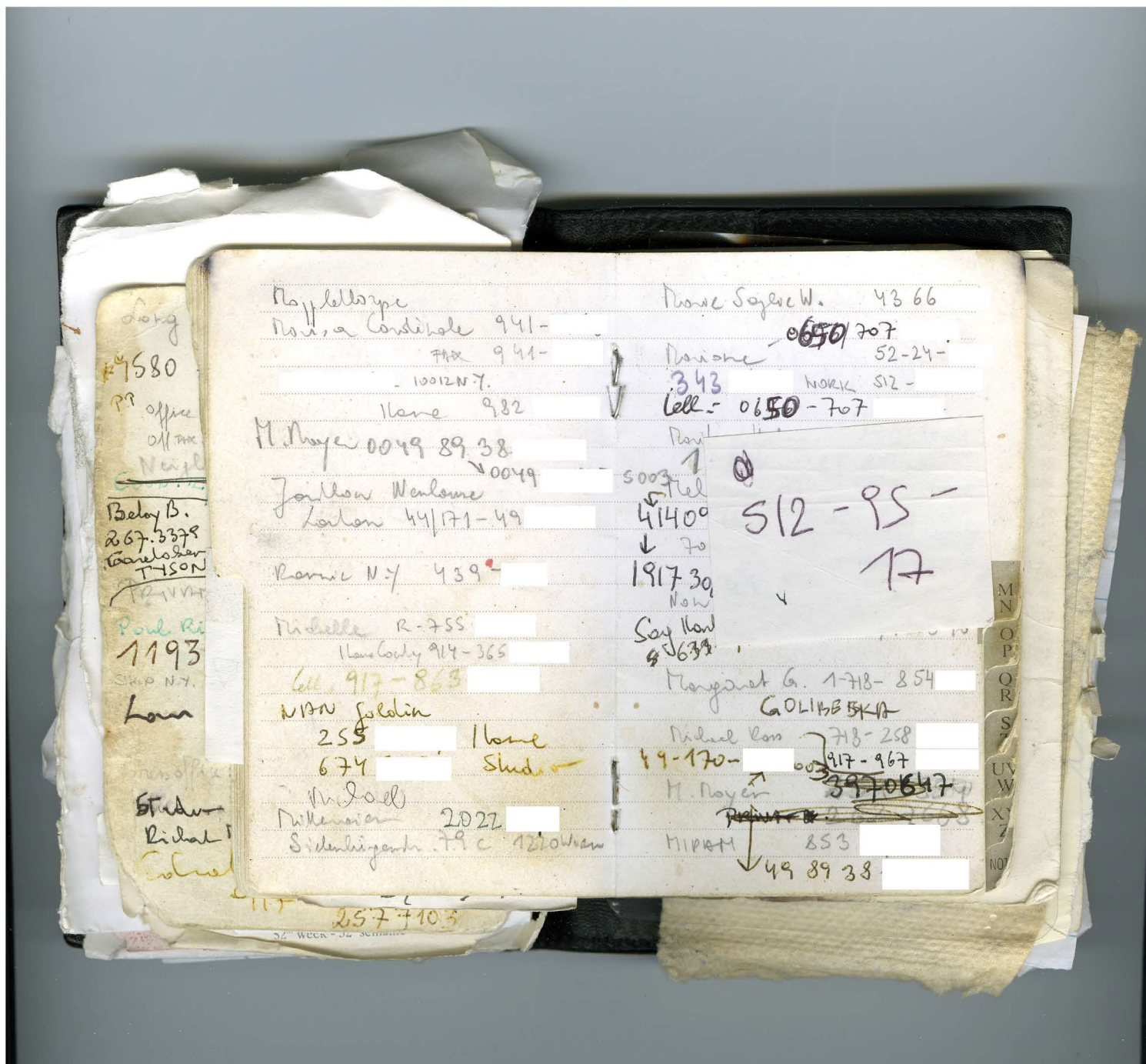
HL: These were formative years on every level, particularly on a personal level, as I got introduced to a very different environment and went through different phases, experiments, and experiences. It built another pillar on which I could stand going forward.

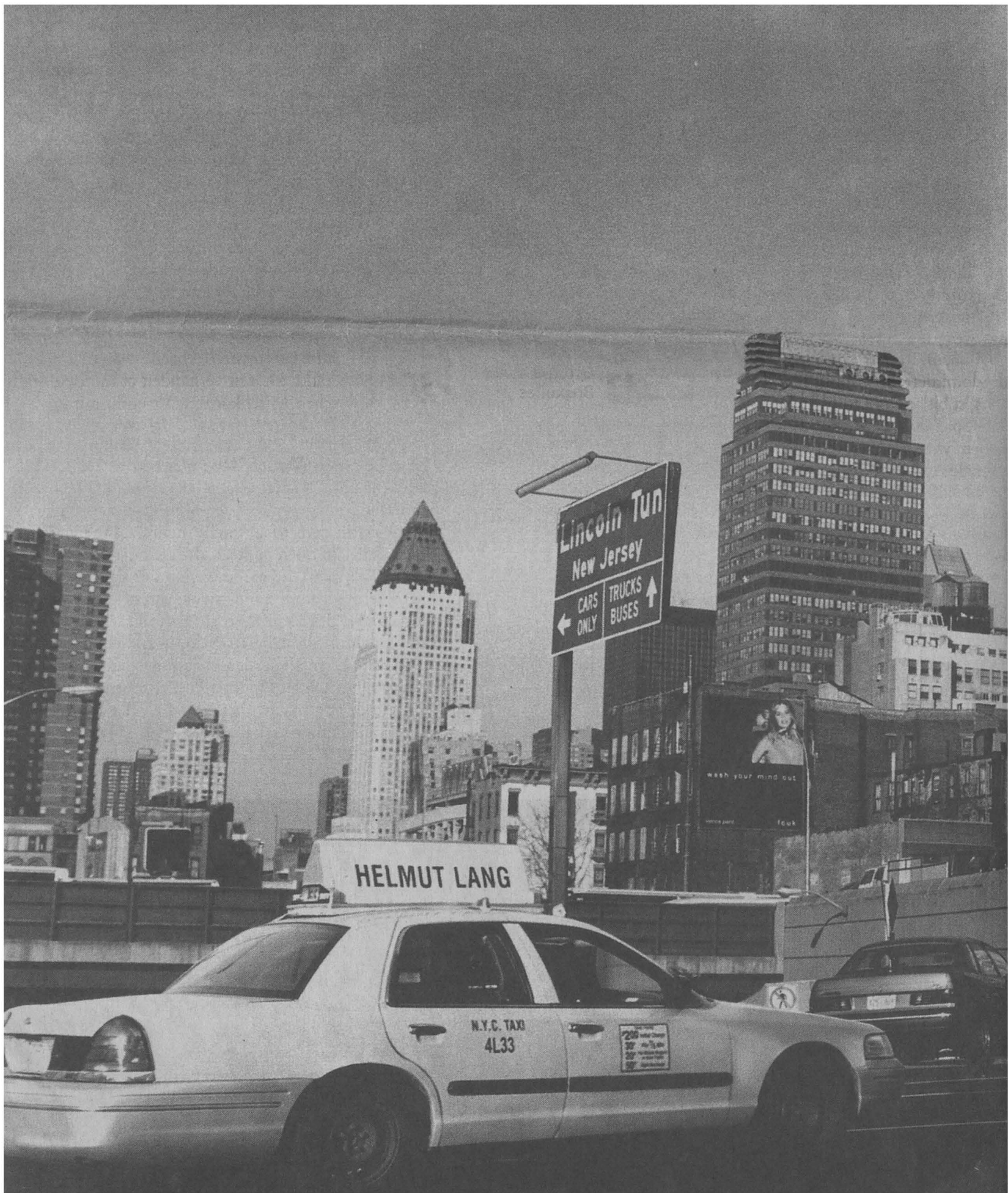
Everything was impressive at first. I worked many different jobs to sustain myself and gradually developed an artistic perspective. Vienna is a very cultural city with enormous history and treasures, and a large variety of interesting people. It formed me culturally and intellectually and gave me the educational background I was later free to use or dismiss, and also to revolt against the predominant conservatism and the general Viennese attitude of living being content with the past, except for the artistic ones who were in a similar dilemma and nourished their artistic expression with it.

I had the desire to escape and embrace the new, and did so. Without the mixture of Viennese complications between greatness and provinciality—and having outlived both at one point—it might have been another outcome for me.

Up: Helmut Lang photographed in Midtown, New York, 2000. Photo: © Elfie Semotan.

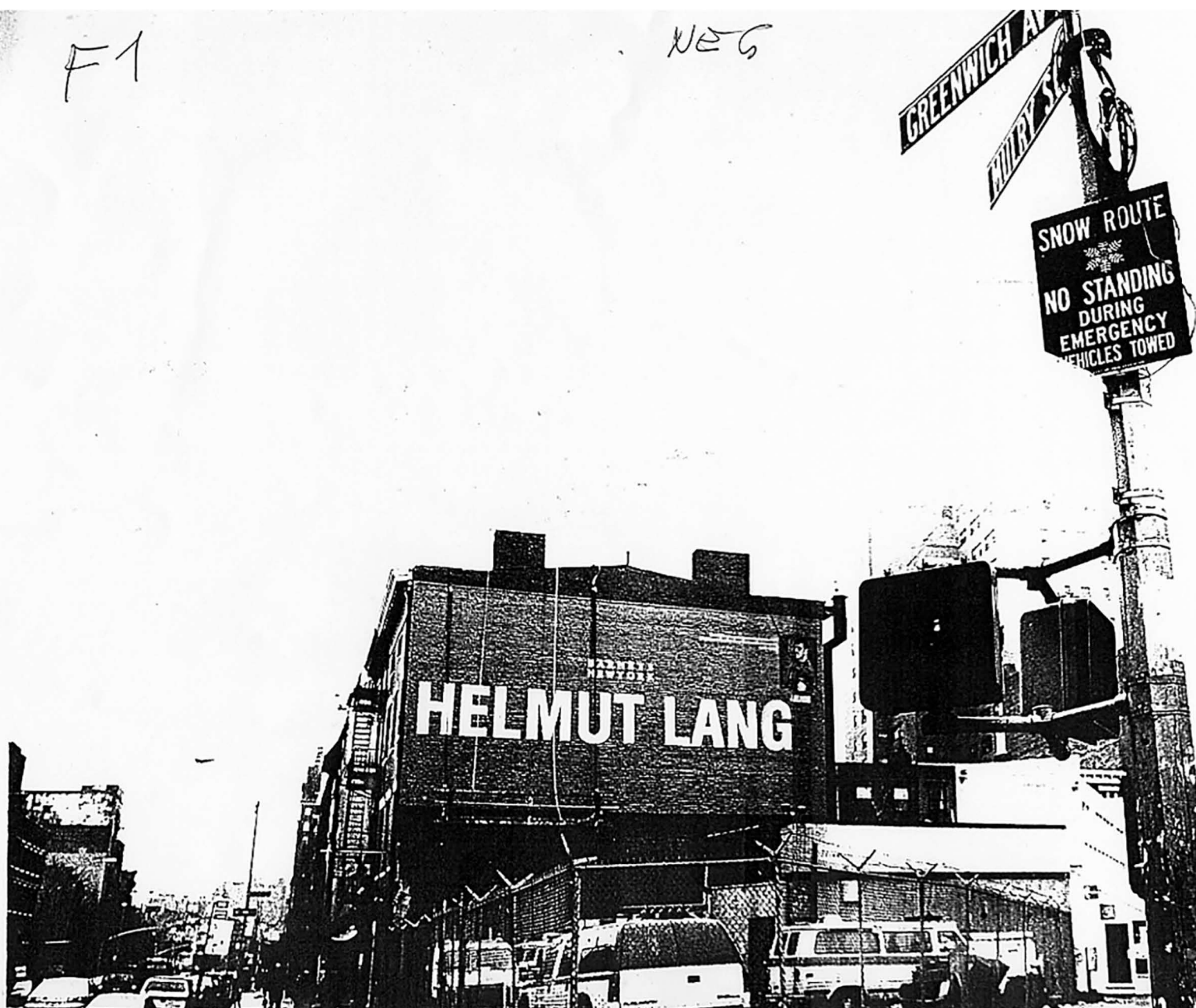
Down: Helmut Lang underwear, New York, 1999. Photo: © Elfie Semotan.





F1

NEG



This page: Helmut Lang mural advertisement, West Village, New York, 1997. Photo: © Elfie Semotan.

Left page: Helmut Lang taxi top advertisement, Midtown, New York, 2000. Photo: © Elfie Semotan.



This page: Helmut Lang and Jenny Holzer discussing her site-specific installation in the under-construction Helmut Lang Parfumerie in New York, 2000. Photo: © Elfie Semotan.

Right page: Helmut Lang, *Selective Memory Series—01_30_97_J_Holzer Fax_01*. Courtesy of hl-art.

Jenny Holzer

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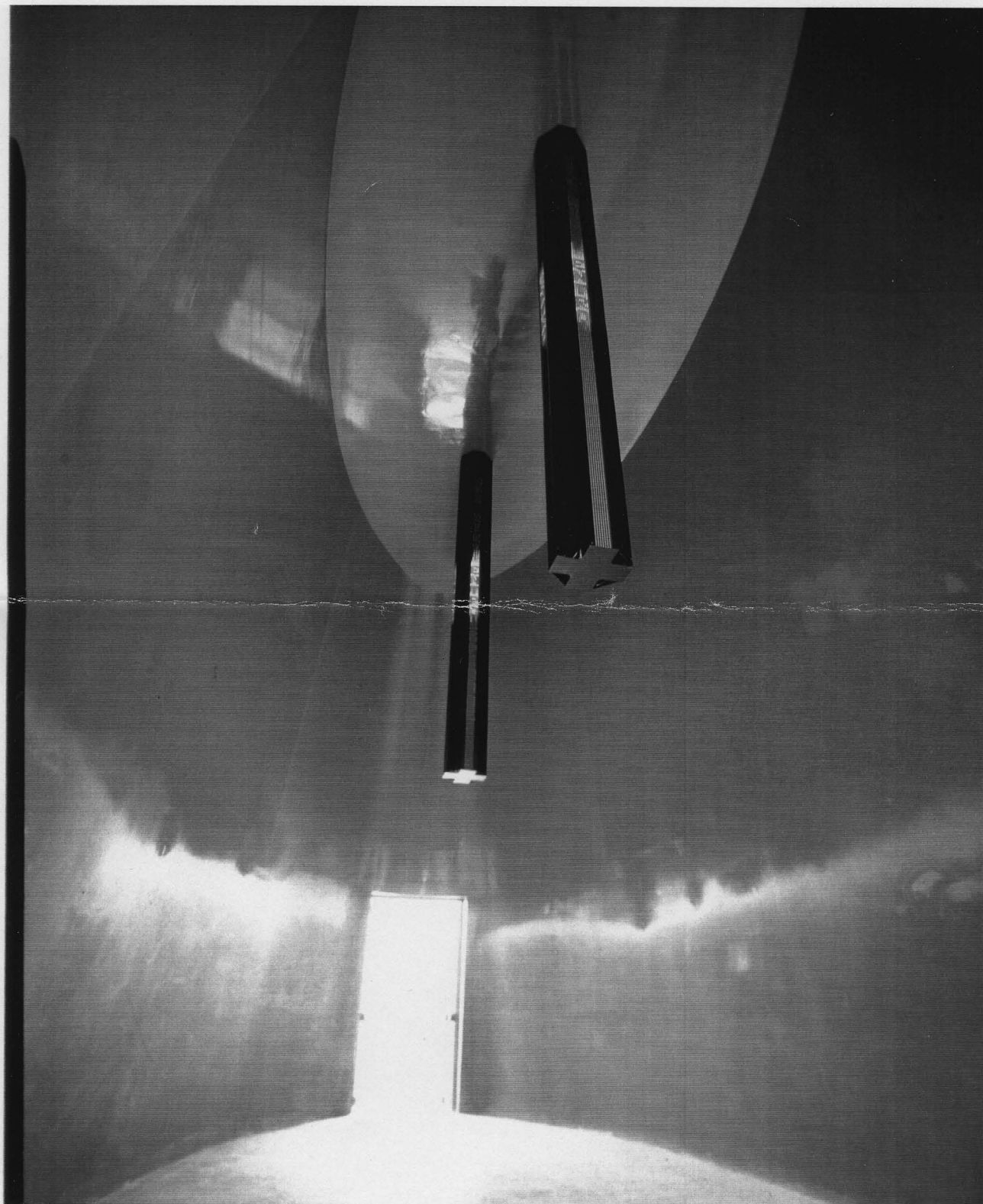
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HELMUT--HERE IS A DRAFT. ADD AND SUBTRACT ANY PERSONAL
QUALITIES. LET ME KNOW (AND I'LL TELL YOU YOU CAN'T CHANGE IT.)

GOOD EVENING.

IT IS MY PLEASURE TO TALK ABOUT HELMUT LANG, AND IT WILL BE EASY
TO DO SO BECAUSE HE IS NOT HERE.

I MET HELMUT A YEAR AGO WHEN WE WERE MADE AN UNLIKELY PAIR IN
THE ART AND FASHION BIENNALE IN FLORENCE. SINCE I KNOW DIDDLEY
ABOUT FASHION, AND PERHAPS LESS ABOUT ART, WE FOUND OURSELVES
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WE TRIED WHAT IS IMPOSSIBLE, SUCH AS TO MAKE THE SCENT OF LOVE
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VERY SMART, UNEXPECTEDLY KIND, A PERFECTIONIST, BOSSY, FUNNY,
DANGEROUS ENOUGH, AND THAT FINE THING, A FRIEND. SO, WITH
AFFECTION, VERGING ON LOVE, HERE IS YOUR AWARD.
CONGRATULATIONS.



I WALK IN
 I SEE YOU
 I WATCH YOU
 I SCAN YOU
 I WAIT FOR YOU
 I TICKLE YOU
 I TEASE YOU
 I SEARCH YOU
 I BREATHE YOU
 I TALK
 I SMILE
 I TOUCH YOUR HAIR
 YOU ARE THE ONE
 YOU ARE THE ONE WHO DID THIS TO ME
 YOU ARE MY OWN

I SHOW YOU
 I FEEL YOU
 I ASK YOU
 I DON'T ASK
 I DON'T WAIT
 I WON'T ASK YOU
 I CAN'T TELL YOU
 I LIE

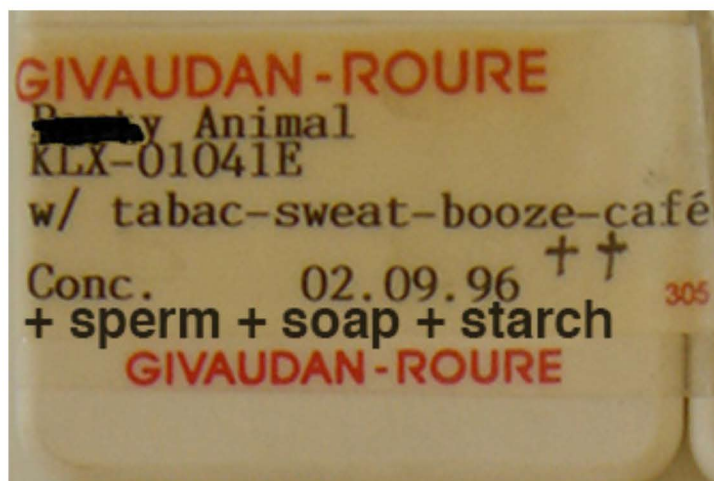
I AM CRYING HARD
 THERE WAS BLOOD
 NO ONE TOLD ME
 NO ONE KNEW
 MY MOTHER KNOWS

I FORGET YOUR NAME
 I DON'T THINK
 I BURY MY HEAD
 I BURY YOUR HEAD
 I BURY YOU

MY FEVER
 MY SKIN
 I CANNOT BREATHE
 I CANNOT EAT
 I CANNOT WALK
 I AM LOSING TIME
 I AM LOSING GROUND
 I CANNOT STAND IT

I CRY
 I CRY OUT
 I BITE
 I BITE YOUR LIP
 I BREATHE YOUR BREATH
 I PULSE
 I PRAY
 I PRAY ALOUD
 I SMELL YOU ON MY SKIN

I SAY THE WORD
 I SAY YOUR NAME
 I COVER YOU
 I SHELTER YOU
 I RUN FROM YOU
 I SLEEP BESIDE YOU
 I SMELL YOU ON MY CLOTHES
 I KEEP YOUR CLOTHES



This page top and left: Jenny Holzer, *Xenon for Florence*, 1996, light projection. Arno River, Palazzo Bargagli, Via de Bardi, Florence, Italy.
 Text: *Arno*, 1996. © 1996 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo: © Gianfranco Gorgoni, courtesy of the artist.

This page middle right: Helmut Lang, study for 1996 Florence Biennale scent installation—tobacco, sweat, alcohol, coffee, sperm, soap, starch. Courtesy of the artist.

Left page: Jenny Holzer / Helmut Lang, *I smell you on my clothes*, 1996, scent and LED installation. Arata Isozaki pavilion at Forte de Belvedere, 1996 Florence Biennale. Original photo: © Attilio Maranzano, courtesy of the artists.



ST: What was the moment and catalyst that led you to present your work in Paris?

HL: 1986. I was invited to show my work at the Centre Pompidou as part of *Vienne 1880–1938: L'apocalypse joyeuse*.

ST: You once said, “Paris is very French, Vienna is very Austrian, New York is the world.” Do you still feel the same way about these three cities now?

HL: In the mid ‘80s, I began to divide my time between Vienna and Paris. I was introduced to the larger French “creatives” there at the time—an interesting, invigorating, and challenging experience. They taught me that not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere. Paris is really responsible for initiating my international breakthrough.

I was positively overwhelmed by the new and the French way of life, which seemed so much more fitting to me at the time. One worked but also lived a lot, and I mean a lot. Naturally, I was also bleeding my fair share, being on the cutting edge with not much social experience on that level, but I learned. Paris was also much more international than Vienna, and especially when all the fairs took place, it felt like the world had arrived. I can only think of good memories. It was one of the best times of my life—the right time, age, and place.

Paris will always have my heart. I was accepted and supported artistically and loved as a human being emotionally and physically. I owe Paris in many ways. Pour toujours.

Vienna—see above.

New York, which I started to visit more regularly in the beginning of the ‘90s, was still wild and seductive—a balance of the unexpected, a merger of a multicultural human landscape of raw and refined, a culture of impossible differences with common encounters, a celebrity-infested environment embedded in the uniqueness of world citizens, a place to be seen or not at all. Manhattan—which is not really a mirror image of the United States but more a reflection of the world—was full of diversity and opportunity, and it gave you the freedom to succeed or disappear. That is a lot more than other places could offer.

Coming from Central Europe—which is complex and deep but also carries the danger of caging one without you even realizing it—I discovered all this new energy, an additional capacity I never knew I had, a new dimension in myself. New York has that seductive power of a movie filled with action and non-action, celebrity, superficiality, and a grandness that



Ich bin nur zufällig
hier. Meine Kleidung
ist mitgekommen,
ohne mich zu fragen.

HELMUT LANG, 1993

Up: Helmut Lang photographed at the Palais de Chaillot, Trocadéro, Paris. Courtesy of hl-art.

Middle: Helmut Lang, *Selective Memory Series*—MRHL_D_Brill_01. Courtesy of hl-art.

Down: “I’m just here by chance. My clothes came with me without asking me.”—Helmut Lang, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, 1993. Translated from German.

was interrupted at any given time when uptown and downtown were still the places that their names indicate. New York would not allow you to live a secondhand life.

Relocating permanently to New York in 1997 just felt somehow necessary and very right for the stage of my life that I was in. Here, maintaining your privacy is entirely within your control. It just depends on how much you want.

I was always traveling and living between two places, which in retrospect was a good way to live and function for me.

From 2005 on, when I left fashion for good to pursue my art practice full-time, I spent most of my time on Long Island, as my studio is there, and just occasionally went back and forth to the city. I am not sure what New York means for me at the moment, as I am not spending enough time there. Only time will tell.

I do occasionally romanticize Europe—at least the Europe I knew—as it is fundamentally different from the American way of life. I have not traveled to Europe since my last time in Paris in 2004.

I haven't minded exploring un-lived desires as inspiration ever since I realized that not everything one is interested in fits in only one life.

I will end up where life wants me to be, and if it is not where I am now, it is not the end.

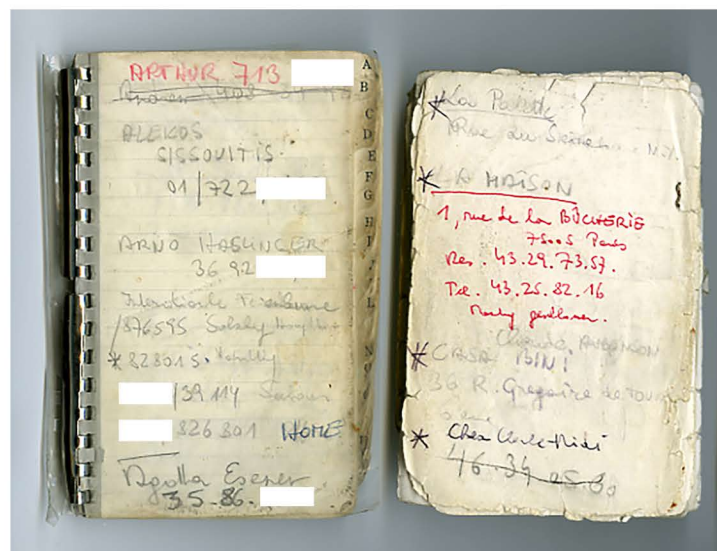
**Helmut went to the ocean to gather his thoughts.
Inspiration comes from retreat.**

—Louise Bourgeois, 2008⁴

ST: Have you ever felt a sense of nostalgia? Among the many places you've lived, where feels most like home to you?

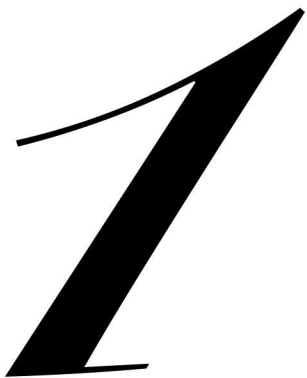
HL: Home is where I am with people I want to be and feel at home with, not a geographic place. I am not nostalgic in the literal sense, but I am still fond of all the places and stages of my life. All were exciting and right at the time. I am thankful for the numerous encounters and thrills, inspirations, and love.

I have always considered myself borderless in the sense that I belong nowhere and everywhere.

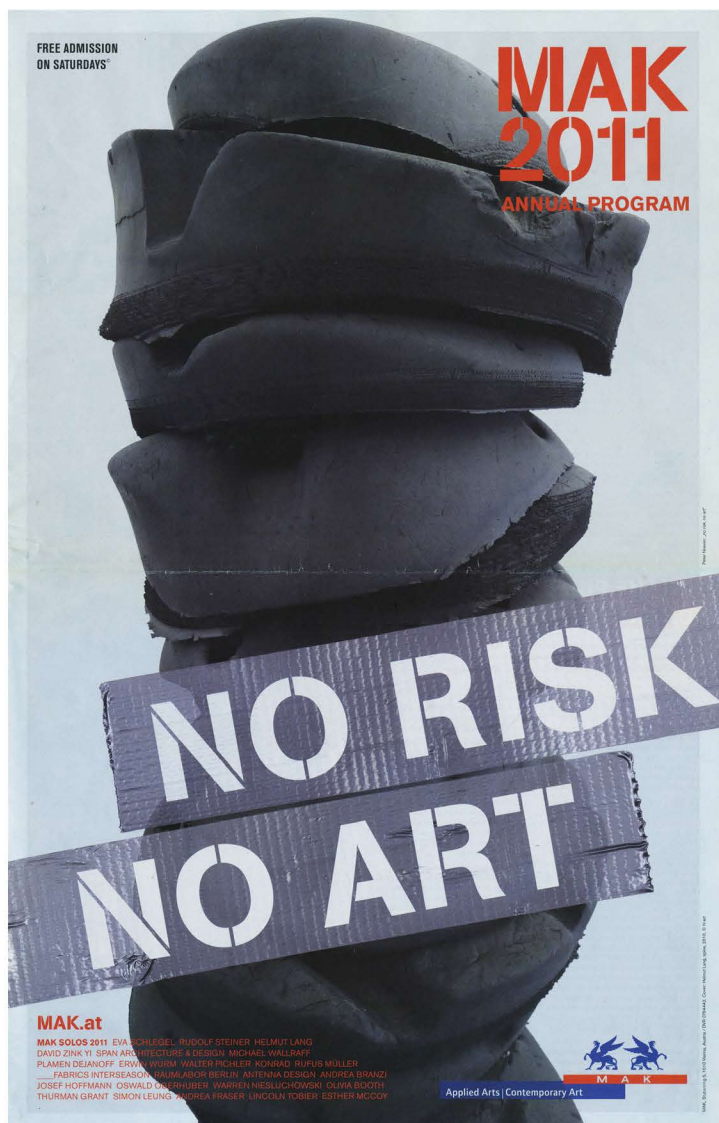


Up: Helmut Lang, *MRHL_Paris/NYC/Vienna_Personal_Agenda*, ongoing, study for a wall work. Courtesy of the artist.

Down: Helmut Lang, *surrogate skin #4*, 2008. Pigment and mixed media, 59 1/2 x 38 1/2 x 1 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Multiple Incarnations But — Helmut Lang



MAK 2011 Annual Program cover.
Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2010. Rubber, chalk, steel. 61 5/8 x 24 x 1/2 inches.
Courtesy of the artist and MAK, Vienna.

ST: Whether as a successful fashion designer or as an artist, you've consistently emphasized being true to yourself and following your instincts. Was your transition from fashion to art a natural evolution for you?

HL: As I consider all work as equally important, whatever I do or have done will come from within and I do not care about a given title or definition. I have been creative from a young age and always have been true to myself, so every next step I attempted to take in the creative process was vaguely clear and naturally defined.

In retrospect, I never presumed to know what people wanted from my work. I didn't believe I had the liberty to make such assumptions, nor did I consider it my calling. I always believed the work would find its own audience.

I don't accept bondage in creativity or public perception.

ST: Let's talk about instinct. Would you say trusting your instincts is an innate quality for you, or was it developed over time?

HL: I assume I was born with it and realized at one point that whenever I did not follow it, I should have.

ST: What are your current obsessions?

HL: I am not obsessed with anything in particular forever. I am intensely engaged with certain subjects temporarily.

ST: You seem to have an interest in found objects and materials. Can you talk about this attraction and how certain elements enter your work?

HL: Materials have always played a prominent role and are often a starting point—the reversal of logic and appearance, experimenting with surface and assemblage. These are often found and used objects, as they have elements with a certain



history embedded in them, elements with irreplaceable presence and with scars and memories from a former purpose.

As I feel less obliged to use traditional distinctions between sculpture and painting, and I'm also invested in forms that break classical expectations, found materials act as a replacement for traditional mediums.

I am not sure when the form comes in. Objecthood, surface, and materials play equally prominent roles.

ST: I was attracted immediately when I first saw your sculptures. Your sculptures appear sexual yet seem to convey more. How important is sexuality in your work?

HL: Sexuality has equal standing or rights as any other materials or content. The quality of unfulfilled desire or the power of a lustful relationship is equally inspiring. Any resulting sensual feeling or sexual tension is subject to the audience's own interpretation.

Works in progress in Helmut Lang's studio on Long Island, NY, 2012.
Courtesy of the artist.



Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2012. Rubber, enamel, steel. 65 x 16 x 12 3/4 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

ST: What does being an “emotional observer” entail for you? What are you observing these days?

HL: I am observing everything. It is part curiosity and part wanting to be aware enough to be able to make the right judgment.

ST: How does your emotional state influence your work?

HL: How can creative work even be possible without the entire range of emotions?

How can life even be interesting without the entire range of emotions?

ST: What are your thoughts on the notion of “genius”?

HL: I don’t like the word “genius.”

We just do the best we can.

ST: How do you reconcile your concerns about social media and AI with your use of technology?

HL: I use new technology and always have, but primarily for mechanical or practical purposes. I have increasingly grave concerns about social media. It was supposed to unite us and it is dividing us with looming, serious consequences. It also unconsciously encourages a certain dumbification and equalization of the wrong subjects.

AI has too many unknowns at the moment for me to be able to make any kind of intelligent comment. My concern is that if it is misused, it will generate a host of fatal possibilities, and human history does not have the best track record of being smart. Power and money normally wins over good intentions.

ST: Louise Bourgeois described you as “always experimenting.” What drives your experiments?

HL: The idea of experimenting is looking for the unknown. I cannot help myself. It is a positively insane and exhausting process at the same time. It can start anywhere and anytime and with anything. Louise was right—I have experimented as long as I can remember.

ST: What kind of books, music, or films attract you?

HL: It is a diverse variety, depending on mood. But I don’t have much time for anything lately. It’s a phase. It will pass.

ST: People rush. For me, I grew up in a time and in an envi-

ronment of rapid pace of life. You're known for taking your time, even embracing idleness. Have you ever felt anxious about this approach?

HL: I am not as zen or sane as you might suggest.

One needs time to do the invisible, because in that time everything is happening.

It is the idea of being allowed to deal with time in a different speed—the discovery of the possibility to take time for oneself if it is needed. It is a time in which one is absorbing and creating space for oneself to reach the point where one begins to know when the right moment is to start something new. The unconscious preparation is a slow process one has to give oneself to be totally open to be able to take the next step.

ST: Is solitude important in your life? How do you find balance between solitude and social interaction in your creative life?

HL: I need time to be alone. Full stop.

I need time to be with loved ones.

Relating to my work, getting away from urban density and urgency in an undistracting setting is beneficial for me, but handing my work over to a wider audience is equally important, as I need that exposure to balance my need for connection, interaction, and communication. It's like balancing the left and right sides of one's brain. This is how I function best.

ST: Do you ever feel lonely?

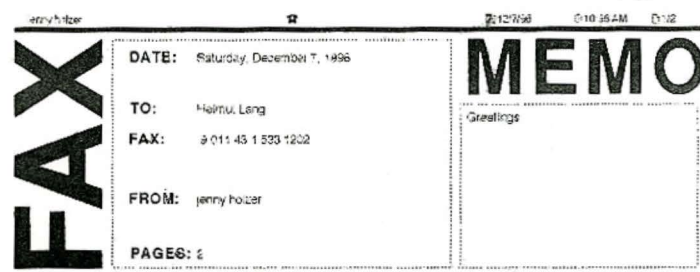
HL: Never.

ST: For you, the ideal scenario seems to be a mix of both friendship and professional collaboration. I've shared this sentiment with others, but not everyone agrees. In creative industries like ours, having a collaborator who truly resonates with us seems essential.

HL: It makes sense to surround oneself with humans one feels at ease with. Work and life are one for me, so I try to make it as pleasant as possible because it is complicated enough.

ST: What do you seek in friendships, and what keeps them fresh for you?

HL: Acceptance of the other without projected expectations. Mutual understanding, honesty, and trust.



Up: Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2012. Rubber, chalk, steel. 53 3/4 x 11 1/2 x 6 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Down: Helmut Lang, *Selective Memory Series*—12_07_96_J_Holzer_CL_01. Courtesy of hl-art.



Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2012. Rubber, chalk, iron, steel. 16 x 45 1/2 x 13 7/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2012. Rubber, chalk, iron, steel. 17 3/8 x 45 1/4 x 13 7/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Works in progress in Helmut Lang's studio on Long Island, NY, 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

From: Roni Horn <[REDACTED]>
 Subject: **Re: Helmut baby**
 Date: November 7, 2007 8:51:15 AM EST
 To: [REDACTED]

I can tell you are in your early morning mode . . .
 But exactly when might that future occur?

On 11/7/07 8:41 AM, [REDACTED] wrote:

for you always, because that is "der lauf der dinge".
 On Nov 7, 2007, at 8:28 AM, Roni Horn wrote:

Did I miss this future?

Is there another?

On 11/7/07 6:39 AM, [REDACTED] wrote:

hi baby back , can we see us in the next hour?
 On Nov 6, 2007, at 10:40 PM, Roni Horn wrote:

Hello Helmut
 I completely forgot to reply
 But that won't work for me

 But I would love to see you
 Any other opportunities in the not-to-distant future?

RONI HORN STUDIO

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

T. [REDACTED]
 F. [REDACTED]

Visit RONI HORN at www.libraryofwater.is

RONI HORN STUDIO

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

T. [REDACTED]
 F. [REDACTED]

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RONI HORN STUDIO

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Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2016. Mixed media, canvas. 20 x 16 x 2 3/4 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Like so much of the artist's practice, *something to think about* by Helmut Lang, resides in the ellipsis of the cultural conscience. The original video work, which runs a mere fifty-five seconds, is simultaneously fleeting and demanding: a black mass with a softened edge slowly rises from the bottom edge of the white screen like mercury in a thermometer. It is one of Lang's rare forays into video art.

One can assign manifold meanings to such an enigmatically simple gesture. The piece tempts the viewer to inscribe whatever sentiment is readily available onto the work, which has lived through various cultural upheavals since its conception in 2011. Despite its glacial pace within the confines of just less than a minute, the work traces the direction of digital culture, which can resemble an upward-scrolling plummet into an oblivion of ever-refreshing, ever-available content.

This is, of course, how the first books were: scrolls that one read by unspooling long, continuous threads of textual information. *Something to think about*, as a looped video, is essentially discontinuous, with the soft meniscus of white-to-black beginning again every fifty-five seconds. As such, the video stands apart from the infinitely networked, seamless flow of global data and takes on a more ancient texture—a thing unraveling and returning eternally.

If all weights are equal, then the bright white origin of the work could be substance and the black a void, and *something to think about* is somewhat of a curtain that gradually reveals an abyss or a barrier. Is this a giant unassailable mass enveloping the void or a veil being lifted to reveal it? Maybe it is a constant transitional state whose sole purpose is to complete its movement and repeat itself? Maybe it doesn't matter which of these it is?

Like all of Helmut's work, this tiny digital file is a ready-made, derived from the froth of quotidian reality. Then, it is slowed down to a syrupy pace where it can be reconsidered and reimagined, using only the non-referential rudiments the artist decides to keep.

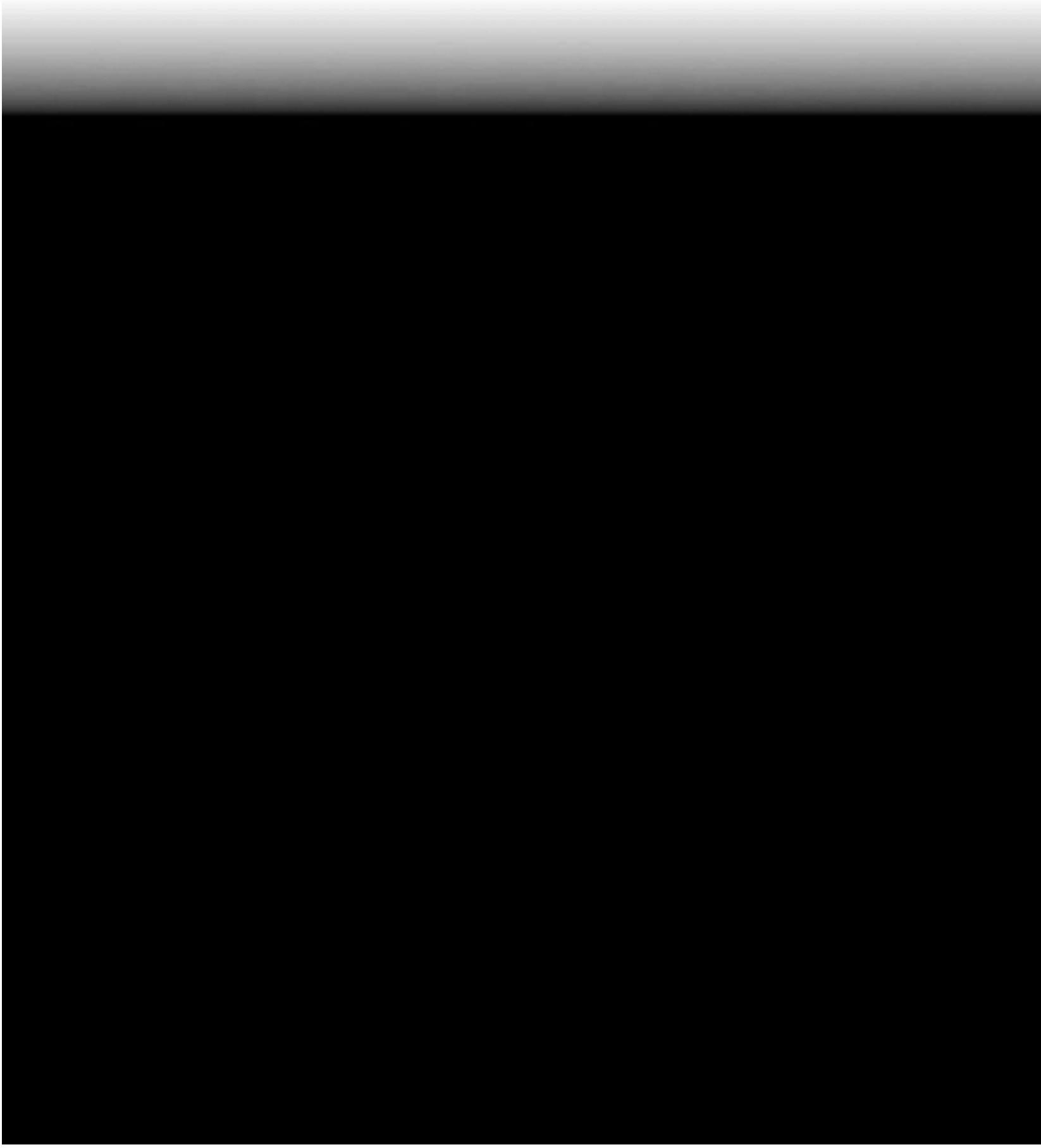
The work essentialises a key element of contemporary history but does so without polemics or sentiment. It merely challenges the viewer to confront the potentially daunting expanse of fifty-five seconds, and dare to inscribe their own experience of the 21st century upon the simple movement of a greyish meniscus; to feel the acerbic white light become enveloped by its opposite.

—Todd von Ammon, 2021 ⁵

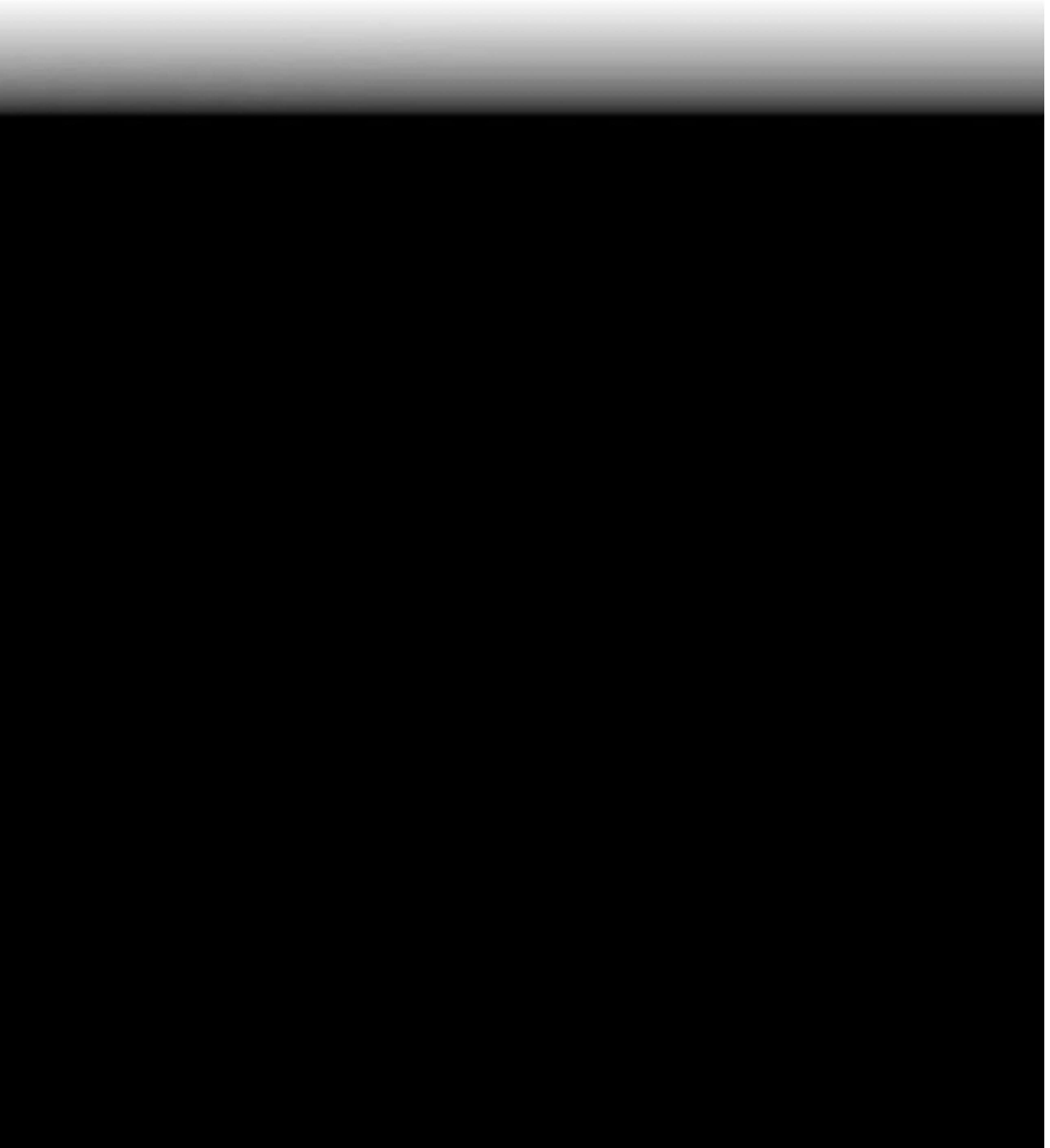


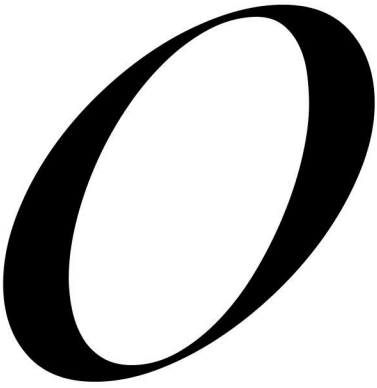
This page: Helmut Lang, *untitled (man no. 1)*, 2018. Foam, pigment, resin, wood, 38 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 15 3/4 inches. Collection of Dakis Joannou. Courtesy of the artist.

Left page: Helmut Lang, study in B/W, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.



Helmut Lang, *something to think about*, 2011 (video still). Digital video, 55 seconds.
Commissioned by the Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow for Commercial Break curated by Neville Wakefield. Courtesy of the artist.





Start From And Return To



ST: You've called yourself an "outsider," relating to your self-taught experience but also a kind of mindset of not being afraid to break the traditional rules. Have you ever doubted yourself because of this outsider mindset?

HL: I actually don't consider myself an outsider. I might have used that expression because English is not my primary language.

Installation view, *Helmut Lang: BURRY*, Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, April 16–August 21, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Dallas Contemporary, Dallas.

I had no formal training in fashion and I have no formal training in art. Consequently, I had to create my own language by being unafraid and experimenting with either subject.

My process is more intuitive than historical. I consider that an advantage now, as I was not burdened by expectations or basic rules from either discipline.

I never seriously doubted my ability and commitment to find a solution for my creative or any other adventures, as messy, crazy, or repetitive the procedure to get there was and still always is.

I recall Kurt dividing artists between “Gottsucher” and “Unterhaltungskünstler.” What he meant is that the former are forced to follow their own complicated procedure without mercy to find out what they are looking for.

ST: Neville Wakefield once said, “Helmut starts with something elaborate and often ornate and reduces it to its abstract essence.” How would you describe your approach to distilling works down to their essence?

HL: Neville described that quite accurately. What happens to me in the work process, intellectually and form-wise, is that I approach a piece with a perception or an idea, which then is condensed and layered, broken up and again collected, and suddenly taken over by another. It becomes an interactive struggle for balance between the importance of form and the importance of content.

It is a process of accumulation, elimination, and layers of opportunities and possibilities in equal importance. In their invincible collectiveness, they accumulate a certain weight and if the piece is strong enough, it will start to fight you back, being aware that the process towards objecthood could have been stopped at any given point.



Up: Helmut Lang photographed in his studio on Long Island, NY, 2016. Photo: © Daniel Trese.

Down: Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2014. Cardboard, tape, resin, pigment, enamel, 21 ½ x 14 ½ x 3 ¼ inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York.



The transformation of one material into another—the destructive distillation of wood into tar and then of soft fleece into hard surface—extends the original impulse of protective preservation into the realm of perversity. Here, the distress of found objects becomes the starting point for a larger meditation on acts of creative destruction and the gestures of reassembly and renewal that attend them.

...All the work carries with it this promise of material in flux. In Lang's hands the sheepskin that began life as protection, then enters the artist vocabulary of materials as decorative covering. He then transforms its meaning once again by separating it from its decorative/protective purpose. As the soft fleeces are hardened into sculpture, they accumulate a different set of meanings—this time the entire mythology of material transformation that begins with the promise of gold and ends with the idea of royal or divine power.

—Neville Wakefield, 2016 ⁶



I also see it as both a horizontal and vertical experience, as something new can happen in between, and everything new is interesting.

ST: How long was the transition from fashion to art for you, especially considering your legacy in fashion? Did you consult anyone about the shift?

HL: I did not consult anyone. I was guided by instinct, desire, and the feeling that it was time for change and to revisit a possible original calling.

Having experimented with my own art before accidentally sliding into fashion, I always stayed connected to it—a thread running through my entire work life, resulting in collaborations with Jenny, Louise, and others.

At one point I felt strongly that I wanted to work beyond fashion and commit fully to working as an artist. I never feared the challenge and I saw a chance to embrace a pace of working and a way of living that I originally started out with.

It felt like the shift was inevitable and it was rather clear that it would not be a one-night stand.

Up: Installation view, *Helmut Lang: BURRY*, Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, April 16–August 21, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Dallas Contemporary, Dallas.

Down: Works stored in the lower level of Helmut Lang's studio on Long Island, NY, 2015. Photo: © Fabien Baron

Right page: Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2012. Resin, pigment, mixed media. 28 1/4 x 23 x 15 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York.



I don't accept bondage
in creativity or public
perception.

—Helmut Lang



From left to right:

Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2014. Cardboard, tape, string, resin, pigment, 26 x 11 x 4 ½ inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York.

Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2014. Cardboard, tape, resin, pigment, 29 x 16 x 5 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York.

Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2015. Cardboard, tape, resin, pigment, 29 x 18 x 5 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York.

ST: After leaving fashion, was there an adjustment period to your new artistic life? How did you manage external expectations?

HL: I took some time off. I did not feel the need to over-explain, as it is hard to understand for most anyway.

ST: What's your perspective on balancing artistic integrity with commercial demands?

HL: I never wanted to be an employee of the audience or of commercial demands. I don't even think the audience wants that.

ST: I find it difficult to imagine the moment you chose to shred your archival work to create new art. While I understand the unique power of such a decision, it still seems like it would have been a tough choice. Was there a particular catalyst, perhaps the fire, that prompted this decision? Did you hesitate before taking this step?

HL: Being left with a large amount of heavily damaged archive pieces and the burden of finding a respectful use, all prior intentions came to a halt for a few months. The idea of reconsidering and reinventing the past arose as a starting point for a new body of artwork.

Shredding the archive and transforming it into raw material for artwork seemed honorable enough, eternally archiving it like a relic but in a new form of an archive or anti-archive. All pieces were compressed without hierarchy of value, status, or chronology. Considering this was the past and the future in one, the transformation was not hard for me to do.

The *Make It Hard* series was produced between 2010–13.

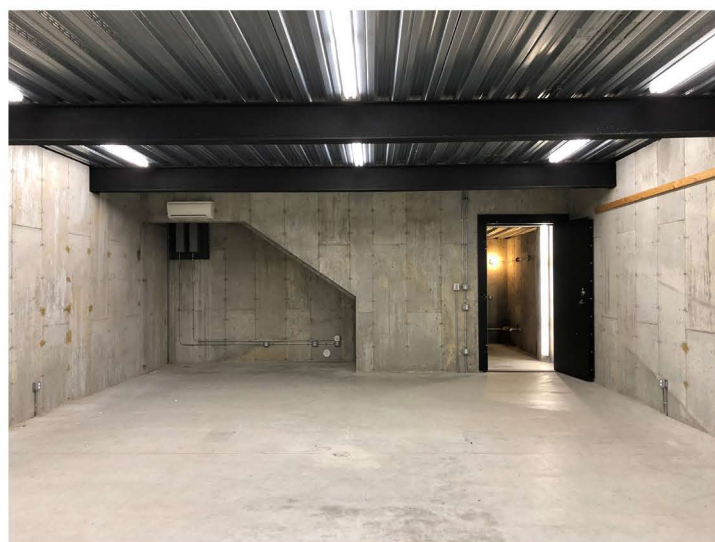
ST: How do you perceive the role of continuity in an artist's journey?

HL: Eventually you collect a body of work that defines you.

ST: Louise said you are “shy, reticent and mysterious,” Roni Horn described you as an “enigma.” How would you describe yourself in a few words?

HL: I was never especially good at describing myself. I inhabit the entire spectrum of complexity, but it is not beneficial to overshare one's personal life in public anyway, as it distracts from the perception of one's work.

Lack of mystery can be fatal, to distort a truism from Jenny Holzer.



Up: Helmut Lang, *ram head #1*, 2016. Resin, pigment, mixed media, wood. 12 x 31 x 14 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Down: The lower level of Helmut Lang's studio on Long Island, NY, 2023.



ST: Can you describe yourself as an artist in three words?

HL: I don't know.

ST: Uncertainty is both a motivator and a challenge for me in my work. Do you experience a similar push and pull? How do you navigate through ambiguity to reach a final outcome?

HL: I don't mind uncertainty. I grew up with it and learned to live with it—it means possibilities. I try to leave behind the safety of experience. Uncertainty also means endless layers of opportunities and dismissals until either the subject matter or oneself is exhausted. That is a good moment to stop.

The object and its integrity are the most important. Context and placement can be vital if you have to respond to a certain environment, or if the space around the object becomes part of it. On the other hand, I am also willing to let a space violate the sculptures and avoid the trap of beautifying the object. I want to think that a sculpture will eventually be placed in different contexts and will respond for better or worse each time. Also, one cannot always choose where it will end up and I don't want to be consumed by that fact. There is something interesting about not always being in control beyond the creation of the object.

I believe that a found audience is much better than a targeted audience. Otherwise, there is great risk that you work for the expectations of others and become an employee. It is not part of my DNA. It's important to push and violate and animate an unexpected dialogue by not explaining to the audience what they expect to know.

I think about how the sculpture will perform in public as a sign or information.

Installation view, *Helmut Lang: Alles Gleich Schwer*, Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, August 31–November 2, 2008. Courtesy of the artist and Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover.

Helmut Lang, *tor*, 2008. Pine, tar, steel, 169 x 75 x 1 inches. Courtesy of the artist.
Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2008. Rubber, steel, gold, tar, 26 x 28 x 7 ½ inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Helmut isn't somebody you can approach head-on. "Enigma" is a great word for him. He follows his own rhythms. He feels the undertow of his sensitivities, and that's really more what's directed him.

—Roni Horn, 2008 ⁷



Helmut Lang and Marie-Sophie Wilson photographed in Paris, 2003. Courtesy of hl-art.



Installation views, *Helmut Lang: new work*, Sperone Westwater, New York, March 30–April 29, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York.

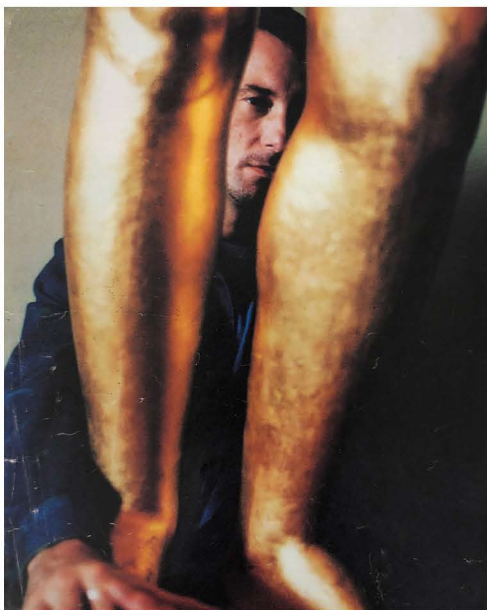




Make It Hard, the title of Lang's recent show, suggests a sexual energy at play in the creation of this new body of work. But alongside this invokes the digestive process whereby material is ingested, absorbed, transformed and expelled. Here the past seems to have been similarly metabolised. And just as the residues of former loves, lives, careers and obsessions also become monuments to a transformed past, so this series of new sculptures may speak to the autobiographical sense in which the material of artist's lives has always been the subject of their art.

Lang's subject may simply be that of transformation. History itself is, after all, a metabolic process, one that is in a state of constant change, of being re-written and reshaped. But if history is, as Karl Marx claimed, condemned to repeat itself first as tragedy and then as farce, then what of its objects and artefacts. Lang's new work seems to suggest that the break in this cycle can be found in the acts that turn life into art. By treating the material of the past in this way, he has created a language that is utterly assured and utterly his own. In doing so, he has staved off the ridiculous and created a space for a new sublime.

—Neville Wakefield, 2011 ⁸



ST: What motivates your artistic creations? Do you see art as an emotional reflection or a break from the norm?

HL: My motivation for creating is that I don't know better. I don't even like to explain my artwork to the public because it limits the possibilities of individual perception.

I see art as something that should escape any preconceived expectations, and consequently, everything is possible.

The art world needs change—it's time to break the generic rules, bourgeois disapprovals of the new, and perceptions that are widely in place. We need to stop keeping a pace that's unnatural for artists. This might be possible now because everything is interrupted beyond the art world, as we need change on so many levels. Bad times often create new beginnings. I hope for a reaction against the overtly grand and superficial.

Up: Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2015–17. Shellac, resin, foam, steel. 56 x 22 x 21 inches. Photo: © Jerry Gorovoy, courtesy of the artist.

Down: Helmut Lang photographed at the Palais de Chaillot, Trocadéro, Paris. Courtesy of hl-art.

Right page: Helmut Lang, *63*, 2010–13 (detail). Resin, pigment, mixed media. Dimensions variable. Photo: © Johnny Fogg, courtesy of the artist and MoCA Westport, Westport.





Installation view, *Helmut Lang: 41.1595° N, 73.3882° W*, curated by Todd von Ammon, MoCA Westport, Westport, March 15–September 13, 2020.
Photo: © Johnny Fogg, courtesy of the artist and MoCA Westport, Westport.





Installation view, *Helmut Lang: Various Conditions*, Stadtraum, Vienna, May 9–November 14, 2017. Photo: © Alexander Rosoli, courtesy of the artist and Stadtraum, Vienna.

Lang's forest of narrow pillars has no allusive title—simply the number of objects in the room, 63. Observed closely, the viewer can identify morsels of manifest reality—a frayed piece of textile, the glint of a metallic sequin—embedded in a delirious muck of resin. Each fragment not only alludes to a time in Lang's life but also to a space which the artist once inhabited. The materials, however, have been rendered so granular so as to completely untether them from memory. The pillars have been installed so as to allow the viewer to become subsumed by not only the presence of the sculpture but by the non-presence of materials embedded therein. 63 is installed as a uniform, incomplete grid so as to remove any reference to naturalistic space. It exists as a non-space made up of linear vectors with no prescribed order: a palace of schizophrenia.

...Lang proposes the exhibition as interstitial, residing in the space where his materials move from one state into another. Far from furnishing the world with new embellishment, the artwork seeks to prove that the only true determinism of matter is to experience itself in new forms.

...Lang's sculptures are a haunting of the present with the disorienting fragments of past lived experience. Memory can be a tyrant, forcing us to assemble a grand narrative based on the spaces we've occupied and the objects we've encountered—to construct a walled city with perceived limits and dimensions. Lang's artwork proposes time as digestive, untidy and unbiased. It suggests that perhaps the greatest reward of lived time is its potential to be forgotten, and that liberation from memory is the one truly sublime state.

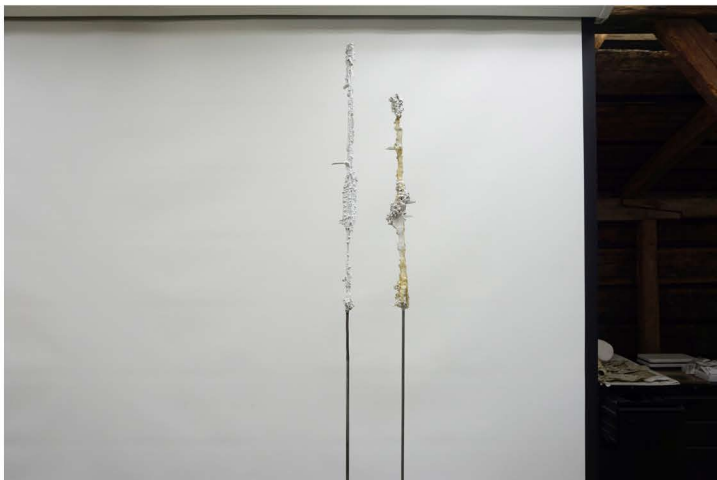
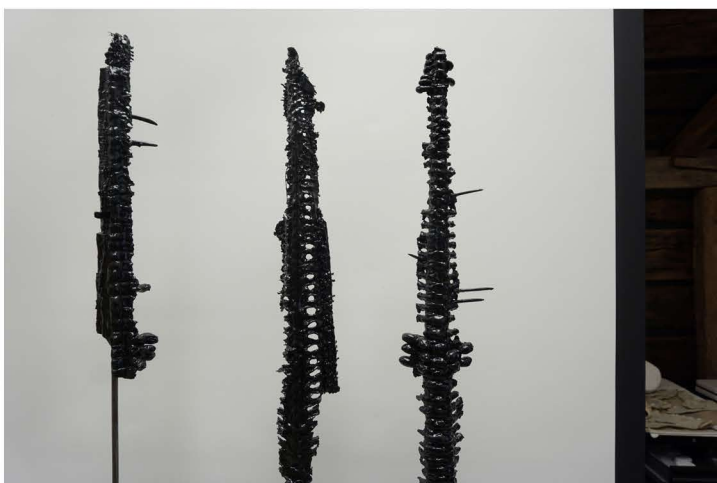
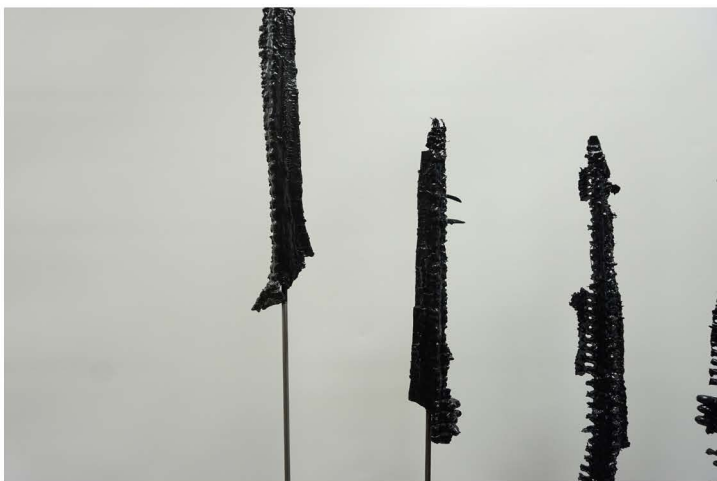
—Todd von Ammon, 2020⁹

It would be a misunderstanding to interpret Helmut Lang's "Pillars," "Spikes," and "Planes" as abstractions. On the contrary, this group of works, which has taken shape in his studio over recent years, is about a process of reduction, condensation, and concentration of concrete corporeal values. For is there anymore more inescapable and concrete than death?

—Hubert Klocker, 2017¹⁰



Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2016. Enamel, resin, paper, cardboard, steel, 67 1/2 x 7 x 4 inches. Photo: © Alexander Rosoli, courtesy of the artist and Stadtraum, Vienna.



Being afraid of change is not one of my qualities. I am not conflicted by the perceptions of the current or the old. For a while now, the art world has been changing and a new generation of artists, galleries, and collectors from all backgrounds is breaking new ground, existing outside the old hierarchies.

Anyone considering slow art?

ST: Is there anyone or anything in particular that influences your art today? What social, ecological, political, and cultural issues are concerning you now?

HL: My interest in the human condition has always been at the core of everything, and when activated, that varied stew of interests (both personal and global) demands a reaction in both my life and work, which are naturally inseparable for me.

We are living in very trying times. Known circumstances are being questioned, and it seems a lot of constants that we took for granted are moving closer and closer to the edge at increased speed. My work is not a direct response to breaking news, but the impact on it is from a broader scale of emotions.

I am deeply concerned about the general human condition and the loss of all civility, and the nearly unavoidable collapse of the global environment in the face of socioeconomic oppression at its worst.

It better be a driving force to deal with it urgently and immediately, to mobilize a solution. Otherwise, we are totally fucked.

ST: What would be the one thing that you would want to make right or better if you were given a second chance?

HL: You cannot edit your life in retrospect, so I don't. It does not lead to anything. We learn from our mistakes.

ST: Do you fear death?

HL: No.



Helmut Lang, *untitled*, 2011 (video stills). Digital video loop, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.





This page: Projection of *Helmut Lang: Alles Gleich Schwer* virtual exhibition, 51 Rue de l'Université, Paris, 2008. Photo: © Sesse Lind, courtesy of the artist.

Left page: *Helmut Lang* curated by Anthony Vaccarello, September 30–October 30, 2020, Paris. Poster: Saint Laurent.



Helmut Lang photographed on Long Island, NY, 2008. Photo: © Bruce Weber.





Helmut Lang, *untitled (twenty-two)*, 2018. Outdoor installation—rubber, steel, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and LongHouse Reserve, East Hampton.

1. Ulf Poschardt, "The Mirror's Deep Surface," in *Alles Gleich Schwer*, eds. Veit Görner and Frank-Thorsten Moll (kestnergesellschaft / Walther König, 2008), 17. Original text written in 1998.
2. Jenny Holzer, from the *Selective Memory Series* by Helmut Lang, 2007–. Original text written in 1997.
3. Jean Maheu, "Preface," in *Vienne 1880–1938: L'apocalypse joyeuse*, ed. Jean Clair (Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1986). Translated from French.
4. Louise Bourgeois, "Louise Bourgeois on... Helmut Lang," *wallpaper*, October 2008, 347.
5. Todd von Ammon, "Something to think about," *i-D* #366 (winter 2021/2022), 312–14.
6. Helmut Lang, *BURRY*. Exhibition curated by Neville Wakefield and Peter Doroshenko at Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, 16 Apr.–21 Aug. 2016. Text by Neville Wakefield.
7. Roni Horn, quoted in Dianne Solway, "Helmut Lang," *W*, October 2008, 278.
8. Neville Wakefield, "The Magician," *Vogue Hommes International*, fall/winter 2011, 286.
9. Todd von Ammon, "41.1595° N, 73.3882° W," in *Helmut Lang: 41.1595° N, 73.3882° W*, ed. Todd von Ammon (MoCA Westport, 2020), 4–5.
10. Hubert Klocker, "Dance of Death," in *Helmut Lang: Various Conditions*, ed. Hubert Klocker (Sammlung Friedrichshof / Schlebrügge.Editor, 2017), 47.

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on Long Island, NY, 2016. Photo: © Daniel Trese.

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**SIMILAR SOULS
COMFORT
EACH OTHER
THAT IS ALL
THAT IS NEEDED**

-Helmut Lang