

ESTHER STERN

Portfolio 2026, interactive installation, Vienna

estherstern@me.com
estherstern.org
@stainedfingerscollective

About

I’m Esther, an artist from Vienna. I work solo as well as with my collective SCHWINDEL LLC (Paula Oberndorfer and Esther Stern).

I use an installative, interactive, multimedia approach to build scenes in which visitors can play freely. I’m interested in creating environments where performative actions are preprogrammed and feel easy and light. My topics revolve around humanness and trying to figure out what that means.

Materials often include sculptural works paired with print, text and photography. Objects are produced in large quantities for visitors to move, buy or take home, constantly changing the landscape of the installation, often with me staying inside it as a performer.



Photo: Paula Oberndorfer



Photo: Johanna Fink



Photo: Paula Oberndorfer

Education

2020–26	Fine Arts, Performative Art class of Carola Dertnig, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Diploma with distinction, January 2026
2023	UCL Slade School of Fine Art, London
2019–21	Forestry, BOKU Vienna
2018–19	Fine Arts, University of Manitoba School of Art, Winnipeg
2014	International Summer Academy Salzburg, with Tobias Zielony



01

a life on it’s own, 2026



Type	Interactive installation, diploma project
Venue	Diploma show, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Schillerplatz, January 2026
Material	1,000 handmade ceramic mushrooms, exhibition architecture, photographic archive of every mushroom, printed calculation of working hours and material costs, sold by weight (€1 / gram)
Online	alifeonitsown.com

a life on it’s own is an interactive installation that examines questions of labour, value and artistic production. At its core are 1,000 handmade ceramic mushrooms.

Rather than focusing on the object, the project foregrounds the conditions of production: repetitive labour, duration, physical effort and economic structures. The installation includes the ceramic works, exhibition architecture, a photographic archive of all mushrooms, a printed calculation of working hours and material costs, and a performative sales setup.

The mushrooms are sold by weight at €1 per gram, transferring a familiar market logic into the exhibition space. Through interaction, purchase and circulation, a life on it’s own explores the blurred boundaries between artistic practice and wage labour, and how value is produced through context.

In 2020 I began my studies at the Academy. In the same year I started selling fish at markets across the city and spent the summers in the Austrian countryside measuring trees. a life on it’s own is directly inspired by working these two jobs and uses their symbols throughout the installation.

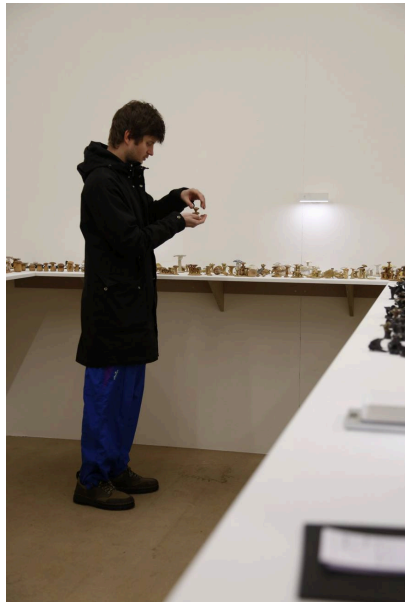



1 € / 9





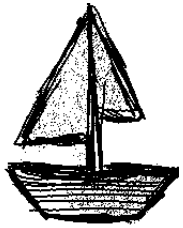






02

PAUSE, 2025



Type	Solo exhibition, installation and curation
Venue	Aquarium Akbild, Kurzbauergasse 9, 1020 Vienna, 27–28 Feb 2025
With	Works by Shanelle St. Hilaire, Timothy Hammer, Belinda Chan, Sheng Yuanjun, Owen Dunnigan
Material	Sandpit with 500 kg of sand, parasol, crosswords, postcards, changing room with borrowed games, books, hats and props

I knew for many months that I had the chance to do a little solo show, but I had no idea what I wanted to show. It became apparent that I did not want to make “real” art. I wanted to play. Go on vacation. So six days before the opening I scrapped all my concepts and decided to build a sandpit instead.

My budget for this show was €100, which I invested in 500 kilograms of sand that my dear partner and I hauled to and from the exhibition space. My work is so deeply rooted in my community it’s almost ridiculous. I borrowed everything else that was shown; some of the props were originals from my childhood, tucked away safely for us to rediscover now.

The exhibition consisted of the main room with the sandpit, parasol, crosswords, postcards and works my friends made, which I curated for the show. The second room was a changing room where you could leave your clothes and shoes, change into slippers, leave your attitude behind and change into a vacation mood. Visitors built sand castles, enjoyed drinks and wrote messages in a bottle.

Even though I was seeking relaxation, I did not end up getting it. Despite my efforts to have a chill time I fell into a hosting role, a performer and facilitator in my own work. I will keep working on my stress levels, and one day I will achieve a relaxed opening!









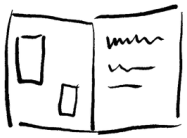



pause
exhibtion
esther stern
thursday 27/02/2025 from 17:00
friday 28/02/2025 from 14:00
@aquarium, kurzbauergasse 9, 1020



03

Dear, 2025



Type	Interactive installation, in collaboration with Rosa Knecht
Venue	Rundgang, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2025
With	In collaboration with Rosa Knecht
Material	Wooden shelf 62 × 13.5 × 14.5 cm, 111 letters in C6 format, lettering on envelopes, wall text
Online	estherstern.org/dear

I mostly get bills or parking tickets in the post. I often put them aside or leave them in the mailbox for a day or two before I defiantly open them.

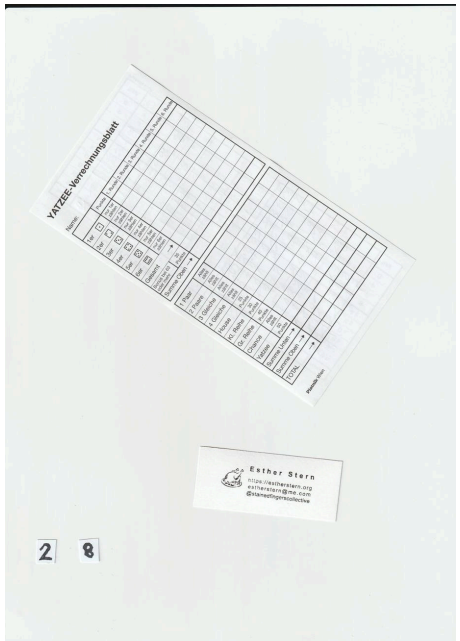
But how do I know which letters contain formal letters, bills and official information, and which contain personal reports, cards from other countries or a long-awaited love letter? The format of the letter actually gives it away straight away.

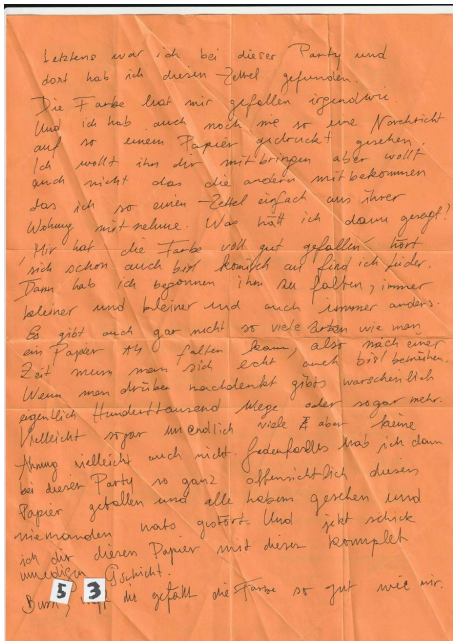
“Dear” deals with the C6 letter format and the content associated with letters of this size. Visitors find letters lined up on a wooden shelf. A wall text instructs them to choose a letter, read it and take it home. Every letter is different; all of them are available online as scans.

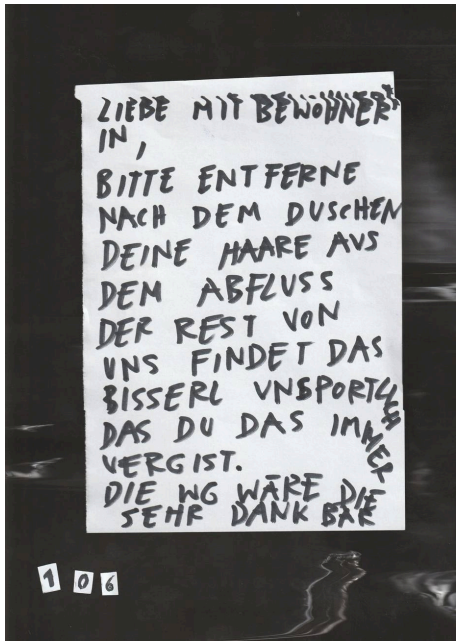





Esther Stern
4


YATZEE-Verrechnungsblatt
Esther Stern
2 8

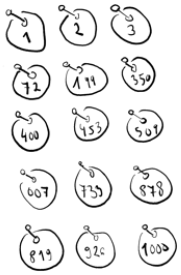

Letztens war ich bei dieser Party und
dort hab ich diesen Zettel gefunden.
Die Farbe hat mir gefallen irgendwie.
Und ich hab auch noch nie so eine Nachricht
auf so einem Papier gedruckt gesehen.
Ich wollt ihn dir mitbringen aber wollt
auch nicht das die anderen mitbekommen
das ich so einen Zettel einfach aus ihrer
Wohnung mitnehme. Was hätt ich dann gesagt?
Mir hat die Farbe voll gut gefallen. Hört
sich schon auch bißl komisch an find ich selber.
Dann hab ich begonnen ihn zu falten, immer
kleiner und kleiner und auch immer anders.
Es gibt auch gar nicht so viele Arten wie man
ein Papier falten kann also nach einer
Zeit muss man sich echt auch bißl bemühen.
Wenn man drüber nachdenkt gibts wahrscheinlich
eigentlich Hunderttausend Wege oder sogar mehr.
Vielleicht sogar unendlich viele. Ähm keine
Ahnung vielleicht auch nicht. Jedenfalls hab ich dann
bei dieser Party so ganz offensichtlich diesen
Papier gefalten und alle haben gecheckt und
niemanden wars gestört. Und jetzt schick
ich dir diesen Papier mit dieser kompliziert
unleserlichen Botschaft.
Bitte sag mir ob dir die Farbe so gut wie mir.
5 3


LIEBE MITBEWOHNERIN,
BITTE ENTFERNE
NACH DEM DUSCHEN
DEINE HAARE AUS
DEM ABFLUSS
DER REST VON
UNS FINDET DAS
BISSERL UNSPORTLICH
DAS DU DAS IMMER
VERGISST.
DIE WG WÄRE DIR
SEHR DANKBAR
1 0 6



04

the key to?, 2025



Type	Interactive installation, edition
Venue	kracherl & krawall, class exhibition of the Performative Art class, Exhibit gallery, Eschenbachgasse 11, Vienna, May 2025
Material	Edition of 108 uncut keys and 245 key tags

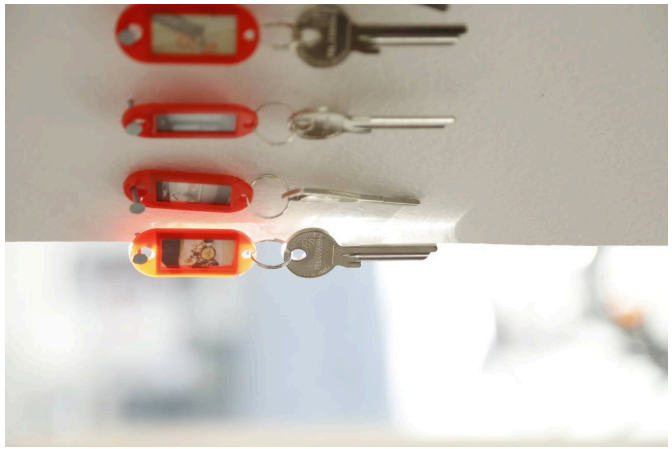
A long row of uncut keys with red tags hangs on the wall. Where or what do you want a key for? A place? A mind? A building? An object?

Tell me about it, and take a key home.

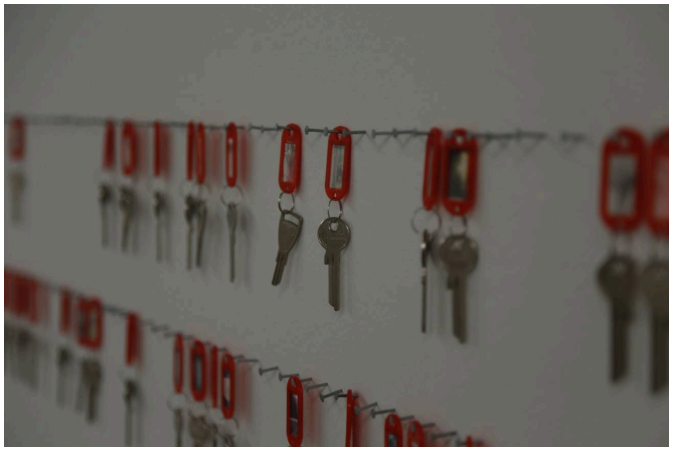












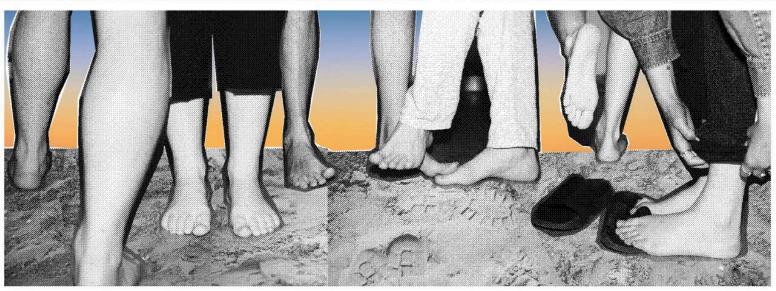


05

Klassenfahrt, 2025

Type	CMYK print, publication
Venue	Clinch 02, publication, June 2025
Material	Collage, four-colour print (CMYK)

A collage of youth memories, feet in the sand and things from school trips, made as a four-colour print for the publication Clinch 02.






Harry Potter
GAME BOY GAME
GREEN DAY



✲ 06

SOFT RECIPROCAL, 2024



Type	Solo exhibition
Venue	Bootleg, Skodagasse, Vienna, 26–28 April 2024
Material	15 works: oversized dog tags with chain, screen prints (dog bowl cocktails), bollard, mobile of dog tags, ceramic and steel bones, bowls with silver cutlery, painted glass door, CMYK screen print, two transport crates with photographs, balls, ceramic poops, picture on PVC; handout with floor plan

Exhibition text:

Tethered at the neck, two beings share a domain filled with artefacts, witnesses of their interconnection. How can we differentiate one from the other when we are presented with a unified vision, a seemingly interwoven destiny?

In a playground scattered with dog bones, drinking bowls and name tags that don’t belong to anyone anymore, two beings are tugging each other by the neck. In SOFT RECIPROCAL the room is set up for a mutually receptive encounter, where Esther Stern allows the other to become oneself, lets oneself become the other, and assumes a mutual respect that contrasts sharply with assimilation or appropriation of the other into recognisable concepts.

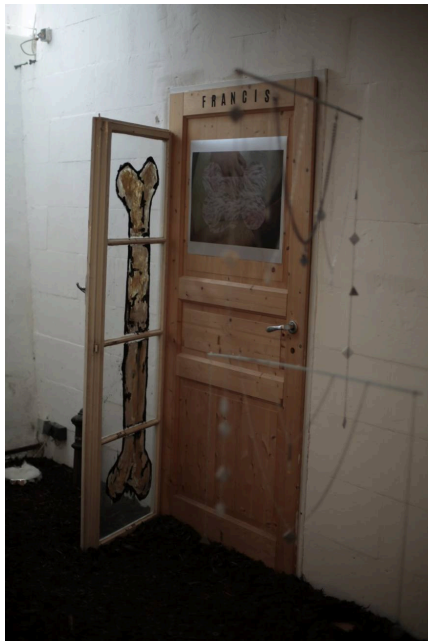
Esther opens that in-between space not only along the lengths of the dog leashes, but demands that the visitor take part. Every object in the room is to be touched and not merely looked upon, to be taken but not claimed, to be witnessed but not consumed.

Meanings are never created alone. In this exhibition the artist doesn’t impose her point of view. Everyone has to bring their own sensitivity, their own capacity for surprise and reflection, their own difference, and in return, you get to take your own shit home.

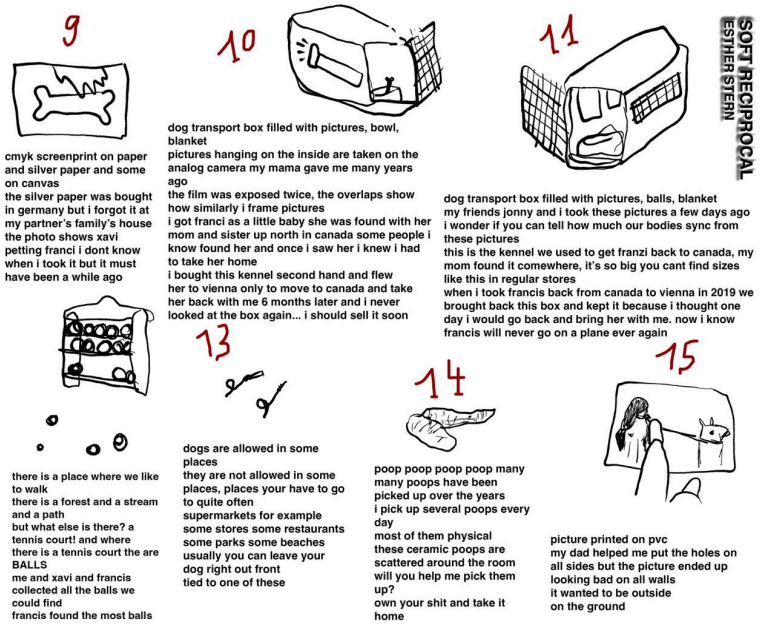







FRANCIS

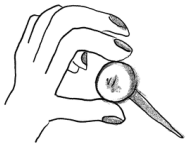



9
cmyk screenprint on paper and silver paper and some on canvas
the silver paper was bought in germany but i forgot it at my partner's family's house
the photo shows xavi petting franci i dont know when i took it but it must have been a while ago
10
dog transport box filled with pictures, bowl, blanket
pictures hanging on the inside are taken on the analog camera my mama gave me many years ago
the film was exposed twice, the overlaps show how similarly i frame pictures
i got franci as a little baby she was found with her mom and sister up north in canada some people i know found her and once i saw her i knew i had to take her home
i bought this kennel second hand and flew her to vienna only to move to canada and take her back with me 6 months later and i never looked at the box again... i should sell it soon
11
dog transport box filled with pictures, balls, blanket
my friends jonny and i took these pictures a few days ago
i wonder if you can tell how much our bodies sync from these pictures
this is the kennel we used to get franzi back to canada, my mom found it comewhere, it's so big you cant find sizes like this in regular stores
when i took francis back from canada to vienna in 2019 we brought back this box and kept it because i thought one day i would go back and bring her with me. now i know francis will never go on a plane ever again
SOFT RECIPROCAL
ESTHER STERN
13
there is a place where we like to walk
there is a forest and a stream and a path
but what else is there? a tennis court! and where there is a tennis court the are BALLS
me and xavi and francis collected all the balls we could find
francis found the most balls
dogs are allowed in some places
they are not allowed in some places, places your have to go to quite often
supermarkets for example
some stores some restaurants some parks some beaches
usually you can leave your dog right out front tied to one of these
14
poop poop poop poop many many poops have been picked up over the years
i pick up several poops every day
most of them physical
these ceramic poops are scattered around the room
will you help me pick them up?
own your shit and take it home
15
picture printed on pvc
my dad helped me put the holes on all sides but the picture ended up looking bad on all walls
it wanted to be outside
on the ground



07

Post-it Party, 2024–25

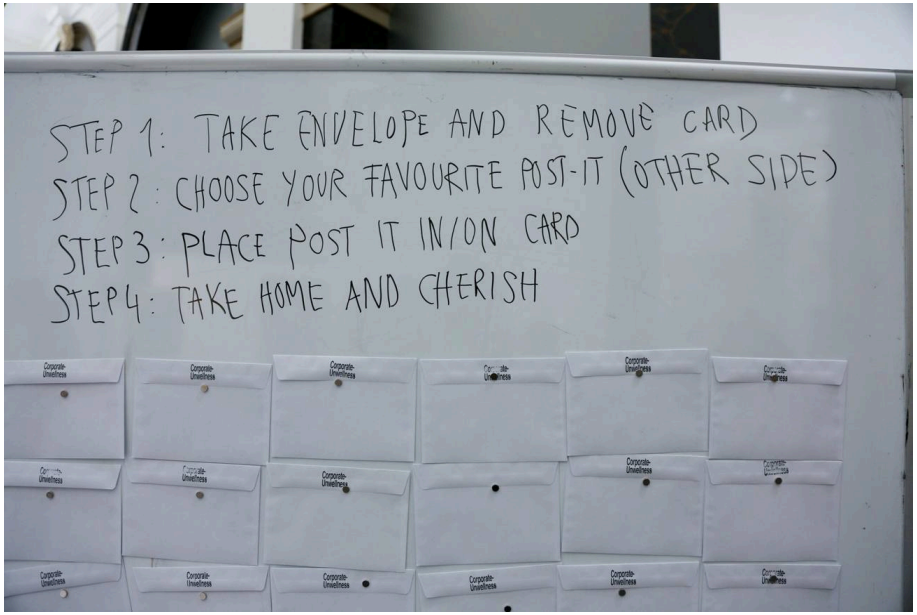


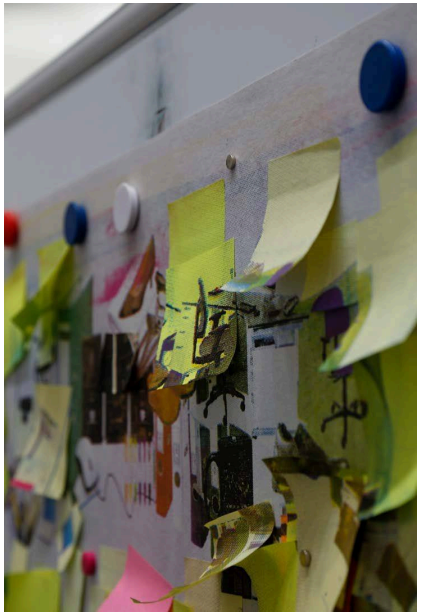
Type	Interactive installation, edition
Venue	Rundgang, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna; CORPORATE UNWELLNESS, DB59
Material	CMYK screen print, 100 Post-its with the same print, magnets, envelopes with cards, instructions, magnetic surface; edition of 30 or 50 Post-its

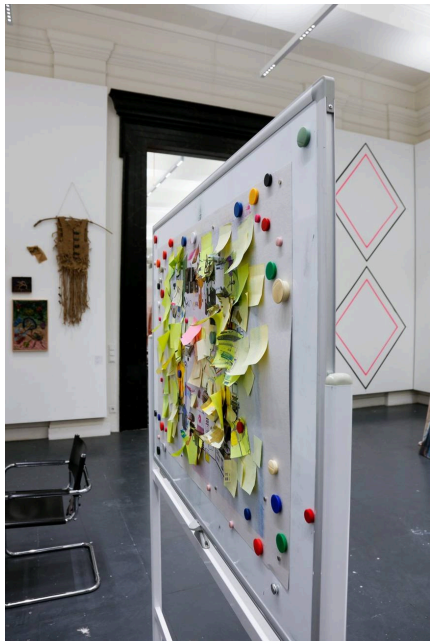
Post-it Party is an interactive installation that can be presented in varying dimensions: a CMYK screen print covered with Post-its bearing the same print, on a magnetic surface. Viewers are instructed to choose a Post-it, stick it onto a card and take it home. This way the print keeps changing as the stickers are removed.

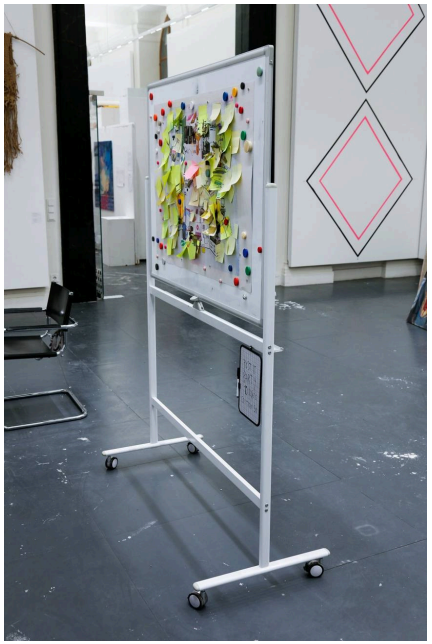
The print shows a collage of the first 100 things I thought of when thinking of an office in a physical sense. In an office much feels replaceable without notice, and working there may feel the same way. The installation asks how much office can be removed before the picture significantly changes.




STEP 1: TAKE ENVELOPE AND REMOVE CARD
STEP 2: CHOOSE YOUR FAVOURITE POST-IT (OTHER SIDE)
STEP 3: PLACE POST IT IN/ON CARD
STEP 4: TAKE HOME AND CHERISH











08

Beer Lovers: Print or Drink, 2024

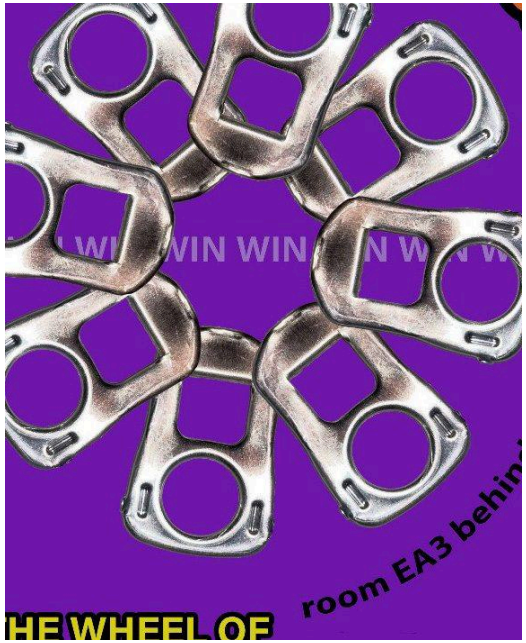


Type	Interactive installation, Wheel of Fortune Project
Venue	Rundgang, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2024
Material	Wheel of fortune, table with gambling games, four screen prints (edition of 100), beer

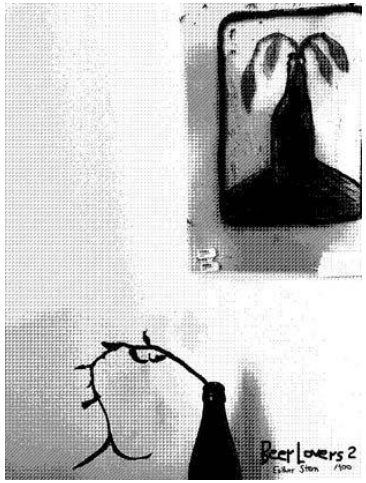
Four screen prints show things you can do with beer other than drinking it. Visitors spun the wheel of fortune and won either a beer or a print. They chose how much they wanted to pay to participate and picked the game and its rules. In the end every participant won exactly what they wanted, for the price they wanted to pay.

The work deals with the idea of having to get lucky to be able to live a lovable life in this world, especially as an artist. Every one of us is born with a different amount of luck; within this installation the rules are twisted and everyone gets to choose their outcome.

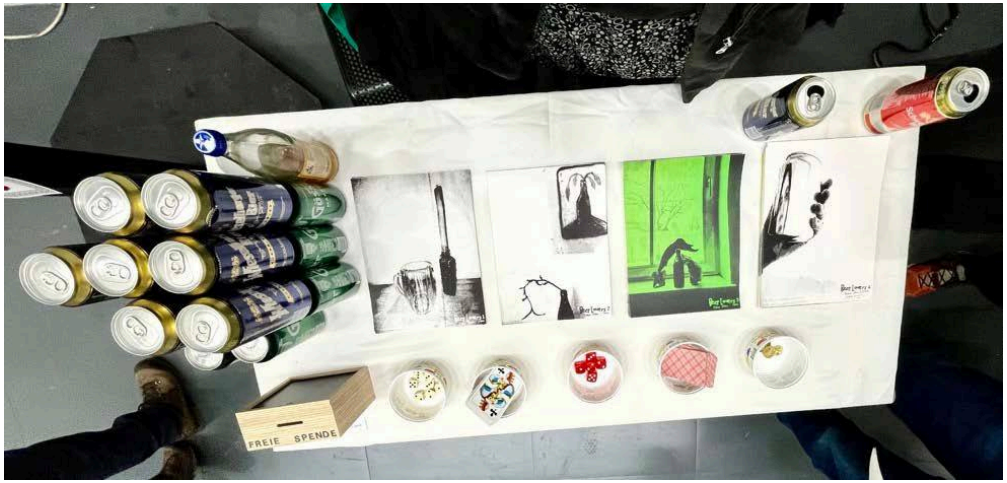



WIN WIN
room EA3 behin


Beer Lovers 4
Esther Stern 1/100


Beer Lovers 2
Esther Stern 1/100

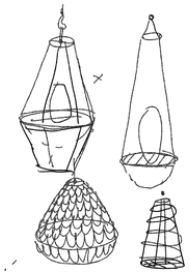



FREIE SPENDE



09

SHELTER, 2023–24

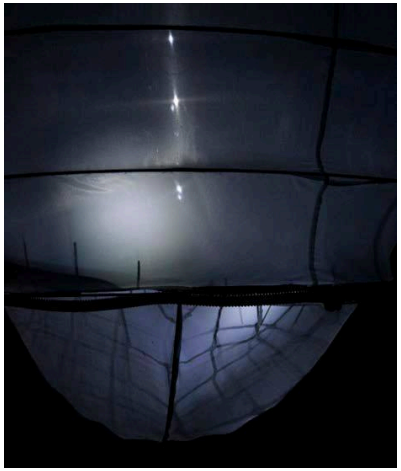


Type	Walk-in installation
Venue	Medienfrische Festival, 2023; Klima Biennale Vienna, 2024
With	In collaboration with Elisa Schober
Material	Two hanging, walk-in structures in four parts, light

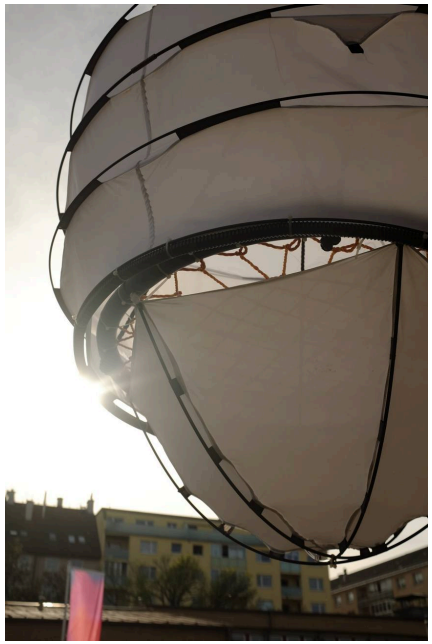
Shelter is an exploration of comfort and safety. Two hanging structures can be entered and experienced by visitors from the inside, like floating rooms in the forest.

The work changes once the sun goes down: lit from within, the structures begin to glow, conveying the feeling of a firefly being caught. The four parts of Shelter can be worked with individually, manipulated in shape and explored performatively.

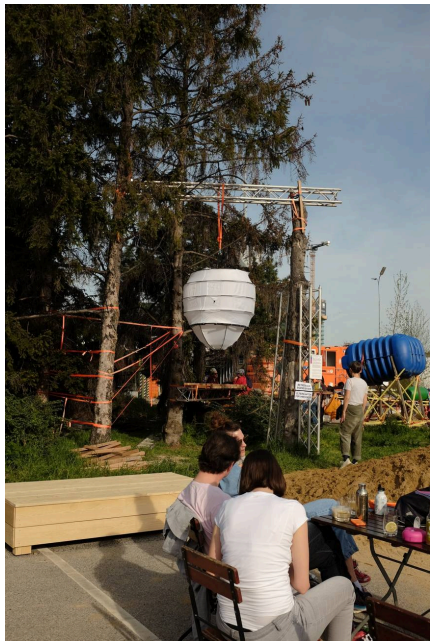














10

2:1, 2023

21

Type	Performance in an installation by Kollektiv Bande
Venue	Medienfrische Festival, Bschlabs, Tyrol, 2023; re-enactment at Summer Showing, Belvedere 21, Vienna, 2023
With	Kollektiv Bande (Elisa Schober and Hannah Parth)
Material	Orange mesh sculptures, wearable objects, snow, rock

2:1 is a performance from my residency at Medienfrische Festival 2023. I performed in an installation by Kollektiv Bande (Elisa Schober and Hannah Parth) on a snowfield in the Tyrolean mountains.

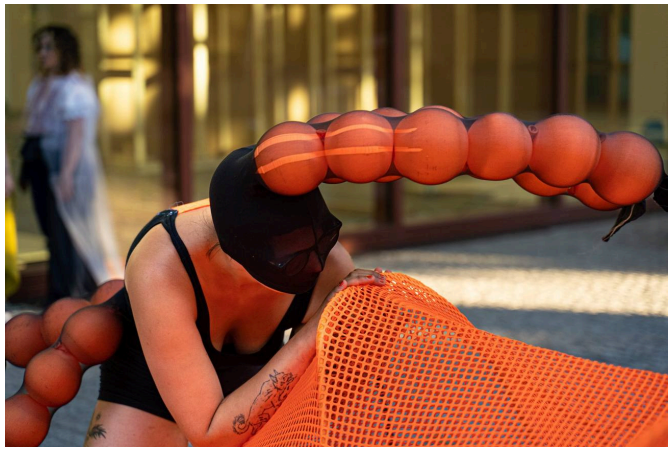
Wearing objects on my body, I move between large orange mesh sculptures, crawl into them, pull at them and almost disappear inside them.

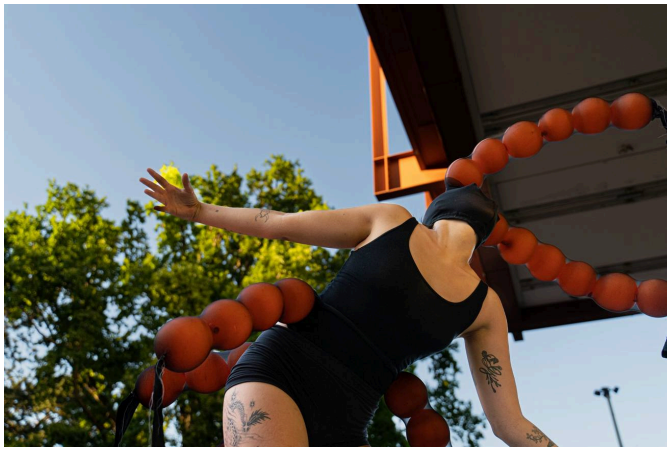
Later in 2023 I re-enacted 2:1 at Summer Showing in Belvedere 21, Vienna, in front of an audience.















11

Choose your luck, 2023

Type	Interactive installation and performance, Wheel of Fortune Project
Venue	UCL Slade School of Fine Art, London
Material	Wheel of fortune, table with dice, cards, coins, screen-printed scratch tickets and certificates, office supplies, date stamp, pens, wall lettering

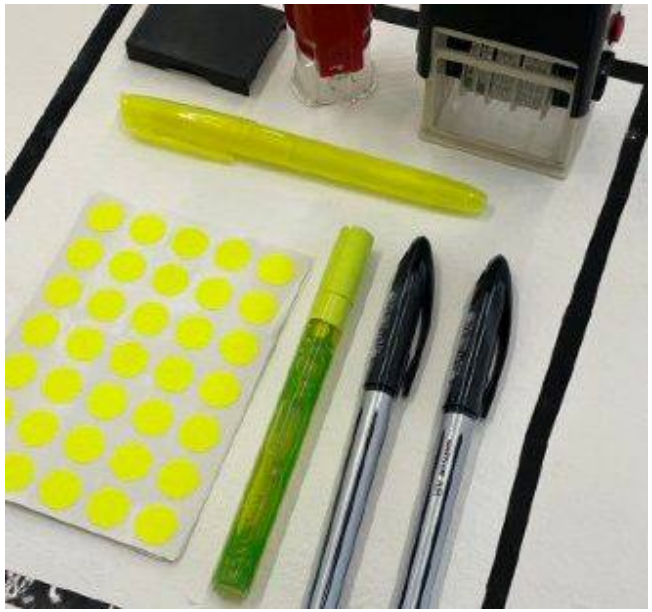
Visitors are invited to follow step-by-step instructions on the wall and receive a “winner” or “loser” certificate, officiated by the artist performing as an office employee.

Participants choose whether they are winning or losing today, sorting themselves into these categories, and the work explores what happens in a room after putting viewers up to this binary choice. How they arrive at their choice is entirely up to them. They come up to the table, fill in their name and the certificate is signed. The certificates are printed double-sided: every winning side has a losing one as well.


STEP 1: DECIDE IF YOU ARE WINNING OR LOSING TODAY
STEP 2: FILL IN YOUR NAME
STEP 3: GET IT OFFICIATED

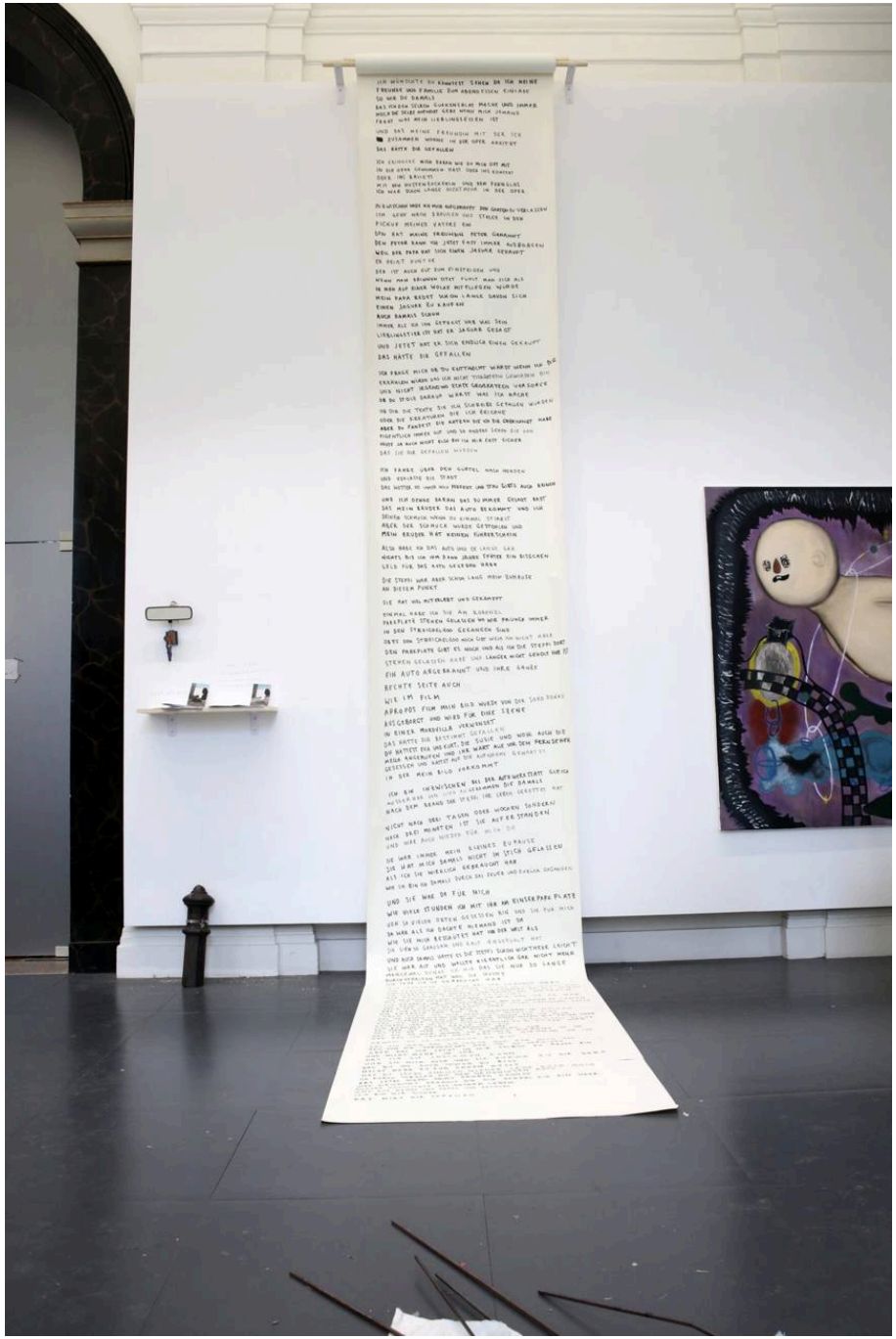

STEP 1: DECIDE IF YOU
STEP 2: FILL IN YOUR
STEP 3: GET IT


SCRATCH OFF TICKIT
(STEP 1)




(STEP 1)


STEP 1: DECIDE IF YOU ARE WINNING OR LOSING TODAY
STEP 2: FILL IN YOUR NAME
STEP 3: GET IT OFFICIATED
(STEP 1)



12

Das würde dir gefallen, 2022



Type	Installation, text, zine
Material	Text on a paper scroll from ceiling to floor, rear-view mirror, car key, shelf with zines to take home (A5, 20 pages, text and drawings), bollard, analogue photographs

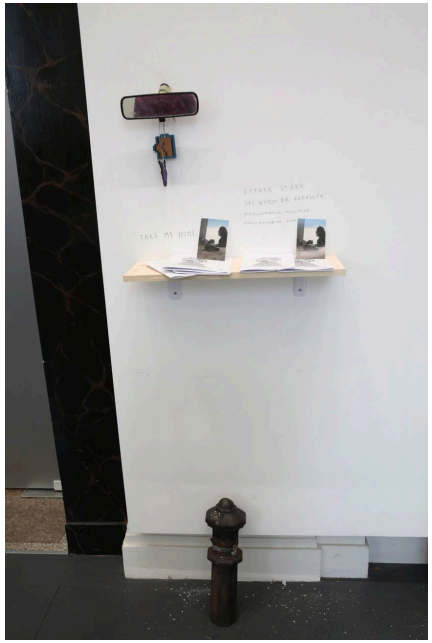
For my car, Steffi:

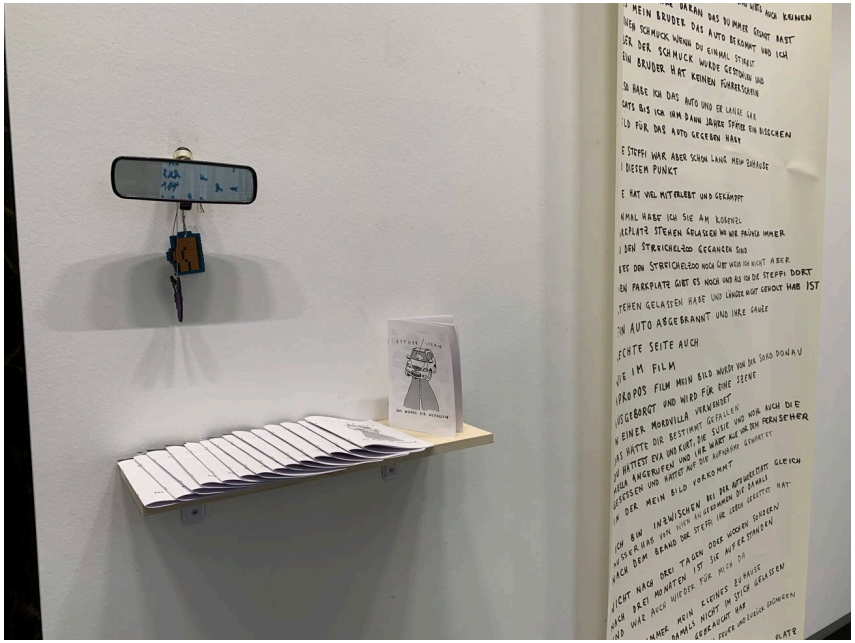
Das würde dir gefallen (“You would like that”) is a text about Steffi, a 2003 Mazda 2 with automatic transmission that was handed down to me and that I named Steffi when I got my driving licence.

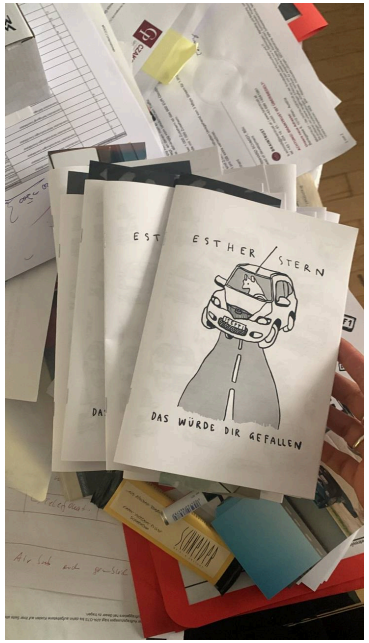
On a walk through Vienna, past the parking spots, schools and gardens of my childhood, the text collects small memories: of the person the car once belonged to, of family, friends, my white dog and all the places Steffi waited for me in front of. It ends with a goodbye to the car.

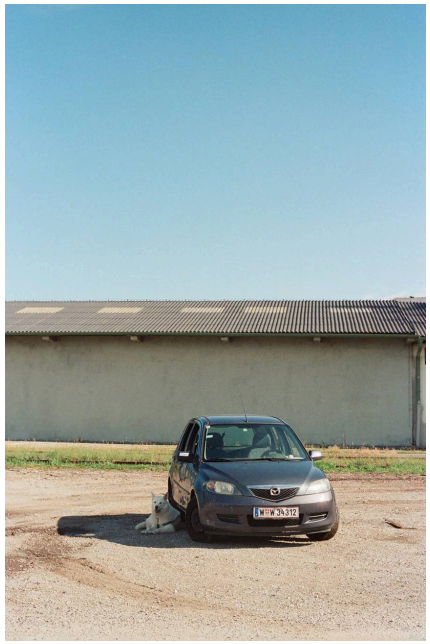
In the installation the text runs on a long paper scroll from the ceiling down across the floor. A rear-view mirror and the car key hang above a shelf of zines that visitors can take home; the zine combines the text with drawings of cars and number plates. Analogue photographs show Steffi with her peeling paint and her name written in the dust.

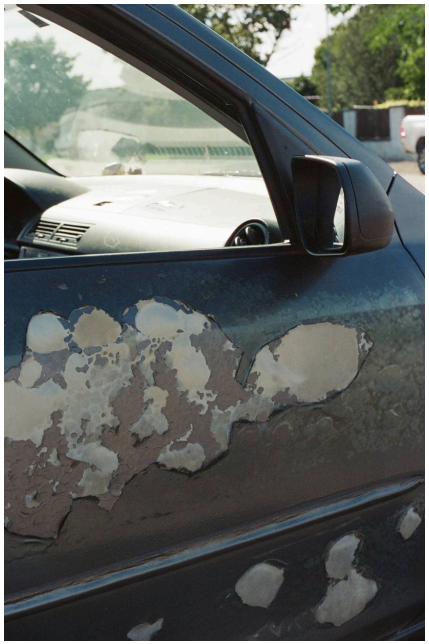
The text is in German. It opens: “Ich gehe aus meiner Wohnungstür / Heute hinunter über die Treppen und nicht mit dem Aufzug”






ESTHER STERN
DAS WÜRDE DIR GEFALLEN









13

Artomat, 2021–25

Type	Interactive sculpture
Venue	OUT THE BOX, Schillerplatz, 2021; BLURRY FOCUS, 2021; Medienfrische Festival, 2022; 2025 with new contents
Material	Two redesigned condom dispensers, 5 × 5 cm stickers

My first interactive work: two old condom dispensers were redesigned and filled with 5 × 5 cm stickers.

The Artomat sculptures were a performative experiment regarding visitor interaction with objects that everyone knows and has seen before, but in a different context.


Cinema
SUPER SILVER








OUT
THE
BOX


KEEP ON
BASTELN



14

SCHWINDEL LLC®

CORPORATE UNWELLNESS, 2024

Type	Group exhibition, curated and organised with SCHWINDEL LLC
Venue	DB59, Dornbacher Straße 59, 1170 Vienna, 15–24 Nov 2024
With	SCHWINDEL LLC (Paula Oberndorfer and Esther Stern), with around 60 artists
Online	www.instagram.com/schwindelllc/

CORPORATE UNWELLNESS was a group exhibition curated and organised by SCHWINDEL LLC, the collective of Paula Oberndorfer and Esther Stern, at Dornbacher Straße 59 in November 2024. It showed works by around 60 artists, including Esther's Post-it Party.

The exhibition came with the full SCHWINDEL LLC identity: logo, posters and corporate-style key tags.

15.11. —
24.11.2024

Opening: 14.11.
17-22h

20.11. 09-17h
23.11. 12-18h
24.11. 12-18h

Other dates
by appointment

Corporate Unwellness

Dornbacher Straße 59
1170 Wien

SCHWINDEL LLC®



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ESTHER STERN

Artist, Vienna
estherstern@me.com
estherstern.org
@stainedfingerscollective

Education

2020–26	Fine Arts, Performative Art class of Carola Dertnig, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Diploma with distinction, January 2026
2023	UCL Slade School of Fine Art, London
2019–21	Forestry, BOKU Vienna
2018–19	Fine Arts, University of Manitoba School of Art, Winnipeg
2014	International Summer Academy Salzburg, with Tobias Zielony

Exhibitions, performances, projects (selected)

2026	Forum Alpbach, project with stamps and pins, project
	a life on it's own, Diploma show, Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Schillerplatz, solo
2025	7th Artist Market, Kunsthalle Wien, group
	1st Artcare Young Art auction, with Kollektiv Bande, group
	Salon Parkour #30, with Paula Oberndorfer and Franz-Xaver Rieder, performance
	Lucky Loop Off-Site Art Festival, curation, organisation and works, curation
	Klassenfahrt, print in Clinch 02, publication
	the key to?, kracherl & krawall, Exhibit Eschenbachgasse, group
	where's liu?, US-RADA, Estonia, group
	PAUSE, Aquarium Akbild, curated by Esther Stern, solo
	Dear (in collaboration with Rosa Knecht) and Post-it Party, Rundgang Akademie der bildenden Künste, group
2024–25	das Edith, Grafikklasse print collection, group
2024	Dogtail Print, Die Hundezone, Generic Gallery Funkhaus 1040, group
	CORPORATE UNWELLNESS, DB59, curation, organisation and works, curation
	Pick me up, Kleingarten 3, Fiktiv Kollektiv, group
	Trophäen des Almwolf, Almvernissage Bayrischzell, group
	Esistenza Integrale, Futurama Lab Artists & Friends, Bildraum Studio, group
	SOFT RECIPROCAL, Bootleg Skodagasse, solo
	SHELTER, Klima Biennale Wien, with Elisa Schober, group
	Übers dableiben und weggehen, text in Zeitgenossin Magazin, publication
	Beer Lovers: Print or Drink, Rundgang Akademie der bildenden Künste, group
2023	Choose your luck, UCL Slade, London, group
	IHS Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna, with Kollektiv Bande, group
	Medienfrische Festival, residency and performance 2:1 in an installation by Kollektiv Bande, residency
	ich kann leider auch nicht LG, Exhibit Eschenbachgasse, group
	Summer Showing, Belvedere 21, re-enactment of the performance 2:1, performance
2022	Megaworld Festival, with Paula Oberndorfer, performance
	Medienfrische Festival, residency
	MATERIAL GIRL*Z calendar, with Paula Oberndorfer, edition of 100, publication
2021	Duo exhibition with Judith Kerndl, KunstGallerie Waldviertel, group
	Summer Showing, Schillerplatz, group
	OUT THE BOX, Schillerplatz Container, group
2020	BLURRY FOCUS, solo