



***VISCOUS
MYTHS***

Michael Hirschbichler

VISCOUS MYTHS

Since thousands of years fountains of burning oil have been reported to spout from the ground on the Absheron Peninsula and to be worshipped in fire cults. Despite this long-standing history the discovery and industrial exploitation of oil in the middle of the 19th century marked a decisive event that led to a radical transformation of the landscape and an enormous growth of the former provincial town of Baku. From then on oil pervaded – and still pervades – nearly all realms of life and according to its great significance possesses a decidedly mythological dimension. The exhibition “Black Myths” presents a series of interrelated work cycles that Michael Hirschbichler created around the resource of oil, and which investigate oil’s interplay with the geological, social, political, economical and cultural reality of the Absheron Peninsula and beyond. In a broad spectrum of artistic media – which comprises installation, sculpture, drawing, painting, photography, performance, film and sound – the works depart from the physical properties of oil and of the landscape, from which it is extracted, in order to encompass its political and spatial implications and finally its deeply-rooted and yet tacit mythologization. The individual works and work cycles shown in the exhibition can be understood as a fragmentary collection of symbolic objects and signs, between which a complex web of myths unfolds.

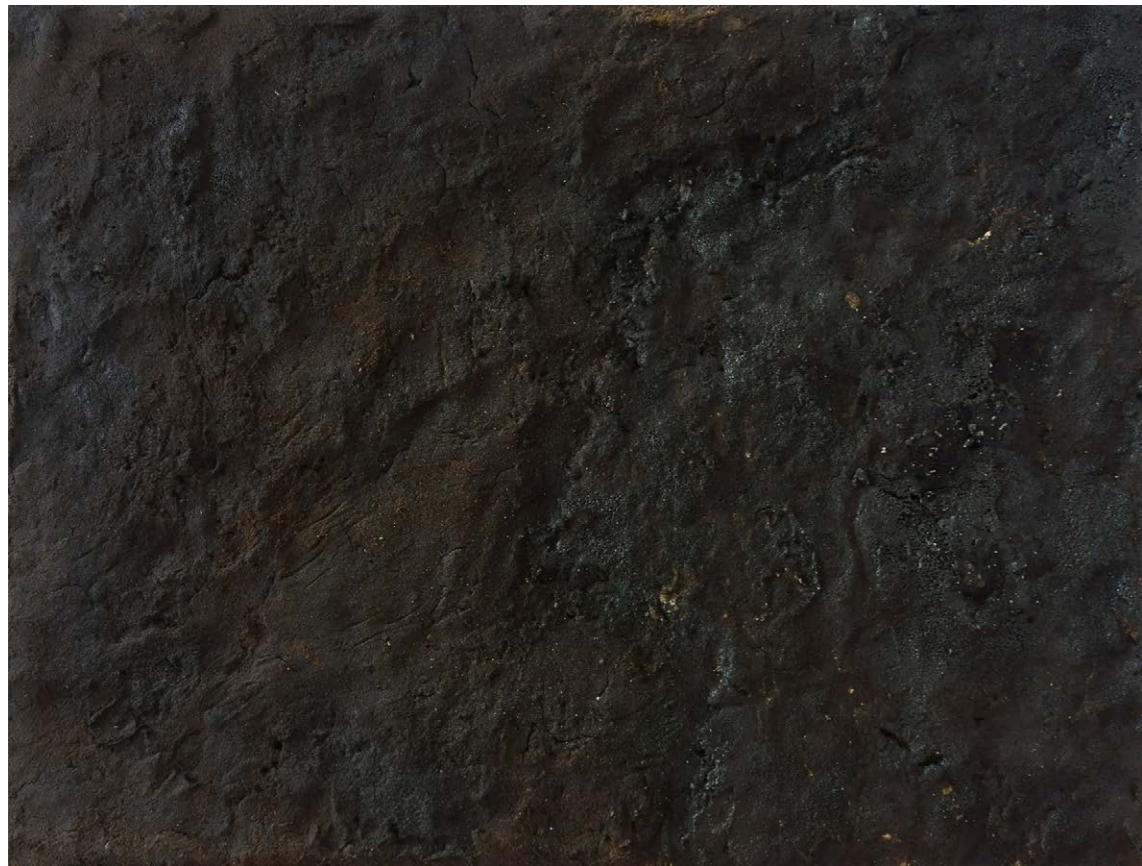
GEOLOGICAL PAINTINGS (THE PENINSULA CHART)

soil samples from different locations on the Absheron Peninsula on wooden boards
57x75 cm each
2017

Soil samples collected from different sites on the Absheron Peninsula that are connected to oil, its extraction, processing, the wealth generated thereof etc. form the basis of this work cycle. By removing the soil from its site of origin and by applying it onto wooden boards it becomes the resource for an aleatory painting process. The resulting "Geological Paintings" form an abstract map consisting of multiple plates that are not meant to be representations or depictions of the territory but rather physical translocations containing hints of the region's treatment of the ground and its mythology. Upon a closer look, traces of human presence and fragments of potential stories contained in this raw landscape material become visible.

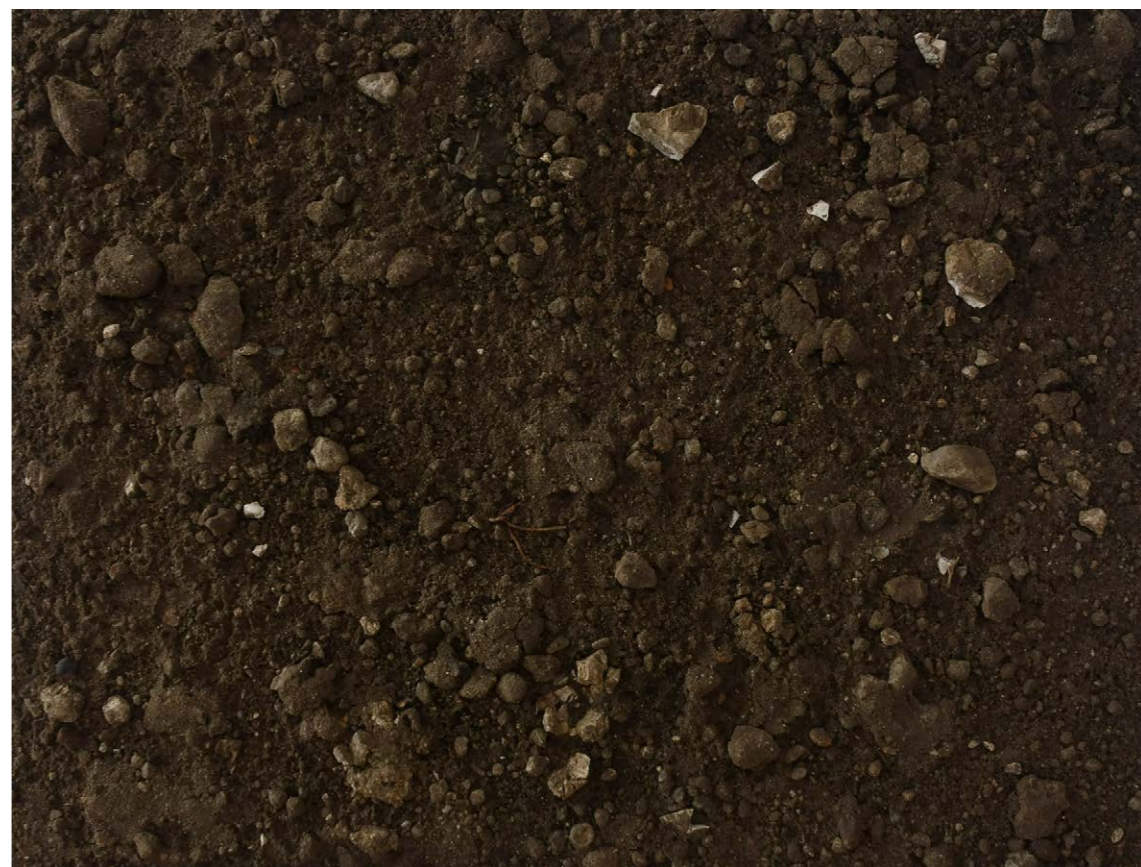


"Geological Paintings"
exhibition view Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Artim, Baku 2017



"Geological Paintings", 2017
above: Artyom Island, latitude: 40.475511, longitude: 50.313606
below: Balaxani, atitude: 40.461657, longitude: 49.932202

"Geological Paintings", 2017
above: Xirdalan, latitude: 40.465661, longitude: 49.791164
below: Dubendi Beach, latitude: 40.424629, longitude: 50.296141



"Geological Paintings", 2017
above: Emin Beach, latitude: 40.367557, longitude: 50.126469
below: Sixov Cimerliyi, latitude: 40.300273, longitude: 49.772265

"Geological Paintings", 2017
above: Bibi-Heybat, latitude: 40.333084, longitude: 49.827849
below: Zabrat, latitude: 40.467085, longitude: 49.948617



"Geological Paintings", 2017
above: Hövsan, latitude: 40.353755, longitude: 50.029174
below: White City, latitude: 40.388399, longitude: 49.890876

"Geological Paintings", 2017
above: Suraxani, latitude: 40.414896, longitude: 50.009852,
below: Xazar Islands, latitude: 40.253289, longitude: 49.625547

OIL FIELD PAINTINGS

crude oil sludge on canvas
85 x 120 cm each
2017

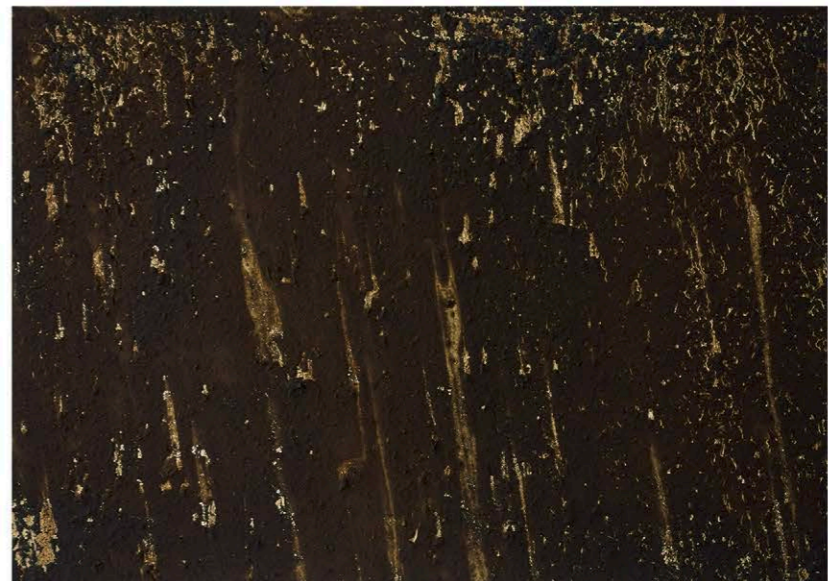
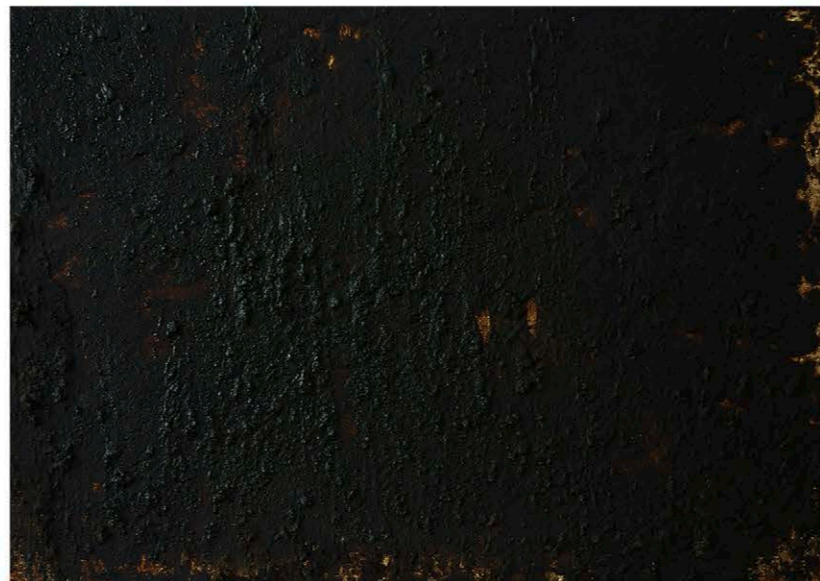
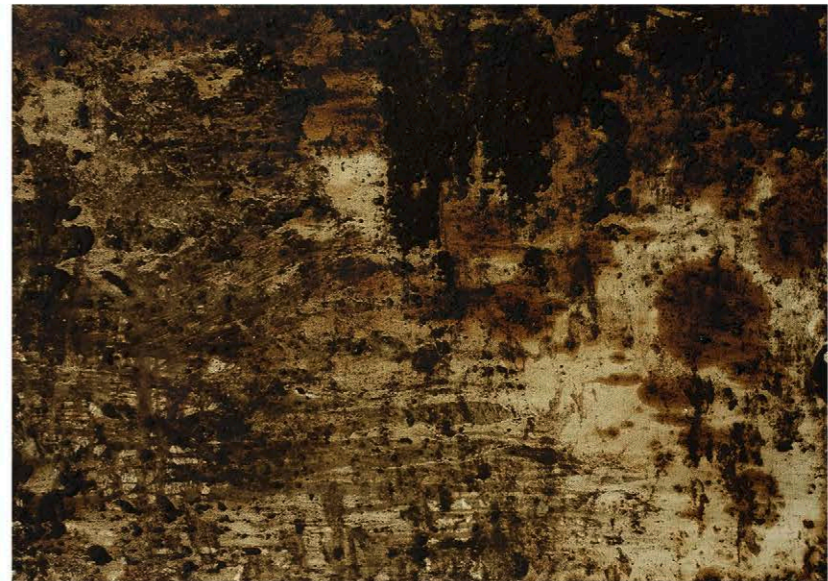
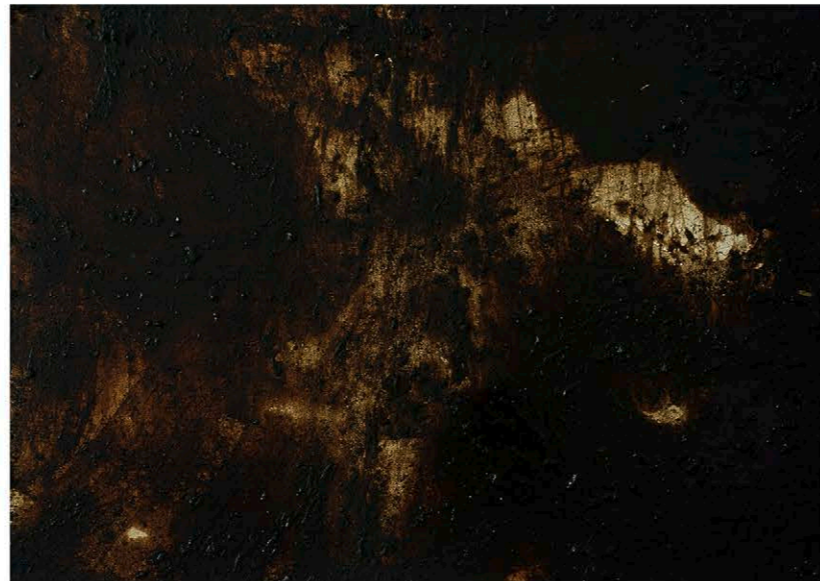
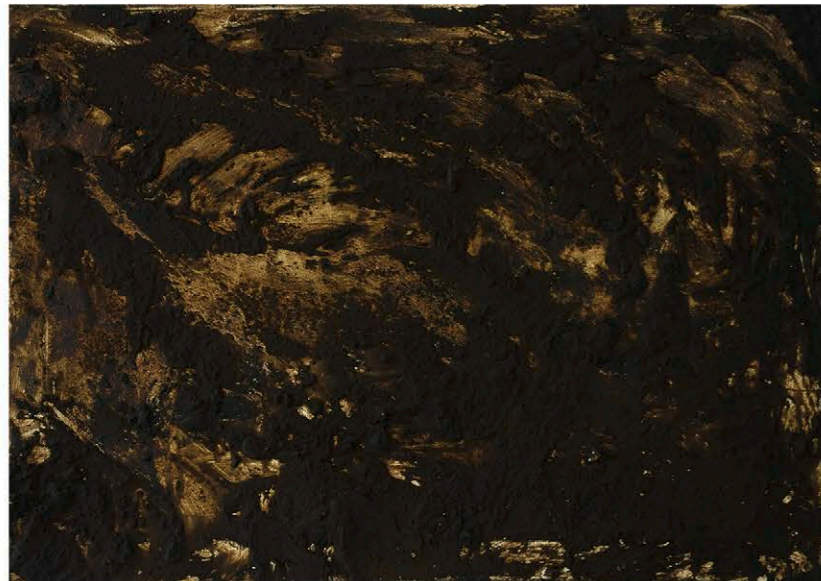
The works of the series "Oil Field Paintings" were created on one of the world's oldest oil fields, in Bibi Heybat, Baku. In a kind of „Plein Air" action, ironically engaging traditions of landscape painting – such as Impressionist as well as Abstract Expressionist techniques – crude oil is taken directly from oil spills in the landscape and carried onto white canvases. Applied in coarse gestures, the paintings are recordings of the different material characteristics and aesthetic qualities of oil. Either liquid or dried, concentrated or mixed with rain water or soil, ranging in color from dark black to light brown, with different textures and haptic properties, the works capture crude oil's different material states, depending on which part of the oil pit the oil was taken from. Considering this fascinatingly wide spectrum of appearances, oil's archaic mythological implications become understandable. It is not without reason that in ancient Greece oil was also known under the name „Oil of Medea", which alludes to the fact that Medea is said to have used it for magical rituals. The performance-like "ritual" of painting the "Oil Field Paintings" was interrupted by the security force controlling the Bibi Heybat oil fields, foregrounding the territorial power relations, in which this valuable resource is enmeshed.



"Oil Field Paintings"
on the oil field of Bibi Heybat, Baku, 2017



"Oil Field Paintings"
on the oil field of Bibi Heybat, Baku, 2017



"Oil Field Paintings"
85 x 120 cm each, 2017

HOW THE FLOOD TURNED INTO GOLD

translocation of 2000 kg of Bibi Heybat oil sludge
variable dimensions
2017

The work "How the Flood Turned Into Gold" stages the process of translocating 2000 kg of oil sludge from the world's oldest oil field in Bibi Heybat (Baku) to the exhibition space of Yarat in Baku. By excavating and moving the oil-drenched landmass from the exterior context of a productive industrial wasteland to the clean interior space of an art institution, both the landscape of the excavation site and the perception the oil sludge's material properties are transformed. In this changed spatial setting the „black gold“ – as oil is frequently referred to due to its central role in industrial society and its finiteness – reveals its visual, haptic and olfactory properties. Moreover, it acquires a mythological dimension, evoking the ancient past, when dead marine organisms sank to the ground of primordial oceans and over the course of millions of years were transformed under the absence of oxygen into what we know as oil today. Besides the material and sensual presence of the oil sludge, the actual process of moving it forms an integral part of the work. This process, which included negotiations with political authorities and an oil corporation, involved people from different social realities in Baku, those who live the promises that the material contains, as well as those for whom they remain an illusion.



"How The Flood Turned Into Gold"
excavation on the SOCAR oil field, Bibi Heybat, Baku, 2017



"How The Flood Turned Into Gold"
SOCAR oil field, Bibi Heybat, Baku, 2017



"How The Flood Turned Into Gold"
exhibition view Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Artim, Baku 2017

THEATER OF COMBUSTION

in collaboration with Lukas Raeber
steel, neon lights, electrical cables, power generator, photographed at different sites
2017

The work "Theater of Combustion" stages the act of burning fuel as a theatrical event. The main actor hereby is a light sculpture in the geometry of a methane molecule, which belongs to the group of alkanes, a main component of oil and gas. This sculptural enlargement of a molecular structure is positioned at different sites of oil production and processing on the Absheron Peninsula in Azerbaijan. Driven by a gasoline power generator the sculpture illuminates its petro-chemical surroundings by burning the resource, which was exploited and refined there. The industrial landscapes and facilities, which are photographed during dusk and dawn, thus become mysterious places, where fossil fuel is turned into a cult object, sculpturally materialized and ritually burned.



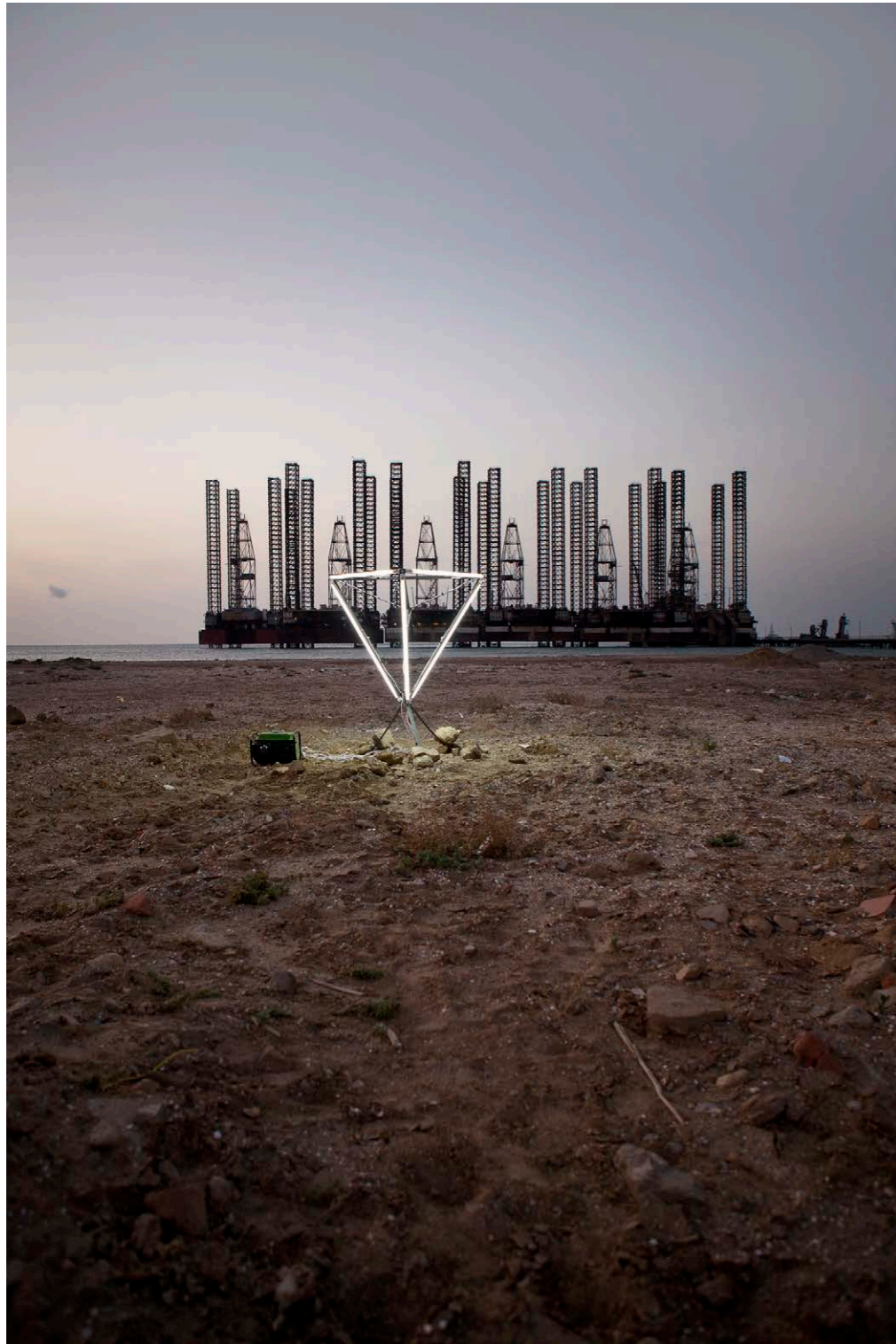
"Theater of Combustion"
Sixov Cimerliyi, Baku, 2017



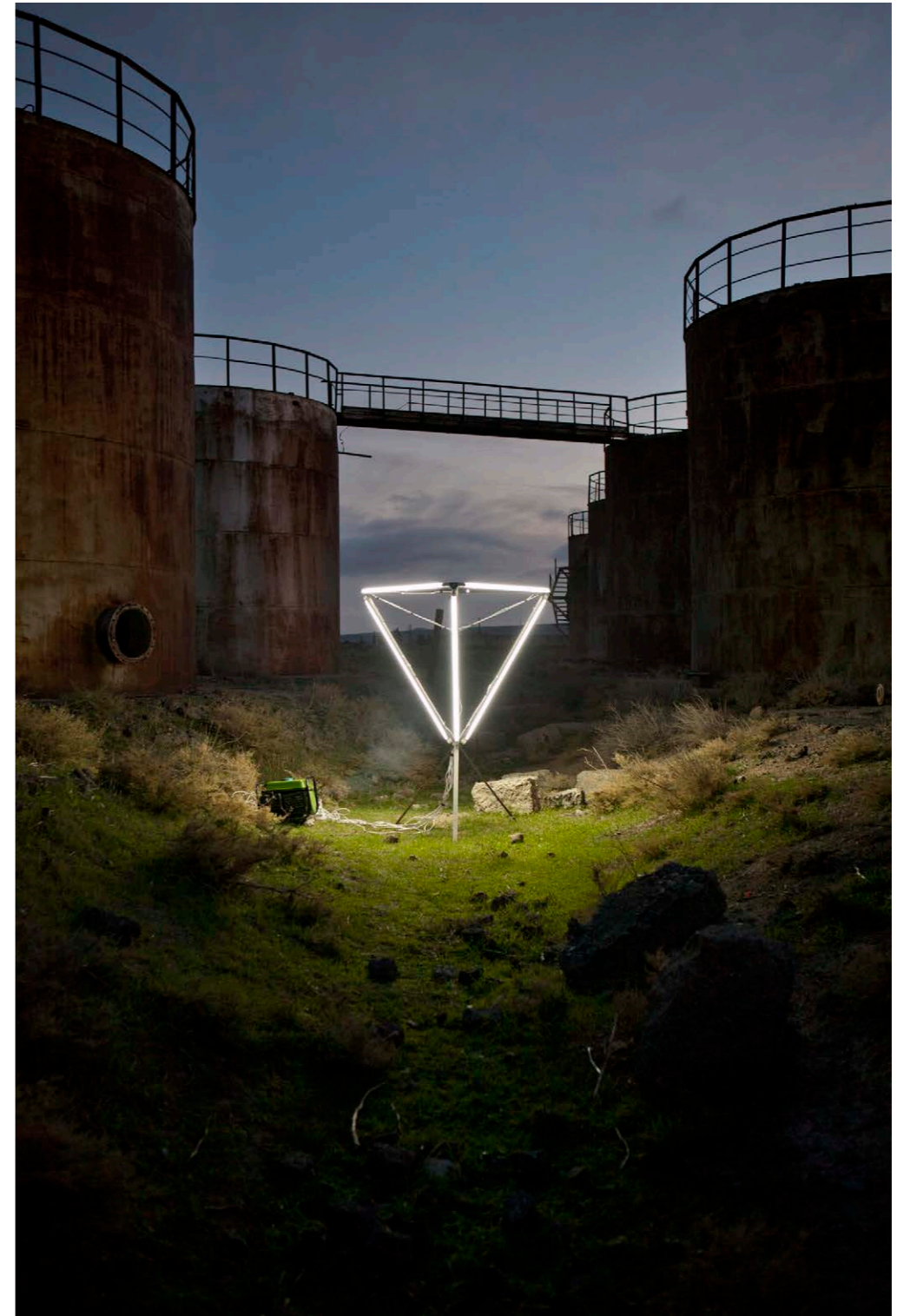
"Theater of Combustion"
Balaxani, Baku, 2017



"Theater of Combustion"
Suraxani, Baku, 2017



"Theater of Combustion"
Sixov Cimerliyi, Baku, 2017

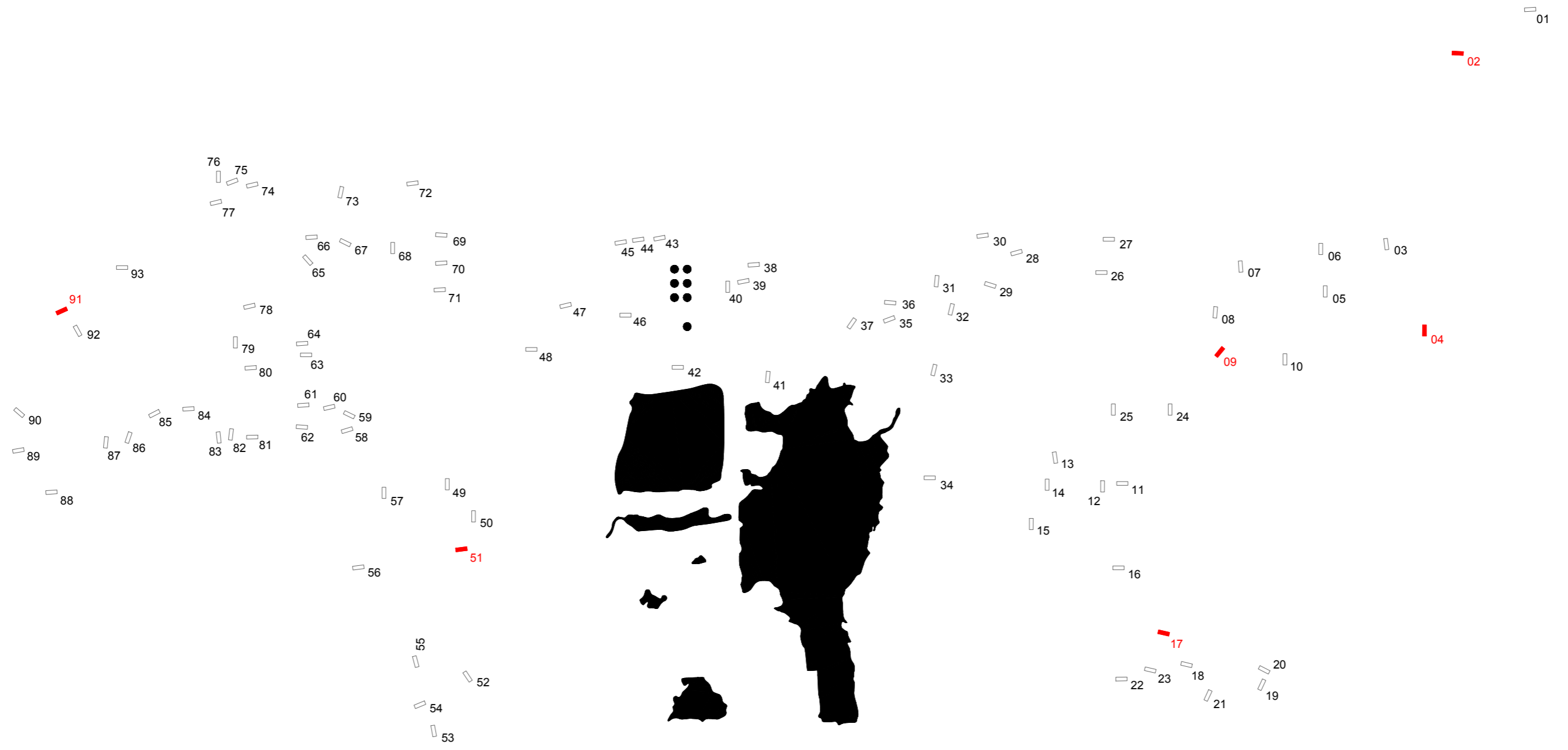


"Theater of Combustion"
Sumqayit, 2017

DARK LAKE RITUAL

sound installation, 6–90 speakers
variable dimensions
2017

The work "Dark Lake Ritual" consists of sound 'portraits' of the different oil pumps on the Bibi Heybat oil fields in Baku. Each of these pumps executes mechanical movements marked by a seemingly perpetual repetition. Although they seem to move in a very similar way, the sound of each pump is unique, due to mechanical imprecisions and wear. The installation condenses the sound by reducing the spatial distance between the pumps on the field to the distance between the speakers in the exhibition space. Thus a simultaneity of sounds and rhythms is created. The pumps become individual actors of a collective ritual in a petro-industrial sound choreography across the topography of the oil fields.



"Dark Lake Ritual"
territorial score showing the oil pumps on the SOCAR oil field in Bibi Heybat, Baku, 2017



"Dark Lake Ritual"
oil pit on the SOCAR oil field in Bibi Heybat, Baku, 2017



"Dark Lake Ritual"
exhibition view Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Artim, Baku 2017

BIOGRAPHY

Michael Hirschsichler was born in Graz (Austria) in 1983 and grew up in Germany. He studied at ETH Zurich, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and Universität der Künste Berlin. He lived and worked in various countries, such as the United States, Switzerland, Papua New Guinea, Italy, Azerbaijan and France and is currently based in Zurich and Munich. With a background in architecture and anthropology, he conceives of his artistic practice as a form of spatial anthropology. Moving between research and its speculative transformation, and employing a wide range of media, he explores how cultural, social, political, religious and scientific narratives, mythologies and ideologies materialize and shape the spaces we live in. He was awarded residencies at the German Academy Villa Massimo in Rome, YARAT Contemporary Art Space in Baku, the Cité internationale des arts in Paris and at Villa Kamogawa in Kyoto.

EDUCATION

PhD (Dr.-Phil.), University of the Arts, Berlin, 2016-2019
Diploma in Architecture (MSc Arch), ETH Zurich, 2005-2008
Vordiplom Architektur, TU Berlin, 2002-2004
Magisterzwischenprüfung Philosophy, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, 2003 - 2004

EXHIBITIONS SOLO

"Wasteland Gestures"
Stiftung BINZ39, Zurich, June 21 - 23, 2019

"Nonhuman Tales"
Cité internationale des arts, Paris, July 26 - August 3, 2018

"Black Myths"
Yarat Contemporary Art Space— artim, Baku, December 22, 2017 - January 12, 2018

"Chiaroscuro"
Kunstverein Ingolstadt, Ingolstadt, March 18 - April 30, 2017

"Masken und Spiegel/Masks and Mirrors"
Galerie Karin Sachs, Munich, March 10 - April 12, 2017

"Around the Island"
AB Contemporary Zurich, January 15, 2015 - April 8, 2016

"Beyond the Shores of Utopia"
House of Architecture, Graz, December 3, 2015 - January 22, 2016

"Jammerthal"
German Academy Rome Villa Massimo, Rome, June 10, 2015

"Toward the Vanishing Points"
AB Contemporary Zurich, February 13 - April 10 2015

"Fragments from Utopia"
Artifact Gallery, New York, February 4 - 22, 2015

"Theatrum Orbis Terrarum"
Galerie Karin Sachs, Munich, May 22 - July 19, 2014

"Architectures of Salvation, Architectures of Damnation"
ETH Zurich, project space Maria HIL F, Zurich, April 23 - May 8, 2013

EXHIBITIONS GROUP (SELECTION)

„Les Traversées du Marais"
Cité internationale des arts, Paris, 7. September 2018

"Monumental"
Yarat Contemporary Art Space — artim, Baku, November 2017

"Mythen. Muster. Migration"
Folium, Interdisciplinary Art Space, Zurich, August 17 - 25, 2016

"Parcours Humain"
Tic Tric Trac, Zurich, July 7 - October 21, 2016

"Incontri – Legami"

Gea Casolaro, Michael Hirschsichler, Via Lewandowski, artQ13, Rome, May 2016

"Villa Massimo"

Final exhibition of the German Academy Rome Villa Massimo, Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, February 2016

"Finale"

Final exhibition of the German Academy Rome Villa Massimo, Villa Massimo, Rome, November 19, 2015

"New Generation Festival"

Palazzo Pisani, Lonigo, October 2 – November 1, 2015

"Residency and work grants by the city of Zurich"

Museum Helmhaus, Zurich, July 18-September 6, 2015

"Premio Combat"

Museo Civico G. Fattori, Livorno, June 27-July 25, 2015

"Spazi Aperti"

Romanian Academy, Rome, June 12-21, 2015

"Summer Presentation"

Villa Massimo, Rome, June 10, 2015

"Open Studios"

Exhibition at the German Academy Rome Villa Massimo, Villa Massimo, Rom, March 26, 2015

"architecture. What else?"

Kulturtankstelle, Döttingen, October 31-December 7, 2014

"Side effects"

Side effects art space in the context of Art Basel, Basel, June 17 - 22, 2014

"Das Modell vom Modell vom Modell vom – ist die Welt"

art space –ion+, Zurich, February–March 2014

"You are here"

group show, together with Lukas Geisseler and Thomas Knüsel, Zollhaus, Lucerne, 2013

Cutlog Art fair

with Gallery Armin Berger Contemporary Zurich, Paris, 2012

Art Bodensee

with Gallery Armin Berger Contemporary Zurich, Dornbirn, 2012

"Theatrum Orbis Terrarum", Swiss Art Awards 2012

exhibited in the context of Art Basel, Basel, 2012

Premio Arte Laguna

finalists' exhibition, Arsenale Venice, Venice, 2012

RESIDENCIES AND AWARDS

Villa Kamogawa (Goethe Institut), Kyoto, residency 2019
Stiftung BINZ39, Zurich, project atelier residency 2019
Cité internationale des arts, Paris, residency (through the federal government of Germany) 2018
YARAT Contemporary Art Space, Baku, residency 2017
German Academy Rome Villa Massimo, residency 2015
Premio Combat, art prize 2015
Residency and work grants by the city of Zurich, 2015, finalist
Lisbon Triennale Début Award, 2013, finalist
Swiss Art Awards, 2012, finalist
Arte Laguna Prize, 2012, finalist
German National Academic Foundation, 2003-2008
SIA-Prize, 2008
Erich-Degen-Foundation, 2007 und 2008

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