

In 1975, the Mexican artist and publisher Ulises Carrión issued his celebrated manifesto, *The New Art of Making Books*, in the literary supplement of the magazine *Plural*.¹ The original Spanish version was translated into various languages shortly thereafter and spread rapidly. For Carrión, the novel approach to book production entailed a self-made creation of the works and the recognition of bookmaking as an artistic practice. To break away from the established production dynamics of the time, the manifesto calls for a fundamental re-evaluation of the structure and form of a book. According to Carrión, the «new» book production will replace the division of labour in publishing as well as artistic outsourcing with institutionally independent artists who take responsibility for all stages of production.

Carrión's concept of book production is regularly referenced in the idea of artists' books during the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, theoretical discussion of the artists' book was instrumental in establishing it as a distinct artistic genre.² However, the genre does not adhere to any singular set of formative norms, resulting in a broad range of variations with different objectives. Furthermore, the production methods of artists' books are similarly as diverse as the artists themselves. Some artists deliberately reflect the capitalist division of labour in a critical manner, while others are simply unable or unwilling to delegate any aspect of the production process. The conceptual texts, on the other hand, counter this diversity of forms with a clear concept of production, which grounds on non-institutional channels of creating, exhibiting and distributing.³ Following a critical, anti-capitalist approach, artists' books repeatedly address commercial book production, which is characterised by highly standardised, serialised and industrialised mechanisms, as well as a production chain comprising authors, publishers, printers, commercially organised shipping, and readers. In the book trade industry, it is primarily the publishers who determine which works are printed; conversely, in the art world, the galleries and other institutions play a pivotal role in deciding which artists and which works are exhibited, marketed, or supported financially in their production. In his essay on artistic publications, the curator and scholar of artists' books Tony White demonstrates that numerous protagonists of the artists' book scene initially established their careers through connections to leading galleries.⁴ Yet, the impulse to arrive at an art that was democratised and decentralised led to the emergence of new forms of production and distribution.⁵ Self-production, self-publishing and distribution via the state postal system became ways of circumventing established structures of the art and book market.⁶ According to Lucy Lippard, the use of scaled-down and non-institutional production methods fostered the reach of art that could «bypass the

system».⁷ In this respect, artists' books from the 1960s and 1970s onwards differed significantly from the early forms of artistic publications, such as the *livres d'artistes*. In their heyday at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the *livres d'artistes* were produced as lavish limited editions by traditional publishing houses and executed by artists as commissioned works.⁸ In particular, this commissioned and market-driven production, whose costly manufacturing is reflected in the economic collector's value of these books, stands in contrast to the «new way» of producing books as an artistic medium.

Artists respond in a variety of ways to the monopolies in the book and publishing industry. In Western art centres, the deliberate incorporation of inexpensive materials and production methods were instrumental aspects of artistic production that conveyed a critical perspective on capitalism and the societal system.⁹ These approaches included minimal production chains, lower-quality designs and the production of limited editions, all of which represented a deviation from conventional and historical book production practices. Utilising more rudimentary production techniques can be situated within artistic practices that could be described as targeted de- and reskilling. This concept is based on a critical reflection of a traditional understanding of art production that assumes craft skills and trained practices as a legitimate condition of art production.¹⁰ In her analysis of politically motivated art in the 1960s, Lippard identifies the central concern of countering the legacy of traditional art contexts and confronting it with other conceptual frameworks and materials.¹¹ However, the decision to utilise relatively simple production methods was not solely an artistic choice; it also corresponded to economic constraints as well as societal and cultural considerations. The possibility of producing art and distributing it outside relevant and influential settings was not a matter of course, especially for those artists who resided outside major Western cultural centres. Additionally, artists lacking unrestricted access to materials due to politically influenced production conditions and limited travel freedom were dependent on alternative production and distribution channels.

The work of Regina Silveira and Martin Kippenberger demonstrates how different conditions of artistic production require distinct processes of creation. Silveira's work exemplifies the methods employed under the constraints of politically determined conditions, where infrastructural prerequisites such as access to materials, printing, publication and exhibition opportunities were either unavailable or vastly limited. Any criticism of these conditions could only be addressed in a subtle and subversive manner. In turn, Kippenberger's prominent presence in public appearances and international exhibitions stands in opposition to this balancing act of producing and distributing art. He published his artists' books in large editions with the intention of increasing their reach. Without concern of censorship controls and violation of copyrights, his artists' books repeatedly satirise market leaders among the publishers in terms of layout and thematic orientation. In both examples, the medium of serially produced artists' books serves to achieve the most effective distribution possible, under different conditions in each case. In the following, I will suggest that the production of artists' books does not aim solely at the production of an object, but also incorporates a programmatic part that discusses and tests what production can mean within the context of political, artistic and economic paradigms.

Printed Interventions on Official Postcards

The early works of the Brazilian artist Regina Silveira, who is better known today for her installation and video works, demonstrate the political influence on her choice of artistic processes and materials. During the repressive regime of the Brazilian military dictatorship in the 1970s, she produced small-format printed works. Under the title *Brazil Today*, she created a series of four postcard booklets, each consisting of six postcards held together by a simple spiral binding. Each artists' book was published in an edition of forty.¹² For *Brazil Today*, Silveira drew upon tourist postcards that she was able to acquire from tourist stands at the local airport in Brazil. The postcards featured motifs that presented São Paulo in an idealised light, as a modern metropolis and in a merry excursion mood. Each booklet series is dedicated to a specific theme: *Birds*, *Indians from Brazil*, *The Cities* and *Natural Beauties*. During the process of making the booklets, Silveira edited the postcards by incorporating graphic elements, which she had printed on top of the cheerful motifs of Brazil. In the booklet *The Cities*, for instance, she has covered the luminous cityscapes of modern São Paulo with its bright blue sky and a view into the distance with a symbolically clear grid structure (fig. 1). The graphic additions in the *Birds* series are based on black and white silkscreen prints in which Silveira dealt with the flights of vultures and transferred the flight paths of these metaphorically threatening birds into diagrams. Some of these diagrams are the artist's own work, while others were appropriated from the magazine *Scientific American*.¹³ In the series *Indians from Brazil*, she comments critically on the diminishing scope for indigenous living by incorporating industrial products such as small toy cars or by redrawing each woman in a group with individual circumferences to mark the spatial boundaries that remain as a free zone of movement. The booklets were produced with the use of limited materials and technical possibilities. In order to conserve the postcards she had purchased and not waste them on initial sketches, Silveira first made enlarged copies of the postcards. She then proceeded to experiment with her graphic interventions on these copies. The final graphic was scaled manually to the size of the postcard and either printed directly onto the front of the postcard in a stationery store using screen printing or applied by means of Letraset transfer sheets using their rub-down technique.¹⁴ On the reverse of each postcard, Silveira stamped her name and the title and date of the work: BRAZIL TODAY REGINA SILVEIRA 77 (fig. 2). The imprinted stamp serves like a label that summarises concisely the central work data. In an unalterable and freely reproducible form, the stamp replaces both the handwritten and individually composed greetings usually sent with a postcard as well as the personal signature. With the stamp, Silveira declares the tourist postcards to be her own artistic works, whereby the impersonal medium negates any individuality and any reference to the artist's own handwriting. Although seemingly an inconspicuous-looking instrument, a stamp may have the power to determine the fates of applications, exhibitions and the parameters of what counts as art. In his text *Rubber Stamp Theory and Praxis*, Carrión reflected on how an artistic rubber stamp may reverse this connection: Despite their lack of power, they could take on glamorous forms and enhance the usual brittleness in their design.¹⁵ Silveira, however, creates a wholly unpretentious stamp for *Brazil Today*, which imitates the official postmark to authenticate onward transport. She thereby effectively authorises herself with the capacity to validate her artistic creations as legitimate artworks and to grant them departure and artistic distribution.



1 Regina Silveira, *Brazil Today. The Cities*, self-published 1977, 10,5 x 15 cm, serigraphy on postcard, 6 pp., edition of 40



2 Regina Silveira, *Brazil Today. Natural Beauties*, self-published 1977, 10,5 x 15 cm, serigraphy on postcard, 6 pp., edition of 40, reverse side

In the 1960s, postcards and rubber stamps emerged as a significant artistic medium. This became particularly evident in the practice of «mail art», in which artists created mobile works and sent written correspondences or postcards internationally, using the postal system as a vehicle to transport their artworks.¹⁶ From the 1960s to the 1980s, this movement played a pivotal role in the repressive art market in authoritarian countries, such as Central and South America, or the GDR.¹⁷ It enabled artists, such as Silveira, to maintain an international artistic exchange via the post. She sent individual postcards of *Brazil Today* to other national and international artists, for example to *Other Books and So*, an alternative art bookshop, gallery and distributor of artists' publications run by Carrión in Amsterdam.¹⁸ In the few exhibitions that Silveira was able to hold in São Paulo, she presented the postcards as thematically organised and bound booklets. A significant exhibition was the 1977 presentation *Poéticas Visuais* organised by Walter Zanini and Julio Plaza at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC-USP), a venue that occasionally permitted independent exhibitions.¹⁹ Both temporary exhibitions and independent postal mailings were important methods of facilitating the accessibility of her work while maintaining control over its distribution. In view of the limited editions of the books and postcards, distribution was an inextricable aspect of the conceptual considerations underlying the production process.

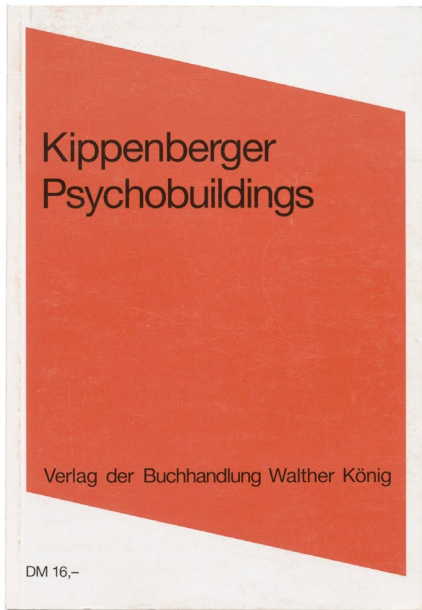
In *Brazil Today* and other early works, the artistic production exhibits a distinct hands-on approach, given that access to professional printers or publishers was limited. Nevertheless, the traces of this manual work recede when ensuring the subsequent distribution and consumption – the reception – of the postcards and artists' books. *Brazil Today* did not seek to emphasise Silveira's artistic signature or artistic skills by using either particularly simple or particularly extravagant practices or materials. The artistic decision to utilise simple materials and production methods is linked to the political and economic conditions of their creation. Silveira's work demonstrates that production is not a neutral, standalone phenomenon but is firmly embedded in political considerations pertaining to the distribution of the artwork. The format and working processes are closely related to the intended subsequent postal circulation and reception. Silveira's postcard books challenge the conventional understanding of distribution and consumption as mere afterthoughts to the production process. Rather, these aspects are conceptually embedded in the works from the outset, influencing Silveira's subsequent production decisions. The conceptual rubric of production, distribution and consumption are interlinked, prompting us to reconsider the processual temporality inherent in this conceptual sequence, which is often presented in a linear manner.

Adopting and Parodying the Publishing Industries

The serial making of artists' books and working in editions provided a mode of counteracting the traditional dynamics of production, exhibition and distribution within the art world, including the context of West German art. In contrast to prevailing political and social circumstances in Central and South America or the GDR, artists such as Martin Kippenberger were able to appropriate repeatedly elements of successful publishing businesses, such as layout or typography, and to invert them in their own works in a conspicuous and often humorous manner. Kippenberger made a strong case for establishing new conditions for exhibiting and distributing beyond conventional museum displays and accompanying catalogues, noting the

long lead times of established publishing and art institutions. In an interview with the artist Jutta Koether, he remarked: «It's just not okay for me to wait. It takes too long. After all, you do your work at your own pace. Everyone does this, including the artist. My satisfaction is that it's coming out.»²⁰ The impulse to exhibit his work and make it accessible as broadly as possible is an integral part and an inevitable consequence of artistic production. This aspect also formed a central focus of his role as a visiting professor at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. When Kippenberger was asked about how he taught his students the «structures of the business», he responded somewhat pompously that he would «show them how to make a catalogue from the work, an exhibition at Grässlin-Erhardt, from front to back, going through the whole system once».²¹ In his own practice, however, he contrasted the previously described linear artistic process of work, catalogue and exhibition with a shorter production cycle. Publications like books, magazines, catalogues, posters and flyers which Kippenberger designed himself are not only a documentation of his artistic practices. He also exhibited the wide range of these ephemerals as art works in their own rights.²² Such an approach enabled him to publish his works quickly, widely, and with minimal delay to completion.²³

Kippenberger produced a comprehensive range of artists' books and magazines in a wide variety of formats, editions and materials. Some of these publications are kept in an emphatically simple style. For example, the work *sehr gut/very good* (1979) consists of loosely folded sheets and was published in an edition of 1,000 copies by the artist himself. In 1978, an inheritance left to him by his mother allowed Kippenberger economic, publishing and artistic independence for a period of time.²⁴ He founded his own publishing company, *Verlag Pikassos Erben* and cooperated with established editors, or satirised these established publishers in collaborations with smaller artist and gallery publishers. The range of cooperation and parody is particularly evident in his collaboration with the publishing house *Merve Verlag*, which was founded in 1970 in West Berlin and is known for its philosophical-theoretical content.²⁵ In 1980, Merve issued Kippenberger's picture series of portraits of women under the title *Frauen* in an edition of 1,500 books. The renowned publisher of theoretical works altered its standard book layout according to the artist's specifications, omitting the author's biography and the otherwise obligatory reference to the other editions in the series.²⁶ A few years later, in 1988, another collaboration with Merve for Kippenberger's book *Psychobuildings* fell through (fig. 3). Kippenberger responded to it by publishing a book in the same format as the Merve series, but with the title layout reversed. The publisher was *Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König*, which was still relatively new but had already gained a reputation within the art scene. König issued the series of uncommented black and white photographs of sculptures and architecture in an edition of 1,000 copies.²⁷ The cover indicates a price of DM 16 for *Psychobuildings*. The position of the printed price tag corresponds to the original layout but is equally reversed as the trademark trapezoid. Furthermore, it is approximately the same price as the Merve editions. In adapting and inverting the format and layout of well-known publishers with a proven market monopoly on certain genres, Kippenberger also draws upon the popularity of these monopolies, which are habitually associated with certain expectations of material quality and content. This adaptation often results in a discrepancy between visual anticipation and the actual content of his artists' books. He employs this appropriation as an eye-catching promotion strategy and as a way of highlighting the influence and



3 Martin Kippenberger, *Psychobuildings*, 1988, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 17 × 12 cm, edition of 1,000



4 Martin Kippenberger, *CALMA-Trio: 1986. Jazz zum Fixsen*, 1986, [Calma-Trio: Albert Oehlen, Rüdiger Carl & Martin Kippenberger], Galerie Grässlin-Ehrhardt, Frankfurt am Main, 15 × 9,4 cm, edition of 1,000

social status of publishers, which play a crucial role in forming what is considered as canonical knowledge, as well as shaping buying and reading behaviour through the book cover. He openly satirises the bourgeois distinction that often goes hand in hand with the purchase of certain recognised book series. For instance, in *Virtuosen vor dem Berg* (1991), he imitates Baedeker, a publishing house known for its detailed and richly illustrated travel guides printed on heavy glossy paper; with *Grond. Der Schoppenhauer* (1994) he mimics the monograph series from the publisher Rowohlt that presents an array of selected biographies of historical figures, predominantly male, thereby influencing the humanistic canon. For the work *1986. Jazz zum Fixsen*, he appropriated the distinctive format of *Reclam's Universal Library*, and used the characteristic orange colour that Reclam reserves for non-German books (fig. 4). The *Calma Trio* which signs as author comprises the artists Albert Oehlen, Rüdiger Carl and Martin Kippenberger, who appeared together as a band. The Galerie Grässlin-Erhardt issued the series of abstract drawings in an edition of 1,000 copies. Although this print run does not correspond to the number of the market-leading publisher imitated here, it is certainly comparable to editions produced for the book trade. Regarding the distribution, however, the *Calma Trio* did not rely on the conventional strategies of the book trade. Instead, they accelerated the process by distributing the book to every concert-goer with a valid ticket who attended one of their concerts in Cologne on 11 March 1987.²⁸ This strategy of self-administration and marketing testifies to a deliberate bypassing of traditional exhibition and sales formats. At the same time, it expands the realm of art and the circle of recipients into areas beyond

galleries and museums. By employing and subverting the production methods of the publishing industry, Kippenberger creates an artistic and economic strategy within his oeuvre of artists' books. His use of large editions inverts the long-held belief that art is a unique, original commodity, and instead demonstrates the adaptability of art as a commodity produced within the context of the book trade.

Kippenberger's and Silveira's works illustrate specific strategies of how artists' books challenge publishers' monopolies in different political and societal contexts. Regardless of the contrasting conditions of production, these case studies show how artists' books participate in redefining art by decisively realigning the relation between production, distribution and consumption. In appropriating and inverting the strategies of the publishing market, the medium of artists' books challenges an artistic production, wherein unique objects are created for a broader audience in distinct institutional settings. An exclusive, one-of-a-kind object is no longer the central concern; instead, the focus shifts toward multiples, a broad self-led distribution, and the individual reception of the objects. In the context of the artists' book, the concept of singularity is not limited to the production side, but rather, extends to the reception, with the individual act of holding and leafing through the artists' book. In this context, it is noteworthy how some curatorial practices respond to this concept. The way artists' books were exhibited at the two *documenta* exhibitions, *d5* and *d6*, for example, differs significantly. In 1972, the *d5* exhibited artists' books for the first time alongside other quotidian items such as magazines, postage stamps and gaming cards.²⁹ Art historian Anna Sigríður Arnar demonstrates that, with a few exceptions, the majority of exhibited artists' books, including renowned editions such as Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), were openly accessible and could be picked up and read by visitors.³⁰ Four years later, at *d6* in 1977, artists' books were conceptualised as an artistic medium in their own right and presented in a less accessible way. Most of them were now exhibited in protected display cases and could no longer be handled manually.³¹ The curatorial reorientation and the presentation in showcases, protected from visitors' hands, reflected a change in the status of artists' books as an artistic medium.³² Such institutional revaluation responds to the increased presence, visibility and value of the book as an artistic form. Although the shielded presentation contradicts the concept of the artists' book since the 1960s and 1970s, it is precisely the means of production and distribution that increased public presence within and beyond art discourse, which ultimately has allowed artists to comment on or undermine artistic market structures with the medium of the artists' book.

Notes

1 Ulises Carrión: El arte nuevo de hacer libros, in: *Plural* 4, 1975, no. 41, pp. 33–38.

2 Lucy Lippard: The Artist's Book Goes Public, in: *Art in America* 65, 1977, no. 1, pp. 40–41. Johanna Drucker: *The Century of Artists' Books*, New York 2004 (1994).

3 Lippard 1977 (as note 2). Tim Guest: An Introduction to Books by Artists', in: idem (ed.): *Books by Artists*, Toronto 1981, pp. 7–8.

4 Tony White: From Democratic Multiple to Artist Publishing: The (R)evolutionary Artist's Book, in: *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 31, 2012, no. 1, pp. 45–56.

5 White 2012 (as note 4), pp. 47–49. Judith Hoffberg: Idea Poll, in: *Art-Rite, artists' books special issue*, 1976–77, no. 14, pp. 8–9.

6 Hoffberg 1976/77 (as note 5), p. 9. Carrión discusses the potential of mail art as a strategy for democratising art and disseminating it more

- widely. Ulises Carrión: *Mail Art and The Big Monster*, in: idem: *Second Thoughts*, Amsterdam 1980, pp. 28–46, here p. 43.
- 7** Lucy Lippard: *Conspicuous Consumption*. *The New Artists' Books*, in: Joan Lyons (ed.): *Artists' Books. A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, pp. 49–57, here p. 50.
- 8** Monika Schmitz-Emans: *Buchkunst als Definitionsproblem*, in: idem (ed.): *Literatur, Buchgestaltung und Buchkunst. Ein Kompendium*, Berlin/Boston, 2019, pp. 14–18, here p. 16. Viola Hildebrand-Schat: *Die Kunst schlägt zu Buche. Das Künstlerbuch als Grenzphänomen*, Lindlar 2013, pp. 85–123.
- 9** Lucy Lippard: *Six Years. The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley 1997, pp. 8–9.
- 10** John Roberts: *Art After Deskillung*, in: *Historical Materialism*, 2010, no. 18, pp. 77–96. For a discussion of skilling and the extent to which re- and deskillung was a central component of art in the 1960s and 1970s, see Helen Molesworth: *Work Ethic*, University Park 2003.
- 11** Lippard 1997 (as note 9); Julia Bryan-Wilson: *Art Workers. Radical Practices in the Vietnam War Era*, Berkeley 2009, p. 146. Dominic Rahtz: *Metaphorical Materialism. Art in New York in the Late 1960s*, Leiden/Boston 2021, p. 18.
- 12** Daniela Maura Ribeiro: *Regina Silveira e Julio Plaza. Agentes da arte conceitual brasileira*, in: *Intelligere. Revista de História Intelectual*, 2021, no 11, pp. 111–156, here p. 148.
- 13** Johanna Hardt: *The Power of Reproduction. An Interview with Regina Silveira*, in: *Berlin Art Link. Online Magazine for Contemporary Art*, May 2019; <https://www.berlinartlink.com/2019/05/02/the-power-of-reproduction-an-interview-with-regina-silveira/>, last accessed on 20 March 2024.
- 14** Teixeira Coelho/Regina Silveira: *The Art of Correcting Reality*, in: *ZUM Magazine. Revista de Fotografia*, 2015, no. 8, <https://revistazum.com.br/en/zum-magazine-8/the-art-of-correcting-reality/>, last accessed on 16 April 2024.
- 15** Carrión 1980 (as note 6), p. 33. The text first appeared in 1978 in the monthly art bulletin *Rubber* (Amsterdam: Stempelplaats, June 1978, no. 6), and was later reprinted in Carrión's collected works *Second Thoughts*.
- 16** Ken Friedman: *The Early Days of Mail Art. An Historical Overview*, in: Chuck Welch (ed.): *Eternal Network. A Mail Art Anthology*, Calgary/Alberta 1995, pp. 3–16. Zanna Gilbert: *Networking Regionalism. Long Distance Performativity in the International Mail Art Network*, in: *TAREA* 2017, no. 4, pp. 84–96.
- 17** Zanna Gilbert: *Art in Contact. The Mail Art Exchange of Paulo Bruscky and Robert Rehfeldt*, in: *Art in Print* 5, 2015, no. 3, pp. 36–41, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26350655>, last accessed on 20. April 2024.
- 18** Ribeiro 2021 (as note 12), p. 144.
- 19** *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- 20** Martin Kippenberger: *Gute Kunst, Intensität und gute Laune. Gespräch mit Jutta Koether*, in: Martin Kippenberger. *Kippenberger sans peine / Kippenberger leicht gemacht*, ed. by Daniel Baumann, exhib. cat., Genève, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva 1997, pp. 39–86, here p. 54 (transl. VP).
- 21** *Ibid.*, p. 56 (transl. VP).
- 22** Diedrich Diederichsen: *The Bookworm*, in: Uwe Koch (ed.): *Annotated Catalogue Raisonné of the Books of Martin Kippenberger 1977–1997*, Cologne 2002, pp. 5–10, here p. 7.
- 23** On Kippenberger's exhibition and marketing strategies cf. Fiona McGovern: *Die Kunst zu zeigen. Künstlerische Ausstellungsdisplays bei Joseph Beuys, Martin Kippenberger, Mike Kelley und Manfred Pernice*, Bielefeld 2016, pp. 107–127.
- 24** Koch 2002 (as note 23), p. 39.
- 25** Thomas Felsch: *Der lange Sommer der Theorie. Geschichte einer Revolte 1960–1990*, Munich 2015.
- 26** *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 27** *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- 28** *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 29** Anna Sigríður Arnar: *Books at documenta: Medium, Art Object, Cultural Symbol*, in: *On Curating*, 2017, no. 33: *documenta. Curating the History of the Present*, ed. by Nanne Burman/Dorothee Richter, pp. 151–164, here p. 153.
- 30** Sigríður Arnar 2017 (as note 29), p. 158.
- 31** *Ibid.*
- 32** On the history of touching art, cf. Constance Classen: *2017. The Museum of the Senses. Experiencing Art and Collections*, London 2017.

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