

Julia Scher
'The Ecology of Visibility'
June 4 – July 4, 2020

Weißer Schriftzüge in geisterhaft, erhabenen Buchstaben wie man sie von Grabsteinen kennt, drohen, auf weiß-glänzenden Schildern an den Wänden der Galerie, dem Auge, jeden Moment wieder zu entwischen. Manche dieser Phrasen wie „Tell me when you're ready“ (1994) begegnen einem hier beim Lesen wie charmantes Servicepersonal, dass uns Besucher in Komfort und Sicherheit wiegen will. Üblicherweise sind solche Warnhinweisschilder auf Straßen oder vor Grundstücksgrenzen gepflanzt, die „Benutzern“ eines Raumes nahelegen, ihr Verhalten nach bestimmten Regeln zu konditionieren – entlang des altbewährten Rechtsgrundsatzes – Caveat emptor: Möge der „User“ dieses Raumes sich in Acht nehmen. Die hier zu sehenden zwanzig, im Raster angeordneten, handlichen und fast harmlos daher kommenden Schilder aus recycelbarem Metall, sind jedoch keine üblich warnend drohenden Agenten der Kontrolle im Namen des Staates oder Privateigentümers wie sie etwa in dem Hit „Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign“ (1970) von The Five Man Electrical Band einst verschmäht wurden. Schers Schilder knüpfen an ihre frühen instruktiven Signs der 80er Jahre sowie ihrer seit 1988 fortlaufenden Performance, Web- und Multimedia-Serie „Security by Julia“ an. In einem zunehmend kontrollierten öffentlichen Raum rekapituliert sie in diesen Arbeiten anhand von Nutzung, Unterwanderung und Verfremdung die doppelzüngige Ästhetik von Sicherheitssystemen bis heute. Prägend für Scher waren dabei auch die aufkommenden Protestbewegungen der 80er Jahre, die sich die Werbe- und Öffentlichkeitssprache aneigneten, um sich im Zuge des Kampfes gegen die Aids-Pandemie für ein „Recht auf Recht“ (Hannah Arendt) einzusetzen und unterdrückte Körper von Gouvernementalität zu befreien. Seien es Poster vom Aktivistenkünstlerkollektiv GRAN FURY wie „Kissing doesn't kill – ignorance does“ oder das Logo der Organisation Queer Nation, die das ursprünglich als Schimpfwort verwendete „Queer“ reklamierte und mit ihrer eigenen Vorstellung einer vom heteronormativen Diktat abweichenden „Nation“ verband. Damals wie heute war klar: „We buy into the ideas of signs“.

Heute, wo neo-benthamsche „Smartpolitik“ die Allorts-Überwachungszone längst unter dem Deckmantel individueller Entfaltung bei garantierter Sicherheit für jeden geschmeidig totalitär gestaltet hat, dekonstruieren Schers „Whiteboards“ die Idee des Warnhinweisschildes an sich: Sie stellen sich jeglicher Kohärenz und Ordnung in ihrer Hängung quer. Sie sind beziehungslos, ja vom eigentlichen physischen Ort entkoppelt und nutzen Unsichtbarkeit regelrecht als Multidetektor der Selbstabsorption. „You are

the one that does it all, the one that you control, the one that you can check (...). It is your own Independence“. So schwebt der Teaser-Text von Schers Online-Projekt „Don't Worry“ auch hier virulent im Raum und entlockt den eigenen situierten Standpunkt in einer dynamischen Überwachungsumgebung, in der sich jegliche Außengrenze eines persönlichen Territoriums, scheinbar aufgelöst hat.

Dass unsere libidinalen Triebe, die uns auch in die digitale Leibeigenschaft treiben im Einklang mit einer korrumpierten Wachsamkeit unter dem Schirm schädlicher Schutz- und Servicebranchen sind, verdeutlicht ein Alexa-Lautsprecher mit Gashupenaufsatz. Aus diesem

tönt ein sich verselbstständigendes Echo der Wandschildtexte, die die Künstlerin selbst rezitiert und schwört paranoide Verwanzungsfantasien und „Weeping Angel“-Cyberangriffe im Galerieraum herauf. Letztlich geben sich Schers Arbeiten hier nicht mit einer simplen Verklärung von Täter und observiertem Opfer als ethische Jungfrau sowie der bloßen Sensibilisierung gegen Eindringlinge zufrieden, sondern ermutigen geradezu zur Nutzung von Invasionsspielräumen. Dass sich das Versprechen von Territorialität immer noch auf der gelebten Seite; der handelnden Seite der Macht (Claude Raffestine) einlöst, demonstriert eine Installation aus zwei benutzten Sprühdosen. In jeweils schwarzer und weißer Farbkennzeichnung der Marke „Montana Black“, eine der wohl beliebtesten Spraydosen unter Graffiti-Sprühern und Vandalisten – „beste Deckkraft, kräftige Farbe, schnelle Trocknung“ neben einem Deckel in Schers Signature-Pink wie griffbereit: „I'm only reclaiming, taking back space.“ (Lone Sloane/Julia Scher).

Elisa R. Linn

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Julia Scher (*1954, Los Angeles) lebt und arbeitet in Köln, wo sie eine Professur für Multimedia Performance & Surveillant Architectures an der Kunsthochschule für Medien (KHM) innehat.

Einzelausstellungen der Künstlerin fanden u.a. statt bei Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), San Francisco; Maurine and Robert Rothschild Gallery, Harvard University, Cambridge; Fri-Art Centre d'Art Contemporain Kunsthalle, Fribourg, Schweiz (Duo-Ausstellung mit Vanessa Beecroft); Kölnischer Kunstverein, Köln; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Wexner Center, Columbus. Werke Schers sind u.a. Teil der Sammlungen des Museum Ludwig, Köln; Neue Galerie Graz, Austria; The Guggenheim Foundation und MoMA PS1, beide New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA); und Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMCO), Genf.

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White lettering, ghostly and grand as the writing on tombstones, on white glossy signboards threaten to vanish from view on the gallery walls at any moment. Some of these phrases like „Tell me when you're ready“ (1994) seem to lure the viewer into comfort and safety, like charming service personnel. Usually such warning signs are planted on roads or in front of property boundaries, suggesting "users" of a given space to condition their behavior according to certain rules – along the tried and true legal principle Caveat emptor: May the „user“ of this space beware. Yet the twenty signboards – arranged in a grid, handy and seemingly guileless, made from recyclable metal – aren't your typical warning agents of control in the name of the state or a private property owner once spurned in the The Five Man Electrical Band hit song „Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign“ (1970). Scher's signs tie on her early instructive series of Signs from the 1980s as well as her ongoing series of performance, web and multimedia works „Security by Julia“ (1988–). In times of an increasingly controlled public space her works to this day recap the two-faced aesthetics of security systems by means of application, infiltration and alienation. Formative for her work were also protest movements emerging in the 1980s in which the language of advertisement and publicity were appropriated in order to make a case for everyone's „Right to have Rights“ (Hannah Arendt) and to free the oppressed bodies from governmentality during the AIDS pandemic. Be it posters of the activist-collective GRAN FURY like „Kissing doesn't kill – ignorance does“ or the logo of the organization Queer Nation who reclaimed the originally demeaning slur and connected it with their own imagination of a „nation“ divergent from a heteronormative dictate. What was clear back then is clear today: „We buy into the ideas of signs“.

Today, as neo-Benthamic "smart policy" has long since smoothly designed and totalitarianised the everywhere surveillance zone under the guise of individual development with guaranteed security for everyone, Scher's "whiteboards" deconstruct the idea of the warning sign itself: They defy all coherence and order in their hanging. They are without relation, even detached from the actual physical space and utilize invisibility as a multi detector of self absorption. „You are the one that does it all, the one that you control, the one that you can check (...). It is your own Independence“. Thus the teaser text of Scher's online project "Don't Worry" floats

virulently in space and elicits its own situated point of view in a dynamic surveillance environment, in which any external border of a personal territory seems to have dissolved.

That our libidinal drives, which also drive us into digital serfage, are in line with a corrupted vigilance under the umbrella of harmful protection and service industries is illustrated by an Alexa speaker with gas horn attachment. It sounds echoes of the wall texts recited by the artist herself conjuring up paranoid bugging phantasies and „Weeping Angel“ cyber attacks in the gallery space. Ultimately, Scher's works here don't stop at a simple transfiguration of perpetrator and observed victim as ethical virgins and a mere sensitization against intruders, but rather encourage the use of latitudes of invasion. That the promise of territoriality is still fulfilled on the lived side; the acting side of power (Claude Raffestine) is demonstrated by an installation consisting of two used spray cans. Each in black and white colour coding of the brand "Montana Black", probably one of the most popular spray cans among graffiti sprayers and vandals („best coverage, strong colour, quick drying“) next to a lid in Scher's signature pink as if ready to hand: „I'm only reclaiming, taking back space.“ (Lone Sloane/Julia Scher)

Elisa R. Linn
(translated from German)

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Julia Scher (*1954, Los Angeles) lives and works in Cologne where she holds a professorship in Multimedia Performance & Surveillant Architectures at the Kunsthochschule für Medien (KHM).

Scher did have solo exhibitions at Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen, Germany; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), San Francisco; the Maurine and Robert Rothschild Gallery, Harvard University, Cambridge; Fri-Art Centre d'Art Contemporain Kunsthalle, Fribourg, Switzerland (two-person exhibition with Vanessa Beecroft); Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; The Wexner Center, Columbus a.o. Among the public collections including her work is Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Neue Galerie Graz, Austria; The Guggenheim Foundation and MoMA PS1, both New York; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA); and the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMCO), Geneva, Switzerland a.o.



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Julia Scher
The Ecology of Visibility (Trumpet), 2020
Amazon Alexa, sound (00:05:03), compressed air fanfare, wall
bracket
28 × 23 × 11 cm
Edition 1/3 + IAP



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Julia Scher
All Bodies Wiped Beyond This Sign (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
Vapor of Time Output Area Mind The Fog (The Ecology of Visibility),
2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + I AP



Julia Scher
Wondering Who You Are (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
*IN RECOGNITION OF VIRUS INDUCED SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL
FIRES (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020*
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
*Risk Distortion Field Calibrate Last Live Position (The Ecology of
Visibility)*, 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher

You Are... The One That Does It All The One That You Control The One That You Can Check The One That Checks Itself The One That Checks The User Therapy for Fear Of The Unknown It Is You Own Independence Don't worry Don't worry (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020

Aluminium sign, four washers and screws

40 × 60 cm

Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
WELCOME This Comfort Area supports relocalization of collective thinking. (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + I AP



Julia Scher
Please Feel Free (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
unlearn ableism (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
The Ecology of Visibility (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
Please Hold Onto The Shiny Metal Body. (The Ecology of Visibility),
2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + I AP



Julia Scher

Eco herding to the left transforming on the right You found me many times before your wet kiss sacrifice (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020

Aluminium sign, four washers and screws

40 × 60 cm

Edition 2/3 + I AP



Julia Scher
All Bodies Whipped Beyond This Sign (The Ecology of Visibility),
2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
Don't Mind Your Insecurity (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
Terraforming Beyond This Sign (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



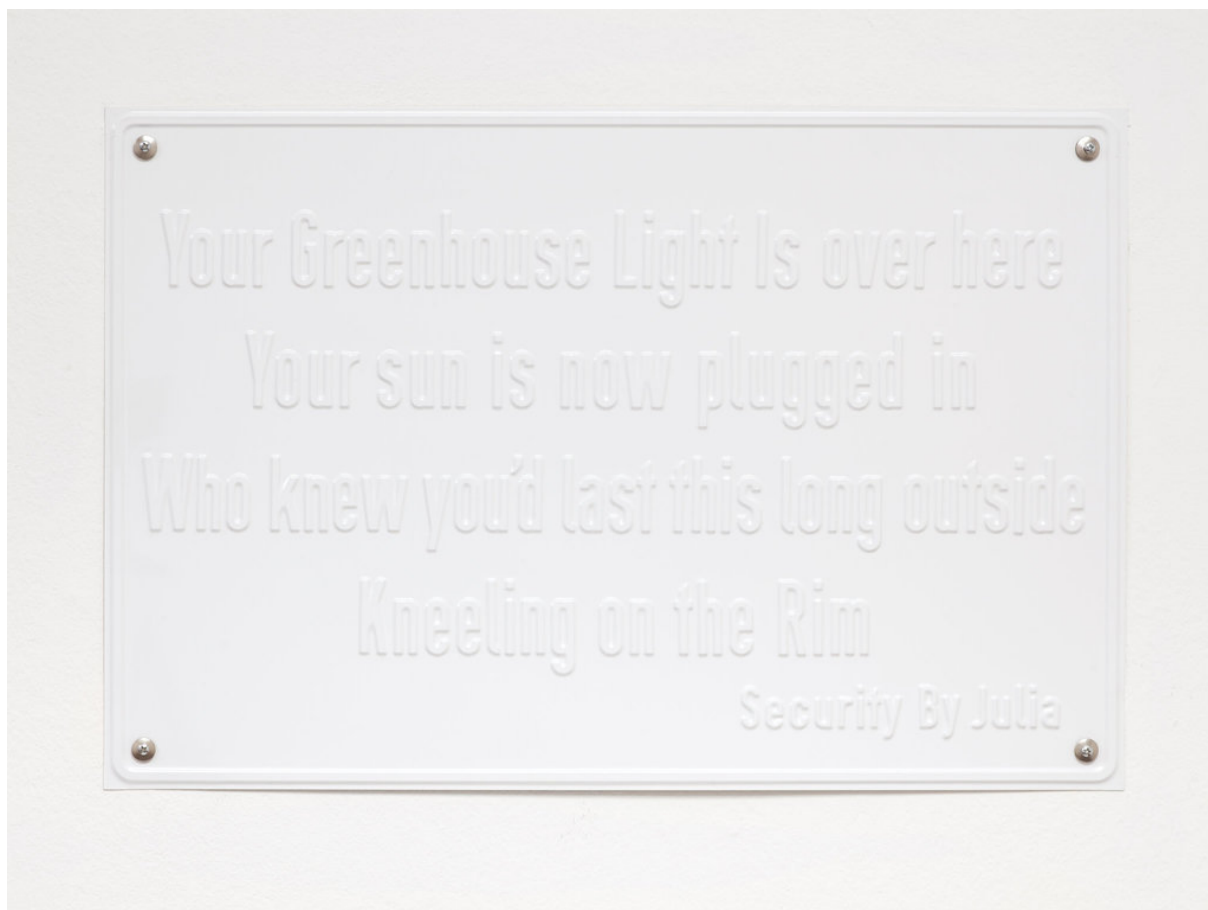
Julia Scher
Tell Me When You're Ready (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + I AP



Julia Scher
Come Play with Us (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher
We Have Found You - Over Here (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP



Julia Scher

Your Greenhouse Light Is over here Your sun is now plugged in Who knew you'd last this long outside Kneeling on the Rim (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020

Aluminium sign, four washers and screws

40 × 60 cm

Edition 2/3 + I AP



Julia Scher
Don't Worry (The Ecology of Visibility), 2020
Aluminium sign, four washers and screws
40 × 60 cm
Edition 2/3 + 1 AP