

**Exhibition title:** Speaking Boxes

**Artists:** Irma Hünerfauth

**Curated by:** Elisa R. Linn & Lennart Wolff

**Duration:** May 19 – 9 July, 2023

**Venue:** Simian

**Photography:** GRAYSC

**Images courtesy:** the artist, Simian

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**Exhibition text:**

Speaking Boxes, the first posthumous solo exhibition of German artist Irma Hünerfauth (1907-1998) brings together her complex oeuvre of kinetic multimedia objects made between the early 1970s and mid-1980s. The exhibition unfolds the artist's poetic, satirical, and critical reflections on the conditions and social relations of modern everyday life - alienation, love, and longing - as well as the correlation between narratives of progress and the extractive violence of Western modernity that plays out in wars, environmental pollution, and extinction.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Irma Hünerfauth, who studied with Conrad Westphal, worked predominantly in the context of Abstract Expressionism, Action Painting, and Art Informel. During the tumultuous years around 1968, she turned away from painting and toward making objects. Around that time, collaborative performances with Danish composer Ilja Bergh and German artist group Gruppe K led Hünerfauth to extensively experiment with sound, music, and feedback, which she henceforth combined into her artistic practice. From the 1970s onwards and later under the moniker IRMANipulations, she assembled delicate and detailed compositions using consumer society's detritus in acrylic glass boxes: electrical switch parts, sheet metal pieces, knobs, wires, and plastic waste, among other things. These interactive objects, which the artist called Vibrationsobjekte (Vibration Objects) and Sprechende Kästen (Speaking Boxes), evoke both the "living anti-art" of Fluxus and a growing interest in emerging cybernetics and systems theory and their implication for art and society.

Building on her earlier training in welding as well as her partner's background as an engineer, Hünerfauth developed the series Vibrationsobjekte, in which steel wires and other elements are soldered to computer circuit boards. Against the modernist ideal of the formalist object, these works possess a behavioral quality that lies in their responsiveness to an outside activation by the viewer. Here, as the works' name suggests, vibrations cause disruption to the seemingly static and fixed compositions and create sound that is then amplified via consumer electronics.

Sprechende Kästen augment formal compositions with narrative layers and employ electro-mechanical composition for theatrical effect. The combination of metal and plastic waste with everyday objects evokes architectural or scenographic models. Tape recordings of the artist singing and reciting poems, parables, admonitions, or hymns written by herself or others (such as Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann) irradiate into the space when set off by the viewer. These audiovisual environments favor responsiveness over a prescribed organization of effects. Made at a time of industrial crisis and decline, these pseudo-machines, foreshadowing an emerging economy of service and experience, collage both symbolic and behavioral properties. Instead of being mere containers for narration, they call attention to how, as Jack Burnham described, both sculpture and technology can be understood as extensions of an urge to control and shape—at least a limited part of—the environment. Playing on their haphazard approximation of life impulse, these works question rationalism and technology determinism that underlie a central "fetish of modernity": the universalized shelter-giving container that conditions and confines the human body.

Elisa R. Linn & Lennart Wolff

**Bio:**

**Irma Hünerfauth** (1907 in Donaueschingen - 1998 in Kreuth) was a German painter, sculptor, and object artist. She is most known for her paintings, kinetic objects and scrap sculptures. During her lifetime, she had solo shows at Kulturzentrum am Gasteig, München (1984), Goethe-Institut, London (1983), Kurfürstliches Gärtnerhaus, Bonn (1974), Galerie Christa Moering, Wiesbaden (1967), Galerie Kaspar, Lausanne (1962), Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, München (1961), among others, and participated in several group shows. Most recently, her works were shown as part of group exhibitions at 15. Triennale Kleinplastik, Fellbach (2022), Markus Lüttgen & Drei, Mönchengladbach (2021), Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2019), and Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, München (2018).

**Elisa R. Linn** is a writer, curator, and educator based in Berlin. She is the co-director of the Halle für Kunst Lüneburg, and teaches at Leuphana University. Linn is a graduate of the Whitney Independent Study Curatorial Program and pursuing a PhD in Philosophy under the supervision of Marina Gržinić at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her writing appears in publications and magazines such as Starship, artforum, Texte zur Kunst, BOMB, Jacobin, and the Journal for the History of Knowledge, among others.

**Lennart Wolff** is an architect, curator, and educator based in Berlin and a graduate of the Architectural Association, London. His work encompasses curated exhibitions, public art projects, architecture commissions, and exhibition architectures, such as recently for a show by LaToya Ruby Frazier at Kunstverein Hamburg. With Klaus Platzgummer, he co-directs the AA Visiting School Zurich "Exhibiting Architecture," which since 2021 has been hosted by Kunsthalle Zurich.

Since 2012, Linn and Wolff have run the curatorial and artistic project **km temporaer**. Recent exhibitions, performances, film screenings, and lectures have taken place at Petzel Gallery and Maxwell Graham Gallery, New York (2023), Architecture Museum at the Technical University of Berlin (2022), Barnard College/Columbia University, New York (2022), Museo Nivola, Sardinia (2020), National Gallery Prague (2018), Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2018), South London Gallery (2018), and Royal Academy of Arts, London (2018).

**Photos are named in numerical order according to list below:**

1. Installation view

2. Selected photographs, publications, exhibition posters and print-outs by the artist

3. Selected photographs, publications, exhibition posters and print-outs by the artist

4. Selected photographs, publications, exhibition posters and print-outs by the artist

5. Installation view

6. Blaue Pistole, 1973

39 x 41 x 21 cm

Operated by hand

Back cover: Offset print

Endless tape with sound by Irma Hünerfauth

Text: Meta Kristall

*Blue pistol full of desire used in boy's hand, now rotting as scrap in the landscape, a butterfly sways on it. Sharp shots fall into Sunday peace, like chocolates into the mouths of the affluent society, maneuver exercise says a man seminal.*

7. Blaue Pistole, 1973

39 x 41 x 21 cm

Operated by hand

Back cover: Offset print

Endless tape with sound by Irma Hünerfauth

Text: Meta Kristall

8. Blaue Pistole, 1973

39 x 41 x 21 cm

Operated by hand

Back cover: Offset print

Endless tape with sound by Irma Hünerfauth

Text: Meta Kristall

9. Installation view

10. Glasstäbe, 1985

Version 2

70 x 19 x 24 cm

Operated by hand

Sound object with self-noise amplifier

11. Glasstäbe, 1985

Version 2

70 x 19 x 24 cm

Operated by hand

Sound object with self-noise amplifier

12. Wie Gras sein..., 1983

Version 1

29 x 40 x 19 cm

Operated by hand

13. Wie Gras sein..., 1983

Version 1

29 x 40 x 19 cm

Operated by hand

14. Installation view

15. Installation view

16. Augen und Glocke, ca. 1970

62 x 19 x 24 cm

Operated by hand

Sound object with self-noise amplifier

17. Krieg, 1975

39 x 41 x 20 cm

Operated by hand

Back cover: Paper collage

Endless tape with sound by Irma Hünerfauth

Text: Meta Kristall

*Your chance is the death of the  
Otherman,*

*Man you shoot Otherman,*

*...Otherman shoots...*

*...shots are fired.*

*dead! dead! Stop the killing!*

*you talk to Otherman*

*...Otherman talks to you...*

18. Regen, 1971

70 x 19 x 24 cm

Operated by hand

Sound object with self-noise amplifier

19. Regen, 1971

70 x 19 x 24 cm

Operated by hand

Sound object with self-noise amplifier

20. Installation view

21. Zikadengeräusch, 1973

34,5 x 41 x 21 cm

Operated by hand

Back cover: Offset print

Endless tape with sound by Irma Hünerfauth

22. Zikadengeräusch, 1973

34,5 x 41 x 21 cm

Operated by hand

Back cover: Offset print

Endless tape with sound by Irma Hünerfauth

23. Glasstäbe, 1984

Version 1

61,5 x 19 x 24 cm

Operated by hand

Sound object with self-noise amplifier

24. Glasstäbe, 1984

Version 1

61,5 x 19 x 24 cm

Operated by hand

Sound object with self-noise amplifier

25. Spiegelobjekt, 1971

55 x 19 x 24 cm

Operated by hand

Sound object with self-noise amplifier

26. Wie Gras sein..., 1983 Version 2 29 x 40 x 19 cm Operated by hand Text: Hans Dieter Schmidt

Interpretation: Irma Hünerfauth

*To be like grass.*

*Undemanding.*  
*Unmissable.*  
*Insurmountable.*

27. Installation view

28. Krieg – auch Tiere leiden, ca. 1986  
24,6 x 25,8 x 22,2 cm

29. Krieg – auch Tiere leiden, ca. 1986  
24,6 x 25,8 x 22,2 cm

30. Erste Liebe, 1973  
34 x 41 x 21 cm  
Operated by hand  
Back cover: Drypoint etching with silver foil, 1971  
Endless tape: Music collage with pigeon cooing

31. Erste Liebe, 1973  
34 x 41 x 21 cm  
Operated by hand  
Back cover: Drypoint etching with silver foil, 1971  
Endless tape: Music collage with pigeon cooing

32. Hörner, 1985  
51 x 31 x 27 cm  
Operated by hand  
Sound object with self-noise amplifier  
Glass and metal under plexiglass

33. Hörner, 1985  
51 x 31 x 27 cm  
Operated by hand  
Sound object with self-noise amplifier  
Glass and metal under plexiglass

34. Installation view

35. Installation view

36. Installation view