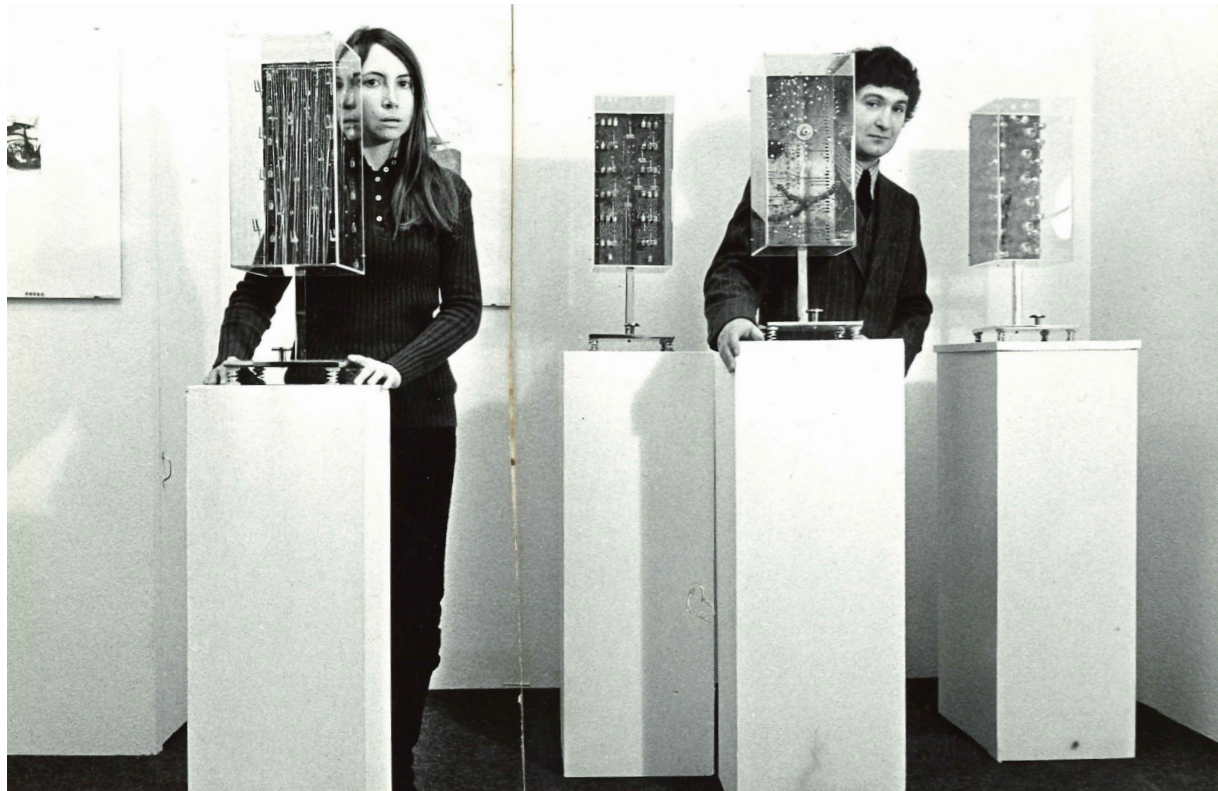




Irma Hünerfauth, *Speaking Boxes*. May 19 - Jul 9, 2023
curated by Elisa R. Linn & Lennart Wolff

Speaking Boxes



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.

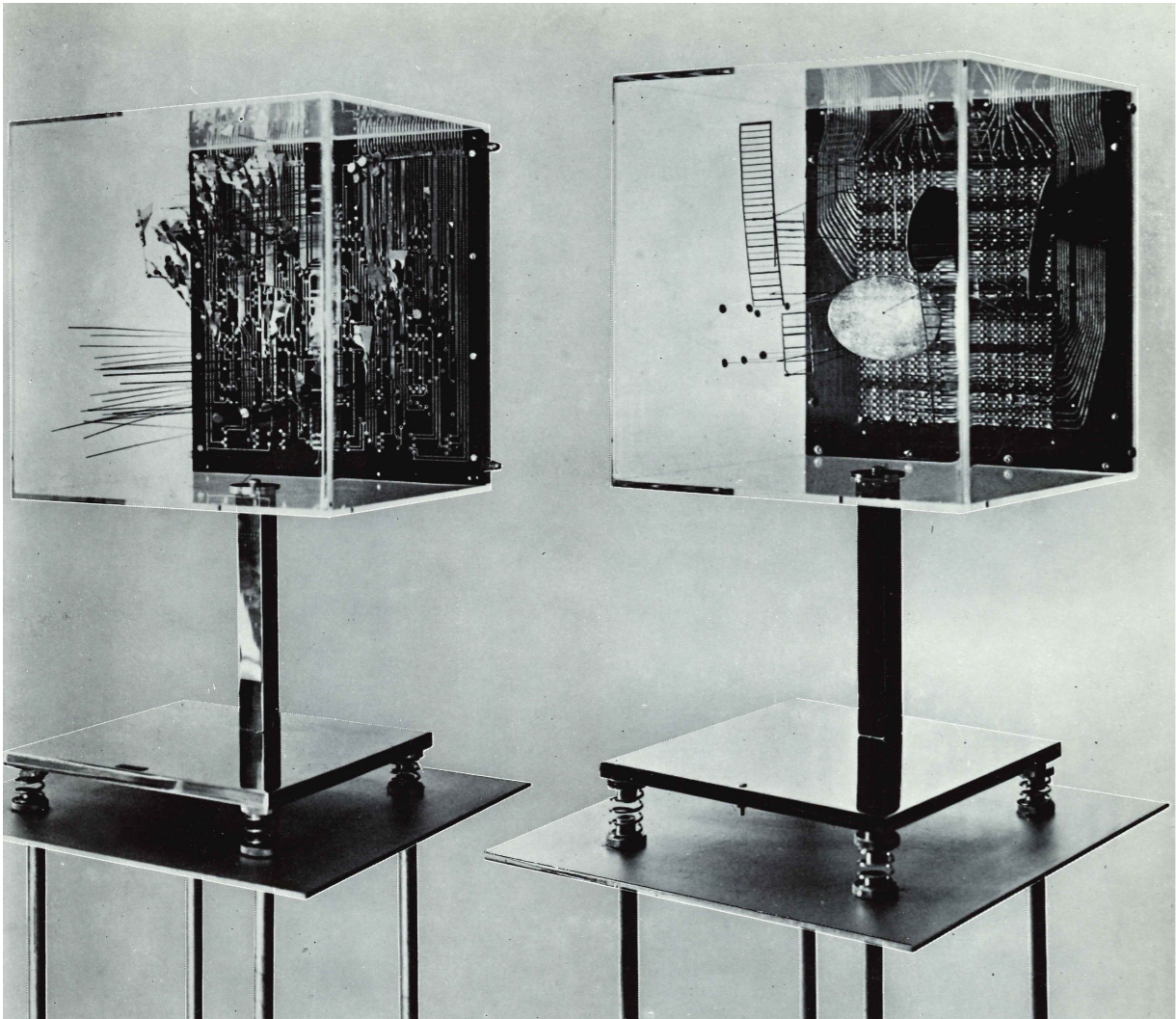
Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Irma Hünerfauth, who studied with Conrad Westphal, worked predominantly in the context of Abstract Expressionism, Action Painting, and Art Informel. During the tumultuous years around 1968, she turned away from painting and toward making objects. Around that time, collaborative 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

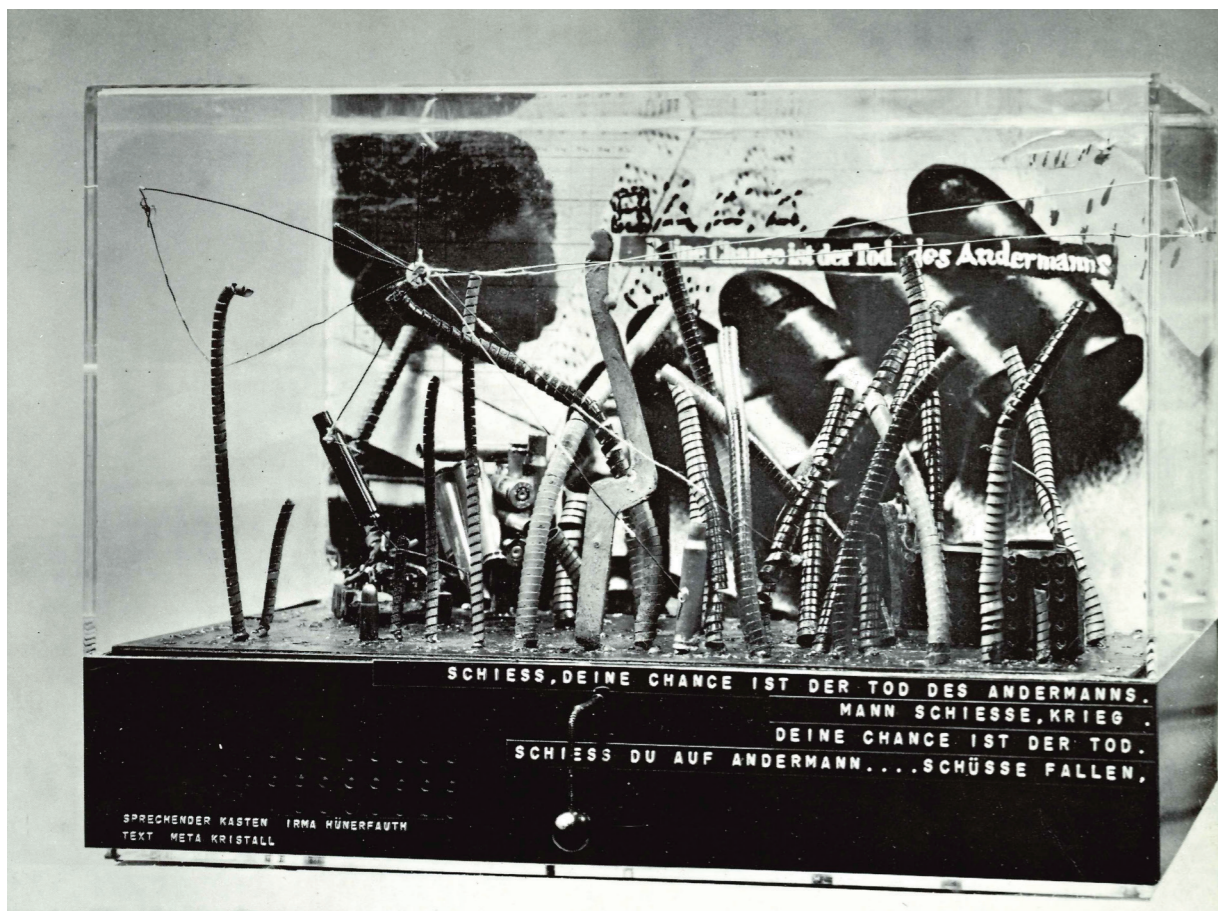


Irma Hünerfauth's *Vibrationsobjekte*, 1972



Installation view of Irma Hünerfauth's *Sprechende Kästen* at Kunstverein München (1974)

List of works



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

Sprechende Kästen (Speaking Boxes)

Press the lever down several times. At the same time, observe how the things quietly sway according to their natural vibration, just as a gust of wind quietly moves nature. The game begins: breathe deeply, listen, connect with your thoughts, take the freedom to dream, forget the constraints of everyday life. Detach yourself from the "rightness" of society, detach yourself from the "rightness" of criticism, detach yourself from the "rightness" of science. They are overrated correctnesses because they are in constant transformation. Breathe deeply, play freely, just be yourself. (Instructions by the artist)

2. Blaue Pistole, 1973

39 × 41 × 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.

3. Wie Gras sein..., 1983

Version 1
29 × 40 × 19 cm
Operated by hand

4. Krieg, 1975

39 × 41 × 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...*

5. Zikadengeräusch, 1973

34,5 × 41 × 21 cm
Operated by hand
Back cover: Offset print
Endless tape with sound by Irma Hünerfauth

6. Wie Gras sein..., 1983

Version 2
29 × 40 × 19 cm
Operated by hand
Text: Hans Dieter Schmidt
Interpretation: Irma Hünerfauth

*To be like grass.
Undemanding.
Unmissable.
Insurmountable.*

7. Krieg – auch Tiere leiden, ca. 1986

24,6 × 25,8 × 22,2 cm

8. Erste Liebe, 1973

34 × 41 × 21 cm
Operated by hand
Back cover: Drypoint etching with silver foil, 1971
Endless tape: Music collage with pigeon cooing

Link to soundfiles:



Vibrationsobjekte (Vibration Objects)

“I developed vibrating objects that were intended to lead to observational play by bumping them with the hand. Art is not a luxury. It serves for the development and relaxation of the individual. Here is my program. I observe the simplest functions of the material, for example, the bobbing of the steel wires under different loads. They are fixed on computer boards. I subdivide the sequence of these wires and place discordant accents that create a compression of the composition. By hand actuation of the viewer, the wires come into slight vibration, and the observation game begins. In these vibrating objects, the ‘fine, precious, like a jeweler’s’—these are her words—is meant to waver. The viewer is confronted with how a composition falls apart. He is supposed to make even the fine compositional elements tremble and clink by tapping on them, he is supposed to ‘experience the discomfort of the destruction of the >beautiful< as an awareness.’” (Quote by Irma Hünerfauth)

9. Glasstäbe, 1985
Version 2
70 × 19 × 24 cm
Operated by hand
Sound object with self-noise amplifier

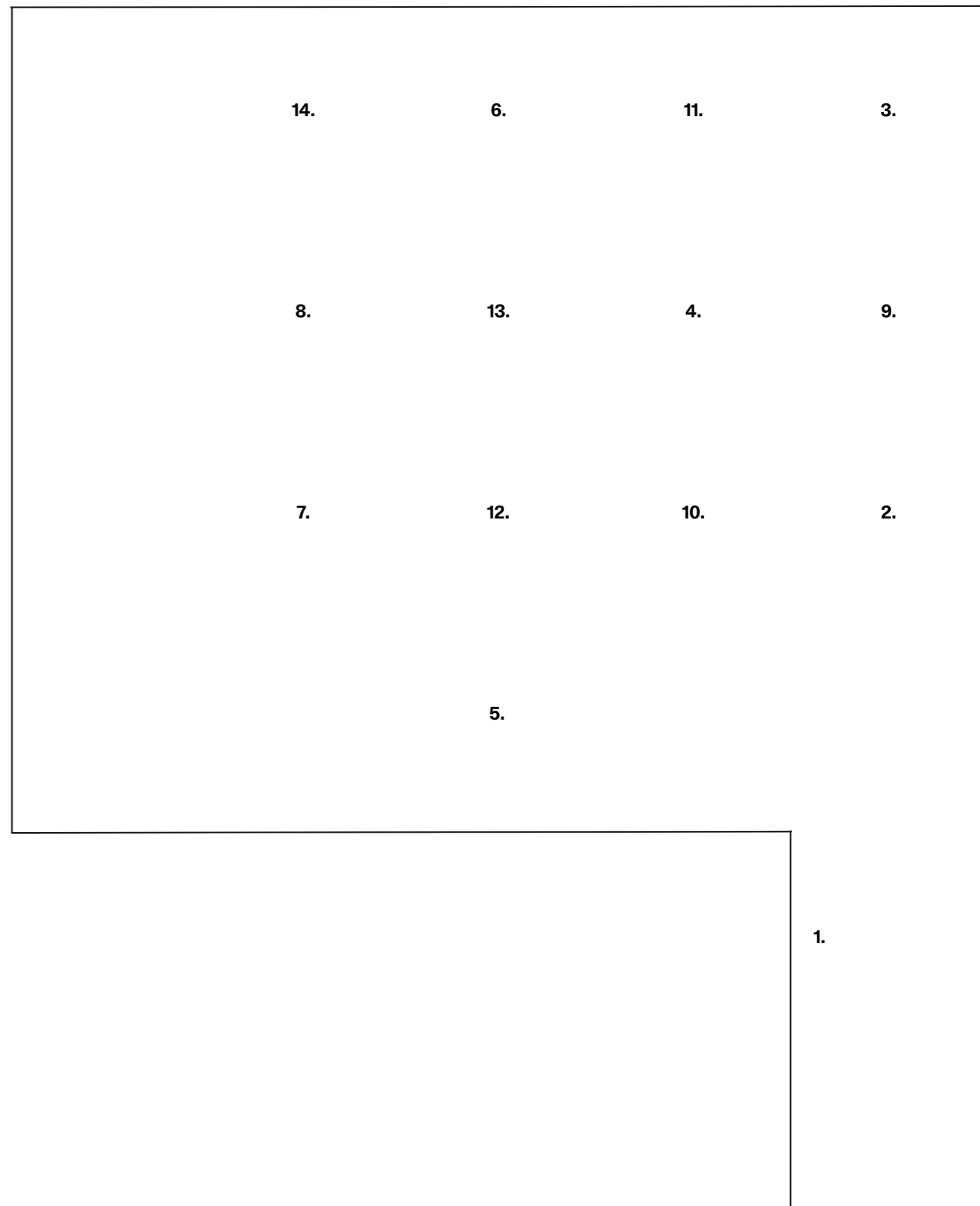
10. Augen und Glocke, ca. 1970
62 × 19 × 24 cm
Operated by hand
Sound object with self-noise amplifier

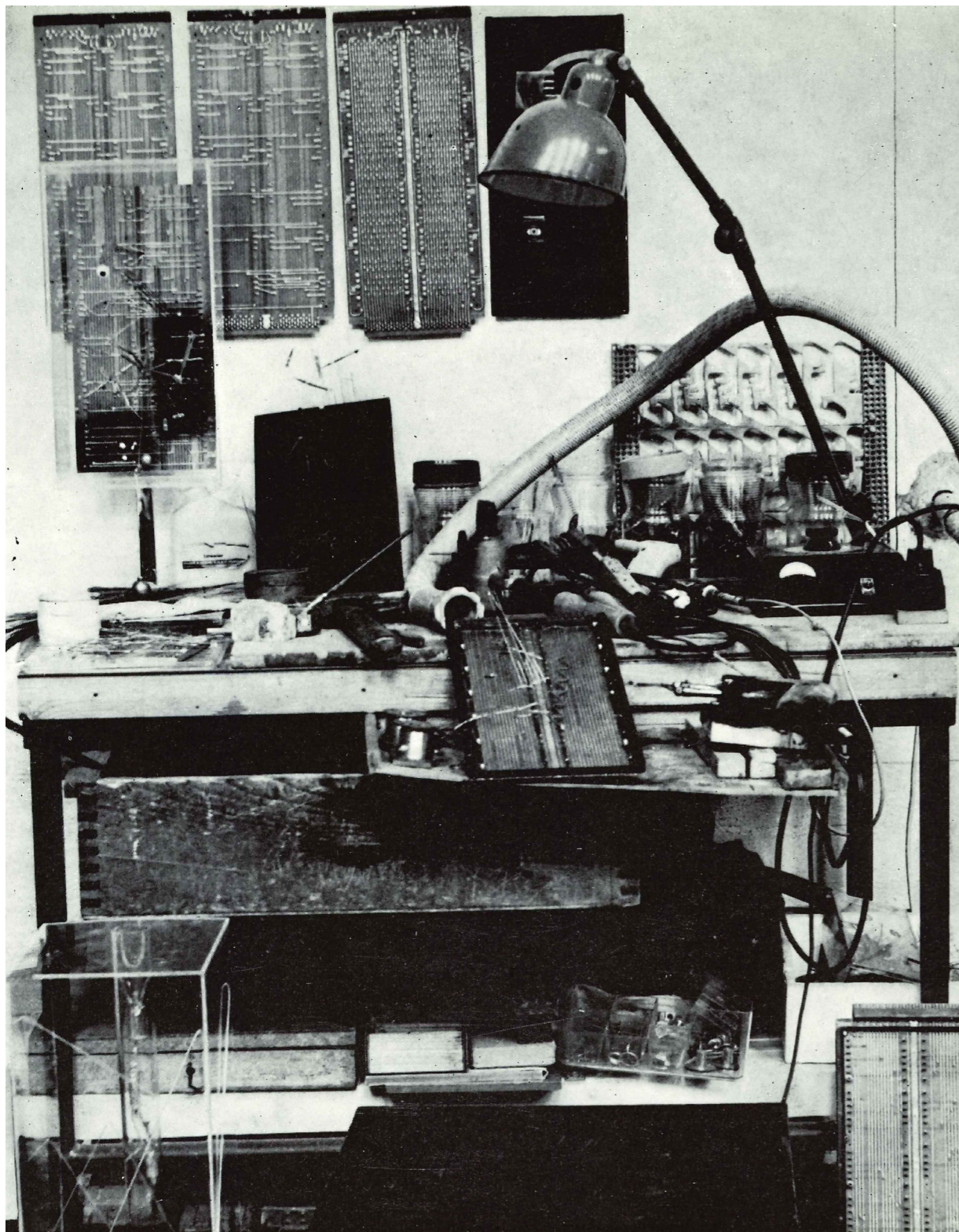
11. Regen, 1971
70 × 19 × 24 cm
Operated by hand
Sound object with self-noise amplifier

12. Glasstäbe, 1984
Version 1
61,5 × 19 × 24 cm
Operated by hand
Sound object with self-noise amplifier

13. Spiegelobjekt, 1971
55 × 19 × 24 cm
Operated by hand
Sound object with self-noise amplifier

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





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).

Simian is supported by:

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Bella Group
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Ørestad City Grundejerforening
Nørrebro Bryghus

***Speaking Boxes* is supported by:**

Amager Vest Lokaludvalg
A.P. Møller Foundation
Knud Højgaard Foundation
Rådet for Visuel Kunst

Special thanks to:

Frank Ernest Stainless – Kunsthandel

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**Simian, Kay Fiskers Plads 17
2300 Copenhagen
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**Opening hours during exhibitions:
Friday, Saturday, Sunday 12-17
or by appointment**