

Series Re-Framing / poster frames in the outdoor area of the GAK

Belia Zanna Geetha Brückner

A good theory in theory

27 September 2024 – 05 January 2025

What's the first dish you want to cook and eat with your loved ones when you're released? As part of an ongoing research project, Belia Zanna Geetha Brückner exchanges letters with prisoners in various penal institutions in the UK, Germany and Switzerland, asking them about their freedom recipes. The answers she has received are on view in *A good theory in theory*, an exhibition in the outdoor area of the GAK. The show takes its title from Antonio Negri's observation that a good theory in theory can fail in practical application. Negri, an Italian political philosopher, state theorist, and a key figure in the radical left-wing movement *Autonomia Operaia*, experienced imprisonment firsthand, an experience that shaped both his personal life and his theoretical work. Recipes could be understood as theories to be put into action. Negri's observations also apply to the prison system that in many countries—while theoretically promising rehabilitation—often fails to deliver in practice.

A good theory in theory examines the dynamic between the political functions of food culture and the penal system: Shared meals foster sociability, creating a sense of belonging and exchange. It is not uncommon for conflicts to be resolved at the dinner table, for important decisions to be made and memories to be shared there. Yet, in German prisons, meals are rarely eaten together.

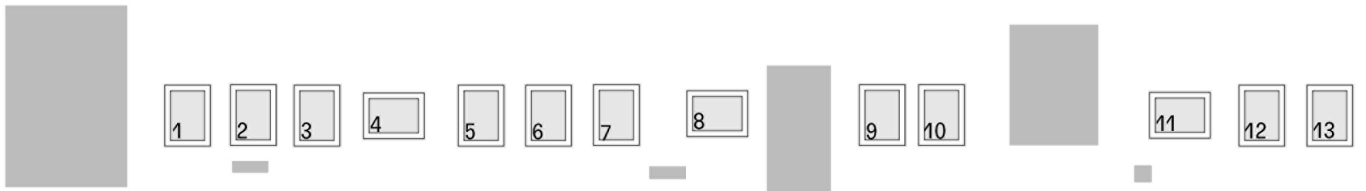
For the exhibition, presented in the poster frames in the outdoor area of the GAK, Brückner collages the recipes with kitchen towels. In this way, and by cooking the recipes during events accompanying the exhibition, she also ties them to her own kitchen. *A good theory in theory* gives visibility to voices that are often isolated from social life in a shared public space.

In addition to the recipes, Brückner fills two of the poster frames with embroidered contexts: Including a depiction of the protest action by two Stop Oil activists during the 2023 Snooker World Championship, this embroidery provides the context for the imprisonment of one of her pen pals.

Brückner's artistic practice investigates power structures in contemporary neoliberal societies, exploring ambivalences in notions of democracy and social participation. She makes use of transparency- and freedom of information laws, archival documents, interviews, and other forms of exchange. In this context, recipes may seem banal, but they have a distinctly democratic and emancipatory character. They convey knowledge and culture, but they are not prescriptive: ingredients can be changed, quantities adjusted. Recipes require participation and only take on their full meaning when interpreted and brought to life by a cook. While incarcerated, however, access to food preparation is severely restricted and financially encumbered by monopolies such as the one held by company Massak GmbH. Moreover, stateprovided meals are usually consumed alone in cells, reinforcing the isolating nature of imprisonment. *A good theory in theory* engages in a dialogue with the prisoners and their longing for bodily self-determination. It is also an invitation to passersby to reflect on the intersection of theory and practice, starting with these recipes—which they might even decide to cook.

Belia Zanna Geetha Brückner (*Mönchengladbach) studied time-based media at the University of Fine Arts Hamburg (HFBK) and at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research-based works have been awarded the Karl H. Ditze Prize and the Max Ernst Scholarship. Recent solo and group exhibitions include those at Kunstverein Dortmund (2024), Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin (2024), Kunstverein Gastgarten Hamburg (2024), City Surfer Prague (2023), Goldsmiths University London (2023), and EIGEN+ART Lab Berlin (2022). From 2023 to 2024, she was the recipient of the Hamburg Cultural Foundation's scholarship for the promotion of young artists.

A good theory in theory ist Teil der Ausstellungsreihe „Re-Framing“ in den Posterrahmen im Außenbereich der GAK. In mehreren aufeinander folgenden Einzelpräsentationen nehmen die eingeladenen Künstler*innen Sprache zum Ausgangspunkt, um in das spannungsreiche Verhältnis zwischen Wort und Bild zu intervenieren. Sie unterbrechen gewohnte Sehweisen, reflektieren (Un-)Sichtbarkeiten oder schaffen Intimität im Öffentlichen.



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- 1 kettle of couscous
Imprisoned in Great Britain
 - 2 Dates wrapped in sheep's cheese and bacon
Rump steak with pulled potatoes
Crème brûlée
Imprisoned in Germany
 - 3 chicken hearts
Imprisoned in Bremen
 - 4 Basel Court of Appeal, including the president of the court
Imprisoned in Switzerland
 - 5 Lamb's lettuce with baked mushrooms
Imprisoned in Germany
 - 6 Udon noodle soup with laonganma sauce and tofu
Imprisoned in Great Britain
 - 7 Tomato and lentil soup
Imprisoned in Great Britain
 - 8 Grilled artichokes
Peas and asparagus risotto
Imprisoned in Great Britain
 - 9 Beetroot bread
Butternut squash
Imprisoned in Great Britain
 - 10 Pasta broccoli
Imprisoned in Switzerland
 - 11 Cheesecake
Imprisoned in Germany

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