

## Andrea Büttner

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by Julia Hegi

Andrea Büttner (\*1972, Stuttgart) explores the value systems and conventions that shape aesthetic experiences, using a wide range of artistic media, including large-scale woodcuts, glass objects, etchings, video installations, artist books, and textiles. The woodcuts displayed in this exhibition were created by the artist at different points in time and explore themes like labor, poverty, shame, forms of cohabitation, and societal influences shaped by belief systems, both religious and secular. The woodcut, as a medium, carries a long artistic tradition, but through this chosen medium, the artist also challenges the meaning placed on handmade craftsmanship in today's political and artistic context.

*Tears* (2010) features small droplets that can be seen as both a physical landscape and an emotional state. This simplicity extends to other motifs in Büttner's woodcuts, such as a houseplant or a woman resting on a mattress. Through her historical research and the formal clarity of her work, Büttner demonstrates a deep interest in themes that are historically often considered low or humble in our society.

This interest is also seen in Büttner's reverse glass *Bread Paintings* which reflect her approach of highlighting the potential in simplicity. The photographs of bread collaged behind glass stand out, drawing attention. They depict a basic food that connects us with a tradition of still life painting, while also addressing the recent «bread culture» prevalent in contemporary society. The focus on bread as well as the culture of bread-making underscores Büttner's conceptual approach, bringing us back to the theme of craft within the context of modernity.

Büttner's work also explores themes of shame and religion with a number of her works focusing on female religious orders. In her video *Karmel Dachau* (2019/2022-23), she examines the Carmelite convent *Heilig Blut*, founded in 1964 near the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial. The convent's windows overlook the former camp, and the Carmelites dedicate their lives to contemplative prayer. Johannes Neuhäusler, a priest and former prisoner of the camp, advocated for the monastery's construction. The convent's architect, Josef Wiedemann, was a former SS member deemed a "follower" during postwar denazification.

In *Karmel Dachau*, Büttner explores the lives of the nuns at the Carmelite convent, expanding on these portraits through recordings made by the nuns in their private spaces. The work addresses themes of remembrance and repression, religion and violence, and the intersections of culture and crime.

Within the context of the artist's visit to Dachau, Büttner also created the photo series *Former plant beds from the plantation and "herbal garden," used by the SS for biodynamic agricultural research, at the Dachau Concentration Camp* (2019–2020). The series focuses on the now-overgrown plant beds of the camp, once used by the Nazis for biodynamic farming experiments and referred to as the "herbal garden." With these paradoxical images, in which the systematic destruction of human lives intersects with the agricultural ideals of a life reform movement, Büttner draws attention to the questionable politics and the supposed moral superiority of a biological lifestyle in modernity. This critique of what Büttner calls «antimodernity» aligns with her criticism of the supposed comfort of homemade bread in a complex global digital world.

Büttner's works offer a perceptive examination of the social, religious, and political structures of our time, encouraging us to question deeply rooted values and ideals in our society. Her art opens a space for reflection on the complexity of human experiences, often expressed through simple, frequently overlooked things.