

In his exhibition *thereafter*, Ian Waelder unites the facade, atrium, and arcade hall of the Kestner Gesellschaft for the first time into a single spatial narrative, in which institutional threshold spaces are connected with familial, material, and historical shifts. His artistic practice begins at the margins of what can be remembered. Instead of designing self-contained narratives, he works with the remnants of past events, with biographical and material overlaps, with what remains, is transformed, or disappears. His works arise from a deep interest in the material conditions of memory and the question of how history continues to resonate in objects, gestures, and sounds, without coalescing into a narratable past. He draws on a variety of media: sculptures, sound installations, found materials, collaged visual elements, architectural interventions—always combined with a sensitivity for the incidental, the overlooked, for that which is neither entirely legible nor clearly referenced. The materials he works with are often used, fragile, easily displaceable: cardboard, newspaper, linen, butter, water, porcelain, wood. They bear traces of time, use, and decay, and make memory perceptible as a physical, haptic, and acoustic experience.

#### The World in a Cardboard Box

The entrance to *thereafter*—integrated into an arcade arch—leads from the main stairway of the Kestner Gesellschaft to a different path. A labyrinthine cardboard structure occupies the center of the exhibition space. Sparse light and small objects on the wall provide orientation within a cardboard corridor. Every step through this passage leaves a trace; every turn opens new perspectives between Waelder’s small sculptures. The cardboard reacts to pressure, moisture, and heat, changing over time and thus making its own transience visible. Waelder’s material choices often revolve around the relationship between body and material—around what supports, what shapes, what touches. In the installation *Bystander (Ankle/Thread/Right)* (2025), porcelain-like molds of a shoe’s interior, called lasts, appear like empty supports. The works draw on childhood memories of Waelder’s father working in a shoe shop, while also addressing a central theme of the exhibition: the bystander, a person who is present without actively intervening. Waelder translates this idea of the spectator and witness into a sculptural constellation in which the body is not present but persists only as a trace—as an impression, a form, a memory of a physical proximity that is long past. The coated shoe lasts refer to a historical experience of absence that is not directly articulated but is made tangible through material constellations. The empty supporting object becomes a metaphor for a historical memory. Justus Bier, director of the Kestner Gesellschaft from 1930 to 1936, was forced out of his position by the Nazis and driven into exile. This biographical rupture is not

directly named in the exhibition. Yet in his engagement with the institution’s history, Ian Waelder recalled Bier’s experience in exile—a detail that overlaps with his grandfather’s biography.

Inside the cardboard space hangs the sculpture *Sprain (38)* (2023), an antique shoe last from which a nose made of air-drying porcelain grows. This tool of the cobbler’s trade becomes a starting point while also referencing a personal family story of his father, who speaks with joy of the “Waelder nose” as a link across generations. In *All Of My Shoes (Tempo)* (2025), an old brass door handle, shoe insoles made of old cardboard and wax, and a drip system converge. Two acoustic interventions connected to the wall sculpture accompany the walk through the cardboard corridor. The irregular sound of a falling drop is amplified and projected into the space via loudspeakers and wanders through the corridor as a subtle acoustic echo. *As Far As I Can Recall (Dad on Piano)* (2025) features a melody, recorded in the artist’s Basel studio on a slightly out-of-tune piano found there. It is a melody by his grandfather reinterpreted by his father without knowing how to play the piano. The piano notes sound randomly, without a fixed sequence. The uncertainty of memory becomes audible in the instrument’s timbre. Both soundtracks interrupt the flow of movement, create pauses, slow the pace, and direct the gaze. The cardboard walls absorb the sound; illuminated areas and dark passages alternate.

The use of cardboard runs through *thereafter* as a central motif and building material. The material gives the installation a provisional and very fragile feel. Cardboard is an everyday material, used for packaging, transport, and temporary protection. It envelops objects, makes them anonymous, ready for transport, and removes them from view, while at the same time storing them as something worth keeping. In Waelder’s exhibition, this logic is reversed: the space itself is reminiscent of a moving box that has been cut open, of a box full of memories, in which individual thoughts, images, and fragments are revealed only in glimpses. Newspaper, too, which after being read is often used to wrap delicate objects or trinkets, takes on a dual role: not only as a protective wrapping but also as a medium for the traces of a moment, for texts, headlines, dirt, and creases from use. Cardboard and wrapping paper become an emotionally charged material: the package that arrives in the mail, awaiting the moment of being unpacked; the stowed-away personal belongings of a former life; the cardboard box as a repository for mass-produced goods and industrial circulation—and, at the same time, a recyclable witness to a world in constant motion. Hardly any other material is so closely linked to private and collective ideas of everyday life, changing lifestyles, and consumption.

#### Newspaper

Waelder uses newspaper as an everyday membrane between the private and the public—as a surface that absorbs images, language, and stains in equal measure. *Mercy (Leak)* (2025)—black tea leaves, butter, a croissant, and oats on a page of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, where the headline word “Erbarmen” (Mercy) catches the eye—translates the permeability of the material into a moment of attention. The chance arrangement of the stains, the capillary action of the oil, the slow darkening of the tea leaves: all of this inscribes itself into a leading article like a silent counter-narrative to the illusion of stable meanings. The leak—audible in the space as a drip, visible on the cardboard as a stain—connects the acoustic and visual levels in a subtle dramaturgy. Beneath the ceiling, Waelder has installed newspaper clippings, collages, and photographs showing articles about children—blurry, incidental, frozen in everyday gestures. Through the ceiling’s semi-transparent light sail, only the headlines of the articles remain legible, suggesting themes such as childhood, nostalgia, and family histories. The texts are fragmentary, torn, and blurred—like a memory that is not fully accessible but nevertheless reveals an emotional presence.

#### Time-Lapse

Ascending the foyer staircase, the work *Background Vehicle (Running Scene)* (2025) unfolds on the right, along the large wall of the light well. The triptych, propped against the wall, consists of three canvases arranged in a row, with a total length of nearly six meters. The collaged images on canvas show a figure with blurred contours running down a street. Judging by the silhouette, it is a boy. The three collages show film stills from the same sequence, with each image capturing a different moment within the movement. The stills were transferred to canvas using a plotter print, then covered with a second layer of raw canvas and treated with marker, adhesive, cleaning agents, oil, and filler. This layering alters the depiction and creates an almost abstract surface in which the materiality of the substrate itself takes center stage. What remains is the trace of something past—comparable to a gradually fading dream. The three scenes are not arranged linearly, thus creating a fragmented image of a sequence of motion. The work also seems detached from the present due to its faded, sepia-colored tone: it evokes the aesthetic of analog photographs from the 1920s and 1930s, whose once-sharp images of memory have been transformed by light and time into vague suggestions. In a similar way, Waelder’s works draw on autobiographical history and personal memory—not as a mere retrospective, but as a starting point for an engagement with collective memory, like photographs in a fictional family album.

#### For the Birds

Like punctuation marks on a sheet of lined paper, sculptures cover the glass facade of the Kestner Gesellschaft. In an asymmetrical arrangement, eight larger-than-life noses protrude from the façade structure, breaking up the smooth uniformity of the surface. Formed from papier-mâché and coated with a paste of fat, seeds, and agar-agar, they are offered up as bird feed. Constantly exposed to the weather and the appetite of the animals, the sculptures are subject to a continuous process of change. Each pecked-out seed leaves a gap, altering the form until it is unrecognizable. In his installation *Self-Portrait as My Father’s Nose* (2025), Ian Waelder devotes himself to the process-based nature of perishable materials, as a tribute to the Hanover-born artist Dieter Roth. His work *P.O.T.H.A.A.VFB (Portrait of the Artist as Vogelfutterbüste)* (1969)—a bust cast from chocolate and birdseed—forms a clear point of reference. Roth’s bust was also conceived as an object to be placed outdoors, where it was to be gradually consumed by animals and thus completely decomposed. While Roth used himself as a model, Waelder commissioned his father, Juan Waelder, to sculpt an image of his own nose in clay. Based on this prototype, eight 30-cm-tall nose sculptures made of bird feed were created—multiplied body fragments that are continuously altered by the environment and nature. With this facade installation, Waelder poses the question of how family connections and history can endure when they are subject to constant transformation. In Waelder’s work, relationships, memories, and attributions appear as fragile constructions—fleeting, unstable, permeable. What remains are traces of a disappearance: material, fragmentary, impossible to hold on to.

#### Memory

The exhibition title *thereafter* does not refer to a conclusive “after,” but to the lingering effects of remnants, gestures, and materials. It is about traces that age, remember, and persist in altered form. Waelder’s works engage with this transition: between individual memory and collective visual memories, between an object’s history and its spatial appearance. The exhibition takes shape as an open constellation in which meanings are not fixed but remain in motion. *thereafter* describes a form of remembering that does not proceed linearly and makes no claim to completeness. Isabelle Graw understands this attitude as a strategy that escapes the exhaustion of pure reference: the fragmentary is not resolved; it is emphasized. In the words of Chus Martínez, a “site to remember” emerges, a space in which remembering becomes tangible as a sensually experienceable act.

Curated by Alexander Wilmschen  
Curatorial Assistance: Emilia Radmacher  
Student Assistance: Janne Lampe

#### Biography

Ian Waelder (b. 1993 in Madrid) is a Spanish artist and publisher who works with a variety of media, including photography, sculpture, sound, found objects, and print-making. In 2023, he completed his studies in fine arts at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main as a master class student of Prof. Haegue Yang. At the center of his artistic approach is an engagement with the question of how stories—especially those that are seemingly insignificant, fragmented, or erased—persist through material and acoustic remnants. Waelder currently lives and works between Mallorca, Frankfurt am Main, and Basel.

In addition to his artistic practice, Waelder founded Printer Fault Press in 2019, which functions as both a publishing house and a collaborative platform, offering a space for the work of artists, curators, and writers.

Waelder has received a number of awards, including the Graduate Prize from the Städelschule Portikus e. V. (2023), the *Art-O-Rama Prize*, and the *Art Nou Prize* from the Barcelona Art Galleries (both 2022). Furthermore, the artist has received various grants and residencies, including a residency at the Laurenz-Haus Foundation (2025), a residency at WIELS (Brussels, 2024), a grant for the Hessisches Atelierprogramm from 2025 to 2029 from basis e. V. (Frankfurt a. M., 2024), and a grant from Kunststiftung DZ Bank (Frankfurt a. M., 2023–24).

His works have been presented internationally in numerous solo and duo exhibitions, including *thereafter* (Kestner Gesellschaft, Hanover, 2025), *cadence* (carlier | gebauer, Berlin, 2025), *even in a language that is not your own* (Es Baluard Museu d’Art Contemporani de Palma, Palma, 2023), *Bystander (Moth Joke)* (Neuer Kunstverein, Gießen, 2024), and *mezzo staccato (romantic gestures)* (Galerie Rolando Anselmi, Rome, 2023).

Waelder’s works have also been part of international group exhibitions, including ... *to leave a space in which the din of war might die down* (NS-Dokumentationszentrum, Munich, 2025), *What does it mean for a place to be loved?* (ifa-Galerie, Berlin, 2025), *Burn The Diaries, Read Them Out Loud* (Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 2025), *Un cuarto cálido (Toma estas paredes por piel)* (Sala Verónicas, Murcia, 2024), *Maresfield Gardens* (Petrine, Paris, 2025), *A=A, B=B* (Antoni Tapies Foundation, Barcelona, 2023).

Kestner Gesellschaft  
Goseriede 11, 30159 Hannover  
kestnergesellschaft.de

Opening hours  
Tue–Sun: 11 a.m.–6 p.m.  
Thu: 11 a.m.–8 p.m.

#### Program

Artist Talk with Ian Waelder  
6 November 2025, 6 p.m.

Additional information about the exhibition’s accompanying program is available on our website.

#### Imprint

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Martínez, Chus: *Ian Waelder: cadence*, exhibition text, carlier | gebauer, Berlin, 2025.

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Ian Waelder, *Calendar (Die Jugend)* (Detail), 2025, courtesy of the Artist and carlier | gebauer, Berlin/Madrid, diez, Amsterdam

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Ian Waelder

thereafter

16.8. –  
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Wissenschaft

Das Mor...

