

Artist Lecture Series Vienna

Sophie Thun

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Sophie Thun
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Hello.

I have a hard time starting this; also, writing is not a form that I feel I should express myself in.

It is February 15th (Jadwiga's and also Dāvis's birthday), 20:49 pm.

The deadline for the draft of this publication is today (Sunday), but since there is no online upload system attached, I assume that this deadline stretches into the night, until Monday morning, before people (Ezara) wake up (I have no idea how early she wakes up). So I will be working on this until (hopefully not quite) then.

To help myself start:

I would like to start with a story that a (dead) (wonderful) friend of mine, Daniel Spoerri, often told me (when he was still alive) when I was in such situations (of not knowing how to start), usually in the evening (I work at night, and I had my darkroom in his studio, which was in the courtyard of the house that he lived in, for a while).

Here is the English translation (we spoke German with each other) from the recording I once made of it (in 2019), in order to use it in my Secession publication (I hope it is ok that I am using it here again, but I do need help, also, in the Secession book the English version of the text has since been glued shut due to binding issues).

2019, in Daniel's kitchen.

S: Daniel, can you tell me the story of your friend again?

D: Of which friend?

S: The author. You told me, you always ... in which city, do you still know?

D: Ascona. But ... I don't know the context now, it is so noisy here and everything ...

S: I remember you telling me that you always drank together and he was terribly frustrated about a book he was writing ...

D: Ah, no, it was that he couldn't find a beginning. He had to have the first sentence before he could start. I met him again and again in Ascona at the bar, in the evenings, and I would ask him, and he would say: No, still not; no, I still don't have anything.

And then one evening, he was suddenly very happy and said: Now I've started!

So I asked: This means, you found this sentence? And he said: Yes, exactly, now I can write.

And what is it then, this sentence?

It was raining.

This is the story, and I have made two (or more?) works with "Es regnete" (it was raining) in the title since. Daniel died in 2024, so I can't go to his kitchen and tell him about it (instead of working) and hear his stories about how it is always like that, until you are 90 (he died at 94), and that the self-doubt and anxiety and senselessness never go away, and anyhow, that you can also make a show in one day, if you have an idea.

Ezra and Rainer Spangl invited me to give a lecture as part of the Artist Lectures Series Vienna. I think they have been organising them since at least 2010, which is almost as long as I have lived in Vienna (I moved here in September 2009). I visited some of them already as a student. This publication will already be printed and stapled at the talk, and will possibly help my lecture take a more concise form, since I might (will hopefully) be able to express myself more clearly if I write at least some of it up ahead of time.

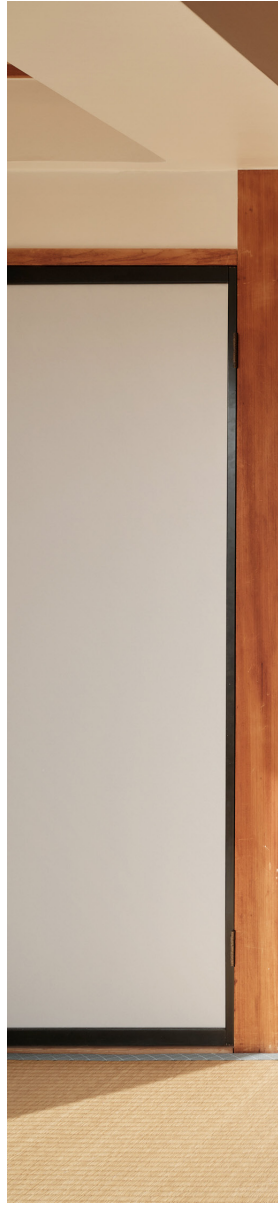
Also, since the invitation to do the talk, which was around 9 months ago, I have gotten the photo professorship at the University of Applied Arts, which is hosting these talks, so everything feels even more serious now.



Sophie Thun

Es regnete (Kettenbrueckengasse 23, Daniel's door, remember?), 2022

Installation view by Bruno Lopes, Working Title, Madragoa





Sophie Thun
6 November 2024, Wien, Oesterreich, 2025
Installation view by Olivier Mignon, Nocturnal, Yonkai

I will briefly introduce myself. My name is Sophie Thun. I am, amongst other things, an artist, I work primarily with the medium of analog photography, which means that I spend a lot of my time in darkness. I listen to music when I make small format prints, I don't when I make large ones, because I need (want) to hear the sound that the machines are making, also in order to orient myself in the space. I am more interested in the printing than the photographing process, although I do take photographs. But I have also used negatives and images that were not (but now are) mine. I am 40 years old, 187,5 cm tall, both are relevant to my practice.

I wanted to talk about some of my jobs in this lecture, since I have the impression that they (some of them, the ones I will write about here) had a very large impact on my life as an artist.

The first job that did this (had direct relevance for my life as an artist) was as a "jeune-fille-au-pair" (young babysitter girl). I did this in France. I wanted to learn French, but there was none at school. I was a very tall teenager, so people usually assumed that I was older. I went for one or two months in the summers, at ages 15, 16, 17 (? not sure here), 18, and 19. It was a great way of learning the language, since kids, especially in one-language households, of a certain age often just assume that bigger people understand them. There were 5 kids, four of them talked, the youngest couldn't speak yet, and I learned quickly. Also, I saw a Monet painting for the first time in my life, and a Daniel Richter painting. The Daniel Richter painting sighting was in 2005, when I went to Paris after the job, and visited the Centre Pompidou, in an exhibition called "Big Bang: Destruction and creation in 20th century art". The painting is called "Duueh", and it seems to show four people falling through the air, and I'd never seen anything painted like that before. I wrote down his name, and applied four years later, first as an erasmus, then as a regular student. (So this is the second (first) very important Daniel.)



Daniel Richter, Duueh, 2003
Oil on canvas
300 x 200 cm

(22:17, I will drink a coffee and wash my hair)

23:03

The jobs that were most relevant to my art work life.

1. Jeune-fille-au-pair, seeing a Daniel Richter painting in the Centre Pompidou, which led to me later applying (and getting accepted! Danke forever) to his class, moving to Vienna, and becoming a lebt und arbeitet in Wien artist. The basic French language skills collected at this job also proved very useful when exhibiting at MCBA Lausanne, and not only.

2. Type-setting for a magazine about the history of photography, where I saw a 19th-century photograph, of a man drinking tea (?) with himself. I could not see any trace of collage, and could not wrap my head around how this image, this doubling, was made in that pre-Photoshop time (I was still a young painter). This later led to my "After Hours" images (in which I am doubled).



Sophie Thun

Ufer, 17–27.02.2019, 2019

Installation view by kunstdokumentation.com



Sophie Thun
Ufer, 30.08.–18.09.2022, 2022
Installation view by Bruno Lopes

3. Working as a student assistant in the photolab at Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, under Thomas Freiler, who taught me, amongst others, about 8x10" photography, his colleague, Siu-Tim Mak, gave me a Man Ray book, Thomas suggested me for the text-setting job in the magazine, where I saw the doubling of the figure described above.

4. Working part-time at Galerie Mezzanin, in Eschenbachgasse (where Galerie Crone now is).

This included

writing emails

making exhibition invitations (setting text and image into a provided structure)

pouring wine, washing glasses, bringing trash out, making coffee etc...

going to storage, learning about the Viennese art world from the drivers (all of them loved Franz West)

packing and unpacking artwork

helping with installing shows

bringing work to framers

going to art fairs, installing, standing in the booth, explaining the work

and so on and so on.

This was a very valuable job on many levels.

I had a really great boss, Karin Handlbauer, who did incredible shows, knew her exhibition space very well, and took (and gave) responsibility.

I had incredible colleagues.

I got rid of my fear of entering galleries.

I learned how to write formal emails in German and in English, how to address people, how to end an email etc...

I learned what to wear to gallery dinners and art fair vip dinners, and so on, without feeling uncomfortable.

I learned "who is who" (apologies, I cannot think of a better shortcut term at the moment) in the Viennese art world (I had to send emails to press, collectors, people working in museums, etc...)

I found out about framers in Vienna, and the prices of frames. I met other artists who were also working for galleries, who were a bit older than I was. I did my first exhibitions and residencies with them, I learned how to install exhibitions from them, and how to handle artwork, and found out about artists that they admired.

I met the artists exhibiting at the gallery, two of whom hired me for jobs later on, others later involved me in shows.

(23:58)

I helped install shows and figured out that how the work is “displayed” in the space, not only making the work on a canvas in a studio (I was still a painter) plays a huge role. I found out how much artworks cost, who gets what percent off, what cut the artist gets, and that production costs can be deducted from the cut.

Some artists, gallerists, and curators treated the girl (me) behind the desk decently (again lacking a better word); some did not, so I also learned who is an asshole and who is not. I learned terminology and how to verbalise ideas about (other people’s) art (part of my job involved explaining the work on show to people).

I was gifted editions by some of the artists, brought lunch boxes, and told jokes.

I learned how to pack artwork, the basics of how to hang it, and how to use certain tools.

I went to the USA for the first and only time in my life, to Art Basel Miami Beach (where I met one of my favorite brains).

5. Some years later, one of the older artists represented by the gallery had an exhibition at Secession, and asked if I would document his exhibition. This led to further jobs at Secession and to exhibition photography becoming my main source of income. Thanks to the documentation jobs at Secession, I got to know the building quite well, the curators, the press, and the technical team. I knew where the doors were, the toilets, the windows, how the spaces were connected, where the water access was, and how the light entered the space. All of this proved very valuable when I was later invited to exhibit at Secession in 2020; my slot was

during the very first Covid 19 lockdown. For this exhibition (which was only available to the audience via webcam), I moved my darkroom to the Grafisches Kabinett (the space in Secession that I was invited to exhibit in). This idea could only appear because I knew that there was a toilet in the staircase (analog photography labs need water; they are wet rooms).



Sophie Thun
Stolberggasse, Secession, 2020
Exhibition view by Pascal Petignat

I used the Secession exhibition to produce the work for my next two (and then more) exhibitions, the work to make work.



Sophie Thun
Stolberggasse 13 zu Friedrichstrasse 12, 2020
Installation view by kunstdokumentation.com



Sophie Thun
Stolberggasse, Secession, 2020
Exhibition view by Pascal Petignat







Sophie Thun

Some of All the Things in my Apartment Smaller than 8x10 Inches
(Extended Care), 2021

Installation view by kunstdokumentation.com

6. I worked for several years as a technician for artists working conceptually with photography. Sometimes I would be the camera operator, or set up the lights, or develop the film, or bring and use my equipment, or all of the things.

I met my gallerist, Sophie Tappeiner, who was not a gallerist yet, while photographing for one of the artists. Sophie Tappeiner then came to see my solo presentation at Parallel Vienna and invited me to work with her, as a represented artist, once she opened her gallery (knowing a bit about how galleries and art fairs work was very helpful here).

(now it is Monday. 01:19. (now Wednesday 10:33, I am re-reading and adding images) (now Thursday 15:31, adding image captions) (Thursday 22:25, fixing typos) I am officially late. The birthdays are also no longer.)

Another of the artists I worked for recommended me for a teaching job, for which I was accepted, which then led to further teaching jobs. This artist I also learned a lot of music, jokes, art history, and thinking from.

I developed a body of work, the doubling one, called After Hours, during these production jobs. They required frequent travel, and involved staying in hotel rooms, which I ended up using as my studio before and after work to produce the work for an upcoming exhibition. Since then, I have been making artwork “on the side” of jobs, sometimes in hotel rooms, sometimes in exhibition spaces, universities, studios, and storage rooms.

One of the production jobs was in Duesseldorf, where I saw the Ed Atkins exhibition, Ye Olde Food, in K21, in 2019. Ed Atkins had a Mike Kelley quote in the show, “When applied to body parts, basic compositional exercises, like up vs. down or in vs. out, come off as cruelly tongue-in-cheek. These simple organizing gestures cannot help but remind viewers of the actual morphology of the body—and of their living bodies in particular. (Maybe the quote only started

here:) Everyone knows how the body is organized and how many of each part he or she has; this is a given and is never thought about. To become aware of these particulars, one must imagine oneself unwhole, cut into parts—deformed or dead,” which has stuck with me (“Everyone knows how the body is organized and how many of each part he or she has; this is a given and is never thought about” is surely not true for everyone).

I have since also bought the book with the full text.

I think this might be it, when it comes to the jobs that were most relevant to the art. Hopefully, more will come; hopefully, the new one is one of them.

maybe 7. I also worked in a photography lab, mixing RA4 chemistry and cleaning the paper developing machine, but I am not sure if this qualifies as a job, because it was more of a barter; I was doing this in exchange for using the space. I was also learning a lot about machines that I previously had not encountered. It grew into friendships and doing jobs and exhibitions together. But this was only possible due to the skills learned as a student assistant from Thomas Freiler and Siu-Tim Mak, and then the barter made my later lab production in Berlin possible (this only worked because they knew that I was also a technician in the darkroom).

Thank you, and apologies.

(Maybe also write about crisis and skill?)



Sophie Thun
Oberkasselerstr. to Poljanski nasip
Installation view Blaž Gutman/MGML, Cukrarna



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