
RICHARD JOCHUM
Endless Bodies of Work

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Endless Bodies of Work

in conversation with Richard Jochum

by Işın Önol

Işın Önol: "Endless Bodies of Work" is the title you've chosen for this book that presents a selection of your oeuvre. Although this title at first glance seems generic, it has many parallels with the essence behind your practices, and, therefore, is a good starting point for the conversation. What does "bodies of work" imply, and what is the connection to the notion of "endless?"

Richard Jochum: I use the plural "bodies" to indicate that although this is a monograph about the work of an artist, my work is only an example of the many bodies of work we all are engaged in creating, as we should be. While we may hear people in the art world speak in a pedestrian way about "body of work," I understand it as a concept that is profound because it challenges us as creators. Nietzsche introduces the necessity of creating as a way to add meaning to our lives. Joseph Beuys took that up when he declared everybody an artist, not in the literal sense, but in the sense of having the ability to create, which all humans share. I support that position.

"Body of work" has many facets. It is as much about the connection between pieces as it is about the dialogue with the audience. It is the struggle of an artist to identify the themes that hold together the work he or she is involved with. It is about the places in between, where the ideas come from and the paths they take to find form. It's also not just about the work an artist creates—the visible outcome, so to speak—but also the ways in which it is conveyed and the texts that describe and connect it. In this way, the work is constantly evolving and growing and will never be fully completed. And yet, the body is already evident in the beginning. Imagine a young artist showing her first piece in a group show. How does the audience read it? How does the artist understand it? It has no references; it's rather alone without the pieces that come after to help give it context and create references and more text as it continues to shape and develop as a "body of work." Still, if it was done thoughtfully and with conviction, it already shows much of what it is only becoming. This aspect of "becoming" is the challenge genuine to a body of work and the reason why it is endless.

There is another aspect that I like about "body of work." While it may be that every work of art is part of the world of art, the body of work itself belongs to the artist, no matter how it is received among the gatekeepers. That's an important distinction that plays into the value of making art as a creative act open to all humans.

To accrue a body of work is empowering and leads us to a form of enlightenment that is not just cerebral, but also embodied. This is one of the most powerful aspects of art: the ability to create works that are grounded in the truth of our bodily lives.

Işın Önol: Looking at your artistic practices, it is inevitable to notice the wide variety of media that you have employed throughout your work history. Your next work could be done with any medium, and this wouldn't surprise your audience. Your artistic stance cannot be defined or recognized through a single style, technique, medium, or genre, but perhaps through your artistic manners and gestures. What characterizes your work?

Richard Jochum: I still often introduce myself as a media artist when people ask me what I do, but am increasingly dissatisfied with that category. I don't think it tells us much about the work that artists do today. In today's world, I feel, media have lost their specificity. The hybridization of artistic forms, the influx of technology, and the interpretation of art as a conduit of social practice, as is widely common now, have made "media" become a bit of a misnomer. In that sense

you are right—my work eludes a single style or technique. While I value craftsmanship in the making and put effort into the creation of a piece, I seek rupture with regards to form and the trying out of new things. The moment I feel settled with a particular routine the work has taken, I want to move on again, if only to pursue non-closure, which in and of itself I find compelling. So while the work is not about the media or technologies that are involved in its creation, all of my works are means of thinking things through. They work as embodiments of a deep reflectivity and as invitations for people to engage with them. If media can, at times, be dry and cold, particularly digital media, the works lure audiences to join me in this reflective engagement using humor, questioning, or commonly known narratives (such as religious, historical, or mythological figures). So, again, I see my work as a way of embodied thinking. Since that thinking will always be unfinished, the work stays in flux, like a body of work that's never completed. And yet, as an artist, I would like to see it completed, either by myself or alongside others.

I am interested in art as a way to express meaning in a very condensed way in whatever form the work takes. And then the rest is revisitation, transaction, and unpacking.

Işın Önol: You have employed the possibility of participation in many different forms in your work, be it through digital interactive technologies or in the most analog form of filling out a survey and posting it through traditional mail. The diversity remains, but so, too, your willingness to invite participation. What is the role of the audience in your work?

Richard Jochum: For young artists, audiences are often an afterthought. When you have done a lot of exhibitions, you somehow know your way around and understand how audiences think and perceive work. And as you learn more about that, it becomes easier to include audiences in the work, and in thinking towards the work. I remember when I did my first public art piece in 1996, I didn't quite know how to communicate the work to a mass audience; this is very different from doing a gallery show where it is merely about a wall label, a press release, etc. This made me realize that there are many shades to audiences.

I have always cared very much about audiences. I've never thought that artworks exist simply on their own. Consider the question: "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" While it may make a noise, it doesn't add up to become meaningful "sound" without the presence of an audience. At the same time, the focus can't be solely on the audience. As an artist I enjoy taking responsibility for shaping a piece in a way that directs the audience. But again, there are not only many different audiences, the level of interaction with audiences varies. This depends on the piece. For *Twenty Angry Dogs*, for example, I wanted the audience to become performers. Or for the *Crossword Project*: The first version was entirely planned out and it was me who collected and curated the questions; but for a subsequent version, I invited crowd-sourced questions and encouraged direct participation. This is one of the affordances of interactive technologies, which help us to reach more audiences and also expand their level of their participation.

Işın Önol: Among the vide variety of media that you have used there is also "land": An early piece, *Sisyphus on Vacation,* was a significant example of land art. Very recently, you have created two new land art projects: *Tree Trunks* and *Rock Candy.* Rock Candy shows formal and material similarities with Sisyphus on Vacation. What is your connection to "land", and consequently how does your art connect to it?

Richard Jochum: Most of my public art projects came out of residencies, i.e. invitations by art organizations with access to extraordinary landscapes to visit for a couple of weeks and then respond to each site artistically. While the land art pieces are seemingly connected in their artistic sensibility and visual language, they are unique responses to the landscape and the creative possibilities that I found at each site. In *Sisyphus on Vacation*, I was reacting to the incredible beauty of the Alps and to the harsh conditions and hard labor that those who try to make a living there experience. The figure of *Sisyphus* was an obvious choice for me. Everything becomes harder—farming, wayfinding, or the weather—in high altitudes. The piece had an absurdist quality, which I tried to emphasize by seeking help in the negentropic act of carrying 800 pounds uphill. To persuade people

Tug of War | 2016, ongoing | Multi-channel video installation | Detail

to participate in a futile act was a challenge. People found the idea whimsical at first. Only in hindsight did *Sisyphus on Vacation* create significant interest. After we were done with the project, I took a large format photograph, which documented the work. As often is the case with land art and outdoor settings, documentation is crucial. In the meantime, the piece largely disassembled due to snow, weather and hikers, who are often seen collecting special-looking stones from the mountains. By disintegrating over time, *Sisyphus* completes its cycle.

The relationship between *Rock Candy* and *Sisyphus on Vacation* is mostly based on form: both consist of a set of rocks arranged in a circle; both are made with large stones that I collected from water nearby, either a stream or the ocean. While the stones in the *Sisyphus* piece are painted grey, the rock candies are gift-wrapped in metallic foil. And while *Sisyphus* relates to the struggle of our professional activities and everyday life, *Rock Candy* allures and allows us a reprieve. *Rock Candy* also reflects my work with crumpled papers, like the PaperSeries in which I first crumpled paper and then photographed it, presenting visually compelling reminders of what happened to the paper.

Tree Trunks was made for an art park in Odense, Denmark, where Hans Christian Anderson was born and lived. The piece reflects the importance of tales and fables as outstanding tools for public education. When I found three tree trunks as ideal sites for putting the chests on top, I did not know that Anderson had actually written a story called "The Flying Trunk." It was a great coincidence, which just underlines how art is never built on concepts alone but is deeply circumstantial. One needs to be open to that, I believe. Having said that, the piece would have worked otherwise, too. It reflects the mysteriousness of the forest and the endless reservoir of stories each of us brings with us all the time.

The notion of "land art" allows me to approach art with a different scope and scale. But while it suits me to create works that take what nature provides and to play with that, I don't want to compete with nature. As a matter of fact, artistically I am not very interested in nature as such; I am much more interested in the human experience. I was raised in a small town in the middle of a canyon, i.e., a very rural area surrounded by woods and rocks. Land art is intriguing to me, because it takes familiar materials that I grew up with, plays with them, makes them different, and then places them back in nature, a bit like Brecht, who emphasized "alienation" as part of the artistic repertoire.

Işın Önol: Oftentimes, those works that invite participation demand a great deal of time and attention from the viewer. *A Fifth of a Huge Exhibition* seemingly inverts this demand: As an observer of this interactive work, I find myself in front of an excessively narcissistic figure, and somehow, I seek his attention. Once I finally receive it, there is a momentary eye contact between the figure and me. At this very instant, the figure freezes the sight of me in its memory by taking a picture, and then I lose him again. A heart-breaking moment! What happens to my image in his memory, and the "collected memories" of the work?

Richard Jochum: In this case, the memory becomes part of a database. But the experience of looking at each other also stays with you, the viewer. Obviously, there are two views: the piece looking at you and you looking at the piece. I should say there are a few more aspects: viewers not only look at the performer; they also see themselves in the webcam image that's drawn up. Should we operate on the assumption that the interaction among people is equally interesting for all parties? That may not be the case! All of us remember things differently; depending on the experiences we have had in life, on the perception we have—all of this affects our memory and our recollection. The performer looking at himself in the mirror may make you already suspicious about his ability to connect with you; and yet you expect him to already have been impacted by you. That's a fascinating assumption, that I think we often make about each other—and then easily can end up being disappointed when we realize that the relationship or experience was one-sided.

Işın Önol: Another interactive video project is *Offering.* The artwork offers a host from a chalice, but it is impossible to receive. So, does it really

offer anything? Even if it were possible to receive the host, would I get anything but an empty symbol? Despite the impossibility of receiving the gift, the work is still interactive in the technical sense, because it is triggered by the viewer's presence (by means of face recognition software). But is the triggering enough to constitute an interaction? To what extent can one interact with these offerings in their original space?

Richard Jochum: I have seen some people standing in front of the piece sticking their tongue out hoping that this may trigger the hands to reach out with the host, just as one would at mass. Because of the strong religious undertones of the piece, I feel it to be a real offering; and yet, you are right, people cannot receive. And I feel that touches upon something that questions the completeness of an experience that we have in front of artworks. While a successful piece is providing us with an experience, given that we are open toward it and pay attention, there is always a barrier, an obstacle. And while I think that it is on us to pay attention, I also believe that art has this very unique power to open up an attention space—if it works, that is. One of the most interesting aspects of the piece is that it locks you in, while making an offer that you cannot receive.

Interaction is really important to me. Audiences are not just viewers, they are also participants, as am I. I value that opportunity to engage in a dialogue that adds another dimension to the work of art; and by that I am not just referring to the object, but to the process.

Işın Önol: The title *A Fifth of a Huge Exhibition* does not tell us about the content of the artwork, but its relation to and position within the rest of the exhibition. When we look at the work alone, or even talk about it, there's always an imaginary exhibition that is entangled with it in its context. What can a title do for your work, or in general, for a work of art?

Richard Jochum: I always felt very strongly about titles. For me they are a great way to shape the response of the audience. They operate as entry points to the work; they don't explain or substitute for the piece. If they are done well, then they can bring forward an aspect of the work that allows the viewer to dive deeper into the work and its experience. Titles can refer to the work on display or to each other, i.e., they operate as reference points to other works, mine or others. And in that, titles can take on a life of their own. Titles can emphasize the dialogic nature of the work, they can continue the conversation that the work starts, and sometimes they are just descriptive and serve as a way to identify the piece. *A Fifth of a Huge Exhibition* refers to the size of the piece, its importance, or to the fact that no piece is ever a piece by its own; it's always a piece within a context, or as I sometimes like to say: Every work of art is a work of art in the world of art. The world of art can be an exhibition, it can be the history of art, or it can be the body of work an artist continues to develop.

Işın Önol: There are also a number of works in which you invite the audience to a collective experience, but they are not necessarily interactive. One example would be *Immersive Surfaces,* a collective work you produced in 2011, in the framework of the Dumbo Arts Festival. How, in your perception, does this connect with your other, more interactive pieces?

Richard Jochum: While *Immersive Surfaces* may not seem interactive, the video mapping project was built on collaboration. From referencing the waterfall that Olafur Eliasson did in 2008 on the other side of the Manhattan Bridge to including a small team of artists, film makers and VJs, to inviting the viewers to become part of the projection—using a web interface that allowed people to upload their own portraits—it truly was an immersive and interactive experience.

Işın Önol: This work created a human waterfall from a crowd of floating people! What did you aim at in producing this work? How do you feel crowd art relates to mass art? Who were the floating people on the surface of the Manhattan Bridge?

Richard Jochum: For me this piece stands on the thin line between "crowd" and "audience." Throughout art history, we have come to classify different

movements, such as pop art, arte povera, op-art, context art, etc. I wanted a new descriptor that allows us to capture an aspect of art making that is unique to our time, and this is how I came up with "crowd art."

I began thinking about the concept of crowd art before I became involved with *Immersive Surfaces*, but the opportunity to collaborate with other artists, filmmakers, and VJs gave me the chance to bring that idea forward.

In a gentrified Dumbo, an art festival is often more spectacle than an expression of a lively community. This absence of the community led us to the visual metaphor of a human waterfall in order to raise the question: are we a society or a crowd? We may be stuck with the fact that we are disintegrated and don't yet know the recipe to re-integrate, but still we try. That's what we do by creating images that put this notion in front of us and make us ponder.

This piece, like the *Crossword Project*, addresses how we are connected and how we share the same questions. To have shared questions seems to me a necessity for a society. The role of the artist today as I see it lies in creating such questions and giving people the space to imagine new possibilities to solve them.

The concept of crowd art is based on the observation that today's art making more easily includes large numbers of people because of new interactive technologies and enhanced ways of communicating (flash mobs would be an example of that). It also describes the heightened participatory aspect of art making today, which is consistent with the understanding of art as a form of social practice that has gained real prominence in the past ten or twenty years.

I see crowd art as something distinct from mass art. Mass art is about entertainment. It becomes spectacle and I believe art should speak to us on a deeper level.

Işın Önol: Another example that invites the audience be a part of the work, not necessarily from a participatory approach, is your performance project and installation, *dis-positiv,* from the year 2000. It can be seen as a collective experience where art theorists, critics and curators are present in the work as, in your words, "embodiments of their own discourse." The viewer of the piece is also invited to experience this moment by attending the performance. This is a rather difficult piece to grasp based on its documentation only. What happened inside and outside of the glass structure?

Richard Jochum: The concept of this piece is fairly straightforward. *dis-positiv* shows art historians, art critics and curators, instead of artworks, as exhibits. Each of the "exhibits" spends a couple of hours behind a plexi-glass structure, essentially becoming a performer. Each of the dozens of people who volunteered to be exhibited found a very particular angle to address the relationship between art as a practice and art as a form of discourse. The structure turned into a performance space in which they all tried to be unique and outdo each other.

I wanted the "exhibits" to share with the public their visions of where art is going. Some of the critics did this in a direct way, by allowing the public to come into the plexi-glass structure for something like office hours; others made it a point to exclude viewers from the structure, for example by holding a special dinner with only invited guests while the audience outside the structure looked on. One pair engaged in a critique of the piece, which the audience was able to watch in real time.

While the premise of *dis-positiv* is a very clear concept–turning the tables, so to speak—on a deeper level it brought to the forefront the questions of how we collaborate with each other and how we can advance the field more intimately by getting to know what the other side is doing (and not just from the safe distance of 25 or more years). We learn from each other and only advance together as a field. We need theory and practice working jointly.

Işın Önol: Another work that deals with the notion of "authorship" in relation to the history of art would be *The History of Art.* Taking Janson's renowned art history book as its object, the work detaches the maker from what is made by printing only the authors' and

artists' names on one side of an accordion-shaped History of Art book, and the content—texts and images—on the other side with the names omitted. This artist's book, just like *dis-positiv,* brings forward the question of the maker becoming a brand and analyzes the idea of the value of the object without its maker. It seems to suggest a new perspective on the history of art for the audience. Could you discuss the background of this project?

Richard Jochum: It was interesting for me to see at some point how certain themes within one's practice come up again and again and how one finds different forms to address them over time. *dis-positiv*, *History of Art*, *I Can't Believe It's Not Art*, and *The Curator* are all dealing in different ways with a similar idea: humorously creating an imaginary dialogue between art makers and their critics. That interesting, intriguing relationship needs to be looked at, again and again.

It's important to clarify the relationship between the makers and the theoreticians and show that neither side can be without the other. It's a fallacy to believe that artists don't exactly know what they are doing or that one can understand art making without having a very clear idea about the making process.

You mention brand. In fact, both sides become brands: even the art historians, critics, and curators engaged in the branding of artists develop their own brands. It's an epidemic trait of our culture: to personify effort. And while we do this, we forget that the artist is never alone in his doing, but always stands on the shoulders of others, and often works in teams. By constantly reinforcing the idea of a single or main "author" or "maker", we are by default not honoring those who in other ways influenced the coming about of a work of art, or of a text. This is part of an individualistic cultural framework.

Işın Önol: Irony is another prominent aspect of your work. *Twenty* (or more) Angry Dogs is perhaps one of the most obvious examples where you leave an audience between the seriousness of the moment and the absurdity of the act. 20 or more people bark at you in the most doglike way possible. The perfection in their work and the perfection of the installation take the viewer on a meditative journey with a mind-set oscillating between what is ridiculous and formidable. Who are these dogs, and what do they do?

Richard Jochum: When I told a friend about the *Twenty Angry Dog* series, he said, if you ever do a catalog about this work, I would like to write the text. He was so certain that he would be able to identify each barking dog by its breed because he had studied dogs and surrounded himself with dogs for all his life. I still need to take him up on his offer. Maybe he knows the answer to this question.

In the very literal sense, these are people who are friends or acquaintances, or came to one of the open studio events where I showed a pilot and became interested in participating themselves. Only two or three of them are trained performers, and the rest are amateurs who either play-barked with their kids at home or howled along with their beagle or who just love dogs or expressing the inner self. In the end, every performer had his or her reasons to participate in the recording. While it spilled out differently for each person, their enactments of dogs made visible a deep understanding of their own, unmasked reality. Usually when we speak we try to be at our best, but this performance brought forth the inner self in a very raw and honest way. One of the performers asked me before I recorded her, what type of angry dog I would like for her to play. When she finally performed, it became clear that she only had one angry dog bark voice.

Işın Önol: The seriousness and sincerity of the performers make the experience very strong, and, thanks to that success, the levels of irony and absurdity also increase. What is the drive behind this work?

Richard Jochum: You might find this surprising: I always had a fear of dogs. By creating *Twenty Angry Dogs*, I faced that fear and overcame it. But that's just personal background. The other aspect is that I am very interested in the enormous power of voice that we carry within us and that we often forget when we use the voice merely to convey messages or, worse, to split hairs for the sake of being right or to exert

judgment. I keep being interested in this aspect of agency, especially as it concerns the connection between each other, that is, where voice leads to communication and action. Is it enough to speak to be heard? Jacques Rancière asked a similar question: "How do you recognize that the person who is mouthing a voice in front of you is discussing matters of justice rather than expressing his or her private pain?"

Işın Önol: Perhaps the performance series *Bandaid* and the performative installation *Collaborative Silverware* are other distinctive examples of the ironic yet experimental approach in your work. Before anything else, these pieces invite the audience to smile. Could this be your artistic gesture—to start the communication with a smile, before going deeper into the journey together with the audience, who is often also a participant in the work?

Richard Jochum: I like art—and theory—to show a sense of humor. Humor is profoundly social. Like a title or wall text commenting on an artwork or exhibit, it creates an additional entrance into a work. It makes a work accessible. It's also a trick to draw people in, to bring them to engage with a serious work by hanging the juiciest fruits lower. Once viewers are hooked, it's possible to engage them more deeply. The question for me is often: how can we playfully engage with wicked problems? If we look at them directly, we tend to avoid such critical confrontations.

Işın Önol: Human psychology, social psychology, and understanding of the self are recurring themes in your works. One of the most memorable ones in this respect is perhaps the performative two-channel video installation *Mama/Papa:* A man seeks out "Mama" in one channel, whereas a woman seeks out "Papa" in the other. Two individuals, speaking not in dramatized theatrical voices but in very natural yet different tones, call out for their parents of the opposite sex. In a first reaction, this piece may inspire a Freudian analysis. But as each performer continues to seek the parent, at an age that societal structures make unexpected, the work makes a very intimate connection with the audience based, perhaps, on shared vulnerability. What was your motive behind the work, and what were the responses to it?

Richard Jochum: *Mama* is a universal piece: it works in China as well as in Finland. I showed it in more than 30 countries and usually received great responses to it. Only in Vienna, the city of Freud, did I experience a backlash. People were upset to hear a man calling out for his mother. This partially had to do with the setup of the piece, which was shown near a subway entrance in the heart of Vienna. Passersby would first hear the piece before they could see it. I think they found it confusing and thought somebody was crying for help. As a result, people criticized the institution that exhibited the piece and a hacker even vandalized a related website with a violent, pornographic image; people wrongly assumed the image was a response by the artist to their comments, which only increased their vitriolic reaction. I was surprised to find that level of protest in response to a piece that focused on the special relationship we have with our parents, no matter how old we are. A friend of mine told me that his father, age 70, felt orphaned when his own father died. And many people call out for their mother on their deathbed.

Işın Önol: *Tug of War* carries us into an encounter of an endless battle with the self. Yet the self is not the same person, but its mirror image, an identical twin. The viewer is surrounded by the spectacle of an imaginary fight between siblings, or with oneself, and left in the middle of the act. The work succeeds once again to receive a bitter smile from its audience. What was the motive for you to design this space for such a specific encounter of this well-known yet intimate aspect of human experience?

Richard Jochum: I am interested in *Tug of War* from the perspective of empathy. Locating the metaphor of push and pull within the self, rather than the other, makes us empathize with each other's struggles and creates companionship. I once sat in a ski lift and several yards

in front of me sat my parents. I was taken by the fact that I could see their backs and they could not. After thinking about this for a while with wonder, I then of course realized that while they cannot see their backs, I cannot see mine either. I was struck by that realization and thought one day I would like to create a piece about that. In some way, art making is precisely that: the ability to create works that allow us to look at our own backs. Maybe this is why I am so upset about the narcissism of our times: we are only looking at our fronts.

Işın Önol: *Crossword Project* leaves the audience with unanswerable questions: "Why?" "Was it worth it?" "What makes you so sure?" "Have you no shame?" The questions—some rhetorical, some philosophical, some based on the rules of physics—create an abstract space for the answers in the mind of the puzzled spectator. What made you do it? Why? Was it worth it?

Richard Jochum: In general, life presents us with questions, some of which are banal, some profound and existential. There is beauty in the questions that we have and the thoughts they produce. There is also beauty in the mundane and the expectation of "flatness," which can be comforting—sometimes we want to be engaged, but sometimes we just want to be in a warm space and feel unforced. No matter how one personally looks at these questions, some may think some of the questions are awful, others may find them thought-inducing; no matter the response, there is comfort that we all experience the same questions. Despite our differences, they bring us together and connect us. In sharing questions, we become a society. We don't have to have the same answers, but sharing similar questions—that's what unifies us. Another aspect of this is, when you teach students, the task is often about finding good questions or inspiring students to rephrase their questions in a way that opens a process that leads to better questions.

What I find remarkable about the *Crossword Project* is the number of forms it has taken on over time: it is a video animation, a wall painting, it exists as digital prints, as interactive video installation, etc. Not all artworks work this way. Some, like *Atlas*, work only in a single modality, e.g., as video. They fall flat as photographs, even though they technically convey the same idea: a guy standing on his head upside down pretending he is able, maybe obliged, to hold up the world. The video shows the instability, which tells the truth; the photograph makes it seem as if he succeeds, but that's just unreal.

Işın Önol: The piece *Survey* also creates its society in this sense. We could perhaps name this society a "speculative" one, as you encourage the society you create through your work to speculate about an unknown fact, giving them three options to select from: "It can't get worse," "It can still get worse," "All splendid, what is the problem." Through an invisible communication, we all know what we are talking about, and perhaps at that very moment of knowing it, we become a society. In comparison to *Crossword Project,* the *Survey* questionnaire is more specific, this time seeking an answer. Do you attempt to push the society you create in a specific direction?

Richard Jochum: What I care for is that I pose the question. Kant once said that we can't fight about taste because it's subjective. Nietzsche responded by saying that there is nothing else we fight about, if not taste. I agree with that. We tend to forget that we are largely predetermined by our tastes. Our attitudes make our arguments. If we want to make better arguments, we need to look at our attitudes. If we want to have better election outcomes, we need to look at the sentiment we had when we voted. Was it justified to be so angry? At whom was the anger directed? At what cost? While I am eager to imagine a different world, I don't believe that utopia is easy, hence the struggle toward it. What makes us assume that we will ever arrive at a moment where our problems will be solved? What about being a bit more open to the possibility that we will face obstacles? And that struggle is okay and part of life? Reality is our friend, not our foe. If we let our anxieties and fears get in the way, we run the risk of falling prey to false securities. The German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder once called one of his movies "Angst essen Seele auf," a brilliant title, literally translated: "Angst eats up the soul." We are seeing it happen right in front of our eyes.

Işın Önol: Just like *A Fifth of a Huge Exhibition, Survey* also collects information from its audience, this time voluntarily. How does the information accumulate in this piece? What does this work expect from its audience? What should the audience, the speculative society, expect from this piece?

Richard Jochum: I don't expect people to give an easy answer. I create a forum to pull in answers, which can go in any direction; I leave this up to the respondents. While I solicit their responses, I am much more interested in their thoughts and in stories of their actions than in their answers. It's obvious that most people respond with "It can still get worse." But that's not the most interesting part of the survey. The checkbox answer is not the real answer and would only be a response to the poll. What do polls ever tell us? I am interested in thoughts. In that sense, *Survey* is not just a statement about the state of the union today, but also an exercise in social imagination, in the ability to imagine how we could arrive at different results had we understood what was at stake from the beginning. That doesn't happen by itself. It demands we make an effort. If the checkbox answer seems like it is enough, we understand democracy very poorly. If responding to a checkbox reflects our understanding of citizenry, we potentially set ourselves up for a great deal of manipulation. But then again, maybe one day we will look back at this moment in time and say if only we still had the ability to cast a vote. It can still get worse ...

Işın Önol: The eternal battle with the self is evident in almost every work. Thoughtfully staged and carefully camouflaged with irony, the deeply intimate, sometimes even tragic connections with the self are never too direct, but the works reveal layers without putting the audience on hold for a long while, and start communicating within a personal space. Seeing the figures acting, mainly in the video-based works, the viewer encounters the artist and him/herself simultaneously. This requires a lot of sincerity from both the artist and the audience for a very intimate communication, although the contact is never direct. I will ask you once again: What is your expectation from the audience, this time at this very personal level?

Richard Jochum: While I am tempted to say that I would like for people to approach the work very truthfully, with an open mind or sincerely, I don't really have these expectations of an audience. I hope they can approach the work however they choose. It would not behoove me to prescribe the ideal viewer. In fact, if I had that type of viewer in mind, I would have a very limited audience and by the same token a very narrow mind. And I would learn very little from them. Art is very much about a confrontation with the unexpected, and in that sense needs to be open. If you ask any number of people about their favorite artists, you very likely hear the names of a select few dead artists. And while I respect what Picasso, Warhol, Rembrandt, and Da Vinci did for art, their contributions are historical. Our concept of art should always be changing since we are always changing, too. Art, I believe, needs to be able to challenge us at the very foundation. It needs to make us ask the questions that we care about; it needs to encourage our response. Art is about "figuring stuff out," and I think that's not something that we do just—or best—alone. I feel the dialogue that the works solicit is critical. In that sense, I like to see myself as an instigator of a process, of platforms for public engagement. And in order to achieve this, I often employ some sort of humor in my work, because humor is social and allows us to relate to each other, independent of our senses of humor, which may be different.

Işın Önol: *Atlas* is obviously a work that very much succeeds in creating this personal connection and deals with the notion of sincerity. Kafka said, "Atlas was permitted the opinion that he was at liberty, if he wished, to drop the Earth and creep away; but this opinion was all that he was permitted." In Letters to Milena, he confesses: "I can't carry the world on my shoulders—I can barely carry my winter coat," when he tries to convince her of his sincerity. Is it coincidence that I recognize a Kafkaesque moment in most of your works? What is your connection to myths?

Richard Jochum: Coming from a similar region, maybe the Kafkaesqueness is no coincidence? I am a big fan of myths, the ones that we all know and can relate to, I should add, and not the new ones, the fake news of our times, that disempower us and take away our dreams. I find it unfortunate when the religious becomes political, when politics becomes mythological. No, I like the mythologies that come from the great narratives of people. They are innately philosophical, as well as educational. Myths have an enormous narrative power. They allow us to pack so much of our individual and shared experience into them. They give space to the paradoxes of our lives and are not beholden to logic or to just one right interpretation. Myths are much less domesticated than tales. They are often much more rambunctious and much less moralistic than, say, Aesop's fables, which, of course, have their own place.

Işın Önol: Speaking of myths, I heard that the Emperor Franz Joseph appeared in a railroad tunnel in Austria to greet the people. Some passengers on the train recognized him very briefly, but they could convince neither themselves nor others about the reality of what they had seen. What do you know about this?

Richard Jochum: This was a piece I did several years ago when the railroad tunnel, in the 19th century the biggest tunnel construction project to date, celebrated its 125th anniversary. The type of imaginary dialogue that you refer to was exactly what I hoped for passengers in the train to experience: the disbelief of seeing what they just saw, and moreover the disbelief in the story they told each other. But that's the strange place of history in the lives of our collective psyche. *With Kind Regards from The Late Emperor* was like producing a throwback, except that history isn't just a postcard from Instagram. The history of a culture holds odd powers over people. History is funny in that sense. There is a German saying, history always takes place twice, once for real and once as a farce. The farcical aspect is what I am drawing from with this piece.

Işın Önol: Returning a question from your work *Survey*, can it get worse? Or can it at least get better?

Richard Jochum: It depends on our attitude and ability to jump from the backseat of the car into the driver's seat. The body of work stays unfinished.

Işın Önol is a curator currently based in New York and Vienna. She has been producing international exhibitions independently since 2009. Before that, she leaded the Elgiz Museum of Contemporary Art, Istanbul as its director and curator for three years (2006-2009). She is an enthusiast producer of exhibition projects, talks, and other art-related events as well as an academic working in the field of contemporary art, cultural studies, and art education.

In 2014-15 Önol worked as a guest lecturer at the Department of Digital Art at University of Applied Arts; and as a guest curator at the Schauraum-Angewandte, Quartier21, MuseumsQuartier, Vienna. She currently works as a visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of Social Difference at Columbia University, and as a visiting curator at the Social Design–Art as Urban Innovation at University of Applied Arts, Vienna.

Since 2010, she has been taking part in the organizational and curatorial team of Sinopale, International Sinop Biennale in Turkey. She is the founder and program coordinator of Nesin Art Village, Şirince, Turkey.