

(de)codiert

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CUNO AFFOLTER, OLGA BUSHKOVA, PRADEEP KUMAR, CELIA LÄNGLE,
PEPPER LEBECK-JOBE, MARIE LIEB, RETO MATHIS, ANDREAS TSCHAPPU

Eight artists — eight positions. What they all have in common is that they set up their own rules or turn them upside down. Some see this as a game; for others, it is the codes themselves that drive them to constantly come up with new (survival) strategies to deviate from the norm. Because following them would mean their collapse.

Our entire existence is closely intertwined with social conventions. An unannounced visit, even a surprise phone call, is quickly regarded as intrusive, a letter without a salutation as impolite. Every day we balance between invisible codes, always careful not to lose our balance. We weigh up which message we send, how and to whom. We don't always succeed. Especially for those who try to break out of social norms, communicating becomes a challenge — and at the same time an opportunity.

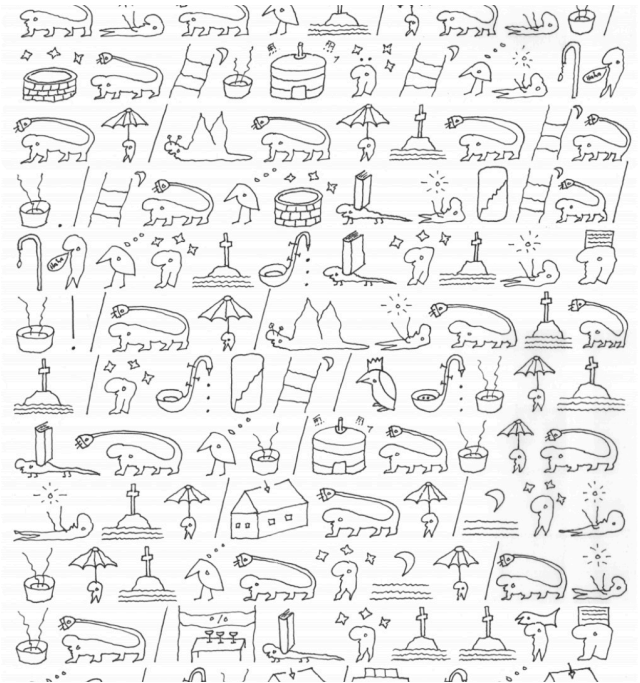
What do the signs, words and images of the eight artists trigger in us as viewers? Do we try to decipher the works, to crack the codes? What happens when the messages remain unclear, when the question marks and blank spaces create new levels of meaning?

Reto Mathis
*1952 in Chur

Bassist, alphabet developer, storyteller — with Reto Mathis, the one can hardly be separated from the other. The pencil is never far from the guitar, everything is connected and flows into the (seemingly) secret worlds of language and imagery that the artist from Chur creates again and again with meticulous attention to detail.

Reto Mathis sees his works first and foremost as aesthetic objects — which, however, have a second base, which are not only beautiful but also say something. It takes some effort to get to the bottom of the mystery. Or would it not be better to let the cipher work without any translation at all?

With his hieroglyphs, Mathis takes us back to the origins of reading, to the interface between image and letter — and thus to the question of where viewing ends and deciphering begins.



Reto Mathis, Nachrichten aus der Provinz (detail), 2023

Pradeep Kumar
*1973 in India

How do you make yourself noticed when you have gone unnoticed for years?

Pradeep Kumar was born in India in the early 1970s — with an impairment that led those around him to believe for a long time that he was mentally disabled: Kumar is deaf and dumb. The fact that his lack of words says nothing about his intellect is only realised when Kumar is given a hearing aid — and when he begins to carve figures out of matches and toothpicks.

At school, Kumar sits in the back row, seemingly unable to contribute anything to the lesson. There, using a broken razor blade, he begins to carve elaborate miniature sculptures, first from stubs of chalk, then from matches and later from toothpicks. Kumar's father recognises his son's talent and encourages him from then on.

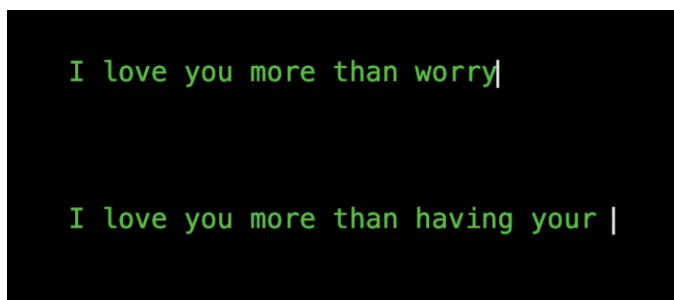
In the meantime, the Indian, who works full-time as a cashier in a bank, has won numerous prizes and has been exhibited in galleries and museums around the world.



Pradeep Kumar, «no title», matches, 2015, loan by Hannah Rieger, photography: Maurizio Maier, © Pradeep Kumar

Pepper Lebeck–Jobe
*1979 in Boone (NC), USA

Since the early days of their relationship, Pepper Lebeck–Jobe, a software engineer and actor from North Carolina, has signed every email to his wife Sarah with the sentence «I love you more than...». Where others send kind regards or loving greetings, Pepper Lebeck–Jobe writes and describes how much his partner means to him. Sometimes he loves her more than pasta, sometimes more than malfunctioning printers, the Brezelkönig, complicated German rules, politics or playing tennis while drunk. For 15 years, his emails to Sarah have ended with the love formula — which, in its abundance and constant execution, may be reminiscent of conceptual art, even if the private expressions of love were never actually intended as art. Communication is no longer just a means to an end, but takes on an emotional meaning that goes beyond the written words.



Pepper Lebeck–Jobe, screenshot of his work «I love you more»

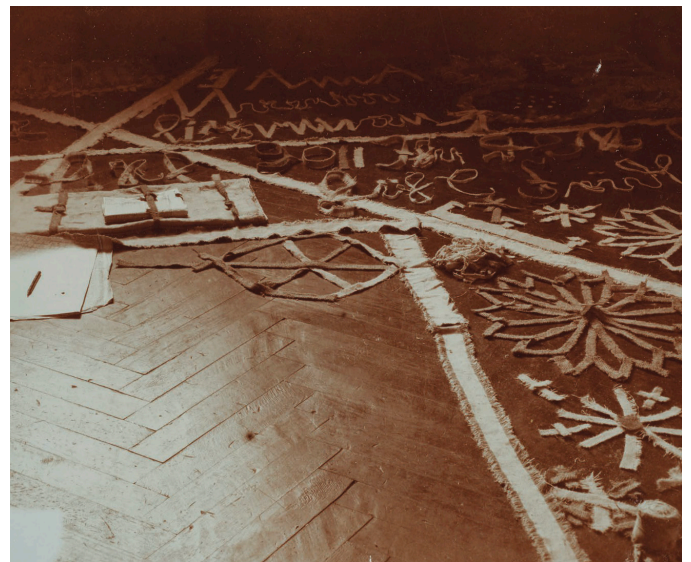
Marie Lieb
*1844 in Flehingen (D) – †1917 in Wiesloch (D)

Marie Lieb was diagnosed with «circular insanity» by doctors at the Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic, where she was repeatedly interned from 1894 onwards. Today, her condition would probably be categorised as bipolar disorder.

What exactly drove her to lay out virtuoso fabric patterns on the floor of her room using torn scraps of fabric? We don't know. The clinic staff describe the ornaments in the patient files as «meaningful signs» and «wonderful decorations» that Lieb made with great skill and perseverance.

From today's perspective, the installations can be interpreted as artistic interventions, even performances or happenings. At the time, the changes to the spatial order seem to have been dismissed as merely part of Lieb's more harmless episodes, small escapes from the existing order to which hardly any deeper meaning was attached.

Why is it that these patterns still fascinate us today? Perhaps it is precisely the blank spaces and question marks that allow us to immerse ourselves in other worlds of thought and imagination — which may ultimately teach us more about ourselves and the spaces in which we live.



Marie Lieb, 1894, Prinzhorn Collection

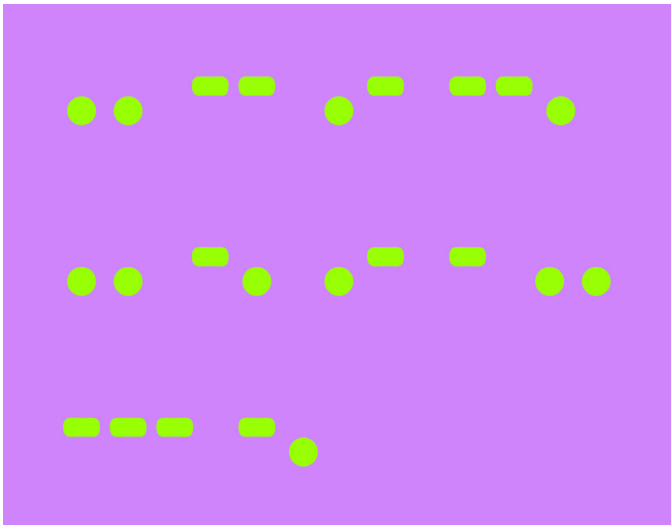
Celia Längle
*1980 in Liechtenstein

Celia Längle is an artist, researcher and translator — but the latter is not of language as we know it. In her works, the Zurich-based artist makes the unspoken audible, artistic processes visible and

creates new references and meanings through her transdisciplinary approach and new combinations of existing elements.

In the sound installation «on imagination», Celia Längle reads a quote from the British mathematician Ada Lovelace translated into Morse code: **Didahdah didididit didah dah...**

What do the syllables mean? Celia Längle is less interested in deciphering the code — rather, she plays with the listener's imagination, opening up new levels of meaning and spaces of experience. Anyone who engages with the sound of the speech syllables will at some point realise how powerful and at the same time fragile codes and conventions are.



Celia Längle, imagination in morse code

Andreas Tschappu

*1951 in Zug

Andreas Tschappu creates small miniature worlds in cigar boxes and other boxes. The self-taught artist from Zug, who can almost call the Kube's art workshop his second home, draws, paints and collages his very own wonder worlds — childishly naive and completely serious at the same time. He furnishes his «Chistli» with miniature furniture, model cars, small cut-out figures and landscape photographs.

For as long as he can remember, the 72-year-old from Zug has been capturing the world as it appears to him with faithful seriousness. While others pull out their mobile phones at every opportunity to capture special moments, Tschappu pulls a pencil, sketchbook and watercolour box out of his pocket. His miniature worlds — whether in boxes or on paper — merge his own experiences and other people's stories into a completely

individualised reality. It is he who drives the sleek vintage car in miniature format; the cut-out photo of the woman next to it turns from an irrelevant side note in the magazine *Freizeit Revue* into the main protagonist of the trip to Italy, which Andreas Tschappu takes us on as soon as he lifts the lid of the box.

Tschappu's works are diaries turned into images and at the same time his gateway to the world, with which he expresses himself and wants to make contact with the people around him.



Andreas Tschappu, «Villa Waldegg», 2021

Olga Bushkova

*1988 in Rostov, Russia

In 2011, Russian Olga Bushkova moved to Zurich after her husband received a job offer from Google.

However, her residence status does not initially allow the mathematician to pursue work herself. The forced idleness gives her the idea of focussing entirely on what she has been passionate about since her student days: photography. It quickly turned from a hobby into a language, enabling her to get in touch with people in Zurich without losing her connection to Russia. Instead of making tedious, never-ending phone calls to her father via Skype, Bushkova has a different idea: every day at 12 noon Moscow time she she wants to send a snapshot of her life in Zurich to Rostov,

while at the same time receiving a photo of her father in Russia.

Will he really join in? In fact, the «project», as Olga Bushkova calls the simultaneous ending of pictures, is now in its eighth year.

With her photographs, she succeeds in building a bridge between two worlds that could not be more different. She speaks to her father not in words, but in pictures, as any other form of contact would cause the bridge to collapse. Where speechlessness prevails or too many words lead nowhere, photography becomes a means of keeping the father–daughter relationship intact.

Presented in a museum context, completely new insights and relationships open up between the images and the people behind them, who had remained invisible in the daily chat.



Olga Bushkova, «Photo at 12», 6 July 2017

Cuno Affolter
*1958 in Olten

Some read between the lines, Cuno Affolter reads between the pages.

The hunter–gatherer, comic aficionado, poet and Fumetto co–founder Affolter has been studying the everyday traces of others for years — from

which he creates his own messages.

Receipts, love letters and scraps of packaging can be found in the books that the man from Olten finds in brockis and at flea markets. Did they get stuck between the pages on purpose or by accident? What happens when the unusual book–marks are recombined? «It gets interesting when I find something quite banal in a large art book and the most beautiful art postcard in a kitsch novel.» It is the space between the notepad and the object that lifts the found objects out of their banality; omitted steps and unanswered questions create space for associations.

Just like the bookmarks, the 71–year–old cannot ignore empty photo albums on his flee market forays. Only the self–adhesive photo corners still remind us of the photographs. Some are transparent, others black, white or gold. For Cuno Affolter, they are one thing above all: beautiful. Taken out of context and placed in a new setting, they unfold a poetry that is hard to resist.



Cuno Affolter, «Lost Memories», photo: Manuela Hitz

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