

**Dianna Frid and Monika Müller**  
*The Registers*

April 8 - May 19, 2018

## *Dianna Frid and Monika Müller: The Registers* Essay by Claudine Isé



Monika Müller, *The empty space*, 2017, from the series [the ] World [as an ordered Whole] III, graphite, pastel, pencil and color pencil on paper, framed, 10.2 in. x 13.6 in.

To register means to note or record something through an official channel, process, or document; it also means to detect, to show outwardly, and to express, indicate or evince, the way a photograph registers the physical presence of light or a face registers strong emotions. Artworks can be registers too. Works of art give us, their viewers, access to various indices of experience—to perception, emotion, thought, memory, sensation—and at the same time, they can register their makers' experiences of those same things. Such is the case with the artworks of Dianna Frid and Monika Müller, each of which in its own way takes note of, evinces or "registers" different aspects of the material and phenomenal world, while at the same time foregrounding the procedures by which the artists themselves—and we, the viewers—attempt to understand them.

[the] World [as an ordered Whole], the series of

graphite, pastel and colored pencil drawings by Swiss artist Monika Müller on view in this exhibition, began in 2016, while Müller was in residence in Chicago as an awardee of the Chicago Lucerne Sister Cities Studio Program. During her four-month stay, Müller made a daily practice of browsing through local and national newspapers, and created a number of dreamlike landscape drawings using photographs she collected from their pages as starting points. After Müller returned to Lucerne, Dianna Frid helped continue this process by clipping photographs from the New York Times that caught her attention and mailing them to Müller through the postal service. At once ethereal and precise, the resulting works at times appear as if they'd been drawn with wisps of smoke. They depict enigmatic urban environments in varying states of disorder or collapse, places where tides are rising and bright orange flames roil atop oil-slicked waters, and the occasional human figures appear shadowy, insubstantial and ephemeral.



Monika Müller, *Lybia's Odds 1*, 2017, from the series [the ] World [as an ordered Whole] III, Graphite, pastel, pencil and color pencil on paper, framed, 10.2 in. x 13.6 in.



Monika Müller, *Tar river*, 2017, from the series [the ] World [as an ordered Whole] III, Graphite, pastel, pencil and color pencil on paper, framed, 10.2 in. x 13.6 in.

Collectively, the works in [the] World [as an ordered Whole] construct an ever-growing image archive of the Anthropocene.<sup>1</sup> They represent the artist's attempts to register and bear witness to innumerable instances of environmental disruption and human displacement that, although extraordinary in their impact on land and human lives, are becoming miserably ordinary in their regularity.

The title [the] World [as an ordered Whole] can be read as an ironic nod to ideas of the cosmos and to cosmological modes of thought that visualize the universe as a well-ordered system. Importantly, Müller never simply recreates the images exactly as they appear in the original newspaper photograph. Instead, she edits and imaginatively adapts her source material by drawing only what her own subjective consciousness filters from it, perhaps adding a bit of color, detail or form here, subtracting it there, all the while rendering the foundational image and the troubling event it captures into something that is uncannily familiar yet no longer recognizable. Müller's attempt to "order" and make

sense of all that is happening in the world through the aesthetic act of drawing is in many ways absurd—and Müller recognizes this. Yet although no single person alone is capable of affecting global-scaled change, many of us still feel quite desperate to do *something* to reverse course. Given this, Müller's drawings register on multiple levels: they describe and chronicle moments of profound instability that may initially appear at a distant remove, but in their intimacy and highly personal method of execution, her drawings also gently insist that each of us bears some responsibility for the fate of others and our planet.

Like Müller, Dianna Frid is also a browser. A self-described "bibliophile" with a longstanding interest in the material and semiotic relationship between texts and textiles, Frid has of late begun visiting exhibits and collections of ancient Greek and Roman marble statuary. She is particularly interested in the ways that the sculptures' garments and hair—things made of fiber—have been rendered in stone. Two



Dianna Frid, *Apuntes (Notations) #6*, 2018, Photographic transfers on cotton, embroidery floss, black canvas, nylon, linen, 14 in. x 22 in. (Photo credit: Tom Van Eynde)

<sup>1</sup> The Anthropocene is a term characterizing the Earth's present geological epoch, which has been defined as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.

of Frid's ongoing series, *Apuntes* (the Spanish word for "Notations") and *Acroliths*, selections from both of which are on view in *The Registers*, consist of photographs Frid has taken of these classical sculptures and transferred (sometimes as negative images) to either fabric or paper, which she then "annotates" with embroidered diagrams from weaving manuals. Of special interest to Frid are the diagrams used in Anni Albers' groundbreaking book *On Weaving*, which show how a piece of cloth is constructed, thread by thread. Frid has described her attraction to embroidery as "a desire to annotate through touch: to build, to take apart, to tear, to pierce," actions which she acknowledges may sound violent but are in fact "very tender."<sup>2</sup> Here, attention is paid and phenomena is registered not just with the eyes but also with the hands, the fingers and the skin; Frid's back and forth, in and out motions of stitching and embroidering can thus be seen as a sensually tactile means of creating an alignment, a correspondence, a bodily and embodied register and a lasting resonance between heterogeneous concepts and materialities, stitch by stitch by stitch.



Dianna Frid, *Deucalion*, 2018, Canvas, Photo transfer, alabaster, cadmium blue, 5 in. x 8.25 in. x 11.25 in. (Photo credit: Tom Van Eynde)

Given her focus on the malleable qualities of fiber and cloth, Frid's incorporation of rocks and minerals into her sculptures and artist's books may seem surprising. But a rock is not just a rock: it is a register of time's passage, and as such can also be understood as another type of text. The rocks Frid has embedded or "deposited" into the sculptures *From before you had a name*, 2017 (bornite, aragonite, obsidian, sand selenite rose, and fluorite) and *Deucalion*, 2018, (alabaster), as well as the artist's book *Transmission and Reception*, 2018 (marble), are thousands, and more likely hundreds of thousands if not millions, of years old. They are beautiful to look at, certainly, but in their stolid presence they also register intervals of time so vast they are virtually incomprehensible to human beings. A very small percentage of us may live to be 100. The average rock is half a million years old. It may take only a few minutes for our eyes to scan the surface of the freestanding sculpture *From before you had a name*, but the rocks nestled within it have existed, and will continue to exist, for countless millennia before and after us. This may also be why Frid's book *Transmission and Reception* has a certain density and weight to it that transcends its physical scale. We are obliged to turn the pages slowly, in part due to their size but also because what we eventually uncover—a line of bone-white marble stones running down the center of the final page, like a fossilized vertebral column—was visibly there all along. We needed time to register it. This is what Frid and Müller's works ultimately give us, their viewers: moments in time, and moments of time, through which we may also find the means—if only for a moment—to take stock of ourselves and our place in the universe.

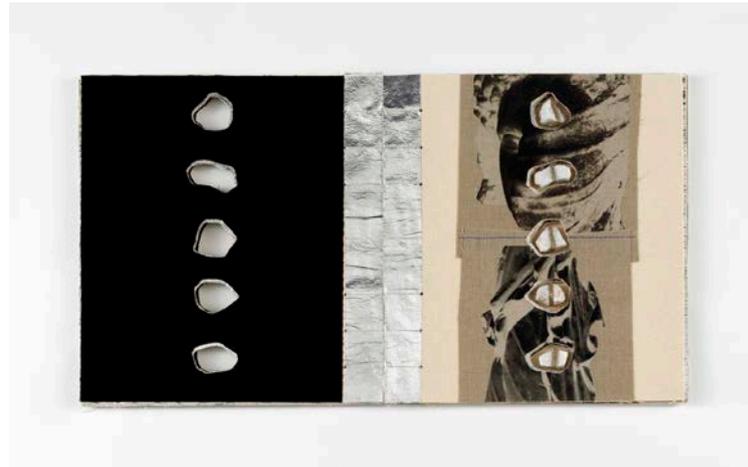
The artists would like to thank the Sister Cities Program Luzern-Chicago, Lucerne and the Fuka Fond of the City of Lucerne for their generous support of the exhibition.



<sup>2</sup> Interview with Dianna Frid by Claudine Isé in *Materias / Matter and Subject Matter*, Dialogo con el acervo de la Biblioteca Francisco de Burgoa, 2015, pg. 88.



Monika Müller, *SPECTRUM L1*, 2017/18, Graphite on paper, 42.5 in x 36.2 in.



Dianna Frid, *Transmission and Reception*, 2018, Artist's book: Photographic transfers on linen, cotton and muslin, canvas, aluminum, thread, marble, Closed: 18 in. x 16 in. x 2 in. Open: 18 in x 32 in. (Photo credit: Tom Van Eynde)

\***Front Cover:** Monika Müller, *Seizing opportunity* (detail), 2017, from the series [the ] World [as an ordered Whole] III, Graphite, pastel, pencil and color pencil on paper, framed, 10.2 in. x 13.6 in.

\***Back Cover:** Dianna Frid, *From before you had a name*, 2017, Plaster, cardboard, cement, paint, wood, canvas, embroidery floss, metal, rocks and minerals: (clockwise) peacock ore a.k.a. bornite, aragonite, obsidian, sand selenite rose, and fluorite, 67 in. x 31 in. x 14 in. (Photo credit: Tom Van Eynde)

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Exhibition dates: April 8 – May 19, 2018  
Gallery hours: Fridays & Saturdays 12–4 pm and by appointment

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*Design by Nicole Gardner*

