

Nadine Fecht's studio lies in Oberschöneweide, a calm, green district just outside of Berlin, sandwiched between the city centre and the long-delayed (maybe never-to-be-finished) new airport. I visit her studio on a sunny day in early July, after navigating my way through the old industrial area located on the banks of the river Spree. The complex is still filled with artist studios, but, like many similar buildings in Berlin, is under threat of being developed into luxury apartment blocks. Her south-facing studio overlooks the river and is dominated by a huge table where she executes most of her large-scale drawings. Over a coffee we talk about her love for drawing, experimenting with material, handwriting styles and collecting lines.

# Drawing as a Subversive Act

Interview by Björn Hegardt

# Nadine Fecht

**I have followed your work for many years, and have noticed that you mainly work with drawing as a medium. What is it about drawing that is so appealing to you?**

I wouldn't say I use it exclusively, but the starting point is always drawing. I was actually trained in illusionistic drawing, and I also did comic and figurative drawing! Later, while I was at university in Berlin I had the video artist Stan Douglas as a professor.

**So, did you do video works during that time?**

Yes, I did videos with actors, but I always came back to drawing. For me, drawing is connected to thinking and also to time. That's what I love about it: you can see in the drawing how long it took and how fast the line was drawn. It's also the most human expression and I find it very intimate. A drawing is so transparent, it shows all the bits and pieces, every side step that was made. Even if a mistake is covered up, you'll see it, it becomes a part of the work.

**Do you try to cover up your mistakes?**

I would say that shifts and imperfections are an integral part of my work. Even if I try to be perfect when executing the drawing, I am still a human being and it won't be flawless. I actually use the shifts as an optical effect in my works. Sometimes you see the mistakes first and then you read the text second.

**Which leads me onto my next question. I wanted to ask you about the text you use in your works, in particular your repeated use of "I am not hysterical" in 'hysteria'.**

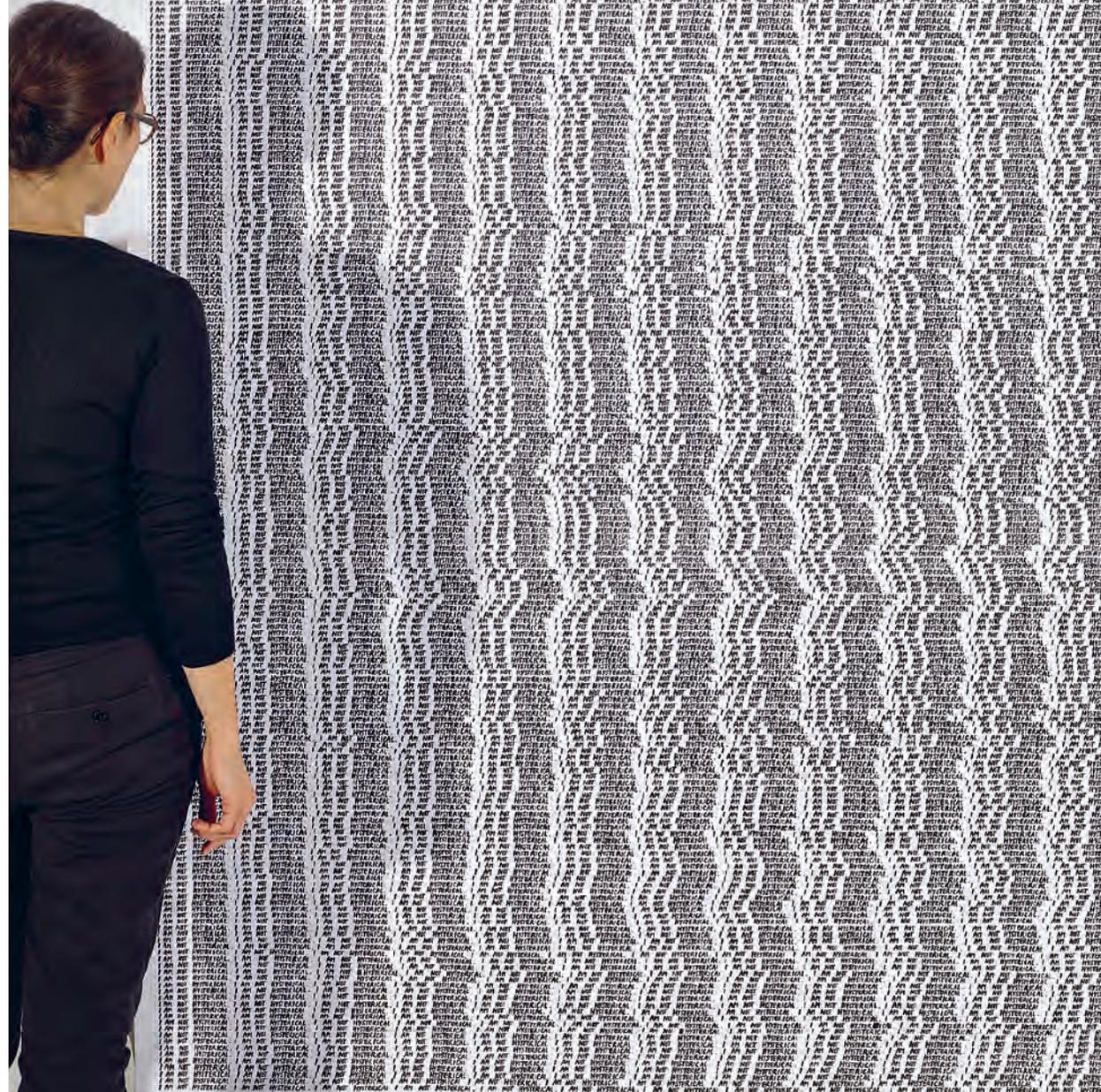
In this work I am referring to outside projections of being a woman. In the 19th century, hysteria was a common diagnosis for female patients in the hospital of Salpêtrière. Georges Didi-Huberman wrote a book called the 'Invention of Hysteria' which looked at the relationship between the medical doctor and the female patient. The more attention the woman got from the doctor, the more hysterical she got. It's a kind of interrelation between the gaze and what is to be seen. This diagnosis was not a choice but was forced upon women by the society they lived in. I used capital letters instead of lower case, to create a distance between me and the words. I realized this work as a series of five drawings, in a large upright scale that affects the whole body of the spectator, especially due to the shift or glitch in between the lines that create an optical effect.

**Almost like a computer glitch?**

Yes, and this optical effect increases from drawing to drawing within the series. The last one is more silent again. Because no, I'm not hysterical, I'm in control.

**Alongside addressing the way society has historically treated women, you have questioned the way other groups and minorities are affected. I've noticed you explore the topics of race and colonialism in your work.**

↓ Hysteria, 2016, black ink on paper, 200 x 130 cm





Yes, for 'privileged', I used white ink on carbon paper, knowing that it will leave an additional black trace of writing on the underlying white paper. In this sense I produced two drawings, kind of opposite drawing. Writing the words "BEING WHITE" is not me saying "I'm white", it's something that comes from society, to be aware of your skin color. Due to the different thickness of the white pen, the drawing looks almost like a world map, even if it's not an actual map, this impression relates to colonial expansion.

**And how about this work, where you have written "I am feeling blue" in red ink?**

Feeling blue is a state of sadness, or melancholia. It's a state of limbo, a vast feeling. This work measures over five meters so its sheer size underlines this vastness. I did it in the manner of a religious monk: I had a strict daily routine where I filled a pen with red ink and wrote until it was finished. One can see where the ink runs out, and gaps appear. The topic is contemporary labour – I am asking what labour is worth. How is it structured

and how do we lose our identity in order to work more efficiently? All of my works are about structures and phenomena in society. But there's also humour in the work, which is heightened with the red ink.

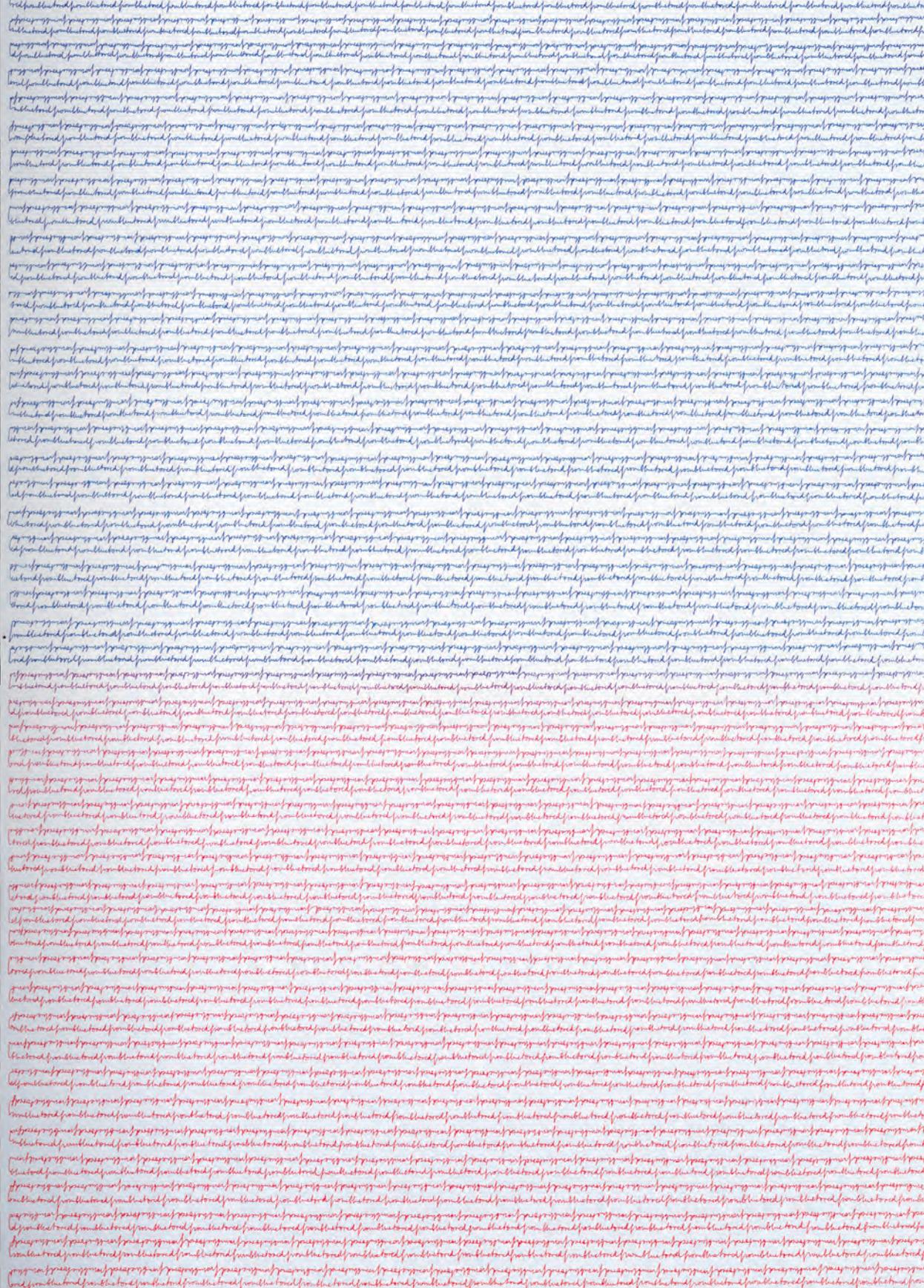
**This kind of humour is also in the work 'Autosuggestive Potentiale'.**

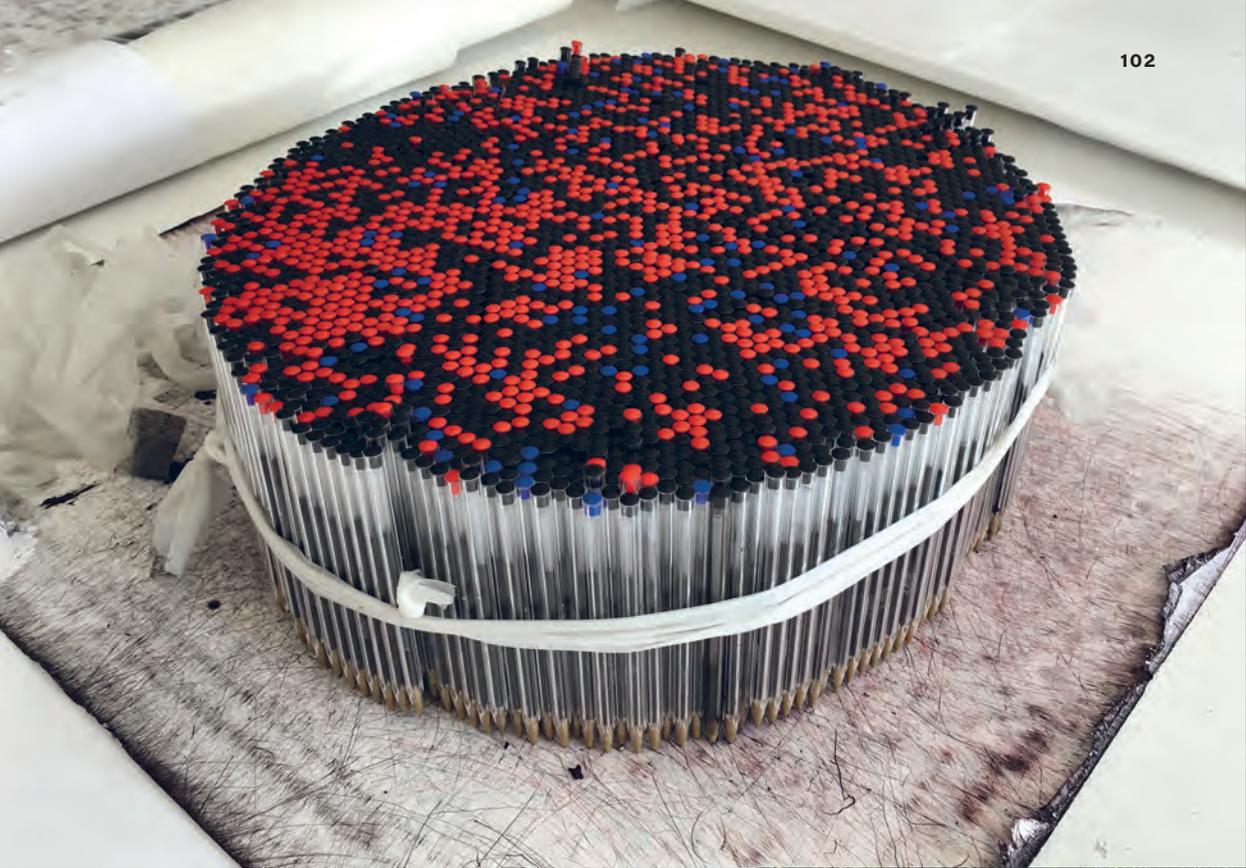
Here I write in shifting colours, for example "from green to red". I start writing it in green, keep on writing until it fades into red. The ink itself, which is not lightfast, will fade out, so the text will gradually disappear. The self-improvement, or the autosuggestive potential, eventually dissolves as well.

**What do you mean by autosuggestive potential?**

The French pharmacist and author Émile Coué introduced it. It's a self-help tool which is designed to help you become a happier person through repetition. This was my starting point into this entire group of works which I have been working on the last few years, I call it 'Exhausted Self'. I wanted to rethink the whole concept of being more efficient and about the idea of self improvement.

↓ Autosuggestive Potentiale (détail), 2015, triptych, fading ink on paper, each 123 x 83,5 cm





It's about the conformity to society's norms of efficiency, which is the shared theme of these works.

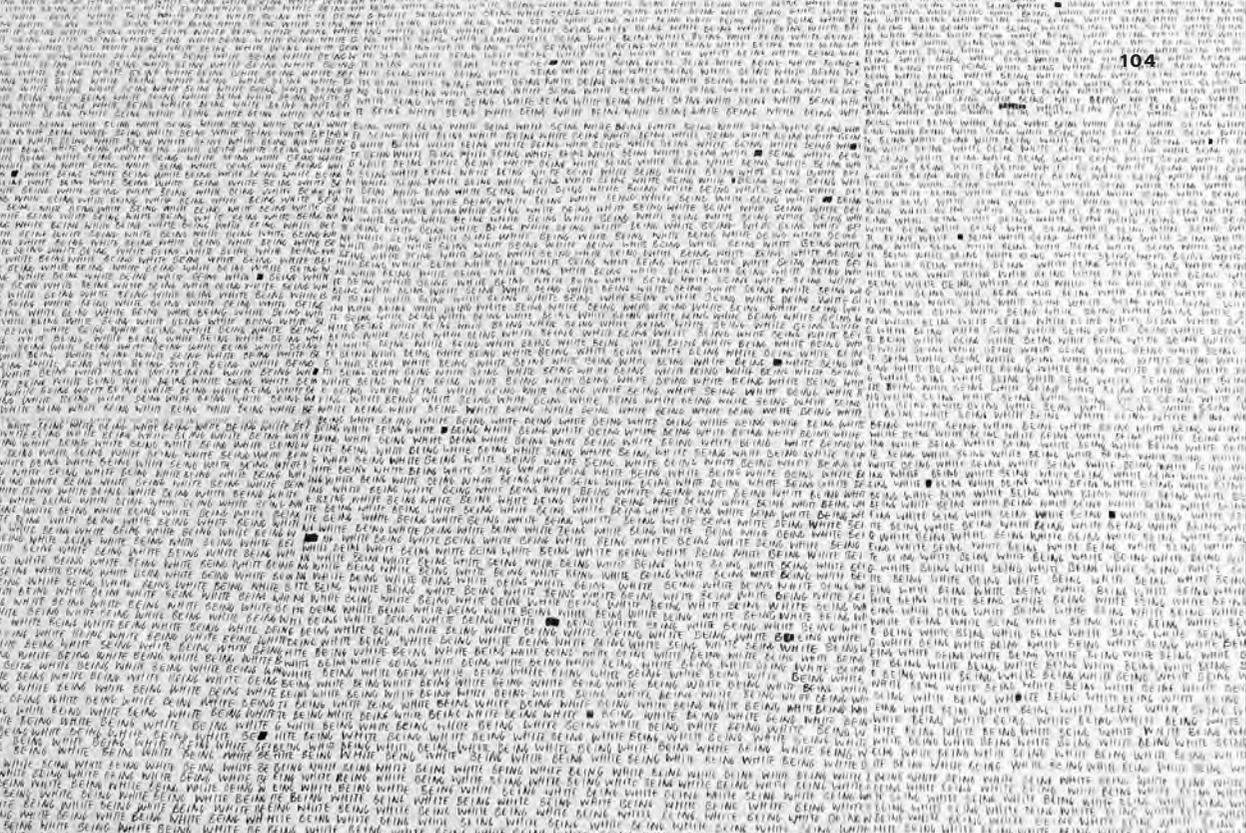
**So is drawing for you a way of self-improving?**

The way I think about drawing is always connected to... or how can I express it, somehow for me it's a subversive act. I draw, but at the same time I use means to avoid drawing. Usually, my works start with experimenting with materials. For example, here [points to the pile of ballpoint pens] I bound together 1805 pens, to lose control and let my body be the drawing tool. It was after the financial crisis of 2009, and in 2013 it still felt like we all were on shaky grounds. I used this idea of being in the world not feeling confident to decide where we should go or not.

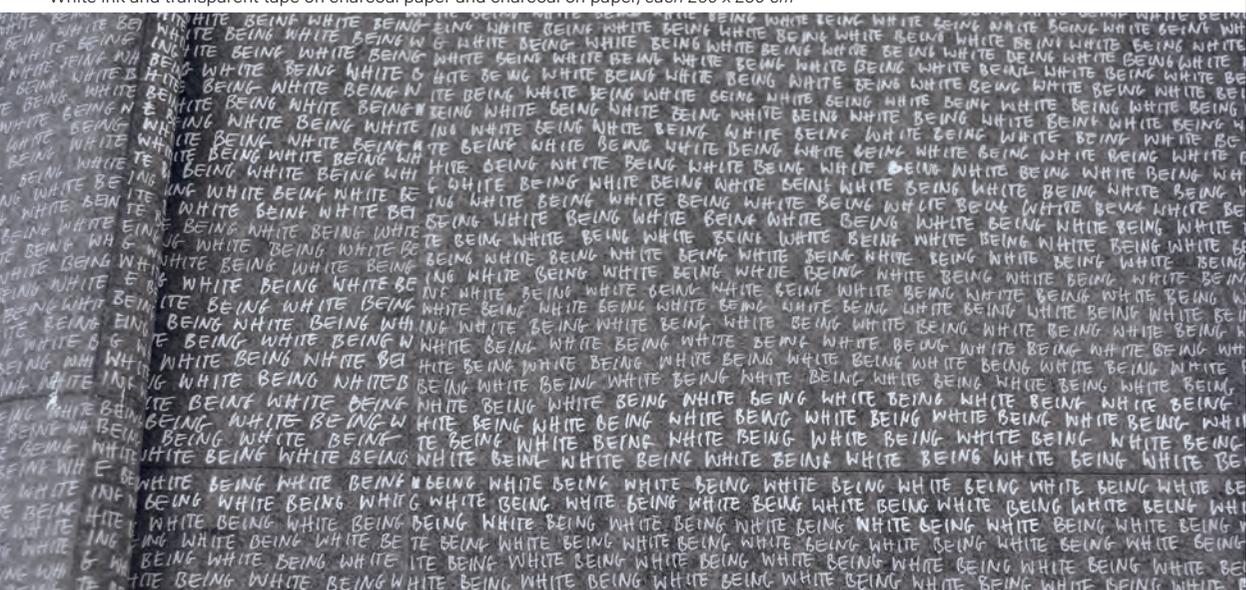


→ Ohne Titel ("Phantomschmerz"), 2015/16 (detail)  
Red pigment ink on paper,  
290 x 550 cm





↑ ↓ Privileged, 2016 (close-up detail), diptych  
White ink and transparent tape on charcoal paper and charcoal on paper, each 260 x 250 cm



Q X 8 Z U P Q X O

E a p s Q s

A Q B X

Q e D B s t k n ü t R

O R D N O M Q

Y O H I U O . B A D

From the book *Hinter*  
by Peter Longerich



The series, MIMIKRY references the anti-Hitler and anti-war-graffiti in Nazi Germany, which often weren't overpainted by the Nationalsocialists but made unreadable by added lines.

↑ (top) *untitled walldrawing*, 2017, plotted letters and acrylic on wall, 100 x 450 cm

↑ *Mimikry Series*, 2017, letraset and coloured pencil on paper, each 40 x 60 cm

The words are all taken from within the context of disciplining, set in vinyl letters and the added handwriting become the element of resistance in this series.