

# Heaven is Mindset

a solo exhibition

Franziska Fennert

# Stitching the World Together

## Anton Larenz

“My imagination, what are you? - I am the stream that feeds the fountain of your mind.”

Hazrat Inayat Khan

Nature is a temple in which living pillars  
Sometimes give voice to confused words;  
Man passes there through forests of symbols  
Which look at him with understanding eyes.

— Charles Baudelaire: Correspondences

Love is the final purpose of world history — the Amen of the universe.

Novalis: Fragments

We are living in “interesting” times, as the Chinese use to say when conditions are risky, even dangerous and troubled. Global politics are shifting, the economy and culture, - the arts and the art market included-, are affected by these changing conditions and circumstances. Artists are challenged by the upcoming transitions, too, and have to face the new context, responding with their works to new situations and upcoming dangers. But, nevertheless, the future remains unforeseeable. One solution maybe is the check of our mindsets in order to see if they are still suitable for the tides of change and to look for new and better answers.

Artists can help by broadening our knowledge and understanding. Artworks can figure as efficient channels of communication and as well as rich sources of knowledge, expressing the basic traits which are generally considered as the foundations of human relations, the social cement that keeps the society together. The mindset basically determines and controls how we organize and live our lives, according to established assumptions and methods. If this mindset is not developed and adjusted from time to time, stagnation and narrow perspectives will be the consequences. Knowledge is one appropriate mean to feed our brains for a resilient and effective method to configure our visions of the world.

Franziska Fennert, a young artist of German origin and now living with her family in Yogyakarta, tries to remind us with her artworks that we live in a world in disarray, that humanity now seems to be

characterized by crises and separateness. But her point of view is positive, because there are ways to surmount this situation of separateness and to re-unite again. She wishes to bring people together by communication and dialogue or, that’s how she names it, diplomacy. Although humanity exists in a condition of disparities (racial, social, political, economical and cultural) mankind is perceived as belonging together and equal, or same. In her paintings as well as in her installations the metaphor of one body with two different heads refers to the impossibility of separating them again, because neither part would survive without the other. Mankind consists of organic units where one part cannot live without the other. Her artworks present a sensible vision of a multifaceted and often conflicted world.

Having grown up in the Eastern part of Germany, she had developed from early youth on an interest to know about other cultures, at first through reading literature, especially classical Russian novels, and later by travelling around in Europe and the Near East. After she had decided to study arts at the Academy of Arts in Dresden, Germany and to become a professional artist, she followed there courses in Chinese calligraphy and ink painting. She studied also intensely Turkish miniature painting. Her studies at the Institute of Indonesian Art (ISI) in Yogyakarta led her to deeper studies of Balinese painting, she visited even Klungkung in Bali to see Balinese painting there on the location. All of these mentioned artistic activities have left their traces in her current works, so they can be read partially as an artist’s biography. Life and art are not separated. Her decision to become an artist came from her heart, an intuitive decision.

After participating in several group exhibitions in Indonesia (and elsewhere, China, Europe) with paintings only, she prepared for the next step in her artistic journey with designing and sewing big puppet-like figures as three-dimensional works for her solo exhibition in Bandung, joined by various paintings in bigger and smaller size. These figures were made of canvas, additionally combined with some accessories like artificial hair and other items like colored threads. The basic appearance of these installations showed fewer colors, more accentuating and maintaining the natural character of the linen fabric. But her special themes already emerged, the double-headed motifs and faces which previously have evolved in the paintings had morphed into three-dimensional objects.

## The Spirit coming from the Past

For her new solo exhibition Franziska Fennert decided to try something else, to experiment with different materials and to create a visualization that goes one step further

into the direction of freeing her mind on her quest for different expressions. Although she kept truly to some of her former style, she added now completely other material, for example stones, wires, a suitcase, parts of an antenna, all kinds of worn clothes (using her own clothes refers to her biography again, but some textiles have been bought for this artistic purpose, second-hand clothes, she he says that it is important that they are already used), even growing flowers (orchids) and more. It's a montage style, now reflecting the fabric of multiplicity, or a bricolage, by creating an object gradually, more oriented toward the process of making and developing it. Her installations show how she perceives the actual state of the world, oscillating between utopian (there is still a chance for a better living together, assumed that we change our mindset) and dystopian elements, regarding the problems which result from history up to present times, the traces and consequences of colonialism and imperialism as causes of inequality and injustice, of a planet that is not living under the conditions of unity and harmony.

But besides the installations she did not abandon painting. "Open Source!" talks about basic needs, food and knowledge. Knowledge and education are as important as food for having a decent living. Knowledge, or the access to knowledge is not shared equally on a global scale. It's all about sharing, being together on an equal level. The figures in the middle are grown together like Siamese twins, being separated they would hardly survive.

A new medium for her, she felt attracted to produce video art. So she did this video "Walking" as her first time approach to this new media art. Moved by the scenes in the TV news she chose pictures of Rohingya refugees on their march to Bangladesh contrasted with shootings of a person that is temporarily prevented from walking because of a broken foot. The Rohingya were forced to walk in order to save their life, running away from their home villages. Destinies can look very different when compared. The foot will eventually heal, but the Rohingnya probably can't go back.

### The Correspondences

During the process of preparation for her show Franziska Fennert was inspired by a book from ancient Egypt, titled "Kybalion", which is ascribed to some mysterious author named Hermes Trismegistus. Hermes Trismegistus was originally another name for the Egyptian god Thoth, the inventor of the hieroglyphs, music, astrology, alchemy and other kinds of science at that time. Thoth was seen as a mediator between worlds, assembler and maintainer. The book contains the philosophy and knowledge of an ancient culture, transmitted, interpreted, used and

changed by many people and cultures, from its Egyptian origin translated into Arabic, Greek and Latin language, finally also into modern European languages. The name Thoth was replaced through the Greek god Hermes, becoming Janus in Roman culture, at the end he was known as Hermes Trismegistus. The Italian author Umberto Eco described such name changes as regular, so that the foreign became comprehensible as another expression of the familiar: "Now many things could be true at the same time, even though they contradicted one another." (Eco:1990)

The Janus head as underlying theme in Franziska Fennert's paintings and figures serves here as a central motif that is taken from Roman mythology. Janus, typically depicted with two faces but one body, is the god of transition, of passage, guarding the threshold of the entrance door of houses. He had a direct access to heaven and the other gods in the Roman pantheon. This head is a symbol of duality, but also of unity. An intermediary, involved with the settling of disputes and even the beginning and ending of wars. Janus is a perfect metaphor for relativity, pluralism, polarities and the exchange of information.

One of the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus is contained in the formula "As below, so above, and as above so below", there is a direct link between the sky and the earth, everything corresponds to something, a total inter-connectedness between elements, plants, stars and all beings. In the beginning of the creation the universe was considered as one entity, according to the perception of the ancient world. Everything what exists is linked through correspondences or analogies, visible and invisible links existing between planets, metals, plants and parts of the human body. Such correspondences provided the basis for astrology, alchemy and wisdom, philosophy and theology, also for medicine. Everything was reflected in something else, the universe comparable to a huge hall of mirrors. Changes occur in parallel on all levels of reality. Opposites are knitted together in ever novel configurations, as it is mentioned in the most famous writing of Hermes Trismegistus, the "Emerald Tablet". The Corpus Hermeticum proclaims a specific kind of redemption, a liberation of the spirit by knowledge.

It was the unity of the spiritual-divine; it left its imprint on the multiplicity of earthly phenomena. As Ebeling (2007:28) comments: "Nothing that possessed dignity and being was separate and iso-

lated, but had its ground and cause in the higher, the spiritual, the divine realm."

Such was the ancient view, or the mindset, of the world around the Mediterranean, particularly in old Egypt and Greece. Greek philosophers like Democritus, Plato, Pythagoras and Thales of Milet knew these Egyptian teachings and were influenced by it.

This concept of the cosmos which was written down in the book "Kybalion", ascribed to the mythical Hermes Trismegistus, finally shaped the foundation of the so-called "Hermeticism" or Hermetic Tradition which had a profound influence on Renaissance philosophy and theology. Traces of this thinking can still be found in the philosophy of more modern thinkers like Gottfried Leibniz (also a renowned mathematician) and others. Hermeticism is one of the undercurrents of Western cultural memory. According to Jan Assmann (in: Ebeling: 2007) it has never been a main current, but neither has it been entirely marginal or entirely forgotten.

Franziska Fennert was surprised to find so many ideas corresponding to her own thoughts about separateness and unity, dignity and connectivity contained in such old wisdom delivered through the centuries. The way this old text took through time and space (and many languages) responded to her perception of knowledge sharing.

History is has been made the subject of the cocoon with the title "Non-Stringent", an assemblage of several items including a chained mirror, a part of a traditional Javanese hair style (konde) surrounded by dark spots, representing a substratum of human mindset, forgotten or suppressed memories of history, which is nevertheless present, reflected or channeled through the mirror that cannot be removed because of the chain. Each nation certainly has darker periods or parts of history that is not being spoken about.

### The Magic of Art

What does magic, or alchemy, mean in contemporary time, and especially to artists? Many modern artists have shown a deeper interest in alchemy, for example Joseph Beuys, Marcel Duchamp, Sigmar Polke, Yves Klein, André Masson, Salvador Dalí, Anselm Kiefer, Max Ernst, Remedios Varo and many others. James Elkins (2003) remarks: "From

Ferrara in the fifteenth century to the Venice biennale, artists have drawn on alchemy, and art historians have worked hard to elucidate the artists' intentionally hidden meanings. So art history and even art criticism should be added to the list of disciplines that are legitimately concerned with alchemy."

Alchemy can be traced back to old Egypt and the Arabs who were famous for their knowledge of alchemy. Generally alchemy is often taken for a material transformation of lead (or other cheaper metals) into gold, but the alchemists have been more concerned about the inner process which is experienced during the alchemical procedures. This alchemical work induces a transformation of the mind as the final purpose of alchemy.

Another point of view about magic and artists in the following quotation about Post-expressionist art makes the difference between art and sorcery clearer: "The magical element in the Post-expressionist art is not linked to sorcery, superstition or divinity; instead it derives from an unmasking of material reality through contemplative awareness." (Felicity Claire Gee:2013). Gee discusses here the 'Magic Realism' concepts originating from the art historian Franz Roh who labeled the term. In this sense the magical element in art represents an open mind, another perspective towards reality.

From the short list of artists above mentioned it already becomes clear that especially surrealist artists have been close to the theme of occultism, looking for another level of reality. Surrealism is foremost concerned with anchoring alterity in the order of the symbolic. It 'primarily serves as a pathway for navigating the inner mind, it is not associated with aspects of material reality: ...but with the imagination and the mind, and in particular it attempts to express the "inner life" and psychology of humans through art.' (Bowers 2004:22) Surrealists are looking for the reality below the surface, exploring the relations between the conscious and the unconscious: "...strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface." (Andre Breton, poet and founder of Surrealism). This is a psychic process, a quest for 'absolute reality', a 'surreality'. Striving for a beauty that is fecund, irrational and improbable, in Breton's words a 'convulsive beauty'. So they evoke an enigma, and a fascination, paired with a sense of surprise. The ordinary is thrown into a new light.

Breton was fascinated by stones which he saw with their hardness and rigidity as crystallizing the past, like cold lava petrified over time, frozen images of temporal constraints. Crystal meant for Breton creation and transformation. The liquid becomes solid, like stopping or catching time. It is a process of stasis and motion, like frozen drops of water. There is a contingent magic of circumstance

implied in the artistic process, through the choice of items, sometimes following a chance composition.

The figures of Franziska Fennert look sometimes strange, even bizarre, but at the same almost funny. Her choice of materials is considerate and follows her conceptualization, but she admits that there are moments when she chooses items by chance. There is a pronounced sense and taste for the detail, the particular is represented, the specific of her story behind. Her spirit interacts with the solidity of the physical objects.

The ceramic works with the title “Solid Heart, Honest Tongue” exemplify the point of solidness and liquidity once more: speaking honest, with a language that utters the truth, but fluently/liquid, contrasted by the anchored heart, that doesn’t move from its place, having found its harbor. From the material aspect this corresponds again with the stopped time, earth hardened by fire.

The assemblage of stone faces (“Extension of Thoughts”) combined with an arrangement of growing plants is another perspective on the stasis/motion contrast. Franziska Fennert explained the stone faces as a limited worldview, a narrow perspective on the outside. The stone material is taken from the local volcano Mount Merapi, as petrified lava. There is no fluidity anymore, but stagnation. The stone faces can’t recognize diversity, they look straight into one direction. “Stoned Consciousness” shows an additional impression of the impact of a closed mindset. The eyes of one face closed with a golden eye patch.

The contrast is from the opposite figure (“Four Directions”) where heads are directed to each other, uniting through and by communication. The heads, characterized through their hair and skin color symbolize persons from different races. Although different, they talk to each other.

Language is a common faculty of all human beings, but, alas, there are so many different languages so that not all people can talk directly to everybody else. As the basic tool of communication language serves all mankind, but foreign languages have to be learned first, or translation is needed. However, language is the common bond between humans, a symbol at the same time of separateness and unity. The old story of the fall of Babel reminds us of this. In Franziska Fennert’s works we find words (words like brotherhood/sisterhood, dignity, respect and so on) sewed or written upon the objects, but in several different languages, as a reminder that it is possible to come over such obstacles of communication. There should no hierarchy be involved, all languages have their own value (unfortunately she cannot present all of them, it would be beyond the scope of the artworks).

Franziska Fennert has experienced the process of conceptualizing, producing and arranging like a three-dimensional painting with the difference that she used materials like fabrics, stones, pieces of synthetic leather and metal wires instead of paint. Finally all of this becomes a beautiful and bright composition of colors. She says that color is healing, as a kind of therapy for mind and soul. More insights and more understanding can only arise when people open their heart and minds.

Color is also symbolic and meaningful. The color of human skin often responsible for exclusion, oppression, even annihilation, is represented several times through a special multi-colored fabric, symbolically integrating all human skin colors, used for the lower part of “Stoned Consciousness”. It looks a bit fashionable (and actually it was made of fabrics used for bathing suits), but this fabric carries a serious message, the appeal that we all belong to the same mankind. A pair of gloves made of the same multi-racial textile is applied to some tiger skin imitation. Besides the inviting visual effect it delivers the message that people living in precarious living situations should better keep together in their struggle for survival. And that it needs courage and power for achieving that. Textile fabric represents the social fabric between people, the point that Franziska Fennert concerns tremendously.

#### Mindset again

What is shaping our contemporary mindset? Modern communication technologies have quickly conquered whole continents now. Some decades ago not everybody in Asia, or elsewhere, had access to telecommunication. Cell phones or smart phones are ubiquitous and flood people with news and images. But people often are not able to check the objectivity of the new information sources or to process this sudden amount of information. Fake news are spread in very short time all over the world.

Hito Steyerl, a German new media artist and essayist, has commented these new developments critically, also discussing the role of art in this process: “I think art’s role,” she says, “is to investigate the way things are comprehended – the lenses through which people see. In conflict, these lenses tend to be very standardised, very stereotypical.”

The contemporary state of constant distraction she calls “junktime”, which adds its own filter to our reading of current events. Junktime commitments – emails, Instagram, Snapchat – keep our eyes flicking between images, never resting long enough to question things properly. (Judah 2017) Facebook and Google are shaping now our mindsets.

In Franziska Fennert’s installation “I Don’t Believe in Your Scapegoats” views of open clouded skies are attached to the body of the figure, open space for insights, and maybe imagination. The depicted skies are channeling views, from limited to unlimited, personal and individual. The artist says: “I wish that people can see so far that they can into the clouds.” The general theme of this artwork relates to exclusion of minorities, turning them into scapegoats. She explains further that her three-dimensional visualizations grow with the time; new ideas, or insights, and spontaneous intuitive decisions guide her way of creating these artworks.

#### The Power of Imagination

The imaginary is close to form of thoughts, underlying the discourse (either as conversation or as literary and artistic works, it could be a current of thought (reflecting what is called “Zeitgeist”), or artistic and political trends, whether consciously or not. This does not mean that it is unreal. The French philosopher and scholar Henri Corbin spoke of the so-called “mundus imaginalis”, where imagination is supposed to give access to this intermediate realm between the divine and nature, opening the access to “subtle”, angelic or archetypal entities. Antoine Faivre wrote: “Creative imagination is the visionary faculty that enables one to grasp the multileveled meanings of reality.”(Faivre 1995:64).

The universe is a forest of symbols, and we can read in it like in a book, if we once understand how these symbols can be decoded through channels or mirror. That is essentially the wisdom of the scholars of the Renaissance like Pico della Mirandola or Giordano Bruno.

Franziska Fennert once mentioned that if we believe in something it can become true, become reality. That’s how active imagination works.

But we also have to be in accordance with the Zeitgeist. The “Kumbang Bawa Zeitgeist” is reaching out with his four human arms to catch the

Zeitgeist and to keep it. The beetle stands on four different feet, symbolizing the power of four different animals: goat, bull, camel and tiger, all of them representing power in their specific way. The Zeitgeist beetle needs power to grasp the Zeitgeist, to keep it for a while and to release it again so that it is able to read the signs of time accurately and to refresh its mind. The colorful clothes shows its interest in fashion and to go with the times.

Franziska Fennert successfully stitched the broken and fragmented parts together, sewing together what belongs together. From such actions new configurations will arise, the opposites will still exist but rather complementing and enriching each other. Her message is that multiplicity and unity can exist side by side without destroying each other. Through the diplomacy of art our mindsets are reset again.

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# Us, the Humans. Us, the Aliens.<sup>i</sup>

Speculations on the recent artwork of Franziska Fennert

Susanne Altmann

I  
Even if conducted digitally between two remote continents, the intimacy of a studio conversation presents a wealth of insights for both the artist and the expert that are engaged in it. It feels like jointly conjuring up a fourth dimension of the art works and the artistic practice under scrutiny. While communicating across the geographical and cultural division between Franziska Fennert's Indonesian and the author's German base camp, the two of us were rewarded with numerous visual, historical and anthropological references that made us entirely forget the said distance. For example, when we were discussing Franziska Fennert's hitherto un-exhibited works such as *Heaven is Mindset*, *As below so above*, *Uncovered Camouflage* or *Übergangszeit* and its multiplying of figures, I had to think of the classical western playing cards with its male and female characters (by the way, a largely underrated example of applied arts). Ever since the card game migrated, interestingly, from East and South Asia into Europe as far back as in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it has developed an aesthetic life of its own. One popular card design, consisting of a head and an upper body only, yet vertically mirrored, conveys the impression of two persons melting into one another. Metaphorically, these miniature images convey the impression of two otherwise invisible facets of one single person. The same phenomenon applies to Franziska Fennert's anthropomorphic figures, which despite closely hovering above their stone platforms, never touch the ground. The piece *As below so above* consists even of four different personae by means of reverse side display. It seems as if a playing card had eventually come to spatial life. This image alludes to yet another occidental meme from literature, namely the famously bizarre croquet game at the court of the „Queen of Hearts“ in Lewis Carroll's „Alice's Adventures in Wonderland“ (1898). There; an entire population of animated playing cards acts at the mercy of a mean-spirited she-monarch.<sup>ii</sup>

II  
This is not to claim that the two- or four-faced beings of Franziska Fennert were directly triggered by the literary precedent, but rather to demonstrate the multitude of cultural cross references contained within these sculptures. Existing archetypes from pre-digital times come to our mind – enlivened somehow. On the other hand, Franziska Fennert's works give the impression of witnessing the materialization of stories that are still untold. In either case, her narratives are not as lightweight and playful as they may seem at the first glance – as

Lewis Carroll's poetic accounts were dark interpretations of human sociability either and therefore highly educative. Franziska Fennert aims to alert to our global interdependencies, to the humane and destructive habits often incorporated in one very same person. Her works even manage to point out conflicting interests and contradictions between outward behavior and inner feelings. This all-too human condition is relevant to virtually all inhabitants of our planet. Speaking of planets, another piece of literature or even philosophy opens in front of my mind's eye and requires for yet another digression: In 1957, more than a decade before humankind landed on the moon, the Polish sci-fi writer Stanislaw Lem published his *Star Diaries*. Entertaining, poignant and uncanny at the same time, this collection of short stories anticipates the turmoil of the digital age and the cybernetic future. The hero of the book, space traveler Ijon Tichy is as naïve and curious as Carroll's Alice. He leads the reader on to journeys through a Universe that is crowded with ethical and astrophysical challenges. Notably he meets higher life-forms that make our earthly hustle and bustle look like the activities of a stupid, underdeveloped race obsessed with unnecessary bloodshed. Often published without illustrations, Lem is forcing us to translate <sup>iii</sup> the detailed verbal descriptions of our extraterrestrial companions into our own images. As seen with the classic E.T.-"archetype", such interpretations circle around phenomena that we already know, then adapting it into a digestible, yet familiar deviation. Looking at „humanoids“ like *Kumbang membawa Zeitgeist*, *I don't believe in your Scapegoats* or *Stoned Consciousness* we observe the artistic desire either to familiarize the alien or to alienate the familiar. Why is that?

III  
In my opinion, Franziska's strategy resembles that of Lem. Because by shifting the scenes from reality into a fantastic parallel world, she acts like a true artist and liberates her critical and serious messages about the condition and the potential of humankind from the gravity of earthly didactics. Lem, who lived during the Cold War between communism and imperialism, doubtlessly was not interested in addressing some distant future. Rather he expressed his fears over the state of present affairs by installing a metaphorical parallel world. For example, in chapter eight of Ijon Tichy's trips, the astronaut participates in an interstellar congress. There the planet earth may or may not be admitted to join the esteemed assembly of United Planets. Tichy represents the ultimate *O t h e r* at this gathering. Unsurprisingly, he is being mocked at by most of the attendants for his apparently inappropriate physical features. Later some experts are evaluating earth according to their cosmic standards. They conclude that humanity does not deserve to be a member of the Union. It is not entirely funny to read their verdict, neither back in 1957 nor today:

*The Thubanian created a picture of monsters wallowing in a sea of blood, and he did this without haste, methodically opening still other learned books, records, annals, chronicles, all placed in preparation on his desk, and took to hurling the materials to the floor when he was done with them, as if in a sudden fit of disgust, as if the very pages that described us had become caked with the victims' blood. Then he turned to our recorded history; he told of the massacres, pogroms, wars, crusades, genocides, and using slides and full-scale charts showed the technologies of crime, instruments of torture, ancient and medieval.*<sup>iv</sup>

Quickly we come to understand that this interplanetary trial serves as an artistic instrument for critical investigation. It comes in the guise of a paradoxical, even humorous setting where the other is the regular and the regular is being taught to feel marginalized. Bertolt Brecht, who died a year before the "Star Diaries" were published, might have considered this artistic technique as "defamiliarizing effect".

#### IV

Encountering Franziska Fennert's colourful, multi-faced cephalopods now, we feel similarly translocated. We are attracted by a variety of unusual shapes and forms with hints to reality. Lured into closer observation, as with *Stoned Consciousness*, we learn to read the details: one of the four heads is blind, but apparently hears quite well. Another seems to wear a fencing mask as if in a perpetual state of defense. So, too, one is rather crude, the next one more delicately rendered. They exist as a collective of individuals, unaware of one another and their team spirit yet forced together by some inexplicable bond. „These figures are not capable to make use of their unity“ explains Franziska Fennert and furthermore wonders: „How is it possible to be socially so backwards, despite living in a technologically advanced era?“ By articulating such "truisms" (in the sense of Jenny Holzer), she subscribes to the critical responsibility of contemporary art to engage and not shy away from simple truth. And of course the hanging "mummies" or rather cocoons are fun to look at, but in the end they symbolize the dire reality: „I wanted to illustrate our existential dependence, be it on an economic or interpersonal level. By looking into a mirror instead in a face, we realize our own complicity in various systems.“<sup>v</sup>

#### V

Recently, the globally learned art audience has been confronted with innumerable artistic offensives which criticize capitalism and neo-liberalism up to a certain degree of oversaturation – not least because many of such works are highly encrypted and/or comment on critical theory. Ever since living in Indonesia, Franziska Fennert has abandoned some unspoken conventions of discursive belonging. Working at the – well, alleged – periphery of

curatorial attention and that of commercial success, she has come to shed such restrictions to the advantage of a greater artistic freedom. Do her means of expression profit from the best of all worlds then? Franziska Fennert's works, too, are codified responses to the very same underlying geopolitical tensions. The difference is that she employs a poetic toolbox that defies analytical rationalism. Without being irrational, this is to say. Is there anything like a spiritual critique of capitalism? If not, the term would have to be invented. Franziska Fennert plays with a blend of exoticist stereotypes, of eastern tribal folklore and western Freudian conclusions, with surrealist collisions and the iconography of cheap everyday magic. Her inventiveness ignores all limitations, except for one: the human figure as an inexhaustible anthropological resource for narration and recognition value. At this point, it is worth to mention the work of Nick Cave: visual artist, dancer and costume designer. Cave's elaborate whole-body masks simultaneously derive from tribal rituals and unleashed fashion events as well as from theatrical staging. Yet how hysterically exaggerated these costumes may ever be, they always remain firmly linked to human scale and proportion. In comparison to Franziska Fennert's sculptures, those of Nick Cave are not only wearable and determined to be further animated by movements, but they are also meant to produce sounds. His wild assembly of seven such sound suits, richly embroidered with mother of pearl buttons, titled *Speak Louder* (2011), even emphasizes that acoustic message with giant tuba-shaped heads. Whereas there the transfigured pate seems to emit an important information, comparable forms in Franziska Fennert's work such as in *I don't believe in your scapegoats* appear to be receptacles for different assignments of guilt. Both sculptural objects, though, reflect upon society, on opinion making and intertwined individuals. Cave's serious mission behind the playful scenes is rooted in his desire to emancipate and reassess colonial and ethnological stereotypes of shamanism and ritualistic processes without being accusatory. Franziska Fennert can build up on seminal strategies like his and does so by offering the multiple faces of her figures (and corpses) as screens for our own projections and reflections.

#### VI

With their stitched and embroidered details, her objects celebrate the potential of needlework and the use of fabric. Even if their content is often ambiguous, they are sharing the haptic surface of the many different textures they were sculpted

with. One particular surprising revelation about Franziska Fennert's „raw material“ consists of her reusing garment on sale in so-called "Pujha" fashion stores. There you get imported second-hand pieces that most probably were cheaply produced somewhere between South and South East Asia to be distributed throughout global West, worn there for a season and then disposed of by ways of charity donations. A sad, yet telling paradox, literally mountains of such textiles make their way back to the regions of their origin so that locals can buy them for little money. The concept of recycling boasts of a largely positive reputation as an idea to protect the environment from (previous) human exploitation. Very likely, the members of Stanislaw Lem's united planets' assembly might add this phenomenon to their list of strangely self destructive habits of the earthlings. In the meantime, Franziska Fennert's artistic decommmodification hopefully fills some of our mental and moral blanks. Similarly important is her decision to employ the looks, not only of masks, but that of dolls and puppets for her soft sculptures. Due to cultural imprinting, our willingness to open up for their (eventually not so pleasant) quintessence increases. Dolls serve for kids' toys and trigger related feelings. But at the same time they are used as substitutes for precisely channeling interpersonal desires and conflicts. Often they are charged with spiritual expectations to change the course of reality. Even if used for mere children's play, dolls are far from being innocent. Role-playing, the re-staging of a family and then that of society leads to appropriating of every single aspect of life. Hence a setting as provided by Franziska Fennert's anthropoid sculptures very well invites for playful interaction or identification first. Yet it takes only a short while until the viewer will be reminded of their more serious, actually hostile capacities: voodoo and worry dolls, scare crows, tin soldiers or demon masks including Rangda.

#### VII

There is of course an obvious contradiction between such violent evocations and the meticulous, humble craft of stitching and embroidering. Franziska Fennert even aggravates such discrepancies by using extra soft fabric, extra "girlish" colors and flashy embellishments for her visual attacks. The boldness of her works makes us think of that of Louise Bourgeois. One of the most successful women artists' of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, she freed fabric and sewing from their purely feminine and "peaceful" connotation towards a truly unsettling, painful, belligerent and yes: feminist iconography. This capacity of needlework as a fully-fledged

artistic medium has been discussed by American writer Siri Hustvedt in her essay "My Louise Bourgeois". Her remarks about the amazing immediacy and power of that technique bear an almost universal significance:

*Aggression is especially a horror for girls. Not just in the olden days of L.B.'s childhood, but now. Girls are still meant to be nicer and better behaved than boys, to hide their hate and aggression...But the grown-up Louise used her fear and her rage to articulate a ferocious dialectic of biting and kissing, of slapping and caressing, of murder and resurrection. There are needles in the bed. There are cuts, wounds, and mutilations in the figures and the objects. There are fabrics stitched together, written upon, repaired. The work is the site of a struggle I feel as a viewer, a visceral experience of the artist's war with and love for the materials themselves.*<sup>vi</sup>

<sup>i</sup> This headline relates to the German art periodical *Texte zur Kunst*, issue 105 of March 2017 titled „Wir sind ihr / They are us“: „With Issue #105, TZK considers the nationalist, conservative, and racist ideologies that have recently become more visible across Europe and the US, giving particular focus to questions of border politics and migration - of humans, of data, of patrimony, of signs.“, <https://www.textezurkunst.de/105/>, last accessed by the author in October 2017

<sup>ii</sup> See: Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, London 1922, pp. 79

<sup>iii</sup> The writer himself made a number of drawing of some of his figures as presented here: <http://english.lem.pl/gallery/mroz-drawings/category/41-star-diaries-1961-iskry>, last accessed by the author in October, 2017

<sup>iv</sup> Stanislaw Lem, *The Star Diaries*, New York 1976/1985, Kindle edition, Pos. 566

<sup>v</sup> In conversation with the author, September 2017

<sup>vi</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *My Louise Bourgeois*, <http://lithub.com/my-louise-bourgeois/> 2016

Franziska Fennert  
*Heaven is Mindset*

canvas, wire, metal, acrylic paint, paillets, artificial hair, resin, wood,  
led halogen lamps, aluminium tubes, car mirrors, threads, polyester fabric  
variable dimension, 2017





Franziska Fennert  
*Four Direction (Heaven is Mindset Parts)*



Franziska Fennert  
*Grip of Conjunction (Heaven is Mindset Parts)*





Franziska Fennert  
*Stoned Consciousness (Heaven is Mindset Parts)*





Franziska Fennert  
**Heaven is Mindpower**  
 canvas, acrylic paint, spray paint, artificial leather,  
 colored feathers, filling material, wire  
 ~100 x 110 x 35 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
**Übergangszeit**  
 canvas, 2nd hand clothes, artificial hair, colored feathers,  
 acrylic paint, threads, silicone ear, print on acrylic  
 ~190 x 90 x 30 cm, 2017

Franziska Fennert  
*I Don't Believe in Your Scapegoats*

artificial leather, canvas, acrylic color, gouache, artificial  
hair, filling, wire, resin, aluminium, color spray  
variable dimension (min. 200 x 300 x 350 cm), 2017





Franziska Fennert  
*Uncovered Camouflage (Blue Cocoon)*

camouflage fabric for marine, wire, paillets, filling material,  
merapi stone, stainless chain, threads, artificial leathers  
500 x 130 x 45 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Non-Stringent (Green Cocoon)*

artificial leather, wire, polyester fabrics, filling material, merapi stone, stainless chain,  
gold & copper leaf, silicone ears, acrylic & spray paint, miniature model palmtrees  
500 x 100 x 100 cm, 2017

Franziska Fennert  
*As Below So Above (White Cocoon)*

artificial leather, wire, polyester fabrics, filling material, merapi stone, stainless chain, breathing mask, silicone ears, acrylic & spray paint  
500 x 100 x 40, 2017





Franziska Fennert  
*Tired of the Me or Act of Diplomacy*

2nd hand clothes, hanger, stainless steel mirrors, computer embroidery, polyester fabrics, wire, silicone ears  
variable dimension (min. 180 x 300 x 400 cm), 2017

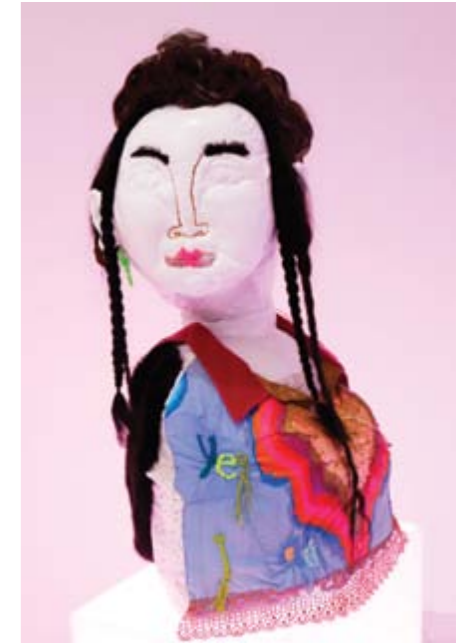




Franziska Fennert  
*Infusion*  
acrylic and ink on canvas  
65 x 50 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Interleafing*  
acrylic and ink on canvas  
65 x 50 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Indonesian Janus*  
canvas, artificial hair, wire, filling material, acrylic & spray  
paint, threads, acrylic light box with halogen led lamps  
~180 x 40 x 50 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Kraftwerk (Power Plant)*  
artificial hair, 2nd hand clothes, paillets, canvas, acrylic &  
spray paint, threads, accessories, car paint on steel  
~180 x 140 x 110 cm, 2017





Franziska Fennert  
*Kumbang Membawa Zeitgeist*  
artificial leather, polyester fabrics, spray & acrylic paint, canvas,  
wire, filling material, printed stretch fabric, merapi stone  
170 x 150 x 120 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Open Source!*  
acrylic and ink on canvas  
150 x 150 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Dress Up*

stainless steel, tima, 2nd hand clothes, computer embroidery, threads, artificial hair, canvas, magnet  
180 x 125 x 35 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Reset*

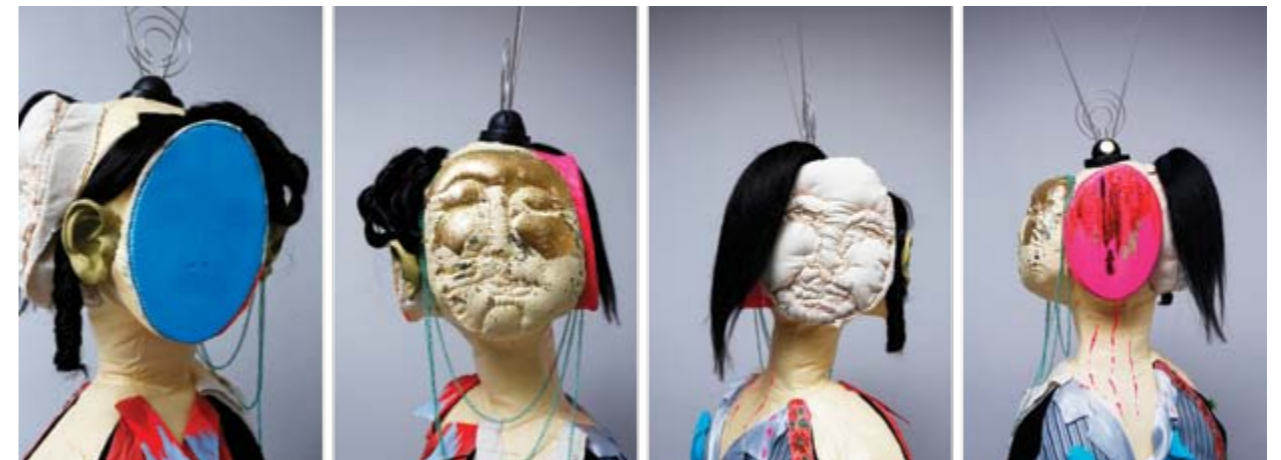
canvas, artificial hair, acrylic paint, threads,  
travel bag, stainless steel, triplex  
~150 x 95 x 55 cm, 2017





Franziska Fennert  
*Four Headed Janus*

2nd hand clothes, canvas, wire, filing material, artificial hair, plastic accessories, acrylic paint, gouache, gold leaf, print on acrylic, video, stainless steel, halogen lamp, indoor tv  
~190 x 200 x 150 cm; 4'05", 2017







Franziska Fennert  
*Extension of Thoughts*  
 ephyphytes, merapi stone, upper jacket part  
 150 x 50 x 80 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Precariat of All Countries - Unite!*  
 artificial tiger fur, designed & printed stretched fabric  
 43 x 45 x 4 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Honest Tongue - Solid Heart*  
 40 ceramics, stitched fabrics  
 variable dimension, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Yes!*

print on acrylic, led light box  
14 x 19 x 5 cm, 2017



Franziska Fennert  
*Walking*  
video  
4'32", 2017



# Franziska Fennert



**BORN**  
1984 Rostock, Germany

**EDUCATION**  
2003-2009 | German Diplom/Master at Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden/Academy of Fine Arts Dresden  
2007 | Study Tour China (Guangzhou, Yangzhou, Hangzhou, Shanghai)  
2007-2008 | Darmasiswa Scholarship in Yogyakarta from the Indonesian Government  
2009-2011 | Meisterschülerin/Postgraduated at Academy of Fine Arts Dresden with Grant of the Free State Saxony, Germany  
2013 | Project Bonded Residency in Shanghai supported by Goethe Institut Shanghai and Research Center of World Culture & Arts of Chinese Language Council International, Shanghai

**SOLO EXHIBITIONS**  
2015  
• Place the King in the Right Position, Sangkring Art Project, Yogyakarta  
2014  
• Place the King in the Right Position, Lawangwangi, Bandung (supported by Goethe Institut Jakarta and ARTSociates Lawang wangi Art and science Estate, Bandung)  
2013  
• Contemporary Fairytales - Zeitgenössische Märchen, Börse Stuttgart Die Hirschkuh säugt den Tiger, Galerie Michaela Helfrich, Berlin  
• VISION OF A SOCIAL EVOLUTION, with an art residency at Lawangwangi ARTSociates, supported from the Federal Foreign Office of Germany  
2012  
• Let Down Anchor, Sanlorenzo-arte, Poppi, Italien  
2010  
• Franziska Fennert, Galerie Albrecht, Berlin  
2008  
• Everything is Rites, Museum Affandi, Yogyakarta

**SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS**  
2016  
• Minimal Art Gallery, HOME, Red Base Foundation, Yogyakarta  
• Things, Human and their Celebration, Green Art Space, Yogyakarta  
• Lore Ipsum, Sangkring Gallery, Yogyakarta  
2015  
• Sequence, Nuart Sculpture Park, Bandung  
• ART-CHIPELAGO, Galeri Nasional, Jakarta  
• ARTJOG 8 Infinity in flux, Taman Budaya, Yogyakarta Base Red, Red Base Art Foundation, Yogyakarta

• FOLK : LORE, Jogja Contemporary, Yogyakarta  
• Terracotta Biennale I, Yogyakarta  
• LOVE, Bentara Budaya Yogyakarta and Syang Art Space, Magelang  
2014  
• On Painting 9, Pinacoteca, Vienna Austria  
2013  
• Collapse-Another perspective of cultural collision, Showroom of East  
• Normal University, Shanghai, China  
• OPEN STUDIO, OFCA International Yogyakarta  
• LOCA FORE 2013, Bandung  
• OSTRALE, Wir überschreiten den Rubikon, Internationale Ausstellung zeitgenössischer Kunst, Dresden  
• Hommage to Asia - Liebeserklärung an Asien, Chinesischer Pavillon, Dresden  
• HYPE, Geh8, Dresden  
• Nass in Nass, Galerie Drei, Dresden  
2012  
• Indonesia di Mata Perupa, Gedung MPR Jakarta  
• Dresdner Biennale, ORNÖ-Festival, Dresden  
• wir hängen Neues von Eric Cruikshank Franziska Fennert Jus Juchtmans, Galerie Albrecht, Berlin

*Franziska Fennert has participated in several group exhibitions since 2007*

**GRANTS**  
2014 | Project bonded funds for PLACE THE KING IN THE RIGHT POSITION from Goethe Institut Jakarta  
2013 | VISION OF A SOCIAL EVOLUTION with an art residency at Lawangwangi ARTSociates, Bandung, supported from the Federal Foreign Office of Germany IEAA International Emerging Artists Award Dubai, "My king will be your king" mentioned under best entries painting & mixed media Residency Shanghai for the project, Collapse-Another perspective of cultural collision by Cover e.V. German Asian Art Association and Department for Culture and Education of the General Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany in Shanghai  
2009-2011 | Grant of the Free State Saxony, Germany/Sächsisches Landesstipendium des Freistaates Sachsen  
2007-2008 | Darmasiswa scholarship from the Indonesian Government  
2006 | Artprize from Cursaxony Festival / Kunstpreis der Cursächsichen Festspiele according to the exhibition „Bildwelten“

*Works are in the public collection of the museum Städtische Galerie Dresden, as well as in private collections in Germany, Indonesia, Turkey, Japan and China.*

In conjunction with the solo exhibition of

**Heaven is Mindset** by Franziska Fennert

Semarang Gallery  
November 18 - December 17, 2017

Visma Art Gallery  
January 26 - February 26, 2018

**Curator**

Anton Larenz

**Writer**

Susanne Altmann

**Exhibition Organizer**

Semarang Gallery in collaboration with Visma Art Gallery

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