

At first glance, the two artists Oskar Holweck and Jonathan Callan could not be more different, but they are united by their fascination and respect for a material that has, for millennia been in existence as a cultural asset: paper. In addition, they are united by an unconditional joy of experimentation to penetrate deeper into this material. For both artists, there are no unusable aspects; instead, they get to the bottom of the original product and explore its formal and contextual properties in a variety of new ways.

Holweck and Callan are separated by almost two generations, but they are united by their enjoyment of the material, their curiosity, perseverance and an eye for subtle nuances. The two artists do not know or did not know each other, but they seem to be related in spirit.

Oskar Holweck (1924 - 2007) was a pioneer of paper art who mostly eschewed colour and worked predominantly with white paper. Holweck wanted to express his faithfulness to the material. His knowledge of paper, along with his constant experimentation through precise actions could be said to be familiar to how Josef Albers taught in the preliminary courses at the Bauhaus, he was similarly concerned with educating his students<sup>1</sup> in the basic relationship of optical to haptic sensibility through experimentation and playful handling of materials. He regarded aesthetic and artistic education as a subject area that - like the natural sciences or learning a language - must be determined by vocabulary and grammar, it must be learnt and mastered. Both concepts are instructive for the consideration of Holweck's work, for he himself bent crumpled, creased, pressed, scored, punched, drilled, tore, and maltreated paper to great effect throughout his working life.

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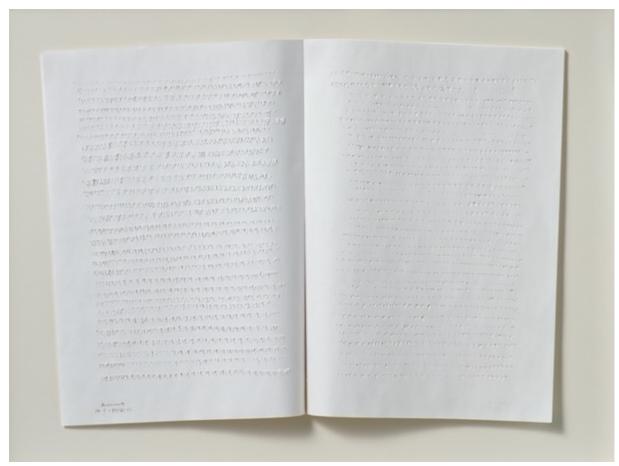
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> In 1956, Oskar Holweck was given the basic teaching position at the Staatliche Werkkunstschule Saarbrücken (later the Saarland University of Applied Sciences, Department of Design).



Oskar Holweck, 25 III 76/8, 1976,  $50 \times 40 \text{ cm}$ 

There are the individual visible signs he makes: punctures, detachments in mouse-tooth-like elevation, tears or rips that leave crumpled paper behind, tongues, and much more. To create this repertoire of visual and physical elements, Holweck created his own tools that allowed him to work on the ground in a consistent, but also economical way. In selecting and inventing these tools, he firmly planned the "experimental arrangement": Distribution of the characters on the surface by sequence, rhythm, density, spacing. This we might regard as the "grammar". This experimentation, which could be described as a "research project" lasted decades, where his question changes only minimally from sheet to sheet: by varying the pressure used, the time spent, and other parameters, a completely different result can be achieved even when the same initial means are used. It is in the serial series that his persistence and discipline are revealed. Holweck remains attached to the classical topos of order and chaos: The supposed violation of the surface suggests the phenomenon of chaos, whereas its structured arrangement order. The subtle tensions between represents counteracting phenomena contribute to the immense appeal of his works.

In their reduction and simplicity, these interventions - which are first and foremost recognised as a violation or destruction of the surface - are a pictorial language that can hardly be surpassed in its clarity, which does not apply anything to the support, but inscribes itself directly on it: The millimetre distortions appear as positive and negative space, creating a lively pictorial surface in which the play of light and shadow can unfold. The artist knows and appreciates the sensual qualities characteristics of purity, and virginity inviolability attributed to white paper. White was not only considered by ZERO artists to epitomise dematerialisation and experiences of the human condition; the renunciation of colour was followed by an entire generation of artists in the West in the 1960s, whose focus was on the delicate tension of light and shadow.



Oskar Holweck, Tb 5 I 84/Bl. 63, 1984,  $29,7 \times 41 \times 2 cm$ 

Holweck's works are offered to the viewer as a way to practice 'seeing', to experience a rhythm in deciphering, and to be completely at one with the works themselves. In his view, light in particular is of paramount importance: "Seeing requires light. Light spreads out in space and is reflected on surfaces, in cavities, and in a changed form due to the nature of the material. [...] The brightness must be given our utmost attention. It is, in my opinion, the most significant study of nature that a creative person can strive for."<sup>2</sup>

In his research, Oskar Holweck demanded of himself strict self-discipline with regard to the material and the means employed. He worked with this approach, which is related to the natural sciences, for decades and used predominantly the same paper qualities and formats. He made his research tangible by means of the art he produced which still involves the viewer in the adventure of discovery: of rhythm, order and ultimately beauty.

Oskar Holweck inscribed himself on paper again and again in new ways by scratching, cutting, supposedly destroying it, but each destruction is a transformation, with the goal of revealing the interior and moving from the flatness of the basic material into the third dimension and helping the sheet of paper to achieve greater plasticity. Crude punctures, cuts and tears are followed by bulges, distortions, condensations of matter that transform the sheet into a minimal relief. Out of ravines and deep valleys rise hills and mountain formations en miniature. The eye glides along these works, mostly in portrait format, and – similar to writing or reading – it wanders from the upper left to the lower right along the lines to the lower edge of the sheet.

The artist finished each work with minute dating, delicately penciled in Arabic numerals for the day and Roman numerals for the month, often in stark contrast to the rough injuries of the paper. The work is recorded to the exact day, with one serial examination following the next. The chronicler can follow Holweck's experiments precisely and marvels at the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Oskar Holweck in: Sehen- Grundlehre von Oskar Holweck. Exhibit. Cat. Museum of Decorative Arts Zurich 1968, p.7

meticulousness and discipline with which the artist uses his "laboratory" to carry out these examinations



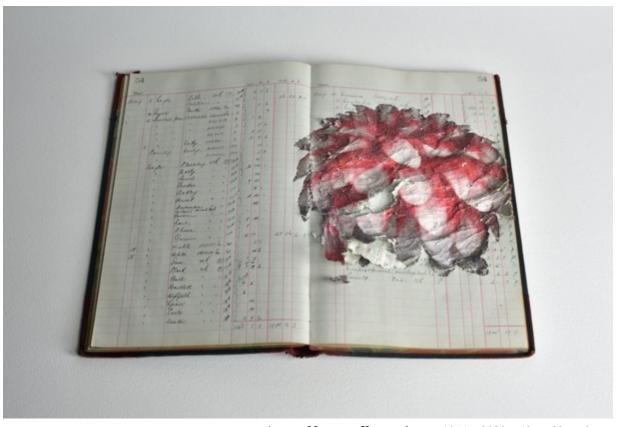
Oskar Holweck, A 66 72, 1972, 100 x 70 cm

Jonathan Callan, the Manchester-born artist, born in 1961, who finished his training at Goldsmith College of Art in London, also ventures with precision into his basic material. For decades, he has focused on working with printed matter: magazines, newspapers, atlases and books of all kinds, including classics like the Bible and works of literary art. But Callan views printed matter (whether book or map, cash register or notebook, city map, magazine or folio) as something that arrives in the world loaded with both materiality and meaning, one cannot be separated from the other.

His source material already carries a history, a storehouse of information. Both a utilitarian and cultural asset, or - as in the case of reused notebooks or cashbooks - very authentic and unique records (e.g. A flower in Trading in May, 2020, 43 x 33 x 6 cm). The charge of content is a major attraction for Callan, he fundamentally attaches a special significance to the way in which language is rooted in his culture. Thus, he considers English culture to be predominately literary, it often misses the presence of the visual, an imbalance he tries to address with his work.

with great joy and dedication, Callan collects and searches for his source material in antique shops, flea markets and on the Internet, sorting it again and again according to various criteria. A particular find can inspire him to create an individual work. There is hardly a form of processing that he has not yet undertaken: cutting, tearing, gluing, screwing, taking apart, peeling off the cover, tearing out the book block, accumulating, pulverising, and much more. For Jonathan Callan, another reading is inscribed or placed upon the book, a reading which has been created by very physical processes, this sometimes expands upon the books content, or it may flatly contradict it, or it may rest somewhere between. Though pages can no longer be turned, images can no longer be viewed, and the books usually can no longer be opened, they can still be 'read' but in a completely different way. The content is sometimes forever enclosed - or else completely removed. (Court, 2018, temporary installation Kunstmuseum Villa Zanders)

In numerous sketchbooks, he lays out ideas and then approaches them experimentally. For these experiments he has at his disposal - compared to Oskar Holweck - a disproportionately larger and completely different palette of tools, as he adds silicone, paints and resins, concrete, toys or other materials with a sense of playfulness and humour.



Jonathan Callan, A flower in My 1944, 2020, 43 x 33 x 6 cm

Jonathan Callan pursues the addition and subtraction of matter in equal measure: Just as in many pieces he transforms the book into another form by adding other substances or materials - from mass product to unique piece - or creates sculptures and monumental wall works by accumulating and connecting books and printed material, he is also able to penetrate the microcosm of the individual book.

Particularly poetic are all those works in which he starts from the individual book page and removes so much from it that only a fragile remnant remains.

Callan chooses this approach for both the photographic pages and pages of text.

He erases, scrapes, and washes out parts of pictorial motifs in order to transform them - sometimes with a wonderfully ironic touch. To do this, he might seek out similar motifs from different sources, which he forms into series (Nowhere, 2014). Using pages of text, on the other hand, one approach is where he punches the type with meticulousness, so that the text is 'buried' into the museum board beneath it. The perforated page is then mounted at a set distance from the text below in which 'buried' projection of the writing provides a legibility. This dissolution of the text, the changing of content and purpose, reveals Callan's unreserved approach to the material. In the same way, however, he has also proceeded in the opposite manner, "doubling" entire book pages by meticulously copying them by hand. Line by line, closely next to and below each other - and in a large format of 153 x 122 cm - (The Bible And My Commentary On It (Genesis to Leviticus Chapter Nine Verse Four), 2010) that one can almost physically feel the time it takes to copy and the confrontation with the content.



Jonathan Callan, Court, 2018, 445 x 275 x 34 cm, Exhibition *Inside Out- Jonathan Callan and Andreas My*, Kunstmuseum Villa Zanders



Jonathan Callan, Nowhere, 2014, 18-pieces, 120 x 200 cm



Jonathan Callan, *The Bible And My Commentary On It (Genesis to Leviticus Chapter Nine Verse Four)*, 2010; 153 x 122 cm; private collection)

In addition, Callan has copied pictorial content from magazines and repeatedly traced it - similar to hidden object images - or punched figures out of illustrations to create collages. The choice of titles for his works is significant, because the artist often focuses on themes that may be loaded on both a personal and political level. It is precisely in these adaptations that his dry humour is revealed, as well as his social and political stance, which is characterised by criticism of prevailing market mechanisms and social injustices. To sum up, one could say that for Jonathan Callan all approaches to the book, text and image are possible: the combination of these possibilities becomes inexhaustible, he penetrates horizontally and vertically into his material, he associates freely and playfully, negates the content or amplifies it.

As differently as Oskar Holweck and Joanthan Callan work, it is a pleasure to accompany them in their research projects and thus to increase and refine one's own sensitivity and powers of observation. In most cases, there is not only a gain in awareness, but also a great feeling of happiness associated with being able to study the results in depth and take away a transfer of knowledge.