

# Foreword A Way of Seeing

Without doubt Lisl Ponger is one of the distinctive voices of Austrian contemporary art. She makes work that skilfully and persistently shifts the borders of photography and film. At the present time, when images can no longer be trusted, Ponger's work points to the processual activity under the surface: to the ideologies, institutions and associated habits of seeing. Her gaze is analytic, though never distanced and it allows representational contradictions to become visible. In the process she never shies away from the role of the author to critically interrogate scientific, aesthetic and social representation. Her works inhabit the field of tension between images made by herself and others which engage with identity, history and gender dynamics, areas in which photos, installations and films become partners in a dialogue where questions are asked but answers are not provided.

In this anthology, the first in the series ... *a way of thinking* (a cooperation between the Austrian Film Museum and the Vienna Publishers, Mandelbaum), twenty-five authors look closely at Lisl Ponger's work. Tara Najd Ahmadi sets off with Laura Mulvey and Roland Barthes on a search for semiotic ghosts in the spaces, both photographic and filmic, of *SEMIOTIC GHOSTS* (1999) which, according to the artist, was her last avant-garde work. In their articles circumscribing Ponger's early works, Petra Belc and Thomas Eduardo direct our gaze towards an artist who, from the very beginning, opened up mental spaces in her filmic essays which are concerned with aesthetic image-making. In his contribution, Thorsten Sadowsky examines Ponger's photographic works which have long been critically concerned with the deconstruction of the European way of seeing »the Other.« He shows that the »repetition of forms, things and allegories [have become] constitutive of her work«. Elena Baumeister engages with Lisl Ponger's enduring curatorial curiosity. During the pandemic years of 2020/21, she produced a 52-part film programme for the *Hundred Heroines* online platform. As

early as 1987 Ponger, together with Wolfgang Drechsler, arranged an avant-garde film programme presenting works by her contemporaries and herself in the 20er Haus [Museum of the Twentieth Century] which, at the time, was one of the few museum locations for contemporary art. In 2017, for the opening of the redesigned Vienna Weltmuseum, she focussed on the spoken word. Dominique Gromes's essay discusses Ponger's love of »small things« and, borne on the artist's voice through the ten-part installation, *THE MASTER NARRATIVE AND DON DURITO*, pursues the issue of what the function of an ethnological museum should be today. Katrin Mundt deals with aspects of otherness in Ponger's travel diary about an »apparently unknown« Vienna. Kurt Kladler, Ponger's long-term contact person at the Charim Gallery in Vienna, undertakes an adventurous trip through the exhibiting practices and asks a provocative question: Do you know Lisl Ponger? While Tom Waibel attempts to define the »Pongerish perspective« in the artist's works, whether photographic, filmic or activist, Christoph Huber, with the help of Amos Vogel, attempts to get to grips with subversion in the artist's work. Tim Sharp, Lisl Ponger's longstanding *partner in crime*, widens the angle of focus on her series of *MAKING OF ...* films and, with precise descriptions, creates insights into the work methods of an attentive and witty storyteller. Over the last two years I, Elisabeth Streit, was repeatedly present on the different sets of her stagings and was able to observe how it was possible for her to reconcile mental images with artistic expression. In his text, Julian Sharp, also a longstanding participant, reveals family relationships and acknowledges all those who have worked with Lisl Ponger for years, charmingly asking them to take a metaphorical bow. And because the artist herself should have an opportunity to put in a word of her own, my co-publisher and co-operation partner, Dietmar Schwärzler (sixpackfilm), conducted an interview with her giving you the opportunity to enjoy a wide ranging workshop discussion with Lisl Ponger.

As long-time associates, Martin Hochleitner, Jean Perret, Serpil Turhan, Nina Höchtl, Mariam Hage, Ryts Monet, Gudrun Ratzinger, Franz Thalmeier, Naoko Kaltschmidt, Del Barrett and Michael Loebenstein have attempted to sketch their encounters with Lisl Ponger in a short form. Whether they describe the works or the person – closely, distantly even fleetingly during a chance meeting – all the authors reveal similar insights into Lisl Ponger's seriousness tinged with irony which makes one only too happy to accept the visual seduction, most especially from the Pongerish perspective. Thanks to all who contributed. ♦