

#SAFE – A NEW SERIES OF WORKS BY DIETER HUBER

#SAFE is a series of 202 individual works on aluminum dibond. The entire series comprises six different sections: POLICY, SURVEILLANCE, ARSENAL, STRIKE, BURST and APOLOGIA. The titles allude to a complex set of strategies, weapons, control measures, effects, and explanations. Dieter Huber has chosen three different formats with heights of 50 cm, 100 cm and 150 cm for the works in each section. The works also can vary in portrait, landscape or circular tondo formats.

The plates in the POLICY section consist of brief texts, phrases and opposing word pairs milled into a high-quality, 3-mm-thick aluminum dibond mirror that is affixed to a second mounting plate. The font, which is reminiscent of the stenciled print on shipping crates, bears the fitting name GUNPLAY. The mirror is clear but tinted medium to dark gray. The viewer standing in front of one of these works becomes a picture within a picture. The panels are hung in such a way that the lettering appears to float directly in front of the viewer's forehead, as if he were thinking the words at that very moment. They are catchwords that form an associative blend with the viewer's perceptual activity.

The second section is entitled SURVEILLANCE. The symbols of control are presented on twenty-five plates that ad-

dress the phenomena of observation, public space, the private sphere, running amok, terror, databases, crime scenes, manhunts and algorithms. They are drawings executed in graphite pencil by Dieter Huber from found, assembled or original, self-constructed reference models. The drawings were then scanned, processed on the computer and transformed into vector files that could then be cut. Each such file served as a template for a special, ultrafine, high-performance milling machine which cut the forms from the different aluminum dibond materials. The milled plate was then manually reworked and cleaned. Thus the handcrafted character of the graphite drawing is preserved in abstract form in a very technical-looking material. The mounting plates for these drawings were affixed to the wall with the aid of a felt-cushioned spacer. That method causes a dark shadow, an effect that is particularly significant in the case of the SURVEILLANCE section, in which the aluminum dibond plates are also positioned in front of a white wall. The negative character of the milled figure generates a strong sense of abstraction. The drawing serves as an interdeterminacy spot that is resynthesized as a positive gestalt that floats against the background in the viewer's imagination.

The third section is ARSENAL. Details of the weapons are depicted on twenty-five plates. The images range from a paving stone, a medieval cudgel, brass knuckles, various knives, a bow, a pepper sprayer,

a snake fence, various different guns (including a machine gun), a hand grenade and a tank gun to helicopters, drones and a Eurofighter jet. The images are high-definition, UV-resistant prints mounted on aluminum dibond, the front surface of which is covered with stainless steel. The extreme close-up views of the weapons stimulate the viewer's imagination, and the viewer mentally adds the weapon parts that are not shown in the picture and reflects on their possible uses or purposes.

The round images in the STRIKE section are taken from different sources. Strike#1 is a photograph of a bullet hole in the car ridden by Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. His assassination precipitated the reactions that led to the First World War. Another group of images includes pictures of test shots fired by the Cobra task force. The subtitles of the STRIKES describe the ammunition used for the shots. The images were captured with a new camera technique. The camera used for the #SAFE project was the newest medium-format version of the LEICA S (Type 007). A combination of multiple close-up lenses and rings and a macro lens (which was not commercially available) was produced by a specialist from Leica for the extreme close-ups. This custom-made camera was needed in order to produce a high-definition image in large formats. It makes things visible that are normally not perceptible to the viewer's eye. This project is also concerned with the process of visualizing

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otherwise invisible details that cannot be perceived in such high definition with normal eyes. The viewer's aesthetic perception is extended, expanded and improved with the aid of a special media technology.

BURST—the attack—is the title of the fifth section, which deals with the aftereffects of explosions. Dieter Huber produced the reference models for the works in this section in collaboration with a master blasting specialist. Various materials, including gunpowder, blasting caps, fuses, firecrackers and rockets, explosives, phosphorus and carbide, were made detonated. The mounting surfaces consisted of white aluminum dibond plates and different white plastic materials. BURST#18, for example, is composed of burning fuses that are burnt into the plastic. The images in this section have a highly abstract, aesthetic look. Nothing remains of the violence of the explosion and its destructive effects. The only evidence is the photographic trace left on the surface by the primary explosive.

The #SAFE series concludes with the presentation of a high-precision Austrian rifle. The last sequence is entitled APOLOGIA – “apology” in the sense of a defense or justification – a truly disturbing title. It implies an attempt to defend or justify a theory or belief. Does it mean in this context that freedom is defended with a sniper's rifle or that the use of such a weapon is therefore

justified? Or does it mean that the safety and security of society can only be ensured with such a weapon? The artist leaves the question unanswered.

Thus we enter the extremely controversial field of tension between the individual's right to freedom and society's need for security. These issues have been the focus of a major debate for a number of years. To what extent does the state and its legitimate executive powers as embodied by the police and military forces, which represent, uphold and exercise the government's monopoly on the use of force, have the right to restrict, control or monitor the rights of freedom its citizens have fought for centuries to attain? The whistleblower Edward Snowden answered that question by publishing classified documents and surveillance strategies employed by the NSA. In doing so, he provided new arguments of relevance to the conflict between existing national laws and an all-encompassing global system of surveillance focused on individuals and institutions everywhere.

In Dieter Huber's series, all traces of the effects of applied violence on human beings or biological agents are excluded. Only detail images of the weapons themselves and the traces of their use left behind on artificial surfaces are shown and visually highlighted. Thus the significance of the series lies to an equal extent in both the excluded and the represented aspects of the use of force.

The series focuses on the one hand on the technical possibilities for the use of force by the state to safeguard freedom and ensure the safety and security of society and on the other hand on the question of the contribution advanced weapons technology can make in this context.

The work of investigative artists like Dieter Huber, Edmund Clark, Trevor Paglen and Eyal Weizman consistently raises the question of which aspects of these hidden processes can be rendered visible. Art has always tested the borders of visibility. It has attempted with the aid of new media and new technologies to show what is possible. But it has also been forced to admit that what may well be the most important relationships are not visual in nature and can be made comprehensible only through further study, investigative research or other media, such as newspaper articles, scholarly essays, books or platforms for disclosure. In these series, art is confronted with the limits of visual representation.

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is an artist, filmmaker and scholar.

He studied painting and drawing as well as art history, philosophy and psychology.

He was a professor at the HGB Leipzig from 1997 to 1999 and has served as Professor of Contemporary Art History, Aesthetics and Art Theory at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart since 1999.