

---

**SILKE SILKEBORG**

---

**Documentation / Selection: 2013 - 2017**

---

2016

## CHEMICAL PLANT – LEUNAWERKE

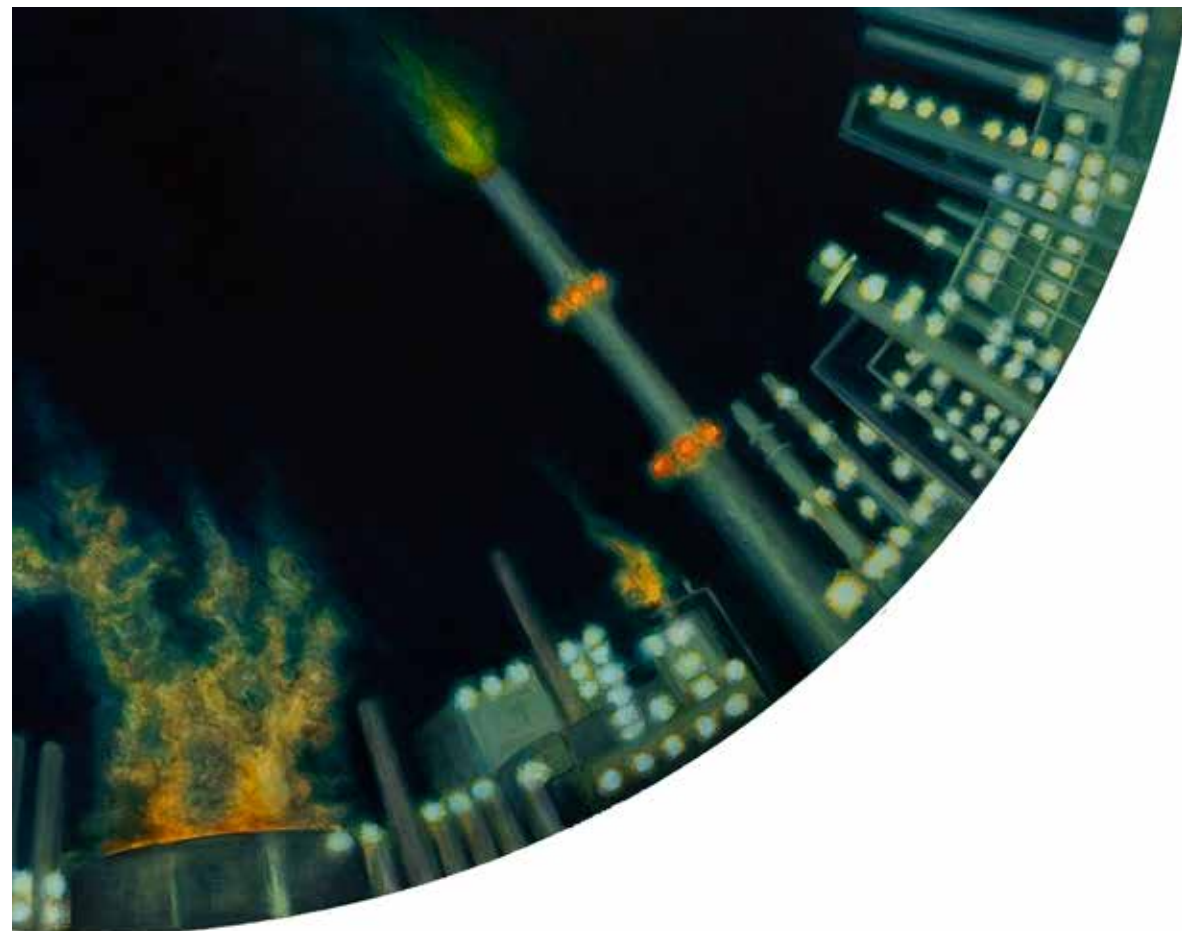
*Leuna*

My work method stands in the context of artistic field research: By means of painting, I explore the dark of night to scout the boundaries of perception and delimit what can actually be depicted. Therefore, I understand the paintings developed at night as on-site studies in the medium of painting. Nightly illuminations – including lighting installations of factory buildings – belong to my main concerns regarding the phenomenology of perception.

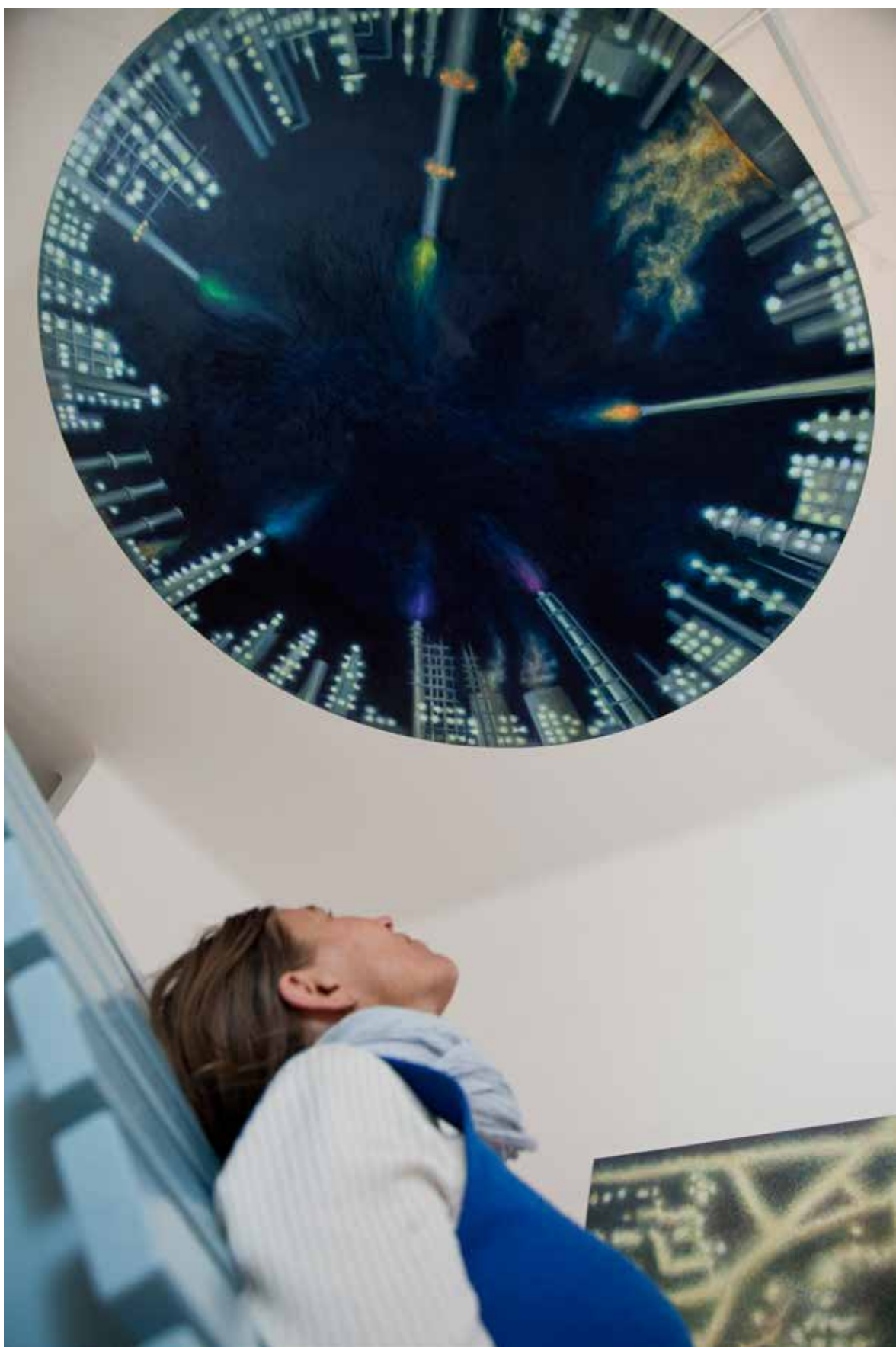
From highway 38, between Göttingen and Leipzig, one sees the artificial lighting of the chemical plants of Leuna. Having knowledge of the existing industrial site creates an ambivalent level of observation, as the human eye tends to connote any light in the dark as something positive. When approaching the site, however, the pervasive olfactory sensation triggers a certain defensiveness. In the scope of my nightly field research excursions, I drove around the Leuna plant several times. This allowed me to investigate the specifics of nocturnal phenomena and the given visual extremes from brightness to darkness. I chose a fairly small, circular format to capture these aspects in painting, which resulted in two journal reports about my nightly field research (see the next pages). Later in the studio, the convenient format served as a basis for a transfer to a Tondo with a diameter of 150 cm. It is hung from the ceiling and enables the viewer an unusual perspective from my custom-built lounger, the “Twinborg”. One’s upward gaze – at night one would expect it to reveal the starry skies – displays a different kind of night. In the place of stars one recognises points of light from the chemical plant and its chimneys, together producing a strange kind of “light smog”.

*Right page: Painting installation, exhibition view, Berlin 2016*









*This and the previous double page: exhibition views 2016  
BERLIN / Wiensowski & Harbord*

*paradise <found>*

*Painting installation  
Ceiling painting suspended at a height of 200 cm, oil on MDF  
Diameter 150 cm  
Twinborg lacquered wood  
Width 82 cm, height 88 cm, length 230 cm*

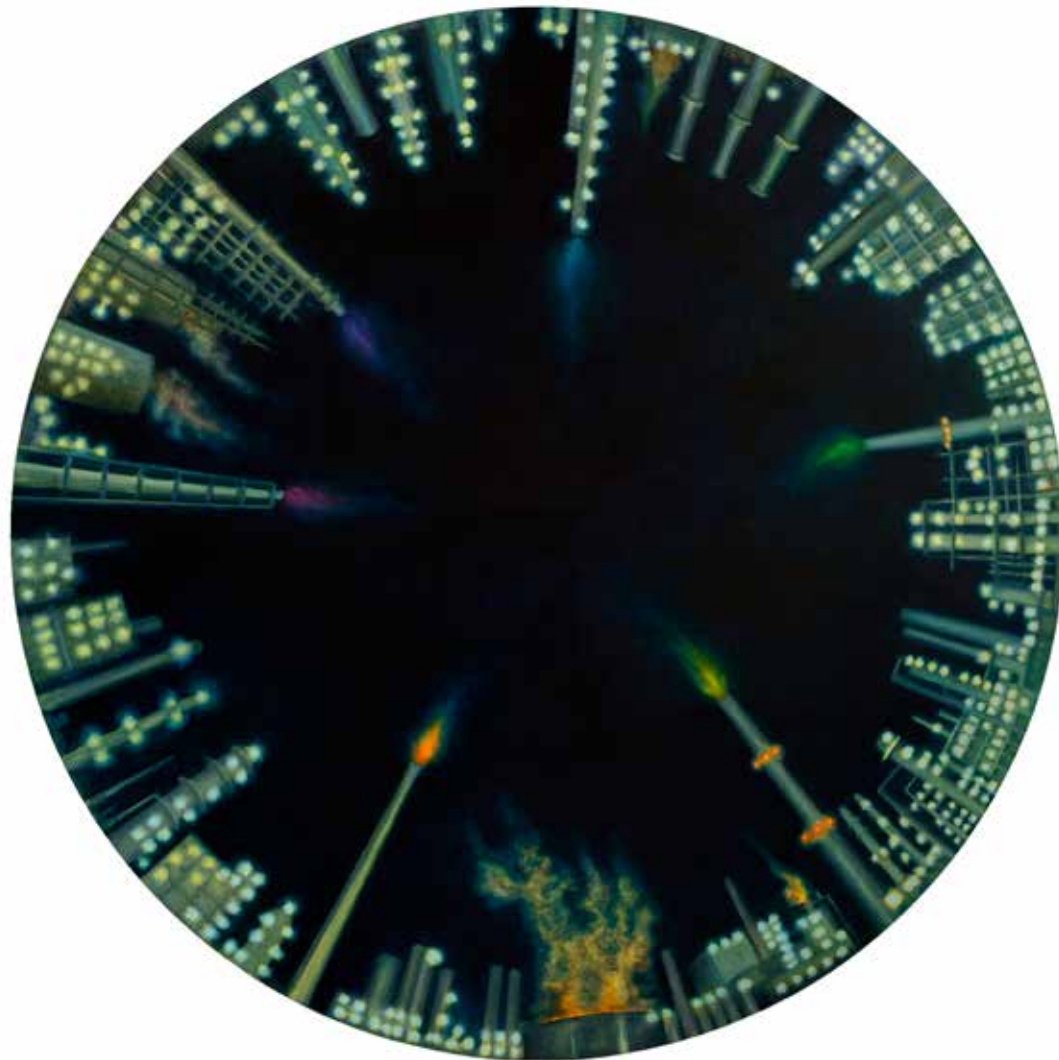


***„fabricare necesse est, natura non est“ \****

**Time: Fri, 5 Aug 2016 / 23.00 h - Sat, 6 Aug 2016 / 02.30 h**

**Place: Leuna, Saxony-Anhalt**

**Weather: 17° C, west wind, partly cloudy, waxing moon**



Departure from Leipzig around 21:30 h. Shortly after the airport Leipzig/Halle you reach the freeway exit Leuna. Already here, the chemical plant is very conspicuous. On my nightly research tour through the residential area of Leuna, in between the well-refurbished single-family homes with their perfectly groomed front gardens, I am granted astonishing views of the chimneys.

I am perplexed. “Why would anyone want to live here if they weren’t forced to do so?” The plant is running non-stop and the noises from the production site and rail transport do not exactly promise a quiet small-town night’s rest. What strikes me as even more bothersome is what my sense of smell encounters: chemical vapours. I would not want to have to open my window for ventilation in this place. But could it perhaps have been a perfect shooting location for Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*?

On a private road, signposted as a dead end, I even see a Martian. He is wearing a dark-blue T-Shirt matched with black knickers. He comes toward me with a baseball bat. “What are you doing here?” he shouts from his forty-year-old, close-cropped head sitting on broad shoulders. Hannes, who has accompanied me on this night tour with his car, replies reassuringly, “We’re looking for a picture!” I am standing by the car, too far away to interpret the angry man’s facial expression. The short message “we’re looking for a picture” somehow must have soothed his temper. “Well... it is not exactly nice here in Leuna,” the man says, turns around and walks back to his home, located right next to the locked gate of the gigantic chemical plant.

I watch the flames dancing out in different colours from two narrow chimneys. A violet-blue one and a pink one. The two adjacent big chimneys are fuming billows of more massive, sulphur-coloured smoke. The spectacle is enhanced by the multiple floodlights installed on site. Their beams climb up the chimney scaffolds like a cold-white chain of lights. This accumulation of harsh-white flares most likely is easily detectable from an airplane.

I fetch the beer-filled cooler from the trunk as a painting table and my fishing bag filled with painting utensils and carry them up the small earthen embankment next to a concrete wall about two meters high. Hannes hands me a stepladder so that I can look over the wall. Directly behind the wall rows of rail wagons are being shunted. This is all I can discern within a split second of the dark night.

Equipped with my painter’s jacket, shorts and an LED-headlamp, I sit down in the tall grass. This earthen wall with its growth of wild grasses and a sleeping Hannes looks almost idyllic. The concrete wall shelters me from the wind. I begin placing a fragment of the work with quick brush strokes towards the edge of the circular painting cardboard: the chimneys in co-

*Leunawerke, oil on MDF, tondo, diameter 150 cm, 2016*

*Opposite page: journal report – nocturnal field research, chemical plant – Leuna, 2016*

loured hues of grey, the floodlights in blue-whitish, sometimes yellowish. Flaring up against the dark surroundings of the black-blue night, they set themselves off self-importantly.

An hour past midnight I wake up Hannes so that we can depart for the next location. Three streets further down there is an open field with a wider view onto the factory. After a short night picnic of goat cheese and mustard, I once again use the cooler as a base for painting. I has turned chilly, and here I am fully exposed the wind. Despite an additional sweater, I start getting cold. I therefore try to speed up the painterly capturing of the plant lighting on the cardboard. Like a wheelwork, it runs around the circle's edge in a seemingly endless manner. A chemical hamster wheel with no escape.

I rub my hands against each other to warm them and, with my 360-degree view, ask myself what was here first: the family homes on the Friedhofstrasse or the chemical plant?

In fact, the Leuna plant, with the first ammonia synthesis facilities, was opened in April 1917 after a building phase of only eleven months. Here BASF and later IG Farben produced gasoline, ammoniac nitrogen fertiliser and other fertilisers. During the Second World War the Leuna plant became a target for numerous air attacks by the Allies due to its arms production. From 1946 on the plant was owned by a Russian corporation (SAG); in 1954 ownership was transferred to the GDR. By then 22,000 employees were working there. Among their products known in the 1950s were: SARNEX – against scabies / MITRANOL – against parasitic insects / MELEUSOL – a disinfectant / LEUNALYD – against stomach and intestinal diseases / TROMALIN – baking powder / LEUNA-WURST – a spread made from yeast / IGELIT – a plastic made of chalk, carbon and muriatic acid (as substitute for linoleum, leather, foil). An advertising poster from the late fifties today seems rather absurd: Chemistry provides bread – wealth – beauty!

**Time: Sat, 6 Aug 2016 / 22.00 h - Sun, 7 Aug 2016 / 01.00 h**

**Place: Leuna, Saxony-Anhalt**

**Weather: 15° C, cool, light east wind**

The oil sketch I began yesterday has to be finished today. I set out early and circle the entire plant by car.

The dimensions of the chemical plant are amazing. It seems much bigger than suggested by the view from the freeway. I drive past historical gateways and numerous newer entrances, each connected with a corresponding company. After a half hour of this circumnavigation, I stop in front of an iron gate directly adjacent to a spacious parking area by the highway to Merseburg. I turn off the motor and get out. In contrast to the abandoned parking area lying in the dark, the plant itself is magnificently illuminated by hundreds of floodlights. I look through the pale gate and am happy to have another Leuna fragment directly in front of me. Equipped with my hoody, my fleece waistcoat and headlamp, I am sitting in front of my small work, spread out beside me the oil colour tubes.

It does not take long before three security vehicles approach the gateway. They come to a halt about a hundred metres away, the front windows facing me like one-eyed creatures. Nobody gets out of the car. I try to ignore them and continue to work with my brush and cardboard on the last section. After a while they turn around and disappear in between the smoking chimneys. Half an hour later a single security car drives up to the gate. Again no one gets out. I had mentally prepared myself to answer all the typical questions. Nothing happened. Did I make such a peaceful impression with the paintbrush in my hand? It is much more likely that they took pictures of me from behind their non-transparent windshield. One may assume that my scanned face has, meanwhile, provided via computer all the police data relating to my person, with the result: harmless.

Around one o'clock I have completed the oil sketch. I put the paint tubes back in the bag and store them in the trunk together with the chemical painting products turpentine, trinitrotoluene and the brush cleaner.

Silke Silkeborg, September 2016



2016

## THE BRIGHT CALM OF BLUE

Jena

In the garden of “Schiller’s Garden House”, Silke Silkeborg shows a painting in the form of an installation, consisting of a “Mind Dome” and a double lounge chair, the “Twin Spinner”. The reclined position facilitates looking upwards and directs one’s gaze to the inner part of the roof. Four triangles mounted in a cubic formation feature oil paintings revealing various aspects of the night in blue colour. The quadruple representation of the colour blue refers to general sentiments of distance, coolness, spatiality and shadow. Silke Silkeborg uses unusual perspectives aimed at counteracting elusiveness. She employs polarities as visual means, as for example day and night, calm and unrest, constriction and freedom. By focussing on the centre of the roof, aspects of the night are allowed to enter broad daylight.

The title of the installation is a variation of Schiller’s poem “The Ideal and the Actual”. He plays with the terms calmness and brightness and thus alludes to the ambiguity of the colour blue. From an outer perspective, the work presents itself as a sculptural-architectural installation bearing the colour light blue. In preparation, Silkeborg was mainly preoccupied with the colouring of Schiller’s tower room and its former coat of paint. An intensive colour analysis based on 200-year-old remainders of wallpaper finally lead her to “Schiller’s light blue”. The work is a kind of heterotopia that animates the observer to contemplative pondering, observing and reflecting.

*Schiller’s Garden House, Friedrich Schiller University Jena*



*Schiller’s light blue – an analysis of remainders of 200-year-old wallpaper, 10 x 21 cm, watercolour on paper, 2015*







*Twinborg, perforated steel plate on steel frame, auto body lacquer  
Width 85 cm, height 88 cm, length 230 cm*

*Mind Dome, stainless steel, exterior: auto body lacquer, interior: oil paint, 156 x 156 cm*





*Left: studio situation*  
*Work process on Mind Dome, 2016*  
*Below: hanging of the Mind Dome in the*  
*maple tree in Schiller's garden, June 2016*  
*Right page: details of the inner part of the roof*





2015/17

## ILLUMINATION OF THE WORLD

LEIPZIG

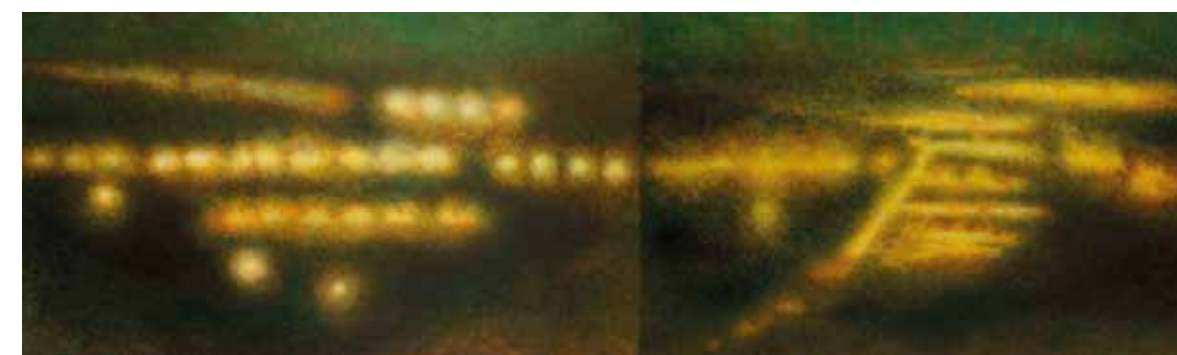
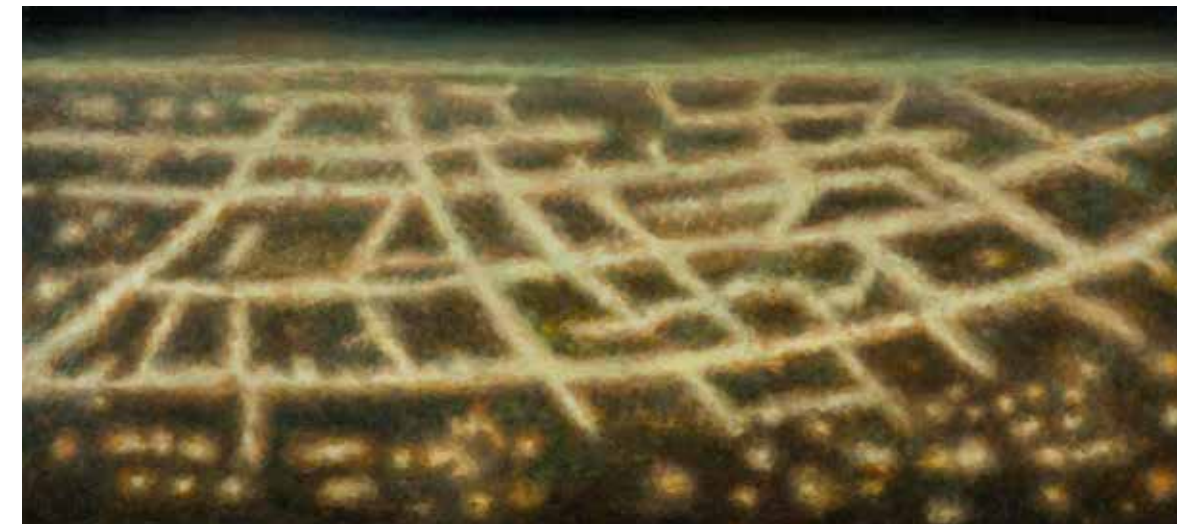
The experiences gathered in the course of Silke Silkeborg's nocturnal field research in the media of painting are taken to extremes in this project (360 x 800 cm). Its focus lies on light formations of electrified cities from an aerial perspective at night. Through the tilted top-down view another dimension develops; the world is literally put into perspective.

In several layers of oil paint, she applied colours from the night shadows on the earth, dissolving from a dark to a lighter blue grey, to ochre and yellow orange under the brightness of city lights onto the twelve-part canvas. At a closer look the observer seems to experience a loss of orientation as the painterly transition from light to darkness dissolves in abstractly shimmering paint strokes. Only by stepping back from the painting does its content become graspable. On the cinema-screen-size picture another reality emerges owing to an artificially illuminated world.



*Working process: Illumination of the World  
Halle 14 / Studio 5 / Baumwollspinnerei  
Oil on canvas in twelve segments  
Overall dimensions: 360 x 800 cm*





Above: oil sketch of *Illumination of the World*, 36 x 80 cm, oil on cardboard, 2015

Below: *Permanent Light*, 120 x 420 cm, oil on canvas, 2014

Left page: Detail from *Perpetual Light*





*On the bright surface even hamsters can't sleep, 120 x 145 cm, oil on canvas, 2014/15*

*Right page: Between HAMB and YORK, 165 x 150 cm, oil on canvas, 2015*







*Urban Light Airport Düsseldorf, diameter 20 cm, scratch drawing on scraperboard, 2015*

*Left page: exhibition views IT WON'T SLEEP, Kunstverein Delikatessenhaus e.V. Leipzig, 2016*



## EYEROPA

2013/14

Brussels

In Brussels Silke Silkeborg, together with Suse Itzel, set up a spotlight at the entrance areas of lobbyists' offices in 2013. She then painted artificially lit macro sections in small formats and the surrounding entrance area lying in the shadow. What was rendered visible is like a cut-out from reality, which nevertheless remains abstract. The choice of the cut-out is comparable with a close up in a film. The oil paintings enlarge and thus expand perceived reality to become a visual metaphor, and question it. This macro-focus distorts what is real beyond recognition and transforms it into an illusory world.

“Just how much of the EU-scheming is brought to light and what remains concealed in the dark ...?” The notion of visibility and invisibility can be transferred to daily political activities and in the scope of this play with lighting is presented like a stage scenery. Lobbyists of large corporations exercise their power and influence on European policy in the invisible realm. The shadow area refers to what remains behind the scenes in the day-to-day political events.

Suse Itzel accompanied the night action with a video camera and produced an artistic documentation of it. The beam of light from the flashlight, as it were, becomes the eye of the picture. Both the video image and the oil sketch look at us, promising exposure. The eye of the camera functions as a surveillance instrument and stands for the documentary proof of the occurrences at the crime scene. In Suse Itzel's video work the names of the lobbyists' offices, such as FACEBOOK or GOOGLE, flare up with their logos. The way the film was cut underlines the shared experience of a “risky endeavour”, which today in 2016 surely could not be repeated in this manner...



Silke Silkeborg painting in the EU quarter 2013 / film stills by Suse Itzel





*Installation view 2014/15*

GRC / Tessaloniki / MIET

*Exhibition:*

„Agora & Garbe –  
GESPENSTER DER  
GASTFREUNDSCHAFT”



*Installation view 2014/15*

Hamburg / SOOTBÖRN

*Exhibition:*

„Bühnenwelten –  
Scheinwelten”



*Installation view 2014/15*

Hamburg / PUPEL-CLUB

*Exhibition:*

„Eyeropa”

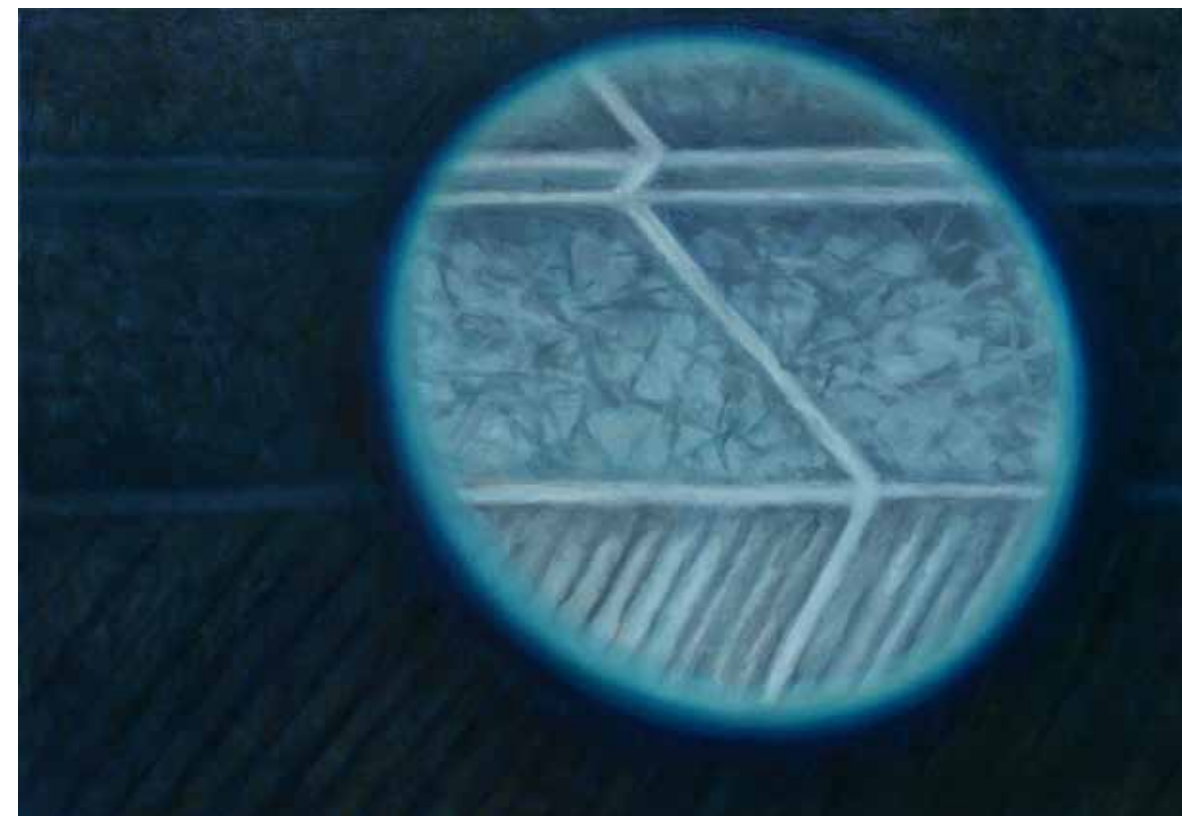


*Brüssel – Avenue de  
Cortenbergh 168 –  
BUSINESS EUROPE  
OFFICE*

82 x 115 cm

*oil on canvas*

2013



*Brüssel – Square de  
Meeurs 37 – BURSON  
MARSTELLER OFFICE*

82 x 115 cm

*oil on canvas,*

2013







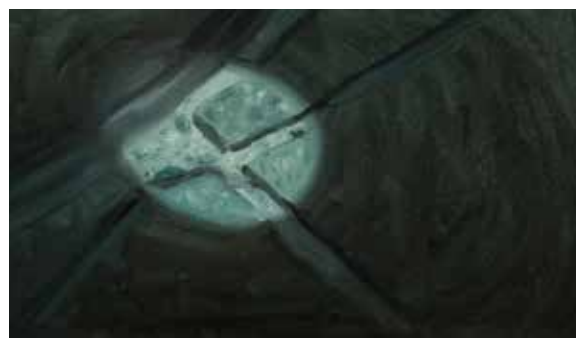
*BRÜSSEL FACEBOOK II OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL FACEBOOK OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL GOOGLE II OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL GOOGLE OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL PERNOD RICARD OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL FLEISCHMANN HILLARD II OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL FLEISCHMANN HILLARD OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL PERNOD RICARD II OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL BUSINESS EUROPE I OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL BUSINESS EUROPE II OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013



*BRÜSSEL BURSON MARSTELLER OFFICE*  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013

## LUCIFERASE LUMINESCENCE

2013-15

### EUROPA

The Firefly Project was an artistic-poetic exploration undertaken during the summer months of 2013 to 2015 in the context of artistic field research. In collaboration with German and Swiss biologists, Silke Silkeborg conducted research on the distribution of fireflies at different locations (Northern Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Germany) with the aim of capturing the firefly phenomenon in painting, directly on site and at night. In the process, she attempted to counteract the momentary nature of the experience, the “fleetingness of the lucid moment”, through the time-consuming transferal into painting. The enthusiasm for the small, vibrant, fugitive and particularly fragile firefly lights derives both from our visual biological preference for light in the dark and our curious pleasure in encountering and studying such occurrences beyond description or explanation. The wish to discover the dancing light signals of the courting fireflies arises from a desire for an experience only to be made in the dark. This artistic research resulted in a total of 39 small-format paintings and several drawings.

“There are plenty of reasons for being pessimistic, yet at the same time it is all the more necessary to open one’s eyes in the dark of night, to be unrelentingly in motion and to set out in search of fireflies.”

Georges Didi-Huberman

Right page: list of locations for firefly research 2013-15

Nr.	Breitengrad, Längengrad	Ort
1.	42.92, 10.90	/No.1 Gavorrano - Grosseto - Toscana, Italien/Italy, 2013
2.	42.92, 10.90	/No.3 Gavorrano - Grosseto - Toscana, Italien/Italy, 2013
3.	42.92, 10.90	/No.2 Gavorrano - Grosseto - Toscana, Italien/Italy, 2013
4.	42.92, 10.90	/No.4 Gavorrano - Grosseto - Toscana, Italien/Italy, 2013
5.	42.92, 10.90	/No.5 Gavorrano - Grosseto - Toscana, Italien/Italy, 2013
6.	42.92, 10.90	/No.6 Gavorrano - Grosseto - Toscana, Italien/Italy, 2013
7.	43.72, 11.22	/No.2 Battai - Florenz, Toscana, Italien/Italy, 2013
8.	43.72, 11.22	/No.1 Battai - Florenz, Toscana, Italien/Italy, 2013
9.	47.58, 8.27	/No.1 Achenberg - Bad Zurzach, Schweiz/Switzerland, 2013
10.	47.58, 8.27	/No.2 Achenberg - Bad Zurzach, Schweiz/Switzerland, 2013
11.	47.58, 8.27	/No.1 Aldrans - Innsbruck, Österreich/Austria, 2013
12.	47.58, 8.27	/No.2 Aldrans - Innsbruck, Österreich/Austria, 2013
13.	47.58, 8.27	/No.3 Aldrans - Innsbruck, Österreich/Austria, 2013
14.	47.46, 11.70	Achensee - Tirol - Oberösterreich/Austria, 2013
15.	47.73, 12.88	Bad Reichenhall - Berchtesgaden, Dt./Germany, 2013
16.	47.75, 13.95	/No.1 Almsee - Salzkammergut, Österreich/Austria, 2013
17.	47.75, 13.95	/No.2 Almsee - Salzkammergut, Österreich/Austria, 2013
18.	48.17, 16.20	Lainzer Tiergarten - Wien, Österreich/Austria, 2013
19.	48.78, 15.07	/No.1 Heidenreichstein - Waldviertel, Österreich/Austria, 2013
20.	48.78, 15.07	/No.2 Heidenreichstein - Waldviertel, Österreich/Austria, 2013
21.	48.92, 13.31	/No.1 Klingenbrunn - Bayr. Nationalpark, Dt./Germany, 2013
22.	48.92, 13.31	/No.2 Klingenbrunn - Bayr. Nationalpark, Dt./Germany, 2013
23.	49.07, 12.88	Viechtach - Niederbayern, Deutschland/Germany, 2013
24.	51.36, 14.84	/No.1 Hähnichen, Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2014
25.	51.36, 14.84	/No.4 Hähnichen, Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2014
26.	51.36, 14.84	/No.2 Hähnichen, Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2014
27.	51.36, 14.84	/No.3 Hähnichen, Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2014
28.	51.57, 12.76	/No.1 Trossin - Presseler Heidewald - Sachsen, Deutschland/G., 2014
29.	51.57, 12.76	/No.2 Trossin - Presseler Heidewald - Sachsen, Deutschland/G., 2014
30.	51.57, 12.76	/No.3 Trossin - Presseler Heidewald - Sachsen, Deutschland/G., 2014
31.	51.28, 12.36	/No.1 Wildpark - Leipzig, Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2014
32.	51.28, 12.36	/No.2 Wildpark - Leipzig, Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2014
33.	51.32, 12.34	Industriestrasse - Plagwitz, Leipzig, Dt./Germany, 2014
34.	51.23, 13.42	Diesbar-Seußlitz - Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2014
35.	51.26, 12.33	/No.1 Cospudener See - Leipzig, Sachsen, Dt./Germany, 2014
36.	51.26, 12.33	/No.2 Cospudener See - Leipzig, Sachsen, Dt./Germany, 2014
37.	51.26, 12.33	/No.3 Cospudener See - Leipzig, Sachsen, Dt./Germany, 2014
38.	51.32, 12.35	Rennbahn Leipzig - Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2015
39.	51.19, 11.87	Schloss Goseck - Sachsen, Deutschland/Germany, 2015





*Aldrans - Innsbruck / AT, No.1,  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013*



*Aldrans - Innsbruck / AT, No.2,  
25 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013*



*Almsee - Salzkammergut / AT, No.2,  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013*



*Almsee - Salzkammergut / AT, No.1,  
25 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013*



*Battai - Florenz / IT, No.3,  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013*



*Gavorrano - Grosseto - Toscana / IT, No.2,  
25 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013*



*Achenberg - Bad Zurzach / CH, No.1,  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013*



*Gavorrano - Grosseto - Toscana / IT, No.6,  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2013*



*Hänichen - Falkenberg, Sachsen / DE, No.1,  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2014*



*Hänichen - Falkenberg, Sachsen / DE, No.3,  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2014*

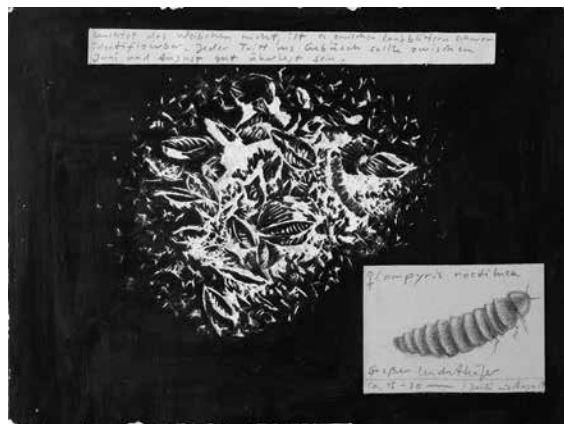


*Hänichen - Falkenberg, Sachsen / DE, No.2,  
19 x 33 cm, oil on wood, 2014*

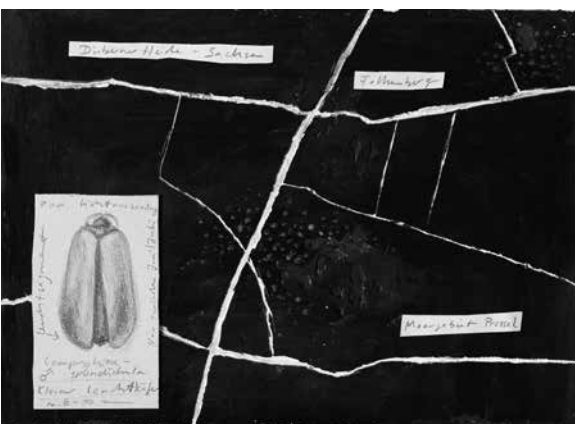




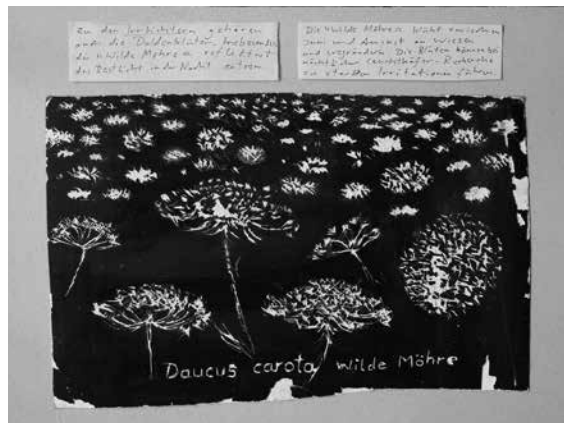
Exhibition view 2016: Zurich / Galerie der Stadtgärtnerei – "FIREFLIES!"  
 Right page: Fireflies on forest slope in Grosseto - Toscana / IT, 19 x 25 cm, oil on wood, 2013  
 Next page, left: Wildlife Park - Leipzig - Saxony / DE, No. 2, 19 x 25 cm, oil on wood, 2014



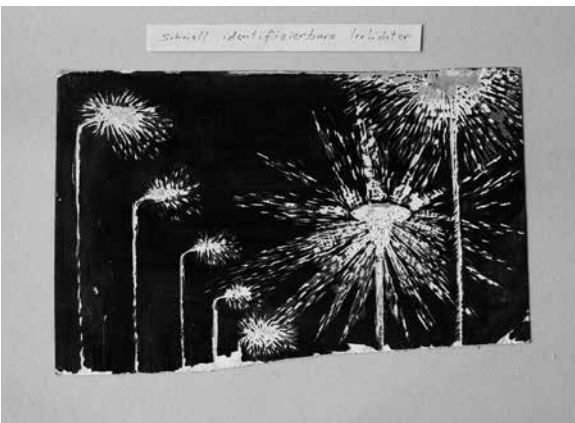
Firefly Research - Large Firefly No. 1, 21 x 29 cm, scratch drawing on scraperboard, 2015



Firefly Research - Large Firefly No. 2, 21 x 29 cm, scratch drawing on scraperboard, 2015



Firefly Research Irritation – Wild Carot, 21 x 29 cm, scratch drawing on scraperboard, 2015



Firefly Research Irritation – Street Lanterns, 21 x 29 cm, scratch drawing on scraperboard, 2015



