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# On Everyone's Lips

The Oral  
Cavity in Art  
and Culture

In collaboration with  
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HATJE  
CANTZ

ON EVERYONE'S LIPS

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# Oral Motif (Hi)stories

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# On Everyone's Lips

## Oral Motif (Hi)stories

**“The mouth is interesting because it is one of those places where the dry outside moves toward the slippery inside.”**

JENNY HOLZER

Uta Ruhkamp

Lips, tongue, and teeth—biting and tearing—eating, tasting, and licking—singing, whistling, and speaking—shouting, spewing, and spitting—breathing, aspirating, and smoking—laughing and crying, touching and feeling, as well as kissing, lust, and passion: the mouth and the oral cavity are an extremely appealing bodily zone, a true all-rounder. In both a literal and a metaphorical sense, all kinds of mouths and jaws have opened themselves up within the pictorial history of art and culture from antiquity to the present day. To systematically trace this thematic richness of the oral means to go on an exploratory tour through the inventory and complex range of functions of one's own oral cavity. Chapter by chapter, it becomes clear that the oral has written a whole series of motif (hi)stories, which the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg and this essay present in condensed form.<sup>1</sup>

A large part of the multifunctional oral cavity eludes the human gaze, which may well explain its long-standing appeal in the context of art and culture. It is a place of the unknown, the gateway to the hidden, to the interior of the body. Rainer Maria Rilke even spoke of a world: “Through all beings stretches the one space: World-innerspace.”<sup>2</sup> In Christian iconography, the metaphorical “world-innerspace” is the place of damnation, because in the medieval imagination it is hell that blazes inside the earth. This interior of the earth is an endless bodily interior, for the infernal gateway is a mouth that is wide open and from which a volcanic fire blazes, as the corresponding woodcuts in the block books from the fifteenth century impressively illustrate (pp. 40 and 41). The damned fall into the sea of flames of the Hellmouth, swim, stumble, and scream in eternal pain. The Old Testament descriptions of a hellish throat by Isaiah (Isaiah 5:14) and also by Job (Job 41:6–13), who tries to give the flame-spitting Leviathan a shape, as well as the Revelation of John in the New Testament (Revelation 20:10), may have “fired” the powerful images of the Hellmouth.<sup>3</sup> From the late Middle Ages onward, hell and its gullet have been an integral part of the depictions of the Last Judgment, while the pictorial theme of “Christ in Limbo” shows the Redeemer as he frees Adam and Eve and the prophets from the portal of hell. The latter of the two motifs is, like the tradition of Jonah and the big fish (Jonah 1:1–2:11), one of the rare pictorial motifs in which the monster's or fish's mouth gives freedom instead of devouring (pp. 50 and 52). In the Book of Jonah, it states that he is swallowed by a big fish and spat out again after three days. In the painting by Jan Brueghel the Elder (1597–98, p. 50), Jonah emerges from the fish's mouth with dignity and purification—no tearing teeth, no sweeping gestures. The turbulent sea alone reflects Jonah's emotional journey.

With the sheer boundless imagination of Hieronymus Bosch and his successors, the depiction of the Hellmouth changed in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The wide-open mouth no longer holds a flaming infernal soup enveloping its sinners but rather functions as a kind of entrance gate, with a pandemoniac landscape unfolding in its surroundings. This apocalyptic, fire-entwined scenery is densely populated by sadistic, devilish personnel—fantastic, imaginative tormentors with an insatiable lust for torture. Decisive is that, in the course of this development, the animal Hellhead is transformed into a human head.<sup>4</sup> The painting *Christ in Limbo* from the direct succession of Hieronymus Bosch (ca. 1520) underscores this central significance by the positioning of the jawless head-like portal in the foreground (pp. 42–43).<sup>5</sup> Enveloped in light, Christ enters the scene through a kind of trapdoor. The same entry scene can be found in Pieter Huys's rendition of the subject (ca. 1560), whereby here the oversized head now has hands, arms, and legs. In the case of the former, it opens its mouth to form a portal, while the true inferno of agony takes place in its surroundings. As late as about 1700, Bosch's legacy continued to have an impact, for Egbert van Heemskerck the Younger has Martin Luther, condemned for his Reformation theses, ride on a skeletal creature toward an anthropomorphic Hellmouth, where diabolical guards await him (pp. 44–45).

Saint Anthony, who as a hermit in the desert tried to resist demonic temptations, had to undergo very similar tortures. The pictorial theme of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* is iconographically closely interwoven with the motif of the mouth and its potential for aggression, be it, for example, the corresponding panel of the *Isenheim altarpiece* by Matthias Grünewald or the print by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (fig. 1, p. 54). While in Grünewald's painting the seducers and tormentors maltreat the saint with sharp teeth and monstrous mouths—a motif variant taken up by Max Ernst in 1945 (fig. 2)—in his print, Pieter Bruegel transfers the idea of the Hellhead to the martyrdom of Anthony.<sup>6</sup> In the print by Bruegel the Elder, the tongue whirls far out of the mouth, with the openings of the body acting as gates through which the temptations and sinful thoughts that contaminate the heart enter.<sup>7</sup> This metaphorical attack on the interior of the head culminates in Joos van Craesbeeck's painting *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (ca. 1650, p. 55), in which the tormentors crowd into the mouth and head in droves.

Similar to the Hellheads, the Roman *Bocca della Verità* (Mouth of Truth), first documented in 1485, is a “head shape,” the mouth of which is considered the place where truth is detected. According to legend, the marble face on the outer façade of the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin is said to have the power to decide over truth or lie through a potential bite. In the eighteenth century, Michele Rocca linked the moment of *veritas* with the story of a suspected adulteress who cunningly instructs her lover to wear a costume and kiss her on her way to the “mouth decision,” so that she can safely claim to have been kissed only by a fool and her husband (pp. 58–59). In reference to the Roman original, Rocca gave his *Bocca della verità* human traits. To this day, this antique lie detector is a tourist magnet. In 2007, Harun Farocki in his film *Transmission* (p. 60), which examines profane and sacral rituals, showed how people attempt to reach spiritual levels through physical actions, although the “Mouth of Truth” has in the meantime become more than anything else a popular motif for photos and selfies.

## All Around the Mouth

When approaching the mouth from an anatomical perspective, the lips are the first visible element. They define the shape of the mouth, are highly sensory and sensual. Especially the predominantly red lips of women have an erotic signal effect. For Man Ray, it is the lips of Lee Miller (1932–34 / 1970, pp. 72–73), for Salvador Dalí the lips of Mae West (1934–38, p. 74), and for Andy Warhol those of Marilyn Monroe (1962, fig. 3) that inspired their imagery. Man Ray's lips, which fill the picture and hover surrealistically over the Paris Observatory, are a homage and at the same time a farewell to his life companion Lee Miller. Dalí, in turn, based on his watercolor *Mae West's Face which May Be Used as a Surrealist Apartment* (1934–35), developed from 1937 onward sofa variations of Mae West's lips on commission from Edward James. Meanwhile, in the year of Marilyn Monroe's death (1962), Andy Warhol separated the mouth from his portrait of the actress, which became an icon of Pop Art and is based on a commercial photograph taken in 1953 for the film *Niagara*. In his typical mass-media style, Warhol repeated the stylized mouth of the celebrated “sex symbol” 168 times on a diptych. Forty years later, David LaChapelle restaged Warhol's portrait of Marilyn with the transsexual model Amanda Lepore (2002, p. 70) whose appearance, shaped by numerous cosmetic operations, is particularly captivating because of the greatly enlarged lips. In a deliberate self-dramatization, the cult of the red kissing mouth is taken to the extreme in accordance with the beauty mania triggered by the media—optical identity as a construct.

With a similarly pop-cultural advertising aesthetic, Marilyn Minter has devoted herself since the 1990s to related constructs from a feminist perspective, in order to break with the male-monopolized view of female lips (pp. 77, 162, and 184). She explores the question of what happens to images from a pornographic context that degrade women by transferring them into her photographic and painterly visual worlds. In this way, she reflects

the male point of view and at the same time transforms it into a female one, which ironizes, but also self-confidently fetishizes, the lips. This deconstruction of the lips as object of desire was presented in a different form in Anna Mendieta's series *Glass on Body Imprints* as early as 1972, and later in Pipilotti Rist's video work *Open My Glade (Flatten)* from 2000 (p. 83). Her means of thwarting the decorative role of the lips and female stereotypes is deformation. In Ana Mendieta's work, face and mouth pressed against a pane of glass are both transformed into an organic mass, which underscores not only her demand for physical self-assertion, but also her goal of disembodiment in the sense of breaking down gender specificity.<sup>8</sup> Pipilotti Rist intensified this defeminization effect by smearing the lipstick and breaking with the image of women and their red mouths as a sales-promoting advertising medium. As if out of a glass prison, she pushed this message out into the public space when she presented *Open My Glade (Flatten)* in 2017 on sixty screens in Times Square in New York.

Bruce Nauman was also concerned with the deformative potential of the mouth when he began working with his own body in the late 1960s. In *Pulling Mouth* from 1969 (p. 84), he used his hands to tear open his mouth in various directions or to deform it, creating an interesting motif-historical parallel to Pieter Huys's *Hellhead*. "The idea of making faces had to do with thinking about the body as something you can manipulate. That's really all the faces were about—just making a bunch of arbitrary faces."<sup>9</sup> These variations of the mouth did not become a motif only with the photographic and video works of Bruce Nauman, but were, for example, already staged photographically in a series by the Bauhaus student Kurt Kranz as early as 1931 (p. 85).

### Baring Teeth

When the mouth opens, the teeth present themselves. In the mid-twentieth century, they leave the mouth as dentures or prostheses and gain intrinsic artistic value, initially primarily as objets trouvés. The French saying *Croquer la vie à pleines dents* means to enjoy life to the fullest. Arman refers to the original meaning of these words with his "accumulation" *La vie à pleines dents* (Living Life to the Fullest, 1960, p. 97) for which he collected worn dental prostheses. In keeping with his typical formalization process, he cleaned them and presented them in a wooden box, which he closed with a sheet of plexiglass, creating an aesthetic "allover" of partial dentures on a black background. Despite the decontextualization, the impression of absence remains, of a human trace left by the wearers of the prostheses. Arman accepts the aspect of transience as a given, which he disrupts through the humorous, almost sarcastic title. He quotes Ambrose Bierce: "Humour is the politeness of despair." He explains, "I don't feel that kind of despair," adding that "the presence of death can be found in my work. But not with an attitude of despair—rather with one of calm acceptance."<sup>10</sup> In contrast to Arman, Daniel Spoerri decided to forgo the neutralizing step of alienation when he acquired a sales stand for used dental prostheses at the Saint-Ouen flea market in Paris in 1961. The sales sign gives the work its title, *Achat de Vieux Dentiers* (Old Dentures for Sale, p. 96), while a small slip of paper invites visitors to try on the dentures. As a wind instrument, the trumpet at the top of the fence adds a humorous note to the ensemble of dentures and refers to another ability of the oral cavity. Although the question regarding the fate of the dentures is present in Spoerri's work, it also has a socio-documentary value for him, since it bears witness to a bizarre form of trade that was already subsiding in 1961.<sup>11</sup> In the same decade, Richard Hamilton had already entered the age of the electric toothbrush with *The Critic Laughs* (1968-71, p. 98). In the 1960s, Hamilton was preoccupied with the market-leading design products of the Braun company. When his son gave him a sugar-molded set of teeth as a souvenir, he placed it as a head on his Braun electric toothbrush, as can be seen in a lithograph from 1968. In the edition initiated by René Block,

Hamilton replaced the brand name with his own. The toothbrush thus becomes a Hamilton product, but with a title that refers to a previous work by Jasper Johns, *The Critic Smiles* (1959, fig. 4), a toothed toothbrush that humorously questions the relevance of art-critical evaluations.

Beyond the objet trouvé, plastics used in dental medicine and artificial teeth have developed into an artistic material in works by artists ranging from Richard Hamilton and Rona Pondick to Fabian Marcaccio, Anselmo Fox, and Mithu Sen. Rona Pondick has been working with body fragments since the mid-1980s. She is interested in involving the imagination of the viewer in the reception process of her works, since she is not concerned with a narrative but rather with the creation of projection surfaces. In this sense, the fragmentary shifts into the surreal in her installation *Little Bathers* (1990-91, fig. 17, p. 100), when she reduces the "face" of an anthropomorphic mass of five hundred pink "head-balls" to a broadly distorted mouth with yellowish teeth. "It was around 1990. Someone took me to see a show of Renoir's *Bathers* and I hated it. There's this use of pink and it's supposed to be seductive and sensual and it put my teeth on edge . . . I thought, 'I'm going to do a piece that captures this' and that's where *Little Bathers* came from."<sup>12</sup> The proverbial feeling of unease ("teeth on edge") triggers a process of motif transformation in Rona Pondick's work, which turns the traditional male desire to depict the female body into an absurd and threatening form. The possible sexual level of interpretation of the *Little Bathers* in terms of the fear of castration (*vagina dentata*) described by Sigmund Freud is, however, only one aspect among others: "I was interested in symbolic and metaphoric interpretations of teeth. We eat with our teeth, they are a symbol of appetite—and they have sexual connotations. They are part of us, and we leave them behind when we die."<sup>13</sup>

Here, Rona Pondick summarizes a kind of universal character of teeth, to which Mithu Sen in her generation adds several levels. For her, they not only connect humans and animals, but also break down boundaries of gender and origin. With its round form, her "tooth landscape" *Phantom Pain 2* (2018, p. 94) picks up the idea of infinity. Mithu Sen uses teeth like an alphabet which formulates a universal language that knows no barriers of understanding. In this sense, the titular phantom pain is not only a personal pain, but a social pain that still has an aftereffect even though its cause has been "eliminated."

### Lip Service

In addition to the eyes, the mouth is the most important bearer of mimic expression on the face, for, through its shape and opening, it can convey emotional registers such as laughter, smiling, crying, screaming, amazement, tiredness, tension, and happiness, which can be read from the corners of the mouth.<sup>14</sup> In 1806, Charles Bell assumed that God had created the mouth purely to express human emotions.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, the more than fifty character heads by Franz Xaver Messerschmidt<sup>16</sup> are of decisive importance, especially since they were created at the time of the studies of Johann Caspar Lavater and Franz Anton Mesmer, when the face was analyzed as a mirror of the soul and character. The wide-open mouth of the sculpture *Character Head - The Yawner* (ca. 1775, p. 104) reveals the teeth and tongue, as well as the uvula. The tongue is slightly raised, which is rather untypical for a yawning person, so that the formal closeness to the scream and the picture type of the *Anima dannata* (damned soul) is all the greater if one compares it with the eponymous sculpture by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1619, p. 284).<sup>17</sup> Whereas Messerschmidt's bust *Locked-Up Grief* (after 1770) turns the corners of the mouth downward, the head *The Artist as He Imagined Himself Laughing* (1777-81, fig. 5) is a virtually unprecedented self-portrayal in the liberated state of beaming laughter.

In the history of art, laughing had a more difficult time than crying or screaming.<sup>18</sup> In the Old Testament, Luke states: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh" (Luke,



Fig. 1 Matthias Grünewald, *Saint Anthony* (detail), ca. 1512-16, oil on wood, third front side right from the Isenheim altarpiece, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar

6:21). It was only from the thirteenth century onward that the blessed began to smile more often in pictorial history, such as, for example, *The Wise Virgins* on the Paradise portal of the Magdeburg Cathedral (fig. 6). In 1435, Leon Battista Alberti depicted laughing and crying as equivalent in the context of history painting and referred here to the theory of affects in antiquity.<sup>19</sup> In the modern era, artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti, and Jusepe de Ribera were concerned with studies of affects, which were mainly used to render pain and crying. Laughter is to be found above all in genre painting, especially in the Netherlands. These depictions have nothing in common with blissful laughter, however, but are usually of a moralizing and classifying nature, since jovial and foolish exuberance was reserved for the lower classes, who indulged in alcohol consumption, flirtations, or other pleasures. *La Bohémienne* or *The Gypsy Girl* (1625) by Frans Hals, a young woman with inviting cleavage and a seductive smile, is attributed to this category. While in the seventeenth century a smile was still forced, contemptuous, or bitter in upmarket Parisian circles, by 1750 it was already sweet, lovely, pleasant, friendly, and virtuous in the age of sensibility.<sup>20</sup> In his graphic works, the Prussian court artist Johann Gottfried Schadow was preoccupied throughout his entire life with multiethnic physiology studies, which together form a didactic atlas of humankind. In 1825, he created a print on which he dedicated himself to laughter at all ages (p. 103).

In the nineteenth century, diagnosed hysteria, which for many women led to admission to a mental hospital, oscillated between crying and laughing. Sam Taylor-Johnson's video work *Hysteria* (1999, p. 105) illustrates this fluid transition, but paradoxically without any sound. She focuses on the expressive activity of the mouth, which repeatedly shows the tilting moment between joy and pain. Francesco Clemente also addressed this pair of opposites in his work *Smile Now Cry Later* (1998, pp. 106-07), in which he reduced the faces of his figures to a crescent-shaped mouth, the angle of which he had pointing either upward or downward. At the same time, the painting suggests the communicative level of the mouth with



Max Ernst, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, 1945, oil on canvas, 109 × 129 cm, Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg

Fig. 2

the invitation to "smile now" and "cry later." The eponymous proverb, which encourages the enjoyment of life, was derived from the tattoo of a friend of Francesco Clemente. From Messerschmidt to Schadow, from Taylor-Johnson to Clemente, as well as the masks of Gauri Gill's *Acts of Appearance* series (2015-ongoing, pp. 108 and 175), the mimic abilities of the mouth develop into a form that basically reflects the abstracted expressions of the smileys of the 1980s and the emojis of our digital culture invented in the late 1990s.

### Toothache & Dental Commerce

We are born without teeth, the first teething is painful, and this only to soon thereafter lose these milk teeth, under which we "suffered" so much. This is followed by the lifelong struggle for tooth preservation. The first references to Apollonia of Alexandria as the protector against dental disorders are found in the thirteenth century; many centuries later, she became the patron saint of dentistry and was canonized in 1634. The *Historia ecclesiastica* or *History of the Church*, written and completed by Eusebius of Caesarea in 325 AD, contains the earliest record of the martyrdom of Apollonia (Book 6, Chapter 41). In the course of the persecution of Christians in Alexandria in 249 AD, her teeth were broken out by blows to the jaw. Even when she was threatened with the stake, she remained true to her faith and threw herself into the blazing flames. Over the centuries, the breaking out turned into a painful extraction of every single tooth. Francesco Granacci depicts the painful moment of her martyrdom, which he underscores by the placelessness of his scene (1530, p. 120). More common is the portrait of Apollonia with her attributes, forceps and tooth, as with Rogier van der Weyden (ca. 1445-50, p. 122) and Francisco de Zurbarán (ca. 1636, p. 121). Andy Warhol transferred the pictorial motif into the twentieth century when he produced a series of prints in 1984, for which he used a depiction of Saint Apollonia attributed to Piero della Francesca (ca. 1455-60, figs. 7, 8).

The need for a patron saint of dentistry and protector against dental disorders can be explained by the genre painting of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, which gives an idea of the "dental" practice and its carnal character during this period. Not only the crude treatments and the charlatanism of the wandering tooth extractors are of artistic and cultural interest here, but also the triumphant, painful, and humiliating experiences that can be observed on the faces of the tooth extractors, patients, and onlookers. In Dutch or Flemish painting in particular, there are numerous illustrations of tooth breakers, tooth pullers, and quacks, like those by Jan Steen (1651, p. 126) and David Teniers the Younger (ca. 1645-50, p. 125).



Fig. 16 Rona Pondick, *Dirt Head* (detail), 1997, earth, wax, thermoplastic, 400 unique pieces, 7.6 x 7.6 x 8.9 cm each, courtesy the artist, Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, London / Paris / Salzburg, Marc Straus, New York, and Sonnabend Gallery, New York

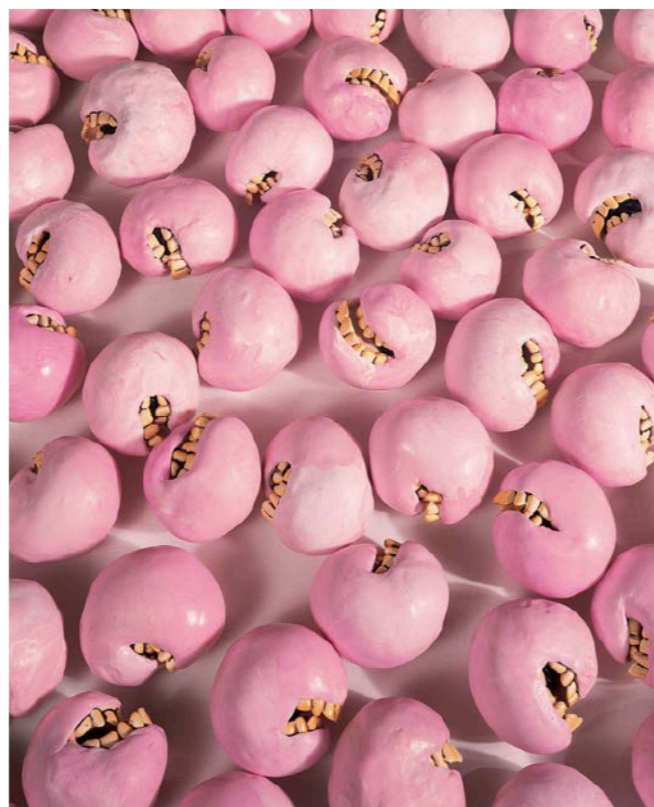


Fig. 17 Rona Pondick, *Little Bathers* (detail), 1990–91, plastic, 500 unique pieces, each 6.4 x 12.1 x 10.2 cm, Marc and Livia Straus Family Collection, New York

and in his *Vox Box* (1963, p. 309), Tilson thus places exclamation marks in the open mouth and alludes twice to its verbal power as an oral cavity. Since he referred to the Roman *Bocca della Verità* in a work called *Bocca* (Mouth, 1961), immediately preceding *Vox Box*, this reference also seems to be present here, although he also references a robot translator from the science-fiction film *The Man from Planet X* (1951), which receives and translates speech by means of a box strapped to its body.

Anselmo Fox approaches the voice from the physical side and, for his bronze *portavoce* (Voice Carrier, 2000, p. 314), which translates as “carrier of the voice,” he molded the inside of the oral cavity to allow the viewer to look into its depths right up to the vocal chords. Meanwhile, Kemang Wa Lehulere had his dentures molded and multiplied in order to express, in *Once Bitten, Twice Shy*, his criticism of the state of the South African school system (2010, p. 310). In individual crates built from old school benches, these duplicate dentures each hold a gilded version of the South African constitution between their teeth. They act as symbolic advocates for the longed-for freedom and peace of the rainbow nation, but remain silent, wherein lies the overall message of the installation—a silent accusation against the post-apartheid government and its failure.

In the twelve photographs of *Word* (1971, p. 312), Natalia LL deals with the pronunciation of one letter at a time, the sum of which results in a word that, to this day, only she knows. The repetition of the series of images creates a twenty-four-part work, a form of visual poetry that is basically related to lip-reading. In the 1960s and 1970s, this nonverbal form of linguistic investigation found its audio equivalent in video art. In his work *Lip Sync* (1969, p. 317), Bruce Nauman films a close-up of his mouth with a camera turned 180 degrees, creating a strange speech situation: “I made a series of videotapes, in which I used the camera as a mirror by watching myself in the monitor. There was one tape called *Lip Sync* that had the image upside-down and the sound of the repeated text, ‘Lip sync,’ going alternately in and out of synchronization with

the lip movement.”<sup>38</sup> Three years later, Samuel Beckett wrote *Not I* (1972) which premiered that same year at the Forum Theater in Lincoln Center, New York. The monologue was performed at the London Theatre (1973) and in the BBC film version (1977) by Billie Whitelaw, whereby the theatrical revolution lay in the fact that, on stage as well as in the film, her mouth alone was illuminated, making it the actual main protagonist. Related to this type of work is Vito Acconci’s video piece *Open Book* (1974, p. 316), a close-up of his mouth, which he tries to keep open while speaking, so that, although the contents of his monologue are difficult to understand, the verbalization activity of the mouth becomes “readable” like an open book. He assured: “I’m not closed, I’m open. Come in . . . You can do anything with me. Come in. I won’t stop you. I can’t close you off. I won’t close you in, I won’t trap you. It’s not a trap.” As the mouth becomes increasingly dry, the act of speaking becomes more difficult, so that Acconci apologizes to the viewer for occasionally closing his mouth, as if he were not keeping his promise. Last but not least, Tony Oursler, who in the 1980s liberated video from the screen and projected it onto humanoid objects, shows such a focus, for example in works such as *Voidvoid* (2009, p. 318). In the middle of a large black spot, behind which there is a monitor, a mouth in close-up likewise emits quiet sounds.

### The Tooth of Time

All our lives we are gnawed on by the tooth of time. Teeth define the stages of our life from the first to the last tooth. Louis-Léopold Boilly captured this dental bracket of life in about 1826 with two small paintings depicting an intimate family situation, *La Première Dent* (The First Tooth) and *La Dernière Dent* (The Last Tooth) (p. 320). In the first of the two paintings, the mother carefully puts her finger in the baby’s mouth to feel the first tooth. The entire attention of the group of figures is directed at this moment. The same is true of the diptych’s counterpart, in which the mouth of an old woman is conceived as the center of the picture, grasping the toothless

oral cavity while holding her last tooth in the other hand. Surrounded by all generations, the cycle of life is depicted not only in the dialogue with the second tableau, but also within the picture itself.

As described in the chapters on teeth and decoration and on toothaches, tooth preservation and replacement were a question of social status. The touching work *Old Hawker Woman* (ca. 1645, p. 324), attributed to Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, depicts an old woman, equipped with her goods, gazing out of the picture, marked by her hard life, and revealing the poor condition of her decaying teeth. Then as now, teeth are the indicator of our living conditions, as two photographs (1997–98) from Boris Mikhailov’s *Case History* series illustrate. They depict the disastrous condition of the teeth of two men who became the social victims of the entry of capitalism in Kharkov, Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Whether in life or postmortem, our teeth characterize us, contain our DNA, and are used in forensic dentistry. In his *Identifizierung durch Gebiß* (Identification by Dentition) (1971), Daniel Spoerri processes the story of a woman found

murdered, whose unique dentition was published so that she could be identified by it within a few days.

The skull and its teeth are the strongest symbol of transience and the primary motif of many vanitas images, for they outlive us. Aelbert Jansz. van der Schoor’s *Vanitas Still Life* (1640–72, p. 336) depicts six skulls and a lower jawbone from different perspectives, offering insights into all areas of the oral cavity and its remaining inventory and thus appearing as an anatomical study. Rona Pondick’s installation *Dirt Head* (fig. 16, p. 337), created in 1997, is a contemporary counterpart to this vanitas motif. It concludes the stories of the oral motif sketched here and in the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, which began with a metaphorical journey into the interior of the earth and the body. Her *Little Bathers* (fig. 17, p. 300) have now been transformed into four hundred “earth faces” that threaten to dissolve into the monumental pile of earth on which they lie. Against the backdrop of German history, this installation evokes images of the Holocaust on the one hand, while on the other the broad grins of their “earth faces” create a humorous note that makes them seem immortal.

1 Hartmut Böhme and Beate Slominski have presented the scientific and cultural-historical dimension of the oral cavity for the first time in the following fundamental publications: Hartmut Böhme and Beate Slominski, eds., *Das Orale: Die Mundhöhle in Kulturgeschichte und Zahnmedizin* (Munich, 2013); Hartmut Böhme et al., eds., *Das Dentale: Faszination des oralen Systems in Wissenschaft und Kultur* (Berlin et al., 2016).

2 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Werke II*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), p. 113. For the English translation, see <https://publitng.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft8h4n55x&chunk.id=40e53348toc.depth=1&toc.id=40e53348toc.ucpress.all> URIs accessed in August 2020.

3 As early as about 1000, this motif began to disseminate in Northern European manuscripts. See Michael Philipp, “Die Höhle im Kopf, der Kopf in der Höhle: Zu einem Motiv der Bosch-Nachfolge,” in *Verkehrte Welt: Das Jahrhundert von Hieronymus Bosch*, ed. Franz Wilhelm Kaiser and Michael Philipp, exh. cat. Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg (Munich, 2016), pp. 61–75, esp. p. 61.

4 Michael Philipp describes the Hell-heads as an element of shock. *Ibid.*, pp. 64 and 66–67.

5 Infrared images have shown that there are overpaintings of figures in the foreground. See Michael Philipp, *Abgründe: Monster der Unterwelt*, in Kaiser/Philipp 2016 (see note 3), pp. 107–19, esp. p. 114.

6 In 1945, Max Ernst transferred Grünewald’s interpretation of the pictorial theme to Surrealism, while Jeanne Mammen exposed Buddha to demonic temptations as early as 1903; see fig. 2 and p. 57.

7 Cf. Michael Philipp, “Die Höhle im Kopf, der Kopf in der Höhle: Zu einem Motiv der Bosch-Nachfolge,” in Kaiser/Philipp 2016 (see note 3), p. 70.

8 Cf. Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Against the Body: Interpreting Ana Mendieta,” in *Ana Mendieta: Traces*, ed. Stephanie Rosenthal, exh. cat. Hayward Gallery, London, and Museum der Moderne, Salzburg (Ostfildern, 2014), pp. 26–37.

9 Christopher Cordes, “Talking with Bruce Nauman,” in *Bruce Nauman*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Baltimore and London, 2002), pp. 285–309, esp. p. 294.

10 Quoted in Jill Carrick, *Nouveau Réalisme, 1960s France, and the Neo-avant-garde: Topographies of Chance and Return* (Surrey and Burlington, 2010), pp. 89–91.

11 See *ibid.*, p. 90.

12 Quoted in Rona Pondick, exh. cat. Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, Paris, Sonnabend Gallery, New York, and Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Bologna et al. (New York, 2002), p. 58.

13 Quoted in Rona Pondick, *Werke / Werke 1986–2008*, exh. cat. Internationale Sommerakademie für Bildende Kunst, Salzburg, Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, Paris/Salzburg, and Sonnabend Gallery, New York (Salzburg, 2008), p. 12.

14 See the essays by Andreas Bettin, Jürgen Müller, and Horst Bredekamp / Kolja Thurner in this volume, pp. 282–91, 112–17, and 62–69.

15 See Charles Bell, *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting* (London, 1806).

16 For more on the number of heads, see Maria Pötzl-Malkova, *Franz Xaver Messerschmidt: Monografie und Werkverzeichnis* (Vienna, 2015), pp. 114–28.

17 In the late eighteenth century, the head was described as *The Yawner*. See Marika Bückling, “Der Gähner / The Yawner,” in *Die phantastischen Köpfe des Franz Xaver Messerschmidt / The Fantastic Heads of Franz Xaver Messerschmidt*, ed. Marika Bückling, exh. cat. Liebighaus Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt am Main (Munich, 2006), pp. 158–60, esp. pp. 154ff. For more on the proximity of yawns and screams as motifs, see the essay by Jürgen Müller in this volume, pp. 112–17.

18 See the essay by Andreas Bettin in this volume, pp. 282–91.

19 See Ulrich Rem, “Zur Geschichtlichkeit des Lachens im Bild,” in August Nitschke et al., *Überschendes Lachen, gefordertes Weinen* (Vienna et al., 2009), pp. 641–76, esp. p. 667.

20 For more on the Parisian revolution of the smile, see Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 1ff.

21 See Richard Barnett, *The Smile Stealers: The Fine and Foul Art of Dentistry* (London, 2017), pp. 44–45.

22 See *ibid.*, pp. 90–91.

23 See the essay by Roland Garve in this volume, pp. 156–61.

24 *Ibid.*

25 See <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/7009/>.

26 Peter Weibel, *Mediendichtung* (Vienna, 1982), p. 55 [translated].

27 “Teresa Margolles,” *Narcopolitics*, February 23, 2011, <http://narcopolitics.blogspot.com/2011/02/teresa-margolles.html>.

28 See the essay by Hartmut Böhme in this volume, pp. 26–37.

29 See Orna Curjalnik, “Being and Having an Identity: Catherine Ople,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 14, no. 3 (London, 2013), pp. 239–44, esp. pp. 241–43.

30 A frequent motif, moreover, is the philosopher hungry for truth, nourished by a stream of milk from the breasts of truth.

31 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Padua, 1625), pp. 94–95 [translated].

32 See Jenelle Porter, “Anti-Tapestry” in *Second Languages: Reading Piotr Ukiński*, ed. Donna Wingate and Marc Joseph Berg (Ostfildern, 2014), pp. 46–61, esp. pp. 54ff.

33 Cf. Kathrin Baumstark, “Entscheidungen – Tugenden und Laster,” in Kaiser/Philipp 2016 (see note 3), pp. 121–41, esp. pp. 121–22.

34 “Bernhard Martin: Ein Leben ohne Abgründe wäre uninspirierend,” *Art Berlin*, n.d., <https://www.artberlin.de/bernhard-martin/> [translated].

35 See Regina Deckers, “Der Drache in Mythologie und Kunst,” in *Monster: Fantastische Bilderwelten zwischen Grauen und Komik*, exh. cat. Germanisches Nationalmuseum (Nuremberg, 2015), pp. 61–85, esp. p. 67.

36 See Dantel Burger, “Die Bestie Mensch im Wolfspeiz: Werwölfe oder die performative Wende der Skulptur,” in *Franz Erhard Walther: Objekte benutzen*, ed. Peter Weibel (Cologne, 2014), pp. 5–18, esp. p. 13. Forthcoming in English: *Franz Erhard Walther: Objects to Use* (Cologne, 2021).

37 See *ibid.*, p. 306.

38 See Birgit Ulrike Münch, “Wo seyd ihr Kinder, wo? Spielarten des Kinderspieler-Motivs zwischen Mythologie, Schwarzer Pädagogik und unerfüllter Mutterschaft,” in *Nuremberg 2015* (see note 35), pp. 295–303, esp. p. 293.

39 See the essay by Hartmut Böhme in this volume, pp. 26–37.

40 See the essay by Marcus Stiglegger in this volume, pp. 88–93.

41 See Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Das Werk des Edward Munch* (Berlin, 1894), pp. 17–20.

42 See the essay by Hartmut Böhme in this volume, pp. 26–37.

43 See Veronika Schmeer, “Vom Zombie zum Dandy: Die erstaunliche Karriere des Grafen Dracula,” in *Nuremberg 2015* (see note 35), pp. 255–79, esp. p. 264.

44 See Anna Großkopf, “Kuss und Kunst: Eine Einführung,” in *Kuss: Von Rodin bis Bob Dylan*, ed. Tobias Hoffmann and Anna Großkopf, exh. cat. Bröhan Museum, Berlin (Cologne, 2017), pp. 8–53, esp. p. 17.

45 For more on the motif of the scream, see the essays by Andreas Bettin and Jürgen Müller in this volume, pp. 282–91.

46 See Doris Gerstl, “Engel und Teufel: Apriori von Schönheit und Hässlichkeit,” in *Nuremberg 2015* (see note 35), pp. 415–27, and 62–69.

47 See Katrien Lichtert, “Adriaen Brouwer: Master of Emotions,” in *Adriaen Brouwer: Master of Emotions*, ed. Katrien Lichtert, exh. cat. Museum Oudeaarde de Vlaamse Ardennen, Oudeaarde (Amsterdam, 2018), pp. 79–97, esp. pp. 83ff.

48 See the essay by Andreas Bettin in this volume, pp. 282–91.

49 David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* [1992], 4th ed. (London, 2002), p. 48.

50 See Margit Brehm, “Keep trying to get in not OUT: Paul Thek in the Context of American Art 1964–67,” in *Paul Thek: Artist’s Artist*, ed. Harald Falckenberg and Peter Weibel (London, 2009), pp. 70–81, esp. pp. 76ff.

51 Christian Marclay, in Rahman Khazam, “Jumpcut Jockey,” *The Wire* 195 (May 2000), p. 28.

52 See Peter Weibel, “Franz Erhard Walther oder die performative Wende der Skulptur,” in *Franz Erhard Walther: Objekte benutzen*, ed. Peter Weibel (Cologne, 2014), pp. 5–18, esp. p. 13. Forthcoming in English: *Franz Erhard Walther: Objects to Use* (Cologne, 2021).

53 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 12 [translated].

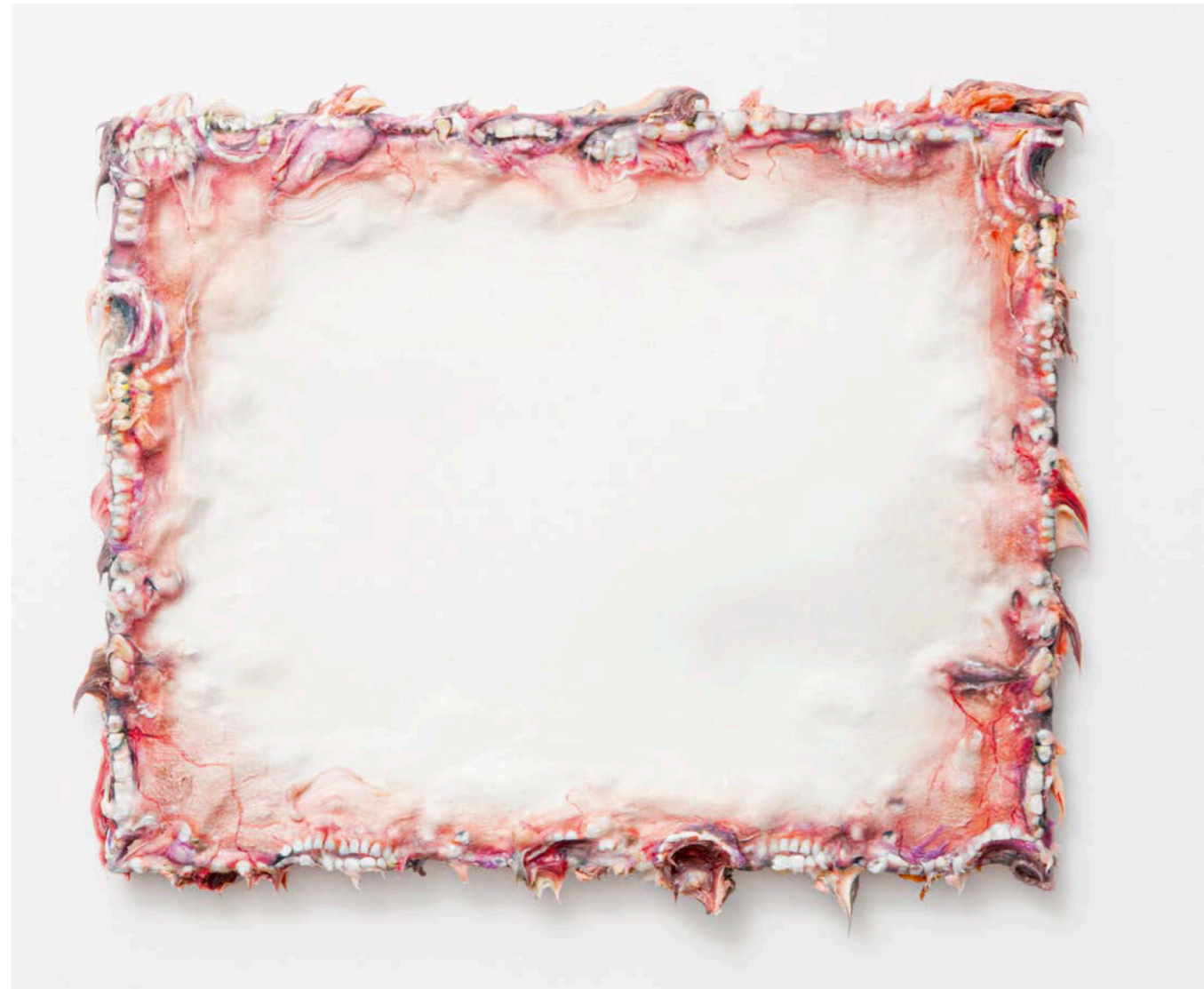
54 See Martin Creed et al., eds., *Martin Creed: Works* (London, 2010), p. XVII.

55 See Marcus Terentius Varro, *De re rustica*, 1.1.

56 Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination* (London, 1977), p. 209.

57 See “Where does it all end? Sarah Lucas interviewed by Jan van Adrichem,” *Parkett* 45 (1994), pp. 86–89.

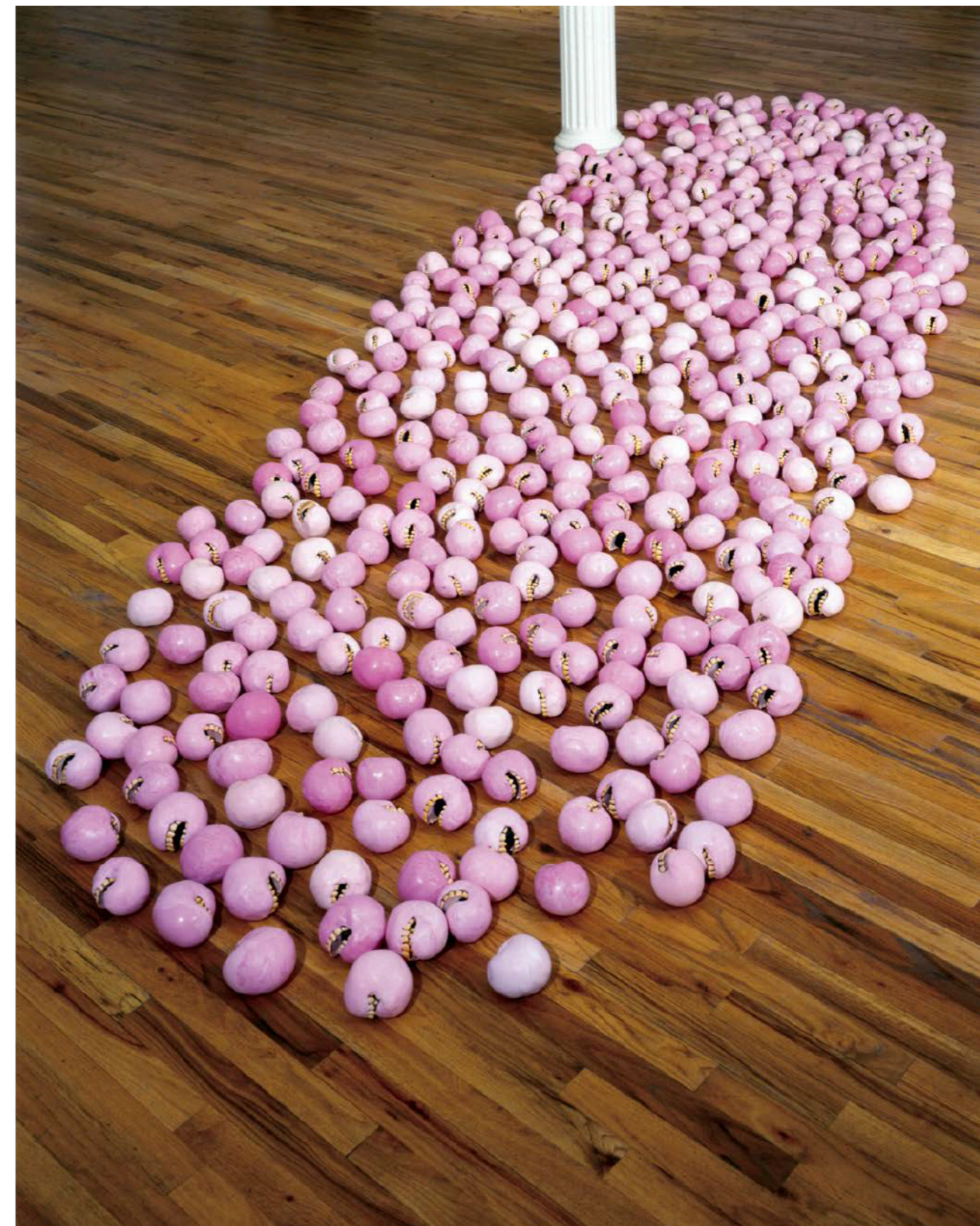
58 Christopher Cordes, “Talking with Bruce Nauman,” in *Bruce Nauman*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Baltimore and London, 2002), pp. 285–309, esp. p. 295.



**Fabian Marcaccio**

*Rage-Frame Paintant 2, 2009*  
Pigmented ink on canvas, aluminum, alkyd, paint, silicone  
81 x 97 x 8 cm

Courtesy Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin



**Rona Pondick**

*Little Bathers, 1990-91*  
Plastic, 500 unique pieces  
Each 6.4 x 12.1 x 10.2 cm

Marc and Livia Straus Family Collection, New York

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**\* Aelbert Jansz. van der Schoor**

*Vanitas Still Life, 1640-72*  
Oil on canvas  
63.5 x 73 cm

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

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**Rona Pondick**

*Dirt Head, 1997*  
Earth, wax, thermoplastic, 400 unique pieces  
Each 7.6 x 7.6 x 8.9 cm

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London / Paris / Salzburg, Marc Straus, New York, and Sonnabend Gallery, New York



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Special thanks are due to the following lenders for generously agreeing to make their works available to us:

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For the friendly support in the realization of the artworks by Anselmo Fox, we would like to thank the manufactory Wohlfarth Schokoladen Berlin and the Aargauer Kuratorium.

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