

**SETH PRICE**  
**SOCIAL SYNTHETIC**

10/21/2017–4/8/2018

Accompanying booklet  
on the exhibition

**SETH PRICE**  
**SOCIAL SYNTHETIC**  
**10/21/2017 TO 4/8/2018**

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**MUSEUM BRANDHORST**  
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The exhibition is accompanied  
by an extensive monograph  
on the work of Seth Price.  
It includes essays and inter-  
views by contributing authors  
Cory Arcangel, Ed Halter,  
Branden W. Joseph, John  
Kelsey, Michelle Kuo, Rachel  
Kushner, Laura Owens, Ariana  
Reines, Achim Hochdörfer, and  
Beatrix Ruf.

The comprehensive monograph  
comprises 394 pages and is  
available for € 54.95 in the  
museum shop, located in the  
entrance hall.

“Seth Price – Social Synthetic”  
was realized by the Museum  
Brandhorst in cooperation  
with the Stedelijk Museum  
Amsterdam, where the  
exhibition was presented from  
15 April to 3 September 2017.

**SETH PRICE**  
**SOCIAL SYNTHETIC**  
**21.10.2017 BIS 8.4.2018**

### **FÜHRUNGEN**

#### **AUS ERSTER HAND**

DI 16.01. | 03.04.2018

jeweils um 15.00  
mit Achim Hochdörfer,  
Kurator der Ausstellung

13.03.2018 | 15.00  
Mit Kirsten Storz,  
kuratorische Assistentin  
der Ausstellung

#### **AUSSTELLUNGSFÜHRUNGEN**

DI 14.11. | 21.11. | 12.12.2017

02.01. | 23.01. | 06.02.  
13.02. | 27.02. | 06.03.  
20.03. | 27.03.2018

jeweils um 15.00

SA 21.10. | 04.11.  
02.12. | 23.12.2017

13.01. | 03.02. | 24.02.  
17.03. | 07.04.2018

jeweils um 16.00

#### **THEMENFÜHRUNGEN**

SA 09.12.2017 | 16.00  
„Seth Price. Die Erweiterung  
der visuellen Darstellung“  
mit Kristina Schmidt

### **TREFFPUNKT**

Im Foyer des Museum  
Brandhorst, begrenzte Anzahl  
an Teilnahmeplätzen, Ausgabe  
von Teilnahmemarken ab  
einer Stunde vor Führungs-  
beginn an der Infotheke

### **EXKLUSIVE FÜHRUNGEN**

Gerne organisieren wir eine  
exklusive Führung für Sie.  
Informationen unter  
fuehrungen@  
museum-brandhorst.de

### **GUIDED TOURS OF THE EXHIBITION**

All guided tours listed here are  
held in German. English guided  
tours may be booked at  
fuehrungen@  
museum-brandhorst.de

## **SETH PRICE – SOCIAL SYNTHETIC**

Museum Brandhorst presents the first international survey of the American artist Seth Price (b. 1973). The exhibition comprises more than one hundred works, including sculptures, film, photographs, designs, paintings, video, clothing and textiles, web design, music, and poetry. Since his artistic beginnings making film and video, Price has programmatically explored creative terrain inside and outside the visual arts. He actively embraces the conditions of production and distribution that obtain in the music industry, the world of fashion, and the literary scene, utilizing their varied dynamics in his art. Price's art deals with fundamental changes in Western culture that have gone hand in hand with the rise of digital media.

Price belongs to the generation born before the internet and has thus witnessed its spread each step of the way: the first computer games and programs of the 1980s; the internet as a place for various political utopias in the 1990s, a time when it was assumed that new technologies held democratizing potential; and, finally, the total digitalization of all aspects of life through Web 2.0 and the smartphone in the early twenty-first century. From 2001 onward, digitalization has increasingly been a catalyst for growing social crises, from the "war on terror," which has also been a war of images, to the crises of the financial system. Price's artistic practice has evolved alongside these conflicts and fascinations.

From the early 2000s onwards, Price has developed a breathtaking array of works: films, music, and poetry, as well as the series "Vacuum Forms" (2004–8), "Calendar Paintings" (2003–4), "Mylar Sculptures" (2005–8), "Addresses" (2006–8), "Silhouettes" (2007–9), "Knot Paintings" (2009–11), and "Folklore U.S." (2012–14). With each successive undertaking, he introduces new topics, techniques, and contexts. The route through the exhibition on the ground floor of Museum Brandhorst traces these developments chronologically.

## **FOYER | POSTERS AND ARTIST'S NOTEBOOKS**

In his seminal photo essay "Dispersion" (2002), now regarded as a manifesto of post-internet art, Price proposes that art might actively reflect the manner of its own circulation through its design. In keeping with this, the exhibition extends into the public sections of the museum and, starting in the foyer, immerses audiences in Price's diverse array of artist's books, posters, and notebooks. The posters overview Price's solo shows throughout his career, while a selection of his published works and notebooks are distributed on the tables in the café and in a display case next to the bookshop. Between 2013 and 2014 Price stopped making art in order to write a novel ("Fuck Seth Price"), and secretly produced a companion "fiction," published the same month as the novel: a web database of more than four thousand contemporary art collectors. Presented here on an iPad and also accessible at [www.organic.software](http://www.organic.software), "Organic Software" (2015) contains profiles revealing, among other things, what the collectors paid for a Seth Price artwork and how much they have donated to particular political parties. The protean quality of art objects is exposed as their identities shift between commodity, advertising, and prestige items.

### **0.2 | BODY FRAGMENTS: EARLY "VACUUM FORMS"**

A leitmotif of Price's oeuvre is the threat to the human subject by today's economic and technological mechanisms of exploitation. In view of the dramatic upheavals of today's mediatized world, the idea of the self increasingly retreats to its digitally mediated surfaces, or is present by its very absence. This comes to the fore in Price's early "Vacuum Forms" (2004–8). Vacuum forming was invented in the postwar period to package commercial merchandise, and evokes serial manufacturing and mass consumption. Price's earliest vacuum forms feature classically sculptural, figurative motifs like hands and breasts, stranded in blank industrial surfaces; he later added masks, clothing, and the still-life motif of a flower. While definitively three-dimensional, all these works make visible their origins as

two-dimensional surfaces. Engaging tensions between flatness and volume, beauty and ugliness, presence and absence, the machine and the body, Price evokes how packaging and display create meaning through oppositions and inversions. In the video “Digital Video Effect: .Holes” (2003), Price confronts shocking images with the banal effects of digital manipulation, presenting such imagery as mere material to demonstrate an invented commercial effect for revealing and concealing images. The accompanying soundtrack is Price’s pitch-shifted voice: human expression transformed into an absurd spectacle of sound, with linguistic elements that do not communicate but are aimed instead at raw emotional effect. The video explores how a perverse fascination with the horrors of reality might be met aesthetically.

### **0.3 | PAINTING AND DIGITALITY: “CALENDAR PAINTINGS”**

In the “Calendar Paintings” (2003–4), Price employs one of the most popular image distribution systems of modernity: the packaging of art in the form of wall calendars, a veritable marketplace of reproductions from a plethora of contexts, found in offices, living rooms, kitchens, restrooms. The “Calendar Paintings” were entirely produced on a computer and printed onto canvas. Price subjected the parameters of the computer software programs to a sophisticated design process in order to play with their rules, modes of functioning, and potential for error.

The imagery in a number of them was appropriated from American paintings realized between the World Wars—art created in the spirit of regionalism and precisionism that portrays the Great Depression through a prism of scenes of alienation. This recourse to painting from the interwar period produces a set of surprising linkages to contemporary issues: between themes of economic decline during the 1930s and the financial crises in the 2000s, and between the existential directness of the motifs depicted and the posthuman inexpressiveness of digital design. This tension finds its uncanny counterpart in the nearby “Vacuum Form” of a featureless, anonymous human mask.

#### **0.4 | CIRCULATION OF IMAGES: “VINTAGE BOMBERS” AND “MYLAR SCULPTURES”**

The “Vintage Bombers” (2005–8) present a further series of “Vacuum Forms.” Using a bomber jacket allowed Price to change focus from the body to its container, and marks his interest in how images change over time. Originally created for World War I military pilots with a design based strictly on utility, the bomber jacket was adopted as a symbol by numerous twentieth-century subcultures, from bikers to punk to hip-hop. Today it is a ubiquitous icon of mass-produced fashion. Crumpled as if discarded, and stamped with its date of production, the cast and molded jacket is rich in references to the ongoing, rapidly changing production of identity.

In the “Mylar Sculptures” (2005–8), Price takes up the topic of shocking images circulating on the internet. In multiple works he has addressed the phenomenon of internet-circulated Jihadist execution videos as a new and complex kind of image, one representative of contemporary contradictions. He wondered how art might engage something simultaneously ubiquitous and hidden, barbaric and contemporary, and for years he negotiated how to bring this difficult imagery into his work. He wrote about it in his 2002 essay “Dispersion,” encoded video files to disc in 2004, and in the “Mylar Sculptures” here, printed video stills on sprawling lengths of librarian’s protective film. The video’s pixelated climactic beheading scene, reproduced as a still image, echoes episodes from the Bible, the French Revolution, and art history.

Due to the nature of the plastic, the pieces tend to assume different forms when installed, though Price ensures that the printed image is always folded or obscured, echoing the way in which the meaning of such videos eludes straightforward understanding. Materially, the sculptures evoke a range of surfaces for reproducing information, from scrolls to film-strips to screens, electronics packaging to crumpled paper. Alluding to the flexibility and placelessness of digitally circulating image files, the “Mylar Sculptures” could be described as embodiments of the movement of images in and through space.

## **0.5 | ANACHRONISMS: “ADDRESSES” AND “UNTITLED FILM/RIGHT”**

The “Addresses” (2006–8) monoprints in this room appropriate an art historical analogue to the beheading videos: Caravaggio’s ca. 1607 painting of David and Goliath. The title of each print contains a link to the source where a digital reproduction of the painting was found at the time the monoprint was made.

The anachronistic splicing of analog and digital modes of presentation is emphasized in Price’s 16mm film “Untitled Film/Right” (2006). Originally produced on a computer, the clip was transferred to 16mm film and then installed in a room of the “Addresses” prints. It features a digital clip of an ocean wave, posed as a counterpoint or supplement to the horrors of the decapitation image. Price acquired and manipulated a short loop intended for commercial purposes and manipulated it to yield a sickening, hypnotic, ceaseless digital wave. Like the Caravaggio monoprints, and like the abstract interludes in „Digital Video Effect: „Holes,” the palette is based on the RGB color system of the computer screen. The swelling surf, itself the epitome of the sublime in our experience of nature, reveals technology’s uncanny effect via digital manipulation.

## **0.6 | ABSENT SUBJECT: “SILHOUETTES”**

In contrast to the aggressive rhetorical charge of motifs in the “Vacuum Forms,” “Calendar Paintings,” and “Mylar Sculptures,” with the “Silhouettes” (2007–9) Price concentrates on images of human communication, understanding, and care. Appearing abstract at first glance, they are in fact representational: they embody the negative space between outlined scenarios of people touching and interacting. Although the scenes seem to reveal intimate moments, they were derived from Google searches for mundane terms like “eating,” “drinking,” and “writing.” From the resulting images Price omitted the people, turning the spaces between them into lustrous surfaces of natural wood bonded to industrial plastic. He deliberately decided against industrial serial production methods that featured in earlier works: “I was moving toward something that could work against this



idea of brutality and industrial production, something that had to do with the perfect surface, and formalism, and beauty.”

This room also presents a new series of sculptures. Price’s complex relationship to utility and materiality is clear in this apparently unusable furniture “Chairs Beyond Right and Wrong” (2017), at once fragile and menacing. These anthropomorphic objects are made by machine-slicing aluminum sheets according to an algorithm; the results may then be folded in myriad, unpredictable ways. Their flexibility is reminiscent of other series, including the “Mylar Sculptures” and “Folklore U.S.”.

It may come as a surprise that an artist who is almost obsessive in his pursuit of industrial production methods and digital techniques should describe drawing as the base of his artistic practice, but drawing has played an integral role throughout Price’s life, and almost every body of work in the exhibition originated in a series of sketches. Here we see renderings of hand exercises recalling parlor tricks and shadow play that were made in tandem with the “Silhouettes” sculptures.

## **0.7 | ENGAGING PAINTING: “KNOT PAINTINGS”**

Whereas many of Price’s early works defy medium-specific definition, he has addressed the classical conventions of painting most clearly in the “Knot Paintings” series (2009–11), although the phonetic double-meaning of “knot” and “not” indicates a degree of irony or skepticism. These works employ a gestural language of oil paint, spray enamel, and poured resin, as well as scanned pencil sketches, inkjet printing, and Price’s signature vacuum forming technique. The image layers, which have been characterized as “real-life Photoshop,” are complicated by the intrusion of knotted ropes, and the plastic surfaces give the works the feeling of oversize candy bars.

In the ropes’ configuration one may discern shapes of heads and bodily extremities, as well as an abstract kinetic rhythm that likewise invites anthropomorphic interpretation. In this context, the ropes function like a lasso with which contexts can be captured, integrated, and interlinked.

## **0.8 | FASHION AND ART: "FOLKLORE U.S."**

In Price's work, clothing and envelopes are sometimes analogous receptacles: the former for the human body, the latter for messages. Moreover, both often bear decorative or corporate logos: clothing is adorned with brands, while envelope interiors feature patterns for hiding sensitive contents. For his contribution to dOCUMENTA (13), Price activated this relationship, designing envelope-like soft sculptures to be fabricated by a New York haute couture factory to resemble clothing, as well as a clothing line (in collaboration with fashion designer Tim Hamilton), which he consigned to a department store near dOCUMENTA's main venue to be sold during the show. Both the sculptures and the clothing were made of canvas, the material of painting, fashion prototypes, and military gear. By sending similar materials and ideas through the parallel networks of both high art and retail, Price explored how different systems alter similar forms: toward or away from utility, fashion, critique, legibility.

In "Folklore U.S." (2012–14) Price "reviews" his earlier groups of works, specifically their formal and associative antagonisms: hard and soft, organic and artificial, open and closed, positive and negative, analog and digital. The canvas garments and envelopes hanging on the wall recall the "Vintage Bombers," the folding and bending procedure of the "Mylar Sculptures," the interplay between presence and absence in the "Silhouettes," and the integration of logos into the "Knot Paintings." The outmoded motif of the envelope, which survives in its digital afterlife as a symbol of sent messages, seems to be the outer shell of an emptied-out subject that is increasingly determined by commercial interests and absorption into everyday life.

### **-1.1 | SURFACES: LIGHTBOXES AND YOUTUBE VIDEOS**

In the central room of Museum Brandhorst's lower level, Price exhibits a new series of lightboxes (2015–17), which continue his examination of human life caught up in technological and economic developments. Price used a computer-controlled robotic camera to gather thousands of photographs of a model's skin,

which were stitched into a single image using satellite imaging software. Subsequently adjusted by a fashion retoucher and processed through a 3D graphics program, the photographs yielded lightbox images that are both large in size and high in resolution, displaying the human surface in disconcerting detail, and intertwining the natural and the artificial, the banal and the sublime.

In their role as technologically manipulated stand-ins for their human counterparts, the sections of enlarged skin are presented on the wall in a row, and refer associatively to a nearby pair of "Vintage Bombers." The iconic glamour of the golden bomber jackets forges an aesthetic alliance with the glow of the lightboxes, while the military provenance of the jacket echoes the lightbox imaging technology's origins in government surveillance and cartography.

A selection of videos is displayed along the walls. Before moving into the art world, Price made music and recorded spoken folktales. Years later, in 2010, he began creating music videos for some of these audio works and uploading them to YouTube. Though he created the videos for his own amusement, he eventually decided to exhibit them in art contexts as single-user, manually operated kiosks. Film began with just such individual, hand-operated viewing machines; it then evolved into a twentieth-century group experience, and now, thanks to the internet, is reverting once again to private, user-guided viewing.

In the video "COPYRIGHT 2006 SETH PRICE" (2006), Price takes unedited TV news footage of the 1981 assassination attempt on American president Ronald Reagan, strips the sound, and alters the speed, color, and shape, lending a raw historical sequence of national trauma the eerie, stuttering feeling of a dream.

## **-1.2 | EARLY VIDEOS AND "REDISTRIBUTION"**

Price started as a filmmaker, screening his work in festivals from 1997 to 2001. Following his degree, he became a technical assistant at EAI (Electronic Arts Intermix), a distributor of video and media art, where he gained access to then rarely known techniques of image processing and had the opportunity to assist

such established artists as Dan Graham, Martha Rosler, Mike Smith, and Joan Jonas. In his own work, he distanced himself from standard experimental film practice of the time, favoring what were then unconventional digital techniques.

Two early videos by Price alternate in the small media room: "'Painting' Sites" (2000) and "Industrial Synth" (2000). Price has called the former his first artwork. It features the results from a web search for "painting," combined with a German Romantic fairy tale written and performed by Price. While "'Painting' Sites" is an artifact of a time before image search tools, YouTube, and the dominance of Google, "Industrial Synth" emphasizes these developments. Exemplary of this early body of work, "Industrial Synth" combines homemade graphics and animations, Price's own music, footage of real people, including the artist, and a video game programmed and illustrated by Price in 1987. With its open-ended narrative, eerie soundtrack, and evocation of a ruined consumer culture, "Industrial Synth" evokes notions of desire, consumption, and death.

The exhibition culminates in the large media room featuring "Redistribution," which Price began in 2007 and continues to update and modify. The work emphasizes Price's skepticism toward fixed meaning, which led him to consider the artist's lecture: What happens when artist commentary, familiar from documentaries and museum education departments, is brought into the exhibition itself? "Redistribution" began as a lecture-performance Price delivered at the Guggenheim Museum in New York 2007, in which he appears to explain his own work, though he avoids addressing meaning and largely sticks to matters of process. He has since continued to alter the documentation of the lecture, filming staged additions and adding tangential inserts, extrapolating it ever further from its source. Over time the video has been presented in seven distinct versions, of which this is the most recent; like so much of today's software and tools, it is a project based on flux, subject to constant updating.

## **MUSEUM SHOP | CATALOGUE AND PUBLICATIONS**

The exhibition is accompanied by an extensive monograph on the work of Seth Price. It includes essays and interviews by contributing authors Cory Arcangel, Ed Halter, Branden W. Joseph, John Kelsey, Michelle Kuo, Rachel Kushner, Laura Owens, Ariana Reines, Achim Hochdörfer, and Beatrix Ruf.

“Seth Price. Social Synthetic” | € 54.95 at the Museum shop (€ 64 in distribution) | Hardcover with transparent dust jacket 22.5 x 30.5 cm | 394 pages | English | Design: Eric Wrenn  
Editors: Beatrix Ruf, Achim Hochdörfer, Eric Banks, Seth Price

Eine umfassende Monographie zum Werk von Seth Price begleitet die Ausstellung. Sie beinhaltet Aufsätze und Interviews von Cory Arcangel, Ed Halter, Branden W. Joseph, John Kelsey, Michelle Kuo, Rachel Kushner, Laura Owens, Ariana Reines, Achim Hochdörfer und Beatrix Ruf.

„Seth Price. Social Synthetic“ | € 54,95 im Buchladen des Museum Brandhorst (€ 64 im Buchhandel) | Hardcover mit transparentem Schutzumschlag 22,5 x 30,5 cm | 394 Seiten Englisch | Design: Eric Wrenn | Herausgeber: Beatrix Ruf, Achim Hochdörfer, Eric Banks, Seth Price

## **MORE SETH PRICE BOOKS AVAILABLE AT THE MUSEUM SHOP WEITERE SETH PRICE BÜCHER IM MUSEUMS SHOP**

“Books of Ice”, Seth Price. Los Angeles: Ooga Booga, 2016

“Fuck Seth Price: A Novel”, Seth Price. 1st edition.  
New York: Leopard Press, 2015

“Seth Price: Drawings”, Edited by Bettina Funcke. Exh. cat.  
New York: Petzel Gallery. London: Koenig Books, 2015

“How To Disappear In America”, Seth Price. 2nd edition.  
New York: Leopard Press, 2015

“Seth Price: Folklore U.S.”, Edited by Bettina Funcke.  
London: Koenig Books, 2014

“Seth Price. 2000 Words Series”, Edited by Karen Marta &  
Massimiliano Gioni. Athens: Deste Foundation for  
Contemporary Art, 2014. Text by Chris Wiley

“Photographic Objects”, Edited by Markus Kramer.  
Heidelberg, Berlin: Kehrer Verlag, 2012

“Notes On This Show”, Seth Price. Self-published, 2006

“Continuous Project #8”, Edited by Bettina A.W. Funcke.  
Exh. cat. Chatou, France: Cneai, 2006

“Poems”, Seth Price. Paris: onestar press, 2004

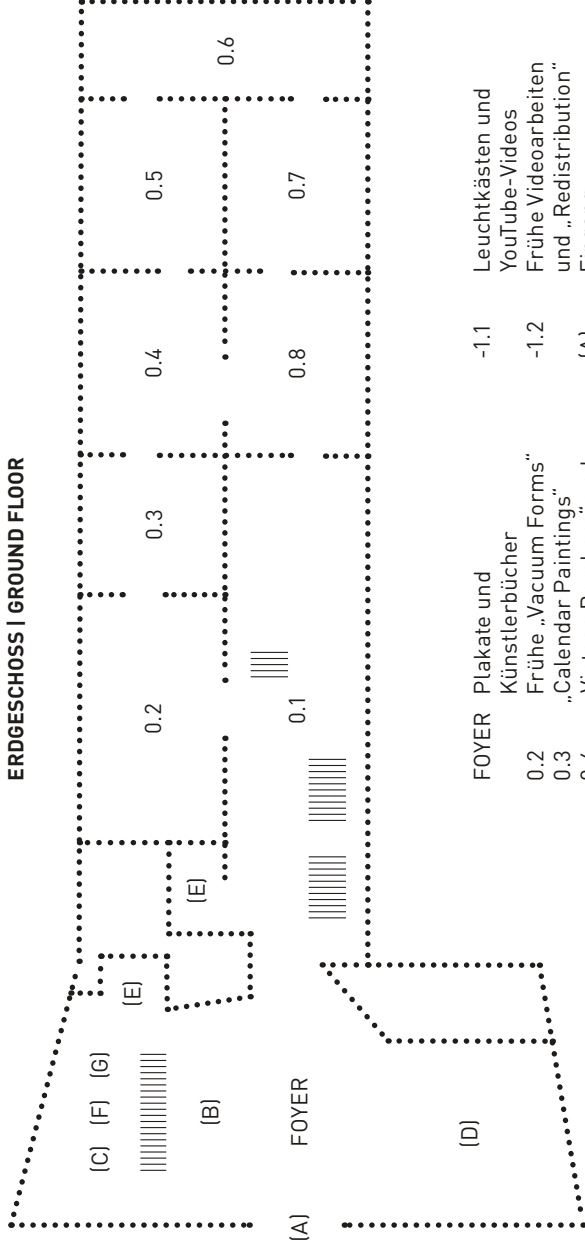
#### **ACCESSIBLE ONLINE | ONLINE VERFÜGBAR**

“Organic Software”, Seth Price, 2015

A web application located at [www.organic.software](http://www.organic.software), with 4,149 unique profiles and associated data. Written in Ruby 2.2.2 using Sinatra 1.4.6, with a MySQL database for user comments and auction data. View templates written in ERB; styles written in SASS.

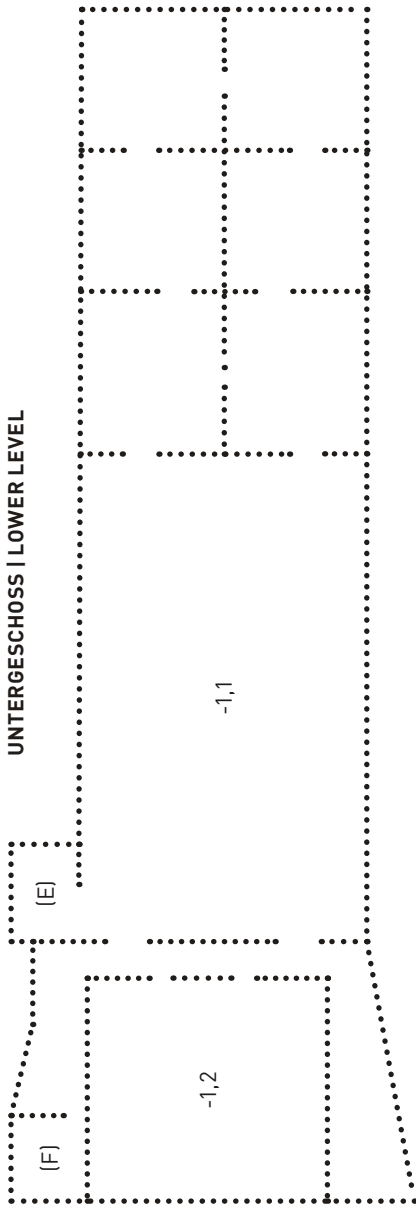
Webapplikation verortet unter [www.organic.software](http://www.organic.software), mit 4.149 singulären Profilen und assoziierten Daten. Programmiert in Ruby 2.2.2 unter Einsatz von Sinatra 1.4.6, mit einer MySQL-Datenbank für Benutzerkommentare und Auktionsdaten. View-Templates programmiert in ERB; Stile programmiert in SASS.

# ERDGESCHOSS | GROUND FLOOR



- |       |  |      |  |
|-------|--|------|--|
| FOYER | Plakate und Künstlerbücher               | -1.1 | Leuchtkästen und YouTube-Videos          |
| 0.2   | Frühe „Vacuum Forms“                     | -1.2 | Frühe Videoarbeiten und „Redistribution“ |
| 0.3   | „Calendar Paintings“                     | (A)  | Eingang                                  |
| 0.4   | „Vintage Bombers“ und „Mylar Sculptures“ | (B)  | Kasse / Information                      |
| 0.5   | „Addresses“ und „Untitled Film/Right“    | (C)  | Buchhandlung                             |
| 0.6   | „Silhouettes“                            | (D)  | Café                                     |
| 0.7   | „Knot Paintings“                         | (E)  | Aufzug                                   |
| 0.8   | „Folklore U.S.“                          | (F)  | WC                                       |
|       |  | (G)  | Garderobe                                |

## UNTERGESCHOSS | LOWER LEVEL



FOYER	Posters and Artist's Notebooks	-1.1	Lightboxes and YouTube Videos
0.2	Early "Vacuum Forms"	-1.2	Early Videos and "Redistribution"
0.3	"Calendar Paintings"	(A)	Entrance
0.4	"Vintage Bombers" and "Mylar Sculptures"	(B)	Ticket Desk / Information
0.5	"Addresses" and "Untitled Film/Right"	(C)	Book Shop
0.6	"Silhouettes"	(D)	Café
0.7	"Knot Paintings"	(E)	Lift
0.8	"Folklore U.S."	(F)	WC
		(G)	Cloakroom