

EVEN IN A LANGUAGE THAT IS NOT YOUR OWN



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IAN WAELDER

even in a language that is not your own

Francesco Giaveri

Ian Waelder's work explores memory and trace, by isolating material histories and language from his biography. He works through the poetics of the accident and collects fragments of what has been discarded and fallen into oblivion.

even in a language that is not your own is a project that proposes a path about memory in a series of successive spaces, each used for subtle interventions. This show is not thought either as a sum or a sequence of works, but is conceived as a whole in which to orient oneself.

The items the artist places in each space speak to the viewer in a rather odd way, to draw us into a shared experience. In exploring the exhibition space, we come across small pictures and sculptures, texts and sounds. After distinguishing and discovering, we find ourselves in a kind of common memory, the memory that is passed on orally, perhaps imprecise and certainly incomplete. Yet recognisable.

In ideal terms, it was a question of catapulting the viewer into an oral cavity, where the air emerging from the lungs is articulated to *determine* speech. An apparently inhospitable, dark place that is however secure, like a safe refuge, with or without a way out. To do this, Ian Waelder creates a path in which silence is followed by histories in the form of comments, almost all trivial, that branch out into a wide range of possibilities and ramifications. They are footnotes to the main text making up this route/exhibition, approached as a work in itself.

The artist alters the space to establish an itinerary in which we encounter, sometimes unexpectedly, images and forms that as indexes are packed with references. An essential structure implemented as a maze, a blank map or rather as an outline with incomplete instructions sketched out from memory. As if we were plunged inside another person's tongue or idiom and were

A Nose Is A Nose Is A Nose (Injured Bird, The Streets Are Still The Same), 2023. Used sneaker, papier-mache, tissue paper, cardboard box and sheet of anti-reflective glass. 31,5 × 23,5 × 15 cm.
Courtesy of the artist

surprised to understand it. After an initial loss of bearings, it might suddenly prove possible for us to begin to use this foreign language.

Visiting this exhibition, listening to its murmurs as we move through it, is like going inside a box, into another's personal space. Surroundings that do not belong to us, but which we are permitted to explore to become familiar with its objects and perhaps recognise ourselves in them. One of the characters in *Following*, an early film by Christopher Nolan, states precisely that, "Everyone has a box." Something that conceals, even if—as inferred in *Following*—they subconsciously want to reveal it. A small collection of objects, carefully laid out and preserved. This kind of box means a container, humble in its structure, that holds something very important to its owner, even if it is of little or no financial value. Its value lies in the affective sphere, in memories and in personal moments, in the real or metaphorical meanings that the objects kept there express to one able to read them. "Pieces" that work as talismans, fragments to help release feelings, to remember. It may be the little childhood box from *Amélie* or the *Music Box* proof of guilt and horror in the film by Costa-Gavras.

The characters in *Following* go into other people's houses not to steal, but because they enjoy reconstructing, imagining, discovering personalities, situations, memories and affections on the basis of the display they find, the sets of personal possessions of whoever lives there, as if they were pages in another person's intimate personal diary. And the box, a cavity that is hidden but wants to be discovered, works in a similar way to an exhibition or a collection of souvenirs, catapulting us into someone else's personal (and therefore irremediably political) life.

This exhibition is an oral cavity in the form of a box, offering a rummage through humble material with flashes and fragments that aim to provide, through recognition, a shared memory. During the gestation of this project, we talked at length with the artist about Joseph Cornell's surrealist boxes and imagined Hanne Darboven's home-studio on the first day, when the whole space was still at the artist's disposal.

We stopped at that point, when the air in the lungs had not yet reached the tongue or the teeth, in the physical, exact moment when you want to say something but have not yet done so. We are interested in the moment before: when you hear something but do not yet fully understand it... when personal items are shared and recognised but have not yet entered the distribution circuit.

The pieces the public sees in room D of Es Baluard Museu are a series of recent works by the artist and others of uncertain authorship, though all are closely related to a place in transit towards a shared memory, which is where this exhibition sets out to take us. Their format was conceived and executed as an oral discourse that constantly appeals to the personal and the political, leaving imprints and open fragments awaiting the viewer.

The exhibition sets out from an exploration focusing on family genealogy, recent History and the parallels between body and machine, but also orientation, speech, the gestures that replace words. This line of work began when Waelder moved to Frankfurt in 2017 and realised that he was the first member of the family to return to live in Germany since his grandfather fled to Chile in 1939. Six years on, the artist now returns to Mallorca to present his individual exhibition at Es Baluard Museu. In it he pursues this line of research, in a way completing it with this project in the form of an exhibition that brings it all together, at the same time releasing it, as a whistling, a song, or even a laughter.

During the first lockdown in 2020, Waelder found, at his parents' house, a cassette with a piano melody by his grandfather, the pianist Federico (Friedrich) Waelder. This recording is so far the only existing trace of his music. Over that year, the artist played this tune once a month on a radio channel in Frankfurt, the city where he lives. The piece was recently released by Heutigen Records on vinyl, accompanied by a publication with a series of texts.

Throughout his researches starting from his family environment, History is observed through the irreducible prism of

the personal. In 2021 this single existing recording of Federico Waelder's jazz improvisation was mixed with another sound piece by Ian Waelder, *All My Shoes (Spooky drums n1)* (2018), as a piano and percussion duet. In the same year, the artist worked with his father to produce a series of clay sculptures depicting the Opel Olympia car model. On one occasion, the pedestals on which the sculptures were exhibited came up to the artist's father's shoulder height.

The Opel Olympia is a car from the thirties, one of which was owned by his paternal grandfather's family and the hurried sale of which enabled him to flee Germany under Nazism. Waelder has closely studied the history and symbolism of this car model to contrast it with his circumstances today. These sculptures and pieces of the car are presented in different ways, specifically adapted to the exhibition context.

Recently Waelder has been looking for and purchasing original parts of this Opel model. His finds include several headlights and a user manual for the 1935 model, the same one as his family owned. The headlight has been exhibited as an installation at the Kunstverein Wiesbaden (2021) and then in the solo show "Is it like today?" at the etHALL gallery in Barcelona (2022). On this occasion the artist presented two original headlights just at eye level to blind the visitor upon entering. The manual includes pictures illustrating the steps to take to carry out mechanical repairs to the vehicle, in which anonymous hands hold up different parts of the car. The artist has worked on and explored these pictures to offer a parallelism with the hand movements of a pianist.

For this exhibition, the artist has created a setting, an architecture in dialogue with the museum, with a place for its "sculptural footnotes" to this main text, as symptomatic sculptures. Personal, symbolic fragments we discover, whose affective value we gradually recognise. And suddenly, perhaps, we will even be able to speak in a language that is not our own, in a dimension that is not ours, but with which we can empathise.

The tiny works dotted around the exhibition are comments for whatever diversions the viewer might like to take.

It is structured like a personal box throughout the exhibition space, creating a series of corridors, rooms and sub-rooms where the audience encounters different situations and becomes aware of their own body.

Like a spoken conversation, without seeking to be assertive but with many possible directions to then go in, below are fragments of a conversation between the curator and the artist.

^{FG} I was thinking about the stains, and in general of the marks we find in many of your works. Sometimes they call on us to stop and decipher or address something indeterminate, seeking the key to a *rebus*.

I was thinking of the stains visible on a very latent photograph, almost hidden beneath the shroud of the canvas in your large-format works... Right from the outset we decided that these canvases would not be part of the exhibition at Es Baluard Museu... This was perhaps the only thing we took for granted.

This whole project argues for the possibilities and limits of language, and it does this through a path (indicating the air coming out of the lungs and passing over the larynx and the tongue...) as its central element. However, stains and the unexpected, as in your canvases, are very much present. These are small diversions: footnotes or annotations to the main text that open up ramifications.

The unexpected could be something like suddenly understanding a language we don't know, that isn't our own... Recognising meaningful structures and sounds that speak to us at a deeper level than ordinary (even "superficial") understanding. Like this the stain stops being something nameless and explains itself or simply "explains something"... An indication or a symptom that points outwards, where we look out...

I remember the scene with the painter in Antonioni's *Blow-Up*. An abstract painter who confesses to the protagonist that gradually, looking at his work in the studio, he is finding a key to guide him through his own paintings, unlike when he has just painted them, when he "understands nothing".

^{1W} The importance to me of the mark, the trace or even the wound has been a constant, going back to my first works in 2012. Since I started working with my collection of analogue cameras, always marvelling at those "scratches" on the negative or the traces of dust that become lines when the copy is enlarged. All this is something that is mirrored in the way I see the city and the objects I come across, obviously influenced by over twenty years of skateboarding. Even so, the stain is something that has appeared explicitly in my works only recently, in the last five years.

I see the stain as something invasive, a mark that expands to obscure or simply obstruct the view of what lies behind it. Something that appears when you already knew the previous state of the surface where the stain now is. In a way, this is how I relate to memory, which is the basis of all my work.

With this show we're putting on, I wanted to take up the challenge of being able to lose myself. To generate a journey that would take in different layers and suggestions in relation to memory. Every corner works as part of this language, this voice we might not know but which sounds familiar. And challenges you to venture down another byway. It is a path full of indications that don't have to lead anywhere, but that force you to continue and generate different puzzles with the elements which you come across.

^{FG} The connection you make between the stain and memory seems relevant. Just as this irregular, shapeless mark covers, wholly or in part, something that was there before, something known that predates the present and which we come across unexpectedly. In my opinion, it is now a matter of interrogating and recognising these signs that persist and have permanently altered the surface on which they have appeared.

I don't think I can make the stains, but I can receive and suffer them (like the wound you mentioned). So, in your case, do you make the stains? I understand that you don't deliberately injure yourself (laughs), though perhaps you expect them when you're skateboarding?

Here we are going into the concept of accident, of something unforeseen, even if it is deliberately made possible... and above all recognised and isolated in a piece...

I therefore think that we have given great importance to moving through this exhibition, as if it were a track or a setting with a lot of props (maybe a film set?) aiming at or preparing the ideal conditions for the stain or the unexpected to take centre stage, to come to the fore... It is as if in a book, the footnotes took up the centre of the pages in larger type than the main text, tiny and locked away, relegated to the bottom of the page...

^{1W} I don't injure myself deliberately, but I sometimes feel that being an artist is like constantly picking at a wound that doesn't quite heal.

I'm not a writer, but I tend to understand the exhibition space like a page in a book. For some reason, I always see parallels between writing and sculpture. With regard to balances, rhythm, spaces. How time takes up a space, and how an object can reveal itself very quickly or quite slowly. Like re-reading a story after a while and discovering new

connections. It seems to me we have to avoid an overly direct reading, an obvious meaning. Thinking about gestures like writing without accents or punctuation marks, with your eyes closed or while climbing stairs. I see the presence of the journey through this exhibition like a sculpture. It interests me because it seeks to distract and confuse; you have to tie up loose ends between the different sculptures, which are like footnotes about different memories. "Sculptural footnotes", as I like to call them. Along this route there is time to think and make connections or see oneself reflected. And with this also comes accident, which is in itself already there in the process behind each piece. Using the stain from the cup of coffee spilt on the page.

But it would be very naive of me to claim that everything here is an accident. Of course, there is a lot of scenography, the theatrical or fiction. I'm now thinking a lot about Juan Muñoz or even Andy Kaufman, a master of silence and waiting.

^{FG} And also, you don't drink coffee, right?

Fiction in this project uses the path as a kind of script. This narrative structure is successively "splashed" with little accents or marks that are symptoms or indications that might or might not lead somewhere else.

I think attention and getting lost are very much feelings and actions that this exhibition seeks. Even if they seem contradictory. Attention is necessary, even though it alone does not suffice to understand and establish a dialogue with the other.

Do you think your "sculptural footnotes" are directions on a map or rather little doors to another (more contemplative, dreamlike) dimension? This evocative, rather strange dimension (while reducing gratuitous strangeness to a minimum) somehow seems to lead us elsewhere and

I believe the use of audio works emphasises this effect of strangeness, the process of recognising and at the same time losing a clear understanding of what is around us: the sinister. When we stop recognising what was familiar to us.

Then I personally fall back on the Mike Kelley of *The Trajectory of Light in Plato's Cave (from Plato's Cave, Rothko's Chapel, Lincoln's Profile)*, in which to get into the work and begin the journey you have to crouch down like a worm. The artist forces us to explore the visceral and the first thing necessary is to change posture (physically and mentally, of course), but isn't this always necessary to establish a dialogue and share a narrative with another?

^W Mike Kelley is certainly a very important influence. This physical and mental change of posture is always necessary, but faced with a certain passivity or habit you need to take things a little further.

You're touching on something that is crucial for me, and this consists of the gesture of challenging the viewer one way or another, for the audience not to just be a passive subject. This isn't something I need in every exhibition or piece I do, but Es Baluard Museu as a venue challenged me to provide an experience that wasn't necessarily comfortable for anyone visiting the exhibition. Along with Kelley's irrational side, I admire in paintings the tensions and mazes originating in a rectangle. What I want to avoid and something that really annoys me is how they end up being used as background decoration and reduced to predetermined formats. In this exhibition I want to carry these visual compositions and mazes over to a space to experience that "non-place", with the option of losing oneself. Keeping an uncanny atmosphere, a

certain familiarity, but with a strange aura that tenses the vision and ends up pressing on the whole body.

With regard to memory and my family history, the idea for the title of the exhibition came out of my stay in Germany. Feeling you belong to a language that isn't your own, and the frustration of observing from afar. The disorientation this causes and the need to reconstruct or expand the gaps of silence.

Regarding these "sculptural footnotes", even though I'd had this term in mind for years, I realised very recently that probably the reference from the "Footnotes" Series by Ana Jotta had slipped in. She's an artist I admire very much, I even have a piece by her in my own collection. Going back to these sculptures, what they have in common for me is, first of all, that they are not part of a very concrete series, but are simply sculptural annotations like jottings in a notebook. Secondly, they have in common the joining of different small-format objects that have accumulated in my studio or at home for years, waiting for the right time to be used. That's where they answer me about something, and I intervene like someone doing a drawing around the page. In the case of the show, identity is very much present in the nose, but in a rather ironic way, a reference to a kind of self-portrait. It is a very open-ended element that, while it is deeply rooted in anecdotes about my father, his family and their Jewish past through my grandfather, it can open up different doors for different audiences. This ambiguity does give me a certain margin to move about in more fictional or dreamlike areas, as you say.

^{FG} That stands out regarding the "great" Ana Jotta, or could be either the accumulative dynamics of Hanne Darboven in her home-studio, where the objects around

you enter into random dialogues and above all you "come across" them unexpectedly, ultimately taking part in a language that is not your own... All this reminds me a little, from the start talking about the route and language, I was thinking about the "zone" in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, full of traps and remains, in a setting that is almost unknown, but also Burroughs's "interzone" in *Naked Lunch*... Though maybe to describe this project most effectively we have "Interzone" by Joy Division, on *Unknown Pleasures*. Rather than a description, this piece of music seems to me almost an invocation... What do you think?

^W Absolutely! "Around the corner...". That gesture of appearance: first maybe the nose, part of a foot, then the eyes. Then the rest of the body. And carrying on round the corner to an unknown place. I think of Venice in winter. Or the Venice of lonely streets in Thomas Mann's novel. Every step is an echo that fills up a space. As we speak, I still don't know what form this exhibition will take (let's be honest with anybody reading this). And I'm really looking forward to getting into the museum rooms and letting myself get carried away by reacting on the spot to whatever I find. Because in spite of my power to control what the space and the works will be, I also find myself in a place of total unknown. And this tension will generate what comes next. In general, we have to abide by certain parameters set by the institution, but this also goes against the nature of many creative processes. And this dialogue or clash is actually a good way of learning.

By pure coincidence, I've been reading quite a few texts to do with walking or waiting. I found a passage I liked a lot in Liz Thernerson's introduction to a book by Vila-Matas—*Perder teorías* [Losing

Theories] (2010)—which mentioned the anecdote about Pío Baroja, that on the day the Spanish Civil War broke out he went to the French border, which “was next to his house”. And just like that, like someone going to the bakery, he went into exile in the neighbouring country.



Sprain (38), 2023. Antique wooden last and air-dry porcelain.
24×11,5×8 cm. Courtesy of the artist



Teo Goes For A Walk, 2019. Photographs taken by Teo Waelder, the artist's brother, of the neighbourhood where he and Ian grew up. Installation made up of inkjet prints on clear PVC sheets. 260 x 140 cm each. Courtesy of the artist. View of the exhibition "Teo's Pink Panther", Las Palmas (Lisbon), 2019



From Time To Time, 2022–2023. Two switched-on original Opel Olympia headlights (1935 model), wiring system, turnbuckles and stereo track in loop. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. View of the exhibition "GROTTO – Städelschule Graduates", Danziger Platz 12 (Frankfurt am Main), 2023

Romantic Gestures (Assembly Line), 2022. Inkjet prints on acetate film, found metallic object. 53 × 10 × 5 cm. Courtesy of Braunsfelder Family Collection, Cologne

The Car Of Our Time (Background vehicle), 2021. Made in collaboration with the artist's father, Juan Waelder. Esparto and plaster on raw DM plinth the height of his father's shoulders (135cm). 38 × 76 × 166 cm (including plinth). Courtesy of the artist



To Handle with Care (Bare Hands #01), 2022. Cutout of inkjet print on acetate glued to the wall behind the entrance of the exhibition space. Series composed of a number of cutouts of hands that are originally holding different parts of the Opel Olympia in the instruction manual of 1935. 24 × 14.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist

From hip to fingertip (Opel upside down), 2022. Remainder of the acrylic resin mould of the Opel Olympia sculpture made in collaboration between the artist and his father, Juan Waelder. Putty on wall, iron rods and remains of the wall on the floor. 33.5 × 35.5 × 30 cm. Courtesy of the artist



Background Vehicle #03 (Les Quatre Cents Coups), 2022.
Laser printout fixed to the wall, nail. 13,9 × 5,8 cm.
Courtesy of the artist

even in a language that is not your own (model), 2023.
Route, cardboard structures. Site-specific for Space D
in Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma.
Courtesy of the artist

IMAGES FOR TIMES WHEN LANGUAGE FAILS US

Carina Bukuts

“We are made for memory, we are made for poetry, or perhaps we are made for oblivion. But something remains, and that something is history or poetry, which is not necessarily different.”

—Jorge Luis Borges, *The Divine Comedy*, 1977¹

In the early days of art history as an academic discipline, the artist's life story served as the primary means of explaining and interpreting artworks. With its tendency to glorify exceptional individuals as geniuses while ignoring broader historical and social contexts, however, this approach was eventually criticised and deemed conservative. As a result, during my studies in art history—and those of many generations that have preceded me—I was instructed never to analyse a work of art based on the biography of its author, as this would supposedly undermine its autonomy. Yet what I was not being taught was art history's very own biased past in relation to questions of gender, class and race that has informed such methodology. That is something I mostly learned from artists—and in particular from those who have been initially denied access at the doors of what we call the ‘canon’. To assume that a matter is not worthy of our attention because it is personal is to ignore the underlying structures that enable some individuals to take action while denying others that very right. In other words, if biography comes knocking on your door again, invite them in, offer them a cup of tea and listen.

Ian Waelder was born in 1993 in Madrid, before relocating to Mallorca, where he spent most of his life, and where Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma now hosts the artist's solo exhibition, “even in a language that is not your own”. In April 1992, a year earlier, Jacques Derrida was invited to give a

1. Published in: Borges, Jorge Luis. *Seven Nights*. New York City: New Directions, 1984.

lecture at the international conference “Echoes from Elsewhere/ Renvois d’ailleurs” held at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, USA. Organised by Patrick Mensah and David Wills, and chaired by Édouard Glissant, the symposium turned a critical eye on the status of francophonie in light of the rise of post-colonial theory. Derrida’s lecture was as personal as it was political, tackling his experience as a Franco-Algerian Jew, the struggle with French as the language of the coloniser and the construction of identity. Throughout his talk, he repeatedly used (variations of) one phrase as if to form a synthesis that remains true no matter how you twist and turn it: “I have only one language; yet it is not mine.”² Evidently both Waelder’s exhibition title and Derrida’s quote attest to the fact that speaking a language does not necessarily mean possessing it—ownership is more often an act of claiming rather than a given condition. Artists know this too well, for the practice of exhibition making is to a large extent a negotiation of the ways in which to take up space. Ian Waelder’s show “Teo’s Pink Panther” (2019) at the artist-run-space Las Palmas (Lisboa) was equally an attempt—and arguably his first—to claim ownership of and to complicate the notion of biography within his artistic practice. Using the characteristic pink walls of the Lisbon-based gallery as a starting point, Waelder presented a series of black-and-white photographic works printed on transparent PVC curtains suspended from the ceiling. As we learn from the title, *Teo Goes For A Walk* (2019), and as indicated in the caption, these are photographs taken by Teo Waelder of the neighbourhood where he and Ian grew up, a neighbourhood in Calvià (Mallorca) known as La Pantera Rosa (Pink Panther). Here, as with many of the artist’s works and exhibitions, the titles are never random results of chance, but instead serve as a tool to unlock meaning from what he is showing us. The photographs range from streetlights, declarations of love in graffiti, the repetitive roofing of the same type of building in housing estates and an open gate, to the only image

2. The lecture was first published in a more extended version in French in 1996 and translated into English in 1998, from whose edition the quote is taken: Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the Other, or, the Prosthesis of Origin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

depicting a domestic setting, a living room-cum-office with a desk, swivel chair, couch and a monstera plant in the background. The plant, which appears repeatedly in Waelder’s work from this exhibition onwards, was gifted to the artist’s parents on the day he was born and has been growing ever since. Originally taken by Waelder’s brother, Teo, and then transformed into an installation, these photographs are one of the first examples within his oeuvre, for which he collaborated with members of his family as a means of addressing questions of memory and heritage.

In 2021, Waelder worked with his father Juan, a sculptor in his own right, on *The Car of Our Time* (2021), a small-scale plaster reproduction of an Opel Olympia on an MDF plinth the height of his father’s shoulders. Introduced to the market in 1935, the car model was named after the highly anticipated 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, which Hitler would use as an opportunity to promote National Socialist ideology. The parents of German pianist Friedrich Wälder, the artist’s grandfather, were one of the many purchasers of this model of car. Frequently used as a symbol of mobility and freedom, cars were among the many items Jews were deprived ownership of as part of the antisemitic and racist Nuremberg Laws, which were repeatedly enacted in different variations from 1935 onwards and ultimately led to Jews being stripped off their German citizenship, rendering them stateless. Like many of his family members, Friedrich was imprisoned in a concentration camp, but managed to escape and flee to Chile in 1939 with the money he had traded for the Opel Olympia, making him the only ancestor of the artist to survive the Holocaust. In Santiago de Chile, Friedrich Wälder became Federico Waelder, with the altered umlaut of his surname serving as the last remnant of his German background. Ian Waelder never met his late grandfather, who passed away in 1989 under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Sculpting *The Car of Our Time* with his father is therefore more than a cross-family collaboration between two artists, it is also an attempt to restore what is believed to be lost through haptics when historical documents no longer exist, or language fails us.

Waelder’s choice of materials is a reflection on memory-building. By means of ordinary materials, such as plaster,

glue, papier-mâché, an occasional streetwear shoe and pieces of cardboard, his sculptural work gives form to what has not been archived, photographed, recorded, written. In *Injured Bird (The Streets Are Still the Same)* (2023), a repurposed cardboard box not only speaks to its intended purpose as a container to hold and protect, but also to the notion of durability as such; a plaster-covered sneaker crumpled together reminds of an exhausted body on the ground while also considering the many movements and steps performed with it. Many of the objects the artist includes in his work do not necessarily come from his own findings, but are often given to him through the hands of others. The same applies to *Sprain (38)* (2023), a sculpture composed of an antique wooden last onto which he has mounted a nose made of air-dry porcelain. Waelder's mother, Gina, discovered the latter many years ago and, uncertain about its origin, gave it to her son, having somewhat of a parental instinct that it might one day feature prominently in one of his works—and she was to be proved right about this. On the one hand, its title ties together the type of injury that both noses and feet can suffer, and on the other hand, the number in brackets—a reference to the shoe size of the mould—looms large when considering the relevance of the year 1938 within the artist's family biography, marking the year of the Kristallnacht in which his grandfather was captured by the Nazis. By employing meaning to the supposedly insignificant, Ian Waelder aims to challenge our perception of the ordinary, or rather the construction of normativity, highlighting the political ideology that accompanies a thinking within such constraints. When looking at the materiality of these works, it is evident that Arte Povera has certainly had an influence on Waelder, but if the late art historian Germano Celant considered “poor” to be an appropriate attribute to describe the workings of artists such as Luciano Fabro, Alighiero Boetti and Jannis Kounellis, “porous” could be an adequate term to approach Waelder's practice. Even though many of the pieces that can be found in his body of work are porous in a material sense, I would like to draw attention to its potential as a metaphor for the presence of multiple openings within a form, thereby allowing for permeability. The clay sculpture *A Nose is A Nose* (2023), for instance, whose tongue-in-cheek title

alludes to the poetry of Gertrude Stein³, could be perceived by visitors as a stereotypical Jewish nose, whereby it also refers to personal anecdotes the artist's father has told him about the distinctive nose that members of the Waelder family have in common. An indication of belonging that can only be read by means of physical characteristics. In this regard, it is a curious coincidence that the newspaper that Waelder has used as a backdrop in various paper-based works, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, is the same news outlet in which Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacin published their essay on the city of Naples in 1925, where they introduced porosity as a concept of thought. For them, porosity is a consequence of “the passion for improvisation, which demands that space and opportunity be at any price preserved”.⁴ I believe that Ian Waelder's practice too is one driven by improvisation and that this is something he shares with his grandfather. While this aspect becomes apparent by Friedrich/Federico expressing himself through jazz music, with Ian, it is his passion for skateboarding, where not only the concept but also the ability to improvise is key. Both within the realms of music and sport, to improvise means to embrace the unknown, to be prepared to fail and fall, and to get up again and again and again. Improvisation is an act of resilience.

Another shared interest between grandson and grandfather lies in photography. Yet again, it was Ian Waelder's father who served as a bridge between the two generations, passing on both the affinity for the method and the technical knowledge to his son from an early age. Even though Waelder's practice spans many mediums, I often have the feeling that much of his thinking is linked to the ways in which a camera serves as a means to fixate time. Ian Waelder is a talented photographer in his own right, but over the last 10 years, he has been removing his finger more and more from the trigger (at least within his artistic work) and instead his hand has become more visible when working with archival material. Calling to mind references like Bruno

3. “A rose is a rose is a rose” from Stein's poem *Sacred Emily*, 1935.

4. Benjamin, Walter and Lacin, Asja. “Naples”. In: *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. New York: Schocken, 1978.

Munari's seminal *Supplement to the Italian Dictionary* (1963), a book comprising the ways of expressing yourself through body language rather than spoken language, or the fixation with hands in Robert Bresson's films, a series of photography-based works by Waelder is focused on gestures. Interestingly, the images in this series have all been lifted from photographs included in the 1935 Opel Olympia user's manual. In *Family Nose (Bare Hands) no 2* (2021), a metal plate showing slight traces of erosion serves as an image carrier for a cut-out picture of a hand replacing a tire—or at least that is what we are made to believe from the scrap the artist presents to us—as well as a plaster nose and a black-and-white photograph of a couple kissing, in which the trained eye can detect an Opel Olympia lingering in the background of the frame. Combing archival film stills in which the car makes a cameo with reproductions of the historical instruction manual already makes for a strong commentary on image circulation and the construction of iconography, but by applying these images with only small drops of glue on a plate of steel that is far from stainless, *Family Nose (Bare Hands)* addresses the fragile nature of memories altogether. I believe that Ian Waelder is interested in repetition, because just as you take snapshots of the same subject over and over again with the expectation that the images you end up with will all be the same, it is only when you look at the result that you realise the distinct differences and thus a shift in their meaning. While *To Handle With Care (Bare Hands #01)* (2022), an inkjet print on acetate film applied to the wall, also derives from a cut-out hand taken from the Opel Olympia user's manual, here, the artist removed any trace that could give away that the gestures depicted are related to handling a car. More than anything, it is in the further fragmentation and, thus, concentration of the material that Waelder filters out truth, which is precisely what poets do as well. Thinking about the ways in which the workings of strangers or the people most close to him feature prominently within the artist's practice, it seems to me that his works are also reflections on the relationship between ownership and authorship. All this to say, if we cannot own a language, can we at least call it by our own name?

even in a language that is not your own

Ian Waelder

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Soad Houman
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#IANWAELDERESBALUARD
@ESBALUARDMUSEU



WWW.ESBALUARD.ORG

ESBALUARD
MUSEU D'ART
CONTEMPORANI
DE PALMA

PLAÇA PORTA SANTA CATALINA, 10
07012 PALMA
T. (+34) 971 908 200

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