

WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN?

CLAUDIA CHRISTOFFEL

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MARLENE DIETRICH ON APRIL 2, 1930

Pencil drawing on acid-free paper, framed, 2024

Photo: Tobias Hübel



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MARLENE DIETRICH ON APRIL 2, 1930

The starting point for the artistic work that Christoffel created during her two-month scholarship from July 2024 to August 2024 at the Wilke Studio is a photo by Richard Fleischhut, the ship's photographer on the "Bremen", which Claudia rendered as an outline drawing. The privileged emigrant Marlene Dietrich sits on her mountain of suitcases. One leg in a high-heeled shoe is resting on a hat box. Today, escape and emigration usually look different...

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator



LALE ANDERSEN (1943)

Pencil drawing on acid-free paper, framed, 2024

Photo: Tobias Hübel



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LALE ANDERSEN (1943)

A second drawing on the windowsill in the foyer of the Wilke studio shows Lale Andersen squeezed into a passe-partout. One arm and her head are cut off by the frame. The drawing is based on a sketch from a newspaper in 1943, a very difficult time for Lale Andersen. It addresses her limited scope for action.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator

TRYING (1)

Marlene Dietrich's handwriting, upcycled acrylic glass,
produced with a CNC milling machine, 9 cm x 110 cm, 2024
Photo: Tobias Hübel

TRYING TO KEEP
THEM SMILING



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TRYING (1)

The starting point is a handwritten note by Marlene Dietrich, which she wrote as a caption under a photo: "Trying to keep them smiling". This comment aptly describes Dietrich's view of her role in the resistance against the Nazi regime. Marlene performs as a singer, hugs the soldiers, poses with them for photos, holds their hands, and kisses them. In doing so, she boosts the morale of the troops and receives numerous awards for her anti-fascist commitment. This must of course be viewed in the context of the time; given today's understanding of gender roles, such commitment would certainly also be viewed critically. It is significant, as Claudia points out, that Marlene was very well aware of what she was doing: trying to keep them smiling.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator

SOME HAPPY HOMESICK FELLOW

Risograph with hand drawing on acid-free paper, 28,7 cm x 21 cm, edition of 10, in black-painted birch frame under UV70 anti-reflective glass, 2024
Photo: Tobias Hübel



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SOME HAPPY HOMESICK FELLOW

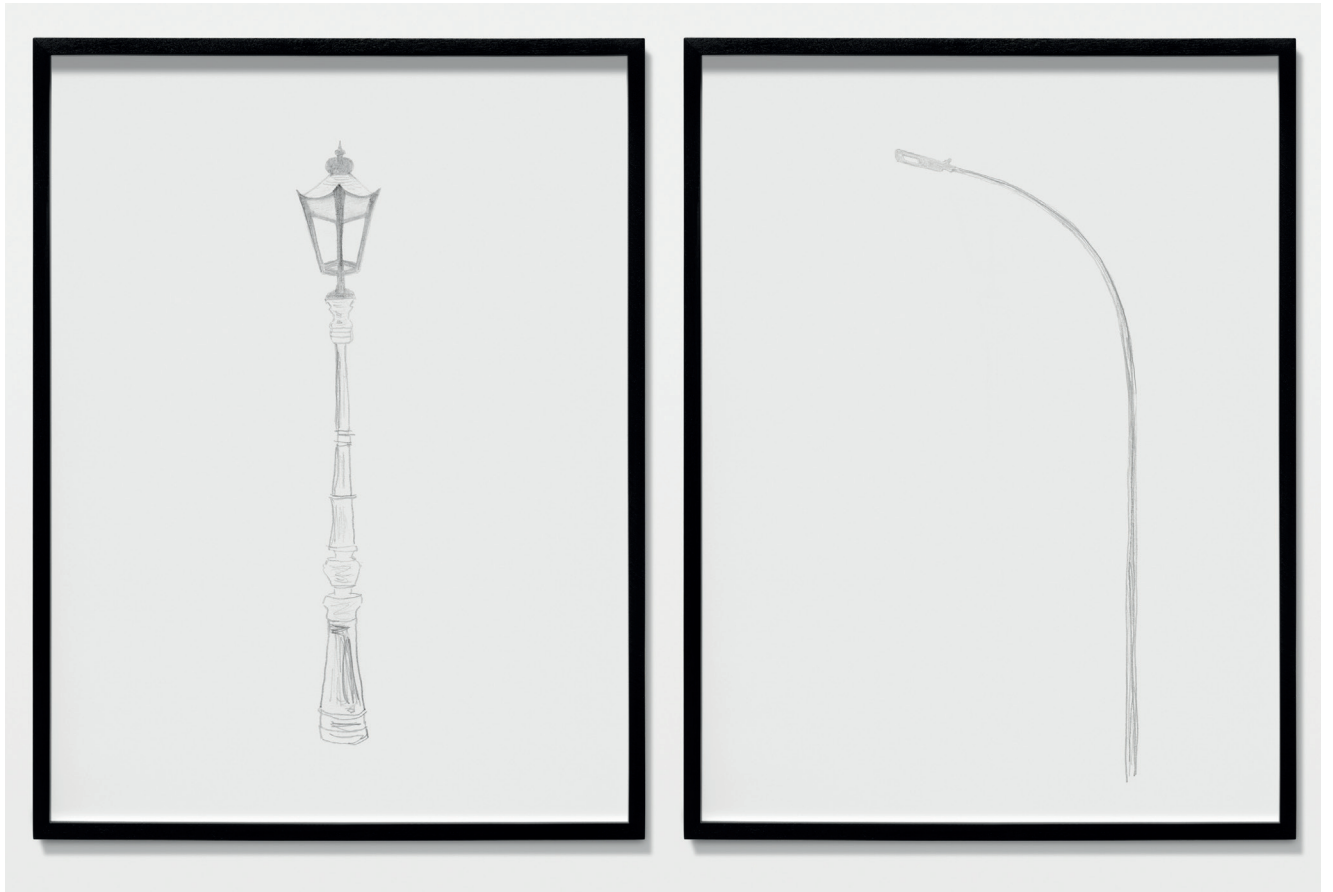
Here, she also presents a transformed photograph: in the first step, she frees her motif from the background; in the second step, Christoffel reproduces the section via Risograph; and finally, she draws the halo by hand. The result is a unique piece. The motif highlighted in this way and charged with meaning is a kiss.

The kiss is not as passionate as one might think; it is reminiscent of Doisneau's world-famous picture in Paris. But here, too, actors were hired, in case you didn't know. Marlene's kiss is a political kiss; she kisses strangers, in this case a soldier who has been freed from captivity: trying to keep them smiling, providing emotional support.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator

LILI MARLEEN (1)

Two pencil drawings on acid-free paper, 31,3 cm x 23,7 cm, in black-painted birch frames
under UV70 anti-reflective glass, 2024
Photo: Tobias Hübel



LILI MARLEEN (1)

In Bremerhaven, in front of Lale Andersen's birthplace at Lutherstraße 3, stands a nostalgic lantern that was restored by the German Navy. Claudia Christoffel drew this lantern and, as a contemporary interpretation, as a kind of countepoint, the modern lantern of the Naval Operations School on Elbestraße in Bremerhaven.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator



TRYING (2)

Lightfast drawing on acid free paper, 29,7 cm x 20,8 cm, in black-painted birch frame
under UV70 anti-reflective glass, 2024
Photo: Tobias Hübel



TRYING (2)

Claudia Christoffel has written the phrase "TRYING TO KEEP THEM SMILING" five times on a piece of paper, adapting Dietrich's handwriting. The repetition and determination are typical of Claudia Christoffel. This work is a reminder, even a warning, that Marlene Dietrich's resistance to the Nazi regime of terror was in line with her profession as a singer, but it was hard work and she performed it again and again with total commitment.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator



TWO TRUCKS AND SOME BOARDS – BEST STAGE EVER

Risograph on acid free paper, 28,7 cm x 21 cm, edition of 6, in black-painted birch frame
under UV70 anti-reflective glass, 2024
Photo: Tobias Hübel



CLAUDIA CHRISTOFFEL

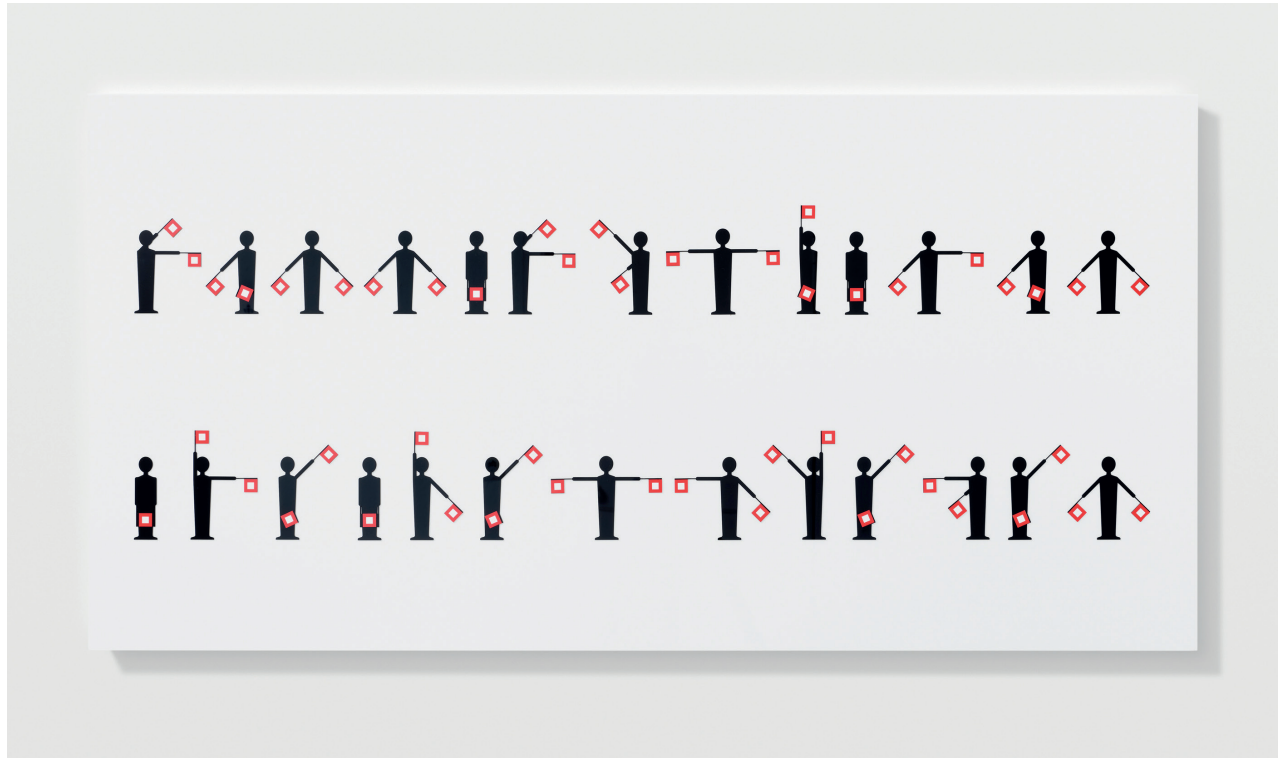
TWO TRUCKS AND SOME BOARDS – BEST STAGE EVER

“TWO TRUCKS AND SOME BOARDS - BEST STAGE EVER” shows a section of a sequined top, the kind Marlene Dietrich might have worn, in black, white, and red—the colors of the Antifa flag. To achieve this, a sequined top was pressed directly onto the exposure glass of a Risograph. Here, too, a technique was chosen to translate the message into contemporary visual language. The title comes from a handwritten note by Marlene under a photo.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE

Glossy white Acrylux, 75 cm x 150 cm, with laser-cut acrylic glass letters,
upcycled material from shopfitting, 2024
Photo: Tobias Hübel



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WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE

After the war, Marlene Dietrich launched an international career as a singer. With her smoky voice, she sang "I'm From Head to Toe for Love", "Lili Marleen" and later "Where Have All The Flowers Gone".

Where have all the flowers/girls/young men/soldiers gone / Long time Passing / Covered with flowers every one—When will we ever learn?

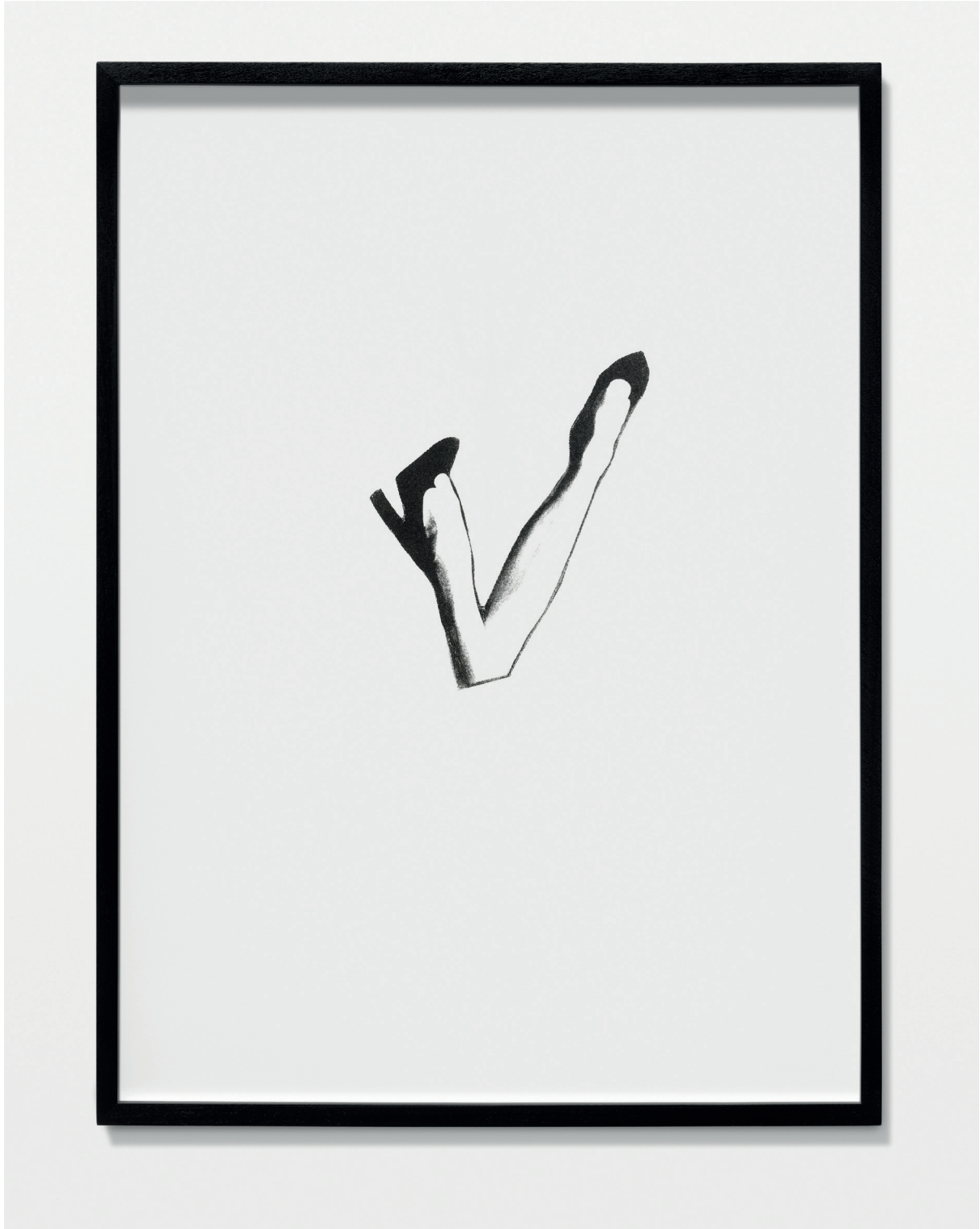
With the beginning of the Cold War, her commitment became increasingly pacifist. Claudia Christoffel took the line from the German version of this song. "WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN" into the semaphore alphabet, which was used for visual communication between ships or between ships and the mainland. In the semaphore alphabet, the individual letters of the Latin alphabet are described by the position in which the flagman holds two flags. The alphabet was often used for military purposes: Claudia Christoffel uses it for an anti-war anthem.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator



VICTORY / PEACE

Risograph on acid free paper, 28,7 cm x 21 cm, edition of 10, in black-painted birch frame
under UV70 anti-reflective glass, 2024
Photo: Tobias Hübel



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VICTORY / PEACE

The V for Victory became an iconic symbol during World War II. In addition to its connection to the English word "victory", it is also the first letter of the French word "victoire", meaning victory, and the Dutch word "vrijheid", meaning freedom. Winston Churchill used the hand gesture during public appearances. Allied soldiers painted the V on their uniforms or on the wings of aircraft, while the population painted it on the walls of their houses. The V signaled that the Allies would defeat Nazi Germany.

After World War II – triggered by protests against the Vietnam War – the V sign became a common greeting within the counterculture: peace. A new meaning as a sign of peace.

In one of the many photos of Marlene Dietrich and her legs, Claudia Christoffel noticed that when she selected a section of the legs and turned it upside down, it formed a V sign. This is typical of her: she looks at things and finds something special that others would not even notice, and she can transform it, turn it into art. A sign: political, feminist, and anti-fetishizing. Here comes the title from Claudia herself.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator

LILI MARLEEN (2)

Digital stopwatch, 2024

Photo: Tobias Hübel



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LILI MARLEEN (2)

The digital clock is set to stop at 3 minutes and 30 seconds. That is the length of Lale Andersen's version of LILI MARLEEN. During World War II, when Radio Belgrade broadcast "Lili Marleen" every evening at 9:57 p.m., there was a pause in the fighting on the front lines for these 3 minutes and 30 seconds, because soldiers from all sides—German, English, Russian, and later American—listened to the song. Is this a myth? Hard to believe! So many contemporary witnesses reported it. And then there were the letters from Germans, English, and Americans who wrote to Radio Belgrade from the front lines asking for the song to be played.

Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator



WHERE ARE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE (PERFORMANCE)

Walter Wiebe (Bremerhaven resident and retired marine) waved the phrase WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN? in the international semaphore at the vernissage on August 23, 2024.

Photo: Hannes van der Fecht



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VERNISSAGE

WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN? at Wilke Atelier, Bremerhaven August 23, 2024

Opening speech by Matina Lohmüller, art historian and freelance curator

Photos: Hannes van der Fecht



CLAUDIA CHRISTOFFEL

VERNISSAGE

WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN? at Wilke Atelier, Bremerhaven August 23, 2024

Photos: Hannes van der Fecht



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EXHIBITION: WHEN WE WILL EVER LEARN?

Wilke Atelier Bremerhaven, 2024

Marlene Dietrich on April 2, 1930, pencil drawing on acid-free paper, framed, 2024

Lale Andersen (1943), pencil drawing on acid-free paper, framed, 2024

Photo: Tobias Hübel



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