



Leutzendorff-Pakesch, Michaela: *Ingrid Wiener. Your Nights*.
Spike Art Magazine, No. 78, Winter 23/24, pp. 80-89

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Portrait

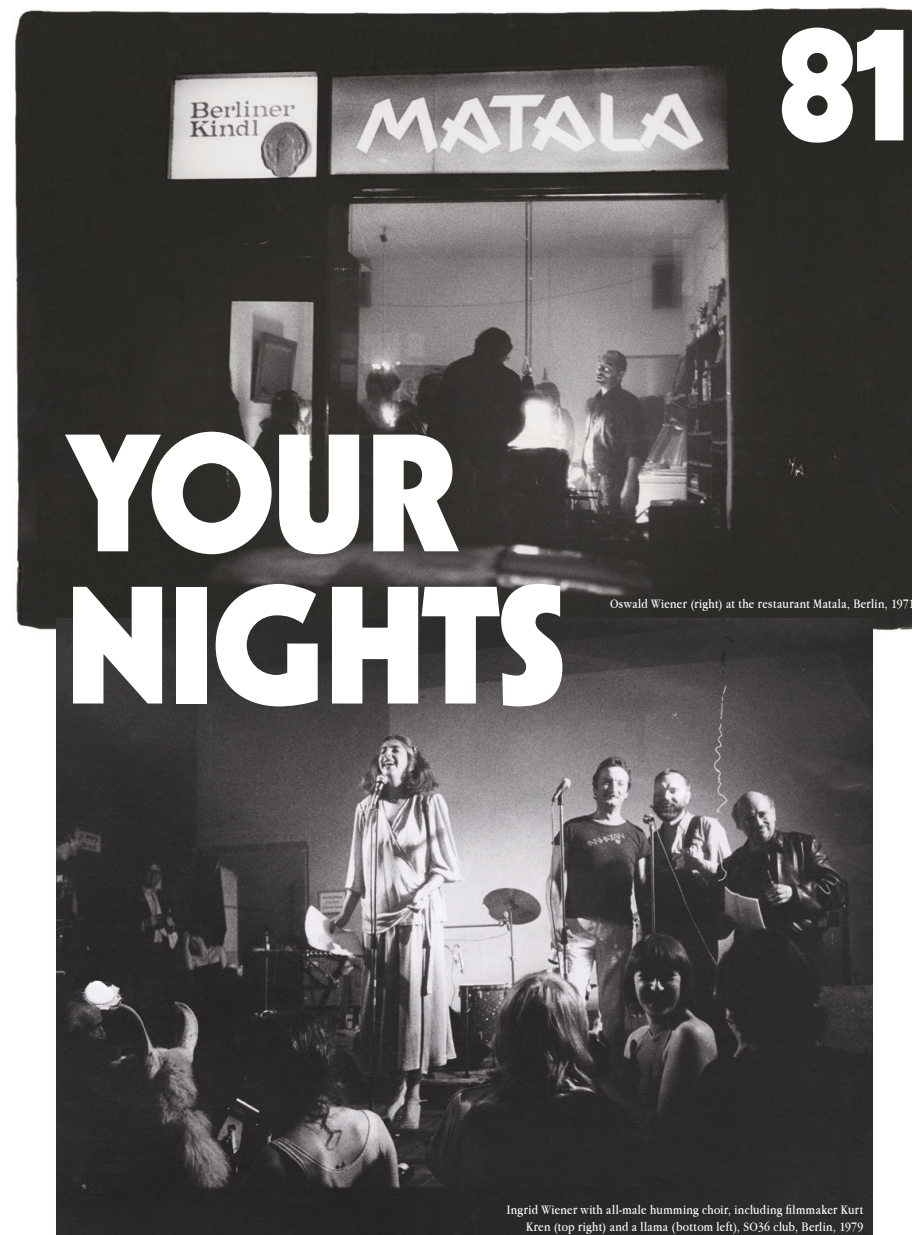
INGRID WIENER

Self-exiled from Vienna, first to the kitchen of West Berlin's most storied artist's haunt, then to the semi-hermitage of the Canadian hinterland, Ingrid Wiener has known two kinds of endless nights. In an interview with Michaela Leutzendorff-Pakesch, she discusses using the weft of time to aggrandize the plumbing and wiring of her everyday.



Ingrid Wiener
in the kitchen
of the restaurant
Exil, Berlin

Photo: Renate von Margoldt



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Oswald Wiener (right) at the restaurant Matala, Berlin, 1971

Ingrid Wiener with all-male humming choir, including filmmaker Kurt Kren (top right) and a llama (bottom left), SO36 club, Berlin, 1979

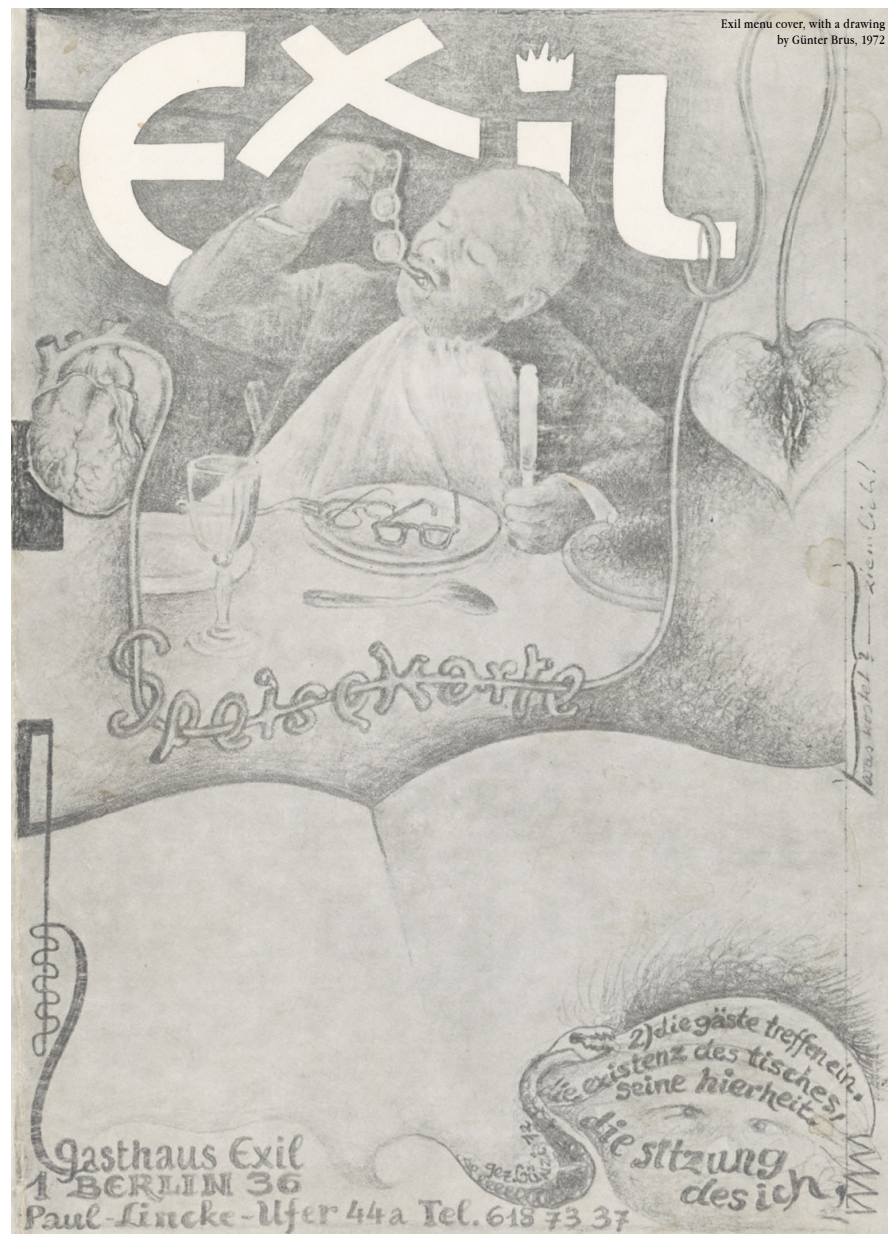


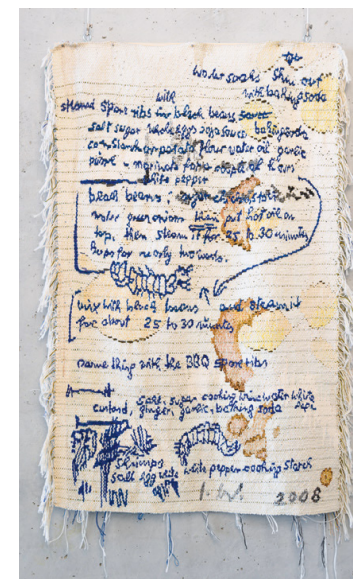
Photo: Georg Petermichl

MICHAELA LEUTZENDORFF-PAKESCH: The theme is the night – your nights. Let's start in West Berlin, where you emigrated in 1969 with Oswald Wiener, who was evading prosecution after the "Art and Revolution" action in Lecture Hall 1 at the University of Vienna*. West Berlin became an exile for other friends and comrades-in-arms, such as [Vienna Actionist] Günter Brus and his wife, Anna, who had already moved there. You soon experienced a gastronomic emergency of sorts and started founding your own restaurants. How did you end up becoming a chef?

INGRID WIENER: It was actually our friend Michel Würthle who had the idea of opening a restaurant because, unlike in Vienna, there were hardly any cozy restaurants in Berlin, and we really felt that lack. First, we took over a former Greek restaurant called Matala, and two years later, Exil. We wanted to create a place where we ourselves would feel comfortable. The 1970s in West Berlin were one of the best times in my life. There was a great atmosphere in the city, and I felt like I was part of a big family. It was all fueled by the fact that there was no curfew there, and nights often lasted until sunrise. West Berlin had a special status in every respect: It was an island, yes, but actually, it was a village.

My mother sent me the cookbook published by the daily newspaper *Kronen Zeitung*, which was popular in Austria at the time, because I had no idea how to cook. I was thrilled at how simply the recipes were explained, and I threw myself into this new adventure. But I also wanted to do something special, so I dealt a lot with the fringes of the culinary world, namely, with offal. I presented the dishes in a somewhat camouflaged way, so that the gourmands burst into raptures over something that would normally have disgusted them. I used tripe, bull's testicles, sweetbreads, lamb's brains ... But of course, there was also *Wiener Schnitzel, Tafelspitz, Palatschinken*.

Although it was far away from Charlottenburg, which was the center of West Berlin at that time, Exil, on Paul-Lincke-Ufer in Kreuzberg, quickly became a meeting place for artists and writers who happened to be in the city. They were all there: Dieter Roth, Dorothy Iannone, Martin Kippenberger, Maria Lassnig, Markus Lüpertz, Joseph Beuys, David Bowie, Bruno Ganz, Wim Wenders, Iggy Pop, Jack Nicholson ... Oswald ran the bar and Michel was an incomparable waiter, while Bruno Brunnet, who went on to co-found the gallery Contemporary Fine Arts Berlin, joined him later on. The friendships lasted a lifetime. I'll never forget the night when I came out of the kitchen late and,



Rezept meines chinesischen Kochs von mir notiert
(Recipe That I Noted Down by My Chinese Cook), 2008,
tapestry, wool, cotton, silk, 81 x 55 cm

not for the first time, this very handsome man with a penetrating gaze was sitting there. We started talking, Michel put on a waltz, and we danced out into the garden, along the banks of the canal, and everything around us disappeared ... It was Peter O'Toole, who invited me to come to Venice with him.

MLP So, you cooked at night and used this newly discovered talent to make a lasting impression on West Berlin's gastronomic scene. How did you then find your way back to your trained trade, that is, to weaving?

IW Once my cooking skills had been reviewed in magazines, I thought it was time to find something else to do. After all, I had graduated from textile school in Vienna and woven several tapestries for [Friedensreich] Hundertwasser with my school friend VALIE EXPORT. I was fascinated by tapestry weaving, but at the same time, I realized that it was an unprofitable art and that it was seen as a craft, in the tradition of Woppswede. Nor was it our thing to make weavings one-to-one from

images. My plan was to turn this old-fashioned art-form into something new because, as we all know, "anyone can paint." Dieter Roth seemed to me to be the right artist to help me realize this plan, as "two women weaving tapestries" would have been a hopeless undertaking in 1974. It was not easy to persuade him, but in the end, he sent us a used damask napkin with a succinct, red, felt-tip pen drawing from the Bertorelli restaurant in London. The interesting thing about it was to work the fabric of the napkin into the fabric of the tapestry; in other words, to depict a textile using the means of tapestry weaving. Of course, this was a translation, an alienation; we wanted to capture changes in perception caused by different incidents of light, for example. It was two meters by two meters and now sits in a glass case in the Kunsthau Zürich.

MLP You once performed at the legendary Berlin punk club SO36. How did that come about?

IW Martin Kippenberger was a regular guest at Exil. He was also involved in SO36, which was nearby, and invited international punk bands and avant-garde artists from New York. However, this displeased the local punk scene, which made a big fuss. So, Kippenberger ended his involvement in 1979 with the "Last Night at SO36," which he invited me to because I liked singing so much; I couldn't sing, but I never cared, and Martin obviously liked my weird sounds. I usually performed with a *Männer-Summchor* (all-male humming choir), but for this night, I wanted something special, so I got hold of a llama. Unfortunately, the llama didn't dare go on stage, and there was nothing I could do, so it stayed in the audience.

MLP In the mid-80s, when you'd had enough of the intense nightlife, you were drawn to the solitude of Dawson City, a small town on the Yukon River in the far northwest of Canada. The nights there are very long, and you didn't see the sun for months. How did you spend those nights?

IW Canada was certainly the most exciting adventure of my life. The extreme weather and the endless, uninhabited landscapes ... We bought an airplane and explored Alaska and the areas along and north of the Arctic Circle.

I continued my collaboration with Dieter Roth there; we had developed a very interesting dialogical working method. He mailed me "flat waste" from Iceland, which I turned into woven pictures, and I answered him with images I wove from my everyday

My whole life is contained in these dreams; they're an unconscious diary, so to speak.

life. This resulted in two monumental dialogical works, *3rd Roth-Wiener Carpet* (1987–90) and *Cheesboard* (1993–96). But I was itching to make something that would be completely my own, and so I began my first independent tapestry, *Windowview* (1985–87), which is the view from my window, seen through the loom's warp threads. It's always the same window, but what happens outside changes. In the in-between spaces, I also see the loom itself, wet socks that I'd hung over the loom to dry, or objects standing around the room. There are partial repetitions, but it's also constantly changing.

MLP In this tapestry, time is inscribed as a dynamic element, evoking an almost cinematic effect. The woven piece must always be turned further, so you never see the entire work, but only the part you are currently working on. So, in *Windowview*, you thematize your tool itself, but also make the process of weaving the subject by savoring the repetition. It also has something musical about it.

Back then, you were only able to sell this unique tapestry to a collector of Roth's by stating that it was inspired by your work with him. Only now has it been recognized as your own work, thanks to several recent exhibitions. What does that mean for you?

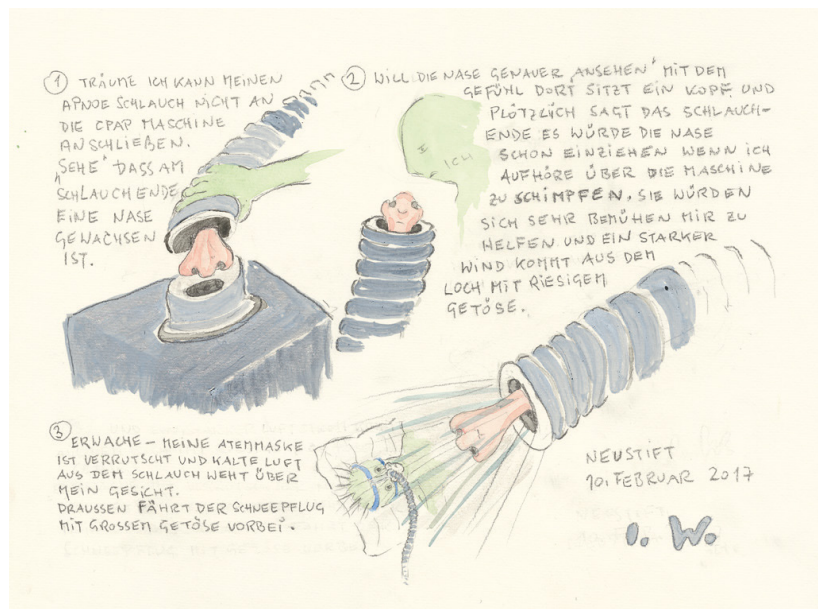
IW It was clear to me from the start that I had no chance on my own as a weaving artist, which is why I picked up Dieter. Of course, you want to be successful and for people to like what you do, but basically, I do it mainly for myself. It's important to me: It's somehow part of my life or my way of living well. If I didn't do it, I would be depressed, which isn't so funny. For me, it's about my own feeling for the thing itself, that what I'm doing is right, that I'm happy and satisfied with it. That's the most important thing.

MLP This new tapestry is a very special self-portrait. How did the image come about?

Atelier Markus Lüpertz, 1992–93,
tapestry, wool, cotton, silk, 60 x 60 cm



Photo: Nick Ash



Traumzeichnung, Neustift (Dream Drawing, Neustift), 2017, watercolor, pencil, and ink-pen on paper, 21 x 14.8 cm

IW After Oswald's death in November 2021, I tidied up and threw away a lot of paper. There were also a lot of X-rays, and I came across this colored computer tomogram (a cross-sectional anatomical scan). I was fascinated by the colors and its mysterious beauty. At first, I didn't know what it was, but then I remembered that I once had my aorta examined. So, it's a self-portrait from the inside, in a way that you never see yourself. I found that fascinating. It's also a kind of memento mori.

MLP Do you know that this makes you part of an art-historical lineage? There is a sculpture by Alberto Giacometti, *Woman with Her Throat Cut* (1932), and Ai Weiwei's *Rubi* (2006) realized a similar motif with internal organs in porcelain.

IW No, I wasn't aware of that, but I've always enjoyed exploring hidden, invisible connections. This also applies to *Kabelfrühling* (Cable Spring, 2009–10), where I turned a tangle of cables that was growing under a good friend's desk into a nine-part tapestry.

Or for *Plumbing* (2020–22), my penultimate work, which unearthed the pipework under the bathroom floor in the Yukon timber house.

Kabelfrühling is also a work of memory: Sadly, the friend and his desk no longer exist. It also marks the preliminary end of a development that began with the invention of the punch-card loom. This machine, which was invented in 1804 by Joseph Marie Jacquard, is regarded as the forerunner of the punch-card computer, such that weaving has been closely interwoven with digitization.

MLP Many of your tapestries have something to do with Canada, and they are often moments from your everyday life; even today, you still use photos from your home by the Yukon River. What I find special about your work is the care with which you capture banal and everyday situations. The elaborate technique of tapestry-making is historically reserved for heroic and mythological scenes. So, for you, when is something worthy of becoming a tapestry?



Traumzeichnung, Krefeld (Dream Drawing, Krefeld), 1999, watercolor, pencil, and ink-pen on paper, 21 x 14.8 cm

IW Often, it was a note that suddenly caught my eye, which I would then proceed to weave. For example, there is a tapestry with a recipe written down by a Chinese cook at the Claims Café, a restaurant we ran in Dawson City for a few years; it was very respectable, with white tablecloths and a handwritten menu. Or, there was a shopping list that I gave to Oswald, who had to fly to Whitehorse, the capital of Yukon, to do the shopping. These are things that somehow touch me, that have something to do with my life. A bootjack that is casting a beautiful shadow on the wooden floor, a pair of glasses lying on the chopping board in the kitchen, a snowshoe under the loom ... I take photographs, and sometimes, the weavings are realized immediately, but often, I find the photo much later and then get to work.

MLP But the Canadian nights also produced monsters, which led you to a new art practice, to your dream drawings. How did this extensive body of work come about?

IW I woke up very often after having the wildest dreams. I started writing them down immediately, and the next day, I would draw or watercolor them. It was only much later that I discovered that the cause of my frequent awakenings was apnea. That's why many of my dreams have to do with shortness of breath and anxiety. I have produced a whole series of very visually powerful states of pain. But of course, my whole life is also contained in these dreams; they're an unconscious diary, so to speak.

For a while, I drew a dream every day, in all the places we had just been, because we traveled a lot. Canada is very present in them, but there is also a whole series that have something to do with cooking and food, and many of our artist friends make

appearances, too. There are drawings that have up to six parts, stories that are often very absurd and funny.

However, some dreams are also abstract and quite obviously created by patterns on the retina. These drawings were also a reaction to an ongoing dispute with Oswald, who doubted the pictorial nature of dreams. I wanted to defend my own perception with my dream images. In the course of my work, however, I realized that the vivid images, which I subjectively experienced as clear, impressive dream images, melt away on closer examination, and that the clarity is more in the feeling than in the image itself. I try to reproduce only what I remember of the dream, what is vague or just a feeling. A text is inscribed in all the drawings, and I appear in them as a contour-less, greenish figure.

MLP To return us to our initial topic: What, in retrospect, does the night mean to you?

IW These kinds of nights, all so different from one another, have certainly shaped me; but I have always tried to adapt them to my needs and to make something out of them that is special, that is all my own. —

* On 7 June 1968, under the guise of a lecture announced by the Socialist Student Association at the University of Vienna, Oswald Wiener, Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, Malte Olschewski, and Peter Weibel staged the action "Art and Revolution" in front of several hundred students. As Wiener bellowed out a text on the "psychology of thought and speech," Brus, stark naked, jumped onto a lecture table, cut his chest with a razor blade, and, singing the national anthem, took a shit on the Austrian flag; all the while, Mühl whipped a student (Olschewski) with a leather strap, the latter's face hidden by a mask of bandages. In what the *Kronen Zeitung* quickly coined the "Uni-Ferkelei" (University Obscenity), Wiener, Brus, and Mühl were charged with disparaging Austrian symbols and the institutions of marriage and the family, offending public morals, and slight bodily harm. Wiener was acquitted, and Mühl was convicted to four weeks in prison; Brus was handed down a six-month sentence, only to escape police custody and flee to West Berlin, where he lived in exile for ten years.

INGRID WIENER (*1942, Vienna) is an artist living in Kapfenstein, Austria. Recent solo shows include Kunsthalle Bremerhaven (2023); Museum Hartberg (2020); Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin (2019). She has also taken part in the duo and group shows "Ingrid Wiener, Martin Roth – From far away you see more," Kunsthaus Graz (2023); "VALIE EXPORT/Ingrid Wiener ... but I come to Thee in the name of the LORD," Glasmoog KHM, Cologne (2018). Her work is currently on view in the group show "Hard/Soft" at MAK, Vienna, until 20 May 2024.

MICHAELA LEUTZENDORFF-PAKESCH is an actress, curator, and art manager, as well as the editor of the Ingrid Wiener monograph *Seeing Through the Warp* (2020). She lives in Vienna and Gnas, Austria.