

# EEW Art

# 2

Jessica  
Backhaus



**eew**

Energy from Waste

# EEW

EEW Energy from Waste GmbH (EEW) is one of the leading companies in Europe in the field of thermal recovery of household and commercial waste as well as sewage sludge. Already today, EEW is making an important contribution towards protecting the climate and resources and is a cornerstone for the circular economy. In the seventeen modern facilities currently operated within our corporate group we are able to process around five million tonnes of waste per year. In the process, our 1,250 employees reduce the volume significantly, sanitize the waste, and recycle scrap metals and agglomerates. Moreover, we make efficient use of the energy contained in the waste and generate process steam for industrial plants, district heating for residential areas, and environmentally sustainable power for approximately 720,000 households.

In line with our vision for the future, we set ourselves the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2030 and climate positive by 2040. A key measure will be carbon capture at our facilities. The captured CO<sub>2</sub> will be partly stored underground (Carbon Capture and Storage, CCS) and utilized as a valuable feedstock for chemical products in a carbon neutral economy of the future (Carbon Capture and Utilization, CCU).

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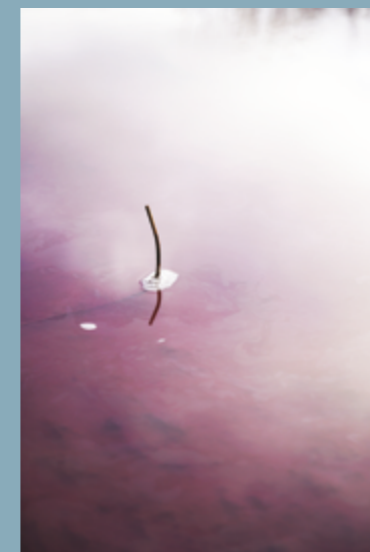
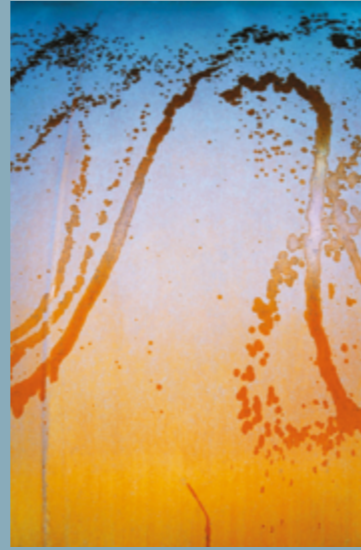
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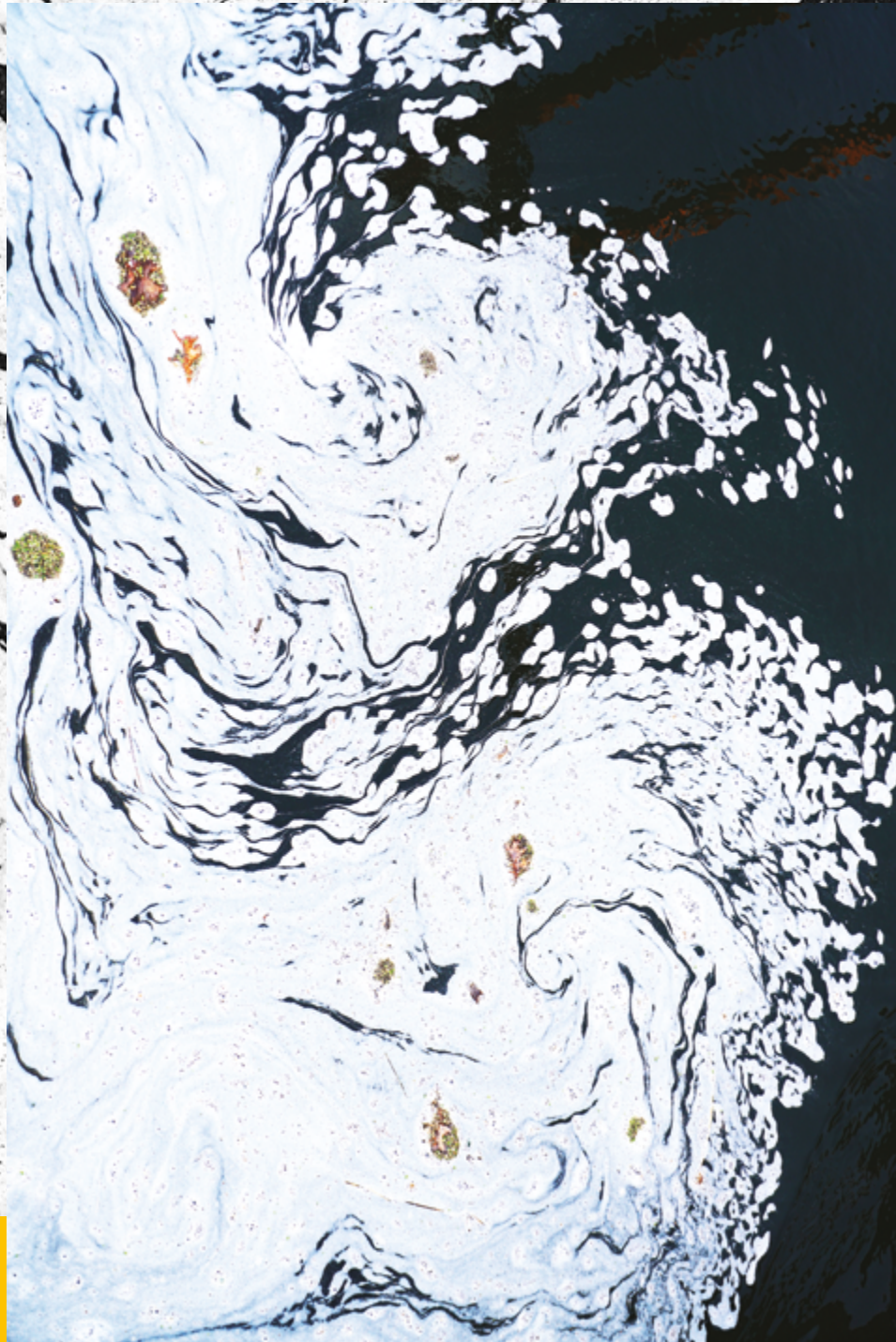
## Foreword

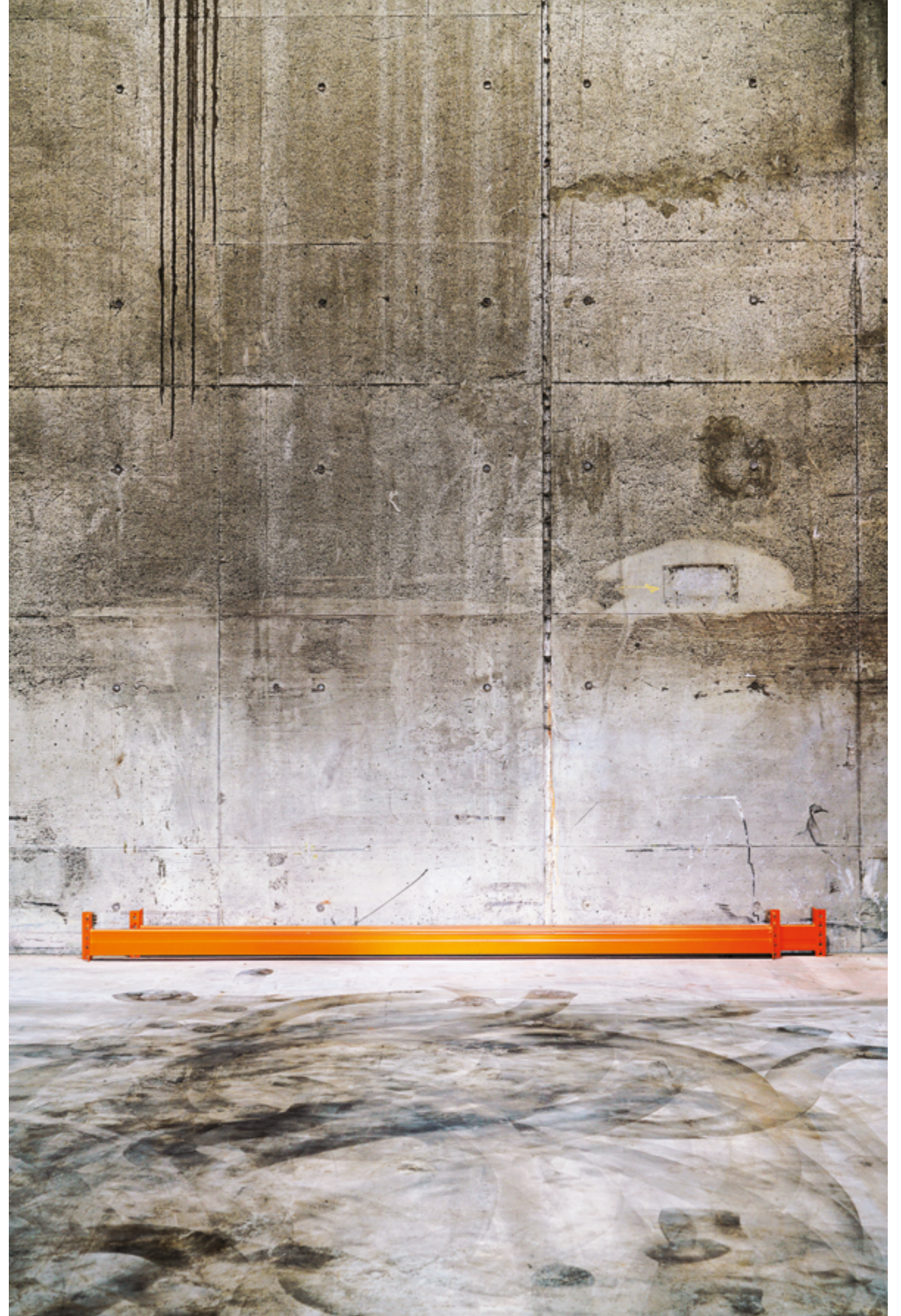
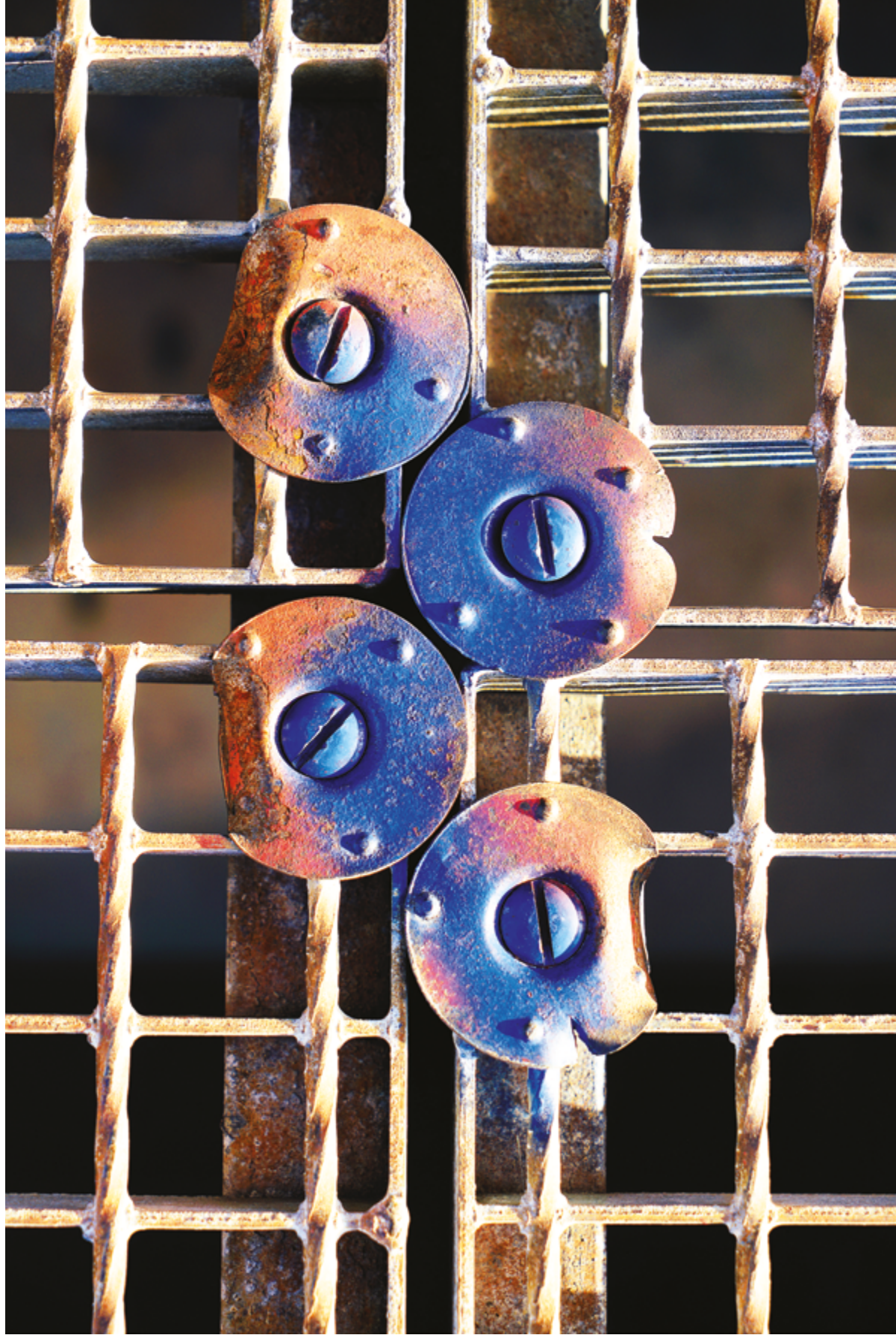
When we invited the photographer Jessica Backhaus to make the second commissioned work for EEW as part of our art program, she had just finished her internationally exhibited series “Cut Outs.” While her photographic work had previously often varied between documentation and abstraction, here she devoted herself solely to staging the abstract. We were extremely curious to see how the photographer would engage with our company. What places would attract her visually and atmospherically? What views, colors, and image details would she find to translate our everyday work and our company into the artistic realm?

After the first photo series by Friederike von Rauch, which explored the Buschhaus plant near Helmstedt, Backhaus decided to work photographically in the plants in Stapelfeld near Hamburg and in Premnitz near Brandenburg an der Havel. The result is brightly colored photographs that testify to how, with great precision and sensitivity, Backhaus perceived our plant sites and their surroundings and how she approached them with immediacy. Like a dance between near and far, Backhaus sometimes focused on details, only to subsequently observe them from a distance. Through her richly colored photographs, objects such as a spoon in bottom ash and the wall of a tank become witnesses to our daily working lives. Light and color are, as Matthias Harder writes so aptly in his contribution below, one of the artist’s most important means of sharing her view between reality and abstraction with us. In this way, the photographer not only helps us to document the present, but also opens up new ways of perceiving and thinking about our company.

Now eight works that we have acquired hang in our corporate headquarters where they enter into dialogue with the first commission executed by Friederike von Rauch. We hope they will stimulate conversations not only about this publication, but also between us EEW employees, that they will create encounters and promote dialogue.

Enjoy the art!





## Colors and Shapes

Dr. Matthias Harder

Director of the Helmut Newton Foundation

Abstract photographs often invite us viewers to give our imagination free rein, because in many cases we can only guess what we have in front of us, or whether we see a classical image at all.

Every photograph is an offer for reflection, even beyond what is recognizable.

The entire photographic artistic work of Jessica Backhaus is a fascinating interplay between enigmatic depiction of reality and abstraction.

For her current work for the EEW Art project, she again took the camera in hand and examined in her inimitable way the EEW plants in Stapelfeld near Hamburg and in Premnitz near Brandenburg an der Havel. EEW is about environmentally friendly energy generation through thermal waste utilization. In the past, one spoke simply of waste incineration plants, but in the meantime the processes of thermal transformation have become much more complex and, above all, more sustainable. Such physical-chemical processes are difficult to translate into images, and so Backhaus consequently does not create a narrative-mimetic documentation of what is seen, but concentrates on close-up details of surfaces, minimalist forms in local color. She remains close to the object yet at the same time opens up a vast associative space. In this respect, the photographs are specific and general at once.

Two chains with metal links of different sizes, shaded in black, form an unequal pair as the foreground motif of a vertical format; two colored areas of different sizes and color gradients form the background. They are yellow and blue windowpanes, drawn somewhat out of focus yet realistic enough to make us understand the shooting situation and situate ourselves within the pictorial space. Backhaus enters what is actually a hermetic system for the project for only a few days; she can move freely in it and perceives completely different aspects than the EEW employees during their shifts.





She senses, one has to put it pathetically, a hidden, metaphysical magic in things. Looking at the photograph of the two metal chains, we inevitably add something from our imagination—perhaps certain waste disposal processes, objects lifted with the help of the chains and thrown into a melting crucible, or certain sounds and smells that arise in the process. The static single image becomes the catalyst of such chains of association and itself appears like a kind of film still.

Other shots are even more clearly and minimally composed, such as the vertical format showing two orange, elongated objects, possibly painted steel beams. They lie in a huge, otherwise empty warehouse in the transition from concrete floor to concrete wall. The stone surfaces of the wall and floor have an interesting texture, containing grinding marks, dirt, and run-down black paint that becomes a delicate line drawing on the wall. Everything in this room and this spatial image remains in the gray-brown color spectrum; only the meter-long colored beam, which marks the tipping point between the horizontal and the vertical and in this respect becomes a space-constituting factor, particularly catches our eye.

Backhaus is always able to react and anticipate congenially on the spot, to confuse and charm us with her visual transformations. And not only here. Fundamentally, she imbues banal things with surprising visual poetry through her choices and focus, including the four screws with washers that connect a metal grid to a substrate construction. The screw heads and washers are partially sprayed with blue paint, which somewhat obscures the rusty surface. The reason for the color change cannot be discerned from the image, nor can the dimensions of the objects be ascertained.

In this artistic documentation Backhaus recurs to earlier series of pictures she created. For EEW, she translated and condensed her visual experiences as well as her inspiration through the medium of painting into fascinating individual images. Here, too, these are mere snapshots, and with the color gradients, the artist once again transports us, beyond mere fulfillment of a commission, into a timeless abstraction. These images, too, appeal to senses other than purely cognitive thought. We can find beauty everywhere, if only we develop a sensorium similar to that of Jessica Backhaus.







# Interview

As part of the EEW Art program, photographer Jessica Backhaus became the second artist to be given carte blanche to artistically explore our company, our most important input material, waste, and its thermal recycling. In a conversation, Jessica Backhaus, art consultant Julia Rosenbaum, and EEW CEO Bernard Kemper discuss how art alters the way we look at things and why this change of perspective can be a prerequisite for sustainable action.

**B. Kemper** Jessica, we've given you carte blanche to impart your view of our facilities to us.

**J. Backhaus** As a rule, commissioned works don't allow artists to develop completely freely. Normally, the customer wants a certain, benefit-oriented view of things. But in your case, artistic freedom is part of the program. This is very rare and something very special.

**B.K.** Artistic freedom is an essential aspect of EEW Art. Because sustainability needs the conviction to want to change something. So it's important to think outside the box from time to time, to consciously step out of day-to-day business and say: Now we're going to venture an unbiased view from the outside.

**J. Rosenbaum** Bernard, when we first started working together, we talked about what could be done with EEW and art. Do you remember that?

**B.K.** Yes, I remember it very well. At the beginning, it was completely alien to us to associate art with our company, and I had to make a concerted effort to persuade my colleagues. But when it comes to sustainability, EEW and art come together. On the one hand, we have a sustainable business model, and on the other, promoting art is a form of sustainability.

**J.R.** Photography is particularly good at bringing together the artistic and documentary levels. It can create a moment of tension in the field between abstraction and documentation. Jessica, can you tell us something about your work process?

**J.B.** I took photos at the EEW plants in Stapelfeld and Premnitz. I was given the freedom to move around the entire plants and look everywhere for things I found interesting and important.

**J.R.** That corresponds to your way of working, doesn't it? You go to a place and immerse yourself in it. Do you first look from the macrocosm into the microcosm?

**J.B.** First, I look around in general, really quickly, like a scanner.

**J.R.** And what captures your attention?

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the conviction to want to change something.

Bernard Kemper

J.B. The colors, the light, the details, or even the moment. I'm often drawn to situations that other people simply pass by. For many years I've been interested in things that are actually incidental.

B.K. You photographed the bottom ash, the so-called slag, and a single spoon in the slag. Basically a symbol. Because we deal with disposable products of our society and try to make something new out of this waste. In this case, the best way is to transform what is thrown away into energy. This is our understanding of sustainability, and it is also reflected in your images. Everything is in a closed cycle and returns. Both we as a company and each person have a tremendous impact on what returns and in what form.

J.B. When I was looking for motifs in Stapelfeld, two employees accompanied me. We were together all day and they showed me the different areas of the plant. I always paused in places that hadn't captured their attention previously. After a while, they said, "We've been working here for twenty years, but we've never seen our plant like this before." That was a particularly nice moment.

B.K. Every person who lives in Germany is connected to us because they produce waste, have an influence on the environment and therefore also on their future. And that's why I think it's so important to look at things from a different perspective.

J.R. And in the process, you have to search for clues in Backhaus' pictures. You suddenly discover a curve and ask yourself what it is.

B.K. This is a curved weld that runs upward.

J.R. Your photographs are timeless and poetic in a very unusual way. How do you create these special moments?

J.B. It's hard to explain, because during the creation I engross myself in a very special world of my own and engage with a wide variety of

topics that don't actually relate to what the photographs will look like. They arise from a longing, from a necessity, from intuition, from thoughts and emotions. Perhaps it is a secret that I always try to discover.

J.B. What is your view of the new series you created for EEW?

J.B. Something happens during engagement with art. EEW chose the right works for this. On the one hand, the photographs show very concrete objects and situations that can be situated directly. On the other, there are works that are quite abstract and are not immediately apparent. In contrast to the figurative, abstraction enables you to find your own space, a free space for dreaming, feeling, seeing, and sensing. The engagement begins with the interplay between reality and abstraction.

B.K. That has to lead to a dialogue, doesn't it?

J.B. I think so. My works live in the facilities, so to speak. Which means that they enter into dialogue with the employees on site.

B.K. Of course, we hope that discussion about the images and about what we do will have an impact. That this discourse will help us move away from a throwaway society and to really think in terms of closed cycles.

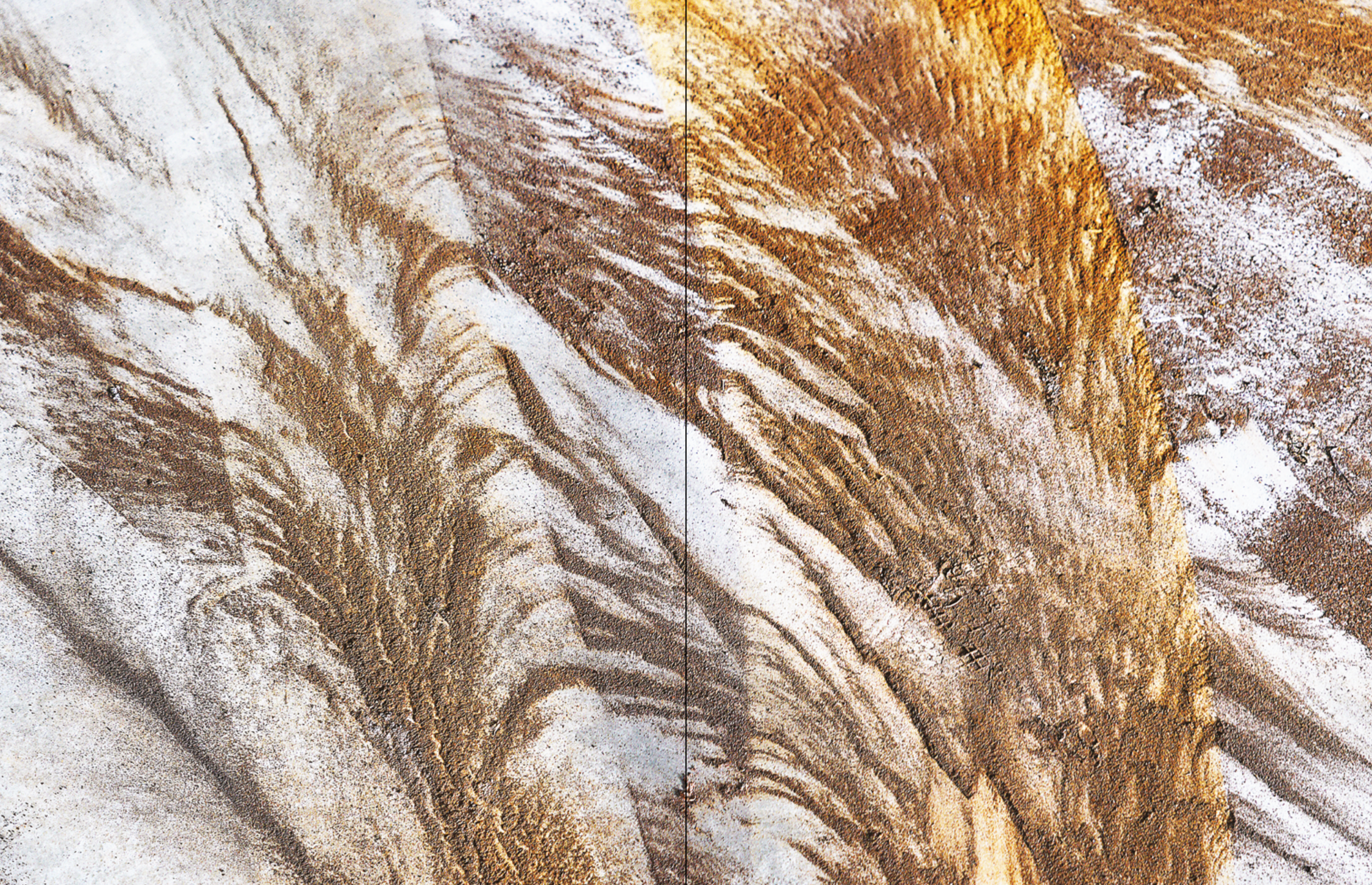
J.B. And an openness to embark on unknown paths also helps with this.

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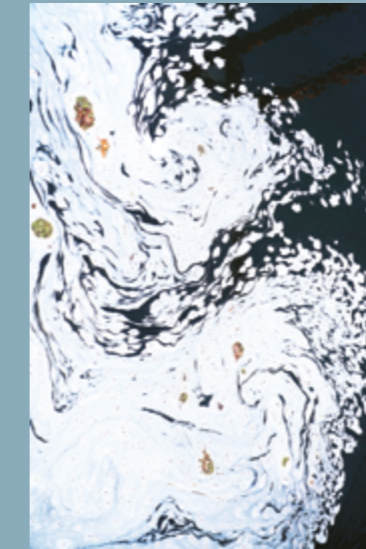
Jessica Backhaus







Jessica Backhaus (\*1970, Cuxhaven) studied photography and visual communication in Paris and worked in New York between 1995 and 2009. Since 2009, the artist has lived in Berlin. Her work has been shown internationally in numerous solo and group exhibitions. The Kunsthalle in Erfurt devoted a large solo exhibition to Backhaus in 2013. Her works are included in numerous public and private collections.



## Imprint

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