

Artist

ELIZA DOUGLAS

A studio visit by

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

ELIZA DOUGLAS I can find the very beginnings if you want that?

HANS ULRICH OBRIST That would be good.

ELIZA It might take me a while...

HANS I know the earlier works from Air de Paris.

ELIZA That is basically the beginning.

HANS What about Houdini? ^{FIG 2}

ELIZA [Laughs] Oh that! Probably about ten years ago a friend took me to Björk and Matthew Barney's house. Matthew Barney had this rubbing of Houdini's grave on the wall, I think he just went with their kid to do it as a fun craft thing. Since then I just thought it was a funny idea to copy the one undisclosed creation I saw of this person whose work is generally so well known and hyper-visible.

HANS So, it's basically a copy of what he did?

ELIZA Yes, exactly.

HANS And what's the zombie fountain? ^{FIG 3}

ELIZA That is for a collaboration I'm hoping to do with Puppies Puppies. We bonded, and it was nice. I was dreaming of doing a collaboration with her and then she proposed it to me and it made me happy. We're kicking around ideas. She likes working with these Hollywood props that are then sold, so I was saying that we should make a fountain out of the zombie ones, with the blood continuously running.

HANS So you're going to do a collaboration, where will that be?

ELIZA Oh we have no plans yet, we're just now writing back and forth...

HANS But you made that zombie fountain drawing, that's you?

ELIZA Yes. We've talked a little bit about where we could do something, because I think we both work a little bit like that, we need a specific thing to work towards.

HANS Will it be a public sculpture? Or an exhibition?

ELIZA It would be part of an exhibition. But it's just one of the many brainstorming ideas we're sending back and forth. This other drawing is a thing I was thinking about making, just because I'm making money for the first time in my life. I'm kind of obsessed with taxes, because I never had to pay them before really. So I was thinking that every year I should make a painting that has all the things that I couldn't deduct from my taxes depicted in it, and thus make them deductible because they're part of my work.

HANS And then you sell the painting?

ELIZA Yes.

HANS So what is not deductible?

ELIZA Things that are not work-related.

HANS Like clothes?

ELIZA Yes, I think if you can use them outside of that context as well, then they're disqualified... I mean, I'm sure that this wouldn't slide if I was audited but I like the idea of doing it regardless.

HANS Where do you pay tax, Germany or America?

ELIZA Technically I pay taxes in both. I get all my money paid to the US so I don't end up having to pay anything to Germany, but I still file taxes there.

HANS So the painting would be about the US?

ELIZA Yes, I would be too scared of the Germans [laughs]

HANS And what else is not tax deductible? Theatre or cinema tickets? It's interesting that at the end of the day everything could be considered work.

ELIZA Yes, especially if you're interdisciplinary...

HANS It's a great idea, would there be one painting or a series?

ELIZA I think it could just be one, because it's really utilitarian, so why would I make a series? I feel like if I made anything beyond what is necessary, then it would somewhat go against the idea of it just serving that purpose.

HANS Yes.

ELIZA But in terms of the genesis of the work, I just started making paintings, I guess three years ago, when I went to the Städelschule. The first ones I made using a digital printer at the school. I made paintings and photographed segments of them, printed them on canvas and then added more paint on top. ^{FIG 4} So it was just a way to make something that looked semi-impressive and get around the fact that I didn't really know how to paint. Then a friend here who has a small gallery sold a couple, so I finally had a little money. I had already been thinking about what kind of paintings I wished I could make, if I had the ability to paint in a 'realistic' way, so I started to think about hiring a trained painter to help me make work.

HANS Do you have photos of those very first works?

ELIZA These are the very first where this under-layer, a photograph of paint that is printed and then I paint on top. ^{FIG 5} I don't particularly like these works, but they are the only reason I was able to make the work that followed.

HANS It made it possible.

ELIZA Yes. It gave me the means to hire an assistant to help me paint the aspects I was unable to. The first paintings I made combined well-rendered hands connected by abstract areas of paint.^{FIG 6}

HANS That's the one I saw at Air de Paris. How did you have that idea?

ELIZA It was a combination of things. First of all, it was partially an economic decision, since I could only afford to have an assistant for about a week. So it made sense to plan something in which just a little portion of the canvas being covered would go a long way. I was also really inspired by Monika Baer's work, paintings that have a real presence of something well-rendered and then something more abstract, or messy. Additionally, because it was this early stage of studying painting, there was a lot of talk about the figuration- abstraction dichotomy. I remember once sitting in a class, starting to think about this series and wondering, "Why haven't I seen a painting like this?" One that contains well rendered body parts and then really abstract areas... Another reason I suppose the motif came to be was because before going to art school I had been into psychoanalysis for a while, so I had Lacanian ideas about body Fragmentation in the back of my mind.

HANS So that is a whole series, when did you stop making them?

ELIZA I still do, like this one I just did today.^{FIG 7} For some reason, the series just doesn't feel done to me, even though I think probably to a lot of other people it does [laughs].

HANS But this one is different from the ones I know, they were more about lines, here it's really a body in a way.

ELIZA Yes, the first ones I gave myself really narrow parameters to work within.

HANS Do you draw before you paint?

ELIZA Just on Photoshop.

HANS So you don't doodle or sketch really?

ELIZA No, but it is kind of doodling because, for example, I'll copy the colour of the hand and then make something the width of a brush stroke and then draw it out on a computer. The very first ones were just flesh coloured paint and hands. It has changed as I allow more and more things to be able to enter the series. After the flesh I thought, "OK that's the way I can have colour." And then all the patterns also gave me something else to work with...

HANS So the brushes become sleeves and

then the sleeves became bodies.

ELIZA This next painting feels to me a continuation of the series. I'm making some that have sort of abstracted t-shirts. This one with the floral pattern, it dissolves.^{FIG 8} Usually I sketch a bit with paint on the canvas to find out what form I want, but sometimes, like with this one, I just liked it as it was: as a sketch...^{FIG 9}

HANS This is amazing.

ELIZA Thank you.

HANS Is Maria Lassnig an inspiration?

ELIZA Yes. I really love her work. One of my first shows was on the ground floor of Museum Folkwang and she had this big show there. I love her self-portrait in which she is holding two guns, one pointed at herself, and the other at the viewer.

HANS She was a very good friend of mine.

ELIZA I should look more at her work. So then I started having the hands holding things... these are early ones.^{FIG 1}

HANS So in a way, this series can continue forever.

ELIZA Yes. Next, shoes became allowed in.

HANS How many have you done?

ELIZA Oh, I shudder to think, someone asked me that recently. I think probably around 40 or 50, maybe more.

HANS [Laughs] But then that shouldn't be a concern, if you look at the fact that certain artists end up doing 30 or 40,000 paintings.^{FIG 11}

ELIZA Yes, sometimes people say "Be careful about over-production!" but I don't understand that because it's not really about the production.

HANS I don't think that's ever a problem, I think the problem is if the demand drove the production. If you look at Warhol, Warhol over-produced, and Boetti did so many of those embroideries. If the logic of the work is that you do many, then you should do many. Only the logic of the artist counts and then the market has to adapt.

ELIZA Yes, I mean it sounds so cheesy, but it just generally seems wrong - especially in the context of art - to fight against who you really are. If your psychological make-up leads you to being the kind of person that wants to make a lot of shit then that's going to be best for the art. These next images show some holding planes,^{FIG 10} and then these are abstracted t-shirts, I don't know if they read like that.^{FIG 11}

HANS And the sneakers?

ELIZA The sneakers are Balenciaga, there is a lot of hype around them. They are called the

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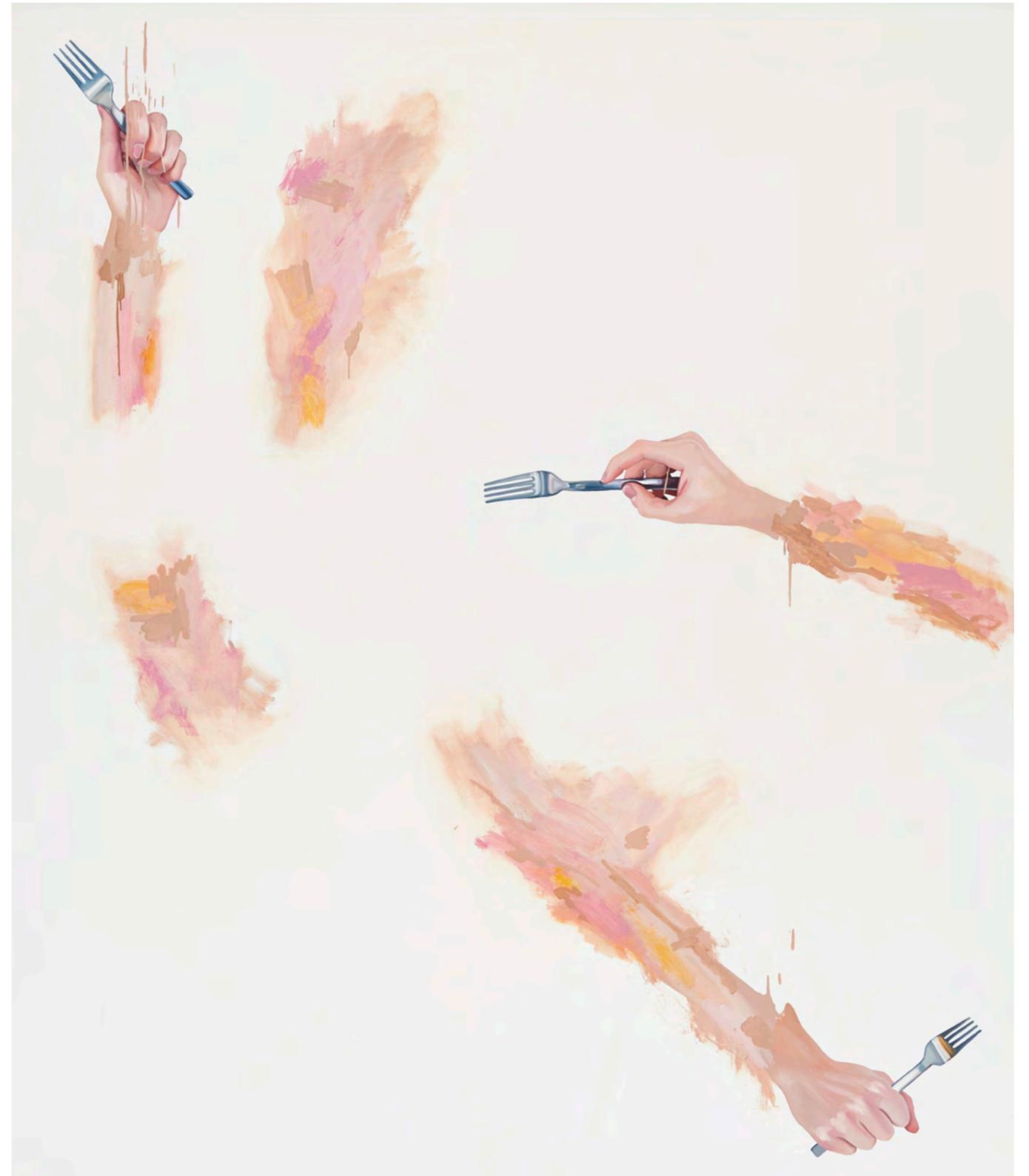




FIG 2
Untitled, sketch, 2018



FIG 3
Untitled, sketch, 2018



FIG 4
Untitled, oil on canvas, 2015



FIG 5
Untitled, oil on canvas, 2015



FIG 6
In My Dream, oil on canvas, 2017



FIG 7
This blobby flesh man is called Eagle, oil on canvas, 2018



FIG 8
Glittering With Decay, oil on canvas, 2017



FIG 9
Sun Spilling Everywhere on Me, oil on canvas, 2017



FIG 10
The Snowy Mountains of the World, oil on canvas, 2017

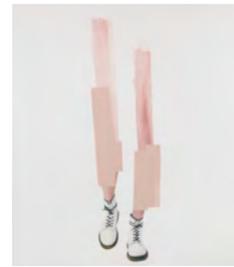


FIG 11
The Potential of Being, oil on canvas, 2017



FIG 13
Untitled, oil on canvas, 2018



FIG 14
Untitled, oil on canvas, 2017



FIG 15
Signature I, oil on canvas, 2017
Eliza Douglas Anne Imhof



FIG 16
I Am the Horse You Should Bet On (IX), oil on canvas, 2017



FIG 17
Roses and Tulips, oil on canvas, 2018



FIG 18
Divide the water, oil on canvas, 2018

**ELIZA
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Triple S and are extremely expensive,

HANS How much do they cost?

ELIZA I think they're \$800, or something like that.

HANS Wow.

ELIZA It's the kind of thing where people line up around the block hours before they are first released in the stores.

HANS That's the really weird thing about sneakers, they become like a currency, it's insane.

ELIZA Yes - I do like that some people will have no idea what they, are and then other people will recognise what a heavy commodity they are. I also think that visually they are simply the right sneaker for the series. They're weirdly over-sized, they look almost like orthopaedic shoes. The only other kind of sneakers I've put in a painting are in fact orthopaedic.

HANS So it's either orthopaedic shoes or these Balenciaga sneakers, no Virgil Abloh so far?

ELIZA Not yet.

HANS Where do you get your t-shirts?

ELIZA This, for instance, I just found on eBay, some of them I've even had for a long time or some maybe I would just find via Google image search.^{FIG 18}

HANS And do you keep them?

ELIZA Yes. A few I never even ordered, if I really like the original photo and it is hi-res enough.

HANS And the t-shirt you are wearing now, might end up in a painting?

ELIZA Yes it could. I really like the way they look, but this one is a little stiff. This next series, *The Monster Paintings*, happened kind of simultaneously with the hands and feet. I wanted to experiment with outsourcing in the Dafen village in southern China, do you know this village?

HANS Yes.

ELIZA So I just did it as a test.

HANS They were painted in China?

ELIZA Yes. I wanted something that I still could intervene with in some way. I like stock image sites, I looked at various pictures of people or creatures holding things, there'll be, for instance, a family, or a puppy, or a doctor holding a big blank sign or business card, which I assume are usually used by corporations to advertise on, then I found this one, of the monster holding a blank card, and I thought it would be funny to have it made into a painting and then paint my own painting on the business card.^{FIG 16}

HANS So you get it painted in China, then when you get it back, you do the little painting on top?

ELIZA Yes. I've made a bunch of them and then I also made ones using an image of just a monster's hand, so for the following show at Overduin & Co, I did a series of those.^{FIG 21}

HANS Do these series have names?

ELIZA They are just referred to as *The Monster Paintings*.

HANS And these?^{FIG 17}

ELIZA *Hands and Feet* - I really don't like that name [laughs] And then I just did one show of these strange portraits of boys, these were also produced in China. A lot of these I wasn't intending on becoming series.

HANS Do you send photos there?

ELIZA Yes - this is an image I made from two different sources, but I wanted to see how they would deal with people, in terms of making portraits, so I just made this as a try-out.^{FIG 19}

HANS Who is the person?

ELIZA He's a model named Falko. There's a model agency [Tomorrow Is Another Day] in Cologne run by Eva Gödel, and she's known for having these outside-of-the-box models.

HANS I have met some of them.

ELIZA Oh you did?

HANS Yes, some of them are artists.

ELIZA Yes, so it just seemed like a good resource.

HANS These are all Eva Gödel's models?

ELIZA Yes, she has a very well done website, she takes all the pictures herself and they're always structured in the same way.

HANS Did you meet her?

ELIZA Yes, I also do modeling for Balenciaga. Not general modeling, but just for them, so she represents me for that.

HANS Oh wow, that actually makes it even more interesting, they're kind of your colleagues!

ELIZA Yes [laughs]. But I started making them before I even met her. I was always afraid that she might see one and be annoyed that I was taking her photos without asking, and then she saw one at a fair and she bought it, which I thought was quite generous of her. Now it hangs in her office.

HANS Her Instagram is really good.

ELIZA I guess I should look at people's Instagrams, but I don't have it so I'm not as aware.

HANS You're not on Instagram?

ELIZA No, do you think I should be? Am I missing out?



FIG 19
Devil's Eye Coming, oil on canvas, 2017

HANS I think you should, yes. I mean, only if you feel like it, but I think it's really fun, I use it regularly.

ELIZA [Laughs]

HANS Because you see work, you know? For example, I couldn't be here for Arca because I had conference to give in London, but I've seen it on Instagram, over fifty people posted different angles. It's not that it replaces the embodied experience but it's really good. I'm going to post your sentence next week, we have it in London, it's being scanned so next week we post it. It's a very good sentence.

ELIZA Thank you. I was also in a photo shoot recently and at the last second I made my own shirt. I wrote "Balenciaga" messily with a black marker on a white t-shirt. I put it on over the outfit that the stylist had put me in, and then it ended up being the cover picture.-

HANS That's amazing.

HANS [looks at cover] What is *Re-Edition*?

ELIZA It's one of the most respected fashion magazines.

HANS A fashion industry magazine. And inside there is more of you?

ELIZA Yes, there's a whole shoot that Collier Schorr did. There are some images of my butt and stuff, but I don't feel uncomfortable with that, I'm just bracing you [both laugh]

HANS So it's Balenciaga and Vetements mixed?

ELIZA Yes, and lot of it is my own clothes.

HANS I love the idea that the cover is your piece.

ELIZA Yes. I've never shown it to anyone in this kind of context, but somehow I felt like you might appreciate it.

HANS I do, it's fascinating. Wolfgang [Tillmans] always says, when he shows magazines he did in the 90s, that they are very important pieces of his. He would consider those as important as a photograph on the wall. It's still original art, in a larger edition. And it's the same for this, people can just order this magazine for \$10 or \$20. [looks at cover] \$28.99.

ELIZA It's expensive.

HANS Yes, but it's democratic art in a way.

ELIZA The editor offered that I could just do my own thing sometime, I think that would be fun.

HANS Can we see more of your work?

ELIZA This series^{FIG 19} started with the red one. I once saw a guy who had this cigarette package with a warning image sticking out

of his pocket, and I thought it was really interesting. I took a picture, made a painting and then it turned into a series. I particularly like the impotent man images. I'm making a series within the series that's just tropical shirts, or palm tree shirts, with impotent men sticking out of the pockets.

HANS And the impotent men all come from the cigarette packages?

ELIZA Yes. People here have no idea what they are, because we don't have these images on cigarette packets in the US.

HANS We have it all over Europe. There's a friend of mine, Alvaro Siza in Portugal, who collects these cigarette images, and it's a real iconography – also really scary cancer images, skin cancer and all those things... horrible. But I wasn't aware that there was a series of impotent men, is it a big series?

ELIZA Well, it might just be this guy curled up, and then this one is just a guy looking down very disappointed [laughs].

HANS And is there an explanation with it?

ELIZA It says, "Smoking can cause impotence."

HANS And what's the image on this one in the middle? ^{FIG 20}

ELIZA I think it's just showing what a bad parent you're going to be if you smoke around your kid.

HANS Does he make a reappearance?

ELIZA Yes. The blue one and the orange one are in the middle of being made but they're all going to have that same image with the tropical motif. ^{FIG 14}

HANS And the backgrounds are shirts? But in this instance it's not your t-shirts...

ELIZA Yes, with these shirts I searched them out specifically for the project. Most of them I ordered from eBay.

HANS Do you continue to do other kinds of projects outside painting, like performance?

ELIZA Yes, I've made one performance and I made some commitments because I want to do more. Working with Anne [Imhof] took a lot of my performance energy from the past couple years and I feel, maybe unnecessarily, a bit self-conscious about doing something on my own because of my connection to her and how strong her work is. But I'm interested in doing it more. I'm doing something in Berlin which is going to be an elaborate fake guitar solo and you can't really tell until halfway through that I'm not actually playing it.

HANS Who is playing it?

ELIZA Well I'm making it with this guy who I'm meeting on Monday and Tuesday

who's just an incredible guitar player. My guitar won't even actually be plugged in, it will last about ten minutes and be deliberately epic and show off-y, spanning a bunch of genres.

HANS And people think it's you?

ELIZA Yes, except if you really know how to play guitar you might know it wasn't me... but I think half way through it'll become more and more apparent that the whole thing is staged because it's going to get more and more elaborate.

HANS Some people might never know. [laughs] And where will that be, in Berlin?

ELIZA Yes, I am doing an edition for Texte zur Kunst and Isabelle Graw asked me to do a performance for the launch of the issue.

HANS Do you have any other collaborations? I saw your project with Anne Imhof at Galerie Buchholz [in New York]. You do collaborative paintings also?

ELIZA Yes. Every month or so we set aside a few days and do that.

HANS Do you do them in your studio, in her studio or in a third studio?

ELIZA [laughs] in her studio, because I don't even have a studio anymore in Frankfurt and she has a really nice one!

HANS In Frankfurt?

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FIG 21
I Am the Horse You Should Bet On (D), oil on canvas, 2017

**ELIZA
DOUGLAS**

ELIZA Yes.

HANS Do you basically paint together?

ELIZA Yes, some of them begin with us literally us standing in front of a canvas passing a brush back and forth, it's very playful. But the signature pieces, those we originally sketched out on the computer. They are comprised of our two signatures overlapped and abstracted in various ways.^{FIG 15}

HANS It's interesting that now you are talking about working with Puppies Puppies – it's a new collaboration?

ELIZA Yes. And probably a bit less emotionally complicated [laughs].

HANS But maybe in a way it's interesting. I mean the interest of collaborations is that they're complicated, and I think with Puppies Puppies – one cannot meet Puppies Puppies, which also makes it complicated.

ELIZA We have met.

HANS Oh, you have?

ELIZA Yes. We are friends. It's a funny thing because I'm so 'overexposed' or something, and she's the reverse. If anything people are probably sick of seeing my face, whereas they've never seen hers at all [laughs].

HANS I didn't think of that. You appearing so much and Puppies Puppies not appearing, or indirectly appearing. There are many artists

throughout history who don't want to appear at all, like David Hammons. He disappears often, or you can't really meet him. I met him a couple of times but it's difficult to reach him. Stanley Brouwn never wanted to be photographed, Thomas Pynchon in literature... and with Puppies Puppies, it's actually very easy to arrange a studio visit, but it's by proxy, and it's that by proxy thing which is interesting. I have not seen that before, it seems almost like the alter-ego, and the alter-ego is also the partner, no?

ELIZA Yes... they're very entwined. After their first date, Forrest [Nash] wrote a very long email to Puppies about her work, so it was almost like their first conversation was about that.

HANS Amazing. And Forrest is a critic, or a writer?

ELIZA I think he does write but his main thing is Contemporary Art Daily, he runs that.

HANS He was very memorable. I went with Kevin McGeary, the art critic from LA, to see them. We sat on a sofa looking at these videos... the whole thing was very ritualised, minute by minute. You should have them do it for you.

ELIZA I would love to. It made me so jealous, the idea that they could just do that, because I feel so inexperienced about talking about this stuff. I don't want to make grand statements about my work. It feels a bit forced at this point in my career. I would love to have someone else...

HANS Explain it.

ELIZA Yeah [laughs]

HANS But at the same time, this is a great studio visit, thank you very much.

ELIZA Thanks for coming.

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ELIZA DOUGLAS, ANNE
IMHOF AND GALERIE
BUCHHOLZ, BERLIN/
COLOGNE/NEW YORK

FIG 7 PHOTO OF
ARTWORK BY ILAN
ZARANTONELLO; FIG
16 AND 21 PHOTO OF
ARTWORK BY LEE
THOMPSON; FIG 18
PHOTO OF ARTWORK
BY DAWN BLACKMAN