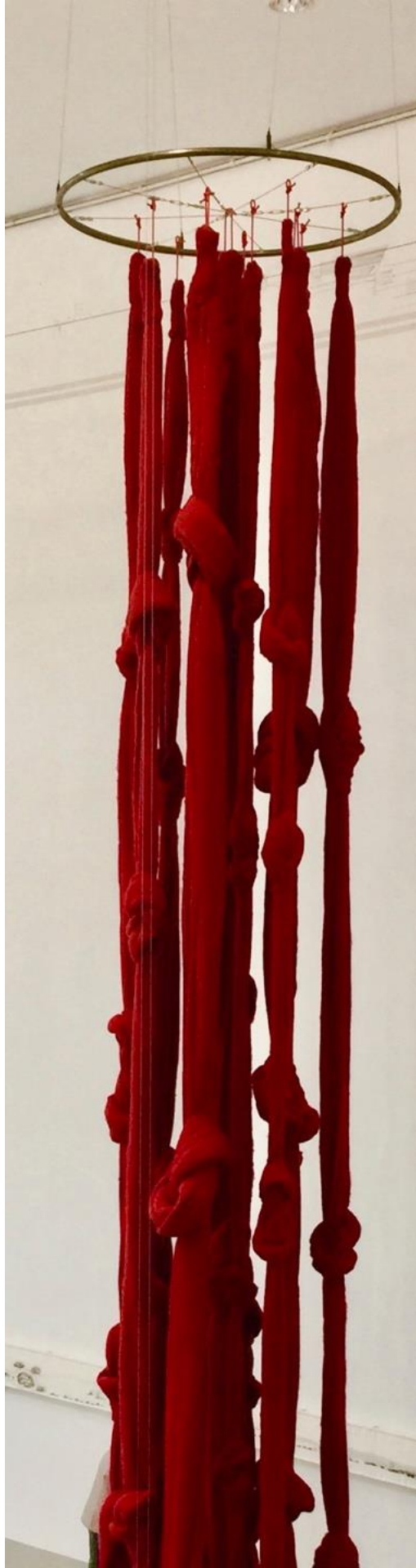


Outstanding work by several of the mature women artists added sensual poetic notes as some derived from literary sources and their own poetry. Cecilia Vicuña's elegant crimson wool hangings in *the Story of Red Thread*.



Cecilia Vicuña, *Quipu Womb, the Story of the Red Thread*, Athens (2017), dyed wool installation view, documenta

Halle, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: ©Susan Firestone

manifested literary rhythms of ancient Peruvian verse structure she defines as “quipuems”. The variously placed knotted skeins draped to the floor from lofty heights. She believes these soft gathered and locally dyed thick threads to be female blood connections between ancient goddesses of the Andes and their Greek counterparts.

Also, spatial and poetic were Indian artist Nilima Sheikh’s figurative scrolls that she arranged in freestanding traditional Asian ceremonial octagonal format. In the painterly miniature imagery of *Terrain: Carrying Across, Leaving Behind* (2016), she combines visual narratives of historical, mythological, and contemporary stories with verses from literary sources that speak of migration across continents, exile, and carry a sense of romantic yearning and hope of transformation.



Nilima Sheikh, works from the series “Each night put Kashmir in your dreams,” 2003-14, installation view,

Benaki Museum—Pireos Street Annexe, Athens, documenta14, photo:
©Stathis Mamalakis

Living now in South America, Elizabeth Wild portrays her life story in small shiny collages cut and rearranged from advertising sources. Her abstracted works form complete wholes that allude to her experiences journeying as a child from Austria to escape the Nazis, on to and from Argentina, and later to Basel due to political situations. Her background in textile design, antiques and clear sophistication in visual culture make her work that she calls *Fantásiasa* a fresh find.

On a very different note, Miriam Cahn of Basel introduces psychological elements in her sketchily painted, frontally presented nudes that noticeably disturb observers. Red tones draw attention to exaggerated, strange sexual parts of her ghostly characters who loom forward uncomfortably from ambiguous empty spaces of the canvases.



Miriam Cahn, 2015-2017, installation view, documenta Halle, Kassel,
documenta 14,
photo:© Roman März

Joyous in comparison, were the late Sardinian artist, Maria Lai's (1919-2013) textiles where her lyrical threads pierce, weave, and drape from canvas wall pieces and original books. Blue is color she fashioned into a ribbon-like sculpture which brought forth her community's ancient story and people in a ritual performance of healing. Generosity of spirit was also evident in her unusual bread books overflowing with threads.

American choreographer Anna Halprin, now in her 90s, was known in California for her open dance rituals that engaged regularly the community on her "dance deck" (1953-54). Scores and photographs of her work attested to the diversity of her dancers- black and white, subject matter-sex, aids, rape, environment, and politically charged choreography. Her innovative and therapeutic dance techniques engaged her dancers and the wider community of San Francisco in creative and collaborative ritual performances. Sadly, that energy was not live and only documented in Kassel.



Anna Halprin , Score for Citydance (1978) Ink and watercolor on paper
Anna Halprin Papers,
Elyse Eng Dance Collection, Mus of Performance + Design, San
Francisco, and others,
documenta Halle, documenta 14, photo:©Susan Firestone

Saucier were the videos (1973-2017) of California porn activists Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens who staged open public weddings that involved sexual rituals for all, that in their minds also embraced ecology with Dionysian excitement. The quiet energy of contemplation/meditation characterized the ripples on big seas of another Californian, Vija Celmins, originally from Riga.

In an off putting performance of attractive, but prepped actors, Serbian artist, Irena Haiduk used various elements of controlled engagement to direct her audience to inquire about horizontal marble slabs, reminiscent of tombs, and objects on view. It turns out one can do a rubbing of the incised slabs for 10 Euros which spelled out the incorporation objectives of *Jugoexport* which has the artist's designed objects especially make for this exhibition for sale at a price in line with your stated income level. Black canvas high top laced shoes made and mandatory for women workers under the former Yugoslavian government were reproduced by the artist and given to female workers at documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens. More were for sale with the socialist guarantee of nine hours of standing in comfort. I bought some before I knew they were an art piece, and, yes they do hold up to the claim! Haiduk's helpers, clarified later, were instructed to remain aloof and perform her idea of being removed and only slightly informative when pressed. Another option was to wait for a mysterious performance that took place in a pitch black dark space for 20 minutes without exit in recliners and listen to a recorded conversation with a colleague - no visuals. Some got uncomfortable and panicked, some snored, and others got lost in curvilinear ideas that one could not remember after the experience... better read than lived.

Another young artist, Regina Jose Galindo from Guatemala City, videoed the performance of a leopard tank endlessly pursuing a desperate young woman who had to keep moving or else? Her work, *The Shadow* (2017) metaphorically addressed the human condition in conflict zones supplied arms by Germany, a ranking manufacturer of guns, and other powerful countries for large profits. In "Objective" (2017), the observer must look down the barrel of a gun pointing at

her in of a closed room. Would you pull the trigger? The conflict is upfront, center and on-going.

Dealing with the aftermath of war and the post-traumatic stress (PTSD) of her father, Bonita Ely of Australia constructed a watchtower of her parent's bedroom furniture that overlooked a wooden trench with soil, a faceless doll and rabbit trap, isolated elements referring to her childhood trauma. Standing by and aimed inward at his domestic aggression was a gun made of her mother's sewing machine and bobby pins. Ely's installation *Interior Decoration: Memento Mori* (2013-17), attests to her struggle with intergenerational transmission of trauma that is undiagnosed, untreated and denied in military history.



Bonita Ely, *Interior Decoration: Momento Mori* (2013-17), installation with three parts, Contemporary Museum, Kassel, photo: ©Susan Firestone

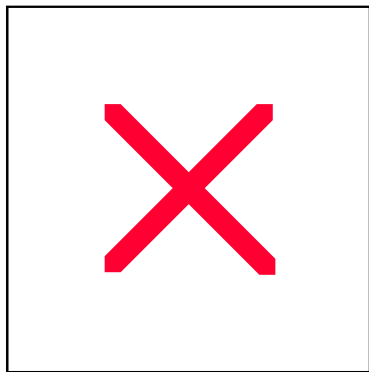
As might be expected, there were several artists who referenced German history and associated trauma in the aftermath of WWII. Uklanski's installation, *The Real Nazi*, filled the wall with photographs of many Nazi players and was chilling to see their faces, knowing of the parts they played in history.



Piotr Uklanski (2017), *The Real Nazis*, contemporary Museum, Kassel,
photo:©Susan Firestone

Other work, such as Maria Eickhorn? Addressed the pillaging of Jewish libraries, among other things, by German officers. In Athens, Roe Rosen's installation of black fabric accounts of a fictionalized musing imagined in the mind of Eva Braun before and after her death and Hitler's. Interspersed between the tall hangings were black and white abstracted figurative prints that offered immediacy and a sense of violence to the uncomfortable highly sexual story of *Live and Die as Eva Braun, 1955-1997*. Romanian artist Daniel Knorr's smoking tower of the Friedricianum in Kassel echoed the burning of art by German Troops in Athens. Arin Rungjang's video, *Tomorrow We Will Become Thailand*, 2016 chilled Athenians as it recalled the bloody university uprising in Athens that was simultaneous with violence in Bangkok.

Broadening images of faces and encompassing world icons and beliefs in form, projected large are multiple images morphing into one another. They stare into our eyes.



Theo Eshetu, 2017, digital video projected on banner, Neue Neue Galerie (Neue Hauptpost),
Kassel, documenta 14, photo: ©Susan Firestone

A surprising moment of reverie, meditation and devotional song was the video work, *Byzantion*, 2017 of Romuald Karmakar. The inspired chanting of the priests from the church Agni Parthene of Slavona was commissioned by

documenta 14 as were many of the works in the exhibition.

I return to the question posed by Adam Szymwzyk.: Can we learn from history? I applaud his emphasis on learning via personal history and making that happen for these artists. What will we do when when we know it? Do we have empathy and courage to act or step up? These artists and the rest of the artists chosen for this exhibition do reveal and have the courage to: use their imagination, their skills and their history to communicate their concerns. Are we looking? Are we hearing?

Reality is breaking news in the world today. Does long term distress, destruction, and dislocation carry forward? Memory, as recollected history, take time to come to light and unfold into form. Does it resonate now? What does a broken past look like? Injustices and atrocities live on in the mind of generations past and those present who survived. Trauma breeds trauma, even if we are silent witnesses, we share their history. Who is and will bear the brunt if we do not look, listen and learn?