

Berlin, 20. Januar 2026

Lieber Natis,

neulich habe ich dich beim Abendessen bei mir kurz gefragt, ob du mit mir zusammen eine Arbeit für die kommende Ausstellung „Explosive Zukünfte“ an der weißensee kunsthochschule berlin machen möchtest. Da es an diesem Abend recht voll war, war es nicht der richtige Moment, um die Einladung ausführlicher zu besprechen. Deshalb möchte ich sie hiermit noch einmal schriftlich aussprechen und gleichzeitig die Gründe festhalten, die diese Kollaboration für mich so wichtig machen. Das finde ich besonders wichtig, gerade heute!

Als Künstlerin habe ich bisher keine Arbeit gemacht, die sich mit meiner Tätigkeit als Professorin beschäftigt. Es schien mir hier nötig, mich mit einer schwierigen Erfahrung auseinanderzusetzen, die dich als Studenten (und mich als Pädagogin) betraf, die uns aber auch beide als Künstler*innen angeht. Wenn du dich lieber nicht noch einmal damit auseinandersetzen oder nicht mit mir an dieser Arbeit zusammenarbeiten möchtest, müssen wir das nicht tun.

Ich möchte die Hintergründe für unsere mögliche Kollaboration auch der Kuratorin und Präsidentin der Hochschule, Dr. Angelika Richter, erklären. Dafür ist mir wichtig, von dir zu hören, ob meine Erinnerungen richtig sind, und mich mit dir dazu auszutauschen, bevor ich mit ihr spreche.

Damals warst du nur für kurze Zeit mein Student, unter dem Namen Hasan Aksaygin. In derselben Zeit studierte an der Hochschule ein Student, der rechtsextrem war...

Ich war vorgewarnt und habe mehrere Gespräche mit ihm geführt. Er sagte, er sei nur deutschnational und konservativ. Gleichzeitig malte er Offiziere in glänzenden Lackstiefeln in der Wewelsburg, Fackelzüge und andere Motive, die nationalsozialistisches Bildmaterial unkritisch aufnahmen. Ein Student beklagte sich bei mir, er habe geglaubt, an einer Kunsthochschule endlich den Neonazis entkommen zu sein, die ihn bereits in seiner Jugend in Rostock angegriffen hatten. Dann wurde mir berichtet, dass der rechtsextreme Student einem jüdischen Mitstudenten diffamierende Mails geschrieben hatte, angeblich im Suff, was das für mich in keiner Weise entschuldigte. Ich führte ein weiteres Gespräch mit ihm, in dem ich ihm unter anderem sagte, dass die Leugnung des Holocausts eine Straftat ist. Er sagte, das würde nicht stimmen.

Ich ging zu meinen Kollegen; sie wollten nichts unternehmen, deshalb bat ich um einen Termin beim damaligen Präsidenten der Kunsthochschule. Er sagte mir, es sei sehr schwierig, einen Studenten der Hochschule zu verweisen; er legte mir nahe, wir sollten ihn einfach in der Zwischenprüfung durchfallen lassen. In der Zwischenprüfung sprach Kollege Prof. A, der glaubte, einen väterlichen Einfluss auf ihn ausüben zu können, nur über Formales – zum Beispiel, dass an einem Mädchenporträt die rechte obere Ecke noch nicht genug ausgeführt sei. Die Wewelsburg und den Fackelzug übersah er. Ich wurde wütend und sagte, man müsse sich jetzt auch zu den anderen Bildern umdrehen und über ihre Inhalte sprechen. Es half

leider nichts. Auch Professor B hatte nicht den Mut, ihn durchfallen zu lassen. Der Student bestand mit zwei Stimmen gegen meine.

Kurz darauf endete meine Zeit in Weißensee, und ich ging nach Kiel. Ich blieb mit etlichen Studierenden, die keine zu ihnen passende Betreuung fanden, im Austausch, so auch mit dir.

Bei einem späteren Besuch sah ich in der Hochschule ein Gemälde eines Hakenkreuzes. Ich fragte Kollege Prof. A, wer es gemalt habe und warum es nicht entfernt werde. Er antwortete, es handle sich um ein uraltes buddhistisches Symbol; gemalt hatte es derselbe Student. Er machte später bei Kollege Prof. A seinen Abschluss, obwohl an der Hochschule bekannt war, dass er mit anderen Neonazis eine Toiletteneinrichtung demoliert hatte und Studierende vor ihm Angst hatten.

Schließlich hörte ich von dir, dass der Student etwas Ungeheuerliches getan hatte. Er malte das Tor von Auschwitz mit der Inschrift „Arbeit macht frei-geist“, und in den Eingang malte er dich. Du hast dich gewehrt und bist zu Professorinnen und Professoren gegangen, aber niemand von ihnen hat sich an deine Seite gestellt. Ich habe das aus der Ferne verfolgt. Ich hatte versucht, ihn von der Hochschule zu entfernen, und war an denselben Wänden gescheitert wie du. Mitansetzen zu müssen, dass er ungehindert weiter andere schikanieren konnte, war für mich ein pädagogisches Versagen. Ich bin damals nicht darauf gekommen, mit dir zur Polizei zu gehen. Das werfe ich mir bis heute vor.

Meine Einladung ist keine Wiedergutmachung; was geschehen ist, lässt sich nicht gutmachen. Ich möchte von diesen Vorkommnissen erzählen, damit sie nicht unter dem Teppich bleiben. Und ich möchte weiter mit anderen darüber nachdenken, wie man in einer solchen Situation handeln muss und kann – das finde ich gerade jetzt sehr wichtig, weil rechte Einstellungen stärker werden und auch Hochschulen mit Landesregierungen zu tun haben können, die selbst rechtsextrem sind.

Die Einladung hat noch eine zweite Seite, die mir ebenso wichtig ist. Bei einem Atelierbesuch bei dir vor vielen, vielen Jahren sprachen wir über die Art, in der wir beide malen. Das Gespräch führte zu der Idee, einmal zusammen zu malen: so, wie keiner von uns beiden es in seiner Praxis tut, also gegen alle Regeln, innerhalb derer wir jeweils malen. Wir malen konzeptuell, kontrolliert und naturalistisch, und wir haben Gründe dafür. Den Gestus des Malers, der aus der Intuition arbeitet und sich ausdrückt, haben wir uns nie erlaubt, weil er eine Freiheit voraussetzt, die nicht für alle gleich gegeben ist. Lass uns jetzt ausprobieren, wie es sich für uns anfühlt, ihn doch einmal einzunehmen. Die Frage, was an dieser Hochschule geschehen ist, und die Frage, wer in der Malerei frei sein darf, gehören zusammen.

Ich lade dich ein, mit mir dieses Bild zu malen, ohne irgendeine Vorstellung davon zu haben, wie es aussehen wird.

Mit lieben Grüßen

Antje

Nicosia, 2. February 2026

Dear Antje,

thank you for your invitation and for remembering that time. Ever since our conversation about the unexplored dimensions of painting that we share, during your studio visit to mine in 2017, I have wanted to collaborate with you. I wanted us to think about that “vorausgesetzte Freiheit” that we both perceive in the art world. But I must also say that, if you had asked me before November 2024 to collaborate on an exhibition in the context of the university, whose premises I have not set foot in since my graduation, I probably would not have been able to do so. Today, with one of my newest (psycho-)artistic tools and with you beside me, I will say “Yes!”

However, I have to answer your invitation with a counter-question, which I will ask at the end of this letter, because I do not know whether you will be up to collaborating with me through this “new tool” I propose to paint with you. First, if I may, I will walk you through my recollections and whatever has stayed with me from them.

Thank you for telling me the whole story from your side once again. Although eleven years have passed, I can say with some certainty that your recollections fit the pieces I have in my mind.

Looking back, I can say with some certainty that my focus was never on that student per se. I was afraid of him, but I never found him interesting enough to think about. It seemed obvious to me that certain constitutive moments in his life had shaped the subjectivity he inhabited then, and perhaps still inhabits. I hope he has found inner peace and a better reason to live in this miserable world. Politically, of course, we do not have to understand, and we don't. We disengage.

I notice I move between compassion and contempt when I think of him. Both are honest. The compassion is for the person; the contempt is for what he made of his fears, and for the structures that allowed him to get away with it.

You wrote that you blame yourself for not going to the police with me. Please do not. Understanding the socio-political conditions, and myself, a little better today, I know that my focus and interest never lay with that person, who felt connected to an ideological formation that this country knows all too well and continues to enable, as exemplified by the AfD. Beyond that, going to the police would have been a futile attempt. I do not think we could have succeeded. At least, that is how it feels to me. Maybe I am wrong! I do not know what I would think if I were an educator like you.

Yes, I was only “Hasan” while studying at weißensee kunsthochschule berlin (w-khb). Yes, that student depicted my likeness awaiting entry into a building represented as a concentration camp (KZ), whose gate was labelled “Arbeit Macht Freigeist.” The ending “-geist” in the inscription apparently gave the school and its professors a reason not to

support the reading of the image as a representation of a KZ, since the inscription did not literally read “Arbeit Macht Frei.”

The incident stayed with me. It became part of how I began to think about painting and the conditions under which an artist is granted freedom. Without knowing it, the then-rector became a collaborator in spirit in the development of this *new painting tool*. Let me tell you how.

As I remember it, she dismissed my concerns when she offered me a “moderation” with that student. I responded: “I do not care about him. Who is going to moderate *you* and *me*?”

“Art should be free,” she said to me, citing the German artist *Jonathan Meese* as the epitome of the freedom of speech “in this land.” Meese has famously used the *Hitler salute* in his works in an attempt to deconstruct the “power” it had acquired through taboos rooted in the *Staatsräson*. What I understood from her reference to Meese was that I was being lectured about European freedom of expression. As I experienced it, her response conflated *hate speech* with *freedom of expression*. Is this a wrong interpretation?

I reported the case with the help of an association to the Berliner Senat which also downplayed the incident, responding in the same way as the then-rector had. Ironically, I see the flexibility of *Staatsräson* at work in both directions: it can excuse hate speech as freedom of expression and, in other contexts, frame freedom of expression as hate speech, as we witness today.

Let us take the flexibility of *Staatsräson* into our own hands and ask: what would the consequences be for “me” if “I “used the “Meese salute” (as I call it now :D) in one of my artworks? Would the then-rector or the Berlin Senate have responded in the same way if *Hasan* had been the one to depict a KZ?

Yes, within such a habitus, as I understand it, hate speech delivered through one of Europe's sacred artistic mediums, oil paint, by a “supposedly baptised body” can be converted into freedom of expression, even when it comes from a Nazi sympathiser. This is the kind of *vorausgesetzte Freiheit* I see linked to wider politics.

I have come to understand that, within this painting tradition, the “freedom” associated with oil painting is not equally available to everyone. When someone who is not structurally granted such freedom takes up the brush, the same medium can become profane, and the resulting painting can be read as pastiche rather than as an expression of mastery, even when its painterly qualities are comparable to those of a painting recognised as masterful. This is the hierarchy I am trying to work against. Fine. I will own pastiche, but not on their terms. I take up the position assigned to me and turn it into a way of working against the hierarchy that produced it.

After learning from the then-rector and the Berlin Senate that “art should be free,” I responded in what, from today's perspective, I consider a weak and unsophisticated way.

But it was what I had in my hands back then. I created a *superhero* as my graduation project and took the work to a gallery instead of participating in the graduation show. He was a jihadist superhero. His jihad was not the one we know from terror-related media, but giving sexual pleasure to German gay men, his sole mission. Identity politics was at its peak back then, and I was truly disgusted by the almost zoophilic fetishisation of Middle Eastern masculinity in the gay scene, a fantasy that was projected onto me without my control.

In 2020, I changed my birth name to Natis. It means “no one” or “nobody.” I decided to keep Hasan as one of my artist heteronyms. He was, in fact, my first heteronym: a name and subject position assigned to me at birth. He was seduced by the temporary and premature satisfactions that identity politics had to offer, by its moral superiority, and believed it held a useful form of power. I still love Hasan, and, more cautiously, I continue to work with his methods. But his approach no longer resonates with me on its own. He was, and remains, a methodology. He was, and remains, part of my reality, which I cannot and do not want to erase. I still use him as a tool to complicate my already complicated relationship with painting, because my aim is no longer to achieve mastery in painting, which would also be another futile attempt.

For eleven years, I have not only tried to understand these historical, structural and epistemological conditions but also built an art-making universe in which I explore the relationship between *bodies* and *their actions*, between the *doer* and the *deed*, *der Täter und die Tat*, especially in art (and sexuality).

Through this exploration, the naive *superhero* work transformed and mutated, giving birth to my current multi-authored artistic practice. My heteronyms allow me to ask deeper questions about the Artist as an invented European subject, the legacy and roots of that *vorausgesetzte Freiheit*, and to critique the liberal identity politics I was subjected to and expected to perform if I wanted to be “recognised.”

But I am no exception to this art world, which either forces and conditions one into a reductive version of oneself, with money in one’s pocket, or leaves one with a peace of mind and nothing to gain from it. It is a double-edged sword, and I know this is a loser’s game!

Now to the real deal. At your dinner, I was quite shocked by your offer, but I also felt a tingling excitement at the chance of another round of confrontation with the school. But I could not answer immediately.

As I said, my answer is yes, today, because I have created another *tool* to address the questions raised ever since my graduation: the relationship between *bodies* and *their actions*. It also helps me complicate the distinction we discuss between political forms of painting and attitudes of art for art’s sake. Two wins with one move. Perfect! What a *timely* proposal!

But I am not sure whether you will want to collaborate with me in a way you might not have expected.

In November 2024, I debuted my latest heteronym at KW. You visited the exhibition with your class from Braunschweig, and you immediately understood what this new figure was all about!

So, I turn your proposal around and ask you: Are you up for collaborating with my new heteronym, *Hasso Weiß Ehrenwerth*?

Hasso is a hybrid mechanism through which I embrace the contradictions within me. (a) He embodies the “master” I have internalised, who controls me and makes me feel like an impostor art-maker. (b) He also gives a human face to the effects of white supremacy on me, effects that I cannot simply externalise or turn into a monster, for the reasons I learned from Hannah Arendt. He exists both within and beyond the binary of good and evil as an Artist, a *binary* that *no one* wants to handle.

Would you collaborate with me through Hasso? If so, I am ready and excited.

Postscript: There is one further idea I would like to explore with you. I have been thinking about including our correspondence in the exhibition, alongside a fictional diploma for Hasso, as his biography continues to be shaped by each exhibition. The diploma would bring Hasan, in the role of *Vorsitzende_r des Prüfungsausschusses*, into relation with the then-rector, in the role of *Rector_in*, as she once was. For me, this would be a way of revisiting that moment and acknowledging how deeply it entered into the transformation of my artistic subjectivity.

I realise that these are separate questions: whether you would like to collaborate on the exhibition through Hasso, and whether you would be comfortable with any of our correspondence being shown publicly. By exhibiting our correspondence, I would also like to leave open the possibility that, if the former rector were to read it, the correspondence could serve as an invitation for her to participate in this fictional document by signing it with Hasan. I would not want to presume your agreement to any of these possibilities, nor her participation.

What do you think? I would love to hear how these ideas resonate with you.

Natis