

I've been asked to speak about my work as an artist. To speak about my work also means addressing trauma, colonial histories and how the body experiences violence. Whenever I am faced with this task, I begin to sweat; my breath becomes shallow, my stomach clenches, my throat closes, my pulse races. I tell you my symptoms not because I want to cast you as the doctor and myself as the patient, nor am I looking for a cure. Rather, I share this as a way to bring our attention back to the body, both yours and mine, as we continue a difficult conversation about state violence, scientific complicity and our individual and collective responsibility towards it.

If the future call of public commemorative art here at Charité, is about the forms of collaboration that took place between medicine and National Socialism, then we might begin with the very ground beneath our feet, and how that ground connects us to a history of genocidal violence. The auditorium we are in is named after physician and anthropologist, Rudolf Virchow. By most standards, Virchow is a celebrated figure within German medicine. However, I would contend that many of the questions we are asking today can be found through the legacy of a scientist and physician like Rudolph Virchow. In 1869, he founded and led, until his death, the influential German Anthropological Society and its Berlin branch. Behind me is an image of Virchow with his physical anthropology collection.¹ His collection, comprised in part of the body parts of indigenous colonized populations, was formed through contributions by his former medical students and doctors working in European colonies. The German Anthropological Organization also helped create the first widespread



understanding within the German public that national identity in Germany was linked to visually discernable racial characteristics of skin color, hair color and eye color, resulting from the massive and systematic collection of data in the "Schulstatistik" project dating back to the 1870s.² The project taught huge numbers of ordinary Germans that Jewish Germans were racially different than non-Jewish Germans. Later, Friedrich Nietzsche referenced the Schulstatistik study in his 1887 *Genealogy of Morals* to differentiate "a blonde race" which he distinguished between the "conquerer and master race, the Aryan race, from an inferior primitive pre-aryan social form, a monstrous atavism, and an attempt of brown people to rule the blond." Though personally anti-semitic, Virchow's work as an anthropologist and scientist helped create the foundation for the Nazi racial state.³

Projects such as Schulstatistik are possible because at the very heart of modern scientific thought, there is a deep structural violence. It is a vastly reproduced and , replicated form of violence which continues to create monstrous offspring. The underlying fantasy it operates with is the existence of objective forms of knowledge - Cartesian splits that continue to divide up the world between observer and observed. It begins with the body and mind, then moves on to conquer everything else, non-European people, women and nature.



¹ Image source: Virchow with his physical anthropology collection, *Die Woche* 3, no.4 (1901): 1792

² Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp. 135-146

³ Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 145

In much of my work I am interested in what we would rather deny, forget or that which creates great discomfort to acknowledge. The question of what we would rather not think about, which histories we'd prefer to deny - led to this project from 2012. It's title is *Therapy for Optophobia* - a fear of opening ones' eyes and was first created for an exhibition titled *Double Vision, Doppelbilder* in Ludwigshafen, Germany at the Wilhelm Hack Museum in 2012. It consists of a wall painting of a diagram depicting stereoscopic vision found in a treatise by René Descartes, titled *Diatropique* from 1637. The large diagram of vision is shown together with antique glasses the viewer is invited to try on. On the lenses of the glasses are miniature portraits of the decapitated head of a Nama man, and a supporting text. An excerpt:



The empire of Germany's Second and Third Reich died soon after birth. The former took with it hundreds of thousands of lives; the latter millions. Both were inspired by a nationalist and racial fantasy that began in the late 19th Century. In the course of the war, an industry had developed around the supply of body parts. In Swakopmund Concentration Camp in 1905, female prisoners were forced to boil the severed heads of their own people and

scrape the flesh, sinews and ligaments off the skulls with shards of broken glass. The victims may have been people they had known or even relatives. The skulls were then placed into the crates by German soldiers and shipped to museums, collections and universities in Germany.

Towards the end of 1906 the bodies of 17 Nama prisoners, including that of a one-year-old girl, were carefully decapitated by the camp physician, Dr. Bofinger. After breaking open the skulls, Bofinger removed and weighed the brains, before placing each head in preserving alcohol and sealing them in tins for export to the Institute of Pathology at the University of Berlin. As well as preparing human remains for scientists in Germany, Dr. Bofinger used the inmates of Shark Island for his own research.⁴

When the Nazis came to power in 1933 they set out to rule Germany according to the twin principles at the heart of their revolution: the expansion of German living space and the creation of a pure Aryan "racial state." Both of these projects would involve the revival of practices, concepts and theories that had been developed in Germany's former African empire.

The [Nazi] party turned to a generation of German race scientists, eugenicists and anthropologists, many of whom had been trained in the colonial institutes or were veterans of field expeditions to the former

⁴ Erichsen, Casper and Olusoga, David, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, Faber and Faber, 2010, p.8, p.224

colonies. The research these men and women carried out on the peoples of Africa and Asia was used to lay the scientific foundations of the “racial state.”⁵

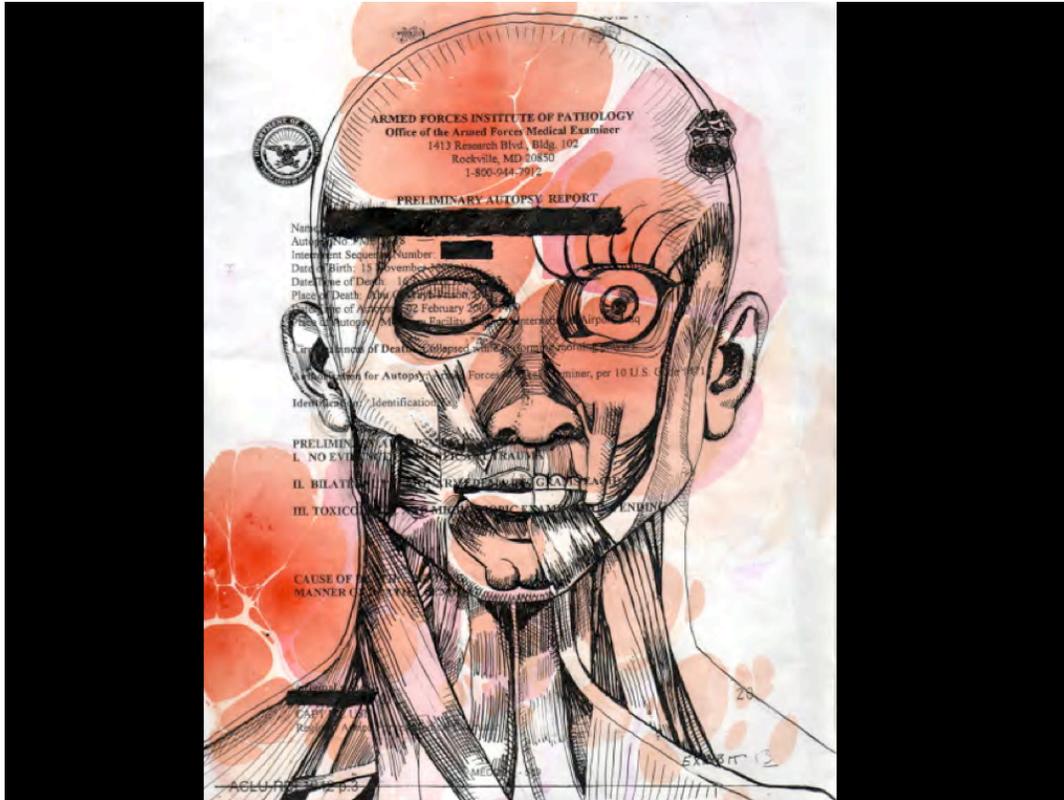


This work asks questions of scale and intimacy in relationship to violence, the performance of vision and those histories one would rather not hold too close to one's own body. I work with history to better understand the present. I am looking for repeating structures and motifs that might exist between disparate geographies and timelines. I am interested in understanding how the visual production of past empires continues to reproduce itself and shapes our contemporary perception of what is real and what is true. Within this frame my work attempts to disrupt the original pedagogical and narrative function of these materials often revealing a subtext that is violent. My work places the body at the center of political, social and structural forms of violence.

⁵ Erichsen, Casper and Olusoga, David, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, Faber and Faber, 2010, p.300

This emphasis on the experiential body is an attempt at bringing the emotional, visceral and intimate within the frame of politics. Instead of silencing or erasing the material I am interested in adding my subjective position within the material and allowing another narrative to be born.

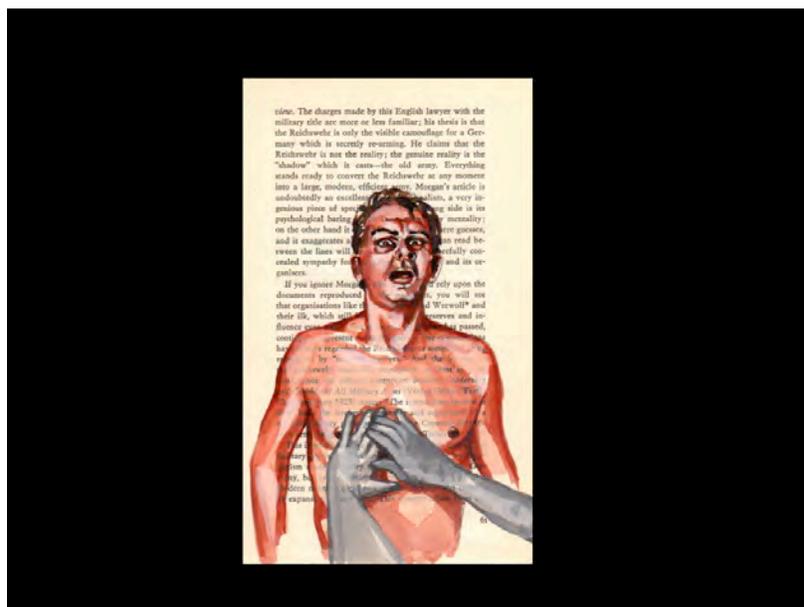
The next project I would like to share is *Did You Kiss the Dead Body? Did you Kiss the Dead Body?* is an ongoing project which makes reference to the last line of Harold Pinter's poem *Death*, read by Pinter during his 2005 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, a speech marked by deep criticism of American foreign policy, and the nature of truth,



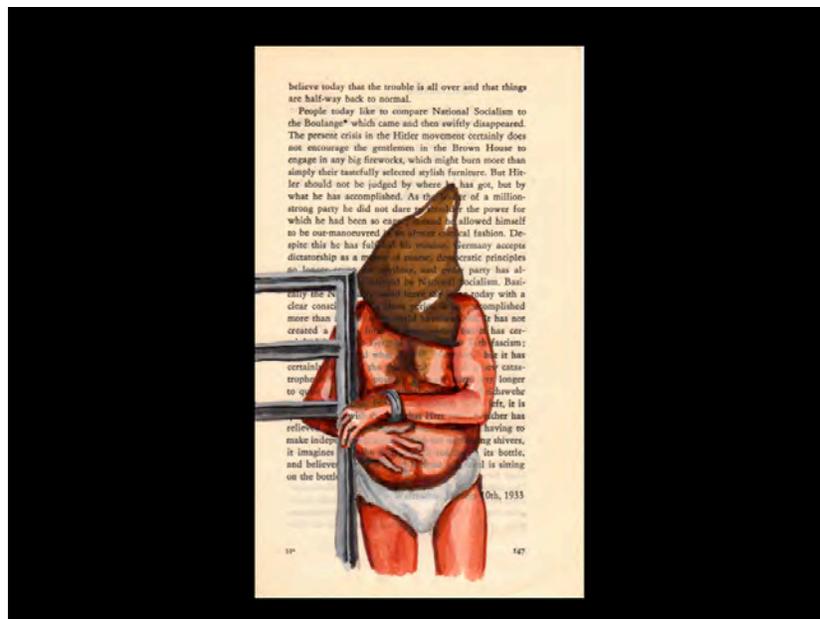
language and power. The project grows out of an eight year reflection on the nature and social implication of autopsy reports and death certificates emerging from U.S. military bases and prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan, first made public on the ACLU's website in 2004 under the Freedom of Information Act. The texts highlight relations of abuse and power through descriptions of anonymous Iraqi and Afghan male prisoners, young and old that have died in U.S. custody. The reports employ a rational scientific language cataloging the internal and external details of the men's bodies while attempting to determine a cause of death, ranging from "natural" to "undetermined" to "homicide."

texts are a small fraction of the documents the ACLU and other civil rights organizations sued to have released and are known as the Torture FOIA. They are documents that took many years for me to be able to work with them. I think of many things when I read them but among them is how do I make the fact of this man's death part of our cultural memory. How do archives remember? What do they insist we forget? There are deep contradictions in these reports. They are the only trace that these men were killed in US custody and the only means of challenging the historical narrative of the Iraq War and the brutality it unleashed, but they are also in themselves an instrument of further violence. A life extinguished, then the dead body is subjected to further violence. Rather than bury the contradiction, it's what compels me to continue the work. In 2012 I spent two months as part of an experimental residency at the ACLU interviewing human rights and national security lawyers and generally reflecting on the legal aspect of the documents.

My work with archives is often haphazard, intuitive and filled with chance encounters. I rarely know what I am looking for but the material has a way of finding me and speaking to our present moment. Roughly half of my work is spent doing research: looking at archives, in person or online, independently or by invitation, reading, collecting images and the other half is spent in the studio where I privilege the role of intuition and try to let the material find some moment of transformation so that it can tell another story. This process of imbibing the material and allowing the work to resonate, develop and transform takes time and doesn't often follow linear forms of logic. Developing work, the creative, intuitive and irrational come first and is followed some time later, by language, analysis and context.



The last project I will share is from *The ABC's of Torture and State Violence*. They are a commissioned set of drawings about state violence and torture made on the pages of an English translation of Carl von Ossietzky's collected writings, titled *The Stolen Republic*, 1971. After winning the Nobel Prize, hospitalized and still under surveillance by the National Socialists, Ossietzky attempted to share his experience of being tortured through a coded request to journalists. He expressed an interest in the subject of torture and asked if anyone could locate a book for him on medieval torture. I made this set of drawings as my response to his request. The drawings are a way to acknowledge the physical punishment and violence born by Ossietzky at the hands of a repressive state threatened by the power of his words and ideas.



I've spent much of the last year reflecting on the images, texts and objects contained within ethnographic and anthropological archives specifically connected to the Weltmuseum in Vienna and the various archives held by Harvard University in my role as a guest artist- researcher. These archives contain a world view that anthropology helped produce, one which frames the non-European body as primitive, barbaric and less than human, and that is contrasted against a materially and technologically advanced western man.

From this and through my research into Germany's colonial history, I've come to understand that National Socialism wasn't an aberration in German or European history.

What happened under National Socialism was an extension of a continent wide logic that grew out of genocidal economic, political and social policies directed exclusively at non-European people until the National Socialists came to power. In *The Kaiser's Holocaust, German's forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, by David Olusoga and Caspar Erichsen, they assert "The Nazi war to build an empire in the east was classically colonial in that it was characterized by genocidal violence, much of which- particularly that ranged against Slavic civilians and Soviet POWs- has largely been forgotten. Colonial genocide has always been a drawn out process of massacres, famines, enslavement and hidden liquidations."⁶ It is a legacy, like Virchow's that continues into this day. It frames how we look at each other and creates the belief that some lives matter more than others. To close I will recite *Death* by Harold Pinter.

Where was the body found?
Who found the dead body?
Was the dead body dead when found?
How was the dead body found?

Who was the dead body?

Who was the father or daughter or brother
Or uncle or sister or mother or son
Of the dead and abandoned body?

Was the body dead when abandoned?
Was the body abandoned?
By whom had it been abandoned?
Was the dead body naked or dressed for a journey?

What made you declare the dead body dead?
Did you declare the dead body dead?
How well did you know the dead body?
How did you know the body was dead?

Did you wash the dead body
Did you close both its eyes
Did you bury the body

⁶ Erichsen, Casper and Olusoga, David, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*, Faber and Faber, 2010, p.8

Did you leave it abandoned
Did you kiss the dead body

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