

***The Exact Opposite of Distance***

Manu Learning Centre (Madre de Dios, Perú)  
May–June 2012

The project started with a month-long expedition to the Manu Learning Centre, Madre de Dios, Perú from May 23 to June 23, 2012. The Manu Learning Centre is located within Fundo Mascoitania, a 600 hectare reserve, encompassed within the cultural zone of the Manu Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage site and the largest protected area in Peru. It is home to a variety of rain-forest types including lowland Andean, pre-montane, bamboo and high terrace forests. This geographical diversity creates habitats for a huge diversity of flora and fauna.

Previous research conducted at the station incorporated aspects of biology, geography, zoology, anthropology, politics, and art & design, through projects focusing on reforestation, mammal behavior patterns, human impact studies, environmental management, monitoring of the (CITES Red listed) blue headed macaw, soil sustainability & agriculture, forest dynamics, carbon trading with local communities, and the legitimacy of local power structures, to name a few. In addition to these the MLC has hosted conferences organized by WWF-Peru, the Organization of Tropical Studies (OTS) and the Anniversary Conference of the Manu National Park.

Since a 2010 field trip to the Antarctic, I had been curious to carry out a project in the completely contrasting landscape of the rainforest; from whiteness to darkness, from emptiness to exuberance, from the cold to the heat and the most minimal landscape to the most baroque I could possibly imagine.

I intended to focus on drawing the light filtered through the gaps of the forest roof. I presumed that the light patterns would vary throughout the day and would possibly change from one day to the next. My objective was to record (by means of drawing) these variations and permutations of existing patterns. My interest in these patterns had a formal aspect, however I was also interested in how the density of the forest was directly related to environmental changes and issues.

Additionally, I was interested in methodological aspects of carrying out research in rainforests, which I expected I could benefit from given the variety of research performed at Manu Learning Centre. The Centre seemed the ideal place to watch and learn about the way other practitioners address and engage with the landscape in the field. It seemed inevitable that spending time there would allow me to learn about other approaches to fieldwork.

When I reached the Manu Learning Centre the scenarios were more complex than I had imagined. The environment was truly overwhelming, and impossible to take in at once being surrounded by a huge number of elements; from plants to insects to other animals, and from a vast array of colors to multiple unknown sounds. It took a while to adapt to the place and, in particular, to understand what I could draw from it. Whereas the sailing trip to the Antarctic provided distant vistas, this was a landscape of proximity—there is no space in between the landscape and yourself, no possibility to take distance, objectify. One does not feel that one is in a



landscape but rather surrounded by a continuum of elements. This place was too dense to grasp and too varied to comprehend for a single human being, and I spent a lot of time thinking (and writing) about ways to tackle the issue; how to position the humble scale of my human presence in proportion to the infinity of things that inhabit that ecosystem.

Once I was there I realized that the experience and observation of this landscape had much more to it than I had presumed, and I tried to find different systems to depict such a baroque environment. It was very difficult to find a way to fragment it or, to frame it. It was shocking to be surrounded by so much information, all elements equally beautiful and asking for my undivided attention. It was so complex and dense that, initially, I couldn't even discern, let alone decide, the kind of elements I could work with.

After a while I created a system that allowed me to draw. I was particularly interested in the way that inside the forest, one could never see something in its totality—there is always superimposition, overlap, things growing in and out of each other, interconnections. Rather than fighting against this, I decided to take that as a point of departure, and started by initiating a line—let's say, that of a tree trunk—and followed this line until it was interrupted by a liana (for example) upon which I would start following the liana, until something else got in the way, let's say a leaf, and I would follow this line until I would see the tree trunk again. I would continue following these lines until I managed to create a “window”. Then I would

draw whatever was inside that window. Once I had established the system I sat for many consecutive days in the same place, drawing different views. When I felt that I more or less apprehended a particular corner I moved a few meters and started again.

Another series of drawings were made at the riverside, looking at the jungle. This was the only spot from which I could view the forest at some distance—not much, just a few meters, but enough to look at and hence “see it” (rather than being immersed in it). I decided to draw only the areas where the forest would get so dense that it would appear black. I translated some of the drawings to color gouache paintings, in an attempt to incorporate the vast amount of greens observed in this environment.



*The Exact Opposite of Distance* is featured in

## ***Entanglement***

Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen (St. Gallen, Switzerland)  
March 16–May 12, 2013

For more details of each work, see also:

*Entanglement · Vertical Landscape*, 2014 [↗](#)

*Sampling Greens*, 2012 [↗](#)





ii

iv

i



i

*Forest Windows*, 2012

36 drawings

pencil on paper, 29 × 21 cm













ii

*From the River*, 2012

27 drawings

ink on paper, 21 × 29 cm



0 metre



25 metre



50 metre



75 metre





100 metre



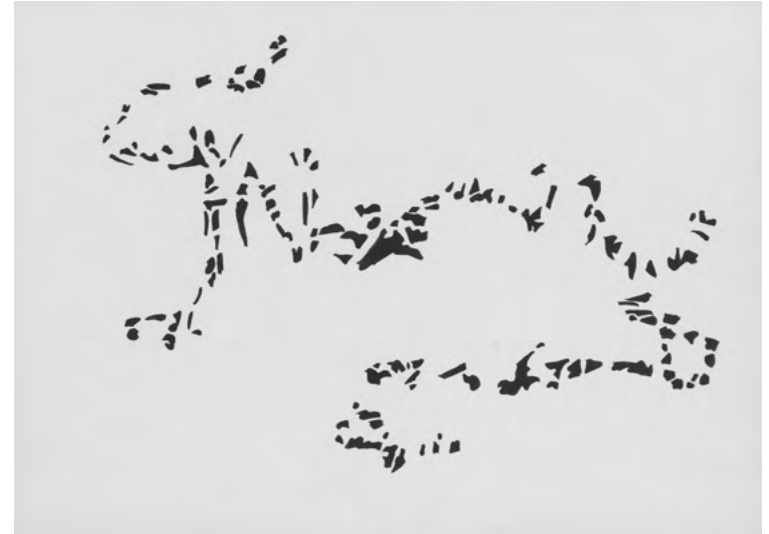
125 metre



150 metre



175 metre



200 metre

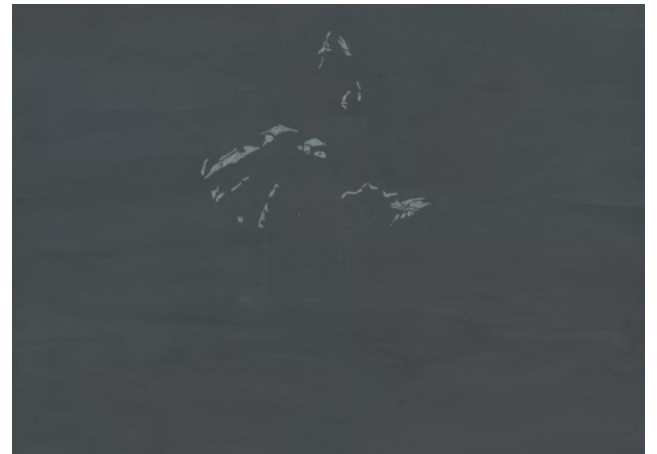
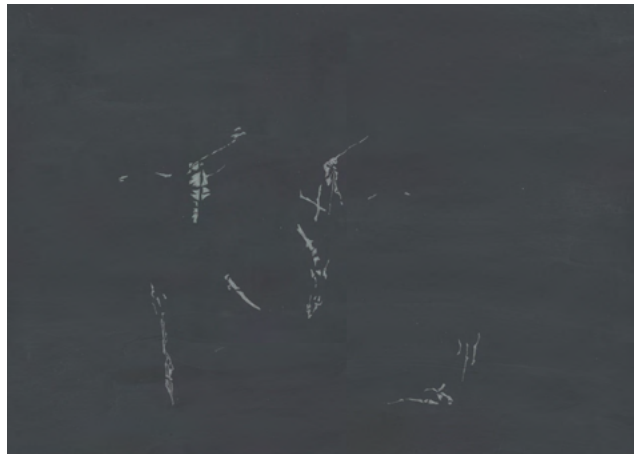
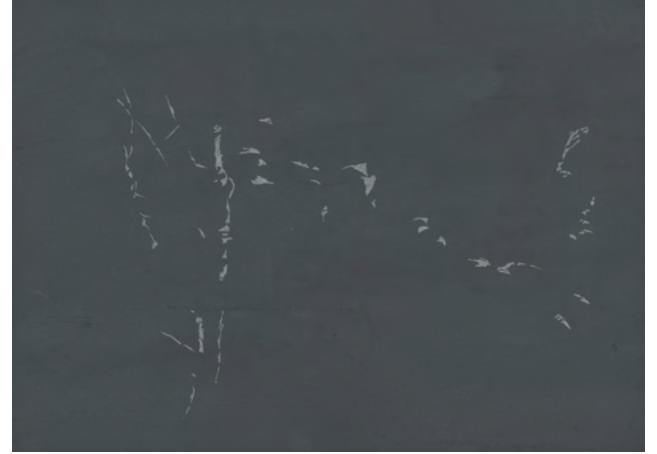
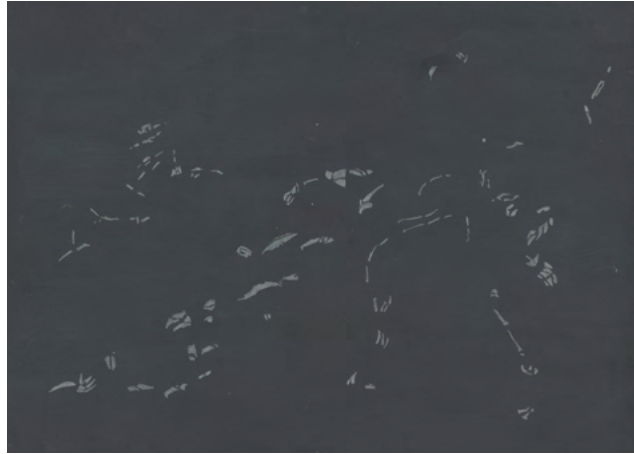
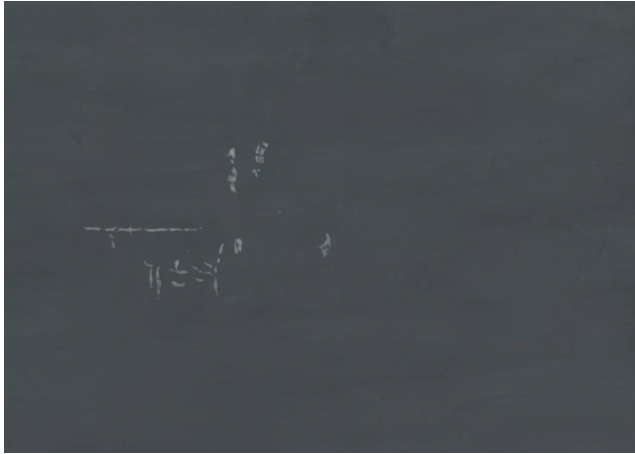


iii

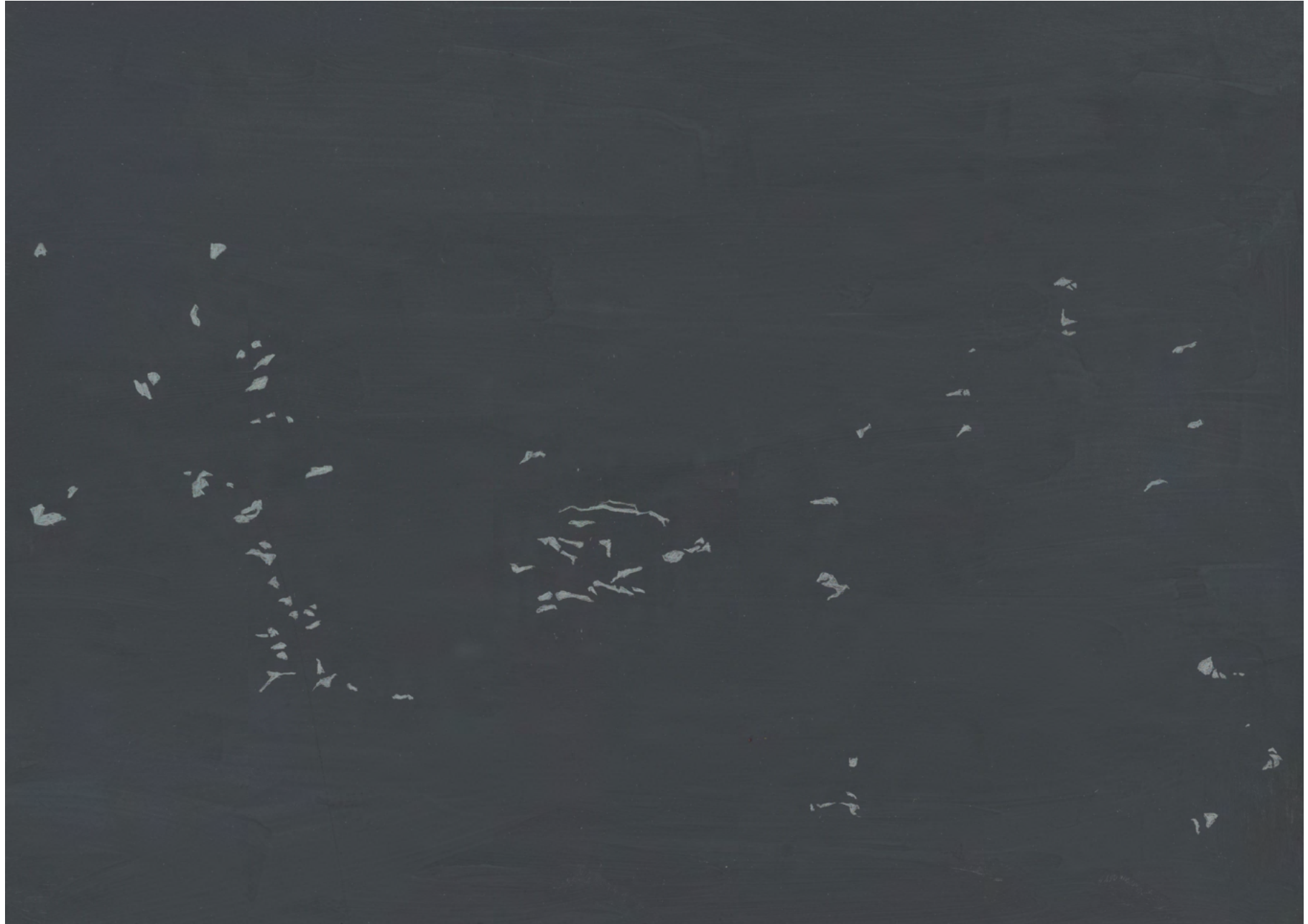
*Light Fragments*, 2012

12 drawings

white pencil on black, 29 × 42 cm







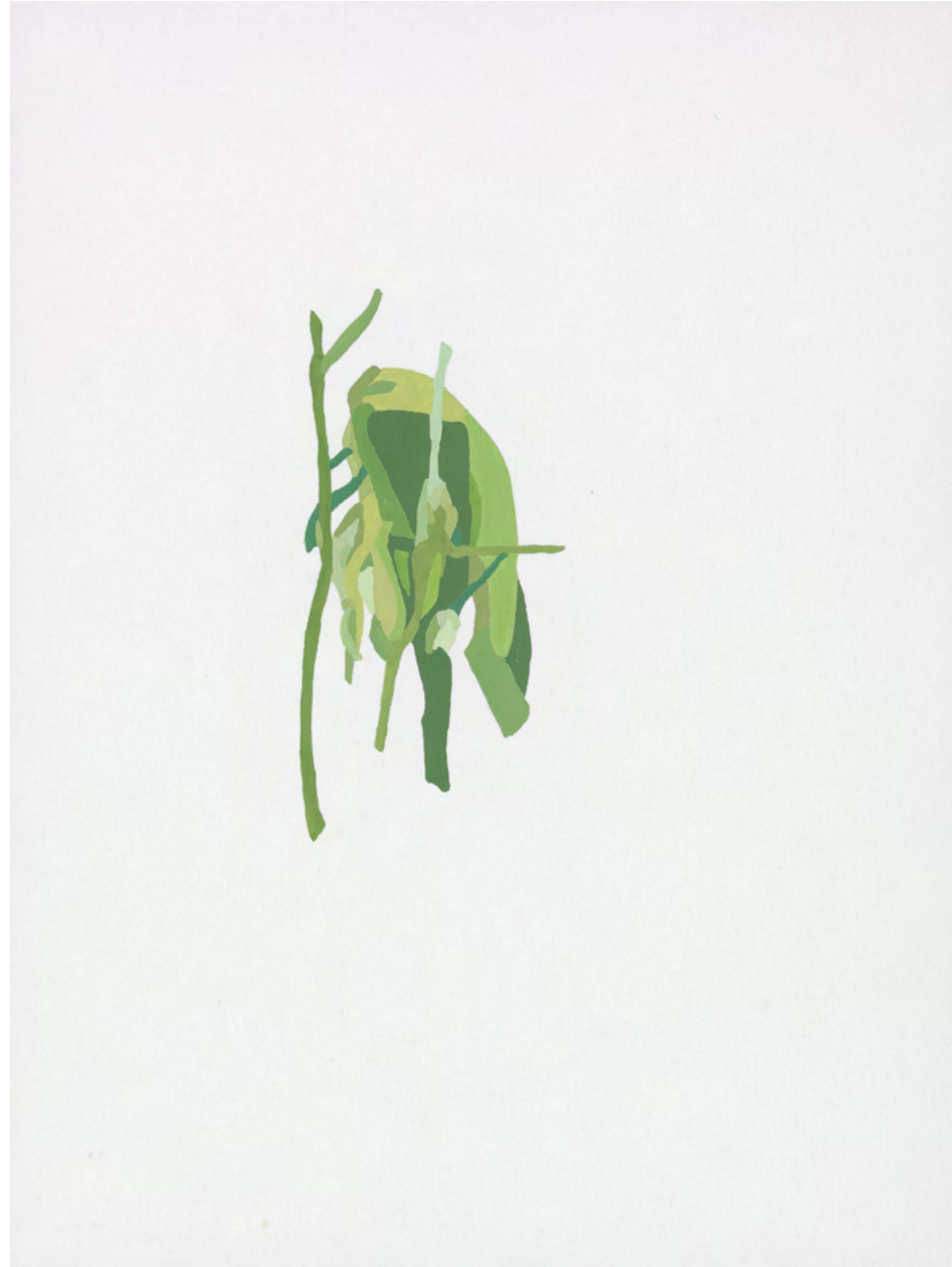




iv  
*Forest Windows*, 2012  
24 paintings  
gouache on paper, 24 × 18 cm














Related exhibition

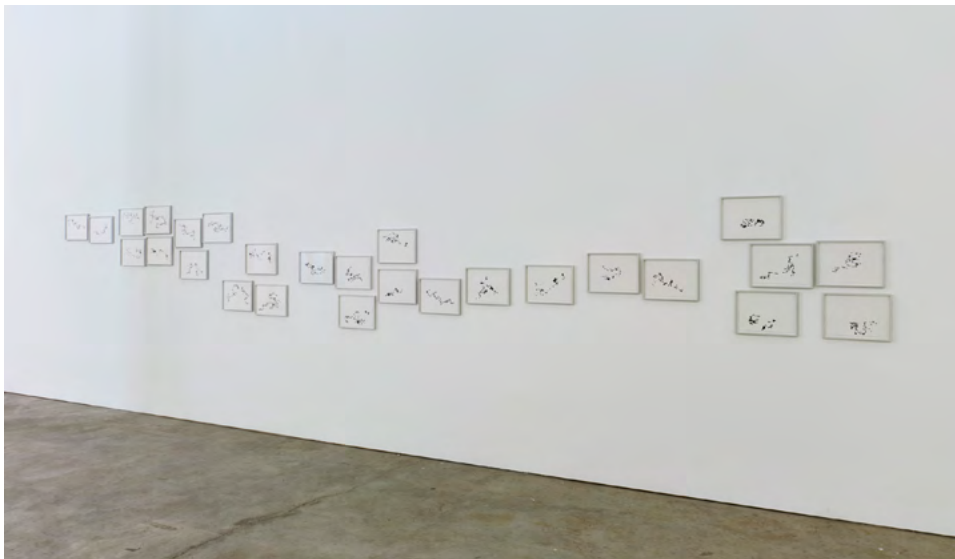
## ***Entanglement · Vertical Landscape***

8<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale (Germany)  
May 29 – August 3, 2014

For more details of each work, see also:

[\*Entanglement · Vertical Landscape\*, 2014](#) 

[\*Sampling Greens\*, 2012](#) 





Irene Kopelman  
*The Exact Opposite of Distance*

Curated by:  
Giovanni Carmine (*Entanglement* — Kunst  
Halle Sankt Gallen, 2013)  
Juan Gaitan (*Vertical Landscape* — 8<sup>th</sup> Berlin  
Biennale for Contemporary Art, Berlin,  
2014)

Credit documentation of the exhibition:  
Gunnar Meier (photograph installation view  
Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen)  
Nick Ash (photograph installation view  
KW Institute for Contemporary Art  
as part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennial)

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