



ART SPIEL

Contemporary Art and Culture

[Home](#) [About](#)

OCTOBER 29, 2018 BY ETTY YANIV

Julia von Eichel – Portraits of Emotional States

Although Julia Von Eichel's sculptures appear to be fragile, at times almost on the verge of collapse, they are held together as if against all odds due to their obstinate resilience. Whether mounted on the wall, hanging on a wire, or drawn on mylar, her shapes embody a restless exploration of the dimensional form – how its defined by line and light. In this interview for Art Spiel the artist talks in depth about her thought and work process.



Julia von Eichel, I'll eat you up, I love you so, 2016, silk, acrylic, wood, thread, plastic, and epoxy, 40 x 30 inches x 24 inches, courtesy of Julia von Eichel

Winston Wächter Fine Art, Inc.

530 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 **TEL** [212] 255 2718 **FAX** [212] 255 2719 **EMAIL** nygallery@winstonwachter.com www.winstonwachter.com



AS: You were born in Switzerland, studied art in DC, Chicago and NYC, and now you live and work in Brooklyn. Tell me a bit what were your formative experiences along the road?

Julia von Eichel: Growing up, I spent all of my summers in Germany and Northern Italy, mostly in the mountains – hiking, playing cards or making art. My father and I would melt small amounts of metal (unfortunately, I believe it was part lead, which is why it melted so easily) and pour it into figure molds. Originally we would make these for my brother to play with (great for kids, since it contained lead!) but it quickly became more interesting to pour the metal partially into the mold and let the remaining liquid spread over rocks we found for just this purpose. I've always been curious about using materials in non traditional ways.

Another favorite thing to do, back in DC, was to go to the hardware store with my father on a Saturday; sometimes I would leave with gallons of roofing cement (tar) and sheets of lead (at that point I was finally using protective gloves) and bring it home to mess around with.

Right now (probably due to the fact that I have two kids in high school) I also remember my profound loneliness and anxiety during those years of being a teenager. I didn't like school and while I loved my family, they were also notoriously chaotic, with lots of fights and lots of partying. My art became a shell that I would crawl into, my refuge. I would skip class to go to paint; I would decline invitations to hangout with new friends in order to paint. Painting calmed me and gave me a place where I felt like I could be myself. I was especially drawn to a group of



bamboo trees, which were all different shades of green, and I think this was the beginning of my interest in monochromatic work.

AS: You studied sculpture and you also draw and paint. It seems to me that you are exploring relationships between 2 and 3 dimensional forms in your wall reliefs and your other installations. What is your take on that?

Julia von Eichel: I think of myself as a sculptor who sometimes works in a very tiny plane, which is then 2D. I don't even know what that means. But I'm a sculptor. I'm interested in forms, lines, and how light is reflected in three dimensions. Then, sometimes, a material appeals to me, like mylar with oil pastels, and I execute a sculpture with color on a single plane. It's probably somewhat academic, but it's how I see the world.



*Julia von Eichel, Six, 2017, Oil pastel on mylar, 36 x 24 inches,
courtesy of Julia von Eichel*

Winston Wächter Fine Art, Inc.

530 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 **TEL** [212] 255 2718 **FAX** [212] 255 2719 **EMAIL** nygallery@winstonwachter.com www.winstonwachter.com



AS: You developed a unique process. What can you tell me about it?

Julia von Eichel: I use golf-ball-sized wiffle balls as joints and dowels as limbs that connect them, creating a twisted armature over which I stretch silk. Then I thread the silk in various places to tighten it into a kind of a skin, and afterwards gesso the silk to harden it into a form. I've worked with thread a lot over the years—suspending mylar inside plexiglass, for example. Threads for me are lines (back to 2D vs. 3D): lines that can lift off a 2D surface and join the three-dimensional world.



Julia von Eichel, Untitled (collapsing), 2014, silk, acrylic, wood, thread plastic, and epoxy, 36 x 32 x 16 inches, 91.4 x 81.3 x 40.6 cm, courtesy of Julia von Eichel

Winston Wächter Fine Art, Inc.

530 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 TEL [212] 255 2718 FAX [212] 255 2719 EMAIL nygallery@winstonwachter.com www.winstonwachter.com



Julia von Eichel: At first these recent sculptures were almost like insane stretched canvasses, as if someone had hammered a canvas to death but the surface just bent with the broken structure and went with it. But then I became more and more interested in the guts inside, and I have been exposing the tangle in the interior more and more, so that there's really no inside or outside. It's all part of one thing.

AS: I am curious to know more about your choice of color schemes. White is pretty dominant and sometimes you have bold splurges of color. What prompts your color choice?

Julia von Eichel: For many years, I felt that to work with color, particularly contrasting color, was a little like cheating: it's so easy to make something seductive with color. It doesn't have to be representational, but the more color you use, the more you're asking the viewer to pay attention to and get attracted to your swirls, or your combinations, or your patterns. I'm more interested in how light changes across manipulated and bizarre surfaces, and letting color take a backseat to all that can happen with light without it.

But, of course, that's also not fair at all. It's not "cheating" to use color, it just wasn't right for that work, it wasn't the point. I recently started a new series of paintings (or are they 2D sculptures?) with a lot of color, and am having fun with it. Mylar is a strange surface for an oil pastel—it creates a very physical experience—more sliding than painting. So I'm cheating now too.



AS: Your work is abstract but it also appears biomorphic, animated, at times verging on the edge of pain. Do you have in mind a narrative?

Julia von Eichel: Yes, completely. It was borne out of a time of mourning for my father, who died from complications following leukemia treatment. Leukemia: cancer in the marrow. Unconsciously, I was creating tangles of broken bones, held together with only silk and thread. They feel alive, on the one hand, but dangerous, splintered, broken like all my emotions that I tried to hold together with a strong exterior surface.

AS: Let's take one work – What can you share about *I'll eat you up, I love you so*, for example.

Julia von Eichel: I don't typically infuse meaning into one work more than another. My sculptures don't "mean" anything; they don't express political beliefs or challenge existing mores. They are, always, expressions of my emotional state; their meaning, such as it is, is human complexity in the form of my language. So it makes it hard for me to talk about a particular piece as separate from the whole.

Actually in the past I preferred to not name the pieces at all, but sometimes I can't help it. The name might refer to a moment when I made it, or something its shape might remind me of. "*I'll eat you up, I love you so*" refers to a line in the Maurice Sendak book "*Where the Wild Things Are*". When I created that piece, it reminded me of a



monster and at that point my children were younger, they still smothered me in their love and sometimes it was too much, they were like little monsters that couldn't get enough of me—sometimes I felt eaten up by their boundary-less love (rightfully so, but sometimes overwhelming).



*Julia von Eichel, I'll eat you up, I love you so, 2016
silk, acrylic, wood, thread, plastic, and epoxy, 40 x 30
inches x 24 inches, courtesy of Julia von Eichel*

AS: You had a recent show at Marc Straus Gallery which opened in Sep 8th. Can you talk about your body of work for this exhibition?

Julia von Eichel: I wanted to disassociate my work from the wall and the floor, and my interest in the guts of the work felt like it could be pushed further if the piece were floating. I've done suspended works



before—very light pieces of painted mylar floating in string—but the idea that such a brutalistic object might be able to stay suspended, almost like a giant wound floating in air, really struck me. The pieces are surprisingly light; this one, even though it's quite large (it's about six feet long and three feet in diameter), is very easy for two people to lift and no problem at all to suspend with twine. So I ended up with something that looks sort of terrifying, angry, broken; but at the same time light and in some sense free, as if it just lifted off the ground to fly away.

AS: How do you see this body of work in relation to your previous work?

Julia von Eichel: You can draw a line from one series to the next, even though the pieces themselves change. My obsessions with line, with light, and with capturing emotional intensity have never gone away; they've just evolved into different forms. I think the current work is simply the latest installment of portraits of my emotional state.

AS: Where are you heading on now in your studio?

Julia von Eichel: It's very hard for me to describe things while I'm in the middle of working on them, but, perhaps very abstractly: I'm working on a series that was inspired by a walk I took in Switzerland a few years ago. I was drawn to these trees that seemed like they were holding on for dear life: they were healthy, big trees growing out of the side of cliffs, completely terrifyingly tenuous but at the same time, boldly insisting on living, strongly. If they had been humans, they'd be highly



stressed out, and I don't know if they'd make it. I find it fascinating to think about how elements of nature insist on existence—even thrive and grow strong in the face of unsupportive circumstances.

I'm making work that tries to capture that tension. Structures that seem fragile, seem on the verge of collapse, seem as if they shouldn't be able to hold it together, but are held together by their own persistence.



Julia von Eichel

Winston Wächter Fine Art, Inc.

530 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 TEL [212] 255 2718 FAX [212] 255 2719 EMAIL nygallery@winstonwachter.com www.winstonwachter.com