

Connectivity

by

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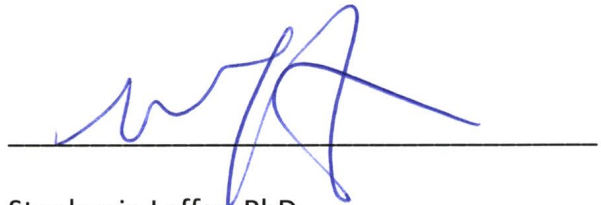
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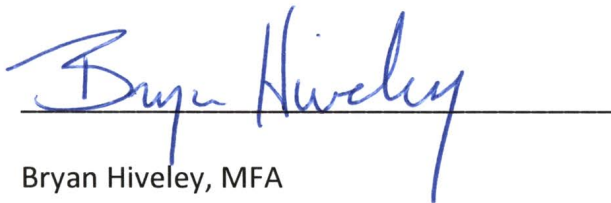
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Abstract

The word *Connectivity* speaks for itself. It is based on my notion that all existence is connected and that every thought, decision, and action cause a palpable reaction in the closed cycle we all belong to. Derived from this assumption, every individual has their personal influence on this cycle, even on a subconscious level.

Simultaneously, *Connectivity* aims to find identity—in particular, my identity. I realized this “side effect” while working on my thesis. Not until I wrote about why I created my ink works and photographs, did I become more clear about who and what kind of person I am.

Acknowledgements

I would like to say thank you to my parents, for being there for me my entire life, raising me in the way that was the best for me, and for letting me be my own person. When I forgot who I was, they reminded me, because they know me best.

Despite the 5,000 miles that separate Florida from Bavaria, we are able to stay closely connected, overcoming space and time. Our relationship is stronger than ever.

Also, I thank all the other teachers in my life. While your lessons were sometimes challenging and I did not immediately understand the message, I am more grateful than ever that you were—or still are—in my life.

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I. Introduction

Connectivity—we are all one.

We are all interconnected and all life is held within an enormous network where every thought, word, and deed results in a palpable effect. While we may be aware of some of these effects, they mostly affect us on a subconscious level. What we see and who we meet—these things generate a reaction in us which, in turn, brings about a reaction in the next person, and so the chain continues. We let ourselves be influenced by society and we have an influence on society. Our whole environment is created and shaped by each of us—it is a never-ending cycle and everyone is part of its overall design.

My body of work illustrates this idea of interconnectedness; it is characterized by my classical education as a graphic designer in which I was trained in different traditional crafts that I now combine. It consists of precise ink drawings, photographs, books, short texts, and collages that I refine digitally or occasionally blend with printmaking. Recently, I began incorporating myself in my pictures and videos by using performative strategies of expression partially based on classical dance and yoga poses.

All of my projects are inspired by nature; they reinterpret natural patterns or are recorded in situ. Some of them might appear whimsical or abstract, because their correlation does not seem to be comprehensible. Their context emerges then, when our senses become sharpened.

In an effort to raise awareness, I call attention to less obvious connections existing between disparate items. The artistic reality I create contains images meant to serve as a metaphor for our consciousness, encouraging us to recognize personal responsibility for all

situations we construct in life, as well as our individual obligation to the environment. Our impact and energy are more powerful than we may think. Not only are we part of a system that guides us, we also define it through our behavior. If we become aware of our role in this synergy, we will realize: all is one.

II. Form of expression

A. The value of different crafts, skills, and materials

When I started to study graphic design in the mid-1990s in Augsburg, Germany, the opportunities of using computer-based technology in the creative field were limited. First versions of graphic software such as *Adobe Photoshop* and *QuarkXPress* already existed and offered new ways of picture editing and desktop publishing, but there were only a few accessible venues. I knew just a handful of people who actually owned a computer where these applications were installed. At the same time, artistic digital work was not established enough to require a mandatory course at my university. I was forced to create most of my work by hand. My actual training included traditional drawing and painting as well as calligraphy, typography, photography, and composition. The materials I mainly used were paper, pencil, paint brush, quill, and ink. My work process took a lot of patience because a small mistake could ruin the whole piece and then I had to start over again. Even when my assignment was flawless, if it did not match my preconceived idea, I started from scratch. Each new attempt improved my skills and therefore, increased my self-confidence.

A few years later, I set up my own advertising agency in Augsburg where I spent 15 years as Creative Director and CEO. I worked successfully for leading global brands with projects small and large in scope. The hours were long and hard, often involving repetitive digital work. Over the years my activity as a graphic designer became less and less, as I had to become a manager and do a lot more marketing and consulting. I enjoyed being in this highly competitive setting, but at some point I realized that I had lost touch with what I loved: following my urge to discover and to create with my hands. This was the beginning of my search.

In 2010, my then-partner had purchased a vacation home in Tavernier in the Florida Keys and we travelled there a few times every year. This small strip of islands is far away from urban civilization and has a calming effect. Due to this, locals joke about what they call the “Keys Disease” someone gets when they spend a longer period of time there. The Keys force their visitors to slow down; there is no escape. After I returned home to Germany from a vacation in 2015, I was not able to go back to my daily routine at the agency any longer. I knew that I had to change something in my life and finally decided to apply for a Master of Fine Arts program in Miami.

In retrospect, when I think about my time in the advertising business, I was completely absorbed in my work. I always fought against time, being as efficient as possible. There were no moments of pause; the focus was on clients, strategic concepts, and deadlines. It was only when I began my studies that I fully understood what I missed. I originally wanted to concentrate on photography, the only form of art I could create sporadically during my busy life, but I had forgotten how passionate I was about drawing. Drawing was my favorite means of expression since I first learned to hold a pen.

I do not regret working for so many years in my agency. I received priceless knowledge I can now use towards my current career as an artist and I became an expert in digital media. The challenges I had to overcome once in a while, increased my assertiveness and raised my consciousness about my actual goals and the things that truly drive me.

My current body of work consists of my preferred forms of expression. Whether digital or traditional, the pieces are mutually dependent and each inspires the others. My ink drawings

take a high level of concentration and I need to make the right decisions—once a line is drawn there is no turning back. I expect each line to be as accurate as possible, which reflects the demand of perfection I place on myself, just as I did in my past career. Specialized skills only come with continuous training and a great deal of thoughtfulness. Both make a work sustainable. In this regard I benefit from my traditional education in graphic design where I was introduced to techniques applied by the old masters. These years of practice now enable me to treat resources like paper with more care.

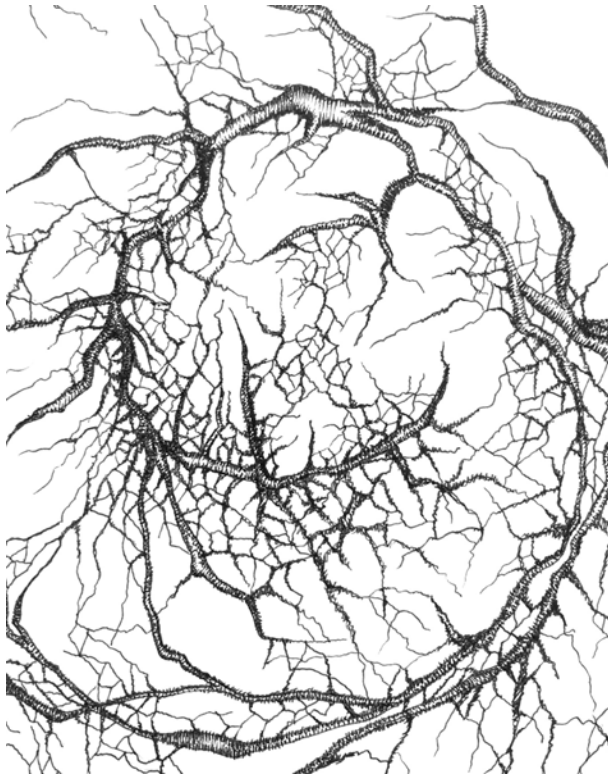


Figure 1: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Smart Expansion I*, 2017,
ink on paper, detail

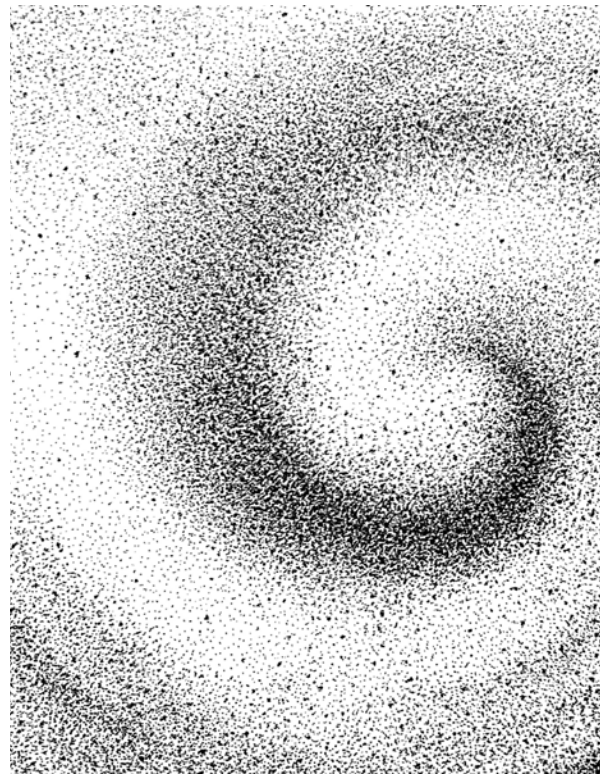


Figure 2: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Smart Expansion III*, 2017,
ink on paper, detail

Leonardo Da Vinci's anatomical drawings are good examples for how precision can have a lasting impact. More than 500 years old, they still serve as reference in modern medical art to educate physicians who study the human body. Although medical illustrators today use computer technology to create, Peter Abrahams, professor of Clinical Anatomy at *Warwick Medical School*, describes the value of Da Vinci's work as "'not worn out over time.'" (Hastie, bbc.co.uk) Abrahams, who has taught with the artist's drawings for 40 years, states: "'Very little has changed from his work. Perhaps five per cent of it was wrong. His drawing of the spine is still the best that has ever been done.'" (Hastie, bbc.co.uk) Da Vinci, who connected arts, crafts, and science, was a perfectionist.

Creating art with ink on paper can be intense. Whether it is a drawing or printmaking, I have to act responsibly to avoid mistakes. Therefore, I sometimes need to recover after finishing a project and work on something else. I often use digital photography to restore the necessary balance. I do not have to think when I take pictures: if a digital image does not meet my expectations, I simply delete it. Switching between different media gives me freedom and independence I have not had for many years.

B. Deceleration and focus

A great idea for creating art rarely appears on demand. For me, it always takes its time and mostly begins on a subconscious level caused by a situation coupled with emotions. Before I find the over-arching theme of a new project, I have to focus on myself without distraction. It

also requires a deceleration of my life style where I can just be. My mind needs to be emptied in order to be able to start something new.

Independent of my choice of media, most of my works are built of compositions that strive to be harmonic and balanced. Even though they sometimes consist of complex graphical lines, they often end up in a final clear shape on a steady background.



Figure 3: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Courage*, 2018,
ink on paper, diptych



Figure 4: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Courage*, 2018,
ink on paper, second piece of diptych

From afar, my depictions likely cause optical confusion. Some of my works first appear only as a white surface because of their delicate content. Gestalt psychology, which investigates human “perceptual organization” (Wagemans et al., 1 Introduction), suggests that our brain

tends to combine singular visual parts and adds missing elements automatically to a unified whole. Even if my pieces' visual structures allow the eye to build forms, in light of this theory, their actual subjects sometimes might be hard to identify.

Just as I need to slow down in my creative process, I want my audience to take their time when they view my work and to come close. Most of my pieces require patience in observation; their motifs cannot be understood from a distance.

III. System nature as a paradigm

I am no environmentalist. I believe it is common sense for each of us to protect our planet as much possible. I see nature as the most complex and connected system on earth, while at the same time being the most simple. Humankind is a part of nature. Even though we are included in this structure, I feel that sometimes it is necessary to take a step back and view a subject from a distance to get a better understanding of it.

Then, seen from this perspective without human beings, nature does not think: it instinctively reacts and evolves. Every living creature, every element, every molecule and atom acts in a self-responsible and self-sustaining way. Otherwise, this system would be unable to exist in such an amazingly broad range. It is a mutual give-and-take where everything constantly strives to achieve a state of balance.

Nature is intelligent and always provides a solution. We can learn from its intuition—I certainly do. It inspires me. Sometimes I just sit on the beach and observe the ocean and its waves, the sheer power of the water when the wind rises. Every wave feels like a heartbeat, like a living thing. I enjoy seeing the water when it is calm, when the wind drops to a whispering breeze. Yet even the quietest waves bring tiny things to the beach, like sand or shells. I laugh when I see the seagulls watching out for food and jumping at every opportunity that comes their way. They model a balanced way of life: both living within the community of their flock and following their own unique flight plans. The grace of their soaring thermal flight delights me.

Everything has its own order. Everything fits together in its own humble way. Everything happens when it should, as it should.

IV. Inspired by nature's beauty and abilities

A. *Connected*: transformation—creating new reality

“We can’t repair the Earth if we don’t fall in love with it,” said Michele Oka Doner in an interview with *studio international* in 2018. These words have been a personal mantra in her life up until today. Nature and its beauty is the artist’s subject and it was all initiated by living close to the sea. Miami Beach-born Oka Doner spent a lot of time on the beach observing the natural world and began to collect washed up gifts from the ocean during her childhood. This flotsam and jetsam mainly included corals, stones, shells and twigs—organic objects which prominently influenced Oka Doner’s works. From their shapes she derives her recurring “‘five magical patterns’—spirals, branches, stripes, random dots, and geometric forms” (Lapidus 23). Oka Doner is fascinated by the forces of nature, its permanent state of flux, the four elements earth, air, fire and water, and how they are interconnected.



Figure 5: Michele Oka Doner, *Burning Bush*,
1995, cast bronze, L 55.1 x D 47.2 x H 31.5 inches

The artist sees herself as a transformer of materials and has an immediate impulse to relate another meaning or purpose to something she had found or watched. For instance, she converts branches into chandeliers (*Burning Bush*, 1995, cast bronze) or palm leaves into vases

(*Palm Vases*, 1998 and 1999, sterling silver). Oka Doner uses various media. They range between sculpture, functional objects, public art or works on paper. Her work, past and present, celebrates life and nature like the ancients for whom the miracles of earth were divine and all existence part of the universe.

When I created my first drawings and collages in the beginning of 2016 (*Planet Head* and *Planet Heart*, *The Little Book of Happiness*, and *La Isla Única*), these pieces consisted of combinations of seemingly disparate items, constantly striving to emphasize their positive aspects. Even if a few incorporated elements were inspired by nature, I was unaware of it at that point; I was just driven by inventing wonderful new things and stories.



Figure 6: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Planet Head*, 2016,
ink drawing combined with collage elements on paper,
W 14 x H 17 inches



Figure 7: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Planet Heart*, 2016,
ink drawing combined with collage elements on paper,
W 14 x H 17 inches

During my time in the Florida Keys, I often observed its natural environment. Even though I was surrounded by water, the place where I lived barely provided access to a beach. Ever since I moved to Miami Beach, I can walk along the ocean which allows me to pick up little marine life and other souvenirs that attract my attention.

Feeling my previous work became too literal and illustrative, I warmly welcomed this new source of inspiration. I remained faithful to my drawings and began blending those with photographs of my findings like seaweed, branches, flowers, and insects into digital collages and photopolymer intaglio prints. These nature-based compositions resulted in the project *Connected* where realistically drawn elements and pictures became assembled in a new unusual order and under unexpected titles. Similarly, Michele Oka Doner imparts other meanings or functions in her artwork. Another example that shows this philosophy is *A Walk on the Beach* (1995, terrazzo floor, bronze, mother-of-pearl) where travelers can marvel at the variety of a miraculous underwater world at Miami International Airport.



Figure 8: Michele Oka Doner, *A Walk on the Beach*, 1995, terrazzo floor, bronze, mother of pearl, detail

Like Michele Oka Doner, I enjoy the development of methods to translate nature's shapes and phenomena in pieces of art and share in her idea of "the possibility of realizing heaven on Earth" (Ramljak 21). I do not ignore what is going on with our planet, even if it is disturbing sometimes. I just focus on its beauty. If we concentrate on positivity, we can empower and appreciate things from another perspective. When the *studio international* reporter asked Oka Doner if the purpose of her art is being seductive rather than didactic, she agreed. It is essential to understand that energy flows where attention goes.

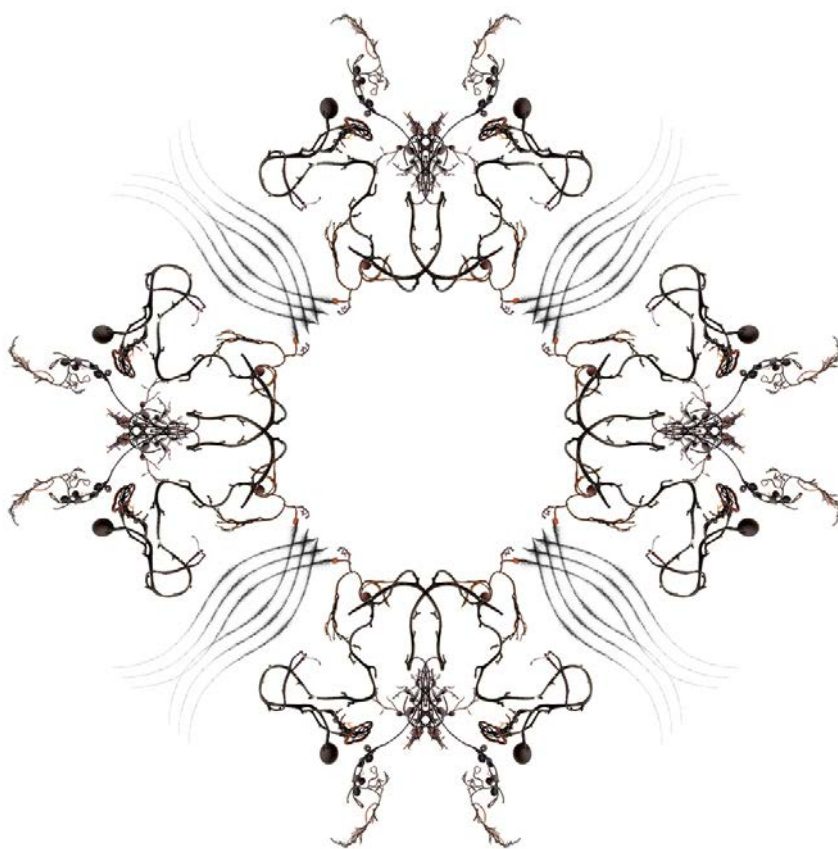


Figure 9: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Law of Attraction* from *Connected*, 2017, digital collage



Figure 10: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Blooming Eden* from *Eden* series from *Connected*, 2016, photopolymer intaglio print, color variation, W 15 x H 22 inches



Figure 11: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Blooming Eden*,
2016, detail of photopolymer intaglio print



Figure 12: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Blooming Eden*,
2016, photopolymer plate

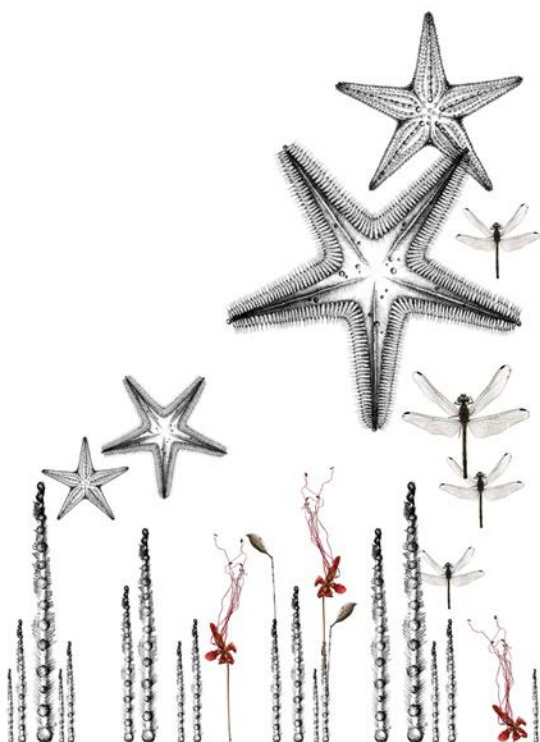


Figure 13: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Watching the Stars I*
from *Connected*, 2017, digital collage

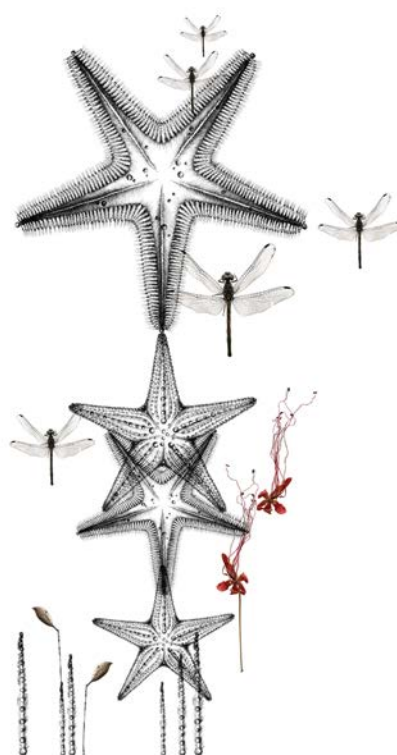


Figure 14: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Watching the Stars II*
from *Connected*, 2017, digital collage

B. *Water and Land*: integration—re-configuring reality

Andy Goldsworthy, a British land artist living in Scotland, makes many projects involving nature. His installations consist of elements including stone, ice, grass, and leaves. He incorporates natural forces like the current of a river, tides, wind, and rain into his process.

Goldsworthy collaborates with nature. The artist treasures his materials as precious gifts and returns them as completed artwork. Many of his pieces are impermanent and elusive, even for Goldsworthy himself. He can barely predict how his art will transform after nature interferes. Goldsworthy enjoys the procedure of creating, the moment before nature takes over, the loss of control, and the final collapse or change.

A few examples of the artist's decades-long career explain this approach: *Nettle Stalks*, 2009—a delicate spiderweb-like installation in which Goldsworthy attached single stalks of nettles to thorns of a hawthorn tree (Goldsworthy 80) might have lasted just for a few hours or days until the wind brought it down. Ice sculptures such as *Thin Sheets of Ice*, 2005, and *Reconstructed Icicles*, 2010, disappeared with the warmer weather—they simply melted. Drawings in the sand were washed away after the tide came (from *Rivers and Tides*, a documentary about Andy Goldsworthy). The only thing left of the artwork's original existence is a picture the artist took before its decay.

Working in nature and with his own hands serves as a ritual of self-connection. Right in the beginning of *Rivers and Tides*, he stated: "Art for me is a form of nourishment. I need the land. I need it. I want to understand that state, and that energy that I have in me that I also feel in the plants and in the land. That energy, that life that is running through the flowing, through the landscape." The artist also mentions that he feels rootless if he does not work for a period

of time (*Rivers and Tides*). Perhaps his works also strive to understand identity and where he belongs.



Figure 15: Andy Goldsworthy,
Reconstructed Icicles, 21 Dec. 2010

Although I was born in Germany, I felt somewhat alienated in my home country, maybe because I was raised by parents who grew up in Transylvania, Romania. Even though they are ethnically German, the cultural development of this German minority was different from the one in Germany. I never felt isolated, but always torn between two worlds. While spending time with my local friends from kindergarten and school, I also joined activities that included only my parents and other people who resettled from Transylvania to Germany. When I moved to Miami, I found myself in the middle of different cultures once more and my struggle became stronger—until I started to take pictures of both of my habitats.

In my books *Water* and *Land* (2017), I explore the two places I now consider as my homes. *Water* is about Miami Beach's ocean environment. *Land* contains photographs of plants, fields,

forests, and lakes, which are prominent in the area of Kissing, Germany, the place where I have lived most of my lifetime. All of my images are shot from an unexpected perspective or are digitally altered. To identify my motifs, the beholder has to look twice. Seeing something from another point of view can give it a new sense—it might become more meaningful. Similarly, Goldsworthy also wants to get beneath the surface appearance (Goldsworthy, npr.org). His compositions sometimes appear unreal, but he uncovers what lays below the items the viewer observes at first sight: he makes visible what is important for the land. All its components show a never-ending cycle.

My photographs are just an instant of time as well. They are not repeatable. I will not be able to take a picture of the same wave twice, and the blade of grass I captured will not exist again.

The more I recognize, the more I learn; the more I understand, the more I can appreciate and let things go—even the thought of finding my home. Home is everywhere and inside of me. In German we have two different terms for home I like to interpret. “Heimat” is home and means that one knows from where they come. It is about cultural and learned things. It is the roots. “Zuhause” is home too. This word describes how one feels when they have realized where they belong. Knowing both is essential. Knowing the difference is priceless.



Figure 16: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Water*, 2017, photo book, 60 pages, excerpt, W 13 x H 11 inches

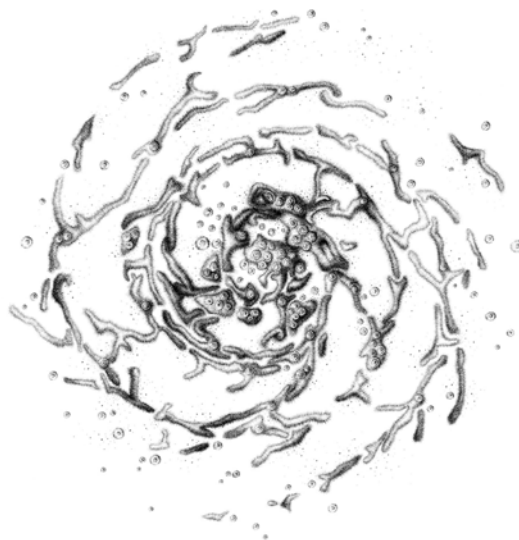
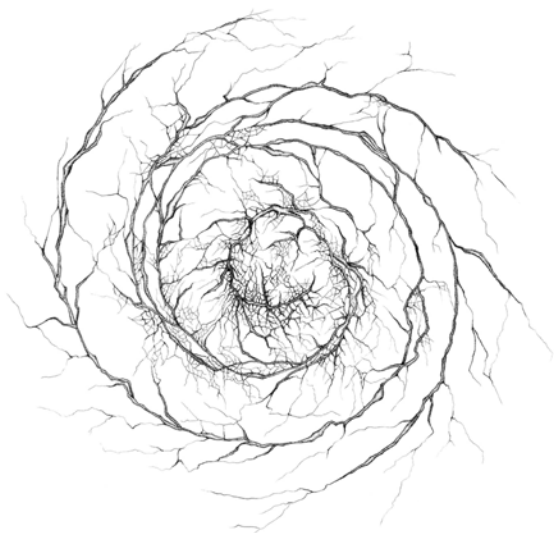


Figure 17: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Land*, 2017, photo book, 60 pages, excerpt, W 13 x H 11 inches

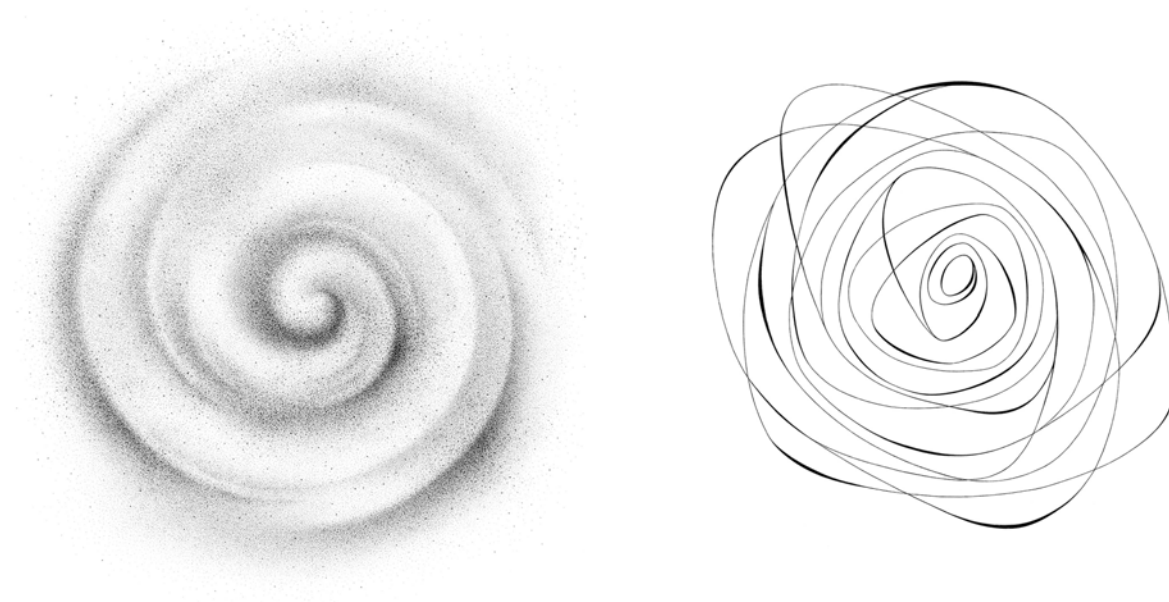
C. *Smart Expansion* and *Fluid*: expansion—building deeper connections

Many people are drawn to the ocean; I am one of them. Yet I have not always felt that way. Growing up in the southern part of Germany, I had always been convinced that mountains, forests, and fields were the most fulfilling places in the world. Since I moved close to the sea, things have changed. While I would not go as far as saying one is better than the other, the ocean is something I had clearly been subconsciously missing.

I became aware of my new-found passion after I had completed my book project *Water and Land*. I began spending more time on the beach and practiced yoga there. My drawings evolved as they were influenced by the ocean and its marine life (*Smart Expansion* series, 2017–2018, ink on paper) and I increasingly photographed patterns of waves and their variations (Book *Fluid*, 2018, photographs and *Smart Expansion* drawings)



Figures 18 and 19 (L–R): Gabriele Gutwirth, *Smart Expansion I* and *II*, 2017, ink on paper, W 14 x H 17 inches



Figures 20 and 21 (L–R): Gabriele Gutwirth, *Smart Expansion III*, 2017, and *Smart Expansion IV*, 2018, ink on paper, W 14 x H 17 inches

This inspiration also changed my behavior. When I found myself too absorbed in my projects and thoughts, I took a break and went to the ocean. Every time I came back from the beach I felt so relaxed that I could clarify ideas and create new ones quickly. I wanted to learn about what lies behind this magic and finally started searching for reasons.



Figure 22: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Fluid*, 2018, book (photographs and drawings), 60 pages, excerpt, W 13 x H 11 inches

Even though research is still developing, a few scientific studies suggest that stays in aquatic areas have a healing effect on the human body and mind. For example, the author of the book *Blue Mind*, marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols, indicates the experience of being near, in, on, or under water as beneficial. Nichols calls his concept *blue mind* and describes it as a “mildly meditative state” (Cimini, usatoday.com) in which stress can be reduced, the feeling of happiness and creativity increases, and interpersonal relationships can be improved. Also—and this is not a very new discovery because water has been part of medical therapy for a long time—pain could be successfully mitigated. Nichols’ findings are based on studies in collaboration with a group of experts consisting of scientists, psychologists, athletes, and artists. The team observed the behavior of different test subjects and measured their brain activity while engaged in or near water.

Nichols verifies his idea by neuroscientific measuring methods. He discusses the enhancement of neurochemicals such as endorphins and oxytocin in the human body which cause the feeling of well-being. Therefore, he likes to ask people “What’s your water?” (Cimini, usatoday.com) My water is the ocean. I never had a comparable attraction to the lakes in my German hometown and began to question my specific interest in it. Since I prefer to make my decisions consciously, I felt the need to gain deeper knowledge. While this research focuses more on the change of mood and emotion, other studies investigate the higher concentration of negative ions in the air near areas of water and their effects on our health. Air ions can be found in every environment, but in contrast to the positive ones which can be pollutants like dust or chemicals, these specific negatively charged molecules or atoms seem to make us feel better. For example, they are given credit for supporting serotonin production and for helping

to boost the oxygen level in our brains.

The reason for a significantly greater amount of negative ions at aquatic spots relates to the water's movement when it disperses into air, one example being splashing which splits neutral air particles. Their negative charge results from pairing these freed electrons with a molecule of oxygen. Fresh country air contains between 2,000 – 4,000 negative ions per cubic centimeter, while at a large waterfall the number of ions in each cubic centimeter can go up to 100,000. The air next to an ocean probably does not have as many negative ions as compared to a waterfall, but their quantity is certainly higher than in the air around a lake. For me, this explains why I can recover at the beach so quickly.

I can derive an important conclusion from my findings: gaining more specific knowledge helps me decide which environmental setting to live in. I feel, if I reside close to the ocean, I will be able to find the right balance between work and freedom more easily. To quote Nichols: "And when we are with the water, it washes our troubles away." (tedxsandiego.com)

D. *Just thinking* and *Simplicity*: simplification—heartbeat and brainwaves in sync

If someone asked me why I create these delicate and complex drawings which can, at times, appear almost obsessive, I would say each line is a thought. Now one can imagine what that means: there were thousands of thoughts in mind. They went back and forth and sometimes I suffered a lot. I tortured myself by thinking. I thought about the meaning of life, if my decision to move to the United States and leave everything behind was the right one, and so on.

Most of my previous works were entirely planned and controlled. I often measured the paper margins before I began a new piece in order to center the motif and pre-drew all shapes with pencil to ensure a perfect result, avoiding any risk of making a mistake.

I sometimes received the advice to try painting as a vehicle to get rid of my obsession, so I tried. I used the finest available paintbrush to turn the painting into a precise illustration again. I simply was not able to be that free spirit I wanted to be and continued working on my precise ink drawings until January 2018. The project *Just thinking* (2018, ink on paper) was the conscious decision to relieve myself.

Just Thinking is a series of eight simple line works and an additional diptych where I blended the process of thinking into emotions. I believe that my thoughts sometimes block the way of what I feel. At the same time, I need my brain to analyze my experiences and to qualify certain feelings. For me, both parts are related to waves and pulse, and therefore, I depicted them as dynamic calligraphic curves.

Although not at all unexpectedly, people who knew my other artwork, responded with speechlessness to this new style. *Useful Thoughts*, *Unfolding Thoughts*, *Unlimited Thoughts*,

and *Heartbeat* caused a kind of irritation which, in turn, caused insecurity on my side. However, I remained true to myself and created the diptych *Courage*.

Even though this project appears less controlled, some parts in the production process still are. A motif looks as if it is built of one movement, but the lines are still precisely pre-drawn with a pencil and neatly executed with a 0.05 mm thick pen. The difference to my earlier art lies in the reduced amount of details and that I had no imagination of the result in advance. I just knew that it would consist of curves, but not how I would compose them. They evolved through sketching the shapes. It also happened that I turned some of the works around after they were done because I liked them better upside down.

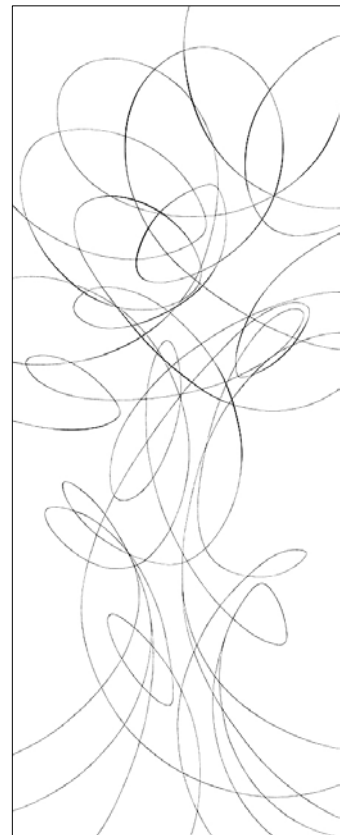
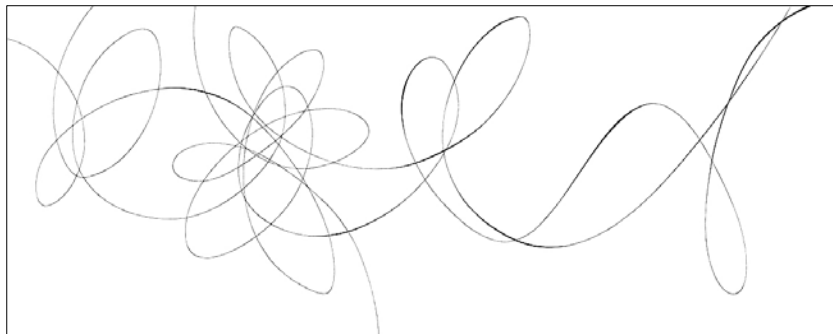


Figure 23: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Courage*, 2018, ink on paper, diptych,
(L–R) W 24 x H 9.5 inches and W 9.5 x H 24 inches

In contrast to my project *Fluid* where the included drawings (*Smart Expansion* series) were done before I began its design, *Just Thinking* arose concurrently with another book, *Simplicity*. I perceive graphic activities to be relaxing, since I was trained for many years in that field and can prepare a layout almost automatically. I created two or three ink works, scanned and matched them with my photographs in my digital file, and then switched to drawing again.

Simplicity is structured into four chapters. Each chapter consists of two *Just Thinking* works combined with pictures I took on the beach, and poetic short texts. As the name *Simplicity* implies, it is all about simplification and, in particular, about taking things in life easier.

On page 75 of *Simplicity*, I write “Listen. Every wave is a heartbeat. It’s your heartbeat. Can you hear it?” If one ever heard blood pulsating through ultrasound, it reminds one of ocean waves. Nature’s rhythm is intuitive, such as the one of our hearts. Simultaneously, this rhythm is based on laws and rules that want to become understood. If we pay more attention to certain feelings and reflect them with what we know, we might stop overthinking situations, and can react without excessive emotions. For me, the word “simplicity” also means that something is easy to comprehend—by both, heart and brain.

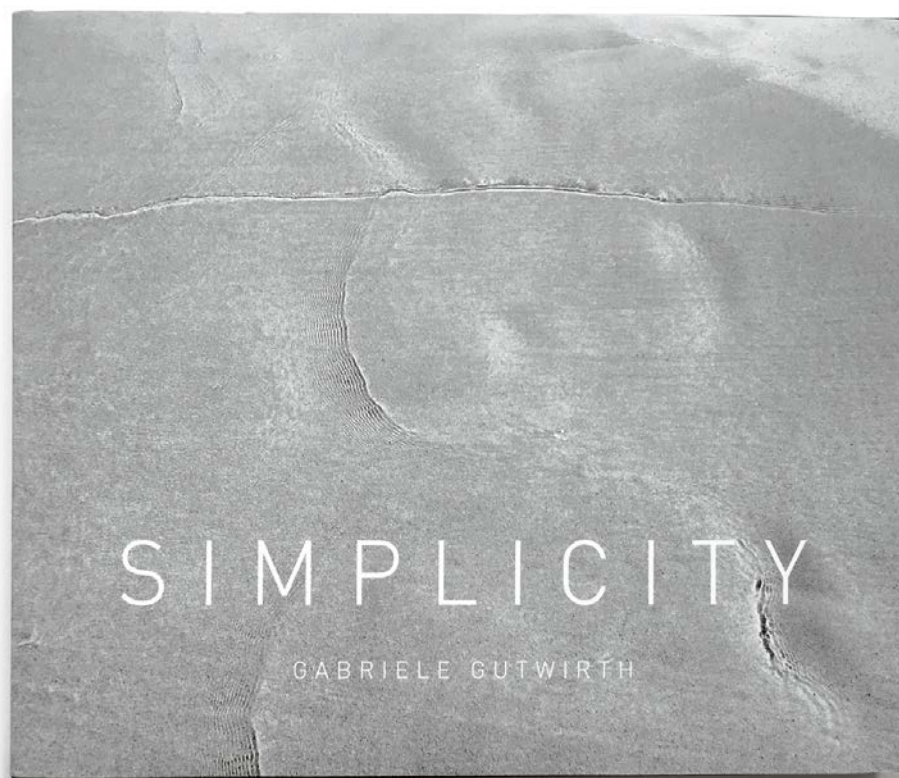


Figure 24: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Simplicity*, 2018, book (photographs and drawings), 88 pages, excerpt, W 13 x H 11 inches

E. *Body Drawings and Natural Transformation*: self-connection—the incorporation of myself

I consider myself a person who has a kind of a talent for body movement. I attended ballet classes when I was a child, and once in a while I love going out dancing. Since I like exercising outdoors best, I joined a yoga group on the beach in the middle of 2017. A few months later, while working on my book *Simplicity*, some of my yogi friends and I took pictures of us posing. Dancing and yoga became increasingly important in my life and I started incorporating these in my artwork.

By chance, it happened that I registered for a course at the university that dealt with performative strategies in photography. My professor assigned a presentation about an artist we could select from a list. This is how I discovered the Finnish photographer Elina Brotherus.

The first finds in my research of this artist were images of herself standing in front of different natural settings and watching them, mostly facing her back to the viewer. They appeared like landscape paintings (*Der Wanderer 1–5* from *The New Painting*, 2000–2004.)



Figure 25: Elina Brotherus, *Der Wanderer 2*
from *The New Painting*, 2004, photograph

I realized quickly that she was completely integrated into the composition. In an article on *My Modern Met*, author Katie Hosmer describes Brotherus' picture series: "The scenes, which are both meditative and sad, investigate the strong relationship between a single human figure and the surrounding environment." (Hosmer, mymodernmet.com.)

Here, in addition to other projects that depict the artist in other scenes and locations, Brotherus plays with the gaze of the viewer. I agree with the headline of her interview on *Collectors Agenda*, that reads "Photographs tell as much about the observer as they do about their author." (Toth, collectorsagenda.com) When I began thinking about incorporating myself in my art, I also thought about the possible reactions of my audience. I saw the greatest challenge in creating a piece in which I was included but not a distraction. I did not want to be the focus of the composition, but at the same time, I wanted to be recognized as an individual in my environment. Brotherus rather shares landscape impressions by showing her back. To use her words: it "results in a sense of standing together." (Toth, collectorsagenda.com) In my photographs, the viewer can look at me and the world I am surrounded by simultaneously. I belong to the ocean and the ocean belongs to me. Here is the place where I want to be.

Body Drawings are ten digitally altered photographs of me in different poses on the beach, inspired by classical dance and yoga movements. In this project, I am the ink and the landscape is my paper. Regarding to the central idea of *Connectivity* I perceive the integration of myself as a logical consequence. Whatever one finds in this series, they always see a human being acting in an ocean setting. How someone weighs one of each might differ, but the model and the environment are inseparable. Natural forces like the wind or the waves, influenced each of my movements significantly.



Figure 26: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Body Drawings* series, 2018, photographs, excerpt

Brotherus also uses video technique in her work. In her point of view, the moving image can appear more realistic than framed photographs (Toth, collectorsagenda.com.) Inspired by the artist's recording *The Black Bay Sequence* (2010), where she can be seen walking nude into a lake and leaving it again after a short swim, I decided to film myself in a similar setting.



Figure 27: Elina Brotherus, *The Black Bay Sequence*, 2010, video installation, 01:00:12, screenshot

Although Brotherus' performance was taken on different times of day with variable light settings, the artist repeats her procedure over and over again. My video *Natural Transformation* (2018) depicts a differing process of change. I disappear in the ocean wearing a black dress. The moment when I dissolve in the waves is escorted by a flock of seagulls. After a few seconds, I return in a white dress; the water serving as an element of cleansing. The whole sequence has a dramatic impact.

I conceived *Natural Transformation* meticulously, but I could not plan what actually happened. I focused on walking a straight line into the water without paying attention to anything else when my friend who assisted me suddenly started to shout: "Look at all these seagulls!" At the same time, I discovered a huge school of big fish swimming around my legs. They were everywhere.

While *Body Drawings* was controllable in each step to its completion—a still picture can always be manipulated in every detail—*Natural Transformation* evolved unpredictably. With the unexpected appearance of the birds and the fish I realized that I could define the overall concept, but not its final development. For me, the seagulls made the video stronger.

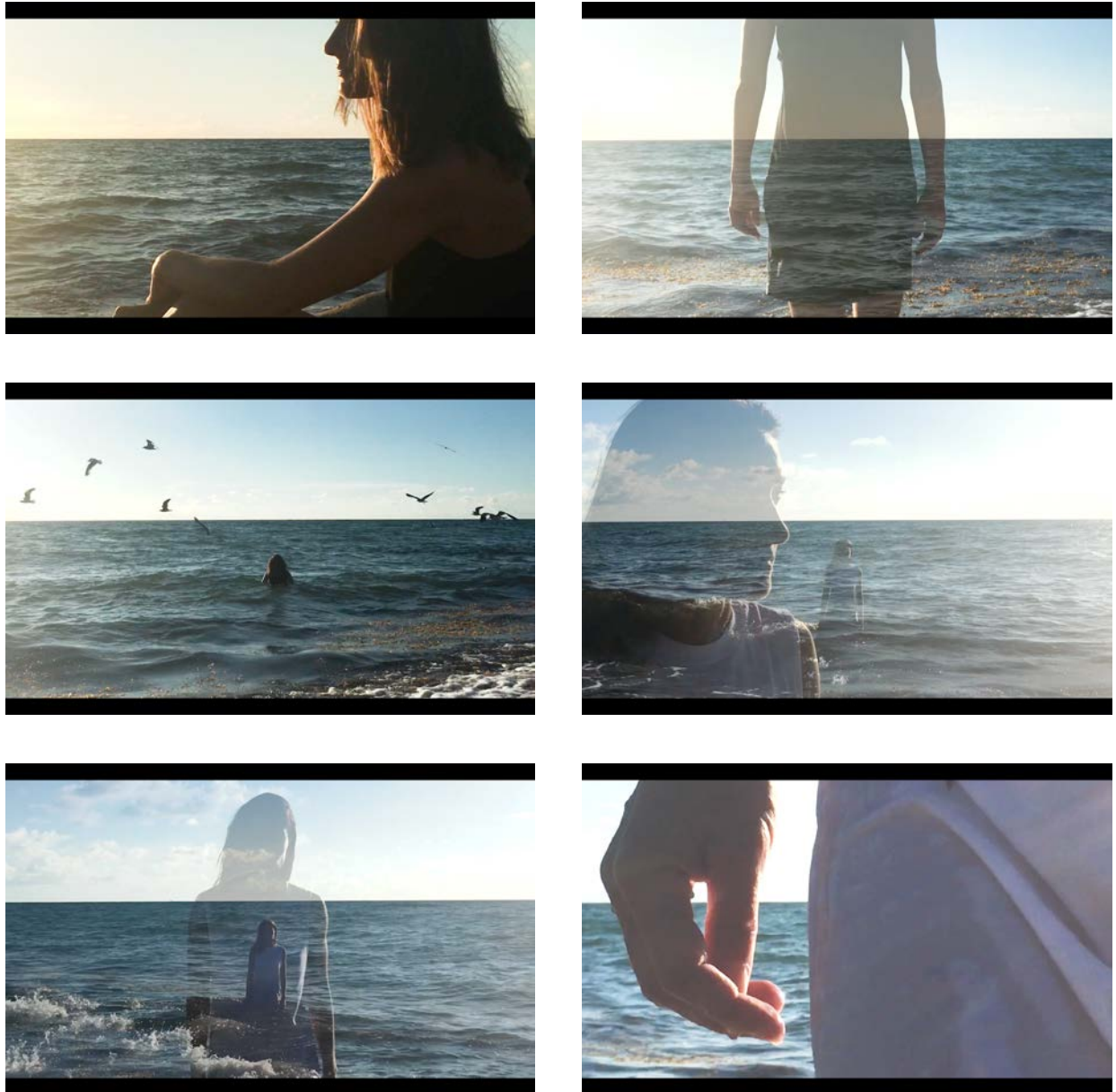


Figure 28: Gabriele Gutwirth, *Natural Transformation*, 2018, video, 00:03:16, screenshots

This is what I have learned: if we try to control all circumstances in life, we might miss the opportunity to improve it. Even though change can challenge us, it is always for the better. We just have to embrace it. As it is with each situation we need to solve, if we dare to accept alternative solutions, things fall into place. Everything has an effect on everything.

V. Conclusion

At this point, looking back at my years of education and practice, I see that this chain of events made perfect sense. Everything happened in a way so that I could build upon prior knowledge. All changes happened exactly at the right time in order to get a better understanding of the idea of a unified whole which I call *Connectivity*.

My specific unified whole is my life and everything that comes along with it. Since I decided to take this challenge of starting another professional career, I am more focused on building a positive interplay between feeling, thinking, acting, and reacting.

Nature serves me as a patient teacher. It shows me the unseen: all attributes that relate to a balanced and respectful way of coexistence. I will continue going outside and enjoying nature with all my senses, creating art from this inspiration. This process helps me to become more conscious about my personal interactions.

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