







Yes, my room is still a mess.

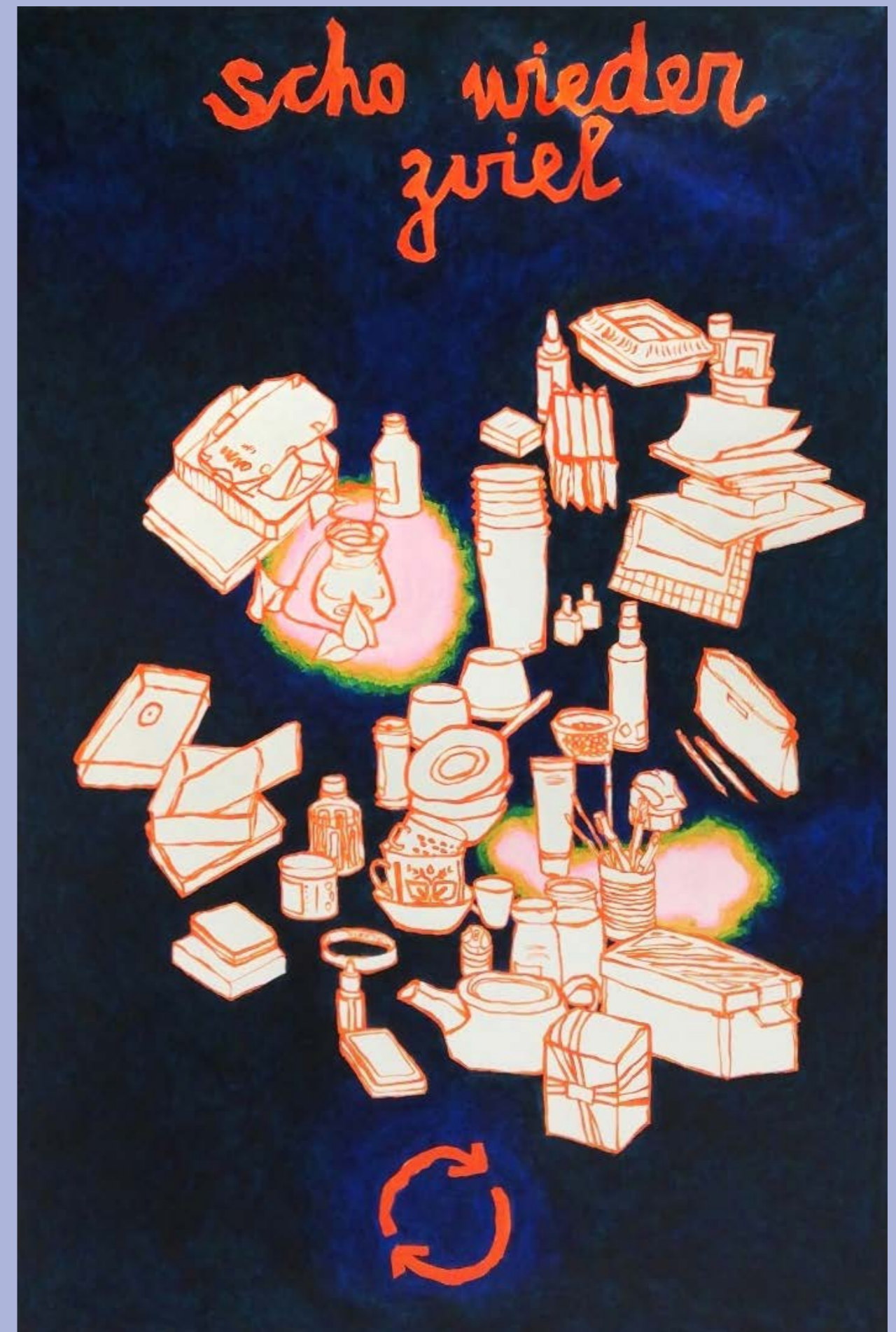
...but now I have a documented rollercoaster of emotions to show for it.

The aim of my project was to confront myself with the mess in my room, to find the main issues and attempt to battle them. I didn't have high expectations, but high hopes; keeping tidy has been difficult for me for as long as I can remember, and I would have been happy to have resolved the mess once and for all, now that I had some time exclusively for it. I didn't set a clear goal, since I wasn't sure what I could realistically get done, but I was more excited for the journey than any outcome.

Spoiler alert: the process has not been as fun as I had wished for it to be. The toughest issue to battle was the deep-seated shame I felt about the mess. Throughout my life, I have been scolded for it and told to 'just clean', but was never told how to actually do it, so I felt I was still stuck in the same cycle of knowing my room is deeply frustrating to look at, but not knowing where to even start cleaning. While I made myself look at, photograph, draw and clean the mess, for a while, I only grew harsher with myself, but luckily realized that cleaning out of hatred for myself was not sustainable, and that the aim should be not to achieve a superficial tidiness, but to strive towards a system that would be easy to maintain even when I have no energy to clean. Realizations like these helped me develop more compassion and acceptance for myself, which is still a win in my books.

The final product of this project are two paintings, composed of the same elements: a composition of mess in colored linework letting the canvas see through, writing in the same color as linework, a symbol supporting the writing, and an ambiently colored background. These works express the way I try to escape the dreary reality of what the mess is actually like. I struggled to pick between realism and escapism and decided that I'd rather explore to which extent I can keep aestheticizing discomfort and what it would look like if I gave myself permission to do that within this project.

'Scho wieder zviel' - 'too much, again' references the cycles of the mess growing and shrinking. It is almost an inevitable force of nature - the everyday troubles stirring up any efforts to keep it at bay. The background's inconsistencies are like fogging on film (or a light leak, or film burn) and represent my frustrations leaking through my exhaustion.





'please don't look' references the isolation I brought upon myself by deciding to not let anyone see my room in it's state. Anytime I thought about a person entering my room, all I would feel is the urge to close their eyes and to convince them, that this does not represent me, I swear this is not all I am, please just look away, just don't look.

PROCESS



The start was arguably the hardest part of the process. There were many places to begin and no plan of action, which made me feel paralyzed in the face of all the room for improvement. Finally, I started by analyzing my starting point and my relationship to cleaning my room, and whether there are any notable patterns and most pressing issues. Writing a digital diary really helped me around this time, retrospectively I concluded: 'one of my working theories right now is that I have phases of acute intervention[s of cleaning], and then phases of very low energy where simple maintenance can't even be expected.' This gives me an idea of what my goal is, which is not 'just tidiness', but a system that is simple to maintain even when I am not well. During this time, I rearranged my room and threw away a bulk of the trash (paper bags, take-away containers, papers, bottles) that was covering my floor. For the project, I was mostly working with photography, because I felt it was important to actually document the mess around me. I was photographing the most cluttered, shocking or disgusting parts of the room to confront myself. This ties back into something my mother used to threaten me with; she used to tell me that she had taken photos of my room and if I didn't clean it, she would send them to my grandmother. I had developed a fear of having 'evidence' of the mess and letting anyone in my room to see the state of it, and now was actively trying to dismantle it by taking pictures of the worst parts of the mess.

1 BEGINNINGS

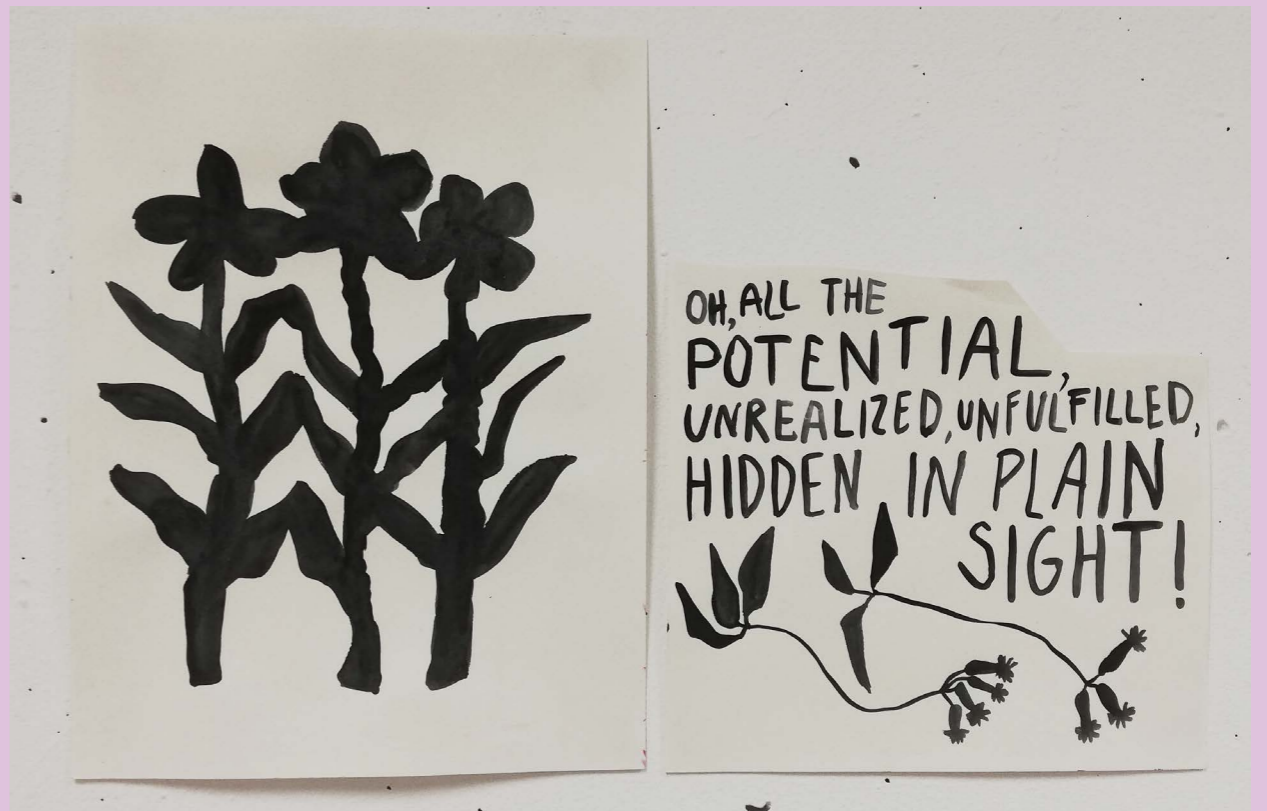


Soon enough, the reality of how unorganized I am, started to really get to me. I didn't do much to come up with a system or draw up a plan of how to accomplish it, and I felt the pressure to do something, but buckled under it too easily as well. I was so insecure about it, that I even doubted whether I had chosen the right topic for the project. I was sick around that time and had no energy, but at the same time, all the pent-up negativity helped me stop avoiding integrating the mess into my works. I struggled with picking a style and drawing anything that wasn't a plant, so to get out of my comfort zone, I started by stylizing plants and inventing new ones, composed of either just an outline or one monochrome solid shape, a silhouette of it. Fuelled by writing in the diary and my frustrations, I started to combine the most striking thoughts in text with my drawings. I quite liked the dichotomy of my escapist flower drawings and direct expressions of dissatisfaction, so I did multiple small series, each with cohesive colors and shape languages; these works helped feel more comfortable with spontaneously discovered color combinations. In a larger piece, I included the mess on my table, drawn in lineart in blue acrylics over a light blue background, and it served as a stepping stone to finally start creating in larger formats and depicting the mess.

2

C R I S I S







In this phase, I made the most progress regarding my room. I divided my room into categories like clothes, books, papers and so on, and within them sorted out all the clutter I didn't need anymore. My grandmother accompanied me for some of these cleaning sessions, and sometimes told me how to arrange the remaining things. By this point, I wasn't as frustrated with my room anymore and was proud of the bags of stuff I managed to get rid of, but I was unexpectedly dissatisfied with the parts of my room that were now tidy. The particular place I felt this at the most is the bookshelf; the top shelf looks tidy, but it's impractical to take any one book out of there. Whenever I looked at it, I felt I couldn't even raise my arms to disturb the sanctity we created. At that point I realized that I couldn't keep letting other people influence my relationship to my room, and that it was the shame other people placed on me that made me amplify the shame I place on myself, and still, I have the last say about how I should feel about the mess. I was soon annoyed with how superficial the progress was, but also felt newly affirmed in seeking an independence of my feelings and put focus on decoupling my thoughts from other's thoughts.

3

SUPERFICIALITY



I created a few larger pieces on craft paper and handmade paper. I chose to draw compositions derived from photos of my room, in lineart in color. It's the basis for something I have wanted to try for a long time; colored lineart, blue shadows and white highlights, all of it on grey or tan-colored paper to make the highlights pop automatically. After then painting the blue areas, which are the shadowy parts of objects and their shadows, I decided that it wasn't enough to make the objects stand out from the background, so I did a light wash of blue over all of them. The paint flowing down at first felt like a mistake – the style I had chosen didn't feel like it made space for anything organic, but nevertheless I left the streaks there. I feel they added a nice play on how I tried to create a feeling of dimensionality for the objects, albeit with few details, the streaks break the illusion by clearly revealing the flat paper surface. I added the highlights in white in multiple layers with clearly visible brush strokes too and refreshed the lineart to make it stand out again.

Having to go over the entire painting over and over again made for a rather pleasant process, it helped me transform a lot of the negative feelings into positive ones, like seeing a beauty within the mess by having to go over the composition once more or laughing at the photos when looking for a new part of the mess to paint. This was definitely a turning point for the project and my mood, but really, I've always known that art for me is a tool to calm down and reassess a situation and really have a space and time to think it over.



Now, to actually sharpen all of what I have learned down into a series of paintings, was still quite a task. I wasn't sure about the style - I thought that the lines and shapes of color were too simple and that a more realistic style would be more appropriate for a final product of this project. So after struggling with finding a compromise, I decided to dive back into a playful and bright palette, linework with big patches of color, and combined that with text. The particular fashion in which I combined these is something I had tried a few months prior, but with my plants. I loved it in smaller formats and had since wished to try it on bigger canvasses. Another reason why I might've chosen the style, is because I already integrated text into this type of work and felt confident I could work it into this topic now also.

4

EXTRACT

CONTEXT



Anna Zemánková, Untitled, 1970s, Acrylic, paper collage, fabric on paper, 89 x 62.5 cm¹



Robert Kushner, Still Life with Three Vases VI, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches²

The first context I ever thought of is social media. It is the reason why I ever felt confident enough to even tackle the topic on a public level. For my personal life and for the project there is the huge hurdle of shame to overcome for that, but on social media there have been movements to show the less than picturesque moments of one's life without, or despite, judgement. While I am aware that I have aestheticized the mess, I am able to separate the final product from the progress I have made in terms of accepting the mess and myself as they are.

Someone, who inspired me throughout the process, was Anna Zemánková. While I personally can never say I operate by the ideas of art brut since I am pursuing an education in art, I sometimes struggle to unapologetically create works of art that are purely from my imagination and that don't have any deeper messages, works that only serve the purpose of helping me pass time or helping me calm down, especially within academic settings. Reading her work being spoken about with respect made me respect my own floral fantasy work more and almost made me change the course of my entire project.¹

Stylistically I see a clear influence from Robert Kushner. I used to mainly draw black linework with fine liner for my pieces a few years back and found it difficult to expand beyond that. Seeing Kushner's work, though, reminded me, that truly, anything is possible. Alright, that might be an exaggeration, but the plethora of patterns, seemingly random shapes of color, colored linework – to me, all of this looked like fun and experimentation, working with plants around you, feeling inspired by patterns that you find in your surroundings and combining all your impressions onto one canvas, and I loved it.²

OUTLOOK



While one of my goals was to make myself push through discomfort, I have done plenty of that without having to reflect that in my final works. It feels like in many ways I managed to leave expectations set by others behind and truly concentrate on what I needed and wanted to do. I am sure this will shape future personal art projects within academics. Towards the end of the project, I noticed that I felt a lot more confident in my work and learned to ask relevant questions during discussions.

I also loved having enough time to create works that are relevant to me but are not the final exhibition pieces. I didn't feel much of a rush to complete the project and could start pieces knowing they are just there to capture what I feel in the moment, or they are an experiment to test out certain paper, paints or color combination; it was valuable experience, and I am very content with what I have accomplished.

Sources:

¹: Cavin-Morris Gallery, *Twilight Before Dawn*, New York

²: Robert Kushner, <https://www.robertkushnerstudio.com/home> (last visited on 08.01.2023)

I am thankful for any and every bit of moral support I got during this project. You know you're out there! You probably got to see my room! Thank y'all for not freaking out and running away. I would also like to thank my mentor Eliane Binggeli Esposito for her continuous support by offering valuable feedback and a healthy dose of positivity.



