

COMUNE¹

Painting as Critical Practice

SOLO EXHIBITION — MUSEUM FLUXUS+, POTSDAM

'Comune – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict'

16 November 2025 – 1 February 2026

Introduction

This essay arises from a precise need: to give theoretical depth to the pictorial dimension of the solo exhibition 'Comune– The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict', shown at the Museum Fluxus+ in Potsdam, Germany, from 16 November 2025 to 1 February 2026. The nine artworks that make up the project — executed entirely by hand, yet born from a dialogue with algorithmic image processing — require no theoretical preamble in order to be looked at. To be thought through to the end, however, they call for a critical space that goes beyond their titles and explanatory captions.

The text that follows does not describe the works, nor does it reconstruct their compositional process, which has been documented elsewhere. It sets out, rather, to make explicit the theoretical framework behind the visualisation of the artworks, following the path traced by the series itself: from memory as critical practice, to the historical construction of separation to the material organisation of war, to the principle that binds these three movements into a single presentation.

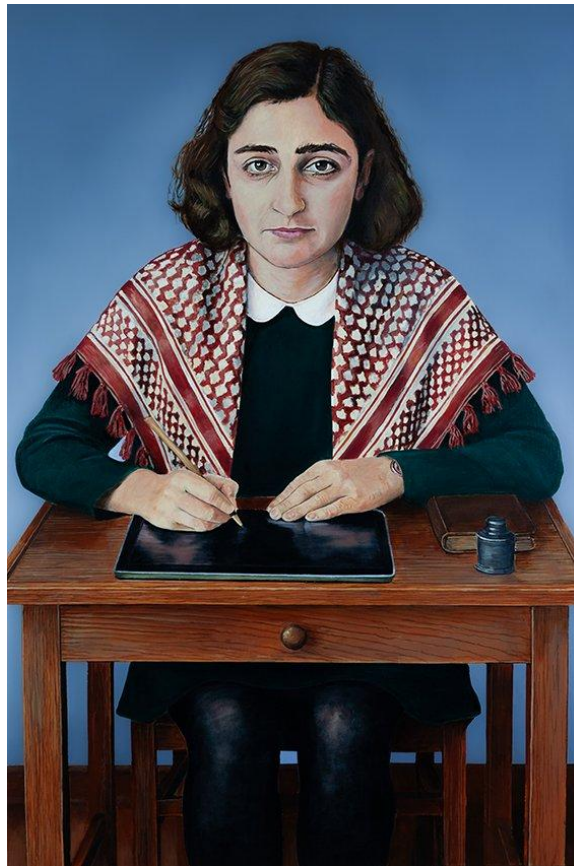
This essay shares its starting point with the exhibition — the paradox of peoples bound by a profound anthropological, historical and cultural proximity, yet separated by relations of domination that are themselves historically determined — but develops it with the tools proper to philosophical reflection, distinct from those of museum display. The artworks depict what is argued here discursively,,: two different practices of the same critical thought, which illuminate each other reciprocally without either being reduced to an illustration of each other.



View of the exhibition Comune, Museum Fluxus+, Potsdam, 2025–2026.

¹*Comune* - the common, as understood in this essay, denotes a historical practice of cooperation, sharing and the collective production of social relations, opposed to domination and the concentration of power. Its meaning unfolds progressively throughout the argument and does not refer to a normative or utopian model of society.

I. Memory as Critical Practice



ANNE, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 138 cm.

Every memory arises from a determinate historical event, yet its meaning never coincides definitively with the time in which that event occurred. Memory survives only for as long as the present continues to evoke it. When that relation is broken, the past turns into commemoration, and memory loses its critical function.

It is this tension that makes *ANNE*, the first Comune painting intelligible. The work does not arise from a wish to remember Anne Frank, nor from any intention to draw an analogy between the Shoah and Gaza. It takes shape from a more radical question: what happens to memory when the present forces us to reconsider the meaning of the categories through which the past had been understood?

The historical contingency in which the painting was made is one in which Shoah scholars such as Omer Bartov and Amos Goldberg have publicly come to describe what is happening in Gaza as genocide. When categories developed to make sense of the Shoah are once again called upon to interpret the present, it is not only the present that is being interrogated. Memory itself is compelled to test its own capacity to continue performing a critical function.

At this juncture, painting enters history. Not as retrospective testimony, nor as an anticipation of historical or legal judgement, but as a theoretical practice that takes historical contingency as the very condition of its own working. The work comes into being while events are still unfolding, when their meaning remains a matter of contention and no interpretation can claim to be final.

Seen in this light, Anne Frank becomes a theoretical figure rather than a symbolic one. The keffiyeh does not alter the meaning of her story; it alters the relation between the viewer and memory. The image does not propose an identification between historically distinct events. It interrogates the capacity of the memory of the Shoah to go

on operating as a critical practice at a moment when the present seems to summon the very categories through which that memory was formed.

Anne Frank is not shown writing in her diary but on an electronic tablet. This anachronism does not update her story: it makes it contemporary. The point is not to transpose the event into the present, but to render present the question the event poses. The historical specificity of the Shoah — the deepest abyss reached by organised violence in the history of the twentieth century — is not thereby relativised; it becomes instead the threshold from which memory continues to interrogate whatever, in the present, recalls its categories, without this implying either an equation of the two events or a denial of the specificity of genocides subsequently recognised as such.

The artwork introduces a decisive distinction. Memory does not coincide with the preservation of what has already happened: that is the task of the archive, the monument or the commemoration. It becomes critical practice only when its capacity to know is continually put to the test by the present. Once this testing is suspended, memory turns into a merely celebratory device, one that shields the past from any confrontation with history.

For this reason, ANNE does not conclude an argument: it opens one up. The task that follows concerns the way in which a society progressively organises the relations that transform proximity into separation. It is from this theoretical demand that the artwork introduces the second movement in the reading of the nine-painting series.

II. The Historical Construction of Separation

If memory is to go on performing a critical function, it cannot confine itself to recognising the recurrence of crimes against humanity. Its task consists in interrogating the process through which that category of crime becomes historically possible. No conflict is born at the moment it becomes openly manifest. By the time a crime against humanity becomes visible, the conditions that made it possible have already been largely produced. Critical practice is therefore called upon to shift its gaze from the event to the relations that precede it.

At this point the *Comune* series shifts its object. Having interrogated the public function of memory, the project turns to the problem of separation. The question is not yet one of war, nor of violence as an accomplished fact. It concerns the process by which a society progressively comes to transform proximity into antagonism, rendering thinkable what until then had seemed incompatible with coexistence.

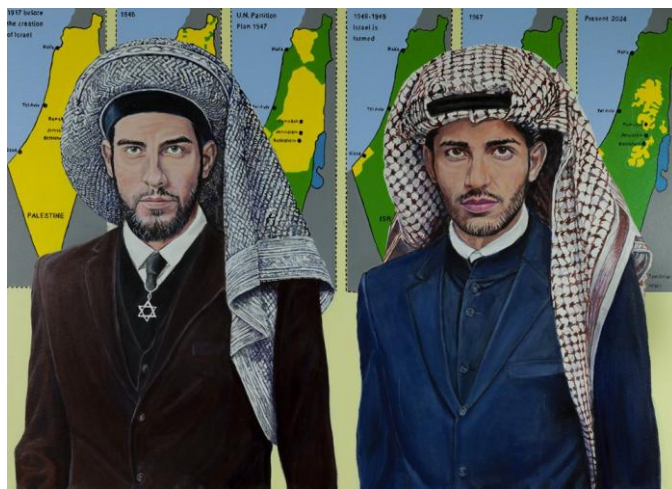
Proximity Does Not Produce the Enemy



CONSENT / DISSENT – Young Boys, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 130 cm.



CONSENT / DISSENT – Little Girls, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 130 cm.



CONSENT / DISSENT – Young Men, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 130 cm.



CONSENT / DISSENT – Young Girls, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 130 cm.



CONSENT / DISSENT – Old Men, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 130 cm.



CONSENT / DISSENT – Elderly Women, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 130 cm.

The second level of enquiry in the pictorial project begins from a paradoxical choice. The six artworks *CONSENT / DISSENT* do not represent conflict. They represent its absence. Children, young people and the elderly are depicted in pairs, each pair made up of a figure from Jewish-Israeli tradition and a Palestinian figure of the same gender and age. Their features are close enough to suggest kinship. The pairs represent a symbolic brotherhood: a shared belonging to life that asserts itself despite the marks of cultural and religious difference each figure carries.

This choice answers not to a narrative need but to a theoretical one. If conflict were inscribed in people themselves, it would be enough to look at their faces to understand its origin. The artworks show the opposite. Differences exist, as they exist in every society, but none of them spontaneously produces an enemy. The mere existence of difference does not explain domination. For that to happen, a historical process is required that turns relations originally open into relations of separation.

The work suspends one of the most recurrent interpretations of contemporary conflicts: the one that attributes violence to ethnic, religious or cultural difference. Such differences certainly belong to the history of societies, but they do not, in themselves, constitute the cause of war. Their existence is not enough to explain why a neighbour becomes an enemy, or why a community is progressively stripped of the material conditions of its own existence. The fundamental question changes direction: not why two peoples are different, but through what historical processes a relation of proximity comes to be organised as a relation of domination.

Territory as Historical Organisation

At this point the work's second constitutive element appears. Across the background of each painting runs a cartographic sequence of Palestine between 1917 and 2024. The historical case represented is named without ambiguity: the sequence identifies, with documentary precision, the territorial transformation of Palestine and Israel. The maps do not perform a documentary function. They introduce a second dimension of the image, one that immediately enters into tension with that of the faces.

The faces belong to the cycle of life. Children, young people and the elderly pass through the different stages of existence. Their shared humanity excludes any indication of a sense of superiority or inferiority. The Palestinian girl looks at the viewer with a force that coincides neither with victimhood nor with defiance. The two young women hold flowers, in an ordinary gesture of reciprocity and care. The young men retain a composure that excludes any logic of confrontation. The elderly men bear the weight of history in their faces without it erasing their dignity.

The maps tell a different story. The progressive reduction of Palestinian territory renders visible a process in which shared space is reorganised through relations of force that grow ever more asymmetrical. What continues to manifest itself as equality in the faces is progressively transformed, in space, into inequality. The faces and the maps do not illustrate one another: they contradict one another. But this contradiction is not inherent in the people represented: it arises out of history.

The Common and Domination: Two Opposites

This is the point at which it becomes necessary to define precisely what is meant here by 'the common'. The common is a practice: the tendency to expand participation, to share material and decision-making goods, to recognise equality among human beings. It is sociality, conviviality, cooperation, substantive democracy. It is power that extends to the many.

Domination is its opposite. It is the concentration of power, and material and decision-making capacities, in ever fewer hands. Domination does not produce cooperation: it destroys it, annuls it, replaces it with relations of force. It is hierarchy, instead of sharing; exclusion instead of participation.

The six artworks CONSENT / DISSENT show precisely this paradox. Israeli Jews and Muslim Palestinians have a great deal in common from an anthropological, historical and cultural point of view: the same physical features, the same experience of life, the same needs for care and reciprocity. Yet the historical, geopolitical and capitalist context in which they are immersed leads some to seek the annihilation of others — and thus to destroy the common in order to establish domination.

The common is not something that 'transfers' from those who are destroyed to those who destroy. The common is what is destroyed. When a people is annihilated, what it has in common — its language, its land, its memory, its practices of sharing — is erased. Domination produces forms of organisation within itself, but these are not the common: they are hierarchy, functionality to power, instrument.

This distinction is what the artworks render visible. The faces show a shared humanity that domination tends to deny. The maps show the process by which domination destroys the common in order to assert itself. Painting does not present the common as an already-given reality or as a guaranteed future. It shows the common as a practice that is threatened, denied, destroyed — and that nonetheless resists, in faces, in gestures, in memory.

The Constitution of Domination

The transformation of territory alters not only the distribution of space. It also progressively alters the way in which that space is administered, regulated and assumed as a stable order. No relation of domination can

consolidate itself through force alone. To endure over time it must become institutionalised, converting historically determined relations into stable forms of political, administrative and legal organisation.

It is in this process that the title CONSENT / DISSENT takes on its meaning. Consent designates the process by which a historically produced order comes to present itself as natural. What arises from relations of force presents itself as the normal order of reality. This transformation can consolidate itself even while it continues to be contested at the level of international law. Domination does not live by force alone. It lives by its capacity to turn itself into institution.

It is precisely this process that the pictorial project interrupts. The relation between faces and maps prevents the viewer from perceiving inequality as a natural given. If shared humanity continues to manifest itself in the faces even as space is reorganised according to relations of force that grow ever more asymmetrical, then what appears as an established order reveals its own historical character. Painting restores to domination its own contingency.

The Destruction of the Common

Domination does not produce cooperation: it destroys it. It can destroy a given in its entirety. The history of settler colonialism in North America demonstrates this without ambiguity. Whole peoples, languages, cosmologies and systems of relation with the land were annihilated; some languages no longer count a single living speaker. The common as an abstract category did not disappear in that process — domination produced its own forms of organisation within itself. But the common — that specific, irreplaceable common those peoples had produced in the course of their history — was eliminated entirely.

There is no historical law guaranteeing the survival of any particular common against the domination that fights it. Domination depends on the common as a practice in order to reproduce itself — in the sense that even domination, to subsist, requires forms of relation among its own members. But this does not prevent it from eliminating a given common and replacing it with its own order. The persistence of the common is guaranteed by no structure. It is the outcome of a struggle, one that history can permanently end.

This is the second level of the contradiction the artwork constructs. The more the maps document the progressive organisation of separation, the more the faces testify to the persistence of relations that this very organisation fails to erase. The children do not yet appear wholly determined by the history that surrounds them. The young women holding flowers keep alive a relation that continues to produce reciprocity within a space traversed by inequality. The young men retain a composed presence that does not coincide with the logic of war. The elderly bear witness to the memory of history without it exhausting the dignity of their existence.

The six artworks of the cycle show that domination never fully corresponds with the social reality it claims to organise. Human relations go on being produced before and beyond the forms through which power attempts to administer them. It is in this space that the title *Comune* takes on its meaning. The common designates neither a future society nor an abstract ideal. It indicates the persistence of relations that continue to exceed the boundaries of the established order. The artworks do not invent them. Rather they render them visible, precisely at the moment when history tends to conceal them.

The problem that arises is this: if domination, in order to assert itself, must destroy the common that opposes it — yet cannot avoid producing forms of relation among its own members — under what conditions does it resort to organised violence in order to reproduce its own conditions of existence? The systematic annihilation of the enemy does not represent the origin of this process but one of its historically determined forms. This is the problem addressed by the third movement of the common, 'CRIMINA JURIS GENTIUM'.

III. War Crimes, Law and Material Organisation



CRIMINA JURIS GENTIUM, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 130 cm.

War normally occupies the centre of the public representation of conflict. The images that document it concentrate attention on destruction, on victims, on fighting and on the immediate consequences of violence. The event of war appears as a sudden rupture of the social order, an interruption of normality to which political, diplomatic or moral causes are subsequently attributed.

This perspective, however, tends to isolate the phenomenon from the historical process that makes it possible. Attention is absorbed by the moment of destruction, while the material conditions that prepared its emergence remain in the background. War appears exceptional precisely at the moment when the economic, political and institutional relations that organise its possibility are concealed.

It is precisely this shift of attention that constitutes the third movement of the pictorial series. *CRIMINA JURIS GENTIUM* does not represent war. It interrogates the historical form through which war is organised.

The title — *crimina juris gentium*, crimes against the law of nations — designates a specific legal category, the one that the tradition of international law has developed to name the gravest violations of the universal legal order. The artworks do not simply invoke this category. They interrogate the distance between its normative formulation and its actual historical realisation. Crimes against humanity are not a product of historical improvisation. They constitute the extreme point of material processes that develop over time, transforming the organisation of production, of institutions, of law and of international relations. By the time systematic violence becomes visible, such processes are already largely at work.

For this reason the paintings do not establish a linear narrative. Their composition bring into relation images that, in ordinary representation, appear separate: the movement of financial markets, the drone, the soldier, the bombed city, the mother holding her dead child in her arms. None of these elements constitutes an autonomous episode. They belong to one and the same historical process. Their simultaneity interrupts the fragmentation through which conflict is habitually narrated. The suffering of victims, military organisation, technological production, finance and economics do not belong to different orders of reality. They constitute different moments of a single material organisation.

The theoretical problem does not consist in establishing which image provokes the greatest indignation. It consists in understanding the relation that makes such images mutually necessary. War and its extreme consequences are not an interruption of the economy. They belong to the way a given economic and political organisation reproduces itself. Violence cannot be understood solely through the categories of military strategy or international diplomacy. It must be traced back to the material conditions that organise production, the circulation of capital, the control of resources, the distribution of energy, of raw materials, of infrastructure and of trade routes. War intervenes at the point where these conditions come into contradiction with their own reproduction.

Seen in this light, law also takes on a different meaning. International law constitutes one of the highest normative achievements produced by the international community to limit violence and to affirm universal principles for the protection of the person. Yet its efficacy depends on the concrete possibility that these principles find realisation within material relations that are often profoundly asymmetrical. The distance between law and its effectiveness is not an occasional anomaly. It constitutes one of the permanent contradictions of political modernity. The universal proclamation of rights does not automatically eliminate the relations of force that limit their implementation. It is precisely this distance that renders visible the historical character of law, continually traversed by the tension between normative universality and the material organisation of power.

The artwork CRIMINA JURIS GENTIUM shows the structural limit within which law is called upon to operate. When the material organisation of society produces ever deeper relations of domination, law finds itself forced to chase after transformations that have already become consolidated at the economic, political and military level. The legal category of *crimina juris gentium* expresses the demand for a universal judgement on the war crime against humanity; but that universal judgement conflicts with the particular relations of force that determine its applicability. This contradiction does not invalidate the law but reveals its historical character, and its dependence on material conditions that law itself cannot produce.

It is precisely into this space that the artworks intervene. The works brings together, within the same space, images that dominant representation tends to keep apart. The viewer can no longer consider the bombardment independently of the economic organisation that makes it possible, nor the financial markets as a reality detached from the human consequences of war. Every element continually refers to the others, rendering visible the material unity of the process.

Criminal violence then appears in a different light. It does not constitute the sudden failure of civilisation. It constitutes a historically produced possibility within a determinate form of social organisation. This does not mean that every conflict is identical to any other. Every war has a concrete history, involving specific political relations and particular geopolitical configurations. Yet, beyond their historical differences, they share a single question: what material conditions permits a society to resort to organised violence?

It is this question that allows the paintings to reach beyond the single event... Palestine, Ukraine, Iran: and every other contemporary conflict. They are neither assimilated nor confused with one another. They remain historically distinct. What the painting interrogates is the process through which different conflicts can emerge within one and the same historical form of organisation of power, of the economy and of international relations.

The artworks do not produce a general theory of war. They render intelligible the historical form within which different wars can be thought of as manifestations of one and the same material organisation. For this reason CRIMINA JURIS GENTIUM does not conclude the presentation. It radicalises it. If war is not the origin of the process but rather one of its historical manifestations, it becomes necessary to interrogate the principle that organises the entire sequence. What relation binds together economic production, law, war, technology, the market and the representation of conflict? This is the question that leads to the final movement of the common: SYLLOGISM.

IV. The Syllogism of Painting



SYLLOGISM, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 130 cm.

The three preceding movements have progressively transformed the object of enquiry. The first showed that memory retains its function only if it goes on interrogating the present. The second traced separation back to the historical organisation of space and social relations, showing that the common and domination are two opposing forces in conflict. The third showed that war is not an isolated event but one of the forms through which such relations are historically reproduced. What remains is to interrogate the relation that unites these different levels.

The ninth painting, *SYLLOGISM*, arises from this question. In the foreground, two cockerels fight. Beneath them appears a tank built out of rolled-up banknotes. The two images belong to different orders of reality. The first evokes a form of conflict that seems to belong to nature; the second introduces the historical dimension of economic and political organisation.

The fight between the animals is not taken as a metaphor for war. On the contrary, its presence makes possible an essential distinction. Conflict can belong to nature. Living beings compete, confront one another and defend their own space. None of this is sufficient to explain modern war.

War does not coincide with the mere fact that conflict exists. It presupposes a material organisation capable of transforming conflict into a stable device for the reproduction of power. The tank built from rolls of banknotes introduces precisely this shift. Military force does not appear as an autonomous element. It emerges from the interweaving of economic production, finance, technology, industry, political organisation and the control of resources. War is not the opposite of the economy. It belongs to the way a given economic organisation reproduces its own relations of force when these come into tension with the conditions of their own expansion.

The artwork does not state a syllogism: it constructs one visually, through the juxtaposition of two images that belong to different orders of reality. It is not the text that produces the inference, but the composition itself: the fight between the two cockerels and the tank made of banknotes do not illustrate a piece of reasoning worked out elsewhere; they enact it within the space of the painting.

Translated into discursive form, the inference the work enacts might be reconstructed as follows. First premise: conflict belongs to the order of nature. Second premise: no historical conflict takes the form of war without a set of institutions, technologies, productive apparatuses, financial instruments, legal orders and political devices that constitute its material condition and determining cause. Conclusion: war cannot be understood by starting from

conflict as such. It is historical conflict that must be traced back to the material organisation of the social relations that make it possible.

This conclusion does not deny that war involves political decisions, individual responsibilities or military strategies. It asserts that these elements do not exhaust the phenomenon. The decisive question is not who began it, or why, but through what material conditions war becomes a permanent possibility of social organisation.

Public debate concentrates attention on the decisions of governments, on individual responsibilities, on military strategies or on ideological oppositions. All of these certainly belong to the concrete history of individual conflicts, but they do not exhaust the problem. The theoretical question remains a different one. What material conditions allow war to become a permanent possibility of social organisation? The painting offers no definitive answer. It shifts the place from which such an answer might be sought. Attention moves towards the relations that produce events. Production, the circulation of capital, the organisation of labour, the control of energy resources and raw materials, logistical infrastructure, military technology, financial markets and international law cease to appear as separate domains. They are traced back to one and the same historical process, of which war constitutes one possible manifestation.

This is the meaning of the syllogism. Painting does not construct an allegory. It constructs a train of evidence. What appears immediately visible does not coincide with what makes its existence possible. The image carries the gaze beyond the phenomenon, towards the material conditions that organise its production.

Conclusion

The nine paintings of the common do not illustrate a theory. They progressively construct it. Memory leads to separation; separation refers to war and war makes it necessary to interrogate the material organisation that produces it. The unity of the project derives not from the theme it addresses but from the continuity of the demonstration. The title acquires its final meaning. The common does not designate an ideal model of society, nor a political programme to be realised. It indicates the point from which it becomes possible to criticise the historical organisation of domination.

In the first artwork it appears as the capacity of memory to go on interrogating the present. In the second it emerges in the permanence of human relations that separation fails to erase. In the third it manifests itself in the possibility of tracing war back to the material conditions that produce it. In the fourth it becomes the principle through which painting renders visible what the organisation of domination tends to conceal.

The common is a practice. It is not a transcendental structure that survives every act of destruction. It is the tendency to expand participation, to share material and decision-making goods, to recognise equality among human beings. It is sociality, conviviality, cooperation, substantive democracy. It is what domination denies, destroys, erases. Domination is its opposite: the concentration of power in ever fewer hands. It does not produce cooperation: it annuls it, replaces it with relations of force, with hierarchies, with exclusion.

The nine paintings show precisely this conflict. Israeli Jews and Muslim Palestinians have a great deal in common from an anthropological, historical and cultural point of view: the same physical features, the same life experiences, the same needs for care and reciprocity. Yet the historical, geopolitical and capitalist context in which they are immersed leads some to seek the annihilation of the others — and thus to destroy the common in order to establish domination. The case from which the work sets out is not a contingent illustration of the thesis. It is what is genuinely at stake. If the particular the common of the Palestinians still persists, this is not because history cannot eliminate it: North America demonstrates the contrary. It persists because it continues, every day, to be practised — cultivated, taught, remembered. This persistence is not the confirmation of a law. It is a fact that still occurs, and that could cease to occur. It is precisely this openness that makes painting a theoretical act, and not a consolation.

The common is not opposed to history in the abstract. It belongs to history. It does not coincide with the established order but with the ongoing production of relations through which human beings make their reciprocal existence possible.

The presentation developed in *Comune* leads to a precise conclusion. Contemporary conflicts cannot be understood as the result of natural, cultural or religious antagonisms. They become historically possible within a determinate material organisation of society. When the reproduction of capital meets its own limits, competition for the control of resources, infrastructure, energy, raw materials and trade routes tends to turn into organised conflict. War is not an interruption of the economic order; it represents one of its historical forms of reproduction. Even genocide, in its radicalism, cannot be thought of as an event without conditions. It belongs to those extreme processes through which historically determined relations of domination can be maintained, reorganised or deepened. For this reason critical practice cannot confine itself to denouncing violence once it becomes visible. It must uncover the material relations that prepare organise and make it possible. In this task painting must be, understood as theoretical practice, finding its own necessity. The artworks do not refer to an already concluded reality. They intervene while history continues to produce the conditions of its own present. And it is only in this coincidence between the timing of the work and the timing of history that it can still aspire to produce knowledge.