

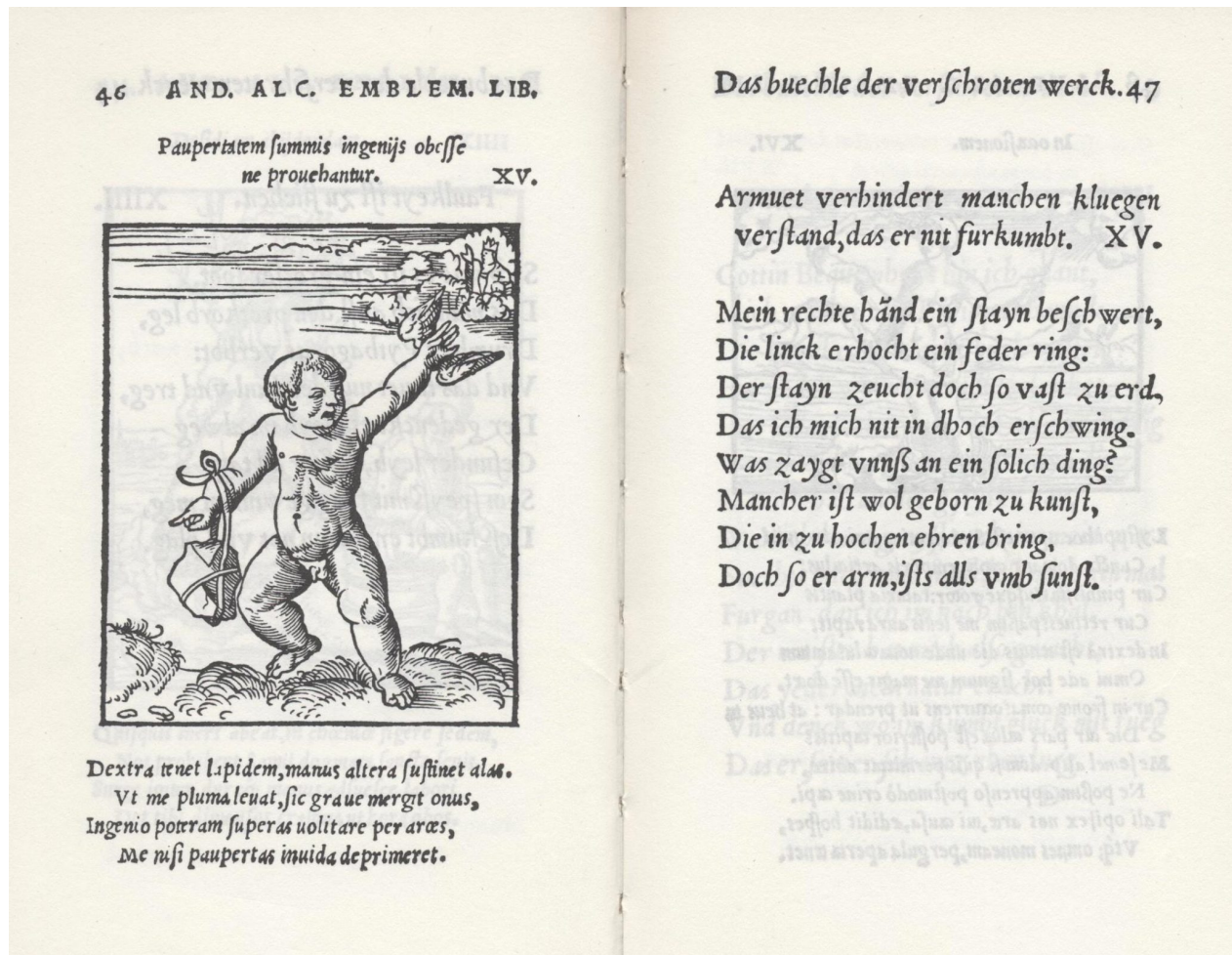
## Emblems – Emblem research – Emblem art

Text: Ingrid Hoepel | Section: Crossover, science-related art

*Abstract: Ingrid Hoepel works both as an academic and as an artist – a bordercrosser between the two fields. The subject of her academic research – emblems and emblematics in all its manifestations – is also the subject of her art. This is a special form of science-related art.*

### **A look at historical emblems**

In my pictures and picture-text collages, I relate to the art form of the emblem, which I would like to introduce at the beginning. This technical term in the history of art and literature specifies a combination of image and text that emerged in the first half of the 16th century, parallel to the invention of printing. It formulates worldly wisdoms and makes general statements about nature, love, death, war, power, flight and displacement. Its sources are ancient authors, mythology, natural history and the Bible. The themes of emblematics in the early modern period are the same as our themes today, but the evaluation of political-social or natural history phenomena is different nowadays. The classical form of the emblem has three parts: motto (heading, *inscriptio*), *pictura* (image as woodcut, engraving or etching) and *subscriptio* (epigram) are to be found on a single book page and are sometimes accompanied by translations into other languages, multi-page commentaries, annotations, quotations or notes.



Andreas Alciatus: *Emblematum libellus*, Paris 1542, Emblem XV. Photo: Reprint Darmstadt 1980 after the copy of the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt, shelfmark: 31/175: 46/47.

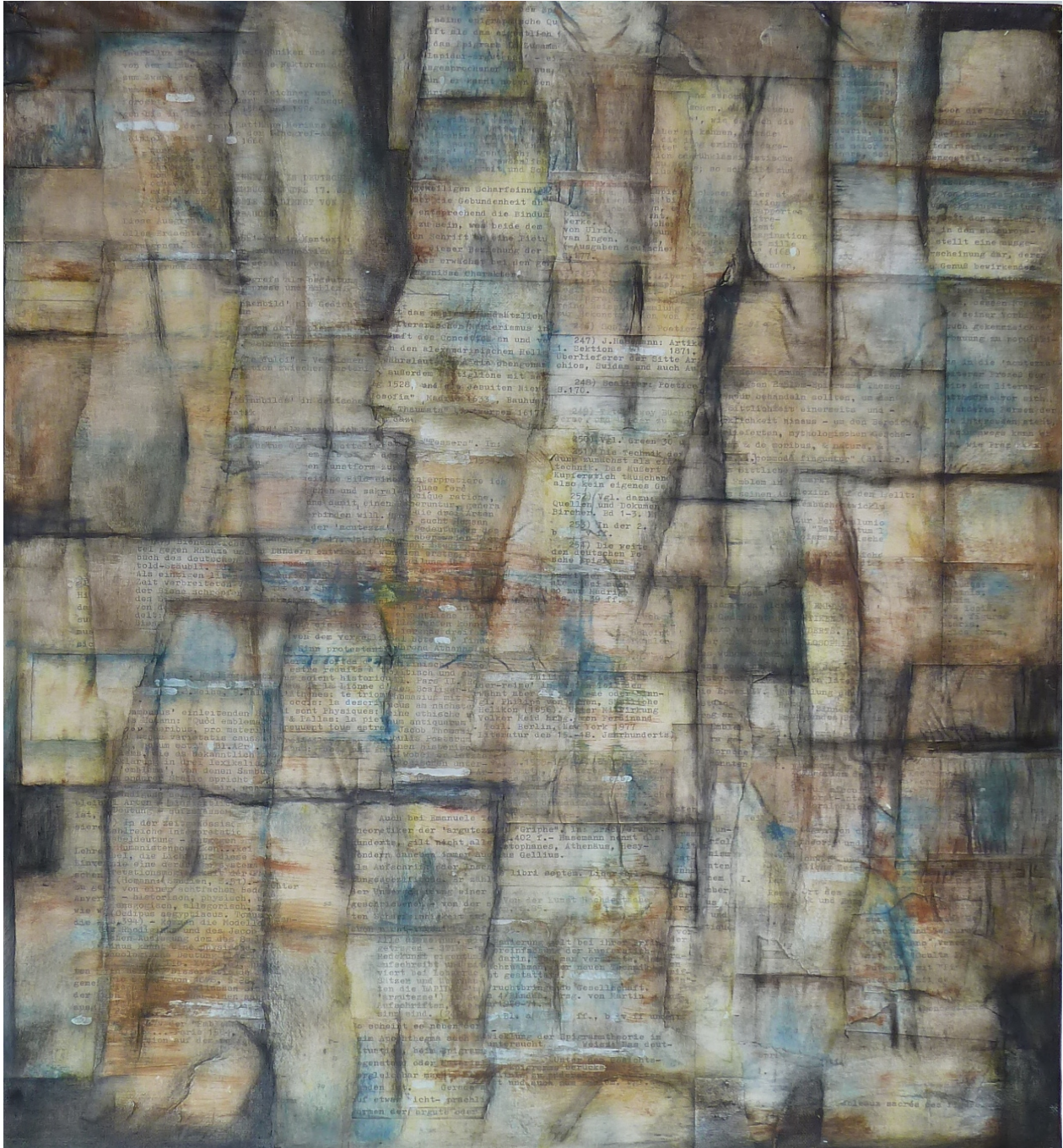
From the 16th to the 18th century, hundreds of authors, artists and many publishers produced books throughout Europe. They were printed in large editions, reprinted, successfully re-edited again and again, imitated and developed new subject areas. Emblem books were popular with the public – according to Horaz' motto "utile et dulci", they could educate and entertain. For publishers, they were a profitable business for more than two centuries. Due to their fame, popularity and widespread distribution, patrons and those politically responsible incorporated emblems into the architecture of their castles, town halls and churches and used them to represent themselves and influence opinions<sup>1</sup>. At celebrations and festivals they served as subjects for conversation. Like pamphlets and the first magazines, emblems were an important part of media culture and information policy. Unlike pamphlets, they did not openly take sides but positioned themselves as an ethical and moral authority that propagated general criteria for virtuous behaviour. In this form emblems were also used by clergymen in churches as a didactic tool.

### Manuscript and typescript as collage material

As an art and literature scholar, I have been working since the 1970s on the various manifestations of emblematics, in books as well as in architecture and on everyday objects.<sup>2</sup> When writing publications

and lectures, there are many different versions between the first manuscript and the printed version. Before working with the PC, I kept the discarded, revised versions or the digressions that were postponed to later publications for further academic use.<sup>3</sup> Together with photocopied material from emblem books, reprints and other scientific secondary literature, I accumulated a large collection of papers well into the 1990s.

At the same time, I worked as an artist drawing, painting and collaging. In doing so, I incorporated handwritten elements into drawings and collages, but also integrated fragments of manuscripts and typescripts into figurative paintings. At the end of the 1980s – after completing my dissertation – such rather coincidental selective connections between my two fields of work became a conscious systematic procedure. When reviewing the extensive preparatory work for the printed version, I was struck by the graphic quality of my typescript pages – they consisted of deletions, thickening with correction tape and the then customary layer of Tipp-Ex applied with a brush and broad paste-overs where passages subsequently formulated had been inserted with glue or adhesive tape, they contained tear-outs and newly collaged pages. In some cases, they took on relief-like forms several millimetres thick. Different coloured highlighters or handwritten annotations reinforced the graphically attractive form, which did not follow any artistic or aesthetic principles, but rather academic and intellectual linguistic work. Inadequacies in the first versions of the text called for manual overwriting and pasting over. My doubts about the finality of the version of a scientific paper consequently led to the idea of further processing these pages – but now from an aesthetic point of view, still with glue and collage materials, but also with brushes and colours. I began by painting over the pages, pasting them over, highlighting certain passages – now following criteria of composition and colourfulness. The next step was to destroy the A4 pages: I tore up the pages and reassembled the scraps into larger picture formats using paste; the picture supports were canvas or cardboard. In the 1990s, I created collages in this way from torn and glued pages of typescripts, which I painted over with several glazed layers of acrylic binder and colour pigments. The pigments adhered to the torn edges, giving the pictures a characteristic appearance that evoked associations with yellowed book pages, semi-transparent coloured windows or spatial, relief-like architecture.



Ingrid Hoepel: *Small fancywork I - Ligation* (1996). Photo: Claus Goehler.

“The glazing technique used by Hoepel allows the text parts of the torn manuscript pages or other papers to shine through and are thus incorporated into the pictorial effect as a kind of graphic background. While the collage process destroys the original contexts of meaning, the fact that scraps of words or entire sentences are left standing allows surprisingly new, sometimes unintentional, sometimes intentional statements to emerge, which the observer may discover.”<sup>4</sup>

The material – the research on emblematics – determined the content of the collages from the very

beginning, without the legibility of the texts being important to me. Texts in different fonts and sizes determined the pictorial effect through their graphic and colourful appearance, not as meaningful texts:

“The observer, who perhaps only perceives structures from afar and suspects that there might be writing here, becomes a reader when he steps closer. Reading is not made easy for him. Like an archaeologist who conjures up a textual context from fragments, he sets to work, combining the one half-understood with the other, the barely recognisable through the translucent colour with the word fragments. The reader constructs the meaning from the fragments again and again in different ways. The result is a work that, like the emblems, the collections of emblems, the emblem books themselves, is designed for continuation, variation, correction and refinement, and harbours within it the signs of its incompleteness and mysteriousness.”<sup>5</sup>

In my opinion, a constellation of the connection between art and science is present in this work phase, which Peter Tepe has described as a *structural affinity*<sup>6</sup>. As Dietrich Bieber and Ulrich Kuder describe it in the quoted passages, the images that were created in this way using scientific-analogue working methods exhibit characteristics that are also inherent in a different form in the objects studied, the emblems – image and text combine to form enigmatic objects through a perception which is forced to slow down.

### **Text fragments and images - between graphic structure and legibility**

The observer’s behaviour changed when I began to work with enlarged lines of text and images towards the end of the 1990s – at first these were headings and mottos from emblem book pages with text and images, later enlarged lines from collections of proverbs and copies of secondary literature with image attachments were added. Suddenly, individual words and images caught the eye, became compositional focal points due to their font size or image quality and at the same time began to emphasise certain contents. I observed that observers’ attention was first drawn to enlarged, legible letters within the text structure. They then deliberately began to decipher the small-print texts next to them and to scrutinise them for thematic connections. The writing recognised as a theme evoked the expectation that the surrounding texts corresponded to it. I intensified this effect in thematic series such as the two-part *emblem stones*, in which an almost square *pictura* is accompanied by an oblong canvas in landscape-format fulfilling the role of the *subscriptio* underneath with legible text fragments as comments on it.



Ingrid Hoepel: *Emblem-Stone 4: Man has to go to the stone* (2002), Photo: Ingrid Hoepel.

I had similar experiences with the collaging of images; they provided a theme, which in turn steered the perception of surrounding pictorial elements in a certain direction. In the process, partial aspects of the emblematic *picturae* are actualised, while others are faded out:

“Ingrid Hoepel uses, isolates, alters, specifies these emblems in such a way that the viewer is prompted to relate their meaning to the present day. Stirring up, turmoil through turbidity, even losing the ground under one’s feet and then setting fire to it: phenomena of our present day that IH notes, reflects on, questions as to their causes...”



Ingrid Hoepel: *Youth in the body* (2006). Photo: Claus Goehler.

**Figurative painted overlays in collage background**

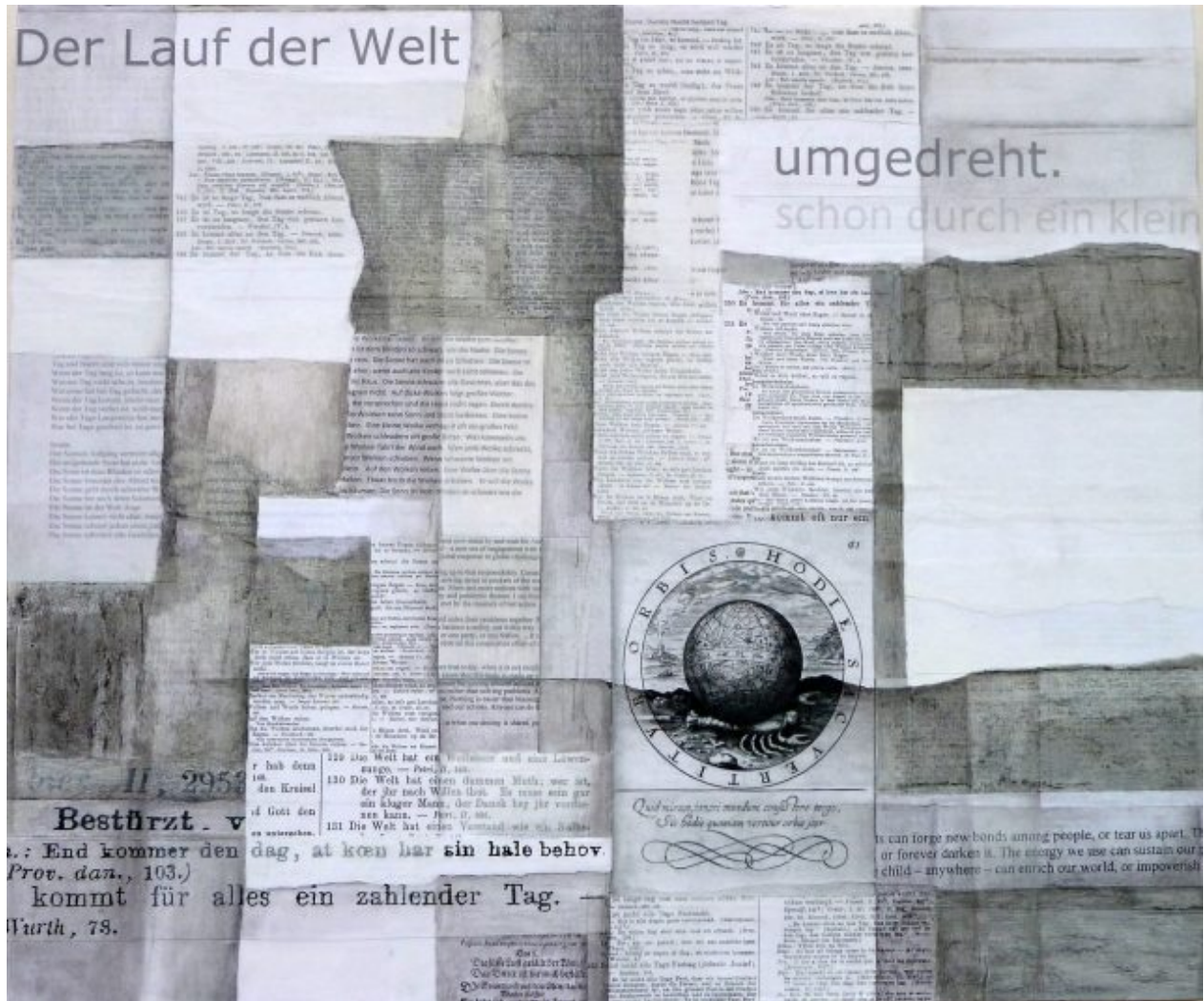
In the further development, the technique of overlaying on collage backgrounds gains more freedom. Small-format experimental daily papers play an important role as a source of inspiration. Like a diary, I combine all kinds of ‘desk and everyday waste’, for example the remains of cut-out photocopies, negative moulds, packaging paper and cardboard, adhesive tape and tracing paper. In addition, there are overhead transparencies, which served as necessary visual material for seminars and lectures after the slide and before the LCD projection. I combine frottage and grattage, fine liner, permanent and board markers and stamp prints with the technique of overlaying – a picture diary complements the writing. The formats remain small, collaged grounds are transformed into landscapes by painting over them, the torn edges become horizon lines or tree silhouettes. I translate written elements into window facades, combining them with deliberately collaged emblematic figures to create unexpected new meanings.



Ingrid Hoepel: *Acedia or sleepy wisdom* (2023). Photo: Ingrid Hoepel.

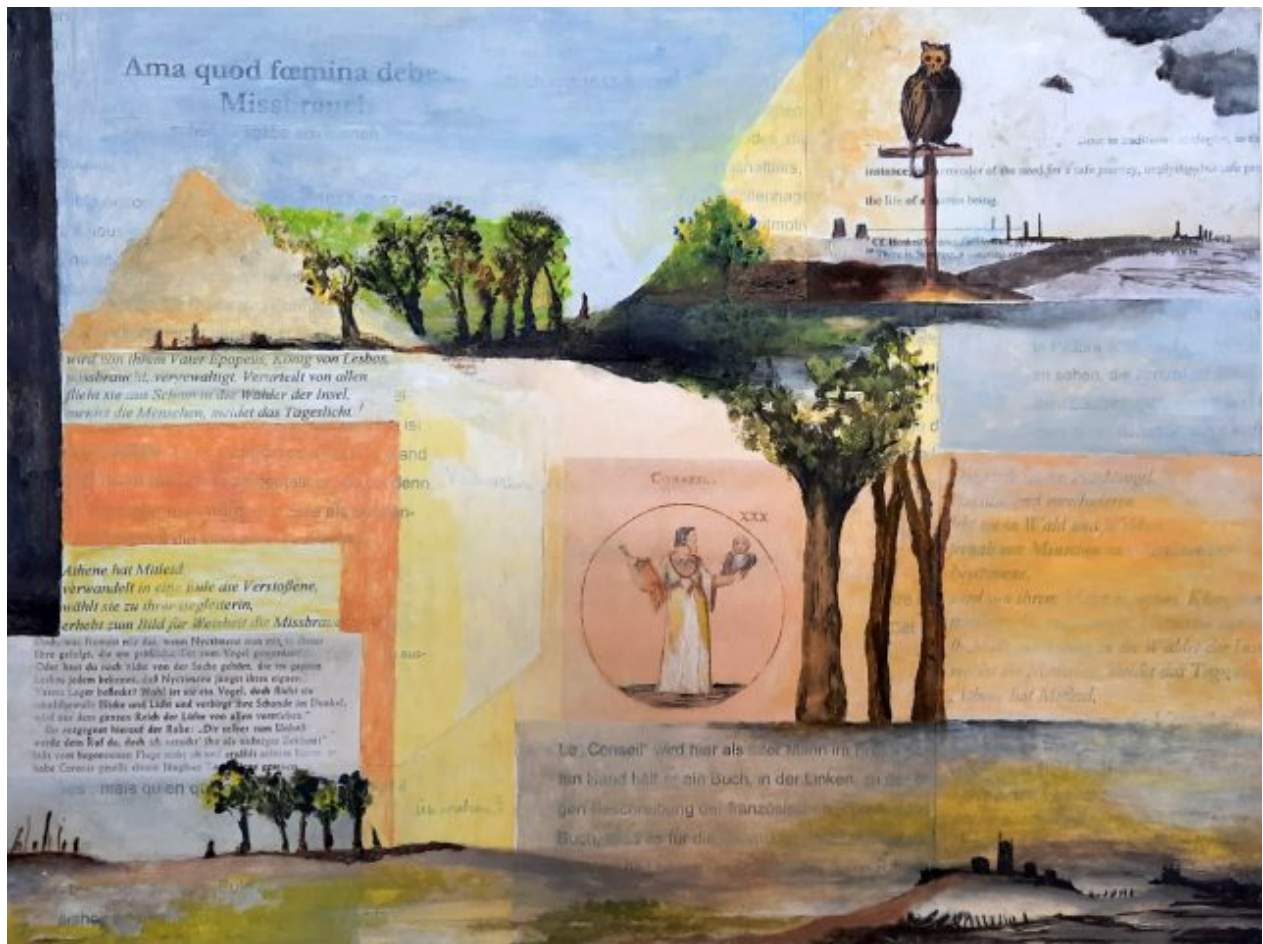
Other painted overlays concentrate on a single emblem and comment on its *pictura* through other pictorial elements, including a series that refers to emblems by Gabriel Rollenhagen from 1611, here to the alleged backward movement of the crab analogous to its world development.<sup>8</sup> Apart from deliberately placed *motto*-like lines, the texts disappear under the painted overlays. In the terminology of emblem research, one could perhaps speak of a variant of the *priority of pictura*.





Ingrid Hoepel: *The way of the world – in reverse* (2010). Photo: Ingrid Hoepel.

I now often integrate not only my own texts, but also self-quoted images, digital prints of earlier images or parts of them. In connection with an article on the emblematic meanings of the owl, I discovered it as an image for sexual abuse and have repeatedly thematised it in collages.



Ingrid Hoepel: *Abuse makes wise* (2023). Photo: Ingrid Hoepel.

Access to a theme is based on the analogy between the meaning of an emblem and current socio-political problems, which can, but do not have to, be linked to an event. Through repetitions and self-quotations, through lifelong adherence to certain themes that are important to me, a kind of emblematic cosmos of my own has grown up in the meantime, which time and again refers back to earlier images and texts, but constantly processes new stimuli. From the many variations I present two series with different thematic and formal emphases.

### Emblematic reliefs with Windows character

I have been creating *monitors* and reliefs since 2009. The illusionistic three-dimensional effect of the collages with torn papers prompted me to make three-dimensionality real and to place individual pictorial elements in front of the surface. Like on a screen, individual windows seem to open up, overlapping and intersecting each other, breaking up the picture frame, obscuring something and making it puzzling, but also creating a new meaning through unexpected juxtapositions.



Ingrid Hoepel: *...love flies out of the window* (2009). Photo: Ingrid Hoepel.

On the subject of youth poverty, the relief *... love flies out of the window* is based on a boy rolling a hoop – with the meaning that once set in motion, the hoop can become unmanageable.<sup>10</sup> The proverbs that appear around the *pictura* revolve around the theme of the consequences of poverty. As if by chance, fragmentation results from overlaps, which at the same time produce an elucidating juxtaposition of disparate elements. The analogy of the form to today's research work on the PC lies in the Windows principle – a website opens next to or above the first, further links lead to deeper levels, some sharpen the eye and brain by focussing, others obscure, lead to byways. The seemingly almost unlimited availability of content changes the scientist's perception and way of working. Pages of printed emblem books from the 16th century can be placed next to their adaptations in town houses or churches. However, the single-minded search can also succumb to distraction, tempting us to drift from window to window, so that a new variant of the relationship between art and science may emerge. I transfer the window principle, which is used in everyday life but also by science, back into the materiality of paper and cardboard. The traditional form of the relief becomes a frozen visualisation of virtual overlays and availabilities. Perhaps this procedure can be described as a further form of structural relationship between science and art – in any case, the reliefs symbolise an everyday and scientific process on the PC.

### Three-part design as a binding form

I have been pursuing a new approach since 2016, using artistic means to explore the three-part emblem

form with regard to its suitability for artistically formulated commentaries on today's social-political problems. I have deliberately given this series strict rules: I design emblems in their ideal three-part form with a *motto*, *pictura* and explanatory *subscriptio* text. Each sheet in the series relates thematically to a specifically selected historical emblem. Each DinA4 page begins with the *motto* of the historical emblem in the original language, a footnote translates and refers to the original. This is followed by a second *motto* that refers to the new meaning. The *pictura* consists of a collage of painted overlays. The *subscriptio* describes the new meaning from today's perspective in the briefest possible language. Following the examples, I use an old-fashioned-sounding, rhythmic German in the choice of words and syntax, which may sometimes be disconcerting. There are notes at the bottom of the page, as there are in the historical emblem books. The A4 page will be reproduced as a digital print. The plan is to combine the 25 individual pages into an emblem book. An example: In 2016, I responded to the worldwide increase in flight and displacement with the first emblem in this new form.

**In eum, qui truculentia suorum perierit.<sup>1</sup>  
Mausoleen für Kinder**

Emblem IV



*Mensch, bleib stehen, und sieh hier  
nur eines der Kinder, die,  
von Krieg, Gewalt und Bomben vertrieben,  
Zuflucht auf einem Boot suchten  
und im Mittelmeer ertranken.  
Ans Land gespült an der türkischen Küste,  
ausgerechnet vor Halikarnassos,<sup>2</sup>  
wo einst Mausolos sein Grabmal errichtete,<sup>3</sup>  
fordert es auf zu bedenken,  
wie Machtstreben, Geldgier und Unmenschlichkeit  
die Wünsche und Träume von Kindern zerstören,  
Menschen erbarmungslos töten.  
Mausoleen für Tausende fordert es.*

<sup>1</sup> „Auf einen, der durch die Wildheit seiner eigenen Leute unterging“, in Anlehnung an Andreas Alciatus, *Emblemata cum commentariis*, Padua 1621, Emblem CLXXVII.

<sup>2</sup> Heute Bodrum im Südwesten der Türkei.

<sup>3</sup> Mausolos II., persischer Satrap in Karien, ließ sein Mausoleum zu Lebzeiten zwischen 368 und 350 v. Chr. bauen.

Ingrid Hoepel: *Emblem IV: Mausoleums for children* (2016). Photo: Ingrid Hoepel.

I was moved by news and images of refugees, including that of the Syrian child Aylan Kurdi, whose body was washed ashore on the Turkish coast.<sup>11</sup> A *pictura* of Alciatus' emblems from 1621 shows a dolphin in the foreground, stranded and dead on the coast, with the *motto*: “In eum, qui truculentia suorum perierit” (On one who perished through the savagery of his own people). The *subscriptio* follows the *Anthologia Graeca* and explains that the dolphin, an animal of the sea, was killed by the sea itself – “by its own” – which is a bad omen for all people who entrust themselves to the sea on a ship. In my *pictura*, I link the dolphin of the emblem with the child who drowned while fleeing and give the new emblem the *motto*: “Mausoleums for children”. The location of the event was Bodrum, today in south-west Turkey, and it was there that the Persian satrap Mausolos II is said to have erected his tomb, which is still known

today as a mausoleum. With this knowledge, I formulated a new *subscriptio* that focuses on completely different aspects from the one for Alciatus' Delphin.

### Research approach and questions

The subject of my scientific research – emblematics in all its manifestations – is also the subject of my art and determines its form. My knowledge of emblematic books and applied emblematics, the writing of articles on specific topics and information from colleagues, all contribute to the content of my art. I start from the hypothesis that the emblematics of the 16th to 18th centuries represented one of the media in which people formulated their world view and through which they communicated with each other – the Internet, press, social media and television correspond to this today. The topics dealt with back then are essentially the same as today. But the emblem was also a form of visual and linguistic art. I see my own art as a medium with which I want to formulate and communicate my view of the world and its problems. For me, emblems also have a strongly provocative character – their enigmatic nature encourages questioning and exploratory decoding, I enjoy questioning their moralising statements, re-evaluating them from today's perspective, breaking down fixed role models, questioning socially and gender-based standardised behaviour from today's perspective, offering alternatives. Artistic means seem more suitable to me than academic essays. I accompany my artistic practice with a multitude of questions, which I can only present here as examples. They relate both to the significance of my academic research for art and to the influence of my artistic work on my research into emblems. In the following, I will focus on the first line of questioning.

In my description of my artistic work, I have already mentioned two connections at the production level – the analogue structures in the processing of the accumulated material, the way I take up the presentation of images and texts on the screen and in relief. Both artistic approaches would be inconceivable without my scientific work. The common characteristic between the scientific and the artistic approach to the emblem is the subject of my further research interest, and here is a small selection of questions:

- The didactic impetus of the emblem always contrasted with the enigmatic game, this discrepancy is also noticeable in my pictures – they want to represent an opinion, but without background knowledge they elude understanding. Can the art form be detached from its time-bound answers to moral and ethical questions?
- Is the art form of the *emblem*, with its allegorical-symbolic approach to the world and its manifestations in books and architecture, suitable for artistically influencing our view of today's world?
- To what extent can contemporary art make use of traditional forms?
- Which methods are possible – commenting on a *pictura* with other image and text elements by means of collage and painted overlays? Or the strict adaptation of the historical three-part form?

There are many other possible procedures in between, which I have only considered but not implemented.

Picture above the text: Andreas Alciatus: *Emblematum libellus*, Paris 1542, Emblem XLV. Photo: Reprint Darmstadt 1980 after the copy in the Darmstadt University and State Library, shelfmark: 31/175: 106/107.

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[1] Cf. William S. Heckscher and Karl-August Wirth: Emblem, *Emblembuch*, in: *Reallexikon der Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. V, Munich 1959: 85-228.

[2] Cf. Ingrid Hoepel: *Verzeichnis der Publikationen zur Emblematis*, undated, <http://ingrid-hoepel.de> (accessed: 4 November 2024).

[3] An example: My dissertation *Emblem und Sinnbild. Vom Kunstbuch zum Erbauungsbuch*, Frankfurt am Main 1987 contains a chapter: *Sprichwort und 'Sinnbild' als moralisch verbindliche Zeichen* by Justus Georg Schottelius, pp.165-90. I gave a lecture on this topic in 1999, which dealt with an emblem book from 1643, for which Schottelius wrote the foreword: *Elster, Kanone und Fledermaus. Zum Verhältnis von Sprache und Moral in den Dreiständigen Sinnbildern von 1643*. The text was printed in 2002: Wolfgang Harms/Dietmar Peil (eds.): *Polyvalenz und Multifunktionalität der Emblematis*, Akten des 5. Internationalen Kongresses der Society for Emblem Studies, Frankfurt am Main 2002: 635-655. For this article, I drew on material that I had already partly pre-formulated in 1980-85. With the printing of the article, typescript material became superfluous.

[4] Dietrich Bieber: *Collage und Emblem im Werk von Ingrid Hoepel*, in: Brigitte Hartel, Bernfried Lichtnau and Berenika Partum (eds.), *Bildende Kunst der Gegenwart in Norddeutschland und Nordpolen*, Frankfurt am Main 2008: 113-126, h.114.

[5] Cited by Ulrich Kuder: *Ingrid Hoepel – ungeliebt und ungezogen*, Kiel 2006: 1-6, h. 3 [<https://ingrid-hoepel.de/images/downloads/2006%20Ulrich%20Kuder%20-%20ungeliebt%20und%20ungezogen.pdf>].

[6] Cf. Peter Tepe: *Strukturverwandt & philosophiebezogen*, 8 November 2022, <https://wissenschaft-kunst.de/strukturverwandt-und-philosophiebezogen> (accessed: 4 November 2024).

[7] Cited as note 5: 2.

[8] Cf. Gabriel Rollenhagen: *Nucleus Emblematum... Centura secunda*, Arnhem 1613: II/61.

[9] Cf. Ingrid Hoepel: *Eulen in der Emblematis – von Weisheit, Verschwiegenheit und Blindheit*, *Kauzbrief* 28/32 (2020): 10-22.

[10] Cf. the pictura in Roemer Visscher: *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam 1614: 145.

[11] My thanks to Rubem Amaral, who first pointed out this connection: *Emblem of the month* n.007. <https://emblemstudies.com/2016/03/eotm007/> (accessed: 10 November 2024).

## Tags

1. Border Crosser
2. emblems
3. Ingrid Hoepel

#### 4. science-related art