

Dorothee von Windheim

non manufactum

Opening May 29th, 6 – 9 pm
May 29th – Jun 27th, 2026
Caprii, Düsseldorf

There are manifold ways of seeing the world. My own is based primarily on looking at reality. My gaze remains on the surface, scanning it, trying to capture the outside sheath that stands for what it encompasses, what it contains. It is this surrounding skin that is marked by influences and impacts.

It becomes a bearer of information for those who perceive such signs and can decipher them.

Dot, dot, comma, line. We are all familiar with that. It stands for a countenance. Nothing else is necessary and we already feel looked at. (Today, we don't even need the comma, the smiley used and understood everywhere has no nose).

On my walks in Cologne's green belt, I experience something else that we are all familiar with and for which there must be a term in the psychology of perception. I pass by a group of trees again and again, without noticing anything about it.

But on the umptieth time, I suddenly have the feeling of being looked at. I stand opposite a nearly life-sized human, male figure, which is crowned by a head right at my eyelevel. An anonymous bark carver has carved it into one of the plane tree trunks, and, judging by the carving, quite some time ago.

My first approach to the figure takes place with the camera. But the immateriality of photography is not enough for me. I have to get closer to the object, have to get my hands on it, which of course contradicts the title of this essay.

Over the years, I place delicate sheets of gauze over the tree trunk many times, sheets that I dampen with water and press with my bare hand so that the impression of a face emerges merely by way of touch and without any other intervention. A direct image, a true image of something that probably no longer has particular value for anyone anymore. People stroll by without noticing, just as I did before. By way of my intervention, this physiognomy, whose creator is not even me, inadvertently attracts attention and appreciation.

On the last of the cloth pictures that resulted in this way, the facial traits can hardly be made out, for plane trees, of course, cast off their bark from time to time, they shed and renew themselves.

In the process, the tree face gradually disappears. It only endures in my work.

Until this point in time, I focused on the on the greatest possible proximity.

But then, taking a step back is required. If until now skin contact was involved in generating the images in a dual sense, the motivation for the emergence of the picture and the means to an end, now, for the translation to another medium, I have to release it entirely from my hands.

One of the tree faces that I found particularly striking was submitted to a weaver in the original size, transferred to a weaving pattern, and now exists in a fine, silvery Jacquard. As a pattern, virtually endless. Myriad faces, always the same one.

Jacquard possesses the quality that its motif is literally woven into it, and can thus be seen on both sides, on the front in positive, on the verso as negative. An image not on, but in the textile. Now a face looks at the beholder from the textile. En gros or en masse from the uncut fabric, or focused and in detail from the cut pieces.

Translation: Brian Currid