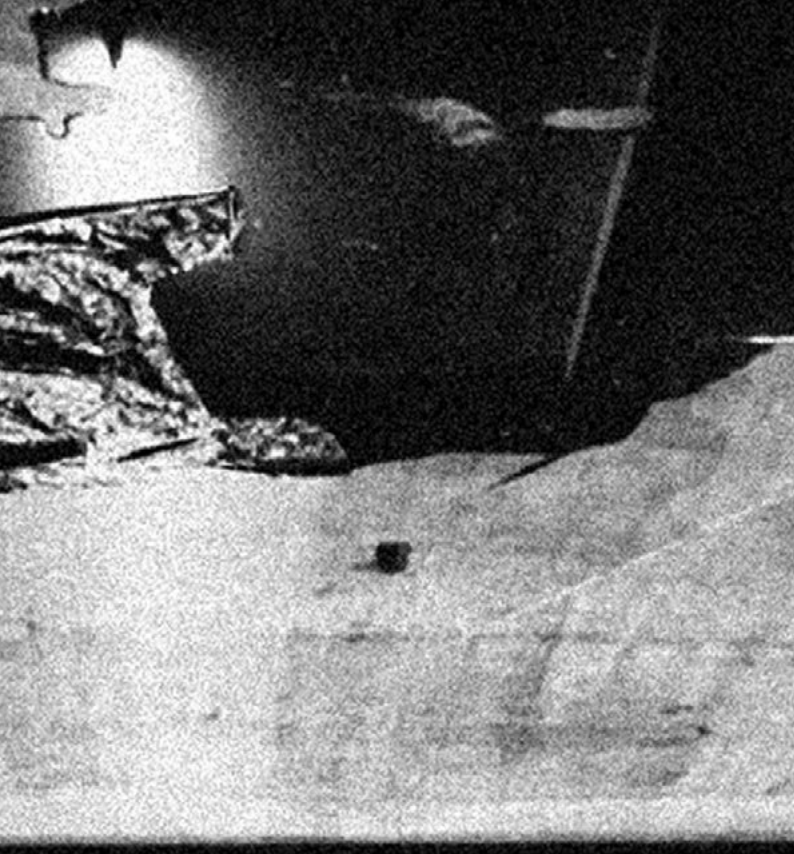


AKOSUA VIKTORIA ADU-SANYAH CORNER DRY LUNGS

...the lungs, grey knots
...of the memory
...chest crying
...leaving death
...fell alone
...fruit dripping like a fruit, ripened
...I remember the ground
...I sit until I remember
...went airborne



AKOSUA VIKTORIA
ADU-SANYAH
CORNER DRY LUNGS



28.09.24-02.02.25

It's dark and dripping. The smell of chemical fumes hangs in the air.

Through manual processes and digital or chemical experiments, Akosua Viktoria Adu-Sanyah creates works and spaces that are at once clear, revealing, and ephemeral. In doing so, she questions the limits of the medium of photography both conceptually and through physical practice. Complete control and complete loss of control define the space of the possible. The lengthy process of developing analog photographs is not concealed here but is a visible part of the installation, inextricably linked to the works, their presentation, and ourselves. By exposing the technical nature of the developing process, we are witnesses—and thus part of the photographic reality.

The works created in the exhibition space, under its light, spatial, and institutional conditions, become part of a mourning process; Frankfurt becomes a place of loss. The incessant tears leave the lungs dry.

For the exhibition *Corner Dry Lungs* at ZOLLAMT^{MARK}, Akosua Viktoria Adu-Sanyah (b.1990) is creating a new, expansive work.

Lukas Flygare and Susanne Pfeffer in conversation with Akosua Viktoria Adu-Sanyah

SUSANNE PFEFFER Dear Akosua, your approach to photography is highly experimental and gestural. How did your way of working come about?

AKOSUA VIKTORIA ADU-SANYAH I have an innocent love for the materials from my own surroundings as well as from other surroundings. Probing this dark and unclear space is what interests me about photography: when and where do I find its material qualities beyond the very limiting and traditional approach to the paper and the technology? For me, this application evokes something innocent but also something erotic. This means that my attitude is almost subordinate rather than dominating. I want to see what the material can offer me under different circumstances, work it out, and accept it.

For the works produced here and for those still to come, I'm interested in the unfixed states in the photographic process and how they emerge in the darkroom. I want to open them up and share them because the paper, and hence the work, has a different form, another quality, a different materiality in its wet state. A wet state does not last, and that is what interests me in the moment. I want to share an experience that otherwise only I would have had alone in the lab and yet not control it completely. I also want to discover and see something new in the exhibition context. And this often happens through an impossibility of size and intensity.

LUKAS FLYGARE What role does the city of Frankfurt am Main play, and what part do the specific conditions in the ZOLLAMT^{MMK} play in the production of your current works?

AVA My father lived in this city. He worked for Lufthansa for almost his entire adult life. My parents were separated, and when I was in Frankfurt, it was always to visit my father. He died three years ago under difficult circumstances. In order to keep working, I have integrated this loss into my work.

That's what Frankfurt means to me. Up until now, I did not associate the city with art but rather with my father. I find it impossible to approach this city with a different energy. That is to say, as functional as I am, I am also sad.

SP How did you come up with the title of the exhibition?

AVA “corner dry lungs” is the title of a poem I wrote at the beginning of the year as I was trying to sum up in words how I processed the death of my father for my book *ROUGH TIDE*. After his death, I had to summon up so much strength and develop a strategy so that I would not stop living myself. I’d intended the text to be very objective and descriptive, but I didn’t manage to achieve that. Fragments and words hung there, as did the effort to capture something in words that is somehow different. The poem resulted from that interweaving.

For the book, I typed up the poem and printed it on 120-gsm textured paper. Then, I took that sheet with me into the darkroom and used it as a negative for a direct contact print. *ROUGH TIDE* consists exclusively of reproductions of images that I made in the darkroom. However, every textual element in the book is also a lab-created image. The paper’s structure created a fleshy, red landscape on the print that I could not have predicted. That’s why both the structure and the quality of the paper play important roles.

For me, the poem describes the immediate physical sensation of grief. Every physical reaction and every physical process you undergo is inscribed into your body and nervous system. It becomes much more difficult to overcome something when you have reacted strongly to it physically.

My body reacted extremely intensely when my mother called me on 9 August 2021, to tell me that my father had passed away. Even today, traces of the experience remain in my apartment, impossible to erase. This event left an imprint on my body, and the weeks that followed were characterized by quite powerful physical destructiveness. I am not talking about alcohol or drugs; that sort of thing doesn’t interest me at all, but physically, my body went through a very hard time.

The poem also describes the body’s loss of fluid and the feeling when you no longer have any more tears. That doesn’t mean that you can no longer cry; you cry drily. Photographic chemicals also sometimes leave behind a feeling of “dry lungs.”

LF How do these specific personal experiences connect with your work here at the ZOLLAMT^{MM}?

AVA What you say is not necessarily the reason behind what you do. There is a connection, of course, but it does not have to be causal. I think it’s important to keep emphasizing that again and again. Therefore, when I describe this approach as part of my process of mourning, that is not the reason I do it; rather, the process is simply part of the gesture. This raises the question of the conscious and unconscious motives behind a decision. I believe that reflecting on a work of art should also provide an opportunity to identify and formulate the unconscious motives for an action, treating them as significant.

LF Would you like to describe briefly what you’re doing in the exhibition here?

AVA I roll out photo paper. Analog photo paper. Heavy, large, wide rolls. In a non-darkened room. Absolutely forbidden. Absolutely forbidden. The process I use actually destroys the paper in the traditional sense of photography, which means we cannot perceive the paper that is white as white because it is immediately exposed to light in the room. The photo paper changes from white by way of lemon yellow and apricot-salmon to a dark shade of plum. The exposure to light causes this change without any intervention from me.

Then comes another moment: I cut the paper into varying lengths and treat them with a chemical developer—this, too, changes the color of the paper. We see this effect immediately as the paper first turns dark gray, then black, as I work the developer into the paper with a sponge. The paper gets wet and soft. Then I spray it with water, crumble it, and stick it in a big trash bag.

Then I’m just glad it’s over for the time being, because the fumes are very intense, and this physical process also strains your back. When I take the paper out of the bag, I spray it off with a little water because it’s highly contaminated. I then staple or nail the crumbled black paper onto boards and let it dry.

I repeat this gesture several times. The folding creates distinct reflection patterns, which ultimately result in a white work. The reflected light turns the black into white. And because it can never be completely dark, there is always a reflection. That is the true core of the work I am doing here.

SP Do the colors black and white have a meaning for you?

AVA Black is white, and one cannot exist without the other. That is also a fundamental aspect of photography. Between white and black, there are infinite gradations of gray. There is an interdependence, a very close relationship, between the two. Then, it comes down to perspective, the intensity, and the specific moment in time. But black is white. It's both. In the end, white can really only be defined by a contour.

I am also interested in the colors that the paper's emulsion introduces. According to convention, the white paper remains pure white in darkness and undergoes a controlled exposure. All the nuances of lemon yellow and pastel, salmon, and apricot are not normally of interest because they mean the destruction, contamination, and uselessness of the material. But I am particularly intrigued by these color landscapes. For me, the meaning of color lies in the appreciation of color per se. If you wish to politicize this, you probably can, and that is also in the work. However, I don't enter the process with that thought. The starting point is really my love of developing the colors.

SP Is this process also visible in the exhibition?

AVA I feel the need to share this process and the moments that I can otherwise only experience alone. It's akin to a dream when you attempt to recount it, yet you are the only one who has dreamed it; it can only inadequately be described in words. When you try to explain it, the dream falls apart, as does the whole experience.

I'd like to share these colors with the people who see the work. Whether they see the whole spectrum depends entirely on how much time they spend in the room. The change from yellow to salmon takes a while. But the change from salmon to black happens very quickly, and I'm able to share this transformation with the audience in the medium that I have defined as a process. You can look behind the curtain, so to speak—and because it is so technical, it is also a kind of demystification.

The opening day is always a high point because you see the work in a way that you couldn't see it previously without the audience's energy. It is a big step to walk into the exhibition space and view your own work, or even produce it. What happens, and how does being surrounded by people's energy make you feel? Only after the

exhibition opening do I know what I won't do again in the future or how I have to change the work. An exhibition is not always the final or best result. This is why I plan to return to Frankfurt now and again while this presentation is up in order to change something, to understand it anew, and also to add something sometimes. It could be a minor alteration or a more drastic intervention. As a result, the presentation will change over time.

LF Can you say something about the meaning of light or of brightness and darkness in the exhibition?

AVA There is a material level. Light consists not only of matter or particles but also frequency. That means it is at once material and ephemeral. I'm interested in breaking up hierarchies while working with the photographic material. If the fluidity and form—the depiction of the fluid—have the same value as the visible paper but don't simply fulfill a pure function, it results in a different kind of work and process. That's how I think about light, too: if photography consists of paper, liquid, and light, then I ask myself what this really means in terms of the value of light in my work.

Paper is palpable and weighty. Liquid is not only palpable, but it also carries weight and can cause contamination. Light cannot be passive in that context. Perhaps to be seen as a material, light must also have weight. But, of course, light doesn't actually weigh anything. I am curious to know whether palpably exposed white paper can produce light. That's at a technical level, which is also part of rendering the colors of the undeveloped paper. But there is also an emotional and a poetic level: if the whole is part of my integrative process of mourning, what consequences does that have for the surroundings in which this process takes place?

What I have created is a room that functions as a protective lab in its own right. It is a kind of safe space. I asked myself whether this room should be bright or dark. When my father died, I broke off all of my friendships. Meanwhile, I have made very many new, good friends, but none remain from back then. This is largely due to the disparity between the lives they led and the experiences I had. Our lives were asynchronous. For me, there was pain, but for other people, my pain was only present when they interacted with me.

If the environment fails to bring a dark theatricality to the experience of pain in my work, the pain becomes

more dignified. It has earned it. That is why I considered simply surrounding these works with a standardized, bright light in order to show that life goes on—even when you are thinking that yours is gone.

SP I find it fascinating that your work has such pronounced corporeality. Photographing always evokes a sense of the corporeal, as the act of photographing and developing require significant elements of corporeality, which seem to disappear in the moment of viewing. By contrast, you make this corporeality visible in your work.

AVA I am interested in both the effort and the limits that the body can reach. What I'm doing is neither extreme nor dramatic, but rather very simple. The extremes don't interest me; I have no urge to shoot myself in the hand or anything like that. As much as possible, I want to make impactful pictures on my own.

There is an imbalance between the ease with which we consume and anticipate pictorial worlds and the physical resources needed to make them, since, after all, we all must die at some point. But the way we consume suggests to me a sense of immortality. I recently read the 1998 book *The Eden Project: In Search of the Magical Other*, a brief essay by James Hollis, a psychotherapist. In the introduction, he writes that we believe in two things in life: one is eternal love and the other is immortality. Our search for images and our dependence on images reveal the imbalance. On the one hand, we consume with apparent ease, but at the same time, we are completely exhausted due to the physical nature of consumption.

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Akosua Viktoria Adu-Sanyah
Corner Dry Lungs

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Akosua Viktoria Adu-Sanyah,
corner dry lungs II (under glass),
2024, courtesy the artist

INSIDE FRONT COVER
Akosua Viktoria Adu-Sanyah, 2024,
courtesy the artist

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