Krčma, Ed, “The Poverty of Riches: On the Woodcuts of Andrea Büttner,” *Contemporary.Burlington.org.uk*, November 2026

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The poverty of riches: on the woodcuts of Andrea Büttner

by Ed Krčma • November 2026 • Journal article

Introduction

The Poverty of Riches, an exhibition by Andrea Büttner (b.1972), was first staged at the Whitechapel Gallery, London FIG. 1, in April 2011, before travelling to the Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia FIG. 2. The exhibition presented work resulting from a residency the artist undertook in Italy, and its most prominent element was a series of large-scale woodcuts based on motifs derived from the fresco cycle at S. Francesco, Assisi, usually attributed to Giotto (c.1276–1337). Although the prints in both iterations appeared alongside work of diverse kinds – monochrome ‘fabric paintings’, a display table, reverse glass paintings, scattered apples, large screen prints, a tablecloth pinned to the wall, simple benches – it is for her woodcuts that Büttner is best known.



FIG. 1 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: The Poverty of Riches* at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2011. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist and Whitechapel Gallery, London).

By the time of *The Poverty of Riches*, woodcuts had long been viewed as an anachronism in the face of new media, even as an expressionist cliché, and it was rare to encounter them in contemporary art galleries.[1] Büttner understands the woodcut to be both poor and rich, and her negotiation of the medium deliberately extends that spectrum.[2] On the one hand, it is a ‘low’ medium. Since the sixteenth century, it has been associated with popular experience, produced ‘for the sake of simple folk’, to borrow the title of Robert Scribner’s influential study.[3] Büttner exacerbates this poverty, especially in her choice of materials: her selected matrix is plywood, which she carves into using an angle grinder or chisels. The result is a crude, rough, splintered facture. Plywood is an inexpensive everyday material: cheap, modern, tough, composite, difficult. While it enables production on an unusually large scale, it is otherwise inapposite as a print matrix, possessing no reassuring organic grain and facilitating no fine work or flowing gestures. Although commonly used in an art context for the construction of temporary walls, furniture and packing crates, for a printmaker it is a material to work against as much as to work with.

On the other hand, while woodcuts are typically quite small, Büttner’s scale is bold.[4] Her use of colour, too, when it happens, is vivid and striking. As large-scale crafted objects made in small editions, her prints are eminently collectable, their sales sustaining other more obviously experimental and less market-friendly aspects of her work. Often depicting human bodies, their impressive size engages the viewer’s body in a direct and insistent way. Their material qualities – the viscosity of the ink, the labour of carving, the pressure of the press, the weight and curl of the paper – are emphasised by Büttner’s preference for displaying works unframed and unglazed, and therefore open and exposed. When deployed, Büttner’s precise use of colour, enabled by the print studio’s meticulous calibration of transparent inks, achieves a light, even field that retracts into the support akin to a fresco.[5]

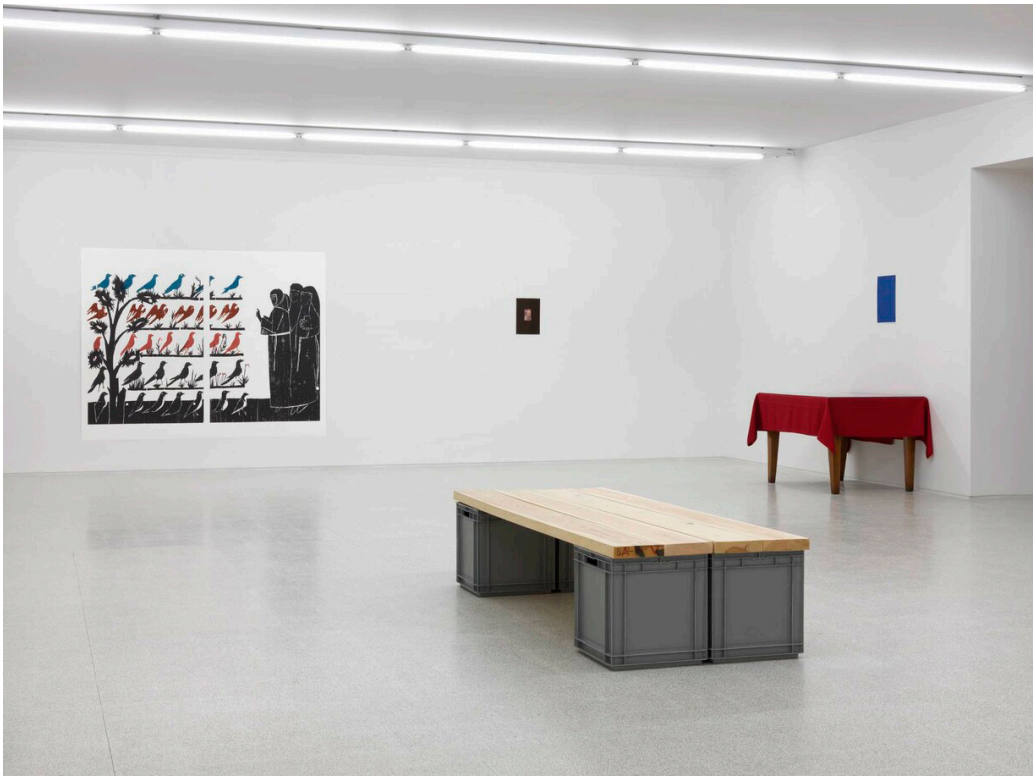


FIG. 2 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: The Poverty of Riches* at the Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, 2011–12, showing, on the left, *Vogelpredigt (Sermon to the Birds)*, by Andrea Büttner. 2010. Woodcut on paper, 2 parts, each 180 by 120 cm. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph C. Dario Lasagni).

Given its deep roots, the choice of woodcut inevitably connects to art history. Büttner elaborates on this connection by emphasising its relationship to European traditions.[6] She also establishes these relations by borrowing images and words from other artists and writers, often from historically remote contexts. Such a strategy is connected to but quite different from the idea of ‘appropriation art’, which was dominant in the conceptualisation of borrowings in the late 1970s and 1980s, at least within a Euro-American context. Appropriation has to do with property and its subversion. In the hands of such artists as Sherrie Levine (b.1947), Richard Prince (b.1949), Louise Lawler (b.1947) and Andrea Fraser (b.1965) these subversions were carried out with broadly deflationary intent, motivated by critical scepticism and shaped by a sophisticated involvement with cultural codes and conventions.[7] Büttner’s borrowings take a longer historical view and embody a different attitude. Here, to borrow is to hold up an existing thing and allow it to stand, affirmatively if not uncritically. It is to challenge the pervasive injunction on artists, and in social and economic spheres more generally, to be ‘creative’, questioning the relationship between repetition and the new.[8] For Büttner, it also means asserting a non-proprietorial attitude towards materials, and taking encouragement from past statements and efforts, albeit ones embodying profound tensions and complexities.[9]

This article focuses on three solo exhibitions staged by Büttner between 2011 and 2023, each of which placed woodcuts at its heart. While negotiating art’s relative autonomy amid the erosion of its secure social functions, Büttner has repeatedly targeted idealist tendencies in modernist discourse that extract works of art from their social and political contexts. In sympathy with the artist’s approach, this article emphasises her presentation of individual works within specific exhibitions and publications, highlighting those Büttner chose as lead images for catalogues and publicity materials.

Firstly, it examines *The Poverty of Riches*, concentrating particularly on *Table* (2010) and related woodcuts. Secondly, it explores the *Beggar* works (2015–16), perhaps Büttner’s best-known series, which, together with *Phone Etchings* (2015), constituted the core of *Beggars and iPhones* (2015–16) at the Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz, Vienna. Lastly, the article explores the *Harvester* woodcuts (2020–21), made from Büttner’s drawings of migrant workers controversially transported into Germany to save the asparagus harvest during the first COVID-19 lockdowns. These were prominently displayed in the final spaces of Büttner’s retrospective *Der Kern der Verhältnisse (The Heart of Relations)* at the Kunstmuseum Basel in 2023. The three bodies of work are united not only by their medium, but by a shared concern with the aesthetic, ethical, political and theological stakes of poverty, and by an explicit, self-reflexive dialogue with art history. Ultimately, drawing on key aspects of Büttner’s exhibitions, this article proposes interpreting these presentations through the form of the parable.

Table

In early 2010 Büttner was awarded the Max Mara Art Prize for Women, which included a residency in Rome and Biella. Büttner arrived in Italy intending to develop her long-standing interest in Franciscan traditions.[10] While there, she travelled extensively, visiting Giotto’s frescos in Assisi and staying with a community of Franciscan nuns. Through exposure to the Maramotti collection, Büttner became familiar with works by Arte Povera artists such as Mario Merz (1925–2003) as well as artists working slightly earlier, including Alberto Burri (1915–95), Piero Manzoni (1933–63) and Enrico Castellani (1930–2017). As such, she came to focus particularly on the role that fabric played in both the story of St Francis and, over seven centuries later, in Italian art of the 1950s and 1960s.[11]

Once back in London, Büttner created a series of woodcuts recasting motifs extracted from Giotto’s frescos that related to this ‘performativity of fabrics’.[12] The young St Francis’s world was the urban elite of late medieval Assisi, his family’s wealth built on his father’s trade as a cloth merchant. In a dramatic act of renunciation – the aftermath of which made Francis a celebrity in his own lifetime – he rejected this privileged life and embraced the poverty Christ had commanded.[13] Fabric plays a central role at key moments in the story: in Francis’s dramatic rejection of his patrimony, when he strips naked in the town square; when, echoing both St Martin and the Good Samaritan, he gives his cloak to a poor man; and in his order’s adoption of the deliberately poor, rough and uncomfortable tunic.

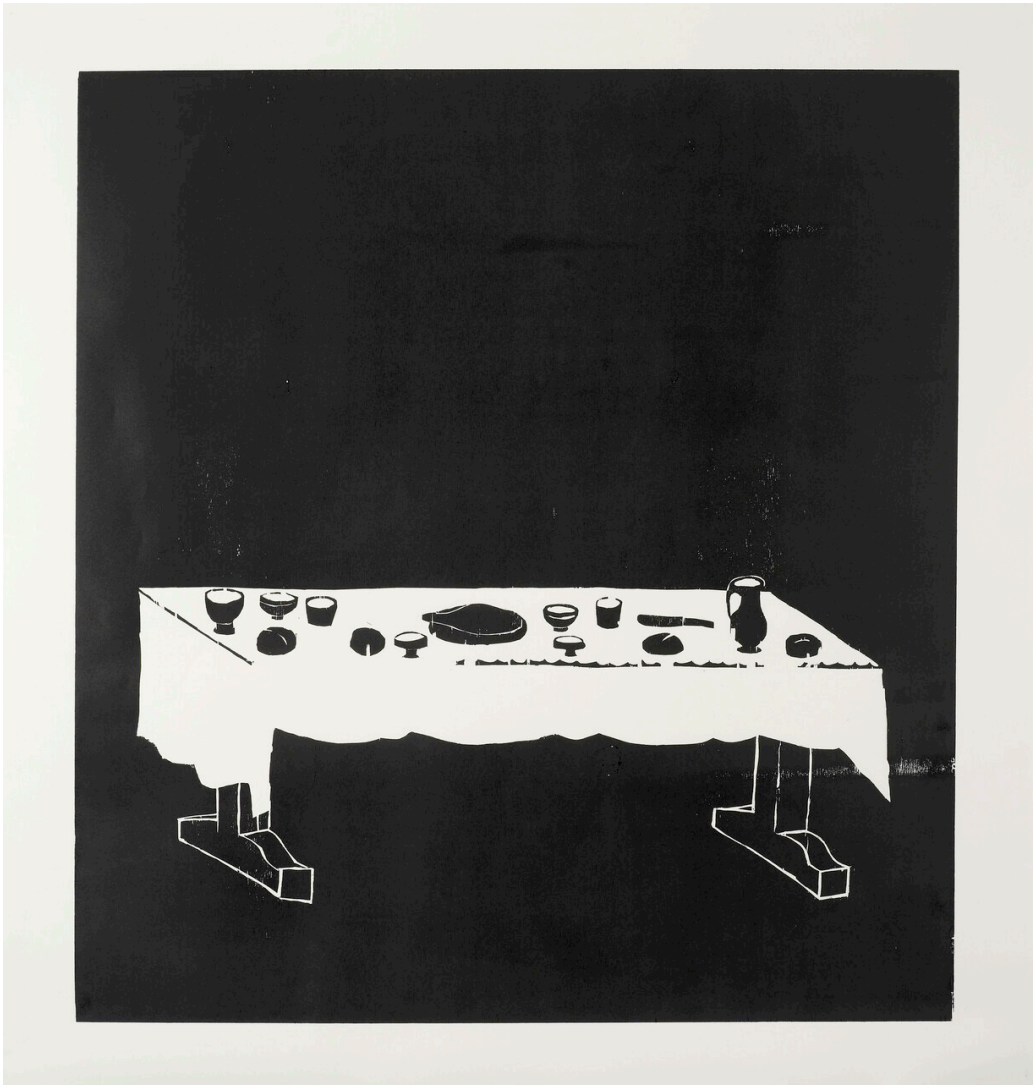


FIG. 3 *Table*, by Andrea Büttner. 2010. Woodcut on paper, 147 by 144 cm. (sheet). (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph Andy Keate).

It is telling, however, that Büttner does not select these well-known episodes for translation into woodcuts.[14] Rather, in a more minor key, she depicts secondary protagonists, those witnessing or otherwise affected by Francis's actions: the rejected father, who gathers up his son's discarded garments (*Father*; 2010); a poor unnamed follower who drinks from a spring that miraculously appears in the mountainside (*Drinking Man*; 2010); and a common man who spreads out his cloak in honour of Francis (*Man with Fabric*; 2010). Indeed, sometimes there is no human body at all, but instead a tent, acting as a canopy above the bed of Gregory IX as he receives a vision of St Francis (*Tent*; 2010); the thorny bush that surrounds the legs of the allegorical figure of Poverty depicted in the presbytery vault of the Lower Church (*Bush*; 2010); or the table, richly laid but vacated of human protagonists. Although *The Poverty of Riches* included an earlier woodcut (2010) that shows Francis's sermon to the birds (*Vogelpredigt; Sermon to the Birds*; 2010), the saint remains out of view in all other cases, visible instead through the impact of his actions.

In *Table* **FIG. 3** the carved areas, created with a chisel, are white against a black field – one that is not quite even, as a kind of 'static' appears where the ink has thinned to reveal the rough, industrial surface of the plywood. A sturdy medieval trestle occupies the bottom half of the composition. Although four-square, it stands a little awkwardly: its horizontal edge is parallel with that of the block mark, but the trestles point to the right at different angles, a small reference to Giotto's unsystematic use of perspective. The table is covered with a tablecloth and richly laid with bread, drinking vessels, a knife and a large slab of meat. This motif is borrowed – imperfectly, but at roughly the same scale – from Giotto's *Death of the Knight of Celano* **FIG. 4**. The story, recounted by Bonaventure, details how Francis and his followers were invited to dine at the rich knight's home. Arriving there, Francis warns his host of the need to repent, saying, 'you shall not eat here but elsewhere'. The knight heeds his warning and prepares for death. Miraculously, as the meal begins, he is struck dead. While Büttner chose the motif primarily for its inclusion of fabric, the story pits riches against poverty and mortality against spiritual judgment.



FIG. 4 *St Francis predicts the death of a Knight in Celano*, by Giotto. c.1297–99. Fresco. (Upper Church of S. Francesco, Assisi; Bridgeman Images).

Poverty is usually thought of in entirely negative terms. The Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina, for example, has used the term *aporophobia* to name the fear and hatred often directed at the poor.[15] However, as with her interest in shame, Büttner explores positive aspects of that which is commonly reviled.[16] Affirmative claims for poverty are prominent in the monastic form of life, especially among the Franciscans. They were also key to radical art movements in the 1960s, such as Arte Povera, inspired by Jerzy Grotowski’s ‘poor theatre’.[17] Although separated by vast distances, both movements emerged in Italy in response to rapid, unsettling economic change. Developments in the thirteenth century were crucial to the commercial revolution of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. Trade was conducted on an unprecedented scale, banks were established and coinage proliferated in newly pervasive ways. More people could participate in exchange

and make a profit, raising the question of what effects such dealings had on the spiritual condition of both the individual soul and the social body.[18] In a distant but related way, following the Second World War, American consumer capitalism flourished and was energetically exported to European nations, not least Italy. One expression of this far-reaching phenomenon was the rise of the contemporary art market, with skilful and dynamic dealers such as Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend having a dramatic impact in Europe from the early 1960s onwards.[19]

In the exhibition booklet that accompanied *The Poverty of Riches*, which bears *Table* as its cover image, Büttner included fragments from two source texts. The first is from *St Francis of Assisi: Rules of the Order* (1210–21): 'Currency and coins shall not have greater use to us than pebbles'. The second is from Merz: 'On Sundays, culture sheds its workers' garments and appears pompously decorated with the mud of its own complacency'.[20] As Büttner herself stated in an interview published in the same booklet, aesthetic claims for poverty were aimed at an explicit rejection of 'the "rich" apparatuses of mass media, style, meaning, or the art market'.[21] Büttner's work aligns with such commitments, being openly and deliberately 'little' or 'poor' in important respects. It does not trade in impressively refined craft skills; it employs low, cheap, available, everyday materials; it is often preoccupied by forms and operations that have to do with falling and lowering; it seeks out low or minor traditions and figures; and it openly explores themes, forms of life and iconographies that have to do with poverty.

In the wake of the 2008 financial crash, the May 2010 general election in the United Kingdom produced a hung parliament and a Conservative-led coalition government was formed. George Osborne, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced a budget that involved rapid deficit reduction and deep public spending cuts. This came only weeks after the first bailout programme for the Greek government, in which the European Union and the International Monetary Fund pledged €110 billion on the condition of strict fiscal retrenchment, which contributed to severe economic hardship. In both cases, harsh political reform was conducted under the banner of 'austerity', defended as a necessary, rather than ideological, form of collective sacrifice in the face of economic crisis.[22]

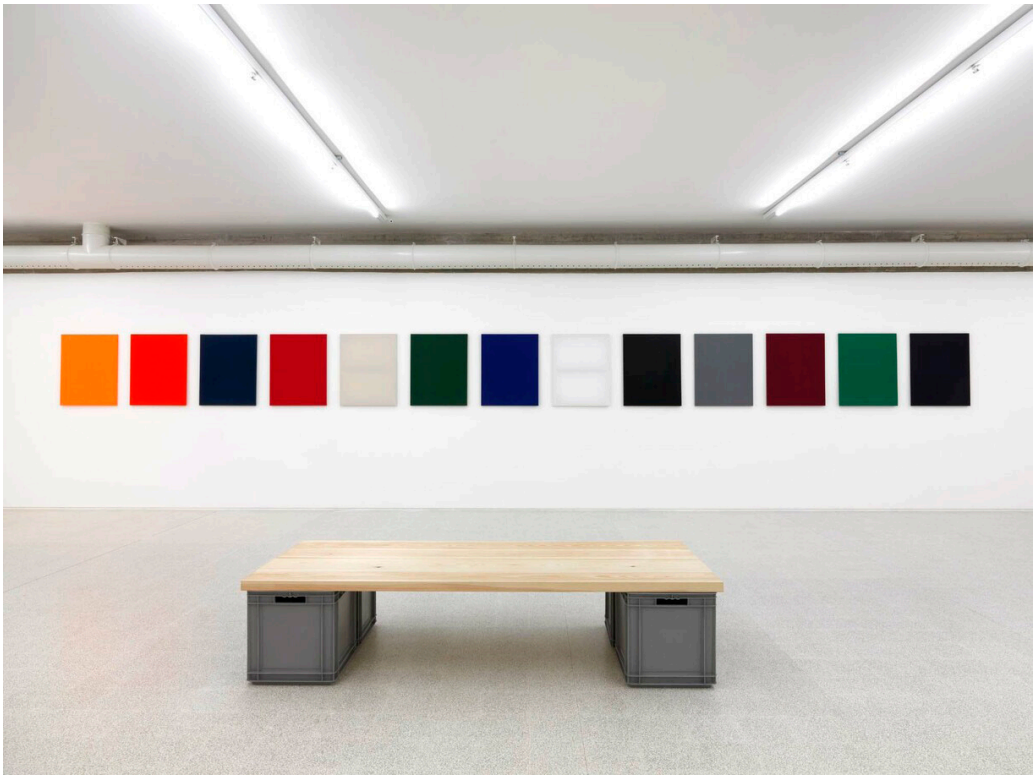


FIG. 5 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: The Poverty of Riches* at the Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, 2011–12. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph C. Dario Lasagni).

As such, questions of social care, wealth inequality and austerity were prominent in public discourse at the time *The Poverty of Riches* opened in London. Büttner addressed the sociopolitical context most explicitly in a series of twelve 'fabric paintings' **FIG. 5**, each of which comprises a monochrome of stretched coloured material.[23] Alongside avant-garde gestures by Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956) and Kazimir Malevich

(1879–1935), they also relate to later monochromes by Ad Reinhardt (1913–67) and Yves Klein (1928–62), and recall the *Superficie* (*Surface*; 1959–2017) works of Castellani in particular. Yet Büttner’s choice of fabric is precise and loaded. She turned to materials used to make the uniforms of public service workers, such as park wardens, police officers, refuse collectors and emergency medics. At a time when, as now, the values underpinning a commitment to social care were being aggressively undermined, Büttner’s monochromes put that care at the heart of her project, challenging any residual idealist claims that modernist painting should be detached from the pressures of the social sphere.

Büttner’s engagement with contemporary situations and debates is often mediated through historical models. Her interest in Franciscan theology stems from its political radicality, as channelled today by liberation theology and its campaigns for social justice, for example in Brazil, where Büttner’s woodcuts were shown before travelling to London.[24] Büttner refuses to treat such historical materials as straightforward exemplary models, however. Although they frequently signal alternative ways of living and forms of thought, they are approached as sedimentations of historical tensions, longings and contradictions, not as pristine emblems. The Franciscan tradition is a case in point. While in Italy Büttner acquired a copy of Kenneth Baxter Wolf’s 2003 critical re-evaluation of St Francis, which stresses the identity of the saint’s renunciations with the elite burgher world from which he came – albeit in the manner of a reversal.[25] Wolf emphasises the mercantile culture of early thirteenth-century Assisi and the fact that Francis’s gesture of worldly renunciation, aimed at spiritual salvation, was available only to the rich.[26] Not handling money and choosing to beg for a living meant that the Franciscans, unlike the Benedictines, could offer little material help to the involuntarily destitute and, in fact, ‘had inadvertently *competed* with the same poor for the charity of the rich, charity that [Francis] had more of a claim to, from the perspective of the donors, because his poverty was more “holy” than the poverty of ordinary beggars’.[27] Moreover, by the late thirteenth century, it was the Franciscan theologian Pietro di Giovanni Olivi who offered a revolutionary defence of the market through his theories of capital and economic value.[28] Therefore, it is not that social problems would somehow be solved if we were to return to the Francis of Giotto. Rather, Giotto’s frescos – rich, modern works produced to decorate a permanent structure for this mendicant order devoted to a life of poverty – embody deep tensions and contradictions.

For Büttner, another image of laid tables in *The Poverty of Riches* shows these tensions precisely. Published as a full-page image opposite *Table* in the exhibition booklet, it is also collaged onto the reverse glass painting *Pranzo di Natale* (2011). The image is a photograph of the annual Christmas dinner for people experiencing homelessness, organised since 1982 by the Comunità di Sant’Egidio in the nave of S. Maria in Trastevere, Rome. This lay community, devoted to care for the most needy in society, was formed in 1968 by Andrea Riccardi, then only eighteen and directly inspired by the revolutionary energies of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). The photograph shows the richly decorated nave and apse as food is served to a full gathering of people seated at tables laid with red tablecloths.



FIG. 6 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: The Poverty of Riches* at the Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, 2011–12, showing *Table*, by Andrea Büttner. 2011. Multimedia installation, dimensions variable, and *Ja*, by Andrea Büttner. 2010. Screen print on paper, 41.5 by 29.2 cm. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph C. Dario Lasagni).

The image captures the tensions and commitments that Büttner often engages with. It also insists on the social function of tables in both domestic and public life: a basic structure around which to sit, eat, drink and talk, or as a vehicle for displaying what is available and what is at stake. Indeed, the first work the viewer encountered in *The Poverty of Riches* staged this function quite directly. Table **FIG. 6** was laid with a red tablecloth and displayed eleven photographs under glass. Alongside some of Büttner’s tourist photographs, the display included images of St Francis’s rough hessian tunic, a *Sacchi (Sacks)* work by Burri, a Manzoni *Achrome* featuring a grid of folded fabric, Leonardo’s *Last Supper* (1495–98) *in situ*, and a table work by Merz. The table was also accompanied by a screen print with the German word ‘*Ja*’ (‘yes’) printed in red on a blue background.[29] While both the present situation and the historical models are far from simple, Büttner declares her intent to affirm as she probes attempts to mediate between wealth and poverty, the spiritual and the everyday, art and social care.

Beggar

The scandal of homelessness is a clear embodiment of the failure of social provision. Entirely preventable, it continues to stand as an everyday source of shame: for the person living on the street, harshly exposed and requiring visibility to attract charity; for those walking by, whose reactions are made under the gaze of others, real or imagined; and for society at large, the self-image of which it rightly compromises. Büttner’s longstanding engagement with discourse on shame provides her with a structural framework for thinking about the intersection of visibility, social norms and affective life. For her, borrowing from the philosopher Hilge Landweer, shame lacks a stable iconography but is a historically contingent meeting of three fundamental terms: ‘*I* am ashamed – *of something* – in the presence *of others*’.[30] As Büttner has argued, it also operates as a ‘free radical’ and can be attached to anything. Whereas today poverty is a source of shame, in the nineteenth century, it was a source of rage, especially as it related to unemployment, a rage without which revolutionary movements would not have formed.[31]

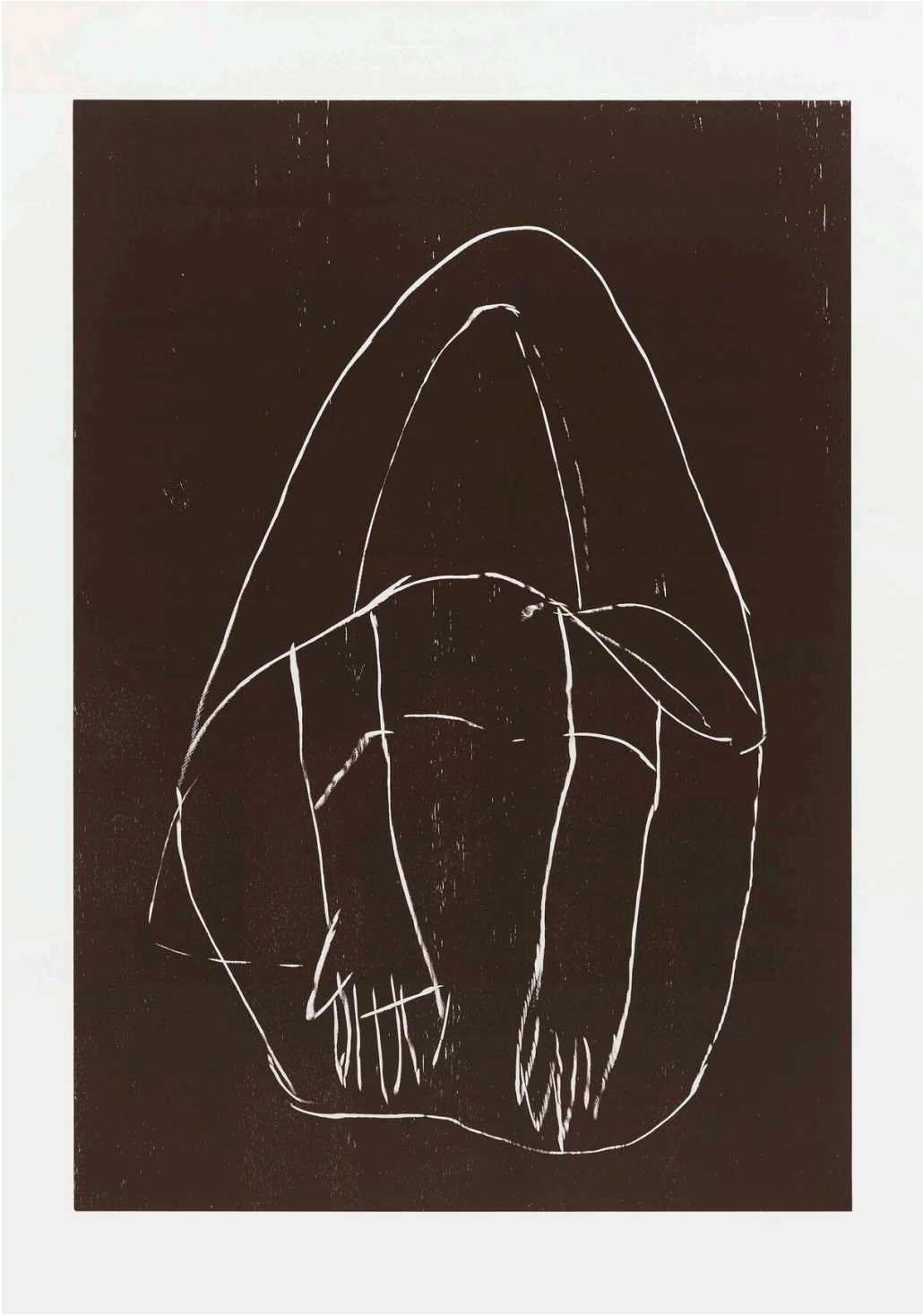


FIG. 7 *Beggar*, by Andrea Büttner. 2015. Woodcut on paper, 174 by 125 cm. (sheet). (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph Wilfried Petzi).

This constellation of concerns finds precise articulation in Büttner’s *Beggar* woodcuts, which comprise two series of editioned prints made from nine plywood matrices.[32] The first was printed in black and white **FIG. 7** and is always displayed pinned to the wall in a single row. The second is executed in a range of vivid colours **FIG. 8**, and the prints are more often exhibited individually or in small groups, sometimes framed, sometimes exposed. Each image is about life-size and presents the crude outline of a single hooded figure, hands outstretched. This motif loosely draws on *Verhüllte Bettlerin (Veiled Beggarwoman)* **FIG. 9**, a wooden sculpture by the German Expressionist artist Ernst Barlach (1870–1938), which interested Büttner because it combines the image of poverty with shame, embodied in the bowed, shrouded head. However, Büttner’s figures are larger, flatter, cruder and more ambiguous than this model. Each has its own scale and shape – a form made more ovular and less pyramidal by the removal of the splayed feet of Barlach’s sculpture.



FIG. 8 *Beggar*, by Andrea Büttner. 2016. Woodcut on paper, 136 by 99 cm. (sheet). (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph Andy Keate).



FIG. 9 *Verhüllte Bettlerin (Veiled Beggarwoman)*, by Ernst Barlach. 1919. Walnut with a tinted coating, 38 by 30.4 by 33.7 cm. (Ernst Barlach Haus, Fondation Hermann F. Reemtsma, Hamburg; photograph Andreas Weiss).

As Aden Kumler has observed, it is not clear whether, as one looks at these woodcuts, one looks over at these figures or down at them.[33] The lines are roughly carved using an angle grinder, the mechanical scrape and whir of which is visible in scuffs on their surface. In a recent reading of the series from a theological perspective, Jonathan Anderson has described how the faceless figures, like the fallen person helped by the Good Samaritan, bear no markers in terms of gender, age or ethnicity: ‘each presents an individual someone, distinguishable from the others, but in a way that resists any demographic categorization; they are all hands, all need, no face’.[34]



FIG. 10 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: Beggars and iPhones* at the Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz, Vienna, 2016, showing the *Beggar* series, by Andrea Büttner. 2015. 9 woodcuts on paper, dimensions variable. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist and Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; photograph Jorit Aust).

The first major public presentation of *Beggars* was in *Beggars and iPhones* (2016) at the Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz **FIG. 10**. Here, Büttner sealed off most of the modernist building’s floor-to-ceiling windows, erecting temporary walls to cancel this transparency, or, differently put, to protect her viewers from exposure to the public gaze.[35] The exhibition’s eponymous central components were the nine black-and-white *Beggar* prints, pinned to the long temporary wall, and five *Phone Etchings* **FIG. 11**, hung on the opposite wall. The latter are made using a complex process that magnifies the greasy deposits left by the artist’s fingertips on the screen of her iPhone: the residue of searching and messaging that almost always remains hidden from observers, if not from governing algorithms. Contrasting the beggar’s poverty, the iPhone is the rich person’s smartphone. Foiling the empty-handedness and open-handedness of the beggars, the *Phone Etchings* record the fast, cramped, semi-automatic work of the fingers – ‘digital’ movements that are magnified to resemble the laden gestures of action painting.



FIG. 11 *Phone Etching*, by Andrea Büttner. 2015. Etching, 212 by 113 cm. (sheet). (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph Lee Thompson).

Placing images of beggars in dialogue with smartphones situates the exhibition’s concerns within the context of contemporary street life and its regimes of visibility and hiddenness, attention and distraction, autonomy and dependence. However, Büttner’s mediations mean that establishing the referent of these images is no simple matter. Owing a debt to Andy Warhol (1928–87), Büttner makes new printed images of what has already been produced as an image twice over. Büttner’s *Beggar* prints are loose renditions of Barlach’s *Verhüllte Bettlerin*, which he made after drawings of destitute people he encountered several years earlier in Russia. Like Warhol’s subjects, people begging must turn themselves into an image – of someone deserving of charity, as Francis did so brilliantly. But just as Büttner’s engagement with Giotto’s frescos is far from straightforward, Barlach provides an even more fraught and complex historical model.

Barlach made his drawings during a two-month trip to Kharkiv, then part of Russia and now war-torn Ukraine, in 1906. That journey, narrated in an illustrated travel essay in 1912, became a kind of origin story for the artist, defining his anti-academic and anti-bourgeois persona. As James van Dyke has noted, in Barlach's text and within German culture more broadly, Russia was mythologised as a 'vast, elemental, soulful' place, a counter to the corruptions of metropolitan modernity, 'populated by primitive existences who prayed, begged and dreamed'.[36] Late in his career, Barlach was hounded by the Nazis; his war memorials had proved intolerable to them for their rejection of the *Kampfgemeinschaft* ('community of warriors') and for Barlach's emphasis on sorrow and empathy; the artist himself was accused of having Slavic and Jewish ancestry.[37] By 1937, one sculpture and four of his drawings had been consigned to the Degenerate Art exhibition.

However, Barlach's desire to continue working in Germany led him to sign a petition by Joseph Goebbels in support of Adolf Hitler, the so-called 'Aufruf der Kulturschaffenden' ('Call to cultural workers') published in August 1934.[38] Barlach had voted for the conservative war hero Paul von Hindenburg in 1932, and as late as 1935 the nationalist art historian and critic Paul Fechter championed his work as representing a distilled, uncorrupted *völkisch* purity, from which the artist's detractors had been hauled too far by the forces of modernity to respond to adequately. In concluding his article Van Dyke argued in Adornian terms that while Barlach was 'repulsed by the culture of National Socialism [...] for decades his self-image and professional identity had been shaped by the illiberal, antisocialist jargon of authenticity that emerged in late-nineteenth-century cultural pessimism and came to hardened maturity in the antidemocratic culture of the 1920s'.[39]

This is important here because it relates to Büttner's attitude towards modernity, her emphatic resistance to the kind of anti-modern pessimism that often accompanies appeals to an aesthetics of roughness, and to medieval history, Catholic traditions and craft practices. Büttner is critical of positions that attempt to resist the ambivalence, complexity and irresolution of modern life as it encroaches on contemporary subjectivity and aesthetic practices. Instead, she is drawn to artists who seek to affirm something in contemporary life, not without criticism, but by embracing its yield of pleasure and possibility: Ellsworth Kelly (1923–2015), Ed Ruscha (b.1937) and Corita Kent (1918–86), for example. On the other hand, she identifies with figures who confront their shame and vulnerability explicitly, staging a tension between hiddenness and disclosure: Warhol and Dieter Roth (1930–98), perhaps most prominently. Although none of these artists embodies an uncritical stance, they each reject nostalgia and defensiveness.



FIG. 12 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: On Vulnerability and Doubt* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2019, showing the *Beggar* series, by Andrea Büttner. 2016. 9 colour woodcuts, dimensions variable. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; photograph Andrew Curtis).

Büttner's own rejection of such attitudes is particularly emphatic in the coloured *Beggar* series **FIG. 12.** Here, she aims for smooth, direct fields of colour rather than the kind of mannered surface that seeks to emphasise the grain of the wood 'to make a point about the roughness of materials'.[40] Büttner's use of colour connects her practice to post-war developments in American art, especially the work of Kelly and Kent. Kelly's uninflected colour fields apparently made Mark Rothko (1903–70) 'feel like a damned expressionist'.[41]

Rothko's endlessly differentiated canvases might stand as gateways to total absorption and concentration, enabling, he hoped, a kind of transcendental encounter, something that might be wrested from the corruptions and banalities of modern life. This attitude intensified and became more brittle as the 1950s drew to a close, with the last decade before his suicide in 1970 hard not to read in tragic terms. Indeed, Briony Fer argues that by this point his exacting standards 'get refracted back as kitsch rather than as guarantors of the highest ethics'.[42] A Kelly painting from the 1950s, by contrast, was less 'composed' than sampled, culled from the distracted conditions of everyday experience: from shapes and colours glimpsed on the streets and subways of Paris or New York.[43]

Any bid to secure special status for artists as insulated from wider social forces is again countered by Büttner with reflexive gestures. Rejecting the 'jargon of authenticity', she emphasises contradiction and self-implication. For example, although the *Beggar* prints depict the destitute poor, the artist has also described them as 'images of artists before their viewers'.[44] For Büttner, both art and shame involve the intersection of 'self-reflexivity, viewers and cultural norms'.[45] Moving from studio to gallery wall, works of art – operating with and against complex social and aesthetic conventions – are transferred from the protection of private concern to a highly visible institutional and discursive space. Visible and exposed by design, their fate depends on the viewer's sympathetic comportment, to which artists appeal.

For Büttner, shame has a heuristic value: in its grip, one's identity and actions are suddenly assessed as though from the outside, from a 'newly self-aware and critical perspective'.[46] Whether such a heuristic is at play for people living on the streets is, of course, another question, and here the disparity between worlds is glaring. Yet Büttner does not offer a predictable, even self-dignifying expression of care from 'up here' to those 'down there'. Rather, she asserts equivalence amid deep asymmetries. The artist, too, is open-handed before viewers, while the scandal of socio-economic inequality continues to exert ethical pressure on cultural activities, and the very right of these activities to exist remains in doubt.[47]

Harvester



FIG. 13 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: The Heart of Relations* at the Kunstmuseum Basel, 2023. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist and Kunstmuseum Basel; photograph Max Ehrengruber).



FIG. 14 Cover of *Liber Vagatorum (Book of Vagabonds)*. c.1509–10.

Collective attitudes towards involuntary poverty have a long history. At Büttner’s retrospective at the Kunstmuseum Basel in 2023, aspects of this history were explored in the wide passageway that connects the Hauptbau and Neubau buildings. Presiding over the space were the nine black-and-white *Beggar* woodcuts, displayed unframed in a row on green velvet-clad walls **FIG. 13**. These were joined by a constellation of works connected to Büttner’s interest in poverty and wealth, as well as a copy of a *Liber Vagatorum* **FIG. 14**, an early Reformation-era book illustrated with woodcuts. Its original purpose was to teach citizens how to distinguish true from false beggars and to distrust the latter’s ruses.[48] For Büttner, such popular books signal a shift from Catholic ideas of charity to the Protestant work ethic and ideas of the ‘deserving poor’.

At the far end of the room were facsimiles of eight small etchings by Rembrandt (1606–69) from early in his career, each depicting itinerant figures, beggars, the disabled and the destitute poor. The first of these **FIG. 15** includes two prominent images: one a self-portrait of the young artist, the other an impoverished elderly couple with walking sticks. This striking juxtaposition resonated with Büttner’s concerns about both poverty

and self-reflexivity.[49] Yet, when explaining her fascination with these images in March 2023, she introduced new interests too:

> I look at these drawings again now [...] and I’m thinking about practical things: Was he there in the streets looking at people who were begging? How quickly did he draw, how many drawings did he do? How big are they, how small are they? For whom were they? What did people think back then, the people who were begging, of an artist drawing them? How is it different to me now drawing people? Why don’t I draw beggars in the streets? What’s the difference between drawing beggars and drawing harvesters?[50]



FIG. 15 *Sheet of studies: head of the artist, a beggar couple, heads of an old man and old woman, etc.*, by Rembrandt van Rijn. c.1632. Etching on paper, 10.2 by 10.7 cm. (Art Institute of Chicago).

This concern with the live encounter, its tensions and ethical stakes, is connected to a more recent body of work: two series of prints based on drawings Büttner made of migrant workers as they harvested white asparagus in 2020. The drawings became models for a series of seven etchings entitled *Asparagus Harvest* **FIG. 16** and six large-scale single-figure woodcuts entitled *Erntende* (*Harvesting*; 2021) or *Erntender* (*Harvester*; 2021), plus a single work showing two figures (*Spargelernte*; 2021). When they were shown in Basel, the six single-figure woodcuts were framed and glazed and shown alongside a cast section of a grimly uniform asparagus bed and a tabletop covered in carved wooden asparagus spears, made by the labour of others **FIG. 17**.[51] The woodcuts each depict a single figure, monumental but crudely rendered. Three show a standing woman in a long skirt bending down to the right or to the left to pick the crop; two show the arms and head of a figure who hangs down from the top of the image, one hand holding an implement – pen, chisel, knife? – seemingly about to inscribe something **FIG. 18**; and one shows a woman bending low and directly ahead, resembling a ballet dancer bowing after a performance.



FIG. 16 *Asparagus Harvest*, by Andrea Büttner. 2021. Etching on paper, 70 by 100 cm. (sheet). (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; photograph Eva Herzog).

The context for this project was again a charged one. With the first COVID-19 lockdown announced in Germany in March 2020, a widely publicised crisis developed by May around the asparagus harvest, the national vegetable still picked by hand. The dependence of farmers on cheap migrant labour – workers already subjected to notoriously poor conditions – and the measures imposed by the lockdown created a tension between the desire to rescue the harvest and the moral imperative to safeguard the labourers, mostly from Eastern Europe. Finally, the government slackened its safeguarding measures to allow 80,000 people from Romania to be bussed in to save the crops, who were reportedly housed in crowded and unhygienic shelters.[52] An adequate German workforce, it turned out, could not be trained so quickly for such backbreaking labour requiring considerable manual skill. Therefore, it was undervalued immigrant labourers whose safety was sacrificed.



FIG. 17 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: The Heart of Relations* at the Kunstmuseum Basel, 2023. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist and Kunstmuseum Basel; photograph Annik Wetter).

Büttner travelled to the asparagus farms around Beelitz to draw the workers directly. She worked with an A3 sketchbook from only a couple of metres away, sharing some of the pandemic’s dangers but protected by the open-air setting in a way the workers were not. In this, Büttner adopted the anachronistic role of the *en plein air* artist, recalling nineteenth-century figures such as Gustave Courbet, Jean-François Millet or Camille Pissarro. In contrast to a documentary film-maker, this was an awkward ‘making’ rather than ‘taking’ of images, the artist operating without the validating support of a crew, an apparatus or the documentary mode. Her recourse to the directness and smallness of drawing instead heightened the discomfort and awkwardness of the scene, charged as it was by uneven class and power dynamics.[53]

Indeed, while the nature of Büttner’s encounter with real-world migrant labourers was redolent of a much older model of realism, her etchings and woodcuts clearly make no claim to tell things as they are. Although there is a kind of monumental dignity in some images, there is no ‘bravado of realism’ here, to borrow a phrase from Stefan Collini.[54] Just as the *Beggars* suggest tense, imbalanced relations between artists and those surviving on the street, the *Harvesters* highlight no less uncomfortable disparities between artistic work and wage labour.[55] The artist, too, bends over a ground, cutting into the surface with a tool, yet her labour is prized and stands apart from the harsh, repetitive work of the migrant labourers that underpins the production of this traditional delicacy.

Much of the tension here turns on the relationship between the rewards of art and real-world suffering, with a kind of ‘self-resistance’ preventing Büttner’s works from being resolved into clear statements of either social critique or insulated pleasures.[56] Rather, pleasure and awareness of inequality and suffering coexist, uneasily. The dynamic is not resolved, and although awareness of the latter complicates the former, it does not cancel it out. Registration of the tension, rather, encourages moral questioning: should it have been the crops or the safety of the migrant labourers that was forfeited here? How might other options have been available? What is at stake in the embarrassment of an artist drawing a worker, or indeed a beggar, from life? How and with what effects is the depiction of poverty and precarity mediated by the conventions of art? How can art continue in the face of real-world suffering?[57]

Parable

> The Parables make a whole, [we have to] understand each one in the light of the other [...] There is more to *think through* the richness of the images than in the coherence of a simple concept.[58]

Büttner's works, and the exhibitions that constitute their primary site of reception, do not claim to resolve these problems. In 1994 the art historian and HIV/AIDS activist Simon Watney wrote that the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–96) refuses to 'retreat into didacticism'. Watney continued: 'They are works which try to take us seriously as spectators, and which encourage us to make as many associative connections as we like in relation to the materials assembled before us, as well as in relation to previous works'.[59] This holds true for Büttner too. Just as Watney had recourse to the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory in responding to the HIV/AIDS crisis and its cruelties, so Büttner has consistently embraced the difficulty of working with the language of Catholicism within a discursive landscape hostile – often in a doxic way – to serious consideration of theology and religion.[60] What follows is a reading of Büttner's exhibitions that mines resources that are therefore unfamiliar to contemporary art discourse: ideas concerning the form of the parable. It is hoped that the saturation of Büttner's work in Christian thought justifies this, despite its strangeness.

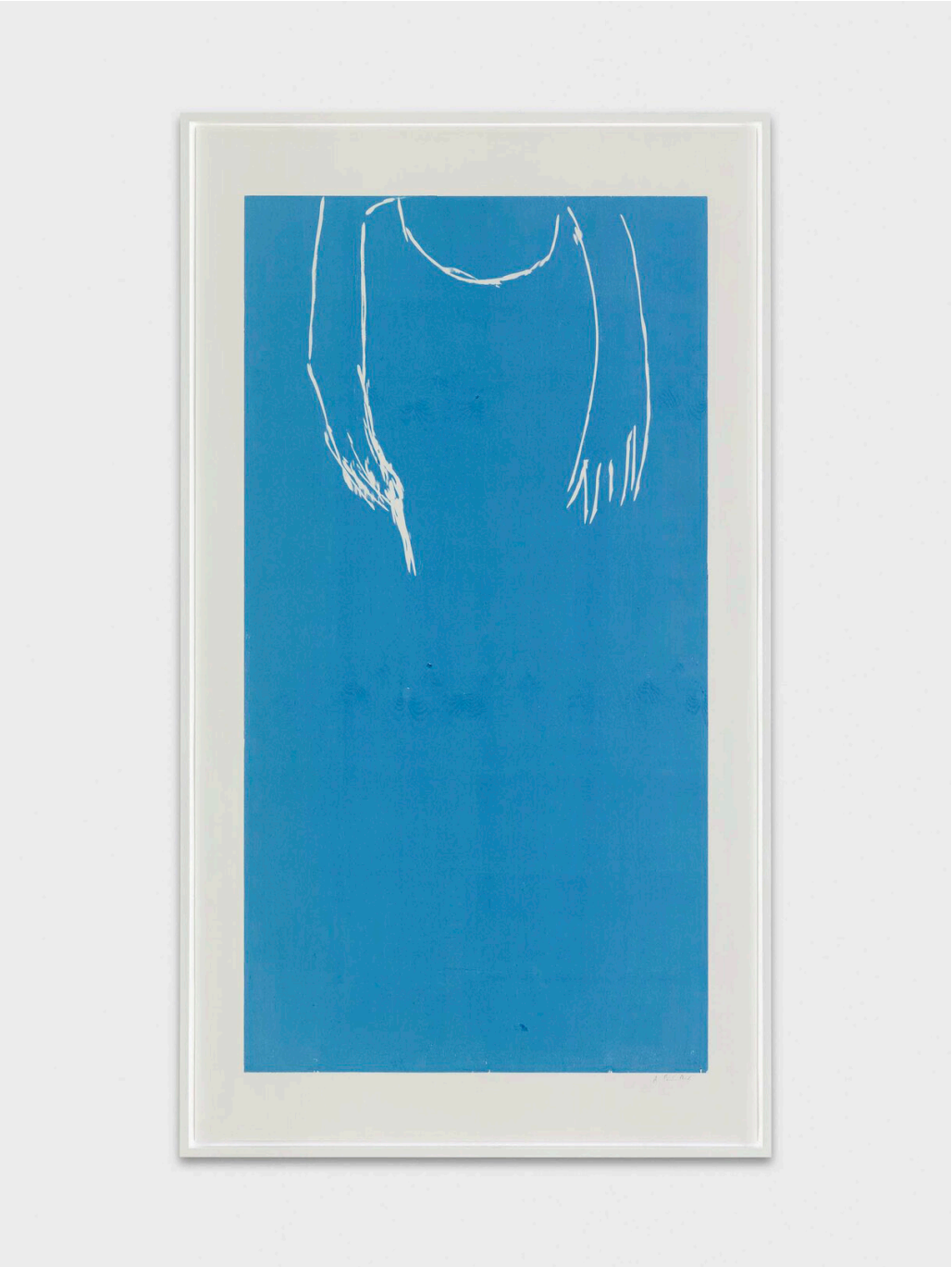


FIG. 18 *Erntender (Harvesting)*, by Andrea Büttner. 2021. Woodcut on paper, 208 by 115 cm. (sheet). (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph Annik Wetter).

The kinds of associative connections that viewers make between works in exhibitions, while never fully determined, are nevertheless intentionally shaped by the work of curation.[61] Exhibitions have a kind of ductus, whereby the rhythm of the architecture, the various design elements such as lighting and wall colour, and the pacing and orchestration of shifting sightlines all contribute to the way in which the arrangement of the exhibited works comes across.[62] Typically, Büttner’s solo presentations involve a fairly delimited set of key concerns: Franciscan traditions, late modernism, fabric and social care; begging, technology, (in)visibility and shame; labour, commodification and claims for the handmade. These concerns are pursued with explicit reference to art-historical models and with the use of everyday objects and figures: fabrics, tables, common foods, smartphones and beggars on the street. Repetition and symmetry cultivate and reinforce associations, with parallels drawn across different moments in the presentations.



FIG. 19 *Untitled*, by Andrea Büttner. 2020. Pencil on paper, 29.5 by 19.6 cm. (sheet). (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist; photograph Philippe De Gobert).

This is as much formal and aesthetic as it is iconographical. For example, at the Kunstmuseum Basel the first work encountered downstairs at the Gegenwart was a small pencil drawing of a figure hanging in an ambiguous way **FIG. 19**. Its source is a woodcut depicting St Bernard’s vision of the Crucifixion, although this was not declared, allowing the prominent hands and arms of this figure to resonate more openly with those of the *Harvester* woodcuts. At the Whitechapel Gallery, the exhibition was bookended by tables: one displaying

Büttner's photographs, covered in a red tablecloth, and the other, her large-scale woodcut **FIG. 20**. In Vienna, the *Beggar* prints and *Phone Etchings* dominated, but motifs of hands and fingers were further emphasised in *Hand* (2015), painted on a side window, pointing to the garden beyond. Such rhymes and repetitions give consistency amid formal and material variety.

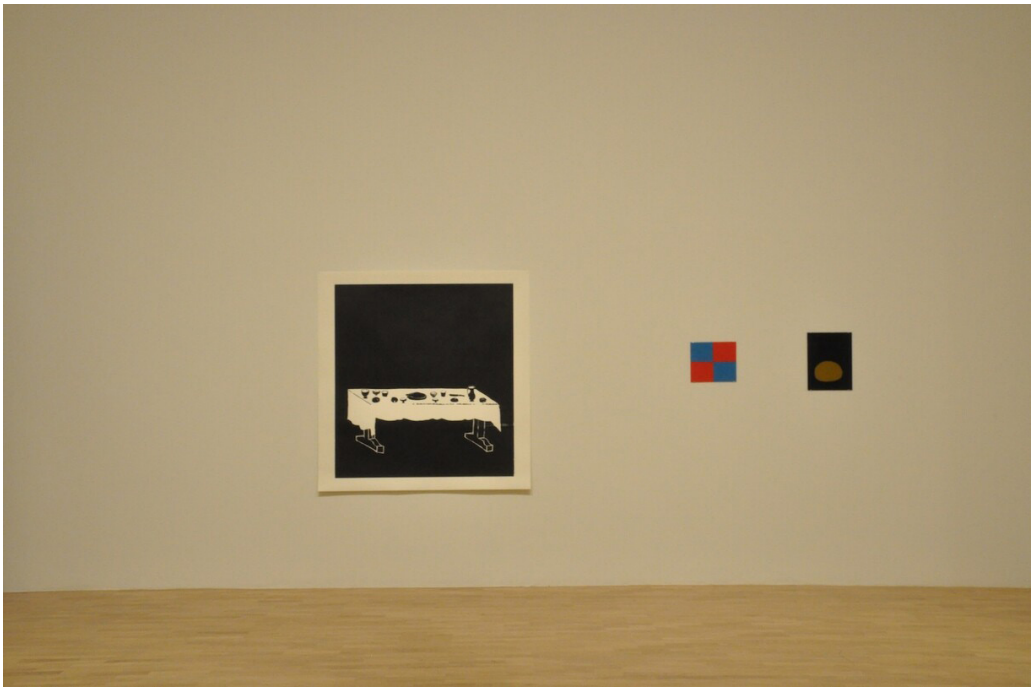


FIG. 20 Installation view of *Andrea Büttner: The Poverty of Riches* at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2011. (© Andrea Büttner and DACS, London; courtesy the artist and Whitechapel Gallery, London).

In these and other respects, Büttner's exhibitions are like parables. There is, of course, much debate about the nature of this category of religious text. In 1935 C.H. Dodd offered a classic definition: 'At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought'.[63] In a major study, the theologian Klyne Snodgrass advanced a list of characteristics of Jesus' parables. Parables are, he observes, brief, even terse, excluding unnecessary details and most often involving anonymous characters. They are marked by simplicity and symmetry, using contrasts, repetitions and parallels. Parables focus mainly on human action, and involve largely familiar types. They are fictional descriptions drawn from everyday life and, crucially, told within a context – unlike fables – so they are 'framed on the reality they seek to show'.[64] These stories frequently borrow from and allude to older texts, especially the Old Testament, and so, like Büttner's work, involve many borrowings. They are often found in pairs or larger groups, serving to explore or strengthen their themes; and, lastly, they are told to be engaging, to elicit thought and to require decision, seeking to reorientate thought and behaviour.[65]

Büttner is fully committed to reception aesthetics and does not attempt to control the meanings or experiences that arise from her work. She is as happy to loosen her grip over the process of reception as she is over aspects of production – for example, when she handed over a video camera to a closed community of nuns to make *Little Works* (2005). And yet, letting control fall away is not the same as relinquishing intent. The coherence and consistency of her concerns over the last twenty years is testament to a governing will to respond to a range of problems in contemporary public life: of poverty, labour relations and wealth inequality; of religion and the fate of its traditions and forms of life; of shame, visibility and interiority; of bourgeois consumption patterns, organic lifestyles and craft; of the status and potential of art, and the bearing of historical experience upon the present. Yet, as the woodcuts make clear, Büttner's art, like parables, is no mere vehicle for discursive content.[66] The bold, unitary images of the woodcuts have an emblematic force, lending wealth and dignity to 'poor' things. Surprising and hard to resolve, they are made under great pressure – of the press, the weight of history, the recognition of art's compromised predicament – yet they also rise, through their intelligence and tact, and through their refusal to bury art under the yoke it carries.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jessica Barker for her comments on earlier drafts, to Alanna Gedgaudas for her help, to Jonathan Anderson for his encouraging feedback and especially to Andrea Büttner for her generosity in making time to speak with me over the last few years.

Footnotes

1. See A. Moshayedi: 'The woodcut revisited', Parkett 97 (2015), pp.46–51.

2. Büttner began making woodcuts in the 1990s while at art school in Berlin, yet they held an important place in her childhood as there was a print studio at the convent school she attended, established by HAP Grieshaber. For a recent account of Büttner's woodcuts, focused on the work relating to medieval and Franciscan material, see A. Kumler: 'Disorientations', in J. Helfenstein et al., eds: exh. cat. Andrea Büttner, Basel (Kunstmuseum) and Düsseldorf (Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen) 2023–24, pp.238–56.

3. R.W. Scribner: For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation, Oxford and New York 1994, doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198203261.001.0001.

4. There are exceptions of large-scale woodcuts – by Sherrie Levine, Helen Frankenthaler and Christane Baumgartner, for example. See J.L. Roberts: Contact: Art and the Pull of Print, Princeton 2024.

5. Andrea Büttner, in conversation with the present author, 2nd March 2023.

6. There would of course be other different stories to tell with regard to the role of the woodcut in East Asian and African contexts, for example.

7. See D. Evans, ed.: Appropriation, Cambridge MA 2009.

8. See, for example, F. Meade and A. Büttner: 'There are many ways to destroy a piano', Walker Art Center (2nd March 2016), available at walkerart.org/reader/andrea-buettner-piano-destructions, accessed 22nd October 2026.

9. 'When I see a work of art or read a book I really like, I don't feel the need to do something better in a competitive way. It is rather that I want to find forms where I can let efforts to be original or inventive fall down, and then take my own process of reception as something productive. Reading is already an act of production. It is like reading a text you love and saying "yes". I have to find answers to the question "how can I be productive and be adequate to this 'yes' I find in myself?"', Andrea Büttner, quoted from G. Leung: 'Artists at work: Andrea Büttner', Afterall (25th May 2010), available at afterall.org/article/artists.at.workandreabttner, accessed 22nd October 2026.

10. Büttner's first exhibitions featured works involving convent communities, and Little Works (2005), a video made in collaboration with a closed community of Carmelite nuns in London, has become emblematic. It was on a residency in Italy that Büttner first met the Little Sisters of Jesus, their general fraternity housed at Tre Fontane, Rome, and with whom she worked to make the video Little Sisters: Lunapark, Ostia (2012), first shown at dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012.

11. While making the woodcuts in 2010, Büttner was also looking towards the 29th São Paulo Biennial, in which she had been invited to participate. She was aware of the way Hélio Oiticica had used fabrics in his Parangolés and Penetrables, and had seen the 2007 Tate retrospective of Oiticica's work. Andrea Büttner, in conversation with the present author, 28th July 2026.

12. Andrea Büttner, quoted from a conversation with Bina von Stauffenberg in the exhibition booklet published to accompany Andrea Büttner: The Poverty of Riches (2011–12) at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, and the Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia (hereafter The Poverty of Riches), pp.13–20, at p.16.

13. See K.B. Wolf: The Poverty of Riches: St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered, New York 2003, doi.org/10.1093/0195158083.001.0001.

14. See J.A. Anderson: 'Antihumanism, Christian humanism, and contemporary art: a meditation on the artworks of Andrea Büttner', Modern Theology (17th August 2026), doi.org/10.1111/moth.70139.

15. A. Cortina: Aporophobia: Why We Reject the Poor Instead of Helping Them, transl. A.N. West, Princeton 2022, doi.org/10.1515/9780691239422.

16. See A. Büttner: Shame, London 2020.

17. J. Grotowski: Towards a Poor Theatre, London 2002, pp.15–25.

18. See D. Jackson: 'Introduction: the origins and uses of money', in D. Wolfthal, ed.: Medieval Money: Merchants and Morality, New York 2023, esp. p.11.

19. See, for example, Hiroko Ikegami: The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art, Cambridge MA 2010, pp.17–55.

20. The Poverty of Riches, op. cit. (note 12), pp.24 and 27.

21. Andrea Büttner, quoted from The Poverty of Riches, op. cit. (note 12), p.13.

22. See, for example, M. O'Hara: Austerity Bites, 10 Years On, Bristol 2024.

23. A thirteenth was added to the presentation at the Collezione Maramotti.

24. Embodied, for example, in the activities of Paulo Evaristo Arns, the Franciscan archbishop of São Paulo from 1970 to 1998.

25. Wolf, op. cit. (note 13), pp.78–79.

26. Ibid., p.20.

27. Ibid., p.24, emphasis in original.

28. See J. Kaye: Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought, Cambridge 1998, doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511496523; and G. Agamben: The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life, transl. A. Kotsko, Stanford 2013.

29. Büttner has described the combination of blue and red, which is often in her exhibitions, in terms of both children's clothes and the fashion of Marc Jacobs, noting that there is 'something very primary and unrefined about it [...] a rejection of elegance', in conversation with the present author, 28th July 2026.

30. Büttner, op. cit. (note 16), p.14.

31. Andrea Büttner, quoted from J. Halpert: 'Andrea Büttner on her iconographies of poverty', Artforum (23rd October 2018), available at artforum.com/columns/andrea-bttner-on-her-iconographies-of-poverty-240912, accessed 23rd October 2026.

32. The discussion of the Beggar works in this article is indebted to Jonathan Anderson's recent analysis, see Anderson, op. cit. (note 14).

33. Kumler, op. cit. (note 2), pp.239–41.

34. Anderson, op. cit. (note 14), pp.18–20.

35. In the gap between the temporary walls and the glass windows, Büttner placed the remnants of the packing and construction materials used to install the show.

36. J. van Dyke: 'Ernst Barlach and the conservative revolution', German Studies Review 36 (2013), pp.281–305, at p.284, doi.org/10.1353/gsr.2013.0093.

37. See P. Paret: An Artist Against the Third Reich: Ernst Barlach, 1933–38, Cambridge 2003, pp.36–48.

38. See J. Petropoulos: Artists Under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany, New Haven 2014, p.148.

39. Van Dyke, op. cit. (note 36), p.300. Büttner's own scepticism towards Barlach is indicated by her decision to decline the invitation to participate in a major retrospective of his work organised by the Albertinum, Dresden, in 2020.

40. Andrea Büttner, quoted from 'Chance encounters IV: Andrea Büttner', Loewe Foundation (2018), available at youtube.com/watch?v=sW2HQ8qfzNU, accessed 23rd October 2026.

41. Mark Rothko, quoted in B. Fer: The Infinite Line: Remaking Art after Modernism, New Haven 2004, p.6.

42. Ibid., p.10.

43. 'For Kelly', Briony Fer has written, 'it was like a "transfer": a transfer from what is seen in the everyday', registering 'the fragmentary condition of perception', Fer, op. cit. (note 41), pp.5 and 8.footnote 43
44. A. Büttner: Beggars, London 2018, p.11.

45. Büttner, op. cit. (note 16), pp.14–15.

46. Büttner, op. cit. (note 16), p.14. Büttner developed her explicit engagement with shame in her 2023 wall-based work, Schamstrafen (Shame Punishments), first presented at Basel. See also D. Keen: Shame: The Politics and Power of an Emotion, Princeton 2023.

47. Discussing our distance from the projects of such modernist artists as Ellsworth Kelly and Henri Matisse, Andrea Büttner comments, 'they were so confident in art, and I'm not so confident in art anymore – I can't be. That art is good in itself, that art is enough, that art is valuable. It's difficult for me to have this confidence, but I don't reject it. If someone would speak from this place of confidence now, I wouldn't say it's not possible; I'd be happy for it and would take encouragement from it. I want to somehow go to that place', in conversation with the present author, 28th July 2026.

48. See C.P. Heuer: '"Libri Vagatorum" and the arts of difficulty', in Büttner, op. cit. (note 44), pp.281–92.

49. See S. Dickey: 'Begging for attention: the artful context of Rembrandt's etching "Beggar Seated on a Bank"', Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art 5, no.2 (2013), doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2013.5.2.8.

50. Andrea Büttner, op. cit. (note 5). See also R.W. Baldwin: '"On earth we are beggars, as Christ himself was": the Protestant background of Rembrandt's imagery of poverty, disability, and begging', Konsthistorisk tidskrift 54 (1985), pp.122–35, doi.org/10.1080/00233608508604082.

51. The work came in the wake of Büttner's sustained interrogation of both progressive political claims for craft practices and middle-class consumerist attachments to the handmade, as embodied in her What is so terrible about craft? / Die Produkte der menschlichen Hand (2019), which was installed on the opposite side of the same gallery at the Gegenwart.

52. See A. Rottmann: 'Notes on Andrea Büttner's (il)legitimate art', in Helfenstein et al., eds, op. cit. (note 2), pp.133–42; and B. Dogramaci: 'Close to the field: the artistic portrait of seasonal workers in Germany', Journal of Migration Research 2, no.2 (September 2022), doi.org/10.48439/zmf.165.footnote 52
53. Andrea Büttner, in conversation with the present author, 9th June 2023.

54. S. Collini: 'Introduction', in idem, ed.: George Orwell: Selected Essays, Oxford 2021, pp.vii–xxvi, at p.xxvi.

55. See, for example, E. Leslie: 'Anti-Fascism, anti-art, doubt and despair', Third Text 33 (2019), pp.293–313, doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2019.1627053.

56. This phrase is borrowed from J. Longenbach: The Resistance to Poetry, Chicago 2004, p.6 and passim.

57. Perhaps the most philosophically sophisticated elaboration of this problem is still Theodor W. Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, transl. R. Hullot-Kentor, London 1997.

58. P. Ricoeur: 'Listening to the parables of Jesus', in C.E. Reagan and D. Stewart, eds: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work, Boston 1978, pp.239–45, at p.242, emphasis in original.

59. S. Watney: 'In purgatory: the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres', in J. Ault, ed.: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Göttingen 2006, pp.333–47, at p.345.

60. See J.A. Anderson: The Invisibility of Religion in Contemporary Art, Notre Dame IN 2025, doi.org/10.1353/book.134817.

61. Büttner worked primarily with Bina von Stauffenberg at the Whitechapel Gallery, with Lucas Gehrmann in Vienna and with Maja Wismer in Basel.

62. See M. Carruthers: 'The concept of "ductus", or journeying through a work of art', in idem, ed.: Rhetoric

Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages, Cambridge 2010, pp.190–213.

63. C.H. Dodd: The Parables of the Kingdom, London 1935, p.16. Büttner’s film works, which have simple narrative structures, might themselves be seen as akin to parables, especially Little Works (2005), Little Sisters: Lunapark, Ostia (2012) and Karmel Dachau (2019/2023).

64. K.R. Snodgrass: Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus, Grand Rapids 2018, p.20.

65. Snodgrass, ibid., affirms that they are also ‘theocentric’, that they tell about ‘God and his kingdom’. The extent to which this is relevant to Büttner’s work is an open question, an openness that she herself has not sought to close down. See ‘Andrea Büttner and Elizabeth Price: an exchange’, in J. Barker and E. Krčma: exh. cat. Living by the Rule: Contemporary Art and the Medieval Monastery, Norwich (Sainsbury Centre) 2026, pp.151–58, reviewed by Alexandra Gajewski and Kathryn Lloyd in THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE, 168 (2026), pp.919–21.

66. See Ricoeur, op. cit. (note 58); and C. Menke: ‘Andrea Büttner’s aesthetics’, Parkett 97 (2015), pp.40–45.