

About Sarah Szczesny

Sarah Szczesny (b. 1979) is a German visual artist based in Cologne whose practice spans painting, collage, video, and performance. Trained at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where she graduated in 2009 as a Meisterschülerin of Professor Rosemarie Trockel, her work has since developed into a distinctive exploration of fragmentation, distortion, and reassembly. Szczesny dissects and recombines images, sounds, and moving sequences, stretching the conventions of painting through the use of loops, GIF techniques, and sound effects. In doing so, she situates painting within a broader field of movement, animation, and pop-cultural reference, often drawing on the visual language of cartoons.

Her practice moves fluidly between the studio and collaborative formats. Since 2016, she has worked closely with musician and producer Lena Willikens on Phantom Kino Ballett, an ongoing body of work that merges performance, video, installation, and sound into immersive audiovisual experiences. Together, they create environments where fragments of film, music, and visual art collide, giving form to surreal, dream-like atmospheres that resist linear narration.

Collaboration also shapes Szczesny's publishing and curatorial work. With artist Alexander Wissel, she initiated Cabinet of Kaput (2016), a series for Kaput – Magazin für Insolvenz & Pop, which invited international artists to contribute works made specifically for an online context. The project questioned how artistic production circulates outside established institutions, cultivating an open, experimental platform for exchange and visibility.

Her work has been presented widely in Germany and abroad, including solo and group exhibitions at institutions such as Kunstverein Düsseldorf, Kunstverein Aachen, Ludlow 38 (New York), Galerie Deborah Schamoni (Munich), Deichtorhallen Hamburg, and O-Town House (Los Angeles). More recent solo presentations include Pastel Succubus at Neuer Aachener Kunstverein (2019), Sarah Loses Out Again (You Ought to be in Pictures) at Fuhrwerkswaage, Cologne (2023), and Painting will need to do all sorts of crazy wonderful things, you know, so that it doesn't restrict me at artothek, Cologne (2025). Her collaborative performances with Willikens have appeared at venues such as Volksbühne Berlin, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, the Issue Project Room in New York, and the Meakusma Festival in Eupen.

Residencies and fellowships have also played a key role in her trajectory, from early support through the Kunststiftung NRW (2006) and Kölischer Kunstverein (2012) to international residencies at Villa Kamogawa in Kyoto (2017), Villa Aurora in Los Angeles (2021), and most recently at CCA Andratx and Istanbul in 2024. These encounters have deepened her investigation of transnational exchange, sonic and visual experimentation, and the porousness of artistic disciplines.

Since 2021, Szczesny has also been teaching Visual Methods at IMM (Klang und Realität), Robert-Schuman-Schule Düsseldorf, bringing her interdisciplinary approach into pedagogy.

Across all these strands, her work is guided by a restless questioning of how images move, fracture, and recombine in contemporary culture. Whether in paintings that pulse with cartoon-like energy, videos animated through loops and distortions, or collaborative environments that immerse audiences in sound and vision, Szczesny's practice opens spaces where the boundaries of art's mediums are stretched, unsettled, and reimaged.



Sarah Szczesny.



Sarah Szczesny. Taler Dip Fall 7, 2022

CV

Education

2009
Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany

Exhibitions (Selection)

- 2025
The Seven Year Itch, O-Town House, Los Angeles (Gruppenausstellung)
Painting will need to do all sorts of crazy wonderful things, you know, so that it doesn't restrict me, artothek, Köln (Einzelausstellung)
Cabinet of Smokes and Burns, CCA Andratx, Andratx (Einzelausstellung)
Alphabet of Daisy, Viktoria 8, Karlsruhe (Einzelausstellung)
- 2024
Joined at the bricks, Mauer, Köln (Gruppenausstellung)
Cabinet of Kaput, KM Galerie, Berlin (Gruppenausstellung)
- 2023
The Last Great Painting, Martos Gallery, New York (Gruppenausstellung)
Sarah Loses Out Again (You Ought to be in Pictures), Fuhrwerkswaage, Köln (Einzelausstellung)
- 2022
Räume mit Aussicht, Thomas Mann Villa Aurora Ausstellung, Silent Green, Berlin (Gruppenausstellung)
The exhibition formerly known as Trace Image, Galerie Deborah Schamoni, München (Gruppenausstellung)
Sarah Loses Out (You Ought to be in Pictures), O-Town House, Los Angeles (Einzelausstellung)
Strike a Pose, K21, Düsseldorf (Gruppenausstellung)
Villa Kamogawa – Verbindungsstücke, Galerie CLB, Berlin (Gruppenausstellung)
- 2021
In Abeyance, Gewölbe, Köln
To feel like a dirty snake is not good (mit Lena Willikens), JUBG, Köln (Einzelausstellung)
- 2020
Identikit Akarden Transkript (Performance mit Lena Willikens), Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt (Performance)
- 2019
Pastel Succubus, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein (Einzelausstellung)
Chambers of Phantom Kino Ballett (mit Lena Willikens), Neuer Aachener Kunstverein (Einzelausstellung)
Phantom Kino Ballett (mit Lena Willikens), Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (Einzelausstellung)
Hyper, Hyper (mit Lena Willikens), Deichtorhallen, Hamburg
Geld und Psyche, Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg
- 2018
Identikit Transcript, an interior by Sarah Szczesny and Lena Willikens, Galerie PCP, Paris (Einzelausstellung)
Akademie, Kunst im Tunnel, Düsseldorf
- 2017
The Applicant (Performance mit Lena Willikens), Stüdyo, Köln
Phantom Kino Ballett (Performance mit Lena Willikens), Issue Project Room, New York
- 2016
Guilty Pleasures, Marmory Show III, Galerie Deborah Schamoni, München
- 2014
Who Framed Sarah Szczesny?, MINI/Goethe-Institut Curatorial Residencies, Ludlow 38, New York (Einzelausstellung)

CV

2013

Plait Moment (13:38:31,1) (mit Hella Gerlach), Clockwork Gallery, Berlin

2012

Jahresgabenausstellung, Kölnischer Kunstverein

Single Club (mit Gerda Scheepers), Düsseldorf

An den Rändern der Kunst, MAP Projekte, Düsseldorf

2011

Monad Fun, Center, Berlin (Einzelausstellung)

Vor Gott ist alle Kunst Scheiße, Boutique, Köln

2010

Drawing Coats And Hindered Kindreds, Oktober, Düsseldorf

I Feel Unreal, Kunstraum am Schauplatz, Wien

Milkwood, Galerie Charlotte Desaga, Köln

Dearie Does The Do Not Care, Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg

2009

Cabin Fever Press, Galerie Cinzia Friedlaender, Berlin (Einzelausstellung)

My Nephews Of The Ostrich, Bar Ornella, Köln (Einzelausstellung)

2006

Terrain Vague, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn

Kunst:Dialoge, Museum Ludwig, Köln

2005

Gründung des Ausstellungsraumes Bar Ornella, Köln

Regarding Düsseldorf, Kunstverein 701, Düsseldorf