

V A I

RIA

TERESA
FEODOROWNA
RIES
STUDIES



A...kademie der bildenden Künste Wien
Exhibit Studio

Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise

9 Oct–16 Nov 2021

"How beautiful it would be if the fragrance
of flowers had killed me in my sleep."

Teresa Feodorowna Ries, March 2, 1951, Lugano-Paradiso

How can an exhibition show that forgetting is fabricated? Forgetting is history of injustice that does not pass. *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* is dedicated to the life and work by the Jewish sculptor Teresa Feodorowna Ries (1866–1956). She was one of the few artists of her time whose works were shown in the Vienna Secession, the Venice Biennale and the Glass Palace in Munich. Ries would have liked her work to be appreciated at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna,

where she studied. This recognition was never granted to her during her lifetime.

Artist Valerie Habsburg developed the concept of *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* based on her and Anka Leśniak's extensive research on Ries, which began with the rediscovery of her estate in 2018. With contributions by Anna Bochkova, Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Mika Aya Azagi, Judith Augustinovič, and Sami Nagasaki, the exhibition raises awareness that forgetting has its effects and that responsibility must be taken for the consequences of forgetting.

Curator: Valerie Habsburg

Curatorial support: Elke Krasny

Artists: Judith Augustinovič, Mika Aya Azagi, Anna Bochkova, Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Sami Nagasaki

Film: Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Karl Martin Pold

Exhibition design: Judith Augustinovič

Opening

Fri, 8 Oct 2021, 7 pm

Exhibit Studio

Schillerplatz 3, 1010 Vienna

Opening Times

Daily except Monday 10 am–6 pm

· *Free entry*

Program for the exhibition and further
information at www.akbild.ac.at

Mediapartner **DERSTANDARD**

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**CURATORIAL
REFLECTIONS
ABOUT
*UN PARADISO
AMARO / BITTER
PARADISE*
by Valerie
HABSBURG**



■ The exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* took place on the occasion of the reopening of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna at Schillerplatz after more than four years of renovation. 2021 was also the year in which women were officially admitted to study at the Academy for hundred years. The ceremonial opening of the old building and the re-entry of the students was also the occasion for further celebrations and exhibitions. In total, there were 4 exhibitions that took place in parallel, whereby I would like to mention the exhibition *Hungry of Time* here, as it had a link to the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*. In this exhibition, the historical art collection of the Academy was

contrasted and presented with contemporary art in the rooms of the Picture Gallery by the Indian curator trio Raqs Media Collective. From the very extensive collection, a photograph of *The Witch* by Teresa Feodorowna Ries was chosen from the archive, along with many other works. Until this date, however, this one photograph of *The Witch* in the Academy's Archive was not really known. This photograph was taken with a large format camera and is of exceptional quality. It shows the sculpture of *The Witch* before all the suffering and destruction she experienced. On the basis of this photograph, insights into the lost hand and other damages can be gained for the first time. (This photo will be discussed in detail later on).

Curatorial Statement of Valerie

Habsburg (from the booklet

accompanying the exhibition

Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter

Paradise)

Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise confronts life in paradise with the pain of the forever present past. Teresa Feodorowna Ries spent the last years of her life in the beautiful Paradiso of Lugano. This place was her exile where she could try to find peace after all her terrible experiences. The entry in the guest book of the Casa S. Birgitta on August 25, 1942, gives only a dark inkling: "After my heavy loss, I found peace and consolation here. Heartfelt thanks. F. Ries."

The artist spent the last years of her life in a place where the world had seemingly not come apart at the seams, where a lake, nestled in a peaceful landscape, gently laps against its shores, and nature breathed life into her. And yet: she could not forget. Her memories almost petrified her; her hands were sealed. Countless letters abound with hints at her struggle to ascertain the whereabouts

of her works, which she considered her children. Words, captured on paper, are what remains. They reveal the ghosts of the past. Memory also resides in paradise; it is the shadow of the golden shine. Mercilessly, the golden mirror of the present shows the past.

The grave of a whole life reveals itself. A jumble of stones, broken forever. The shards of a sunken world are the foundation on which this paradise is built.

"*Death* and *Lucifer* are smashed, that's for sure. I feel particularly sorry for *Lucifer*. I received the Golden Medal for it in the Künstlerhaus after all - as the only lady in Austria."

June 22, 1949

Stories haunt you until you embark on a quest. Found stones are picked up. What emerges is a building, a sculpture, the spirit captured therein. The spirit of an artist, of a time that is no more and yet teaches us so much that is important for the present.

"... and yet I am doing well compared to five million people."

February 4, 1956

The title of the exhibition, *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*, stands for bitterness and pain, beauty and suffering, life and death. Gold as a color and material refers to the supposed splendor of the past. Gold as jewelry, as a symbol of beauty - yet toxic nevertheless. The toxicity of capitalism and the toxicity of the past. Living on the damaged Earth, toxic yesterday held in memory, makes one wonder about the possibility of preserving the past of a generation in the present generation. Is it possible to retrieve the memory's store and continue writing? Can history be shown at all without looking through the glass of the present? The true price of gold is doubtful and relentless. Its value is determined not only by the past but also by the daily influences of the present. Gold represents the torment (of the workers in the mines) and merciless capitalism. "I have great difficulties breathing. Whenever I cough, my chest feels very dry. Like there is dust in my lungs. I want to get rid of it. But it doesn't come out." (Miner in South Africa, deutschlandfunk.de)

You can never get rid of this dust, nor of that of the past. It covers the gold that shines in the present. Not everything can be weighed in gold - not even in art. In the exhibition, gold as a symbol of success, achievement, and triumph refers to all that is past, to forgotten successes, and to the highest of all virtues, love. Gold is one of the treasures in paradise, it cannot be assigned to any specific place. The Garden of Eden is a fenced terrain, and yet it is not clear where it is. However, the bitter paradise can be explored on foot, the fragrance of the past inhaled.

The works, building blocks of an existence, can speak when they are questioned. Silent stone becomes a narrator about time. Is paradise a palace, and is its foundation made of gold? Are the gates covered with dust and reveal themselves only to the seeker? And is not bitterness also of gold, born of suffering and pain? Is it not agony that makes gold shine? Memories blur in the ocean, the spirits drowned long ago.

Description of the exhibition

When you entered the exhibition, you were immediately greeted by the original sculpture of *The Witch* to the toilet at Walpurgis Night by Teresa Feodorowna Ries (TFR). The fact that we were allowed to show this monumental marble sculpture at and in the Academy was unique. Thanks to a loan from the Wien Museum, it was possible for this central work by TFR to remain in the rooms of the Academy. It seemed almost like coming home, as this was the starting point for TFR's idea for this sculpture at Schillerplatz.¹

In this building, over these stairs, TFR walked and describes very impressively in her autobiography how the thoughts about *The Witch* revealed themselves. It was one of her leading encounters with the Academy, the building and the architecture, the students and the ancient works of art in the building. This impression was overwhelming for her and equally overwhelming was becoming famous overnight with her work, *The Witch*. But this work was also torn apart in the newspapers - after all, only a woman could create such a grimace out of noble marble.²

On the free-standing wall directly behind the witch was the inscription "Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise" and a quotation from a letter written by the artist TFR on March 2, 1951. Written here in golden letters was: "How beautiful it would be if the scent of flowers had killed me in my sleep."³

Later, when it became known that a direct thread of *The Witch* led to the neighbouring rooms of the Gemäldegalerie to the exhibition *Hungry of Time* and the research on this photograph hanging on the wall there was immediately started, an almost mystical circumstance emerged. There was a comprehensive series of images of TFR's works in the photo collection of the Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings) at the Academy, and how these photographs came to the Academy could be proven precisely by this letter from 1951.

It can now be assumed that Teresa Feodorowna Ries would have liked to become an honorary member of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and for this reason and as proof of her

artistic work she sent these photographs to the Academy. Of course, women were very rare in the list of honorary members and a corresponding letter has unfortunately not been found to date.⁴

Opposite *The Witch* looking out of the Academy window was the work *Little Witch* by Anna Bochkova on a golden plinth made especially for this exhibition. These plinths were also located in the room behind the free-standing wall and the exhibition was presented on them.

The juxtaposition of *The Witch* and *The Little Witch* opened up a possibility of time, the time in between and a space. In this space, questions arise as to how the sculpture is dealt with today? What is the history of the witch in art and what does it tell us? How do contemporary artists interpret the witch and her story?

The text on the base of the marble sculpture was also intended to point to the way we deal with this witch, which has been severely damaged by the suffering of history and has now been restored. It was a text written by Felix Salten and a statement at the time about the artist's work. The curatorial decision to delete individual letters from this text as a reference to forgetting (being made), disappearance and erasure from history supported the possibilities of interpretation and contemplation by the visitors. The fact that this work, *The Witch*, has received the inscription with the reference to the questions of restitution for the first time in the entire history is also essential and of great significance here.⁵ In the exhibition where it was shown before, such an inscription was not yet present and it was thus another historical moment of the sculpture of *The Witch*.

On the back of the wall, the work *Kittel* by Judith Augustinovič was displayed and projected onto it with a slide projector, the original handwritten testament of TFR could be seen, felt and read for the first time. The smock, an artistic interpretation of the sculptor's working smock, the garment in which TFR depicted herself as an artist and sculptor in her portraits and was an important garment for her, became the presentation and projection surface of its wearer and her legacy.

Next to it in a column-like display case lay the original will bedded on a fabric with a floral print. The will presented itself here not legibly, but as an object. Likewise, in the booklet that accompanied the exhibition, the first page of the handwritten will was also right in the middle. The exhibition as a place for an opening of the will and space for possible readability was an important basic idea for the curatorial questions and the conception.

When you walked through the exhibition, you found the works of all the participating artists. They stood there like little islands. The *Witch's Spaces / Teresa Spaces* by Anna Bochkova spread out at the feet of the work *Kittel* and the showcase with the original will. Like little sentinels, they stood there and told about the history of TFR. Be it a house that dealt with life in exile, flight and loss or the witch's tower where being locked up was legible. But also non-existent things and dried flowers showed themselves to the viewer.

Directly against the wall, yet seemingly around the corner, was the work *Declaration* by Sami Nagasaki. A work, an object, that contains a line of an original handwritten letter from TFR, in which she gives advice to a student as a teacher. It is a document of TFR's concern to introduce other women to the possibility of sculpture. But Sami Nagasaki also deals here with questions of visibility, legibility and presentation. Framework conditions are deliberately deconstructed and place themselves in the way of the viewer, in the space and invite reflection.

One step further, on the right-hand side of the floor, was an installation with the video work *Skin / Stone* by Mika Aya Azagi, which deals with the material stone, being an artist, forgetting and transience, and also burial. Directly afterwards, but at a distance, the works *Three Faced Goddess* and *Unburied* by Mika Aya Azagi were projected onto the wall as an installation with two slide projectors and sound. The sound here, the dull rumbling or rolling of the stones, seemed almost meditative. This work also deals with the artist's personal connections to TFR and its history. But

it also recalls the fact that TFR has not received a gravestone to this day and that her grave in the Jewish cemetery in Lugano does not have a stone. But a stone that is of such great importance here.

The connection between body, earth and stone and the decay, the natural cycle and the doubts speak to the viewer.

Again one step further, almost around the corner, stood a white block of marble. Unhewn, not shaped and yet. It is a stone that was dedicated by the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in collaboration with Roland Kollnitz as a possible gravestone. This stone, which at first glance does not appear to have been worked, was nevertheless already shaped. The first sculptural traces came from the sculptor Ulrike Truger and the stone came from her studio stock, some of which she donated to the Academy's sculpture workshop. In the exhibition and as a first step towards the creation of a gravestone for TFR, TFR's poem "The Marble Block" was projected with a slide projector.⁶

It is also important to mention the fact that it was a conscious curatorial and artistic decision that was chosen for showing the photographed original materials from the archive - a photograph as image and document, as proof of existence and witness to the original.

A few steps further on, visitors could see the large-scale installation *The spell with scissors* by Anka Leśniak. Here, old scissors moved almost magically when the visitor moved, in front of the video work *The March for The Witch* projected onto the wall. The hands of the female sculptors, the students in the sculpture studios in the Prater from the Academy today, could be seen in this video. The sound is the rhythmic sounds of carving the stones, composed to a piece of music, the sound of the sculptors working while they carve the stone with the sculpting tools. Also as an island in the room are two old Hantarex screens, arranged into a column. On them are two video works *The Witch* and *The Reconstruction of The Witch* by Anka Leśniak, where she deals with questions around the sculpture of *The Witch* of TFR, the restoration, the Disappeared Hand and

a possibility of reconstructing this hand. Interviews with restorers, pictures of the red spray-painted and demolished witch, create a queasy feeling. What was done to *The Witch*?

At the end of this retrospective mental tour through this room of the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*, there is now a tall fragile narrow golden pedestal with the work *Book of Sculptures* by Valerie Habsburg. A book can be seen and touched, and can thus be felt, leafed through and palpated. An old wine-red velvet photo album with brass ornaments reveals a skeleton inside. The skeleton on which a hundred years ago there were other photos. Now they have disappeared, leaving holes and scars. On the individual skeletal sheets of the old photo album are black and white photographs of TFR's works that can be found and still exist today. These black and white photographs appear colorless, as a reference to yesterday and disappearance. But the gold and velvet point to a splendor that remains and a treasure, even if it seems almost bony and empty.⁷

Next to this work hangs on the wall the work *The Measurement of Time* by Valerie Habsburg. An acrylic glass box, its contents a black and white photo of a self-portrait of TFR with countless torn old analogue colour photographs. This self-portrait of Teresa is a historically important photograph, as it represents one of the first artistic self-portrayals and representations through photography - far ahead of many artists known today. The posture of TFR's hands opens up many possibilities of meaning and interpretation. The torn colour photographs - called snippets by Valerie Habsburg - stand for the pain of passing, forgetting and erasing, but also for working with memories, temporality and working with an archive in itself. Discarded memories manifest themselves in torn fragments to a new meaning and generate an image that is changeable.

A second location and showcase for the *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* exhibition was also the Director's Room in the Academy's library. This historic room was already the library director's room in TFR's time. It was here that the later director of the library, Hans Ankiewicz-Kleehofen, sat and copied TFR's letter of application - the first letter of application by a woman as professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 1931.⁸ Of course, it was not acted upon at the time and it disappeared into the archives until it was unearthed through research by Valerie Habsburg.

The library of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna is in possession of one of the world's last copies of TFR's autobiography *The Language of Stone*, published in 1928.

Texts, a video work on computer with the correspondence between TFR and Mark Twain, excerpts from other works by the participating artists in paper form and with code to scan and invite into the virtual space showed up as an installation on an old desk of the Academy. It is the workplace of artistic research, where the visitor could also take a seat and linger - whether to read, think or work. The original book *The Language of Stone* was also on the table on the occasion of this special event and could be looked at with one's own hands. Other working materials that gave insight into the research project and the TFR Archive were also on display.⁹ Like paperweights, but not suitable as such, were small models of the participating artists' works in the exhibition.

On the wall on the occasion of the exhibition was a large-format photograph of TFR's handwritten list of works from 1938, which she made shortly before her escape and the preservation, protection and donation of her works.¹⁰

This list of works, the writing of TFR and the traces that can be found here opened up many good conversations during the duration of the exhibition, and this workplace and space were also an important place for courses, lectures or even interviews about the project. The students

were thus able to be very close to all this and to feel the often invisible archive work. A beautiful aspect is that this large-format photo is still there today in this place on this wall and in this room. Traces inscribe themselves - in the building and stand for a possible tomorrow.

The exhibition was accompanied by the launch of the homepage <https://teresafeodorownaries.com/> and the Instagram presence [tfr_archive](#). Information, readings, archival material and interviews were also shown on the Academy's online platforms in the run-up to and during the exhibition. The participating artists, curators and curatorial support gave readings Gartenpalais Liechtenstein from TFR's autobiography *The Language of Stone* in the summer of 2021 and these *Lectures in the Garden* were recorded on film and shown online. The non-resident artists recorded their readings in Israel, Poland, Brazil and Italy. These small pieces can still be found online today and stand on their own and as a trace for the history that is now also inscribed in the virtual space.

Notes

¹ See in the autobiography *Die Sprache des Steines*, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library.

² Ibidem.

³ Letter from Teresa Feodorowna Ries, 2. März 1951, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ÖNB Sammlung von 4 Handschriften und alten Drucken, Autogr. 1121/14-2.

⁴ Bettina Henkel initiated the application for honorary membership of TFR at the Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna. The application was presented to the Senate and Valerie Habsburg gave a presentation. The Senate unanimously approved the application and forwarded it to the Rectorate.

⁵ https://www.wienmuseum.at/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/Restitutionsbericht_2019.pdf.

⁶ "Poem Marble Block" by Teresa Feodorowna Ries, TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg.

⁷ See also in the autobiography *Die Sprache des Steines*, p.11, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library.

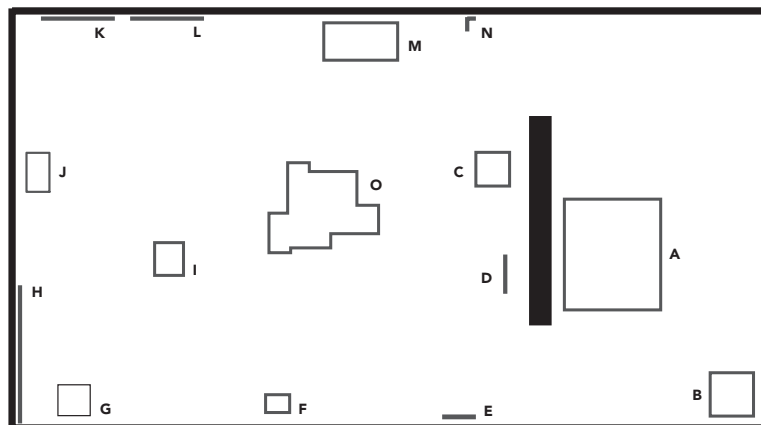
⁸ Verwaltungsakt 1931, GZ 963, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Archive.

⁹ Working materials on the desk were: documents of TFR Archive; poems by TFR; research documents and 10 writings by participating artists; sketches by Anna Bochkova; Ries_Twain by Sami Nagasaki; original book *Die Sprache des Steines* by TFR from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library; *Spezialschule - Zur Geschichte des Bildhauereigebäudes der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien*, Hrsg. Simone Bader, Katharina Hölzl, Jakob Krameritsch, Fabian Leitgeb, Emanuel Mauthé, Florian Mayr, Bianca Phos, Oktober 2019 by Schleebrügge Editor; exhibit models, prints of further related art works by Anka Leśniak; article published by Mika Aya Azagi in Israel, photographs with works from TFR.

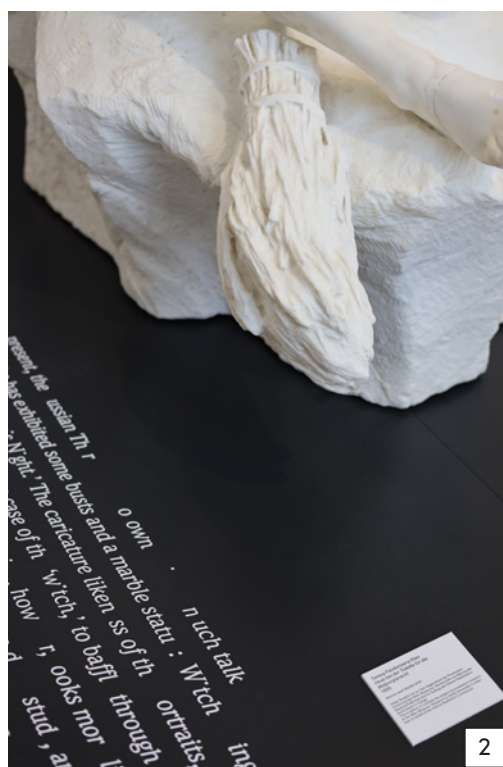
¹⁰ Original Testament of Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Pro Memoria (certified donation to the Israeli National Museum in Jerusalem), TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg.

Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise

Werke



- A Teresa Feodorowna Ries - *Hexe bei der Toilette für die Walpurgisnacht*, 1895, Courtesy Wien Museum
Das Podest ist von der Ausstellung *Im Schatten von Bambi. Felix Salten entdeckt die Wiener Moderne*, 15.10.2020 bis 19.09.2021, Wien Museum MUSA, übernommen.
Diese Skulptur ist zur Zeit Gegenstand der Provenienzforschung des Wien Museums. Recherchen zur Klärung der Besitzverhältnisse sind im Auftrag der Wiener Restitutionskommission in Gange.
- B Anna Bochkova - *Hexe*, 2020
- C Teresa Feodorowna Ries - *Handschriftliches Testament*, 1941, Courtesy TFR-Archive
- D Judith Augustinovič - *Kittel*, & Valerie Habsburg - *Projektion Testament TFR*, 2021
- E Valerie Habsburg - *Die Messung der Zeit*, 2019
- F - *Book of Sculptures*, 2020
- G Anka Leśniak - *The spell with scissors*, 2021
- H - *March for the Witch*, 2019
- I - *The Witch*, 2016
- *The Reconstruction of the Witch*, 2019
- J Valerie Habsburg - *Marmorblock*, 2021. Projektion des Gedichtes *Der Marmorblock* von TFR
- K Mika Aya Azagi - *unburied*, 2019
- L - *three-faced goddess*, 2019
- M - *skin/stone*, 2019
- N Sami Nagasaki - *Declaration*, 2021. Originalbrief von TFR
- O Anna Bochkova - *Witch's Spaces/Teresa Spaces*, 2021



1. Valerie Habsburg, *Book of Sculptures*, 2020. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

2. Exhibition View. Base of *The Hexe* with erased inscription and information on restitution. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

3. Exhibition View. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, *Hexe bei der Toilette für die Walpurgisnacht*. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



4. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel with Last Will*, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

5. Valerie Habsburg, *The Measurement of Time*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



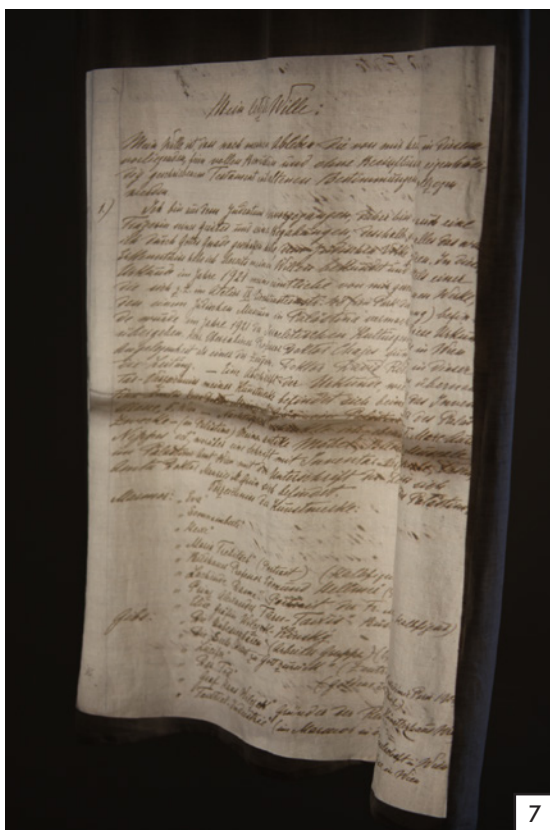


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6. Teresa Feodorowna Ries in Arbeitskittel. TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021

7. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel with Last Will* (detail), 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

8. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel with Last Will*, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



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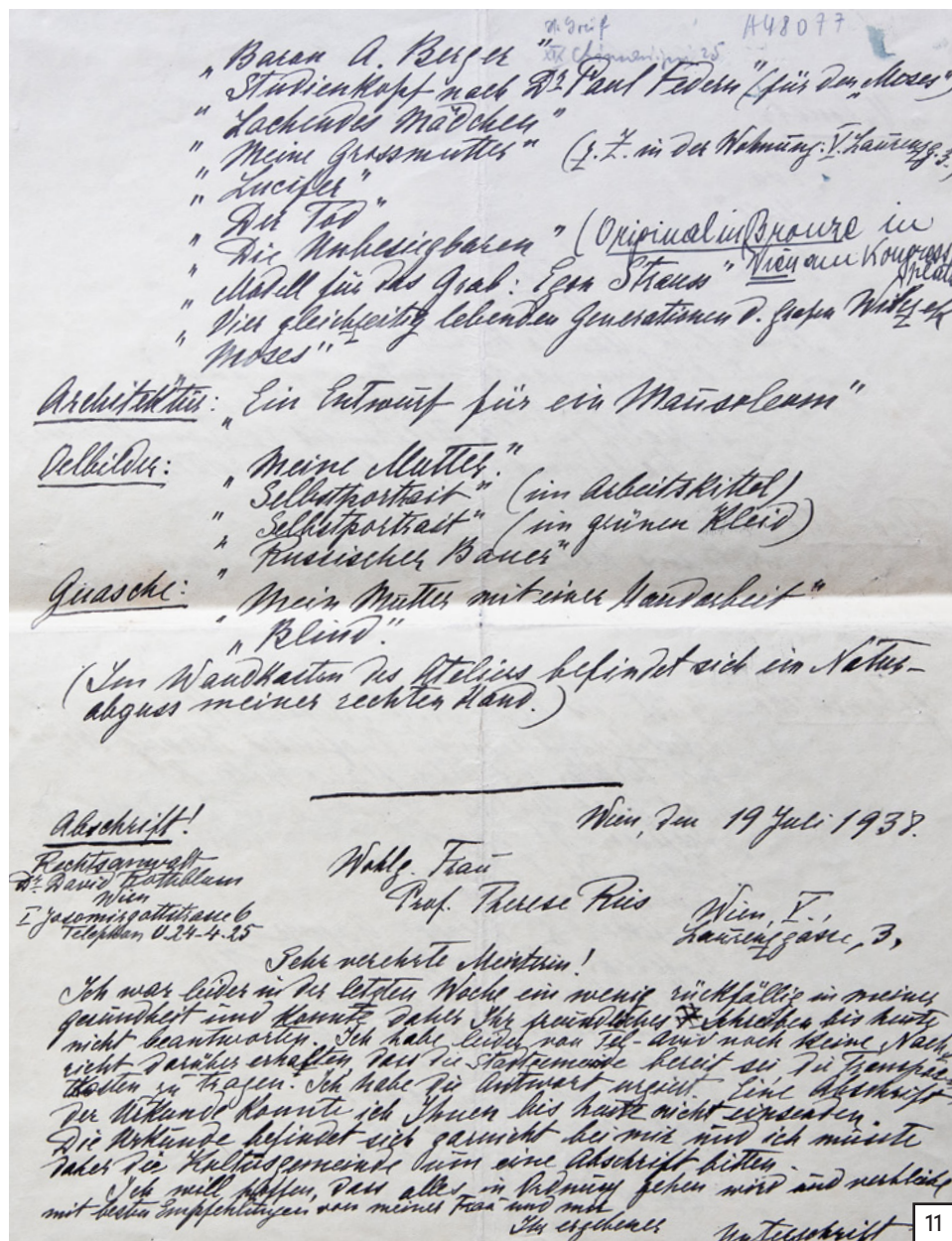
Mein letztes Wille:

Mein Wille ist, das nach meinem Ableben die von mir kreierte, in Vienna vorliegende, kein vollen Herrschaft und ohne Beeinflussung, eigenhändig geschriebenen Testament enthaltenen Bestimmungen, vollzogen werden.

- 1.) Ich bin aus dem Judentum hervorgegangen, daher bin ich auch eine Trägerin seiner geistes und seinen Begabungen. Deshalb soll alles das was ich durch Gottes Gnade geschaffen habe, dem jüdischen Volk gehören. In dieser Erkenntnis habe ich bereits meinen Willen bekundet und mittels einer Urkunde im Jahre 1921 meine sämtliche von mir geschaffenen Werke, die sich z. Z. im Hotel IX. (Lichtensteinstr. 40 im Park an Eingang) befinden einem jüdischen Museum in Palästina vermacht. Diese Urkunde wurde im Jahre 1921 der jüdischen Kulturkommission in Wien vorgelegt. Herr Abraham Pichler, Gutsbesitzer in dieser Angelegenheit als einer der Zeugen. Herr Hans Rothmann übernahm die Leitung. — Eine Abschrift der Urkunde, wie auch das Inventar-Verzeichnis meiner Kunstwerke befindet sich beim Leiter des Palästina-Amts Herrn Dr. Hans Pichler, Leiter des Palästina-Amts I. Maria-Käferstr. 5, Wien. — Nachträglich wurde ich ebenso für ähnliche Zwecke (in Palästina) meine antike Möbel, Bilder, Teppiche, Schmuck, Nippes etc. worüber eine Schrift mit Inventar-Verzeichnis sich im Palästina-Amt Wien mit der Unterschrift des Leiters des Palästina-Amts Herrn Hans Pichler befinden.

Verzeichnis der Kunstwerke:

- Marmor: „Eva“
 „Sonnambule“
 „Hexe“
 „Maria Tschekel“ (Portrait) (Kalkstein)
 „Bildhauer Professor Edmund Hellmer“ (Portrait, Kalkstein)
 „Lachende Waise“ (Portrait in F. M. H.)
 „Prinz Alexander Thurn-Taxis“ Bronze
 „Elise Gräfin Wilczek-Rosenberg“
 Gips: „Die Mahesinghatten“ (Arbeitsgruppe) (Gips in L. K. Wien 1920)
 „Die Seele kehrt zu Gott zurück“ (Zentralgruppe)
 „Lucifer“ (Gips, Medaille Künstlerhaus Wien)
 „Der Tod“
 „Hans Wilczek“ (Gips der Rettungsgesellschaft in Wien)
 „Textil-Industrie“ (im Marmor in der Reihe in Wien)



11. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Werkliste (page 2). TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021

12. Sami Nagasaki, Declaration, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

13. Exhibition View with Kittel and Witch's Spaces. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

14. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Werkliste (page 1). TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021

15. Anna Bochkova, Witch's Spaces, 2020. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



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16. Mika Aya Azagi, *Skin Stone*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

17. Anka Leśniak, *The Reconstruction of the Witch*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

18. Anka Leśniak, *The Spell with Scissors*, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

Anna Bochkova
Valerie Habsburg
Violetta Leitner
Anka Leśniak
Curated by Anka Leśniak

Lost Element. Re-construction of the Witch

Exhibition

**14 January
– 13 February 2022**

Opening hours
Opening
Finissage

Fri/ Sat 14:00–18:00 and by appointment
13 January 2022, 15:00–21:00
13 February 2022, 14:00–18:00



VBKÖ
Austrian Association of Women Artists
Maysedergasse 2/28, 1010 Vienna, Austria
www.vbkoe.org

 Bundesministerium
Kunst, Kultur,
öffentlicher Dienst und Sport

THE EXHIBITION
LOST ELEMENT /
RE-CONSTRUCTION
OF THE WITCH

CURATORIAL
REFLECTIONS

by Anka
LESNIAK



that are ready to fight for a better world —
past/present/future.¹

It wouldn't get any better opportunity to present the life and artistic output of Teresa Feodorowna Ries and an artistic investigation of the TFR Archive. The TFR Archive is a group of feminist artists who work with the forgotten legacy of Teresa F. Ries, an Austrian artist of multi-ethnic origin: Jewish-Russian-Hungarian, who had to flee from Vienna after 1938. A biography of the artist and her works, mostly lost, or destroyed have become a starting point for the research and works of a collective of contemporary artists who work with different aspects of Teresa F. Ries's life and art in contemporary contexts and discourses.

■ The exhibition *Lost Element / Re-construction of the Witch* was the next chapter of a collective artistic investigation on the life and damaged or lost artworks by Teresa Feodorowna Ries (1866-1956). It took place at the VBKÖ – The Association of Austrian Women* Artists – gallery. The show was one of the series of selected presentations in the open called "The Portal." The title referred symbolically to the iconic portal at the Maysedergasse, which, as the authors of the open call wrote in their statement, has been the sole remaining eyewitness of the VBKÖ's history since 1910 and has thus experienced a myriad of challenging, celebratory, historic, empowering, and entertaining moments.

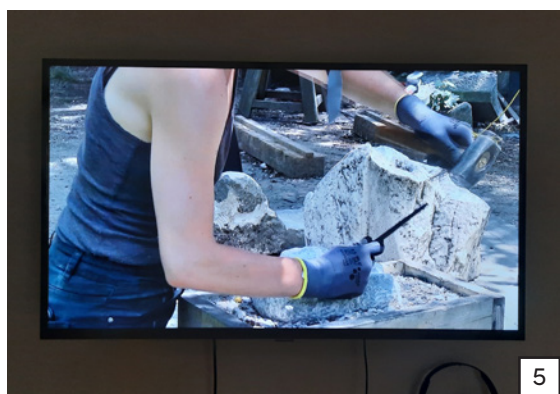
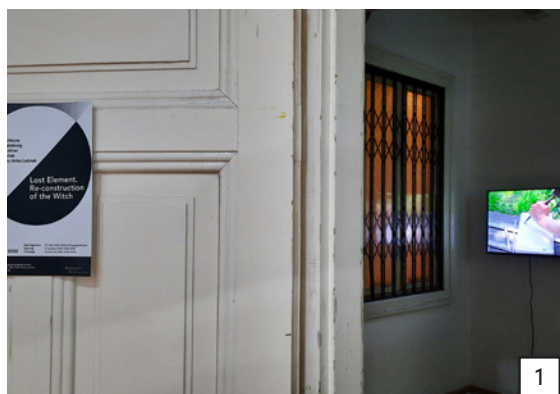
We define these golden doors as a portal, a starting point, a threshold, a wormhole, or a gateway. It stands for new beginnings, time and space travel, change, access, virtual realities, gatekeeping, role play, transformation, a means of passage, progress, transition, or ultimately the ending. The VBKÖ gallery welcomes exhibitions that critically investigate the concept of the portal in its diverse meanings, and ponder why gates might be open for some and closed for others; projects that imagine beyond the physical framework of reality, or those that highlight characters

The collective had its roots in the encounter between Valerie Habsburg and me in 2019. We worked earlier on the story of Teresa F. Ries separately. The word "archive" refers to the private archive of Teresa F. Ries, which Valerie Habsburg came across in an auction house and managed to acquire.² The informal structure of the TFR Archive allows other artists to join the subsequent chapters of this research-based project. We explore historical, sociopolitical, and artistic facts and contexts concerning the fate of Teresa F. Ries and her artworks as a Jewish and woman artist, also the victims of the Nazi regime. This forgotten artist was only recently rediscovered. However, the policy of presentation of her works, and access to them, remains problematic. Thus, we as artists decided to work together and reinterpret the case of Teresa F. Ries through artistic research in/with her archive and with a critical approach towards (art) institutions and the distribution of power in the past and nowadays.

The first spectacular event of the TFR Archive, presenting the artworks based on Teresa F. Ries's biography, was the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*, curated by Valerie Habsburg at the Exhibit Studio of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in October/November 2021. This show was one of the four exhibitions accompanying the reopening of the historical building of the Academy at the Schillerplatz after



Anka Lesniak, *Sculpture Rituals*, video-still



1. Entrance to the exhibition. Photo: Anka Lesniak
2. Anka Lesniak, *Lost Element*, video, installation. Photo: Anka Lesniak
3. Lena Violetta Leitner, *Tremate*. Photo: Lena Violetta Leitner
4. Lena Violetta Leitner, *Tremate*, installation, detail. Photo: Lena Violetta Leitner
5. Anka Lesniak, *The March for the Witch*, video. Photo: Anka Lesniak

a few years of its restoration. This exhibition was immensely significant since Teresa Ries couldn't officially study at the Academy, however, she worked there on her sculptures, taking private courses from Professor Edmund Hellmer. Thus, the exhibition was her symbolic and authorised comeback, both through her original sculpture *The Witch* (1895) presented at the exhibition and through the contemporary and new media artworks inspired by her story.³

Teresa F. Ries was one of the prominent artists of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and a few times also exhibited at the VBKÖ's exhibitions. In 1938, her studio was "Aryanized" so to speak, and taken over by Gustinus Ambrosi, while she had to flee to Switzerland, forced to leave all her professional life and artworks behind. Among the numerous works left in her studio was a marble figure of *The Witch at her toilette before the Witches' Sabbath*. The sculpture depicts a vigorous naked woman looking straight into the viewer's eyes and smiling maliciously while cutting her toenails with big scissors.

Although witches were not a rare inspiration for artists at the turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, Ries's sculpture was an extraordinary example of an artwork challenging the old patriarchal order. Her *Witch* was a symbol of feminine power. The figure seems to be full of vigour and eroticism and at the same time a rebel who challenges the clichés of representations of women in art and goes beyond stereotypes. Perhaps this was the reason for several acts of vandalism on this sculpture during the next decades, especially when it was left unattended on the outskirts of Vienna until the 1990s. Although the hand with the scissors is still missing, *The Witch* has been restored by the Vienna Museum and is exhibited more and more frequently. *The Witch* by Teresa Ries is a witness to the history, of political and social changes. The damaged sculpture feels like an accusation against H1Story, institutions, politics towards women (artists), anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. However, it has an inspiring potential for political and social changes and the

emancipation of minorities. As a part of a research-based art project, the exhibition *Lost Element / Reconstruction of the Witch* also poses the question of how it is possible to symbolically reconstruct the lost element of *The Witch* through contemporary cultural discourses and interpretations.⁴

The exhibition explored different threads related to the history of the damaged sculpture, as well as the role of the witch as a rebel against the oppressive and constraining patriarchal order. Through the presentation of our works, based on historical research and archives, the exhibition opened "the portal" between the past and contemporary women's art practices.

The exhibition *Lost Element / Reconstruction of the Witch* at the VBKÖ shared the space of the VBKÖ gallery with the exhibition *Craving supernatural creatures*. The *Lost Element...* occupied two smaller rooms, where previously was the VBKÖ's archive. My installation presented in the first room consisted of the fence stretched between two opposite walls and the video projected behind it. This work introduced the viewer to an artistic investigation of *The Witch* and the possible causes of damage to this sculpture. The fence in the gallery referred to the fences appearing in the video, which were filmed in the places connected with Teresa F. Ries. It was the fence around the hotel Lido on the island Lido in Venice, where the artist used to spend her holidays at the peak of her career. It was also the fence in Lugano, close to a former location of the Villa Emilia – the pension house, where Teresa F. Ries under the name Loevitowa, spent her last years in exile. The fence stretched in the gallery was similar to the garden fence behind which the *Witch* and other sculptures by Teresa F. Ries were kept, and where they were found in the 1990s by art historian Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber. The video is a sort of patchwork consisting of excerpts from my previous video works on the *Witch*, among others, the interviews on the damaged sculpture with art conservators Marija Milchin and Johann Nimmrichter. The video also includes the documentation of the installation *Spell with*

Scissors, presented at the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*. The accumulation of scissors and shears projected onto the fence evoked ambiguous associations – vandalism or removing the barrier alike. The fence itself is to protect, but also to deny access. In the room with the installation, there was also a barred window overlooking the staircase, which fit the character of the work.

In the same room, there was also a monitor with the video *The March for the Witch*. This work was shot during my OeAD scholarship in Vienna in 2019 when I continued my artistic investigation on the lost hand of the sculpture *The Witch*. Then, I came up with the idea of filming the hands of women sculpture students during the classes on carving in stone. It was a year before the centenary of the official admission of the first women students to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Thus, I've realised that the lost hand of *The Witch* keeping the shears, the hand with a tool, the one that is with the ability to act, reappears in many hands of young women sculptors. I filmed them during chiselling in stone and intertwined this action with sentences telling the story of Teresa F. Ries and her sculpture. The video characterises the dynamic montage in the rhythm of the soundtrack with the use of the sounds of chiselling, composed by Justyna Stopnicka June.

The video refers to constraints that Teresa F. Ries faced as a woman in her times. She was not allowed to study at the Academy in Vienna, even though that was a place where she found inspiration for creating a rebellious figure of a witch, and where probably she worked on this sculpture, for which posed an academy model - Anna Faust. Additionally, the sculpture was considered a domain of male artists, where women were the most unwelcome, compared to other art disciplines. On the other hand, the video shows the contemporary academy, where most of the sculpture students are women. Their repetitive, rhythmic chiselling refers to the incessant and growing women striving for equal rights and agency in society. This struggle doesn't bring the expected results quickly, and

we still face gender discrimination. Nevertheless, from the perspective of one hundred years, we can see that full women's emancipation is inevitable, especially thanks to education where men and women have equal access to knowledge.

The aforementioned garden fence wrapped around the corner led the viewers through a small passage to the other room. In this passage, on the wall behind the fence, was placed an enlarged photo of the damaged *The Witch*, taken by Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber in the rural suburbs of Vienna, where she found the neglected and vandalised sculptures by Teresa F. Ries.

The Witch and other marble sculptures, as Valerie Habsburg managed to establish the facts, were left close to the compost stack in the park in Oberlaa. This contrast of the marble sculptures as something designed, solid and valuable, and the compost as raw, dirty, worthless material, and the fact that these two entities of opposite features had been somehow equalized, seemed very surprising to us, also fascinating and... "bewitching." From the perspective of preserving artworks as a cultural heritage and regarding the biography of the artist persecuted by the Nazi regime, such a disregard towards her artworks by the institution which should have to protect them, says a lot about the policy towards the artworks made by women, categorized also as the Other. However, if we apply the post-human and ecological perspective, we may assume that the compost is valuable and useful. The decaying, rotting leaves, branches, hay, etc. fertilize the soil and contribute to the rebirth of nature. So, the compost is not that worthless and unpleasant. We are all compost... as says Donna Haraway.⁵ And from this point of view, what's the difference between stones and rocks that emerged and were shaped by organic processes and the stone (marble) elaborated by the human hand? The marble sculptures, besides being vandalised by "unknown" perpetrators, began to be "reappropriated" by nature. They started to cover with the biofilm - a dark coating that consists of bacteria, algae, and fungi.⁶

Valerie Habsburg took pictures of today's look of the place where *The Witch* and other sculptures were left for years. In the large-scale photographs entitled *Composted Stone*, one can see a pile of dry leaves, grass, soil, and stones. These works are the analogy to the picture of neglected and damaged stone sculptures by Teresa F. Ries documented by Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber. These photographs of composted nature were placed above an installation by Anna Bochkova.

In Anna Bochkova's work, small ceramic sculptures were put on the soil. Her ceramics objects were expressive and organic. The artist called them *Witch Houses*, like the *Defending House*, *Lost House*, and *House With a Secret*. One may associate them with the houses of Baba Yaga (Baba Jaga), a Slavic witch. In patriarchal versions of the fairy tales, Baba Yaga is a cruel, old woman, harmful to people, especially harsh to children, and is even able to devour them.⁷ She gives them very demanding tasks and if they fail, they will not survive. However, the psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés, in her inspiring book *Woman Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, proves that this character may be interpreted in a more ambiguous and even positive way. Baba Yaga as a witch (the woman of wisdom) teaches children that the ability to cope with hard experiences is necessary to survive and to protect our physical and mental health. She starts the process of initiation into adult life.

The tiny ceramic sculptures made by Anna Bochkova while placed on the soil, evoke ambiguous meanings. On the one hand, they look like precious, fragile artistic objects, on the other, in the context of soil and the photographs of composted stones by Valerie Habsburg, they can be also interpreted as remains, trash. The Baba Yaga houses, according to the fairy tales were hidden in forests. Here, they were shown on dry soil. The soil used in the works presented in the exhibition had been taken from Oberlää, close to the place where Teresa F. Ries's sculptures were left, and then found. Thus, it refers directly to the story of *The Witch*. In the context of global warming (due

to, among other things, the human harmful activity resulting in the gradual destruction of forests), the dried soil touches the ecological issues and reminds us that the patriarchal order, based on disregard, violence, and exploitation of nature, finally will lead the humankind to self-destruction.

The soil was also used in Lena Violetta Leitner's work *Tremate*. Lena Violetta Leitner is an artist working with plants and technology. Her installation consisted of four elements: a living plant and a pile of soil, on which she placed a vessel, where water was turning into steam. On the steam, there was appearing a sentence: "Tremate, tremate, le streghe son tornate," which means "Tremble, tremble, the witches are coming back."⁸ The sentence refers to the feminist demonstrations in Italy in the 1970s when women started to protest against the law based on so-called traditional values, that limited their right to divorce and control their reproduction.⁹ Women re-appropriated the figure of the witch as a representation of female power and also the expression of women's anger and rage.

This return of witches means for women the regaining the right to express the reactions considered as "inappropriate" for them in the patriarchal world, such as resistance, anger, and even fury, which women use in the fight for, and to defend, their rights. The witches become also heralds of the rebirth of women's knowledge and healers of bonds that have been destroyed for ages in a patriarchal culture. This process of enslaving women reached its peak in the witch-hunt in the Early Modern period in Europe and Colonial America. It was large-scale femicide resulting in depriving women of the rest of their relative independency that they had had since medieval times while helping people using herbal medicine, as midwives, or living together in secular communities such as Beguines.¹⁰

The work by Lena Violetta Leitner refers to ecological issues, but it's also somehow "uncanny." In her way of connecting the natural elements (plant, soil, water) and technology (steam, clay), one can also see a subtle sense of humour. The



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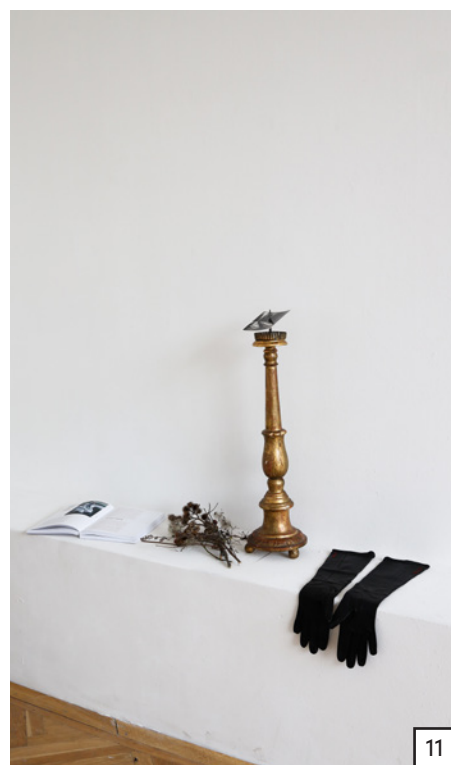
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6. The damaged *Witch* from the Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber's archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

7. Lena Violetta Leitner, *Tremate*, installation, in the background, Anka Lesniak, *Sculpture Rituals*, video. Photo: Lena Violetta Leitner

8. Valerie Habsburg, *Hüterin der Erinnerung*, Object N°1; Valerie Habsburg, *Composted Stone #3*, C-Print. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

9. Anna Bochkova, *Defending house*, from the series *Witch Houses*, glazed ceramics, installation. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

10. Anna Bochkova, *Expanding house*, from the series *Witch Houses*, glazed ceramics, installation. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

11. Valerie Habsburg, *Hüterin der Erinnerung*, Object N°2 and N°3. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

12. Valerie Habsburg, *Hüterin der Erinnerung*, Object N°2 and N°3, details. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

13. Exhibition view with works by Anna Bochkova and Valerie Habsburg. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

second part of the work – the plant – "spoke" to us in Morse code. The plant was shaking from time to time unnaturally and in its subsequent movements (longer or shorter) the message "I will survive" was encoded. These two messages – projected on the steam and encrypted in Morse code, could be interpreted in the context of the need to return to so-called female values, such as care, and respect for the environment and other entities, but also with the belief that witches (wise women) can overturn the harmful patriarchal order. Additionally, the plant chosen by the artist was a fern, which is one of the oldest plants on Earth. The soil used in Lena Violetta Leitner's work, contrary to the soil in Anna Bochkova's installation, was constantly irrigated by steam. Thus, it was wet and after a few days, even the sprouts of vegetation appeared.

Morse Code appeared also in my video-performance *Sculpture Rituals*. The video is another work from the series inspired by an unexplained loss of a meaningful part of *The Witch* – A Hand Holding Shears. In this video, I am 'sculpting' an invisible sculpture, with the use of chisels, hammers, etc. I am chiselling it in the air as if I was doing a kind of mysterious ritual around the sculptor's stand. However, the sounds made by knocking a hammer and chisel refer to the letters of the Morse code and contain an encrypted message – spelling out "a witch." The hand equipped with a tool, of *The Witch* by Teresa F. Ries, symbolized agency. That is why hands and sculptural tools are significant elements in my performance. However, their function has changed – they become a kind of sound communicator. The work also refers to the shift observed in the field of art that more and more moves from making an object – an artefact – towards performativity, a gesture, and a process. I also ask about the relationship between what is visible and what is encoded in a work of art.

This video was installed next to Valerie Habsburg's photograph of the blossoming bushes of roses and other plants in the park/garden in Oberlaa, where *The Witch* had been left. This photograph was placed opposite the already

mentioned photographs with the composted stones. One of the possible interpretations of the meaning of the hand of *The Witch* with shears leads us to gardening and knowledge of plants as one of the witches' occupations. The shears/scissors can be also associated with Atropos, one of the Three Fates (Moirai) – she who cuts the thread of life.

Besides the photographs, Valerie Habsburg prepared a series of ready-made objects. One of them *Hüterin der Erinnerung, Object N°1*, (Guardian of Memories) was a head cover made of random objects such as fur, ribbons, and pieces of photos. These torn photos were arranged in a kind of ornament adorning "a hat." While looking closer at the tiny scraps of the photographs, one could recognise that they are photos – looking like old ones – taken in a garden. This gesture of tearing the photographs (frequently taken by the author herself) and using their scraps in a new context, is characteristic in Valerie Habsburg's works. She also plays with photography as a re-presentation of reality and its existence as a physical object, which is particularly visible in tearing and through this the destruction/deconstruction of the consistency of the image.

An intriguing balancing act between the palpability of the objects themselves and the symbolic notions hidden in them was to be seen in the *Hüterin der Erinnerung, Object N°2 und N°3* – a composition consisting of an old candlestick, archival black and white photo, dried flowers, black gloves, and a book. The photo, where the main motif was the dreamlike light of the sun shining through the trees, was punched and put, instead of a candle, on a spike of the candlestick. The dried plants were taken from Oberlaa rural area, where *The Witch* had been left. The book – opened on the page with the picture of the damaged *The Witch*, was a copy of the *Spezialschule*, where one of the chapters referred to the story of Teresa Ries.¹¹ And the long gloves – black and elegant ones, with the embroidered words: "Dame" (Lady) and "Hexe" (Witch), referred to the ambiguous and often contradictory descriptions of "woman nature" and the social expectations towards

femininity. However, these mutually exclusive notions of "expected" and "condemned" ways of being a woman and represented here as "the lady" and "the witch", don't need to be such opposite as in patriarchal understanding, where if a gentle "lady" reveals her rebellious "witchy" character is considered as false and two-faced. In this context, the gloves by Valerie Habsburg can be interpreted as a symbol of accepting and adopting the whole spectrum of behaviours that empower a woman.

The gloves as well as the torn photos belong to Valerie Habsburg's visual repertoire. She explores this motif through compositions made of found gloves, which also belonged once to women from her family, and through photographs of them. The gloves, in the past the emblematic element of the suit of a higher class woman, are currently being used in a more utilitarian way, not only to protect our hands from freezing but also in a range of jobs where hands may be injured or have to be protected for hygienic reasons. Teresa F. Ries as a prominent artist belonged to the higher society, but being a sculptor, she also did hard physical labour such as carving in stone. We may assume, that, like some contemporary (women) sculptors filmed in the video *The March For The Witch*, she probably protected her hands from cuts and blisters with gloves, while chiselling in stone. The gloves can be also used to protect valuable objects such as artworks and archival documents from our touch that can damage them. Valerie Habsburg as an artist, a caretaker of Teresa F. Ries's private archive, and also a memory keeper of her legacy, used women's gloves as a symbolic representation of different aspects of Teresa F. Ries's personality and biography.

To conclude, the exhibition *Lost Element/ Re-construction of the Witch* asked the question of how we can work with loss, which here is represented by the lost hand of *The Witch*. *The Witch* deprived of the hand with shears refers to the woman deprived of her agency. The sculpture also represents the fate of the artist herself who was persecuted by the Nazis because of her Jewish origin and had to flee to Switzerland, leaving all

her life and artworks in the country governed by her oppressors. She survived and spent the rest of her life in a safe place, however, was deprived of everything that brought meaning to her life and died forgotten in Lugano. She was buried there at the Jewish cemetery. The striking fact is that the artist who carved masterpieces in stone doesn't even have a memorial stone on her grave. Only dust... and some weeds...

The word "re-construction" used in the title of the exhibition refers to the symbolical restoration of the "lost element" through contemporary art means such as video, installation, ready-made, etc. The complexity of the story of Teresa F. Ries and the fate of her artworks, allow us to treat her as a case study for posing and analysing the questions related to refugees, women's rights, the attitude of art history towards the heritage of women artists, protection of artworks and archives and access to them as well as questions about restitution. The Nazis looted a huge amount of artwork during the World War. A lot of them were sold and/or disappeared. Some were placed in Austrian museums, and for decades the rightful owners unsuccessfully demanded their return. This problem was described in a complex way in the book by Sophie Lillie *Was einmal war*. One of the most spectacular cases of restitution became the return of Gustav Klimt's painting including the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I (The Lady in Gold or The Woman in Gold)* from the Belvedere Collection in Vienna to Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer's niece Maria Altman.¹² Teresa F. Ries's artworks were also considered the property of the Vienna Museum. However, according to her last will, found among other documents in her private archive, she wished to give her works to the museum in Israel. The fact that her studio was taken by Nazis and the works were looted, and probably cheaply sold and dispersed, and only after the war they were taken under the protection of the City Collections (later in the Wien Museum) makes the ownership even more complicated. The works are currently under the restitution process.

Contemporary (women) artists from the TFR archive, with the range of "tools" remind, re-work and re-tell the story of Teresa F. Ries in today's contexts and discourses. The research that results not only in scholarly articles but in artworks, opens "the case" of Teresa F. Ries and develops it as a rhizomatic structure, that can grow/expand in different directions. While comparing the methods of working with damaged artwork in the field of art to the methods of treating it in art conservation, like in the case of the lost hand of *The Witch* by Teresa F. Ries, art conservators can only decide if to reconstruct or not reconstruct the missing part, and for each option, we could point out the pros and cons. Art historians can describe their research in publications. Without the pioneering studies and the book on women artists by art historian Sabine Plakolm-Försthuber and also the knowledge and experience of the art conservators Marija Milchin and Johann Nimmrichter, we couldn't have the base for our artistic research and artworks. However, as artists, we are not obliged to "tell the truth" understood as proven facts, and we can adopt the tools of art historians, archivists, and investigative journalists and publish the results of our research as our artworks that also become our manifestos.

Although each of the artists taking part in the exhibition presented her works, there were the shared elements, such as the fence, soil, gloves, plants, and stones, that led the viewer through the visual narrative. These visual signs refer to the story of *The Witch*, but they are also open to other interpretations. While working on the exhibition, I realised that I am somehow obsessed with fences. It was a time when thousands of refugees from the far East started to try to cross the Polish border with Belarus. Used by Lukashenko's regime as a living weapon and by the Polish government as a tool for boosting the popularity of anti-refugee politics, these people were freezing and even died in the forest, treated violently by both countries' border guards. Instead of humanitarian ways of dealing with this crisis, the government decided to invest in a wired fence to stop the refugees.

This fence is also a trap for wild animals, which frequently die in agony entangled in it.

Thus, the motif of the fence present in photos taken when the damaged *Witch* was found, was replicated in the gallery space as an ambiguous symbol of protection and oppression alike. Teresa F. Ries was also an immigrant and then a refugee. The lost hand of the damaged sculpture of *The Witch* has been replicated in many hands of today's young women artists making their sculptures. However, the gesture of hitting and breaking the stone can also be interpreted as the symbolic destruction of the patriarchal order. But, on the other hand, a question is: why do we have the right to excavate the stone for industry and art with such invasive methods for nature as they are used in quarries now in the first place? Thus the title *Reconstruction of the Witch* means to restore the disregarded values such as sensitivity, empathy, and care, but also the passion to stand against the violence towards human and non-human persons.

The exhibition in the gallery of the Association of Austrian Women Artists was also a great opportunity to reinterpret and give a new spirit to the works of Teresa F. Ries as an artist of multi-ethnic roots, by contemporary women artists of different origins, who were connected through her story. It's also a tribute to the woman artist, who was brave enough to live the life she wanted to live, even though she had to face constant prejudices towards her gender and origin. She was one of the women who paved the path for the next generations of women artists.

The Patriarchal Concrete!

We hammer iron into your cold heart.
 We are striking it with chisels,
 passionate and willing to destroy.
 Disappear you must!

We are penetrating your concrete heart
 ever deeper.
 Until you break into a billion pieces.
 And let your heaven consume you!

Let's reconstruct the Witch!
 A rebel against the prevailing order.
 Let's reclaim her power!
 the power to stir the "divine" order.
 Let's find the lost element.

Let's enjoy our
 imperfection,
 diversity,
 incompatibility...
 Let's play
 The March for the Witch!

Anka Lesniak, 2020

(the manifesto inspired by the poem by Teresa F. Ries, *Der Marmorblock*)

Lost Element / Re-construction of the Witch, 14 January – 13 February 2022, VBKÖ, Vienna.

Arists: Anna Bochkova, Valerie Habsburg, Lena Violetta Leitner, Anka Lesniak.

Curated by: Anka Lesniak / TFR Archive.

Notes

¹ "The Portal," VBKÖ, <https://www.vbkoe.org/2020/09/09/opencall-theportal/>.

² Valerie Habsburg, "The Sculptor Teresa Feodorowna Ries and her private archive," *Art and Documentation*, https://www.journal.doc.art.pl/pdf21/art_and_documentation_21_teresa_ries_studies_habsburg.pdf.

³ Liudmila Kirsanova, "Un Paradiso Amaro/ Bitter Paradise," *Les Nouveaux Riches*, <https://www.les-nouveaux-riches.com/un-paradiso-amaro-bitter-paradise/>.

⁴ Anka Leśniak, "Teresa Ries and the Witch," *Art and Documentation*, https://www.journal.doc.art.pl/pdf21/art_and_documentation_21_teresa_ries_studies_lesniak.pdf.

⁵ Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 107.

⁶ Eric May, Sophia Papida, Hesham Abdulla, "Consequences of microbe -biofilm-salt interactions for stone integrity in monuments," New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003, 452-471. <https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/en/publications/consequences-of-microbe-biofilm-salt-interactions-for-stone-integ-2>.

⁷ Mike Dixon-Kennedy, "Baba-Yaga," *Encyclopedia of Russian & Slavic Myth and Legend* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 23-28.

⁸ Irish artist, Jessi Jones, referred to this sentence, see: Aidan Dunne, "The persistence of the feminine, embodied in the witch, demonised, and hounded," *Irishtimes*, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/the-persistence-of-the-feminine-embodied-in-the-witch-demonised-and-hounded-1.3543103>.

⁹ Susan Bassnett, *Feminist Experiences, The Women's Movement in Four Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge / Boston and Sidney: Allen & Unwin, 1986/2013), 95.

¹⁰ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn NY: Autonomedia, 2004), 38.

¹¹ Valerie Habsburg, Jakob Krameritsch, Anka Leśniak, *Spezialschule*, edited by Simone Bader, Katharina Hölzl, Jakob Krameritsch et al. (Vienna: Schlebrügge.Editor, 2019), 110-127.

¹² Eli Anapur, "How Maria Altmann Fought To Recover Nazi Looted Klimt Paintings," *Widewalls*, <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/maria-altmann-klimt-paintings>.

BOOKS

Tomáš Ruller. Perform- -made

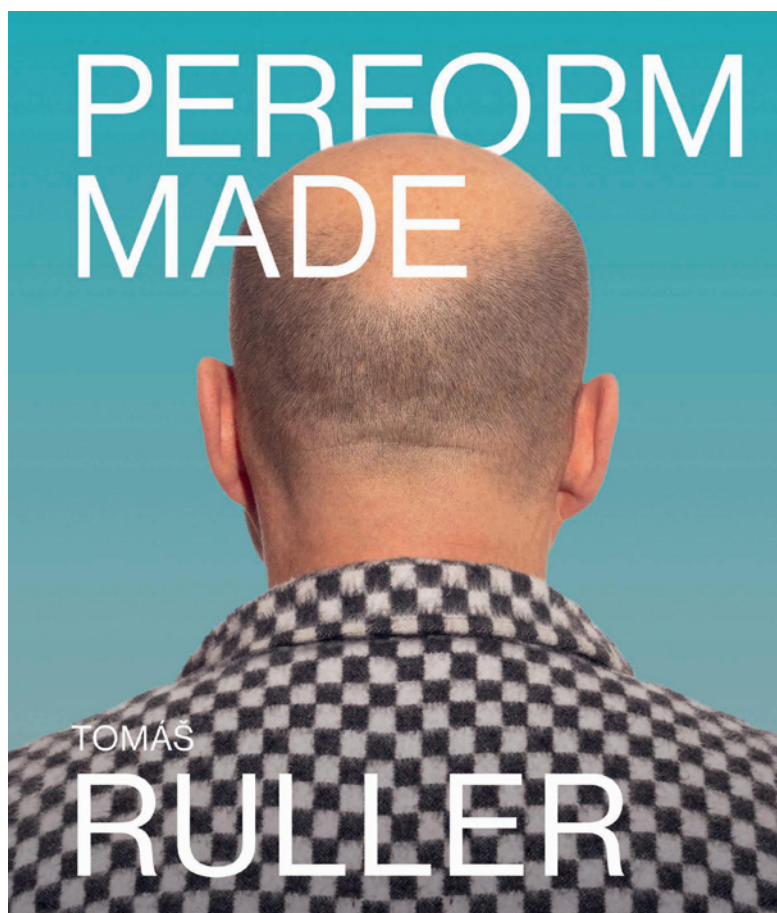
Ukazał się długo oczekiwany *catalogue raisonné* dzieł Tomáša Rullera, sporządzony przy jego udziale i obejmujący twórczość do roku 2020. Artysta nadal bardzo intensywnie pracuje, więc katalog będzie wymagał aneksów. Zasadnicza wartość krytyczna tej publikacji polega na wyczerpującym przedstawieniu wczesnej twórczości Rullera. Ten okres jest szczególnie ważny z dwóch powodów. Pierwszy jest taki, że w Czechosłowacji, w okresie poprzedzającym przełom polityczny w Europie Centralnej i upadek Żelaznej Kurtyny, niemal niemożliwe było swobodne uprawianie sztuki o charakterze konceptualnym i akcjonistycznym. Zachowana dokumentacja takich działań jest szczątkowa i bez komentarza twórcy trudna do zrozumienia dla współczesnych badaczy. Dlatego udział autora w jej opracowaniu czyni z tej publikacji tak istotne źródło wiedzy o tym okresie. Drugi wynika z licznych i bardzo żywych kontaktów Rullera z artystami i środowiskami pracującymi nad pokrewnymi zagadnieniami artystycznymi w Polsce. Ich początek sięga lat osiemdziesiątych, okresu Stanu Wojennego, a więc czasu wyjątkowo trudnego dla polskich twórców. Rezultatem tych kontaktów było powstanie formacji Black Market, której twórczość jest kluczowa dla historii sztuki performance, zarówno polskiej jak i światowej.

Ruller prezentował swoją twórczość w Polsce ponad 15 razy (!). Uczestniczył w ważnych festiwalach sztuki performance, takich jak Zamek Wyobraźni (Bytów/Ustka) czy InterAkcje (Piotrków Trybunalski), organizowanych w latach dziewięćdziesiątych i początkowych dwutysięcznych, a więc w okresie wielkiego boomu na tą sztukę w Polsce. Ale może najważniejsze były pobyty w latach osiemdziesiątych, na zaproszenie Grzegorza Dziamskiego, teoretyka sztuki konceptualnej i organizatora takich inicjatyw, jak spotkania pod hasłem Expanded Theater w Międzyzdrojach w 1983 roku, kontynuowane w jego galerii Maximal Art i sympozjum w Jabłonce (rozmowa z Dziamskim jest opublikowana w tym katalogu, datowana na rok 1985). Zaowocowały one najpierw współpracą z Zygmuntem Piotrowskim, w konsekwencji prowadzącą do założenia Black Market. Wszystkie te fakty arty-

styczne zostały zebrane i bardzo detalicznie opisane w omawianym katalogu. Ruller był w Polsce w 2010 roku z okazji dwudziestej piątej rocznicy powstania Black Market (Lublin, Warszawa). W 2022 roku pojawił się znowu w ASP w Gdańsku na festiwalu FNAF (FNAF – Festival of Naked Forms zainicjowała Lenka Kłodová w Pradze w 2015 roku, a od dwóch edycji ma on odsłonę w gdańskiej ASP).

Performance nie jest jedynym rodzajem sztuki uprawianej przez Rullera. Należy on także do pionierów sztuki mediów w Czeskiej Republice. Jest założycielem Wydziału Video-Multimedia-Performance w Brno University of Technology, od 1992 roku. Równie ważne miejsce w jego twórczości odgrywa rzeźba, obiekt, instalacja. Cała jego różnorodna twórczość została zaprezentowana na wystawie w Brnie w galerii Dům umění města Brna, pod takim samym tytułem jak omawiany katalog, wydany w związku z tą wystawą. W katalogu znajdziemy także informacje o kulisach pozyskania ze Stanów Zjednoczonych - z inicjatywy Rullera - prac wideo i dokumentacji Woody'ego i Steiny Vasulków i ustanowienia w Dům umění města Brna instytucji pod nazwą Vašulka Kitchen będącej centrum studiów nad ich twórczością, która jest kluczowa dla historii sztuki obrazu medialnego.

Katalog otwiera pierwsza zrealizowana praca Rullera. Rzadko zdarza się, aby już na samym początku kariery artysta stworzył pracę tak dojrzałą, która pozostaje dla niego punktem odniesienia na późniejszych etapach kariery, a co więcej stanowi wsparcie dla rozumienia i interpretacji jego aktualnej twórczości. *By the Way* to performance do fotografii wykonany w jaskini Pekarna, w górach Moravian Karst, w 1974 roku. Ruller miał wtedy niespełna 18 lat. Na fotografii widzimy niewyraźne postaci stojące w jaskini. Praca jest – świadomym – odniesieniem do platońskiej przypowieści o jaskini. Artysta wyznaczył tu pole gry jaką prowadzi między reprezentacją a światem otaczającym w swoich performance, a od 1983 roku w pracach wideo. Przy czym, materiał zawarty w katalogu, jak i sposób jego strukturalizacji w ramach tej publikacji, jednoznacznie wskazują na live art jako prąródło i fundament całej jego różnorodnej twórczości.



Tomáš Ruller: Perform-made: Resistant Moments. Edited by Pavel Liška, Dušan Brozman, and Tomáš Ruller. Praha and Brno: Karel Kerlický - KANT and Brno University of Technology - VUTUM Press, 2021. Wszystkie teksty zostały opublikowane także w języku angielskim.

W świetle kategorii współczesnej performatyki jest całkowicie zrozumiałe zarówno szerokie rozumienie kategorii performance, jak i używanie tej praktyki w rozmaity sposób, także dokamero-wo. Jednak należy zauważyć, że Ruller stosował rozszerzoną (expanded) performatykę w swoich realizacjach od początku, od owej akcji w jaskini platońskiej. Performance jest dla niego także sposobem budowania relacji między mediami i łączenia mediów sztuki, zgodnie ze źródłową zasadą dialektyki mediów Dicka Higginsa, twórcy teorii i praktyki sztuki intermedialnej.

W późniejszych latach Ruller wielokrotnie powraca do działań w jaskini. Często też pracuje w przestrzeniach w rozmaity sposób zamkniętych czy izolowanych, bądź inaczej wydzielonych. Pra-

ca w ukryciu wynika ze sposobu rozumienia sztuki jako doświadczenia wewnętrznego, ale ściśle po-wiązanego z kondycją fizyczną, somatyczną artysty. Częstym miejscem realizacji jest też pejzaż, natu-ralne otoczenie. Ten sposób działania jest charak-terystyczny dla artystów w Czechach, jak i innych krajach za Żelazną Kurtyną, gdzie wyjście poza galerie i poza miasto było koniecznością wobec systemu kontroli i cenzury państwa, a zarazem stanowiło poszukiwanie enklaw wolności artystycz-nej i świadczyło o determinacji artystów chcących tworzyć sztukę mimo wszystkich przeciwności. Te decyzje, zdawałoby się - wtedy - będące aktami desperacji, dziś są ważnymi dokumentami sztuki współczesnej. Pokazują jak dzięki uporowi artystów mogła ona istnieć i się rozwijać, mimo wszystko.

Stąd w tym obszarze geograficznym ukształtowała się specyficzna odmiana land art. Inaczej niż jej amerykański odpowiednik, nie operowała gigantyczną skalą, a wręcz przeciwnie – była personalna; to interwencja w pejzaż, którą można wykonać własnymi rękami *in situ*. Akcje i instalacje tego typu mają charakter site specific, co jest kluczową praktyką lat dziewięćdziesiątych. Jednak ze względu na wspomniane warunki tworzenia w Czechach, ta praktyka była rozwijana przez Rullera już od początku lat osiemdziesiątych. Jego liczne realizacje outdoor bazują, tak lub inaczej, na elemencie performatywnym, który był kluczowy zarówno dla tej sztuki jako lokalnego zjawiska, jak i praktyki własnej Rullera. Zarazem, była ona w punkcie wyjścia powiązana z konceptualizmem, operowała znakiem i logiką tautologii. Ale inaczej niż realizacje w white cube była kontekstualna *par excellence*. Odnosiła się zarówno do miejsca realizacji, jak i – szerzej rozumiana - stanowiła manifestację polityczną wolności w totalitaryzmie. Innym zagadnieniem rozwijanym przy tej okazji, a należącym do metodologii konceptualizmu, była dokumentacja i późniejsze prezentacje śladów działania. Jest to istotne dziś, w sytuacji gdy każda najdrobniejsza nawet pozostałość ma wartość muzealną. Katalog prac Rullera dowodzi jak ważne są strategie pracy z dokumentami sztuki i tworzenie dokumentów przez artystów. Katalog *Perform-made* stanowi wzorcowy przykład opracowania dokumentacji sztuki żywej.

Osobny rozdział w tym katalogu, jak i w życiu artystycznym Rullera, stanowi ‘art of meeting’ – tworzenie sztuki z innymi, wspólnie, które jednocześnie jest tworzeniem sztuki własnej, w zgodzie ze sobą, bez utraty ani odrobiny indywidualności. Oparcie sztuki na podmiotowych relacjach międzyludzkich wymaga wypracowania specjalnej metodologii. Ta z kolei wynika z praktyk warsztatowych, edukacyjnych, w których ma miejsce zwrotny przekaz informacji między nadawcą a odbiorcą. A więc znów natrafiamy na sytuację dynamiczną, czyli performatywną, gdyż w takiej dwustronnej relacji żadna ze stron nie może pozostać bierna. Przykłady wspólnej pracy znajdziemy już w najwcześniejszej praktyce Rullera. Należy

do nich także inicjalna dla niego akcja w jaskini. Współpraca z Zygmuntem Piotrowskim stanowiła rodzaj ukoronowania procesu rozwijania tej praktyki. Była ona tak udana także z tego powodu, że również Piotrowski uznawał współpracę warsztatową z innymi za jeden z fundamentów swojej praktyki twórczej. W katalogu znajduje się zdjęcie zorganizowanej przez Rullera ‘sytuacji’ podczas spotkania Expanded Theatre. Sytuacja to słowo-klucz jego praktyki tego typu. Zbiorowe performance są organizowane przez niego do dziś pod nazwą *Open Situation*. Zdjęcie przedstawia osoby stojące na tle morza (*Stand-up*). Kadr jest podobny do ujęć sytuacji w jaskini. I to podobieństwo wynika z charakteru formy akcyjnej opartej na ‘czystej’ obecności – artyści, innych, a w rezultacie wspólnej. Wspólna praca z Piotrowskim doprowadziła do powstania międzynarodowej grupy Black Market (pierwsze kolektywne performance pod tą nazwą odbyły się w 1985, ostatnie w 2010 w rocznicę powstania). Katalog Rullera stanowi podstawowe źródło do studiowania historii grupy poprzez opublikowane w nim dokumenty, teksty źródłowe, korespondencję. Informacje na ten temat znajdujemy także w szczegółowym kalendarium twórczości artysty. Współpraca międzynarodowa przełamywała ograniczenia polityczne tego czasu wynikające z funkcjonowania Żelaznej Kurtyny. Zarazem zaistnienie takiej wymiany zapowiada schyłek post-jałtańskiego podziału Europy na wschód i zachód.

Katalog dowodzi, że cała sztuka Rullera opierała się, i opiera do dziś, na dialektycznym uzgodnieniu sprzeczności między wzorcami kulturowymi, praktykami i mediami sztuki, indywidualnymi i kolektywnymi postawami. Zgromadzona dokumentacja pokazuje, że Ruller wypracował metodę twórczą opartą o performance, która tym niemniej zawsze może zostać otwarta i zintegrowana z praktykami innych twórców. Indywidualne jest społeczne – to konkluzja z długiej drogi artystycznej Rullera.

Łukasz GUZEK

OBITUARY



Marek ze swoją pracą w mieszkaniu, 2016

THINK CRAZY

4 marca 2022 roku zmarł, przeżywszy 86 lat, Marek Konieczny. W nekrologu rodzina napisała: *Niegdyś Inżynier – Architekt, Narciarz, Twórca idei Think Crazy*. Marek Konieczny, który pochodził ze śląska Cieszyńskiego, przywędrował do polskiej sztuki z dość nietypowego kierunku. Studiował na Politechnice Śląskiej w Gliwicach, która w tym czasie była spadkobierczynią Politechniki Lwowskiej. Na wydział Architektury Wnętrz warszawskiej Akademii Sztuk Pięknych przyszedł jako doświadczony konstruktor i już w trakcie studiów współpracował z jej profesorami. Trzeba wspomnieć, że w okresie jego studiów na warszawskiej akademii znalazła przystań czołówka polskiej awangardy architektonicznej. Wspominał, że projektował „ptaki,” czyli pawilony handlowe w lubelskim osiedlu Słowackiego, głównym dziełem małżeństwa Zofii Garlińskiej-Hansen i Oskara Hansena. Doświadczenia z tego okresu mocno odcisnęły się na twórczości Marka powodując, że była ona unikalna, nie tyl-

ko na polskim podwórku. Jakie cechy wyniósł ze swojego architektonicznego doświadczenia? Przede wszystkim precyzję myślenia, poczucie misji i wiarę w nowoczesność, wszystko, co składało się na pojęcie awangardy z połowy ubiegłego wieku. Także specyficzne umiejętności warsztatowe, które były obce polskim artystom z tego okresu. W tych latach droga artysty była tradycyjna – ognisko plastyczne, liceum plastyczne i wyższa szkoła plastyczna, w których ćwiczono rysunek z gipsu i modelu. Na studiach wyższych za nowoczesne uważano rysowanie, malowanie, czy rzeźbienie niedokładne, to znaczy z zamazanymi rysami twarzy. Wyjścia poza bryłę, czy płaszczyznę, jako nośnik dzieła przy tym trybie kształcenia nie brano pod uwagę. Podobnie było z miejscem zaistnienia dzieła. Nie wychodzono ze sztuką poza galerię, ponieważ ówczesna polityka kulturalna kontrolowała poczynania artystów. Istotnym doświadczeniem Marka był wyjazd do Stanów Zjednoczonych w ramach



Marek z żoną Moniką Szwejewską w ich mieszkaniu, 2016

Stypendium Kościuszkowskiego i kontakt z grupą Fluxus. W tym czasie amerykańscy artyści z tej grupy zamieniali swoją egzystencję w formę dzieła sztuki, ze wszystkimi wynikającymi z tego konsekwencjami. Marek wspominał współpracę z Georgem Maciunasem, który w tym czasie ukrywał się przed wierzycielami. Później chętnie zamiast notki biograficznej zamieszczał krótki tekst o sobie, który był podstawą do notki w nekrologu: *Urodzony pod znakiem Raka. Syn Księżycy. Kocha orchidee. A szczęście zapewni mu szmaragd. Artysta. Niegdyś inżynier. Narciarz, wizjoner, kusiciel. Dezercer konceptualizmu. Twórca idei Think Crazy. Żyje w Europie.* W tych słowach widać wyraźne zamknięcie jednego etapu życia i rozpoczęcie innego. Od czasu tego wyjazdu Marek przestał działać jako inżynier i oddał się w pełni sztuce, traktując to jako działanie totalne. Zarówno jego pracownia, jak i mieszkanie, były traktowane jak dzieła sztuki. Podobnie traktował swoje ubranie i ciało. Czasem występował jako jednorożec z rogiem na

czole, lubił też podobny w kształcie sierp. Procesualne prace Marka opierały się na zestawieniu ludzkiego ciała z artefaktem. Początkowo dokumentował takie działania na taśmie filmowej, często zapętlonej, co dawało efekty medytacyjne. Jego warsztat artystyczny znacznie odbiegał w tym czasie od konwencjonalnego warsztatu plastyka. Właściwie jedynymi jego pracami na płaszczyźnie były wielkoskalowe pastele na fizelinie, które też chętniej niż na ścianie eksponował w przestrzeni. Pozostałe prace mocno wkraczały w trzeci wymiar, przynajmniej ramami, często jako elementy prac wykorzystywał *objet trouvé* – wypchane zwierzęta i dekoracyjne przedmioty połączone z formami abstrakcyjnymi. W obrazach wykorzystywał efekty znamion luksusu, przede wszystkim złoto, w tym celu używał szlagmetal, ale też futra, szlachetne drewno i tkaniny. Jego prace rzeźbiarskie były najczęściej oparte na gotowych, polichromowanych i złożonych znalezionych przedmiotach, a właściwie przedmiotach wybranych, które inspirowały go do



Marek ze swoimi pracami w pracowni, 2014



Rzeźby Marka w jego pracowni, 2010

kolejnych przekształceń. Ten proces porównywał do robienia kanapki, na której kładzie się kolejne warstwy jedzenia, żeby była pożywna i smaczna. Performance Marka były krótkie, agresywne, działały jak koany w Zen, chociaż nie odwoływał się do inspiracji buddyzmem. Na wystawie organizowanej przez Janusza Boguckiego w kościele na Żytniej w Warszawie zbudował własną, artystyczną kaplicę. Marka poznałem bliżej w latach osiemdziesiątych, kiedy organizowałem wystawy w pracowni. Bardzo pasowała mu otwarta formuła tych wystaw, w których obok sztuk wizualnych odbywały się koncerty, teatr, poezja, sztuki walki i performance. Obok uznanych artystów występowała też młodzież. Dla młodzieży zorganizowaliśmy w tych latach Akademię Komplet Sztuki. W ramach tej akademii poznałem podejście Marka do tworzenia dzieła, bowiem wypracował on specyficzny warsztat artystyczny. Podstawą był temat, czyli sens dzieła. Mogło to być hasło, typu: *ogon konia mongolskiego*, ale zawsze była konkretna przyczyna, dla której powstawał

dany obiekt. Istniał w tym pozytywny program nauczania architektonicznego, w którym forma powstawała w odpowiedzi na postawiony problem i powinna być skonstruowana w sposób logiczny. Forma, w której temat miał zaistnieć, nie mogła być konwencjonalna, ale jak najlepiej skorelowana z tematem, odpowiadająca charakterowi artysty. Miała być przy tym kompletna, czyli zamknięta, a więc nie wymagająca poprawek. Uczestniczący w naszej akademii studenci oficjalnej akademii zaproponowali Marka jako profesora wizytującego w warszawskiej ASP. Marek był profesorem wizytującym krótko, ale wychował kilku artystów, którzy wyrosli ponad standardowe umiejętności absolwentów akademii. Ten niezwykle istotny powód, sens tworzonego dzieła powodował, że jego prace, chociaż formalnie abstrakcyjne, niosły w sobie niezwykle istotny przekaz zarówno intelektualny, jak i emocjonalny. Sens tworzonych dzieł spowodował, że nie są one, jak współcześnie często widzimy, obiektami dekoracyjnymi, ale pomimo złocen i bogatej formy są



Rzeźba i gwasz Marka
w pracowni, 2010



Marek wykonuje działanie w swoim mieszkaniu, 2016



Prace Marka w jego pracowni, 2010

esejami dotyczącymi sensu naszej egzystencji. Tu trzeba powiedzieć o innej cesze Marka, jego non-konformizmie. Bardzo chętnie uczestniczył w niezależnych wystawach, nie tylko w latach osiemdziesiątych. Pamiętam demonstrację, jaką zorganizował z nami w 1989 roku przeciwko powołaniu w Zamku Ujazdowskim Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, który miał być ośrodkiem prowadzącym artystów zgodnie ze standardem konwencjonalnej sztuki zachodnioeuropejskiej. Już w XXI wieku, po działaniach w kierunku ograniczenia swobody twórczej przez system kuratorski, uczestniczył w wystawach organizowanych przez stałych uczestników wystaw pracownianych z lat osiemdziesiątych pod hasłem: *Kultura niezależna 25 lat później*. Te wystawy, mimo że opierały się na czołowych polskich artystach, nie mogły zaistnieć w oficjalnym obiegu, co

także świadczy o kondycji organizacji polskiego życia artystycznego. Był jednym z tych twórców modernistycznej awangardy, którzy mocno weszli w nurt postmodernizmu, chociaż jego wiara w sens sztuki nie pozwoliła mu na afirmację nurtów post sztuki. W 2021 roku namalowałem poczet władców Polski. Władcom do Zygmunta Augusta z nieznanymi obliczami nadałem twarze polskich współczesnych artystów. Pierwszemu władcy – Lechowi nadałem twarz Marka Koniecznego, uznając jego rolę we współczesnej polskiej sztuce. Będąc niewątpliwie jedną z najciekawszych postaci w sztuce przełomu XX i XXI wieku przeminął wraz z nią. Na cmentarzu żegnało go niewielu. Kilka osób z rodziny i kilku artystów.

Jan RYLKE