

Kunstverein Eisenstadt *zu Gast im Gärtnerhaus*

Von dem, was trägt

Curated by Christian Kosmas Mayer

The former residence of the head gardeners serves as a direct reminder of the work that makes a garden possible in the first place: before anything grows, there is a vision; for this to become a landscape, it requires care, observation and time. The exhibition *Von dem, was trägt* brings together artistic works that explore how such visions become reality – and how they change as soon as they encounter something living. The works approach plants from various perspectives: as counterparts to human care, scientific curiosity, creative practice, personal memory or imagination.

For their multi-channel film work *The Water Cabinet*, the artist duo Hanakam & Schuller accompanied gardeners at the Anima Garden in Marrakesh. Speaking in their native language, they discuss irrigation, plant care, technical processes and their daily routines. The garden thus emerges as a complex infrastructure comprising water, labour, experience and microecology. Its continued existence relies on knowledge that is formed through daily observation and interaction with living things. Amid the extreme conditions of a research station at the South Pole, the cultivation of plants becomes the subject of Sonia Leimer's video *Eden Antarctica*. Documentary footage of an experimental facility where vegetables grow under artificial conditions is interwoven with the fictional narrative of a scientist who lives and works there. Amidst accounts of cultivation successes, loneliness and climate change, the cultivation of plants appears as preparation for the possible living conditions of a future characterised by change and uncertainty.

The idea of creating new living conditions also lay at the heart of the Llano del Rio garden city. Designed in California in 1914, the settlement was intended to reorganise agriculture, care work and community life in a novel way. The utopian project failed, partly due to water shortages and the loss of important water rights. In *Soft Skill*, Jenni Tischer takes up the diagrammatic structure of the never-realised town plan and demonstrates how closely societal ideas are bound to the material conditions of their realisation.

From the shaping of social ways of life, the exhibition leads to the garden as a place of personal experience. Anna and Anastasia Jermolaeva, mother and daughter, each draw their own garden for the other. The works emerge from an exchange about plants, memories and the daily routine of gardening. The garden thus appears as a place where experiences and knowledge are passed down across generations. Traditional knowledge is also at the heart of Christian Kosmas Mayer's *Telltale*. Discreetly mounted above a window frame, the dried branch of a balsam fir reacts to changes in humidity and foretells changes in the weather by rising or falling. Mayer thus draws upon a simple instrument that, long before modern measuring technology, emerged from the careful observation of natural processes and was used as a weather indicator in gardening.

In Lois Weinberger's *Portable Garden*, plastic bags are filled with topsoil and left to their own devices for weeks on end. Nettle roots and seeds already present in the soil germinate, wind-borne seeds are added, wild plants spread out and grow ever higher throughout the duration of the exhibition. The artist merely creates the conditions and refrains from determining how things will unfold. Over time, the vegetation unfolds according to its own dynamics and can be observed from then on. Whilst Weinberger leaves the vegetation to its own devices, Mark Dion turns his attention to cultivated plants and the cultural notions with which we approach them. In his series *Nursery*, a pram and a playpen serve as containers for plants. These familiar objects appear both familiar and alien due to their new

function. In this way, it becomes apparent, in a humorous manner, that care is also a cultural practice which shapes our relationship with the plant world.

With Anna Zemánková's drawings, the exhibition finally returns to its original premise: every garden begins with an idea. Zemánková's plants, flowers, seed heads and organic forms only take shape through the act of drawing and follow a vision of their own. Imagination itself becomes a form of creation here. The garden begins anew – this time in the image.

The exhibition concludes with the collaboratively produced book *After Eden: Art With and Against the Garden*, which was created during the course of the same name, led by Christian Kosmas Mayer, at the International Summer Academy of Fine Arts in Salzburg, Austria. Its pages bring together sketches, texts, photographs and notes that emerged from the collective engagement with the garden. Diverse observations, ideas and artistic approaches come together here to form an open process of thought and practice that extends the exhibition's questions beyond its exhibition space itself.