

To the press

Uriel Orlow  
«Theatrum Botanicum»

14 April – 17 June 2018

Press preview: Friday, 13 April 2018, 11 a.m.

Opening: Friday, 13 April 2018, 6 p.m.



In his research-based and process-oriented practice Uriel Orlow (born in Zurich, lives and works in London, Lisbon and Zurich) is concerned with blind spots in the representation of history and ensuing questions of restitution, including repatriating memory to the present. At Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen Orlow presents his large-scale body of work *Theatrum Botanicum* (2015–2017) which considers the botanical world as a stage for politics. Working from the dual vantage points of South Africa and Europe the project shows plants as witnesses and actors in history, as dynamic agents linking nature and humans, tradition and modernity – across various geographies, histories and knowledge systems. Films, sound works, photographs and installations highlight 'botanical nationalism' and other legacies of colonialism, plant migration, bio-piracy, flower diplomacy under apartheid, the role of classification and naming of plants as well as the garden planted by Mandela and his fellow inmates in Robben Island prison.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is a video trilogy which investigates the ideological and commercial confrontation of two different yet interwining medicinal traditions and their use of plants (*The Crown Against Mafavuke*), considers questions around indigenous copyright protection (*Imbizo Ka Mafavuke (Mafavuke's Tribunal)*) and documents the continuing presence of herbal medicine in the postcolonial context (*Muthi*).

The surround-sound installation *What Plants Were Called Before They Had a Name* for example can be seen against the background of the expeditions that preceded and accompanied European colonialism in South Africa (and elsewhere), that aimed at charting the territory and classifying its natural resources, in turn paving the way for occupation and exploitation. The supposed discovery and subsequent naming and cataloguing of plants disregarded and ultimately obliterated existing indigenous names and botanical knowledge as the Linnean system of classification with its particular European rationality was imposed. *What Plants Were Called Before They Had a Name* functions as an oral plant dictionary of indigenous South African languages such as Khoi, SePedi, SeSotho, Swazi, Tswana, Tsonga, Xhosa and Zulu.

Orlow used film material found in the basement of the library of the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden in Cape Town as the starting point for his video work *The Fairest Heritage*. The films were commissioned in 1963 for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the garden, to document its history but also the jubilee celebrations with their 'national' dances, pantomimes of colonial conquest and visiting international botanists; the only Africans in the films are workers. Considered passive and neutral, flowers were excluded from the boycott for a long time and 'botanical nationalism' and flower diplomacy flourished unchecked in South Africa and abroad. For *The Fairest Heritage* Orlow worked with an actor who puts herself and her body in these loaded images, inhabiting and confronting the found film material, and thus contesting history and the archive itself.

«Theatrum Botanicum» not only profoundly engages with colonialism and recent historiography but also offers the opportunity to delve deeply into Uriel Orlow's way of working.

**Uriel Orlow** (\*1973 in Zurich) lives and works in London, Lisbon and Zurich. He studied at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design London, the Slade School of Art and the University of Geneva, completing a PhD in Fine Art in 2002. Solo exhibitions (selection): PAV – Parco Arte Vivente, Turin/IT (2017); Parc Saint Léger – Centre d'Art Contemporain, Pougues-les-Eaux/FR (2017); The Showroom, London/UK (2016); Castello di Rivoli, Turin/IT (2015); John Hansard Gallery, Southampton/UK (2015); Depo, Istanbul/TR (2015); Kunsthaus Pasquart, Biel/CH (2012). Orlow's works have been exhibited internationally in museums and galleries, amongst others in London/UK (Tate Modern, Tate Britain, Whitechapel Gallery, ICA, Gasworks), Paris/FR (Palais de Tokyo, Fondation Ricard, Maison Populaire, Bétonsalon), Zurich/CH (Kunsthaus, Les Complices, Helmhaus, Shedhalle) as well as Geneva/CH (Centre d'Art Contemporain, Centre de la Photographie). Orlow's work was further presented at major survey exhibitions including: 7th Moscow Biennial, Moscow/RU (2017), Sharjah Biennale 13, Sharjah/UAE (2017), Manifesta 9, Genk/BE (2012); 54th Biennale di Venezia, Venice/IT (2011). Orlow's films have been screened at Oberhausen Short Film Festival, Oberhausen/DE, Locarno Festival, Locarno/CH, Videoex, Zurich/CH, Centre Pompidou, Paris/FR; BFI London Film Festival, London/UK; Kino der Kunst, Munich/DE; Visions du Réel, Nyon/FR and the Biennale of the Moving Image, Geneva/CH.

**Events and Educational Programme:**

**Opening**

Friday, 13 April 2018, 6 p.m.

**Artist Talk** – With Uriel Orlow

Saturday, 14 April 2018, 12 noon

**Guided Tour I/Introduction for Teachers**

Tuesday, 24 April 2018, 6 p.m.

**Art Lunch** – Guided tour followed by lunch

Thursday, 3 May 2018, 12 noon

Admission: CHF 25/members CHF 22; registration at [info@k9000.ch](mailto:info@k9000.ch)

**Art Snack** – Short guided tour and a snack

Thursday, 7 June 2018, 12.30 p.m.

Admission: CHF 10/members CHF 7; no registration required

**Painting Afternoon** – For children from 4 to 8 years-old

Wednesday, 13 June 2018, 2 p.m.

Admission: CHF 5; registration until the previous day at: [info@k9000.ch](mailto:info@k9000.ch)

**Guided Tour II**

Sunday, 17 June 2018, 3 p.m.

**Workshops for School Classes**

From 25 April on we are offering workshops at the exhibition.

More information: [www.k9000.ch](http://www.k9000.ch) (Art Education/Workshops for School Classes)

**High-resolution images can be found in the press kit on our website under 'Press'. For further questions please contact Giovanni Carmine ([carmine@k9000.ch](mailto:carmine@k9000.ch)) or Maren Brauner ([brauner@k9000.ch](mailto:brauner@k9000.ch)).**

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Opening times:  
Tues to Fri 12 noon – 6 p.m.  
Sat & Sun 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.