

[Biennale Weiertal 2023](#)

COMMON GROUND, curated by Sabine Rusterholz Petko

The 8th Biennale Weiertal is titled **Common Ground** and is curated by **Sabine Rusterholz Petko**. Seventeen nationally and internationally important artists are participating. They all conceive site-specific works for the biennial exhibition in the Weiertal garden outside Winterthur.

Featuring works by: Brigham Baker, Vanessa Billy, Nicolas Buzzi & Harmony, Ishita Chakraborty, Sam Falls, Dorota Gawęda & Eglé Kulbokaitė, Sarah Hablützel & Marko Mijatovic, Dunja Herzog, Thomas Julier, Hanne Lippard, Lithic Alliance, Martina Lussi, Thi My Lien Nguyen, Uriel Orlow, Reto Pulfer, Miriam Rutherford & Joke Schmidt and Raul Walch.

Exhibition: 21 May - 10 September 2023

Opening: Saturday, 20 May 2023

Searching for a Common Ground in the Weiertal

Sabine Rusterholz Petko and Giulia Bernardi

"This is the appeal of the commons as a 'small form of a new society', because they stand for a power that comes from "below" rather than from the political state and is based on cooperation and collective decision-making rather than on coercion. In this sense, the commons resonate with Audre Lorde's insight that 'the tools of the masters will never dismantle the houses of the masters' [...]"
Silvia Federici, *Die Welt wieder verzaubern* (2021).

What comes to mind when we hear the term "Common Ground" or when we read it as the title of this exhibition? Perhaps it conjures up the image of a communal territory in which labor and resources are fairly distributed and notions of state or private ownership no longer hold sway. But how can such a place still be possible in our capitalist, fast-paced world? Italian philosopher Silvia Federici addresses this question. With the term "commons", she pleads for spaces that move beyond the dominating logic of production and consumption; for spaces that can become the "small form of a new society". She sees this potential, for example, in the development of urban gardens. In her book *Aufstand aus der Küche* (Uprising from the Kitchen), she traces how such gardens were established in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s and how the initiative of marginalized and migrant communities made them possible in the first place. According to Federici, it is precisely such places that create the premises for new forms of participation by becoming "centers of sociality, knowledge production and cultural and intergenerational exchange".² Not lastly, urban gardens provide food security by producing for consumption within the neighborhood rather than for commercial purposes. In the context of a subsistence economy, work can also be redistributed and the division between paid gainful work and unpaid care work can be fundamentally put to question. Consequently, Federici sees the politics of the commons as a revolution in the relationship to ourselves and to others. As a space of thought and possibility for caring and solidary ways of living.

FROM COMMONING TO COMMON GROUND

According to Silvia Federici's reflections, cooperation and collective decision-making become the central element. Accordingly, urban gardens are "commons" and "common ground" at the same time. The term, derived from the studies of philosophy and linguistics, refers to the common ground that is necessary for interpersonal as well as socio-political discussions and negotiations. As in a garden, this ground must be worked out and cultivated together. The challenge here is that this soil is

never rigid, but constantly in motion. 3 Because "reality" as such does not exist. Its perception depends on our socialization and on the point of view from which we look at the world. 4 Both the literary scholar Hevin Karakurt and the author Sarah Elena Müller address this aspect in their essays. While Karakurt explains how our understanding of reality is becoming increasingly fragile due to unequal participation or even manipulation through "alternative facts", Müller writes: "There is no independent reality that we could approach researching without standing in it ourselves with at least one foot or hoof." In her essay, a first-person narrator appears, who wants to become one with a goat. It is a (thought) experiment with leaving the human perspective and connecting with other, more-than-human living beings.

REMAINING RESTLESS

The relationship between human and more-than-human beings thus becomes the central aspect. Do we include our "companions" when it comes to negotiating the "Common Ground"? Cultural scientist Julia Grillmayr takes up this question in her essay. Following Donna Haraway, she explains how the border between "nature" and "culture" cannot be drawn at all - although we do so again and again. For this, Haraway uses the term "naturecultures" 5; written without a hyphen, so that the idea does not even arise that these could be two separate spheres.

Yet we give little space to our more-than-human "companions" - neither on the planet, nor in our thinking. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's book *The mushroom at the End of The World* exemplifies how they reclaim this space despite everything. In her book, the US anthropologist examines the Japanese matsutake mushroom, which grows even where the organic soil has been destroyed, i.e. in the midst of "capitalist ruins". Where it sprouts, it forms - like other fungal species - a subterranean network that creates cross-species connections, or diverse "entanglements", as Lowenhaupt Tsing calls them. 6

In this sense, the root network is symbolic of the exchange that is created, of the thoughts that are spun - during the exhibition and beyond. But it requires us to keep questioning our own point of view and find something positive in the complexity that comes with it; that we have the courage to remain restless and to keep fundamentally rethinking our "Common Ground" - again and again.

1 Silvia Federici, *Die Welt wieder verzaubern*. Feminismus, Marxismus & Commons. Berlin/Wien: Mandelbaum 2021, S. 253.

2 Silvia Federici, *Aufstand aus der Küche. Reproduktionsarbeit im globalen Kapitalismus und die unvollendete feministische Revolution*. Münster: Edition Assemblage 2020, S. 92–95.

3 Donna Haraway, *Unruhig bleiben*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag 2018, S. 49.

4 On this, Haraway writes in the chapter *Situated Knowledges*: "Vision is always a question of the power to see - and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices." For the US theorist, reflecting on one's own position is fundamental: "Positioning is, therefore, the key practice grounding knowledge organised around the imagery of vision, as so much Western scientific and philosophical discourse is organised. Positioning implies responsibility or our enabling practices." Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge 1991, pp. 192-193.

5 Donna Haraway, *Das Manifest für Gefährten*. Leipzig: Merve Verlag, 2016, p. 8.

6 See: Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2015.