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Press release

Katja Davar
Lace it was

Provinz Showroom

June 18 – extended until September 3, 2023

In the works of Katja Davar (born in London in 1968, lives in Cologne), multiple discourses from the worlds of natural and cultural sciences meet. The artist condenses heterogeneous content into complex visual worlds. The title of the exhibition alone – Lace it was – suggests that the images of animals shown here transcend themselves. The animals shown in landscape settings are transcribed from paintings and image cycles from varying epochs and cultures. Shahnameh, the Book of Kings, written around 1000 CE is one important source as is Habbiballah of Sava's illustrated manuscript, of the traditional poem Mantiq al-tair Language of the Birds. Another source are several works of the British artist George Stubbs.

A key stylistic element in the work of Katja Davar is her layering of graphics and drawings, creating formal and contextual space for further associations. In this case, the constructive-geometric structures are authentic lace patterns, which have been screen printed in white over the drawings which are executed in ink and varnish. These structures are based on ancient pattern books which were used to provide instructions to the lace-makers, as well as using individual lace depictions from European portraiture of the 17th century. The oldest written record of this varied and difficult technique - a distinction is made between needle lace and bobbin lace, among others - is the pattern book „Le Pompe“, published in Venice in 1557. Lace tells us much about the socio-political context and conditions of Europe from the 16th century onwards. For centuries, lace making was the epitome of needlework, requiring time, patience and skill. It was sold at accordingly high prices and was unaffordable for any class below the nobility. Anyone who wanted to demonstrate their wealth and associated power did it through jewels, precious stones and metals – and lace.

Katja Davar's series of works and her large format mural of intricate lace patterns point to these complex levels of interpretation. Her work weaves together different techniques and depictions that were created at different times and in different cultures. As we look at and through the lace, we are allowed to participate in former “paradisical” or unspoilt conditions, and the loss thereof. The latter can be put into the context of the 15th century, beginning with the “discovery of the world”, which is connected to the beginnings of the ruthless European colonisation. Despite their beauty, Davar's works reveal historical structures and the distribution of power as well as the colonial continuity of both still present to this very day.

Katja Davar teaches as Professor for Experimental Drawing at University of Applied Sciences, Mainz. Studies at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London, Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and Kunsthochschule für Medien, Cologne. International Exhibitions include 2020 - 2021 Notes from a Flickering Stage, Kunstverein Heilbronn (DE), 2020 These rooms of Earth and Stones, (with Michel Bouanger) Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal (CA), 2019 Electric Spinning Gaze, Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl (DE), 2022 Ornamental Forest Geology, Kunstmuseum Gelsenkirchen (DE).

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