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Veronika Eberhart

GARTEN SPRENGEN



Veronika Eberhart, *Garten sprengen*, 2022. Filmstill. Courtesy of the artist

In this solo exhibition, Veronika Eberhart presents her film *Garten sprengen* (“Watering the Garden”, 2022) together with a new series of sculptural and photographic works based on the biography of the composer Hanns Eisler (1898 – 1962). Coupling an inward gaze with a sprawling investigative outlook is a common strategy employed by Eberhart. An artist and musician born in 1982 in Bad Radkersburg in Austria and based in Vienna, Eberhart studied sociology before finding her path towards the visual arts. Her work unfolds through rigorous research, often interpreting a specific historical reference into complex arrangements encompassing video, sculpture, and installation. While her works are frequently rooted in specific places, their sense of time remains ambiguous.

Her film *Garten sprengen* is named after a poem of the same title by Bertolt Brecht from 1942, for which Hanns Eisler composed the score. At this time, Brecht and Eisler, who had already been working closely together since 1930, were both in exile in California alongside many other European intellectuals. They would lie on the beach and think about bloodshed. Especially the sight of so many parks and gardens, all in need of copious amounts of water and expensive irrigation systems to stay alive in the middle of the desert, both delighted and disturbed Brecht.

Like the plants, Brecht himself was an unlikely resident of Los Angeles. It wasn't long before his and Eisler's espousal of communism began to cause them trouble in their adopted home. From 1943 onwards their circle of European intellectuals found itself under FBI surveillance. The scrutiny only intensified in the following years with the heightening of McCarthyism. In 1947 Eisler was interrogated by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and accused of acting as a Soviet agent. One year later, he was expelled from the country and returned to Vienna. Eisler later settled in the GDR, where he composed "Auferstanden aus Ruinen" (Risen from Ruins), which became the young republic's national anthem.

*Garten sprengen* is set in the same location as Eisler's first HUAC hearings: the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. Eleven stories high and spanning half a city block, its various ballrooms have been the setting for Hollywood films and Academy Awards ceremonies. Pointing her 16-mm camera at the hotel's cascading staircases, elaborate carpet patterns, and sprawling dining halls, the symbolic specificity of the Biltmore allows Eberhart to connect the broader themes surrounding Eisler's biography and his time in Los Angeles: being in exile, the threat of censorship, and how to make art under capitalism while longing for revolution.

In addition to the film, the exhibition also presents new sculptures and photographs that interpret artefacts and gestures appearing in *Garten sprengen*. They each reference specific objects connected with Hanns Eisler's artistry, while creating a sense of timelessness through abstraction.

Eisler's biography and censorship throughout different historical periods also leads us to the fundamental question of what constitutes 'free' and 'unfree' art, a politically motivated Cold-War binary that remains pertinent in light of recent global events. As Bertolt Brecht asked in one of his and Hanns Eisler's most famous compositions, the Solidarity Song from 1931: "Whose tomorrow is tomorrow? / And whose world is the world?"

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VERONIKA EBERHART (\*1982 in Bad Radkersburg, Austria) works with a transdisciplinary approach that combines video, sound, performance and sculpture. Her work has been exhibited at institutions including Belvedere 21, Vienna; Kunsthalle Wien; Kunstraum Niederösterreich and CalArts, Los Angeles and the Mackey Garage Top of the MAK Center, Los Angeles.

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