

SALTS is pleased to present *Ströme* (streams), an exhibition with new works by Gina Folly and Mandla Reuter.

The exhibition brings together two artistic positions which share a common interest in the natural and the urban environment, as well as the notion of the exotic and the creation of an artificial Nature. The title of the exhibition acts as topic and program and thematically sets the ground of this collaboration.

A stream (English singular for Ströme), colloquially describes the direction a larger water-stream takes before flowing into the sea. The term “Ströme” depicts a physical movement as well as an attitude or tendency that encompasses a literary or artistic era. For SALTS, the artists adapt the term as a metaphor for a transfer, mostly in the sense of a cultural exchange. What happens when you “transport” Western culture into an untamed natural environment and what happens in turn when the exotic gets exhibited in the Western world? Nature becomes the basis of the artists’ investigation, and the central theme of the exhibition, where most objects are in fact made of industrial materials.

Gina Folly is interested in a multitude of cultural and social phenomena. Plants, animals, as well as everyday objects and situations play a vital role in her work. She examines how those imitate nature and contribute to artificially build and shape our daily environment, forming new ways of being. Such confrontation between humans and their natural surrounding is translated in Folly’s installations, objects and photography. Under the term “Ströme” she negotiates the interest of our society in the exotic, a fascination that started centuries ago, and looks into the Western perception of the wild and exotic animal world. Within her research practice, Folly deals with the positive and negative aspects of zoos and other artificial animal parks, assembling new works that serve as placeholders for a larger discussion.

For *Ströme*, the artist is making use of pre-fabricated objects from the monkey house of the zoo of Basel. The boxes, made of Polycarbonate, have several openings, which are divided into different levels and usually filled with hay and fruits. They are food containers on the one hand, and on the other training objects for the monkeys, who use twigs and branches to figure out how to maneuver the food out. The boxes are meant to simulate a natural situation and encourage the apes, who have never lived in a natural habitat, to develop logical and cognitive thought processes. Produced industrially, this “system“ was developed by the zoo of Basel, and reminds in its simplicity of the serial aesthetics of 1960s Minimalism. The installation is being complemented with a video work that further explores the attempt to build a realistic display of Nature.

For the exhibition, Mandla Reuter presents an ancient manhole cover, which has only partly been restored with white epoxy filler, giving the impression of a historical relic. Fitting the outline of the exhibition, the lid symbolizes the access to and the end point of subterranean water-streams, automatically bringing the dark and the hidden to mind. Invisible to the eye, those “Ströme” or streams hold a great role in our infrastructure and consequently our quality of life. In addition, the artist has shipped 1000 liters of drinking water from Iquitos, Peru. Shipped via sea freight from Lima passing through Rotterdam, the journey of the water will take place during the length of the exhibition. Imbued with remote meaning, the transatlantic load becomes an outsourced and mobile part of the exhibition, a time axis around which voyage and experience are simultaneously rooted in different geographical locations. In another work, Reuter is branching off water from the local river Birs, just outside of SALTS, and diverts it through the exhibition space all the way into the drain system of the house. With this gesture, the artist creates yet another artificial stream, which serves as model for the multi-channeled systems of the city’s sewer structure.

In the context of sign and signifiers, both the works of Gina Folly and Mandla Reuter play with light in different manners. While Reuter’s bright yellow gas street lamp, which couldn’t be more artificial, is used to make night into day, Folly’s day-light lamps simulate realistic daylight. Even though both light sources aim to produce a day-like situation, the melting of both works creates a harsh, yellow tinted artificiality, immersing the exhibition space into a surreal spectrum of colourplay.

*Ströme* can be read as an exhibition and research project by two artists, whose practice uses metaphor to critically investigate notions of replicated Nature, as well as the exchange of cultural goods. Part of this research starts with the travel and exploration of various countries in Central and South America, a continent that flourished under Spanish and Portuguese colonialism. After Reuter’s initial trip to Iquitos, Folly will travel to Mexico following the exhibition. Based on their mutual experience and their individual research, as well as their physical confrontation within the exhibition space, SALTS will release a publication towards the end of 2015 gathering collected experiences and paraphernalia.

Gina Folly (\*1983 Switzerland, works in Basel and Rome) Mandla Reuter (\*1976 South Africa, works in Berlin)

Drafted by Fabian Schöneich

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