

# Westfälischer Kunstverein

Rothenburg 30,  
48143 Münster  
westfaelischer-  
kunstverein.de

Opening Hours  
Wed-Sun 11am-7pm

Regular 4 €  
Reduced 2 €  
Members free

Eve Tagny  
*In the Underbelly of a Kernel*  
05/07-05/10/2025

Focusing on photographic and video-based media, Eve Tagny's artistic practice intertwines performance, sculptural elements and research to produce spatial installations reflecting narratives of grief, resilience and strength. She understands landscapes as witnesses of individual and collective disruptions, at the same time, uncovering their hidden potential for remembrance and regeneration. Starting with materials, forms and cycles found in nature, the artist explores ways of conceiving a relationship to nature that is not reduced to a logic of extraction or scientific categorisation, but that allows for other forms of knowledge, languages and connection.

In her most comprehensive presentation to date, Eve (b. 1986, CA, living and working in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal) continues her examination of the entanglement of colonialism, botanical science and the commodification of nature and body in a site-specific installation featuring newly-commissioned video works. *In the Underbelly of a Kernel* is her first institutional solo exhibition outside of Canada and will be accompanied by an extensive programme of events, centred in part on close collaboration with local actors to interrogate traces of colonialism in the city of Münster.

The show is part of the year-long research, exhibition and discourse programme *The Company We Keep Makes the World We Live In* under the new artistic direction of Theresa Roessler. It focuses on the political and resilient potential of friendship, taking this both as a prerequisite for productive collaboration and as a model for constructive political relations.

*Who is speaking? Who is allowed to speak?*

These questions form the central political contention of the institutional context. As a white institution<sup>1</sup> the Westfälischer Kunstverein carries within it power dynamics, structures of representation, exclusions and spheres of imagination forged in history – as well as the potential to play a part in their continuation.

Given that Eve's exhibition at the Kunstverein deals with the continued effects of colonial structures in botany, economics, property rights and culture, this might, then, seem a necessary entry point. Whilst this does not necessarily mean that the exhibition itself is in need of explanation, the fact that exhibition institutions comprise a kind of 'underbelly,' a substructure that can stabilise mechanisms of exclusion and dependency, ought to be considered in this context.

Passing by the Kunstverein's glass façade, texts on ruched white silk come immediately into view, referring to this underbelly described above. Like a festive banner, they adorn the hay bales in the foyer, stacked on top of each other in their representative positions. The sentence "The colonial present" stands out in its bold typography, alongside quotes from postcolonial thinkers such as Brenna Bhandar, Sylvia Wynter and Robin D.G. Kelley. The colonial present is here, as it is in the EDEKA supermarket across the road, an abbreviation that still stands for "Einkaufsgenossenschaft der Kolonialwarenhändler" ("colonial merchants' purchasing co-operative"). Here, as at the University of Münster, even after its name was changed in 2023.<sup>2</sup> Here, as in the Botanical Gardens, which received plants from the colony of 'German East Africa' gifted by Friedrich Tobler, among others, in the 1910s, and here as on Anna-Krückmann-Weg in Rumphorst, which, in 2017 was renamed to honour a woman who co-founded the Münster branch of the Women's Association of the German Colonial Society.<sup>3</sup> In Short, the city space bears a multitude of visible and invisible traces of German colonialism.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Coloniality of Nature*

Colonialism refers to a political and economic relationship in which the sovereignty of one nation or people is imposed upon by the power of another, creating empires. However, coloniality goes beyond this framework: it describes enduring patterns of power that arose from colonialism but continue to shape culture, the notion of labour and ownership, social relations, and knowledge production long after the end of formal colonial administrations. This underscores how coloniality is embedded not only in governance but also in economic and ecological structures. Robin D. G. Kelley insightfully notes, as appears on one of the ruched banners: "seizing control of natural resources turned into commodities by devalued labour is where capital begins."

The modern world order, founded on racism, continues to result in a division of those deemed superior and inferior, the controlling and controlled, the knowledgeable and unknowing, the profiteers and the exploited. (There can be no cut roses in the supermarket for 2,99 € without water theft, low wages and pesticides.) The concept of coloniality described above goes beyond the realm of political rule and permeates epistemic orders, e.g. in the fundamental separation of nature and culture. The coloniality of nature can be understood as continuing colonial logics, such as the extractivist practices, exploitation of raw materials and unequal value chains that remain structurally anchored in global trade relations. Who has to work the land, who benefits from it?

These logics condense in an exemplary fashion in botanical gardens – an important starting point for Eve's research. These gardens are sites where plants were collected, classified and utilised in the service of economic and imperial interests:

"Instead of being used for local African benefit, the collection of knowledge surrounding colonial botany was knowingly and overwhelmingly produced for the benefit of European commercial, scientific, and economic gains. Thus, it has underscored the asymmetrical power relations at play within colonial spaces."<sup>5</sup>

Employing an 'exotic' aesthetic, botanical gardens staged the empire, while the plants' origins and the often-violent processes used to appropriate them were (and still are) systematically concealed and

overwritten. However, the fact that local stories and knowledge were, and continue to be, unacknowledged by the West does not mean they never existed.

As Eve observes, it is these very plants that stand, as resistant protagonists, for regeneration, healing and other forms of coexistence. *In the Underbelly of a Kernel* is positioned precisely within this tension, this simultaneity: a garden as a place of refuge, for solace – and yet always also a place of control, of taming, of human order over the more-than-human. What do we actually value in nature?

### *The Oppositional Gesture*

Eve chose a photograph from her series *Mythologies de la Valeur* (2023) as the exhibition's lead image. The image shows a Black ear with a pearl earring, a Black hand pointing towards it. The pearl may be considered an object of beauty and rarity, but they are obtained through extractive practices, often under precarious conditions in contexts governed by colonialism. In the image, as in the exhibition space, using one's own body to take a counter-stance to colonial objectification reads as confrontation and resilience. Much like in the portrait of the artist, here the subject's body is staged as if speaking through posture, gesture and gaze, which is reminiscent of bell hooks' notion of the oppositional gaze: "Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The "gaze" has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally."<sup>6</sup>

This thought could be central to Eve's photographic works: bell hooks illustrates here that looking back – as opposed to a forced looking-away or passive observation – represents an active act of power appropriation and conscious intervention in colonial and violent regimes of looking, which degrade, anonymize, exoticize.

The idea of the oppositional gaze might also be extended to the recurring pointing gestures in the exhibition – perhaps as a kind of "oppositional gesture." A pointing hand indicates and determines the direction of the gaze, thus also setting the focus in the picture. This visual strategy not only gestures-towards, it demands. In this way, two levels intertwine in the photographic self-composition: on the one hand, there is reference to the powerful gesture of 'showing,' as it was historically established in colonial and museum contexts – the showing and resultant marking of the 'other.' On the other hand, there is a subversive appropriation of this gesture as the artist shows herself, not as an object, but as a subject.

### *Listening to Images*

In four large-format wooden frames, Eve places colonial images directly into relation with her own photographs, for example from the botanical garden in Limbe, Cameroon, founded in 1892 during German colonial rule. Like many former colonies, Cameroon is still characterised by the consequences of a monostructural export economy rooted in colonial plantation and extractivist systems.

So what happens within this visual juxtaposition? Perhaps a form of 'listening' manifests in the montage of these different temporalities. What is particularly remarkable is that the frames, in their sculptural, accumulative and preserving character, bring together numerous image segments on different levels: the cardboard mount is covered with dyed textile, screen printed in places, as fragments of research and text enter

into a dialogue with photographs. This confrontational and, at the same time, poetic way of working creates a conceptual reference to Tina Campt's book *Listening to Images* (2017):

"What is the frequency of these images? Quiet. A quiet hum full of reverb and vibrato. Not always perceptible to the human ear, we feel it more in the throat. [...] To listen to them is to be attuned to their unsayable truths, to perceive their quiet frequencies of possibility—the possibility to inhabit a future as unbounded black subjects. Listening to these images gives us access to something much more mediated and perhaps far more powerful: the hum of utopian dreams and diasporic aspiration."<sup>7</sup>

The colonial image is not erased, but instead placed in the present. In this way, a "quiet desire" against representation could be realised – within a document of powerlessness and dehumanisation. These "quiet frequencies of possibility," as Tina Campt calls them, perhaps mark alternative modes of storytelling and witnessing, which are also to be found in *In the Underbelly of a Kernel*. Affective media translations emerge from the documentary mode that give space to the invisible, the hidden, the unspoken – groping, exploring, rhizomatic; beyond linear, teleological narratives. Works thus develop a visual and physical grammar in which history, memory and resistance find new forms of expression, as does the relationship between nature and culture.

What does the banana leaf, for example – which appears in several pictures and frames the passageway to the rear room in the form of a bronze sculpture – testify to? It becomes, in part, a bearer of multiple stories that inscribe themselves across bodies, materials and geographies. Resistance is not articulated loudly here, but quietly, shifted, affectively, asynchronously within the temporal shifts – the "low hum" that Tina Campt describes.

### *In the Underbelly*

The term underbelly describes both a vulnerable, hidden underside and a dark, corrupt or seedy side of a system or topic. Colonial ideologies – and this can be read in texts on (post-)colonial subjectivity by the authors mentioned here such as bell hooks, Tina Campt, but of course also Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter or Saidiya Hartman – do not only have an external effect; they become ingrained, psychologically internalised, inherited. If the kernel, the seed of a plant, stands as a symbol for colonial knowledge and value production, then the inscribed legacy of these ideologies can also be recognised within it: the assimilation and transmission of colonial logics, both materially and mentally.

But at the same time, as the exhibition may assert, envision or even demand, this kernel harbours the potential for reversal: as a repository for repressed knowledge; insubordinate, cyclical and decolonial narratives and, thus, futures. While the seed of the oil palm gave rise to an exploitative industry, Eve's kernel became the vocabulary for a new language – one that is affective and sensorial. Can the seed stand, in spite of the underbelly, for the possibility of sowing new relationalities?

- 1 The term 'white institution' refers critically to cultural institutions that are characterised by Eurocentric, hegemonic power structures. This does not refer to the skin colour of individual actors, but to a system that sets white, Western-influenced perspectives as the norm and marginalises or excludes other points of view.
- 2 In April 2023, the Senate of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität (WWU for short) decided to remove Wilhelm II from its name. As of 1 October 2023, it has therefore borne the name 'Universität Münster'. The decision was preceded by a public discussion process, which included the project "Zur Sache WWU" ("on the matter of WWU"): <https://www.uni-muenster.de/ZurSacheWWU/> (accessed 30.06.25).
- 3 Maximilian Wiech, "Koloniale Straßennamen in Münster: Ein Überblick," in: *Koloniale Spuren in Münster und im Münsterland*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2025, p. 71ff.
- 4 From 23.08.2025 to 15.02.2026 the Stadtmuseum will turn its focus to traces of colonialism in Münster in its "Themenraum Kolonialismus" ("colonialism theme-space") where Eve's exhibition will also be presented with image and text material.
- 5 Felicity Jensz, "Kolonialbotanik: Networks of collecting practices in colonial Germany," 2022, URL: <https://locus.ou.nl/locus-dossier-doorwerkingen-van-natuurhistorische-kolonialiteit/kolonialbotanik-felicity-jensz> (accessed: 01.07.2025).
- 6 bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze", in: *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, South End Press, Boston 1992, p. 116.
- 7 Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images*, Duke University Press, Durham 2017, p. 45.

## EVE TAGNY

Eve Tagny (b. 1986, CA, living and working in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal, Québec) studied journalism at the University of Montréal and film at Concordia University in Montréal, CA.

Selected solo exhibitions: *landless heirloom*, Platform, Winnipeg, CA, 2023; *Fragments De Roses*, Musée du Bas-Saint-Laurent, Rivière-du-Loup, CA, 2023; *Unadorned Landscapes*, Cooper Cole, Toronto, CA, 2022; *Monuments aux vestiges*, Franz Kaka, Toronto, CA, 2021; *Condolere Sanctuaries*, Centre Clark, Montréal, CA, 2020.

Selected group exhibitions: *HAPPY PLACE*, Biennale für Freiburg #3, Freiburg, DE, 2025; *Beyond the Commons: From Stardust to Everlasting Sun*, A space Gallery, Toronto, CA, 2025; *Memory/Myth*, Sydney, AU, 2024; *Undoing Earthwriting*, Optica, Montréal, CA, 2024; *Thick as Mud*, The Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, US, 2023.

## PROGRAMME

- 01/07/2025, 6 pm Münster Lecture by Eve Tagny at the Art Academy
- 16/07/2025, 6 pm Curator's Tour with Theresa Roessler
- 17/07/2025, 6 pm Conversation and Exchange on Colonial Botany and the Botanical Garden Münster with Ricarda Holthaus, Felicity Jensz and Eckhard Kluth
- 13/08/2025, 6 pm Public Tour with Vivien Kämpf
- 10/09/2025, 6 pm guesting ['gestiŋ] no. 2: *ein baum kommt selten allein*
- 15/09/2025, 6 pm Screening of *Naked Reality* (2016) by Jean-Pierre Bekolo at Schloßtheater Münster

- 27/09/2025, 6 pm *Make a Salad* by Jasmine Parsley (registration required)
- 01/10/2025, 6 pm Curator's Tour with Theresa Roessler and Vivien Kämpf

## TEAM

Administration: Tono Dreßen

Documentation: Thorsten Arendt, Ygor Souza Bahia

Curator: Theresa Roessler

Exhibition Management: Jana Peplau, Jenni Henke

Install Team: Mannan Atasoy, Beate Sikora, Tobias Maria Doerr, Bernhard Sicking, Meike Schulze-Hobeling, Team of the LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur (Renate Biedermann, Detlev Brauner, Thomas Erdmann, Wolfgang Möllers, Leonie Müller, Frank Naber)

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