

*Death by Landscape*  
Dorota Gawęda &  
Eglė Kulbokaitė

*Haus*  
IG Maisander

22.6.–24.8.2025

In spring, Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė travel to Altdorf for the first time to view the exhibition spaces at the Haus für Kunst Uri. We then return together by train, following an arm of Lake Lucerne and skirting Lake Lauerz, with sweeping views of the mountains. We try to photograph the passing scenery through the train windows – never quite successfully. Both the solo exhibition *Death by Landscape* by Dorota and Eglė and the foyer intervention *Haus* ('House') by IG Maisander reference the surrounding landscapes and our relationship to nature. Questions of landscape representation – whether in the Western tradition of landscape painting or in contemporary attempts to capture landscape via a smartphone camera – are as central as the knowledge or stories a landscape might contain. Thus, the summer exhibition at the Haus für Kunst Uri is at once site-specific and global in scope. It engages directly with the geographical and cultural space outside the institution, asking fundamental questions about our existence within landscape and, by extension, in the world. This perspective will also inform forthcoming exhibitions and projects at the Haus für Kunst Uri in an open and exploratory manner.

In the foyer, IG Maisander has created a space – more precisely, a house – constructed from straw bales and stools (sawn and carved from a fir tree from Gitschenen), inviting us to sit, read, listen, and observe. The collective, comprising organic farmer Andrea Gisler, beekeeper Petra Gisler, musician Hildegard Kleeb, performer and yoga teacher Anna Dahinden, and visual artist Florian Maritz, brings impressions and ideas from Gitschenen, high above Lake Lucerne. "Last Friday, we gathered in Gitschenen at the table, with tea, beer, bread, and lentil purée, contemplating the *Haus*", Hildegard

writes to me a few days ago. For the collective, the installation at the Haus für Kunst Uri refers back to 'their' house in Gitschenen: an alpine hut, set wide and inviting on the Geissboden Alp at the foot of the Maisander mountain. The lived-in house on the alp forms the heart of IG Maisander. The Alpine cultural landscape – with its accumulated knowledge, narratives, and inhabitants – constitutes the starting point for the collective's projects and events. One such event, the Gitschenen Bee Day (this year coinciding with the exhibition's vernissage at the Haus für Kunst Uri), focuses on the social organism of the honeybee. For the *Haus*, IG Maisander is also collaborating with other friends: in her sound installation, musician Rosanna Zünd presents recordings made in Gitschenen on 6 and 7 June. We hear the cuckoo, active at this time of year, the mountain stream, footsteps in tall grass, and the beating of hagsticks. The bricks were made by Lucca Blum and René Lou Jungo from soil from Gitschenen. And Raphael Wicki has designed postcards inscribed with the names of local flora and fauna. Lichens grow around my feet. The *Haus* within the Haus für Kunst Uri also draws vitality from our imagination and from the stories we carry into this landscape.

With the exhibition *Death by Landscape*, Dorota and Eglė further extend these reflections on landscape. For the first time, the artists present all parts of their *Mouthless* trilogy, placing them in dialogue with sculptural and installation works. The exhibition title is borrowed from Margaret Atwood. In her 1989 short story of the same name, a teenage girl, Lucy, disappears during summer camp in the forest. Lois, Lucy's best friend at the time, remains haunted by this disappearance for years. The wilderness is shut out of her apartment – "she is relieved not to have to worry [...] about the ivy or [...] about the squirrels gnawing their way into the attic"<sup>1</sup> – yet remains present: the walls are hung with landscape paintings. "Despite the fact that there are no people in them or even animals, it's as if there is something, or someone, looking back out."<sup>2</sup> Lois finds her lost friend in these painted landscapes – behind the tree in a golden autumnal wood. Lucy is there, in the landscape. Dorota and Eglė's works similarly evoke such ghostly presences and absences – figures in and of the landscape. Here, too, death by landscape signals a becoming-one with it: living in, through, and with landscape.<sup>3</sup> For, indeed: 'standing above the landscape' has failed, leading us directly into the acute climate crisis. The artists call for a radical change of perspective. In their work, landscape and nature emerge as active, resistant protagonists. Dorota and Eglė consciously move away from the Western

conception of landscape as a passive backdrop that simply unfolds before the artist's gaze – as in the genre of landscape painting. Instead, they seek – also by means of artificial intelligence (AI) – new modes of representation, reminding us that landscapes and nature are never untouched, but always constructed. They question the presumed supremacy of humans over nature and the associated construction of human subjectivity, which in Western culture is defined by demarcation from nature as 'other'. Their research draws on scientific voices from biology and ecology, which demonstrate our deep entanglement and symbiotic dependence on nature.

The first object we encounter in the exhibition are two large haystacks. The *Hexanol* ②/⑤ sculptures, made from hay sourced in Gitschenen, naturally smell intensely of it. The title refers to the chemical formula cis-3-hexenol, a compound with the scent of cut grass, commonly used in perfumery. Here, laboratory-produced substances and the traditional cultivation of land are interwoven. A sharply pointed iron rod lends the work a menacing aspect. The landscape for Dorota and Eglè – as in Atwood's story – is always both beautiful and threatening. With *Hexanol*, the artists also address the persecution of witches: the haystack evokes a pyre, and the German word 'Hexe' ('witch') echoes in the title. Italian philosopher Silvia Federici describes how the early capitalist reorganisation of agricultural land at the end of the Middle Ages coincided with intensified witch hunts.<sup>4</sup> Women, denied the right to own land under the new order, resisted and were persecuted. The expropriation of land was thus inseparable from the systematic subjugation of women.

The exhibition spaces are scented not only with hay, but also with damp earth. *The Large Piece Of Turf 02:60 II*, ③ a wall-mounted fragrance diffuser, activates every two minutes and six seconds, emitting a synthetic version of petrichor – the intense, earthy scent released when rain activates soil bacteria. The work's title alludes to Albrecht Dürer's celebrated 1503 watercolour, *The Great Piece of Turf*, regarded as one of the most significant nature studies in Western art history. The scent melds with the images and sounds of the video work *Mouthless I*. ④ projected in the same space. This is the trilogy's first chapter. Mouthless refers to the Astomi (from ancient Greek α-στόμα 'mouthless'): beings who have no mouths. The Roman scholar Pliny describes them as beings who dwell near

the Ganges river, covering themselves with tree leaves and living from the scent of flowers, roots, and wild fruit. From a Western perspective, they appear as exotic, mute entities – a personification of the foreigner, the other. In Dorota and Eglè's work, these beings (among many others) are given a voice, narrating their own histories.

In *Mouthless I* the artists interweave narrative layers, blending AI-generated landscapes with performance documentation. At times the voices are clear; at others, mere whispers, like incantations. The witch reappears: Barbli Bodmer von Wattenwyll, executed in the canton of Fribourg in 1637. Dorota and Eglè, together with historians from the State Archives of Fribourg, tracked down the relevant texts. Barbli Bodmer is accompanied by ghosts from the Dziady – a pre-Christian ritual in Slavic and Baltic cultures (the artists' countries of origin) for summoning the souls of the dead. As with the Astomi, the witches and spirits in Dorota and Eglè's work stand for magical rituals, coexistence with nature, and journeys through time and cultures.

With the *Mouthless* trilogy, the artists propose an alternative mode of storytelling: a non-linear narrative in which human and non-human, living, dead, or undead agents all speak, and in which other forms of knowledge transmission – magical ritual, folklore – take on significance. For Dorota and Eglè, these reflections are also nurtured by their nomadic long-term project, *YOUNG GIRL READING GROUP* (YGRG) in which they read scientific or theoretical texts, literature, and science fiction together with friends. They are interested in the relationship between text and voice, and in how knowledge and narrative circulate collectively through reading and listening. The reading figures in *Mouthless I* allude to these practices.

*Kratt* ⑥ – a small, limbed sculpture affixed to the wall – draws once more on Eastern European mythology, where, as with the devil figure of the Schöllenen Gorge in Uri, entities are intimately connected to landscape. The Kratt is an Estonian mythological creature, insatiably hungry for labour, and now also a metaphor for artificial intelligence in Estonia. According to legend, it was brought to life when a master sacrificed three drops of blood to the devil in order to conjure a willing servant. For Dorota and Eglè, this work also refers to feudal domination in Eastern Europe (and beyond), as well as contemporary echoes in the plight of migrant agricultural workers.

In *Mouthless II* (on the upper floor ⑨) and *Mouthless III* (in the pavilion ⑦), Dorota and Eglè develop these themes further. *Mouthless III* is a two-channel video installation, its images in ‘landscape’ format – wider than tall. Vast cornfields and mist-shrouded forests, developed together with scientists at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), are generated using AI. To rethink landscape, to place ourselves within it rather than outside it, we require new images – ones that break with the landscape-painting tradition, and which might emerge through digital technology. In the landscapes of *Mouthless III*, two figures confront one another: an archetypal Eastern European peasant and Południca, a landscape demon from Slavic folklore, who appears in cornfields in the midday heat. These figures, and the landscapes themselves, are mutable. They recount the story of Jakub Szela, leader of the mid-19th-century Polish peasant uprisings, and the cycles of life and death.

Upstairs, *Votive Flower* ⑧ evokes the widespread practice of making offerings across cultures – to supernatural entities, deities, spirits, the dead. For me, these fibreglass flowers remind us that we are not alone in this world, but live in coexistence with a multitude of beings from different times. For Dorota and Eglè, these undying flowers also signal the possibility of a new, more hopeful future. The artists present *Mouthless II* ⑨ on three screens. For the almost hypnotic sounds accompanying the videos, they drew inspiration from the Sutartinės – polyphonic folk songs of Lithuania. The English lyrics comprise theoretical and poetic fragments from the YGRG archive, interwoven with passages in Polish. At times, the lines are sung backwards. For Dorota and Eglè, this play with language and sound invites us to conceive of our time – and indeed our existence – in cycles and loops. The polyphony of the chants symbolises the integration of the individual voice, the singular body, into a collective whole. On the three screens, three figures recite these plaintive songs against landscapes that are part fantastical, part computer-generated. The costumes – recurring props throughout the *Mouthless* series – are loosely inspired by Baroque iconography and continually adapt to the performers’ bodies. In the same space, fetish-like objects reminiscent of sculptural golf chairs gleam menacingly on sharply tapered, metallic legs. Dorota and Eglè refer to them as *Spectators* ⑩.

The lament lingers in my ears. The awareness that my body exists only in symbiosis with countless bacteria, that it is permeable to the ‘nature out there’, that it can live and die only within landscape, is both unsettling and exhilarating. Recognising that human and non-human organisms are intimately intertwined – that we are ‘nature’ – transforms our thinking about the current climate emergency. There is no ‘return to nature’, only the realisation that we are nature, and that we live – and must live – in solidaristic coexistence across species and time. Our lives and deaths are inseparable from landscape, from nature itself. The figures encountered in *Death by Landscape* are ambiguous, spectral, monstrous. They traverse time and cultures; they sing, mourn, and speak in many, at times mysterious, tongues. For Dorota and Eglè, their artistic practice is a call to move beyond the fear of the unknown. They propose a different, speculative history – sketching a landscape populated by humans and non-humans, ghosts, monsters, and demons. This narrative is at once haunting and exhilarating.

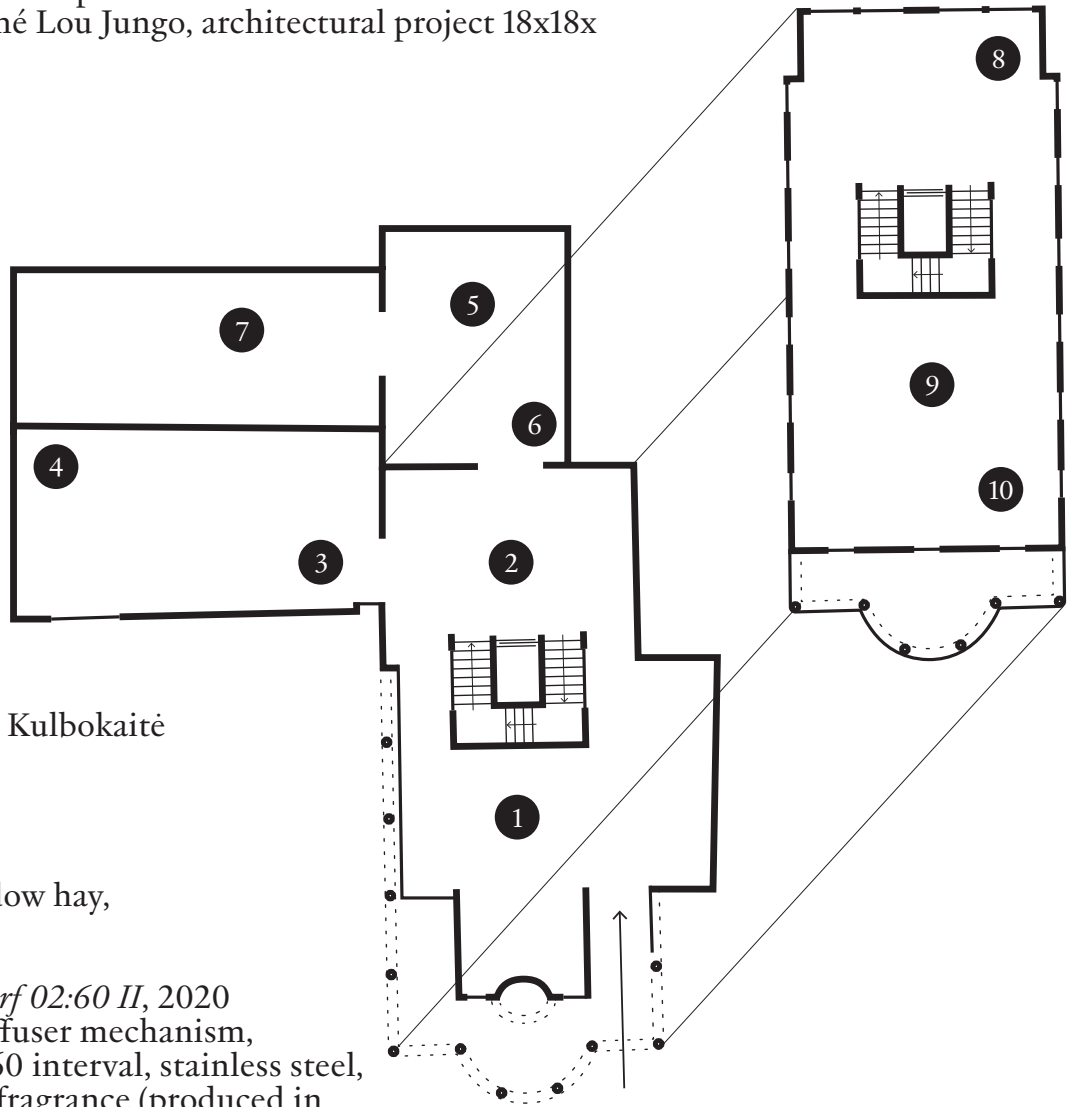
Gioia Dal Molin, June 2025

- 1 Margaret Atwood, “Death by Landscape,” in: *Wilderness Tips: Stories*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991. p. 91.
- 2 Ibid., p. 92.
- 3 Dorota and Eglè also reference the essay “Death by Landscape” by Elvia Wilk, which draws on Margaret Atwood to explore our relationship with nature and the potential of fiction in what Wilk calls the ‘age of extinction’. See “Death by Landscape,” in: *Death by Landscape*, New York: Soft Skull Press, 2022, pp. 3–24.
- 4 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, New York: Autonomedia, 2024.

IG Maisander is made up of the organic farmer Andrea Gisler, the beekeeper Petra Gisler, the musician Hildegard Kleeb, the performer and yoga teacher Anna Dahinden, and the visual artist Florian Maritz. The transdisciplinary, intergenerational collective works in and for the cultural landscape of Gitschenen, in Isenthal, Switzerland. They invite others to inhabit and shape this remarkable environment – whether for a short visit or a longer stay – encouraging all who come to observe, participate, and grow within this place.

Dorota Gawęda (\*1986 in Lublin, Poland) and Eglė Kulbokaitė (\*1987 in Kaunas, Lithuania) are an artist duo living and working in Basel. Their multimedia practice encompasses performance, video, sculpture, and installation. Both are graduates of the Royal College of Art, London (2012), and founders of the Young Girl Reading Group (2013–21). The duo has exhibited internationally, including at Kunsthalle Mainz (2023); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2023); ar/ge Kunst, Bolzano (2022); Shedhalle, Zürich (2022); Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Vienna (2022); Centre culturel suisse, Paris (2022); Kunstverein Hamburg (2021); Istituto Svizzero, Palermo and Milan (2021); Kunstverein Leipzig (2021); Swiss Institute, New York (2020); Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf (2020); Fri Art – Kunsthalle Fribourg (2020); Lafayette Anticipations, Paris (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018).

- ① *Haus* – Installation IG Maisander, 2025.  
 Straw bales, humps made of Gitschen fir trees, haystacks, hay rakes, texts on postcards, flower pots with houseleek, stones, lichen with fir wood, moss, juniper and fir needles, propagator with breeding frames, honey, books, clay bricks, media player, headphones.  
 Field recordings from Gitschenen: Rosanna Zünd  
 Typography, graphics: Raphael Wicki  
 Lucca Blum and René Lou Jungo, architectural project 18x18x



*Death by Landscape*  
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ground floor

- ② *Hexanol (IV)*, 2020  
 Polished steel, meadow hay,  
 230 × 100 × 96 cm
- ③ *The Large Piece Of Turf 02:60 II*, 2020  
 Industrial aroma diffuser mechanism,  
 programmed at 02:60 interval, stainless steel,  
 synthetic petrichor fragrance (produced in  
 collaboration with International Flavors And  
 Fragrances Inc.), dimensions variable
- ④ *Mouthless Part I*, 2020  
 HD film and sound, 45'26"
- ⑤ *Hexanol (V)*, 2020  
 Polished steel, meadow hay,  
 250 × 100 × 96 cm
- ⑥ *Kratt*, 2021  
 Recycled leather, hay, chromed steel fixtures,  
 dimensions variable
- ⑦ *Mouthless Part III*, 2023  
 Two channel HD film and sound, 29'

upper floor

- ⑧ *Votive Flowers II*, 2022  
 Lightbulb, optical fibres, paper and plastic  
 flowers, electric cable, colour gel disc and  
 rotating mechanism, mirror polished  
 stainless steel, 68 × 36 × 18 cm
- ⑨ *Mouthless Part II*, 2021  
 Three channel HD film and sound, 23'08"
- ⑩ *Spectator (I-III)*, 2020  
 Polished stainless steel, print on leather

*Mouthless Part II:*

Lyrics: Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė  
Voices: Valentin Bezençon, Anastasia Chaguidouline, Abongile Gwele  
Performance: Oskar Pawełko, Dorothea Rust, Tiran Willemse  
Sound design: Haraldur Thrastarson  
Cinematography and Post Production: Raphael Wanner  
Light: Torvioll Jashari  
Costume: Tim Heyduck with Manfred Elias Knorr  
Makeup: Jasmin Berger

The production of *Mouthless Part II* was generously supported by Fachausschuss Film und Medienkunst Basel and Pro Helvetia – The Swiss Arts Council, Lithuanian Culture Council and La Becque Artist Residency.

Texts quoted or indirectly referred to (in no particular order): *Remembrances* by John Clare; *Mariola* Greek folk song; *Dziady* by Adam Mickiewicz; writings of Amílcar Cabral

*Mouthless Part III:*

Directed by: Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė  
Performance: Oskar Pawełko  
Cinematography: Raphael Wanner with Jonas Stirnimann  
Costume: Tara Mabilia  
HMU: Jasmin Berger  
Sound: Haraldur Thrastarson; *Gorged* by OXHY; sounds of the sun, NASA  
GAN animation sequences were created in collaboration with Laurène Donati (Imaging Center), Edward Andò and Florian Aymanns (Image Analysis Hub) and the team, EPFL, Lausanne, CH

*lalia* sequence was created in collaboration with Emanuele Guidi, ar/ge kunst, Bolzano, IT  
Performance: Giulia Terminio  
Music: Bill Kouligas  
Sound design: Haraldur Thrastarson  
Voice: Justyna Chaberek

*Mouthless Part III* contains number of references to texts such as *The Books of Jacob* by Olga Tokarczuk, *The Wedding* by Stanisław Wyspiański, *Gravity and Grace* by Simone Weil, *With Stake and Spade: Vampiric Diversity in Poland* by Łukasz Kozak, *The Second Body* by Daisy Hildyard, *The Peasant Nightmare: Visions of Apocalypse in the Soviet Countryside* by Lynne Viola, *Dark Ecology* by Timothy Morton, *Rotten Sun* by Georges Bataille, and words generated by GPT-3.

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