

Windhager von Kaenel

EARTHBOUND I curated by Violeta Burckhardt
10 June – 30 July 2022

The garden— at once natural and artificial— is a space of experimentation. It is where humans negotiate their relationship with nature by establishing clearly defined limits where speculations and fabulations can be enquired. The boundary or enclosure that defines it is also what mediates between human-constructed environments and that which lies beyond the raised horizon offered by the garden wall. An enclosure that divides and protects, separates and connects — a space for difference and repetition that encompasses both the inside and outside as equally important extensions of each other.

Change is not only driven by the garden architecture and its defining boundaries, but also through the actions of those that frame it. The second defining element of the space is the work of the gardener, artist and alchemist who, through a selective process, manages to alter form through the modeling and transmutation of its components.

Artist as Gardener

As a gardener, the artist plants and cultivates ideas that come to life through the passage of time. The artist molds concepts that are then let loose within this testing ground. Once inside, they project outwards and resonate through their ability to interact. Time is bent and orchestrated for both past and future to play a part.

Sergio Rojas Chaves' performance, *Neighbourhood Birdfeed, 2022*, begins on the street, before we enter the exhibition space. It is an invitation in the form of a soft but radical gesture that recognizes the non-human as an elementary part of its design. Armed with a hat made of bird seeds, *Feeder Hats, 2022*, Sergio Rojas Chaves walks around the block, creating the first invisible enclosure that defines the garden. Armed with bird feeders that he shares with the public, he begins to mark the route, which like a bread trace opens the way for another type of interspecies dialogue.

In *Lost in the Woods_0011, 2022*, Andreas Greiner explores the passage of time by projecting its multiplicity into an indeterminate future. Thousands of images of primeval forests are fed into a computer system powered by artificial intelligence and face-recognition technology which weaves the different images into an ever-changing whole. These nature portraits blend into each other, constantly deconstructing and reconstructing the original. The result is a fragmented notion of reality that understands memory as malleable and technology as a central part in our perception of it.

Opposite to this piece, *It's Not What Happens, It's How You Deal With It, 2022* by Anne-Laure Franchette reflects on the movement of time by freezing it. The weeds displayed in these vertical resin structures — unwanted vegetation thriving on the reconditioned grounds of construction sites — are commemorated through their ability to stay intact. It is another type of memory device that seeks to understand wilderness through its control. An amulet able to conjure the past through the binding of vegetation within inert matter.

The work of Mirko Basialga takes time as an integral part of the lifespan of all materials of his work. By dissecting the total, the artist uses time as a way to forge material and color palette, able to create an image through mixture. In *Rascha, 2015*, Mirko Basalgia uses the spruce tree, of the genus *Picea*, as a starting point for his experimentation. The frame as well as the resin have been collected and transformed in order to create the image. *Nuée, 2022* on the other hand, considers the geological elements of the landscape it represents by transforming the inorganic material into pigments, airbrushed onto a canvas made of larch wood. True to the origins of where both paintings come from, their monochrome character flattens all forms of pictorial representation, synthesizing the subject into a timeless composition of material form.

Artist as Alchemist

As an alchemist, the artist strives for the transmutation of matter and meaning as part of a process to escape the initial framings of the garden by connecting heaven and earth. It is not only a physical experiment but a search for something beyond.

As we enter the second room of the exhibition, the neon lights that serve as a backdrop to Chloé Delarue's *TAFAA – Lonely Night, 2021* force us to look up. The rhizomatic structure, cast in tin from the organic body of an octopus, shines like a street sign above. An abstract body powered by light, the figure is both subject and object simultaneously. Like the light that now brings it to life, the cephalopod dermis ensures survival through its adaptive camouflage skills that through specialized skin cells change its image through light.

The volcanic character of the casted metal octopus creates a dialogue with Ivy Lee Fiebig's work *Luftblut, 2021*. The hidden image of a naked body fades into the red fiery tones that shape the volcanic landscape. The rugged stone against her soft, almost invisible body, fuelled by her search to find the point of energetic transfer. Armed with a Soviet era ionizing apparatus, her arms extend towards the sky, seeking that moment of closure where the earth meets the sky.

Across from this wall, Matheline Marmy's *Longue Durée, 2019* plunges below the horizon line to create a fluid image of a prehistoric past. What looks like an abstract painting are photographic imprints made of Cyanobacteria — believed to be responsible for the Great Oxidation Event that transformed planet Earth into a habitable place. Largely responsible for the oxygen we breathe, these blue-green bacteria absorb energy from the light. The outcome is a sort of miniature landscape made of microscopic life.

The large window found in the back of the space can be defined as a garden inside a garden and works as the setting for Sergio Rojas Chaves' work *Hands that Feed, 2022*. Thought of as a complimentary part to the opening's performance, the work transforms the human body into a site of feeding frenzy. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, these hands, made of bread and seeds, will not only lure the non-human inhabitants of the neighborhood, but will also lose form and eventually disappear as they serve their purpose.

Earthbound takes an expanded notion of the garden as a symbolic space, in order to deconstruct and re-configure our relation to our environment. The exhibition space works as a mediating platform through which the different layers of culturally built concepts of nature are put to the test. The result is an artificial landscape, carefully constructed through an invisible choreography where alternative narratives are able to grow and blossom through the establishment of chemical, physical and metaphysical bonds.

The exhibition understands nature as a composite ecology that binds concepts of nature together as both real and imagined. Each work holds within it a promise of rebirth: one that through alchemic and metabolic transformation — binding organic and inorganic material — creates a specific model of nature. Something ethereal, made up of matter and bound to the earth.