

The Neutral
12.09. - 14.10.2023

Gregor Podnar
curated by Dr. Kirstin zu Hohenlohe

Artists: Joël Andrianomearisoa, Jared Ginsberg, Thania Petersen, Usha Seejarim

Passage to Promise

The exhibition „Passage to Promise“ shows four different artistic positions from southern Africa: Usha Seejarim, Thania Petersens, Joël Andrianomearisoa, and Jared Ginsburg.

The exhibition borrows its title from a work by Usha Seejarim and creatively references Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial concept, The Third Space. In his book “The Location of Culture”, the social theorist argues that cultural identities are neither fixed nor essential, but are always constructed through processes of negotiation and interaction. The Third Space is an “in between” space of cultural hybridity that arises when different cultures come into contact. It is a space of ambiguity, where dominant and marginalized cultures intersect, creating new meanings and identities. A space that challenges and destabilizes established categories, opening up new and transformative possibilities.

Barthes’ The Neutral is also a liberating concept that seeks to challenge prevailing narratives and set meanings. It is about an alternative way of dealing with culture, language and forms of representation. And it propagates openness, ambiguity and different possibilities for interpretation. This game of meanings, of construction and reconstruction is evident in every society, but it can be particularly evident in diasporic communities. The artistic positions in the exhibition play with the variety of meanings and interpretations associated with cultural symbols, traditions and iden-

tities within their works and have translated these phenomena into intriguing works of art.

Artistic expressions from different cultural contexts therefore offer great opportunities to conceive how meanings are constructed and how signs and symbols are subject to different interpretations which touch us in different ways. This exhibition emphasizes the formation of meaning as an ongoing process. However, „Passage to Promise“ does not recreate idealized theoretical positions, but offers a platform for the positions and interpretations of the artists involved in this exhibition.

Usha Seejarim creates installations and works that are both minimalist and sculptural, often dealing with indentured labor and exploitation, functionality and domesticity. With fine conceptual sensitivity, she transforms everyday household objects into particularly aesthetic works of art. With these works, she explores, among other things, the conditions or harsh circumstances of the daily work of the less privileged in her home country South Africa. But it is also about the use and value of tools and the daily rituals of the household.

Thania Petersen is a multidisciplinary artist. Her discourses are about „identity“ in today's South Africa. With photographic „self-portraits“, installations and multi-sensory performances, she challenges classifications of apartheid and also their everyday further acceptance of these labels in the post-apartheid era. Among her points of reference are the history of African colonial imperialism, contemporary Western consumer culture, her deeply personal Cap Malay heritage, and the legends and myths of Sufi Islamic ceremonies.

Joël Andrianomearisoa's work is always dealing with the idea of duality, between light and darkness, passion and fragility and the space between us, creating Labyrinths of Passion. He explores concepts of time and physicality in a fine, inside-out approach. Activating the latent, emotional power of the material world, he transcends the boundaries of video, fashion, architecture, sculpture, installation and photography. Black plays a prominent role in his textile works, which hover seductively between ephemeral and permanent. These works are partly sculptural, partly left to chance and to the randomness of the material.

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Jared Ginsburg uses art-making to explore alternative modes of knowledge production and transfer. He recognizes art as a tool, a means to test and probe the world, hoping to nurture new strategies for productive engagement. Ginsburg employs a range of media types in his practice, including painting, sculpture, drawing, video and performance. The room is his canvas and plays a significant role as a lab, an instrument and a character in conversation, seeking “indeterminacy or chance operations” in this process.

„Passage to Promise“ is creatively playing with the individual formation of meaning as a sensually-physical process, which is influenced by contexts and shaped by socio-cultural factors. Subtle sensual experiences evoke associations and memories and illustrate how physical our knowledge is - like a „Passage to Promise“.

- Kirstin zu Hohenlohe