

klosterruine berlin

Out of Season Shirin Sabahi

Exhibition

25. Jun – 06. Aug 2023

In *Out of Season*, Shirin Sabahi presents a series of site-specific interventions and sculptures that relate to the motif of a garden. Using re-located material fragments of public infrastructures, architectural elements, and commodities, she speaks to how meanings shift through circulation, displacement, and re-appropriation.

Through using the motif of a garden, Sabahi speculates on the history of the site as a former Franciscan monastery and on the changing functions of (semi-)public gardens. Throughout history, gardens have repeatedly functioned as places of domination, staging and the aestheticization of nature.

As a central element within the Klosterruine, Sabahi presents *Fabled Bowl I: Fountain of Zero Graces, Howz in Manganese Blue* - a water basin painted in swimming pool paint that simultaneously recalls both the shape of the choir polygon and the architecture of Berlin's iconic public toilets called "Café Achteck"¹. The basin references an element from Persian architecture, the titular *howz*. Such a symmetrical water basin is found in public and private, secular and religious places. Often the basin serves as a place to gather and linger, especially in shared courtyards. Sabahi, who grew up in Tehran, associates the basin with childhood memories in semi-public spaces where fountains serve no representative function². In the site of the ruin, her fountain emits a sense of having been displaced. Equipped with a ready made pump, the fountain highlights a decorative functions. In a globalised market, fountains such as these can be purchased today as mass commodities and exoticizing staffage that tie into the long legacy of Orientalism and appropriation.

¹ The joking term "Café Achteck" referred to the urinals designed by Carl Theodor Rospatt in Berlin's public spaces, which were characterized by an octagonal floor plan. In 1920, there were about 142 of these facilities in Berlin. Today, about 30 still exist in the city, partly in other locations.

² Public fountains can also mark sites of protests. They can become politicized and policed spaces as was demonstrated in the context of the women's demonstrations that started in September 2022 in Iran. In solidarity, an anonymous artist dyed some of Tehran fountains red.

klosterruine berlin

The work *Windcatcher (Geisterharfe)* is a hybrid object that is both sculpture and resonance body. It is inspired by an element that appears in the architecture of the Middle East and North Africa, regions that are now particularly affected by global warming. A windcatcher fulfils the function of redirecting the wind, thereby allowing buildings to cool. Removed from its functional context, recreated in reflective metal and fitted with piano strings, the element serves as a resonating body that picks up the surrounding wind and translates it into sound. The ghostly sound within the war-torn ruin also speaks to the stories that were always there, even if they are repressed.

Cuttings is a series of glass objects whose shapes are based on flowers, consisting of assembled glass bowls, vases and ashtrays. They are found objects that Sabahi acquired from online portals, flea markets, or thrift stores, in whose composition, the effect of their decorative lifelessness intensifies. The objects symbolise a form of appropriation of flowers for domestic decoration, with which their life also comes to an end, and in which they exist in vases until their final withering. *Cuttings* does not represent existing plant species. Against the backdrop of the climate crisis, they seem like relics that exist only as shadows of nature.

For the duration of her exhibition, Sabahi has brought garden chairs to the Klosterruine which were made for the 2005 "Bundesgartenschau" (BUGA), the Federal Garden Show, in Munich. Sabahi's engagement with questions of displacement and display in relation to contemporary gardens led her to revisit the legacy of the biennial garden show.³ The first editions of BUGA in the post-war period were aimed at the reconstruction and beautification of the war-destroyed cities, partly overwriting the traces of the Nazis' violent past from cityscapes. In addition, she considered the fact that garden and urban renewal projects of this scale often remove existing landscapes and leave behind.

Sabahi's *Turf Fan*, distributed on special occasions during the exhibition, is an edition of hand-held fans sprayed with organic paint that's used to dye withered grass - a pigment used for lawns, sport arenas, and gardens, and increasingly exerted to artificially improve the natural greenery.

Throughout *Out of Season* the garden is associated as a place of contradiction - as a borderland between the past and the present, between rationality and speculation, between utopia and dystopia. Sabahi's garden evokes a time out of joint, in which plants and species live on only as effigies, and in that the supposed place of refuge is countered by its transience, artificiality, and commodification.

³ Dating back to the 19th century, the garden show was instrumentalized as the "Reichsgartenschau" during the Nazi regime to serve as propoganda and world view production.

klosterruine berlin

List of works

Fabled Bowl I: Fountain of Zero Graces, Howz in Manganese Blue, 2023

MDF, wood, resin epoxy, pool paint, fountain pump, water, cables, LED lights
36 x 300 x 300 cm

Windcatcher (Geisterharfe), 2023

Polished stainless steel, wood, piano strings, acrylic tape
300 x 80 x 80 cm

Cuttings #1–25, 2023

25 objects, modified glassware, stainless steel, nylon
Dimensions variable

BUGA Chairs, 2023

Intervention, refurbished chairs originally commissioned by 2005 Federal Garden Show (BUGA) in Munich, produced by Designafairs/Dengler
82 x 76 x 51 cm und 85 x 63 x 51 cm

Edition: *Turf Fan, 2023*

Paper fan, organic grass paint, sticker
27 x 21 x 1 cm

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