

HOŠEK CONTEMPORARY

— EST. 2016 —

MONIKA DORNIK

the ease with which [a] may be distorted under the action of [b]

Opening reception: 28th April 2023, 7 - 10 pm

Exhibition period: 28th April - 13th May 2023

Curated by Linda Toivio

“She is growing stones”. That is what I tell people about Monika Dornik’s new solo exhibition at Hošek Contemporary. This is more or less accurate.

As I first visit her studio, I discover paintings, sculptures and various organic elements lying around, as one might expect. In this atelier however, the most fascinating things are probably hidden in buckets and jars of various sizes. They hold stones, pieces of wood and dead leaves sitting in a mysterious liquid, sometimes for years. Now and then, when she remembers, Dornik lifts one of the lids, never knowing what to expect, checking if something might seem ready for an audience. Being a complete novice regarding the breeding of crystal stones, at first glance I suspect that I am looking at colourful mould growths or intricate, rare types of fungi. (They are indeed stones.)

the ease with which [a] may be distorted under the action of [b] continues Dornik’s sculpture series ‘Aesthetics of Knowledge’ (2019-ongoing) and practice-based research, which engage with humanity’s position in the Anthropocene. She perceives the sculptures as a collaboration with more-than-human agencies, in particular stones and water. Such elements are also relevant in the current exhibition, as the interplay and reactivity between stones, wood and water portray the agency of a hybridised nature.

More-than-human agents or non-humans include not only flora and fauna, but all creatures, microorganisms and elements which co-exist amongst each other on Earth. Human life would not exist without them, as everything is thoroughly interconnected and interdependent. Moreover, opposing the Euro-Western concept of culture-nature dualism, humanity cannot be separated from the natural world. Bruno Latour, French philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist, argues that we must break free from this dichotomy, but also the dominant modes of classification, which define the subject-object hierarchy. He advocates for the autonomy of those one might consider as objects or other-than-human, as well as their equal agency with humans.

Following Latour’s criticism and questioning of human exceptionalism, the stones in Dornik’s work are not seen as objects, but as agencies that perform growth and transformation. The stones are not translated by humans, but they are actors in their own right. The body of work can thus be interpreted as a hybrid between a performance and an exhibition. Her multi-sensorial work fuses epoxy, textile, wood, fluids and stones with a new auditive score. Some of the crystal stones in the kinetic installations have

been bred in alliance with the waters of the Spree, thus forming a direct link to the surroundings. Addressing symptoms specific to this era, such as alienation and solastalgia, the site-specific installation is a balance of alchemic processes and carpentry, evoking both science and imagination. A key component within the exhibition, the aforementioned liquid triggers crystal growth on particular surfaces, through a mixture of minerals, pigments and other components developed by the artist through experimenting.

While the dripping mechanism slowly releases the red solution, the hanging piece of spruce is steadily soaked, bearing a resemblance to driftwood collected by the artist. It is also serving as a refuge for a stone, snugly nesting within its core. Laid directly on the ship's original floorboards, the sculpture underneath is collecting the dripping liquid, its stone inhabitant partially submerged like a small island. Another dripping mechanism is hung above the centrepiece, a sturdy wooden structure painted in striking red, framing an installation of stones and crystals. The crimson fluid has an important function, as it awakens an otherwise arid landscape of dehydrated stone growth. A mirror is placed below the installation, allowing the viewers to observe the activation and developments at the bottom of the frame.

Playfully appearing at the back, a beastly character is perceived on the textile banner, similar to a theatrical backdrop. It is not a single creature or entity, but represents the interconnectedness with all other entities as well as the construction of identity and the animal-self. Gently encapsulating the entire exhibition, the sound work is a composition of the artist's voice, crystalline growth and the movement of more-than-human agencies. The score, written by Dorniak, can be heard in a loop throughout the space, recited by the artist herself:

"...we live,

as we dream,

alone,

alone, entangled in a construction of a divine braid of associations."

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