

HOŠEK CONTEMPORARY

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VALERIE RENAY AND CHRISTY LANGER - EXORCISM // EXORCISME

Opening reception: 26th April 2024, 7 - 10 pm

Exhibition period: 26th April - 12th May 2024

Curated by Linda Toivio

Welcome to *exorcism // exorcisme*, a library of secrets by Valerie Renay and Christy Langer.

Over Gallery Weekend Berlin, Hošek Contemporary becomes a depository for secrets, offering a sensorial experience through sonic and visual elements. An analogue surround soundscape is composed of collected secrets, overlooked by a delicate canopy. In their collaborative work, the artists enmesh the visitors in a web of truths, where personal thoughts become public confessions. The gallery space is inundated with written and recorded secrets, individual stories told in private and brought together as one in a collective setting. Before and during the exhibition, the contribution of external people is an essential part of the concept, as it allows the growth and transformation of the project, while perhaps offering the participants a sense of release.

The foundation of *exorcism // exorcisme* is co-creation through sharing or active listening. Renay came up with the initial idea while working with students, whom she took out of the city for an intense workshop. On their final evening surrounded by nature, she asked everyone to write a secret on a piece of paper. The group gathered in a dark space and each participant picked a random secret to read out loud, as if it was the reader's own. Unexpectedly, the listeners began to respond to each other's secrets through questions or counts of similar experiences. Embraced by the entire group, the secrets became collective, creating an unanticipated healing circle.

The process behind *exorcism // exorcisme* emphasises our desire to be seen and heard. The yearning to share and talk about one's life is human, so is the need to be understood, accepted. The exhibition concept is not about individual secrets nor their specific content, but the power they have in unity as a communal experience. Carrying secrets may be a heavy burden, isolating us from others. Sharing some of this weight brings us closer, reminding how we are interconnected through universal concerns. What also interests the artists is how something is told, the hesitations and the apprehension. The vibration of a voice, the breathing and thinking, the pauses between carefully chosen words count as much as the story itself. This collection of voices forms a choir of concealed truths, played simultaneously on old tape recorders.

The interactive installation is composed of two main features, Renay's sound element and Langer's sculptural structure. The tape recorders are placed in clusters at various heights, creating an everchanging and unique soundscape. The tapes play unsynchronised at random intervals and once finished, they are flipped manually. Borrowed, found or bought, most of the tape recorders are old and come with varying degrees of defects, each with their own temperament. This affects the quality of the sound and brings about some background noise, such as buzzing or murmur, which act as natural filters. Since Renay is using old tapes retrieved from her family's house in France, we sometimes hear short extracts of music from her teenage

years as she is now “erasing the sound of her youth, to engrave these confidential stories”. The disposition of the tape recorders is framing the space while the cacophony of voices provides an unpredictable rhythm guiding the visitors in their exploration.

Suspended from the ceiling, Langer’s magnetic tape structure is a visual representation of the collected stories and sounds; we can not only hear them, but we see them stretched in the air. Her goal was to create a complimentary in situ piece for the sound element by using the mass of a single material. The webbing technique and the subtle vibrations of the shimmering tape portray how the voices are layered and overlapping, intertwined and connected despite their distinctive characteristics. The tapes Langer is using for her installation contain some of the secrets recorded for the project, reflecting the ubiquitous web of hidden truths hanging above us every day.

The recording sessions were powerful moments of surrender, even meditative, where guests could face themselves unmasked. The secrets were gathered by both artists, through different methods from friends and strangers. Renay mostly recorded at home, where she would leave the guest lying on her bed alone in the dark, with a recording device and a microphone. Langer would sometimes let people record and send their secrets as voice messages, as she thought this could reduce inhibitions. Although some participants felt self-conscious and hesitant, there was also a sense of excitement stemming from the thought of one’s secret becoming part of something bigger than the self.

A participatory performance accompanies the installation. Led by Renay, it steers away from the traditional idea of a performance/performer, as here the audience plays a central role. It is an opportunity to share amongst friends and strangers, to be part of nurturing a temporary safe space.

Before the ritual is initiated, guests are invited to visit the confession room, where surrounded by cosy elements from Renay’s bedroom, they can immerse themselves in her atmosphere while writing down secrets. A selection of anonymous secrets will be read out loud at the ritual, giving the circle the possibility to respond. The key here is compassion and participants are encouraged to face each other or anything they might hear with empathy and non-judgment.

“It was essential for us to create an inclusive space that breaks the boundaries of inhibition, free from concepts of self-accusation. The walls are down in the floating sea of secrets. When visiting the installation, one should feel the healing agent of communication - people are offered an experience to take away, play, and also hopefully, to leave something, a burden perhaps, behind.”

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