

Kunsthhaus Glarus

# Im Volksgarten

Olivia Ali + Tobias Kaspar, Rachal Bradley,  
Trisha Donnelly, Richard Frater, Carissa  
Rodriguez, Julia Scher, Bea Schlingelhoff  
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*Im Volksgarten* has been the address of Kunsthhaus Glarus since 1952; it serves as both street name and location description. *Im Volksgarten, 8750 Glarus* is also the title of a site-specific work by Maria Eichhorn, on view recently as a loan along with works from the Glarner Kunstverein collections. Painted nearly invisibly on the wall, the address declared the museum as a site that took temporary possession of the work. In the exhibition *Im Volksgarten*, the understanding of “possession” goes beyond the object and is returned to the space: it is about forms of taking possession of space, but also about fetishization and desire. How is the status of objects and things altered when they enter the museum? How do these things seduce us? What significance does the private and intimate have in this public realm. But also: what social or political and public meanings do we associate with the museum?

The two-winged modernist building of the museum is located at the edge of the Volksgarten, a lush city park that was stocked with exoticized flora at the end of the nineteenth century. It is idyllic and full of contrasts at the same time: life on the outside varies from that within. The Kunsthhaus was renovated last year; the structure of the heritage-protected building was upgraded, refurbished and, where permitted, brought up to the latest technical standards. At the same time, infrastructural and safety regulations had to be implemented in publicly accessible areas. What kind of independent existence does the physical shell of the museum have? And, conversely, how do we, visitors and artists, hold sway over or control this shell? The museum must continually reexamine these questions without getting caught up in a state of idle institutional critique.

A series of silvery, satellite dish-like objects attached to the façade of Kunsthhaus Glarus welcomes visitors to the museum. British artist **Rachal Bradley (b. 1979, Blackpool, lives and works in London)** is interested in the psychosocial properties of infrastructures that are continuously directed at their “inhabitants” and vice versa. Her works address predominating social structures in (art) institutions and predominating concepts of work therein as well as their associated entanglements. Such institutions, entrusted with the task of knowledge production, are also always shaped by social and power relationships that play out in language and which, in turn, mediate between the institution’s various bodies and its “inhabitants.” In her sculptural practice, the artist creates material bodies situated between function and fiction: devices or systems that look functional but in fact are not. Positioned behind the satellite receivers, linking those individuals who are most often inside the museum by necessity to the world outside, are ionizing devices that supposedly purify the air via an electrical process. The devices use electricity to generate negative ions that are released into the air, where they dock onto positive ions that are more abundant in polluted particles, thus neutralizing them. The energetic effect they have on spatial atmosphere is scientifically disputed. An ideal ionic composition for inducing calm is purportedly found next to waterfalls, where air and water mix together. A text by the artist accompanies the installation and will be read publicly at the beginning of the exhibition.

**Carissa Rodriguez’s (b. 1970, New York, lives and works in New York)** work *The Maid* (2018) follows a selection of American artist Sherrie Levine’s *Newborn* sculptures throughout the course of a day in various residences, private and institutional, from New York to Los Angeles. Levine made the works in crystal and black cast glass in the early 1990s, molding them after Constantin Brancusi’s marble and bronze sculptures of the same name from 1915 and 1920. By featuring not only Levine’s sculptures, already appropriations of another artist’s work, but also capturing their contemporary environments, Rodriguez engages the conditions and settings in which art circulates, proposing

that the futures of artworks are inherently speculative. Taking its title from a 1913 short story by Robert Walser about a devoted maid searching for a lost child who has been put under her care, the film similarly follows its subject toward a resolution that is more cyclical than gratifying. After searching around the world for the child for over twenty years, the maid in Walser's story finally finds her in Paris — and immediately dies from joy. The enigmatic story becomes a parable that frames the work, as it tackles the complexity of care-based relationships forged through time and follows Rodriguez's ongoing artistic exploration of subjecthood.

In addition, Rodriguez has produced a silver gelatin print, *All the Best Memories are Hers*, 2018, which serves as a "portrait" of embryos taken with an EmbryoScope. The resulting image is created from a hybrid of digital and analogue techniques. Whether used for assisted reproduction or stem-cell research, the embryo holds a legally fraught status between "person" and "property" as its regenerative potential is increasingly advanced by biotech industries. Together, the works speak to notions of time: suspended, potential, and actualized. By placing technologically mediated biological time alongside the proposed eternal life of the art object, Rodriguez finds momentary intersections in the disparate qualities and conditions of human and non-human "life," renewing meaning in both. Engaging the discourse of sculpture through the tools of cinema, *The Maid* follows the lives of "related" artworks and recasts the conditional relationships between artist, artwork, and third-party agents (institution, caregiver, surrogate) in familial terms. Rodriguez investigates how techniques of modern reproduction — both artistic and biological — are organized around property and kinship structures that are advanced by technology and mediated by law.

**Richard Frater (b. 1984, Wellington NZ, lives and works in Berlin)** looks at the institution as a public space for uniting not only various social groups and interests but people and nature as well. The installation created for the exhibition brings into focus incompatibilities between the viewpoints of species that share habitats, as the architecture of the building makes clear. *Einladungsdilemma* (2020), comprising various photographic configurations and imaginary architectural sketches, runs through new ways of imagining the human-animal relationship. The title references a specific problem on which his research is based: in German ornithologist jargon, the term "Einladung" (invitation) describes what is known as the "window dilemma." Meant here is the fact that glass window panes are invisible to birds: not only can they not see them but they invite birds to fly towards them when reflecting natural surroundings or allowing birds to see through buildings to trees on the other side. An invitation was also the starting point for the creation of this work, a commission without conditions to the artist to address the surroundings of Kunsthaus Glarus. *For Rewi* (2020) is dedicated to Māori architect Rewi Michael Robertson Thompson (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Raukawa: 1954–2016). Two photograms show the plywood façade of a house built by the architect before and after its renovation. Rewi Thompson built it for himself and

he lived here until his death. The terrace-shaped building grow together with the treetops and surrounding plants so that it is barely visible. Despite the contrasting forms and materials, nature and civilization are merged here into an architecture that was never intended to last forever, even if the aging wood paradoxically resembles concrete from a distance. This work is conceived as a gift: one half will go to a family descendant of Rewi Thompson, the other half to the collection of the Glarner Kunstverein. This gesture speculates on the different meanings a gift will take on in an institutional context as opposed to the private.

**Julia Scher's (b. 1954 Hollywood, lives and works in Cologne)** work *Delta* (2018/2020) consists of an audio installation on the first upper level and a series of peculiar, concrete-like wall panels at the reception and in the Seitenlichtsaal that first seem as if they might serve a sound-dampening function. Surveillance society and the predominating principles of authority and control are the focus of Julia Scher's work. Just as important, however, are related questions of identity and society. Since the 1980s, her installations and series of works such as *Security by Julia* have subverted and upended security systems designed to control both public and private space. From today's perspective, these early works—e.g. motion-sensor cameras installed in museums or galleries that continuously monitor viewing audiences—are practically visionary harbingers of a perpetual surveilling of public space. Back to *Delta*: reminiscent of bunker walls, the painting-like panels serve as supports for a purposeless, dysfunctional surveillance system that both provides us a view of ourselves as well as observes the external area of the building. A tangle of cables extends from the panels into the room, a configuration that gives the impression of suddenly finding ourselves in an outdated museum control room that is attempting to connect with the outside and its viewing audience. Read abstractly, the nostalgic-like arrangement of technological elements, which calls to mind protection and security, could represent a landscape seen from a bird's-eye view: various rivers and vestiges of water snaking together to form a delta. On the upper level, Alexa loudspeakers linked together with wires form an imaginary post-apocalyptic topography: a network of streets and houses bathed in green light seemingly viewed from a plane. Amazon's Alexa smart speakers used here embody the ambivalence of smart technology: they promise users an easy way of controlling their devices via voice command while simultaneously entangling us in a virtual web of dependencies. *Delta* was presented for the first time in 2018 at the Aachener Kunstverein, a museum that, like Kunsthaus Glarus, is also located in a park. Re-presenting this work, originally created for a different context, raises not least the question what role the specifics of location play for institutional practice.

In their large-scale installation *coreOATK or Stop Reading My Art as the Story of my Life* (2020), **Olivia Ali + Tobias Kaspar (b. 1985 and 1984, both live in Zurich)** create an abstract portrayal of the life of a fictitious character. The artworld context and related socio-economic ties provide the backdrop for this loosely structured narrative. Various

elements touch on major themes: an implied coming-of-age drama that works its way through the central rituals of bourgeois life. An upside-down cross decorated with baptismal or wedding flowers, symbols of a loving bond, a cemetery-esque configuration; stage props serve the sculptures and objects as anchor points for the narrative. Giveaway matchboxes speak of fantasy and branding. All these are various proposals for (fictionalized) identity formation, which is given room to develop within the art institution—a context often viewed as hermetic. Here, the artists playfully act out various roles in order to reveal the possibilities and freedoms of artistic authorship. *coreOATK or Stop Reading My Art as the Story of My Life*, however, also questions the conventions of an institution that seeks to strike a balance between its partly historical codes and an embracing of contemporary life.

Revealing the structures that define our political and social realities is a focus of **Bea Schlingelhoff's (b. 1971, Waiblingen DE, lives and works in Zurich)** artistic practice. In so doing, she refers directly to the specific exhibition venues revealing the power relations at work there.. Following her exhibition *PAX* (2019) at the Freulerpalast Museum des Landes Glarus, things have now come full circle at the Kunsthau. Created for this exhibition is *Presentation Roulette (318 works in custodial care of the collection Glarner Kunstverein: thereof 67 acquisitions, 47 donations, 9 annual gifts, 2 legal estates, 1 deposit, 1 collection of sketchbooks, further 192 specifications are in process)*, 2020. The 3-channel slide installation comprises images—views of works and reproductions—of all works by female artists in the Glarner Kunstverein collections, a list of all names and, where available, the years when the particular works were added to the collection as an acquisition, gift, or a Swiss Graphic Society annual edition, as well as a complete catalog of these works in the form of a list. In creating this work, the artist asked the institution to provide her with photographic documentation of all works. Where this was not available, we made reproductions or images of the works over the last several months and cross-checked the status of our inventory data with the specific works. Bea Schlingelhoff's work not only generates visibility for a group of works she has selected, shedding light on the current state of affairs, but also intervenes directly in the administering of the collection and its related classification systems by her making the prioritization of certain works necessary.

**Trisha Donnelly's (b. 1974 San Francisco, lives and works in New York)** artworks are often barely visible or perceptible and elude ostensibly valid patterns of observation and mediation. Here, sound often functions as a formative element that seeks out a life of its own within the spaces of the museum. *Dark Wind* (2002) becomes the subtle soundtrack to this exhibition. From older Western films we are familiar with the sound of a howling wind as a suspense-building narrative element, where such sound elements are used to announce an conceptual event. Only those who take their time in the exhibition or are there at the right moment will perceive this work at all. As indistinct, invisible or at times short-lived as Trisha Donnelly's works are, they succeed in posing fundamental questions: what is

an artist or art. Without offering answers, they demonstrate art's possibilities and freedoms, an art also always situated in the conflicting priorities between the audience's expectations, projections and fantasies.

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