



that other world, the world of the teapot tenderness, a model

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that other world, the world of the teapot, is the world the writer and the 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature Laureate Olga Tokarczuk is longing for. In her Nobel Lecture, she recalls Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale of a teapot that is broken due to people's clumsiness and carelessness and is immediately discarded and rejected. Tokarczuk writes about her childhood world of fairy tales, inhabited by talking objects and nature manifesting its own existence and life. This is that other world, an enigmatic Raumgeist, an Aleph, where the entire visible and invisible world is combined in a utopian harmony and bond, whereas our world is a disconnected, lifeless expanse, colonized by loneliness and failure. To evoke that other world, Tokarczuk advocates tenderness as a magical means thanks to which the unappreciated and ignored teapot starts to talk:



The Teapot by Hans Christian Andersen, 1863

There was once a proud teapot; it was proud of being porcelain, proud of its long spout, proud of its broad handle. It had something before and behind [...] and that was what it talked about. But it did not talk of its lid, which was cracked and riveted; these were defects, and one does not talk of one's defects, for there are plenty of others to do that.

"I know you," it said within itself. "I know, too, my imperfection, and I am well aware that in that very thing is seen my humility, my modesty. Imperfections we all have, but we also have compensations. The cups have a handle, the sugar bowl a lid; I have both, and one thing besides, in front, which they can never have. I have a spout, and that makes me the queen of the tea table. All this said the teapot in its fresh young life.

It stood on the table that was spread for tea; it was lifted by a very delicate hand, but the delicate hand was awkward. The teapot fell, the spout snapped off, and the handle snapped off. The lid was no worse to speak of; the worst had been spoken of that. The teapot lay in a swoon on the floor, while the boiling water ran out of it. [...] It was a horrid shame, but the worst was that everybody jeered at it; they jeered at the teapot and not at the awkward hand.

"I was called an invalid, and placed in a corner, and the next day was given to a woman who begged for victuals. I fell into poverty, and stood dumb both outside and in. But then, just as I was, began my better life. One can be one thing and still become quite another."

"Earth was placed in me. For a teapot, this is the same as being buried, but in the earth was placed a flower bulb. [...] And the bulb lay in the earth, the bulb lay in me; it became my heart, my living heart, such as I had never before possessed. There was life in me, power and might. The heart pulsed, and the bulb put forth sprouts; it was the springing up of thoughts and feelings which burst forth into flower.

One day I heard someone say that the flower deserved a better pot. I was thumped hard on my back, which was a great affliction, and the flower was put into a better pot. I was thrown out into the yard, where I lie as an old potsherd. But I have the memory, and that I can never lose."



Hans Savery II., Pferd, von Löwe und Tiger verfolgt, 1597–1654
Collection Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover

From the approach to materials to the elaboration of form, the use of color, and the thematic consideration of the human psyche and its fragility, here we find an investigation of surface sensations, an anatomy of tenderness and attention, an empathic journey into that other world, the world of the teapot that Olga Tokarczuk dreamed of.

As such, this exhibition is a possibility of a new paradigm, an offer "to visit the other. The other, the tender—extend her, extend him. The proof of the tender is only in tending" (Jacques Derrida), a visit accompanied by a candid appearance by the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, a tender narrator. (Adam Budak)



Maria Lassnig, Selbstporträt als Tier, 1961
© Maria Lassnig Foundation, VG Bild-Kunst 2022, Bonn

pletely different kind of responsibility for the world, because it becomes obvious that every gesture 'here' is connected to a gesture 'there', that a decision taken in one part of the world will have an effect in another part of it, and that differentiating between 'mine' and 'yours' starts to be debatable." The tender narrator is a conscious homo empathicus, who practices critical intimacy and considers tenderness "a way of looking

that shows the world as being alive, living, interconnected, cooperating with, and codependent on itself."

That Other World
There are so many approaches to another—that—other world (the "world of the teapot").

Some are secret; some are known, but access is denied; some just suddenly appear, but we only become aware of them later.

In a lecture on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, Olga Tokarczuk describes this other world with the image of the teapot, a container for a traditionally healing beverage. The teapot can only achieve its own strength and liveliness—"be made to speak"—when it receives tender affection, tender affectionate contemplation; this is what gives it the time and space it needs to develop. The English translation of her work *The Tender Narrator* underscores this existential necessity with the expression "to come into existence"—in order to be, in order to live.

The Chinese-American martial artist and actor Bruce Lee also mentioned the image of a teapot in a 1971 television interview: "You must be shapeless, formless, like water. When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup. When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can drip and it can crash. Become like water, my friend." Bruce Lee's remarks seem like an intense magical incantation. In particular, he emphasizes the verb to become.

According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault in his essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (Greek: *hetero topos*, "other place"), that other world has a completely different quality than utopia. The latter ultimately remains part of this world, though as a positive mental counterpart. The heterotopic world, on the other hand, opens up a new, previously unknown dimension of being, whose special quality lies in having created a free space in which differences and peculiarities can be experienced which depart from pre-conditioned norms and ideas.



Fernand Léger, Etude pour la "Composition aux 2 perroquets" motif central, 1937
Collection Sprengel Museum Hannover, © VG Bild-Kunst 2022, Bonn

Perhaps the ideas of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze also lead to a better understanding of the search for access to this other world. Deleuze's concept of *becoming-other* ties in with the descriptions mentioned above. The verb to become indicates an act of movement: a process takes place. The movement is connected to its inclination—where it wants to move.

In his work *The Birth of Physics*, the French philosopher Michel Serres examines this phenomenon based on Lucretius's ancient atomic theory with the concept of inclination: All atoms fall like rain straight down, yet due to their inclination (their slight deviation, their minuscule bending, *clinamen* in Greek), occasionally they collide, by chance (at an unknown place, at an unknown time)—a potential of encounter and change that is subject to a higher (other) law in which human beings cannot intentionally intervene.

The coincidence of a subject-object distinction and the connection between visible and invisible phenomena are important themes for the French philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In his study of the French Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne's work, Maurice Merleau-Ponty discovers that Cézanne, like many subsequent painters, refused to obey the previously known "law of geometric perspective" in favor of something else that he considered far more valuable.

Cézanne describes this intense experience, this particular form of insight that happened to him when, while painting, he noticed how he seemingly merged with the environment he was concentrating on: "We are an iridescent chaos. I am there in front of my subject. I lose myself there [...] We germinate." (*Joaquim Gasquet's Cézanne: A Memoir With Conversations*) However, Cézanne notes that he must not intervene in capturing this sensation at the moment of iridescence and germination. Only then can the flow of oscillatory movement run in its mysteriously predetermined, naturally given direction and the other world

be reached. As in the resulting artwork by Cézanne, "the world then no longer wavers—it is dense, it is full, it is true." (Julia Meier)

The group exhibition *that other world, the world of the teapot. tenderness, a model* is the largest and most comprehensive show in recent history at the Kestner Gesellschaft. It embarks



Pamela Rosenkranz, Anamazon (Human Touch), 2021
© Pamela Rosenkranz, courtesy the artist, Sprüth Magers, Berlin, © Photo: Stefan Altenburger

on a search for artists as tender narrator and focuses on the themes of tenderness, care, and hospitality. It is a process for acting with care in the world which transcends historical, geographic, and sociopolitical distances. The artists in the exhibition take different approaches to the theme of tenderness, representing different perspectives in the current state of global unrest. The works assembled at the Kestner Gesellschaft embody various forms of tenderness, some in the materials they use, and others in the themes or contexts in which they were created.

With loans of works from Germany and abroad, from public and private collections in Hanover, including the Sprengel Museum Hannover, the Landesmuseum Hannover, the Museum August Kestner, and the Ahlers Collection, the exhibition enters into a dialogue with the community around it about the cultural history of tenderness. In its search for tender narrators, the show ranges from the idealized nature in 17-century Baroque paintings to Käthe Kollwitz's political graphics; modernism and the dissolution of bodily forms in painting and sculpture; figuration in the work of Alexander Archipenko, Hans Arp, Fernand Léger, and Francis Picabia; Alice Neel's realistic, expressive paintings; Maria Lassnig's *Woman Laokoon* (1976); Renate Bertlmann's *Zärtlicher*



Sharon Lockhart, Milena, 2020
© Sharon Lockhart, courtesy the artist, neugerriemerschneider, Berlin and Gladstone Gallery

Tanz (1976); and Dorothy Iannone's *People* series. The exhibition features a variety of perspectives leading up to the present, including the AIDS crisis in the 1980s with photographs by Peter Hujar such as *Anthony Blond (I)* (1981), works by the conceptual and feminist artists Ewa Partum and Valie Export, little-known textile nature-related works by Barbara Levittoux-Świdarska, and queer imagery from the most recent generation of artists such as Yong Xiang Li, Dominique Knowles, and Kayode Ojo. With the highly topical work *Gazelle*

(2015) by the Ukrainian artist Nikita Kadan and site-specific installations by Joana Escoval and Jochen Lempert, the Kestner Gesellschaft opens up a cross-generational dialogue on the uncertainties of the precarious present.

The exhibition includes over 150 works by more than 44 historical and contemporary international artists, from the 17th century to the present, and shows numerous new productions. In addition to the artworks in the exhibition, teapots from different decades are presented. They show idealistic images of nature with animals, scenes of loneliness and sharing, ideas of a better world through design, the disappearance of the outer form, a view of inner life, the transformation of porcelain into natural forms, and the metamorphosis of the teapot into a space capsule, ready to depart into other worlds. (Alexander Wilmschen)

Curator: Adam Budak
Assistant Curator: Alexander Wilmschen

Text: Adam Budak, Julia Meier, Alexander Wilmschen
Design: ItYt, Hanover

Renate Bertlmann, Zärtlicher Tanz, 1976
Courtesy the artist, Silvia Steinek Galerie, Vienna

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