

ARTS ⇄ CRAFTS

Between Tradition, Discourse, and Technologies

2 October 2020 to 10 January 2021

Artists in the exhibition: **Azra Akšamija** (born in 1976 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; lives and works in Graz, Austria, and New York, United States), **Olivier Guesselé-Garai** (born in 1976 in Paris, France; lives and works in Berlin, Germany), **Plamen Dejanoff** (born in 1970 in Sofia, Bulgaria; lives and works in Vienna, Austria), **Olaf Holzapfel** (born in 1967 in Dresden, Germany; lives and works in Berlin, Germany), **Antje Majewski** (born in 1968 in Marl, Germany; lives and works in Berlin, Germany), **Jorge Pardo** (born in 1963 in Havana, Cuba; lives and works in New York, United States, and Mérida, Mexico), **Slavs and Tatars** (founded in 2006; live and work in Berlin, Germany), **Haegue Yang** (born in 1971 in Seoul, Korea; lives and works in Berlin, Germany, and Seoul, Korea), and **Johannes Schweiger** (born in 1973 in Schladming, Austria; lives and works in Vienna, Austria)

In recent years, the interest of contemporary artists in materials and artisanal processes, in experimentation with materials and techniques has grown remarkably. The nine international art positions in the exhibition **ARTS ⇄ CRAFTS: Between Tradition, Discourse, and Technologies** work with materials such as wood, glass, textiles, and straw and use skills from knotting to carving. The works in the exhibition—including sculptures, textiles, and large-scale installations—relate to artisanal, folk, and artistic traditions as well as contemporary and technological discourses. They exist within the context of current issues in a globalized world: questions of belonging, migration, and technological developments play a role, as do the dissolution of attributions, hierarchies, and demarcations. This wide-ranging exhibition with several new works will be on view at the Kestner Gesellschaft from 2 October 2020 to 10 January 2021.

Based on a strong interest in materials and techniques, the artists focus on the categorizations, hierarchies, and prejudices that are attributed to the different materials and methods. Why do wooden carved doors look old-fashioned today? Plamen Dejanoff places these in a clearly contemporary environment in the context of his foundation. Johannes Schweiger's work focuses on the attribution of gender to textiles and examines the role of female artists, who were once more commonly associated with crafts and the applied arts. This followed the traditional notion of an autonomously conceived art as an expression of (higher-quality) intellectual processes and an applied art as its (inferior) translation. How do we evaluate the works of Cameroonian artisans today, for example? Can the beaded skirts they produce, now sought-after collector's items, be seen as equal in value to abstract, western European art? In their works, Olivier Guesselé-Garai and Antje Majewski formulate criticism of an art historiography that "forgets many artists, categorizes visual art and arbitrarily subdivides it into territories, also in regard to areas outside Europe." Their contribution opposes separating categorizations in cultures' relationship to one another. This is also true of Slavs and Tatars', Haegue Yang's, and Azra Akšamija's works.

With their works, the artists advocate for intermediate spaces, transition zones, and opaque areas, and are skeptical of categorizations, dualities, and oppositions: Olaf Holzapfel's work challenges the classic dichotomy of nature and culture by examining the far-reaching influence of the physical properties of wood on our social spaces. Jorge Pardo disposes of a conception of craftsmanship as involving manual work: the artist works with new technologies such as CNC milling and stamping as well as lasers.

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The artists in the exhibition bring together a variety of materials and processes in their work. They combine traditional or local knowledge with other cultures and times, as well as with modern and contemporary art. Culture is understood as a flow of diverse, synchronously and diachronically fed and interlinked influences and elements, and as a process in which local forms of knowledge and global knowledge transfer are intertwined. The importance and appreciation of artisanship as an essential part of cultural identity and, above all, the community-building potential of craft traditions are considered along with the social and economic conditions in a globalized world.

The exhibition also responds to the increased interest in crafts, which has developed in very different directions. On the one hand, there is a neo-conservative awareness of quality and the associated consumption of high-end artisanal goods, while on the other hand DIY movements have gained popularity. And, not least, political incorporations of crafts alongside concepts such as homeland, people, folk art, and tradition have become apparent. Based on their engagement with materials and artisanal techniques, the artists challenge these cultural attributions, concepts of identity, or categorizations and show in their works how local identifications and global developments have long been intertwined. Conceptions of coherent, self-contained cultures and identities are subverted in favor of ambiguity and hybridity.

Since its founding in 1916, the Kestner Gesellschaft has dealt with many of the exhibition's themes, in particular the hierarchization of art and crafts, European modernism and non-European cultures, as well as gender-specific attributions of techniques and materials and the role of design. For this reason, the curators of the exhibition have decided to offer a glimpse of the archives of the Kestner Gesellschaft alongside these works of contemporary art in order to examine the historical development of these issues from an institutional perspective.

The exhibition will also be accompanied by a digital supporting program and extensive discursive offerings in the exhibition spaces.

The exhibition is being realized in cooperation with the Kunsthaus Graz and the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig (GfZK).

The exhibition is supported by the Stiftung Sparda-Bank Hannover, the VHV-Stiftung, the GETEC Group and the friends of the Kestner Gesellschaft.

An exhibition catalog has been published by Verlag für moderne Kunst and can be purchased for 20 euros.

Curators of the exhibition: Barbara Steiner and Lea Altner

Graphic design: modern temperament, Berlin

The original exhibition dates of 13 June to 13 September 2020 were postponed to 2 October 2020 to 10 January 2021 due to the coronavirus-related closing of the Kestner Gesellschaft. Visitors to the exhibition must follow the current social distancing and hygiene guidelines.

Further information: www.kestnergesellschaft.de

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