

Yalda Afsah

Every word was once an animal

25. 6. – 4. 9. 2022

Press talk: 24. 6. 2022, 10 am

Opening: 24. 6. 2022, 6 pm

HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark
Burgring 2, 8010 Graz (AT)

Cooperation Kunstverein München
Catalog

Curators:

Maurin Dietrich, Cathrin Mayer

Press contact:

Helga Droschl

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The human relationship with animals, and the agency surrounding that interaction is critical to the work of the German-Iranian artist Yalda Afsah. Together with Kunstverein München, HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark presents her first institutional solo exhibition, focusing on questions of power, care, and control in relation to domestication. Using three examples – bullfighting, horse dressage, and pigeon breeding – she examines the blurred boundaries between affection and identification with animals on the one hand, as well as submission and human domination on the other.

In the conditioning of animals, anthropocentric power relations become evident. Afsah's works reveal the ambiguous character of the forces that operate at the center of these relationships. She directs our gaze to the moments when the bodies of humans and animals are marked by an uncanny closeness: the camera lingers on the aesthetic yet unnatural movements of a horse, focuses on the concentrated aggression of a bull, or follows the gazes of men searching the sky for pigeons performing falls.

In ancient eurocentric definitions of social space, exclusion has long been inscribed. As philosopher Fahim Amir writes: “a place to which neither animals, plants, slaves nor women had access, but only the free anthropos loitering smartly,” while the others struggle at the edges. It is precisely these margins that Afsah focuses on in her work, for that is where we decide who cares for or subjugates whom, and who is even defined as an independent subject in the first place. The animals themselves appear in Afsah's works as protagonists and as living beings – not only under the gaze of their human companions.

Every word was once an animal is also a reference to the collapsing divide between “nature” and “culture.” It takes place during an ongoing pandemic of which the origins remain a mystery, but the prime suspect is a bat. Such zoonotic influenzas are frequently the result of a disturbed relation between the species and usually caused by the intensive breeding, slaughter, and trading of animals. This crisis is forcing us to rethink the concept of the political: nature is not merely a passive object of political influence, but a resistant agent of the social. In the works, viewers are confronted with an intimate portrait of the mutual interdependence of human and non-human protagonists. Afsah never suggests a return to “nature” is possible, but asks us to consider other ways in which we co-habitate.

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Kunstverein Medienturm in der „HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark“, Burgring 2, 8010 Graz, Austria, ZVR: 542738445

1/2

German-Iranian artist and filmmaker Yalda Afsah (b. 1983, Berlin, lives in Berlin) has presented her work at various exhibitions and festivals including Manifesta 13; Locarno Film Festival; New York Film Festival; Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur; Institute of Contemporary Arts London; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein. In 2018, she received the Karl Schmidt-Rottluff scholarship and from 2019–2021 she was a fellow at the Berlin University of the Arts' Graduate School. She is currently a mentor for the Berlin program for artists (BPA).

On the occasion of the exhibition, Afsah's first comprehensive catalog was published by DISTANZ including contributions by Fahim Amir, Maurin Dietrich, Cathrin Mayer, Gina Merz, and Filipa Ramos.

Every word was once an animal is initiated by Kunstverein München where the exhibition was on view from January 15 to April 3, 2022, and realized in cooperation with the HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark.

Program

Artist Talk

Yalda Afsah, Maurin Dietrich, Cathrin Mayer
25.6.2022, 4–5 pm

Curator's Tour

Cathrin Mayer
30.6.2022, 6–7 pm

Explanatory and transfiguring videos on the concepts of: Animal; empathy; anthropocentrism

Mara-Daria Cojocaru (Munich School of Philosophy)
14.7., 28.7., 4.8.2022, 6–6:15 pm, Series of discursive videos (online)

Gošogaoka, 1997

Sharon Lockhart, Film, 63 min.
11.8.2022, 6–8:30 pm, Film screening

Gladiators of Beauty in South Central, Los Angeles

Fahim Amir (philosopher, author, Vienna)
1.9.2022, 6–7 pm, Lecture

Art education & Context

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