



Borjana Ventzislavova, *Und der Himmel klärt sich auf (MAGIC RESISTANCE)*, 2018, HD-Video, Filmstill, courtesy of the artist & Bildrecht

Borjana Ventzislavova. And the Sky Clears Up

April 12 – July 7, 2019

This film was originally commissioned in 2018 as part of commemorations for the 1938 annexation of Austria by Germany. Specifically, the film was commissioned as part of “Exiled Gaze,” a series of projects that acknowledged *Mexikoplatz*, founded and titled in post-war Vienna because of Mexico’s singular 1938 intervention: This was the only country in the world that protested before the League of Nations (forerunner of the United Nations) against the Nazi Annexation of Austria. However the film itself has little to do with Mexico, but more rather with acknowledging parallels between political shifts that happened then with those happening now.

In the film, we see five women perform ritualistic acts, all of which aim to cast out the ghosts of fascism, and to eradicate traces of Nazism that remain within current populist politics. It is no secret that not only are current politicians in Austria allegedly associated with nationalist and “identitarian” organisations, but that the wave of populist politics that has swept Austria and Europe in recent years – as well as the policies emerging from the current regime - has undeniable elements of exclusionism, racism, anti-migration sentiment and nationalistic rhetoric.

These five women are thus determined, in the form of small ritualistic gestures, to weed out and eradicate these political tendencies and their repercussions. We first see the protagonist Demir arranging a circle of glasses at Café Kafka in Vienna, and pouring a white liquid in a ritualistic manner into them. Later on in the film, she dances on the balcony at the Hofburg (the former Palace of the Austrian Empire and the current work place and resident for the President of Austria) where Hitler gave his famous address in 1938 to a massive, jubilant crowd. Demir’s dance is an act of decontamination, where small movements and bodily gestures as well as references to belly dancing and ritualistic head-shaking all amount to forms of resistance and casting out. These most delicate and seemingly ineffective counter-measures are presented against the

realpolitik force of the spectacle that once engulfed this same site in addition to the political currencies associable with this site today. Likewise the other protagonists, perform rituals before highly-charged historical and current political sites in Vienna, whether the Ministry of the Interior (now run by the far-right party, the FPÖ, under the highly controversial Minister Herbert Kickl), the Parliament Building itself, or again the Hofburg, as well as sites of the persecution of Jews from the 1930s and 1940s in Vienna's second district. A final protagonist appears to chase away evil spirits to flow them away along the Danube and out of the city. Some of the rituals are the inventions of the participants themselves, and others arise by instruction from the artist, making references to a variety of cultural sources, including indigenous, Balkan, Roma, Voodoo and other sources. The artist noticed a number of cross-cultural shared elements to some of these rituals in her ongoing research, including a residency that she spent at the Banff Centre, Canada.

The objects used in the rituals are also presented in a series of photographs at the entrance to the Kabinett. Appearing like anthropological samples, their presentation suggests that such "tools for change" are always available. It is our responsibility to find or even make them, says the artist. Likewise although the rituals are presented individually in the film, an overall spirit of collectivism is encouraged. This film also presents a steep contrast to the performances and violent rituals of the Viennese Actionists for example, whose artwork continues to cast a shadow over Austria. Instead, this film depicting "magic resistance" suggests that it is not through violence sublimation or de-sublimation that one forms an artistic movement that is ritualistic while being immediately political and responsive to forms of political catastrophe and trauma, as the Actionists had. That violence, more associable with the problematics of masculinity and, while self-absorbed in a pretentious shroud of criticality and activism, is only the flexing of a tired, old phallus. The violent rituals of the Viennese Actionists failed, and this artwork is a legacy of failure not despite of but also because of its canonization and commercialization within museal archives and gallery networks. Although the artist had not intended so, "And the sky clears up (MAGIC RESISTANCE)" stands against these misguided activities of the Viennese Actionists and the pastiche of artwork associable with them to conjure a female-led collective resistance that is not only non-violent, it is inclusive. It is also highly appropriate to our times and may be indicative of things to come. *Text by Séamus Kealy*

With: Songül Boyraz, Renée Gadsden, Esra Emine Demir, Maruša Sagadin, Claudia Slanar

Camera: Hannes Böck

Sound: Kai Maier-Rothe

Text: Ovid Pop

Voice over: Susanne Schuda

Produced in the frame of:

Exiled Gaze | Der exilierte Blick

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Hours Exhibition: Tue-Sun 12-7pm

Hours Café Cult: Mon-Fri 11am-11pm