

Fotograf Gallery

Memory and Desire, stirring

**Özlem Altın
Tereza Zelenková**

19. 4.–20. 5. 2023

Layers of paint, like lace curtains, prevent us from seeing something that is forcing its way to the surface. That something, which remains partially hidden, is present in the works by both artists currently showing at Fotograf Gallery. Altın and Zelenková often turn to storytelling in the form of an artist book or exhibition, with stories clinging to the viewer's retina like a lost memory contrary to a fixed narrative. Both artists prefer working with a feeling or a promise of something distant within the intimate or familiar. Through combining and mirroring images, they invoke a longing for what is about to emerge into existence or what is ceasing to exist. Similarly, as casting from a mould produces a new shape that has for a long time existed only as a possibility, a freshly dug hole receives and forms the roots of a newly planted tree. The present works in the exhibition are affected by a touch of hand and hint on ways of looking that are increasingly haptic. Metamorphosis, as well as the possibility to breathe life into something inanimate is a line that weaves strongly through the entire exhibition.

“April is the cruellest month, breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire, stirring dull roots with spring rain,” writes T. S. Eliot in the introduction of his famous poem *The Waste Land*. In the preparatory phase of the exhibition, we discussed the rhythm and cycles of nature and man-made rituals, a repetition that deforms time in its own way since it always brings the ‘same’ but in slight variations. We also spoke about metamorphosis because the bodily in their art often intertwines with the non-human, whether it is long hair and heavy curtains in older works by Tereza Zelenková or human limbs, organs and natural forms in the works by Özlem Altın. The works of both artists contain the corporeal and a residue of the touch of hands

For this exhibition, Zelenková has chosen detailed larger than life shots of antique tin forms, traditionally used for baking Christmas and Easter biscuits, and hundreds of their small plaster casts arranged on the wall. Her photographs, printed directly to aluminium, bring out the marks and scuffs on the forms’ surface as testaments to their repetitive use, often spanning several family generations. The haptically interesting surfaces scarred by these minute imperfections and scratches are a reminder of all the hands that repeatedly touched them. From a formal viewpoint, the prints may remind us of older works by Tereza Zelenková, who often turns to photographing sculptures and inanimate objects, however, in this case the scale of the objects is deliberately amplified, transforming them into near totemic objects. Similarly, the plaster casts made from these ‘shells’ resemble votive objects that worshipers place in holy places to seek grace or wishes. At the same time, they also evoke the entirely profane, repetitive, and laborious process of the making of the biscuits, which exist for a disproportionately short amount of time. A repetition or doubling, rhythmic reiteration or mirroring are also distinctive visual motifs of the work by Özlem Altın. In the exhibition two photographs are installed next to a diptych where she combines collage with painting. Here two enlarged pupils, as in a state of excitement or shock, gaze right back at the viewer. The eyes are embedded in a surreal, orange landscape, where different hands seem to be frozen in moments of touch and contact, jointly braiding and weaving. The scenery equally resembles memories or maybe dreams buried deep inside a fertile soil. The viewer approaches the work, trying to decipher and make sense, looking from a distance or more closely at the details, only to come to the conclusion that a clear resolution is impossible.

Tereza Zelenková is an artist based in Prague. Working with black and white photography, installation, and text, she combines facts and fiction to reveal intricate and sometimes unexpected relationships between objects, places, and their mythologies. Her work is largely influenced by Victorian gothic, romanticism, and surrealism, with contemporary twist. The repeated themes of her work include relationship between land and identity; the uncanny and the domestic; and photography's relationship with the occult. She received her MA in Photography at the Royal College of Art in London in 2012. Her recent exhibitions include *Known and Strange* at Victoria & Albert Museum in London (2021–2023), *Maladies of The Infinite* at the Cultural Centre of Belgrade (2022), *The Double Room* at Campbell House Museum in Toronto (2021), *Dead Language* at Josef Sudek Atelier in Prague (2020), *The Essential Solitude* at The Ravestijn Gallery in Amsterdam (2018), *A Snake that disappeared through a hole in the wall* at Foam Museum in Amsterdam (2018), and *a Handful of Dust* at Whitechapel Gallery in London (2017). Her photographs are held in the collections of Victoria & Albert Museum, Foam Photography Museum, Musée de l'Élysée, Saatchi Gallery and Fotomuseum Winterthur. She has two published books, *Supreme Vice* (Mörel books, 2011) and *The Essential Solitude* (VOID, 2021), as well as several self-published books.

Özlem Altın is an artist based in Berlin. In her work which includes paintings, collages, photographs, and artist books, Altın explores the body at rest and the inanimate in action. To create her work, Altın digs through a photographic collection that she has assembled over the years, combining found images with her own photographs into a dense constellation of amalgams. Altın received a Master of Fine Art in 2006 at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Altın was a guest-professor for photography at HGB Leipzig in 2020-2021, and currently is UMPRUM visiting artist at the academy in Prague. Last year, Özlem Altın was part of the 59th Venice Biennale *The Milk of dreams* curated by Cecilia Alemani. Her most recent exhibitions include *Kunstverein Braunschweig; Tongues of Time* in Villa Romana, Florence (2021); *Companion Pieces*, MoMA, NY (2020); *The 16th Istanbul Biennial* (2019); and participation in *The 10th Berlin Biennial* (2018).

List of works:

Tereza Zelenková:

The Altar of Domestic Bliss (Oltář domácí blaženosti), 2023
aluminium print
(1)

Deities of The Second Shift (Božstva druhé směny), 2023
aluminium print
(2)

Ex-voto, 2022-2023
plaster casts
(3)

Omfalos, 2023
found photograph, digital inkprint
(4)

Özlem Altın:

Untitled (Auricula), 2023
photo print
(5)

Untitled (stirring a hole), 2023
photo print
(6)

Naked eye (landscape), 2023
photo print on canvas with ink and oil
diptych
(7)

Curated by: Tereza Rudolf
Production: Pavel Matěj
Technical production: Jakub Prašivka, Jakub Tulinger
Marketing, communication: Jan Hladoník
Social media: Tereza Vacková
Director of Fotograf: Markéta Kinterová
Director of Fotograf Gallery: Viktorie Vítů
Fundraisign & executive manager: Marie Rozmánková
Translations: Lenka Marie Čapková

The basement of the Fotograf gallery will remain closed over the course of the exhibition to be opened at the very end (19 May-20 May) for the prepared group work by the students of the Atelier with the UMPRUM visiting artist who in the summer semester is Özlem Altın herself.

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME:

15 May, 6 pm - a guided tour with the curator and the artists

19 May, 6 pm - exhibition closing / opening of the student exhibition
"The shape is what you hold"

Fotograf Gallery
www.fotografgallery.cz

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