

ODYSSEY – AN EXILE COLLAGE

Olaf Metzger, Maya Schweizer

Exhibition partners: Produzentengalerie Hamburg/Raum für Kunst Hamburg e.V. and Drawing Room, Hamburg in collaboration with Centre Photographique Marseille

The exhibition project *Odyssey – an Exile Collage* takes as its starting point the odyssey of the Heine monument designed by Danish classicist sculptor Louis Hasselriis which portrays the German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine as a suffering human being of old age who versed the painful experiences of his life – censorship, political persecution, being spied on and illness. The marble statue was commissioned and first installed in 1892 by Empress Elizabeth of Austria in the Achilleion on the Greek island of Corfu, from where it was brought to Hamburg in 1909 by the son of Heine's former publisher Campe, staying there until 1939 when the statue was moved by his daughter to its present location in the Parc Mistral in Toulon to protect it from vandalism. In Sanary-sur-Mer, just a few miles away from Toulon, some of the most famous refugees had sought temporary shelter: Berthold Brecht, Thomas Mann and Ludwig Marcuse, to name but a few. Heine can be regarded as the 'patron saint' of all German artists and authors, many of them of Jewish faith, for whom France, and especially the South, became vitally important both as spiritual and aesthetic inspiration as well as political refuge from the growing Nazi regime.



The works of the the internationally well-known contemporary artists Olaf Metzger and Maya Schweizer present contemporary debates on the timeless subject of exile. The awareness for current inner-European conflicts as well as for the disrupted fate of humans forced to flee from their native countries will be sharpened in the context of an exemplary historical odyssey conveyed by two current artistic statements.

With the wall piece *We Refugees* by Olaf Metzger and the film *The Dying Soldier of Les Milles* by Maya Schweizer we juxtapose artistic statements of different generations, dealing with similar cultural-historical events and experiences. The link is the theme of persecution, migration, odyssey and exile. The aim of this project is to further a better understanding of these highly relevant themes in the face of current political discourses.

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Metzel's wall object *We Refugees* from 2020 (aluminium, stainless steel, digital print) shows excerpts from Hannah Arendt's famous essay "We Refugees" from 1943, published by the Jewish political theorist of German origin in the *Menorah Journal* in January 1943 while in exile in New York (*The Menorah Journal* 31, New York 1943, Nr. 1, p. 69 – 77).

Arendt's name always appears when one speaks of "refugees" and "philosophy": *"We have lost our language and with it the naturalness of our reactions, the simplicity of our gestures and the relaxed expression of our feelings. [...] Our identity is changed so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are. [...] and that means the collapse of our private world."*

This quote sounds timeless, like a verse from the eternal lament of the disenfranchised, the stateless, the refugees. Perhaps that is why these lines have been heard and read again and again since the beginning of the so-called "refugee catastrophe". It seems that to this day no one has been able to add anything substantial to Hannah Arendt's brief description of the loss of professional existence, language and emotionality.



Olaf Metzel (b. 1952 in Berlin) is one of the most prominent contemporary artists active in Germany today. His body of work includes large sculptural installations in the public sphere, as well as small-scale, refined works, bold drawings, and reliefs composed of silkscreen prints on thin sheets of twisted metal. Metzel responds not only to his physical or architectural surroundings, but also to the social or political environment. His spatial works engage in an in-depth dialogue that refers to a wide range of social, urban, religious, and historical contexts. Olaf Metzel seeks to stimulate in the viewer a higher degree of awareness; for him, the open sphere of discourse and the challenge to what seems obvious are the essence of contemporary art. In engaging with sociological, inter-cultural, and political concerns, Metzel positions his work at the heart of contemporary public discourse. Metzel's works have been exhibited at Documenta in Kassel, as well as in numerous important international exhibitions, including the 2017 Istanbul Biennial.

In recent years the artist **Maya Schweizer** (b. 1976 in Paris), a resident of Berlin, has been dealing with questions such as perception and memory, identity and homelessness, narrative fiction and everyday life, and migration and integration in her multimedia works. In her films – hybrid mixtures between documentaries and staged accounts – the artist combines images, sound and text into subtle analyses of the past, which always incorporate contemporary environments, or a concrete link to a collectively remembered location. Her work has been exhibited internationally. In October 2020, Villa Stuck in Munich dedicates a solo show to her, presenting a compilation of old films as well as a newly commissioned piece.

Schweizer's film *The Dying Soldier of Les Milles* (HDV, 13 min) from 2014 observes both the memorial Le Camp des Milles - a former internment camp and later a Vichy / German concentration camp of World War II in an old brickworks in Aix-en-Provence – and the monument of a wounded soldier dedicated to soldiers who died in the two World Wars and the Algerian War. The camera moves around the sculpture and the square. It takes up the rhythm of the game Pétanque played by the villagers at the soldier's feet and makes him come alive again. Schweizer's video installation exposes fragments of the memory of the former brickworks / the later internment camp Les Milles, in which intellectuals and artists

such as Lion Feuchtwanger, Golo Mann, Alfred Kantorowicz, Wols, Hans Bellmer and Max Ernst were imprisoned, and thus makes a direct connection to recent French-German history.

Les Milles functions as a special place of remembrance in several respects: At first, the region is a crucial hub for German emigration to France (especially in the nearby Sanary-sur-Mer). From here, the path led out of Europe for the lucky ones – often via Marseille or the Pyrenees – for the unfortunate ones, it ended in suicide or deportation to Auschwitz.

Yet through its sounds, montage and the sand of the installation, the film also evokes the smells and beauties of Southern France today.



Images:

Page 1: Heinrich Heine monument, Toulon

Page 2: Olaf Metzger, We Refugees, 2020, aluminium, stainless steel and digital printing

Page 3: Maya Schweizer, The Dying Soldier of Les Milles, 2014, HDV, film still