

Sies + Höke Galerie

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FORT | *The Great Await*

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PRESS TEXT

An egg as the dwelling of a brooding thought, balanced in a surreal setting of furniture. Meanwhile, bouquets of flowers recount an existential insight and imaginary smokers gather in shiny, metallic pastel shades for their death on credit. Among others, it is these images, which have become installations, that lay the traces of waiting and expectation in the exhibition *The Great Await*. With new works that place a particular focus on the sculptural work in FORT's oeuvre, Alberta Niemann and Jenny Kropp of the artist collective narrate about the transient becoming and unbecoming anchored in life from the perspective of artistic creation. Like the grains of sand in an ever-rotating hourglass, poetic-sculptural states of suspense intermingle with object-formed motifs of memento mori and vanitas.

At the very beginning of the exhibition, visitors encounter oversized eggs carried—perhaps beared—by miniature chairs, taking a rest on a clothes rack or nesting on a stool. In many cultures around the world, the egg is a symbol of life and birth. In the exhibition it takes on a double role. The motif refers both to the becoming inherent in existence and to the production of art, or rather: the hatching of an artistic idea. As tenderly as a nascent strand of ideas develops, it can also quickly be dropped again—and thus, breaks the shell of the still raw egg. The installative setting of the titular work *The Great Await* traces this process, and playfully portrays the developmental stages of idea generation. Moving into the fantastic, the sculptural spatial situation evokes the scenario of a surreal Dadaist vaudeville. Thoughts encased in eggshells turn furniture upside down or settle on the aforementioned coat rack—in the hope of being whisked away on a clarifying walk.

Longingly awaited and meticulously endured, artists sometimes experience the flourishing of their ideas in the course of their careers. Fantasies of such unfoldings weave connections to the works of Melancholia. The group of works bring together paintings of bouquets of flowers from the 1920s to the 1960s by deceased and unknown painters. Gathered from a collection of already existing works, FORT adds painterly interventions which do not, however, address the blossoming of the “heyday”, but rather ironically the associated demise. One flower in each bouquet repeats the words “I will die”, with a singular echo of “me too” reverberating from the upper floor of the exhibition. In this way, the paintings bundle together a multi-budded chorus of poppies, daffodils and other blossoms that call out to each other in their best handwriting about their withering soon to come. In announcing their imminent death, they acknowledge their transience and do so on behalf of their creators. An interstice is created between the still existing vitality of the painters in the moment of the painting's creation, their inevitable death and the vanitas motif of the flowers: a transtemporal collage that leads the artistic duo of FORT not least to the question of what remains of us when we depart from the world.

Back to the beginning of life, the work *CV* deals with the time before death. A shelf of carefully lined up black laced shoes—ranging from children to adult sizes—form a linear timeline, suggesting the continuous progression of life. The title of the work refers to the abbreviation of the Latin “Curriculum Vitae”, hence the résumé, which we present at crucial moments and whose planning and progression play a significant role in the shaping of life itself. In thinking of the expression “to follow in someone's footsteps” and looking at the ever-same footwear of the sculptural composition, a sketch of a possibly pre-formulated path in life is described, into or out of which we try to grow. The initials C.V. engraved on the shoe insoles then refers to the interweaving of one's own person with one's career—an entanglement that particularly affects the life and work of artists. Following this trace, the work *CV* again makes an arc back to questions of legacy.

Following the initial confrontation about the temporality of existence, and with the idea of letting an idea rest for a while, the protagonists of the *Smoker* group coalesce on the gallery's tribune for a collectively decided escapism. With the

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imaginary smoke of their cigarettes, they cloud the exhibition rooms and diffuse their worries about the great ideas that may not come to pass. Originally mounted on buildings in public spaces, they usually appear functionally, inconspicuously and without frills as containers for falling ash. Befitting the rendezvous of vaporous contemplation, they shed their usual drab appearance in the exhibition. Indeed, in keeping with FORT, who designed individual cigarette emblems for each smoker, they now express their personality and join the act of smoking to the exhibition's narrative strands about waiting, expecting and the pastime in between.

Victoria Tarak