

GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER

KONSTANZE STOIBER
There Have To Be Bells

26 JAN – 27 APR 2024

Opening: Friday, January 26, 2024, 6 p.m.
Vienna 1, Domgasse 6

The opening sequence of Ingmar Bergman's film *Fanny och Alexander* from the year 1982 shows the young protagonist, Alexander, engrossed in play. In the candle-lit scene he is cautiously – as if in a stage-performance – shifting figures around in his toy theatre, creating a variety of perspectives and relationships. The shooting script of this film is displayed in Konstanze Stoiber's exhibition *There Have To Be Bells* and refers to a similar spatial situation that the artist creates with her presentation at Domgasse 6. In this historic space characterized by its Baroque architecture, she has carefully positioned recent works together with loans from St. Stephen's Cathedral as if they were stage props. In their arrangement and inter-relationships they capture and prompt reflections on Christian themes that have undergone fundamental changes in the course of temporal and societal transformations. As in *Fanny och Alexander* we encounter anachronistic religious customs and collective habits, which Konstanze Stoiber links with the history of the gallery and that of the neighboring Viennese Cathedral of St. Stephen.

Possibly the most important symbol of the Cathedral (to which the Galerie St. Stephan, founded in 1954 by Monsignore Otto Mauer, owes its name) is the so-called *Pummerin*, St. Stephen's great bell. Originally cast from cannon balls and re-installed following the destruction of the Cathedral's roof timbering in the Second World War, the bell stands for the construction of an identity-forming cultural narrative. At the same time, however, through its continual use and the resulting wear and tear, the bell symbolizes a process of decay, which can be delayed only by the replacement of the bell's clapper – a procedure that was last carried out in 2011. The clapper from the 18th century, used up to that date, is a central element in the exhibition and, together with the multicolored glass pieces of the windows of St. Stephan, which are also on display, forms in Konstanze Stoiber's own words, "fragments of experiences of the sublime". Mystical experiences thus receive a spatial enhancement – the incidence of divine light is enhanced by the intensive colors of the stained-glass windows; or the miracle of the conversion of Saint Paul, to be seen on the Singertor, is enhanced by the extraordinary dynamism of its portrayal in the medieval relief.

Around the religious objects Stoiber groups works of her own. The two diptychs – oil on canvas – act as an atmospheric stage-set and thematize the interaction of staging, liturgy and dramaturgy. Conceptually, they refer to the conversion of Saint Paul and are marked by the topography of the Holy Land and of an imagined journey through the landscape of Syria. This mental scenery is supported likewise by desert flowers that the artist collected in the Negev and the Judean desert regions and which she displays in an historic showcase reminiscent of the presentation of religious relics.

The focus of Konstanze Stoiber's presentation is on a European society informed and shaped by Christianity and its institutions. Her exhibition asks how identity-forming and societal rituals have changed during the process of secularization and how much impact and influence historical religious sites still have on our current-day experience.

KONSTANZE STOIBER, born 1999 in Vienna, lives and works in Vienna.

Stoiber completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Fashion Design and Painting at the Parsons School of Design, New York City and Paris. She is currently participating in the Artistic Research PhD Program at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna.

Her most recent exhibitions include: September. Reminiscence of a Journey to the Holy Land, Department for Biblical Studies, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Vienna, Vienna (solo) (2023); She Only Likes Violence, Galerie D., Romainville, France (solo) (2022); and the Parsons Paris Graduate Show: YMCA, Paris (group) (2021).