

Kunsthalle Bern

Morgenröte, aurora borealis and Levantin: into your solar plexus, 30.1. – 7.6.2015

During her time as a guest curator at Kunsthalle Bern, multi-disciplinary artist Donatella Bernardi (born in Geneva, 1976) has conceived a process-oriented exhibition project that connects three distinct narratives: it deals with politically loaded questions of national identity, signified by the alpine motifs in several works, while pictures from the artist's private archive foreground more personal myths – and last but not least, the exhibition undertakes a visual journey to the Middle and the Far East, to Lebanon and to Nepal.

These three perspectives are represented by works that stem from disparate artistic traditions and contexts. The exhibition features historical objects from the Swiss Federal Art Collection (BAK), framed photographic prints from the 1970s, a projection of countless digitized slides and monumental murals. The project's stylistic breadth encompasses classicist *kitsch*, geometric abstraction, graffiti on the Kunsthalle's naked walls, as well as small- and medium-scale objects scattered on pedestals, which could be considered sculptures in their own right.

Each room bears its own thematically relevant name that signals or acts as a key to its content. Drawing on the different, loosely linked exhibits, visitors can choose their own personal paths through the exhibition. Since the project was designed as a kind of 'event', a work-in-progress, an ever-changing series of snapshots, visitors had the opportunity to watch fresco artist and conservator Sara Baldi paint the mural "Sisyphus" over the course of the exhibition. This composition is an amalgamation of 1'000 slides recorded by Bernardi's uncle and godfather Alfonso Bernardi (1914-2010) on a trip to the Nepalese mountain Dhaulagiri. They function as an anthropological documentation of this Italian-led expedition, which took place from February until May 1976. The depictions of Western alpinists and local Sherpas and porters shed light on an emergent touristy 'event economy' – while the Himalaya sky seems to recall the Venetian school of painting. The fresco also metaphorically alludes to the endless cycle of ascension and decay, to familial and cultural heritages, and, quite simply, to the cycle of life.

The next room over, named "Mother – Daughter", establishes a contrast between works by two Lebanese artists, Saloua Raouda Choukair (born in Beirut, 1916) and her daughter Hala Schoukair (born in Beirut, 1957).

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This is the first time mother and daughter are exhibited alongside each other: Which connections, apart from those concerning their individual production, can be drawn between the two women and their conceptions of 'art' – modernist for the former, perhaps almost therapeutic for the latter?

Downstairs, the tropical botany by the artist's father Luciano Bernardi (1920-2001) replaces the mineral foundation of ruins and sediments visible in a Syrian frieze near the museum's entrance: the photographs in the Kunsthalle's atrium show the citadel of Aleppo, already damaged by the war, and the excavation site of Palmyra, which is acutely threatened by it. These supposedly imperishable stone formations have suddenly become fragile, while the transitory blossom of a plant gains in presence and strength through the sheer fact of its aliveness – some examples on show here appear almost supernatural or hallucinatory.