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ENGLISH

LandLiebe. Art and Agriculture

18.09.2021-
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With its exhibition *LandLiebe. Art and Agriculture*, the Museum of Fine Arts in Chur is focusing on a subject which has been close to the hearts of both Switzerland in general and Grisons in particular, one which has, since time immemorial, represented a paramount theme in fine art. For a long time, art harbored an idealized notion of rural life and even some time into the 20th century often portrayed the latter as part of the cycle of nature. Sheep grazing in the sun or mowers working their way up a slope are the kind of motifs with which we are familiar thanks to artists such as Giovanni Giacometti, Andrea Garbald and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. In contemporary art, the idyll of rural life in days of yore has, however, been replaced by a questioning of such subjects as soil erosion and overcultivation. The exhibition focuses on the ambivalent relationship between man and the land because viewing land and the earth as the source of our agricultural economy allows us to draw conclusions about such wide-ranging topics as climate justice and food sovereignty. Although in art pieces focusing on rural life are to be found in all styles and down through all eras, the exhibition does not offer an historical perspective but instead takes a reflective, associative approach to its highly charged subject matter. Somewhere between myth and history, longing and reality, the exhibition offers new and surprising takes on only seemingly familiar terrain.

The exhibition presents works by Korbinian Aigner, Cuno Amiet, Mirko Baselgia, Denise Bertschi, Emil Brunner, Edward Burtynsky, Carlos Fernández, Andrea Garbald, Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė, Oliver Gemperle, Giovanni Giacometti, Asta Gröting, Ilkka Halso, Johann Jakob Hauswirth, Lois Hechenblaikner, Olaf Holzapfel, Sofia Hultén, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Marcus Maeder, Val Minnig, Roland Roos, Louis Saugy, Paul Senn, Lerato Shadi, Beatrix Sitter-Liver and Anna Tiessen.

The Earth Slips out of Control

Overgrazed meadows, intensive farming and deforestation are accelerating soil erosion throughout the world. Nitrogen fertilization and livestock husbandry are also responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. Philosopher Timothy Morton sees our planet's ecological plight as one of the results of global agriculture. Should we, in fact, be searching for the roots of the Anthropocene at the beginnings of the farmnig, some 12,500 years ago?

Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė get the exhibition underway with their work *The Large Piece of Turf 02:60* (2020). An inconspicuous piece of apparatus in the foyer gives off the kind of smell that occurs when rain falls on dry earth. This scent is known as petrichor. Anybody experiencing it automatically thinks about natural material and thus about familiar landscapes or memories of childhood. The scent of the earth as a synthetic composition reflects not

only our sensory desire for the land, it also references industrial husbandry and the volatility of the earth.



Mirko Baselgia
Endozoochory Project,
2018 / 2021
Courtesy the artist

The artificiality of the installation *Endozoochory Project* (2018-2021) by **Mirko Baselgia** is reminiscent of laboratories and is reminiscent of industrialized food production. For the duration of the exhibition there are different vegetables growing on raised areas and visitors can harvest and consume them. This installation makes use of hydroculture, a technology-driven production system that is also suitable for vertical gardens in towns and cities. The plants have their roots in a mineral wool substrate rather than in soil. With his exhibit, Baselgia undermines our tendency, based on iconology, to see gardens as evocations of paradise. He simultaneously reflects on whether we can become part of the natural cycle once more and again enter in on a dialogue with nature. This idea becomes a demand when the seeds of the plants he is cultivating pass through his digestive system before he plants them.



Asta Gröting
Acker, 2012
Courtesy the artist and carrier | gebauer, Berlin/Madrid

Asta Gröting uses the material that is earth as a symbol when, for her relief *Acker* (2012) she shapes a man-sized piece of freshly plowed sod, coats her mold with gold, and immediately hangs this sun shape on the wall. In fact, she exaggerates the image of a plowed field as an archetype to such an extent that her work can be seen either as a chimera of destruction or as a monument to sustainability. In a similar vein, in his photographs *Salt Pan, Little Rann of Kutch, Gujarat, India* (2016) **Edward Burtynsky** shows a barren landscape consisting of interlocking rectangles and spiral-shaped tracks. In his pictures, this artist captures the precarious balance in our ecological system. With the falling groundwater table and the market value of salt, the salt pans are disappearing, along with the ways of life associated with them. The only people there are searching for traces of that salt. **Beatrix Sitter-Liver** evokes memories of the hard day's labor once put in by the men and women who mined the salt pans in her work *Flerdner Heutücher – Der Tod der Ahnen* (1981–1989). The worn cotton cloths were used for carrying the hay which needed to be brought down from the hills, no easy task. The empty cloths tell of the absence of people and of the constant changes in the agricultural world. A contrast to **Cuno Amiet's** little watercolor *Landschaft* (undated) portraying an idyllic undulating landscape at dawn is the scientific approach adopted by **Archäologische Dienst Graubünden** (The Canton of Grisons Archaeological Service). These document the structure of the Grisons countryside in Maladers and provide insights into its history.



Beatrix Sitter-Liver
Flerdner Heutücher - der
Tod der Ahnen, 1981-89
Bündner Kunstmuseum
Chur, Schenkung der Künstlerin (2017)

Living Soil

An agricultural economy has been the basis of life since time immemorial. The fact that we have survived is due to the cereals, fruits, and vegetables that the earth provides. However, it is not enough just to see this earth, made up of water, humus, insects and fungi, as merely fertile, tractable soil. In fact, it is a self-sustaining system and we can even ask ourselves whether it possesses an awareness, an intelligence and a memory of its own.



Olaf Holzapfel
Schattenbild – Rotes Kreuz,
2011
Courtesy the artist and Ga-
lerie Marzona, Berlin

Hexanol (I) (2019), a work by Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė is of prime importance to the exhibition. The romanticized motif theme of the haystack, to be found in so many historical paintings, has been alienated here by sticking a steel rod right through the middle of the hay like a larger-than-life needle. This is echoed by the ordered structure of the work *Lichtbild 2/1 Stoff* (2013) by Olaf Holzapfel. Here, too, harvested produce represents the artist's starting point. As pieces with their own smell, two pictures by Holzapfel focusing on hay and straw, *Schattenbild – Rotes Kreuz* (2011) and *Pyramide* (2017), have a strong presence in the room, as well as questioning agriculture as an aesthetic structure. *Sonniger Hang mit Ziegen und Schafen* (1900) by Giovanni Giacometti shows a steep mountain slope, but without indicating a horizon of any kind. The straight brushstrokes are interrupted by the shadow of the moving trees, with the artist focusing on the structure of the willows and the warm light. It seems almost to be the case that Holzapfel's work has its roots in the above painting by Giacometti.

Carlos Fernández' video *Agrofit* (2014) shows men and women with axes and shovels in a field in the forested hills of Costa Rica. What they are doing amounts to the kinds of workout normally associated with gyms. Fernández, who works as a trainer in organic cropping systems, sees *Agrofit* as a way of countering profit-oriented agricultural policies by humorously combining topics such as harvesting, food production, eating habits, and well-being. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's woodcut *Schnitter zu Berg gehend – Aufsteigende Mäher* (1918) predates this work by almost 100 years. Kirchner's characteristically expressive portrayal contributes to making the mowers' climb appear arduous and lends the setting a strangely vivid quality.



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Schnitter zu Berg gehend –
Aufsteigende Mäher, 1918
Bündner Kunstmuseum
Chur, Dauerleihgabe Samm-
lung Werner Coninx (2018)

Imagination and Reality

It is characteristic of our society to intervene in the natural world and to use economic arguments to justify our actions. Does this mean that we see the reality of agriculture through rose-tinted spectacles? Innumerable media formats, labels, adverts and events support this view. In agriculture, imagination, and reality appear to contradict each other on a regular basis.



Ilkka Halso
House with Garden - Unique
Opportunity, 2011
Courtesy the artist

Photographs such as *House with Garden – Unique Opportunity* (2011) by Ilkka Halso are reminiscent of media spectacles or theme parks for family outings, the kind where nature is parceled up into modules and placed in a gigantic warehouse complex. Nature's most popular species – earth, plants, animals – have been assembled to create a functioning ecosystem. Is it the case here that nature is being preserved for better times? The Svalbard Global Seed Vault represents a real-life version of this. Norway's seed repository is a kind of subterranean bunker. It is a warehouse for all kinds of seeds – for such things as rice, corn, wheat, potatoes, apples, tapioca, coco yams and coconuts and its function is to preserve the diversity of the species and varieties of crop plants. Giovanni Giacometti's painting *Umstechender Bauer* (c. 1929) impressively illustrates a general concern about the soil as a primal mythological motif. The picture suggests that we long for a world where care by humans comes into its own.



Giovanni Giacometti
Umstechender Bauer,
um 1929
Bündner Kunstmuseum
Chur, Schenkung Simon
Sprecher, Chur (2020)

Our earth is a living fabric and is far more than merely fertile soil. The earth filters water, purifies air, and provides tens of thousands of organisms with a habitat. When we deplete the soil by extracting its nutrients, it can no longer look after itself. It starves and humankind starves with it. In his installation *On Land* (2021), Markus Maeder investigates activity in the earth. It would appear an obvious conclusion that the activity of living beings and bacteria in organically cultivated earth is particularly great and the artist explores this notion. He makes a sound recording of the soil dynamics and thus renders that dynamic audible, contrasting two different types of soil with each other – an expanse of organically cultivated soil and a monoculture operated on an industrial scale. Contrary to expectations, the activity is equally high in both types of soil. However, the work has no intention of attempting to account for these surprising findings, even if Maeder tells us that the organically cultivated field is turned over more often than the monoculture.

Even the pitchfork is included in the exhibition, as one of agriculture's most important tools. However, Sofia Hultén breaks with the symbol of the pitchfork representing “dirty work” by cleaning and polishing its prongs. By using the title *Grin* (2021), the artist is suggesting a personification of the item in question. After all, in its gleaming new state it appears to be grinning, as suggested by the title.

Old Suffering

Only the person who owns the land can decide how it is to be cultivated, with the question of ownership having been partly associated with ecological aspects, from the colonial era right up to the present day. Sustainable agriculture is inextricably linked with land rights. What fates await those farmers who do not own the land that they cultivate?



Denise Bertschi
PLANTA(TIONS), 2021
Courtesy the artist

The starting point for the work *PLANTA(tions)* (2021) by Denise Bertschi is Villa Planta, built between 1874 and 1876 with the fortune amassed by Jacques Ambrosius von Planta during the 19th century from the proceeds of his cotton plantations in Alexandria, Egypt. Since 1919 the Villa has housed Grisons' Museum of Fine Arts. Bertschi looks at the question of what the villa's architecture has to tell us about its agricultural history. In her video installation she takes an associative approach, segmenting the hidden economic structures that resulted in the villa being built. Just to what extent the capital behind Villa Planta is the product of a system of oppression is something that Bertschi only hints at. In her combination of a dual-channel projection with various artifacts, the artist succeeds in minimizing the symbolic distance between Egypt and Switzerland. The video expands the narrative to include questions about the knowledge industry when the Plantahof estate in Landquart is included as a center of learning for trainee farmers.

In the video projection *Motlhaba We Re Ke Namile* (2016) South African artist Lerato Shadi processes the historical suffering slavery caused in South Africa. A human being stuffs chunks of soil into his mouth. He chews on them resolutely and eventually swallows them. His body fights the situation by choking in an automatic gagging reaction. Shadi is referencing the slaves' gesture of resistance by swallowing earth as a means of committing suicide. The video offers some idea of the incredible torture suffered by plantation workers of both sexes if we consider the fact that they used eating earth as their chosen method of suicide.

Although the apple is considered a forbidden fruit, priest Korbinian Aigner devoted his entire life to painting the fruit. He drew and painted almost one thousand varieties of apples and pears in a demonstration of unparalleled devotion. In this way he assembled one of the most comprehensive inventories of the kind in existence. The variety KZ-3 (600) (1941 – 1966) was accorded special significance by him. Aigner not only painted it, he also secretly cultivated it while he was interned at the Dachau concentration camp.



Korbinian Aigner
KZ-3 (600), 1941-66
Technische Universität München | TUM Archiv

The village Castasegna in Val Bregaglia is surrounded by Europe's largest chestnut groves. The mild climate in this low-lying area is highly suitable for growing these "selvas". There was a time when the humble, nourishing, sweet chestnut was one of the region's sta-

ple foods, that is, until it was supplanted by potatoes and corn in the 18th century. The photograph *Kastanienwald bei Castasegna* (c. 1910) by **Andrea Garbald** documents one of these bright groves cultivated by the people of the region right up to the present day.



Johann Jakob Hauswirth
Ohne Titel (204), 1868
Collection Musée du
Pays-d'Enhaut, Centre suisse
du papier découpé

The cultural importance of farmers is also reflected in the local arts and crafts market, in its rustic art, in its houses' architectural decorations and, to quote one example, in the papercuts of **Johann Jakob Hauswirth**. Not much is known about the latter artist who was born in the 19th century near Rougemont, in the Canton of Vaud. It is said that the woodcutter and charcoal burner lived in great poverty and produced his papercuts in the evenings as a thank-you when he was given a hot meal. **Louis Saugy**, who worked as a postman in Rougemont a little later and came across Hauswirth's papercuts in a great many houses was inspired by him and eventually picked up paper and a pair of scissors like Hauswirth did.

Agriculture likes to keep its animals as far away as possible from fields and other sources of food and from breeding grounds. Building these creatures their own runways is, on the other hand, unusual. In the installation *bijö-biwitt* (2021) **Val Minnig** turns the existing hierarchies between humans and the animal world upside down, constructing environments intended not for us but for birds and the smaller animals such as mice. Its title is onomatopoeic and imitates the red kite's warning cry when it detects intruders in what it considers to be its territory. Alongside an installation there are little runways and hiding places distributed around the exhibition premises. Minnig is thus relating the earth to the skies. And something that initially appears to be a humorous, affectionate gesture turns out to be a reflection on possession, control and the allocation of farmland. Human beings are used to taking possession of spaces. Minnig symbolically returns it to the animals.



Emil Brunner
Bergkinder. Rueras, Bündner
Oberland, 1943/44
Sammlung Paul Hugger

A Cherished Myth, a Cultivated Economy

Since time immemorial, the farming culture has been distinguished by a great adaptability. However, it is now largely the case that nature has been replaced by economic considerations and where once the ground was tilled there are now golf courses. Is it not only the case that fissured earth is disappearing but also that our traditional agriculture is being eroded?

The portrayals of rural life are too numerous to count, particularly the photographic ones which show Swiss farmers as stalwart and brave. In his photograph *Mäherin* (1935) **Paul Senn** uses the powerful stroke when mowing. As a symbol of self-determination and tenaciousness. With his series *Bergkinder* (1943-4) **Emil Brunner** came up with contemporary testimonies without the feel of propaganda. These photographs tell of poverty, austerity and hard work.

Although the children are not very old at all, at times they look worn and exhausted. These are pictures that subtly adjust the myth of the strong nation of farmers, without attempting to destroy it.

Anna Tiessen's series of photos *Kommando Korn* (2016-17) take us back to present-day North Germany. Her work shows youths who have grown up on the land – the farmers and mechanics to be. Tiessen photographs them working on machines and cars and drinking a beer with their friends in the evenings after work. Although her chosen perspective takes her up close to the proceedings and opens up insights into the young people's everyday life, the community as a whole and the young people's attitude remain, in part, a mystery to us. This is because they do not have a voice. Are they content with their lives? What kind of a future awaits them?



Anna Tiessen
Kommando Korn 11, 2017
Courtesy the artist

In **Oliver Gemperle's** slide projections *Calanca* (2010) we see signs of a migration away from the countryside in the form of abandoned farms and dilapidated barns which nature is reclaiming. The slopes to be cultivated are just too inhospitable, the profit margins too small for it to be worthwhile cultivating them. This is contrasted with the situation in Tirol, Austria. With her series of photographs *Hinter den Bergen* (2010) **Lois Hechenblaikner** displays not only a juxtaposition of generations but also economic and cultural shifts. All her pairs of pictures show both a black-and-white picture from the estate of certificated agriculturalist Armin Kniely and a color photograph by the artist.



Oliver Gemperle
Calanca, Ri Dedent, 2010
Courtesy the artist

In his work *Peter – gemeinsam voraus!* (2021) **Roland Roos** offers a reinterpretation of the world-famous classic *Heidi* (1880-81) by Johanna Spyri. Roos' work takes the form of an artist's book with a video, written as a piece of autofiction. The starting point was the art happening *Together Ahead* (2018), in which Roland Roos switched the nameplate of the second-highest mountain in Switzerland in order to attract attention to the impending relaxation of Switzerland's rules on arms exports. The book describes all the activities connected with this happening as a further installment in the Heidi story. In the video we see an episode in which Peter (as a fill-in for Roos) meets an American tourist who, later in the story, provides the basis for the happening. However, in the book, which is presented in a display case and is handed out to interested visitors by the supervisory staff, this particular section is missing. Amalgamating the happening *Together Ahead* with the historical figures in the novel can also be seen as an invitation to adopt a more nuanced view of Switzerland, a country which benefits, even today, from an idealized image.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated publication issued by Kehrer Verlag, which includes literary texts by Zora del Buono, Dorothee Elmiger, Joachim B. Schmidt and Leo Tuor, an introduction by Stephan Kunz and an essay by Damian Jurt.

PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS

On Sundays at 11 a.m. on Sept. 19 / Nov. 28 / Dec. 05
On Thursdays at 6 p.m. on Sept. 30 / Oct. 21 / Nov. 04

EVENTS

6 p.m. on Thursday, October 07
Damian Jurt interviews artist Denise Bertschi [in German]

6 p.m. on Thursday, October 21
Guided tour with Georg Blunier, Claudia Hanimann, the organic farmers at Hof Dusch and Damian Jurt [in German]

6 p.m. on Thursday, November 11
Damian Jurt interviews the artists Mirko Baselgia and Marcus Maeder [in German]

SYMPOSIUM

10 a.m.-6 p.m. on Saturday, October 30
“Der Grund, auf dem wir leben, fliesst!”
More information about the symposium is available on our website:
<https://kunstmuseum.gr.ch>

Registration required: +41 81 257 28 69

We would like to thank for the generous support:



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