

Leslie

Bahar

Opening: October 20, 2017

Exhibition: October 21 – November 10, 2017

Dies ist meine Mütze,
dies ist mein Mantel,
hier mein Rasierzeug
im Beutel aus Leinen.

Konservenbüchse:
Mein Teller, mein Becher,
ich hab in das Weißblech
den Namen geritzt.

...

-- Günter Eich, "Inventur" (1945)

*This is my cap,
this is my coat,
here is my shaving kit
in its linen pouch.*

*A tin can:
my dish, my tumbler,
in the tinplate
I've scratched my name.*

...

-- Günter Eich, "Inventory" (1945, translation S.M.)

Mufed Tapany, 21-year-old Yezidi refugee from Iraq, escaped ISIS massacres and destruction and arrived in Berlin in 2015 after months of travelling through the Middle East and Europe . Carrying with him little more than the 21st century version of the items listed in Günter Eich's famous "Inventory", he was accommodated in a gym which sheltered hundreds of other refugees from a broad variety of backgrounds. Some of the wood displayed in this exhibition was part of Mufed's bunk bed in that gym. He inscribed it, using a ballpoint pen – as if to create his own space, in a place where privacy is limited to one's dreams, thoughts and unfulfilled wishes.

In spite of the overcrowded rooms and the difficulties which arose from the involuntary situation of living together with masses of people – all strangers among strangers like Mufed – his memories of the two shelters he stayed in before moving to a shared apartment are predominantly positive. "When we left the gym, we felt that we missed each other: sitting together, smoking shisha or cigarettes, chatting and telling stories", Mufed explains. And he reminisces about sitting in a circle with other refugees and Berliners in music sessions entitled "EveryoneSong", which were offered by Maha Alusi, a Berlin-based artist from Iraq.

Seeking a medium to express this positive experience, Mufed, together with Tim Greaves, a Berlin-based artist from the UK, and the gallerist Leslie Frey, developed the idea to create an artwork that referenced interiors and would provide a space for encounters between people. The art installation that has come out of this cooperation reflects the sense of belonging which is not so much connected to places or objects, as it is to shared time, activities and memories.

The semi-permanent structures dividing the exhibition space encourage closer interactions with others, while also allowing room for individual reflection. The white tent evokes memories of shelters and refugee registration offices, where such tents are erected to protect queues of immigrants from unpleasant weather, and also of middle class barbecue parties. The fish tanks contain products of shared experiences: objects created in art workshops, in which Tim and Mufed worked together with other artists, items from a previous installation by Maha Alusi, and ferns. The latter were the object of a craze, known as Pteridomania or Fern-Fever, in 19th century Victorian England. Collected in the wild and often kept in glass-fronted cases, this common interest sometimes brought people of very different social backgrounds together.

Indeed, of equal importance as the objects included in the installation are the workshops that took place prior to the exhibition and the events accompanying the exhibition. Along with dealing with the topics of migration and belonging, poetry readings, workshops, discussions and a speed-dating with different-minded people in the exhibition space aim not only to entertain or educate visitors, but instead to enable encounters between strangers and produce shared experiences. The events are therefore an integral part of the installation.

Far from romanticizing living conditions in refugee shelters, the “Bahar” exhibition (bahar = Kurdish/Persian/Turkish for spring) tells the story of a new beginning. It celebrates friendship and the beauty that lies not in the things themselves, but in the glimpses of happiness they may remind us of.

Text: Stefan Maneval

Collaborative project:
Tim Greaves
Mufed Tapany

With participation by:
Osamah Abouzor, Raghad Alrez, Maha Alusi, Leslie Frey, Christopher Rollen, Flora Whiteley

Accompanying program:
Sawsan Alzouhaily, Gregory Carlock, Eva Dingel, Abir Gattas, Sarah Hartmann, Stefan Maneval, Mohammed Nazari, Zarah Nazari, Gal Rachmann, Nicole Yazolino