

Maria Loboda

Dead Guardian

March 22 – June 1, 2014

„Austerity is a very conscious aesthetic decision of mine. I usually build the pieces with lavish backstories but I give the works a simple form to divert from the rather baroque references and bring the viewer to a different state of perception and feeling of trust. I don't want viewers to fight the form – they should surrender to the seemingly harmonious structure, which may ultimately irritate and distress them once they find out the story behind it.” – Maria Loboda

Maria Loboda (born 1979 in Cracow) has a penchant for encrypted messages and meanings. The beautiful and the harmless in her sculptures, installations and collages conceal the partly uncanny, partly threatening essence of things. In the process Loboda develops a very special form of contemporary archaeology in which she creates completely new interpretations and associations by rearranging signs and restaging old symbols. Her pieces consequently reference enigmatic legends and protagonists as well as historic circumstances, whereby they likewise join together to form a new, constantly changing narrative. In her contribution to dOCUMENTA 13, *This Work is Dedicated to an Emperor* (2012), for example, Loboda exposed nature's romantic beauty to be an incalculable camouflage: 20 potted cypresses on the Karlsau simulated military formations from old written documents, rearranging themselves daily as if by magic.

Loboda not only takes up the relationship to nature in her art but also the spiritual comprehension of space and interior from the early 20th century. In complete accordance with Sigmund Freud's statement that “The ego is not master in its own house” the unconscious and long forgotten take possession of the spaces in Maria Loboda's exhibition *Dead Guardian* at Kunstverein Braunschweig. The early classicistic residence built in 1808 becomes an enraptured place where objects and fragments seem to lead a hidden life of their own. But lacking human presence, nature has also already recaptured its territory. The otherwise so sublime and proud villa is subtly brought out of balance; the shelter almost unnoticeably comes apart at the seams and a wondrously tension-filled silence dominates — the proverbial “calm before the storm”. Maria Loboda's art turns to the viewer in this silence with the languages and forms of mysticism and alchemy, of classical antiquity and ancient Egypt.

At the core of the exhibition is the dichotomy of culture and nature, order and chaos, reason and instinct, high culture and the archaic. There are signs and omens in both worlds that condense and connect with each other before untamed nature takes over complete control in the end. The patron saints as they are repeatedly to be found before and in the Villa Salve Hospes in the form ancient symbols seem to have lost their effectiveness long ago and mirror at the moment the human primal fear of the collapse of his arduously created cultural bastion.

The prophesy equating the consummation of culture with its end formulated by Oswald Spengler in his book “The Decline of the West” (1918) finds an impressive image in her works and their assembly. The signs indicating an approaching downfall are increasing and an old archaic culture is on the rise again.

“The invention of the city was a way of breaking with the nature: an ideal space, ordered by the gods. Nature was peopled with monsters and wild beasts and had to be tamed. The city was the antithesis of nature: A place of conviviality.” – Pedro Azara, Caixa Forum Madrid

Maria Loboda studied at the Städelschule in Frankfurt under Mark Leckey. Aside from dOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel she also took part in numerous other group shows, among them at the *Museum of Modern Art*, Dublin (2013) and *Hamburger Bahnhof*, Berlin (2011). Solo exhibitions devoted to her work have been seen at the *Kunstverein Bielefeld* (2010), *Ludlow 38*, New York (2012) and the *Museo Reina Sofia*, Madrid (2013). Mousse Publishing will issue an artist's book accompanying her exhibition at the Kunstverein Braunschweig in the summer of 2014.

Exhibition and Catalogue are funded by the Alfred Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung.

The exhibition is supported by:

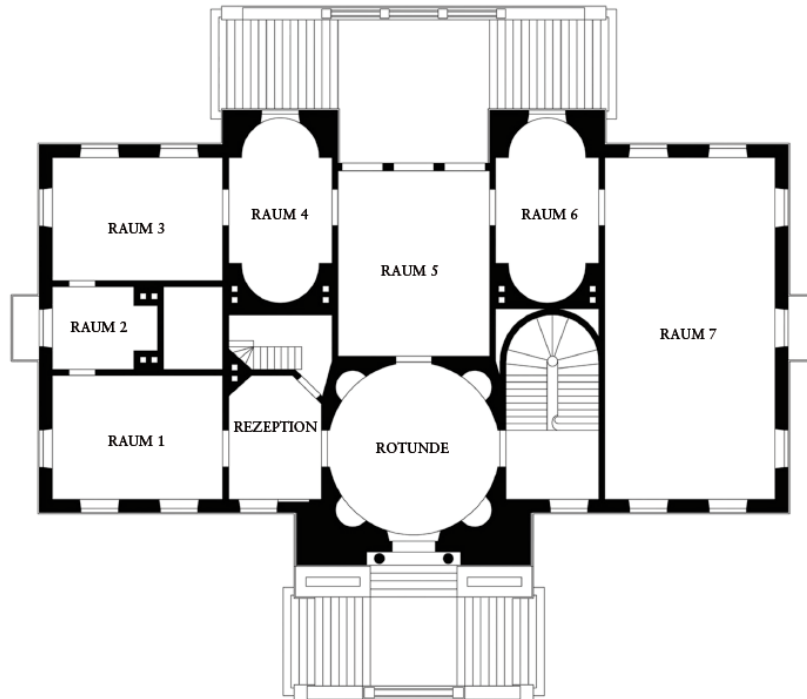


Alfred Krupp von Bohlen
und Halbach-Stiftung



Niedersächsisches Ministerium
für Wissenschaft und Kultur





ROOM 1

Who cares who wins (Pompadour Blue)

2014, wall paint

Curious and cold epicurean young ladies

2011, platinum-coated silver flacon, hydrogen, metal chain

The houses are all gone under the sea

2013, patinated bronze crab claws

A shiny silver object hangs in the midst of a room that has been painted Pompadour Blue. Upon closer examination, it is revealed to be an elegant accessory with a dangerous potential: The tightly closed platinum-coated flacon contains hydrogen which, if the flacon was opened, would react chemically with the surrounding oxygen, using the platinum as a catalyser. The troublemaking catalyser would consequently cause two basically harmless elements to undergo an explosive reaction. Pompadour Blue, on the other hand, was the favourite colour of the French paramour of the same name. And it was also this colour of all things that a British Special Forces unit chose as its corps colour. The title *Who cares who wins* references the motto of the aforementioned Special Air Services, which is in fact “Who dares wins”. Using the original slogan as their starting point, the soldiers attached to this elite unit, whose hymn was Lale Andersen’s *Lili Marleen*, developed the ironic equivalent “Who cares who wins”. *The Houses Are All Gone under the Sea* concerns bronze replicas of crab claws, which in Roman times were mounted as wedges underneath Egyptian obelisks after it was discovered that the disassembled columns that had been taken to Rome as trophies also lost their equilibrium on the original plinth.

PRIVATE COLLECTION, MADRID (THE HOUSES ARE ALL GONE UNDER THE SEA)

ROOM 2

The unbroken seal

2014, double door, hemp rope, granite modelling compound

Inspired by the seal to a famed closed passageway (to the burial chamber of Pharaoh Tutankhamun), which concealed one of history last great secrets, this door likewise refuses to let the viewer pass through it. We do not know what is hidden behind it and the title indicates that it is not intended to be broken.

ROOM 3

Guardian

2014, polished agate

Sub Rosa

2013, Desert rose crystals

In ancient Rome, participants in meetings were admonished to keep what they heard secret by means of roses hanging from the ceiling. Everything that was spoken under the rose had to be kept confidential. The idiom “sub rosa [dictum]” (“spoken under the rose”) subsequently developed from the Roman symbol for secrecy. The rose (in its modified form as a rosette) can also be found on the round arch over the terrace on the garden side of the Villa Salve Hospes. But in the exhibition space there are so-called desert roses – bizarre crystal formations as can be found in North Africa or in the Sahara. The *Sub Rosa* and the agate eyes of the *Guardian* admonish those present to remain silent and demand the promise that occurrences taking place inside the house do not escape to the outside.

PRIVAT COLLECTION COPENHAGEN

ROOM 4

Interbellum

2013, lacquered wood

The two cabinets presented in the conchs reference Art Déco design. They represent two opposites: the monolithic and the multi-part, in fact exploded – two planes of existence of ultimately the same object. They can stand exemplarily and visually for two stations of cultural development: the libidinous (open) archaism and the more cerebral (closed) modernism. The title *Interbellum* refers to a time that mirrors the transition between the two described states: the two decades between World War I and World War II. It is described by historians as a time of political and economic instability, which certainly had an effect on making this interwar period fruitful as far as culture is concerned. A frenetic generation traumatised by the first war of mass destruction in the history of humankind was eager to experiment with new things.

Verbal sculpture I

2012, vinyl text

The texts describe objects of art in the extremely precise language that can also be found in Sotheby’s auction catalogues. The absent objects manifest themselves solely in the mind’s eye of the viewer and the lucid words evoke an image without also providing explanations or interpretations.

ROOM 5

The interrupted pillar

2014, polyurethane, acrylic lacquer

Verbal sculpture II, III

2012, plotter text

RAUM 6

Interbellum

2013, lacquered wood, grain, photography, object made of modelling compound

Verbal sculpture IV

2012, plotter text

ROOM 7

The ... (something of cloth) of the Pharaoh when he was a boy

2014, wool fabric

The rapid approach or more likely departure

2014, wickerwork baskets with small amounts of lentils, juniper, coriander, emmer wheat

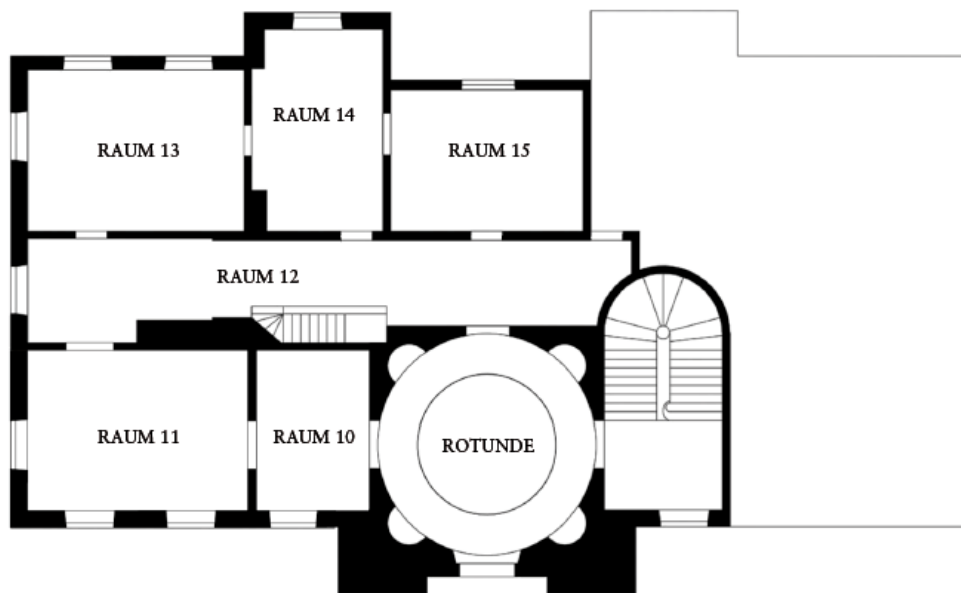
Her Artillery

2013, polyurethane, concrete mixture, leather gloves

A stone lioness that faces away from the viewer watches– half asleep, half covering – over its unusual prey. Two conflicting emotions seem to beat in the animal’s chest at the same time: the long-suffering humiliation of domestication but also the pent-up tension of growing resistance. Is this an omen that all the stone creatures that are intended by human beings to protect their homes will come alive?

The torn baskets and the hanging garment bag derive from the written accounts made by the archaeologist Howard Carter. His notes on the objects he found in the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922 indicate that they were unexplainable and unidentifiable for him. Only later was it understood that they concern funerary objects given to the pharaoh to assist in his imminent journey to the hereafter. Death was not seen as an end but rather as a beginning.

PRIVATE COLLECTION, MADRID (HER ARTILLERY)



ROTUNDA

The interrupted serpent

2014, cast bronze

ROOM 10

Hydrochloric acid on marble

2014, marble, hydrochloric acid

The viewer’s attention is riveted by this curious marble sculpture that appears like a hybrid between a classical sculpture and a pre-dynastic Egyptian depiction of an elephant. The museum-like staging is likewise misleading. Behind the protective glass, the marble, a type of limestone, reacts almost unnoticeably with the hydrochloric acid that has been applied to it and begins to slowly corrode.

ROOM 11

The egyptian blue coat (Victory)

The egyptian blue coat (Abhayamudra)

The egyptian blue coat (Veto)

2014, inkjet prints on Hahnemühle photo rag, 62 x 115 cm each

The gestures on the photographs revolve around the visitor like silent portraits of familiar rituals, lending a ghostly atmosphere to the otherwise empty space. The faceless, anonymous owner of the same black gloves that suspiciously look out from under the lioness's paw speaks again to us through sign-like hand movements.

ROOM 12

A phenomenon which I have often noticed

2013, falconer's glove, leather

The wish and the ability to tame nature and make it useful ensured humankind's existence from the beginning of time. A falconer's glove protrudes from the wall in the empty corridor, waiting silently but demanding for the landing of a bird of prey. The brief gesture tells of the tragic departure and absence of the coveted and of the desolate balance of power between humanity and nature.

PRIVATE COLLECTION, MADRID

ROOM 13-15

Ah, Wilderness

2010-2014, pine, spruce, Douglas fir, cedar, birch, beech, oak and alder

On the abandoned upper floor, nature demandingly reclaims its space once and for all. The grand home appears broken up and defeated. But there is also an inherent decline in this supposed triumph because the proliferating species of trees are all monocultures, meaning they remove each other's nourishment from the soil and could not exist in such close proximity to each other in a natural environment. This *wilderness* consequently personifies the destructive Darwinian principle of life, referencing in the process the role played by humankind as a cultivating, taming authority.