

NADA HOUSE

Gwenn Thomas & Kerstin von Gabain

June 4 - August 7, 2022

House 403 on Governors Island, NY is approximately 6798.57 km or 4224.43 miles removed from EXILE, situated on Elisabethstr 24 in Vienna. The island, originally known as *Paggank* (Nut island) to the local Lenape Native American tribe, was deceitfully acquired in 1637 by Dutch colonialist Wouter Van Twiller for reportedly “two ax heads, a string of beads, and a handful of nails”. Following WWII, EXILE’s current gallery space in Vienna functioned as a travel agency for the US Allied Forces. Later, most likely sometime in the mid 1970s, the space was fully clad in wooden paneling. Being renamed Governors island by the British, the island’s defensive importance decreased over time, its original purpose and relevance fading to history.

Until the mid 2010s, EXILE was the office of an unnamed chain-smoking Russian businessman. In 1870 six houses were built on the island to accommodate officers and their families on what is now known as Colonel’s Row. Left unchanged, the abandoned smoking lounge became EXILE’s new gallery space, eventually transformed into a white cube during the pandemic. In June 2022, as part of NADA House, EXILE and House 403, Colonels Row, Governor’s island, NY meet inside an upstairs bedroom and adjacent bathroom. Layers of histories intertwine and collide for a nanosecond of transitional time.

EXILE invited New York-based artist Gwenn Thomas and Vienna-based artist Kerstin von Gabain to respond to this temporal collision and create an immersive stage for their artworks. The selected works were not meant to be installed *into* but *onto* the existing space itself. Some of the artworks’ material sources are in a state of flux themselves. Left exposed to the elements, von Gabain’s soap pieces, shaped after human bone structures and arranged within the bathroom space, will begin to sweat and disintegrate over time. Thomas’s translucent glass shapes, their repetitive form taken from an abandoned found object and displayed in the bedroom’s cupboard, slowly pass the changing light of day. Both works respond to the spaces’ fluctuant nature and honor the opportunity to become short-lived, but active negotiators between historical space and present visitor.

Thomas, who for many years has been researching window shapes as membrane-like metaphors for transformation and time, places a single resin and copper object central onto the bedroom’s floor. The object consists of two intersected shapes that seemingly depend on one another. The outer copper shape forms an enclosure for the negatively placed inner resin-made, opaque shape. Oppositional in materiality, both shapes together enclose a spatial volume that gives the artwork its final dimension and particular identity. Both materials together, one opaque, the other solid but changing its hue from bronze to green, again reference time with nothing else than an enclosed vacuum at its centre. By scale and form, the untitled object appears like the marquette of a previously positioned piece of furniture and becomes an

imaginary vessel for the domestic and intimate character of the space it is situated in.

The two black and white photographs included by von Gabain show limbs of human bodies that appear like anatomical wax models known from historical archives. Either crudely cut-off from the human body or cropped by the photographic frame and dipped into liquid, they directly refer to how the medium of photography was historically used to dissect, categorize, compare and analyse the human body into distinct identities. Initially the photographs remind of the previous identities that have occupied these specific two room as much as the island itself. Further though, they are reminders of a violent history that is, even if passed for a long time, forever embedded onto this island. Set in context with the bone-shaped soap works an inability to wash off historical pasts or personal self lingers within the work. Constantly transformational, von Gabain refers to a pressing urgency to revisit and re-evaluate all histories.

Collectively, the installed works by Thomas and von Gabain humbly express gratitude for their time of existence within the historical fabric of these two rooms. The selected materialities loosely reflects onto the absurdity and consequences of an uneven exchange of material value in 1637. History appear in layers. The dust shall never fully settle, the light never fully fade. The artists acknowledge and honor the particular history of these two rooms - their artworks imagine and reflect upon past and future spatial and personal relations. The displayed artworks are glitches of spatial time mirroring an uneven past onto an increasingly unpredictable future.

LIST OF WORKS

Room (left to right)

Gwenn Thomas, *Metallica II*, 2019. Copper, reclaimed chroma resin, 16 x 21.5 x 7 inches

Gwenn Thomas: *Ingots I - XVII*, 2021-22. Cast neodymium and praseodymium glass, 4.5 x 6 x 2, or 5.75 x 5.5 x 7 inches each

Kerstin von Gabain: *Out on a limb*. 2014. Silver-gelatin print, 18 x 18 inches

Bathroom (left to right)

Kerstin von Gabain: *Plaster feet*, 2014. Silver-gelatin print, 18 x 18 inches

Kerstin von Gabain: *Bone (lower arm)*, 2022. Cast soap, 8 x 4 x 3 inches

Kerstin von Gabain: *Bone (arch)*, 2022. Cast soap, 6 x 4,4 x 2,75 inches

Kerstin von Gabain: *Bottle*, 2022. Cast soap. 0,5 x 0,5 x 3 inches