

Knowledge Is a Garden

28.9.2024–19.1.2025

Uriel Orlow in dialogue with the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection

Curated by
Uriel Orlow with
Nadia Schneider Willen

Curatorial Assistant:
Louisa Behr

With works by Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Sammy Baloji, Lothar Baumgarten, Teresa Burga, Maria Eichhorn, Dani Gal, General Idea, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Eva Kotátková, Susan Hiller, Zahra Malkani, Teresa Margolles, Senga Nengudi, Uriel Orlow, Elodie Pong, Ed Ruscha, Munem Wasif

What possibilities emerge when we see knowledge, which is presumed fixed, as something organic and growing? The title of the exhibition, 'Knowledge Is a Garden', derives from a West-African proverb: 'Knowledge is like a garden: if it's not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.'

Taking this saying as his starting point, Uriel Orlow unpacks the question of what a garden of knowledge could be and what its cultivation and growth might mean. His work 'Theatrum Botanicum Trilogy' (2016–2018) has been part of the collection of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst since 2020 and is one of the key works of this exhibition, exploring questions of ownership and appropriation in relation to indigenous knowledge. Expanding this engagement, the artist sets up a dialogue between his own works and those of the museum collection, which for their part raise questions around the production or suppression of knowledge. This selection is expanded by invited loans from Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Sammy Baloji, Zahra Malkani and Munem Wasif – artists from parts of the Global South, whose inclusion extends the previous geographical focus of the collection on Europe, USA and Latin America, and who engage with suppressed history and traditional knowledge in their artistic practice.

'Knowledge Is a Garden' is an artistic engagement with the repression of knowledge, the unjust appropriation of knowledge, and ultimately with multiple forms of knowledge production. Knowledge does not consist of neutral facts and information – and is never all-encompassing. Rather, it is always situated, historical, and, above all, contested and vulnerable. The question of who gets to speak and whose voice is silenced is as urgent as ever – and marked by global inequality. Three loose thematic threads run through the exhibition: the entanglement of knowledge and language, and the loss of both; the extraction of knowledge and exploitation of raw materials in the Global South by countries of the Global North; and the wilful suppression of knowledge as well as consciously looking away. Both Uriel Orlow's own works and the other works in the exhibition are connected to one or more of these broader themes.

Orlow's 'Learning from Artemisia' (2019) is rooted in these questions and relates the story of the Artemisia afra plant, which is successfully used in indigenous medicine for the prevention and treatment of malaria. Nonetheless, the remedy is not recommended – to the benefit of the global pharmaceutical industry. This is only one of many examples that remind us how the botanical world has been entangled with political power relations for hundreds of years as well as controlled by economic interests.

Sammy Baloji's installation 'Untitled' (2018) shows plants potted in shell casings from the First World War. These plants come from rainforest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and have enjoyed great popularity since their domestication as houseplants in Europe. Through his work Baloji reminds us that the colonial history of Europe is interwoven with the present in many ways.

Susan Hiller's video work 'Lost and Found' (2016) reveals cultural inequalities resulting from (neo-)colonial power relations: the dying out of threatened languages. Hiller focuses on the notion of a common language as the basis for the creation of realities that also vanish when the language disappears.

Teresa Margolles' work engages with deliberate acts of looking away. Based on clues about missing women, she shows how politically motivated neglect in uncovering violent crimes reveals wider social power relations.

Dani Gal's 'Historical Records, Part I' (2005–2018), raises the question of who decides what a society should remember: the archive comprises 246 records that document historical events of the 20th century. Disseminating and preserving in this manner not only served propaganda purposes, but also underpinned national historiography.

General Idea's 'White AIDS (Wallpaper)' (1991) points to politically influenced narratives; specifically, the fight for knowledge around HIV and the accompanying concealment of the disease in the late 20th century.

These and other works in the exhibition engage with knowledge in various historical and geographical contexts and with different artistic strategies, in order to question and expand conventional forms of knowing. 'Knowledge Is a Garden' opens up a discussion around the following questions: what shapes our knowledge of the world? What knowledge is permitted as part of human power relations, what is suppressed or concealed? What knowledge is illegally appropriated? How is knowledge lost? The Migros Museum collection itself, and the selection of the works in the exhibition, also represent a partial take on knowledge which is inevitably incomplete. By extension, the exhibition encourages visitors to consider their own knowledge as a garden that must be cultivated.

Info / Agenda:



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GUIDED TOURS

The public tours of the current exhibition in the museum take place on a regular basis in German or English on Saturdays from 3 pm and Thursdays from 6.30 pm. The tours last approximately one hour and offer an in-depth insight into the themes and backgrounds of the exhibitions. The individual dates are published online on the agenda.

On Thursday, November 21, the public tour in German will be accompanied by sign language translation.

The audio-descriptive tour in German on Thursday, October 17 from 5.30 pm offers people with visual impairments the opportunity to get to know various works of art in the exhibition.

The curatorial tour on Thursday, November 28 from 6.30 pm with the co-curators Uriel Orlow and Nadia Schneider Willen offers visitors the opportunity to learn more about the concept and creation of the exhibition as well as the background to the artworks and to ask questions to the exhibition makers. The tour will be held in German.

ARTIST CONVERSATION WITH URIEL ORLOW, FRANCESCA BRUSA AND LOUISA BEHR (EN)

Thursday, Oktober 3, 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm, Caring Space

On the occasion of the exhibition, the museum is organising an artist talk between the artist Uriel Orlow, Francesca Brusa (researcher and curator ZHdK) and Louisa Behr (curatorial assistant). The thematic starting point is the artist's interest in topics relating to the repression of knowledge, the unlawful appropriation of knowledge and, ultimately, new forms of knowledge production and knowledge plurality. The discussion will take place in cooperation with the ZHdK's talk series 'Art Talks'. Subsequent dates will be published on the agenda.

HERBAL WALK WITH MAJA DAL CERO (GER)

Thursday, Oktober 24, from 6.30 pm

The tour with ethnobotanist Maja Dal Cero opens up a new perspective on plant worlds in the shared habitat and offers the opportunity to tell the stories of the great quick-change artists of the plant world together. The tour will take place in German.

SUPPRESSED (QUEER) HISTORIES – SYMPOSIUM

Thursday, November 7, 6 to 9 pm

The lecture and workshop event focuses on the active and joint production of knowledge and aims to offer strategies for taking action and encourages people to become active themselves and to counter the unjust distribution of knowledge. The invited initiatives 'Lesbenorganisation Schweiz – LOS' and 'Karachi LaJamia' will present their political-activist practice with a short input presentation, followed by a round table discussion. This will provide an opportunity to share experiences and ask questions.

ART DETECTIVES (GER)

Once again, young art detectives can pick up our exciting exhibition riddles specifically for *Material Memories* at the reception!

- Available free of charge from 11 October onwards
- 12 backpacks with the equipment (cannot be reserved)
- Ideal age: 8 -12 years (also suitable for younger children with the help of adults)

Duration of the riddle fun approx. 1 hour (can vary individually)

AUDIOGUIDES

Our audio guides offer visitors an introduction to the multi-layered themes of *Knowledge is a Garden* and illustrate the topics in concrete terms using various works of art. A conversation with Uriel Orlow also provides further insight into the exhibition. Headphones are available at *the* reception.



GLOSSARY

We offer definitions of the technical terms used in the work descriptions in our glossary.



All events are free of charge, but registration is required for some. Further information will be published on www.migrosmuseum.ch/agenda and in our newsletter. We look forward to your visit!