

Transcript YOYI voices: Stephanie Rosenthal

Magnus Rosengarten: Stephanie, the show will assemble over 20 artistic positions dealing with these large themes of caring, repairing and healing all in their own context and from their own viewpoints; also, with a special emphasis on non-Western epistemology and Indigenous knowledge systems. You decided to invite a group of curators to do this show. Can you talk a little bit about why you invited this group and how you know these people?

Stephanie Rosenthal: I think what I really like about the show is that it's a very organic process; that it brings together many conversations which we had as curators of the Gropius Bau for the last five years. And the first really kind of conversation, which was meant to lead into an exhibition, was the conversation with Kader Attia about repair and our long meetings to discuss the building and the importance of how the building is restored. And out of that, at some point, it was actually Kader who said: "But I think you're really interested in this question of care. So why is it not a care and repair show?" And so, it continued and continued, and when we ended up by saying: "Why not doing a show about care, repair, healing?", we were also at the point where we said it shouldn't just be Kader and myself; it has to be a larger group. Also reflecting that the thematic of the exhibitions really came out of us working with different artists; inviting artists as residents or for exhibitions. And I felt that that theme was coming up, you know, in different ways. But it was always around this question of: "What does care mean? How do we care? Do I you know, when I do a show, how do I deal with the institution? How do I deal with the world and who has to be taken care of? And how can I do that with my artistic practice?" And that went from Wu Tsang to Otobong Nkanga to Lee Mingwei, where it was much more about hospitality, but also SERAFINE1369. So, that was the starting point and then I think it became a bit more strategic of who should we invite in and who would make sense. And, of course, Natasha Ginwala, who had, you know, worked in the Gwangju Biennale around themes which are very related to this investigation and has worked with us [as Associate Curator at Large] at the Gropius Bau since I became the director. She was the kind of person I really thought has to be in there and her perspectives are very valuable. Then, Brook Andrew, who I had met when I was living in Australia, but then he was again, I think, a forerunner because he did one of the first Biennials with only First Nation artists [22nd Biennale of Sydney, 2020]. And doing this exhibition around that subject, I was aware that we really want to have completely different perspectives and also kind of people who are really representing a certain perspective. And Brooke Andrew was always very outspoken about that he is representing this perspective of

Transcript YOYI voices: Stephanie Rosenthal

First Nation artists and does it in his own work and does it also in the framework of even governmental entities. And Jamila was our *In House: Artist in Residence* when we kind of went into the deeper research of the exhibition. So, we also discussed it with Jamila and as SERAFINE1369 we now have another curatorial role, but also another artistic role. And that I think was something else we were interested in: in having curators who are also artists. So, curators as artists who invited other peers who they felt reflected perspectives they thought are important for them. In a way, I mean, it's a bit like how one would curate a Biennale, I guess, where you say you kind of put that artistic team together and then everybody is joining into the key conversations, but also everybody is then responsible for certain artistic positions and is working with these artists. And the last position we wanted to bring in, because in our case, healing or the question of: "Is healing possible?" is, of course, related to health and how artists engage with that. And Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz had just put together that reader about health [*Documents of Contemporary Art: Health* (2020, Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press)], and so we invited her in her [former] position as curator at the Wellcome Trust to join in and help us to make a selection of artists.

Magnus Rosengarten: In November [2021] we had already organised the event *Ámà: 4 Days on Caring, Repairing and Healing* as a sort of prelude also to the show in which we invited various artists, community organisers and practitioners to give presentations, talks, but also performances on these themes. And this will all sort of culminate now in the exhibition in September. Why do you think it is a good moment for it now in 2022; or is it a good moment now?

Stephanie Rosenthal: I mean, it's a good moment now because when we started to think about these themes, we couldn't even imagine what it means to have a pandemic. But I don't think that this is the reason why I say it makes more sense now than in the years before. I just think it's an investigation artists are interested in and I think that is because we're in a huge transformation, I think, in us as humans in relation to nature; in relation to ourselves. And that leads to the fact, I think, that artists have thought about these relations and different kinds of kinship since many, many years. And then there's always this moment where you think it's surfacing, and then I feel it's a good moment to do an exhibition. I do think it's an interesting one because it has so many layers and in itself so many angles you can look at. And therefore, *Ámà*, I think was important for us. And also that you became the

Transcript YOYI voices: Stephanie Rosenthal

curator for that project to really make sure that we look at all the different angles and invite people from afar. But also, I think, what you managed is to really link it with the discourse here in Berlin and to also have that close relationship to this city we are in. And therefore, I think, that idea of having that research phase before and then culminating it in a public programme really worked for us because I do think that we created that extended group of collaborators who now are somehow part of our thinking and will come back also through the programme you're doing now. So, I think it is an exhibition, but it's also just a conversation we're having and I think therefore it's an interesting form of exhibition because what we are presenting now in September is one way of discourse around it. It's not the only way and I think it's a way of having an anchor. But what we want is actually that people look at and learn from these different perspectives and maybe also change their own perspectives.

Magnus Rosengarten: If you specifically think about the artistic positions you've invited to the show, how do you think or feel they negotiate or discuss these topics and what fascinates you about that?

Stephanie Rosenthal: So, for me, the key artist, of course, that investigation started in a very concrete way with, was Kader and his thinking around repair. And I'm very fascinated by the fact that he really sticks with this research for years now. And I think that he kind of investigates it by learning from scientists and people outside of the art world. And so, I think that is something what we as an institution also try to do: to go out of that kind of world of the art to see what we can actually learn from outside. So, that's one position, but also Andrea Büttner, who's an artist who lives here in Berlin; who's German. And I think for that exhibition, of course, it's very important to also look at, you know, right where we are. And I think Andrea does that in a marvellous way and making us think again about the relationship between the National Socialism and that kind of going back the organic made me really rethink: "Where is it coming from?" I didn't think[...]much how actually organic food and right wing, or national-socialist thinking is actually connected and that they have this very similar seed.

Magnus Rosengarten: When I think about the entire programme, which is so rich of the exhibition: we have that discourse programme which you mentioned, but also a performance programme by Jamila. So that this show or this entire time is really speaking to people on many sensory levels. And I wonder what role that played in the curatorial process, like how do you want to speak to the audience; on what sensory levels really?

Transcript YOYI voices: Stephanie Rosenthal

Stephanie Rosenthal: I do feel it helps by having all these different curators that the more perspectives you have, I think the more people you talk to, because we all know we all have different perspectives. And I think working in the arts, we realise that it's sometimes very hard to understand someone else's perspective or even get as close as seeing that there is another perspective and not just thinking: "Oh, this is wrong". And so that I think from more than the different art forms, I think it's really that the participating artists, they look at things very differently and have a different approach to it. And the variety, I think, from like performances to only sound pieces to immersive [works] to drawings, to documentary [works], you know, to showing collectives, I think makes it more interesting to learn about that. And I mean, also this decision to having a painter, the painter Artemisia Gentileschi and really going back in art history. Even if it's just this little window we open, it's also to say this is actually not new. I mean, artists have always also represented or have had a political agenda and they were representing things where they felt they don't work in society and through that showing have also instigated change like Paulo Rego in relation to the abortion law [in Portugal].

Magnus Rosengarten: But also then like you were saying, how timely and contemporary it is if we look at the Supreme Court decision in the United States that it's cyclical or repeats itself and it's nothing that we can push back into the past. Thinking about the sensory question too and incorporating, I think that's also a big emphasis for this show, Indigenous knowledge systems and non-Western epistemologies. How far is it also about like sort of not always forcing the rational but also like going on to the emotional level or the physical performative level. Was that something that's also important to kind of de-center this like, we always want to rationally understand or capture things or phenomena?

Stephanie Rosenthal: Well, I think one reason art exhibitions are powerful is I think they do speak to not only the mind but also the body and many works, also like if you think of Yhonnie Scarce and these massive kind of black cubes you enter. Yes, they talk about the harm of how land and the history of the colonial structure in Australia have been harming. But on the other hand, I think you just feel it even if you don't know what exactly happened. You feel this, you know. You're going into these dark spaces and you have sculptures in there you don't quite know, but they kind of seem to talk about a certain pain or threat. And I think that is as important as that you then be able to read a story. I think that what you also carry out is a feeling you have with your body and of course, with SERAFINE1369, you really

Transcript YOYI voices: Stephanie Rosenthal

learn how bodies experience. But many of the works we are showing, they engage the body by either walking through it or sitting down. And of course, depending on how the posture of your body is, you experience things differently. And the same with sound. I think, you know, like Anne Duk Hee Jordan's dance piece where you get this feeling of really being immersed in the deep sea and the deep ocean and you have these other kind of living organisms around you. I mean, I kind of want to give you this impression that we as humans, I think, only if we care about the world of the animals, we really will change our behaviors. As long as we don't connect with them also on an emotional level, I don't think we'll be able to really change.

Magnus Rosengarten: How far would you say that this exhibition is really also in conversation with the programming since you've taken over the directorship four years ago? You've already mentioned in your opening remarks that this question of care has been sort of like actually informing the recent programming too. And how far is this show really speaking to the recent exhibitions here at the Gropius Bau?

Stephanie Rosenthal: Well, I think it's interesting to see, because when we started in like late 2017 or even before, I was thinking about what will be the first programme; and we were thinking a lot about how is our relation to land and how it was related to what passport/past would I have, but also like what is my relationship to the land I live in? But the land is also, as you know, the kind of earth I'm standing on. And this was with Ana Mendieta and Lee Bull to really think who has the right to define who belongs where. And somehow that developed further into this question of care, repair; I think this question of how do we deal with these painful histories which have been lived through? And I think the programme we've done wasn't working towards a show for us like that, but I think it's an accumulation of artists who basically showed us through their work and the presence here that that is something which is a huge interest of artists worldwide. And that it's interesting for an audience to see how does this artistic community think about it and what are the different aspects and strategies and structures they are unravelling in their works.

Magnus Rosengarten: Well, of course, curating such a huge show is a lot of bureaucratic organisational work: meetings with curators and artists that are living all over this globe basically, so, considering time differences is important. So, there's a lot of just organisational

Transcript YOYI voices: Stephanie Rosenthal

work, but maybe you could also talk about moments or insights or realisations you personally had throughout this entire process that instigated some change in you or made you see things differently or that touched you even?

Stephanie Rosenthal: One interesting thing, I think, was coming up in these endless discussions of the title, which we, of course...as a group of many curators, the title is always a difficult thing because it's representing something. And so we had this working title: "care repair, heal" or "caring, repairing, healing", and, you know, it went in and out. And at some point we were like, maybe we'll just get rid of it because it's actually, you know, inviting so many conflicts, because if you do a show with that, you're also saying: "We care about that – but then what do we care about as an institution?" So, I think it's a very conflicting thing. And there was this moment where at some point we were like: "No, no, no, we'll just stick with it. We'll go through this...we're discussing this now and we kind of open ourselves up for that discussion". And so, there was this title idea of "inevitable tensions" or there were kind of many, many others. And it's at that point where you feel like, well: "We'll never, ever find a title", because each time we'll have one, someone says: "Oh, maybe it's actually really problematic to do that". And I think it really shows the different perspectives from the different curators because everybody comes with a different knowledge and a different, I think, approach and also standpoint. But you also realise you really stand somewhere else – what one defines as colonial or the decolonial discourse is of course, very different depending on where you are, and also this question of who has the right to talk about it and who doesn't have the right in the group. But what is in this group, I think, exceptional, in the many collaborative projects, that I feel everybody is also relaxed about it to say at some point, you know, I'm fine with it. And I think, you know, in a collective very often you're in this moment where you say, if I would decide it by myself, I wouldn't, but in the collective, I'm fine to carry it. And that's something where I think that exhibition and maybe also this idea of doing something in relation to care, repair and heal does something in the way how you also try to be open to learn about different strategies and not forcefully think, you know, one side knows.