

SVETA MORDOVSKAYA

COSTUME

01.03.–19.05.2024

cur.: Paolo Baggi

Putting on a costume reinforces a status, a specific belonging to a culture. But when the costume is used as disguise, an identity is distorted. In Sveta Mordovskaya's (*1989) work, strong statements are made by assembling materials picked up in the street, online purchases (cleaning products, fabrics, plastic wrappings) and artists' materials such as plaster and papier-mâché. When joined together, sometimes by force and coercion, these assemblages show the artist's relationships with the resources to hand. They may take on biomorphic forms and, so doing, combine with cultural references. The animistic connotations of some of the sculptures may suggest how the modern world has appropriated motifs from non-Western art works while devitalizing their active, living roles in social or ritual use.

The only possible form of existence (2024) is a cloth sofa whose cushions have been removed and replaced with a jumble of disparate materials. The proliferation of paper, fabric, plastic and wire speaks of the manic activity of the artist and so do the two legs twisted around each other. The embedded ocular shapes underline the biomorphic character of the sculpture. Three photographs from the artist's personal archives hang on the walls. Their closeness to the sculpture is both physical and emotional. One of the photos is a portrait of the artist as a child, dressed up in a vague costume more or less reminiscent of a character from a European court of the eighteenth century, the Age of Enlightenment and universal values (*Artist, 2023*). The self-confidence of her pose and her smile contrast with her soft child's shape and the improbable social and cultural codes of the costume which are not hers at all. The feeling of awkwardness is accentuated by the photo's frame, an old discarded one picked up by the artist and awkwardly fixed around the photo.

This idea of misalignment persists and haunts the whole *Costume* exhibition. In another image, the artist is posing with her classmates in a class graduation photo (*Group Portrait, 2023*). The red star fastened to the photograph is like a talisman summoning up the strength and unruliness of the group of teenagers into the present moment. But compared to the small format generally used for such personal souvenirs, this assemblage of a decorated private photo has clearly been blown up. The move from a private to a public space seems to have modified its proportions. In its new size, the assemblage loses its private character and becomes an architectural element which opens *Costume* out to distorting mirror games and surprising reflections. This transformation disturbs the emotional context, perhaps because nostalgia always contains elements of fictionalization and reconstitution.

Costume exudes a feeling of quest and failure where the object of desire is vague and its satisfaction uncertain. *Untitled (2023)* seems to illustrate this. It consists of a pair of red children's shoes set beside a wooden sword leaning against the wall, nothing else, just the bare minimum for «dressing up». The scarlet shoes remind us of Dorothy's in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. Obligated to take control and grow up all by herself, Dorothy uses her red shoes – whose magical powers are far from certain – to forge her destiny and succeed in her quest to find her native Kansas once again.

EVENTS

Artists Talk

Thurs 14.03.2024

at 18:30 (Eng)

Paolo Baggi in conversation
with Debbie Alagen
and Sveta Mordovskaya

Art at noon

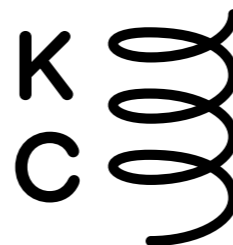
short visit followed by
a collation

– Fri 19.04.2024, at 12:15
(de/fr)

– Fri 17.05.2024, at 12:15
(de/fr)

CHF 15.–

booking up to the day
before: info@kbc.ch



Kunsthhaus Centre d'art
Biel Bienne

Opening hours

Wed 12:00–18:00

Thurs 12:00–20:00

Fri 12:00–18:00

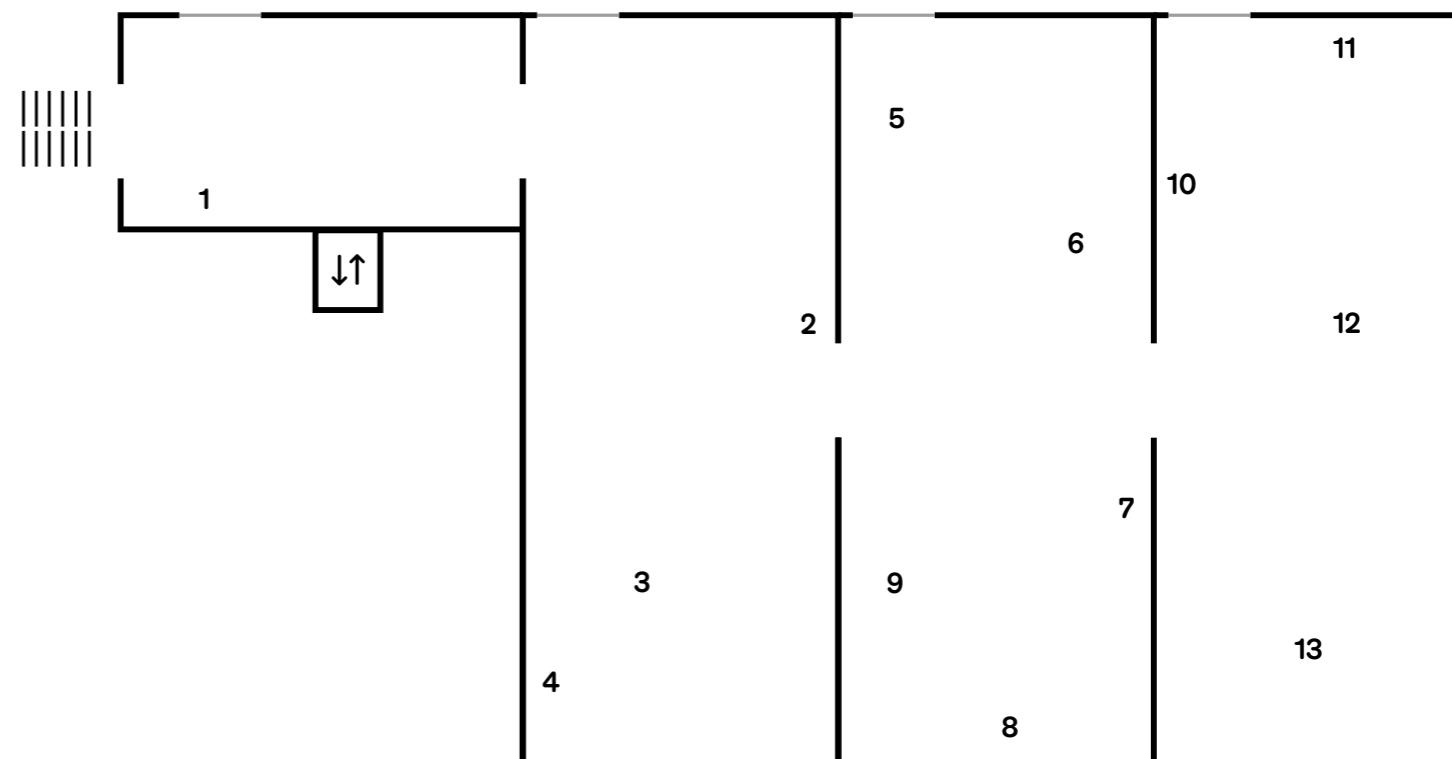
Sat&Sun 11:00–18:00

The combination of the dressy shoes and the wooden sword is enigmatic, even contradictory. Children's cinema usually keeps to a strict symbolic division of genders and accessories, they have to be either masculine or feminine. A journey is an allegory of the psychological path through childhood, where reality is distorted and fantastic, things are trivial and bedazzling, the everyday and the extraordinary advance side by side. *Zimmer* (2023) illustrates this sort of diffraction in the interior design of the apartment. The photo seems like a fantastic costumed reality, haunted and strange while still familiar. In fact, *Untitled* (2023) and *Costume* proceed in a similar way to *The Wizard of Oz*: the instructions are vague, the accessories are ways to freedom and the real power is in the hands of the feminine given that the masculine is absent from the exhibition.

Quest and failure, childhood recalled; this is a world of shadows, a dream space of revelations where strange, magnified, comical and fantastic creatures act as costumes for our inhibitions. *Untitled (black)* (2024) uses the codes of sculpture. A pile of black clothes are draped over a stand.

The costume looks like a magician's, a person who has secret or esoteric knowledge, and he himself seems to have collapsed. *Costume* is built up through these metaphorical journeys where the magician once again reconciles opposites and where a medal is not really a reward but rather a talisman for making changes happen. Sculpting is seen as a ceremony, like that of a masked ball.

GALERIES



1 *Costume*, 2024
eye shadow, kajal pencil,
highlighter, bronzer, mascara

2 *Instrument*, 2023
mixed materials
courtesy the artist
& King's Leap, NYC

3 *The only possible
form of existence*, 2024
mixed materials

4 *Zimmer*, 2023
c-print

5 *All adults are idiots and
children too including you*,
2024
mixed materials

6 *Ultraviolett*, 2024
mixed materials

7 *Artist*, 2023
c-print, wood

8 *Untitled*, 2024
mixed materials

9 *If you are reading this
fuck you*, 2024
mixed materials

10 *Group Portrait*, 2023
c-print, metal

11 *Untitled*, 2023
mixed materials

12 *Untitled (black)*, 2024
fabric

13 *Untitled*, 2024
fabric, plastic

Unless specified otherwise,
courtesy the artist