

Oa4s  
Friendship

[Kevin Space, Vienna](#)

Text by Anna-Sophie Berger

A stack of A4 printouts (*Notable 2-person artistic practices*) laid out with the press release at the entrance to the space sets the tone of what I would consider the generosity of *friendship*, Oa4s' (read: On all fours) first exhibition in Vienna. Using stars as bullet points, several historic and contemporary artistic duo's are listed here.

The selection's disarming arbitrariness across all disciplines – Bernd & Hilla Becher, New Noveta, Donna Haraway & Cayenne Pepper, Deleuze & Guattari to name just a few – ends with a single star bullet suggesting an endless game of expansion. The list is crucial since it defies the logic of a specific sociality of insiders or an artistic milieu as a closed circuit, while instead presents us the collaborative effort as subject matter.

The storefront windows of the gallery space located in one of Vienna's less picturesque public squares have been collaged with colorful papers and plastic foil shapes (O4sis, all works 2018). Colors of soft orange hue's change to darker tones staging a day's course as the sun falls through the windows and kids play outside.

Conceived as a performance staged at the opening of the show, we encounter the exhibition as the site of various sculptural elements that manage to both remind us of their status as props while also defending their autonomy as results of a dialogue made up of "requests rather than demands". Formally, the placement of the single objects is not imprecise but casual, like a house that is lived in. The history of a recent use is what imbues the setting with a quality that is harder to achieve through installation alone.

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The central and largest sculpture is a camel made from fabric (*Friendship*) that has been inhabited by the artists during the performance and is now standing on a skeleton of interconnected plastic pipes, exposing them only as legs. In the tradition of both folklore circus and marionette theatre, navigating the huge animal costume present an inbuilt complication that amounted to slapstick. Since the performers could see only the tips of their own feet when inside the camel, movement represented the literal push and pull of dialogue with the added chaos of a gallery full of people. Another important part of the installation are small red hieroglyphic scribbles dispersed all across the gallery floor that help leading the performers.

The staggering beauty of this act “on all fours” reminds me of the fictional character pushmi-pullyou in Hugh Lofting’s *Doctor Doolittle*- a “gazelle-unicorn cross” which has two heads at opposite ends of its body. Like the suggestion of the fantastic name – inside the camel each push of “me” will translate in a pull for “you”.

Other elements in the exhibition include a type of trough for the creature to drink from and a beehive from which a hidden green laser beam points to a tiny glass bell (*Friendship*), refracting its light back at the space.

While it is possible to formally relate the installation to contemporary sculptural positions, I find this less helpful. To understand their coming into existence we need to look at the performed sociality of such practices. What I am recalling is a performance by Feminist Land Art Retreat in Dusseldorf in September 2015. As part of a self-organised festival staged to highlight the neglecting of a Dan Graham sculpture (Two-Way Mirror Hedge) in Ständehauspark, Feminist Land Art Retreat planted a small apple tree inside the mirrored structure, underscored by a pop musical soundtrack. Both performances were highly effective live and achieved to leave behind a charged site that represented the logic of the past event and the organization of objects as authentically relational. During Oa4s performance, the audience was invited to channel a soundtrack provided via QR code through their smartphones.

Finally there is a series of black and white photographs of Eligio & Charly (en su taller, CDMX 2018). A classic portrait of one man in a striped polo shirt facing the camera straight hangs on the wall. Another portrait of a second man smiling from within a car is lying on the windowsill paired with three photographs of both of the men engaging in a task involving a ladder whereas one person hands an object to the other. Finally a close up of the extended arms reaching out. In the context of Vienna, left without explanation, we would only be able to recognize these portraits of two men as being Latin American or Mexican. The exotica of such a presentation, the genre of the foreign subject, is countered by the information in the press release introducing the two as another duo – steel fabricants Eligio and Charly, that have helped Oa4s with their previous exhibition in Mexico City. Their activity is a mirror image of the camel in action.

TAG

Anna-sophie Berger, Kevin Space, Oa4s, Vienna

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