

A FLOWER IN MY MOUTH



13.04. – 07.07.2019

A PROJECT BY MEHRANEH ATASHI, SARA GIANNINI, JACOPO MILIANI.
WITH: MEHRANEH ATASHI, AZIN FEIZABADI, SARA GIANNINI, ASTRIT
ISMAILI, LANOCHE-ÁNGELA DE LA SERNA, LINDER, MARIOS, JACOPO
MILIANI, ASHKAN SEPAHVAND.

***A maze is a bar is a
flower is a word is a
silence is a gesture is
a distraction is a
name is a mirror is a
scream is an erotic
pain is a flattering
sadness is erasure is
blood is gambling is
revenge is a wedding
is a funeral.***

The Salzburger Kunstverein is pleased to present *A Flower in My Mouth*, a project by Mehraneh Atashi, Sara Giannini and Jacopo Miliani. Entangling both curatorial and artistic practice together, *A Flower in My Mouth* speculates on the semiotics of flowers in relation to sexuality, esoterism and political power.

Themselves being sex organs of the natural world, flowers have been used since ancient times to speak about the unspeakable; to seduce, adorn, and distract. Seemingly only ornamental, flowers can convey covert meanings, masking that which cannot be openly shown or spoken about. Their transient beauty articulates a mute language of deception, desire and allusion. As the philosopher Georges Bataille noted, their sweet fragrance, vivid colors and gentle shapes speak to human ideals of beauty and keep us in denial: We don't wish to see their decay, we don't wish to smell how they rot.

Associated with life as much as with death, flowers have appeared as sacred allegories in different religions as well as esoteric traditions. Functioning as metaphorical agents, they have been deployed as occult signs heralding martyrdom, suffering, chastity, purity, fertility, initiation and rebirth. Their luring and esoteric presence is also intertwined with the history of capitalism. Flowers, like money, promise us something absent and probably unachievable. In the 17th century, when tulips were newly imported to the Netherlands from Istanbul via Vienna, they sparked a collective mania later regarded as the first recorded financial bubble.

The speculative nature of the language of flowers hides and masks but also conjures and whispers. Over time, roses, carnations, peonies, or lilies have been implemented as political and religious emblems, but they have also been reclaimed for the circulation of illicit desires, identities, and ideas. In this sense, flowers can function both as instruments of suppression and tactics of resistance. If a flower can silence unwanted voices, it is in this silence that new tongues can blossom.

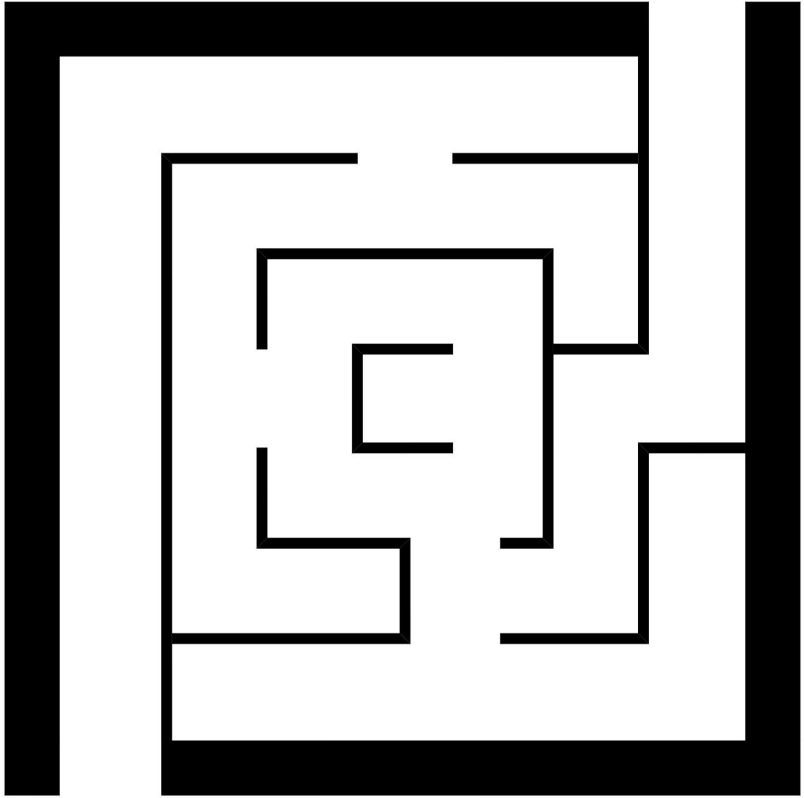
A Flower in My Mouth inhabits the slips of these different tongues, interlinking two recent books by Mehraneh Atashi and Sara Giannini & Jacopo Miliani. Both projects address the topic of flowers in relation to censorship and its subsequent subversion. In *Only the Morning Bird Treasures the Flower Garden* Atashi re-appropriates –and by so doing– repositions the multifaceted iconography of the flower in an Iranian context. In *Whispering Catastrophe. On the Language of Men Loving Men in Japan* Giannini and Miliani explore a visual erotic language where flowers, and in particular the rose, are signifiers of forbidden sexualities. In the Japanese homoerotic publications that they researched, flowers are used to cover naked bodies fulfilling censorship regulations. However, their obstructing presence is also a trigger of desire and seduction. A similar *détournement* is the base of Atashi's project too. A collection of different contributions, the book was conceived by Atashi in Tehran in 2009, after she was instructed by the authorities to take picture of flowers, rather than self-portraits addressing social political matters.

As an expansion of these researches, *A Flower in My Mouth* invites audiences to a speculative environment activated by the imagination. Upon entering a maze of flower arrangements, one is led to a space called 'the bar.' The maze is a visual pattern of initiation, a reference to the petalled maze of blossoms, where failure shapes the possibility of speech.

Whereas the maze echoes the silence of the language of flowers, the bar offers a polyphony of sounds, objects, videos and performances. In this garden of sorts, new artworks by Atashi, Miliani and Giannini converse with subversive flower collages of Linder and a video depicting the act of eating roses by Azin Feizabadi. On the opening evening, and for one night only, the bar blooms with live acts. Astriti Ismaili presents a new song and choreography on the 'libidinous economy of the Coca-Cola Flower.' Ashkan Sepahvand ponders the relationship between flowers, memory, and psychic transformation. LANOCHE/Ángela de la Serna performs a new musical composition specially conceived for the occasion. Throughout the evening a silent master of ceremony dressed by Marios serves the audience petalled refreshments.

Traces and sounds of the opening night remain in 'the bar' for the duration of the exhibition. They will linger on in the space as ghostly vestiges, while as time passes, the flowers in the maze will transform, finally loosening their tongues.

Sara Giannini
2019



The Crystal Prison

My hands dream of a blackness sitting on the tree, it is a
wingless bird flies at night.
The body is pierced to the heart.
The heart has a beak like a flute.
The stars come down like a chain to hear the flute.
My body becomes a fluid motion in a vortex,
The water escapes by evaporating.
Locked up in the inner of the salt crystal
My eyes are still open: the body turns itself into dry water, into
wine, into mercury, into external fire.
I became the voice.
The warmth of sulfuric acid will coagulate the body to the
bones in the stars.
A flower grew from my blood.

Mehraneh Atashi
2019

“I would NOT represent.”

This is what a flower told me.

The flower was tired of being beautiful, tired of being fresh and pure... The flower has never been beautiful, fresh and pure, but the human eye has often looked at the flower in this way.

Who said that? My mouth.

I want to show you, flower, not as my flower. But I can only use my mouth to do that. I will show you, but I will not reveal your inner power, resisting any expectation of clarity and comprehension. I would show complexity through the most complex simplicity. I would immerse myself within contradiction and abstraction, failing the purpose of not imposing my ideology.

Every time I open my mouth I am suffocated by petals of words that don't belong to me.

I am trying to be you and I ask you to be me.

The time would slow down, I will not be consumed by time and I will invent *his* name over and over again.

I need Chaos to pollinate me, feeling inside my body all the bee's previous passages.

Through an abused symbol, I feel the strength of my weakness. My system of representation could not choose a better slave than you, flower. My brain thinks you are fragile and deciduous because my body is fragile and deciduous. My

hand can take you and bring you wherever I want, exhibiting a violent act.

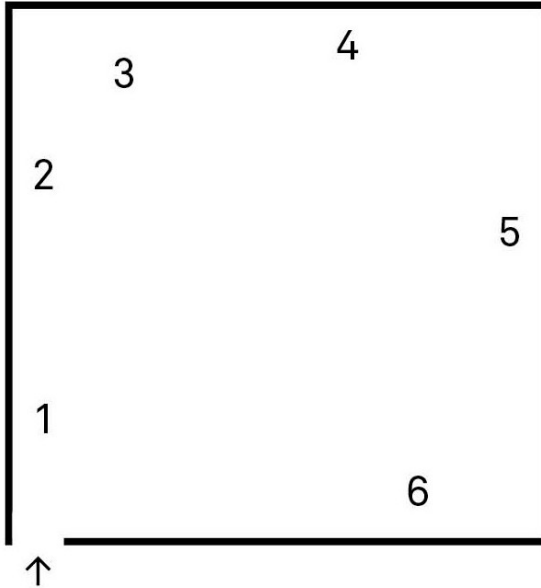
However, like when a flower enters a vase, my body is penetrated.

Who is more fragile, the penetrated or the penetrator?
The fragility of violence or the violence of fragility?
These words penetrate myself but I also use them to penetrate you.

A flower in my mouth.

Jacopo Miliani
2019

WORKS IN 'THE BAR'



1 *Stolen Flowers* 盗まれた花, 2019

2 *I Never Found Those Lips Again*, 2019

3 *Flowers*, 2005

4 *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero iii; Untitled; The Myth of the Birth of the Hero ii*, 2012

5 *Amaze Arose*, 2019

6 *Hentai*

Jacopo Miliani

Stolen Flowers 盗まれた花, 2019

Video, 10 min 33 sec

This video is an imaginary journey into the universe of men loving men in Japan, deploying flowers as a key to enter an unknown language. Images of books, erotic magazines, anime, manga and movies are in turn used to read the English translation of *Eros and Flora*, a short essay by Japanese novelist and art critic Tatsuhiko Shibusawa. Renown translator of de Sade and Bataille, Shibusawa researched eroticism, sadomasochism, black magic and demonism. Losing the words through the passages between the different languages, flowers remain as the only possible voice.

Images of flowers and bodies can be found in the T-shirt series *Hentai*.

(Trans. of *Eros and Flora* by Ramona Ponzini.)

Mehraneh Atashi

I Never Found Those Lips Again, 2019

Polaroid collages, dry air clay, pigment

The flower stimulates both forgetting and remembering. Traces of memory form a geography that lives inside the bones. The bodies are constantly bonding together and disappearing: Abandonment of the self.

Azin Feizabadi

Flowers, 2005

Video, 10 min 32 sec

A mouthful of petals. A ritual for all roses rejected to love him. He listens to music, classical Iranian music. The Tonbak drums further, like the soldier who dances his sword in the air, riding his horse towards Karbala. The sweet pleasure to fight the forgetting like fighting the parasite in his body while eating roses and drinking rose water. The result is always red. It is beautiful. Beautiful as the glance of the martyr painted on the wall on the other side of the street, beautiful as the landscape of flowers projected on the green screen and transmitted by the black and white TV of the living room.

Linder

The Myth of the Birth of the Hero iii; Untitled; The Myth of the Birth of the Hero ii, 2012

Photomontages, courtesy Modern Art, London

“I spend an unhealthy amount of time cutting out pictures of roses, lilies, orchids and wild flowers. I’ve spent years collaging photographs of roses onto found photographs of ballet dancers, fashion models and pornography. Within the collages that I make, the rose rises to every occasion, no matter how bizarre the juxtaposition. As you say, roses have an ambiguous wildness despite our attempts at domestication. If I was a Jungian analyst, I might suggest that this was a healthy metaphor for the self. With an accurate cut and the permanency offered by the glue stick, a photograph of a flower

can suddenly become articulate beyond its normal realm, it can paraphrase a feminist or a pornographer, it's my perfect dummy." (Adapted from an interview with Amy Sherlock published in *The Plant* journal, fourth issue, 2013.)

PERFORMANCES

APRIL 12, 7-11pm

The sound recording of the performances will remain in the bar as a ghostly soundtrack for the entire duration of the exhibition.

Astrit Ismaili

The Coca Cola Flower, 2019

The Coca Cola Flower is a performance exploring the intimacies between the Coca-Cola, as a symbol of capitalism, and the flower, as a symbol of reproduction and beauty. Referring to the violent seduction of neo-liberal imagery, the body of the performer is synced to a meditative sound-scape that turns into a pop song. By becoming a 'Coca Cola Flower' the performer moves between desire and refusal, transformation and paralysis. They intend to escape from the context of the human body by also acknowledging the impossibility to fully remove themselves from the oppression of the systems they are running away from.

LANOCHE/Ángela de la Serna

You looked around
Found the flower dead
And got back to the day
You saw it bloomed

Its death reflected an image
Of your own death
And what seemed to be easy
Became long-desired

Ashkan Sepahvand

(Her) Vision Must Be Protected, 2019

An American in Athens. A Persian demon. A German faggot. The Libyan sibyl. Names of plants and flowers, innumerable, repeated. A secret, a riddle, an oracle. I want to be left alone, and yet the men come and go, a new one each day. The oleander, the palm. A papyrus reed, a walking stick, an arduous journey. Seeds of knowledge sown, salt and sand, dust and ash. The unexpected, or, how to die? Traces, what is left behind? A portrait, her eyes look down, she is holding a bouquet. She is beautiful. Being acted upon, losing presence, the horizon of crisis. Ruins, recovery. Casting out, calling forth.

BIOGRAPHIES

Mehraneh Atashi is an Iranian artist living and working in Amsterdam. Since completing her BFA in photography in Tehran, and her postgraduate education at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, she has developed a body of work consisting of assemblages, sculpture, photography and video. Shifting between conceptualism and materiality, imagery and iconography, her practice explores the possibility of becoming within static systems as well as concepts of gaze. Her work has been awarded with the Mondrian Stipendium for Established Artists and presented in solo and group exhibitions at de Appel Amsterdam, M HKA Antwerp, REDCAT Los Angeles, Artissima Turin, Salzburger Kunstverein, and the Grazer Kunstverein. Her forthcoming show is *City Prince/sses* at Palais de Tokyo (June 2019).

Azin Feizabadi is a visual artist and filmmaker from Iran currently based in Berlin. He is currently a research fellow at the Graduiertenschule of University of the Arts Berlin. Since 2009, Feizabadi has been working on a long-term multidisciplinary research and production project titled 'A Collective Memory'. Swaying between fact and fiction, as well as poetics and immediate politics, the multidisciplinary works within 'A Collective Memory' create both political imagination and emancipatory participation. Within this project he directed and produced his latest feature film *Cryptomnesia* (Premiered in 2014 at RWE Kino Museum Ostwall Dortmund) and among other mid-length and short films *Conference of the Birds* (Premiered in 2012 at Berlinale – Forum Expanded) and *The Negotiation* (Premiered in 2010 at HKW Berlin).

Sara Giannini is an independent art researcher, curator, teacher and writer based in Amsterdam. Informed by a background in theatre and semiotics, she is interested in how the interlinking of language and performativity can question categorizations and unleash tangential bodies of knowledge. She has been developing transdisciplinary and collaborative projects such as the online publishing platform *Unfold* and the Amsterdam based initiative *Heterotopics*. As independent curator, she has collaborated with Jumex Museum, Mexico City; documenta 14, Athens; the Museum of Modern Art, Kunsthalle São Paulo, CCSP and Casa do Povo, São Paulo; de Appel, Stedelijk Museum, Rijksmuseum and Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; M HKA, Antwerp; 98weeks, Mansion, Assabil Public Libraries; Beirut. Since 2017 she is one of the lead tutors of the If I Can't Dance class at the Dutch Art Institute a.k.a. DAI Roaming Academy. Sara has recently completed research about ecstatic performance at the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, NY.

Astrit Ismaili lives in Amsterdam. The artist holds a MA in Theatre from DasArts, Amsterdam. Ismaili is a recipient of the Young Visual Artist Award 2011 and was a resident at ISCP in New York City. Furthermore, they won the Award for Best Director at the Skena Up International Student Festival 2011, received the Forum ZDF follow-up Grant 2013 and won the Awards for Best Video Performance and Best Styling Video at VideoFest 2014. They have showed work at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, ISCP, New York, S.A.L.T.S. Basel, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, Juliette Jongma, Amsterdam, a.o.

LANOCHE/Ángela de la Serna is a Madrid-based artist, working mainly in the field of electronic music. LANOCHE gives name to her main musical project, which embodies a mixture of Deep House, Ambient and atmospheric, slowed-down Techno, as well as drone and experimental music. The release of the EP 'Inmensamente' (her first 12", published in her own imprint So Unreal) meant a depiction of LANOCHE's deep and intimate club music and spawned live show appearances in festivals like Lapsus, She Makes Noise or Sónar. The latter collaborations with artists like María Jerez ('Yabba' 2017-2019) and Luis Úrculo ('A Green Chroma, over Yoga Matats, over Flashing Lights' Arredondo/Arozarena Gallery, Mexico City 2018) give place to new directions of work in the field of soundtrack composition for performing arts and art exhibitions.

Linder is known for her photography, radical feminist photomontage, and confrontational performance art. Emerging from the Manchester punk and post-punk scenes in the 1970s, Linder focuses on questions of gender, commodity and display. Her highly recognizable photomontage practice combines everyday images from domestic or fashion magazines with images from pornography and other archival material. Cut and collaged by hand, the juxtapositions recall a rich art history harking back to Hannah Hoch and the Dadaists. For her solo shows at the Hepworth Wakefield and Tate St. Ives in 2013, Linder collaborated with choreographer Kenneth Tindall of Northern Ballet for a major performance piece, *The Ultimate Form* (2013). In 2017 she was appointed as the inaugural artist-in-residence of Chatsworth House. Recent solo exhibitions include Modern Art, Nottingham Contemporary,

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and Museum of Modern Art/PS1. Linder's work has also been included in group exhibitions at Tate Modern, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Museum of Modern Art, Tate Britain, and Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. In 2017, she was awarded the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award.

Marios is an independent brand based in Milan and is distributed across Europe, Asia and America. Marios was born in 2002 out of an idea of Greek Cypriot designer Mayo Loizou and Polish performer Leszek Chmielewski; and it opened the first flagship store in Tokyo between 2001 and 2005 *Marios Left Tanker*, with the partnership of a Japanese investor.

Jacopo Miliani lives and works in Milan. His practice addresses performance as an expanded methodology that aims to investigate the connections between language and the body. He has collaborated with different performers including Jacopo Jenna, Antonio Torres, DivaD, Benjamin Milan, Mathieu LaDurée, and Eve Stainton. His projects have featured professional collaborators from various disciplines including the filmmaker Dario Argento, the fashion designers Boboutic, and the music producer Jean-Louis Hutha. He is the founder of an independent publishing project that focuses on homosexuality and language: Self Pleasure Publishing. His work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions at Galeria Rosa Santos, Valencia, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon GAMeC, Bergamo, ICA studio, London, Biblioteca Nacional, Buenos Aires, GAM, Turin, Studio Dabbeni, Lugano, Frutta, Rome, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, David Roberts Art Foundation, London, Museum of Dance, Stockholm, CCSP, Sao Paulo, MADRE, Naples.

Ashkan Sepahvand is an artistic researcher and lives and works in Berlin. His performative discourse practice engages with how knowledge-forms are sensorially translated and experienced, taking shape as publications, installations, exhibitions, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Previously he has worked as a research fellow at the Schwules Museum*, where he curated the exhibition *Odarodle - an imaginary their_story of naturepeoples, 1535-2017*, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, where he co-edited the publication *Textures of the Anthropocene: Grain, Vapor, Ray* (The MIT Press, 2015). In 2010 he co-founded the institute for incongruous translation with Natascha Sadr Haghghian, a framework for their collaborative, long-term investigations, including *Seeing Studies* (2010-2012) and *Carbon Theater* (2016-ongoing). Since 2013 he organizes the technosexual reading circle, an informal platform for collective study, with gatherings, workshops, and seminars in Berlin, Beirut, and Tehran. His work and writings have been exhibited at dOCUMENTA (13), Sharjah Biennials X and 13, Gwangju Biennale 11, Ashkal Alwan, and ICA London, amongst others. He is currently a Guest Lecturer at the Hochschule für Künste, Bremen.

**The exhibition *A Flower in My Mouth*
is friendly supported by**



Whispering Catastrophe. On the Language of Men Loving Men in Japan by Sara Giannini and Jacopo Miliani (2018) is published by Self Pleasure Publishing, Milan, in collaboration with OuUnPo.

Only the Morning Bird Treasures the Flower Garden by Mehraneh Atashi (2019) is published by REDCAT, Los Angeles (Roy And Edna Disney/Calarts Theater).

Many thanks to:

David Ogunlade, Andrea Verdecchia, Becket Mingwen Flannery, Daniela Gomez.

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