

피곤한 야자수  
Tired Palm Trees

# Tired palm trees

2024. 7. 9.  
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The Ground

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## Tired Palm Trees

Text by  
Markus Waitschacher and  
Elisabeth Piskernik

This exhibition is not an exhibition “about” palm trees. It borrows the palm tree as a symbolic image — a symbol with very different meanings. Plants, not just the palm tree, have always had a highly symbolic and therefore political character. They must embellish, trivialize, cover up, or greenwash. In the exhibition, they have become tired. Tired of the burden of all the projections they have had to absorb, of the actual torments they have been exposed to, or of the eternal misinterpretations and misuses of their habitat.

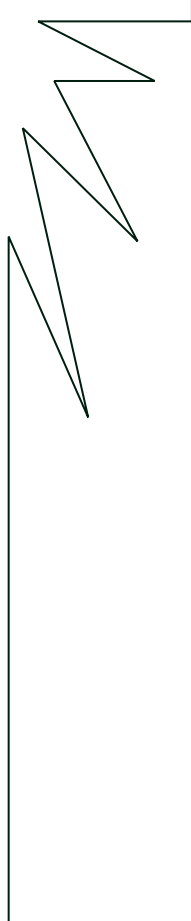
Due to the increasing warming of the planet, palm trees and their friends will soon be able to live anywhere. However, changes in the earth’s climate pose a massive threat to their natural habitats. Even hardy plants such as palm trees can no longer withstand storms, heat waves, or floods. The increasing number of natural disasters and the associated dangers give a foreboding of their future and the future of mankind.

At the same time, palm trees are souvenirs and witnesses of colonial practice, which for centuries arbitrarily shipped, “scientifically” categorized, and exploited to death not only humans but also their botanical fellows. Plants carry this knowledge and memory, even if we humans want to deny it to them.

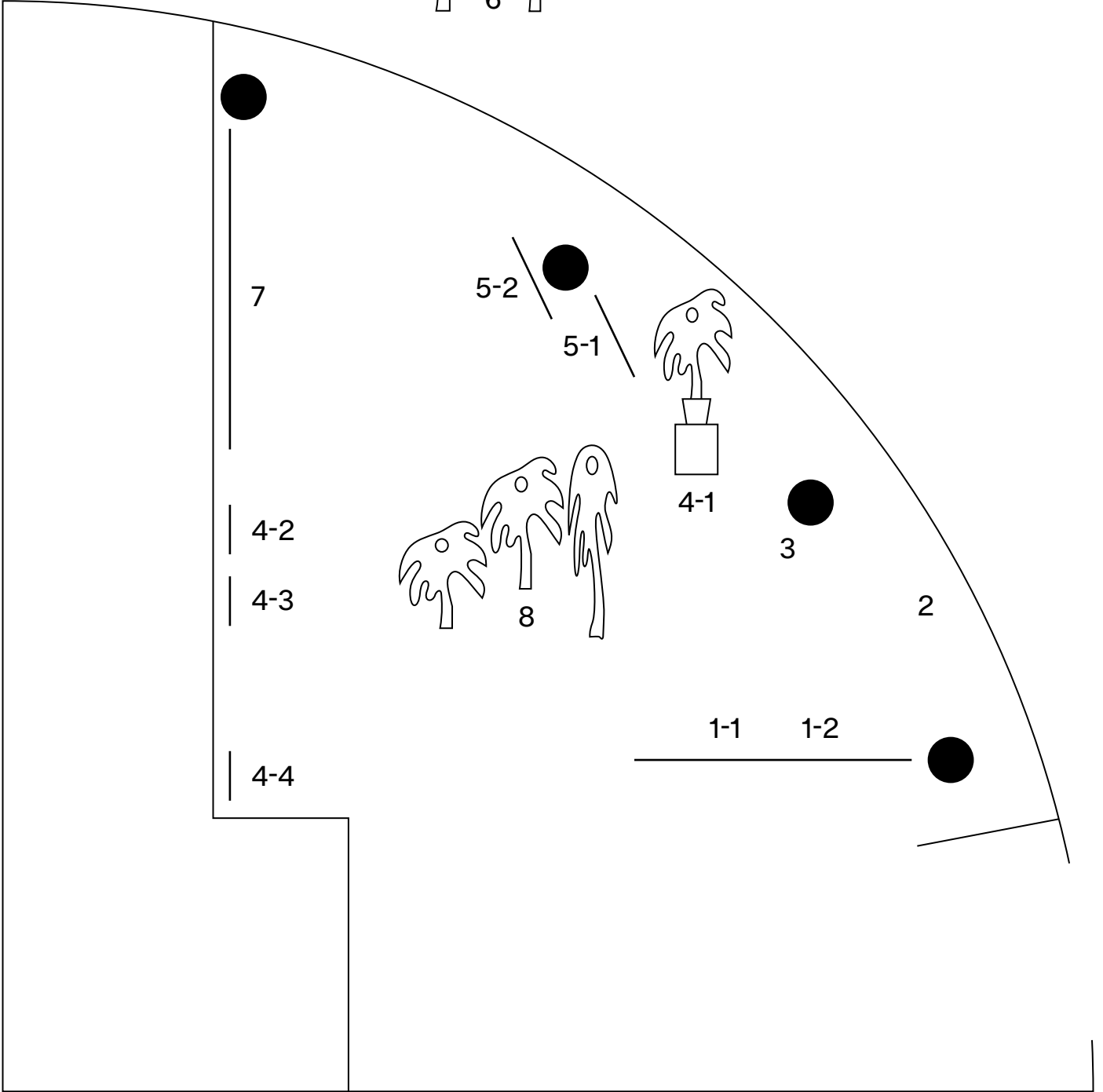
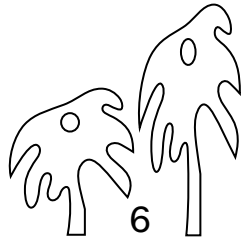
Political power structures often prioritize economic growth and resource extraction, leading to the overexploitation of natural resources or the degradation of ecosystems. Driven by urbanization, technological progress, and the desire to incorporate nature - or rather its artificial substitute - into our daily lives, the artificial replication of natural elements in built environments aims to provide the aesthetic and psychological benefits of nature without the complexity and maintenance of real ecosystems.

The exhibition brings together a variety of works that are concerned with these aspects, especially focusing on palm trees and other plants as symbolic trespassers borders, and migratory subjects. By employing an anthropomorphic approach, the exhibition aims to create an empathetic view of our environment.

What all the contributions have in common is that their plants are symbolically suffering and tired. Tired palm trees is symptomatic of the tiredness of a society that cannot find rest even in the soundest sleep.



# Floor Plan



## Work Description

1-1.

Seif Kousmate, *Untitled, Waha* واحة series, 2020–2024, watercolor ink print on PVC, 271.61 × 350 cm

1-2.

Seif Kousmate, *Untitled, Waha* واحة series, 2020–2024, archival pigment print on paper, 50 × 65 cm, 50 × 63 cm, 63 × 50 cm (2)

*Waha* (واحة: oasis in Arabic, 2020–2024) is a four-year photographic research project aimed at understanding the complex relationships between people, their environment, and the history of the territories they inhabit. Collectively, oases carry a mystical, almost magical aura. Growing up in the south of Morocco, Kousmate always found oases to be an intriguing, transitional territory he wanted to explore and demystify. Beyond myths and orientalist representations, oases define systems, cultures, indigenous knowledge, and innovation. They maintain a delicate balance between water, flora, soil, and climate in hostile environments. Oases reflect what happens on a larger scale, reminding us that humans can build and nurture entire ecosystems while, at the same time, being able to destroy them in the blink of an eye. Exploring and experimenting with new processes and visual narratives, the series extends the metaphor of erosion within the oasis. It calls upon external and organic elements intimately linked to the spaces photographed, both documentary and conceptual, to navigate the realities of present-day and yet-to-come deterioration.

2.

Jongwan Jang, *I Prefer White Wine*, 2024, acrylic gouache, color pencil on Korean paper, 194 × 259.2 cm

Jongwan Jang primarily creates surrealistic landscapes and scenarios in his paintings through a process of disassembly, recombination, and personification of natural images. The major subject in his work *I Prefer White Wine* (2024) is cut-down trees, a recurring element in his art. This motif continues from a piece he created a few years ago, which paid homage to René Magritte's *The Labours of Alexander* (1967). Jang's work reflects the anxieties amplified by war and the climate

crisis, presenting contradictory concerns through a surreal and irrational gathering of dead trees that are portrayed in a humorous way. The two main colors in the painting, green and pink, were influenced by Jang's experiences with infrared scopes used for night training during his military service and thermal imaging cameras employed to measure people's temperatures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jang evokes unfamiliar emotions and hidden aspects of objects you were previously unaware of through paintings that consist of unique colors, much like how an infrared camera enables people to see things that are invisible under visible light.

3.

Roswitha Weingrill, *How to fold a palm tree*, 2024, textiles, dimensions variable

Wind-distorted palm trees, whose bending and waving are supposed to visually indicate the wind's strength, are a classic image within reports about hurricanes. The most common palm species in Florida, *Dictyosperma album*, for example, is also called the hurricane palm. The reason for this is its ability to drop its leaves in strong winds to avoid serious damage to the trunk. Yet, not all members of the *Arecaceae* or palm family can rely on such extraordinary abilities to tackle the effects of extreme weather which are becoming more and more common in the ongoing climate crisis: The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species currently categorizes 162 palms as critically endangered. For *How to fold a palm tree* (2024), Weingrill remakes parts of critically endangered members of the *Arecaceae* plant family from fabric. In the installation, some palm parts are neatly folded waiting for the weather to clear up while others are scattered on the floor as a reference to the catastrophic state of our planet. The habitat of plants has already been largely restricted and destroyed at will. Now we humans are also starting to feel that the situation is getting worse. Unlike some palm trees, however, we cannot shed leaves to alleviate the blow.

4-1.

Regula Dettwiler, *Top performers*, 2024, house plants, lace borders, rubber, various pedestals, dimensions variable

4-2.

Regula Dettwiler, *Efeutute made in China*, 2014, watercolors, 80 × 60 cm

4-3.

Regula Dettwiler, *Caladium made in China*, 2014,  
watercolors, 80 × 60 cm

4-4.

Regula Dettwiler, *Washingtonia made in China*, 2014,  
watercolors, 80 × 60 cm

Regula Dettwiler's watercolors initially resemble traditional herbaria, presenting biological plant studies with a meticulous approach. However, Dettwiler employs botanical classification methods to dissect and reassemble artificial plants—made of plastic or silk—into pseudo-scientific displays. Her detailed botanical studies transform mass-produced plants into objects of research, mimicking the scientific exploration of a new field with exaggerated precision. This underscores the significance of nature in a globalized world that eliminates natural variability. While nature is replicated to meet consumer demands—always fresh and perfectly shaped—the longing for rare and authentic experiences persists. In her new, site-specific installation, Dettwiler takes this concept further by creating compositions of various houseplants. These plant sculptures highlight the alienation of natural beauty through human attempts at optimization. Upon closer inspection, the exotic plants, though seemingly natural, reveal subtle artistic interventions. Dettwiler adorns the leaves with borders and lace edges, creating a temporary, lavish cladding. As the plants grow, they shed these artificial adornments in a performative act of liberation, emphasizing the ephemeral nature of the imposed aesthetic.

5-1.

Mi Jung Shin, *Bam Island: Oral Records*,  
2024, print on polyester, 470 × 112 cm

5-2.

Mi Jung Shin, *Bam Island: A Record of drifting  
images vol.1*, 2022, single-channel video, color,  
sound, 6 min 42 sec

Through visual materials, Mi Jung Shin contemplates the concept of affective solidarity between a place and individuals who have lost their hometown. Shin specifically narrates the experiences of people who have lost their homes due to external forces, such as forced displacement, exile, and evacuation, focusing on their unrecovered physical and psychological

spaces. In addition, Shin challenges the possibility of the infinite interpretation that film images possess and documents individuals whose lives were forgotten or erased in the context of modern Korean history. Based on research about Bam Island, which disappeared during Seoul's urban development in the 20th century, *Bam Island: Archives of Drifting Images Vol. 1* (2022) is a reconstructed film comprising collected archive files and artist notes. Bam Island became an uninhabited area after being designated as an Ecological Landscape Protected Area. In the past, it was part of an island that included Yeouido, which is located in the middle of the Han River. About 400 residents used to live on Bam Island, but in February 1968, the island was demolished by the government as part of the Yeouido development plan and efforts to improve the Han River's flow. As a result, the residents relocated to nearby neighborhoods. Bam Island vanished underwater after the explosion, though it did begin to resurface in the 1980s.

6.

Edith Payer, *Pietà*, 2024, fake plants, mixed materials,  
dimensions variable

The *Pietà* is the depiction of the Holy Mary with the body of her son Jesus Christ taken down from the cross. It is one of the best-known iconographic representations of the Middle Ages. In contemporary Western European art, the pictorial motif of the *Pietà* is used as a prototypical pictorial formula to visualize existential or socially critical moments. In Payer's installation *Pietà* (2024), two artificial palm trees play the roles of Jesus and Mary, surrounded by fellow mourners, all represented by other artificial plants – in reference to Pietro Perugino's famous *Pietà* (1483–1493) depiction, which he created together with the *Agony in the Garden* (1483–1493) for the church of the monastery of San Giusto Alle Mura (Florence, Italy). The main protagonists are palm trees because of the multiple personalities of these plants: In Christianity, they are a symbol of peace and justice; in post-colonial social criticism, they stand for the atrocities of European colonialism and the exploitation of the Global South; from an ecological perspective, palm trees are directly linked to the overexploitation of tropical forests; but they are also one of the most popular motifs in advertising and interior design. The Bible verse “[r]eplenish the earth and subdue it” plays a key role. However, instead of humans, artificial avatars

of various plants make up the staging of Payer's Pietà scene. As products made from fossil resources, they fulfill a special claim to eternity that is naturally denied to the human body.

7.

Katrin Ströbel, *Ile de Gorée*, 2011, digital printing (drawing), 2 fans, 286 × 380 cm

In Katrin Ströbel's drawing-based installation *Ile de Gorée* (2011), we see the palm-fringed landscape of the Ile de Gorée. The island lies off the coast of Senegal, only a few kilometers away from Dakar. The drawing itself is printed on countless sheets of paper that move quietly in the wind of two fans. It shows the small island over which many enslaved people were shipped from the African continent to the Americas. Ströbel lets the palm fronds be blown by an artificial wind created by the two fans. The sadness about the history they have witnessed is inscribed in them. At the same time, they must continue to move, swaying in the wind and still serving and maintaining the image of the romantic, exotic other.

8.

Víctor Cruz & Hugo Portillo, *Tropical sculptures: the possibility of impossibility*, 2024, wood, banana leaves, dimensions variable

Víctor Cruz & Hugo Portillo brings a memory of his native El Salvador to Seoul. His tropical sculptures are not real palm trees but rather attempts at reconstructing the past. They are the possibility of the impossibility: using simple materials, found wood, and banana leaves, they attempt to improvise memories of the Global South. In his deconstruction of the palm tree, a symbol of longing for Western tourists, he uses it merely as a backdrop and prop to create certain moods and evoke longings. What socio-political ideas do these palm trees convey to us? The palm tree functions here as a symbol of touristic (and other) exploitations of the world, but also as an identification factor. It is shipped, replanted, used, changed, but also longingly cared for. But who can afford to take care of nature?

## About the Artists

Regula Dettwiler (b. 1966)

Specialized in drawing, installation, sculpture, and public art, Regula Dettwiler focuses on the artificial nature found in environments ranging from amusement parks to synthetic flowers, which she replicates using old master techniques. Her botanical studies present mass-produced plants as objects of research in an exaggeratedly detailed process, as if exploring a new scientific field. Dettwiler's work subtly critiques the commodification of nature, highlighting how industrially produced plants, with their durability and decorative appeal, alter our interaction with the natural world. Her approach critiques this shift without making overt accusations, inviting viewers to reflect on the artificiality and commercialization of nature in contemporary life. Based in Vienna and Kleinriedenthal, Regula Dettwiler studied art at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and sculpture with Bruno Gironcoli at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. She has held residencies in Chicago, Paris, Montreal, and Japan and presented her work in numerous international exhibitions at Ursulinenkirche, Linz (2020); Stadtgalerie, Saarbrücken (2014); Kunstverein Friedrichshafen (2012) and Kulturforum Austria, Tokyo (2005).

Jongwan Jang (b. 1983)

Jongwan Jang portrays the endless anxiety of human-centered societies and modern humanity, which emphasizes selfish rationality, from a peculiarly warm but cynical perspective. Jang's works combine colorful and seemingly lighthearted images with his astute insights on contemporary society. The ironic landscape maximizes its kitschiness through the use of animal hide, symbolizing the human desire for salvation, the neglect of nature and animals, and foolish, blind faith. In recent years, Jang has held solo exhibitions at FOUNDRY SEOUL, Seoul (2023); Arario Museum In Space, Seoul (2020) and Arario Gallery, Seoul (2017). His work has also been featured in group exhibitions at the 22nd SongEun Art Award, Seoul (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art Busan, Busan (2021); Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul (2021); Buk-Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2021) and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Cheongju (2019).

### Seif Kousmate (b. 1988)

Seif Kousmate is a visual artist who lives and works in Tangier, Morocco. As a self-taught artist, he began his journey into photographic imagery by exploring documentary photography. His lens was focused on capturing the diverse manifestations of marginalization in Africa. His early projects served as a platform for the narratives of post-genocide Rwandan youth, formerly enslaved people in Mauritania (Haratin), and Sub-Saharan migrants in search of a better life in Europe. In Morocco, Kousmate's work revolved around Bujlood celebrations and documented the lives in the Atlas Mountains in the face of climate change. His ongoing photographic series *Waha* واحة, deals with oases and the changes they are facing. Kousmate's artistic practice has evolved over the past decade, now intersecting with contemporary art and photography. His upcoming project explores masculinity and fatherhood, pushing the boundaries of photography into the realm of installation artwork and video art. Kousmate's work has been shown internationally and it includes Contact Photography Festival, Toronto (2023); San José Foto, San José (2023); Foam Museum, Amsterdam (2022); Les Rencontres d'Arles, Arles (2022) and Addis Foto Fest, Addis Ababa (2018). He was awarded the prize of Explorer by National Geographic (2018) and won awards from the Magnum Foundation, and Prince Claus Foundation, and is the recipient of the Prix de la Photographie of Musée du Quai Branly.

### Edith Payer (b. 1975)

The central point in Edith Payer's art practice is to collect and re-contextualize found objects and bulk products. In her installations, she creates scenarios to relativize and satirize common social views and traditional practices. Her most crucial interests are the reflection and discussion of the anthropocentric perspective for evaluating the world, mostly in terms of culture, implying evolutionary schemas through which societies inevitably progress. Her works have been shown in numerous exhibitions at the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo (2024); EKO 9 Triennial of Art and Environment, Maribor (2024); ACF London, London (2016); Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, Havana (2015) and Le Cube - independent art room, Rabat (2014). She participated in residencies in Athens, Greece (2022); Petrozavodsk, Karelia (2019); Šmartno, Slovenia (2018); Shanghai, China (2017); Paliano, Italy (2016); Rabat, Morocco (2012) and Paris, France (2012).

### Víctor Cruz & Hugo Portillo (b. 1978)

Víctor Cruz & Hugo Portillo was born in El Salvador. He works between Austria and El Salvador. After studying International Relations, he graduated from the Friedl Kubelka School of Artistic Photography in Vienna. His award-winning works have already been exhibited internationally and are in several public collections. Víctor Cruz & Hugo Portillo is his artist name. In a play on words, he splits his real name into two so as to incorporate a part of his childhood and youth that was shaped by the upbringing and influence of his late grandfather Víctor Cruz into his artistic practice. The artist is interested in showing a social reality within our stereotypical image of tropical countries and using artistic practice as a means of communicating with the public to create dialogue. Inspired by the life experiences and coping strategies of the communities living in the countryside of El Salvador, Víctor Cruz & Hugo Portillo's work, while capturing the essence of collective responsibility dealing with life's adversities, is not without a touch of black humor and parody that makes the viewer think. His work has been featured in group exhibitions at Museo de Arte de El Salvador, San Salvador (2023); Parallel, Vienna (2021); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018) and the 17th Media Art Biennale WRO, Wroclaw (2017).

### Mi Jung Shin (b.1983)

Mi Jung Shin's works reflect her interest in the demolished sense of place, where only traces of individuals excluded from the grand narrative and their lives remain. She primarily creates videos based on oral histories and historical materials collected through fieldwork and experiments with the construction of micro-narratives within the tension that emerges at the boundary between images and records. She is particularly drawn to recording the lives of individuals who have been forcibly forgotten or erased from modern Korean history, experimenting with the potential of video works through open-ended interpretations. For Mi Jung Shin, the landscape of the nature presented in her works is not just aesthetic object. Instead, it represents an artistic space where forgotten placeness and the temporality of history coexist as one. In the past, Mi Jung Shin has held a solo exhibition at POMA, Seoul (2024); SeMA Bunker, Seoul (2021); space 9, Seoul (2018) and been part of group exhibitions at the Diaspora film festival, Incheon (2024); Space Mirage, Seoul (2024); the 23rd SongEun Art Award, Seoul (2023); Nam-Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul

(2021) and Ottawa Korean Film Festival, Ottawa (2021).

#### Katrin Ströbel (b. 1975)

Katrin Ströbel lives and works in Marseille, France; Stuttgart, Germany; and Rabat, Morocco. Her drawings, site-specific works, and installations are based on a critical questioning of social, cultural, and geopolitical conditions that define our everyday life. Ströbel's work deals with cultural codes and (visual) languages, but also with issues such as colonialism, migration, and displacement, and shows the intricate relationships between geopolitics and the politics of gender. With a critical-ironic view, the artist deconstructs gender relations and female stereotypes in a variety of drawings and collages. Since 2004, the artist has worked and exhibited regularly in Germany, France, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Peru, Australia, and the United States. Her work has been shown internationally and is represented in private and public collections. Katrin Ströbel studied visual art and literature. She holds a PhD in art history. She is a mother. From 2013 to 2023, she held a professorial teaching post at Villa Arson, École nationale supérieure d'art Nice, France. Since 2023, she has been professor at ABK State Academy of Art and Design, Stuttgart, Germany.

#### Roswitha Weingrill (b. 1984)

Roswitha Weingrill is an artist and educator who graduated from the University of Applied Arts in Vienna in 2010. Her works include mixed media pieces, interventions in public space and research-based approaches. Breaking down big global topics into small specific issues has been a crucial strategy for many of her recent projects. She has used salt crystals to capture the specifics of Bad Ischl, an Austrian town where royal glamor is used to deflect from social and ecological hardship. A book project involved women in mineral mining from a secluded Austrian hilltop, whose professional and personal lives have been strongly influenced by several multinational corporations. She dipped various test strips into communal and municipal wells for a project on the accessibility of clean water in Graz. A collaboration with Nellya Dzhamanbaeva combined audio material from interviews about gardening with data models made from various kinds of soils collected in Vienna. Recent projects include exhibitions at Galerija Legat, Belgrade (2024); GPLcontemporary, Vienna (2023); Peter Gaugy Gallery,

Vienna (2023) as well as workshops with Kaeshmaesh, Vienna (2024) and Atelier Schillerstraße, Graz (2023). She is currently researching public fountains in Bregenz and sedimental river materials in the Czech town of Brno.



Opening Hours  
12:00–19:00 (Closed on Mondays)

Admission Fee  
25–64 years: KRW 10,000  
19–24 years, over 65 years,  
Art Pass cardholders: KRW 7,000  
9–18 years: KRW 5,000  
Free: 8 and under, visitors with disabilities,  
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Docent-guided Tours  
Date & Time: Friday–Sunday 14:00, 16:00  
Booking is available both online and on-site

Tired Palm Trees  
July 9 – August 4, 2024

Venue  
The Ground, Art Sonje Center

Artists  
Regula Dettwiler, Jongwan Jang, Seif Kousmate, Edith Payer, Víctor Cruz & Hugo Portillo, Mi Jung Shin, Katrin Ströbel, Roswitha Weingrill

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