A...kademie der bildenden Künste Wien Exhibit Studio

Un Paradiso Amaro/ Bitter Paradise 9 Oct–16 Nov 2021

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"How beautiful it would be if the fragrance of flowers had killed me in my sleep."

Teresa Feodorowna Ries, March 2, 1951, Lugano-Paradiso

How can an exhibition show that forgetting is fabricated? Forgetting is history of injustice that does not pass. *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* is dedicated to the life and work by the Jewish sculptor Teresa Feodorowna Ries (1866–1956). She was one of the few artists of her time whose works were shown in the Vienna Secession, the Venice Biennale and the Glass Palace in Munich. Ries would have liked her work to be appreciated at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna,

where she studied. This recognition was never granted to her during her lifetime.

Artist Valerie Habsburg developed the concept of *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* based on her and Anka Leśniak's extensive research on Ries, which began with the rediscovery of her estate in 2018. With contributions by Anna Bochkova, Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Mika Aya Azagi, Judith Augustinovič, and Sami Nagasaki, the exhibition raises awareness that forgetting has its effects and that responsibility must be taken for the consequences of forgetting.

Curator: Valerie Habsburg Curatorial support: Elke Krasny Artists: Judith Augustinovič, Mika Aya Azagi, Anna Bochkova, Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Sami Nagasaki Film: Valerie Habsburg, Anka Leśniak, Karl Martin Pold Exhibition design: Judith Augustinovič

Opening Fri, 8 Oct 2021, 7 pm

Schillerplatz 3, 1010 Vienna

Exhibit Studio

Opening Times Daily except Monday 10 am – 6 pm · *Free entry* Program for the exhibition and further information at www.akbild.ac.at

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CURATORIAL REFLECTIONS ABOUT UN PARADISO AMARO / BITTER DARADISE by Valerie HABSBURG

The exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* took place on the occasion of the reopening of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna at Schillerplatz after more than four years of renovation. 2021 was also the year in which women were officially admitted to study at the Academy for hundred years. The ceremonial opening of the old building and the re-entry of the students was also the occasion for further celebrations and exhibitions. In total, there were 4 exhibitions that took place in parallel, whereby I would like to mention the exhibition *Hungry of Time* here, as it had a link to the exhibition *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise*. In this exhibition, the historical art collection of the Academy was

Curatorial Statement of Valerie Habsburg (from the booklet accompanying the exhibition Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise)

Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise confronts life in paradise with the pain of the forever present past. Teresa Feodorowna Ries spent the last years of her life in the beautiful Paradiso of Lugano. This place was her exile where she could try to find peace after all her terrible experiences. The entry in the guest book of the Casa S. Birgitta on August 25, 1942, gives only a dark inkling: "After my heavy loss, I found peace and consolation here. Heartfelt thanks. F. Ries."

The artist spent the last years of her life in a place where the world had seemingly not come apart at the seams, where a lake, nestled in a peaceful landscape, gently laps against its shores, and nature breathed life into her. And yet: she could not forget. Her memories almost petrified her; her hands were sealed. Countless letters abound with hints at her struggle to ascertain the whereabouts contrasted and presented with contemporary art in the rooms of the Picture Gallery by the Indian curator trio Raqs Media Collective. From the very extensive collection, a photograph of *The Witch* by Teresa Feodorowna Ries was chosen from the archive, along with many other works. Until this date, however, this one photograph of *The Witch* in the Academy's Archive was not really known. This photograph was taken with a large format camera and is of exceptional quality. It shows the sculpture of *The Witch* before all the suffering and destruction she experienced. On the basis of this photograph, insights into the lost hand and other damages can be gained for the first time. (This photo will be discussed in detail later on).

of her works, which she considered her children. Words, captured on paper, are what remains. They reveal the ghosts of the past. Memory also resides in paradise; it is the shadow of the golden shine. Mercilessly, the golden mirror of the present shows the past.

The grave of a whole life reveals itself. A jumble of stones, broken forever. The shards of a sunken world are the foundation on which this paradise is built.

"Death and *Lucifer* are smashed, that's for sure. I feel particularly sorry for *Lucifer*. I received the Golden Medal for it in the Künstlerhaus after all - as the only lady in Austria."

June 22, 1949

Stories haunt you until you embark on a quest. Found stones are picked up. What emerges is a building, a sculpture, the spirit captured therein. The spirit of an artist, of a time that is no more and yet teaches us so much that is important for the present.

"... and yet I am doing well compared to five million people."

February 4, 1956

The title of the exhibition, Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise, stands for bitterness and pain, beauty and suffering, life and death. Gold as a color and material refers to the supposed splendor of the past. Gold as jewelry, as a symbol of beauty - yet toxic nevertheless. The toxicity of capitalism and the toxicity of the past. Living on the damaged Earth, toxic yesterday held in memory, makes one wonder about the possibility of preserving the past of a generation in the present generation. Is it possible to retrieve the memory's store and continue writing? Can history be shown at all without looking through the glass of the present? The true price of gold is doubtful and relentless. Its value is determined not only by the past but also by the daily influences of the present. Gold represents the torment (of the workers in the mines) and merciless capitalism. "I have great difficulties breathing. Whenever I cough, my chest feels very dry. Like there is dust in my lungs. I want to get rid of it. But it doesn't come out." (Miner in South Africa, deutschlandfunk.de)

You can never get rid of this dust, nor of that of the past. It covers the gold that shines in the present. Not everything can be weighed in gold - not even in art. In the exhibition, gold as a symbol of success, achievement, and triumph refers to all that is past, to forgotten successes, and to the highest of all virtues, love. Gold is one of the treasures in paradise, it cannot be assigned to any specific place. The Garden of Eden is a fenced terrain, and yet it is not clear where it is. However, the bitter paradise can be explored on foot, the fragrance of the past inhaled.

The works, building blocks of an existence, can speak when they are questioned. Silent stone becomes a narrator about time. Is paradise a palace, and is its foundation made of gold? Are the gates covered with dust and reveal themselves only to the seeker? And is not bitterness also of gold, born of suffering and pain? Is it not agony that makes gold shine? Memories blur in the ocean, the spirits drowned long ago.

Description of the exhibition

When you entered the exhibition, you were immediately greeted by the original sculpture of *The Witch* to the toilet at Walpurgis Night by Teresa Feodorowna Ries (TFR). The fact that we were allowed to show this monumental marble sculpture at and in the Academy was unique. Thanks to a loan from the Wien Museum, it was possible for this central work by TFR to remain in the rooms of the Academy. It seemed almost like coming home, as this was the starting point for TFR's idea for this sculpture at Schillerplatz.¹

In this building, over these stairs, TFR walked and describes very impressively in her autobiography how the thoughts about *The Witch* revealed themselves. It was one of her leading encounters with the Academy, the building and the architecture, the students and the ancient works of art in the building. This impression was overwhelming for her and equally overwhelming was becoming famous overnight with her work, *The Witch*. But this work was also torn apart in the newspapers - after all, only a woman could create such a grimace out of noble marble.²

On the free-standing wall directly behind the witch was the inscription "Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise" and a quotation from a letter written by the artist TFR on March 2, 1951. Written here in golden letters was: "How beautiful it would be if the scent of flowers had killed me in my sleep."³

Later, when it became known that a direct thread of *The Witch* led to the neighbouring rooms of the Gemäldegalerie to the exhibition *Hungry of Time* and the research on this photograph hanging on the wall there was immediately started, an almost mystical circumstance emerged. There was a comprehensive series of images of TFR's works in the photo collection of the Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings) at the Academy, and how these photographs came to the Academy could be proven precisely by this letter from 1951.

It can now be assumed that Teresa Feodorowna Ries would have liked to become an honorary member of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and for this reason and as proof of her artistic work she sent these photographs to the Academy. Of course, women were very rare in the list of honorary members and a corresponding letter has unfortunately not been found to date.⁴

Opposite *The Witch* looking out of the Academy window was the work *Little Witch* by Anna Bochkova on a golden plinth made especially for this exhibition. These plinths were also located in the room behind the free-standing wall and the exhibition was presented on them.

The juxtaposition of *The Witch* and *The Little Witch* opened up a possibility of time, the time in between and a space. In this space, questions arise as to how the sculpture is dealt with today? What is the history of the witch in art and what does it tell us? How do contemporary artists interpret the witch and her story?

The text on the base of the marble sculpture was also intended to point to the way we deal with this witch, which has been severely damaged by the suffering of history and has now been restored. It was a text written by Felix Salten and a statement at the time about the artist's work. The curatorial decision to delete individual letters from this text as a reference to forgetting (being made), disappearance and erasure from history supported the possibilities of interpretation and contemplation by the visitors. The fact that this work, The Witch, has received the inscription with the reference to the questions of restitution for the first time in the entire history is also essential and of great significance here.⁵ In the exhibition where it was shown before, such an inscription was not yet present and it was thus another historical moment of the sculpture of The Witch.

On the back of the wall, the work *Kittel* by Judith Augustinovič was displayed and projected onto it with a slide projector, the original handwritten testament of TFR could be seen, felt and read for the first time. The smock, an artistic interpretation of the sculptor's working smock, the garment in which TFR depicted herself as an artist and sculptor in her portraits and was an important garment for her, became the presentation and projection surface of its wearer and her legacy. Next to it in a column-like display case lay the original will bedded on a fabric with a floral print. The will presented itself here not legibly, but as an object. Likewise, in the booklet that accompanied the exhibition, the first page of the handwritten will was also right in the middle. The exhibition as a place for an opening of the will and space for possible readability was an important basic idea for the curatorial questions and the conception.

When you walked through the exhibition, you found the works of all the participating artists. They stood there like little islands. The *Witch's Spaces / Teresa Spaces* by Anna Bochkova spread out at the feet of the work *Kittel* and the showcase with the original will. Like little sentinels, they stood there and told about the history of TFR. Be it a house that dealt with life in exile, flight and loss or the witch's tower where being locked up was legible. But also non-existent things and dried flowers showed themselves to the viewer.

Directly against the wall, yet seemingly around the corner, was the work *Declaration* by Sami Nagasaki. A work, an object, that contains a line of an original handwritten letter from TFR, in which she gives advice to a student as a teacher. It is a document of TFR's concern to introduce other women to the possibility of sculpture. But Sami Nagasaki also deals here with questions of visibility, legibility and presentation. Framework conditions are deliberately deconstructed and place themselves in the way of the viewer, in the space and invite reflection.

One step further, on the right-hand side of the floor, was an installation with the video work *Skin / Stone* by Mika Aya Azagi, which deals with the material stone, being an artist, forgetting and transience, and also burial. Directly afterwards, but at a distance, the works *Three Faced Goddess* and *Unburied* by Mika Aya Azagi were projected onto the wall as an installation with two slide projectors and sound. The sound here, the dull rumbling or rolling of the stones, seemed almost meditative. This work also deals with the artist's personal connections to TFR and its history. But it also recalls the fact that TFR has not received a gravestone to this day and that her grave in the Jewish cemetery in Lugano does not have a stone. But a stone that is of such great importance here.

The connection between body, earth and stone and the decay, the natural cycle and the doubts speak to the viewer.

Again one step further, almost around the corner, stood a white block of marble. Unhewn, not shaped and yet. It is a stone that was dedicated by the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in collaboration with Roland Kollnitz as a possible gravestone. This stone, which at first glance does not appear to have been worked, was nevertheless already shaped. The first sculptural traces came from the sculptor Ulrike Truger and the stone came from her studio stock, some of which she donated to the Academy's sculpture workshop. In the exhibition and as a first step towards the creation of a gravestone for TFR, TFR's poem "The Marble Block" was projected with a slide projector.⁶

It is also important to mention the fact that it was a conscious curatorial and artistic decision that was chosen for showing the photographed original materials from the archive - a photograph as image and document, as proof of existence and witness to the original.

A few steps further on, visitors could see the large-scale installation The spell with scissors by Anka Leśniak. Here, old scissors moved almost magically when the visitor moved, in front of the video work The March for The Witch projected onto the wall. The hands of the female sculptors, the students in the sculpture studios in the Prater from the Academy today, could be seen in this video. The sound is the rhythmic sounds of carving the stones, composed to a piece of music, the sound of the sculptors working while they carve the stone with the sculpting tools. Also as an island in the room are two old Hantarex screens, arranged into a column. On them are two video works The Witch and The Reconstruction of The Witch by Anka Leśniak, where she deals with questions around the sculpture of The Witch of TFR, the restoration, the Disappeared Hand and

a possibility of reconstructing this hand. Interviews with restorers, pictures of the red spray-painted and demolished witch, create a queasy feeling. What was done to *The Witch*?

At the end of this retrospective mental tour through this room of the exhibition Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise, there is now a tall fragile narrow golden pedestal with the work Book of Sculptures by Valerie Habsburg. A book can be seen and touched, and can thus be felt, leafed through and palpated. An old wine-red velvet photo album with brass ornaments reveals a skeleton inside. The skeleton on which a hundred years ago there were other photos. Now they have disappeared, leaving holes and scars. On the individual skeletal sheets of the old photo album are black and white photographs of TFR's works that can be found and still exist today. These black and white photographs appear colorless, as a reference to yesterday and disappearance. But the gold and velvet point to a splendor that remains and a treasure, even if it seems almost bony and empty.7

Next to this work hangs on the wall the work The Measurement of Time by Valerie Habsburg. An acrylic glass box, its contents a black and white photo of a self-portrait of TFR with countless torn old analogue colour photographs. This self-portrait of Teresa is a historically important photograph, as it represents one of the first artistic self-portrayals and representations through photography - far ahead of many artists known today. The posture of TFR's hands opens up many possibilities of meaning and interpretation. The torn colour photographs - called snippets by Valerie Habsburg stand for the pain of passing, forgetting and erasing, but also for working with memories, temporality and working with an archive in itself. Discarded memories manifest themselves in torn fragments to a new meaning and generate an image that is changeable.

A second location and showcase for the *Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise* exhibition was also the Director's Room in the Academy's library. This historic room was already the library director's room in TFR's time. It was here that the later director of the library, Hans Ankwicz-Kleehofen, sat and copied TFR's letter of application - the first letter of application by a woman as professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 1931.⁸ Of course, it 9 was not acted upon at the time and it disappeared into the archives until it was unearthed through research by Valerie Habsburg.

The library of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna is in possession of one of the world's last copies of TFR's autobiography *The Language of Stone*, published in 1928.

Texts, a video work on computer with the correspondence between TFR and Mark Twain, excerpts from other works by the participating artists in paper form and with code to scan and invite into the virtual space showed up as an installation on an old desk of the Academy. It is the workplace of artistic research, where the visitor could also take a seat and linger - whether to read, think or work. The original book The Language of Stone was also on the table on the occasion of this special event and could be looked at with one's own hands. Other working materials that gave insight into the research project and the TFR Archive were also on display.9 Like paperweights, but not suitable as such, where small models of the participating artists' works in the exhibition.

On the wall on the occasion of the exhibition was a large-format photograph of TFR's handwritten list of works from 1938, which she made shortly before her escape and the preservation, protection and donation of her works.¹⁰

This list of works, the writing of TFR and the traces that can be found here opened up many good conversations during the duration of the exhibition, and this workplace and space were also an important place for courses, lectures or even interviews about the project. The students were thus able to be very close to all this and to feel the often invisible archive work. A beautiful aspect is that this large-format photo is still there today in this place on this wall and in this room. Traces inscribe themselves - in the building and stand for a possible tomorrow.

exhibition The was accompanied by the launch of the homepage https:// teresafeodorownaries.com/ and the Instagram presence tfr_archive. Information, readings, archival material and interviews were also shown on the Academy's online platforms in the run-up to and during the exhibition. The participating artists, curators and curatorial support gave readings Gartenpalais Liechtenstein from TFR's autobiography The Language of Stone in the summer of 2021 and these Lectures in the Garden were recorded on film and shown online. The nonresident artists recorded their readings in Israel, Poland, Brazil and Italy. These small pieces can still be found online today and stand on their own and as a trace for the history that is now also inscribed in the virtual space.

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Notes

¹See in the autobiography *Die Sprache des Steines*, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library.

² Ibidem.

³ Letter from Teresa Feodorowna Ries, 2. März 1951, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ÖNB Sammlung von 4 Handschriften und alten Drucken, Autogr. 1121/14-2.

⁴ Bettina Henkel initiated the application for honorary membership of TFR at the Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna. The application was presented to the Senate and Valerie Habsburg gave a presentation. The Senate unanimously approved the application and forwarded it to the Rectorate.

⁵ https://www.wienmuseum.at/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/Restitutionsbericht_2019.pdf.

⁶ "Poem Marble Block" by Teresa Feodorowna Ries, TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg.

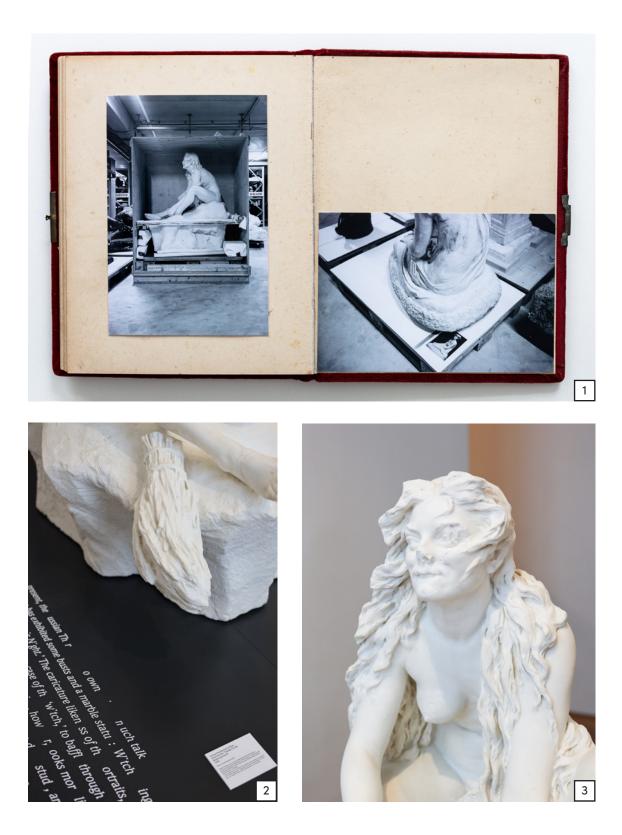
⁷ See also in the autobiography *Die Sprache des Steines*, p.11, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library.

⁸ Verwaltungsakt 1931, GZ 963, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Archive.

⁹ Working materials on the desk were: documents of TFR Archive; poems by TFR; research documents and 10 writings by participating artists; sketches by Anna Bochkova; Ries_Twain by Sami Nagasaki; original book *Die Sprache des Steines* by TFR from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, University Library; *Spezialschule - Zur Geschichte des Bildhauereigebäudes der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien*, Hrsg. Simone Bader, Katharina Hölzl, Jakob Krameritsch, Fabian Leitgeb, Emanuel Mauthe, Florian Mayr, Bianca Phos, Oktober 2019 by Schleebrügge Editor; exhibit models, prints of further related art works by Anka Leśniak; article published by Mika Aya Azagi in Israel, photographs with works from TFR.

¹⁰ Original Testament of Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Pro Memoria (certified donation to the Israeli National Museum in Jerusalem), TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg.

	Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise Werke
A	Teresa Feodorowna Ries - Hexe bei der Toilette für die Walpurgisnacht, 1895, Courtesy Wien Museum Das Podest ist von der Ausstellung Im Schatten von Bambi. Felix Salten entdeckt die Wiener Moderne, 15.10.2020 bis 19.09.2021, Wien Museum MUSA, übernommen. Diese Skulptur ist zur Zeit Gegenstand der Provenienzforschung des Wien Museums. Recherchen zur Klärung der Besitzverhältnisse sind im Auftrag der Wiener Restitutionskommission in Gange.
В	Anna Bochkova - Hexe, 2020
С	Teresa Feodorowna Ries - Handschriftliches Testament, 1941, Courtesy TFR-Archive
D	Judith Augustinovič - Kittel, & Valerie Habsburg - Projektion Testament TFR, 2021
E F	Valerie Habsburg - <i>Die Messung der Zeit</i> , 2019 - <i>Book of Sculptures</i> , 2020
G H I	Anka Leśniak - <i>The spell with scissors</i> , 2021 - <i>March for the Witch</i> , 2019 - The Witch, 2016 - The Reconstruction of the Witch, 2019
J	Valerie Habsburg - Marmorblock, 2021. Projektion des Gedichtes Der Marmorblock von TFR
K L M	Mika Aya Azagi - unburied, 2019 - three-faced goddess, 2019 - skin/stone, 2019
Ν	Sami Nagasaki - Declaration, 2021. Originalbrief von TFR
0	Anna Bochkova - Witch`s Spaces/Teresa Spaces, 2021



1. Valerie Habsburg, *Book of Sculptures*, 2020. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

2. Exhibition View. Base of The Hexe with erased inscription and information on restitution. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

3. Exhibition View. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Hexe bei der Toilette für die Walpurgisnacht. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg



4. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel* with Last Will, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

5. Valerie Habsburg, *The Measurement of Time*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

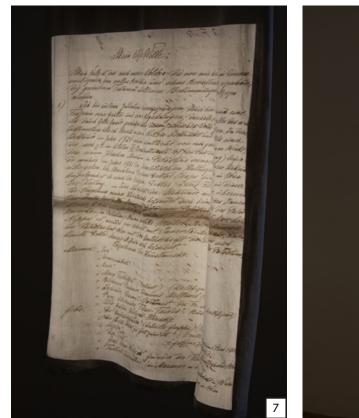


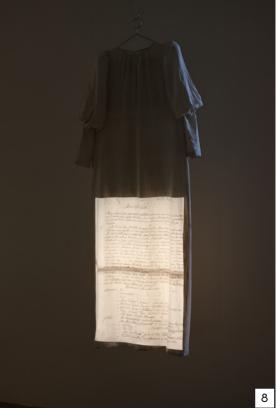


6. Teresa Feodorowna Ries in Arbeitskittel. TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021

7. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel* with Last Will (detail), 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

8. Judith Augustinovič and Valerie Habsburg, *Kittel* with Last Will, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg





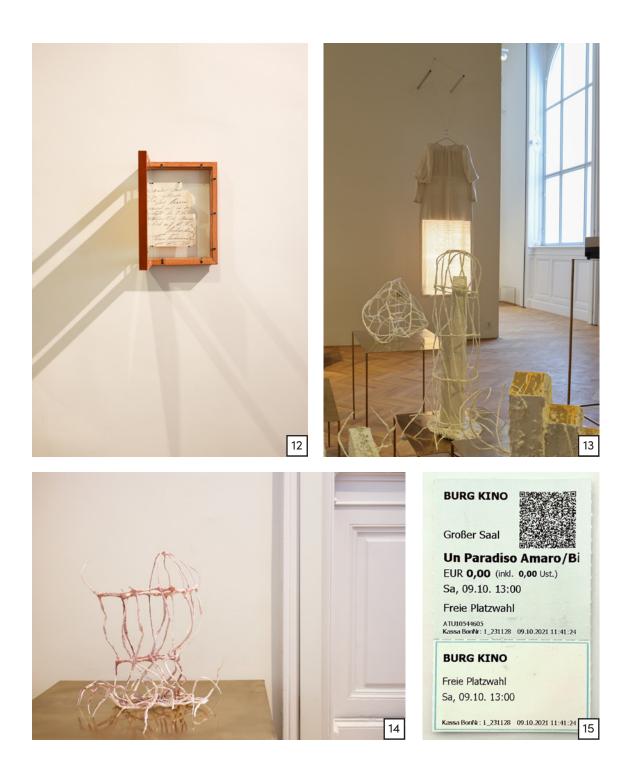
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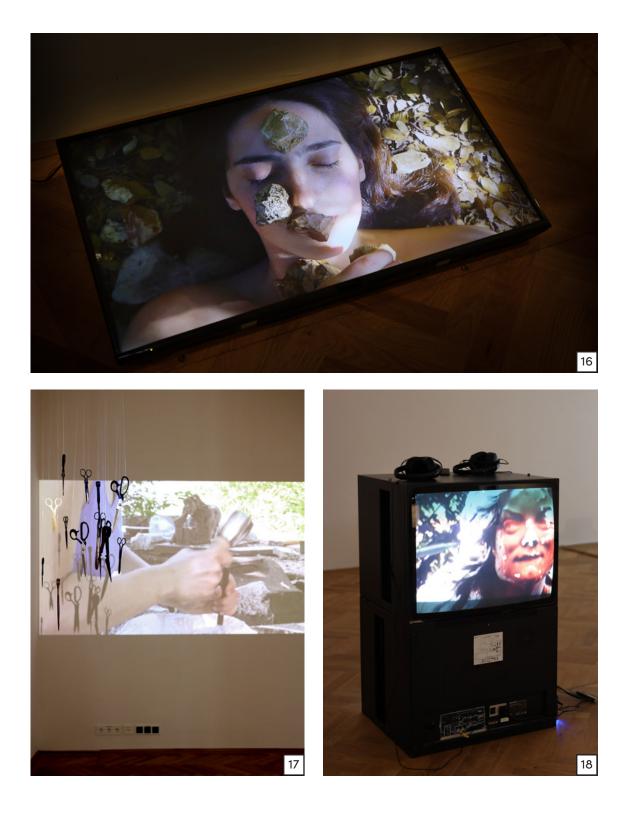
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9. Testament (original, page 1). TFR Archive10. Un Paradiso Amaro / Bitter Paradise (short film, ticket), 2021. TFR Archive

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- 11. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Werkliste (page 2). TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021
- 12. Sami Nagasaki, Declaration, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg
- 13. Exhibition View with Kittel and Witch's Spaces. TFR Archive. Photo: Valerie Habsburg
- 14. Teresa Feodorowna Ries, Werkliste (page 1). TFR Archive by Valerie Habsburg, 2021
- 15. Anna Bochkova, Witch's Spaces, 2020. Photo: Valerie Habsburg





16. Mika Aya Azagi, *Skin Stone*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

17. Anka Leśniak, *The Reconstruction of the Witch*, 2019. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

18. Anka Leśniak, *The Spell with Scissors*, 2021. Photo: Valerie Habsburg

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