

The Castle

Elinor Sahm

Elinor Sahm often refers in her works to elements from her complex family history, and uses them to formulate questions about to identity, memory and place. Sahm is the daughter of an Israeli mother and a German father who met and married in Israel. Her father, a member of a large Protestant family, is a German journalist who came to Israel in the 1970s, where he met her mother. For most of her life, Sahm maintained close ties with the German branch of her family and often spent family vacations in Germany. Among other things, she carries with her memories of her visits to the "family castle" - a castle owned by the Von Reden dynasty, to which her paternal grandmother belonged, located in the town of Hastenbeck near Hanover. In 2017, after her parents' divorce, the relationship with the father was severed, and so were his daughter's ties with his German family.

The starting point for the exhibition "The Castle" is the artist's visit to the family castle last summer, or we should say: her attempt to visit the castle. To Sahm's surprise, her appeals to her family members in Germany were not answered, and even though she went to the castle and insisted on meeting one of its owners, her father's aunt, she was not allowed inside. From the little information she was able to glean, she learned that the castle was divided into apartments rented to foreign families, some of them Muslim.

The cold treatment she received surprised her in light of the direct blood and the warm childhood ties with family members. It seems that during this visit, precisely on the verge of moving her place of residence to Berlin, Sahm began to understand and digest the alienation and foreignness of the family without the mediation of the German father. The expectation of feeling an affinity to a place or a sense of family belonging did not materialize. During this visit, she began to process the loss of the fantasy of belonging to a warm and accepting German aristocratic family, of "her own" family castle that she could visit as she pleased. Her hope to be welcomed in the castle with an open heart, to share magical stories or memories hidden in personal belongings left at the place, has been dashed.

In the exhibition, Sahm deals with the dream and its breakdown. On the one hand, she presents a longing look that imagines the interior of the castle and its past splendor. On the other hand, she sketches with a controlled, inquisitive, and nostalgia-free look the structure's envelope and the changes that have taken place in it over the years. Since she was not allowed to enter the castle, she found herself circling it again and again from the outside, looking for an opening to peek into. The result is a series of pencil and graphite drawings that capture architectural fragments of the ancient and magnificent building on its many contemporary cracks: historic stone decorations alongside new construction additions, electrical cables winding on stone walls, a gutter pipe coming out of the mouth of a sculpted gargoyle, mailboxes bearing foreign surnames on a wooden door Ancient and more. Sahm as if appropriating the place for herself in the very act of drawing, embedding its details in the graphite on the paper as well as in her imprinted body. In the act of art and creation, she recreates the castle on paper and, at the same time, claims and establishes her ownership of it.

In the center of the exhibition is a large-scale wooden sculpture simulating the front of the castle. The two-dimensional sculpture is flat and does not allow entry or inclusion. The wooden legs on which it is supported depict a theater setting, an opaque and depthless facade that creates the illusion of a castle. His building materials are recycled planks, pieces of wood that carry with them a history of uses and past lives. These stand in well-planned contrast to the new wooden beams from which the back of the statue is made, emphasizing the flat appearance of its setting and the gap between past and present.

On another wall in the exhibition is a wallpaper that Sahm drew herself, which serves as the only glimpse in the exhibition into the blocked and inaccessible interior of the castle. The pattern is a hybrid between the original wallpaper model in the castle, as revealed in a minor motion picture filmed there in 1967, and contemporary additions. The hunting scenes that Sahm recognized in the original wallpaper (a hunter, a predatory lion, a deer and a bull) were added symbols that represent for her the story of the separation from the castle and her exclusion from the family and German history. Among the images: Capricorn and Virgo - astrological signs representing her late brother, who never visited the castle, and her Israeli mother, who was naturally excluded from her after the divorce; The symbol of the nobility of the German family and a short-line red Christian cross.

The exhibition is marked by a new documentary-like video work tracing Sahm's attempts to visit the castle. Sahm records her way to the castle with her cell phone camera, her search around the building for an opening to enter or a person to talk to, as well as suspicious fragments of conversation with the owner of the castle, her distant aunt, who refuses to be photographed or allow her to enter the place. The frantic photography with a mobile phone camera, the fragmented conversation with the distant aunt, and the jumpy video editing - produce a photographic language identified with social networks; A language that stands in contrast to the splendor of the past that is still evident in the castle and contrasts it with a changing world and with an alienated contemporary reality.

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