



Markéta Garai: With(out) Care

The exhibition will take place from 4 April to 6 June 2023 at the Artwall gallery on the Kpt. Jaroš and Edvard Beneš Embankment

The exhibition With(out) Care is about the decriminalization of pleasure, the ecological impact of the global flower trade, and the relationship between the privileged and the marginalized artist. The title in Czech is based on a combination of the words "care" and "safety" and refers to feeling unsafe and without care – a common experience of those working in the sex industry. In visually compelling photographs, the artist creates still-lives combining waste from a flower shop with objects discarded from nightclub dressing rooms. The exhibition culminates in a portrait of Karim, a queer artist living on the margins of society with traumatic experiences related to sex work. The flowers adorned with piercings can be seen as a celebration of erotic pleasure, but they also reference the tradition of the memento mori. Their fragile and sometimes apparently wilting beauty suggests human vulnerability. The bodies of plants and humans are symbolically connected and at the mercy of wanton consumption. The ecological dimension of the exhibition is based on the fact that the artist used flowers in the photographs that would otherwise have ended up in a rubbish dump.

Markéta Garai rejects the labelling and stigmatisation of sex workers. In an empathetic way, she opens up themes of control over one's own body in the context of sex work. She draws on her artistic research, during which she experienced first-hand the work of a nightclub dancer. This experience influences her work, which is both critical and sensitive at the same time. The artist herself adds: "If we don't want to stigmatise, we shouldn't put people in the sex industry in restrictive boxes. I tried to portray a person with experience of sex work without objectifying them."

In the Czech Republic, the provision of erotic services operates in a legal vacuum. Prostitution is neither prohibited nor permitted by law, which in practice means that those who practice it are not protected from stigmatisation or harassment by customers, the public or state authorities. The With(out) Care exhibition contributes to the debate on this long-standing debt to sex workers and highlights the need for consistent decriminalisation. The main reason for reframing sex work, however, should not be to control the people who do it and tax their income, but a real change in the moralising social attitude. For only in an environment where sex work is seen as any other form of livelihood will it be possible to provide effective protection, safety and care for those who do it.

About the artist:

Markéta Garai graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Her work has dealt with themes of sexuality and the stereotyping of women as objects of the male gaze, sexual violence and the stigmatization of people working in the sex industry. Currently, she focuses on the interconnection of embodiment and spirituality, and is dedicated to writing and therapeutic practice.

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