

## **Corner College at UNTERTAGE im Waldhuus best of visarte zürich & guests**

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Waldhuus, Kurhausstrasse 18, 8032 Zürich

Corner College präsentiert Arbeiten von **Johanna Bruckner**,  
**Anne-Laure Franchette**, **Milva Stutz** und **Katharina Swoboda**

### **Anne-Laure Franchette**

#### ***Archéologie du chantier***

*2017. Construction site separators. Metal poles for temporary roadwork fencing, invasive plants in resin*

*Archéologie du chantier* is a sculptural ensemble made of metal poles for temporary roadwork fencing cast in a concrete circular base. The gaps made to hold barriers serve as containers for elements molded in artificial resin that contains frozen weed plants.

The work embodies the fascination of the artist to experiment with industrial and synthetic/polymeric materials. The artist's interest is based not only in their materiality, material qualities and their aesthetics values, but also on what they represent, as symbolic significant in the urban environment. The work can be seen as an assemblage of immaterial and material layers, interwoven desires and projections into the material qualities of the materials themselves. The work exposes a sacral anatomy of invisible structures and mimics some similarities between categorising system of labour and the taxonomy of plants, in a critical fashion. The poles, which are usually deeply in the ground, now stand up on display like an iceberg or a boat out of the water revealing its hull, which usually remains invisible under the water. The artist digs them out of the ground to transform them into performative structures, a kind of sacral objects that symbolize the current fast urban restructuring. They hold the possibility of talking about the categories and hierarchies they contain in themselves, being fabricated and produced for specific industrial needs. The artist shifts them to a new plasticity that offers new social stratifications to transform them into unexpected forms of critical archaeology, digging social layers and giving insight into the process of improvements of the urban space by reason, like reducing the noise or expanding the city roads. The work is a reflection on how, in the spectrum of labor and plants, some similarities can be seen between the social categories and their projection onto plants, in a context that renders labor visible or invisible, such as the night shifts on construction sites. The work draws on her personal memory of evenings of her childhood, when she visited construction sites with her father, as well as the construction workers whose labor is a leftover of industrial working class histories in the landscape of contemporary creative flexible cities.

The performative value of the work reminds the viewer about the performance of the construction workers that takes place during the night – a spatio-temporal location often connected to blocking the traffic and redirecting it, with artificial lights illuminating the streets. The body

of construction workers in their uniforms who anonymously re-enact the continuous transformations of the urban restructuring process in the city. The archaeology of this invisibility excavates the base and supporting structures that make and pave every possible movement in the urbanity, on which the incredible infrastructure of contemporary urbanism strives.

If the uniformity of the construction workers is a symbol of gentrification and of how the city continually changes in front of our eyes, it is also a mark of work and labor at the lower end of the career ladder. The sculpture spans the hierarchy of art techniques and the differentiation between art and craft, between low and high art, as well as skilled vs. deskilled labor, precious and ordinary materials. The artist is interested in what is designed not to be beautiful, but useful, takes it for its aesthetic qualities and utility, as well as for what it represents.

The artist inserts artificial amber into the steel holders, thus creating a fake archaeology, or artefacts embedding frozen collected plants from building sites in Zurich. Their transparency, together with the warm gold pigment, gives additional 'glamour' to the insignificance and uselessness of the weeds. The artificial residue imitates natural amber – a fossilized tree resin, valued as a gemstone and made into a variety of decorative objects and jewelry.

The fake archaeological items of *Archéologie du chantier* presuppose the idea of resurgence, being a metaphor of plants that grow freely as they pop up in-between the small crack in the concrete and asphalt. In this specific work, the artist uses the plants rather as a metaphor, than as botanical knowledge. The work is a critical expression of our ways of seeing and categorizing the natural world, and the way that labor and work are categorized in their turn. The creeping plants show the power of nature to overcome the cities and adapt. With this sculptural ensemble, the artist aims to turn the big topics into small objects, to cut across the big discourse and fold it into small details in order to shift the way of looking. It is a critical performativity of the fast categorizing glance that contains in itself the whole range of categories and their discriminating boundaries and lack of empathy and recognition within the mechanism of constructing value and exclusion – an archaeological practice that excavates the geological layers of the construction of sociality, like upper, middle and lower classes, and how work, labor, plants are signified by these categories.

*Text: Dimitrina Sevova*