

Opening Sunday 4 May - from 3 to 6 PM
Exhibition on view until 22 June 2025

Open: from Thu - Sun from 2 -6 PM and by appointment

Maria Sawizki

Tales of Walks in the Desert: on becoming hyperportable

According to the first law of thermodynamics, energy can neither be created nor destroyed, it can only be converted from one form to another. In other words, everything that seems lost, is reappearing somewhere, albeit invisible.

The introduction to Maria Sawizki's (*1991, Barnaul, RSFSR) multi-channel audiovisual installation *Tales of Walks in the Desert: on becoming hyperportable* poses cryptic riddles that are written in a visual form reminiscent of code during a five-minute countdown. The viewer's gaze rotates back and forth between four screens on four different walls. While time seems to run out and several puzzles appear and disappear, no solutions to them come forth — or can be reached — as they are conceived as koan-like thought experiments¹. They are made to provide a context but resist the attempt to suggest any narrative. One of the riddles reads, for example:

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"If(code.isComplete()){      Body.decompose();  
  //TODO (law): what with the mind?  
}"
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In her works, Maria Sawizki makes use of various media: Found objects which she employs in performances — aiming at revealing an essence and inherent meaning in them; written or spoken language, in several different tongues — Russian, English and German; poetry; soundscape and moving image. Many of the objects Sawizki uses as well as the recordings she collects in her personal archive, re-appear — in different forms — throughout several of her works. Sometimes she treats a quotation — essentially a found piece of language — as just that: As a linguistic objet trouvé of sorts, that can be taken up, questioned and reused:

"It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." — *Tales of Walks in the Desert: on becoming hyperportable* takes this famous parable, which appears in both the Quran and the Bible as its point of departure.

The needle's eye can serve as a metaphor for a passage or portal, like the image on the invitation card and the made-up word 'hyperportable'². On the back of the card, all practical information about the exhibition is written in Russian, Dutch, English and German. Anyone who speaks more than one of these languages will immediately notice inaccuracies in the translation of the title. In the four different tongues, it assumes four slightly differing meanings. Only in the English version – which has served as a working title for over two years, does it contain any reference to storytelling, speaking of 'Tales'. As the realisation of the final artwork approached, and the additional titles were developed, the idea that a story was being told was omitted in favour of the content of the work itself.

The four screens of Maria Sawizki's work at LLS Paleis are oriented towards the four points of the compass. The video that unfurls on these screens consists of recordings whose relation might appear unclear at first but proves, at the same time, uncannily evident. One long standing image shows several slightly moving sewing needles, pierced deeply into skin — which the artist thinks of here as a desert, using and asserting her own body as landscape. The work unfolds the complex potential meanings and implications of the archetypal desert; its dual symbolic potential as both an empty, seemingly calm space and a saturated, fraught one — as a place of

¹ A koan is an anecdote or a riddle without a solution, used in Zen Buddhism to show the fallacy of logical reasoning.

² Furthermore, the spelling of the neologism 'hyperportable' also contains the word 'portal' hidden within it.

vastness — one of digging — a dry place and also one where there is oil — as a site of extraction — a dumpster — and not the least, as a philosophically, and spiritually charged, potentially sacred site of challenge.

The video work is conceived by the artist as a mental flow, representing a journey through a needle's eye. Coming from sculpting and having turned to less material media, Sawizki seems to ask: How to generate value that can fit through the eye of a needle? In an earlier work from 2023, titled *Nadelöhr* (German for 'eye of the needle'), she has worked with the theme of the famous parable already. It is a video that shows the artist repeatedly climbing through a small hole in a wall that she only just seems to fit through. She enters the frame, approaches the hole, climbs into it, through it — and jumps. This is how she exits the frame — seemingly falling — before reappearing shortly after, to repeat the same choreography anew. The work was exhibited in FAAR in 2023, in the same space where the activity of climbing through the hole in the wall was recorded.

The moment of falling into, or down, a hole might bring notions of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland to mind. Through the repeated gesture, the loop, the work potentially also evokes Nietzsche's concept of the eternal recurrence of the same.³ This interpretation can be emphasised by the reappearance that the images of *Nadelöhr* make when Sawizki incorporates them here into *Tales of Walks in the Desert*: on becoming hyperportable. The artist refers to her archive — analog and digital, consisting of objects, notes and recordings — that she draws from, as her 'compost'. Again and again, she methodically ploughs and sifts through it, bringing things to the surface, for reuse. Consulting her own repository, in which the lines of documenting lived life and art blur, Maria Sawizki generates auto-referential material that seems to get richer — concentrated, or fortified — with every appearance it makes, in a process like simmering something down to its essence.

In one sequence, the camera records text fragments written by hand onto a wall: "Wie schäme ich mich meines Steigens" (...) "und Stolperns" — A quote from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, German for: "How ashamed I am of my climbing and stumbling!", spoken by a youth, addressing Zarathustra. This might be read as hinting at the *modus operandi* of the artist.

In many ways, Sawizki's work seems to speak of gravity, bringing together images of jumping (up and down), of falling, floating, climbing, hanging, walking, pulling, dragging and lifting. The camera employs a bird's-eye view: a tub filled with water and several small glass bottles resembles an eye. The benches for the exhibition at LLS Paleis are made in the shape of a (needle's) eye, as well. Together with the motifs of the presence of her daughter in the picture, the desert, and the needle, the eye is a recurring form in Sawizki's oeuvre — both within the recordings and the physical objects she works with. The parable of the camel and the needle, and a certain colour code can be named as further elements that repeatedly attract the artist, and which then appear in various ways in (several of) her works.

Visitors enter the exhibition space through a neon yellow thread curtain that closes off the room. Neon is a signalling colour used for protection and visibility, one of profound pragmatic importance (eg Mason's plumb line).

The recurring elements in Sawizki's work can be seemingly 'worthless' items, too — even such found in the rubbish, as the tub was, to which great value can then be attached. The tub is both physically on display in the exhibition and appears several times in the images of the installation: Holding water, being dragged over the floor, and — in a decisive, long and recurring moment, it appears as a vessel broken into pieces. The object on display at LLS Paleis carries the traces of the unrevealed incident. It silently tells of holding, breaking, mending and reappearing.

Thanks to the artist, Youniss Ahamad, Tom Blondeel, Benny Boogers, Kato Bouckaert, Dora Brams, Elias Cafmeyer, Wim Catrysse, Matthias Hellemans, Emilia Keller, Lucia Mrakovcic, Ria Pacquée, Mariami Tsotadze, Rune Tuerlinckx, Laura Vandenbroucke, Pascal Willekens.

LLS Paleis is subsidized by the Flemish government and sponsored by Vidi-Square and GHYSEL & DE LOMBAERDE accountancy & fiscaliteit. For this project we received funding from the city of Antwerp

³ The idea of the eternal recurrence from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* refers to a complete affirmation of all of life's (joy- and sorrowful) aspects, which can be tested by applying the idea that everything could ultimately repeat itself.