Tobias Rehberger

“Sunny-side up” is the notion of expanding and altering the hierarchies of culture: What is the relationship between plants as landscape and plants as art?

Tobias Rehberger has designed three fried-egg-shaped planters for the terraces of the UC Berkeley Art Museum. These non-naturalistic gardens form small, semiprivate spaces in which visitors can gather, sit or recline on beds of grass, snack on fruits, vegetables, and herbs planned by the artist to create delectable combinations, and smell flowers. ‘Various fruit-growing plants—banana, camu-camu, and coffee—grade—should participants from view Rehberger is creating areas of private space (the planters) in a larger public space (the balconies of the museum). The sense of privacy, however, can also be deceptive. As viewers ascend the terraces to engage with different planters, they will be able to see into those on lower levels. The artist is in a position of control regarding ownership of space. Knowing that the museum is a public institution supported by private funds, he asks both how public and how private is the space of the museum. As a means of testing these perhaps arbitrary constructs, he encourages people to experience basic human needs usually fulfilled in private in the public space of the institution. Thus people meet others’ effort toward reestablishing a physical and visceral connection between people is particularly relevant now as one aspect of technology is often privileging virtual over physical interaction.

Central to “Sunny-side up” is the notion of expanding and altering one’s perspective. The distance between the artist and his subject or product is not really being sure what one wants to experience a gap that forces a decision about what perspective one is attempting to fill a “black hole” with human contact. Rehberger intends the viewer to experience a gap that forces a decision about what perspective one wants to take on the installation; another version will arise from standing in front of the installation and not really being sure what one can or cannot do. Questions posed by this project can inform how one approaches any artwork, as well as facilitate a shift in the way that people see and think about the hierarchies of culture. What is the relationship between plants as landscape and plants as art?”
Tobias Rehberger was born June 2, 1961, in Leipzig, Germany. Rehberger studied with Thomas Ribitzky and Max Bill at the University of Arts, Chur, Switzerland, where he received a Masters of Fine Arts in 1985. Currently, he lives and works in Frankfurt and Berlin. Tobias Rehberger is supported by the Council MATRIX Endowment Fund, and anonymous donors. MATRIX is supported by Phyllis Wattis, Ann M. Hatch, the California Arts Council, the UAM Natural Resources and Oracle Landscape.

Rehberger’s use of chance—an element that pervades the installation, from the successful growth of the plants to the interactions of the people inside the planter—has of course an historical precedent dating back to Dada and Surrealism. Chance was formalized as an art medium in the late 1950s and 1960s with Allan Kaprow’s Happenings, in which he assembled all the elements—people, objects, music, and text—and the resulting creation happened as well, as with John Cage’s works made in relation to consulting the I-Ching. The development of installation and conceptual art, on the other hand, introduced the use of many alternative materials. In the “land (or earth) art” movement, soil, vegetation, and landscape were employed in an attempt to renew art’s relationship to nature. Rehberger, in contrast, is more interested in imposing a decorative and functional element—people, objects, music, and text—and the resulting creation happens as well, as with John Cage’s works made in relation to consulting the I-Ching. The development of installation and conceptual art, on the other hand, introduced the use of many alternative materials. In the “land (or earth) art” movement, soil, vegetation, and landscape were employed in an attempt to renew art’s relationship to nature. Rehberger, in contrast, is more interested in imposing a decorative and functional element—people, objects, music, and text—and the resulting creation happens as well, as with John Cage’s works made in relation to consulting the I-Ching. The development of installation and conceptual art, on the other hand, introduced the use of many alternative materials. In the “land (or earth) art” movement, soil, vegetation, and landscape were employed in an attempt to renew art’s relationship to nature. Rehberger, in contrast, is more interested in imposing a decorative and functional

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