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**Hevea Act 6:
An Elastic Continuum
Bethan Hughes**

11.10.2024–18.01.2025



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Mi–Fr 12.00–18.00 | Sa 11.00–15.00

Hevea Act 6: An Elastic Continuum Bethan Hughes

Visitors Text

Dandelion – Ger. Löwenzahn; syn.: Löwenmaul. Milchstock. Milchschock. Milchblume. Milchzahn. Milchdistel. Michstengel. Rahmstock. Kuhblume. Ringlesstock. Ringlesbusch. Ringelblume. Pappel(-blume). Sonnenwärme. Sonnenwurm. Märzenstock. Märzenbusch. Märzenblume. Maienschopf. Markdistel. Hummelblume. Rotzmücken. Schmalzblume. Brunzblume. Kettenblume. Laternlein. Lichtlein. Blaseblume – Löwenzahn.

Hevea Act 6: An Elastic Continuum is part of Bethan Hughes' ongoing artistic research project *Hevea: rubber, gender and power*, in which she explores the connection between the organic substance rubber and the success of capitalism, imperialism and modernity, and the ways in which human and non-human life is intertwined with military-industrial complexes. The sixth act of this *Hevea* series, and thus also the exhibition at the Kunstpavillon, focuses on the history of the *Taraxacum Koksaghyz*, better known as the Kazakh or Russian dandelion from the Tian Shan Mountains in Kazakhstan.

Nowadays, the dandelion is considered a weed or an indicator of acidic soil, often caused by intensive agriculture. It is also used in homeopathic remedies or even as a vegan substitute for honey. Little, however, is known about the political role, both past and present, played by the this yellow-flowered plant, (which can be found all over the world with the exception in Antarctica). What makes it so important is the rubber extracted from its roots – a largely invisible but indispensable component of modern

Visitors Text

production goods. *Hevea Act 6* is dedicated to the dandelion, the raw material it provides, the places where it can be found and the women who are associated with this plant. The exhibition tells a story characterised by the vagueness of this central figure in the raw materials policy of some of the most influential and incisive global centres of power of the last century - the Soviet Union, the USA, Nazi Germany and the European Union.

To tell this story, Bethan Hughes visited the places most significant to the dandelion: steppes, fields, mountain valleys, greenhouses, biotechnology laboratories, plant breeding facilities and archives in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, the Netherlands, Poland and Germany.

By the end of the 1930s, a network of experimental farms and state laboratories for the extraction of dandelion rubber had been established in the Soviet Union through Siberia, Uzbekistan, Belarus and Ukraine. Knowing about the Soviet Union's dandelion rubber production, the fear of a rubber shortage grew in the USA. The resulting 'Emergency Rubber Project' combined agricultural science and war machinery, with the aim of establishing and industrialising domestic rubber cultivation. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 and discovered large-scale rubber cultivation there, the Nazis also saw this as the solution to their political and economic isolation and the associated shortage of raw materials. Heinrich Himmler was appointed special commissioner for all matters relating to plant-based rubber, and Auschwitz became the place where agriculture, trade and the machinery of war came together.

The so-called 'Gärtnerei- und Pflanzenzucht-Kommando' (engl. 'Horticulture and Plant Breeding Command') in Rajsko was a subcamp of Auschwitz in which 300 women were imprisoned, including many female botanists and scientists from all over Europe. The lives of these women in Rajsko were dedicated wholly to the dandelion and its life cycle. Under forced labour, they sowed it, sorted and numbered the seeds, they watered, pollinated, harvested, documented and dissected the plants and while doing so, they manipulated and boycotted the experiments of the 'Kommando Pflanzenzucht' (engl. 'Plant Breeding Command') project by subtle but effective acts of sabotage. They did this by not dabbing the brush used for pollinating the individual plants in the alcohol provided for this purpose, by secretly burning particularly promising seeds in the oven or by swapping the numbers of the plants and passing on incorrect information.

After the end of the Second World War, the trade routes to Southeast Asia gradually opened up again. Hevea rubber was once more available and dandelion research was abandoned. Today the dandelion and its rubber have attracted renewed interest in research. Therefore, there can be found publicly funded research networks all over the world again. What unites all these current Koksaghyaz research projects is the narrative of sustainability: the less rubber that needs to be imported from Southeast Asia, the less rainforest deforestation and emissions from import/export there will be, it is claimed. The undeniable contradiction that the plant in this form is only needed to maintain the inherently flawed principle of endless growth and our unsustainable continuous consumption remains.

Visitors Text

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This little known story of the dandelion has been captured by Bethan Hughes in the single-channel video installation in the rear gallery space. Using a mixture of her own footage, found footage and archive material such as the documentary film *Koksaghyz* by Hryhorii Lipshyts from 1949, she takes us on the journey of the dandelion, in which the history of the women involved is also made visible. The names of 71 women imprisoned in Rajsko are read out. In doing so, it pays tribute to the subtle and silent resistance of these women in the subcamp of Auschwitz and the impact of their courageous actions.

As part of an audio-visual, immersive installation, the film is complemented by seven oversized dandelion sculptures made of glass, steel and rubber, with their buds still closed or just opening. These hybrid human-plant-beings embody their complicated and interwoven interrelationships and objectification through the machinations of politics, war and capitalism. With them, the artist gives the plant, whose story is dominated by the raw material extracted from it, a body that appears both, delicate and fragile, as well as aggressive and resilient. In collaboration with sound artist Diego Florez, Hughes composed a soundtrack for the sculptures, a mix of voice textures and field recordings created during her research for the film. The sound bodies are vibrated by exciter speakers, giving each individual sculpture its own voice and at the same time creating a polyphonic choir as a group. New additions for the show at the Kunstpavillon are the alienesque flies by artist Wie-yi T. Lauw, which complement the organic character of the sound installation.

Hevea Act 6: An Elastic Continuum is dedicated to the different fates of all those women whose stories are closely linked to that of the dandelion and at the same time focuses on the narrative of the plant itself. In her expansive multimedia installation, Bethan Hughes illustrates a narrative of resource extraction, economic and political imperialism, gendered labour, representation and memory, which will also be documented in a publication and presented at the end of the exhibition at the Kunstpavillon.

Visitors Text

Bettina Siegele

An Elastic Continuum

2023

Credits Installation

Glass, steel, rubber, quadrophonic audio + 7-channel generative audio, single-channel video, 27 mins.
Dimensions variable.

Sound: Diego Flórez

Flies in collaboration with Wie-yi T. Lauw

Production assistance: Berlin Glassworks e.V., Dimitra Charizani

Research assistance: Oleh Sharma, Anel Ilyassova

Translation: Gary Vanisian, Maja Zagórska, Bettina Siegele

Voice artists: Nicola Sangs, Raushan Tolganbayeva, Anna Kin, Daria Shyshko, Halina Rasiakówna, Marlene Dietrich
Archival material

Archival material courtesy of:

The German Federal Archives; The Central State Archive of Film, Photo Documents, and Sound Recording of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Central State Film, Photo, and Sound Archive of Ukraine; Lore Shelley archive at the Holocaust Centre, San Francisco.

With many thanks to:

Professor Dr. Dirk Prüfer and the team at the Institute of Plant Biology and Biotechnology, University of Münster; Fred Erkner and the staff at ESKUSA GmbH; Peter van Dijk, Anker Sørensen and the staff at Lion-Flex / KeyGene; the Tselinny Centre of Contemporary Culture Almaty; Pablo de Soto and the team at LABoral; Dominika Kluszczuk; Bettina Siegele, Cornelia Reinisch-Hofmann and the team representing the Künstler*innen Vereinigung Tirol.

This project was realized within the framework of a European Media Art Platform residency program at LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial with support from the Creative Europe Culture Programme of the European Union. It was produced with support from the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion Berlin, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, and the Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung.

Credits Installation

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Archival material

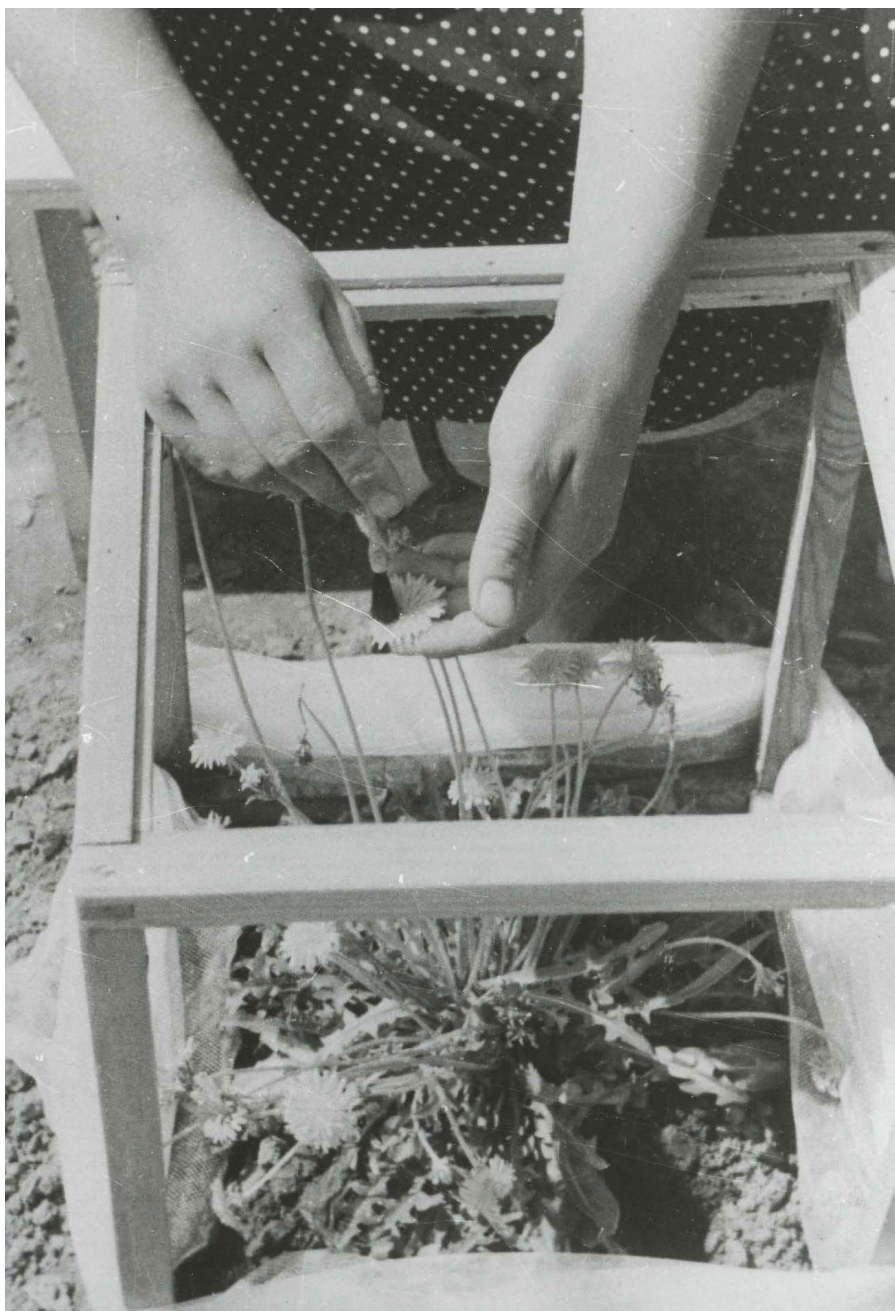
Anatoli Agranowski, blurb for *Von der wunderbaren Pustoblume*, 1953, Verlag Neues Leben, Berlin. Illustrated by Hans Mau. The book was first published in Russian in 1951 by Anatoli Agranovski and was called *Повесть о чудесном одуванчике* (The Tale of the Miraculous Dandelion).

in Agranowski's "Pustoblume"
"Wir müssen sie finden!" Wochenlang durchstreifte Wadin Wachnow mit seiner kleinen Gruppe die öden Wüsten und zerklüfteten Schluchten des Tien-schan Gebirges. Groß waren die Entbehrungen, doch die fünf Jungen ließen sich nicht entmutigen. "Wir müssen sie finden!" Plötzlich stieß Wadin einen Ruf der Überraschung aus: Dort, an jenem sumpfigen Tümpel, da war sie - eine kleine unscheinbare Pustoblume.

Und nun verfolgen wir den spannenden Lebensweg dieser wunderbaren Pustoblume, deren Wurzel Kautschuk anhielt. In hartnäckiger Arbeit wurde sie aus den Sümpfen des Tien-schan in fruchtbare Niederungen verpflanzt, ~~und~~ geduldig und liebevoll gepflegt. Und in wenigen Jahren vollbrachte der Sowjetmensch das Wunder: Er entwickelte aus dem schmächtigen Gras eine wertvolle Kautschukpflanze.

Während des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges versuchten die Faschisten die kostbaren Samen zu rauben; doch das Sowjetvolk schützte in unerschütterlicher Entschlossenheit seine Pustoblume. So wurde der Heimat ein wichtiger Rohstoff erhalten, der heute aus der Technik nicht mehr wegzudenken ist.

Wappentext zu "Pustoblume"



© The Archive of the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim

An illegally taken photograph showing the hands of Wanda Tarasiewicz as she pollinates a *Taraxacum Koksaghyz* dandelion with a brush. The photograph was taken by Wanda Jakubowska in 1944 at Rajsco, a subcamp of Auschwitz, and smuggled out of the camp. Both women were part of the so-called Kommando Pflanzenzucht, a complex dedicating to research the rubber producing potential of *Koksaghyz* dandelion.

**Archival
material**



An image held within the records of the Guayule Emergency Rubber Program, 1942 - 1945, US Forest Service. The archival caption reads: August 1943. Moorhead, Minnesota. Most efficient tool for roguing is this dandelion knife. The woman is holding a plant she most probably refers to as a Russian dandelion.

Archival material

**Archival
material**

1950, Zhytomyr Region,
Ukraine. A black and white
image of a woman standing
in a field. In the distance,
stooped figures tend the
land. In one hand she holds
the stem of a Koksaghyz
dandelion, in the other she
cradles the head of the flower
between two fingers. She
gazes not at the camera but
at the plant.



© The Central State Cinema-Photo-Phono Archive of Ukraine

Biography

Biography

Bethan Hughes is an artist and researcher who creates installations that combine moving image, film, sculpture and text to explore political, social and technological transformations. Her latest work, *Hevea Act 6* premiered as part of the European Media Platform at LABORAL Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial in Spain in December 2023. Bethan Hughes completed a PhD in Art and Cultural History at the University of Leeds (GBR) in 2020. Participation in numerous exhibitions and solo shows throughout Europe, including *Summer Interlude*, Flutgraben Project Space, Berlin (D) in 2023; *A Fluid Defence*, Künstlerhaus Sootborn, Hamburg (D) in 2022; *Hevea Act 4: Unnatural Ecologies*, feldfünf, Berlin (D) in 2021; *Hevea: frontviews*, HAUNT, Berlin (D) in 2018; *Softbodies*, Project Space, Leeds (GBR) in 2017.

www.bethanhughes.com

Credits

Credits

Curatorial support: Bettina Siegele

Exhibition Technique: Paul Irmann, Lukas Klestil

Production: Cornelia Reinisch-Hofmann

Exhibition Booklet: Milena Thurner

Exhibition Booklet Editorial: Bettina Siegele & Cornelia Reinisch-Hofmann

Graphic design Booklet: Marille. Büro für Grafik und Text

Hevea Act 6: An Elastic Continuum is part of the annual programme *The Resistance of Nothingness* curated by Bettina Siegele. Jury for the programme 2024: Didem Yazıcı, curator and director of the gallery of Yapı Kredi Culture Arts and Publishing, Istanbul, Michael Strasser, artist & board member of Künstler*innen Vereinigung Tirol and Bettina Siegele, artistic director & management of Kunstpavillon & Neue Galerie.

Dates

OPENING

Thursday 10.10.2024, 7 pm

09.11.2024 | 2 pm

Exhibition talk in the realm of the
PREMIERENTAGE 2024

23.11.2024 | 11.30 am

Exhibition tour Art & Coffee

11.12.2024 | 5:30 pm

Guided tour with Bettina Siegele

17.01.2025 | 7 pm

Finissage & Book Launch

Current information on events
can be found at:

www.kuveti.at

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