

DHARMENDRA PRASAD

STORIES OF GRASS

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Exhibition

ILEA - Institute for Land and Environmental Art
Berghotel Alpenblick, Tenna GR
31. Dec 2022 – 29. Oct 2023

The current exhibition at the ILEA Gallery in the Berghotel Alpenblick in Tenna features "Stories of Grass", a solo presentation by Indian artist Dharmendra Prasad. He spent about three months in the ILEA artist residency in Tenna last summer. During this time, he began to work intensively with grass as a material and medium. In the process, grass developed into a non-human personality for him. The exhibition is both a retrospective of the works created in Tenna (objects, drawings, texts, photographs, videos, performances and installations), and also the continuation of his work in India on the same topic. The Grass Museum above Tenna, which was part of the last Art Safiental Biennale can still be visited until the end of winter, is probably still well remembered by the local public.

The exhibition tour is best started on the Ground floor in the Stübli to the right after the main entrance. After an introductory text and a selection of objects from the Grass Museum, the tour leads through the dining hall and the veranda to the staircase with more objects. On the first floor there are photos, videos, texts, drawings and objects from the "Swiss phase" of the project. Then, on the 2nd floor, the focus is on works from India (photos, drawings, texts, objects). The exhibition culminates on the third floor with a juxtaposition of the artist's experiences and manifestations with grass in rural Switzerland and rural India (photos, videos). The Grass Museum (facade only) can be visited as one of the few remnants of the last Art Safiental until approximately the end of April 2023. The more than one hundred year old grass-covered barn is located in the direction of Innerberg at the beginning of the alpine road to the Tenner Alp (approx. 10 min walk from Berghotel Alpenblick).

Grass

Grass provides the unique quality for life to exist on earth. It tells stories from the time when there was no one to tell stories to. Grass was among the first to breathe on earth. It feeds the animals and therefore the people. Grass gives life and prosperity.

Born in a rural state of India, the artist comes from a long line of farmers. His grandfather spent his entire life in the fields, inspiring Dharmendra's early connection with the land and those who engage with it as a way of life. Grass was never just a material, but a non-human personality that surrounded Dharmendra. Today, he has become a medium that tells stories about grass everywhere he goes through observations, interpretations, and manifestations. In this exhibition, spread over four floors, we see different chapters that bring together Dharmendra's encounters with grass in Tenna (Switzerland) and Assam and Bihar (India).

Ground floor and staircase: Introduction

The prelude to the exhibition and a first overview are created by the exhibits in the Stübli to the right of the entrance. The objects are mostly from the Grass Museum created by the artist for the last Art Safiental Biennale. These objects used in agriculture and daily life in Tenna are borrowed from the inhabitants of the village and modified with grass. Each item is wrapped in local grass and unravels its own story and lineage, in some cases having been passed down and continued to be used across generations. A special object in this collection is an animal cage in which Capricorns were carried on foot from Italy - to start a new era of these mountain animals, which today are the pride of Graubünden and the symbol of the canton as well as the

Beverin Nature Park. Some of the grasses used are over 30 years old which were found in a local barn. The objects tell stories about the land, its people and their history, the seasons and the weather. The narrator is someone who has seen it all - grass.

1st floor: Focus Switzerland

On the second floor you can relive the experiences of artist Dharmendra Prasad, who lived on this floor for three months while he created the Grass Museum and its collection of objects, stories and performances. As you walk down the hallway just as we do to his room (104), you encounter his sketches and poems, the thoughts he drew and wrote as he became familiar with the village. He had many visitors and conversations that developed into friendships, whom he also wrote and drew about in his sketchbook. One day, this hallway was littered with blades of grass as Dharmendra wrapped performer Olive Lopez in grass from hair to toe. A video of their collaboration tells of it.

2nd floor: Focus India

Artist Dharmendra's residency at this hotel was his very first voyage away from his home country, India. He grew up in a small, rural village in the state of Bihar and then moved to Guwahati, the gateway to the seven north-eastern states of India. In both places and lifestyles, what was common was grass, which he remained in awe of, and continued to playfully and creatively engage with by making structures, wrapping found objects and also covering his friends in hay. His natural and simple connection with grass found its way into an artistic practice but also a source of philosophy and poetics.

3rd floor: Switzerland and India

Both India and Switzerland are heavily reliant on agriculture, and hence grass also plays a vital role in their culture and traditions. While the two countries are worlds apart, Dharmendra unifies them with a binding material, medium and non-human personality - grass. Through his notes, poems, sketches and artworks, Dharmendra inspires a video that juxtaposes the meaning, significance, process, rituals, occupations and animals that are integral to the ecosystem of grass.

Production: ILEA (Institute for Land and Environmental Art, EAE (Environmental Art Exchange))

Curation: Johannes M. Hedinger (ILEA, EAE) + Shazeb Shaikh (EAE, the Story of Foundation)

Videos: Dharmendra Prasad + Shazeb Shaikh

Support: Berghotel Alpenblick, Naturpark Beverin, Pro Helvetia (To-gather)

Dharmendra Prasad is an artist and a networker. Born in-between stories, discrimination, hierarchies, chaos and silence, full of winds and dust, without any address, Dharmendra practices between the fields of the Gangetic plains to the villages, water bodies and rainforests of northeast India. Through the medium of need, time, toil and soil, Dharmendra's practice gets cultivated and tilled-up in the form of installations, videos, paintings, photography, texts, events, travelogs and beyond. He is the co-founder of the Guwahati-based Anga Art Collective (since 2010) and co-director of Harvest School. Instagram: @unhorizoning2

*ILEA Gallery is an offering of the ILEA Institute for Land and Environmental Art, which is situated in the Berghotel Alpenblick in Tenna/Safiental since 2020. The ILEA organizes the **Art Safiental Biennale**, the international summer school **Alps Art Academy** and initiates research projects, exhibitions, events and publications in the field of art & ecology. In addition, a residency program is under development. Currently, the sponsorship lies with the Nature Park Beverin in cooperation with the municipality of Safiental and Safiental Tourism. ILEA is supported by the UBS Cultural Foundation and by an NRP project in order to establish and expand it in the longer term into a competence center for creative industries and art, a creative laboratory as well as a research and education center in Safiental.*