**PRESSFILE**

**Pejvak**

**If Need Be**

12.06 to 22.08.21

Z33 presents the first European solo exhibition of the artist duo Pejvak (Rouzbeh Akhbari & Felix Kalmenson), consisting of entirely new work.

*If Need Be* is a constellation of stories about water scarcity. The exhibition leads you to the arid regions of Central Asia, the steppes of Mongolia, ancient Persia, and the American Great Plains. Pejvak strings together a series of hallucinatory events involving artificial glaciers, dams in the desert, and other human attempts to bring water under control.

Giving equal weight to gossip, legend and historical fact, Pejvak takes the role of an unreliable narrator, situating the struggle for water within the struggle for the historical record. In this way, they draw attention to the role of imagination in history writing. How much of the past has been fabricated? Which version do we believe?

**About the works**

1. **Cold-Chain Logistics**

2021

Industrial freezer, copper pipes, antifreeze liquid, truck door, vinyl, aluminum chain, patina

In this work, the freezer technology specific to cold-chain logistics is utilized to freeze over the bridge, blocking the passage of the viewers.

1. **Ficciones**

2021

Illuminated manuscript by Mojtaba Abu Talebi, mid-20th century Soviet fabric produced by the VLKSM silk combine in Osh Kyrgyzstan

These miniatures retell the legend of Amir Kabeer Hamadani (c. 1314–1384), a Persian theologian who is said to have introduced the practice of glacier-growing in Ladakh and Baltistan (Northern India) as a method to block mountain passes from Kashgari raiders. Legend has it that the expansion of Genghis Khan’s Mongol Empire came to a temporary halt when his army was faced with one such artificial glacier.

1. **The Wetting**

2021
Steel, gun blue, wood, horsetail, Yuan Dynasty-minted coinage, fragment of 12th century Frankish statue

The Wetting refers to the military expansion of the Mongol Empire during the Little Ice Age. A global drop in temperature lowered the snow line in the mountains of Asia and expanded Siberian glaciers. This resulted in the rapid transformation of arid and impassable regions into pastureland, which provided the sustenance necessary for the Mongolian cavalry. The design of The Wetting references the Turkic practice of memorializing fallen warriors by erecting a pole with the deceased’s horse’s tail affixed to it.

1. **Invocation (An Incitement to Ruin)**

2021

Bricks, mortar, concrete, pigeon spikes

This work references the architecture of historic ab anbars, large water reservoirs that were built in Iranian antiquity.

1. **Memories of the Dry House**

2021

Embroidered cotton fabric, acoustic partition, speaker, media player, Global Truss system. Story written by Farshad Takavoli and performed by Bahar Modiri.

Memories of the Dry House references Shahr-e-Sukhteh (the Burnt City), once a thriving industrial center in Persia (now Iran). It is widely believed that Shahr-e-Sukhteh was abandoned due to prolonged drought. Recent research suggests that this was caused by the construction of dams further upstream. The story of the Burnt City appears here as an embroidered calligraphy and as a sonic experience. You can occasionally hear a vocal technique called tahrir (melisma) that is inspired by nightingales’ calls.

1. **Works-in-Progress**

2021

Risograph prints, upholstered cotton mat board

This set of photographs catalogues water infrastructure projects as part of the expansion of cotton plantations in and around the Ferghana Valley (Central Asia) from the 1930s to the 50s. The works are framed by a Russian cotton lining used in traditional silk robes from the valley.

1. **Descriptions of My Life**

2021

Book attributed to Abulqasim Lahuti (‘Descriptions of My Life’, CIA version, 1953), book written by Abulqasim Lahuti (‘Descriptions of My Life’, genuine version, 1956), risograph reproductions of Farman newspaper (issue 572 of October 1953), printed cotton with an agitprop pattern by Maria Nazarevskaya with cotton-harvesting machines

Abulqasim Lahuti (1887-1957) was an Iranian poet and communist revolutionary who fled to the Soviet Union in 1922. When the CIA grew worried that Lahuti might lead a Soviet takeover of Iran, they commissioned a fake autobiography. Although Lahuti denounced the falsely-attributed autobiography, the Iranian propaganda newspaper Farman continued to spread rumors and cartoons with false information about the poet. When Farman was called out by the Soviet ambassador in Iran, they published another caricature accusing the ambassador of trampling on journalistic freedoms.

1. **Tournament of Shadows**

2021

Fiber-based silver gelatin print, custom printed fabric

Titles of the tableaus, from left to right:

Act 1: The Catastrophe (Gathering Storm, Dust Bowl, Flight from the Plains, Arrival of the Refugees)

Act 2: The Demands of the Present Moment (The Speech, Audience with the President, Invocation, Visions of Shambhala)

Act 3: The Expedition (Amassing Supporters, Advancing on the Border, Gathering Samples, Herbarium)

This work tells the story of the Russian painter and mystic Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947). He collected drought-resistant plants in Inner Mongolia on an expedition commissioned by the US Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace. The plants were supposed to help restore American farmlands that had been destroyed by unsustainable farming practices, heatwaves and severe droughts. Wallace regarded Roerich as his spiritual leader and secretly supported the painter’s mission to establish a utopian society based on high spirituality and cooperative labor. They believed that this society could avoid the extremes of both communism and capitalism. Although Roerich did not succeed in his utopian mission, he managed to collect 900 samples of drought-resistant plants. A selection of these samples has been turned into photograms and arranged into panoramic tableaus narrating the story of their capture. The frames feature an agitprop pattern depicting a plowing tractor.

1. **In the Name of Contemplation**

2021

Wood, zinc roofing, graphite, concrete, hand-pressed felt, tablet, publications

Publications authored by Anisa Sabiri, Distributed Cognition Cooperative (Anna Engelhardt & Sasha Shestakov), Benjamin Filler & Irakli Qolbaia, Dina Cheraghvand, Farshad Tavakoli, Masoud Borbor and Pejvak (Rouzbeh Akhbari & Felix Kalmenson)

In the Name of Contemplation is a facsimile of a tea room in the Stalin collective farm outside of Leninabad (Khujand), Tajikistan in the southwestern part of the Fergana Valley. The table inside is designed after the earliest backgammon table found in the archeological sites of the Shahr-e-Sukhteh (Burnt City). The pattern shows an ouroboros that is twenty-fold entangled. The publications contain newly commissioned stories about the figures and events referenced in this exhibition, among other subjects.

1. **The Great Game**

2021

Taxidermy rock pigeon, cyanide, UV light bars, velvet curtain, fiber-based silver gelatin print

On August 4th, 1922 the Ottoman military general Enver Pasha noted in his diary, ‘Today the air is still’.

1. **Post-Disaster Solution**

2021
1000 liter water tank, 125 liter tanks, PVC piping, MDF, water from the Demer River

This work references the system of dams, canals and water management infrastructures of the Fergana Valley. Lying at the intersection of two rivers and three international borders, this valley is at the center of a long-standing conflict over water access control. The water poor countries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan allege that planned dams in upstream Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will exacerbate existing water shortages downstream, affecting among other things the cotton industry. In light of the heightened tensions in the region, the Pax Cultura symbol on the reservoir refers to the international treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments (also known as the Roerich Pact).

1. **My Guru**

2021

Water pump: Woodford Model Y34 Freezeless Yard Hydrant (1929), concrete, Novichok agent

‘Could this be the hidden meaning of our tortured times? I can find no other explanation, knowing as I do the essential spiritual nature of Man. But the great Seven Pillared City is not under the water, it is the water under the soil we tread. And it shall be unearthed.’

— Nicholas Roerich in a letter to Henry Wallace, January 8, 1935

**About the artists**

**Pejvak is the long-term collaboration between Rouzbeh Akhbari (IR, 1992) and Felix Kalmenson (RU, 1987). T They are currently artists in residence at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. Their recent solo exhibitions include: In Its Place, Only Steel, State Silk Museum, Tblisi (2019); Make Breeze, Hay Art Cultural Center, Yerevan (2018); and Tides of Sand and Steel, Si Shang Art Museum, Beijing (with Ash Moniz, 2017). Upcoming group exhibitions include: Eurasia: A Landscape of Mutability, M HKA, Antwerp (2021) and Rewinding Internationalism: The 1990s and Today, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2022). Pejvak’s films have been screened at numerous film festivals worldwide, such as Docs Lisboa, Sharjah Film Platform, and Kasseler Dokfest. Their first feature-length film, Threshold, was recently premiered at the 44th Mostra Internacional de Cinema, São Paulo.**

**In collaboration with:**

**Mojtaba Abu Talebi, Timur Akhmetov, Javad Azari, Masoud Borbor, Dina Cheraghvand, Distributed Cognition Cooperative (Anna Engelhardt & Sasha Shestakova), Benjamin Filler, Hamid Ghezlou, Rudy Guedj, Bahar Modiri, Irakli Qolbaia, Anisa Sabiri, Farshad Tavakoli, Lisa Vetkhova**

**Curator: Tim Roerig**

**If Need Be runs from 12 June to 22 August in Z33.**

**Practical information**

Prices

- 26 : free

Ticket : 10 euros

Discounted ticket : 5 euros

Installation programs : available via z33.prezly.com

**Contact**

Geerhard Verbeelen | geerhard.verbeelen@z33.be