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Seventeen Grams of Longing

Iris Häussler

Seventeen Grams of Longing tells of unconscious and conscious, individual and collective longings through the lens of the intertwined lives of two men and their interest in migratory birds. In 2024, the artistic legacies of two brothers were discovered on two different continents. Through the respective findings in Berlin and Toronto, we learn about their shared passion and once again ask ourselves one of the questions that the sciences have been asking for decades: How much are we determined by nature, and how much by our experiences?

For her project *Seventeen Grams of Longing*, Iris Häussler developed the two characters Kurt and (K)Carl, twins who were born in Germany during the Second World War and then separated as small children. While Kurt continued to reside in Berlin, (K)Carl's life took its course first in the US and then later on in Toronto, Canada. As the twins grew up on different continents, they never saw each other again; in the context of the exhibition *Seventeen Grams of Longing* in March/April 2024 at PSM in Berlin and in September/October 2024 at Daniel Faria in Toronto, the two figures symbolically meet again "in the air".

Through their bird-watching, metaphorical thinking, creativity, empathy and passion, Kurt and (K)Carl created alternative worlds in pursuit of their endeavor to 'bring back into the air' the birds whose extinction they were observing - each in their own way. Unconsciously, this act perhaps also expressed a longing to travel together, to escape their life's circumstances and find their unknown other selves.

*'Migratory birds weigh about 17 grams on average, they are very delicate and fragile, but at the same time have the incredible stamina and strength to cover continental and intercontinental distances (distances of up to 15,000 kilometres) twice a year; an ability that has not yet been fully researched scientifically. **

The artistic environments of the two characters that each of them created has allowed them to embrace something mysterious - something intangible, something that they didn't know of - that nonetheless had power over their emotional state throughout their lives: the traumatic experience of separation in early childhood and (K)Carl's subsequent migration as a toddler, and then ultimately the fact that their separation was never spoken of in either family. The birds they watched and read about, and their eyes gazing up at the sky, filled them with a longing for something for which they had no real language - and also no professional skills to record these birds whose populations would then appear in smaller numbers year after year.

Kurt collected ornithology books, which he read with fascination but also treated destructively: cutting out every illustration that showed a bird. What would then remain were books with eerie holes and gaps, showing only the negative outlines of the cut-out birds. However, Kurt brought them back into the skies: as mobiles, as cut-out paper birds pinned to the walls that populated his alternative world.

In the creative process of *Seventeen Grams of Longing*, Iris Häussler emulates the metaphorical, almost magical thinking and dreaming of her fictional figures, suggesting that we can address and express our innermost, deepest worries and hopes through art-making, transforming their power into something tangible. The works show the negative space around the birds rather than the birds themselves; there are no taxidermized birds or bird sculptures and the books, which despite describing the birds of the world in great detail, knowledge and passion, lack precisely their illustrations.

Iris Häussler traces the concept of transgenerational trauma not only in the series of works by the twin brothers Kurt and (K)Carl, but also in her entire oeuvre through the creation of fictional artist figures and their works; triggered by her own biography and the attempt to escape the trauma of the Second World War within her own family through emigration.

*'Why do I lie awake for hours at night imagining birds arriving at one of their breeding destinations after their migrations (a tawny owl, a woodpecker, a goldfinch, a blue tit, a chimney swift...) and although completely exhausted, they are still "ready to nest". While the world changes in their "absence" - their former nesting sites disappear, the trees they used to perch on are cut down, the flight paths they once dominated are equipped with skyscrapers that reflect the sky but are nothing but a "deadly trap" for the animals.'**

Quotes from *Iris Häussler, text by Iris Häussler and Sabine Schmidt.



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