

Ulla von Brandenburg

English



Pérez Art Museum Miami

It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Gray Moon

Alluding to the ingenuity of theater, Ulla von Brandenburg (b. 1974, Karlsruhe, Germany; lives in Paris) creates immersive installations that reconsider collective experiences and question the role of the individual in social hierarchies. Using theatrical constructs—the stage, audience, and actors—her work generates multilayered narratives that often reference the pre-modern moment of late 19th-century, magic, color theories, and pre-Freudian psychology, as well as 20th-century Hollywood cinema. Von Brandenburg also makes drawings, objects, and films, crafting a visual language that blurs the boundary between reality and imagination. In PAMM's double-height gallery, *It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Gray Moon* (2016) explores these and other tropes that have inspired the artist for more than decade, including architecture, ritual, textiles, dance, and the stage as a mirror of social order. The work draws connections between theatric representation and power systems, encouraging new associations with modern-day social norms.

Museum visitors enter the gallery through a dark passageway covered with black fabric that houses four watercolor paintings and several objects that could be props for a play. Watercolors paintings, wooden sticks, and a photograph are on the floor reclining on the fabric walls. Midway on the walls, one can notice the shadows of the photograph and watercolors as if these were recently uninstalled. Along with the wooden sticks, all objects appear to be left behind or ready to be used. At the end of the passageway, viewers enter a space with a massive white staircase that divides the space diagonally in two. In this area, a video shows a version of the white staircase and seven performers dancing with colored fabrics. The recorded dancers move around the staircase to the beat of a drum and other percussive sounds in a ritualistic state, often as a group, struggling with one another, or at times individually, engaging with the structure. In the gallery, only the bottom step of the staircase is accessible to visitors, but people can engage with the structure mimicking the scene portrayed in the video.



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In *It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Moon* staircases are central to understand the artist's gesture. In his essay “The Fourth Wall,” published for a previous presentation of this piece, Jeremy Lecomte discusses how von Brandenburg is considering stairs.¹ Lecomte highlights von Brandenburg's fascination with the architecture of theaters and the emergence of the modern culture. He describes how staircases were used in ancient Greece to separate the stage from the audience; and how they were used in mid-century cinema as a tool to create anxiety or tension. Additionally, Lecomte explains how in the early 20th-century, staircases and arcades embodied the spirit of modern industrialization in Paris—the Art Nouveau staircases at the upscale department store Galeries Lafayette became a symbol of the city's high-end fashion. This “luxury bazaar,” where the staircase is one of its major elements, marks the evolution of the 20th-century department store, now found everywhere around the world, from Dubai to Aventura. Von Brandenburg is interested in the symbolic history of this architectural form, specifically how this structure can be appreciated as a space for theatrics, tension, movement, and as an icon of the bourgeoisie's modern spirit. In *It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon*, the staircase triggers the actions of the performers and the museum visitors. In the video, performers dance on it, fall from it, and engage with it, emphasizing its status as a symbol of power.² In the gallery, the staircase divides the space in two, directs the visitor's movements, and creates a mirror effect between the video and gallery.

Another important element in this work is the expression of von Brandenburg's interest in 19th- and 20th-century color theories. Refuting Isaac Newton's idea that color is purely a physical state, Johann Wolfgang Goethe argued that the human eye makes multiple associations when distinguishing color, including emotional responses. Von Brandenburg often uses the colors of Goethe's color wheel in her work, centering her attention on their emotional and phenomenological aspects.³



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She also makes references to Max Lüscher's color test, which describes an individual's personality through his or her color preferences. Von Brandenburg is interested in the subjective aspects of color, and the colored textiles featured in the dancers' movements in the video come illustrate the personal struggles with the collective. The artist's approach to the materials themselves can be seen as a direct reference to theater curtains and costuming. Visitors enter the gallery through an area covered in fabric as if crossing behind a curtain—the threshold between reality and imagination. Moreover, von Brandenburg is interested in investigating fabric as women's work in relation to modern ideals, which formed a distinct binary between crafts and fine arts.⁴ At times considered closer to craft, textiles have an organic and handmade quality essential to this work. Von Brandenburg uses textiles to validate this aesthetic form and its multiplicity. Fabric also has a connection to theater (as costume) and the individual—specifically when considering how clothing is used to express individualism, fashion, and group identity in Western culture.

In both walking through the gallery and watching the video, visitors can observe ritualistic motifs at work in this piece. The performers seem to be under a type of trance, in repetitive motion as they confront the staircase with their colored fabrics. References to ritual culminate in the last scene of the video, in which the camera turns away from the performers, revealing that they're performing in an empty theater. When museum visitors sit on the first step of the gallery staircase to view the video, they too become, in the end, performers interacting with the unique structure. In this sense, von Brandenburg makes apparent the ritual of experiencing art.

It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon creates a metaphor about the dynamics and interdependence between the individual and society. The massive staircase becomes a symbol of social systems that reduce the individual's identity within a community to a single step in a hierarchical structure. Through its theatricality, museum visitors can become both audience members and performers participating with the artist's proposition. This work tells the story of a community dancing, struggling, and attempting to comprehend how they are meant to be together engaging with the steepness, heaviness, and authority of a massive structure.

Maria Elena Ortiz
Assistant Curator



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¹ Jeremy Lecomte, “The Fourth Wall,” in *It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon*: Ulla von Brandenburg, ed. Alexandra Baudelot (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2016), 13. ² It is important to consider that stairs have also been a common trope in modern Western art history, especially when considering Surrealist works such as Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending Staircase, No. 2* (1912). ³ See Ida Souliard, “Touched Color,” in *ibid.*, 155.

⁴ See Jacinto Lageira, “Ritual Scenes,” in *ibid.*, 124.

Ulla von Brandenburg
November 4, 2016–June 25, 2017

Ulla von Brandenburg
b. 1974, Karlsruhe, Germany; lives in Paris

It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon, 2016
Digital color video, transferred from Super 16 mm film,
with sound, 22 min., 25 sec.
Courtesy the artist; Art : Concept, Paris; Pilar Corrias Gallery,
London; and Produzentengalerie, Hamburg

Ulla von Brandenburg: It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon is organized by Pérez Art Museum Miami Assistant Curator María Elena Ortiz and is presented by Chloé with support provided by Knight Foundation.

Chloé  **Knight Foundation**

Biography

Ulla von Brandenburg studied scenography and media art at the Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe, and fine art at the Academy of Fine Arts, Hamburg. Recent solo exhibitions of her work have been presented at The Power Plant, Toronto; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Fonderie Darling, Montreal; Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich; Kasseler Kunstverein, Kassel; MAMCO, Geneva; Secession, Vienna; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; and CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco. Significant group exhibitions have been presented at Performa 15, New York; Musée National

d'art Moderne/Centre Pompidou, Paris; Biennale of Sidney; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius; Witte de With, Rotterdam; Biennale of Lyon; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit; Venice Biennale; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and Tate Modern, London. Her work belongs to several prestigious collections, including the Musée National d'art Moderne/Centre Pompidou, Tate Modern, Kunsthalle Hamburg, and MAMCO, among others. She lives and works in Paris.

Images

Cover, 2–4 *It Has a Golden Sun and an Elderly Grey Moon*, 2016
Digital color video, transferred from Super 16 mm film,
with sound, 22 min., 25 sec. Courtesy the artist; Art : Concept, Paris; Pilar Corrias Gallery, London; and Produzentengalerie, Hamburg
Photos: Martin Argyroglu

5 Installation view: *It Has a Golden Orange Sun and an Elderly Blue Moon*, Fonderie Darling, Montreal, 2016. Courtesy the artist; Art : Concept, Paris; Pilar Corrias Gallery, London; and Produzentengalerie, Hamburg
Photo: Maxime Boisvert



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