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Kristina Buch's Constant Garden

by Aimee Walleston

As part of *The Lover* (2012), her contribution to dOCUMENTA13, German artist Kristina Buch will remain in Kassel for the duration of the show, caring for her installation. Essentially a low hanging garden, the piece consists of a total of 3,000 plants (180 separate species) and 3,000 butterflies (40 separate species), which are hatched and brought to the site daily by Buch herself. The piece is quietly durational, and built into its conceptual agenda is the necessity for nature to remain uncontrolled. The plants, which nourish and shelter the butterflies, will grow throughout the summer, and Buch's butterfly emigrants often get carried away in the wind.

Unlike public art forms that demand attention and exist to be consumed completely by the viewer, *The Lover*, installed at the center of Kassel's Friedrichsplatz, is not easily viewable—which is Buch's goal. "It hides itself a bit from the viewer, and in order to experience it, you have to really want to see it." In service of making her public art even less accessible to the public, the artist has planted a prickly border of nettles and thistles around the perimeter, ensuring that the casual observer must negotiate both a physical and visual barrier before experiencing the piece from the inside.

At 29, Buch is the youngest artist showing at dOCUMENTA, and her path to art is less straightforward than that of the average young artist. She holds a BS in biology and worked in bioethics before starting her MA in sculpture at the Royal College of Art. "In school, I did my research on developmental genetics, and I worked in a lab studying how insects perceive color, and what their color preferences are," says Buch, who is quick to point out that her education is not the only thing that drives her creative interests. "Studying biology—





and theology—gave me sort of a general direction and are two major sources of inspiration," says the artist. "I would never deny it because it's such a rich resource. But all that research and science is really just going to the material and formal part of the work—setting up the canvas. Science has nothing to do with it beyond the device, material and method to make the work formally."

One of Buch's better-known works, *Before the I Was Folded* (2009), exhibited at the Royal College of Art, consisted of the artist handing over lumps of clay to chimpanzees, and displaying the sculptural results. The work emphasized the culturally imposed—and somewhat illusory—distinction between what is created by humans as art, and by animals as nature. Sculpture that is not held within the bounds of human production is also an important aspect of *The Lover*: as part of the work, the artist will be displaying the cast-off chrysalides—essentially the sculptural detritus of the newly hatched butterflies, which she brings to the site daily.

The artist has been breeding the butterflies she uses for the piece in her apartment in Kassel—a part of the piece she has chosen to keep private. This action makes her not just the artist and caretaker of her garden, but also, in some respects, the matriarch. "There's a very subtle but important performative part to the work," says Buch. "When I moved here in March and started planting, I decided that I would not hire someone to look after the plants. I would stay until the end of dOCUMENTA to look after the plants and breed the butterflies," says Buch. "Every day I come bringing new butterflies, knowing that the wind will have most probably blown away the butterflies I brought in from the day before. People might find some of those butterflies in the big park, but you also might find them where I put them. Inherent in the work is the fact that you cannot really contain or control it. You can't own it. By nature it's boundless and ephemeral. Even on the label to the work, the wind is part of the work."



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