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DOUBLE CHECK

Ursula Palla: Pale Light
Overview

kunstraum dornbirn

Facts and Figures	Exhibition Title Pale Light Exhibition duration 20 November 2026 – 28 February 2027 Press Preview Wednesday, 18 November 2026, 10.30 am Opening Thursday, 19 November 2026 Artist Talk Friday, 20 November 2026, 2.00 pm After Work Tour Thursday, 10 December 2026 and 25 February 2027, both at 6.00 pm
Download Press Images	→ www.kunstraumdornbirn.at
Teaser (894 Zeichen inkl. LZ)	Maverick vegetation takes possession of **Kunstraum Dornbirn**. Wild, pioneer, and medicinal plants, cast in bronze with scrupulous attention to detail, unfold like an imaginary landscape within the former industrial architecture. In "**Pale Light**" (Fahles Licht), **Ursula Palla** (born in 1961 in Chur, CH) brings together for the first time several bodies of work that she created over a number of years, uniting them with her video piece, "Reblooming", to form an immersive, site-specific installation of sculpture, moving image, light, and shadow. The focus rests on those inconspicuous plants which human activity displaces or eradicates, yet which thrive precisely where other life seems untenable. Straddling the realms of nature and artefact, disappearance and recurrence, Palla opens up a poetic space for reflection on our relationship with the environment. Imperilment and persistence, destruction and regeneration coexist in close proximity, ultimately drawing our gaze towards the potential of a new beginning.
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Maverick vegetation takes possession of Kunstraum Dornbirn. Dark stalks, leaves, and blossoms, some scarcely knee-high, others looming larger than life, sprout within the remains of the former industrial architecture. Rootstocks stand upon the concrete floor as if violently torn from the earth; elsewhere, stalks appear to emerge directly from the ground itself. What at first appears to be a barren landscape, threatened by decay, proves upon closer inspection to be permanent and weighty: the plants are cast in bronze, each one unique. Every detail, leaf vein, and thorn is visible. It is not to splendid blooms or botanical rarities that Palla raises this sculptural monument. Instead she honours the so-called weeds, the wild flora, and the resilient pioneer or medicinal plants that grow at the fringes of our awareness – displaced and removed, or thriving precisely where other plants find no basis for life. In “Pale Light”, they become the protagonists of an imaginary landscape.

In this exhibition, Palla brings together for the first time the series of works that she created over several years – “Empty Garden 3” (2019–2022), “Fireweeds” (2022–2024) and “Botanical Notes – Hortus Medicus” (2023/2024) – with her new video work “Reblooming” (2026) to create a large-scale, immersive installation. She thus develops a dense interweaving of sculpture, moving images, light and shadow

Palla’s point of departure lies in a fundamental enquiry that has long characterised her work: her practice places humanity at the centre, with all its actions, aspirations, errors and the traces it leaves behind in the world. She focuses on our multifaceted relationship with the environment and our responsibility within this interplay of existences. Palla perceives the bond between humankind and the environment not merely through an ecological lens, but equally within the transitions from the natural to the artificial, and the manipulation of our own perception. In this context, she is particularly drawn to those often overlooked moments that reveal just how fragile the equilibrium between humanity and nature truly is, and how swiftly it may be disrupted.

The ‘weed’ serves as a remarkably precise entry point. Its very name describes less a botanical category than a human value judgement. How do we construct nature? What is permitted to grow, and what must give way? Which plant is cultivated, and which torn out? What concept of nature emerges when humanity decides what is desirable within a garden, a landscape or an ecosystem?

These questions find a concrete art-historical resonance in “Empty Garden 3”. The series had its inception during Palla’s visit to Claude Monet’s famous garden in Giverny. With its Impressionist riot of colour, the carefully cultivated site stands as a paradigm of a wildness that is the result of continuous selection and design. In winter, this profusion subsides, and the grounds resemble fallow fields. In January 2013, Palla observed how native wild plants briefly returned to this controlled terrain. Inspired by these plants, she cast their likenesses in bronze. That which was rendered invisible returns, and the supposedly worthless is imbued, through one of the medium’s most traditional materials, with a permanence that translates its persistent return into sculptural presence.

This reveals Palla’s intuitive dialogue with materials, spaces and histories. Material is not merely a vehicle for form, but moreover an integral part of its narrative. Transformation becomes an artistic process that encompasses shifts in perception and meaning as well physical changes. We experienced this with particular vividness in the “Fireweeds” series. Rosebay willowherb is a pioneer plant that colonises clearings and wasteland, spreading with remarkable speed after forest fires: hence its common Canadian name, ‘fireweed’. In Germany, the plant is also known as the ‘rubble flower’ (*Trümmerblume*), as it was the first to bloom amidst the ruins of the Second World War. Palla casts her willowherbs in a distinct alloy of bronze and weapon steel. Embedded within this new material is the history of destruction, yet our gaze is simultaneously directed towards that which is emerging: ‘The sculptures transform weapons into plants, turning against destruction and violence to become a metaphor for that which is flourishing and yet to come.’

For Palla, research and the assimilation of knowledge are inextricably linked with artistic thought: ecological interrelations, scientific findings and historical sources form the foundation of her aesthetic decisions and narrative threads. In the series “Botanical Notes – Hortus Medicus”, she turns her attention to medicinal plants and the *hortus medicus*, a horticultural form that systematically organises and preserves medical and botanical knowledge. This tradition ranges from medieval monastery gardens through the teaching gardens of the early modern period up to the present day. In Palla’s work, the collection comes together to form an imaginary global apothecary. Biodiversity thus appears not merely as an ecological

factor but also as a living archive: worldwide, around 50,000 plant species are used medicinally, up to 15,000 of which are estimated to be endangered species. Wild medicinal herbs in particular constitute a vital reservoir of genetic diversity and could provide the raw materials for future medicines.

With “Reblooming”, the recurrent motif of disappearance assumes an immaterial form. Wild plants threatened with extinction appear as shadow projections on the floor, where they mingle with the real shadows cast by the plant castings. Body and image, presence and absence, merge into one another. At this point, the exhibition title “Pale Light” invites a potential interpretation: during the winter months, muted daylight filters through the large windows of the historic assembly hall, altering the appearance of the landscape over the course of the day. At the same time, the artificial light of the projections allows endangered plants to return as fleeting images. The pale light becomes an intermediate state: it brings into view, while simultaneously harbouring the possibility of disappearance.

Thus the exhibition “Pale Light” speaks of a nature that is anything but static. Habitats dwindle, biodiversity is lost and natural rhythms falter. But Palla does not train her gaze exclusively upon what has been lost. Her pioneer plants bear within themselves the potential for a new beginning: they grow on destroyed, scorched or fallow land, establishing the conditions under which other life can follow. In this landscape, threat and persistence, absence and return, destruction and regeneration exist side by side.

Herein lies the poetic quality of Palla’s work. It does not merely illustrate ecological interrelations, nor does it confine itself to a warning against their loss. Rather, Palla translates the knowledge that underpins her work into situations that we can experience through the senses. Within the monumental industrial architecture of Kunstraum Dornbirn, a landscape thus unfolds whose protagonists are precisely those inconspicuous plants which repeatedly elude human control. The natural and the artificial are as inseparable from one another as destruction and new beginnings. Palla’s work moves within these transitions: between nature and artefact, loss and return, destruction and regeneration. Out of this ambivalence, Palla develops an open space for reflection: not as an idealised image of an untouched nature to which we might return, but as an enquiry into what forms of coexistence with nature will remain possible in the future.

Ursula Palla: Pale Light

Press Text

Publication

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Biography

Ursula Palla, born in Chur in 1961, lives and works in Zurich. For 30 years, her work has been featured in numerous exhibitions and video festivals in Switzerland and abroad. Her major solo exhibitions include 'Like a Garden' at Kunst(Zeug) Haus Rapperswil-Jona (2022), 'Nowhereland' at the Kunstmuseum Graubünden (2022), 'Black Flowers' at the Kunstmuseum Bern (2017), 'Die fünfte Jahreszeit' at the Museum Langmatt Baden (2013) and 'Strange Paradise' at the Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur (2008).



Ursula Palla, "Botanical Notes – Hortus Medicus", 2023/24, installation view Bündner Kunstmuseum, Chur 2025, photo Ursula Palla, courtesy of the artist.

Kunstraum Dornbirn
About us

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Kunstraum Dornbirn was founded in 1987 as a non-profit association with the aim of presenting and fostering contemporary art. Since 2003, it has been holding exhibitions in the historic assembly hall of the former Rüschwerke machine factory in Dornbirn's Stadtgarten, which offers ideal conditions for displaying large-scale installations. The quality of the architecture in its original, raw state offers an excellent setting for current trends in international art. Three exhibitions a year showcase both established, internationally renowned artists and emerging voices.

The exhibition history of Kunstraum Dornbirn has been shaped by artists such as Michail Pirgelis (2026), Karla Black and Anna Hulačová (both 2025), Toni Schmale (2024), Chiharu Shiota and Judith Fegerl (both 2023), Monika Sosnowska and Robert Kuśmirowski (both 2022), Tony Oursler and Peter Sandbichler (both 2021), Atelier Van Lieshout and Claudia Comte (both 2020), Bernd Oppl (2019), Thomas Feuerstein (2018), Hans Op de Beek (2017), Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg (2016), Berlinde de Bruyckere (2015), Not Vital and Tue Greenford (both 2012), Jan Kopp (2010), and Mark Dion and Roman Signer (both 2008).

Site and infrastructure

Vorarlberg lies in the four-country region around Lake Constance, enjoying easy access to and lively exchange between Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. The region is not only scenically attractive for tourism; another significant added value is the dense and high-quality cultural activity of a wide variety of institutions in both the performing and visual arts. Kunstraum Dornbirn's present building, the large brick assembly hall, was built in 1893 on the Rüschwerke site. Following an international landscape planning competition in 1999/2000, the grounds were redesigned as the "Stadtgarten" or City Garden. Key buildings of the Rüschwerke, such as the assembly hall, were preserved to create an urban leisure and cultural venue. Measuring 30 meters in length and 14 meters in width, the former assembly hall has a total area of 440 square meters and offers an ideal venue for exhibiting large-scale installations.

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