Collecting, showing and staging plants.

A filmic analysis of the Botanical Garden Berlin-Dahlem:
its history(ies) and projections in contemporaneity

Abstract

In my artistic work, I assemble and produce narratives related to specific geographical and social contexts. Within the Ph.D. in practice, I propose an investigation of the largest botanical garden in Germany, located in Berlin-Dahlem. On the basis of a historical research on the garden, the origin of its plants, the design of its landscape and its exhibition space, the aim of the project is to explore how the different geographies and periods of time contained in it could be revealed in a contemporary experience of its space.

Built for the purpose of cultivating food or as a space for contemplation of beauty and the pursuit of idleness since ancient times, many cultures see the garden as a model of the universe. But apart from its immersive characteristics, the Botanical Garden in particular is a typically modern space, with further specificities. It is a space for empirical observation and experiments of scientific research, open for a wide audience. Erected in the beginning of 20th century, under the guidance of Adolf Engler, Berlin’s Botanical Garden displays and preserves Flora from various continents and habitats, as close to their natural surroundings as possible. Nevertheless, since the establishment of the Anthropocene Era, the garden seems now even more closed within itself, far from the current environmental disasters that plague the planet. So how is it possible to actively bring it into relation with the theme of the perishable and finite nature of the contemporary world? What possible narratives can be created, based on the multi-geographical and multi-historical collection of its plants?

For this project, I consider the garden as a visual category whose various components I plan to investigate in a multi-perspective video installation. The goal of
the artistic project is to use the video as a medium in its essayistic form\(^1\), reflecting the multiplicity of possible narratives about the garden, in multiple perspectives of its spaces and times. In the scientific part of the thesis, the practice of Historiography will be explored in its aesthetic dimensions, especially in its connection with the concepts of *Imagination* and *Projection* by Vilém Flusser.