

Yulia

Mahr

Yulia Mahr's relationship with the chapel at Compton Verney is personal. Located just 25 minutes from her home in the British countryside, she has spent a significant amount of time there over the years. It is a respite for quiet moments of reflection. Of course, historically, chapels were built to serve specifically religious purposes. In her most recent show, *Speaking in Dreams*, which took place in November of this year at Verney, Mahr utilized the space's multitudes, creating a work she describes as a poem. More than just a site-specific installation, we are invited to contemplate the opacity of meaning and the prescribed utility of architecture. Regardless of being constructed under religious pretense, Mahr transforms the chapel into a more secular, nuanced space, inviting the visitor to engage in a contemporary sense of surrender.

Within the work, we are confronted with symbolic archetypes. A crow perched on top of a large textured grey sphere is the central sculpture. Mahr explains, "There are crows that inhabit the grounds here; they're embedded in the story already. They also serve to signify certain histories within Indigenous cultures and folklore." The crow often symbolizes a trickster, traversing between the spirit world and our earthly world. It is also a sign of warning, which Mahr uses to enter the dialogue dealing with her anxieties about the state of the world. Crows can be menacing and deliver grave omens, which Mahr thinks are currently upon us.

The sphere on which the crow sits is ominous in and of itself. The orb is fabricated out of charcoal and ash. The materials are abrasive in opposition to the serene, delicate features of the chapel. One can't help but ponder death, and our fragile proximity to mortality.

Accompanying the sculpture and taxidermied crows are two of Mahr's thermal images, a solid component of her artistic oeuvre. For these, Mahr uses a thermal camera, normally employed to surveil borders, often used as a dehumanizing tool. "I chose the thermal camera because it registers the energy of the subject, rather than how the surface looks." Mahr explains that she shares extended, intimate time and space with the subject to register the image.

In a thermal work from an earlier series entitled *About Sarah*, the interior-exterior world is explicitly exposed, a woman's hands folded gently on a bed cover, veins trickling nearly black. Sarah is a living part of the image, but the veins, amplified by the heat inversely registering the living body, produce an image with a corpse-like eeriness. Veins of different forms are also present in other works by Mahr. Showcasing the cyclical aspect of nature, Mahr's photographs of plants move us through the notion of flora as a vital source of life, yet her perspective and colour instead magnify decay.

Mahr's anxiety is that we as humans are not paying enough attention, or nurturing our interior and exterior worlds. We no longer prioritize taking space to contemplate them within the newly accelerated pace of our world and technology. A previous series, *Stoneworks*, harkens forward to the sculptures in the Compton Verney show. There is an upwards reverence. In the piece *Quiet Uncertainty of Stone*, the interior of the ancient Greek sculpture ends up looking like a constellation, pointing to the unseeable parts of ourselves that are connected to everything greater. When you enter the poem that is *Speaking in Dreams*, you are invited to acquiesce, to pause. Mahr believes that, though we might be usurped by the modern ills of technology and chaos, the power of art can take us out of this hyper-accelerated loop, even if just for a moment.



Installation view *Speaking in Dreams*, 2025. Photo © Compton Verney and Jamie Woodley



About Sarah III, 2023. Lens-based work on Somerset paper, 150 x 200 cm



Installation view *Speaking in Dreams*, 2025. Photo © Compton Verney and Jamie Woodley

The Fact of Mutability I (a), 2023 Lens-based work on Somerset paper, 71 x 70 cm



The Fact of Mutability I (b), 2023 Lens-based work on Somerset paper, 71 x 70 cm



Below, 2020 Lens-based work on Somerset paper, 71 x 70 cm



Yasiin Bey Anuar Khalifi

blue



moon

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Diane Arbus, Cyrill Lachauer, Cady Noland, Greer Lankton,
Georges Binda Celeste Alexandrino Gabriel Ferreira Da Silva Hallas,
Yulia Mahr, Victor Unwin, Chad Murray, Marina Abramović

The Quiet Uncertainty of Stone IV, 2024, marble pigment on lens-based print, 76.2 x 76.2 cm

