

Martina Gasser

The political hair

Installation: hemp fibres, cardboard, barbed wire, ribbons

Vernissage: Friday 15 December 2023, 6 pm

Exhibition: 15.12.23 to 13.03.2024, Mon-Sun, 7 am to 11 pm

Location: Schaufenster Denis, Brunnengasse 45, display in Grundsteingasse, 16th district

Info: www.grundsteingasse.com

Let us ALL be feminists and stand up for a better and fairer society for all (worldwide)!

Human rights are freedom rights! If women's freedom rights are not respected, the whole of society is not free and minorities and children, as well as men, suffer alongside women.

In Europe, the well-behaved, pure and demure woman wears her hair long, often tamed in plaits or hidden under scarves (radical believers of all kinds). The racist-nationalist woman also wears her hair in plaits without make-up and bears children for the people.

Short hair on women has historically been considered indecent and unfeminine (e.g. 1920s bob¹), is seen as an attack on patriarchal domains (framing as "man-woman") and is repeatedly used by women as an act of resistance against patriarchal or socially unacceptable conditions.

At the same time, the wearing of long hair by men was just as long opposed (hippies) and also persecuted (Schlurfs of the 30s/40s²). This can also be seen as an act of resistance against mainstream society and the values it represents.

In Austria, women's rights are once again increasingly being attacked by right-wing extremist and conservative forces. Abortion rights are suddenly being discussed again and we are hearing about "cooker bonuses"³ for women who are supposed to stay at home with their children. In addition, feminism is increasingly being discredited and ridiculed.

Despite all the struggles for these rights, today we find ourselves in a world in which women's rights are consistently enforced and practised in very few countries. In many countries, women and minorities are brutally oppressed, completely disenfranchised and unprotected in private and public life, exposed to all kinds of brutality against their minds and bodies. The degree of injustice in a country can be measured by the violation of women's and minority rights.

In the course of the Iranian protests against the regime since 2022, triggered by the violent death of the young Jina Mahsa Amini after her arrest by the "morality police"⁴ for allegedly not wearing her hijab "according to regulations", women in Iran began to take off their hijabs and thus accept martial punishments and manslaughter. Some women posted videos online in which they cut off their hair in protest against this oppression. Hair symbolises femininity par excellence, but also the "dangerous seductive effect" on men, which is why the "morality police" believe it must be covered at all costs in order to "protect" men from it.

Cutting off their hair becomes an act of political self-empowerment for women, with which they show that they have control over their own bodies. At the same time, they rid themselves of their stigmatising femininity. Cutting off the hair is an old gesture of mourning when a woman's husband dies. This gesture is re-contextualised and expresses mourning for the murdered women and girls.

It is a powerful sign against a brutally patriarchal oppressive regime ruled by some extremist men who seem to be very afraid of (the intellect of) women.

Martina Gasser's installation - based on the Iranian protest movement and the gesture of cutting off hair - thematises the political nature of (female) hair. The blonde colour of the plaits in the installation is due to the material (hemp fibres). All hair colours of all women in the world are meant!

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¹ Term "bob": The bob is a short hairstyle for women and girls. The hairstyle is a variation of the bob. The cut became very popular in Europe in the 1920s. It was influenced by the "boyish type", the image of women at the time, and quickly became the most popular hairstyle. The "bob" was a symbol of modernity and emancipation for metropolitan women of the interwar period. Source: de.wikipedia.org and www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de

² Term "Schlurf": Term for a young male "drifter" who stood out due to his hairstyle (long hair and overlong sideburns), among other things. "Schlurfs" appeared in Vienna from 1939 at the latest as members of a subculture of working-class youths centred around jazz. The lifestyle of the "Schlurfs" was criminalised under the "Police Order for the Protection of Youth" issued in March 1940. The sanction of "youth detention", introduced in autumn 1940, was imposed on "Schlurfs"; they were drafted into the "Reich Labour Service" or the Wehrmacht and, in extreme cases, threatened with imprisonment in the Moringen and Uckermark youth concentration camps. Source: geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at

³ Term "cooker bonus": Proposal of the Salzburg state government 2023 (ÖVP-FPÖ coalition) for the payment of a cash benefit to mothers who look after their children "within the family" instead of sending them to kindergarten. Source: kontrast.at

⁴ Term "morality police" in Iran: The morality police is an "instruction patrol" or "patrol for [Islamic] instruction", also known as the "fashion police", "morality police" or "morality patrol". It is a group acting on behalf of the Islamic religious police to combat "vice". It was set up in 2005 with the task of arresting people who do not adhere to the current dress code. These arrests mainly affect women. Source: wikipedia.org