

Yalda Afsah***Temper*****5.9.–8.11.2026**

Whether it be spiritual ceremonies, seasonal festivities or rituals of initiation and transition – customs and rites count among humanity's oldest collective practices. They foster temporary communities, help structure emotions and enable forms of belonging that often defy rational explanation. At the same time, they can be closely connected to marginalization, disciplinary power and violence.

In her latest series of works, the artist Yalda Afsah navigates precisely within this area of tension. She explores rituals and their role as social and physical choreographies, in the scope of which universal questions of power, identity and community come to the fore. In her solo exhibition at the Kunsthau Hamburg, the films *JARRAMPLAS* (2025, 15:30 min), *PAN* (2026, 20:06 min) and *HEAT* (2026, 21:00 min) are presented together for the first time. Based on research into local ritual practices in Spain, Bulgaria and Taiwan, the works examine how societal orders and collective experiences manifest themselves in performative acts.

In her film *JARRAMPLAS*, Yalda Afsah traces a custom celebrated in the Spanish village of Piornal every year. We see young men throwing turnips with remarkable physical intensity at a target which initially remains out of view. The question of who or what this collective aggression is directed at is deliberately left unresolved. The artist works with intentional restraint in terms of contextual information, thus shifting the focus from the specific event to the dynamics of the group. Her careful observation of this unfolding spectacle – equally menacing as it is theatrical – draws the audience into a reflection on the role of the spectator.

PAN is devoted to Paneurhythmy, a spiritual dance ritual for which thousands of people gather every summer in the Rila Mountains in Bulgaria. In an atmospherically dense composition, Yalda Afsah works with circular camera movements and visual overlays to render a multi-layered choreography of collective movement. With images oscillating between quiet meditation and collective ecstasy, the piece inquires into the relationship between spirituality, physical discipline and community-building. As in her earlier works, Yalda Afsah also addresses humanity's dependence on nature and its simultaneous alienation from it.

HEAT, the artist's most ambitious project to date, led her to Asia for the first time. There, she witnessed a ceremony considered one of the most dangerous in the world: the Taiwanese Bombing of Master Handan Festival. During these festivities, crowds of people in protective gear move through the night, surrounded by a cacophony of exploding bangers. In this physically demanding parade – which is an affirmation of faith, a test of courage and a spiritual purification all at once – light, sound and movement merge into a complex dramaturgy. Trust and fear, resistance and devotion all seem to blend into one another. The custom can be traced back to the end of the cholera epidemic in the 19th century, when the residents of Taitung set off fireworks all night long, whereupon the epidemic subsided. In her portrayal, Yalda Afsah focuses on the visual impact of the event while reflecting on the collective willingness to endanger oneself and others, and on the normalization of violence within ritualized practices. The striking, at times hypnotic images appear to absorb the energy of the swaying masses. The scenes are underpinned by a richly layered soundscape that allows intimate moments to emerge from the overall noise of the crowd.

The exhibition demonstrates Yalda Afsah's ongoing engagement with performative social structures and her rigorous artistic exploration of the role of customs in the present day – as practices that shape a sense of belonging and identity and, at the same time, as orchestrated outlets for collective, at times, brutal affects. Approaching these subjects with great intimacy yet critical distance, she reveals how fragile and contradictory the systems are that produce communities.

Curated by Anna Nowak

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