

Eva Grubinger: *Cauda Pavonis*

Cauda Pavonis is situated within a space that already embodies its own history of transformation: a historic kitchen. It is a place where materials were heated, broken down, recombined, and reshaped – where processes that often remain invisible became tangible. It therefore provides a particularly fitting setting for an exhibition deeply concerned with change, transition, and transformation.

Grubinger's work continuously investigates how meaning shifts through context. Different materials and objects, which at first seem unrelated, enter into constellations that alter our perception. Rather than producing a fixed meaning, these arrangements generate a network of relationships—between objects, spaces, histories, and, above all, symbolic systems. Materials are never neutral; they carry traces of their original use, their iconography and iconology, as well as their cultural inscriptions and functions. By displacing or dissolving these functions, Grubinger opens up new fields of meaning. The familiar becomes estranged, creating new perspectives – both on the extraordinary within the everyday and on the enduring relevance of historical modes of thought.

The title *Cauda Pavonis* refers to a concept from the alchemical tradition – the “peacock's tail.” It describes a stage in which a substance undergoing transformation, through processes such as decay or fermentation, develops iridescent, shifting colours. These chromatic phenomena directly evoke the plumage of a peacock, whose shimmering, multicoloured tail serves as a visual metaphor for this state. This is not a final condition, but rather a transitional one: a moment between dissolution and reordering, in which form remains unstable and has not yet fully crystallised.

Alchemy, often reduced to an early form of chemistry or to the pursuit of gold-making, was in fact part of a much broader intellectual framework. It combined empirical observation with philosophical and spiritual reflection. The transformation of matter was understood in parallel with processes of thought, perception, and inner development. In this sense, transformation extends beyond the purely material. It is not conceived as a singular event, but as a gradual process in which matter passes through different states, often made visible through changes in colour and texture. Central to this worldview is the idea that opposites are not fixed but mutually dependent. Consequently, many alchemical images and texts focus not on stable entities but on transitions: between solid and liquid, form and dissolution, beginning and end. In his text accompanying the exhibition *Pagans & Peacocks* at the Museumspavillon Salzburg (2024), Martin Herbert draws on Catholic imagery such as the transformation of wine into blood or bread into flesh to illustrate this principle of transubstantiation.

The objects in this exhibition resist clear categorisation. They appear at once familiar and strange, occupying a space between everyday functionality and symbolic presence. Some recall tools or devices, yet through displacement and recontextualisation they are removed from their original function. What remains is not function but possibility. The objects point toward processes – melting, separating, condensing – without settling into a single meaning. They are distributed throughout the space in a way that activates movement and perception, foregrounding both their relationships to one another and their relationship to the surrounding architecture. At times, this arrangement recalls the display of heraldic emblems – aligned