

## I8: The Other Garden (EN)

### Isil Egrikavuk:

Because I felt like I'm out of my space. I don't understand the language. I don't fit in here. So I'm a human body, but I feel like I'm silent and just like a plant.

So I've been working at the GWK for five years now, and something that really struck me was that lack of diversity, especially in this department, and not in terms of just students, but also in terms of faculty. I'm the only non-European faculty here. And then I came here also to work. I didn't speak any German, so it was really hard for me to integrate, especially, I said in many institute slots and in many meetings and job committees, and I didn't understand anything and I felt like an other. So that was one of the reasons that I wanted to start this project was really feeling like an outsider here and not able to integrate. And there are not enough recognition of this lack of diversity. People knew it, but they didn't say anything because there's also not many programs to provide this kind of inclusion. And the second thing is that also our building here at Mierendorffstraße it's very isolated from the rest of UdK. We don't even have a cafeteria. I feel like everybody's in their own room. So I wanted to create a social space. And then I had this idea to set up a garden in our backyard. And then I offered as a special interest group (SIG) to my students. And I always say this only one student signed up at first, but you really, like, worked on bureaucracy to get the permissions from the university, from building manager, climate manager, all these kind of really brick walls that we had to apply to it. And finally they accepted the project. They assigned us this side space in the backyard. And also we got a small amount of money to buy some Hochbeete and some earth and also a fertilizer. So that's how we started it. And then in the second semester we had ten students that signed up for the project and then finally we started doing it. And then we wanted to think of a concept like, what's the concept of the garden will be. Like I was explaining to the students that these things that I felt, and they were also feeling similar in other reasons, you know, like feeling isolation and loneliness and also lack of diversity. But I think one important aspect of this garden is not just because diversity is mostly discussed among humans, but we wanted to create an atmosphere of diversity, not just among humans, but also plants and animals. So it was biodiversity. So we decided to name it the „Other Garden“. And it's about being other and also coming together as an other with our otherness. And we wanted to only plant wild plants or weeds they are called. These plants are neophytes and that means they are not original in Germany's geography, but they are immigrant plants that came to Germany, either through wars or colonization or world fairs hundreds of years ago. And we are also doing artist talks and lectures and classes. So it really became a social space. Through the garden I made many connections. Now I got to know other people who are interested in similar issues. We are all doing a colloquium together, so there will be these like different events within different gardens at UdK. And also I joined the exhibitions through this garden project, so I feel like it's rooted me here. More sometimes we just like came together and talked like how we feeling at the university. So it's also like a place for sharing how we're feeling. I was invited as an artist to join this exhibition at the Tania and it was about home and belonging and I think this garden really represents that and all the story that I was speaking about in the beginning: not feeling like I belong here, feeling other. Honestly, like my first year here, I felt like a plant because I felt like I'm out of my space. I don't understand the language. I don't fit in here. So I'm a human body, but I feel like I'm silence and just like a plant sitting among humans.