

Zurich Issue: Dark Matter, Grey Zones, Red Light, and Bling Bling

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Interviews with Mitchell Anderson, Nadja Baldini, Livio Baumgartner, Annette Bhagwati, Mirjam Bayerdörfer, Philipp Bergmann, Maria Bill, Clifford E. Bruckmann, Roger M. Buerger, Karolina Dankow, Adriana Domínguez, Christoph Doswald, Elisabeth Eberle, Ann-Kathrin Eickhoff, Esther Eppstein, Christian Etter, Allam Fakhour, Corrado Ferrari, Fredi Fischli, Anne-Laure Franchette, Arianna Gellini, Kristina Grigorjeva, Anne Gruber, Antonia Hersche, Christian Jankowski, Cathrin Jarema, Linda Jensen, Tobias Kaspar, Nicola Kazimir, Esther Kempf, Emil Michael Klein, Lucie Kolb, Sabina Kohler, Andreas Marti, Maya Minder, Pablo Müller, Adrian Notz, Niels Olsen, Ludovica Parenti, Barbara Preisig, Eva Presenhuber, Thea Reifler, Elena Rosauero, Nina Roehrs, Giampaolo Russo, Sabine Schaschl, David Schildknecht, Evelyn Steiner, Marc Streit, U5, Regula Weber, Judith Welter, Eva-Maria Würth, Romano Zerbini

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Imprint

Editorial

Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter

“OnCurating, the Zurich Issue: Dark Matter, Grey Zones, Red Light, and Bling Bling” seeks to bring to the forefront the various positions and strategies of the most diverse art initiatives, from project and off-spaces to personalities within the art field, as well as those of established galleries and institutions and city officials based in Zurich in 2020. Originally, this issue was intended to draw a picture of the Zurich art scene and was meant to be published parallel to Art Basel 2020. Now, with a significantly smaller crowd, we inform the international art scene through our website and not just the art flâneurs invading Basel and Zurich. We hope that this issue will nevertheless give a longer-term idea of art in Zurich.

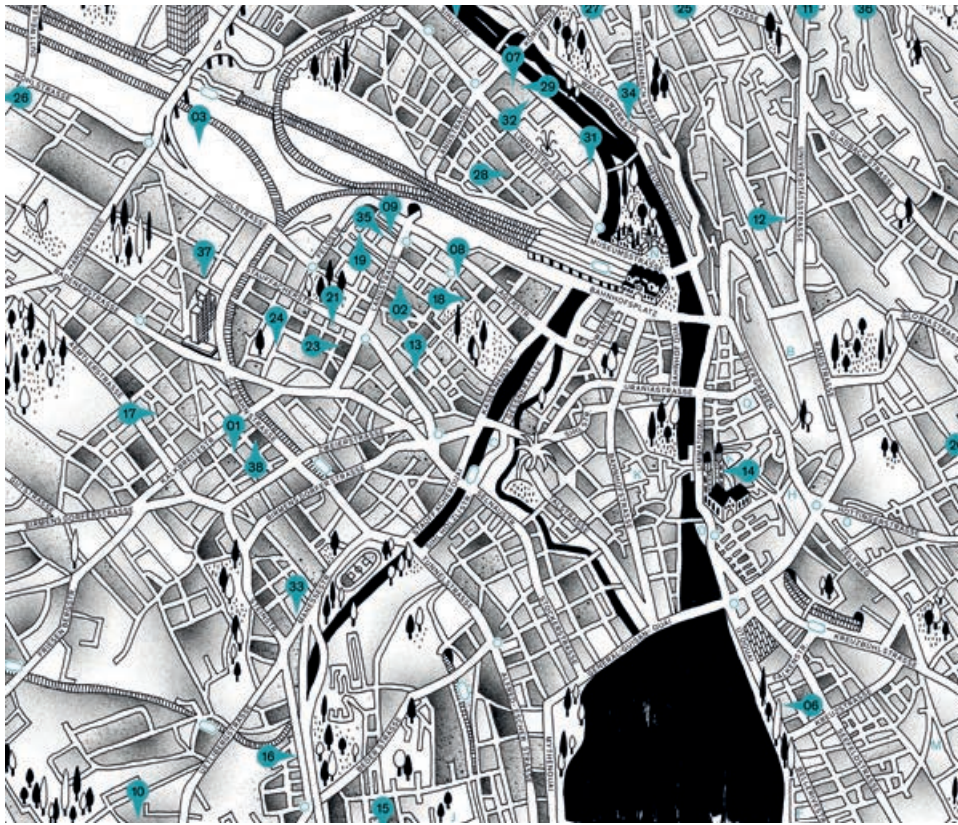
We conducted over forty interviews with initiators of the most diverse project spaces and off-spaces, projects without a space, city/government-funded institutions, city representatives for the cultural sector, temporarily funded and non-funded institutions, art lovers’ initiatives, artists and projects in favor of art discourse and critical art, and personalities having resided in Zurich for a long time, knowledgeable about the historical changes. The questions in the interviews ranged from the history and concept of the respective project space and its curatorial approach, to financing and sustaining the project, how working processes are set up, about measures of inclusiveness, about their own agenda within Zurich and internationally, and so on.

Clearly, you will not find a homogeneous art scene in Zurich. Even within off-spaces and project spaces, there are huge differences: some are quite in line within distinctive fine arts procedures and operate structurally close to galleries, while others are more in favor of discourse and are built around an artist community and special shared interests. And then others are more culturally driven or closer to entertainment and partying. They differ immensely in scale, infrastructure, personnel, and ambition.

And they all have their own agenda; at the same time, they (mostly all) compete for the same funding from the city, the canton, and other private supporters. And the funding—despite what one might assume after hearing “Zurich” and “Switzerland”—is not an easy task for the independent art scene.

For a rather small but rich city like Zurich with a population of 400,000 residents, one can find a large, vibrant art scene with over forty officially registered project spaces, and art initiatives and over twenty-five other projects without a regular space.¹ Those who are part of this independent scene often know each other well; some projects collaborate in specific instances, enriching the cultural life of Zurich tremendously. Yet, all of them compete for a very small contemporary art budget, which has stagnated for years. And then there are the big institutions, like Kunsthhaus, Kunsthalle, and Haus Konstruktiv, which are extremely well funded. Of course, the overall cultural sector is, in comparison with other city departments, not overfunded at all, especially if one takes into consideration that the creative industry—which profits from the independent and wild open art scene indirectly—is an enormously important business sector in Switzerland.

We would also like to think about the situation from a more theoretical perspective: the notion of “dark matter” was applied to the arts by Gregory Sholette, who laments



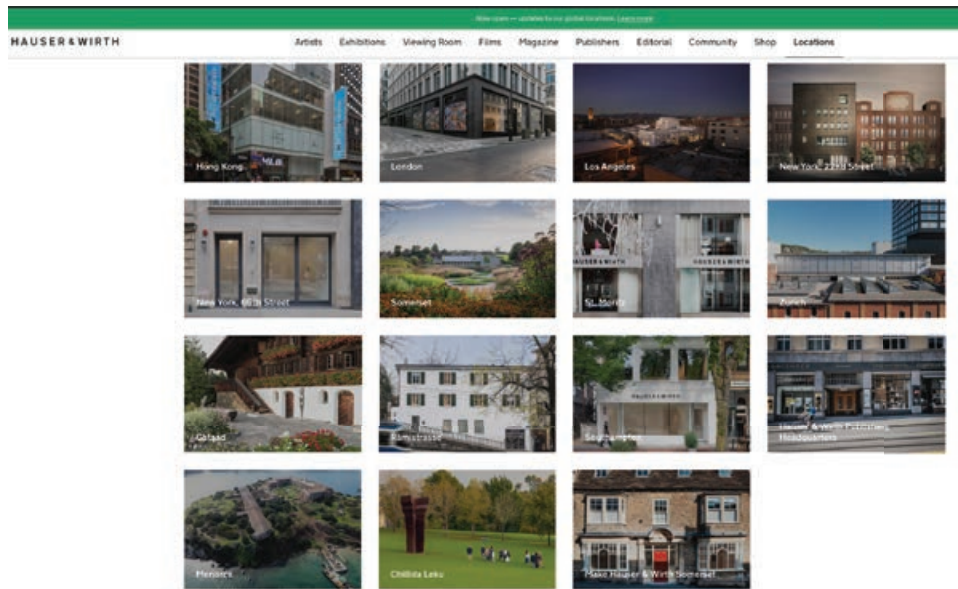
www.zurichartspaceguide.ch. Courtesy of Andreas Marti, Design by Badesaison, badesaison.ch

that a vast majority of artists are ignored by critics and that this broader creative culture feeds the mainstream with new forms and styles that can be commodified and used to sustain the few artists admitted into the elite. Sholette writes: “In brief, artistic dark matter refers to the marginalised and systematically underdeveloped aggregate of creative productivity that nonetheless reproduces the material and symbolic economy of high art.”²

This dark matter resembles the usual inquiry into the professional lives of art school graduates ten years after their diploma. As we all know, only a small percentage (2-4%) of fine arts students “make” a career in the art market, while others work in the cultural field as practitioners, or in education, or leave the field altogether. But although not recognized in a broader sense by the institutional art field, this “artistic dark matter” provides “essential energy and ideas to the broader art world discourse and practice.”³

In Zurich, and with Art Basel close by, the extremes of contemporary art come together pretty visibly, and in close proximity: on one side, the high art products of the art fair, which are often still painting and sculpture, through conservative consumer decisions, and on the other side, the lively scene of off-spaces, curators, and artists working for very little money. Thus, at a glance, one could state that the comment from Sholette is especially true here. The clash is there, even if a precarious situation is relative in Switzerland, since most people have some sort of social security and most have health insurance; nonetheless, the support of art is clearly dedicated to the big institutions. The numerous, lively, buzzing off-spaces are surprisingly underfunded in comparison to other cities with a busy cultural scene. This situation is paired with the presence of influential collectors, like Maja Hoffmann and Michael Ringier, and let us

not forget one of the biggest galleries worldwide: Hauser and Wirth, with so many more international venues in Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, New York (22nd Street), New York (69th Street), Somerset, St. Moritz, Zurich, Gstaad, Southampton, Menorca, and now so many that we might have lost track...



<https://www.hauserwirth.com/locations>

What Sholette claims is that the unpaid work of artists (and curators, if we may say so) are in the end producing a surplus that ends up exclusively in the high art market with billions of dollars in revenue circulating in art fairs and big galleries. Art workers are therefore deprived of a surplus they are working for: “One of the key questions raised in my book *Dark Matter*,⁴ therefore, is not only what this glut of artistic creativity consists of—after all, artists have regrettably constituted an unregulated, overeducated, and spectacularly over-productive labour force for decades—but instead what function does this seeming surplus play in the production of art world values estimated by some in the billions of dollars in sales. Is it a lightless backdrop to starry careers, a shadowy other realm over which the bright and articulate signal of success and value is superimposed?”⁵

One of our findings is that the working situation in Switzerland, with its restrictive migration policies, vast international finance business, and large service industry, provides enough work to somehow earn a living—some jobs are of course precarious, some quite shady—while working in the arts. The shady work ends up in its worst form in the red-light district, which was expelled from the inner city of Zurich to the outskirts.

The venues for off-spaces therefore tend to be in less glamorous places, often in close proximity to Zurich’s former red-light district and party scene. Another aspect can be found in the grey zones of the art scene, with unpaid work, or tax-free work, and “illegal” work that the Sans-Papiers are left to do...(of course, if you are fighting for your basic existence, art plays no role). You can find more about this in Issue 30 of *OnCurating*: “Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics,” edited by Dorothee Richter, Tanja Trampe, and Eleonora Stassi.

The borders between shady and illegal work are fluid. On another level, artists and curators have shady jobs, as these cover up for their unpaid jobs in the arts, since the smaller spaces are dramatically underfunded.

To make contemporary art more popular and more accessible for more than the happy few showing up to the big exhibition venues, (actually the venues were extremely crowded during openings before COVID-19), the city of Zurich invited Manifesta, the traveling European large-scale exhibition, in a brave attempt to bring more attention to contemporary art. (Maybe also in the hope that this might change the funding situation in the long run). And this was a success; contemporary art was out there, literally out on the Zurich lake, younger and older enthusiasts were floating through the city and the venues (and sometimes searched for the venues). We also dedicated an issue to this Manifesta, in an attempt to theorize the neoliberal situation of working conditions today.⁶ Despite a rather conservative understanding of the work in play in the Manifesta concept for Zurich—which we tried to recontextualize with our conference and *OnCurating* issue—, all in all Manifesta did generate attention for contemporary art—and it was there, present in the city with a floating platform, therefore establishing a link to everyday uses of the arts. Here, in this issue, you will find a conversation between Sergio Edelsztein, a Swiss/Israeli curator and Christian Jankowski, artist and curator of Manifesta 11 in Zurich.

For this issue, we invited Marina Vishmidt to contribute with a lightly reworked reprint of her article, “The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labor,” thoughts that are still relevant and exciting. It starts where the discussion of *Dark Matter* ends. “The rationale of this text is to outline the connection between the contradictions of the social development of artistic labor in capitalism and the formation of the aesthetic subject in modernity as the displacement of labor from the category of art, bringing it into closer affiliation with the speculative forms of capital valorization.”⁷ These considerations seem to apply perfectly to Zurich as a central point: capitalist accumulation of surplus from the arts, dealing with high-priced art, underfunded free artistic and curatorial work, and that what Mariana Vishmidt analyzes as new formations of subjectivity that are enabled and that enable the economic system of neoliberalism. In her article, Vishmidt lays out the foundation of modernity, which was to separate artistic work from other forms of work. Already Terry Eagleton argues that there is an ideological parallel between the autonomy of the arts, with the free genius artist and the entrepreneur, who has also to act autonomously.⁸ Or in Vishmidt’s words: “The autonomy of art arises with the autonomy of capital as a central phenomenon of modern experience.”⁹ Art is positioned as the opposite of monotonous work, of real subsumption, the real subordination of any work under the capitalist order. Art is now concerned with generating an aesthetic judgment, and the labor of art projects with the “speculative” modes of accumulation. In other words, again art seems to strangely mirror the speculative mode of hypercapitalism of the neoliberal system in which we are now living. The uncanny moment occurs when artistic work becomes more and more immaterial or more and more “speculative,” as a logical development of the separation of handicraft and artistic work in a contemporary understanding. (Something that is lamented from different sides: on the one hand, from the perspective of a conservative understanding of art that still sees the classical genres at the center, and on the other hand, from the side of new directions, such as New Materialism, one could argue.) This speculative, immaterial aspect of contemporary art and curating comes in a way close to the extremely speculative financial businesses and its agents. Therefore, artistic and curatorial subjectivities

present a proposal for managerial subjectivities needed in hypercapitalism, except, of course, for the payment.

To come back to the demands for better payment in the arts, Vishmidt argues that the fight for wages for art also resembles the fights for remuneration for reproductive work in the households that was/is unseen, unpaid, but necessary to uphold the system. She mentions many paradoxes raised by the redefinition of artistic production as wage-labor (however the wage is calculated). “One of these could be that the practice of social work, and the practice of social relations, which produces the artist as an independent type of ‘non-professional’ professional, cannot be reconciled with a simple agreement that art can be valued according to the same standards as all other types of work, especially if capitalist work in its entirety is made precarious, contingent and self-realizing for everyone according to the classically reactionary model of the autonomous (starving) artist,”¹⁰ i.e., becomes neoliberal.

And, of course, Switzerland, and Zurich, has a profound neoliberal system: especially in the arts, short-term project work is common, though compared to other European countries the living expenses are exorbitantly high. Employment contracts are easy to dismiss, parental leaves are short, and there is no job security for disabled individuals whatsoever. Of course, on the other hand, there are also very low taxes, but who will benefit from them? The political system is built on a concordance system, which means, often in the parliaments, one has to come to an agreement with everyone, also with the very right-wing parties. (see the conversation with Eva Maria Wuerth in this issue). And speaking about right-wing parties and cultural knowledge, just a few days ago in July 2020, the SVP put out a poster for the “Restriction Initiative” (*Begrenzung-sinitiative*)—an initiative against immigration—, which somehow managed to bring together the anger about the increase of concrete building with an image of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin—apparently unwittingly.¹¹ Well, we think this should be general knowledge for anybody in Europe, especially for anyone with public responsibility. Any change in cultural policies also has to be negotiated with the far right, and one must know that the far right was one of the first and one of the most aggressive political parties in Europe. (Was, one must say, looking at Hungary and Poland today). About 30% of the population of Zurich do not hold a Swiss passport, many of them working in finance, medicine/pharmacy, service industries, and creative industries, but these people do not have the right to vote. It is still a very long and complicated procedure to become Swiss; knowledge of Swiss culture and politics is required. (Unfortunately, one cannot lose one’s citizenship because one does not possess basic cultural knowledge—just saying.)

In her article, Marina Vishmidt pins down the basic difference between “regular” work and artistic work, which she sees in the fact that art is not under the rule and ordering of real subsumption—and therefore cannot be subsumed under a comparable general demand for wage. Real subsumption means that capital gradually transforms all social relations and modes of labor until they become thoroughly imbued with the nature and requirements of capital, and the labor process is really subsumed under capital.¹² Which means that the real subsumption of the labor process occurs once every aspect of the latter has been subordinated to capitalist production.¹³

And it is precisely at this point that the parallel with work that is done for wages ends, as Vishmidt argues with an example: “It is no longer self-evident that the type of artwork Darboven was doing—obsessive and repetitive, logically motivated hand-writ-

ing—can or should be deemed tantamount to manual labor in its usefulness, just because so much wage-labor looks and acts like Darboven's (though perhaps not as much as Bartleby's the scrivener's would) and has no pretence to either diligence, duty or social utility."¹⁴

Even if Darboven's monotonous work looks like monotonous administrative work devoid of meaning, it is still something else: Darboven's work is presented in high culture, it shows that these devoid-of-meaning work contexts exist; it also shows the beauty of monotony, and therefore it always has a representative, ideological function. Another important difference is that Darboven herself decided on this work and could leave it again at any time, and a further, not insignificant aspect is that she was one of the few who was ultimately well paid.

Further on, Vishmidt sees it as a deeper structural problem of art as institution, where a simplistic wage model would not work. Paraphrasing Vishmidt here, she speaks about W.A.G.E., which proposes certification or a voluntary code of best practices to which art institutions can submit in order to clarify their commitment to pay cultural producers appropriately. She sees several problems with this: first, that an unregulated market such as the sphere of art production and mediation is not self-regulating voluntarily, and second, that art institutions operate in a capitalist social space whose iron law states that the rewards of the powerful few are at the expense of the weak many—a structural fact that is not amenable to moral pressure. The professionals on the lowest tiers are unpaid, allowing institutions to operate with inadequate budgets; artists do not receive fees, so there is more money to pay salaries to administrators, or, especially in the American market, to collect donations from rich donors. If, almost all together, it is a characteristic feature of art production that it is not organized by the same structures as other types of work and not accessible by the same standards (for example, because it is not subject to total subordination), then it is difficult to see how the demand for equal pay can play more than a metaphorical role in pointing out certain social injustices of this kind within the institution of art.¹⁵

Additionally, we may add, a wage model applying to all art institutions—without taking into account the infrastructure and means of said institution—will most likely mean fewer projects for less well-funded institutions, or even closures in the end. And where does the economical offset end? Hypothetically speaking, are off-spaces also in favor of asking for an honorarium from artists or speakers if they offer their curatorial work?

The purely economic wage-labor model leaves out where the capitalization of the artwork happens: it happens at the art fairs, it is with potent galleries, it is with big auction houses. It also leaves out how to think about inequalities of race, class, and gender, of structural and intersectional violence, which also works on the basis of inclusions and exclusions. Furthermore, in Vishmidt, thoughts following modernists' desire for the fusion of art and life, this move to pseudo equalizing artistic labor "can mean that the real class divisions that underpin the maintenance of regimes of paid and unpaid labor, mental and manual labor, art work and 'shit work', are obscured."¹⁶

The demand that would make more sense is to ask for an overall better funded art scene, giving the usually lively and creative art scene the recognition and appreciation it deserves, and that is oftentimes crucial for a cohesive city and its politics. In the logic of earlier workers' demand for higher wages, one should see this struggle for more support of the art field as a shared fight of a societal group. The art scene in that regard

should be understood as a social grouping, not just as individuals with individual contracts. Here, one could ask for redistributions on a bigger scale, coming from parts of the revenue that are generated in the high-priced business of art, from the public tourist departments (that often advertise using arts and creativity), and other sources of redistribution of surplus (there are many).

Nevertheless, art—meaning art production, curating, writing about art, and all transdisciplinary forms—presents a paradoxical situation, in its representational capacity and in its ideological power: art is able to generate resistance to the existing system, yet this resistance can only happen when any direct pay-out is ignored—as an opposition to the great leveler (in the sense of completely interchangeable) that is the monetary economy. It is a strength in the Fluxus attitude, for example, to give a shit about the art market. Even if art will always remain in this contradictory relationship with the market, even if in retrospect the ideological critical art actions, like Fluxus pieces, might end up in the high-priced art market, even then it has an ideological function. Art always interprets the world in which we live, it always comments; art makes proposals for being in the world.

So, to ask for other forms of valorization, it must be a structural protest, not a protest that remains at the level of individualized honoraria; it can only be a demand for transfer of the surplus from the art market, when other forms of suppression are also taken into account, to understand social inequality from a much more radical perspective. And here, art might be of assistance, art might be an ideological machine, a thriving force. This is also an argument by Marina Vishmidt: “It is the distorted and attenuated form of art’s autonomy as a *speculative intransigence to the existing*, including work, that can be the source of its political powers. And yet, identifying with work, especially with the disregarded and disposable subjects of that work, can indeed be the first step for such a politics of artistic inquiry and making, since capitalist work is structurally the antithesis of capitalist art, even if practically they sit on the same continuum.”¹⁷

In this respect, we would like you to read, hear, and see the interviews with the Zurich art scene and to read them not only as a lively, diverse, surprising, dazzling scene, but also as an ensemble of shared demands towards cultural policies.

Notes

1 <http://www.artspaceguide.ch/>.

2 Yan Su and Gregory Sholette, “From an Imaginary Interview with Gregory Sholette,” *OnCurating* 41 “CentresPeripheries – Complex Constellations,” eds. Ronald Kolb, Camille Regli, Dorothee Richter (2019), <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-41-reader/from-an-imaginary-interview-with-gregory-sholette.html>, last accessed Aug. 14, 2020.

3 Ibid.

4 Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

5 Su and Sholette, “From an Imaginary Interview with Gregory Sholette.”

6 See *OnCurating* 30, “Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics,” eds. Dorothee Richter, Tanja Trampe, Eleonora Stassi (June 2015), <https://on-curating.org/issue-30.html>, last accessed Aug. 14, 2020.

7 Marina Vishmidt, “The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labor,” see in this issue, 66—79.

8 See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (New York: Wiley, 1990).

9 Vishmidt, “The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labor,” 68.

10 Ibid.

11 Fabian Baumgartner, “Die Werbung der SVP mit Holocaust-Mahnmal ist geschmacklos und geschichtsvergessen,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, July 24, 2020, <https://www.nzz.ch/zuerich/svp-zuerich-wirbt-mit-holocaust-mahnmal-das-ist-geschmacklos-ld.1568094>. Unfortunately, the article is behind a pay wall; here some of the headlines (translated from German): “SVP: A poster in the “damaged brain” category | NZZ, Aug. 19, 2019... The visual language of the current poster is tasteless and without doubt historically charged. Those who portray their political opponents as vermin...”; “SVP Zurich advertises with Holocaust Memorial: It’s in bad taste | NZZ, July 24, 2020: “The Zurich SVP goes on a vote-catching campaign with the Berlin Holocaust Memorial. By accident, the party claims. This is embarrassing.”

12 See <https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/s/u.htm>.

13 See “What is to be Done under Real Subsumption?” workshop and meeting, November 28-30, 2014, <http://www.mattin.org/essays/what.html>, last accessed August 17, 2020.

14 Vishmidt, “The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labor,” 70.

15 Ibid., 70.

16 Ibid., 71.

17 Ibid., 77.

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OnCurating Project Space, oncurating-space.org



"Five artistic strategies with and against the change of time", Kunstszene Zurich 2018 OnCurating Project Space.



Hilla Toony Navok, *Rolling Rooms*, 2020. Event #7 of *Choreographing the Public*. Curated by Ronny Koren and Maya Bamberger



Maëlle Gross, *THIS IS YOUR CAPTAIN*, 2019. As part of 2019 Zürich moves. Curated by: Camille Regli



Assembleia MotherTree, 2018. Alongside Ernesto Neto: *Gaia-MotherTree at Zurich Main Station*. A project by *Fondation Beyeler*. Curated by Ernesto Neto, Daniela Zyman and Damian Christi

Part 1

Between Art and Politics: Eva-Maria Würth

Interviewed by Dorothee Richter

Eva-Maria Würth (Zurich), artist from the duo Interpixel (together with Philippe Sablonier), lecturer (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Design & Art, study course Art & Mediation), and politician (Co-President, Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich) interviewed by Dorothee Richter

Dorothee Richter: You are a politically engaged artist with projects such as *Disarming the Children's Rooms*, and now you are in real politics, how did that happen?

Eva-Maria Würth: The art system is partly a rather closed social field. For some years now, there have been increasing efforts to open up cultural institutions and make them more permeable, and also to adapt cultural funding accordingly. But this was not enough for me. I was interested in becoming active in further fields beyond Interpixel's own transdisciplinary and art-system-breaking art projects. It is true that our artworks had social and political effects in and outside of the art field. I didn't just want to take up topics and bring them into the social discussion, but to get involved in a very concrete, factual political way. In politics there are other possibilities for action than in art. In politics, decisions are made effectively—depending on political majorities—which have implications for Realpolitik. The language in the art system and in Realpolitik are different. In some respects, the spheres are mutually dependent; in others, there are hardly any points of contact.

DR: You were a member of parliament in the Canton of Zurich, and you were a member of parliament in the City of Zurich. Did the work in real politics influence your artistic work, and if yes, in what ways?

EMW: Art and politics are both formative areas of society, in which an idea is developed in long processes from the initial idea to its implementation. A large part of the political work takes place in exclusion of the public in the form of intellectual work, discussions, and the working out of political proposals. This is similar to artistic work, in which a large part of the work—in the studio or elsewhere—is also carried out in the background. Only a small part of the political work becomes visible to the public. Political work is an intellectual marathon run, i.e., highly strategic work, whose craft—similar to making art—is learned through action and doing and requires a great deal of endurance. The acquired skills can be used very well for making art and for mediating activities, especially on a linguistic and content level. Realpolitik takes a lot of time if you want to get seriously involved. That's why in recent years, I have increasingly focused on political work and put the purely artistic work at the back. In addition to my parliamentary work, I have been involved at a national level as a member of the central board of the Swiss Visual Arts Association (Visarte). Currently, I am a founding member and Co-President of Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich and am active outside parliament as well.

DR: For an outsider, the way in which decisions are made in the art and culture department and, of course, in politics is very dubious for me. It is not that easy to find members of a cultural committee. Is it that all the decisions are made by the whole parliament? And is it because of this that politics look so tame in some respects?

EMW: In Switzerland, the principle of publicity applies to state authorities. This is intended to make the actions of the authorities and offices comprehensible and transparent for outsiders. On the one hand, it obliges state authorities to make information of general interest available to the public on their own initiative, i.e., to pursue an active information policy. On the other hand, every person has the fundamental right of access to information held by government agencies. Requested state agencies are obliged to answer such requests.

Since Switzerland is organized on a federal basis, the authorities in each of the twenty-six cantons and in the more than 2,000 communes are structured differently, both organizationally and politically. As a result, the political processes are very different and so is the way information is disseminated. In some cantons, for example, all cultural tasks are concentrated in a single office, while in others they are distributed across various offices or departments. This means that cultural practitioners, curators, etc. have to obtain information about public cultural promotion directly from the public authorities in the respective canton. Unfortunately, there is no standardized system. This makes it both demanding and time-consuming for cultural operators to bring together the funding of cultural projects that go beyond the cantonal borders. However, thanks to the principle of publicity, the information is accessible to everyone. In the canton of Zurich, for example, the state agency for culture publishes an extremely transparent annual activity report, which is also available on the website as a PDF file, where it shows its activities and who has received cultural funding. It is important to know that the main responsibility for public cultural promotion in Switzerland lies with the cantons and municipalities, not with the federal government. This means that this is also where the most funding is available across the country.

Ideally, politicians define the framework conditions for cultural promotion (law, finances, etc.), and independent cultural promotion commissions do the substantive work. In many cantons, however, the policymakers also want to have a say in the content of the awarding of grants. Thus, there are certain decisions that are made solely by cultural promotion commissions and others where the government body or parliament has the final say. In other words, cultural promotion always interacts directly or indirectly with politics. That is why it can be said: the more open-minded a state (canton) is, the “better” its cultural promotion is structured.

DR: Switzerland is one of the first European countries in which the right-wing party had a higher percentage of votes? In what way does this influence the cultural sector?

EMW: Across Switzerland, public cultural budgets came under pressure, especially at the cantonal level. In some cantons, they have experienced drastic cuts, which have been painfully felt by the cultural scene. These are not purely due to the strengthening of the SVP (Schweizerische Volkspartei/ Swiss People’s Party). All in all, it can be said that the liberal and, to some extent, the bourgeois forces have increasingly lost the awareness and self-conception of promoting and supporting culture. As a result, majorities that are necessary for financing culture have been and are increasingly

breaking away. The big debate revolves around how much public support for culture is needed, whether art and culture should be financially self-sustaining, and who should fulfill the cultural mandate guaranteed in the constitution. I advocate a democratically legitimized art that also allows for uncomfortable questions and that is not oriented towards neoliberal profit for the individual. Blockbuster culture and box-office hits must be oriented towards the mainstream and thus towards the economic power of an artistic or cultural work. However, the promotion of art and culture and their content must not be tied to whether they are financially profitable. The culture of a country also consists of small and fine tones, which in their diversity form the cohesion in our country. This cannot be determined by a political left-right scheme but requires a fundamental cultural understanding of pluralism. It is not clear to many people that cultural work is not a hobby but a profession and that those who work in the cultural sector, those who mediate culture and all those involved must also be decently rewarded. Above all, it is also not clear to many that art and culture play a decisive role in creating identity.

DR: Does the concordance system also make it necessary to find an agreement with right-wing parties?

EMW: Since Switzerland has no opposition policy, the task is always to find political solutions that are supported by a majority. Alliances between the parties can change from business to business. Politics in a democracy means convincing with arguments. The middle parties are the most important players. They are courted by both the left and the right because they are the tip of the scales. Switzerland is a country of consensus. It is always a matter of finding solutions that are at least accepted by everyone. This makes Switzerland somewhat slower in political processes than countries with an opposition system, but also more stable.

DR: What is the next big challenge for the cultural sphere?

EMW: The cultural scene in Switzerland is acutely threatened by the COVID crisis. It is essential to ensure that cultural diversity with all its niche productions can be preserved. Switzerland has co-signed the UNESCO resolution on cultural diversity and is obliged to implement it. Culture contributes to our quality of life. It is the backbone of Switzerland: apart from its ideal cultural values, it is the basis of a long economic value chain. It is often argued that culture only costs. Studies¹ prove the opposite. It not only creates jobs, but also provides innovation and impulses. Culture is relevant to the system in various respects: for society, for the individual, for the economy. It is important not to be deceived by numbers. Economic reasons are never decisive for cultural activity. Ultimately, the question is what it takes for people to be creative. The aspects of the precariousness and fragility of cultural production are important here. This is something that must be discussed after COVID. We must have a discussion about the value of culture and consider what a contemporary, liberal, democratic society needs in order to provide a good life for all members of society. For that we need a well-functioning cultural sector.

DR: What does the association Verein Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich do in Switzerland and especially in Zurich?

EMW: Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich² is the community of interest of the cultural producers, cultural institutions, and cultural mediators in the Canton of Zurich. The organization is the common voice of all sectors for city and country, for both broad and high

culture. It is politically committed to the comprehensive, future-oriented, and sustainable promotion of art and culture in the Canton of Zurich and its communities. The aim is to maintain and strengthen the Canton of Zurich as an important cultural location. To this end, Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich, as a political lobby organization, tries to convince political decision-makers of the importance of public cultural promotion and of an active and broad concept of culture.

The organization does everything in its power to ensure that public cultural promotion is maintained and that new tasks are neither compensated for by cuts in the current free cultural promotion nor that the legally enshrined operating contributions for large cultural institutions are reduced in order to safeguard other cultural promotion. After all, in order to fulfil its legal mandate, public cultural funds need not less but more resources if cultural support is not only to continue to make the existing possible, but also to offer courageous and innovative scope for the emergence of new things and thus secure Zurich as a cultural location.

In concrete terms, Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich is calling for more support for professional cultural production and mass culture in the municipalities and regions. The strengthening of non-commercial areas in art and culture creates democratic negotiation spaces for all age groups and all parts of societies. Decentralized structures are to be used to bring professional cultural practitioners more closely together with other fields of work and society in order to benefit from mutual impulses through exchange. Funding provided by the canton and communes must make it possible to pay cultural practitioners the fees recommended by professional associations so that their social security can be improved. New sectors and areas should be promoted and the narrow boundaries between sectors and between high and mass culture should be reconsidered. Cross-generational cultural projects to strengthen the joint cultural participation of children, young people, and adults should be given greater weight. Cultural education and the promotion of cultural projects in primary schools, vocational schools, technical colleges, and universities should be expanded. Inclusion is also to be promoted: more attention should be paid to projects by other cultures and by cultural workers with a migration background in order to stabilize, democratize, and secure social peace in our society. The aspect of gender diversity and gender issues should also be increasingly included. In addition, greater weight must be given to the inclusion of people with disabilities. Then cultural reporting must be ensured. The visualization and reflection of cultural creation must be ensured by means of an independent platform or by promoting media cultural reporting, which also takes into account smaller projects, exhibitions and performances as well as unknown persons.

DR: For me, it is rather strange that an extremely rich city like Zurich neglects the open scene, the “dark matter” of the art world in such an extreme way. All in all, the open scene gets a very small part of what each bigger institution gets; this sounds dubious and rather strange, since the Zurich art scene has many off-spaces and a manifold cultural scene. So, in the end does this mean that the art in Zurich can be only done by rich kids?

EMW: If it goes on like this, yes... The economic pressures are getting worse and worse. Everything is getting more expensive, especially rents, which are an ever-increasing share of household costs. So, the pressure on freelance and self-employed cultural workers and off-spaces is increasing. In the city of Zurich, tax money is invested in cultural promotion. Playing the cultural institutions off against the independent scene is not conducive to achieving the desired results. Rather, the question should be asked whether the available money is sufficient for the density of cultural

workers in the city and canton of Zurich, or whether more should not be demanded, as Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich suggests. Because the funds are far from sufficient for project funding and small operating contributions... pressure would have to be built up from the scene.

Zurich, as the largest Swiss city, is a magnet. The Zurich University of the Arts has an additional charisma: many students stay in the city after completing their studies because they have built up a functioning network here over the years. In my opinion, the city and canton have a responsibility to do more for the independent scene and to raise more money. Because only if the independent scene has enough money and space at its disposal can it develop sustainably and carry out essential work in terms of content. Everything is a system that builds on itself. The independent scene is a breeding ground for the big houses. And here it needs more effort than the independent scene is not just a heater for the graduates, but that this scene has its (niche) justification and existence parallel to the big houses and lighthouses. If this is lost, the cultural diversity in the city of Zurich will wither away. The (self-)exploitative situation that prevails will create a new precarity in the long run.

DR: How could the cultural scene support the fight for a much steadier situation in the arts and culture?

EMW: The cultural actors must join forces and stand up for their interests and concerns in politics and society. The relevant organizations exist: from professional associations to trade unions, political parties and interest groups for culture. Everyone is free to become a member of Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich or of a professional association and to actively participate in political discourse. Without commitment, there is no culture.

Notes

1 "Culture as an Economic Factor," study by Bank Julius Baer 2013; see BAK Basel: <https://www.bak-economics.com>. Study on the Swiss value added of the creative economy in Switzerland by the ZHdK; see Creative Economies Reports ZHdK: <https://www.zhdk.ch>. "SALZBURGER FESTSPIELE—Motor for the Economy, Infusion of Excellence for the Location. Value Added Analysis of the Salzburg Festival" study by the Salzburg Chamber of Commerce 2016; see Salzburg Festival: <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/daten-fakten>. Its members are the cultural institutions in the Canton of Zurich as well as political communities, cultural associations, cultural mediators, cultural workers, and interested persons. They are active in the visual arts, film, literature, music, opera, dance, theatre, museums, and other fields.

Eva-Maria Würth was born in St. Gallen, lives and works in Zurich and Lucerne. She studied fine arts at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and has been working as an artist under the name Interpixel together with Philippe Sablonier since 2000. As a lecturer she teaches at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts - Design & Art. Together with the artist duo Interpixel she artistically thematizes social and political phenomena with the means of visual art. Their methods are oriented towards the production of social communication in the form of interventions and playful actions. With its strategies, it questions the perception of reality and rethinks it with those involved in the discourse.

Eva-Maria Würth is involved in cultural policy as Co-President of Pro Kultur Kanton Zürich - which she initiated and built up in 2017. From 2007 - 2017 she was a member of the central board of the professional association for visual arts (visarte.schweiz). In the past, Eva-Maria Würth has held other political mandates, such as Zurich Cantonal Councilor from 2016 - 2019 and Zurich City Councilor from 2012 - 2014.

Dorothee Richter is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, and Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS/ MAS Curating, which she founded in 2005 at the Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland. She is director of the PhD in Practice in Curating Programme, a cooperation of the Zurich University of the Arts and the University of Reading. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she was initiator of Curating Degree Zero Archive and Curator at Kuenstlerhaus Bremen. She is Executive Editor of the web journal OnCurating.org.



Eva-Maria Würth, *Interaction_32: 56 Stunden*, for "Baden and Work, Art Chair BBB Baden (Art and Construction Project), 2012. Photo: Hans Stuhmann, Aise Yavas

I might be wrong—Focus on Off-Spaces Unravelling Success in a Discursive Series

by Giovanna Bragaglia, Miwa Negoro,
and Camille Regli

I might be wrong is a discursive and explorative series of events taking place at the OnCurating Project Space. Initiated in 2019, the program invites people from different disciplines to shed light on moments of impulse, doubts, and experiments that one comes across in life. It is not about pinpointing the mistake but rather understanding the experience as a transformation, a passage, or a learning curve that is essential to one's growth. Taking place on weekday evenings, *I might be wrong* sets a safe and intimate environment in order to pursue alternative and nonhierarchical ways of sharing and producing knowledge.

The project started from a desire to increase engagement at the OnCurating Project Space, an independent non-profit and experimental space at the heart of Zurich that fosters cross-disciplinary and multi-formatted projects. While developing the programming for the space, a new conversational format arose. A program that would increase debates among visitors, as well as a bridge to art and curatorial practices with other disciplines—such as design, architecture, food, science—to trigger dialogues beyond the field of contemporary art. The idea is to propose a format that does not follow the traditional discursive model of speakers in front of an audience, but instead breaks this binary presence by creating a more integrated setting.

Challenging the standard talk format comes with the understanding that its dynamics mostly function in a unidirectional way, establishing power relations in knowledge production. In an attempt to disrupt the unilateral gesture of the 'conference,' this discursive project aims to become more rhizomatic and inclusive by inviting the audience to be part of the conversation in a more spontaneous and organic way. This is achieved by scaling down the environment's hierarchies (no pedestal for the speaker(s); no linear chair disposition; more proximity between the speaker(s) and the public; no silence regulation, etc.) and scaling up accessibility and the horizontalization of the setting (by sitting on the floor; offering drinks and snacks; toning down the lighting and toning up the music; also by formulating open questions; and talking about difficulties and challenges rather than achieved successes and opportunities, etc.).

*– I feel there is often little interaction between the persons that speak and the audience during a talk. It's usually about one's success and its effects. Not a lot is given on the things that explicitly or implicitly go wrong, the 'failures' you know. It's hard to speak about failures.**

–I agree. It reminds me of this song from Radiohead that goes, “Think about the good times and never go back, what would I do, if I did not have you, open up, let me in, let’s go down the waterfall, have ourselves a good time, it’s nothing at all...”

These events are called *I might be wrong*. Resonating with the melancholic Radiohead song of the same name, the program of conversations addresses moments of vulnerability. It is not only about expressing accomplishments, but more about the motivations and events that went ‘less right’; the detours and lessons learnt over time; the risk-taking experiments; the doubts and insecurities; the unusual situations and how to adapt to them, among other. These conversations explore our sense of genuineness, and aim to generate honest exchanges and learnings from each other, in an endeavor of care.

Diving deeper, these reflections quite subtly resonate with the situation of the OnCurating Project Space and the precariousness, the struggles, and the learning that come with it. After some thorough conversations among the curatorial board of the space, it felt natural to make the uncertain yet vibrant landscape of independent art spaces the starting point of this discursive program. Indeed, there are notable conversations to initiate and insight to share among spaces’ initiators, curators, and cultural workers, ranging from the amount of emotional and free labor involved in the process; the competitive landscape towards funding; the relationship with artists and with institutions. A field of numerous complexities.

– How do you understand the term of ‘independent art space’ or ‘off-space’ as such? It’s quite difficult to frame, isn’t it?

– To me, there are different modus operandi, conditions and structures of running an art space. For instance, they can be artist-run, curatorial-led, or project-based. Speaking of the OnCurating Project Space, I would say that it emerged from the need to have a physical site to experiment: going from research to practice.

– It also cultivates emerging practices by encouraging the new generations of artists and cultural practitioners.

– There is this book,¹ for example, that introduces Sara Ahmed’s observation on unconscious habitual behaviors in institutions. It reads, “To institutionalize is to become routine or ordinary.” So, in order to escape such structure, one should act in other and unordinary ways.

– Yes, and that’s what makes it ‘off’, an outsider of the institutional structures. It’s ambiguous, but perhaps that’s what an off-space is: a non-definition.

– Somehow, the presence of a side art circuit or rather an autonomous circuit that develops in parallel to the public and private institutions allows one to counter-think the system set in place and to question the discourse. In my view, the independent art spaces, both physical locations or nomadic projects, are freer in articulating new and creative ways of exhibiting. They endorse a self-reflective attitude towards their role in the wider cultural context.

– So, in other words, they are not substantially driven by monetary goals nor do they satisfy market demands. They are tendentiously experimental, self-determining, and essential in channeling the currents and the voices of tomorrow.

– That’s right. And now I push it further, how can one challenge the preconceived ideas of an off or project space, if there are some?

Many questions are to be raised, and many answers and opinions to be listened to. Narrowing the framework, the program of *I might be wrong* kicked off with a focus on the Zurich art scene and what it means to run an independent space in the city. Overall, to question how different spaces position themselves in the city’s artistic map and how their presence shapes the cultural topology of Zurich. The first events invited space representatives that are established in Zurich and nurture the local artistic panorama.

The first event was hosted at the OnCurating Project Space in November 2019 with **Kulturfolger**, **la_cápsula**, and **Kein Museum** (some of them are featured in this issue) to discuss the specificities and difficulties in managing an independent space in the city, addressing the stakes involved when looking for funding; the scarcity of team members and the management of tasks; the concerns and necessities of engaging with diverse audiences, to mention a few.



I might be wrong, at the OnCurating Project Space, November 2019.

Petra Tomljanović from Kulturfolger founded the project space in 2016 with her former professional partner, Lisa Lee Benjamin. The space works as a cross-disciplinary environment, dealing mostly with topics of digital information and philosophy. Kulturfolger is interested in the edges and frontiers of the world and is committed to exploring new modes of inquiry, through indexes, definitions, concepts, and experimentation. Besides the exhibition program, Kulturfolger offers one-year-long residencies and talk programs which reach out to scholars from transdisciplinary fields to share input on various topics.

– One has to be constantly active. The residency is one of the formats that extends the physical space at its most. It brings back fresh blood and constantly changes perspectives because it’s totally out of my curatorial power. It actually happens outside of it, and that’s somehow how I can put myself down. It’s part of the practice. It’s important to have a certain structure and then change the formats within it.

– That’s interesting. For us with la_cápsula, we started without a space, so it was difficult to call it a space or a project. To what extent are we open? How do we want

to program? We started without a space and did projects nonetheless. But now we have a space, so it's about what we do with it.

Adriana Domínguez and Elena Rosauero founded la_cápsula in 2017, an independent and experimental curatorial project that bridges dialogues between artistic and cultural production between Latin American and Swiss/local artists. It started up as a pop-up project in a garage, which brought up the name “the capsule.” It collaborated with different art spaces in Zurich until the opening of its own exhibition space in December 2018. Since the very beginning, the curators have been promoting cross-national dialogues and tackling topics such as environmental issues, feminism, geopolitics, gender issues, and decolonializing exhibition discourse, informed by the context of Switzerland.

– Our cross-regional approach led us to create a community of people that are interested in the Latin-American related events. This community is something that keeps us going.

To think of a space as a collective act is undoubtedly what brings the various invitees to believe in their projects and aspire to their community. In those terms, the initiative of Kein Museum emerged from friendship. Represented at the event by Carla Peca, Cristiana Stella, and Wanda Honegger, the collective is formed by seven members from diverse disciplines and studies, such as graphic designers, art historians, photographers, editors, those with backgrounds in cultural analysis, psychology, philosophy, literature, and gender studies. As an independent exhibition space, Kein Museum offers a platform for young artists, scientists, and other cultural producers to realize projects and examine cultural phenomena through the lens of institutional critique.

– We named the space ‘Kein Museum - Raum für Experiment [space for experiments]’ because at the University of Zurich we were trained in reading society and analyzing culture. So, for us to have a space is an approach to try out research.

– Also, it's not like we are the curators and that's all. We include people who want to work with us. Our team is always growing.

– Exactly, as a structure we are flexible. We organically share the organizational tasks, meaning that each of us take a certain role and specialty. Our collectivity brings us together and fosters a space of gathering... also made of fun and parties.

A couple of months after the first event, the second edition of the series took place in January 2020 at the OnCurating Project Space, inviting **Last Tango** alongside **Art Empowers**. The conversations ranged from the practicality and criticality of having a physical space, including the location and positioning, to the legal procedures of dealing with artworks and the DIY techniques in art-handling and production—especially facing efforts in thinking sustainable and non-wasteful. Indeed, both spaces expressed struggles in maintaining their space, which eventually allowed them to think more creatively about their own aesthetics, curatorial and experimental exhibition-making.

Setting up *I might be wrong* at the OnCurating Project Space, January 2020, in the site-specific installation of Israeli artist Hilla Toony Navok

Once a space, Art Empowers runs as a nomadic project by Fabienne Ott. It uses exhibition formats as a means of participation and artistic strategy, blurring the roles



of curators and art mediators/educators. Trained as a schoolteacher, Fabienne Ott initiated her project space and research during her master's in Curating at the ZHdK. While doing educational tours in art institutions alongside her studies, she realized that, in order for kids to face the complexities and holistic nature of society, they needed more active reasoning and enhanced stimulations, beyond entertainment. With Art Empowers, she creates workshops in collaboration with artists that are activated by children to trigger self-empowerment and to develop a more creative and reflective understanding of the world.

– I combined the role of the curator and the art mediator from the very beginning. That makes the whole process of curating really participatory. I use participation as an aesthetic strategy.

Founded in 2016 by Linda Jensen and Arianna Gellini, Last Tango is an exhibition space currently located in Kreis 5 in Zurich. Its curatorial agenda is mostly based on—but not restricted to—two-person exhibitions, coupling contemporary artists working with either similar or contrasting positions. The nature of the project is to look for empty and abandoned spaces in Zurich and to occupy them until the lease runs out. So far, this method has brought Last Tango subsequently to three different locations, all three with a different architectural space. Choosing the “right” space is a characteristic and an essential criteria of their curatorial practice.

– Until now, we have been interested in locations that have a strong architectural identity.

– We have also been interested in mixing different artists' positions. For instance, by having one from the more mainstream art scene and the other who has shown less in the last years, or comes from different scenes and backgrounds in order to see tensions. In our first group exhibitions, we showed duos in each room, so it still relates to our 'tango' in a sense.

The series of *I might be wrong* continues, involving more spaces, more collectives, more projects, and eventually more disciplines to express thoughts and experience in an

environment of intimacy and confidence. The immediate impact of the program has generated positive outcomes from the participants. Not only for the audience, but also for the space's representatives who have acknowledged the lack of crossovers and awareness of each other. It resulted in a necessity to listen to each other, shaping a heterotopic setting for reflections and debates among peers.

– It reminds me that William Kentridge opened an incubator for artists to fail, called the 'Centre for the Less Good Idea' in Johannesburg. He says "in the process of making, a meaning will emerge"² and basically there are no good solutions. The only thing that we have is the need and the will to produce things.

– *It's very Beckettian, "try again, fail again, fail better."*

– So, our only certainty in the world of uncertainties is to keep believing in our projects as they themselves create meaning.

– And, to accept an unfinished or incomplete state of it.

The beauty, and perhaps the absurdity, of these conversations is found in the absence or lack of conclusions. The experience of going through these debates—as much as the experience of running an independent space—is about the 'process.' It is about the process of trying and failing. It is about 'learning by doing' and about the courage to take risks. The aesthetics of failure resonates with a school of thought and a practice of attempts. It is the act of seeking to undo what is considered standard by exploring and transcending existing boundaries. In a nutshell, *I might be wrong* is about opening up the realm of possibilities and looking at a future that holds the benefits of doubt.

**The dialogues and quotes inserted in the text have been retrieved from internal conversations, emails, Whatsapp and personal documentation of the events. They are purposely anonymous, in order to respect the intimacy of the conversations.*

Notes

1 Binna Choi, Annette Krauss, Yolande van der Heide, UNLEARNING EXERCISES: Art Organizations as Sites for Unlearning (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2019). (Its glossary of terms "Habits" suggests further readings: Gayatri Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization, 8; Sara Ahmed, On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life, 21).

2 William Kentridge, cited in Harry Swartz-Turfle, "Failing Better: William Kentridge's Drawing Lessons," Hyperallergic, April 8, 2010, accessed online in March 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/4985/william-kentridge-drawing-lessons/>.

Giovanna Bragaglia is an independent curator living in Zurich. She holds an interest in issues dealing with identity politics and encounters in particular in relation to deterritorialized geography. She curated the exhibition *Processos Públicos*, at Paço das Artes, *Alice Brill: Impressões ao rés-do-chão*, at Instituto Moreira Salles, as well as *Decolonizing Art Institutions*, *Say the same thing*, and *Silvan Kálin: Homo Viator*, at the OnCurating Project Space. She has published texts for the *OnCurating.org* journal, *Revista ZUM* online, and in exhibition catalogues. Bragaglia is an alumna of the MAS in Curating, ZHdK.

Miwa Negoro is a curator and researcher currently based between Berlin and Zurich. With interests in the discourse of performativity, decolonial thinking, and re-narration of histories, her curatorial practice aims at reconfiguring cultural representations and hegemonic social mechanisms to encourage a fluidity of transcultural, non-binary conditions in the global present. She works as a curatorial research assistant at various institutions and international projects, and is a curatorial board member of the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich. Negoro is an alumna of the MAS in Curating, ZHdK.

Camille Regli is an independent curator and art professional. Her curatorial research focuses on 'small' (as opposed to overarching) narratives that sustain alternative means of knowledge production. She holds a Master's in Cultural Studies at King's College London and MAS in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts, and gained experience working in communications for institutions such as the Swiss Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, and the Istanbul Biennale. She is part of the OnCurating Project Space's curatorial team, is a regular contributor to the *OnCurating.org* journal and has taken part in the Young Curators Residency Programme at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin. Regli is an alumna of the MAS in Curating, ZHdK. She is appointed together with Kristina Grigorjeva as curatorial team for the exhibition space „Alte Krone“ in Biel/ Bienne.

A discussion on Blackness and the Arts in Switzerland

by Brandy Butler, Yara Dulac Gisler, Deborah Joyce Holman, and Sarah Owens

In light of the recent open letter by Black artists and cultural workers in Switzerland, Brandy Butler, Yara Dulac Gisler, Deborah Joyce Holman, and Sarah Owens speak about and reflect on tokenization, the white gaze, access to cultural spaces, and already living in the future.

Deborah Joyce Holman: Let's start this conversation by talking about tokenization. Because we want the things we have to say to be public—and we have a lot to say—but at the moment, considering the platforms we are offered, we almost always end up being tokenized. It's always a weighing one against the other. And so, just because this conversation is going to be in this journal, or because this conversation is taking place here, it doesn't mean that we're completely happy with the conditions or happy with this institution, but it is urgent that this message gets out.

Sarah Owens: One thing is how we privately deal with the issue of tokenization, and the other is how we act publicly, but both are connected, of course. I have sometimes responded to being invited that I feel I am being tokenized, and then the person who invited me answers "Aha," and that's it. It seems that as soon as I put a name on it, they think the issue has been discussed and that they no longer have to deal with it. This makes it seem like it's only a personal issue—that I merely have to decide whether to feel tokenized or not—rather than a wider one.

Brandy Butler: I think a lot of people just don't know what it is or what it feels like. For myself in a position of feeling tokenized, there's always this conflict of being between a rock and a hard place, and that is because so many jobs come from this place. I am originally a Black singer from America, and so I am intimately aware of the commodification of Blackness as a validation of what they do. So, of course, you do not want those jobs, but you also have to live. It's always this moral fight with myself: what am I willing to do, how many times, and in what way, so I am still able to live off this thing that I do that is also of value—to me, but also for other people.

DJH: I agree with what you said about a lot of people not knowing what tokenization really is. It's almost as if we're being told to just be grateful to be included or offered any platform at all, so tokenization is impossible or irrelevant at least. There are all these subtle ways we are continually told that, "Actually, you are asking for too much." That we should just be happy with anything we are offered at all, even if it's the crumbs of the cake.

BB: I had a job a couple of years ago where I got asked to sing for a very famous Italian pop singer. I don't speak Italian; they were specifically looking for Black backup singers. In the end I said, "No, I will not take this job simply because I'm Black. I don't even speak Italian." They were so outraged that I had said it. I think it was the first time in my career that I said it so openly. I was at this point where I was trying to figure out

who I was as a solo performer and realized I had to stop taking these jobs. They push me into this identity that I don't actually necessarily even identify with. It distorts the feeling that I have about myself every time I loan my body and artistic work to that image. In the end, the people who offered me the job were so outraged that I never got a job through that agency again.

Yara Dulac Gisler: Being in the experimental theater field gives you the space to react to this directly. For example, the theater I work with gets labeled as a migrant theater all the time, simply because there are no white performers in it. So, in reaction to that, in our last two productions, we decided to step out of our costumes and sit there as "us," which was a total exposure. We would just talk about this issue. This was especially interesting in the case of the last production, which was about structural change in the asylum system. I was the only performer who had not experienced the asylum process on my own body. This was a super crazy conflict for me, because I was tokenized as someone who had physically gone through the process of migration as well. I was trying to negotiate with myself how important my experience is in this situation, and then I had the chance to discuss this directly with the audience as a part of the piece. So this is a possibility, but I realized it's a double-edged sword because you serve them by being present, and then you try to revoke that or renegotiate that, but what you offered already is inside of their space, which leads to a lot of confusion, and they can still be ignorantly happy. So, it's not the perfect solution, but it leaves more space.

SO: A group of students who are doing interviews with designers recently asked me about how they could ensure diversity and whether they should introduce a quota. I said, "No, because although I think it's super important to showcase the work of under-represented designers, a strict quota has the danger of making you think of diversity as a checklist, something that can be quickly and easily done. Which makes you forget that diversity is a change in mindset—you have to begin looking at design and designers differently, and that is not something you will achieve with a checklist." I have the feeling that tokenization, this "checklist mentality," and the argument that racial bias "is not a Swiss problem" interlock in a bad way that is difficult to entangle. The open letter by Black artists and cultural workers in Switzerland that was recently published asks some very important questions of local cultural institutions. Do you think that some institutions might interpret these questions as yet another checklist? And that some might think, "If we just answer the questions, then we're okay" and that no further action follows?

DJH: This work is based on long-term investment, so it's hard to say. Maybe it's unfair to say at this point, since hopefully there will be more work that is being put in: but at the moment it feels like the addressed art spaces that answered did approach it as a checklist, as if the work is now done. Within those that answered, it was also mind-boggling that they managed to circumvent our actual questions: we asked about their engagement with and commitment to Black artists, cultural workers, and audiences in Switzerland. We didn't get a lot of responses, but several out of those we received brought together Black and POC, so we actually still do not know how many Black people are in their institutions. Also, we asked that they answer the questions in terms of Black artists and cultural workers living or working in Switzerland and that in a second step, they should answer the questions in terms of international Black artists, cultural workers, and so on. I don't think anyone made that differentiation. So, again we don't actually have the transparency that we asked for about "what *is* your engagement with Black artists and cultural workers in Switzerland," and once again the

engagement with international Black artists and cultural workers is used as a plaster for a problem that is very much local, here in Switzerland, namely the marginalization and silencing of Black artists and cultural workers and the ignorance when it comes to structural racism.

YDG: We can actually dare to say that we didn't even get an acknowledgement of the real problem because they are unable to understand it.

BB: Again, I come back to this place where I don't think people know what it feels like, because if everywhere you go in the art world all you see are reflections of yourself, you of course never have to know outrage that you are not there. Anytime I see anything, if I see an all-white panel, if I see an all-white show, it's immediately jarring, because I don't think like this, ever. Anything that I've ever organized, there's always diversity present, because it's part of who I am. On the other side, it's also because I grew up in the US at the time of affirmative action where it really was a program that people just had to get used to, so you started to think this way. My mom was a multicultural education specialist, not because she studied it, but because it was our life. The idea of incorporating diversity at all levels was already very implemented in our house from the books with all the different people; my mother was as a white person very thoughtful of this from my childhood forward, and that remained her specialty, always. It's a practice in which you practice seeing difference. First, you have to see that it exists. And this is where I think the whole issue lies, because Switzerland is majority white, and none of them sees it as a problem because they're still everywhere. Everywhere they go they're always represented.

DJH: It's a big unlearning, mostly. It's letting go of the world as you perceive it: I don't have any other words to describe it other than a white supremacist world. I come from a very different background than you, Brandy. I grew up in a village where most people were white. And I grew up with a white mother, who had her own issues and challenges around race. So, because of that, and because so often we're taught to assimilate to whiteness especially when there are only very, very few of us, I grew up with a lot of internalized racism.

With that, I want to return to the question of tokenization for just a second. Often, I perceive it as an arrogance when I am invited to join a diversity consultation panel or if I am invited to speak on structural racism in the arts by institutions who are not doing the work to dismantle their own structural racial bias internally, because it's almost a refusal to sit with the problem and actually start deconstructing how you yourself perpetuate white supremacy. This was work I *had to* do, too. This knowledge didn't just appear out of the blue for me either—because I had and continue to have internalized racism. And I *chose* to let go of the world image I had and was brought up with. Because I had to. Because obviously I still continued experiencing racism, even when assimilating. But even had I not—deconstructing the world views we're brought up with and those reinforced by society in every aspect of life constantly is work that starts with yourself and that you just have to do as a responsible adult.

SO: That makes me think of the white/dominant gaze and this assumption that cultural events have a mostly white and very homogenous audience, which implies that the way the work will be seen is the way in which this very specific audience views it. And when outreach and media coverage of events or exhibitions take the same perspective, they reinforce this dominant gaze. I find this very problematic, also for myself, because having grown up in a majority-white society, I notice the white/domi-

nant gaze in my own way of looking. It sometimes is still my intuitive response because my normalcy was being surrounded by and seeing mainly whiteness. The internal fight then consists of resisting this response and trying to see differently. But many institutions seem to resist questioning their own perspective, which is why the argument that says, “Well, our audience *is* mainly white” has become a useful excuse.

BB: We can definitely say that most major art institutions, whether it’s visual art or theater or music, are on a feedback loop with themselves: “We are white people curating for white people giving feedback to ourselves, and we don’t make any real efforts.” Maybe they make the effort to put People of Color or Black people in as far as fulfilling and reinforcing the white audience’s views, but they don’t make any attempt at diversifying audiences at all, ever. That’s the number one issue for me: I want to produce works and also, I don’t want to constantly be restricted to the white gaze. Because it is uncomfortable. For that, I need this institution to take the responsibility to recognize me. They need to cultivate more diverse audiences, which means they urgently have to change their whole structure. Some slowly are—for example, some theaters are switching to “pay as you can” payment structures. This is one small step, but you also have to make programming for these people, you have to make them feel welcome in this space. Because I work in a theater and because I want more Black bodies in theater audiences, I started going to different theaters with Black friends and friends of color. More often than not, they’d say, “I just don’t feel comfortable here.” I understand of course—just like you said—I have the ability to turn off my uncomfortableness because I am also used to speaking in the language of whiteness and existing in the code of whiteness, so I know how to make myself pretend I am comfortable and to turn off the voice that says, “You don’t belong here.” This set a lot of thoughts in motion on how to even begin to make these spaces more welcoming or more mixed than they are now.

YDG: I totally agree. I was immediately questioning the reasons as to why audiences are very homogenous and white as soon as you said that.

BB: One of the things the choreographer and performer Jeremy Nedd, who I’ve been working with over the last years, taught me is that, “You don’t owe it to anyone to reproduce trauma or violence in order to tell your story.” I did not know this, actually. It never occurred to me that I could find another perspective to explain what happened to me or whatever it is that I want to talk about. Most of my work is very personal, related to my body, my Black body, my fat body. All of these are very important central themes in my performances. And I didn’t know initially how to do it otherwise. This is also because it’s not only a creative part, but also because aforementioned audiences expected it of me, and then I fell again into the feedback loop, doing what people want so that you can be seen at all.

DJH: Completely. It goes into all the different realms, like producing work and you feel like you have to include trauma or make your body relive trauma in order to make the work. Especially in theater and performance, you don’t just show something, you actually perform it, you make your body feel it again. This also goes for this whole discussion about racism in the arts: we are constantly asked, “Do you have any examples? Can you relive your trauma for us? Can you tell us about how painful this was?” But why should we have to?!... It’s painful! It’s not just an anecdote that is “oh so interesting.” Because it is something that we relive again and again and again.

BB: Returning to the question of how to make institutions more accessible and accommodating to diverse audiences, I wanted to speak about this project on wellness

we did at Neumarkt in February 2020. The theater itself is a fairly white space, but wellness is a white, white, white space. From the beginning, the question for me was how do we get people of color, how do we get Black people in this space. I wanted Black people to have access to this wellness experience. Together with some of the other ensemble members, we could convince the institution to have one day that would be exclusively for audiences of color. Immediately, so many discussions erupted, “Why is it necessary? Who can be in this space? POCs could just come any other day.” Internally, I was so frustrated. If you can understand that women need their own sauna space, because they may not feel safe within a mixed sauna, then you can understand that POCs may also need their own space because they may not feel comfortable. I can see that it’s a socialization. That the dissonance comes because people are not practicing thinking this way. It’s like a light switch that has to get turned on in so many instances. In the end, it’s a realization that it’s a reality: you have to accept that there are many different groups of people that may not feel comfortable just because—it doesn’t even matter exactly why... just because—and then the individual work that goes into understanding how to get those people there regardless of the discomfort it may produce for the institution. But it will never be: “Okay, now we’ve made our prices cheaper, so now it will be a more diverse audience.” I think honestly that you will just have a more diverse white audience, you will have more students, people who are retired. It needs a complete reframing of the space. You have to make the space into a new place that is like, “We consciously are aware this space has this vibe, and so now we remake it, so we try to get rid of at least some of it, so that other groups of people can feel like they can be in it as well.”

DJH: It all goes back to this letting go of your own worldview, right? You have to let go of your own worldview to even understand that it is oppressive.

SO: Not understanding that a white space might be perceived as uncomfortable by Black people really connects to what we were saying earlier about this response of “You should be grateful for even being invited.” It’s really apparent in those incidents when you decline an invitation, and the response hints that the inviting person is thinking, “How can this even be? How can a Black person decline being in this space when we’ve tried to make it accessible to them?”

BB: That also means that it’s clear that it is necessary to hire Black people into these positions to even offer that space and to know what it means to make it comfortable for other Black people.

DJH: There are a million different examples coming into my head. But I want to note here that we’re talking in terms of comfortable-ness, when actually what we mean is feeling safe, I believe. Being safe from the awareness that, in any given moment, a situation can turn into a harmful, violent encounter when white people are in the space through subtle or explicitly racist remarks or actions.

YDG: My mind is buzzing...everything seems so banal and at the same time so complex. Banality starts at the point where we as women are used to being the only women in a room, and you realize it but still you know how to endure it. A Black person in an all-white space—especially in a white wellness space—we all are used to enduring it. But how crazy would it be if a white person were to be the only white person in a Black wellness space.

DJH: It's always this story, isn't it? "Oh my god, I went to... insert African country here... and I was the only white person on the plane! Can you believe it?" And you're expected to mirror that shock in response.

YDG: And then you have to clarify that this a feeling we also get all the time.

BB: It was interesting to observe how different the wellness evening with a primarily white audience was to the one exclusively for POC. They were like day and night. One was about: "We do something parallel to each other, but we are very quiet so we actually don't bother anybody else," and on the POC wellness night, people were singing and there was therapy. All of this was initiated by the audience. It actually highlighted that you cannot do the same thing for everybody and expect that it's going to fit and that everybody will feel welcome. You have to also give people the space to create within that. Really on this POC evening, the people that were there dictated what happened, and that's why they also felt so free.

DJH: I'm thinking about, you know, the accusation about separatism and reverse racism that loves to creep into these spaces. It's not about creating separate worlds or exclusion, it's about recognizing difference, actually discarding this phenomenon of "color-blindness" that ignores difference in saying that "we all want and need the same thing." There should be no problem with catering to different experiences.

SO: Something we mentioned earlier was that it seems what is usually picked out of the work of a Black artist are pieces about trauma. I think the white gaze becomes very evident in this. The white gaze seems to be directing that, "This is the work we want to see, we want to see Black pain, and this is the only thing we want to talk about."

DJH: That resonates with me so much, it's literally what I had to navigate when I was at Uni studying visual arts. At the beginning of the course, I was very interested in online space and social media and stuff like this, but then every time I presented my work, identity would come up. In several crits, it seemed that lecturers wanted to say, "Oh, but also let's talk about that you're Black in a very flat way," all the while refusing to acknowledge the lens through which they'd view my work and the fact that they, too, inhabit an identity and a relational position in the world. I didn't want to talk with these people about that. That wasn't what I was interested in with my work. I shouldn't even have to justify that. I realized that the main thing I learnt from art school, was how to navigate those expectations and how to demand my work to be treated with as much consideration and depth as we do with white artists... Towards the end of my course, Black students and those of color started to have more exchange around that experience, and we realized that in fact none of them were isolated issues. Most of us felt that our work was not given appropriate nurturing and care by lecturers in an educational institution that is supposed to facilitate our growth as artists. Most of us experienced crits as extremely violent and traumatizing. Together with Yara, I am thinking a lot how we all are tricksters in a way because we know that we live with all these expectations we have to navigate. We have to negotiate with ourselves how much we give, like: "Is it worth giving so much just to make sure we're understood?" It connects back to this thing of giving trauma or appealing to humanity—and appealing to the humanity of white people surprisingly often doesn't work. As Toni Morrison said, "The very serious function of racism is distraction. To keep us explaining over and over our right to existence." Even in this conversation, we are navigating: when do we provide specific examples of the systematic issues we are speaking about, when do we not, how much do we give, how much do we keep hidden? And we have to do it all the

time. But there also is something very powerful in there, in illegibility, in refusal, in silence.

YDG: I don't know what happened to me while studying at university, or rather, what is still happening, actually. I realize now that I entered Uni and this specific course very naively, but that is a conversation for another day. Three years ago, several peers of mine told me, "Oh, it's so interesting how you are only interested in Africa-related or Black topics." And this is very crazy, because there had not been one single seminar about this. I don't know where they got that from. And there is no list where people register their interests, so how would they even know my interests differ from theirs? We were all studying the same thing. Back then, it really worried me because I felt this white gaze all over me every time I wanted to say something in class. It could be a seminar about Japanese drawing, but the moment I would say something I felt the white gaze. But at the same time, I realized this is where the question comes in why I started this course, and it's very art-related. I am not sure how much I did it for myself, or if I did it in order to be able to name things or in order to get out of there and be more sure of what I want because now I can name it. And then with art, somehow the same thing happens when they tell you, "Well, what's the reason for art—suffering generates social change. So of course, you have to focus on this narrative over and over again, because this is the field in which you need to act." It's hard for me to differentiate, where am I? And then again comes the question, when do I act in line with what they expect me to do? But I also have to, because then I can call it what it is. And we can have a second conversation about it. But yes, I feel very hopeless about where the way out is.

BB: This constant questioning is a tool of racism—"Why are you being so Black?" It makes you feel like an Other, and immediately makes it bad, even in this case, when you say "I didn't even make this a topic." They have made it a topic for you, and they have let you know that it's not okay. Meanwhile, the entire curriculum is just made up of white men.

YDG: Yes. And the ultimate question is as a *woke* Black person, where is your action field? I can trick, but at the end of the day I fear that they will live in this parallel, other world and will continue there. I can, of course, continue in my parallel world, too, and be happy.

BB: You can look at classical music as the long game, where you see what happens when a white institution feeds itself with white people, and over time what happens is that it makes itself irrelevant. It's a warning that no matter how much money is pumped into classical music, nobody actually goes to listen to it. They have to subsidize it so much, because the people are not invested in it anymore. In Zurich, the city opera is subsidized with CHF 80 million per year only to pump money back into the white men who died hundreds of years ago... And because the world is changing, the stories that people want to see are changing, but they're just holding onto this dying narrative. These institutions are playing themselves right now, they are just making themselves redundant. However, my perspective has changed in the last year. I used to be like, "You just have to navigate the system, and once you have worked my way from the bottom up..."—all these horrible tropes that you learn as a Black person, like: "Pull yourself up by the bootstraps" and "Just be the best." But now I'm just: "Hold on, I'm on another game now, I just want to get on the top of the institution and then I'm gonna change things." I want to fight that feeling of hopelessness, because I experience it sometimes, too, since I'm still not at that position. I'm in the middle of an institutional

structure where if something happens, I want it to be addressed. This doesn't seem as important to anybody who is not Black or a Person of Color at the institution, and those are the moments that make you totally feel hopeless. I just give myself a new path: Let's just get to the top of this, and then go and change it. This is the only way that it feels feasible for me at the moment to want to continue in this space... It makes it something totally else when you are able to make your own frame of reference instead of fighting this other frame of reference. How is it for you, Deborah, because you work also as an associate director?

DJH: I have two answers to that. For the question about me being in a senior role in an artist-run organization that is majority white: there are many things I am negotiating within myself. For example, imposter syndrome and that voice in my head that tells me I can only keep this job if I tone down all my political views. That's nothing to do with this particular organization, but it's also not only to do with myself. These are based on previous experiences of voicing concerns or making complaints to art institutions, the stories we see unfold way too often, i.e., the system we have been socialized into. We're told to tone it down, constantly. Only now am I realizing, "Well actually, they wanted to hire *me*. So, they're going to get the full *me*. They actually approached me about the job, so why am I then imposing this thing of 'keep it down, be quiet, let's not address these things...' on myself?" As mentioned, there are obvious reasons for that, and if this were not an organization that already has a tradition of self-reflecting, questioning the dominant systems and invested in getting better in all areas, it would clearly be a decision that brings the tangible risk of becoming the location of the problem in the eyes of the institution, as Sara Ahmed writes. It's a lot of work to continuously put yourself out there and address things as they come up. I'm still figuring out how much labor I can dedicate to this, also outside of my work at this organization, because it's always additional to my actual job. But I'm learning that change is triggered already when you fully show up. In terms of your question about the long game of things—I am similar to Yara: I'm very hopeless and actually very pessimistic. Depression is my normal state at this point. But I'm also a Scorpio, and I also have a great relationship with some of my ancestors. And I recently joined a Black abolitionist reading group facilitated by my friend Imani Robinson that has pulled me back to intentionality and created space within me to imagine otherwise again. Like, what would happen if there is no principle of reward and punishment, if it's just about relational care? What if that community care were applied to our daily lives and to all our actions and not just the police state? We need to strive for the whole capitalist patriarchal racist system to fall. I attended a panel talk this week with Gail Lewis, Hortense Spillers, Miss Major, and Zoé Samudzi. The starting point was Audre Lorde's "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Gail Lewis was speaking on what makes Black feminists Black feminists: she spoke of Black feminism as the transcending of time, and that we already live in the future just by living and acting and behaving in the way that we want the future to be and as if the world around us had already arrived in that future, too. That blew my mind. Honestly, I am moved to tears all the time just by the power of and how amazing Black women are. And especially Black queer women. Just thinking about how we literally transcend time. That just gave me a lot of hope. And that we are able to manifest right now, on a smaller scale, we can start nurturing the world that we want in the future reminds me of the value of intentionality, because all of this really doesn't mean that we have to give everyone our time. It emphasizes the importance of intention and for us to be very selective in who we give our time and energy.

BB: That was a delicious statement there to enjoy. Yes—I think each one of us, we’ve all worked together, and in different ways we are all already in the future and being the thing that we want for ourselves, for our community, and for our work.

DJH: These are the spaces that make it possible to continue. I cringe at all these short terms like “Black joy is radical” and stuff like this, but it’s so true!

SO: I find it very moving to think about it in this way because the things that we’re up against are not contained within one sphere, but are in every sphere: When you step out on the street, at the workplace, even in your head. That makes it very hard, because how can one deal with all these expectations and adversities, all the time, everywhere? But to say, “Look at it in the long run, give yourself time, select what you want to do and who you want to spend time with”—this gives hope.

YDG: Of course, we spoke about the future, and that we have to live in the future very intensely as well, which brings me to think that this conversation is so futuristic. I also cringe when I read “Black joy is radical” or “Black rest is radical,” but to acknowledge this is also radical and important. So, this is my “acknowledge moment.”

BB: This is why I bought roller skates. Black people on roller skates is the most radical form of joy that I’ve seen lately, and I want this for myself, feeling untethered.

DJH: In terms of being futuristic, anyone Black, queer, gender-non-conforming, stepping out into the world and most likely looking fabulous doing so, that person is already living in the future, because actually in this world, that’s not possible—that’s what we’re taught day in, day out. The systems that are in place don’t allow that. I came to think about it because that’s my refuge and the way I try to navigate the world. However, in instances where the violence is so present that you cannot escape it, that’s what crushes me, because I’m reminded: “Shit, we are still in this world, we are still here.” People are really out here operating like they’re in the 19th century or 20th century, while we are already in 3020. We know this, every day, regardless, but damn... And that’s what frustrating about getting answers that are really mediocre to really simple questions or getting invited to panel talks or to be on a diversity and inclusion board by someone who acknowledges that they don’t know what to do, but yet feel justified in having the role that they have, as a director, as a head of an institution. In 2020, investment in anti-racist work should be part of every job description that is a senior role at this point, in the same way that climate consciousness—which, side note, urgently and without a question has to be rooted within anti-racism to be effective at all—should be part of any senior role in any institution: “You need to do anti-racist work.” The audacity that these people occupy these positions and yet feel justified just to include us only when it’s about those issues that we live through, and only as an appendix to the institution, not even inside the institution! And then you think, “I actually have the skills to do your job. But it will take me 50 times the work to ever be in your position.” That’s what gets me all the time. You know that meme of “What the world would look like if, for example, fathers would go to therapy?” I just always think, “What if Black people, especially Black trans and disabled folx were allowed into senior roles across the board?” I am just constantly baffled at the level of commitment to standing in the way of advancement. Because, as Brandy said before, really, you’re only making your institution become irrelevant within the next five, ten, twenty years.

BB: Remember I sent you guys a study about racial justice? This study came out of the US, and they had done research on how funding had been applied to Black people or in

general situations surrounding racial justice? And one of the first things they had written in the report was, “We have found that you should listen to Black women.” That already is totally in the future. But I thought it is great that this study is actually very clear that it’s not possible to have the change that you want and dismantle the place that you are at if you are not changing the people who are in these positions to do it.

DJH: And that makes sense to us as well, right? Acknowledging that I am cis-gendered, that I am light-skinned, that I am able-bodied. It’s not about my personal advancement, it’s not about me in my position, it’s about realizing that I have privileges that I need to use for the advancement of others as well. Interesting that we covered so much in an hour, but they’re all connected and interwoven, when I think about where we started and where we are now.

YDG: And still, white people might say, “Wow, this is an emotional talk.” But emotions are facts. This is the lack of empathy and the lack of understanding these issues.

DJH: Also, emotions aren’t wrong, that’s part of the whole problem, that they are dismissed as irrelevant and our messages being discarded due to the tone or whatever. It’s part of it, obviously, because we live it every day.

SO: It’s striking that although we are all from different fields within the arts, the experiences and problems are so similar.

BB: I just read a little bit about “dark matter” and think it’s interesting that it doesn’t specifically refer to Black people, but to the underground that’s feeding the system and giving the creative impulse. And in all of these fields, whether it’s visual art or music or theater, a lot of these impulses are coming from the Black community. In the last 100 years of art, so much of it is coming from Blackness in its various forms. I refrain from using the word “dark matter” for it, but it also *is* dark matter, as source energy that is feeding the global creative impulse. It’s not surprising that these industries behave the same way that they do, because what’s happening is that they try to disconnect the place the impulse is coming from, from who is profiting from it. You can see this everywhere, in every institution.

DJH: And beyond institutions. We’ve centered our conversation around our professional work because that’s where we started the work with the open letter, but I am sure if we spoke beyond that about our lived experience, romantic relationships, friendships, or family relationships, I’m sure we also would have recognized the same thing, because it’s not a problem only of the arts, it’s not a problem only of design, it’s not only a problem of theater, it’s not only a problem of music, it’s white supremacy that trickles through it all and beyond.

YDG: What I love about this conversation and why I would like to have it printed like this, for me this is exactly what I want, I want these kinds of conversations printed, I want to have these conversations in the university, on that level. I don’t care if everyone understands or not. This is the futuristic conversation I want to have. But still I am anxious.

BB: Isn’t that interesting that despite us living in this futuristic world that you actually want to be a part of, it also comes constantly with the danger of being attacked. That there is always a possibility of violence. The fear of being attacked just for saying what we know to be true and also what we want for ourselves.

DJH: It's again this issue of time. We are talking in a time that isn't right now.

Brandy Butler is a soul singer, performer, and activist who has toured Europe, America, and Africa with bands such as Chamber Soul, Dee Day Dub, Brandy Butler & The Fonxionaires and King Kora, and has appeared in theater productions at Zürcher Schauspielhaus and the Münchner Kammerspiele. She is active in various contexts and in various collaborations, such as the format "Drag Queen Story Time" (Kosmos, Zurich / About Us-Festival) in 2019, the concert installation "Ode to the Patriarchy: an Evening of Misogynistic Song" (Kraftwerk) and the performance of the "Black Performance Lab" "We real cool." Since the 2019/20 season, she has been a permanent member of the ensemble at Theater Neumarkt.

Deborah Joyce Holman is an artist and curator working as Associate Director at London-based arts organization Auto Italia and as Founder and Director of artist-run space 1.1, Basel, until its closure earlier this year. In her artistic practice, strategies of refusal and the destabilizing of boundaries between fiction, truth, and facts are recurring themes. Refusal and shape-shifting, especially with regard to visibility and instrumentalization have thus become focal points and tools in Holman's practice, as well as her navigation of the arts. Deborah Joyce Holman's work has recently been shown at Material Art Fair, Mexico City (duo booth, 2020); Les Urbaines, Lausanne (curation, 2018 and 2019); BBZ BLK BK: Alternative Graduate Show, London (curation, 2019); Fondation Entreprise Ricard, Paris (group exhibition 2019); Mikro, Zurich (solo exhibition, 2019); Auto Italia, London (reading, 2019); Live In Your Head, Geneva (group exhibition, 2018); Alienze, Lausanne (duo show, 2018); Topic, Geneva (duo show, 2017); Locale Due, Bologna (group exhibition, 2016), among others.

The work of **Yara Dulac Gisler** takes place in the field of experimental theater or in places where decolonial practices of listening can be discussed. In theater, she has worked with Thokozani Kapiri on the reinvention of Shakespeare or with Experi Theater around P. Vijayashanthan on Switzerland's concrete asylum policy. Her alias i-vye is a composition of the letters, made up of her father's daughters. They are in different contexts, but they share their colonized reality. Through i-vye, Gisler reflects on how power relations are contained in sound and communication and how they shape our listening and political entanglement / disentanglement.

Sarah Owens is Professor of Visual Communication and Visual Cultures at Zurich University of the Arts, where she chairs the subject area and directs the graduate program and research unit in Visual Communication. Her work focuses on social and anthropological aspects of the history, production, and circulation of visual artifacts. In particular, she is interested in marginalized and hidden epistemologies and practices, the process of unlearning and de-skilling, and the praxeological conditions for art and design as everyday action.

In Search of the Locality of Globalization: Ursula Biemann's Postcolonial Critique

Jose Cáceres Mardones

With the election of a new curatorial duo in 1994, the Shedhalle started with a fresh program which would establish the institution in the Zurich art scene as a catalyst for experimental, interdisciplinary practices at the intersection of art, discourse and political engagement. Until then, the Shedhalle had offered a more traditional Kunsthalle-style program. The new curatorial team not only changed the dynamics in the production of the exhibitions, it transformed the institutional foundation, turning the process into a collective endeavor: Artists engage in curatorial activities, curators are involved in administrative issues and the managers participate in curatorial projects as well; synergy, communication and egalitarianism characterizes the work philosophy of the institution with the shed roof. It is exactly this framework that permitted Ursula Biemann to take the approach on institutional criticism, started by Renate Lorenz and Sylvia Kafehsy, into new directions, properly said, out of the borders of the Shedhalle. After eight years of post-studio art education and practice during the politically active 1980s in New York, Biemann returned to Zurich to find an art scene she could not relate to and grabbed the opportunity at the Shedhalle to collaborate in the development of a new art context and discursive field. After starting as managing director in 1994, the curators Renate Lorenz and Sylvia Kafehsy asked her if she would like to do an exhibition "every once in a while". This gave her the opportunity to develop several projects between 1995 and 1998 with one common binding denominator: postcolonial critique.

Colonial Cultural Representation and Production

For the attentive reader, the questions around postcolonialism are not something spectacularly novel today. The postcolonial studies established themselves from 1980 onwards in the academic field. While postcolonial theory based its reflection on the past and present of former colonies, it soon extended to encompass a discussion of the role of the former empires and of the colonial condition of their own societies. Nowadays, the calls to decenter and decolonize the art world have gotten more urgent. Politics, market, institutional programs and infrastructures have been in the middle of the decolonial endeavors within the art world.

Coming from New York where the postcolonial discussion in the arts was already in full swing, these questions at the intersection of postcolonial and institutional critique were already very clear to Ursula Biemann back in 1995 when she participated together with Tom Burr, Mark Dion and Christian Philipp Müller in the exhibition "Platzwechsel" at the Kunsthalle Zurich, which happened simultaneously with her first curatorial project at the Shedhalle. Referring to the Platzspitz Park, site of the Swiss National Expo in 1883 and of the Swiss National Museum which was opened in 1898, Biemann created hybrid ethnographic mise-en-scenes by letting a Kasakh-Turkish model present traditional hats from the museum's costume department and presenting Turkish head coverings on the museum's wooden dummies, highlighting the multiethnic configuration of the current population that remains unreflected in the displays at the Swiss National Museum. In her catalogue text, she analysed how the Swiss National Expo served to promote a specific idea of nation and looked at the role

'otherness' plays in constructing and disseminating this Eurocentric *weltbild*⁴. The influence of the Whitney Independent Study Program where she studied is palpable. Ron Clark, its long standing director, explains how the main characteristic of the program has been the recognition "that there are always social and political stakes involved in cultural practice. Art and culture are never neutral or innocent. They are always shaped or determined in some way by social interests."⁵ Ursula Biemann is a strong proponent of this critical perspective which she articulated in her artistic and curatorial practice with the question of postcolonialism, in Swiss society and at large.

Switzerland has an oxymoronic relationship to colonialism. Because they did not 'possess' any colonies, it is taken for granted in the Swiss society that Switzerland had nothing to do with colonialism. This colonial myopia (or should we call it amnesia?) went so far that the Swiss Federal Council aimed in 2003 "to play a mediating role between African states and former colonizing powers"⁶ without recognizing their own participation in the transatlantic slave trade. With a new wave of cultural and historical research on the postcolonial issue in Switzerland at the turn of the 21st century, the Swiss colonial condition was reframed in the emerging concept of "Colonialism without Colonies" and contributed to the discussion a myriad of concepts such as "colonial complicity", "Swiss imperialism" or "part time colonial power".⁷ In this context, a reading of the earlier curatorial projects of Ursula Biemann become once again relevant. At a time when the "self-understanding of Switzerland as a colonial power" was non-existent, Ursula Biemann brought to light the participation of Switzerland in the consequences of colonialism expressed in new schemes of the post-1991 international extension of capitalism, the formation of a global culture and the eruption of migration from the 'periphery' to the 'centers'. To examine these new dynamics, she conceived and developed the exhibition projects *Foreign Services* (1995), *Kültür* (1996) and the media project *Just Watch* (1997) which aimed to reflect on questions about the production and representation of culture from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Instead of looking at the colonial past of Switzerland and Europe, Biemann directed her interest to "where new forms of colonialism was emerging through all kinds of economic and political mechanisms, through strategies of representation and the globalization of media which happened parallel to it."

Through the critical approach to the colonial condition of culture, Ursula Biemann added a further dimension to the institutional critique that characterized the *Shedhalle* program. She did not only take a critical position in relation to the art institution by trying to change the existing power relations that structure such cultural spaces, she also examined several other signifying systems, such as ethnography, advertisement, cultural collections, media and education.⁸ At the *Shedhalle* these questions were situated within the geopolitics of power and knowledge that is in their relation to the colonial dialectics between hegemony and subaltern regions.

Living the Locality

Biemann's early postcolonial critique in these projects was strongly influenced by Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands,⁹ which was particularly useful to her understanding of neocolonialism with its transformation of national borders under the new configurations of outsourced industrial productions. In her video essay "Performing the Border" which she already started to work on around 1988 and finally released in 1999¹⁰, she took a scrutinizing look at the exploding globalization effects in the expanded border space between Mexico and USA documenting the sexualization of the new Mexican workforce, the fetishized female desires in the entertainment

industry and sexual violence in the precarious law-free zone. The border is presented as a place where the boundaries of the nation and of female bodies collapse.

Moreover, beyond a mere critique, Biemann also wants to create new spaces. Taking as reference Anzaldúa's "mestiza culture", she considers of great importance "to forge new hybrid cultures, a product of several intermingled cultures that could occupy a third space in the imaginary. The collective imaginary is something we need to create and constantly cultivate. That might be more effective than focusing on the critique of racism". This was also the goal of Biemann's first curatorial project at the Shedhalle "Foreign Services" (1995) exploring the ways in which this dissolution of cultural identity materializes and what new forms emerge in its stead. The exhibition, workshops and film program presented positions on cultural representation, self-representation, orientalism in the media, hybrid education, aesthetics of cross-overs and the ambivalence of cultural identity and (des-)integration as well.¹¹ Mauricio Dias and Walter Riedweg engaged for example in their project "Domestic Services" with young migrant girls and boys who attend "integration classes" in Zurich's primary schools. The kids brought one object and smell from their original home and one from their new Swiss home and they explained the meaning of these objects and smells in their lives. Through this remembrance exercise it became possible for them to connect the past to the present and at the same time experience an ambivalent and hybrid form of cultural identity in the social reality of Zurich.¹²

The theoretical reference to Bhabha's "third space"¹³ or Anzaldúa's "hybrid space"¹⁴ is not only a discursive argument in Biemann's curatorial projects, it is more of a kind of guide to a concrete artistic and curatorial practice that Biemann reflects in her self-understanding as cultural producer. That's where she located her position from where to develop different forms of interventions that serve as a prototype for social and political changes in our society. "It's really a space of negotiation", she says. "Kültür" (1996) is an excellent example for this kind of intervention and negotiation in social and political processes. Kültür was a two-year research-driven project with eight women artists and scholars from Istanbul. Responding to the massive transfer of labor-intensive manufacture of the European textile industry to cheap labor peripheries, Biemann's curatorial model takes on the form of outsourcing artistic production to Istanbul, a new hotspot of the textile industry. From the initial discussions in Istanbul through the production and presentation phase at the Shedhalle, the project took a workshop format and transformed itself into a collective space of negotiating postcolonial relations. The Kültür participants put the research emphasis on the condition of migrant women at the urban and social periphery of the mega city, bringing to light the power relations and marginalization processes that structured the center-periphery relation. This focus permitted them to look at the tensions created by the global economic colonial order between modern, democratic, Western center and non-modern, migrated, illegal periphery. Kültür understood these power relations as constitutive for the cultural production as well. The following year, the group developed a new edition of Kültür for the young Istanbul Biennial, a further phenomenon of the globalization of and through art and culture. In all this, a critical consideration of locality and translocality played a fundamental role in their strategy of intervention in the globalization of Western aesthetics and values.¹⁵

The locality of culture¹⁶ has taken different directions throughout Biemann's career, but it has been almost omnipresent. From the Spanish-Moroccan borderland (Europlex, 2003), through the Sahara (Sahara Chronicles, 2006-2009) to the Ecuadorian Amazon (Forest Law, 2014), Ursula Biemann is always denouncing the space where culture

totalizes and discriminates through concepts as gender, body or race and simultaneously, articulating the “creative power of counter-geographies”. She reveals culture at its fringes and consequently, she uncovers the spatialisation of globalization, hegemony and its dynamics of marginalization, making visible the micropolitics on the ground and going beyond the universal structures as nation and culture. It could be suggested that Biemann artistic and curatorial work is always looking at the “obscure and ubiquitous form of living the locality”¹⁷ of globalization.

Displacing and Co-Creating Culture

Twenty years later, Biemann’s curatorial and artistic practice still pursues these same questions in an ever shifting context, grounding them on intense and deep research and mustering an exceptional sensibility to the human condition. In her latest curatorial endeavor “Devenir University” (2019-2021), the artist commits to the co-creation of an indigenous university in the panamazonic post-conflict territories in the South of Colombia¹⁸ The project aims to integrate two worlds of knowledge that have been historically hierarchized through colonial epistemic violence: the Indigenous knowledge systems and Western modern science. In this juxtaposition, Biemann sees again a possibility for intervention in the coloniality of the world, this time by decolonizing indigenous epistemology from which we have a lot to learn about improving the damaged human-earth relations at these times of ecological breakdown”. Furthermore, her continuous reflection about locality has found new soil to grow in this epistemology that is defined as “territory-based, localized and deeply rooted in an inseparable ecological relation between culture and nature” which offer an alternative to the Western anthropocentric project and its conception of the natural world. In contrast, the indigenous empirical approach lies in a set of practices that connect different places, species, and meanings, which together form the territory they live in. Epistemic diversity is directly connected to the biodiversity in the territories. Hence, new ecological projects should be accompanied by the plurality of knowledge.

Biemann’s artistic work has experienced a shift from a feminist and postcolonial perspective on borders and migration, toward environmental concerns revolving around climate change and the ecologies of natural resources, but it has been continuously motivated by a “desire to critique the phallogocentric system we live in”. In her view it is the same logic, “whether it’s the colonization of other peoples in the world or of women or of nature, it’s still the same kind of ideology that has brought us there. It is systemic”. But today, she concludes, “artists should be less concerned with how institutional frameworks impact on the meaning of what artists produce and exhibit, the most important question now is how we can co-create the environment we want to live in”. The shift from a critical to a more caring attitude is something we can all contribute to.

Jose Cáceres is an historian and independent curator. He is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Zurich, developing a decolonial critique to the idea of history from a Latin American perspective. Recent projects include the intervention *Chile Despertó* with Impresionante (Chile) at Volumes 2019, the documentary exhibition *Chilean Revolt. A Chronicle* at la_cápsula and *Walmapu ex situ* in collaboration with the collective Trop cher to share. He is enrolled in the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS, ZHdK

Notes

1 “Culture as an Economic Factor,” study by Bank Julius Baer 2013; see BAK Basel: <https://www.bak-economics.com>.

Study on the Swiss value added of the creative economy in Switzerland by the ZHdK; see Creative Economies Reports ZHdK: <https://www.zhdk.ch>.

“SALZBURGER FESTSPIELE—Motor for the Economy, Infusion of Excellence for the Location. Value Added Analysis of the Salzburg Festival” study by the Salzburg Chamber of Commerce 2016; see Salzburg Festival: <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/daten-fakten>.

2 Its members are the cultural institutions in the Canton of Zurich as well as political communities, cultural associations, cultural mediators, cultural workers, and interested persons. They are active in the visual arts, film, literature, music, opera, dance, theatre, museums, and other fields.

3 We would like to express our gratitude to Ursula Biemann for her collaboration, support and critique. We (Arianna Guidi, Myriam Boutry and Jose Cáceres) had the possibility to interview her on 20th February 2020, our exchange transformed itself then into an ongoing conversation and discussion through the writing of this essay. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are from the interview with Ursula Biemann, 28 February 2020.

4 Ursula Biemann, Ethno-x-centric on the National Expo and the National Museum, in *Platzwechsel*, Kunsthalle Zürich (Zürich: Kunsthalle Zürich, 1995), 51.

5 *Independent Study Program: 40 Years, 1968-2008* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2008), 19.

6 Thomas David, Bouda Etemad, and J. M. Schaufelbuehl, *Schwarze Geschäfte: Die Beteiligung von Schweizern an Sklaverei und Sklavenhandel im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Limmat-Verlag, 2005), 188.

7 See Patricia Purtschert, Francesca Falk and Barbara Lüthi, Switzerland and ‘Colonialism without Colonies’. Reflections on the Status of Colonial Outsiders, *Interventions. International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 18, 2016, 286-302.

8 Here is visible the influence of the collection of essays “Writing Culture” which gave rise to a debate on the epistemic and political predicaments of ethnography that influenced not only ethnography and anthropology, but history, cultural studies and literary studies as well. See James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Ed.), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

9 See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

10 Interview with Ursula Biemann, 28 February 2020.

11 Ursula Biemann, KunstproduzentInnen im Aussendienst. Ausstellungspraxis im postkolonialen Raum, in: *Hors Sol. Reflexionen zur Ausstellungspraxis / Réflexions sur la pratique de l'exposition*, (Zurich and Geneva: Shedhalle. 1997), 24. (trans. Jose Cáceres)

12 See Ursula Biemann, KunstproduzentInnen im Aussendienst. Ausstellungspraxis im postkolonialen Raum, in: *Hors Sol. Reflexionen zur Ausstellungspraxis / Réflexions sur la pratique de l'exposition*, (Zurich and Geneva: Shedhalle. 1997), 25-27.

13 See Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 85 ff.

14 See Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera, 77 ff.

15 See Ursula Biemann, Kunst. Feminismus. Migration, in *Kültür: ein Gender-Projekt aus Istanbul / Istanbul'dan bir “toplumsal cinsiyet” projesi*, (Zurich: Shedhalle, 1996), 6-9.

16 See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994)

17 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 200. An example for the creative and sensitive use of theory and for the continuity for the search after locality is *Remote Sensing* (2003) where Biemann explores the globality of sex trade and the narrator repeats this quote to talk about clandestinity.

18 See <https://www.geobodies.org/curatorial-projects/devenir-university>



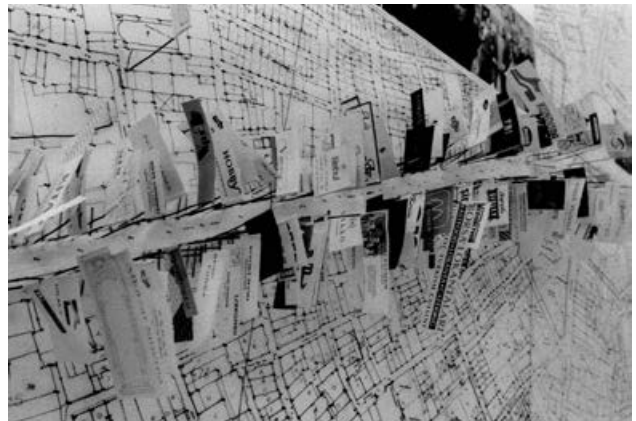
Kültür



Foreign Services



Kültür



Kültür



Foreign Services



Just Watch

Dead End?

Pablo Müller

Right after the rebuilding in 2012, some fundamental contradictions came to light at the Löwenbräukunst Zürich. The once promising alliance of art dealers, big business, and public authorities has recently become increasingly disastrous for the art conglomerate. But also the Shedhalle Zürich, located on the lake in the middle of the cultural center Rote Fabrik, has also been in crisis for some time. Precisely these two art venues, the Löwenbräu-Areal and the Shedhalle, formed the two most distinctive poles of a booming Zurich art scene in the 1990s. This article is the prelude to a thematic focus on the online art magazine *Brand-New-Life* in which we take the current mood of crisis at the Löwenbräukunst and the Shedhalle as an opportunity to look back on the developments in the art scene in the 1990s and at the same time to ask how the conditions and perspectives for contemporary art have changed in Zurich today.



Renovations at the Löwenbräukunst Zürich, April 2019. Photograph by: Pablo Müller.

In the 1990s, Zurich experienced what amounted to an art miracle: numerous new galleries opened, the Kunsthalle was founded, the retail giant Migros launched its own museum, and countless self-organized art spaces made their mark on the Zurich art scene. Two ventures in particular drew international attention: the art conglomerate that was established in 1996 on the premises of the former Löwenbräu brewery and the Shedhalle that met with a highly controversial response after a programmatic reorganization. They constituted two poles in the then newly forming Zurich art scene: the Löwenbräu-Areal with its proximity to the art market on one side and the Shedhalle with its political program on the other.

The Löwenbräu conglomerate formed in 1996 by the merger of the privately funded Migros Museum for Contemporary Art, the publicly subsidized Kunsthalle, and a group of then young and now globally operating galleries (Peter Kilchmann, Hauser & Wirth, and others). Some had previously been located in the Schoeller-Areal, others elsewhere in the city. The joint location ensured greater visibility and better access (visitors could view multiple art spaces in one go) and promoted informal communication. The coexistence boosted a common self-understanding, and the ‘competitive’ situation resulted in mutual profile-raising. The Löwenbräu-Areal with its exclusive focus on contemporary art and the extravagant lifestyle the latter cultivated saw itself as a progressive force in contrast to the seemingly antiquated Kunsthaus Zürich. Regularly ending in wild parties, the exhibition openings at the Migros Museum for Contemporary Art were legendary.

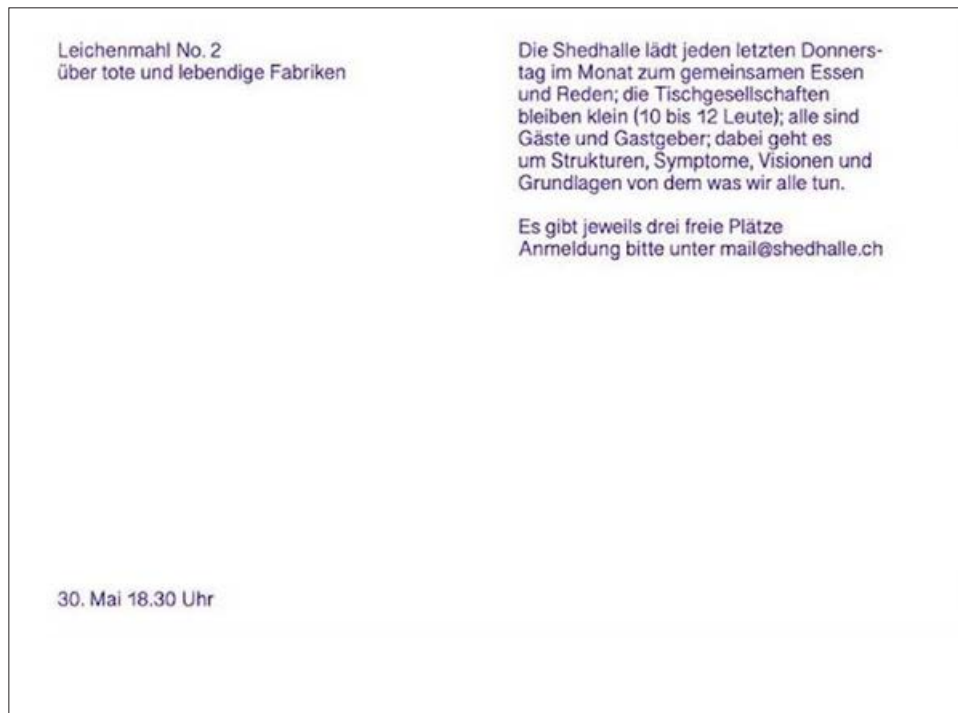
On the other hand, there was the Shedhalle Zürich, located by the lake, in the middle of the cultural center Rote Fabrik. In 1994, a new operational concept took effect that allowed for a radical programmatic realignment. Instead of an individual curator, a team of three was to be responsible for the program. The *Konzept 94* also called for a stronger thematic orientation, and the format of the solo exhibition was no longer considered desirable. The subsequently elected curatorial team consisting of Renate Lorenz and Sylvia Kafeshy (Stefan Banz resigned shortly after being elected) pursued a decidedly political agenda. Beyond any art market logic, current socio-political issues were discussed in, and based on, art, and a strong emphasis on discourse came to define the new Shedhalle. Both of those two poles, the different protagonists of the Löwenbräu-Areal and the Shedhalle scene, were extremely well networked internationally, highly agile and firm and vocal in expressing what they considered to be the relevant art of the present. Between the two ‘camps,’ there were occasional hostilities and public, quite productive controversies (e.g. the Jochen Becker/Rein Wolfs debate).



Renovations at the Löwenbräukunst Zürich, April 2019. Photograph by: Pablo Müller.

Today, none of the vitality of those days is left. The Shedhalle, currently led on an interim basis, holds a *Leichenmahl* [funeral meal] every last Thursday of the month. At these (semi-)public meetings, guests and other interested people talk about service agreements, budgets, and other general conditions and ask what aspects of the Shedhalle should be left to die or, alternatively, kept alive. At the Löwenbräu-Areal (today named Löwenbräukunst), the once nostalgic look back to, and celebration of, those glamorous founding years—most recently in the special issue of *DU* published in 2012 following the Löwenbräu-Areal reopening—has given way to seemingly desperate reanimation attempts. They now have an *Open Day* where they woo the public with guided tours,

children's events, and coffee and cake. Even the title of the performance event held for the second time at the Kunsthalle Zürich in 2018 (December 14)—*Löwenbräu Lebt* [Löwenbräu Lives]!—sounded like an attempt to conjure the last vital force of the Löwenbräukunst, especially given the fact that it was once again closed due to construction.



Leichenmahl No. 2, May 2019, Shedhalle Zürich Announcement

By the time its renovation was completed in 2012, a number of fundamental contradictions became evident at the Löwenbräu-Areal. The off-putting and anonymous atmosphere of the building due to the consistently identical concrete floors, white plaster walls, and neutral light is but the most obvious challenge of the new Löwenbräukunst. The once promising alliance of art trade, big business, and the public sector is becoming a curse for it. The initially still prevalent sense of community has vanished by now. As a result of the substantially higher rental and operating costs following the renovation, individual interests are coming to the fore. The smaller and medium-size players are forced to be more cautious in their calculating and have less leeway. The financially strong players, by contrast, are taking over more space or visibly losing interest in the Löwenbräukunst as a location, especially since it is but a sideshow in their international operations. The fact that there is no more sense of community is illustrated by the coffee bar, a long-standing desideratum that was to become a meeting place for both visitors and people working on the premises, which did not materialize. Meanwhile, LUMA does run a food and drink establishment with the schwarzescafé designed by the artist Heimo Zobernig, but it is not really dependent on regular operation. Instead, the multifunctional space is aimed at exclusive events and external private functions. And Tschingg, the pasta fast food restaurant that moved into the ground floor this year, is primarily frequented by students of the nearby vocational business school. In addition to this lack of a sense of community, an ambitious exhibition practice at the Löwenbräukunst is becoming less and less of a priority. Already with LUMA West (which moved in after the renovation in 2012), a strange mix of exhibitions, activities, private functions, and promotional events was added to the Löwenbräu-Areal. To this day, it is difficult to discern an artistic or curatorial concern

in this disparate program supported by the LUMA Foundation. And with the recent move of two big departments of Migros' cultural promotion, Migros-Engagement and Migros-Kulturprozent, into the Löwenbräukunst, the complex is moving even further away from active exhibition and art mediation practice.



13 m3 Sand - Ihr bringt die Schaufeln, wir haben den Sand, 2019, exhibition project at Shedhalle Zürich.
© Shedhalle Zürich

In the case of the Shedhalle, the institution got caught up in itself: persisting tensions and changes in the curatorial team, an awkward division of internal responsibilities, and disputes with the City of Zurich were accompanied by discussions about how the socio-critical educational practice developed in the 1990s could be translated into the present. While meant to be critical by those involved, this self-reflection led to a glorification of the 1990s and resulted in self-imposed standards. The unproductive self-preoccupation is particularly evident in the Shedhalle archive that was prepared in 2014–2017 and eventually put online. There, keywords of the exhibition projects of the 1990s—ranging from gender politics and pop culture to critique of technology—are uncritically adopted into the archival order. At the same time, this archive, while intrinsically intended for an interested public, largely defies meaningful use due to its confusing classification and unwieldy structure. This results in a paradox: essentially outward-directed and intended to encourage productive further thought, the archive becomes a symbol of institutional constriction und stasis.

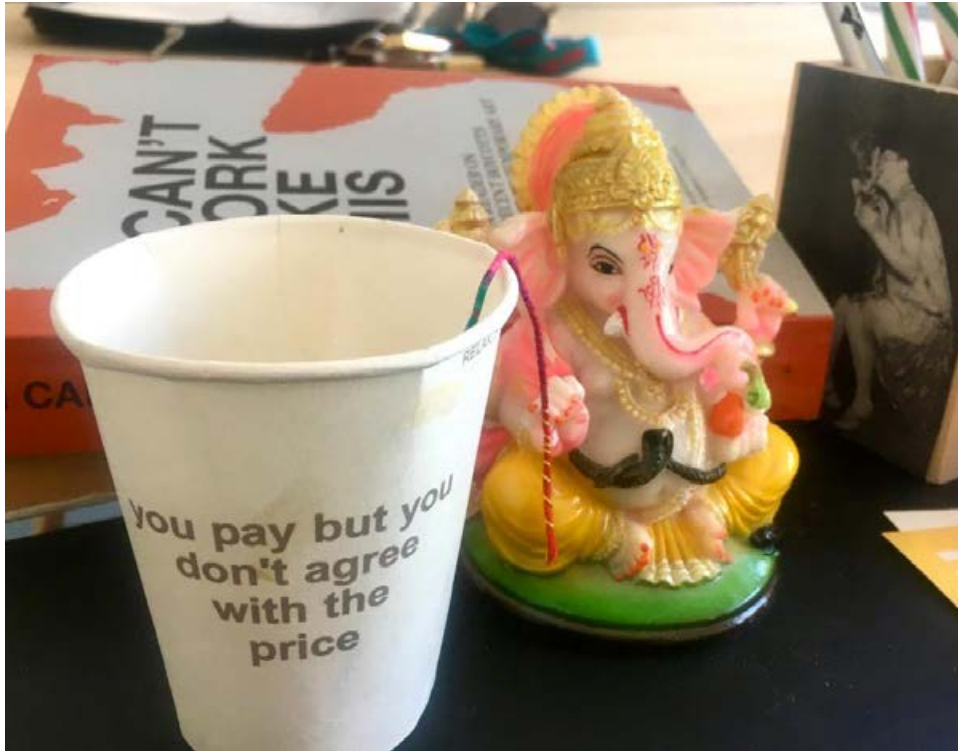
However, a nostalgic look back at the Zurich 'art miracle' is hardly productive. Rather, the thematic focus, which started on *Brand New Life* at the end of 2019, takes the current mood of crisis at the Löwenbräukunst and the Shedhalle as an opportunity to look back on the 1990s in Zurich, and would like to formulate questions and approaches on this basis: What artistic strategies, theoretical debates, and issues that were negotiated at the time continue to be relevant and worth drawing on today? How have social and economic conditions changed in the past twenty-five years? What perspectives and new personal and institutional constellations are the result of this? In 2020, we will publish a series of essays on our online art magazine, and we invite anyone interested to participate in this open editorial process and contribute their ideas.

Pablo Müller studied fine arts at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), and philosophy, art history, gender studies, and history at the universities of Basel and Bern. After that, he worked at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein n.b.k. and at the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation (APRAF) in Berlin. With a Fulbright Scholarship, he was able to do research at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York for one year, supervised by Claire Bishop. Since 2014, he has been working at the research group Design, Art & Public Spheres at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. He is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Art History at the University of Zurich, supervised by Prof. Sebastian Egenhofer. The working title of his PhD thesis is *Art Criticism and Critical Contemporaneity: A Reading of the Art Journals October, Texte zur Kunst and Mute*. Fields of research are artistic self-organization, economies of art, artistic writing practices, and art criticism. He also writes regularly in art magazines and newspapers, including *Kunstbulletin*, *WOZ Die Wochenzeitung*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, and *Jungle World*, and received the R & R Prize for Art Journalism in 2011. Since 2015, he has been publishing the online art magazine Brand-New-Life together with Lucie Kolb, Barbara Preisig, and Judith Welter.

CAN I WORK LIKE THIS?

In Search of Presence in Pandemic Times

by Tanja Trampe



RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co), *you pay but you don't agree with the price*; paper cup, 1994–2013. RELAX is an artist group based in Zurich founded in 1983 by Marie-Antoinette Chiarenza and Daniel Hauser. The “& co” in their name refers to all kind of co-operations with people.

“A cheap cardboard container, a disposable item ennobled into a work of art? Or is it more appropriate to speak of ‘infecting’ because the artists are not at all interested in producing valuable art items. To them, art is not a rare commodity, not a commodity that increases in value, but a tool to reflect. It often occurs as a disturbance—similar to a virus, with minimum packaging—and interrupts our ‘normal’ flow of thought: You pay but you don’t agree with the price.”¹

For a long time, one of these cups has been standing on my desk. It’s early May 2020, and Switzerland is in the ninth and, for the time being, final week of a shutdown related to the coronavirus pandemic. As it regards the shock of being attacked by a pandemic, the artwork’s timeless message breaks the ‘normal’ flow of thought once again: for now, it is monitored by this ‘new coronavirus.’ The virus as such teaches us that in a very short time, familiar settings can become super flexible. How and through what our usual behaviors and current practices will have changed when this essay will be published in September is uncertain. The disastrous uncertainty is as paralyzing to a liberal democracy as it leads to life-sustaining individual questions. During the “extraordinary situation in terms of the Epidemics Act,” the Federal Council of Switzerland takes the full authority. This act makes us an attentive audience: while

many of us are showing voluntary solidarity with vulnerable people in our neighborhood, it seems at the same time almost impossible to critically reflect on a societal level and ask how not to be ruled like this.² “I pay but I don’t agree” makes me individually reflect on my immediate duty to act under the comprehensive pandemic issues. That’s why this contribution is dedicated to a “Swiss-made” freedom of artistic production under the institutional framing of concern, solidarity, and security. As a theorist and practitioner in the field of socially engaged art, I focus on the role of the public sphere and the future of community-based projects.

At its meeting on March 16, 2020, the Federal Council of Switzerland declared that an “extraordinary situation” in accordance with the “Epidemics Act” now existed and introduced more stringent measures to protect the public, such as the closing of all entertainment and leisure facilities. To provide economic assistance in Switzerland, the cultural sector applies the established rules of a “life before corona”: “Compensation is regulated in accordance with the Income Compensation Act and applies also to freelance artists. It is paid as a daily allowance. This corresponds to 80 percent of income and amounts to a maximum of 196 Swiss francs per day. In order to avoid welfare cases, the Federal Council extends this arrangement also to self-employed persons who are not directly affected by the ban on events. This is subject to the condition that their self-employed income amounts to more than 10,000 but less than 90,000 Swiss francs a year.”³ Due to the subsidiary system, cultural issues are under authorization of the cantonal governments. The State Secretariat of Economic Affairs paid 26.5 million Swiss francs to the Canton of Zurich, to which the department of culture added another 20 million.⁴

This pandemic compensation is directed to a competition-oriented and, up to now, super vital creative industry. With a 33% value added-share, Zurich’s creative crowd has the largest share of the economy nationwide —artists are, of course, included in this figure.⁵

While the majority of this important creative sector (institutions, companies, freelancers) is able to quantify their losses, doing so is difficult for artists. They usually have completed most of the workload before contracts or financial agreements find a way onto their desks. However, the granted compensation is based on either short-term cancellations or on the most recent tax return. Whoever has mainly produced in the studio during that period is unlucky and receives either nothing or just savings for a rainy day. That petty bureaucracy unfolds yet another paradox: a part-time job lost at short notice is recognized by the Income Compensation Act and is compensated accordingly, while the main occupation as an artist leads to a dependency on state benefits that are frozen at a meager 18.3 million Swiss francs. Such conditions put artists directly into a stigmatized position of neediness.⁶

As under a magnifying glass, the current crisis reveals mercilessly the consequences of the reduced budgets, especially in the health sector, but also for culture. All over Europe, we can observe that governments who restricted their cultural budgets are now also suffering from shortcomings in the care sector. Despite the increased attention paid to issues related to the pandemic, artistic engagement was not seen as systemically relevant. Since Swiss cultural politics is merely an administration within a system of neoliberal capitalism, the opportunity to consider artistic work as a benefit for society as a whole and to free it from the dependency on secondary employments was not taken. In Switzerland, the fine arts are understood as part of the value chain of the creative industry and are strongly promoted as such. A look back to the situation

fifty years ago shows a missed chance for the independence of artistic production in Switzerland, that it could be in a much better state than it is today.

From its foundation to its rededication to a university in the year 2000, the School of Arts and Crafts of the City of Zurich (Kunstgewerbeschule) was oriented toward demands from the established Swiss craft trade. In doing so, the school created a broad platform for today's multifaceted creative economy. However, until the mid-1980s there was no professional training for fine arts at any public institution throughout Switzerland. In Zurich, anybody willing to start a career in fine arts attended the division for art teaching. This continuously cemented the status quo that artistic practice is basically a leisure time occupation of gifted art teachers. It is even more astonishing that at the same time in Zurich a private art school with roots in the School of Arts and Crafts already existed. In 1965, the experimental art class "Farbe und Form" (color and form) was founded. Inspired by the concepts of Bauhaus and Black Mountain College, transdisciplinary courses in public social engagement and teamwork were taught. All decisions were made democratically by a student council. By the hegemonic school management, this open teaching à la Joseph Beuys was increasingly perceived as an attack on patriarchal structures as well as on the design school's reputation as a stronghold of the "Good Form" introduced by Max Bill. The experiment ended in 1970 in an unsolvable conflict and was sealed by the withdrawal of all teachers and all students. On a private basis, they immediately founded the now established art school F+F.

Open-minded authorities would have recognized the withdrawal as their mission to introduce fine arts into public education. Instead, they continued promoting a creative workforce for the flourishing economic system and classified artistic education as a profession of unwaged work. They were happy to have transferred that economic burden to a private institution. As soon as the global art market increased in the 1990s, the artistic profession became part of Switzerland's official education system. A few years later, the same fate struck the bachelor's program in arts theory. The current crisis reveals an important aspect of this mechanism: in Switzerland, institutional critique has a hard stand. All too often it is perceived as a questioning of our direct democratic achievements, which affect everyone. But in re-thinking institutional critique more and more in terms of infrastructure, this current crisis opens a deep insight into the function of infrastructures.

It was in 1988-89 when I myself was a student at the F+F School. The imperative was as simple as it was clear: don't agree with the price!

You play I pay?

During the pandemic shutdown, the virus has infiltrated our everyday life even without viral pathogens—passively, so to speak. Trapped in constraints between a slowness of binding certainties and the speed of imposed measures, we regrettably avoided looking beyond the closed borders in many ways. Again, we are witnessing a "tyranny of the few that restricts the public arena and enacts policies that vastly increase private wealth, often with complete disregard for social and ecological consequences."⁷ Behind the fallen "corona" curtain, the well-known play called "Profit over People" largely continues. But unlike the financial crisis in 2008, to which Chomsky refers, this crisis affects our lives *a priori*: our bodies. It's precisely the collective vulnerability—appearing as immediate emotions and thoughts such as between information and affect, pausing and stagnation, deceleration and tiredness, voluntariness and compulsion—that enables us to empathetically reflect on our

individual lifestyles. Against all denials of the designation “social distancing,” our social space, and therefore its significance in particular, has been considerably shrunk within the last few weeks (even in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria where we were generally allowed to leave our homes). Since we have little certainty about the behavior of this virus so far, our personal assessments are all the more important. Given the relationship between neoliberalism and power, Foucault speaks about the importance of self-relation. “He thus addresses the possibility of behaving in a certain way that is not predetermined by power. For him this was the basis for the freedom of the subject. Therefore, the ‘relationship to oneself’ is, as Foucault stated in a lecture in 1982, ‘the last anchor point of resistance’. What he was referring to: a resistance against power. Today he might add: resistance to the virus.”⁸

The pandemic crisis challenges our community through complicated conditions such as solidarity through social distancing or the “shared burden of guiltlessness.”⁹ The strong interventions in our everyday life in recent weeks have shown that it is time to review our assumptions about the conditions of individual lifestyles. The sudden recognition of post-Fordist self-exploitative labor as “systemically relevant” as well as the confrontation of our neoliberal political model with its own failure to provide vital aid to homeless, sans-papiers, and refugee people, SARS-CoV—without killing us all at once—probably gives us a last opportunity to initiate comprehensive social change. Moreover, the sudden dual challenge of home office and home schooling once again confirms the extent to which the heteronormative distribution of roles is ingrained in our liberal economic society: “There are no studies yet, but female editors of scientific journals report, that submissions from men have increased by 50 percent in recent weeks, while female scientists are submitting virtually no texts at all.”¹⁰ These notes highlight quite well what the neoliberal society as a whole also suffers from in times of the pandemic and deliver arguments in favor of a statutory basic income. In 2016, the first referendum on this subject in Switzerland received 23% votes in favor. Now, the current art newsletter of the Zurich Department of Culture provides arguments for this idea: “One thing is certain, however: the cultural sector and in particular the internationally connected art scene, both of which thrive on exchange and encounter, were directly and severely affected by the pandemic from day 1 of the shutdown.”¹¹

The Medium is the (Short) Message

When this text is published, the world of consumption will be back on track, and schools and exhibitions will have reopened. The Federal Council made quick concessions to the economy, but initially put the revival of cultural concerns on the waiting list. This hesitation has led to an eager migration to the World Wide Web, which at first glance appears aseptic. There we can find rehearsals by musicians and dancers at private homes, site-specific explorations, revivals of plays, and even a performance festival that is broadcast live from the quarantine. But no difference whether a curator does the tour through a comprehensive exhibition in five minutes by explaining just one single artwork, or if we are able to complete a super expensive show in only eight minutes thanks to the curator’s assistant being familiar in setting ideal “key business topics”—it is disappointing. Due to the art paradigms of the loss of the aura of the artwork and the reason that the medium is the message, the World Wide Web cannot replace the multi-dimensional aesthetic experience within the triangle of self, artwork, and space. “The impression of mass and power and the positive experiences one makes in real assemblies go beyond the purely informative representations, for example of network visualizations.”¹²

Public events will remain suspended for a longer period of time, so we will have to move through the one-dimensional wasteland together with art institutions for a while yet. This also puts us in a deeper dependency on the countless free online portals. Those are neither aseptic nor egalitarian or neutral in value. On the contrary, they are “infected” in particular by the insensitive handling of personal data. While during the initial shock of this pandemic, institutions have entered into our private sphere through an online communication provided by the private sector, we all of a sudden serve a profit-making lifestyle. It seems that we are now, more than ever, obliged to place institutional critique in relation to infrastructure.¹³ From this perspective, some relevant questions also appear from the artists’ point of view: whether the online streaming of their exhibits will be financially compensated in terms of a copyright; whether they accept the digital transmission not only aesthetically, but also with regard to the contracted provider. Recently, the performance artist Alexandra Pirici wrote on the blog of the Harun-Farocki-Institute about her concerns: “Marketing departments, framing the old as new with every new line of old products, keep inviting us to embrace the ‘new’ digital space, as if there was no digital space before the coronavirus crisis. Of course, there was, just like there was net art, online art, videogames, artworks and cultural objects that reflected, consistently, on the virtual, on digital platforms, on technology and also on the materiality of the digital. The ‘new’ to be embraced, therefore, is not the digital but the reduction of communication to one single space/channel, highly protocolled and owned by corporate monopolies, on which a competitive precariat was already fighting for monetizable, quantifiable attention.”¹⁴

The Re-Materialization of Presence

VIRUS XI 2020

Generation X shapes politics more actively. There will be a world oil crisis. Drones will patrol the skies. Texting will be made possible by thought power alone, using headsets that detect and convert brain signals to digital signals. A pill for curing malaria will be available, and major experiments in longevity will yield promising results. I am 51.

This calendar note is an extract from the text-based artwork *VIRUS (2010–39)* by Bharti Kher. It is conceived as a thirty-year-long enduring investigation: “Each text combines predictions (in italics) and chronology. One virus will be released a year to mark an entry into space somewhere. Like a time-tunnel that you can climb into, or a vortex, or a womb or a safe hole. A mutation of colour and pattern so light, a virus so subtle, that no one will notice its slow and transformative essence. Except you. [...] This text will continue to change as I meet time and add narratives.”¹⁵

While in Switzerland we are returning to a cultivated exhibition visit qua hope, the majority of artists are migrating to the Internet or, if their artistic practice is based on audience participation, they have to withdraw and wait and see. What applies to political rallies applies to them: a ban.

In the search for the “transformative essence” of this current coronavirus, we must ask ourselves how engaged art practices can be re-materialized, because it is their specificity to be flexible and able to adapt quickly to changing conditions. To make a clear distinction between an established art world, which reproduces both the market and the discourse, and the vast majority of independent cultural producers, artist-theorist Gregory Sholette paraphrases the cosmological term “dark matter.”¹⁶ He claims that a “creative dark matter” which “self-consciously works outside and/or against the

parameters of the mainstream art world for reasons of political and social critique” displays [...] a degree of autonomy from the critical and economic structures of the art world and moves instead within, or in-between, the meshes of the consciousness industry.” He notes further, that “increasingly inexpensive technologies that allow informal and activist artists to network with each other have also made the denizens of this shadowy world ever more conspicuous to the very institutions that once sought to exclude them. In short, dark matter is no longer as dark as it once was.”¹⁷

Like the tip of an iceberg, the so-called art world is slowly reappearing, while independent art practices that have long since ceased to be independent of our apparatuses and systems are being kept under water for the time being by their assignment to the political *dispositif*. In Foucault’s discourse theory, every *dispositif* has first and foremost a strategic function that includes a “functional overdetermination and strategic replenishment.” Located outside the institutional and economic *dispositif*, the free-floating “creative dark matter” retains its gravitational effect. As such, it continues to serve the parameters of a “mainstream art world.” What the “creative dark matter” sadly produces by itself in such a pandemic darkness is the expansion of the artist precariat.

In a recent note, Tom Holert writes that, “As a market-shaped, speculative representation machine, art is now coming under particularly strong pressure to legitimize itself.” Through the pandemic crisis, he sees greater scope for committed and useful art practices, at least as intellectual freedom: art could also be “completely unconditional, immaterial, resource-saving; a kind of basic supply, independent.”¹⁸ In her manifesto *arte útil*, written in 2011 by artist Tania Bruguera, she states that “Useful Art is a way of working with aesthetic experiences that focus on the implementation of art in society where art’s function is no longer to be a space for ‘signaling’ problems, but the place from which to create the proposal and implementation of possible solutions.”¹⁹ What the transformed virus socially reveals are the shaken infrastructures of our neoliberal battlefields. Finally, with the perspective of an institutional critique focused on infrastructure, a re-materialization of presence-based art practice under the given circumstances becomes possible.

Darkness matters.

Can I work like this?

In its extraordinary press conference on March 16, 2020, the Federal Council proclaimed the shutdown of the whole of Switzerland in accordance with the “Epidemics Act.” Ironically, it was the same day that the press conference organized by the city council of Payerne (canton of Vaud) in view of our two-day walk in the framework of the “week against racism,” which we as artists (data | commission for para-sitic* guest work) had prepared together with the local population, was cancelled and the project stopped. The next community-based project is now in preparation and will be taking place in November 2020—if the pandemic situation allows. “WHAT’S COOKING? A re-arrangement” (conceived in 2014 as a curatorial series) initiates a fifty-hour nonstop gathering that brings together artists and further professionals of the arts field as well as spontaneous guests for simultaneous production, reflection, discussion, and presentation in order to broaden dimensions that allow us to reflect actively on presence and individual involvement with regard to engaged arts practices. Permanent open doors as well as permanent cooking stoves are furthermore essential.²⁰ “Can I work like this?” is the subtitle of the upcoming edition. Set long before the pandemic broke out, it paraphrases the reader *I Can’t Work Like This: On Recent Boycotts and*

Contemporary Art published by curator Joanna Warsza in 2017. In her introduction, she states that, “In recent years, artists and curators have often been confronted with a classic political dilemma of engagement or disengagement. The ideological, economic, or ethically objectionable circumstances of certain biennials and institutions have raised the question of whether to continue and, if so, under what circumstances, facing what consequences, and to what ends?”²¹ In the face of the pandemic, the intention to examine engaged art practices, particularly with regard to the risks of their political and institutional instrumentalization, is now under the spell of a reconsideration of limitations and changed possibilities of engaged art practices as a whole. The question whether I can work “like this” is itself growing into a social sculpture: “Everyone involved in an artwork/project—through entering into dialogue and sharing in the ‘making’ of a Social Sculpture—can have a dialogical aesthetic experience (of a kind that is only possible through Social Art). It is precisely at this point that art is integrated into the praxis of life, whereby numerous traps can cause the failure of the endeavor to act together and democratize society. For this reason, it is important to continue working on a theoretical model for identifying the political and aesthetic potential of Social Art and to put this model to the test in practice.”²² With the declaration that every “community is made of interruption of singularities,” Jean-Luc Nancy links the longing for togetherness directly with the conditions of our individual lifestyles. In the face of the pandemic, this manifold connection points to the basic question on how we want to live.

With the power of the Epidemics Act, our ‘Realpolitik’ is currently liberating artistic commitment from its own social agenda. The retreat is already underway: quiet, fast, and comprehensive. Whether committed art will ever again be part of a “political power of the assembled bodies,” which Judith Butler describes as indispensable for our societies, is being tested in reality right now.²³ In the fatal fate of passively waiting for further official announcements while being fed with emergency aid, the “creative dark matter” is on its way to becoming more dependent on economics and politics than ever. On the other hand, a renewed withdrawal of art into the safe haven of exclusivity and intransparency, according to Isabelle Graw, “calls into question nothing less than the value of art itself.”²⁴

But perhaps this “virus so subtle, that no one will notice its slow and transformative essence” opens up an even wider space for socially engaged art in a gentle way, finally allowing the concept of curating to comprehensively meet its roots: *curare*.

Notes

1 Claudia Jolles and Britta Polzer, “Editorial,” *Kunstbulletin* 5 (2017), accessed May 26, 2020, www.artlog.net/de/kunstbulletin-5-2017/editorial (this and all following texts in German translated by author).

2 “Criticism is the art of not being governed in this way.” Already in his first answer to the question “What is critique?”, Foucault hands over the responsibility to criticize to each individual. Michel Foucault, *Was ist Kritik?*, trans. Walter Seitter (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1992), 12.

3 State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO, accessed May 26, 2020, www.seco.admin.ch/seco/de/home/Arbeit/neues_coronavirus/selbstaendige.html.

4 Canton of Zurich, Corona pandemic: financial assistance, accessed May 26, 2020, https://kultur.zh.ch/internet/justiz_inneres/kultur/de/kulturpolitik/corona_2020.html/Stand.

- 5** “The following 13 sub-segments are attributed to the creative industries cluster: music, books, art, film, radio, performing art, design, architecture, advertising, software/game industry, arts and crafts, press/media, recording industry.” Canton of Zurich, Office for Economy and Labour, Creative Industries, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://awa.zh.ch/internet/volkswirtschaftsdirektion/awa/en/standortfoerderung/cluster/kreativwirtschaft.html>.
- 6** Suisseculture, Corona emergency aid for cultural workers, accessed May 26, 2020, www.suisseculture.ch/index.php?id=207.
- 7** “Chomsky takes on neoliberalism: the pro-corporate system of economic and political policies presently waging a form of class war worldwide. [He] offers a profound sense of hope that social activism can reclaim people’s rights as citizens rather than as consumers, redefining democracy as a global movement, not a global market.” Publisher’s note in Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999).
- 8** Philipp Sarasin, “Mit Foucault die Pandemie verstehen?,” in *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, March 25, 2020, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/mit-foucault-die-pandemie-verstehen/>.
- 9** Simon Maurer, in “Helm(zu)haus,” Zurich Department of Culture art newsletter (May 2020), accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/kultur/de/index/institutionen/helmhaus/hintergrund/Helmzuhaus.html>.
- 10** Carolin Wiedemann, “Kinder, Küche, Corona. Die Krise ist die Bühne des Patriarchats,” *Tagesspiegel*, April 29, 2020.
- 11** Barbara Basting, “Kunst(förderung) in Zeiten des Lockdown; in: Zurich Department of Culture, art newsletter, 5/2020 (originally in German); see www.stadt-zuerich.ch/kultur/de/index/institutionen/helmhaus/hintergrund/Helmzuhaus.html (accessed 26-5-2020)
- 12** Mercedes Bunz, quoted in: “David Hunziker, Autokorso der Cyberdemo?, WOZ Die Wochenzeitung, Zürich: 23-4-2020 (originally in German); see also Mercedes Bunz, Graham Meikle, *The Internet of Things*; New York: 2018
- 13** Sabeth Buchmann, “Re-think institutional critique in terms of infrastructure; online lecture for the Postgraduate Programme in Curating ZHdK, 22-5-2020
- 14** Alexandra Pirici, “I want my writing to be photographed so as to explain my hand,” March 5, 2020, in *Rosa Mercedes 02*, online journal of the Harun Farocki Institute, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.harun-farocki-institut.org/en/2020/05/03/i-want-my-writing-to-be-photographed-so-as-to-explain-my-hand-2/>.
- 15** Bharti Kher, accompanying text to the exhibition *Chimeras*, Centre Pasquart, Biel/Bienne, 2018.
- 16** “Dark matter is dark because it does not appear to interact. Unlike normal matter, dark matter does not interact with the electromagnetic force. In fact, researchers have been able to infer the existence of dark matter only from the gravitational effect it seems to have on visible matter.” CERN, , accessed May 27, 2020, <https://home.cern/science/physics/dark-matter>.
- 17** Gregory Sholette, “Dark Matter: Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere,” *Neme* (2006), accessed May 27, 2020, <http://www.neme.org/texts/dark-matter>.
- 18** Tom Holert, “Fragilität und Nützlichkeit,” *Texte zur Kunst, Notes from Quarantine*, March 26, 2020, accessed May 27, 2020, www.textezurkunst.de/articles/fragilitat-und-nutzlichkeit/.
- 19** Tania Bruguera, “Introduction on Useful Art,” April 23, 2011), accessed May 27, 2020, www.taniabruquera.com/cms/528-0-Introduction+on+Useful+Art.htm.
- 20** data | Auftrag für parasitäre* Gastarbeit, What’s cooking? A re-arrangement (2017), accessed May 27, 2020, <https://whatscooking2017site.wordpress.com/>

21 Joanna Warsza, “I Can’t Work Like That,” in *I Can’t Work Like This: A Reader on Recent Boycotts and Contemporary Art*, ed. Joanna Warsza (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 11.

22 Martin Krenn, “Social Art in Democracy,” in *Dialogical Interventions: Art in the Social Realm*, ed. Martin Krenn (Vienna: De Gruyter, 2019), 77.

23 Butler explores the dynamics and tactics of public gatherings under the current economic and political conditions. Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

24 Isabelle Graw, “Wert generieren in der Pandemie,” *Texte zur Kunst, Notes from Quarantine, May 13, 2020*, accessed May 27, 2020, www.textezurkunst.de/articles/wert-generieren-der-pandemie/.

Tanja Trampe is a curator, cultural theorist, writer, and artist based in Zurich. First educated as a graphic designer, she graduated with a degree in theory of arts, design and culture in 2003, and received an MAS in Curating at the Department of Cultural Analysis and Education in 2014, both from the Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK. From 2005 until 2015 she was the assistant curator of Museum Bellerive/Museum of Design Zurich, where she co-curated first exhibitions. She was working as an art mediator for the Cabaret Voltaire Zurich, guest lecturer at the Postgraduate Programme in Curating ZHdK and as event coordinator for the artists in residence programme at Fundaziun Nairs in Scuol/Lower Engadine. Today, she is a freelance curator whose curatorial practice and theoretical research focuses on community-based relational art and the politics of public spheres. In 2013, she received the POOL curatorial grant hosted by the LUMA Foundation. In 2014 she founded the curatorial series “What’s cooking? A re-arrangement”, a fifty-hour nonstop-gathering organized around a permanent active fireplace and open to the public. Invited artists, theorists and cultural activists are called for simultaneous production, presentation and reflection in order to broaden dimensions of individual involvement. As an accomplice of the artistic/curatorial duo data | Auftrag für parasitäre* Gastarbeit (Mission in favour of a para-site guest-work) Tanja Trampe investigates urban, rural, and socio-cultural issues through artistic field research and interventions. Currently she is co-curator of “Bonus Track”, a 16-showcase exhibition series in Zurich. Next “What’s cooking?” will take place in November at the Ausstellungsraum Klingental in Basel, subtitled as “Can I work like this?”. She is alumna of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating ZHdK.

Nadja Baldini

Interviewed by Ronald Kolb

August 23, 2020

Ronald Kolb: What is your professional background?

Nadja Baldini: I studied art history and French literary studies and have been working as an independent curator and art educator for many years in Zurich.

RK: How would you define your curatorial practice individually?

NB: I'm less interested in "classic" curating than in testing and developing collective forms of work and different educational formats. My focus is on participatory art practices. I also refer to the concept of artistic intervention. It is about the relationship between art, politics, and society. The focus is on the interfaces and links between artistic interventions, social movements, and educational processes. This also applies to my own practice and projects. It is not the self-referential relation to the art field, but the connection between artistic interventions, educational processes, or social movements and activism that interest me.

RK: What was the most interesting/successful project/exhibition, and which was the most challenging?

NB: I can't say that in general. With projects, especially long-term ones, you go through different phases and situations that are extremely revealing, satisfying, and inspiring, and then there are setbacks, wrong decisions, or things that simply fail. Club La Fafa—a post-migrant, transdisciplinary, artistic mediation and research project—is certainly one of the more exciting projects I'm currently working on. The club was founded on the occasion of the *Refaire Le Monde* (2018) exhibition in the Museum Helmhaus in order to bring people with or without refugee experience and diverse cultural and social backgrounds together across generations and disciplines. Our aim is to use the knowledge and practices that come together in Club La Fafa in order to jointly shape democratic participation and social jus-

tice. On the other hand, projects always become very demanding when different institutional logics clash, and the point is that all those involved leave their secure place, and new positions have to be negotiated together.

At the same time, I am drawn into the same areas of conflict again and again because I believe that change can and should happen here.

RK: How do you finance your projects? Do you have funding? From whom? Can you make a financial profit for yourself? How did you find the projects and/or collaborations in which your exhibitions take place?

NB: The question of financing is always central. There are projects that are great, but you simply cannot find funding for them. And you can worry your head about why that is. Are the project partners missing or have you got the wrong ones, is the whole thing too big or too small, is it the uncomfortable topic, etc.? The reasons are innumerable. It is very pleasant to work when the project is already partly covered by a recognized cultural or educational institution. Fundraising is also easier to do on this basis, and you don't have to justify yourself permanently.

The fact that many independent artists and curators always see paying their own wages as their last priority is actually extremely problematic. Not only do we exploit ourselves, but we also keep the pressure on others to act in the same way. In doing so, we support a system that is primarily competition-oriented and deeply lacking in solidarity.

Perhaps sooner or later we should think about organizing ourselves as a union; this idea has preoccupied me all the more since last year I worked 20% on the management of Visarte Zurich, the professional association of visual artists.

RK: Do you have a quota in mind (of male/female, migratory backgrounds, other intersections)?

NB: The ongoing discussion about the low proportion of female artists in solo exhibitions at large art institutions in Zurich is concerning. Much does not seem to have changed. But is a quota the solution? This discussion has also been held a thousand times, and you know the arguments for and against. A quota is certainly not the solution, but it is a legitimate means of bringing about change. The discussion that concerns me especially is how diversity and inclusion—both demands that were also set as priorities in the current Kulturleitbild of the City of Zurich—can really fall on fertile ground in museums. Diversity needs to be addressed everywhere. It promises creativity and innovation. But in practice, there is still very little being done to make this diversity possible, especially when that means questioning positions and established habits. There is a lack of knowledge about how to actually deal with diverse needs. We first have to learn how specific work and learning situations can be reconciled with different realities in everyday life. Taking diversity seriously means work!

RK: What role do your projects (and your space) in the city of Zurich play locally (or internationally)? What is the role of art in your opinion and from your position? How are you connected in Zurich, with whom?

NB: I don't think that my projects will be widely noticed in Zurich or anywhere else. They're too much of a "niche product" for that. Nevertheless, I am convinced of what I do because I believe that niches are extremely important as fields of experimentation. In this context, I would like to come back to our Club La Fafa project. For two years, we have been collecting knowledge about the asylum system together with peers, dealing with questions and problems that shape the realities of everyday life of those who have an uncertain residence status and are looking for ways to communicate this knowledge to the outside world. If we assume that we live in a post-migrant society, then culture and educational institutions must also take this into account. But it seems nobody really knows how. Interested cultural institutions could get us on board as a project partner and benefit from our knowledge and experience. In return, we could intensify our project, expand it, and make it accessible to a wider public and leave the niche.

I have lived and worked in Zurich for a very long time. And the Zurich art scene is small. Everyone knows about each other around two or three corners. In recent years, I have dealt less with the Zurich art scene, or art

scenes, as one should correctly say, than with the question of who does not belong. Which artists are neglected, not addressed in applications, or simply overlooked and why? This question was also the basis of the project that I realized together with the artists Vreni Spieser and Whamid Al-Ameri in 2018 for the Kunstszene Zürich: 2018—an exhibition format without a jury, where basically anyone can apply to participate. For two months we did research, met a lot of people, and tried to find out if there was such a thing as an "invisible" art scene. We documented our search on Instagram; shared insights from studio visits, showed works, exchanged stories, and discussed the reasons for inclusions and exclusions. It has been shown that the reasons for not participating in the Kunstszene Zürich are surprisingly heterogeneous. Some didn't know about it or missed the deadline. For many, however, language was an obstacle. Here, it would certainly have been helpful to publish the applications and announcements in several languages or at least in English. While this project could only be seen on Instagram (@from_here_and_everywhere), we continued our search for the "unknown" in the winter of 2019-2020 at Helmhaus Zurich. In the exhibition Auf der Suche nach Zürich, we showed positions and works that challenged the usual gaze and excerpted the diversity of art production in Zurich, yet in an exemplary manner.

Nadja Baldini is an art historian and independent curator and cultural mediator in Zurich. She currently works for various art institutions and is involved in different long-term mediation and publication projects in the educational context. She is a lecturer at the F + F School for Art and Design and works on the management board of Visarte Zurich, the professional association for visual artists. She is alumna to the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, ZHdK.

Ronald Kolb is a researcher, designer, film maker and curator. He is Co-Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, Zurich University of the Arts, and an Editor-at-Large of the web journal On-Curating.org and honorary vice-chairman of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. He is a PhD candidate of PhD in Practice in Curating, a cooperation of ZHdK and University of Reading, supported by swissuniversities.



Club La Fafa@Helmhaus, *Refaire le monde PROPOSITION*, 2018



Club La Fafa@Helmhaus, *Refaire le monde PROPOSITION*, 2018

Elisabeth Eberle

Interviewed by Dorothee Richter

The following interview was done online, as many of our encounters have now been transferred to the virtual space. Elisabeth Eberle is an artist based in Zurich. She is mainly working with drawing and sculpture, but recently also her compilation, or archive, on the discrimination of female artists was exhibited.

Dorothee Richter: Elisabeth, you became an art activist fighting for better quotes for female artists in Zurich (and Switzerland). How did that happen? Was there a moment, a special event that made you wish to make the unbalanced gender relations in the Zurich art scene public?

Elisabeth Eberle: When I was managing an art space for an artists' association about ten years ago, the gender imbalance in the art scene was obvious. I analyzed the canton's funding activities on the basis of the culture report and published the (binary) gender-oriented figures in the association's magazine. Afterwards, someone in charge called and asked me why I was so upset, since there were also very few female university professors.

At an opening, I asked the government council responsible for culture for explanations. He was not aware of the situation. Stereotypical attempts at explanation followed, speculation about a low number of applications from female artists, etc.

In the meantime, museums and institutions were gradually publishing their collections and activities on the Internet, and the access to data became easier. The situation turned out to be more extreme than I had ever imagined. The more respected the institutions were, the worse the statistics.

DR: How did you start your public actions?

EE: My commitment was slow in starting but tenacious. I tried to make female artists aware of the situation and confront everyone with influence with the problem. Some didn't believe me, and many female artists actually believed that if they were good enough, discrimination didn't apply to them. Others were resigned or had accepted the status quo, had tired of the

pointless effort and had ceased to even apply for exhibitions and grants anymore. I was told several times that feminism was out, and a young curator even confessed to me that she just found men better.

On top of that, I was also warned several times about criticizing decision-makers.

DR: How did you gain more collaborators in this?

BB: Through social media I learned about international initiatives and began to collect articles and publications on the topic, which grew into a small archive. I contacted some of the authors personally when I had something to contribute. I built a loose network of contacts, both nationally and internationally.

I regularly sent interesting discoveries taken from the art scene and from revised art history to a circle of committed artists and art historians, some of which were unable to disclose information because of their positions.

I posted my criticism directly to institutions, e.g. on Facebook, and received orchestrated support from other women* in the discussions.

In addition, I participated in panel discussion on the topic (e.g. Café des Arts), asked critical questions in public discussions and was also consulted by the press, blogs, and administrative offices for information. Political developments and published figures in the press (*Brand-New-Life*, *swissinfo*, and *Tagesanzeiger*) also backed me to discuss the topic publicly here.

Last year, the FATart in Schaffhausen, the only art fair in Europe for women*, asked me to exhibit my archive on a large wall and present it in a talk. Slowly but surely, my work as an archivist merged with that of being an artist.

DR: What action did you start, and how can the reader participate?

EE: Based on the city's mission statement regarding culture, I realized that almost 80% of the budget earmarked for art in Zurich goes to the Kunsthhaus, where women* artists are highly marginalized (*swissinfo* 2008-

2018: 15% women* artists in solo exhibitions, none in 2019).

Together with a culture blogger (Freya Sutter) and the artist and co-founder of FATart (Ursina Roesch), we launched an appeal to have postcards from individuals sent to the Kunstgesellschaft. They called for more women* artists and more diversity in the Kunsthaus Zürich, especially since the institution also has an educational mission to fulfill. Unbeknownst to many, governmental donors are actually in the majority on the board of the private museum association. I am convinced that the private sector on the art scene would immediately adjust to the circumstances if the flagships with public funding were to change their behavior. Clearly governmental involvement in contents of culture is problematic, but even corporates have social responsibilities. Because our intervention was not tied to a formal organization, it spread quickly across various groups (ZHdK, businesswomen*, doctors, the art scene, retirees, academics, etc.). According to our estimates, several hundred individually written postcards and letters were sent.

DR: What were the reactions of the institutions you addressed? I guess they can be very condescending? We once did an overview on the galleries in Zurich, the quota was easy to understand: the more successful on the art market, the fewer women* were in the program, even if one could mention that Hauser and Wirth played an important role in presenting Louise Bourgeois's work to an international art community.

EE: Many reacted very condescendingly, mostly with the by now standardized, clichéd quality arguments or with the cost a change in course would mean, or just that there were fewer female artists.

Initially, there was almost subtle ad feminam criticism directed against me as an artist. That I was railing as a would-be victim—many had decided not to believe the statistics. I was denied the legitimacy as an artist to expose a system that judges me.

On social media, institutions immediately adapted their PR in response to criticism. Typically, muses and female patrons were trotted out to buffer possible reactions.

At a panel discussion, two influential museum curators pointed to the influence of collectors and the lack of

academic treatment of women* artists as a reason for their absence.

Only when a journalist inquired did a Kunsthaus Zürich spokesperson admit to having received “a few dozen” letters, but on the basis of historical precedence saw no need for change.

I was shocked by the reader's comments in the ensuing debate in the *Tagesanzeiger*, which I turned into an audio installation read by a computerized voice. The “museumability” of female artists is generally questioned in many of these opinions. I would never have thought that in 2020 gender or quota discussions in art museums could be such a provocation. Link to the audio installation *Kai spricht*, 2020, in German: <https://vimeo.com/399409127> (code: kisskiss).

DR: How do you see race, class, and gender as intersectional aspects of discrimination?

EE: I am aware that collecting statistics focusing on binary gender distribution do not reflect the general prevalence of prejudice, but it is a good, strategic indicator. As a straight, white woman in contrast to People of Color and other gender modalities, I still have one foot inside the club of decision-makers and know their rites and perceptions. This gives me an advantage when I monitor their actions.

However, I would expect that those managing art institutions take steps to connect with varied publics and as a way forward, adopt policies that reflect a differentiated perception of society (like Tate, MoMA and others have already started to do). These would actually be the core and crucial functions of their positions even it might contrast with commercial forces that reinforce class-driven decisions.

Elisabeth Eberle (b. 1963) is a Canada-born Swiss artist who lives and works in Zurich. In her work, she deals primarily with the intersection of nature and artificiality, mostly in drawings, videos, and sculpture. In recent years, she has collected an archive about the representation of female artists in the art scene and included her findings in her work. She has received several awards, including a Pro Helvetia prize in collaboration with the US Embassy in Bern (Department of State), was juried into the artists' program of The Drawing

Center, New York, and exhibits nationally and internationally. She holds a master's degree in natural sciences from the ETH Zurich, where she came into contact with imaging techniques and scientific drawing.

Dorothee Richter is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, and Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS/MAS Curating, which she founded in 2005 at the Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland. She is director of the PhD in Practice in Curating Programme, a cooperation of the Zurich University of the Arts and the University of Reading. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she was initiator of Curating Degree Zero Archive and Curator at Kuenstlerhaus Bremen. She is Executive Editor of the web journal OnCurating.org.



Elisabeth Eberle, *Frauen zählen.*, Archiv, work in progress, 2010-2019



4th women's strike day 2019, Photo Elisabeth Eberle (Building Fence Kunsthaus Zürich New building: banners anonymous, posters: Beatriz González, Zócalo del Duelo (Foundation of Mourning). Intervention in the streets of Zurich in collaboration with KiöR - Public Art Zurich, 2019



Elisabeth Eberle, *femme à Anne Marie Jehle (1934-2000)*, selfie series, 2019/2020

The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labor

Marina Vishmidt

*This piece was written, in most of its parts, nearly ten years ago, and constitutes a lightly revised version of material from a then-recently submitted doctoral thesis. It was prepared for a Routledge collection on art and politics which was edited by the late and greatly missed Randy Martin. Much of this was re-worked, on a spectrum from light to substantial, for my book *Speculation as a Mode of Production: Forms of Value Subjectivity in Art and Capital* (Brill 2018; Haymarket 2019).*

Reading over this text now, it strikes me that while I wouldn't necessarily disagree with any of its arguments, things have moved on a great deal from the era of Global Financial Crisis and Occupy, both in the political situation and in the thinking that aims to respond to it, including my own. The historical and categorical analysis here notably does not engage with questions of race and property in its genealogy of both capitalist and aesthetic value forms. This now seems like not so much an omission but as producing the wrong kind of construction altogether; one which at best hints at dispossession and de-humanization but in leaving the key scholarship and ways of conceiving the problem out of its purview, doesn't really give us all the tools to understand what kind of thing (or relation) modernity, art or modern art, is: the tools that, among many others, writers such as Fred Moten, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Brenna Bhandar, David Lloyd or Saidiya Hartman, decisively do provide. The race, gender and class relations of the self-owning human that subtends the free individual of property-owning democracy and aesthetic judgment alike are integral to any discussion of Kant's third Critique, even one as careful and open-ended as the one I undertake elsewhere in the book, although that individual makes an appearance here as the subjective premise of human capital in its mode of the aspirational creative. Concomitantly, as I have been doing in my work over the past few years, the exceptional, autonomous or purposeless status of art, which remains an economic and institutional shibboleth albeit one disavowed at the level of critical production, should not be understood in isolation, or, should not be understood without a tracing of the mediations between that status and this set of practices, and the constitutive role of the 'exceptional' as the norm – the unpaid, unwaged and non-human to capital's value relations, as feminists, theorists of blackness but also political ecologists such as Jason W. Moore have taught us, particularly in an age where extraction seems to override exploitation, from the gig economy to 'unconventional' energy sources.

It's a folly to try and re-write extensive bodies of work from a later vantage, no doubt, so this preface should function really as an extended paraphrase of 'yes, and ...'

Introduction

The rationale of this essay is to outline the connection between the contradictions of the social development of artistic labour in capitalism and the formation of the aesthetic subject in modernity as the displacement of labour from the category of art, bringing it into closer affiliation with the speculative forms of capital valorisation. I will start with a brief survey of how artists have approached and appropriated the politics of labour, following the role of labour within artistic practices in a historiographical

and analytic key. Then we will see how the speculative category of real subsumption can function in a discussion of artistic production, allowing us to trace the emergence of the aesthetic subject as a displacement of labour and a reification of an oppositional space – though not necessarily an antagonistic one – to the social relations of capital accumulation and the society of work. This is a space of autonomy that, however, has significant affinity to the ‘autonomisation’ of capital from labour. Whereas capital and art once confronted each other as heteronomy and autonomy, now they seem to share a certain utopian vision of an ‘automatic subject’ that can valorise itself indefinitely. This affinity of course has certain limitations – art can at best be a flattering self-image of capital, which is actuated by profit and is thus as far as can be from the core aesthetic principle of ‘purposiveness without a purpose’.

Crucial to the determination of how the dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy for art is displaced in the present is the status of the concept of ‘real subsumption’. ‘Real subsumption’ plays a central role in accounts of the restructuring of the valorisation processes of capital and their relation to labour as it has developed over time. While we can start by thinking about how artistic production has been differentially ‘really subsumed’ by the industrializing circuits of art markets, fairs, biennials, urban branding strategies, or even education and social services, this should be situated as part of a broader trend. The annexation of art by ‘culture’ and ‘culture’ by the economy has been seen as a symptom of the ‘seizure’ of previously ‘untouched’ areas of subjectivity and social life by the valorisation process, or, conversely, the socialization of capital in cultural consumption. Processes such as these have been theorized in terms of the periodisation of phases of capital accumulation and of the relation between capital and labour within them. [Endnotes 2010: 140] The developmental tendency, then, for the relation between capital and labour is that labour not only appears more and more, but is experienced as, a moment of capital. This registers both in the objective parameters of reproduction mediated by financial rather than welfare state institutions and in the subjective parameters of “human capital” ideology. Some theorists have also suggested that debt represents a concrete instance of the change in the class relation wrought by financialization. Insofar as debt has the effect of individualizing the subject’s relation to capital – whereas the wage once served as a common basis for struggle – it disguises the capital relation of exploitation as “self-investment.” [Federici 2012] Thus, the term “human capital” is hardly an ideological vector pure and simple; it simply describes the structural condition of workers in the era of financialization.

The status of class antagonism in this era of “self-investment” also undergoes a significant change – labour can no longer be affirmed as a positive counter-pole in a vision of a non- or post-capitalist future. We now need to construct an account of capital formation “from the inside out,” that is to say, when capital is presupposed at the affective and operative level of the individual subject insofar as she constitutes a free individual, rather than a worker or any other socially determined role.

To do this, we will need to revisit the autonomy/heteronomy nexus as it has played out in the emergence of the artistic subject as both the emblematic and oppositional figure of modernity, internalizing the abstraction of the capital relation as the innermost truth of its existence in the world. Beyond the “death of art” (Hegel), the artistic (“creative”) subject takes on the self-expanding dynamism of the ‘automatic subject’ of capital and is advanced as a role model for all labour. At the same time, the artistic subject marks the division of social labour which produces art and labor as socially, and even ontologically, distinct institutions. It could even be said that it is precisely

through the dissolution of the artwork into the field of wider social relations (social, participatory, relational and “invisible” forms of art) that the recuperation of this dissolution as individual artistic capital is upheld most forcefully, with the artist emerging as both a de-skilled “service worker” and manager and curator of social creativity or the “general intellect.” [Fraser 1997: 111-16; Buchloh 190: 105-43; Mattin 2011: 284-307] The artist as both not-worker and utopian model of labour which mediates these shifts in productive relations serves as an analogue of capital’s boundless creativity and transformative agency, even or especially in times of crisis and decline, when this figure takes on oppositional contents within forms which remain very much the same. As Adorno has noted, “A contradiction of all autonomous art is the concealment of the labour that went into it, but in high capitalism, with the complete hegemony of exchange value and with the contradictions arising out of that hegemony, autonomous art becomes both problematic and programmatic at the same time.” [Adorno 2005: 72].

In this sense, the challenges to art’s autonomy which have themselves solidified into an orthodoxy in the past three or four decades have by and large accommodated themselves to the results of these challenges, that is, a conception of artistic practices and artistic institutions that are more and more defined by the heteronomy of the market.

Artistic autonomy thus becomes a style, a form of “taste” that positions art as a refined consumption of objects and social relations, whose relationship to art’s heteronomous conditions of existence must be disavowed. These disavowals can take the form of registering unjust material conditions on a discursive level while reproducing them in the practico-inert everyday of the institution. The conservatism which generates these disavowals is often framed as a pragmatic defence of art’s independence and ability to nourish its socially utopian potentials, a stance which underpins many recent defences of the “bourgeois art institution” from the depredations of the market. The artist, meanwhile, seems to retain a commitment to autonomy as a professional standard, though it is now mediated by the character masks of the manager, the researcher, or ethnographer. This quick typology of the objective parameters of how autonomy appears in the field of art today centers on the figure of the artist as a figure exempt from the relations of exploitation that obtain elsewhere in society. The artist is a figure who can be “autonomous” because she belongs to a productive structure that allows her to appropriate and produce cultural material as the expression of her subjectivity rather than for profit or survival. She is beyond the capital relation; she has the enviably protean nature of capital itself – as close as “human capital” can get to the idyllic state capital imagines for itself as an entity unencumbered by labour, regulation or deflating asset prices. In this way, the formal autonomy of the artist aligns with the “automatism” of capital as engine of accumulation and self-valorization that both includes and expels “alien” labour.

The autonomy of art arises with the autonomy of capital as a central phenomenon of modern experience. It invents a category of social relation which is not one, a social relation of exemption – aesthetic judgement or “taste.” [Kant 1987: 43-95] This forms a central thread of what I call “speculation as a mode of production” because it is through aesthetic judgement that we can come to perceive more clearly the oppositionality of art in its separation from labour and use-value, an oppositionality very different to the negativity posed by labor, in its character as the “enemy within” for capital, with a subversive content predicated on its affirmation of use over exchange. But it may be precisely this under-determined form of social negativity belonging to art which becomes pivotal when that antagonism is dissolved by the re-structuring of the relations

between capital and labor, when the ascendancy of finance sees the very “use-value” of labor put into question by its main consumer, capital.

Concomitantly with the loss of definition for labor, art assumes a new economic centrality as its indeterminacy is put to work in the more “speculative” modes of accumulation. This encompasses both the market and the public institutions of art, although the socially reproductive role assumed by the latter is increasingly de-stabilized as the legitimation art supplies for speculative capital is “de-leveraged” through austerity programs.

Is Art Working?

For an adequate understanding of the role of labour in current artistic production, the idea of the artist as a manager, an engineer of social processes which she may capitalize, needs to be thought in conjunction with the increasingly pervasive politicization of the artist as a worker: a notion with many historical antecedents which cannot be explored fully here. The question here would be what happens when labour becomes not just a thematic or image for artistic production, but when artistic production is re-imagined as itself a form of labour, and the kinds of political forms this produces. Artists and cultural workers assuming the organizational forms and demands of the labour movement such as fair pay and equitable working conditions can be briefly encapsulated in the history of Artists Unions in the U.K. and U.S in the 1970s, the Art Workers Coalition in New York in the late ‘60s – mid-70s, as well as current groups such as W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) and the PWB (Precarious Workers Brigade). There is also a sub-rosa tradition of artists ‘withdrawing’ their labour, such as the Art Strikes initiated by, respectively, the Art Workers Coalition (1970), Gustav Metzger (1977-1980) and Stewart Home (1990-93).

There are many paradoxes thrown up by re-defining artistic production as wage-labor (however the wage is calculated). One of these might be that the division of social labour that produces the artist as a separate kind of “non-professional” professional cannot be reconciled with a simple agreement that art be valued through the same metrics as all other kinds of work, particularly when capitalist work across the board is being rendered precarious, contingent and self-realizing for everyone on the classically reactionary model of the autonomous (starving) artist. Yet this fragile homology between artistic labour and labour in general does furnish the political core of initiatives by artists and cultural workers to organize on the traditional lines of labour politics. These initiatives seem to multiply at a time when artistic production increasingly does not result in object commodities, but in ‘services’. As Hito Steyerl writes, what that means is that such services are instantly commodified themselves. [Steyerl 2011] But are they? While remaining art? Here we can recall Marx’s comment about labour which does not produce use-values: “If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value.” [Marx 1990: 131] If it was use-value producing labor, it wouldn’t be art; and, come to think of it, a great variety of waged labor these days hardly produces use-values either. It is in this light we would have to re-interpret the late conceptual artist Hanne Darboven’s statement:

I have a good conscience; I’ve written thousands of slips of paper. In the sense of this responsibility – work, conscience, fulfilment of duty – I’m no worse a worker than anyone who has built a road.”

[Darboven, quoted in Adler 2009: 106]

In other words, it is no longer self-evident that the type of artwork Darboven was doing – obsessive and repetitive, logically motivated hand-writing – can or should be deemed tantamount to manual labour in its usefulness, just because so much wage-labour looks and acts like Darboven's (though perhaps not as much as Bartleby's the scrivener's would) and has no pretence to either diligence, duty or social utility. Thus labour solely quantified by wages, without a narrative of social utility apart from 'servicing' the financialized infrastructure, cannot be 'qualified' by such traditional virtues, and nor can art ennoble itself by drawing an analogy between its dedication and the commitment of workers.

Aware of the thorny conceptual and practical issues besieging the task of quantifying artistic labor, a group like W.A.G.E. focuses their campaign on the distribution of resources in public institutions. Dealing with technologies such as contracts, budgets, and certificates of good practice (and wielding the threat of sanctions from funders) WAGE is programmatically challenging the mystification of artistic labour as an 'investment' which may recompense its maker in the future. They set out to break the cultural tie between artists and (financial) speculators by re-positioning artists as workers: a gesture of another kind of speculation, that is, speculating about a state of the world different from what it is.

This bears directly on the relationship of art-making to speculation as a form of production. Besides artistic work – whether it is recognized as 'labor' or not - unpaid labor in the cultural sector (typically internships, as well as the more humdrum self-exploitation characteristic of this work) is paradigmatic of speculation as a mode of production since this kind of labour is presented as a speculative investment in one's human capital, with its hallmarks of affective excess, self-management, and submissive auto-valorization. However, it should not be disregarded that the prominence of unpaid labor in the cultural sector is more than anything else pointing to the larger de-valorization of labour in the economy: that is, it is very much an index of a structural problem of dwindling resources and aggravated social inequality.

The strategy of organizing around the means of compensation for artists and cultural producers reveals a number of paradoxes when seen through the filter of labor politics. The artistic mode of production is so mystified and individualized that labor regulation could indeed only be performed by a much more omnipotent state than we are ever likely to have, and even that would hardly touch on the opaque and unregulated primary and secondary art markets. W.A.G.E. proposes a form of certification or voluntary code of best practice that arts institutions can sign up to, indicating their commitment to pay cultural producers properly. What this misses is first, that an unregulated market like the sphere of art production and mediation does not voluntarily self-police and second, that art institutions operate within a capitalist social space whose iron law is that the rewards of the powerful few come at the expense of the weak many; a structural fact not amenable to moral pressure. The professionals at the lowest rung of the ladder are unpaid so that institutions can function on inadequate budgets; artists don't receive fees so that there's more money to pay salaries to administrators to fund-raise from wealthy donors. If one of the distinguishing features of art production is that – by and large – it is not organized through the same structures as nor accessible to the same forms of measure as other kinds of labour, then it is difficult to see how the political forms of labour organization can play more than a metaphorical role in pointing out certain social injustices of this kind within the institution of art. [Passero and van den Berg 2011: 174-5] Further, this kind of pointing will swiftly need to point to itself, as the expansion of the art world, however unequal

the distribution of its rewards, is a symptom of extreme wealth inequality, a symptom of vast amounts of money being accumulated and invested in e.g. the art market and not e.g. in social reproduction. [Fraser 2011: 114-127] Additionally, as John Roberts and Gregory Sholette have written, art increasingly functions as a sink for disguised un- and underemployment, as statistically larger numbers of people try, with varying degrees of success, to monetize their free creative activity in a hostile economic landscape. [Sholette 2010; Roberts 2011]

Besides the paradoxes from the side of labour and the commodity, there are also paradoxes to be found on the side of art. If what is most characteristic of progressive art since Modernism is to desire the end of art, to dissolve into life, then re-defining art as wage-labor fits into that tradition, while continuing to insist on the cultural exception that determines a price for it as far as the state and market are concerned – and to accept the power of capital, which ensures the existence of divisions of labor and classes which defines the whole social existence of art in its current form. As already noted, this move can mean that the real class divisions that underpin the maintenance of regimes of paid and unpaid labor, mental and manual labor, art work and ‘shit work’, are obscured. Also, the move of construing art as labor reduces art to one of its dimensions, namely what it shares with all capitalist work: the commodity form. A labor politics of art boils down artistic production to the ‘absolute commodity’ Theodor Adorno speaks about [Adorno 2007: 28; Martin 2007: 15-25] or to abstract social labor in its generality, vitiating the critical inflection art still possesses as “the antithesis of that which is the case.” [Adorno 2007: 159]

However, raising the issue of the links between art and labor in the speculative mode of production can have other, equally if not more urgent, critical and political consequences. Art’s role in social reproduction – the “concealment” of labor Adorno mentions in our epigraph – is problematized when this role is re-defined as labor, that is, as production. This is also the lesson of the 1970s feminist Wages for Housework movement, and indeed any instance when a social relation accepted as natural and exceptional to the laws of market exchange is re-defined as labor, thus alienated, and alienable: political. It is not only a matter of recognition: once the disregarded is revealed as fundamental, like unwaged labor for the system of waged exploitation, the relations in that field can be configured anew. On the terrain of art, probably still the most precise gesture of this kind was the feminist conceptual artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ “Maintenance Art Manifesto” and artwork. To begin with, Laderman Ukeles dramatized the nominalist protocols of Conceptual Art when she performed domestic labour as an artwork, what she called “Maintenance Art.” [Lippard 1979: 20-21] Ukeles would bustle around exhibits with a duster and cleaning fluid, wash the steps of the museum, and hound the administrative staff out of their offices on her cleaning rounds. The point was that the work of maintenance made all other kinds of work possible – waged labour, artwork, even “the revolution.” In proposing a world in which “maintenance” activities were just as legitimately a part of the art as the objects or even the more ephemeral propositions or documentations that announced conceptual art, she was suspending the division of symbolic and physical labour that ensured work and art remained matter and anti-matter, autonomy without a taint of heteronomy. If the daily uncompensated labor performed mainly by women in the household could migrate to the museum and seek legitimacy as art, then it was no longer self-evident that this labour was any less “creative” than the kinds of activity hitherto enshrined as art, and no less public than socially necessary wage-labor. It could even be said that her work synthesized the political stakes of identifying with “work” at that time (late 1960s and early 1970s) for art and for the feminist movement, since

identifying with work was a way of reaching for some sort of political collective agency (and, inversely, the political stakes of upgrading housework to artwork). The debates around art's relationship to work sounded very similar to the domestic labor debates; both were seen as taking place outside the social contract of waged labor. This was correct on one level, a descriptive one. Yet both feminism and radical cultural politics like the Art Workers Coalition drew their strength from either disproving this premise or mining the marginality for political effect.

As one of the driving forces of *Wages for Housework*, the Marxist feminist scholar and activist Silvia Federici, wrote in 1984:

Yet, the demand for wages for housework was crucial from many viewpoints. First it recognized that housework is work—the work of producing and reproducing the workforce—and in this way it exposed the enormous amount of unpaid labor that goes on unchallenged and unseen in this society. [Federici 2012: 56]

As soon as an activity, and the identity of those who perform it, is alienated in this way, its stability as a social relation is suspended. In the field of cultural production, it allows the question to be posed of what it is about the organization of society that impels some to work for no money whatsoever because the alternatives seem even worse. Considered in a purely formal manner, it is here that the question of “self-abolition” – of the proletariat, of social existence under the category “woman” or “homosexual” or “black” – also becomes a question for artistic labor. This returns us to the decomposition of the class relation discussed in the first part of this text. The relations between the negativity of labor for capital and the political affirmation of labor within capital can be seen in analogy to art's heteronomy and autonomy. Art cannot affirm itself as art within the relations of capital – its autonomy – without using that autonomy to disclose the horizon of its own erasure, whether that means merging with life (heteronomy) or wider social transformation (overcoming the autonomy/heteronomy contradiction). It is clear that the analogy between the self-abolition of art and the self-abolition of the proletariat, or other forms of social self-abolition, is questionable at a greater level of concretion, which would bring into focus the class relations of art and its “exceptionality.” However, there is the formal correspondence in the relation of art to capital and unpaid domestic work to capital that looks like a relation of the ‘supplement’, that which is necessary but must be depicted as incidental. The constitutive exception, whether it is reproductive labour in the home or the unquantifiable reproductive labour of the cultural worker or the serviceable artist: the “under-laborer” who is the condition of possibility of the system's ability to reproduce itself as a whole, the “work” that must disappear in order for “the work” to appear, whether that work is the waged worker or the art installation. A further question here would be how the participatory, post-conceptual and relational art practices of the past several decades have sought to internalize and exhibit this ‘work’ as part of ‘the work’ that emerges thereby.

How does the social relation of capital mobilize and valorize the desire to be “not-labor” that is the founding moment of art in the capitalist modernity? How does the artist emerge as a subjectivity which allegorises the real abstraction of capital, equating ceaseless flux, change and competition with personal and social freedom? At the same time, this alignment generates a negativity which seeks its content in opposition to capital's rule, if not always to its logic, as the above indicates. As Adorno sketched it half a century ago: art de-functionalizes subjectivities but only as an exception which

proves (even if it on occasion contaminates) the rule. Art is where the use-value that legitimates social production in a capitalist society elsewhere is suspended. Such a suspension of use value is performed within the limits set by the accumulation needs of capital, within and beyond the workplace. It can be contended that it is precisely art's micro-alienation from productive labour and commodity relations that in the age of creative work, creative industries and creative cities, acts to socialize capital on the macro-level, fulfilling art's oft-cited role of being "the commodity that sells all others." Thus, the affect of emancipation and critique that comprises the "surplus value" of art in this schema is not simply or merely ideological, but wholly structural, flourishing as it does in an era of seemingly indefinite capitalist crisis.

Concomitantly, we might look at how art's practices and parameters have globally become aligned with the restructuring of labor into ever more arbitrary, placeless, transient and performative modes of generating value, including even the value of its non-reproduction. By "non-reproduction" here, I refer to brakes put on expanded social reproduction by debt in the case of labor (and capital), or, in the case of art, its self-referential continuation beyond and by means of, its own exhaustion and ambiguity. So here we can approach real subsumption as the restructuring by direct integration into capital of arenas of social life that had been principally, though contestably, separate instances from value accumulation – social reproduction as the consumption of use-values, art as the production of useless or "higher" values. This heralds a loss of mediation on the one hand and its proliferation on the other, when capital's mediations – financial and managerial mechanisms – expand into and reshape in their own image instances of relative autonomy where this autonomy has recently become a barrier for further accumulation, a barrier that comes to seem ever more intolerable in periods of crisis. Thus the separation of art and labor, premised on the self-consistent identity of each, is transformed by real subsumption, with the decomposition of the sites and senses of work on the one hand, and the untenability of proper places and pursuits for art on the other. Hence, the politics stemming from each also – use versus exchange in the traditional iterations of labor politics, and the criticality of useless art against reigning use-values in social reality – themselves are hollowed out by the rationalization that come with real subsumption. This was already the case in the previous global socio-economic crisis, the one which heralded the onset of the "neoliberal" era. In the speculative mode of production that has prevailed since then, art's attempts to model or embody greater social utility itself relied on a vast expansion of debt-financed social spending and culture-led urban development. A vast array of types of 'social speculation' pursued by means of contemporary art thus claimed critical purchase in the midst of this abundance, inequitable as it was. The current crisis punctuates, though it cannot be said to introduce a sharp break into, the self-understanding of such practices. The kinds of supportive infrastructures that social practice art has dedicated itself to prototyping in recent years seem objectively more urgent than ever, now joined to an invigorated activist and collectivist impulse in the wake of Occupy. But if the respective erosions of art and labor come as symptoms of a crisis, can there be a contestational as well as a palliative reflection on the current situation, and can those struggles also potentially disclose a re-composition, precisely around the crisis of "value" that the social forms of art and labor manifest in their own ways?

Here, we must be careful to distinguish art's relationship to real subsumption from the claim that art itself is really subsumed; or, stated otherwise, art's conceptual or "imaginary" subsumption and the real subsumption determining labour must be held apart if we are to track how art and labour converge and diverge in the recent period of capital accumulation, and the shift in the mechanisms of subsumption this has

brought with it. If we refer to the exegesis given by Marx of the category of subsumption (in its formal and real variants), it will be clear that the production process of art is not subsumed at all, neither really nor formally. I have previously discussed this in terms of art having a relationship to the value-form while itself not being determined by the law of value; it is this condition of difference which allows it to have a relationship to the social instance that is thus determined, namely abstract labour and its concrete articulations. And this, in turn, is what allows us to really situate art within the speculative mode of production as ‘speculative labour’. As John Roberts writes in a recent essay:

Artistic praxis certainly plays a part in the accumulation of capital, through opening itself up to interdisciplinary and environmental forms of situatedness [...] But as speculative labour art lies outside of the value process: most artists, most of the time, don't have to work harder and faster in order to produce a range of prototypes to a given template and to a deadline.
[Roberts 2012]

My hypothesis is that art's non-compatibility with the category of real subsumption is clear when the category is applied to the characteristic production processes of art, and that this is important for reading the specific political potential of art in the speculative mode of production, with regard especially to its relationship to general “social technique,” as Roberts also notes. However, if we refer instead to the broader application of real subsumption that has been outlined so far in the piece, it is equally clear that we can discuss art as pivotal – again, due to its specificity as a “non-labour” - to real subsumption seen as a tendential process of capital investing the whole of social reproduction with its value imperatives.

The Specialist of Non-Specialism

Let us stay with the category of real subsumption as a shorthand for describing the socialization of capital through mediations outside of the direct site of the wage-relation – the sphere to which Marx originally applied the term – in accord with contemporary theorists in the Italian post-Autonomia current, but also other contemporary Marxist currents such as the communisation theorists. “Real subsumption” can be broadly conflated with “speculation as a mode of production” according to the preceding definitions I have given this term, insofar as real subsumption in these two currents is often used to designate the absorption of affect and subjectivity into the capital relation; or, to be more exact, the remoulding by capital of how this subjectivity is produced. In order to trace how the subject of contemporary work is modified by this kind of real subsumption into the subject of “human capital” and how that connects to the subject of artistic labour, we need to specify what kind of subjectivity was created in the division of social labour under capital between those who go to work and those who make art.

Following on from the general lens that has been established through the concept of real subsumption, I would now like to focus more closely on the production of artistic subjectivity within it, as its constitutive exception. In artistic subjectivity, (which is more properly called “aesthetic subjectivity” to encompass the viewer/consumer as well as the producer of art, also since the classic philosophies of the aesthetic such as those of Kant or Hegel are more concerned with the viewer), the subject of labour is transformed into the subject of judgement.

What follows from this? At first it seems as if we are presented with the artist as a conservative figure, where the direct relation to the world or with social reality entered into by the worker is replaced by a mediated one which is purely reactive; the artist as empty, abstract subject who takes no position and who evaluates the world rather than changes it. Alternatively, we can see the artist as a radical figure, whose formal relationship to the world is free from the mediations and power hierarchies imposed on the worker, as well as the entrenched understanding of reality imposed by repetitive alienated labor. This latter is the artist as the abstract subject of unconditioned freedom who gains a critical purchase on the world due to her (productive) alienation from its utilitarian reason. As we track the generalization of the abstraction of value as pure creative subjectivity in the current moment as speculative mode of production, we can return to the earliest moments of their contact to understand what has changed. To what extent was the splitting of the subject of aesthetics from the subject of productive labour, inseparable from the development of culture in modernity, already a reaction to the grip of abstract value on social relations? In other words, what are the subjective grounds for the split between autonomy and heteronomy which makes art possible in capitalist modernity?

Giorgio Agamben has recently located the production of subjectivity as pure abstraction in the figure of the artist – recoded into the “man of taste,” thus, as indicated above, crossing between the making and the appreciation of art. He offers an exploratory genealogy of the subject of aesthetics primarily with reference to Hegel’s philosophy of art. To risk an as yet-unfounded leap, what he discovers at the root of this genealogy is the demand for self-annulment, a Hegelian imperative of sublation. Can this be placed alongside the communist revolutionary principle of the ‘negation of all that exists’ and the self-abolition of the proletariat, as noted earlier? That which is nothing but its relation to capital can only overcome this condition by annihilating the relation itself. For this, there must be a moment of alienation, where what is most concrete is transformed into the most incidental and contingent [Agamben 1999: 35]

For Hegel, the more reflexivity art develops, that is, the closer art gets to philosophy, the more it renders itself redundant, its proper sphere of activity becoming merely to illustrate, using its own means, the philosophical endpoints which overdetermine the very possibility of its continuation as art. [Kosuth 1969/1991: 13-32] Art can only realize itself by disappearing. For Agamben here, following Hegel, art as a specific kind of production of a specific kind of object is also liable to vanish on attaining to the condition of absolute freedom. It becomes simply discernment or taste, a capacity for selection. The subjectivity of the artist only registers as the measure of its own emptiness; or, as the power to choose from “indifferent prosaic objectivity” and render the selection a proof or example of this subjectivity at work, a purely gratuitous act. However, when we look at the thematic of such a “self-abolition” for art in Adorno, we encounter a more relational concept, one whose horizon is materialist rather than metaphysical:

Art and artworks are perishable, not simply because by their heteronomy they are dependent, but because right into the smallest detail of their autonomy, which sanctions the socially determined splitting off of spirit by the division of labor, they are not only art but something foreign and opposed to it. Admixed with art’s own concept is the ferment of its own abolition. [Adorno 2007: 5]

With reference to the proposition that what is most characteristic of art in our period is to desire the end of art, be that in the axiomatic manner of Hegel, or in the performative

blurrings between art and labour in present-day work, art and social action alike, [Rancière 2002, 2004, 2009, et.al.] it seems that this can also become a transcendental parameter, a criterion, a normative command. The wish for the end of art can become, or rather has long since become, the primary principle of its continuation. As Agamben notes, this end is in fact the beginning of autonomous art. This is testified by the role of criticality as mark of seriousness and ambition in art as it is currently produced and taught, even if the normativity of such criticality opens itself to charges that it “adds value” to an otherwise consistently conservative sphere of discourse and practice. For Adorno, the “foreignness” of art to the reality principle, the very fact that a society based on exchange-value could find no use for it but to sell and collect it, was already a sign that its autonomy was potentially realizable: art could help bring about a world in which it no longer existed as the legitimating exception to the rule of value over the social and natural world. However, it may be that Agamben’s point is more relevant in an era when it is artistic subjectivity that has been discovered to have a use-value all across the social field, a use-value historically derived from art’s refusal to be art in the era that coincided with Adorno’s later years and has lasted into the present.

The content of artistic subjectivity is then its form, the form which emerges from the split with wage-labour which creates the possibility of “art itself”. The contingent, or “inessential,” is the primary characteristic of the artist’s subjectivity since it is via this that she develops the singularity of apprehension, or “taste,” which makes of her consciousness a productive form for any content it might encounter, and enables her to transform this content by means of the singularity she has cultivated. Production is a moment of consumption, and vice versa. As the truth of artistic subjectivity is found in this detachment, contingency colours its relationship to the world in (at least) two ways: the artist’s autonomy and the autonomy of her production is founded in this detachment. It is at once utterly dependent on this detachment for its (non-)identity, and at the same time retains an agnostic attitude towards it, disavowing dependence and reifying detachment as the non-specialized specialism that distinguishes art in the social division of labour. Its scepticism towards content – here for “content” one might speak of constituted social reality, or heteronomy– allows it to approach it as form, thus acceding to its demands without taking them seriously, as long as there is a possibility of continuing to reproduce oneself as an artistic subject within this heteronomy; on the other hand, it occludes the form-determination of this reality, that is, by the historically specific form of value which has engendered precisely these objective contents, and delivered them to the faculty of judgement at the core of artistic subjectivity and artistic labor.

Conclusion

This essay has proposed a constellation – with pretensions to a narrative – between the concept of real subsumption in Marxian theory, and the place of art in social reproduction. I have further tried to develop what is distinctive about aesthetic subjectivity as it comes to represent the central character in speculation as a mode of production, once this latter concept has been articulated with real subsumption as the re-shaping by capital of the processes of social reproduction as well as production and consequently the role art is called upon to play. Art as a form of “speculative labor” comes both to serve as the model for all kinds of work while providing a distinctive and desirable prototype of liberated – non-capitalist – labor which can either be antagonistic or conciliatory. These are two outcomes whose premises are not determined by the concept of art itself but precisely by what “role it is called upon to play.” The “politics” of speculative labour, then, inhere both in this and in the detachment of art from use-value and useful labour, which can only be attained in their capitalist

modalities to the same degree that art and labour can only be irreconcilable in capital, however “speculative” this capital may become in its operations.

We know that capital tends to externalize its costs, and that unwaged and unmeasured labor is not only the source of value for it (the process transpiring in paid work which expands across the whole of society with gendered and raced division of paid and unpaid labor, work and non-work) but the central mystification that traps people in compulsory activity as an expression of autonomy. The critical, as well as positivist, division between production and reproduction in art and in other kinds of labour can obscure this systemic tendency, and end up calling for an economic recognition that would measure and support both equally, or revalue one at the expense of the other, ignoring that it is in the interests of profit as a *social* as well as, or rather than, an economic relation to keep them apart only to bring them together, that is, to eliminate payment across the board and replace it with a speculative approach to one’s own activity as (possible) commodity more like that of the artist. Therefore, bringing a feminist analysis of reproduction to art, reminding us of its formal symmetry with the pure form of value and thus with capital, is only a first step: to show what it excludes. We need to take the further step, though one that was often left implicit in the politics of social reproduction in the feminist movement, such as Wages for Housework, although the same cannot be said for its best-known texts which put the ‘against’ front and centre. [Federici 2012 (1975)] That step would have to be a destructive one: a challenge to the wage-relation that homogenizes all activity with money, a challenge to the division of labour that produces art - art as a refusal of work that ends up sustaining the rule of exploitation as exception, and which itself increasingly is organized according to an industrialized, customer-facing model. If, as Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*, “only what is useless can stand in for the stunted use value,” then it is the distorted and attenuated form of art’s autonomy as a *speculative intransigence to the existing*, including work, that can be the source of its political powers. And yet, identifying with work, especially with the disregarded and disposable subjects of that work, can indeed be the first step for such a politics of artistic inquiry and making, since capitalist work is structurally the antithesis of capitalist art, even if practically they sit on the same continuum.

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Part 2

Failure Is A Possibility

Interview With Cathrin Jarema and Clifford E. Bruckmann

Interviewed by Gözde Filinta

For Artist-Run Space Hamlet
March 1, 2020

Gözde Filinta: Could you tell us about your professional background?

Cathrin Jarema: I completed my BA in Fine Art at ZHdK and then went to Vienna to continue my studies; currently, I am studying performance at ISAC in Brussels. I work between Brussels and Zurich, and this gives me a chance to know and work in both art scenes.

Clifford E. Bruckmann: I also studied in the Bachelor program in Fine Arts at ZHdK and then completed the MFA. I've lived and worked in different cities, but I always end up back in Zurich since this is where I have a network, and it's easier to realize my projects.

GF: How did you start Hamlet?

CEB: We started out as three co-founders, Andrea Abegg Serrano, Cathrin, and me, and currently, it's the two of us, Cate and me. So, actually, one summer evening in 2018, we were drinking champagne in my garden, and a conversation came up about why we would never open a space. In the course of the conversation, we naturally also hypothetically discussed what criteria would have to be met if we would ever even consider starting such a project. One of them was the location; it would have to be in the periphery of the city where there is movement, and we have relative freedom—where the art scene isn't set in stone like around Löwenbräu or Rämistrasse. Then, a few days after our loose conversation, by chance, we found this space and sort of took it as a sign. And then suddenly, we had the space and found ourselves committed.

CJ: We took over the space as is, but we just added the lighting. For all I know, it was rented out as a studio by Raumbörse before we came in, and we believe it was an architect's office before that. Probably it was originally built as apartments.

GF: What is the conceptual idea behind Hamlet?

CEB: One thing that I think motivates us is our own experience. A few years ago, I did my first solo show over several rooms in a large space. It completely changed the way I had to think about my work in comparison to, for example, bringing one single piece to a group show. From there, I realized that putting together a large, coherent exhibition is a whole other experience for an artist that changes the entire practice. In Zurich and even in Europe, there are many off-spaces and project spaces that are very well run, which are fairly small in size. Yet, one of the main goals of these spaces and their artists in the long run is institutional representation, or at least I think it is for many. The problem lies here; there is nothing in-between these smaller shows and the large institutional spaces. An artist is expected to extrapolate and scale something from a group show in 20 sqm to 800 sqm. There is no in-between place to practice, and it is a tough feat to think of an entire exhibition that way. So, that is one of the motivations here, that we allow artists to practice this in-between stage. We do have roughly 130 sqm here, over four rooms.

CJ: We try to make six to seven large projects per year, and at least half of them would be given to individual positions: solo shows. We also organize other formats, such as a screening series—Cinema Hamlet—that lasted six weeks in collaboration with different curators and artists.

CEB: Another aspect of our conceptual approach is the thematic complexes that we are interested in. We have common interests in language, communication, along with our personal interests in different fields. I'm interested in political and economic topics.

CJ: I'm more interested in transformation, intersectional terms, and notions. Given also where we are and where Hamlet is located. On the other hand,

when we look at something together, we share similar interests in the themes of our shows.

CEB: I would say we are not so ideological; I think we are very much interested in surveys and overviews more than statements. Yet, at the end of the day, I guess we ought to define an attitude or position, but we like to think of ourselves more as facilitators. I suppose, we keep our research limited in comparison to people with a strictly curatorial approach and try to support positions that can develop conversations.

CJ: Another conscious decision are our opening times. We hold openings on Sundays between 2pm and 6pm because we wanted people to gather on a Sunday, joining a day time conversation without the expectation of a party. Also, being in Oerlikon, it seems to many people like a further trip. This way we have people sticking around a bit, talking to each other, engaging in the conversations we try to develop.

GF: How do you choose the artists you work with?

CEB: We are constantly in an exchange. When we are planning our annual program, we go through a list of artists and topics that we have followed and are interested in. Before the next year starts, we discuss the positions and topics that we feel are urgent and we are interested in and try to place them in a coherent and sensible program.

CJ: Of course, we try to be critical with ourselves. It is in the nature of such projects that we bring in our networks, but also don't want to be trapped inside the network. But sometimes, of course, it can happen that we are bound to a particular aspect and are biased. We try to look at our working methods as objectively as possible and improve them. When we work with a new idea, we remind ourselves of the possibility of failure. Failure is always a possibility, and we accept it, also in regard to the artists we work with, but we give it a shot and try our best.

GF: How do you finance Hamlet?

CEB: For our first year, we got funding from the Canton of Zurich and two private institutions. For this year, the Canton of Zurich is still supporting us, and a few private institutions are supporting us as well. We are open for the sale of artworks, and we take small commissions, which go directly into our next productions, but sales are definitely not the priority. The priority is putting

together the best possible projects. We don't get paid or pay ourselves for the work we do here. In our virtual budgets, we take 30 CHF for an hour, and then gift our time as personal contributions to Hamlet. Theoretically, these contributions would translate to around 70,000 CHF annually. When there is a deficit, we cover it from our own savings—which, frankly, aren't huge.

CJ: Production is crucial for us. We try to make as few compromises as possible. We try to realize the projects with the artists according to their wishes and desires. That is definitely a priority. Also, very important to us is that we always add the artist's or curator's fee to our budget and try to balance it with our production cost.

CEB: We articulate and promote a proto-institutional setting for solo presentations. We had this idea and motivation since the start, and we use this in our funding applications. We try to be transparent with everyone we work with, and we try to take care of our artists in a way that maybe even some institutions and galleries do not.

GF: How do you involve others art producers?

CJ: We collaborate with artists, curators, and others. For our screening series, we invited artists and curators to program a screening of their choice, for a weekend each. We had the series as an umbrella, trying to embrace anyone interested in collaborating with us on the very broad topic of "transformation." Generally, we try to be reachable, collaborative, and supportive. Hamlet can ask for funds and help with finding resources that the individual person cannot. We are open to using every resource we have with others, including the use of space. Last year and this year, Hamlet was used for a book launch, breakfast, New Year's Eve, birthdays, dance classes, and other things. Hamlet is open for proposals and ideas. The only criteria would be to work with someone who truly commits to what they are doing, and, of course, we need to have the resources like time and money available.

GF: What role does Hamlet play in the city of Zurich?

CEB: Meanwhile, some of our neighbors started coming to our events, yet we are not trying to achieve a sociocultural approach. Our wish is to be welcoming and open, a familiar place, like an extended family who help each other and sustain each other.

GF: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

CEB: First of all: a decent fine arts program. And I mean “decent” as in morally and ethically sound. It might also contribute to the quality. Who knows?

Then, I might be romanticizing, but I genuinely wish for a place where new people can meet with each other and start a conversation. Basel or Bern seem different to me. Zurich has a weird size—big enough to form groups but not big enough to be entirely separate from each other. So, these separate groups collide, but unfortunately they rarely mix.

Another missing point in Zurich, ironically, is the lack of support both in terms of network and finance. The density of high-end galleries in Zurich, given the size of the city, is probably higher than New York, Hong Kong, etc. So, everyone who is in the arts, new graduates, students, see all these super high-end galleries all around and dream of becoming part of this gallery system. It is easy to get in touch with people working in these galleries, compared to other cities, yet it is a whole different story to be part of these galleries and work with them. It is tough to find a home in Zurich, as a young artist, a place, a structure, and a network that will help you carry your burden. Artists in Zurich are sustained, in the best case, by public grants and funding, but in the worst case, they are not sustained at all.

However, galleries who are expected to support these artists do not solve this problem, because they hardly exist or have ceased to exist in recent years. There are no galleries in Zurich to support the vast number of outstanding quality, exciting artists. Even though the artworks can be quickly commercialized, there is no structure to pick them up. Along with these young people, the young and mid-career galleries are dying in Zurich; it is not sustainable for them to continue with their work. So, here we have a lot of people producing work, without a vessel to carry them, also financially.

The in-between step, as we mentioned before, is also missing on the commercial side. We, as a project space, we cannot and don't want to do the work of a gallery. We can only offer them one-time solo presentations, for practice and maybe be there for them as friendly support, of course, also in the long run.

So, the support network on the commercial side is lacking. I believe that a good gallery, in the long run, can

have a significant impact for its artists, especially positioning them in a historical retrospective. People around today will not get historical recognition because there is nothing and no one around to document and disseminate the work. Sadly, public funds and grants, blockbuster galleries, or off-spaces cannot compensate for that. So, then we see lots of people disappearing again. I actually believe—and it might sound anachronistic—that the most exciting field to work in currently as a curatorial position could actually even be the gallery. We need new formats in galleries which support new artistic approaches and involve others, while still being economically viable.

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Gözde Filinta is a curatorial researcher and writer based in Zurich. She has taken part in multiple art projects since 2012 in various roles. Currently, she is working on her research on multispecies survival in the Anthropocene and the use of art narratives, for her ongoing MAS program at ZHdK in curating. Along with her research articles, she writes about contemporary art in relation to her research area. She continues working on her curatorial projects in Zurich and Istanbul, and is genuinely interested in urgent global issues, interspecies relations, and the non-human in artistic expressions and narratives.



Cinema Hamlet #1: Five Weekends of Moving Image exploring Transformation (Installation View). Programs by: Onur Akyol, Keren Cytter, Kelly Ann Gardener, Thomas Moor, Jiajia Zhang. Image courtesy of Hamlet



Unreal Estate (Installation View). With works by: Heidi Bucher, Jan Hofer, Matthias Liechti, Anita Semadeni, Elza Sile, Jiajia Zhang, Julia Znoj (Reception Area by Kevin Aeschbacher). Photo by Flavio Karrer. Image courtesy of Hamlet and the artists.



Philip Ullrich, *takes two to tango (Installation View).* Photo by Flavio Karrer. Image courtesy of Hamlet and the artist.

Statement on the Covid Situation

by Cathrin Jarema and Clifford E. Bruckmann

In March 2020, we knew something was cooking, obviously. For the past months, we were becoming more and more aware of the upcoming pandemic. The virus creeping closer from one degree of longitude to the next, we had to—as did every other organization, company, institution, family, and person—anticipate what that might mean for us and weigh the options.

Fortunately, through past and current professional experience outside of the art industry and observing other countries hit earlier and harder, we had a rough idea of what was coming on a nationwide scale. This allowed us to negotiate with our cooperators for upcoming projects swiftly and organize contingency planning for pretty much any imaginable scenario. If they hadn't done so first, we reached out to the entities offering us financial support in order to share thoughts on how the situation might effect programming. Without exception, we were met with understanding and good will.

Hamlet is an artist-run organization, and therefore our surroundings and us were not only handing out cancellations and postponements but also receiving them. In the weeks leading up to the various lockdowns and shutdowns across the continent, we already started hearing of people so strongly affected by cancellations that they were losing entire annual incomes within less than a week. As an organization, we apparently had no trouble surviving; as artists, however, we were becoming aware of how deeply fucked we were. Given that many artists, especially in the stage in which the career is in development, still moonlight in other jobs to generate regular income, you'd assume that there isn't too much to worry about. Obviously, artists with day jobs are rarely looking for a career in their salaried occupations, which leads to them taking on employment in low qualification and informal settings which are therefore also low-income and often paid by the hour or per gig. Industries like gastronomy and the event industry are often the go-to receptacle for artists looking for jobs with flexible working hours and the possibility to adjust frequency and involvement with respect to their individual work and projects. You can see where we are going with this: amongst the first branches that were shut down in most countries and for obvious reasons

were all things eating, drinking, partying, and entertaining. So, there you are, thinking for a brief moment "Well, I might as well just go and put in some more salary work for the time being," before quickly realizing that your employer has already sent you a text message saying that you're out of work for the foreseeable future, and because you're hired on an hourly or freelance basis, they don't see any possibility to keep you on as long as the company can't generate income.

For us personally, we knew that we'd get by one way or another. We were able to retreat home, in proximity to our families, to close friends, always knowing that there is a safety net we could rely on. And also not forgetting that we live in Switzerland as Swiss citizens with more or less Swiss sounding names which turns out to be an invaluable privilege, although this luxury is also one with limits as we would experience later. However, these limits appear easy to overcome in comparison to the situations other people found themselves in.

In anticipation of a lockdown in Switzerland (which would be decreed as of March 16, 2020), we moved our offices home and made ourselves as comfortable as possible given the circumstances. Our understanding of what our space can be has been readjusted time and again even within the short time it has existed. One constant, however, is that Hamlet can function as a relay for resources. Even as a small independent art space, we can bundle all sorts of resources as long as we are capable of sustaining the public impression of a certain degree of professionalism. However, bundling these resources is only interesting if we manage to find the right outlets to pass them on to. Suddenly, confronted with the limitations of running our space, putting on projects, and conducting public events, our resources lay inert. And if we couldn't pass on our resources to the artists we work with, probably no one could. And then again, if no one could, no resources would reach the people we work with. The buck stops not at the top, but at the bottom, the socially and economically most vulnerable, exposing themselves and assuming risks on a project basis inside a gig economy full of opportunities but even more potential downfalls. The exact opposite to, for instance, athletic careers; with well-paid jobs early in life, but subsequently having to

live off the earnings of these early careers, reinventing life plans at a stage at which many other people are already settled. Athletic careers ask for humongous sacrifices which are met—in the best case—with adequate remuneration in an early phase in life. Artistic careers, however, tend to be almost lifelong exercises in paying forward: investing in careers which might pay off at a very late stage in life. In many cases, a career in the arts, especially as an artist, is playing the long game. Again, the sacrifices made might be compensated by certain freedoms and flexibility but are in parallel accompanied by severely prolonged economic adolescence, making artists particularly vulnerable in moments of general peril. Although hopefully most artists are aware of their starting positions to their careers, this awareness doesn't make them any more protected or supported by the circumstances surrounding them.

While we can only make a subjective and halfway qualified statement about the situation and also only for Switzerland, artists as a group of professionals tend to lack organized political and economic representation. Up to a certain degree, it appears intuitively logical, as artists are usually self-employed, exploiting themselves and their resources seemingly by choice and therefore amiss of an entity, institution, or subsumable industry other than themselves to which demands could be addressed. At the same time, the only organization in Switzerland, Visarte, which self-identifies as a national interest group for furthering artists' economic and political standing, has missed out on the past few decades in complete oblivion of new generations, new circumstances, new urgencies, and new situations regarding the accessibility to all kinds of resources. It is important to us to point out that we are quite sure that artists tend to be better off in Switzerland when compared to other parts of the world with an abundance of public grants and support, directly or indirectly. This changes nothing about the fact that entire economic, social, political, and welfare systems are in no way prepared for a workforce laboring in a gig economy, without fixed contracts, lacking the financial or structured administrative and bureaucratic resources of other self-employed people or businesses. According to one account, it turns out that the database of the Swiss unemployment agency includes the professions "art historian" and "art expert," but it isn't possible to register and file for unemployment as "artist." While there are several layers of safety nets and welfare support systems in case of unemployment or distress in Switzerland, none are prepared to handle a logic of

labor not based on a fixed, monthly income or, in the case of self-employment, realities which are based on a principle of paying forward, with incomes oscillating annually, and are therefore often inherently precarious. We can only assume that this situation is even more severe in places which are not Central Europe's Disneyland.

On March 14, 2020 we drafted a letter to disseminate throughout one of our most important resources: our media canals. We released a call for donations in order to build a fund, as uncomplicated as possible, to offer artists in dire need support and relief. It turns out that we did this not one day too early. We were overwhelmed by both the incredible readiness of people in Hamlet's vicinity and beyond to offer their help by sending money and entrusting us with delivering it to the people in need, as well as the immense response we received from exactly the people in need of this support. In retrospect, we aren't surprised that the first person applying for money from our fund was a US-American national and resident who we'd never had contact with before. From there, applications started coming in, at times by the hour.

On March 20, 2020, the Swiss Federation announced that there was an extensive financial aid package being put together also for individuals working in the cultural sector. A syndicate consisting of a variety of organizations representing cultural workers' interests in Switzerland, mostly musicians, was tasked with developing a process, processing the applications and paying out the "immediate relief" [Soforthilfe] funds to artists in need. This organization, Suisseculture Sociale, of which the aforementioned Visarte is a member, went through the tedious work of developing a secure platform and fair process to handle the applications. We can only imagine what kind of extensive work was executed in such a short period of time; however, yet again, individuals working in the visual arts were confronted with a questionnaire and asked for records which are often impossible to provide, knowing the realities of visual artists. The platform was activated on April 6, 2020. For all we know, the first person we know personally who received "immediate help" had money hitting the account on May 12, 2020 after submitting an application as early as April 7th. It took more than a month and several rounds of insisting and explaining that certain documents were simply not available and a total of nearly two months after the Swiss lockdown was instated before the first person received relief. That is two months without income and, in the worst case,

without money for rent, food, medical expenses, toiletries, or other basic expenses. Again, this is what was branded “immediate relief.” Dated April 16, 2020, the president of Visarte, born in 1955, sent out a letter to all members of the organization blathering about the worms in the garden of the home he owns and how artists must learn to say “no.” Often, “no” is a word one needs to be able to afford. While we too love watching the change of seasons and species in our respective gardens and would never want to take away or diminish someone’s joy over such things, the blindness for artists’ situations in less established and settled circumstances was symptomatic and, frankly, disappointing bordering on ridiculous and cynical.

Around the time of this letter, by mid-April 2020, after raising and paying out about 15,000 Swiss Francs, we started seeing donations declining rapidly. Of course, this sum is nothing compared to the 280 million Swiss Francs made available for the cultural sector by the Swiss Federation, but we do take some pride in the fact that up until then, we sent immediate relief to 35 individuals across Europe and the Americas. We hope that we were able to put some food on the table here and there, help with the rent or, in the most extreme and rare cases, help pay for insulin or gasoline to put in the car to bring children to school.

Confronted with an abundance of applications, we felt committed to continue raising money but knew that we had exhausted Hamlet’s network and the few media relations we had. We also need to point out that there appear to be significant cultural differences in how charities function and how people support them when comparing continental Europe to the Anglo-Saxon parts of the world. Nonetheless, we decided, with the generous help of a few friends, to set up an online platform for a benefit auction. And again, the support from within the art world itself was impressive: from art school students to blockbuster artists, works were consigned to our platform from artists directly. While collectors were able to buy art at a bargain, in some cases even almost absurd bargains, the auctions raised roughly an additional 25,000 Swiss Francs to distribute among artists in need.

In mid-June 2020, we phased out the Hamlet SARS-CoV-2 Support and Relief Fund for Artists. This, after making payments to a total of approximately 120 individuals across about twenty countries. Now, this doesn’t sound like much, but we do hope that we could at least help these few people.

Now, at the beginning of August, about six months after the pandemic started hitting Europe and the Americas with increasing force, we still have people reaching out for funds that we unfortunately cannot provide. We hear and read stories of Argentinians not being able to access their bank accounts to withdraw the money we sent them, Brazilians being left entirely alone, artists living in Switzerland who can’t access support from either the regular unemployment system or the process supposedly specifically designed for them and therefore have to rely on the social welfare system, artists residing in Belgium receiving significantly less support in comparison from the institutions they study in because they are not Belgian nationals and, of course, there are more stories.

All this being said; it is not all bad. But if anything, the structures, or lack thereof, at the foundation of a large part of the art industry appear to have been anticipating realities increasingly more people are experiencing in their professional and personal lives also outside of the arts. It is shocking to witness the lack of understanding with regard to these realities from state agencies, media, the broad public, schools, art institutions (with a workforce normally relying on fixed contracts), individuals in politics, and most of all the interest groups and organizations which are supposed to further artists’ interests and interest in artists. It goes without saying that our personal positions are privileged ones, even within the broader field of the arts. Although, knowing this and experiencing the pressure we did during these times, it must be insurmountable for many. Fortunately, there are ways of unlocking empathy, understanding, resources, support, and solidarity, but it involves a huge effort, and that is weight no one can pull alone.

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la_cápsula—between Latin America and Switzerland

An Exploration in Three Acts

by Jose Cáceres and Noriko Yamakoshi

1. Saturday, November 30. Welcome to la_cápsula

It is a buzzing weekend in Zurich. The 7th edition of Volumes, the independent publishing fair, is taking place at the Kunsthalle, and several Latin American artists and curators are participating—rapidly a small Latin American community was built within the stands and halls of the fair and they will probably come together again at one place: la_cápsula, an independent and experimental art space that seeks to create a dialogue between Latin America and Switzerland. Today, Enrique Arriaga and Janet Martínez are performing *The Beasts*, an audiovisual exploration, within the program of the exhibition.

We arrive late. Despite the darkness set for the performance, we find some seats. We were immediately in: you could close your eyes and let the sonorous messages by Arriaga relate to your thoughts; you could open your eyes wide and get pulled into the video imagery created by Martínez; you could immerse yourself in their collective dimension of relations, translations, and rifts. After the performance, the discussion with the artists moved from Spanish to English, English to Spanish—Spanish may be the (main) language at la_cápsula, but their events are characterized more by the fluidity between languages, honoring their intentions to be a place of dialogue.

The discussion ends; the bar opens. Adriana Domínguez and Elena Rosauero, curators of la_cápsula, “disappear” behind the bar and start to serve beer, water, glasses of wine. They talk warmly with everyone, they laugh (...a lot and almost always simultaneously), Elena comes to the front side and hugs the Latin American Volumes community arriving. Adriana comes out as well, talks to the artists, asks if they need anything. They are always cheerful, welcoming. Visitors and artists at la_cápsula are more than their intellectual, artistic, and connoisseur personae, they are guests in their home, hogar, that

Adriana and Elena have created within the Zurich art scene.

2. Wednesday, February 5. The Interview

“Tenemos para 8 horas de conversación con esas preguntas” (“We will have like 8 hours of conversation with these questions”), wrote Elena the day before the interview. We checked our questions, highlighted the important ones. For the interview, we have invited Adriana and Elena for lunch. It was their turn to be guests. The conversation started effortlessly. We shared experiences of how everyone arrived in Zurich—neither interviewers nor interviewees are from Switzerland. Adriana is from Mexico, where she studied art history, and came to Zurich for an internship at the Galerie Peter Kilchmann and graduated later from the MAS Curating Programme. Meanwhile, Elena studied art history in Spain and finished her PhD in “Latin American Contemporary Art and Political Violence,” which brought her to Zurich. Their stories started rapidly to interweave. From their personal and collective memories, a herstory emerged:

Exhibition Memories

José Cáceres and Noriko Yamakoshi: What was your first exhibition both separately and together?

Adriana Domínguez: I organized my first exhibition when I was 16 (everyone laughs). It was really like I WANTED to do exhibitions. My mom had a friend who owned a beautiful English school with a beautiful backyard and garden and we did the exhibition there—like very creatively on chairs and hanging elements. In the university, I did, I think the most important one, an exhibition about feminism, because I was able to show Valerie Export and Ana Mendieta who were my heroes at that time.

Elena Rosauero: “Sheroes”?

AD: Yes! And our first show together at la_cápsula was...

ER: ... in a garage, *wave · forms* [with Joanna Selinger and Mayar el Hayawan] which was [held] in June 2017.

JC+NY: What was first: the exhibition idea or la_cápsula?

AD+ER: la_cápsula.

JC+NY: Could you explain more about it?

AD: But you have to say your first exhibition, Elena.

ER: That was my first exhibition by the way.

AD: That was your first exhibition? I didn't know that.

ER: Well, I had an exhibition before, but I was the artist (everyone laughs).

A Garage, A Name

JC+NY: How did the concept of la_cápsula come about?

ER: You tell the story.

AD: Well, Elena and I share the similar interests in Latin American art, it was the theme of Elena's Master's and PhD, and for me it's my background, and it was something that we felt was missing here in Zurich. The only space that was showing art from Latin America was the Daros Collection, but by the time I arrived here it was already closed.

ER: They are still here, but now they do not have an exhibition space anymore.

AD: So, we were very lucky to find each other. We met through our internship at Peter Kilchmann; that was when we found out that we share the same desire or need to show Latin American art in Zurich. We didn't have a space then, but my husband at that time was renting a tiny garage close to Prime Tower, together with some friends. I asked Elena if she would like to do exhibitions with me in this tiny garage, which was the only space we had available. But it was better than nothing.

We had to start somewhere. Elena was very enthusiastic, which was the best thing that could happen because this was how the project started. As for the name, it was inspired by the tiny space, because it was so small that we thought it's like a tiny capsule where something happens and then stops because you simply close the door. Then we started to discuss a concept and idea around the space. Our objectives were very clear: what we wanted to show was Latin American art, and we also wanted to showcase politically engaged art along with socio-political criticism. We also thought that it would be interesting to encourage dialogues between Swiss and Latin American artists. This was the only thing we had clear at this point. It was still very confusing at the beginning, then we chose a couple of artists—actually we started our first exhibition with Swiss artists (both start to laugh), because we didn't have any money and we only had this tiny space. We thought, it is better to feature local artists who can attract the local audience because no one knew who we were nor the name of la_cápsula. And yes, our first show was literally held in a garage. (laughs)

JC+NY: How long had you had the garage space for?

AD: We actually did just one show! So, it basically gave us the name (laughs).

Zurich and Latin America

JC+NY: Were there any challenges in introducing Latin American artists to the city of Zurich within the political, social, and cultural context?

ER: It wasn't difficult to bring Latin American artists here, but it was challenging to bring the Swiss audience to Latin American art exhibitions.

AD: But we have seen a change since we started. Somehow, it's getting popular. There were places where Latin American art was shown, such as Peter Kilchmann and Christinger de Mayo, which was a gallery that closed four, five years ago. And they also have a lot to do with Latin America, so you can say that there was some interest towards Latin American art in Zurich. But we experienced more resistance in the youngest generation, in this very emergent art scene. There was already a circuit of off-off-spaces which is very popular in Zurich. But we were able to attract all the people who were feeling sort of “orphaned” including students from

Latin America who are doing their Master's and PhD in the city. Our space became a meeting point for them and also because we always hold parties at the end of the shows, and we were discussing topics that the other spaces normally wouldn't discuss. Recently, we are also connecting with emerging Swiss curators who now also are very interested in Latin American art, so it's becoming a bigger network involving many Swiss curators.

ER: But it's been a process ...

AD: ... a long process.

Community and Political Space

JC: I would like to hear your opinion, but I feel like Zurich has a less strong Latin American community in comparison to the other cities in Switzerland such as those of Lausanne or Geneva. It doesn't seem to be either active or organized.

AD: I think we are attracting orphans really. It became a community very slowly. At the beginning, it was only our friends coming to our shows. No one knew who we were, and I think many of the people in the other art spaces weren't really interested.

ER: I feel like somehow la_cápsula became a safe space for many people. People we knew and people we gradually met. Now it's bigger and open.

JC+NY: This could be a big statement, but would you say la_cápsula is assuming the role of being the meeting point of the Latin American community in Zurich?

AD: (laughs) In a way we do.

ER: Yes, actually, we have a friend from Chile who was living here for five years, she is a cultural journalist, and then she moved back. Last summer, she visited Zurich for some conference and stopped by at la_cápsula. The moment she entered she was like, "Wow, this is the place that was Daros before." That was the first thing she said. There were orphans and now they have a space to meet again.

JC: In my opinion, the sense of a Latin American community is closely attached to the la_cápsula. At the end of 2018 when I first visited your space and one of your exhibitions, this is what I immedi-

ately felt: "This is the place you want to be if you want to know something about Latin America, to talk about it, and want to see artists from Latin America".

AD: A year ago, we started to notice or someone made it clear to us that the same people who are visiting this off-spaces circuit were not coming to la_cápsula. It was a kind of different public. I started to panic a little, thinking what are we doing wrong, why are people not coming to our exhibitions, etc.

ER: ... Swiss people.

AD: Yes. ... the Swiss people who were following emerging artists in this independent art scene. But then we realized that this is what makes us unique, and this is what we can offer: to open a space where you can find different sorts of narratives and discussions, and also a different kind of public. And then slowly, slowly people started to come to la_cápsula from this circuit. We also have to say that we did an exhibition last summer with Adán Vallecillo [*Golpe #10*, June 2019] which helped us a lot because he already had a big network with Swiss curators and galleries. He is a renowned artist from Honduras, although he is very young. The show provided us a platform that we didn't have before. So, thanks to him we are able to connect with even more people.

ER: And actually, this kind of politically engaged discourse we had, we never made it explicit until he came and told us, "Of course, this is the only space where you can show politically engaged art."

ER+AD: It's a political space.

An Exhibition, A Concept

JC+NY: Which exhibition has represented your curatorial concept at the best so far?

ER: We would say our last exhibition [*The Animal That Therefore I Am?*, October 2019-January 2020].

AD: There are several reasons why the show represented us the most—it was probably the first exhibition that we could do thorough research from the art history point of view. We were inspired by the bestiaries, a topic which has been intensively researched, but we wanted to do a contemporary take over. It was really fun to do

the research, look for the artists, and give it a twist. But at the same time, we addressed themes we are interested in; there was a lot of political and social content in the show. We had both Latin American and local artists. It involved kind of everything.

ER: We created a publication towards the end of the exhibition and did a lot of performances which were inspired by the show.

JC: You could say, you had a full program.

ER+AD: Yes!

ER: We developed our curatorial work through this exhibition. For our next ones, we want to keep a similar practice.

AD: We had always these wishes in mind, to have a program and to do a publication, but we didn't have the money. Thanks to the little funding that we got, we were able to bring people in, to do performances, to do something specific for the exhibition. It was really important for us to have the possibility to do as many things as possible.

ER: But if you ask us next year, then we'll probably say "our last exhibition!" again. (laughs)

Curatorial Persona?

JC+NY: How do you position yourself as curators in your exhibitions?

ER: I think this is something difficult for us. I would say it's more like a personality trait, and we don't enjoy talking too much. We are always like, "Let's drink!" We do this all the time.

AD: And we drink. (laughs)

JC+NY: "Welcome to la_cápsula, here is your drink! Then we can talk." (laughs)

ER: We did the finissage talk with Michael [Günzburger]. Actually, we wanted to do a talk with two artists from the exhibition [*The Animal therefore I Am*], but one couldn't attend and he actually suggested that maybe we could talk about the exhibition and we were like, "Hmm...yes." (laughs)

JC: As a witness, it was pretty cool to hear about the concept of the exhibition. In my humble opinion, it could be repeated.

AD: This is something I also noticed. We could give more information; we should. So, as Elena said, it's more like our personal traits. But it's important, because there is a lot of research. We do the curatorial text which explains the general idea, and also we like that the artworks speak for themselves, which is really the main thing. But yes, I think sometimes we should do something differently.

JC+NY: The question would be: in what way do you explain your curatorial concepts the best. Is it in a text, in guided tours, in a conversation after two mezcals?

ER: Maybe in karaoke. (laughs)

AD: I think the nicest way always is to have a talk. People can ask questions and something grows out from there. Sí. Sí. Because we enjoy talking to explain our exhibitions one-on-one when people visit us individually, but for the future, this is something we have to tackle.

ER: At openings, we always said like, "Ok. At eight we say something." But then it is a quarter past eight, and we don't say anything.

JC: I think your style is more about hosting your audience when they come into your space, greeting and taking care of them, making sure everyone is enjoying it. I've witnessed that you always try to connect people. I think it is one of the appeals of your space and your curatorial personality.

ER: We were often misunderstood as bartenders, since we are usually behind the bar (laughs). We don't position ourselves so much as "the curators."

AD: We definitely like being that way, to connect people and welcome them all. It's authentic, and we enjoy this part the most about all the events that we do.

JC: Maybe it is also part of our Latin American culture. When we invite people, we take care of them, and we do everything so they have fun.

AD+ER: Absolutely!

AD: Sure. I think it's a matter of personality. For this "curator persona," you need some kind of personality that we don't have. We are curators, we assume being curators, and we are very proud of it, but we never will be this kind of "look at me" type of curator.

JC+NY: Would it be appropriate to call your style like a "living room," considering all the personal aspects together?

ER: Oh, I like that (laughs). Yes, I think we have been doing as we felt comfortable. I think that can be our method.

To: Zurich

From: la_cápsula

JC+NY: We heard that you had some struggles connecting with the community and the local scene, and at the same time, the city has enabled you to do what you do. If you would wish for something for the Zurich art scene, what would it be?

ER: The first wish I would say is more financial support. Also, lately I have been thinking that it would be nice if the city or the canton would support the off-spaces, if they would give spaces with low rent that they are not using. If they would provide this kind of space with this kind of rental option, it would be something that would really help us all. We are all struggling with the financial aspects. If we had some kind of support from the public institutions like having a space where we could do la_cápsula... I mean we really love our space, but in the event that we wouldn't have our space and we need to look for another one, if the city could offer one empty space with low rent, that would be really helpful. I would wish for that.

AD: We had talked many times about this, because the issue is not that we would like that they give us all the money. Actually, we would like to be totally financially independent and not have the need to ask for money from the city, but then the way they could help us is, like Elena said, if they could offer much reasonable spaces or if they allow us to sell food without a special permit. These kinds of compromises that allow you to become independent. They know we are doing this work without pay. No one running an off-space is getting paid for it, and it's something that brings a lot to the city because all the emergent artists start exhibiting there, then they

become more famous and start showing at Helmhaus and so on. It's good for the city and its culture. These kinds of tiny things that will support us to become independent, that would be our wish. Or you don't have to apply for twenty different funds. Maybe, once you are selected, it would cover three years. This would be really helpful because people normally have to split their time between their normal job, running the space, and getting the funding. If the city could help us with these things or create new models, it would make things easier.

JC+NY: I think you explained the system of the art scene in the city very well.

AD: These days, the new politics has made it difficult to receive funding for the off-spaces that have been around for a while. They are making it easier for new spaces, and we definitely worry about this trend. Our wish is to be here for a long time (laughs).

3. Wednesday, February 26. Der Spaziergang.

We would have met at 11am in Helsinki, a club in Zurich. But we never did. On that day, Zurich had a winter's day that people had been wishing for in December and January but had never arrived. Plans have to be changed. We should meet for lunch. Tacos. No, we should go to the Bistro on the top of Prime Tower, the highest skyscraper of the city to see the snow. Both interviewers and interviewees forgot about the objective of today: to have a curatorial stroll through the city. We surrendered to the weather. Nature responded kindly to our acceptance because it stopped snowing when we finally met. So, they took us to their origin: the garage that gave them their name. Welcome back to la_cápsula!

Over lunch, Elena and Adriana narrated their experience as artists. Yes, they are performance artists now; maybe they always were. Just a couple of days ago, they participated in a set of performances called "Through States of Matter," which they have hosted before at la_cápsula. They staged a writing performance based on the concept of "sentipensar" (to feel and think simultaneously)—Eduardo Galeano wrote once that, "The only language that says the truth is the thinking 'sentipensante.'" They will let their senses go with the flow of the performances and start to write their thoughts or quote from a pile of books they have in their corner stage.

Unknown poets were born from their writing and quoting exercises:

mischwesen werde ich sein
 the scent of time
 encendidos, vibrantes, eléctricos
 force of (modern) history
 casi carnívoramente

this is a poem addressed to duration
 she was quiet but she liked noises
 así, sólo así se llega al centro
 avoid this sort of lunacy
 it floats at a distance

Later, we walked through the *Kreis 5*, and it was definitely a curatorial experience (we were back on track!). Besides appreciating the aesthetics and history of the district buildings, Adriana and Elena examined apparent empty spaces and their possibilities as an art space. Floors, display windows, doors, and colors were noted and discussed for the ultimate goal of making exhibitions. You could see their experience of being an “itinerant space” during their first year as la_cápsula. Every space has its potentialities.

Suddenly, a small snowstorm arose and made our walk difficult. Winter was here again. We found refuge in Helmhaus. We read with joy the small exhibition booklet, almost a kind of key to experiencing the exhibition of Florence Jung. As the usual talks in opening days at la_cápsula or the poems created out of their performance, the conversation was a lively ceaseless dialogue between languages and cultures, impressions and opinions, coziness and laughter.

la_cápsula is an independent and experimental curatorial project initiated by Adriana Domínguez – alumna to the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS, ZHdK – and Elena Rosauero in June 2017. By promoting a dialogue between artists and cultural producers from Switzerland and Latin America, la_cápsula has opened a space in Zurich in which topics that affect both geographic territories, such as environmental issues, feminism, geopolitics, gender issues, and decolonialism, are addressed in a wider sense and discussed within the context of Switzerland and its local population.

Jose Cáceres is an historian and independent curator. He is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Zurich, developing a decolonial critique to the idea of history from a Latin American perspective. Recent projects include the intervention *Chile Despertó* with Impresionante (Chile) at Volumes 2019, the documentary exhibition *Chilean Revolt. A Chronicle* at la_cápsula and *Walmapu ex situ* in collaboration with the collective Trop cher to share. He is enrolled in the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS ZHdK.

Noriko Yamakoshi is a German born, Japanese curator, researcher and writer. She has engaged herself with exhibition and programme making under various forms of organizations in contemporary art along with research and writing projects. Her recent curatorial involvement includes *Games. Fights. Encounters* (OnCurating Project Space, Zurich, 2020). She is currently in the Postgraduate Programme in Curating at ZHdK.



Brand-New-Life

Interviewed by Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter

Background and Concept

Ronald Kolb/Dorothee Richter: What are your professional backgrounds?

Brand-New-Life: The editorial team consists of Ann-Kathrin Eickhoff, Lucie Kolb, Pablo Müller, Barbara Preisig, and Judith Welter. We all have had professional training and work in various roles and contexts in contemporary art.

RK/DR: How did Brand-New-Life come about?

B-N-L: We founded Brand-New-Life as an online art magazine in 2015. We felt that there was little controversial art criticism in Switzerland, which was the main reason we started our project. The magazine offers polyphonic perspectives on contemporary art and its political and social contexts. Our goal is to encourage pointed and analytical comments about art.

RK/DR: How does it work?

B-N-L: In Brand-New-Life, artistic, journalistic, and academic approaches complement each other. We would like to push disciplinary boundaries and are looking for experimental formats for a reflection on art.

RK/DR: Is there a certain aim you wish to reach?

B-N-L: Our aim is to create a critical discourse for Switzerland which takes the local context as a starting point to discuss topics that are of international relevance.

RK/DR: Do you have a space to work?

B-N-L: We do not have a working space. Our editorial meetings take place at cafés or at someone's home.

RK/DR: How do you finance your project? Do you have funding? From whom?

B-N-L: We have funding from public and private sources. A considerable part of our budget comes from our association members and the online ads.

RK/DR: Can you make a financial profit for yourself?

B-N-L: The editors are working voluntarily. We all have our jobs, and Brand-New-Life runs alongside. Our writers and also the translators and copy editors are paid a standardized fee. We want every contribution to be fairly paid.

RK/DR: What is the working process like? Do you decide on your own? Are others involved?

B-N-L: Once a month, we have an editorial meeting. At those meetings, we discuss what we want to do next, which themes seem relevant, which exhibitions would be interesting to review. Our writers also can make suggestions. One other main part of our work is reading their texts and giving feedback. Each contribution is read at least by two people of the editorial team. A productive exchange with our writers is essential to us.

RK/DR: How would you define your practice? Is it a writer/critic approach? Does the collective play a role?

B-N-L: Our approach is pragmatic. We try to deal with limited resources and push our project always a step further.

RK/DR: How do you archive a project?

B-N-L: Our website also works as an archive.

RK/DR: Is there a quota for gender on the funding schemes or acquisitions?

B-N-L: We do not have a quota for gender.

RK/DR: What role does your project space in the city of Zurich play locally (or internationally)?

What is the role of art in your opinion and from your position? How are you connected in Zurich, with whom?

B-N-L: We all are mainly based in Zurich.

RK/DR: Could you tell us more about the visibility of your project—how do you make it known and visited? What is the relation between real space and digital space, especially in your case as a digital-only project?

B-N-L: Our project does not exclusively exist online. We have published two books, realized at least two exhibitions, we do launches for our editions, and annual association meetings. Additionally, we are planning to do public editorial meetings on an irregular basis. In this format, readers and others can contribute to the editorial process.

RK/DR: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

B-N-L: Open-mindedness, visions, and a global perspective.

Judith Welter is a curator, and since 2015 she has been the director of the Kunsthaus Glarus. Before that, she was collection curator at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartkunst.

Pablo Müller is an art critic and art historian. Since 2014, he has worked as a researcher and lecturer at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. His research interests include art and economics, institutions of art, art criticism, self-organization in visual arts, and artistic research.

Ann-Kathrin Eickhoff is a writer and curator, based in Zurich and Nurnberg. She is working as a curator at Kunstverein Nurnberg and as a researcher at ETH Zurich. She is currently working on contemporary painting discourses and their intertwining with economic and neoliberal theories.

Barbara Preisig is an art historian and art critic. Since 2015, she has worked as a researcher and lecturer at the Zurich University of the Arts. Her research interests include contemporary artistic research, institutional critique, conceptual artistic

practices of the 1960s and 1970s, feminism, and translocality.

Lucie Kolb is an artist. She is a researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Experimental Design and Media Cultures Basel, the Zurich University of the Arts, and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her main fields of research are institutional studies, art writing, self-publishing, and art education.

Dorothee Richter is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, and Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS/MAS Curating, which she founded in 2005 at the Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland. She is director of the PhD in Practice in Curating Programme, a cooperation of the Zurich University of the Arts and the University of Reading. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she was initiator of Curating Degree Zero Archive and Curator at Kuenstlerhaus Bremen. She is Executive Editor of the web journal OnCurating.org.

Ronald Kolb is a researcher, designer, film maker and curator. He is Co-Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, Zurich University of the Arts, and an Editor-at-Large of the web journal On-Curating.org and honorary vice-chairman of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. He is a PhD candidate of PhD in Practice in Curating, a cooperation of ZHDK and University of Reading, supported by swissuniversities.

Andreas Marti, Dienstgebäude

Interviewed by Daniela Hediger

Dienstgebäude is an independent art space in Zurich with three exhibition rooms run by the artist Andreas Marti and his team. The focus lies on young emerging and mid-career artists with a conceptual approach, mostly Switzerland-based. In the course of time, more and more international positions have been added to the program. Sometimes you also can find the art space Dienstgebäude at art fairs like at “The Others” in Turin, where Andreas Marti even won the art prize in 2017 for the project “Dienstgebäude.”

Daniela Hediger: Andreas Marti, where would you see the connection between Dienstgebäude and the title of this issue: “Dark Matter, Grey Zones, Red Light, and Bling Bling”?

Andreas Marti: Dark matter—I don’t really know how to make the connection to our art space; maybe a grey zone is more suitable for Dienstgebäude because it’s an independent space and it’s a form to escape the art system—so it’s a parallel path.

DH: It was in the red-light district where you opened first the art space Dienstgebäude. Do you think something changed in your exhibitions, when you changed the location into another district? Did this influence your program as well?

AM: No, the change of the venue didn’t change the kind of exhibitions we show. Now we are here at the border of the city. It was a new area for me. I haven’t been here before, and the change was also connected to a certain fear if we could bring our audience to this new place.

DH: And was it easy to bring the people along to this new venue?

AM: A certain audience followed, and for some others it probably was too far away, or the new space was too much a white space for them. Before, it was more a kind of illegal bar like in the ‘80/’90s with exhibitions, and now it’s a white exhibition space.

DH: Do you have a target group you curate your exhibitions to, or do you curate free of thinking about the audience?

AM: I think it’s always connected. But first of all, I am interested in showing interesting art. And as I have three spaces, the smallest is always a small platform for an unknown, less connected artist, and at the same time in the bigger room I show more famous and known artists. But in the end, I curate including my intuition.

DH: Are you taking special care of diversity matters?

AM: I have had different solo shows with women artists, and I have also shown with different kind of nationalities—but I am not especially taking care of it. It just came like this, as it was interesting art. I haven’t counted the solo shows of women or of other nationalities, but on our website you can see that there have been also a lot in this range like a female artist from China, an artist from Puerto Rico, from Ethiopia, etc.

DH: You are an artist yourself, what led you to open your own independent art space in 2008? Was it because you couldn’t find a space to exhibit in Zurich?

AM: Somehow yes...I had this space where I worked with three other artists—Cat Tuong Nguyen, Isabelle Krieg, and Marianne Engel—and as there hadn’t been that many opportunities for us to exhibit, we started with our own exhibition. And then it was my interest to follow this exhibition thing, but there was no plan at the beginning. I also was inspired by London and the independent art spaces there. I think spaces like this create space for experimental art, and this is actually the playground for bringing up new projects and new artists in a city.

DH: Do you think Zurich is an easy place to run an independent art space like Dienstgebäude?

AM: I think it is. There was a strong movement in the ‘80s with many independent art spaces, and then it became quieter at the end of the ‘90s/2000. So, when I started in 2008, there just existed around six spaces like Dienstgebäude, and they already existed for a while. So, everyone was curious about our new space and our activities in the middle of Zurich. And today there are

around forty independent artist projects, small spaces, and window projects up to spaces like Dienstgebäude. This means it is not an easy situation now, as there is a lot of competition. That's why I initiated, with Ann-Laure Franchette and Patrizia Mazzei, the *Zurich Art Space Guide* (zurichartspaceguide.ch) where we wanted to bring the independent art spaces together and make them more visible.

DH: How is it to be funded in a city like Zurich where so much money is around?

AM: Compared to the construction works on the road where Zurich is spending loads of money, the city invests just 150,000 CHF a year for activities like ours. This is not a lot. In Zurich, just a selection of art spaces are getting support. Montreal, for example, spends a lot more than Zurich on cultural activities like this.

DH: Are you supported by projects or for your yearly program?

AM: Normally, I try to find funding for my yearly program. But sometimes it is not easy, caused by deadlines and the fast rhythm in the art world where you have to react spontaneously. Because the yearly funding decreased, I have started in the last three years to look for money for specified projects, but in general it is very difficult.

DH: Can you live from your art and your art space? Do you have collaborators?

AM: Until last year, I had someone who was working part-time for the art space. But due to financial issues, I had to change this, and now I have someone who is paid on an hourly basis. And regarding myself—I also still have another job.

DH: What was your favorite exhibition?

AM: Ouuu...this is difficult to say, as there were so many exhibitions in which I was strongly involved with the set-up, the artists, and/or the artworks. But if I would have to name one, I think it would be *Catch of the Year*, where we present always around 100 works from 100 artists—the intense exchange with the artists and working with all the people I really like a lot.

DH: How would you define art?

AM: This is a bit complicated. The definition of art...I've learned a lot over these last eleven years, and my focus

has changed regarding what is interesting to me or what is attracting me. The definition is always a fluid situation. So, I can't really make a definition. When I decide to exhibit an artist, it is more a feeling than something rationally defined.

DH: What would be your wish for the art scene of Zurich?

AM: I think the scene has changed a lot over the last ten years. There's a lot of competition, and that's a kind of a bad feeling. I would wish for a bigger concentration on art and less on career.

Daniela Hediger is a curator and founder of WOM!-art. WOM!-art organizes exhibitions and events dealing with current issues and values such as diversity/plurality and norms in our society and in economy such as in the working world. Based in Zurich, she studied Fashion Design in Zurich and worked as a stylist before running the cultural location Seefeld-Razzia, where she organised exhibitions, art performances, concerts, fashion shows, film and literary events. Currently she studies in the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).



Kristina Grigorjeva, curator at BINZ39

Interviewed by Tea Virolainen

For twentieth years, the BINZ39 foundation has been the initiator and supporter of an extensive program of artist residencies, exchange programs, exhibitions, interdisciplinary events, and networks for artists and cultural professionals in Zurich, Switzerland and abroad. This means not only that over 400 artists have been able to enjoy the infrastructure and subsidies of the foundation, but also that the project and all the people involved have made an important contribution to the production of culture in Switzerland and in the numerous countries, in which they operate.

In November 1982, Henry F. Levy, founder of the BINZ39 foundation, signed the first lease for studios which the foundation wanted to make available for artists in Zurich under subsidized conditions by the foundation. In the past twenty years, the number of studios has increased up to a total of forty-two studios in Zurich at the locations Sihlquai 133, Binzstrasse 39, and Raffelstrasse 45.

The BINZ39 foundation was never limited to artist residencies: the exhibition space at Sihlquai 133 is one of the most important and active exhibition spaces in Zurich for the presentation of the current art in the city. A basic principle of the foundation is to enable freedom for artistic practices, but also to support interdisciplinary projects between various art disciplines.

Tea Virolainen: Thank you for taking your time for the interview. Please tell us a little bit about yourself and the foundation BINZ39.

Kristina Grigorjeva: I'm very new to the foundation—I started in January 2020, but I've been helping here and there since October 2019. The former curator—Gioia Dal Molin—has moved on to the Istituto Svizzero in Rome. The foundation BINZ39 is an artist residency, there are seven ateliers and an exhibition space. The residents can stay in the ateliers for the duration of two years, and they are completely free to do whatever they want in there (except for using it as housing, of course). At the end of the residency period, they can have an exhibition in the space. So, that's mainly what the foundation offers.

TV: What's your background, what did you do before getting this job, and what has your journey been like up to here?

KG: Originally, I studied architecture and worked as an architect for a couple of years after graduating. At some point, I became a little bored of working 9 to 5 and became a little more critical, I guess. So, I started with the MAS Curating at ZHdK and realized I was more interested in questions relating to public space, rather than architecture or architects who “create” it.

TV: And how did you get involved with BINZ39? How did it happen?

KG: Last year, we started a series of exhibitions with Marco Meuli where we try to offer a different mode of perception of exhibitions. We called it “détours.” The last edition of the exhibition series was with one of the residents of the foundation, and at the time and they were looking for somebody to follow Gioia (the curator at the time) as she was leaving for Rome, and I got the opportunity to send in my portfolio. They were specifically looking for a female curator, I think. I believe there has always been a female curator in the BINZ39.

TV: Can you define your role in the exhibitions and your main responsibilities?

KG: As the curator, I am involved in the selection of the artists, as well as providing support with the exhibitions of the residents. In fact, we will have a jury in a week to choose the next couple of residents.

TV: Can you tell us something about that? How do you choose them, do you search for them or do they approach you?

KG: There is an open call, and anyone can apply for an available atelier. For example, this year we only have one atelier that is available, and we'll be choosing an artist for that. The deadline was in January, so now we have received all the portfolios. We now have to go through all of them together. I think there are about 24 or 27 artists who applied this year. The jury itself consists of Lucia Coray, Gianni Garzoli, me, and an external curator. This year, we will have Elise Lammer—she is a curator and writer based in Basel. She's really great. We're very happy she could find the time.

TV: Is the decision consensus-based or is it democratic?

KG: Well, it's the first time I'm doing it—I don't really know what to expect. I don't want to look at the portfolios beforehand, I would prefer it if we would just go in, look through them all together and decide spontaneously during the discussion.

(Afterthought: before the jury, I was asked to do a first screening and put aside the portfolios that did not fit at all, to narrow the selection down. I think I couldn't put more than two aside. The rest we laid out on the table and took half an hour to look through all of them. Then each of us talked a little about our favorites, and after a long discussion round we narrowed the selection down to six artists, whom we invited for interviews.)

TV: Are there any criteria you have to make your selection? Like the one you said, for example. They're always hiring someone female.

KG: Well, you have to live in Zurich or have some ties to Zurich. Because as I understand the foundation has been an important part of the Zurich art scene. So, I really find it important that the residents are based in Zurich. They can also use the space more efficiently; it doesn't stay empty.

(Afterthought: We were mainly looking at young artists, at the very start of their career or just out of school that live in Zurich or around. To help in the process of the selection, we also tried to make sure that there is a variety to the media that the artists in the BINZ and an important criterion was their ability to be integrated in the life of the BINZ, to be part of the BINZ family. The female/male balance was also an important issue.)

TV: Are you supporting more young artists or is that not the case?

KG: Yes, mainly younger artists at the start of their career or just out of school. But there is no age limit, I guess.

TV: But on the website, they say young.

KG: How do you define young? In England it's up to 26, here I think it's up to 40, it depends on how you define a young artist. As soon as you start having regular shows in galleries I guess, you become a more established artist, right?

TV: If you want to describe the exhibition, the curatorial concept of it, how would you define that?

KG: It's a little hard to define because they are always very different. Last year, for example, there were a couple of exhibitions that were curated by the resident Sarah Burger. There were two exhibitions that she did. It was very collaborative; she invited many people to participate from other parts of Switzerland as well. Maya Rochat did a performance, for example, and there was a concert that followed as well, if I'm not mistaken. But there were also artists from Zurich. In her last exhibition, she just invited some people to perform in the exhibition itself who she got to know the week before. It's just very on the spot. It really has this kind of off-space feeling, but at the same time, it is not.

TV: I mean there's a foundation behind it. It is kind of organized but still seems very open.

KG: Exactly. Henry's (Henry F. Levy/founder) idea was to offer a space to artists where they can have the freedom to do what they want. They even have a little kitchen over there so they can cook. I think it's very cosy.

TV: What did the president have in mind when they first came up with that kind of an idea? Do you know? Because it's an interesting concept, and it's really supporting the artists to do whatever they want and show themselves in an authentic way.

KG: So, the Stiftung BINZ39 was founded in 1982. And I think at the time there weren't spaces like this in Zurich, but Henry grew up in the UK and saw the residencies in London. He was inspired by them, got together with a couple of other people, and they thought that it would be nice to have something similar particularly at that time in Zurich. Everything was flourishing, Zurich was very active in the '80s. So, at the time, it was fantastic that he could do something like that. The spaces at the time that they were looking at were in the Binz, it's this industrial area of Zurich. That's where the first studios actually were, at Binzstrasse 39, and that's how they came up with the name. It was not only there; it was also on Rffelstrasse, the neighboring street. In the '90s, they had an opportunity to move some of the ateliers to Sihlquai here on the river. And they still have studios in the Binz, which they rent out.

TV: Do they own the properties where the studios are?

KG: In the Binz, I think they own the property, and this one on Sihlquai is “Zwischennutzung”—that’s why the rent is very cheap.

TV: So, it’s going to be torn down at some point but can be used until then.

KG: Exactly, and this has been going for ten years now, and you never know when it happens. And we have to understand that eventually we will have to move to a new location. That will be the next chapter.

TV: How do you finance the exhibitions?

KG: I can’t tell you where the money comes from because at this point I don’t know yet. What I do know is that every exhibition gets a certain budget from the foundation. Together, the artists and the curator can use it however they prefer, and when the exhibition needs more money, then the curator has to rely on other sources and organize external funding.

TV: Can you tell us about how you define the role of the venue in the Zurich art scene and how it differentiates from the other ones, and what is unique about BINZ39?

KG: Well, the Binz is neither a gallery nor an institution. Or it is both. I guess that is its beauty, it’s flexible, but it’s an artist residency with an exhibition space. It works more on a project-oriented basis, I guess.

TV: They can also bring somebody in?

KG: Of course! The artists have a lot of freedom and flexibility for their exhibition and are welcome to choose their collaborators. That also invites more visitors, which is always nice. I almost feel that the foundation is not as known as it has been before. I’ve lived in Zurich for five years now and have only been to one or two exhibitions.

TV: So, it’s not so well-known? Is that a communication issue?

KG: I think it’s both. It’s definitely a lack of communication on the part of the foundation, but only because they haven’t updated their media outlets, I think. Mediation is the main problem—we are working on some

changes right now. We’re changing the website; it hasn’t been touched for ten years, and one of the residents, Johanna Kotlaris, is doing the graphic design. So, we are hoping it will get a little more attention.

TV: So, you are going to enhance the communication? You can hardly find more information than what is on the website.

KG: That’s exactly my point; it isn’t easy to find any information about the foundation. I was looking for a book just recently, and I just happened to find this book with the entire history of the foundation; it’s not on the website, and nobody knows about it. So, it’s a little bit hidden, and I think the reason for that is lack of communication. But I’m not sure how it worked up until the ‘90s. I think ten or twelve years ago they started the website when the Bitniks were here; they work with the digital medium. They haven’t changed it since then. And, of course, the Bitniks can’t consistently keep working on it, so there’s always a different person who changes things or posts something for the exhibitions. It’s always a little bit of a mess. Now, everything will be organized and mediated by one person.

TV: So, there was a kind of a lack of visitors and spectators in the exhibitions?

KG: I think it also depends on who is exhibited. But I feel that the foundation is less open to the public than it should be. That’s what we’re really working on this year.

TV: Who would you like to attract as an audience?

KG: I don’t know. I was hoping that we could in general have a more open structure, and people would understand more how the foundation works—who is there, what work is being done. I think this is very important.

TV: I was in art commission for several years, and we did studio visits; that was the part I really loved because you usually never get the chance to go to the studio of an artist and get so close to their artistic practice.

KG: I think that’s very interesting, but also very invasive and I wouldn’t want to impose this on our residents.

TV: What is the role of art nowadays from your perspective?

KG: I haven't been in the arts long enough to answer that. From my personal point of view, it's the ability to move you, and I see artists as those who manage to stand and look at society from the outside or a different angle. They shed light on this problem or point to that interesting fact and are basically pointing to things that we normally don't notice. The power of art, I guess, is to potentially make you think that something can be changed or should be changed.

TV: It changes your perspective.

KG: Exactly. This is also why for me public art is interesting. Because it's there, but you don't tend to notice it so much. It should make you think differently of the public space or of how we are using the environment.

TV: Do you think art is changing? Is it changing from object-based to more digital art because we use a more and more digital language? Is the old kind of art vanishing?

KG: I think it just changes its form, but it is still the same thing. The form changes with the time, but the issues remain the same.

TV: So, you think it's kind of a reflection of our lifestyle?

KG: Absolutely. But I think the idea of what the artist is trying to communicate still remains the same. Whatever the form or the medium is, it doesn't change much as long as the idea behind it is the same.

TV: I think it changes its form and becomes more dynamic, because it's getting digital. Suddenly it's gone, it's not like a painting that's there on the wall for hundreds of years, it's more in the moment.

KG: Everything is more spontaneous. But I think it's not even about content for me; it's more about the gesture and the way you make people think about something else. That makes you change your point of view.

TV: I love that moment! It makes a twist in your head.

KG: It's that "wow" moment.

TV: The last point: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene? And what's your vision for it?

KG: To be a little more open and for the city to give more funding to off-spaces or public projects. They are already doing so much work for this, but it seems like they also rely a lot on the institutions or the commercial galleries. I think they should support the off-spaces more.

TV: Thank you very much for the interview.

Kristina Grigorjeva (b. 1990, Tallinn, Estonia) is an independent architect and curator based in Zurich. After her studies at the Academy of Architecture in Mendrisio and at the University of Arts in Zurich, she worked for Caruso St John Architects, where she combined her architectural practice with various international curatorial projects. Her collaborations include the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2018) and Gasträume (a KiöR project for art in public spaces commissioned by the City of Zurich, 2019 and 2020), as well as institutions such as Architekturforum Zürich and Kulturfolger. She has also recently been appointed curator of the Stiftung BINZ39, following Gioia dal Molin, where she has set up a brand new program and worked with the residents to establish a new identity for the iconic foundation since November 2019. She was recently appointed (together with Camille Regli) as curatorial team for the exhibition space „Alte Krone“ in Biel/ Bienne.

Tea Virolainen (b. 1970, Asikkala, Finland) is a graphic designer, based in Switzerland near Basel. After completing her training as a typographer, she switched to advertising. During this time she continued to educate herself as a multimedia designer. In 2002 Tea Virolainen ventured into self-employment and in January 2013 she founded together with Tina Guthauser KOKONEO GmbH, a studio for visual communication. Her interests in social arts led her to the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS at the ZHdK.



BINZ38

Die Diele and Sihlhalle

Interviewed by Eveline Mathis and Beatrice Fontana

April 24, 2020

We invited the two art spaces Die Diele and Sihlhalle for a joint interview, as both have decided on a similar concept. Their exhibitions take place in and around a shop window located in the same street. We wanted to get to the bottom of this special format. The interview took place via e-mail.

Eveline Mathis, Beatrice Fontana: Tell us something about you and your space.

David Schildknecht: My name is David Schildknecht, I am 38 years old. I am a film producer and director for commissioned films. My company is located opposite the Sihlhalle. I've always been interested in art.

In 2013, I had the idea to start an off-space. So, when the Sihlhallenstrasse shop window was advertised, I immediately applied for it. The building management liked my idea of offering a platform to young Swiss artists on a monthly basis. That is how I started Sihlhalle. Here, the artists get *carte blanche* and can let off steam. Everything is allowed from the artistic point of view; the only condition is that they must create a new work for the Sihlhalle and do not exhibit anything already existing. The purpose is to offer a platform for young artists through the creation of a place for exchange, for example, at vernissages.

Livio Baumgartner: Die Diele is neither a hallway nor an art space in the classical sense: it consists in two shop windows on Sihlhallenstrasse, regularly filled with art pieces which can be reached via a hallway. Die Diele is an independent and non-profit art space. I personally initiated it together with Sandro Fiechter in 2009, and since 2015 I have been managing the space myself.

I studied photography at the ZHdK and hold a Master in Contemporary Arts Practice at the Hochschule der Künste Bern. I run the space program in a certain pragmatic way, usually selecting a specific subject and without any conceptual or theoretical superstructure. I do not see myself as a classic curator, more as an organizer

or as a *möglichmacher* (facilitator), as someone that offers a platform and makes things happen.

Die Diele functions as an open vessel and offers the invited artists space for experimenting. They receive *carte blanche* and are thus free to decide what to show. The small space is actually not a space at all, rather a place which empowers the exhibited works. It comes with existing spatial limits, which are not to be understood as limitations in the true sense of the word, but rather as inspiration. The result is site-specific art *par excellence*, since the artists are invited to deal with the existing space conditions, to break new ground deviating from traditional forms of display and to try out new things. The view, always accessible from the street during the making-of and the 24-hour visibility of the works underline the desired openness and immediacy of the art space.

EM+BF: What inspired you to choose the display window model, and what are the limits and the advantages of such a choice?

DS: The shop window was the logical solution to my wish to start an off-space. I wanted to create something for artists. I was doing well enough, and I thought maybe I could do something to support others. It was clear that it should be small. But above all it should be in a place that had nothing to do with art. Size also played a role in the choice of the name. Sihlhalle sounds big, somehow winking to the big galleries and museums. In my opinion though, the small-sized room only offers advantages. The artists are forced to be innovative and think site-specific. The space is reduced, and how the artist deals with this is always an interesting question. Sihlhalle has already had room-filling sculptures in it, for example.

LB: I understand the shop window as a democratic place for art. There is no fear of entering the gallery, and the exhibition is visible 24 hours a day. Since it is not so obvious that Die Diele is an art space—there are no references to the website or any other kind of hints—it can also lead to a small disturbance and

function as a visual rupture in the daily routine. This disturbance moment was possibly the reason why I choose a shop window to become an art space.

EM+BF: In what way does your offer complement or enrich the independent art scene in the city of Zurich? And what is your relationship with other curated spaces in the city, both institutional and not?

DS: In my opinion, the Sihlhalle is an enrichment for the independent art scene in Switzerland and especially in Zurich. It is a place where young artists have the possibility to show their work in the form of a solo exhibition. And that is a fundamental need in the promotion of young independent art. I have already had some feedback from artists who have come into contact with others through their exhibition in the Sihlhalle and have consequently been able to exhibit in different off-spaces or galleries. There have also been cases where artists have sold their work after the exhibition. That always makes me very happy. I know Livio Baumgartner because my company is in the same building as Die Diele, and the Sihlhalle is just on the other side of the street. We have already exchanged ideas about subsidies, etc.

Artistically, I consider myself a greenhorn. And I actually quite like this position. It allows me more freedom to try out and learn a lot more.

LB: Like many off-spaces, Die Diele offers a platform to young or relatively unknown artists. For me, it's always nice to see that I can push and support them somehow, allowing them more visibility in the art scene. There are a lot of different art spaces in Zurich, and it is nice when some of their curators or founders come to an opening. This year, I have had three shows curated by an external curator, Esther Eppstein, and one show in cooperation with The Random Institute and Wagner & Friends. It is important to me that Die Diele does not remain a closed network, therefore I like to work with different institutions and open up to new audiences.

EM+BF: How does the space that you have at your disposal affect your curatorial choices?

DS: The size of the Sihlhalle does not really affect the choice of the exhibited artists. I choose artists whose work I like. Up to now, all of them could think of something fitting the peculiar space of the Sihlhalle.

LB: The limited space possibilities of Die Diele do not affect too much the choice of the artists we exhibit. In a way, I try to attract artists who can create large narratives with a direct statement.

And since I invite artists giving them *carte blanche*, it's their task to respond to the limited possibilities of the space. Also, the proximity to the street and the neighborhood situation around the space (I like to call it: the last criminal corner in Zurich) does not allow us to exhibit or use valuable objects (like beamers, screens or well-known artist's pieces. Our windowpanes have been broken twelve times already during the last ten years.

EM+BF: How do you select your artists, and how do they react to the space and its potential limitations?

DS: Usually the artists themselves contact the Sihlhalle. Very rarely do I approach them directly. Of the inquiries I receive, about 40% make it to an exhibition. I do not like everything of the so-called 'art' that is offered to me. Handicrafts (e.g. sawing pretty candlesticks with a chainsaw) are not in the right place in the Sihlhalle. It is important to me that the artist deals with and takes into consideration the specificity of the space and incorporates it into his/her work. I have become more and more selective in my choices.

At the end, all of them find the Sihlhalle an exciting place with a lot of potential. I like to define my space an 'unspace' [*Unraum* in German] because it offers many small corners.

LB: I try to keep a balance between gender and between well-known and less known artists. I make my choices intuitively and curate the changing exhibitions in a pragmatic way.

As in most exhibitions, you can go with a strategy of small parts or with a big gesture. Given the spatial limitations, it is always nice to see how the artists think and produce their new works and respond to the challenge of the space.

A shop window works also a bit like a picture, and you can work with it through different layers.

EM+BF: As people cannot physically enter the exhibitions, the public space becomes an extension of your project space, how do they relate to each other?

DS: The space in front of the Sihlhalle is usually the viewing area. The piece must work from this specific perspective. Standing in front of the Sihlhalle you can meet people from the neighborhood, who are always happy to discover something new, but also passersby, who stand puzzled, because they would not have expected to see art in such a place. In this respect, the Sihlhalle and the walkway in front of it belong very strongly together.

LB: I think that is one of the most interesting aspects of the window experience. It is a private space, but at the same time open to the public. Therefore, you cannot do things which might offend people or (in my case) show things of a certain value.

EM+BF: How does that affect your relationship with the neighborhood?

DS: There were already people in the building who asked why I was doing this and what it was all about. But there have also been people who have asked when the next vernissage would take place.

LB: In different ways. As I mentioned, some windowpanes have already been broken, and not every time it was a break-in. The mixture of the passersby that you could meet in front of Die Diele was a relevant factor for the initiation of the art space. Situated in one of the last bastions of the creative economy, next to strip clubs and at the corner of the big nightlife scene, Die Diele offers access to a huge variety of viewers.

Since drugs are often traded and consumed in Sihlhallenstrasse, especially on the stairs between the two shop windows of Die Diele, one is inevitably confronted with this “neighborhood” during the set up and during the opening. People have often told me that they would have liked to visit an exhibition, but there were a bunch of drug addicts in front of the windows, so they just could take a look from the distance.

But this, so to speak, open drug scene is also a clear sign that gentrification has not yet fully reached the neighborhood, so that the artists can still afford a studio space in this building.

In a way, I would say, the space generates a symbiotic relationship with the passersby. Sometimes one can also have very exciting insights from people who do not deal with art on a daily basis. Once, at an opening, standing in front of the window, a woman asked what “*this*” was. After we told her that was art, she replied: “*Ah art, I was*

also schizophrenic once!”

(You won’t hear that from any art critics, and you won’t learn it at the university either.)

EM+BF: How do you finance your projects?

DS: I’m paying for this out of my own personal funds. On the website, there is the possibility to support the Sihlhalle, but nobody has done that yet.

LB: The eternal fight for private and public funding! Die Diele cannot become self-supporting and is therefore dependent on subsidies.

EM+BF: What was the most interesting or successful project/exhibition, and which was the most challenging?

DS: For me, an exhibition is a success if I see that the artist takes a lot of time to develop his/her ideas and uses the chance to get inspired by the space and by the place. And if there are many guests and the possibility of an exchange at the vernissage. Of course, I am happy each time I receive a thank-you letter, sometimes also months later, and I hear that new contacts were established, or works were sold through the Sihlhalle. Because that is exactly what I see the Sihlhalle as: a springboard for young artists.

LB: There have been countless wonderful exhibitions in the shop windows.

But it is always nice when Die Diele can get out of the space and curate an exhibition in different rooms. A highlight of the last ten years was certainly the Great Gutter Festival with lots of live performances, all put on a 1m x 1.2m stage. Surprisingly, the Swiss television came, though not for Die Diele but for the poet Michael Fehr.

When the management of the building gave me notice of termination because of a further broken window, I had to use all my diplomatic skills to be able to stay. After this, I had to give up curating any form of “extravagant variation.”

EM+BF: What would you wish for the Zurich art scene?

DS: I wish that the city could create spaces, or would put places at disposal, like buildings, where off-spaces could have a possibility. It would be also great if the city

or the regional authority would grant subsidies more easily.

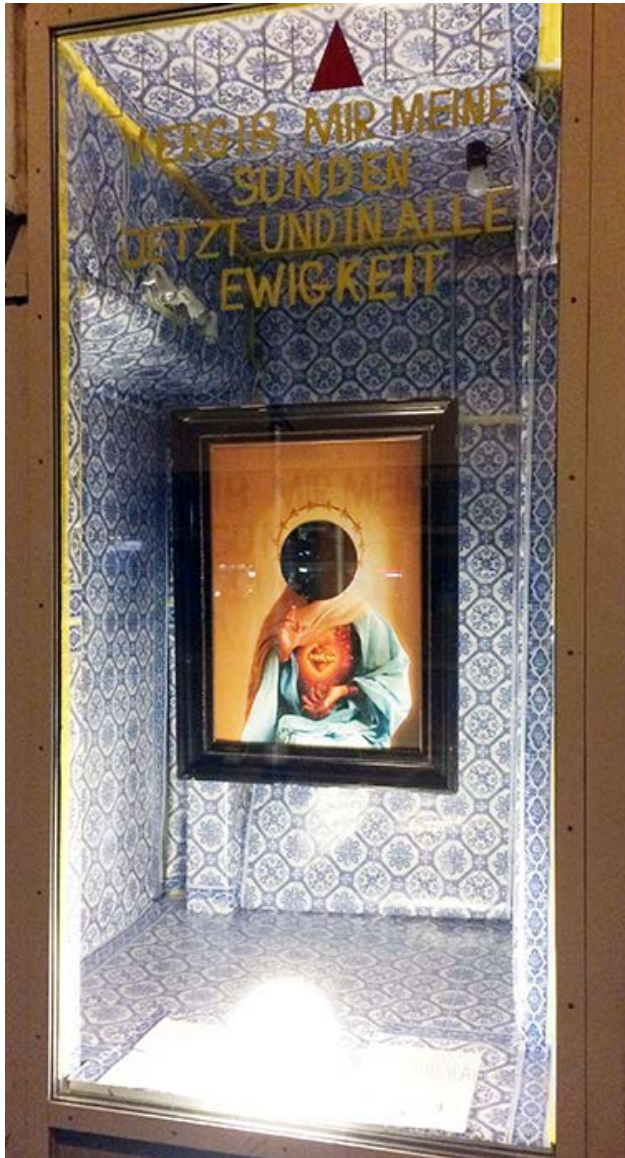
LB: I would wish a Perla Mode 2.0, a place where people meet, discuss, can be heard, and maybe even have a party that lasts until the early morning. More spaces, more fallow land, less marble. I wish the eyes would be more focused on art and not just on career and success. And a little bit more courage in being *uncool*.

Beatrice Fontana is a Zurich based architect, curator and independent researcher.

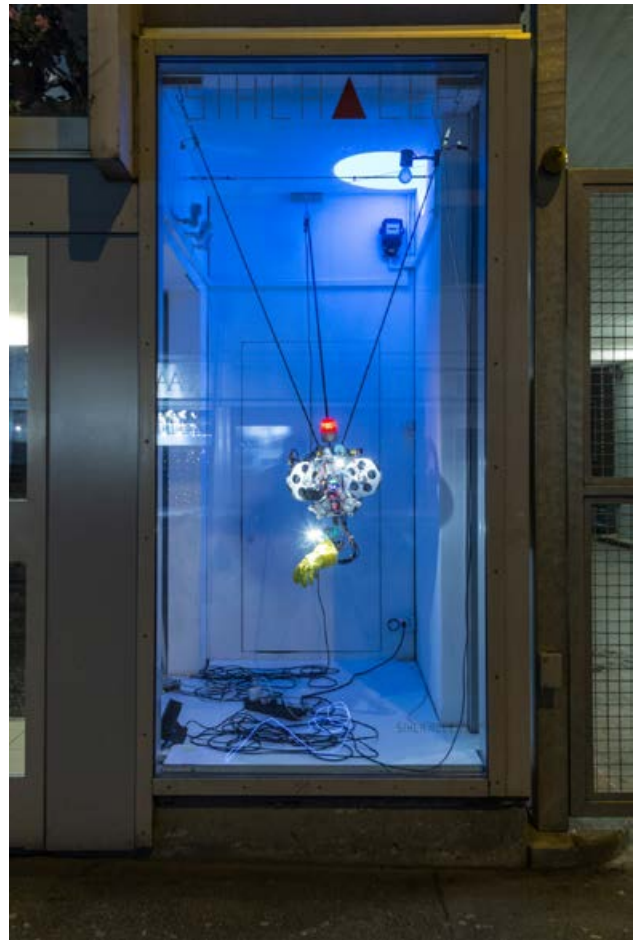
Eveline Mathis (b. 1986) is an independent curator based in Zurich and holds an MAS (Master of Advanced Studies) in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts. Her current focus in her curatorial research is on the reflection on the human species, its reference to artificial intelligence, the emerging realities in their nexus as well as the resulting influences in artistic and curatorial practices. She was a co-curator and responsible for the communication of the multi-formatted event series *Choreographing the Public* and is a member of the curatorial collective *bæd*.



Die Diele



Sihlhalle, #Sanctus7, Andrea Ebener



Sihlhalle, Ungenau Robotics, Ungenau, ungenau.io/.



Sihlhalle, Low Poly II, Greatest Adventure, Seiler Sommer, Foto: Christian Beutler.

Hidden Spaces and Heavy Satin— Last Tango

Interviewed by Anastasia Chaguidouline

Februar 2020

Last Tango, the off-space in Zurich's Kreis 5, was founded in 2016 by Linda Jensen and Arianna Gellini. The two come from diverse backgrounds: Arianna Gellini is Italian and studied Chinese language and culture, and Linda Jensen is Danish-Algerian and studied design. After having met in Hong Kong many years ago, they had the desire to open their own space in Zurich, where Linda had previously been living for six years. Facing immense uncertainties, they managed to finance their space on a project-to-project basis and establish themselves in Zurich's art world. Another striking feature is the duo's ability to adapt: to new spaces with different architectural presets, to be a small team (themselves and one intern), to the project-to-project funding system, which requires the right balance between emerging and established, local and international artists and to work closely together. They noted: "Instead of fighting, we talk it out."

Last Tango is about to move into its third space in March 2020, and the scope of everything that has been done so far becomes physically perceptible to me when I feel the weight of a photo album on my knees, filled with images illustrating past shows and their public program. And there is much more to come.

Anastasia Chaguidouline: What was the main reason for founding Last Tango? How would you describe your curatorial concept of the space?

Linda Jensen & Arianna Gellini: Having worked in various fields, we felt a wish to initiate our own endeavor, one that would allow us to explore varied artistic directions. We were set on not having a space that was tied down to a certain genre, a specific curatorial agenda or discourse. We've recently been reading *A Short Life of Trouble*, a brilliant autobiography by New Museum founder Marcia Tucker who inspires us to, in her words, "act first, think later—that way you might have something to think about." There is a joy in testing ideas and searching for the unexpected.

We had an interest in exploring and exhibiting local artists, as well as international, emerging, mid-career and established artists. A number of local artists, who are also so-to-speak mid-career, were in our opinion not getting enough opportunity to show their work. In addition to that, in the past three years, there have been a number of small and mid-sized galleries as well as art spaces that have closed.

In the beginning we set out to "tango" and combine the practice of two artists working with kindred subjects or contrasting positions. We were interested in finding a potential in the compatibility, proximity, and/or tension played out through the juxtaposing of two practices. We paired artists such as Hans Witschi & Sabine Schlatter, Dieter Hall & Xénia Lucie Laffely, Manon & Mélodie Mousset, Sam Durant & Andrew Gilbert, Megan Rooney & Sarah Margnetti, and Kirstine Roepstorff & Matyáš Chochola.

One exhibition that comes to mind was Fiona Banner & Peter Voss-Knude, wherein there were various common threads—be it the semiotics of conflict, language, or the expressive potential of the body. Fiona Banner with her longstanding use of found and transformed military aircraft to examine the ways in which conflict is mythologized through popular culture and Peter Voss-Knude with his work that musically relates to the life of the soldier. We recall installing Fiona Banner's *Wp Wp Wp*, which took us three days to paint. It was the first time the work was ever displayed indoors. *Wp Wp Wp* is inspired by the sound of helicopters as portrayed in comic books and film storyboards. The way that it was written comes from Captcha (a computer program or system intended to distinguish human from machine input).

We have since gone beyond our initial curatorial idea of the twosome and done various groups show and what we jokingly and pervily call threesomes.

In the first year, additionally to the exhibition program, we dedicated a space called Side Step to site-specific responses by Hong Kong and Filipino artists such as

Nadim Abbas, Pio Abad, Trevor Yeung, and Kong Chun Hei.

AC: How did you two meet? What is your professional background, what projects have you been involved in before Last Tango?

LJ/AG: We met in Hong Kong years and years ago! We had no idea at the time that we would eventually be living in the same city, let alone starting an art space together. I [Linda] was assistant curator to a private collection that was back in 2013 doing a large-scale exhibition in Hong Kong. I traveled back and forth from Zurich where I was based. I [Arianna] was directing a gallery in Hong Kong after having lived in Mainland China for six years.

AC: How did you find the space in which your exhibitions take place?

LJ/AG: Since our start in 2016, we've rented two spaces that were both "Zwischennutzung" meaning they were short-term leases and required a hefty amount of renovation in order to be exhibition-ready. We're done being hermit crabs and renovating, as now we're happy to have found a new space at Sihlquai 274 with a longer lease.

AC: Do you invite external curators for projects?

LJ/AG: This is uncharted territory, but we're toying with the idea. It was important for us to test our own ideas out, though we have often hosted other projects such as zürich moves! or cineclub. One upcoming event that we are hosting on March 6 is *Tarantismo: Odyssey of an Italian Ritual*, a transdisciplinary project on the tarantella with links to contemporary art, history, anthropology, popular music, and vanguard electronic sounds.

AC: How important is gender balance in your shows?

LJ/AG: I think the Guerrilla Girls would give us a good grade! Sure, it's definitely something that we are aware of.

AC: What are your plans for potential growth and development of Last Tango's practice at the moment?

LJ/AG: That's a good question. In terms of programming, we're very excited about the year ahead. At the moment, we're researching for our upcoming show in May at our new space and are looking at practices that relate to topics such as the crafting and decorating hand, the occult, and fantasy as an escape from daily life. In the fall, we'll likely open a show that deals with taboos, morality, and hypothetical imaginings. In the first year, we did six exhibitions, which was exciting yet quite demanding. Being a small team, the rhythm was too fast. It felt a bit like being on a hamster wheel that was going too quickly. We've scaled the number of exhibitions down to four or five.

Arianna Gellini is co-curator of Last Tango. Born in Faenza in 1984, she worked for over nine years in Asia, where she realized projects in Zurich, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Jakarta, and Seoul.

Linda Jensen is founder and co-curator of Last Tango. Born in Copenhagen in 1985, she has realized projects in Zurich, Hong Kong, Paris, and Copenhagen.

Anastasia Chaguidouline is a curator, art mediator, and nomad. Currently based in France, she holds a BA in Fine Arts from the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, an MA in Arts from Institut Kunst, Basel, and a MAS in Curating from the ZHdK, Zurich. She currently works as a curatorial assistant in the Museum Tinguely, Basel, and as an art mediator for the Kunstmuseum Winterthur and Art Basel. Her contributions have been published in The Contemporary Condition series (Sternberg Press) and the *OnCurating* journal.



Last Tango

LONGTANG

Interviewed by Domenico Ermanno Roberti, Beatrice Fontana, and Eveline Mathis

The program of LONGTANG seeks to critically question self-institutionalization and the instrumentalization of art for the purposes of the institutions. How would you define LONGTANG, and what role does it play within your practice?

Longtang reacts to the positions, people, topics, and its surroundings and tries to transform it into practice. Longtang as a think tank can deal with an interest in particular (art) practices and systemic challenges in a playful way other institutions might not be able to. Longtang is an (anti-)think tank. "Anti" in the sense that think tanks are the norm, are part of our society and also the art world. The idea of establishing something outside has become the norm, it simply doesn't work anymore—to operate within hell seems to be the last option—a massive self-excuse to become a conformist. We are doing the projects we think have to exist, cause no one else does them.

Given the premises above, do you see your current practice at LONGTANG as a form of activism?

We don't have an aim in a didactic way, but our positions and ways of collaborations within the field can activate people to rethink relations. Production and distribution come with a sense of responsibility—at/with Longtang we want to share certain desires without imperatives. No. No.

What does LONGTANG offers to its residents and passersby?

Due to our different professional involvements, we can offer different perspectives on their works and can also help with questions (e.g. with funding). Longtang is embedded within a living cooperative; we try to partake in that format as much as possible, additionally to our other "services." It's Zurich's finest art venue. Experience. But then it's the other way around. It's taking parts of You.

Could you tell us something about your practice and what you have been working on?

See our program. We have four different practices that don't need streamlining; the program is a result of finding a form for common interests. Longtang is a multitude and doesn't have a precise agenda. To go somewhere no one went, thus some Space opens.

Why is LONGTANG important for Zurich?

Longtang is located at the border of Zurich, which enables it to identify and to gain a distanced perspective on dynamics. Longtang is not for Zurich but exists because of it. Zurich has, in fact, massive potential; it's a sleeping beauty. Zurich is hell on the other hand. To be more precise, due to its overpriced reputation as a banking city, it doesn't attract international creatives to consider it as a base—therefore the local art scene is not very diverse, although thanks to the improvement and new perspectives of the local art school, this is very slowly changing. It's part of Züri.

Longtang was founded as "a tank to think through contemporary art" in spring 2018 by Anne Gruber, Tobias Kaspar, Emil Michael Klein, and Ludovica Parenti. The above questions were answered as a cadavre exquis via e-mail.

Longtang is located at the edge of a modern housing cooperative in the industrial quarter, Zurich Oerlikon. From the very beginning, Longtang started to establish relationships with artists for websites, fonts and architecture—introducing its integral concerns such as questioning the nature of an institution, its coherence and representation, as well as negotiating the relationship between art and service or living and working formats.

The think tank's working rooms have housed workshops, readings, screenings, concerts, dinners, productions, and exhibitions of young as well as established artists, with a particular interest in facilitating an intensive examination of the artist's practice. These rooms are accompanied by three studios, one of which is offered as short- or long-term residency to artists according to their needs.

Domenico Ermanno Roberti is an independent curator based in Zurich. His research focuses on the links between space and architectures of power, most recently on the notion of the interface as an agent in the exhibition mechanism of the work of art. In addition to being part of Roehrs & Boetsch, he is a member of the curatorial team of the OnCurating Space in Zurich.

Beatrice Fontana is a Zurich based architect, curator and independent researcher.

Eveline Mathis (b. 1986) is an independent curator based in Zurich and holds an MAS (Master of Advanced Studies) in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts. Her current focus in her curatorial research is on the reflection on

the human species, its reference to artificial intelligence, the emerging realities in their nexus as well as the resulting influences in artistic and curatorial practices. She was a co-curator and responsible for the communication of the multi-formatted event series *Choreographing the Public* and is a member of the curatorial collective *bæd*.



VOYAGE, Christian Philipp Müller, 2020, exhibition view, Longtang, Zurich. Photo: Gina Folly



Too Late To Read, Claire Fontaine, 2019, exhibition view, Longtang, Zurich. Photo: Stefan Burger



Too Late To Read, Claire Fontaine, 2019, exhibition view, Genossenschaft Mehr als Wohnen, Zurich. Photo: Stefan Burger



Chapter one: or change, Valentina Triet, 2018, exhibition view, Longtang, Zurich. Photo: Simon Javed Baumberger



SHOP SOCK, Edgars Gluhovs, 2018, exhibition view, Longtang, Zurich. Photo: Chantal Kaufmann

Nicola Kazimir, Mikro

Interviewed by Domenico Ermanno Roberti

Domenico Ermanno Roberti: Hey Nicola, nice to see you. So, let's start: what is Mikro?

Nicola Kazimir: I would categorize it as off-space. It's run by a collective. I don't know if it will always stay an art space or if we will continue to show exhibitions. At the moment we do raves: Mikro is a space for electronic music, and we also make contemporary art shows. Sometimes we also have concerts and musical performances, but mostly the raves finance the art exhibitions.

DER: In what way the raves support the art exhibitions?

NK: With Mikro, we first asked ourselves: what is the role of an off-space? What does the term off-space imply? Are you an off-space if you inhabit the same framework as a gallery or institutional space, and do you just do it in a smaller and even more precarious way? What could we do differently as an off-space? With Mikro, we started to do raves that are open for everyone. That was because we are coming from a deejay and musical background. We also studied visual art, but I think the first art genre we inhabited was music, electronic music.

My economy was deejaying, gigging. And while deejaying and gigging, I found it contradictory that clubs and techno spaces would describe themselves as open for everyone, while the door politics would be severely exclusive instead. Dress codes, appearances, race, or gender were and still are terms for selection at club doors, also here in Zurich. I really didn't like that, and with Mikro we tried to give back the possibility to the people to decide whether to stay or go. There is a clear reference to underground resistance, we have always said: "Music is the bouncer." It's our aim to have a very diverse crowd, not shaped by any kind of power structure or taste.

The same kind of thinking got adapted to the exhibition-making. While programs of so-called white-cube institutions might appear rather progressive, the same frameworks, its "door policy" excludes on so many

different levels. A considerable part of the currently exhibited art requires knowledge of a certain set of references to begin with (acquired through a privilege mostly), which makes it largely inaccessible—also at Mikro. And then also the institutions have additional borders, their own "doors," just because of the way they are set up. Someone from a working class family in Oberengstringen or just outside of the artscene, for example, would not go to the Kunsthalle, for a number of reasons. Think just about the opening times, everything seems rather exclusive. With Mikro, we tried to open up. Exhibitions are open 24 hours daily from their vernissage. This way the artwork itself isn't so secure anymore. It isn't in this isolated space, under surveillance, away from the people.

DER: Away also from certain ideas of "preservation," in fact policing of the artwork that are still rather common elsewhere.

NK: Yeah, totally. At Mikro, you won't have someone telling you "Hey, you can't touch it." It's a choice that challenges artists themselves. As an artist, you might have a tendency to feel overly protective of your own work. And then what happens when the artwork is in an unsupervised space, accessible to everyone? It can be stolen; it can be damaged. How do you handle this? As a leftist, progressive artist, I might have radical views on the relationship with the material world. But what happens when this impacts my own work? Can I leave it out there, not just exposed to people, but also to weather and other elements?

DER: And how did you find artists reacted to this?

NK: Very differently. There were artists that embraced this framework from the point of envisioning a show specifically for it. Almost site-specific. Some others instead would show exactly the same as if they were exhibiting anywhere else—a gallery, for example. We are upfront about it; we tell them there are theft and damage risks. Fortunately, it only actually happened very few times. Two times there was a theft, as I can recall. Once was a necklace, and the other it was also a little stone from Swarovski. So, it was jewelry basically. About

damage, the weather might be unpredictable sometimes. And then there was this one time when there was a birthday party in the area, one kid turned fifteen. First time with alcohol. And they basically destroyed everything, not just the show but the whole neighborhood. In the same building, we have a center for school dropout kids, and I believe the aim then was to make them socialize among themselves, sometimes supervised sometimes unsupervised. They damaged the works of Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė, but the artists took it very well, and the works were just replaced. They were actually even supportive and encouraging afterwards, adding that they found this curatorial framework especially relevant and that we shouldn't stop because of a single episode.

And also, the event had an interesting turnaround. We talked to the kids, explained to them that what they did wasn't cool, that their actions had also financial consequences on us. And they learned: times after they were still hanging around the space, but this time in a more respectful, almost protective way. It's an experience that made us more aware of our context and surroundings, confirming that we aren't just the usual art space that operates within its own four walls and its "assigned scene."

DER: You don't think Mikro is part of the gentrification process of the area?

NK: Huh, tough question. To begin with, this building has been rented to us by the city for temporary usage, which in itself is a framework for gentrification. We have our studios and Mikro for a very affordable price, and in this we are indeed very fortunate. But I feel there are different practices that either work in favor of, or steer against the gentrification process of the area. This coffee right here [Auer & Co.] is probably the pure face of gentrification.

Yes, we are part of the same framework, but we believe it can also be used to build a community around it. We are near the ASZ, and during the corona lockdown, Mikro was turned into a food storage facility for low-income families, refugees, and sans-papiers by the ASZ. There are many living in this condition here in Zurich, who aren't able to access social services because they don't have the required paperwork. Over 1,500 people were queuing for food here every week. .

DER: Mikro is therefore an active part of its surrounding community.

NK: We try not to be hermetic and isolated, but to help and support our very local context where we can. At the same time, we do not want to turn any of our community work into virtue signaling. Our social media pages are very pragmatic: they announce raves and collect documentation of our shows. That's it.

DER: And how do you balance your mixed program between raves and shows at Mikro?

NK: There is a degree of spontaneity with it. With time, we found that six shows are doable a year; we could do more but then we would have to cut into the budget. For the first time last year, we received public funding: before then everything was financed through the raves. It was, and still is, a very precarious financial situation. Until the funding, we didn't pay ourselves a single cent. Everything went into the shows to pay for material and artists' fees. Regardless of the context, we always pay a—admittedly symbolic—fee to the artists. It can be between 400-800 CHF, depending on the artist and on the available funding, or what we can make from a rave. And we aim to always have a decent budget for the exhibitions.

DER: How many people is Mikro made up of?

NK: Currently four. It is me and Flavio Audino, Luca Digilio, and Walid El Barbir (Les Points). We were twelve at the beginning, three artist collectives. Two all-female collectives and one all-male collective. The all-male one is the only one left. One collective imploded by itself and left the group for various personal reasons. Some others just stopped practicing for more ordinary jobs/artistic practices, or because they relocated abroad, or they no longer had the time to participate. Some are still honorable members of Mikro, though, and collaborate when possible. It was a time with different opinions, conflicts, and projects, which overall was a good experience in terms of groups, group dynamics, and self-growth.

DER: At the very core of Mikro there seems to be this search for inclusiveness. How is this reflected into the program?

NK: We have ratios in mind, but aren't picking artists solely based on their identity. Our PoC ratio is very bad; this is something that we have realized and need to work on. Our FLINT* ratio compared to CIS males is pretty balanced instead, probably even favoring FLINT* by the end of this year. But to be clear, ratios don't solve the inherent structural problem, though they are one

possible strategy to tackle it. The same applies for the curatorial work. I don't curate all the shows; sometimes I'm just the designated technician or facility manager. We also receive ideas and projects from the outside, so there isn't one curatorial, hegemonic position. It's pretty fluid in that sense. I can even think of the possibility of giving the space to a curatorial collective to be run for an entire year or extend the amount of people running the space, for example.

DER: Until last year, you had funded the program almost entirely through the rave parties, until you finally applied and also received public money. How and why did this transition take place?

NK: We worked for four years entirely for free. We also struggle financially as artists, and we understood there was an imbalance between paying artists, giving them all, working the raves, the bar, then repainting the space, cleaning it, setting up exhibitions, curating, graphics, communication, etc., and not receiving any form of compensation. Therefore, we thought, hey, let's get this money, so we can pay ourselves as well a fair wage per hour. We do not distinguish between curator, graphic designer, technician—everyone gets the same money per hour. And then the second reason: this way we can also make shows that require more money. Such as the *Bubble Chamber* exhibition, which wouldn't have been possible without funding.

DER: And did you find any obstacles in applying for funding? Was it difficult?

NK: I found the Canton of Zurich the most uncomplicated. Pro Helvetia is more problematic for off-spaces. We still haven't received the second half of the promised amount because we had to postpone a show. So, even if we made other shows in between and didn't cancel but postponed, they were adamant.

DER: It seems that the system lacks flexibility.

NK: It definitely does. And, in addition to that, since last year a limit has been set on a maximum amount of funding available per space (City of Zurich). You can now get funded three times, after which your application will be automatically rejected. As Mikro, we are running until 2024, then we are allowed to apply one more time and that's it. It forces you to think strategically to comply with the system. You ask for 15,000 CHF; some institutions might give you 2,000. In the end, the hardest part isn't the application, that comes after-

wards. How the single bodies handle the various processes, whether they are very tight in complying with their own regulations or more adaptable. And this is what I find hard to understand: as an artist-run space, we are clearly in the most vulnerable position and constantly in a precarious financial situation. If we decided to have a show that costs 2,000 to make, but the funding only arrives after the show is open, who provides the money to begin with? Out of our pocket? It therefore means you have to first apply to a regular job, to just have the money to be repaid. I understand that funding bodies want proof or guarantees for what they support, but there should be also alternative solutions available. For spaces like Mikro, not relying on big sponsors like banks or corporations, there should be different approaches.

DER: This means that, according to current rules, Mikro already has a closing date set.

NK: We thought this would have been our last year actually, but with all the contractual extensions during this time, it's the end of 2024. Mikro was founded at the end of 2014, and it has been operating with the current 24/7 framework since summer 2016. It's been a process of learning and unlearning for us.

DER: What will be the legacy of Mikro?

NK: We keep an archive of every art show, with the traditional form of documentation such as photography and texts. And then there are the livestream recordings, which is camera footage of visitors of the shows. Over the years, people did actually come at four in the morning to visit and discuss the art, which is kind of amazing. Faces aren't visible in these recordings, the image is pixelated, though now we have stopped the recording as we felt it was becoming redundant. There is still the livestreaming on our website for every show, the notion of camera is still there, together with the possibility of visually accessing the space virtually, without physically being in it. This material will one day be edited to take a form we aren't yet sure about.

DER: Do you also document the raves?

NK: What we like is that so many people are part of this process of documenting the raves. We should and want to do more by ourselves, but during a rave you're busy with other more important things as an organizer. But I also think many people have recordings and memories of the raves. After every rave, we ask them if

attendees are willing to share them with us, and then we archive them. I believe the impact of Mikro in the musical scene of Zurich has been much more relevant than the contemporary art one. I mean, it's a platform. But, in terms of electronic music, I think Mikro definitely contributed, kick-started, accelerated movements. Mikro played a part with other spaces to build an electronic music scene in Zurich which works outside of normative clubs and sounds played there. In the fields of contemporary art—I'm not quite sure what the legacy will be.

Probably, when Mikro is over, we might make a book, with essays, photos, and so on. We could do better in terms of archiving of course. But I also like this notion of a decentralized database, from people through Instagram stories or videos or photos. Like a multiple perspective, a shared nostalgia, memories you can refer to and reuse.

DER: And you mentioned you have already been working on a new project for the Zurich scene.

NK: That's right. It's also important to know there are no figureheads or external spokespersons for the media in this project—but members consisting of a lot of collectives and individuals, so if I phrase a sentence with “we”—I mean all members. It began in September 2019, responding to a search call from the Canton looking for a non-commercial practice to run an art space. The first question we asked ourselves was: what does the Canton define as non-commercial? And in this we found out that, for the Canton, non-commercial basically implies relying for the half part on unpaid—volunteer—work, and the other half subsidized, therefore paid. And also, that you don't host corporations or make big money out of it. The available space is next to Hardbrücke station, in a decommissioned central laundry facility, the Zentralwäscherei Zürich ZWZ. Raumbörse Dynamo got this space for six years. We had to pitch the proposal in front of the Raumbörse Dynamo with already an intended internal structure, organization chart, a reflection council, a curatorial group, a daily activity plan, etc. Not an easy task.

The idea now is to have a decentralized cultural space, with which we attempt to erode hierarchies and power structures as much as possible through the use of technology, democratic voting processes, and transparency. It is almost oppositional to Mikro, which still relies on fairly aesthetic, hegemonic curatorial normativity centered on a collective. With Zentralwäscherei, all of this

aims to be erased, in favor of a mixed program of art shows, craft workshops, theater pieces, all taking place at the same time. The only curatorial limits will be placed on the respect of basic human rights, as well as for-profit projects. Corporations will not be allowed; fascist and sexualized thinking won't be allowed; gender/race ratios will be implemented. Other than that, it will be a very free platform for everyone, no borders. There will be an open kitchen and a bar that will also finance the space, though you won't be required to consume anything to be there. No door policies, only pay-as-you-want pricing.

We want a space that is open for all and also that has different genres of curation without being tightened up by tactical or aesthetic decisions. And I'm looking forward to what impact that might have on the city, because it's a 1,000-square-meter space, which is quite big, and there are lots of young collectives that are interested on kickstarting new projects in it.

DER: Do you think Zurich is the right place for such a project?

NK: I could see it in other cities as well. Though Zurich really needs a project taking place on such a large scale, in a space of this size. Something in between a squat and an institution. Our hope is also that together with the public funding won't come any sort of political obligation with it. Would be a pity if such a project got instrumentalized by politicians asking favors or censoring the program. We will see about that.

DER: How does the city support the project then?

NK: It provides the building rent-free and a budget of half a million for renovations. It might seem like a lot, but for 1,000 square meters with a kitchen, it is really nothing. We will have to do lots of unpaid, DIY labor.

DER: Is there an opening date yet?

NK: We were expecting the money by now, but due to corona the project got shifted back. Hopefully, by the end of the year construction work will start. If no neighbor files an appeal, of course. Until then, a spontaneous program of events might be set up to also help us test all the ideas we have in mind. The space will be available for this until 2026, then the building is planned to be demolished to make space for a new elderly home or a

new public swimming facility, I'm really not quite sure, and I could be both wrong. We'll see.

Nicola Kazimir is a DJ, producer, curator, space-owner, record label owner, and party organizer who works freely across platforms and communities. For Kazimir, these numerous positions are not static, and they can act fluidly and reciprocally as a whole, or as separate entities. His artistic and acoustic productions are mostly based on topics that include the institutionalization of rave culture, copyright, and dividualism.

Domenico Ermanno Roberti is an independent curator based in Zurich. His research focuses on the links between space and architectures of power, most recently on the notion of the interface as an agent in the exhibition mechanism of the work of art. In addition to being part of Roehrs & Boetsch, he is a member of the curatorial team of the OnCurating Space in Zurich.



2067



A Soft Spiral, Deborah Joyce Holman



YGRG14X: reading with the single hand II, Dorota Gawęda & Eglė Kulbokaitė



Jody & Shayna, Annie Murrells

nano – Raum für Kunst, Zurich

Interview with Maria Bill, Antonia Hersche, and Regula Weber

Interviewed by Alina Baldini and Annick Girardier

February 15, 2020

Alina Baldini: Could you tell me about your art space?

Nano: nano – Raum für Kunst emerged from the art space KunstRaum R57. Since the beginning of 2019, we—Maria Bill, Antonia Hersche, and Regula Weber—have taken over, creating the current new management team, a new name, a new logo, and a new concept.

AB: What is your concept and curating approach?

Nano: nano - Raum für Kunst is an alternative and non-commercial platform for professional artists from local and national areas. We offer a place for multidisciplinary art projects and organize around five duo-exhibitions per year, and a collective annual exhibition. Artists with different backgrounds are invited (always two at a time) to collaborate and create a common exhibition. An artistic exchange and process enables them to create a dialogue between their different artistic personalities (in terms of media, age, experience, and origin).

Each exhibition lasts two and a half weeks. We also have performances, music, and literary interventions during openings and closings.

AB: Who is your audience?

Nano: Many people come through our newsletters, flyers, website, art platforms, Instagram, and word of mouth. It is rather difficult to get coverage through the press however. The exhibiting artists bring their own public as well. We have visitors of different generations and different backgrounds, artists, people with a cultural interest, visiting our exhibitions regularly.

AB: How are you connected to the Zurich art scene, and what is unique about what you do?

Nano: We have a good network in Zurich, its area and Geneva (where one of us comes from) because we are artists ourselves.

The concept of showing duo-exhibitions and creating cultural projects connected to the neighborhood is our uniqueness. For example: from the 2nd to the 18th of September 2020, nano - Raum für Kunst has invited nine artists, three authors and two musicians living in Wipkingen to work in conjunction with this neighbourhood and create an interactive exhibition covering different aspects in relation to the community. This cultural project is called WIP-KINGE, ein Klang aus dem Quartier.

AB: What are your backgrounds?

Nano: We are artists living, working, and exhibiting in Zurich and elsewhere. We manage nano - Raum für Kunst as curators but do not exhibit there.

AB: What is art for you?

Nano: We wish for the Zurich art scene to continue to be open to different art forms, to promote cultural diversity and create cultural connections. It is important for us that Zürich continues to support off-spaces and artist run spaces, as they enrich the art scene and offer a complementary perspective to the more institutionalized venues.

AB: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

Nano: We wish for the Zurich art scene to continue to be open to different art forms, to promote cultural diversity and create cultural connections. It is impor-

tant for us that Zürich continues to support off-spaces and artist run spaces, as they enrich the art scene and offer a complementary perspective to the more institutionalized venues.

We are concerned that the new regulations from Zurich city limiting financial support for off-spaces will put their existence at risk. We hope this position will be revisited if not amended.

Maria Bill lives and works in Zurich. Her artistic work deals predominantly with alterations in urban environments changing the structural identity of the city, proposing a new geography. From these alterations emerge new aggregates, architectural fragments, floating cities. It is through drawing, monotype prints, painting, and objects that her imagination and concerns emerge.

www.mariabill.net

Antonia Hersche lives in Zurich as a freelance artist with a Master of Arts FHNW Fine Arts, and Film/Video designer HFG. She mainly works cross-media with video/audio, animation, photography, and drawing. Poetry and socially relevant topics are important components of her work and exhibition projects.

www.antoniahersche.ch

Regula Weber lives in Zurich, where she works as a freelance artist. She mainly exhibits in the greater Zurich area and its surroundings. Her works refers to space, location, and society. The medium for her artistic work is painting, drawing, and installation.

www.regulaweber.ch

Alina Baldini is an Italian psychologist, she has lived and worked in Basel (CH) since 2017. For the past couple of decades, she has been working in corporations addressing topics like company culture, coaching, and personal transformation. Following her passion for contemporary art and her curiosity to discover the curating aspects in what she experiences, she decided to begin the Post-graduate Programme in Curating, MAS at the ZHdK in 2019.



tempo rubato, Ida Dober, Lara Russi, Photos: Maria Bill and Regula Weber



Die Massnahme, Regula Spörri, Philipp Ehgartner, Photos: Maria Bill and Regula Weber

Romano Zerbin, Photobastei

Interviewed by Beatrice Fontana

January 24, 2020

After five years of inspiring cultural activities, the PHOTOBASTEI 2.0, a place for photography in the middle of Zurich, will be closing. During its tenure, it has received international acknowledgment and put Zurich on the map of independent contemporary photography. I met Romano Zerbin, the person who started it, in the cozy café area of their venue, on the third floor of the Sihlquai 125.

BF: What is your background, and what is your specific relation to photography?

RZ: I studied semiotics at the University of Zurich, and I first came in contact with photography shortly after having opened my public relations agency. Back then, I received the commission from a professional association in photography to build a platform. It was 1998, the very beginning of the digitalization process, and they were looking for a way to display their works and advertise the newly achieved quality in photography.

The result of this collaboration was the Swiss Photo Award,¹ which for twenty years celebrated and awarded Swiss photography. Within the agency, I started following the topic out of personal interest, the common roots with my field of studies, transforming it slowly into a personal project, and so the things came together. Shortly afterward, I opened an off-space: the *Photogarage*. It was a little cozy space, mostly conceived for professional photographers and their long-time projects, meant to support the artistic side of their work. This is where everything started.

BF: How did the *Photobastei* project come to life after that—what was the concept behind it?

RZ: At the beginning of the 2000s, it became obvious that public policies of financing and support for art production were changing, and that it would become more difficult to find money for complex projects. Also, in regard to private sponsors, you could feel a growing pressure about results and revenues. Such circumstances generate dynamics which push you into the mainstream and in commercial performance cycles. You cannot choose content you feel is important, beautiful, or experimental, because with commercial content

you are obliged to produce money. *Photobastei* was born as an attempt to avoid those dynamics. I wanted to offer a space which would finance itself, in order to keep the freedom that we had in the '80s and in the '90s to make art, to generate ideas, to convey experimental energy. That was the idea.

In order to achieve this financial autonomy, we based our concept on three pillars: one was the museum, a space for international renowned exhibitions; to that, we added spaces to rent, offering them at low prices to photographers or artists who wanted to try and exhibit their work. Thirdly, we offered an event room, an open space for performances, concerts, or any other kind of event or energy present in the city. This was the idea, and this mixed-use concept is how we generate money to cover our expenses and try to survive.

BF: With your project, you are implementing a specific way of mediating and communicating photography. Could you describe it?

RZ: Well, there are perhaps two important facts to consider: on one hand, certain photography is finally acknowledged as art. It wasn't that clear fifteen or twenty years ago. On the other hand, the term "art" has become controversial: who and what is part of it, and who is, in an intrinsic way, making art. We often know photographers for their commissioned works, but many of them understand themselves also as artists. As such, they do not find space in galleries, nor in museums. The *Photobastei* is a sort of *niche* in that sense. As a space, it hosts and gives home to any kind of photography production, whether it falls in the category of art or of professional photography.

Photobastei also gives room to the work of young professionals following their passion and looking for feedback on their work. Sometimes they just want to find out if they have the skills to become artists and make a living out of their art. It is quite a special place, mostly because it brings together such different views. Without this possibility, the risk is to lose sight of diverse aspects of photography production, at least the ones which happen outside the strict criteria that we are being given when talking about high art.

I am interested in this gap between what one normally acknowledges as “art” and the views of people who are actually producing it. I observe it as a social praxis, as I am interested in what a person is doing, regardless if this person calls himself or herself an artist, without saying if it is “photography” or if it is “art.” I am open to what is happening on Instagram as much as I am to what happens in the art market or in the museums. This is our approach, and it allows us to reach quite a lot of different people.

BF: What is the situation today in Zurich concerning off-spaces and experimental concepts for photography acknowledgement and distribution? What will be the impact of the closing for young professionals and practices located outside of the institutional circuits, or not (yet) related to market dynamics?

RZ: In the city of Zurich, there are a number of different off-spaces for photography. Often, it is exhibited in cultural or neighborhood centers in the different areas of the city. Closing the *Photobastei*, though, will mean losing the advantage of a big common space with both local and international resonance. The bringing together of different positions, different meanings, and different levels, and the possibility to have enough room to reflect on the social practice of photography. In this way, we could assure even to young artists a lot of different publics, and at the same time we offered to the public different artistic points of view. Everybody would profit from this mix.

People come for the international exhibitions downstairs, and then they come up to take a look at other spaces. Sometimes they find things they really like, they are inspired; sometimes they just say: oh my god, this is not the quality I am looking for. This is it, this is the advantage we offer: we allow young and less acknowledged photographers the possibility to try and to fail, and there are not so many other places where that can happen. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not, but one must have the possibility to fail, because the next step is then to progress. This is my philosophy: failure is part of the process and has to be allowed.

BF: As an independent space, where do you place *Photobastei* in relation to the institutional activity of the *Fotomuseum Winterthur* and of the *Fotostiftung Schweiz* on the one hand and of private galleries on the other?

RZ: You cannot compare apples and oranges. The *Fotomuseum Winterthur* is an institution oriented to investigate and discuss photography and visual culture, and the *Fotostiftung* has a fundamental role in preserving and communicating the visual history of Switzerland. We are a house of photography, and the goals that we try to achieve are quite different: we show work that they would never show. As a result, I do not see the *Photobastei* as a competitor for these institutions.

In a way, we fill the gap between off-spaces, galleries, and museums, by presenting and curating a consistent production of photography of different kinds, which would otherwise remain unknown. Of course, we have a section that works like a museum, but considering what we show, I would feel more a proximity with an institution like the *Museum für Gestaltung* than with the *Fotomuseum Winterthur*. With the definitive acknowledgment of photography as a form of art, photographic exhibitions are entering the classic museum more and more often.

As a matter of fact, I think that these spaces would complement each other; there is so much going on, and being produced, and it deserves to be exhibited, like we do here, to become possibly the photography of tomorrow.

Unfortunately, competition—rather than collaboration—among institutions is one of the reasons for which the municipality has denied a yearly deficit guarantee of 50,000 CHF to our project, things that have contributed to the upcoming closure of the *Photobastei*.

BF: Considering those ups and downs which marked your interaction with the city institutions in recent months, do you think a renegotiation of the criteria of assigning public funding for culture might be necessary?

RZ: Definitely. We need to redefine the cultural policies. Criteria are made in specific contexts. At the moment, in my opinion, we have criteria stemming from the end of 1990s, and I am not sure whether they are still valid for today’s issues and whether they fulfill the needs of the category. Artists are not working alone anymore; they tend to collaborate in networks. These networks are constantly changing and evolving; therefore, criteria that were conceived for single artists do not suffice—we are dealing with collectives. What collectives need is non-curated creative space rather than municipal acknowledgement. The municipal policies should take into consideration the fact that non-curated open spaces are the best investments for art growing and

flourishing in a city because they allow freedom of expression. This is what art schools promote and teach: the introduction of some thoroughly subversive strategies of counterculture as elements of art. Confronted with these realities, in my opinion, the current criteria of funding assignment are both out of touch and promoting an elitist idea of art. We need to move the role of the municipality into the contemporary, allowing for organic and dynamic growth. If Zurich wants to be relevant in the art scene, and the municipality really wants to support that, they would help pivot the discourse to space.

BF: Do you have the feeling photography falls into a secondary category in financing policy?

RZ: According to criteria of municipal policies, most of the photography that we show here at the *Photobastei* belongs to applied art, craft, and therefore is not “art.” This, for me, is one of these criteria which belongs to the past. For example, if you take Olafur Eliasson, who is currently being exhibited at the *Kunsthhaus*, where do you place the line between art and craft? He brings them together. And that happens in an always larger number of cases. To claim a strong distinction among applied art and fine art today, in the age of digitalization, defines a mechanism of exclusion, and if you perpetuate the same mechanism for too much time, the consequence is that you create always more of the same. You do not progress, and you do not see what is happening around you, and reality overtakes you. In my opinion, the municipality is not ready to open a discussion with the art scene here, to listen to what is really needed. And that is not always just money, or at least a lot of money, in order to generate a full, creative, and booming art scene, of which some exponents will end up in a museum. Instead, they spend huge amounts of money on preserving a memory of *Dada* and the like. That generates a certain frustration in the scene.

BF: So, how would you go about helping to create an interesting and relevant art scene if you wore municipal shoes?

RZ: To make a point: it is the case that the lack of support by the city puts projects into a commercialized mainstream direction. Everybody begins to lie when applying for grants; we write what they want to hear, we paint budgets rosy. It is sad that we have to do that, the absurdity of this kind of *Kulturförderung*. It is poison for young artists to sell their souls in order to make a living. Zurich is not Berlin or Glasgow. Even municipal rents are forcing tenants to commercialize as much as possible just to make

rent; there is no space for trial and error. We sell out our future in this way and lose relevance in these times of great change.

BF: After surviving five years on the “free market,” what was it in your opinion that has led to the malfunction of the model? And what would you do differently if you had to start anew?

RZ: We had a Photobastei 1.0, located close to Paradeplatz, in a high-rise in the Bärengasse, a temporary space. Back then, we also ran on a tight budget, but we were able to refinance the entire initial investment in just eight months, the exact time that we were allowed to stay. If we could have stayed longer, we would have made a fully self-sustainable system.

It is obvious that the problem has to do with the location, with the kind of temporary space that we use and with the financial risk. For the rest, I trust and I am really convinced of the concept that we put together in this experimental space, this combination between a classic museum format and an open space for performances. You can really reach the people. Also, so many projects which started here traveled then anywhere in the world. If I had to do it again, knowing that the municipality would not be not helping, I would have to change the concept, giving it a more mainstream and commercial understanding.

BF: Which project/exhibition will you remember as being the most satisfying?

RZ: The exhibition about punk: *Raw Power – Revolt Against the Innocent*. It consisted of fourteen different exhibitions in one, investigating the question of how punk is still engaging us today, where the traces of punk are still visible. During this time, we were really able to unify the space of the exhibition with the space of the events. We became a room in which the space of reflection became one—it was a magic, crazy moment: punk was living here, and this was not just research, or a story, or a curatorial narrative telling us what was important or not. Punk was here and alive. It was the real thing.

To bring event and exhibition together in an authentic way is the aim of the *Photobastei*.

NOTE: The interview was conducted in January and before the Corona crisis.

Back then, the announcement of the closure triggered a great response. Today, thanks to a very successful crowdfunding, the Photobastei has been saved and

appears in its new guise as Photobastei 3.0. A collaboration with the foundation JETZT KUNST from Berne also opens the museum on the 2nd floor to other art disciplines besides photography and puts the project on a new financial footing. Photobastei will continue to be exclusively privately financed.

Notes

1 The Swiss Photo Award is one of the most renowned and highest endowed photo awards in Switzerland. For nineteen years, it has been presenting Swiss photography in different categories: architecture, editorial, fashion, fine art, free, reportage, and advertising.

Romano Zerbini, born in Zurich in 1963, is director of the Photobastei. Since 1998, he has been responsible for the Swiss Photo Award, the most renowned Swiss Photo Prize. In 2010 he opened the Photogarage, a gallery for Photography in Zurich, from which the Photobastei stemmed in the following years.

Beatrice Fontana is a Zurich based architect, curator and independent researcher.



Photobastei



Photobastei, event space, 2nd floor

Mitchell Anderson, Plymouth Rock

Interviewed by Domenico Ermanno Roberti

Mitchell Anderson: This is Mitchell Anderson, and I consent to this being recorded.

Domenico Ermanno Roberti: That's great, thanks. So, what is Plymouth Rock?

MA: Plymouth Rock is a project space that I founded and have run since 2014. Its main goal is to show that which is not being shown in Switzerland, in Zurich, or outside Switzerland. It can be giving first exhibitions to Swiss artists, first exhibitions to international artists, or pulling in perspectives from elsewhere in Europe or the world that aren't getting shown here.

DER: And where does its name come from?

MA: I had a different name like up until a week before I had to set up the e-mail address for the first show, and then I switched it. Plymouth Rock is a mythical site in the States where the pilgrims landed. Supposedly, this rock was stepped on when they disembarked. So, I guess six years ago I was making some kind of joke about a reverse colonization. I mean, in the end, as in any kind of space perhaps, this is about my ideas, about my taste. I can compete with myself against that, but at the end, it's about pushing what I want to see more of in the cultural world.

DER: Because you are actually the sole person behind the space, correct?

MA: Yeah.

DER: You are the one that writes the program and selects the artist. How do you choose what to show?

MA: If I hear or see something that's going to be interesting or something that I'm interested in, or maybe some artists that I don't understand or that I think maybe I can understand through giving them a show, providing this larger opportunity they haven't had, this is what I'd go for first. Other times, there are people that I've wanted to work with or art that I've loved since I was a teenager in my twenties. I mean, it depends. In the last year, I gave the first show to a Swiss artist,

Zurich-based Mohamed Almusibli, but also did the first show in Europe of Tony Feher, who died of an AIDS-related illness in 2016 and was an influential sculptor in America, though his work never crossed over the Atlantic. And then within that, I get to play with exhibition format through group shows, which is something fun for me to play with.

DER: You are also a practicing artist yourself; you work in a different range of mediums. So how do you combine your own practice, and do you see it complementary to what you are doing here?

MA: No. I know people that think that their curatorial work is part of their practice. This is not me, this is like a hobby for me. In the good, true sense of that word. It's a way to interact with the wider art world, to get out of my studio and outside of my head. If I see a work that looks like mine, in some ways if I understand the work very clearly, I'm less likely to show it here. If I understood the work exactly, then what would I learn from it? It wouldn't work. So, it's usually work that I'm interested in learning more about.

DER: And would you define this space rooted within the Zurich art scene?

MA: The canton and city repeatedly refuse to grant Plymouth Rock any funding, but still, it's a Zurich-based space. That being said, I think I make a big effort to balance it with an international position. And over the period of six years, I think it's been very balanced. In order to keep a total audience engaged, I make a mix. So, when you come here as a visitor, you never know what you're going to get. It can be a show of someone that you have known for a long time. Or it could be somebody that's known elsewhere in the world and you discover here. Or it can be a crazy group show. I don't rely on sales, I've paid for it almost totally from my own pocket, so I have the freedom to experiment and I allow the artists that freedom, too.

DER: Some artists you have exhibited have since gone a long way—thinking, for example, of Jon Rafman.

MA: I have good taste [laughs], and I have my ears and eyes looking outward from this provincial city. My relationship with these artists usually finishes after the show. In the exhibition way. It continues as a friendship. This is why I couldn't run a gallery, for example. This idea of continuously working with one artist. There's something very lazy of me in that, but also the needed independence of an art space where you do a show and you can move on to something else. You know, I'm not tied by having to make lifelong commitments.

DER: And how much of you is actually in these shows, and how much is the work of the artists themselves?

MA: It depends on what the artist needs. Primarily, I want the show to be good and necessary. I want it to make sense with the artist, but sometimes we don't agree on that. But that's also where the very interesting conversations happen. I want it to be a project space show; the location here is a bit shittier than you'd get with an institution and this can be the chance to take more experiments and more chances.

DER: I am thinking about your locker room show.

MA: That was a pretty great show, but I was also lucky. Before moving to where I am now, I shared a larger, industrial space that had been a boxing gym. We built walls and had our studios in the main space, but the storage units were actual locker rooms for the boxing gym. There were built-in showers, built-in lockers. It was a locker room. So, the whole time I had that space, I was playing with this idea in my head. I was reacting to a situation. There's no way I could have done this anywhere else; it'd have required a big budget, it would have been so wasteful. I'm really committed to having a kind of economy of means. What we have is here already and we react to that. We're not going to build another situation. That's something for the institution to do, if that's interesting. I don't think it's always necessary for art.

DER: How do you position Plymouth Rock next to the larger art institutions in the city? Do you feel your program questions or perhaps complements theirs, or the other way around?

MA: This isn't possible but, ideally, I would not need to do any of this. Ideally these things would get shown on their own. But this isn't the case, this isn't the reality.

I'm not competing with institutions such as the Kunsthalle or the Kunsthaus, because the styles are different, and also the situations. I guess our works are complementary. At times, of course, there are shows that are done here where I think they could have been in a bigger museum. But part of doing this is also having curators coming to see the works. And in the past six years I have learned over time that people did see positions here that ended up in bigger shows later. So, we are making small changes here. We're opening people's eyes, but also the other way around—I learn a lot from their work.

DER: Do you have a long-term vision within your work?

MA: Well, I'd like to see the artists and the works I show also in larger situations. If I believe in it, I believe in it to the logical conclusion. But Plymouth Rock is a project space; it's not that if all of a sudden I get three million dollars, I build a new large building for it. I don't think that there's that kind of ambition. Its power, its vitality comes from being a project space.

DER: So, could you still see yourself doing this in ten years?

MA: Yeah. I mean, originally, I started it because I wasn't having so many shows at the time. I was younger, so it was a way of filling my time with something related to art when I wasn't having exhibitions of my own things. There are times now when I have a few shows at the same time, when it becomes kind of stressful. But you just stay up eight hours longer and finish it.

DER: The next question would be how many personas Mitchell Anderson is, considering how many activities and roles you cover.

MA: Lots? I am an artist, I run a project space. I also write quite often for art publications. I used to work for galleries, and I used to collect as well. I kept all of them very separate, professionally. I have a way of doing it in my head. But I am also playing video games four hours a day, so there's probably something else that I can add to it, too, if it was interesting. I take Plymouth Rock very seriously, but also very casually. I'm not going to spend time polishing and shining it. It is what it is, and I think that's enough to get the art across.

DER: And would you ever show your own work here?

MA: It's happened. If it makes perfect sense, which it never does, I'd do it, but it's really rare. One time, in 2015, I had a group show, and one of my pieces just made perfect sense. I was curating the show, and it was clear that this piece was also related to it. There's an idea that this is inappropriate, but it's only inappropriate if it doesn't fit perfectly. You just have to question yourself endlessly. I'm not against it, but I think it's difficult.

DER: Who's your work addressed to and who's your public?

MA: You know, the obvious kind of cheap answer would be that I do it for myself. And that's not untrue. But it's also a lie because I work actively to have as many people come to see the work in person as possible. So, I would say people interested in art within Zurich, within Switzerland. And then there's also the international group of people throughout Europe, in New York and L.A. that also actively look and check on images online or come when they're visiting. I think they're all interesting and important in their own ways. At the end of the day, if I like someone's work, and I think it's good, I want to see it reproduced elsewhere. I want to form connections with people to have that show be shown in institutions and galleries elsewhere in the world.

DER: So, your work is addressing the art world specifically, not actively trying to engage a larger public.

MA: Why do they have to be separate? I mean, we have opening hours. There are people that I don't know that come in every week. Maybe one or two, but that feels like a million for me, this is a small space. But the power of the off-space is in its ability to highlight something for someone with more power to show. My job is to show it to somebody who has more resources, who can execute the grander work.

DER: And how do you record and archive what takes place here?

MA: I have everything photographed. Usually I write a text for every exhibition, somewhere between a press release and an exhibition, or more lyrical, text. And this is all saved on the website. I save one or two paper copies, as a small archive, but for what I don't know.

DER: As a queer artist, is sex, gender, or race balance a specifically relevant issue for you?

MA: For the first two years, there was only one woman shown. And then, over the next year and a half, just with the natural occurrences, I was able to overturn that; since then, the gender parity became equal. It's not something that I'm actively sitting thinking about, but I am interested over a period of years to look at this retrospectively. Because if this wasn't equal, I'd be asking myself why.

There's kind of a moratorium in my head on working with straight guys right now. Opportunities exist elsewhere bountifully for them. There were also times where I hadn't shown a gay artist for four years, and then I showed three or four in a row. So, I mean, it's like everything has a way of balancing out naturally when the opportunity exists.

DER: You always mirror to yourselves the questions your shows raise.

MA: A group show is a good place to talk about these kinds of issues. If I have to put a group show together and I have eight men and only one woman in mind, then there's something wrong with the show or it has to be what the show is about. The locker room show was a show about the male locker room, it had no women in it. To me, it didn't make sense to include them. It was about men and the homosexual gaze in the locker room. I feel comfortable in defending that, there was a reason for it.

It still is true that men have the most visibility. And I do want to show positions here that aren't getting the visibility they deserve. It's the same with mediums, for example, for painting. I have had three painting shows in here, which is extraordinarily low out of over fifty shows.

DER: Fundamentally this space IS you. But why Zurich?

MA: Because this is where I ended up. I was waiting tables in Marfa, Texas. Then a friend called me for a job of two weeks here. I stayed two weeks. Then a month. Eventually I was living here.

DER: Is there an artist that you wish you had shown here and for some reasons you couldn't?

MA: On the basis of economics, it's been very rare that I've been able to fly people over. Normally, I rely on people who are in town already. There's tons of people

and pieces I'd like to bring here. But in a way, it wouldn't reflect the space as much. I don't know if the space would be better with more money. Probably it would be just easier.

Thinking on a big scale, who should definitely have a show at a museum here: Jim Hodges. He made really beautiful, poetic sculptures such as the spiderwebs, dealing with this kind of poetry of loss and AIDS. Really beautiful and political work. But I'd rather see it at the Kunsthhaus, and I shouldn't have to do it.

DER: You are not openly political, although, based on what you are telling me, your program seeks to be political when it tries to subvert some sort of established economics within the art world.

MA: My politics would be expressed with what I am showing. I could never sleep at night if I exhibited a fascist here. I think about the space as a way of launching a reproduction of ideas and images into the world, and I want to reproduce what I believe in. But the basic thing of showing something that's not being shown is a critique of what it is currently being shown elsewhere.

DER: Who are the people that you feel support this project the most?

MA: I think there's a difference between a friend who comes to an opening and somebody who supports the project. The types of people who support the project are the same who support me as an artist. There's a large group of curators who come almost every time. And there's people that live in New York who every time I send an email out, I write back and forth with. That's also a different form of support, making you feel that the work you do has been seen.

DER: What I enjoy about Plymouth Rock is that it is pretty much a matter of what you are and what you like, which is different from how many other off-spaces operate. Can you mention any other place in the city that pique your interest?

MA: What separates me, which isn't in itself a better thing, is the freedom of my program. I can switch from a young artist to a historic position, then a weird group show. It's the inconsistency that keeps me interested, and I think that's what sets the space apart. The ones I visit consistently are Longtang here, Milieu in Bern, and Cherish in Geneva.

Mitchell Anderson is an artist based in Zurich. Recent solo exhibitions include Fondazione Con-verso, Milan (2019), Galerie Maria Bernheim (2018), and Fri/Art Kunsthalle Fribourg (2017). He founded and has run the alternative space, Plymouth Rock, since 2014 and is a regular contributor to a variety of international arts publications.

Domenico Ermanno Roberti is an independent curator based in Zurich. His research focuses on the links between space and architectures of power, most recently on the notion of the interface as an agent in the exhibition mechanism of the work of art. In addition to being part of Roehrs & Boetsch, he is a member of the curatorial team of the OnCurating Space in Zurich.



Installation view, Tony Feher, Plymouth Rock, 2019.
Photo: James Bantone



Installation view, Mohamed Almusibli, Plymouth Rock, 2019. Photo:
James Bantone



Installation view, *The Locker Room Show*, Plymouth Rock, 2017.
Photo: Gina Folly



Installation view, Jon Rafman, Plymouth Rock, 2014, Photo: Douglas Mandry

Sabina Kohler, *jevouspropose*

Interviewed by Noémie Jeunet

jevouspropose is a curatorial series by Sabina Kohler and accomplices. Several times a year, *jevouspropose* invites someone to propose an artist with a specific group of works. The works are installed in the space, celebrated with an opening, and exhibited for a while. At the same time, the respective presentation is expanded and continued in a virtual space: on the *jevouspropose* Instagram account, the proposer and the artist will have a chat, a free visual discussion on the works and themes on display.

NJ: Sabina Kohler, how did you come up with the concept of *jevouspropose*?

SK: Two years ago, I decided to open my own office and to follow different projects in the contemporary field of art. The aim was and still is to have an open office, where people would come, and each time they visit, they could discover something special in a room that has, although tiny, a unique character. I wanted to fill the space with art and people, to let them meet each other in a sort of contemporary salon whose content continually changes. The idea is to connect the different bubbles which exist in the art world and break down the borders between the different art fields. It's in the end about art and not about where you belong to, about dialogue and making things possible. Giving two people a platform for a certain period of time that will bring different networks together and make the best of it. It has a totally open character within a clear and defined concept.

NJ: What is your professional background and how did you arrive here today?

SK: A long time ago I was a pharmacist. Then I studied modern and contemporary art at Christie's Education in London. When I came back to Switzerland, I did an internship in the art gallery *staub*gfzk* where I was involved in many different things, until I became a partner of the gallery (*staubkohler*). After two years, Rolf Staub decided to resign. Following this, Bettina Meier-Bickel and I decided to start a new art gallery together: *Rotwand*. After nearly ten interesting years, we closed the gallery and I started my own office.

NJ: As you said, Sabina, you closed your art gallery *Rotwand* in 2017 as a co-owner and co-gallerist. Do you now feel closer to this new concept? Is this a new beginning for you in the field of artistic mediation?

SK: It's a difficult question, because I have been always working with passion. My long experience in the gallery world is the base for my new project. During the realization, I took the freedom to concentrate on the things I like and where my strengths lie. When you do something, especially in a creative field, you have to do it with your full heart; otherwise, it doesn't produce any good result.

NJ: How would you define your curatorial practice individually, and what exactly is your role in these curatorial series? To what degree do you get involved with helping to develop the shows?

SK: First of all, I would like to say that I'm not a curator. In my opinion, this term is used in an inflationary way, used by so many people for so many purposes. My role is not so much a curatorial one. It's more bringing people together, making things possible, looking for solutions, giving a platform, and helping people express their ideas. My main role is to invite a person that I find interesting. I do this very thoughtfully and consciously. If you like, this might have a certain curatorial aspect. It was only recently that I realized that, unconsciously, I often invited people that I didn't know so well. This is really interesting and rich for the whole project, as it makes it possible to open up. Of course, it is at the same time a big adventure to contact people you don't know really well, meaning, you don't know how they work, but it is an interesting and important part of the game. The diversity and the surprises have become a crucial part of the project. My other roles are to help the artist with the space, to coordinate the technical part between the artist and the technician, to discuss with the proposer and the artist about the people who will be invited for the opening, etc. In short, it is a close collaboration between the tandem made up of the proposer and the artist and me, where each has their own role.

NJ: From which field are the invited proposers? Are these people mainly from Switzerland or do they come from the international art scene?

SK: So far, they have been mainly curators, but I would like to open it up and to invite people from other fields, not only from the contemporary art scene. It was already the fact with Susanna Koeberle, who I invited in June 2019. She's a freelance journalist, writing about design, art, and architecture. Next year, I will invite Gesa Schneider from the *Literaturhaus Zürich* and Marc Streit, who is responsible for the artistic direction of *zürich moves!* I try once or twice a year to invite somebody from abroad. This year it was Francesca Gavin, she is a London-based writer and curator, very well connected, and François Piron, a French art critic, curator, teacher, and publisher. They both invited people from abroad. Sometimes also proposers from Switzerland invite somebody from abroad, e.g. Lars Willumeit who invited the Italian collective Discipula. I like to have this international approach.

NJ: What is the role of the invited proposer? Does this person influence the selection of the artwork group that will be shown, or maybe the display of the artwork?

SK: There is no strict rule, and each time it's totally different. It's what I like in these series. For example, Fanni Fetzer (director of the Kunstmuseum Luzern) who proposed Marion Baruch, a 90-year-old amazing artist, decided to do a kind of a tiny retrospective of the artist's work as a teaser for the artist's big retrospective show opening in February 2020 in the Kunstmuseum Luzern. Therefore, Fanni Fetzer was focusing on three different working periods of the artist: the '70s, the '90s, and today, with textile as the connecting element. The display worked fantastically, and the visitors really got a sense of Marion Baruch's thinking and approach to art. On the other hand, François Piron who together with the artist Jules Lagrange, a former student of his, focused on a totally new production of works. Or Martin Jaeggi and Mathias Renner who chose to play with the space by transforming it. I normally leave the conception of the show up to the tandem of proposer and artist. Of course, if they need advice, I will intervene with my experience as a gallerist. It's important to say as well that the proposer always writes a small text, which serves as introduction to the exhibition. The text is distributed in a handout format during the exhibition, and you can find it on the website as well. So, I am much more the host and not the curator.

NJ: As you said, you don't always know the invited proposers really well. Could a proposer propose the work of an artist which she/he doesn't feel close to or is the relationship between the tandem always a strong one?

SK: Usually the relationship is quite strong. The proposer and the artist know each other pretty well. But I think that the experience at *jevouspropose* seems to strengthen this existing relationship, which is always nice to see.

NJ: How many female and male artists will be shown in your space?

SK: I only invite the proposers. Who the proposers then will invite, male or female, is up to them. In choosing the proposers, I try to keep a certain balance. But for me, the most important is to generate an interesting and diverse program through the invitations.

NJ: *jevouspropose* shows sometimes one artist's work, sometimes several artists' works at the same time. What can you say about it? Is it more interesting to gather more than one type of work in the space?

SK: The concept of the project is mainly to invite one proposer and only one artist. There have been two exceptions so far: with the gallerist Elisabeth Kübler and for the edition with *Kunst: Szene Zürich 2018*. Elisabeth Kübler brought pieces of art from different artists who played a strong role in her gallerist life into the space. For the special edition *Kunst: Szene Zürich 2018*, I was assigned four different artists. Under the title *Abstract Playground*, we put on a multifaceted exhibition and the talk series *sofa talks*. Each artist could invite a conversation partner.

NJ: What are these talks you organize for the exhibitions about? What role do they play in the series?

SK: The idea is that there is at least one conversation for each edition of *jevouspropose*. They take place either at the opening or during the show. It depends on the edition, and it's not an obligation. It could also be a short intervention of one of the two invitees. It's not a formal talk but more an intimate discussion in a tiny room. Often, the audience participates quite actively in the conversation.

NJ: Do you have a target audience? What type of audience does your exhibition space attract?

SK: What is interesting is that the audience always changes, depending on the two invited people. But it is always a mix of different scenes making connections with each other. The exhibitions are totally open to everyone. Of course, I also send out personal invitations for the openings. And sometimes we organize a talk in a very private setting.

NJ: Do some artists sell their artwork during the exhibition?

SK: Selling is not in the foreground. As I said, it's about opening a platform and accompanying people for a certain time. But if there is something for sale, which is not always the case, of course you can buy it. At the end, if I can sell something from the artist, who has to make a living, I am more than happy for her/him.

NJ: Regarding the conditions, are the proposers and/ or the exhibited artists paid by you?

SK: I pay the proposers who I invite. It's not a huge amount of money, but I would like to esteem their work. As an artist, it's great to have the possibility to be visible in a project space like this, but, of course, this is not sufficient. So, I always buy myself something small from the artist exhibited. The proposers and the artists always know in advance what the conditions are.

NJ: Could you tell more about the visibility of your project space, how do you make it known and visited?

SK: Here, the Instagram account of *jevouspropose* plays a decisive role. Not only to spread the project further but even more: @je_vous_propose is an integral part of the project. For the duration of each exhibition, the proposer and the artist take over the account of *jevouspropose* and run a visual dialogue that goes beyond the works shown in the exhibition. The project also gains visibility through its website and some press articles, in particular the one in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in August 2019. This is a rather tricky point: on the one hand, I would like to keep it small and keep its "salon" aspect, but on the other hand, of course, I love when people hear about it.

NJ: How do you finance your project? Do you have funding? If yes, from whom?

SK: For the first two years, I thought I would like to cross-finance the project with the other things I do in the office, so I didn't apply for funding at the beginning. I only had funding when I was part of the *Kunst: Szene Zürich 2018*, but this was a special case. Then something really great happened with the *philaneo* association that approached me and my concept. *philaneo* is a rather new charity organization promoting contemporary art that is headed by two women, Christina von Rotenhan and Caroline Baumhauer. The association supports the production of new works, exhibition projects, and acquisitions for public collections. I submitted the project, and they approved funding for three editions. Now I am considering applying at other places for a new round of financial assistance. The *jevouspropose* project is definitely a non-profit project.

NJ: What role do the other functions you have play (management of the artist Klodin Erb/ ambassador of Klaus Lutz's work)?

SK: My office is made of four pillars. One of these is the *jevouspropose* project; another very important one is the studio management of the artist Klodin Erb; furthermore, I am an ambassador for the estate of Klaus Lutz. The fourth pillar is made of different running projects. Currently, for example, I am involved as an external art expert in an art in construction project of the City of Zurich, and since very recently I have had a mandate by Galerie Urs Meile regarding the artist Marion Baruch—an artist they discovered through *jevouspropose*. All these functions are complementary to *jevouspropose*; one nourishes the other.

NJ: What role does your project space play in the City of Zurich? How can you use your work to promote difference and variety?

SK: Actually, that's a question you should ask other people. That's quite hard to answer, but the feedback I get from the audience is that they like it, because it's a different concept, very simple in its construction and yet playful and changeable, offering a huge variety in an intimate surrounding. The concept helps to raise awareness for difference. A good example for this is the wood carved-works by Jules Lagrange, which "talk" about the quality of slowness.

NJ: How are you connected in the Zurich art scene? Do you have a big network? Is it important in your case?

SK: After more than fifteen years of activity in the art field, I hope that my network will have a certain reach which is essential for the project of *jevouspropose*. I have to know what is going on in the Zurich art scene and beyond.

NJ: What was the most successful edition, and which was the most challenging?

SK: It's hard to say, but a very successful edition would be the one with Fanni Fetzer and Marion Baruch because a lot of things emerged for the artist through this show. At the opening, there was this very special vibration in the air, and I knew immediately that this was a very precious if not to say magic moment I was attending and that you would hear a lot more from Marion Baruch in the near future. The most challenging edition was probably the show with Elisabeth Kübler who brought several pieces of art by famous artists such as Louise Bourgeois or Pierre Klossowski. The small space of *jevouspropose* had been transformed in a little museum, and I was quite afraid that something might go wrong. Apart from their monetary value, the works also had a huge emotional value for Elisabeth. It was like bringing part of her life into my little space. It was challenging but such an amazing experience for me and in the end also for the audience. And the friendship with Elisabeth Kübler and the proposer Susanna Koeberle which resulted from this exhibition is definitely the most beautiful reward. Your question opens up the issue of success, which is interesting to define from my point of view. Society often values success in a monetary way, but for me success can be seen and evaluated in many more different ways such as courage, strength, creating a special feeling or a certain atmosphere.

NJ: What is the role of art in your opinion and from your position?

SK: It's a big question. Art is extremely important because it can change and sharpen the way you look at contemporary life. Be curious and attentive, and suddenly you see or understand things you haven't been aware of before. You have to actively engage with art, and it will open up your mind. It's a sort of a motor for the present culture and the heritage that will remain of our culture in the future. Finally, it's a vehicle to bring people together.

NJ: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

SK: I wish for an art scene that is lively. It should be open and curious and offer space for a wide variety of actors and ideas. I also believe very much in collaboration and hope it will play an even more central role in the future. I wish that the art scene will not be completely pushed to the outskirts of the city, but that there will always be opportunities for exhibitions and studios more in the center. The art scene should have an important and active voice.

NJ: Thank you, Sabina Kohler, for your answers and the very interesting exchange about your work and art in general. It was a pleasure to meet you.

Sabina Kohler has been running *jevouspropose* since 2018. Prior to that, she was co-owner and co-director of Rotwand Gallery and staubkohler gallery, both located in Zurich. She has been an external expert for art in construction projects in the city of Zurich, and, amongst other activities, she is the studio manager of the artist Klodin Erb and ambassador and advisor to the association for the preservation of the work of Klaus Lutz. She holds a diploma for studies in modern and contemporary art at Christie's Education London (certificate University of Cambridge) and a Master of Science (ETH Zurich).

Noémie Jeunet (b. 1988) is a Swiss architect; she received her Diploma at the EPFL in Lausanne (CH). She has lived and worked in Zurich (CH) since 2013. After working as an architect for Park Architekten and Armon Semadeni Architekten for several years, she decided to study curation in more depth, beginning a CAS program at the ZHdK in Curating in 2019. At the same time, she is now working as an exhibition designer at the Museum Rietberg. She has been part of the Post-graduate Programme in Curating, CAS, at the ZHdK since 2019.



Installation view, *jevouspropose#6* Susanna Koeberle *vous propose* Elisabeth Kübler, 2019



Elisabeth Kübler (right) in conversation with Susanna Koeberle (left), sofa talk during *jevouspropose#6* Susanna Koeberle *vous propose* Elisabeth Kübler, 2019. Photo: Martin Jaeggi



Installation view, *jevouspropose#6* Susanna Koeberle *vous propose* Elisabeth Kübler, 2019



Installation view, *jevouspropose#2* Fanni Fetzler *vous propose* Marion Baruch, 2018. Photo: Conradin Frei

U5

Interviewed by Patrycja Wojciechowska

Patrycja Wojciechowska: You met and started the U5 collective at the Zurich University of the Arts. Can you describe how you formed the collective and what were your backgrounds ?

U5: U5 was founded in 2007 during our studies at the New Media Department at the ZHdK (Zurich University of the Arts). Subsequently, we applied collectively for the MA in Fine Arts. All of us gained different backgrounds through previous work and studies. We have an engineer, a trained architect, and a failed architect. We chose to work in a collective, as we wanted to step away from the concept of individual identity and authorship. Neither our gender nor our origin matters.

PW: Very often collectives function as an art collective, but they do list the members. You avoid this. It's always U5.

U5: Yes. It's not a secret; people know it is us, but we try not to mention it.

PW: Do you think your work experience before the emergence of U5 had an impact on the formulation of the collective's methodology ?

U5: We believe that everything around us has an impact, not only our professional backgrounds, but also people we are involved with, places we have visited or where we grew up. In our understanding, it is important to keep the collective's practice diverse. We reach out to different networks and disciplines, all of us have their different communities, with different interests, who have different approaches to our work and to the way we work.

PW: I think that when you work within the collective, it's good to have people who have very different backgrounds and very different takes on practice, both within the collective and around. Working together becomes more dynamic, and maybe opens different doors.

U5: We often say our practice is organic. We let it grow and are not planning too much. When we have projects to finalize, deadlines to meet or exhibitions to plan,

then of course, we have to. But we try as much as we can, to use chance as a tool. We like unpredictability.

In order to maintain this methodology, we need to be space-based. It has to be a space big enough to work on different things at the same time, and for things to interconnect. Combinations are important for us.

When we started to work as a collective, we didn't start with the idea of moving straight into the production of art. Instead, we started with setting up the task to learn how to work collectively. During our first year, there were no products, so to speak, coming out, not in the sense of art production. The method was to observe, to experiment, to find a way to work together and to gain trust in each other. We wanted to let loose, just let the others do what they needed to do in order to give each other the freedom and confidence necessary to work together on one piece, or to let go of their contribution and let others step in. One could take what someone has done and push it further. We let go of ego and the claim of individual authorship. We realized that sometimes where one leaves work, the other can pick it up. The first year was about figuring out the workflow and our internal dynamics.

PW: So, one could say your practice was focused, especially at that time, more on the process itself than a finished art object?

U5: In the beginning, the process was directed at how to learn to trust each other and have the confidence necessary for working together in a collective. We tried to induce a situation where one of us can come into the studio and continue working on a piece, even finish it, without asking the others, without justifying this decision and without fear to take it over. The process was to learn to work under shared authorship and for the practice to evolve organically. So, anyone could just do whatever they wanted. Whatever was in the space belonged to every and each one of us. It is not easy to go through a process which suppresses ego. One has to start to think that this is not about 'MY' work, but the collective's work. It doesn't work all the time, but when you work in the collective, you have to accept that it

happens, that you don't actually get on with everyone all the time.

PW: I was curious if you were interested in working with other artists outside of the collective, using the space or presenting their work in there?

U5: It is primarily our studio and the place where we store all of our work. However, a lot of our artworks are created in collaboration with other artists. We especially like working with musicians. For our recent projects, we worked together with art historians, scientists, musicians, and performers. Our work has been becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, not only in choices of medium but also in terms of research and the networks which surround it. We always want to grow and evolve. At the same time, we understand, it's hard for people to step in. We worked together for so long, and there's a very distinctive style that we have. It's not easy. But we are willing.

PW: You have a teaching and commission program—I was wondering if you could speak about this a little bit?

U5: It happens by occasion, because we like the exchange with other practices and disciplines. We often collaborate through friendship. Friendship is something that is very important for us. Usually in our practice, we don't start a new project with an idea or a topic. Or maybe we don't start with the topic, but we start with an idea. When it comes to commission work, we need to begin with a topic. It's not really how we normally do things, so the commission process differs much from our practice. We also realized that a commission program means work with many other people, and this can be difficult. It causes trouble, but at the same time, the people we worked with said it was productive.

PW: You reach out to other artists and collaborate, you have the commissioning program, which may have its challenges, but it still means that even though that may be accidental or peripheral, you do give visibility to other artists throughout your practice. So, therefore, I think within the way you run U5 is an answer to the question, how you see "the Dark Matter," as described by Gregory Sholette's text, which was our starting point for this issue of OnCurating. You take the people out of it and involve them in something that becomes more visible.

U5: We are the Dark Matter. Nowadays, you have to look professional and follow a certain formula of presence and image in order to function in the art world. You have to fill out applications and write proposals, concepts, etc., to receive funding (at least in Switzerland there is a good funding system compared to other countries), but this never covers all costs (especially as a collective), or helps to save some money, or even to pay the studio rent. It is precarious. The whole application and funding process is unbalanced. I once heard the decision process itself takes 2/3 of the money provided. Maybe that's also what Gregory Sholette writes about. It's not exactly a positive situation, but it's sometimes interesting, as you need to find ways to connect. We are going back again to the notion of organic. How the flow of all activities works, and where does the money end up and who benefits.

PW: How do you finance your projects and studio?

U5: We finance most of it ourselves, with our practice. Often, we have to be creative in covering costs. This can be everything, from selling art pieces, teaching, commissioned work, to working for institutions and being involved in research projects. We organize events here, in the studio: concerts, dinners, parties, bar. People always thought that it partially financed us. But this is not the case. It's the opposite of financing. It's not profitable. We do it because we have fun doing it, and it is a valuable source to bring people in and connect. We definitely want to maintain this space.

PW: Do you receive any funding from the city, or do you have any sponsorship?

U5: No, not for the space. Usually one has to have an annual program, which includes shows by other artists. We don't do that. We do collaborate a lot, for example, with the Helmhaus we organized an event, and we also opened our space for an offsite art presentation, "Kunstszene Zürich," organized by the City of Zurich. Overall, we feel the space needs to be free and flexible to use, not programmed and scheduled. We received multiple amounts of funding for our artwork. In recent years, we have gotten increased funding for our digital art.

PW: So, would you say that within the Swiss funding system, options for financial support to sustain the practice as an art collective are somehow limited?

U5: In terms of costs for the studio space and the way we want to use it, yes. It came to our mind, of course, we could create a program, do exhibitions, etc., and apply for space funding, but we always decide against this idea. We try to keep the distinction between an artistic and curatorial attitude. But also in terms of art grants or residencies it's quite hard; those programs are made for one person not a group.

PW: How do you choose your projects? You describe your work as organically evolving. I was wondering how the process is being shaped.

U5: We really like working with material in our hands. For more than ten years now, we have been working with plastic and everyday materials, colorful things. We are interested in handicrafts, kitsch, mass-produced things. We didn't choose to work specifically with plastic. Instead, we made the decision to work with material you use every day, with what's around, and this meant working with plastic. Nowadays, this is changing, and it affects our material and therefore our art pieces. When things change, they impact our practice. In recent years, our work depended on where we were, as we were traveling quite a lot. We couldn't keep working the usual way and had to find other ways to practice without the studio space. During this time, our digital work came into the foreground. We tried to find ways to produce work we could transport from one place to the other.

There are many things we are interested in, especially those that don't get a lot of attention at first sight, or even the ones people prefer to look away from. This type of inspiration and experience reveals itself not only in known surroundings, but also in outside of our own culture.

PW: Your attitude towards the material makes me think about the notion of found objects. You look for what is around. Plastic, let's face it, it is all around us. These days, finally, we started to tackle this problem. As a result, social reception of the material has changed. And you find other materials, as the environment around changes.

U5: Yeah, and if it does, it is happening without us forcing it. We are responsive to those changes.

PW: As you work as an art collective, you negotiate throughout the whole process. Do you at any point have certain responsibilities one person runs and the other doesn't? I think with few people in a

group, it usually happens that someone is better with one thing, while someone else with another thing.

U5: Of course, there are things that one of us prefers to do more than the other. But even though someone does something better, it could happen that someone else does it anyway. It's like in jazz. Maybe you have your favorite instrument. But it's really interesting when you try to play one you are not used to. And even if someone doesn't touch something at all, everyone still leaves an imprint on it.

PW: Is gender of any importance in your collective?

U5: I have to say, I do not fear being dismissed because I'm a woman... We fear more being dismissed because we want to do things differently, in a collective and getting rid of gender or identity politics altogether. However, we still feel that the art market, even if there are more people working in collectives now, is not really ready for alternative options.

PW: What are your connections and networks in Zurich?

U5: We have some friends in various fields, but we are strategically not very well connected to the other art spaces or art institutions. We have some connections to the architecture world, to art historians, artists, musicians. This results from the most recent projects, where we have been working with Philip Ursprung. Besides this, our "Automatenbar" sort of created our own network. For four years, we organized a bar every damn Tuesday, and we opened the studio to everybody.

PW: How do you see the future of your practice here in Zurich?

U5: For such a small city, Zurich is really international. Our future is here. We will carry on finding ways to keep the studio and our practice going. The most important thing is to keep on going and have the passion and naiveté to not worry too much. You need humor to withstand all the problems.

PW: From the moment I started to plan this interview, I knew I really wanted to ask you to break down the rules of the U5 collective: "All the members have equal rights, but consensus is not nec-

essary. All works are created in cooperation. Presence and absence influence the work equally.”

We spoke about this briefly. You described the importance of acceptance of the lack of the necessity of consensus in the decision-making. I was wondering about the reason behind your choice to use “cooperation” not “collaboration” as the operative word for the description of the methodology of your practice. Further, whose presence or absence is of importance within the collective? The members, the artwork, the audience, the physical being of the things, the materials not being within the space? I think it is exciting to learn how you see these little nuances within the very open rules that you have.

U5: Usually, rules are to specify something that is not allowed. We realized we need rules as guiding lines to open up and not to restrict. Guidelines that allow you to act. Guidelines that encourage you to act. Self-doubt is sometimes too easy. We want to evolve and to grow, and that’s why they are so open.

PW: What were the reasons for your decision to work with the things that are around you, everyday materials?

U5: We feel like a lot of our decisions are just pragmatic. We needed to establish the ground enabling us to be productive as a collective, especially during the first years of working together. We focus on materials around us and the materials you could get in high numbers for not much money. In the beginning, there was also a time when we didn’t want to produce anything at all. The world is already overfilled. So, we didn’t want to buy stuff; instead we looked around. People gave us things they didn’t need any more. We have all sorts of collections now.

PW: Can you please describe your camera, PALM, as method of working and communicating. How did you arrive at it? Would you also comment on the notion of surveillance and the performative aspect of PALM as a method of creative practice and cataloging, where it is split between choice and chance? How random is really random? How do you see the place of the site from the point of view of PALM?

U5: Our first studio was situated in the basement of the ZHdK. It was called U5, a rotten room that some profes-

sors stored their old work in. The topic of that semester was “space and time.” This was the beginning, our foundations. We were students, we had time, but we had no space. The lack of space was the problem. We checked every corner of the school and found this room, which was really small. No more than ten square meters. The first thing we did was to install a surveillance camera. We didn’t know each other very well at that time, and the rules did not come up yet. It was a way to figure out how to work together. You could see if someone was in and you could see what this person was doing. The system was established for the camera to take over the required documentation and let us work freely. To make a long story short, we developed our own mobile surveillance camera and our own streaming platform, which we call PALM now. The camera takes a picture every two seconds and streams it online. We wanted to be able to take the camera wherever we moved and have an insight wherever we were. We gave cameras away to other people. It is a tool for interacting. All the images are stored in our archive, which now holds around 100 million images of everyday life from around the world.

It’s not clear what kind of archive this is. Of course, it is impossible to view all the images. We can just browse through them. Sometimes we find amazing shots and we use them, print them, turn them analogue again. It works a bit like human memory and the way it’s stored within the brain. You have these moments that you can remember, and you have those moments you completely forget, but your friend tells you: “Can you remember that?” We are now categorizing the archive by hand as a preparation to manage the archive by machine learning. PALM is kind of an anti-Instagram: it documents the routine and boring parts of life.

The images are the everyday material. They capture what is around. On the other hand, there can be highlights. Sometimes just because it’s a visually, aesthetically striking image, and sometimes because they are the moments you couldn’t catch without this tool. The performing aspect of it can be fun, too.

PW: It’s like it’s there, but at the same time it’s not. It is constantly doing something. I want to talk about the idea of constant transformation. Do you understand this as ever-present change within practice, an archive being in the process of constant flux?

U5: Yes, as a concept. We search for the uniqueness in the moment, too.

PW: Carrying the camera means both that you observe and you are being observed. Sometimes it's not clear. There is a duality inscribed within the system. You watch, but you're also being watched. You observe, but you are also being observed. You create an archive, but you are also archived. It has this double meaning.

U5: Yes, you are both perpetrator and victim at the same time. You also have to be able to stand it from both positions and be able to experience how it feels and what kind of reactions it provokes. It is not always a pleasant process to work with these cameras.

PW: It creates a certain aspect of anxiety. That's why I asked about surveillance. It's a similar experience to when you are in the urban environment. You do forget about this, but now and then you remember that you are in the city and you are being constantly watched by countless CCTV cameras and not all of them with such an innocent idea behind them.

U5: From time to time, critical people don't want to be on our camera. This is weird. They still believe that they can decide and escape surveillance. But they cannot. We all cannot.

PW: I can see why it's uncomfortable, but I can see how it can be interesting as a form of the constant recording of change. Do you see the viewer as an active participant in this ever-changing environment? I mean this across the whole process of the camera, of the work itself, even your practice? Because they'd been recorded as well. So, it's not only direct interaction with the artwork, it's also interaction with the ever-expanding archive that matters.

U5: I mean, there are not so many people watching now on a daily basis. But there is the possibility to interfere by tagging images. We have two types of archives. We have our archive of all images, and a publicly open archive, where the last 50 tagged images are stored. Those images are kind of highlighted. We also give away cameras to people who are interested. They get access to the images they produce and can also work with their image archive.

PW: I felt when I was looking at your work that you see transformation as a quality lying at the core of your practice. Seen partly as a way of creating new temporalities, new pluralities and partly as a continual feedback effect? My understanding of it encompasses the feedback from yourself, from the artwork, feedback from the archive and from the viewer. I would like to see how that creates the new moments, new change and so forth...

U5: It comes from our collective method. It's changing, it's happening all the time, because of the presence of absence. Even if I do nothing, I'd come back, and the work has changed.

PW: It's very interesting. For example, if you work in the museums, there is this constantly present idea of preservation of the artwork. So, in a sense the methodology is to stop change. For example, when you read about Eva Hesse's work, the curators and collection owners lamenting because the materials deteriorate, because they're so experimental. But then there is another aspect. She was experimental. The materials do deteriorate. And this is normal. And maybe we should accept this, that sometimes the materials change, and things deteriorate and become something else. I personally think it's quite important to have an art practice that accepts change, and as you said, many times accepts the destruction factor, too.

U5: People sometimes ask us how do we decide on when an art piece is finished. Our answer is: we are not interested in finishing, as we have already started. Art and culture are a possibility for accessing the infinite.

When we answer this question more seriously: a piece is finished when it is sold, or when none of us continues working on it. It happens that, after an exhibition, we continue working on an art piece or while exhibiting we change the context of an art piece by showing it in a different set-up, which changes this piece—not the work itself, but its impact and significance.

Patrycja Wojciechowska is a curator based in London. She is graduate of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS in University of Art, Zurich, Switzerland. She co-curated the exhibition *games.fights.encounter* at the OnCurating Project Space, Zurich. Her research focuses on identity, postcolonial studies, non-human intelligence and

forms of communication, and position of the body in art experience. She currently works on an interdisciplinary online platform.



U5, studio view, 2020



Bleach, Performance, U5

Book as Art or Reading as Seeing: Volumes

Anne-Laure Franchette, Art Director Volumes

Interviewed by Marco Arrigoni

Marco Arrigoni: Thorny problems always arise with definitions, but I think that being able to define something is sometimes a good starting point. Could you define what art books, zines, and magazines are?

Anne-Laure Franchette: Questioning and investigating the existing systems of production and classification is truly fascinating, as many zones of frictions and overlapping exist. To keep it short, we can say that art books are usually books about or containing art and which are by an institution, a publishing house, or an artist. Artist books are generally books made by artists, by themselves or with a publisher. Magazines are periodicals routinely published following a regular schedule. Zines can also be periodicals, but they are mainly self-published, with small means and circulation. All these categories are very permeable, and many hybrids formats can be found, even more so since the appearance and democratization of digital tools and formats.

MA: In your opinion, which direction should art publishing go in order to be really interesting and to be able to communicate something meaningful to people?

ALF: This is highly subjective. What I find interesting is that within the range of cultural objects, publications are amongst the most identifiable ones, which makes them very accessible and almost comforting. At the same time, they can be extremely versatile, in content and in form. What is the most interesting and meaningful to us, as organizers, is to showcase this diversity by making the platform we have created as inclusive and accessible as we can. We are deeply interested in the idea of self-representation which is at the heart of independent art publishing, the alternative art scene and the VOLUMES project. How do people create their own opportunities and distribution? How do they create their own social space, how do they share content that

they care about but which is not represented? On wider terms, we are fascinated by the history of publishing, which lies in between art, design, and activism. Nowadays, there is a newfound fascination for the printed object, which is showcased by the surge in production and the unprecedented development of book fairs and related events. While being largely motivated by digital fatigue, this scene is incredibly supported by the new tools provided by new technologies. We are also very interested in this dialogue between the analogue and the digital. Our motivation, as a platform, is to showcase and discuss collectively the broad spectrum of publishing practices. This is why we try to invite and showcase many different voices, styles, and contents, so that every visitor might find something of interest and hopefully meaningful.

MA: In the last VOLUMES edition, the exhibition section featured installations by artists and collectives, which were activated through performances, workshops, and talks. Could you tell us what this section was, for what reasons it was created, and how the choice came about?

ALF: Since we started in 2013, we have been developing the combination of a classic book fair set-up with series of exhibitions, workshops, talks, and performances. As for the first six years, we were an itinerant event, our program was conditioned by the possibilities offered by each new space. We experimented with exhibition formats, analogue and multimedia performances, talks and workshops. As the event grew bigger each year, so did the program. The exhibition or display section came from a wish to showcase curated selections of books as well as to give more space and time to specific projects developed by artists, curators, researchers, or activists. Book fairs can be very hectic and packed, which is an integral part of their appeal as they bring people together. But it can be quite difficult for some projects to stand out. We try to create a variety of geographies

and temporalities within the event, in order to provide different ways to experience the content showcased. As publications can be part of a much larger set of practices, mediums, and investigations, we invite projects to showcase their practice as a whole in the exhibition section. The displays function as islands which get activated one after the other through a workshop, a talk, or a performance. This allows additional entry points for everyone to dive into each other's work. We think of the whole event as a community gathering, a huge showcase of practices. So, it is very important for us that participants are present and engaged with their own content and the content of others.

MA: In the Luma Westbau room, located on the third floor of Löwenbräu Kunst, there was also a program of talks, performances, and readings with the symposium "Publishing and Archival Strategies in Artistic Practices." What emerged, what topics were covered, and what did the symposium consist of?

ALF: Last year, part of the program of performances, talks, and readings took place in the Luma room on both Friday and Sunday. And on Saturday it was home to the symposium "Publishing and Archival Strategies in Artistic Practices." The idea for this symposium originated from the fact that VOLUMES has a collection/archive, of mainly printed material. Most of this collection has been donated through the frame of the International Open Call Exhibition, which was created as we started in 2013. We have been using this collection as a starting point to investigate and activate content through cataloguing and curating displays. It has enabled us to organize open discussions around the question of the collection and the archive, which is nowadays widely questioned, both in popular culture and academic discourse. Teaming up with Michael Hiltbrunner who coordinates the research project around the archive of the Swiss artist Peter Trachsel, we decided to explore collectively how artists, researchers, and curators experience the use of archives and the impulse to edit the content within it. The "archive fever," or "mal d'archive," as Derrida described is a "compulsive, repetitive and nostalgic desire." Why do we long for archives, and how is knowledge produced through archives? Onto them we project our imagining and can be as selective as we like. Just like memory and history, archives can never tell the whole story. Thinking through the personal practices of the artists, curators, and researchers participating, we discussed methods of collecting, investigating, and re-writing. The very nature

of archives is characterized by gaps. Some of these are random, as in the VOLUMES collection, which is composed by donations. Archives talk as much about content as about absence.

MA: On the basis of what criteria is the selection of exhibitors made, and by whom?

ALF: Every year, we release an open call to which anyone can apply. We try to spread it as far as we can. And we always try to invite a fair mix between the local scene, outsiders, and newcomers. As well as between zines, magazines, artist books, art books, and any other publishing formats or experiments. Zurich being a rather expensive city, many practitioners from outside Switzerland find it difficult to come. To counter this, we try to build relationships with funding bodies which can allow us to invite a wider variety of voices and practices.

MA: VOLUMES was born in 2013 as "Üsin, Zürich Small Press Fair." The 2019 event was the seventh edition. What are the main transformations and evolutions, and what are the objectives for the 2020 edition?

ALF: We started very small, and we didn't initially plan for this project to get so big. Initially, we just wanted to hang out and exchange with other people who made zines and artist books. The response was so enthusiastic that VOLUMES naturally grew into what it is today: a large interdisciplinary festival about publishing practices. When we started, the art spaces hosting us kept closing, due to rampant gentrification, so we had to change location every year. And by the time permanent spaces invited us, we had gotten used to being nomadic and decided to keep moving for a time, as it allowed us to experiment with different formats. But even though our events are big, we are a very small non-profit organization. So, in the long run, starting from scratch every year wasn't very sustainable. We decided to try something new, which was to have a permanent address. For the last two years and the upcoming one we are at the Kunsthalle Zurich, and it has been great to explore how we can reinvent the same space. We have been reusing some of their exhibition displays, which is something that falls within our concern with topics of sustainability and production. In terms of topics, these last few years we have been focused on micro-history, self-organization, activism, feminism, decolonialism, and outreach. For 2020, our objective is to keep experimenting, try to invite as many exciting practitioners as we

can, and try to think together about questions of representation, care, and degrowth.

MA: We are in 2020 (which is a 20 reflected): could you indicate the 20 art books, zines or magazines released in the last 20 years that in your opinion are really interesting and daring?

ALF: So many amazing publications have been published, and many lists following highly subjective criteria could be made. Beyond listing personal favorites and to somehow stay within the proposed numbers (two and zero), I would propose to look at two projects reflecting on modes of production in publishing:

No Libros, by Bia Bittencourt, is a project based in Barcelona which reflects on the current excess and overproduction of books. This collaborative publishing interface works and distributes locally, in direct opposition to the interconnected system of big chains, systems of production and distribution.

Futurress, by Common Interest, is an online feminist library of books that are yet to be written. The platform collects ideas for books that address blind spots and missing narratives in design theory and history, in order to foster critical awareness and democratize the making of design history. Because what we produce, how we produce, who produces, and for whom are concerns increasingly widespread and which are at the core of our own questions and preoccupations as a platform project.

As a non-profit organization and collective depending on funding, **VOLUMES** happily accepts donations, and thank you very much for your support. You can find more information on our website: www.volumeszurich.ch.

Marco Arrigoni lives and works in Milan. He is an art consultant for Harper's Bazaar Italia, and writes about contemporary culture for Il Tascabile, Elle Decor Italia, and Capri Life. He won the Prada Foundation Degree Award in 2018. He studied literature and art history in Milan, Paris, and Zurich. He completed the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS, ZHdK in 2020.



Volumes 2019, Photo: Jan Bolomey and Spyros Paloukis



Volumes 2019, Photo: Jan Bolomey and Spyros Paloukis



Volumes 2019, Photo: Jan Bolomey and Spyros Paloukis

Sculpting Through the Ashes, the Journey of Allam Fakhour

by Rafia Kodmani

I left my country, Syria, in 1983. I used to visit Damascus a few times a year to spend time with family and friends. I never thought that one day I would not be able to go back. Since the start of the revolution on March 15, 2011, I was banned from returning because I sided with the revolution against the fifty years of Assad dictatorship rule.

The revolution faced unprecedented violence from the Syrian regime. As a result, millions of people have been forced to flee their homes. Currently, there are over eight million internally displaced refugees, and more than six million Syrian civilians living in various countries around the globe, among them a big number of the Syrian artists, the artists who I used to visit in Syria are now scattered in Europe. All of sudden, as an art curator, I felt the urge to save the artists' archive in my country, a project that I started to work on with the New York Abu Dhabi University center, and more than ever, I felt the need to document their lives. One such artist is Allam Fakhour.

Arriving in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, as Syrian refugees on December 15, 2015, Allam Fakhour and Mervat, his wife, thought, "Finally, we are in a safe haven." In just two years, Allam learned the German language while looking for a job in what he knows best, sculpting. From the year 2000, Allam practiced sculpting with different materials. In 2003, he graduated from the Fine Arts Faculty in Damascus University, sculpture department. In 2006, during what is known as the Damascus Spring, Allam was jailed in Damascus along with seven other activists for promoting democracy and defending human rights. He was sentenced to five years and was released in March 2011. During his time in jail, the artist created a material from soap and bread to produce small sculptures: "Doing sculptures made me feel that I am still a human, that I am still alive," he reports. Sadly however, the sculptures he made during his time in jail were either offered to his cell mate or lost.

After his release, Allam was involved in the Syrian revolution by helping displaced people, an act seen as a

crime by the Syrian regime. In 2013, the artist met Mervat who soon became his wife.

The couple escaped to Beirut, Lebanon a year later. In Beirut, Allam revisited his memories in jail by creating a few sculptures from soap and bread, the very materials he used then.



Courtesy of the artist.

Allam and his wife then submitted an application to the UNHCR and were granted asylum in Switzerland.

The Swiss Government lodged the couple in Neuchâtel for a month, then moved them to their new home in Haslen, a small village in the Alps, part of the Glarus canton, near Zurich, populated by a few hundred people and covered with snow five months a year. The government offered them a two-bedroom apartment, in which Allam transformed half of the space to an atelier.

Excited to have a new life, they started to learn German, and made finding a job their daily mission. Luckily, after twenty months of searching, and three months of training, Mervat became a sous-chef, a job she is currently enjoying.

Allam was not as lucky in his search. In addition to sculpting artworks in Syria, Allam worked with interior designers executing clients' orders to decorate houses and gardens with sculptures, a work that gave him a good standard of living. Considering his background, Allam hoped to fall under a similar career path in Zurich.

Learning the language allowed the artist to meet with a few Swiss locals and institutions, but unfortunately, this did not aid in finding work. He sensed that he was being looked at through the lens of a stereotype, a needy Middle Easterner, someone who doesn't know anything and is nothing but a refugee from Syria.

With the continuous war news coming from his hometown, and the disappointments of not finding employment while depending on the social pension, Allam felt trapped in an unfamiliar space, with no hope for a better future, which led him in a downward spiral to depression, as he says, "So, I decided to train my mind and my soul that I am not an artist, will never be one, and I have never seen art in my life."

After about a year in Haslen, Allam moved to Nafels, a bigger town in the same canton. To his dismay, despite having a higher education with an attested degree from Damascus, many employers in Switzerland did not accredit his degree, and required four years of Swiss education instead, like many others in his position. Therefore, during the following months, he taught himself how to become a cleaner, a profession that does not require an education, one where he could easily be recruited. He compared himself to his fellow refugee artists in France and Germany, who reportedly did not confront as many difficulties as he did. On this note, I asked the artists Rim Yassouf and Khaled Dawwa who both sought asylum in Paris on how their first years were; they stated that there are a few French associations that support refugee artists, such as The Agency of Artists in Exile, which offered the artists residencies and introduced them to galleries where they get the chance to exhibit their work. In contrast, Allam was forced to leave behind a part of his identity, "I was killing the artist in me to be able to work as a cleaner."

In June 2018, Allam faced a turning point in his artistic path. An association in Haslen called Asylbetreuung

Glarus asked Allam to design the canton's poster for the World Refugee Day, which he did in watercolor. In the June 23 issue, the local newspaper *Südostschweiz* covered the event, included the biography of Allam, and stated how the artist fled Syria and arrived in Switzerland with his wife in 2015.

Seven months later, Allam got a call from the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, informing him that the UNHCR had established an initiative called, "Art Stands With Refugees," and that on the occasion of World Refugee Day, the agency would take part in Art Basel 2019. Organized by Alfredo Jaar, international artists were asked to create a series of posters, and Allam Fakhour was selected among the participants. The 2019 initiative was dedicated to refugee women, titled, "Where should birds fly after the last sky?"

Allam created a poster about a little Syrian refugee girl he saw in the news. Upon the girl's arrival in Germany, a reporter asked her about her dreams in Germany, to which she replied, "I don't want Germany, I wish I have wings to fly away from the globe, I want to fly to another planet."

A week after the UNHCR call, Thomas, the owner of a newly opened gallery in Zurich called Hard Cover contacted the artist and asked for a meeting. Despite taking part in some artistic content, Allam was experiencing a deep depression, one where going back to the abandoned artist in him seemed like an impossible reach. Despite Allam being a sculptor, Thomas offered Allam a solo exhibition for paintings, and with enough patience and determination, was able to reach out to Allam, reinstalling some confidence in him. As a result, Allam hesitantly accepted the offer to exhibit paintings and, staying true to his form, also exhibited one sculpture using soap and bread. "The opening of the exhibition was an awakening for me, I realized that I did not work for four years," Allam said.

All artists who were in prison, once out, drew and sculpted their experiences in jail. Therefore, it is not surprising that Allam carried the prison's trauma with him to the Swiss art scene.

Using art to heal from a trauma is a known practice in psychology. According to professor and art therapist Paula Howie, art therapy is a method used to help patients heal from traumatic experiences, it "transforms

the images from unfinished (seemingly present) experience to past history.”¹

I personally had the chance to visit the exhibition at Hard Cover gallery in Hardplatz, where the welcoming gallerist offered me an exhibition tour. The black and brown simple lines reveal sad, long faces staring at the viewer; they are the artist’s friends in jail. Some are jammed together on the window to see the street while being transported between prisons, others are squeezed in a black void background.

According to human rights organizations, today there are more than 200,000 political prisoners in Syria. In addition, tens of thousands of detainees lost their lives under torture in Assad prisons.

More than fifteen artists were imprisoned during the Syrian Revolution, some were lucky to survive prison, three were not.

Today, the artist is preparing for a new exhibition. When I asked what the subject of his exhibition was, he said, “I am done with war and pain, it is behind me now.” He is working on colorful abstract artworks.

After few years of despair, Allam considers himself very lucky. With the help of the UNHCR and the gallerist, he was able to get up on his feet and practice art again.

Notes

¹ Paula Howie, “Art Therapy with Trauma,” in *The Wiley Handbook of Art Therapy*, eds. David E. Gussak and Marcia L. Rosal (Oxford, UK: Wiley & Sons, 2016), 337.



From left: Jeannette, the gallery manger; Allam; Thomas, the gallery owner. Courtesy of the Hard-Cover Art Gallery.

Thinking Alone Is Criminal: Artist Maya Minder Interviewed by Gözde Filinta

February 12, 2020

Gözde Filinta: Could you tell us more about your work and journey as an artist?

Maya Minder: I work at the intersection of culinary, fermentation, bacteria, art, and science. I studied art history at the University of Zurich and continued MA Fine Arts at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), practicing mostly performance art there. I worked as an initiator and organizer in off-spaces and curatorial projects. I have practiced performance art for a long time, which might be the reason for my consistency in creating immaterial art; most of my works are non-physical, temporary. I work with micro-organisms, and the living organism has an expiration date.

My culinary knowledge was always there but came after. I started to apply the things I love into my practice, started to cook and produce food, and found a new relational method to combine my experience into art. I do commercial work as well as being a cooking artisan, holding workshops in culinary, and when I organize these workshops, I do the administration work along with the creative. I am self-made. It is challenging to divide my artistic practice from my curatorial or commercial work.

Until I joined Hackteria, I never considered myself a biohacker but naturally became one through my practice of fermentation. Hackteria is a loose network of artists, scientists, and hackers all working at the intersection of art and science. It is a community-based platform that empowers citizens in opening up the fields of science and technologies. We use GitHub, blogs, forums, and create gatherings to communicate outside the mainstream art and academic fields. Through the possibilities given in the digital age, people empower themselves by learning on a DIY approach in various areas of life science, the digital realm, and new media. This approach is useful to attain extensive knowledge in a specific field, which is, later on, shared openly—for distributing new forms of technology and science.

GF: What is your working method?

MM: I always try to find ways to collaborate. To create something big in the 21st century, we have to work in multitudes. Throughout my journey, I saw the significant result of the fluidity of collectives and one's ability to adapt and change between different communities. I realized that I can act more freely as my works expand when I come together with a community for some time. I also learned when to take distance and accept it's time to get out and work with another collective. I believe thinking alone is criminal, and to perform broader and do more, we have to think in collectives and be able to be fluid to shift between ideas and stay open to share practices, knowledge, and acknowledgement. I take part in many collectives and associations: bio-hacking Hackteria, Badlab, Humus Sapiens, SGMK, etc.

Through the fermentation practice, I meet other fermentation practitioners, and I'm very inspired by how a broader topic is covered by different localities. For example, within Hackteria, all the participants work around similar issues but bring along their geography, culture, and history. I'm fascinated to discover the hidden local aspect of a universal topic. For me, the different cultures, the exchange with other worlds, the bacteria, yeasts, and fungi are something multi-diverse. There is a lot of inspiration in it, and it would be deadly boring if I only worked within one field.

GF: Could you explain more about your activism?

MM: People say I'm an activist because of my involvement in the slow food movement, and our collective Humus Sapiens. Humus Sapiens is an activist project in which we focus on soil ecologies and the communication between scientists and farmers. I always come back to emphasizing food, because I believe food embraces many aspects of society. Food is an everyday action that contains our history and culture. It is a democracy. It is a starting point where you can grasp the mindsets of people. In my work, I try to put seeds into people's minds through the food I prepare. When diverse people attend my workshops, I feel excellent about reaching a

broader audience. We gather around the food as I try to display various perspectives for the food we prepare, shifting ideas.

I believe that to change a system, one has to act within the system, encountering it. Maybe that is the aspect I take, where I feel I reach more minds, the closer I am to the society. In my work, I appreciate multiple opinions and an exchange of ideas for common and collective knowledge production.

GF: What are your thoughts about the Zurich art scene?

MM: I have been living and working for many years in Zurich, and have also taken part in art scenes from Germany, Australia, Italy, the Balkans, India, and Indonesia. Compared to these art scenes, it can easily be said that regarding the closeness to the international established galleries in Zurich, the local art scene and its institutions are oriented towards high art. I think Switzerland, in general, has a problem with using and accepting popular culture practice into high art, since life here is closely linked to money, wealth, and affiliation problems.

Since the 1980s, artists have worked at the intersection of biology, science, climate change, and art, and it has been present all over other places on Earth. I have been recognized in the international sphere as a bio artist. However, Switzerland is falling behind this recognition. The interdisciplinary art forms, especially the ones that bring together science and art, have only recently started to be recognized in Switzerland.

I visited and participated in various meetings such as Transmediale and ars electronica, ISEA, FeMeeting, and I was amazed by how many big names were present, working in bio art. These big names and projects like Symbiotica, Critical Art Ensemble, Kathy High, Center for PostNatural History, or the Free Art and Technology Lab (F.A.T. Lab) have worked in biology and new media for more than 30 years, there is so much more to explore. Climate crises, environmental issues, hacking, and activism have been a source of inspiration not only since the protests in 2019 but long before.

These movements gave birth to many innovative ideas where artists unwound themselves from academic and high-art practices to working interdisciplinarily in science or activism. To tell you the truth, for me, academic or high art is a practice of self-celebrating,

intellectual ejaculation, too lazy to move out of its fluffy pampered comfort zone.

Still, this interdisciplinary approach of science and art has been a mind-elevating pool of inspiration for me, and it seems like Swiss art institutions are starting to acknowledge it as a potential field, ready to explore. Besides, ZHdK appears to be following this, creating interdisciplinary meeting points, which I appreciate. These efforts provide paths for fruitful collaborations that do not think alone.

Maya Minder (CH/KR, b. 1983) is an artist, fermentista, and organizer. She lives and works in Zurich. Her work has been shown in several exhibitions in local and global spheres, including Pro Helvetia, Werkbeitrag 2018 and 2020, was nominated for the KADIST AWARD 2017, and was part of the Klöntal Triennale 2017. She has been awarded several grants and support from Migros Kulturprozent, Pro Helvetia, Gubler Hablützel Stiftung, and Gerbert Rüb Stiftung for projects she co-curated. She studied art history at the University of Zurich and holds a MA in Fine Arts from the Zurich University of the Arts.

Gözde Filinta is a curatorial researcher, and writer based in Zurich. She has taken part in multiple art projects since 2012 in various roles. Currently, she is working on her research on multispecies survival in the Anthropocene and the use of art narratives. Along with her research articles, she writes about contemporary art in relation to her research area. She continues working on her curatorial projects in Zurich and Istanbul, and genuinely interested in urgent global issues, interspecies relation, and non-human in artistic expressions and narratives. She finalized the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS, ZHdK in 2020.



BadLab at BigBiennale, Geneva, 2019. Photo: ©LisaBiedlingmaier



Hackteria, *Crispr Chäsli*, Workshop on genediting and cheese making, Food Culture Days, 2018. Photo: Marie Capesius

Esther Kempf

Interviewed by Oliver Rico

Oliver Rico: What is your professional background?

Esther Kempf: I studied fine art (and one year of Scenography) at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. I graduated in 2005, and I have been working as an autonomous artist since then.

OR: What interests you in the art field?

EK: I am interested in human perception: how we see, understand and name our surroundings. The physical presence of places and things, natural phenomena such as gravity, pressure, and light play an important role. I like to observe everyday life, react to and experiment with the particular context I find myself in. By reorganizing, shifting, and transforming its components, I try to create unexpected connections and new meanings.

I also pay a lot of attention to language and words, since this is how we transfer the physical world to an abstract, fictional level, and multiple meanings play an important role.

OR: How would you define your curatorial practice individually?

EK: I do not have a curatorial practice as such. I am part of the art commission of the City of Zurich (Kunstkommission der Stadt Zürich), and in this position I have had the task to “curate” the “Werk- und Ausladatelier-Stipendien” exhibition at Helmhaus the past two years. What me and my “co-curator” did, I wouldn’t call it curatorial work, though. We didn’t get to choose the works, but rather we placed the works of about 30 artists in the spaces of the museum. Working mostly with installation as an artist, I like that kind of work, because it’s all about the relationship between the space and the works and the works between each other. It’s an intuitive, fluid process with a lot of trying out and repositioning and rearranging. It also reflects my way of working in the sense that I like to use what there is already and try to make the best out of it.

OR: How would you describe your mission/purpose and point of differentiation in the Zurich art scene?

EK: As an artist, I like most to react to the space an exhibition takes place, use it as a starting point for ideas, and to interact with this place physically. For that reason, exhibitions in places that are for interim use are interesting to me: they are never in a typical white cube space, but take place in different interesting locations like a former chocolate factory or an apartment that people actually live in. By participating in such exhibitions, even though they are mostly not interesting financially, I want to contribute to keep these alternatives alive. This is important to me because it brings art to different places, reaches a diversity of people, and blends in with ordinary life.

OR: What was the most interesting/ successful project/exhibition, and which was the most challenging?

EK: I always find it intriguing to work with the context of an exhibition space. I observe and analyze the peculiarities of a place: its architecture, size, light conditions, sounds, surroundings, and history and then develop a work on site and work with the physical or social givens of the place.

This is mostly possible if a place is to be demolished or renovated. In Zurich, examples are the exhibition *Der verwaschene Ort* at Zentralwäscherei in 2019, or *5 Salons* in a private apartment in 2007. For the works there, I could interfere directly with the physical matter: For “*Salon vert*,” I took off the wallpaper and carpet to create the illusion of a ray of light. For “*Ohne Titel*,” I was able to break through an existing wall and install a table that connects two neighboring former office spaces and can be used from both sides.

But also in galleries or institutions, this is sometimes possible: for my first exhibition in my gallery Brigitte Weiss in 2009, I used the fact that the space was more like a living room in size and with its parquet than a white cube. I did the work “*Für Filomena*,” an installation determined by the room’s architecture and the law of

gravity. A construction made of wood slats installed between the ceiling and the walls lifts the furniture from the floor and thus makes the individual pieces imperatively dependent on one another.

For the work *“Hannah’s Garten* at the group exhibition *Hallo Hannah* in the Shedhalle in 2019, I used the structure of the Shedhalle roof and the temperature difference between the floor and the place under the roof as a starting point for the work *Hannah’s Garten*.

What I find difficult is when there is no chance to interfere with the surroundings. At the 2018 Swiss Art Awards exhibition in Basel, it was impossible to do anything directly connected to the exhibition space—a huge fair hall. Each participant gets their white box, square meters, or wall, and this is the space you can work with. I wanted to integrate parts of the infrastructure (the movements of the escalator and the ventilation system) into my installation, but after many emails and discussions, I found out that it is impossible to physically touch anything outside the box that was intended for me. In the end, I found inspiration in the history of the place: the annual watch and jewelry fair taking place in the same hall and the facts and rumors on the thefts that equally happen there almost every year.

OR: How did you find the space in which your exhibitions take place? Does it belong to a private person or maybe to the City of Zurich? What rent do you have to pay?

EK: For the group show *Was nützt --- in Gedanken 2* at Locher this year, I was invited by the artists Tom Menzi and Karin Schwarzbek, who organized the exhibition. They are both part of the Verein Zitrone, which are currently using the spaces of Locher as studio spaces. I didn’t pay rent and I don’t know about the deal of the organizers. As far as I know, they could use the space for free. If you want to know more about that, you could ask Tom Menzi. If you need more information about the Verein Zitrone, Yves Sablonier would be a good contact person.

OR: How do you finance your projects? Do you have funding? From whom?

EK: The exhibition was not financially supported, and all of the expenses for my work were covered by myself. I did receive help concerning transportation and building up the work by the organizers and other partici-

pants of the show. The exhibition as a whole was also not supported by the City of Zurich or any other organization/foundation, but as far as I know there was no attempt to get financial support.

OR: What is the working process like? Do you decide on your own? Are others involved?

EK: I like to spend time at an exhibition place. I observe, analyze, experiment, and develop the work on site. Locher was a great opportunity because I was able to work more from February to June in an empty barn of about 300 square meters. Originally there was less time intended (about a month) but due to the lockdown, the time frame was expanded. There is no chance to find something similar in Zurich ever again!

For the performance installation *“Ereignis 2 (ein Sonnenstrahl)* that I realized for the exhibition at Locher, I used several aspects of the barn: the entrance is facing south, so the sun always passes on one side of the barn. It is a freestanding building on the ground floor and has no window, which means the light contrast between the inside and outside is striking. I used the barn like a camera obscura, a dark place that echoes the outside to the inside. At a certain time during the day, one ray of sunlight falls through an opening into the barn onto a mirror table. From there, the light spot is directed to other reflecting objects, scattered in the barn. For twenty minutes, the light spot moves through the space, hitting settings of reflecting objects. Geometrical light drawings emerge and disappear in different places in the barn.

Exchange is very important to me. After having spent time by myself in the space, I talk to the curators or I invite friends to the place where a work develops. The external view is crucial as a sort of reality check. What works, what doesn’t? What is in my mind, in my imagination, what is out there, visible, perceivable?

In the end, taking decisions is a very lonely task. I hate it when someone tells me: this is your decision. Sometimes it’s easy, and sometimes is it not at all. There is no rule to follow, and there is a lot of trying out, making mistakes and panicking around it.

OR: How much influence do you have on what is curated?

EK: In the case of the Werk- und Auslandatelier-Stipendien exhibition at Helmhaus, the influence is limited since the works are defined by the artists themselves, I try to find the best solution for each work, and have a balance for the total exhibition. By combining works in a space, a theme or an aspect can be emphasized, but there is little influence on the content of the whole exhibition.

OR: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

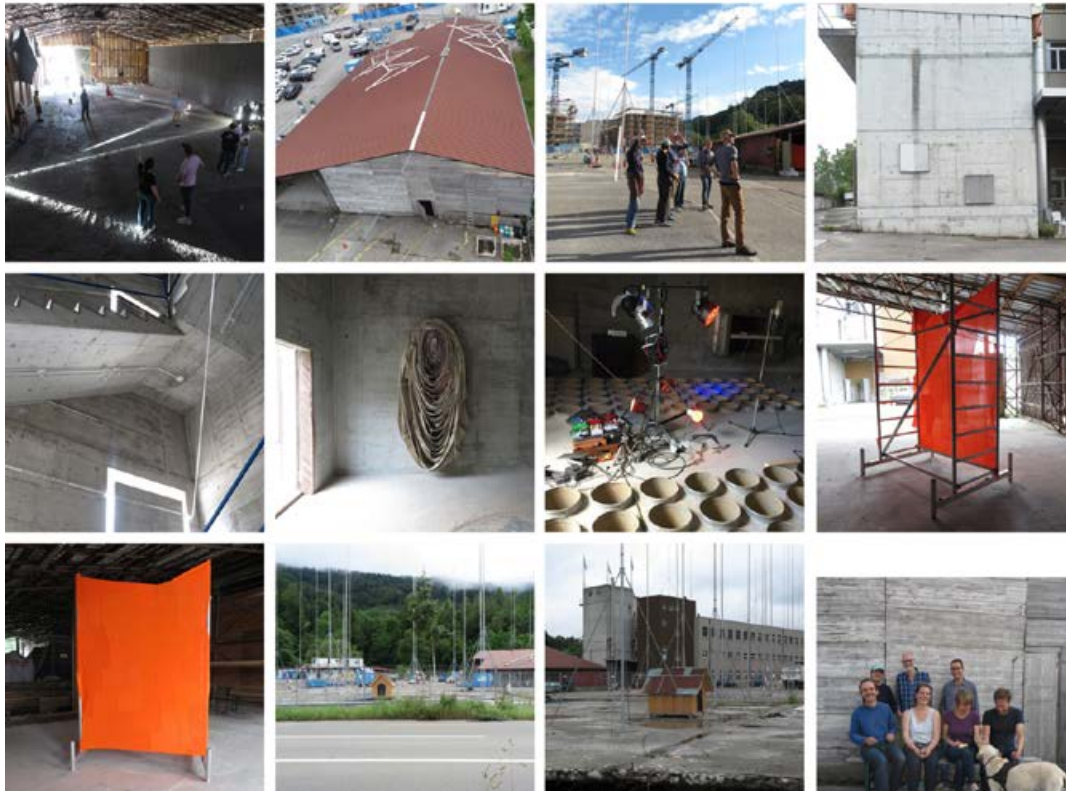
EK: More spontaneity, less seeking of security. One thing I appreciated when living in Amsterdam is the attitude of “*gewoon doen*.” I have the impression that people there are more experimental and don’t let themselves be impressed by possible regulations and problems coming up.

Esther Kempf (b. 1980 in Bafut, Cameroon) studied fine arts and scenography at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam and graduated in 2005. After her graduation, she had residencies in Argentina and at the Cité des Arts, Paris. Since 2009, she has lived in Zurich. Esther Kempf’s works are based on space, the perception of it, and the words with which places, objects, and events are described. She works experimentally and reacts strongly to her environment. The inspiration for her work comes from everyday observations, which the artist detaches, investigates, and sharpens into precise works. The outcome of this investigation is expressed in a medium that is determined by the idea and the process of the respective work.

Oliver Rico (b. 1980 in Zurich) studied sociology and law in Zurich and Lucerne, after which he completed a Master’s degree in communication and organization sociology in Lucerne. He was a visiting lecturer at the Department of Design/Cast/Audio-Visual Media at Zurich University of the Arts during the 2011-2012 semester. In 2017-2018, he gained the CAS Curating qualification, again at Zurich University of the Arts. He has worked in Switzerland and Spain as a recording manager and script consultant for short films. Other posts include work as a producer and dramatic advisor for the Actaeon Production Theatre Group and the theatrical association Hengst & Hitzkopf.



Esther Kempf, *Ereignis 2 (ein Sonnenstrahl)*, 2020



Documentation of "Was nützt ---- in Gedanken 2" curated by Tom Menzi and Karin Schwarzbek with Marco Fedele di Catrano with Sascha Greuter & Michael «Koko» Eberli, Esther Kempf, Valentin Hauri, Ilona Ruegg, Yves Sablonier, Karin Schwarzbek. Photo: Tom Menzi/Karin Schwarzbek

Giampaolo Russo

Interviewed by Oliver Rico

Oliver Rico: What is your professional background? What are your particular interests in the art field? How would you define your artistic practice? How would you describe your mission/purpose and point of differentiation on the Zurich art scene? What was your most interesting/successful project/exhibition, and which was the most challenging?

Giampaolo Russo: I'm a painter, etcher, and I also draw. I've been living between Italy and Switzerland. I studied fine arts painting at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts in Milan and later at the Art Education Department of the University of the Arts in Zurich.

In the last twenty years, I have had to take the initiative and organize 90% of my exhibitions independently and with other artists. I noticed early on that in Zurich classical art media like painting and sculpture are undervalued after all by local institutions and that I had to organize things myself to exhibit my works regularly.

In my artistic research, I'm always inspired by life itself. This curiosity led me towards the medium of painting.

In Zurich, I see very little fertile ground or a welcoming approach towards classical media like painting or sculpture by city institutions. The cultural background of this town, the harsh Calvinist thinking are reasons for this radical view: constructive and concrete painting was possible in Zurich but not fleshy figurative painting.

The Zurich University of the Arts, originally a school for the Applied Arts, has a tradition in design and graphics for industry. It and also the main juries in national art awards like in the Museum Helmhaus or Canton Zürich. The Institute of Fine Arts of the University of the Arts has focused for over twenty years on conceptual and intellectual forms of art, the idea being making to the detriment of handcraft and artistic technique.

If you are interested in doing painting—figurative painting—and developing your artwork only in the painting medium, you don't find much understanding for that. Through my part-time job at the library of the University of the Arts, I have had many conversations

and exchanges with students from the Fine Arts department on this topic.

Many students don't stay more than a year in the same medium, because the concept is more important than developing yourself in one medium.

There is currently no professor in painting; the last one was Thomas Müllenbach, who left many years ago. So, the students combine their work in art with other media: the work should be "transdisciplinary" and political, otherwise you are not "really contemporary." When you declare yourself a painter, you are often confronted with the word "conservative" here. Zurich is a little rich town (in terms of money) with interesting galleries and institutions, but at the same time with a limited, closed attitude in general, but also towards classical media.

In other parts of Europe, if you think of Berlin or London, cities with which Zurich likes to be compared, you don't have such epithets for painters: in these cities you notice that painting is deeply rooted in the cultural tradition. Painting has there an equal validity with other art media.

There are people interested in painting, also here in Zurich. And people who really understand are always few, everywhere. People who really "venture" and "risk" giving you a space for exhibitions are few and far between.

I remember speaking with the curator of the Kunstmuseum Luzern visiting the Leon Kossoff exhibition in the Kunstmuseum Luzern more than ten years ago. He said to me: "This exhibition is a risk here in this place." In his own words...you see in these words also what I mean, what the general view and mood is about painting and about a great painter like Kossoff here.

I think it's important to promote dialogue with other artists, especially with artists of other media. To keep up this interchange, I have organized exhibitions with other painters of the region: I see "my mission" to show that there are some very good painters in Switzerland, even if they are not well-known internationally.

Switzerland has produced some good artists in the last forty years internationally, but not painters. In Germany, there are names like Markus Lüpertz, Anselm Kiefer, and younger ones like Daniel Richter and Neo Rauch who have gained international recognition.

I founded the painters group SALON DER GEGENWART 2014 in Zurich. In the statement of the Salon der Gegenwart it is written: "THE SALON DER GEGENWART IS A GROUP OF PAINTERS FOUNDED IN ZURICH. The group came about to fill the gap in figurative painting. A loosely connected group of painters see figurative painting and sculpture as a central pillar of the contemporary art."

It's in the consciousness of all painters who have participated in a Salon-exhibition and all the people who have come to see the exhibitions, that there is a "gap" in Zurich in figurative painting.

I think it's an interesting experience to see painter friends of many years developing the own artwork in group exhibitions. Bendicht Fivian, Ercan Richter, Rosina Kuhn, Corinne Gudemann, Heiner Kielholz, Andrea Muheim, and other painters from the region have worked for thirty to forty years as figurative painters.

Art must be challenging to be interesting. So that every project can be different, and show new aspects of the participating artists, it has to be challenging. For example, in one of the Salon-exhibitions, we chose works that highlighted our artistic biographies. In another Salon show, the next one, which will be shown in late May 2021 in the former Hallen für neue Kunst Schaffhausen, we will exhibit works as a thematic development at the edge of abstraction.

It's very challenging to organize these exhibitions (which began in 2008 with Dichte Gegenständlichkeit, Kunsthalle Wil/2011 All Diese Altmodischen Sachen, and oxyd Kunsträume Winterthur, then to the series of exhibitions with the SALON DER GEGENWART). In all this organizational work, what really remains at the end is to see your artworks and those of the other artists grow and mature through mutual encounters.

OR: How did you find the space in which your exhibitions take place? Does it belong to a private person or maybe to the City of Zurich? What rent do you have to pay? How do you finance your project? Do you have funding? From whom?

GR: Let me return to the example of the SALON DER GEGENWART ZÜRICH, the painter organization, which has already shown the works of almost forty important painters of German-speaking Switzerland. The SALON DER GEGENWART ZÜRICH has put on four exhibitions since 2014 in different places in German-speaking Switzerland, (2016 Salzhaus, Brugg 2017 Museum Villa Flora, Winterthur 2018 Villa Renata, Basel 2019 Zeughaus, Uster). The next exhibition will take place in the Kammgarn West (former Hallen für Neue Kunst) at the end of May 2021 in Schaffhausen.

Even though the organization SALON DER GEGENWART was founded in Zurich, we have never found a place in Zurich to exhibit. I have made many attempts at requesting space in Zurich, for example, private ones like the Kunstraum Walcheturm or the Stiftung BINZ39 (where I had a studio grant for two years) or those under the purview of the City of Zurich. For example, the Museum Bäregasse: the museum was administered for like two years from 2012 for art projects by the City of Zurich under Miss Basting and the Cultural Council of the City of Zurich. I tried many times to apply for exhibition space at the Bäregasse, also for a group project before the creation of the SALON DER GEGENWART. The first time I was told that I have to wait and to ask in half a year, and when I asked half a year later, the place had already been booked by other projects until the end of programming period. As you see, it's a very diplomatic way to throw you out by the town cultural office.

So, I looked for spaces outside of Zurich, where I was more successful. Growing up in Italy, you learn to be less dependent on national institutions and more self-reliant.

For the projects I have arranged, the Canton Council of Zurich sometimes contributed a bit. But most support came from private companies and individuals.

OR: What role does your project space play in the city of Zurich locally (or internationally)? How are you connected in Zurich, with whom?

GR: I think the positive thing about Zurich is that it's not such a big city, so you get to know people fast, also people that are into art. I'm connected with many artists from Zurich and throughout German-speaking Switzerland.

The projects I initiated like the SALON DER GEGENWART have given me the opportunity to become acquainted with many people and many artists, also with people that might help in organizing an exhibition.

My studio in Zurich is in an old building in the oldest artists' association in town: the "Südstrasse." There are like ten other artists in this location.

Through competitions such as the portrait award of the National Portrait Gallery in London and some exhibitions in Italy and Germany, I have been able to get in touch with other artists and to exhibit in some places outside Switzerland.

In general, you have to persevere and work tirelessly to develop your art; in parallel, you also have to persist in the search for opportunities to exhibit and from time to time ask people who have art locales. Doing the artist is about being attentive and active, in sense of initiative and not to be discouraged by negative responses of juries or other parties.

OR: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

GR: In the last few years, with the closure of many private art galleries in Zurich, I wish that the Museum Helmhaus and also the new Kunsthaus would look to exhibit local artists more often.

I would also like to see more variety in the artists chosen in the city's and canton's art prizes and the national art prize as well. There should be more regular people on the juries for the city and cantonal art scholarships and not only curators and artists from the "Zurich art scene," so that the same artists and the same kind of art don't win all the prizes.

With the phenomenon of globalization, many exhibitions or artists are passed around from one curator to the next, on loan, as a "product" or object, without looking more closely at the artworks themselves.

In general, I wish that experts would take more time to look more carefully at works of art.

Giampaolo Russo was born in Zurich in 1974 but grew up and went to school near Lecce (Italy). In 1990, he came back to Zurich and attended the Liceo artistico (arts high school). Subsequently, he completed his studies in painting at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera and the ZHdK. In addition to scholarships from the Hulda and Gustav Zumsteg Foundation and Steo Foundation and several exhibitions in Switzerland, he was exhibited at the BP Portrait Award at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2010. In 2012, he lost almost his entire life's work in a fire in the Rote Fabrik, where he had his studio. In 2014, he founded the group SALON DER GEGENWART, whose aim is to make figurative painting and sculpture visible in German-speaking Switzerland. His paintings are exhibited in renowned galleries and museums in Switzerland, Italy, and England.

Oliver Rico (b. 1980 in Zurich) studied sociology and law in Zurich and Lucerne, after which he completed a Master's degree in communication and organization sociology in Lucerne. He was a visiting lecturer at the Department of Design/Cast/Audio-Visual Media at Zurich University of the Arts during the 2011-2012 semester. In 2017-2018, he gained the CAS Curating qualification, again at Zurich University of the Arts. He has worked in Switzerland and Spain as a recording manager and script consultant for short films. Other posts include work as a producer and dramatic advisor for the Actaeon Production Theatre Group and the theatrical association Hengst & Hitzkopf.



Salon der Gegenwart Villa Renta, Basel 2018. Photo: Franziska Stern



Studio of Giampaolo Russo. Photo: Oliver Rico

Enriching the Homogenic Zurich Art Scene: Esther Eppstein

Interviewed by Daniela Hediger

Esther Eppstein has spent the last twenty years hosting ‘message salon’, an independently artist-run space for experimental art practices and ideas. This makes her a key art figure in Zurich; her contribution was recognized in 2014 with the advancement award by the Canton of Zurich (Förderpreis des Kantons Zürich) for interdisciplinary art mediation. Esther Eppstein grew up in Zurich, and she states that this city was from the beginning and still is very important for her work, as she knows how the scene works here. This allows her to maintain and expand the network and her pool of national and international artists. She sees her artistic practice as bringing artists closer to each other, to strengthen bonds among the artists and to give a space to the “Dark Matter” zone. She is really interested in this zone, and she finds it also very important to take care of the artists who belong to this zone, as she also knows about the importance of it for a diverse and independent art scene.

The message salon’s actual format, “message salon embassy,” is an artist-run artist residency in Zurich; Esther Eppstein is the host, networker, and curator of it, and this is at the same time her artistic practice.

Daniela Hediger: Where would you see a connection between message salon and the title: Dark Matter, Grey Zones, Red Light, and Bling Bling?

EE: Dark Matter—I didn’t really know this expression before you explained it, but I definitely agree with this expression. Referring to Grey Zones: I always found it interesting to work with message salon in this grey zone, as I like to expand the borders and to experiment with it and sometimes, we also had to. For example, to finance the project, which we did with our illegal bar we ran for some time. To Red Light: when I opened the space in 1996 in the area of Kreis 4 in Zurich, there were a lot of message salons around, as it was the red-light district. Culturally, there was not a lot going on—just around four galleries but nothing else. And Bling Bling....probably art is lifestyle....or something like this...

DH: Gregory Sholette, the author of the book *Dark Matter*, states that, “The ‘Dark Matter’ of the artists are the ones who are not seen by the art critics. They are feeding the mainstream and the art elite with new forms and styles.” Do you observe this in Zurich, too?

EE: Yes, sure. I would say message salon is one of these places. I think they are very important, because these are the places where things happen and new things are born.

DH: Did you struggle sometimes with the fact that message salon belongs to this “Dark Matter” zone?

EE: The question is, how much Dark Matter? Even though I think that message salon belongs to this Dark Matter zone, the art spaces I ran from 1996 until 2013 were also recognized by the media as well as the established art scene. Especially in the ‘90s when it started with all the off-spaces in Zurich, off-spaces had a lot of influence also on the institutions and the galleries. I actually think that this is the reason that Zurich became such an interesting art city in the late ‘90s. Because it was exactly this mix of subcultural and high and low that happened in Zurich. Also, the people from the institutions visited the off-spaces. message salon, for example, was one of the sources for the exhibition of the curator Bice Curiger at Kunsthaus Zurich in 1998 with the title *Freie Sicht aufs Mittelmeer*. In this exhibition, a lot of the artists she showed were also exhibited at message salon and other off-spaces at this time.

DH: So, the acknowledgement you had, but also the money?

EE: No—this time not really. But because me and others constantly applied for funding, the government created at that time a new funding format as they recognized that a lot of things were going on. From this

time on, I always got a little support. But also, this funding changed as the system got more professionalized, and nowadays there is more competition and more consciousness on the other side to use this tool to form the scene. I think when I started, we were freer and there was more trust from the government, and it was less restricted.

DH: How free do you feel in your artistic practice/curatorial work nowadays? Do you sometimes have to commit and to whom?

EE: In my actual artistic/curatorial project with message salon embassy, I am quite free at the moment. It's always about finding the balance. But for me, it always was very important to be independent. This was also the reason why I always wanted to work as an off-space and didn't want to get institutionalized.

DH: Nowadays, you are bringing artists from all over the world to Zurich for a residency with your project, message salon embassy—how do you choose the artists you invite?

EE: It's a very similar way to how I used to invite the artists to my art spaces. It's coming out of the network and friendships, and it's always a personal thing. During the times I ran the art spaces, artists didn't apply with a portfolio. For me, it was much more important to get in contact personally, and it was not so much about the stuff the artist already did. It was more about sympathy, interest, questions, confusion, and spending time with this artist. And this is still the same motivation for my current project, message salon embassy. In this project, it is also about spending time together. With "Madame l'Ambassadeur," the artist visits openings, curators, parties, diners, places. And this is important for the artists who are from abroad to get connection into the Zurich art scene, and I think it is important for the Zurich art scene, as I feel that it is actually somehow quite homogenic.

DH: Are these artists in their own country of the Dark Matter side or already established ones?

EE: No, most of them are definitely from the Dark Matter side.

DH: Your curatorial concept is at the same time your artistic practice—to be the personal host of the artist and to produce with the artist a little zine during

the resident stay and to give somehow a frame to the resident stay. What is your statement in this as an artist or your own mission?

EE: My artistic practice and my mission I always saw and see in the friendship and network between the artists and to bring them together outside of the institutions. I think that we artists gave too much away of our independence the last time. I have the idea of strengthening the support of each other, solidarity, and bringing the artists together. I also feel that an artist's life sometimes is not really understood, and that's why I think it is important to create spaces where artists can just spend time together without this pressure of constant producing and entertaining. But at the same time, I don't want to lose the connection to the audience and the public; that's why message salon embassy is publishing with the artist a zine in limited edition, something that remains, and the artist can spread back home in their community.

DH: In 2014, you won the advancement award of the Canton of Zurich (Förderpreis des Kantons Zürich). Do you think this helped you get acknowledged and also get easier funding for your projects?

EE: I was really honored and very pleased to get this prize, which also gave me satisfaction as I got acknowledgement. But I wouldn't say that it helped to get more funding. For some of the ones who won the prize, it was even harder to get funding after this.

DH: How do you fund the current project, message salon embassy?

EE: The partnership with the hotel allows me at the moment to run this project with the residents from all over the world. And I am currently looking for financial support with foundations and government. It is not about how much money you can offer for the stay, but more about this artist network and solidarity I was talking about before. I have the—probably romantic—idea that it is not about being the only shining star over the Dark Matter, as I think this is not what it is about.

DH: Who do you want to reach with your exhibitions? Do you have a target audience?

EE: With message salon embassy, I would say it is the artist community. I don't run a public space at the

moment. But I have a collaboration with the off-space and window gallery Die Diele at Langstrasse; some residents of the message salon embassy have the possibility to have an exhibition in the windows. It works temporarily as a window from message salon to the public. At the opening, we present a new zine, open a bar; it happens as a get-together with new friends and the local art scene.

DH: In what way does the cultural environment of Zurich play a role in your artistic/curating practice?

EE: From the beginning, I saw myself as a pool for artists, and I always was interested in the Dark Matter of Zurich. The city of Zurich as my background is and was always very important for my curatorial work as well as for my artistic practice. I grew up in Zurich, and I feel related to the art scene in Zurich, as I know how the scene here functions.

DH: What would be your wish or vision for the art scene in Zurich?

EE: I wish that the young scene would become braver and create their own spaces. I have the impression that most of them are involved in the institutionalized art life, and I wish they would have more *esprit* or power and motivation to create independent spaces for community, where experiments can happen, for exchange, for fun and lust and spending time together.

Esther Eppstein (b. 1967 Zurich/CH) currently lives and works in Zurich. In 1996, the artist and curator founded message salon, Zurich's longest existing independently run art space, which has matured since then into a central meeting point for the local art scene. It became a gathering place where artists could connect and exhibit their work, serving as the first exhibition venue for many young artists. It started at Ankerstrasse (1996–98), then moved to a mobile artist-run space in the form of a caravan (1998–2000) and now part of the Collection of Migros Museum, then to Rigiplatz (2001–06), followed by Perla-Mode at Langstrasse (2006–13), and since 2014 it is the message salon en route. The message salon embassy, Eppstein's first artist-run artist residency in Zurich is her current project and artistic as well as curatorial practice. You can also find out more about her work in her book: *Esther Eppstein—Message Salon* (Scheidegger und Spiess, 2016),

an artist monograph with analogue photography by Esther Eppstein, a selection out of 58 Albums of 100 photos, showing eight years of Perla-Mode, the artists, the exhibitions, the community, the visitors, and Langstrasse.

www.messagesalon.ch

Daniela Hediger is a curator and founder of WOM!-art. WOM!-art organizes exhibitions and events dealing with current issues and values such as diversity/plurality and norms in our society and in economy such as in the working world. Based in Zurich, she studied Fashion Design in Zurich and worked as a stylist before running the cultural location Seefeld-Razzia, where she organised exhibitions, art performances, concerts, fashion shows, film and literary events. Currently she studies in the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).



message salon embassy Zurich Nord, 2017. Photo: Esther Eppstein



The residents Ninutsa Shatberashvili and Sandro Sulaberidze on tour with Madame l'Ambassadeur, Kronenhalle 2017. Photo: Esther Eppstein



message salon embassy Zürich Nord, Daniela Palimariu, 2018. Photo: Esther Eppstein



essage salon embassy Zine Daniela Palimariu, 2018. Photo: Esther Eppstein



message salon embassy Zine Nr.12, Desislava Pancheva, 2018. Photo: Esther Eppstein



message salon embassy zines ,2018. Photo: Esther Eppstein



message salon embassy. *Davix zu Gast bei Die Diele*, Zurich 2019.
Photo: Esther Eppstein

Part 3

Four Years After Manifesta 11: Christian Jankowski Interviewed by Sergio Edelsztein

*In 2016, the city of Zurich hosted Manifesta 11. This show must have been the biggest artistic event ever presented in the city. Manifesta, the “European Nomadic Biennial” is an initiative that has been staging large art exhibitions every two years since 1996 in different cities and regions in Europe. The 11th edition was curated by the artist Christian Jankowski under the title *What People do for Money: Some Joint Ventures—a proper concept for a city that has branded itself as an ultra-rich financial hub.**

Jankowski invited thirty artists to come to Zurich and collaborate with diverse people from various professions creating a new site-specific work to be presented at the place of work of the collaborator, and simultaneously in a Zurich art institution. The professions of the local “collaborators” went from firefighters and policemen to security consultants—waste plant operators, a sex therapist, a chef, a dentist, a dog hairdresser, translators, schoolteachers, a transgender escort, and many more.

Sergio Edelsztein: Christian, within the framework of Manifesta and your curatorial premise, you had an intense relationship with the city—from the Cultural Department of the Municipality to art-and-architecture students and even high-school kids—and, of course, the public in general, so you have a unique outlook on the city’s view of itself and the reality out there.

To try to understand these issues, I did what no one does—I took the catalogue and read those short salutatory texts that normally open these publications written by various politicians and bureaucrats. It is interesting to see the process and understand the aim of such an endeavor in their own words. In these short texts, there is much talk about. Two interesting points: one is stressing the position of Switzerland and specially Zurich as being “geographically located in the center of Europe—but not aligned with Europe politically.”

Christian Jankowski: This view, “We are not really part of the parade and we are distinct,” reminds me a bit of the position of artists. It creates a ground for negoti-

ating. It’s also a very good excuse for exceptions if you know how to instrumentalize this special position.

SE: The other point that is constantly stressed in the texts is the position of Zurich as a first-class cultural capital with museums, collections, etc.—especially interesting is their boasting about a “vibrant off-space scene and a rich galley scene.” From your experience and your interactions throughout the preparation of Manifesta: How does Zurich’s political, financial, and cultural elite see itself and their role in fostering this image of the city?

CJ: Everyone thinks: “Oh! Switzerland is such a rich country—it’ll be easy to receive funds,” but it’s not—although it is not impossible. With Manifesta, it was especially complex. I was in some meetings with sponsors, and it was clear to me the usual way the event was “sold” to countries in Eastern or Southern Europe would not work in Switzerland. It was more of a mentality issue. You can’t come to the Swiss with this attitude that “we know better,” patronizing them. There was some tension there, and sometimes it got a bit bizarre. But however difficult it was to get people on board, when they say “yes”—things get done.

SE: Did you feel this was a conflict along the process?

CJ: If there was a conflict, I think it was between the office of Peter Haerle, who is the director of cultural affairs of the city, and some other departments and politicians in the city, justifying the event and the financial effort imposed by it—once the decision was made. I had a great collaboration with Peter; he did his best to support. He knew how to get through, permissions, etc. A project like the Pavilion of Reflection took a lot of political negotiations.

SE: What you say is interesting, and curiously, it comes across in the catalogue texts I mentioned. Alexander Rinnooy Kan and Hedwig Fijen—both from Manifesta, stress again and again that they

were the ones that selected Zurich as the 2016 venue, while Peter Haerle opens his article specifically stating that it was Zurich's choice (to submit). Moreover, while Manifesta argued that: "By partnering with the city of Zurich and with Cabaret Voltaire, Manifesta hopes to hold up a mirror to the socio-political and the cultural conditions of Zurich," Haerle states: "The city of Zurich itself would be the exhibition space and our society would be on show." He then concludes in a statement that looks like a quote from Allan Kaprow: "We want to dissolve the boundaries between art in general and to the space in which art is shown. The aim is to create awareness of the fact that art can be part of our lives." Are these empty words? Clichés? Is this an aim to be achieved? In Zurich?

CJ: That is a very avant-garde statement—almost Dadaist! The curatorial concept of Manifesta 11 was to couple an artist with a professional from another field than art. These professions were chosen by the artists. The local professionals, we called them hosts, were there to inspire, connect, and help the artistic productions. Ultimately, they provided the necessary space for showing the final artwork in their own working environments. That in itself is an un-orthodox way of doing art; it is also an un-orthodox way of showing art, and I think Peter Haerle is talking about that. The decision to work in the professional's working environments make a complex and specific setting, a unique situation that informs the artists and later the audience. I heard about the Artists Placement Group from the '60s, but also it was Jan Hoet's *Chambres d'Amis* that inspired me. He invited the artists into the private houses of art lovers in Ghent. I invited the artists to the working spaces of art lovers in Zurich. I could have called the Manifesta 11 "Professions d'Amis."

In the end, we showed each of the thirty resulting new artworks in three places: 1. in the semipublic working spaces of our hosts: diverse spaces shaped by their professions and businesses; 2. in the white cubes of Zurich art institutions (Löwenbräu and Helmhaus); and 3. in the form of thirty artistic film productions at the Pavilion of Reflections.

It was amazing to follow the working process between the artist and the locals, and how their encounters and negotiations led to the final artworks. As an example, the artist Marco Schmitt started as an intern at the Zurich Police. He sat in the backseat during driving night patrols through the streets of Zurich engaging the officers in discussions by asking them about the

strangest thing that ever happened to them during working hours. This scene could be witnessed by seeing the film produced about this project, showcased at the Pavilion of Reflections. At the same time, at the police station the policemen arranged a cinema room in one of their offices, open to the public to see the artist's video featuring the police officers as actors. Concomitantly to the police station, in the white cube of Löwenbräu, Schmitt presented a group of clay sculptures informed by the interviews with the officers. To see a Zurich police officer using a baguette bread to have a surrealist smoking experience was amazing, they were experimental—even anarchic.

In the end, the fact that people collaborate in "doing art" is always the ultimate "excuse" for opening up the gates. Whether or not they understand the whole depth of an artistic concept is not so important. It's not the same for everybody. As Rio Reiser sang: *Ich bin anders, weil ich wie alle bin und weil alle anders sind.* (I am different because I am like everyone, and everyone is different). To allow things to happen is a gift to art, and here again, I want to thank all our hosts for doing what they did.

SE: It's interesting that in the catalogue, especially in Jakob Tanner's article "Creative Coups," the author tries to narrate the chronology of Zurich—but he can do it only in terms of economy and sociology. As much as he tries to include prominent cultural figures like Elias Canetti, Stefan Zweig, and Romain Rolland, these can be pictured only on a promenade along the Limmat. James Joyce is mentioned only in talking about the cemetery. The exception is Cabaret Voltaire. Talking about this, it is also interesting that in all the bureaucrats' texts, it sounded as if the whole Manifesta coming to Zurich in 2016 was orchestrated as a commemoration of the 100th year for the Cabaret Voltaire and the Dada movement. It sounds like they are very proud of its "subversive quality."

Do you feel that Cabaret Voltaire has acted throughout history—and still does—as a fig leaf for Zurich as a conservative society, or do you think the Cabaret and Dadaism itself is somehow rooted in the city's psyche?

CJ: Well, it's interesting that even though the city of Zurich really prides itself in the Cabaret Voltaire, the situation of the place is incredibly precarious, even as they commemorate the 100 years. I witnessed this when

I was there. It was a disaster. The Municipality of Zurich missed many opportunities to develop the place. It so happens that after failing to acquire the building, the municipality is renting it from a private company. So, they think they are spending a lot of money on the Cabaret—but only on rent! They do not have any budget for programming, so, in turn, they rent it out for any commercial purpose, failing to give the place a specific character that would resonate on the things that happened there 100 years ago—things that they are so proud of. I think that for a movement like the Dada, and this 100-year celebration, they are missing to create a lasting symbol for the city.

SE: Was it difficult to work with the people of Zurich?

CJ: In general, dealing with real estate was problematic. Obviously, since it is so expensive, there is a lot of “value” in just being able to use a space. For instance, in the Helmhaus, where Santiago Sierra’s work was presented: the upper floors are art venues, somehow—but the space on the street level is rented to many people, from events to sausage stalls, and it was every difficult to have the space for the whole duration of the Manifesta. You can imagine, to build down an artist work like this and to re-install it after just one weekend is not an easy task. It was just impossible to have everyone involved at the same table to discuss this...

And yet, I was busier fighting the structure of Manifesta. For me, the problems with the city of Zurich were quite marginal. I can understand resistance from the bureaucrats—I am used to dealing with this, but I was not prepared to have these issues with an art institution like Manifesta, and how people had fights within... It could have been more fun, I sometimes dream.

SE: And what kind of collaboration did you strike with the local community?

CJ: Well, there were a great number of Zurich-based people involved in Manifesta 11. Take, for instance, the work of the “art detectives”—who acted in the artistic film productions of each project. Each film team included a “detective” who interviewed the artist and the host, a director, camera, sound, music, post-production, etc. This was massive, but also an interesting grouping. The “art detectives” themselves were high school pupils. Some of them were eleven or twelve years old and others fifteen. The camera, and most technical part, was done by ZHdK students. This was a group

around professor Martin Zimper that was very engaged and fundamental.

In general—it was very important to collaborate with the main academic institutions in the city—the ZHdK and the ETH. The first was involved in the “software,” the artistic film productions; the ETH team lead by Tom Emerson was involved in the “hardware,” the design and production of the Pavilion of Reflections. I also had great support from the institutions and the art community: Parkett, Löwenbrau—of course, with Heike Munder of Migros Museum, Daniel Baumann, and Maja Hoffmann.

SE: So, basically the main mediators of the works were high-school kids?

CJ: In a way, yes. I see these films as artworks in their own right; they are informed by how I work on my own works. They float between performance, documentation, video art, collective works, and individual ones, refusing to stick to a definition. These films were the core of the programming at the Pavilion of Reflections.

SE: Ok, let’s talk a bit about the Pavilion of Reflections. It was indeed beautiful and obviously very expensive. What was the aim of it? Did it leave an imprint in the collective experience of the Zurich inhabitants? Were there any calls for leaving it in place as a new landmark of the city?

CJ: Well, the idea of Manifesta 11 was that it would be spread all over the city, not concentrated in one area. But I also wanted to have a central place that would be a “neutral ground,” a place that would gather the new energy spread in the city. The lake is so specific to Zurich that we thought we should build a “piazza” on the water. It was nice that it became a symbol for Manifesta 11. Lots of people were going there, as the architecture was so prominent, and in a location where no one could miss it. Once there, the films and the events mediated and expanded the meaning of the different works in the show. It really created a new democratic space in the center of a city as urbanly stiff as Zurich.

There were calls for keeping it, yes—but that was tremendously expensive. There was also an idea to ship it to another part of the lake, and that too was discarded because of costs. Also, Manifesta wanted to sell it, not give it for free—although it was sponsored by the local electricity company—and that was another expense no one could take on. I would have loved to see this

amazing raft re-appearing in other art-venues and places—imagine it by the Thames in London or in a deserted place. I see it as a collective Gesamtkunstwerk. To me, the Pavilion of Reflections could have also ended up in a private or public collection. But in the end, although it was destroyed in its entirety, I am happy that it was and still remains the symbol of Manifesta 11.

SE: What in your view was left for Zurich about Manifesta 11?

CJ: An idea.

Zurich is a city of individualists, so it is hard to pinpoint a certainty. However, there were valuable and exciting aspects about these professions' forms of exchange and the eye-to-eye encounters that would not easily happen without this artistic curatorial framework. The artists, the professionals, and the citizens of Zurich, the biennale visitors and the Manifesta institution itself were all exposed to each other in unexpected and fundamental ways that managed to brush off the well-known 'neutrality' of a country like Switzerland. In collaborations, like the thirty we did, you are either in it or not... neutral is not exactly what you are looking for. Our Zurich "hosts" positioned themselves in the art. And this is a unique experience for these exposed people but also for all the visitors who see them in their "new" artsy positions. The creative agency given to the thirty "art detective" youngsters can be seen as a way to disregard that highly bureaucratic and standardized system of how art should be mediated and instead empower the teenagers' artistic intuition and interest. All of these experiences got pulled together in the Pavilion of Reflections. So, in the end, even if I wish I had involved more local artists, I still managed to work with them, but more with the upcoming generations.

So, to me, what stays behind is the spirit created when artists and people outside the art world meet on eye level and collaborate to make images that are new to all of us. And this spirit is embodied in the catalogue and the videos that were made for the Biennale. Right after the opening, Maurizio Cattelan wrote to me: Good morning Christian! Congratulations for the beautiful show!! Yesterday I spent an hour watching the videos about the projects at the Pavilion of Reflections and they are AWESOME! Those together are a real Django piece. In the future, all shows should have such type of video coming along with the works. To my regret, the videos were never published by Manifesta to be viewed by the public, which is why, from today on, you will find them on my website.

Christian Jankowski (b. 1968, Göttingen, DE) lives and works in Berlin. Since 2005, he has held a professorship at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart. His work is in the field of conceptual and performance art, for which he uses a variety of media and genres, such as film, video, and photography as well as painting, sculpture, and installation. Jankowski initiates collaborations between the visual arts and other professional worlds such as religion, politics, and entertainment. His works are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, the Tate, London, and the New National Gallery, Berlin, among others. Jankowski has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions, most recently at Fluentum in Berlin (2020), at Joségarciá, mx, Merida (2020), at ARoS Aarhus (2020), at the 21st Century Museum in Kanazawa (2020), the Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2019), the KCUA Kyoto (2018), the Yokohama Triennial (2017), and at the Haus am Lützowplatz, Berlin (2016).

Sergio Edelsztein was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1956. Studied at the Tel Aviv University (1976-85). Funded and directed Artifact Gallery in Tel Aviv (1987-1995). In 1995 funded The Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv and has been its director and chief curator since then, he is now in the board of CCA. In the framework of the CCA he curated seven Performance Art Biennials and five International Video Art Biennials – Video Zone. Also curated numerous experimental and video art screenings, retrospectives and performances events. Major exhibitions curated for the CCA include, among others, shows of Guy Ben Ner, Boaz Arad, Doron Solomons, Roe Rosen and Jan Tichy – and international artists like Rosa Barba, Ceal Floyer and Marina Abramovic. Since 1995 curated exhibitions and timebased events in Spain, China, Poland, Singapore and elsewhere. Curated the Israeli participation at the 24th Sao Paulo Biennial (1998) and the 2005 Israeli Pavilion at the 51st Biennale in Venice. L lectured, presented video programs and published writings in Israel, Spain, Brazil, Italy, Austria, Germany, China, the USA, Argentina etc. Writes extensively for catalogues, web sites and publications.



Pavilion of Reflections, Manifesta 11, Zurich, 2016

Constellations of Knowledges: Interview with Anette Bhagwati

Interviewed by Gözde Filinta

3 March 2020

Gözde Filinta: What is your professional background?

Anette Bhagwati: My professional practice began as an assistant to the department of exhibition in film and media in the early 1990s at Haus der Kulturen Welt (HKW), a multidisciplinary cultural institution in Berlin. I studied in Germany and the UK at the School of Oriental African Studies (SOAS). I'm an art historian, anthropologist of art, and geographer.

In the year 2000, I became the deputy head of the visual arts exhibition department at HKW and stayed until 2006. In conjunction with external curators I managed and oversaw numerous exhibitions that looked at rising and emerging contemporary art scenes from specific regions like Iran or China. Exhibitions included *China-Between Past and Future*, *DisORIENTation: Contemporary Arab Artists in the Middle East*.

In 2006, I left HKW for family reasons and moved to Canada for 6 years, where I worked as an affiliate professor at Concordia University in the Department of Art History. In my teaching and research I focused on exhibition studies, curatorial studies and global art.

In 2012, I returned to Berlin and joined the HKW again, this time as the project director of long-term curatorial research projects, including 'The Anthropocene Project'. I managed the project, devising the overall concept together with the artistic director and initiator of 'The Anthropocene project'. My role was to oversee and weave together the themes, projects and strands of research, initiated and developed by the different departments of HKW. My task was to identify overarching topics emerging from each project, to link them in meaningful ways, to devise strategies for research-oriented and transdisciplinary curatorial research, to initiate national and international cooperations, to curate exhibitions and develop a dramaturgy for public events. The Anthropocene Project is still running under

the direction of Bernd Scherer. I moved to Zurich in November 2019 where I had been appointed as the new director of the Museum Rietberg.

GF: How would you define your curatorial practice?

AB: The HKW has informed my curatorial approach in many ways. I understand curating as asking questions, as developing particular forms, and giving a specific *Gestalt*, a curatorial shape, to specific issues. My idea of curating is not representational, in the sense that I do not come up with a visual equivalent, a representative form of an ultimate truth. Instead, I am interested in a philosophical question, a collection history, an object biography, and later understand in which forms, space, relations are required, correspond best to answer these questions. I understand it as a collaborative effort, a process in which knowledge is produced in changing constellations of objects, spaces and people.

In the mid-1990s, the notion of a curator was very different. In the early years at HKW, even the heads of the department who would conceive the exhibition would not be called curator. Another aspect of my work at HKW which shaped my understanding of curatorial practice is the notion of "collaboration and cooperation". If you work trans-culturally, you have to ask yourself: What do I exhibit and to whom? Who is speaking? What is being conveyed?

Back at HKW, when we developed regional exhibitions featuring contemporary art scenes from around the world, we commissioned curators from the region in order to avoid a Western bias and invite an informed local perspective instead.

GF: How is your working process at Museum Rietberg?

AB: The team of curators at the Museum Rietberg is very diverse; each of them has a different training, regional expertise and theoretical approach. They

develop an idea and present it, first to the board of curators, then to the Executive Board for discussion and feedback. Criteria include the connection to the collection, the quality and depth of research, the relevance and acuity of its topic and its impact and relevance to different stake holders and communities, both locally and internationally. Our latest exhibition, 'Fiktion Kongo, ("Congo as Fiction") for example, dedicated one section to the notion of beauty in the art of Congo of the 1930s. From there a line of inquiry explored different practices of fashion and design, including the Sapeurs both in Congo and in Switzerland.

GF: How does the Museum Rietberg situate itself in current debates about restitution and provenance research?

AB: Museum Rietberg is very engaged in the question of provenance. Already ten years ago it created a specific position for a historian to research the collection history, as well as the context in which an object was acquired. An essential part of the museum is the collaboration with source communities, but also the collaboration with artists, museums, experts, curators, art historians.

GF: What do you think of the Zurich art scene?

AB: It has been a great experience so far. I am deeply impressed by the way, in which art institutions in Zurich reach out to each other, collaborate, connect, and develop something together. Another strength of Zurich is its outstanding universities, as well as a lively art scene, engaged with artistic and curatorial research, and experimental practices. These activities are highly stimulating for our own practice, and openness to ask fundamental questions about art, curating, and exhibition-making.

Annette Bhagwati studied Anthropology, African Art and Literature, Art History, and Geography in Freiburg im Breisgau, Berlin, and London and received her PhD at the School of African and Oriental Studies London. From 2012 to autumn 2019 she worked at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin where she headed various curatorial, long-term research projects. At the same institution she realized a number of exhibition projects at the interface of art and science in curatorial as well as organizational terms. Annette Bhagwati took up position as director of the Museum Riet-

berg in November 2019. From 2009 to 2012 Annette Bhagwati taught Anthropology of Art, Museology, and History of Exhibiting Non-Western Art at the Department of Art History at Concordia University, Montreal. Annette Bhagwati has close ties with numerous associations and research networks some of which she co-initiated herself. In addition, she is a highly sought-after speaker and host at international symposia and congresses. Countries she visits for research and study purposes include Benin, India, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and Canada.

Gözde Filinta is a curatorial researcher and writer based in Zurich. She has taken part in multiple art projects since 2012 in various roles. Currently, she is working on her research on multispecies survival in the Anthropocene and the use of art narratives, for her ongoing MAS program at ZHdK in curating. Along with her research articles, she writes about contemporary art in relation to her research area. She continues working on her curatorial projects in Zurich and Istanbul, and is genuinely interested in urgent global issues, interspecies relations, and the non-human in artistic expressions and narratives.

Fredri Fischli and Niels Olsen

Interviewed by Dorothee Richter

Dorothee Richter: What is your professional background?

Fredri Fischli and Niels Olsen: We have known each other since teenage times, studied art history together, and did internships at museums and galleries. During our studies, we did a project space in the studio of Niels' grandmother called STUDIOLLO: a study room, studio, and exhibition space showing artists and architects from different generations. At the time, we also started to publish, did international curatorial programs, and were given a stipend by the Gebert Foundation.

DR: How would you describe your artistic/curatorial concept of the space?

FF/NO: gta exhibitions is part of the institute for the history and theory of architecture at the ETH Zurich. In a collaborative way, we work with the students, researchers, and architects of the university to try to invite protagonists that challenge the discourse at the school and beyond.

DR: How would you define your curatorial practice individually?

FF/NO: Collaborative. We always work in discussion with others—every exhibition is about a collaboration with other people—artists, architects, writers, academics, musicians, etc.

DR: How did you come up with the idea/concept?

FF/NO: Studying together, you share and discuss your ideas. You share music and movies and challenge each other. We try to continue with this mentality.

DR: How do you select the proposers/artists? International, Swiss-based?

FF/NO: We select what challenges us. We mostly show artists or architects that we would like to learn more about and maybe don't understand in the beginning. So, we try to get closer to the practice by working on an exhibition together.

DR: What was the most interesting/successful project/exhibition, and which was the most challenging?

FF/NO: There are different ways of success. The traveling exhibition and book with Trix and Robert Haussmann got the most feedback. The current moment in the middle of the corona crisis is the most challenging. Many things you take usually for granted are turned upside down and art and architecture in their practice as a whole are very much questioned in this moment.

DR: How did you get to the position at the ETH?

FF/NO: We were approached to apply for it. For the interview, we had to present a possible program and concept.

DR: How are the exhibitions financed?

FF/NO: Our funds by the ETH would allow us a basic program without sponsors. But as we want to do new productions, we have sponsors from the building sector and culture foundations.

DR: Which exhibitions or other projects do you do?

FF/NO: We do exhibitions with mostly young artists at Luma Foundation's schwarzescafé. We initiated this space designed by the artist Heimo Zobernig. We are editors at Kaleidoscope magazine where we publish interviews. Fredri teaches a little bit at the HEAD in Geneva, and we always try to do exhibitions beyond the ETH but that are nevertheless linked to it. Our current exhibition, for example, is traveling to the Harvard GSD, and at the Fondazione Prada we're preparing an exhibition which will later travel to gta exhibitions.

DR: How do you finance your projects?

FF/NO: We do fundraising for the ETH, but other projects need to be funded by our collaborators.

DR: Are you employed in a full-time job or percentages (as often happens at the ZHdK)?

FF/NO: Yes, we're also employed in percentages, which gives us the freedom to work at projects that are not linked to the ETH, but mostly they are.

DR: What role do the other functions of your space play?

FF/NO: There's no clear separation. Everybody is doing what he likes, and if no one is doing a project it's a sign that the project shouldn't be done.

DR: How would you define your curatorial practice as a collective Or do you have defined roles?

FF/NO: We're neither a collective nor do we have defined roles.

DR: Do some artists sell their artwork during the exhibition?

FF/NO: Our shows in most cases don't take place in commercial spaces.

DR: How do you archive?

FF/NO: That's a little bit a problem. We archive, of course, all images, texts, and so on, but with e-mails we're afraid that all the correspondence will be lost and we should have a more systematic approach to archiving. We don't do editions, but maybe we should start to do them.

DR: How many women/men to you show?

FF/NO: We never made the count. But possibly at gta exhibitions we did more shows with men, and at schwarzescafé less shows with men than with other genders. In architecture, the imbalance of gender is even more a problem than in art. When we did the exhibition with Petra Blaisse, we realized she's possibly the first woman who ever got a solo show in the main hall of the ETH.

DR: What role does your space play in the city of Zurich locally (or internationally)?

FF/NO: There aren't as many exhibition spaces for architecture as there are for art, so probably we stick out somehow internationally. To make exhibitions at a school is also special. Often architecture schools have an exhibition space but no curators. The professors use it to do their individual projects, and therefore they are

quite diverse and don't stick out as a program but for their individual projects.

DR: What is the role of art in your opinion and from your position?

FF/NO: We were just talking about the lecture "Life and Prison" by Catherine Malabou we watched on YouTube in which she elaborates on the prison and fascism of language. This, too, of course, goes for art making: it's a prison. How can you turn things upside down and actually challenge society through culture? We think that's possible, but you need to come up with the unexpected.

DR: How are you connected in Zurich, with whom?

FF/NO: The ETH is a place where over 2,000 students of architecture and over forty chairs unite. Most of our friends are somehow connected to culture, and the city is not that big.

DR: How are real space and digital space connected in your projects?

FF/NO: So far, we have neglected the digital space a bit. We have a shared Instagram account, but it's not very active and we archive the exhibitions online in a simple way. With so many exhibitions and art projects going online, they sometimes risk of appearing as spam. But generally we would like to develop a meaningful project for the digital space.

DR: Do you see exhibitions as public spaces?

FF/NO: Our exhibition space is in a school, so we have to continue to work on to make it more public and that people don't think they just relate to the students from there. But it's clear that not everybody would come up to the campus on Höggerberg. We are aware that there's a barrier to enter an art exhibition if you're excluded by class, gender, and more. This barrier is different when you enter a science campus, but it's also there.

DR: Could you tell more about the visibility of your project space—how do you make it known and visited?

FF/NO: As the students cross it every day, they know it. We do very little advertisement, only in Texte zur Kunst.

We think and hope that people come to see our exhibitions because they appreciate and therefore follow the program.

DR: What type of audience does your exhibition space attract?

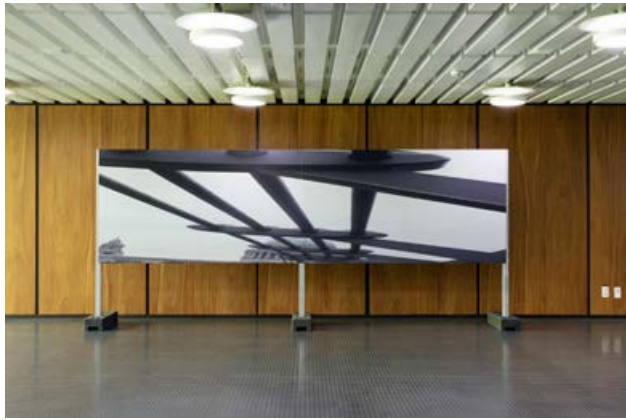
FF/NO: Mostly students of architecture but also artists, researchers, etc. Probably the vast majority are from academia or the cultural sector.

DR: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

FF/NO: Lower rents and more writers and publishers.

Fredri Fischli and **Niels Olsen** are the directors of gta exhibitions at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at ETH Zurich. Together they have curated numerous exhibitions on art and architecture, including in 2018 *Ready-mades Belong to Everyone* at the Swiss Institute, New York; Trix and Robert Haussmann at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin and Nottingham Contemporary, and the retrospective of *Inside Outside / Petra Blaisse* at La Triennale di Milano and at ETH Zurich. Recent publications include *Serpas* (Koenig Books), *Richard Hamilton and Sigfried Giedion* (jrp Ringier), *Heimo Zobernig. schwarzescafé* (Koenig Books) and *Arno Brandlhuber* (Edition Patrick Frey).

Dorothee Richter is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, and Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS/MAS Curating, which she founded in 2005 at the Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland. She is director of the PhD in Practice in Curating Programme, a cooperation of the Zurich University of the Arts and the University of Reading. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she was initiator of Curating Degree Zero Archive and Curator at Kuenstlerhaus Bremen. She is Executive Editor of the web journal OnCurating.org.



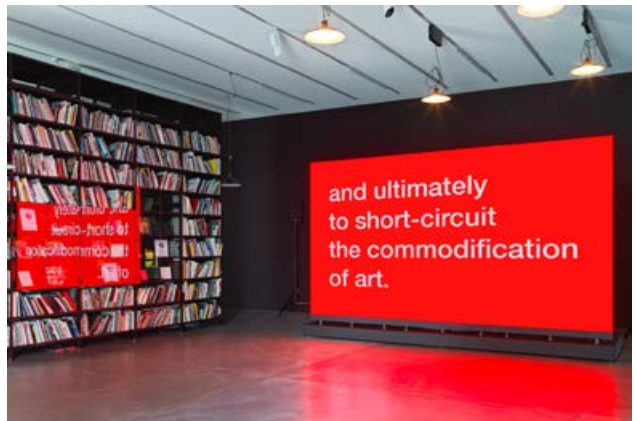
Gili Tal, *Mastering the Nikon D750*, 2019, gta exhibitions, ETH Zurich. Photo by Nelly Rodriguez



Cinzia Ruggeri, *Home. A User's Manual*, 2019, Curated with Valentina Ehnimb, gta exhibitions, ETH Zurich. Photo by Nelly Rodriguez



Reba Maybury, *A-good-individual*, 2019, schwarzescafé, Luma Westbau, Zurich. Photo by Nelly Rodriguez



Tony Cokes, *Before and After the Studio: Volume II*, 2019, schwarzescafé, Luma Westbau, Zurich. Photo by Nelly Rodriguez



Precious Okoyomon, *A Drop of Sun Under The Earth*, 2019, schwarzescafé, Luma Westbau. Photo by Nelly Rodriguez



Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin, *The Total Vomitorium*, schwarzescafé, Luma Westbau, Zurich. Photo by Nelly Rodriguez

Marc Streit

Interviewed by Abongile Gwele and Patrycja Wojciechowska

In 2012, Marc Streit founded the zürich moves! festival for contemporary arts practice in performing arts. zürich moves! is a yearly, international festival that breaks boundaries between different interpretations of contemporary performing arts practices. The festival presents contemporary performance works in a theater context as well as dance in the white cube and alternative spaces. Every year the festival is constructed around a different topic and builds a different curatorial context. The multifaceted platform creates time-based experiences and engages and challenges the embodied presence and abstraction of the body. The very core idea of the festival is to bring contemporary performance to more hybrid spaces, disrupting the distance between performer and audience, creating an artistic flow and breaking the traditional and classical ideas of normative thinking. Over the past nine editions, Streit has forged the festival into a happening of artists and spectators, an intersection between art and life. When Marc mentions “that by contextualizing and queering bodies and spaces, I am looking for experiences that push boundaries and investigate our contemporary society beyond physical performance,” one has to add that the festival is an important opportunity for the Zurich LGBTIQ+ community to claim and perform visibility.

Abongile Gwele: Where does the uniqueness of curating something as ephemeral as performance lie? What are your key considerations in this practice?

Marc Streit: What fascinates me most in the field of contemporary performance is the fact that we are dealing with real bodies in real time which have to be taken into account not only in the artistic creation of pieces but also in the mediation and presentation of these artistic works. Therefore, we must have a great sense for people, the architecture, the space, and its surroundings. I consider the spectator a co-inhabitant of the respective space and want to free them from being a passive observer. The sensibility and ability in order to accommodate and facilitate a respective work is closely connected to the vulnerability and precarious-

ness due to liveness and ephemerality. I always remind myself that the audience is as individual as its diversity.

AG: How would you explain the notion of “Dark Matter” as proposed by Gregory Sholette, who laments that a vast majority of artists are ignored by critics and that this broader creative culture feeds the mainstream with new forms and styles that can be commodified and used to sustain the few artists admitted into the elite, in relation to your practice and the Zurich context?

MS: I am interested in collective experiences. I intend to make things visible, freeing them from invisibility and giving them dignity and credit. My practice has a very personal approach and is mainly driven by the encounters with people. Dark Matter is very much driven by the capitalistic contemporary art market. Live performance rooted in dance and theater has always been my main interest, and therefore other modes of production are applied.

Patrycja Wojciechowska: Your practice and its criteria have a very international take. In my understanding, they move freely between expressions of various identities and cultural backgrounds. I was wondering, how do you find Zurich’s cultural scene in this context, especially as your base and location of the festival?

MS: Context and geography are very important factors and have to be taken into account when contextualizing a platform like zürich moves!. The Zurich contemporary performance and dance scene has grown exponentially over the past decade. Considering the size of the city and its cultural landscape, I find the scene here a pretty vibrant one.

AG: How do you feel the festival has had an impact on the Swiss arts scene as a Swiss political and economic reality?

MS: I find it interesting to observe how zürich moves! has formed a network amongst Swiss and Zurich-based

artists and even beyond. Because of the thematic frame which I create for each edition, I always bring new artists on board while also bringing people back who have been contributing to zürich moves! in a substantial way over the course of the past nine years.

PW: I'm based in London. So, for me, that saturated but still very rich, multicultural, endlessly fast pace of events is quite normal. So, when I come to Zurich, I notice immediately different pace and dynamics. One cannot help the comparison.

MS: I like to refer to a quote by George Orwell: "It is only when you meet someone of a different culture from yourself that you begin to realize what your own beliefs really are." I think that sums it up nicely. It is of great value to step outside your comfort zone and encounter the other. I am not necessarily interested in comparison but rather juxtaposing and discovering similarities within the various discourses.

I hope I will never stop encountering and learning from others, as it nourishes my interest and critical approach to the various realities we are living in.

I am interested in hybrid forms of contemporary performance. By contextualizing and queering bodies and spaces, I am looking for experiences that push boundaries and investigate our contemporary society beyond physical performance.

PW: During a *Flash Art* interview conducted by Patrick Steffen, you listed failure and slippage, vulnerability and precociousness as integral parts of the media, and accepted them as part of the festival and of your curatorial practice. It felt like a description of methodology, which accepts mistakes and most importantly, it moves the emphasis from the event as the final result, to the creative process as the principal part. How important for you is the process itself, not only in the arts, but also in your own practice, in a situation when it is relieved from the burden of necessary success?

MS: I like that you bring this up. I am very much interested in process. It has been an integral part in my practice in terms of curation and production and hosting in the field of contemporary performance. I enjoy accompanying an artistic process as it reveals other layers of a work and grants access to the complexity of the respective piece and the various artistic practices. I get very excited about that. Things tend to shift or move away from their initial proposals and grow. It is very much about imagining the unimaginable and also very much related to life in general. I just love seeing how

things transform and find new ways and new meaning, especially working in collaborative ways. We should all be constantly negotiating and renegotiating who we are and how we coexist in this world. Failure and slippage are integral parts in performance practice.

PW: I think performance art is not as clearly opposed or divided from the performative arts. The zones are becoming blurred. The boundaries are being removed. I personally really like this direction.

MS: Not only do I want the performers or the performance makers to get lost in their process, but also that this is actually translated onto the audience. A good work for me is something which displaces me and brings me to another universe. In a way, I want to lose consciousness. I am looking for those moments when I am being taken out of my own bubble, my reality.

PW: We are used to this very simple division: public on this side in the seats, while the performer is on stage, where that relationship is always pretty much the same. It works for the individual experience, but the place is prescribed, so to speak. In my impression, what you're trying to do is you're trying to get away from that script that is so rigid in a sense.

MS: Absolutely. I like using my intuition. The sensation of being carried away and being pulled outside of the very moment. It is about creating images and experiences.

PW: Another quality which strikes me is the idea of the festival rooted with the body in focus. Understood as a form of experiencing culture, identity, and the political, on a bodily level. As an experience based in the bodily and experienced through the body, both for performers and for the audience. So, the body is the subject, the tool, and the medium. It always comes back into focus.

Would you agree that by putting it at the center, you obviously refer to performative arts, but also look at the body and the bodily experience in general. Of the performer, of the pleasure of watching the performance, the abundant experience of culture itself, of identity and of the political. To me, that action starts from almost visceral, intuitive knowledge deep inside and then is formulated in a theoretical or visual way.

MS: I agree. I usually start from a very personal interest or concern. Very often, it is a point of not knowing. The urgency to explore something I would like to experience. By creating a certain curatorial frame, I learn and educate myself through people and culture, and face the complexities of a certain (theoretical) discourse. My research and the process of constructing a certain context is always inextricably tied to an overall discourse and the content of the respective artistic works that are being presented alongside each other. This process is gradual assembly and building blocks, step by step, that in discourse, would form a whole. It is a balancing act to frame the respective work and yet give the piece itself enough room to let it speak for itself.

PW: All the topics and key notions of each of the festival's editions are very political. I do see your practice as political, or at least politically conscious. Do you agree with this statement? Further, do you think is it important to be political as a curator in contemporary dance and performance arts? Do you think that the festival as a form, as a formula, may be a political investigation, political statement, or action?

MS: Yes, definitely. I consider art as a metaphorical exile, a place of resistance and action, that can and should create new perspectives and new meaning. Bodies are political no matter what, and therefore it will be and is always political.

AG: Over the years, how have you negotiated funding for the festival? Have there been significant structural changes in application strategies and where has the greatest assistance come from for zürich moves! with regard to funding?

MS: The initiative doesn't receive structural funding, and therefore the funding starts from scratch every year. One of the complexities for funders has been my profile as a freelance founder and curator in the performing arts scene. I am very much drawn to my multifaceted profile and enjoy acting in many different roles. A lot of explanation and justification was needed in order to get credibility. Once people understand that you are committed, and you've established a legitimate platform, things obviously get a little easier and more accessible.

PW: Do you feel you need to negotiate more for your artistic and curatorial independence when working with public funds and public, famous, and

established venues? For example, you've worked with Cabaret Voltaire. I am asking because it's a great space, and the heritage itself is very rich and interesting. But it is also may be a tricky little thing to insert projects in spaces which are so rooted within the specific heritage and their own established program.

MS: I ended up partnering up with Adrian Notz from Cabaret Voltaire, because he approached me and asked me if Cabaret Voltaire could collaborate with zürich moves! and then gave me complete carte blanche, which I really appreciated. Cabaret Voltaire is an amazing space which allows a proximity to the spectator. It creates a very different intimacy within the space than larger venues.

PW: I was wondering if you could describe the main differences within the challenges in your practice as deputy artistic director at Tanzhaus Zürich and the founder of the festival? They're completely different spaces, so to speak, with different structures and initiatives. How does it work for you?

MS: They have very different profiles. Tanzhaus Zürich is a production house, offering time, space, and support to local artists and providing residences for international artists and is not a performance venue in the first place. Tanzhaus Zürich acts as a co-producer for Zurich-based artists and has been the main co-producer of zürich moves! since the beginning in 2012 when Andrea Boll directed the house, and was taken over by Catja Loepfe who is currently the artistic director at Tanzhaus Zürich. The institution receives structural funding and operates on a very different scale than zürich moves! does. zürich moves! is my personal initiative.

I did actually leave my position as deputy artistic director at the Tanzhaus Zürich at the end of September 2019. I still hold a mandate as a dramaturgical advisor for very specific projects within the institution.

PW: You are trying to establish a different take on the practice of curator within a very specific environment. Could talk a little bit about this?

MS: I understand myself as a connector, networker, organizer, contextualizer, producer, and host in the field of contemporary performance and dance. It is of great importance to be able to accommodate and be interested in encountering people and respond to people's

needs. Even more so than in the contemporary art context, because art objects don't respond to you in the same way. I think there's a lot more human aspects which you have to take into account while dealing with contemporary performance and dance.

PW: I see it a similar structure to that of museums. It has the baggage of tradition, of hierarchy, of how it was done before. I have a feeling that it may be very similar within the performance arts. That it just is a very long tradition of how things used to be.

MS: Hierarchical structures within the performing arts have been breaking open over the past few years, which I think was/is needed. Even though I am initiating an idea or format, I don't place myself in a higher rank in terms of my role. The artists and activists who are willing to come on board for these adventures are the ones to expose themselves and make their voices heard. I am dependent on the people who realize and manifest their thoughts and actions. The way I tend to interact with artists and the community creates a different dynamic and enables an artistic flow and truly breaks the traditional and classical ideas of normative thinking.

PW: How do you see your role as a curator and artistic director in lending visibility to art and art practitioners?

MS: I forged the festival into a happening of artists and spectators, an intersection between art and life. As I mentioned at the beginning of this interview, I consider the spectator a co-inhabitant of the respective space and want to free them from being a passive observer. In this regard I am not talking about participatory pieces but rather the way in which an audience is addressed and taken into consideration, and therefore engages on a very personal level with the respective work. I am facilitating and trying to create the most ideal contexts for these experiences.

AG: Do you foresee future editions of the festival potentially being head curated by someone else?

MS: I could totally see somebody else taking over. I like the idea of a collective programming for the festival, a board of directors, for example. I think that this will show within the next couple of years. It is also related to the whole funding system in Zurich. In dance and theater where zürich moves! has been getting funding from, there will be a big change most likely in 2022.

There are still a lot of questions around it and a little bit out of my hands.

PW: I am interested in the notion of hybridity, which you mentioned before, and things that operate as non-defined, liminal, at crossroads. This, it seems to me, is an important value within the festival. What is your understanding of these qualities in the context of zürich moves!, and also in the light of politically driven topics of each edition, and the festival considered as an investigation of contemporary society beyond the physical act of the performance?

MS: The multifaceted platform creates time-based experiences, engages and challenges the embodied presence and abstraction of the body. The core idea of the festival is to bring contemporary performance to hybrid spaces or rather construct them. I am not really interested in labeling things, but rather getting lost and finding new ways of being together and communicating through other means.

I am trying to challenge my own norms or rather escape them.

Marc Streit was born and raised in Bern, Switzerland and completed his studies in management before he earned his MAS in Curating at the University of the Arts in Zurich. Streit has been working as cultural entrepreneur, facilitator, artistic advisor and organizer for several institutions and organizations in research and realization of artistic projects. Streit was the deputy artistic director at Tanzhaus Zürich until September 2019. He is a guest lecturer at the theater department at the University of the Arts in Zurich (ZHdK) and at DOCH - Stockholm University of the Arts – School of Dance and Circus. Streit is currently a member of the jury for the Alumni Award at ZHdK. He is an advisor in dramaturgy and production for the realization of contemporary performance work. Starting in summer 2020, he will be a guest curator at Gessnerallee Zürich for the upcoming four years. Artists, activists, and academics with whom Marc Streit has been working include: Simone Aughterlony, AA Bronson, Tamara Cubas, Miguel Gutierrez, Jack Halberstam, Keith Hennessy, Marie-Caroline Hominal, Valerie Reding, Alice Ripoll, Xavier Le Roy, Isabel Lewis, Dana Michel, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Carlos Maria Romero, Tino Sehgal, Mårten Spångberg, Teresa Vittucci, Arkadi Zaides,

and many more. Streit is an alumnus of the MAS in Curating, ZHdK.

Abongile Gwele is a South African artist and curator currently living in St. Gallen, Switzerland. She received her Bachelor of Technology in Fine Arts at the Tshwane University of Technology in 2013. In 2010, Gwele volunteered at the Pretoria Art Museum as an educational assistant. Working under Mmutle Arthur Kgokong as a junior curator, she co-curated a number of exhibitions in an extensive curating program with the museum. She was selected as one of 40 Emerging Creatives in 2016 by the Design Indaba for her Apples and Oranges jewellery designs. In the past few years, she has exhibited her work in her home country as well as in France, England, and the USA. Gwele is currently completing her MAS in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts.

Patrycja Wojciechowska is a curator based in London. She is graduate of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS in University of Art, Zurich, Switzerland. She co-curated the exhibition *games.fights.encounter* at the OnCurating Project Space, Zurich. Her research focuses on identity, postcolonial studies, non-human intelligence and forms of communication, and position of the body in art experience. She currently works on an interdisciplinary online platform.



Gage Of The Boone. Photo: Georgios Koukouridakis



Alex Baczynski-Jenkins. Photo: Nicolas Duc



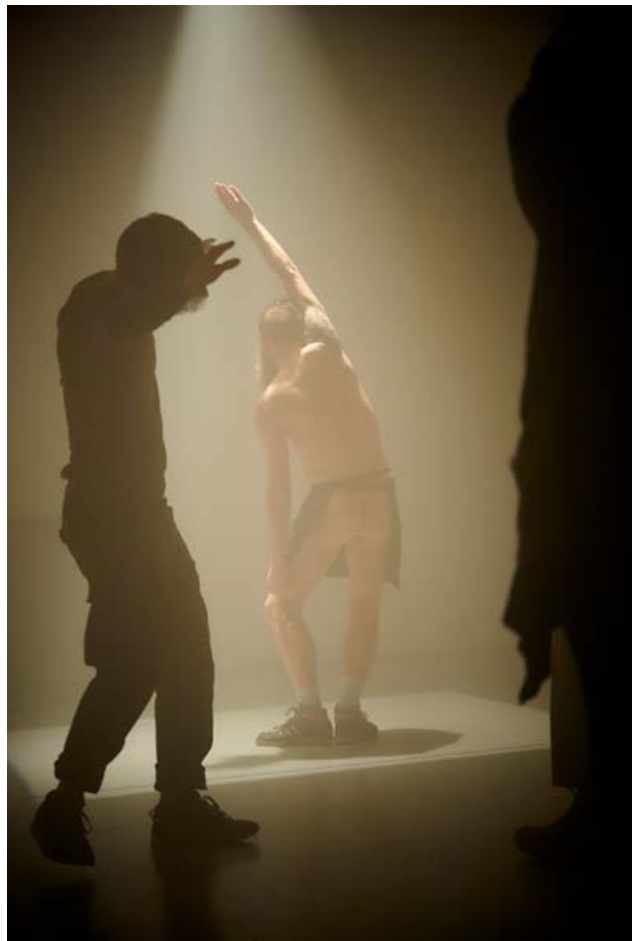
Simone Aughterlony, *Laboratory*. Photo: Renzo Pusterla



Jaamil Olawale Kosoko. Photo: Leni Olafson



PRICE. Photo: Leni Olafson



Frédéric Gies. Photo: Renzo Pusterla

Barbara Basting, Cultural Department of the City of Zurich

Interviewed by Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter

Ronald Kolb/Dorothee Richter: What is your professional background?

Barbara Basting: I studied French and German literature and philosophy, passed the state exams in French and German, and have about 25 years of professional experience as a journalist and editor for print media and radio with a focus on literature and contemporary art as well as cultural analysis (sociology, history, aesthetics, digital developments). I was partly in a responsible/ managing position, and for seven years I have been working in the current position for the City of Zurich. Since my studies, I have had a keen interest in contemporary art and photography.

RK/DR: How does your own professional/cultural background shape the work you are doing?

BB: From this background, my perspective is more of a transdisciplinary, broadly based approach to art as a place of social exchange. I am less interested in a perspective that is narrowed down to specialized professional discussions; what is important to me is an openness to new developments, especially to artistic developments that engage in or reflect a closer dialogue with social developments.

RK/DR: What are your tasks in the agency?

BB: My areas of expertise are: management of the Commission's work (Commission for Visual Arts of the City of Zurich), together with an assistant—i.e., several major juries per year, grants exhibition at the Helmhaus, acquisitions, allocation of the subsidized studios of the City of Zurich, in short, all awarding processes in connection with the allocation of the freely available grants for visual arts.

Also, ex-officio representation of the city or cultural department as subsidy provider in city subsidized art institutions as well as in various working groups

(e.g. AG KiÖR = Working Group for Art in Public Space of the City of Zurich).

In addition, this includes various tasks relating to art-specific issues dealt with by the cultural department, as well as general projects of the cultural department (e.g. development of the cultural mission statement, development of new funding instruments, strategic developments). I am also responsible for answering all kinds of inquiries (from the public and from the politicians/municipal council), maintaining contacts, representative tasks, as well as everything related to these tasks (budget, guidelines, accountability to the local council/special commissions/financial control/public).

In addition, I also have special tasks in connection with various special projects of the cultural department (e.g. Manifesta, "Kunstszene", pilot for new forms of cultural support, etc.).

RK/DR: How can the task of the agency be described? What do you want to enable?

BB: Promotion of the visual arts in the City of Zurich, taking into account the possibilities offered by the legal framework (municipal regulations, cultural mission statement). According to the Swiss understanding, support is subsidiary, i.e. the City of Zurich's task in this area relates mainly to artists living in the City of Zurich or otherwise closely associated with it. In contrast, other sponsors such as Pro Helvetia promote the placement of Swiss artists abroad.

I would like to use my opportunities to contribute as much as possible to ensuring that there is a lively and diverse art scene in the City of Zurich, where new developments have a chance and where social reflection through and about art is strengthened, including through attractive mediation. The Culture Department of the City of Zurich sees culture as an important

medium for a society to understand itself. This is the more general perspective of our actions.

RK/DR: How is the agency structured? How many people work there, in what roles?

BB: Two people, 80% each = 160 FTE: one management post, one assistant post. The assistant is given as much leeway as possible; he/she can also carry out small projects or is involved in discussions on content wherever possible. Direct reporting to the Head of the Cultural Department.

RK/DR: How are the selection process for project spaces, grants, and acquisitions regulated?

BB: Through the general criteria for cultural funding as set out in the respective mission statement and the specific guidelines for the Commission's work and for the various funding instruments. The detailed structure of the Commission's work is derived from these guidelines. The Commission has a recommending function, but the recommendations are almost always implemented. The mission statement is approved by the City Council of the City of Zurich and taken note of by the City Council; the guidelines are signed by the Mayor. All funding decisions are based on pro and con arguments, which are recorded in minutes; funding decisions are made after a majority vote in the Commission or the relevant commission subgroups. Funding decisions are official decisions which are legally contestable.

RK/DR: How are you in contact with the Zurich art scene? With whom?

BB: I am in contact with as many actors as possible, through the representatives in the institutions with the respective boards of directors, through visits to exhibitions, galleries, degree exhibitions by art schools, events, partly studio visits (with the Commission) with curators and artists talks or appointments on request are possible, random contacts in everyday life ("Migros", "Badi") also occur regularly. However, the time available is far too limited for regular structured visit programs and visionary work, and a certain degree of separation is sometimes necessary in order not to be completely consumed by the various demands and requests. I can't and don't want to mention any names here, because there are a lot of them, and the contacts are constantly changing, which I try to keep aware of. As a representative of the "administration," one should be and remain

open to all actors, even if this is, of course, an ideal that is difficult to realize.

RK/DR: What role does the agency play (locally or internationally)?

BB: Our department in Zurich is certainly very important for the artists and the institutions. We are among the first contacts and addresses for the promotion of cultural and art projects; how we are perceived internationally I cannot judge well, there are no evaluations that I know of.

RK/DR: Is there a quota for gender on the funding schemes or acquisitions?

BB: There is no explicit quota, but there is clearly a need for diversity and gender balance both in staffing and in appointments to commissions, as well as in purchases. This is also stated in the city's mission statement and in the guidelines for commissions in general. The commissions are regularly prepared by us during the jury work with a respective note.

RK/DR: What is the role of art in your opinion and from your position?

BB: I see art as a very specific medium for dealing with our world. It represents a potential force that can have an effect on society and allows it to learn more about itself.

RK/DR: Could you tell us more about the visibility of the agency, [how] do you make it known and visited? What is the relation between real space and digital space?

BB: Visibility is created by our homepage, by what we do in a very concrete way (e.g. scholarship exhibitions) and promote (obligatory logos/references to the City of Zurich as a sponsor in the case of contributions and subsidized institutions), by our presence, the presence of the Commission and that of the City of Zurich's art collection in official buildings, schools, hospitals, and in public exhibitions both locally and internationally, publication of the art newsletter, other publications on occasion, media releases from the Presidential Department, media reports. Social media is a semi-official channel that is only partially available for individual events. Public discussions of all kinds, ad hoc or organized (e.g. hearing on the cultural mission state-

ment), municipal council discussions (all documented publicly and on the Internet).

The homepage of the Cultural Department provides access to the most important information; all application procedures for funding must be submitted via the electronic application portal. The cultural mission statement is also posted there, as are various other documents, and is only available in digital form.

With all these functions, the digital space is a virtual twin of the analogue space; it ultimately always refers back to it. The service function is in the foreground due to limited resources.

RK/DR: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

BB: I hope that the sometimes strong “garden thinking” will give way to an approach that is more oriented towards common goals or cooperation. I hope that the only too easily understandable “vested interests” will not help to slow down or even prevent new things from happening.

I hope that we will continue to be able to fall back on sufficient or even increased funding in the future, because society is increasingly recognizing that the promotion of culture plays an important role for it as a very specific medium of understanding—far beyond “entertainment,” “leisure activities,” or “location improvement.”

Barbara Basting studied Romance and German languages and literature as well as philosophy at the University of Constance and at the Sorbonne in Paris. She was editor of "du"-Magazine (1989–1999), editor of Tages-Anzeiger (cultural pages), and managing editor of DRS2/SRF2Kultur. She now heads the division for visual arts at the Culture Department of the City of Zurich. She has been observing the culture(s) of digitality as a participant since the Net.art of the late 1990s.

Dorothee Richter is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, and Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS/MAS Curating, which she founded in 2005 at the Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland. She is director of the PhD in Practice in Curating Programme, a cooperation of the Zurich University of the Arts and the University of Reading. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she was initiator of Curating Degree Zero Archive and Curator at Kuenstlerhaus Bremen. She is Executive Editor of the web journal OnCurating.org.

Ronald Kolb is a researcher, designer, film maker and curator. He is Co-Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, Zurich University of the Arts, and an Editor-at-Large of the web journal On-Curating.org and honorary vice-chairman of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. He is a PhD candidate of PhD in Practice in Curating, a cooperation of ZHDK and University of Reading, supported by swissuniversities.

Christoph Doswald, Chairman of the Working Group for Art in Public Space, KiöR

Interviewed by Alina Baldini and Tea Virolainen Jordi

February 4, 2020, Part 1

Alina Baldini and Tea Virolainen Jordi: We start with the background—what is your professional background?

Christoph Doswald: I was doing history, art history, and political science with a degree from University of Zurich. And already during my time at university, I was organizing exhibitions—sometimes together with friends. I was living in a house in Baden in a *Wohngemeinschaft* [shared apartment] with Paolo Bianchi, who now is a lecturer at the ZHdK. We organized exhibitions in our house; today, you would describe this as an off-space. At the same time, I was active as an art critic for Swiss and international media—special interest and general interest. And then I also had in parallel a journalistic career. I was working for newspapers, like *Weltwoche* (at this time it was a very interesting newspaper, not as it is today), *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, and *Tagesanzeiger*, mostly on art, design, and architecture. Sometimes also political issues.

I was one of the founders of Shedhalle, the exhibition space in Zurich's Rote Fabrik. At that time, in the Eighties, everything was highly politicized, and we were activists, thinking about cultural centers not only in the classic terms, but with a political twist. Culture at that time meant literature, opera, theatre, and museums. And we all missed a platform with a contemporary approach. This ignorance for our needs was the main reason why the Eighties riots in Zurich started.

AB+TVJ: Do you think today this is happening again—that art is getting more political again?

CD: I would not say so. Politics and social issues have always been part of contemporary art after World War II. So, it's nothing new. I would say since the beginning of the 20th century, art and culture have had a strong political and social sideline. And as we do quite intensely discuss gender and postcolonial questions

today, it is clear that artists are focusing on it. But art has also formal qualities, deals with the media-discourses. Picasso's *Guernica* is a political statement, indeed. But it would not be as important as it is without the formal qualities of the painting itself. Should artists define themselves as political artists? I don't know. But I know that Barbara Kruger or Cindy Sherman are dealing with feminist issues and that they are good artists.

AB+TVJ: What about your current position and role?

CD: Before 2006, there was no public art program in Zurich. Which means there was public art, but there was not a systematically developed strategy of how to deal with it. The ZHdK and the city of Zurich collaborated in the early 2000s and worked on a research project, a study on the state of art in public space in Zurich. It was Christoph Schenker, together with students, who did a field study about what had been done in the past, and what could be done better, how this could be developed specifically for Zurich. The full report, published in the book *Kunst und Öffentlichkeit*, recommended establishing a permanent work group—not a commission but a work group that is constituted by 50% of members of the administration, people who are involved with the public space like Grünstadt Zürich, Tiefbauamt, Amt für Stadtentwicklung, Hochbauamt—five city departments are involved today, including the cultural department. And then there are five members from outside. Chairing should be always an external specialist not employed by the city. In the work group, we develop strategies and projects for the city of Zurich together. We make proposals/suggestions to the city council and the parliament. We do not have a budget which is defined; they have to raise the money.

AB+TVJ: But the art commission has a budget?

CD: Yes—they have a defined budget for buying art for the art collection. They have also a budget for grants.

But the KiÖR job is completely different. As the city's development is quite dynamic, we have to react to permanently changing contexts. I'll give you an example: when the city and SBB, the Swiss railway company, started to develop Europaallee, the work group had a discussion about this issue—this was in the time before I was the chairperson—should they consider starting a program there? As Europaallee defines a completely new form of public space in Zurich, the work group suggested to the city council of Zurich to do a curatorial program in the Europaallee for ten years. The city council agreed to this, and with this commitment the project was able to start. The financing of the project is split between the city and the Swiss railway company. From then on, the work group was no longer involved in direct operations. The Fachstelle is coordinating the project. Sometimes members of the work group are invited, when there is a competition. There was an open call for curatorial teams at the start in 2010 to present their projects for Europaallee. More than seventy teams applied for it on a general basis, which means they have to send in their portfolio. A commission—experts from the working group, people from SBB, and the city's administration, external experts—went through the portfolios and made a pre-selection. There were all different kinds of curatorial teams: couples, female/male, young and old curators, there were people from Vienna, Berlin, Paris, London...it was completely diverse and international. We stated in the briefing that we were not looking for artworks, but we wanted a curatorial masterplan for the next ten years instead. The winning project is titled *Space* and deals on a general level with the notion of urban space. The early phase was during the construction period—and it was titled *Under Construction*. Patrik Huber and Evtixia Bibassis, the curators, invited artists to do interventions during the construction process—Kerim Seiler's installation *118-11*, for example, created a huge light wall which marked the moving frontline of the railway station and the Europaallee, which was always transforming during the period of the construction. One of the lecturers at ZHdK, Heinrich Lüber, is a performance artist, and he did a performance called *Hub*. There were also music interventions—like the one by Big Zizz. So, there were all kinds of artists involved during this construction process.

Actually, the second phase is running, which is titled *Constructed*, and there are two directions in which they work. One is with light interventions, and the other one is sound interventions. This will be realized in the next two or three years.

AB+TVJ: This was realized by these curators that applied for the competition?

CD: Yes—that won the competition. Out of those seventy teams, we invited seven and paid them 8000 CHF to work out a concept. So, they were paid for the proposals. There was a wide variety in the proposals, and it was interesting for us to see how they dealt with it.

AB+TVJ: Eight teams are quite a lot, isn't it?

CD: You know, it is not a small budget, and at that time it was four million CHF before it was reduced to two million CHF, due to the financial crisis. And for this size of project, you really want good input. My experience is that when you invite just three or four, you may get maybe one good proposal—maybe...

AB+TVJ: Your role was to supervise or coordinate the activities of this curatorial team?

CD: I was the head of the selection committee. There were external experts, e.g. Jacqueline Burkhardt, at that time she was editor-in-chief of *Parkett*; there were young artists, there were also people of the railway company... it was quite a variety of people. We had people from the art scene but also people who are not in the art scene. The role of the chair is to moderate the process and bring those diverse opinions to a decision.

AB+TVJ: So, the curatorial team was free as to which artists they could invite?

CD: At that time, the winning team did not even say with whom they would work in the future. Their proposal was just a general concept. Of course, they gave examples like, "We could think e.g. of Pipilotti Rist for a light intervention," and so on. When you're in such a process, you have to question those proposals in order to find the best one.

AB+TVJ: Is there any specific curatorial line or concept that KiÖR follows, or does it change from one project to another?

CD: Working in public space means that you have to work with the context, and the context can have a wide variety: a dense neighborhood in the historic heart of the city; industrial areas in transformation; a park or a place with social problems; or a place where the rich people live. The context is pretty essential for our work. And the diversity of the city as a stage for art. 450,000

people live in Zurich, 35% of them are foreigners, so our context is very multicultural. We have young and old people—so we are quite challenged by this diversity of people, attitudes, interests, and I would never put my personal taste or curatorial focus over the whole program. As a chairman of the working group, my role is more the function of a moderator than of a curator. But there are exceptions when I'm the curator of a specific project. Maybe you had the chance to experience *Art in the City* or *New North Zurich* or *Art Altstetten Albisrieden*—a series of nomadic projects on different sites and connected to the city development. There, I act as a curator, and I have to make my choice. But I would be a bad curator if I chose only male artists over sixty or only people doing sculptures. These exhibitions have between thirty-five to forty-five artists, and you will find everything—from participation art to drop sculptures, from video to neon, from Los Angeles to Beijing.

AB+TVJ: How are the places for the *Gasträume* found? And how did you decide where in the city?

CD: *Gasträume* is another format. It invites people, as the names says, to be guests on a specific site. It is a concept that KiöR developed, because we have almost daily proposals for an artwork to be installed in town. It's great to see that people care about their urban neighborhood, that they want to be involved. They come, for example, with requests for monuments for Köbi Kuhn (a national football trainer) or the last Äbtissin in Fraumünster or the *Guru XY*. And it's our job to help, to support or say no. That's why we started a discussion in the working group, how to react to all those requests. As public spaces are very limited, we have to focus on quality. We do not want an "anything goes." This is essential for the credibility of the KiöR project, and we must spend time on helping people understand what quality is. But how can we do that? At the end of this discussion, we developed the *Gasträume*: once a year, during the summer period, we offer in an open call to everybody in and around Zurich for a selection of public spaces—e.g., Paradeplatz, Basteiplatz, Sigi-Feigel-Terrasse, Turbinenplatz, Maagplatz. And then you can apply and present your proposals to a selection committee. This process is completely transparent, including a written report on the discussions. The people in the committee change every year—this year, for example, there is Ines Goldbach from Kunsthau Baselland, Lionel Bovier from Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (Mamco) of Geneva, two members of KiöR, and me. It is essential to rotate the selection committee every year. But it becomes more and more challenging to find

the sites for the artworks, the *Gasträume*. As a lot of construction work is happening, as many manifestations and parties are celebrated, the public spaces are under high pressure. If you compare photos from 100 years ago with the situation today, you will see that the city is completely overdefined—crowded not only with people, but covered with many signs and information: signaletic, commercials, traffic signs, infrastructure buildings, and many more things.

AB+TVJ: Often, it's actually not public space but instead belongs to someone—it belongs to a company or is private...

CD: Yes, some of the *Gasträume* are privately owned indeed. But Paradeplatz, for example, the Gessner Allee or Basteiplatz belong to the City of Zurich. And it is important to provide the artists, the galleries, the off-spaces, or the institutions with attractive sites, as they have to finance the projects themselves. We do not support the production of the artworks, we only enable the sites, we do the marketing and communication, we support the installations if it's necessary and as far it is possible for us. The job can be very "hands-on," as young artists are not at all experienced in the urban space. Public space is not easy to work with; it's not just hanging a picture on the wall, you have to consider security issues, the weather during the three months, vandalism, and so on.

AB+TVJ: Do you have a specific audience in mind?

CD: International specialists and professionals are 10% of our audience. People who are curious to discover art in Zurich, coming from Zurich itself or nearby, as this is often an opportunity for discovering places in their city that they did not know, make up 40%. They come to visit new neighborhoods in their own town like it happened with *Art and the City*. And finally, we have people coming from all over Switzerland who are attracted because they know that the exhibitions in public spaces in Zurich are pretty spectacular.

AB+TVJ: What is the role of art in public spaces?

CD: The renaissance of urban life in the 21st century is quite an exciting and a challenging phenomenon. We experience a sort of a new *Gründerzeit*, comparable to the late 19th century. Art can and must be part of this new city development. The architecture in the 21st century has a pretty homogeneous style, as it's very related to economic decisions. The surfaces of the build-

ings are pretty monotone. And worst of all, this style has been globalized. What could create a difference is art. Art can support the creation of specific identities in the urban context. If we do not invest now in public art, the people of the future will not know the history of their city, as everything is going to be very homogeneous. We have to invest in culture in order to create urban identity for the future.

AB+TVJ: Is there a way for people who visit art in public space to understand what is installed?

CD: Information on public art in Zurich is accessible in many ways. There are guided tours for the summer projects; there is a very detailed information system connected directly to the artworks in German and English; we work on social media; and we have a classical catalogue.

Zurich is very rich in public art; when I started to work with it, we were lacking essential information on these artworks and had to build up a database from scratch. With that homework done, we are able now to publish this information. We plan to use QR codes and additional information systems that will guide the visitor to identify what is exhibited nearby. But this takes time and is expensive. I'm not complaining, but the operational work with public art at the city's administration is done by two people working 150%.

AB+TVJ: How do you promote your work?

CD: We use all kind of web platforms: Instagram, Facebook, YouTube videos. We have our own platform [www.instagram.com/kioer/; www.stadt-zuerich.ch/kioer]. We have a publishing series, dealing with public art issues, like, for example, how to de-install sculptures.

AB+TVJ: How many women and men are exhibited?

CD: Diversity is an important topic: we represent the city of Zurich, which is very diverse. In Gasträume, we still have a majority of male artists. Female artists do not even apply. When I do curate projects, I invite half male and half female artists, but it's really much harder to convince women for an exhibition project. So, in the end we have two-thirds male artists.

Gender statistics for open-call projects, like Gasträume, are even worse. In 2019, there was activity by women on Facebook asking why we had only 20% women. I went

through the applications. Six came from female artists, five of them were accepted for the exhibition. The refusal ratio of male artists was much higher. We do everything possible to have a fair representation. But we need more female applications if we want to avoid the 12:5 gender gap we had last year.

As you might know, I also work in the artist association of Switzerland where we try to improve the conditions of female artists. We just invented a special program for mother artists with children, creating a studio exchange program customized for artists with kids... Other countries are more advanced in this sense (France and Germany, for example).

Alina Baldini is an Italian psychologist, she has lived and worked in Basel (CH) since 2017. For the past couple of decades, she has been working in corporations addressing topics like company culture, coaching, and personal transformation. Following her passion for contemporary art and her curiosity to discover the curating aspects in what she experiences, she decided to begin the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS at the ZHdK in 2019.

Tea Virolainen (b. 1970, Asikkala, Finland) is a graphic designer, based in Switzerland near Basel. After completing her training as a typographer, she switched to advertising. During this time she continued to educate herself as a multimedia designer. In 2002 Tea Virolainen ventured into self-employment and in January 2013 she founded together with Tina Guthauser KOKONEO GmbH, a studio for visual communication. Her interests in social arts led her to the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS at the ZHdK.



Kerim Seiler at Paradeplatz, KiöR Gasträume 2017



Renata Kaminska at Basteiplatz, KiöR Gasträume 2019

Roger M. Buergel, Johann Jacobs Museum Interviewed by Ronald Kolb

Ronald Kolb: What is your professional background?

Roger M. Buergel: I don't have much of a "professional background." I trained as an artist early on, but I never felt sure about what art is: an idea, a practice, or something altogether different? Becoming a curator was a way of pursuing this question and leaving it open at the same time.

RK: How does your own professional/cultural background shape the work you are doing?

RMB: If you follow your artistic sensibilities, you will realize that "professionalism" is a trap. You have to stay an amateur and cultivate a sense of not really knowing what to do and how to do it. Improvisation is the way to go. Taking such a stance does require a few privileges, of course (money-wise and beyond), which you also have to share. This gets us into questions of politics, learning, collaborations with artists and audiences that are not your typical museum-going audiences, and so on.

RK: What are your tasks in the institution?

RMB: We are a tiny museum with a very small team, so everyone more or less has to do everything, from concocting exhibition ideas to booking hotel rooms. There is no front/back divide.

RK: Does the institution has a clear mission? What is it?

RMB: Our museum looks at global trade routes past and present. In other words, we address the global mishmash of history, politics, raw materials, religions, arts, and cultures. There are moments of clarity, though.

RK: In what way is the mission/concept realized?

RMB: Our program is based on the work of artists and researchers (not necessarily academics; they can also be schoolchildren, for example). We do exhibitions related

to our areas of interest (Japan and the West; Tropical Modernity; Forms of Showing; New Africa, to name just a few).

RK: How is the institution structured? How many people work there, and in what roles?

RMB: There is small team with a director, a manager, two people doing regular office work, an academic advisor, and a researcher. All of our projects have a transcultural character, so we also work intensely with collaborators in Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

RK: How does the program come about? What is the selection/decision process?

RMB: Pursue a certain topic or agenda with a group of collaborators—say, global trade between Africa and China since the early 15th century—and a number of questions pop up. Some of these questions are fascinating, and there is no easy way to answer them, and those tend to turn into new exhibition projects. In that sense, our programming bears some semblance to music. You have a theme, then variations of it, then variations generating a new theme, and so on.

RK: How are you in contact with the Zurich art scene? How do you see your place in the Zurich art scene?

RMB: We don't target any particular "art scene." We welcome visitors from all walks of life.

RK: What role does the institution play (locally or internationally)?

RMB: We are a small institution, so we have to opt for a highly experimental style, both curatorially and intellectually. Our immodest idea is to come up with a museum model that is no longer governed by the bad spirits of the 19th century with their faulty labels and false distinctions between art and non-art, China, Islam,

and so on. The world was and is entangled, and this needs to be shown and understood.

RK: Is there a quota for gender or ethnicity?

RMB: No.

RK: What is the role of art in your opinion and from your position?

RMB: There can be no role, otherwise art would be useless.

RK: Could you tell us more about the visibility of the institution, [how] do you make it known and visited?

RMB: Apart from the obvious channels (typeface, booklets, media), we believe in word of mouth and the seductiveness of certain ideas.

RK: What is the relation between real space and digital space?

RMB: Probably similar to what Jacques Lacan said about the sexual relation: there is none. Which, of course, doesn't mean that there is no relation at all but that the form of relation cannot be pinned down.

RK: What do you wish for the Zurich art scene?

RMB: That people enjoy what they're doing.

Roger M. Buergel is the founding director of the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich. The first recipient of the Menil Collection's Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement (2002), he was artistic director of documenta 12 (2007), Garden of Learning (Busan Biennale, 2012) and—together with Zhang Qing—Suzhou Documents (Suzhou, 2016). The New York Times named his exhibition Mobile Worlds (co-curated with Sophia Prinz) at Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg "one of the best exhibitions in 2018."

Ronald Kolb is a researcher, designer, film maker and curator. He is Co-Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, Zurich University of the Arts, and an Editor-at-Large of the web journal On-Curating.org and honorary vice-chairman of

Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. He is a PhD candidate of PhD in Practice in Curating, a cooperation of ZHDK and University of Reading, supported by swissuniversities.



"Omoshirogara", 2016. Kimono-patterns as documents of Japan's modernization. Image courtesy JJM



"The Dockers' Museum" by Allan Sekula, 2015. The artist as ethnographer of maritime trade and its people. Image courtesy JJM



A Season in Shell" by Zheng Mahler, 2014. 2 tons of abalone shells on their way from Somaliland to Guangdong. Image courtesy JJM



Installing Ellen Gallagher's "Kapsalon Wonder" in the hall. Note the coffee paraphernalia on the wall! Image courtesy JJM



"The Haitian Rushes of Maya Deren", 2015. 16mm-footage stored by Deren in coffee cans. Image courtesy JJM



"Lina Bo Bardi", 2014. A model of the MASP done in the 1960s by a master of folk art in Bahia. Image courtesy JJM

An Ecosystem at Work

Mirjam Bayerdörfer

Interviewed by Arianna Guidi and Myriam Boutry

If we had to think of Mirjam's Bayerdörfer practice as a mushroom, we would identify it with the mycelium, this invisible part underneath the soil that forms the biggest part of the mushroom. Composed of thin filaments, the mycelium is ramified to form a huge underground network that connects various plants and creates a community of living and nonliving organisms interacting as a system.

The first time we met Mirjam, she had been co-running the Shedhalle1 for almost a year and was giving a talk at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste's Postgraduate Programme in Curating about her artistic and curatorial practice. Born in 1984 in Munich (Germany), she had studied fine art and curatorial practice in Zurich and Saarbrücken (Switzerland and Germany); navigating between the two fields she had blurred the boundaries and had put an emphasis on creating encounters. The outlines of her practice are difficult to grasp, not linear but rather made of a multitude of ramifications, each branch representing a relation she built up with other artists, friends, curators, or the public, creating her own ecosystem. In 2015, Mirjam founded, in collaboration with Philip Matesic, *Outside Sundays*, a series of afternoons inviting participants to take part in a walk in the city of Zurich and outside, "to exchange and produce a new kind of communication and knowledge." In 2017, she published, in collaboration with Rosalie Schweiker, *Teaching for People Who Prefer Not to Teach*,² a pocket-sized red book that offers inspiration for various situations: "After a lot of talking," "Can run parallel," "When you're motivated." Each page lifts the corner of your lips up: "*ALL INCLUSIVE - Imagine a utopian holiday destination / Interview each other about this holiday / (landscape, social life, accommodation, food, in detail entertainment, sightseeing, cultural highlights) / Try to not describe Switzerland.*"³

After the talk at the ZHdK, we wanted to further the discussion with Mirjam, and we met a second time at her studio, situated in a building made of red and beige brick, former offices transformed to offer artists a place

to work, thanks to the support of the city of Zurich. Her studio is an office-like room, with books on metal shelves, a desk, a big printer, a white board in a corner with a list of words, thoughts for future projects. Aligned on a wall, objects and A4 xeroxed pictures, there "since forever" for some of them: a picture of a medieval painting taken by Mirjam representing Saint Magdalena covered with fur, "an interesting vision on femininity and body hair"; a drawing pinned on a review of Linda Nochlin's text "Why Have there Been No Great Women Artists," waiting for some development or not; a picture of hybrid mushrooms representing the sporocarp, the upper part of the mushroom, inverted, disassembled, or phallomorphized. A sketch related to the workshop *Feminist Mushroom Picking*, together with Mariann Oppliger, a mushroom hunt in the woods that ended in a discursive afternoon where the mushroom was identified with the female network, where only the smallest part of it is made visible.

We talked while drinking green tea for three hours, about the Shedhalle, Mirjam's desire to slow down and work on new projects, her longing for a return to more materiality in her work. We looked outside the window's studio following her thoughts digging to weave new connections.

Arianna Guidi/Myriam Boutry: In January 2019, you started to work at the Shedhalle, sharing the direction with Franz Krähenbühl. Could you tell us more about this collaboration?

Mirjam Bayerdörfer: It was a curatorial blind date. Siri Peyer, from the new Shedhalle Board Committee, asked us independently if we were up for it. She had an idea of the direction the Board wanted the Shedhalle to move towards—and knew our work and positions. We didn't know each other, but she did a good matchmaking job. It turned out to be a really extraordinary collaboration.

There have been different models of running the Shedhalle since it has existed; next year is going to be its 40th anniversary. In the beginning, it was self-run by artists, and then they had one appointed curator followed by a long phase of two or three people running the space, sometimes even without being in Zurich, organizing everything from afar. The curators didn't work together necessarily; there were a lot of different ideas of teamwork. In the '90s, the Shedhalle started considering itself even more as a political space, trying to address topics within the institution: what is an (art) institution, what are the implications? All official positions and hierarchies were taken down. There was a long term of group logics, without any given division of who does what, who is responsible. Every group had to find themselves in responsibilities and tasks. The groups running had always a very high set of goals in terms of self-understanding, of who they are, how they run the space, what they stand for. It created a pressure that was incredibly high, together with expectations from the outside that accumulated over the years. You have this bag full of history, of being very well known for a certain type of engagement and political exhibition-making, and you, as the curating team, have to meet those expectations. And at the same time, you put up your own expectations, or your own as a group. I don't know how many times it imploded, exploded. The last team had an unlimited contract, and they lasted a year and some months, which is really sad.

AG/MB: There is a very strong political engagement at the Shedhalle; we can imagine that it adds to the pressure you can have in a “normal” institution.

MB: Yes, it's this leftist cultural scene where you have the highest expectations in terms of what you live up to. How do you conduct projects? How do you show them? Who do you reach out to? And what type of working condition(s), what kind of politics are you creating through your way of running a project, an institution? This might get aggressive; it might eat you up.

AG/MB: Did you feel that pressure?

MB: I thought I would feel it more, but the way we got in was an exception. When we started on January 1st, there was nothing planned for the year. Of course, there was some pressure, but I was surprised how relieved people were that the Shedhalle was safe and its history did not end there.

AG/MB: Is there something like an anecdote or an experience during your time at the Shedhalle that you'd like to share with us? A particular moment that was important to you. For example, a talk with a coworker, a collaboration with an artist, or simply something that made you stop and think.

MB: Something that I think about a lot, which is not an anecdote, but rather an experience, is the cardboard building project we curated at the Shedhalle, *Wir überbauen* (Sept. – Oct. 2019). This project aimed at rebuilding Shedhalle from the inside, from 100% cardboard; it worked with curiosity and humor and asked people to actively engage. While it was running, we realized: this project should have continued much longer. Why? If you are trying to make an art space work differently than the most conventional exhibitions, by changing the rules and the role of visitor, you have to give people much more time in order to understand what is happening—to find their way of relating to it. Because of that, I started to love the idea of *Wir überbauen* being exhibited for almost a year and doing all the other things we planned inside the cardboard structure itself, all the other exhibitions and talks. A kind of a dream project.

AG/MB: Do you mean creating exhibitions inside the cardboard structure as individual projects?

MB: Individual and group shows, screenings, concerts, discussions: one would have been able to adjust the cardboard architecture according to the artists' work or needs of the event. But it would be much more fragile and totally away from the idea of the white cube with its pseudo-neutral, nonexistent space. Some artists might find it difficult to show their work within such a setting. But for others, it would spark ideas and open up infinite opportunities, which is what I am really interested in: settings and situations that give space for unknown combinations, something a white cube can offer rarely. In the case of *Wir überbauen*, it was also great watching how easily children move through everything and how the grown-ups have to crouch. Totally different dynamics of a public that showed on a bodily level—but that concern all other levels as well: intellectual, sensual, social, habitual.

AG/MB: I imagine it can be difficult to expose artworks inside a space that is not the classical even white wall; they acquire a different meaning, it's another sort of communication. This curatorial approach is very similar to the project *13m3 Sand*

(Feb. – Apr. 2019) you curated at the Shedhalle earlier in 2019.

MB: *13m3 Sand* was the first project that followed this spatial and social curiosity. We just said: “OK, this space itself is very dominant, so let’s just fill it up with material and see what it needs to combat the architecture and the emptiness.” So, we wanted to fill it up with sand. But in the end, the pile of sand in the middle of the hall was nothing compared to the size of the space. Anyhow. People loved it. They would bring their children to play, but slowly they themselves began to work the sand as well, to react, to manipulate, to build. And also a lot of artists signed up to do interventions in the sand and with it.

AG/MB: This also makes you think about art as a moment: it’s there for a certain time, and then it goes away. The public becomes the artist itself, and the artist becomes the public. So, it’s a different way of approaching the object displayed compared to the most traditional ways.

MB: It makes you think about the way we usually perceived the art object as object, the piece that you have to pack very carefully and store somewhere. For the cardboards and the sand, it was a recycling organization that took it back. It was like a loan. By the way, I kept a staircase we built for the cardboard project! There was one guy who since the very first day wanted to build a second level on the cardboards, where you could walk on, and we were hoping very much that it would happen, which in the end it did, smaller than planned, but it did. I kept the staircase because I got so attached to it; I still have it at the Shedhalle. It’s huge; I don’t really know what to do with that. I could bring it here, but it doesn’t really fit in my studio.

AG/MB: The works *Wir überbauen* and *13m3 Sand* are two main projects you curated at the Shedhalle. Could you tell us more about your artistic and curatorial background in this institution and outside? You said once that in the fall of 2015, during a rock paper scissors battle, fate “decided” that you were an artist. Playfulness and chance seem to play an important role in your curatorial and artistic practice.

MB: It’s something I discovered for life, and very central also when I teach. At F+F in Zurich, for example, a student almost my age just repeated saying, “Oh my God, you’re such a child.” [Laughs] Two weeks later he

got to know Esther Kempf, who runs the seminar with me, and he said to her, “Oh my God, you’re such a child, too!” It’s an incredible force within art and learning. I think that’s what kept me more on the art side, because I realized if you commit to a certain institutional framework and you want to make your way within the institution or academia, this playfulness has no place. You’re just endangering the institution, you’re questioning the rules by which it runs, and it’s always putting at risk something that someone else gets really nervous about. I think playfulness and institution is something that hardly ever goes together; maybe there are rare moments when an institution allows it. But normally, for any institution its main goal is carrying on existing. I think any sort of playing is questioning and putting at risk and possibly working against it.

AG/MB: It’s interesting that you consider yourself more on the artistic side; the artist and curator seem to be inseparable in your practice, as if the one is not going without the other. What do you think your curatorial practice adds to your artistic practice?

MB: You can also put it the other way around. I tend to forget that a lot of artists are not playful at all, and they perform well within the framework of the institution, in their own idea of an artist persona, and they don’t want to put anything at risk. They are just like, “I am an artist. I produce artwork. I show it, and this is what I do. I’m not questioning the way of production, nor the way it’s been looked at, nor the space.” So I always tend to think that an artist is playful *per se*, but it’s not true.

For the curating part, on what it added to the artistic practice, I think I was always interested in the format, the moment when art encounters a public: How is the space defined? What is the social situation? What do we expect from the public, what do they expect? Should they be interested anyhow, or do we make them curious? Do they have to do something, or can they consume it, like watching a movie and eating popcorn at home? Do they have to invest more?

AG/MB: That’s always an important topic, how to connect with the public.

MB: And also, how does your practice affect spatial settings? Does it have to happen in a building, with walls and with white fluorescent lighting? Is that necessary to make this encounter between art and someone who wasn’t involved in its production? This is why I

moved into the curatorial field, because this is normally how inviting other people for an event and proposing a framework is looked at: you are immediately considered a curator and much less an artist.

AG/MB: It's interesting that we always need to make this distinction between artistic and curatorial practice. What does curating mean? It can be so many things. There is this fluidity between being an artist and being a curator; when are you a curator or not, it's an attitude maybe.

MB: I think the main feature is inviting others. And that's something I really like, because I've always been, I think, more intelligent, more productive, and happier when I'm in the company of others. And if you look, you'll find a lot of artists who do it, it's been done forever: the crossing. But somehow, it's a story that gets forgotten, because it's more complicated to tell, so people either get famous for being the artist/artist or for being the curator/curator.

AG/MB: Sometimes your practice is made up of different components, so why is it that we have to define ourselves? The question can be applied to everything, not only to artists and curators.

MB: It's very interesting, because that's something I really tried to explore in my last academic assignment for the Master's in curating. What gives you the position of calling yourself an artist? Because there's so much myth about inspiration, the idea that it's just something that you are and the genius thing. I was interested to see if you could find a different sort of definition. What turns the person who does a certain activity into an artist? I think it has changed; maybe once "the artist" was really like a hat that you were given and then you could just keep it and whatever you did was art. This might still exist somehow; if you have a gallery, then you can produce whatever. But I think in other terms, it changed towards the idea that you have to justify by making and you have to keep doing it. As soon as you stop, your position as an artist is questioned. You also have to document that you're doing it. The representation has shifted into a constant proof that you're active, you're showing here, you're doing this, and less of a one-time thing where you passed a certain line of recognition. People ask or invite you for what they see that you do. It's kind of natural. So, what I'm asked for, it's a lot of inviting, coming up with ideas, concepts, and group moments. And sometimes that makes me a bit sad.

AG/MB: What do you mean by sad?

MB: Realizing there's a performance event, and the invitation is addressed to people whose work I really like and feel familiar with, but nobody asks me. Why? [Laughs] It's obvious, last year I didn't show performances, I did not submit work in any sort of exhibition, so people don't know what I do apart from the curating things. You have to show people whatever it is that you want to keep on doing. You have to give hints to the others

AG/MB: And you would like to be part of it.

MB: Somehow I have this longing for material artworks, but then I know a lot of times I go for it, I remain unsatisfied in a way. For all the group things or the settings that I've created in the past few years that involved other people—most of them workshop or curatorial moments—, I remained much more satisfied. Maybe I should analyze why. Then I could take an element and use it in a material production, some sort of open end or a cliffhanger.

AG/MB: This brings us to the topic of collective work. Working collaboratively with others is very important in your artistic/curatorial practice. We were wondering what are you looking for when you work collectively? Being part of a collective also sounds like a pretentious way, almost a safe way to say that you are working with others. You put the collective in front of it, and you are safe...

MB: Yes, I guess you can use the collective to make something seem more relevant. But this does not work in the long run. Working collectively is too demanding to just use it as a nice cover. As I mentioned earlier, I feel I am more productive, intelligent, and happy working with others.

Something that I think about more is the difference between visual art and other art forms—for example, music in terms of acceptance. I am always wondering why in music, compared to art, it's so normal to be recognized for a set of skills—which you can use to work collectively and on your own. That's no problem at all, you're a musician; of course, you can adapt to a certain style, depending on who you're performing with! Whereas in visual art you have to pretend to be one sort of living persona, who has to use his/her skills for his/her art in one and only one way—the artist, bound to produce in this only manner. Switching between several

groups, or between collective and solo is not allowed, because it takes away your credibility. Art is regarded not as a set of skills that one can control but as some weird unknown measure controlling you.

AG/MB: I think that fixed “identity” is something that the art world needs very much in order to believe in the genius of the artist.

MB: In music, it’s possible to have different identities/personae, and everybody understands that this is not the actual individual person performing but it’s like his/her persona. And in art, it’s always very difficult.

AG/MB: Before concluding our conversation, we would like to know who is/are the person(s) who has inspired you the most?

MB: Many. The writer Daniil Charms, the artist and friend Rosalie Schweiker, the artist and professor Georg Winter, the writers Lucia Berlin and Ursula K le Guin, the artist group RELAX, the ex-curator, clown and friend Micha Bonk, my current artists’ group Mein Verein—this list is neither complete nor chronological—it even makes me think that inspiration itself runs contrasensical to chronology.

Notes

1 In 2018, the Shedhalle, famous in Zurich and beyond for its political engagement and its progressive way of showcasing art, lost its board and direction. Mirjam Bayerdörfer and Franz Krahenbüler were appointed at the beginning of 2019 as interim co-directors by the new board committee.

2 Mirjam Bayerdörfer and Rosalie Schweiker, *Teaching for People Who Prefer Not to Teach* (London: AND, 2017).

3 *Ibid.*, 51.

Mirjam Bayerdörfer (b. 1984) is part of various artistic collectives. She investigates social permeabilities and forms of self-organization. She lives and works in Zurich. She was employed in the artistic interim management of the Shedhalle Zurich and as project manager of a cooperation between the F+F Schule für Kunst und Design and the Vögele Kulturzentrum Pfäffikon. Her ongoing free work includes: the handbook “Teaching for people who prefer not to teach” with Rosalie Schweiker (2017), meetings with Mein Verein (since 2016), and the walk series Outside Sundays (since 2015). Mirjam was an Assistant at the Postgradu-

ate Programme in Curating and was involved in the shows, projects, and talks at the Museum Bären-gasse, Gasthaus zum Bären (2014/2015). She studied at the ZHdK, Zurich, and HBKsaar Saarbrücken.

Myriam Boutry (b. 1987, Paris) hold a Master’s Degree in art history and museology from the University Paris Ouest Nanterre and a CAS in Curating from the Zürcher Hochschule Der Kunst. She has developed extensive experience in contemporary art and especially in exhibition production while working for public and private institutions (Galerie Isabelle Gounod, New Patrons by Fondation de France, Frac Île-de-France, Galerie Perrotin, and Musée du Quai Branly).

Arianna Guidi is a designer and curator originally from Rome. She studied art and design in the Netherlands and holds a MA in Contemporary Typographic Media from the London College of Communication. After working with various leading branding and design agencies in London and Amsterdam as a creative designer and consultant, she started her curatorial practice which focuses on language and miscommunication, multicultural perspectives and encounters. She is now studying in the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).



Mirjam Bayerdörfer and Franz at Shedhalle, Zurich



View of the exhibition, *Wir überbauen* (September - October 2019), Shedhalle, Zurich



View of the exhibition, *Wir überbauen* (September - October 2019), Shedhalle, Zurich



View of the exhibition, *13m3 Sand* (February-April 2019) Shedhalle, Zurich



View of the exhibition, *13m3 Sand* (February - April 2019) Shedhalle, Zurich



View of the exhibition, *13m3 Sand* (February - April 2019) Shedhalle, Zurich

Shedhalle Contaminated

Interview with Thea Reifler and Philipp Bergmann

Interviewed by Arianna Guidi, Jose Cáceres Mardones, Myriam Boutry

7 February 2020, the long wait has ended. Shedhalle has a new curatorial team: Thea Reifler und Philipp Bergmann will be the artistic directors of Shedhalle from 2020-2025, in collaboration with a curatorial board (Lucie Tuma, Isabelle Vuong, Michelangelo Miccolis) and the general manager Miriam Haltiner. They will put into practice their concept PROTOZONES which aims to establish Shedhalle as an institution for process-based art. Reifler and Bergmann have been working together in the fields of opera, visual arts, film, music theatre and performance since 2013. Their work locates in the intersection of artistic and curatorial practice which is part of Shedhalle's institutional genome as well. But as every microorganism, the Shehalle has mutated throughout the last decades and will find a new shape under Thea Reifler and Philipp Bergmann's direction. After the announcement, they took the time to give us some insights into their process of "prototyping" in and "contaminating" the Shedhalle - and how the process is still a process.

Arianna Guidi, Jose Cáceres Mardones, Myriam Boutry: Why did you choose Shedhalle, and what do you see in this institution for the development of your practice?

Thea Reifler and Philipp Bergmann: Shedhalle is a shapeshifter that has transformed many times since it was founded and has given space to try out formats and forms of curating. It is and always has been a very dynamic institution that for some years has had a pioneer function thinking about exhibition-making. We found that idea of an institution that challenges and reinvents itself very appealing. It strongly resonates with our idea of how we deal with our own work.

We think this particularity of Shedhalle is connected to a long history of working with artists as curators. And we as well actually have been working mostly as artists (performance, opera, installation, film) in recent years.

Some of our artistic works had strong elements of a curatorial practice—as they often included several art forms and many different groups of people. It is exactly that intersection that we find exciting. And now, with Shedhalle, we can expand and develop our practice within an institutional framework.

Furthermore, Shedhalle is deeply rooted in left culture which we grew up with. Nowadays, most of our ideas and concepts rise from our connection to a queer-feminist culture. This is also why we applied together with a curatorial board (Michelangelo Miccolis, Lucie Tuma, and Isabelle Vuong)—each of them will curate one protozone a year. That might sound like a phrase, but we want to create a diverse program that is also not only shaped by us.

Finally, we also fell in love with the space the first time we saw it. We showed a piece right next to it at Zürcher Theater Spektakel last year. During that time, we started to envision the possibility of working with this space. Now, we are very grateful for the opportunity that was given to us, thrilled to start working and already full of ideas and formats that we want to develop there.

AG, JCM, MB: For Shedhalle, you are proposing to develop a concept called "Protozonen"—could you explain this concept as a format of exhibition-making? And tell us more about what inspired you to come up with this concept?

TR&PB: We want to dedicate our time at Shedhalle to process-based art: forms of art that focus on the process of creation with all its unfolding possibilities, uncertainties, surprises. The protozone is a format we developed to exhibit process-based art. It should combine the classical exhibition format with processes that take place in or around that exhibition. You can imagine it like an exhibition that opened one week too early. There are artworks installed, but some are in the making.

Some of the artists are still present, and you can get in contact with them in different ways.

The first couple of days of each protozone we envision as a moment of intensity—we call it the “high-intensity-phase”: different parallel processes going on during days and nights in a flow of events and shared experiences. After that, a “low-intensity and residency-phase” follows: there will be occasional public events and opening times, but the space will also be used as a non-public working space.

What inspired us was “prototyping”—a term that is mostly used in science, programming, or design, referring to the establishment of a first functional draft of an idea. A prototype comes into existence exactly in the process of the making. We connected it to “zone” as a specific shared time-space of an exhibition. “Protozone” also echoes a biological term: “protozoan”—a micro-organism. Our vision is that the protozone lives and is shaped in a shared process between its related parts.

The protozones will not only involve people from international and local art scenes, but we will as well collaborate with people working in future technologies, science, and local initiatives engaged in social, ecological, and technological change. The idea is that different people, materials, and their processes find their own ways of becoming, relating, and co-existing in the space like in a temporary ecosystem—thus creating space to think and experience together, to shape together.

(As you maybe already see, we are strongly inspired by thinkers like Donna Haraway, as well as feminist utopian science fiction writers like Marge Piercy and Octavia Butler.)

AG, JCM, MB: Technology, migration, ecology, and identity are going to be, according to the press release published by Shedhalle, at the core of your programming. Those topics already have a history at Shedhalle—what are the challenge for those topics today? How do you want to bring them to Shedhalle?

TR&PB: Those topics have a history not only at Shedhalle, but in every cell of the world :) For us, those topics sum up the large processes present in our lives that are entangled in very complex ways and because of that often evoke a sense of helplessness. How we would like to approach them is from a perspective of complexity,

adaptability, and agility—we want to open this perspective of moving with these processes and participate in shaping them rather than being overrun by them. This is why we put process-based art at the center of our work at Shedhalle. Process-based art focuses on acting in the here-and-now, in relation to others and to the environment. In other words: together with artists, scientists, activists, and the audience, we would like to train to swim in the currents of crisis, reality, possibilities, and every unknown.

AG, JCM, MB: What is your next exhibition called?

TR&PB: First, we will start with smaller “Pilots”. We will show Nile Koettings performative exhibition “Remain Calm (*Reduced +*)” during Zurich Art Weekend and workshops by Lilly Pfalzer and Isabelle Lewis during the Fleshy Interface Festival that was initiated by Theater Neumarkt.

Then, End of October, coinciding with the 40th birthday of Rote Fabrik, we are planning to open the first Protozone. “Fun” fact: in the very beginning of this year, the title we came up with for our first exhibition in Shedhalle was *CONTAMINATION*. Back then, we were thinking about it in the sense of contaminating Shedhalle and Zurich with the protozone and with process-based art. Now, the meaning has changed completely under the new influence of coronavirus (another micro-organism)—this is a good example of how one process is related to another; in this case, how our working process is related to the global spreading of a virus.

We kept the title, but made an addition: *CONTAMINATION/RESILIENCE*. Which systems have been “contaminated” - are coming to an end or are currently undergoing change? Which toxic structures have been contaminating us? In view of this, what could make future societies and ecosystems resilient in the long term? This Protozone brings together concepts, practices and artworks that combine science fiction with eco-feminist approaches, thus provoking new and hopeful ways of thinking about the future—a thing we find much needed in our dystopia-dominated culture.

Also, the members of the curatorial board are starting smaller projects already this year, as their “Pilots” so to say. Right now, facing the corona crisis, they are especially focusing on formats that take its effects on the (inter-)national art scene into account. You will hear

about all of that very soon ;) Our multiple coming-outs at Shedhalle are—of course—in process.

Thea Reifler and Philipp Bergmann have been working together as artists, directors, and curators in the fields of opera, visual arts, film, music, theatre, and performance since 2013, most recently in Berlin. Their process-based works and interdisciplinary projects are inspired by queer-feminist theory and practice and have been shown at Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart (Berlin), 3HD-Festival - Kunsthaus Bethanien, Berghain, Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin), NOWY Teatr (Warsaw), Mousonturm (Frankfurt), Zürcher Theater Spektakel (Zurich), Hellerau - European Centre for Arts (Dresden), SPIELART-Festival (Munich), Opera Darmstadt, Sophiensæle (Berlin), et al. From 2020-2025, Thea Reifler and Philipp Bergmann will be the artistic directors of Shedhalle Zurich. With their concept PROTOZONES 2020-2025, they want to establish Shedhalle as an institution for process-based art.



Thea Reifler and Philipp Bergmann Photo: Rita Couto

Myriam Boutry (1987, Paris) holds a Master Degree in art history and museology from the University Paris Ouest Nanterre and a CAS in Curating from the Zürcher Hochschule der Kunst. She has developed an extensive experience in contemporary art and especially in exhibition production while working for public and private institutions (Galerie Isabelle Gounod, New Patrons by Fondation de France, Frac Île-de-France, Galerie Perrotin, Musée du Quai Branly).

Jose Cáceres is an historian and independent curator. He is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Zurich, developing a decolonial critique to the idea of history from a Latin American perspective. Recent projects include the intervention *Chile Despertó* with Impresionante (Chile) at Volumes 2019, the documentary exhibition *Chilean Revolt. A Chronicle* at la_cápsula and *Walmapu ex situ* in collaboration with the collective Trop cher to share. He is enrolled in the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS ZHdK.

Arianna Guidi is a designer and curator originally from Rome. She studied art and design in the Netherlands and holds a MA in Contemporary Typographic Media from the London College of Communication. After working with various leading branding and design agencies in London and Amsterdam as a creative designer and consultant, she started her curatorial practice which focuses on language and miscommunication, multicultural perspectives and encounters. She is now studying in the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, MAS at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

I don't want to be an artist. I want to be a King.

Adrian Notz (Cabaret Voltaire 2004–2019)

Interviewed by Elena Vogiatzi and Anastasia Chaguidouline

Anastasia Chaguidouline: What exactly was the situation of Cabaret Voltaire before you started working there? What year did you start working there?

Adrian Notz: I started in 2004. That was the year of the re-opening in September 2004. Before that, the whole building was squatted in 2002 by artists for a couple of months. Mark Divo, Pastor Leumund, and Ayana Calugar were the head figures of a lot of local and international artists who lived there and made daily programs, exhibitions, and crazy actions during that time, which earned a lot of international attention. It is thanks to the squatters that people in Zurich, in Switzerland, and worldwide, became aware that Zurich has this cultural heritage, the birthplace of Dada.

After the squatting, a committee was founded and a project group formed. An architectural competition to renovate the place was put into place, which Rossetti + Wyss won. The members of the initial project group were Juri Steiner, a locally known Dada specialist, Thomas Kramer, a journalist and now head of publishing house Scheidegger & Spiess, and Karin Hilzinger, a design thinker, as she calls herself today. The overarching context out of which the project group, the architects, and also other supporters emerged was the *Expo.02*, a big national spectacle that was happening in the French part of Switzerland (May 15, 2002 to October 20, 2002). I started more or less in June 2004, as an assistant of Philipp Meier, who had been appointed as the director (of Cabaret Voltaire).

Also, Swatch was a sponsor at that time, where Swatch basically said that they would pay for the program, if the city paid the rent of the space. So, we had Hayek Jr. at the opening, and John Armleder made an art piece made out of Swatches (Swatch watches). The Mayor of Zurich, Elmar Ledergerber, was, of course, also present at the opening.

AC: After the building was squatted, did the City of Zurich become aware of the importance of this building and its history?

AN: In a way, yes. There were a lot of political debates in the local parliament, because when Swatch said they would pay for the program for four years, they simultaneously suggested that the city should pay for the rent of the building. The building belonged to an insurance company, Swiss Life. To be able to pay that rent, the City needed to have a parliamentary decision. There was a big very Dada-inspired debate in the parliament in 2003. The right-wing parties were, of course, totally against Cabaret Voltaire stating: "Dadaism, Anarchism, Terrorism!"

On the other hand, there were socialists, some of them teachers of German, fans of Dada and even the Christian party, the CVP. There was one moment when Marc Richli, one of the socialists, recited *Karawane* (a sound poem by Hugo Ball) in the parliament. That encouraged a lot of room for debate, fights, it was a legendary parliament meeting in Zurich.

It is a nice story that a squatted place becomes a public cultural place. What was not so nice is that the government didn't really talk to the squatters. They let the artists do what they wanted to do during the squatting, and the cultural director of the city helped them a lot during that time, negotiating with the police, but they were never seriously considered to run the space.

AC: So, that is why a committee was brought into place, to not let it become an artist-run space?

AN: Yes, that would have been too wild for the City of Zurich. Besides, founding a committee or an association is a very Swiss thing to do.

AC: So, it was put in a framework that would work for the city as well.

AN: There was a committee with about 2,000 members that was put into place, with people from culture, from advertising, politicians. They signed a full-page ad in the NZZ (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*) under the name “Pro-Dada Haus.” They tried to generate broader support, rather than just appealing to the squatting scene. However, the squatters did get the feeling that Cabaret Voltaire was being taken away from them. But they kept on doing this “Dada Festwochen,” a festival that ran every year in different squatted spaces in Zurich and abroad.

AC: Is this initiative going on today?

AN: Not in Zurich. Mark Divo lives close to Prague. Pastor Leumund is in Berlin. Ayana Calugar is still here in Zurich, and she organizes open-stage events.

AC: And how did you proceed to become a director?

AN: I was just very good! (laughs) At the beginning, Phillip, who was my boss at the time, and I did some projects which were a bit too provocative for the city of Zurich. There was one workshop we did together with the media group bitnik where we invited street artists from London, C6. They went all around the city and did a stencil with Mona Lisa, and they had QR codes so one could know exactly where the pieces were located. It was very easy for the police to figure out where the pieces were and how many were done. So, one actually got the idea that people who had joined in the workshop, then went out in the city to do these stencils, which made some local politicians and the building owners’ society furious. The FDP said: “This is vandalism!”

We once also had a shop, and some designers or artists from Basel did two T-shirts with an AK-47 on it and with Brigitte Mohnhaupt, who was one of the RAF terrorists that had just been released from prison. We also had the Che Guevara poster next to it. In a way, we wanted to say that maybe the RAF might become a fashion like Che Guevara.

AC: Nowadays, there are so many T-shirts with R.A.F.

AN: T-shirts, Gerhard Richter’s works, films, etc. At the time that didn’t exist. The right-wing party said: “You

are supporting terrorism. We have to stop supporting you!”

AC: The “Dadaism, Anarchism, Terrorism!” in their mind worked.

AN: We fulfilled the self-fulfilling prophecy, yes! Luckily, we were not prosecuted for the “glorification of terrorism.”

There was another project with sex expert Maggie Tappert, who is specialized in the female orgasm and does workshops. For these workshops she made a casting for the men who would be part of her workshop. It was quite interesting to see how old men, members of the city government, and our board got so upset about this that they went directly to the press and let us know via the press that we were not allowed to do it.

So, we had a terrorism scandal, a sex scandal, and a vandalism scandal. Then the mayor of the City of Zurich said that the board should dismiss my boss Phillip (Meier). Therefore, the solution of our board was to say that we would have a co-direction (of him and myself). I was already doing shows, like the *Dada East? The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire* exhibition, or organized conferences, like the *Symposium Merzbau* (May 7, 2005). That’s how I became the co-director. Then in 2012, when we invited Chto Delat for the first time and made a show with them, when we also had members of the Voina group as well as Reverend Billy, Yes Men, and a lot of other activists as guests and did actions with them, we went into a financial crisis. One could say, cleaning the big banks in Zurich because of the dirty business they do is not too good for sponsoring. We didn’t have any sponsors anymore, because we didn’t manage to find new ones, and we had a debt of 120,000 CHF. Therefore, Phillip said he would leave, because we were two directors with 80% employment—which means 160% employment for the director’s position. After Phillip had left, I was reduced to half of my job (40%) with the idea to resurrect the institution by focusing more on the historical aspects of Dada and, therefore, prepare the Jubilee in 2016 and to make Cabaret Voltaire a more established institution. So, that is how I became the director. Being stubborn and ignoring all the signs that were against the place.

AC: And believing in Dada!?

AN: Yes! I had devoted my whole life to Dada. Dada was my religion.

Elena Vogiatzi: What role, according to you, does Dadaism play in our time?

AN: For me? NONE! That's why I left (laughs). I mean this is a question that has been asked a lot. A question one can answer in a lot of different ways. One can understand Dada as an art movement that happened from 1916 until 1923. As an art movement, one can say, in hindsight, that it influences other art movements and artists, and therefore has something like a heritage line of Dada, Surrealism, Bauhaus, Fluxus up through performance art today. One could say it has importance today because performance is everywhere nowadays. One can also say that Dada is an idea. The idea of Dada is not to say yes nor no, but maybe something third. It's a kind of a queer idea. To not be left and to not be right, but to be vertical, as Dadaist Walter Mehring said, when asked about his political views. So, it has a strong importance today, in its idea of queerness, in the idea of dissolving the masculine dialectics. Not being left or right, good or bad, black or white, male or female, but to aim for a third possibility and to be in-between everything.

Also, there is another explanation, in which I can refer to Kurt Schwitters, who said, that one can say Dada in three different ways: Dáda, Dada or Dadá. Dáda sounds very vulgar, like a drunk Swiss local politician would sound or men's locker room talk. Therefore, Schwitters says: "Dáda is the style of our times, and our time doesn't have any style." In that sense, if one looks at the current president of the United States, or other world leaders, one can say that they are "Super Dádas." It is mainly vulgar people who are in power, so in a way Dáda is all over us. Additionally, I think nowadays that the detachment of sense and content from communication is very common. It has become very difficult to find and make sense and to understand things in our times. Kurt Schwitters says: "Dada sounds indifferent," something an art critic would say; it doesn't really matter. Dadá, however has élan and drive and verve, it sounds French, very metropolitan, and urban. Schwitters concludes that Dáda makes a diagnosis of our times, Dáda is the medicine against our Dáda time. So, we can say, we need get rid of Dada and have more Dáda, that is dynamic and queer, to fight Dáda. Or as Hannah Hoch's painting from 1919 says: Cut with the kitchen knife Dáda through the last Weimar beer-belly cultural era.

AC: Dada as a concept can nearly be used as an analytical tool.

AN: That's a little bit what I have been trying to do with Dada in recent years. To use it as a tool and to maybe even find certain characters or personas, functions and interests, like the trickster, for example, or a joker or even a dandy. It can also be a female dandy. Also, I am not really a feminist, but I think that Dada is a very feminist idea. It dissolves masculine dialectics and tries to seek a more holistic approach.

AC: Have you been focusing your program around that idea? You have been presenting a lot of performances for the last couple of years; you had also female artists represented. How did you build your program, departing from that more theoretical idea?

AN: I didn't have a totally female-oriented program, no. I developed the theoretical idea more or less when I became director. We didn't really have many contemporary art exhibitions until 2016. Then we had the 100-year Jubilee of Dada in 2016 and for me after that, Dada was everywhere and I thought now everybody understands it, so we can carry on. In my opinion, performance was a logical step referring to the heritage line that I described before, but also because during the Jubilee we made a show and performance program together with Una Szeemann, where we had a copper stage in the cellar of Cabaret Voltaire with the idea that copper as a conductor can revitalize the ancient Dada heritage and bring the place into the here and now. Performance deals with a lot of queer, gay, and gender topics, personal identities, question of bodies, communities, and microhistories. It has a very fragile and almost experimental status, despite the fact that nowadays performance is everywhere. One can also say that all performance artists are to a certain degree dilettantes, because they are trying things that they do not know or master. They leave their comfort zones and expose themselves to their panic zones. The Dadaists did similar things and therefore promoted dilettantism a lot. So, the idea of starting a performance program after the Jubilee was about arriving in the here and now and not only look back at a moment that happened a century ago. I wanted to show that we can take the whole one hundred years and to maybe start thinking about the next one hundred years.

AC: You had quite a mix of ages in your program?

AN: Yes. We had a lot of very young artists, but also a lot of old white men. When one looks back into what we did more than ten years ago, today one would say it

was racist or sexist. There was one year, 2008, where we had a lot of old white men coming. There were exhibitions and events with Christoph Schlingensiefel, Jonathan Meese, Peter Weibel, Franz West, Maurizio Cattelan, Werner Nekes, and so on, all men! We were too focused on using these people as eminent authorities, glorifying them, and, because most of them had that mansplaining notion about them, also learn from them. Explaining the world to us, what art is, what architecture is, what the future will be. Later, we worked with a lot of activists and political artists. Also, my co-director Philipp was very much into social media from early on, and we also worked with a lot of media artists. These are just some examples, but in retrospect it is very fascinating to see the Zeitgeist being reflected in what we were doing, and sometimes we even managed to be at the forefront of it.

EV: Can we ask you about your audience? Do you believe that the audience is evolving or changing?

AN: I can only speak for Cabaret Voltaire, but when we started with this performance program two years ago, it would generate a lot of younger people, hipsters, cool people coming from the outskirts of Zurich, the local art scene would start to come to Cabaret Voltaire. Before that and because we had a very diverse program in terms of events, sometimes we would have a room full of over 60-year-olds, another time it would be full of Russian radicals. To a certain degree, I think our audience was more diverse before we started focusing on performance. Performance is a niche. It only attracts a certain kind of people.

But also, by renting out the space, by having the bar and by doing tours, we had bankers, teachers, pupils, advertisers, local associations, business clubs, city and state clerks, and so on coming.

AC: When did you start renting out the space? Did you also involve other curatorial or art practitioners in your program? Did you rent out the space on a regular basis?

AN: From the beginning in 2004, we always collaborated with others. At the beginning (with the financial support of Swatch), we could even support the external events and involve them financially, and organize events together with other institutions, art spaces, magazines, or individuals.

Then with the time, we started renting out the space for cultural events. To cover the running costs of such an event, one would have to pay 500 CHF and then one could do whatever one wanted. It was a totally uncurated, open space.

For the Jubilee, we wanted to focus more on our own program and give it a clearer profile, so we only rented out the space for private events and charged them very high fees (4,000 CHF). That concept worked, we didn't lose any money, but we had fewer events like weddings, birthday parties, business think tank workshops, a lot of company Christmas dinners, and some hackathons, that didn't disturb our own program. Besides, in 2016 we also took over the bar. So, to a certain degree it was more lucrative to just have the bar open, especially towards the weekends. However, we had certain partnerships, with institutes from the universities like the Zentrum der Künste und Kulturtheorie, Zentrum Geschichte des Wissens (ZGW). We focused on having academic partners, which are, especially the ZGW, very up to date on political debates and current topics. It made more sense to collaborate with people who know what they are talking about, instead of doing it on one's own.

AC: Maybe now that you are “gone” from the Cabaret Voltaire, you could recall and tell us something about what you had been doing before these fifteen years of being there?

AN: Before my time at the Cabaret Voltaire, I was a student at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, ZHdK. I studied Theory of Art and Design and basically came to the Cabaret directly from studying. It was my first job. I only had one job until now. Before that, I studied Art in Bremen and I wanted to become an artist. Which is funny because now that I am done with Dada, I am also connecting more to what I was doing before. But first I think I need to go some distance to be able to understand what I have been doing for the last fifteen years. I have the feeling that it could be worth putting this practice into a different narrative. I have often perceived it as a job, doing one project after the other, but it would be nice to see it as a story one could tell. Also, it seems that what I have been preaching the last fifteen years in the name of Dada had a deep impact on me, which I can start understanding and actively using now. I feel like I have become a real experimenting subject of my own interpretation of and special interest in Dada.

AC: You don't want to become an artist anymore?

AN: It is difficult as a curator to then become an artist. The only titles I still have are, on the one side, *Chevalier de la Tombe de Bakunin*—I am together with nine others sharing the responsibility of Mikhail Bakunin's grave in Bern—and on the other side, I am *King Adrian I of Elgaland-Vargaland*. I was previously an ambassador of the Kingdoms of Elgaland-Vargaland, which is a kingdom composed of all borders. That can be political borders, state borders, but also the borders between life and death, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between languages and so on. So, basically, it is the Kingdoms of everything in-between. Elga means elk and Varga means wolf in Swedish. It is a project by Carl Michael von Hausswolff and Leif Elggren, two Swedish artists who founded the Kingdoms in the nineties. Because I had been doing a lot for the Kingdoms—we annexed Lake Constance in 2008, and in 2016 we annexed all of Switzerland as a border—I was announced to become one of the seven kings and queens. So, what I need to do now is to write the adventures of King Adrian I of Elgaland-Vargaland in two epic books. One is the story of how Adrian became King Adrian I, which is an adventurous tale starting in my puberty up through December 2019, when I stopped working at Cabaret Voltaire. The second book describes the travels of King Adrian I of Elgaland-Vargaland in his Kingdoms, adventures in all spaces in-between, in interference, for example, in the space between languages, but also in Utopia or in the land of milk and honey (*Schlaraffenland*). I think that this in-between space is a vast space of the imagination. So, I don't want to be an artist. I want to be a King!

AC: That's amazing!

At the time you took on the position at the Cabaret Voltaire, were you a friend of Phillip's or acquainted with him?

AN: We had been doing projects together before, Phillip and I. He was originally a gardener, a landscape architect, no academic. He was a practitioner, had studied art at the F+F in Zurich and was known in the city as a club curator who organized artistic events in clubs. He hired me because I had studied theory. He thought that he could use me as a "theoretical backup."

Also, in my diploma work, I tried to establish a new art term, which was called "*Die Installative Event Skulptur*," that was based a lot on our collaboration before Cabaret Voltaire and on his works as a club curator. Looking

back, I realize that all I have been doing in Cabaret Voltaire was maybe just about erecting this installative event-sculpture.

AC: A "club curator" sounds exciting! It is very interesting how the term curator/curating is used nowadays. The Zoo of Zurich, for instance, also has a curator, Dr. Robert Zingg! In what way is it necessary for a zoo to have a curator? He is giving a theoretical background to what the zoo is doing; he is a scientist. He is basically doing the same thing that a curator is doing in a museum, just in a zoo.

AN: But the zoo is a museum. It is the museum of animals. It is also part of the association of Zurich Museums.

AC: That is really interesting!

EV: What will you miss the most about running the Cabaret Voltaire?

AN: Well, I had been missing a lot while running the space. I missed the beginnings, when we received more funding and also the curiosity about the topic, because when I started, I didn't know anything about Dada. I was like a naive Dada pilgrim travelling to the places these things happened back then. I will miss the easy access to artists I had thanks to working at Cabaret Voltaire, the birthplace of Dada. That is a great passe-partout that one should try and use as much as possible. What I loved doing was going to visit artists and diving into crazy stories. I just came from Amsterdam, where I was visiting Carlos Amorales. I have been working with him since the first project we did in 2009 (I got to know him in 2008). Since then, we have been engaged in a very long conversation (laughing). Back then in 2009, we went traveling by train together to all the Hans Arp archives and exhibitions in Europe. We traveled by train to Locarno, Strasbourg, Rolandeck, Hanover, Kassel, and Paris and we talked about what we had seen while trying to develop a project together. It seemed very old-fashioned, but I liked it a lot, working very closely with artists and trying to get into their fascinating stories and help from them.

AC: What do you think was most problematic about the space as an institution in Zurich?

AN: I think you already gave the answer: "in Zurich." That's the most problematic aspect. I noticed that basi-

cally it was a lot of fun, very exciting and interesting to do all the projects, but there was always this problem of the support from the side of the city. I am not only talking about the financial support, because we can observe a lot of cultural spaces that always have financial problems anyway, but it is more the mental support that I found missing. For the whole duration of me working there, Cabaret Voltaire has never really arrived in the city, and I never understood what the problem exactly was. How come the city doesn't really accept this space, nor support it like any other art space that is internationally less known? There was never any real generosity or openness for Cabaret Voltaire. It was more fear that was driving the local politicians and the administration, even when we had two successful referendums with more than 60% of positive votes. Meanwhile, the local scene ignored it, because it seemed more like a tourist attraction than an art space. The city has been supporting Cabaret Voltaire over the last fifteen years with always the same amount as in 2004. We made this whole Jubilee in 2016, thinking that then they would understand the importance of the space. Instead the left-wing politicians, the "Alternative Liste" asked: "Why does Cabaret Voltaire have to be where it is? Why can't we do it in Altstetten?" (laughing), and I said: "Well, because it is the birthplace and you can't move a birthplace." One could notice a total Dada overkill in Zurich for years, Zurich tourism exploited it like hell, but it just didn't arrive in their heads.

In a way the failure of Cabaret Voltaire is actually inscribed in the history of it: it can never, at least mentally, fit into the city, and that is basically what we have been fighting for the last fifteen years. But Cabaret Voltaire stayed always in-between everything. So, the failure of properly establishing Cabaret Voltaire in the city was actually a success.

AC: Then again, inducing fear can also be a very powerful tool. But, of course, if you want to function as an institution and not as an artist-run space, then it is probably a bit problematic.

AN: Yes, also with the mentality that we have in Zurich; even if you induce fear, there is no reaction. It is not like if you do it in Germany, or even in Russia, where there will be a lot of discussions or fights. Here, one just mostly looks the other way. Fear is not so productive. Also, irony or ambivalence are things that don't work here. If they do, then only in private social contexts. This kind of mentality seems very U.S.-like, where you

declare when you make a joke, and you are full of professional enthusiasm about everything all the time.

EV: Do you recall a particularly challenging event or an event that made an impact, in your opinion?

AN: It depends where it made an impact. One of the toughest things I did was to do an exhibition in Moscow, *Rewriting Worlds: Dada Moscow*, during the 4th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, with about fifteen artists. It was very difficult to work with the people there. Also, I think that, for me, it's very difficult to figure out what had an impact and in what sense, because I am too much in it. Furthermore, I am very bad at self-marketing, so I can't really say.

AC: I don't think you are that bad (laughing). Was it difficult to work with the Russian authorities, the Russian audience, or the artists?

AN: No, not the artists! It was difficult to work with the construction people and customs, etc. It was extremely difficult on a very practical level. I learned from the Slovenian artist, IRWIN, that you need to yell at the people, or else they won't do anything, and, of course, a lot of things, like the customs, could've been solved with some extra money, so to say. As a whole experience, it was very tough.

I want to use Carlos (Amorales) again as an example. One could say that this tour that we did in 2009, to Hans Arp archives, didn't really have an impact on him at that very moment, but it had an impact a lot of years later, when he started working with printing and doing collages, using coincidence in his work. That was six years later. I also did a project once with Rainer Ganahl, an Austrian artist living in New York, who wanted to come to Cabaret Voltaire and read Marx. I told him that he couldn't read Marx at Cabaret Voltaire, it would make more sense to read Lenin, because he was our neighbor. So, we were reading Lenin, and out of that a whole body of work developed, which he has been engaged with for about ten years: *Dadalenin*. So, the impacts are very subtle, but some artists have been influenced by what we did together.

AC: So, for you as a curator, it was really this interaction with the artists that you can look back at?

AN: Yes exactly, to see how one can infiltrate certain art practices, and how years later something comes out of it. I think it is a dialogue, because on one side, I am very interested in what they are doing, and on the other side

they might get something out of what I could offer. IRWIN, for example, started to paint religious icons after they did a show in Cabaret Voltaire, where we worked on Hugo Ball's book about three saints, called *Byzantine Christianity*. It's like an exchange: I get to understand their work, to collaborate with them, and they get something out of working together with me, with Dada.

AC: Does Cabaret Voltaire have an archive? A digital or physical archive?

AN: Yes, the analogue archive of the past fifteen years is in the city archive of Zurich. Also, we scanned more or less everything and put it online on <https://cabaretvoltaire.kleio.com/>.

AC: You invited quite a lot of international artists for a Zurich institution. Do you think that was a problem as well?

AN: Yes. I invited more international artists than Swiss artists. It was just because I was more interested in international artists and maybe also because they were more interested in working with this heritage. Of course, this was strategically not very clever, because one neglects the local scene. Once I did a project where I had twelve Zurich artists involved, and it was so easy to have the audience, to get articles in magazines, in newspapers, and to get the funding. It is very simple; we are social beings and we go more easily to see the projects that friends do and not merely out of curiosity. It is also difficult, almost impossible, to find funding for international artists doing something here. In a way, funding systems are very nationalistic. In Zurich, you can only work with Swiss or Zurich-based artists, because foundations have this as a criteria. I find it very problematic to basically only support your own national identity.

Of course, in the last fifteen years, the idea of sponsoring and supporting art projects has changed a lot. Now, it's a lot more work to get a small amount of money. In 2018, we applied for funding at over 100 different foundations with five totally different projects, to then finally get around 30,000 CHF in total. When we (Cabaret Voltaire) started, one would still have opportunities to get 100,000 or 50,000 more easily. It was a lot more trust-based back then, and less about controlling. Swatch, for example, gave us 330,000 CHF a year. On top of that, they made Dada Swatches, and then we got royalties, of again approx. 30,000 CHF a year. Somehow, the understanding that art has an importance and value

of its own was bigger. Today, we talk a lot more about the importance and value of art, but mainly, one could say, to question it and to apply different criteria to evaluate art that often don't have anything to do with it.

AC: Why did Swatch stop supporting you? Because of all these scandals (that you mentioned at the start of our conversation)?

AN: First of all, the reason for not setting up a new contract was, as I was told, that they were not happy with the way the city treated them. It had something to do with parking lots in front of one of their office buildings in the center of the city. A weird story, I cannot really remember. On the other side, there was this idea that Hayek Jr. had of Dada, as a rebellious art movement that could feed the legend of Swatch as a rebellious watch brand. So, maybe we just didn't really fulfill the cliché image that he had in mind.

AC: You mentioned your plans to write. Any other plans for the future?

AN: My plan is to not have a plan. As Hugo Ball said: orgiastic devotion to the opposite of everything that is useful and necessary.

Adrian Notz (b. 1977, Zurich) is a freelance curator, King of Elgaland-Vargaland and Chevalier de la Tombe de Bakunin. From 2012 to 2019, he was director of Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. He worked there first as a curatorial assistant from 2004, and from 2006 to 2012 as co-director. From 2010 to 2015, he was Head of the Department for Fine Arts at Schule für Gestaltung in St. Gallen. Since 2007, Notz has been a diplomat of NSK State, and from 2008 to 2018, he was Ambassador of the Kingdoms of Elgaland-Vargaland for Zurich. He has curated numerous Dada and contemporary art exhibitions mostly at Cabaret Voltaire but also internationally. His latest show is *End of Future / Fin del Futuro*, with Heba Y. Amin (AE), Carlos Amorales (MX), Mihai Barabancea (RO), Beni Bischof (CH), Alexander Brener (KZ) & Barbara Schurz (AT), Thomas Hirschhorn (CH), Elsa Louise Manceaux (FR), Jonathan Meese (DE), Anca Munteanu Rimnic (RO), Ciprian Muresan (RO), Janiv Oron (CH), Christodoulos Panayiotou (CY), Augustin Rebetz (CH), Jorge Satorre (MX), Melanie Smith (UK), Lena Maria Thüring (CH) and

Antonio Vega Macotella (MX), at SAPS La Tallera, Cuernavaca, Mexico.

Basel. Her contributions have been published in The Contemporary Condition series (Sternberg Press) and the *OnCurating* journal.

Anastasia Chaguidouline is a curator, art mediator, and nomad. Currently based in France, she holds a BA in Fine Arts from the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, an MA in Arts from Institut Kunst, Basel, and a MAS in Curating from the ZHdK, Zurich. She currently works as a curatorial assistant in the Museum Tinguely, Basel, and as an art mediator for the Kunstmuseum Winterthur and Art

Elena Vogiatzi studied theater and visual arts in Athens, Greece (Deree-The American College of Greece, 2010) and the U.K. (University of Exeter, 2012). In 2020, she completed the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS, at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). She is currently working as a freelance artist and curator in Athens, Greece.



Was ist Kunst, Hugo Ball - IRWIN



Monte Verità, Jonathan Meese, Bazon Brock, Harald Falckenberg (Performance)



Prozession Paul Polaris (Invent the Future With Elements of the Past)



Learn Tu Fuck Yourself, Carlos Amorales



Cyclop, Carlos Amorales



Cally Spooner, United in Stomach Flu



KREV, Annexation of Switzerland



Libita Clayton

Interview with Evelyn Steiner, Curator at ZAZ – Zentrum Architektur Zürich

Interviewed by Beatrice Fontana and Noémie Jeunet

January 10, 2020

Evelyn Steiner welcomes us into one of the small rooms surrounding the incredibly wide anteroom on the second floor of the Villa Bellerive on a cold January morning. The small meeting room is ordered and plain, somewhat makeshift, and the big window frames the barren park skirting Zurich's lake.

Beatrice Fontana/Noémie Jeunet: Good morning, Evelyn, and thank you for having us here. You were appointed curator of the ZAZ – Zentrum Architektur Zürich last year; please tell us more about this project: its history, concept, and development.

Evelyn Steiner: The institution is called ZAZ – Zentrum Architektur Zürich and was started in January 2018. The idea behind the project was to establish a multidisciplinary practice with a focus on architecture as well as on the urban and social development of the city of Zurich. The main intention was to offer a broader focus on the subject, in order to complement, with a different profile, other existing institutions like the Museum für Gestaltung¹ or the GTA Exhibition² in Hönggerberg.

The Villa Bellerive, in which we are housed, had hosted the collection of the Museum für Gestaltung between the end of the Sixties and 2017, as Museum Bellerive. In 2017, they moved their entire archive to the Toni Areal. At that point, the Municipality, which owns the building, proposed to devote it to an alternative cultural purpose with reference to architecture. They first approached the ETH and the Architekturforum and tried to develop a draft concept. Later, BSA (Bund Schweizer Architekten) and SIA (Schweizerischer Ingenieur- und Architektenverein) also joined the project; those are the four founding members of the ZAZ. They all have representatives on the Board. The

actual institution moved here at the beginning of January 2018. I started here as a curator in March 2019.

BF/NJ: How do you finance your project?

ES: The city of Zurich has allocated 1.65m CHF for this pilot project, distributed over approximately three and a half years. The biggest part of this amount covers the rent of the building; the rest is used to cover the operating costs.

The Municipality is currently evaluating the project and will decide next year, or already at the end of this year, whether it will continue or not. Of course, these evaluations are fundamental to disperse public money. The final decision will be made partially on the basis of economic considerations, but of course the activity of the ZAZ will also be evaluated content-wise. A balance among facts and figures will lead to the decision. Some of us working here have been in contact with evaluation agencies, and they also survey the public and visitors. I do not know exactly what the criteria and the modalities are, but it is of course extremely interesting to observe how this process works.

Back to the financing, what remains of the public funding after covering the costs is not enough to finance the exhibitions, so we have to raise additional money through foundations or sponsors, or a different form of collaboration. At the same time, we have to question the number and the display of exhibitions, the educational program, and in general the complete activity of the institution. As we are not a museum, and do not have a permanent collection to offer, this is, of course, a delicate issue.

This research of a balance, between financial possibility and cultural program, is for us, as well as for the board members, a learning process, as we always adopt and experiment with different strategies to diversify what we offer.

For example, the next exhibition will be about pioneering female architects, and it is an existing exhibition, curated two years ago at the DAM Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt. We will now bring it here to Zurich and add to it a section regarding Swiss women architects. For this exhibition, we were able to raise a significant amount of funds, since this is a hot topic, very much felt from different kinds of publics. And I think working with contemporary topics (*Zeitgeist*) is always a clever strategy.

BF/NJ: As you mentioned, the decision of locating the ZAZ in the Villa Bellerive in Seefeld came directly from the city of Zurich. How does this location impact your work?

ES: Seefeld is a neighborhood in which there are not that many architectural offices; this is a fact we have to deal with. Of course, during the summer, the proximity to the lake and the big lawn on the promenade constitutes a big benefit.

The City is also working at the moment on a project that will ideally join the four institutions along the Höschgasse in a sort of museum mile, which will include the Villa Bellerive, together with the Corbusier Pavilion, the Atelier Haller and the Villa Egli. We would also like to be connected to the tram line Museumslinie, and I think they are working on the feasibility of this idea. That will, of course, be of great importance for us, since we are still not that visible—we also do not have a proper sign.

BF/NJ: How do you actually take advantage of the outdoor space of the Villa? Could it be considered a crucial element for connecting the ZAZ to the city?

ES: I think so, yes. Such a big outdoor space has a huge potential. However, the lawn in front of the house including the part facing the lake, while it could be furnished with small tables to host a café, can only partially be used for educational projects or as a museum space, since the building and the surrounding green area are listed. But we saw that just by installing a wooden platform, during the exhibition last summer, we had tremendous feedback; people entered the space from the lake and started perceiving it as a public space, as a public institution. That was an exceptional event. Otherwise, we usually take advantage of the small patio facing Höschgasse.

BF/NJ: Multiple different partners are involved and support your project on a technical, cultural, and financial level. What is their influence in your curatorial choices or in your mediation program? And, on the contrary, to what extent does your program influence their institutional activity?

ES: Well, this is not so clear-cut. As I mentioned, we have a Board with eight members, but just three of them deal with exhibition content. When we talk about exhibition projects, we mainly refer to Christian Schmid, André Bideau, Daniel Bosshard and Christoph Bürkle—it is just a small group. But I would not really say that the institutions which they represent have any kind of direct influence on our choices; it is more that we benefit from the background and the competence of the person. Each of them has his own field; for example, Christian Schmid's interests are more connected with sociology and urbanization processes, and the next exhibition will propose a project which he initiated, about the Swiss photographer Gertrud Vogler and the '80s protest movement *Züri brännt!*, on the occasion of the Fortieth Jubilee. It will display pictures and documents of those days. That does not establish for us a direct relationship with the ETH. We do not, as an example, exhibit their diploma projects, which may be a possible form of collaboration. It is somehow too early to talk about those kinds of relationships; we are still experimenting in that sense.

BF/NJ: Does the Municipality and its cultural department have a say in the topic you choose to exhibit?

ES: No, not really. Of course, there is a certain common interest in acting in a politically correct way, but so far, we have not had any direct confrontation with them in relation to the exhibition topics. On the other hand, the people working in the cultural department have a certain experience with regard to culture production and culture mediation, so I think it would be interesting to also consider input from their side.

BF/NJ: Your space does not entirely circumvent the institutional structures. It cannot in fact be properly defined as an off-space.

ES: Yes, we are definitely not an off-space, as we are partially funded by the city of Zurich. However, I have to admit that since we are not a permanent institution yet, there is a strong hands-on approach; we are all part of it, sometimes it is hard, but also kind of exciting, because

it feels like you can still keep a certain amount of freedom.

BF/NJ: With your pilot project, you are implementing a certain way of mediating and communicating architecture. The exhibition formats seem to be conceived and scheduled to reconnect the city with architectural theory, and with the application of the latter to the city's inhabitants, in order to generate interest in subjects that are normally relegated to professionals and often exclusively in an academic environment.

How do you set up an exhibition of this type? How do you make those issues accessible? What kind of display or format do you use, knowing as well the tight budget that such exhibitions have access to?

ES: As I mentioned, so far I have worked here on just two projects. The first one, when I arrived in March, was the exhibition about Zurich,³ and everything was finalized, it just needed to be installed. The display for this show was definitely not expensive. We implemented different strategies; for example, everything was printed here, in-house, and that meant a strong format limitation: there was no print bigger than an A3, but of course a significant saving.

As I said, the strategies are different; once we benefited from borrowing a lot of material from the GTA exhibitions archive, and maybe, going to your previous question, it is on this mutual support that you can really see that a collaboration between ETH and ZAZ does exist.

Also, we do not have restrictions in terms of security or climate conditions for what we exhibit here; we do not dispose of a special heating system, or a humidity and temperature regulation, and that allows us to recycle and reuse a lot of materials.

For the next exhibition about women in architecture,⁴ it was clear that the time was tight. I only had six to seven months to organize it, and considering that I am working here 60%, it would have been impossible to curate a full new exhibition on my own in this short time frame. We decided then to work with an existing show, and we agreed on *Frau Architekt* that was exhibited at the DAM in Frankfurt at the beginning of 2018.

What we did, and for me that was a key point, was adding Swiss positions. First of all, because showing just German architects would have not attracted a lot of people here in Zurich, but also because adding something new meant not merely show something already existing. That remains a great strategy to control costs and offer content.

BF/NJ: In that sense, the display is not really a curatorial choice that comes with the purpose of a certain mediation, but more the answer to a series of occurring issues?

ES: For this exhibition, it was like that, but for the next one that will change—I am already excited about it. For that, I am working with a young scenographer, Damian Fopp; he is already co-curator at the Museum für Gestaltung, and our goal is to do something fresh and new. It is, of course, my intention to implement a discussion about the display choice as a curatorial act. Also, I think that is absolutely necessary for architectural exhibitions, where the object itself (architecture) cannot be present, and you just have to work with mediums which convey it. It becomes fundamental, also to avoid becoming too academic, and consequently not accessible to everybody. This is a widely discussed topic in the contemporary discourse about exhibiting architecture. But, the lack of time and the lack of funds sometimes prevent us to really come to the point I would wish to come to; we have to go step by step.

BF/NJ: Is it possible to exhibit architecture without showing a mere representation of it?

ES: Yes, if you really cleverly choose your topic. One does not necessarily have to plan shows about buildings or monographic exhibitions about architects. I am really interested in the intersections between different disciplines, like, for example, architecture and film. I did an exhibition in Basel where I decided not to show any plans or models at all; instead I wanted to show a film, so I produced one, with a friend of mine who is a film director, and there I really tried to work with other media to convey architecture. Then, it starts to become really funny and a pleasure to deal with the architectural subject.

Of course, I do not have anything against classic or academic exhibitions; they can be wonderful, and sometimes you can really see beautiful drawings, but here, at least in this building, that would not be possible, because of the lack of climatic or security measures. So,

we have to choose and find other ways to build a show, and that is still very interesting.

BF/NJ: Making reference to the subject of your next exhibition, is there a gender problem in architecture and in its representation?

ES: Oh, well, that is certainly an issue. Things are changing, but we have not reached yet a balance in presence and a complete equality between men and women in architecture. And that, of course, affects representation and mediation of the practice. There are today many more women professionals in the field, and of course that comes with a certain amount of recognition, but still many institutional entities suffer for an evident lack of women representatives. It is our job also to make those issues visible and bring them to the table.

BF/NJ: What kind of public are you addressing with your project?

ES: I think that is really interesting to observe like, for example, for the current exhibition, *Wie wollen wir wohnen?*, the public is completely different than the one which we welcomed during the summer exhibition. The latter, *Nach Zürich. Kontroversen zur Stadt*, attracted a lot of architects and professionals, while the current one reaches regular citizens, living in cooperative housing or interested and connected with the cooperative housing scene.

Of course, we could generally say that our public includes a majority of architects and students, but it is very fascinating to acknowledge how this building can host so many different audiences. I would therefore not specifically say that we are aimed at a certain public, but it is clear so far that each exhibition reaches different categories of people.

Furthermore, exhibitions about architecture are often seen as something “exotic” by the audience. There are not so many institutions that deal with the subject in Switzerland, and we are ourselves not a traditional institution, we are not an art or a history museum; there are for us not so many existing models to look at, and that is a reason for continuously questioning our practice.

BF/NJ: In your program are also included regular appointments, like the “Debatte” and “Akzente” series. What are they exactly?

ES: Yes, this is a thing that was introduced by WBG (Wohnbaugenossenschaften Zürich), so I cannot really say why they chose these kinds of names for the series, but I think their idea was not only to put emphasis on the exhibition but also to participate in the discourse through their program, and I have to say they are quite successful; they have more than thirty to forty visitors for each event, and for an institution like ours, this is definitely not bad. They have a very intense program—normally there are like three events every week.

BF/NJ: Do you also organize guided tours or walks in the city?

ES: Yes, depending on the exhibition, and this is a very interesting topic for me. For example, we did it for the *Nach Zürich* exhibitions; that was about the city of Zurich and, of course, one of the ways to discover architecture at its best is walking outside of an institution. It was great to connect the people with their city. Going out is a key element, and back then we organized a very nice thing, I think; we contacted the Tram Museum and asked permission to use the old tram line, and with that we planned three free city tours, one in the Gartenstadt-Schwamendingen, one in Oerlikon and one in Zurich West. It was a huge success.

For the next exhibition, I am in contact with Frauenstadtrundgang5; they also organize architectural tours, and they will integrate a tour of the Swiss women architects who we are showing in their program, in the time frame of the exhibition and afterward.

Recently, I looked at other institutions like the Architektur Zentrum Wien, and they regularly offer city tours, which opens up to a completely new kind of public and provides the possibility of expanding the audience.

BF/NJ: Which one has been so far the most successful exhibition? And which the most challenging?

ES: I still was not working here, but my colleague told me that the exhibition about bunkers was a great success, considering also the limited amount of money they invested in it. It was an exhibition based on the thesis research of two former ETH students. It attracted a lot of different people, mostly elderly, whose reaction to the topic was incredible. They organized more than twenty bunker tours, they were all fully booked, and still now we keep getting emails from people that would like to book them. Personally, I would have never thought that

this topic could appeal to so many people, but its accessibility and immediacy worked very well. This is definitely an experience from which we should learn.

The *Nach Zürich* exhibition was also a success, although it mostly attracted professionals who could experience a different way of learning about their own city, and to discover the different city development of the '60s and '70s. Also, for me, I mean, I have been living here for a couple of years now, and I discovered so much. I think it was a clever way to shed light on Zurich.

But this was also the most challenging for me so far. I came here a month before the opening during the set-up, and as you can imagine, it was so chaotic. It was the biggest exhibition for the ZAZ, we used the full house. Also, there were many partners involved, and it was quite challenging to put together all these voices.

BF/NJ: What would your wishes be in this case, and how do you see yourself and your contribution for the Zurich architectural and cultural scene in the future?

ES: I think what I really would like to achieve is to offer a platform to connect people and initiatives and institutions, both directly related to architecture or not.

I think it might stem from the federalist system of Switzerland, the tendency for which everybody here tends his own garden. I realized that when I was doing the preparation for the women architect exhibition. There are a lot of initiatives related to women's lives, culture, and societal role, but they do not really connect. And an exhibition offers the opportunity to show people what is going on around them and how rich the scene actually is. I imagine this platform offering not just an exhibition, I do not really want to play the museum, but a space to gather and connect ideas. All the institutions I know that are dealing with architecture are mostly museum-like institutions, and I do not know if that is enough; the challenge is to find a new, very sharp and complementary profile to differentiate the what we are offering.

BF/NJ: Would you like to continue after the first three years?

ES: I am convinced that there is huge potential in this project, and that it should continue further. We have a beautiful house, in a beautiful location, which, of course, has advantages and disadvantages, but

the outdoor space, as we said, could be developed. The BWG already tried to revive the space during the summer period, it was quite nice; the question if there should be a café or a restaurant is there, it is an issue, maybe once we get to the point where we are able to afford a good coffee machine.

But also for the city of Zurich, there are a lot of architectural offices here, there is a nice and rich architecture scene in Switzerland, and of course we have Basel and the GTA exhibition already, but still I think it would be sad if the project would stop and the building all of a sudden would go to a bank or an insurance company. Also, in terms of educational projects and mediation, it would be great to expand also with projects for children and elderly people, to improve our collaboration with the Volkshochschule, for example.

Yes, I really hope it will continue.

Notes

1 The Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich houses a broad collection of design and visual communication items. Founded in 1875, it owns today, in two different locations in the city of Zurich, over half a million objects relevant to graphic and design history.

2 As part of the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at the ETH Zurich, gta exhibitions display theoretical and practical research subjects of the architecture department.

3 *Nach Zürich. Kontroversen zur Stadt.*

4 *Frau Architekt. Seit mehr als 100 Jahren: Frauen im Architektenberuf.*

5 Frauenstadtrundgang is an association of around twenty historians who have been researching the history of women and gender in the city of Zurich.

Evelyn Steiner (*1981, Zug) is an architect and art historian, currently holding the position of curator at the ZAZ (Zentrum Architektur Zürich, Switzerland). She was appointed as main Salonnière for the Salon Suisse in 2020, taking place during the 17th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. After completing her architectural studies in Zurich (ETH) and Buenos Aires, she worked in different architecture practices in Rome, Barcelona, and Zurich. In 2012, she received a Master of Arts in Art History at the University of Berne with a special qualification in Curatorial Studies and Museology. She then moved to Frank-

furt to work at Deutsches Architekturmuseum (2012-2014). From 2014 to 2016, she was curator at the SAM (Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum) in Basel, where she curated the exhibitions Constructing Film. Swiss Architecture in the Moving Image and Aristide Antonas. Protocols of Athens, among others. Afterwards, she worked as a freelance curator and writer, and as an assistant lecturer at Hochschule für Gestaltung Basel at the Institute of Interior Design and Scenography.

Zentrum für Architektur Zürich (ZAZ) is an exhibition space, an interdisciplinary forum, and a venue for cultural events. It focuses upon themes related to the city and architecture, to space and the environment. With its program of events geared toward a broad public, ZAZ covers a diverse range of topics. It asks what urban planning and architecture do to people, respectively could do for them. The focus is on the city as the site of decisions involving architecture and urbanism – with all their implications for the coexistence in a society facing social and environmental challenges. The public is invited to adopt and learn about various perspectives on a given subject, but also to introduce viewpoints of their own.

Noémie Jeunet (b. 1988) is a Swiss architect; she received her Diploma at the EPFL in Lausanne (CH). She has lived and worked in Zurich (CH) since 2013. After working as an architect for Park Architekten and Armon Semadeni Architekten for several years, she decided to study curation in more depth, beginning a CAS program at the ZHdK in Curating in 2019. At the same time, she is now working as an exhibition designer at the Museum Rietberg. She has been part of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS, at the ZHdK since 2019.

Beatrice Fontana is a Zurich based architect, curator and independent researcher.

Museum of Digital Art – MuDA – Zurich: Christian Etter

Interviewed by Alina Baldini and Annick Girardier

This interview took place February 21, 2020. Since then MuDa – Museum of Digital Art was forced to close its doors.¹

Alina Baldini/Annick Girardier: What is your background?

Christian Etter: I studied typography in Switzerland and then worked in digital design in Italy and London. I run my own design company.

This museum was opened four years ago, and when it opened it was the first of its kind in Europe. We are two founders [the other one is Caroline Hirt], a core team of four professionals and three interns. We have a small budget, but given that we automated most of the operation, we manage to survive.

We came up with this idea because I was disappointed with the museum scene in Zurich; after writing complaint letters and not getting answers, we decided to do something about it.

AB/AG: How do you sustain the Museum?

CE: Partially with the funding we receive from the City of Zurich, which is a small amount but still important. And then with the tickets visitors pay.

We struggle in making people understand that entry fees are for us the main way to survive. When people visit museums in Zurich and pay for a ticket, the price is actually much more than that, as it sums up to the funds that the Museum receives through public money. We do not get that kind of funding, and we need to sustain ourselves differently, for example, through tickets.

AB/AG: What is your curatorial concept?

CE: We decided to program an algorithm that scans the web to look for artists, scores them, and we call the

ones that score at the top. The first four artists were picked by us by hand, and this was a reference we gave the algorithm to scan the web for. And the first one chosen by the algorithm was a Swiss artist Pe Lang. The algorithm uses data patterns about artists who were already exhibited [at MuDA] and looks for matching data patterns on the web. It doesn't understand culture, gender, or nationality, and therefore doesn't consider these parameters.

Once the algorithm proposes the artists, we contact them. They decide whether they are interested. They usually curate their exhibition completely. We just provide them with practical information (fire escapes, etc.).

AB/AG: Is there enough room for diversity?

CE: The field of digital artists is pretty small still, therefore there are many new artists and innovators, as we do not have well-established “blockbusters” yet in the sense of how we define them for classic or modern art. In fact, our exhibitions go from Vera Molnar, who is a 96-year-old pioneer in digital art, living in Paris, to a young Chinese artist, Raven Kwock, and he is giving a talk tonight (February 21), and the vernissage is on March 7 and it stays on until July 19, 2020.

AB/AG: What about gender balance?

CE: It is probably two men to one woman.

AB/AG: How did you come up with the idea of using an algorithm?

CE: We have been inspired by what the Philharmonic Orchestras started to do in the '70s and '80s to ensure gender-neutral auditions. They put a curtain in front of the candidates, and they are even asked to remove their shoes that could provide a hint about the gender of the candidate.

AB/AG: How do you promote your exhibitions?

CE: Mostly through social media and the internet site of the museum.

AB/AG: Who is your target audience?

CE: We are a niche museum, so we also have people flying from everywhere to see the exhibitions. We have visitors from all ages and backgrounds, we also have many schools visiting us. It is a bit nerdy, but if you are nerdy you do not want to miss it.

AB/AG: What would you wish for the Zurich art scene?

CE: Diversity is the most important aspect to invest in. Small off-stream/off-space activities should be sustained; unfortunately, the gap between the funds that go to large institutions compared to the small ones is increasing.

Last year the City presented their cultural strategy, and the title was “Diversity.” I would like to see that happening more in practice. More transparency in this area would also be appreciated.

AB/AG: What do you like the most about our work at MuDA?

CE: I like the opportunity to learn through the connection with artists, and I am inspired by the enthusiasm of visitors. I also enjoy working with kids for whom we organize regular workshops and they build their own devices-products-artworks.

AB/AG: What would you like to see more of in your work at MuDA?

CE: More funding could help. I am very happy with the contents. With more resources, we could organize more events. And we could also take these contents outside the museum, in public spaces, for example.

AB/AG: What’s the role of art nowadays?

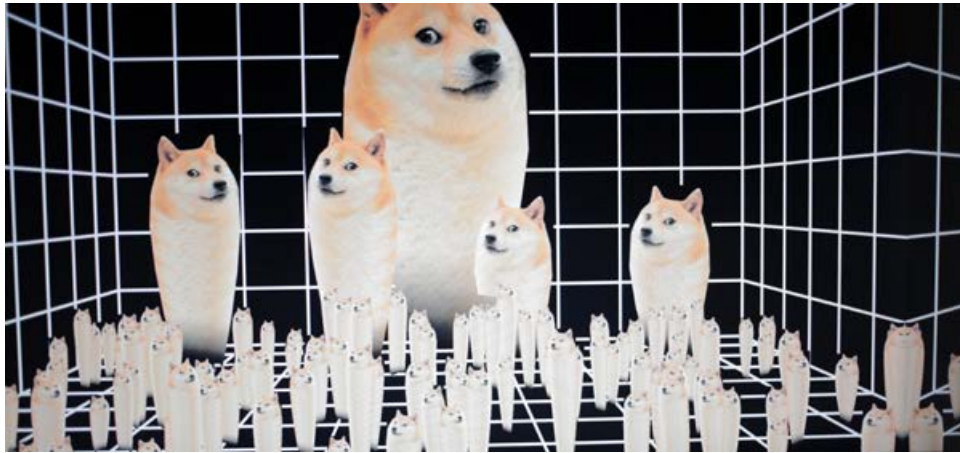
CE: I like this quote: “A book must be an axe for the frozen sea within us.” This is what good art should do. What is art? Whatever does not have an economic purpose and creates an insight, or helps people to see new perspectives, this is art for me.

Notes

I See Press Release, Jun 30, 2020: <https://muda.co/closing>.

Christian Etter was born in the mountains of Switzerland in 1982. He did an apprenticeship in typography in Zurich. Christian has worked as an art director for Saatchi & Saatchi in Milan, as well as a consultant for Fabrica, United Colors of Benetton’s research center near Venice. For ten years, he worked as Director for UNIT9 in London. In between, he worked as a counsellor for children at the skateboard recreation center in Lausanne, then continued counselling sexually exploited children in Bogota, Colombia. Currently he heads Etter Studio, a small interdisciplinary design company based in Zurich. Simultaneously, he is the Co-Director of the Museum of Digital Art (MuDA) in Zurich. He is a member of the Advisory Board of UNESCO’s Design21 Association (New York), European member of the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences (New York), as well as Chairman of the Digital Arts Association (Zurich)

Alina Baldini is an Italian psychologist, she has lived and worked in Basel (CH) since 2017. For the past couple of decades, she has been working in corporations addressing topics like company culture, coaching, and personal transformation. Following her passion for contemporary art and her curiosity to discover the curating aspects in what she experiences, she decided to begin the Post-graduate Programme in Curating, MAS at the ZHdK in 2019.



Raven Kwok, 7 March–19 July 2020, MuDa

Art as a Prize: the Zurich Art Prize

Sabine Schaschl, Director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv

Interviewed by Marco Arrigoni

Marco Arrigoni: “The prize reflects an important link between the history of constructivist, concrete and conceptual approaches and their continuing impact, through to the present day.” How do you think this reflection around the themes of the award takes place?

Sabine Schaschl: Museum Haus Konstruktiv believes that one of its key tasks is to encourage contemporary art that addresses the content of the museum with a broadened understanding. Taking the thematic accomplishments of the Zurich Concretists (Max Bill, Richard Paul Lohse, Verena Loewensberg, and Camille Graeser) as a starting point, Museum Haus Konstruktiv occupies itself with the contentual continuation thereof, through to contemporary art. Thus, rather than honoring history in the traditional sense, the *Zurich Art Prize* honors an independent artist who operates at the interfaces where the cultural heritage of constructivist-concrete and conceptual art, on the one hand, meets contemporary art concepts and research on the other hand.

MA: What is the main feature of the exhibitions that arise from the Zurich Art Prize?

SSCH: The winning artist is free to conceptualize an exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv and present his/her works to our audience. The artist presents his/her exhibition proposal in advance to me, and we discuss conceptual and practical topics. Most of the artists produce new works or integrate existing works within new ones, so that each *Zurich Art Prize* exhibition is a representation highlighting the newest concepts.

MA: Do you think it is important that a prize focuses on the place where it is located and on its history?

SSCH: Yes, I think so. The *Zurich Art Prize* was set up in 2007 by Museum Haus Konstruktiv together with

Zurich Insurance Group Ltd., patron partner of the museum, and now has a strong international presence. Our partnership with Zurich Insurance Group Ltd. is based on a common understanding, in that both partners see the promotion of creative forces in our society as an important basis for social responsibility.

MA: What are the main criteria that lead to the nomination of the winner? And what are the parameters according to which the six nominated artists are chosen?

SSCH: Each year, as chairperson, I invite six curators, critics, and art experts to each nominate one artist who has already made an impression as a visible force on the international art scene, and who demonstrates an intellectual extrapolation of the constructivist-concrete and conceptual heritage within contemporary art. From the six nominated artists, a select jury of experts chooses the prize winner. As already mentioned above: the *Zurich Art Prize* honors an outstanding artistic position who operates at the interfaces where the cultural heritage of constructivist-concrete and conceptual art, on the one hand, meets contemporary discourses on the other hand.

In 2020, the Zurich Art Prize goes to Argentine artist Amalia Pica. The fact that Amalia Pica, with her constructivist and minimalist language of forms, shares the same substantial focus as Museum Haus Konstruktiv, was already established in the 2019 group exhibition *Concrete Contemporary*. She enthused the *Zurich Art Prize* jury by means of her precise engagement with political and sociological themes, based on scientific research and findings.

Sabine Schaschl, director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich since 2013, is an art historian and curator of exhibitions on contemporary art and classical modernism, as well as an author and editor of academic publications and catalogues. From 2001 to 2013, she was director of Kunsthaus Baselland in Muttenz, Basel. Her work as a curator has encompassed exhibitions on socially relevant topics (e.g. *Dada Differently*, *On the Metaphor of Growth*, and *Cooling Out: On the Paradox of Feminism*), as well as solo exhibitions on international artists, such as William Kentridge, Etel Adnan, Cerith Wyn Evans, Marlow Moss, Tomás Saraceno, Omer Fast, Javier Téllez, Laurent Grasso, Gal Weinstein, and Sharon Ya'ari. Sabine Schaschl is a member of several art committees and juries, and was named Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Republic in 2010. In 2007, she received the Swiss Federal Award for Art and Art Mediation at the Swiss Art Awards.

Marco Arrigoni lives and works in Milan. He is an art consultant for Harper's Bazaar Italia, and writes about contemporary culture for Il Tascabile, Elle Decor Italia, and Capri Life. He won the Prada Foundation Degree Award in 2018. He studied literature and art history in Milan, Paris, and Zurich. He completed the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS, ZHdK in 2020.



A ∩ B ∩ C (line), 2013. Installation with plexiglass forms and occasional performance. Courtesy of the artist and Herald St, London. Photo by: Andy Keate.

“There is no magic”: An Interview with Art Dealer Eva Presenhuber

Interviewed by Maya Bamberger

The Austrian-born art dealer Eva Presenhuber has been based in Zurich for over thirty years. Representing artists such as Peter Fischli & David Weiss, Ugo Rondinone, Douglas Gordon, Tschabalala Self and Shara Hughes, she is often listed among the most powerful figures in the art world.

In 1996, Presenhuber co-founded LISTE art fair alongside Peter Kilchmann and Peter Bläuer, as they felt the need for a younger fair in Basel. In 2003, after a few years of collaboration with Hauser & Wirth under the name Hauser & Wirth & Presenhuber, she founded Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Zurich.

While expanding in Zurich, and opening a venue in New York, Presenhuber has on many occasions expressed her commitment to the flourishing of the Swiss art field. On the occasion of opening the exhibitions of Shara Hughes, Joe Bradley and Ugo Rondinone for Zurich Art Weekend, I had the opportunity to interview Presenhuber about her background, the gallery program and about the city.

Maya Bamberger: This issue of *OnCurating* features a spectrum of voices from the local Zurich art scene. In an increasingly globalized art world, how would you describe the relationship between Galerie Eva Presenhuber and its hometown? How many Swiss-born artists does the gallery represent? Is being Swiss a relevant parameter? How has the gallery’s role in the city developed over the last nineteen years?

Eva Presenhuber: We have a close relationship with Switzerland and its art institutions and work with four Swiss-born artists. The gallery is an international one; being Swiss-born is great but not the criteria for being in the program.

MB: How did your personal journey with art start? What is your background? What was your first position in the art world?

EP: I went to art school in Vienna and finished with the title Magister Artium. After art school, I had a few very talented artist friends, like Ugo Rondinone, who gave me the idea to open a gallery in Zurich and show them. This is how I became an art dealer. My first position was at Galerie Walcheturm.

MB: Speaking about the Art Basel selection criteria, you emphasized the importance of a gallery’s role in “building” artists. How would you characterize the “magic” of Galerie Eva Presenhuber in that respect throughout the different phases of an artist’s career?

EP: There is no magic; an artist’s career is based on hard work and consistently good shows.

MB: How has the gallery exhibition program evolved over the years? Is there a common thread that unites the artists?

EP: I do not think there is a common thread. Choosing to work with an artist has to do with respect for the work. The works can be very different, but the quality is there.

MB: How have your interests as an art dealer evolved over the years as your gallery’s program grew into prominence? Which daily tasks are your favorites?

EP: Overseeing exhibitions and personally curating our art fair booths are some of my favorite tasks. Of course, being in close contact with my artists and supporting them in their global activities is paramount.

MB: If you could change one thing in the art world today, or specifically in the Zurich art scene, what would it be?

EP: It would be nice to see my colleagues and the curators of the institutions more.

MB: Could you name a few emerging artists from Zurich to keep a close eye on?

EP: Vittorio Brodmann, Sonia Kacem, Andriu Deplazes, and Timothée Calame.

Maya Bamberger (b. 1991, Jerusalem), live and works in Tel Aviv and Zurich. Bamberger is the curator of RawArt Gallery in Tel Aviv, a gallery representing young and emerging artists, both local from Israel and international. She is part of the multi-formatted project *Choreographing the Public*, focusing on the relationship between the artist, the artwork, and the audience. She is currently studying for a MAS in Curating at Zurich University of the Arts and holds a BA in history of art and cognitive science at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She is interested in non-verbal, non-rational, imaginary, and spontaneous ways of making art and exhibitions.



Ugo Rondinone, *orange yellow monk*, 2020, Painted bronze. © Ugo Rondinone, Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York, Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich



Installation view, Shara Hughes: *Day By Day By Day*, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Rämistrasse, Zurich, 2020 © Shara Hughes, Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York, Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich

Karma International

Interviewed by Patrycja Wojciechowska

Patrycja Wojciechowska: Thank you again for agreeing to have this talk. We are very excited at the opportunity to speak with people active on the Zurich art scene and would like to contribute in putting together this publication. Could you please briefly describe your professional background? I know that you [Karolina Dankow] and Marina met during your PhD studies at Zurich University, and I am interested how your partnership started.

Karolina Dankow: I studied literature, linguistics, and art history at Zurich University, and during my studies I was working for *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* as a critic. I began my association with the newspaper by an internship, and afterwards I began to work there as a freelance art critic. Marina, at the same time, was working at Kunststhal St Gallen for Gianni Jetzer while also studying. We used to meet at events, all contemporary art-based, because of those jobs that we were doing. I wrote for many publications at that time, like *Artforum*, *Frieze*, and more.

And as we wrote our PhDs, we already had started to run Karma International as not-for-profit project space. We ended up running it for two years. After we completed our PhDs, we decided to change the profile from a not-for-profit formula to a commercial art gallery.

So, I have never done anything else. I only did freelance journalism and once I worked for six months in the museum in Biarritz. Marina actually went to New York, and she completed internships at two galleries, Gavin Brown and Anton Kern. She also worked for a little bit for the gallery in Zurich, but truly, we didn't really know how to run a gallery. So, from being a not-for-profit space for two years and having jobs on the side to sustain it, we sort of slowly learnt how to run a commercial gallery.

There was one thing we did from the very beginning, we went to art fairs even though we were not-for-profit. We did not really go to sell, we went with this mindset of giving our artists an international platform and for us to network, to talk to more people and a wider demographic then just to those who visited the space.

It was actually a great learning process for us to learn how to run a gallery.

PW: How would you describe your curatorial concept of the space, especially at the time when you started to run Karma International as non-commercial site?

KD: We had two main ideas. One was to show mainly international artists. At the time, there was no not-for-profit space in Zurich that would do that. There were a few really great, long running non-for-profit places, but they all would have shown predominantly local artists. I understand why. It doesn't make sense, it's much too expensive, there are artwork shipping costs, and this is usually not in the budget for not-for-profit spaces.

Our idea, from the very beginning, was that we would fly the artists in, and they would stay with us during production and set-up time and make whole show on the spot. There was an emphasis on international artists, and at the beginning they were all our generation. Ida Ekblad was same age as we are, the first show was by LA-based artist Chris Lipomi who was more or less our age. Somehow, they were all people of our generation, and they all worked with the space. They were all invited to stay and really create something unique at the site. It was such a nice bonus because of this concept.

PW: So, there was a process-based aspect to it as well?

KD: Yes. I mean, because they all created most of the work on the site.

PW: I find Karma International a relatively young, but very successful gallery. It was established only in 2008, but it has very good visibility, high recognition, your artists do important shows and you do shows at big art fairs, you are a recognized gallery and were instrumental in establishing visibility for a lot of your artists. My question is, would you think that the beginnings of the gallery that the non-commercial, curatorial-driven aspect helped with that?

KD: It definitely helped, because we didn't start from zero as a gallery. However, we had different challenges when we morphed into a commercial space. We had no idea how to sell art whatsoever, we had no client base, but at least we already had a kind of like fan-base, people who knew who we were. We had a recognizable name.

I think what we already had, what was the main thing that actually came out of the non-commercial period. We had all those ties that we were able to build with artists. People that we showed at the beginning, like I said: Ida Ekblad, Tobias Madison, Pamela Rosenkranz, people that we showed when we were not-for-profit became a core of our represented artists.

PW: They still are, aren't they?

KD: Yes, they still are. And the nice thing is that we didn't have to come up with a list of some sort, that just feels forced. Representation came out organically, through the relationship with this artist that you see, that you like working with, and they like to work with you, who do not have representation. When it grows organically like this, I think for us, it is an ideal beginning.

PW: You mentioned (in an Art Basel video) that your decision was prompted by a commitment to better representation of the artists. So, the reason behind the decision was not purely because of how difficult it is sustaining a not-for-profit organization, but also in order to improve the visibility of the artists?

KD: As a non-for-profit, most people show artists just once, so one can't really help them grow. That's why I think non-for-profits are great, but they are not meant to be forever, because it's so tiring, to always have a job on the side, to always look for funding, so in a way it doesn't grow.

When you have a gallery, you have this deal with your artists, that you are meant to show them every two years, that you bring them to fairs, that you pay for their storage, take care of their inventory, of course, take money from their sales, but I still think then you can really build something.

PW: Do think you still retained some of that original characteristic, the relationship with artists, not only in term of sales, but more nurturing, with support

for longer projects? Do you think is it still possible to maintain that sort of balance in the commercial world?

KD: Yes, definitely. What also gave us a new spin was opening the new space here, in Los Angeles. At the beginning we were doing everything ourselves. Everything was us, us, us. With time, luckily, we were able to be much more professional, on different levels and could have some help. At the same time, that removed us from process a little bit, but that was, in a way, also the goal. But when we opened a space in LA, it was a little bit like going back to the roots. An artist would come, some of them would stay a month.

Sylvie Fleury stayed over a month. She did all the works here. And she really used the resources of the city. She said, "Find me a motorbike from the Seventies." We tracked down all those motorbike sellers, dealt with the price, arranged the transport of the motorbike, and figured out the way how to get it into the gallery. The space here refreshed a bit our original idea. Artists really come, and they want to spend time here, and they want to do something special with the city.

PW: So, it is different compared to Zurich, isn't it?

KD: Completely, yes.

PW: What exactly are your roles (I mean you and Marina) in the responsibilities of running the gallery? To what degree do each of you get involved, how do you split decisions with developing the shows? And does one of you focus on one of the sites? Or do you really balance everything together?

KD: No, we really balance everything together. I am physically more here in LA, she is obviously more running the Zurich space, but I don't think that there was ever an important or crucial decision that we made without each other. It never has been the goal. We really thrive on working together, and now that we have figured out good times to talk (because there are issues with communication, with the time difference), we try to talk almost every day and keep the dialogue alive.

PW: You worked together as curators, and now together you run a gallery. To me, and please correct me if I am wrong, it is a little bit like you are more of a collective than just two owners of a commercial gallery, with the collaboration and friend-

ship that started at the beginning showing through. How important do you find your professional relationship for the profile and the success of the gallery?

KD: I think it is everything. I think I wouldn't be able to run a business by myself, or not this one. It's too...it's so nice to be able to bounce off ideas, to share the good parts together, and then when a problem comes up, you have someone to be a partner in crime. For me, it's the perfect constellation. For Marina, too. In some ways, we are very similar, and in others we have different strengths, so it's a good combination, and yeah, we have the same taste, which is also great. I think it's 90% of everything, this relationship.

PW: With two sites now, how do you select the artists, how do you balance out the proportions? Is it always an intuitive choice to take on new artists? Do you think in a sense about the different characters of the sites?

KD: It has always been quite intuitive, I have to say. Also, we have had so many women artists from the beginning. It was never really strategic, or by deliberate choice. It was always more about what we like. Also, in the beginning, no one was really talking about this issue and that we have a lot of women artists. Now, we have a lot of requests for interviews, because it is a topic that all of the sudden has become "hip," you know. For us, it was how it has always been; we were always gravitating towards these artists and wouldn't say we have a strategy when it comes to gender or age, or any of this. Now, in LA we have shown three guys, one after the other, and sometimes we think: "Oh, is that a good choice?" Then we say that it doesn't matter.

It is problematic, but for us it is not problematic, because we represent so many female artists. We can balance it out. If we were the gallery that represents mainly white male artists, then I would think we should change something, but we always have been showing so many women.

Vivian Suter, Simone Fattal, Judith Bernstein—when we took them on, they didn't really have any significant careers. They were all in their 60s or even older. Now, we are doing a show with Elisabeth Wild who is the mother of Vivian Suter. She is 97. And now lots of things are happening for her. She has a solo show at MUMOK. And we in way have been instrumental in re-discovering a lot of these women.

So, three guys in a row, so be it, because the next one is going to be a woman again.

PW: In the OnCurating issue statement, we mention the notion of "Dark Matter" in the context of the visibility of artists as described by Gregory Sholette. How do you see it, and more importantly, how do you see your role as a curator and gallery owner in giving visibility to art and art practitioners? As I understand it, your decision behind the change of the gallery profile was partially prompted by this need for visibility? And how do you see participation of the art world, and especially its commercial side, in sustaining the Dark Matter situation? Keeping it unchanged?

KD: There has been this big trend of discovering artists for, I would say, more than five years. I think some of these artists, they are undiscovered for a reason. I mean, it has become a little bit of a trend in some ways. On the other hand, so many women artists have been really undervalued. I think it's very necessary to change it, and as I said before, I think we contributed to that in some ways. But it shouldn't become just like a global trend, to discover, to re-discover everyone.

PW: What would you consider the most successful or the most interesting project you have completed so far?

KD: I can't just pick one. For example, now we have a lot of press about Vivian Suter, and I really think that her story is so very extraordinary. She was born in Buenos Aires as a daughter of Swiss and Austrian immigrants. Then she briefly lived in Basel. She married Martin Suter, the famous Swiss writer. Later she divorced him, she left Switzerland, traveled, and she settled in Guatemala for thirty years. And she was really painting in the rainforest, completely secluded. Nowadays, people are saying artists have to be entrepreneurs, have to work for themselves, have to be outgoing, be seen at all these events. And she did the opposite. She had the luck of being discovered. And now, she is preparing her show at the Reina Sofia, she has a lot of museum shows, she just opened show at the Camden Art Centre, and at Tate Liverpool. She came out of nowhere and completely unexpected. This is amazing! I think it is an amazing story. But I think there are so many; I mean I have been working with all these artists and all of their stories.

PW: Can you talk a little bit about financing the gallery? Do you support the gallery expenses solely from the commercial operations?

KD: Yes, it has to be.

PW: Which of the sites is more challenging from the expenses point of view? LA or Zurich?

KD: LA used to be cheaper when we moved here five years ago, but now it has become more expensive.

PW: In terms of working process, how large are the teams for both galleries? How do you shape the working process?

KD: We share the artists, but since we also have a space in LA, we have taken on a few LA-based artists, which is great, because you need to show some local artists. And there are so many. It is a good resource for us. In terms of working, in Switzerland we have two people full-time and one part-time, and here we have one-person full-time and two part-time.

But the main operation is in Switzerland. We have the bigger storage there. When we prepare for the art fair, we build the model over there. We have the operation here in LA, but I would say, the main focus is still there.

PW: How do archive the projects?

KD: Everything is online. In the beginning, we would do a little publication for the show, but those were also more the non-for-profit days. It is a sad reality of gallery days that we don't do these publications anymore. It was a super nice thing; I think now you almost have to be globally active and with all the fairs, and the artists having more and more museum shows, and traveling to all these places, we are not able to do this anymore. In the beginning, we had like a little book that was a publication for each show. Now it's all online.

PW: Do you also do editions?

KD: If the artists decide to do editions, then yes. Mostly video and photographs, also some sculptures are multiples. But it is up to the artist. It's not something that we influence.

PW: I am aware that you put emphasis on a high number of women artists represented by Karma International. You and Marina mentioned your awareness of a tradition of strong women, the

presence of creative women in Switzerland. You are two female art professionals running a gallery. How do you see the gender issue? You said your representation of a large number of women was intuitive. I find it kind of interesting, when you were talking about Switzerland and strong females, you sounded definitely more optimistic than I feel myself. Firstly, Switzerland joined women suffrage very late in Europe. And I am wondering how it feels from this perspective, when you are working in Switzerland as a female professional. Would you say it is still a problem?

KD: In Zurich, we grew up with a lot of strong women figures who at that time were leading the art scene, like Bice Curiger, Eva Presenhuber, Heike Munder, Jaqueline Burckhardt, Pipilotti Rist. They were all such different personalities. When I was in my formative years, I say, there were a lot of women present. To be honest, I think we need to work a little harder to prove ourselves. I think that is exactly the case, but I never dwelled on that too much. I consider it a waste of energy. For me, as long as it works for us, I am fine.

For example, I work with Judith Bernstein, who in her seventies is finally getting the recognition that she deserves. It still happens slowly, and her prices are quite low, if you compare with male artists of the same stage, but she told me she never became bitter, that she never lost her humor, because then in a way everything would have become tainted.

PW: What role did your project space play and, now, does the gallery play in the city of Zurich?

KD: The move to commercial operations changed extremely the whole situation. First of all, we became something else than we were before. But also, the whole landscape has changed. Five years ago, they were so many galleries of our generation around, everybody was doing something else, everybody had their niche, and now a lot of these spaces have closed. I think it is a bit sad for Switzerland. For the Zurich art scene, I hope it will rejuvenate. I mean, there is still energy; for example, Bernstein moved to Ramistrasse, which I think is fantastic. Galerie Bernhardt is already there, but at the same time there are fewer young galleries around, and the older ones also don't seem to have so much verve anymore. I think is bit of a sleepy moment, and we really try to counter it. That's why, for example, our dinners are very inclusive. We don't do these tight, very exclusive dinners. We go to a pizza place that is close by and

make sure we have artists with us, that we have collectors, that somebody out of town can also come, just to keep the scene going. I think it is important.

PW: What would you consider your main connections within Zurich art scene?

KD: I think because Zurich is so small, you are always talking to everybody; you are always in a way in dialogue with everybody, but at the same time we have to say everybody has their own niche. Everybody is very unique if you think about it in their program. In terms of museums, we have a super good relationship with Kunsthaus. Cathérine Hug, who is a curator there now, studied with us, so it has been a really nice relationship, and she has shown several of our artists. Then Alexandra Blättler, who is also a curator, has shown a lot of our artists. It's mostly with curators like Heike Munder that we have more of an ongoing stronger dialogue. We have collaborated with Company Gallery in New York, which is a younger gallery that has a lot of feminist, a lot of queer art. I think they really have a special program, and we are collaborating a lot with them. We worked together on shows in Paris. Taylor Trabulus, who works there, curated two shows, here in LA and in Zurich, for us. So, we have these alliances, but they are mostly with people from other cities.

PW: What made you specifically interested in Los Angeles as a second site for the gallery?

KD: It was five years ago, and the art scene in LA started really happening; however, all these museums that now are here weren't around. You could sense that something was happening. You could see artists were moving in. We were thinking about various sites, which city was not saturated. In LA, there was a space to do something, but there was also already an interest. There was already ground to build something, which was great.

PW: I also read that you're considering expansion in Asia? Is that still happening?

KD: We are not pursuing a space. We have a representative, a young woman, who has been living in Asia for seven years. Currently, she is based in Taipei; previously she was in Beijing and in Hong Kong. She comes not only to fairs with us, but, for example, now Pamela Rosenkranz has a project in Japan, so this woman can go. Similarly, Vivian Suter was in the Taipei Biennale, and this way, we had somebody who was already local

and could go. She is also actively working on promoting our artists within the region. She will come here to LA, because many Asian collectors are around. It's a nice addition to the gallery, but we are not thinking about opening a space there.

PW: What is the relation between real space and digital space? You have already spoken about publications moved completely online.

KD: We are not very on the forefront with these things, but also by choice; I really believe that art has to be experienced, has to be seen. We know about all of these possibilities now.

I think I am still very old-school about these things. A lot of it is about the people behind the space and the artwork.

PW: What type of audience does your exhibition space attract? And again, do you think it has changed?

KD: The prices increase, you attract different people, then the new program develops. So, definitely the crowd has changed. What has stayed is that artists still like to come and see the space. This remained somehow, but in terms of collectors, it has changed a lot.

PW: Does the crowd present at the beginning still come to the PV?

KD: The openings are social events—collectors, art students, and the general public. The usual thing.

PW: A lot of commercial galleries these days have inserted activities into their program traditionally assigned to public cultural institutions. You moved from a non-profit to a commercial operation but have a strong curatorial tradition. Do you still find it present and important in your gallery? And I am interested, what do you think about this trend in general?

KD: I think it's great, important, and very valuable. We are asked a lot by schools, universities, and various organizations to open a space on certain days, sometimes outside opening hours, we can sometimes give a talk. We are always happy to do it.

When it comes to a more organized program, for example, in LA we had screenings, workshops, concerts for two months. We had a whole program set up for the

summer, especially because we have a garden. We put together a workshop where one of the artists worked with kids. There was also a talk with Frank Gehry and Charles Arnaldi. We definitely like these activities and are trying to organize them when we can.

PW: How do you see Zurich as an art hub in a global network, and how do you think it is going to evolve?

KD: I think Zurich is very interesting globally, because it is so small and yet has so many institutions. It is also in such close proximity to Basel and the fair. There is the Zurich Art Weekend that really attracts more and more people. I think Zurich has a very unique position, because if you compare it with cities the same size, even if they have as many museums, they are not exactly as contemporary as the ones that we have. I think it's a very rich place in that way.

PW: It has quite a strong cultural scene overall.

KD: Yes, in all fields. Now, Schauspielhaus has taken on visual artist to do programming. There are always a lot of not-for-profit spaces that still pop up. It also has to do with all these amazing funding opportunities that Switzerland has.

PW: What do you see as the role of art in the contemporary world?

KD: On the one hand, the art market is now so important and active. On the other hand, sometimes it is a bit discouraging to see that people lack vision, people bring the same stuff to fairs, put the same spaces up.

At the same we really believe in it. If I go around, for example, and see fantastic shows, I still get to discover amazing things. This type of inspiration, I think it's why we are all in it. Otherwise, you could just do a different job.

For me it's worth it. I have never considered doing anything else. I think it is a very lucky position to be surrounded by artists, by their creativity, by the collectors who also open up new worlds for us, by the curators. And again, it is a whole universe. That's the nice, the wonderful part of it.

One good show makes up for twenty mediocre ones. I see one good thing, and it can keep me going for a while.

Karma International was founded by Marina Olsen and Karolina Dankow in 2008. After two years of curatorial activity in a non-commercial space, the gallery transitioned to a commercial space to better represent the artists of the original program: Pamela Rosenkranz, Ida Ekblad, David Hominal, Carissa Rodriguez, and Emanuel Rossetti, among others. Each of them represents the generation of artists challenging art-world norms and continues to do so as their career develops. These artists have been crucial in building Karma International's identity. As time has gone on, more artists from different generations, such as Judith Bernstein, K8 Hardy, Vivian Suter, Simone Fattal, Sylvie Fleury, Urban Zellweger, Ser Serpas, and Markus Oehlen, as well as the estates of Meret Oppenheim and Xanti Schawinsky, have joined the roster of practices in conjunction with the original grouping of artists. In 2015, Karma International opened a second space in Los Angeles that has established itself and found a strong position within the city's landscape of art venues. The created dialogue between Europe and the US brings a new quality to the program that allows Karma International to experiment even more actively with an ongoing parallel exhibition program.

Patrycja Wojciechowska is a curator based in London. She is graduate of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS in University of Art, Zurich, Switzerland. She co-curated the exhibition *games.fights.encounter* at the OnCurating Project Space, Zurich. Her research focuses on identity, postcolonial studies, non-human intelligence and forms of communication, and position of the body in art experience. She currently works on an interdisciplinary online platform.



KarmaInternational, Pamela Rosenkranz, 2018. Photo: Gunnar Meier



KarmaInternational, Simone Fattal, 2019. Photo: Stefan Altenburger



KarmaInternational, Sylvie Fleury, 2019/2020. Photo: Annik Wetter



KarmaInternational, Judith Bernstein, 2020. Photo: Stefan Altenburger

ART IN THE DIGITAL AGE: Nina Roehrs, Roehrs & Boetsch Interviewed by Giulia Frattini

Giulia Frattini: What is Roehrs & Boetsch?

Nina Roehrs: Roehrs & Boetsch, founded in 2016, is a contemporary art gallery devoting its program to exploring digitalization and its implications for society. For us, the term “digitalization” is intended not as a technological description limiting the gallery program simply to artists working in New Media. Rather, it should be understood as the common denominator pervading their creative practices as well as our gallery model.

GF: Why did you choose this direction, and what’s your mission?

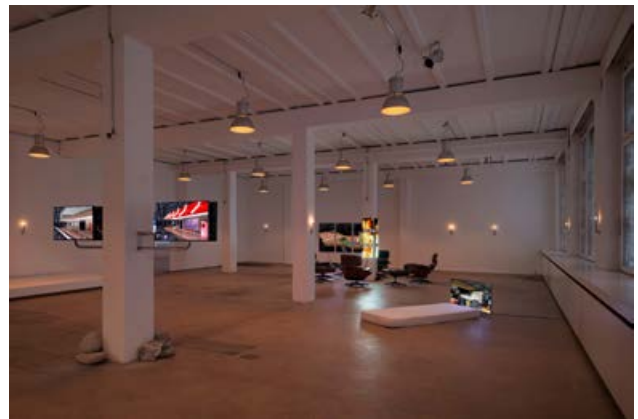
NR: In recent years, the rapid pace of technological progress and increasing digitalization have not only had a major impact on contemporary society, but also continue to evoke old and new issues in a wide range of art-related topics. New technologies and their application for artistic practices have greatly expanded the variety of media and creative possibilities. Consequently, artists in this field are continually testing the boundaries of what is conventionally considered “art” while also developing a new set of aesthetics.

Roehrs & Boetsch’s overriding mission is to create a space for critical reflection on current and past developments as well as provide a platform for new positions in art. By working very closely with young as well as emerging artists, our exhibitions explore and critically reflect the relationship between contemporary culture, digitalization, and art in a range of media and techniques. Furthermore, as an art gallery, we take great interest in actively discussing and developing new forms of exhibiting and promoting artworks where conventional methods have failed.

GF: How do you select your artists?

NR: It depends. Some artists I have been an admirer of the work for a long time, such as Olia Lialina, a pioneer of the 1990’s net.art movement. Or Aram Bartholl: his

installations in the public space have shown us new ways to bridge physical and digital worlds. Some others, instead, I have come across more recently, and I have decided to invest in their development when I felt there was potential. This is the case of Shawn Maximo, for example, an artist working predominantly with CGI and extensive installation, still unknown to the larger public. Although part of several group shows at influential institutions such as the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and MoMA PS1, I was the one to give him his first solo exhibition. In general, we are interested in artists whose work offers new perspectives from both a media and society side. Looking back at last year’s solo exhibition by Shawn, for which he transformed the gallery space into a strange subterranean lair—part transit station and part refuge, it feels as if we went time traveling. By thinking through the example of an isolated community living underground, Shawn Maximo carried the idea of isolation—such as national isolation and its benefits as increasingly advocated by some politicians—ad absurdum and unmasked it as a myth.



Shawn Maximo – *Deeprecession (Isolationism and other Myths)*, solo exhibition at Roehrs & Boetsch (2019) | Photo by: Michael Harald Dellefant.

GF: Your gallery does not only engage with traditional gallery shows, but also experiments with new exhibiting formats such as Gallery.Delivery. Is

there any project you found particularly interesting or challenging?

NR: Each project has its perks and challenges, but I have been passionate in developing every single one of them.

Gallery.Delivery by Berlin-based artist Sebastian Schmiege is both a group exhibition and a performance that can be ordered online. It is delivered by bike courier in a “White Cube” courier bag to the address stipulated in the order, where it will be temporarily installed. As the Internet increasingly penetrates every corner of our lives, this is giving rise to a mindset where we expect immediate availability in all aspects of our material world, triggered by a simple click or tap. Gallery.Delivery applies the promise of immediate availability to the exhibition space and the format of the group show. In 2018 and 2019, Roehrs & Boetsch premiered and presented the format during Art Week in Berlin. In a next step, we will bring Gallery.Delivery to Zurich.



Gallery.Delivery by Sebastian Schmiege (2018), presented by Roehrs & Boetsch | Photo by: André Wunstorf.

Technology has provided artists with new media for their artistic practice, but also gallerists with new platforms to exhibit their works. Most recently, we have launched an in-app exhibition format. FitArt—developed together with New York based-artist Damjanski—provides art shows on your phone in the form of a fitness plan. Available to download for iOS and Android, the application is designed as a series of workouts, featuring exercises created by artists. Building on widely disseminated and highly accessible technologies—a mobile phone and an app developed for it—FitArt allows a wide audience to experience

works of art even in times of social distancing and isolation.



FitArt – Fitness Art Club powered by Roehrs & Boetsch (2020), in-app exhibition format developed with Damjanski.

And, then there is of course CUBE – Virtual Gallery for Virtual Art.

GF: What is CUBE exactly?



CUBE – Virtual Gallery for Virtual Art (outside view) of Roehrs & Boetsch, architectural design by Manuel Rossner (2019).

NR: CUBE is a pioneering virtual reality platform, which simulates a virtual gallery for virtual art. Using VR glasses, visitors enter the virtual gallery building where they embark upon an immersive, self-guided tour. Visitors use a controller to move through the gallery space, extending over five floors, each floor exhibiting different virtual artworks.

New virtual reality architectures such as CUBE are the logical environment for digital and virtual art, especially three-dimensional art. With that in mind, CUBE is primarily intended for digital and virtual artworks with no physical prototype for which a faithful realization in the physical world fails or seems illogical. For us, CUBE

serves as a testing ground not only for new digital and virtual artworks, but also for virtual modes of presentation.

CUBE was conceived by me in collaboration with artist Manuel Rossner, who was commissioned with the artistic design of the architecture and the technical realization of the project. Together, we developed CUBE over the course of one year.

In 2019, CUBE was launched at the gallery in Zurich with an inaugural group exhibition on sculpture. Through the combination of exhibition space and art forming an integrated virtual reality, CUBE offers one of the first immersive experiences of the diverse possibilities of digital native sculpture.



CUBE | Virtual Natives – Sculpture (inside / exhibition view), Virtual Reality Sculpture *VR Bodypaint 01* by Banz & Bowinkel (2019).

Now, we are working on an extension of the architectural structure and the next show.

GF: What are the challenges in working with artists using new media?

NR: There are many, from the technical difficulties in the set-ups to the hardship of mediating with a public still new or resistant to new devices. But it is not the artists' nor the public's fault: technology has reached a level of development in such a fast pace in order to respond to consumerism that it has left many of us behind. But this is what I would like this gallery to be, a bridge, a tool to decode and reflect critically on the effects of the phenomenon of digitalization. And also, a place to reconsider the understanding of art history as a tale rooted in our times, with new media challenging our definitions of what is a painting or a sculpture, for

example. These are my challenges, but also what makes this journey interesting to me.

GF: How are artworks sold, collected, or archived in these cases, in particular when it comes to net-based works?

NR: There isn't a singular recipe that works for every case. We work with originals as well as series and editions when the artist and the artwork allow it, since it's what the market and collectors ask for. But we are also well aware of the issues that fast and planned technology obsolescence brings. Some artists make of this a subject of their investigations within the medium. In the case of Shawn Maximo, for example, his images are secured by design, and unauthorized reproduction would be easily discoverable—but the hardware can, and is intended to, be replaced overtime. With the work of Olia Lialina, instead, the hardware is either an integral part of her pieces or not at all, as in the case of her network portraits series. Here, the preservation of the memory of our data on the net is largely delegated to the future development of the web, and its immateriality, as well as its fragility, is an integrant part of her poetic.



Self-Portrait by Olia Lialina (2018), Series: Network Portraits | Installation view at Roehrs & Boetsch | Photo by: Michael Harald Dellefant.

GF: How do you fund your projects, and how do you provide support for the artists?

NR: As an art gallery, my goal is to support the artists and give them the visibility I believe they deserve, despite current art market logics working against non-traditional mediums. Even though this might change faster than we ever expected in light of the digitalization push that corona has created. But not all the projects we do are for profit: FitArt, for example, is something

that we have developed mainly to show the potential of alternative exhibiting formats that, thanks to the rapid distribution of new technologies, can provide a place for the artists to produce and exhibit their works, even during lockdowns. And this autumn, with the support of Pro Helvetia and a curatorial team from different art institutions across Switzerland, we will even be able to realize a second exhibition/workout, promoting Swiss(-based) female artists within this new format.

GF: As the first and only art gallery devoted to this field in Switzerland, what role does it play within the city of Zurich? And how is it internationally connected?

NR: We are a young, small gallery with a focus on an even smaller share of the market and art world in general. I like to believe that Roehrs & Boetsch is a converging point for new and experimental approaches to art and, because of that, is a place very much rooted in our time. Our lives are already heavily impacted by digitalization; portable devices are both extensions of our bodies and carriers of our minds and feelings. Zurich and Switzerland, like any other place for that matter, need a place to critically reflect about the effects of this phenomenon. And Switzerland is a tech hub recognized worldwide for its audacity and innovation, with large communities of professional developers and thinkers, in Zurich as well as Zug or Geneva. We, of course, follow very closely the work of larger public institutions such as the HeK in Basel or the ZKM in Karlsruhe, as well as Rhizome in the US. Through and with them, we hope to contribute to the education of the younger, local artists by exposing them to international perspectives, as well as serving as a place for them to come in and discuss new ideas.



Damjanski: *Humans Not Invited – IRL* (2020), Closing installation at Bachstrasse 9 | photo by Michael Harald Dellefant.

For over three years, we have run an intense program of events in a beautiful space at Bachstrasse 9, close to Rote Fabrik in Zurich. As a consequence of the restrictions that limited physical proximity between people during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have decided to temporarily shift our focus over to projects that can have a meaningful presence also without physical displays. Understanding the immaterial dimension of art also involves differentiating between what is purely digital documentation and what is art that finds its purpose in the space of the connections that link us all together. We do believe, though, that one doesn't have to exclude the other: our intention is to follow the current developments and come back with a new space when opening gatherings won't be perceived as hazard anymore.

GF: What is the role of art nowadays in your opinion and from your position? And specifically, of technology related to art?

NR: If there was ever a time that we needed artists more than anything, this is today. We need their radical ideas, visions, and perspectives on society. Art and artists are willing to provide their work and effort for common, shared goals. They offer critical thinking, intuition, and creativity for us all to reflect on who we are and what we have become. Digitalization has brought, and continues to bring, massive changes and challenges, and art is a place and space where debate can actually take place. Technology and innovation aren't a problem in themselves: they might actually even hold the key to solving some issues. A society that is obsessed with self-optimization will not revolt against itself—that's why we need art and the artists to question our status quos, highlight our neglected issues, provoke us, engage us, communicate to us. Artists are very good partners for these discussions.

Nina Roehrs (b. 1974, lives in Zurich) studied economics, politics and international relations at the universities of St. Gallen and St. Andrews. After 13 years covering various strategy and business development positions at UBS, in 2016 she founded Roehrs & Boetsch. In her free time, she enjoys the beautiful nature of Engadina together with her partner and their dog.
<http://www.roehrsboetsch.com>

Giulia Frattini (b. 1992, based in Milan) graduated from the Brera Academy of Fine Arts and attended the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS, at ZHdK, with a final dissertation concerning the digital influence on individual and collective emotional dimensions. In March 2020, she was part of a curatorial team that launched an exhibition and mediation project on video activism at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich. Currently, she is exploring creative writing as an experimental expression and continuing her research on digitalization and its cultural implications regarding art and society.

Lullin + Ferrari: Interview with Corrado Ferrari Interviewed by Alina Baldini

Zurich, January 18, 2020

Corrado Ferrari has worked in the gallery business for many years. He started with the famous Gallery Turske & Turske in Zurich and was in charge at Jamileh Weber until he opened his own gallery with his business partner Etienne Lullin.

Etienne Lullin worked at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur in Switzerland and for Paragon Press in London before founding Lullin + Ferrari in 2008.

Corrado defines the gallery as a “connoisseur boutique.” This is one of the galleries in business for quite some time in Zurich, even though they opened “only” twelve years ago.

The number of art galleries in Zurich is shrinking. There may be many reasons for that. However, if we focus on what makes Lullin + Ferrari one of the ones still there, a key factor is the approach that Etienne and Corrado have with their public even before they become their customer. They welcome everyone into the gallery and invite them into a conversation about the artworks that are exhibited at that moment.

Talking about the crisis of art galleries, Corrado says that younger people are not as attracted to art as their parents were. Nowadays, we look more toward collecting experiences than objects.

Corrado expands: “One of the old-fashioned aspects of an art gallery that we need to change is the idea that this is an exclusive and elitist place where only those who are part of the ‘club’ can enter. An art gallery should be a place for everyone who is even just curious. We are not concerned about entering a bookshop for the first time, so why should we be hesitant about entering an art gallery?”

Lullin + Ferrari also welcomes schools who are interested in visiting the gallery and understanding more about what it is exhibited.

Corrado says: “This is a people business: people buy if they have a personal connection with the galleries and a trust relationship is created.”

“Etienne has a book where he writes ideas about titles and themes for exhibitions,” says Corrado. Once they have defined the theme, they then invite artists from the gallery program to participate and choose works from private collections and their own holdings. The exhibition I saw while conducting the interview was *Narration and Performance* with works by Anne-Lise Coste, Klodin Erb, Slawomir Elsner, Richard Hamilton, Rebecca Horn, Urs Lüthi, Mamiko Otsubo, Ulrike Rosenbach, and Dieter Roth.

Regarding the Zurich art scene, Corrado wishes that the place is strengthened as a brand. Zurich has a number of very good galleries and is a great place to visit even only for a weekend, especially the nature and the vicinity of everything—great restaurants and many art spaces besides the exquisite galleries make it a place to discover again and again. A way to position Zurich with a clear footprint in the art scene.

Reflecting on what is happening in the art world and the secret of success of the gallery, Corrado thinks that what is important is reinventing ourselves, and we close the interview with a quote from John Maynard Keynes: “When the facts change, I change my mind.”

“Art, in the end, is a reflection about life,” says Corrado.

Alina Baldini is an Italian psychologist, she has lived and worked in Basel (CH) since 2017. For the past couple of decades, she has been working in corporations addressing topics like company culture, coaching, and personal transformation. Following her passion for contemporary art and her curiosity to discover the curating aspects in what she experiences, she decided to begin the Post-graduate Programme in Curating, MAS at the ZHdK in 2019.



Installation view, *Narration and Performance*, with works by Anne-Lise Coste, Klodin Erb, Slawomir Eisner, Gilbert & Goerge, Richard Hamilton, Rebecca Horn, Urs Lüthi, Mamiko Otsubo, Ulrike Rosenbach, Dieter Roth and others, Lulli + Ferrari, Zurich 2019

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