

“DO WHAT IS NECESSARY, NOT BECAUSE IT IS WRITTEN”

curated by, Vienna, 2022

by Ewa Borysiewicz



View of “Water Being Washed Away” curated by Alessandro Rabottini, Galerie Hubert Winter, 2022

The 2022 edition of curated by in Vienna followed the impulse of Dieter Roelstraete: “Kelet,” which is Hungarian for “East.” Its success was not the overarching theme itself, but its contestation.

A closer, emphatic look at the “East” was the underlying paradigm of this year’s curated by, an annual presentation of exhibitions by international curators in Vienna. Involving twenty-four galleries, the festival’s core idea is to realize a show in response to a theme proposed by the selected Impulsgeber (literally, “the Impulse-Giver”) of each edition. This year, Impulsgeber Dieter Roelstraete opted for “Kelet” meaning “east” in Hungarian. Certainly, the choice of the theme is to be read as a gesture of solidarity, a catalyst for familiarization with the culture of our close neighbors in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, and doubly, Austria’s dedication to neutrality in the face of Russia’s aggression. Roelstraete hopes for “a complex panoramic picture of ‘our’ east or ‘Kelet’ – from the near east of Bratislava to the far east of Khabarovsk – as an imaginary land bathed in the sun of artistic riches and renewal” as an outcome of curated by. The effect was indeed wonderful. This year’s festival included a great number of extremely well-put-together exhibitions – presentations of works of paradigm-changing juxtapositions by underrepresented geniuses. Nevertheless, the strength of this year’s curated by was not the Impuls itself, but its contestation.

0 FELIX GAUDLITZ



View of "The Prompt" curated by Adomas Narkevičius, Gianni Manhattan, 2022. Courtesy: the artists and Gianni Manhattan. Photo: kunstdokumentation.com

Direct questioning took place at Gianni Manhattan where curator Adomas Narkevičius found a way out of geopolitical dualisms with "The Prompt". Works by Milda Drazdauskaitė, Elena Narbutaitė, and Ola Vasiljeva proposed a nuanced look at the oft-romanticized East, allowing viewers to discover a place where nothing is as promised by stagnant, theory-fetishizing academia. The centerpiece of the show was Vasiljeva's *En Rachâchant* (2022), an ornamental steel tribute to little Ernesto, the protagonist of the eponymous 1971 book by Marguerite Duras, a "boy who refuses to go to school because they only teach him things he doesn't know." A selection of black and white photographs by Drazdauskaitė presented a counter-stereotypical view of life "behind the Iron Curtain," depicting herself and her subjects somewhere between the conflicting paradigms of 1980s Lithuanian culture, the progress of Soviet modernization and an idealized view of Lithuania's rural landscapes. Narbutaitė's *Fumy Frig Sour* (2013–18) a pulsating, luminescent line of bright red on the wall, composed of two superimposed laser beams, served as a reminder of the discreet lines we use to discern "us" from "them".



View of "I Had a Dog and a Cat" curated by Hana Ostan Ozbolt, Georg Kargl Fine Arts, 2022 © Georg Kargl Fin Arts. Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com

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Hana Ostan Ožbolt's "I Had a Dog and a Cat" at Georg Kargl Fine Arts is a story of reconciling differences. Inspired by Josef Čapek's *All About Doggie and Pussycat* (1929), a children's book about animals doing their best to run a household, the exhibition was full of careful, yet firm juxtapositions, thanks to which new meanings could spark. The tone of the show was set by *Eating Grammar III* (2021/22), an installation by Josse Pyl: a sequence made of tooth-shaped elements which created an elegant diagram on the wall. On the opposite side, an echo: Andreas Fogarasi's *Prague Sights (Architecture)* (1955/1967/2003) (2021), a delicate assembly of cut-out map markers. The tiny black buildings placed on a white paper background, create a pattern – and a plan – of their own. Viewers wandering through the gallery space witnessed several analogous encounters, the clash of senses occurring within single works – like in Denisa Lehocká's delicate "spatial collages" – or in dialogue. The exhibition's scenography – conceived by David Fesl whose intricate miniature sculptures are also on view – used natural light instead of the trademark white cube spotlights. In effect, to admire the details of the artworks, the spectators must eliminate distance. Here, the process of learning was not dependent solely on the sense of vision.



View of "I am the secret meat" curated by Tolia Astakhishvili, Felix Gaudlitz, 2022. Courtesy: the artists and Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna. Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com

A correspondent phenomenological approach to space was also found at Felix Gaudlitz in "I am the secret meat" curated by Tolia Astakhishvili. The curator and artist reconfigured the gallery to tell a story of loneliness and passing. The windows were painted brown, adorned with occasional drawings, pieces of graffiti, and scribbles, filling the room with ochre light. Astakhishvili's design also accommodated Simon Lässig's *Untitled* (2022), a desk carries a pile of documents with entire fragments of text struck out with a careful yet confident thick black line, leaving only the fragments the reader considered essential. Remnants – decapitated statues, bodiless marble heads – were also the wary protagonists of photographs by Hervé Guibert (*Deux têtes*, Musée Grévin, 1979), brought out by the sunlight which gashed in through the opposing window.



View of "Extraneous" curated by Zasha Colah and Valentina Viviani, Exile, 2022

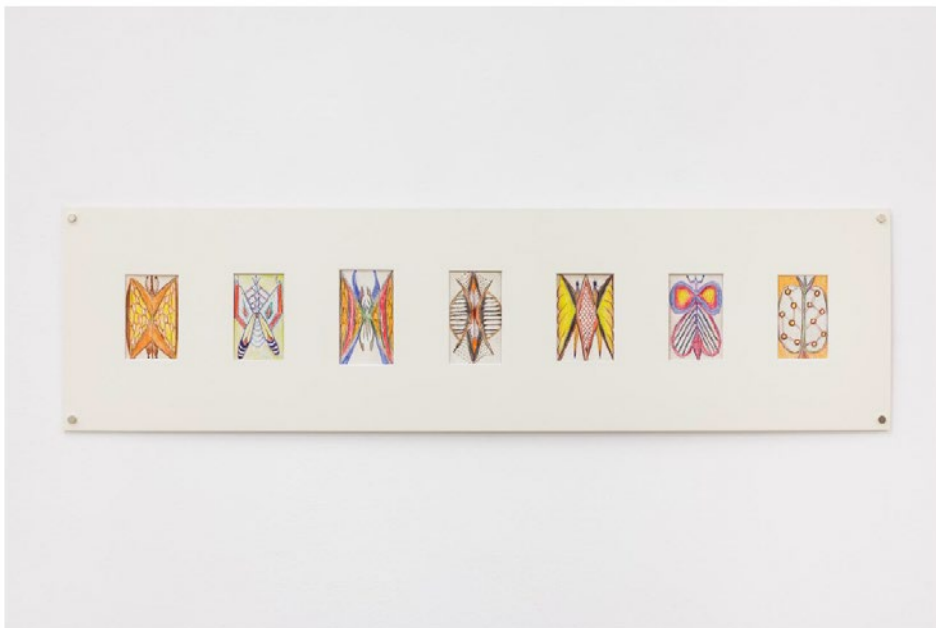
Two brilliant shows – “Water Being Washed Away” (curated by Alessandro Rabottini at Galerie Hubert Winter) and “Extraneous” (curated by Zasha Colah and Valentina Viviani at Exile) discarded the idea of a geographical space altogether in favor of the symbolic one. The former deconstructed the illusory durability of aesthetic and political notions through an analogy of fluid dynamics. The arrangement of the show used “infiltration” as its spatial principle and indeed, the works on view seemed to grow organically from the gallery space, rather than simply being planted in it. At Hubert Winter, a site-specific installation by Latifa Echakhch (*Gaya (E102) Horizon*, 2010), a barely visible horizontal bruise was drawn along the gallery walls. Its yellow color was the outcome of the use of an artificial substitute for precious saffron. The investigation of what an original can that a copy cannot, was continued by Philip Lai (*Expulsions*, 2019) in his assemblage of replica oxygen tanks cast in bright red, white, and pink resin, hung from the ceiling like a bunch of grapes as eagerly depicted in baroque still life. Fixed high up on the gallery walls, Claudia Pagès Rabal’s *Ventiladors petxines (sur)* (2022) looked down on viewers. The installation consisted of modified fans, which hummed quietly as they emitted a faint yet memory-stirring scent of sea air, adding another layer to the sensory impact of the show: artificially manufactured sensations generated true and permanent traces on the mind.

The exhibition at Exile concentrated on “extraneous gestures” – actions of expanding the political field through surplus. They unmasked the arbitrariness of the current order and served as a step towards reclaiming full-fledged subjectivity. This is the case of Milica Tomić and Grupa Spomenik’s psychoanalytical research of the Srebrenica massacre (*Towards the Matheme of Genocide*, 2009). The video documentation of this investigation displayed on the upper floor of the gallery, depicts a process of discovering immaterial and non-appropriable modes of commemoration: a restoration of the victims’ personhood will allow them to tell their own story – and free them from the narration demanded by their oppressors. Downstairs rested Margherita Moscardini’s clay models of public fountains in the Za’atari refugee camp in Jordan, recreating the structures as they were designed and built by the inhabitants of the camp. Because of Za’atari’s “temporary” status, the original designs for the modest yet necessary public utilities which are therefore built of permanent materials, are considered illegal. Moscardini’s extraneous research laid bare the cruel and absurd nature of international law. Her strategy revealed a crack in the seemingly infrangible and non-negotiable structure, becoming a starting point for a re-recognition of the personhood of the subjects of the law.

0 FELIX GAUDLITZ



View of "ENDRE TÓT | SEMMI SEM SEMMI" curated by Róna Kopeczky, Christine König Galerie, 2022. Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com / Manuel Carreon Lopez



View of "Anna Zemánková: Pollen" curated by Lukas Hofmann, Sophie Tappeiner, 2022. Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com / Manuel Carreon Lopez

The 2022 edition hosted many other notable monographic exhibitions. The politically charged conceptualism of Endre Tót (curator: Róna Kopeczky at Christine König Galerie); the rural Cosmism of Fedir Tetyanych (curator: Natalia Siewicz at Croy Nielsen); the bitter-sweet feminism of Maria Pinińska-Bereś (curator: Jarosław Suchan at Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder); and the psychedelic herbarium of Anna Zemánková (curator: Lukas Hofman at Sophie Tappeiner) all deserve recognition of a museal scale. Hopefully, the consequences of this year's theme, critically interpreted by curated by's artists, gallerists, and curators, will transgress the festival's monthly lifespan. A durable, lasting encouragement to exercise empathy, openness, and support towards the "Others" close and far, is the best Impuls one can follow.

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