

## Short summary of panel discussion on project

### Ignorance is Strength?

#### Artistic Expression and Biopower in the Post/Pandemic Age

On Saturday 8. of October 2022. a panel discussion was held in the Museum of Contemporary Art – Zagreb (MSU). Speakers for this panel were Luiza Luz, Liesbeth Bik, Leila Topić, Cristina Stoenescu (curator of Romanian Association for Contemporary Art) and Josip Zanki. Main topic for this panel was artistic research and how artist integrated different methodology of research into their work. Other important topic in aspect of contemporary art was process these artists went through.

Josip Zanki (artist, vice-president of HDLU) opened the panel with introduction of other speakers and description of how they envisioned the project. In the beginning they wanted artist to document their progress on website so it can have more interactive side but they ended up doing this on LOOM. He puts emphasis on artistic research describing it as something new that is more integrated with doctorate degree research that started 20 years ago. He also talks about different ways to interpret text one way as anthropologist and as an artist. For one work he did while researching one phenomena on Velebit in the 90's as a future anthropologist he produced text and as a future artist he made a performance. He notes that research was the same it was just two different fields that required different interpretative outcome.

Luiza Luz (artist, member of the open call) introduced themselves as genderqueer neutral pronouns. They spoke about how through their practice and years of research work they got to the point of creating the project *'The Privilege of dreaming'* (2022.) that they applied for the open call. With some questions like *'How to dream collectively?'*. Since they started their work this topic started to be really present in their life. Luiza started to have much more support in their work. Many institutions especially UdK was constantly talking about climate justice. One of the goals of UdK is to become a sustainable university. The question they had was how Europe got the privilege to speak so much about climate justice and have so many solutions and resources to solve the problem. In their opinion, there was something missing and it was to address the problem that is colonial history and the responsibility of Europe in humanitarian climate crisis we live in today. Main question was *'Who has the privilege to dream in a wicked world?'*, *'Who has the privilege to produce the knowledge?'*, *'Who is producing the narratives?'*, *'Who's changing the narratives?'* Based on that they envisioned this space that is mobile, an installation that's very easy to view, it has no space, it can move around, change contexts and ecosystems. Main goal was to address topics of privilege and dreams. Luiza created a program, with guests, artists and students attending the seminar. One of the exhibitions they did after a seminar with students. In which the focus of dreams went to this thin line between dream-awake, dream-asleep and the nightmare. The idea of rest as resistance was prominent because they were all feeling super exhausted because of the need to produce and be productive. So the seminar was the space where they could be vulnerable and talk about what they were feeling all while creating. They did this exhibition with 8-meter snake (symbol for healing) that is a big pillow.

While talking about their project *'T(t)ERRA'*(2016.) artist said that we create difference between culture and nature on different levels. Luiza began to use language as a strategy to perceive human as nature. In portugese planet Earth (Terra) with upper case T means planet

Earth and terra with lower case t means soil, so artist tried to use language to integrate planetary dimensions with a terrestrial level. While researching this they tried to understand how we stopped perceiving planet Earth as a living organism and how to remember that planet Earth is a living organism. Trying to bring us to an understanding that we are not only part of it but it is itself a living organism/entity. They had a theoretical approach and started to find images, art and performances to engage with these topics. First they found a space to distribute the soil, seeds were planted by the participants. Then there was a cultivation of the dress that they wore and it became a living sculpture. As they put soil with seeds in the pockets of the dress. Then they replanted the buds in the urban ecosystem. Artist notes that there is always a relationship with their body, people, soil and seeds. There is always a relationship with urban landscape and social relations.

Luiza also did a photo performance series '*Earth Series*' (2018.-2019.) while they were living in sustainable communities in Brazil where they spent a lot of time in the forest and in the city where they created bridges between these ecosystems. They were living in Minas Gerais for two months. For them it represents a symbiotic relationship where they merged into this living organism. Luiza showed us the selection of works where they worked with organic materials. They started to integrate this practices with technology (like music and sound) to combine and communicate what they are researching. Circle with soil is still present but they expanded the set up with computer and the lights, other electronic devices. Each of their lectures have natural, visual landscape and audio aspect.

Liesbeth Bik (artist, member of the jury, chair of Academie van Kunsten KNAW)

The first two projects they were developing themselves. After that, they've been continuously invited by institutions, museums and sometimes city organizations to talk and look at the environment and urban problems and to create the work diving into the history, and background of the certain area. On their website they keep a very good archive and after so many years they started to see correlations/connections.' It's like projects are talking with each other.' The start of the work they did in Melbourne. With invitation of Australian Centre of Contemporary Art. Because of the need of artists from Melbourne the first building, space they had as an artist was a cottage. The cottage was situated in the park called Kings Garden. Then in 2002 they moved to a place specifically built for them. The difference is huge, this new place is totally closed off, it's a barren urban environment, hot, sandy, concrete steel. She made a joke: '*It's a prototype of contemporary art, as usual.*' Then artists from Croatia related to this joke, as we are in the same position as them with our Contemporary Art Museum. Then she continued that from a previous place to this place was a huge step. They always start the research from stories. Talking with the curators, people on the ground in order to get a sense of the place and also find something that could be a start of work. That way work will be specific to the place and also their practice. Through this they discovered that in 1983. there was an immense dust storm that went over Melbourne. '*Everybody in the art world was talking about it because it was such a hallucinating experience.*' , she says. They were talking about how they were dancing in the dust and how it was the first day of Apocalypse. That's how they felt. This sand came from the middle of Australia, because there is very loose soil. It occurs more often because of the agricultural methodologies that were started by Europeans when they came to Australia. The way they worked the land is not in response or dialogue with the land. The way they worked the land was European way. A week after came bushfire which is usually the case with this dust storm They called it Ash Wednesday. Large plots of land were turned into ashes. After following this processes for years they were able to recognize these patterns. As they were struck with these calamities they decided to talk about

these things. So the question is: 'How do you talk about things that are happening to you and they may be part of climate change, maybe part of changing world around us that we are a part of.'

In their project *'Letters to the land'* (2017.) they took inspiration from Plato's text *Symposium* and decided to make an exhibition loosely taking inspiration from this. *'Letters to the land'* invited seven individuals, each taking a different role or archetype (Aunty Joy Wandin Murphy AO (the host/traditional owner), Evelyn Araluen Corr (the writer/poet), Justin Clemens (the philosopher), Justine Poon (the legal expert), Nurin Veis (the educator), Dermot Henry (the scientist) and Michael Short (the rhetorician). They produced sound work from this letters. They proposed to Australian Academy of Contemporary Art to get the soil from the area, this big space in the museum was filled almost to the edges with soil. People listening can take time and be in resonance with the soil while listening to the letters. Most of the visitors took the opportunity to lay down and listen to this letters.

Another project *'Eminent domain'* (2015.) is based on a complex term that is also very relevant in everyday lives. Few years ago before the calamity we are into today they wanted to work with this Red list (list of extinct species). It is part of the calamity we started counting in 1500's. and from then Red List has continuously grown. They've been organizing everything that is disappearing before our eyes. When we organize like this, we can count, we can create statistics. Everything is being chopped up in numbers and diagrams. The counting and measuring is really important but it can also work against you. What they did eventually is create huge carpet on the floor where they took the letter names of all the extinct species. The space they got had a ceiling that they made into a mirror. The carpets would be a mirror image of the names, so when people lied down and looked up, they could see themselves amidst the names of all the extinct species. On the opening there was 3000 people and this is exactly what they did. People were laying down enjoying, looking and also listening. They collaborated with soundscape ecologist Dr. Bernie Krause he recorded/archived the natural world with his equipment in all the different continents, landscapes. That way he archived the world that is disappearing, so the sound recorded is the sound from 4 areas of the world that has changed radically through either natural disasters or human disasters, so the sounds people listened don't exist anymore. While Bernie was living north of San Francisco, there was a bushfire so all the original tapes were destroyed (connected to the first project).

Leila Topić (curator in charge of media art, film, video, photography at Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art MSU) talks about how 20 years ago she was lucky enough to work as a researcher for Sanja Iveković (Croatian photographer, performer, sculptor, installation artist, activist). First project they worked on was *'Searching for my Mother's Number'* (2002.) it examines the archives of the artist's mother, a Yugoslav partisan and Auschwitz prisoner. Her mother was in Auschwitz and she received as all inmates a number on her arm. While looking through the archives to find her mother's number they documented this work as part of artistic research.

*'Rohrbach Living Memorial'* (2005) In cooperation with the Austrian women's organization Frauentreffpunkt Iveković invited the citizens of Rohrbach to give a living memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. The performances resembled photographs from the 1940's, which depicted the deportation of Roma and Sinti people to a concentration camp. The group of citizens was standing in the main square whole day wearing the yellow stars and same clothes. It was not just a performance to recreate the image. Leila says it was difficult to watch how these people were changing in the process of standing there in this oppression

uniform. The work is significant because it uniquely opposed the almost forgotten past through a process of awakening the empathy. Leila says this was the first time she saw that artistic process can create this healing within society.

'*Women's house*' (1998.-2002.) Safe houses in Zagreb that help victims of domestic violence to cope with separation from the violent member of the family and to become economically independent. They were in danger because there was no money to run this house. In the end it was very dangerous place for women who were living there. Sanja put cast faces of women from this houses along with their stories, why and how they ended up there, in Ban Jelačić square in front of shop windows. So everyone who was shopping at the main square got the opportunity to read this stories. The government decided to financially support this houses. Today there are two safe houses in Zagreb.

In conclusion, each of the work we were presented with today has in its core a goal to create change within society. Three different artist also have different points of focus and they use unrelated materials and artistic process to make change happen and to awaken new way of thinking in people. Today there are many artists who use environmental and political activism in their work some of them fail in their campaigns but that's the process of change. It's important to keep striving for a better world. Some of it is beneficial for contemporary art and some is beneficial for society. Josip Zanki in conclusion of our panel notes that he sees artist as '*consciousness of society*'. Artist are faced with a problem and through their work they try to create a healing method for those struck with a certain problem. It's important to archive these artistic works as they hold deeper and broader value than just scientific text.

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*Presentation and discussion Ignorance is Strength? Artistic Expression and Biopower in the Post/Pandemic Age*  
Friday – Saturday, 7 – 8 October 2022  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (Croatia)

Exhibition *Truth is a Forgotten Memory* by Željko Beljan and Rebecca Merlić  
Saturday, 8 October 2022  
Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb (Croatia)

An Event in cooperation with [Croatian Association of Fine Artists](#), [Academy of Fine Arts Zagreb](#) and the [European Alliance of Academies](#).