

Looking IN for ways OUT?

We need to have knowledge of space not only as an abstract principle, or a means for ideological and material control but also as the contested terrain in which everyday life and practices create meanings, values, signs and symbols.

(Andrzej Zieleniec)

Right behind the grand staircase on the first floor of KHB's peculiar building, one is greeted by a video introducing all nominated artists: Ondřej Houšťava, Tamara Kametani, Viktorie Langer, Èv van Hettmer and Luki Essender.

The intro gives insight into the five artists' practices, talking to each of them in their studios as well as following them in public. These personal portraits are the first indication of a show that addresses different states of movement and challenges contemporary narratives surrounding our use of space and mid-pandemic cultural production.

Two separated rooms, one on each side, were built into the unusual hexagon structure of the Kunsthalle. These freshly zoned areas offer plenty of room for the video installations of Ondřej Houšťava and Tamara Kametani to unfold and breathe. Kametani's work titled "The End in Three Parts, Part One" is the first in a trilogy and presents material clearly identifiable as found footage as well as animated segments whose origins are harder to distinguish. Two projections and a seducing voiceover lure visitors into a dystopian narrative, set in an alternative post-pandemic scenario. Balancing recent lived experiences with different extended trajectories, this two-channel video installation negotiates tensions between fiction and truth, hinting at our current notion of science losing its credibility. While this disbelief hits an already sensitive nerve within global intellectual and liberal communities, the piece comments on the fabrication of individual realities. Visitors are invited to sit down on wholesale barrels of the painkiller paracetamol, evoking thoughts on how we can tranquilize and stabilize not only our aching bodies but communities at large. Ultimately, Kametani proposes that various traditional belief systems, religion and science alike, are currently at stake.

A similar energy of creating potential resonates in Ondřej Houšťava's screening room. Here, one is invited into a world of body articulation, dance and semi-verbal communication. A collaboration with the artist Tonica Hunter, "Composition I.", bears witness to different breathing as well as vocal exercises. The work, however, does not only show an ongoing process of verbalization, it also suggests the importance of mechanisms of translation outside of language and with regards to the uptaking of space. While the visitors are invited to rest their own bodies on stage elements casually installed in the middle of the room, the performing body on screen seems to go through various phases of distress and pain, tension and relief. All the same, while gracefully remaining in charge.

The scenes vary from observing rehearsals to direct into-the-camera shots and a strong focus on sound, in its connection to the image, can be felt. Layers of images and choreography mix into emotional and captivating audio collages that provoke an eerie feeling of dislocation from the audio source itself and therefore leave you alone in the dark, meditating, following the courses of the dancer's steps.

Navigating through reverbs resounding and visitors inside a poorly lit room, the film exposes its own underlying structure: set in a studio scenario, as if for its own production, it shows backsides of sculptural props as well as close-ups of reoccurring fabrics and their textures.

Central to the movie are scenes featuring a suit that has been opened and adapted for the performer to optimally dance in it. The presentation of the moving image is completed with a letter from Houšťava to his collaborator, Hunter, in which he additionally annotates his thoughts around resistance in relation to speech and movement. Successfully packaged, emotional yet open, the installation begs for more collaborative work of this kind.

Entering the daylight flooded main exhibition hall, one is quick to realize that this room is being divided and shared between the three other nominated artists. Èv van Hettmer's large-format paintings end in a separate installation by the artist; which, however, cannot be entered. Through a net of strings upholding small works on cardboard one can peek into a multimedia installation featuring sculptures reminiscing of vases or caskets as well as an undersized video projection. In almost fluorescent shades of red and orange, bold multilingual statements (English and German) fill her paintings but at times are also painted onto the walls behind them. In opposition to the other contributions, the presentation feels more subjective and untimely, working through overarching topics such as the artist's own identity but not extending or contextualizing them much beyond. The web of strings that ties some of the works together, comes off more as a literalization, potentially distracting the viewer away from the connections the works and sentences already have.

Undeniably, there is still a need for expressive and unapologetic gestures within the male-dominated painting scene. However, the variety of blatant statements lack clarity and the mixed languages do not allow any distinctive reflection of intent.

Whereas the jury praised van Hettmer's stance towards sexism, the sole impression the works and their eclectic motifs leave is one of spontaneity and surface-surfing, rather than deep dives into a truly critical examination and positioning. Negotiating matters of access, equality and representation, van Hettmer's work points to specifically these power dynamics, while hinting at the same structural problem in society at large.

Opposite the collage of stretched canvases, on the other side of the main space are the wall and floor works that make up Viktorie Langer's contribution to the show. Without frames but equally extended towards the walls behind them, Langer's

installation consists of nine draped canvases as well as five mattresses, all covered with lively dyed fabrics in pink, orange, purple and blue. On top of them are arrangements of different stones, crystals and tools for meditation. Twigs and (semi-)mystical ephemera hover at the visitor's eye height, carefully positioned with the help of almost invisible nylon strings. The work reads as a meditation on spiritualism and the effect that certain colour combinations may have on us. Rooted in introspection and the recollecting of memories, "Free Spirits" both exemplifies and challenges our perception of esoteric practices today.

The standout presentation in the exhibition hall, however, is with Luki Essender's sculptural interventions. Meticulously welded together, a door leans on a low white wall. To one side, a wire fence with flipped ceramic cups on top of its beams. Two empty wooden frames—one red, one green—reminiscent of decorated windows, evoke a rural, country-side feeling, not in the least because of the serif house numbers on top and a woven basket hanging from one of them. These open windows are eye-catching: looking out onto nothing your attention is forced to drift to the sides, to the details they are "decorated" with, but also the installation as a whole and the relationship of its individual parts. The third of Essender's wall sculptures is even more exciting. Positioned in an identical red frame just with a different number embellishing the carved wood, here a tent-like structure sticks out from the wall like an abstracted belly. Deconstructing the architecture of the home, Essender mixes different visual cues that translate our lived experiences of the recent years. Wittily addressing a variety of socio-political crises, climate consciousness and search for shelter, Essender makes use of the mundane to direct our attention away from ourselves and draw a bigger picture of what is realistic and what can be dreamt of, but not abandoned. Hinting at the ways we separate and mark territory, they animate us to rethink notions of origin and belonging.

Making the decision to assign each artist their own, defined space the curators of the show clearly wanted to allow each position to stand on its own, accepting the soft segregation that comes with that choice. The artists in *All In. At least, a Possibility* subvert, imagine, inhabit, and impose their own ideas, values and uses on or of the space allotted to them in creative and playful ways that contest dominant forms and representations of space outside of the gallery.

The Oskár Čepan Award was established in 1996 and it is intended for upcoming visual artists. We congratulate the winner of this year's edition, Ěv van Hettmer.

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