

Kunsthhaus
Graz

English

The Other

Re-Imagine the Future

Space02

28.09.2023–18.02.2024

Opening: 27.09.2023, 19 Uhr

Curated by Andreja Hribernik

Location: Space02

What makes us different? As people, as individuals, as groups, as nationalities? What or who is the same for us, what or who is different from us? *The Other* disturbs our norm, angers or inspires us, delights or frightens us, makes us marvel or smile – if we engage with them at all.

Whatever or whoever is perceived as different, *The Other* has the potential to have an effect on our own self-image: to challenge and change it or, conversely, to reinforce it in its status quo like a kind of contrast agent.

Our own identity is something we are constantly working on, in fact by necessity through confrontation with, or demarcation from, the other. We react to the gaze and the judgement of others, are confronted with unknown values and behaviour. We draw boundaries in an attempt to figure out where we ourselves stand. Sometimes we may feel that these boundaries are permeable, sometimes robust. Robust boundaries can protect us, but more often than not they also limit us, narrowing the view into the future and so our space of possibilities.

This exhibition seeks to show us alternatives to this narrowing. It presents works by international artists that uncover hidden or half-forgotten histories, interweave the past with the present. They put forward other social systems, yet also question them. They call on us to rethink the familiar and to enter a state where we have the opportunity to conceive previously unimaginable ideas, especially in relation to our social and political future. Time and again it becomes clear that what we consider possible or impossible in the here and now is linked to the image we form of our (own) past.

On the roof of the Kunsthaus Graz, **Black Quantum Futurism's** text *All Time is Local: Graz* aims to inspire a rethinking of time itself – it is not just the present that is 'local', i.e. to be located in the here and now. In the same way, the past and the future constantly influence the here and now. Our present – our actions, thoughts and feelings – is intertwined with what already lies in the past for us, and what we expect to come next.

As we enter the exhibition, we encounter a spatial installation that extends a fragmented image out into the room. Upon closer inspection we see that it is an image of a broken mobile phone screen. Its liquid crystals have taken on a static form. Images on screens shape our interactions in real life, and what we consider important or desirable. In **Anetta Mona Chişa & Lucia Tkáčová's** installation *The Glow*, the screen is broken and no longer provides images. This becomes a moment of liberation. Instead of concrete images of actual people and things, suddenly abstract, open forms emerge from the screen – and so a new space of possibility to make you feel good or be amazed.

What can motivate a meaningful design for the future? **Olafur Eliasson's** *Navigation star for utopia* transports us into an atmosphere in which many things suddenly seem possible. The work is one of his 'kaleidoramias' (a combination of 'kaleidoscope' and 'panorama'): objects that create beautiful coloured shapes like a kaleidoscope while at the same time engaging like a panorama. The work resembles a compass, that is, a device used for orientation. It encourages us to sense that true utopia is not necessarily a specific destination like a place on a map. Instead, it may be a kind of intangible value that can take shape in different places.

Hannes Zebedin, in contrast, confronts us with scorched earth. What good is supposed to come of this? The earth is from the karst region between Slovenia and Italy, which was hit by devastating fires in the summer of 2022. But the history of these fires stretches back much further. The original deciduous forests were cleared over centuries, for activities like shipbuilding in Trieste and Venice. The desolate area was intensively reforested with Austrian pines when it was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. However, Austrian pine is very rich in resin and so highly flammable.

A combination of cultural influences, the natural conditions of the area and the effects of climate change led to disastrous consequences.

Jasmina Cibic focuses on specific political gestures and the rhetoric of diplomacy. Her photo series *The Gallery of the Non-Aligned* features sculptures from a special art collection, the gallery of the 'Non-Aligned States', which is housed in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Podgorica, Montenegro. The sculptures are works that were donated by heads of state, cultural workers and artists from the non-aligned states. The group of non-aligned states sees itself as a forum for those countries that are not formally aligned with (or against) any major power bloc. It was founded in 1961 as a reaction to the polarisation of the political world between socialism and capitalism, on the initiative of the then Yugoslavia together with India, Egypt, Ghana and Indonesia. Today, 120 countries are members. The sculptures photographed depict female torsos, busts and heads. Here, the woman is a symbol of her own nation: the vital 'mother' of all of her citizens. But if we look closely, we can see moths and insects on the surfaces of the sculptures. Vitality seems to be transient,

just like the motivation to build an alternative world order.

Kapwani Kiwanga confronts us with the short-lived nature of some concrete dreams for the future. Her *Flowers for Africa* are replicas of historical flower arrangements. This is what the flowers looked like that were captured in photographs during the independence celebrations of African states such as Ghana, Mozambique and South Sudan. Just as the flowers wither and dry out with the passing of time, Kiwanga says the enthusiasm of the period of independence is also fading. Dreams for the whole of Africa are overshadowed by the difficulties of everyday life for many African citizens, according to the artist. Kiwanga's flower objects give the independence celebration a new physical form. Any view into the future depends heavily on which aspects of the past can live on in our present and which, on the other hand, lose their potency – often due to external circumstances.

In the film *Newsreel 242 – Sunny Railways* (2023), **Nika Autor** presents us with a place – a scenic landscape between the cities of Šamac and Sarajevo in present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina. Here, at different times and in very

different ways, human belief in a better future takes shape. On the one hand, there is the historical construction project of 1947: thousands of young volunteers from all over the world helped to build the railway line between the two cities in what was then Yugoslavia. Today it is over 10 years since a train has run along here. Instead, refugees now walk along the abandoned train tracks in the hope of a better future in Europe.

‘Eat or be eaten’ and ‘everyone for themselves’ – it is common belief that these principles are simply part of our way of life, or even central aspects of any (evolutionary) development. **Jonas Staal’s** film *94 Million Years of Collectivism* encourages us to rethink this belief. Does the view of necessary conflict prevent us from dreaming of other forms of coexistence between creatures in the future? He invites us to look far back into the Ediacaran period: a geological age spanning 94 million years when complex life was already evolving, but still without the predator-prey dynamic we know so well, where one creature becomes another’s food. Instead, the underwater organisms of the Ediacaran period lived in a non-predatory, symbiotic dependence on each other, in which nutrients were exchanged with each other.

Who has a say when it comes to actually shaping the future and forming a national identity?

Rossella Biscotti explored the *Buru Quartet* novels (1980-88) by the Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Among other things, he highlighted the political role of women in the development of Indonesian national self-confidence against the Dutch colonial power. Set in the late 19th century, the novels allow women to have their say in a way that counters both male-dominated Indonesian society and the Dutch colonial ruling elite. Biscotti’s works made from natural rubber are conceived as portraits of these figures: she gives them physicality and visibility. The imprints in the material are inspired by significant patterns in Indonesian batik, an extremely complex fabric-dyeing process. Batik clothing, Biscotti says, was sometimes all that these female figures possessed. They have to face others’ desire to dominate them. One of these women, Surati, defends herself in a particularly drastic way. She is about to be forced to become the concubine of a Dutch sugar factory manager, and so she deliberately infects herself with life-threatening smallpox in order to change her destiny. The fictional characters in the novels have historical models. They tell of the minor role

and invisibility of women in history, and yet at the same time Biscotti shows us that the actions of one individual can lead to change.

Only Time Will Tell – **Driton Selmani’s** illuminated text work announces. It is a call to look at everything with a certain scepticism, even the things that might seem self-evident and obvious to us. The restraint from any strong conviction may make us more hesitant in acting at first, but it can also broaden our view and so reveal undreamt-of alternatives.

As part of the collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), the group **IRWIN** has been questioning the theme of national identity for many years now, as they do in *It’s a Beautiful Country*. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the collective founded the virtual and utopian NSK state. It has no physical territory and extends as an idea over all existing nation states, so it exists only in time. Anyone who recognises the founding principles can become a citizen – regardless of their national, sexual or religious identity.

Identity – be it personal, community or national – does not have to be a monolith, a uniform thing, but can be made up of different and mobile individual

elements. **Bouchra Khalili’s** film *The Tempest Society* highlights the narratives of people who, as individuals, are faced with ‘arriving’ in the greater whole of a country (here: Greece). *The Tempest Society* does theatre, its name paying tribute to a Parisian theatre group of the 1970s: *Al Assifa* (Arabic for ‘The Tempest’) was a group consisting of French students and people from North Africa who had come to Paris to work. Like *Al Assifa*, *The Tempest Society* stands up against inequality and racism in Europe. It is the perspective of people whose basic needs are often ignored and who are not recognised as citizens that can shed an especially clear light on the state of Greece and Europe. Hearing them has the potential to correct Europe’s self-image and cultivate new ways of driving social and political developments.

‘Don’t Dream Dreams’ was British politician David Owen’s famous ‘advice’ to Bosnians when their capital Sarajevo was under siege from the Serbs in 1992. He told them not to live under the dream that the west would come and sort the problem out. His statement is emblazoned across **Lana Čmajčanin’s** work of the same name above a depiction of the Habsburg Bosnian campaign

in 1878. The painting from the same year is by Alexander Ritter von Bensa and Adolf Obermüller and is now in the Museum of Military History in Vienna. At first glance, it looks like an idyllic landscape painting, but actually shows the northern camp near the town of Mostar, where the Bosnian campaign started. What had at the time been declared a peaceful occupation led to a de facto territorial expansion of Austria-Hungary, which was met with resistance. The warlike actions of the dual monarchy all too quickly shattered the dream of a peaceful and humanitarian intervention.

Whose story remains? How is it recorded, and from what point of view is it told? In *Clara*, **Rossella Biscotti** recalls a rhinoceros from the 18th century. She was shipped from India to the Netherlands by VOC, the Dutch East India Company. The 2,700 kilograms of bricks served as ballast to load the ship on the outward journey. On the return journey Clara replaced this weight. Eventually, Clara was sold by the VOC for the sum of 100,000 écus. Douwe Mout van der Meer – the captain of the ship that brought Clara to Europe – travelled with the rhinoceros through several countries, displaying her in return for money. Clara is shown here as

she appears in various historical sources: as a weight, as an indication of the amount of food she consumed (tobacco leaves) and as her monetary value.

I want a president who is a cleaner. A teacher. A nurse. A housewife. A midwife. [...] Immediately in her first demands, **Marina Naprushkina** shakes up the established image of a president. In her work, the artist refers to the peaceful mass protests of 2020 in her home country of Belarus. The demonstrations were against the sham elections from which Alexander Lukashenko once again emerged as president. In terms of style, Marina Naprushkina combines maljavanka painting – a traditional technique mostly practised by women – with artistic-political demands and activism: with Zoe Leonard's seminal work from 1992, which is also called *I want a president*, and the commitment of activist Maryja Kalesnikawa, who was imprisoned as a member of the opposition in 2020. Naprushkina demands her immediate release as well as that of all political prisoners in Belarus. In this way the artist recalls the political events in Belarus, which are marked by a struggle against injustice. What would a future with an alternative president look like? What could change in society

through other, encouraging representations?

Sometimes it takes long (until things change) is the name of **Helene Thümmel's** work. She records the dates of political revolutions, protests and uprisings as embroideries. The dates refer to resistance and struggles against injustice that have taken place in locations all over the world over the last 250 years. In doing so, she pays tribute to the individuals and groups who, at the risk of their lives, attempt to change their present and so also the future.

In order to be clear about the possibilities of our own future, we need to take an honest look at our own past. **Kader Attia's** *Repaired Broken Mirror* (2023) invites us to look into a mirror with an obvious break. We must not close our eyes to the wounds and mistakes of the past: neither to those that we ourselves have caused or suffered, nor to those that affect us as part of a group or as people acting within a system.

Finally, in the foyer and in the Needle, awaits the idea of a world in which national identities are preserved, but where borders are designed to be permeable. *U.N. Camouflage* by **Société Réaliste** shows flags in which the originals

from the 193 UN member states have been transformed into camouflage patterns. They are not completely dissolved: the original colour tones and the proportions of the colours to each other have been kept. The symbol of a future utopia? The flags also extend outside the Kunsthaus: for a limited time, a specific selection for the exhibition in Graz can be seen on the Schloßberg and on Herrengasse.

Supporting programme

28.09.–01.10.

Hidden Spaces. Architectural tour

German: daily at 11am and 3.30pm

Slovenian: Saturdays at 2pm

Italian: Sundays at 1pm

English: Sundays at 2pm

Alien Space: Create Aliens in Space03

Daily from 10am to 7pm

Bubble Up – Join us in Space04

Daily from 10am to 7pm

Every Sunday

Guided exhibition tour in English

During this guided tour you will get an insight into our current exhibitions.

Additionally, we will have a look at the fascinating biomorphic architecture.

2pm

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