

On City Agents. Part I

interviews and text by Sabin Bors

On August 5, 2016, the exhibition project *City Agents* opened at the Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia (EKKM) in Tallinn. Curated by Jussi Koitela in the context of his ongoing curatorial research project *Skills of Economy*, the exhibition was intended as a discussion about exhibition spaces and the contemporary cityscape as sites of the accumulation of capital. Its attempt to map out current active agencies that gentrify the city – zooming in on artistic practices that expose and shape forms of social, ecological and economic activation and de-activation of urban space – has provided an opportunity for a broader debate on artistic practices and human and extra-human co-agencies in the public space shift socio-economic structures. The first exhibition extension of Koitela's research project, *City Agents* was an attempt to expose the material flows, objects and densities of the city, seeking to rethink city space from the perspective of more hybrid, blurred and merged notions about contemporary cityscapes and the agencies that form it. Abandoning the binomial divisions of function/non-function, human/extra-human, built/empty, or local/global, *City Agents* was followed by a second exhibition, *Mattering City*, that recently took place at SixtyEight Art Institute. Presenting the works of Melanie Bonajo, The BodyBuilding Project and Asbjørn Skou, *Mattering City* is a more concentrated show aiming to echo various symptoms and reactions to the contemporary city space as an accumulation of capital. The reflections and bodily engagements to neoliberal human-centric urbanism, gentrification processes, and the geometries of city spaces, make *Mattering City* an organic development of *City Agents* that further investigates autonomous and regenerative agency dynamics taking place between human and non-human interfaces, challenging the entangled spaces of ontology, epistemology and ethics in urban areas.

"The whole idea for the research and process started around 2011," says Jussi Koitela explaining the interdisciplinary format of his research. "I realised that a lot of daily discussions in the field of art end up with money and worries about earnings, whatever was the original topic. After the economic crises in 2008 and the full force austerity politics that came into effect, public discussions were dictated by economic discourses. I wanted to develop artistic discourses and acknowledge artistic practices on economy that are not dictated solely by questions of earnings in the creative industry or in lowering public art funding caused by austerity. At the same time, I wanted to test out and develop a kind of 'institutional' setting for my own curatorial practice, to maybe secure some continuity for it. Here is where the concept of *skills* comes in. It is something that merges with your daily efforts for getting paid in order to determine critical curatorial and artistic ways of engaging economic discourses and structures. For me, it is way of 'working' with economy and, at the same time, challenge it with research that takes different formats and presentations. I then started to think about artistic practices that I wanted to present in the context of the project and test different ways of discussing about them. My interest in different disciplines and areas of knowledge raises from understanding that art, economy and other fields of specialised knowledge should always be read and performed through other fields of knowledge, as intra-actors in the

Exhibition /



City Agents (August 5 - September 11, 2016)

The Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia (EKKM) is a self-established non-profit initiative, that situates itself somewhere between official state-run institutions and artist-run-do-it-yourself venues. It is an unconventional concept of a contemporary art museum that works towards producing, exhibiting, collecting and popularizing local and international contemporary art while altering the prevailing working methods of established art institutions. It is a tool of self-establishment for younger generation artists, curators and art students. EKKM was founded by Anders Härm, Elin Kard, Neeme Külm, and Marco Laimre in late 2006. Since 2016 it is run by Marten Esko and Johannes Säre who joined the team in 2011.

EKKM operates from late 2006 as an ex-squat that has now legalized its premises in a previously abandoned office building of Tallinn's former heating plant. EKKM has been producing exhibits and collecting art from 2007 and since 2010 has established its regular exhibition season that takes place from April until November. In 2011 EKKM initiated its own contemporary art prize, the Köler Prize, that is accompanied by an exhibition of the nominees. From then on, it has become a constantly evolving area of creative initiative where 2013 marks the opening of Lugemik Bookshop alongside the exhibition production company Valge Kuup. Subsequently the student gallery ISFAG and project-space-like EKKM's Café followed.

same network of reality. Curating should find formats and methods to speak about them simultaneously and intra-act them together. [4] This is not about bringing together or representing art, economy and politics, for example, but acting in situations and realities where they are connected and inseparable. It is not about dealing with art, economy and politics – it is about acting with art, economics and politics on art, economics and politics.”



Zachary Formwalt, In Light of the Arc, 2013. Double-channel HD video with sound. Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

Koitela's intention to create “a flow of views” from multiple perspectives is based on the interconnection of arts, activism and theory as a means to nurture effective mediations between symbolic and direct actions. Whether symbolic actions can “create new representations of the visualisation of economy or re-perform economic concepts, situations and habits,” has been an ethical, epistemological and aesthetic questioning and process for Koitela. “I don't think that art, economy or politics should be left only to those who are trained or have a background in these fields,” he argues. “Questions around access to knowledge production and who has such access should somehow lie at the core of every curatorial process. There is this modern epistemology – but division into areas of specialised knowledge and art is, for me, something that curatorial practices can challenge by creating formats and models for different disciplines and thoughts. This is an area where independent curatorial practices can develop institutions to host such formats. There are many possibilities to explore but there are not many contemporary institutions to see this. From the perspective of aesthetics and visual, material and performative communication, I believe that only forms that merge together their different understandings can react to contemporary urgencies that are also very complex aesthetically, materially and affectively. Maybe one specific aspect of this complexness is the relationship between or ‘within-ness’ of art and politics. Art, activism and theory are involved in all actions and representations that are experienced and perceived. All movements and events that intra-act in the network are affected by art, political activism and theory, so they need to be analysed by practices that result out of this constant becoming and being together. The projects and practice of Estonian group Visible Solutions LLC are a very good example of re-performing economic concepts and situations. Their entire practice is a reaction to changes in the cultural politics of Estonia, and I would say broadly that, in Europe, neoliberal cultural policies are heavily affecting the field of art. Visible Solutions LLC's form of creative company is performing the role that is ‘given’ to artists in creative economies but they bring criticality to it. Works such as Adam Smith's Pet Invisible Hand in a Cage take concepts that are effectuated in the background of this neoliberal turn and put them in performative situations.”

Opening Hours:

Tuesday-Sunday: 12-19

Free Admission

Open from April to November

Address:

Contemporary Art Museum of
Estonia
Põhja pst 35
Tallinn
Estonia

Contact:

info@ekkm.ee

[WEBSITE](#)

About the Curator /

Jussi Koitela is a curator and a visual artist currently based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His long term curatorial research project Skills of Economy address artistic reactions to economic discourses and structures. He was participant to De Appel Curatorial Programme 2015/2016.

[Website](#)

Artist Biographies /

Zachary Formwalt (b. 1979) is a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. In 2004 and 2005 he attended the Critical Postgraduate Program at the Malmö Art Academy. [Full CV available here.](#)

Alma Heikkilä (b. 1984) lives and works in Helsinki and Hyrynsalmi, Finland. The art of Heikkilä consists painting, installation, video and photography. She received her MFA from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in 2009. Her work has been shown in galleries and museums in Finland, Sweden, Germany, Italy and Estonia. Heikkilä is the co-founder of two artist run projects: the Helsinki based gallery Oksasenkatu 11 and the Hyrynsalmi based MUSTARINDA, association and artists/researchers-in-residence program. The core activities of the association consist of independent and critical art, research, and education. The activity is centered in the Mustarinda House, which is located next to the Paljakka Nature Reserve in the Kainuu region.

Barbara Knezevic was born in Sydney, Australia and lives and works in Dublin, Ireland. She attended the Sydney College of the Arts (Bachelor Visual Arts) and National College of Art and Design, Dublin (Master of Fine Art). In 2015 she undertook residencies at ArtSpace, Sydney, Australia and HIAP in Helsinki, Finland. Recent exhibitions include With Leftover Agencies, Gallery Augusta, Helsinki (2016); Duality of Form,

Looking back on the “project exhibitions” of the 1990s and how artistic practices have responded to socio-economic shifts over the last twenty years, Marion von Osten has shown that artistic practices act as “shapers of discourse” and “are able to adopt new points of view on economic change and introduce ruptures to its seeming logic.” Cultural producers have created “a new arena in which a decentring of modernist universalisms or normative subjectivation can be practiced, in which imaginaries of the political can not only be expressed and visualised, but also worked through in changing constellations that are not fixed.” [2] The production of an exhibition can be radically transformed into public action, argues von Osten, with project exhibitions serving to generate “a potential for new positions of speech, articulations and cultural practices on the sidelines of hegemonic discourses. (...) In addition to the collective experience, project exhibitions by artists can thus chart an imaginary map of oppositional cultural practices and experimental knowledge spaces, pointing beyond the symbolic space of the exhibition and academic disciplines.” [3] Project exhibitions nurture productive potential for micro-political actions and the creation of new public spheres, challenging the neutrality of the art space and related representational regimes.

City Agents: approaching the subject

Placed into the EKKM in Tallinn, an artistic institution located in between the city’s most rapidly gentrifying urban areas, *City Agents* presented the works of 14 artists – [Zachary Formwalt](#), [Alma Heikkilä](#), [Barbara Knezevic](#), [Antti Majava](#), [Arttu Merimaa](#), [Anu Pennanen](#), [Asbjørn Skou](#), [Uku Sepsivart](#), [Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić](#), [Jon Benjamin Tallerräs](#), [Mona Vätämanu & Florin Tudor](#), and [Ingel Vaikla](#) – whose works traverse the politics and economies urban environments. As an articulation of a much broader project, *City Agents* looks at transformative ways of inhabiting the space, seeking to challenge the constraints of capital and production. “I would describe the whole research project behind *Skills of Economy* as a communication and intra-action between my theoretical interests and urgencies, artistic and research practices, and institutional, economic, political, social, and ecological possibilities,” says Koitela. “Of course, these are not autonomic factors, they function within and as part of each other. I’ve been mapping out artistic practices and projects that are opening new ways of experiencing different aspects of economy and economic processes. At the same time, I’ve been looking for theoretical texts and formulations that challenge the different modern western binaries and understandings of specialised knowledge. Bringing them together has enabled and also challenged some of the current political economy critiques, in a very fruitful way for me; they have lead to other texts and artistic practices that developed research in whole other directions. I just finished reading *Capitalism in the Web of Life* by Jason W. Moore and I would have read it in a completely different way if I had not experienced Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares’s work *Forest Law*. Exhibiting and displaying are a kind of test site for these processes in various different institutional and infrastructural settings. What does it really mean to bring these works and thoughts in this kind of social, economic, material, and spatial context, with this kind of audience? *City Agents* and the selection of artists and artworks is the ‘result’ of such processes. For example, I saw Mona Vätämanu and Florin Tudor’s work *Distribution Land* online a few years ago already, and I feel that having read so many texts, I experienced many other works and contexts through them. Another example is Uku Sepsivart’s work on beaver/human made objects and sculptures. I met him and visited his studio, maybe one year and a half ago, and this has affected in many ways how I have thought about certain texts, other artworks and other contexts. Half of the works in *City Agents* have perhaps been part of similar processes. If I didn’t have them with me one way or the other for the whole time, there would not have been this exhibition concept either. They have opened up new ways of reading the whole show and ended up somewhere unexpected. I try to work with people and practices where there is a certain sensitivity in engaging with the theoretical, material, spatial, political, and social contexts where the whole process takes place.”

Solstice Arts Centre (2016); *Seachange*, Tulca Festival of Visual Art, curated by Mary Cremin (2015); *Frontiers in Retreat* HIAP, Helsinki, Curated by Jenni Nurmenniemi (2015); *ULTRA*, The LAB, Dublin City Council, (2014); *Temple Bar Gallery and Studios are Dead*, curated by Chris Fite Wassilak, TBG+S, Dublin (2013); *Golden Mountain*, Tulca Festival of Visual Art, curated by Valerie Connor (2013); *Where exists a remnant*, The Dock, Carrick on Shannon (2013); *Future Perfect – We are here*, Rubicon Projects, Brussels (2013); *Whitewashing the Moon*, Project Arts Centre, Dublin (2012); *After the Future*, eva International Biennial of Art (2012). Forthcoming exhibitions include *City Agents*, curated by Jussi Koitela, at EKKM, Estonia in July 2016, *The Last Thing on Earth*, a solo exhibition at the MAC, Belfast in September 2016 and *Three acts in the time of astatine* a solo exhibition of new work at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios in November 2016.

Antti Majava, M.A. (Fine Art), is a visual artist and writer who strives in his art as well as all his other actions to find what it is all about. Majava is interested in hidden and unconscious meanings and particularly the hiding of things in the centre of our attention so that our understanding cannot reach them. His central working method is the observation of the operational logic of individuals and groups by taking part in the workings of organisations in different roles. From these observations he makes art and conclusions, out of which Majava strives to produce strategies for the stopping of the development which endangers the future of humankind and ecosystems. Majava is a founding member of the Mustarinda Association.

Arttu Merimaa (born in Pori Finland 1983, lives and works in Helsinki) is an artist focusing on moving image and video installation. His videos deal with the merging of the common and the subjective; how personal experiences co-exist with the media culture and how reality is conceptualized through visual imagery. He has graduated from Tampere University of Applied Sciences in 2007 and is currently finishing his Masters in Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki. He has presented his works in various solo and group exhibitions as well as video screenings in Finland and abroad. He has also participated in residencies; Changdong National Art Studios in Seoul South-Korea (2009), Ox-Bow, Saugatuck, MI, Usa (2010), Cité des Arts in Paris, France (2011) and Residency Unlimited in New York, US. His works are included in the collections of Helsinki City Art Museum and Kiasma Museum Contemporary Art in Helsinki. In his works, Merimaa has been dealing with the aesthetic qualities of visual technicalities such as 3D or chroma keying in relation to their conceptual positions in the politics of seeing. Merimaa concentrates on the rhetorics and visual wrappings of societal ideas, public subjection and subjects aspiration towards an individual identity. In addition to his own artistic work Merimaa runs a window gallery called Alkovi in Helsinki. In 2013 Alkovi gallery focuses on commissioned works from invited artists



Arttu Merimaa, Autochthonic Fantasy, 2016. 18:00 min. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.



Ingel Vaikla, The House Guard, 2015 (still image). 25:55 min. Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

City Agents also looks at how art institutions, studio complex and gallery spaces are an addition to the neoliberal creative space within contemporary urban networks, with art-related spaces and institutions seen as agents of gentrification that are part of broader considerations on cultural tourism and real estate speculation. The rhetoric of creativity and the booming development of creative urban areas have shifted the roles of artistic institutions, which are prime agents in (re-)developed city areas. Gentrification and urban planning capitalise and re-functionalise 'non-productive' or unused spaces, instrumentalising production and producing knowledge within the framework of neoliberal economies. The question, therefore, is how does one engage the flow of objects, energies, densities, and cartographies of matter and form that lie at the intersections of capital and the production of knowledge; how does one shift perspective from the only alternative of neoliberalism; and how can we redirect and reshape the objects and energies at work in the public space so as to counter the geometries of control and division that define human-driven capitalism. This is particularly relevant in the case of societies transiting from bureaucratic socialism to capitalism, where neoliberalism has brought massively unregulated privatizations and denationalizations, and an apparatus of intervention mechanisms designed to increase western investment opportunities. Neoliberal urban development has disrupted the fabric of society, adjusted to the demand of different actors – from investors, developers, business, and politicians, to NGOs and various types of institutions – and altered a wide range of political discourses, social realities and cultural productions. The withdrawal of politics from daily life and the institution of homogenising, socially sterile policies has led to the depoliticization and financialization of public spaces.

to deal with the specific location of the gallery and its existence in the public space. Merimaa's curatorial work centers around the concept of collegial art practice and artist-run initiatives. He has been organizing exhibitions, events, screenings and art projects since the year 2005.

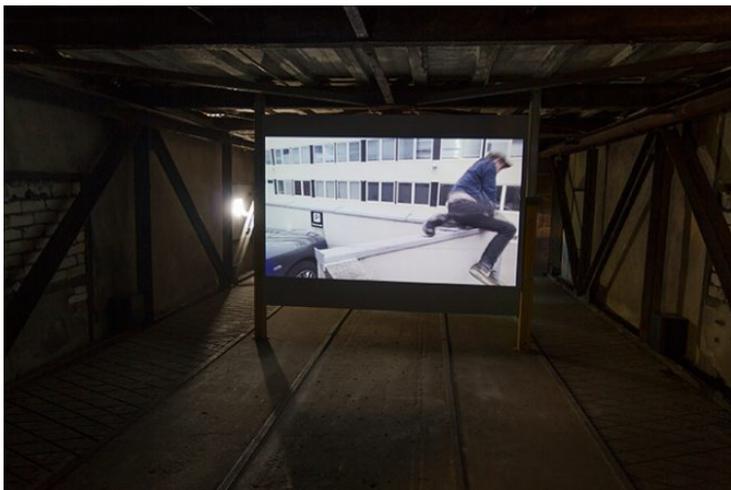
Anu Pennanen is a Finnish-born filmmaker and a visual artist. Lyrical and often sensorial, her film works show people marginalized economically, socially and politically, and transform in a subtle way their experiences through the use of fiction. In 2011 she teamed up with artist, screenwriter and director Stéphane Querrec. They founded the company Palo Productions, to produce their films without artistic compromises.

Asbjørn Skou (b. 1984) lives and works in Copenhagen and studied at Hochschule für Künste in Bremen from 2004 to 2009. His recent solo projects include Terminal Infrastructure at Third Space in Copenhagen, A Hole Through the Future at Munch Gallery in New York, as well as Impossible Society at Vejle Art Museum. He has also participated in numerous group shows in Denmark and abroad, including at Westwerk, Hamburg; Gallery Steinsland Berliner, Stockholm; Athens Video Art Festival, and KØS Museum of Art in Public Spaces in Køge.

Uku Sepsivart (born 1988) has obtained both his MA (2015) and BA degree (2009) from the department of sculpture and installation of Estonian Academy of Arts. In 2012 he started MA studies in the same department. During the studies Sepsivart has taken additional courses in Finland – in 2009 in Villu Jaanisoo's studio and during 2013–2014 in Helsinki Art University. The artist has been taking part in several street-art festivals and has released a book about street-art together with Tõnis Palkov and Andres Siplane. In 2012, Uku Sepsivart was awarded the Young Artist Prize (by non-profit organization Noor Kunst and Estonian Academy of Arts).

Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić are Belgrade-based artists whose artistic practice comprises working with drawing, text, video and photography. Since 2002 they develop a joint artistic practice, exploring the overlapping space between art and politics. In their artistic work they focus on social and economical conditions of reproduction, unveiling in a provoking way the contradictions of today's societies. With means of artistic research and analysis that combine text, slogans, photo, video, drawing, and public action they transform discourses both in the arts and in the political field. A focus of their work are historical and emerging constellations that bring forward emancipatory action and movements of precarious workers, art workers, migrant workers, Roma... Their projects include engagement in current public debates and struggles, cross-disciplinary collaboration and dissemination through different media and channels. Rena Rädle and Vladan Jeremić are editors of a number of publications such as the issue Reclaiming Realism of the Open Systems Journal,

The role of artistic interventions is to interrupt daily routines and regular social intercourses in the city, argues Pascal Gielen, removing rational (and rationalized) divisions and allowing the conversion of antagonisms into agonisms. [4] Gielen takes Richard Sennett's argument for more anarchy in the city – to break open communities and heterogeneous neighbourhoods, and remove purely rational divisions [5] – to stress the primordial role of the public space in the city and modern society in allowing for otherness to exert the political function “to convert antagonisms into agonisms.” This is, according to Chantal Mouffe, the very basis of democracy: “To revitalize democracy in our post-political societies, what is urgently needed is to foster the multiplication of agonistic public spaces where everything that the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate can be brought to light and challenged.” [6] The role of artists in this context is to shape and articulate opinions, images, beliefs, or ideas by putting city-dwellers out of their comfort zones and interrupting routines, in order to *make* the public space anew and charge it politically. As Gielen explains, “(...) an artist's ‘message’ absolutely need not be political. Simply by the act of pushing the otherwise conceivable, by lending it a possible expression, the public and the political emerges. (...) the artist introduces a ‘dismeasure’ into the measure that is regarded as ‘normal’ by an urban culture at a given moment in history. (...) Precisely in this unforeseen ‘dismeasure’ lies the political character and the force to generate the public space.” But as Gielen points out, “the interruptive character of artistic interventions happens to depend strongly on the contexts in which they are performed.” [7] From the monumental to the situational city, and from the creative to the common city, Gielen shows, the motion of the city creates a complexity of the real life that evades typologies, categorization, or creative interventions for that matter. Unlike artists of the 1960s and 1970s, who fought tactically “against the rigidity of hierarchic structures and a superimposed, planned experience of the city,” artists today “navigate an extremely fluid domain in which movement and change are the rules. (...) They must constitute new real worlds, real social, political and economic plateaus in the city from where that same urban fabric can be consistently irritated. (...) Artists do not perform in the public space, but have to continually claim their place and in doing so *make* space public time and again.” [8]



Jon Benjamin Tallerås, *No alternate route*, 2015. Video Installation, 7.15 min (loop). Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

Jon Benjamin Tallerås explores architectural and urban spaces by reading the cityscape in unconventional manners, through the perspective of overlooked or unused sites, building conglomerates, and temporary routes. In his practice, urban elements function only as a means to wander along alternative paths and drift through the city. Walking is an important part of his artistic practice, providing an opposition to the conventions of monuments, objects, or normative crossing points, and thus a different way of interacting with urban infrastructures. In doing so, the artist challenges pragmatic and standardised conventions, acting against the regulative routes

Austria or the ArtLeaks Gazette 1 & 2. Rädle and Jeremić have worked with groups such as the Chto Delat?, ArtLeaks, Perpetuum Mobile and other collectives.

Jon Benjamin Tallerås (b. 1984, Oslo, Norway) graduated from Oslo National Academy of the Arts in 2011, and his improvised actions, informal sculpture and low-profile infiltrations belong to a tradition of urban wandering that reaches back at least as far as André Breton's photographic expeditions in 1920s Paris. Tallerås works with a variety of media such as photography, video, sculpture, performance, text and installation. Tallerås investigates urban space, exploring hidden and often non-used areas of the city. Using found materials to create sculptures and making transient performances that claim the accidental gaps and spaces formed on the margins of functional architecture. Parallel with his artistic practice Tallerås is one of the initiators and curators of the project space One Night Only Gallery.

Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor (b.1968, Romania – 1974, Switzerland) work together since 2000. Their artistic practice spans diverse media including film, photography, painting, performance, and site-specific projects. Vătămanu and Tudor's broad-reaching practice has positioned them among the most compelling and literate interpreters of our contemporary post-communist condition, which extends far beyond their native Romania. Widely shown in Europe, Vătămanu and Tudor's artistic practice involves bringing history into the present tense, whether in the form of performative re-enactment or symbolic recuperation. A deep interest in architecture as a repository of both personal and collective memory and as a mark of communist power underlies many of their projects.

Ingel Vaikla is a photographer and filmmaker. In her work she mostly questions the relation between architecture and its users, and the representation of architecture in camera based mediums. Ingel was part of the team representing Estonia at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale with a contribution titled How Long is the Life of a Building? She writes for design and architecture magazine Idee and is a film program curator for the International Interior Architecture Symposium SISU.

Notes /

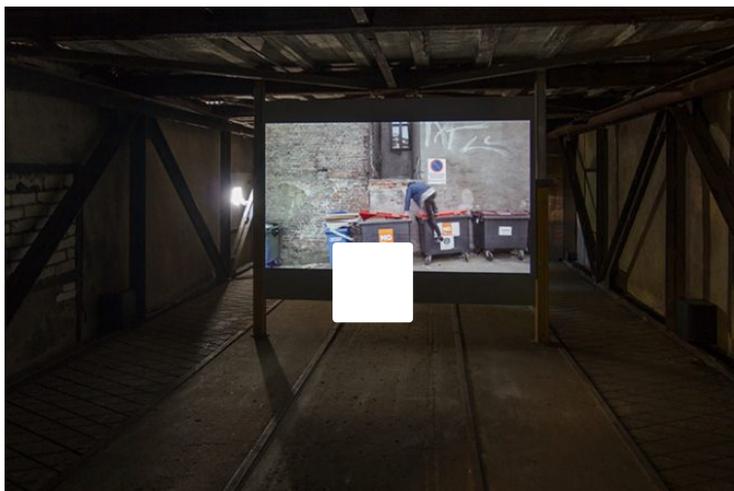
[1] For a broader discussion of intra-actions, see the interview with Karen Barad taken by Adam Kleinmann.

[2] Marion von Osten, 'Another Criteria... or, What is the Attitude of a Work in the Relations of Production of Its Time?' in Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry, Issue 25 (Autumn 2010), pp. 56-69, quote on p. 68.

or urban planning. Much more than merely a metaphor, walking is thus a means to resist the navigational perspective of the city.

“The walking is not a metaphor,” says Jacqueline Schoemaker in her exceptional reading of the city, *The Undivided City*. “You don’t walk hundreds of kilometres through a city actually to refer to something else. At most walking is a metaphor in the literal sense of the word, the meaning stripped of all metaphors, namely the metaphor as a means of transport. (...) Walking from north to south, taking the ferry, crossing, don’t refer to anything else, don’t refer to anything other than their physical reality. (...) The metaphor you take carries all sorts of things, across the water, from north to south, but it doesn’t carry meaning. For the conveyance of meaning there has to be a ground between two things or places, a reason for comparing them. But there is no ground. In your transport of your experience to the text, you inevitably stumble on a gap. Language and design are always metaphor. Between language and design on the one hand, and what takes place on the other, is a wide gap. The text is no experience, the map no space.” [9]

Relating to the exhibition concept, *City Agents*, Rena Rädle and Vlado Jeremić argue that “Art and culture are catalysts and accelerators of the gentrification of city space. If artists are agents of these processes, the question is then how artists position their production in the process of accumulation of capital. We think that urban movements have a real and significant agency to resist the anti-social urbanisation that is going on. Artists and cultural workers need to be solidary with these movements and join the struggle for a social city.” From this perspective, the artistic construction is a social one as well, to be experienced as *part of and in solidarity with* urban realities, constantly shaping and reshaping social interactions. Within the fluid dynamics of the urban space, this is also a gesture to perform a common ground.



Jon Benjamin Talléräs, *No alternate route*, 2015. Video Installation, 7.15 min (loop). Photo: Johannes Säve/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

[3] Id., *ibid.*, p. 69.

[4] See Pascal Gielen, “Performing the Common City: On the Crossroads of Art, Politics and Public Life” in *Interrupting the City. Artistic Constitutions of the Public Space*, edited by Sander Bax, Pascal Gielen, and Bram Leven, ‘Antennae,’ Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015, pp. 277-279.

[5] “It is the mixing of diverse elements that provides the materials for the ‘otherness’ of visibly different life styles in a city; these materials of otherness are exactly what men need to learn about in order to become adults. Unfortunately, now these diverse city groups are each drawn into themselves, nursing their anger against the others without forums of expression. By bringing them together, we will increase the conflicts expressed and decrease the possibility of an eventual explosion of violence.” – Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*, New York, NY: Knopf, 1970, p. 162, apud. Pascal Gielen, “Performing the Common City,” *ibid.*, p. 277.

[6] Chantal Mouffe, *On The Political: Thinking in Action*, London and New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 20, apud. Pascal Gielen, “Performing the Common City,” *ibid.*, p. 278.

[7] Pascal Gielen, “Performing the Common City,” *ibid.*, p. 278.

[8] Id., *ibid.*, p. 292-293.

[9] Jacqueline Schoemaker, *De ongedeelde stad / The Undivided City*, Eindhoven: Onomatopoe 75.2.2 – Cabinet Project, 2012, p. 55.

[10] These ideas, based on Jacques Derrida’s “Point de folie: Maintenant l’architecture,” published in Bernard Tschumi, *La case vide: La Villette 1985*, trans. by Kate Linker, London: Architectural Association, 1986, p. 4-20, have been commented in Sabin Bors, “The Curative Sensorium of the Architectural,” in *SITE UNDER CONSTRUCTION*, catalogue of the Romanian Pavilion at 14 International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale Di Venezia, Ministry of Culture / Site Under Construction, 2014, p. 65.

[11] See Sabin Bors, “Anticipative Geographies and Experimental Archaeologies” in *The Would-Be City: In(ter)ventions in the post-communist urban space*, edited by Ina Stoian and Daniela Calciu, Cluj-Napoca: Tact Publishing House / asociatia plusminus, 2012, pp. 265-271.

[12] Chantal Mouffe, “Institutions as Sites of Agonistic Intervention” in *Institutional Attitudes. Instituting Art in a Flat World*, edited by Pascal Gielen, ‘Antennae,’ Amsterdam: Valiz, p. 66.

[13] Id., *ibid.*, p. 67.

[14] Id., *ibid.*

[15] Id., *ibid.*, p. 68.



City Agents exhibition, installation view. Right: Uku Sepsivart – *Rise of the Beaversculptor*, 2016, installation. Left: Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić – *Real Struggle, Fake Estates*, 2016, textile flags and acrylic. Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

While Alma Heikkilä feels the title *City Agents* “gives space for and hints towards multiple viewpoints and various agencies in the city terrain,” allowing the artists in the exhibition to play a role and get involved in actual situations, Uku Sepsivart understands it “as a title for an exhibition that gathers artists who have in some way integrated the city as a location or a process in their work practice. They must be somehow interfering in it or working with it.” This interference – with urban spaces, terrains, and architecture as well – needs to counter the functionalization and instrumentalization of spaces, and institute a constitutive indeterminacy; for when turned into an aesthetic experience, the formal language of built space becomes an open semantic system that ensures ‘dysfunctionality’ and deinstrumentalization. [10] Interference is a performative gesture and, as such, a political act that challenges normative semiotic paradigms and consolidates imagined space geographies that shape the anticipations of participative dynamics arising within the city. [11]

“I understand this [title] as the art institution, the exhibition and then the artwork as an agent for politics, thought, critique, and material production in the city, but also understand the artistic production as an agent for gentrification,” explains Barbara Knezevic. The various forms of production breed novel types of resistance that also depend, as Pascal Gielen has shown, on the context in which artistic interventions are performed, raising questions on what types of relations need to be established with the institutions. It has been argued that art institutions share a complicit relation with capitalism and reproduce the system, thus being no longer able to be perceived as sites for critical artistic practices – and that in order to be effective, artistic practices need to be constituted outside cultural institutions. Such a perspective is profoundly mistaken, argues Chantal Mouffe: “To believe that existing institutions cannot become the terrain of contestation is to ignore the tensions that always exist within a given configuration of forces and the possibility of acting for subverting their form of articulation.” [12] By advocating for a strategy of ‘engagement with institutions,’ Mouffe relies on a theoretical approach where society is always politically instituted and the social is “the realm of sedimented political practices, practices that conceal the originary acts of their contingent political institution.” [13] Because every order is the expression of a particular structure of power relations, hegemonic confrontations and disarticulations take place wherever one finds constructed hegemonies. “Artistic practices have a necessary relation to politics because they either contribute to the reproduction of the common sense that secures a given hegemony or to its challenging. Critical artistic practices are those which, in a variety of ways, play a part in the process of disarticulation / rearticulation which characterizes a counter-hegemonic politics.” [14] Artistic and cultural production are agents for gentrification because of their strategic importance in how the modes of subjectivation underlie the reproduction of capital. The capitalist system needs to mobilize people’s

[16] This question is all the more relevant in the context of audience interaction today. On the one hand, whether performative, participatory, co-productive, reflexive, or dialogical – the various forms of artistic practice need not only to challenge hegemonic socio-political constructions but, perhaps more dauntingly, the dominant commercial model for audience interaction imposed by neoliberalism and the ideologies of financialization. On the other hand, as curator and writer Simon Sheikh noted, “the quintessential modernist object that was the gallery space [has] remained intact,” and continues to be “socially tilted towards a certain group – the upper class – and their cultural rule and political hegemony.” – Simon Sheikh, “A Long Walk to the Land of the People: Contemporary Art in the Spectre of Spectatorship” in *Future Publics (The Rest Can and Should Be Done by the People): A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Hlavajova and Ranjit Hoskote, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015, p. 242.

[17] Jacqueline Schoemaker, *De ongedeelde stad / The Undivided City*, *ibid.*, p. 49.

[18] Odile Heynders, “Cities & Signs: Rethinking Calvino’s Urban Imaginaries” in *Interrupting the City*, *ibid.*, p. 66.

[19] *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 68.

[20] Andreas Huyssen, ed., *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008, p. 3. apud. Odile Heynders, “Cities & Signs,” *ibid.*, p. 73.

[21] Odile Heynders, “Cities & Signs,” *ibid.*, p. 77 and p. 81.

Keywords /

accumulation, activism, aesthetics, agency, agent, Alma Heikkilä, Antti Majava, Anu Pennanen, architecture, artistic practices, Arttu Merimaa, Ashjorn Skou, austerity, autonomy, Barbara Knezevic, capital, capitalism, City Agents, city space, cityscape, communication, conflict, context, control, conversation, creativity, criticality, critique, culture, curating, democracy, division, ecology, economy, environment, ethics, exhibition, extra-human, financialization, gentrification, global, hegemony, ideology, imaginary, infrastructure, Ingel Vaikla, institution, institutional, instrumentalization, intervention, interview, intra-action, Jon Benjamin Talleras, Jussi Koitela, knowledge, local, materiality, Melanie Bonajo, Mona Vätämanu & Florin Tudor,

desires and shape their identities in order to maintain its hegemony, hence the key position of culture and cultural institutions in the process of commodification. Critical artistic practices that engage with the institutional terrain hold the power to create “a multiplicity of agonistic spaces where the dominant consensus is challenged and where new modes of identification are made available.” [15]



Alma Heikkilä, *Microbiota*, 2016 (detail). Ink, acrylic, rice glue, polyester, plaster, wood, metal. Photo: Johannes Säze/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.



neoliberalism, non-human,
normativization, paradigm,
performative, politics,
post-political, practice,
privatization, production,
protocol, public space, reality,
regime,
Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić,
representation, semiotics, society,
socio-economic, solidarity,
subjectivation,
The BodyBuilding Project, theory,
Uku Sepsivart, urbanism,
Zachary Formwalt

Related Stories /

City Agents /

The Map is Not the Territory (But Neither is It Nothing) /
On Knowing and Voiding in My Work

Simon Crofts: Expectations /

Asbjørn Skou: A Staggering Territory /

Asbjørn Skou: Hauntings /

Asbjørn Skou: Misanthropologi /

Artistic Operations /
A Conversation with Annett Zinsmeister

Critical Mass /
Nuclear Power in Germany

Proportional Exchanges /
A Conversation with Vera Hofmann

Uncertain Destiny /
A Conversation with Javier Barrios

Błażej Marczak /
The Grey City

Vanessa Colareta /
Exodus

Constructed Aims /
A Conversation with Sabine Schründer

Vanessa Colareta /
Migrant

Alma Heikkilä, Microbiota, 2016 (detail). Ink, acrylic, rice glue, polyester, plaster, wood, metal. Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

“Some of the connotations of [our work] *Land Distribution* would be currency, reform, poverty, depending on the political situation,” say Mona Vătămănu and Florin Tudor. “These meanings of the installation enter in a dialogue with the theme of *City Agents* – ‘exhibition space or contemporary city space as sites of the accumulation of capital.’ This work has been installed in different contexts – public space, biennials, galleries, museums – in different countries, we leave its interpretation to be constructed by its public with their own way of experiencing it.” *Land Distribution* looks at the idea of common property in the socialist East to underline broader socio-political concerns. In the 1950s, the lands have been confiscated by socialists and redistributed in an attempt to transform society by forcing it to accept the sharing of things in common. In order to restore the legal rights of the owners, cooperative lands were given back to their original owners in the 1990s. But in order to secure the loans and credits they’ve taken, people had to pawn their lands again – a situation widely speculated by banks and private corporations. With land being redistributed to poorer people in Venezuela as a means to provide further opportunities, the artists create a bridge to address the multi-faceted issue of poverty, reform and currency. The use of analog VHS tape to fence the land is a reflection of the socio-cultural disparities within consumerist societies and a profound reflection on extreme inequalities, asymmetrical distribution of possibilities or opportunities, and the failures in the social fabric itself. ‘Looking through’ and ‘passing through’ the work creates a metaphorical frame around movement, observation and awareness. Within this artistic setting, a redistribution of agency takes place between the artwork and the viewers, enabling a temporary, situational and contingent experience of superposed representations and meanings. More importantly perhaps, the question of who is the public that experiences such artworks touches on both the circuit of the art world (biennials, galleries, museums) and the social conditions of viewing itself. [16]



Mona Vătămănu & Florin Tudor, Land Distribution, 2010. Installation. Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

Anu Pennanen stresses the philosophical definition of agency, as it has informed Koitela’s perspective on artists as agents who take “conscious actions within a given city context, questioning the given order of late neoliberalism, which is very visible in today’s Tallinn, as it can be observed against the remaining traces of Soviet era communism.” Neoliberalism is a question of socio-cultural, economic and ideological landscaping where power relations in the public space are re-articulated around new or converted hegemonic symbols. What conscious actions also need to

ZhangXiao /
Subdue

Klaus Pichler /
Middle Class Utopia

Klaus Pichler /
One Third

Annett Zinsmeister /
Plattenbau / Outside-in

Lancel / Maat /
Paranoid Panopticum

Benoit Aquin /
The Chinese "Dust Bowl"

Lancel / Maat /
Straitjacket Embrace!

Nicolas Carrier /
It's the Ghost

Lancel / Maat /
StalkShow

Christoph Draeger /
Heidrun Holzfeind /
Tsunami Architecture

Margret Hoppe /
Bulgarian Monuments

Michael Najjar /
netropolis

Margret Hoppe /
*Guest house of the State
Council of the GDR*

Pierre Lionel Matte /
European Rorschach

Sylvain Couzinet-Jacques /
Standards&Poors

challenge is how newly established forms of relations come to reproduce capitalist mechanics. “Agents are actors, argues Zachary Formwalt. “All kinds of things may be considered agents in a given situation. Chemicals are often referred to as agents when discussing how they affect something – a cleaning agent, for example. Computer programs are agents. There is something about agents and decision-making. On the one hand, agency seems to refer to the ability in a given circumstance to take action that would bring about some kind of change, but on the other hand, an agent always seems to be working in the name of something. Government agents, corporate agents, algorithmic agents are all carrying out some kind of a program – acting in the name of a certain pool of interests and often according to a particular protocol. I guess this just points to a scepticism that should be maintained towards naïve notions of individual freedom. The category of agent could be seen as a critical tool as well; a way of looking at a sequence of events as transformative in relation to something. In this sense, *City Agents* would be a proposal to see certain things as agents in relation to the city; a kind of lens through which actions appear only to the extent that they are transformative in relation to the city.”

“When Jussi [Koitela] first approached me in regards to the project, we were spending time discussing the possible intersections between the critical traditions of historical materialism, the critique of political economy, and concepts of new materialism and object-oriented ontology,” recounts Asbjørn Skou. “I think that my understanding of the title is located somewhere in that muddy field; maybe it is a double sided mirror of sorts, one that reflects the observer, inhabitant or agent – thereby creating a possibility of understanding our own placement or agency within a certain space or scope – and is also an agent that, being double sided, makes us feel that another agent might be behind that surface, watching us, or posing the mirror such as to force us towards a certain point of view.”

City Agents: articulating artistic practices

The question of how a Nordic curator sees, understands and relates to the different perspectives of artists coming from the North, the West and the South – and, as such, from different political and semiotic systems – is brought by Koitela to the common denominator of neoliberal market capitalism: “Even though there are differences in the political and semiotic systems, economic systems are based on neoliberal market capitalism. This is actually creating a lot of common connection points, and what the *Skills of Economy* project addresses. Of course there are different traditions and worlds that I cannot fully understand, but curating and displaying is, for me, a way of learning and creating new knowledge together, and not about showing things that I already fully grasp or artistic practices that I have pinned down to specific meanings. This also describes how I think about what curatorial research is – it is research through practicing it, not doing research from pre-existent research which aims to question and find the most functional way to display ‘results.’ Curator Miguel Ángel Hernández-Navarro’s understanding of ethics and curating has been and continues to be the most meaningful formulation of ethics and curating for me. He claims, following philosopher Simon Critchley’s understanding of ethics as infinite demand that can never be fulfilled, that curators have infinite ethical demands towards institutions, the work of art and the audience. I could also add here the artists and contexts where artistic practices take place. Maybe this formulation of relations between ethics and curating could be a tool to understand these demands – to know and understand are infinite and you cannot fully fulfil them.”



Zachary Formwalt, In Light of the Arc, 2013, installation view at EVA Biennial, Limerick, 2014. Double-channel video installation. Photo courtesy Zachary Formwalt. Used here by kind permission from the artist. All rights reserved.



Barbara Knezevic, installation view at EKKM. Back: Barbara Knezevic, Portals, 2016. Fired clay, sea water, fabric. / Front: Barbara Knezevic Lumps, 2016. Fired clay, leather. Photo: Johannes Säire/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

In describing his work *No Alternate Return* as a map of the urban space that traces alternate routes horizontally and vertically through the metropolitan landscape, Jon Benjamin Tallerås echoes Jacqueline Schoemaker's appropriation of the territory. "In order to know the way in the territory, you have to give up being a stranger," Schoemaker writes. "The territory continually brings forth itself, through new lines on the map, by introducing new codes such as the disappearance of transitions in the city. (...) In order to keep knowing the way in the territory, you have to give up being a stranger over and over again. You have to move into a space without transitions. You have to become part of the code. In order to keep reorganizing yourself, you have to give up knowing the way in the territory. Replace the knowledge of the territory by experience of space. By being a stranger and reading the map incorrectly, by following a line instead of a street, you engage in a spatial experience that is not determined in the codes of the territory. You make the map as unreadable as possible by drawing straight lines on it. Of all possible maps the topographical map supports this discovery best. There is no street name index. No buildings or areas are indicated as more important or worth seeing than others. (...) The map has no easy to carry format. It does not include a public transport network. (...)

The topographical map shows the place without pursuing you in a certain direction, it doesn't interpret the space it represents. (...) The topographical map is best capable of leaving the walking to the walker, of not diverting the question 'where am I?' in the direction of a place of interest but of allowing the question to remain open." [17]

Barbara Knezevic stresses her work's focus on material agencies, the flows and economies of materials, as a means "to touch on the mercantile, economic imperatives of materials. My work is a contrast to some of the other works in the exhibition in that it is more text-based, or lens-based. It expresses the sense of agency in the city as the hand of the artist in the forming and gathering of matter, in the arrangement and accretion of matter in an exhibition. I feel my work has more similarities with the approach of Uku Sepsivart and Alma Heikkilä in terms of its form as 'sculptural' or material arrangement in a space, and particularly with the exploration of human and non-human agents in their works. The beaver and fungal growth are active in forming the work of these artists, further mirroring the meeting of human agency and other agencies in the formation of things. My work includes Baltic Sea water, contained in the ceramic vessels, and this sea water evaporates and requires replenishment, reflecting also on the role of the port and the sea in forming the economy of Tallinn."



Barbara Knezevic, *Lumps*, 2016 (detail). Fired clay, leather.
Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission
from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

"There is this one quote from Italo Calvino that I kept thinking about," remembers Asbjørn Skou: "*Within cities it is as with dreams; everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.* In my work, I wanted to talk about cities that have been made and are perhaps forgotten, and cities being made which we can only begin to glimpse at now – and I wanted to talk about economy as an ecosystem, or a system of spells, and how the two, the city and the magical system of economy, have always been interconnected. I kept walking through all these building sites, where the skeletal outlines of huge glass buildings were being erected; and I kept feeling this shortcoming of anything I could do to actually enter those systems of architecture, economy and politics that they represented, but I was also unable to escape it either. There was this feeling that something tentacular was creeping up on me by way of the surroundings, something attaching itself to me, getting lodged in my language and the way I moved. It had this age old promise with it, of something brilliant and golden, but that promise was covered in something viscous and autistic. The work I made attempts to relate to the discourse of the show – and the space where it was shown – through an elaboration on that feeling. Opposite the room I was working in was Zachary Formwalt's piece, and perhaps because we were talking about subjects of economy in completely different ways, yet

both relied on a subjective narrative form, I felt there was some sort of connection between our works.”

*They are tearing down the city and
rebuilding it at the same time, as an
undead slug-like anomalous thing,
contracting and folding inwards and
upwards, in mirror sections, animosity,
elevated concrete decks and psychoactive
car-parks.*

from Ashbjørn Skou's "Golden Cities Golden Towns"

In all Skou's work, the expressive coding of representation draws a politically representative scenario. In *Misanthropologi*, the architectural traumas in the recent history of the city of Aalborg – a city undergoing profound changes that outline the passage from industrial production to knowledge economies, with their inherent speculative construction undertakings – have inspired the artist to articulate a broad artistic and political discourse around capitalism, the economies of capitalisation, the complicity between capital and architecture, and the haunting spectres of inherent ruins or catastrophes. *Golden Cities Golden Towns* is yet a more subtle literary and critical interpretation of contemporary urban spaces. Skou's reference to Italo Calvino reveals the inner workings of his artistic discourse. Like Calvino, Skou's work can be read as a subversive commentary on the mechanisms of urban imaginaries, an exploration of interstices where language, reality and the self mediate the meanings of absence. “Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) can be characterized both as exploratory fiction and a narrative without a conventional plot,” writes Odile Heynders, “and as a tale in which the various images are pieces of a meticulously composed puzzle. The 55 city miniatures can also be considered prose poems, as the texts present words that hint rather than describe, addressing imagination over reference, and showing the potential of density and subversiveness.” [18] Skou's work too is exploratory, narrative and unconventional, assembled into meticulous imaginary compositions that through their enigmas reflect back on current realities. The conflicting fantasies and attitudes provide a literary critique on the transformations of our conceptions of cities. “Reading Calvino encourages counter-intuitive thinking, taking other paths, so to say, through the text. We will never arrive at a truth located *within* the text, yet we will become aware of the potential of meaning and of our ability to create and experience it,” argues Heynders. [19] With Skou, like with Calvino, reading is *a seeing* that enables *doing* – the construction of meaning, the assembling and understanding of ideas, speech acts and imaginary perspectives reflect on the city as an imaginary experience; the description in words and visualization in images is what *makes* the city real. As Andreas Huyssen explains, “an urban imaginary is the cognitive and somatic image which we carry within us of the places where we live, work, and play. It is an embodied material fact. Urban imaginaries are thus part of any city's reality, rather than being only figments of the imagination. What we think of a city and how we perceive it informs the ways we act in it.” [20] Inspired by Calvino, Skou's work is a form of semiotic practice in the city where meanings and significations are constantly negotiated and experienced. “The city is not what it is, but is constructed by the way inhabitants see, experience and imagine the space as the place of everyday life, the site of traditions and continuities, as well as scenes of destruction, crime, greediness and conflicts of all kinds. The global city is a grid of material, physical and strategic places. (...) The invisibility of the city becomes visible, once people recognize the patterns and the signs and are capable of responding and imagining.” [21] In *Mattering City* – the organic extension of *City Agents* – Skou's work *Exoskeleton* is again based on fragmented narrations to present the city space as a formation for magical debt-based economies, informing and enacting materialities, language, bodies, and thoughts.



Ashjørn Skou, XERO/POLIS #1: Golden Cities Golden Towns, 2016. Wall drawing (acrylic ink on wall). Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.



Ashjørn Skou, XERO/POLIS #1: Golden Cities Golden Towns, 2016. Wall drawing (acrylic ink on wall). Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

Uku Sepsivart looks at his background work in street art, graffiti and keen sense of city observation as the source of his ideas. “The installation that is on display at the exhibition relates to the concept through ideas about economy,” he explains. “Economy tends to translate everything into its own language and describe it in the money language without boundaries. *The Rise of the Beaversculptor* relates to topics of work, being a worker and the characteristic of economy to translate it into various values, depending on the context. Some work has been done in the forest by beaversculptor and it does not serve any practical purpose. Somehow, the economy treats the beaver as a pest when it bites the trees in the forest, yet the beaver is very often depicted as a perfect worker on the logos and graphics of different establishments – the beaver would be a perfect worker if it could be controlled, but this is only a capitalist fantasy since it is wild. Beaversculptor is anonymous and it can be anyone, the only difference being who takes the credits. This ultimately refers to taking a process that occurs naturally and taking credit for it. It seems that the idea of economy is about controlling and owning everything through humans, including their people, nature, energy, and copyrights; like Monsanto which aims to patent the water. It’s about power and the attempt to evade getting digested by it. I think my work relates to [Rena Rädle and Vladan Jeremić’s] *Real Struggle, Fake*

Estates that was in the same room with my work; to Asbjørn Skou's *Golden Cities Golden Towns* in its criticism on 'struggle' and commentary on economic utopias; to Barbara Knezevic's *Lumps* and the topic of production; and to Jon Benjamin Tallerås's *No Alternate Route* in how it discreetly and almost inevitably breaks the boundaries – but I also have affinities with Antti Majava's work.”



Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić, *Real Struggle, Fake Estates*, 2016. Textile flags, acrylic. Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

“The point of departure for our artistic intervention is Gordon Matta Clark's *Reality Properties: Fake Estates*, a critique of private property,” explain Rena Rädle and Vladan Jeremić. “In 1973, Matta Clark acquired tiny pieces of unusable and sometimes inaccessible surplus land in Queens from the city of New York. At that time, industries relocated their production to low-wage, non-union states and the warehouses and manufacturing sites of Queens became an abandoned place with its inhabitants left without jobs. The current development of Tallinn's former workers' quarter Kalamaja into a hipster place of the creative industries and the selling out of state-owned land at Tallinn's coastline to real estate investors is an example of appropriating the city space. The social structure of the city is already changing and the less wealthy population, students, unemployed, Russian speaking marketers, artists, drug addicts, homeless, and other in precarious life situations will be driven out of the inner city. In Tallinn, we gathered information about the ongoing processes and talked with people involved in citizen associations that try to influence the politics of the city. For the work, we developed a set of flags named *Real Struggle, Fake Estates* the shape of which is derived from the lots of Matta Clark's *Fake Estates*. On one side of the flags, drawings show the contradictions or agents of gentrification that have targeted the city as a speculative financial object. The city space today is not shaped by the social, economic and democratic needs of its citizens but by the interests of real estates and other businesses. Art business and creative industries, tourism and leisure industry, create a bubble identity of the city to attract solvent consumers. Public space is privatized and protected by security agencies, another blossoming industry in times when social justice is off the agenda. The other side of the flags is painted with signs of the Ironworks ABC, a sign language derived from sculptures that emerged from the creative collaboration of workers and artists in self-managed Socialist Yugoslavia in the '70s. This side of the flag stands for the agency of the artists, cultural workers and all the others who with their daily activities reproduce the city. With the flag we call for a new collectivity that overcomes the division of labour and the individualization and fragmentation of life and working relations. Flags are often used to claim ownership of colonized and privatized land. With the *Real Struggle, Fake Estates* flags we (re)claim the class position and consciousness of solidarity of art and cultural workers with all other workers whose productivity is exploited. The installation *Land Distribution* by Mona Vătămănu and Florin Tudor addresses the redistribution of land in a very direct and irritating way, physically

hindering the visitors from accessing the exhibition space, unless they bend down under the videotape that divides the space into a number of lots. We appreciate that Mona Vătămănu and Florin Tudor bring to mind here that there is more than one way to distribute ownership, as with the videotape they refer to the redistribution of land to poor farmers in Venezuela. We also find links to *The Rise of the Beaversculptor* by Uku Sepsivart and his investigation of the idea of artistic work – shaping sculptures in collaboration with beavers, he questions the idea of the autonomy of artistic production, but also the superiority of human activities over the activities of animals.”



Uku Sepsivart, Rise of the Beaversculptor, 2016 (installation detail). Photo: Johannes Säre/EKKM. Used here by kind permission from curator Jussi Koitela. All rights reserved.

Zachary Formwalt's *In Light of the Arc* is a work set in the Shenzhen Stock Exchange, mostly in the spring of 2013, half a year before any trade started there. “At that point, it was transitioning between a construction site and the new home of one of China’s two mainland stock exchanges,” says the artist. “Shenzhen was one of China’s first Special Economic Zones (SEZs), set up under Deng Xiaoping in 1979. The SEZs served as places where free market capitalism could be introduced and experimented with on the mainland. The SEZs are now an integral part of the Chinese economy and the Shenzhen Stock Exchange (SZSE) describes one of its main functions as ‘promoting the restructuring of the economy.’ In this sense, the SZSE is certainly an agent in respect to both the city of Shenzhen and China as a whole. A key part of *In Light of the Arc* is shot in the ‘Listings Hall’ of the exchange, where the entry of new companies onto the stock exchange is celebrated. Central to this hall’s design is a stage where representatives from the new companies ring a large bell to symbolically open or close the trading day and this stage is situated just across from a large photographer’s platform where the media is positioned to photograph the event. The photographs and videos made here become the images of ‘economic growth’ and the ‘restructuring of the economy’ for which the exchange claims to provide a venue. These images are of course detached from the material processes which economic growth and restructuring entails, yet they are a crucial part of the institution of the stock exchange and they are images which must be continually produced and reproduced. Their agency in relation to transformations within the city of Shenzhen, which is becoming more service-oriented economically, has more to do with the kinds of images they could be than the ones that they are. These are images produced to take the place of other images. They are a kind of barrier between the realities of economic growth and restructuring and the images of progress. Huge LED boards behind the corporate bell ringers distil economic growth into a graph of upward mobility, a purified quantity of increase, as photographers snap their pictures. Elsewhere, a series of strikes unfolds, demanding wage arrears from companies further down the supply chain, workers threaten to jump from a factory for the same reason. Houses are demolished to make way for the expanding business district. The Stock Exchange filters out these images so that the supposed rationality of the

market seems to have no other consequence than an increased efficiency in carrying out transactions which allow capital to accumulate.”

The speed of things lined out on a thin flat plane. New obsidian suburbs like police kettles. There are few places you can go anymore. Hoaxes, failures, indexical euphoria and hostile strata of surplus value, there are lilacs in the windows of the empty hotels, it's 11.48 in the outskirts of Europe, whatever that means.

from Ashbjørn Skou's "Golden Cities Golden Towns"

“I started by thinking of human ecosystems (living in city surroundings) and how the ‘city’ affects the body and mind,” says Alma Heikkilä. “For example, I was reading studies on how the variation of bacteria in our surroundings relates to allergies. I fell in love with the findings I came across in the studies of Tari Haahtela; his studies show meadows are a very ‘healthy’ place to be in because of the vast diversity of bacteria. Personally, I love meadows and they are usually seen as good for humans because of their beauty and because they are a place where you can rest your mind. One basis of my work has been the way surroundings affect our body and mind, as they actually are part of our bodies and minds. From ideas relating to meadows I moved towards watching the city as a surrounding. Discussions with curator Jussi Koitela about gentrification have led me to linking those thoughts and raising questions on what does this mean for the human body. Other works in the exhibition have similar tendencies to bring up togetherness of being and collaborative making that I’ve been searching in my work. Some of the works show the non-human elements that support our existence; in many of the works, I think one can see the paradoxes and lack of logic that connect our visions of what we think we are in the city and what is important in a city. Then you have the architecture of EKKM, where different rooms are arranged in what seems – when looking from the perspective of other art spaces or museums – to be something random, organic and tight. The path to different artworks goes through other works, especially in the case of Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor’s piece. You can also hear the soundscapes from the other works – for example, you can hear *In Light of the Arc* by Zachary Formwalt around my work. I felt many of the works worked very well together, making wider and multiple enough visions on being in a city. Close to my work, there was Antti Majava’s aerial landscapes from the Netherlands, seen through a small window. I think it was somehow working together with my work through very different scaling. But maybe I felt the closest to Barbara Knezevic’s work – I enjoyed the intimacy with the chosen objects and the materials shown.”

TO BE CONTINUED

Like 16

Tweet

G+

Editions

Subscribe to Our Monthly Newsletter

Enter Email Address

Subscribe

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONTACT

APPLY AS GALLERY

FAQS

CALENDAR

TERMS AND C