In Vodka Veritas

CCQ invited a group of artists at RIBOCA, the first Riga Biennial, to engage in a vodka-fuelled round-table conversation, which took its inspiration from the ancients' approach to organising a symposium. Before proposing a toast, each artist was invited to respond, in turn, to a provocation from **Fagot Koroviev**.

The idea of a symposium has, in recent centuries, become synonymous with measured and objective, academic exchange, usually within the safety of an institutional space. But, for the ancients, a symposium was more of a happening, a quest for truth – *veritas* – lubricated with wine and presided over by a *symposiarch*. *CCQ* invited artists Jevgeni Zolotko, Sasha Huber & Petri Saarikko, Marco Montiel-Soto, James Beckett, Teemu Korpela, Taus Makhacheva, and Stine Marie Jacobsen, participating artists at RIBOCA, the first Riga Biennial, to participate in a symposium – in the original sense – during the Biennial's opening weekend. Vodka shots, in place of wine, were liberally administered to the participants to facilitate the disclosure of *aletheia*; the collaborators sought a spirit of clarity in an arena of curated and subjective complexity. Fagot Koroviev acted the part of symposiarch/game show/bar man for the evening. In Vodka Veritas was kindly hosted by Michael Landy at his contribution to RIBOCA, a 'booth for Britain' entitled *Open for Business*.

Marco Montiel-Soto: A toast… a toast to…. Britain.

All: To Britain…Cheers!



Fagot Koroviev: Thank you Marco, how delightfully quaint. Now James Beckett is suitably lubricated, I'll begin by asking about his presentation of a scale replica of a 19th century ruin in Holland; a magnificent industrial creation, a technical tour-de-force that burned down; do you think, in the 21st century, we should be making more monuments to failure?

> *James Beckett (b. 1977) is a Zimbabwean–born artist currently living in Amsterdam. For RIBOCA, Beckett presented* Palace Ruin, *a reconstruction of the former Paleis voor Volksvlijt (Palace of Popular Diligence), the Netherlands' own Crystal Palace, which went up in flames in 1929. An archival photo shows a flank of the remaining building, amid a haze of smoke and debris, the morning after attempts to douse the fire failed. Beckett recreates this moment in the form of a large sculpture, a smoldering wreck – part horror house, part memorial.*

James Beckett: The building's demise was due to technical failures, (there were no fire regulations, of course, back then). There are many structural aspects that it shares in common with a family of buildings –





Crystal Palace in London for instance – then there were similar buildings in Madrid, Paris, Munich and Amsterdam; they were all architectural display cases for hosting exhibitions. The one in Munich was an exhibition hall, influenced by botanical architecture. They were built with a mix of materials, to begin with they were meant to be purist – made with just iron and glass – but then there was the wooden floor and panels and the fabric. They were designed to burn, in a way.

Fagot Koroviev: You use this wonderful term, 'rambling logic', in the accompanying text to the work, what do you mean by that?

James Beckett: It's synonymous with something like sprawling, or growing without planning. If you look at Belgium, there's a lot of haphazard building, a lot of seeing what comes and not so much urban planning; more like letting things grow, like a plant. One leads to the next... A healthy complexity.

Stine Marie Jacobsen: Trying to free language, as well as architecture, from grammar and from national control is important. We need to make space for the rambling and for gibberish.

Jevgeni Zolotko: Those buildings James, they are industrial phalluses... like the Eiffel Tower.

Marco Montiel-Soto: What'll happen to your work James, is it staying here?

James Beckett: It looks permanent, but it's not. It was interesting having the fire safety officer come on the first day to check it out. The scale is 1:2, and it's just a fragment of the ruined building. Normally you propose a project in architecture with a scale model, say 1:200. When you shrink something you fetishise it, you can't have the actual thing, so you have something else that represents it. This work is after the fact though, unlike a maquette, which is a proposal.

Fagot Koroviev: Thank you James, it's your turn to propose a toast.

James Beckett: We work very hard as artists and we are away from our homes and our families a lot. When we work together though, we create new kinds of familial bonds; this toast then is to Art's many cousins.

All: To Art's many cousins... Gesondheid!

Fagot Koroviev: Taus, the speakers you've placed on tripods, they're superficially different, but fundamentally similar in design that is. Are they symbols of our own homogenisation as human beings?

Taus Makhacheva (b. 1983) is a Russian artist, based in Moscow. Working primarily with video, Makhacheva often turns her attention to the traditions of her multi-ethnic origin before Sovietisation. The idea for Makhacheva's RIBOCA presentation stems from a loss of humanism, as she perceives it, a sense of guilt and anxiety that manifests in the apologies we all seem to start our emails with. The installation is comprised of numerous small travelling speakers of all different brands and shapes. From each speaker a different first line of an email is heard.

Taus Makhacheva: With respect to speakers, I have no idea what you are on about, but there is something in what you say in relation to the words we all use and what they mean. In an apology, for example, the words themselves are generic; difference and meaning, within a particular statement, are expressed though nuance. It's about chatter, and yes, it is homogenised. But, as you listen more closely to the emails being read, you pick out things; my first email to Katerina (Gregos, chief curator at RIBOCA), with all its apologies, is a big part of the piece...

Fagot Koroviev: So, in essence, we're not good enough as human beings. And, as we become increasingly digitised, so our failure becomes more evident.

Taus Makhacheva: Of course we're good enough, we're better than good enough! Yes, we're always behind on answering emails, and we have the impression that we're not fast enough. But perhaps we should just kill the people who are fast enough.

Fagot Koroviev: So who should we begin by killing?

Taus Makhacheva: I am not naming names...

Jevgeni Zolotko: No, we're not good enough, because we don't scrutinise our behaviour. Opening emails is something that we are expected to do and we don't question it. At the end of the day, it's just another behaviour pattern we choose not to question.

Fagot Koroviev: ...but Taus is questioning it now...

Jevgeni Zolotko: Too little, too late, my friend. I think a lot of what we are actually seeking today is socialised meaning. My life will be meaningful if... if you go to this particular beach, or if I buy this particular car.

Taus Makhacheva: But we are all biennial artists aren't we? We're all institutionalised and we play these social games gladly; we turn up like clockwork, every two years. The problem is that artists require inner production time; I can't make decent work in less than six months.

Then we have this parallel 'email time', which I am talking about in this particular piece. I sent this email out to about 100 people, most of whom work in the artworld; three replied that they don't apologise for replying late any more, they say 'thank you for your patience.' It was also interesting, hearing back from heads of institutions, to know that they too share our anxieties about digital death. One of the standard excises was, 'your email was trapped in my spam'.

Fagot Koroviev: No one apologises to me for replying to an email late... but then I am not the head of an institution!

Taus Makhacheva: I think you should get on to those artists that haven't turned up tonight...

Fagot Koroviev: Will you kill them for me Taus?

Taus Makhacheva: Well, I'll demand an apology at very least.

Fagot Koroviev: Thank you Taus, and now it's your turn to propose the toast.

Taus Makhacheva: I'd like to drink to the volumes of our inboxes becoming much lower than they are right now.

All: To tiny inboxes...Nostrovia!

Fagot Koroviev: Turning to Teemu now: You experienced a generalised sense of loss, when you visited the former Faculty of Biology, (one of the RIBOCA sites), for the first time. Productive melancholy as an idea, as a necessary transitional phase, how significant is this to you, and how does it translate into beautiful, delicate works on paper?

Teemu Korpela (b. 1980) is a Finnish painter. For RIBOCA Korpela presented Deposition I, *an installation made of paper painted with floral shapes, referencing the former Faculty of Biology's dwindling archive.*

Teemu Korpela: It's a kind of synesthesia – the concepts and the sensations intertwine – and then I try to make the abstract phenomena into something tangible. In doing this, I think about the material on the one hand – I'm a painter after all – and, on the other hand, it's helpful to consider philosophy and semiotics. For this installation, the semiotic starting point was the floral collection that they used to have here. The

empty spaces of the Biological Faculty became a sort of metaphor for the ongoing processes in nature where species are vanishing. There is so much that we, as humans, have tried to collect and study, to bring together, but it never seems to be enough. There's a growing sense that, if these things we have collected and studied disappear, we are going to disappear with them. The starting point for the work is a realisation that all the knowledge we have, about the sensitivity of the natural structures, does not seem to be able to save us.

Jevgeni Zolotko: Is it nihilism that you're working with then?

Teemu Korpela: Jevgeni, if I were a nihilist, I would've hanged myself a long time ago.

Petri Saarikko: Teemu and I were looking in the archives here, and we found these plants, which were stored, squeezed between pieces of paper, with their imprints on the paper surface. It is as though the plants have been sleeping. Some of them are still green, even though they had been there since the 1830s. We were touching something that had been dead for 150 years, but somehow it still seemed to be alive. It gives a sense of hope, and I think that Teemu's work comes out of that.

Jevgeni Zolotko: I thought that the work had been done by a woman, actually. It's so sensitive, so fragile. You know that, in ice mountains, there are lifeforms that were alive 5,000 years ago – bacteria – and they are coming alive all over again... it's happening now!

Fagot Koroviev: Teemu, what would you like to raise a toast to?

Teemu Korpela: I would like to raise a toast to save humanity, and if you think that is naïve, you can fuck off.

All: To save humanity... Kippis!

Fagot Koroviev: So, Jevgeni, your work, *Sacrifice,* is situated in an isolated part of the docks, an old animal trailer with these strange and violent noises coming from it. I understand you are keen that your work should hook into the limbic system, the collection of structures deep in the brain which, amongst other things, play an important role in the construction of memory and in our emotions. Is this a section of the brain that's not successfully accessed by the art world at present?

> *Jevgeni Zolotko (b. 1983) lives and works in Tartu, Estonia. His installations delve into our shared suppressed consciousness. His presentation at RIBOCA consists of a trailer, formerly used for the transportation of cattle, standing alone in the middle of an empty field; primordial and violent noises emanate from the lonely construction.*

Jevgeni Zolotko: Those words, 'the limbic system', they're not my words, it's from an Estonian critic's text about me. I have absolutely no idea what he meant.

Fagot Koroviev: Ok, so what about horror, do you watch horror films? *Sacrifice* would seem to fit within that genre.

Jevgeni Zolotko: No. I watched a small bit of one film when I was nine, and never again. No, the ideas behind this work come from a very different place. For four years, I had been living in a dormitory for labourers, in an industrial area of the city, so it's alive during the daytime, but dead at night, just full of silent concrete. I got to know the stories of everyone there. One evening, I walked back late to the dormitory, past a big parking lot for trailers. It was empty apart from one animal trailer, a multi-layered one. I heard noises coming from it, animal noises; the animals were staying for the night on their own, without the front end of the truck. I wandered on to my own dormitory building, which was situated just beyond it.

Fagot Koroviev: The philosopher Theodor Adorno, broadly speaking, claimed that good art should make you unhappy, would you agree with this?

Petri Saarikko: I agree!

Marco Montiel-Soto: If it makes you unhappy, perhaps it's because the work is about truth and maybe we are all are living in an arty bubble here? Perhaps art, and all us artists with it, should be cast out of our comfortable spaces!

Teemu Korpela: The work that I do is often about understanding that unhappiness. It makes me do what I do and it's why I am an artist.

Jevgeni Zolotko: So we are all running around to get happiness, but does Adorno define what happiness, and therefore what unhappiness, is? Happiness for me, it's is a short term thing. And it's always shifting, it's a movable horizon.

Fagot Koroviev: I think dissatisfaction is a better term than unhappiness. As artists, we are contributing to that general dissatisfaction, that movable horizon. Because we are offering a glimpse of an alternative reality, how things could be better.

Jevgeni Zolotko: Of course. When I make a work, I fail all the time; the horizon moves and I get it wrong. And it's the same with happiness, it's always moving.

Fagot Koroviev: So, how would you distinguish an artwork from, say, a human rights campaign?

Marco Montiel-Soto: I work as an anthropologist on expeditions, I do not work directly with politics, and I would regard a human rights campaign as being political. Venezuela is very different from how it appears in the newspapers. When I phone my mother and she is saying she is happy because she has electricity, or she asks me, 'do you remember that person, well she was killed the other day'; or if she says she is happy because there is toilet paper in the shops, these are existential anthropological issues, they are not political. I am an artist, not an activist.

Stine Marie Jacobsen: Politicians would rather work with artists than with scientists, or with a human rights campaign, because we're not as big a threat. It doesn't even matter what we define ourselves as, because they know that if we are artists, they can let us into whatever institution. Notions of paints and sculptures hang around us, we don't carry the same organisationally threatening system at our backs as human rights campaigners would do. So I think we have to be very aware that we can become potential bridge builders, if we're very clever when we're invited in.

Teemu Korpela: We are constantly bombarded by these alienating simulacra, which are so much more than the sum of the realities of what we experience. We try to live out our lives virtually. For example, we don't have sex, we watch porn, because the porn is 10 times better than the real thing. So there's this constant feeling that we are lacking something.

first spread, left hand page:
Portrait of Michael Landy in front of: *Open for Business,* **Michael Landy,** 2018, Site-specific temporary installation, dimensions variable, courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London

first spread, right hand page:
Palace Ruin, **James Beckett,** 2016, Public sculpture (powder-coated steel, accoya acetylated wood, multiplex, Indian ink, smoke), 7.2 x 3.5 x 5.7 m, courtesy the artist and Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam

second spread:
Dear R., R., K., S., M., A., C., S., K., I., G., L., A., A., L., P., G., E., J., D., M., C., B., O., F., F., R., D., M., E., L., I., F., L., A., M., T., K., K., L., P., F., V., A., L., L., **Taus Makhacheva**, 2018, installation, mixed media, speakers, sound, dimensions variable, courtesy the artist

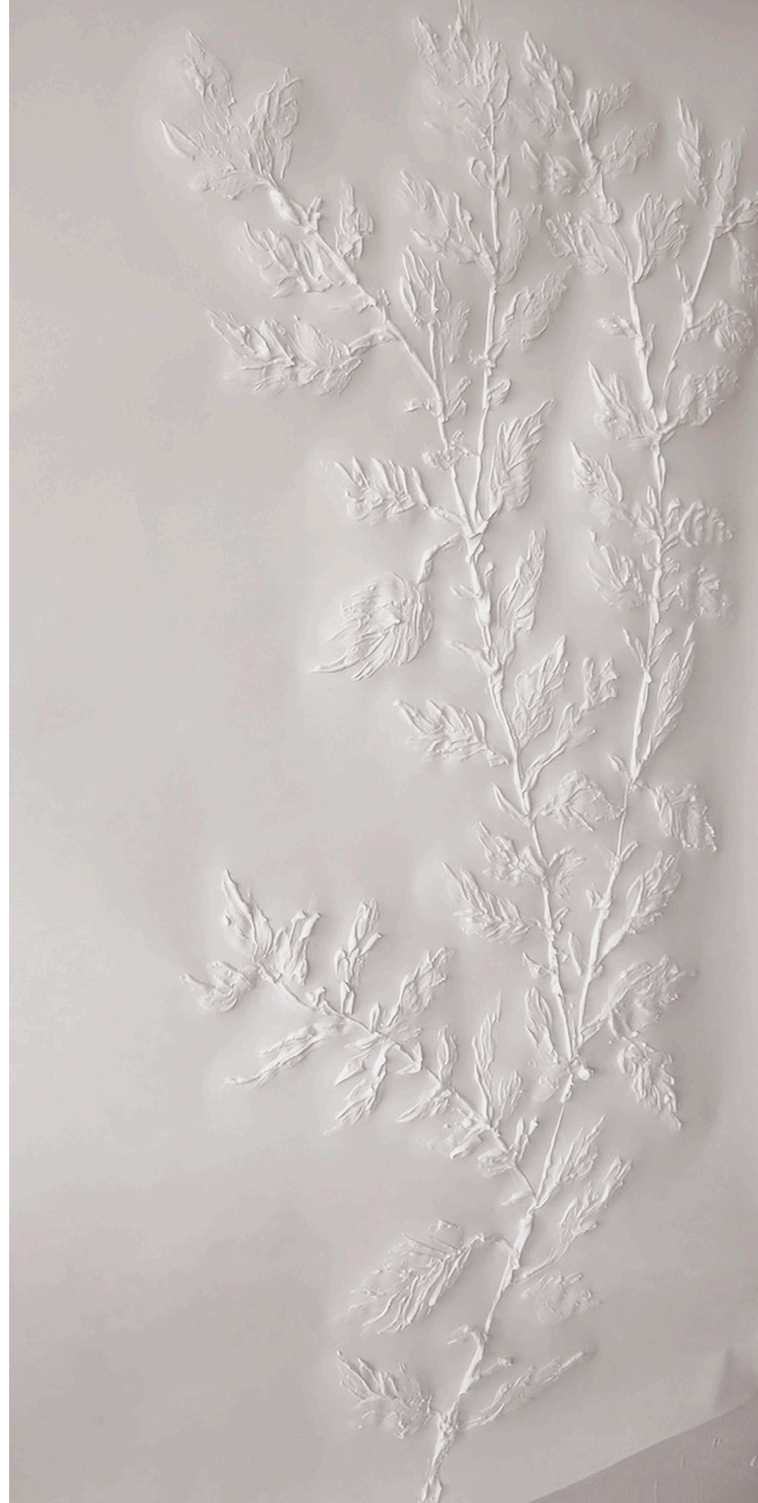
current spread:
Deposition 1, **Teemu Korpela**, 2018, Site-specific installation, acrylic paint and pigment on Fabriano paper, dimensions variable, courtesy the artist

fourth spread:
The Sacrifice, **Jevgeny Zolotko,** 2018, Installation, mixed media (livestock trailer, sound mechanism), continuous sound loop, approx. 800 x 260 x 350 cm, courtesy the artist

fifth spread:
Permanent Storm for a Tropical Constellation, **Marco Montiel-Soto,** 2017, Three-channel video installation, colour, sound, wood, bamboo, water, palm leaves, zinc, plastic, light bulbs, photographs, coins, plaster figures, clothes, flag, nets, hammock, boat, oars, hat, tapestries, newspaper, coconuts, stuffed piranhas, maps, Duration 75' 42", courtesy the artist Carmen Araujo Arte, Caracas and Galería José de la Fuente, Santander

sixth spread:
Pidgin Tongue, **Stine Marie Jacobsen,** 2018, Sculpture (wood), publication, 200 x 320 x 100 cm, courtesy the artist

seventh spread:
Dziedināšana Remedies, **Sasha Huber & Petri Saarikko**, 2018, hardcover book, 15.5 x 20.5 cm, courtesy the artists





Taus Makhacheva: To be honest, I'm not really interested in being a bridge between activism and art, or getting access into this or that political arena. I suggest that we get hold of a psychic and call up Adorno, because I think that he meant that good art moves you. We need to double check with him.

Fagot Koroviev: And so, it's Jevgeni's turn to make his toast.

Jevgeni Zolotko: OK, I know this thought is vodka-fuelled, but I would like to raise a glass to the human condition, and that someone will get what we do as artists.

All: To someone getting us...Terviseks!

Fagot Koroviev: Marco, you're presenting a straightforward, virtual world, in the context of an artworld, which is self-referential and cynical. How do you, as a straight talking artist, function in an artworld that is so fucked up.

> *Marco Montiel-Soto (b. 1976) originates from Maracaibo, Venezuela, and now lives and works in Berlin. As a self-professed traveller and immigrant, his installations explore the intersections between the political and the poetic, in relation to his homeland's traditions, economy, archaeology, religion and myths. For RIBOCA Montiel-Soto presented* Permanent Storm for a Tropical Constellation, *an artificial lake with a wooden bamboo stilt house in the water,* (palafito, *in Spanish). The installation is enriched by a plethora of visual stimuli including: videos; photographs; maps; nets, pictures of saints; coconuts and fish. The* palafito *represents a typical construction of the surviving villages of Lake Maracaibo.*

Marco Montiel-Soto: When I get a show invitation, I always try to do an expedition, and I collect stories. I want to travel, I like to meet people like you, people who are fucked up.

Fagot Koroviev: Coping with folk who are fucked up though, people like me, it can't be easy!

Marco Montiel-Soto: I travel geographically and I travel in time as well. I look into histories of people and how they have come to be where they are. When the first Spanish came to Venezuela, and they saw people living on Lake Maracaibo in houses, they thought it looked like Venice, so they called it 'Little Venice', Venezuela. Then the Germans came looking for the mythical *El Dorado*; the Spanish owed them money, so they gave it to them and they called Maracaibo, my city, 'New Nürnberg' (Neu-Nürnberg). The Germans did not find *El Dorado,* of course, so they left and the Spanish returned. We are in the Third World now, in Venezuela, everything has been taken: the gold, the oil; I am showing people what is left.

Petri Saarikko: I have copied something of what I have seen and transposed it into my work, and I struggle with the idea of exploitation as a result, that I am exploiting other people's realities. I go to Africa and make pictures of dying children, then come back to Europe and put them in an exhibition.

Teemu Korpela: The work is there to expose what we are... Ok... So this was not as profound as I thought it was going to be.

Fagot Koroviev: No, I get you... Marco is presenting an alternative reality and, by looking at it, we are actually revealing who *we* are?

Marco Montiel-Soto: What I am presenting is not my reality now, for sure, I live in Berlin, but it was my reality when I lived there. My surname is the same as that of many people in these villages, I speak the dialect of the region; if a German or French artist went to work in El Congo, the village I am focusing on in this presentation, it might be different. The village is going to disappear

though, there are only 20 families there now. What I did was try to preserve what was happening. I hope that the people who see the installation will be able to feel something about the villagers, their everyday life; they don't have doctors and they have little electricity... and because I am from that particular place in Venezuela, I feel it more intensely I think. It's like going to Cuba, and everyone really likes it there, but the Cuban people are fucked.

Fagot Koroviev: Everyone, do you all have vodka? Jevgeni d'you have some?... Go on have some more, I'm the doctor here, look into my eyes, not around my eyes...

Jevgeni Zolotko: I'm looking into your fuckin' ass at the moment.

Fagot Koroviev: And Marco, your toast is?

Marco Montiel-Soto: If we are going to do something with our hearts, it is best not to have a heart attack.

All: To a heart attack, Salud!

Fagot Koroviev: The Greeks said that, when you get to the sixth *Krator (jug of wine, or round of vodka shots in our case)*, you're basically screwed, we're now on the eighth and in the realms of insanity. At this point it feels appropriate to talk to Stine about language, Stine, can you tell us about what you've learned from the workshops you conducted in Latvia, as part of your project for RIBOCA?.

Stine Marie Jacobsen is a conceptual artist and educator living in Berlin and Copenhagen, working to decode violence and law through participatory means. With a focus on film, language, gender, violence and psychology, she conducts performative experiments and creates participatory projects worldwide for critical thinking and new ways of looking at ethics, identity, control, fear and trust.

Stine Marie Jacobsen: For this project I worked with Latvian and Russian kids on a language project. This is sensitive territory, because of the prior Russian occupation; Russia has eradicated Latvia three times. And, right now, some political parties are wanting to close the Russian schools in Latvia. Educational material is currently 60 per cent Latvian, and will go up to 80 per cent. I wanted to try and liberate language from this arena of political control and the cultural suffering it induces. As it is now, here, the Russian mother-tongue speakers and Latvian mother-tongue speakers don't really engage with one another before they get to their early twenties, which makes the country very vulnerable to political manipulation...

Fagot Koroviev: ...and why is that?

Stine Marie Jacobsen: I think national languages are very closely linked to politics within a country... We all know that, in many countries, people can get permissions to stay depending on their passport status but, in a lot of places, language can be the passport to stay somewhere. Right now there are 300,000 Russians in Latvia without citizenship, many of the Russians who do have a Latvian citizenship, have had to take a Latvian language test. So, language is directly linked to nation states. Language has been kidnapped.

Fagot Koroviev: How is violence integrated into how we speak?

Stine Marie Jacobsen: Many politicians are saying that they need to change their language because the citizens don't believe them anymore. In the US, they don't care, because it's been 'Trumped', kidnapped; it's like Newspeak, from *Nineteen Eighty-Four;* we speak, but as we speak we cover up truth; the light is flashing, but it's flashing dark. I work with children and I am particularly

interested in them because they don't have these boundaries naturally, the boundaries are imposed on them. When the two groups of children I worked with met, they couldn't speak to one another for the most part. They started to find another language, like Pidgin.

James Beckett: For me, as an African, Pidgin is a Central/West African, Ghanaian, Cameroonian, post-colonial thing. There were so many languages, in Cameroon, for example, some say more than 200, because there was so much dense forest and people couldn't travel easily. So, until colonisation, different peoples couldn't speak to one another. *Pidgin* was a simpler hybrid of the colonial languages.

Stine Marie Jacobsen: So, like the word cookbook, would be written 'cukbuk'. Nigeria just accepted Pidgin Tongue as an official language...

James Beckett: ...and the BBC has a Pidgin service in West Africa. In a way it's about trauma, and about post colonialism and it's very relevant. It's like a street thing, a means toward a solution.

Teemu Korpela: Do you have any philosophers of language you look to? Wittgenstein comes to mind.

Stine Marie Jacobsen: My practice is, to a large extent, based in practical social work, in the empirical rather than the theoretical. I'm in the streets working with non-art institutions. I'm trying to form a bridge between different worlds.

James Beckett: What is your background Stine?

Stine Marie Jacobsen: I'm an artist, I'm not a linguist. I'm much more dialogue-based, in that I work like a journalist who creates platforms for sharing political statements.

Fagot Koroviev: The dialogues between the non-overlapping magisteria of art and science have, in recent European history at least, been rare. But you are freely moving between the two. Is that a lonely place to be?

Stine Marie Jacobsen: It's not lonely. I work with big teams, – cinematographers, politicians, teachers...

Fagot Koroviev: But do they have any idea what you're doing?

Stine Marie Jacobsen: They know about use of language. Art institutions will give you two weeks to work with a group of people on a sensitive topic, but an organisation from the world of social science will say, 'Oh you want to work with refugees, expats, immigrants, we'll give you a year'. So I get my money from the world of social science and then I negotiate a project within the art world.

There are so many restrictions in art institutions, it's always about time and budget. I work with a lot of participants. They're not just pawns, and I can't just take something from them and then leave; there is responsibility embedded within what I do. I want to be politically satirical, but I end up having to adhere to a code of ethical correctness, and that



Those are Lithuanian letters!

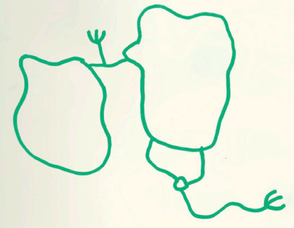
Dude, they're not exactly Lithuanian and not exactly Russian!

Where were you born?

Well, I wasn't born in Lithuania, but my grandmother is there, so I have roots in Lithuania.

I can't see them.

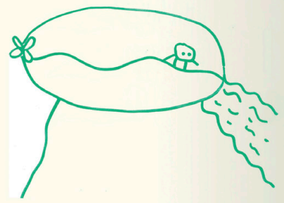
They're invisible, actually they're small. I have 'rootlings' there!



A pool?! Of course, a pool!!

And our pool will be in an unbelievable place! Yes, exactly! A flying pool!

Does anyone else want to be sucked from their bed into the pool?



Do they talk in a different language?

It depends what you mean by different language?

We'll, we're Latvian for example but we speak Russian.

So what?

First we worked with the Russian and Latvian speaking groups separately.

bothers me, because satire and doing things that are risky and incorrect are very important too.

Teemu Korpela: I think people should read more Marquis de Sade...

Stine Marie Jacobsen: In the type of work that I do, I'd much rather work with libertines than politicians; people in power, that's the hard part.

Fagot Koroviev: Stine, can you do the toast? We've run out of vodka, I've failed as a *symposiarch*.

Taus Makhacheva: We have a private stash!

Fagot Koroviev: You saved the day, thank you!

Stine Marie Jacobsen: European governments should admit that they are censoring their people.

All: To governmental honesty... Skål!

Fagot Koroviev: Sasha and Petri, you're looking at traditional Latvian folk practices. Is there an idealistic position you're talking about in relation to the past and to folk tradition. What does tradition mean, as you are framing it, in relation to our contemporary experience?

Sasha Huber, from Switzerland, with Haitian roots, and Petri Saarikko, from Finland, are a visual artist duo living and working in Helsinki, Finland. They have been working and exhibiting both collaboratively and individually around the world since early 2000. In 2011 they initiated an independent art space, Kallio Kunsthalle, based in Helsinki, and in 2016 in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. Since 2011, Sasha Huber and Petri Saarikko have been working on the Remedies *project. The project explores methods of self-help and medical healing in different geographical and cultural contexts.* Remedies *has taken different form of expression, such as live performance and video in Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, Haiti, Russia, Germany, Tasmania and now in Latvia.*

Sasha Huber: I remember I had these two warts; I used the tincture you could get from the pharmacy to burn them off. My grandfather, who is from Haiti, saw this, and said, 'Oh, no, you should use the white saliva from your tongue before you clean your teeth in the morning'; I did as he instructed and it worked. It's like animals licking their wounds. So, ten years later, we were on a residency in Sweden, at Million Projects, which was a place built in the '60s for workers, and which now is inhabited by immigrants; and there are quite a lot of problems with the Swedish population nearby, racism, and so on. We wanted to focus on families and the information that has been passed down from previous generations within each community. Every country represented there had its own traditional remedies. We made a form in five different languages, and asked people about what they knew, and then we made a pictographic, non-verbal archive. Since then, we have been to New Zealand, Australia, Sweden, Russia, Haiti, Germany and Tasmania. Every time we went to a different country, to do this project, it has been very different.

Petri Saarikko: The US company Revlon gave groups of medical anthropologists $10 million to seek oral remedies in Amazonian South America, as they wanted to commercialise them. It is true with any sort of practical infusion in nature, once you have patented those plants or seeds you want to use, you can basically occupy that knowledge for yourself. The more that becomes patented, the more it becomes regulated, and so it becomes commercialised. The remedies that we have collected are a demonstration against this whole notion of commercialisation. This is happening systematically in many areas, especially in arts and humanities; lots of theoretical thinking became a tool for technocratic change. And language has a really big role in this, that's why we wanted to start the project without language, and to use activity instead. I think that tradition can have really nasty connotations with nationalism.

Fagot Koroviev: But you're still dealing with particular geographical realities...

Petri Saarikko: Of course, but when Jung and Freud were discussing sociological archetypes, they were suggesting something else. I mean, if you fold a leaf in the forest and eat it, you can't really share that experience through language, you have to show it. How could we create an artform that doesn't exist. We want to know how far can we go... I think Tino Sehgal went some way towards this, but not far enough.

Fagot Koroviev: OK, Petri and Sasha and we will finish on your toast.

Petri Saarikko: Can we acknowledge the contribution of the cat that lives here in this space, and the birds that have been singing to us?

All: To the cats and the birds... Kipis!

Stine: ...and to friendship

Special thanks: to the chief curator at RIBOCA, Katerina Gregos. for cat-herding and supplying the vodka; to all of the participating artists for their enthusiasm and energy; to Ioli and Inese at RIBOCA; to the journalist Lema and the editor of Harper's Bazaar Arabia, Rebecca Anne Proctor whose contributions were felt but had to be left out of the final edit , sorry; to Alice and Mary at Pelham Communications for the shot glasses! And finaly to Michael Landy and his team for hosting us.

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