

MATTER OF ART

Ve věci umění
Matter of Art
Biennale 2022

21. 7. –
23. 10. 2022
Praha Prague

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Dittrichova 349/13
120 00 Prague
Czech Republic

Press Release

Biennale Matter of Art 2022

www.matterof.art/2022

Biennale Matter of Art 2022 opens this week in Prague, exploring vulnerability and traumatic pasts

The biennale offers new perspectives on the origins of contemporary crises and the ways in which we construct collective identity. The exhibition has a strong presence of artists from East and Central Europe (Marie Tučková, APART Collective) but also features works by Mandy El-Sayegh, Larisa Crunțeanu, and Candice Lin, among others. Eight artists (including Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, Robert Gabris, Sina Seifée, and Linh Valerie Pham) were commissioned to create new works directly for the biennale. The biennale was curated by Rado Ištok, Renan Laru-an, Piotr Sikora, and the tranzit.cz collective. The exhibition will take place at the Prague City Gallery, the General University Hospital in Prague, and the Šaloun Studio. A program of performances, guided tours, and discussions will run parallel to the exhibition, which will be open from July 21 to October 23, 2022. In order to establish the institution as a widely accessible platform, admission to the biennale is free of charge. The biennale is organized by tranzit.cz in cooperation with the Prague City Gallery.

“The central theme of the exhibition is vulnerability. Every person has a weak spot, a childhood self, a memory of something painful. Sometimes such injuries are caused by injustice in our society. Sometimes, the most vulnerable among us—people who are excluded for various reasons, ill or handicapped people, children, single mothers who were left alone with their kids, and also animals or things—don’t have a position in our society to tell their stories. This exhibition should be such a place for them,” says tranzit.cz program director Tereza Stejskalová.

The second edition of the biennale is the culmination of nearly two years of research and collective practice of the curatorial working group. It also coincides with the 20th anniversary of the tranzit network as an important actor in the international contemporary art field in East and Central Europe. “The biennale was born during a protracted pandemic, against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and in the shadow of the economic and climate crisis. Our society is continuously traumatized. We want to give space to reflect on how others have dealt with pain and uncertainty,” says Veronika Janatková, director of tranzit.cz. The first edition of the biennale took place in Prague in 2020.

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The past that haunts us

What is life imagined in violence? In other words, how can we let the soft be soft? The second edition of the biennale Matter of Art invites the public to explore diverse artistic positions that reiterate these intertwined questions in various affective registers, media, and outputs. The choir of voices that is at times consonant and at times dissonant seeks know-how for undermining the bold narratives that revolve around heroic, autonomous figures who exert extraordinary power to overcome obstacles. Where does the saying about the events which make us stronger unless they kill us come from, and what is the actual meaning of the word “stronger” anyway? In contrast to this proverb, the art presented in the exhibition weaves together different stories of essentially vulnerable bodies and deficient systems dependent on and inseparable from other bodies, the environment, and infrastructures. The artworks have been selected with an awareness of the various power dynamics and hierarchies we all have to position ourselves within. The exhibition incorporates the “minor” perspectives of children, enthusiasts, kidults, and introverts as well as the “poor” experiences of the chronically ill, the prematurely deceased, and the monstrous as agents who act, create, and deliberate meanings. The works understand that the violence of the present conditions is rooted in historical traumas, that the past lurks behind contemporary crises such as pandemics or wars. Sometimes, like in this exhibition, bodies and matter reimagine their experiences through art. While we have been taught that suffering will strengthen us or that a cure will end trauma, we propose an alternative task: nourishing our soft spots.

Three venues

The exhibition is spread over three biennale locations in the wider center of Prague. In addition to the classical “white cube” of the Prague City Gallery, a former laundry facility of the General University Hospital in Prague will be opened to the public for the first time as the second largest venue for the biennale. The third part of the exhibition will take place in the art nouveau Šaloun Studio on the border of the Vinohrady and Vršovice neighborhoods.

New commissions

Eight new original projects were created directly for the exhibition based on close and continuous collaboration between the curators and the invited artists. At the invitation of tranzit.cz, the artists participated in a residency in Prague, during which they prepared works related to the local context. **Robert Gabris** and **Luboš Kotlár** together created an installation for the art nouveau Šaloun Studio, in which they open up the topic of sugar as the most volatile commodity in the post-colonial world. A video by **Alina Kleytman** and **Maria Lukáčová**

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elaborates on the old Czech legend of the Maidens' War—a war between men and women. Puppeteer **Linh Valerie Pham** reflects on the role of playfulness and improvisation in everyday life in her project *A Game of Good Citizen*. Pham borrowed the “non-human” characters of Filipino children's literature writer **Rene O. Villanueva** in reinventing a traditional Vietnamese game. **Bára Šimková's** listening installation expresses anger through a fairy tale. Its heroine is the artist's mother, who has to take care of her child alone and is misunderstood by her surroundings. In the project *Relaxing Horror Tales for Children and Adults*, artist Sina Seife expands on the practices of storytelling in the Czech, Persian, and other cultural environments rooted in folklore and bestiary. In her film, **Hera Büyüктаşçıyan** connects the underground world of Prague's old sewage treatment plant, the motifs of public baths, and the famous tiles produced in the city of Rakovník. Through the motifs of cleanliness and water, the film points to a shared past that is often subject to cleansing of unpleasant events and injustices. **The Laundry Collective**, made up of women with experience of life on the streets, has created a place for the gallery where everyone can feel comfortable. Its members will meet every Tuesday afternoon in the gallery, and all visitors are welcome at these meetings. **Tarek Lakhri** has created a series of futuristic weapons, symbolically designed for revenge and self-defense for those who experience violence and injustice.

Fragility and trauma

The diverse collection of installations, paintings, sculptures, and objects reflects the different approaches and scopes of the individual curators. The concept of the exhibition follows several thematic vectors. Several artists address the relationship of society to “unacceptable” emotions and their potential in defense or resistance to oppression and violence. Romanian artist **Larisa Crunteanu's** work presents various female literary characters and asks how the exaggerated reactions of these women are connected to the social injustice they had to deal with. The autodidactic painter **OMARA – Mara Oláh** used her paintings to cope with her life traumas and the difficulties she faced as a Romani woman living in Hungary. In postwar Japan, the avant-garde artist **Shūji Terayama** speculated on a parallel world where children are the new authorities of ethical imagination and adults become the new minority.

Other artists deal with political, historical, and social aspects of the material world in their works. In their video installation, the duo **Anca Benera** and **Arnold Estefán** focus on the theme of diamond mining in Namibia using a ship built in a Romanian shipyard, showing the interconnectedness of global economic systems based on the extraction of natural resources and their impact on the landscape. In the project *Looters*, artist **Michal Bar-Or** exhibits photographs of “thieves” caught stealing art artifacts. The photographs come from the Israeli Archaeological Authority, where they served as evidence. In the

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context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the artist thus questions how we determine who is labeled a looter or a thief and by whom. In another context, Filipino artist **Renz Lee** used books, soil, and a tropical emblem—the coconut—to insist on the return to land as a locus of discussion on trans-local disenfranchisement.

Another distinct curatorial line is the theme of historical traumas and the fragility of those who have gone through them. Artist **Hanni Kamaly** brings fragility into her critique of structural power relations and recalls stories of suffering in the form of alternative memorials. The abstract sculptures evoke the stories of specific people who have been deprived of their dignity or freedom and subjected to various forms of violence. At the age of ten, **Ceija Stojka** and her family were deported to Auschwitz and other concentration camps. She survived her stay and in the 1980s was the first to break the silence regarding the Roma Holocaust in Austria. At the end of the 1980s, she began teaching herself to draw and paint and to process the subject in the form of paintings. Similarly to Stojka, the starting point of **Charlotte Salomon's** work is also a coming to terms with a difficult personal history—her mother, aunt, and grandmother all committed suicide. In the series *Life? or Theatre?*, singing mixes with intellectual and popular culture. The paintings contain scenarios—ironic texts or witty dialogues—and a “soundtrack” to give the narrative an acoustic background. Salomon's work in the exhibition resonates with the voices of others who have died before their time. The exhibition's curators seek answers to the question of how to treat these artists' works and how the trauma of death changes the way we view their art and lives. Composed of multiple works, **Alina Popa** is presented in the exhibition with the drawings she created towards the end of her life in dialogue with her “unperformable” performances, theoretical writings, and suggestions on how a diseased body can be in another space beyond life and death. Elsewhere, **Lenka Vítková** offers a horizon of new possible relations with trauma in her modest appreciation of gravitation, walking, and hanging on something.

Opening week

Spanning July 20–27, 2022, the inaugural week of the exhibition comprises opening events, performances, guided tours, and a debate. The main opening ceremony of the biennale will take place on Wednesday July 20, 2022, at 6 p.m. at the Prague City Gallery. The opening will include a performance by Florin Flueras and a meeting with the Laundry Collective. An opening party in the Bike Jesus space on Štvanice Island with DJ zey will follow from 10 p.m. On Thursday July 21 from 4 p.m., artist Linh Valerie Pham will present her project *A Game of Good Citizen* at the Prague City Gallery. Afterward, the second part of the exhibition will be officially opened at the General University Hospital at 6

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p.m. The program will continue at the nearby Center for Architecture and Urban Planning, where there will be a discussion between the biennale's curators and artists entitled *Greetings from Debris* and a performance by Nolan Oswald Dennis and Zeynab Guey called *Guide Songs for Mud*. On Friday, July 22 at 4 p.m., the third performance of Florin Flueraș's *Desolation* will take place at the Prague City Gallery. Then, in the evening at 6 p.m., an installation by Robert Gabris and Luboš Kotlár will open in the Šaloun Studio. The complete schedule can be found at www.matterof.art/2022/program.

Participating artists & authors

Hamja Ahsan (UK), Gwendolyn Albert (US/Czech Republic), APART (Slovakia), Michal Bar-Or (Israel), Anca Benera & Arnold Estefán (Romania), Hera Büyüктаşçıyan* (Turkey), Larisa Crunțeanu (Romania), Nolan Oswald Dennis (South Africa), Patricia Domínguez (Chile), Mandy El-Sayegh with Alice Walter and Lily Oakes (UK), Brenda Fajardo (Philippines), Florin Flueraș (Romania), Ramon Guillermo (Philippines), Filip Herza (Czech Republic), Jana Horváthová (Czech Republic), Robin Hartanto (Indonesia), Robert Gabris* (Austria) & Luboš Kotlár* (Slovakia) (from the i pack* collective, formerly with Cat Jugravu), Brigitta Isabella (Indonesia), Hanni Kamaly (Norway/Sweden), Barbora Kleinhamplová (Czech Republic), Alina Kleytman* (Ukraine) & Marie Lukáčová* (Czech Republic), Jacques de Koning (Netherlands), Jana Krejcarová-Černá (†) (Czech Republic), Tarek Lakhri* (France), Renz Lee (†) (Philippines), Dorota Jagoda Michalska (Poland), Candice Lin (US), Fathia Mohidin & Adele Marcia Kosman (Sweden), OMARA – Mara Oláh (†) (Hungary), Linh Valerie Pham* (Vietnam) with Ha Thuy Hang and Rene O. Villanueva's characters, Alina Popa (†) with Florin Flueraș (Romania), Pižmo (Czech Republic), Kolektiv Prádelna* / The Laundry Collective* (Czech Republic), Ábel Ravasz (Slovakia), Anna Remešová (Czech Republic), Vincent Rumahloine (Indonesia), Charlotte Salomon (†) (Germany), Rudolf Samohejl (Czech Republic), Františka Schormová (Czech Republic), Sina Seif* (Germany/Iran), Jana Shostak (Poland/Belarus), Sráč Sam (Czech Republic), Ceija Stojka (†) (Austria), Bára Šimková* (Czech Republic), Olúfẹ́mí O. Táíwò (US), Shūji Terayama (†) with Tetsuya Chiba and Ashita no Joe artifacts (Japan), Marie Tučková (Czech Republic), Rene O. Villanueva (†) with Jo Atienza (Philippines), Lenka Vítková (Czech Republic), Zai Xu (Czech Republic)

* new commissions

Venues

The venues reflect the political aspects of public space in Prague and its accessibility. All three buildings are accessible for wheelchairs and strollers, and admission will be available free of charge. Building upon the first edition of Matter of Art, the exhibition will return to the **Prague City Gallery at the Municipal Library** (GHMP). The institution occupies the second floor of the

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1920s building. Since the early 1990s, it has become one of the most prominent spaces for temporary exhibitions of modern and contemporary art in central Prague and beyond. The second part of the biennale will take place at the premises of the **General University Hospital in Prague** (Hospital) in the spacious rooms of a former laundry facility. The exhibition resonates with the efforts of the hospital to attract casual visitors to the hospital grounds, which include the Kateřinská Garden adjacent to the VFN Psychiatric Clinic. The third venue for the exhibition is the art nouveau landmark **Šaloun Studio** (Šaloun), the former studio of the sculptor Ladislav Šaloun on the borders of the Vinohrady and Vršovice neighborhoods. The building is a part of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.

Biennale Matter of Art is a founding member of the East Europe Biennial Alliance. The main partner of tranzit.cz is the ERSTE Foundation. The biennale is a part of the project tranzit.cz / Biennale Matter of Art “Center and Periphery: Cultural Deserts in Eastern Europe,” which is supported by grants from Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway (EEA Grants) in the scope of the Culture Program. The biennale is organized by tranzit.cz in cooperation with the Prague City Gallery. The exhibition is being held with the support of the minister of culture of the Czech Republic, Martin Baxa, and Prague city councilor Hana Třeštíková.

Biennale Matter of Art July 21–October 23, 2022 Prague, Czech Republic

Curated by:

Rado Ištók
Renan Laru-an
Piotr Sikora
tranzit.cz

Venues:

Prague City Gallery (GHMP)
Municipal Library of Prague, 2nd floor
Mariánské náměstí 98/1
110 00 Prague 1
Czech Republic

General University Hospital
Karlovo náměstí 502/40
128 00 Prague 2
Czech Republic

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Šaloun Studio

Slovenská 1566/2

101 00 Prague 2

Czech Republic

Attachments:

Print-quality photographs with captions

Links:

www.matterof.art

www.instagram.com/biennale.matterof.art

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Organizer:

tranzit.cz

In cooperation with:

[Prague City Gallery](#)

Main partner:

[ERSTE Foundation](#)

With the support of:

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Literary Estate of Rene O. Villanueva, Jewish Museum Amsterdam, Charlotte
Salomon Foundation, United Nations Audiovisual Library

Contact:

Max Dvořák

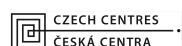
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