



Responses #2
– Opinions Informed by Practice

forms of the surrounding futures

**Göteborg International Biennial
for Contemporary Art
(GIBCA) 2023**

Curated by João Laia

Artists

Sophia Al-Maria / Adam Christensen / Joana da
Conceição / Niko Hallikainen / Rodrigo Hernández /
Sky Hopinka / Maria Jerez / Agne Jokše / Kem / Tarik
Kiswanson / Yong Xiang Li / Yarema Malashchuk & Roman
Khimei / Guadalupe Maravilla / Esse McChesney / Sandra
Mujinga / Rasmus Myrup / Ania Nowak / Outi Pieski / Luiz
Roque / Prem Sahib / P. Staff / Iris Touliatou /
Ana Vaz / Osías Yanov

Venues

Röda Sten Konsthall / Göteborgs Konsthall /
Gothenburg City Library / Hammarkullen Konsthall



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Osias Yanov, *Orphan Dance* (2018/2023)
at Göteborgs Konsthall



Luiz Roque, S (2017) at Röda Sten Kontshall

This anthology series is somehow seemingly haunted by stormy weather.¹ For this volume, the MA Curatorial Practice programme cohort once again set out to explore a curatorial project to respond to in writing on an extremely windy day. We were masterfully piloted from Oslo, Norway, to Gothenburg, Sweden, and back the same day, in a minibus that just about withstood the pounding gusts of wind, as we travelled at high speed along the motorway between the two cities. I was accompanied by Jialing Chen, Scott Elliott, Maiken Håvarstein, Anna Jakobsson, Monika Kalinauskaitė, Peter Meanwell and Martina Petrelli. The members of the group, all of whom are practising curators, have each produced a text for this anthology.

We visited the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, or GIBCA, on 11 October 2023. This twelfth edition was curated by João Laia. Titled *forms of the surrounding futures*, the biennial was distributed across four venues: Göteborgs Konsthall, Gothenburg City Library, Hammarkullen Konsthall, and Röda Sten Konsthall – the biennial's host institution.²

The visit was scheduled for a Wednesday, when entrance was free in the evening and came with a complimentary guided tour. This particular Wednesday there was a performative iteration by the artist duo Status Queer, titled *PEEK!*, which was part of their ongoing collaboration with the photographer Elsa Groener, who was tasked with capturing reactions to the artists' sensational drag characters Meatling the Meatbaby (Sam Message) and Sinfluencer (Kolbrún Inga Söring) as they traversed public space.

Ng'onga Silupya and Marny Garcia Mommertz were unable to join us in Gothenburg, and have instead responded to *forms of the surrounding futures* by engaging with all the material that GIBCA very generously shared with us online.

Once again Gerrie van Noord has been co-editor, while Abirami Logendran has further developed the visual profile of the series for this anthology.³ Logendran joined us in Gothenburg and thus, once again, has experienced the exhibition that is the focal point of this anthology herself, being able to translate some of the embodied knowledge into the design.

The *Responses* anthologies are a tool for reflection on curatorial practices as well as the repository for a professionalising writing exercise. They also form a continued pedagogical experiment that started with the 2021–2023 cohort.⁴ Treating the experience of a curatorial project as a “data set”, we employ a form of Collective Qualitative Analysis in a workshop that is reconfigured each time, based on growing experience with the methodology.⁵ Thus, the visit to GIBCA was followed by a one-day workshop that resulted in the contributors' first drafts of abstracts, at the start of a four-month-long writing process. The texts are thus based on the rawness of experiences.

The *Responses* series is an exploration of different forms of curatorial production and practices, and I am writing this with the privilege of hindsight and with experience from the earlier volume where the cohort responded to a traveling solo exhibition. The solo exhibition and biennial exhibition have offered different curatorial strategies, methodologies, and formats, which in turn influences *how* a response is crafted. However, it is telling that the two first volumes are covering fairly classical exhibition formats. Other forms of curatorial making are often fleeting, small scale, mostly without the financial possibility to make a mark in a saturated mediascape. The planning required in an educational setting therefore challenges the wish to support non-institutionalized practices like that. Nevertheless, the two projects thus far has made apparent that there is indeed much to reflect upon still.



Status Queer,
PEEK! Live (2023)
at Röda Sten Konsthall

The MA-programme is actively attempting to slow down the production cycle of each of the participating curators. The programme focuses on the conceptualisation, the research, and the scaling of each MA-project to pave the way for deep reflection on own practice and investigation into the context that surrounds the student's practice. The *Responses* series is therefore a pedagogical tool to shift perspective; it is a mobilisation of empathy as much as it is an exercise in criticality. For both cohorts, there have been important questions raised dealing with ethics, "industry standards", curatorial responsibility, and performativity. Concurrently, the text demands of the writer to position themselves and their practices in relation to someone else's interests, professional choices, and preferences. I find, as a pedagogue, that asking of the contributors to filter and connect to other curators' productions in a time of deep reflection on their own practices creates a particularly interesting form of analysis.

Like many perennial exhibition projects, GIBCA was initiated by the city council. It is often distributed between several locations, and has since 2006 been organised and hosted by Röda Sten Konsthall.⁶ I am grateful for all assistance provided by GIBCA's interim Artistic Director, Sarah Hansson, in the preparations for this anthology and Artistic Director, Ioana Leca, in the last stages of the publishing process. We were given full access to an online folder with documentation images, texts, mediation and education materials, and even private viewing opportunities to see the video works in the exhibition. All of this provided us with substantial information to work with, in addition, of course, to the experience of the exhibition as it was installed in its different spaces.

I personally have had the chance to follow the twelfth edition of GIBCA from before its opening date, thanks to the generous invitation by IASPIS/Konstnärsnämnden in Stockholm to join curator João Laia in conversation about the then upcoming biennial in May 2023.⁷ The event was

well attended, and to emphasise Laia's interest in embodied experiences, I invited the audience to join us in a performative exercise: after Laia's presentation, I asked members of the audience to change places, to sit with someone they hadn't arrived with, next to a stranger, to see the front of the room – where Laia and I were sitting with a projection screen behind us – from a different perspective. Laia and myself also changed seats, to counter the hierarchy that is so easily established in a space where speakers are facing a sea of people seated in rows.

Many of the contributors to this volume adopt an interest in the embodied experiences in the exhibition in their discussions. **Peter Meanwell** investigates the sonic landscape of the exhibition in the text *You Can't Turn Your Back on Sound*, and concludes that although the curator's intentions were to go beyond the visual and spatial, the requirements for appropriate experience of sound were not fully met. In *On the Threshold to forms of the surrounding futures*, **Maiken Håvarstein** makes use of the threshold as a narrative and investigative device to approach the curatorial project via the two largest exhibition spaces in the biennial – at Röda Sten Konsthall and Göteborgs Konsthall. **Monika Kalinauskaitė** employs a literary format, reacting to the curatorial project through a poem titled *Poetry in Practice*, in which around half of the works in the exhibition are turned into active agents – like stars in the sky to navigate by. **Jialing Chen** also reacts to the overall curatorial project in her text *The Potential and Limits of Queering Futures through an Exhibition*. Devised as an exhibition walk-through, she discusses the curatorial premise in depth. Represented by three works in the exhibition, artist Prem Sahib links the public space offered by Hammarkullen Konsthall located in the borough of Angered in the suburban areas of Gothenburg, and the intimate space of the staircase connecting the floors of Röda Sten Konsthall. **Martina Petrelli** reads the curatorial project from the perspective of this one artist's work in the text *Angered City*. **Ng'onga Silupya** and **Marny Garcia**

Mommertz also use artworks as jumping off points in their texts. By sheer coincidence, both works selected are from 2019, and as a result the two end up making a post-pandemic analysis. Silupya reads the single-channel video work *Dedicated to the Youth of the World II* by Yarema Malashchuk and Roman Khimei through the lens of challenges that young people face across the African continent in the text *Alienation of the Youth as a Response*. **Garcia Mommertz** contextualises *Disease Thrower #7* by Guadalupe Maravilla with her own experience of the artist's work elsewhere and at different times in the text *Installation Views: A Reflection on Curatorial Engagement and Guadalupe Maravilla's Work in Images and Live*. **Anna Jakobsson** focus on the artworks *How is Your World?* (2023) by Adam Christensen and *Dear Friend* (2019) by Agne Jokšė exhibited at Gothenburg City Library in the aptly titled text *The Public Library as a Site for a Contemporary Art Biennial*. Being Swedish, she has access to a variety of sources in Swedish and she writes with in-depth cultural insight into the location of this part of the biennial. **Scott Elliot** employs his experience of the culture of exhibition and biennial openings to fictionalise GIBCA's launch in the text *Unruly Machine*. The reader gets to follow two friends Ellis and Miles as they experience 16 September 2023, during which the opening of the twelfth edition of the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art took place.

Although raising critical points, the curator-writers in this volume have been committed to responding to *forms of the surrounding futures* as an exhibition project and biennial, the artists involved, and curator João Laia with deep respect. As fellow-professionals they situate themselves as self-appointed -critical friends.

As a final text in this volume, the reader meets **João Laia** in a conversation with myself. The online exchange was conducted on Monday 25 March 2024, marking a point between *forms of the surrounding futures* having been realised as a

biennial exhibition in Gothenburg, and the second iteration of the exhibition at Kunsthalle Münster in Germany and The Galeria Municipal do Porto in Portugal. Today, Laia is acting Artistic Director at The Galeria Municipal do Porto. In the conversation we touch upon issues of curatorial analysis, the gift of in-depth responses, and the complexities of travelling a biennial exhibition to locations it was not initially intended for.

I want to thank everyone involved in making this book possible, and give a shout out to the copy-editor Rachael Fernandes who has streamlined all our voices – from a cacophony to series of discreet reflections.

¹ The first sentence I wrote in “Introduction to Responses #1 – Opinions Informed by Practice”, Responses #1, 9, was: “On a stormy Thursday in February 2022, I visited Kunsthall Charlottenborg in Copenhagen to see Mohammed Bourouissa’s solo exhibition HARA!!!!!!hAaaRAAAAA!!!!!!hHaaA!!!!”, last accessed 2 May 2024, https://kmd.uib.no/en/studies-and-admissions/curatorial-practice/book-launch-responses-1--opinions-informed-by-practice/_/attachment/download/c4ad827f-9f8d-40a4-a74b-aa69fc3f7861:06c9c548c6362c7bf0cb3c34ab39aa15a155d40f/Responses%231_FINAL.pdf.

² Contributing artists were Sophia Al-Maria, Adam Christensen, Joana da Conceição, Niko Hallikainen, Rodrigo Hernández, Sky Hopinka, Maria Jerez, Agnė Jokšė, Kem, Tarik Kiswanson, Yong Xiang Li, Yarema Malaschuk & Roman Khimei, Guadalupe Maravilla, Esse McChesney, Sandra Mujinga, Rasmus Myrup, Ania Nowak, Outi Pieski, Luiz Roque, Prem Sahib, P. Staff, Iris Touliatou, Ana Vaz and Osías Yanov.

³ “Abirami has designed a grid for this volume for both on- and off-screen reading. The PDF is easily distributed and manageable as a digital file, yet also cost-effective and beautiful in print by means of a regular desktop. Given how the design mimics book pages scanned for wider distribution, my thoughts are directed to the pedagogical setting from which this volume springs. Even though the design also hints at the affordable mode of reproduction through a xerox machine, and the disposable nature of a photocopied text, it is characteristic enough to feel precious.” Responses #1, 11, last accessed 2 May 2024, https://kmd.uib.no/en/studies-and-admissions/curatorial-practice/book-launch-responses-1--opinions-informed-by-practice/_/attachment/download/c4ad827f-9f8d-40a4-a74b-aa69fc3f7861:06c9c548c6362c7bf0cb3c34ab39aa15a155d40f/Responses%231_FINAL.pdf.

[a74b-aa69fc3f7861:06c9c548c6362c7bf0cb3c34ab39aa15a155d40f/Responses%231_FINAL.pdf](https://kmd.uib.no/en/studies-and-admissions/curatorial-practice/book-launch-responses-1--opinions-informed-by-practice/_/attachment/download/c4ad827f-9f8d-40a4-a74b-aa69fc3f7861:06c9c548c6362c7bf0cb3c34ab39aa15a155d40f/Responses%231_FINAL.pdf).

⁴ “Kollektiv Kvalitativ Analyse” (Collective Qualitative Analysis) by the sociologist Helga Eggebø was presented together with the methodology development in Responses #1,15 this way: Helga Eggebø, “Kollektiv kvalitativ analyse”, Norsk sosiologisk tidsskrift 4, no. 2 (2020): 106–122, last accessed 7 July 2022, <https://norskbrage.unit.no/norsk-xmlui/handle/11250/2724396>. The text was later translated into English by Victor Szepessy, as “Collective Qualitative Analysis”, for the purpose of sharing with the MA Curatorial Practice students, to build on Eggebø’s methodology. I want to mention the two courses led by Marie Vander Kloet and Stine H. Bang Svendsen as particularly useful for my practice as an educator: UPED 693 Group Supervision of MA students, and UPED674: The Politics of Curriculum, both of which are part of the University of Bergen’s Programme for University Pedagogy (UPED), a unit for training, research and development in learning and teaching, hosted within the Institute for Pedagogy (Department of Education) in the Faculty of Psychology, last accessed 2 May 2024, https://kmd.uib.no/en/studies-and-admissions/curatorial-practice/book-launch-responses-1--opinions-informed-by-practice/_/attachment/download/c4ad827f-9f8d-40a4-a74b-aa69fc3f7861:06c9c548c6362c7bf0cb3c34ab39aa15a155d40f/Responses%231_FINAL.pdf.

⁵ Helga Eggebø, “Collective Qualitative Analysis”, in Responses #1, 164, last accessed 2 May 2024, https://kmd.uib.no/en/studies-and-admissions/curatorial-practice/book-launch-responses-1--opinions-informed-by-practice/_/attachment/download/c4ad827f-9f8d-40a4-a74b-aa69fc3f7861:06c9c548c6362c7bf0cb3c34ab39aa15a155d40f/Responses%231_FINAL.pdf.

[2c7bf0cb3c34ab39aa15a155d40f/Responses%231_FINAL.pdf](https://kmd.uib.no/en/studies-and-admissions/curatorial-practice/book-launch-responses-1--opinions-informed-by-practice/_/attachment/download/c4ad827f-9f8d-40a4-a74b-aa69fc3f7861:06c9c548c6362c7bf0cb3c34ab39aa15a155d40f/Responses%231_FINAL.pdf).

⁶ GIBCA was established by Gothenburg City Cultural Committee, with the first iteration taking place in 2001, “About Gibca”, GIBCA, last accessed 20 March 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/about-gibca/>. Other examples are, for instance, the Bergen Assembly, the Venice Biennale, the Liverpool Biennial etc.

⁷ Konstnärsnämnden, last accessed 2 May 2024, <https://www.konstnarsnamnden.se/kalender/goteborgs-internationella-konstbiennial-gibca-bjuder-i-samarbete-med-iaspis-in-till-presentation-och-samtal-med-utgangspunkt-i-den-12e-upplagan-av-biennalen/>.



From left: Gudalupe Maravilla, *Disease Thrower #7* (2019),
Outi Pieski, *Guržot ja guovssat / Spell on you!* (2020) and
Ana Vaz, *Atomic Garden* (2018) at Göteborgs Konsthall

You Can't Turn Your Back on Sound

Peter Meanwell

You can't turn your back on sound. It bounces around, fills spaces, doesn't behave, nor stick to its allocated corner. Two sounds in one space create interference – metaphorically and physically – the sound waves intersect and modulate each other. Yet sound is also directional, you can be on the wrong side of it.

Within the grand spaces of Göteborgs Konsthall, Outi Pieski's *Guržot ja guovssat / Spell on you!* (2020) was framed majestically at the rear of the large room, with Ana Vaz's 16mm film *Atomic Garden* (2018) flickering, stroboscopically, suspended from the ceiling in the near corner. A small bench positioned against the wall offered a viewing seat. As I sat, the focus and immediacy of the sound shifted. I looked up. By sitting, I had been positioned behind the speakers. Placed, perhaps unintentionally behind the source of the film's audio, I thought, sound is not a consideration here.

Visual art spaces are (mostly) not designed as concert halls, their acoustic properties often an afterthought to their proportions and physical characteristics. The proliferation of artworks since the 1960s that go beyond the purely visual presents an ongoing challenge, with other aspects, such as acoustic fields, now also needing to be considered in curatorial practice. In a biennial such as the twelfth edition of Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA), which necessarily offers a multitude of works across a range of spaces – many of which have explicit sonic elements – this means curatorial decisions can be heard as well as seen and possibly sensed otherwise.

In advance of GIBCA's opening, curator João Laia promised that visitors would encounter “not very subtle or minimal work: all the works speak quite directly to the viewer,” making “shows that are borderline chaotic. It will not be a well-behaved exhibition.”¹ But for an audience member that not only sees, but listens too, what message do I hear in this directness and mis-behaviour?

Prem Sahib's newly commissioned sound works *Man Dog* (2020/2023) and *Alleus* (2023) stretched and disembowelled renderings of hate speech, filling the vertical shaft that connects the floors of the Röda Sten Konsthall. Chat room bile incomprehensibly twisting and intertwining with the reversed vitriol of the UK home secretary is transduced and transmitted through the physical reverberations of the steel staircase that clings optimistically to the internal structure of the building. Without context, Sahib's sonic rendering of violence shifts the umbilical transit route between floors into a throbbing vein of angst, wordless resonances filling the liminal space, bleeding through open doors, seeping into installations, across films, and over sculptures.

Sandra Mujinga's *Pervasive Light* (2021) hidden in its make-shift blanket fort, becomes the first victim of the spatial sonic bleed at Röda Sten Konsthall. With sound composed by the artist, the three-channel video is positioned, perhaps provocatively but certainly precariously, at the entrance to the grand industrial hall on the second floor. The work is swamped in washes of sub-bass, unclear where they emanate from, whether they are the soundtrack of Mujinga's own making or the rumble of the neighbouring work across the gallery floor.

Nearby sprawls Maria Jerez's multi-textural, extruded fabric body *Yabba* (2017/2023), pulsating and wheezing somewhat pleuritically, occasionally puffing clouds of smoke. Originally a piece for five performers and live music, created in 2017 for GIBCA, it takes the form of an installation – the performers replaced by motors and air that keep the enchanting body moving, but somehow robs it of its animus.

Curator João Laia writes that “the white cube in its classical sense silences and even oppresses the bodily in favour of visibility. Because of my interest in embodiment, how space choreographs bodies and how that is part of knowledge production, I've always been more drawn to the stage of the



Maria Jerez, *Yabba* (2017/2023) in front of Luiz Roque, *S* (2017) at Röda Sten Kontshall



Kem Dragana Bar (2018/2023) and Rasmus Myrup, *Outside Salon des Refusés* (2023)
at Röda Sten Kontshall

theater [sic.] as this non-space that can be re-choreographed and reformulated every time you use it.”² The body is inarguably present at this edition of GIBCA, but the “unsilencing” in this space is still in the favour of the visual, which to some degree resists the intended chaos. Physical objects are not, and cannot be, superimposed upon each other (as sound can). Helpfully in this regard, in her book *Listening to Noise and Silence*, Salomé Voegelin contrasts vision, “which captures orders and disciplines space but [...] does not see the simultaneity of its time,” with sound and “its immediate sensibility, unordered and purposeless, always now.”³ In this context the “direct” and “chaotic” of the curatorial vision is one that respects the differing temporalities of the artworks presented as they sit politely next to each other within the space. The chaos, at least in the Röda Sten Konsthall, flows from the stacking of sonic temporalities. What is unclear is how, or if, this is intentional.

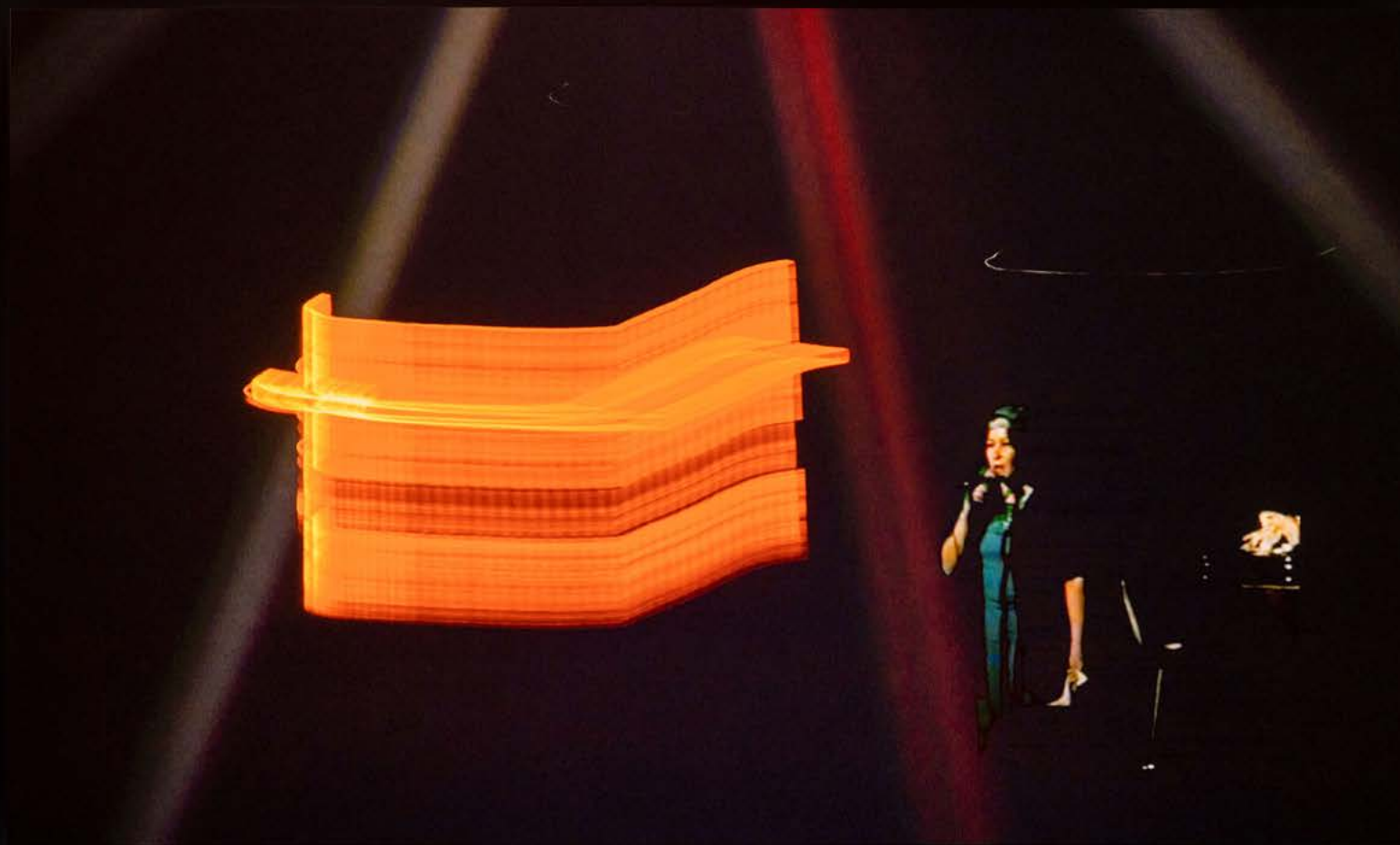
Peering down from high above, projected large above the graffitied walls of the second-floor space of Röda Sten Konsthall, the bodies of Luiz Roque’s dancers in *S* (2017) eyeball the camera, their heavily made-up faces rendered textural in the monochrome shots, at once hi-tech and elemental. The crispness of the projection sits in sharp contrast to the handmade fabric corpse of *Yabba* that wallows below. Sound throbs, bodies dance, but whose sound do they dance to? That of Marcio Biriato, credited for sound on the film, or the other throbs from below or behind? The space is certainly full and confusing, and I struggle to work out to whom the cacophony belongs.

The sonic chaos makes most sense as your eye is drawn to a physical door in the rear wall, plastered in posters, suggesting a portal to another space, evoking a back-alley entrance to a club or bar. In front of this gateway, “figures from Scandinavian folklore, Norse mythology and the Nordic past”⁴ clamour for attention. Sculptures, human in size and anthropomorphic in form are crafted from reed and

moss, birch and eelgrass, clothed in cast-off, idiosyncratically assembled outfits. These thrift-store wicker men are frozen in gestures, part still-life of urban clubbers taking a breath of cold air, part musty folkloric display, clumsily depicting a scene of village life I can’t quite relate to. Now the dislocated throbbing that fills the room tangentially does make sense. Is it this club scene in Rasmus Myrup’s *Outside Salon des Refusés* (2023) that the overlapping sonic landscape serves, sound behind walls, audibly evoking absence and exclusion?

In the theory-heavy text introducing this biennial exhibition titled *forms of the surrounding futures*, Laia lists how “the crucial activities of feminist, LGBTQI+ and racialised voices [...] have had an unparalleled role in dismantling longstanding structures of inequality”⁵ as a template and inspiration for a radical new, queer future, or “multiple futures”⁶, which is something that Laia tries to evince through the form of the biennial. Reading *queer* through the lens of Sarah Ahmed, as a disruptive reordering of relations through a refusal to follow an accepted path, perhaps the sonic intention of this biennial lies within this list of non-conformist reference points that the curator proposes?⁷

If electronic music and the club stand as markers of delineated queer space – with their transgression of social norms and sonic histories that are born from queer Black spaces⁸ – the muddy throbbing of the Röda Sten Konsthall could be read as a sonic portrayal of the corridors and sound system clashes of (in)famous Berlin nightclub Berghain and its imitators. Noise too has played an integral part of queer protest, from Stonewall to HIV/AIDS activism (both included in Laia’s list of crucial activities), where the noisiest of these activists – AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) established in the 1980s at the height of the AIDS epidemic in the USA – employed sound to “exercise agency and demonstrate social worth” to “unify disparate parts of identity—and disparate identities—a coalescing rather than normalizing process.”⁹



Sky Hopinka, *I'll Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become* (2016)
at Röda Sten Kontshall

For writer Airek Beauchamp, this queer cacophony is posited as a vital, trembling part of queer identity.

“Queer noise is the noise of the queer everyday,” writes essayist Rafael Frumkin. “It’s louder than straight noise, which is the taupe buzzing of a cell tower or the mechanical galumph of a Honda Accord with a broken muffler.”¹⁰ Frumkin’s positioning of loudness is about volume but also vibrancy. “Loud and Proud” for some is an integral catchphrase about queer visibility, of claiming space and wanting to be heard.¹¹ But to shout over the cacophony, is at once about not being silenced, volume, but perhaps also legibility. To be heard is to not have your message drowned out or your voice muffled. The power of the club rests not solely on an exclusionary entry policy, but also on its inclusionary admittance of a unified community. The power of ACT UP was in the singularity of their message, loudly proclaimed. While noise may be integral to the queer futures GIBCA explores, perhaps it could have been given greater legibility and therefore been given greater agency.

Moving up the staircase of anxiety once more, away from the tall-ceilinged machine rooms, the third floor of Röda Sten Konsthall revealed a meta diorama of a video of a film studio transformed into a dance floor, presented in a warehouse beginning to resemble a club. In *Dedicated to the Youth of the World II* (2019) by Roman Khimei and Yarema Malashchuk the bodies were more animated, depicting a hopeful abandon on the part of Kiev’s youth. Yet I was fatigued, tired of trying to discern what and who I was listening to. Tucked behind the projection wall, a dark quiet space emerged, where Ho-Chunk Nation/Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians filmmaker Sky Hopinka’s elegy to the Anishinaabe and Chemehuevi poet and performer Diane Burns *I’ll Remember You as You Were, not as What You’ll Become* (2016) was screening. Once again, I was behind the speakers, but this time as if having entered a chill-out space, the club happening metaphorically and literally on the other side of the wall.

Sonically Hopinka’s film draws on archive footage of Burns at a reading in New York in 1996, interspersed with field recordings, compositions by Otomi composer Ramiro Ramírez, as well as Sacred Harp singing. Jumping between close-ups and wider-angle shots, the headphones offered entry to an immersive sonic world, conjuring a well-crafted textural space, in contrast to the haphazard busyness of the floors below. Hopinka’s reflections on landscapes of death and dying and the transcendent journey of the spirit evoked through sound and image, collapsed the temporal as well as physical realms.

Amidst the noise, what role does silence, or stillness have in a new future? I’m reminded of a work by Navajo composer and artist Raven Chacon, *Silent Choir (Standing Rock)* (2017–2022) a field recording captured at the Standing Rock NO DAPL protests in 2016. “After months of yelling at the police, expressing their frustration and anger, Water Protectors from the camp, led by Elder women decided to go up and confront the North Dakota State police and the NO DAPL Security, who were barricading the freeway to get off the reservation. *Silent Choir* is a recording of 300 or 400 people, standing in absolute silence, waiting for the police to respond as to why they are aiding in abusing the land and its water.”¹²

To be silent, is not the same as being silenced, and it is from the quiet intentionality of Hopinka’s film that I first glimpse a sense of the futurity the exhibition promised. The stark contrast of this focused listening experience compared to how the sound operates in the other spaces made me wonder if, in striving to create a polyphonic experience but failing to attend to the sonic implications of their strategy, GIBCA’s curator has inadvertently robbed powerful individual works of their agency, their voice literally being lost. In platforming “directly speaking” works¹³, the singular voices of Mujinga, Myrup, and Roque et al. deserve more than being subsumed within a still largely visually-oriented whole, however radical

the vision – their clarity of intention detracted from, their sonic potential to posit “multiple futures”¹⁴ blurred into one throbbing club-like atmosphere, placing them behind a door that will always be out of reach. A queer futurity undoubtedly requires transgressive and defiant noisiness, but for me, in attempting to build a chaotic polyphony, GIBCA has underscored the power of silence, and the need for more listening in this future-building.

- ¹ “Borderline Chaotic”, *Kunstkritikk*, last accessed 7 May 2024, <https://kunstkritikk.com/borderline-chaotic/24>.
- ² “Borderline Chaotic”, *Kunstkritikk*, last accessed 7 May 2024, <https://kunstkritikk.com/borderline-chaotic/>.
- ³ Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 169.
- ⁴ GIBCA Exhibition Guide, 188.
- ⁵ João Laia, Curator’s text, “Tolfta upplagan av Göteborgs Internationella Konstbiennial”, GIBCA Exhibition Guide: forms of the surrounding futures, 124.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.
- ⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Duke University Press, 2006).
- ⁸ Blair Black, “The Queer of Color Sound Economy in Electronic Dance Music”, *Current Musicology*, 2020.
- ⁹ “Live Through This: Sonic Affect, Queerness, and the Trembling Body”, *Sounding Out*, last accessed 8 May 2024, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/09/14/sonic-tremblings-sound-affect-queer-body/>.
- ¹⁰ Rafael Frumkin, “The Ecstasy of Queer Noise”, *Resonance: The Journal of Sound and Culture*, 4, no. 2 (2023), 192–97.
- ¹¹ Natacha Marjanovic, “‘Be Proud, and Loud’: Linguistic Markers of Pride in Drag Queens’ Spoken Discourse”, *Discours*, 32, 2023.
- ¹² “The Voiceless Mass and the Silent Choir: an Interview with Raven Chacon”, *The Wire*, last accessed 7 May 2024, [https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/interviews/the-](https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/interviews/the-voiceless-mass-and-the-silent-choir-an-interview-with-raven-chacon-interview)

[voiceless-mass-and-the-silent-choir-an-interview-with-raven-chacon-interview](https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/interviews/the-voiceless-mass-and-the-silent-choir-an-interview-with-raven-chacon-interview).

¹³ As referenced in footnote 1, with the quote from <https://kunstkritikk.com/borderline-chaotic/24>.

¹⁴ As referenced in footnote 5, with the quote from João Laia, GIBCA: forms of the surrounding futures.



Sandra Mujinga, *Pervasive Light* (2021) at Röda Sten Kontshall

**On the Threshold to
*forms of the surrounding futures***

Maiken Håvarstein

Halfway through my visit to the twelfth edition of Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, GIBCA (2023) – titled *forms of the surrounding futures* – the act of entering exhibition spaces and venues became a distinct experience. It made me curious how it might affect my engagement with the various artworks and the overall thematic and curatorial statement. Similar to an “establishment shot” in a film that sets the mood and raises expectations as to action and theme, what kind of mood and expectations are activated and how, when standing on the threshold of the various exhibition environments in Gothenburg?

The curatorial statement can be found on the biennial website and in two essays in the exhibition guide – a small lightweight pocketbook, free of costs. The guide was handed to me before I entered the main exhibition space at Göteborgs Konsthall, one of the four biennial venues. Curator João Laia reminds us that we live in a time that can be defined as a “perma-crisis” – an ongoing period of abrupt changes.¹ To address the current urgencies, Laia suggests that we approach plural narratives in ways that can promote mutual interdependence and collaboration. Critical of Western thought, which according to Laia hasn’t shown a capacity to think beyond the many current crises, the curator explores an expanded notion of queer, specifically through the act of cruising as a relational and environmental ethic.

To examine the curatorial strategies at GIBCA 2023, purely from the threshold to the exhibition spaces, seems to counter Laia’s ambitions – given the articulated attempt to overcome the privilege and dominance of the visual and the eye.² Based on the idea that our understanding of the world is a product of many senses, and borrowing strategies from theatre and scenography, the curatorial strategy has been to select artworks that operate on a bodily and/or sensual level.

In recent years, we’ve seen an increase of exhibitions spoken about in terms of the bodily apparatus.³ Interactions between

visual and performance practices create aesthetic experiences that generate bodily encounters in a specific space and time, no longer limited to objects. Visitors are confronted with what can be seen, and they have to negotiate their own movements through exhibition spaces. Their participation as spectator, as well as the very act of observation, are being choreographed. This sense of being choreographed was prominent at GIBCA 2023, especially in relation to the two main exhibitions venues: Göteborgs Konsthall and Röda Sten. My instinctive response at the entrance to the main exhibition room at Göteborgs Konsthall was to stay in the doorway for a while to take in the whole space. The three artworks in the relatively large room came across as a unified composition facing towards me, organised inwards in a zigzag movement. I became attentive to the visitors who had entered the room and how they walked between the artworks.

Closest to the entrance, slightly to the right, was the video work *Atomic Garden* (2018) by Ana Vaz, suspended about a metre above the floor. Alternating images of fireworks and close-ups of flowers in different colours created a stroboscopic effect and shouted for attention, similar to a GIF-animation on a website. The sound of fireworks competed with that of cicadas, both being emitted further into the exhibition room. In the middle of the space stood Guadalupe Maravilla’s larger than life’s sculpture *Disease Thrower #7* (2019), made of objects and materials the artist collected when retracing his migration route across Central America and Mexico. Furthest from the entrance, situated in front of a free-standing exhibition wall, hung the artwork *Guržot ja guovssat / Spell On You!* (2020) by Outi Pieski, a three-dimensional Duodji “painting” made of thread, steel, and wood. A black coloured section represents the spirit Guoržžu and a brighter section relates to Guovssa, a spirit bringing luck. The space behind the exhibition wall was illuminated by purple light, which in turn blended with the yellow lighting that seeped out from one of the inner exhibition rooms at the Konsthall.



Outi Pieski, *Guržot ja guovssat / Spell on you!* (2020) at Göteborgs Konsthall

The ample space between these three artworks and the stage-like scenario offered by the lighting, made a first impression of the works occupying a shared space. It didn't seem as if the visitors lingered by the artworks for a long time. I saw some moving back and forth between the wall text and the artworks, and wondered whether a more radical gesture would have been saying nothing at all about the works and letting us fully engage in the act of cruising – which is a goal-oriented and distinctly visual affair – without necessarily exchanging any information.

While clearly divided into a fore-, middle- and background, the zig-zag positioning of the works, combined with the illuminated and free-standing exhibition wall behind Outi Pieski's work, broke with the single-point perspective. My gaze was not drawn to prioritise one plane or one artwork over another. The spatial positioning of the three artworks brought out their formal and conceptual differences and indicated a non-hierarchical coexistence between them. This way of organising the space resonates with what Ana Vujanović calls *landscape dramaturgy*.⁴ As a dramaturg, researcher, and writer, she has paid particular attention to developments of dramaturgy in Western theatre, where the performative and affective turns have guided theatre towards meaning-making processes, not predetermined by text and the logocentric tradition. Vujanović observes various uses of dramaturgical landscape tactics from the 2010s onwards in performance arts, slow cinema and post-internet practices, which explore perspectival spatial organisation to re-imagine the position of human thinking and agency in the world.⁵ To break with the historically prevailing and Western logic of the single-point perspective, as Laia does in using landscape dramaturgy as a tactic, is to open up to a less anthropocentric world view and break with a visual strategy that has influenced our understanding of the world and its hierarchies from the Renaissance era.

Through Laia's selection of artworks and the organisation of the

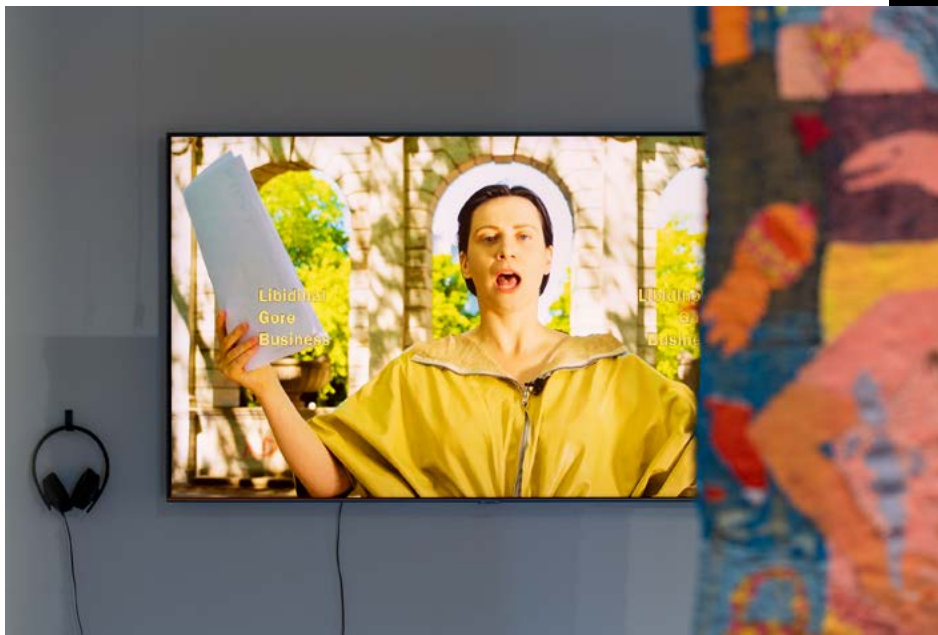
exhibition room at Göteborgs Konsthall, I've started to speculate on how a space without the perspective – environments of co-existence – could act out. One of the works that was often highlighted in press coverage, centrally situated at the main venue Röda Sten, was in a multi-sensory way inviting me to reconsider the perspective of a landscape. The colourful sculpture *Yabba* (2017/2023) by Maria Jerez is a large, animate, textile-based sculpture – shiny and landscape-like – which has smoke seeping from its immense mass, accompanied by a surrounding sound piece. Jerez describes *Yabba* as “a kind of world that is everything and nothing, is full and empty, that takes all forms but does not yet have any.”⁶ When *Yabba* was presented to the public for the first time in 2017, then as a theatre performance, it was described as an ever-changing theatre landscape, as a theatre space completely thrown back on its spatiality: a dusky cave, a semi-dark chamber, with us – the audience – descending into, and entering it.⁷

When I entered Röda Sten, I was almost thrown into the space by the strong wind, as the day of the visit was nearly storm-like. As a result, I didn't realise that Iris Touliatou's odour work *Visitors or, what are the odds* (2023) was mounted by the door, until on my way out a few hours later. It may have been the artist's or the curator's intention that the visitors should not pay any immediate attention to this work. *Visitors or, what are the odds* embraces the visitors more or less unconsciously with its scent, at the entrances of both Göteborgs Konsthall and Röda Sten.

I was met by several other artworks before I reached the exhibition rooms at Röda Sten. By the ticket office hung Esse McChesney's installation of embroidery and textile works with imagery and stories from a queer, non-binary, trans person context,⁸ and the video documentation piece *To the Aching Parts! (Manifesto)* (2022) by Ania Nowak was displayed close by.⁹ Two sound works by Prem Sahib, *Man dog* (2020/2023) and *Alleus* (2023), took possession of the space



Esse McChesney, *Längtan/oro* (2022) at Röda Sten Konsthall



Ania Nowak, *To the Aching Parts! (Manifesto)* (2020) at Röda Sten Kontshall



Ania Nowak, *To the Aching Parts! (Manifesto)*, performed at 3.15 pm,
16 September 2023 outside Göteborgs Konsthall,
for the opening performance programme

between the floors, with two monologues intermingled; a hate speech recorded in online gay chat rooms, and a speech made by the British home secretary. Presented in the staircase, an architectural in-between place which normally has a functional role, they performatively infiltrated the space outside the exhibition rooms. My walk through the corridors and staircases became more than functional, crossing the threshold of functional and factual and highlighting the intersection of the private and the public. My choreographed steps reinforced the between spaces and passages, creating a hybrid space and a momentum between the artworks, the space, and my movements.

Walking up the staircase to the three exhibition rooms at Röda Sten, I was met on every floor by an entrance view that was completely or partially blocked. At the top floor, I had no choice but to fully enter the room to experience the total installation of Joana da Conceição's *Cosmic Solipsism* (2022-23). The door was covered by stage masking fabric to create a darkened space and to prevent sound from seeping out. On the second floor was Rodrigo Hernández' *Gourd* (2018), a large rectangular painting on glass, hung some meters into the room, established an initial one-on-one interaction, akin to that of a sparring partner. In the main hall stood Sandra Mujinga's three-screen video installation *Pervasive Light* (2021), blocking the view of two larger installations placed on the right side and further inside the exhibition space; Rasmus Myrup's sculptural installation *Outside Salon des Refusés* (2023) and Sky Hopinka's *I'll Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become* (2016).¹⁰ Mujinga's video-installation was framed by a theatrical cloak of stage masking fabric on a suspended metal rail, hanging by some thin threads from the ceiling, which made it impossible to see what was behind. A figure appeared and disappeared across the three screens at short intervals, making it difficult to understand what was going on. To watch Mujinga's work properly, I had to get closer and step into the room.

Still standing at the doorstep, Mujinga's work visually competed with two other artworks for my attention; *Yabba* by Maria Jerez, and the catching, hypnotic, black and white video *S* (2017) by Luiz Roque, which put me in a club mood. *S* was displayed on a huge screen, and presented, in an iconic visual style, androgynous voguing and breakdancing men in shiny clothing, jewellery, and makeup, mixed with images of a glowing rotating sculpture.¹¹ Displayed at the opposite side of the room on the right side, mounted high on the wall, the screen had a similar effect to Ana Vaz's video at Göteborgs Konsthall. They *inhabited* the exhibition spaces. This impression was enhanced by the fact that I had seen the films before I arrived. Framed as "entry points, questions and approaches to thinking differently about the futures you want to dwell in," the biennial let anyone with internet access view five of the video works through the online *Screening room*, accessible from the biennial website.¹² Viewing the biennial films on the bus to Gothenburg, had a huge effect on how I experienced them in the exhibition environments – in relation to the other objects, and visitors, and the architecture. They became screen objects and sources of light and sounds. With Guiliana Bruno, I think about how screens can be used to foster new forms of connection and relatedness, of activating material relations.¹³ Following this train of thought, screens can become sites where different forms of mediation, transfer, and transformation, can take place; and can help us re-imagine our sense of space and relations with the environment. According to Bruno, the contemporary screen is, far from representing any perspectival ideal, no longer containable within optical framings. The contemporary screen signals a state of becoming.

On the second floor at Röda Sten, two video works shared a white, free-standing exhibition wall – one video projected on each side. I could watch *Dedicated to Youth of the World II* (2019) by Yarema Malashchuk and Roman Khimei from the doorstep, but I could only imagine the other film, Sky Hopinka's *I'll Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll*



Joana da Conceição, *Cosmic Solipsism* (2022-23) at Röda Sten Kontshall

Become (2016), from the flickering lights emitted from behind the wall. The reflecting light from the video work touched the wall at the back of the exhibition room in a poetic, architectural gesture. Could this be construed as an attempt to break down the idea of seeing as the opposite of knowing?

My different experiences of Göteborgs Konsthall and Röda Sten reflect Laiā's ambition to stage encounters that embrace a nonconforming affinity. I was met in different and partly confrontational ways, both inside and outside of the exhibition rooms. My desire to analyse the biennial from the doorsteps – from a functional point of view – reflect a staged position from which I started to question the constructed nature of these encounters. Still Laiā, in many ways, adheres to the conventions of use of exhibition spaces. Little seems to have been done to bring new voices into them. The mediation programme was primarily developed by the pedagogical team, and the mediation of the works through text was conventional and rather sparse. Göteborgs Konsthall presented works in a white cube fashion, although no works were mounted on the walls. The vision at Röda Sten was less hermetic. I could see out of the windows, and the walls displayed artworks and elevated the gaze, making me aware of the uniqueness of the space. No architecture design took my focus away from the objects, which reinforced the encounter between me and the works and other visitors.

Nevertheless, when I visited the biennial in October, a few weeks after the opening, I had a strong feeling of being too late to the party. I saw few signs of the ambitious performance programme that had taken place during the opening weekend, including any documentation. There were relatively few artworks presented compared to other biennials, and there were also fewer newly-commissioned artworks than expected. However, this seemingly downscaled scope has grown on me. Fewer artworks and venues than expected can be seen as an opportunity to recalibrate our expectations of the biennial format towards the more sustainable.

The biennial took place in two other venues in addition to Göteborgs Konsthall and Röda Sten – Gothenburg City Library and Hammarkullen Konsthall. As I linger at the threshold of the exhibition space, I can't see either of the two works displayed in the library. But an institution full of books and people (I saw many), generated a space for imagination and a scope of plural narratives. Hammarkullen Konsthall, in turn, was almost deserted when I visited. The Konsthall is situated in the only underground tram station in Gothenburg, in a suburban area – part of the modernist urban planning in the 1960s and 1970s – and operated by the Culture House Blå Stället, the first cultural centre in a suburb in Sweden.¹⁴ When I took the escalators down to the Konsthall, the advertising showcases along the walls made my perception of space a more kinetic affair. The advertisements had been replaced with bright yellow light in which one could sunbathe, part of Prem Sahib's light installation *Liquid gold* (2016/2023). Occupying space through the codified use of colour, the aim of the installation was to turn the site into a vessel, "expanding like a fluid, to fill – or overflow – its proportions. The light acts like an unruly substance that leaks beyond the windows, positioning the viewer outside of the vessel."¹⁵ Several of the bigger display cases at Hammarkullen Konsthall, five in total, were filled with the biennial poster and other text-saturated posters about *Liquid gold* (the same text as in the exhibition guide). Rather than experiencing these as inviting, enticing gestures, to create new entrances to the art world, they communicated half-hearted attempts at mediation. Visitors were offered little information about why Hammarkullen Konsthall was an interesting venue for the biennial – or for Prem Sahib's light installation specifically – beside saying that the intention was to invert the traditional museum model of audience engagement, during hours when the museum is closed. Hammarkullen is classified as a particularly vulnerable area in Sweden, with high rates of crime. Instead of creating surfaces with potential for new imaginings, Laiā's biennial experienced from Hammarkullen Konsthall, created a feeling of covering over one of the current crises.



Ana Vaz, *Atomic Garden* (2018) at Göteborgs Konsthall

¹ The exhibition guide of *forms of the surrounding future*, (GIBCA, 2023) is presented in Swedish and English, and contains two curatorial essays, a longer and more theory heavy one (120-127) and a shorter one (143-144).

² See interview with João Laia on the biennale website, GIBCA 2023, last accessed April 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/thematic/>.

³ See Pamela Bianchi, *The Theatricality of Exhibition Spaces. Fluid Spectatorship into Hybrid places* (2016).

⁴ See Ana Vujanović, "Landscape dramaturgy: Space after perspective." (2018).

⁵ Vujanović underline that "landscape" is not a new dramaturgical concept. We know it from Gertrud Stein's plays and from the post-dramatic theatre of the 1990s. In a broader perspective, Vujanović associates landscape dramaturgy with new forms of social organization, such as assemblies, protests, and self-organized communities in a neoliberal Europe, with their horizontal ways of gathering and being together. Within curatorial thinking, Paul O'Neill has suggested in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (2016), to employ "landscape" as metaphor to grasp the qualities that could constitute the exhibition-as-form. He uses the metaphor of exhibition-as-landscape to establish a formal structuring unit where background, middle ground, and foreground can be understood as three planes of interaction. Landscape is here used as a container for objects and moving spectator subjects. Three spatial categories represent the organisational strategies and levels of interaction through which the exhibition takes its form and is experienced. The background - the primary layer - refers to the architecture of the exhibition venue.

The audience interacts in the middle ground based on format of exhibition design and layout. And in the foreground participates the visitor of the exhibition in a subject-object relationship with the artefact/art object.

⁶ See Maria Jerez website, last accessed 4 April 2024, <https://mariajerez.com/yabba.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Esse Mcchesney's artworks, as part of the installation: *Hejdå* (2020), *Händer mot himmel* (2019), *Längtan/oro* (2022), *Mastektomi* (2020), *Till mig* (2021), *Untitled* (2023), *Åt upp* (2022).

⁹ The performance documentation piece presented on LCD screen (20 min) is from 2022, the performance *To the Aching Parts!* (Manifesto) took place in 2020.

¹⁰ Sky Hopinka's work was in two parts; one installation in the main room, and a video work on the second floor.

¹¹ Luiz Roque is, in their practice, attracted by the power of image and by sensations that stem from the sense of vision; *Plug In ICA*, last accessed 4 April 2024, <https://plugin.org/exhibitions/luiz-roque-s/>.

¹² GIBCA 2023, last accessed 4 April 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/screening-room>.

¹³ See Giuliana Bruno *Surface; Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media* (2014).

¹⁴ See Göteborgs Stad, last accessed 4 April 2024, <https://goteborg.se/wps/portal/enhetssida/kulturhuset-bla-stallet/kalendarium/hammarkullen-konsthall>.

¹⁵ See exhibition guide of *forms of the surrounding future*: 200.



Sophia Al-Maria, *A Whale is a Whale is a Whale: Swan Song for the Arabian Humpback* (2014) at Röda Sten Kontshall

We are such boundless people
covered with the almost-being
from lung to limb.
All that could be thought of,
put in poetry
and –
or –
practice
while pulling up the car, wake up wind city –
a bright sequence of facts
working to set the sight of the scene.
The air is always a mess of everything out there:
old, untraceable fingers and cheeks
evaporating from a cold hard cash planet,
a snake of transaction gliding
over a solid rock of lonely bills.¹

Hurt clings to boundless people:
there is plenty of being
dissipating the ouch
leaving little around for poetry
and –
or –
practice.
Unless one really commits to digging a wound
all the way down to the dead oceans of language²
or maybe upwards, to the life
of stars and their shepherds.³

This is the skeleton of the scene,
cracking,
heavy with many
but first of all,
piss
and –
or –
gold.
And, supposedly, time?

As if there was any to be spared, ever.
One display second
has the heart value of close to nine figures –
surely more than the yellowest dreams are made of.⁴

And this is the membrane of the heart of the scene,
presumably, waxed with kindness.
Often, though, lashed with words
to sour poetry
and –
or –
practice,
to sever
choice
from
skin.⁵

The place made here is meant to be read as a pulse
but it really just looks like a set
or
a scene.
Usually, the quiet voice witnesses
the weirdness of growth and imagining
and the blur blending them into
a restless else: a cupboard of gills,
a migration,
a necklace clutched in a shooting
or even a you –
but it is not the quiet voice of this history.
It is only a jewel of sadness
amongst the boundless
and people.⁶

This is the edge of the scene now,
it houses world in the corners:
tissues of song, bones of story,
deep and sharp flesh of threat,⁷
the light of eyes in the dark of intention⁸

and a constant zip line stitch tear
in poetry
and –
or –
practice.
A body bag of surveillance.
A chastity costume of news.⁹

Some boundless people have hope at their edges –
when they walk, they walk with the burn.
Mouth to step,
tongues, teeth and embers,
the deep heat pumping
to the heart of the scene¹⁰

And yet in poetry
and –
or –
practice
the place made here
breaks the heart
and the scene.

Every day, as the scene is setting
there is a moment to reshuffle the heart.
You may perform now, go easy –
usually to a silent, cautious understanding
that together we are all very neural here,
essential to keep the boundlessness
in the right sequence,
to generate terms
which may then be stretched to poetry
and –
or –
practice –
and if we stay obediently neural
they are.
That doesn't sit well in the stomach of things, though.

Uneasy, biling
the scene sets in the throat with a deep burn.

That is just what happens when you play with boundless
people.
We keep a few things just a little too raw.

And when you stage a scene
in raw poetry
and –
or –
practice
a heart leaking heat
may burn you to myth.
From lung to limb
boundless people

see through the wake-up wind city
through the endless bright sequence of facts
into the demand:
do not go easy
face and teach us
to read
the ashes.

¹ Iris Touliatou, *Visitors or, what are the odds* (2023)

² Sophia al Maria, *A Whale is a Whale is a Whale: Swan Song for the Arabian Humpback* (2014)

³ Rodrigo Hernández, *Anche di Notte* (2022)

⁴ Prem Sahib, *Liquid Gold* (2016/2023)

⁵ Prem Sahib, *Man Dog* (2020/2023)

⁶ Yong Xian Li, *a break (by the bamboo wave)* (2021)

⁷ Luiz Roque, *S* (2017)

⁸ Sandra Mujinga, *Pervasive Light* (2021)

⁹ Tarik Kiswanson, *Passing* (2023)

¹⁰ Sky Hopinka, *I'll Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become* (2016)



Tarik Kiswanson, *Passing* (2023) at Göteborgs Konsthall

**The Potential and Limits of Queering
Futures through an Exhibition**

陈稼冷 Jailing Chen

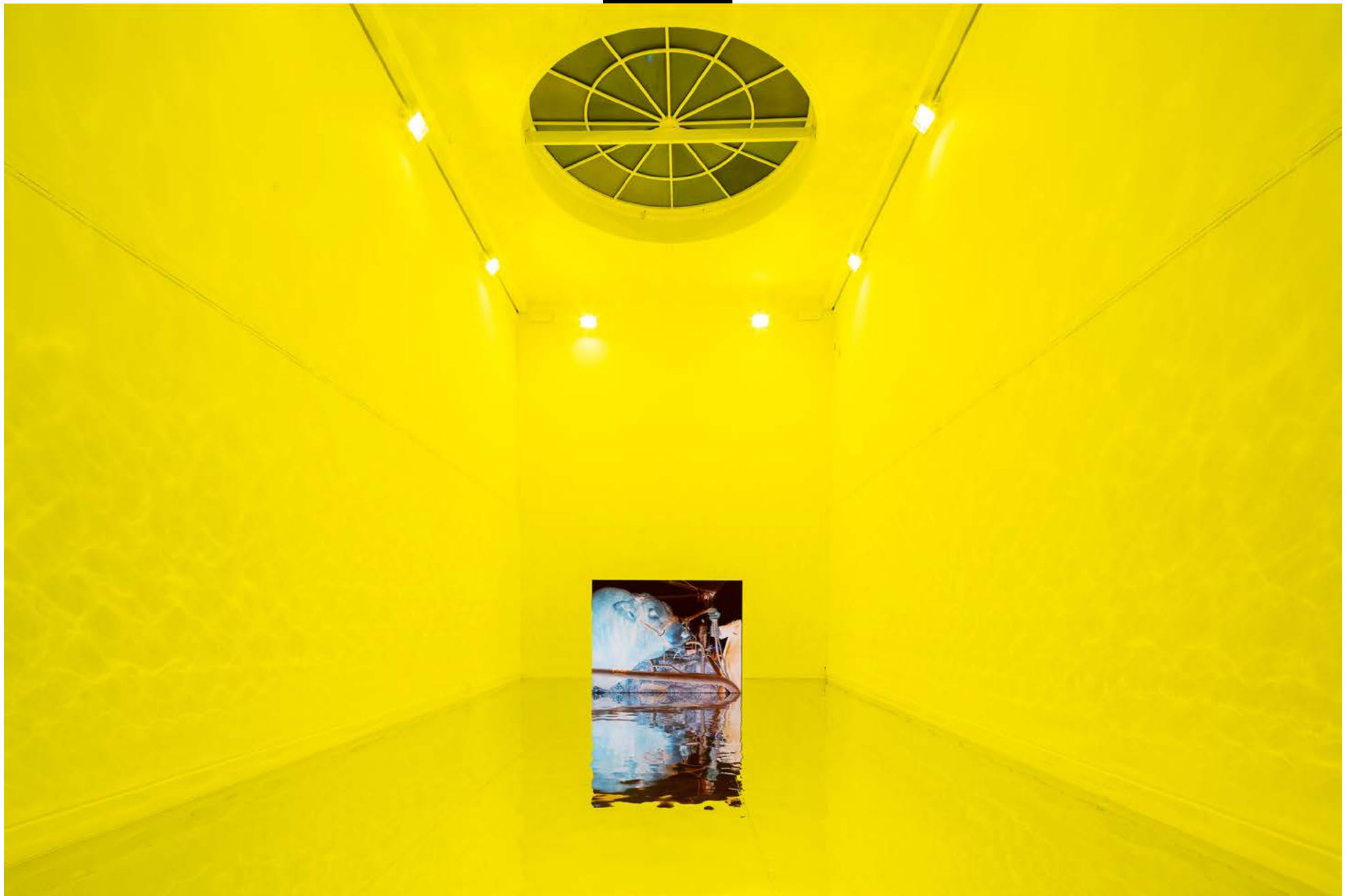
forms of the surrounding futures, which ran from 16 September until 19 November 2023, was the twelfth edition of Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, or GIBCA, curated by João Laia. The exhibition took place at four venues throughout the city of Gothenburg: Göteborgs Konsthall, Gothenburg City Library, Hammarkullen Konsthall and Röda Sten Konsthall. Building on queer theory, João Laia brought together work by 24 international artists and artist groups that addresses inequalities concerning race, species, gender, and sexual orientation, to imagine multiple futures in which different life forms can co-exist more equally beyond existing norms. In this text, I consider whether the exhibition achieved its goal, and if so, to what extent.

forms of the surrounding futures can be argued to expose how we live with the legacies of colonialism whose inequalities concerning race, species, gender, and sexual orientation have existed for centuries. In other words, the word “we” never refers to the spectrum of natural life but relates to specific groups, hierarchies, advantages, and disadvantages. As outlined by feminist philosopher María Lugones, modern/colonial knowledge structures rely on a series of binaries, such as modernity/tradition, man/woman, human/nature and human/non-human, as well as heterosexual/non-heterosexual.¹ Life forms to the right of the forward slashes in these binaries tend to be categorised as Other. And as philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti points out, “the sexualized others (non-binary, women, LBGTQ+); the racialized others (non-Europeans, indigenous); and the naturalized others (animals, plants, the Earth)” are subjected to discrimination, oppression, and exploitation within the structural norms.² Laia’s exhibition contemplated how these normative structures permeate our daily lives through language, culture, public places, and private spaces. For example, Prem Sahib’s *Man Dog* (2023), installed on the stairs of the Röda Sten Konsthall, emitted hate speech the artist gathered from gay chat rooms.

The distorted and slowed-down voices were terrifying and alienating; filling the space from top to bottom, they suggested that homosexuals, under the exclusive lens of heterosexual sexuality, were marginalized as Others – a bizarre and potentially dangerous group. The similar issue of othering is also found in Eastern cultures, who are portrayed as oddly dressed and highly exotic, standing in contrast to the Western (modern). Just as the floral motifs in Yong Xiang Li’s installation *a break (by the bamboo wave)* (2021) reflected a seventeenth-century European style that is a fantastical mash-up of Chinese, Japanese, and Indian motifs, exposing European stereotypes of the East.³ When these chairs are mass-produced and placed in people’s dwellings, the image of the Eastern Asian cultures is continuously being alienated.

These modern/colonial norms pervade people’s everyday lives, defining and oppressing those considered as Others. The exhibition further presented the twisted and dangerous living situations of Others – they are confined to the hell of these hierarchical structures – their existence in social, cultural, cyber, and even physical dimensions is constantly being squeezed. For example, P. Staff’s video *On Venus* (2019), was placed in a yellow room and showed the farming on an industrial scale of hormonal, reproductive and carnal animal commodities – the violent and gory images of urine, semen, meat, skin and fur manipulated into morbid neon shades of red, orange and pink.

The work’s title, *On Venus* – the name of an uninhabitable planet – metaphorically referenced what it feels like to be queer or trans in the UK – toxic, dangerous and uninhabitable.⁴ However, modern/colonial norms, and the toxic living environment they sustain, continue to prevail because both the oppressed and the beneficiaries of the existing structure, seem already lost in their ability to imagine other futures. Quoting Franco Berardi, Laia highlighted that “[t]oday’s dominant paradigm offers no alternatives, contributing to the pre-determination of the



P. Staff, *On Venus* (2019) at Göteborgs Konsthall



Maria Jerez, *Yabba* (2017/2023) in front of Rodrigo Hernández, *Anche di notte* (2022) at Röda Sten Kontshall



From left Maria Jerez, *Yabba* (2017/2023), Luiz Roque, *S* (2017), Kem, *Dragana Bar* (2018/2023), Rasmus Myrup, *Outside Salon des Refusés* (2023) and Sky Hopinka, *I'll Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become* (2016) at Röda Sten Kontshall



Prem Sahib, *Man Dog* (2020/2023) and *Alleus* (2023)
at Röda Sten Kontshall



Yong Xiang Li, *a break (by the bamboo wave)* (2021)
at Röda Sten Kontshall

future.”⁵ As distinct entities within the human race, we reside within our individual here and now, which is inherently rife with hierarchical norms that have unconsciously become ingrained within us. The artist group Status Queer, who were invited by the biennial to host one of the weekly guided tours, stated in an interview that people may prefer white walls and white sofas; however, this aesthetic preference is merely a reflection of the white heteronormative hegemony.⁶ Adhering to these modern/colonial norms, we will move along the linear, modern logic of development as progress, of which capital accumulation is an indication; even though this blueprint has come at the expense and neglect of a large part of “us”.

Using the notion of queer as an anchor, *forms of the surrounding futures* guided the audience to imagine other, more pluralistic, and egalitarian futures, beyond existing norms. The word queer represents a diversity of genders and sexual orientations and questions the stability of the dichotomies of man/woman and straight/homosexual.⁷ However, struggles about gender and sexual orientation are inherently and tightly intertwined with struggles around race and class. As Cuban American academic José Esteban Muñoz pointed out, when some white neoliberal queers studiously avoid the question of ethnic, racial, class, ability, or gender difference, the Third World Gay Revolution group is still caught up in the race issue and the struggle for decolonization.⁸ Due to differences in cultural, ethnic and geographical dimensions, we, as human beings, are living in our respective spatio-temporal matrices. We are affected by modern/colonial hierarchical structures to varying degrees, and struggle with our respective socio-political dilemmas. In this context, Laia treated queer as an expanded perspective that leads us beyond the here and now, permeated by normative structures – the places we inhabit are filled with hierarchies, and the only future we can envisage is based on the linear development of modernisation and capital accumulation – to imagine other

more diverse and egalitarian modes of being when we place ourselves in other times and spaces.⁹ In this way, the exhibition let us dream of the intimate connections and futures between diverse life forms.

Laia combined the work *Dragana Bar* (2018) and *Outside Salon des Refusés* (2023) to create an ideal space where people can live beyond existing norms, carrying forward queers’ desire for a space that accommodates a plurality of genders and sexualities. *Dragana Bar* was a neon sign by queer feminist collective Kem. Its pink triangle originated from the ACT UP! movement (1987), symbolising the history of resistance to homophobia, now often used as the signs of gay bars where same-sex orientations and gender-variant identities can socialise and openly express themselves. Gathered at the bar were figures from Rasmus Myrup’s work *Outside Salon des Refusés*, derived from Scandinavian folklore, Norse mythology, and the Nordic past. In this safe space, both them and the audiences were free to, as Laia described, “be heathen, uncivil, unnatural, TOO natural, cursed or queer.”¹⁰ Following queers’ strategy of imagining new spaces and identities, these two works allowed the Others, oppressed by modern/colonial norms, to live on their own terms. In the struggle for gender and sexual diversity, queer desire and its more multifaceted models of beings and relationships beyond the binary of male and female was expanded on in Maria Jerze’s *Yabba* (2017), where the artist deployed these ideas to rethink the binary between human and non-human. The installation shaped an unstable space in which entities expanded and decreased in size over time like balloons, which failed to be identified and named by the audiences.

When the audiences were in the space of this installation, they were free to move around and encounter these unknowns. They were encouraged to abandon the closed nature of their subjects and to invest themselves in the connection with these entities, forming ever-changing communities.¹¹ Building on queers’ resistance to the normalization

But they
apparently do
not insist
that
existence depends upon
sense perceptions alone. He claims that what is thought of, what is felt, and what is
spoken, in fact, anything that is brought before his consciousness,
is a sufficient indication of its existence
and it is the question
of the existence
and reality
of these
spirits in
which he
is interested.

Sky Hopinka, *I'll Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become* (2016)
at Röda Sten Kontshall

and categorization of relationships,¹² this work created an interactive space that allowed the audience to experience possibilities beyond the binary paradigm of the human and the non-human, the internal and the external.

Following queers' imagery of other times and spaces, the exhibition also presented some premodern cosmologies. For example, Rodrigo Hernández's *Anche di notte* (2022) took us back to a pre-Columbian universe, where day/night, light/dark, live/dead, above/below ground, oppose and complement each other in cycles. The radiant brass panels were reminiscent of twilight, a state of time between day and night, where a bat and a group of human figures floated among the stars and planets.

The bat haunts us and symbolises the moon and the underworld, but also bridges "the supernatural distance between God and man."¹³ The work encouraged the audience to rethink their relationship with the spirits, as well as their position in the cycle of reincarnation. Furthermore, there existed several works that illustrated the space and time perception rooted in indigenous culture, such as *I'll Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become* (2016), a video made by Native American artist Sky Hopinka, who is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation. In this video, Hopinka created some poems about rebirth and reincarnation from the belief of the Ho-Chunk tribe, the texts are combined in the shape of an eagle. According to Diane Burns, an Anishinaabe (Lac Court Oreilles) and Chemehuevi artist, the eagles follow the music of powwows and fly high in the sky, where the songs of generations of tribal gatherings once echoed.¹⁴ Sometimes the texts floated like symbols, etching the shapes of mythological figures against the black sky.

The work visualized the routes of the people's cycle of re-incarnation, a spiritual territory located in the sky. Based on pre-modern cosmologies, Hernández and Hopinka's works presented alternative ways of living outside mod-

ern/colonial norms: human beings hold intimate relationships with natural and spiritual worlds, and will be reborn in the future by reincarnation. In this sense, the indigenous groups, animals, nature, spirits, and ancestors are no longer others, but the equal life forms that deserve respect and protection. Overall, following queers' rethinking and remaking of bodies, times and spaces, the exhibition brought together multiple modes of being, allowing the audience to embrace multiple Others who are repressed by the dominant structures – ranging from the sexualised others represented by queer, to the racialized and naturalized others – opened up multiple futures.

Facing the unequal problems concerning race, species, gender, and sexual orientation, *forms of the surrounding futures* imagined multiple futures and collectives where diverse life forms could co-exist equally. I think this ambitious and idealistic goal is realised in a certain degree through the form of the exhibition, but it also fails because of its limits as an exhibition format. Through the works, the exhibition proposed an idea of harmony, justice, and equality. When entering the exhibition halls of Röda Sten Konsthall and Göteborgs Konsthall, I was in a theatre-like setting, where the art works served as stages for me to experience different modes of existence and community relations.

Some of the works showed the present, which is full of oppression and violence, while others allowed the audience to travel to alternative time and space scenarios, to meet diverse beings, and form different patterns of relationships. I think the form of the exhibition, the constellation of the works selected, and the way they were installed across the various venues, fitted the queer approach to the biennial that Laia took – foregrounding a non-fixed, fluid, and open understanding of the bodies, times and spaces, and the relationship with our surroundings. The audience could have a very ephemeral, random, and flexible experience, while also forming multiple collectives, as their encounters with



Rodrigo Hernández, *Anche di notte* (2022) at Röda Sten Kontshall

artworks and other people could be very diverse, depending on what kind of artwork they met and when. The future pursued from a queer perspective has no fixed form, no rigid hierarchical structure, and its potential and openness are embedded in infinite uncertainty.

However, as an exhibition, *forms of the surrounding futures* seemed to lack the motivation to realise this proposal of harmony, justice and equality in reality. Laia quoted Muñoz, where the latter regards queerness as “a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.”¹⁵ In the exhibition, queerness acted like what Muñoz called “the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality,” guiding us, those trapped in the here and now, to imagine the there and then.¹⁶ However, also as Muñoz argues, “we may never touch queerness,” queerness does not refer to a specific form of existence and organisation that take us to the horizon. For example, what kind of political regimes could be used to address the problems of discrimination, oppression, and exploitation of the Other? What systems could help different life groups share resources more equally in society, education, healthcare, and technology? The exhibition failed to address these practical problems, which are exacerbated by its format. There is an undeniable barrier between exhibition and the real world, and it is difficult to evolve a political point of view raised in the art field into a significant social force. The barrier is akin to the one encountered in traditional Western theatre, where there is a deliberate and constructed difference between those on and off the stage. When we enter the exhibition hall as audiences, we are ready for new ideas and plays, and we are encouraged to freely envision possibilities about the collective and the future. However, these auras and glories may fade as we leave the theatre and return to real life.

¹ Modernity/coloniality has been marked by oppositions such as modernity/tradition, man/woman, and particularly, human/natural. According to María Lugones, “dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human is the central dichotomy of colonial modernity.” Lugones quoted in Madina Tlostanova (2017), “TRANSCENDING THE HUMAN/NON-HUMAN DIVIDE,” *Angelaki* 22, no 2, 25.

² Rosi Braidotti (2020), “‘We’ Are In This Together, But We Are Not One and the Same,” *Bioethical Inquiry* 17, 466.

³ From “scholarship holder yong xiang li,” *hkst*, accessed 19 March 2024, <https://www.hkst.de/en/maecenas/stipendiat-yong-xiang-li/>.

⁴ “I was interested in using Venus as a way to articulate a parallel state of being — a parallel state of near life or near death, a place much like the one that we know, and I use that super broadly, a body, a space, a feeling of atmosphere or ecology that is familiar to ours yet totally permeated with a violence somehow...a feeling of being queer or trans in the UK now.” From Quinn Harrelson, “Patrick Staff Discusses ‘On Venus’ at the Serpentine Galleries / London,” *Flash Art*, accessed 10 March 2024, <https://flash---art.com/2020/02/patrick-staff-discusses-on-venus-at-the-serpentine-galleries-london-%E2%80%A8/>.

⁵ From the exhibition guide of *forms of the surrounding futures*, (GIBCA, 2023), 122.

⁶ “like with people who fight the white heterosexual hegemony in everything else, but have a hard time realizing that they in many ways represent themselves according to it. I’m thinking about the fact that people often choose white walls and white sofas without second thought,

because it’s nice looking, it’s easy to get, it can’t go wrong, etc. in short, it is considered in ‘good taste’.” From Mycket, “Circumnavigating and Crushing,” *Theme Strategy, Bang*, no.2 (2013), 30.

⁷ Kath Browne (2006), “Challenging Queer Geographies,” *Antipode* 38, 886.

⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 99.

⁹ João Laia, GIBCA 2023, accessed 18 March 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/>. Laia says in the exhibition preface: forms of the surrounding futures adopt queer as an expanded perspective to challenge dominant narratives, replacing them by a broad rethinking and remaking of bodies, spaces and times.

¹⁰ From the exhibition guide *forms of the surrounding futures*, p. 189.

¹¹ “Andrea Maurer on Yabba by María Jerez,” *TQW Magazin*, accessed 18 March 2024, <https://tqw.at/en/was-man-wahrnimmt-nicht-weiss/>. Yabba demands that we stop clinging. Stop insisting on a separation between inside/outside, human/non-human, me/not me. Otherwise, we would stare at this “something” like amputee archaeologists, without moving an inch, without discovering anything. Yet we do move: even without words, we dig into the changeable, changing formations. Like strangers among strangers, we are familiar with one another other, we coexist, and in this meeting of an in-between we practice an unknown encounter without a name.

¹² Kath Browne (2006), “Challenging Queer Geographies,” *Antipode*, 889. “Queer can remain ever elusively transgressive not just by defying being named, but by doing what queer does—operating beyond powers and

controls that enforce normativity. As particular operations of power seek to normalise, categorise and fix the proper relations of objects, this makes 'it' difficult to define, categorise and most importantly control."

¹³ The original sentence is in Italian, from "Rodrigo Hernández – Anche di notte | P420, Bologna," ATP DIARY, accessed 18 March 2024, <https://atpdiary.com/rodrigo-hernandez-anche-di-notte-p420-bo/>

¹⁴ Max Ldvin, "I'll Remember You as You Were, not as What You'll Become," Screenslate, 8 February 2024, accessed 14 March 2024, <https://www.screenslate.com/articles/ill-remember-you-you-were-not-what-youll-become>.

¹⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 96.

¹⁶ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 37, "We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality."



ANGERED

CITY

Spread across four locations – Röda Sten Konsthall, Göteborgs Konsthall, Gothenburg City Library, and Hammarkullen konsthall – the exhibited artworks of the twelfth edition of Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA), on view September 12 through November 19, 2023, aimed to present plural narratives and their multiple futures.¹ In a video interview, curator João Laia argued that *forms of the surrounding future* encouraged an alliance of social formations and proposes different positions, narratives and agencies “that enact or materialise as an imaginary that resists – or even counteracts – the stable narrative of continuous or permanent crisis.”² With the title *forms of the surrounding future*, Laia urged visitors to read the current condition of permacrisis through various systems of knowledge and practice.³ Referring to events such as the Covid-19 global pandemic, the most recent wars, and the escalating financial crises, the term permacrisis “defines an atmosphere in which catastrophes accumulate with numbing regularity.”⁴ Laia invited visitors instead to read these challenging conditions as abrupt changes, transitions, or transformations, and to observe the future that “is already being invented by those on the margins,”⁵ where he hoped “the exhibition will be a celebration, not of the dire state we’re in, but of the different possibilities we still hold to move elsewhere.”⁶

Laia’s use of the notion of crisis can be traced back to feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti’s essay, “Yes, There Is No Crisis. Working Towards the Posthumanities” (2015), in which she reflects on the “widespread consensus in the Humanities scholarly community that it is inappropriate to speak of a ‘crisis’ of our field.”⁷ Braidotti puts forward a hypothesis of survival based on our capacity and willingness to undergo major processes of transformation in response to both technological advances and geo-political developments. She argues that “[w]e need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering terms for the changes and transformations currently on the way. [...] Animals, insects, plants and the environment, in fact the planet and the cosmos as a

whole, are called into play. This places a different burden of responsibility on our species, which is the primary cause for the mess.”⁸ Speaking of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, in August 2020 Braidotti wrote that “[t]he current crisis [...] enables subtler and more complex cartographies of powers and discourses at work in our societies, that is to say a more adequate rendition of where we are at.”⁹ Describing historical communities “who have come to represent the dialectical opposites and opponents” of the “dominant and normative vision of the human,” she situates them as being “the sexualized others (women, LGBTQ+); the racialized others (non-Europeans, Indigenous); and the naturalized others (animals, plants, the Earth).”¹⁰

Presenting his curatorial practice at Office for Contemporary Art Norway – OCA, in the build-up to the Biennial, Laia referred to this 2020 text while considering how these “historical communities” were forced to think otherwise in their proximity to crisis and consider other futures – non-speculative ones that exist already. Honouring these non-normative ways of being together is a key aspect of Laia’s curatorial approach to the Biennial, which is reflected in the selection of artists and communicated as “*forms of the surrounding futures* adopt[s] queer as an expanded perspective to challenge dominant narratives, [...] Enacting a collective and emancipatory position, [embracing] multiple agencies in a nonconforming affinity [...]”¹¹

Laia’s curatorial position was characterized by his overarching aim to escape the dominance of the eye in our experience of the exhibition – in acknowledgement that our engagement with the world relies on other senses too. He highlighted his curatorial method as immersive in its discursive and productive strategy, “not as a gesture opposed to criticality but as a more holistic, sensual, and bodily strategy to create discourse via exhibition making.”¹² His previous curatorial projects also focused on live artworks and a specificity impossible to access remotely.¹³



Iris Touliatou, *Local Libido* (2023) at Rôda Sten Kontshall



Iris Touliatou, *Local Libido* (2023) at Rôda Sten Kontshall

Although Laia situates his approach as a reaction to clinical and hyper-visual exhibitions in the wake of online circulation platforms in the early 2000s and a critique of our “attention economy,” the emphasis on works relying on physical presence is double-edged; the immersive sensorial nature and the idea of shared presence in space also provide a challenge for some bodies, neurodivergences, and societal needs. And despite these intentions, the exhibition included many works that relied on their visual presence. Only two engaged with the senses otherwise: Iris Touliatou’s *Local Libido*, and Prem Sahib’s audio work that “allow[ed] the force of the words to be embodied by the building and the viewer.”¹⁴ With the largest number of works represented in the biennial, Sahib’s sound and light installations were spread across several locations: on the façade and in the staircase of Röda Sten Konsthall, as well as a solo presentation at Hammarkullen Konsthall. All the spaces displaying his practice were transitional ones in the exhibition that, by their use, approached the institution as a social body – plausibly envisioned by both Laia and Sahib’s practices as expansions to the personification of architectures.

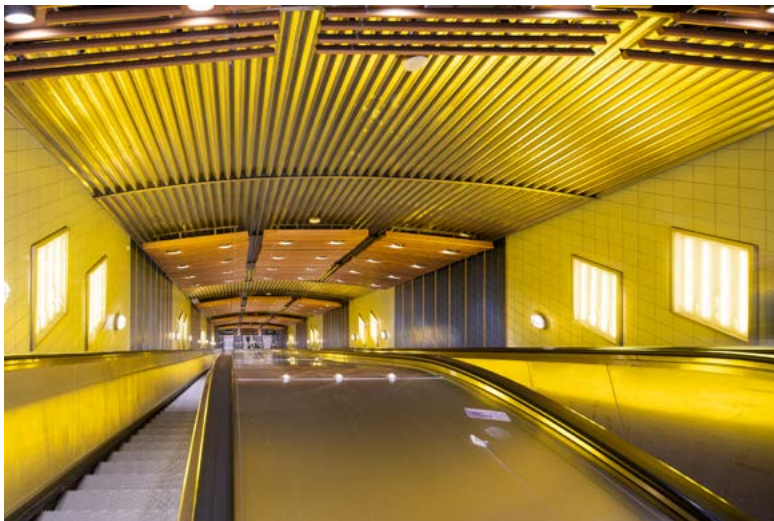
Installed on the metal staircase that forms the spine of Röda Sten Konsthall’s building, the sounds of Prem Sahib’s *Alleus* (2023) and *Man Dog* (2020/2023) were played through sound-exciter and amplifiers.¹⁵ The two works were intertwined and played alternately on different levels of the building so that *Alleus* would, for instance, play through the lower two levels, while *Man Dog* would play through the upper two, and vice versa. This broadcasting system effectively transformed the staircase into one large speaker set that would, depending on the sounds’ spectrum, significantly vibrate and resonate through the space, with visitors experiencing the works’ reverberation through their limbs.

In *Alleus*, Sahib appropriates a distinctly xenophobic speech in parliament, given by the British Home Secretary Suella Braverman in March 2023, which advocated refusing entry

to anyone seeking asylum in the UK when arriving through “unauthorised means” – specifically refugees crossing the English Channel in small boats.¹⁶ Parts of the speech are intelligible, while the rest of the recording is distorted and reversed by Sahib to create an abstract soundscape that refuses and “sends back”, mirroring the suggested anti-immigration policies. By doing so, *Alleus* becomes a sort of incantation in which words are the material. The work’s title is Braverman’s first name, Suella, spelled backwards – a similar pun “on the trope of online conspiracy theorists seeking hidden messages in the reversal of words and phrases, whilst implicitly suggestive of subterfuge, dishonesty and the exploitation of identity as a political tool.”¹⁷

Working with similar aspects of hatred and social violence, *Man Dog* is based on the recording of a homo-nationalist hate speech Sahib was subjected to in a gay chat room. Far removed from the fantasy of utopian queer spaces, in *Man Dog* a racially abusive man who admits he would rather speak to a dog than a human being – someone who might look like Sahib. With similar strategies as those used in *Alleus*, in *Man Dog* the recording is slowed down and warped, and the distortion as a method of working with harmful rhetoric is expanded. For the installation on Röda Sten Konsthall’s staircase, the man’s voice was removed – what remained from the original sound was the distorted abstraction that resembled a growl.

The decision to position the work in Röda Sten Konsthall’s staircase, a transient space where people move between galleries, relates to a longstanding practice – both Laia’s own and contemporary curatorial practices in general – of playing with the boundaries between institution and exhibition, exploring where the experience of an exhibition starts, and approaching the institution as a social body.¹⁸ The resulting total installation and the effect of immersion are referred to by Laia as a strategy of seduction – a way to avoid a linear understanding, an attempt to liberate exhibitions from a



Prem Sahib, *Liquid Gold* (2016/2023) at Hammarkullen Konsthall



Prem Sahib, *Liquid Gold* (2016/2023) at Hammarkullen Konsthall

coded regime that demands prior knowledge, and to create openings for different kinds of audience. Broadening the exhibition beyond the framework of the institution, Sahib's light installation *Liquid Gold* (2016/2023) was also part of the biennial and located at Hammarkullen Konsthall, Gothenburg's only underground tram stop.¹⁹

At Hammarkullen Konsthall, Sahib's installation of yellow light in the advertisement cases along the escalators and in the large vitrine that constitutes the Konsthall's exhibition space, took over the environment. With an interest in how our surroundings impact the way we interact or act in a space – assumptions of modes of behaviour – Sahib often works with materials used in the design of public space that, in turn, socialise us.²⁰ The artist is also interested in how an artwork survives outside their dedicated contexts and the privilege of working in an active public space that isn't structured through specifics of looking, prioritising movement rather than sight as the dominant sense.²¹ Sahib's artistic practice can be seen as an ongoing analysis of the public and private spaces and architectures that shape our sense of self and our relationship to others, senses of belonging, alienation, and confinement. As Huw Lemmey describes, "[...] for certain relationships to exist, certain spaces have to be made available for them. For many subcultures, those spaces are hard-fought for, slippery and disintegrating, and loaded."²²

What type of relationships are to exist in the transitional spaces of Röda Sten Konsthall's staircase and the escalator of Hammarkullen Konsthall? In the absence of exhibition architecture,²³ the works appeared and disappeared in the locations they were superimposed on – this juxtaposition to the usual state of the spaces structured the Biennial's exhibitions. In the same way in which non-speculative futures are already present for the "racialized, sexualized, and naturalized others," this lack of scenographic strategies could be positively interpreted as the recognition of such spaces being available for present futures as they are. In this invest-

ment, "recognizing a future that is already existing requires prioritizing embodied forms of knowledge."²⁴ In *forms of the surrounding futures*, presentation and reception intersected and shifted across architecture, artworks, and audience – all accorded an active role in becoming part of "artistically conceived social arenas."²⁵ As per usual, such arenas didn't take long to also reveal the perceptual and gender biases that affect how art and the world in general are being judged. With a minimalism reflecting the viewer's gaze more than anything else, *Liquid Gold's* juxtaposition with Hammarkullen Konsthall was particularly successful in revealing, in the gaze of the observers, exotic and xenophobic perceptions about working classes, decentralised, and queer lives.²⁶

In the aftermath of the biennial, the live spaces that materialised in the meeting of architecture, artworks, and audience, live on in the memories of their experience. As for any other experience, which bodies of memory one will choose to engage with is an exercise in recognising the future.



Prem Sahib, *Man Dog* (2020/2023) and *Alleus* (2023) at Röda Sten Kontshall

¹ GIBCA 2023, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/thematic/>, last accessed 8 February 2024.

² "Interview with João Laia, Curator GIBCA 2023," 17 October 2023, Vimeo video, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://vimeo.com/875130628>.

³ "Permacrisis" is the 2022 Word of the Year, "a term that perfectly embodies the dizzying sense of lurching from one unprecedented event to another [...]." Collins defines it as "an extended period of instability and insecurity [...]" David Shariatmadari, "A year of 'permacrisis'," Collins English Dictionary Blog, 1 November 2022, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://blog.collinsdictionary.com/language-lovers/a-year-of-permacrisis/>.

⁴ Natasha Marie Llorens, "Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art," Artforum, December 2023, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://www.artforum.com/events/natasha-marie-llorens-goteborg-international-biennial-for-contemporary-art-various-venues-2023-544081>.

⁵ Natasha Marie Llorens, "Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art".

⁶ Nora Arrhenius Hagdahl interview with João Laia, "Borderline Chaotic," Kunstkritikk, May 2023, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://kunstkritikk.com/borderline-chaotic/>.

⁷ Rosi Braidotti, "Yes, There Is No Crisis. Working Towards the Posthumanities," DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies 2, no. 1-2 (2015): 9-20, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://doi.org/10.11116/jdivgendstud.2.1-2.0009>.

⁸ Rosi Braidotti, "Yes, There Is

No Crisis. Working Towards the Posthumanities".

⁹ Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova in Rosi Braidotti, "'We' Are In This Together, But We Are Not One and the Same," Bioethical Inquiry 17 (2020): 465-469, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-020-10017-8>.

¹⁰ Rosi Braidotti, "'We' Are In This Together, But We Are Not One and the Same".

¹¹ GIBCA 2023, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/thematic/>.

¹² "Public Talk with João Laia, Curator of the 12th Göteborg Biennial," Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA), 6 June 2023, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://oca.no/programme/public-talk-with-joao-laia-curator-of-the-12th-goteborg-biennial>.

¹³ "Public Talk with João Laia, Curator of the 12th Göteborg Biennial." Presented curated projects included: Hybridize or Disappear, Paços do Concelho, Câmara Municipal do Porto and Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado (2015), Lisbon, Portugal; 10000 anos depois entre Vénus e Marte [10000 years later between Venus and Mars], Galeria Municipal do Porto (2018), Porto, Portugal; Ahogarse en un mar de datos/Drowning In a Sea of Data, La Casa Encendida (2019), Madrid, Spain; Vanishing Point – Works from the António Cachola Collection, Galeria Municipal de Lisboa (2019), Lisbon, Portugal; ARS22 – Living encounters, Kiasma_Finnish National Gallery (2022), Helsinki, Finland. Links last accessed 8 February 2024.

¹⁴ Iris Touliatou, "Local Libido," GIBCA 2023, last accessed February 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/artists/iris-touliatou/>.

¹⁵ en/gibca/gibca2023/artists/iris-touliatou/. Olfactory composition produced in collaboration with Göteborg-based perfumers Doftarkivet; HVAC scent diffusion system. Commissioned by Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art. Supported by Iaspis/Konstnärsnämnden. Joonas Pulkkinen, 'Liike tulevaisuuksiemme ja kehojemme välillä [Movement between our futures and our bodies]', Mustekala Kulttuurilehti, 7 November 2023, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://mustekala.info/liike-tulevaisuuksiemme-ja-kehojemme-valilla/>. "The work is not so much an object to be examined, but an odorless smell spreading through the premises, which conceptually blurs the spaces between private and public. The conceptual work raises questions when it deals with the economic, material and sexual exchange and circulation between experiences and circumstances. As an object, it mostly looks like an electrical cabinet in both spaces, which actually adds to the confusion".

¹⁶ The sound element of *Man Dog* was adapted for the Biennial to be played through the sound exciters on the stairs. Previously, the work was only transmitted through a sound-exciter on the reverse of an obsidian mirror sculpture, exhibited in the staircase's top landing floor at Röda Sten Konsthall.

¹⁷ Suella Braverman is an overtly far-right conservative politician, known for having advocated for the withdrawal of the UK from the European Convention on Human Rights and called for reforms to the United Nations Convention on Refugees. The Illegal Migration Bill she promotes in the speech used by Prem Sahib in Alleus was passed in July of 2023 and is currently an Act under UK law, despite enormous protest, warnings from UN bodies, and multiple legal challenges due to contravention of

international law.

¹⁸ Prem Sahib, "The Life Cycle of a Flea," Phillida Reid, 2023, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://www.phillidareid.com/exhibitions/the-life-cycle-of-a-flea>. Press release for exhibition at Phillida Reid Gallery, 10-16 Grape Street, 6 October – 11 November 2023.

¹⁹ "Hybridize or Disappear," Mousse Magazine, 2015, last accessed February 2024, <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/hybridize-or-disappear-porto/>. Exploring where the experience of an exhibition starts can, for example, be traced to João Laia's curatorial practice in the exhibition at Paços do Concelho, Câmara Municipal do Porto and Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, Lisbon (2015). Other examples from Laia's curatorial practice are listed in footnote 13.

²⁰ Located in Gothenburg's only underground tram stop in the suburb of Angered, Hammarkullen Konsthall is run by Kulturhuset Blå Stället – built in 1979 as the first cultural centre in a suburb in Sweden – in consultation with a local artistic council.

²¹ Sahib's interest in materials used in the design of public space that, in turn, socialise us has been stated in "Inscribing Desire – Prem Sahib interviewed by Paul Carey-Kent," ArtMonthly, no. 433 (February 2020), last accessed 8 February 2024, and in the artist's statement published in 'Prem Sahib fyller hållplats i Hammarkullen med ljus', GIBCA 2023's magazine-catalogue interview: 14: "I work with many different media, and am interested in the structures we live in and which shape our sense of self and our relationship with others – it can be about physical or environment-related structures such as architecture, or more social ones. I work with a lot of different materials,

including those common in public design, things that can be perceived as functional, cold and impersonal, but also with archival objects, found objects, moving image, sound and light. I use them to reflect on the reciprocal relationship between how we create or organize the material world and how it in turn creates or socializes us. [...] ." [Note: non-official translation from Swedish to English by the author]. <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Ascds%3AUS%3A8a9709f0-f439-339e-8c157925dcb1731c&viewer%21megaVerb=group-discover>.

²¹ "Prem Sahib in Conversation with George Chamoun," Hammarkullen Konsthall, Vimeo video, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://vimeo.com/883214147>.

²² "Prem Sahib – Words by Huw Lemmey, Web Special", CURA, no. 28 (Summer 2018). Huw Lemmey is author of the essay series utopian drivels and co-host of the podcast Bad Gays.

²³ The absence of exhibition architecture was discussed by João Laia in an interview with Nora Arrhenius Hagdahl in "Borderline Chaotic." "In the past, I've sometimes used heavy-handed scenographic strategies, but that's not the case this time. We're not going to build any walls, for example. This time, I felt like the works in themselves are very performative. I'm not doing much; I'm just choreographing and the works stage other possibilities than the white cube."

²⁴ Natasha Marie Llorens, "Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art."

²⁵ James Voorhies cited in Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger, "New Institutionalism Revisited," OnCurating, no. 21 (January 2014), last accessed 8 February 2024,

<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-21-reader/new-institutionalism-revisited.html>. Cited in Joonas Pulkkinen, "Liike tulevaisuuksiemme ja kehojemme välillä [Movement between our futures and our bodies]."

²⁶ Frans Josef Petersson, "Luxury, Calm, and Queer Voluptuousness – The 12th Gothenburg Biennial is splendidly self-absorbed," Kunstkritikk, 22 September 2023, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://kunstkritikk.com/luxury-calm-and-queer-voluptuousness/>. "Also, since I find art with a saviour complex to be in bad taste, I am quite skeptical about the British artist Prem Sahib's Liquid Gold (2016/2023) displayed at Hammarkullen's tram stop. The work consists of yellow light radiating from a glass vitrine and up the tarnished escalator. Are we here supposed to watch art lift the wretched out of their misery? Or worse, savour the exotic working-class milieu and the supposedly different people who live there?"

Valerie Kyeyune Backström, "Competent and accurate – but the art sucks," Expressen, 5 November 2023, <https://www.expressen.se/kultur/konst/duktigt-och-korrekt-men-konsten-skitful/>. 'Prem Sahib in Conversation with George Chamoun', Hammarkullen Konsthall, 10 November 2023, last accessed 8 February 2024, <https://vimeo.com/883214147>. "It's interesting that you mention the sensitivity, or kind of the locality of this space, because I read a few reviews about GIBCA, and there were specifically two reviews that I thought at least were kind of tone-death when it came to this particular work in Angered. I was quite shocked actually, it was very... in a way – I will say it – it felt a bit racist and kind of clear that the ones who wrote the reviews had not even gotten into what the work actually was about. [...] It was this very strange kind of... xenophobic [...], as if there were no queer people in the suburbs, and kind of complaining.

[...] They were also talking about the abstract nature of the work wondering if the people that lived there would be able to understand it, and kind of in a way of – 'oh, is it abstract in order to not stir up negative emotions from the people who live there?' – which I see as actually very racist."



Yarema Malashchuk & Roman Khimei, *Dedicated to the Youth of the World II* (2019)
at Röda Sten Kontshall

I have engaged virtually with the twelfth edition of the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA). I took time to read, watch, and listen to the resource material made available online about the 2023 biennial whose title was *forms of the surrounding futures*, curated by João Laia. The segment of the biennial that was of most interest to me was the film by Yarema Malashchuk and Roman Khimei, titled *Dedicated to the Youth of the World II* (2019) which focuses on alienation of youth and reflects their social, cultural, political, and economic context.

Roman Khimei and Yarema Malashchuk are a Ukrainian artist collaboration residing in the capital city, Kyiv. Their works reflect changes in Ukrainian society from the Maidan Revolution of 2014 to the current war, through visual arts and cinema. The 2014 war in Ukraine began early in the year, as an armed conflict broke out in eastern Ukraine as a result of Russia's annexation of Crimea. The year before, state security forces violently put down protesters in the capital city of Kyiv, Ukraine, opposing the decision of President Viktor Yanukovich to turn down an agreement for deeper economic integration with the EU.¹

In *Hyperallergic* magazine, Malashchuk describes *Dedicated to the Youth of the World II* as meshing “footage of a rave party in Kyiv, followed by scenes of the morning after reflecting ‘the escape from a war-torn country after the first Russian invasion, the aftermath of a party’”.²

Youth of the World is a series of videos conceived as a multi-part movie that offers glimpses into Ukraine's unique but relatable youth culture. Khimei and Malashchuk have been featuring youth groups in their video works across Ukraine since 2017.³ The pair skilfully capture the unease that young people experience both in Ukraine and around the world as they negotiate the past and come to terms with historical tragedies, while looking toward the future through the point of view of the actors. Feelings of alienation, caused by issues

such as homelessness, financial, and other precarity, create uncertainty, restlessness and worry, and are common indicators of one of many contemporary crises.

The 2020 World Youth Report declares that there are 1.2 billion young people worldwide aged 15 to 24, accounting for 16 per cent of the global population.⁴ I find myself in the age bracket of Africa's nearly 420 million people aged between 15 and 35. Of this demographic, one-third are unemployed, another third are vulnerably employed in jobs with harsh conditions, low wages and uncertainty, and only one in six are in waged employment. Young women make up over half of the unemployed youth and are finding it harder than ever to close the gender gap.⁵

With 65% of the population under the age of 25, Zambia has a very high percentage of young people; one reason is the fertility rate, which is among the world's highest, with almost six children per woman. Young people in Zambia are capable of contributing significantly in politics, innovation, and sustainable development, and every year Zambia joins the world in celebrating International Youth Day. However, the majority of young people are still struggling with their careers. In this context, I would argue that young people are the actors that surround the future; the next generation will be the driving force of society, they can transform issues into opportunities and solutions. Young people are crucial in promoting advancement, change, and the creation of new spaces for development in the future. However, currently they are typically a socially marginalized group.

Emil Øversveen in his journal refers to alienation as subjective experiences of estrangement, powerlessness, isolation and detachment, as well as to general processes of social fragmentation and disintegration.⁶ In her 1987 article “Alienation: The Modern Condition”, Nicole Cauvin defines alienation as a condition in which people are dominated by forces of their own creation, forces which confront them like



Yarema Malashchuk & Roman Khimei, *Dedicated to the Youth of the World II* (2019) at Rôda Sten Kontshall

alien powers. This condition creates a feeling of non-involvement and estrangement from one's society and one's culture. Such estrangement renders people incapable of controlling their own destiny and unable to identifying with a common culture, both of which make them incapable of having any significant effect on the events of the world through their own actions.⁷ With the arrival of technology and social media, humans have become an object rather than the subject of events, with individuals pictured as isolated, torn away from their nature, and baffled by the circumstances of modernity in these depictions of society.

In an interview, GIBCA curator João Laia posits that “the exhibition proposes an alliance of different positions, narratives, which enact or materialises in the now to deal with the continuous crisis caused by the covid19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.” João suggests “looking at the *now* as the moment of transformation. To imagine other ways of being in the world, the exhibition had a design performance program, a hybrid model that flirts with the idea of a party that brings people with different identities together to celebrate the gathering of difference and possibilities to imagine other ways of being in the world.”⁸

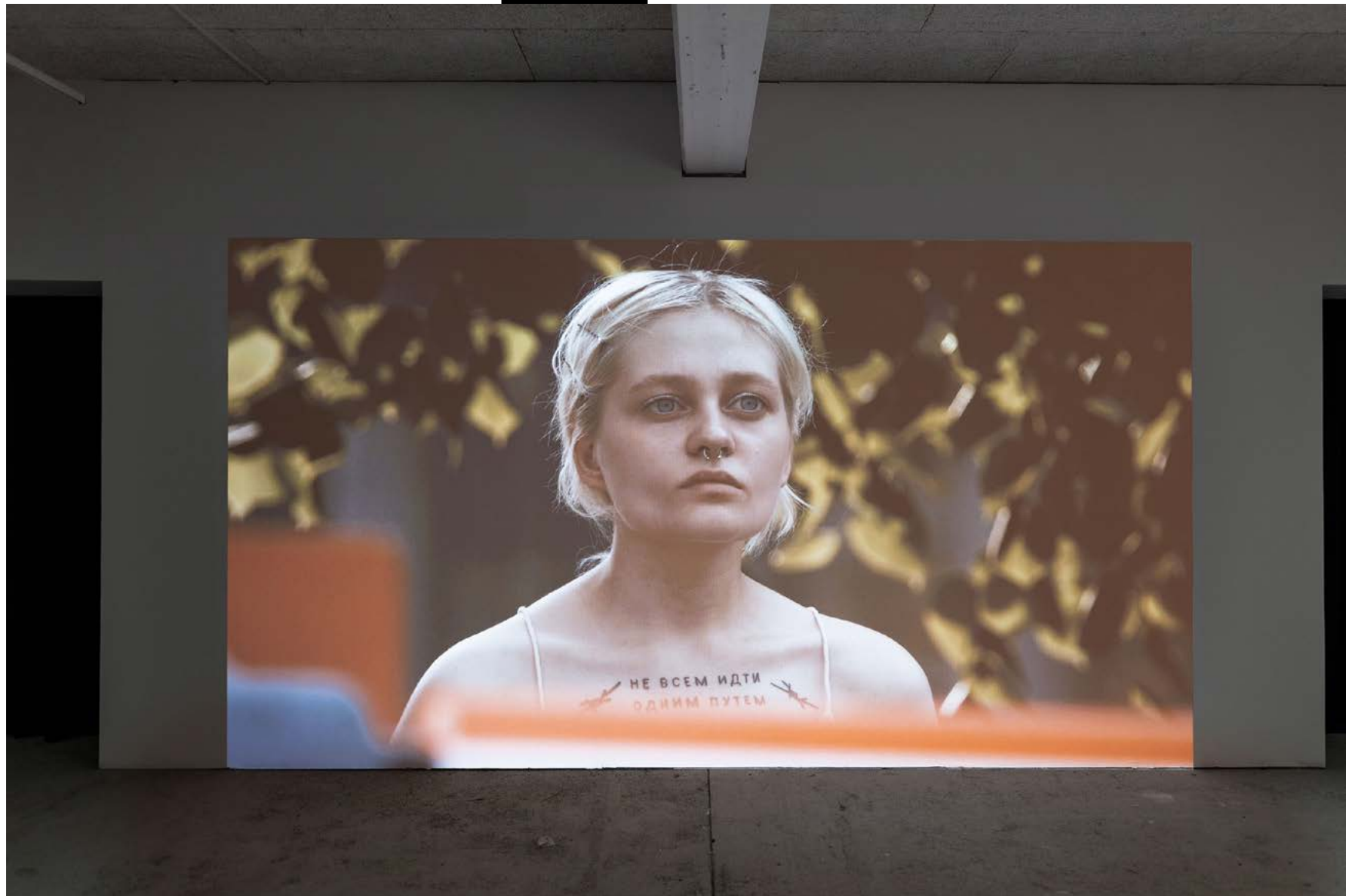
In contemporary culture, philosophers have emphasized the importance of the present, which alludes to the decadence and inversion of all rules, values, and representations. The characteristics of contemporary society are seen as illusions that conceal the true self with a busy lifestyle that constantly forces people to hurry and hasten. Modernity is experienced by individuals as restlessness, self-preoccupation, and enslavement to the moment, others' opinions and fashion as a display of time's transient and fleeting character.

Yarema Malashchuk and Roman Khimei's approach towards young people in their film *Dedicated to the Youth of the World II* highlights how they are often alienated, by portraying individuals that seem detached from their reality

and lost in thought. Malashchuk and Khimei's video shows that contemporary alienation is characterized by a sense of disconnection from one's social group, both during and after parties. The artwork features very powerful and depressing facial expressions and the feelings these pictures convey are touching. The young people shown appear to be in unison, but they also appear to be very cut off from their surroundings. They seem depressed and ill-prepared to embrace the present moment and its out-dated realities.

In today's generation, many young people are struggling with identity crises and mental health issues. Researcher of philosophy Jon Stewart refers to alienation as a modern crisis where people are believed to feel a sense of alienation from their government, economic system, workplace, religion, community, and even family and themselves.⁹ Since the rise of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism in the middle of the twentieth century, alienation has been a central topic in public discourse and academia, where it is used extensively in numerous fields, from psychology and sociology, to religion and philosophy. In essence, existentialism in philosophy and literature emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice. Based on the view that humans define their own meaning in life and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe, it focuses on the question of human existence and the feeling that there is no purpose or explanation at its core. It holds that, as there is no God or any other transcendent force, the only way to counter this nothingness and to find meaning in life is by embracing existence.¹⁰

Since its independence from colonial rule in 1964, Zambia still has to contend with colonial legacies that are vividly present in its governance systems. Policies that fulfil a neo-colonial agenda are prioritised more than those that encourage civic engagements, which have consequently affected young people who are usually far from the seats of power. The government provides limited space for young



Yarema Malashchuk & Roman Khimei,
Dedicated to the Youth of the World II (2019) at Rôda Sten Kontshall

people to be at the centre of decision-making processes and solve challenges affecting the country and the wider continent. Educational curricula also provide weak solutions for these challenges, making young people less employable as a result of skill/job mismatches. As a system, colonialism aims to keep the oppressed permanently reliant on the colonizer, rather than fostering critical and autonomous thought. Political philosopher Frantz Fanon had the opinion that black self-consciousness cannot be considered free in these circumstances, contrary to what European existentialists often believe.¹¹

Building on Karl Marx's theory of alienation, Asher Horowitz argues that alienation is the objective structure of experience and activity in capitalist society, without which it cannot exist.¹² Capitalist society, in its very essence, requires that people be placed into such a structure and, even better, that they come to believe and accept that it is natural and just. In addition, antiracist feminist activist, public educator, and independent curator Françoise Vergès posits that, "Capitalism produces rubbish that pollutes, invades and colonises. Neither green capitalism nor feminist capitalism will be capable of responding to these current threats because both want to believe that neoliberalism will bring diversity and inclusiveness that will reduce racism, sexism and exploitation."¹³ Contemporary capitalist institutions and processes play a major role in the alienation of young people. They are subjected to systems that rarely seem to be working in their best interests.

Translating this to my own context, young people in Zambia's visual arts sector are also marginalized when it comes to equitable opportunities. The structures that exist in government are mirrored in the development of the visual arts sector, which are hindered by senior artists who have a tendency to hold on to positions of power, rarely collaborating with younger artists. This has led to a generational gulf between the two groups. The majority of young individuals

who possess talent and skill work alone, because they believe they have no place in the sector.

As a young and female-identifying person in the field of visual arts, I struggle with being taken seriously and to have my work recognised. Regardless of how much work I put in, I am still looked at as a young female and I only slowly begin to be recognised. In post-colonial Zambia, young people find it challenging to break through because of the perception that society has of young people. Little to no respect is accorded to young professionals and leadership positions are mostly trusted and left to older ones. This side-lining is often what leads young people to feel alienated and constantly searching for a sense of belonging in a continuously changing society. As a curator and young person, I believe it is my role to help young and upcoming artists realise their potential and make them feel included in the creative field. Young people play an important role in shaping our society. They are the ones who offer crucial insights into what might and might not be effective for a specific group. As a result, adults, peers, and even policy decisions can be influenced by their actions and ideas. They are able to contribute new ideas and fresh perspectives to promote social and economic advancement. Their obligation is to make a positive impact on society for all. Young people have made significant contributions to societal transformation in a variety of disciplines, including politics, education, and community service. Youth are crucial in determining the direction of society, and can create a brighter tomorrow for everyone by leveraging their activities. Roman Khimei and Yarema Malashchuk's film offers an opportunity to the audience to delve into the harsh realities that young people are faced with, at the same time bringing out the power that they possess in shaping society and bringing about change.

João Laia's diverse and inclusive approach towards the exhibition encourages cooperation and helps to think towards one common goal – thinking about progressive ways of

looking at the now for a more meaningful future. Khimei and Malashchuk's work compliments the theme of the bien-nial, portraying young people as key players in this quest to "produce a thought and mythology responsive to our times" and "to imagine multiple configurations for tomorrow" to create a way of being in the world today with all its crises.¹⁴

¹ "War in Ukraine", Global Conflict Tracker, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>.

² "New Residency Gives Ukrainian Artists a Platform in LA", Hyperallergic, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://hyperallergic.com/792777/new-residency-gives-ukrainian-artists-a-platform-in-los-angeles/>.

³ "Youth of the World", Mackenzie Art, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://mackenzie.art/exhibition/youth-of-the-world/>.

⁴ "World Youth Report", United Nations, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2020/07/2020-World-Youth-Report-FULL-FINAL.pdf>.

⁵ "Youth", United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/youth/overview>.

⁶ Emil Øversveen, "Capitalism and alienation: Towards a Marxist theory of alienation for the 21st century", *European Journal of Social Theory* 25, no. 3 (2021), 440-457, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310211021579>.

⁷ Nicole Cauvin "Alienation: The Modern Condition", *Sacred Heart University Review* 7, no. 1, Article 3 (1987), last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/shureview/vol7/iss1/3>.

⁸ "Interview with João Laia, Curator GIBCA 2023", October 2023, last accessed 30 April 2024, Vimeo video, <https://vimeo.com/875130628>

⁹ "Modern Alienation, Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy", Cambridge Blog, last accessed 30 April

2024, <https://www.cambridgeblog.org/2021/09/modern-alienation-hegel-and-nineteenth-century-philosophy/>.

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism", Marxists, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>.

¹¹ "Race and the Coloniality of Being", JECS, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.jecsonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Race-and-the-Coloniality-of-Being.pdf>.

¹² "Marx's Theory of Alienation", Asher Horowitz, last accessed 30 April 2024, https://www.yorku.ca/horowitz/courses/lectures/35_marx_alienation.html.

¹³ "Another Imagination, Decolonial and Feminist: An Interview with Françoise Vergès", *positions politics*, last accessed 30 April 2024, <https://positionspolitics.org/another-imagination-decolonial-and-feminist-an-interview-with-francoise-verges/>.

¹⁴ Curatorial statement by João Laia, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/thematic/> last accessed 13 May 2024.



Gudalupe Maravilla,
Disease Thrower #7 (2019)
at Göteborgs Konsthall

**Installation Views: A Reflection on
Curatorial Engagement and
Guadalupe Maravilla's Work in
Images and Live**

Marny Garcia Mommertz

In March 2022, I visited the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City (USA), where Guadalupe Maravilla was showing a solo exhibition entitled *Luz y fuerza* (light and power). I had missed the sound bath sessions that were part of the Salvadorian artist's exhibition and wanted to make sure to see his work in person. I had heard much about it and was intrigued by the artist centring his own health as well as migration story from Central to North America. As I tried finding the show in the huge museum, I approached one of the security people for directions. She, like myself, was a Black woman. As soon as she started explaining which way to go, I noticed a familiar sounding Spanish accent that prompted me to switch from English to Spanish. Following her giving me directions, I asked her if she had seen the show herself. She had, and shared that Maravilla had insisted on hosting sound baths for security personnel of the museum only. She loved the work. After listening to her reflections for a while, my impression was that beyond her having roots in some part of the Spanish-speaking Americas, like Maravilla and myself, the woman felt seen in her role as a member of museum staff.

Having worked in different artistic contexts as a cultural producer, I have often observed how security personnel are not explicitly invited to engage with the exhibited art. In most cases they are hired to protect the institution by protecting the works, that are often valued at levels that are multiples of their annual salaries. I have never seen or heard of them being invited to experience a piece of art just for the sake of their personal enjoyment and experience. Therefore, I interpreted Maravilla's gesture, described to me by the woman, as a nod of solidarity towards her and her colleagues.

Fast forward to September 2023, I found myself in Brazil at the 35th São Paulo Biennale entitled *coreografias do impossível* (choreographies of the impossible), which was curated by Diane Lima, Grada Kilomba, Hélio Menezes and Manuel Borja-Villel. Maravilla's sculptures were once again on dis-

play and accompanied by sound bath sessions. This time I was able to attend one of the early morning iterations. However, I was struck by the lack of diversity among the audience, which was at odds with Maravilla's intention to centre marginalized communities in his activations. The placement of the four or so sculptures in an open space allowed for a communal experience but seemed overshadowed by the audience's socioeconomic and racial make-up, highlighting the persisting problem of elitism within contemporary art environments.

Based on what I had observed throughout the first days of the biennial, I was surprised to see few Black people in the audience. I knew that Maravilla's sound bath activation practice centred refugees, and also cancer survivors, like himself. It had been one of the main reasons why I was fascinated by his work. Yet, I remember that when I saw that the majority of the audience settling in on yoga mats appeared to be white and upper middle class, racing to be at the centre of the installation, my first feeling was one of discomfort. The few other non-white people that I could identify were somehow pushed to the margins. This included one of the biennial's curators, with whom I found myself exchanging knowing glances.

The sound bath itself was an engaging experience. What I found more intriguing, particularly in the context of this essay, is the space in which the works were shown. At MoMA, the six installations were placed on their own in a medium-sized gallery space with huge floor-to-ceiling windows opening the space up towards the street. In São Paulo, however, they were situated in the middle of an open-plan space, ideal for a group of around 40 people to attend the activations, and surrounded by other works. Although the sculptures appeared a little lost in comparison to how they were installed at MoMA, they were not isolated. Rather, they were positioned in a circular way that clearly delineated their space. In addition, the fact that they were surrounded by,



Installation view of the gallery "Guadalupe Maravilla:
Luz y Fuerza" in the exhibition "Collection 1970s-Present",
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

and on the same floor as, works of artists such as The Living and The Dead Ensemble, M'Barek Bouhchichi, Malinche, Sammy Baloji and Sonia Gomes, extended the biennial's discursive approach into the space and fostered an ongoing dialogue between the practices and works.

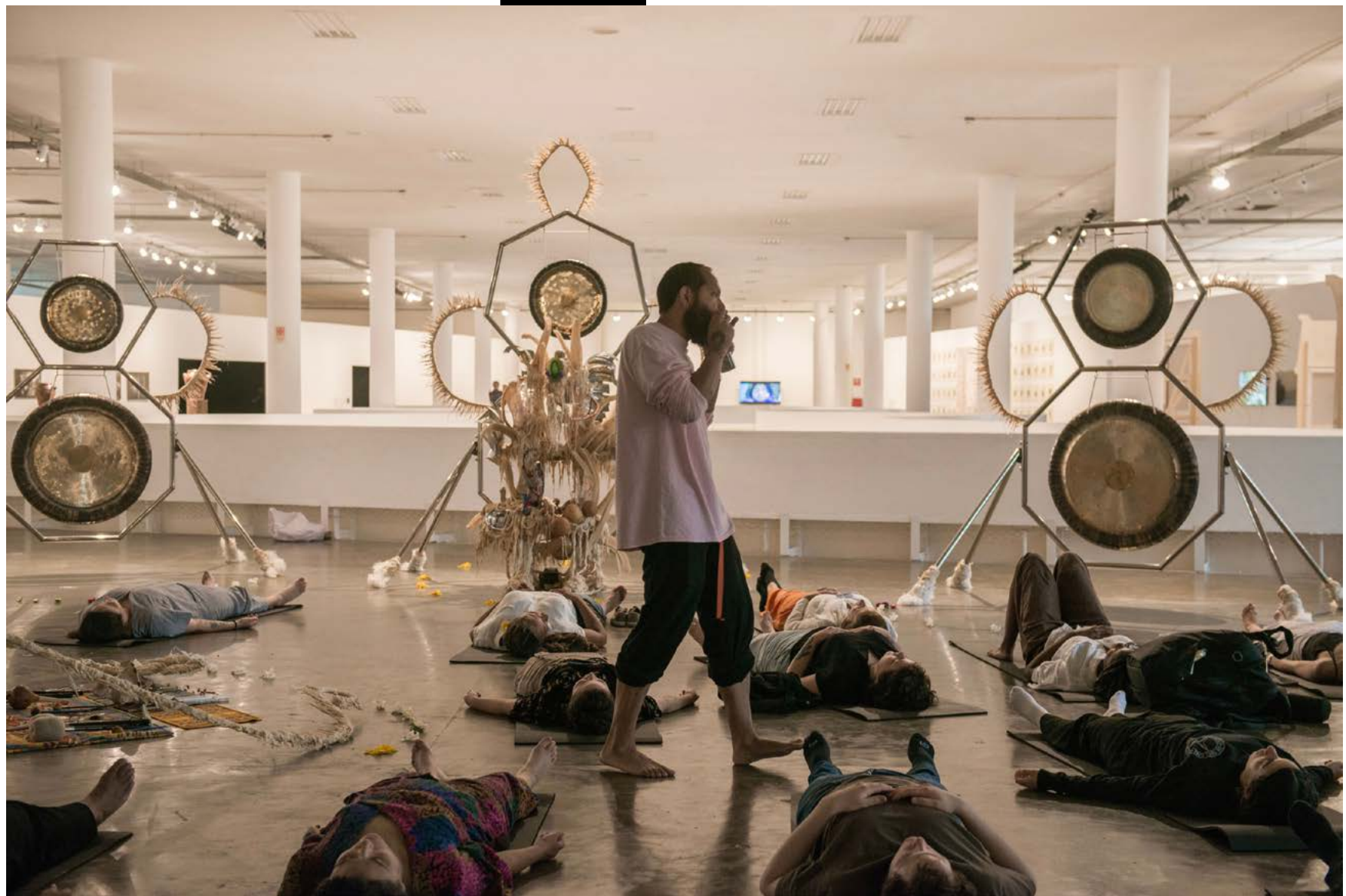
Next to my two live encounters with Maravilla's work, I have engaged with the artist's practice a third time in the context of the twelfth edition of Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA) 2023 in Sweden, and through visual documentation only. Although there is undoubtedly a difference between experiencing a work versus seeing it on a 14-inch screen in the comfort of a co-working space or my home, I have learned to value this experience just as much. I currently work as managing editor for a contemporary art magazine and one of its most popular formats are so-called "Installation Views". Contrary to other pieces, they are very image heavy, mainly featuring close-ups and wide shots of exhibitions. I believe the reason why they are so popular, simply put, is that in reality most exhibitions are only visited by a relatively small pool of people who are either locals, or who have access to the resources needed – money, time, energy – to visit exhibitions in different parts of the world. Installation views offer people from different contexts the opportunity to see shows within their possible means. They offer important clues about the concept, the composition, the aesthetics and execution of artists' works, as well as their display by the hosting institution and curator(s).

Seeing images of Maravilla's work *Disease Thrower #7* (2019) in the installation view shots kindly provided by GIBCA 2023, I was not surprised when I found out online that in the context of GIBCA 2023, the work did not feature sound baths as part of the public program. The lack of community, which I had made out to be key components of the previous two times I engaged with his work, was evident.

Based on the images, only one of the artist's installations was positioned in an open space, surrounded by works of other artists which it didn't seem to be in dialogue with. The installation shot showed it seemingly lost and singled out, an impression specifically fostered through the lighting by way of a single spotlight that almost created a visual barrier. Seeing these images made me feel sad and I could not shake a sense of isolation, unsure whether I was over-identifying with the work or whether I just didn't feel addressed by the mediation of the exhibition and the way the work had been photographed.

Before and in the process of writing this piece on Maravilla's work, I read and re-read curator João Laia's concept essay, accessible on the official biennial website. I kept returning to it but didn't seem to be able make sense of it. After reading it for the umpteenth time, I felt exhaustion, alongside my sadness about the images. A sense of heaviness and a brain fog crept into my head, so dense that it made me want to close my laptop in resignation and not write this very essay that is supposed to find an interesting angle addressing the curatorial approach of the entire exhibition. These feelings are familiar to me; usually, they are symptoms of fatigue, likely to arise when I need to engage with positions that I encounter and sense to be white, uncritical, and ultimately problematic.

To find an opening into the intricacies of the curatorial concept behind the exhibition and its alignment with Maravilla's work, I turned to AI, hoping it would offer clarity. I copied the essay and pasted it into ChatGPT, instructing it to break down the essential points made by the author. I wanted them first explained to me as if I was a teenager and then an academic. The following sentence this exercise generated, explained to an academic, helped me most: "Central to Laia's discourse is the notion of embracing diverse perspectives and narratives as a means of transcending the limitations of mainstream thought." I now understand that Laia attempted



Sound bath ceremony for the installation of
Guadalupe Maravilla during the 35th São Paulo Biennial.

to move out of what is referred to as “permacrisis” by bringing the future into the present and diversifying present perspectives. GIBCA 2023 is Laia’s example of this approach.

Applying Laia’s approach to the images of Maravilla’s work at the exhibition, I can’t help but think that the work looks like a foreign object that is not supposed to be there. It appears to me that it was swallowed by what I can only describe as a dialogue that attempts to superficially touch upon important questions but which would benefit from greater complexities to sustain an engaging and critical discourse. Maravilla’s practice is unique, especially because of the way the artist chooses his audiences for certain moments – such as the sound bath sessions – and to a certain extent makes art for and, perhaps more importantly, *with* them. I would argue that this is what makes his work stand out and special. The fact that Laia aims to propose innovative approaches but seemingly falls short in showcasing Maravilla’s unique practice raises concerns of cultural appropriation, resulting in an exhibition of “what could be” without delving into the deeper complexities of the artists’ work.

But whose responsibility is it that the piece seems lost without activation or community engagement? Is it really just the curator’s? Essentially, the disconnect between Maravilla’s practice and its presentation at GIBCA 2023 raises questions about care, on the part of the artist as well as the curator and the institution. I contemplated the implications of selling artwork focused on communal healing to institutions that may prioritize exhibition over activation. While Maravilla’s sincerity with his sound bath sessions suggested a great level of authenticity, the logistical challenges of maintaining such engagements across exhibitions underscored the complexities of an artist’s relationships to art institutions.

Disease Thrower #7 presented in GIBCA 2023 was on loan from the Henie Onstad Art Center (HOK), where Maravilla had a solo exhibition in 2022. HOK had acquired the

sculpture in this context. At first, it seemed odd to me that an artist who puts healing, and more importantly communal healing, at the centre of their practice had sold their work to an institution that has the right to loan it to another without taking the activations into account. I had experienced the sincerity and authenticity of his practice during the sound bath in São Paulo, where I had laid on a mat at the margins of the group, yet very close to one of the sculptures. When I thanked his assistant, she asked me whether the sound bath had been too loud, given that my head was so close to the gong of the sculpture. The woman who worked at MoMA as a security guard had conveyed a similar sense of authenticity and sincerity that she had experienced in her encounter with Maravilla’s work. This, in contrast to my observations at GIBCA 2023, made me wonder whether the artistic emphasis on communal healing through performance can be interpreted as exactly that, a “performance” for a given institution, a performance for an audience, as well as an homage to the difficult history the artist has lived. Based on my lived experiences, I have decided to discard the hypothesis that the artist’s intention is to use the sound baths to perform authenticity. This, however, does not necessarily apply to how curators might frame the works in their shows, or how audiences perceive them.

The point that I am trying to make tangible is the naturally nuanced interplay between the artist’s intentions, the manifestations of his practice, the curator’s framing, and audiences’ perceptions. Maravilla’s artistic practice, which I understand to be marked by its emphasis on communal healing and inclusivity, presents a unique challenge in navigating the realm of authenticity – especially in so-called Western, white-dominated contemporary art spaces. The location of GIBCA and the curator of this edition (Laia is Portuguese, and I perceive to be white) underscores this problematic and suggests tokenism. Apart from the exception of a few indigenous artists and a few artists from the so-called Global South, this curatorial project is positioned

in a Western European context. While the artist's sincerity in incorporating sound baths and other communal engagements into their work is palpable, the manifestation of this practice within institutional spaces such as GIBCA 2023 is subject to curatorial interpretation. Is the artwork complete without sound baths? It can be assumed that for Laia, it is at least complete enough for Maravilla's installation to be presented as one of 25 positions within the biennial.

Audience perceptions further complicate the equation. The way in which viewers interact with and interpret Maravilla's work is influenced by a myriad of factors, including their own backgrounds, experiences, and expectations. While some may embrace the artist's emphasis on communal healing and view it as a genuine expression of solidarity and inclusivity, others may perceive it as performative or tokenistic, particularly if it is separated from meaningful engagement with marginalized communities. This discrepancy in audience perceptions exemplifies the nuanced nature of authenticity, where the line between genuine intention and perceived authenticity can be blurry. What also needs to be acknowledged is that despite all the intentions Maravilla may or may not have, it is a reality that artists experience difficulties when trying to live off of their works and there is a financial necessity linked to selling them. Furthermore, Maravilla simply cannot be present in each of spaces where his work is shown in order to add that layer of authenticity by performing sound baths. I would argue that this would even be inauthentic itself, because as an evolving artist he is responsible for making his art, rather than ensuring his works are being used beyond being exhibited.

I still admire Maravilla's work and practice, however, seeing how the work was positioned by Laia in the GIBCA 2023 space took away some of its power. I think that this power could have been maintained by inviting other sound bath practitioners to engage with Maravilla's work or by having it in dialogue with the surrounding pieces, rather than aesthet-

ically isolating it. At least in the publicly available resources on www.gibca.se, I could find no information in the public program that may suggesting otherwise. I understand the care for the mise-en-scène of an artwork to not only involve paying attention to the artist's intentions but also to include considerations of audience experience and perceptions. The responsibility lies not solely with the artist or the curator but in the collaborative effort to uphold the integrity of artistic practice and its communal significance. With or without sound bath, a close reading of the ways in which Maravilla's works are shown, offer a way in to detangle profound critiques on some of the contemporary art world's dynamics.

Note from the author:
In the writing of specific parts of this essay,
I have instructed the open-source resource
ChatGTP to offer suggestions and feedback.



Gudalupe Maravilla,
Disease Thrower #7 (2019)
at Göteborgs Konsthall



Adam Christensen,
How is Your World? (2023)
at Gothenburg City Library

The City Library at Götaplatsen, situated in the heart of Gothenburg, is a prime example of a public library in a Scandinavian context. Opened in 1967 and designed in a typical modernist architectural style, the library transcends its traditional role of a mere repository of books and knowledge in many ways.¹ The library's commitment to equality and accessibility is evident in its various facilities, including accessible toilets, a vast children's play area, and multiple open-access study spaces – all embodiments of a societal model that emphasises the importance of education and an environment where everyone can thrive. The particularity of the social code of the library as a public space in this context was confirmed by an incident in November 2023, when staff accidentally forgot to lock the door when they left the building on a Friday night. During the night and following morning, members of the public entered the library and engaged with the space as they usually would. Within a few hours, 446 people entered the library – the sensor at the door showed the exact number – and 245 books were borrowed.² Other than that, nothing sensational happened.

From 16 September until 27 October 2023, the library was one of the venues for the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA). Since 2001, this event has served as a platform for contemporary artists showcasing their work and engaging with the public. The twelfth edition of GIBCA, titled *forms of the surrounding futures*, curated by João Laia, aimed to challenge hegemonic conceptions of the social by adopting notions of queerness as an expanded perspective. This means not only looking at queer practices in a speculative sense but also, as the biennial's title suggests, looking at what is already present to empower, and distribute “narratives which celebrate our collective ability to imagine and rehearse worlds to come.”³

The City Library is one of the recurring venues of GIBCA. During editions when the library was not used as a site, it was part of GIBCA Extended, a network of cultural institu-

tions in the region that contributes to the biennial's public programme. The library is essential for GIBCA in reaching a broad audience and audiences who have yet to visit the biennial. As a public space, the library has unique conditions, such as the convention for libraries to be quiet places, which impact on how art is exhibited and how visitors engage with the pieces on display. During my visit to GIBCA, I encountered two artworks exhibited in the library, *How is Your World?* (2023) by Adam Christensen and *Dear Friend* (2019) by Agnė Jokšė, which highlighted the challenges and complexities of working with art in public spaces, albeit in different ways. Christensen's work was specially made for the library, a site suggested to the artist by the curator. Jokšė's work was first exhibited in 2019 at the JCDecaux Prize exhibition at the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius.

Upon entering the library, I immediately noticed Adam Christensen's large-scale textile drapes hanging to my right in the atrium. Christensen is a London-based multidisciplinary artist who primarily works with textiles, music, and installation – blurring the boundaries between everyday life and fiction.⁴ According to the biennial's website, *How is Your World?* interweaves biographical anecdotes with theatrical moments – resulting in a mix of textile works infused with love, melancholy, and loss. The large collective bodies of brightly-coloured textiles blended well with the building's 1960s architecture. Its communal and cosy nature is precisely what one would expect to find in a public library. At first glance, I thought it was not even part of the biennial and had been hanging there since the library opened.

The setting reminded me of the courtyard in my upper-secondary high school in a suburb of Stockholm; built in the same Scandinavian modernist style, with internal brick walls and an atrium. We used to have exhibitions of what we had made for needlework in school along the balconies. The design and use of glass-covered courtyards in schools and modern libraries share a common goal: to create wel-

coming, adaptable, multi-functional environments that promote sociability and foster community. These public-private spaces provide students and faculty with a comfortable and inspiring place to learn and underline the importance of human connection and collaboration in educational settings.

As I came up the stairs to the first balcony, I saw Christensen's textile figures at a closer distance and noticed how my perception of the work changed. The textile drapes were at eye-level and, through the partly transparent fabric, I could see bookshelves and fellow library visitors on the other side of the atrium. I could see that the artwork was well-suited for the context and probably would be appreciated by many. Still, for me, the framing of the artwork as queer was challenging to grasp as it evoked so much of the aesthetics of common public spaces that I grew up with. I associate queer perspectives and practices in a contemporary art context with disruption, not necessarily disturbing or inappropriate but provoking, in the sense that it alters one's perspectives or opens up new ways of seeing. Although I know that the notion of queer as a disruption is not the main focus of Laia's curatorial project, I still expected to encounter something a little more unexpected – for lack of a better word. Christensen's fabric bodies floating over the atrium, for me, perfectly embodied the ideology that the library was founded upon. Could something be queer when it so seamlessly blended with the surroundings?

Curious to learn more about the relationship between the library and the biennial and to gain an insight into the curatorial process from the library's perspective, I reached out to Martin Holmquist, Coordinator of Programming at the City Library since 2018. From Martin, I learned that the curator had instantly fallen in love with the atrium when visiting the library and suggested it to Christensen as the site for displaying the mix of textile works that became *How is Your World?*. Before the opening, the production team had spent significant time installing the textile drapes, trying

out hanging the various pieces at different height levels, and ensuring that the piece was aligned with the context of the library. Both audience and critics had received the work well. According to Martin, many library visitors had, unusually, commented on the artwork too, praising it as a good fit for the location. Oscar Svanelid, writing for *Göteborgs-Posten*, was particularly impressed by it and proclaimed it as “without a doubt, his favourite” of the entire biennial.⁵ Birgitta Rubin at the major Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, was equally enthusiastic and wrote, “They appear to be made for the site. Effectively hung at different levels, they are perceived as materialised novel characters who slipped out of the books.”⁶

Months after the biennial ended, Christensen's textile drapes were still on display, and the library enquired whether they could buy them from the artist. But since the library is part of the City Council, it must follow a strict protocol for more significant investments (artworks included), which requires a formal commissioning process announced to the public in advance. The request to buy the artwork had therefore been turned down by the authorities. In a further attempt to keep them, the library asked the Gothenburg Museum of Art if they could provide the means to buy the textile drapes. Unfortunately, they received another negative reply, and the artwork was planned to be taken down by the end of February 2024.⁷

Whereas Christensen's works were difficult to miss, it took me more time to find Agnė Jokšė's work, as the only sign was relatively small and there was no indication in which direction to go. Passing through several sections of books, I entered an open-access study area located along the glass facade which covers the whole library building. Jokšė's work was installed as a screen in the corner, in front of these large-scale windows. I picked up the headphones and sat down. Jokšė is a Lithuanian artist and writer, working between film, written pieces, and performances⁸ and *Dear Friend* (2019) is a video letter about



Adam Christensen, *How is Your World?* (2023) at Gothenburg City Library

a broken friendship. In the film, Jokšė reads a text from her mobile and walks around in what appears to be an empty art gallery. She talks about a relationship that seems to be over and reflects on non-romantic friendships with other women, and what it meant to have a friend when she came out as gay. It was a lovely October day, and the sun shone brightly through the glass facade and dazzled me as I tried to watch the film. Although I enjoyed listening to the artist's voice, the idea of trying to watch the 25-minute-long video with the sun in my eyes was less appealing. Deciding that I probably would get more out of watching it online, I left.

After visiting Göteborgs Konsthall, another venue across the square, I picked up the catalogue and discovered that another work by Jokšė was exhibited on the library's second floor. As I did not want to miss out on any work, I returned to the library. Upon encountering the screen in the second-floor study area, I found it switched off. The space had been appropriated by a group of teenagers who had rearranged the furniture, creating a living-room atmosphere. After unsuccessfully attempting to turn the screen on, I sought assistance from a library staff member who also failed to activate the display. I was about to leave when I discovered the unplugged cord on the floor, apparently removed by one of the youngsters charging their phone. I later learned that this screen showed the same work as I had already encountered on the first floor.

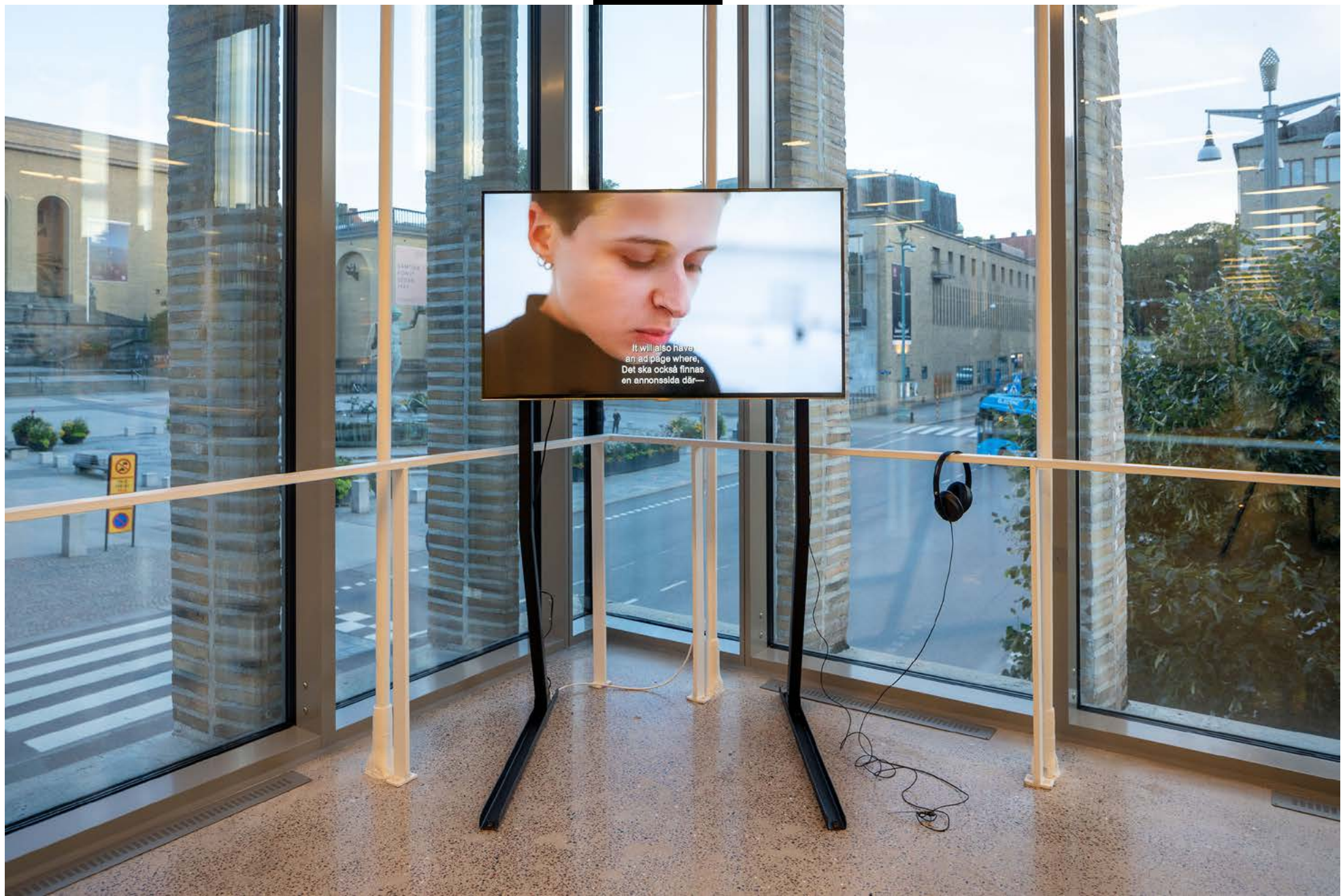
I mentioned the problems with the screen to Martin, who confirmed that the work's malfunction had occurred before, likely due to visitors unplugging it to charge their own devices. He also confirmed that, as was the case with *How is Your World?*, the curator suggested the placement for Jokšė's work, consciously placing the screens in a corner pointing towards Göteborgs Konsthall to connect the two venues. By positioning the screens in front of the large windows, the idea of the curator was to create an impres-

sion that the film was presented right in the heart of the city, integrating the library in the busy urban landscape.

Dear Friend was first displayed in the exhibition *Not at Anyone's Request* (2019), curated by Monika Kalinauskaitė and Adomas Narkevičius. Knowing Monika as a fellow student, I was able to gain first-hand information on how the work was originally exhibited. I learned that Jokšė initially imagined *Dear Friend* as a filmed performance piece – rather than the video letter it became – with the work being presented in the same space as it was filmed in, creating a sense of continuity and immersion. This preferred display enhanced a sense of connection with the work for the viewer, experiencing the environment in which the video was created, while simultaneously watching the footage. The artist, the curators and the exhibition architect, Linas Lapinskas, wanted to use something other than headphones, as they would detract from the visual elements of the work. After some persuasion, the art institution agreed to invest in a sound shower – a targeted audio delivery system that directs sound waves to a specific area – allowing visitors to hear the audio clearly without disturbing others.

I think one of the most exciting aspects of the original *Dear Friend* presentation was the potential for two modes of presentation and for viewers to engage with the artwork closely or maintain a more passive, observational role. A bench was placed beside the video installation, inviting visitors to sit down and listen to the audio while watching the piece. Alternatively, viewers could choose to stand, allowing them to observe the physical space, sound shower and video simultaneously creating a multi-sensory and interactive encounter taking in footage, sound and space. This invited visitors to reflect on the relationship between the artwork and its environment and their role in the experience.

While Christensen's work was specially made for the atrium in the library, a site suggested by Laia, the work of Jokšė



Agnė Jokšė, *Dear Friend* (2019) at Gothenburg City Library

that I encountered during my biennale visit. I searched for Swedish newspaper pieces that mentioned Jokšė's work at the biennial, but in vain. I did, however, find extensive material regarding the work in the Teacher's Guide for the Biennale. The theme of coming out as gay and the theme of platonic friendships – often neglected for the theme of heteronormative romantic love – is relevant to a young audience from 15 years old, according to the teacher's guide. The education material made me reflect on who Jokšė's work was intended for in the context of the biennale. By placing the work in the corner of the library in an area where it could be perceived as being in the way of regular activities, the cynical answer to this question would be no one.

The second thing I noticed when I entered the library for my biennial visit, was two queer teenagers holding hands at the top of the amphitheatre, located to the left. I would hazard a guess that they never made it to the other end of the library to watch Jokšė's video letter. What if a friendly biennial mediator had greeted them as they entered the library and offered tablets where the audiences could see the work more privately than on a television screen displayed in public? What if there had been stickers at the amphitheatre with a QR code to manage access to the video letter about queer friendship on their own devices? Or, to keep it simple, what if a big sign with a QR code had been positioned right at the entrance? In Jokšė's video, the artist reads from her phone. In that sense, framing and positioning the work like this would have built on the initial artistic intention to create a sense of immersion in the surroundings; as was initially intended when the work had been displayed in the same space as where it was filmed. The sockets in the library could then be used for what they were intended for – charging its visitors' devices and keeping them there longer than the battery life of their phones.

was initially made for a different context. Jokšė's work as displayed during GIBCA, demanded more of the visitor as it was situated in a less accessible part of the library, and was more challenging to find unless you knew where to look. Although the video letter is relatively short, the difficulty of finding it and the challenging placement made it much less likely for visitors to spontaneously experience the work as a whole. At the biennale, the sound in Jokšė's work was confined to headphones which, in my view, created a distinct hierarchy between Jokšė's and Christensen's work. Drawing from my experience, working with an organization supporting women and non-binary sound artists and composers, I have encountered numerous proposals for headphone installations in open spaces, such as foyers of public spaces.⁹ In this context, Jokšė's piece is relegated to the periphery while Christensen's work takes centre stage.

In light of Laia's proposition of queer as building on something already in our surroundings, one could argue that by highlighting the commonality and diversity of the library as catering and caring for us as a society, he succeeded in his curatorial project through the positioning of Christensen's work. However, the contrast between his work in the middle of the atrium and the placement of Jokšė's work in the corner, could not be more telling. The placement of Christensen's work in the public and communal atrium suggests that contemporary art can indeed be accessible and enjoyed by all. Jokšė's work is presented in line with the curatorial intentions in the official biennial's photographic documentation, with the screen showing a close-up of Jokšė's face and the bustling Götaplatsen square in the background. However, during my visit to GIBCA I encountered something entirely different. The unplugged cord itself became a metaphor for the disconnect in the curatorial approach to Jokšė's work.

Balancing artistic intent, public access, curatorial framing, and the practicalities of an active library setting, proves to be a delicate task – as evidenced by the unintended hierarchy



Agnė Jokšė, *Dear Friend* (2019) on view in the exhibition JCDecaux Prize 2019:
Not at Anyone's Request at the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC),
 Vilnius, Lithuania, September–December 2019.

¹ Higab, last accessed 18 March 2024, <https://www.higab.se/vara-hus/stadsbiblioteket/>.

² "Det hände lördagen då biblioteket glömt att låsa dörren," Dagens Nyheter, 23 December 2023, last accessed March 2024, <https://www.dn.se/sverige/det-hande-lordagen-da-biblioteket-glomt-att-lasa-dorren/>.

³ GIBCA 2023, last accessed 18 March 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/thematic/>.

⁴ GIBCA 2023, last accessed 18 March 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/artists/adam-christensen-dk/>.

⁵ "Recension: Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA)," Göteborgs-Posten, 16 September 2016, last accessed 18 March 2024, <https://www.gp.se/kultur/konst/recension-goteborg-international-biennial-for-contemporary-art-gibca.d5331fa1-6e60-4b49-9aa7-3c73063b4ecf>. My translation.

⁶ "Göteborgsbiennalen har överdrivna anspråk men fångslande konst," Dagens Nyheter, 23 September 2023, last accessed 18 March 2024, <https://www.dn.se/kultur/goteborgsbiennalen-har-overdrivna-ansprak-men-fangslande-konst/>. My translation.

⁷ When I was about to submit this text, I learned that the library had just renewed the rental contract for another six months, meaning the artwork will be on display until August 2024. Instagram post, last accessed 18 March 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/C4qDG03JpOb/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==.

⁸ GIBCA 2023, last accessed 18 March 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/gibca2023/artists/agne-jokse/>.

⁹ Since 2018, I have worked as a producer and executive leader (from 2021) at Konstmusiksystrar (Sisters in Contemporary Music), an organisation supporting composers and sound artists who define themselves as women, non-binary or transgender people. We regularly organise Open Calls for new musical works and performing opportunities, often collaborating with institutions such as concert halls.



Rasmus Myrup,
Outside Salon des Refusés (2023)
at Röda Sten Kontshall

It had been an abnormally short winter, but the wind still ravaged on, unrelentingly. The station at Hammarkullen offered much welcome shelter and the descent down the escalator felt like the approach towards a sin parlour in a slick, dystopian cyberpunk crime film. This slow incline down wrapped them in some sort of baptismal light, equipping them with a forcefield strong enough to withstand whatever form of social exchange awaited the biennial's opening evening – a talking point that could take things in any direction depending on the person's reaction to 'have you been bathed in the yellow?' They were a pair of college friends who had recently reconnected since moving to this part of town around the same time. Neither was the slightest bit interested in the other, they had just latched on and forgot to question this abstract coupling which, when boredom became too overwhelming, occasionally inched towards intimacy. If they had actually liked each other in that way, they would probably have met up more often than once every few months.

When they got to the bottom of the escalator, Miles blessed Ellis with his left hand and quipped, 'you have now been cleansed, lol.' Ellis raised both hands to the heavens as a thank you and burst out laughing. The wash of the golden shower from Prem Sahib's *Liquid Gold* marked the transition to a new phase of their evening, as if passing through a decontamination zone. For those heading up the escalator for the umpteenth time this month, the novelty had worn off.

They sprinted towards the tram, urgency propelling them forward like rats racing across the platform, knowing the next one was not due for another thirty minutes because of delays. The overly embellished mediation text adjacent to the Hammarkullen Konsthall would be the only conversation topic they'd have at their disposal.

'Where'd you get that shirt?' asked Ellis, catching his breath as the tram pulled out of the station.

'I've had it for a while, but never really had an excuse to wear it. Is it too extra?'

'I mean, it's a party, it looks cute on you,' Ellis

replied, though 'cute' came out a bit condescending.

'What's the look you're going for? Seductive socialite?'

As if trying to make up for being a little too cutting in tone, Ellis offered Miles a cigarette.

'Where's V these days?' Miles thumbed through his phone to find their last exchange, which to his surprise took place two years prior.

'She didn't get an invitation apparently, which is so weird. Check your spam, sis.'

'How did you wrangle yours?' prodded Miles.

'Oh, an old college friend works for the local newspaper now and she offered me hers; apparently she's deathly ill this week so she asked me to report back.'

When they finally emerged from the tram into the cool, amber-washed evening, the square seemed unusually calm. Being on time this evening was apparently a social faux pas. Strolling across the plaza towards a growing synth beat gradually pulsing out from inside the building as they approached, it became clear that the emptiness of the square was deceptive, as the Konsthall was brimming with an eager audience.

Donning an iridescent black fabric suit that covered her from head to toe, a woman with a steel tablet guarded the entrance and ensured all invitations were scanned, double-checking and marking off names on the list with a stylus. Her manner was more than intimidating. Miles suddenly worried that they had skipped some important event etiquette outlined in the e-invite, falling subject to a feeling similar to as if he was, for some random reason, smuggling drugs through airport security and totally blanked on it. Neither of them had scrutinised the invitation's small print – whoever has time for that?

The second they were ushered in, they lost sight of each other in the crowd. Ellis decided to patiently wait in the corner, close to a flatscreen emitting a hypnotic wash, gazing vacantly to avoid social contact with another lonely stranger. Miles always kept him waiting in these kinds of situations.

‘He’d no doubt been held captive by a fellow scene-kid by the cloakroom or in a vacant bathroom stall,’ Ellis thought to himself.

A dozen or so stoic attendees in the corridor were part of a much larger cohort that moved as if a single flock, marking a certain social barometric whenever present. He continued to hover patiently with zipped up lips.

‘Don’t go down there for a little while. That guy you ghosted recently is floating around there, Jay something.’

‘It’s Jayce.’

Ellis nodded nervously, but before he was able to open his mouth and explain that it was in fact the other way around – that he was the one being ghosted – Jayce jumped in with an enthusiastic hug, startling them both, triggering a flutter in Ellis’s heartbeat and a rapid-fire game of semiotics ensued. The excitement on Jayce’s behalf felt a little detached from reality, so before long they both signed off from the conversation and migrated to the source of the music, a space at the back of the Konsthall bathed in a colourful fluorescent glow, where Osias Yanov’s installation *Orphan Dance* had attracted the majority of this evening’s visitors. Zipping between the audience and their allocated charging stations, a cohort of robotic vacuums moved to a soundtrack of soothing 90s Balearic beats, inciting a nostalgia for escapes to warmer climes that were affordable once.

They drained the first welcome drink within seconds, knocking down their glasses, confidently hinting at a refill that was offered begrudgingly. ‘An uncouth move,’ Ellis admitted to himself, knowing it would only take two drinks to get him drunk. As he scanned the room, he noticed the noise level was notably reserved, as if everyone had been given a decibel restriction to adhere to. This also highlighted a sense of reverence, somewhat similar to viewing images of seminal queer nightlife spaces now confined to documentation in a vitrine – their potency diluted through translation to an art space.

One of the robotic vacuum cleaners suddenly made a beeline for the door but was quickly returned to normal

operations, placed on the carpeted floor by a vigilant exhibition invigilator, as if it were an unruly toddler trying to wriggle from under a watchful eye. The invigilator appeared to be well and truly over the choreography of babysitting these feral machines. She glanced at the culprit in a manner that signalled, ‘next time, you’re getting my boot, Roomba.’ Beeping continuously as it lay by the charging station, as if rendering the incident, it recalibrated itself and mapped out an alternative escape route. It would have to make its way through a humming crowd and over latex fetish-wear armoury laid out on the floor like an as-of-yet undiscovered species of jellyfish. In the corner of the room opposite, another robot spun furiously, cleaning the same spot to the point that you could – almost – eat your dinner off it. Seemingly having taken responsibility for only this spot, its vigorous efforts highlighting the rest of the mess it was not attending to. This enhanced polish evoked the uneasy feeling in Ellis that there was maybe something beyond the Konsthall’s walls that needed protecting against, a contamination, an entanglement, or a cross-pollination that was gotten rid of when crossing the threshold.

‘I wonder how long those things would last outside, in the autumn weather,’ Ellis said.

‘I’d love to see them all collectively rise up and roll out to freedom.’

‘Yeah, I feel like they’re just cleaning around us to keep busy, as if they’re claiming their territory.’

Shifting from a fugue state to an actively inquisitive one, Ellis started mapping out connection points across the room, as if he were a detective drafting a crime network with notes and threads that linked relationships in a conspiratorial fashion. He could only gather the odd snippet of conversation, what sounded to him like people trying to trace their points of connection. He envisioned a mastermind power at play having crowdsourced this group with carefully curated intent. Was this a reunion of pals disguised as public programming? He imagined that all of the attendees mingling in the room were trying to figure

out their common denominator or shared mission, like an elaborate game of Konsthall Cluedo meets Guess Who?, with hints of performative happenings either just missed or imminent, but keeping their curiosity afloat. Miles, ever the social butterfly, flitted from one conversation to the next as if possessed by the spirit of a Roomba.

Scanning the space one last time, he couldn't help but think about a pile of lost invitations stuck in the limbo of a neglected mailroom, the result of a mix up, or someone having had their press lists crossed. Did the correct e-invites go straight to spam folders? It wasn't just V who was missing from tonight's party given the apparent inclusiveness of the invitations he received. Where was the rest of his motley crew, the queer future revolutionists? The future is queer, question mark. 'Queer because colours, latex, and neon? I guess,' he thought. A mental rolodex of names scrolled before his eyes, flashing names of all those engaged in various types of protest, provocation, and other acts of queer dissent on the regular, perhaps omitted due to jarring aesthetic sensibilities or for being too overt in their causes.

On their way out, heading to the next venue on their list, Ellis pointed something out to Miles, giggling to himself as the literalness of technological entanglement played out in front of them. Grappling with a loose HDMI cable on the floor, a Roomba fought for its life. In his head, Ellis tried to formulate something along the lines of 'a robot, a mushroom and a dog walk into a museum.' There was a joke in there somewhere...

The two of them burst out of the Konsthall and raced across the square, scanning Götaplatsen for one of the last few available taxis, to no avail. With an ominous cloud formation moving in, the pair quickly decided to seek shelter in the library, which was a relatively quiet venue this evening according to the group chat they were both part of. They could regroup there and would hopefully have a better chance of catching a ride online. They hurried over, impatiently disregarding the red light at the pedestrian crossing

and across the main street to the library where Ellis was granted a welcome reprieve. Draping from high above a communal reading space to the entrance's right, Adam Christensen's installation *How is Your World?* conveyed a sense of longing that Ellis had always found hard to articulate in his most intimate relationships. He almost felt the need to reach out across the balcony to the characters floating in front of him. Overtly flaunting their lustfulness, these were fabulous, and a touch of jealousy washed over him. Looking over at Miles who was busy with ordering them a car, Ellis was on the verge of admitting either something secretive or embarrassing, or both.

Miles finally received a notice about a car being two minutes away, but before he could open the app, a wave of messages filled his phone's screen. The driver spammed him impatiently, asking for details on their ETA, so they gathered themselves as if the place were aflame. Once they got in the car, Ellis became notably monosyllabic, and wasn't forthcoming enough to explain that he was trying to revisit the textile works they just left behind. Well, this and the nagging thought that each visit to an international biennial required a sim-card, access to a car sharing app and... what next? Most of the mediation could be redirected to circumnavigating an unknown cityscape, Ellis thought.

The journey seemed to take three times as long as the app stated it ought to.

Once they approached the evening's festal nerve centre, they were left in a nearby parking lot, their driver claiming this was as far as he could take them. Miles couldn't help but feel it had something to do with him muttering 'girl, read the room' quite audibly, in response to an invasive question about 'meeting their girlfriends there or something' from the driver.

Arriving at Röda Sten, where the buzzing queue of attendees blended into the black skyline, felt like a return to the clubbing days that both had reluctantly sacrificed. Miles occasionally allowed himself the odd party once every few months as a reward for finally working through a productive

streak, but Ellis was doing his best to cut everything out after a particularly heavy experience the previous summer. Ellis couldn't help but think that the violent wind ravaging around them was setting some sort of foreboding tone for the rest of the evening – it was almost comically cinematic.

He was easily overstimulated by social events of this scale, so they quickly went up to the most expansive space on the second floor to take the edge off the claustrophobia, at least in theory. Emerging from behind a cloud of smoke and a deflating veil of silver fabric, persona non grata Trace languidly approached. Trace was like Jayce's chaotic evil twin from one of the darkest corners of the omniverse. Neither Miles nor Ellis had seen him since an explosive argument around the time they all graduated together. He appeared to float over, as if the smoke was not actually coming from the installation.

'Not much to take home,' said Trace.

'Right, I mean it's not the optimal circumstances for engagement tonight,' said Miles, scanning the crowd for an out.

'Yeah, I'm still waiting on my last acquisition to clear customs. The room is ready, just need the work to get here now, you know.'

'Oh, you mean "take home" literally? Yeah, that's why we're gathered here, to add to our collections; I know, mine's stagnated as of late,' Miles added dismissively.

'That little scene kid really put the tan in satanic,' Ellis thought to himself. Fresh off a gay cruise, according to a continual stream of stories online and paid for by who knows.

'Syphilis of the seas, honey', Miles whispered in Ellis' ear.

Trace still owed Ellis a grand from a regrettable period a few years prior, but giddily assured him that it was 'a few days away' each time they crossed paths. 'If only that textile blob was sentient enough to seek out nourishment in the form of demonic twinks,' he thought.

'At least he had the grace to exit the conversation swiftly. That was clearly unsolicited,' Ellis commented.

'That felt like a horror movie, just with the gory parts cut out,' quipped Miles.

'He's clearly rejuvenated with an overdose of vitamin D, judging by the ear-to-ear grin,' retorted Ellis in an uncharacteristically callous tone.

All Ellis wanted by now was to dive into Maria Jerez's *Yabba*, a textile entity that expanded and contracted in the centre of the room, occasionally emitting soft clouds of smoke. He imagined the comfort of being engulfed, melting into a form, all sounds muffled into a calming hum. The work invited you to dive into it, being swallowed by its entrails, fingering all parts of you, but no, the threshold that limited entanglement was very much in place.

'There's this thing about touring in clubbing and queer practices that removes all vitality, or that fun nastiness, at least when it's presented for all,' contemplated Miles.

As if his intention to plunge into the work had been detected, they were being ushered downstairs already. On the way down to the ground floor, it was as if the crowd was being herded into the bar in anticipation of a welcome speech or performative intervention. The woman in charge of guest list passes at the Konsthall appeared to psychically address Ellis with a stern look and a tap on the shoulder, ushering him to the right as opposed to the left where he was headed. How was she working at two venues on the same evening? Ellis started to notice something kick in and an internal mistrust was now at play. Ellis could tell by the tone in her voice that he had been suspected of *gaucherie*, despite the dimly lit space masking the details of his outfit, one actually quite understated. He only ever wore black to these events, like the majority.

Downstairs, a considerable hub had formed by the bar, gently accompanied by the white noise of an impending storm outside, the water poised to breach its confines and halt proceedings abruptly. It was barely audible when you approached the edges of the room, but otherwise a steady techno forced everyone into a state of near psychic com-

munication, unable to hold a clear conversation. A glass of red wine smashing against the wall was quickly taken care of, the commotion drawing the attention of a number of concerned attendees. The spillage of fluids reminded him of the lack thereof throughout the exhibition itself, the void and messiness that was inevitable in living a queer existence. That was something that didn't quite align with the aesthetic sensibilities laid out from the get go, as though any interaction between the works would disrupt the delicate balance, contaminating the neighbouring subject if their paths crossed.

The notably leaden feeling in his legs coupled with a luminous coating across all of the faces around, made it clear that the change in mood was down to an accidental dosing of psychedelics. Ellis couldn't help but laugh about the mycelium interference, imagining someone had actually noticed the gap in the programming and introduced the more than human crossover, which had contamination written all over it. Retracing his steps as best as he could in his condition, he chalked it up to a cup of tea at Miles's before they headed out together. This wasn't the first time this had happened, and even though it was another red flag attributable to Miles, he couldn't help but feel a degree of relief that it was not just his raw anxiety causing him discomfort tonight.

He wouldn't have been surprised if some sort of covert flash mob exercise had been brewing all night, that all outfits contained a tearaway to reveal a hard-hitting slogan or blood stains in protest against ecological atrocities, or one of the other countless evils on everyone's lips. He could see them smashing the non-vegan catering spread and raising a shattered ceramic shard to their necks when approached by security, poised to remove the provocation; Gothenburg's very own stonewall in stealthily fine-tuned disguise. Turning his head, Ellis eyed a nearby utensil just in case he had to join in, guesstimating how fast he could make it across the room or to the nearest exit in case there was an unexpected collective exodus or a need to start slashing in all directions.

A concerned partygoer enquired about his state, asking 'can I get you a glass of water?' to which he could simply nod, in what felt like slow motion. For a split second, the luxury brand name plastered across their chest momentarily morphed into the word 'Disgrace' as he hoped it comprised a longer message of protest. As it came into focus, a campy reference resurfaced and he couldn't help but internally pronounce it the way Nomi Malone does in *Showgirls* – 'Ver-say-ce'.



*Dragana Bar, Kem at Röda Sten Konsthall
from 8 pm to 1 am, 16–17 September 2023*



Osías Yanov, *Orphan Dance* (2018/2023)
at Göteborgs Konsthall

A conversation between
Anne Szefer Karlsen and
João Laia

Anne Szefer Karlsen: This anthology series is based on the idea of the “response”, and I want to introduce the idea that not only others – artists, audiences, critics – respond to curators’ proposals, but that we often respond to our own proposals over time too. In regards the latter, how do you situate the project for the twelfth edition of Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, GIBCA, *forms of the surrounding futures*, within the trajectory of your overall practice? Could you tell me about a few previous curatorial or other projects that have led to, or fed into, your approach to this biennial exhibition?

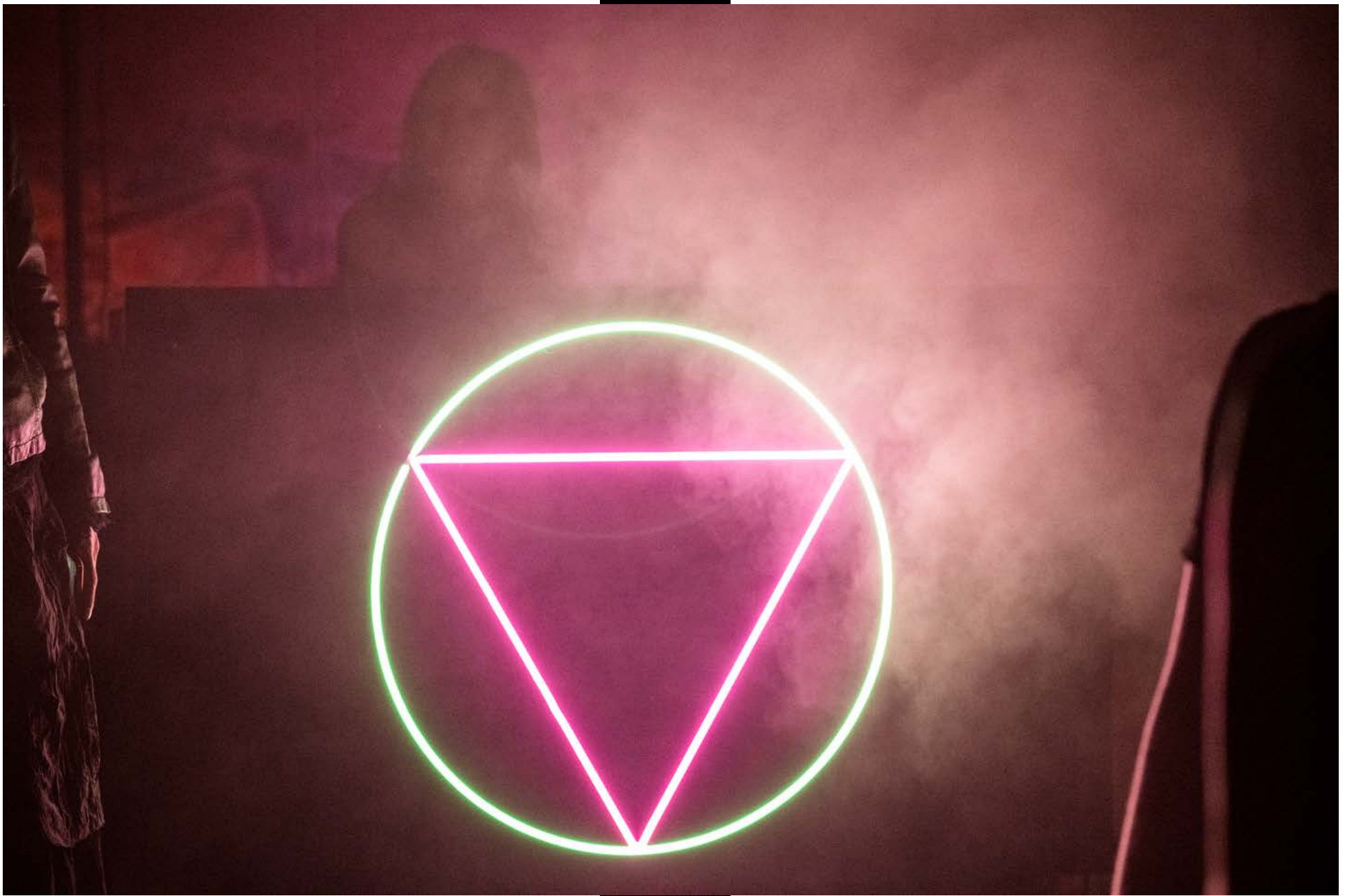
João Laia: The twelfth edition of GIBCA expanded or strengthened several directions I had been exploring for quite a while. Of course, these connections are more easily recognised or identified in retrospect. It’s not that I had a clear sense of trajectory, of where I was going with each project. It’s more a matter of interests that accumulate, together shaping a landscape of experimentation.

One interest, for example, is the idea of the “white cube”, as institutionalised by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and its first director Alfred Barr. Even though it is a historical, heavily criticised vessel for contemporary art, it still operates as the standard format for display and presentation. How can it be shaped as a fully operative format and is that still useful in the twenty-first century? Looking back at my final project for the postgraduate research program CuratorLab at Konstfack, Stockholm, in 2012/2013, I was already investigating the triangulation between artworks, space, and audiences, that materialise in the white cube.

Another strand that I’ve been exploring quite intensely has been around ideas of immersion, sensuality, hapticality; using the vessel of exhibitions as a multi-sensorial tool rather than a merely visual one, which is what the white cube primarily was assigned to be. I’ve, for example, done a project titled *a polyphonic wave of concrete elements that*

flow through the air, at ARTES Mota Galiza in Porto, in 2014, which explored materiality and embodiment.¹ It was a sort of choreography in space built by different activations. I like to think of it as an exhibition, but considering the information material made available before and during the event, it could be understood as a performance programme. It was basically a five-hour event – when different agencies are being activated at different times, I tend to use the word event. ARTES Mota Galiza is a large space with three separate galleries, and during the event, different pieces were activated, while you could only engage with one at the time. Some were immediately identifiable as performances, for example Shana Moulton’s performance. Others were videos that would be played, such as Laure Prouvost’s *It, Heat, Hit* (2010). The videos would be played once and then disappear. There was also Raimundas Malašauskas’ contribution, which was a spicy sauce made available as a spread during the five hours, but it actually finished maybe around three hours into the evening.

10000 Years Later Between Venus and Mars (2017–18) at Oporto City Hall Gallery, also in Porto, was a more linear approach to what the white cube could be.² I was literally thinking about the whiteness of the white cube and trying to engage with the critique around the false idea of neutrality, where the artworks would inhabit this supposed “empty” and “ahistorical” space. I considered what an actual neutral space could be today, in the twenty-first century. I looked into the use of chroma key and how it uses blue or green to produce a sort of boundless visual space. The green in particular has this nervousness to it and for that reason I used the blue, which is connected with introspection – which I am very interested in in relation to exhibitions, which are both a collective and subjective experience. I was interested in exploring introspection in a collective environment. The employment of chroma key also connected with the title, which was derived from the progressive rock album by Portuguese musician José Cid from 1978. As a title, *10000 Years*



Kem, *Dragana Bar* (2018/2023) at Röda Sten Kontshall

Later Between Venus and Mars lent itself to a kind of outer space narrative or imaginary because of the literal meaning of the phrase, rather than the reference to the album. I also enjoyed the connections the title created with the idea of liquidity and how today images, narratives, and objects, are in flux, unstable. Blue manifested several tensions I was working with. In practical terms, I replaced the white for blue by putting filters on the windows, while also adding filters to the lights. So, the whole space was kind of “liquid”, or had this feeling of an outer space sort of environment. The title also reframed contemporary artworks as remnants or archaeological objects of a civilisation from the past, seen from the vantage point of the future – categorising them no longer as “contemporary art” objects.

I would also like to mention an exhibition titled *Transmissions from the Etherspace*, at La Casa Encendida in Madrid in 2017, where the institution decided to add the subtitle “a performative exhibition.”³ There, I didn’t really play with colour so much, most of the rooms were dark, with the theatre as main reference rather than the white cube. The exhibition was organised by using the space as a stage rather than a gallery; something that has interested me a lot. I wanted to connect with notions of performativity, but also liveness or time-based work, even in the case of a painting. And yes, there are other projects too, through which I can trace longer trajectories in my practice, but I think these ones are enough to mark a few directions.

forms of the surrounding futures kind of embraced all these issues and expanded from them. For example, sound was very important in the way it manifested the exhibition as a highly contaminated space and challenged the white cube as a context of categorisation and division, which I don’t consider to be apt to echo the contemporary moment. Sound was essential to create this porous sort of environment, where boundaries were not clear, very difficult, or even impossible to identify.

ASK: Maybe you could talk a little bit about how that attitude to exhibition-making was realised within the biennial setting – a curatorial format that is recurring and is seen to be more tied to its locality than a white cube exhibition. How did you, for instance, work with the local art scene, or with any kind of local anchoring for the project?

JL: That view of the biennial format is one possibility. There are others. The interest I have in biennials, despite the critique of its formats and questions regarding its validity today, is that it is repeated, yet can be totally reframed and reconfigured for every edition. Meaning that it lends itself to experimentation in a way that an institutional programme might struggle with. It’s a very open model.

Yes, it is located because usually there’s a city in the name of the biennial, which grounds the project. My interest, however, is mostly in the possibilities for experimentation that lie in the biennial as a format. GIBCA 2023, for instance, was not built out of the specific context of Gothenburg. Not that I haven’t done that before; the 14th Baltic Triennial in 2021, titled *The Endless Frontier*, which I co-curated with Valentinas Klimašauskas, was exactly the opposite. It was built out of a very specific context and a very specific history, foregrounding art practices from that region.

In the case of the twelfth edition of GIBCA, the curator of the two previous editions, Lisa Rosendahl, had done a very serious archaeological research into the city as context, so I felt in a way liberated not to have to do that again, because it had been done so thoroughly already.⁴ What I tried to do, rather, was bring a question – or a number of questions, narratives or positions – that would echo locally, while not departing from the specific local context.

To me there seemed to be more of a need to bring something from outside, rather than highlighting something local. Having said that, during the research period, I found many local



Niko Hallikainen, *Mystery Machine* (2022) at Röda Sten Konsthall during the opening 16 September 2023

specificities that connected very closely with the narrative I was putting forth.

I was not aware Gothenburg has a very specific and violent history towards non-normative identities, specifically queer ones. It was a place where homophobes and right-wing people from all over Sweden would congregate to literally harass and aggress queer people, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. There's actually a monument now, recently inaugurated, to pay tribute to a victim that was murdered in the street in Gothenburg.⁵

I was also kind of toying a bit with the idea of the harbour or the port, which had been really key to the previous editions. But here thinking of it more in terms of its agency – the harbour as a porous territory, which is really a bridge to the sea, to other identities, to other territories. Harbours in general, not only Gothenburg's, are places where marginal identities take refuge and that are often sites for cruising. So, there were a number of echoes that emerged during the research, but they were not part of the early proposal.

ASK: Moving away from the location to the mediation material of the biennial, I really appreciate that the catalogue was a free handout. In the introductory essay, you draw on quite a few theoretical sources. Could you expand on how theory infuses your practice?

JL: It plays a huge role in the sense that I mostly read theory, while I see a lot of shows and discuss them with many artists and colleagues. Both these activities are part of a very expanded and not so coherent universe, but there are always threads in common that you find between theory and artistic practices. I can't really detach one from the other and say "oh, this specific theoretical strand influenced me to approaching this specific artist practice," it's more of an ongoing digestion. I come from the social sciences, and I think that's quite key to my work, because even if some

authors might be well-known in art circles, they are not really art-centric in their discourses. And when I approach artistic practices, I'm always interested in addressing them or engaging with them via sociological readings rather than art historical perspectives. So, there isn't really a detachment between theory and practice. It's sort of the same metabolic process of digesting both, with the same objective: engaging with social dynamics that I feel are quite urgent via contemporary art and contemporary theory.

Where theory comes from is not so relevant. It can be philosophy, it can be sociology, visual culture, etc. It also doesn't need to be from the now. I can re-read older theorists from the vantage point of the present, as long as I feel they have something very current to say about the now. Because the now is also not only that; the past is also the now. I guess for GIBCA 2023, the key figures would be Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Déborah Danowski, who spoke from a non-Western perspective, emphasising that rather than reading the current moment as a crisis, we should see it as a moment of transition.⁶ They are not queer thinkers, but it was really interesting to see the overlaps with people like, for example, Paul B. Preciado, who also talks about the now as a moment of mutation, of transition, rather than crisis.⁷

The threads connecting these authors were that they all identified, firstly, the idea of crisis as something that was detrimental to imagining other possibilities. Secondly, they acknowledged an ongoing crisis, which was not actually a crisis towards us as non-normative identities but rather of oppressive dominant narratives. Again, finding that which corresponds with my interests, by combining people of different interests, perspectives, geographies, ages even – all signalling similar dynamics.

ASK: Perhaps I can add one last question for us to round up. The GIBCA 2023 project *forms of the surrounding futures*

will open in both Germany and in Portugal during spring 2024. Tell me about these two new iterations of the exhibition.

JL: The GIBCA 2023 show never really “closed”, because when it finished in Gothenburg in November 2023, it reopened at the end of January 2024 at 1646 in The Hague as a solo presentation of Rasmus Myrup’s *Outside Salon des Refusés* (2023), with the same installation that was on show in Gothenburg.⁸ That installation, plus other works from *forms of the surrounding futures*, will reopen at the Kunsthalle Münster in May.⁹ In mid-June, another formulation of the show opens here in Porto at the Galeria Municipal do Porto. The Porto iteration is a new addition and an outcome of the fact that I’ve moved from my role as chief curator for exhibitions at Kiasma – National Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, to become Artistic Director of the Department of Contemporary Art of the Municipality of Porto.

These turns of events fit very well with how I always imagined the show; not so much as a process culminating in a single exhibition, but rather as a mutant entity. It was interesting to think of an exhibition not as a defined, precise, and concrete object, but as something that evolves and changes. I’m particularly happy with the fact that it ends with two shows that are quite different from GIBCA 2023, like two mutant branches. Here in Porto, we will have most of the large-scale installations, whereas in Münster there will be more of a constellation of smaller works. This is of course connected to very practical matters: the spaces where the shows happen. But I also like that it reflects that the show in Gothenburg had different venues with very specific features, and that the artworks were never conceived of as a unified set. These two exhibitions open more or less simultaneously, showing at least two sides, if not more, of the same show that now happens again in different spaces.

¹ Contributing artists were: Meris Angioletti, Von Calhau!, Henning Lundkvist, Nuno da Luz, Raimundas Malašauskas, Mattin, Jacopo Miliani, Shana Moulton and Laure Prouvost.

² An exhibition with works from the António Cachola Collection by Ana Manso, Ana Santos, André Romão, Andreia Santana, António Júlio Duarte, Carla Filipe, Catarina Dias, Claire de Santa Coloma, Diana Policarpo, Diogo Evangelista, Fernanda Fragateiro, Filipa César, Francisco Tropa, Gabriel Abrantes, Gil Heitor Cortesão, Joana Escoval, Joana Vasconcelos, João Maria Gusmão e Pedro Paiva, João Queiroz, João Tabarra, Luís Lázaro Matos, Mariana Caló e Francisco Queimadela, Mariana Silva, Marta Soares, Mauro Cerqueira, Musa Paradisiaca, Nuno da Luz, Pedro Barateiro, Pedro Neves Marques, Rita Ferreira and Vasco Araújo e Von Calhau! See Galeria Municipal do Porto, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.galeriamunicipaldoporto.pt/en/historico/2017/10000-anos-depois-entre-venus-e-marteobras-da-colecao-antonio-cachola-2017/>.

³ Contributing artists were Sophia Al-Maria, Nina Beier, Hicham Berrada, Joana Escoval, Celia Hempton, Shahryar Nashat, Andrew Norman Wilson, Eddie Peake, Jacolby Satterwhite, Pepo Salazar and Emily Wardill. See La Casa Encendida, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.lacasaencendida.es/en/exhibitions/transmissions-etherspace>.

⁴ For GIBCA no. 10 in 2019, see GIBCA, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/archive/gibca2019/thematic/>. For GIBCA no. 11 in 2021, see GIBCA, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.gibca.se/en/gibca/archive/gibca-2021/overview-gibca-2021/>.

⁵ See “Gothenburg’s First LGBTQI+ Monument,” Kunst Kritik, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://kunstkritikk.com/>

gothenburgs-first-lgbtqi-monument/.

⁶ See Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World* (2016).

⁷ Paul B. Preciado, *Dysphoria Mundi* (2022).

⁸ See 1646, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://1646.nl/program/salon-des-refuses/>.

⁹ See Kunsthalle Münster, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.kunsthallemunster.de/en/programme/forms-of-the-surrounding-futures/>. Participating artists: Rodrigo Hernández, Agnè Jokšė, Tarik Kiswanson, Esse McChesney, Rasmus Myrup, Ania Nowak, Luiz Roque, Ana Vaz, curated by João Laia in dialogue with Merle Radtke. Participating artists in the upcoming iteration at Galeria Municipal do Porto are Kem, Maria Jerez, Rodrigo Hernández, Sandra Mujinga, Ania Nowak, Outi Pieski, Luiz Roque, P. Staff, Ana Vaz, Osías Yanov.

This conversation happened online 19 March 2024, transcribed using Jojo Transcribe.



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Status Queer, *PEEK! Live* (2023)
at Röda Sten Konsthall

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is a master's student and curator. She is a student of MA Curatorial Practice in University of Bergen (2023–2025) and was the assistant project intern for the exhibition *Walking China: Stories Yet to be Told*, hosted by the ICA at New York University, Shanghai (January–July 2023), and the Excellence Award winner of the Chinese First National Virtual Curatorial Competition for Undergraduates in 2022.

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João Laia

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Maria Jerez, *Yabba* (2017/2023) in
front of Luiz Roque, *S* (2017) at Røda
Sten Kontshall

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