

UNIVERSUM

W

24. 6. 2021 – 2. 1. 2022 • OMA – Triple Nave

The main exhibition of the SEFO 2021 Triennial presents a group of artists from the broader Central European region whose work repeatedly addresses the issues of the determination, naming, composition, organisation and meaning of the elements making up the world we inhabit. Rather than by topic or approach and definitely not by the medium in which they work, these individuals are united by a way of thinking, their use of basic definitions and polarities that we employ to help us on the path to understanding. The human world is paradoxical: the more it longs for unity and wholeness, the more it creates dividing lines and barriers. The tension between what is inside and what we consider our own and what is outside and belongs to everyone, so to speak, is considerable and also critical for our own self-perception.

6 The world in which we lived was measured out in the 18th century. In the middle of that century, the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten called aesthetics “the doorway to the midday light of rationality”. David Hume introduced the basic human paradox, the opposition of the personal and the general. And Immanuel Kant showed the limits of human reason, and thanks to him, we all have the right to beauty and truth. Unfortunately, it's getting harder to agree on what this means. And yet, it all starts with the body, our own senses and the experience they convey to us. A giant abyss separates that which is and what we consider as such. Who decides what is right? Who bears responsibility for such a decision? Why does our world look like it does? We could classify rocks not by their chemical composition but by their colour. Instead of describing types, we could describe individual specimens. We can also imagine worlds and universes other than ours, or we could try to follow a different system of the time. The power of imagination is enormous, the possibilities of classification infinite. As the British mathematical physicist Roger Penrose also tries to show, it is quite possible that the cosmos itself is cyclical and without memory, that it not only shrinks and expands, but also breaks apart, and that what we consider its origin, the big bang, could be only one of many to have occurred.

Human universe is cyclical – such is its exposition. At its beginning as well as the end, it is a structure. Uršula Berlot-Pompe, Zdeněk Trs, Jarosław Grulkowski and even Lubomír Axmann represent the seeming transparency of a logical system, the technically accurate visualisations of its structure. While it would be convenient to understand chaos as its direct opposite, far more subversive are marginal positions or pseudo-systems that use credible mechanisms and established strategies, slightly misinterpreted to make them more pliable. But the more we bend the idealised objective system to our needs and possibilities, the more we betray it. Examples of this subtle yet fundamental shift are the work of Jana Gunstheimer, Áron Kútvölgyi-Szabó, Agata Gertschen, Ondřej Přibyl, Joanna

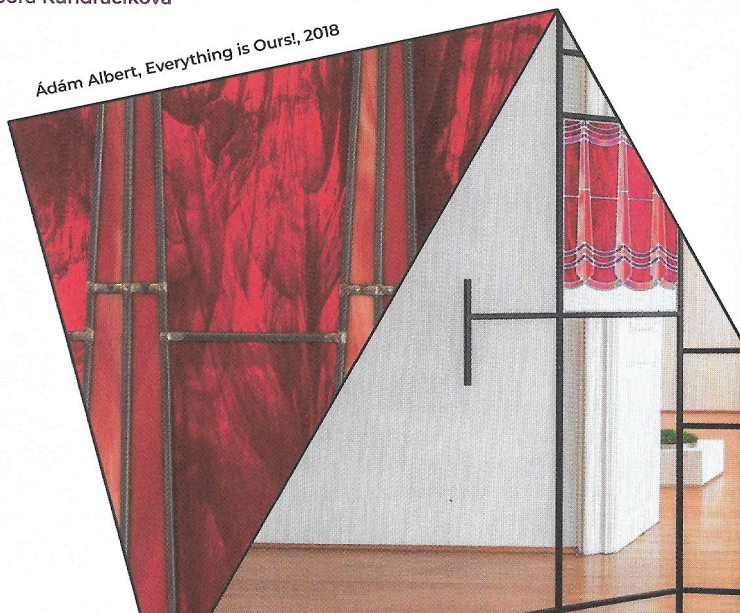
Leszczyńska and Ádám Kokesch, which are all the more impressive because they work with "traditional" media and practices.

Continuity, the universality of the process of cognition and the formulation of one's own arguments or findings are a topic pursued by Nikolaus Gansterer. He also represents the centre of the spectrum – in a tradition in which, at least on a personal level, we follow the Renaissance idea of a centralised universe, in the middle of which stands man, not only as its recipient, but also as a reciprocally creative agent. The importance of the installation's meaning is enhanced by the technique the artist adopts, drawing.

The oscillation around this ever-changing focus then includes other artists, including those trying to recreate the moment of experience with what is, what serves for direct touch or view, e.g., Gábor Koós, Karol Pomykała and Ádám Albert, but also Anna Witt, her own work as well as a selection from Central European video art production. At the same time, they transcend the boundaries of the real, or the virtual, the possible, and show the great importance of storytelling, the story we share and the language we use to relate it. At the same time, they demonstrate the most important thing, i.e., that facts are established on the basis of a common culture, not the other way around. And that art permanently and constantly reveals what it means to create reality.

In this constellation, the universum is a pliable structure. It is not complete or all-embracing. Its skeleton is human experience with the world – non-factual, complex and variable. What we share is a system of fixed points, and what makes it exceptional is what lies in between.

curator: Barbora Kundračíková





Uršula Berlot, *Bodyfraction*, 2020

Uršula Berlot (Slovenia)

*1973, visual artist, printmaker
lives and works in Ljubljana

Uršula Berlot has long been interested in the relationship between science and art, more precisely – modern technology and aesthetics, specifically neuroscience and neuroaesthetics. Her art utilises a variety of media and procedures, a combined strategy of classic and new media. That which on the one hand abstracts – like science – on its own principle, concretises precisely through the laws of aesthetics on the other. The result is a remarkable tension between the logical and the tactile, or sensory qualities and experiences in general. Uršula Berlot is also the author of a book on Marcel Duchamp and numerous articles on the subject of art theory.

Which of your works do you consider that best represents your intentions, possibilities and desires of the moment? Some of my recent video works, such as *Bodyfraction* or *Suspensions*, quite successfully meet the conceptual intentions that originally motivated these works, whereby a visual form derived from specific technical procedures resulted in creating a kind of “new” reality, accentuating the unknown, unseen, unfamiliar or ambiguous aspects of an imaginary topology. Ambiguous in the sense that it is somehow difficult to comfortably situate a newly created space into a realm of known or recognizable reality. I think some of my recent drawings well express the idea of the intangible quality of fluid (or multiplied) spatiality. Furthermore, my series of light works entitled *Corporeal Abstractions* achieved some higher level of technical perfection that I was looking to realise for decades, alongside lending some new expression to the dubious balance between abstraction and realism (considering the fact that they could simply be seen as images of a body).

The Triennial of Contemporary Central European Art is part of the Central European Forum Olomouc (SEFO) programme and complements the range of activities dedicated to this geographically and semantically unstable region. The triennial is thematically focused, community-oriented and open to partners, including the Palacký University, the Academia Film Olomouc, the Flora Olomouc Theater and the Olomouc Ecological Days, respectively the Ludwig Museum in Budapest, the East Slovak Gallery in Košice, the Kunstmuseum Lentos in Linz and the International Cultural Centre in Krakow. The special guest of the triennial is the Kassák Museum in Budapest.

The SEFO 2021 Triennial is named *Universum*. This project is based on the long-term efforts of the OMA to embrace the Central European idea not only in the past but also in the present. Does Central Europe even still exist? Didn't it break apart definitively in 1989? Has it been reduced to political caricature today? Or, on the contrary, is it an escape into the utopias of childhood or homeland? While the Triennial naturally cannot answer these questions, it can at least ask them.

One of the most typical manifestations of efforts to create a concept of the world, to know it and understand it, to encompass it, is a museum – a collecting institution that expresses the community's belief that it knows how things are and how they relate to each other. An art museum, of course, is a more complicated case, but it shares the same principle, at least to some extent. At a time of heightening criticism of institutions, we decided to dedicate the Triennial to the museum. The 2021 Triennial is focused on an exploration of the world and the ways in which we relate to it. Art is understood as an expression of the efforts of the mind, while paper, the primary artistic medium, is perceived as a means of deliberation, the carrier of the idea. The Triennial is interested in the issue of the system, which can generally be understood in two ways – as an ideal order that we discover, that we imitate and learn in an aesthetic way, or as an artificially formed construct which, often out of convenience, we call the truth. The fact is that we each design our own universe, but few of us can and want to share them. The museum does the same, only on a larger scale and with an objectifying aspiration. However, it is not the Triennial's ambition to change the world, but simply to pay attention to it. Its mission is not to be engaged, but stimulating. It does not understand art as autonomous or, on the contrary, servile, but as capable of creating the world. And paper is the best metaphor for that.

Due to the circumstances, the triennial program is significantly adapted. One of the key changes is its spreading to the whole of 2021, with overlaps in 2020 and 2022. The path of smaller but targeted events is chosen, respectively the remote ones, in which foreign partners are involved. The triennial is also associated with new research projects of the institution, workshops and conferences. The current situation really serves as a starting point for us to think about the possibilities of a public cultural institution in the post-pandemic period, in a world that is undergoing intensive reconstruction.