

steirischer herbst 21/09–14/10/2012

Truth is concrete

Everything is different this year. No customary opening, no exhibition tour on the first weekend, instead a one-week "24/7 marathon camp" with a round-the-clock programme, an overwhelming kick-off. The fact that steirischer herbst is changing markedly, is the result of rapid global change. The revolutions in many Arab countries, the Occupy movements, the massive upheavals and financial disasters in Europe, all together question the role of art. In this race of events artists had played a major role everywhere and from the outset. But it also evolved that the question as to the role of art itself is much more difficult: whether or not there can and should be an art that not only observes, comments and documents, but also gets practically involved.

Artistic strategies in politics and political strategies in art

And so this year's steirischer herbst sets out in search of artistic strategies in politics and political strategies in art. "**Truth is concrete**" is a **24/7 marathon camp**: around 150 artists, activists and scientists will lecture, perform, play, produce, debate and collect artistic strategies in politics and political strategies in art. Day and night. Including the philosopher and democracy theorist Chantal Mouffe, Antanas Mockus, philosopher and legendary former mayor of Bogotá, who has changed the self-awareness of a highly criminalised city of millions with the aid of artistic strategies, Srđa Popović, figurehead of the Otpor! student movement that toppled Serbian dictator Milošević, and the current director of Canvas, the Centre for Applied Non Violent Actions and Strategies, that supports revolutions and revolts in the Arab world, among other places, with its writings and training schemes, the Austrian artist and activist Oliver Ressler, New York cult preacher and activist Reverend Billy, activists from New York to Moscow, from Cairo to Korea, and many, many more.

As part of a grant programme, we will also be inviting some 100 young students, artists, activists and theorists from all over the globe. "Truth is concrete" is a platform and a toolbox as much as a performative statement; an extreme effort at a time that seems to call for extreme efforts. The camp is a temporary habitat: here the sleep areas, there the herbst exhibition, over there the kitchen and next to it the bookshop. The video library alongside the hairdresser's. Camp radio, speech karaoke, plenum. Open all the time and for everyone, day and night. Some stay throughout, but everyone is invited to drop by any time: for a particular lecture, for an hour or so, perhaps another hour, for a discussion, a performance, a concert, a film – the doors are always open, as long as there is room. The camp venue is designed by **raumlaborberlin**. They give the marathon camp a flexible form, linking the two buildings, the Thalia and Opernring 7, creating a landscape for working and living, a landscape that wants to be used. Not a turnkey facility handed over when the festival begins, but one that is constantly changing during the course of the marathon camp. And which will afterwards proudly sport the scars of a bustling week of living and working.

Also embedded in the setting of the camp is this year's **herbst exhibition** – or better, a laboratory for new paradigms, structures, hierarchies and forms of collaboration, a collective process that begins long before the opening and that will continue long after it has ended: "Adaptation".

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Prague exhibition-makers Zbyněk Baladrán and Vit Havránek address the question as to the relationship between art and politics not only to the content of a hypothetically committed art work, but also to the contexts of its creation and reception: from the subject to the institutional art system and curatorial practice itself. Therefore, they see themselves as inviters rather than curators in this project: in a communal process, they not only develop the form but also the main topic of "Adaptation" together with the artists. At the same time, they put alternative models of society and collaboration to the test.

Spread out around the city, the exhibitions of the partner institutions in Graz also present their own view of the relationship between art and politics. "Absolute Democracy" at < **rotor** >, takes a critical look at the concept of democracy, spotlighting the problem of its social, political and economic consequences and offering alternative interpretations of historiography. How do artistic interventions in global realities work, and what is the power of the collective? Cittadellarte, a working and research group set up by Michelangelo Pistoletto, focuses on this same question at **Kunsthaus Graz**. Artistic participation is the starting point for an examination of democratically lived civil society that extends into real urban space. **Forum Stadtpark** with its "Post" project invites writers and visual artists to leave the space of art and to engage in an agitprop mailshot intended not only to reach, but to mobilise every household in Graz. New interpretations of social and architectural space, visualising unofficial, but prevalent hierarchies and mechanisms of exclusion – that is the approach taken by the Argentinian artist-activists Iconoclastas, who are joining forces with artists and scientists at **ESC im LABOR** to develop a new cartography of Graz: "demo graz ya!".

"Intolerance / Normality" is the title of the exhibition at **Grazer Kunstverein**, where artists analyse the increasing normalisation of public intolerance and xenophobia based on case studies. The caricature drawings by Styrian painter Alois Neuhold on show at **Kulturzentrum bei den Minoriten** demonstrate the political, provocative impact that an artist connected with the Church can have on the authoritarian Church system, while **Akademie Graz** focuses on the Roma culture, showcasing a new generation of artists who explore their cultural background and its marginalisation between art and activism: "Reclaiming Identity". With "Fallen imperials / forgotten spaces – reoccupied!" **Pavelhaus / Pavlova hiša** spotlights the state art of former Yugoslavia, confronting it with current politically committed art. What effect has this art had in the context of its creation? What use is it, what is it capable of today? Artistic positions, finally, that elude any question as to their "usefulness", but which are nevertheless politically effective in the autonomous space of art by means of the reality and concrete truth that they create, are on show at **Medienturm Graz** in "Realness Respect" and **Camera Austria**, where artists will be able to use the exhibition space for two weeks each, starting with Anna Jermolaewa: "Art is concrete. And so is Truth?"

Truth is concrete

The leitmotif of this year's herbst is a quote from Brecht quoting Lenin quoting Hegel: it serves to look for the concrete in art, for a definition of truth that, while complex and not final, in every case nevertheless enables concrete action. Our search will also continue after the marathon camp: "Rebranding European Muslims" is the title of Israeli artist group **Public Movement's** PR campaign

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for a different European culture. The campaign, that begins in Graz, to be relayed to other countries, kicks off with a big gala: a political charity event as much as a theatrical enactment of commitment and conflict. The Moscow documentary theatre **Teatr.doc** brings on to the stage what Russian politics and society try to conceal. Their plays are based on authentic texts, interviews and the lives of actual people, between art and concrete social analysis. **Rabih Mroué** and **Lina Saneh** astutely reconstruct the final moments of a young Lebanese man, at the same time passionately unmasking the problems of a country in which last year's Arab revolutions have failed to strike a spark.

In "Come Back" by the Austrian performer **Doris Uhlich** five former ballet dancers are establishing their own revolutionary movement with radical self-irony. Further performative statements in steirischer herbst 2012 come from New York based **Young Jean Lee**, who with her company takes a look at feminism in America and the legendary Mexican theatre-maker **Gómez-Peña (La Pocha Nostra)**, who with an inimitable, mind-blowing, eclectic blend of ritual, performance and crass entertainment exorcises capitalism. And finally this year's festival rounds off by building a bridge between the former Cultural Capital Graz and the current Cultural Capital of Europe, Maribor: on a big evening at the end of the festival, the composer and director **Heiner Goebbels** leads us, with forty young female singers from the Vocal Theatre **Carmina Slovenica**, through the ups and downs of growing up: When the mountain change its clothing

Sounds rouse us to change the world and to perceive the world in a different way. But the meaning of the world, the meaning of a sound may change without the sound itself changing. So what sounds are still symbols, and thus instructions on how to act today? Instructions for what, in what context and under what social circumstances? **musikprotokoll** 2012 guides us in a world as sound between iconic commercial sound logos and private ringtones, instrumental avantgarde, abstract electronica, sound design and pop songs. With works by dieb13, Anke Eckardt, Boris Hegenbart, Yukiko Watanabe, Thomas Amann, Rebecca Saunders, Daniel Lercher, Heimo Lattner, Tapist and many others. Aside from musikprotokoll, there will be several other live concerts at steirischer herbst 2012, including Pål Moddi Knutsen alias Moddi from Norway, the two electronic pioneers Terre Thaemlitz and Franz Pomassl, and The Kominas, a prominent part of the "Islam Punk movement", following the "Rebranding European Muslims" charity gala.

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