

ICH UND WELT

Post_____ (I'm)possibilities

With Ramiro Wong, Kay Walkowiak, Kai Trausenegger, Nedko Solakov, Hector Schofield, Lara Reichmann, Nazanin Mehraein, Estefanía Peñafiel Loaiza, Marlene Lahmer, Dejan Kaludjerović, Kaja Clara Joo. A Project by Klaus Speidel & TransArts / DieAngewandte

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“Mr. McCabe thinks that I am not serious but only funny, because Mr. McCabe thinks that funny is the opposite of serious. Funny is the opposite of not funny, and of nothing else.” (G. K. Chesterton)

“There is a big difference between still believing something and believing it again. Still to believe that the moon has an influence on plants, is a sign of dullness and superstition, yet to believe it again, is a sign of philosophy and reflection” (G. C. Lichtenberg)

A title like “Ich und Welt” (I and World) sounds terribly old-fashioned in a world of post-everything and hashtags. It is far too direct, overly focused on the question of existence and ways of being in the world. Next thing you know Martin Heidegger comes around the corner and eventually states that the work of art “opens up the being of the existing”. Today’s art world hardly knows what to make of this kind of language and questions of existence are at best a private matter. In public, we juggle references and make obscure formalistic, political or poetic gestures – It’s all just a question of taste or political affiliation. And so the subtitle seems right to assert the “impossibilities” that determine our zeitgeist and our art.

Or have we misunderstood something? Is the point to make the post-what-nots impossible? Is this about *again* creating art which tells us “what everything is” (Aristotle). And isn’t the “I” standing in the centre, nicely framed with (possibly unlimited) possibilities. So perhaps after Fukushima, COVID19 and the ongoing climate crisis, it is time to again search for something else. Time to again look for the place of art and the artist in the world, time for *post-ironic* art that does not necessarily exclude humour.

The artists in *Ich und Welt* oscillate between doubts about “the power of art” and believing in art as an adequate means of relating to the world; between interpreting the present and expressing the suffering self. There’s a lot of art about art and some art about railways, picnics and powders. The artists narrate stories of I, world and work: humorous, serious or both. The only thing linking all participants is the theme of narrative.

With **Lara Reichmann’s** work, the question of our place in the world is discussed quite literally. She audaciously positions herself on grounds that do not exist. In her poster series “A New Voyage Around the World” that greets us as we enter the exhibition, she offers fake islands for sale. While these islands do not exist in reality, they are well established in the world of representations and despite their inexistence, they have a real history, having appeared in texts and on maps for centuries. Their shapes have been invented by resourceful cartographers, sometimes as a copyright signature or created by

mistake. If we buy a non-place from Reichmann's fictional agency, we do not own any land to set foot on, but we certainly hold a stake in the economy of signs.

Ramiro Wong's performance installation is quite literally the spot where "I" and "world" meet over tea. When visitors bring their existential conditions to the table to receive instant remedies for their struggles, they experience an artistic ritual that borrows from Peruvian shamanism and Austrian pharmacies alike. But perhaps the sharing of stories that happens along the way is even more important than the remedies that are consumed.

Following the social unrest that was suppressed in November 2019 in Iran and the global crisis after the American assassination of general Soleimani on the 3rd of January 2020, **Nazanin Mehraein** draws us into her inner world, while she follows the tragic developments in her home country Iran from a distance. Living physically in Vienna and mentally in Teheran – even more so as the long distance connection is interrupted – she tries to go about her affairs, recording her feelings and contemplating the fate of her loved ones.

In a work that can be read as a dramatic family story or an allegory of the situation after the war in Ex-Yugoslavia, **Dejan Kaludjerović** asked all those who were present at a troubling event that happened over 25 years earlier: Eight different – and often incompatible – versions of what happened on the 1st of May 1977 appear. The artist thinks about how our memories determine what we consider to be our place in the world. Which is the version of ourselves we should believe in? How does the way others frame us affect the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves? And...does the existence of photographic footage in the other room really solve all the problems of our unreliable memories?

Kaja Clara Joo explores the art world as a territory under hermetic seal in which everything can and has to be claimed for an artistic process to be possible. She fashions herself as a space explorer who brings extraterrestrial artefacts to earth, while simultaneously knowing that this obvious tale will be accepted as an impetus for artistic creation within the limited world of art. But are the possible worlds created by artists always more remote than those that may lie in outer space or Hollywood?

In **Kay Walkowiak's** *Anonymous Objects*, iconic works of modern and contemporary art start to speak. In his storyworld, iconic sculptures have fallen from grace and landed in places far away from the safety of the institutions that normally harbor them and now have to renegotiate their identities in a world where they are forgotten. Something must certainly have gone terribly wrong for them to suddenly find themselves in dismal mundane settings, far from Paris and New York. In quirky monologues, they contemplate their fate so compellingly that we end up identifying with them as much as we do with our fellow humans.

Nedko Solakov's painting of a black square similarly strives for a recognition that it finds hard to get in the face of so many other, bigger and older works of its kind. It not only asks questions of original and copy, self-definition and the way others might frame us, but by questioning its "ornamental context" that it would like to escape from, it also points to possible incompatibilities between I and world.

Solakov's makeshift monument for a defunct communist leader calls into question the symbolic and architectural grandeur of monuments for politicians. Mausoleums magnify the tragic absence of great leaders and influential personalities, but by his choice of materials, Solakov implicitly suggests that the mundane might be suited better to do justice to their not so great deeds.

While many works penetrate the viewer's mind, **Kay Walkowiak's** work *in canvas* reaches out into the exhibition space, asking to connect to our bodies – through an orifice that traditionally counts as the least noble one through an anal plug.

Kai Trausenegger's red sculpture on thin long legs undeniably has a strong presence in the space, but we do not question its object status until picking up the head phones leading into the sculpture's organic yet industrial body and hear the speech emerging from its tight lips: In evocative words, the sculpture suggestively subjects its meanings to negotiation, trying to take the visitors along on its travels through possible meanings, turning itself into an object desired for its market value, a feminist manifesto or a post-colonial critique.

Estefania Peñafiel Loaiza addresses differences between storytelling traditions and wonders what happens if words wander through the world. In her video *Las palabras andantes (premicés)*, a story of forbidden books migrates not only from South America to India but also from an oral to a visual medium. Details are lost and gained in translation – like the words in the buried books of the stories, some disappear for good while images appear. The collaborative creative process that we can follow on the video screen contrasts with ideas of the lonely artistic genius.

Calling into question the authenticity of one of our most intimate resources, namely love rhetoric, **Marlene Lahmer** claims that portrayals of love originate from predefined cultural tropes, not (just) from our hearts. Even though lovers are often said to live in their own worlds, the scripts of love on which they act, anchor them in much larger social constructs. As François de La Rochefoucauld wrote in 1666, “there are people that would never have loved if they had never heard someone speak about love in the first place.” Connecting love scenes from films with her personal relationship to romantic love, she reminds us that the I is not an island, but is always already connected to the world it lives in.

With Nazanin Mehraein's work, **Hector Schofield's** creation is the the work which most directly relates to autobiography. Having recourse to the most basic way stories are conveyed, namely through oral telling, he talks about his experience of working as a train conductor in Central Europe during the refugee crisis of 2015 when he was confronted with choices that would determine the destiny of refugee families. As they scan the barcode, the visitors can take the story with them while themselves travelling back to their save homes.

Introductory text: Klaus Speidel

Work texts: Marlene Lahmer (& Klaus Speidel)