

annie vigier et  
frank a pertet  
les gens d'interpan

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## 卡塞尔的局外人

时间：2017-7-11 15:23:20 信息来源：艺术中国

古希腊的人文主义世界观造就了希腊的“民主”。雅典城邦作为古代文明的代表影响了欧洲的文化、艺术的发展，从文艺复兴到新古典主义都是在一次又一次的回到古典，也就是雅典所创造出的和谐以及共和制度下的民主与繁荣。“民主”（δημοκρατία）一词来源于希腊语的δῆμος（人民）和κρατος（强权），即人民掌握权力。策展人亚当·希姆奇克（Adam Szymczyk）将本届文献展的主题定为“向雅典学习”，并将雅典作为分展场。他在接受采访时谈到：“古典希腊是德国民族意识形成过程中的标准典范。早期的浪漫主义者都将古典希腊视为自身的直系起源。”[1]所以不难看出，向雅典学习既包含雅典的艺术也包含其古典时期的民主政治。然而对于欧洲的起源与文化遗产我们并没有直接参与的传统。从主题的立意来看，我们只能作为偶然参与其中的局外人。

相较展览主题，以“身体议会”作为概念的公共项目则更加包容。“身体议会”主张给文化活动者提供一个空间，在为主权、生存所争取权利的国家之间建立新的联盟。自2016年9月以“自由的34个练习”（34 Exercises of Freedom）启幕，通过一系列讲座、艺术活动、工作坊等活动讨论不平等政治制度下的各种抵抗形式。“身体议会”反对个体化，但也反对身体变成市场营销的对象。反对清晰的边界和身份政治。以身体这个概念作为主体，首先排除了地理概念，任何国家、种族、群体都是其包含的主体。这样看来，“身体议会”相较“向雅典学习”这样的话题更具可持续性。



Marta Minujín, 《书之帕特农》, 2017



### 艺术研究

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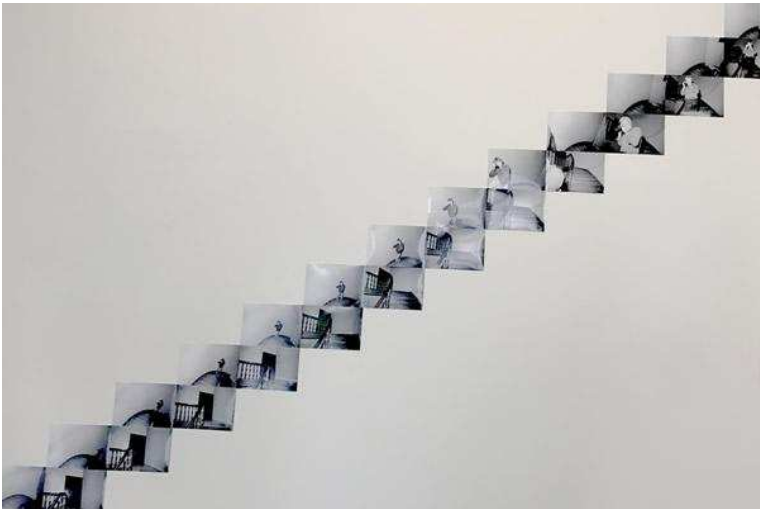


Marta Minujín, 《书之帕特农》在现场收集的各个时代的禁书, 2017

谈及抵抗的形式, 书可以作为一种“反抗”的载体。阿根廷艺术家Marta Minujín的作品则以“禁书”作为观念的来源, 她自2016年开始向全世界征集禁书, 并将这些收集来的书捆绑在同比例搭建的帕特农神庙上。在雅典展区, 罗马尼亚艺术家Daniel Knorr延续了他的“考古学”研究方法, 利用从雅典全城各处搜集到的物品, 例如老旧的画, 手枪皮套, 可乐罐等制成作品。艺术家用上吨重的压力将它们碾平在书中, 并在现场制作成自己的“艺术家书”(artists' books)。此书售价80欧元/本, 而销售的资金将用在制作艺术家在卡塞尔展区的另一件作品“Expiration Movement”。Knorr使卡塞尔展区主展场弗里德里希美术馆的塔楼顶部每天冒出白烟, 然而初到现场的观众很容易误以为是塔楼的排烟口的烟雾排放, 并没有将其当成作品。实际上, 这里的烟雾在艺术家看来是一种释怀, 但也同样象征着纳粹曾经的焚书活动。这让人联想到1977年第六届卡塞尔文献展的会场中也有一件让人难以分辨的作品, 展馆中的管道从天花板向下延伸, 并不断滴落类似油的液体, 看似建筑施工中的一部分, 实际上是博伊斯的一件作品。

策展人亚当·希姆奇克(Adam Szymczyk)在卡塞尔弗里德里希美术馆中展出了雅典国立美术馆收藏的1100件作品。其中包含二十世纪六七十年代的老作品和部分二十一世纪初的作品, 作者多为希腊籍艺术家。目的是为两个机构的协同合作创造途径。将雅典的馆藏运到卡塞尔展出的做法显然能够呈现一个更全面并具有历史序列的希腊当代艺术, 然而这种展览方式则将展厅变成了卡塞尔与雅典两者之间的交流, 展出的大量不为人知的希腊当代艺术家的作品可能会使一些来自世界各地的当代艺术狂热粉丝感到身处局外。

一层展厅主要位置展示了希腊艺术家Vlassis Caniaris 在70年代的作品。在1973年的石油危机之后, 许多欧洲国家开始关闭边界, 试图保护自己的居民就业。作为临时移民本人, Caniaris对这种情况极度敏感, 并将这些问题集中在他的艺术实践中。在今天的语境下, 作品则能很轻易地让人联想到今天欧洲的移民问题。展览中只有少部分作品不表达政治意图, 但却更能引起“局外人”的共鸣。其中有一组摄影作品令人印象深刻, 照片被一字型从左到右上升排开, 照片中是两个正在给对方拍照的人。他们一个从下往上走, 一个从上往下走, 到楼梯中间处汇合。轻松的动机与简练的展示方式的巧妙结合到让人顿觉艺术本身的力量。







Danny Matthy, downstairs—upstairs, 1975

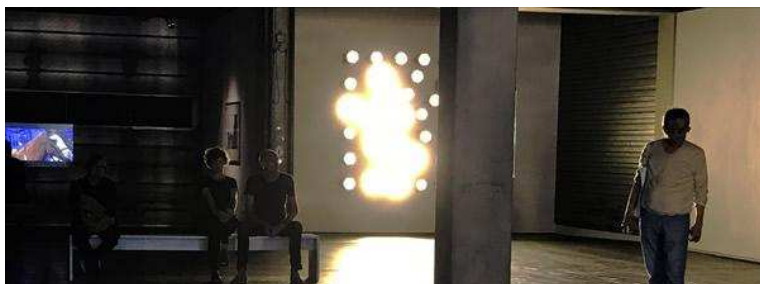


Annie Vigier &amp; Franck Apertet, Scène à l'italienne (Proscenium), 2014

Documenta Halle是距离弗里德里希美术馆最近的另一展区。艺术家Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet利用空间制作了一个与展厅同宽并有5度斜角的台面，这种台面规格是依照巴黎歌剧院的演出舞台所制造。作品也将空间分隔出高低不同的层次。这种高台在古希腊时期代表了参与性政治的公共空间，一般用于竞选和演说，观众不自觉的行走其上也体现了一种对民主政治的象征性参与。



Theo Eshetu, Atlas Fractured, 2017





Neue Neue Galerie 展场中的表演艺术家

Neue Neue Galerie (Neue Hauptpost) 的建筑改造自闲置的老邮局。这栋建筑原本作为后福特主义的劳动厂房，如今废弃，标志着数字化、虚拟化对服务业经济产生的影响。此展场位于卡塞尔城北的移民区，在二战后，德国劳动力大幅下降，大量移民涌入填补了劳动力的空缺。所以将展场选择在此，同样也考虑到了将移民纳入展览的社会意义，带动当地人和来自世界各地的人关注这个城市中的少数族裔群体。

此展厅展出的大都是年轻艺术家的作品。由来自亚洲、非洲的更广泛的艺术家构成。展厅中央，艺术家 Theo Eshetu 的影像作品投射在几乎横跨了整个空间的幕布上。而在旁边，表演艺术家在场馆的地板上不断挣扎向前爬行仿佛要越过一条无形的线。无论从作品的呈现方式、形式还是多样化角度，Neue Neue Galleri 都要胜过主展区。

看过卡塞尔的几个展区后，我似乎并没有在繁多的展品中找到太多的共鸣。展览似乎也没有与城市形成良性的互动，除了展场分布于城市的各个角落之外，而在展场之外策展人并没有将活动与话题巧妙地结合起来。在 Neue Neue Galleri 附近，土耳其移民开的咖啡厅依然如往常般做着生意；观者在展厅内耐心琢磨着当代艺术作品的含义，而在他们之间，在展场内和展场外，却难以寻找到恰如其分的结合点。

但在展览期间，城市内却有许多由艺术家或艺术爱好者自发组织的小展览。我所住的 arinbnb 房东也热情地邀请我们去参加他在附近酒吧里策划的卡塞尔艺术大学摄影系学生的展览。除此之外，在城市的各个角落也散布着一些艺术展览。独立的艺术空间或艺术家运营的空间 (artist-run space) 可以说是文献展的“局外人”，因为它们既不受国际性话题的约束也不对其他机构负责；通常能够产生更强试验性的作品；策展人在其中能够成为行动的发起者或者问题的提出者，所以这些空间往往更能够把握最新的艺术动向与自身特色。

回顾文献展的历史不难看出，它已从最初的为艺术的自由争取一席之地的实践场，到为艺术确立某种话语权的场所。文献展始于1955年，起初以推动战后地区重建为目标，60年代在受到大众媒体冲击的“反文化”、“反艺术”潮流影响下，将大众文化引入展览；90年代在全球局势的变化中，再度演变成一种社会行动，而近几届的文献展开始关注民主问题与公共教育问题。文献展独立于艺术市场，不接受画廊的推荐以及艺术家的申请是其独立性的保证，而已成规模的“文献展品牌”也具有了机构性的权威。所以文献展本身似乎也可以作为机构批评的对象之一。文献展的侧重点相较意大利威尼斯双年展而言，更加重视对当下社会事件以及经济发展的讨论与直接反映，而并不那么在意艺术作品在展场中的呈现、或者艺术作品的展陈形式本身。相较政治呼吁而言，艺术则在文献展上显得微不足道。

在“艺术终结”之后，艺术的标准开始变的多元化并特别强烈地依附于时代和热点问题，体现政治正确性与多民族平等成为了当下西方当代艺术的责任也是许多国际大展的必然趋势。然而虽然艺术在地理空间中已经扁平化，地区的多元化仍然不能被一种声音引导。所以作为主导话语之外的独立艺术生态及出没在市井街巷里的空间作为文献展、双年展等展览的“局外人”则更加富有活力。

作者：贝壳

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# BODY BEAUTY BOOKSHELVES: CICERO'S PEGMATA AND LES GENS D'UTERPAN'S "LIBRARY"

🕒 25th September 2017    📁 documenta 14, Minus Plato Today    👤 Annie Vigier, Atticus, Cicero, Franck Apertet, les gens d'Uterpan, Libraries, slavery    👤 Minus Plato

In a letter to Atticus (Att. 4. 8. 2), Cicero expresses his delight at the installation of some new bookshelves in an oddly convoluted and high-flown fashion:

postea uero, quam Tyrannio mihi libros disposuit, mens addita uidetur meis aedibus. qua quidem in re mirifica opera Dionysi et Menophili tui fuit. nihil uenustius quam illa tua pegmata, postquam mi sillybae libros inlustrarunt.

Now that Tyrannio has set up (disposuit) my books for me, a mind seems to have been added to my house. Your Dionysius and Menophilus were fantastic on that job. There is nothing more beautiful (uenustius) than the bookshelves (pegmata) you sent me, once the labels (sillybae) illuminated the books for me.

In his discussion of this passage in his book *Cicero, Catullus, and the Language of Social Performance*, Brian Krostenko highlights the conflation of philosophical and erotic language that Cicero uses to describe something as seemingly mundane as new bookshelves, focusing on the term *uenust(us)* as used to denote the attractiveness or beauty that stems from an ordered arrangement. Krostenko notes how the *dis-* of the verb *dispōnō* 'emphasizes the assignation of parts to their places to form an orderly whole', comparing the term *dissignatio* used by Cicero elsewhere of Tyrannio's arrangement of his books (Att. 4. 4a. 1) to its use in theatrical contexts, whereby the person who assigned seats in the theater was called an assignator. As for the odd phrase of the ordered books adding 'a mind (mens)' to Cicero's house, Krostenko follows previous scholars who read a reference to Anaxagoras' concept of *nous* or principle of order.

Krostenko's analysis, however, does not extend to Cicero's use of Greek terms for the bookshelves themselves (*pegmata*) and their leather labels (*sillybae*), even though at least the first of these terms seems to be Greekish slang that supports his argument. The word comes from the Greek verb *σύνδεσθαι*, which means "to fasten together" and by using it, Cicero is conflating the process of ordering the books with



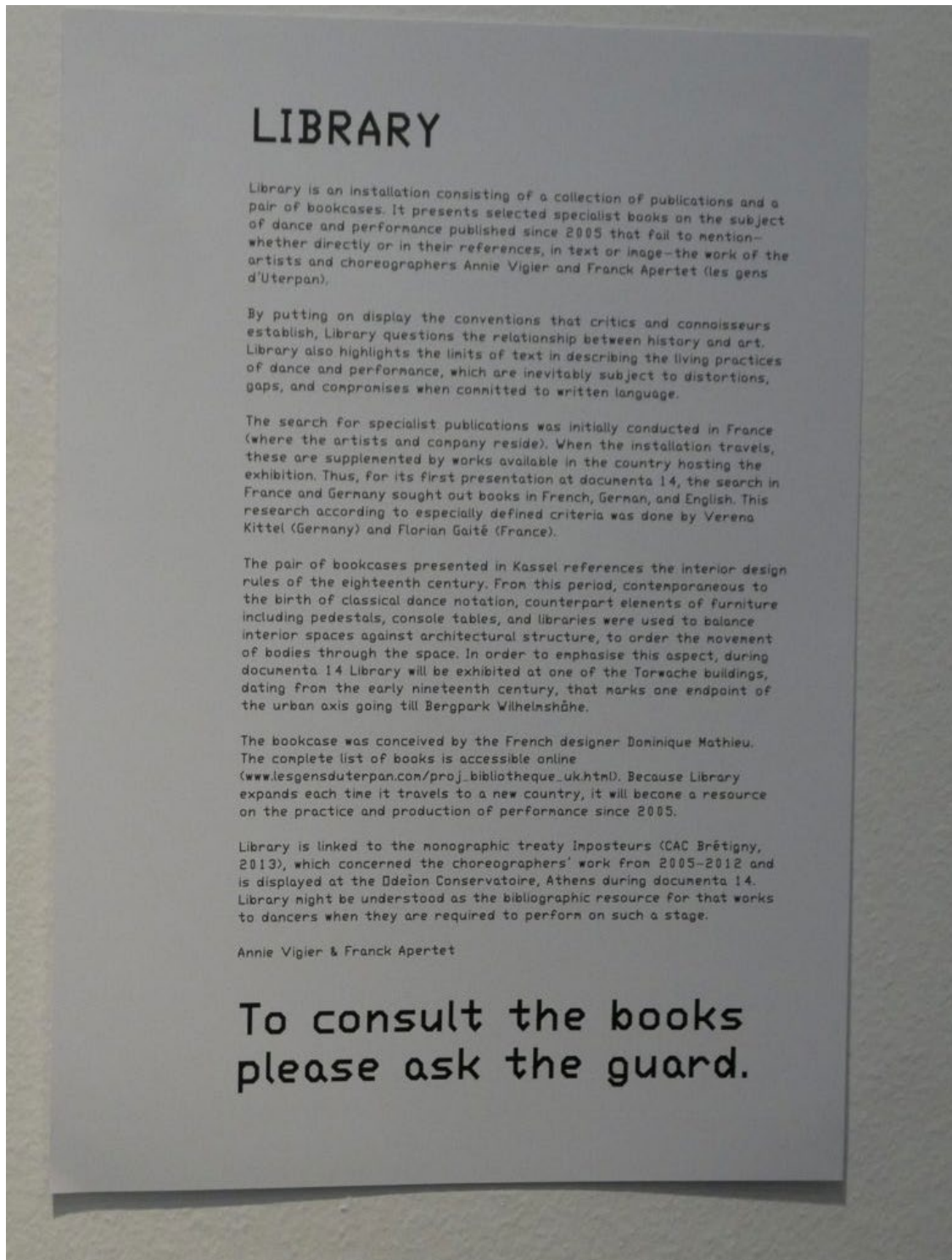
also hinting at the pivotal role of Greek philosophical wisdom housed within the bookshelves.

This conflation of Greekness in both slave-labor and intellectual prestige is a timely reminder of how so much of what survives for us of ancient Greco-Roman cultures hold traces of commodified and oppressed human bodies. To dwell on this fact in terms of my post yesterday about highlighting the figure of the dancer or performer in terms of the value of the dance or performance and its construction by an artist or choreographer, brings me to a work by Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet, who work together as the collective *les gens d'Uterpan* that I encountered at documenta 14 in Kassel.



Called Library, 2017-, this work, housed in the Torwache, the 19th century building enveloped in an installation by Ibrahim Mahama, was part of the artists' ongoing and multifaceted project Procedure of the New Principle of Research and Creation, 2014-.

Here is how they describe Library in the wall-text:



## LIBRARY

Library is an installation consisting of a collection of publications and a pair of bookcases. It presents selected specialist books on the subject of dance and performance published since 2005 that fail to mention—whether directly or in their references, in text or image—the work of the artists and choreographers Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan).

By putting on display the conventions that critics and connoisseurs establish, Library questions the relationship between history and art. Library also highlights the limits of text in describing the living practices of dance and performance, which are inevitably subject to distortions, gaps, and compromises when committed to written language.

The search for specialist publications was initially conducted in France (where the artists and company reside). When the installation travels, these are supplemented by works available in the country hosting the exhibition. Thus, for its first presentation at documenta 14, the search in France and Germany sought out books in French, German, and English. This research according to especially defined criteria was done by Verena Kittel (Germany) and Florian Galté (France).

The pair of bookcases presented in Kassel references the interior design rules of the eighteenth century. From this period, contemporaneous to the birth of classical dance notation, counterpart elements of furniture including pedestals, console tables, and libraries were used to balance interior spaces against architectural structure, to order the movement of bodies through the space. In order to emphasise this aspect, during documenta 14 Library will be exhibited at one of the Torwache buildings, dating from the early nineteenth century, that marks one endpoint of the urban axis going till Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe.

The bookcase was conceived by the French designer Dominique Mathieu. The complete list of books is accessible online ([www.lesgensduterpan.com/proj\\_bibliotheque\\_uk.html](http://www.lesgensduterpan.com/proj_bibliotheque_uk.html)). Because Library expands each time it travels to a new country, it will become a resource on the practice and production of performance since 2005.

Library is linked to the monographic treaty *Imposteurs* (CAC Brétigny, 2013), which concerned the choreographers' work from 2005–2012 and is displayed at the Odeion Conservatoire, Athens during documenta 14. Library might be understood as the bibliographic resource for that works to dancers when they are required to perform on such a stage.

Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet

To consult the books  
please ask the guard.

What struck me about this description, when read in terms of Cicero's letter to Atticus on his own bookshelves, was not only how the artists had incorporated the differences in place and language into the construction of the two shelves (if you look at the photographs, you can see overlaps between the French and German shelves), but also how they brought the museum guards into the process of a visitor accessing the library. Furthermore, the final sentence about the use of Library as a bibliographical resource for dancers when they are required to perform the artists' work creates a significant triangulation between the artists, the audience and the performers. At the same time, if we imagine a performer in Kassel asking a museum guard to access a book from Library, we experience a unique dialogue between two underrepresented figures within the institutional system for the production of art. Of course, visitors to exhibitions may interact with museum guards, but what does it mean for dancers and performers to do so, especially as a direct extension of their work on behalf of artists and choreographers? In terms of Cicero's letter, we could ask, what does it mean for two Greek slaves to enact ideas of rational order in the bookshelf construction and labeling of a Roman's library of Greek philosophical works?

And what is there to say about the bookshelves themselves? Where does the ordered beauty of their bodies fit into this exchange? A visitor could bypass the books themselves and visit the online catalogue (of the French and German shelves). Or, if you visited the exhibition, you could merely peruse the typed list of the books included. For my part, I decided to take a series of photographs of the shelves (reproduced below) as a reminder of the bodily experience of being confronted by the work, in a time and space. Looking back over these photographs now, however, I regret not speaking to the museum guard to enact the performative potential of the work and to see these bookshelves for all of their ordered beauty in terms of the body of human labor, in a space and time. All that remains of these bodies (as of the Greek slaves' bodies in Cicero's letters) are traces, in the form of these photographs of the two bookshelves and of my own shadow on the wall-text between them:







**ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK  
APERTET (LES GENS D'UTERPAN)**

(geb. 1965, Gonesse, Frankreich/geb. 1966, UGINE,  
Frankreich)

**Library (2017-)**

(b. 1965, Gonesse, France/b. 1966, UGINE,  
France)

**Library (2017- )**

**Handlungsweise des Neuen  
Forschungs- und Gestaltungsprin-  
zips (2017-)**

**Holzregale und Bücher**

Vollständige Bibliografien abrufbar unter  
[www.lesgensduterpan.com/  
proj\\_bibliotheque\\_uk.html](http://www.lesgensduterpan.com/proj_bibliotheque_uk.html)

Gestaltung der Bücherregale: Dominique Mathieu;  
Recherche Frankreich 2017: Florian Galté;  
Recherche Deutschland 2017: Verena Kittel

Koproduziert mit der Fondation Nationale  
des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques, Paris;  
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und dem französischen Ministerium für Kultur  
und Kommunikation

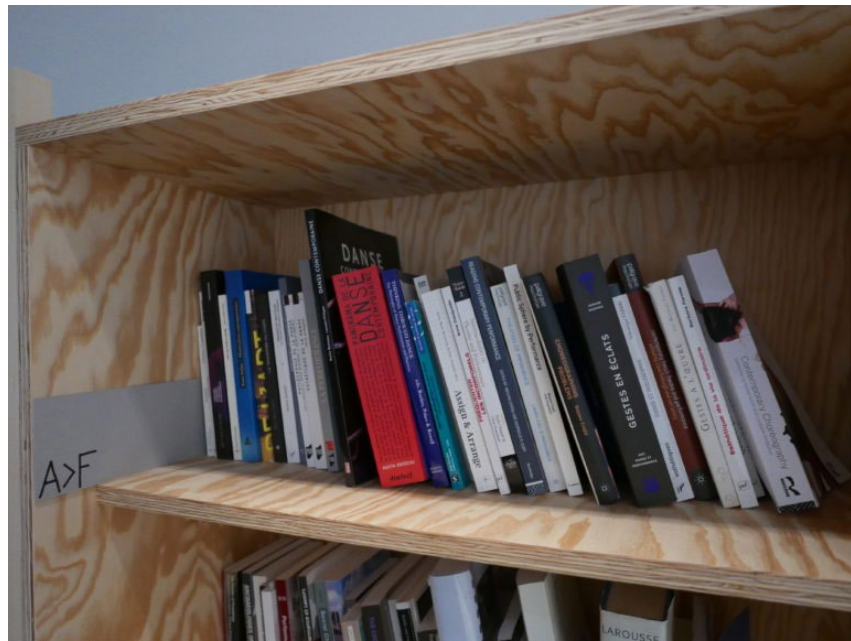
**Procedure of the New Principle  
of Research and Creation (2017-)**

**Wooden bookcases and books**

Complete bibliographies available at  
[www.lesgensduterpan.com/  
proj\\_bibliotheque\\_uk.html](http://www.lesgensduterpan.com/proj_bibliotheque_uk.html)

Bookcase design: Dominique Mathieu;  
research France 2017: Florian Galté; research  
Germany 2017: Verena Kittel

Coproduced with Fondation Nationale des Arts  
Graphiques et Plastiques, Paris, Île-de-France  
Regional Cultural Affairs Office, and the French  
Ministry of Culture and Communication



**parole, parole, parole** : A glimpse inside the exhibition of documenta 14 in Kassel,  
Norbert Bayer

<http://parole.norbertbayer.de/documenta-kassel-art-capitalism-criticism/>

25 août 2017 / August 25th 2017

PERFORMATIVE, SPACIAL, VISUAL & ICONIC

# *A Glimpse Inside The Exhibition Of documenta 14*

25. AUGUST 2017 | NORBERT BAYER

| ANNA «ASJA» LĀCIS, ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK APERTET, ARTUR ŹMIJEWSKI, AUSSTELLUNG, BILL  
VIOLA, CHRISTOPHER D'ARCANGELO, DOCUMENTA, FOTOGRAFIE, GLEICHBERECHTIGUNG,  
INSTALLATION, KUNST, LORENZA BÖTTNER, MARCEL BROODTHAERS, MARTA MINUJÍN, OLAF  
HOLZAPFEL, PERFORMANCE, THEATER

**Let's focus on the 14th edition of documenta which is still  
on display in Kassel until September 2017.**





*The artwork «Ardoises magiques, Magie» by Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924 – 1976) shown at Neue Galerie*

This is the work «Ardoises magiques, Magie» by Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924 – 1976) shown at Neue Galerie. It consists of a publication with the title «Magie» and an old fashioned magna doodle or etch-a-sketch as the title puts it already with his initials.

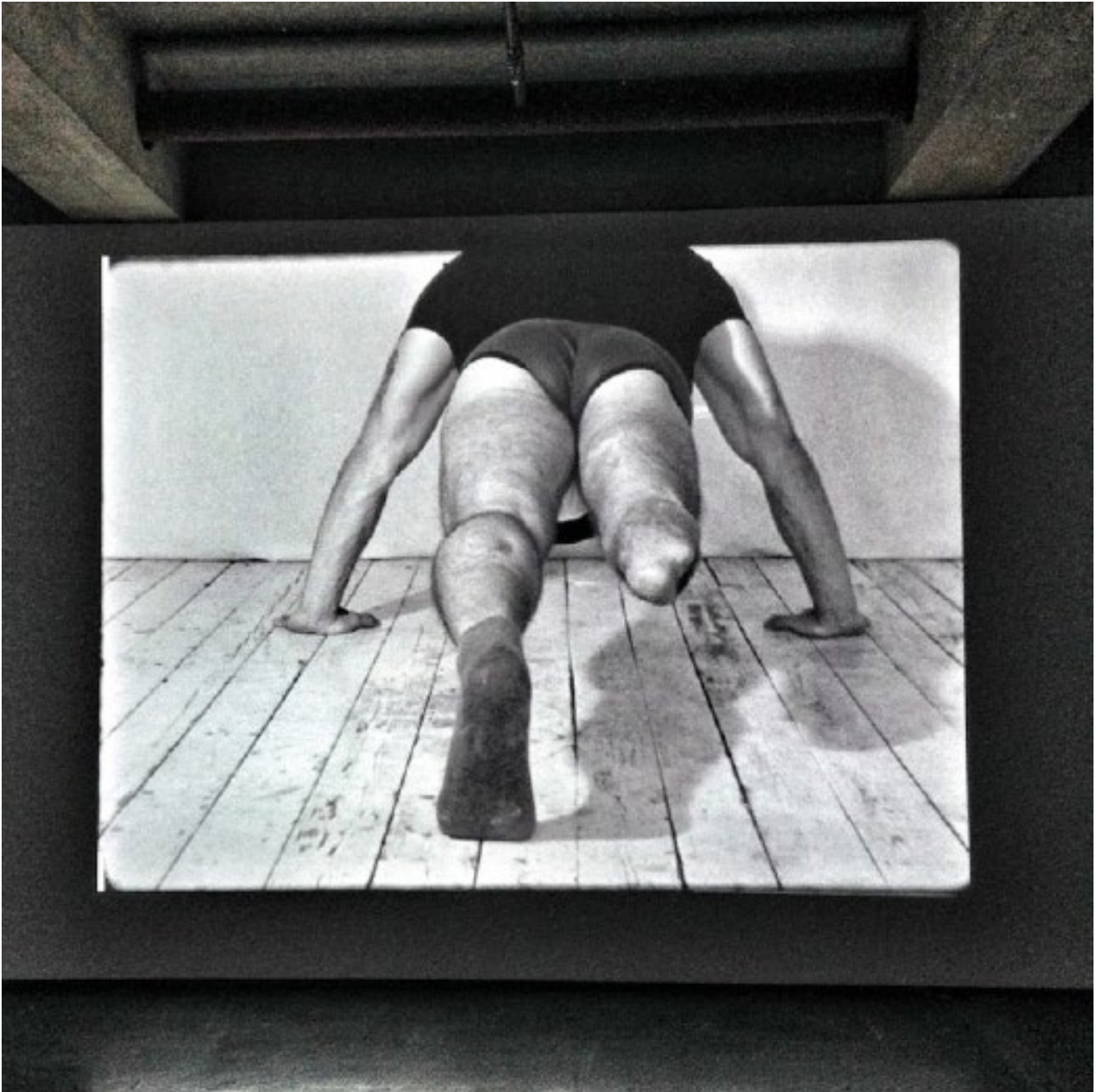
Sigmund Freud already described the second part in his essay about the «Wunderblock» (German for etch-a-sketch or magna doodle):



erased over and over by lifting the upper paper from the ground plate. Although the writings or drawings made on it are always erased on the surface through the covering paper. Nevertheless on the main board small, almost invisible marks remain. These marks Freud was interested in when he compared this special device to a human mind which is confronted with a bunch of information which stays primarily unnoticed or unconscious, but are important for the subliminal in that what follows.

When Broodthears puts this tool next to a journal with the title «Magie» – notably in German – he may refer to this essay of Sigmund Freud, which reveals that there is not so much pure magic in our subconscious as we might think.

Or the other way round, connected to «Art et Politique» also mentioned on the journal: That magic is not only at work in art, but also in politics – even more if it is denied and presented as pure logic and a form of cybernetic systems theory. And that politics leave its marks for longer than we might think, even if it turned out wrong and got erased on the surface. •



*A still of the six-channel video installation «Realism» from 2017 by Polish artist Artur Żmijewski (\*1966) shown as part the 14th edition of documenta at Neue Neue Galerie (Neue Hauptpost) in Kassel*

Here we see a still of the six-channel video installation «Realism» from 2017 by Polish artist Artur Żmijewski (\*1966) shown as part the 14th edition of documenta at Neue Neue Galerie (Neue Hauptpost) in Kassel. Each black-and-white loop is approx. 4 – 12 minutes each and without sound.

The question with which Żmijewski is dealing is about the place the

art takes in our world, which are its goals and its impact on reality. He is all about confrontation and his artworks can be summed up with «social experiments» or «staged documentations».

In «Realism» men who are lower limb amputees perform their a choreography which lies somewhere between fitness exercises and minimal dance movements. It is not explained where these amputations come from, some say it might be from landmines, therefore these athletic types could be former soldiers.

In any case it is a strong statement for the will to survive and not giving up. Through its straightforwardness it captures the viewer and after the first irritating moments the poetic qualities of the artwork sets in.

It it also an example for the powerful principles of presentation and representation – or as Joseph Beuys has put it: «zeige deine Wunde» («show your wound») as one of his artworks from the 1970ies is called. Beuys, who was a jet-pilot in World War II, trusts in the act of showing not only physical wounds to heal the psychic traumata.

Showing and revealing wounds and traumata involves also the existence of the viewer who turns the subject into an object. That special process of objectification seems to be the key to freed from the weight of the past. •



*The artwork «Scène à l'italienne (Proscenium) – Procedure of the New Principle of Research and Creation» of Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet from 2014 and is shown in the documenta Halle in Kassel at documenta 14*

This wooden stage and the stairs which are connected to it on one side are the artwork «Scène à l'italienne (Proscenium) – Procedure of the New Principle of Research and Creation» of Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet from 2014 and is shown in the documenta Halle in Kassel at documenta 14.

Both are choreographers and want to create a dialogue between



contexts of performance, spaces, sculptures and live spectacles. For the documenta Halle they produced a simple empty stage modelled after the one of the Opéra Garnier in Paris. It is inclined about 5% to the back end to present the actors standing in the back slightly higher and make them more visible. Thus the prospect for the viewer is organised after the illusionistic principles of perspective.

The wood reflects the vibrations when you walk on it and without having a curtain or an auditorium it is clear that this is a stage.

A stage for each and every visitor.

A sacred place, a specific space, a platform and a podium which transformed itself through the time: In ancient Greece it was the round place in the amphitheatre; in the middle ages it turns into an heightened area on a public space and in the renaissance it turned into an inclined wooden construction which was erected in connection to a wall. This way of construction which is in use up until today divides a space into two opposing areas and is called «theatre à l'italienne» («theatre in italian style»).

Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet intend to put the exhibition as such on a stage and to create a possibility for fugitive and spontaneous occurrences instead of presentations and performances.

I can confirm that it just works! •



*One of the landmark artworks of the 14th edition of the documenta in Kassel: The «Parthenon of books» by Argentinian artist Marta Minujín (\*1941)*

Here we see one of the landmark artworks of the 14th edition of the documenta in Kassel: The «Parthenon of books» by Argentinian artist Marta Minujín (\*1941).

The monolithic sculpture is modeled after the original Parthenon on the acropolis in Athens which was built between 447 and 438 B.C. The structure is approx. 65 meters long, 30 meters wide and 20

meters high and has therefore almost the original size of its original in Greece.

The ancient Parthenon was originally conceived as a temple for the statue of Athene and the city's silver reserves were stored there. In the case of a Persian attack, the silver could be transformed into new coins, so that the government had fresh money to go into war.

Later on it the building was also used as a Christian church in the middle ages and after that also as a mosque.

Religion, aesthetics and politics intertwine here into a complex structure.

Marta Minujín conceived the first version of the «Parthenon of books» in 1983 in Buenos Aires, when the Argentinian military junta was collapsing. Back then she was presenting the 25.000 books which were forbidden during their domination.

For the 14th edition of documenta she made a public call that everybody could bring books which were or are still forbidden to cover the metal structure. The call is still ongoing, because the framework is still not covered completely. That detail of incompleteness strengthens the artistic message even in that point that there will be forbidden books, opinions and messages also in the future. •





*«Post No Art» from the mid-seventies by Christopher D'Arcangelo (1955 – 1979) shown at the 14th edition of documenta in the documenta hall in Kassel*

«Post No Art» is a work from the mid-seventies by Christopher D'Arcangelo (1955 – 1979) shown at the 14th edition of documenta in the documenta hall in Kassel.

In 1975 D'Arcangelo worked on a series of unauthorized interventions in New York's big museums to initiate a dialogue and debate about the fastening process of the institutionalization of the



art world.

On one hand D'Arcangelo himself hadn't exhibited his works in public, but on the other hand he wasn't also an outsider of the contemporary art world, because he was assistant of the artists Stephen Antonakos and Daniel Buren and worked for a gallery. In 1974 he had already begun with the production of a series of images where simple stencil typography is set on a monochrome background – a reference to a back then vanguard practice inspired by the linguistic turn. The stencil font has already been used by his father Allan D'Arcangelo who was an artist and printmaker, best known for his pop art paintings of highways and road signs.

In combination with the nihilist message of the pictured work of Christopher D'Arcangelo – which can almost be seen as prophetic for our times – another artwork of him seems interesting to me. It is a poster from 1974/1975 which spreads the following message:

«THE IDEA THAT TODAY THERE IS NO AESTHETIC  
MOVEMENT RULING THE VISUAL  
ARTS IS INCORRECT.  
CAPITALISM RULES.  
IS THIS NECESSARY?»

It has already proven wrong that a vanguard style, even if it wants to beat the system and to stay outside of the common commercial circles, can stay away from the cycle of appropriation, commodity fetishism and the sphere of trade.

Also the spreading of art – might it also be critical – via social networks has to face this dilemma. Should we even stand back from posting and perpetuating it? •



*At documenta 14 the German artist Olaf Holzapfel (\*1967) presents the work «Trassen» («Crossing») in Kassel's Karlsaue.*

At documenta 14 the German artist Olaf Holzapfel (\*1967) presents among other artworks the work «Trassen» («Crossing») in Kassel's Karlsaue.

The painted structure is made from wood and 8,50 m long, 4m wide × 5,50 m high.

This minimalistic sculpture refers to the traditional rural way of

construction. Its appearance depends directly on the size of the used trees and therefore on the space and the nature which surrounds it. Holzapfel already worked with these framework-constructions before and this series can be located between land-art, concept art and craft, but to distinct it from artisanal products he includes some «errors» into their symmetry.

Holzapfel sees this way of building as a way of creating space from mere lines and a possibility to draw into the space and to work with the tension between two dimensional images and three dimensional spaces.

These lines which are flexible and multifunctional reveal that framework-constructions are also the origin of a lot of modern ways of building, because rural methods like these are an ideal model for the transformation of material into technique in a way that you can still see how it is built.

Unfortunately nowadays only few people still have the knowledge how to build these constructions.

Holzapfel sees his frameworks as open and interactive constructions which offer an alternative to the «White Cube» of galleries and museums. «A framework can become so many different things: a house, a machine, a skeleton, or support structure...».

Indeed I was seeing children climb on them or others relaxing within them – and I guess the artist would approve. •





Archival documentary material which includes books about and by Anna “Asja” Lācis (1891 -1979) and this tissue by Berlin theatre Berliner Ensemble are shown in the Grimmwelt Museum in Kassel as part of the 14th edition of documenta.

This a piece of the archavial documentary material which includes books about and by Anna “Asja” Lācis (1891 -1979) shown in the Grimmwelt Museum in Kassel as part of the 14th edition of documenta.

Anna Lācis was born in Ķempji, Latvia in 1891. She established the Experimental Children’s Theatre workshop «Orel» and worked as



actress also.

She is an important figure of the theatre scene not only because she visited Germany and met Fritz Lang, Erwin Piscator and her later husband the director Bernhard Reich, but also because of her writings and her establishment of the connection between Brecht and Walter Benjamin.

She's the one Benjamin dedicated his book «Einbahnstrasse» to: «This street is named Asja Lācis Street, after her who as an engineer cut it through the author.» She inspired him to the «Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater» which refers to her experiences in using the power of imagination of the childrens' phantasy.

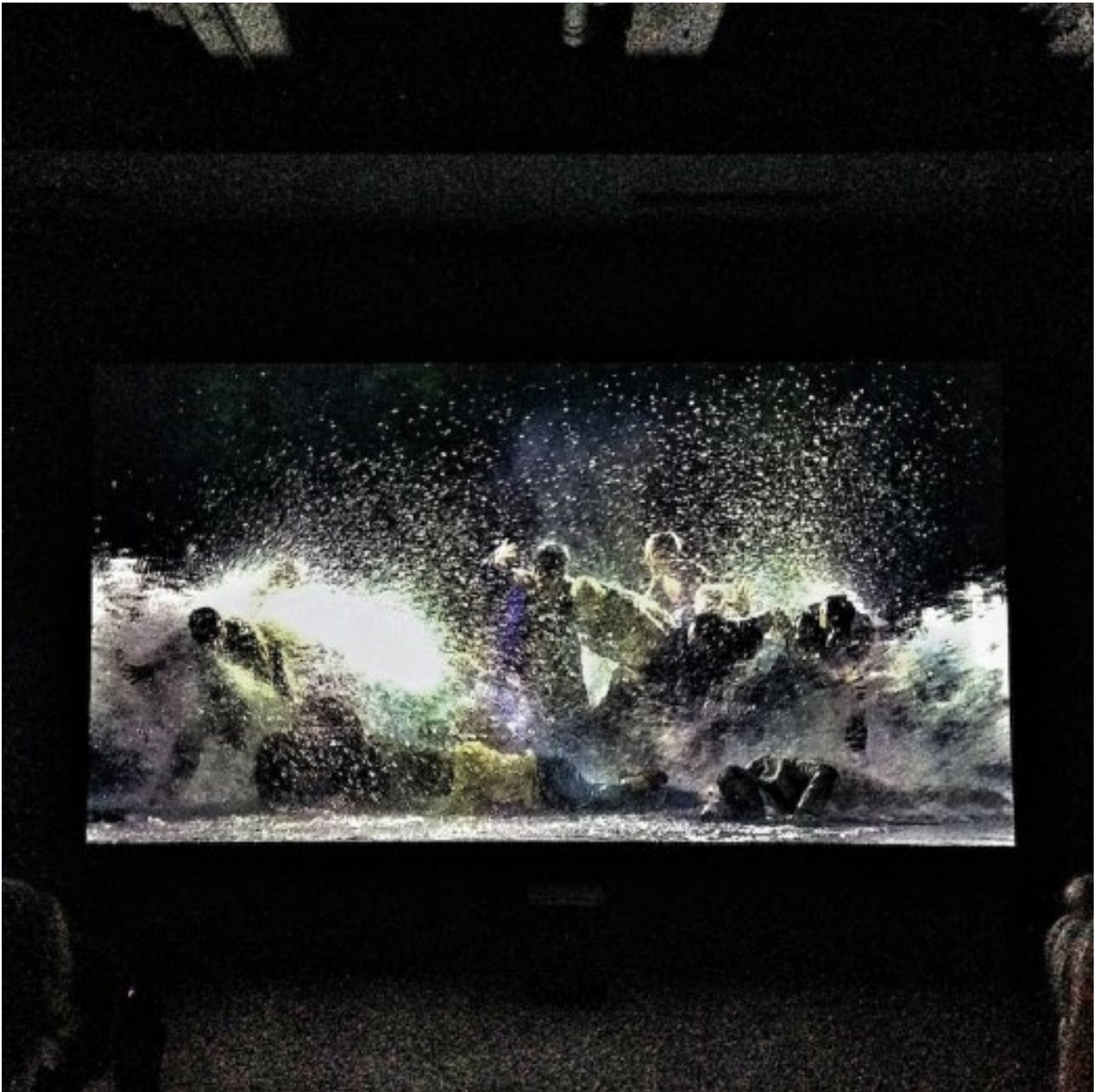
In 1938 Lācis was sentenced to ten years forced labor in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, because she was falsely accused of being part of a fascist nationalist movement. But still Lācis managed to organize inmates' theater while imprisoned there.

Only after these ten years when returned to Latvia she got to know about the tragic death of Walter Benjamin on his escape from Nazi Germany near the border between France and Spain in 1940, because his letters to her were confiscated by the KGB. Lācis was officially rehabilitated in 1955.

She re-established her contact with Brecht and Piscator and officially joined the Communist Party in 1955.

Lācis's work was rediscovered and her «Program» was published illegally in East Germany in 1968 where it became influential for the political theatre.

Pictured is a tissue by Berlin theatre Berliner Ensemble founded by Berthold Brecht which claims not less than «Peace for all nations.» •



*Screenshot of Bill Viola's (\*1951) video installation «The Raft» from the year 2004 shown at Fridericianum in Kassel as part of the 14th edition of documenta*

This is a screenshot of Bill Viola's (\*1951) video installation «The Raft» from the year 2004 shown at Fridericianum in Kassel as part of the 14th edition of documenta.

In the approx. 10 minutes long video, you see a group of people standing together like a tableau vivant and being blown away by a big splash of water. The whole scene is presented in slow motion.

Raft of the Medusa» by Théodore Géricault from 1818–1819 which is presented in the Louvre.

When Géricault handed the painting to the Paris salon to be exhibited, people knew immediately what should be presented despite of the classic title. To put it short it's a story of post-colonialism and a sort of karmic revenge: A french captain of the marine wasn't able to navigate the ship «Méduse» when heading to Senegal after England had handed over its colony to France. From the 400 passengers, some fled to boats and 147 were first rescued on a raft, of which only 15 survived through cannibalism.

So in this video we can see a different possible prequel to the painting: A group of everyday people standing together without contact to one another is just blown away by the powers of nature which is here the pressure of the water which is squirting in.

For Bill Viola there's obviously no need for a further story to give context or an explanating reason: Destruction and death can happen anytime – there's no need for karma or other metaphysic things. •



*The artist Lorenza Böttner (1959–1994) is presented with drawings, pastels, paintings, videos and other archival material at Neue Galerie as part of the 14th edition of documenta.*

The artist Lorenza Böttner (1959–1994) is presented with drawings, pastels, paintings, videos and other archival material at Neue Galerie as part of the 14th edition of documenta.

Lorenza's touching biography is told by documenta as such:

«Lorenza, originally named Ernst Lorenz Böttner, was born into a family of German origin in Chile. At the age of eight, s/he received



an electric shock after climbing a pylon, as a result of which both arms were amputated below the shoulder. S/he returned to Germany to have a series of plastic surgery operations and moved to Lichtenau, a city near Kassel, in 1973.

Böttner grew up being considered «disabled» and suffered interment, exclusion and rejection being considered a freak. S/he refused prosthetic arms and developed an acute interest for classical ballet, jazz, and tap dancing, and learned to paint with feet and mouth. S/he studied painting at the Kassel School of Art and questioned the category of disability.

At this point a double process of subjective and artistic self-construction began: Lorenz decided to use the name Lorenza, affirming an openly transgender feminine position. Lorenza's dissident transgender body becomes a living political sculpture, a trans-armless sculptural manifesto.

Lorenza transformed the practice of painting into performance art, making the streets a stage for the politicization of bodily difference. Surpassing both the male narcissistic position of drip painting and the feminist tradition of public performance, Lorenza claimed the right to exist and create in a transgender armless body. Böttner travelled extensively doing hundreds of street performance paintings.»

(Sorry for just editing the catalogue's text this time.)

With this more than powerful statement about art and an artist's life I finish my selection from documenta 14. •

# OCULA

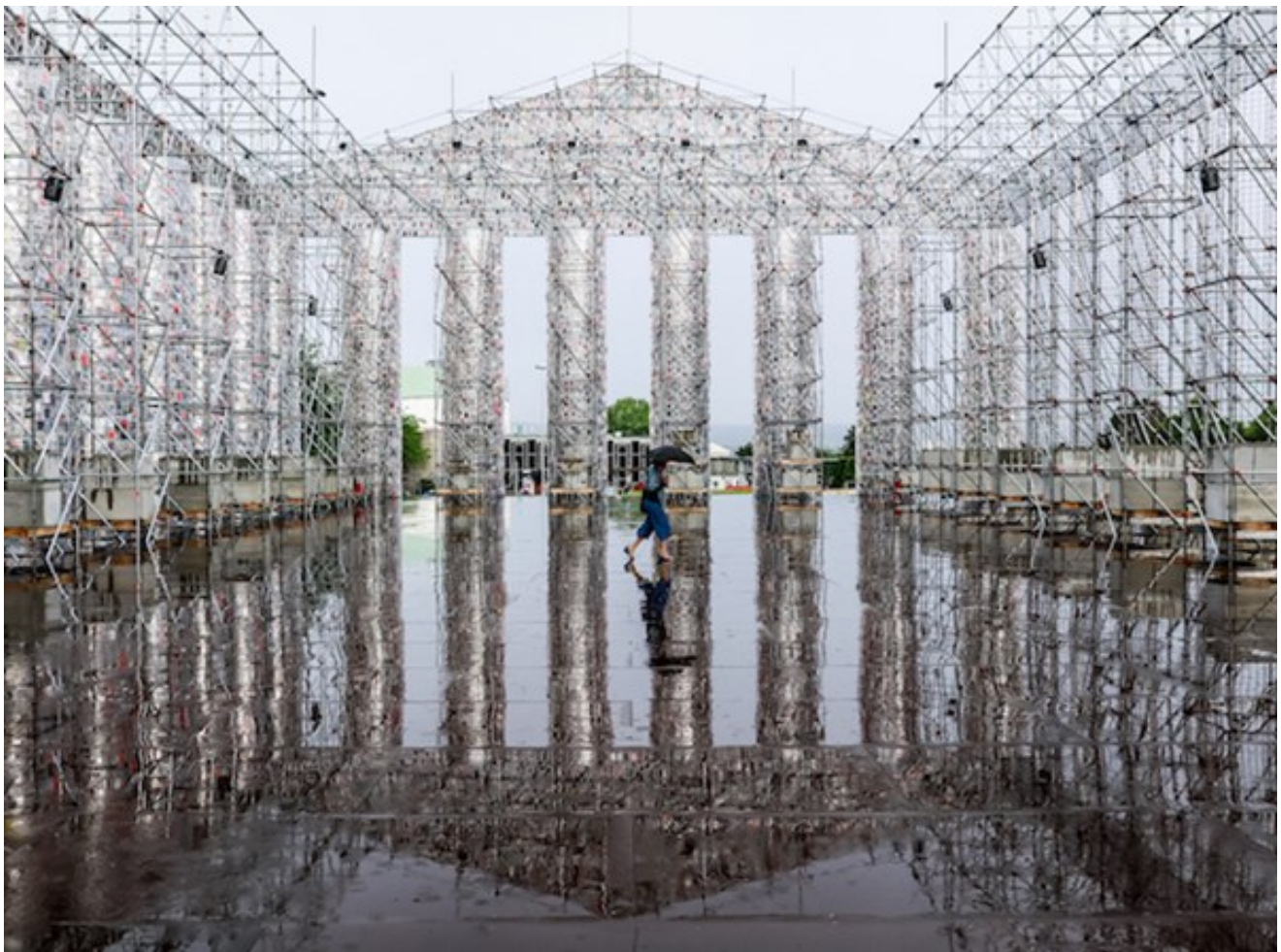
OCULA REPORT

## Tough love: documenta 14

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Stephanie Bailey | Kassel | Athens | 11 August 2017

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documenta 14, Kassel (10 June–17 September 2017). Courtesy Ocula. Photo: Charles Roussel.

To find 'Athens' in the Kassel chapter of documenta 14, *Learning from Athens*, is easy. At the Fridericianum, one of documenta's central venues in the German city, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens (EMST) is presenting an exhibition of works from its collection, titled *ANTIDORON*. The title, which can refer to blessed yet unconsecrated leavened bread, is interpreted in the exhibition's wall text as the return of a gift or loan. The concept is fitting when considering the split artistic director Adam Szymczyk created when he decided to stage the exhibition across two cities for the first time in documenta's history, each located at opposite ends of the European

spectrum, geographically, culturally, and fiscally—a 'gift' to crisis-inflicted Athens in terms of the redistribution of capital (both economic and symbolic) and an anti-gift to Kassel, which had to share its wealth with another place. (A gesture that mirrors Germany's role in managing Greece's economic crisis, and the divisive politics that have occurred therein.)



Geta Brătescu, *Automatismul produce violență: Proiect de acțiune* (*Automatism produces violence: Project for an action*) (1974). Installation view: documenta 14, Neue Galerie, Kassel (10 June–17 September 2017). Graphite on tracing paper, 27 x 85 cm. © Photo: Haupt & Binder.

On a wall at the entrance to the Fridericianum there is a list of artists taking part in *ANTIDORON*, at the bottom of which are three names singled out as 'documenta 14 participating artists in the Fridericianum', making it unclear as to whether the artists of the EMST show are part of the main exhibition or not. The gesture recalls the discontent in Athens surrounding documenta 14's ambiguous approach to the city that has lent its name to the entire quinquennial event. A sentiment driven by the title's objectification and its subsequent effects on the ground in the Greek capital, made worse by the title's suggestion that documenta 14 would effectively be speaking not only for Athens but the city's art scene throughout the build-up to the exhibition's opening, and a controversial interview that took place after the Athens launch, in which Szymczyk stated never having an interest in working with the local art scene in the first place (which some commentators have pointed out to be untrue).

documenta 14's titular objectification is diagrammed in the Fridericianum, where EMST as a state institution is presented as an 'object' in documenta 14's Kassel curatorial—a process that was also reflected in certain points in the Kassel exhibition, with some irony. Take Geta Brătescu's short



video *Automatism* (2017) at the Neue Galerie, which shows a man cutting through large vertical canvases positioned in a line, Fontana-action style, until he reaches a man at the end, who is theatrically stabbed. (A sketch depicting this scene nearby draws blood.) To abstract something, or make it iconic, you need to symbolically kill it first—this is the first step in understanding what *Learning from Athens* has demonstrated to those who have observed its 'lessons'. To reduce an entire context into a frame for an exhibition that doubles as a world stage is an inherently violent act, even when enacted with good intentions. (Which is why there is a sense that future curators will indeed be learning from *Athens*.)



Theo Eshetu, *Atlas Fractured* (2017). Digital video projected on banner. Installation view: documenta 14, Neue Neue Galerie (Neue Hauptpost), Kassel (10 June–17 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke.

But the politics of the exhibition's title and its impact in real terms is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the overlapping and underlying logics behind documenta 14. At least, this is what comes out in the Kassel exhibition, where all the loose threads left dangling in the Athens show come together. Take Theo Eshetu's *Atlas Fractured* (2017), a powerful video that presents a grand facial tour of culture, in which faces depicted in the art of various religions and societies, from Buddhist to Minoan (plus portraits of Bowie and Tupac), are projected onto living visages. In Athens, the work is shown at the Conservatory in a small black room with golden tinsel-lined walls. In Kassel, another version is projected at the Neue Neue Galerie on a large banner draped over a huge wall depicting masks that represent Africa, America, Oceania, Asia, and Europe. (The banner once hung from the front of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin-Dahlem.) The soundtrack for



both versions of the video is the same: over an epic, sci-fi warp (which includes a stretched-out version of the Rolling Stones' 'Gimme Shelter') we hear voices. There's Angela Davis, Charlie Chaplin, and Maya Angelou, who recites the last section of her poem, *The Human Family*: 'We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike.'





Angela Melitopoulos, *Crossings* (2017). Video and sound installation. Installation view: documenta 14, Giesshaus (University of Kassel), Kassel (10 June–17 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke.

That our differences are a thin line separating a shared, inherent likeness is also conjured at the former Giesshaus foundry, a rotunda whose interior dome feels like a cross between a miniature pantheon and a Turkish hammam, and which once operated as part of a Nazi arms factory. Here, Angela Melitopoulos' *Crossings* (2017), made with the participation of Angela Anderson and Maurizio Lazzarato, weaves oral and visual testimonies together in a four-screen and sixteen-channel installation. In focus are the ancient fort of Sounion and the Lavrion mines (the site of a slave rebellion), Greece's oldest refugee camp in modern-day Lavrio (in operation for some sixty years and effectively managed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party), the island of Lesbos (a focal point in the Mediterranean migrant crisis), and the forest of Skouries in Northern Greece, currently being developed by Canadian mining company Eldorado Gold (around which protests have focused on the exploitation of the region's natural resources). In one clip, a Skouries local admits that he will become a terrorist if he witnesses the pillaging of his land for much longer, implying that violence is the only way to go when all other options have been exhausted. In another, migrants are filmed declaring 'fuck you' to the European Union and everyone else while they watch their refugee camp burn to the ground.

A narrator describes these scenes in *Crossings* as the 'signs and sounds of an epochal reconfiguration'; expressions not of 'a clash of civilisations' but 'a war of subjectivities installed by capitalism.' As one member of the anti-mining movement in Skouries notes, capitalism does not only colonise lands; it colonises our souls, extracting every possible resource the natural world has to offer, including the human mind. This reality—and the struggle against it—is a key component of the Greek crisis: a fact that documenta 14 expands on by considering how various indigenous movements have experienced similar forces, including the Sámi, whose territory crosses from Northern Europe into Russia. Sámi artist Máret-Ánne Sara presents a series of works grouped under the title *Pile o' Sápmi* (2017) at the Neue Neue Galerie, which includes a curtain of reindeer skulls and two lightboxes presented side by side. One lightbox shows an 1892 image of a man sat atop a mound of buffalo skulls, reflective of a United States military tactic during the conquest of the American West to eradicate a crucial Native American resource. The other presents a photo of a pile of some 200 reindeer heads with a Norwegian flag placed at the top—documentation of an incident that occurred when legal proceedings were initiated against the Norwegian Reindeer Herding Act



of 2007, an obligatory reindeer cull, by the artist's brother (a Sámi reindeer herder), who described the Act as 'tantamount to enforced bankruptcy.' (Sara's brother won the case, but the Norwegian government has appealed the ruling.)



Naeem Mohaiemen, *Two Meetings and a Funeral* (2017). Three-channel digital video installation. Installation view: documenta 14, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Kassel (10 June–17 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Michael Nast.

Throughout documenta 14, peoples and places are connected by a common struggle: for access to common resources that larger powers seek to claim and limit, often violently. Naeem Mohaiemen's *Two Meetings and a Funeral* (2017) is an excellent three-channel video study of the Non-Aligned Movement—established in 1961 by a group of states from within the burgeoning Third World liberation movement to offer a third way through the Cold War binaries of the time. Shown at the Hessisches Landesmuseum, the documentary follows historian Vijay Prashad, leftist politician Zonayed Saki, and writer and activist Samia Zennadi into events and architectures associated with that history. It also features archival interviews with figures from within the movement, which are interspersed with footage from a 1973 NAM summit in Algiers attended by such figures as Che Guevara and Yasser Arafat. In one clip, Marcelino dos Santos, a founding member of FRELIMO for liberation of Mozambique, points out how important it is for Non-Aligned member nations to control their national resources and strengthen their economies in order to consolidate their political positions on the global stage.

The Non-Aligned Movement did push for a new world economic order that recognised the mutual reliance of the North and South, but this was blocked, as Vijay Prashad has written, by developing Reaganite and Thatcherist policies in the 1980s. This backstory seems crucial when thinking about one of documenta 14's core gestures. By redistributing half of the exhibition's 37 million euro budget to Athens, one of Europe's Southern states, documenta 14 effectively engaged with the idea of North-South exchange on both a practical and state level. On that note, it makes sense that a large stage built into Kassel's documenta Halle by Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet is presented alongside a wall text mentioning the common form of the 'Italian style' theatre, in which a single space is divided into two separate areas facing or confronting one another. *Learning from Athens* is a performance, or a staging, of an oppositional game of give and take, in which a concrete gesture of exchange has manifested as an abstract concept within the curatorial itself.



Arin Rungjang, 246247596248914102516... *And then there were none (democracy monument)* (2017). Wood and brass sculpture. Installation view: documenta 14, Neue Neue Galerie (Neue Hauptpost), Kassel (10 June–17 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke.

In both cities, a non-aligned expression of the world as it stands, complete with historical threads that converge and diverge, unfolds. At the Benaki Museum's Pireos Annexe in Athens, [Arin Rungjang](#)'s installation of oil on paper works depicting newspaper spreads and a digital video, *And then there were none (Tomorrow we will become Thailand)* (2016), unifies two significant events that took place in 1973 just one month apart in Bangkok and the Greek capital—the Thanmost University uprising (October) and the Polytechnic Uprising (November), respectively; both against



military dictatorships. In Kassel, Rungjang considers the ambiguous nature of a 1932 monument dedicated to the democratic revolution in the Philippines that became associated with fascism until that 1973 student movement reclaimed its symbolism. A partial reconstruction of the monument is shown alongside the film *246247596248914102516... And then there were none* (2017), which narrates semi-fictional recollections by those from the student movement who fled Bangkok post-uprising, over a scene of a man and woman dancing by a Berlin tower block.

Some space is devoted to the themes of upheaval, war and its aftermath in Kassel. There are Sunil Jan's Gelatin silver prints from 1943–1944 documenting the Bengal Famine during World War II, and Karl Hofer's painting *Mann in Ruinen* (*Man among ruins*) (1973), which shows a body emerging from a scene reminiscent of the bombed-out model of Kassel depicting the results of an air raid in 1943, on view at Stadtmuseum as part of its permanent display. There, Hiwa K presents *View from Above* (2017), a video that focuses on that model while the artist narrates a story scripted by him and Lawrence Abu Hamdan about displacement from safe and non-safe zones and strategies that are produced to enter or escape them. (The story is told as the camera performs a slow and steady sweep over the model, which sits just beyond the room where the video is screened.) The overall effect is an inter-relation of histories, sites, and subjectivities, which feels like a key undercurrent of this exhibition, through which the underlying function of the Athens-Kassel split becomes apparent; particularly when thinking about the dynamics that occur when various entities are positioned to face one another.



Hiwa K, *View from Above* (2017). Digital video, colour, sound. 11:23 minutes. Installation view: documenta 14, Stadtmuseum, Kassel (10 Jun –17 September 2017). © Photo: Haupt & Binder.

Certain works seem to act like portals between Athens and Kassel as an illustration of this point. Bouchra Khalili's *The Tempest Society* (2017) is presented in exactly the same way in both cities: in a dark room with theatre seats positioned in front of a large freestanding screen. The video shows three contemporary actors, who form 'The Tempest Society', tracing the steps of a group known as al-Assifa ('The Tempest'), started by two French students and a Moroccan migrant in 1970s Paris. At one point, there is a musical interlude in which a rembetiko song about a 'little refugee' draws parallels, through an association of present with past, between the displaced Greeks of Asia Minor coming to Greece in the 1920s (part of rembetiko's legacy as a form of political expression), the Greeks coming to West Germany between the 1950s and 1970s as part of a postwar guest worker programme, and the migrants in both places today. There is an appeal embedded into the gesture here, in which viewers are implored to see the world not as a site of clear-cut division, but as 'a fragmented image that connects all of us'—an image that emerges from histories told through lives, not books. (To quote and paraphrase one actor in the film.)



Bouchra Khalili, *The Tempest Society* (2017). Digital video. Installation view: documenta 14, Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA)—Pireos Street ('Nikos Kessanlis' Exhibition Hall), Athens (8 April–16 July 2017). © Bouchra Khalili/VG Bild-Kunst.

History as an embodied experience is very much part of documenta 14's focus: an approach that rejects dominant, sanctioned narratives that act in the service of nationalism, empire, or capitalism, through which 'others' are identified in order to create and preserve a cohesive cultural—and thus, political—identity (and form). The exhibition pushes this rejection outwards and inwards by offering space for colonial and post-colonial representations and gazes to commingle and overlap without ignoring the inherent hierarchies and contradictions encoded into documenta's structure as an international exhibition funded by the German state—a European power that has been accused of neocolonialism. Aside from an edition of the *Code Noir*, there is Basil Wright's 1934 *Song of Ceylon* in Athens: an in-depth study of the Sinhalese and the impact of industrialisation on their culture, albeit in a film sponsored by the Empire Tea Marketing Board and the Ceylon Tea Board. At Tofufabrik in Kassel, Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor's video and film installation *Commensal* (2017) presents a haunting interview with a Japanese cannibal who killed a white woman (he had a Grace Kelly fantasy), ate her, and created a manga comic about the experience. It is at once a compelling yet uncomfortably fetishistic study of objectification on multiple levels, depending on who is looking. (And given Japan's imperial history, and the nation's postwar associations with the United States.)



Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, *Commensal* (2017). Video and film installation. Installation view: documenta 14, Tofufabrik, Kassel (10 June–17 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke.

Presented in isolation, *Commensal* seems to reflect documenta 14's study of othering in all its forms—a multi-faceted view that collapses the 'us' versus 'them' binary into something multi-positional yet still fundamentally problematic, which might explain how unnerving documenta 14's decolonial-global gesture has been for many. For one, there is the deliberate visibility of the so-called white gaze throughout; even in the figure of its artistic director and the institution he embodies. But that violence—of the coloniser engaging in a decolonial conversation with the colonised—is the drama that *Learning from Athens* created, knowingly or not. And while there are those who say this exhibition has no humour, it does have one. At the Benaki Museum in Athens, one work by RH Quaytman shows artistic director Adam Szymczyk in hazy profile, pulling a quiet Hitchcock. This self-objectifying gesture says something about Szymczyk's approach to his role as a 'global curator' of a historical, world-renowned, western state-funded exhibition. It all seems set it up so that the politics of acting globally through the infrastructures of the art world would become the subject of a global exhibition whose contradictions form the conceit.



Installation view: RH Quaytman, *documenta 14*, Benaki Museum—Pireos Street Annexe, Athens (8 April–16 July 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Stathis Mamalakis.



All of which brings us to critic Ben Davis' apt description of the Kassel show as a controlled demolition. With all the talk of documenta 14 being an act of neocolonialism, this scenario appears to have been turned into a logic that fed into the curatorial, which is at once a study of colonial processes and their implications in the present, and an illustration of how such binary concepts that characterise colonial impulses, including the division between 'North' and 'South', are being problematised as a result of increasing enmeshment. The result is a reappraisal of a unified global ideal often perpetuated in art world curatorials, since universalism as a cohesive aspiration is a colonial construct (think *Exposition Universelle*). documenta 14's view of 'universality' seems more in line with Terre Thaemlitz's *Lovebomb/Ai No Bakudan* (2003–05) at Kassel's Museum für Sepulkralkultur. This electroacoustic audio and visual installation compares, among other things, the totalising nature of western love songs with an anthropologist's work, describing the universality in popular ballads as a 'mentally invasive violence' that, like anthropology, 'begins where it hopes to end: with a conclusion' identifying the 'parameters of difference...'

It is this contradictory universalism—'there is no love song that extends beyond insulting reductionisms', to quote *Lovebomb*—that documenta 14 puts to task in order to reflect on the issues that lie at the heart of the universal, or global, concept. One text box included in *Lovebomb*'s narration offers a rationale for this approach: 'when strategising co-existence in a global context love is not the answer'. documenta 14 seems to embrace this sentiment without apology, not least in the curatorial split it enacted between two cities and the impact it had on both—after all, it is violence, and not peace, that binds so many histories together. Lala Meredith-Vula's enlarged photographs from the series 'Blood Memory' pasted onto the walls of EMST in Athens offer a bittersweet punch to this point. Taken in 1990, the images depict reconciliation gatherings in Kosovo, organized by students and villagers against deadly medieval blood feud laws; and they are hopeful. Even if feuds live on, attempts at resolution are *made*. —[O]



## Performance and Participation: Les gens d'Uterpan at Documenta 14

Posted by BOBROWJ on AUGUST 9, 2017

We have encountered a lot of participatory art over the course of this program, and I mean a lot. It has not only been a major theme at the exhibitions we have visited, and also in our readings for our courses. It is clear that the contemporary art world is currently captivated by this notion of viewer involvement. At Documenta 14, I discovered the choreographer duo Annie Vigier and Frank Apertet, working under the artist name “les gens d'Uterpan.” They have two works included in the Kassel portion of Documenta 14, both of which explore notions of performance and participation. In a contemporary art world whose discourse is so focused on the participatory, I think that these works contribute a lot to the discussion coming from a choreographic standpoint, based in performance theory.



Photo: Dominique Mathieu, Courtesy: les gens d'Uterpan

<https://www.lesgensduterpan.com/contact.html>



Scène à l'italienne, 2014-, installation view.  
<https://goo.gl/images/X4d9op>

The first work, *Scène à l'italienne*, 2014-, is unobtrusively installed at the Documenta Halle. I say unobtrusively because the work is easy to miss as it is in effect the floor. More specifically, Vigier and Apertet created a wooden stage– a stage that is tilted at a 5-degree angle like the stage at the Palais Garnier Opera House in Paris. When I experienced the piece, it was only this slight tilt that made me aware that there was anything different about this stage compared to the floor on which I had previously been walking. I made my way over to the wall label where I learned that I had been on a stage, and as a result a performer. Stage fright instantly kicked in, but dissipated relatively quickly as I

realized that there was not much of an audience. Still, the idea that I had been performing without knowing it made me uncomfortable. I decided to sit on the steps going down from the stage and watch how other viewers interacted with the piece. Many viewers were entirely unaware of the stage's presence, using it as a space to take pictures of the other art objects, to converse with friends, or simply as a liminal space to get from one work of art to the next.

It was most interesting to observe viewers who made the same uncomfortable realization that I had and then, once aware of their activation as performers, moved through the space differently. This was the type of experience for which the work was intended to create. In fact, in the didactic material, the artists state that *Scène à l'italienne* is “not a performance set,” but “a way of ‘staging’ the event to provide a physical experience to the people who walk along.” This statement demonstrates the extent to which the artists are attempting to counteract normative and conventional ways of conceiving of performance. This idea is reinforced by the fact that the artists explicitly state that planned shows and performances cannot be held on the stage as it is devoted to staging everyday situations. While their attempt to curb traditional notions of performance is poignant, I find that their denial of the performative nature of the space too dismissive of the implications ingrained in a stage. It is almost impossible to dissociate a stage with performance; therefore, whether or not they want the stage to be “performance set,” the viewer will feel like a performer.

Their second piece *Library*, 2017–, was installed at one of the two Torwache houses, which had been inhabited by the Grimm family. At the Torwache site, the work consists of two simple wooden bookshelves housing books about performance and dance. I specify the site because this is a traveling work, whose literary contents will change depending on its location. For Torwache, which was built in the early nineteenth century, the bookshelves reference interior design practices of the eighteenth century. During this period, furniture items, such as bookshelves, were used to counterbalance the architectural design elements and to direct the



Library, 2017–, installation view, photo: Mathias Völzke.  
<http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/10316/annie-vigier-franck-apertet-les-gens-d-uterpan->

movement of bodies in the space. As choreographers this is clearly a point of interest for Vigier and Apertet. The intersection of architecture, decorative arts and performance is unpacked with this piece in a highly site specific manner. Its site specific nature is further emphasized by the fact that all the books included in the shelves are written in German, French and English. In line with the idea of performance, the work is participatory in that viewers can read the books. While I did not participate as I was short on time, I liked that the option was there because the act of reading the books can itself be seen as a performance. There is almost a double performativity here, as the viewer is performing by reading about performance.

*Library* complements *Scène à l'italienne* because they highlight two different models of participation. Whereas viewers of *Scène à l'italienne* are automatically rendered participants regardless whether or not they are aware of their role as performers, viewers of *Library* can choose if they would like to engage with the work. Becoming a participant by picking up a book to read is a conscious and agential choice on the part of the viewer. I like that Vigier and Apertet are exploring these two types of participatory art, distinguished primarily by whether or not the act of participation is conscious. I think that their intervention into the contemporary art world as choreographers is important because it centers the notion of performativity in participatory art. Ultimately, their work begs the questions: Is there a distinction between a viewer participating and performing in a work of art? Are we always performing as art participants? And, how can performance and dance theory expand our discourse surrounding participatory art?

**Art net** : *Straining for Wisdom, documenta 14 Implodes Under the Weight of European Guilt*, Ben Davis,  
<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/documenta-14-implodes-from-the-weight-of-european-guilt-998150>

20 juin 2017 / June 20th 2017

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## Straining for Wisdom, documenta 14 Implodes Under the Weight of European Guilt

Curator Adam Szymczyk's vision is pulling in two different ways at once.

Ben Davis, June 20, 2017



Zafos Xagoraris, *The Welcoming Gate* (2017). Image: Ben Davis.

documenta is one of world's most closely watched art events, a quinquennial referendum on what art is and can be in the present. And what does Polish curator Adam Szymczyk's big show say about the state of art in 2017, now that it is finally fully open?

It says that art is... very confused.

It's hard to put into words how perplexing the experience of documenta 14 in Kassel is. People who like their art to be entertaining are going to hate it, because it is a strikingly alienating show.



This is deliberate. At the Kassel press launch for documenta 14, Szymczyk was asked if he thought that art needs to “look good.” His characteristically otherworldly answer: “If you think of aesthetics as more akin to cosmetics, as a pretty thing, I suppose this can be useful sometimes, but we’re more interested in the texture and the structure.”

A simple “no” would have sufficed.

documenta 14 artistic director Adam Szymczyk



documenta 14 artistic director Adam Szymczyk, during the opening press conference at Kongress Palais on June 7, 2017 in Kassel, Germany. Photo by Thomas Lohnes/Getty Images.

The more didactic temperament is fine—except that people who think art should say something urgent about the political moment are also going to hate this show. As self-serious and overburdened with political themes as it is—it’s called “Learning From Athens,” for crying out loud!—nothing is really clear (a few moments of public art aside, which feel almost like overcompensation).

This lack of a clear message is also very deliberate. As Szymczyk has explained (sort of), “the process of becoming a political subject is a process of unlearning.”

The only thing I’ll say to counter the rain of vitriol that is no doubt going to greet documenta 14 is that there is a method to its messiness. If it feels like it represents art imploding under its own contradictions, it is also true that it appears to be a controlled demolition on Szymczyk’s part.



Olu Oguibe's *Monument for Strangers and Refugees*, featuring the Bible verse "I Was a Stranger and You Took Me In" in four languages. Image: Ben Davis.

It may be interesting to compare "Learning From Athens" to the recent Venice Biennale, which starting with its hokey name, "Arte Viva Arte," was all about redemption and healing, and ended up being pleasant enough—but probably not something people will be thinking about for very long.

documenta 14, on the other hand, is much more deliberately irredeemable, and probably much more something to brood over.

### **Documents of Barbarism**

The distinction between a show that is alienating on purpose and a show that just doesn't come off is a pretty fine one, so let's retrace the ideas that went into this documenta.

Faced with the headline-consuming crisis of the Eurozone, Szymczyk's main curatorial decision, of course, was to call the show "Learning From Athens" and fragment it between its traditional home in provincial Germany and crisis-ravaged Greece, in a gesture of North/South solidarity. (My colleague Hili Perlson has already reviewed the Athens section.)



Hans Haacke, *Wir (alle) sind das Volk—We (all) are the people* (2003/2017). © Hans Haacke/VG Bild-Kunst. Courtesy documenta 14, Photo: Roman März .

Yet the most important curatorial gambit when it comes to understanding Szymczyk's intentions for Kassel might be one that didn't actually happen: His attempt to host the Gurlitt Collection of art, whole, during documenta 14.



The Gurlitt Collection, of course, would be the staggering trove of 1,500 works of Modern art, which was found in the Munich apartment of one Cornelius Gurlitt in 2012. His father, Hildebrand, had been art dealer to the Nazis, and the hoard has been the subject of multiple restitution claims by Jewish families that were dispossessed of their art during the war.

The gesture didn't come together because of unspecified "legal and political restrictions," but the proposition lays bare more than anything else documenta 14's presiding sensibility: It would have confronted you with a massive, impressive collection of treasures—but the point would be how its pleasures were compromised, tangled in circuits of power that you cannot see.



Banu Cennetoğlu's *BEINGSAFEISSCARY*, (2017) on the exterior of the Fridericianum.  
Image: Ben Davis.

The Gurlitt hoard would have borne curatorial testimony to the fact that there "is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," as Walter Benjamin wrote in the shadow of Nazism, some 77 years ago. And that very much is the larger idea that haunts everything here.



## A Bookish documenta

What results in Kassel is a show that feels like an airing of evidence, not of artworks, a fact that accounts for both its lack of aesthetic appeal and its cryptic feeling.

The most direct echo of the aborted Gurlitt initiative comes at the Neue Galerie venue, where the centerpiece is Maria Eichhorn's formidable series of displays relating to the Nazi seizure of Jewish property. Dubbed the "Rose Valland Institute" and taking over multiple galleries as a museum-within-a-museum, it includes a literal tower of books that the Nazis had confiscated, plus yards of historical documentation, inventories, and letters relating to the vast and systemic campaign of plunder.



Tower of books from Maria Eichhorn's Rose Valland Institute (2017). Image: Ben Davis.

Eichhorn's piece is nothing if not specific. But this type of aesthetics of evidence becomes the free-floating leitmotif of "Learning From Athens," reappearing elsewhere in very different forms.

Take, for instance, Argentine artist Marta Minujín's *Parthenon of Books*, located in the symbolic heart of the show, the Friedrichsplatz.



Marta Minujín, *The Parthenon of Books* (2017). Photo by Thomas Lohnes/Getty Images.

A massive recreation of the Parthenon covered top to bottom in banned texts, Minujín's architectural showstopper makes a perfect centerpiece for a show called "Learning From Athens." What the big installation illustrates, however, is that even at its most spectacular and photo-ready, art here remains primarily a vehicle to remind you of political nightmares unseen.

Truth be told, Minujín's idea was probably more resonant when it was originally staged, in 1983 in Buenos Aires, as a showcase for the books specifically banned by the then-just-ended Argentine junta. In Kassel, it is built around a rather vaguer idea—just taking a stand against the banning of any books, anywhere.

It has also attracted rather less enthusiasm: At the opening of documenta 14, the *Parthenon of Books* had only received enough donated texts to be half finished.



At another of the show's 30-plus venues, the Torwache, the exact same bookish motifs are dispersed into unintended comedy. There, choreographers Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet's *Library* consists of shelves of academic tomes about performance and dance that, we are told, have been curated to include only texts that *do not* reference their own work, a bit of omphalocentric commentary on the biases that structure art history.



Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet's *Library* (2017) in documenta 14. Image: Ben Davis.

At once obvious and labored, this could easily be a parody of contemporary art.

Except, *Library* is shown right next to Oskar Hansen's 1957 proposal for a *Monument to the Victims of Fascism in Auschwitz-Birkenau*, so I guess you are meant to take Vigier and Apertet's career woes very seriously indeed....

Everywhere you look, this is a very document-focused documenta, its works tending to come with paperwork attached.

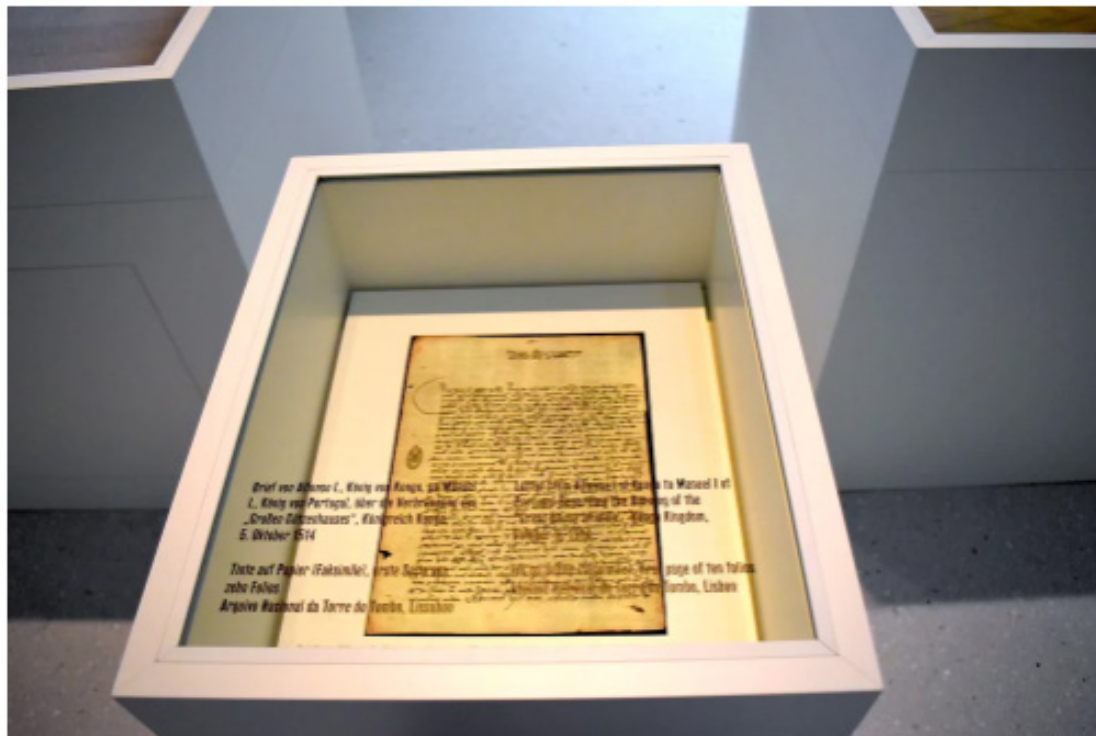
There's Máret Anne Sara's display of the transcripts of two trials concerning the indigenous Sami people's right to stop Norway's forced reindeer cull.



Máret Anne Sara's *Pile o' Sapmi* (2017), a display containing excerpts and conclusions of the first and second trial of Jovsset Ante Iverse Sara versus the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Image: Ben Davis.

There's Congolese artist Sammy Baloji's installation *Fragments of Interlaced Dialogues*, which includes, under glass, a 1514 letter from King Afonso I of the Kongo to the king of Portugal, boasting that he had burned the local idols.





A historical letter, displayed as part of Sammy Baloji's installation *Fragments of Interlaced Dialogues* (2017). Image: Ben Davis.

At one point, at the Neue Galerie, you simply see the small tome—the so-called “Code Noir,” or Black Code, of 1742—that systematized the French Empire’s racist laws towards its possessions.



*The Black Code or collection of rules that have been passed so far: regarding government, administration of justice, police, and discipline & trade of Negros in the French colonies and the councils and companies established for these matters (1742), as displayed in documenta 14. Image: Ben Davis.*

You can't read it, you can only read about it in a wall text. There's no artist; it is just Szymczyk entering another exhibit into the evidence file.

### **Europe Under Glass**

At the press conference, the eminent philosopher, curator, and transgender activist Paul B. Preciado, who has organized the public programs of documenta 14 for Szymczyk, gave probably the most rousing and convincing statement of purpose for the event.

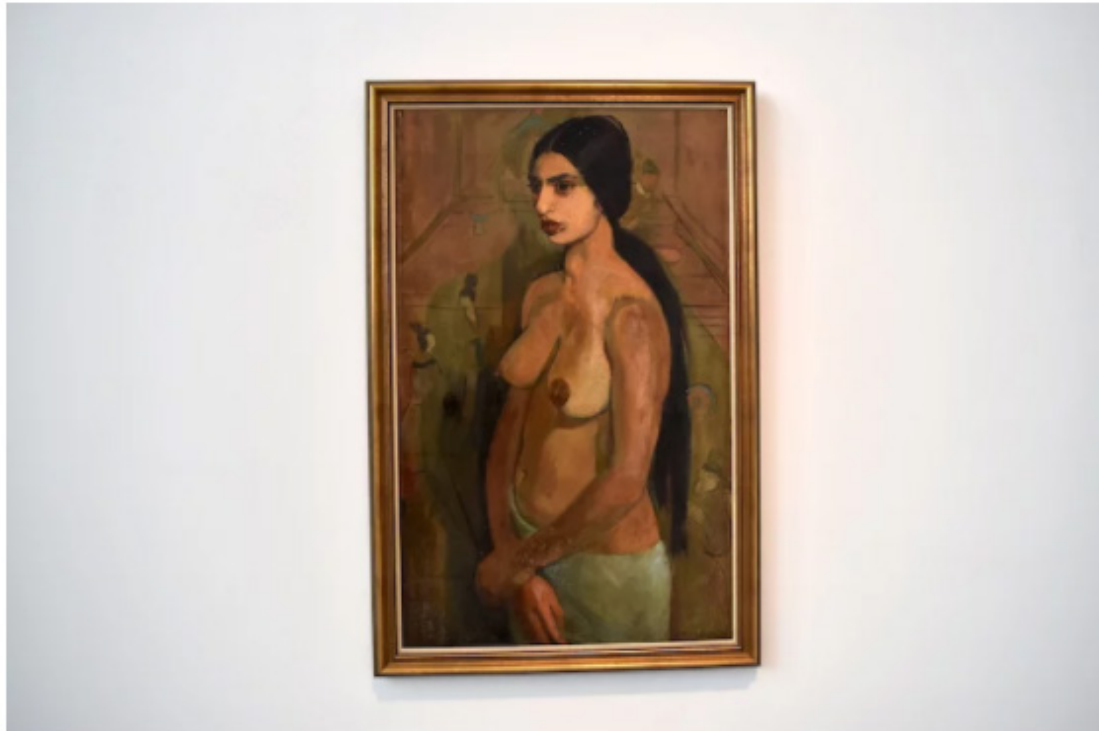
Preciado was reflecting on the history of the Kassel venues, the Natural History Museum. "Many of the artists of this exhibition—themselves, their bodies, their languages, their tradition, their art practices—could have been the subject of vitrines," he declared. "We have been given agency to destroy the vitrines where those considered less than human were exhibited... and become artists and curators. The colonial, the white supremacist, and the heteronormative—they created the modern museum."



The Naturkundemuseum in Kassel. Image by Mathias Völzke. Courtesy documenta 14.

This is an exciting mission, and reflects the fact that one of the ambitions behind documenta 14's twists and turns is to be a decentered, post-colonial event. Far more than actually being about Greece, the title "Learning From Athens" means "learning to see the historically dominated," and the attention Szymczyk pays to voices that don't normally get heard is absolutely worth celebrating.





Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian* (1934). Image: Ben Davis.

Some of the show's most memorable points are the ones that organically articulate these themes: the wonderful paintings of the Indian-Hungarian Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941), including the startling *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian* (1934); the New York-based Naeem Mohaiemen's *Two Meetings and a Funeral* (2017), a lucid, intellectually rich three-channel video essay about the failures of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Cold War attempt of Third World countries to carve out a space between the spheres of influence of the USSR and the US; the astonishingly powerful masks of the late Kwakwaka'wakw carver Beau Dick (though a few of the excellent texts produced by curator Candice Hopkins about Dick are worth seeking out for context).





Works by Beau Dick, at documenta Halle. Image: Ben Davis.

And yet, the strange fact about the experience in Kassel is that, overwhelmingly the effect is the *exact converse* of the one Preciado gave: not to smash the Natural History Museum, but to turn its ethnographic techniques back around on documenta itself, to en-vitrine Europe.

Thus, at the Neue Galerie, for one long passage, you are hit with the most concentrated dose of traditional European painting. And yet none of what you see makes any sense if read just as an art object.

There are drawings on Greek themes by documenta's founding director Arnold Bode (1900-1977); images of Greek ruins by Hitler's favorite painter, Alexander Kalderach (1880-1965); drawings of the Parthenon by Theodor Heuss (1884-1963), the first president of the Republic of Germany... and much more art in this vein.



Alexander Kalderach, *The Parthenon* (1939). Image: Ben Davis.

You need to understand who made them, and where they fit into the particular point Szymczyk is making about the sins of German culture and its infatuation with Greek culture.

And speaking of Greek culture, the same ethnographic effect holds true, in a different way, of “Antidoron,” the dense display that occupies the Fridericianum. It packs a vast chunk of the collection of Greece’s Museum of Contemporary Art (a venue in the Athens installment) across three giant floors, a missive from the margins in what is normally central venue of documenta.

What you encounter are mostly names that you don’t know, though often palpably reflecting recent international art trends through a Greek filter. The status of “Antidoron” within documenta 14 is somewhat undetermined, its artists technically in the show but not listed among the participants.



Installation view of “Antidoron” in documenta 14, with Nausika Pastra’s *Synectron—Square—Circle* (1968-76) in the foreground, and Yiannis Bouteas’s *Untitled* (1974-80).  
Image: Ben Davis.

Aesthetically, the effect is uneven—but that doesn’t really matter because the net outcome of displaying this collection comes off as sociological, not artistic: “Greek contemporary art” held up to scrutiny as an object of curiosity.

### **Lessons Unlearned**

In Athens itself, “Learning From Athens” has received some stern reviews. Former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis has compared Szymczyk’s gesture to “crisis tourism,” and worse.



That shows you that the conversation about decentering art can have very different connotations depending on which end you come at it from, the center or the margins—particularly when you are touching on raw political matters.

All the fragmentations and deflections that make Szymczyk's show feel particularly in-its-head link back to his theme of the historic guilt of the German or Western center as the underlying through-line, as indicated by the importance of the (absent) Gurlitt hoard as a symbol.

Yet this is slightly different conversation than the one that Preciado was touting, of letting the formerly marginal speak fully as “artists and curators.” The latter would first and foremost be about letting those subjects tell their stories clearly, in a way not weighed down with someone else's guilt and hang-ups; about supplying a missing context rather than denaturalizing a context taken-for-granted.



The documenta Halle venue of documenta 14 during the opening week. Image: Ben Davis.

Consider one of the oddest moments in Szymczyk's show, the first thing when you enter the space at the documenta Halle.

There, you are presented what amounts to an accumulation of music memorabilia relating to the life and music of Malian singer Ali Ibrahim "Ali Farka" Touré (1939-2006), courtesy curator Igo Diarra.



A 1994 Grammy for Best World Music Album, from a collection of objects and archival materials related to Malian musician Ali Farka Touré. Image: Ben Davis.

What to make of this hoard, which includes a wall of LPs, a display of the musician's personal IDs, a tableful of Grammys and other awards, and a spotlit guitar laid against the wall? What function does it serve?





Wall of LPs representing Ali Ibrahim "Ali Farka" Touré. Image: Ben Davis.

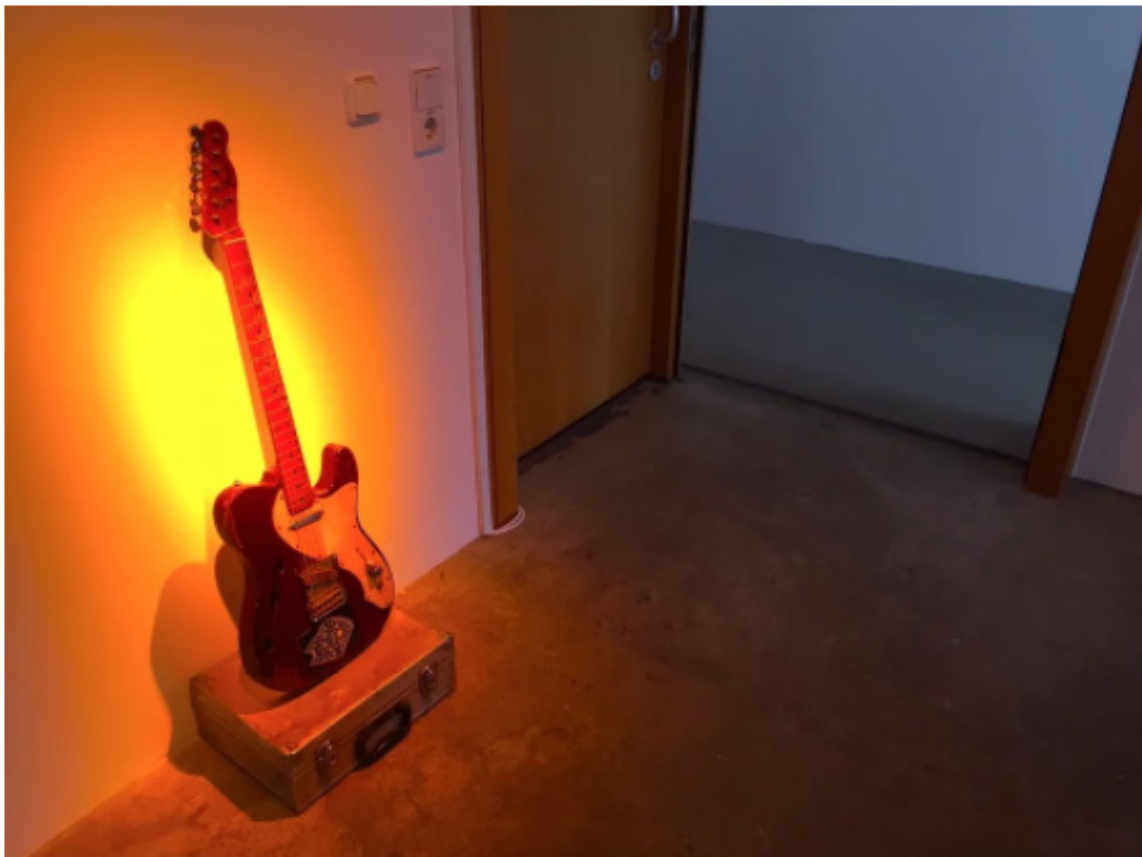
Maybe, given the ambient themes of geopolitical disintegration and free speech in documenta 14, you are meant to somehow make the connection to the recent Islamist music ban that afflicted the north of Mali, causing Ali Farka Touré's music to be forbidden. I say maybe, because nothing tells you that.



ID cards of Ali Ibrahim "Ali Farka" Touré, as displayed in documenta 14. Image: Ben Davis.



Or perhaps making the presiding figure at the documenta Halle a musician rather than an artist points to how the whole show invests in living culture as the opposite of dead museum culture. Indeed, a whole other essay could be written about how much of the fragmentary feeling within Szymczyk's galleries is explained by the fact that they center mainly on the remainders of political rites of atonement or exorcisms of various kinds. Live art is where documenta 14 invests the possibility of redemption.



A guitar in the display dedicated to Ali Ibrahim "Ali Farka" Touré, at documenta 14.  
Image: Ben Davis.

The label for the installation, however, suggests that you are meant to take away a very specific cultural lesson. It highlights a quote by Touré about his music, from the liner notes to his album *Niafunké*:

*This record [Niafunké] is more real, more authentic. It was recorded in the place where the music belongs—deep Mali. We were in the middle of the landscape which inspired the music and that in turn inspired myself and the musicians. My music is about where I come from and our way of life and it is full of important messages for Africans. In the West perhaps this music is just entertainment and I don't expect people to understand. But I hope some might take the time to listen and learn.*

The implicit German or international art viewer is told that what they are seeing is evidence of the richness of a cultural production that belongs elsewhere.

But what about the fragile potential that Touré describes for Westerners to “listen and learn?” You don't get much help. Szymczyk, of course, is more interested in forcing his audience to “unlearn.”

Perhaps the Touré epigraph suggests that the viewer needs to be disabused of any idea of easy “entertainment” before they can arrive at that hard-won deeper cultural understanding, to commit to cultural communion as work rather than something pleasant. “Learning From Athens” definitely feels like work.

In the end, documenta 14 makes me think about an argument you sometimes hear about the oft-invoked “death of painting,” that it only really happened at the exact historical point when women and minorities began asserting themselves as painters.

A similar thought occurs here, on the expanded level of the big international art show: It would be a pity if the post-colonial subject gets to speak in art only at the moment when speaking ceases to be empowering, and starts to be a burden.

*documenta 14, “Learning From Athens,” is on view in Kassel, Germany through September 17, 2017.*

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# **Fotokritik : Vom Lernen und Entlernen. Fotografie und Fotokunst auf der documenta 14 in Kassel., Thomas Wiegand**

<http://www.fotokritik.de/index.php?art=181>

11 juin 2017 / June 11th 2017

www.fotokritik.de

Blog zur zeitgenössischen Fotografie  
und digitalen Bildkunst

## **Vom Lernen und Entlernen. Fotografie und Fotokunst auf der documenta 14 in Kassel.**

von Thomas Wiegand

Bilder: [www.fotokritik.de/imgblog\\_39.html](http://www.fotokritik.de/imgblog_39.html)

Trotz aller Verdienste um das Medium (1977!) ist die documenta selbstverständlich und wie immer keine Fotoausstellung. Aber Fotografie ist auch auf der 14. Ausgabe der Weltkunstschau in Kassel vertreten, sogar mehr, als zu erwarten war. Die documenta ist dieses Mal größer denn je, denn mit Athen wurde ein zweiter Ort gewählt unter dem Motto: „Learning from Athens“. Dieses Motto ist sinngemäß von einem berühmten Architekturbuch bekannt (Robert Venturi, „Learning from Las Vegas“, 1972) und meint, dass man in Athen, auf dem Boden antiker Kultur, geradezu schmerzhaft spüren kann, wie sich die Verwerfungen globaler Politik auf die Menschen auswirken. Die Kuratoren haben darauf reagiert und eine ambitionierte Programmstruktur gewoben, die möglichst unhierarchisch, antikolonialistisch, marktfern sein und für eine gewisse Widerständigkeit stehen soll. Das Kuratorenteam bietet einiges auf, um von einem gefestigten theoretischen Fundament die Ausstellung aufbauen zu können und eine passende Atmosphäre zu schaffen. Das Schlagwort heißt nicht Lernen, sondern Entlernen, um die Kunst unmittelbar auf sich wirken zu lassen, ohne dass zu viel Information und Interpretation den Weg zu Reflexion und Erkenntnis verstelle.

Die Ausstellung mag Kunst in ästhetisch rand- und widerständigen Formen dokumentieren und in den Mittelpunkt stellen, aber das Ausstellen an sich wird nicht hinterfragt und ist konventionell mit Rahmen, Vitrinen und aufmerksamen Ordnern, die wie üblich darauf achten, dass die Objekte nicht vom Betrachter begriffen werden. Allein durch die absichtsvoll bunt vermischte Anordnung der einzelnen Beiträge Verwirrung oder auch Querbezüge zu stiften ist noch keine Innovation. Letztendlich wird doch wieder Vermittlung betrieben: Die Ausstellungsführer sind hier ein „Chor“, der „Spaziergänge“ statt Führungen anbietet, die (in den ersten drei Tagen teils noch nicht komplett vorhandenen) Namens- und Erläuterungsschilder gehören zu den am meisten fotografierten Objekten in der Ausstellung. Katalog (bestehend aus „Daybook“ und dem eigentlichen Exponatenverzeichnis „Map Booklet“) und Website bieten weitere, zuweilen bitter nötige Informationen, wenn auch im „Daybook“ nicht alphabetisch geordnet, sondern nach den 163 Tagen der Dauer der Ausstellung in Athen und



Kassel. Wie passt das zur Idee des „Entlernens“? Kann man nicht allein auf die Offenheit der Besucher vertrauen, das Große Ganze zu verstehen? Trotz aller Freiheit, die man sich nimmt und die man für die Kunst reklamiert (bis hin zur Umbenennung der Holländischen Straße auf dem Ausstellungsplan), zeigt sich, dass die von der öffentlichen Hand subventionierte Ausstellung nicht frei von „Sachzwängen“ agieren kann.

Die d14 kann, wenn sie will, nicht nur anstrengend, sondern richtig populär sein. Der schmucke Büchertempel von Marta Minujin auf dem Friedrichsplatz wird jetzt nachts dekorativ beleuchtet! „The Parthenon of Books“ funktioniert perfekt als Hingucker und Treffpunkt und bietet gleichzeitig zum Thema Zensur ein politisch korrektes Konzept, das die Bevölkerung und die Kasseler Uni über Bücherspenden einbezieht. Im Fridericianum, sonst das Herz der Ausstellung, wird eine Art Retrospektive moderner Kunst unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Griechenlands geboten, denn hier werden vor allem Arbeiten aus dem Bestand des Museums EMST in Athen ausgestellt, ein Haus, das aufgrund der finanziellen Krise bislang nicht eröffnet werden konnte. Spannender sind da die beiden anderen großen Ausstellungsorte Neue Galerie und die „Neue Neue Galerie“ in dazu umgenutzten Fahrzeughallen und kleineren Räumen des Hauptpostamtes.

Die Ausstellung wendet sich gegen ein kleinbürgerliches Verständnis von Lernen, nach dem „alles, was man nicht in wenige, einfache Worte packen kann, gefährlich oder bedrohlich ist“ (so sagte es der künstlerische Leiter Adam Szymczyk am 2.4.2017 im Deutschlandfunk ([www.deutschlandfunk.de/documenta-kurator-adam-szymczyk-die-kunst-hat-eine.911.de.html?dram:article\\_id=382838](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/documenta-kurator-adam-szymczyk-die-kunst-hat-eine.911.de.html?dram:article_id=382838))). Ein gewisser Rest des „Nicht-Verstehens“ sei „fundamental für die Erfahrung von Kunst“. Wenn man denn bereit ist, sich darauf einzulassen und die vielen, vielen Brocken, die die Kuratoren ausstreuen, aufzupicken. Ein wenig Brüder Grimm oder etwas aus der Familie Gurlitt? Wie wär 's mit dem Godesberger Programm der SPD? Oder mit einer Zeichnung der Akropolis von Theodor Heuss, mit erschütternden Dokumenten aus dem künstlerischen Schaffen des nach einem Unfall armlosen Lorenz, später Lorenza Böttner? Was sagt mir das stramme Training von Unterschenkelamputierten (Filminstallation von Artur Zmijewski)? Immer wieder tauchen Masken in Filmen (Samnang Khvay im Ottoneum), auf Fotos (Gauri Gill im Landesmuseum) oder als Objekte (Beau Dick, documenta-Halle) auf oder in fast ethnographischer Herangehensweise werden Handwerk und Gebräuche bestimmter Gegenden thematisiert, wobei Olaf Holzapfel sogar auf den Fachwerkbau eingeht. Neben Masken kommen auch Fahnen bzw. Fahnenartiges und vor allem Bücher sehr häufig vor, natürlich in der Grimmelwelt, wohin das so gut passt wie ein wenig Volkskunde ins Landesmuseum, etwas Natur ins Naturkundemuseum und Arbeiten über Liebe und Tod in das Museum für Sepulkralkultur. Maria Eichhorn beschäftigt sich in ihrem aufwändig installierten „Rose Valland Institut“ (Neue Galerie) mit von den Nationalsozialisten geraubter Kunst und

präsentiert u.a. ein turmartiges Regal voller „unrechtmäßig aus jüdischem Eigentum erworbene[r] Bücher“ aus der heutigen Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin, den Bildband „Witnessing the Robbing of the Jews“ von Sarah Gensburger (2015) sowie eine von den Besuchern benutzbaren Handbibliothek zum Thema Raubkunst und Holocaust ([www.rosevallandinstitut.org](http://www.rosevallandinstitut.org)). In der Torwache stehen zwei schmale Regale mit „speziell ausgewählte[r] Fachliteratur aus dem Bereich Tanz und Performance“ ([www.lesgensduterpan.com/proj\\_bibliotheque\\_uk.html](http://www.lesgensduterpan.com/proj_bibliotheque_uk.html)), die zum Beitrag von Annie Vigier und Franck Apertet gehören.

Bücher und andere Drucksachen finden sich, vor allem in der Neuen Galerie, immer wieder in Vitrinen als Beleg für dieses und jenes – von der Kasseler revolutionären Zeitschrift „Hornisse“ (1850) über ein Heft mit Zeichnungen „Hungry Bengal“ (1943) oder den Band „Divine Horses: Living Gods of Haiti“ (1953). Es gibt noch andere Zeugnisse von historischen oder künstlerischen Ereignissen bis hin zu einem Objekt von Marcel Broodthaers („Magie“, 1973) und einer Materialsammlung von und zu Annie Sprinkle. Das alles könnte Nachforschungen anstoßen, dürfte aber ansonsten leicht im Strudel der Masse an Werken übersehen werden. Dieses Aufblitzen formuliert das gedankliche Spektrum der Ausstellung nicht aus, sondern reißt es nur an.

Immerhin ein Fotobuch ist zu entdecken, nämlich die „Kriegsfibel“ (1955) von Bertolt Brecht als unscheinbarer Teil einer Installation von Daniel Garcia Andujar („The Disaster of War/Trojan Horses“, Neue Galerie). Im gleichen Raum lag dann auch noch, fein säuberlich von Maret Anne Sara in einer meterlangen Vitrine ausgebreitet, der Ausdruck des norwegischen Gesetzes über das Halten von Rentieren – absurde Bürokratie, wie sie nicht nur in Norwegen in das Leben eingreift und uralte Erfahrungen zu regulieren versucht. Jetzt auch als Künstlerbuch ([www.kasselerfotobuchblog.de/kunst-mit-realen-nazis/](http://www.kasselerfotobuchblog.de/kunst-mit-realen-nazis/)) gibt es die aus Reproduktionen (Fotos u.a. von Walter Frenzt, Tita Binz, Fritz Kempe, eines von August Sander!) zusammengestellte Serie „Real Nazis“ (2017) von Piotr Uklanski, die in der Neuen Galerie um Hitler als Zentrum gruppiert ist. Erschreckend, doch der Vorgänger „The Nazis“ (1999, mit Abbildungen von Schauspielern in Nazi-Rollen) war subtiler. Uklanski hat auch Joseph Beuys (unterste Reihe, 7. von rechts) mit aufgenommen; die „Real Nazis“ fanden ihren Platz vor dem Raum mit Beuys’ nicht für die d14 abgeräumten Hauptwerk „Das Rudel“ (hier installiert 1976).

Fotobücher als Medium, die Welt mit Hilfe der Fotografie zu beschreiben, festzuhalten, zu verstehen oder zu kritisieren, werden im Übrigen von der documenta schlichtweg ignoriert. Der fotografisch dokumentierte Sektor des bürgerschaftlichen und studentischen Protests hätte perfekt zur d14 gepasst. Fotobücher waren auf früheren documenta-Ausgaben sehr wohl Ausgangspunkt für die (Wieder-)Entdeckung fotografischer Positionen wie zum Beispiel von Helen Levitt oder Ed van der

Elsken (schon 1997!). Die Entwicklung in der aktuellen, lebendigen und üppig blühenden Szene fanden offenbar kein Interesse bei den Kuratoren. Anderenorts ist man da schon weiter mit dem Einbeziehen von Fotobüchern in Ausstellungen (zum Beispiel in Barcelona, [www.kasselerfotobuchblog.de/phaenomene-des-fotobuchs/](http://www.kasselerfotobuchblog.de/phaenomene-des-fotobuchs/)).

Fotografie allerdings kommt aber auf der dl4 häufig vor, vor allem als Dokument. Zum Beispiel in Form einiger Bilder aus den zwanziger Jahren, die Tina Modotti in mexikanischen Landwirtschaftsschulen aufgenommen hat. Es geht dabei nicht um die berühmte Fotografin oder um das Wie ihrer Fotos, sondern um das, was sie aufgenommen hatte, eine Art Utopie, eine Hoffnung auf ein besseres Leben. Weiter ausgeführt wird das freilich nicht. Bei etlichen Werken dienen Fotos der Vergegenwärtigung von Vorstudien oder Vorzuständen, gehören zum Konzept bzw. sind Bestandteil eines Gesamtwerks. Nur gelegentlich sind Fotos als autonome Arbeiten zu sehen (zum Beispiel im Fridericianum ein Wiedersehen mit Alan Sekulas „Fishstory“ von der documenta 11; drei Geldautomaten aus der Serie „Busts“ von Manolis Baboussis; „Nisyros“ mit fotografierenden Strandbesuchern von Panos Kokkinias, alle drei Arbeiten aus dem Bestand des EMST). Von dort stammt auch die mit einer kontinuierlichen Performance verbundene Installation „Precarious Archive“ von Stefanos Tsivopoulos mit Fotos zur Geschichte Griechenlands 1963-2002. Dazu der Künstler im Text des Erläuterungsschilds: „Diese Sammlung konstituiert ein idiosynkratisches Archiv, das auf untypische archivarisches Strategien anspielt, Repräsentationsmethoden in Frage stellt, über Bilder als vieldimensionale, von der Ökonomie angetriebene Hyper-Waren nachdenkt und schließlich die Idee der Sichtbarkeit in unseren mediatisierten Demokratien befragt“. Das hätte man mit „einfachen Worten“ niemals so überzeugend ausdrücken können.

Im Palais Bellevue wird eine Serie urtümlicher Heuhaufen gezeigt, die Lala Meredith-Vula im Kosovo und Albanien fotografiert hat, eine Typologie zufälliger Begegnungen mit den behutsam zum Trocknen des Grases aufgetürmten temporären Skulpturen, wie sie hierzulande durch die Mechanisierung der Landwirtschaft schon lange nicht mehr zu sehen sind. Großartig in den Konstellationen, im genauen Treffen des Momentums, sind die Fotos von Hans Haacke von der 2. documenta 1959, die zur historischen Abteilung der dl4 gehören (die ansonsten in der Neuen Galerie ihren Platz hat). Haackes im Flur des Fridericianums hängenden Kontaktbögen (warum diese eigentlich?), vor allem daraus ausgewählte Vergrößerungen zeigen Publikum, Künstler und Kuratoren, wie sie der damalige Kunststudent erlebte. Akinbode Akinbiyi spürt (sogar in Kassel und Hamm/Westfalen!) dem urbanen Leben nach; seine in 12er-Blocks zusammengefassten Schwarzweißfotos sind im Ottoneum zu sehen.

Allgegenwärtig ist das Thema Migration. Das Leben von in Nordhessen Zugezogenen thematisiert Ahlam Shibli in der 2017



entstandenen Reportage „Heimat“. Diese wird, ordentlich ausgedruckt und gerahmt, von kleinen Texttafeln begleitet, auf denen zum Beispiel Folgendes zu lesen ist: „El Torito – Spanische Spezialitäten, Kassel, 08.03.2017. Maria Dolores Sabates Juliana kam 1973 aus Barcelona. Ihr Ehemann Adolfo Suarez war schon früher von Madrid aus nach Kassel gezogen. Er arbeitete als Gastarbeiter bei VW. Seine Frau Juliana wurde Spanischlehrerin und gab privaten Nachhilfeunterricht. 1999 eröffnete sie ihren Laden auf der Holländischen Straße. Herr Suarez ging 2009 in Rente.“ Die bildjournalistische Arbeit informiert freundlich und sachlich über Menschen, die man nicht kennt und versorgt den Betrachter mit pseudogenauen Informationen, die man nicht bräuchte, wiesen nur die Fotos über sich hinaus. „Heimat ist ein angeeigneter Raum. Sie existiert objektiv nicht in der Wirklichkeit“ wird Shibli Kollege Santu Mofokeng im Begleittext der John Berger gewidmeten Serie zitiert. Man merkt, „Heimat“ zu fotografieren ist schwer, auch wenn es im Auftrag der documenta geschieht. Oder nicht? Denn am selben Ausstellungsort, dort aber schwerer zu finden, werden drei Serien von Ulrich Wüst gezeigt: „Stadtbilder“ (1980-83, also noch aus der DDR), „Morgenstraße“ (1998-2000) und „Dorf“ (2014-16) über die Gemeinde Nordwestuckermark. Man merkt sofort: Der Fotograf kennt sich aus. Mit gnadenloser Lakonie seziert er das architektonische Geflecht der Plattenbauten, der verlassenen Industrieanlagen und der stolzen Neubaugebiete und legt mit Präzision und Schärfe in insgesamt 76 kleinen „Silbergelatineabzügen“ frei, wie sich der Traum des Menschen nach einem schönen Leben materialisiert und wie schnell dies nach Abwanderung der Arbeitsplätze zu einem Alptraum werden kann. Wüst entspricht vermutlich ganz dem Credo der Kuratoren, weil er zurückgezogen lebt, nur von Zeit zu Zeit ein Fotobuch (wie „Morgenstraße“, 2001) sozusagen als Flaschenpost nach draußen schickt, aber sonst auf dem Markt praktisch nicht präsent ist, es sei denn, es ginge um unabhängige Positionen der späten DDR-Fotografie. Denn in dieser Schublade steckte Wüst bislang (was eine Last sein kann). Für das Publikum könnte die große Präsentation seiner zum genauen Hinsehen zwingender Arbeiten DIE Entdeckung jenseits der selbstgefälligen und plakativen „Fotokunst“ aus der Düsseldorfer Schule sein. In Athen wird von Wüst ein Leporello gezeigt, das aus einer Kombination von Fotos mit Zeitungsüberschriften besteht.

Nicht zuletzt durch seine zahlreichen Fotobücher bekannter als Wüst ist der Niederländer Hans Eijkelboom, dem eine weitere der seltenen originär fotografischen Positionen in Kassel zu verdanken ist. In Athen ist ein Video zu sehen, das der Konzeption von Eijkelbooms Buch „The modern Street Life“ folgt. Im Kasseler Stadtmuseum sind alle vier Wände eines Raums mit chronologisch gehängten, zwischen dem 9.1.1992 in Arnhem und dem 14.4.2017 in Amsterdam, ansonsten weltweit inklusive Kassel und Athen entstandenen Tableaus gefüllt, deren kleinen Bilder einzelne Passanten zeigen. Eijkelboom kombinierte die Fotos nach formalen Kriterien von Kleidung, Accessoires oder Haltung

und erreicht so eine Aussage über die Gesellschaft, über Individualismus und Globalisierung. Die Kunst muss nicht unbedingt in Sackleinen und mit Parolen daherkommen; es geht auch mit Witz, ohne dass das als Karikatur oder in purer Oberflächlichkeit enden müsste.

Eijkelbooms obsessives Konzept war auf der documenta die Ausnahme. Die Welt ist schlecht, ganz ohne Frage, aber wie genau man damit umzugehen hat, kann auch die Kunst, so gesellschaftlich engagiert und politisch sie auch gedacht sei, nicht sagen. Kurator Adam Szymczyk war mit seinen Ansprüchen im Vorfeld der beinahe unübersehbaren Ausstellung zu Recht vorsichtig und sagte: „Für mich ist der Erfolg der Ausstellung, ehrlich gesagt, dass sie überhaupt stattfinden kann“ (Interview mit dem DLF, wie oben). Ob man nun von Athen oder Kassel lernen wird, ob die documenta ihren weltweiten Spitzenplatz als Ausstellungsinstitution halten oder ausbauen kann, muss offen bleiben. Sicher ist nur, dass sie in fünf Jahren wiederkommt.

PS Eine Anmerkung des Denkmalpflegers zu einem völlig anderen Thema sei noch gestattet: Die d14 ist global gedacht, sollte aber das Regionale nicht vernachlässigen. Der documenta-Nebenschauplatz „Henschel-Hallen“, gemeint ist das ehemalige Henschel-Werk Rothenditmold (Hammerschmiede), wird im „Map Booklet“ (S. 9) unzureichend beschrieben, denn die Firma Henschel wurde nicht während des Zweiten Weltkriegs aufgelöst, sondern in den 1960er-Jahren zerschlagen. Der Standort Hammerschmiede wurde erst 1998 von einer Nachfolgefirma aufgegeben; die ab 1871 errichteten Gebäude sind heute durch die Untätigkeit ihrer offenbar nicht an einer nachhaltigen Entwicklung interessierten Besitzer („Investoren“) stark gefährdet, was ein schönes Thema für eine d14 mit politischem Anspruch gewesen wäre. Militärtechnologie wurde im Übrigen dort nicht entwickelt, sondern im 1917 eigens dazu errichteten Henschel-Werk Mittelfeld. Und die Henschel-Flugzeugwerke befanden sich in Berlin und in Altenbauna, nicht in Kassel, wie die d14 in einer Pressemitteilung vom 30.6.2017 behauptete. Das Konzept des Entlernens treibt seltsame Blüten.

11.06.2017

# OCULA

OCULA CONVERSATION

## A conversation with Adam Szymczyk

Artistic director, documenta 14

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Despina Zefkili | Athens | 2 June 2017

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Adam Szymczyk. Photo: Gina Folly.

For this interview, Adam Szymczyk meets with us on the large, dark stage of Megaron at the Athens Concert Hall. A few hours before, the same stage was full of his team of curators and more than a hundred artists and collaborators. Unconventionally the press conference for the opening of documenta 14 in Athens, started with this team of people performing *Epicycle* by Greek composer Jani Christou (1926–1970), articulating sounds and screams from the work's original score.



With 'Continuum', of which *Epicycle* is part of, Christou gradually moved from experimental musical forms to open scores, enabling all kinds of activities—sound and performance being only two possibilities—to take place over a duration, the length of which is determined by participants. documenta 14 started in September with its public programme, sometime before the press conference and the event's official opening, and unlike any other exhibition in the institution's history, Szymczyk has orchestrated his own 'continuum' by moving with his team to Athens over two and a half years ago, transmitting, as he puts it, from the city to the rest of the world.

It is the first time since its inauguration in 1955 that documenta, which takes place every five years and is one of the most prestigious exhibitions of contemporary art in the world, is split between two cities: its homeland in Kassel, Germany and Athens, Greece. The process of *Learning from Athens*, as the exhibition is titled, now reaches a crescendo with an exhibition staged across more than 40 venues throughout the city and running from 8 April to 17 September. Inviting us to 'unlearn what we know', while proposing to redefine the controversial slogan 'Learning from Athens' as meaning 'Learn from Athens out', the city is positioned as a kind of amplifier for the multiple voices forming what Szymczyk sees as a 'personal/collective attempt of his team to 'change our circumstances'. We asked Szymczyk to give voice to the exhibition and comment on the echo it has already created.



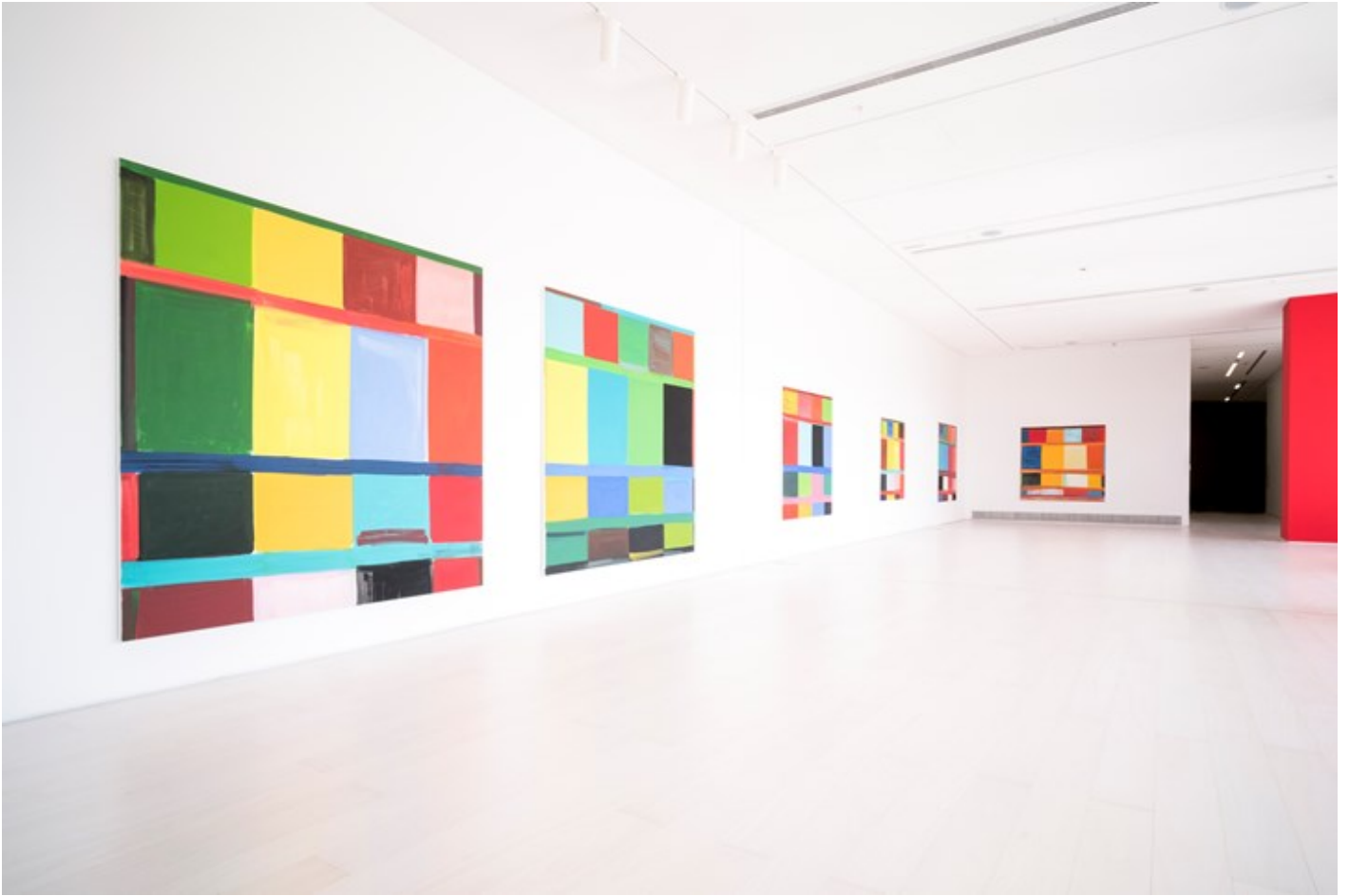
Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (*les gens d'Uterpan*), *Imposteurs* (2013), from the *re|action* process (2009– ). Print on fabric and box. Installation view: Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), documenta 14 (8 April–7 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke.

How has the initial concept of 'Learning from Athens' evolved or changed over these three years?

It has grown bigger and more rich, like something that initially seemed almost like drawing a formula has now become flesh. It's like the difference between looking at a diagram and trying to understand the theory behind it and making it happen. In the last years, we were busy making and didn't like to be in the spotlight, but now we are on stage, we are exposed, one can see the works and ask questions. We are open for debate. But first of all I hope it is an enjoyable, long and multifaceted experience for the viewer as it has been for us these three years, despite the crazy pace we were in.

Now that the exhibition in Athens has opened, how would you summarise your main preoccupations behind it?

There are many things. First of all, we are really close to certain forms of making which have a lot to do with craft. Not like 'arts and crafts', but there's a lot of work which requires skills which are beyond the manual skills of a skilled sculptor or painter trained in the academy. A lot of artists in the exhibition are craftsmen. They are producing many useful things, like beer (that will be in Kassel), soap, textiles, and lots of jokes. There are many amazing things you haven't seen before because the tactile knowledge is getting lost, and this exhibition is against the loss of a tactile relationship with the world, among other things. So when we are talking, for example, about abstract painting, we are interested in the kind of blindness and the type of abstraction you can see with your hands rather than your eyes. These are preoccupations that are brought forward more clearly at the EMST (National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens), where you have the oil paintings *Composition (Afterimage)* (1948–49) and *The Sun—The Heart of the Day* (1948) by Władysław Strzemiński next to a series of dancing signs in ink and oil pastel on paper by Ernest Mancoba, or the music of colour in the works of Stanley Whitney and the performance by Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet, where the visual side of the performance and the *métier* of the dancer is taken away from the eyes of the viewer and the only thing left is the sound of the bodies that are jumping away.



Installation view: Stanley Whitney, EMST—National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, documenta 14 (8 April–7 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke

This exhibition goes into a series of investigations of what 'genre' is today. Not as the distinction that is there to keep things separate, but to talk about specificity of a genre. For example the genre of theatre in Peter Friedl's film *Report* (2016), where we see professional and non-professional actors on the stage speaking fragments of Franz Kafka's 1917 short story *A Report to an Academy*, in which a human who used to be an ape tells his story of becoming a human. This story is told by many people who live in Athens today. There are so many things in this work which makes it so hard to talk about it, but it connects to so many other works in the show which are doing completely different things. These connections are like those between one tentacle connecting to another. So the exhibition is like a mess, it's not a networking exhibition, but a mess-working exhibition, like the once fashionable term 'rhizomatic', but more pretty than that!





Peter Friedl, *Report* (2016) (film still). Single-channel video installation. Courtesy documenta 14.

### What about the role of music in the process?

There is music, sound, and scores. Things that reverberate like sound, and scores, which are not there to limit possibilities, but to enable people to do things. Like the traditional music from *Epirus* played in Emeka Ogboh's installation *The Way Earthly Things Are Going* (2017) in the Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), which reminds me of the album by The Stranglers, *Aural Sculpture* (1984) which has a stone ear on the cover—it makes me feel like I am inside a concrete ear. These voices seem from another world. And then we have the EMS Synthi 100—a rare analogue synthesiser built in limited edition by Electronic Music Studios, London, in 1971 and later purchased by the Contemporary Music Research Center in Athens—which is now restored and will be performed on by a new generation of musicians. We are interested in the antique era of technology, which is the 1970s. Odeion shows this direction, but it's not only about sound works. There are many works which do not go into music, but when you look at them, they make you think about them in terms of music. I am thinking, for example, of the musical sources of early abstract art—we have two works from the Costakis Collection in Thessaloniki by Maria Ender from the 1920s, which are like visual representations of sound. Or contemporary ways of working with sound in a visual way, like in Alvin Lucier's *Music on a Long Thin Wire* (1977), where a 30-metre long string along the stairway of EMST captures the sound of the building and amplifies it through speakers letting the building become the musical instrument.



Alvin Lucier, *Music on a Long Thin Wire* (1977). Audio oscillator and electronic monochord. Installation view: EMST—National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, documenta 14 (8 April–7 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke.

**What is negotiated for you in the institution of documenta coming to Athens? Paul B. Preciado talks about your constant struggle to challenge the institution, while certain local voices find orientalist aspects in the project.**

We are innocent! It was about making work, not about the sake of challenging something. We were unhappy about how things are in general and wanted to change it, so we decided to make this exhibition and many people joined on the way. I see it more as a personal/collective attempt to change our circumstances and, judging from what I've seen so far, the exhibition succeeded quite a bit. It feels different from any other exhibition I've ever seen. Of course each exhibition is different, but still this exhibition is a different experience, also compared to every other big exhibition I've visited. It's huge but very personal, yet it belongs to many persons. The institution was challenged, it was personalised and divided into multiple persons. Each of them acting and at the same time being very altruistic. So since we didn't kill each other, that's great!

What was misunderstood in Athens, I feel, is that we are not an army or a corporation, we are many armies and we are many people so it is something that changes, that moves, that evolves. And it's not flexible at all, it's not about flexibility as an efficiency idea. We are terribly inefficient, we paid a very high price, lots of disappointment because we were not acting like a smart guy who gathers

money, grabs something, puts his product there and displays it. It was about making this bloody experience. As we said in the [press] conference, one should be judged for the outcome, not the source. I am so tired of preemptive critique and defensive responses. I am not a tiger with two heads, I am a human being, and so are all my colleagues, more or less. We had one dog in the team but it left ...



Olu Oguibe, *Biafra Time Capsule* (2017). Documents, archival objects, and mixed media. Installation view: EMST—National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, documenta 14 (8 April–7 September 2017). Courtesy documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke.

I think this certain type of criticality as negativity is so passé and so useless. I cannot understand why people are still wasting time on destroying something instead of focusing on what can be built. Maybe not built in the sense of a big construction, but made together. This is one of the aims of this exhibition in terms of any single artwork also in relationship with the terms we got involved with. There are so many interlocutors or those who gave us a lot in conversation and who I hope enjoyed this exchange and made them think differently of what they have. I know this experience from when I lived in Poland especially. The best moment was when someone arrived from abroad and saw the city differently. I once wanted to offer very banal tours of the country to foreigners who were coming, because they would make me feel very differently for the places I was familiar to. I liked this moment when things that used to be familiar were suddenly becoming completely strange and unfamiliar because somebody was visiting.



Documenta didn't arrive in Athens to make discoveries, but to speak from Athens. And in this way, the Athens experience is actually very productive for many people not only outside of Athens but from anywhere practically. It's a great place from which to speak and the directionality of the title, I saw it in this way: to learn from Athens out. It's not a transport. We are not transporting, we are more transmitting, amplifying. It's like we put a speaker and they can hear you further away. Let's see. Maybe they hear us in Kassel.

What's happening now that Kassel takes the baton?

We have inaugurated the exhibition in parallel with Daniel Knorr's *Expiration Movement Manifest* (2017) which consists of a smoking tower over Fridericianum. During the opening hours of the exhibition, there's white smoke coming out, which looks like burning, or giving signs. So this smoke will be there throughout the 160 days of documenta, it will be something like a smoke clock. —[O]

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Review:

## documenta 14: Learning from Athens Athens, Greece

Text / Fanny Singer



**Summer 2017**  
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Rebecca Belmore, *Blinjiya'iing Onji (From inside)*, 2017, marble, Filopappou Hill, Athens  
[photo: Fanis Vlastaras; courtesy of documenta 14]

Early April is a particularly sympathetic time to visit Athens—the weather is clement; the air, not yet summer-hot, is tender and neroli-scented from the thousands of blooming citrus trees lining the city's streets. It is still spring, not yet high tourist season, so the early visitor to the Greek portion of the 14th edition of documenta [April 8–July 16, 2017], the international quinquennial art exhibition typically held only in Kassel, Germany, had the crush of neither heat nor humanity to hinder her progress. And yet, she would have still found it difficult, exhausting even, to navigate the exhibition's 40-plus venues featuring more than 160 artists—to say nothing of the supporting program of events, concerts, performances, talks, tours, and launches that runs in tandem. This edition of documenta, helmed by artistic director Adam Szymczyk, is the first to take place, since the institution's inception in 1955, across two locations: overlapping by a bit more than a month, the Kassel chapter opened on June 10, 2017, and will run through mid-September.

The decision to stage this exhibition—founded by Arnold Bode in the hope of contributing to the cultural rehabilitation of postwar Germany—at least partly in the Greek capital was, of course, a charged one. Kassel and Athens are cities facing an imbricated set of crises (most prominently, migration and financial recession, respectively) in countries whose political maneuverings have very directly impacted one

another, contributing to the fraying of European unity. Germany's alleged recent tampering with the democratic proceedings of Greek elections, not to mention the antagonism inherent in any lender-debtor relationship, could hardly have engendered feelings of receptivity vis-à-vis an exhibition funded by the EU goliath. Although no previous documenta has had its own subtitle, this one adopted the "working title" (which, so far, has been left unchanged) of "Learning from Athens," a moniker that felt at once inconsistent with the exhibition's contents, overwhelmingly earnest, if not outright glib, and even condescending: the West has been learning from Athens for the better part of recorded history.

As with any exhibition of this scale, there is plenty of room for inner conflict, contradiction, inconsistency, blunder, and (indeed) beauty. In this respect, documenta 14 does not disappoint. In part *because* of these internal tensions, its Athens component is also an exhibition that refused to readily quit the collective psyche of the members of the art world who had attended its opening—for weeks afterward, I found myself at gatherings in which heated discourse erupted around the subject. And it is an exhibition with plenty of politically charged content to discuss, in works that range from the somewhat silly and absurdist to the genuinely affecting. In the former category is *Payment of Greek Debt to Germany with Olives and Art* (2017), a sculpture by Marta Minuj'n. She installed a shallow, rectangular container brimming with olives in the lobby of the largest documenta venue, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (EMST), where occasional performances by an Angela Merkel impersonator accompanied it. Placed on Filopappou Hill, overlooking the Parthenon, Rebecca Belmore's *Biinjiya'iing Onji (From Inside)*, (2017), an impenetrable marble tent—a symbolic refugee shelter rendered in the material of ancient temples—is an over-elegant, over-obvious distillation of the present political context. And then there is the contentious but powerful piece by Polish artist Artur Zmijewski called *Glimpse* (2016–2017), a pregnantly silent 20-minute, 16mm black-and-white film made in large part in the famously inhumane Calais Jungle, and whose subject is the ethics of an artist's sociopolitical engagement. In the film, Zmijewski offers various "gifts" to refugees in the camp, but proceeds to both pose and disrupt the recipients, by, for example, covering the face of a black man in white paint, having only just extended him the gift of a new piece of clothing. Although these works, and a spattering of others, allude to the refugee crisis that Greece—of all the EU members—continues to feel most acutely, with as many as several thousand migrants arriving daily on its shores, the exhibition still managed not to feel stridently polemical. But make no mistake, there are still many, many works throughout whose subjects included such fare as genocide, war, imperialism, the decimation of aboriginal cultures, the suppression of minority communities, the failures of capitalism, etc.





Pope.L, *Whispering Campaign*, 2016–17, installation view, Cantina Social, Athens  
[photo: Freddie F.; courtesy of documenta 14]

Although the overall experience of documenta 14 in Athens is difficult to synthesize, certain particularly tangible strands nonetheless emerge. The proliferation of sonic works, and works relating—archivally or otherwise—to music, sound, and composition constitutes one such thread. In fact, if anything, the exhibition felt abundantly polyphonic, whether through the works on display or the cacophony of voices emitted by the ungainly curatorial team. Few decisions seemed to have been made in advance as to how best to unify the institutional voice of interpretations and print materials; it ranged from "Occupy-lite" to academic jargon. Visitors were invited to join tours of the exhibition led by members of a "Chorus," presumably consisting of art students willing to trudge around the city with a group of discursive strangers. Given that a staggering 60 of the exhibited artists are no longer living, this aural motif often produced the sensation of walking around listening for voices from beyond the grave. Among the more poignant works in this vein is the stirring "sonic graffiti" by Benjamin Patterson (who died last year during preparations for documenta). Inspired by Aristophanes' *The Frogs* (405 BCE), *When Elephants Fight, It Is the Frogs That Suffer* (2016) embeds the sounds of croaking frogs, punctuated by apposite pronouncements such as "All is flux," within the overgrown grasses that hem a stream flowing through the Byzantine and Christian Museum's gardens. Pope.L's citywide *Whispering Campaign* (2016–2017), in which 9,438 hours of eerie susurrations issues from alcoves and corners at multiple venues, felt genetically linked to Patterson's work. Described as consisting of "Nation, people, sentiment, language, time," Pope.L's installation narrates an abstracted, fragmented history of Kassel and Athens, assembled from the artist's interviews with migrants in both cities. Back at EMST, choreographers Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet (aka "les gens d'Uterpan") created a hulking, multisided structure filling one of the galleries nearly to its edges—an enclosure that functioned as a towering white wall, devoid of any evident point of ingress. As the viewer walks its periphery, she might hear but not see the dancers operating within: the staccato of their steps as they sprint its length, or their panting breath. The work is a visual performance rendered auditory, reduced to the sounds of labor—perhaps not intended as such, but an apt metaphor nonetheless for the invisible, inscrutable machinations of government.

In an adjacent gallery plays a startling "documentary" film called *The House Is Black*, dating from 1963. The Iranian director Forough Farrokhzad filmed this unsettling

masterpiece at the Bababaghi Hospice leper colony, a still-extant community in northwestern Iran. Stylistically on par with the best of the French New Wave, it depicts the brutal deformities of the residents and their everyday activities (sports, education, mealtimes) with such mesmeric beauty that one finds it near impossible to look away. Overlaid with incantatory quotes from the Old Testament and the Koran, the film seems bent on summoning forth *something* from the grave. The choice to screen it here is potent: documenta 14 appears so intently, even strenuously to be looking backward, and film, even if fleetingly, reanimates the dead. Notably, the exhibition largely excluded any so-called Net or Post-Internet art, as well as the now usual 21st-century biennial suspects—Rose, Atkins, Arcangel, Wolfson, etc.—perhaps mainly to skirt the trends of the commercial mainstream.

The distortions that separate a live act from its echo, or the present from even the very recent past, are the essence of Alvin Lucier's extraordinary *I am sitting in a room* (1969), which the artist performed live during the exhibition's opening days. Sitting on a spartan chair on the cold, subterranean floor of the Athens Conservatoire, the octogenarian softly read into a microphone: "The resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed." At once a description and the content of the piece, this line was amplified and picked up by microphones placed in the center of the assembled audience, then looped back, repeatedly, through speakers placed within close proximity to the microphones. In the near-dark of the room, Lucier's phrase, even the discreteness of the individual words, retained its integrity for a remarkably long time, before, all at once, seeming to deliquesce into waves of liquid sound, as much felt by the body as heard. Even with the source of the sound still present in the room (Lucier himself), the frequencies, separated from his form and distorted by technology and space, lost their human shape, became mere melancholic vibration, before falling off entirely into a thrumming emptiness.

Upstairs at the same venue, Emeka Ogboh's sound installation presented a different kind of disembodied voice. *The Way Earthly Things Are Going* (2017) is a multichannel sound installation broadcast from a ring of human-height standing speakers placed in a strikingly raw concrete amphitheater. Against the backdrop of a real-time LED display of world stock indexes, these speakers offered a chorus of voices singing musical scores that were created by Greek and Igbo composers, and were based on data from Ogboh's research on financial crises from 1929 to the present. Given that this piece, like most, was absent much in the way of a wall text to explain its conceptual underpinnings, it was hard to square the gorgeous sounds of clear and vivid voices in harmony, reverberating richly within the chamber, with the presence of the LED ticker—a juxtaposition that was at once a heavy-handed gesture and a preemptively wishful *memento mori* of capitalism.

Also at the Conservatoire is a video installation by Susan Hiller called *The Last Silent Movie* (2007-2008), previously shown by Szymczyk in his 2008 Berlin Biennial—clearly a work of considerable importance to him. Its soundtrack incorporates a series of historical field recordings of extinct and endangered languages, which Hiller excavated from libraries and archives. As these dying, or dead, words wash over the viewer, she sees nothing but a black screen emblazoned with subtitles, translating a diversity of obsolescence into English, the most dominant and rapacious of tongues. Again, these voices come from beyond the grave: a reminder that Western imperialism doesn't just bring about the obvious deaths, but also the more ineffable ones.

**Mowwgli : Carte blanche à Marc Lenot : Les gens d'Uterpan, Marc Lenot**

<http://mowwgli.com/14611/2017/05/03/carte-blanche-a-marc-lenot-gens-duterpan/>

3 mai 2017 / May 3rd 2017

## Carte Blanche à Marc Lenot : Les gens d'Uterpan

by Mowwgli (<http://mowwgli.com/author/admin8122/>) on 3 mai 2017

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**Marc Lenot est notre invité de la  
semaine (lire son portrait publié  
lundi 1er mai  
(<http://mowwgli.com/14470/2017/05/01/marc-lenot-lininvite-de-semaine/>)), dans le  
cadre de sa carte blanche, le critique  
d'art a souhaité nous parler de danse  
contemporaine avec la compagnie Les  
gens d'Uterpan.**

Aujourd'hui, je voudrais vous parler de danse.  
Je suis loin d'être un grand connaisseur en  
danse, tant classique que contemporaine,  
mais depuis quelques années je m'intéresse  
de plus en plus à la danse très contemporaine.  
J'ai ainsi découvert (à la Biennale de Lyon en  
2007) une compagnie de danse, qui, oh  
étrange, était présentée dans la Biennale  
même aux côtés des artistes plasticiens : les  
gens d'Uterpan, des chorégraphes Annie  
Vigier et Franck Apertet. Cela m'a tout de

suite intéressé, car il n'y avait plus de frontière, ni spatiale entre danseurs et spectateurs, ni temporelle entre préparation, échauffement et spectacle proprement dit, ni conceptuelle entre dans et art contemporain. On assistait à tout et de tout près, j'étais un spectateur toléré dans l'espace chorégraphique, n'osant trop m'approcher, ni trop bouger, mon corps entrant en rapport et parfois en contact avec celui des danseurs.

J'ai depuis vu bon nombre de leurs actions (plutôt que spectacles ou performances) et contribué à quelques-uns de leurs projets. Il s'agit toujours de questionner les codes de la représentation chorégraphique, que danseurs et participants s'installent dans l'espace urbain et interagissent avec lui (Topologie), ou qu'une audition de danseurs postulants devienne un spectacle interrogeant les relations de pouvoir et économiques dans le contexte d'une compagnie (Audience), ou bien que le théâtre devienne lieu de perturbation avant un spectacle prévu (Parterre). Il s'agit de toujours contrecarrer des codes établis en y introduisant un peu d'anarchie, de bordel parfois joyeux et toujours doublé d'une réflexion critique acerbe.

Evidemment, tout cela n'est pas toujours très bien perçu et les gens d'Uterpan, entre art contemporain et danse, ont eu (c'est moins vrai maintenant) un certain mal à être reconnus en France, alors qu'ils ont rapidement eu beaucoup plus de retentissement à l'étranger : ainsi, ils font actuellement partie de documenta 14, tant à Kassel qu'à Athènes.

Que cette présentation rapide et sommaire vous donne envie d'en savoir plus. Leur site est <https://www.lesgensduterpan.com> (<https://www.lesgensduterpan.com>).

A la suite de leur projet Uchronie autour de l'analyse des attitudes et des comportements individuels et collectifs dans la ville, une publication vient de sortir, qui n'est pas du tout un catalogue, mais une sorte d'occupation de l'espace de publication, d'infiltration dans le livre d'une uchronie collective.

<https://www.lesgensduterpan.com>  
(<https://www.lesgensduterpan.com>)

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# THE POLITIZATION OF ANATOMY

PIERRE BAL-BLANC IN CONVERSATION WITH PRINZ GHOLAM, MARIE COOL FABIO BALDUCCI  
AND ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK APERTET (LES GENS D'UTERPAN)

In her book *Political Anatomy*,<sup>1</sup> Nicole-Claude Mathieu contrasts sex as a matter of “biology” and gender as a matter of the “social.” But she underscores that definitions of sex and the frontiers between sex and gender are not so clear in a number of non-Western societies and marginal territories of the west itself. The feminist impulse to which she contributed in the 1970s with the notion of social sex led her to theorize the notions of the “third sex” and “third gender.”

**Pierre Bal-Blanc** is Curator of documenta 14. He was formerly Director of CAC Brétigny (Contemporary Art Center of Brétigny, greater Paris). From 2003 to 2014, he organized the *Phalanstère Project* (catalogue, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2017), a series of site-specific proposals indebted to the theories of Charles Fourier and aimed at critically rethinking the logic behind the accumulation of works of art. His exhibition series *La monnaie vivante/Living Currency* (CAC Brétigny/Micadanses, 2005–2006; Stuk, Leuven, 2007; Tate Modern, London, 2008; MoMA, Warsaw, and Berlin Biennale, 2010) and *Draft Score for an Exhibition* (Le Plateau, Paris; Artissima, Torino; Secession, Vienna, 2011).

Her method consisted in thinking about representational phenomena that were matters of norms, “institutionalized deviance” or self-definition. Her analysis thus focused on the balancing act between norms and margins, sex and gender. This took three forms, in her view: gender translates sex; gender symbolizes sex and conversely; gender constructs sex. “The person is not only individually situated with respect to biological sex; personal identity is strongly linked to a form of group consciousness.” Sex is not merely lived as an individual anatomical fate to be followed through the corresponding gender identity; gender is experienced as a sort of collective way of life. In conclusion, Nicole-Claude Mathieu identifies two, clashing tendencies in sexed identity: the anatomization of the political versus the politicization of anatomy.

In the course of the collective exhibition *The Death of the Audience*<sup>2</sup> at the Vienna Secession in 2009, I conducted a study of the behaviors of the various members – artists, attendants, audience members – who formed the body of the artistic scene. With the artists present, I drew out transversal figures that freed them from these assigned roles, as for example in the case of John Latham and his self-definition as a “Professional Outsider.” The politicization of the anatomy of the artistic body undertaken by the “practitioners” of this exhibition (in the sense that these artists called into question the notion of the author) contrasted with an institutionally-imposed anatomization of the cultural field. The collective experiment of documenta 14, which invented itself on moving ground between Kassel and Athens, among other things, led me to look more deeply into these questions by inviting artists whose practice inscribed the metamorphosis of the individual body into a third entity. Via their names and above all through their practice, Prinz Gholam, Marie Cool Fabio Balducci and Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d’Uterpan) express a third space or a politicization of anatomy that also has echoes in art history. Other examples of the emergence of hybrid practice and third spaces exist, from presenting the division of one into two, as in the case of the Italian artist Alighiero Boetti —or “Alighiero e Boetti” as he became known, inscribing this division within his very name—to the merger of two names, as in that of the French artists Bernard Bazile and Jean-Marc Bustamante, whose have joined their names in that of the public limited company BAZILEBUSTAMANTE. In these interviews, I attempt to engage in a discussion of these subjects in the context of the documenta 14 exhibition, which also takes place in a third space merging the cities of Kassel and Athens. To borrow the language of Guattari, it is an “Existential Territory”<sup>3</sup> that “does not give itself in itself, closed on itself, but rather as a precarious for itself: finite, finitized, singular, singularized, capable of bifurcating in stratified and deadly reiterations or opening up procedurally from a praxis that enables it to be made ‘habitable’ by a human project.”

Opposite, from top - Prinz Gholam, *My Sweet Country* (still), 2017. Courtesy: the artists and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris; Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, *Untitled*, desktop, chair office, window, rain, 2014. Courtesy: the artists and Marcelle Alix, Paris; Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d’Uterpan), *Aviss d’audition* performance at Theater Karolos Koun (Theatro Technis), Athens, 21 February 2017. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis



## PRINZ GHOLAM

**Wolfgang Prinz**, born 1969 in Leutkirch (Germany) and **Michel Gholam**, born 1963 in Beirut (Lebanon). They have been working together since 2001, they live in Berlin.

## MARIE COOL FABIO BALDUCCI

**Marie Cool** and **Fabio Balducci** (1961, Belgium - 1964, Italy) Recent exhibitions include *Contemporary Locus* at Area Tsmec (curated by Paola Tognon) and Granpalazzo—Lulu Mexico City. Projet. Zagarolo, (curated by Chris Sharp).



## ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK APERTET (LES GENS D'UTERPAN)

**Annie Vigier** was born in 1965 and **Franck Apertet** in 1966. They live and work in Paris. Under the title *les gens d'Uterpan*, they have developed creations focusing on experimentation. Their act on touches upon several points, by exploring, among other things, the limits of the human body and of representation on. This process implies redefining the practice of dance and the function of the dancer. Their work has been presented (selection on): Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon 2007 (France), Project Arts Centre, Dublin (Ireland), ICA and Tate Modern, London (United Kingdom).



## PRINZ GHOLAM

### PIERRE BAL-BLANC

Is the fusion of your two names, Wolfgang Prinz and Michel Gholam into Prinz Gholam a statement about working in collaboration or a result of the work itself?

### PRINZ GHOLAM

We can't say that our work is a collaboration. It is in its birth already one work, by one author, and the author is a couple. Being together is visible in the work itself. Seeing ourselves as dependent on a social and cultural environment makes it possible for two individuals to work together. It is not about the ego, but about dealing with the constraints to which both of us are exposed in the same way, because we live together under the same conditions. Appropriating and embodying already-existing works of art in a very precise manner allows us to see our dispositions and work as inextricable from our identity and the conceptions we unconsciously internalized through education. It is a kind of exorcism, a way to liberate oneself from these almost primordial constraints.

**PBB** When did you start to work together?

**PG** We began working together in 2001 because our symbiotic existence could no longer be ignored. And this came gradually with our skepticism regarding how art is done. We trusted in the inevitable shift from planned artistic intention once one ventures into something incalculable, like placing oneself in front of the camera and judging results later when the moment is over. This is something we still feel very strongly in the live performances, where all preliminary preparations lead to the work. The symbiotic nature of this work has become a sort of intuition to both of us. This doesn't mean that the performances are spontaneous or improvised, but that our activity becomes effortlessly synchronized when following the requirements the work imposes.

Yet when the work is presented, it is released in a situation that cannot be controlled. And so we as performers do not know what it actually exactly looks like. We can only imagine how it should look. Systematically we apply all references to both of us. Equally we submit ourselves to a visual language formed in the performance. Both of us are equally absorbed in this activity.

**PBB** What did the move to Athens give to your work?

**PG** When we are in Athens for documenta, we are working in the exact place where antiquity happened. The ruins and remains symbolize and assert continuity of culture. The performative commitment on these sites, the pictorial source material and the local, cease to be merely cultural heritage; they become a nonverbal yet active language in use.

**PBB** You embody different genders in your poses in the work; how does this affect your language?

**PG** As for the transition of gender, we always have the feeling that we "neutralize" the gender roles in the figure constellations by doing them ourselves, with our two male bodies. This could then mirror any age or gender or type or physical characteristics. It is as if the corporeal representation we make would be a description in words (language) that each reader understands and emphatically imagines herself or himself doing (not knowing if this is possible).

We want to add here: mixture, confusion of genres, inevitable oddity, ambiguity in meaning, off-ness, weirdness, un-fitting, unlikelihood, naïveté (if possible), provoking discontinuity and a new image, a lost continuity.

**PBB** Can you expand on this description to explain how you are working with the resources and context of Athens and Kassel?

### PG (M)

I remember the moment we performed Rouault's *Mon doux pays, où êtes vous?* in the empty Olympieion. This was the first posture we took. We dwelled some time in this pose. This physical action of lying horizontally on the ground, the stomach tensed to be able to prop up the head, the shoulders pulling forward to the feet and the hand closed. We felt then, in that moment, the oppressive weight of the archaeological site. So it is an empirical experience that allows us to continue and reinforce the postures within the performance.

**PBB** What was your inspiration?

**PG** The word "inspiration" is very important, as we have very vivid memories of images, pictures, and especially paintings. This comes from a long process of self-education and a strong conviction that artworks matter in the lives of people. We do not mean the embellishment or prestige of being exposed to culture, but the idea that these artistic proposals are there and available for use by those who engage in controversy or confrontation with the artworks. So in the case of Athens and Kassel, the choice of the site for the work was very fast.

The performances in Athens and in Kassel have different titles: *My Sweet Country* and *Speaking of Pictures*. The performances revolve around (with slight differences) many similar sources. We want to explore different approaches. We see the postures as a visual language that can be composed and reorganized according to the needs we encounter.



Wilhelm von Plüschow, *Two nude youth in front of the Ancient Roman tomb of the Rabirii, along via Appia, Rome, ca. 1900.*  
Photo: User: G.dallorto / Wikimedia Commons / CC-0

**PBB** What materials do you work with in Athens?

### PG (W)

We worked mainly with images that refer to Greek classical antiquity and which were used to create historic and cultural continuity. We wanted to deal with the fantasies, phantasms, and ideologies that were and still are attached to ancient Greek culture, which Roland Barthes called the "most cultured culture" in his text on Wilhelm von Gloeden. A Roland Barthes quote:

"These contradictions are 'heterologies,' frictions between different and opposed languages. For instance von Gloeden takes the code of antiquity, he overloads it, he displays it heavily (ephebes, shepherds, ivy, palms, olive trees, vine leaves, tunics, columns, pedestals) but (first distortion) he mixes up the signs from antiquity. He combines the vegetable Greece, Roman statuary, and the





Top - Prinz Gholam, *My Sweet Country* (still), 2017. Courtesy: the artists and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris  
Bottom - Prinz Gholam, *Speaking of Pictures* (still), 2017. Courtesy: the artists and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris



'antique' nude derived from the Ecoles de Beaux-Arts. But it seems that he takes without any irony the most worn-out of legends for cash value. And this is not all: antiquity thus displayed (and by inference the love of boys thus sponsored) is peopled with African bodies. Perhaps he is right: Delacroix used to say that one could find ancient togas to look good only on Arabs."

Barthes continues: "But since art is a field of recuperation (nothing can be done about it: art even recuperates challenges to it and makes new art out of them), it is better to see the photographs of Baron von Gloeden less as art than as strength: the thin, hard strength by virtue of which it resists all varieties of conformity, those of art, morality and politics (lest we forget the fascist codifications), and which may be described as its naïveté. Today more than ever, mixing the most 'cultural' culture with the most radiant eroticism is an act of great bravery. Sade and Klossowski did it. Von Gloeden tirelessly stirred this mixture without thinking about it. Thus the strength of his vision, which continues to astonish to this day: his naïveté, like his prowess, is grandiose."<sup>4</sup>

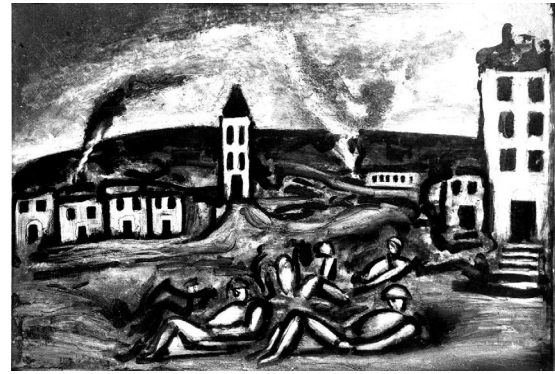
**PBB** Is it different to work around the real historical references compared with references mediated through books?

**PG (W)** Working in Athens on an archaeological site and in the Panathenaic Stadium (Kallimarmaro), we saw that the ancient ruins and the stadium appear inevitably as symbols of the identity of a country. In the Kallimarmaro we embodied images from Nelly, Wilhelm von Plüschow, and ancient Greek sculptures on the outer edge of the stadium with an asymmetrical perspective on the whole from an elevated viewpoint. Our performative activity for the video camera happened next to the joggers and the school kids doing sports down in the stadium. Our pursued continuity with the ancient past was evident when we were in direct bodily contact with a monument. Especially seeing the kids, who were brought there in order to experience this historical stadium (which is a nineteenth-century classicist reconstruction of an ancient structure), to cultivate their national identity.



Eugène Delacroix, *The Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople*, 1840.  
Photo: User: Hohum / Wikimedia Commons / CC-0

**PG (M)** The osmosis of living figures with limestone.<sup>5</sup> Through the archetypes of depictions we are taught that there exists a closeness and a relationship to the human figure. An organic conviviality and dependence. The incompleteness and fragmentary conditions of these cultural sites call for human intervention. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Wilhelm von Plüschow depicted (a rough rendition) young undressed men (or sometimes in white cloaks) snuggling themselves on or to the boulders of Greek and Roman ruins. Holding hands, reclining on a ledge. The exchange that finds a place between different degrees of presence is very interesting to us. The Greek remains from several centuries before Christ, updated and added to at the end of the nineteenth century with figures of boys, now intervening there in the presence of the tourism industry. There is an enjoyment in performing. It is overwhelming and difficult to describe.



Georges Rouault, *Mon Doux Pays, Où Etes-Vous?* (My sweet country, where are you?), 1948, "Miserere," Plate 44. Collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee. Gift of Mr. Leonard J. Scheller

**PBB** You come from different cultures: German and Lebanese. Did this project offer a way to engage in a cultural dialogue?

**PG (W)** We do come from different countries, actually different continents, but neither of us is attached to a specific national context. It is more that we are able to avoid being the representative of a single country or culture, because otherwise it would not be possible to work together. For Michel, Athens felt very familiar, because of its strong similarities with Greek Orthodox neighborhoods in Beirut. Actually Athens felt very familiar both of us—we were both able to relate to it very easily. One main reference for our work was Eugène Delacroix's *Entry of the Crusaders in Constantinople* (1840). We gave Athens the role of Constantinople in the painting. The columns in the background of the painting were replaced with the ancient ruins of the Temple of the ancient Zeus (Olympieion), which is one location of our performance and video.

**PBB** We should also discuss your inclusion of Delacroix in the daybook.

**PG (M)** Our work depicted in the daybook is from 2005, and only a fragment of Delacroix's painting. Yet the idea with the daybook made us look again at the large historical painting and consider it as a whole. And we found it very fitting. Because we are now more conscious of the conflict in the depicted work and its relevance for today. Michel Butor's analysis and interpretation made us feel as though we were entering the work and seeing the world out of it. We intend to depict almost all figures of the painting in our performance.

**PBB** You were inspired, I know, by the division of the exhibition into two locations, Athens and Kassel. Did this also confront you with your own dialectical play? Or if you don't define your play as dialectical, how does the framework apply to your practice?

**PG (W)** Kassel is for us in a way the opposite of Athens, because you see hardly any historical remains: a big part of the city was destroyed in World War II. Without looking for it, we found a location in Kassel with a strong neo-Gothic context: Lutherplatz. The remains of a neo-Gothic church, apparently neglected grave-stones and monuments from the nineteenth century, surrounded by streets with a lot of traffic. We were immediately struck by it and decided to locate the performance there. We apply the references we already used in Athens to this place, adapting the Delacroix painting and the constellations of the photographs of Wilhelm von Plüschow. For us Lutherplatz appears as a culturally very typical place, especially when one thinks of the German Romantic movement, for example Caspar David Friedrich's depictions of graveyards. Paradoxically the references we are working with seem not to fit in this situation at all. This contraction is very interesting and motivating for us. Maybe it plays unconsciously with our backgrounds: northern Europe (German) and Mediterranean (Middle Eastern). There is also some irony and humor, which makes it possible to suspend or pervert all these cultural connotations of identity and nationality.

MARIE COOL  
FABIO BALDUCCI**PIER BAL-BLANC**

You are Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci but your work is credited by Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, in one single name. How did you come to that?

**MARIE COOL FABIO BALDUCCI**

We would like to answer first with a quotation :

"Bartleby is not the writer's metaphor nor a symbol of something else. It is a violently comic text and the comic is always literal. It is like the novels of von Kleist, Dostoevsky, Kafka or Beckett, with which it forms a subterranean and prestigious language. It only wants to say what is literally said. What it says and repeats is I WOULD PREFER NOT TO. This is its famous phrase and every keen reader repeats it in his turn. A lean and colorless man spoke this phrase and disconcerted everyone. But in what does the literality of this phrase consist?

One immediately has the impression that a certain mannerism, a certain solemnity is a work: to prefer is rarely used in this way and neither Bartleby's employer, the lawyer, nor the other 'writers' generally use it ('queer word, I never use it myself...') More commonly, one would say 'I would rather not.' But more than anything, the strangeness of this phrase goes beyond speech itself. True, it is grammatically and syntactically correct but its abrupt conclusion, NOT TO, which leaves what repels suspended in mid-air, gives it a radical aspect, a sort of liminal function. The repeated, insistent use of it makes it all the more perfect and unusual. Whispered by a soft, patient, expressionless voice, it becomes a type of insubordination, forming an inarticulate whole, a single breath. In this sense, it has the same power, the same function as an agrammatical phrase.<sup>6</sup>



Paul Thek, *The Fishman*, installation view of the courtyard at Stable Gallery in New York, 1969. Courtesy: The Leo Baeck Institute, New York. Photo: John D. Schiff

**PBB**

How would you define your common work?

**CB**

Our "community" in work is not a collaboration, it is an association of intents, that defines itself through the concept of competence. The allocation or responsibility of a role indicates the overall capacity of one or the other in dealing with a specific sector of the work.

Competence, in itself unites a wide range of abilities: practical, individual knowledge acquired in other contexts and differences in attitude that indicate one's predispositions for a given task.

This community was founded with the "ruthlessness" thought we came upon one day, that we wouldn't be able to continue working and living without creating an association.



American movie poster of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema*, 1968

Distant from the elitism found in "Establishing a State and Republic" and following a modern idea of self-sufficiency of creating a homogeneous system, as autonomous as possible, with shifting borders in respect to the outside, we began to act, self-produce and spread the work.

**PBB**

Only one of you is visible, Marie. Fabio, are you the hidden face of the works?

**CB**

To use an expression from Morin, the impossible couple (reason-madness, order-disorder) is possible, in fact, it is necessary and sufficient for interpreting human as well as economic action, cohabitating with its entropic state and integrating in its very complexity.

Considering the esoteric aspect of number two, we put some segments side by side. Number two is depicted in origin by two parallel lines, in different traditions they may either be two vertical or horizontal lines. It is the first number that distances itself from unity and for this reason symbolizes sin. It is the first number that considers division symbolic of "corruptible things." The number two, which according to Jewish Kabala defines the line after a point and represents entry into time, after an indivisible and incorruptible unity.





Top - Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, *Untitled*, golden leafs, golden stars, sunlight, desktop, 2011. Courtesy: the artists and Marcelle Alix, Paris  
Bottom - Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, *Untitled*, sheet of paper (A4), sunlight, desktop, 2007. Courtesy: the artists and Marcelle Alix, Paris



## ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK APERTET (LES GENS D'UTERPAN)

**PIERRE BAL-BLANC**

Why did you create *les gens d'Uterpan*?

**ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK APERTET**

A taste for challenge in the experience of our relationship disposed us to extend our creative confrontation beyond the couple we initially formed. The decision to continue elaborating a work corroborated the principle of reversibility that we had inscribed in *les gens d'Uterpan* (1994) as a project. Exceeding in order to invent, creating in order to exist, is a dynamic that we apply even in our way of being at a distance from one another in the third identity that is *les gens d'Uterpan*.

**PBB**

What was the aim of the company?

**VA**

Calling into question frameworks and conventions through the medium of the body, choreography as sociological interpretation and systems of exhibition may be understood as an artistic statement that has returned to the political. "It can obviously be said of our work that it is political but it is not just that. I have always had the impression (and feared) that categories become closed labels that once again prevent one from seeing."<sup>7</sup> But it also represents the consequence of a collaboration that has been freed and cast beyond intimacy in a transgressive project. "We felt and then addressed the role and frameworks imposed upon us as arbitrary—first as choreographers and then as artists. We have not adhered to the exploitation that accompanies the destinies attributed by the institution. We have reacted by granting ourselves a lot of freedom, enough freedom to work in any case."<sup>8</sup>

**PBB**

Is it a dual formation?

**AV**

It is an experience of duality that we reiterate and that is to be found in each work bearing this indefinite name, this patronym that includes and potentially exceeds us. On the basis of a conflict that is reciprocally acknowledged and accepted, it is less a matter of a creation than it is the result of a process of sapping opposition. "Working as two people is to already observe how discourse is accepted by and resonates with the other person, how thought is transformed."<sup>9</sup> Our creations are the positive precipitate of an opposition that remains unresolved as long as our relationship lasts. *Les gens d'Uterpan* is a space, a way of thinking that enables a game of overtaking.

**PBB**

Has context played a role in the formation of *les gens d'Uterpan*?

**AV**

The academicism to which we lay claim as a dance company simultaneously calls into question the conventions of the field of plastic arts, for which this status is not calibrated, and the field of dance and live performance, for which our work represents an anomaly, an imposture. In the plastic arts, it is a theme evoked by a community to such an extent that it sometimes seems a grotesque cult of the body, an effect that dispels the more appropriate concept of the collective.

**PBB**

Is the company an anonymous society?

**AV**

For us, the "company" identity counts for the organization it represents. A dance company manages people but the particularity that makes it interesting has to do with bodies. In this respect, its operation duplicates and exposes the hierarchized system of the distribution of roles and functions that society offers at the national and global levels. Like citizens exploited by a government in power, the dancers are totally involved in the service of the choreography. "During the 2007 contemporary art Biennale in Lyon, the presence of

dancers over the course of four months rendered visible the chain of authorities—from the director to the delegated representatives, the invited representatives, the guards and the dancers of X-Event 2."<sup>10</sup>

**PBB**

Is the company a tool or an organ, is it technological or organic?

**AV**

For a choreographer, taking on a dancer is to radically possess a tool. Other situations of subjugated bodies exist but the dance company, because it conventionally acknowledges this, reveals the contract, the control and the objectification of these bodies and people more than elsewhere. In a part of our work, mainly the X-Event cycle, we transgress the potential that is the dancer by exceeding certain limits that remain problematical for dance. "The X-Event protocols were conceived in opposition to the idea of choreography, in an objective—that is, transgressive—use of the dancer and in a desire to exhibit the experimental act."<sup>11</sup> There, the dancer clearly appears as an exploited medium of our performance. This (always consensual) appropriation of the other's body was made visible as soon as we became involved in the field of plastic arts. *Les gens d'Uterpan* company is an administrative entity but it is above all the set of people who adhere to and produce these acts of excess.



Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (*les gens d'Uterpan*), *Avis d'audition* performance at Theater Karolos Koun (Theatro Technis), Athens, 21 February 2017. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis

1. Nicole-Claude Mathieu. *L'anatomie politique*. Editions côté-femmes, 1991 and iXe, 2013.
2. Pierre Bal-Blanc. *Ver Sacrum / The Death of the Audience*. Catalogue. Secession 2011.
3. Félix Guattari. *Les trois Ecologies*. Galilé, 1989.
4. Roland Barthes, *Wilhelm Von Gloeden*. *Interventi di Joseph Beuys, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Andy Warhol* (Naples: Amelio, 1978).
5. Limestone is a type of sedimentary rock composed mostly of calcite, a carbonate mineral. It also contains fragments of marine invertebrates such as coral. Limestone is abundant throughout the world, including in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.
6. Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben. *Bartleby*. *La formula della creazione*
7. *Uchronia*, duplicate > do not create, infiltrate > do not exhibit, exceed > do not belong, appear > do not claim, delegate > do not restrict.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.





Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan), *Avis d'audition* performance at Theater Karolos Koun (Theatro Technis), Athens, 21 February 2017. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis









Ibrahim Mahama, *Check Point Sekondi Loco*. 1901–2030, 2016–2017, various materials, Torwache, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Tanya Augsburg

## Unlearning in Kassel: Partial Impressions of documenta 14

By Tanya Augsburg

Documenta 14 is an incredibly ambitious curatorial experiment of enormous proportions. Touted as the most important art exhibition in the world, documenta 14 cost 34 million euros (over \$36 million), around half paid by public funds with the rest paid by sponsors and documenta itself. Its exorbitant cost is expected to pay for itself: according to a documenta 14 press release dated July 27, 2017, "On Saturday, July 29, 2017, which marks the halfway point of the exhibition period in Kassel, documenta 14 will have attracted some 445,000 visitors, seventeen percent more than the last documenta at the same point."<sup>[1]</sup>

For the first time the quinquennial exhibition is being shared (or perhaps more accurately, divided) between two locations: Kassel, Germany, the site of documenta's 13 previous iterations, and Athens, Greece. Over 160 living artists have been commissioned to create and present (or perform) works in one or both of these cities during the 163 days of documenta 14. To complicate things further, the two exhibitions are not running simultaneously as documenta launched first in Athens on April 8, 2017 before opening

approximately two months later in Kassel on June 10, 2017. The primary reason for this dual venture is evident with documenta 14's title, "Learning from Athens," which opens up many potential thematic avenues given Germany's long traditions of Greek-inspired classicism, its recent economic stronghold over Greece, and its ongoing conflicts with Greece's policies regarding refugees and migrants.

It has been widely reported that during the opening day press conference in Athens, documenta 14 Artistic Director Adam Szymczyk confounded the audience when he suggesting that they should "unlearn what you know" and that "the great lesson is that there are no lessons." One critic who was in the audience compared Szymczyk's demeanor to that of a zen master.[2] Another noted similarities between Szymczyk's words to Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous tautology from his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, "It is either raining or not raining." [3] Having minored in Classics in college, I note resonances between Szymczyk's riddles and those of the ancient Greek oracle of Delphi. Case in point: in advance of the opening in Athens Szymczyk told the German press agency, while defending his decision not to publish the list of participating artists in advance: "In my opinion, an exhibition should be an experience, without great programmed expectations." [4]

Perhaps Szymczyk was counting on his audience to be unfamiliar with aesthetic theory, because it goes without saying that the act of viewing art is at the very least an *aesthetic* experience that implies certain expectations. Such enigmatic pronouncements could be an attempt to mask the disorganization that was all too apparent to see months later in Kassel. Then again, maybe the unwieldy website, confusing maps, hastily handwritten art labels, missing artist attributions, and less-than-informative *documenta 14: Daybook* consisting of creative artist biographies (available for sale instead of an exhibition catalogue) were part of a programmatic strategy to unsettle, if not to frustrate, documenta 14 visitors with the aim of instilling in them feelings of instability and disorientation. Indeed, "unsettling" might be a more apt synonym for "unlearning" rather than the obvious "forgetting."

The problem with such curatorial strategies is that they are disingenuous. To appreciate documenta 14 fully, the visitor needs to have learned a few things beforehand, such as documenta's history given that its founder Arnold Bode envisioned the first documenta in 1955 to reclaim and restore modern art's rightful place in Germany after it was banned under the Nazis and disrupted by World War II. Moreover, Szymczyk presumed the visitor's knowledge of what he has called the "Gurlitt case," which made international news headlines in 2012 but has had special significance in Germany. The Gurlitt case, which I had heard of but had also "unlearned" or forgotten, refers to the police seizure of approximately 1500 artworks found in the homes of Cornelius Gurlitt, the son of art dealers who had secretly amassed their own private collection of Nazi-looted art. Szymczyk's failed attempts to exhibit the Gurlitt estate, which Cornelius bequeathed to the Kunstmuseum Bern in Switzerland upon his death in 2014, is crucial bit of information for the visitor to keep in mind when visiting documenta 14. [5] As a first-time visitor I was scarcely aware of documenta's history, let alone of the vital importance of the Gurlitt case for Szymczyk's curation, and it was indeed from a state of relative ignorance as opposed to unlearning that I experienced the exhibition.



Ibrahim Mahama, *Check Point Sekondi Loco*. 1901–2030, 2016–2017, various materials, Torwache, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Tanya Augsburg

## Torwache

My art tour commenced at the Torwache, twin 19th-century edifices on opposite sides of a busy street that appear as a quasi-city gate. Both are enveloped in quilts of ragged jute sacks that make up Ibrahim Mahama's installation, *Check Point Sekondi Loco*. 1901–2030 (2016–2017). From a distance they appear as formidable postcolonial rebukes of Cristo's shiny wraps, bringing to the surface the hidden and untold

histories of colonial labor and slavery that made European cultural achievements possible. Up close hints of untold narratives of trade and collective labor can be discerned with visible stitches, stencils, and writing.



Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan), *Library*, 2017–, wooden bookcases and books, installation view, Torwache, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Mathias Völzke

Inside Torwache South on the first floor are two bookcases that make up choreographers Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet's installation *Library* (2017). I recognized many of the books on the shelves as important scholarly works within the interdisciplinary field of performance studies. The accompanying artist statement reveals that the artists selected those books published since 2005 that do not mention them, calling attention to their omission or erasure from official histories of performance and dance. The displayed books thus function as visible symbols of (academic) power that dictates who gets accepted to the canon and who ends up in the dustbins of history. But do they really? From my vantage point as a performance scholar this book installation comes across as an arrogant self-vindication by the artists stemming from a sense of narcissistic injury rather than a rightful restoration or revision of academic scholarship. The self-serving aims of *Library* furthermore appear incredibly solipsistic given its proximity to the exhibit of the architectural model, drawings, photographs, and prints for Oskar Hansen's 1957 *Design for a Monument to the Victims of Fascism in Auschwitz-Birkenau*.



Detail of Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan), *Library*, 2017–, wooden bookcases and books, installation view, Torwache, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Tanya Augsburg

## Friedrichsplatz

Walking along a major Kassel thoroughfare for several blocks quickly led me to the centrally located Friedrichsplatz. There, in the middle of the public plaza, one cannot help but gaze in awe of documenta 14's majestic centerpiece, Martha Minujín's spectacular *Parthenon of Books* (1983/2017). Constructed out of metal scaffolding, its columns display banned books individually packaged in plastic and held in place by what appears to be industrial-strength Saran Wrap. Although Minujín first installed this work in 1983 in Buenos Aires in response to Argentina's previous regime's censorship, *The Parthenon of Books* gains new contexts on the site where Nazis burned books in 1933. Minujín resurrects her earlier replica of the Athenian Parthenon in its exact dimensions. Onlookers can climb up steps and walk around inside the



structure. Inside they can engage in impromptu treasure hunts to find familiar books, all of which purportedly were all donated as part of the work's participatory aims. I saw numerous German editions of *50 Shades of Grey*, *1984*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Harry Potter*, and Sigmund Freud's writings; I also came across an old German translation of Shakespeare's plays. Encased and suspended in impenetrable plastic, each book when scrutinized closely is reduced to its cover image. When viewed further away, the books range from appearing collectively as colorful mosaic during daylight to opaque rectangles at night.



Marta Minujin, *The Parthenon of Books*, 2017, steel, books, and plastic sheeting, Friedrichsplatz, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Tanya Augsburg

Without question *The Parthenon of Books* is an utterly amazing, monumental work. The celebration of banned books nevertheless omits their unique contexts—the particular ideas and expressions deemed unacceptable. So while *The Parthenon of Books* raises awareness about censorship, visitors are left to find out on their own exactly why. Unlike the kinds of spectacle found in popular culture, *The Parthenon of Books* leaves visitors wanting to know more and encourages their mass participation (indeed, the artist has a long history of creating mass-participation projects).

Each donated book has been catalogued and will be offered to the public after *The Parthenon of Books* is taken down when the exhibition closes. Nevertheless, *The Parthenon of Books* is not without contradictions. While it is easy to marvel over how the clear plastic as a medium enables countless light effects depending on the time of day and weather, reconciling one's aesthetic pleasures with one's environmentalist concerns about the use of so much plastic is "clearly" much more challenging.



Additional text-  
Hans Haacke's  
(2003/2017), with  
the Fridericianum  
and recast brass

most notably  
the people  
I walked past  
the aluminum  
SCARY, above the  
national

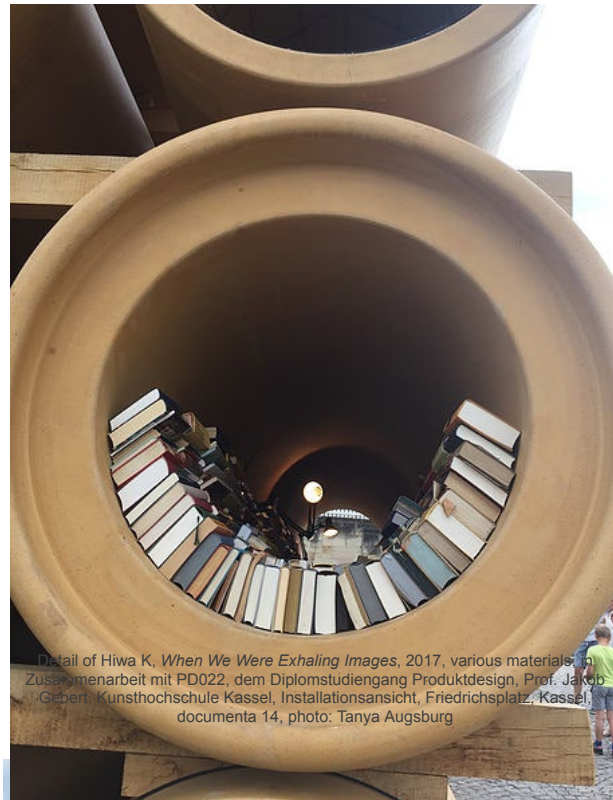
Technical University in Athens. To put it more bluntly, Cennetoğlu, who is an internationally known artist, appropriated and remediated street art by an unknown local Athenian artist for documenta 14. On the day of the opening, visitors witnessed first hand how BEINGSAFE CAN BE REALLY SCARY when they saw gun-toting snipers ready to shoot above the slogan on the Fridericianum's roof, photos of which can be easily found online.



Banu Cennetoğlu, *BEINGSAFE IS SCARY*, 2017, various materials, Friedrichsplatz, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Roman März

Also at Friedrichsplatz a few steps from the Documenta Halle is Iraqi-born and former refugee Hiwa K's *When We Were Exhaling Images* (2017), an installation of 20 stacked ceramic pipes with their interiors turned into living environments—apparently inspired by Hiwa K's own biography as he resorted to find shelter in drain pipes near Patras, Greece, when he first arrived there in 1988. It was often repeated while I was in Kassel that Hiwa K, who refurbished the pipes with the help of students, intended that the environments be used as Airbnb rentals, but the city of Kassel nixed the idea, citing safety concerns. One pipe was curiously filled with books, calling attention to documenta 14's paradoxical themes of learning/unlearning/experiencing. Are we to learn new ways of living from resourceful but dispossessed refugees? Are these model living environments supposed to be utopian fantasies? Dystopic nightmares? Or, are they collectively a cynical commentary about rampant urban gentrification? Inspired by the actual experiences of refugees, the installation nevertheless glosses over the harshness of the conditions in which they must endure in order to survive. While the work succeeds to raise awareness of the plight of refugees, it also raises questions. Are refugees in Greece still living in such conditions? How do books and learning fit in their lives as they struggle to survive? What steps can each of us take to help improve shelters for refugees? *When We Were Exhaling Images* presents the social injustices involving makeshift sewer pipe shelters as a bit too appealing, without any sense of irony. They look ready for an Ikea catalogue when they are inspired by actual shelters created by refugees under terrible circumstances.





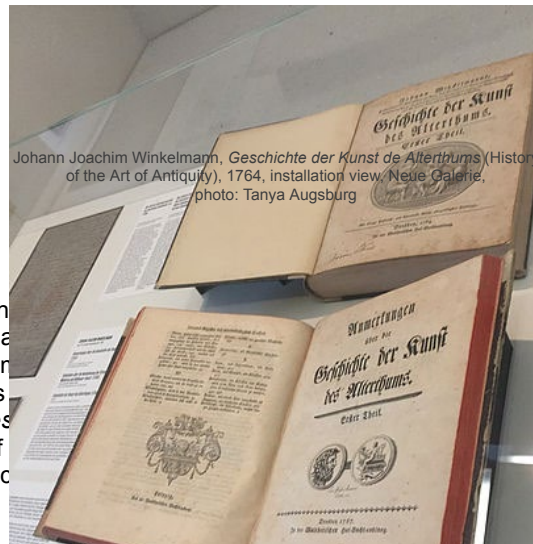
Detail of Hiwa K, *When We Were Exhaling Images*, 2017, various materials, in Zusammenarbeit mit PD022, dem Diplomstudiengang Produktdesign, Prof. Jakob Gebert, Kunsthochschule Kassel, Installationsansicht, Friedrichsplatz, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Tanya Augsburg



Hiwa K, *When We Were Exhaling Images*, 2017, various materials, in Zusammenarbeit mit PD022, dem Diplomstudiengang Produktdesign, Prof. Jakob Gebert, Kunsthochschule Kassel, Installationsansicht, Friedrichsplatz, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Mathias Völzke

A more no-holds-barred portrayal of the plight of refugees can be seen a several blocks away in Karlskirche, a Lutheran church, as part of another multi-city exhibition *Luther and the Avant-Garde*. There, in the upstairs choir loft German artist Thomas Kilpper with Massimo Ricciardo display *Inventories of Escape*, a collection of found objects 2014-2017, consisting of actual objects, many in various stages of disintegration, that were left behind by refugees and migrants in boats abandoned on Sicilian shores. I found myself close to tears while viewing the carefully arranged display, which included personal effects such as photographs, passports, and written notes. My parents themselves were once refugees from Eastern Europe, so the sense of irreplaceable personal loss was palpable.





Johann Joachim Winkelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (History of the Art of Antiquity), 1764, installation view, Neue Galerie, photo: Tanya Augsburg

## Neue Galerie

The following day I spent the afternoon at the Neue Galerie, where Szymczyk's curatorial team makes visible many of documents related to philhellenism to restitutions. Johann Winkelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (History of the Art of Antiquity) (1764) is displayed near paintings of the painter, Alexander Kalderas and Gurlitt.

Neue Galerie, which is a museum of historical texts serves to educate about the history of German art. The first edition of Johann Winkelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764) is owned by Alfred Bode, Hitler's favorite art collector and art hoarder Cornelius Gurlitt.



Pélagie Gbaguidi, *The Missing Link. Dicolonisation Education by Mrs Smiling Stone*, 2017, various materials, installation view, Neue Galerie, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Mathias Völzke

A 1742 edition of the French *Code Noir*, a legal decree passed by Louis XIV in 1685 to regulate colonialism and slavery within the French empire, is also displayed along with several racist works featuring moors, mulattos, Jews, and gypsies by Ludwig Emil Grimm, one half of Kassel's favorite duo, the Grimm brothers. Strategies for unlearning the legacies of colonialism and racism are perhaps best illustrated at the Neue Galerie with by Pélagie Gbaguidi's pedagogical installation, *The Missing Link. Dicolonisation Education by Mrs Smiling Stone* (2017), which includes school desks, photographs, broken ceramics, toys, notebooks, and children's art drawn on hung paper sheets created as part of a workshop collaboration with local school children and their teacher. Gbaguidi's installation at the Neue Galerie was a rare glimpse of the transformative and emancipatory power of critical pedagogy based on Paulo Freire's pioneering work, a ray of hope amidst all the displays of oppression and injustice.



Maria Eichhorn, *Unlawfully Acquired Books from Jewish Ownership*, installation view, Neue Galerie, Kassel, documenta 14, © Maria Eichhorn/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2017, photo: Mathias Völzke

Maria Eichhorn's Rose Valland Institute (2017) takes center stage at Neue Galerie with its various forms of documentation of Nazi looting of Jewish furniture and books. Her monolithic bookcase installation reaching the ceiling, *Unlawfully Acquired Books from Jewish Ownership*, contains library books from Berlin that were confiscated from their rightful Jewish owners by the Nazis. Books are yet again displayed to be gazed upon only—but as powerful evidence of German past injustices and current initiatives such as Eichhorn's provenance research to remedy them. In a side room *Auction Records 1935–42, Berlin* are projected on an entire wall. To be fair, Eichhorn's project does include the small Library and Reading Room complete with benches to facilitate reading. But from what I observed visitors used the benches to check their smart phones, leaving me with the impression that in this current epoch of post-literacy we are fetishizing books because we are reading them less and less—if at all.

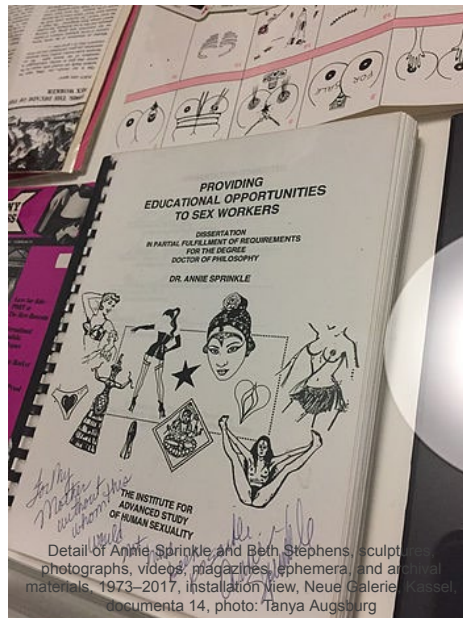


Maria Eichhorn, Library and Reading Room, thematic reference library, Rose Valland Institute, Neue Galerie, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Tanya Augsburg

Eichhorn's entire independent project is as breathtaking as it is eye-opening. Nevertheless, it didn't make as strong of an impression on me as it could have had I known how important the theme of restitution was for documenta 14. Instead, I pondered why the curatorial threads of sexual liberation and positive body politics evident in the exhibited works of the artist couple Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens as well as those by Lorenza Böttner, seemed truncated at the Neue Galerie. I spent some time in the room where Sprinkle and Stephen's artwork, videos, and artifacts, which included Sprinkle's doctoral dissertation, were displayed. I was not the only one drawn to their work: I noted that the room was crowded when I first arrived, and it was even more crowded when I returned for a second look. As for Böttner, her art and accompanying curatorial documentation were complete showstoppers. Born male, as a young child Böttner lost both her arms in an accident, went to school in Kassel, and became a visual and performance artist before dying of AIDS in 1994. It doesn't take much to assume that the curator of Public Programs, the eminent theorist of sex and gender non-conformity, Paul B. Preciado was the curatorial force behind the inclusion of Sprinkle, Stephens, and Böttner in documenta 14. I left the Neue Galerie fatigued yet still wanting to see more art selected by Preciado.



Exhibition room, Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, sculptures, photographs, videos, magazines, ephemera, and archival materials, 1973–2017, installation view, Neue Galerie, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Tanya Augsburg



Detail of Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, *sculptures, photographs, videos, magazines, ephemera, and archival materials, 1973–2017*, installation view, Neue Galerie, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Tanya Augsberg

In contrast to the spectacular central venues of documenta 14, from all reports and reviews I have heard and read, most of the more probing political works were delegated to exhibition spaces in the northern outskirts of Kassel, which is where many immigrants and newcomers currently reside. Truth be told, I left Kassel with an incomplete impression of documenta 14. That being said, I departed with an overriding sense of exteriority, surfaces, and resurfacing or “covering over” in order to present difficult and challenging ideas without causing too much offense or demanding calls for action—despite any claims to the contrary. There are sweeping gestures and preoccupations of books-as-evidence while some structural omissions such as missing signs, attributions, and information are less immediately evident but perhaps more telling. With few exceptions, onlookers can leave Kassel feeling “refreshed” having been intellectually stimulated and dazzled by all the ideas and images offered at documenta 14 without feeling too much of an obligation to participate in the difficult and uncertain labor necessary for actual social change.

#### Notes

[1] “Beyond Artistic Freedom,” *documenta 14 News*, July 27, 2017, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.documenta14.de/en/news/24306/beyond-artistic-freedom>.

[2] Hili Perlson, “The Tao of Szymczyk: documenta 14 Curator Says to Understand His Show, Forget Everything You Know,” *Artnet News*, April 6, 2017, accessed August 8, 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/adam-szymczyk-press-conference-documenta-14-916991>.

[3] Jeni Fulton, “How documenta 14 Failed Everyone but Its Curators,” *Sleek Magazine*, July 3, 2017, accessed August 6, 2017, <http://www.sleek-mag.com/2017/07/03/documenta-14-kassel/>.

[4] Deutsche Presse Agentur, “Documenta Is to Be ‘Experience without Expectations,’” *Monopol*, March 11, 2017, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.monopol-magazin.de/documenta-soll-erfahrung-ohne-erwartungen-sein>.

[5] See for example, Adam Szymczyk, “The Indelible Presence of the Gurlitt Estate: Adam Szymczyk in Conversation with Alexander Alberro, Maria Eichhorn, and Hans Haacke,” *South as a State of Mind #6* [documenta 14 #1], Fall/Winter 2015, accessed August 2, 2017, [http://www.documenta14.de/en/south/59\\_the\\_indelible\\_presence\\_of\\_the\\_gurlitt\\_estate\\_adam\\_szymczyk\\_in\\_conversation\\_with\\_alexander\\_alberro\\_maria\\_eichhorn\\_and\\_hans\\_haacke](http://www.documenta14.de/en/south/59_the_indelible_presence_of_the_gurlitt_estate_adam_szymczyk_in_conversation_with_alexander_alberro_maria_eichhorn_and_hans_haacke).



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ART

## How documenta 14 Failed Everyone but its Curators

On day two of the press preview of this year's edition of documenta in Kassel I lost my temper. It was cold, intermittent showers pelted Kassel's already unedifying city centre, and I was sick of being lectured to. I was standing in front of an installation consisting of two bookcases with dance titles in the Neue Wache. The piece, I learned from one of the few wall texts I encountered during my three day visit, was called "Library", by the artists Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan). What these titles had in common, the text told me, was that they, since 2005, had "failed to mention the work of the artists". Apparently "by putting on display the conventions that critics and connoisseurs establish, Library questions the relationship between history and art. Library also highlights the limits of text in describing living practices of dance and performance, which are inevitably subject to distortions, gaps, and compromises when committed to written language."

*documenta 14's curatorial strategy is a meaningless pair of tautologies akin to Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous phrase "It is either raining or it is not raining."*



- Annie Vigier, "Library", 2017

Ordinarily I would have bypassed this egregious art speak with nothing more than an eye roll. (Quick analysis: Connoisseurs are not academics per definition, and these were academic texts. Critics no longer establish anything aside from the death of criticism, and of course dance isn't reducible to language, but this is hardly controversial. What is the point of this work, then? Nothing. How does it add to the discourse in any meaningful way? Not at all, especially since Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson effectively unpicked canon formation back in 1977. So does that mean that my Ikea Billy bookcases and their contents could be said to perform a similar action on art reception since 1770? Probably.)

But this time, something inside me snapped. Was it the four hour press conference we'd been subject to on the opening day, with the total absence of any information provided by any of the curators on either artists, sense, or orientation for the exhibition, but with a 40 minute atonal piece for solo violin? Or was it the meaningless curatorial statement "Documenta 14: learning from Athens"?

What does this learning consist of, one may legitimately enquire, given that the Athens arm of the exhibition has been on display for 8 weeks at that point? According to the curators, "learning is unlearning". Furthermore "Athens could be anywhere," as curator Adam Szymczyk elaborated. This is a fine curatorial strategy to avoid standing for anything, refusing any claim or argument: a meaningless pair of tautologies akin to Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous phrase "It is either raining or it is not raining."





- Beau Dick, Twenty-two masks from the series "Atlakim", 1990-2012

This non-statement was hammered home at every single juncture encountered: the guide ("Daybook") which refuses anything so banal as a contents page, or any discernible order – artists are assigned "days" in a non-alphabetic sequence, so any attempt to find an explanation of well, anything, is met by a pained flick-through search. Similarly the exhibition organisation – wall texts were absent or hastily written in biro, there was no sense, no orientation as to why which artworks were ordered, artists names were missing, the graphic design of the map misleading... I could go on. There was a near total lack of useful information – the post-truth art exhibition indeed.

Very little could be established as a fact, very little ascertained about art or artists, the curators eschewing such banal things as artists' biographies. The procession of artworks, spaces and arguments was as jumbled as a child's toy box. The exhibition seems to have been conceived in celebratory maximalist gusto: "oh yes, lets have five curators! And 199 artists!! And 70 venues in two cities! And an "encounter point" for lunch with Athenian normies! And a radio station! And a Parthenon made of books wrapped in cling film!" with very little consideration of how these languages, spaces, mediums or narratives might fit together, or illuminate each other, beyond chocolate box identitarianism.



- Guillermo Galindo, "Fluchtzieleuropahavarieschallkörper", 2017

This inconsistency was most visible in Kassel's Documenta Halle, which read as a parody of the old ethnographic museums the exhibition purported to be critiquing. A badly photocopied score of British avant-garde composer Cornelius Cardew's piece *The Great Learning* – an ironic comment? – kicked off the exhibition upstairs. Beau Dick's Kwakwaka'wakw masks abutted work by Igo Diarra and La Medina, who'd created a display of records and promotional material of the Malian musician Ali Farka Touré. Nearby, Mexican artist and musician Guillermo Galindo had repurposed pieces from two shipwrecked refugee boats that had washed up on the island of Lesbos as musical instruments. Vigier and Apertet reappeared here, constructing a stage with a decline. Rounding off the large hall was a tapestry by Saami artist Britta Marakatt-Labba. Aboubakar Fofana had hung sheets dyed with varieties of the Indigo plant from the ceiling and installed Indigo seedlings below.

## *When the political or ethical imperatives override artistic claims, the art itself suffers*

As my father, a former member of Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, commented: "I don't understand why a display of musical scores like this appeals to the documenta curators. It's as if worshipping the score would make it part of you, transcendent and immanent." It is precisely this auratic worship, however, that the curators demand: affect over an analytical approach to the work. While analysis doesn't preclude emotion, by not providing sufficient information, the curators bar the visitors from having a reasoned relationship to the artists and their work on display.

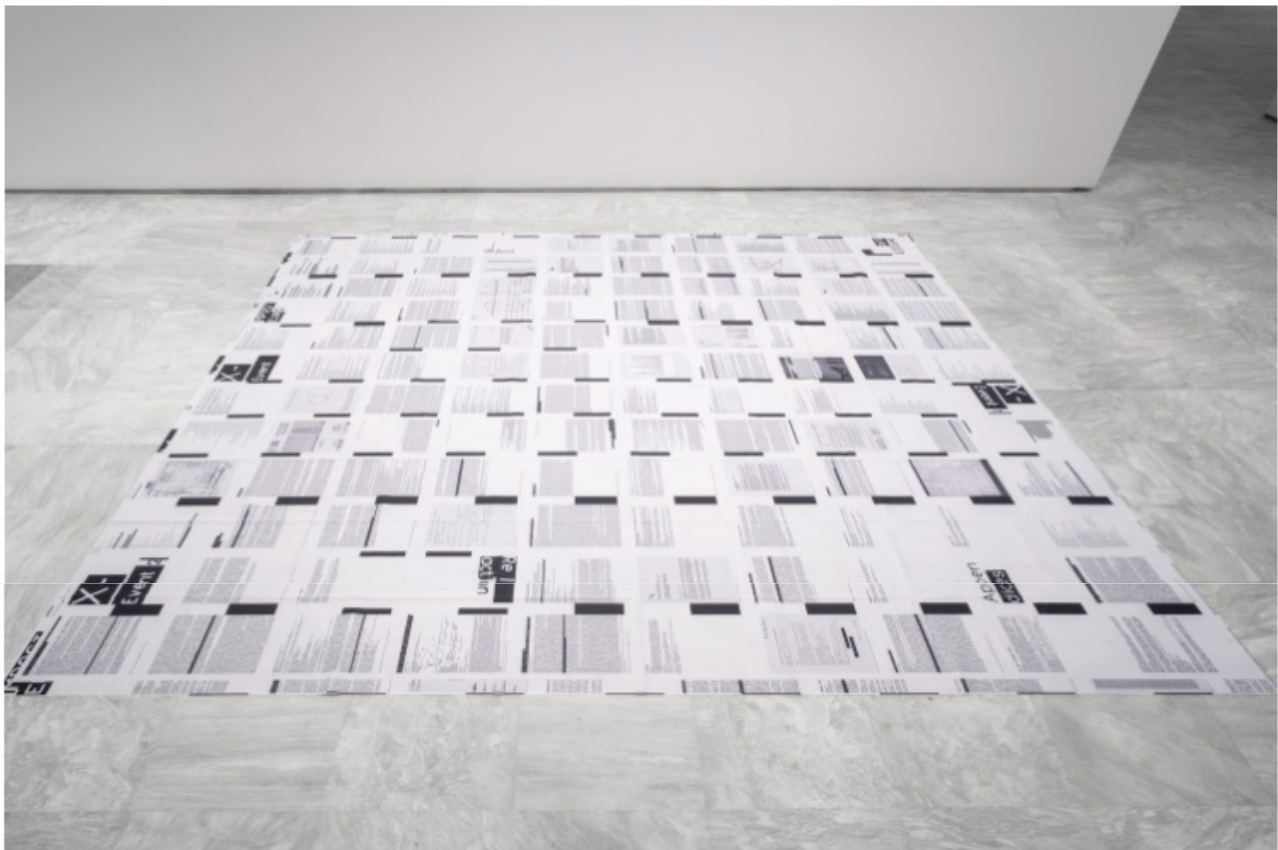




- Aboubakar Fofans "Fundi (Uprising)", 2017

The artworld of today is post-conceptual. It is generally assumed that all artworks have conceptual elements, and therefore rely on chains of explanation that either supervene upon or have equal status to the work itself. Hence, refusing commentary not only disservices the viewer, but the artwork itself, which invariably becomes imbued with whatever narrative the curators wish to impose on it. This leads to a hollowing-out of the artwork, which then serves as a mere decorative footnote to the curatorial claim, rather than an autonomous object in and of itself. In documenta's case, the narrative amounts to little more than weak versions of post-colonial narratives and identitarian claims, weak theory packaged as Orwell's fictional language Newspeak. Thus, the exhibition isn't an exhibition, but an assemblage of objects, where affect and sentimentality is valid over cogent engagement (of course there are artworks that escape this fate by their sheer power, but many don't).

It has been said that the curators' disdain for explanatory wall texts and a central theme was a strategy to avoid the narrative being sucked up by the market in the guise of symbolic capital. However, I have yet to see the type of work on display at documenta 14 – the vitrines, the archive as art, the installations – taking over at Art Basel, which remains wedded to the media most collectors prefer buying: painting and sculpture. Also, why is it so distasteful to accept that artists might have to make a living from their work?



– Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet "les-gens d'Uterpan Imposteurs", 2013

In sum, what was there to learn from Athens? That coining neologisms is not the same as generating new ideas – instead, it is an empty exercise in obfuscation, albeit an obfuscation costing €37.5 million. Parsing curatorial strategy as a tautology results in an exhibition that does not result in new model or ways of showing art but does a disservice to all whose (underpaid) labour it employs; artists, curators, visitors and critics. When the political or ethical imperatives override artistic claims, the art itself suffers.



Finally, it results in an exhibition where the art on view is not treated as art, but as footnotes to an assemblage of post-colonial narratives. When ethics overrides aesthetics as a matter curatorial strategy, the works on display cease to function, in many cases, as artworks. Documenta 14, therefore, ceases to be an exhibition, it is a collection of more or less interesting objects, whose relationship to another remains shrouded in nebulous, half-baked statements. The discourse has eaten its own children. Come back, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, you and your talking strawberries are much missed.



## Jeni Fulton

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**#jenifulton**



documenta 14, 2017

d14 in Kassel

documenta Halle



14 of 17



Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan)

Scène à l'italienne (Proscenium). 2014–  
Procedure of the New Principle of Research and Creation (2014– )  
Wood

\*1965 Gonesse, France

\* 1966 Ugine, France

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