

Mona Vatamanu
& Florin Tudor

I dreamt the work of
another artist

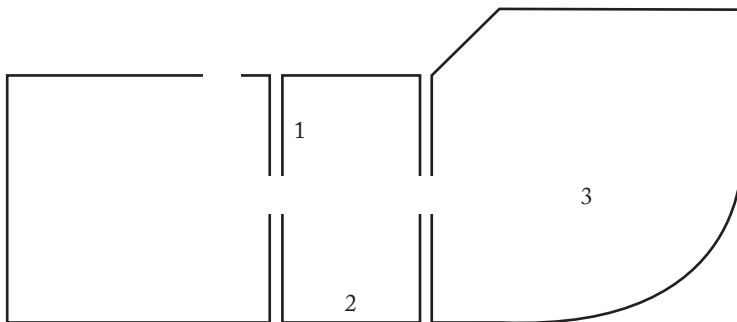
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Kunsthalle Lissabon presents I dreamt the work of another artist, the Romanian duo Mona Vatamanu & Florin Tudor's first solo show in Portugal. The artists' practice has been investigating their critical engagement with defining issues of today such as collective memory and amnesia, the formulation of artistic agency, and the politics of representation and has positioned them among the most compelling and literate interpreters of our contemporary post communist condition, which extends far beyond their native country.

The exhibition is centered around a new installation, I dreamt the work of another artist (2013), specifically developed for Kunsthalle Lissabon's exhibition space. This new work is put into dialogue with Rite of spring (2010) and Olympia (2010-2012), two films made recently, allowing for a better understanding of the artists' practice as well as the research they have been developing.

Mona Vatamanu (1968) & Florin Tudor (1974) have been working as a duo since 2000. They live and work in Bucarest. A selection of their recent solo shows includes The order of things, daadgalerie, Berlin (2012); There Will Be Hope, D+T Project, Brussels (2011); Land Distribution, Lombard - Freid Projects, New York (2011); Mona Vatamanu & Florin Tudor, All Power to the Imagination!, Secession, Vienna (2009); Mona Vatamanu & Florin Tudor, Surplus Value, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht (2009); Living Units, Mercer Union, Toronto (2006); Unitati de locuit, CIAC, Bucarest (2004); Consuming the City, Kunstlerhaus Buchsenhausen, Innsbruck (2003). Their work has been featured in many group shows: One Sixth of the Earth. Ecologies of Image, MUSAC, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Castilla y Leon (2012); Untitled (12th Istanbul Biennial), Istanbul (2011); Call the Witness, Roma Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale (2011); Flying Down to Earth, FRAC Lorraine, Metz (2010); Modern Dialect, MHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp (2010); Shockworkers of the Mobile Image, 1st Ural Industrial Biennial (2010); Constructing History: the future life of the past, Kunsthalle Lissabon (2010); Walking the Hinterland, Argos Centre for Art & Media, Brussels (2010); No New Thing Under the Sun, Royal Academy of Arts, London (2010); Volando Hacia La Tierra / Flying Down to Earth, MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporanea de Vigo (2010); Histories de L'Est, La Caixa Foundation, Barcelona (2010); Bucharest Biennale 4 (2010); Videos Europa, Le Fresnoy, Centre National des Arts Contemporains, Tourcoing, Lille (2009); Sounds and Visions, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv (2009); 5th Berlin Biennial, When Things Cast No Shadow, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2008); 6th Gyumri Biennial, Transformation of History or Parallel Histories (2008); Like an Attali Report, but different: On fiction and political imagination, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2008); 52nd Venice Biennale, Romanian Pavillion, Low-Budget Monuments (2007); Prague Biennale 3, Der Prozess, Collective memory and social history (2007).

Acknowledgments: Vera Cortès Art Agency.



1
Olympia, 2010-2012
film, sound, 8'38"

2
Rite of spring, 2010
film, 7'51"

3
I dreamt the work of another artist, 2013
installation, scaffolding, earth, plastic, digital print

**WORDS DON'T COME EASY
MONA VATAMANU & FLORIN TUDOR**

Conversation between Mona Vatamanu, Florin Tudor, João Mourão and Luís Silva, on the occasion of the exhibition I dreamt the work of another artist, held in March 2013 in Kunsthalle Lissabon.

KL I dreamt the work of another artist, the exhibition you are preparing for Kunsthalle Lissabon, has an unusual title. We are very curious, and have to start this conversation by asking you who is this "I" who had a dream about somebody else's work? And whose work did he or she dream about?

MV&FT We don't remember who dreamt that dream, nor who's the artist in the dream. It could have been an artist from the unconscious or somebody else, from a construction worker to a writer.

It is interesting that you consider the spectrum of possibilities for the dreamer of this dream going from a construction worker to a writer. We were instantly drawn into the possibility of all these construction materials inside such a bourgeois (even if slightly rundown), 19th century space being the unconscious workings of the mind of a sleeping construction worker. Was this binary between bourgeois, very ornate architecture/decoration and rough construction materials something you had in mind when developing the installation?

The materials used in the installation are the same as in the dream, they could develop a relation with the existing architecture of the space and this may point to what you just mentioned. The process of constructing is always accompanied by this kind of things, scaffolding etc. Having them filled with earth implies questioning human ways of understanding and taking possession. In dialogue with the sculptural scaffolding elements we chose an image taken in a dump area, it is a photo of a photo from a family album thrown away along with other things. In the photo the character, a man, stands in an exotic landscape. The image led us to some connection between geographical areas, some narrative that could link our modernist utopia in Eastern Europe with other stories maybe in Latin America or elsewhere. That man disappeared together with his own history, it could seem that he never lived, it might be that utopia never existed, at the same time there was something promising in that

dream, the worker or the writer will start their work again.

You seem to be linking the act of dreaming with a utopian narrative of modernity. We were wondering if you consider such narrative to have been only a dream, as in something one aspire(d)/desire(d), or if along the way it actually became a reality. In other words, do you think the modern project was fulfilled in its entirety? Or was it only an attempt at establishing utopia that never came to be?

This idea of utopia being established on a large scale proved to be a nonsense again and again. Each time reality was constructed in these directions, freedom, equality, solidarity were brutally interrupted, crushed by other ideologies, other utopias, or slowly destroyed from the inside by old habits like hierarchy. Was the modern project fulfilled? It is said it was; a construction sustained by contradictions and tensions, complications as history reflects it. Class society as material reality and religion always try to reinvent themselves. Fascism, nationalism are still there to feed the general need for populism, to protect from the fear of finitude.

When we mentioned utopia in Eastern Europe we thought more specifically of the 50-60-70s, of a link with the larger frame of anti-colonial movements, of leftist movements in the capitalist countries, of a kind of internationalism that can be found in different domains, from thinking to architecture and construction. It was something beyond the socialist world, with implications on a larger scale, in education and living. There was no afterworld to promise, like in religion. But in the end it couldn't overpass its own completion. This doesn't mean at all it will not appear again and continue in another way, and not only in dreams. It is difficult for us to guess what the work of the artist in the dream was about, maybe the relation between the geometry and the earth filling it was pointing towards a new beginning, a renewal, a way to re-imagine.

So imagination seems to be a key word, in a way, for such a desire of renewal. We're happy that you mention it because to a big extent, what we are trying to do with Kunsthalle Lissabon is imagining an institution (and consequently all institutions and the act of instituting itself) otherwise. And since institutions are social (and therefore subjective) protocols (sets of rules) that prescribe and normalize not only behavior but perception even, by imagining them differently one can imagine the world differently. The danger of such an approach is of course imagination being understood almost like a metaphor, and being connected to dreaming (what did that artist dream about?) or day dreaming, but we use it as a very concrete tool, in order to achieve very concrete results, like this institution in which you are showing. How do you relate to imagination?

Dreaming, unconscious, what was the work of the artist in the dream about, one can only try to understand it rationally. Imagination may have those different meanings you mentioned, contradictory maybe, we think they complement each other, feed each other. Daydreaming as it was beautifully expressed by Ian Curtis in “I used to work in a factory and I was really happy because I could daydream all day” may seem escapist and compared to Romania in the 80s there was also a sort of general escapism from a totalitarian political system, its dominant discourse. There was no organized resistance but when the events in December¹ happened people proved to be more than prepared to take risks and to try to change. What happened after the few hours, days of freedom was a new beginning, the construction of another class society after a supposed classless one. It was not so much about rationally and intentionally imagining than it was opportunism and adaptation. Then it was too late to go back and search for mistakes and re-imagine, re-do better the past. The sense of human society, as in nature, is to have renewal at the expense of surplus energy and so, to imagine the future.

You speak of Romania and its process of political renewal. Even though your point of view always departs from that very specific situation, one has always the feeling when coming across your work that it addresses universal issues. Our connection as individuals, and as a community, with history (memory or the lack of it) and power (with its physical manifestations, like architecture, for instance) seem to be at the core of your practice and the reason why even though it arises from a very specific geopolitical situation it surpasses it and becomes more overarching than simply context-responsive.

There is a sort of realism we try to hold on to, maybe this is related to the fact that we have lived in two opposite political systems, but at the same time individuals around the world experience different politic regimes, conflicts in their own lives. From this a feeling of common understanding arises.

We have been talking about dreams and imagination, utopia and modernity, realism and the future. Do you think these terms make any sense when discussing and thinking about your practice?

Our discussion was triggered by the work in the dream, we tried to guess what that mean, maybe we failed by trying to link it to these terms or even interpret it.

¹ The Romanian Revolution was a series of riots and protests in Romania in December 1989. These were part of the Revolutions of 1989 that occurred in several Warsaw Pact countries. The Romanian Revolution was the only one of these revolutions that forcibly overthrew a Communist government and executed the country's head of state.

KUNST
HALLE
LISBONA
BON

Avenida da Liberdade 211 - 1º esq

1250-194 Lisboa, Portugal

www.kunsthalle-lissabon.org / info@kunsthalle-lissabon.org