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Utopian Pulse – Flares in the Darkroom

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A research project by Ines Doujak and Oliver Ressler
in collaboration with a group of artist-curators

Secession, Vienna (AT), 2014

Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (DE), 2015

MOCAK – Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow (PL), 2016

We understand “Utopia” as an always incomplete alternative, the invocation within the given world of something incompatible with, and hostile to, given conditions. It is a negation of the given and a recognition of “something missing,” but also a necessarily imperfect assertion of that which is not – yet.

The work follows utopian projections that serve the purposes of secession from and resistance to our particular present. The “negative” or “critical” version of the utopian “impulse” is not just a matter of satire, or listing what’s wrong with the world as though listing it could change it. Utopia, rather, is the assertion of the unrealized in and against the real.

The first public appearance of “Utopian Pulse – Flares in the Darkroom” was SALON KLIMBIM, orchestrated by the artist-curator Fahim Amir and Ines Doujak on January 23, 2014 in correspondence with Oliver Ressler.



Etcétera, “B.A.N.G.”, banner, 900 x 340 cm, 2014. Installation view: MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow, 2016 (photo: Rafał Sosin)

Between February and September 2014 a series of 7 large-scale banners (9 x 3,4 meters) has been presented on the façade of the Secession. URGENT ALTERNATIVES: UTOPIAN MOMENTS relates to the uprisings, occupations and

social movements that have emerged in recent years. The artists were invited to focus on the utopian pulse in these actions and movements. This is most clearly manifested in the integration of how and what was being fought for, a break with the-ends-justify-the-means politics which discredited communistic thinking and politics for so long. All the artists in URGENT ALTERNATIVES: UTOPIAN MOMENTS have in common that they are directly involved in the protests they focus on in their banner, or talk from a clear, unequivocal position of solidarity with them.

Banners have been commissioned by Katarzyna Winiiecka (Fluchthilfe & Du; February 2014), Halil Altindere from Istanbul (March 2014), Wealth of Negations from London (April 2014), Nobodycorp. Internationale Unlimited from Jakarta (May 2014), Etcétera from Buenos Aires (June 2014), Oreet Ashery from London (July 2014) and Daniela Ortiz from Barcelona (August 2014).



Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri, "STÖRUNG der KOMMUNIKATION" (Interrupted Communication), banner, 900 x 340 cm, 2014. Installation view: Secession, Vienna, 2014 (photo: Ines Doujak)



"Utopian Pulse – Flares in the Darkroom", banners. Installation views: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2019 (photo courtesy Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía)

"Utopian Pulse – Flares in the Darkroom" as an exhibition at the Secession was divided into seven salons. It seems urgent precisely when the potential imperfectly

expressed in the salon is seen as neither a proto-public sphere – that is, one stage in an orderly evolution towards universal convivial conversation—nor pure “courtly” proprietorship, but rather as a partial breach of the prevailing order of class and gender, a disruption that cannot become the public norm because it prefigures total upheaval of what constitutes the “public” and is instead a place for the monstrous birth of new alliances.



CUARTOS DE UTOPIA, curated by Pedro G. Romero/Máquina P.H.. Installation view: “Utopian Pulse – Flares in the Darkroom”, Secession, Vienna, 2014 (photo: Ines Doujak)

“Utopian Pulse – Flares in the Darkroom” brings together international cultural producers who have substantial artistic and curatorial practices. Over two months, starting on September 10, 2014, they have shown and discussed works of other artists in the gallery of the Secession in Vienna every week. The contributions of the individual artist-curators were not shown sequentially, but productively interacted with one another. The outcomes – whatever their form—constitute a collective challenge to the constituent roles of social actors within the field of art in more complex ways than simply as “artists,” “curators,” and “viewers”, in order to imagine new forms of exchange.



“Utopian Pulse – Flares in the Darkroom”, banners on facade of Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, 2015 (photo: Oliver Ressler)

The sequence of exhibitions at the Secession consists of:

SALON PUBLIC HAPPINESS, curated by Christoph Schäfer, 10 – 16 September 2014

SALON-E-GIRDBAD (Salon of the Whirlwind), curated by Mariam Ghani, 17 – 23 September 2014

SALON ORIZZONTI OCCUPATI, curated by Bert Theis, 24 – 30 September 2014

SALON FLUCHTHILFE, curated by Zanny Begg, 01 – 07 October 2014

SALON DADADA, AND AND AND with Ben Morea, 08 – 14 October 2014

CUARTOS DE UTOPIÁ, curated by Pedro G. Romero/Máquina P.H., 15 – 21 October 2014

SALÓN DE BELLEZA, curated by Miguel A. López, 22 October – 02 November 2014

The sequence of exhibitions were linked with large-scale banners on the façade of the Secession for the use of the artist-curators.

Utopia is secession without instructions.

The project was continued in a new configuration at Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart between June 20 and August 16, 2015.

A selection of the banners was presented on the façade of MOCAK – Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow throughout 2016.

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