

2ND INDUSTRIAL ART BIENNIAL

Various venues, Istria, Croatia

Titled 'On the Shoulders of Fallen Giants' and curated by the Zagreb-based collective What How & for Whom/WHW, the 2nd Industrial Art Biennial spans five towns and cities on Croatia's Istrian Peninsula – Labin, Pula, Raša, Rijeka and Vodnjan – each of which is around one hour from the next. The distance creates delays, but the specific slowness involved in discovering an exhibition over three days, city by city, only enriches the experience of unpacking both the region's history and the biennial's proposed future.

With a list of 23 artists, the biennial is organized as part of 'Rijeka: 2020 European Capital of Culture' and takes place across various institutions and historical sites. A highlight is at SENSE – The Centre for Justice in Transition in Pula, which preserves the audio-visual archive of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), a body of the United Nations established in 1993 to prosecute war crimes committed during the Yugoslav Wars. The artist Rajkamal Kahlon was invited to take the archive as a point of departure for a new project, *Dear Yugoslavia, I regret to inform you ...* (2018) but, instead, worked with a book of Yugoslav folk costumes by the late Croatian illustrator Vladimir Kirin. Onto Kirin's pages, Kahlon painted new illustrations that attempt to process the violence of the archive, presenting them alongside monitors showing muted videos from the ICTY trials. It is a project tracing how trauma shifts as it moves from victim to witness to outsider. It is a project about the memory of violence.

Siniša Ilić's *Waste* (2018) questions the collection of the Serbian artist's host institution: the Museum of Modern & Contemporary Art (MMSU) in Rijeka. Ilić has selected a number of works that reflect life in the city during 1930s and '40s, a period of rapid industrial and capitalist development. Paintings of industrial landscapes are presented alongside those depicting everyday rituals, such as a beautiful drawing by Božidar Rašica, *At the Exhibition* (1940), and a powerful portrait by Sonja Kovačević Tajčević: *The Black Man with Pink Hat* (1930–32). Paired with these works are drawings and videos made by Ilić in response to the collection: updates for a post-industrial generation that is economically at sea. Alongside Ilić's project is a photographic series by Vlatka Horvat, which similarly considers how contextual shifts can fundamentally alter meaning. Each image shows the artist's hand clutching a found object – a brick, elastic bands,

cotton wool. These materials were once discarded; now, brandished by the artist, in the context of MMSU, they become 'Monuments' (2018).

Elsewhere, Oscar Murillo's *The Institute of Reconciliation* (2018), which sees roughly hewn effigies of workers gather within the Temple of Augustus in Pula, provides a powerful statement about labour and making work public. Similarly, the Serbian collective ŠKART also addresses accessibility and the circulation of voices. Working with schools and community centres across Pula, they compiled *PO-PO (POetry POver Makers and Breakers)* (2018), a collaborative poetry anthology that was distributed on the streets of the city.

On the eight-hour bus journey from Belgrade to Croatia, I was reading Tirdad Zolghadr's book, *Traction* (2016), in which he reflects on the time he spent working on the 5th Riwaq Biennale in Palestine: 'The knowledge production specific to cultural tourism plays an intrinsic, central part in biennials almost anywhere.' While many works included in 'On the Shoulders of Fallen Giants' should be commended – as should WHW for selecting complex sites and facilitating new commissions – a question remains as to the long-term ambitions of a biennial that is, in part, involved in a citywide campaign to build momentum ahead of its 'Capital of Culture' year. Once the dust has settled, how will it sustain itself and, if it can, what will its unique contribution be to a world already inundated with biennials? Can knowledge production, when bound to cultural tourism, ever be sufficient?

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This page

Rajkamal Kahlon, *Dear Yugoslavia, I regret to inform you ...*, 2018, watercolour on book illustration

Opposite page

Above
Rosa Barba, 'Drawn by the Pulse', 2018, exhibition views

Below

Şükran Moral, *Bordello*, 1997, video still

Şükran Moral, *Married with Three Men*, 2010, video still

