

Vlatka Horvat's performance in the LA River

Interview with the artist and Outpost for Contemporary Art's Julie Deamer

Next Saturday, July 31st, former artist-in-residence at [Outpost for Contemporary Art](#), Vlatka Horvat, returns to Los Angeles for [This Here and That There](#), an 8 hour performance scheduled to take place in the Los Angeles River under the Fletcher Bridge from 9am to 5pm. ForYourArt's Sarah Williams interviewed the artist and Julie Deamer, Director of Outpost, about the ambitious performance.



How does the upcoming performance of *This Here and That There*, relate to Vlatka's previous residency at Outpost?

Julie Deamer: Vlatka was in Los Angeles last October to familiarize herself with the city and locate potential sites for a new performance. During her artist talk she presented *This Here and That There*, showing documentation of the piece as it was performed in Berlin. I was completely taken by the piece and secretly became very interested in her performing it in L.A. I didn't ask her to consider that possibility during her residency, however, because we were discussing ideas for a new piece and I didn't want to override other ideas she was exploring. Once she returned to New York, we continued our discussions, and I learned that Vlatka had no objections to repeating the piece because she was interested in seeing how it would work in different contexts.

Vlatka Horvat: During my residency, which was the first substantial chunk of time I spent on the West coast, I was very interested in outdoor spaces, and public space in particular. Public space in L.A. felt to me very different than public space on the East Coast, or in the Midwest, or in Europe. I'm often investigating ideas around space and place: how it is organized, how you occupy it, how meaning is constructed in the process of a person, or persons, negotiating their relationship to space, to the built environment, to objects and structures. While at Outpost, I spent a lot of time driving around L.A., doing little "experiments" in different locations... I was drawn to doing something in L.A. that would explicitly deal with space with the possibilities of playing with it, reorganizing it, reconfiguring it.

What did some of these "experiments" look like?

VH: One day, I went out with a shovel (aided by Outpost's lovely intern Sara) and spent a day digging (and covering again) holes in the Arroyo Seco; collected popped balloons on a stretch of Highland Park where all the party stores are; tried out (and shot) some ideas with found objects and environments: under a bridge, at an archery target practice site for instance; shot a lot of "backs" of things - buildings, signs, and in general shot a lot of images of various things I encountered or chanced upon around LA...



***This Here and That There* was first presented in Berlin in 2007. Why is it interesting to repeat in Los Angeles? How do you think the performance will change with the location?**

VH: I have done this piece twice so far – initially in Berlin, and again last summer at PACT Zollverein in Essen, in the context of their Jetlag Festival of durational performance. I learned a lot about the piece by doing it the second time. In Berlin, the work was staged in a large pool of water in front of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, which is this incredible structure from the 50s, with a rather idealistic mission: to be the “house of the world cultures.” The history of the institution was an interesting starting point for me – it was envisioned as a place where “different cultures” would come together to talk, meet, have an exchange. In addition to exhibition and presentation spaces in the building, there were also rooms designed for meetings – UN-style – with microphones built into tables, etc. . . . Of course there was a big sense of failure attached to all those ideas – in spite of the many attempts to bring various immigrant communities “in” to engage with the programs of the institution, the immigrant families mostly used the environs around the museum as a picnic site (and actually only entered the museum building itself to use the toilet).

So in this context, the piece – which is comprised of me arranging and rearranging 50 chairs into many different spatial configurations, invoking various kinds of social setups – echoed in some ways these failed institutional attempts, but also more broadly – attempts at a dialogue, at interaction, at ‘coming together.’ For eight hours I’m setting and resetting fictional scenarios, but the events that are seemingly being set up never happen. All there is, is the process of preparation, of building structures and frameworks, which are dismantled as soon as they are proposed.

When I did the piece in Essen this past summer, the location was a former coal mine that was a site of huge production in the first half of 20th century – an incredible, imposing Bauhaus structure. So the aspects of the work that seemed to really come to the fore here were these issues of production, of labor, of mechanization and this kind of work, work that doesn’t necessarily produce a tangible result... It was interesting to learn how the piece tends to morph in relation to the site where it is being performed by bending, taking on some of the resonances of the place itself. So the particularities of the site – the physical and formal organization of the space as well as its former and current use, its history, feel – all tend to be very present in the work, tend to come through in an active way.

What element of the performance interests you most?

VH: I'm interested in how the piece molds to the site – I tend to plan only the first and last arrangement of chairs and the rest is improvised on the spot. I make decisions on my feet so the audience witnesses that process of 'making it up as you go along', a live negotiation of, and an engagement with, the 'thereness' and 'nowness' of the place. Sometimes the next step in the "game" is clear, and other times I start moving chairs without a clear plan or a diagram in mind and then part of the enjoyment (both for myself and those watching) is in the act of figuring out what the next arrangement will be... Sometimes these decisions are made in relation to the formal qualities of the site, other times an arrangement will "naturally" emerge from the one preceding...

What are some of the major considerations in producing projects in a public space?

JD: When working in public space as opposed to a controlled environment like a gallery, things come up that are sometimes hard to plan for, therefore contingency plans are really important. In this project's case, we initially planned it for December, deciding to take a gamble with rain. Who knew that Southern California's draught would end the week of our scheduled performance!? This points to a major consideration, which is to balance risk with the desire to take chances in order to allow something interesting and unexpected to happen. Generally, I often find myself asking, is it more risky to attempt to get a permit to use a public space legally, which, if turned down, might stop the project from happening or moving forward with a project without proper permits to possibly have it shut down by the authorities mid stream? In other words, an extra set or two of people enter into the picture when planning a publicly-based project, which can sometimes slow down the process or get in the way of its full realization.

Another consideration when programming public space as opposed to a gallery is the sort of promotion and outreach efforts you make. Getting the word out about stuff is already difficult in a city the size of Los Angeles but getting people to come out to a public space on a certain day and time can be extra challenging. You have to ask different questions about your audience and how you want to reach them. In a gallery setting, audiences pretty much select themselves. If they are interested in art, then art activities get on their radar and they decide where they want to spend their time looking. When projects pop up in public space for a one-day event, the audience is comprised largely of who happens to be there at that spot at that time, which is great in many respects but a little challenging to quantify. Often the audience will expand over time through stories, documentation and interviews like this one, which adds to the satisfaction and raises interesting questions about the way artwork is experienced these days, with so many alternative communication channels making it possible for artists' work and ideas to spread far beyond the site of production or presentation.

Vlatka participated in Outpost's Eastern European program cycle, next year brings the South American cycle. Julie, what interests you about organizing residencies and exhibitions based on geography? What kind of dialogue do you hope to create with the Los Angeles art community in doing this?

JD: Programming in multi-year cycles around a specific geographic area of interest allows Outpost, to stay focused and clear about our priorities. Everything happens so quickly these days and we are all so much more aware of what is going on culturally across the globe than ever before, which is exciting but also a little anxiety provoking. So, rather than feel distracted and overwhelmed by the boundless numbers of artists I could potentially work with, I thought it would be useful to try to narrow things down by limiting the number of artists Outpost spends time researching and understanding by creating a geographic lens through which to look. This makes our decisions to work with certain artists over others feel less arbitrary and I like the internal rationale it gives me when I develop the scope and purpose of our programs.

Also, this helps Outpost do a better job developing meaningful extended engagements with international artists, out of which come various programs that introduce these artists to our audiences in L.A. We don't have a gallery because I am less interested in keeping up the pace an exhibition program demands, moving quickly from one artist or project to another without much continuity among them, and more interested in working with artists whose cultural backgrounds, political

histories, and social understandings will be different from my own. By setting up these rare opportunities for cultural exchange, the hope is that Los Angeles audiences will enjoy interacting with artists whose comparative perspectives are shared in various ways over a period of two or three years, and whose stories, artworks, perspectives and experiences of our City allow us to develop a better understanding not only of where they are from but of Los Angeles as well.

Posted by: **Sarah Williams** on July 26, 2010

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