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2024 – How was it for you?: Vlatka Horvat

Artist Vlatka Horvat reflects on a year immersed in *By the Means at Hand*, her project for the Croatian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and shares her hopes and plans for 2025.

What kind of a year has 2024 been for you?

Intense. Inspiring. Hardworking. Filled with dismay and desperation over the state of the world. But also filled with hope and optimism, having witnessed an incredible amount of solidarity at work through my project for the [Croatian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale](#), which activated collective energy to make something happen.

By the Means at Hand manifested as a durational, performative structure into which I invited a large number of artist friends, all living ‘as foreigners’ in countries they were not born in, who all made works that in some way reflected on their experience of migration or life in diaspora.

The project staged exchanges between me and the invited artists, through the sending of artworks to one another through a network of friends, acquaintances, and sometimes strangers enlisted as couriers. All the works travelled to and from Venice in someone's hand luggage, traversing distances and borders via these alternative logistics. In the process, we built a loose community of people working together to achieve a shared goal.



Vlatka Horvat, *By the Means at Hand* – Pavilion of Croatia at the 60th Venice Biennale, 2024. Photo: Hugo Glendinning

What would you say has been your major achievement this year and why?

I spent the whole year immersed in this one project; it was a huge undertaking. I lived in Venice – in the exhibition itself – for eight months of its unfolding, responding to the ebbs and flows produced by the project and its processes of exchange.

Realising a year-long, continually changing exhibition with several hundred participants based all over the world is in itself something I'm incredibly proud of, but an additional sense of achievement comes from the knowledge that we have pulled it off in a way that goes against the grain. By piggybacking on existing travel, we were able to circumvent the machinery of the biennale and its extractive, resource-and-waste-heavy model of producing art exhibitions, in favour of an alternative proposition. Thanks to the cooperation and goodwill of many people, we were able to realise this work without generating the need for additional travel, keeping our carbon footprint very low.

The fact that it all worked – over 200 artworks from artists living across the world were delivered to me in Venice and the same number of my works were delivered back to them using the same alternative transport system – demonstrated that working together can achieve a lot with limited means.

Looking back at it now, I'm thinking of the project as a celebration of friendship and solidarity. It showed that you can rely on people, and that on the intimate scale of human encounter, people are willing – keen even – to connect, to get involved, to help one another.



Vlatka Horvat, *By the Means at Hand* – Pavilion of Croatia at the 60th Venice Biennale, 2024. Photo: Hugo Glendinning

What has changed for the better?

That's a hard one. Looking at the world, I can't really say that much has changed for the better. Tories are out, that's something.

One thing I'm thinking of – and I'm not sure this is something that has changed but has maybe been made more visible because of the dire context in which many are trying to survive – is that people are very resilient and inventive. When institutions of all kinds are failing around us, people come up with ever new ways to get by, to support each other and to thrive.

What do you wish had happened this year, but didn't?

Ceasefire. Arms embargo. Freedom for Palestine. Peace in Ukraine. A different outcome to elections in many places around the world.



Vlatka Horvat, *By the Means at Hand* – Pavilion of Croatia at the 60th Venice Biennale, 2024. Photo: Hugo Glendinning

Is there anything you'd like to have done this year but haven't?

There's a longform piece of writing I was hoping to complete alongside my project in Venice. But once my project started, it became apparent very quickly that this was not going to happen! *By the Means at Hand* took over my life – *was* my life – this year. I had the ambition to become fluent in Italian while living and working in Venice for most of the year... but somehow that didn't happen either.

What are your plans and hopes for 2025?

I'm collaborating with my partner [Tim Etchells](#) on a new dance piece for Basel Ballet, titled *Go With Your Heart*, that's opening in March. So I'm getting ready to spend three months at the start of the year in Switzerland, where we'll be working with an ensemble of 17 dancers. We are starting with ideas to do with traces that linger in the body after violent and/or transformative events, looking at both the aftermaths of things that have happened and 'rehearsals' for things that are yet to come.

I'm also working on plans to present the archive of *By the Means at Hand* in different contexts. The extensive catalogue of the project, documenting both the exhibition in Venice across its eight-month-long timeline as well as various traces of the exchanges at the heart of the work, is coming out at the start of January, and we will be launching it in London, Zagreb, Berlin and Milan.



Vlatka Horvat, *By the Means at Hand* – Pavilion of Croatia at the 60th Venice Biennale, 2024. Photo: Hugo Glendinning

The final part of my project – something we are finalising as I write this – is the donation of the entire archive, including the collection of over 200 works by international artists whom I invited to take part, to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb. The documentary materials and the collection generated through the artist exchange will have its permanent home there. For a project based on gift economy and realised thanks to the generosity of a lot of people, it seemed fitting to end it with a gesture in the form of a gift.

Also, I'd like to finish that writing project! And maybe learn Italian properly...

In terms of broader hopes, I'm hoping that we can all find the strength, the wherewithal, and the collective energy to stay resilient and to keep going, in spite of Trump and others, in spite of rising nationalisms, and cruel anti-immigrant policies. I'm hoping that as artists we can keep on working, asking questions, and making ambitious propositions, in spite of the shrinking budgets, populist cultural policies, and dwindling state support.

And very concretely: I would like to see an end to all these wars.

Top image: Portrait of Vlatka Horvat. Photo: Hugo Glendinning



Ellen Wilkinson

