**Thursday[[1]](#footnote-0)**

is a day for aging fools

*How did we get here and how long do you plan to stay here?*

**Drag Exhibition**

The Efemerne Konfesije [Ephemeral Confessions] Drag Collective ‘performs’ within their first solo ‘drag exhibition’, titled *Thursday*. In order to present an extremely specific form of performance practice, having been continuously developed since 2015, the members[[2]](#footnote-1) of this collective embarked on two long, but in the end closely related processes.[[3]](#footnote-2) First of all, they needed to think through, together, all aspects of their working methods and the realized production, and to precisely articulate some of the fundamental social, political and personal issues that, as a collective, they have been reviewing since the beginning of their activities. This included reflecting on their individual positions and understandings, as they are not homogenous and coherent in everything, which no collective is, after all. Also, it was necessary to articulate the premises, concepts and referential networks on which they rely together, but also the contradictions that directly or indirectly arise from the specificity of their practice and the conditions in which they develop and perform it.

At the same time, the first ‘solo gallery presentation’[[4]](#footnote-3) within which their positions would be (ephemerally) articulated, implied the need for a kind of *translation* of the performative experience of stage music drag performance into an exhibition format. Like any (successful) translation, this also required avoiding mechanical transmission, and engaging in the process of *active creation*, i.e., *invention* of a new (drag) language. The intersection of these two processes will enable the self-reflexive ‘look back’ so as not to produce a ‘retrospective look’, but a kind of ‘look forward’, into the *future*. In other words, although in this exhibition they reflect their previous practice to a certain extent, they are simultaneously embarking on a new artistic experiment. It is important to point out that despite the presence of direct references to previous performances, the documentary-archival approach is not dominant in any segment of this exhibition. On the contrary, the material traces of the performances, including documentary material (photographic, audio and video recordings) and various props and artefacts, have been completely refunctionalized and incorporated into new art forms (collage, video art, site-specific sound installation). The way in which all this is shaped and framed can be understood and experienced as another form[[5]](#footnote-4) of remediatization of live drag performance, providing visitors with one possible experience of drag by other means.

Like the exhibition itself, this text emerged as a kind of product of the preparatory work for the exhibition, since, in addition to the experience of watching live performances, many conclusions rely on insights and observations derived through discussions and exchange. Aligning with the exhibition’s logic, which abandons the production of any form of ‘retrospective’, and primarily demonstrates the way of thinking and working of this in many ways specific collective, the main purpose of this text is to provide additional insight into the logic and dynamics of their artistic and creative process. The goal was also to shed light on the fundamental concepts that define their practice and the ways in which they understand and use them, as well as the methods of articulating criticism of, as they describe it, the “socio-political sourdough”[[6]](#footnote-5) in which, like (I guess) everyone else, they are “up to their ears”.

So, who are Efemerne Konfesije and how can we define their practice as closely as possible?

*Who are we, what are we and where do we come from?*

**Collective, Drag, Cross-Dressing, Queer**

As they state in one of their biographies, Efemerne Konfesije represents “a post-cabaret drag collective consisting of drag queens Markiza de Sada and Dekadenca, fake queen Johana Helmut Kol, drag kings Zed Zeldić Zed, Darlin Brando and Fric Klajn, as well as the master of ceremonies illilllilllll.” Paradoxically or not, two important terms that appear here must be used very conditionally in the context of understanding their practice.

Firstly, although it has become unquestionable by now, it is not entirely self-evident why Efemerne Konfesije is referred to as **art** (drag) **collective**. Although they undeniably function on principles of collectivity, fostering non-hierarchical relationships and a practice of collective creative processes, the label *collective*, as a technical term in the field of art, framed their practice only *a posteriori*. As they articulated in discussing this question during the exhibition preparation, perhaps they can rather be thought of as a kind of ‘phenomenon’, partly because this is not the primary framework of activity for any of them, but an ‘ephemeral’ and mostly non-profit activity with an extremely uncertain future. In the context of the material conditions of production, this has been an important point of reflection for all members of the collective, to which they returned during the preparation of this exhibition.

Not only the concept of collective is conditionally applicable, but the concept of **drag** itself should also be understood in a similar way. Although they are definitely familiar with and incorporate certain experiences of historical and contemporary forms of drag expression into their work, their efforts to not treat drag as a fixed performative form, mechanically adopted and ‘imported’ from some ‘original context’, can be recognized in almost all of its key aspects. Among other things, this approach is evident in the very free hybridization of drag with other performative practices through their characteristic **collage-citation process**. Namely, like all other cultural and artistic texts that they reference or directly quote,[[7]](#footnote-6) they **hybridize** drag to such an extent that, in the end, it is transformed and refunctionalized completely. They do so by incorporating it into a new, distinctly specific form and practice that resonates directly with the political context in which it emerges, as well as with the personal and artistic experiences and approaches each member individually brings into it. This is of particular importance given that, independent of their activities within the collective, all members have been active for many years in various fields of art and culture, such as curatorial practices, design, music, production of art events, activism, etc.

The mentioned process of hybridization includes a very free collage of their interpretation of drag with quoting, appropriation and use of elements from various theatrical experiences such as commedia dell’arte, theatre of the absurd or Brechtian theatre, then elements from performance practices associated with the historical avant-garde and contemporary visual arts, and various (post)cabaret forms and plays (to name just a few). Music material, which is an equally important element of their practice, is treated and ‘dragged’ in a similar manner. This involves a (most often melodic) hint of a borrowed quote (from some pop song), followed by an explosive performance that is always different as it evolves through improvisation and responding to the dynamics that develops on stage, and the structure of the ‘source’ is almost entirely destroyed, leaving behind “masterfully disfigured songs, performed in a way they shouldn’t be”.[[8]](#footnote-7) However, all the mentioned elements completely permeate what they are ‘added’ to, so it is certainly impossible to talk about some ‘original state’ of performance before and independently of interpretation and transposition through collage, quoting and grafting of all referential systems and texts. What is certain is that none of these frames of reference is mechanically replicated with all its key features, but is always altered by the logic of something else. Therefore, we can only say that what Efemerne Konfesije produces both is and is not (just) drag, and is and is not (just) performance, and it is and is not (just) theatre, and so on. In this sense, they intentionally deessentialize drag by reinterpreting it through each new performance, attempting to demonstrate what drag can be rather than what it unquestionably is, as they also do through the materialization of this exhibition.

If we briefly return to the basic enumeration from the collective’s biography, we will notice that Efemerne Konfesije, save one exception (master of ceremonies), encompass all typical ‘drag roles’ (drag queen, drag king, fake queen). From this, it can be concluded that – just as they do not ‘favour’ the drag itself, they do not ‘favour’ any of the mentioned drag positions. On the contrary, in order to differentiate critically precise yet dramaturgically exciting discursive and symbolic voices within their performances, Efemerne Konfesije offer their own, highly complex interpretation of these drag roles, which are often commodified and standardized today, using unique relational dynamics they produce among themselves. This is an interesting, even provocative place, considering the opposing meaning implications that they individually occupy in the context of drag practice and theory since, according to certain interpretations, some of these drag roles are exclusively associated with emancipatory, subversive and feminist positions, while others are linked with patriarchal and misogynistic positions.

What they adopt as a constitutive aspect of drag, crucial for them, is, as they say, the act of cross-dressing. On a performative level, this act can, although of course not necessarily, indicate an intention towards transgressive or transformative breakthroughs, as well as the development of different strategies for the production and/or metamorphosis of subjectivity. According to certain interpretations, drag performance has the potential to demonstrate the phantasmatic nature of the category of gender and gender roles, liberating them, in a certain sense, from what determines them, namely sex, indirectly questioning, on a more general level, the very concept of naturalness.[[9]](#footnote-8) Thinking about drag in this way means understanding that every performance of gender, or gender behaviour, is essentially drag, or in other words, we are all in drag when we play our gender roles every day. Becoming’ one’s own body, which is always a particular “nexus of culture and choice”, is revealed from this perspective as “a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms.”[[10]](#footnote-9) “To the extent that gender norms function under the aegis of social constraints, the reinterpretation of those norms through the proliferation and variation of corporeal styles becomes a very concrete and accessible way of politicizing personal life."[[11]](#footnote-10)

Members of Efemerne Konfesije like to play with gender and sexual ‘given’ identities, as they do with other normed categories, but they always situate these questions within a wider corpus of socio-political-economic issues. However, even though they inevitably “politicize personal lives” in a certain sense, they decisively refuse to define drag through the usual sexual identity categories of those who perform it. Hence, they never explicitly address these questions within their performances, rather it can be said that they are implicitly present according to the logic of the drag expression itself. Along these lines, LGBT discourse and activism that are almost inevitably expected do not represent a referential framework intentionally navigated by them, even though they have performed in a context that included these positions.

While, as already indicated, treating drag as an insufficient term, to which they are conditionally associated, they recognize the discourse of **queer** as something much closer to them, which transcends the mentioned questions of gender and sexuality in many aspects, even though it undoubtedly includes them. In the broadest sense, queer, or as (due to similar pronunciation) it is translated locally ‘kvar’(Serbian word for defect, failure, malfunction…T.N.),[[12]](#footnote-11) denotes everything that is shifted, twisted, that refuses to be fixed, deviates from accepted norms and desirable forms of behaviour, or tends (at least temporarily) to transgresses them. Queer can also be understood as a verb, signifying various forms of behaviour, actions and activities that produce this ‘deviation’, raising the political question of who has the power to name what is normative and what is deviant behaviour.[[13]](#footnote-12) Due to its deviant or transgressive character, what is queer therefore often finds itself on the margins of society, including the margins of the field of art. Regardless of numerous interpretations, queer is not primarily defined by what it is, but by what it actively changes, insisting on the constant reorganization of current categories.[[14]](#footnote-13) As stated by José Muñoz, queer involves the extremely important issue of ‘queer temporality’, since it appears as a place of constant reprocessing of the present, but not with the aim of rejecting the past or the future. On the contrary, the continuous creating of rifts in the current moment disrupts the idea of stable and linear time flow in order to emphasize the projection of “different worlds, ways of living, different relationships and public effects”.[[15]](#footnote-14) This understanding resonates well with the practice of Efemerne Konfesije*.* Searching “for other states, other souls, other lives”,[[16]](#footnote-15) they do not articulate their interpretation of queer through stereotyped forms of representation or explicit narratives within the content of their performances. Instead, they materialize ‘queerness’ through a specific performative-artistic-music form they have developed, their approach to different temporalities (past, present, future) that they freely use and connect, but also through a highly distinctive language and speaking style that have made them recognizable.

As they wittily summarize it, “when you hear our language, you know something is not right, you know it is Thursday.”[[17]](#footnote-16)

*Do we speak the same language or are we from the same planet?*

**Language, Humour, Play and Playfulness**

Within their practice, **language** is undoubtedly one of the most important places of joint invention and ‘decadent’ enjoyment. Describing the creation of the collective itself, within the framework of this exhibition, the master of ceremonies explicitly says: “In order to express their primary characteristics, the mentioned six shouted, squealed, grinned, expressed all sorts of stimulation, provoked and finally developed their own language”.[[18]](#footnote-17) In their characteristic manner of *shouting, squealing and grinning,* they very humorously but at the same time quite precisely articulate the way in which they produced, and continue to invent the aforementioned language. What is constitutive of that process, and at the same time represents the place of production of the collective itself, are extraordinarily intense multi-year “gatherings equal to Dionysian feasts”, which, in brief and without exaggeration, are filled with “peals of roaring laughter and uncontrollable hysteria”.[[19]](#footnote-18) Described as “play in the common space of intimacy”,[[20]](#footnote-19) these gatherings include almost unstoppable flows of free association, digression and fabulation, processing elements of bizarreness, trivia, precise socio-political analyses and comments, as well as extremely intimate experiences, permeated, almost without exception, with all-pervading humour.

In their case, the eruptive enjoyment of a very specific sense of humour often arises from a kind of bending and breaking of language, through parodying and defamiliarizing platitudes and commonplaces, through permutations, mutations, hybridizations or wordplay. Equally powerful is their enjoyment of the ecstatic production of the most diverse voices, sounds, as well as collective spontaneous musical interventions and improvised songs. All of this together can be (and very often is) liberated from (clear or any) meaning, so that the sense is revealed precisely in the work of the signifiers which, in relation to others, produce combinations that do not operate primarily in the field of knowledge and interpretation, but in the realm of ultimate absurdity and pure enjoyment. This sometimes may make it impossible to ‘conduct a structured conversation’ (which, we must say, also happened during the preparations for this exhibition), but so far, ultimately, it has successfully led them towards the structure and articulation of their own practice, and in this case, towards the conceptualization of the structure and dramaturgy of this exhibition. Finally, such logic of **sufficiently structured restraintlessness** is indirectly inscribed in the very narrative specific to their pieces, and in this sense, the audience at their performances encounter an equally strong presence of both, absurdity and sensefulness, utmost immediacy and exceptional precision, and extreme licentiousness and sophisticated articulateness.

Regardless of whether these aspects appear synchronously or alternately, the visual, auditory, semantic and metaphorical images produced by such dynamics are always witty, as already indicated. The recognizable **humour** specific Efemerne Konfesije, besides greatly entertaining both them and the audience, seems to have at least two (additional) functions. On the one hand, in their pieces, humour occupies a “creative process status” that, akin to the perspectives of certain surrealists, “brings together the logically incompatible” and can take away “the usual meaning” from everything that is “numbed by habits of thought, or everyday use”.[[21]](#footnote-20) In this way, it makes a “poetic transformation of reality”, demonstrating a kind of “instinctive criticism of every conventional mental and emotional structure”.[[22]](#footnote-21) Surrealists based their understanding on the teachings of psychoanalysis, which interprets humour as a form of ‘rebellion’ and ‘irreconcilability’ towards often unbearable and unacceptable reality. Freud even suggests that through the use of humour, we can temporarily redefine the system of relationships in which we find ourselves in a performative way. Namely, if we withdraw symbolic and libidinal investments that legitimized and reproduced that system, we no longer perceive reality, or our position in it, as completely fixed, but subject to transformation, and humour allows us to view that world, which seems “so dangerous” as a “child’s play”, whose only value is “to become the object of ridicule”.[[23]](#footnote-22) Similar ideas are presented in some understandings of the concept of playfulness, which is also interpreted as a strategy for dealing with different instances, positions and principles of power, which is itself never inherently “playful”.[[24]](#footnote-23) In the context of the practice of Efemerne Konfesije, the purpose of humour is not only “to survive the day”, as they put it, but it also functions as a means of dealing with the paralyzing absurdity of everyday life, which it poetically transforms into a new, always humorously absurd distortion and/or intentionally parodies it, generating precise satirical criticism. This is best articulated through their exceptional philosophical, poetic and witty slogans, uniquely synthesizing a political attitude and artistic form:

Revolution is the thing; the rivet isn’t riveting!

Moistly naked I shan’t be!

I don’t know what I want, but I know how to get it.

Meaning is absent, and you have to find it!

It’s all just aphid of history repeating!

*Who we are, what we are and where we come from, part two*

**Friendship, Confessions**

These brief notes on their creative process clearly indicate that their entire work is inseparable from the **friendly relations** that bind them together. They are directly inscribed first in the dynamics of character development, then in the fragments of the performance content, and finally in the process of forming the collective itself. Some characters emerged directly from everyday friendly exchanges and their mutual communication, and in the same way, stories about their personal histories and imaginary encounters were produced. Sometimes, personal experiences of the collective members (this often related to experiences of marginalization and class issues) spill through the described process, are then modify and further fabulate through the lives of characters, although the traces of this transfer are irrelevant to the audience and, for the majority, naturally, remain completely invisible.

Therefore, not only the form is hybrid and liminal, as previously discussed, liminal and hybrid is also the place from which the characters are ‘confessed’ to us. If the human is a “confessing animal”, the act of confession basically represents one of the places of its production, from which it is clearly concluded to what extent the process of subject formation is contingent within the context of history.[[25]](#footnote-24) Such discourse, beyond aiming to explain how we have become what we are, refuses to equate the confession with an admission of ‘wrongdoing’ that the subject has committed, but rather defines it as a statement that reveals the truth about them and that has the potential to change them.[[26]](#footnote-25) In other words, “rather than confessing to what we are”, we have the opportunity, through a different ‘confession’, to ‘reinvent’ ourselves, and to try to “make ourselves other than what we are”.[[27]](#footnote-26)

At this point, two questions emerge as interesting in the context of Efemerne Konfesije: the question of the level and mechanisms of mediating ‘confession’, as well as the question of the strategy and effects of producing new subjectivities. We can, therefore, ask whose ‘truths’ are told by the characters that the performers occasionally and ephemerally ‘possess’ (although it can be said that the ‘possession’ is actually reciprocal), and to whom they are primarily addressed, given that confession always seeks the Other in front of whom and for whom it is spoken. Taking into account the way in which their pieces are created, we can identify several levels of mediation, which of course cannot be separated cleanly or completely. In the first intersection, their personal experiences, refracted through social, political and artistic attitudes and positions they critically articulate, are ‘inscribed’ into the personal characteristics and destinies of the characters themselves. In the second step, which sometimes completely overlaps with the first, all of this is further modified through their very intense friendly exchange and shared experiences, and in the third step, it is finally mediated by the script prepared for each performance and the specific performative form discussed earlier. Of course, we should not overlook another level that comes into play in contact with the audience. In this context, it is important to emphasize that the songs, for which their pieces are recognizable, occupy a crucial place in the dramaturgy of the performances as the ‘truths’ of the characters, because almost as a rule, they represent the points where the most important aspects are clarified or resolved. Here, again, we see how the form summarizes the model of thought, because, as they say, it is always better and more precise to “sing it than to explain it”.[[28]](#footnote-27)

Considering all this, we can say that the place from which characters speak on the stage also turns out to be hybrid just like the form, since, conditionally speaking, the so-called ‘first person speech’ and ‘speech from character’ are indissolubly interwoven there. As it is explicitly stated at the exhibition ‘through’ the voice of one of them, “beings called characters always have more than character in them”.[[29]](#footnote-28) This stems from the fact that these ‘beings’ were created by their performers, ‘for themselves’ and ‘from themselves’. If an actor almost invariably ‘interprets a character’ produced by someone else, here we encounter an interesting twist and deviation because the processes of production and interpretation overlap completely. Also, although unequivocally fictional, drag characters have a strong dual nature and dual function, since not only is the personal inscribed in the performative, but also vice versa. So, they have their own lives and realities created by those who interpret and perform them, but in return, they transform, teach, liberate and, of course, entertain those who have created them. All members of the collective articulate and emphasize this in various ways, highlighting, among other things, how the voices, experiences and lives of the characters enable their personal ‘ephemeral’ transgressive breakthroughs, creating space for continuous metamorphosis and the liberation of their own subjectivity.

**Characters, Apparitions**

Almost everything about these ephemeral, ‘phantom’ beings is shifted and/or exaggerated. “Although one is plagued by nightmares, the third by hormones, and the last by fees”,[[30]](#footnote-29) they all parody numerous stereotypes, but do so in a completely non-generic way. Purposely remaining unsituated in time and space, placed in the midst of eternal present, these characters come from everywhere, have been everywhere, have lived (almost) always, and (for now) do not grow old. As such, they operate on the border of archetypes, **apparitions** or mythical figures, which, although timeless, are at the same time thoroughly immersed in the current contemporary moment. While they ephemerally appear in intimate and private encounters, their central place of production is still the public space, and their existence and performative effectiveness are undoubtedly conditioned and defined by the time-space coordinates of the performances themselves, during which new fabulations about the lives of the characters and their peculiar encounters are continually produced. Some of them exist only within Efemerne Konfesije (Johana Helmut Kol, Darlin Brando, Fric Klajn), while others lead their ‘independent’ lives, appearing in various related contexts and beyond joint encounters (Markiza de Sada, Dekadenca, Zed Zeldić Zed, ilillillillill). They were created successively, before or after the formation of the core collective (Markiza de Sada, Johana Helmut Kol, Fric Klajn), and the number of members actually increased over time.[[31]](#footnote-30) Besides the fact that the collective emerged from the friendly relations of its members, the characters themselves, regardless of when they were created, have developed over time, *relationally and performatively*, i.e., through their friendships and live performances.

From the very beginning, some of the main plotlines have revolved around the unresolved family and intimate relationships among the **characters**. In short, Johanna Helmut Kol, who exists only within Efemerne Konfesije, is the only ‘child’ of this collective. However, as it is not clear who her mother is or who her father is, she is in a constant hysterical search for answers about her origin. This “anarchist, punk warrior, of undefined age but constantly infantile”[[32]](#footnote-31) can be understood in a sense as a central character, since a significant part of the narrative is organized around her ‘impertinent’[[33]](#footnote-32) questions about her parents’ origins and the ‘identity crises’ that arise from there. In this case, these questions were initially introduced through intriguing and confusing stories about protegeship, mentorship and her ‘possible’ mothers – “probably the oldest of them”, Markiza de Sada, “insufferably loud and egocentric communist always on the verge of a nervous breakdown, who loves to caress but also to scream”[[34]](#footnote-33) and the “amorous, seductive, superficial and devouring salon anarcho-leftist”[[35]](#footnote-34) Dekadenca. The plot further complicated through the story of the so-called ‘crisis of fatherhood’ in which the “macho figure of a worker, fence, good pal and a man of the people”[[36]](#footnote-35) Zed Zeldić Zed, as well as the “gentleman scoundrel, a frenzied pianist with a nasty temper, the mother of a male child”[[37]](#footnote-36) Fric Klajn were entangled in mysterious ways. These two drag kings never made a decisive statement about the hypothetical paternal role. Also, the history and nature of relationships between all the individual ‘maternal’ and ‘paternal’ figures are highly dynamic and complicated, remaining rather unclear to the end.

The character of Darlin Brando[[38]](#footnote-37) has a very specific place in the overall constellation of positions and relationships. He mostly appears “as a true archetype”, who, as a kind of “vocal presence” rather than a clearly defined character, strongly intervenes in the narrative flow with “universal truths” and “messages from memory”.[[39]](#footnote-38) These ‘memories’ (for example of revolutionary upheavals including the Yugoslav experience and heritage), as they put it, “are decontextualized and refracted through the perspective of the characters themselves and the way they remember them”,[[40]](#footnote-39) with the aim to imbue them with meaning and life through a kind of reimagination. Finally, Efemerne Konfesije produce an interesting exception as one of the members, the master of ceremonies, has not developed a typical drag character, because, as he articulates it, his personal position and stage function have ‘glued’ together. In addition to various roles he performs in the collective, in the context of performances, he appears as a narrator-compère. This function is very significant because, through the ‘ceremonial’ introductions of characters and events during the performance, occasional interruptions of actions or their conclusions, specific cuts are produced within the dynamics of the narration, which then, in a Brechtian manner, enables the audience to take a critical distance from what they are witnessing and observing.

And indeed, watching (or listening to) the performances of Efemerne Konfesije, it is obvious that, exactly in the spirit of Brecht, the audience are not invited to ‘identify with characters’, to ‘emotionally immerse themselves in the plot’ or to sensibly follow a conventional dramatic narrative, leading to a cathartic resolution. On the contrary, all of this is deliberately hindered by the way characters are performed, recognizable through various practices of exaggeration, the content dominated by an abundance of their unique absurdities, and the dramaturgical organization of the narrative with numerous interruptions and undefined resolutions. Hence, it seems that the audience is prompted or challenged to wonder what they are witnessing, how to name it and, more importantly, what is there and why it entertains or provokes, and “what is real and tangible, and what persistently “eludes (their) gaze”[[41]](#footnote-40). This achieved critical distance not only allows the observer to avoid the trap of identification but also creates space to, at least ephemerally, alienate themselves from the state (of things) in which they live, including common-sense platitudes they often lean on and ready-made understandings that tend to clearly and unquestioningly categorize things. All this can motivate them to “catch themself thinking”[[42]](#footnote-41) not only about the “state of things” in which they are immersed, but also about their own position within that constellation.

**Politics, Thursday, Collectivity**

From Brecht’s perspective, every theatrical piece should pose the **political** question of the “relationship between the *character and historical destiny*”, or in other words, show how the subject develops through “the play of forces that constitutes it, but which is also the space of its volition and its choices”.[[43]](#footnote-42) Efemerne Konfesije do this continuously in a very specific way. By interpreting the relationship between the ‘subject’ and various historical, political, social, economic and cultural forces that constitute them and persistently grind them, they simultaneously performatively create and question spaces for possible (re)creations of subjectivity, relying on their own will and choices. The matter is all the more complex and exciting because, as already mentioned, the characters themselves inseparably link the personal and the fictional, remaining closely connected to their creators, that is, the performers.

Such an approach is also evident in the current exhibition, for which a purpose-designed scenario was created and perfrormed, just as in the context of the live performances. However, it is particularly specific because it is largely self-referential, since it synthesizes in a way all the issues[[44]](#footnote-43) around which the collective has revolved in their previous practice through six thematic sections, updating them, of course, from the standpoint of the moment of its creation.

*Primordial Soup, Memory, Collectivity, Decadence, Place of comfort* and *The Future* are the names of the aforementioned sections, allowing visitors to familiarize themselves with the poetic and critical apparatus of Efemerne Konfesije, through which they interpret and transform the socio-political and artistic reality in which they work (which they have done from the beginning), while, together with the voices of apparitions, they go through a possible ***Thursday*** and the eponymous exhibition.[[45]](#footnote-44) At the same time, each unit opens a poetic-political but also a philosophical question to which the characters themselves directly answer, delegating them further for contemplation to all visitors to the exhibition: Who are we, what are we and where do we come from? What do we remember and what is it all for? What are we – family, collective, community or...? Is it decadent to earn money? How did we get here and how long do you plan to stay here? Are we from the same planet?

The dramaturgical connections and the envisioned ‘chronological’ sequence between sections are predefined, but within the space, they are left to the free movement and exploration of the visitors themselves. As in the context of their theatrical plays, the linear flow of time, which has been their fantasy since the day of the formation of the collective, is abolished, and all temporalities freely merge: they evoke (drag) memories from the past, while simultaneously seizing the momentum of the present to finally project a different future. Their ‘chronological’ sequence is, of course, fictional and newly invented, created to produce ‘sense’ that does not exist and would not exist otherwise. Wondering about the origin of the characters and collective, and the nature of the collectivity they created in their search for a common place of comfort, they develop a very specific interpretation of decadence as a place of enjoyment and a possible principle of destruction of dominant values and a source for the production of new ones. Not failing to humorously note the difficult-to-resolve contradiction in the position they are in, as they say, “we are inclined towards alternatives, but we also need cash”,[[46]](#footnote-45) they confidently engage in imagining a different, albeit always uncertain, future. Because “different worlds”, they believe, “are possible”.[[47]](#footnote-46)

In the process of creating a ‘new world’, one of the most important questions undoubtedly involves the production of different modalities of togetherness and collectivity, including the articulation of non-normative family and social relationships. It has already been mentioned that the process of forming and the dynamics of development of Efemerne Konfesije are inseparable from the friendly ties that bind its members. At this point, we encounter another important place of ‘meeting’ of the real and the fictional, because, as they themselves say, reality has never been enough. Thus, it has been already emphasized that in the context of the ‘confessions’ of individual characters, they greatly politicize their personal lives by inscribing the outlines of their own singularities, through complex mediation mechanisms, into the field of the fictional, thereby pointing to the porousness of the boundary between the real and the apparent, as well as between the personal and the political. Following a relatively similar principle, the issue of **collectivity** is resolved both in the personal and intimate space, as well as in the space they produce through shared imagination. In other words, the members of Efemerne Konfesije continuously examine the nature of their common ‘place of comfort’ and the complex interrelationships they have built over time, simultaneously fabulating some of the most important plots in their performances centred around the nature of family and/ or intimate relationships among characters. Hence, in this exhibition, they once again attempt to answer the question of whether they are a “family, collective, community or...” something entirely different. But just as they successfully translate the personal into the political on the level of character production, so this seemingly ‘their’ question, in fact, turns out to be unambiguously ‘ours’, provided that by ‘us’ we naturally mean the audience and visitors to the exhibition. So, these questions, like all others, demand translation both on a personal and on a broader, political and societal level, and together with the ‘voices of apparitions’ we are invited to embark on our own inquiry into who we are, what we are and where we come from, what we remember and why, how long we plan to stay here, whether it is decadent to earn money, what our places of comfort are, and how we might envision a different future, in which, among other things, it would be possible to redefine the nature of various forms of collectivity and togetherness, as well as the processes of their creation.

At the intersection of personal and fictional relationships, uniquely interwoven, Efemerne Konfesije detect some of the main symptoms of the current moment we live in, such as the phenomenon of anti-love, the evaporation of politics, the breakdown of social connections and the loss of orientation in the field of the symbolic. The special value of their practice lies in the fact that they do not thematize these issues only at the level of representation, i.e., through the narratives of their performances, but through their own artistic practice and personal lives, they performatively produce specific models of collectivity that support the metamorphoses of subjectivity. In line with understanding of psychoanalysis, we can talk about the “two poles of human subjectivity”: the need for a place of comfort, belonging, identification, alliance, union, which is always accompanied with an equally strong need for wandering, “realization of one’s own difference, separation, for new experiences, unknown and untried, “for the desire of desire that would be one’s own” ─ singular.[[48]](#footnote-47)

The connections we need are those that support this dialectic, i.e., those that “enable the experience of belonging” while at the same time being able to withstand differentiation and distancing, revealing singular differences, “without demanding group homogeneity, without insisting on the ‘repetition of the same’”.[[49]](#footnote-48) Disrupting this dynamic in any collectivity or community is a symptom of the illness of the bonds that constitute them, leading to either the “dominance of an alienating regime of identification with the ideals of the Other” or the “dissolution of the experience of freedom that seems to want to deny any obligation to the Other, any origin, any symbolic debt.[[50]](#footnote-49) In this regard, through the relationships they build with each other, the members of Efemerne Konfesije demonstrate a specific model of togetherness in which everyone must, as they say, “transcend themselves”, yet, in the process, they do not achieve absolute homogeneity and coherence of the collective, but through targeted efforts, they manage to integrate singularities based on belonging, demonstrating both the creative and political potential of friendship. In a time of unbearable conformism and a narrowing space for political imagination, it is necessary to think and produce new subjectivities that can hear and understand the voices of perhaps ephemeral but unstoppable apparitions that continuously and persistently “defy by creating other realities in which egalitarianism and love are not poetic whims or the result of imagination”.[[51]](#footnote-50) Unfortunately, or perhaps not, “there is no offered solution, and you need to find it.[[52]](#footnote-51)

Simona Ognjanović

1. One of the first things that a visitor to the exhibition *Thursday* can hear is: “Every day is important. We celebrate Sunday and red days but Thursday, more popularly known as Little Friday, has something of that sheer ephemerality in which our whole life fits”. At the same time, *Thursday* is the name of a ‘thrash horror song’ and a kind of debauched pianist Fric Klajn’s ‘sound manifesto’, which opens all the performances of Efemerne Konfesije. Actually, the author of the song is Umbra, who, besides Fric Klajn, is another alter-ego of Marija Balubdžić, a member of the Efemerne Konfesije collective. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Marija Balubdžić, Vladimir Bjeličić, Zoja Borovčanin, Zoe Gudović, Ilija Milošević and Andrej Ostroški participated in the preparation of the exhibition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. At the beginning of 2023, in the context of the realization of the exhibition *Critics Have Chosen*, they were invited by the curator Simona Ognjanović, who got a drag name of Sezona Sfumato while preparing the exhibition. The name was created by a slip, but not the surname.

Anyway, the concept of the exhibition was formulated through joint work and a year-long preparatory process. As it was decided at the very beginning, there were constant inversions of all positions, which made it possible for this exhibition to be largely ‘autocurated’, through a critical reflection of the curatorial view itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. So far, they have presented their work in various cultural and artistic venues such as the Grad Cultural Centre, Imago Creative Urban Culture, Podroom Gallery of the Cultural Centre of Belgrade, then on the Third Programme of Radio Belgrade, as well as at various festivals and events such as Befem – Belgrade Feminist Festival, Kondenz ─ festival of contemporary dance and performance, Skopje Pride Weekend TRANS-FORMATIONS. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. In 2019, the collective recorded the radio drama *Ephemeral Audio Piñatas* for the Third Program of Radio Belgrade. According to Irena Ristić, this radio performance can be understood as ‘drag liberated from visual travesty’. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Replica from the script for the video work *Place of comfort*, created for the exhibition in late 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. In the exhibition itself, you can see an incredibly exciting dense network of references integrated into their work, including artistic, philosophical, literary, musical, cinematic references, as well as references from the realms of drag, pop and thrash culture. The list of references is available not only within the exhibition but also in the margins of the exhibition catalogue [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Replica from the script for the video work *Decadence*, created for the exhibition in late 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. A. Zaharijević, *Život telâ: Politička filozofija Džudit Batler*, Novi Sad, Akademska knjiga, 2020, 272 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. J. Butler, “Sex and gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*”, in: *Yale French Studies*, Vol. 72, 1986, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. See more about it in: Ivana Marjanović, *Staging the Politics of Interconnectedness between*

*Queer, Anti-fascism and No Borders Politics. The Case of QueerBeograd Cabaret,* doctoral dissertation, 2017, 92-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Meredith Heller, “Female-Femmeing: A Gender-Bent Performance Practice”, in: *A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, Michigan State University Press, Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 2015, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. S. Kesić, *Teorija prikazivanja kvir identiteta u savremenoj istočnoevropskoj umetnosti i kulturi*, doctoral dissertation, Belgrade, 2016, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. J. Blagojević, J. Timotijević, “Failing the Metronome”, Queer Readings of The Postsocialist Transition, in: J. F. Bailyn, D. Jelača, D. Lugarić (eds.), *The Future Of (Post)Socialism: Eastern European Perspectives*, New York, Sunny Press, 2018, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Replica from the script for the video work *Kolektivitet* [*Collectivity*], created for the exhibition in late 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Quote from interviews conducted with members of Efemerne Konfesije during the preparation of the exhibition in the period from March to September 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. Replica from the script for the video work *Sećanje* [*Memory*], created for the exhibition in late 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. Replica from the script for the video work *Kolektivitet* [*Collectivity*], created for the exhibition in late 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. Quote from interviews conducted with members of Efemerne Konfesije during the preparation of the exhibition in the period from March to September 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. J. Novaković, *Tipologija nadrealizma: pariska i beogradska grupa*, Belgrade, Narodna knjiga Alfa, 2002, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. S. Freud, “Humour”, in: *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 9, 1928, 1─6. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. Quote from Allucquère Rosanne Stone taken from the text *Playfuness as a strategy* available at the link: https://221a.ca/texts/playfulness-as-a-strategy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. C. Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault A Genealogy of the ‘Confessing Animal’*, New York, Routledge, 2009, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. Quote from interviews conducted with members of Efemerne Konfesije during the preparation of the exhibition in the period from March to September 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. Taken from the opening address of the drag character Mlaćenica, who ‘welcomes’ visitors at the very entrance of the gallery [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. Replica from the script for the piece *Ephemeral Audio Piñatas – Radio Drama in three acts* [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. In some pieces, such as *Efemerne Konfesije in Outer Space* *– Songs about Decadence, the Crisis of Spirituality and Nitrogen*, and the radio drama *Ephemeral Audio Piñatas*, other authors are ephemerally involved in the realization (Ah Ahilej, Viva la Diva, Igor Koruga, Olga Dimitrijević, Dajana Ho, Katie Woznicki, Marija Đorđević…). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. Quote from interviews conducted with members of Efemerne Konfesije during the preparation of the exhibition in the period from March to September 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Taken from the description of the piece *Efemerne Konfesije* – *Songs about Decadence, The Crisis of Fatherhood and Alcohol* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. Quote from interviews conducted with members of Efemerne Konfesije during the preparation of the exhibition in the period from March to September 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. Ksenija Latinović, a member of the Efemerne Konfesije collective, who performed the character of Darlin Brando, passed away due to a long and serious illness in April 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. Taken from the opening address of the drag character Mlaćenica, who ‘welcomes’ visitors at the very entrance of the gallery. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. Replica from the script for the piece *Efemerne Konfesije in Outer Space* *– Songs about Decadence, the Crisis of Spirituality and Nitrogen* [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. A. Badiou, “Novi svet, da, ali kada” [A new World Yes, but when?], in: A. Vujanović, M. Šuvaković (eds.), *TkH, časopis za teoriju izvođačkih umetnosti*, No. 3, April 2002, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. It is impossible to cover here all the topics that Efemerne Konfesije address in their work. In principle, the range of problems they touch upon and that are related to the mentioned question, includes their interpretation of the subject’s place in the context of the system of the capitalist production and economy, as well as questioning its position in the patriarchal order, including, of course, the problem of interiorization of patriarchal patterns and various forms of subjugation and submissiveness. Their understandings of anarchy, contemporary environmental issues, the concept of time and history, their relationship to feminism, female solidarity and female friendship, as well as specific insights into spirituality, hedonism, transhumanism, technophobia, vices, enjoyment of opiates, luxury, hatred, death, or heritage that haunts us are also interesting and extremely important. Finally, their interpretations of love, friendship, family, parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood, solidarity, equality and togetherness seem particularly significant and omnipresent from today’s perspective. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. Besides the script itself, the specific spatial framework of the visual-sound-scenography type, specially designed for its interpretation and ‘performance’ in the gallery space, is equally important in the organization of the dramaturgy of the exhibition. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. Replica from the script for the video work *Decadence*, created for the exhibition in late 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
47. Replica from the opening address of the drag character Mlaćenica, who ‘welcomes’ visitors at the very entrance of the gallery [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
48. M. Rekalkati, *Šta ostaje od oca?: očinstvo u hipermodernom dobu*, Novi Sad, Akademska knjiga, 2014, 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
49. Ibid.

Recalcati is explicitly talking about a family relationship here, but this principle and logic seem to be applicable to other forms of collectivity or community as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
50. Ibid, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
51. Replica from the script for the video work *Budućnost* [*The* *Future*], created for the exhibition in late 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
52. Replica from the script for the video work *Primordijalna supa* [*Primordial Soup*], created for the exhibition in late 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)