

1/ Kristina Bajilo

Delivered, 120 x 60 x 40 cm, pop object,
oil on the cupboard, 2024

2/ Nikola Balberčáková

Emotional Lipgloss, 2023, video, 9'08"
Performed by Andrea Čverčková, Vladimir Iugai,
Teuta Jonuzi, Doris Sisková
DOP: Kristián Babjar, Peter Frohlich
Sound: LenkaAdamcová, Daniel Schiefner
Costumes & styling: Barbara Shevchuk
Video edit: Marek Bihuiš

3/ Sophia Giovannitti

Contract: Choreography 1, from Incall: Study 2;
Contract (2022)
Performance score, First performed at DUPLEX (NY, NY), March
5 –April 6, 2022

4/ Đejmi Hadrović

The Perfect White Cisgender Woman, 2022,
A short film 6'00",
Camera: Mina Petrović

5/ Aja Janković

Pole dance, a performative lecture, 2023, 5"
Pole dance, performance script, 2024 ,70x140cm

6/ Pennie Key

PW., 2023. iPhone taken images blown up to life size and printed
on A3 papers using a Xerox printer, 1485 x 2100 mm
Ballad of Sexual Independency - SexyArtGirl, Song, 2'43",
Written and performed by Tom Letts

7/ Milica Mijajlović Živković

Angels, 2024. Oil on textile, 30x40 cm and 120x150 cm

8/ Jessica Stoya

Unbanked, 2024. Video, 10'17"24"

9/ Zuzana Svatik

THIS COULD BE US, 2024. Handbuilt glazed clay, gold luster,
90,5 cm; 49 cm; 14 cm

10/ Working group Merlinka

(Pavle Banović, Marija Iva Gocić, Leah Rivka Lapiower,
Sara Pantović, Chloé Sassi)
When Merlinka was Building Stone Towers, 2024,
Spatial installation / Archive
w, 2024, digital video, 1'26"
Merlin Mourning, Chloe Sassi, 2024, digital video, 1'26"
Kalemegdn: Merlinkina's home, 2018, Camera: Marija Đoković,
Music: Love Hunters, XXZ magazine, QR code, video, YouTube
archive, 1'20"

Kristina Bajilo graduated from the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade, de-
partment of painting in 2018, where she also completed her master's studies.
In the same year, the cooperation with Gallery X Vitamin began. Dealing with
the influence of media representation, the construct of the value system and
the paradox of choice, Kristina Bajilo's work encourages the viewer to critically
consider and reevaluate the mechanisms of advertising, consumerist practices
and the dominant sense of reality.

Nikola Balberčáková holds a BA from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design
in Bratislava and a masters degree from UMPRUM Academy in Prague. In her
practice, she weaves various methods of narration by using cinematography,
storytelling, honesty and irony to create a specific language for emotional land-
scapes reflecting today's society. She spotlights many non-prevailing identities;
hyperbolized, affective, naive or nerd characters which are creating fiction and
reconstructing dominant scenarios.

Sophia Giovannitti is a New York based conceptual artist who works with: cho-
reographic failure; money; the ongoing distortion of reality through images and
language; autonomy; revenge; female narcissism. Her work has been shown at
Recess, Athens Biennale, Duplex, PPOW, The Bowery Hotel, Sophia Zero Inc., and
ICA London, and other spaces both physical and digital. In 2023 her first book,
Working Girl: On Selling Art and Selling Sex, was published by Verso.

Đejmi Hadrović is a visual artist whose artistic and scientific research is fo-
cused on complex historical, anthropological and social elements, showing the
complex relations between different regimes of power: civil, religious, sexual
and colonial. Hadrović obtained her Ph.D. at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.
In 2022, she received the YVAA award. Her work Zahida is a Feminist (2016) is
archived in the permanent collection at the Viennese Museum MUSA. She lives
and works between Vienna and Slovenia.

Aja Janković graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade in 2024 after
formal education in the field of ballet. In his work, she investigates the field of
institutional criticism, which includes the problem of the pressure of market and
institutional mechanisms on the formation of artistic practice within the system
of cultural production. Through her practice, he re-examines the socioeconomic
role of the artist, audience and institutional mediation in the reception of a
work of art.

Merlinka Working group is an informal group of cultural workers who gath-
ered around the common goal of preserving the heritage of Vjeran Miladinović,
better known as Merlinka. The group consists of Pavle Banović, Marija Iva Gocić,
Leah Rivka Lapiower, Sara Pantović, Chloé Sassi.

Milica Mijajlović Živković is a multidisciplinary artist whose artistic practice
is influenced by her experiences growing up in the Balkans, especially during the
post-war years, family migrations between the former Yugoslav states, as well
as politics of memory. She completed her Bachelor studies of painting at the
Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje in 2017 and obtained her master's degree at the
Academy of Arts, Design, and Architecture in Prague in 2020. In 2023 Mijajlović
won the "Milchik" award for contemporary young artists.

Pennie Key (Penelope Koliopoulou) received an MFA in Fine Arts from Gold-
smiths in 2016. She was a Rijksakademie resident for 2020-22 and received the
Stavros Niarchos Foundation Award ARTWORKS 2021. Her research is currently
supported by Mondriaan Fund (2023-26) and Amsterdam Fonds voor de Kunst.
Her work is largely about power dynamics, sexuality, and gender. An important
part of her research comes from practising Martial Arts and various forms of
Sex Work. Her biggest accomplishment to date is leading a well-attended daily
PE class for artists for 2 years.

Jessica Stoya began working as a fetish model in the mid-2000s and proceed-
ed into a career as a performer in adult films. She has written about sexual
labor, and the way the world reacts to it, professionally since 2012. Her first
book, Philosophy, Pussycats, & Porn, has been translated into three languages
including Serbian. She once tried to unionize pornography, and now lives in Bel-
grade with two cats.

Zuzana Svatik is a visual artist working primarily in the media of ceramics,
drawing and painting. In her work, she critically re-evaluates the function and
potential of applied art in contemporary society. Her works reflect various cul-
tural, social and political problems in the countries of Eastern Europe and depict
the specificities of this environment and its way of thinking. She is currently
interested in themes such as the nuclear family and its public representation,
hunting as a masculine hobby, the relationship between disciplinary institutions,
domestic spaces and pornography.

Културни центар Београда
Галерија ПОДРООМ
Трг Републике 5/-1, Београд

Радно време:
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The rotten smell is you

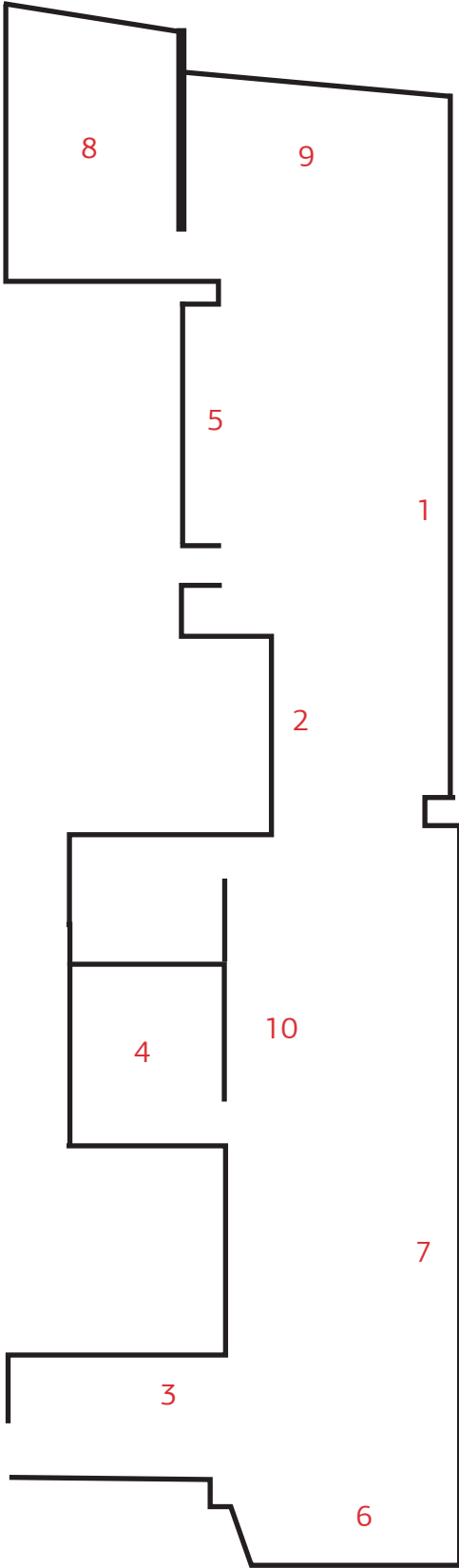
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Participating artists:
Kristina Bajilo, Nikola Balberčáková,
Sophia Giovannitti, Đejmi Hadrović,
Aja Janković, Merlinka Working Group
(Pavle Banović, Marija Iva Gocić, Leah Rivka
Lapiower, Sara Pantović, Chloé Sassi),
Milica Mijajlović Živković, Pennie Key,
Jessica Stoya, Zuzana Svatík

Curator:
Jelisaveta Rapaić

/

4.7-10.8.2024



In March of this year, Kunsthalle Bratislava lost its independence as a state funded institution, by the recently elected right wing government, resulting in its program being canceled and all of its employees fired, under the allegations of “promoting values that put the future of Slovak children in jeopardy”.

The new edition of *The rotten smell is you* group exhibition, which is realized in collaboration with the Cultural Center Belgrade, welcomes some changes in relation to its initial presentation at Kunsthalle Bratislava (5.9-16.10.23). The artistic positions were carefully readjusted to include additional geographies and histories, and to emphasize the gaps which exist within the local context. The second volume of this exhibition also came to creation as a direct reaction and an urgency to the growing favoritism and haze around the rise of right wing politics in 2024.

By examining and uncovering the interior turmoil and the generational gap within the feminist movement, this exhibition explores the underlying frenzy of the right wing appropriation and *mirror worlds** of post-truth and conspiracy theories. The ephemeral space created here houses different experiences which are causing tensions in the feminist household; viewing the movement as a family, with multiple generations living under the same roof by default. A family should be united, chosen; through thick and thin, family sticks together, yet the reality behind closed doors is not always so peachy.

The staging of this open house isn't meant as an all encompassing study of the feminist movement, nor of the fourth wave, but rather to highlight and bring back into a safe conversation these topics which are causing fragmentation. Nevertheless, *The rotten smell is you*, builds a storyline incorporating different experiences and expressions to analyse the gap between the third and the fourth wave feminists that is mostly noticed in the discourse regarding transness, sex work and hyperfemininity, topics on which the movement fails to stand united, failing its own offspring.

Went through a fair share of sticks trying to break a few right ribs only to be seated at the same table, once again, and to notice all the wrinkles on the cloth we'd never straightened, and the splashed stains from previous feasts which are now a running gag. I've been a good daughter, I've been a great son and everyone in between, but the longer I sit, the more the stitches start to itch. Understanding can shift, then words become tiresome and efforts seem in vain until reminded of a great historic event with which we are seated once again. With my micro battles I'll break more than one right rib, but how come micro battles behind the heavy curtains of a family home break me like a twig?

It's a public secret we feminists have neglected a rotting issue, it lives in the same house we built, under the roof we erected, inside the walls we constructed. It spreads as a dormant illness, a psycho-somatic past lurking for the next big kill, gatekeeping the values which were laid in a stream of care, but the creek has now turned to stone. The smell is pungent, encapsulating and overpowering, a rich, juicy, leaky fruit turned to dust and neglect. It sat in the room for a while, but it was easier to open the window when air needed to be cleared, as if help would come from outside.

May we be seated once again at what is left of a common space, where the mold quietly grows until the burning questions are addressed, until laws are passed, until true acceptance and understanding is achieved. In this exhibition, exposed to the public eye, each position is expressing an aspect of the equation in their own manner.

The exhibition opens with a short but captivating performance by Aja Janković, titled *Pole Dance*, a performative lecture; where the artist performs tricks and dance moves while quoting *the parents of contemporary culture theory and philosophy* on their thoughts on pole dance as an empowering feminist and artistic practice. Like many children that formed in the ballet educational system, Aja found herself transitioning to pole dance as an adult, meanwhile encountering side gazes combined with admiration and support for this athletic and sexy movement that originated in strip clubs. What is left after the performance is a text-based script Aja has performed in the opening.

We are encountered with a pseudo-scientific examination of a middle-aged white woman performing everyday rituals, while the narrator reminds us of our own performativity in Đejmi Hadrović's short film titled *The Perfect White Cis-gender Woman*. Đejmi wittily lures us into a game of detecting the bad feminist within ourselves, calling out privilege, color blindness, and societal pressure we might be reproducing ourselves. The video evokes uneasiness and doubts around our own placement on the feminist spectrum as the narrator points to contemporary environments within monitored systems with high productivity pressures.

Sophia Giovannitti, who writes about selling art and selling sex in her 2023 book**, which can be found in the exhibition's reading room presents a performance score in the form of a contract, from *Incall: Study 2*, which first took place in DUPLEX Gallery, NYC where the artist inhabited a gallery space for a month which she closed to the public. Visits were only available upon appointment and paying a nonrefundable deposition fee of 1000\$. The conceptual focus of this work stems from criminalization, as sex work is a discursive crime occurring upon the agreement of both parties for a transaction, whether the agreement between the parties has been fulfilled is legally irrelevant. The score gives us a sneak peek into the performance and forces us to evaluate our assets, desires, and needs as we simultaneously live through it.

Milica Mijajlović Živković presents a headless angel, resembling the winged victory of Samothrace, drained of color apart from the distinctive canvases Milica rests her paintings on. This painting which evokes feelings of empowerment, comes as a transition between her series of bodiless women's garments floating in space and the angel series as she navigates between topics of womanhood, girlhood, tradition, and angles as the genderless guardians.

"...He thinks I'm a hustler, a harlot, a whore; I'm an entrepreneur, my ass is hot and it's got a real soft spot for a well-known collection..." are the lyrics to *The Ballad of Sexual Independence* by Pennie Key that echoes throughout the space, encapsulating the experience and almost giving a soundtrack to the exhibition. The song accompanies a blown-up, iPhone-taken, office-printed image of a vast blue space and a bit of skin and fabric. As an artist, martial arts practitioner, and sex worker, Pennie finds herself often working and having sessions in the gym and in the studio and drawing physical, visual, and theoretical parallels between consensual submission and recreational sparring.

What lays before us under the title *When Merlinka was Building Stone Tower*, and what has been brought to us by the hands of the Working Group Merlinka, comprised of Pavle Banović, Marija Iva Gocić, Leah Rivka Lapiower, Sara Pantović, Chloé Sassi is a portion of Vjeran Miladinovics, widely known as Merlinka, personal and artistic archive. The working group formed as an immediate reaction following the accidental discovery of the reconstruction of the Kalemegdan observatory, where the first Yugoslav openly trans and sex-working Merlinka lived, worked, and contributed, until her tragic death

as a result of murder in 2003. Excluded from public knowledge, and shared within the community, her functional stone objects stood their ground for decades behind the observatory, slowly decaying after her death, until June 2024 (documentation of the original structures available in the QR code). The objects gathered from her personal space and the site tell us and confirm much of what we thought we knew of her diverse interests, tastes, and otherworldliness; they are now exhibited to the public eye, in an institution, for the first time. The working group aims to find a permanent home for Merlinka's archive and for it to receive the kind of care it needs and deserves, until further developments, the Cultural Center of Belgrade has agreed to include them in their archive and safeguard a tiny portion of her material legacy. This legacy also, sadly, brings us to a rough wrestle with the present and painfully points to a crevice in public space and discourse about being trans today in this geography. More of her life can be learned from her autobiography titled *Theresa's Son*, which is included in the exhibition's reading room.

Through her paintings that stretch out into objects, created for this exhibition, Kristina Bajilo references and honors three contemporary female rappers, Muni Long (*Baby Boo*), Saweetie (*Closer*), and Baby Tate (*Bounce*). In her work she often draws inspiration from everyday objects- their marketing, brands- their auras, promoted lifestyles, and fetishization of commodities, however, the rappers that are referenced in the artwork, manage to promote female empowerment and girlhood core rather than the products placed in their videos, seamlessly blending the unreachable and the very familiar, nostalgic.

We are introduced to three exaggerated hyperfeminine protagonists, a blonde, a brunette, and a redhead, building their own emotional landscapes and creating a shared diary in Nikola Balberčáková's video. *Emotional Lip-gloss* depicts nostalgic awkward girlhood and the coming of age of a generation that grew up with Mean Girls and early 2000s celebrity culture. The video takes us on a storytelling journey through bedrooms, shopping malls, and highways of social roles, affect theory, masks, and identity.

Zuzana Svatik draws us in with an intricate wholesome painting of a hetero couple holding a newborn baby in all their parental glow framed in a ceramic vase. Enchanted by the moment and crowned by a bloomed cherry blossom, fertility and procreation, the couple doesn't seem to notice a big black spider, staining the picture-perfect nuclear family image. The opposite side of the vase depicts raw, graphic anal sex, with gold letters reading *THIS COULD BE US*. This composition, which happens to be facing the back view of the exhibition space, is a symbolic representation of topics and acts that no longer have room in the new constellation the couple embodies (or rather an insight into what is still possible). With this piece, Svatik highlights topics of power, sexuality, and nuclear family, as this family structure is highly favorable in a capitalist system as it most often functions as a control tool. However, sex in this sense can be a disruptive force to the system.

Jessica Stoya graces us with the debut of her new work, titled *Unbanked*, which combines the speaking style of testimony with that of personal storytelling. The static yet telling piece, minimalistic in its setting, speaks of the practice of *Unbanking* —revoking access to financial infrastructure by groups who are considered morally undesirable, such as sex workers. The piece was inspired by an invitation from adult producers' rights organization the Free Speech Coalition to speak with representatives of the United States Government on this topic. Jessica's 2018 book *Philosophy Pussycat Porn****, which has recently been translated into Serbian can be found in the exhibition's reading room.

The rotten smell is you begs to address the you in the equation; and while the question of the you is more useful than answering whether the you itself is addressed to the viewer, their positionality, or some outside element. It is a starting point and a navigational tool through the intricate web of histories, relations, power plays, politics, bodies, economies, emotions, identities, false care systems, and interdependencies. The rotten smell in you demands a self-check in the first step taken in this space, the game of detecting the bad feminist in oneself. The rotten is the neglected, the unaddressed which assumes, which overlooks, or which particles will stick to the walls of your lungs, way past the point of exposure.

*In her recent book *Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World*, Naomi Klein uses the term *mirror world* to describe our destabilized present rife with doubles and confusion, where far right movements playact solidarity with the working class, AI-generated content blurs the line between genuine and spurious, New Age wellness entrepreneurs turned anti-vaxxers further scramble our familiar political allegiances, and so many of us project our own carefully curated digital doubles out into the social media sphere.

***Working Girl, On Selling Art and Selling Sex*, 2023, Sophia Giovannitti (Verso, 2023)

****Philosophy Pussycat Porn*, Jessica Stoya, 2018

The rotten smell is you includes a selection of essays and publications offering room for additional voices referencing the discourse within the exhibition / *The rotten smell is you* uključuje izbor eseja i publikacija koje nude prostor za dodatne glasove koji se pozivaju na diskurs u okviru izložbe:

Terezin Sin, Vjeran Miladinović Merlinka (Red Box, 2018)

Working Girl, On Selling Art and Selling Sex, 2023, Sophia Giovannitti (Verso, 2023)

Wandering Concepts, publication of selected essays (Kunsthalle Bratislava, 2023)

Philosophy, Pussycat, Porn, Jessica Stoyadinovich (Not a Cult, 2018)

Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World, Naomi Klein (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023)

The Feminist Killjoy Handbook, Sara Ahmed (Penguin Books, 2023)

Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights, Molly Smith, Juno Mac (Verso, 2018)

Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation, Sophie Lewis (Verso, 2022)

Cash/Consent, Lorelei Lee (2019)

Postjugoslo/avenski TRANS životi, aktivizmi i kulture, Zbornik suuredili: Bojan Bilić, Iwo Nord and Aleksa Milanović (Policy Press, 2022)