

Artists: **Erick Beltrán, Verónica Lahitte, Elena Lavellés, Irmina Rusicka, Adéla Součková, Katharina Stadler, Sandro Sulaberidze, Nino Zirakashvili, Jiří Žák** | Curators: **Data Chigholashvili, Alba Folgado** | Authors of the project *The New Dictionary of Old Ideas*: **Lucia Kvočáková, Piotr Sikora**

The New Dictionary of Old Ideas project widely explores the phenomenon of Central Europe by examining its urgent political topics, history, geography, and visual culture. Among a number of notions, the project refers to *Identity Paradox* and the definitional challenge of Central Europe, asking if it is “a fact, a utopia, a concept of thought, or just a chimera?”

The exhibition, which presents itself under the same title, takes the above-mentioned worry as a starting point. Its extended scope brings together artists based in the Czech Republic, Georgia, Poland, and Spain. In the exhibition, ever-changing ideas about Central Europe are considered not only subject to a physical location, but also influenced by socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. For this reason, defining Central Europe usually generates disagreements, creating dichotomous divisions such as center and periphery, giving more privileges and attention to some countries over others, and often creating further detachments.

Central Europe can also be seen as an idea, a metaphor of connection between the presumed West and East. However, this contact should not be understood in absolute terms, but relative to the specificities of each context. Historical and global processes, the existing threads between locations and ideas, must also be considered, since they contribute greatly to the shaping of opinions and beliefs tied to this concept.

How, then is it possible to define “central” when aspects beyond geographical location intertwine, and when boundaries and definitions are not seen as fixed entities, but rather in flux? In search of this, the exhibition addresses issues that are critical in many countries of Europe and beyond, such as oppression, the distribution of power and resources, the dismissal of perspective, and historical reenactment.*

Diverse ways of artistic investigation concerning socio-political matters are linked here. The artworks invite us to contemplate how the world is seen from near and afar, and how its perception can be (re)defined through movement, time, and beliefs. The production of dominant images and narratives in Europe has legitimized new forms of persecution of minorities and underprivileged groups, both within its territory and beyond. Consequently, a collective image of hatred has been created against “others” who don’t fit normative views.

The repetition of repressive practices, connected to the totalitarian history suffered in Central and Eastern Europe, can be observed in capitalist systems, once desired and considered, by many, utopian. Nowadays, the polarization of societies and violence are found again within borders that have been changing and appearing around, or even inside different places. The works also expand upon various contested economic relations and their effects, seemingly one-sided in whom they benefit. A dialogue between the addressed ideas and contexts, imagined and real, physical and social, may suggest what repeats and what is new in today’s world, as well as what could change.

Each artwork explores particular topics and opens possibilities to understand new meanings, which may also emerge when the connections between them are drawn. The exhibition creates a space with a complex web of definitions, providing a new dictionary, allowing itself to always update.

*As the project progressed, the COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenging issues worldwide. In this context, those addressed here remain urgent, if not requiring even more attention.

- ***The Image of Power***
Erick Beltrán

How can we visualize power?
Which image represents the will of the masses?
Which metaphorical arts should be called to see this invisible figure?
Why is it that power and its representations can easily seduce us?

Abrams wrote that the State is not the reality behind the mask of politics but the mask itself blocking the reality of political practice. In order to come to a representation of this Golem, we require the power of the fetish. The visibility of this mask implies a transmutation of the sacred into matter: revelation getting its form from the social psyche.

The social subconscious images develop during long processes in which many factors work simultaneously. The social, the historic narrative and ideological tendencies work as geological forces, producing signs with characteristics depending on the sedimentation of all these nutrients. How can we compress these time periods to solidify this spectrum? Immediate visualization of the current state of myth?

These icons are crucial to understand how relations with institutions and ideology are established. Such images are difficult to grasp, since they imply a change of scale like the one proposed by oracles –renouncing the subject and allowing the collective to gain a body. What is the limit of our sovereignty over our own actions? The riddle begins when agency appears and we realize that “that something” also defines us in the distance.

- ***“We had seen a tiger”***
Verónica Lahitte

The project takes as its starting point the drawings and texts that Florian Paucke (Silesia, 1719) made between 1749 and 1767 during his stay in what is now called Argentine territory. During his trip, he produced 33 drawings of plants, 33 drawings of animals, and 86 drawings portraying the daily life of the moqoit indigenous community. The codex, which is stored in the archive of Stift Zwettl in Austria, is one of the most extensive portraits of human and non-human life in that area. *“We had seen a tiger”* delves into the material produced by Paucke to contrast the missionary’s gaze with a present that has been called for annihilation during the formation of the nation-states. *“We had seen a tiger”* examines and responds to an ancient (and current) utilitarian way of approaching the world: a fundamental part of *The New Dictionary of Old Ideas*.

- ***Expanded Stratigraphy: Beyond Linear Materiality***
Elena Lavellés

Expanded Stratigraphy: Beyond Linear Materiality explores the intersection between social and geological layers, focusing on the expansion of capitalism and policies of natural resources extraction that are linked to the logic of power and transnational exploitation as well as social resistance movements and associated social groups displacement. This form of combining cultural and natural landscape allows to deploy a historical and environmental fabric that delves into how certain materials and their exploitation can talk about environmental racism, ecological debt, corporate imperialism, resilience and, especially, the importance of decolonizing not just history but also our concept of nature and the construction we have made of it.

This project expands the artist’s previous work and research, from México, the United States and Brazil to Central Europe, developing a geopolitical conversation between the different regions. The goal is to establish a dialogue between case studies on local scales and intermediate scales which can illustrate a larger picture. The work includes a historical-temporal cycle of various periods that represent the foundations of society, economy, and culture as we know: Modernity, Industrial Revolution, the creation of totalitarian regimes in Europe and the current moment of the return of nationalism, euro-skepticism, and anti-immigration attitudes. This cultural and historic evolution affects how we understand, act and shape the world around us.

- ***Mind How You Dance: A Central and Eastern Europe Monument Project***
Irmina Rusicka

Monuments as objects or as social events exist in only two instances: when erected and when dismantled. As observed by Robert Musil, between these moments the monument becomes invisible. Despite how spectacular the monument looks, over time it becomes ordinary, grows into the fabric of the place and solidifies itself on its pedestal in a vulgar way.

A bus stop is something certainly not commonly regarded as a monument. Likewise, a no refurbished bus stop, put up in one of the self-made centers of Europe, would be considered a monument. Though ambitious to represent this peculiar region, the author does not want to remind us of yet another unsuccessful modernization project. Along with the promise of the end of History and dashing Westernization, we have economic immigration, nationalist tendencies and the decay of local industry. In spite of Fukuyama, History has not ended, unlike bus connections between county towns.

A playful exploration into the meaning of the monument can be discovered in Rusicka’s project. We can deliberate on the monument’s form and state of being, try to give it a utilitarian function, or discuss the concept of an anti-monument. However, a more important focus of the installation is the monument’s role in commemorating defeat, or, more optimistically, paying homage to unfulfilled promises which still bear leftover hope. Exactly like everyone waiting for the bus, at a bus stop, in a place called Nowhere.

- ***Ways to Connect I: Trajectories of Immobility***
Adéla Součková

People watching flocks of birds and flying their thoughts along with them, being able to become someone else. People fly their thoughts along with airplanes, becoming someone else. People fly their thoughts with flocks of birds, let them be changed by birds and airplanes, I ask myself which is easier and what are the consequences for the landscape where this is taking place.

You sit in the middle of the room
Your ancestors behind you
– dinosaurs, insects, parents and manatees.
They follow you and lead you.
Satellites from above
They surveil and influence your mind.

You lie in a cemetery with seed under your tongue,
Until it grows into a place or a tree.
You lie in a cemetery, watching satellites and the sky above,
Observing them, divining what is to come.

Starting by engaging with nature, where thoughts originate, this installation aims to connect by exploring local contexts and ways of being in the environment, the artist looks for patterns and repetitions among animist, historical, and contemporary socio-political structures. The softness of the textiles, dyed with natural materials and folk methods during the residency at the State Silk Museum in Tbilisi, is connected with long walks, drawings, lines, and words that contemplate on social issues. They combine animism and ecology with the aim of refreshing a dictionless dictionary.

- ***Ruins Not Yet Built – Solidarity Blueprint***
Katharina Stadler

In our contemporary post-visionary dilemma of social envy and nationalistic tendencies, the question arises how to think both a present and a future based on solidarity from within a system of endless inequalities. I have been tackling this question based on 20th century science fiction novels from *Central Europe*.

In these texts, a future – as either utopia or dystopia – has once been envisioned. A future, which today belongs to a long gone past.

This past, thought of *time to come*, is imagined as a past of our future. Hence, through examining possible future ruins, the sound installation *Ruins Not Yet Built – Solidarity Blueprint* tries to expose structures, which both in the past and in the future past could and can lead to barriers of solidarity conduct and social togetherness.

ALL THE HORRORS [REAL OR IMAGINED] AS BLUEPRINT
ALL THE RUINS AND/OFF THE FUTURE [REAL OR IMAGINED] AS BLUEPRINT
THE CENTER OR CENTRAL [REAL OR IMAGINED] AS BLUEPRINT
FOR A UNIVERSE CONTINUOUSLY EXPANDING

THERE IS NO CENTER OR CENTRAL
THERE IS GRAVITY
AND SOUND DESPITE GRAVITY
AND MOVEMENT OF SOUND DESPITE OBSTACLES

THERE ARE CONSTANT WHISPERS
CENTERED AROUND NOTHING BUT THEMSELVES
AND THERE ARE VOICES
CHALLENGING PHYSICS
WHISPERS AND VOICES
CONCRETE AND CONCRETELY
DISTURBING

VOICES
IN LINGUISTIC PATTERNS
STRUCTURES
GRIDS OVER GRIDS
OVER GRIDS

OF MAZES AND LABYRINTHS
IN RUINS NOT YET BUILT

- ***Eyes and Barriers (Metamorphosis)***
Sandro Sulaberidze

“Gregor’s serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month (since no one ventured to remove the apple, it remained in his flesh as a visible reminder), seemed by itself to have reminded the father that, in spite of his present unhappy and hateful appearance, Gregor was a member of the family, something one should not treat as an enemy, and that it was, on the contrary, a requirement of family duty to suppress one’s aversion and to endure—nothing else, just endure.”

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

A long-dead body of a bug was found in Berlin last summer. Remains from Charlottenstrasse, covered in concrete dust and spider web, were examined and treated.

Successful chemical fixation of the pre-mortem image was made on a surprisingly well-preserved left eye retina. Surely, the creature’s optogram is not sharp, but it delivers vast color information.

On reconstructed footage, an object with distinct, vibrant color (green, yellow, or red) is clearly seen...

The work is about perception, based on a fictional sequel to *The Metamorphosis* by Kafka. It is an infinite loop of image sequences shot with two different types of cameras. They replicate different ways of seeing: human vision in black and white, and the insect eye in color.

This is about the process of alienation, as seen from personal and external perspectives. Questioning how perception turns into a barrier, and how subjectivity potentially materializes into something that affects many people.

Two opposing devices observe the same event – the transformation of a piece of fruit. The filmed apple comes from abandoned gardens, divided by the barbed wire fences of borderization. This fruit comes from a real area of conflict in Georgia, where people live under constant terror and threat. Russia’s occupation line constantly moves and swallows territories, family farms, gardens, and houses.

- ***A Long, Unending Road***
Nino Zirakashvili

The feminization of labor emigration from Georgia starts after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The 90s came with a socio-economic crisis, and a lack of employment that is still one of the biggest challenges of the country. Because of labor market inequality, many women are forced to migrate abroad. Despite their experience and higher education, they agree to a hard-work outside their home country. Many of them have been living undocumented in various countries for numerous years. These migrant women from Georgia mostly work as cleaners, carers, or domestic helpers. They financially support their family members, relatives, and friends in Georgia. Being undocumented and hard working conditions hinder their social lives and integration. Because of this, their existence is often invisible to the societies abroad, as well as at home.

The work combines information I have collected from and about them. The long, unfinished quilt includes different texts and visual material connected to their emigration. It is an abstract representation of “invisible women’s” stories, an endless social issue in Georgia.

- ***The Debt: The Epilogue of a Long Friendship I***
Jiří Žák

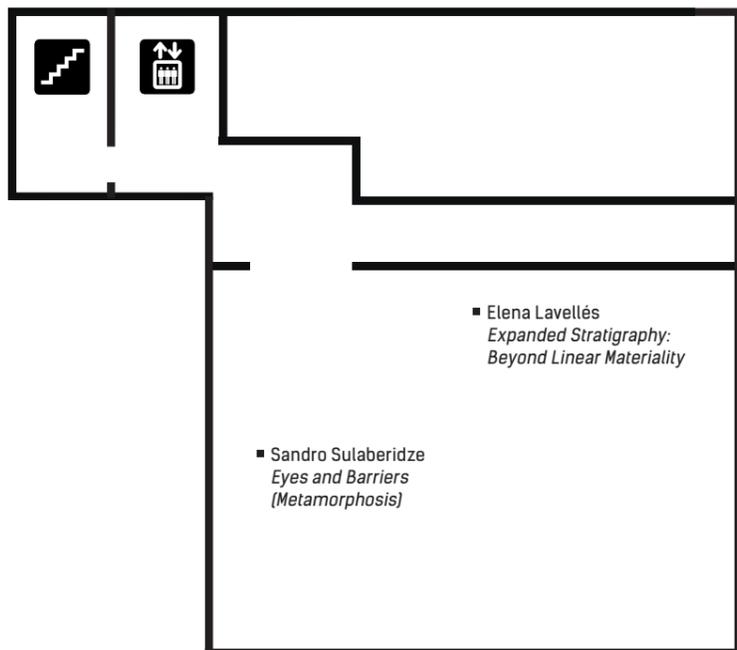
Special material. These two words somewhat euphemistically refer to weapons and military technology in the archival documents of the former Czechoslovakia. These were important Czechoslovak commodities exported to various parts of the world during the 20th century. With the rise of the Communist Party government in Czechoslovakia in 1948, there was a turn in this area towards cooperation with fraternal socialist regimes. The Syrian Arab Republic stood out from a long line of trade-cooperation friendly states. The first contract with Czechoslovakia was signed in the second half of the 1940s, and the mutual trade and cultural dialogue lasted until 1991.

The film is situated in the early 1990s and shows negotiations between the two countries’ government representatives. The subject of their discussion is Syria’s debt, which has gradually increased over the years. The fictional dialogue unfolds the reality of the Czechoslovak arms industry and the end of a long friendship. To what extent does a suppressed historical memory influence or directly determine our current experience? Are we able to see the cracks in the peaceful image of the Czech national identity?

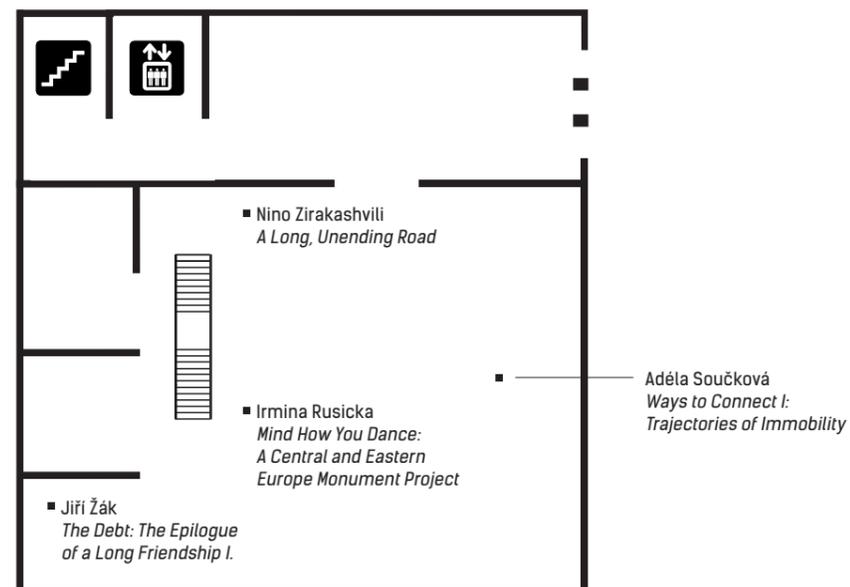
This video-installation is artist Jiří Žák’s first work based on his research of Czech-Syrian relations and Czechoslovak arms exports.

EXHIBITION MAP

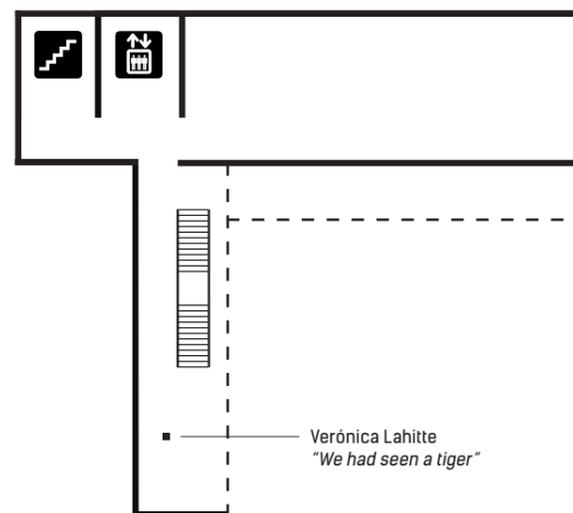
basement



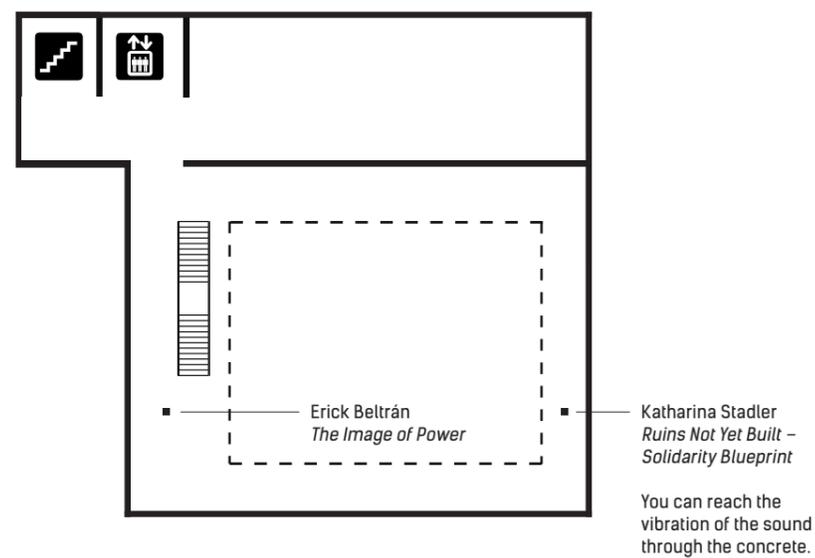
ground floor



1st floor



2nd floor



The New Dictionary of Old Ideas II 18.06.–16.08.2020

Artists:

Erick Beltrán (MX/ES)
 Verónica Lahitte (AR/ES)
 Elena Lavellés (ES)
 Irmina Rusicka (PL)
 Adéla Součková (CZ)
 Katharina Stadler (AT/GE)
 Sandro Sulaberidze (GE)
 Nino Zirkashvili (GE)
 Jiří Žák (CZ)

Exhibition curated by:

Data Chigholashvili, Alba Folgado

Authors of the project *The New Dictionary of Old Ideas*:

Lucia Kvočáková, Piotr Sikora

Production:

Adam Dzidziszewski, Karolina Gołębiowska, Daria Grabowska,
 Anna Konopka, Robert Konopski, Ada Kusiak, Natalia Laskowska,
 Mariusz Miłczarek, Sławomir Solarek, Andrzej Witczak

PR:

Jędrzej Wijas, Anna Konopka

Polish translation:

Anna Konopka

Proofreading:

Glynis Hull-Rochelle

Texts:

Concept:
 Data Chigholashvili, Alba Folgado

Texts of artworks provided by artists.

Text about Irmina Rusicka's work *Mind How You Dance: A Central
 and Eastern Europe Monument Project* by Aleksy Wójtowicz;
 translation from Polish into English by Stan Baranski.

The brochure contains a quotation from *The Metamorphosis* by Franz
 Kafka, a translation from the German by Ian Johnston, Malaspina
 University-College Nanaimo, BC., 1999.

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