

Polonca Lovšin

WHAT DOES THE FOREST SAY?

21 October–19 November 2022

artKIT

This time it all starts with the question, with which artist and architect Polonca Lovšin creates a space for a post-humanist view of the world. This seemingly simple question provides the contextual cues for a reflection on the work of the same name. The video performance, done in the Kočevje forest by a group of personified forest creatures, was modelled on the pop hit *The Fox (What Does the Fox Say?)* by Ylvis. The fox of the viral original title has now been replaced by a forest, and the key question is *What Does the Forest Say?*

Asking this question at a moment when many creatures are facing extinction and forest ecosystems are irreparably threatened only makes it more relevant. Although the question is light-hearted and humorous, artist Polonca Lovšin uses it to undermine the anthropocentric worldview and focus attention on the interdependence and biodiversity of life in the forest. As her approach is based on the posthumanist critical theory, the artist is aware that the humanist ideal of the »human being« as the universal measure of all is not sustainable, just as the hierarchy of species and human superiority are not sustainable. Therefore, in the poem we listen to the ant and the stone, the mushroom and the rabbit, which symbolize something that is "more than human", on which the balance of the whole ecosystem depends. We know that the forest always means plurality, and its very existence is based on a rich biodiversity. On the other hand, the poem says that in the forest we can meet a mama bear, a forest witch, a dead animal, a migrant's shelter, an old refrigerator, or a downhill biker, which is a direct testimony to our anthropocentric perception of the forest. Whether it is a hideout for beasts, a treasure trove for fairy tale secrets, a shelter, a dump, or a place for hiking, such a representation always preserves the human view of the world. Therefore, from an anthropocentric perspective, the forest is always that place beyond. The opposite of the urban, the civilized, the thinking. Such an understanding reflects the spirit of capitalism, which is constantly exploiting and bulldozing everything in front of it. Consequently, in this context, the artist is interested in how to reverse this perspective.

Is the poem a powerful enough tool for such a reversal? The song creates a relational body of sound and invites bodies in the space to move. Listening is even more important than singing. As artist and theorist Brandon LaBelle points out, listening is an act of welcome, of courage – listening literally invites someone else to speak. By listening, we create the conditions for sharing. For LaBelle, speaking and listening are key to building a community, and the use of the acoustic paradigm can help create the conditions for trust, responsibility and mindfulness. This may lead to new ethics of the community that includes those with whom we have nothing in common.

Multi-species equality is expressed in the project through the voices of insects, mushrooms, grass, snakes, and trees, which live together with humans in the forest, where all their roles and voices are intertwined in the voice of the forest. All creatures living in the forest can then be seen as »forest citizens« within a space that is essentially political, except that its »citizens« still need to be given rights.

As the architect and urban planner Paulo Tavares says, in order to make the relationship between the human being and nature more horizontal and less destructive, it is necessary to reconceptualize the polis as a forest, which requires a radical shift in perspective and a decolonization of thought and gaze. As he points out, »The nature of nature is social, and therefore political. In the context of the post-climate-change world order, this forest-polis calls for an universalist, multi-species social contract beyond the human.«

On a symbolic level, the entry into the multi-species society is made possible by the masks that the protagonists of the performance have put on their heads. In doing so, they temporarily cross over into the space of the symbolic, into the space of ritual, and on this level, they create a new imagined community. Imitation as a repetitive symbolism is particularly pronounced here and is the key to the newly created ritual. The masks hanging on the walls act as artifacts which, in their simplicity and timelessness, speak of the rituals of an imagined forest community.

With the exhibition *What Does the Forest Say?* the artist continues her series of works dealing with the phenomenon of the forest. In a humorous and visually distinctive way, she touches on contemporary pressing problems and invites us to consider alternative solutions. Her practice is always collaborative and her activist, educational and artistic roles are constantly intertwined. Even when the forest is not at the forefront of her work, she is becoming increasingly interested in the position of humans within nature and is always seeking possible in-between spaces that allow room for other ways of working. The project *Beyond the Construction Site* is just one of the projects that connect activism, community, environment, learning, and fun. In the project *What does the forest say?* Polonca Lovšin also emphasizes the pedagogical component, where she is interested in how to involve others in the process of creation and what we can learn from the forest. In doing so, the artist reverses the perspective – the forest is now both a teacher and a classroom, and it is up to us to listen attentively.

- Irena Boric

The project involved: Klavdija Križ Potisk, Vid Potisk, Bor Potisk, Rawley Grau, Tilen Stepišnik, Tjaša Avsec, Todorovska, Lucija Ronja Nanjara, Valentina Berente, Lejla Šetar Mihelčič, Manja Drenik Bučar, Mateja Kurir, Vida Novina Kurir, Mila Novina Kurir, Mateja Lovšin Herič, Tobi Tomažin, Zala Bilbija and the team of TV Kočevje.

The exhibition is supported by KUD Obrat and Kunstraum Memphis, Linz.

BIOGRAPHY

Website



Polonca Lovšin is an architect and artist. She graduated from the Faculty of Architecture (1996) and the Academy of Fine Arts (2001), where she also completed her postgraduate studies (2005). In 2015, she obtained her PhD in Visual Arts at the Bauhaus University in Weimar. Her work deals with ideas of self-organization and the search for alternative solutions for the functioning of the human being after the end of his rule in the light of climate change. Her projects are based on artistic research, the integration of different disciplines, knowledge and public engagement. She has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions at home and abroad and has held artist residencies in Europe and the USA. She received the Golden Bird Award in 2010 and the Rihard Jakopič Award in 2018. Polonca Lovšin is a member of the art association KUD Obrat (other members are Stefan Doepner, Urška Jurman and Apolonija Šušteršič), which organizes artistic interventions, research projects, and public events with a focus on the democratization of public space.

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artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor

Opening hours: Tuesday–Friday: 3 p.m.–7 p.m., Saturdays: 10 a.m.–1 p.m.