

GIVE UP THE GHOST. Baltic Triennial
curated by Vincent Honoré

Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius
11 May–12 August, 2018

Tallinn Art Hall (Kunstihoone)
29 June–2 September, 2018

Kim?, Riga
21 September–18 November, 2018

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THE FIRST EXHIBITION OF THE BALTIC TRIENNIAL 13 OPENS AT THE CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE, VILNIUS, ON MAY 11, AND IT WILL BE FOLLOWED BY THE OTHER CHAPTERS AT TALLINN ART HALL (KUNSTIHOONE) ON 29 JUNE, AND AT KIM? CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE, RIGA, ON 21 SEPTEMBER. WE HAVE MET VINCENT HONORÉ, CURATOR OF BT13, TO SPEAK ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF GIVE UP THE GHOST, ITS DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTISTIC SCENE OF THE BALTIC REGION, ITS PUBLIC PROGRAMS AND NEW COMMISSIONS, AND THE CATALOGUE CO-PUBLISHED BY CAC VILNIUS AND CURA.

GIVE UP THE GHOST is the title of the whole Baltic Triennial. Can you explain more in depth what kind of motif and vision it entails and what are the main themes addressed by the project?

Vincent Honoré: I was approached to curate the Baltic Triennial 13 partially as a celebration of the centenary of the independence of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. At the same time, I was approached at a time when Brexit had just taken place and when various populist movements were (and still are) on the rise and jeopardizing the state of the European Union. I was approached when Donald Trump was running for the American presidential elections. These factors and events, as well as concurrent debates on gender, race, and socio-economical ruptures to do with class, encouraged me to think of this anniversary not in a nostalgic manner, but rather as a chance to rethink our presence within the world. With this in mind, and also thinking about the word itself and concept of 'identity', I wanted to address this notion in, what I thought, could embrace our contemporaneity. Thinking of Édouard Glissant, whose writing has informed the Triennial too, I wanted to go beyond identity and look at belonging, specifically: what does it mean to belong, on an individual and global scale, to a world in which we all feel like bastards,

and where all forms have been bastardized? So, while the title may initially read in a negative way – to “give up the ghost”, ultimately, means to die – it also encapsulates the possibility of a renewal and a renaissance.

For the first time in its history, the Baltic Triennial will take place in the three Baltic countries: Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, with exhibitions opening in different times from May to November 2018. Will every exhibition be different in terms of artists and works or is there a clear continuity among the locations?

VH: From the very beginning, BT13 was conceived as a series of events and exhibitions that build on top of each other consecutively like a music score. We began in Autumn 2017 with a Prelude at the CAC in Vilnius that set the tone for the Triennial to come and foregrounded some of the key concerns and formats – specifically poetry – that have underpinned our research and thinking. This was followed by *Bastard Voices*, an evening of performance, poetry and music at South London Gallery in London which enacted a momentary geographical displacement of BT13. For the three exhibitions in Vilnius, Tallinn and Riga it was important to find a balance between coherence and fragmentation. It has been important to delineate a coherent structure that forms a single exhibition, united by the main theme of belonging. At the same time, it has been of equal importance to resist any form of conclusion that would neutralize the potency of individual works, hence leading us to embrace fragmentation as an active strategy. However, to avoid the Triennial becoming too sprawling and epic, each chapter will be concentrated in a single venue per city. The main motifs of the Triennial will surface in all three chapters, but Vilnius will particularly focus on notions of belonging to a (geographical, ecological or cultural) territory. Tallinn will focus more on the body (the moving body, the fragmented body, the expressive body, the political body), while Riga will address more directly citizenship and our relationship to the public sphere and social structures with an active public program underpinning the works distributed in the main venue, kim?

The list of participating artists include both emerging and established protagonists of the contemporary international scene, some of which you already collaborated with during your past curatorial activities. Did you also work with the local scene of the Baltic countries?

VH: Of course, an important part of BT13 has been to research both contemporary and historical artists from the Baltic region. It is an honour and privilege to exhibit seminal works by Ülo Sooster – an Estonian non-conformist painter who spent the majority of his working life in Soviet Russia – and Anu Põder, an Estonian sculptor whose works speak of vulnerability and fragility, but who is perhaps less of a familiar name to an international audience. At the same time, there is a young generation of artists coming from the Baltic countries whose work speaks to some of the most pressing concerns of our age, among them Augustas Serapinas, Ieva Rojute, Ola Vasiljeva and Young Girl Reading Group. Ultimately though, our aim has been to focus on shared concerns in relation to the notion of belonging that extend beyond country-specific boundaries, and which allow work by artists from the Baltic regions and beyond to share an equal footing.

The poetry section (words, rhythms, thoughts, music, theory) is a crucial part of the project, if not its core. Why did you want position language (written and spoken) and knowledge engagement as the starting point of the Triennial?

VH: One of the curatorial tools for BT13 has been the concept of ‘bastard objects’. With this in mind, poetry has been at the core of BT13 since the beginning because of its ontological status as a bastard language. It is essentially a manner of decodifying a mundane and generic language, and perverting it into a personal and highly subjective, yet simultaneously intensely universal new language and form of communication.

Can you describe a couple of representative works included in the exhibitions, as well as some of the new commissions developed for the Triennial?

VH: In Vilnius, Augustas Serapinas, whose work privileges highly context-specific scenarios, has worked with a local community to address the heritage of Lithuania’s nuclear industry and, by extension, the still-fraught relationship between the country and Russia. For Tallinn, Paul Maheke, an artist whose practice foregrounds the body as an archive and territory with its own cartography, will dictate the unfolding scenography of the exhibition. Achraf Touloub will be presenting a new series of works on paper that continues their investigation into the growing convergence between modes of tradition and modernity. Meanwhile, in Riga, Ben Burgin and Ksenia Pedan will develop an ambitious,

large-scale environment which will be populated and activated by a range of actors – by invitation from us and the artists – to ruminate on the stifling natures of societal bonds and strictures performed by us on a daily basis.

The Triennial is also accompanied by a publication, which is co-published by CAC Vilnius and CURA. BOOKS, and is meant as an important part of the research process. Can you tell us more about this editorial project?

VH: The BT13 publication is intended as a reader to accompany the exhibitions in every city. It is an extension of BT13's ethos and so it was important for us to invite a range of curatorial and critical voices to provide highly individual reflections on each of the artists, poets and musicians taking part in the Triennial. The publication is intended less as an encyclopedic introduction to the project and practice of each artist, and more as an invitation to view individual practices and works from distinct positions, opening up a series of portals through which to access each artist's contribution.

Is there a program of public events connected to the Triennial? How are you envisaging the involvement of the public in that specific context?

VH: BT13 will be accompanied by a public program in each of its iterations, with the public taking an increasingly foregrounded position with each exhibition. Importantly though, we did not want to have the public program as a pre-conceived, fossilized form. Instead, it will be built up during the course of the Triennial, reflecting critical responses to each exhibition. This approach enables us to maintain the Triennial as an open-ended form. BT13, after all, is not conceived as the conclusion of a period of research, but as an opening and an intrinsic component of the Triennial that allows the polyphonic to rise, welcoming a plethora of subjectivities and individualities.

Having said that, for Riga, especially, we have envisaged an exhibition that is highly reliant on an active public program to enact the very questions surrounding social structures, relationships and citizenship around which that particular chapter is built. Riga acts both as the concluding chapter and epilogue to BT13, and as an invitation for the questions and concerns that BT13 will raise throughout its duration to live on independently and autonomously.

Participating Artists: Caroline Achaintre, Evgeny Antufiev, Korakrit Arunanondchai, Carlotta Bailly-Borg, Darja Bajagić, Olga Balema, Khairani Barokka, Nina Beier, Huma Bhabha, Hannah Black, Dora Budor, Harry Burke, Eglė Budvytytė, Ben Burgis & Ksenia Pedan, CAConrad, Miriam Cahn, Jayne Cortez, Adam Christensen, Anaïs Duplan, Jesse Darling, Michael Dean, Melvin Edwards, Merike Estna, Gaia Fugazza, Penny Goring, Daiga Grantina, Caspar Heinemann, Max Hooper Schneider, Anna Hulačová, Pierre Huyghe, Derek Jarman, Sandra Jõgeva, Jamila Johnson-Small, Vytautas Jurevičius, E'wao Kagoshima, Sanya Kantarovsky, Agnese Krivade, Ella Kruglyanskaya, Žygimantas Kudirka, Tarek Lahkrissi, Lina Lapelytė, Kris Lemsalu, Klara Lidén, Elīna Lutce, Paul Maheke, Benoît Maire, marikiscrycrycry, Pierre Molinier, Maria Minerva, Moor Mother,

Katja Novitskova, Precious Okoyomon, Pakui Hardware, planningtorock, Anu Pöder, Laure Prouvost, Ieva Rojūtē, Rachel Rose, Augustas Serapinas, Michael E. Smith, Ūlo Sooster, Christopher Soto, Achraf Touloub, Mare Tralla, Ola Vasiljeva, Kārlis Vērdiņš, Young Boy Dancing Group, Young Girl Reading Group (Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė)

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