



Kunsthalle Bratislava
Nám. SNP 12, 811 06 Bratislava
Slovak Republic
www.kunsthallebratislava.sk

Ilona Németh: EASTERN SUGAR

(press release)

Kunsthalle Bratislava is opening a large-scale exhibition by the prominent Slovak artist Ilona Németh. Entitled *Eastern Sugar*, this is an exceptionally ambitious undertaking by local standards. The project developed as a collaborative effort involving a wider collective of artists and architects, with the curators, KHB director Nina Vrbanová and Leipzig-based curator Krisztina Hunya, taking overall responsibility. The launch of the exhibition will be held on Thursday April 12, 2018, at 6 p.m.

Eastern Sugar is an entirely new work by the visual artist Ilona Németh, prepared and realised specially for the exhibition spaces on the first floor of Kunsthalle Bratislava. This site-specific project thematises, explores and critically reflects on the fate of the sugar factories in Slovakia, once prospering, then state-owned, gradually privatised and tunnelled, today irrevocably destroyed. Reference is made to the privatisation processes in the 1990s, associated with the government of Vladimír Mečiar, and also in the first years of the new millennium; but beyond this, there is the wider context of a misappropriation of the state vis-à-vis the citizens and society. The title of the exhibition (borrowed from what was previously the largest sugar factory in Slovakia, renamed ‘Eastern Sugar’ after the accession of a foreign majority shareholder) ironically and metaphorically alludes to one of the project’s key themes: “the selling-off of our own values”.

Kunsthalle Bratislava’s spaces, now for the first time modified to an exhibition’s requirements, offer visitors an opportunity to move symbolically in time. The central hall of the gallery is changed to an open workshop: a real factory making sugar loaves, which the visitor may produce with his/her own hands and take away as a kind of memorial object or “artefact”. This section of the exhibition has the character of a spacious participative workshop, which reconstructs memory and gives present form to a lost past, to the

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• RÁDIO DEVÍN

work and its associated background, which thousands of employees of the sugar factories lost, all in the name of financial profit for “investors”.

Apart from the work as a manual activity, manufacturing has significant resonance also on the mental plane, in the co-engagement of the workers involved (here the manufacture of sugar loaves is intended to be a path to empathy, identification, remembrance, and so on). Németh involves people with personal experience in the production process, i.e. former employees of the vanished sugar factories, who together with the visitors, in the form of temporary work, symbolically activate lost memory and what is now in actual fact history, the story of sugar production in Slovakia.

In a surrounding tract of the gallery, on the other hand, visitors are offered a view of the contemporary state of the sugar factories, conveyed via several media. The artist visualises time in its present-ness, using an interactive adjustable archive of the museum type. In its layers she has installed contemporary photographic “portraits” of almost all of the factories in our country. There are also several video-documentaries, employing visual and also oral history, which bring the viewpoint of those involved directly into the exhibition. In particular, there are interviews with the current director for external relations of the sugar factory in Sereď, and also with a former member of the Managing board of *Eastern Sugar*.

Focusing on the phenomena of work, the workforce and its distribution in wider (post)colonial and global conditions, the exhibition gains added breadth of context through the works on display by artists Jeremy Deller, Harun Farocki, and the duo of Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan. Their work will be presented to a Slovak public for the very first time. Also making a guest appearance is the pilot project of a hitherto non-existent institution, the *Museum of Sugar*. In the context of her exhibition the artist is initiating it and “founding” it, with the real ambition of seeing a future institution emerge: thereby she once again declares the imperative necessity of preserving and reflecting on memory.



“This exhibition offers a complex, layered view of the fate of one segment of the food processing industry, spreading out to the wider contexts of the recent history of Europe. The story of the sugar factories is crucially linked with the phenomenon of work and the values which we lost when we sold out, literally. It is a critique of the social attitude to a certain thing and a pointer to the consequences of our decisions,” Vrbanová says in her accompanying text. She adds that the exhibition *“offers viewers several tracks for critical reflection to serve as paths to knowledge, where work or manual activity, an apparently ordinary walkway or an informed awareness, mediated either in the form of oral history or of museum exhibits, may be instruments of empathy.”*

Ilona Németh (b. 1963, Dunajská Streda) is an artist, organizer and curator based in Slovakia. She exhibited in numerous local and foreign galleries, in 2001 she was representing Slovak and Czech republic at the 49th Biennale of Art in Venice. She is a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, leading Studio IN and an international education program Open Studio at the Department of Intermedia – AFAD Bratislava. Her works are represented in various collections including the Ludwig Museum Budapest, National Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow or Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

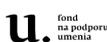
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EASTERN SUGAR

Artist: Iona Németh

Guests: Jeremy Deller, Harun Farocki, Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan

Curator: Nina Vrbanová

Assistant Curator: Krisztina Hunya

Essay: Maja & Reuben Fowkes

Photo-essay: Olja Triaška Stefanović

Architects: PLURAL, Marián Ravasz

Video: Cukru production

Invited project: Museum of Sugar

Curator: Miroslav Eliáš

Opening: Thursday, April 12th, 2018 from 6 until 8 p.m.

Duration: April 13th – July 15th, 2018

Venue: 1st floor KHB

Partners of the exhibition:

Goethe-Institut Bratislava, British Council Slovakia, Fond na podporu umenia, Fond na podporu kultúry národnostných menšín, Mestské múzeum Šurany, Korunný cukor (Agrana), Slovenský cukrovarnícky spolok, Ravasz & Partners, Cukru production, Veselá paradajka zo Žitného ostrova, MINIT bakery, Bittner print

Support of the exhibition:

The Academy of Fine Arts and Design Bratislava, Karlin Studios, Nová Cvernovka, East Slovak Gallery

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Complementary Programmes with Iлона Németh's Exhibition: EASTERN SUGAR

A complementary and educational programme will form part of the exhibition. Guided tours of the exhibition with the artist and curators have been prepared, also lectures and discussions on the history and actuality of sugar processing in Slovakia. There are also special commented tours in the *Museum of Sugar* section with its curator *Miroslav Eliáš*.

The scope of the programme is enriched by invited guests from abroad. On April 20, in collaboration with tranzit.sk and Ateliér IN (Academy of Fine Arts and Design) in the Open Studio programme, a lecture will be given by the Romanian choreographer *Alexandra Pirici*. Using examples of her own performance, she points to a relationship with art as the mediator of a more profound view of the object of large-scale production. Furthermore, she suggests possibilities of a complication of this theme in the future.

Also planned is a discussion with the German visual artist *Andreas Siekmann*, whose work is focused on changes in our society, the influences of globalisation and the displacement of economic responsibility, with the privatisation of the public sector playing the main role in this context. Siekmann has developed a method whereby he can transmute his analyses and research to an unconventional, but easily comprehensible, pictorial language.

Educational programmes and workshops for families, schools and adults add to the participative quality of the exhibition and aim to stimulate thinking about history, processual art, and the memory of place. We also explore the process of working with sugar and manufacture of sugar loaves; in this we exploit the sculptural qualities of this material. Making its contribution to the project, *Kunsthalle KIDS* approaches the exhibition in its regular format: a guide to the exhibition in which visitors will be accompanied also by children, participants in the *Child Mediator* project.

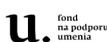
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