

Qui il contenuto per l'intestazione di stampa.

Genesis: a celebration of the stunning mosaic...

Simon Delobel at Art Brussels 2014



View the embedded image gallery online at:

<http://www.myartguides.com/categories/interviews/item/4561-an-interview-with-elena-filipovic-from-kunsthalle-basel#sigProGalleria42629f5d10>

An interview with Elena Filipovic from Kunsthalle Basel

Reporter

Andreas Kreienbühl

Share this article

Facebook

Twitter

Stumbleupon

Pinterest

Email

Los Angeles-born **Elena Filipovic** is the new director of the **Kunsthalle Basel**, the institution's eleventh director in its 175-year history and successor to Adam Szymczyk, who has been nominated artistic director of Documenta 14 scheduled for the summer of 2017. Prior to her new position, Filipovic served as senior curator at the WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels.

Andreas Kreienbühl: The city of Basel—an agglomeration of approximately 200,000 inhabitants—is probably the place with the highest density of world-class art museums per capita. The Kunstmuseum Basel, then still known as the Amerbach Kabinett, was the first municipal art collection in Europe to open to the public. It shows how deeply rooted art is in this city and what significance it has to the people in their everyday life. How would you define the role of Kunsthalle Basel within this exceptional framework?

Elena Filipovic: It truly is a fantastic framework, not only to have so many amazing

institutions and exhibitions around, but also to be in the luxurious position of having an extraordinarily open public that is used to being surrounded by art of all kinds. In this context of institutions that are deeply committed to preserving an incredible cultural heritage, Kunsthalle Basel is among a select few institutions in Basel that are not conserving cultural heritage but rather making it—with nourishing and encouraging emerging artists that will be, in fact, the cultural heritage of tomorrow. Every context needs both, just as museums and collecting institutions actually need a Kunsthalle to encourage the artists that they will collect tomorrow.

At the recent opening of the Paul Gauguin exhibition at the Fondation Beyeler, Sam Keller noted that the artist's very first exhibition in Basel was at Kunsthalle Basel in 1928. Indeed Kunsthalle Basel has a very long tradition of showing artists early in their career, often before they were widely recognized, or simply of staging historically significant solo shows. It is for that reason that I am trying to shift one of the ways that Kunsthalle Basel has often been spoken about: instead of saying that it is an institution "founded in 1872," which of course it was, one can point out that what we do is present the now—and the institution has been doing so since 1872. Understood in that way, one comprehends better how exciting its 175-year history is, also for Basel.

When I became director, I thought that precisely because of this history, Kunsthalle Basel might be the very place where we could actively rethink the conventions of what an exhibition is. The question of what an exhibition is (or could be) thus became an important starting point for the launch of the new program at the Kunsthalle.

AK: It is fascinating to see the results of your curatorial strategy and visions. With Zhana Ivanova's *Ongoing Retrospective (Chapter 1)*, for example, you made your work at the Kunsthalle Basel come alive by turning the visitors' ways of viewing the structure of exhibition-making upside-down. Could you further explain your idea of showing works of an emerging artist as an ongoing retrospective, piece by piece, through the years to come.

EF: I launched the new program with the beginning of the first solo show in an institution of Zhana Ivanova. I say "beginning" because it is a long-term project that has only just started: and since it is a "retrospective" that takes place in reverse, if you will, it will only become an exhibition at the end, once all her selected works have been shown, many years from now.

In fact, the performances of Zhana inspired this approach. I noticed that there are two things that are quite common to her work: her performances reveals the codes, structures, unwritten rules of society, including constructions of gender and power and a number of her pieces are set in a near-future time. We tried to use those two traits as operational principles for her first solo show. It got me thinking: we all know that a retrospective comes at the end of a career of a famous artist, when you can see from the comfortable armchair of history what the important works are and how the artist progressed and developed in this process. So, I wondered: what would happen if we reversed things and showed a single piece by this rather young artist at the beginning of her career, a point where history has not yet decided whether or not she will be famous or "important," and we claim it the beginning of an ongoing exhibition, and continued to show her work over time whenever she decides that

another work belongs in the retrospective. One of the untouchable codes of exhibition making is revealed and we have a show that is set in the future!

AK: So, in some way the ground for experimentation is not only offered to artists but you allow a certain bandwidth of experimentation to yourself, to your own work?

EF: Of course! I think it is also quite a risk for the artist to take. The challenge I made to her and she made to me is that we will show her work in this retrospective-in-the-making for as long as I am director of the Kunsthalle Basel. My predecessor was director for 11 years, so she and I both knew that it could potentially take a long time for her retrospective to be complete. All the mechanisms that she deconstructs in her work, I use in the exhibition in an attempt to deconstruct them too. It is an experiment, but I thought that since the Kunsthalle historically has been a place for risk-taking and experimentation, why not—as an opening statement—bring this right to the fore and make it very visible. It is not something I would do with another artist: not every work calls for such an operation. But this work did.

AK: I was part of the public that watched Zhana Ivanova's performance, which is played within the walls of a stage-set and sketches a non-descript room, similar to a waiting room where people are expecting someone or something to come. After a while it came to my consciousness having waited for the new director to arrive and that my attitude was similar to the actors on stage. Can the show somehow be interpreted as an act of mirroring?

EF: I definitely didn't plan it that way! But I also couldn't have anticipated how the Basel public felt waiting for the arrival of the new director. I was pleased that what might have looked like a very modest project, a rather diminutive stage and performance of minimal gestures in the grandiose Oberlichtsaal, was understood as something larger, and something that now we will be waiting for over many years to see the rest of the exhibition as it unfolds.

AK: The exhibition that has just started, *Patterns for (Re)cognition*, is the first show in Switzerland of the Belgian artist Vincent Meessen (*1971) who will represent Belgium at this year's Venice Biennale. By integrating abstract paintings of the little-known Congolese painter Thela Tendu into his exhibition, Vincent Meessen not only features as an artist but also takes over a curatorial role. Can we say that visitors will somehow be discovering two exhibitions in one?

EF: Something like that! Or, an exhibition within an exhibition. Vincent was fascinated by the works of Thela Tendu, not only for their formal dimension, but also because he was troubled by the fact that they had entirely escaped entering art history. As an artist himself, he couldn't understand how it came to pass that this 1930s Congolese artist, who had this incredible body of work remained almost totally unknown: had never been shown in the Congo, was barely known to Congolese historians, had very few shows in Europe....and this despite his having created a momentary sensation in the 1930s and being featured in avant-garde galleries, in shows alongside Paul Delvaux, René Magritte, and Pablo Picasso. Many of Tendu's works have been preserved since 1959 at the Royal Library of Belgium although the historical value of this work was not really understood. And now, as a result of this exhibition at the Kunsthalle, in other words, as a result of a young artist looking

back and trying to give a forgotten artist a place in history, the Royal Library of Belgium have announced that they will organise an exhibition of Tendu's work. So in a very concrete manner, this show is about history and the writing of history, but it also manages to rewrite history in a small way.

AK: Meessen's work often includes investigations into gaps in the writing of history, particularly colonial histories. Did you invite the artist to Switzerland—one of few countries that did not take part at the 1884 Berlin Conference where claims to territory in Africa were formalised—also keeping in mind a possible gap of "colonial awareness" in the Swiss population?

EF: I suppose that is true, that Switzerland didn't participate in the Berlin Convention and thus on some level isn't directly responsible for the colonial splitting up of Africa. But if we learn anything from Vincent Meessen's show, we learn that even when we think something is "neutral," it often is not. As the show reveals, even geometric forms and scientific "tests" that were thought of as objective and universal, in fact, have specific cultural, historical, social, and political biases. But one could take these as examples of the debunking of "neutrality" of all kinds—the neutrality of forms but also the neutrality of countries—because I actually don't believe any nation in the Western world can claim they had no hand whatsoever in the atrocity that was colonialism. In any case, awareness of such histories is just as important in a place like Belgium as it is in Switzerland, whatever the direct role of each nation in that history.

The whole show builds upon many layers of research about these histories. And Paul Klee, a Western contemporary of Tendu (although the two did not know of each other), plays a role in this. At the Kunsthalle Basel Klee had three major shows, including one in 1967, and Vincent uses the installation views from that show to create new work. He folds the photographs into origami-like abstract form and juxtapositions them with ritual objects from the Kuba Kingdom dating from the late 19th century. He brings together all of these levels and narratives which have to do with this specific place, but here they are abstracted and have to be analysed through the way he frames them in relation to Tendu's work.

AK: Thank you for bringing us closer to Vincent Meessen's multi-layered exhibition. Could you tell us something about the other exhibition you just opened at the Kunsthalle?

EF: On March 5th, we opened a very peculiar show by Mark Leckey, someone who isn't necessarily from the emerging generation, but he is someone that has been extremely influential for a younger generation of artists, and I wanted Kunsthalle Basel to be the kind of place that can also celebrate artists, like him, when they take important steps in their practice. And I think Mark just made one, and we are really excited to have it at the Kunsthalle.

The show is a facsimile or an ersatz version of an exhibition that Mark Leckey curated in 2013. There is a backstory to the project: he was asked to curate a show as part of a Hayward Touring exhibition series. He took his harddrive to the organisers of the exhibition; it contained images of strange objects that he had collected while being on the Internet: a mummified Egyptian cat, a vase in the shape

of a uterus, a Nike Transformer shoe, a Louise Bourgeois sculpture that fascinated him, or the Cyberman helmet from Dr. Who. All kinds of crazy objects that he put into his own quasi-Foucauldian archaeology of things. It took the organizers three years to track down or buy the original objects on which Leckey's digital files were based and it resulted in an impressive exhibition curated by the artist and revealing so much about his way of thinking, processing, and working.

At Kunsthalle Basel, he is showing a 1:1 copy of that show. Almost every single object, or at least as many objects as he could, were copied, either in papier-mâché, as a cardboard cut-out, photographic replica, or a 3D copy. What we have is a copy of a exhibition that is itself an exhibition but is also a total work of art by Leckey, one in which the real and copy, the world and the Internet, artist and curator get all mixed together.

Address: Steinenberg 7, 4051 Basel, Switzerland

Mail: info@kunsthallebasel.ch

Phone: +41 61 206 99 00

Web: [Kunsthalle Basel](#)

Opening hour: Tue - Wed - Fri | 11am - 6pm; Thu | 11am – 8.30pm; Sat - Sun | 11am – 5pm

Closing day: Mon

Admission: CHF 12.– / 8.– (incl. SAM Swiss Architecture Museum)

Photo credits: 1. Elena Filipovic, Director of the Kunsthalle Basel. Photo: Zlatko.Mićić 2. Zhana Ivanova, Detail All the Players (2013/2015), in Ongoing Retrospective (Chapter 1), Kunsthalle Basel, 2015. Photo: Philipp HKnger 3. Mark Leckey, Installation view UniAddDumThs, Kunsthalle Basel, 2015. Photo: Philipp Hänger 4. Vincent Meessen / Thela Tendu, Installationview Patterns for (Re)cognition, Kunsthalle Basel, 2015.

Like    59

Map

Comments

More in interviews



A conversation with Hans-Kristian Hoejsgaard



Interview with Annette Schönholzer and



Interview with Peter Bläuer



Interview with Marianne Goebel



An Interview with Fayçal Baghriche



Interview with Mollie White

Qui il contenuto per il footer di stampa