

## BUCHAREST

## Vlatka Horvat

### EASTWARDS PROSPECTUS

The poetic gestures in Vlatka Horvat's exhibition "Supporting Objects" made visible the traces of the absent artist's body while responding to the elegant interior of Eastwards Prospectus, a gallery set in a nineteenth-century villa that strikes a sumptuous, bourgeois note far from a white-cube or industrial ambience. The gallery's three rooms each featured an installation incorporating one or more wooden tables, or parts thereof, many rescued from Bucharest flea markets and bearing marks of their previous use; several had been patched together out of different kinds of wood, witness to alterations or recycling.



Vlatka Horvat, *Bent Double*, 2018, concrete, metal and PVC pipes, foam and insulation tape. Installation view. Photo: Miluta Flueraș.

*Counterpoise Table* (all works cited, 2018) delivered a lesson on balance and stability. Six thin wooden planks were placed so that they dangled off one side of a table; resting atop each of them were several objects, including a spool of red and white thread, a found plastic bird, and a series of wooden door stoppers in varying sizes and states of use and discoloration. The equilibrium was so precisely calculated that visitors had to pass with care lest their footfalls destabilize the work.

A similar exploration of precariousness was apparent in the other sculptural works on view on the gallery's first floor. *To Get Over* consisted of four wooden sticks that just barely spanned the distance between two wood-and-metal tables. Placed right next to an imposing brown ceramic stove, *Wooden Legs* presented some table legs with corner sections of the tables from which they had been detached. The way they were piled atop one another on the parquet floor called to mind a game of pick-up sticks, as if Horvat were tempting the viewer to try to extract one of them without ruining the rest of the structure.

The three installations in the basement were even more absurd in their construction, whether made out of concrete, insulation tape, or cardboard. *Bent Double*, for instance, seemed to be an attempt to imitate the redbrick arcades already existing in the space with curved PVC tubing that was mounted in concrete forms shaped like truncated cones or, in one case, a cast of a tire. The artist seemed to have taken on the role of a general contractor to construct nonutilitarian objects out of stray building materials, but in such a way as to emphasize what is usually left behind: the process of making. The works hinged on the intermediate.

While Horvat's presence was deliberately not made visible in these works, her body nevertheless seemed to be a guiding force. Sometimes the shape of her body generated a form directly: *Along the Way*, a numbered version of which was present in each of the gallery's rooms, was a visual poem made up of the artist's footprints in black paint. One might have thought of the performative physicality of works by the Gutai group—Kazuo Shiraga, for example, made many paintings with his feet—but not their gestural vehemence. Horvat's mark-making is, rather, a Zen gesture—the artist's engraved memory in the space. In a series of color giclée prints titled "Monuments," she uses her hand as a plinth for various objects, some so insignificant and small that they are hidden in her palm and can't be seen at all.

Safe, clean, and stylish, the gallery was transformed through Horvat's hands and visions: The building became a shell that seemed to require rethinking or recomposition, even a sort of regrowth, of its discursive content. The artist's background in performance gave itself away as the visitor witnessed the *after-performance*, its mechanisms, and its absurdity. One felt immersed in a suspended process, waiting for the real show. But this *was* the real show. These fragile situations thus also reflected Horvat's strong social commitment: Her minimal and conceptual gestures were explorations of the situation of working amid precarity.

—Daria Gbiu

## VILNIUS

## Julijonas Urbonas

### GALERIJA VARTAI

If you were lucky, you might have been greeted by the dense sounds of a grand piano at the start of your visit to "A Planet of People," a recent solo show by the Lithuanian artist, designer, and engineer Julijonas Urbonas. In these concerts, which took place periodically during the course of the exhibition, the composer, sound artist, and improviser Gaile Gričiūtė periodically played excerpts from the opera-cum-art installation *Honey, Moon!*—conceived and directed by Urbonas in 2018—on a piano inside a shiny, wavy circular structure that rotated in the room like an elegant spaceship.

Evolving from the artist's longtime interest in what he calls "gravitational aesthetics," the exhibition presented a scientifically grounded but artistically interpreted proposal to create a new celestial object by catapulting human bodies into space in such a way that they would arrive at a Lagrangian point—that is, a spot between the gravitational fields of two larger objects at which a smaller object in orbit remains at a stable distance from both. These human bodies, according to the artist, would slowly form a new core to which others would slowly attach themselves. This was the Anthropocene radicalized—not humans extracting natural resources from the environment, but their own bodies becoming raw material for "a cosmic fossil of humanity," as Urbonas puts it: "a monument to humans of humans."

In the gallery, the demonstration of this quasi-scientific, quasi-speculative scheme resembled a cross between a laboratory and a cutting-edge design store. Slick, shiny surfaces, streamlined silhouettes of objects, vertical screens, and column-shaped scanners seemed evidence of how science and business, blue-sky research and product development, have become indistinguishable. After all, in order to fund their investigations, scientists need to pitch their ideas on TEDx stages. And Urbonas's pitch was strangely alluring, despite its absurdity.

After hearing the mini concert in the gallery's first room, viewers were guided by shiny metal barriers through an otherwise empty space to a third area encircled by bright blue PVC curtains. Here, three