

# KATARINA ZDJELAR

## Rehearsing Closeness

3 December 2021–8 January 2022

MMC KIBLA / KiBela

Language is a system of expressive means of spoken and written communication; it is a system with clear and definite rules, and the more precisely we know and follow them, the better we can master it. But how can we learn something *in between*, something that is not clearly defined in language, such as improvisations, mistakes, meaningless voices, gesticulations, stutters, silences, and other loops? It is this *in-between* space within linguistic communication that is at the heart of Katarina Zdjelar's artistic practice. The artist deals with *language in an expanded field*, with language that is not necessarily verbal but contains sounds, with language that is not necessarily intelligible but is based on a familiar gesture. She is interested in the effects of assimilative language policies imposed on certain groups of people, in the abstract manifestations of speech, including the musicality of speech and the physics of the voice, and in the instances in which even the most intimate leaning, humming, and tuning of the voice opens up the social relationship between the reception of the voice and its possession. *Language in the extended field* is based on paradoxes, experiments, and failures, and becomes the interface that connects and brings us closer together, and consequently must be understood with all its inherent social and political implications.

The exhibition *Rehearsing Closeness* emerges from this understanding of language, which subtly speaks about solidarity, resistance, language learning as a codified method of cultural integration, the uprooted individual and the »speaking body« through unexpected, unintentional, and usually unnoticeable sonic and visual rhythms of touches, gazes, movement and, last but not least, sleepiness. Considering the above, the artist's approach to sound is crucial, sometimes dropping it like background noise, sometimes amplifying it, sometimes subtracting it.

In her work, Katarina Zdjelar often uses rehearsal as a working method to explore the subject's voice, and it is the rehearsal, alongside language, that is one of the narrative threads within the present exhibition. As an exercise in writing, upon entering the exhibition, selected verses of Athena Farrokhzad's *Open Letter to Europe* are written out on a large black wall that reminds us of an oversized school blackboard or a school notebook. Within the formal and contextual framework that the written text provides, two video works alternate – *Reading the text »Europe, Where Have You Displaced Love?«* and *My Lifetime (Malaika)*. In the work *Reading the text »Europe, Where Have You Displaced Love?«*, the artist invited four musicians to interpret the above-mentioned text by Athena Farrokhzad through improvisation. Zdejlar was not interested in the final interpretation or the final performance, but in the openness of the process in which different voices meet and converge. Through musical tuning, complemented by different sounds such as whispering, conversation, children's play, the artist explores the accidental and intentional connections between the creation of a shared heterogeneous space.



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Opening hours: Monday–Friday: 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Saturday: 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

*My Lifetime (Malaika)* features Ghana's National Symphony Orchestra recorded in the National Theatre in Accra. The musicians play Malaika, originally a cheerful and empowering postcolonial composition that has been famously performed by many musical celebrities. The Ghana National Orchestra was founded at the time Ghana gained independence from the United Kingdom under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah. In fact, it was to establish and assert national consciousness within the newly independent country that the Nkrumah government invested heavily in cultural structures. As the artist recorded a symphony orchestra rehearsal, the individual's states and moods, such as yawning, tiredness, and sweating, also came to the fore. The artist is interested in details that, although we never think of them when we think of a symphony orchestra rehearsal, are an intrinsic part of it. With these details and fragmented frames, the artist narrates the rhythm of temporal and social in-betweenness, a state of constant transition, and a suspended future.

In this exhibition, the artist follows a certain historical narrative of the emancipatory potentials of solidarity and collective transformation through a spatial transition into another space, where the viewer first encounters the 3-channel video installation *Not a Pillar Not a Pile (Dance for Dore Hoyer)*. This work is inspired by archival documents from the women's dance studio founded in 1945 in post-war Dresden by Dore Hoyer, a choreographer and expressionist dancer whose choreographies were based on the graphic works of the artist Käthe Kollwitz. For this work, Katarina Zdjelar brought together an international group of dancers and activists and transposed the past into the present or future. In the installation, one body meets another. The embodied language of human proximity, expressed through subtle gestures, movements, touches, pushes, and even frictions, speaks of solidarity, closeness, and alliances, while constantly reminding us of their inherent fragility in the current socio-political condition. The floor sculpture with carvings resonates with the choreographies by Dore Hoyer and graphic works by Käthe Kollwitz, whereas the whole installation is a manifestation of the affinity with (proto)feminism, whereby the artist accentuates the constructive power of alliances, solidarity, and anti-fascist resistance.

Brandon LaBelle wrote in *Lexicon of the Mouth* »that the agitating and contaminating behavior of any sound is at one and the same time a means for rupture and attachment, interference and nurturing assurance, and resistance and solidarity. (...) In this regard, sound teaches me how not to be myself; how to trespass certain lines, supplement particular languages, and relate to another body. In short, it leads the way for how to depart, but also, how to arrive, elsewhere. It literally enfolds and unfolds me, as a you.« And it is precisely this transitional space between the individual and the other, that Brandon LaBelle writes about, that is one of the key moments of Katarina Zdjelar's work. This in-between linguistic space is most noticeable in the work *AAA (My Heart)*, shot in a single take, where a young woman performs four different pieces simultaneously while maintaining the original style, tempo, and rhythm of each piece. Silence, music, sound, and words alternate and »collide« with each other, while her face and voice become the battleground for the jolting transitions between the songs. Although it is the performer who speaks all these languages, they simultaneously speak her. The conflict that arises with the almost simultaneous rendering of each language, tone, the genre of music, change of rhythm, and switches between compositions on the singer's face is transformed into a specific harmony by her mastery of the gaps between compositions, as well as the precision of her performance of historically, stylistically and linguistically different compositions.

And to conclude with the words by an art historian and curator Branislav Dimitrijević, who wrote of the artist's work: »In her films, Katarina Zdjelar explores the relationship between sound and image and their connection to the human organism, which, through voice and sight, produces something that belongs and does not belong to this organism at the same time – something

*that returns to it from the physical environment, from the space of sociality, from a space marked by rules of regulation and power structures. Through the personal experience of moving from one cultural milieu to another, the artist interrogates the ways in which learning a language or any form of disciplining voice and sound (e.g. singing, language, or music exercises) locates the body within given cultural and ideological frameworks, and how the body responds to such framing. In her films, there is almost never a view of the whole situation she depicts, but a series of cut-outs, details connected by the moving eye of the camera placed in the center of the action, where it becomes part of the body, moving within a particular, orchestrated and closed system.«*

- Irena Borić and Živa Kleindienst

## BIOGRAPHY

Webpage:



**Katarina Zdjelar** grew up in Belgrade and is currently based in Rotterdam. Working mainly in the medium of moving image and installation, her work explores the way one body encounters another as a site of resistance and possibility, pointing to the fragile agency of collective action in the present. Voice, music, sound and language have been the core interests throughout her practice. Her most recent works look at potentials and legacies of pacifist (proto) feminist practices, including that of Käthe Kollwitz and Dore Hoyer. Zdjelar holds an MA in Fine Art from the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam, she is a graduate of the University of Arts Belgrade and has completed a two year residency at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. Zdjelar represented Serbia at the 53rd Venice Biennale and has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions internationally at such venues as 11th Berlin Biennale, Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam; Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo; Frieze Foundation, London; Casino Luxembourg; De Appel, Amsterdam, MACBA Barcelona; MCOB Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade; Museum Sztuki Lodz. She was awarded several prizes, most recently the MMSU Award of the 24th Zagreb Salon (2019), Dolf Henkes Prize (2017), as she was one of the nominees for the Dutch Prix de Rome Award (2017, 2010). Zdjelar is also an educator in her post as a core tutor at Piet Zwart Institute (MA Fine Art), WdKA Rotterdam and Master Artistic Research at Nederlandse Film Academy in Amsterdam.