

kinesiology and physiotherapy practices, and the countless YouTube videos of self-proclaimed experts – reflects a desire to return to a time when the spine was far more horizontal. Thermal spas are precisely the sites where geotrauma is transformed into therapy, where the catastrophic origins of the world seep into bathing pools and reappear as a healing force. The human body shifts from upright to reclined: the tactfulness of chaos slipping unnoticed into salubrity.” (Andrej Tomažin)

Matej Stupica similarly achieves a synthesis of psychophysical and media-based elements, and in doing so not only maintains his artistic *raison d'être* – the foundational rationale of his practice – rooted in a broad spectrum of authorial approaches developed by himself and his collaborators, but also extends it further. Through audiovisual apparatuses and physically multivalent sculptural forms – quasi-robotic sound devices – along with expansive wall drawings installed throughout MMC KIBLA, he reveals an additional dimension of his work: its musical inflection. Notably, Stupica performed in the ensemble **nevemnevem** with poet and musician **Blaž Božič**, now recognized for his experimental breakcore–glitchcore project **SsmKOSK**, who also appears as a guest at this year’s KIBLIX festival.

When discussing twentieth-century music and the concept of silence, one cannot overlook John Cage. His best-known work, *4'33"* from 1952 – often referred to simply as *Silence* – uses four minutes and thirty-three seconds of sonic neutrality to draw the attention of inattentive listeners to the everyday soundscape that constantly surrounds us. Such sounds, like those produced by musical instruments, may be musical; in a certain sense, they may even become music itself. Cage was more fascinated by the noise of New York’s Fifth Avenue than by any Beethoven symphony. He also invented the prepared piano, in which he altered the instrument’s sound by inserting various objects – wood, metal, and paper – on or between the strings and hammers.

Cage’s work in the 1960s includes some of his largest and most ambitious compositions, as well as socially utopian projects that reflect the spirit of the era and his engagement with the writings of **Marshall McLuhan** (1911–1980) on the impact of new media and **R. Buckminster Fuller** (1895–1983) on technology’s potential to foster social change. *HPSCHD* (1969), a vast, durational multimedia work created with Lejaren Hiller, featured seven harpsichordists performing chance-determined excerpts from works by Cage, Hiller, and a compressed history of canonical classics, superimposed with fifty-two tapes of computer-generated sounds, 6,400 slides – many provided by NASA – projected through sixty-four slide projectors, and forty films. It was presented in a five-hour performance during which the audience entered after the piece had begun and left before it ended, freely circulating throughout the hall for as long as they chose to stay.

The 1985 event at Cankarjev dom was followed by an intriguing conversation in which Cage reflected on the (non)significance of music. He spoke about a mushroom recipe and about the inability of music to address the urgent problems facing the Earth, emphasizing that we must all work toward clean air, a clean environment, peace, and the elimination of the causes of global hunger.

Just as Cage was a musician and composer with a unique musical approach, Matej Stupica is an artist and musician with a unique artistic vision. He draws on the rich corpus of twentieth-century world avant-garde and brings it into the present, not merely referencing avant-garde landmarks but transporting them into contemporary times – into our minds, our guts (as Artaud remarked, art should be like *“a punch to the gut”*), and our hearts. Still, as we move forward, we must continue to fight for clean air, a healthy environment, peace, and the elimination of the causes of hunger worldwide. As we see today, in the twenty-first century, there is even more we must fight for – including, indeed, *“Topless Toplice.”*

– Peter Tomaž Dobrila in Matej Stupica

# Matej Stupica

## TOPLICE/TOPLESS

14 November–6 December 2025

MMC KIBLA/KiBela

**Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating**  
(John Cage, 1937)

*Toplice/Topless* is the second exhibition in the *Toplice* series, remixing elements from the first by doubling, negating, developing, or subtracting its content. If the English translation *“Topless”* for the Slovenian Toplice (literally *“spa”*) seems unsuitable or ironic, it is because it recalls a once-popular term meaning *“bare-chested”*, referring to women sunbathing or swimming without the top part of their swimsuits. Yet something more is hidden there: the second part of the title is revealing, but only partially. Half of the bodies either remain in the summery bareness of the spa’s VIP wing, where nudity is allowed, or are lost in the war in Palestine, where body parts are mixed with reinforcement structures, buildings in ruins, the city’s image, and hospital infrastructure. The bare female chest – once a symbol of revolutions – is now covered in newer editions of history textbooks, and, aided by human folly and artificial intelligence, an algorithm has generated a new image that complies with contemporary norms, at a time when the visual and conceptual brutality of real images surpasses the world of images and reproduced reality.

In this edition, the *“spa”* element in the title, compared to the first iteration of the series, takes on a central role and serves as both a generator and starting point for meaning. The first object associated with the spa imagery is *Fontana Mix* (2025), the central piece, which functions as an actual fountain. The second is the series of multiples *Whitewash* (2025), bath soaps printed with graphics from the Toplice series. The textual component, authored by **Andrej Tomažin**, also directly draws on the spa phenomenon. The essay accompanying the first exhibition, *Toplice/Terms*, was divided into thematically fragmented sections related to individual themes within the exhibition, whereas this essay, *Toplice/Topless*, focuses on a single theme, the spa, and through it introduces content that connects to the exhibition’s themes.

One of the principal tools of *Toplice* is language. The English translation, *Topless*, is thus understood as an extension of meaning – a new semantic field. Here, as duality, paradox, an intersection of comfort and wartime destruction. On one hand, there is the body focusing on itself, health, and repose; on the other, the body becomes collateral damage in the pursuit of military interests and conflicts.

The central piece, *Fontana Mix*, is shaped by the underlying principle of a fountain: all objects within it are subordinated to the flow and dripping of water. The work borrows its name from John Cage’s composition of the same title, which consists of ten sheets of paper and twelve transparencies, featuring curved lines, a grid, and a straight line. The fountain follows this principle: curved pipes along which water flows represent the curved lines; structural profiles represent the straight lines; and textile elements signify the grid. The textile components, created by costume designer **Hana Podvršič**, are made from materials used in police uniforms – a sign of the repressive apparatus increasingly present in contemporary societies. In this way, Cage’s focus on street sounds and found sounds or objects is deliberately subverted.

John Cage (1912–1992), one of the most important avant-garde and revolutionary composers, who “taught” us to listen to and perceive music with “a new ear,” visited Slovenia forty years ago, in May 1985, when he presented an evening of his works at Cankarjev dom. It was his first and only visit to the country. I was there, and after the event I spoke with the composer and musician who was arguably the most influential figure in twentieth-century music. I was struck by his warmth, ease, candor, and lucidity as he opened the evening with a concert, continued with a reading of his poetry, and concluded with an encore – an unannounced twenty-minute variation he decided to add to the program at the last moment. He titled the event *Variations on Mushrooms*. Those who knew him were aware that his favorite pastime was mushroom foraging, something he pursued during every tour: he would inquire about local mushrooms and set off into the forest. Because gathering is always followed by cooking, he spoke about a recipe for mushrooms and about the insignificance of music, which offers no solutions to the pressing problems facing the Earth today. He emphasized that we must all fight for clean air, a healthy environment, peace, and the eradication of the causes of hunger worldwide.

It is no surprise that he was a musician and composer with a unique artistic approach, as his music continues to provoke and elicit a wide range of responses, from dismissive to exalted. Cage is among the few composers who transcended the narrowly defined boundaries of the discipline and shaped the broader artistic landscape of the second half of the twentieth century. He collaborated with some of the most radical artists of the period, pioneers of contemporary artistic practices across diverse fields. With the French artist, chess player and inventor **Marcel Duchamp** (1887–1968), a key figure in the development of the avant-garde in the United States, he played chess; these encounters in which the two avid players “made music” and played in earnest by moving pieces across the chessboard before an audience, were also sort of performances. With the Korean video artist **Nam June Paik** (1932–2006), who was also Cage’s mentor, he staged action-based audiovisual performances. Alongside musical instruments and various found objects – ranging from children’s toys and buckets of water to the washing of hair with shampoo, all used as sound-producing devices – they incorporated video into their performances as early as 1960. Nam June Paik, whom I also met, is recognized as the first video artist in the world. With the choreographer and dancer **Merce Cunningham** (1919–2009), who also performed in Ljubljana, Cage played a pivotal role in the development of modern dance, which swept across Europe and the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. In New York, he collaborated with the renowned Soviet experimental filmmaker **Maya Deren** (1917–1961), one of the most eminent figures of the New York avant-garde. Together with the Japanese essayist, philosopher, religious scholar and translator **D. T. Suzuki** (1870–1966), a leading authority on Buddhism, especially Zen and Shin, he advanced the dissemination of Zen Buddhism and integrated Indian philosophy and culture into their lectures with music.

In his essay *Defense of Satie*, he championed the music of French composer and pianist **Erik Satie** (1866–1925), which was then regarded as inferior, even as barroom music, and identified Satie as one of the first avant-gardists of the early twentieth century. He also “enthroned” Satie as the progenitor of (American) minimalism in the second half of the twentieth century. Today, Satie is considered essential repertoire for contemporary pianists.

Cage paid homage to Satie again in 1969, when he composed *Cheap Imitation for Piano* – his first fully notated work in several years. The composition is a chance-controlled reworking of Satie’s – tellingly titled – **Socrate**. Both listeners and Cage himself acknowledged that the piece was openly sympathetic to its source. Although Cage’s admiration for Satie’s music was well known, it was highly unusual for him to compose a personal work in which another composer’s presence was so explicit. When asked about this apparent contradiction, Cage responded: “*It is obvious that Cheap Imitation lies outside what might seem necessary in my work in general, and that is disturbing. I am the first to be disturbed by it.*” Cage’s attachment to the work even resulted in a recording – a rare occurrence, since Cage disliked making recordings of his own music – which was made in 1976. In many respects, *Cheap Imitation* marked a significant shift in Cage’s music:

he returned to writing fully notated pieces for traditional instruments and explored several new approaches, such as improvisation, which he had previously discouraged but was able to integrate into works from the 1970s.

*Cheap Imitation* was also the last work Cage performed publicly. He had struggled with arthritis since 1960, and by the early 1970s his hands were painfully swollen, making public performance impossible. Nevertheless, he continued to play *Cheap Imitation* into the 1970s before he was finally forced to stop performing altogether. Preparing manuscripts also became difficult: previously, published versions of his works had been produced in Cage’s own calligraphic hand, but now assistants had to complete the manuscripts for publication.

In the late 1950s, he and his students developed the artistic form known as the “happening” and his courses in “experimental composition” became legendary as the American source of *Fluxus* – the international network of artists, composers, and designers devoted to audiovisual events and multimedia psychophysical performances, in which their presence and physical bodies became part of the action. They created distinctive, all-encompassing artworks. In this context, Cage also drew on the work of French multimedia artist **Antonin Artaud** (1896–1948), known primarily for his writings and his work in theater, film, and music. Widely recognized as a major figure of the European avant-garde, Artaud had a particularly profound impact on twentieth-century theater through his concept of the “theater of cruelty.” He was known for his raw, surrealist, and transgressive oeuvre, and his writings explored themes from the cosmologies of ancient cultures, philosophy, occultism, mysticism, and indigenous Mexican and Balinese practices.

Between 22 and 29 November 1947, Artaud recorded the work *Pour en finir avec le Jugement de Dieu (To Have Done with the Judgment of God)*. The piece remained true to his vision of the theater of cruelty, using “screams, rants, and vocal shudders” to realize that vision. The director of French Radio withdrew the work from the broadcast schedule the day before its planned airing on 2 February 1948, partly because of its scatological, anti-American, and anti-religious references and statements, and partly because of its overall indeterminacy, with its cacophony of xylophone sounds mixed with various percussive elements, screams, grumbling, onomatopoeia, and glossolalia. In response, the director of dramatic and literary programming for French Radio convened a committee of fifty artists, writers, musicians, and journalists, who attended a private listening session on 5 February 1948 to evaluate the broadcast. Although the committee was almost unanimously in favor of airing Artaud’s piece, the director refused to authorize the broadcast and subsequently resigned. The work was not aired publicly until 8 July 1964, when a public radio station in Los Angeles broadcast an illicit copy; the first French radio broadcast took place in 1967, twenty years after its original production.

We now turn to the work of Matej Stupica, whom we first encountered through his drawings, comics, and illustrations, but whose first solo exhibition in Maribor reveals his engagement with other artistic fields as well. In his multimodal and multidimensional installations, he brings together this creative complexity, involving numerous collaborators in their creation. *Toplice/Topless* is a unique gesamtkunstwerk in which drawing, shifting from static to animated, intertwines with sound, text, video, musical instruments, and various objects that, combined with electromechanical kinetics, add a performative dimension to the work. The arrangements come to life in either controlled or chaotic dynamics and, amid the general cacophony, connect to form a unique environment into which we can immerse ourselves or simply observe from the “shore.” Entering this imaginary world, where sound and image shape a complex installation, we encounter contemplative sensations that place us in a kind of “spa” of our own – a soothing environment that imposes no diagnosis.

“Geothermal springs mark the intersection of two ontological strata: the ordered surface of natural law and the chaotic interior ruled by the forces of chaos.”

“Contemporary society’s fixation on flexibility and fluid movement – evident in yoga studios,

# BIOGRAPHY

**KIBELA**

Website



**Matej Stupica** (born 1987, Ljubljana, SFR Yugoslavia) is an artist, working in various fields of contemporary art and theatre. His work consists of installations, drawings, comics, artist's books, paintings, illustrations for books, newspaper, music albums, etc. In 2014 he graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana with a bachelor degree in painting. Since 2006 he has been publishing illustrations in *Objektiv*, the Saturday supplement of the Slovenian newspaper *Dnevnik*. Since 2012 he also works in a tandem with artist Lenka Đorojević. For their work *Monomat*, they received OHO Award for Young Artists in 2015. Works and lives in Ljubljana.

Concept and realization: **Matej Stupica** / Text: **Andrej Tomažin** / Voice: **Ana Pepelnik and Andrej Tomažin** / Costumes: **Hana Podvršič** / 3D animation and video montage: **Neža Knez** / Sound collaborator: **Staš Vrenko** / Coding: **Matic Potočnik** / Electronics: **Gregor Krpič** / 3D recording and processing: **Anže Mrak** / 2D text animation: **Jure Lavrin** / Fine mechanics: **Bojan Stefanović** / Song: **Irena Tomažin** / Song mix: **Tomaž Grom** / Thanks to: **Aljaž Lavrič, Krištof Modic, Uroš Mehle, Katerina Mirović (Stripcore), Uroš Vovk, DA Tisk, Martin Lovšin Schintr, Primož Čučnik, Tomo Per, Andraž Magajna, Lenka Đorojević**

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Matej Stupica: Toplice/Topless  
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MMC KIBLA/KiBela

MMC KIBLA/KiBela, Ulica kneza Koclja 9, Maribor  
Opening hours: Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.