

review

The luxury of stability

Sustainability, eco-politics and climate-change



Ex abrupto. I agreed to take on a challenge. To write about subjects that are, to a greater extent, on everyone's minds, alas stubbornly gaged by artists. Sustainability, eco-politics, climate-change: the depth of intellectual dogmatism and the complexity of tone. After visiting the exhibition "Chronicles of the Future Superheroes" curated by Anca Verona Mihuleț, which opened on October 2, 2021 – still on view until March 20, 2022 at the Kunsthalle Bega in Timișoara, I realized that my plunges into her proposed calm waters should be high in some places and low in others. However, getting vertical was always a challenge.

The exhibition "**Chronicles of the Future Superheroes →**," a large-scale multi-media show based on the book *Danielle: Chronicles of a Superheroine* by American inventor Ray Kurzweil, which follows the efforts of a young woman to solve the world's great problems with the help of knowledge and technology.

Miss Mihuleț is based in Seoul and was awarded the 2019 Bega Art Prize for curating by Kunsthalle Bega in Timișoara, Romania, the city that was named **European Capital of Culture →** in 2016 and has been dirty bulking for the spotlight ever since (postponed to 2021 and later changed by the European Parliament to 2023).

Kunsthalle Bega has established a reputation in the local and international arena as a respected, worthy of good practice, extroverted swinger, juggling with the implicit and the explicit, in artistic, educational, and social splits, since its inaugural show, *SEEING TIME*, curated by Liviana Dan, an experienced curator, who has been on board since the beginning, assisting directors Alina Cristescu and Bogdan Rata in successfully landing their high jumps.

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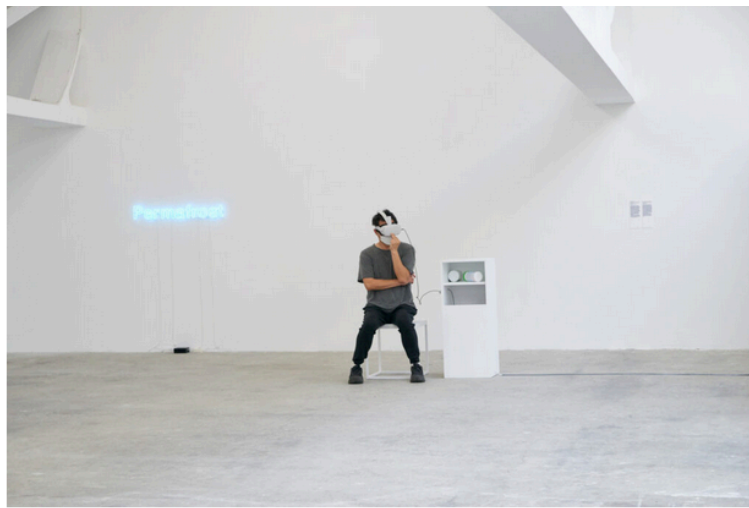
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Dimitar Solakov Permafrost and Icecaps, 2019 flickering neons / Let Humanity Tip Over. I Need Fewer Priorities, 2021 VR animation with sound, 2 mins. 45 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Vlad Cindea



Kunsthalle Bega photo: Alex



Fabio Lattanzi Antinori Masters and Slaves. Google, 2019 sculpture; LED, microcontrollers, extruded aluminium, electronics, financial data, 175 cm x 13.5 cm x 60 cm Courtesy of the artist and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Vlad Cindea



Stardust Architects Meta

The twelve positions as the curator insists in calling the artistic inputs are at stake: **Hyunjin Bek** → (South Korea) / **Adriana Chiruta** → (Romania) / **Baptiste Debombourg** → (France) / **Heecheon Kim** → (South Korea) / **Fabio Lattanzi Antinori** → (UK) / **Lawrence Lek** → (UK) / **Dalibor Martinis** → (Croatia) / → **Adina Mocanu** → (Romania) / **Maria Pop Timaru** → (Romania) / **Larisa Sitar** → (Romania) / **Dimitar Solakov** → (Bulgaria) / **Stardust Architects** → (Romania).

A symbolic toolset for a better world

The artists are experimenting with Kant's concept of the 'thing in itself', and with the risk we pose to ourselves, exhibiting preoccupations with finitude, displacement, and entitlement. With both the support of Baptiste Debombourg and Heecheon Kim's authoritative and lyrically colossal artistic diligence we skip the foreplay. Nevertheless, the leap that these two works make could not have been achieved without their proximity to each other.

A symbolic toolset for a better world is an obvious pre-requisite for this event, and it always appears to call on these two artists to provide it.



Adina Mocanu Being Nina, 2019 – 2021 Multi-channel video installation, on-site interventions, performance. Courtesy of the artists and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Vlad Cindea



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Adina Mocanu Being Nina, 2019 – 2021 Multi-channel video installation, on-site interventions, performance. Courtesy of the artists and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Vlad Cindea

It appears like no one feels at ease in this show. Both as an artist and as a writer, I am affected by this state of mind. Dissatisfaction with one's current situation is usually followed by a powerful intellectual proposal. Each artist's level of involvement in his or her work and geographic location are major factors. No matter what one sees in the show, it's never the object in and of itself. We are constantly whisked away to another location or universe.

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Shared love of berries, winemaking, and crème brûlée

Adina Mocanu's work is particularly poignant in this regard. A multimodal performative piece that includes 13 videos, an installation *in situ*, a performance, and a video projection from the Kunsthalle Bega directly to her hotel room is on display at this show. Her project's title *Being Nina* derives from that of a controversial Russian woman, Nina Kulagina, who claimed to possess mysterious psychic capabilities that were always performed on a table, raising doubts about the validity of her abilities. To set up a deeper narrative, she uses the story of Nina and Adina meeting in her hometown and their shared love of berries, winemaking, and crème brûlée. This is an attempt to show how ignorant we can be about our own creative abilities in light of the world's apparent inability to deal with her powers. Adina appears to place a high value on narrating the tale quite linearly, as if she is attempting to entrap the audience inside the confines of the written word. Nina Kulagina's universe is brought to life through a series of old-fashioned monitors and screens that are only shown for a brief period of time in the 40-minute narrative. Adina's ability to create an entrancing atmosphere for her audience is a sign of their undeniable artistic power.

Using a method known as the cone of light, Adina Mocanu, Larisa Sitar, and Stardust Architects engage in a dialogue with Danielle on the wings of the past.



nd Kunsthalle Bega photo:



Larisa Sitar Studiu (II) pentru Aeternum, 2021 bas-relief; cement, 2,2 x 2,7 m Courtesy of the artists and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Vlad Cindea

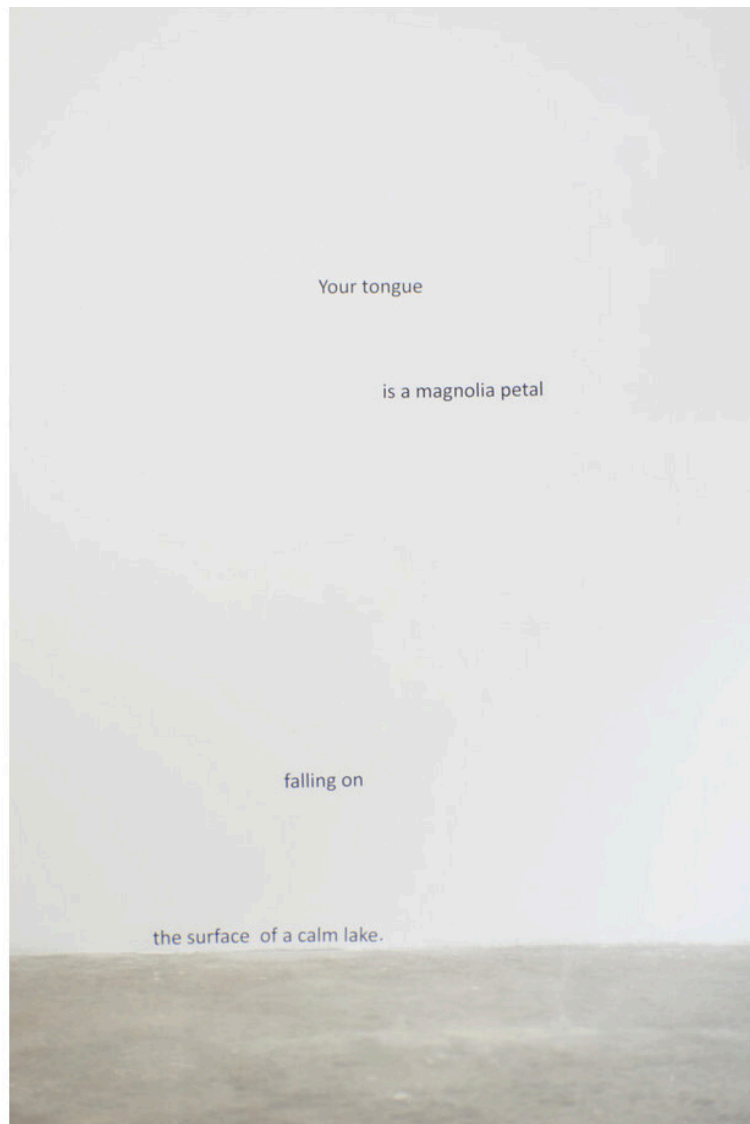
Larisa Sitar Studiu (II) pen

A reminder of the generational amnesia that we're all prone to experiencing throughout our lives.

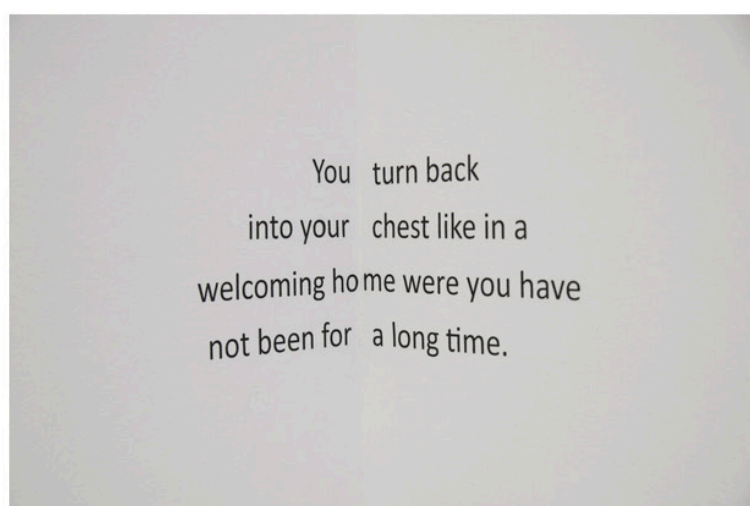
For example, in her large cement wall sculpture, *Study (II) for Aeternum*, by **Larisa Sitar**, composed of multiple studies for a larger unrealized work, she takes a position within the medium's expression that is both temporally modernist and aesthetically futuristic. Similarly, in their circular table installation, Stardust Architects collective (Anca Cioarec and Brîndușa Tudor), show the inside of various methods of resource management authorized by five meta cooks. *Metakitchen* is an installation that began in 2017 for Romania's representation at Venice Biennial and currently displays a wide range of organic materials, including anion, avocado skins, and seeds, calabash (*Lagenaria siceraria*), a plant that is no longer used in our dishes but had a very different story 300 years ago, hemp shives and other organic construction materials. Allowing the passage of water vapours, hempcrete regulates humidity levels by absorbing excess water vapours and releasing them when humidity levels fall below a certain level. In the meantime, like-minded eco-logistics are quietly updating these technologies, and the Stardust Architects' work serves as a reminder of the generational amnesia that we're all prone to experiencing throughout our lives.

"Life blooms in a big empty space"

Adriana Chiruta, a theatre director and philosophy graduate, uses her atmospheric punch lines scattered throughout the exhibit area to remind us of the brain's innate capacity for creativity. This is how Chiruta engages his audience: with texts like "You shake as a crimson algae on the bottom of the ocean" and "Life blooms in a big empty space.". As a surrealist, she believes that art has the power to save the world. With Chiruta's works, I've been forced to re-evaluate what we do in a culture that's plagued by an inability to attribute cause. Through her art, she expresses her desire to heal both the social and personal evils of the world, as well as her own personal trauma in a ritual for sensitive people. As Chiruta points out in a brief video presentation of her technique, it's not yet clear whether art can save the planet.



Adriana Chiruta Techniques to get out of the needle for those who believe they are butterflies, 2021
Performative installation consisting of video, sound, 11 micro-movement techniques and a collective ritual for sensitive people. Courtesy of the artists and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Vlad Cindea



Adriana Chiruta Techniques to get out of the needle for those who believe they are butterflies, 2021
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But if we adjust our focus, we come across something a little more obstinate, resistant to the polarization, us-them, inside versus outside, in place versus out of place.



Heecheon Kim, *Deep in the Forking Tanks*, 2019 video still; video HD, 42 mins. 54 secs. Courtesy Heecheon Kim



Heecheon Kim, *Deep in the Forking Tanks*, 2019 video still; video HD, 42 mins. 54 secs. Courtesy Heecheon Kim

Deep in the Forking Tank

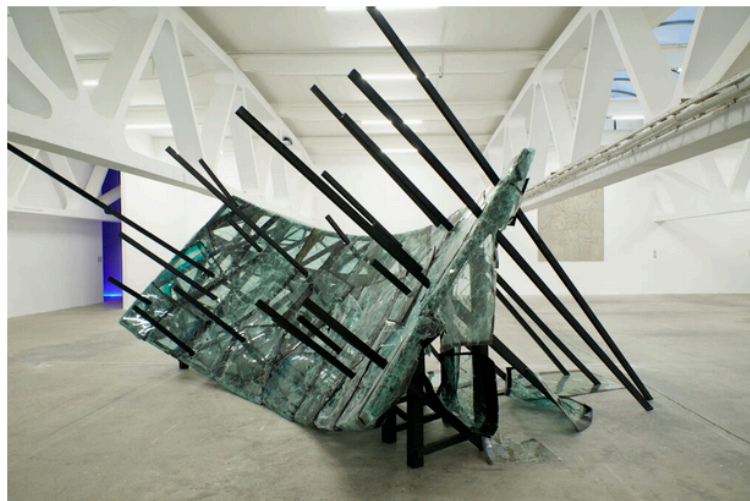
Heecheon Kim's *Deep in the Forking Tanks* (2019), a film lasting more than 40 minutes, explores the ways in which the development of new tools and gadgets alters human cognition. The artist's attention on free choice and body release in a hybrid film in which the artist is concerned with the potential of people becoming autonomous cars fascinates me. K-pop dancers who are trying to "leave their bodies" are followed by the camera during a long session of public dance routines. It is their mission to free themselves from their bodies by disabling their internal surveillance function, which constantly checks who they are, when and where they have been to ensure continuity. They practically become dancing machines as a result, to create new body images and liberate those filmy fragments of their own personalities. The story's trajectory is aesthetically interesting, with a variety of imaginative camera work, such as low-resolution film, concealed cameras, and underwater recordings. This disembodied sensation is the ultimate goal of all of this. In addition to being more intriguing because of the unmediated nature of the footage, viewers are also drawn in by its treatment of the persons depicted as representations that transcend the limitations of the body. It's said by the narrator at one point in the movie that this gang has the desire to forget their own bodies and eventually vanish. "The Day of Automation" is the moniker given to this drive. As depicted in the film, this day occurred just a few days before Day of the Dead in the late autumn of 2019. One of the dancers said, "the automated vehicle is a graphic-like or data-like existence, speeding across the graphical environment." So there are a variety of methods to go about it. Approaching the topic of resolution in a variety of ways is an option that we have. By relinquishing control over the resolution of space and time, we can achieve this.

It's not just divers who come to meet the South Korean artist in the Forking Tanks; they also venture down into the water. A trial dive in a float tank prepares him for the real thing. Voiced over by Kim, the first-person narration asserts that this is a video log of Kim's first-person training in the floating tank, which was used to collect the corpse of an underwater diver who had perished in an underwater cave and left a video log till her final moments. However, neither the time period nor the location of the narration are made explicit. It's also known as a "sensory deprivation tank," which allows you to completely block off your senses of sight, hearing, and smell. When a person is submerged in one of these tanks, their sense of body disappears, allowing them to concentrate solely on their thoughts. One begins to wonder if they're in a simulation or truly diving as the training progresses. "While imagining my body as a pool of water, I consider the pixels that make up my physical form. That moment when I entered the water and felt its warmth on my body is something I can never forget. Until you look at the video recording, you've forgotten everything." says the narrator. Another sensory stimuli is gaining momentum in the tank as they are being drawn into an altered state of consciousness. The "tank" in this context is a frame that can both blur and enhance the line between what we see as real and what we perceive as unreal.

To test his hypotheses, Heecheon Kim uses video as a medium to create storylines he then tests. First, he captures a real-life event on film in a documentary style. In order to back up his claims, he relies on this document. The artist uses GPS, VR, face swapping, games, and other digital tools to enhance his footage. Digital applications are one of his key visual rhetoric and serve as a platform for stimulating alternative conceptions of reality in his artistic activity."



Baptiste Debombourg Untitled, 2021 contextual installation; wood, broken windshields, dimensions variable Courtesy of the artist and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Vlad Cindea



Baptiste Debombourg Untitled, 2021 contextual installation; wood, broken windshields, dimensions variable Courtesy of the artist and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Vlad Cindea

A Manifestation of the Subconscious

The brutal *mise en scene* *Untitled* by **Baptiste Debombourg** immediately weaponizes the view of the entire space. As though seeing a manifestation of the subconscious, the artist used two components (wood pillars and cracked windshields) to force a penetrative interaction of forces in this large-scale installation, which was built specifically for the location.

"The thing I came for: the wreck and not the story of the wreck, the thing itself and not the myth." Adrienne Rich wrote in one of her early poems.



Baptiste Debombourg *Untitled*, (detail) 2021 contextual installation; wood, broken windshields, dimensions variable Courtesy of the artist and Kunsthalle Bega photo: Alex Mirutziu

Menacingly erect and 'facing' the entrance it sets the tone superbly. It then transforms into an image with its locus in the mind and maybe even a lens through which the visitor looks at the other works. A metaphor of a memory too painful to bring to light, the image of a corpse whose rot we have the luxury to examine and come back to.

A graduate of the Ecole National des Beaux Arts in Lyon, Debombourg is a sculptor who uses windscreens as a metaphor for the protective shield that protects and edulcorates our minds from reality. As of 2015, he has used glass to create conceptual installations that elicit a visceral response from his audience. Instead of the old-fashioned artisanal aspect and politeness of the material, it's the vibrancy of the material itself that attracts him. Glass is not distributed when broken since the material is laminated. Distinct layouts and sizes of glass sheets take over the areas that are being hammered by an expert sculptor who is interested in destroying surfaces, expressing interference or tempering, and accepting it as a norm in today's culture.

Taking a break from the 'out of sight out of mind' narrative of the late twentieth century is an important aspect and strength of this exhibition. What has been quietly and methodically devalued in our lives has come back to haunt us and question everything. A surplus of usefulness leads to uselessness, and an excess of communication leads to ineffective communication. But there is still a space where we can act, improve, and explore in this man-made world where there is no nature left except for that fraction we allow. Finally, the curator and the artists are successful in bringing us closer to ourselves through artistic clarity and urgency, a demonstration of the impacts of knowledge, which can never be completely innocent, urging us to face the consequences of our actions, mystified in the fog of daily life.

About The Author



**Alex
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Artist whose practice deals with the process of how we create meaning to interpret the world around us. Inspired by philosophy, literature, and design, he explores the inadequate use of objects, language, and the body as tools of communication.