

## WORK OF ART AND EXHIBITION AS A DISCURSIVE FORM. AND VICE VERSA.

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With a combination of spontaneity and studiousness, Amela Frankl has been developing the multidisciplinary project *Black Glass on the Way* since 2019, the divergent forms of which enable consolidation of all her conceptual, methodological, media and aesthetic interests. The project is conceptualised as a journey, so from its inception it tautologically adopted the form of a journey towards its comprehensive end, through the successive presentation of individual stages from one exhibition space to another, from city to city. As part of this exhibition strategy, the set-up at the Josip Račić Gallery, under an even more poetic title *A Stone on a Branch*, should be understood as a milestone on a multi-year journey. The entire project was born during the artist's trips to Mauritania, a vast and sparsely populated country in the western region of Sub-Saharan Africa. Like the hero of Conrad's novella "Heart of Darkness"<sup>1</sup>, who, on his river voyage towards the centre of the exotic continent, ultimately came face to face with the animalistic and self-destructive aspects of human beings and civilised society, Amela Frankl, albeit travelling by land, encountered or confronted, in the process of habitual self-examination, the artist in herself again. Unlike Conrad's colonial corporate agent who sailed up the river and into the stifling lush heart of tropical Africa, as a metaphor for inscrutable animalistic urges that tear asunder the thin skin of civilised humanity with ease, Frankl found herself in a diametrically opposite environment of the desert, the inorganic exclusivity of which steered the artist, who bases her work on personal experience, towards quintessential doubts about the meaning of art within the defining discourse of life. As she herself will say, she found herself in a desert that is also barren of artistic activity. If, in the interpretation of the exhibition *A Stone on a Branch*, as a metaphor for the dislocation of artistic work itself, apparent in the very title of the exhibition, we start from the assumption that artwork is a medium of communication between the artist and the observer, with a vague creative input and an even less predictable variable of ensuing conclusions, we will quickly understand that the discursive format of the audience's encounter with the artwork, although a key point of communication, is only one in a series of dialogues necessary for the construction and perception of the work of art. The context of the artist's stay in Mauritania, which reduced her view of the environment to a suitable for introspection contrast of the blue sky and ocean with white sand, or rather the deep blue sky and the desert ochre, exposed her, on an existential level, to the surprising experience of exotic culture based on an inherent (post)colonial perspective of the 'other', the foreigner, the Westerner. For Amela Frankl, this specific yet simplified and layered situation initiated that essential internal process of examining herself as a participant in the social construct of art that is inherent to all creative work based on ethical postulates of honesty and truth. Simply put, Amela Frankl intended to methodologically develop this fruitful, but formally and substantively still undetermined position, through a dialogue with the curator in a creative synergy that goes beyond, and thus exposes, the usual process of constituting artistic work into a concrete exhibition. Since the original plan did not materialise, the collaboration remained within the

framework of the conventional dialogue between the artist and the curator, which determines the substantive and formal aspects of the what, how, how much, when and in what parameters, type of exhibition. The planned framework of the exhibition, in accordance with the Josip Račić Gallery programmatic focus on the traditionally understood art object, was conceived as a series of posters on the theme of dialogue between the artist and the curator, and it developed into an epistle of sorts on a poster, in which the artist, through a formal dialogue of visuals and text, presents her side of the communication established by the exhibition. The posters, as a dialogue between the artist and the designers, are based on performative black and white photographs focused on the figure, gesture and facial expression of the artist, in order to demonstrate the intensity of her inner dialogue processes. Direct and confessional statements delivered as unexpectedly witty colloquial phrases, in more or less rhyming stanzas and uniform font and position, are placed at the bottom of the visual as their integral part, much like film subtitles. In a steady rhythm, similar to a film reel or a photo-novel, the posters completely saturate the parameters of the exhibition space. Two video works with sounds and colours that refer to the context of Mauritania, are presented as a discursive pair to this uniform, black-and-white series of static situations. The first, PK22, presents a recording of the physically demanding local fishing method, which can easily be interpreted, from a Western voyeuristic perspective, as an exciting choreography. The second, titled the Last Motif but One, is a performance of the artist's direct confrontation with the vast desert landscape on the edge of a beaten road that meanders into space until it exits the frame. Amela Frankl, her barefoot and nude body wrapped in a fur coat, enters the frame with a shovel, and throughout the performance, she shovels the material, resembling the rest of the landscape and the road, from the artificial pile to the very edge of the road. For the duration of the monotonous and practically pointless action, the rocks are stabbing at her bare feet, the dry desert wind ruffles the hair and lifts the fur coat. The dialogue between these two videos – the first featuring the choreography of the practical and pragmatic physical labour, and the second presenting the choreography of the symbolic, artistic activity – clearly points to the methodological similarities and essential differences between these two human activities. On the other hand, the first indicates the passive perception of local existence through the prism of the other, and inherently, superior position, while the second is an attempt to actively infiltrate the local living space with personal energy and worldview in an attempt to reject the stereotypically assigned roles. Perhaps it is meant for our eyes only, but the artist did indeed intend this dialogue for those who look at other people's existence from a safe and culturally dominant position, regardless of whether they are looking at the exoticism of Mauritania or artistic work. The question we all ask ourselves about what is Amela Frankl actually doing or at least trying to communicate in the layered, discursive, but still inscrutable dialogue of the A Stone on a Branch, is perhaps best revealed by a single colour photograph: titled If I were to close my eyes now... Taken in Mauritania in 2019, it shows a motif of an asphalt road, with a series of light posts on the left side, that is gradually being covered and swallowed by desert sand. The futility of human efforts and actions, the overpowering indifference of nature that does not distinguish between

organic and inorganic, life and death, artistic and non-artistic, and so on, all this and more fits into a reference to any segment of earthly existence, albeit more clearly outlined when viewed through the prism of existence in, what to us is an exotic destination.

1 “Heart of Darkness” (1899) is a novella by the English-Polish writer Joseph Conrad, in which the old sailor Charles Marlow recounts the story from his tropical voyage that develops into a testimony of colonial plunder and oppression. It provided the inspiration for Francis Ford Coppola’s film “Apocalypse Now” (1979)