

OSKÁR  
ČEPAN  
AWARD  
2021  
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**KHB**  
Kunsthalle  
Bratislava



*AT LEAST,  
A POSSIBILITY...*

**LUKI  
ESSENDER**

**ÈV  
VAN  
HETTMER**

**ONDŘEJ  
HOUŠŤAVA**

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LANGER**

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## *All In: At Least, a Possibility...*

There is no end in sight to the pandemic. We are growing accustomed to the status quo, hoping that in time something new will replace it. At first, we were all optimistic, and we projected models and formats in our minds: a new collectivity, a solidarity-based approach to everyone around us. But where are those times when we sewed masks, brought older people their shopping, and planned a world that had learned the lessons of the pandemic? A world in which the current late capitalism will be replaced by another system. One that will so far stay abstract, nebulous, porous and open-source like, one that will be gradually formed, while taking practical knowledge from all that we are going through?

The answers are never absolute. Active cleavage and polarisation in society are more obtrusive than ever before. Instead of the original hope, we are getting by on a daily basis in fear of unforeseeable things in our lives and livelihoods and blaming the other side (however difficult it may be to identify) from where we seemingly firmly stand. A typical, ever-recurring story! Rationality sublimated as a long-since forgotten dream. In parallel, the mental health pandemic is gradually excising from the world those who might have offered the potential of change. In this condition, in this setting of contradiction, we silently stride onwards each new day.

Fortunately, however, there are relevant voices that resonate and can scatter the otherwise seemingly impenetrable mist of pessimism and scepticism. This year's nominees for the Oskár Čepan Award are a good example. In the recent past, most of the art awards were attempting to examine the possibilities of non-competition and equality among artists. In the perspective of current events this discussion already looks like a sunset gleam from more peaceful and hence more privileged times. The artists in the Oskár Čepan

Award 2021 are constructing new systems of resistance, or sketching possible contemporary and future narratives on personal axes. Each of them offers their alternative to the general state of society, whether in the form of analysis and critical thinking, directive polemic, or specific forms of resistance, or through self-preserving dissociation. Without exaggeration, one can say that these artists have produced a joint work, although divided into individual fragments. As if unconsciously, they have created a navigation system steering a course for different realities. Given these circumstances, the choice of a “winner” is only a minor ripple, which does not “outshout” the impact, testimonial value, relevance and reach of each input. Potential pathways are offered via meditation; queering of established discourses, contemporary and historical narratives; utopian visions with hints of their polar opposites, a mild flirtation with dystopia; and a voice of indignation, uttered plainly and harshly.

*All In: At Least, a Possibility*, i.e. this year’s Oskár Čepan Award exhibition, does not dictate how viewers should behave, does not point to the right or the left, and does not attempt to replace already existing authorities with new ones. Openly, and at the same time with precision, it offers a potential for change, or escape from the cul-de-sac which we are pressed into, apparently leaving no way out.

Jen Kratochvil & Lucia Gavulová

In 2021 the international jury of experts chose five artists who are nominated for the award. They are Luki Essender (\*1995), Ěv van Hettmer (\*1987), Ondřej Houšťava (\*1995), Tamara Kametani (\*1988) and Viktorie Langer (\*1988).

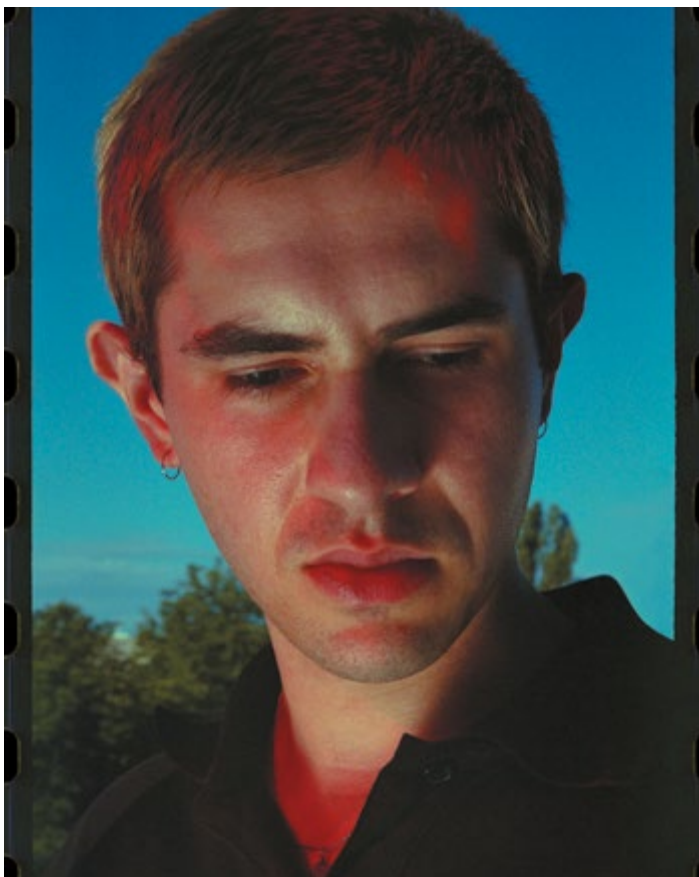


Photo: Ľuboš Kotlár



LUKI  
ESSENDER

In this exhibition, Luki Essender presents a number of narratives in the form of an installation, which, however, can be understood as a complex sculptural statement. They create an environment that includes components created and manufactured in Bratislava. For this purpose, they moved here for half a year from Stockholm, where they otherwise live and work. Replicas of Bratislava realia appear in the installation, for example deck chairs from the Kuchajda lake area.

A significant reference to folklore traditions is placed here, the charred part of the figure of Morena, the winter goddess. Large-format wooden frames with house numbers and various attributes are situated along the walls, at first glance non-homogeneous or even chaotic, but with a consistent artistic logic. The setting which Luki creates does not let the viewer under its skin easily. It is all the more captivating when one finally unravels the individual layers of its contents, each one referring to the artist's various circles of interest. The viewer finds themselves at the centre of Essender's experience and thinking, situated in between hints of self-portraiture and the careful analysis of phenomena, spreading out over a rich scale where public intersects with private.

Behind all this is a long-term process of creating and examining, accompanied by a certain slowness. The artist did concentrated work at relative length on the project for the Oskár Čepan Award, and this naturally caused its modification in the given time. One of the driving forces in Essender's work is a certain curiosity about where the process of discovering methods of expression will lead; the current installation, for example, is the most colourful they have done so far. Characteristic for this one is a strongly present sculptural interest, yet they approach the sculpture and installation both performatively and textually: from the outlined relationships one could construct a consequent narrative, that may be different for everyone.

The installation for the Oskár Čepan Award moves on an axis between sculpture and ritual, between exactness and

precision expressed in the form of strict materiality, through an open process that integrates metaphor, allusion and transformation. The abundance of inner questions, the interest in language, sexuality, the public, the private, and various types of relationships on this trajectory transform into a solid and tangible vocabulary. The artist builds, adds, does not destroy, alters. In a considered manner, following the work's own logic, seeking the most exact means for expression. They draw motifs from public space, whether it is fragments of architecture or work with language, including categorical elements which here take on the form of descriptive door numbers, that become another material layer the artist works with – an index. Every new element used mutates in the process into sculptural material. The narrative of the public intertwines with the private, which includes for example the wish to fulfil certain desires from the past, or to try to confront them: this is precisely the case with Morena, whom the artist in childhood years, together with a group from kindergarten, brought into a stream, but has since been unable to come to terms with the destructive act that was inflicted upon her there.

Even though Luki Essender's installation – scene – situation – spatial sculpture at the Oskár Čepan Award exhibition may at first appear as a kind of closure, the artist does not actually close their projects: they love to return to older works with newly acquired knowledge and with some distance over time, which in Luki's work is not in the least bit linear.

LG

LUKI ESSENDER (\*1995, Ilava) is based in Stockholm, Sweden. Between 2018 and 2020 studied at Konstfack – University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, graduating in Fine Art. In 2018, they graduated from Lenka Klodová's Body Design Studio of the Brno Technical University's Faculty of Visual Arts, having studied there from 2014.



Photo: Ľuboš Kotlár





È V  
VAN  
HETTMER

Into radiant shades of pink and orange, Èv wraps the dark folds of the world, which even after going through the globally widespread movements such as #metoo or #timesup, are still staggering in the legacy of our almost unseeable history of the patriarchal systems of power and the associated oppression and disregard for all bodies that are not masculine enough and not endowed by a shiny white skin. Enthusiastically and with inner urge, she expressively imprints her monumental canvases with statements, slogans and phrases that drive sharp spikes into the mindset of a male-dominated world.

Èv is not afraid of confrontation, irony, sarcasm, or outright harsh criticism, although she expresses herself mostly with her natural degree of snideness rather than the literalness of the problems that surround us. This is in a very similar spirit to her choice of the aforementioned colours for her canvases, cardboards or notebook pages. For Èv, there are no barriers impossible to break through. She is not interested in established power structures, therefore she moves freely, often with emphasis on her own individuality in spite of her surroundings.

Her confident painting has its natural parallel in the digital space of endless Instagram stories, where Èv situates the context of her thinking, worldview and clearly defined position, which is simply impenetrable. With every word on the canvas, the aggression and controlled anger of disillusionment with the functioning of the art world and the world we live in as such digs into the skin of anyone who still believes that the position of women should remain in the background. Her feminism is strong, distinctive and requires no fulcrum of collectivism or belonging, because Èv speaks for only herself, yet for all of us.

Her conscious stubbornness gives her the opportunity to paint ten canvases per day if her inner urge pushes her to do so. She doesn't like to think things through in advance and prefers to express them when the time is right. And if the conditions

are not right, she creates them herself. Early on, when the pandemic restrictions started, she wanted to buy a series of canvases to paint on during the lockdown. But the painting supply store literally shut the door in her face. So within a few moments, Èv shook off her dissatisfaction with the situation and went to the grocery store, where she got boxes of various products and painted the cardboard as if they were newly primed canvases.

To put it simply, Èv does not put any limits to her painterly expression, which is why she has recently started working with ceramic vases and sculptural objects, applying additional layers of paint and additional words to make clear what bothers her. Context is key, with a dose of a certain declared unconsciousness and its own denial.

Èv is a romantic artist straight out of art history books, who creates on her own terms, so that circumstances are just another fold of reality she has little respect for.

JK

ÈV VAN HETTMER (\*1987, Nitra) is based in Hamburg, Germany. In 2020, she graduated from the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna, Austria, with a 2019 scholarship in Hamburg, Germany. She got her bachelor's degree from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, the Department of Painting and Other Media.

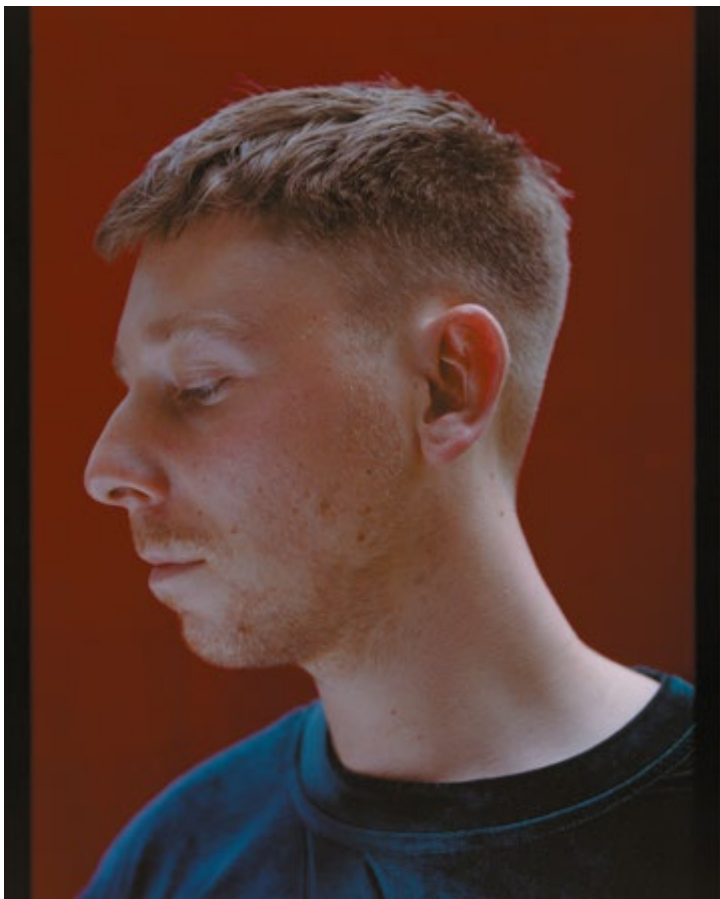


Photo: Ľuboš Kotlár



**ONDŘEJ  
HOUŠŤAVA**

Ondřej systematically looks for ways of collective work directly applying the outputs of shared research into his work, which thus ceases to be his own, but rather a kind of conjunction of multiple thinking, experience and knowledge. Ondřej does not like to speak of himself as an artist because he critically perceives this term as a historically defined construct established by the patriarchal systems of power of the privileged West. He considers himself more as a producer or mediator of voices he invites to cooperation. These voices do not belong only to his close collaborators, in this case performer Tonika Hunter, choreographer Silvia Sviteková, artist, curator and cultural producer Denis Kozerawski, sound designer Lenka Adamcová, lighting designer Gabriela Procházka, clothing designer Tomáš Košarištan, but also to the authors whose texts and lectures formed the backbone of the whole process, such as, among many others, the scholar Sara Ahmed, operating at the intersections of feminist theory, lesbian feminism, queer theory, critical race theory and postcolonialism.

At a time when every precarized cultural worker is forced by the globalized art world to build their own purely individualized representation through social media tools, endless exhibiting, sharing and networking, when the boundaries of the personal and the professional have ceased to apply and every single aspect of our lives is fully commodifiable, Ondřej attempts to set up alternative forms of solidarity, reciprocity and collectivism. He does not only want to thematize and evaluate these systems through his own work, but he reconfigures the principles of work itself on their basis. Rather than getting shallow answers, he is interested in asking open questions through utilisation of the full political potential of contemporary art as the platform for discourse, exchange and belonging to a greater social unit. For Ondřej, art is a tool of resistance, a tool for creating new inclusive narratives and challenging codified ways of perception, behaviour and existence.

His new film installation explores questions of orientation, the link between the body and the space it is situated in, as well as the mutual reciprocal influences that arise from such a link. He is looking for ways to express himself differently, to listen differently, and to move differently. Once the original contexts are erased, the space becomes unfamiliar, offering the potential for getting lost in the absence of previously clear navigation points. Then, the question is whether the original authoritatively established system of anchor points should be replaced by a new one, or whether it is possible to fully embrace the unknown and confusing and learn to live in it alone.

In his letter to Tonica, Ondřej recalls one of the resistance strategies of the Kurdish guerrillas, who used boots with inverted soles to confuse potential pursuers when crossing snowy mountains. Moving backwards. Apparent chaos. Confusion. Loss of orientation. The search for a different frequency or better frequency of movement and ways of passing through the spaces around us.

The impossible, the untranslatable, the inappropriate as the only meaningful trajectories of escape for an assumed rationality that is no longer able to offer answers due to the state of our world.

Ondřej is looking for ways how to queer our reality, not to attempt an individualistic dictate of the new, but instead to embrace and fully accept what the context offers.

JK

ONDŘEJ HOUŠŤAVA (\*1995, Vítkov) is based in Prague, Czech Republic. Between 2018 and 2020, he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, graduating from Studio vvv (visual, verbal, public). In 2017 and 2018 he studied Media Art at the Accademia di Belle Arti Frosinone in Italy, and previously at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Ostrava.

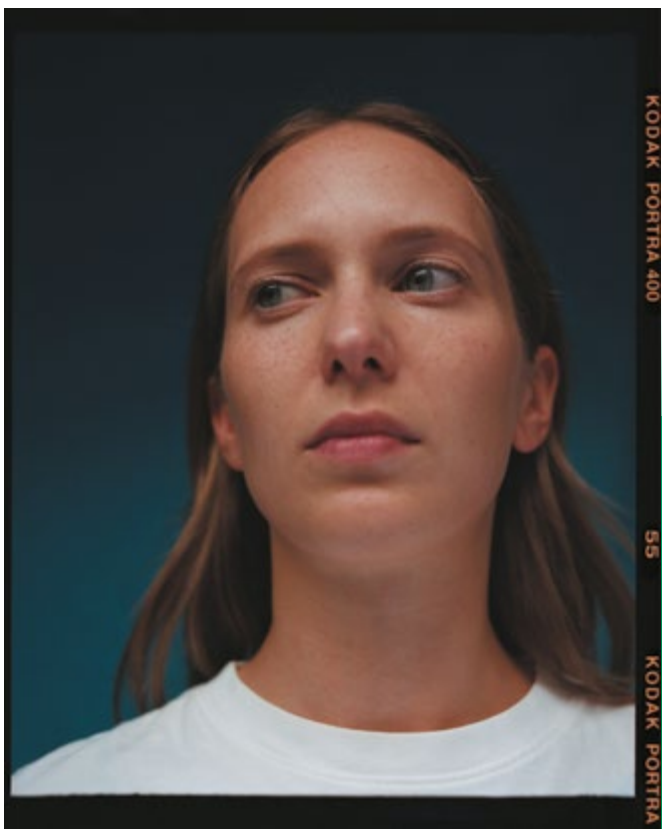


Photo: Luboš Kotlár





TAMARA  
KAMETANI

In 2005 Michel Houellebecq's novel *The Possibility of an Island* was issued by the French publisher Librairie Arthème Fayard. The text deals with the entire human race, in the culminating stage of the world's ruin. Now, in 2021, Tamara Kametani comes forward with the first part of a trilogy which makes predictions about the course that the world may potentially take, with the possibility of a Null Island. This is not merely a testimony about the current situation, or indeed about the universality of a theme that pervades some decades. Null Island is a place that may yet become home for all. Eden 2.0. *"When the asteroid finally penetrated the Earth's atmosphere and fell into the ocean, far away from inhabited regions, everyone breathed a sigh of relief. After a brief study, the location where it alighted was determined as 0,0 coordinates (only a small section of the meteorite remained above the surface). Naturally, for the Nullists this was the conclusive sign, even if the Human Coalition of the Earth insistently argued that the asteroid's point of impact was purely coincidental. Seeing this extraterrestrial event as confirmation of their belief and a claim to the 0,0 coordinates, the Nullists declared with finality their religious right to exodus."* So much for this citation from the voiceover part of Tamara Kametani's exhibited work entitled *The End in Three Parts, Part One*.

In 2020 Tamara came to the conclusion that she wanted to move her art practice closer to the ideas that she had of its future direction. After a certain period of "artist's block", she found her path in "free research", having spent time reflecting and pondering the method of achieving this. For her, the path seemed to be one of reading, assimilating and re-evaluating new sums of information. It was then that Tamara began to unfold a story in her mind, oscillating on an axis of utopia and dystopia, proceeding de facto from the future but reacting upon the present. There is a place in it for a pandemic, religion, belief, conspiracy theories and escapist scenarios. Its mission and content are evident in the statement, and so are the grounds for choosing the medium of film: in times of uncertainty about the possibilities for presenting physical objects, it appears (even under potentially unfavourable

conditions) an alternative that is sufficiently flexible and capable of representation.

This artist describes herself as a *reactive artist*. Her mode of working is based on observing actual events and the organic reaction to them. When something interests her, she naturally tends to pursue a closer examination of the given phenomena and situations, and subsequently she begins to thematise them creatively in her own perspective. She does not take an a priori critical stance to anything. Her method is based rather on observation and commentary, which offers a certain groundplan for the viewer on which they are given the opportunity to freely reinterpret the themes presented. Since as a society we do not have solutions for practically anything in our current society, and the outlook on existence in this setting ipso facto induces scepticism and makes the individual's life difficult, Kametani therefore leaves her postulates open. To her it is not of decisive importance that her point of view is met by public's opinion. In any event, however, she communicates what she is thinking, and this by using a contemporary method: for the most part she opts for digital media, even with awareness of their ephemerality and the prospect of rapid obsolescence and extinction. That belongs to the nature of technologies, which are central to her interests as an artist and at the same time are the sustaining means of expression of her artistic narratives.

LG

TAMARA KAMETANI (\*1988, Nitra) is based in Athens, Greece and London, UK. Between 2015 and 2017, she studied and graduated from the Contemporary Art Practice Department of the Royal College of Art in London, UK, having previously graduated in Film & Photography from the Edinburgh Napier University. In 2020, she took part in a Google Maps Residency (Offsite Project) in London.



Photo: Ľuboš Kotlár



VIKTORIE  
LANGER

Viktorie's work offers an alternative to the codified reading of reality. Literally, it presents a kind of abstract map for searching the path to epiphany. However, this is not a digital map that would calculate the fastest trajectory, show us a series of gas stations and rest stops along the way, warn us of potential traffic jams, or point out places with a higher risk of crashes. Rather than that, her map is a guide to navigating the contemporary world of predatory late capitalism so that we can bypass its systematic grip on our personal and professional lives altogether.

Together with the *Free Spirit* installation, she offers us the latest issue of her zine called *Victory*, "an interesting magazine that has become legendary", as she writes in the introduction. *Victory* quotes from Plato: "Reality is created by the mind. We can change our reality by changing our mind." In fourteen points she describes elements of contemporary existence and possible methods to configure oneself in a way that allows for us to go through the journey, but as the otherwise hackneyed yet relevant saying goes: the journey has no destination, the journey is the destination in itself. Viktorie draws on Eastern philosophy and its Western interpretations and adaptations for our own context, space and time. To avoid reading newspapers and news from the Internet is one of the basic prerequisites, i.e. not to harm the pure perception and formation of one's own reality. Meditation is the key. A journey through the corners of one's own mind and its otherwise dormant potential.

The series of large-format paintings on canvas without adjustments in frames, only haphazardly pinned to the walls, is complemented by an ornament of mattresses on the floor, where each mattress offers a figurative abstraction rounded off by a series of carefully composed found objects, stones, semi-precious stones, crystals, bones, feathers, wires or waste materials transformed into unintentional sculptural expressions influenced by the nature where Viktorie found them. There is no point in asking Viktorie what the individual

canvases represent. Her creations happen in the states of deep immersion after long hours of meditation, sometimes being surprised herself in retrospect at what they reveal.

The absence of the frame seems to suggest a disembodiment and the need for attention to the invisible precursors of existence. The canvases themselves are purely performative, lying on the ground like crumpled sheets before installation and only gradually being stretched into formats with each successive pin, where individual shapes, brushstrokes and imagery form recognisable marks. The contraction and expansion on them works similarly to the human mind with a rising state of concentration. The option of free associative reading turns each canvas into an extensive literary formation denying linearity. For hours, we can stand in front of each of them and use them for our own meditative projections or, on the contrary, we can absorb them in a moment and gain an intense experience far beyond the limits of ordinary perception.

Viktorie follows up precisely on the very strong tendency of contemporary art to search for a new spirituality completely removed from the institutionalized and political units of the great religious traditions and systems.

JK

VIKTORIE LANGER (\*1988, Žiar nad Hronom) is based in Prague and Novara di Sicilia. Between 2009 and 2015 she studied in Painting 2 Studio at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. In 2004, she did an internship at the Universidad Complutense Bellas Artes in Madrid, Spain, in 2012 with the AFA's visiting professor Florian Pumhösl, and in 2011 in the studio of the visiting teacher Silke Otto-Knapp.

The Oskár Čepan Award was established in 1996 on the initiative of the American foundation Trust for Mutual Understanding. It is part of the international set of awards Young Visual Artists Awards. Since 2001 it has been organised by the Foundation – Centre for Contemporary Arts. The project serves to support contemporary visual art and its creators. Submissions to it, on the basis of open entry, are not restricted to any specific media. The age limit for participation in the project is 40 years. The laureate receives a financial reward, a two-month residential stay at the programme Residency Unlimited in New York (USA), and a solo exhibition or realisation of another project, according to their preference.

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