

Extra Citizen

An exhibition with works by Meriç Algün, Younes Baba-Ali, Zbynek Baladran, James Bridle, Bram Demunter, Cao Fei, Iman Issa, Ahmet Ögüt, Dan Perjovschi, Antonis Pittas, Martha Rosler, Marinella Senatore, Grant Watson, and Philippe van Snick.

Curated by Antonia Alampi and iLiana Fokianaki

"The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective."

Hanna Arendt, "The Origins of Totalitarianism", 1979

"Major social issues such as the status of immigrants, aboriginal peoples, refugees, diasporic groups, environmental injustices, and homelessness have increasingly been expressed through the language of rights and obligations, and hence of citizenship. Moreover, not only are the rights and obligations of citizens being redefined, but also what it means to be a citizen and which individuals and groups are enabled to possess such rights and obligations have become issues of concern. In other words, the three fundamental axes, extent (rules and norms of inclusion and exclusion), content (rights and responsibilities) and depth (thickness or thinness) of citizenship are being redefined and reconfigured."

Isin, Engin F.; Bryan S. Turner, eds. (2002). Handbook of Citizenship Studies, Introduction.

How can we describe what a citizen is today? How do people *become* one? When can a person say they belong to a place? How much have the informal meaning and legal definition of the notion of citizenship transformed over the last decades? These questions form the foundation of the exhibition, which serves as an introduction to Kunsthal Extra City's programme for the next three years, focusing into the present and future condition of citizens and denizens, from a social, political and civil perspective, vis-à-vis the texture of the city.

The "extra" in the title invites us to think beyond the conventional meaning of citizenship: what can be added to the normative definition of a citizen and what aspects of citizenship lie outside the confines of its strictly legal definition?

The definitions of citizenship and the questions of what being a citizen can entail have been evolving and reformulating since the beginning of organised societies, when "articulating rights as claims to recognition has always invoked the ideal of citizenship."¹ Within an accelerated present, with its renewed path towards far-right nationalisms, and a growing frustration for political systems and representative democracy in general, we aim to contribute from a cultural perspective to discussions

¹ Isin, Engin F.; Bryan S. Turner, eds. (2002). Handbook of Citizenship Studies, Introduction.

on what can citizenship mean, what rights and responsibilities come along with this, but also what parameters are still used to define who is entitled to be and become a citizen.

In extreme summary: in the last two centuries between colonialism, the end of the cold war and ongoing warfare, globalization and growing economic disparity, and the free movement of labour within the European Union, the composition of people that inhabit the cities of the old continent has rapidly changed. Global migration and the world wide web, new and complex forms of mass interaction (social media or else) and knowledge exchange and new forms of capital accumulation, define the world in which we live in. Things such as nationality, birth-place, language, or religion, are not the sole definitions of our sense of belonging to a place or to a community. Nevertheless we are witnessing, once again, a re-emergence of “us” and “them”, one that denies the complex diversity and hybridity of cultures and world-views that define contemporary metropolises. We witness the shortcomings of limited integration policies that failed to engage in structural change and a shift in legislation towards the right to citizenship, all the while European borders are fortified. On the other hand, against this hostile backdrop, grassroots movements have increasingly emerged, intervening in municipal procedures and political agendas, finding new ways and means to organize (socially and politically), offering support, shelter and hospitality to new comers, presenting alternative solutions of para-citizensry. Something that correlates to the reality of the current composition of our cities, made up by citizens and denizens that are more culturally, socially and economically diverse, multi-lingual and multi-national.

It is for these reasons that today we think it is relevant to reflect once again on the purpose and power of citizenship, not solely in relation to the nation state, but also vis-à-vis other organized communities, from the city to the neighbourhood, or to supranational bodies.

The space of law, and individual and collective forms of resilience are presented in the ground floor. The bureaucratic aspects put in place to judge, monitor and evaluate when, how and if a subject fits into a European society and its set of questionably shared values, are addressed by Meriç Algün. Her practice for the last years takes as a starting point her personal experience of becoming European by migrating from Turkey to Sweden, an individual experience that comes to stand for many. James Bridle reveals a different kind of monitoring, one allowed by the internet with *Citizen Ex*, a new form of algorithmic citizenship, one defined by our movements on the internet across many nations and jurisdictions. Younes Baba-Ali mixes languages and the rituals that come along with them, and twists the meaning and role of common objects of urban landscapes. He questions what the consequences may really be of a multi-culturalism that seems to be largely talked about but not really understood or practiced. Dan Perjovschi takes over the façade of the building, humorously commenting and provoking reflections on all the contradictions of the interconnected world in which we live now. A tool to express our discontent is provided by Marinella Senatore, while on the same floor is the Center for Urban Citizens, a growing archive and illusionary study room - a new commission by Ahmet Ögüt residing at Extra City for three years.

On the first floor of the exhibition space we zoom into the human condition. Grant Watson exposes portraits of active citizens from Antwerp and elsewhere, that have engaged in questioning existing social structures, particularly in relation to feminism and LGBT communities. Bram Demunter portrays isolated characters, in between the real and the imagined, struggling to engage in any social interaction. Martha Rosler confronts us with the patriarchal language of the state from a feminist perspective.

Antonis Pittas engages directly with Extra City's surroundings by exchanging door-handles he makes himself with those of the neighbours, asking us to reflect on the hostility and hospitality of urban space and the space of art. Zbyněk Baladrán reflects on symbolic violence, and how excluded individuals and communities are denied the means to organize and represent themselves.

Differently, Philippe Van Snick and Iman Issa take us towards more abstract terrains, monitoring and echoing the remnants of human presence in familiar cities and places. Here, small mundane events or vaguely recognizable forms speak of how the personal might relate to more collective ways of seeing and understanding.

Finally, Cao Fei offers us the image of a city in a dystopic future, one defined by violence and riots, darkly recalling recent events around the globe. Her zombies destruct and devour „La Town“, they echo the dissidence and disenchantment of its inhabitants, but also their growing alienation from the social fibre, whilst the serene environments of suburban lawns reinforce the lack of care and interest for one another, and the vast distance amongst the social classes of a place.

The intention behind this exhibition and its narrative path but also of our longer-term program is to inspire a reflection on what we might inscribe in a much-needed new polyphonic definition of citizenship. We aim to question with our audience and contributors alike the contemporary interpretations of a concept in transition, one that exists in a liminal space between legality and ethics.

(AA & IF)