

and if I devoted my life to one of its feathers? a prologue in public space

1/6–31/7 2020

ARTISTS **manuel chavajay**
• **chto delat** • **inhabitants**
with margarida mendes •
daniela ortiz • **prabhakar**
pachpute • **sophie utikal**
CURATOR **miguel a. lópez**

A JOINT PROJECT OF
KUNSTHALLE WIEN AND
WIENER FESTWOCHEN

team kunsthalle wien

DIRECTORS What, How & for
Whom / WHW (Ivet Ćurlin, Nataša
Ilić & Sabina Sabolović) • CFO
Sigrid Mittersteiner • CURATORIAL
ASSISTANT Laura Amann •
PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT Hektor
Peljak

kunsthalle wien
museumsplatz 1
1070 vienna
www.kunsthallewien.at

team Wiener Festwochen

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Christophe
Slagmuylder • EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Wolfgang Wais • DRAMATURGY
Carolina Nöbauer

Wiener Festwochen
Lehár-gasse 11/1/6
1060 Vienna
www.festwochen.at

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This project constitutes a prologue for *And if I devoted my life to one of its feathers?*, an exhibition that starts from Indigenous epistemologies to explore the possibilities of interweaving the poetic gesture with radical political action. It examines artistic practices that counter the destructive ways in which the legacies of colonialism, entangled with patriarchy and extractive capitalism, continue to produce suffering and environmental disaster on a global scale. The exhibition was scheduled to open on May 29, 2020, but in the final stages of its realization, it was put on hold by the worldwide coronavirus crisis. Its Costa Rica-based curator, Miguel A. López, in lockdown on another continent, the exhibition space of **kunsthalle wien** closed for more than two months, the **Wiener Festwochen**, of which the exhibition was to have been a part, cancelled in its original form, international artists unable to travel, and the exhibition's artworks, boxed up in their wooden crates, still waiting to be picked up. This group exhibition, with over thirty-five artists who are located everywhere from the Amazon region to Australia, from Guatemala to India, is unable to take place this year in its originally conceived form, but we intend to realize it in full in 2021.

Until then, we are happy to introduce to you a first manifestation of the exhibition—one that is designed to be encountered in public space. In an attempt to translate some of the exhibition's voices and topics into a medium that is compatible with the current obstacles and circumstances facing cultural presentations around the world, six artistic statements have been produced specifically for the advertising-billboard format. These works have been digitally sent, printed, and mounted all over Vienna. Public space lately has been the field experiencing the most significant change within our lives. It was made unavailable and charged with restrictions, but we are now experiencing a reopening of its possibilities for physical and social dialogue—and thus a calling for its artistic activation. We invite you to discover these six newly commissioned artworks on 250 billboards across the city.

We would like to express our gratitude to curator Miguel A. López and artists Manuel Chavajay, Chto Delat, Inhabitants with Margarida Mendes, Daniela Ortiz, Prabhakar Pachpute, and Sophie Utikal for this inspiring collaboration and for their topical and poetic contributions. We are very much looking forward to seeing their work on the city streets, and to presenting the full iteration of *And if I devoted my life to one of its feathers?* at **kunsthalle wien** in May 2021. ●

— Christophe Slagmuylder, Artistic Director, Wiener Festwochen, and What, How & for Whom / WHW, Directors, kunsthalle wien

a prologue for a prologue

The title of *And if I devoted my life to one of its feathers? A Prologue in Public Space* quotes Cecilia Vicuña, a Chilean poet and activist who urges us to weave aesthetic and spiritual threads between people and nature. Across the planet, the COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted our everyday lives and the ideas that form the basis of our understanding of the world. Faced with the reality of this new and challenging moment of lockdowns and closing borders and doors, we understood the importance of keeping a collective transnational conversation going beyond these walls that have been put up, instead of merely pushing back the dates of the exhibition.

This “prologue in public space” brings together six artists and collectives—Manuel Chavajay, Chto Delat, Inhabitants with Margarida Mendes, Daniela Ortiz, Prabhakar Pachpute, and Sophie Utikal—whose practices engage in the struggle for collective survival and the processes involved in restoring social bonds that have been disrupted by misogyny, colonialism, and imperialist violence. Each was invited to produce specific works for a series of billboards that reflect on the current pandemic from the perspective of their own experiences, concerns, geographies, and political communities. These billboards are designed to convey messages that are different from what we regularly see in social media, commercial ads, and newspapers. Each work responds to and reflects a different outlook on a shared world that is collectively, but unevenly, being affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

In keeping with the spirit of the original exhibition, these billboard interventions seek to start a dialogue about self-determination and social and ecological change. The showcased works critically examine the breakneck pace with which raw materials are mined and the environmental destruction inflicted by neoliberalism. Indigenous positions burst through colonial legacies to remind us of the continuation of extractive logics in the twenty-first century. Solidarity-based and anticolonial feminisms highlight the struggle against patriarchal capitalism and state oppression, while other works tell stories of reverse migration and forms of affective belonging. Collectively, the works of *And if I devoted my life to one of its feathers? A Prologue in Public Space* call for the urgent development of a degrowth society that has justice and equality at its core. ●

— Miguel A. López, CURATOR



Miguel A. López (b. Lima in 1983) is a writer, researcher, and Co-Director and Chief Curator of TEOR/ÉTICA in San José (Costa Rica). His work investigates collaborative dynamics and transformations in the understanding of and engagement with politics in Latin America in recent decades, as well as feminist and queer re-articulations of history from a Southern perspective.

manuel chavajay

b. San Pedro La Laguna
(Guatemala) in 1982,
lives and works in San Pedro
La Laguna

Tz'ikin, 2020



Maya Tz'utujil artist Manuel Chavajay depicts Tz'ikin, one of the twenty *nahuales* of the Mesoamerican cosmology, which are animal spirit counterparts of the humans for whom they function as protectors. The character carries a gold ingot, representing how the Traditional Territories of the Maya are seen by the West as a place for the accumulation of capital based on extractive logics, through the exploitation of people and natural resources. The Tz'utujil word "Ru k'ayewaal," which appears at the bottom of the work, can be translated as "being in trouble because of an imposed, violent situation." ●

chto delat

collective, founded in
Petersburg in 2003

Eine Feder (visualized by
Dmitry Vilensky), 2020

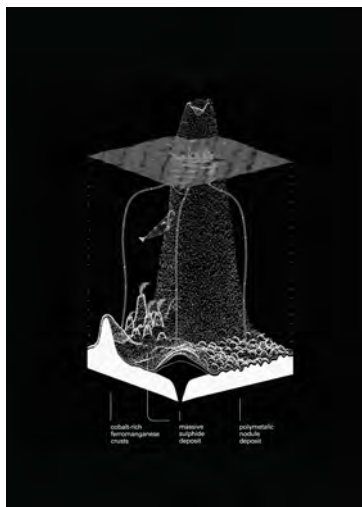
The work of the Russian collective **Chto Delat** draws on the aesthetics of Soviet anti-nuclear war posters from the 1970s, which mixed cutout images to create threatening scenarios of environmental devastation. The question in **Chto Delat's** graphic work, "What will happen if one feather falls from its body?," is a playful revision of the exhibition's title, inviting us to see the origins of the coronavirus pandemic in terms of the black swan theory—which describes unpredictable and unexpected events that can trigger severe consequences. In the work's speculative fiction, an interconnected and globalized world is pushed around like a toy by a skinny pig, a breed of guinea pig developed in 1978 by scientists. ●



**inhabitants with
margarida mendes**

What Is Deep Sea Mining?,
2018-20

THE RESEARCH PROJECT
WHAT IS DEEP SEA MINING?
WAS COMMISSIONED BY
TBA21-ACADEMY.



Inhabitants is an online channel for exploratory videos and documentaries about issues related to environmentalism and the Anthropocene, founded by Portuguese artists **Pedro Neves Marques** and **Mariana Silva** in 2005. This graphic work is part of its research into the deep-sea mining industry, which has turned oceans into the latest frontier of corporative mineral extraction. The graphic draws attention to current explorations that are part of development plans for new undersea mines that will cover an area the size of Europe. The destruction of the

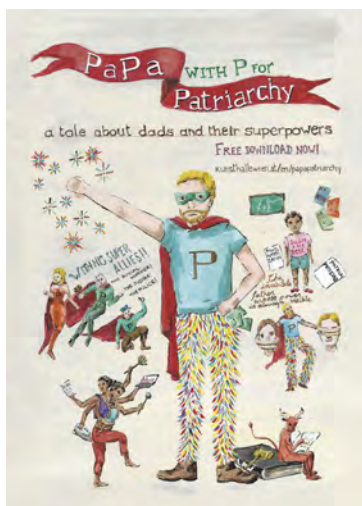
ocean floor threatens not only marine life and ecosystems but the entire global fight against environmental injustice and the climate emergency. ●



daniela ortiz

b. Cusco (Peru) in 1985, lives and works in Barcelona

Papa, with P for Patriarchy, 2020



This work by the anticolonial artist and activist Daniela Ortiz is an ad for a hand-drawn children’s book about a father who is a hero—but a hero of the patriarchy. The image introduces the different characters of a story that explores the legal mechanisms behind racist and patriarchal abuse and violence. Ortiz addresses how psychological oppression and its forms of economic, mental, physical, and emotional confinement, particularly as experienced by single mothers while parenting, is close to the social quarantine being enforced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The book is available for free download at kunsthalles.at/en/papapatriarchy. ●

prabhakar pachpute

b. Sasti (India) in 1986, lives and works in Pune (India)

A plight of hardship, 2020

Prabhakar Pachpute’s drawing depicts a character midstride who is made up of body parts, personal belongings, and cleaning accessories, evoking the iconographic forms of some Indian goddesses of epidemic diseases. Here the artist addresses the flipside of the global slowdown of everyday activities and nationwide lockdowns: lowest-paid essential workers who keep things moving during the pandemic and often lack access to benefits like paid leave and health insurance. The character’s movement also may refer to migrants who have nowhere else to go, or perhaps to the current mass exoduses from densely populated cities to rural areas. Underneath the various layers worn by the walking figure, a violent absence of justice and labor rights is revealed. ●



sophie utikal

b. Tallahassee (Florida, USA) in 1987, lives and works in Berlin and Vienna

What was, is gone, 2020



Sophie Utikal’s textile piece explores the sensations of belonging and displacement in the encounter with an unknown future. The interruption of everyday life emerges in her work as an atmosphere of constant and conflict-ridden negotiation with passivity. The arrangement of the characters evokes the forced physical distancing and the disruption of the tactile currently being imposed on interpersonal relations, addressing the effects that the pandemic has had on our emotions, feelings, and behaviors. ●