

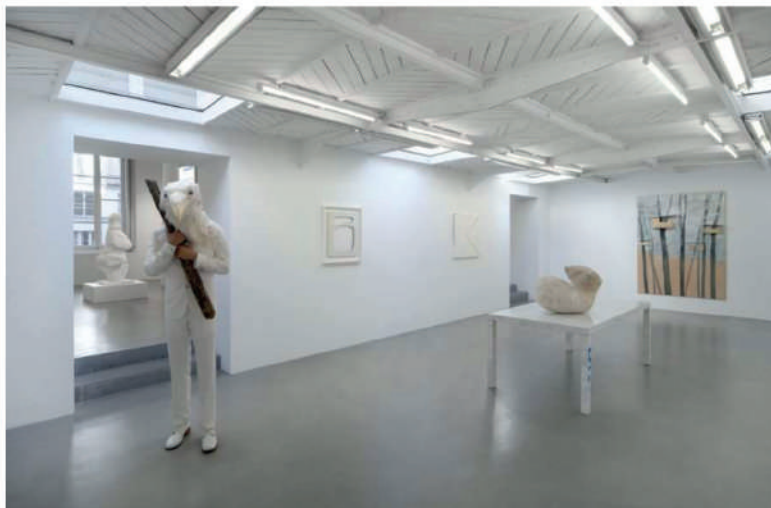
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PETRIT HALILAJ  
PRESSE / PRESS  
(selection)

KULTURË

## Petrit Halilaj në Paris zbërthen "Historinë e një përqaqimi"



"Strumbullari sh pë rfaq një histori të veçantë familjare, ishte vegël punë e gjyshit tim dhe ë shtë druri që ai po e mbante në duar kur më soi se gruaja do të lindë të mijë n e parë. ishte interpretuar si një shenjë e dobësisë në atë kohë, ai e për qatoi drurin me gjithë fuqinë e tij...", ka thënë artisti Petrit Halilaj për elementin e veprës së tij, "Historia e një për qaqimi"

Kudo ku prezantohet artisti Petrit Halilaj, vendlindja e tij Kosova merr vë mendjen. Së fundmi me veprën "Historia e një përqaqimi" (History of Hug) "Kamel Mennour". Ai ë shtë i interesuar që të transformojë çë shtë nga jeta e tij në vepra arti. 18 tetor dhe mund të vizitohet deri më 29 janar të vitit që vjen.

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Petrit Halilaj: fragments drawn from a traumatic childhood | Financial Times

**Visual Arts**

**Petrit Halilaj: fragments drawn from a traumatic childhood**

The artist talks about how he processed his experiences as a refugee from the Kosovo war in a new show at Tate St Ives



Installation view of Petrit Halilaj's 'Very yellow over this green feather' © Tate. Photo: Matt Greenwood

Jane Ure-Smith NOVEMBER 30 2021

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When Petrit Halilaj received confirmation of his inclusion in the 2020 Belgrade Biennale, he was surprised to find a blank space next to his name where his place of birth should be. The artist is from Kosovo, a country recognised by half of the UN's member states — but not by Serbia, from which it declared independence in 2008, after a long-running conflict that erupted into war in the late 1990s when Halilaj was in his early teens and which drove his family into a refugee camp for more than a year.

The omission shocked him, undermining at a stroke his belief that, as an established artist living and working between Germany, Italy and Kosovo, he was “over it”. Delving subsequently into the literature on trauma, he discovered that it is typical for 20 years to pass before a person can revisit nightmares. “You tell yourself the main thing is that you survived,” he says on the phone from Berlin.

Halilaj, now 35, pulled out of the biennale, but the effect of the letter was profound. Suddenly he found the courage to re-examine drawings he had made as a 13-year-old in the Kukës II refugee camp in Albania during the war. He had left the drawings with Giacomo “Angelo” Poli, an Italian psychologist and now a close friend, who had visited the camp in 1999 and encouraged the children to draw and talk about what they had seen. “Always as a kid I had been more comfortable to draw rather than to talk,” Halilaj says. “And, at 13, I was becoming even more introverted.”

The Belgrade moment coincided with an invitation to make an exhibition for Tate St Ives. Like earlier work, the show was to reference Halilaj's home town, Rrmik, exploring the fact that it is built on neolithic ruins and investigating contemporary attitudes to that history. But by the time the ideas were nailed down, the pandemic had put paid to the travel and movement of artefacts that the exhibition required. A show based on the drawings Halilaj made in the refugee camp began to take shape as an alternative.

Petrit Halilaj: fragments drawn from a traumatic childhood | Financial Times



Artie Petrit Halilaj © Angata B. Suarez



The show features fragments from Halilaj's teenage drawings © Tate. Photo Matt Greenwood

"Petrit said, 'I'm not sure I am ready, but if I could be, the thing I would most like to do is revisit the drawings,'" recalls Tate St Ives director Anne Barlow. "Over time, that became more and more what he felt compelled to do."

The result is *Very volcanic over this green feather* — the title alluding to the emotional turmoil concealed by the bright fairytale landscape the artist initially appears to offer us. The room-filling installation makes brilliant use of the extra space Tate St Ives acquired in a 2017 extension. And on the way there you have a chance to survey the newly rehung permanent collection, which cleverly places the story of St Ives and modernism in a thematic, more global context.

Inside the temporary exhibition space Halilaj invites us to explore a dense forest of fragments from his teenage drawings, blown up, printed on felt and suspended from the ceiling. Viewed from the entrance, it's a lush and exotic landscape, alive with animals and birds — a dove, some parrots and a peacock. Follow the path through the middle of this fantasy, however, and turn back. As you retrace your steps, the darkness of war takes hold — on layer after layer of the fragments, houses burn, bombs explode, Serbian militiamen wield knives and guns and mass graves pile up. It's not a purely eyewitness account, Halilaj explains; the drawings combine images from the media, his imaginings and what he actually saw.

Petrit Halilaj: fragments drawn from a traumatic childhood | Financial Times

**There were mines, but we didn't care. We were so happy to go back, to see that landscape without the fear of death**

At the centre, slightly off to one side, Halilaj has included himself, a cut-out of a small boy that comes not from the 38 drawings he made with Angelo, but one he made to show the then UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, who had seen the young artist on television and asked to meet him when he visited the camp. The figure is double-sided, the only element of the installation that touches the ground and faces in

both directions.

Halilaj and his family returned to Runik just days after Nato peacekeepers arrived in Kosovo in June 1999, Nato's air campaign having forced Serbia to accept a peace agreement. Their house had been destroyed, so they camped in a tent in the garden. "There were mines, but we didn't care," he says. "We were so happy to go back, to see that landscape without the fear of death."



Halilaj and Dr Giacomo Poli in 1999 © Courtesy Giacomo Poli



'Paesaggio Fantastico' (Fantasy Landscape) (1999) © Courtesy the artist and Giacomo Poli

The body of work he has built up since he went to Italy in 2004 to study at Brera Academy of Fine Arts, Milan, has been rooted in his biography, with Runik and his lost family home playing important roles. For the sixth Berlin Biennale in 2010, he recreated the skeleton of the house, with live chickens scratching around, the absence of walls highlighting the impossibility of feeling safe there.

Memories of his childhood and his experience of exodus and displacement re-emerged in 2013, when he represented Kosovo in the Venice Biennale. Subsequent installations have drawn on graffiti on the desks in his school, which was about to be demolished, and a play he mounted in the ruins of Runik's cultural centre, the latter winning him the Mario Merz prize in 2017.

Birds, particularly migratory birds — which cover huge distances, knowing where to pause and how to come back — fascinate the artist. They occur throughout his work, as a metaphor either for people on the move or for the imagination. At times, he says, he has dressed as a bird to avoid having to talk about his work. "Birds have come in different shapes, and somehow I feel they always came to save me!"

Petrit Halilaj: fragments drawn from a traumatic childhood | Financial Times



The installation features images of migration and conflict © Tate. Photo Matt Greenwood

At St Ives, Halilaj pursues his desire to understand both the world and his own identity without the straitjackets of nationality and nationalism. "This is so much my drive for what I do," he says. But he hopes the exhibition goes beyond his own story.

The fragments at Tate are not just about loss, memory and the past: they are about the choices we make as we construct the future. "We are always able to deny the parts of a story we don't want to see," he says. Yet he is eager to play a part in the reconstruction of Kosovo and was recently in the capital, Pristina, helping to campaign for a section on LGBT+ rights to be included in the new constitution. His optimism is palpable. "I have no intention of giving up the dream of a better future."

To January 16 2022, [tate.org](https://www.tate.org)

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<https://www.ft.com/content/63f52b02-3ec3-48a8-afac-477d74649c55>

Künstler Petrit Halilaj  
**"Auf dem Boden des Zelt es schuf ich ein  
großes Bild für Kofi Annan"**



Foto: Tate Photography (Matt Greenwood)

Petrit Halilaj "Very volcanic over this green feather", Installationsansicht Tate St Ives, 2021



**Auf mehreren Fotos, die 1999  
aus einem albanischen  
Flüchtlingslager um die Welt  
gingen, ist der Künstler Petrit  
Halilaj als Kind zu sehen. Dort liegt**

Anzeige

Kunst

Text  
**Juliet Kothe**

Datum  
24.11.2021



**auch der Ursprung seiner Kunst.  
Ein Gespräch über die Biografie  
als Teil kollektiver Geschichte**

Während in Petrit Halilaj's Heimat 1999 der Kosovo-Krieg wütet, findet der damals 13-Jährige in dem albanischen Flüchtlingslager "Kukës II" durch den Psychologen Giacomo "Angelo" Poli zum Zeichnen. Es ist Petrit, der kurz nach der Begegnung mit Angelo eingeladen wird, dem damaligen UN-Sekretär Kofi Annan bei seinem Besuch im Krisengebiet eine Filzstift-Zeichnung zu überreichen. Darauf abgebildet sind kriegerische Gräueltaten, verübt durch die jugoslawische Armee Slobodan Miloševićs neben traumhaft-bunten Landschaften. Petrit Halilaj's Biografie, verwoben in die große Erzählung des Kosovo-Krieges, ist Ausgangspunkt seiner Ausstellung "Very volcanic over this green feather" in der Tate St Ives im englischen Cornwall.

**Petrit Halilaj, der Kosovo-Krieg ist der jüngste kriegerische Konflikt Europas, in dem die Nato durch das Abwerfen von Bomben militärisch intervenierte. Ab 1999 wurde Ihre damalige Heimat Serbien angegriffen, um die jugoslawische Armee vor dort zu vertreiben und Menschenrechtsverletzungen an der Zivilbevölkerung zu beenden. Wie erlebten Sie die Situation, die auch den Ausgangspunkt Ihrer Ausstellung in der Tate St. Ives bildet?**

Ich bin 1986 im Kosovo geboren und in einer Zeit aufgewachsen, in der ich offiziell nicht einmal meinen Namen in unserer Sprache schreiben durfte. Die kosovarisch-albanische Bevölkerung lebte in einer Art Apartheid-Status. Von der jugoslawischen Regierung, die über unser Territorium herrschte, wurden wir als Terroristen bezeichnet. Die Nachbarländer ignorierten unsere friedlichen Versuche, den Zustand der Segregation, der sich mitten in Europa manifestierte, zu beenden. Es schien als warte die Welt auf Opfer, um eingreifen zu können.

**Wurden Sie selbst Zeuge von Übergriffen auf die Bevölkerung?**

Die serbische Armee und Polizei begannen 1999, schon während der Nato-Bombardements, unser Dorf Kostërre niederzubrennen. Alle Familien wurden in die dreistöckige Schule getrieben. Frauen, Alte und Kinder mussten sich von den Männern verabschieden. Sie drohten uns: Wer weinte, dessen Vater würde man schlagen. Es war ein Abschied ohne Tränen. Ein Verwandter, der wie ein Mädchen aussah, bekam ein Kopftuch von einer alten Frau übergehängt. Wir sagten uns, warum versuchen wir nicht, ihn zu verkleiden, sie werden wahrscheinlich sowieso alle töten. Meine Mutter, Geschwister und mein Großvater gelangten in ein Flüchtlingslager.

**In der Ausstellung erfährt man, dass hier der Grundstein für Ihre künstlerische Laufbahn gelegt wurde. Wie kam es dazu?**

Ich war der Älteste unter meinen Geschwistern, der Großvater über 70, meine Mutter weinte oft, weil sie nicht wusste, wo mein Vater als Kriegsgefangener hingebracht wurde. Ich musste bei unserer Versorgung mithelfen. Es ging dieses Foto von Andrew Testa von mir um die Welt, das mich inmitten einer Schlange von Frauen zeigt, die um Brot anstanden. Irgendwo da, wo Essen verteilt wurde, sah ich ein Schild mit einem Angebot für einen Zeichenkurs. Dann erinnere ich mich nur an ihn, Angelo. Als er sich vorstellte, trug er all diese farbigen Stifte bei sich. Das Camp war unübersichtlich, über 5000 Menschen lebten hier, ich hätte Angelos Programm leicht übersehen können. Aber nichts existiert ohne Ursache. Bevor Angelo in seine Heimat Italien zurückging, gab er mir seine E-Mail-Adresse. Sobald es ging, schrieb ich ihm. Ein italienischer UN-Soldat übersetzte meinen Brief. Es ist eine lange Geschichte, aber mit 18 nahm er mich in seinem Zuhause auf und das Unglaubliche wurde wahr: Ich begann mein Studium an der Akademie der schönen Künste in Mailand.



Foto: Angela B. Suarez

Petrit Halilaj wurde 1986 in Kostërre (Kosovo) geboren. Er lebt und arbeitet in Deutschland, im Kosovo und in Italien. Sein Werk ist eng mit der jüngeren Geschichte seines Landes und den Folgen der politischen und kulturellen Spannungen in der Region verbunden. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der kollektiven Erinnerung entspringt oft einer persönlichen Erfahrung und ist normalerweise das Ergebnis eines intimen Prozesses.

Unter anderem waren Installationen von ihm 2020/2021 in der Ausstellung "[Studio Berghain](#)" in Berlin und im [Palacio de Cristal](#) in Madrid zu sehen. Noch bis zum 13. Januar läuft die Ausstellung "[Very volcanic over this green feather](#)" in der Tate St Ives.



**Was genau haben die Kinder in diesem Programm im Flüchtlingslager gemacht?**

Angelo war ein Psychologe aus Norditalien, der die Helfer im Lager unterstützen sollte. Als er sah, dass die Kinder nur Hilfe für die grundlegendsten Bedürfnisse erhielten, initiierte er den zweiwöchigen Zeichenkurs. Kunst ist sehr effektiv, um Traumata in eine andere Art von Sprache zu übersetzen. In zwei Wochen habe ich 38 Zeichnungen produziert, die den Ausgangspunkt für die Ausstellung in der Tate St Ives bilden. Zwei Zeichnungen übergab ich damals dem UN-Botschafter Staffan de Mistura, die er zum Internationalen Strafgerichtshof für das ehemalige Jugoslawien mitnahm. Dieses Haager Tribunal, ab 2002 eine ständige Einrichtung, bestand seit 1993 und war für die Verfolgung schwerer Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit während der Jugoslawienkriege zuständig. Die Zeichnungen wurden als Beweis für Kriegsverbrechen verwendet.

**Neben der Hauptausstellungshalle in der Tate St Ives gibt es einen angrenzenden Raum. Hier dokumentieren Sie die Begegnung mit Angelo, das Tagebuch Ihres Großvaters ist hier ausgelegt, man erfährt von anderen Wegbegleitern und Situationen, die für Ihre Lebensgeschichte essenziell wurden. Durch einen BBC-Film ist dokumentiert, wie Sie Kofi Annan bei seinem ersten Besuch im Krisengebiet eines Ihrer Bilder überreichen. Wie fühlte sich das an?**

Meine Geschichte ist es wert, durch eine Ausstellung als Teil eines kollektiven Narrativs erzählt zu werden, weil vieles an dem, was passierte, surreal war, wie eben Kofi Annan in einem Camp gegenüberzustehen und Teil der kollektiven Geschichte zu werden. Ich empfand die Situation als eine Chance von 20 Sekunden, um zum Ende des Krieges beizutragen. Ich wusste drei Tage vorher, dass Annan kommt und ein einfaches A4-Bild wollte ich ihm nicht geben. Ich schuf am Boden auf dem Zelt ein großes Bild, das wir auf Karton legten, weil es im Zelt so matschig war.

**Wie fiel die Reaktion Annans aus?**

Man spürt als Kind sehr gut den Unterschied zwischen belangloser und wahrhaftiger Aufmerksamkeit. Journalisten, Helfer und Annan sahen in der Zeichnungen Beweise für den Krieg. Ich spürte den Nutzen des Dokumentierten. Kofi Annan bat um das Bild, um es in der Woche darauf dem UN-Sicherheitsrat in New York vorzulegen, aber ich wollte es ihm nicht geben.

**In der großen Galerie der Tate St Ives zeigen Sie nun Fragmente der originalen Kinderzeichnungen als Vergrößerungen. Darauf zu sehen sind die Grausamkeiten des Krieges und Fantasiewelten eines Kindes voller Vögel und fantastischer Visionen.**

Jedes Mal, wenn wir uns erinnern, verändern wir die Erinnerung. Der individuelle Blick in die Vergangenheit, genauso wie die Vorstellung von der Zukunft, sind immer fragmentiert, weil sie sich aus einzelnen Bildern im Kopf zusammensetzen. Kunst ist die perfekte Darstellungsform für eine fragmentiert gedachte Realität. Es ist faszinierend zu sehen, dass ich damals gleichzeitig Soldaten zeichnete und bunte Pfauen. Diese Tiere hatte ich noch nie gesehen. Mein Großvater glaubte nicht an meine Hoffnung, die ich mit dem Bild für Kofi Annan verband. Als ich zwischen Annan und dem albanischen Präsidenten vor den ganzen Medien stand, spielte sich die Szenerie wie auf einer öffentlichen Arena ab. Mein Großvater sagte, das alles sei nur ein politisches Spiel. Das erklärt vielleicht, warum die Ausstellung viele Elemente aufweist, die von der Theatersprache abgeleitet sind.

**Die Besucher der Ausstellung können den Hauptraum in zwei Richtungen durchschreiten. Zunächst begegnen sie den bunten Landschaften. Beim Zurückgehen trifft man schließlich auf die Situationen, die auf den Krieg hinweisen. Das einzige beidseitig sichtbare Motiv ist ein kleiner Junge.**

Der kleine Junge aus der Kofi-Annan-Zeichnung thematisiert das sogenannte Racak-Massaker. Dieser Junge steht symbolisch für den Überlebenden, der von den

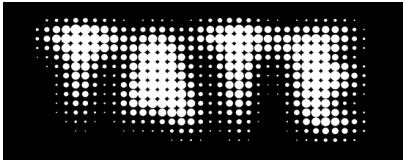
Mördern vergessen wurde. Selbst im Holocaust und in allen großen Tragödien und Kriegen gibt es die Überlebenden, die davon berichten, was geschehen ist. Nichts lässt sich auslöschen. Denn auch die Auslöschung hinterlässt Spuren.

**Bereits als 13-Jähriger glaubten Sie an das aktivistische Potenzial Ihrer Zeichnungen. Auch in Ihren überdimensionierten Blumenskulpturen, eine Gemeinschaftsarbeit mit Ihrem Mann Alvaro Urbano, sind extreme Vergrößerungen echter Blüten das Mittel, dem natürlicherweise Kleinen und wenig Augenscheinlichem zu einer materiellen Präsenz zu verhelfen.**

Meine Skulpturen sind mehr als formale Kunstwerke. Die Arbeiten in der Tate St Ives und die Blumenskulpturen ähneln sich insofern, als dass sie Überbringer einer humanitären Nachricht sein möchten. Die Blüten, alles Blumen, die Alvaro mir im Laufe unserer Beziehung geschenkt hat, sind Zeichen homosexueller Liebe und Zuneigung. Wir haben die Blumen jüngst und zum ersten Mal in Pristina gezeigt – nicht in einem Museum, sondern in einer öffentlichen Bibliothek. Kosovo tut sich schwer damit, Gleichberechtigung für die LGBTQI+ zu garantieren, trotz der derzeitigen Gesetzeslage gegen Diskriminierung. Alvaro und ich waren dementsprechend nervös. Doch dann geschah etwas Unglaubliches. Für eine so junge Nation mit einer sehr jungen Bevölkerung haben wir eine großartige Pride Week geschaffen. Sogar der kosovarische Premierminister Albin Kurti kam zur Eröffnung, gemeinsam mit der Party- und Schwulenszene Pristinas und politischen Aktivistinnen und Aktivisten. Albin Kurti sagte zu mir: "Ich habe mir in meinem Leben immer Blumen von oben angesehen und jetzt sehe ich, dass etwas so Zerbrechliches so groß sein kann und auf mich schützend niederblickt." In gewisser Weise repräsentieren beide Werke durch ihre Vergrößerungen und das Ausschnitthafte individuelle Erfahrungswelten, die dann repräsentativ werden. Die Blumen, wie auch die Zeichnungen, haben das Potenzial, Perspektiven zu ändern und am Ende vielleicht sogar Gesetze.



Juliet Kothe



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Artist Petrit Halilaj's childhood drawings from the Kosovan War | Tate

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**Tate** ✓

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Petrit Halilaj's work investigates cultural identity, nationhood and heritage, and ideas of personal and collective history. Hear from the artist about his childhood in an Albanian refugee camp during the Kosovan war (1998-9) and the drawings he made, which he has re-interpreted into large scale hanging sculptures in his exhibition at Tate St Ives.

See Petrit Halilaj: Very volcanic over this green feather at Tate St Ives until 16 January 2022.

NEWS | CRITICISM

## Arts

The New York Times

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2021 CI



### A War Zone Was His Canvas

GUY MARTIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

By ALEX MARSHALL

ST. IVES, ENGLAND — When Petrit Halilaj was 13 and a refugee from the brutal war in Kosovo, a group of Italian psychologists arrived at his camp in Albania and gave him some felt-tip pens.

Halilaj was soon drawing dozens of bright, childish pictures. But their subjects were far from colorful: In one, he depicted tanks blowing up a family's home; in another, a mass grave. Other pictures showed soldiers standing over dead bodies, with guns or bloody knives apparently raised in

Petrit Halilaj won acclaim with drawings that reflected on Kosovo's past. In a new show, he's getting more personal.

Petrit Halilaj at his exhibition "Very Volcanic Over This Green Feather," at Tate St. Ives in Cornwall, England.

celebration.

The psychologists spent two weeks in the camp, in 1999, trying to help the children there process the traumas they had experienced during the war, in which ethnic Albanian rebels fought against Serbian troops. For Halilaj, an ethnic Albanian, those traumas were many. Serbian forces burned down his home and captured his father. His family fled from place to place, until they ended up in the refuge in Albania.

Halilaj's vivid pictures impressed the psychologists — and not only them: Reporters visiting the camp interviewed him for

international news bulletins. Halilaj told a Swedish broadcaster at the time that his sleep was broken by nightmares. "I feel happier when I spend time like this," Halilaj said of the drawings.

Now, more than 20 years later, Halilaj (pronounced ha-lee-LYE) is a rising figure in the European art world whose work has been displayed at the Venice Biennale and in museums across the continent. In his latest exhibition, at Tate St. Ives, an outpost of the British museum group in Cornwall,

CONTINUED ON PAGE C6

## A European War Zone Was His Canvas



GUY MARTIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



GUY MARTIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1  
England, Halilaj has returned to the shocking pictures he drew as a child who had seen too much. (The show, "Very Volcanic Over This Green Feather," runs until Jan. 16.)

On a recent tour of the exhibition, Halilaj, 33, said he revisited the pictures last year and was surprised by what he had drawn. Among the violence, he said, "I saw all these birds — peacocks and doves — and they were as big as the soldiers, as happy and proud."

"I'd taken the space to draw landscapes that made me feel good," he added. "It was like I was saying, 'Yes, it was awful, but I can dream and love, too.'"

In the show, segments of Halilaj's childhood drawings have been reproduced at huge scale and hung from the gallery ceiling, so that when visitors enter, they are met with a fantasy landscape of exotic birds and palm trees. But when they reach the

### The wonders and horrors Petrit Halilaj experienced as a boy underpin an exhibition.

other side of the room and turn around, they find that some of the suspended forms have been printed on the reverse with a more macabre selection of Halilaj's doodles: soldiers, tanks, wailing figures, burning houses. The tranquil scene becomes one of horror.

Halilaj said he hoped the exhibition would make people think about how politicians and the news media portrayed the conflict. Even today, he added, some Balkan lawmakers twisted the reality of the war in Kosovo to bolster their nationalist agendas. But making the show had also helped him come to terms with his own memories, he said.

Christine Macel, the chief curator of the Pompidou Center in Paris who featured Halilaj's work in the 2017 Venice Biennale, said Halilaj "was both original as a person and artist — very open, and creative, and resilient, and full of imagination."

His work tackles serious subjects like nationalism and exile, she said, yet "there is always a note of fantasy and joy underpinning them." The Tate exhibition showed his early promise as an artist as being met, Macel added.

Erzen Shkollari, a former head of the National Gallery of Kosovo, who showed Halilaj's work there during his tenure, said the artist always used the country's history as a starting point in his work, "but his art is about so much more," and anyone can connect with it.



ANDREW HARRIS



PETRIT HALILAJ

Above left and right, two Halilaj drawings from 1999: "I saw all these birds — peacocks and doves — and they were as big as the soldiers, as happy and proud."



PETRIT HALILAJ

In some works, Halilaj's messages are clear. In 2011, he dug 66 tons of soil from his family's land in Kosovo, then piled it into a booth at Art Basel, the art fair, offering it for sale. Jennifer Chert, one of his gallerists, said that work "was obviously about attachment to soil, the idea of homeland, and exile, but there was also the more cynical side of, 'What is the value of land?'"

Other pieces are more elusive. For another work, "Poisoned by Men in Need of

Some Love," Halilaj recreated displays of moths and butterflies that had once been on display at Kosovo's Museum of Natural History, but were left to decay during the war. Holland Cotter, a New York Times art critic, said in a 2014 review of that piece that Halilaj's art "makes much current New York art look like fluff."

Halilaj said he was prompted to make the Tate exhibition by a series of events that made him feel as if politics in Kosovo and

Above from left, a landscape of trees and exotic birds at Petrit Halilaj's exhibition "Very Volcanic Over This Green Feather" at Tate St. Ives; from the other side of the gallery, a more macabre view. Left, Halilaj, center, in a green coat, was 11 in 1999 when this photograph was taken in Albania.

Serbia were still stuck in the 1990s. In October 2020, he was scheduled to present work at an art biennial in Belgrade, Serbia — a country that does not recognize Kosovo as an independent state. Halilaj said he was excited by the opportunity, but disappointed when the event's organizers omitted his nationality from the official list of participants published online.

After he complained, biennial administrators added that Halilaj was from Kosovo on the biennial's website, but put an asterisk by the country's name, as used by some international bodies to denote a contested status. Halilaj withdrew from the event in protest.

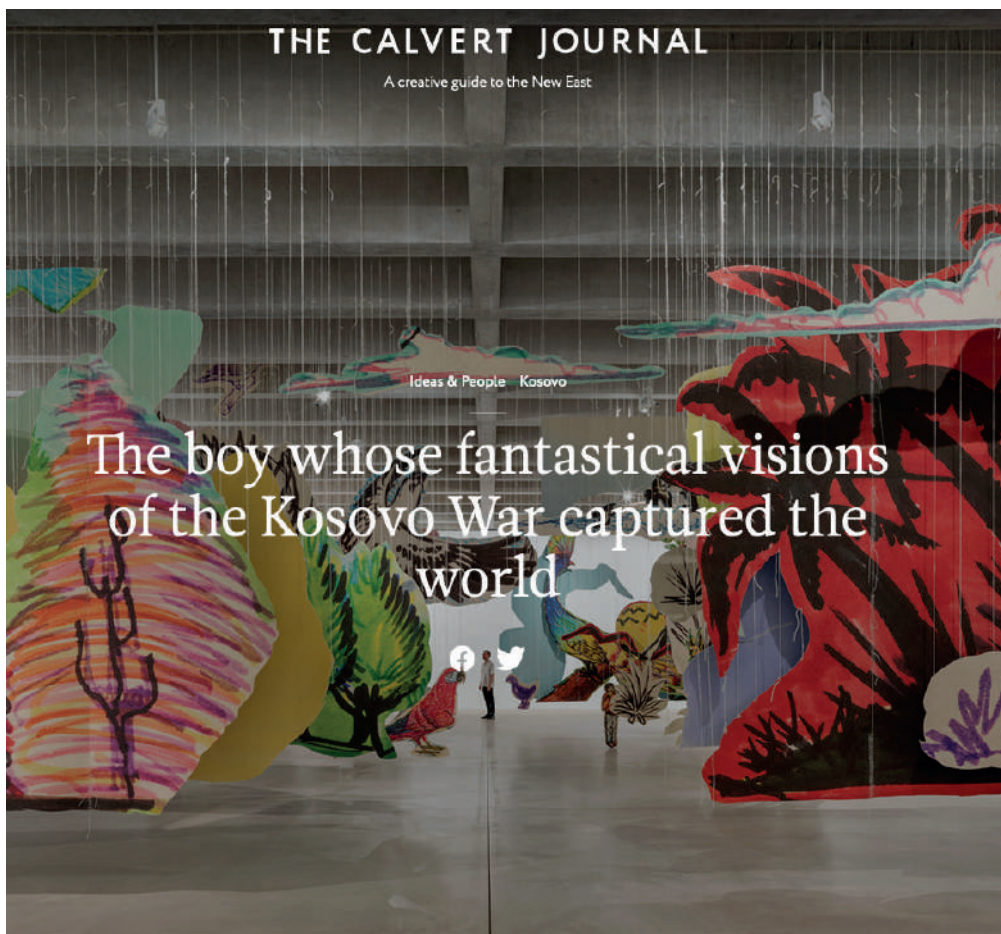
Around the same time, Halilaj said, he heard news reports saying that Aleksandar Vucic, Serbia's president, had described a massacre that occurred during the Kosovo War as "staged." If nationalist politicians were inventing fantasies about the conflict, he would respond with his truth: "I felt as a citizen, and an artist, I want to stand and counter-narrate something," Halilaj said.

Yet he said he didn't want visitors in St. Ives to focus solely on the show's dark side. They have to walk back to the start of the exhibition when they leave, Halilaj said, and if they happen to look back, they'll again be met by the fantasy landscape of exotic birds and trees. Did that desired ending reflect his views about Kosovo today?

"Totally!" Halilaj said, smiling broadly. He was "very, very positive" about the country's future, he added. Halilaj recently staged a joint show there with Alvaro Urbano, his husband and artistic collaborator, in which the couple hung huge fabric flowers under the dome of Kosovo's National Library during Pride Week. Those included a replica of a lily that had been part of the couple's engagement bouquet.

Kosovo is still a macho society, Halilaj said, yet no one had "thrown tomatoes" or protested against the artists' celebration of gay love.

"When this happened, under the flowers, I felt home for the first time in my life," Halilaj said. There was no need to imagine peacocks and parrots anymore.



November 2021  
ixt: Liza Premiyak

In a clip broadcast by a Swedish Television news programme on 17 May 1999, 13-year-old Petrit Halilaj gave his first matter-of-fact account of how Serbian police and special forces killed 152 people in a Kosovan village not far from his hometown. Now known as the massacre of Izbika, the event was one of the most horrific mass executions of the Serbia-Kosovo war.

Watching the footage now, it's difficult to see the young Halilaj as just a kid: he is poised and remarkably pragmatic in his word choice, aware that he's speaking on behalf of Kosovars who have lost relatives and homes. It's only when the topic changes to drawing – particularly his love of sketching parrots – that he beams with childlike wonder. "I drew these because I'm so into them," he says, grinning quietly.

Now 35-years-old and opening his first solo UK show – *Very volcanic over this green feather* – at Tate's westernmost outpost in St Ives, Cornwall, Halilaj wears the same expression of unbridled glee. He shows the natural world he has recreated in two-dimensional pieces of felt: peacocks and palm trees taken from his childhood drawings are delicately suspended from the gallery ceiling. As you navigate the installation, you encounter a pair of antelopes grazing, hens wandering. Then, amid some shrubbery, you spot a crying boy in the distance – the first sign that this peaceful landscape might be a mirage. From the back of the room, the landscape changes, revealing scenes of massacre depicted in childlike simplicity and frankness, with burning houses, displaced masses, and soldiers wielding guns.



Petrit Halilaj Photo by Angela B. Suarez



Petrit Halilaj Photo by Angela B. Suarez

Growing up in the village of Runik during the Serbia-Kosovo war, Halilaj learned to run at the sound of shelling. One day, his father disappeared. Women, children, and the elderly were rounded up. Fearing that the village would be torched, his mother collected a few treasured possessions and buried them in the ground – Halilaj’s drawings were among them. Their home was razed, and his family were forced to flee to Albania, where they found shelter at the Kukës II refugee camp. At the time, they did not know if Halilaj’s father or classmates had been imprisoned or killed.

Like many kids at the camp, Halilaj missed his classes. Without art supplies, he couldn’t continue his creative pursuits. That was until Italian psychologist Giacomo “Angelo” Poli arrived with paper and colourful felt-tip markers. Drawing was to provide distraction and relief from cramped and uncomfortable living conditions – and help the children unload the heavy burdens of war.



Petrit Halilaj, Installation view of Very volcanic over this green feather at Tate St Ives, 2021. Photo: Matt Greenwood, Tate Photography

The pain that emerged from the exercise was harrowing: violence and NATO airstrikes are depicted in utter clarity; Serbian forces and armed KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army or the Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës) fighters fill every page. These sinister scrawlings of the cruelty and chaos of war make Halilaj's vividly-hued parrots all the more impactful.

“This was the first time anyone had given any attention to me or the other kids,” the artist recalls of his time at the camp with Poli, speaking over Zoom from his Berlin studio. “[The drawings] seemed so important to people. This was when I realised that art can talk to people and that it was important to show what was happening [amidst the war].”





Petrit Halilaj, Paesaggio Fantastico (Fantasy Landscape), 1999. Courtesy the artist and Giacomo Poli

Among the scenes of tragedy, he also found space to dream: populating his drawings with magnificent peacocks, swans floating in serene lakes, and bucolic and tropical landscapes. It's no coincidence, perhaps, that peacocks unfurl their brilliantly-coloured tail feathers as a defence mechanism – to look larger and more intimidating. In the 13-year-old's case, drawing these creatures was a way of reconnecting with himself in the turmoil of war. "I was using that time [with Poli] to draw what I love: nature." It is something the artist is still fascinated by, so much so that when the internet connection drops and he has to switch rooms, Halilaj takes the laptop for a quick tour around his garden, to show me his birdhouses and flowers.

Naturally, the media covering the refugee camp caught sight of Halilaj's talent and for a moment, war reportage was brightened by his and other children's artworks. When the UN secretary general Kofi Annan asked to meet the young man, Halilaj's mum encouraged her son to draw a bigger picture for the occasion. Together, they made a canvas out of the cardboard floor of their tent – still damp from soil on the day of the meeting.



Petrit Halilaj, Installation view of *Very volcanic over this green feather* at Tate St Ives, 2021. Photo: Matt Greenwood, Tate Photography

In the summer of 1999, Halilaj and his family returned to Runik and reunited with his father. Together, they installed a temporary tent in the rubble of their house. It took many more years to rebuild their home and make it habitable. Meanwhile, Poli believed that the children's art represented an underappreciated perspective on humanitarian catastrophe and, on his return to Italy, he gathered the drawings to put on an exhibition.

He remained a pivotal supporter of Halilaj's artistic career: helping the young man secure a scholarship to attend the only art-focused high school in Peja, Kosovo, and later hosting him during his university studies in Milan, Italy. "Without his help, I would never have been able to achieve what I have." Once Halilaj arrived in Italy, he was finally able to spread his wings. "I wanted to see new things. I felt immensely lucky to have a new life. I had only ever imagined Venice and Paris, then, suddenly, I couldn't stop travelling," he beams.



Petrit Halilaj and Dr Giacomo Poli 1999 Courtesy Giacomo Poli

Throughout his career, he never ceased drawing birds, fascinated by their ability to transcend human boundaries. Early on, he exhibited a series of drawings showing an elegant breed of hens, which later inspired his installation: “They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens.” He delved into the bird archive of the former Natural History Museum of Kosovo and, in 2020, turned Madrid’s Crystal Palace into a giant bird nest with feeding areas to invite feathered visitors into the building. Though Halilaj hasn’t brought real birds into Tate St Ives, he has sewn bird feathers into his felt wildlife, a representation of the way real life is torn apart and stitched together to form memories.

“I had no interest in going back into the war,” Halilaj reflects. He didn’t consider using his childhood drawings until the pandemic struck. In a smaller, separate room from the St Ives installation, his family’s experience at Kukës II is presented in a display table outlining the conflict of 1998–9, NATO’s interventions, and The Hague International Court of Justice’s ongoing investigations into the war atrocities committed. Despite the timeline starting with in 1998, Halilaj says the tremors were felt long before the start of the war.



Petrit Halilaj, Installation view of Very volcanic over this green feather at Tate St Ives, 2021. Photo: Matt Greenwood, Tate Photography

“The nightmares began at the end of the 80s. My dad had work and we had a sense of regularity in the house. He would even bring toys every other week. Then, he was kicked out of his job, which happened to most Kosovar Albanians. The 90s grew darker and darker. There were no renovations at school. Teachers were unpaid. Albanians and Serbians were divided.” With segregation came the slow enforced assimilation of Kosovar Albanians. “The war started when they closed schools, when they closed theatres, when they cut off culture. That’s the real horror. That’s how politics really sets in.” The policing of culture crept into personal conversations and domestic spaces too. “I loved Serbian music. But my parents discouraged me from listening to it, worried about playing or celebrating our neighbours’ culture.”



Petrit Halilaj, Installation view of *Very volcanic over this green feather* at Tate St Ives, 2021. Photo: Matt Greenwood, Tate Photography

Whether exhibiting Albanian alphabet books (for his series *Abetare*), or using performance to bring to life the ruins of his hometown's House of Culture (for his series *Shkrepëtima*), his recent projects have been prompted by a desire to revisit, if not rebuild, this lost heritage. The artist knows too well how identity can be erased: he pulled out of the Belgrade Biennial last October, after organisers omitted his nationality from the official list of participants published online (you can read his open letter [here](#)). Responding to the Biennial theme of "Dreamers", Halilaj had wanted to dedicate his work to the dreams of Runik's citizens, inspired by his former teacher, who he had recently discovered was an actor and activist prior to the war.

"After the withdrawal from the Belgrade Biennial, I went back to the childhood drawings [I made with Poli]. He proposed to curator Anne Barlow that they aren't treated as kids drawings, but instead ask questions about how to engage with this material. Still, there is something powerful about reclaiming the wonder of childhood imagination. "How else do you unblock something that is already historicised and analysed?"



Studio Petrit Halilaj, work in progress for Tate St Ives exhibition, Spring 2021

You cannot move on from the trauma of war. When you look at the lush landscapes, you cannot unsee those traumatic scenes. But, as the exhibition suggests, you can build a new narrative from those memories.

“We construct the future as we remember the past,” continues Halilaj. “Seeing the latest developments in Europe, the way France and Holland have changed their mind about including southeastern countries into the EU, and the harsh diplomatic war continuing between Kosovo and Serbia, one thing is clear: there’s a lack of vision for a better future.” His disappointment with the Belgrade Biennial inevitably ties into this. “We should be more radical than ever, building new ways to connect. We should have a human point of view rather than a national point of view.”



Petrit Halilaj, Installation view of *Very volcanic over this green feather* at Tate St Ives, 2021. Photo: Matt Greenwood, Tate Photography

His eyes light up when he talks about the future, a glimmer of optimism that, in the context of Halilaj’s own history and the current pandemic, might seem astounding. That sense of hope is channeled through his felt creatures – reminders that life will flourish from disaster.

He points out an image of a soldier in the exhibition, this time sounding completely celebratory. “With the peacock in the background, it looks a bit like a drag queen dancing.”

Art

## Petrit Halilaj: 'I started to live with fear on a daily basis'



Claire Armitstead

@carmitstead

Mon 1 Nov 2021 09:00 GMT



'Kofi Annan was bigger than Star Wars to me': Petrit Halilaj with some of his drawings from 1999. Photograph: Angela B Suarez

The artist was 13 when the Kosovo war destroyed his home, but a chance meeting in a refugee camp led him to document a child's-eye view of the conflict

**P**etrit Halilaj was 13 years old when Serbian troops moved into his Kosovar village, forcing his family to flee and then burning their house to the ground. Piling as much as they could on to a tractor, they took off for his grandfather's home. When that was also invaded they moved again, flitting from refuge to refuge until they arrived at a camp in Albania, where they sat out the rest of the 15-month war between Serbia and Kosovo.

It was there, in the spring of 1999, that Halilaj met up with the Italian psychologist who was to change his life. News reached the tent (in which he was living with his mother, grandfather and four siblings) that Giacomo "Angelo" Poli was giving out paper and felt-tip pens to any child who wanted to draw. Before long he was pouring out images so powerful that the then UN secretary general Kofi Annan asked to meet him during a visit to the camp.

“I’d grown up with Kofi Annan. He was bigger than Star Wars to me, so I said to my mum: ‘I can’t show him a little A4 picture,’” recalls Halilaj. Together they managed to liberate some of the cardboard used to floor the tents, so he could redraw one image of a massacre in a village. The original plan was to give the picture to Annan, but Halilaj’s mind was changed by his grandfather’s insistence that the visit was no more than a piece of political theatre. So, while the image was broadcast around the world, the picture itself stayed in Albania, where Halilaj only rediscovered it decades later.

A year after the war ended, the family returned to Kosovo. Halilaj was given a scholarship to art school in Italy, setting him on a course that now brings him to Tate St Ives for his first solo show in the UK. Though Angelo’s visit to the camp only lasted two weeks, it was the start of a lifelong friendship. The two worked together to find an adult sense in the 35 drawings produced during that fortnight, which are the basis of Halilaj’s Tate installation. One room documents his childhood: it not only includes a video of Annan patting Halilaj’s head as he is shown the picture, but an Andrew Testa photograph he discovered years later on the New York Times website, of his little figure, squashed between two plumply upholstered women, in a food queue at the camp. Their plumpness, he points out, is the result of many layers of coloured felt that protected them from the vicious cold, and now plays a signature role in his art.

The installation itself is an enchanted forest of images, where parrots and peacocks hover over the churned earth of mass graves and burn you into the mind of a 13-year-old boy who somehow managed to craft his own salvation from the trauma of war. As installers stitch the felt cut-outs to the threads attaching them to the ceiling, the artist runs around poking feathers in here and there - peacock, chicken, flamingo - “for those who care to look closely”.

“When we talk about the war in Kosovo, we are not talking about a historical situation that has been resolved,” says Halilaj. But it is the artist’s role to find an alternative to “boring diplomacy”. In the end, Halilaj says, “landscape is what remains and gives us dreams of the future. So to me this exhibition is not just fragments of 1999 but fragments of the future, too.”



## Petrit Halilaj on his Tate installation



Photograph: Matt Greenwood/Tate

### The blanket

“This red and yellow cover was over the body of a three-month-old baby who was killed in the village of Obri, very close to where we lived. I didn’t put the child in the picture, because for me it’s an image of a massacre. I didn’t want to show the victims, because we’re so bombarded by war images. At first we were told that the soldiers would never hurt children. The murder of this child and his entire family was the moment when I started to live with fear on a daily basis.”



Photograph: Kirstin Prisk

### The burning house

“In another part of the installation you can see our yellow and red house before it all happened, but here it’s burning to the ground. There’s nothing left of it now. In the background you can see a soldier and a bulldozer, but in the foreground are birds in those first colours Angelo gave us. It’s a way of giving back to him what he gave to us as kids: paper and colour and space for our imaginations. That was such an amazing gift.”



Photograph: Kirstin Prisk

### The peacock

“Birds represented to me the colour and joy of my imagination, even in the worst of places. Behind it you can see the shadow of a soldier with a knife. It’s up to you which way you turn: you have either the unfolding of war or the unfolding of dreams.”



Photograph: Kirstin Prisk

### The little boy

“This little boy is the one figure I have taken directly from the drawing I made for Kofi Annan. In that, he stands to one side, with a tank rolling in, watching a massacre. I didn’t want to put him in the middle because it’s not a self-portrait, but a picture of all of us.”

*Petrit Halilaj: Very volcanic over this green feather is at Tate St Ives to 16 January.*

## Art

The Kosovar artist Petrit Halilaj in Spring 2021, with some of the 90 or so silhouettes that feature in his 'Very volcanic over this green feather' exhibition at Tate St Ives. Made from pieces of felt printed with the artist's childhood drawings on one side, they form an immersive installation inspired by trauma and hope





## WAR & PEACE

Petrit Halilaj looks back to his childhood drawings for a new exhibition at Tate St Ives

PORTRAIT: ANGELA B SUAREZ WRITER: TF CHAN

In 1998, when Petrit Halilaj was 11, Serbian troops swept through his native Kosovo and forced him and his family to flee into nearby Albania. Destruction, displacement and loss came to define his youth, and eventually shaped his career as an artist. Now one of the foremost cultural figures to have emerged from his young homeland, he has explored these themes with poignant urgency. At the 2010 Berlin Biennale, he reconstructed the scaffolding of his family home, burned down in the village of Kostërc during the war and later rebuilt in the capital city of Pristina; and let loose a flock of live chickens as symbols of rural life and recovered freedom. He subsequently meditated on migration and integration through large-scale recreations of the jewellery that his mother had buried in the soil as they prepared to escape, and by filling an Art Basel booth in 2011 with the same soil.

Contemplating wider themes of nationhood, he created a giant bird's nest out of Kosovan soil and twigs for the country's first pavilion at the Venice Biennale two years later, and then resurrected specimens from the vanished Natural History Museum of Pristina for a solo show at the Wiels Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels. Adding to this more recent projects such as *Ru*, 2017, inspired by Neolithic artefacts from the town of Runik that wound up in Serbian hands; and *Shkrepëtima*, 2018, a performance presenting the collective memories of Runik's citizens; and Halilaj's ability to give widely resonant form to his personal histories becomes abundantly clear.

There is, however, one aspect of his biography that Halilaj was hesitant to mine for many years: his actual experience of the Kosovo War, which he is finally drawing on for a major installation at Tate St Ives, his first solo exhibition in the UK. 'For a very long time, I preferred to not talk about it, or to not remember it in detail,' he explains over Zoom from his Berlin studio. 'I never went back to the conflict, and I was very annoyed by journalists who were interested in my experiences as a refugee.'

What changed? The passage of time, which empowered Halilaj to finally confront his traumas »



head-on, as well as the realisation that the conflict continues to reverberate in contemporary politics. There was also the pandemic, which compelled the artist to slow down and revisit his memories.

In lockdown, he had plenty of time to call an old friend, the Italian psychologist Giacomo 'Angelo' Poli. They first met at the Kukës II refugee camp in Albania in 1999, where Halilaj and his family were living, and Poli was part of a humanitarian mission. Poli wanted to help children at the camp to communicate their experiences, so he offered them felt-tip pens and paper and asked them to draw. 'After almost a month in the camp, I heard there was a programme for kids. I often describe it as one of the best presents of my life,' the artist says. The workshops were a respite from the hardships of the camp and a much-needed outlet: 'We drew about the war. It wasn't just the personal need for expression. We were trying to inform everyone we could about who we left behind, and what we just saw, and the extremely hard time Kosovo was going through.'

He depicted scenes of devastation – tanks tearing their way through the countryside, homes going up in flames, soldiers holding civilians at gunpoint, a family being massacred. But with Poli's encouragement, he also drew the same things he had drawn before the war, idyllic landscapes and fantastic birds that offered a sense of normality. Halilaj made quite an impression, first with his insistence on having twice the number of pens as other children (he is ambidextrous) and then with the drawings themselves, which attracted the attention of the international press and eventually the then UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, who asked to see the young man on a visit to the camp.

Halilaj struck up an immediate friendship with Poli, who had to depart after 15 days, taking with him 38 of Halilaj's artworks. 'I wrote to him anytime I could in the years to come,' says the artist. 'Back in Italy, »



From top, work in progress; Halilaj and Giacomo Poli at the Kukës II refugee camp in April 1999; the artist with some of the giant fragments appearing in the Tate St Ives exhibition



‘It’s not in our hands to take trauma out of our lives.  
 It’s what makes us who we are’

he persuaded his municipality to give me a grant to go to the only art high school in Kosovo after the war. Eventually, Angelo and his wife hosted me for three years when I was at university [the Brera Academy in Milan]. They became my second family.’

It was thanks to his recent conversations with Poli that Halilaj decided to revisit his 38 early drawings for Tate St Ives. He asked Poli to scan the drawings (he still prefers that the psychologist keeps them), and they began to discuss them one by one. ‘I started to be fascinated by how reality and fiction were already mixed in my mind [at the time],’ explains the artist. ‘I thought it would be amazing to have the chance to elaborate on the idea of traumatic events talking to your biggest hopes and dreams, how the two can sustain each other.’

He was also inspired by how Poli had been using theatre techniques as a way to process trauma. It gave him the idea of creating an immersive environment in Tate St Ives’ largest gallery, like a gigantic theatre set formed from magnified fragments of the drawings suspended from the ceiling. Relating to either war or fantasy, each fragment is arranged so that viewers first witness a happy scene featuring birds in vivid colours. But ‘the further you go in, the more the story of the war will unfold, and when you reach the other side and turn around, the impression is that of terror.’ Visitors should struggle to shake off the visions of devastation as they exit the gallery. ‘I’m interested in this idea that you will never see only the birds again. In your memory, it will always be the other side.’

Titled *Very volcanic over this green feather*, the work encourages empathy with the victims of war, but also articulates a certain optimism: one fragment, the child from the drawing Halilaj presented to Annan in 1999, feels autobiographical. ‘There’s a magic to bringing together all these different events in your life, and building a new story with them somehow,’ says Halilaj, who admits that he embarked on this project to move past his own traumas. ‘Actually, you learn that trauma will always be in life,’ he reflects. ‘It’s just what we do with it that can change. But it’s not in our hands to take it out of our lives. It’s what makes us who we are.’

In a way, *Very volcanic over this green feather* dovetails with an installation Halilaj and his life partner, fellow artist Alvaro Urbano, created for Madrid’s Palacio de Cristal last year. A series of large flowers representing milestones in their relationship, it is a dedication to queer love and expresses an aspect of Halilaj’s identity that he once thought incompatible with his Kosovan heritage. Happily, the tide is turning: this July, he and Urbano were invited to present the flowers under the cupola of the National Library of Kosovo, as part of the Autostrada Biennial and the nation’s fifth annual Pride Week. It felt like a homecoming, he tells me, a testament to the joys of living authentically and without fear, of sharing one’s full self with the world. ✨  
*‘Very volcanic over this green feather’, 16 October–16 January, Tate St Ives, [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk)*

Halilaj and Urbano’s installation at Madrid’s Palacio de Cristal features giant flowers made from painted canvas stretched over steel frames and representing milestones in their relationship

## Petrit Halilaj: Very volcanic over this green feather

15 OCTOBER 2021



Work in progress for 'Petrit Halilaj: Very volcanic over this green feather' at Tate St Ives, 2021. Photo: Angela B. Suarez

For his first solo show in the UK – at Tate St Ives from 16 October–16 January 2022 – Petrit Halilaj presents an installation that recreates a series of felt-tip drawings he made aged 13 at the Kukës II refugee camp in Albania, after his family were displaced by the Kosovo War. Halilaj was encouraged to draw at the camp by the Italian psychologist Giacomo ‘Angelo’ Poli, who remains a close friend; the exhibition has been informed by conversations between the two, and includes materials from both of their wartime archives. The installation takes the form of a sculptural environment, comprising scaled-up elements of the artist’s childhood drawings, from representations of the atrocities he witnessed to images of birds and fantastical beasts. [Find out more from the Tate St Ives website.](#)



*Fantasy Landscape (1999)*, Petrit Halilaj. Courtesy the artist and Giacomo Poli



Installation view of 'Petrit Halilaj: To a raven and hurricanes that from unknown places bring back smells of humans in love', Palacio de Cristal, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2020. Photo: Imagen Subliminal; courtesy of the artist, ChertLüdde, Berlin, kamel mennour, London/Paris



*Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night? (grey and warm yellow) (2017), Petrit Halilaj, Courtesy the Artist, ChertLüdde, Berlin and kamelennour, Paris/London*



## QUADRIENNALE D'ARTE 2020: UNO SGUARDO *FUORI* DAGLI SCHEMI, DAGLI ANNI SESSANTA AI GIOVANI ARTISTI

SAMANTHA DE MARTIN

29/10/2020

**Roma** - *"Dove ci incontreremo la prossima volta? Cosa vorresti vedere? Oggi ti chiedo solo di colmare questa distanza con le tue parole, così che diventi un coro di voci desideranti"*.

Nella Sala 15, su cartoni della pizza impilati, la scrittura di Giulia Crispiani rievoca stralci di una lettera che l'artista spedisce a 60 destinatari diversi, utilizzando le risposte come punto di partenza per il suo manifesto poetico.

Tremila di questi cartoni verranno distribuiti a pizzerie di Roma e utilizzati come consegne a domicilio, uno dei pochi sistemi di comunicazione permessi durante il lockdown.

*Incontri in luoghi straordinari 2020* nasce infatti durante l'emergenza sanitaria del Covid19, in risposta all'impossibilità di abitare lo spazio pubblico.

Non lontano dall'intervento di Crispiani, in una delle 35 sale di **Palazzo delle Esposizioni**, che accolgono **fino al 17 gennaio le 300 opere dei 43 artisti in mostra alla Quadriennale d'arte 2020**, la materialità e il movimento si fondono nella pratica artistica del danzatore e coreografo Michele Rizzo.

### ● In un bouquet di fiori l'amore "oltre" di Petrit Halilaj e Alvaro Urbano

Il giglio regalato per la proposta di matrimonio (che avrebbe dovuto tenersi quest'anno in Spagna) i *Non ti scordar di me* e il fiore della mela cotogna regalati durante la quarantena.

Il bouquet di fiori di Petrit Halilaj (naturalizzato italiano ma originario del Kosovo, Paese che non riconosce le unioni gay) e Alvaro Urbano (nato in Spagna, paese che non riconosce l'indipendenza del Kosovo) visibile avvicinandosi allo scalone di accesso al secondo piano di Palazzo delle Esposizioni, racconta la storia d'amore dei due artisti.

L'intervento è una delicata celebrazione dell'amore, in tutte le sue forme, e di una nuova modalità di essere famiglia, oltre i limiti della riconoscibilità identitaria e nazionale.



Petrit Halilaj e Alvaro Urbano, veduta dell'allestimento, *Quadriennale d'arte 2020 FUORI* | Foto: © DSL Studio | Courtesy Fondazione La Quadriennale di Roma

## FLIGHT FANTASIES

MARK GODFREY ON THE ART OF PETRIT HALILAJ

Below: Petrit Halilaj, *The history of a hug*, 2020, steel, fabric, feathers, leather, wood from Kosovo, silicone, paint, hair. Installation view, Palacio de Cristal, Parque de El Retir, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. Photo: ImagenSubliminal (Miguel de Guzmán and Rocío Romero).

Opposite page: View of "Petrit Halilaj: To a raven and hurricanes that from unknown places bring back smells of humans in love," 2020–21, Palacio de Cristal, Parque de El Retir, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. Photo: ImagenSubliminal (Miguel de Guzmán and Rocío Romero).

IN FEBRUARY 2020, a transparent envelope arrived through my letter box. There was no paper inside, just some tiny seeds. Stamped on the outside were the names Petrit Halilaj and Alvaro Urbano and a date: 26.03.20. It was an invitation to the couple's wedding celebration, hosted within Halilaj's installation in the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid's Parque de El Retiro. The seeds hinted at what guests would find in the Palacio: monumental cloth flowers, lilies, tulips, poppies, carnations, and cherry blossoms, hung from the high glass ceiling to form a canopy. Each sculpture, made collaboratively by Halilaj and Urbano, was based on a flower the lovers had given each other during their courtship. Brass bird's claws were planted in the middle of the space, huge thin legs stretching up toward the sky. Halilaj had assembled thickets of branches within the light-filled conservatory; in among these were brass bird feeders filled with seeds. The windows were open so that birds would come in from the park, feast, and fly off to perch on the outside cloth petals.

As magical as it sounds, the project was actually incomplete, because the wedding celebration could never take place. Covid made the festivities impossible in Madrid. Pandemic notwithstanding, it would have been unthinkable in Halilaj's home country, Kosovo, where same-sex marriage





is illegal. Halilaj and Urbano had been planning to dress as animals for their union, and one element of the ceremony remained in the installation, which opened to the public, after delays, in mid-July 2020: Wandering the space was a hired performer dressed as a white raven and clutching a branch. This was the same branch Halilaj's grandfather had held decades earlier when he was told, while working in the fields, that his wife had given birth. Men were not supposed to express their feelings, according to the mores of the time, but the new father could not contain his joy and randomly embraced this stick. He later gave it to his grandson, perhaps recognizing that the stigmatization of male emotional expression would have to end if the traumatic past were to be confronted.

Since the early 2010s, Halilaj, born in 1986 in a rural village near the town of Runik, has emerged as one of the most interesting artists in Europe, with solo shows at museums and kunsthallen in Berlin, Milan, Brussels, Bonn, Cologne, Turin, and Venice and with important outings in Los Angeles and New York too. The Madrid show was characteristic. He creates fantastical scenarios drawn from personal and cultural histories in order to dream of new possibilities, and he does so with extraordinary material and spatial sensitivity. For Halilaj, as a Kosovar who lived through civil war and who was only able to express his sexuality when he was well into adulthood,

imagination serves as a critical tool rather than as a means of escapism or self-mythologizing. He does not express nostalgia for an idyllic past he knows never existed, nor idealize a homeland in which LGBTQIA+ people still struggle for acceptance.

In 1998, when Serbian forces began to persecute Albanian Kosovars after a decade of flouting Kosovo's independent status, Halilaj's family fled along with thousands of others, winding up in the Kukës II refugee camp in Albania. Halilaj was seen as a kind of child prodigy in the camp thanks to his remarkable ambidexterity and his ability to draw two different pictures simultaneously. He was noticed by an Italian psychologist, Giacomo "Angelo" Poli, who supplied him with felt-tip pens and paper and to whom he gave many of his sketches. After some months, Halilaj returned with his parents and four siblings to Runik, but at the age of eighteen he traveled to Italy to live with Poli, whose family fostered him. They lived near Milan, and Halilaj was able to enroll in the Brera Academy, an art school in the city. His work is clearly influenced by postwar Italian art: Pino Pascali's blue spider and cleaning-brush-bristle worms; Mario Merz's sculptures modeling nomadic dwellings; Giuseppe Penone's environments of branches, leaves, and cast-metal forms; Alighiero e Boetti's turn to "feminine" traditions of embroidery. Land art also seems to have made an impression.

This page: View of "Petrit Halilaj: She, fully turning around, became terrestrial," 2015, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn. Photo: Thekla Meusel.

Opposite page: Petrit Halilaj, *Abetare*, 2015, steel, desks from Shotë Galica school. Installation view, Fondazione Merz, Turin. Photo: Renato Ghiazza.





**Most visitors to Halilaj's exhibitions are unfamiliar with the history of Kosovo, but they can viscerally feel the resonances of that history through his work.**

Halilaj moved to Berlin in 2008. I first saw his work when Danh Vo selected him for a summer show at New York's Marian Goodman Gallery in 2014. Like Vo, who also became a refugee as a child, Halilaj reflects on questions of displacement, on the intersections of personal and global histories, on income inequality and queer identities. But where Vo often repurposes objects with extraordinary provenances, Halilaj works from situations that he discovers, and his installations are almost like stage sets—the viewer becomes a kind of protagonist within the environment and explores the story physically and imaginatively. Most visitors to Halilaj's exhibitions are unfamiliar with the history of Kosovo, but they can viscerally feel the resonances of that history through his work.

The first of Halilaj's projects to gain attention was his contribution to the 2010 Berlin Biennale. Given funds for a sculpture, Halilaj turned the money over to his parents, who had dreamed of moving from the countryside to Pristina and of building a larger house. The house was duly erected, and Halilaj retained the wooden slats that had been used to cast its concrete frame. These slats were trucked to Berlin and attached to the ceiling on the ground floor of the KW Institute for Contemporary Art to create a ghostly upside-down echo of the Pristina residence. Chickens meandered about under the slats, as they had done next to Halilaj's house when he was a child. Without striking an accusatory tone, the artist pointed to the economic disparities between Germany and Kosovo. A year later, he realized another displacement: Digging a rectangular hole near his childhood home, he created a kind of negative sculpture à la Michael Heizer. The dimensions of the hole were keyed to those of his Berlin gallery's booth at Art Basel. The earth was trucked to Switzerland, so a little patch of Kosovo occupied the pristine space of the art fair.

Living abroad, Halilaj gained a perspective on Kosovo that enabled him to explore histories whose ramifications might not be so easily legible to those living in the country. One of these stories concerned the fate of the extraordinary collection of taxidermied animals once proudly displayed in the Natural History Museum of Pristina. The collection had been moved into a warm, damp storage room right after the war ended in 1999, when the museum was repurposed to bolster a nascent sense of Kosovar identity and its galleries given over to traditional costumes and folkloric artifacts. A skeptic of all forms of nationalism, the artist was worried by this development. On one of his visits to Pristina, he asked to see the taxidermy collection. He found the stuffed animals rotting in the darkness. In response to this terrible sight, he re-created each specimen, sculpting the beasts and birds with a mixture of mud and animal dung. He acquired a number of the museum's original vitrines and created an installation, first shown at Wiels Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels in 2013 and reprised two years later in Bonn at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. The vitrines were open and empty; the animals appeared to have escaped. Some seemed to roam around the floor; others were perched on beautifully crafted stands Halilaj had sculpted in brass, a material to which he has repeatedly turned for its lustrous appearance as well as for its fragility and susceptibility to tarnishing. Entire exhibitions have been devoted to the ways in which artists have deconstructed vitrines and the other apparatuses of museum presentations, but this installation felt incredibly fresh, mainly because of the wonderful contrast between the rough corporeality of the sculpted animals and the smooth golden-hued metal. The material juxtaposition elegantly captured the collision of a depressing present-day reality and Halilaj's poignant vision of resurrection and escape.

The Brussels and Bonn projects were also animated by the formal contrast of the heavy cases and the elegant brass structures elevating some of the animals, and this sculptural dynamic of groundedness and flight similarly inspired the artist's next major installation, first realized at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in Cologne 2015 and reprised for the Mario Merz Prize in Turin in 2018. Again, these arose from a situation that Halilaj encountered in Kosovo. On one trip back to Runik, he passed by his old school and came upon a group of desks that were about to be destroyed. They were covered in teenagers' graffiti: classroom jokes, hearts and the names of crushes, erect cocks, EMINEM and MESSI, but also with drawings specific to the location and to the experiences of young people growing up in the wake of a civil war. There were insignia of local political parties, depictions of military equipment, slogans in both Albanian and Serbian.

NOVEMBER 2021 149

Halilaj rendered some of the graffiti as huge black wire sculptures and installed these so that they seemed to fly off the original desks, which he'd salvaged. In Cologne, they filled the main room and tumbled down the staircase; in Turin, they climbed the walls of Merz's former studio, where the Italian artist's neon Fibonacci numbers would once have been. At both venues, most of the desks were laid out in neat rows, as they had been in the classroom, but in Milan one was also suspended above the floor. It was a beautiful way of memorializing the mundane daydreams and escapist hopes of a generation of Kosovar kids while attending to the powerful impact of political discord on their imaginations.

Very different and much older artifacts were at the heart of a project Halilaj realized in 2017 for his first institutional show in the United States, at New York's New Museum. Archaeological explorations near Runik in 1968 and 1983 had unearthed hundreds of figurines and musical instruments, evidence of a significant Neolithic settlement. The instruments, called ocarinas, were small globes with apertures that when blown into produced a breathy note like a birdcall. The discoveries were shipped off to Belgrade and never shown to the local people, who had no access to this part of their cultural heritage, except for a few objects that had been missed by excavators and unearthed by farmers during plowing. Halilaj researched the collections that had been removed from their local context and made copies in clay of more than five hundred objects. He turned each little



Above: Petrit Halilaj, *RU, Egretta cerulea, Limosa limosa*, 2017, reproductions of Neolithic artifacts from the region of Runik, Kosovo (clay, plaster, resin, pigments), brass, left: 28 3/4 x 11 x 20 1/4", right: 22 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 15 3/4".

Below: View of "Petrit Halilaj: RU," 2017-18, New Museum, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

Opposite page: Petrit Halilaj, *Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night (red)*, 2017, Dyshek carpet from Kosovo, flokati, polyester, chenille wire, stainless steel, brass. Installation view, Arsenale, Venice. From the 57th Venice Biennale.





replica ocarina into a bird's body, giving it thin brass legs and claws. At the New Museum, he hung a set of huge nests made of branches and mulch from the walls; the replicas were arranged in the nests and on the floor. It was a striking sight, one laden with historical and political meaning. The work's creation was triggered by Halilaj's reflections upon internal colonialism, the ways in which modern states despoil and exert crypto-imperialist control over provincial territories. Rather than offering an explicit argument for the restitution of these artifacts, Halilaj showed how their loss

allowed them to be reimagined. Ocarinas and figurines metamorphosed into a flock of migratory birds, landing in their temporary nests in New York before departing for other climes. The work seemed to suggest the value of historical fragments in constructing a national self-conception that avoids the pitfalls of identitarianism and militarism, one that acknowledges change, transience, and a kind of strength in vulnerability.

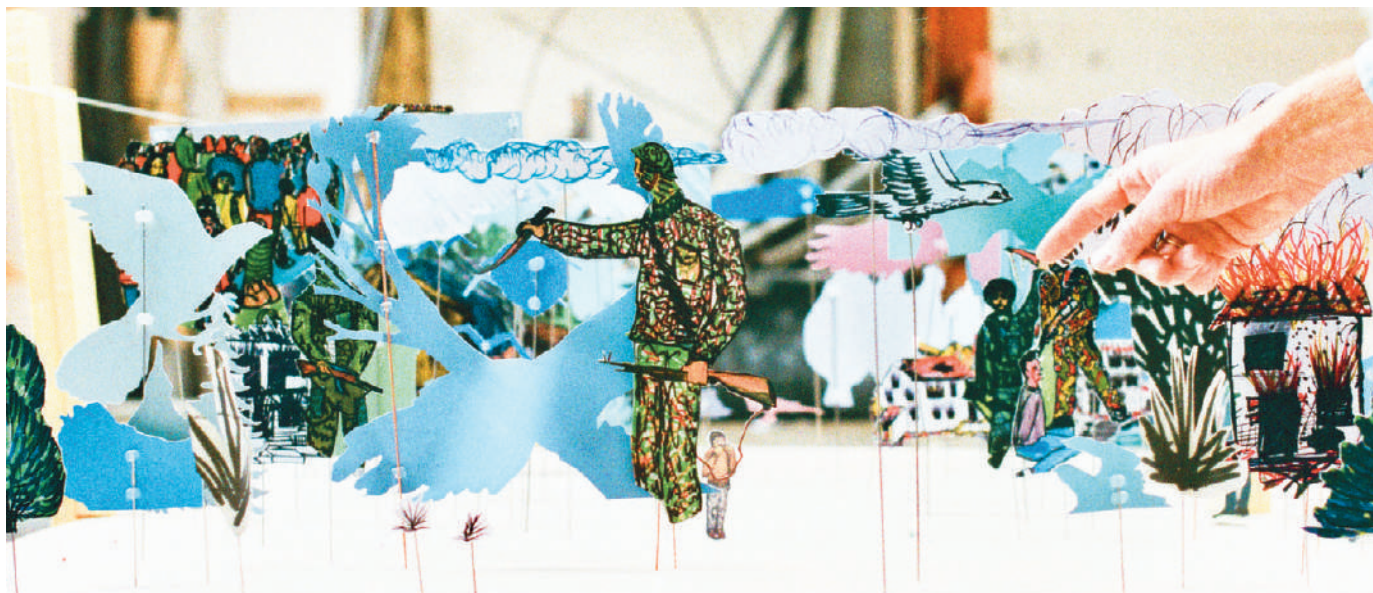
It's no wonder that birds—tethered to specific places yet peripatetic, resilient yet seemingly fragile—loom large in Halilaj's art. He is drawn not to eagles and hawks but to less predatory and mostly smaller creatures, from the chickens that wandered around his childhood home and the canaries he kept as pets to the parrots and peacocks he sketched as a child. His 2014 artist's book, *of course blue affects my way of shitting*, is filled with images of his collages. These start with old black-and-white photographs of birds over which he drew extra colorful wings or stems and branches, sometimes pasting on fragments of fabric, making real animals into mythical creatures. It is easy to understand why a child in a refugee camp might identify with small birds and their capacity, despite their size, to fly wherever they wish, borders notwithstanding. This is a symbolism that is Halilaj's, but not so far from that of other artists: One might think of David Hammons's "Flight Fantasy" assemblages of the 1970s and '80s, or of the feathered *Ciguapas* that populate Firelei Baez's paintings, or Joan Jonas's performance and installation *Stream or river flight or pattern*, 2016.

Halilaj's identification with winged creatures, vulnerable ones especially, has been a way to express his queerness in a traditional and homophobic culture. This aspect of his art became more prominent in his contribution to the 2017 Venice Biennale. Invited by curator Christine Macel to make a work in the dim and lofty spaces of the Arsenale, he remembered his childhood love of moths, his awe at their transformation from larvae and the enchanting sight of their patterned wings. He embarked on a series of moth sculptures, which were also costumes that he sometimes wore in performance. The antennae were made from fuzzy chenille wire; the wings were fashioned from traditional woven Kosovar qilim, dyshek, and jan carpets and boasted trailing cascades of colored fabric. Halilaj made these works in collaboration with his mother, Shkurte Halilaj, and the process enabled the pair to talk through his sexuality, which he had only recently revealed to his family. The sculptures were installed in the Arsenale under flickering electric lights, some resting on the walls, others in the rafters. It was a captivating installation that won Halilaj a Special Mention (full disclosure: I was on the awarding jury). The moths flew from Venice to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, where they landed in 2018.

A couple of years ago, on one of Halilaj's regular visits to his Italian foster family, Giacomo Poli showed the artist a folder of the felt-tip drawings that Halilaj had made as a child in the refugee camp some twenty years earlier and that Poli had guarded ever since. Back in the camp, Poli had encouraged children to draw whatever they wanted, but also what they had seen, knowing that many would be unable to verbalize the traumatic events they had witnessed. The thirteen-year-old Halilaj must have been very open to this encouragement. He drew precise pictures of palm trees, parrots, sunset-drenched landscapes, peacocks. He also drew tanks, military aircraft, and equally precise pictures of crowds of Kosovars huddled together while being held at gunpoint, with lone figures separated from the group, kneeling down to face brutal beatings or execution.

Around the time Halilaj rediscovered these works, he became aware that Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vučić, was claiming that the massacres of the Kosovar war had never happened, that the stories of atrocities had been fabricated. Faced with this revisionism, Halilaj felt an urgent impulse to

NOVEMBER 2021 151



return to his juvenilia. He conceived an installation connected to his childhood drawings for his next institutional outing, a show currently open at Tate St Ives, UK. Certain elements of the drawings—trees, birds, soldiers, refugees—were scanned, digitally cut out, enlarged to many times their original size, and printed on huge felt sheets, which were also cut, silhouette-like, to conform to the contours of the images. These will hang in rows in the St Ives space, much as painted flats would be arranged on a stage. While most of Halilaj's installations evoke theatrical sets, he wanted to emphasize this resemblance here because he was thinking about the ways in which psychodramatists have helped survivors of war, genocide, and natural disasters to stage their own stories so as to bear witness and work through trauma. Crucially, Halilaj chose to separate the imagined scenes from the recollected ones by suspending the fantasy images facing forward, toward the entrance to the gallery, and the soldiers and refugees facing backward. This means that only when you turn around to exit will you see the images Halilaj once witnessed.

All but one of the felt sheets will hang suspended at varying heights. The exception, the only one of these felt works to touch the floor, is also the only one printed on both sides. It's an image of a child, and it comes from a rather special drawing. When Halilaj was living at Kukës II as a boy, he heard that Kofi Annan was coming to visit the camp and prepared, on cardboard, the most ambitious picture he had made up to that point. It showed a child watching a massacre. Annan, who had superhero status in Halilaj's eyes, actually asked to take the drawing to the UN, but Halilaj kept hold of it. The figure might be a kind of proxy for the viewers in this new exhibition, a character with whom to identify, so that it might be possible to understand what such children see, and what their dreams are made on. □

*"Petrit Halilaj: Very volcanic over this green feather" is on view at Tate St Ives, UK, through January 16, 2022. MARK GODFREY IS AN INDEPENDENT CURATOR BASED IN LONDON. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)*

**At Tate St Ives, Halilaj was thinking about the ways in which psychodramatists have helped survivors of war, genocide, and natural disasters to stage their own stories.**







Opposite page, top: Maquette for "Petrit Halilaj: *Very volcanic over this green feather*," 2021–22, Tate St Ives, UK. Photo: Angela B. Suarez.

Opposite page, bottom: Petrit Halilaj in his studio working on *Very volcanic over this green feather*, 2021, Berlin, April 16, 2021. Photo: Angela B. Suarez.

Above: Petrit Halilaj, *Paesaggio Fantastico (Fantasy Landscape)*, 1999, felt-tip pen on paper, 8 3/4 x 11 3/4".

Left: Little boy detail from Petrit Halilaj's 1999 drawing for Kofi Annan.

## First solo exhibition by international artist Petrit Halilaj opens at Tate St Ives

The show will run until January 16, 2022

🕒 20 October 2021



By **Olivier Vergnault**

Kosovo artist Petrit Halilaj working on his first solo exhibition for Tate St Ives back in the Spring (Image: Angela B Suarez)

A major new arts installation by international artist Petrit Halilaj has been opened in Cornwall.

‘Very Volcanic Over this Green Feather’ is Halilaj’s first solo exhibition and will run at Tate St Ives until January 2022.

The shows in **St Ives, Cornwall**, stems from the artist’s own personal story, while also bringing forward the collective trauma of the Kosovar Albanian people and other survivors of conflict.

family lived at the Kukës II and Lezhe-Shengjin refugee camps in Albania in 1999.

For this exhibition, Halilaj presents a poignant new installation reimagining a collection of felt-tip drawings he made as a child at Kukës II.

The original pictures were created under the guidance of Italian psychologist Giacomo 'Angelo' Poli, who was taking part in a humanitarian mission at the refugee camp.

Poli supported the children in communicating their experiences through drawing, encouraging them to document the destruction they had experienced but also to imagine ideal, fantasy worlds for the future as a tool to escape the present.

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In a period of 15 days, Halilaj created 38 drawings, all of which have been preserved by Poli until today. After Poli's departure, Halilaj continued to create drawings of his experiences, one of which he showed to Kofi Annan, then Secretary General of the United Nations, when he visited Albania.

Since 1999, Poli has become a close friend and supporter of Halilaj, who is now an established artist based in Berlin.

In 2021 Halilaj revisited the original pictures he made with Poli for the first time in over two decades. Informed by those conversations, Halilaj has created an immersive environment within Tate St Ives's largest gallery, magnifying and reconstituting fragments from the original drawings on a grand scale to reflect on personal and collective memories. Fusing the atrocities he witnessed with his birds and fantastical visions, the exhibition presents a powerful meditation on conflict, hope and memory.

Speaking about the exhibition Petrit Halilaj said: "When memories emerge from the past they do it in fragments, and our imagination of the future operates in a similar way.

"If our dream of the future has a fragmentary nature too, then this exhibition can be seen as a small star in a constellation that forms the collective imagination about the world-to-come — a world that is able to look at the future with radical hope, but also with deep roots in its history."

The exhibition at Tate St Ives will run until January 16, 2022.

	<b>MADRID</b>	
<p><b>A Giant Nest</b></p> <p><b>PETRIT HALILAJ</b>  <b>"TO A RAVEN AND HURRICANES THAT FROM UNKNOWN PLACES BRING BACK SMELLS OF HUMANS IN LOVE".</b>  <b>PALACIO DE CRISTAL</b>  <b>17 JULY 2020 – 28 FEB 2021</b></p> <p>The first exhibition since the re-opening of Madrid's cultural calendar was organised by the Museo Reina Sofía and is an invitation by Petrit Halilaj (*1986) for humans and non-humans alike to feel at home inside a "giant nest" surrounded by flowers. Juan José Santos caught up with the artist to talk about the show.</p> <p><b>Juan José Santos:</b> Did you decide from the outset on the scaled variations of the flowers and the dialogue between exterior and interior?</p> <p><b>Petrit Halilaj:</b> This exhibition is the result of a deep engagement with the space, and every element has been created in close relation with the architecture and the historical context of Palacio de Cristal. The flowers were conceived and realised together with my life-partner, the artist Alvaro Urbano; their scale was adapted according to the shape of each flower, how it interacted with other elements of the exhibition and with the space itself. Palacio de Cristal is almost entirely made out of glass, and one quickly realises how the outside becomes so present inside the space. I wanted to emphasise this continuity – both formally and metaphorically. I decided to open the windows and place feeding areas inside to invite birds, insects, and other living beings into the space, those inhabiting or just transiting through Retiro Park. This simple gesture carries a political message that I see in strong connection with the history of Palacio de Cristal: I wanted to create an environment that</p>	<p>attempts to overcome the impossibility that many people face daily when their identity and subjectivity is neglected, dismissed, or even brutally repressed by family members, friends, society, or politics.</p> <p><b>JJS</b> Would you say that it is an exhibition made for the birds and insects that could inhabit it, and that the humans are the visitors to this gigantic nest?</p> <p><b>PH</b> This is a very interesting question and relates so much with many thoughts I am having lately regarding the structures we live in and those we humans have built. My desire was to welcome all living beings into the space, whether human or non-human. By questioning the scale it also implicitly questions species as seen from an anthropocentric perspective (with humans at the top of the pyramid). One of the things I love about bowerbirds is their "extended phenotype" (a concept introduced by Richard Dawkins in 1982) – the complex structures that they build and the elaborated rituals or choreographies that they create to attract a mate, are an effect of their genes on the environment. The creative behaviour of these birds seems to be rooted in their evolutionary process, where they are themselves not extravagantly beautiful but they build something aesthetically pleasing that is attractive to their species. I am fascinated by the fact that they act on the space in a way that is comparable to what artists do, and that this creative behaviour seems to be following an evolutionary process – with some aesthetic results being more successful than others, ensuring the successful reproduction of the bird.</p> <p><b>JJS</b> Your biography plays a great role in your work, to the point that you want to end the exhibition with a performance that is the wedding with your partner. Do you fear that</p>	<p>the biographical aspect could overshadow the viewer's interpretation, or that the opposite could happen: that the viewer will not connect what they see with your own personal story?</p> <p><b>PH</b> The exhibition is conceived as a stage for encounters to take place, as the bowerbird nest suggests, and for different forms of care and kinship to flourish. Every living creature transiting through or inhabiting Retiro Park is invited to do this while experiencing the space. The wedding ceremony is one of these encounters. We are also working on a public programme that departs from the need to deepen the reflection on the current political situation of Kosovo, where I come from. My decision to celebrate my marriage to Alvaro at Palacio de Cristal is partly driven by the fact that Spain recognises same-sex marriage but it does not recognise Kosovo, and partly by the fact that Alvaro comes from Madrid. So in a way, I am celebrating beyond this impossibility that is rooted in my personal experience, but that is also the condition that many of us experience today, for different reasons, belonging to marginalised communities that struggle daily against many forms of direct or subtle repression. The exhibition brings us together in a dreamy environment despite the reality of this situation.</p> <p><b>JJS</b> Your exhibition has been described as "instagrammable", and indeed, when I went to see it, everyone was posing in front of the flowers. Are you worried that it will only serve as a background image, or is that something that pleases you?</p> <p><b>PH</b> I am actually pleased that visitors are attracted by the flowers, as flowers have a similar function in nature: they attract birds, insects, butterflies, and other animals that are fundamental for pollination,</p>
<b>150</b>		<b>VIEWS</b>

## MADRID

Photo: Inagorés del Real (Miguel de Guzmán and Roberto Boreo)



View of "To a raven and hurricanes that from unknown places bring back smells"

reproduction, survival of the species and, by extension, for the balance of our ecosystems. From the feedback from people visiting the show and the articles I have read, it seems to me that people have been looking for the meaning of these works, and I believe that the exhibition has not been misunderstood. The issues of identity, belonging, care, and love that the show deals with have been generally felt and expressed. Also, I realised that I had a great responsibility opening an exhibition after this long time of isolation and disconnection. I am not worried that people share what they saw: every gesture we do in these difficult times to feel closer and more connected with others is of great importance to me.

**JJS** The connection established between your show and the neighbouring Mario Merz retrospective

in the Palacio de Velázquez is interesting. However, I find the relationship with *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch, also nearby in the Museo del Prado, more convincing. The items you have in the Palacio de Cristal are symbolic, and those open flowers are quite erotic – or am I getting carried away by the summer heat?

**PH** The flowers have really something erotic to them, as do actual living flowers, which are the plant's reproductive organs and serve precisely this function of attracting insects for pollination. During my first trip to Madrid in 2012, I went on the same day both to Palacio de Cristal and to the Prado. I was extremely impressed by Bosch's paintings, but I agree that the connection is far-fetched. The relationship between my work and Mario Merz's, however, is very important to me, and I

am honoured that my exhibition happens in conjunction with his retrospective. As in many projects I do, the process of installing shows me things I hadn't thought of before, and the exhibition really comes together only in the space, like a micro world that eventually starts to breathe all together. While I was installing at Palacio de Cristal I decided to leave all the glass that was removed from the structure inside, in order to put the windows on display instead of hiding them, as I had initially thought. These materials have been placed behind the giant bird legs, carried by branches and by soft silicon windows. They could suggest a nest that is still to be made, materials for Merz still to create a sculpture ... Or for birds to come and continue the work I started by nesting inside the palace. ✓

## VIEWS

## 151

ME INSTALACIONIN E PETRIT HALILAJT E ÁLVARO URBANOS NIS EDICIONI I TRETË I "AUTOSTRADA BIENNALE"

## “Lule Mosmëharro” në kërkim të lirisë e dashurisë për të gjithë

Nuk është vetëm një emër interesant për një instalacion lulesh gjithfarësoji: boshtra, fara palme, luleqersh, luletofi apo karajfile. Nëpërmjet tyre është vënë në spikamë edhe potenciali që kujtesa personale mbart në vete për të rishkruar gradualisht kujtesën kolektive. Lulet janë histori personale të Petrit Halilaj dhe Álvaro Urbanos dhe rrefejnë lidhjen e tyre. Për shoqërinë ata sjellin lule si shpresë për liri e dashuri për të gjithë

Salih Mehmeti

PRISHTINË, 30 QERSHOR – Kupolat e Bibliotekës Kombëtare të Kosovës mund të mos jenë i vetmi raritet i ngrehinës brutaliste që u projektua nga arkitekti kroat Andrija Mutnjaković. Lule masive të bardha, luleqersh dhe aso të ftohtë lavjerrëshin statike nga tavani si për të mbzotëruar krejtërisht ndërtesën e dy kateve të sipërme.

Ky paralelizim i hapësirës së brendshme nëpërmjet artit ishte pjesë e instalacionit “Lule Mosmëharro” e dyshes së artistëve Petrit Halilaj dhe Álvaro Urbano.

### Fillimi i “udhëtimit të bukur”

Me atë që u përshkrua si fillim i “udhëtimit të bukur” në Prishtinë, “Autostrada Biennale” të mërkurës pasdite ka shpaksur edicionin e saj të tretë me radhë.

Me një performim simbolik me kostume kualash nga dy artistët protagonistë, dy shkëputje muzikore të Flutura Haziraj dhe Plator Gashit, e kanë bashkëshoqëruar ekspozitën me lulet që prej vjetshit përshkuan Madridin, Romën e Berlinin.

Bashkë me fushën e luledielli të mbjella në platenë e Pallatit të Rinisë nga artistja Agnes Denes, instalatori

i artistit nga Kosova dhe atij nga Spanja i mëshon domosdoshmërisë për transformim shoqëror.

“Ato lidhen me tokën, ujin, dritën – të gjitha këto që nuk mund të merren si të mirëqena. Ato bashkojnë perspektivat mikro dhe makro, kujtimet personale të çlirimit dhe transformimit ndërsa krenrohet jokonformiteti. Lulet po ashtu u përgjigjen me dhe mbshuri shtresa ve të traumës dhe dhunës, me një thirrje për diversitet; për histori, specie dhe komunitete të ndryshme”, është thënë në libërthrin “Çka rëse një rrugëtim...” me synimet e vizionet e shtjete të “Autostrada Biennale”.

Në hapje të ekspozitës, Vatra Abrashi, drejtuese e programit të edukimit në “Autostrada Biennale”, është shprehur e lumtur që kjo ngjarje po e fillon edicionin e saj të tretë.

“Është një nga ëndrrat tona që Petriti me Álvaro-n e bënë realitet duke i vendosur këto lule në magjinë e një prej ndërtesave më të jashtëzakonshme që ka Prishtina”, ka thënë Abrashi.

Të pranishmëve u janë drejtuar me një fjalë rasti edhe dy kuratorët e bienales, Joanna Warsza dhe Ovíul Ó. Durmusoglu.

“Përgatitjet i kemi nisur që prej vitit të kaluar”, ka thënë Warsza teksa ka shprehur kënaqësinë që



Të punuara në madhësi gjigante nga një kornizë delikate e çelikut dhe me pëlhurë të ngjyrosur, ato ngërthejnë në vete historitë personale dhe lidhjen e artistëve Petrit Halilaj dhe Álvaro Urbano (Foto: Driton Paçarada)

ndërtesa e BKK-së ofroi një vend ideal për këtë ekspozitë. Duke qëmtuar historinë e objektit, ajo kishte e mësuar se qysh në fillim ishte menduar si diçka që do të rritet e rritet e të mos jetë e përfunduar.

“Dhe kjo është një nga metaforat që po e përdorim edhe ne për identë e mospërfundim”, ka shtuar ajo.

Adrian Berisha, drejtor për Kulturë në Komunën e Prishtinës, ka thënë se objekti i Bibliotekës nga brenda ka marrë një pamje si asnjëherë më parë. Sipas tij, lulet magjepsëse të dyshes artistike erdhën në Prishtinë për të rikujtuar se nuk ka kufi për kujtimet e përbashkëta.

“Sigur është një ftesë për të na këtyer në memoriet tona, por edhe shpresat për ndryshim, guxim e moskonformizim me preokupimet e përbashkëta që kemi si komunitete pavarësisht se ku jetojmë”, ka theksuar Berisha.

### Transformimi i historisë personale

Në të vërtetë, ekspozita e së mërkurës ishte veçse riformatizim i asaj që në korrik të vitit të kaluar pati një hapje spektakolare në Pallatin e Kristalë në Madrid me titullin “Një korb dhe uraganet që nga vendet e panjohura rikthejnë erëra të njerëzve të dashuruar”. Në tetor u hap njëkohësisht edhe në “Quadriennale di Roma”, si dhe në “Berghain” në Berlin.

Të punuara në madhësi gjigante nga një kornizë delikate e çelikut dhe me pëlhurë të ngjyrosur, ato ngërthejnë në vete historitë personale dhe lidhjen e dy artistëve me njëri-tjetrin.

Titulli i ekspozitës rrjedh nga lula “Myosotis”, emri i së cilës vjen nga greqishtja e vjetër (μυοσότης) “veshi i miut”, e që njihet edhe si lula “Mosmëharro”.

“Këto lule gjithashtu shërbejnë si përkufizues të potencialit që kujtesa personale mbart me vete për të rishkruar gradualisht kujtesën kolektive”, është thënë, mes të tjerash, në tekstin kuratorial.

Në një prononcim për KOHËN, Álvaro Urbanos e ka quajtur sitë rëndësishme që po mbahet në Prishtinë.

“Dhe në njëfarë mënyre ky udhëtim i bukur ka qenë një nga ndalesat më të mira”, ka thënë Urbano, artist 38-vjeçar nga Madridi.

Edhe artisti Petrit Halilaj është shprehur i lumtur që në njëdjet e BKK-së këto lule “janë bërë edhe më të mëdha”.

“Nuk mund të gjendej një vend më i bukur për neve për këtë ekspozitë”, ka thënë Halilaj teksa ka treguar edhe për sfidat për instalimin e tyre.

Secila prej kuleve, sipas Halilaj, e ka një histori personale: idenë që secili t’ia japim nga një lule njëri-tjetrit.

“Fakti që në këtë shoqëri ka vend për liri, barazi e për të gjithë, këto lule bëjnë thirrje që të ketë dashuri për të gjithë. Këto lule janë si memorie, por sjellja e tyre në Kosovë është sjellja e

tyre në shtëpi”, ka thënë ai teksa ka shtuar se e ka pasur të rëndësishme sjelljen e instalacionit edhe në një shoqëri që ka pasur rrugëtim të gjatë në kërkim të lirisë. “Është emocion tepër i madh”, ka thënë Halilaj.

Për të lulet simbolizojnë diçka që është e hareshme, e bukur, por edhe e ndjeshme dhe e pasigurt. Kurr e kishte hapur ekspozitën në Madrid, kishte zbrëthyer për KOHËN zanafllën e tyre si një simbol tradicional i dashurisë dhe festimit.

“Lulet po ashtu krijojnë një hartë të historisë sonë në mes të kohës dhe hapësirës, një gjest i vogël privat që ndodh këtu – brenda hapësirës publike – dhe ndahet me të tjerët. Me madhësitë e tyre ato zënë një hapësirë për të shfaqur atë që ne ndonjëherë detyrohem që ta fshehim”, kishte thënë Halilaj, artisti i cili e përfaqësoi Kosovën në debutimin e saj në Bienalen Ndërkombëtare të Artit në Venedicë, në edicionin e 55-të më 2013.

Me lule, Halilaj dëshiron që publiku të jetë në gjendje të bisedojë për dashurinë dhe miqësinë. E bisada tashmë ka nisur.

Në orët e mbrëmjes, edhe kryeministri Albin Kurti ka vizituar ekspozitën e artistëve, e të cilën e ka njoftuar përmes profilit të tij në “Instagram”.

“Petrit Halilaj dhe Álvaro Urbano kanë vendosur një kopsht në tavan që ngjan si shtëpi e dëshirës”, ka shkruar kryeministri Kurti.

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Me një performim simbolik me kostume kualash nga dy artistët protagonistë, dy shkëputje muzikore, e kanë bashkëshoqëruar ekspozitën në Bibliotekën Kombëtare të Kosovës me lulet që prej vjetshit përshkuan Madridin, Romën e Berlinin (Foto: Driton Paçarada)

EKSPOZITA E ARTISTËVE TË NJOHUR VJEN NË KOSOVË

## Petrit Halilaj e Álvaro Urbano në Prishtinë me lule feste e ndryshimi

Lulet e Petrit Halilajt e Álvaro Urbanos, që shkojnë përtej një simboli dashurie, do të ekspozohen në Bibliotekën Kombëtare të Kosovës. Ekspozita që u hap në kryeqendra botërore, në monumentin e veçantë me nëntëdhjetë e nëntë kupola, sipas Halilajt, është një festim i jokonformizmit, nxitje e vizionit për ndryshim, ftesë për të ëndërruar e thirrje për diversitet. "Lule për Kosovën, këtë herë", ka thënë Halilaj për KOHËN në lidhje me ekspozitën, e cila në Kosovë vjen me titullin "Lule mos më harro"

Alberina Haxhijaj

PRISHTINË, 27 MAJ - Artisti Petrit Halilaj, gati dhjetë ditë më parë dha shenja për projektin e tij të ri, por nuk jepte detaje. Insistonte se krejt atë do ta shpaloste një javë më vonë. Nuk u është përmbajtur emocioneve as të enjten kur bëri të ditur emrin e projektit.

"Lule mos më harro" është titulli i ekspozitës së tij të re, që do ta sjellë në Prishtinë. Ka qenë fillimisht "Autostrada Biennale" që e dha lajmin.

"Ky është titulli i ekspozitës, por edhe emri i lules", ka thënë Halilaj. Në fakt bëhet fjalë për riformatizim të asaj që në korrik të vitit të kaluar pati një hapje spektakolare në Pallatin e Kristaltë në Madrid. Në tetorin e atij viti u hap njëkohësisht në "Quadriennale di Roma" dhe në "Berghain" në Berlin.

Lulet e Petrit Halilajt dhe Álvaro Urbanos do të ekspozohen nën kupolat e Bibliotekës Kombëtare të Kosovës "Pjetër Bogdan", prej ditës së fundit të qershorit. Të punuara në madhësi gjigante nga një kornizë delikate e çelëti dhe me pëlthurë të ngjyrosur, ato ngërthejnë në vete historitë personale dhe lidhjen e dy artistëve me njerëzimin. Mes luleve është zambaku i dhuruar për propozimin e martesës - për dasmën që ishte paraparë të ishte organizuar vitin e kaluar në Spanjë - lulja "Mos më harro" (lule e bardhë), lulet e ftoit të dhuruara gjatë karantinës, luleqershia, nga një pemë e mbjellë jashtë shtëpisë së tyre në Berlin.

Titulli i ekspozitës rrjedh nga lulja "Myosotis", emri i së cilës vjen nga greqishtja e lashtë (μυωσότης) apo (veshi i miut), në hemisferën veriore njihet si "Mos më harro".

"Lule për Kosovën, këtë herë", ka thënë Halilaj për KOHËN. Ka shtuar



Ekspozita e Petrit Halilajt dhe Álvaro Urbano, e cila për herë të parë u hap në Pallatin e Kristaltë në Madrid, në korrikun e vitit të kaluar (në foto) vjen edhe në Prishtinë. Organizohet nga "Autostrada Biennale" në bashkëpunim me "Manifesta 14" dhe Bibliotekën Kombëtare të Kosovës, ku do të zërë vend (Foto: Alex Molto)

se ai dhe Urbano këto lule po i sjellin në Prishtinë "për të festuar moskonformizmin, një nxitje për një vizion për ndryshim, një ftesë për të ëndërruar një thirrje për diversitet".

Ekspozita "Lule mos më harro" do të hapet në kuadër të edicionit të tretë të "Autostrada Biennale" në bashkëpunim me BKKG-në, "Manifesta 14", si dhe do të shënojë edicionin e 5-të të Javës së Krenarisë në Kosovë. Në komunikatën për media të "Autostrada Biennale" është shkruar se këto lule gjithashtu shërbejnë si përkufizuese të potencialit që kujtesa personale mbart më vete për ta rishkru-

ar gradualisht kujtesën kolektive.

"Lulet e prezantuara mishërojnë format e dashurisë, dëshirat seksuale, intimitetin, lidhjet, dhe identitetin, në përgjithësi, e sidomos të atyre që janë vazhdimisht të lënë, e të lëna anash, apo të shtypur, e të shtypura nga politikat dhe normat regresive të krijuara nga shoqëria", është shkruar aty. Kuratorët e bienales, e cila sjvjet shënon edicionin e tretë, Joanna Warsza dhe Oval O. Durmuşoğlu, citojnë të kenë thënë se arti i thërret dëshirës për transformim të thellë në shoqëri, dhe mundëson aty krijimin e lidhjeve mes pikëpamjeve të

ndryshme. "Jemi jashtëzakonisht të lumtura që po prezantojmë instalacionin e Petrit Halilajt dhe Álvaro Urbanos, një instalacion që me një ndjeshmëri të veçantë u jep dëshirave dhe nevojave të njeriut një formë poetike e plotë imagjinatë", janë cituar Warsza dhe Durmuşoğlu.

Në komunikatë është bërë e ditur se ekspozita mbështet kampanjën qytetare për të drejtat e barabarta në Kosovë, veçanërisht për komunitetin LGBTQI+, fushatë kjo që kërkon nga hartuesit e Kodit të ri Civil të përfshijnë aty të drejtën e martesës mes personave të gjinive të njëjta, si dhe

mes personave të gjinive joheteronormative, duke fuqizuar kështoj fushatën me bukuri lulesh - që tanimë është bërë edhe imazhi i kësaj kauze.

Petrit Halilaj e Álvaro Urbano, historinë e tyre nëpërmjet artit e zbrërthyer në ekspozitën e Madridit, e cila për titull kishte "Një korbi dhe uraganet që nga vendet e panjohura rikthejnë erë të rjerëve të dashuruar", e hapur më 16 korrik. Atëherë për KOHËN, Halilaj kishte treguar se frymëzimi fillestar për lulet kishte ardhur nga një histori personale, krenrimi i lidhjes së tij me artistin Álvaro Urbano.

"Në fakt, ekspozita flet për shtigjet e rënda dhe shpeshherë dramatike që duhet t'i ndjekim për të arritur te pika ku mund ta dashurosh dikë, për ta ndër rjohjen e dashurisë sonë, së pari nga vetë ne dhe pastaj nga familja dhe miqtë dhe më pas nga e gjithë shoqëria", kishte thënë ai për ekspozitën që hapi dyert e Pallatit të Kristaltë pas mbylljes për shkak të pandemisë. Ekspozita qëndroi aty deri në shkurtin e sivejtmë.

Të njëjtat lule ishin paraqitur edhe në "Palazzo delle Esposizioni", që shërben si hapësirë ekspozuese, qendër kulturore dhe njëkohësisht edhe muze në Romë. Objekti i ndër-tuar në vitin 1883 ishte nikoqir i "Quadriennale di Roma", që nisi më 29 tetor dhe përfundoi më 17 janar të këtij viti. Në Berlin, nikoqir ishte klubi "Berghain", që ndryshe konsiderohet edhe tempulli i tekno.

Petrit Halilaj u lind në Kostercë, në vitin 1986, ndërsa u rrit në mes të Italisë e Kosovës. Álvaro Urbano ka lindur në vitin 1983 në Madrid të Spanjës. Dy artistët jetojnë e veprojnë në Berlin.

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## petrit halilaj turns madrid's palacio de cristal into nest of giant flowers

in his first solo exhibition in spain, artist petrit halilaj has transformed madrid's palacio de cristal into a giant nest of massive flowers. the artist has connected the temporary installation with the city's retro park by opening windows, setting up structures, and placing feeding areas to attract the birds and other creatures inhabiting or passing through the park. 'to a raven and the hurricanes which bring back smells of humans in love from unknown places' is the first show inaugurated by the museo reina sofia since its closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which interrupted the montage of the exhibition.





views of the exhibition 'to a raven and hurricanes that from unknown places bring back smells of humans in love',  
museo reina sofía - palacio de cristal, madrid, 2020-2021  
all images by imagen subliminal © petrit halilaj,  
courtesy the artist; kamel mennour, paris/london; chertlütde, berlin

organized by the museo reina sofía, petrit halilaj's exhibition at palacio de cristal employs a wide variety of elements that explore topics such as home, nation, love and cultural identity. the artist has drawn from the courtship ritual of bowerbirds, which make elaborate structures ('bowers') and decorate them with colorful objects to attract a mate. in collaboration with his life partner, the artist álvaro urbano, halilaj has adorned his giant nest at palacio de cristal with large flowers made of delicate steel framework and painted canvas. their choice forms part of the personal history that binds them together, and its purpose is to celebrate their union: forsythia, palm seeds, cherry blossom, poppy, carnation, and lily.



*'I wanted to conceive palacio de cristal as a place for the celebration of love,' says halilaj. by making these personal references public, the artist adds a social and political layer to their intimacy, highlighting the need for visibility and acceptance. in this way, the exhibition pushes the boundaries between public displays that are considered acceptable or worthy of attention and those which on the other hand are censured or scorned.*



a key element that addresses these conventions is the white raven holding a piece of wood in 'history of a hug (2020)', which alludes to a particular moment in halilaj's family history. the piece of wood was a tool used by his grandfather when working in the country, and the object he was holding when he learned his wife had given birth to their first child. unable to express his immense joy in public, since this might have been interpreted as a sign of weakness in a patriarchal society, he hugged the post so hard that he thought he might break it. for halilaj, the motif of the white raven suggests diversity and resistance to change in the bid for acceptance.



by scaling up the size of the nest and flowers, the artist encourages viewers to escape, even momentarily, the notion that humans are the center and measure of all things, and recognize ourselves as just one more element among many. the nest is thus revealed as the setting for a ritual that lies in wait for encounters, alliances and unions among its different visitors, altering and changing with the space.

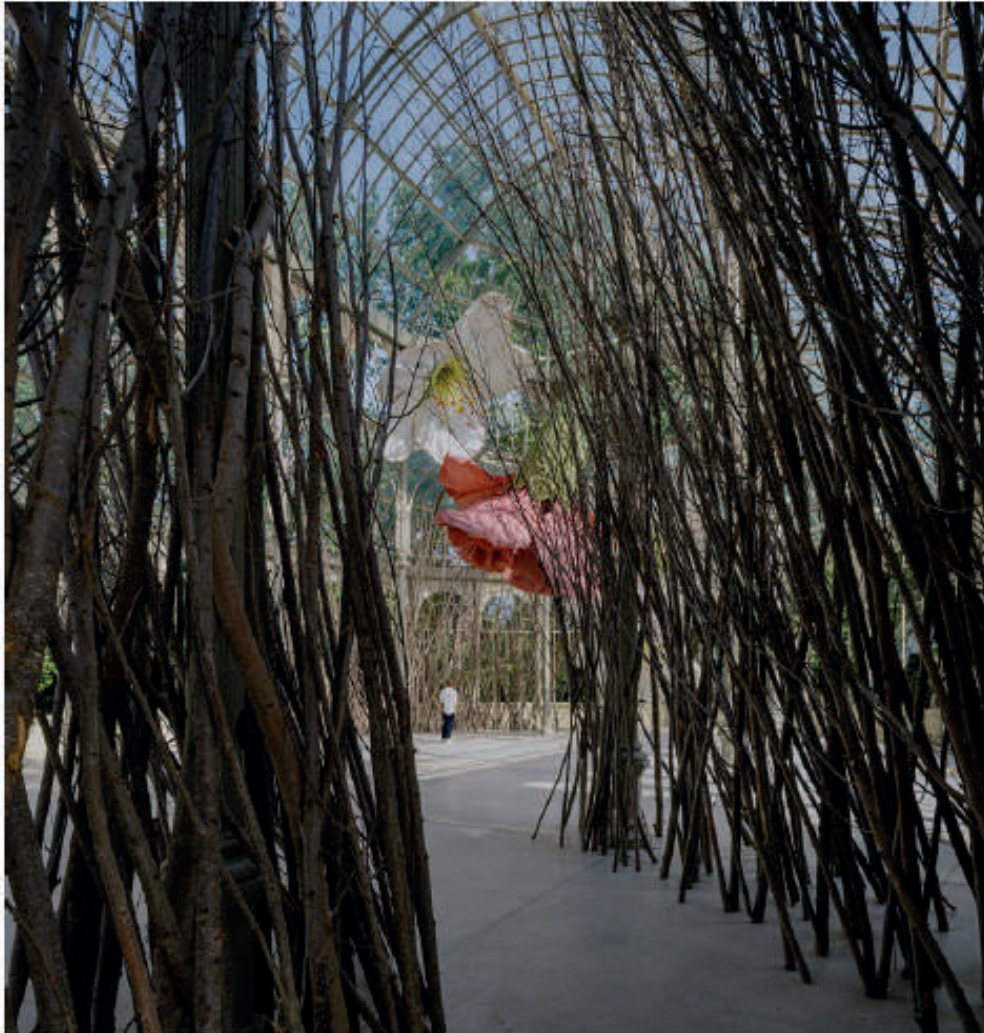


born in the republic of kosovo, petrit halilaj creates works tightly bound up with his biography, the recent history of his country, and the consequences of the political and cultural tensions in the region. childhood memories steeped in the drama of war and refugee life recur throughout his art, which embraces themes like home, nation and cultural identity through a variety of media. however, he does not proclaim a rupture between the personal and intimate and the historical and social, but instead perceives a relationship and continuity to be found in his intervention for the palacio de cristal.









exhibition info:

name: to a raven and hurricanes that from unknown places bring back smells of humans in love

artist:

duration: july 16, 2020 – february 28, 2021




AMOR EN EL ARTE

## La emocionante historia de amor detrás de las flores gigantes del Palacio de Cristal del Retiro

Petrit Halilaj y Álvaro Urbano han capturado nuestra necesidad de mensajes de esperanza con las enormes flores, símbolo de su historia de amor, que han 'plantado' primero en Madrid y ahora en más capitales. Los artistas nos abren su estudio berlinés



TOM C. AVENDAÑO   
21 NOV 2020 - 00:30 CET

Las flores gigantes de lienzo y acero que desde julio se ven en el Palacio de Cristal de Madrid, e inevitablemente en las cuentas de Instagram de sus innumerables visitantes, son obra de **Petrit Halilaj** (Kostërrc, Kosovo, 1986). Tenían que servir de decoración para la gran *performance* que iba a ser *To a raven and the hurricanes that from unknown places bring back smells of human in love*: su boda con el también artista **Álvaro Urbano** (Madrid, 1983), su pareja desde hace diez años y que además colaboró en la fabricación de las flores. Ese plan se frustró, como se frustró todo, con el asalto de la covid-19. **La exposición, en la que Halilaj había trabajado durante meses para el Reina Sofía, se quedó sin su pieza central y las flores se convirtieron en toda la historia.**

El giro es que esas flores siempre tuvieron un gran valor narrativo. Está la Forsythia, la amarilla: recuerda aquellas que Urbano le regaló a Halilaj al mes de conocerle en Berlín, en 2010. **“Es de las primeras en salir en la primavera alemana y de las últimas en desaparecer, el árbol entero se vuelve amarillo, es precioso”**, explica Halilaj por teléfono desde su estudio en Berlín. Y apostilla Urbano desde la misma llamada: “Fue cuando me di cuenta de que estaba enamorado de él. Cogí una ramita y se la di”. En 2015, Urbano conoció a la madre de Halilaj. “Sabíendo que a ella le encantan los jardines, le regaló dos semillas de palmera”, recuerda el kosovar.

**“En aquella época mi madre tenía dificultades para aceptarnos, pero las plantó y ahora son dos árboles que crecen en Kosovo”**. La flor de esos árboles es la de mayor tamaño en la exposición, la que ocupa la capilla principal del Palacio. No muy lejos está la amapola, que debía simbolizar el final de aquel noviazgo. **“Le había dicho a Petrit que si me pedía que me casara con él, lo hiciera bien**. En 2018 llenó la casa de amapolas. Un millón de flores que había recogido con un amigo”, recuerda Urbano. Halilaj ilustra: “Las puse en el horno, en el retrete, en cualquier lugar imaginable de la casa”. Urbano dijo que sí, naturalmente, y empezaron a planificar esa boda que nunca sería.

“Es interesante hasta qué punto la covid ha cambiado el significado de estas flores”, razona Urbano. **“Ya no simbolizan solo nuestras historias personales, sino también el acto de dar y recibir, de cuidar**. Durante el confinamiento, el Real Jardín Botánico de Madrid estuvo cerrado y los jardineros recogieron todas sus flores y las llevaron a los hospitales de la ciudad. Es ese tipo de gesto: llevarle el jardín a alguien. Las flores se convierten en satélites, te hablan. También las vemos como entidades sexuales, algo con su componente erótico: la flor está para atraer insectos, con sus formas y colores, con sus texturas. Eso también es importante”.

**Urbano y Halilaj tienen trayectorias artísticas independientes el uno del otro**. De hecho, no muy lejos de la exposición de Petrit en el Retiro, está la de Álvaro en La Casa Encendida. Se inauguró en febrero y ambas apenas tendrían que haber coincidido en el tiempo, pero el segundo giro de guion de esta historia es que, con el parón que ha provocado el coronavirus, van a convivir mucho más de lo previsto (hasta febrero de 2021 la de Urbano, hasta marzo la de Halilaj). Son dos de las exposiciones más excitantes que se han visto este año en Madrid y vienen no solo de la misma galería, Travesía Cuatro, sino de dos artistas que comparten estudio, ambiciones y vida.



"Le dije a Petrit que si me pedía que me casara con él, lo hiciera bien. ¿Leró lo caso de amapolas?", Urbano. ÁNGELA SUÁREZ

En *El despertar*, Urbano reanima un edificio muerto, el Pabellón de los Hexágonos de la **Casa de Campo**. Proyectado por José Antonio Corrales y Ramón Vázquez Molezún, cuando se presentó en la Expo de Bruselas de 1958, se consideró una pieza clave de la nueva arquitectura española y se le entregó la Medalla de Oro, por encima incluso del Atomium belga de André y Jean Polak. Hoy, sin embargo, el pabellón está abandonado. Urbano recrea ese abandono en una sala iluminada por farolas en forma de hexágono, en la que la performance la hace el propio edificio: el espectador lo contempla mutar según lo observa de un ángulo u otro, como se mira una película, una de atmósfera kubrickiana. El proyecto tiene incluso banda sonora, del compositor Juan Carlos Blancas, la cual se editará en vinilo próximamente. La exposición se trasladará al Storefront for Art and Architecture de **Nueva York**, dirigido por el mexicano José Esparza, quien ha actuado de comisario desde el principio.

Halilaj, que hoy vive entre Alemania, Kosovo e Italia, parecía destinado a una carrera artística desde joven. A finales de los noventa, un matrimonio italiano lo vio dibujar en un campo de refugiados de la guerra de los Balcanes, y se ofreció a acogerle en su casa, en Bozzolo, Lombardia, para que pudiese estudiar. A finales de la década pasada, visitó Berlín durante unos días. "Allí vi que podía hacer mi vida, salir del armario como homosexual, y dedicarme a lo que me dedico", recuerda. Urbano también ha desarrollado su vida en varias ciudades: a los 22 años se mudó de Madrid, donde estudió arquitectura de interiores en la Universidad Politécnica, a Nueva York, donde hizo performances en la calle. Allí, se decidió por una carrera artística. Se matriculó en la Universität der Künste de Berlín y en esa ciudad conoció a Halilaj. Todavía viven en ella.

De vez en cuando trabajan juntos. "Lo hacemos una vez al año, no más: no queremos que acabe siendo problemático", bromea Urbano. En 2014 publicaron *Kushtetuta*, una revista de temática *queer*, en Kosovo: "La primera revista gay de los Balcanes", según el artista. Hace cuatro años, durante una residencia en el centro Mak de Los Ángeles, diseñaron unos trajes de mapache con los que hacían performances: recuerdan a los animales que se ven hoy en *El despertar*. Ambos son profesores de la École des Beaux Arts de París.

Han colaborado en otra flor para Berghain, el club musical berlinés que ahora, cerrado, acoge obras creadas durante el semiconfinamiento de Berlín. Y una más de sus últimas creaciones también se puede considerar conjunta. Para la Biennale Ghardéina, que comisaría Adam Budak, del Palacio Kinsky de Praga, Petrit ha creado una caseta para pájaros. "Pero en cuanto te acercas a ella, la oyes roncar, un ronquido profundo de la noche. Una noche grabé a Álvaro en secreto y lo usé", explica Halilaj. La obra sigue los principios rectores de las demás: "Es un gesto muy doméstico de dar y cuidar, que se convierte en otra cosa, como las flores".



El estudio está en Britz, una pujante zona al sur de Berlín. **ÁNGELA SUÁREZ**

Precisamente las flores, otras cuatro nuevas que acaban de crear mano a mano, aparecerán en su nuevo proyecto, uno para la Quadriennale de Roma que comisariarían Sarah Cosulich y Stefano Collicelli Cagol. “Toda la exposición va sobre escenas que necesitan su sitio en la sociedad pero no lo tienen necesariamente, como el deseo. En nuestro caso, el deseo queer”, explica Petrit. Pero alertan que esa etiqueta, *queer*, hay que usarla con cuidado. “Como idea de ver las cosas desde un punto de vista abierto y sin fronteras, sí, somos artistas queer. Pero no queremos estar vinculados a una sexualidad”, afirma. “Y esa es la gracia del arte. Cuando Álvaro le dio aquellas semillas a mi madre, muestra de un amor homosexual, ella lo vio como el gesto de un amor no solo homosexual y no solo entre nosotros. Los árboles que han salido de ellas no son árboles queer. La magia del arte es que cuando te expresas tú, de alguna manera acabas conectando con más gente”.



Silla de urbano y pintura de Tyra Tinglett. ÁNGELA SUÁREZ

## Step Inside Petrit Halilaj's Monumental Nest of Oversized Flowers Within Reina Sofia's Palacio de Cristal

AUGUST 28, 2020

CHRISTOPHER JOSSON



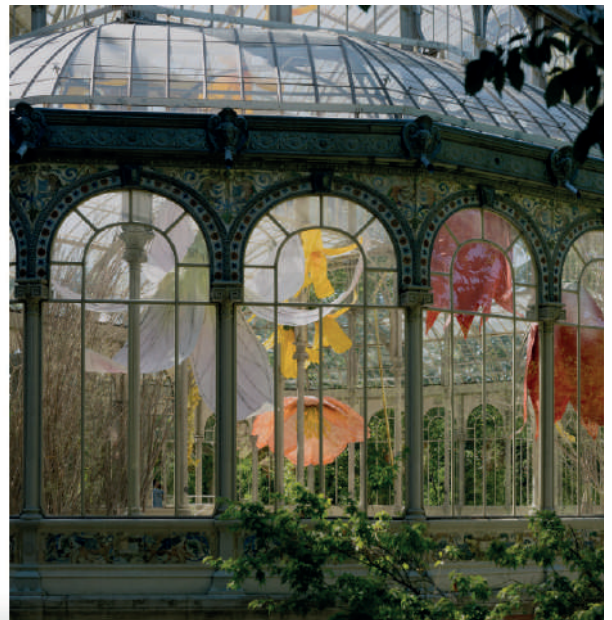
Bowerbirds are renowned for one of the most unusual courtship behaviors in the animal kingdom, where males build elaborately decorated nests—called bowers—in an attempt to court a mate. Kosovar visual artist Petrit Halilaj drew inspiration from this unique ritual for his first solo exhibition at Reina Sofia’s Palacio de Cristal (previously) in Madrid. Titled “To a raven and the hurricanes which bring back smells of humans in love from unknown places,” the installation serves as a metaphorical nest that connects the inside and outside spaces of the palace and features several avian elements like trays of birdseed and a giant pair of bird’s feet that descend from above.

The collection of artworks is actually a collaborative effort between Halilaj and his life partner artist Álvaro Urbano, who helped construct the oversized forsythia, palm seeds, cherry blossom, poppy, carnation, and lily that fill the space. “I wanted to conceive Palacio de Cristal as a place for the celebration of love,” Halilaj shares. From the museum’s release:

There is something strange and disproportionate about the size of this nest, the gigantic scale of its flowers, and the comfort and centrality it offers the birds. The artist thus suspends the logo-centric perspective that makes us believe we are the center and measure of all things, encouraging us to recognize ourselves as just one more element among many. The nest is thus revealed as the setting for a ritual that lies in wait for encounters, alliances and unions among its different visitors, altering and changing with the space.

“To a raven...” is open now through February 28, 2021, at the Palacio de Cristal, and you can see more views on [Yellowtrace](#).





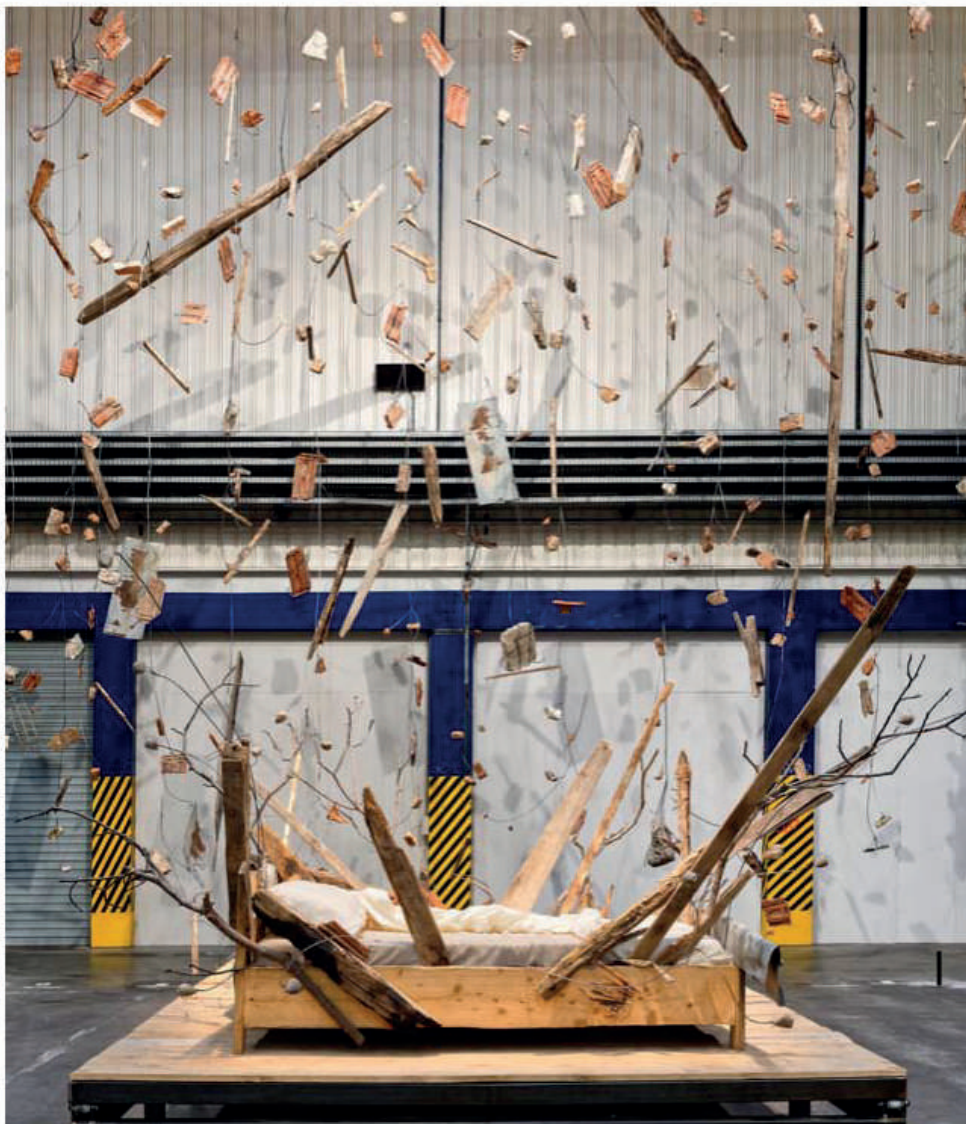
Studio process view



## À la Biennale de Lyon, l'artiste Petrit Halilaj reconstruit une réalité en éclats

Stéphane Renault

Publié le 25/09/2019. Mis à jour le 25/09/2019 à 16h56.



**À la Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon, Petrit Halilaj propose "Shkrepëtima" une scénographie hautement théâtrale, inspirée de sa propre histoire qui s'inscrit dans la continuité des recherches de l'artiste kosovar.**

**P**our cette quinzième édition de la Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon, intitulée « Là où les eaux se mêlent », titre d'un poème de l'Américain Raymond Carver, le plasticien d'origine kosovare Petrit Halilaj, né en 1986 — et qui a reçu le prix spécial à la Biennale de Venise « Viva Arte Viva » de 2017 —, présente l'une de ses installations les plus récentes et spectaculaires. *Shkrepëtima*, précédemment montrée à la Fondazione Merz à Turin, s'inspire d'une performance unique organisée l'année dernière à la Maison de la culture de Runik, ville du Kosovo où il a grandi et qu'il a dû fuir pendant la guerre de 1998. Une expérience fondatrice — le conflit, l'exil — dans laquelle il ne cesse de puiser, élaborant des univers sensibles où la délicatesse narrative va de pair avec la puissance visuelle.

L'œuvre est installée avec d'autres dans une vaste halle des anciennes usines Fagor, à Gerland, site où la Biennale a pris ses nouveaux quartiers (ex La Sucrière). Des hangars industriels conservés dans leur état brut, qui présentent l'intérêt d'offrir une vaste surface mais desservent aussi nombre d'œuvres, écrasées par l'immensité d'un tel écrin. Des œuvres produites in situ, dans une logique de circuit court, en partenariat avec les entreprises de la région qui ont mis à la disposition des artistes des savoir-faire, des matériaux ou

## Un propos bien dans l'air du temps

Explosive avec ses éléments en suspension, comme autant d'éclats, *Shkrepëtima* est l'une des pièces les plus marquantes de cette Biennale, qui présente une sélection d'une cinquantaine d'artistes. Composé sous la houlette d'un septuor de commissaires du Palais de Tokyo, ce « Paysage » de la création émergente entend saisir un *Zeitgeist* (esprit du temps), les préoccupations d'une génération consciente de l'état d'un monde hanté par le spectre du réchauffement climatique, incertain quant à son devenir. Le propos, bien dans l'air du temps en effet, résiste difficilement à l'épreuve de la visite. A l'issue de celle-ci domine une impression de confusion générale, entretenue par l'absence de fil conducteur. On assiste à un enchevêtrement revendiqué d'univers hétéroclites juxtaposés, manquant cruellement de cohérence.

Dans ce maelström, Halilaj raconte les faits dont témoigne la vidéo qui accompagne son installation. Car cette scénographie hautement théâtrale, réalisée à partir de costumes, d'objets, de morceaux de bois, a été inspirée par une histoire bien réelle. La sienne. Celle de sa ville. Abandonnée après la guerre, à la fin des années 1990, la Maison de la culture de Runik avait été jusque-là un lieu de rencontres multiculturelles. Chacun pouvait fréquenter sa bibliothèque, son théâtre, son cinéma. Le conflit ethnique a sonné le glas de ce lieu de partage et de vivre-ensemble.

L'œuvre, dont le nom (*Shkrepëtima*) signifie « étincelle » ou « éclair » en albanais, reprend le titre d'un magazine culturel publié ici même dans les années 1970-1980. Elle s'inscrit dans la continuité des recherches de l'artiste sur les racines historiques de la ville, et plus largement sur l'identité kosovare, à partir de ses souvenirs d'enfance. Ce décor symboliquement reconstitué pour la Biennale de Lyon rappelle l'importance de préserver de tels lieux d'échanges, constitutifs de la mémoire collective, où la différence est d'abord source de dialogue, l'altérité, une richesse et non un motif d'exclusion. Poétique, l'œuvre de Petrit Halilaj s'y révèle aussi humaniste et éminemment politique.

« **Là où les eaux se mêlent** », Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon, usines Fagor et Mac Lyon, du 18 septembre au 5 janvier 2020.

acquisition / musée

Petrit Halilaj,  
**ABETARE (Fluturat)**,  
2017, exposé à la galerie  
Kamel mennour, Paris,  
2017-2018.



Photo: archives kamel mennour © Petrit Halilaj/Courtesy Petrit Halilaj et Kamel mennour Paris, London

## Le LaM acquiert une installation de Petrit Halilaj

Tous les quinze jours, l'*Hebdo* relate une acquisition récente d'institution. Focus cette semaine sur le projet **ABETARE** de l'artiste kosovar Petrit Halilaj, récemment acquis par le LaM de Villeneuve-d'Ascq.

Par Marine Vazzoler



© Alexandre Trassinelli/LaM

**« Les pièces qui composent le projet **ABETARE** sont magnifiques. C'est un projet puissant, poétique. »**

**Sébastien Delot**, directeur du LaM à Villeneuve d'Ascq.

**« L**es pièces qui composent le projet **ABETARE** sont magnifiques, s'enthousiasme Sébastien Delot, directeur du LaM depuis 2017. *Y étant confronté, on est tout de suite interpellé.* » Récemment acquis par le musée villeneuvois, le projet de l'artiste Petrit Halilaj est constitué de trois œuvres, à la fois liées et indépendantes les unes des autres : une installation monumentale (**ABETARE - The Classroom**), un papier peint (**ABETARE - Wallpaper Installation**) et un film (**ABETARE**). *« C'est un projet puissant, poétique et important pour l'artiste, nous explique Sébastien Delot. Il est lié à l'histoire récente de son pays d'origine, le Kosovo. »* Né en 1986 à Kostërc, Petrit Halilaj a fui, petit, la guerre au Kosovo et s'est retrouvé à vivre dans un camp de réfugié.e.s. Il fut ensuite adopté par une famille italienne, d'où sa double culture kosovare et italienne. Petrit Halilaj a pensé l'ensemble de l'installation en 2015 pour la Kunstverein de Cologne et l'a développée davantage quelques années plus tard, en 2017, pour la Fondation Merz à Turin et la galerie Kamel Mennour, qui le représente. *« C'est important que l'ensemble du projet appartienne désormais à une institution,*

/...



Photo Renato Ghiazza © Petrit Halilaj/Courtesy Petrit Halilaj et Kamel Mennour Paris, London.

Petrit Halilaj, *ABETARE*, 2017, vue d'installation à la Fondation Merz, Turin.



Photo archives Kamel Mennour © Petrit Halilaj/Courtesy Petrit Halilaj et Kamel Mennour Paris, London.

Petrit Halilaj devant son œuvre *ABETARE*.

se réjouit le directeur du LaM. Cette œuvre est au carrefour de la pratique artistique de l'artiste. Il l'a réalisée après un voyage à Rudnik en 2010, un village qui fut très abîmé par la guerre. »

Là-bas, Petrit Halilaj est retourné dans son ancienne école primaire et a discuté avec les écoliers. Dans la vidéo de 22 minutes, Petrit Halilaj filme la démolition de l'école, les enfants jouant dans les bâtiments laissés à l'abandon, tandis qu'on peut lire sur les pupitres les graffitis de plusieurs générations. Le nom du projet lui-même, *ABETARE*, fait référence au titre de l'abécédaire avec lequel l'artiste a appris à lire l'albanais. « Cette méthode de lecture fait un trait d'union entre les différentes générations et fut une composante importante de l'identité culturelle de la population albanaise du Kosovo, au moment même où l'oppression

du gouvernement serbe était à son apogée », précise Sébastien Delot. Le papier peint est une reproduction de ce manuel page par page. Quant à la sculpture monumentale *ABETARE - The Classroom*, elle est composée de plusieurs pupitres que l'artiste a sauvés de la démolition et d'immenses sculptures en acier reproduisant les graffitis et inscriptions qu'il a pu y lire.

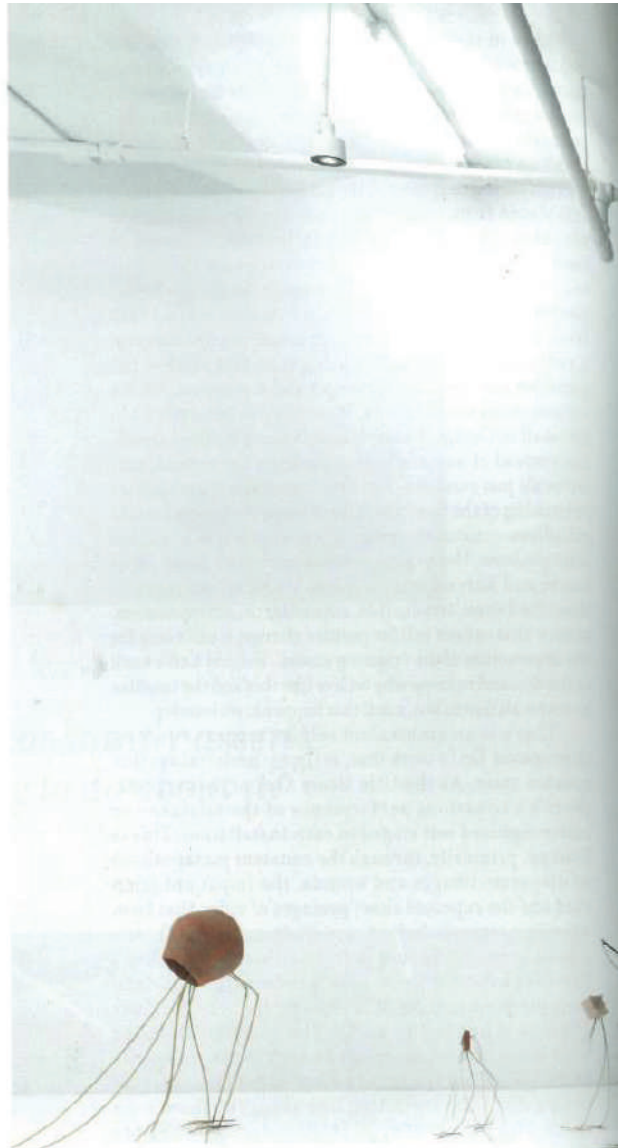
### Une collection publique dynamique

« C'est une œuvre forte car elle a une portée universelle, souligne le directeur du LaM. Les graffitis nous renvoient à notre propre expérience d'écoliers et d'écolières. Certains gravés sur les tables appartiennent à notre culture populaire, font référence à des célébrités que nous admirions enfants. » En plus d'être une œuvre charnière de Petrit Halilaj, le projet *ABETARE* « se lie avec beaucoup de choses dans nos collections, note Sébastien Delot. L'art brut, avec les pièces du photographe Clovis Prévost sur les graffitis, et l'art moderne, avec des pièces de Max Ernst ou Joaquin Torres-García ». Concernant la valeur de cet achat, Sébastien Delot tient à préciser qu'« une institution publique comme un musée a la responsabilité morale de dépenser cet argent au mieux ». Ainsi, sur les 400 000 euros de son budget annuel d'acquisition (tous départements du musée confondus), le LaM a dépensé pour l'œuvre 150 000 euros (hors taxes), soit 32 % de moins que le prix de départ, qui s'élevait à 221 000 euros. « Kamel Mennour et l'artiste ont accepté de faire un prix », concède le directeur de l'institution villeneuvoise. Il continue : « Il est important que les collections publiques françaises restent dynamiques. Grâce à ses diverses acquisitions [dont l'achat de 28 pièces d'Etel Adnan récemment, ndlr], le LaM a un vaste réseau et prête régulièrement. Cela participe à nos missions de curiosité et de découverte. »

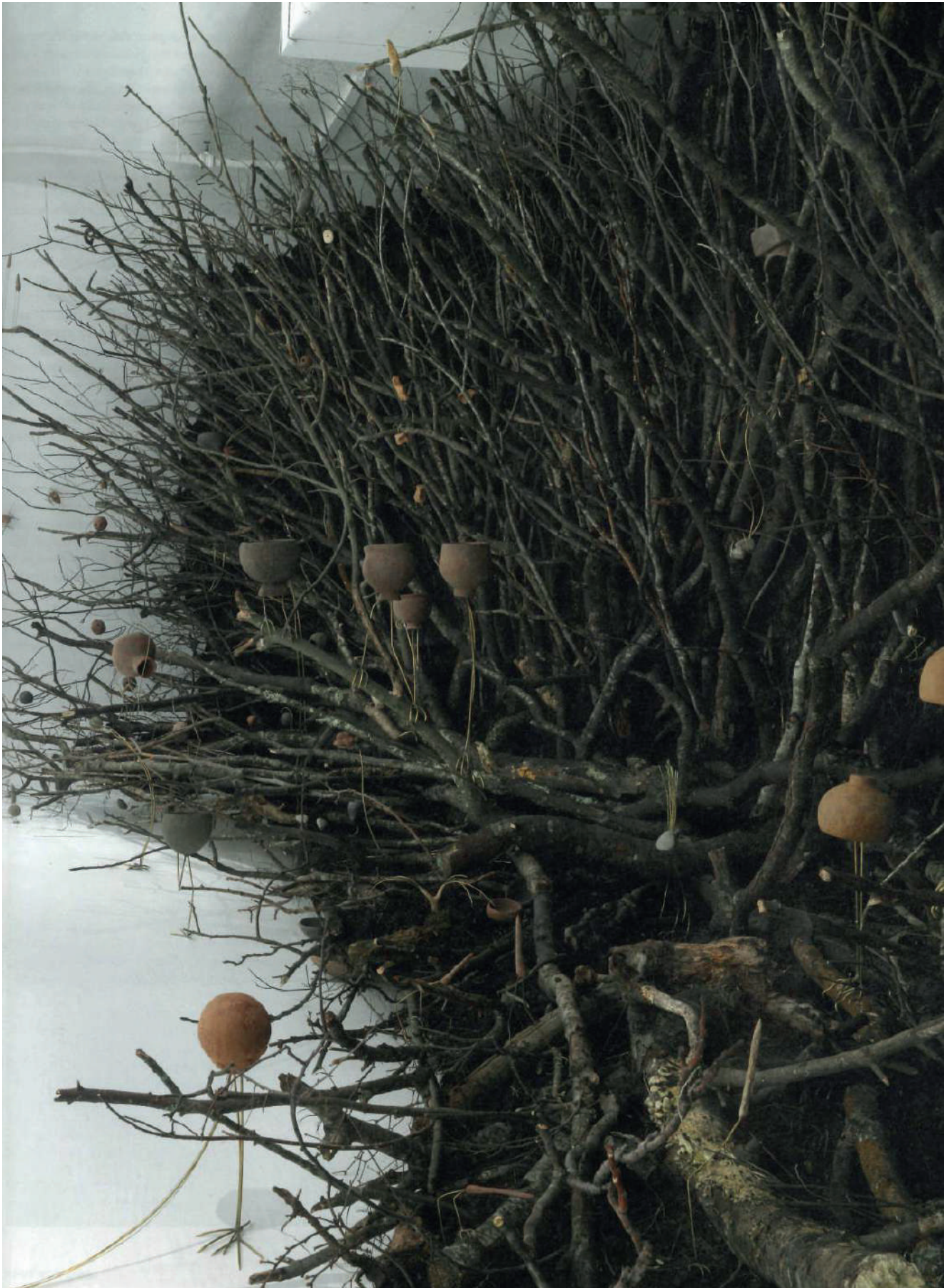
### Petrit Halilaj

1986 : naissance à Kostërc (Kosovo)  
2013 : expose au sein du Pavillon du Kosovo lors de la Biennale de Venise  
2017 : Prix Mario Merz  
2018 : Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship  
2020 : expositions au Crystal Palace (Reina Sofia à Madrid) et à la Tate St Ives (Royaume-Uni)  
Il est représenté par la galerie Kamel Mennour. Il vit et travaille entre Bozzolo (Italie), Berlin (Allemagne) et Pristina (Kosovo).

PETRIT HALILAJ talks  
with *Hettie Judah* about  
butterflies, the politicization  
of artefacts and the  
lost cultural history  
of his Kosovar home city



# Living Archaeology



CARPET MOTHS STITCHED FROM WOVEN RUGS, water vessels re-imagined as wading birds, woodland creatures sculpted from mud and wire: Petrit Halilaj's works are populated by a menagerie that suggests home and habitat are moveable, living entities. Little wonder: born in the former Yugoslavia in 1986, the artist fled Kosovo with his family when the Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001) broke out in his early childhood. The first artist to represent the Republic of Kosovo at the Venice Biennale, in 2013, Halilaj's work questions what is sacrificed in the construction of national identity. Who owns the past? What is no longer spoken of? Who is left out in the collective 'we'?

Recently, Halilaj has explored the hidden histories of his home city of Runik. Among them are modern myths relating to Neolithic artefacts that were excavated between 1968 and 1983, following the discovery of a site of major archaeological importance, and which still surface periodically. The findings were archived but work never resumed, inspiring the sculpture and film installation *RU* (2017), commissioned for the New Museum in New York. While working on this piece, Halilaj was alerted to the remains of Runik's House of Culture. Upon returning, he spent months reviving portions of the building and staged a night of collaborative performance. This became the foundation for the multifaceted theatrical installation, *Shkrepetima* (A Lightning Bolt, 2018), which was then shown alongside a film of the event at Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern and the Fondazione Merz in Turin. Fragments of the ruined building floated like an exploding dreamscape, as weird bird forms watched from the eaves, their harsh metal feet gripping deep into the plaster of the gallery walls.

THIS PAGE AND PREVIOUS SPREAD *RU*, 2017, installation details. New Museum, New York. Courtesy: the artist, ChertLadde, Berlin, and kamel mennour, Paris/London; photograph: Dario Lasagni

HETTIE JUDAH *Chaotic museums, disordered archives, buried memories: these are all things I associate with your work. Why did you begin to explore these topics?*

PETRIT HALILAJ The first things that really moved me were butterflies. In 2009, I was doing a show at Stacion in Pristina, which shared its storage and gardens with what is now the Ethnological Museum of Kosovo. Upon cleaning out the space for my show, I was amazed to find butterflies in dusty wooden crates that had been abandoned by mistake. The installation *Poisoned by Men in Need of Some Love* (2013), which was shown at WIELS in Brussels, started there.

The Ethnological Museum didn't want to talk about the fact that they shut down the Natural History Museum in order to establish their institution. Knowing the space – and a trick to enter the building – I decided to steal the butterflies and bring them to Germany. What made me want to steal them was a conversation with my mum. She told me how, when I was very young, I had a passion for butterflies, flowers and other things that, in her opinion, were for girls to play with. Around the time of this conversation, I was discovering my sexuality, so the butterflies became very important to me. I was living abroad, in Berlin, and my family didn't know about my sexuality but I had no idea how to tell them.

This point was crucial: I didn't know how the state came to the decision to set aside the Natural History Museum and replace it with the narrative of the new nation. In the same way, I had no idea how I had decided to set aside my sexuality and to appear, culturally, as others did. What made me discover both was my passion for butterflies.

For *Poisoned by Men in Need of Some Love*, having finally reached an agreement with the museum, we re-opened the doors that had kept the collection hidden all these years, only to discover that 90 percent of the specimens had deteriorated to the point where they no longer had any scientific value.

HJ *RU* took as a starting point the unfinished archaeological excavation of Runik. How did you discover the historic importance of the city?

PH We did not learn about Runik's archaeological history in school, but I grew up with neighbours and their stories. In the new reality, after the Kosovo War, I came to see how important the fact that we were living on top of this Neolithic site was for everyday life; how the citizens identified with this earlier civilization and the stories about it. It was so poetic: people chose this history and not the recent history of conflict.

The excavation of the Runik site was interrupted by the downfall of the former Yugoslavia and the subsequent need to construct new properties. The artefacts were stored in different archives. I had no access to those in Belgrade and, while I had access in Pristina, most of the artefacts were unlabelled and disorganized. The Runik ocarina and the majority of the objects remain in Belgrade.

HJ You mentioned the Runik ocarina, the earliest instrument found in Kosovo: why is it so significant?

PH What I ask is how the ocarina was significant for the people of Runik, specifically. In Serbia, the artefacts have been culturally – and physically – appropriated and are identified with in a certain way, while in Albania, the same objects are appropriated and identified with in a different manner. In each case, the objects fit with a particular national interest. It's time we read these artefacts in a new light: instead of trying to nationalize them, they should bring people together.

This archaeology is so alive. People in Runik even use the vessel of the Neolithic goddess figure as an ashtray. I would be fascinated to find a compromise: to reflect how





these histories are now completely personal and part of day-to-day life. Can you conserve narratives and objects without taking them away from the people and the city? Perhaps you could declare the whole city a museum.

HJ *When we spoke at the time of your New Museum show, you mentioned a desire to hold a festival in Runik inspired by the ocarina. This led to the installation Shkrepetima. How did the project evolve?*

PH In Runik, the borders between fiction and reality were always so unclear. It was the result of a huge void of historical information. Even today, there is no billboard in the city that indicates the archaeological site you're standing on. As I didn't learn this at school, people were my primary source of information. They would say that this was the most important Neolithic site, and I thought: 'Yeah, every small town thinks they are the centre of the world.' But then I would go to museums and discover that what I thought of as mythology was, in fact, true.

While I was working on *RU*, I discovered there was something else which had been crucial for the community: the House of Culture. It had a library, a cinema and theatre, and it existed until 1989. I realized that the community knew what it was to have culture, but the narrative of the war had become so strong that this never came to the surface.

When I discovered that one of my teachers in Runik was also a former actor and activist, it opened a whole new conversation. I was deeply touched. Even within the frame of communism, some 30 years ago, there had remained signs of a multi-ethnic society. There were always dreamers, and that is something that I had almost stopped dreaming of myself. That was the beginning of *Shkrepetima*.

HJ *For both the reconstruction of the House of Culture and the performance that ultimately took place within, you brought in professionals from outside of Runik. Why was this?*

PH There were no archives. Everything was either burnt or lost. People were the only available basis for my research. The first thing was to feel what it meant to use the square again and whether people even wanted it, because this is not my house. This is not a museum. This is not a place you are supposed to go as an artist.



*“Can you conserve narratives without taking them away from the people?”*



ABOVE  
*Abetare (Fluturat)*, 2017, installation view. Kamel Mennour, Paris. Courtesy: the artist, ChertLadde, Berlin, and Kamel Mennour, Paris/London

BELOW  
*Shkrepetima (A Lightning Bolt)*, 2018, performance documentation. Fondazione Merz, Turin. Courtesy: the artist, Hajdel Foundation, Fondazione Merz, Turin, ChertLadde, Berlin, and Kamel Mennour, Paris/London; photograph: Majlinda Hoxha

*As I fell asleep your face came to my mind. When I opened my eyes it was nowhere to be found.*  
2018, installation view, Fondazione Merz, Turin. Courtesy: the artist, Hajdel Foundation, Fondazione Merz, Turin, ChertLudde, Berlin, and kamel mennour, Paris/London; photograph: Renato Ghiazza



*“Even within the frame of communism, there were dreamers. I had almost stopped dreaming of this myself.”*

When we first gathered the citizens and proposed a re-awakening of the square, the intensity of emotions was strong. The square had become a dump, but at the same time it was what made the community and identity of Runik. I couldn't add up these two narratives. Something had interrupted the relationship between people and public life. It was a very fragile situation.

I was bombarded by stories: how proud they were about this time; how amazing it was; how there were couples who met there. I proposed that the former actors, the professionals, would perform again, but it was too much for them to take. Instead, they talked to me about their past performances: the ways in which they adapted plays in order to discuss subjects that were almost too big to talk about. How, for example, in that time, 95 percent of women were illiterate and not going to school.

Writing the script [for *Shkrepëtima*], I had this idea of the dreamer, a guy sleeping in the centre of the stage who would connect all these fragments: years, human stories, facts, books. I saw that it was not true that we didn't have dreams or plans. They were just hidden by bigger events, like the war, or the ten years of conflict and darkness of the 1990s, and they needed *shkrepëtima* – a lightning bolt – to wake up.

**HJ** *It was such a huge gesture to bring the House of Culture back to life. Was the response as you expected?*

**PH** When I visited the site with actors from the old times, I couldn't believe how important it was for them and the collective memory of the whole community. The risk was that everything would get lost but, 20 days after the play, the government and Ministry of Culture put the building under protection, which is very rare in the Balkans.

Growing up in a place where you feel different because of your sexual orientation and you can't fully be yourself, you open up an abstract, invisible distance between yourself and your community. That's why I feel preoccupied now that the Kosovar community is so happy to finally be independent. The majority is now happy, but what about the minorities? This event was an attempt to both reconnect and raise new questions. We can have a new life. We can have a community again, and art ●

HETTIE JUDAH is a writer based in London, UK.

PETRIT HALILAJ is an artist based in Germany, Kosovo and Italy. In 2018, he had solo exhibitions at Fondazione Merz, Turin, Italy; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA, and Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland. In 2017, he had a solo exhibition at New Museum, New York, USA, and received an honourable mention by the jury of the 57th Venice Biennale, Italy, for his contribution to the Arsenale and Central Pavilion exhibition.

Petrit Halilaj,  
*Si Okarina e Runikut,*

2014-2019, laiton, terre, résine  
acrylique, dimensions variables.  
kamel mennour.



## GÉORGIE

### Tbilisi Art Fair : acte 2

Dans la galaxie démesurée des foires internationales, c'est l'une des plus jeunes. La Tbilisi Art Fair a été lancée l'an dernier, fondée par Kaha Gvelesiani, avec un Français pour directeur artistique, Eric Schlosser (qui a précédemment officié à Art Moscow et Art Vilnius), et un board comprenant des experts chevronnés, notamment Nicolas Iljine (directeur du développement Europe et Proche-Orient du Guggenheim jusqu'en 2010, conseiller du directeur de l'Ermitage depuis 2014) et Anna Somers Cock, longtemps au timon de l'*Art Newspaper*. Installée dans le bâtiment Art nouveau Expogeorgia, dans la capitale géorgienne, elle accueille 33 galeries, reflétant à parts égales la jeune scène du Caucase et d'Europe de l'Est (Lituanie, Bulgarie, Azerbaïdjan, Arménie, Iran) et les galeries plus établies de l'Ouest, dont une poignée de poids lourds comme Continua ou kamel mennour. Pour s'imposer comme une étape obligée dans la région, l'une des cartes maîtresses de la manifestation est son programme off et VIP, avec des performances, des « talks » et des expositions, qui mettent en valeur de jeunes créateurs cosmopolites ou des valeurs sûres de l'art géorgien comme David Kakabadze (1889-1952), pionnier de l'art cinétique.

**RAFAEL PIC**

Tbilisi Art Fair,  
du 17 au 19 mai  
[tbilisiartfair.art](http://tbilisiartfair.art)



## Tbilisi Art Fair : acte 2

Édition N°1724



Tbilisi Art Fair 2018.  
Tbilisi Art Fair.

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Tbilisi Art Fair, du 17 au 19 mai  
[tbilisiartfair.art](http://tbilisiartfair.art)



Petrit Halilaj, "Si Okarina e Runikut", 2014-2019, laiton, terre, résine acrylique, dimensions variables. [kamel mennour](http://kamelmenhour.com).  
Courtesy [kamel mennour](http://kamelmenhour.com).

Petrit Halilaj *Shkrepetima*

Fondazione Merz, Turin 29 October – 3 February

In a small town in the depths of the Kosovan countryside lies the dilapidated shell of a former cultural centre. Many of its walls have crumbled, its roof has collapsed, its floor is ankle deep with rubbish. It's not that remarkable a place, and Runik isn't that remarkable a town, but it's where Petrit Halilaj grew up. The cultural centre once thrummed with life, but all that's left is the crap that remains when things have been forgotten, when the world around you has moved on. And now, chunks of it are in an art gallery in Turin.

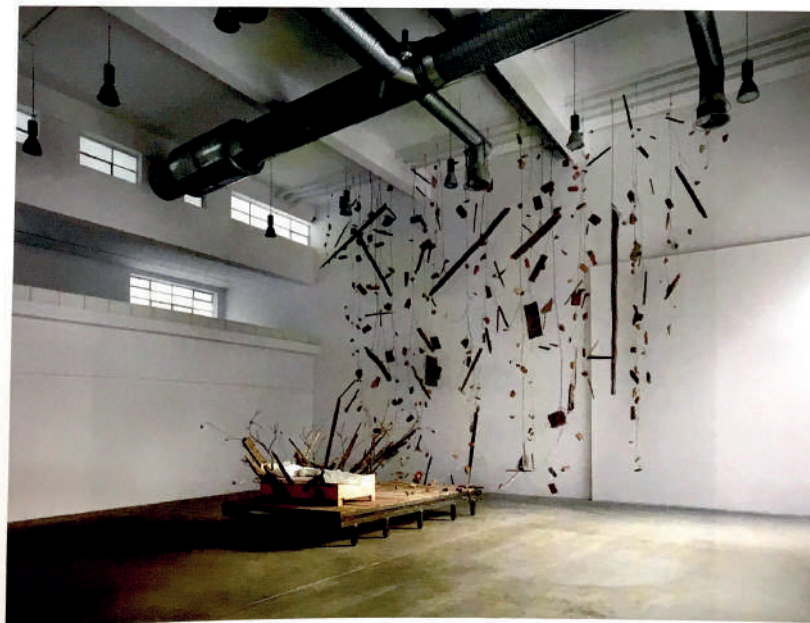
The big metaphor at the heart of Halilaj's work at the Fondazione Merz – the final part in a trilogy of shows that started with a performance in Runik's dilapidated cultural centre, became an exhibition at the Zentrum Paul Klee and is now an installation – isn't subtle. It's a lobbed breezeblock of a message: his childhood cultural centre in his rural hometown is in ruins, so his culture itself is in ruins. That culture embodies a sense of self, identity and purpose: and it's all been left bereft and derelict. Now Halilaj is trying to spark, or 'shkrepetima', it back to life.

Scattered around the space of the Fondazione Merz are the remnants of that cultural centre: chunks of timber, masonry and bricks hang suspended from the ceiling, draping towards a bed covered in wood and clay recreations of Neolithic objects, copies of artefacts found in and around Runik. It's as if Halilaj has frozen time just as a tornado ripped the building from its foundations, dragging the debris up into the sky in a sort of arte povera cyclone. High platforms, wooden structures like guard towers, line the rest of the space. Toy rifles and blackboards hang from red curtains suspended from the platforms. These are the objects of the town's demise, and the symbols of what was lost. Education and tradition blighted by neglect.

But angelic winged creatures, floating up by the ceiling, hint that these objects could also be the symbols of rebirth. The problem is, it's pretty obvious that you're surrounded by props from a performance rather than finished pieces. It ends up feeling like the detritus of

art rather than the work itself, objects that once meant something but now just represent those ideas. It even looks like a stage set, begging dramatically to be brought alive by actual action. Drawings in the adjoining room feel like an afterthought, and, down in the basement, a film documents the performance at the heart of all this, but that also doesn't feel that fulfilling, because it's not the performance, it's not the art, it's a document of it. And that's only half of a story.

Despite those shortcomings, in this messy builders' yard of an exhibition, Halilaj is trying to cobble together a sense of identity out of the ashes of a cultural bonfire, trying to make something new out of the ruins. It's reconstruction out of literal destruction, or at the very least dereliction. This is bigger than the objects in front of you, this is Halilaj dragging eyes and attention back to his hometown, and his hometown's cultural corpse back to life through his art, and there might just be a pulse there. *Eddy Frankel*



*Shkrepetima*, 2018 (installation view). Photo: Renato Ghiazza.  
Courtesy the artist and Fondazione Merz, Turin

L'OFFICIEL ART

# Petrit Halilaj The Lightning

Interview by Elise Lammer

With ethnic conflict as the backdrop, Petrit Halilaj (b. 1986, Kostërcc) has returned to the Kosovar town where he grew up in an attempt to revive its history, particularly through the spoken memories of the townspeople. His play *Shkrepëtima* brings together a cast of local ocarina players with professional actors and dancers, thus reviving Runik's House of Culture, until recently used as a dump.

124



"HAMMER PROJECTS:  
PETRIT HALILAJ,"  
HAMMER MUSEUM,  
LOS ANGELES. THROUGH  
JANUARY 20, 2019.  
"PETRIT HALILAJ.  
SHKREPËTIMA,"  
FONDAZIONE MERZ,  
TURIN. OCTOBER 29, 2018-  
FEBRUARY 3, 2019.



Petrit Halilaj, *Abetare*, 2015.  
Wallpaper, scans of pages  
of the alphabet book *ABETARE*  
repeated on the walls, variable  
dimensions. Installation view,  
"Another Banana Day for the  
Dream-Fish" by Clément Cogitore,  
Palais de Tokyo, Paris.



L'OFFICIEL ART

N°27



*Shkrepëtima* (The Lightning) is the title of Petrit Halilaj's recently initiated play project in Runik, the Kosovar town where he grew up. Fleeing the ethnic conflict that took place in Kosovo between 1998–99, Halilaj has since then lived in Italy and Berlin, where he is currently based. He often works with elements of his own biography in an attempt to rebuild a sense of identity, not only for himself but his country as well, whose status is not yet fully accepted by the European community. As a result of the war and the following diplomatic imbroglio, most of the official history of the region has been lost. Returning again and again to a town whose only vestige of the past is its name, Halilaj has slowly unearthed Runik's past through the spoken memories of its inhabitants, gleaning and collecting information with each new visit. Staged in and around the cultural center recently brought back to life, *Shkrepëtima* is a long-term project meant to revive Runik's cultural past and allow people from both ethnical backgrounds to build a new community. It was launched in early July with a performance in four acts featuring a cast of fifteen ocarina players from the local community, along with ten actors and dancers from Kosovo's theater and ballet world. Followed by an exhibition at the Zentrum Paul Klee (July–August 2018), it will culminate at the

end of October with an exhibition at the Fondazione Merz in Turin, which awarded Halilaj with the Mario Merz Prize in 2017.

**ELISE LAMMER:** Runik already was the topic of your show at the New Museum in New York in September 2017, after you discovered it was the site of one of the earliest Neolithic settlements in the region, and home to the ocarina, the oldest musical instrument ever discovered in the Balkans. You've just spent months cleaning and rebuilding Runik's former House of Culture and interviewing people about their recollection of a building that once housed a library containing about 7,000 books, a theater, and the farmers' cooperative. The restored space was the main character, as well as the setting, of a bombastic performance in which the spirits inhabiting this old building were the voices restoring the history of your hometown. Why did you pick this place, and what was this play about?

**PETRIT HALILAJ:** I see the play as the event marking the beginning of long-term and self-sustaining project. The House of Culture is located in the center of Runik, in the middle of the main square. Until last March, it was used as a dump;

people would basically use it to throw their trash and pee. It was part of a program launched by the then Yugoslavian government in the late 1940s to promote culture in the countryside, in smaller towns and villages. There were plans for over 4,000 such centers throughout the country. Some of them, with varying degrees of involvement from the local community, became hugely successful. They played an important role in helping people build a sense of community after World War II, while promoting cultural and social improvement. In Runik alone, concerts and events were regularly sold out, which is incredible for such a small town. At some point the local acting troupe was so successful that it started touring the entire country. During Serbia's rule over Kosovo, Slobodan Milošević banned all cultural initiatives and the House of Culture was abandoned and never used again. After the war, people were mostly concerned with their survival. Many were left homeless and had to care for the most urgent matters. In a way, the trauma the war left, combined with a rather chaotic reconstruction scheme, led the population to become suspicious of their own community. As a multiethnic city, any initiative would have to involve both communities (Serbians and Albanians), and for some years after the conflict, both

N°27

L'OFFICIEL ART

ЗЕМЉОРАДНИЧКА ЗАДРУГА Култура Пшеница  
Облик сарадње Уговор

## УГОВОР бр. 1

О сарадњи и производњи у економској 196 36 год. састављен дана 31. 8. 1963  
 196 36 год., између Земљорадничке задруге Задруга  
 с једне стране и Петрић Халилај на Задруга  
 с друге стране.

**I Обавезе Земљорадничке задруге**

1. Земљорадничка задруга се обавезује да ће на основу овог уговора извршити саговорачу ниже наведене радове, као и обезбедити доле наведени репродукциони материјал за производњу Пшеница на површини од 100 ха у потесу Задруга К. О. Задруга парцела кат. бр. \_\_\_\_\_ предусев Пшеница и то:

ВРСТА РАДА И МАТЕРИЈАЛА	РОК ИЗВРШЕЊА ДО	Јез. мјег	Кодична 100	Цена по јединици	Вредност динара
Орање до 20 см.					
"   25 см.					
"   30 см.					
"   35 см.		Xa	100	1500	1500
Расурање или пубрња					1500
Тањрање					
Драње		Xa	100	2000	2000
Сева		X	100	2000	2000
Међуредна обрада					
Жетва-берба					
Комбајнирање					
Заштита усева		Xa	100	2000	2000
		Xa	100	3000	3000
				5000	5000
<b>Материјал</b>					
Мин. ђубрива <u>Минерал</u>		Xa	100	10	11000
фосфорна <u>150 р</u>		Xa	100	11	11000
калцијена <u>100 р</u>		Xa	100	19	19000
мешана					
Семе				240	90
				240	90
<b>ДОЗ</b>					1364
Камета %					1138
Остало <u>Пшеница</u>				150	150
<b>УКУПНА ВРЕДНОСТ УСЛУГА И МАТЕРИЈАЛА ДИНАРА</b>					<b>85512</b>

2. Задруга ће давати писмева или усмена стручна упутства за производњу уговорене културе, а посебно на захтев произвођача — саговорача.

3. Задруга је обавезна да изврши услуге и набави материјал квалитетно и у одређеном агротехничком року

Facing page: Petrit Halilaj, *Shkrepëtima*, performance, Runik, 2018. Produced by Fondazione Merz and Hajdel Foundation.  
 Above: Petrit Halilaj, *Shkrepëtima*, 2018. Ink drawing on archival document of the Koperativa of Runik.

L'OFFICIEL ART

N°27



128

FEATURES

N°27

Petrit Halilaj, *RU*, 2017. Installation view, New Museum, New York. Sculptures and landscapes, clay, plaster, resin, pigments, brass, steel structure, wood, soil, glue and earth, variable dimension.

were still killing each other. Despite the war being officially over, the wound remained open for a long time.

Since I had no direct memories of the House of Culture, I started interviewing former actors, going to their houses, asking them about the plays that had once been performed. We talked for hours. Twelve plays seemed to stand out, so I decided to use and rework some fragments to write the script of *Shkrepëtima*, which is about the past, present and future of Runik.

**The play was only performed once, on July 7 in Runik. Most of the art world probably missed it. Can you talk more about the story and scenography, tell us what it is about?**

The play was really conceived for the people of Runik and was only the starting point of a three-part project between Kosovo, Switzerland and Italy. While working on the play, I documented the process while collecting objects and ephemera. I also made drawings on some archival documents from the House of Culture I discovered during my research period, intending to show them at the Zentrum Paul Klee and the Fondazione Merz, as elements documenting the concept behind the performance.

*Shkrepëtima* is divided into three acts, where the first act deals with the distant past of Runik, which was one of the earliest Neolithic settlements in the region. Archaeological digs in 1968 and 1983 uncovered part of Kosovo's most significant prehistoric artifacts, including the Runik Ocarina, which plays a leading role in the narrative. We follow the dreams of a boy who falls asleep in a bed made of the remains of the cultural center. The boy, who remains asleep during the entire play, serves as the narrative thread running throughout. The building does not only shelter the boy, it slowly impacts the story, while transforming his subconscious to direct the destiny of the boy and his town.

**The Runik Ocarina has played an important role in Kosovars' attempt to grasp and redefine a sense of national identity. During the war it was "loaned" to the Natural History Museum in Belgrade and never returned. The play seems to address, though very poetically, the missing of cultural treasures. How was this conveyed in *Shkrepëtima*?**

The ocarina is the element connecting past and present in the play and, more generally, the country. At some point, the librarian, another key character, tries to awaken the boy by playing the ocarina. More players join, forming a chorus of fifteen musicians playing the instruments we crafted during a workshop organized at the local school in collaboration with the Fondazione Merz Education Department. Instead of waking the boy, the ocarina players awaken the building, which is brought to life and starts

L'OFFICIEL ART

communicating with them and the spectators. There is a growing awareness of displaced cultural treasures, and I'm hoping that the play will contribute to our placing value on Runik's cultural heritage.

**What happens after the House of Culture comes alive?**

The second act deals with the more recent history of Runik and somewhat traces a biography of the House of Culture through the anecdotes and scripts I collected. The first fragment is about a mother and her daughter, who is in love with the wrong man. He isn't the husband who was assigned to her, a typical scenario of Kosovar patriarchal society, where women are still considered only as mothers and homemakers. The second fragment tells the story of a female teacher who gets punished for trying to educate women while teaching them the alphabet. The third is about a woman who transforms herself into a man in order to avoid a forced marriage as she awaits the return of the man she loves. The fourth and last fragment takes place during a wedding and is about Hakmarrja, an Albanian tradition – still ongoing for a portion of the population – that consists of blood revenge over questions of honor. Despite the dramatic angle of the four fragments, each story has a surprise twist, and the play is concluded on a positive note. Finally the boy awakes in what looks like a nest made with all the props used during the play, and he realizes that his dreams weren't only illusions. The July performance ended with a grande finale by ANDRRA, a Kosovar singer born in Germany with whom I worked on the soundtrack.

**You left Berlin and spent a lot of time in Runik for this project. Now that the House of Culture is back to life and the community revitalized, what's next?**

The goal was to start a process of renewal; it was important to include all layers of history, as well as people of different generations and ethnic backgrounds. I needed a profound understanding of what was at stake. I think I brought in a structure, so that the group of people with whom I worked can autonomously produce a similar event next year. Through the exhibitions in Bern and Turin, I have also been able to provide an awareness of the many cultural and political aspects confronting the region, and I have realized how many people are interested in keeping this place alive. I'm convinced that the knowledge we built together is here to stay. Runik has such a rich historical and cultural history that there is enough material to actually build a museum!

Elise Lammer is curator at SALTS, Birsfelden, Switzerland. She is based in Basel and Berlin.

FEATURES

129

# BLOUIN modernpainters

ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

OCTOBER 2018

## STORIES FROM THE RUINS

PETRIT HALILAJ, THE BERLIN-BASED  
ARTIST WHO WAS AWARDED THE MARIO  
MERZ PRIZE LAST YEAR, GAVE NEW LIFE  
TO A CULTURAL CENTER — AND A  
COMMUNITY — IN HIS NATIVE KOSOVO

BY ANYA HARRISON



PHOTO: DARIO LASAGNI



Petrit Halilaj



**T**he town of Runik sits in the north of Kosovo, some one-and-a-half hour's drive from the capital, Pristina. The journey there, on a dark night in early July, took me via serpentine routes through a Balkan landscape cocooned by greenery during the day, but pitch black after the sun sets. I could occasionally make out small settlements, lone houses standing mid-construction, their newness paralleled in the smooth asphalt of the roads not yet worn down by years of use. Everything, in fact, more or less feels new, a strange reminder that the conflict that left much of this land in ruins only 20 years ago has, in its wake, perpetuated a natural hurry to rebuild, leaving no traces of the past behind.

Runik itself is not much different in this respect. But just behind the few shops, bars and cafes that line its main street, is the ruined carapace of its former House of Culture. Built in the 1950s, like other similar structures across former Yugoslavia it functioned as the beating heart of the community — staging plays, screening films, hosting a library — before falling prey to neglect during the 1990s as ethnic tensions steadily grew. Until a few months ago, it had lain dilapidated, the square in front of its façade a rubbish heap. That is until Petrit Halilaj, the Berlin-based Kosovar artist, got a team of helpers, including the curator Leonardo Bigazzi, on board to clean up the building to use it as the setting and subject of “Shkrepëtima!,” a one-night-only, open-air performance that blended theater, music, choreography and costumes, and which forms the first chapter of a three-part project that has been in development since Halilaj was awarded the Mario Merz Prize last





Petrit Halilaj,  
 "Shkrepetima," 2018,  
 ink drawing on  
 archival document  
 of the Koperativa  
 of Runik.

year.

"Shkrepetima!" marks Halilaj's first foray into working in theater, for which he engaged some of Kosovo's most-respected actors and dancers, and a direct intervention into public space. It feels like a natural extension for an artist whose practice has consistently explored personal and collective narratives. These most often proceed from and oscillate between his own personal history and family relationships, as well as prolonged research into the recent history that have shaped both his hometown of Runik and the country as a whole. "My research is really about how to understand and respect the past," he explained over coffee, "and through that, how to build new emotional connections today and how to give value to a ruin, simply because it has its own aura and story."

"Shkrepetima," which means "flash" in Albanian, is taken from the title of a multi-ethnic, polylingual magazine that was created by local actors, teachers and students at the height of the House of Culture's activity. It includes fragments of prominent plays that had been performed in its theater from the 1950s onwards, and which address issues related to Albanian social identity: struggles for personal and collective freedom, resistance to proscribed gender roles and efforts to overcome regressive mentalities. It is an amalgamation of archives, documents discovered still hidden in the building's rafters, and oral histories and recollections of those who had worked, taught or played in it. But rather than a nostalgic look at the past, or a decrying of the socio-cultural erasures perpetrated by the conflict, the project's libretto instead offers a dedication "to all the dreams of the citizens of Runik."

If anything, "Shkrepetima!" is insistent on the creative potential that this particular community can

ЗЕМЉОРАДНИЧКА ЗАДРУГА

Култура \_\_\_\_\_  
 Облик сарадње \_\_\_\_\_


УГОВОР бр. \_\_\_\_\_

О сарадњи и производњи у економској 196 76 год, састављен дана 21. 9. 1966 год, између Земљорадничке задруге \_\_\_\_\_ с једне стране и \_\_\_\_\_ из \_\_\_\_\_ с друге стране.

I Обавезе Земљорадничке задруге

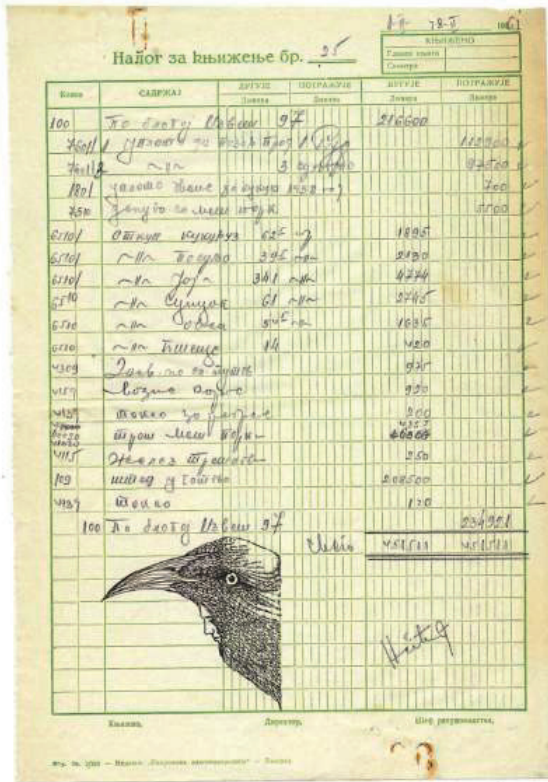
1. Земљорадничка задруга се обавезује да ће на основу овог уговора извршити саговорачу ниже наведене радове, као и обезбедити доле наведени репродукциони материјал за производњу \_\_\_\_\_ на површини од \_\_\_\_\_ ха у потесу \_\_\_\_\_ К. О. \_\_\_\_\_ парцела кат. бр. \_\_\_\_\_ предусев \_\_\_\_\_ и то:

ВРСТА РАДА И МАТЕРИЈАЛА	РОК ИЗВРШЕЊА ДО	Јед. мјера	Количина	Цена по јединици	Вредност динара
Ораве до 20 см.					
"   25 см.					
"   30 см.					
"   35 см.					
Распурање или ђубрење					1500
Тезирање					
Драње	ха	100		2000	2000
Сева	ха	100		2000	2000
Межурица обрада					
Материјал					
Мин. ђубриво					
фосфорна					11500
калцијска					11500
мешана					11500
Сева					21600
ДОЗ					1364
Калити					4733
ОСТАТОК					150
УКУПНА ВРЕДНОСТ УСЛУГА И МАТЕРИЈАЛА ДИНАРА					85512



2. Задруга ће дати писмена или усмена стручна упутства за производњу уговорене културе, а посебно на захтев произвођача — саговорача.  
 3. Задруга је обавезна да изврши услуге и набави материјал квалификовано и у одређеном агротехничком року.

generate. While the performance was a blend of dreamscape and magic realism — underlined by the fact that the day's torrential downpour gave way to a rainbow and three-hour dry spell, just long enough for the piece to go ahead — for Halilaj it is as much a project that harbors hopes of bearing a direct impact on reality by recreating a public space that tethers Runik's population to questions of ownership, citizenship and civic responsibility. Just as he is adamantly against giving "anyone the pleasure of seeing myself as a victim [of war]," he dismisses the he said/she said, us/



LEFT:  
 Petrit Halilaj,  
 "Shkrepëtima," 2018,  
 ink drawing on  
 archival document  
 of the Koperativa  
 of Runik.

RIGHT:  
 Petrit Halilaj,  
 "Shkrepëtima," 2018,  
 ink drawing on  
 cover page of  
 the magazine  
 Shkrepëtima.

them binaries that govern people's behavior and mindsets, long after the conflict in question has ended. "Maybe I'm being stupid but if we start to dream again, then I think that's where the power lies in changing mindsets," Halilaj said. "If we believe once more that we share something precious, that's what brings people together to plan the future."

Back in his Berlin studio, where we met a couple of months later, ephemera from the performance had a new lease on life in preparation for its reappearance in a different guise at the Fondazione Merz. A pair of iron bird legs gripped a wall. Pleated fabric in forget-me-not blue cascaded down the metal armature. A fairy-tale creature, one of several that animated the Runik episode, was yet another addition to Halilaj's burgeoning menagerie. It would be an understatement to say that the artist

has an affinity for animals. In the drawing series "Bourgeois Hens" (2010 — 2015), Halilaj has gifted each bird fantastic plumage, and a personality to match. Similarly, live chickens have inhabited his installations, whether in "Back to the Future," 2009 at Stacion, Pristina, or in "The places I'm looking for, my dear, are utopian places, they are boring and I don't know how to make them real" (2010), a skeletal wooden reconstruction of his family's new home in Pristina, which was first shown at the 6th Berlin Biennale and propelled him to international awareness.

But his artistic language also extends to canaries, moths, as well as a whole bestiary of animal remnants, modelled on the decaying remains excavated by Halilaj at the former Natural History Museum in Kosovo ("Poisoned by men in need of some

love," 2013). What they share in their dual role as subjects and objects, often an alter ego for Halilaj and his close circle of family and friends, is a fragile vulnerability, desire for proximity and a collective being. There is an empathy that perhaps stems from his own position as an outsider, both as an expatriate but also as an individual unwilling to conform to local deep-seated cultural expectations that still govern modes of behavior, appearance and being, especially in relation to his sexuality.

Halilaj is naturally drawn to objects and materials that have been discarded and now lay forgotten. He concedes a certain indebtedness to Arte Povera, especially given that he completed his studies in its birthplace, Italy. "The post-war transformation that the Arte Povera artists were living through is in a way similar to my connection to Kosovo,"





he said. "It's a huge economical, developmental change, a moment when certain materials acquire a poetry because you see things disappearing right in front of your eyes, your city changing constantly from month to month." This can be glimpsed in the multiple works that have been borne from Halilaj's research into the aforementioned Natural History Museum in Kosovo that, once the war was over, was transformed by the new government into an ethnographic museum, its rich collection of taxidermy animals bundled away into damp basements where they slowly disintegrated.

Similarly, a re-evaluation of what might be neglected by some but treasured by others was an underlying theme in "RU," which was first shown at the New Museum last

year (part of the work has since travelled to the Paul Klee Zentrum in Bern). "RU" took as its starting point Runik's identity as the site of one of the earliest Neolithic settlements in the region. A portion of the project recreated over 500 found and recorded objects and fragments, discovered during archaeological digs in the 1960s and '80s — including the musical instrument ocarina, native to Runik — but which for the most part are now kept in storage at the Natural History Museum in Belgrade, while those of lesser quality are in Pristina. Yet locals still dig up fragments of clay and stone objects in their backyards, forming the basis of new origin myths. For Halilaj, who gave these artefacts new identities as birds, it's a natural reflection of the need to belong and "to try and give a sense to the world by

placing yourself in the center of it." In the films that form part of "RU," we hear locals' own interpretations, "the mythologies that come up of how they deal with these artefacts," explained Halilaj, "but also what they mean in a place where everyone is looking either to appropriate or to find a new identity, one that we are all trying to fix and are obsessed with." He added, "It's about the power of fiction that connects us back to reality, and the translation between the two." So far, his approach seems to have worked. Soon after the performance in Runik, the House of Culture was declared a protected building, spurred on by the head of the Kosovo Parliament's own experience that night. It was an apt reminder that a lightness of touch, boundless energy and a poetic outlook can be infectious.<sup>MP</sup>

Petrit Halilaj,  
 "Shkrepëtlima," 2018,  
 produced by  
 Fondazione  
 Merz and Hajdel  
 Foundation.

**Petrit Halilaj**

Galerie Kamel Mennour / 1<sup>er</sup> décembre 2017 - 27 janvier 2018

Petrit Halilaj (1986, Kosovo) a fait du souvenir d'enfance l'un de ses motifs d'élection. Dessinateur, peintre, sculpteur, installateur, il se consacre notamment à faire revivre le Kosovo de ses jeunes années, en un moment, les années 1990, où cette neuve république balkanique au statut aujourd'hui encore contesté était l'objet de profondes dissensions avec la Serbie, dans le cadre sanglant du conflit ex-yougoslave. Massacres, deportations, épuration ethnique et exil emcellent cette période noire, que l'artiste revisite à sa manière particulière, détournée et subtile, jamais frontale, afin de dire une identité, en fonder la légitimité.

Cette exposition parisienne a de nouveau fourni à Petrit Halilaj l'occasion de faire retour à ce passé douloureux, d'une façon, cette fois encore, inattendue. L'artiste a d'abord recouvert, comme pour créer un vestibule, l'espace d'accueil de la galerie d'un papier peint reprenant les pages d'un abécédaire kosovar (*Abetare* en kosovar, terme qui donne son titre à l'exposition), celui avec lequel il a appris à lire à l'école de Runik, entre 1992 et 1996. Les images de cet abécédaire, celles de personnages emblématiques, d'animaux familiers et de scènes de la vie quotidienne, évoquent, assemblées aux mots qui les désignent, à la fois l'apprentissage de la langue et l'élaboration d'une culture locale, spécifique par ses repères et ses représentations fétiches. Dans une seconde pièce, la présentation d'une dizaine de pupitres d'école agencés comme en une salle de classe, sur plusieurs rangs, prolonge cette entrée en matière. Ces pupitres, collectés par l'artiste en 2010 à l'école Shote Galica de Runik alors en cours de démolition avant sa reconstruction, l'artiste les expose tels quels, dans l'état où il les a trouvés. Couverts de graffitis, ils portent les indices d'une histoire vécue – histoires de cœur, passions sportives et brèves considérations politiques réunis en un même ensemble brouillon. On y découvre diversement des noms d'inconnus, les acronymes de groupes paramilitaires, des dessins d'animaux, des croquis de matériel militaire (ainsi de cette compilation des différentes mitraillettes utilisées durant le conflit). Pour donner plus de sens à ces inscriptions qui sont autant de hiéroglyphes venant définir un état mental particulier, à la fois rêveur, anxieux, amoureux ou chargé d'espérance, Petrit Halilaj décore enfin l'espace de cette salle de classe au moyen de multiples

sculptures métalliques noires reprenant la forme et le tracé de certains des graffitis trouvés sur les tables, en les agrandissant, depuis les murs jusqu'au sol et au plafond. L'effet d'immersion est saisissant. Le visiteur ne consulte plus seulement l'équivalent de documents d'archives, il baigne au milieu d'eux. Un traitement de la mémoire pour le moins singulier, entre présentation littérale d'une documentation et esthétisation sans retenue.

**Paul Ardenne**

« Abetare (KOSOVA Desk) ».  
2015-2017 Sculpture en acier et table  
de l'école primaire Shote Galica,  
Runik, Kosovo. 270 x 305 x 70 cm.  
© Petrit Halilaj, Ph. archives  
kamel merriour) Steel sculpture  
and table from the former Shote Galica  
primary school, Runik, Kosovo



## Petrit Halilaj

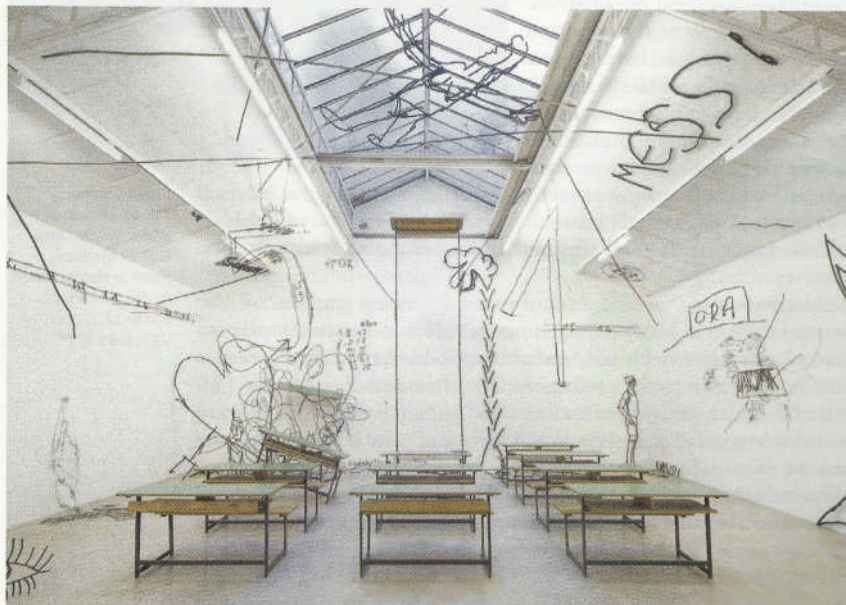
KAMEL MENNOUR

Wallpaper composed of the pages of *ABETARE*, an Albanian spelling book, was arranged in a grid over the two long walls of the Kamel Mennour gallery's first room. At one time, such books were tools of resistance: In 1998, when Petrit Halilaj, age twelve, fled Kosovo to take refuge in Albania, the Serbian government was forcing people to speak Serbo-Croatian and forbidding them to learn Albanian. Each page of the book not only depicts an individual letter but also accompanies it with stereotypical representations of Albanian usage and customs.

A metal butterfly affixed to the wall pointed visitors to the next room, which housed an installation composed of two elements. On one side were twelve desks from the Shotë Galica elementary school in the village of Runik, north of Kosovo, which the artist attended from 1992 to 1997. On the other side were numerous sculptures in steel wire of varying depth and sizes derived from some of the drawings left on the desks. Having accumulated over the years, these sketches seem as ancient as cave paintings, so it's not surprising to learn that Runik is the site of important Neolithic archaeological finds, which Halilaj has recently addressed in other works.

These capricious scrawls—it is sometimes unclear if they constitute letters or drawings, numbers or figures—amount to a canny encyclopedia of childhood. They testify to a youthful impulse to leave a trace of one's passage: scribbles and scratches, inscriptions and boundary lines, curses and declarations of love, tables and numbers with anthropomorphic shapes, hearts and sex organs, allusions to pop music and soccer (Eminem, Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo). If those references

View of  
"Petrit Halilaj,"  
2017. Photo:  
Julie Joubert.



imply an awareness of an international culture disseminated in part by the internet, the works also contain insinuations of the country's searing reality, from the dragon on the Albanian flag to acronyms of military groups and faithful reproductions of weapons accompanied by their technical names.

Halilaj's three-dimensional drawings, or sculptures without depth—which seem to have escaped from Calder's circus—inhabit the space in heterogeneous fashion, gathering in a corner or forming a heap in which the shapes are difficult to distinguish from one another. Here, too, one recognized the spelling book, where a child gives three-dimensional form to a letter *A* that seems bigger than he is. Contrary to the pedagogical intention of the spelling book, the writings on the benches and walls transgress the order imposed by the school as an institution intended to shape future citizens. While the benches are arranged symmetrically, as in an actual schoolroom, the teacher's desk has disappeared, and a desk with extremely long legs rises up, as if ready to be catapulted outside over the gallery's veranda—an ironic and fantastical reference to the artist's exile.

In the neutral space of the gallery, Halilaj thus created a microcosm of his fractured childhood. The image also referred, more generally, to the childhood of all people, who are born not equipped with language, but “in a circle in which infancy is the origin of language and language the origin of infancy,” as Giorgio Agamben observes in his 1978 book *Infanzia e storia: Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia* (Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience). Naively considered as something that precedes language and ceases to exist with the learning of the word, infancy is what pushes human beings to assume the form of subjects in language. And as Halilaj has clearly intuited, this is what truly turns us into historical beings.

—Riccardo Venturi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.



## PETRIT HALILAJ, SOUVENIRS, SOUVENIRS

*Mention spéciale du jury  
à Venise, le Kosovar présente  
« ABETARE » chez Kamel Mennour*

### ART CONTEMPORAIN

**Paris.** On n'oublie pas facilement les installations de Petrit Halilaj. Ceux qui ont vu en 2014, dans cette même galerie, le lac rose réalisé avec du produit de vaisselle parfumé, entouré de rochers, de terre, de végétaux avec un grand cheval en son milieu, s'en souviennent encore. Cette deuxième exposition chez Kamel Mennour n'échappe pas à la règle. Pour l'espace du bas, l'artiste (né en 1986 au Kosovo, il vit aujourd'hui entre Berlin, le Kosovo et l'Italie) a en effet conçu une œuvre

Petrit Halilaj, *ABETARE*  
(Flutorat), vue de  
l'exposition à la galerie  
Kamel Mennour.  
© Petrit Halilaj



composée de douze tables et bancs de l'école primaire de son village natal qu'il est allé récupérer en 2010, avant qu'elle ne soit reconstruite. Avec, comme dans toutes les écoles, les lettres, graffitis, inscriptions, dessins gravés dans le bois ou le formica des pupitres. Autant de

traces qu'Halilaj a sculptées et agrandies en fils d'acier et qu'il a disposées tout autour, comme une mise en volume de ces écritures et évocations enfantines. On retrouve là aussi une fusée, un cœur, des armes, ainsi que des noms de stars de musique (Eminem) ou du foot

(Messi, Ronaldo) et les acronymes, TMK, FSK, KFOR, PDK... des groupes politiques et armés, liés au conflit qui a déchiré la région. On y découvre aussi les lettres du mot « ABETARE » (abécédaire), un livre qui donne son titre à l'exposition et, avec lequel, enfant, l'artiste a appris l'albanais,

dont l'usage était alors interdit par les Serbes. Un manuel de lecture qui des années 1960 aux années 1990 passait de main en main, de génération en génération. Petrit Halilaj a fait imprimer sur papier peint toutes les pages, qui tapissent entièrement la première salle de la galerie, avec les lettres et l'imagerie qui le composent. La grande force de l'exposition est là, dans cette plongée nostalgique, dans cette mémoire à la fois individuelle et universelle. Elle témoigne aussi, à travers ces souvenirs, d'une profonde réflexion sur le langage et sur une identité culturelle qui, avec une dimension politique affichée, anime le travail d'Halilaj depuis une dizaine d'années.

Entre 5 000 (pour la plus petite œuvre, une sérigraphie et dessin à l'encre sur papier) et 50 000 euros, les prix sont logiques pour un artiste qui a représenté le Kosovo à la Biennale de Venise en 2015. Cette année, il y a reçu la mention spéciale du jury.

● HENRI-FRANÇOIS DEBAILLEUX

**PETRIT HALILAJ, ABETARE (FLUTURAT)**, jusqu'au 27 janvier 2018, galerie Kamel Mennour, 6, rue du Pont-de-Lodi, 75006 Paris.

## Petrit Halilaj, de l'enfance à l'histoire



Il y a toujours une forme de légèreté dans le travail de Petrit Halilaj, cet artiste que l'on n'a pas encore beaucoup vu en France, alors qu'il est très présent sur la scène internationale, et qui montre actuellement sa seconde exposition personnelle à la galerie Kamel Mennour, *Abetare (Fluturat)*. Une légèreté liée à l'enfance, cette période de la vie qu'il semble particulièrement chérir et où il trouve l'essentiel de son inspiration. Mais une légèreté qui ne rime pas avec insouciance, car il est né en 1986, au Kosovo, juste avant la chute du communisme, et il a donc connu toutes les tensions politiques et culturelles qui ont ravagé son pays dans les années qui ont suivi. Ainsi, lorsqu'il a présenté *Poisoned by men in need of some love* au Wiels de Bruxelles, il a reconstitué les animaux taxidermisés qui se trouvaient précédemment au Musée d'histoire naturelle de Pristina, un musée auquel il était très attaché et qui avait été complètement détruit pendant les conflits, mais il l'a fait avec la terre et les matériaux de son pays, afin d'interroger la question d'identité nationale (il avait déjà fait venir des m3 de terre du Kosovo pour un stand à la Foire de Bâle). De même, lorsqu'il a exposé à la Kunsthalle de Saint-Gall, en Suisse (*Who does the earth belong to while painting the wind ?*), il a reproduit

les bijoux que sa mère avait enfouis dans le jardin, avec ses dessins d'enfants, pour les mettre à l'abri, mais à une toute autre échelle et avec les gravats de sa maison, saccagée entre-temps par la guerre. Enfin, lors de sa précédente exposition, à la galerie Kamel Mennour, *Yes but the see is attached to the Earth and it never floats in space. The stars would turn off and what about my planet?* (on notera l'extrême poésie des titres de ses expositions, tirés d'un journal qu'il tient régulièrement), il avait évoqué la figure de son arrière-grand père, un intellectuel pacifiste assassiné au début du XXe siècle, mais sous la forme d'un cheval haut de plusieurs mètres et semblant surgir d'un lac de couleur rose.



Car chez Petrit Halilaj, on passe sans cesse de l'intime à l'universel, du privé au public, de la petite à la grande histoire. Tout son travail, que l'on pourrait qualifier de conceptuel et qui entretient aussi des liens très forts avec le « Land art » et « l'Arte Povera » (il a fait ses études en Italie), est basé sur des souvenirs personnels, des rêves, des situations vécues, mais qui n'ont jamais rien d'anecdotique, qui ouvrent sur un large regard sur le monde et qui posent clairement des questions politiques. Il est proche, de ce point de vue, de plusieurs artistes de cette génération qui proposent une réflexion profonde sur les mutations qui s'opèrent en ce moment dans la société, mais qui n'hésitent pas à révéler les éléments privés qui l'ont fait naître. Et l'on pense en particulier à Danh Vo, qui, comme lui, a connu la guerre et l'exil et qui garde un lien très fort avec sa famille (en l'occurrence son père). Ce même Danh Vo l'avait d'ailleurs invité dans la sublime exposition collective,

*Slip of the Tongue*, qu'il avait réalisée, il y a deux ans, dans le musée de François Pinault, à Venise, et ils ont aussi pour point commun d'aborder directement, à travers leurs œuvres, le thème de l'identité en général, mais aussi plus spécifiquement sexuelle.

La présente exposition parisienne, *Abetare (Fluturat)*, a pour thème l'école, une période fondamentale pour la formation de l'enfant et pour la vie de tout individu. Il s'agit en fait d'une variation d'une exposition qu'il avait présentée, en 2015, à une plus vaste échelle, au Kunstverein de Cologne. Au rez-de-chaussée sont placardées, comme un papier-peint, les pages du livre dans lequel il a appris à lire, *Abetare*. A l'époque, il habitait dans un village à la campagne et l'apprentissage de l'albanais apparaissait presque comme une résistance à l'oppression et au massacre du gouvernement serbe (rappelons que, pendant la guerre des Balkans, plus d'un million d'Albanais du Kosovo ont été chassés par les Serbes vers l'Albanie, la Macédoine et Monténégro voisins). A la lettre « p », apparaît d'ailleurs un personnage appelé « Petrit » qui joue avec des poules, un animal que l'artiste aime beaucoup et qu'il a souvent dessiné. Et sur une autre page, on peut voir un garçon qui façonne des fils métalliques pour former de lettres.



Ce sont aussi des fils métalliques que Petrit Halilaj a façonnés pour réaliser la grande installation qu'il montre au sous-sol. Il s'agit cette fois de dessins qui, pendant plusieurs générations, ont été gravés sur les tables de l'école qu'il a vraiment fréquentée et qu'il reproduit en volume et en leur donnant une dimension spectaculaire. Les tables et les bancs sont aussi présentées, où l'on peut chercher les originaux (lors de la rénovation de son école, il a réussi à récupérer les vieilles tables et les bancs qui s'y trouvaient). Dans un enchevêtrement un peu chaotique, ce sont alors tous les motifs que l'on trouve habituellement sur ce genre de supports qui sont représentés et que chacun, à un moment ou à un autre de son existence, a été amené à graver : des plus triviaux (des sexes en érection) aux plus communs (les nom de footballeurs célèbres), en passant par des fleurs, des messages d'amour, des dates, etc. Mais dans le contexte du Kosovo, on trouve aussi les acronymes des forces militaires qui opéraient alors dans le pays, comme la KFOR (Kosovo Force) ou des représentations détaillées de pistolets et d'armes à feu et, dès lors, ce qui n'apparaissait que comme une simple énumération des préoccupations d'enfants prend une toute autre signification.



A la même époque se tient dans la récente galerie londonienne de Kamel Mennour une autre exposition de Petrit Halilaj qui découle, elle, de sa participation à la dernière Biennale de Venise, où il a reçu une mention spéciale (*Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night !?*). Là ce sont des papillons de nuit géants réalisés avec l'aide de sa mère et avec des tapis et des tissus kosovars, qui sont accrochés au mur, ainsi que des dessins. Des papillons pour lesquels l'artiste a toujours éprouvé une fascination particulière et qu'il passait des heures à chasser, enfant, dans sa maison natale. Des papillons, aussi, que l'on retrouve à la lettre « f » du livre de lecture présenté à Paris (en albanais : *Fluturat*) et qu'il dessinés sur certaines pages. L'enfance, le pays, l'histoire : décidément, chez Petrit Halilaj, tout converge dans une même forme légère, poétique, presque joyeuse, mais qui sous des couverts anodins, voire humoristiques, masque les blessures les plus profondes.

– Petrit Halilaj, *Abetare (Fluturat)* jusqu'au 27 janvier à la galerie Kamel Mennour, 6 rue du Pont de Lodi, 75006 Paris. L'exposition *Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night !?*, elle, se tient jusqu'au 4 janvier à Londres, au 51 Brook Street, Mayfair. ([www.kamelmennour.com](http://www.kamelmennour.com))

Images : Petrit Halilaj, : vues de l'exposition « ABETARE (Fluturat) », kamel mennour (6 rue du Pont de Lodi), Paris, 2017 – 2018 © Petrit Halilaj Photo. archives kamel mennour (1,2,3) ; Vue de l'exposition /« Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night!? », kamel mennour (51 Brook Street), London, 2017 – 2018 © Petrit Halilaj Photo. archives kamel mennour Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour Paris/London (4)

**Petrit Halilaj, Vue de l'exposition ABETARE (Fluturat), kamel mennour (6 rue du Pont de Lodi), Paris, 2017 — 2018** © Petrit Halilaj — Photo. archives kamel mennour — Courtesy de l'artiste and kamel mennour Paris/London  
Petrit Halilaj  
ABETARE (Fluturat)  
Encore environ 2 mois : 1 décembre 2017 → 27 janvier 2018

Le travail de Petrit Halilaj est profondément lié à l'histoire récente de son pays, le Kosovo, et aux conséquences des tensions politiques et culturelles dans la région. Cependant, si elle fait appel à la mémoire collective, sa pratique trouve souvent son origine dans son expérience personnelle et est généralement le résultat d'un processus intime, d'un moment partagé avec quelqu'un qu'il aime. Sa manière unique et parfois irrévérencieuse de défier de façon ludique l'essence de la réalité aboutit à une réflexion profonde sur la mémoire, la liberté, l'identité culturelle et les découvertes de la vie. Pour sa deuxième exposition personnelle à la galerie

à Paris, Petrit Halilaj présente sa série intitulée *ABETARE*. Le projet a été créé pour son exposition personnelle au Kölnischer Kunstverein de Cologne (2015) avant d'être encore développé en 2017 à la Fondazione Merz à Turin, où il a reçu le prix Mario Merz. *ABETARE* est le titre du manuel de lecture de l'artiste quand il était enfant, l'abécédaire traditionnel où chaque lettre de l'alphabet est associée à un dessin et un mot commençant par cette lettre. Petrit Halilaj, comme tous les enfants de sa génération, a appris l'albanais sur ce livre alors qu'il fréquentait l'école primaire du village kosovar de Runik entre 1992 et 1997. À cette époque, l'oppression de la population albanaise du Kosovo par le gouvernement serbe était extrême. Le livre est alors devenu une composante essentielle de leur identité culturelle, se transmettant de génération en génération. Petrit Halilaj propose ici une reproduction ludique de ce livre, page à page, sous forme de papier peint, qui rappelle le processus d'apprentissage familial, où, en plus de l'alphabet, les fondements de la société sont illustrés par des scènes de la vie quotidienne.

*Leonardo Bigazzi*

*Né en 1986 à Kostërrc au Kosovo, Petrit Halilaj vit et travaille entre l'Allemagne, le Kosovo et l'Italie. Son travail a déjà été montré dans des expositions personnelles au New Museum à NYC, au Hangar Biccoca à Milan, à la Kölnischer Kunstverein à Cologne, à la Bundeskunsthalle de Bonn, à la National Gallery of Kosovo, à la Kunshalle Lissabon, à Lisbonne, à la Fondation d'Entreprise Galeries Lafayette, à Paris, au WIELS — Contemporary Art Center —, à Bruxelles ; ainsi que dans des expositions collectives à la 57ème Biennale de Venise, à la Fondation Merz à Turin, au MAK Center for Art and Architecture à Los Angeles, au Palazzo Grassi à Venise, et à la Westfälischer Kunstverein à Münster. Il a représenté le Kosovo pour sa première présence à la 55ème Biennale de Venise en 2013. Il a reçu le prix Mario Merz, et la mention spéciale du jury de la 57ème Biennale de Venise en 2017. Plusieurs expositions personnelles sont prévues à la Fondazione Merz à Turin, the Zentrum Paul Klee à Berne, et le Hammer Museum à Los Angeles.*



## New York

### Petrit Halilaj

NEW MUSEUM

235 Bowery

September 27–January 7

Petrit Halilaj's complex exhibition merges issues of identity, collective narrative, and echoes of past battles in a dreamlike environment populated by flocks of imaginary birds. In the two-channel video *The city roofs were so near that even a sleepwalking cat could pass over Runik without ever touching the ground* (all works 2017), Halilaj interviews people living in the titular village in Kosovo, where he grew up—an area that contains important Neolithic settlements found during archeological digs in 1968 and 1983. After the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, the artifacts became displaced. The most valuable pieces are currently stored in Belgrade's Natural History Museum—inaccessible to the people of Runik but vividly alive in their minds. With handheld cameras, Halilaj visits rural neighborhoods and farms, and walks in fields where women, men, and children still dig up fragments of ancient pottery and animal bones. They share recollections of their discoveries with an intensity that highlights a deep attachment to the symbolic values of their heritage.

We watch the video reclining on soft fabric sculptures in the shape of large fowl, which takes us to the following room, where Halilaj's research on the habitats of migratory birds becomes a metaphor for a utopian free world. Here we find the sprawling installation *RU*, made up of about five hundred objects and fragments collected from Runik's historic sites. Small pots, vases, and cups are placed on thin bronze legs and appear as odd avian creatures perched on intricate branches, either sitting around a pond or scattered on the floor. The delicate poetry of this fantastic landscape shifts nostalgia for a lost past to a lively present, where memories and legends give shape to a new world, devoid of borders.



View of "Petrit Halilaj: RU," 2017–18.

— *Ida Panicelli*

## ABETARE (Fluturat)

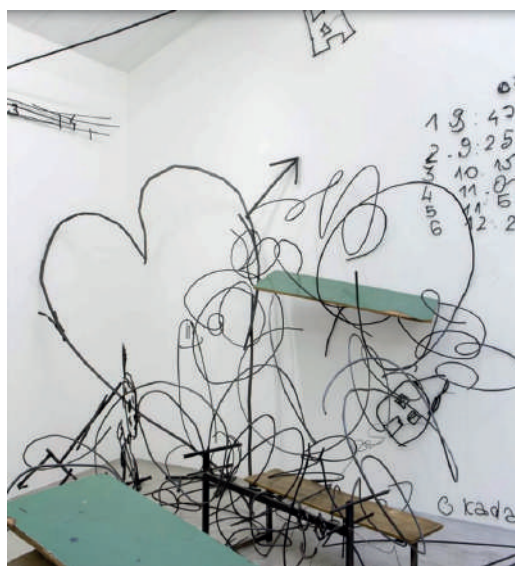
01 Déc - 27 Jan 2018

Vernissage le 01 Déc 2017

📍 GALERIE KAMEL MENNOUR

👤 PETRIT HALILAJ

L'exposition « ABETARE (Fluturat) » à la galerie parisienne kamel mennour présente de nouveaux dessins, sculptures et une installation in situ de Petrit Halilaj. Des œuvres inspirées par l'enfance, l'histoire personnelle de l'artiste et l'histoire récente du Kosovo.



L'exposition « **ABETARE (Fluturat)** » à la galerie kamel mennour, à Paris, dévoile des dessins, des sculptures et une installation monumentale de Petrit Halilaj. Ces œuvres récentes se nourrissent autant de l'histoire collective du Kosovo que de l'histoire personnelle de l'artiste.

## « **ABETARE (Fluturat)** », entre histoire personnelle et histoire du Kosovo

La première partie de l'exposition présente la série intitulée *ABETARE* que Petrit Halilaj a conçu en 2015 avant de poursuivre son développement en 2017. Le titre de l'œuvre, *ABETARE*, reprend celui d'un manuel de lecture que l'artiste utilisait dans son enfance. A une période, les années 1990, où la population albanaise du Kosovo était opprimée par le gouvernement serbe, ce livre par lequel tous les écoliers apprenaient l'albanais est devenu un témoin de l'identité culturelle albanaise.

Avec *ABETARE*, Petrit Halilaj s'est lancé dans une entreprise de reproduction page par page de cet abécédaire où chaque lettre de l'alphabet est associée à un mot commençant par cette lettre et à un dessin représentant l'objet du mot en question. Sous la forme d'un papier peint, les dessins de l'artiste montrent les connexions entre l'apprentissage de l'alphabet et celui des fondements de la société et de la vie quotidienne. Mais surtout, ils révèlent les étonnants liens entre de nombreux dessins du livre et la vie personnelle et la pratique de Petrit Halilaj.

## Petrit Halilaj rend hommage à la liberté de l'enfance

Ainsi, la lettre P est illustrée par un garçon prénommé Petrit jouant avec des poules, or cet animal est récurrent dans le travail de Petrit Halilaj. La lettre F renvoie au mot « Fluturat » (papillons) et trouve un écho dans les souvenirs d'enfance de l'artiste qui les chassait la nuit. Elle introduit par ailleurs parfaitement la nouvelle série de dessins et la série de sculptures *Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night!?* qui représentent toutes deux des papillons de nuit.

La deuxième partie de l'exposition dévoile une installation in situ qui occupe tout l'espace de la galerie. Composée d'un ensemble de douze tables d'écoliers et de plusieurs sculptures en acier, elle offre une autre évocation du monde de l'enfance et de la communauté albanaise dont il faisait partie. Les tables ont été récupérées dans une école primaire d'une petite ville du nord du Kosovo, où Petrit Halilaj a habité et étudié. Les sculptures reproduisent quant à elles en grand format et en volume les dessins et inscriptions dont les tables étaient recouvertes. Noms familiers de célébrités, parties d'anatomie et autres motifs courants se mêlent à des éléments liés au Kosovo, formant une superposition complexe de récits autant qu'une ode à la liberté de l'enfance.



IN QUESTA PAGINA. TOTAL LOOK ETRO.  
IN APERTURA. TOTAL LOOK SALVATORE  
FERRAGAMO. FASHION ASSISTANT FILIPPO  
CASAROLI. GROOMER BERENICE AMMANN  
USING KEVIN MURPHY & UND GRETTEL  
BERLIN. FASHION EDITOR SARAH GRITINI.



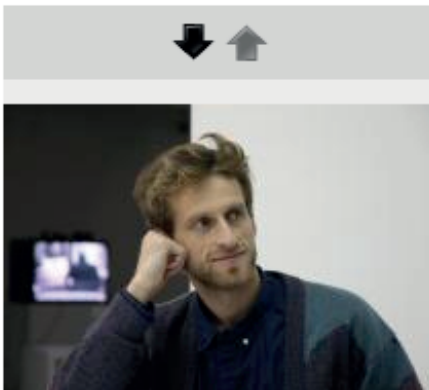
Non è la prima volta a Venezia per Petrit Halilaj, 31 anni compiuti a marzo. Nel 2013 aveva realizzato un'imponente scultura-nido, dimora di una coppia di canarini, per quella che fu la prima partecipazione ufficiale del Kosovo alla Biennale Arte. E se pensate che sia cosa da poco, basti ricordare che un'ottantina di nazioni Onu, tra cui cinque membri dell'Unione Europea, ancora non riconosce l'autonomia del giovane stato balcanico dalla Serbia. La Biennale è talvolta specchio lucidissimo della geopolitica internazionale. «Quattro anni fa ho contribuito a fondare un padiglione: una casa per una parte fragile della mia terra d'origine e della mia vita. Stavolta è un po' diverso perché il mio lavoro sarà esposto all'Arsenale, in mezzo a tante altre opere», racconta Halilaj dal suo studio di Berlino. «L'atteggiamento però rimane lo stesso perché credo che noi artisti dovremmo avere un pensiero politico in qualunque occasione, anche quando esponiamo nel più piccolo dei musei di provincia». In quattro anni però le cose cambiano in fretta. Oggi il Kosovo vive una fase di evoluzione che nel 2013 era solo all'inizio, dopo la dichiarazione di indipendenza del 2008 e dopo la guerra tra il '96 e il '99, quando l'artista, costretto alla fuga con tutta la sua famiglia, aveva poco più di dieci anni. Halilaj pensa allora alla società kosovara come a una farfalla notturna, un animale capace di trasformazioni radicali lungo l'arco di una vita breve. E a Venezia espone una serie di maschere da falena, "Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night?!", le cui ali sono prodotte assemblando tappeti kilim con altri tessuti tradizionali: «Sono così pesanti che quando ho indossato la prima maschera nel 2016 durante una performance al centro d'arte contemporanea di Pristina, le mie gambe non smettevano di tremare. Per muovermi ho dovuto chiedere al pubblico di aiutarmi a sorreggere il costume». Petrit aveva già finito tre maschere prima di incontrare Christine Macel, che lo ha subito spinto a rendere questo progetto monumentale: «Avevo chiesto

a mia madre di aiutarmi a cucire, perciò all'inizio lavoravo fingendo di avere una commissione da un museo anche se non era vero. Il tempo passato con lei era così bello e le discussioni così piene d'amore che non volevo smettere. Infatti le sculture ora sono diciotto». Così i viaggi verso est si moltiplicano e una parte dell'atelier viene trasferito per la prima volta nella nuova casa di famiglia, dalla Germania a Pristina: il contrario di quanto era successo per la collaborazione con il padre alla Biennale di Berlino nel 2010. La ragione per cui Petrit coinvolge intensamente i suoi familiari nella realizzazione delle opere sta nel legame tra i cambiamenti di un'intera società e il progresso personale: «Dopo che i miei cari sono tornati in patria, migrando dalla vecchia casa sulla collina di Kostërë alla capitale, anche mia mamma ha iniziato a trasformarsi. Dall'essere una donna dedita solo alla famiglia ha iniziato ad apprezzare l'indipendenza che le dà il suo lavoro di sarta, e cambiando ha potuto capire meglio il mio modo di essere e di amare». Questa comprensione reciproca è incorporata nelle falene a cui madre e figlio hanno lavorato assieme. Sotto i pesanti kilim i due hanno cucito un tessuto acrilico lucente e colorato che per motivi diversi rappresenta l'evoluzione di entrambi. «Il cambiamento fa paura ma è anche meraviglioso da osservare. Per questo il titolo della mia opera lo si deve leggere come se alla fine non ci fosse solo il punto di domanda, ma anche il punto esclamativo».



## Rescuing Butterflies Tea with Petrit Halilaj

*Petrit Halilaj is conquering the art world with his poetic installations and fantastic drawings. Yet his work is also quite political and based on hard experiences: war, expulsion, forgetting. The young Kosovar artist is represented in the Deutsche Bank Collection. Oliver Koerner von Gustorf visited him in his Berlin studio.*

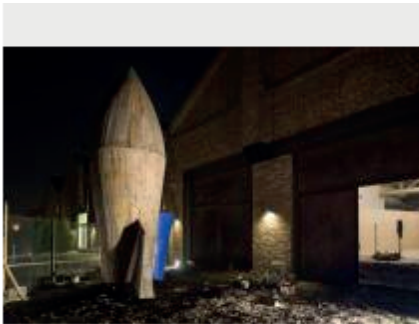


*Petrit Halilaj, Courtesy Chert, Berlin*



*Petrit Halilaj, Installation view, Space Shuttle in the Garden, Hangar Bicocca, 2015. Courtesy the artist and Chert, Berlin.*

"Take another good picture of it, tomorrow the school will be gone," says the little boy. Although there is something aloof about this remark, it is also menacing. But the video for [Petrit Halilaj's](#) exhibition [ABETARE 2015](#) at the [Kölnischer Kunstverein](#) begins very innocuously. In 2010, he revisited his old school in the Kosovar village of Runik, which he attended from 1992 to 1997. He must have loved it. According to his biography, he had his first solo exhibition there at the age of ten, apparently curated by his teacher. Just a year later, in 1998, following the outbreak of the Kosovo war, Halilaj was fleeing with his family. Years later the artist, now working internationally, returned to his hometown, as luck would have it, a day before the school building was torn down to make room for a new edifice. He filmed the activity – the workmen on the roof sorting out recyclable building material, elementary-school children frolicking around the abandoned building, collecting themselves, then speeding into different directions like a flock of birds. Intuitively, the children seem to sense that Halilaj is different. At first a little timid, they now become aggressive. They put their hands over the lens, grab for the camera, grimace, start screaming. Latent violence is in the air, somewhat more than is usual in a schoolyard. Halilaj can barely keep them in check and follows a group into the building on a wild-goose chase that culminates in a moment of pure destruction. Owing to the presence of the camera and the artist, things start to escalate. The children smash windows, spray paint, rip up posters and cards, tear pictures down from the walls. Halilaj is stunned, and, while filming, repeatedly says "Stop it!" as he tries to get the children under control. "Who is this guy?" a brawny boy asks hypocritically as he stomps on a framed photograph of an athlete or a politician. "I don't know, but you're destroying his face," replies Halilaj dryly. And a fundamental conflict suddenly emerges: a silent, secret battle between nerds, outsiders, eccentrics, and representatives of purported normality, who seem to always have the upper hand. At this moment the film suddenly has a subversive irony that characterizes Halilaj's entire oeuvre, even drives it.



*Petrit Halilaj, They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens II, 2009. Installation view at Hangar Bicocca, 2015. Courtesy the artist and Chert, Berlin.*



*Petrit Halilaj, The places I'm looking for, my dear, are utopian places, they are boring, and I don't know how to make them real, 2010. Installation view at Hangar Bicocca, 2015. Courtesy the artist and Chert, Berlin*



ABETARE are the school booklets that every child in Kosovo knows and that Halilaj grew up with. The film showing the destruction of the village school is repeatedly interrupted by book pages with idealized illustrations, letters, and writing exercises, like a foil that no longer matches reality. For his installation at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, the artist created a different kind of alphabet out of these overlapping levels. He used thin steel rods to reconstruct, on a much larger scale, the doodles, drawings, and comments covering the furniture and the classroom, which in the film he appraises together with the children. Three dimensionally, these giant scribbles, hearts, stars, machine guns, birds, and insignias like KFOR and UCK pervaded the sun-flooded postwar modern building. They were concentrated on the ceiling, encircled doorframes, clung to banisters, cast shadows, and created mirror images. In the basement, old desks were piled on top of one another. The artist gave some of them legs so long that they rise up through the stairwell to the upper floors. It looked like the aftermath of a bombing. With his intervention, Halilaj filled the museum with these scrawls, creating a direct, semiotic experience. Thinking of *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, the famous treatise by the poststructuralist and semiotic theorist Roland Barthes, one could say that Halilaj brought together something like fragments of a language of war and conflict – all the standards and constraints, the clichés and gender roles children are confronted with from a very early age. In addition, the installation has an imaginative and poetic aspect that cannot be pinned down, that flutters lightly like a butterfly, and from a position of vulnerability produces something new and original.

He himself, says Halilaj, was a rather special child. "My mother told me that apparently when I was four or five I loved butterflies and when my parents didn't lift me up to catch them I cried like what they referred to 'as a crazy girl.' I caught them and took them to my room. In my room there were always about ten butterflies. And my mom had to laugh and said: 'We were so happy when you started going to school because you became more normal.'" But Halilaj was never really "normal." At a refugee camp in Albania, staff from an aid organization offered each child a colored pencil to draw with. Halilaj asked for two because he was ambidextrous. A little later, camera teams filmed the then 13-year-old refugee rendering different kinds of birds with both hands.

Years later, you still have the slight impression that you are sitting across from a child prodigy. The artist, who is only 30, is extremely open and friendly, almost soft. It's a rainy winter evening in Berlin. We're drinking tea in his studio in Berlin Wedding. It is nothing like what you would imagine that of a budding art star to be. He works in a modest, manageable shed in the backyard. There is giant table full of books, magazines, drawings, and sheets of paper, and a couch on which his little sister is currently spending the night. Her visa will run out soon and then she'll have to return to Kosovo. Halilaj and his assistant are sitting across from each other at two small desks.



Petrit Halilaj, *Several birds fly away when they understand it (39)*, 2013 (detail). Deutsche Bank Collection. Courtesy the artist and Chert, Berlin



It's hard to believe that he realizes all of these projects here. It all began in 2010, with the **Berlin Biennale** curated by **Kathrin Rhomberg**. In 2013, he was the first artist to represent Kosovo at the **Venice Biennale**, and he had a large solo exhibition at **WIELS** in Brussels. That was followed by a double dip in the Rhineland. Almost concurrent with **ABETARE** at the **Kölnischer Kunstverein**, Halilaj showed *She Fully Turning Around Became Terrestrial* at the **Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany**. When we meet to talk, his rather monumental show *Space Shuttle in the Garden* is on view at the renowned **Pirelli Hangar Bicocca** in Milan. With the exception perhaps of the Vietnamese-Danish artist **Danh Vo** before him, Petrit Halilaj is the only young artist to become a darling of curators in just a few years. What he and Vo have in common is the fact that from a past characterized by flight and migration, they have developed their own conceptual visual language that is reduced yet also biographically and psychologically charged. Halilaj, too, incorporates fragments of his family history and historical artifacts in his work and questions gender roles and cultural identities. And he, too, engages with absence, with the loss his home and a sense of belonging.

What differs is Halilaj's earthiness, in a literal sense, the clay and excrement he works with, the filth he roots around in. An example is the 60 tons of soil from the property of his parent's destroyed house in Kosovo that he had dumped without comment in the "Statements" sector of **Art Basel** – the load was so heavy that the floor of the hall almost collapsed. Or the menagerie of animals he molded out of clay and cow dung and mounted in minimal, geometric installations made out of golden shimmering copper rods for the exhibitions at **WIELS** and the **Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany**. Both of these exhibitions were preceded by the adventurous discovery of a complete ethnology museum that had disappeared.

When Halilaj was organizing an exhibition in a project space housed in the ethnology museum in **Pristina**, he made a strange discovery. "The night before the opening I was cleaning up and moved things to storage, and there I discovered these amazing wooden cases filled with what used to be butterflies. I was really fascinated because you could still see the pins that were used to fixate them, but the butterflies had decayed and had started to disappear. I just could guess that they had a very tough history. There were splashes of cement, paint, grain, dust everywhere on the cases. To tell you the truth, I was getting kind of obsessed by them. So I simply took the butterflies and really thought I was rescuing them as obviously nobody wanted them. But in the morning the curator of the contemporary art center that shares spaces with the ethnological museums arrived and asked me: What the hell have you done? I answered: But they are neglected and I want to have them. And he responds: No, we bring them back in the night when the museum guards are not there. He told me they were not his and he is not supposed to touch them, they are from the ethnological museum. And I asked myself, why would an ethnological museum have butterflies? And then I visited the museum and there was no sign of any animal. So I was wondering if these were special Albanian or Serbian butterflies?"

When he returned to the project room one day, he found an old, soaking-wet notebook. Opening it, he read the words "Pristina Natural History Museum." Halilaj relates how he pulled out all the stops to keep the butterflies and find out what had happened to the ethnology museum. He sent "love letters" to the curator and director, but to no avail. Only when the museum appointed a new director did he make headway. Halilaj met the former director of the ethnology museum, a biologist, who, like in a Kafka novel, lost his job and thirteen years later was still sitting in an office in the building. He found out that the natural history museum was vacated in a cloak-and-dagger operation to make room for an ethnology museum, which from now on would give insight into Albanian folk traditions. Which was understandable, says Halilaj. It was clear that in their young nation, Kosovo Albanians wanted to show their history more than domestic fauna. But what happened then was a true scandal. "During the war the Serbians took a lot of the archeological artifacts but they left the collection of the natural history museum completely intact, untouched. When the system changed they took the collection out. The first party ignored it; the second party just let it down without even caring what was happening. It was a mix of arrogance, ignorance, and laziness. They didn't even take the time to think about how to store the animals correctly."

Halilaj's film *Poisoned by Men in Need of Some Love* (2013) shows the recovery the artist pushed through. The path down to the basement is like a descent into an Egyptian burial chamber. Guiltily, aggressively, with bureaucratic or scientific zeal, the museum's staff tried to prevent entry to the exhibits until the last moment, and to conceal their shame about what had happened to the collection in the moist, overheated rooms. The situation was reminiscent of a scene at a school. Halilaj represents the nerd, the crackpot, the child who wants the butterflies. He refuses to go away and innocently asks time and time again: "What in the world are you doing here?" During our conversation, he says that it's okay to unsettle people and create difficulties for them. You can understand why when you see the workmen ripping open boxes, revealing incredible damage. The sight of the stuffed animals, covered with mold and cracks, is strangely beautiful. With their dried limbs, bills, and snouts, the beaver, deer, and herons look like mythical creatures. The groups of owls and ducks pressed together, the drawers full of snakes, which have almost disintegrated to dust, are symbols of neglect. In the film, in his installations in old display cases, and in his animal bodies molded out of excrement, Halilaj achieves the feat of making this decay visible as a social state without wagging his finger didactically.

Instead, one can view his art as a labor of love. The birds and animals that Halilaj copies in minute detail, including those in his works in the [Deutsche Bank Collection](#), based on old documentary photographs from the natural history museum, are much more than reconstructions of reconstructions. He imbues these forgotten creatures with fantastic, art-nouveau-like feathers, like the actors in a decadent play. He gives one stuffed, eyeless canary in his installation an operetta-like, frivolous mask that is suspended at a distance from its beak – a metaphor for the interplay between seeing and being seen, subject and object, but also a symbol of a different, queer look. The animals he renders using cow dung and clay and implants in modernist structures made of shimmering gold brass rods underscore his manner of working – the alchemical idea of obtaining gold from excrement, from things that are absolutely worthless. In alchemy, this material process is an inner spiritual path that leads to wisdom and knowledge. "In a way one could say that my work is sometimes about our way of dealing with shit, ignoring it and letting it go. When I was dealing with the museum I asked myself, should I let it go? I knew the whole museum was in storage. And it was a very bad story to be ashamed of. Should I touch this thing or should I ring my friends and make an amazing trip and create some kind of artwork out of it? I couldn't really decide as it would put other people on the line as well. But after all, it was and it continues to be all about confronting myself."

## Review of Petrit Halilaj: Space Shuttle in the Garden, HangarBicocca, Milan



"When I conceived and constructed the shuttle rocket for *They're lucky to be Bourgeois Hens*, I was thinking deeply of how things might be transformed if looked at or considered from above, from an unusual point of view." With this statement, Petrit Halilaj introduces one of the largest works to be displayed outside HangarBicocca, in Milan. The intervention was planned to stand just outside the exhibition space, serving as a metaphorical entrance to the show. As a connection between the external urban fabric and the hangar within; between natural and artificial light, as well as between imaginary worlds and multiple realities. It takes the form of a rudimentary space rocket conjuring up the notion of a voyage of discovery and re-evokes the title of Halilaj's first institutional solo exhibition in Italy: *Space Shuttle in the Garden*.

With its Klein-blue vault, the shuttle interior is actually home to dozens of real hens – a metonymic animal in Halilaj's work – that are as free to move among the works in the exhibition as the visitors themselves. Just like a poetic declaration, this installation aims to strip away all notions of hierarchy between living creatures, introducing a humorously-inflected desire for change. The rocket-shaped installation is the latest part of a project begun in 2008 as part of *Art Is My Playground*, a group exhibition held in an amusement park in Istanbul. There, Halilaj presented a series of sculptures made from water, iron, wood and *objets trouvés*. These offered an introduction to the *Space Shuttle in the Garden* installation, with a floating black feather immersed in the waters of an austere, hydraulically-activated fish tank.

Halilaj practice bears witness to the renaissance of an independent country – Kosovo – while elaborating on various experiences of the recent war. A period of loss for the artist and his family is explored, representing the history of his country of origin, considered a new ground for re-birth.

Employing his baggage of memories, he delves into universal themes like the search for identity and the concept of home as both common and individual space. The issue of *Domesticity* at HangarBicocca is primarily examined in works like *The places I'm looking for, my dear, are utopian places, they are boring and I don't know to make them real* (2010-2015). Created in 2010 for the 6th Berlin Biennial, and now on show in a new form for the first time in Italy, the installation is made from the wooden framework used to construct Halilaj's new family home in the capital, Pristina, after the family decided to leave Runik, where they had lived for years. Like a disassembled negative mark, the structure – a mould of the building – fills the exhibition space with its outlined emptiness, defining different rooms and spaces.

In HangarBicocca, the work has been exploded on different horizontal and vertical levels. The common areas of the house serve as the central section of the installation, connecting other, surrounding works such as *26 Objekte n'Kumpir* (2009) and the metal enlargements of the space, realised in 2015, entitled *It is the first time dear that you have a human shape*. In fact, imbued by a desire marked by expectation, a feeling that precedes any move to a new city, *The places I'm looking for* is actually a family portrait in which past and future intertwine to compose new stories derived from the vicissitudes of its inhabitants' lives. "When I look at this new displacement", remarks Halilaj, "I can almost perceive the real house, now almost finished in Pristina. The same house that I have not been able to build with all of my family and the one I still have to see in person, because I'm often abroad. Each artwork shown here in Milan is a measurement of the distance, in space and time, I could have not covered during the years." This is the common element that runs equally strongly through the sculptures, projections, installations and drawings on show: truth spreading through a time-lapse microcosm.

Ginevra Bria

**Petrit Halilaj**  
***Space Shuttle in the Garden***

A cura di Roberta Tenconi / 3 dicembre 2015 - 13 marzo 2016



**"Space Shuttle in the Garden"** presenta una selezione di opere di **Petrit Halilaj** (Kosovo, 1986) realizzate nel corso degli ultimi sette anni, oltre a opere riadattate e a nuove produzioni concepite appositamente per l'occasione.

Partendo dal vissuto e dalla storia personale dell'artista e dai cambiamenti del suo paese d'origine, il progetto espositivo approfondisce temi universali come la memoria, la ricerca di identità, il concetto di casa come luogo di condivisione e spazio individuale, fino a toccare aspetti legati alla collettività e alla creazione e conservazione di un patrimonio culturale condiviso. La mostra è soprattutto un viaggio nell'universo e nella mitologia dell'artista. A metà tra immaginazione e realtà, le opere di Petrit Halilaj raccontano un mondo familiare e surreale al tempo stesso: sculture, disegni, performance, video e installazioni indagano i cambiamenti della storia e il contesto che ci circonda, in un continuo rimando tra memoria e attualità, realtà e utopia, relativo e assoluto. Ogni opera, pur attingendo a eventi e storie del passato e del presente, è tutta proiettata nel futuro poichè accoglie aspettative e desideri dell'artista, anticipando visioni e sogni che nella realtà devono ancora avverarsi.

Posta all'esterno di Pirelli HangarBicocca, l'opera ***They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens II*** (2009) è l'ingresso ideale alla mostra: un razzo spaziale elegantemente dipinto al suo interno di blu Klein e abitato da galline – soggetto ricorrente nel lavoro dell'artista – invita alla scoperta di un mondo nuovo, tutto da inventare. L'installazione crea un microcosmo dove il pubblico partecipa osservando, ma senza mai potervi accedere: un contesto familiare e al tempo stesso la

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Nella sua immagine essenziale e spettrale, l’opera evoca un senso di perdita che però, come suggerisce anche il titolo ***The places I’m looking for, my dear, are utopian places, they are boring and I don’t know how to make them real*** (2010-2015), rifugge da ogni sentimentalismo o senso di nostalgia. Come un grande affresco di famiglia, l’opera narra di un luogo utopico e ideale in continua trasformazione: sospesa nello spazio dello “Shed” di Pirelli HangarBicocca, la casa si frammenta, rispecchiando i cambiamenti vissuti dai suoi abitanti. Tutte le stanze dell’abitazione considerate individuali, si staccano da quelle che assolvono a funzioni collettive e condivise, per navigare liberamente nello spazio e dialogare con gli elementi circostanti.

***Si Okarina e Runikut*** (2014), infine, è una serie di sculture che si ispira a uno strumento musicale a fiato di epoca neolitica rinvenuto in Kosovo a Runik, cittadina in cui Halilaj ha trascorso parte dell’infanzia. Le opere, strumenti che richiedono la partecipazione del pubblico, possono essere suonate sia individualmente sia in gruppo. Nelle loro forme elegantemente sospese su supporti in ottone o lasciate cadere a terra in modo del tutto spontaneo, esse ricreano lo spazio di una foresta magica che custodisce memorie corali. Anche il suono ancestrale prodotto dalle sculture rimanda a un tempo atavico, ma l’opera vive soprattutto nel presente e nel momento pubblico in cui gli strumenti vengono suonati. In questo senso ***Si Okarina e Runikut*** diventa metafora dell’intera mostra: un viaggio attraverso esperienze private e personali che nella condivisione diventano veicolo per la conoscenza di sé e del mondo circostante.

## Alvaro Urbano & Petrit Halilaj

The artists tell us about their recent large installation "For the birds" and its development, from their one year residency in Villa Romana, in Firenze, to the group show "Trouble in Paradise" at Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, and how everything started in their Berlin apartment.

luglio 17, 2015

Matteo Mottin

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Sometimes the best things start by necessity.

Almost since when we started to live together in a 45 sq meter space in Kreuzberg we have been sharing our home with canary birds. Small, fragile and beautiful animals flying around without a cage...





— ★

Slowly we started a conversation with them, studying and imitating the sounds they produced. A strong relation and admiration grew with time. We never tried to teach them or train them and our situation far from being something idyllic, our living space ended up being a wild ecosystem where our needs started to melt and we had to constantly redefine them day by day.







— \*

The canaries built a little nest with all the small things they found in our studio, from human hair to small pieces of paper to tobacco, to Christmas and party decoration... the nest was a sort of bizarre and colorful model, which one could see maybe as a quite fascinating miniature of our home. Then the eggs and small new birds came after.





— \*



In 2014 and after a long trip with our birds by train we arrived at Villa Romana in Florence to stay almost for a year. The director of the residency Angelika Stephen warned us about four "predators" that would have loved our birds just as much as we did...



— ★

The first plan was to leave them free in our apartment inside the Villa but in the end we moved them to the studio on the other side of the house. To go from the apartment to the studio one has to pass through the garden... Some days we would bring them to the apartment and then back to the studio again...



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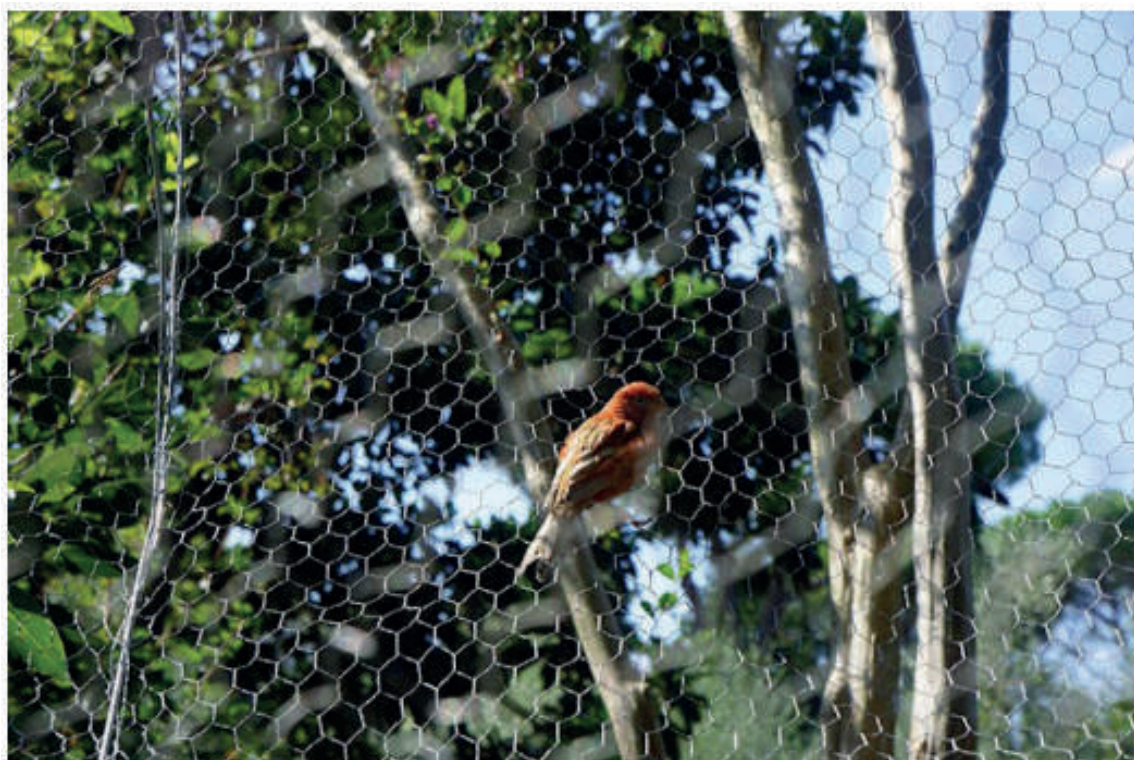
Eventually, we came up with the idea of connecting the two spaces... it wasn't meant to be an installation or a sculpture, but at that time it was simply something necessary for us. Planned and developed together with our good friend and architect Pietro Minelli and a lot of help from other friends – we built a 90-meter long passage over two long weekends. We used rope and chicken fence, and a very simple helicoidal construction.





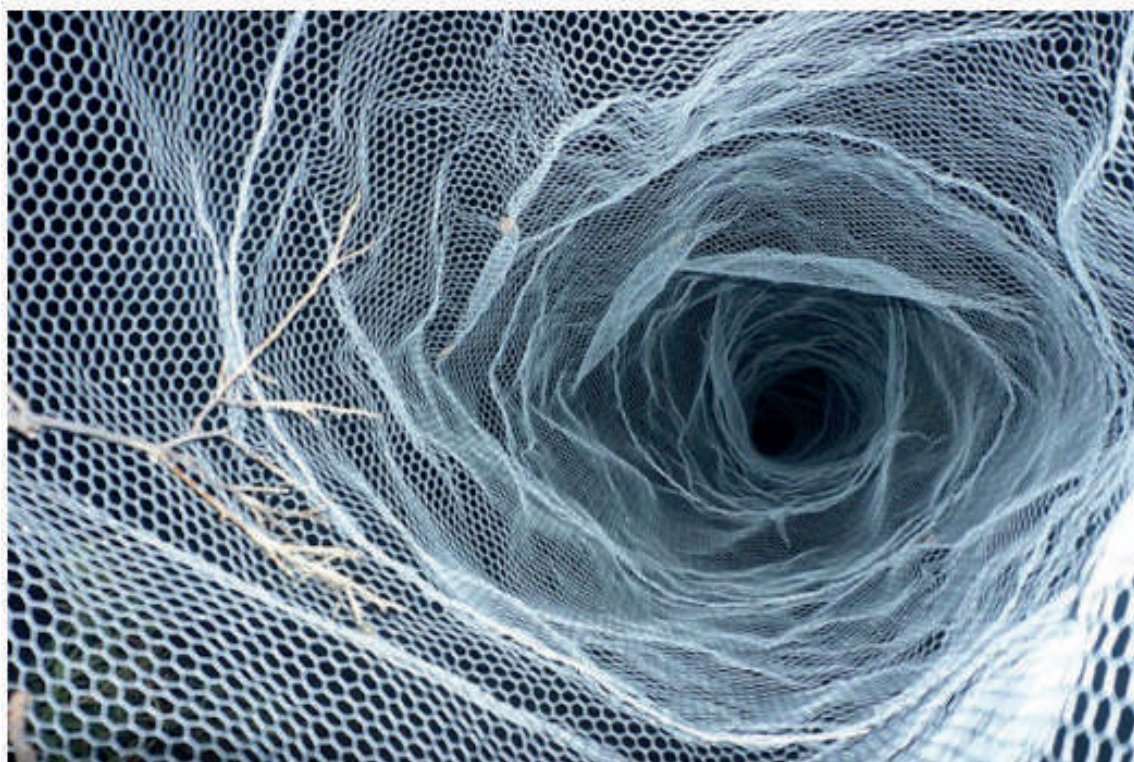
We traced the form and the curves by thinking about how a bird would fly; the trees and the architecture of the Villa shaped the rest. This floating structure was an attempt to give our birds more autonomy and still protect them.





— ★

The experiment ended up being quite successful since the birds seemed to be very happy and already started flying from our home to the studio from the very first day. In the next weeks they could do it in only few seconds. Birds were appearing and disappearing in the room fluttering and chirping. Small and colorful dots singing, flying and zigzagging in the garden... The window of our bedroom looked like sci-fi entrance, as if you could jump into another dimension.





— ★

Back in Berlin we both were invited to participate in the group show "Trouble in Paradise" at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn and we thought this was the perfect occasion to present the birds project.

The resulting piece, called "For the Birds", in this new context was not only quite different in terms of the building – from our apartment to a public institution, but also the path itself was in contrast to the specific architecture of the building.







On this occasion we extended the project to the library as well, hiding some photos of our birds and their domestic life in the book collection of the museum.



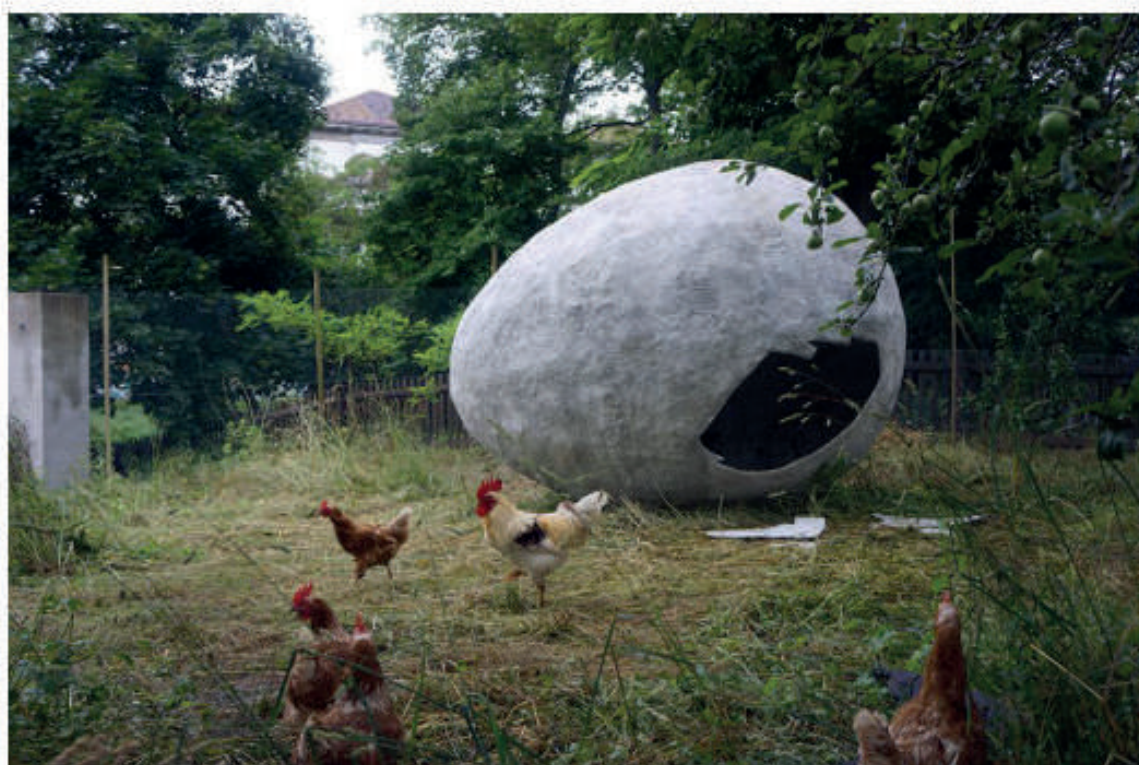
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The birds in Bonn seemed to be quiet happy and made a nest and had eggs.



— ★

Soon after, while our birds were growing their little ones, we were invited for another project at Salis, Basel, where we extend the idea by building a big egg.



# LIGNE RA DICALE

**D**ifficile, lorsque l'on évoque la ligne d'une galerie, cet esprit particulier qui se dégage du choix des artistes et de leur travail, de ne pas aussitôt penser à la galerie Kamel Mennour. Une ligne faite d'aisance, un goût prononcé pour les démarches conceptuelles. Un est très loin ici de l'art glamour, voire kitsch qui constitue souvent le plus court chemin pour parler tant au cœur qu'au portefeuille des riches collectionneurs, vite dans laquelle s'engouffrent certains de nos confrères et concurrents dont tel est le fond de commerce. La ligne de la galerie Kamel Mennour, quant à elle, se caractérise par une ambition peu commune.

par **Alain Guenin**

avec **Petrit Halilaj**

Ayant gagné en familiarité avec l'art contemporain, il a alors pris toute autre envergure en se consacrant toujours davantage à l'art, infiniment plus exigeant qui est en quelque sorte devenu sa marque de fabrique. Être artiste chez Kamel Mennour, c'est, grâce au soutien sans faille de son galerie, en trouver en mesure de pratiquer une création des plus ambitieuses.

Si les stars, aujourd'hui âgées – car il en va ainsi du monde de l'art contemporain actuel – ont rejoint la galerie sur le tard, les artistes consacrés tels Daniel Buren et François Morelet ayant besoin de vastes espaces pour présenter leur travail, d'autres pléiades très célèbres constituent la grande famille artistique de Kamel Mennour tels Claude Lévêque, Martial Rayse (baptisé du génie), prii Praetorium impérial décerné par le Japon en 2014), Martin Parr, Jens Vestri et Janssens, Alfredo Jaar, Tadashi Kawamata, Huang Yong Ping, Lee Ufan (artiste invité au Château de Versailles en 2014) ou encore Anish Kapoor (leu comme David Buren, celui-ci a eu droit à une fantastique exposition au Grand Palais dans le cadre de Monumental). Tous sont venus couronner le travail accompli par leur mar-

chand et renforcer la légitimité de la galerie. Pourtant, par-delà cette liste prestigieuse, la piste Kamel Mennour se situe bien davantage ailleurs. La grille du galeriste, c'est avant tout le formidable talent avec lequel il découvre de tout jeunes artistes et parvient, en quelques années, à leur assurer un niveau de visibilité et de reconnaissance que ne réussit à égaler aucun autre galeriste parisien d'aujourd'hui. Parmi les jeunes artistes français, on peut ainsi citer, outre Mohamed Bourouissa (né en 1978, déjà exposé à la Monnaie de Paris), deux autres succès fulgurants, ceux de Latifa Echakhch (née en 1974), lauréate du prestigieux prix Marcel Duchamp en 2011, et Camille Henrot (née en 1978). Il, couronnée, la même année, du Lion d'argent de la Biennale de Venise – la plus importante au monde de ce type de manifestations – et qui, depuis, enchaîne les succès. Si le tradrait pas oublier la talentueuse artiste germano-pakistanaise Alija Riwala (née en 1979), le prochain artiste à suivre pourrait fort bien être le tout jeune prodige Micham Borrada. Celui-ci, né en 1986, et qui n'a encore que 28 ans, il focalise déjà tous les regards. Bien que découvert par une autre galerie, désormais possédée par toute l'équipe de Kamel Mennour, il semble d'ores et déjà appelé à un brillant avenir.

Parvienne famille d'artistes ne peut se défendre qu'en la présentant dans les meilleures formes, sur quatre continents du monde, mais aussi en lui offrant des lieux toujours plus vastes à Paris, cette double expansion étant à la fois rendue possible par les succès et venant l'alimenter encore. Si, en 2014, le parcours de Kamel Mennour l'a mené, à l'occasion des foires, de Paris, avec la FIAC et Paris Photo, à Londres (pour Frieze Art Fair), Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi Art), Miami Beach (pour Art Basel Miami), et Bâle pour le saint des saints, Art Basel, c'est aussi sur place, à Paris, qu'il étend son empire avec, coup sur coup, en 2013, l'ouverture de deux nouveaux espaces qui sont venus s'ajouter à sa galerie de la rue Saint-André-des-Arts où il accueille avec chaleur les amateurs depuis 2007. Faut-il, à l'occasion de cette extension, rappeler le Marras, où se concentrent tant des meilleures galeries parisiennes d'art contemporain ? La question se pose, mais Kamel Mennour a préféré demeurer fidèle à son quartier et au saint patron protecteur qu'il vénère, depuis bientôt dix ans, au-dessus de sa galerie de la rue Saint-André-des-Arts si bien nommée. Et l'ensemble galériste de rester tout aussi fidèle à sa ligne. Point à la ligne.

*Poisoned by man in need of some love (Christina arillo), 2013*

*Photo: WIELS Contemporary Art Centre / Laura Toos  
Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris*

169

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texte **Alain Quemin**  
œuvre **Petrit Halilaj**

Issu de l'immigration algérienne en France, après des débuts durant lesquels, encore largement néophyte, il a joué quelque temps la carte de la facilité en vendant un art assez accrocheur, photographie souvent choc et plaisante, Kamel Mennour n'a pas hésité à prendre des risques en rompant radicalement avec sa période d'apprentissage.

Ayant gagné en familiarité avec l'art contemporain, il a alors pris toute autre envergure en se consacrant toujours davantage à l'art infiniment plus exigeant qui est en quelque sorte devenu sa marque de fabrique. Être artiste chez Kamel Mennour, c'est, grâce au soutien sans faille de son galeriste, se trouver en mesure de pratiquer une création des plus ambitieuses.

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*Poisoned by men in need of some love (Oriolus oriolus), 2013*

*Photo, WIELS Contemporary Art Centre / Laura Toots  
Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris*

chand et renforcer la légitimité de la galerie. Pourtant, par delà cette liste prestigieuse, la patte Kamel Mennour se situe bien davantage ailleurs. La griffe du galeriste, c'est avant tout le formidable talent avec lequel il découvre de tout jeunes artistes et parvient, en quelques années, à leur assurer un niveau de visibilité et de reconnaissance que ne réussit à égaler aucun autre galeriste parisien d'aujourd'hui. Parmi les jeunes artistes français, on peut ainsi citer, outre Mohamed Bourouissa (né en 1978, déjà exposé à la Monnaie de Paris), deux autres succès fulgurants, ceux de Latifa Echakhch (née en 1974), lauréate du prestigieux prix Marcel Duchamp en 2013, et Camille Henrot (née en 1978), couronnée, la même année, du Lion d'argent de la Biennale de Venise – la plus importante au monde de ce type de manifestations – et qui, depuis, enchaîne les succès. S'il ne faudrait pas oublier la talentueuse artiste germano-polonaise Alicja Kwade (née en 1979), le prochain artiste à suivre pourrait fort bien être le tout jeune prodige Hicham Berrada. Celui-ci, né en 1986, et qui n'a encore que 28 ans (!) focalise déjà tous les regards. Bien que découvert par une autre galerie, désormais porté par toute l'équipe de Kamel Mennour, il semble d'ores et déjà appelé à un brillant avenir.

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## ARTISTS' ARTISTS BEST OF 2014



Petrit Halilaj, *Poisoned by men in need of some love*, 2013, earth, grass, animal excrement, brass. Installation view, Galeries Lafayette Foundation, Paris. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

### MAURIZIO CATTELAN

Petrit Halilaj (Galeries Lafayette Foundation, Paris) Greetings from Kosovo! Today, in the Natural History Museum of Pristina, I saw fishes, peacocks, rabbits, and lizards. They were made out of soil and excrement, and they wandered the space like ghosts. They looked very dignified, though. It seemed that they were transitioning, occupying a space in between. Maybe because they weren't in Pristina anymore but in Paris. Or maybe because someone—namely, Kosovar artist Petrit Halilaj—excavated their carcasses from the museum's underground stockrooms and made replicas of them, now displayed in what will become the Galeries Lafayette Foundation art space. It felt like wandering in someone's unconscious (or in mine?). It also felt like being in a "lost" museum, which is the best, most twisted way to inaugurate a building committed to a new future.



**PREVIEW** madame

# PETRIT HALILAJ OISEAU RARE

PAR PATRICIA BOYER DE LATOUR

**P**PETRIT HALILAJ, JEUNE ARTISTE KOSOVAR NÉ EN 1986 À KOSTËRRÇ, un petit village, aime tout ce qui porte plumes. Les poules, avec lesquelles il jouait enfant, mais aussi les chouettes, les paons, les canaris... On en verra quelques spécimens dans sa première exposition à la galerie Kamel Mennour\*, qui se présente comme une « installation autour d'un paysage onirique à parcourir tous sens en éveil ». Est-ce un hasard si Kosovo signifie « merles » ? L'étymologie charrie parfois des bizarreries. À la naissance de Petrit Halilaj, ce pays n'a pas d'existence. Il fait partie de la Yougoslavie, aujourd'hui disloquée. La guerre, qu'il a vécue avant de fuir avec sa famille en Albanie, puis en Italie, où il fait des études d'art, et à Berlin, où il s'établit, a eu raison de son enfance. Comment rendre compte d'un monde qui s'est effondré ? L'univers de Petrit Halilaj est pétri de souvenirs intimes mêlés à la grande histoire. L'exil, la terre et l'identité sont au cœur de sa création. ■

✓ \* Jusqu'au 22 novembre.  
6, rue du Pont-de-l'Odéon, 75006 Paris.

PHOTO FRÉDÉRIC STUJICH

Petrit Halilaj "I'm hungry to keep you close. I want to find the words to resist but in the end there is a locked sphere. The funny thing is that you're not here, nothing is." at Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon

August 27~2014





Kunsthalle Lissabon presents “I’m hungry to keep you close. I want to find the words to resist but in the end there is a locked sphere. The funny thing is that you’re not here, nothing is.”, the first solo show of Kosovo artist Petrit Halilaj in Portugal.

Petrit Halilaj was born in present day Kosovo in 1986. He is too young to remember the fall of the Berlin Wall, but old enough to remember the ensuing consequences of that historic moment for the geographic area that rapidly came to be known as “ex-Yugoslavia”. In questioning his own life experiences, the artist has come to reject pathos or any kind of nostalgia associated to his childhood memories of life as a refugee, privileging instead a more optimistic and materially complex practice, which favours a more critical and politically relevant approach.

From the start of his artistic activity, Halilaj’s preference for ordinary materials and childhood memories have come to constitute an attempt to understand what notions of “home”, “nation” or “cultural identity” might mean. The way in which he frequently combines earth, rubble, wood, birds (especially domesticated birds like chickens or canaries) or delicate drawings, evokes a personal and utopic world. At the same time, it reveals the incontrovertible reality of a geo-political situation that is much vaster and all encompassing than any single subjective experience of the world.

For his first exhibition in Portugal, Petrit Halilaj will present the inner structure of the nest that previously formed the project he developed for the Republic of Kosovo’s first official representation in the Venice Biennale of 2013.



The exhibition at the Kunsthalle Lissabon recovers both the work's title and the inner structure (made of wood panels and paint) of the installation. By moving this structure to Lisbon, these panels cease to operate as forms that construct and outline a space, and become the content of the project itself. Halilaj presents these architectural elements as both simple construction materials and as independent and autonomous objects, bearing the marks of their previous lives and usage.

For the original presentation in Venice, the panels were demarcating an inaccessible, closed space; a private nest for two canaries, which visitors could only peep at. Now, this space is open and accessible to the public, who are free to walk amongst the panels.

Furthermore, by situating these components in the exhibition context of the Kunsthalle Lissabon, which has been self-performing as an institution since its conception, the artist reflects on questions connected to the ways in which national or other representational logics are materialized in certain objects, and in the narratives they conjure.

at Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon

until 27 September 2014





Petrit Halilaj, Mousse, Septembre / September 2014









Petrit Halilaj "I'm hungry to keep you close. I want to find the words to resist but in the end there is a locked sphere. The funny thing is that you're not here, nothing is." installation views at Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon

EXPOSIÇÕES



BRUNO LOPES

Instalação de Petrit Halilaj na Kunsthalle Lissabon

## Apesar da guerra

Um artista oriundo do Kosovo cujo trabalho tenta encontrar um sentido para lá da memória do conflito

Texto **Celso Martins**

**N**ão raramente, quando um artista possui um percurso biográfico particularmente marcado por circunstâncias históricas intensas, estas tendem a condicionar decisivamente o modo como o seu trabalho é olhado (veja-se, por exemplo, como Joseph Beuys mitificou a sua autobiografia, tirando partido desta possibilidade). Petrit Halilaj (Kosterrc, 1986), um artista que foi também uma jovem vítima da guerra do Kosovo, parece compreender o alcance profundo desta armadilha que nos leva a andar sempre à procura do trauma onde devia estar a arte. Apesar dos seus escassos 27 anos foi o primeiro artista a representar, depois da independência, o seu também jo-

vem país, numa bienal e esta sua primeira exposição em Lisboa possui uma relação estreita com o que mostrou na cidade italiana em 2013.

Apesar de bastante jovem, Petrit viveu as agruras do desmantelamento político da ex-Jugoslávia como quase toda a gente na sua terra natal. Esteve num campo de refugiados e foi depois adotado por uma família italiana o que possibilitou que estudasse na Academia de Belas Artes de Brera, em Milão.

A sua poética não é porém imediatamente relacionável com os acontecimentos políticos de coloração trágica que enquadram a sua infância não obstante as memórias juvenis que a enformam.

A intervenção agora apre-

★★★★

**I'M HUNGRY TO KEEP YOU CLOSE. I WANT TO FIND THE WORDS TO RESIST BUT IN THE END THERE IS A LOCKED SPHERE. THE FUNNY THING IS THAT YOU'RE NOT HERE. NOTHING IS**

Petrit Halilaj  
Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisboa,  
até 27 de setembro  
[www.kunsthalle-lissabon.org](http://www.kunsthalle-lissabon.org)

sentada não é um *remake* do que mostrou em Veneza. Embora repesque alguns materiais expostos na Bienal, a lógica expositiva da mostra lisboeta é bem diversa. Se em Itália o espectador só tinha acesso visual a um espaço configurado com painéis de madeira que assegurava uma gaiola para dois canários, aqui o espectador está no próprio espaço desenhado pelos painéis.

Essa é uma transformação cenográfica importante. Entretanto, Halilaj opera aqui outra conversão que faz com que contexto e representação se tornem indistinguíveis na medida em que são corpo e espaço de evocação redentora dos pássaros (os tripés dos painéis são garras de pássaro metálicas), presença que se reforça nos dois fatos de canário gigantes tombados no chão que o artista também usou para uma performance.

Se esta é a sala referencial da exposição, os outros espaços da Kunsthalle deixam-se habitar por presenças que se tornam mais inteligíveis se entendidas como parte de um roteiro autobiográfico que assimila aspetos da sua vida e memória pessoal (um vestido pendurado numa parede, cabides que lhe foram oferecidos quando foi para Itália) ou do seu percurso expositivo (as luzes que usou para iluminar o seu trabalho em Veneza). Estrutura, ação, memória, reconfiguração, são palavras-chaves para entender uma obra que arrasta consigo um movimento diacrónico que vem da infância mas que é um modo permanente de digestão do passado e formulação do futuro. Haverá um modo de viver a memória do terror sem aderir ao esquecimento? Não sabemos, mas olhando o trabalho de Petrit Halilaj inclinamo-nos a pensar que, a existir, é provável que isso tenha algo a ver com arte. **A**

## EXPOSIÇÕES ATUAIS



*I'm hungry to keep you close...*, 2014, Petrit Halilaj. Instalação. Vista de exposição, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisboa. Fotografia: Bruno Lopes



*I don't have a room, I don't have a mind. Nevermind! (Pia Pia)*, 2014, Petrit Halilaj. Instalação e disfarce de canário. Vista de exposição, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisboa. Fotografia: Bruno Lopes



### PETRIT HALILAJ

*I'm hungry to keep you close. I want to find the words to resist but in the end there is a locked sphere. The funny thing is that you're not here, nothing is.*

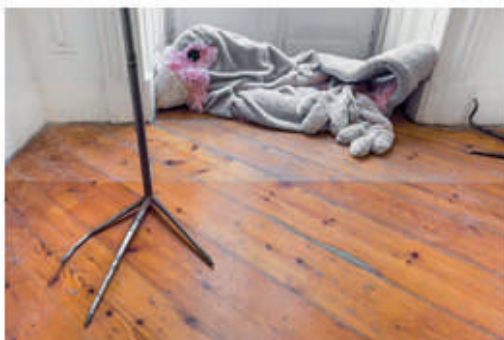
KUNSTHALLE LISSABON  
Rua José Sobral Cid 9E  
1900-289 Lisboa

17 JUL - 27 SET 2014

O ambiente tardo século XIX disfarçado em galeria white cube da Kunsthalle Lissabon tornou-se em um campo de vestígios, de algo que se passou, antes, talvez ali, mas, possivelmente também, algures diferente.

O autor desta transformação é o jovem artista kosovar Petrit Halilaj (1986), e os vestígios são parte da sua instalação para a representação do Kosovo na última edição da Bienal de Veneza, em 2013. O que em La Sereníssima tinha sido um ninho-gaiola enorme que continha dois canários vivos os quais podiam ser vistos pelo público através de uns pontos específicos, agora são as paredes dessa instalação (feitas por painéis de madeira pintados de branco) instaladas na galeria principal da Kunsthalle Lissabon, encostadas à parede ou seguradas ao alto, em curva vertical a lembrar o voo das aves, por grandes pés de metal em formato de garras de pássaros.

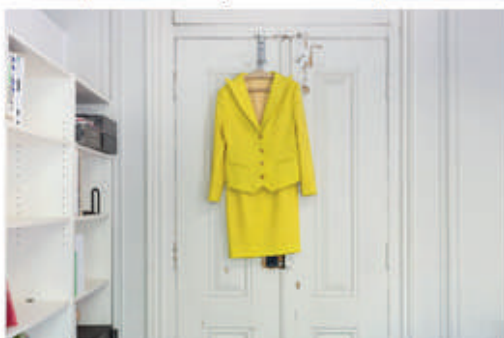




*I don't have a room, I don't have a mind. Nevermind! (Drago Mandarin)*, 2014, Petrit Halilaj. Disfarce de canário. Vista de Instalação, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisboa. Fotografia: Bruno Lopes



*I'm hungry to keep you close...*, 2014, Petrit Halilaj. Instalação. Vista de exposição, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisboa. Fotografia: Bruno Lopes



*I'm hungry to keep you close...*, 2014, Petrit Halilaj. Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisboa. Fotografia: Bruno Lopes

Nos painéis brancos, outrora formando parte do ninho-gaiola, agora fazendo-nos lembrar voos e camas, estão os vestígios escatológicos dos dois canários. Provas de um encontro a dois, com uma certa intimidade, do qual não fizemos parte, mas que podemos reconhecer, através dos restos dos fluidos corporais, agora secos.

Neste reconhecimento do que está ausente parece estar a chave desta obra, como o próprio título indica. É normal focar na biografia do artista - o abandono da terra natal em guerra, a migração, o seu amor pelas aves - e isto também faz parte da sua *persona* artística, mas, na sua aludida intimidade, a instalação tem ressonâncias que não transportam esse tipo de trauma, mas sim uma emancipação à qual se chega através do corpo, também em relação com outros corpos.

Provas ou lembranças de encontros pessoais e íntimos estão espalhados pelo resto da galeria: cabides em madeira dados a Halilaj, um vestido de terno amarelo pendurado que aparenta estar em um estado impecável, e, no entanto, parece ser uma referência cromaticamente velada ao vestido azul da Mónica Lewinsky, o que faz querer procurar manchas, rasgos, sinais de actos furtivos.

Além disto há também elementos cartoonescos (onde a escatologia e o humor corporal não carecem): uma instalação sonora de alguém intermitentemente a reproduzir grasnidos de pássaros, dois fatos de disfarce de canário, tipo aqueles usados pelas mascotes das equipas desportivas, abandonados pela galeria. Este último par de obras tem o nome *I don't have a room, I don't have a mind. Nevermind! (Pia Pia)* e *I don't have a room, I don't have a mind. Nevermind! (Drago Mandarin)* e o artista tem os vestidos em performances e em inaugurações. Não obstante o título, aqui parece continuar o tema da emancipação: fatos e disfarces são abandonados para uma nudez, supostamente a dois, que mais uma vez é sugerida mas não vista. Mesmo do título pode-se deduzir uma certa libertação, sem, porém, cair no falso romantismo da loucura, a não ser que seja uma euforia temporária.

Em um ambiente sujo e de certa forma alienador, Petrit Halilaj cria intimidade e calor. Os elementos mais claramente ornitológicos, como as garras e os grasnidos, são também os mais cómicos e desconfortantes, mas também lembram que em cada voo pode haver queda.

**Eva Oddo**

## Vecinos con arte

Empecemos por nuestros países fronterizos esta guía para quienes vayan a viajar por Europa y todavía quieran ver más exposiciones de arte contemporáneo. En esta primera escala, Portugal y Francia.

Javier HONTORIA | 30/07/2014



Obra de Petrit Halilaj que se puede visitar en Kunsthalle Lissabon.



### Además

- Una oferta británica inabarcable
- Benelux para viajeros de arte

Tal vez no sea el artista contemporáneo más conocido para el gran público pero **Petrit Halilaj**, un kosovar que no tiene aún treinta años, tiene una exposición estupenda en **Kunsthalle Lissabon**, uno de los espacios más interesantes de la ciudad. Halilaj, que participó en 2010 en la Bienal de Berlín de la mano de la comisaria Katrin Rohmberg con una gran instalación en Kunst Werke, ha realizado este año una extraordinaria muestra en WIELS, Bruselas, organizada por Elena Filipovic. El artista de Pristina muestra en Lisboa un discurso muy particular en el que se mezclan las experiencias cotidianas con su propia biografía y con asuntos de carácter geopolítico relacionados con la vidriosa historia reciente de su país.

En **Culturgest** puede verse otra de las exposiciones importantes del verano, la dedicada a Helen Mirra, una de las artistas más sugerentes trabajando hoy. La estadounidense tiene una obra que explora nuestra relación con la naturaleza a través de una aproximación sutil y minimalista. Es una práctica que quiere ahondar en la experiencia del paisaje a partir de gestos leves y cortos que se formalizan como pequeños acentos en medio de grandes vacíos.

En la siempre dinámica **Fundación Calouste Gulbenkian** pueden verse varios proyectos expositivos. Una exposición individual dedicada a una de las figuras más relevantes de la *performance* y la instalación, **Tulia Saldanha**, una artista que trabajó muy activamente en el círculo de Coimbra y que es un referente imprescindible para el desarrollo de las artes portuguesas en las décadas centrales del siglo pasado. Un proyecto también individual del artista lisboeta **André Guedes** basado en sus lecturas de William Morris con esculturas, trabajos audiovisuales y una profusa documentación. También puede verse una muestra que pone en diálogo al artista armenio emigrado a Estados Unidos **Arshile Gorky** con obras de la colección del centro en un proyecto firmado por un equipo de comisarios entre los que se encuentra Isabel Carlos, una de las comisarias más relevantes de Portugal. Y, finalmente, el programa **The Next Future**, con el que la Fundación quiere indagar en las prácticas artísticas

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realizadas en África, Latinoamérica y el Caribe. Es un programa que se puso en marcha en 2009 y que está basado en intensos procesos de investigación sobre las tensiones geopolíticas de nuestro tiempo, la deriva de lo que antes llamamos globalización y la vigencia del término en un mundo virtual y deslizante.

Si emprendemos camino hacia Oporto podemos parar en el Museo Colección Berardo, que tiene su sede en el Centro Cultural de Belem, donde puede verse una interesante exposición dedicada al siempre sugerente campo de los **libros de artista**, ediciones y todo tipo de material gráfico perteneciente a la **colección Teixeira de Freitas**.

Ya en Oporto, la visita obligada es, lógicamente, el **Museo Serralves** donde puede verse una exposición dedicada a **Marwan**, uno de los artistas árabes más aclamados de la segunda mitad del siglo XX. La muestra lleva la firma de Catherine David. Nacido en Siria en 1934, emigró a Berlín cuando tenía 23 años y en la ciudad alemana ha realizado la totalidad de su carrera. La exposición se centra en una etapa decisiva en su trayectoria, la década de los sesenta, en la que realizó un grupo extraordinario de pinturas de las que aquí pueden verse unas 140 obras. Bajo el título **Artchitecture** puede verse también una muestra que explora las siempre complejas relaciones entre las artes visuales y la arquitectura.

## Francia



*Instant Mural* del grupo ASCO, en el CAPC de Burdeos este verano.

Las opciones en Francia para este verano son infinitas. La programación de las instituciones es realmente inabarcables y este 2014 es uno de los años más ricos en exposiciones de interés que recuerde.

Comencemos por las ciudades más próximas a nuestra frontera, como Burdeos o Nîmes. El **CAPC de Burdeos** dirige la mirada a la escena artística californiana, y más concretamente a la ciudad de Los Ángeles. En esa ciudad vive ahora **Aaron Curry**, a quien se dedica la principal exposición, uno de esos artistas que triunfa en los mercados internacionales con un trabajo que podría calificarse, efectivamente, como muy americano. Formas orgánicas realizadas en metal deudoras del ideal surrealista a las que se aplica un cromatismo eléctrico caracterizan las obras de este artista que tiene entre sus referencias a algunos de los grandes escultores modernos como **Henry Moore** o **Alexander Calder**. También pueden verse muestras individuales de figuras muy jóvenes que residen también en aquella ciudad, como **Dan Finsel y Carter Mull**. Además, una exposición del colectivo **ASCO**, el estupendo grupo de artistas activo en los setenta y ochenta que orquestaron su particular cruzada a favor de los derechos de los chicanos en la zona oriental de Los Angeles. ASCO fueron unos de los grandes protagonistas de ese estupendo *revival* que en torno al arte californiano se organizó en diferentes instituciones del estado hace un par de años.

En **Nîmes** no se pueden perder la exposición de **Walid Raad** en el **Carré d'Art**. Reseñada no hace mucho en nuestras páginas, es una estupenda muestra de uno de los artistas árabes más importantes del momento. Es Raad un personaje esencial no sólo por su arte sino por su implicación en el desarrollo de la escena artística de la región, aunque desde tiempo vive en Nueva York donde el año

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que viene tendrá una importante retrospectiva en el MOMA. La exposición que propone el centro construido por **Norman Foster** hace veinte años se centra en dos de las series de trabajo más importantes del creador libanés: *The Atlas Group*, centrada en la historia reciente del Líbano, y *Scratching on the things I would disavow*, que ofrece una ficción prospectiva sobre lo que será el contexto artístico árabe en el futuro.

Ya en la Provenza, una primera parada podría ser **Arles** que, como cada verano, alberga su **Reencuentros de Arles**, un festival de fotografía creado en 1970 y que constituye uno de los eventos clásicos no sólo del verano provenzal sino del programa expositivo que el país vecino organiza cada año. Arles siempre ha sido un festival ambicioso. El pasado año reseñamos algunas de las exposiciones importantes que ahí tuvieron lugar, como las excepcionales muestras de **Giuseppe Penone** y **Lee Ufan** y donde también destacó una soberbia muestra de **John Stezaker**. Este año, los grandes espadas son el brasileño **Vik Muniz**, sólidamente instalado en el ámbito más comercial de la fotografía o el español **Chema Madoz**, que muestra su trabajo de la mano de **Borja Casani** en una coproducción con PHotoEspaña. De entre los grandes atractivos del festival destaca la presencia de **David Bailey** uno de los grandes de la fotografía de moda, que muestra su trabajo producido por la National Portrait Gallery de Londres.

En **Avignon**, la **Colección Lambert** cierra ahora sus puertas debido a las obras de ampliación que verán la luz en 2015. Pero Avignon, tan culturalmente activa en verano, no se quedará sin arte contemporáneo. Organizada por la Colección Lambert, toma prestada la colección particular de **Enea Righi**, una de las mejores colecciones privadas de Italia, y la expone en la **Cárcel de Santa Ana**, detrás del célebre Palacio Papal. La exposición lleva por título **La desaparición de las luciérnagas**, tomado de un texto publicado por **Pier Paolo Pasolini** en el *Corriere* en 1975. Se trata de crear un diálogo entre las obras de la colección y el contexto, tan extraordinario, de la cárcel, que se mantendrá inalterada para preservar su esencia. Será ésta sin duda una de las grandes exposiciones del verano francés.

Seguimos hacia **Marsella**, donde en el **FRAC PACA** puede verse una gran exposición del pintor suizo **Adrian Schiess**, uno de los artistas que mejor ha canalizado eso que llamamos pintura expandida o pintura que se aleja de los formatos tradicionales para aventurarse en el espacio expositivo. A Schiess, tras sus exposiciones en la galería Distrito Cuatro Schiess, le conocemos por su cuadros realizados con esmaltes sobre aluminio o sus impresiones digitales laqueadas que sitúa tanto en los muros como en los suelos. Las que propone son experiencias de carácter sensorial donde el color afecta de un modo tan racional como emocional.

A finales de agosto tendrá lugar en Marsella una nueva edición de la feria de arte **Art-o-Rama**, un evento de formato pequeño pero al que acuden este año dos galerías españolas, **Nogueras Blanchard y PMS**, el espacio vigués que viene realizando un estupendo trabajo en fechas recientes como ya pudo comprobarse en la pasada edición de ARCO.



Obra de Lucio Fontana expuesta en el Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

exposiciones en **Villa Arson** dedicadas al estupendo tándem libanés formado por **Joana Hadjithomas y Khalil Joreige**, artistas que en sus lecturas del modo en que se trabaja el documento tienen ciertas afinidades con su compatriota **Walid Raad**, que expone su trabajo en Nîmes. El tándem presenta en esta exposición un trabajo que parte de la investigación en torno al *spam*, el inevitable compañero de fatigas de nuestros correos electrónicos. Con un número ingente de correos *spam* reunidos desde hace 15 años, Joana Hadjithomas y Khalil Joreige han modelado una narrativa que se formaliza en películas, esculturas, dibujos, fotografías y otros medios y que reúnen bajo el nombre *Debo excusarme*. Con este proyecto, y a través del tratamiento de estos mensajes, el dúo quiere crear una cartografía de nuestro presente que toca multitud de palos desde lo social hasta lo afectivo.

Si seguimos hacia el norte dejando a nuestra derecha las fronteras con Italia y Suiza llegaremos a **Grenoble**, donde uno de los espacios de arte contemporáneo más espectaculares de todo Francia, el **Magasin**, nos ofrece una muestra dedicada a **Liam Gillick** titulada **199C to 199D**. Se trata de un proyecto en colaboración con los alumnos de la *École du Magasin* en el que se recuperan algunos de los trabajos más importantes realizados por Gillick desde los años noventa. Es un tipo de proyecto que ya realizó en 2013 con los alumnos del curso de comisariado del Bard College de Nueva York y que se traslada ahora al contexto francés. La idea es explorar el concepto de tiempo, tan central en el trabajo del británico, y ver cómo se asocia con factores clave para entender nuestra era capitalista.

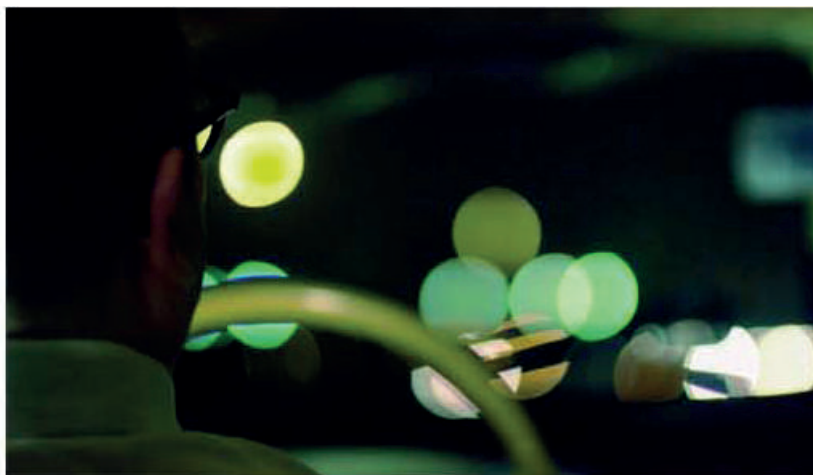
Cerca de Grenoble pero más en el interior, la ciudad de **Lyon** nos recibe con su siempre atractiva oferta cultural que se suma a la belleza de sus barrios. En el **IAC de Villeurbanne** puede verse una de las exposiciones del verano, la dedicada a uno de los grandes del arte contemporáneo francés, **Guillaume Leblon**. Esta es una de esas soberbias exposiciones de escultura en las que el artista ha analizado con detenimiento el singular espacio del centro para crear una escenografía poderosa, impecable. Leblon, cuyo trabajo conocemos por sus sucesivas apariciones en la galería *ProjecteSD* de Barcelona, practica un tipo de escultura de carácter híbrido en la que lo orgánico se confunde con lo industrial, en la que lo antropomorfo se mezcla con lo minimalista. Conviene realmente no perderse esta expo si se está cerca de Lyon.

Si trazáramos una línea recta hacia el oeste desde Lyon podríamos llegar a **Limoges**. Desde esa ciudad del centro de Francia apenas hay un corto trayecto en autobús hasta uno de esos centros que siempre merece la pena conocer, el **Centro Internacional de Arte y Paisaje de la Isla de Vassivière**. Aquí puede verse una exposición dedicada al **grupo RADO**, un colectivo formado por 9 artistas afincados en las inmediaciones de París que han venido trabajando en torno a un proyecto de carácter social en la región de Tulle. La exposición tiene lugar en los espacios proyectados por Aldo Rossi en Vassivière y también en la iglesia de Saint Pierre en Tulle.

Sigamos hacia el Atlántico y hagamos parada en **Carquefou**, a las afueras de **Nantes**, donde se encuentra el **FRAC de Pays de la Loire** en el que puede verse una interesante exposición de uno de los artistas más interesantes del panorama internacional, el irlandés **Gerard Byrne**. Titulada ***A late evening in the future***, la exposición tiene algo de retrospectiva, pues reúne trabajos realizados en los últimos diez años, y también algo de proyecto específico, pues las piezas han sido reelaboradas en su escenografía para adaptarse a la lógica espacial del centro. Byrne es uno de los artistas que con mayor rigor relea la historia del arte del siglo XX en el marco del advenimiento de los sucesivos movimientos políticos, sociales y económicos.

Aprovechando la corriente del Loira, continuemos hacia el estuario y paremos en **Le Grand Café de Saint Nazaire**, donde nos espera una individual de **Bertille Bak**, joven francesa nacida en 1983 cuya obra se centra en procesos colaborativos con diferentes grupos sociales. No es tanto una representación de la realidad de cada uno de estos grupos, en su mayoría marginales, sino un modo de insertarlos en una rueda creativa de la que surgen narrativas insólitas. Es una obra construida al alimón, no una obra de Bertille Bak *sobre* los diferentes estratos sociales.





Obra de Gerard Byrne en el FRAC de Pays de la Loire.

Llegamos a **París** y lo que primero nos llama la atención es la nueva presentación de la colección que muestra el **Centre Pompidou**, una ambiciosa relectura que ha llevado a cabo la conservadora jefe de la institución **Christine Macel**. Compuesta por 400 obras y titulada **Une histoire**, la exposición recorre el arte de las últimas tres décadas con trabajos que han entrado recientemente a formar parte de la colección y otros que se exponen ahora por vez primera. El recorrido arroja luz sobre las transformaciones que han acaecido en el mundo en los últimos decenios, poniendo el foco en la llegada de la era digital y el modo en que ha afectado a las sociedades contemporáneas. Junto a esta revisión (en la que se incluye un trabajo de la española Cristina Lucas), puede verse también una exposición documental que recupera la muestra **Magiciens de la Terre**, la mítica exposición que el Centre Pompidou presentó en 1989 de la mano de Jean-Hubert Martin. Es un proyecto en el que se trata de poner a disposición del gran público las herramientas para entender la importancia de la exposición en términos historiográficos.

En el **Palais de Tokyo** podremos ver un programa heterogéneo y abierto, como nos tiene acostumbrados la institución parisina. Múltiples proyectos de diferentes escalas se acumulan en los complejos espacios recién renovados. Desde el 14 de febrero y hasta el 7 de septiembre, el ciclo **L'Etat du Ciel** propone un crisol casi inabordable de elementos expositivos que se configuran en muy diferentes ritmos. Así, habrá exposiciones individuales que convivan con grandes colectivas de tesis en una suerte de etéreo caleidoscopio. Configuran esta propuesta poliédrica comisarios como **George Didi Huberman y Arno Gisinger**, que firman la colectiva *Nuevas historias de fantasmas*, que no es exactamente una exposición sino una especie de presentación a lo **Aby Warburg**. Didi Huberman ha estado trabajando en su peculiar percepción de la historia del arte durante 30 años. Este tipo de presentación, basado en su interés por el modo en que se relacionan las imágenes, tiene su origen en el proyecto presentado en Le Fresnoy en 2012.

Esta presentación dura todo lo que dura *L'État du Ciel* por lo que entendemos que tiene un componente vertebrador de todo el proyecto. Otros artistas que han pasado y pasarán son **Ed Atkins**, con una fascinante instalación titulada **Bastards**, o **Eduardo Basualdo**, que también está presente en la citada colectiva de la Fundación Gulbenkian de Lisboa. En esta fase veraniega del proyecto se podrá ver también la colectiva **All That Falls**, cuyo título parte de la célebre pieza radiofónica de Beckett. Comisariada por **Marie de Bruggerolle y Gérard Wajcman**, versa, cómo no, sobre las mil perspectivas desde las que se puede auscultar el tema de la caída.

En el vecino **Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris**, y a la espera de la gran exposición dedicada a Sonia Delaunay que inaugurará en octubre, el principal interés reside en la retrospectiva de **Lucio Fontana**. Es la primera gran exposición dedicada a este artista nacido en Argentina desde la realizada en 1987. Más de 200 obras entre esculturas, pinturas, dibujos o cerámicas recorren la obra de este artista esencial desde sus primeras incursiones en el arte en la década de los veinte hasta su muerte en 1968. También puede verse en el MAMV una muestra sobre la creación en **Irán**, acotada entre 1960 y la actualidad. Se detiene la muestra fundamentalmente en la pintura, la fotografía y el cine del país asiático y lleva la firma de, entre otros, la ubicua Catherine

En **Le Plateau**, en el barrio de Belleville, puede verse una interesante muestra comisariada por **Philippe Decrauzat**, un artista que expuso recientemente en este centro, y **Mathieu Copeland**. Bajo el título *Waywords of Seeing*, tomado de una pieza de uno de los artistas participantes en el proyecto, Dan Walsh, la muestra colectiva incide en los modos de percepción fragmentarios inherentes a la práctica contemporánea, siguiendo siempre los dictados abiertos, heterogéneos y enconados que confiere Copeland, un comisario que lleva años explorando los límites de lo que implica enfrentarse al arte contemporáneo.

Y en el **Jeu de Paume**, el artista colombiano **Oscar Muñoz**, uno de los más relevantes de su generación en Latinoamérica, presenta una gran exposición que reúne muchos de sus mejores trabajos agrupados en temas específicos. Bajo el título **Protographs**, combina en esta muestra un estudio sobre las propiedades técnicas y narrativas de la fotografía o el vídeo con sus temas habituales de trabajo, la pérdida, la memoria, el tiempo... Muchos recordarán aquel trabajo en una Bienal de Venecia, *Proyecto de memoria*, en el que el artista retrataba figuras con agua sobre una losa de cemento castigada por el sol y la escasa perdurabilidad del recordado. Hay una belleza en el trabajo de Muñoz que no está exenta de graves tensiones emocionales.

## Petrit Halilaj começou de novo



Na obra do kosovar Petrit Halilaj, desde antontem na Kunsthalle Lissabon, a guerra e a migração confrontam-se com uma confiança no futuro que interpela raízes, lugares e histórias.

José Marmeleira

**N**a sala da Kunsthalle Lissabon, Petrit Halilaj (Kosóvrc, Kosovo, 1986) sorri, leva o braço à nuca e rememora os principais momentos do seu percurso artístico. Interrompe-se, aqui e ali, para corrigir uma data ou um nome, entusiasma-se quando fala da família ou do futuro, procura as palavras certas antes de ser assertivo. Está em Lisboa para inaugurar, no espaço da Avenida da Liberdade, a sua primeira exposição em Portugal (patente ao público desde antontem). Tente-se uma descrição daquilo que o espectador ali encontra: painéis de madeira dobrados que formam uma dança suspensa de curvas. São formas abstractas que à partida não remetem para qualquer história, mas as manchas de sujidade e um fato de carnaval, que alguém deixou esquecido, intrigam.

O que estão ali fazer? De onde vieram? O trabalho de Petrit Halilaj é indissociável da biografia do artista. Obter uma resposta à pergunta exige viajar no tempo. Durante a Guerra do Kosovo, Petrit Halilaj foi forçado, com a família, a abandonar a sua casa, em Runik, e a viver num campo de refugiados.

A guerra marcou a sua vida. "Foi um acontecimento que interrompeu o meu quotidiano, tinha eu 13 anos. As casas arderam, a minha escola desapareceu, pessoas morreram ou foram deslocadas. Quando pediram

para descrever o que tinha visto, falei de cadáveres, soldados, valas comuns. Coisas que vi e ouvi na televisão e que vi de facto", sublinha.

Antes da guerra, o desenho era já um hábito reconhecido e acarinhado pela família. E foi, porventura, para o lembrar e proteger que mãe do artista escondeu, sob a terra, os desenhos do filho, minutos antes de abandonarem a casa. Petrit Halilaj viria depois a recuperá-los e a integrá-los na instalação *Several Birds Fly Away When They Understand* (2012), ao lado de outros desenhos mais recentes ou apropriados de arquivos do Museu de História Natural do Kosovo. A infância, o conceito de casa, a vibração frágil e tocante da arte confundem-se neste trabalho. "A guerra não é a origem do meu trabalho. Faço parte de uma geração pós-conflito", diz. "A minha experiência é sobretudo a de alguém que sai de casa, que recomeça de novo, com esperança de construir uma nova identidade, de começar do zero."

Depois da experiência no campo de refugiados, o artista encontrou uma nova família em Itália e viria a formar-se em arte na Academia de Belas Artes de Brera, em Milão. Nada que o impedisse de olhar para as transformações que o processo de reconstrução impunha ao Kosovo. "É curioso constatar que nos países da região o desenvolvimento por que muitos esperavam aconteceu de uma só vez, com a liberdade, com a Internet. Não houve uma experiência prolongada da democracia. De repente, um sistema político de décadas foi substituído por outro."

### Sem o peso da História

Mas Petrit Halilaj não faz juízos, prefere, através da arte, lidar com a realidade que o confronta. Foi o que fez na Bienal de Berlim, em 2010, com outra instalação, *The places I'm looking for, my dear, are utopian places, they are boring and I do not know how to make them real*. "Depois da guerra, um dos sonhos das pessoas foi reconstruir as suas casas ou construir casas novas. E, em busca desse sonho, muitas abandonaram o campo para viver nas cidades. Quis homenagear de certa forma esse sonho, que era também o da minha família", revela. Regressados a Runik, os pais reconstruíram a casa cuja estrutura de madeira o artista replicaria em Berlim. "Em Kosovo, nasceu uma casa real. Em Berlim, apenas a sua estrutura, o seu esque-

leto. Achei importante trazer a madeira, não o cimento. É uma verdadeira casa, livre e tangível, sem o peso da História."

Em Lisboa, o artista procura reproduzir uma sensação semelhante. A instalação *I'm hungry to keep you close. I want to find the words to resist but in the end there is a locked sphere. The funny thing is that you're not here, nothing is* é composta de fragmentos da grande peça apresentada em 2013 no Pavilhão do Kosovo da Bienal de Veneza. Um ninho gigante feito de galhos, ramos, terra e lama, no interior do qual os espectadores entravam e descobriam, mediante um ponto de vista determinado, um outro espaço, habitado por dois canários e um casaco. "A essa sala as pessoas só tinham acesso visual. Esta apresentação representa um segundo passo, para tornar tangível o que era misterioso ou íntimo." Os painéis provêm dessa sala e o disfarce de carnaval é afinal um fato de canário que o artista tem usado em performances no contexto das inaugurações. "Não sei se vai ficar aqui ou se o vou usar. Não forcerei nada", afirma. Mas um certo mistério permanece. Porquê os canários? "São do meu namorado, fazem parte do meu quotidiano, são animais muito frágeis que precisam do cuidado humano. Mas não os trouxe. O objectivo nunca foi reconstruir a peça, mas reutilizá-la no presente. Quis abstractizar o pavilhão para quem não o viu, mas as coisas que apresento não são abstracções. Têm referentes reais, concretos."

A biografia continua a ser uma fonte de materiais, de ideias e de reflexões para Petrit Halilaj, e nela inscrevem-se as experiências da migração e da guerra. Mas será um erro reduzir o trabalho deste artista a essas situações. "Eu caminho com as minhas raízes. São elas que me permitem viajar e olhar para o mundo, mas de uma forma silenciosa. Não quero negar a importância e os efeitos [da guerra e da migração], mas é muito perigoso usar esses temas. Para mim, não constituem o ponto de chegada. Quando decidi reconstruir a sua casa, o meu avô pediu-me que o ajudasse a retirar as ruínas. Achei isso interessante e acabei por transformá-las em esculturas que modelei a partir de joalheria da minha mãe. Gosto da ideia de que essas 'ruínas' encontraram outras casas. Foi uma forma que encontrei de lidar com o que era supostamente intocável, sagrado, e de me aproximar de um futuro."

## Petrit Halilaj

How one artist lets the past flow into the present, and lynxes, cranes and foxes balance on rods to create sculptures and environments in which repression is negated and sorrow overcome

by Barbara Casavecchia

Hens, like archaeologists, are good at finding things hidden below the surface and excavating them. Petrit Halilaj is fond of hens. He used to play with them as a child, and they often appear in his works: as the subject of meticulous drawings in the series *They Are Lucky to Be Bourgeois Hens* (2008–) or as flocks of real chickens, roosting inside installations. He's also fond of personal archaeologies. Since his first projects, produced in the mid-2000s, he has unearthed a considerable quantity of his own roots: childhood in rural Kosovo, the war, the loss of his home, forced displacement before moving to Italy and then Germany, and the difficulty of maintaining long-distance family ties. But his 'way of the shovel' (to quote Dieter Roelstraete's much-quoted essay for e-flux journal #4) is an affirmative one: instead of mourning the irreparable loss of whatever has vanished, he re-forms and reproduces it in unexpected ways, often in an enlarged scale that seems to reflect an enormous, almost candid wonder at our ability to overcome sorrow, move on and live (happily) in the present.

In 2009, for his first exhibition at Chert gallery in Berlin, Halilaj created some very simple wooden replicas of objects belonging to his grandfather, embodying the daily routine of his relative's occupations (26 *Objekte n'Kumpir*, 2009), and organised them as prehistorical findings inside a vitrine shaped like a nest. No surprise, then, that the former Museum of Natural History in Pristina is an object of interest for the artist, who has been studying it for years.

The artist sculpted animals with an impasto of grass, earth and animal excrement. They occupied the space as if they were the only survivors of a large diorama

The institution embodies Halilaj's fractured history in a number of ways: its collection of 1,812 specimens, mostly birds, much loved and visited by local kids, was relocated to Belgrade during the conflict; it returned only in its aftermath, when all the archival records had to be translated from Serbian to scientific Latin and Albanian, in accordance with the region's new identity. In 2001, biodiversity didn't seem too popular a subject any more, and accordingly the vitrines with insects and skeletons, and the taxidermied bodies of mammals, reptiles and winged animals had to be 'cleansed' (ie, locked up in wooden crates, stored away and sealed behind a wall in the damp basement) to make room for the new displays of the Ethnographic Museum of Kosovo. Fieldwork and data shifted from interspecies relationships to the traditions and social codes of a human monospecies ('ethnos' stands for 'nation' in ancient Greek), to the exclusion of all others.

In 2011 Halilaj exhibited *Cleopatra*, a series of slide projections of the decaying butterflies in some showcases of Pristina's ex-museum: the work was presented in two different versions, at the group show *Ostalgia* at the New Museum in New York, and at Kunstverein Nürnberg – Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft, where his presentation also included a lightbulb moving in a loop, the trajectory imitating the movements of an insect attracted by the light. Halilaj's recent exhibition at Wiels, Brussels, *Poisoned by Men in Need of Some Love*, recreates a portion of the original museographic collection in





Prénom Nom, média, date,



*Cleopatra* (detail), 2011, slide projections (c. 180 photographs documenting insects),  
18 insect showcases (provenance: Natural History Museum, Pristina),  
documents and books, two pieces of luggage, lightbulb, motor, cable and various other  
materials, dimensions variable



*Kostèrrc (CH) (detail), 2011, hole in Kostèrrc hill, soil transported  
to Basel, 600 × 400 × 230 cm*

January & February 2014

Pristina, by now largely lost. With an impasto of grass, earth and animal excrement – a ‘primitive’, ‘terrestrial’ mixture he has already used in the past – the artist sculpted several animals. They occupied the space, otherwise empty, as if they were the only survivors of a large diorama or as if the white cube was a temporary set, wherein to experiment with regulated forms of coexistence or play hide-and-seek behind the vacant vitrines and cabinets. Owls, wolves, eagles, lynxes, cranes and foxes were scattered around, resting or balancing themselves on brass rods, an elegant nod to modernist aesthetic.

And yet Halilaj is not drawn to rarefied abstraction: his works are figurative and often act as material, sometimes even literal translations of his past experiences or imaginary worlds, connecting different points in time, space and desire. At the 2010 Berlin Biennale, he crammed the main hall of the KW Institute for Contemporary Art with the doppelgänger bulky frame of the house his family was trying to reconstruct in Kosovo (*The places I'm looking for, my dear, are utopian places, they are boring and I don't know how to make them real*, 2010); as cumbersome a presence as an elephant in the room. The following year, he transported to Art Basel 60 tons of soil from the hill he grew up on in Kosovo, thus entirely filling up a fair booth with a sellable piece of his ‘homeland’ – or *heimat*, to use an obviously loaded term (*Kostërrë (CH)*, 2011). That same year he installed a huge rotating ‘cap’, painted with a skyscape, on top of the Kunstraum Innsbruck so that viewers, while looking up from the openings in the museum’s ceiling, framed by wooden planks, could see the rapid progression of clouds and colours in the sky from dawn to dusk (*Because it is for you my Dear, and the Sky doesn't see you and we can fall. Yes I am doing it for you, to see if you are free too*, 2011). At the Kunst

Halle Sankt Gallen he turned a couple of earrings and a necklace, buried by his mother together with a pack of Halilaj’s drawings from his childhood, into giant sculptures, filled with the ruins of their house (*It is the first time dear, that you have a human shape*, 2012). Halilaj’s long titles often come in the form of affectionate though elliptical dialogues with a nondescript ‘you’, so that they could be letters to a friend, lover or sister, as much as diaristic notes to self.

**Halilaj is not drawn to rarefied abstraction: his works are figurative and often act as translations of his past experiences or imaginary worlds, connecting different points in time, space and desire**

In the artist book accompanying the Wiels show (*Poisoned by Men in Need of Some Love*, 2013, published by Wiels and Motto Books) the story of Pristina’s museum is reconstructed by documents, including the inventory of birds, maps and photos of the original dioramas, on which Halilaj

based his sculptures. The exhibition, though, includes only some reproductions of the archival records, the black-and-white image of each bird transfigured by colourful drawings, thus turning common species into exotic creatures with an exaggerated plumage, histrionic like a carnival mask, akin to the illustrations of a Victorian travelogue. At Wiels, Halilaj has continued his exploration of the past as a treasure to unearth with a video triptych, *July 14th?* (2013), documenting the

moment when he managed to rescue the vitrines from the basement and their rotting contents were finally unveiled. The title refers to a dialogue between the artist and a member of the museum’s staff, trying to remember the date when the video was shot, but it easily brings up a number of associations with time, chronologies and memorable dates (on the same day, in 1789, French revolutionaries stormed the Bastille). The moment at which the walls of any ‘repressed’ past finally come tumbling down is always an epic one, Halilaj seems to say, in personal mythologies as much as in reality. ar



*She, fully turning around, became terrestrial (stolen canary)*  
(installation view, Wiels Contemporary Art Center, Brussels), 2013,  
taxidermy canary from the Museum of Natural History, Pristina, with brass  
and paper mask made in collaboration with Alvaro Urbano

*An exhibition of work by Petrit Halilaj will be shown at Chert, Berlin, in April*





*Poisoned by men in need of some love (Duo Mustela nivalis)*  
(installation view, Wiels Contemporary Art Center, Brussels), 2013, iron, two  
animals with cow excrement, soil, glue, brass plate, dimensions variable

*all images. Courtesy the artist and Chert, Berlin*

January & February 2014

## Petrit Halilaj

KUNST HALLE SANKT GALLEN

The installation *It is the first time dear, that you have a human shape* (all works 2012) opened this solo show by Kosovar artist Petrit Halilaj. One might be tempted to describe it as a sort of neo-Povera assemblage made up of imposing hollow metal structures that wind around the floor of the exhibition space, from which spill quantities of stone, some of it ground fine. Contemplating these large objects at greater length one gradually began to realize that their forms are reminiscent of jewelry: a necklace, a pin, a pair of hoop earrings, and a pair of drop earrings. The form of the pin seems to recall a bug or spider, its body a basin that collects white powder; the necklace is made up of many metal crates, uncovered and containing very small, lightly colored stones. The earrings collect in their grooves an almost impenetrable material, like dry pigment, red for the hoops and yellow for the drop earrings.

Purely on the level of the visual, this exhibition, “Who does the earth belong to while painting the wind?!” might have seemed to be about symbols of the feminine and the primeval relationship between woman and the earth. But the press release revealed another, autobiographical dimension to this work, relating to the war that shook the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. The rubble in question comes from Kosovo; these are bricks and stones that once formed the house where Halilaj lived, the home his family had to abandon when war broke out and which they discovered in ruins upon their return. The sculptural forms allude to the jewelry the artist’s mother buried when she had to flee. And so Halilaj’s art becomes an occasion to contemplate and transcend these events, moving toward a more hopeful future.

Another room contained the video that lent the exhibition its title. Its first seconds show fleeting images of the artist at age thirteen, followed by views of a sunny countryside, rich with fruit trees, flowers, and butterflies. Deft editing has united an extremely brief fragment of a video shot by a Swedish journalist reporting on the story of Halilaj



Petrit Halilaj, *It is the first time dear, that you have a human shape* (detail), 2012, steel, stones, dimensions variable.

family at the end of the war with new footage by the artist. His mother also interred along with her jewelry a number of drawings that little Petrit himself had made up through the age of twelve. These drawings could be found in the third and final room of the exhibition, floating in the air on metal threads clustered between the jaws of another large sculpture, *Several birds fly away when they understand it*. This piece resembles an enormous mole cricket that has dug up the drawings from the oblivion to which they had been condemned in the earth. Even without knowing its backstory, one could easily understand this as a

## 11. Petrit Halilaj

WIELS

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wiels.org

The first time I saw Petrit Halilaj, he was flying. In a video, at the end-of-year exhibition at the Brera Academy: he was jumping in slow-motion around a classroom, with his Papageno profile, to the news of his country's independence, which at the time was only a dream. For that matter, he is a migratory creature, travelling an annual route between Kosovo, Italy, and Germany, as well as between present and past – his own having been ravaged by the war and by exile during his adolescence (he was

born in 1986). He loves birds. As a boy, he would play with the hens around his house in the country, later destroyed by the conflict, and imitate their clucking; as an adult, he began drawing them, lived with them in an installation, turned his parents' new chicken coop into the fantasy of a moon-bound rocket ship. As we know, neither barnyard animals nor humans can escape their imprisonment behind fences with a flap of their wings. I've seen him build nests, like the huge one made of earth and woven branches, inhabited by empty clothes and a pair of canaries, with which he represented Kosovo at this year's Venice Biennale: *I'm hungry to keep you close. I want to find the words to resist but in the end there is a locked sphere. The funny thing is that you're not here, nothing is.* Those canaries came from his home: they live free there, with no cage, and he watched them for months as they raised a family. At WIELS, for the exhibition "Poisoned by men in need of some love," curated by Elena Filipovic, Halilaj has peopled the museum with sculptures of birds and other animals, made from a mixture of dirt, straw, excrement, glue, and wire. He has perched them on light fixtures, on the ground, on the corner of a window, head-down or balanced on elegant brass rods. They are dark specters of the stuffed specimens from the former Museum of Natural History in Pristina, which no longer exist, except in photos and archival records. The story is told to us in the catalogue by the head of the Nature Sector, Safet Nishefci, who traces the life of the collection (some 1,812 specimens, 600 of birds alone, highlighting the biodiversity of the Balkans – and it's hard not to think in metaphors): from its inauguration in 1951, to the traumatic transfer of its contents to Belgrade during the conflict, to its reopening after the war, with a new inventory and the translation of all records from Serbian to Albanian and scientific Latin, until 2001, when the museum had to make way for the Ethnographic Museum of Kosovo and the animals from the showcases ended up behind a wall, rotting in the dark. Halilaj also tells its story in the video triptych that accompanies the show (*July 14th?, 2013* – the title is a fragment of dialogue) recording the staff member's reluctance to reopen that door in the basement, justifying things with the American orders that everything was to be "tidied up" quickly. Under the spotlights, the "skeletons in the closet," covered in mold and cobwebs, seem macabre and fascinating, like mummies pulled from a sarcophagus. Embarrassing mummies, though, that no one here wants brought to light. At WIELS there is just one specimen "captured" from the real world: a yellow canary for which Petrit Halilaj and Alvaro Urbano have constructed a blue mask of paper and wire, rendering it hard to identify. On the walls we instead find Halilaj's drawings of the museum's inventory cards, which turn the birds of the region into exotic creatures with tropical plumage. Kosovo (Kosova, in Albanian) is, in Serbian, an abbreviation of Kosovo Polje, or "Field of Blackbirds," the place near Pristina where a famous battle was fought in the fourteenth century between Serbs and Ottomans. On the six-hundredth anniversary of this event, in 1989, Slobodan Milosevic gave a speech that marked the beginning of Serbian hostilities towards the Albanian population, which then grew into the horrors of civil war and ethnic cleansing. Kosovo's former flag, in homage to the Albanian one, featured a glorious two-headed eagle, but the bird that lends the country its name is the *kos*, or *Turdus merula*, the Common Blackbird – duly registered as number 37 in the inventory of the vanished Natural History Museum of Pristina, where different races and species, ornithological and otherwise, could coexist in peace. There is a stubbornness full of tenderness, and of maturity, in Halilaj's attempt to bring that time back to life. The dioramas of natural history museums are among the ineradicable memories of childhood, convincing examples of the illusion that time can be made to stand still, be frozen and kept safe under glass. It is best expressed by Holden Caulfield, obsessed with the ones in New York: "The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deers would still be drinking out of that water hole [...]. Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be you. Not that you'd be so much *older* or anything. It wouldn't be that exactly. You'd just be different, that's all." (*Text by Barbara Casavechia*)



11 Petrit Halilaj, Installation view of *Poisoned by men in need of some love* at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Chert, Berlin. Photo: Kristien Daem



12 Yvan Pestalozzi, *The Loziwurm*, 1972, re-installed outside of Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Photo: Josh Franzos



12 Image from "The Playground Project Exhibition", 2013. Carnegie International, Pittsburgh.

HIGHLIGHTS

By means of  
impertinent  
gestures,  
commonplace  
materials and  
memories of  
his refugee childhood,  
*Elena Filipovic* frames  
PETRIT  
HALILAJ's work as  
rejecting pathos in  
favor of an intimate  
and critical  
inflection of  
the political.

*Elena Filipovic*, 2012  
Courtesy of the artist and Chartwell



Biography

PETRIT HALILAJ (b. 1986, Kostërre) lives and works in Berlin, Kosovo and Albania. Halilaj has had solo exhibitions at Kunsthaus Sankt Gallen, St. Gallen; Kunstsauerei Braunschweig and Chert, Berlin. He has also been featured in group exhibitions at Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan; Museum, Bonn; Kunstsauerei Nürnberg, Bonn; Kunstsauerei, Bonn; New Museum, New York and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Münster. In addition, Halilaj participated in the 6th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art, Berlin.

Current & Forthcoming

PETRIT HALILAJ will be representing Kosovo at the 55th Biennale di Venezia. Solo exhibitions of his work will be featured at WIELS Contemporary Art Center, Brussels, and National Gallery of Prishtina. Additionally Halilaj is participating in group exhibitions at Pflanzberg, Salzburg, Austria; Domus Schindler, and Museum Schloss Hohenland, Badenburg, Hesse.

HIGHLIGHTS

Who can forget all that dirt? Sixty tons of it, crammed within the flimsy drywall perimeter of a small booth in Art Basel's Statements section in 2011. It was an impertinent gesture; the banal pile of earth refused to be the luxury commodity one has come to expect at such art fairs and yet it outweighed even its most heroic and monumental neighbors. At one point, Art Basel's organizers even considered reinforcing the flooring beneath the stand to keep the work from crushing the fair's entire floor, a constant threat that slyly offered its own form of institutional critique. Although this act, like so many of the artist's works, might evoke the aesthetics of Arte Povera or Land Art, or even a specific precedent like Walter De Maria's *Earthroom* (1968/1977), Kosovar artist Petrit Halilaj inflects his dirtwork with an altogether different set of references. Entitled *Kostërre (GH)*, the earth was taken from the precise location where the artist's family home was destroyed during the war, leaving behind a barren gash in the ground. It was then transported to politically "neutral" Switzerland, no small or ambiguous undertaking, especially considering that each of these vastly different places traffics in a political rhetoric that connects blood and soil to contentious notions of nation, territory and identity. Halilaj (b. 1986 in Kostërre) was too young to remember the fall of the Berlin Wall, but just old enough to remember all too well what came in its wake in the soon-to-be "former" Yugoslavia: a landscape marked by ethnic conflict, war, forced exile, corruption and loss. Having fled with his family to a refugee camp as a young boy during the conflict in Kosovo, the artist has a history as inseparable from war and exodus as is his resulting oeuvre. Yet even as he mines his own experience, his body of work rejects pathos or nostalgia in favor of something more optimistic, materially complex, politically resonant, and, ultimately, critical. From the start of the young artist's practice, Halilaj has used commonplace materials and childhood memories in adroit drawings, atmospheric sculptures and often monumental installations. These works evoke a world at once intimately personal and utopian (note the recurrence of his homemade earth and twig-lined spaceships, suggesting a fantasy of a little boy's intergalactic escape), all while revealing the inevitable realities of the far wider sociopolitical sphere that his materials and forms allude to.

Halilaj's first project in Berlin, where the artist moved after finishing art school in Italy, was the result of his having transformed a space in Kreuzberg slated to become a new gallery into an entirely operational, if makeshift, temporary residence in the run-up to the first show. There he constructed all the amenities of a home, including plumbing, bathroom, kitchen and bedroom, a welcoming environment to temporarily house and reconnect him with his father, who was told that this was his son's *actual* home. Halilaj had erected the elaborate fiction because years of exile had left father and son with little chance to be together outside of a homeland already too loaded with difficult memories. Only once his father departed did the artist admit that the whole situation had been a meticulous ruse, the living residue and material traces of which comprised *Bathroom wall, water pipes, shower rail* (2008), Halilaj's contribution to Chert gallery's inaugural exhibition "The Lamb's Mother in the Creche."

Just over a year later, the artist used his biennial artist budget to attempt to reconstruct his war-torn family home just outside of Prishtina in response to curator Kathrin Rhomberg's call to reflect on reality in the 6th Berlin Biennial (2010). His proposal was not art imitating life or even the inverse, but real life made into an

The plates *The building for my day, one empty plate*, 2010. My art brings and I don't know how to make it surreal. 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Chert, Berlin

The first time dear mother became cleaner/sloper (dignity) - carrying, 2012. Courtesy of the artist and Chert, Berlin. Photography by Gunnar Meier





Author

ELENA FILIPOMI is Senior Curator at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels. She co-curated the 5th Berlin Biennial with Adam Szymczyk in 2008 and has curated a number of exhibitions with artists ranging from Marcel Duchamp, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Alina Szapocznikow to Leigh Ledare, Kara Liday, Marvin Hott, and Tré Young-McKitt.

HIGHLIGHTS

art form. He transported the remnants of wood slat and brick from the attempted reconstruction of his former home in Pristina, which was beset by a saga of local corruption and mafia intervention, and erected a ghostly, monumental structure in Berlin that echoed the loss and undoing of the faraway original, shown at twenty percent larger than life size. Live chickens similar to those that surrounded Halilaj during his rural childhood roamed alongside the structure, offering just one example of the everyday and memory-laden stuff that so frequently recur in his oeuvre.

*Gleopatra* (2011) perfectly evinces the subtle but undeniably ideological implications of the artist's practice. The installation comprises partially destroyed, dusty museological specimens, including a number of small glass cases displaying butterflies and other insects complete with the original hand-written labels listing their species name. These are the central protagonists in the artist's ongoing excavation and presentation of some of the remains of the Natural History Museum in Kosovo, a formerly remarkable and well-loved place before splintered nationalisms disintegrated what was once called Yugoslavia. These abandoned butterfly specimens, like the various stuffed animals that the artist has also recently turned his attention towards, are in their own way victims of the post-war urge to use the space of the Natural History Museum to display folk tradition and heritage in place of the museum's usual contents. The shoring up of a clear sense of Kosovar national identity, distinguished from its ethnically diverse neighbors, is a maneuver officially understood as infinitely more pressing than the fate of the animal, insect or other specimen belonging to the former museum. Halilaj's attempts to save and display the collection, whose neglect might seem to sit outside of ideology, quietly points to the consequences of the new nation's prioritization of one kind of cultural heritage at the cost of another.

The artist's personal inflection of the political will perhaps receive its most appropriate platform at the upcoming Venice Biennale. With his first institutional solo exhibitions at the Kunstraum Innsbruck (2011) and Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen (2012) behind him, and in the midst of preparing for even larger solo shows at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre and the National Gallery of Kosovo, the artist will "represent" his homeland in the very first Pavilion of the Republic of Kosovo in Venice. Kosovo is a nation that still struggles—two decades after the end of the bloody struggle that formed it—to solidify itself as an entity and identity, and to come to terms with its war-torn history. The choice of Halilaj, who builds his work from the very rubble of this history, could not be more apt. Perhaps fittingly, the artist will construct a structure within a structure on the real estate allotted to him, his enclosure covered with twigs and earth gathered from Kosovo and filled with the drawings, objects and narratives that propagate the young artist's singular universe. These in turn speak for the particularities of a place and a history at once both geographically near and metaphorically far from the art world playground that is Venice during the Biennale, reminding us that the stakes of art, like life, run deeper than they sometimes seem. Still, like Beuysian felt and fat, Halilaj's mnemotechny of both homeland and homelessness is neither, properly speaking, documentary nor romantic. Instead, it walks an elegant tightrope between memory and actuality, the ingenuous and the fictive, the personal and the shared experience of all of us who know what it is to have lost our innocence and yet continue to marvel at the magic still left in the world.

*Kosovo (2011)*  
 Courtesy of the artist and Chea, Berlin



MOUSSE 23 ~ Petrit Halilaj



*They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens*, 2008. Installation view, "Art is my Playground", Istanbul, 2008.  
Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.



## HERE AND THERE

BY BARBARA CASAVECCHIA

A space-shuttle trip and its crew of hens, photographic portraits of bourgeois chickens, a gang of biddies to share the pen with... second-rate birds, incapable of flight, that artist Petrit Halilaj – whose new work will be presented at the Berlin Biennale – uses as a metaphor for a rural world in migration that aspires to live in the city. A society caught between nostalgia and ambitions, which the artist reconciles in his surreal projects.

MOUSSE 23 ~ Petrit Halilaj

- P.: MAYBE I DO BELIEVE IN DREAMS,
- IN FANTASY.
  - IN MIRACLES OR I DON'T KNOW, BUT.
  - I DO HAVE THE DESIRE TO DEDICATE MY ATTENTION.
  - AND BE THERE IN THE MIDDLE OF YOU.
  - AND NOT FORGET YOU.
  - BUT YOU MUST NOT CHANGE ANYTHING IN YOUR LIFE.
  - I LIKE TO TALK AND I DO BELIEVE IN WHAT WE TALK ABOUT.
  - PERSONALLY, I DO SEE IT AS A LEVEL, WHICH GIVES ME THE POSSIBILITY TO SEE SOMETHING ELSE, BEYOND THAT, THEN COMES THE OTHER PART OF THE WORLD, WHICH MAKES THE WHOLE.
  - (...)
  - I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN CREATE OUR OWN WORLD.
  - (...)
  - ... IF WE HAD A MOMENT TO BUILD A SPACE SHUTTLE...
  - WHAT WILL REMAIN IS OUR EXPERIENCE.



They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens II, 2009.

Installation view "Back to the future", Contemporary Art Center, Pristina. Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.

*Communication seems to be lacking us as well, a conversation between two voices, those of Petrit Halilaj and his sister Blerina (published in issue 19/2009 of Gagarrin, a ten-year-old Belgian magazine entirely dedicated to printing unpublished texts by artists), distills the roots of his work, which fluctuate between here and there. In this alternating rhythm, the here is all the places where Halilaj has moved: first Italy, in the Mantuan countryside and Milan, where he studied at Brera Academy; then Berlin, where he has lived since 2008 and is working on the special project "Artists Beyond" for the next Biennale, curated by Kathrin Rhomberg. There is Runik, the village in Kosovo, near Skënderaj, where he was born in '86 and where he witnessed the horrors of the conflict with Serbia. Runik is where his family lives, having rebuilt the house that was burnt down during the war.*

*In Halilaj's projects – sculptures, installations, pen or ink drawings – here and there are mixed together. They are accompanied by texts scribbled on notebook pages, in which the artist recreates the private dimension of a diary and the poignant one of speech, his own kind of speech, with mistakes that mingle different languages and identities. Sometimes they serve to portray the nostalgia of the emigrant, who dreams of finding everything just as he left it, because if his starting point remains the same, then the parallel life he has embarked upon will not irredeemably diverge from it. Other times, they play hide-and-seek with the awareness that his own life is led elsewhere, and, perhaps, "always out of place", as Edward Said titled his autobiography (*Out of Place*, 1999).*

*In *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001), Svetlana Boym, a Russian artist and writer, professor of comparative literature at Harvard, dissects this feeling, which is composed of *nostos* (going home, the return to one's native land) + *algia* (ache, melancholy, longing). And rather than its link to the past, she stresses the yearning for a present that threatens to disappear. "At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense,*

*nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time". Boym distinguishes between "restorative nostalgia", which attempts to reconstruct and shield the lost home and period; and "reflective nostalgia", often ironic, more closely linked to the personal timeframe, which prefers the fragments of memory and refuses to let emotion obliterate critical reflection. Moreover, she intertwines them and compares them with two categories formulated by philosopher Reinhart Koselleck: the space of experience, which serves as a past present, and the horizon of expectation, which is a present future. "Nostalgia, as a historical emotion, is a longing for that shrinking 'space of experience' that no longer fits the new 'horizon of expectation'".*

*For Halilaj, who is still very young and immune to analytic compartmentalization, experience is a key word. It allows him to open up channels of communication with the public, but above all to overcome the gaps in his link to the world of Runik, building bridges between different phases in his life and different generations of his family. So that, at times, the home here and the home there, or rather, the allegories of them, can fit together. Before Chert gallery opened in Kreuzberg, in September 2008, Halilaj had the opportunity to fit out the spaces with plumbing, a tub and shower, a gas stove, beds, furniture and lamps to create a domestic environment for a meeting with his father: a sort of "no-man's-land", both real and fictional, where they could talk and listen to each other for*



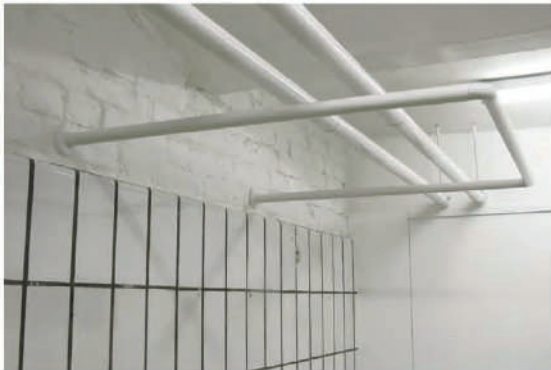
Untitled (space shuttle in the garden), 2009.

Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.

*week. An easily grasped device to use with a parent visiting from afar, in order to explain – without too many words – what one is doing and where, what an installation is, what relationship one wants to establish between art/work and life. Subsequently, the same materials, rearranged on-site as part of the inaugural show "The Lamb's Mother in the Creche?", became the abstract stage set of their relationship.*

MOUSSE 23 ~ Petrit Halilaj

A similar mechanism was used again by Halilaj a few months later at Artissima 2008, where he asked to be allowed to create "a room of his own" in the gallery's booth: a space closed off behind a door, packed with artwork, projects and personal belongings. To anyone who knocked and entered, he would begin explaining – once again in the intimacy of a *tête-à-tête* – who he was and what he was working on; putting himself at the center of the frame, in the role of a first-person narrator, but also using walls and locks to protect and circumscribe



Bathroom wall, water pipes, shower rail, 2008. Installation view, "The Lamb's Mother In The Creche?", Chert, Berlin, 2008. Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.

Right - *Bourgeois Hen*, 2009. Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.

the space of that experience. Many of the pieces discussed there grew out of the project *They Are Lucky to Be Bourgeois Hens* (for "Art Is My Playground", a group show organized in 2008 by Tersham at the Küçük Çiftlik amusement park in Istanbul), which in the meantime evolved into a unified cycle of works. Reflecting the rather ramshackle, carnivalesque ambience of the old funfair, Halilaj separated off an area with red barriers, "furnished" it with a few knick-knacks and sculptures with iron birds' feet, and then shared it, for days (and nights), with a group of chickens, the animals he played with the most as a boy, imitating their clucks and cackles. An innocuous scrap of a zoo, where the creature in the cage, at times ignored by the public, is the artist himself – as in Kafka's story "The Hunger Artist" ("Ein Hungerkünstler", 1922). And so the chicken coop also becomes a metaphor for integration in a different context, where one is necessarily alien, literally of a different race, while in the text "Fucking hell, the sun blinds me...", the hens, once friendly with each other, begin scuffling, then succumb to uniformity ("It doesn't exist in nature. They just want to be like other religions. Why?"), while some consider the possibility of mating with other species. Halilaj gave the title *Bourgeois Hen* to a number of drawings, mounted in frames and on wooden objets trouvés, from a recent series that depicts haughty pullets and cockerels, all puffed up with conceit, or roosting within minimalist structures, seeming to mock the dreams of a comfortable urban life shared by so many Kosovars, thousands of whom flock to the city from the countryside. As it appears his family is planning to do, taking off for Pristina, and as he himself did, taking off for here. *They Are Lucky to Be Bourgeois Hens II* was also the title of the second exhibition at Chert, last September; Halilaj presented an igloo/cradle of interwoven branches, surrounding an illuminated showcase full of "humble" objects (*26 Objekte n' Kumpit*, 2009) such as clogs, a walking stick, frames, utensils – an exact replica of the things his grandfather crafts to keep himself busy and "to dont/ talk with his/ son"; thus a useful tool, like his first installation, for re-establishing a dialogue about family dynamics. Accompanying it is a video that documents the surreal chicken coop the artist conceived and convinced his friends, relatives, and neighbors to build in Runkit: it is shaped like a space shuttle, the perfect means of transport for moving back and forth between two worlds, as if designed for birds who can't get off the ground by themselves. The last chapter in the saga, *They Are Lucky to Be Bourgeois Hens III*, is the installation made for the solo show "Back to the Future" (2009, curated by Albert Heta) at the Stacion contemporary art center in Pristina, which brought the "rocker" physically into the exhibition circuit, along with the chicken coop and its occupants. As Foucault wrote (*Des Espaces Autres*, 1967): "The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates".

DI BARBARA CASAVECCHIA

Un pollaio-space shuttle e il suo equipaggio di galline, ritratti fotografici di polli imborghesiti, una combriccola di chioce con cui condividere il recinto... volatili di serie B, incapaci di volare, che per l'artista kosovaro Petrit Halilaj – il cui nuovo lavoro sarà presentato alla Biennale di Berlino – sono metafora di una realtà contadina in migrazione, che aspira all'inurbamento. Una società fra nostalgia e aspettative, che l'artista riconcilia con i suoi surreali interventi.



La conversazione a due voci *Communication seems to be lacking us as well* tra Petrit Halilaj e la sorella Blerina (uscita sul n. 19, 2009, di *Gagarin*, rivista belga che da un decennio pubblica solo inediti d'artista) estrae la radice pendolare, tra *gai e la*, del suo lavoro. A ritmi alterni, il *gai* sono i luoghi dove Halilaj ha deciso di trasferirsi: prima l'Italia, tra campagna mantovana e Milano, dove ha studiato all'Accademia di Brera; poi Berlino, dove abita dal 2008 e sta lavorando al progetto speciale "Artists Beyond" per la prossima Biennale, curata da Kathrin



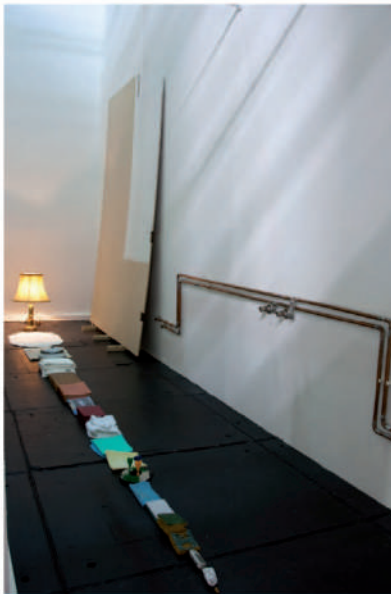
*They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens II* and *They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens III*, 2009. Installation view "Back to the future", Contemporary Art Center, Pristina. Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.

MOUSSE 23 ~ Petrit Halilaj

Rhomberg. Il *lâ* è Runik, il paesino del Kosovo, vicino a Skenderaj, in cui è nato nell'86 ed è stato testimone degli orrori del conflitto con la Serbia. A Runik risiede la sua famiglia, che vi ha ricostruito la casa bruciata durante la guerra. Nei progetti di Halilaj – sculture, installazioni, disegni a penna o inchiostro – *qui e là* si rimescolano. Ad accompagnarli ci sono testi scarabocchiati su fogli da taccuino, con i quali l'artista ricrea la dimensione intima del diario e quella accorata del parlato, il proprio, con strafalcioni a cavallo di lingue e identità diverse. A volte, gli servono a mettere in scena una nostalgia da emigrante, che sogna di ritrovare tutto così come lo ha lasciato, perché, se il punto di partenza continua a permanere immutato, la vita parallela imboccata non divergerà irrimediabilmente. Altre, giocano a rimpiazzarlo con la consapevolezza che la propria esistenza si svolge comunque altrove e, forse, "Sempre nel posto sbagliato" (*Out of Place*, 1999), come Edward Said ha intitolato la sua autobiografia.

Nel libro *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001; confluito in parte in *Nostalgia. Saggi sul rimpianto del comunismo*, Bruno Mondadori, 2003), la studiosa di letterature slave comparate ad Harvard, artista e scrittrice russa Svetlana Boym dis seziona questo sentimento, fatto di *nostos* (andare a casa, tornare al paese) e *algia* (dolore, malinconia, desiderio). E lo considera non tanto legato al passato, quanto in tensione verso un presente a rischio di sparizione. "Al primo sguardo, la nostalgia è la mancanza di un luogo, ma in realtà è lo struggimento per un tempo diverso – il tempo della nostra infanzia, i ritmi più lenti dei nostri sogni. In un'accezione più ampia, la nostalgia è una ribellione contro l'idea moderna del tempo, il tempo della storia e del progresso. Il nostalgico desidera cancellare la storia e trasformarla in una mitologia privata o collettiva, rivisitare il tempo come se fosse uno spazio, rifiutando di arrendersi alla sua irreversibilità". Boym distingue tra una "nostalgia restauratrice", che vorrebbe ricostruire, blindandoli, la dimora e il tempo perduti; e una "nostalgia riflessiva", a tratti ironica, più legata al tempo individuale, che preferisce i frammenti del ricordo e impedisce alle emozioni di cancellare la riflessione critica. Inoltre, le intreccia e confronta con due categorie formulate dal filosofo Reinhart Koselleck: lo spazio dell'esperienza, che funge da passato-presente; e l'orizzonte di aspettativa, ovvero un futuro-presente. "Così la nostalgia, come emozione storica", scrive, "è il desiderio di quello 'spazio' sempre più ristretto dell'esperienza che non corrisponde più al nuovo 'orizzonte di aspettativa'".

Per Halilaj, ancora molto giovane e immune dalla compartimentazione analitica, *esperienza* è una parola chiave. Gli consente di mantenere aperti i canali di comunicazione con il pubblico, ma soprattutto di risarcire e colmare le lacune del legame con il mondo di Runik, gettando ponti tra fasi diverse della propria vita e generazioni diverse della famiglia. Così che, a volte, la casa di là e quella di qui, o meglio le loro allegorie, possano coincidere. Prima che la Galleria Chert aprisse a Kreuzberg, nel settembre 2008, Halilaj ha potuto attrezzarne i locali con tubature, vasca da bagno e doccia, cucina a gas, letti, mobili e abat-jour per allestire uno spazio domestico destinato a un incontro con il padre: una sorta di "terra di nessuno", insieme reale e *fictional*, dove potersi parlare e ascoltare per una settimana. Un congegno comprensibile, da far esperire a un genitore venuto da lontano per arrivare a spiegarli – senza troppe parole – cosa si stia facendo e dove, cos'è un'installazione, che rapporto si vuole istituire tra arte/lavoro e vita. A posteriori, quegli stessi materiali, riorganizzati *in situ* come parte della mostra inaugurale "The Lamb's Mother in



the Creche?"), sono diventati la quinta astratta della loro relazione.

Un meccanismo analogo, Halilaj l'ha riproposto pochi mesi dopo ad Artissima 2008, dove ha chiesto di ritagliare "una stanza tutta per sé" nello stand della stessa galleria: uno spazio chiuso dietro a una porta, gremito di opere, progetti e oggetti privati. A chi bussava ed entrava, si metteva a raccontare, di nuovo nella dimensione intima del *être-à-être*, chi fosse e a cosa stesse lavorando; ponendosi al centro della cornice, in prima persona e nei panni dell'io narrante, ma anche proteggendo e circoscrivendo con muri e serrature lo spazio di quell'esperienza.

Molti dei lavori discussi in quell'occasione nascevano dal progetto *They Are Lucky to Be Bourgeois Hens* (per "Art Is My Playground"), una collettiva organizzata nel 2008 da Tershame nel parco dei divertimenti Küçük Çiftlik di Istanbul, che nel frattempo si è evoluto in ciclo coerente di opere. Rispecchiando l'atmosfera un po' circense e sgangherata, da fenomeno da baraccone, del vecchio luna park, Halilaj ne ha perimetrato un'area con transenne rosse, l'ha "arredata" con poche suppellettili e sculture dalle zampe anisodattili in ferro, scegliendo poi di condividerla, per giorni (e notti), con un gruppo di galline, gli animali con i quali più giocava da piccolo, imitandone il chiochiare. Uno scampolo innocuo di zoo dove, a finire in gabbia, più o meno ignorato dal pubblico, è l'artista stesso – come succedeva a "Il digiunatore" di Kafka ("Ein Hungerkünstler", 1922). Così il pollaio diventa anche la metafora dell'integrazione in un contesto diverso, dove si è per forza alieni, letteralmente di un'altra razza, mentre nel testo *Cazzo il sole mi scotta...*, le gallinelle, un tempo amiche, iniziano ad azzuffarsi, per poi soccombere all'omologazione ("Non esiste nella natura loro / Vogliono solo essere come altre religioni / Perché?"), mentre qualcuna considera la possibilità di accoppiamenti con altre specie. Halilaj ha intitolato *Bourgeois Hen* alcuni disegni, montati su cornici e *objet trouvé* in legno, di una serie recente che ritrae galline e galletti boriosi, tronfi come palloni gonfiati, o appollaiati in strutture minimaliste, e sembra sfottere le aspirazioni agli agi della vita in città di tanti Kosovari, che a migliaia lasciano le campagne per inurbarsi. Come pare voler fare anche la sua famiglia, puntando su Prishtina, e come del resto ha fatto lui stesso puntando su *qui*. *They Are Lucky to Be Bourgeois Hens II* è anche il titolo della seconda mostra da Chert, lo scorso settembre; Halilaj vi ha presentato un igloo/culla di rami intrecciati, con all'interno una vetrina illuminata piena di oggetti "poveri" (*26 Objekte n'Kampir*, 2009) come zoccoli,

un bastone, cornici, utensili – replica esatta di quelli che il nonno è solito fabbricare per tenersi occupato e "to don't talk with his/son", e quindi strumento utile, come l'installazione d'esordio, a riattivare un dialogo attorno alle dinamiche famigliari. Ad accompagnarlo, un video di documentazione sul pollaio surreale che l'artista ha progettato e convinto parenti, amici e vicini a costruire a Runik, a forma di space shuttle: la navetta spaziale, mezzo di trasporto ideale per chi voglia fare la spola tra due mondi, come per dei volatili che non sappiano staccarsi da terra. L'ultimo capitolo della saga, *They Are Lucky to Be Bourgeois Hens III*, è l'omonima installazione realizzata per la personale "Back to the Future" (2009), a cura di Albert Heta) al centro d'arte contemporanea Stacion di Prishtina, che ha fatto traslocare fisicamente il "razzo" nel circuito espositivo, insieme al pollaio e alle sue occupanti. Scriveva Foucault (*Des Espaces Autres*, 1967): "Il naviglio è l'eterotopia per eccellenza. Nelle civiltà senza battelli i sogni inaridiscono, lo spionaggio rimpiazza l'avventura, e la polizia i corsari".

Top - *Bourgeois Hen*, 2009. Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.

Above - *Bathroom wall, water pipes, shower rail*, 2008. Installation view in Chert booth at Artforum Berlin 2009. Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.

Opposite - *They Are Lucky to Be Bourgeois Hens*, 2008. Courtesy: Chert, Berlin.

# MOUSSE

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Mousse  
Mai / May  
2010





## PETRIT HALILAJ

### STATEMENT

Warum liebst du mich? Was ist liebenswert an mir? Warum kannst du deine Liebe zur Kunst nicht verbergen? Du bist der schlechteste Scherzbold, und wenn ich lache, dann nur, weil ich an Bushs Rede denke. Falls ich heute in China bin und die Büronummer wähle, sind dann alle 100 000 000 000 Büros in deinem Museum besetzt? Sind alle Sekretäre und Assistenten an der Arbeit? O.k., kannst du meinen Bericht erledigen? Ja, es gibt da ein Werk, das nur Hunde verstehen. Sie fühlen es, die Menschen sehen es bloss. Mehrere Vögel flattern davon, als sie dieses Werk verstehen. Wie viele Minuten lang stehst du, dein Elick, dein Geist, dein Körper vor einem Kunstwerk? Wie stark kannst du absorbiert sein, ohne einen Moment lang egozentrisch zu werden? Warum denkst du nicht an jene Momente? Was sind sie? Wo sind sie? Warum willst du dauernd vergessen, wer du bist und was du weisst? Wo sind all die andern? Auf der anderen Seite des Fensters ist kein Balkon. Du fällst aus dem zehnten Stock auf den Zement, und die Schwerkraft lässt nach. Was? Ja, ja. Das einzige Mal, dass ich ausserhalb meiner selbst dachte, war ich am Fliegen. Und all die Dinge, die du isst? Ich weiss nicht, wo die hingehen. Sie werden bestimmt zu Kräften. Du bist nutzlos, und das ist nicht natürlich. Es macht dich zum Aussenseiter. Du wirst zu jemand anderem, den niemand mag, dem niemand zuhört. Ah! Fast hätte ich vergessen, dir zu sagen, dass ich an dich denke, dass ich an dich glaube, aber du wirst sterben, weil du nicht mehr an die toten Momente glaubst. Fessle mich, meine Liebe!!!



### *Was ist Ihr neuestes Projekt oder an welcher Ausstellung arbeiten Sie gegenwärtig?*

Ich arbeite an einem Projekt für die Berlin Biennale. Dieses ist möglicherweise die Realisierung von etwas, an dem ich seit Langem arbeite. Es ist schwierig, zum jetzigen Zeitpunkt etwas dazu zu sagen, weil vieles noch offen und unklar ist. Aber es sollte daraus ein neues Haus in Priština werden, wo ich hoffe, mit meiner Familie zu wohnen.

### *Welches ist Ihr liebste unrealisiertes Projekt?*

Ich habe noch keines. Ich hatte das Glück, realisieren zu können, was ich realisieren wollte. Oder vielleicht war das, was ich wollte, einfach einfach genug, um realisiert werden zu können.

### *Wer sind Ihre persönlichen Vorbilder oder was hat Sie am stärksten beeinflusst?*

Ich glaube nicht, dass ich welche habe. Es gibt viele Leute, die mir wichtig sind und deren Meinungen und Ideen ich teile. Es sind keine Helden, aber sie haben mich beeinflusst.

Du 807 – 83

*Welche anderen Bereiche, abgesehen von der Kunst, inspirieren Sie am meisten?*

Ich würde nicht «inspirieren» sagen, aber ich interessiere mich für vieles ausserhalb der Kunst. Bis jetzt gibt es kein Fachgebiet, in dem ich gerne ein «Experte» wäre.

*Wie stellen Sie sich die Kunstwelt im 21. Jahrhundert vor?*

Diese Frage würde ich gerne Hans Ulrich Obrist stellen.

*Haben Sie ein Manifest? Verkünden Sie es!*

Ich habe keines, aber mein Grossvater hat eines, das mir gefällt: «N'koft e hajrit ishalla asht kysmet, po n'koft qi s'asht e hajrit ishalla sa kysmet.» Das bedeutet ungefähr: «Hoffen wir, dass es geschieht, falls es Gutes bringt. Hoffen wir, dass es nicht geschieht, falls es nichts Gutes bringt.»



Petrit Halilaj:

- 1: *They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens* (2008, Aquarium, Bügeleisen, Motor, Federn)
- 2: *They are Lucky to be Bourgeois Hens II* (2009, Holz, Farbe, Elektrizität, Hühner)
- 3: *Un gallo borghese che voleva essere un pappagallo fino a quando ha potuto capire che poteva essere un gallo. E la sua moglie.* (2010, Zeichnungen auf Papier, Holzrahmen)



3