

# Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Raw Future of 100 Years Before



10 May - 28 August 2016

Opening: Tuesday 10 May, 18:00

Artists: **Guy Ben-Ner, Luchezar Boyadjiev, Paul Buck, Anetta Mona Chișă & Lucia Tkáčová, Ivars Gravlejs, Yoshua Okón, Larissa Sansour, W. Mark Sutherland, Kenneth Tin-Kin Hung**

Curator: **Simona Nastac**

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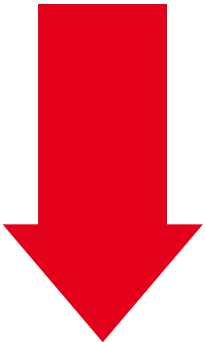
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In 1916, against the backdrop of the Great War, Dada unfolded as a symptom of a profound existential crisis, a corrosive, rizomathic and viral negation of the ‘idols of reason’ left unreplaced by a new truth after Nietzsche situated man in a Godless world. Influenced by his iconoclasm, the Dadaists responded sceptically and irreverently “yes, yes” (“da, da”) to the Great Powers of politics and art, with a pair of scissors in their hands. The proposed DIY method was deceptively simple: “Take a newspaper. Take some scissors. Choose from this paper an article of the length you want to make your poem. Cut out the article. Next, carefully cut out each of the words that makes up this article and put them all in a bag. Shake gently. Next take out each cutting one after the other. Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag. The poem will resemble you. And there you are – an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd.” (Tristan Tzara, To Make a Dadaist Poem)

Insurgence, incoherence, irony and shock, doubled by the liberation of the signifier, the relativization of sense, the poetics of arbitrary juxtapositions of words, sounds and images, and the promotion of hazard and spontaneity as absolute principles of creation became the *modus operandi* of Dada, programmatically mobilized to question and test the status quo, in a paroxysmic anti-project aiming to revitalise society, language and the arts.

Today, the procedure follows a similar recipe: one examines and copies the mannerisms of the adversary; one adopts the delusory strategies and accessories of the prevailing order; everything gets exaggerated to the limit of parody, then one poetically yet intransigently confronts political, social and artistic topics of unambiguous criticality. One employs audience alienating and delayed perception devices, and also updates and augments its expectations. With the same ethos as a century ago: confidence in unexplored tensions and unprecedented theories; reactivity to the present (the newspaper is not an accident!); alertness to anything that could be text; the belief that art and life share the same DNA and the risk of being mutually incomprehensible; and, more than anything (although Dada is all about horizontalism and grassroots action), the infectious availability for paradox, openness to an elsewhere and otherwise than it is, not as an anarchic whim but as a means of keeping the possibility of freedom and renewal alive. Against the universal economic fatalism, Dada tells us that everything could be different, although it doesn’t want anything and is never right.

Misappropriating the title of Hannah Höch’s iconic Dada photomontage, the exhibition *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Raw Future of 100 Years Before* aims to show that Dada is as sharp as a knife with two blades today, able to cut through the dense layers of power, mainstream media and institutions and expose their methods of domination and control. It seeks to examine how artists engage with the present-day’s raw contradictions, intensities and inconsistencies, 100 years after Dada redefined the very idea of art, offering the first joyous yet no-nonsense dogma for its release and true freedom.

Last but not least, it aims to probe how Dadaism has become part of almost every artist’s practice and how it re-emerges, uncompromised, equipped for the 21st century, when it can claim both fidelity to its original defiance and serve as a still-living collection of usable and adjustable techniques – chance procedures, collage, photomontage, readymades, cacophony, appropriation, culture jamming, pastiche and pranks.

Wildly open to misinterpretation, the exhibition features artists who decided to take matters into their own hands, although the notion of responsibility in art remains debatable and contingent. Encompassing video, photography, documented performance, installation, sculpture, text and other unstable genres, their works invite visitors to take a Dada break from the burnout society and reflect on autonomy, resistance, audacity, invention, utopia or else. There is no master plan of coherence here, or indeed any transcendental experience to be had (after all, ‘humour is reason gone mad’, as Groucho Marx said). Instead, **the reward is 50 Euros to the person who will best explain what Dada is!** (Terms and conditions: exhibition visitors only)



**Guy Ben-Ner** is known for his DIY, low-tech ‘home movies’ produced with what is out there already: his apartment in Tel Aviv, IKEA showrooms, chain coffee-shops, his family and friends. Frequently blurring the fine line between stealing, appropriating, refreshing and abusing, he employs guerilla tactics and absurd slapstick to address complex and pressing issues that impact our daily lives, reminding us that wherever they take place, they are political. In *Soundtrack* (2013), the artist focuses on sound, superimposing 11 minutes of Steven Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds* soundtrack onto a family drama taking place in his Tel Aviv kitchen. Exploding blenders, broken bottles, flying fried eggs and falling toys are a substitute for the alien horror story, punctuated at times by real-life video footage of the Israeli-Lebanon and Palestinian hostilities streaming on the family laptop. The overall effect is both hilarious and hilariously threatening, with the gap between the family’s domestic activities and the dramatic soundtrack feeling as tangible as the ever-present account of regional conflict affecting Ben-Ner’s life.

**Luchezar Boyadjiev’s** recent work is an exploration of, and sometimes intervention into the dynamic and multi-layered interface of the city, particularly his home town, Sofia. The city shapes and is shaped by the lives of its inhabitants, as subjected to political, economic and social forces, hidden or apparent. In *Sofia*, as mostly everywhere in Eastern Europe, capitalism has voraciously appropriated every inch of the urban space for private profit and interest, changing not only its visual identity but the identity of the people too, flattened, reduced to one dimension only – that of subjects concurrently devoured by and feeding the relentless consumption machine. In *Billboard Heaven* (2006), the artist explores the visual evidence of the new global imaginary in Sofia through digital photomontage, by creating a totally manufactured environment with peculiar and hilarious effects, a shared global visual landscape in which advertising has become society’s only unifying and polarizing force.

**Paul Buck** is a poet, writer, playwright, artist, performer, translator and editor. His work is a continuing investigation of language, and its derivations and deviations, that finds expression not only on the page in the traditional form of books, but through various performative approaches that range from film and theatre, to performance art, poetry readings and music, often resulting in other textual realisations for art spaces. The work in this show plays with the question what is copyright, appropriation and fair use in the art world by wittily bringing together one of the most combative and obstructive of all literary estates, James Joyce Estate, and a hugely successful artist who has built his entire career on appropriation, Richard Prince. Paul Buck’s tactics of subversion and deceit are not only defying copyright issues around Joyce’s unpublished correspondence, but are also reminding us that a priori, in other words with its eyes closed, Dada doubts everything and everything is Dada, too, be it fact, fiction or both.

**Anetta Mona Chisa & Lucia Tkáčová** are primarily interested in gender relations, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and the contradictions of the New Europe after the end of the Cold War. The video *Try Again. Fail Again. Fail Better* (2011) uses a universal symbol of protest, a raised fist, evocative of the Communist revolution and the workers’ struggle among other global resistance movements. But quite often many of these protests succeeded only to bring about dictatorship, indefinite transition or the intrusion of first world market economies, dragging along its people like marionettes in a puppet show. With a twisted sense of humour, the artists turn the clenched fist into a double-edged symbol, an amusing toy yet a critical reminder of the deep waters of revolutionary desire, with uneasy questions about political efficacy, complicity, and the art’s limits rising from the depths. The inflatable fist can also be seen as a mutation of the Dada pointing hand (the index typographic sign Dadaists used extensively in their publications), relevant for the 21st century.

**Ivars Gravlejs** is an artist who can’t resist subversive acts. At the age of 11, in Latvia, he traded 20 empty fizzy drink cans for his first camera and started experimenting with photography, mainly to negotiate his unhappy schooldays. Later on in Prague, he improvised “a short introduction to the discourse of faeces in contemporary art”, together with the exiled Russian artist Avdey Ter-Oganyan. His equally original installation *Pat & Mat* (2012) refashions the two popular characters of the homonymous Czech stop-motion animated series banned in socialist Czechoslovakia from 1979 to 1985 for ‘ideological impurity’. Failure, miscalculation, and imperfection are central elements to Pat and Mat’s work - an artist duo who present themselves as a parody of DIY culture and an opposition to over-intellectualized art. Like the Dadaists, they are against standardization, order and formalism, solving self-made problems with surprising tools and imaginative approaches. It is essential to note that the lifetime of their works is often very short, but long enough to bear comparison with Duchamp or Fischli and Weiss’s art.

**Yoshua Okón** considers humour the only tool for dealing with some of the harsher aspects of his native Mexico City. Ever provocative, the artist has mastered the art of combining irreverence with insight, creating uncomfortable work charged with dark humour and political overtones. *Canned Laughter* (2009) documents the creation of a *maquiladora*, a typical Mexican factory which exploits underpaid workers and most of the time is run on account of foreign multinational companies. Operating under the fictitious corporate aegis of (Henri) Bergson (who famously argued that the mechanical aspects of human behaviour invariably provoked mirth), the factory conceived by Okón produces cans of laughter for the media and entertainment industry. The artist rented an abandoned space in one of the ex-assembly plants in town, hired a group of unemployed local people and asked them to ‘orchestrate’ their laughs to create different effects: hysterical laughs, nervous ones, wicked and so on. As most of Okón’s works, *Canned Laughter* is another near-sociological experiment executed for the camera, which blends staged situations, documentation and improvisation in order to question ingrained ideas of reality, truth and morality.

Equally disturbing yet comic is Okón’s other piece in this exhibition, *Hausmeister* (2008). The video presents a solo performance by a German museum guard who, like a Beckett character reduced to speechlessness, pops in and out of a sort of crawl-space door, muttering, growling and gesturing unintelligibly at the camera in a lather of territoriality. It could be seen as a meditation on Keynes’s ‘animal spirits’ and their most pervasive effects in contemporary economic life, but also a poetic investigation of our relationship with other creatures in the world or with art itself, both disempowered by our insatiable urges.

**Larissa Sansour’s** interdisciplinary work is immersed in current political realities, with a focus on the dichotomy of belonging to and being removed from the very same piece of land. With a mixture of computer generated imagery, live actors and arabesque electronica soundtrack, her sci-fi short *Nation Estate* (2012) offers a dystopian yet humorous approach to the deadlock in the Middle East. The artist proposes a vertical solution to Palestinian statehood, in which Palestinians have their state in the form of a single skyscraper: the Nation Estate. One colossal high-rise houses the entire Palestinian population, now finally living the high life: Jerusalem is on the 13th floor, Ramallah on the 14th floor, Sansour’s native Bethlehem on the 21st, and so on. By approximating the reality and complexity of life in Palestine and the Middle East to visual forms normally associated with entertainment, Sansour’s grandiose and quirkily humorous scheme clashes with the gravity of the topic. A Palestinian who reached the moon in *A Space Exodus* (2010) has made the journey to Cluj to further lobby for an optimistic Palestinian future.

**W. Mark Sutherland’s** art is an investigation of the play of signs found in conflicting principles of authority between language, sound, images and objects. His *Code X* (2009) is a collision of text and voice, generating networks of possible meanings. It is based on a dichotomy of containment (interactive computer program) and indeterminacy (automated computer program). In the interactive mode, the performer can create visual and sound poems, coding, decoding and jamming the *Code X*’s paragraph. In random-automated mode, *Code X* will replicate interactivity until the interactive program is re-engaged. The title, a pun on the word ‘codex’, meaning an ancient manuscript, also refers to the myriad of cultural codes that permeate our lives: linguistic, visual, programming, etc. As Hugo Ball could have said back in 1916: “In a typically compressed way, the work shows the conflict of the vox humana with a reverberating world overtaken by global and digital sublime, whose rhythm and noise are ineluctable”. **I believe we can call it the Dada Manifesto of 2016, shall we?**

**Kenneth Tin-Kin Hung** has been called the “John Heartfield of the digital era”. Like Hartfield, who developed a photomontage technique and turned it into a form of social critique, Hung’s meticulously researched works, composed entirely of imagery appropriated from cyberspace, expose injustice, corruption and hypocrisy, reflect on a call for social change, and shed a light on issues of today, which are bound to have historical impact. *Shit Wars - The Shit Awakens* addresses the increasing polarization of American politics by culture jamming pop culture imagery such as *Star Wars*, *The Hunger Games*, *Games of Thrones*, etc. By employing the method of détournement, the artist questions the power of politics and its effects on manufacturing public consent, while investigating how social media shapes our opinions on global politics. As the *New York Times* says, “Mr Hung does not propose any solutions, but by hilariously highlighting the exasperating, salacious and mendacious inanity of a hyper-mediated political process, he performs a valuable public service”.



## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

**Guy Ben-Ner** [www.postmastersart.com](http://www.postmastersart.com)  
**Luchezar Boyadjiev** [www.galeriefeinkost.com](http://www.galeriefeinkost.com)  
**Paul Buck** [bit.ly/1Ypb1Y1](http://bit.ly/1Ypb1Y1)  
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