

## Moment no. 2 : Rodrigo Ghattas-Pérez

As part of the exhibition *27DAGE (27DAYS)*, f.eks. organizer Scott William Raby initiated a discussion with artist Rodrigo Ghattas-Pérez about his artistic practice and work in progress, especially with Verdensrommet, his “restivist” practice, and upcoming work with The Union (NO), a.o.

The second of three “publishing moments” activating f.eks.’s past, present, and upcoming work, this text coincides with the exhibition’s de-installation, culminating f.eks.’s month-long physical presence at Art Hub Copenhagen in February 2022.



Banner designed by Oslo-Helsinki based design studio [Blank Blank](#) for the Verdensrommet petition campaign of 2021. Photo: Verdensrommet

**Scott William Raby:** Perhaps a good starting point is your backstory and how you ended up living and working in Norway. When we first met each other, we discussed your family history, and how this relates to different movements, locations, and cultures. It brings up socio-political circumstances around cultural mobility and the freedom of movement in the arts and elsewhere – and the lack thereof. I’m wondering if you can begin by talking about this cultural mobility and your place within it – what are your thoughts on this need to move artistically and the politics of who has access to do so?

**Rodrigo Ghattas-Pérez:** I’ve been living in Norway for the past five years, and before that was roaming around as a young, emerging artist. There was a really important personal moment when I realized I’m missing part of my identity, my culture, which is the Palestinian side of my family as I hadn’t met them yet at that point in time. As a Latin American artist, with a Peruvian mother and a Palestinian father, I began to investigate my past. A few years back, I ended up going to Bethlehem for the first time and this was a moment of realization when I connected more deeply to the struggle of Palestinians as well as my family’s own struggles, which opened up different layers of personal introspection for me.

As a middle class person pursuing an artistic practice in Peru and not having to deal with the Palestinian struggle, I found it important to try to connect to this aspect of my family history that I wasn’t personally experien-

cing in my daily life. This was also a part of trying to push forward some curiosities and interests beyond my individual relationship to my own background and context back in Peru. A pursuit of knowledge and seeking a broad minded approach to understanding the way I was interconnected to the history of displacement, struggle, and resistance of my own family and others was important. Relatedly, I started to question how the practices of survival present in my family history could inform my own art and life practices. I was thinking about this in relation to the strong grassroots organizing in both Latin America and in Palestine, which I'm quite proud of how much this culture is rooted in my different ancestries. I took inspiration in this history of self-organization from my different lineage, and tried to learn from the processes of people coming together collectively – for them, it's sometimes essential for survival.

This history inspired what became a motto for me – *how can I develop a practice that is not just a social critique, but extends beyond this?* How can I develop a practice that is not only an unorthodox way of thinking, but rather tries to blend these different experiences, wisdom, and develop critical curiosity? That was something I really wanted to do with my artistic practice – to envision how it can travel within different latitudes – not necessarily within the physical way of taking a plane and going somewhere – but really try to develop different strategies and tactics to help knowledge and tools enter other spheres and thus to be able to find common ground with allies in other countries and contexts.

Now being an immigrant for several years, you begin to understand the bureaucratic burdens and everyday sensibilities around a system built toward “othering” that tries to separate people and fragment the notion of what it is to “be together.” In this chaotic path and process of trying to understand myself, I bumped into bureaucratic checkpoints and legalities that made me want to push boundaries, and find stimulation and energy toward unexpected opportunities out of the most complicated moments. This is especially true when you are an artist wanting to cross borders and settle in a different country or a different geography.

**SWR:** Your father was a Palestinian immigrant to Peru and met your mother who is Peruvian, and this is the genesis of these two cultures in your life, correct? This is actually not super common, but there are some small groups of Palestians that immigrated to Peru to work in specific jobs, right?

**RGP:** That's right, my father was born in Bethlehem, Palestine and migrated to Peru in the 70's. My mother is actually not from the capital city in Peru, she's from the northern city of Tumbes. Coincidentally, my ancestors were the first ones to meet the Spanish colonial power when they arrived in what we know as Peru in 1532. These struggles in how mobility really happens in different contexts, not only in Europe, but through the crisis of migration and with refugees became more relevant. In 2020, there were approximately 272 million immigrants worldwide, of which 84 million were forcibly displaced.<sup>1</sup> That is also a point of understanding – to realize how others walk in life or are forced to do so in a particular way. It can be incredibly difficult to access different foreign systems, and for many they need to live in a permanent survival mode.

**SWR:** Definitely. I try to have some self-awareness around this issue as I do have some privilege, but from my position as an immigrant, I can speak to what you said about the overly bureaucratic and legal burdens and how these have been super problematic in my own experience. This is a background in which one can develop a practice beyond social critique – a critical curiosity – to use your words – and in your instance, your roots seem to inform this. Many of your projects also directly reflect upon these bureaucratic parameters, laws, regulations, income regulations, and visa requirements, but also the social, cultural, and linguistic challenges in relation to immigration that are faced through this cultural mobility – or immobility – that you find yourself a part of. How does this play out for you in Norway – or rather, how do you see your own conditions right now?

**RGP:** This has only become present in my practice for the last couple of years. I didn't have a level of understanding where I could have mature thoughts to put into practice regarding these issues – it's a very fresh introspection. The past two years have been quite unique with the pandemic, and that's when I found the momentum to tap into this rebellious spirit and formulate a project, intention, or a series of skill sets toward pinning down the real struggles and complications that arise when one's cultural mobility is stagnant. Now, in the “post-pandemic” moment there is a lot of time away from all of the mundane routines many of us inside and outside of

the arts had previously been experiencing. You could just pop-in and enter different spaces much more easily. That temporary visitation of different cultural scenes, art venues, and arts infrastructures in different places were much more available and at your disposal – despite this we've seen the first infrastructures to be closed during the covid-19 pandemic were museums, cultural venues, sports, and the arts. Also, large indoor and various public spaces.

Simply stated, I wanted to find an innovative way to be of service to others at this time. How could I apply my practice differently? How could I build other kinds of accessibility in times of physical impossibility? I also wanted to give voice to how my closest colleagues and myself were feeling about our own individual stories, moments, and how we suddenly didn't have a safety net.

**SWR:** It wasn't necessarily only about having more time and space to be more introspective and invent new infrastructures, but you were also faced with pressing, new realities. How did the pandemic change your circumstances as an immigrant in Norway? We had spoken about this, comparing our situations in Denmark and Norway, realizing they were quite different in relation to our visa requirements. For you, it was a transformation about how the pandemic actually affected how you are allowed to exist in Norway.

**RGP:** Yeah, for sure. It was an impossibility of making a living – quite literally.

**SWR:** Isn't there an economic threshold one needs to earn to reside in Norway, but you weren't allowed to work to meet your minimum economic threshold due to the pandemic, right? On top of that, there was no relief package for immigrant artists to stay in the country. It seems like a massively almost unsurvivable contradiction.

**RGP:** Yes, several of the welfare systems were working against each other, and many artists from abroad - among other groups – were caught in the middle. You always have exceptions, but due to the pandemic a lot of us became the exception all at once. If you need to show 250,000 Norwegian Krone (about 30,000 USD) in annual income for your visa, but you cannot work because all of the events are canceled or postponed, there's no alternative for your labor situation, and you enter an endless loop of not being able to provide for yourself. In addition, as a skilled worker you are not allowed to work outside of your field of "expertise". In that sense, it became clear to me how fragile the artist economy was, but it can be even more vulnerable when you are a non-EU artist. Even though there is a new government now, the covid crisis hit when the right wing party was in power.<sup>2</sup> This happened at a moment, where artists didn't have a chance of bargaining for a solution, and I believe we (the artists working independently outside of institutions) didn't have a system in place to respond quickly enough as a coordinated effort between artists to face the struggles we were experiencing. Don't get me wrong – Norway has a lot of really well-articulated associations and trade unions, but I still feel that we, the artists as a self-organized group, were not organized enough to push for these compensation schemes to come our way or to better our economy during this time. This is despite the fact we tried hard to lobby the government to review its policies. Things are changing now in this strange space of a transitional pandemic to post-pandemic moment.

**SWR:** These conditions are the pretext for Verdensrommet's founding, correct? The organization started during the corona pandemic as a response to these conditions – could you describe what Verdensrommet is – what is it working on now, and what are its notable achievements or ambitions?

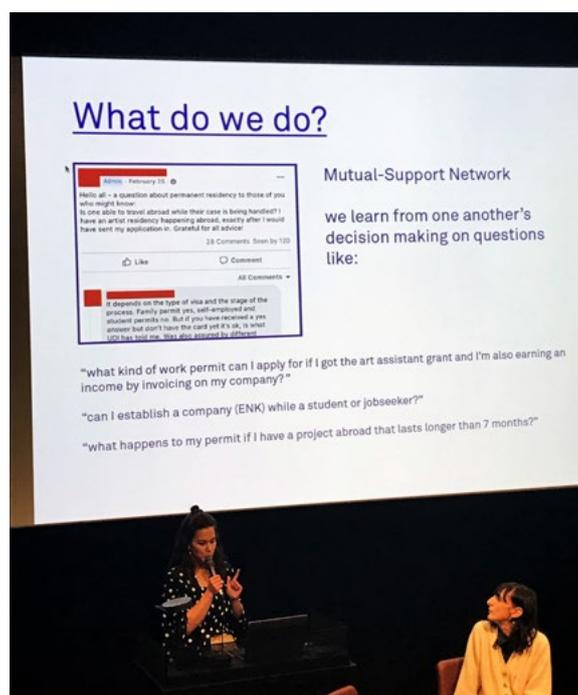


The Migrant Assembly, *Participatory Imaginaries For Rest And The Future Of Retirement*. Performative moment depicting *The Production Of Rest* by artist Karin Sletten. Organized by Verdensrommet. Eidsvoll plass (Stortinget), Oslo 2021. Photo: Jacky Jaan-Yuan Kuo

**RGP:** It wasn't entirely a premeditated idea – it went rather quickly from ranting on social media about how problematic the situation was for many artists of non-EU origins to organizing online.

**SWR:** Which is important because non-EU artists have special conditions they have to follow in their visa category, correct? As an EU citizen, you can live in Norway essentially just like a Norwegian citizen, but as a non-EU immigrant, you have a different status.

**RGP:** You do, whatever your visa is – whether it is employed or self-employed, you have to renew it every year and you have different restrictions (especially economic conditions) than a regular European Union citizen moving to Norway, so you have to deal with much more of a bureaucratic burden and need to find many workarounds...



Verdensrommet keynote at UKS' *100 Years of Conviviality Seminar: Artists Organizing Artists*, Deichman Bjorvika, Oslo 2021. Photo: Verdensrommet

**RGP:** As I was saying, there were rants on social media about this, and then one of the most progressive artist-run institutions in Norway called UKS commissioned a text about the situation of immigrant artists in Norway, so I had a chance to write about this and managed to lay out a bit of what the challenges for artists trying to immigrate to Norway are, and how difficult it is to remain there as a cultural worker or creative professional.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the key question posed was – how do we build translocal and sustainable artistic practices in the long-run?

Then, my artist friend Gabrielle Paré and I came up with this idea of trying to gather as many artists in the country as possible that were sharing similar conditions to hear them out; to share knowledge, tips, information, and stories about what it is to be a non-EU artist in Norway.

Suddenly, we became a larger group of artists discussing this and helping each other. We wanted to get to know other people and their struggles, but then the intense labor of maintaining a network, and trying to make information circulate around as much as possible comes into the mix. Despite the challenges, we saw people contributing hours, time, and energy as volunteers to Verdensrommet, which allowed us to work on different petitions to the government, different campaigns, create events – mostly virtual because of the pandemic, since we didn't have a chance to meet physically.<sup>4</sup> We felt some level of solidarity from different friends, colleagues, institutions and others in the country who were supporting us in our demands – 2,500 people from different fields.<sup>5</sup> In the early stages, we didn't really aim at challenging immigration policies, we were only advocating for the ability to work. We were trapped by a system that was not allowing us to do our job, and we didn't have any welfare security either.

We then became interested in understanding artists' economies in the country, especially for this group, and how artists' labor conditions and immigration are intertwined with different economic problems. Now there are close to 200 artists in Verdensrommet's network. We're working on an immigration clinic where we're uniting lawyers, policy makers, and artists to make a series of practical and informative workshops that will hopefully concretize into a proposal for reimagining the immigration policies for artists and self-employed people in the country.



The Migrant Assembly, *Participatory Imaginaries For Rest And The Future Of Retirement*, Organized by Verdensrommet, Eidsvoll plass (Stortinget), Oslo 2021. Photo: Jacky Jaan-Yuan Kuo

**SWR:** This is quite a shift from social media “rants” to finding solidarity around the issues you are experiencing that are problematic in your daily life – organizing legal, political, and sector related work, that has leverage on the broader scope of the immigration policy of a whole country for a class of vulnerable people is quite remarkable. Do you think you will actually be able to make a structural change?

**RGP:** We don’t know yet. That wasn’t necessarily the initial goal, but Verdensrommet is trying to open up a space for other ways of affecting change. That’s why this is seen as an artistic process in and of itself, a critical artistic project based on tactical positioning from a place of autonomy to access political life, working with methodologies across other sectors, doing transdisciplinary collaborations with others that have knowledge and competence to provide us with the tools, consultancy, and advice we need in order to formulate larger demands.

One of our major issues is the lack of communication between different public systems. In fact, it’s not that the legalities and the policies are actually always wrong, but it happens that there are so many gaps in understanding how artists’ economies actually work, and so those policies make it impossible to produce a harmonious, integrated system that allows cultural workers to progress their work in the arts or in culture in general. It is a complicated matter. Also, we don’t want to advocate only for ourselves, but also understand that once you make a commitment to a larger community, it cannot be a commitment for one project or one moment, but must be a long-term engagement. In that sense, we never had an intention to equate our hustle to the same degree as refugees or asylum seekers in the country. We don’t want to overshadow their life struggles, but rather we want to produce tools and strategies that can also be of use to them or other groups – more cultural mobility, improving immigration policies, formulating greater access to different systems, etc. In this way, systems should be reciprocal and work *for* the people, not against them. That’s something that I hope we manage to put forward with our work.

**SWR:** Sometimes I wonder how the unique qualities of art facilitate a political project like this. I’m wondering if there are special characteristics art has – hopefully, I’m not looking too closely from my own position with a naive gloss that art is overly special when, for example, perhaps striking Uber drivers could have a broader impact for precarious workers. However, speaking about this in terms of a critical artistic practice, I’m curious to know what you think are some of the advantages, nuances, or notable qualities art provides you in relation to this socio-political organizational work?

**RGP:** It’s important for art to remain autonomous so it can provide critical analysis and test out non-capitalist relations and new propositions. When you have the opportunity to “hack” the loop, it becomes essential to anticipate precarious futures, precisely because we are in a precarious field we might have additional tools to deal with this situation. We want to overcome highly bureaucratic systems, and so we use adhocracy – a flexible, adaptable, informal and self-organized form of organization as a remedy to confront bureaucracy.<sup>6</sup>

What adhocracy is really about is relying on self-organization rather than norms or rules that dictate the way you solve certain problems or situations. By bringing people together from different perspectives, that’s where the power and potential of art lies. Also, art can create these generatively strange equations where people with different competencies and different perspectives can come together and think otherwise. Not only that, but also anticipate moments that have not happened yet, but will come because there are already patterns, complications, or difficulties that are present in our current time that will repeat themselves, or will be a part of our lives in the future.

Art is a productive space to “propose” and have a critical space to “institute otherwise.”<sup>7</sup> How can we forward affirmative ethics toward commoning and collectivizing around political struggles, but also reshape society over time? This issue is part of a system of values that we need to flip entirely, redesign, or infiltrate somehow. It’s a symptom - the lack of disregard for the value artists or creative professionals produce – it is a symptom of a system of values that is broken in our socio-economic reality.<sup>8</sup>

In order to change how things work, we need to change how we value things. This can only come as a long-term practice of instituting or proposing otherwise, that’s how I see the potential for artistic practice to move across

these different boundaries somehow.

**SWR:** From your position, context, and experience, do you think the critical potential of artistic practice applied discursively in different social contexts has a chance to succeed where other practices have failed?

**RGP:** I try not to be idealistic, and as such I also advocate for practical intelligence. We need to step away from the notion of the artist as a savior, or hero, or the arts as the only place where effective and affective change can come from. I might be pessimistic, but art is not the place or space where I'm finding the kind of resistance I'd like to see or experience, but that's my own intuition. I think there are other fields and social movements we can learn from that are waiting for new connections to be generated, and art should activate more of these connections to bring diverse thinkers and activists together – people who are willing to collaborate, formulate, and “riff” together with their different knowledge – that's when unconventional proposals can be created.

**SWR:** I find the most generative camaraderie with educated artists who can't necessarily find their practice within institutional frameworks - these are my favorite group of practitioners – the crudgumoney, critical, sometimes anti-artists who often have a political grievance, or some legitimate reason for hating the norms and values of the art sector – these are the people I find the most allegiance and compassion with. This also relates to a specific attitude, a spirit, in rejecting, or being rejected by the hegemony of the art world, which I think is reflective of the broader global capitalistic framework.

Of course, the art sector is exceptional in some ways as well. This is something that we have discussed throughout your residency period at *f.eks. AIR* in Aalborg in 2021.<sup>9</sup> For example, *Verdensrommet* examines the artist's role in a broader framework of policy making, legal, financial, cultural rules, values, and works toward reshaping these in a better way. *f.eks. AIR* was designed to create a space, or place, for immaterial practices that weren't anti-social, studio-based, market-driven object-based practices. We are similar in that we found mutual sympathy in rejecting many of these outdated art world stereotypes, feeling alienated in this hegemonic depoliticized framework, and how it spits out people who are critical of this depoliticization. On top of this, there are often toxic cultures and work environments that are not just problematic socially and psychologically, but are often boring, overly safe, and not subversive enough. I'm wondering if you can discuss or describe these conditions in your own practice. Stated differently, what is valuable about infrastructuring within the art field, or developing new artistic contexts to operate within?

**RGP:** I was never interested in someone else setting the rhythm of my practice. I wanted to find my own ways of dealing with art as practice, so I started approaching every project not as a project – I just call it a project for practical reasons - rather, it's a diverse series of ongoing training where the projects deliberately don't come to completion. It's really about testing different foundations and transforming different conceptual frameworks in order to make some of these ideas a semi-reality – a proposal for what we envision. Also, a tactical and strategic sense is important to make the subjects of interest, exercises, and training encounters more open-ended.

**SWR:** How does *restivism* fit into this?

**RGP:** That is a good example. People ask me “are you an artist?” or “are you an activist?” I reply: “I'm not an activist, I'm a restivist” – people often just laugh. They'll ask “are you lazy? Don't you do anything?”, and I might occasionally end up quoting Paul Lafargue's famous text *The Right To Be Lazy*.<sup>10</sup>

It's really about how “grind culture” and capitalist routines are actually dictating the way we live our lives and experience time. It is about reclaiming our capacity to mutate together with time and allow ourselves to build and put to use moments where we don't have to be assigned stars for our productivity. We are not necessarily equal in how productive we are, but there are other ways of resisting “grind culture”. Even if someone is doing social work, humanitarian work, or wanting to change the world – if there is no consciousness around what it means to sustain the collective body, if we cannot arrive at a position where individual humans have the tools to take care of themselves then it is not possible to sustain long-term practices, friendships, relationships, networks, camaraderie – it is impossible for us to arrive at a moment of collective sustainability.

That is why it is critical to look into restivism as a form of alternative economy – an intangible economy – that is not based on monetary exchange. I try to provide others that self-define as activists a space of rest for them to keep doing what they are doing (changing the world), and this pause, this slowing-down is essential to any activist proposal. As such, I like to work behind the scenes with the aesthetics and the logistics of “sustaining”, trying to support collective formulations for different groups trying to make a difference.

**SWR:** I experienced this first hand with your restivist performance, which was probably the most intriguing, relaxing, properly holistic art event I’ve ever been a part of. We went to the spa, had a saunagås, and got into the pool – the heat, the cold water, the spirits afterward. I don’t want this to seem like I’m rehashing a hedonistic moment, but instead you used your artistic position to intervene in f.eks.’s work, and make us – along with our audience – relax at the sauna and “slow down” as the art event itself.



Aalborg-based artists, activists, and other audience members decompressing during Ghattas-Pérez’s “Restivist Sauna” session hosted by *f.eks.* at Haraldslund Vand og Kulturhus, Aalborg, 2021. Photo: Rikke Ehlers Nilsson

During this performative moment, you also made a speech act that really sophisticatedly framed the event historically around one of the spirit makers Harald Jensen, who worked at the former Akvavitvej factory, where the new residency you were staying was located at Spritten in Aalborg. Jensen wanted to be an artist, but was discouraged by his parents, who dissuaded him from pursuing a career in the arts.

He then became a well known spirit maker – some of the Akvavit spirits bare his name, and are well-regarded as classics – this passion to be an “artist as a spirit maker” was made evident in the eventual philanthropic gifting of his private property – now public land - to the local municipality that is today the community leisure center. It is a little oasis in the quickly gentrifying Aalborg, where the public pool and sauna are located, as a dedicated site of “leisure” and “culture” – a perfect site for restivism.

This context is important because on the one hand it shows how you infiltrated into the *f.eks.* system and made us and our audience rest, relax, and become temporary “restivists”, but also reveals this artistic gesture rooted

in site, context, and critical reflection.<sup>11</sup> It goes to this question related to Verdensrommet, about how Verdensrommet also acts as a critical artistic practice, across multiple sectors, multiple strata of social and legal life. I'm wondering how you see restivism in this process, because we had discussed a fine line between being a hedonist and being a restivist in relation to its critical dimension.



(Left Image) Audience gathered at Ghattas-Pérez's *Restivist Sauna* at the former *f.eks. AIR* location at Spritten, Aalborg, 2021. (Right Image) Pouring a snaps for audience members during the *Restivist Sauna* event, Aalborg, 2021. Photo: Rikke Ehlers Nilsson

**RGP:** Indeed, it is a fine line. At first, you might not understand the origins, but this practice is rooted in an African-American spirit of resistance – it is not called restivism there – that is something I came up with, but it takes different forms.<sup>12</sup> As I've phrased and in my own practice, restivism is where artists and activists try to use rest as a form of resistance against the neoliberal speed of life. In some ways, it is a post-capitalist or post-work approach – how can the world be experienced where capitalist logic is not dictating the way in which we experience work and life?<sup>13</sup> Restivism aims to help artists and activists intercept the logic of capitalism by trying to collectively “cut ourselves some slack”. This doesn't necessarily mean wasting time, or engaging in overly self-indulgent practices, but instead transforming the way we see labor, rethinking the way we see value, productivity, and trying to assemble a new set of values so that we don't feel guilty about being humans in the way we are supposed to be. This is in opposition to capitalism, which has the agenda of extraction, hyperproductivity, and hyper performance.

Restivism is not about victimhood either. It's not about trying to disregard the different struggles of people around the planet, because I also understand there is a certain privilege in trying to provide a space like this to artists and activists in a Scandinavian context who want to affect change. However, I'm against rhetoric of comparative struggle or pain – as I believe all who struggle in one way or another have the right to claim social justice for themselves, despite their different levels of “privilege”, however, this also demands a clear awareness of one's racial, class, gender, and other biases. At the same time I think if we tap into the unique nature of internationalism, then we need to keep rehearsing and creating new practices to be able to open up channels and systems so ideas can circulate across communities. For example, I'm more in sympathy with worker unions, and trying to see how practices like restivism can work together to rethink what the nature of labor is in today's society. It might be a long shot, but restivism might be one of the answers that could be implemented into a system that is otherwise highly exploitative. This is especially true if you look into how the economy of the artist – the artist as an entrepreneur, the artist as a consultant, the artist as “something” or “someone” else is so widespread, rather than the artist in and of themselves being deemed valuable enough.



*El Buen Vivir* at Hvervenbukta, biopolitical intervention, Oslo, 2021. The sail reads “Slutten på velferdsstaten nærmer seg...er vi klare for ‘El Buen Vivir’?” which translates to English as “The end of the welfare state is approaching...are we ready for ‘Living in Plenitude?’” Photo: Andrea Fritsvold

**SWR:** That’s a really good point to think about restivism as a tool in a system that is highly exploitative. Also, to think about this practice in relation to the work of labor unions, among other types of organizations is crucial. Speaking of, you’re also working on an artist-run initiative called *The Union* that is working on other forms of resistance. Maybe you can speak about *The Union* and this unique residency structure you’re co-developing? I know there are similar formats of “stay at home” residencies, but it’s almost like a grant you’ve initiated that is trying to provide free time and space for artists. Maybe you could describe *The Union*’s work and introduce the residency you are working on?

**RGP:** The Union started a couple of years ago, with a few different Oslo-based artist colleagues – Oscar de Carmen and Martinka Bobrikova – as we were thinking about what new initiatives Norway could benefit from. It evolved into a mediation platform in the arts for the public interest – at least this is something we are still working toward.

One of the projects we were developing was a “no-school” or an anti-school that would be reactionary to the hegemonic school systems of today. This was supposed to become a physical residency – we call it “residency” because we like to flip the traditional art formats – flip the concept of what a residency is, and make attempts to modify what an artist-in-residency experience could be. We were working toward that when the pandemic hit, so again it was impossible to meet physically. We quickly tried to adapt to it, and make a virtual residency working toward “no productivity” as another form of labor.

It also builds on this sort of restivism vibe – to provide theoretical, practical knowledge, and training to challenge power, and to build more sustainable, long-term artistic practices while also supporting “life practices.”<sup>14</sup> They are very much intertwined into how we think about art and how to use the residency format and public funding to provide artists with time and leisure in other situations. When we apply for funding, we don’t apply for funding per se, but we apply for funds to buy people’s time so that they can engage in concept making and rare situations like this. What we don’t do is provide a physical infrastructure that is a residency space itself, but

rather provide intangible infrastructure in which you can share skills, connect with other artists that are having a difficult time, and facilitate trying to figure out how artistic practices can develop in new ways.

This is also a moment for people with confusion or doubts about where to go in their artistic path. This is something I experienced a few years ago. I had the opportunity to be a part of a place like this, and then I decided to move away from conventional art making into a different kind of practice, which I'm still trying to nurture. *The Union* is trying to facilitate reflections around this, for other artists that might even want to leave the art market or the art field altogether - to say "fuck it" I'm done with these norms and develop new trajectories. This comes with a lot of logistics, and managerial challenges if one is going into a self-employment situation, a more radical position, or advancing their ideas into a new system of grants, for example. We try to provide both moments of fiction and reality for artists and other people to explore these issues on their own terms.



*The Common LivingRoom* at The Union, consisted of a series of informal Covid-free and creative meet-ups in our living room in Old Town, Oslo 2021. Photo: The Union

**SWR:** You are also working on a project proposal for Documenta 15 – which is on standby, or is in process – can you tell us what you've proposed and what is the project's status?

**RGP:** This was a proxy invitation to myself and another artist, so this is a collaborative endeavor, which is currently on standby. We've proposed to create "free economic zones", which are based on post war 1950's industrial models, where some countries started to set up special economic zones with their own financial logic, in order to promote a city or nation in a more attractive manner for investors so different economic development could happen more easily. The idea is to challenge this notion and use the idea of free economic zones in a different way and make them more of a post-capitalist attempt to play against the economic logic we have at

the moment. The idea is to create different special economic zones with their own unique logic and protocols across the city, led by different contributors that run small, outdoor public spaces, where games, workshops, or moments in which the audience and the public can explore together and somehow be guided on how we can otherwise rethink our economy. Also, how that economy might relate to its context was important – it was a site-specific economic proposal or economic “challenge” for people to experience across the city – and try to connect it to their own realities.

**SWR:** You also just came back from Peru recently. Similarly, in relation to conversations around alternative economies, you’ve been speaking about different projects thinking about public housing. You were discussing a project on a post-capitalist or decommmodified artistic practice in relation to housing in Peru – how does it relate, but in a different way, to the projects you’re working on in a European context that have a different context or stability?



Audience member reading Ghattas-Pérez’s fanzine *Dirt Exchanges* v.1 as part of *f.eks. AIR’s Open House* launch event, Aalborg, 2021. Photo: Rikke Ehlers Nilsson

**RGP:** This goes back to anticipating precarious futures, and I’ve become obsessed with thinking about how the climate and other crises we’re experiencing at the moment will shape our futures. It is a part of an exercise thinking about how we can be ready for a future that doesn’t look so bright. I don’t want to be pessimistic, but because of the likelihood of crises, I am training and trying to initiate these different projects, e.g. what happens with public housing. I see how real estate and public housing in a so-called social democratic country like Norway is highly neoliberal – it is still a system that is built on inheritance wealth as income is not redistributed equally across the population. One begins to think about the future – I’m currently squatting in a squatter friend’s studio because he’s away, but this is also a personal footnote on the difficulties of what the long-term housing and social housing situation is like in Norway. When you don’t have the same resources or infrastructures, and thinking about Peru, I feel there is an urgency for an infrastructure that will allow people, a community, to come together and modify the rules of neoliberal capitalism, wealth accumulation, and accessibility toward something that should be a right, like public housing. That’s why I started working with some friends – they are

not artists themselves, but we started working on combining different knowledge, and bringing people from different communities together to look into the economies of reciprocity and mutual aid.<sup>15</sup> It sounds quite utopian...

Anyway, we are designing a public/private cultural house for a diverse group of people from farmers, to fishermen, to artists, to musicians, to hydro engineers, and many others to live together within. We're designing this housing proposal as a way of exercising ourselves in a scenario where we lack the things that we have access to today – energy, health care, employment, welfare, food, etc. – that will likely be more scarce in the future.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is according to a World Economic Forum report on Global Migration from January of 2020, see here: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/iom-global-migration-report-international-migrants-2020/>

<sup>2</sup> The conservative party and the so-called “progress” party (FRP) are well known for their right-wing, anti-immigration policies.

<sup>3</sup> For further information about UKS, see here: <https://www.uks.no/uks-union/>

<sup>4</sup> See Verdensrommet’s manifesto here: [https://verdensrommet.network/wp-content/44abf-verdensrommet-manifesto\\_2021.pdf](https://verdensrommet.network/wp-content/44abf-verdensrommet-manifesto_2021.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.change.org/p/beskytt-kunstnere-og-kulturarbeidere-i-norge-med-statsborgerskap-uten-for-eu-oes?utm\\_source=share\\_petition&utm\\_medium=custom\\_url&recruited\\_by\\_id=3934ce10-b38e-11e8-b347-1bd6c290d7cd](https://www.change.org/p/beskytt-kunstnere-og-kulturarbeidere-i-norge-med-statsborgerskap-uten-for-eu-oes?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=3934ce10-b38e-11e8-b347-1bd6c290d7cd)

<sup>6</sup> A New Museum exhibition highlights the ideas and potential roles of Adhocracy in an interdisciplinary artistic practice, see here: <https://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/adhocracy>

<sup>7</sup> See more about utopian, anti-capitalist, and other speculative interdisciplinary strategies for re-inventing new societies through creative practice at *Training for the Not Yet* at BAK: Voor de actual Kunst, Utrecht, Netherlands, <https://trainingforthenotyet.net>

<sup>8</sup> Nika Dubrovsky and David Graeber’s conversation on art and communism informs these notions and elaborates on both present inequalities and speculative futures. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/nika-dubrovsky-and-david-graeber-another-art-world-part-1-art-communism-and-artificial-scarcity>

<sup>9</sup> Which is framed around trying to create a network for “misfit” practices within the art world, or an infrastructure for many different types of marginal, alternative, or non-normative artistic practices and approaches. See more about f.eks. AIR here: <https://f-x.dk/f-eks-AIR>

<sup>10</sup> See Paul Lafargue’s *The Right to be Lazy*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lafargue/1883/lazy/preface.htm>

<sup>11</sup> The *Restivist Sauna* event that took place in Aalborg in autumn of 2021 is detailed further here: <https://www.rodrigoghattas.art/2021/11/14/reading-event-on-restivism/>

<sup>12</sup> Trisha Hershey highlights some of the Principles that inform “restivism” in her podcast *Rest as Resistance* episode 185 - see here: <https://forthewild.world/listen/tricia-hersey-on-rest-as-resistance-185>

<sup>13</sup> See Helen Hester and Will Stronge’s article on Post-work misconceptions, <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/post-workmisconceptions2/>

<sup>14</sup> The Gasworks produced podcast series *True Currency: About Feminist Economics* is of relevance in articulating life practices further, see here: <https://www.gasworks.org.uk/exhibitions/true-currency-about-feminist-economics-podcast-2020-07-16/>

<sup>15</sup> Ecuadorian artist José Luis Macas Paredes writes interestingly about the Andean concept of Ayni or “reciprocity” as a strategy within artistic contexts. <https://coleccioncisneros.org/editorial/debate/contribucion/ayni-trans-action>