

AHC : Newsletter #33 : November 2023

## INTRODUKTION

Art Hub Copenhagen (AHC) er netop hjemvendt fra dette års Performa-biennale i New York, hvor otte billedkunstnere var inviteret med til at blive en del af biennalen: [Søren Aagaard](#), [Jane Jin Kaisen](#), [SUPERFLEX](#), [Ayoung Kim](#), [Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi](#), [Lina Hashim](#), [Kristoffer Akxelbo](#) og [Hannah Heilmann](#).

Den danske performancekunstner [Filip Vest](#), som tidligere har været i residency hos AHC, var også i byen, og vi bad ham om at være vores alle sammens øjne og ører på biennalen. For foruden AHC's eget program af talks, øl-servering og performance, hvad fandt så ellers sted på de talrige scener, som Performa satte liv til rundt om i byen? Hvad rører sig på den internationale performancekunstscene? Og hvad gør RoseLee Goldberg, grundlægger af den nu 20 år gamle biennale, sig af tanker om om dette års jubilæumsudgave? Det er nogle af de spørgsmål, som Filip Vest undersøger og reflekterer over.

Billederne undervejs her i brevet portrætterer de talks og værker, som AHC bragte til biennalen, [og du finder mange flere her](#). Du kan desuden meget snart læse Filip Vests anmeldelse af Performa23 og hele interviewet med RoseLee Goldberg på netmediet [bastard](#).

## INTRODUCTION

Art Hub Copenhagen (AHC) has just returned as a contributor at this year's Performa Biennial in New York, where eight visual artists were invited to be part of the biennial: [Søren Aagaard](#), [Jane Jin Kaisen](#), [SUPERFLEX](#), [Ayoung Kim](#), [Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi](#), [Lina Hashim](#), [Kristoffer Akxelbo](#), and [Hannah Heilmann](#).

Danish performance artist [Filip Vest](#), who has previously been in residency at AHC, was also in town, and we asked him to be our collective eyes and ears at the biennial. Apart from AHC's own program of talks, beer serving, and performance, what else took place on the numerous stages that Performa brought to life around the city? What's happening on the international performance art scene? And what are RoseLee Goldberg's thoughts, the founder of the 20-year-old biennial, about this year's anniversary edition? These are some of the questions that Filip Vest investigates and reflects on in this letter.

The images here all portray the talks and works from the program of AHC at Performa23, [and there are many more to find here](#).

You can also soon read Filip Vest's review of Performa23 and the entire interview with RoseLee Goldberg on the online media [bastard](#).

## PERFORMA23 – EN BIENNALE FYLDT MED ORD

af Filip Vest

"Jeg forstår ikke, hvad der er så spændende ved hende Nora Turato... Snakker og råber hun ikke bare?" spørger en kurator mig i køen til den kroatisk kunstner Nora Turatos performance på performancebiennalen Performa23. Dagen før ryger der en kommentar fra en anden besker til Søren Aagaards performance, om at "de godt nok snakker meget". Og Performa23 er virkelig fyldt med ord. Ikke bare i det pakkede ambitiøse talk-program, men også i de forskellige performances. Der er tætskrevne manuskripter, approprieret tekst, digte, sange og beskrivelser af performances, som aldrig har fundet sted.

Performa er en biennale for performancekunst, der blev grundlagt i 2004 af kunsthistoriker og kurator RoseLee Goldberg. I de sidste snart 20 år har festivalen udforsket performancekunstens rolle i kunsthistorien og samtiden gennem kommissioneringer af nye værker af både amerikanske og internationale kunstnere, talks, udstillinger, videoer og publikationer.

Programmet for Performa23 er løst inspireret af konceptkunstens arv, ligesom tidligere udgaver har taget inspiration fra Dada og andre kunsthistoriske strømninger. RoseLee Goldberg kalder det ikke selv et decideret tema, men et "historisk anker", da jeg mødes og interviewer hende om Performas og performancekunstens historie. "'Er performance tilbage?' spørger folk mig altid..., men performance var aldrig væk," siger Goldberg og peger på, hvordan performancekunsten altid har været integreret i kunsthistorien. "Performancekunsten har været afgørende i både Konstruktivismen, Bauhaus, Dada, Surrealismen og alle mulige andre strømninger." Så Performa peger både tilbage, samtidig med at det med sine kommissioneringer af nye værker prøver at pege fremad. "Jeg vil se noget, jeg ikke har set før," siger Goldberg. På den måde har Performa altid en fod i kunsthistorien og en fod i samtiden.

Det er ikke, fordi det er helt åbenbart, hvordan konceptkunsten spiller en rolle i kurateringen af Performa i år, men det er tydeligt, at mange af værkerne i denne udgave af Performa er meget optaget af sprog. Der bliver rigtigt nok snakket meget. I Nora Turatos performance gør hun det ud for en slags coach. Med bare fødder træder hun selvsikkert ind med et halvt misfornøjet, halvt snedigt ansigtsudtryk og leverer en manisk monolog om selvhjælp og selvrealisering. "Hvad har forhindret dig i at lykkes?" spørger hun, og sådan fortsætter performanceen i en strøm af tekst hentet fra diverse selvhjælpscoaches og influencere og deres let truende sprog: "Du har gjort dig selv syg. Du er ikke god for dig." Nora Turato gør præcis, som hun plejer i sine performances, "snakker og råber", som kuratoren i køen sagde. Men hun har en enorm karisma, så man ikke kan lade være at blive hevet med. Desværre løfter teksten sig aldrig rigtig, og mens jeg lytter til Turatos svada, tænker jeg, at ulempen ved at arbejde med approprieret materiale, er, at vi kender det så godt i forvejen. Der er dermed ingen overraskelser, og det føles bare som at blive præsenteret for kunstnerens researchmateriale.

Søren Aagaards performancemiddag *CAFE ZERO – a nomadic smoke and fermentation house with no seasons* gør også brug af et langt teksttungt manuskript, men her har teksten en mere muumlende kvalitet. I performanceen står en flok kokke i en postapokalyptisk scenografi med

telte og tøj i 'tie-die', designet i samarbejde med den danske designer Anne Sofie Madsen. Kokkene laver mad og småsnakker sammen om bakterier i et gastronomisk og politisk perspektiv. På et tidspunkt spekulerer én af dem i, at befolkningens besættelse af at lave surdej under coronapandemien måske var en måde at kontrollere bakterier på for at føle, at man kunne kontrollere virussen. Performancen er ligesom Turatos fyldt med ord, men også fyldt med lyde og lugte: våde ting, der bliver klasket mod hinanden, hårde skaller, der bliver knust, skilt ad, rørt rundt, en klirren, en klakken, en sur lugt af hav og urter. Og til sidst får værket en anden dimension, da vi får lov at spise den eksperimenterende mad. Op til serveringen prøver kokkene at finde ud af, hvordan de skal præsentere maden for gæsterne, når der ingen årstider er at læne sig op ad længere. "Med den rette historiefortælling kommer det til at gå fint," siger den ene kok. Til sidst drukner historiefortællingen dog i publikums snak, og kokkenes mumlende samtale om bakterier er ikke længere til at adskille fra publikums småsnak, smasken og gnasken – måske intentionelt.

Netop historiefortælling spiller en rolle i flere af biennialens værker i år. Hvilke historier, vi fortæller og ikke fortæller - og hvordan. Den canadiske kunstner Marcel Dzamas performance *To Live on the Moon (For Lorca)* er løst baseret på Federico Garcia Lorcas aldrig realiserede manuskript *Trip to the Moon* fra 1929 og blander både live band, store kapper, sprællende fisk, månepersoner, guitar-spil og digtoplæsning i en fortælling om surrealisme og fascisme. Dzamas værk bliver desværre aldrig andet end en nostalgisk hommage til Lorca, der ikke bliver kontekstualiseret i forhold til samtiden. Performancen kæmper også med både at ville være en film og en performance, så performerne på scenen ender med at gøre præcis det samme, som der sker på filmen, der bliver projiceret bag dem, og det bliver lidt dobbeltkonfekt. Dzama har ikke før lavet performance, før han blev kommissioneret til Performa23, og det er en strategi som Performa generelt har arbejdet meget med som en slags benspænd. Det kan godt virke selvmodsiggende at have en biennale, der skal sætte fokus på performance, hvor man vælger at invitere kunstnere, der aldrig har lavet performance til at opføre værkerne. Og på mange måder er kommissioneringerne både Performas styrke og svaghed. Det er "trust and risk", som RoseLee Goldberg siger, men det er også "hit and miss". Og måske er det okay. I hvert fald giver det nogle uforudsigelige resultater.

"I'm Marcel Dzama", siger en af skuespillerne i starten af Dzamas performance, og sådan opererer mange af værkerne fra Performa23 hele tiden på et metaniveau og peger på deres egen produktion. Hvordan værkerne bliver til i mødet med deres publikum. Et andet eksempel på dette er en oplæsning af et teaterstykke af den iranske kunstner Nasim Ahmadpour, som finder sted som en del af et arrangement af magasinet Pages; et tosproget tidsskrift for scenekunst på farsi og engelsk, grundlagt af kunstnerne Nasrin Tabatabai og Babak Afrassiabi i 2004. Ahmadpours performative oplæsning tager form som en fikcionaliseret udgave af en juryproces i forbindelse med en iransk teaterfestival, hvor flere kunstnere endte med at trække sig. På scenen sidder fire performere, en af dem Ahmadpour, som spiller de fire jurymedlemmer, der inkluderer Ahmadpour selv (dog spillet af en anden performer for at forskyde skellet mellem virkelighed og fiktion). På en skærm bag dem står en række regibemærkninger for stykket med hvid tekst på sort. "Betragt din læsning af denne tekst som en performancekontrakt," står der i starten. Senere får vi beskrevet, hvordan performerne bytter plads og kommer ind igen, selvom det ikke sker i virkeligheden, og på et tidspunkt står der, at

en plakat bliver projiceret på skærmen, men vi får ikke lov at se den. På samme måde har vi heller ikke mulighed for at se de performances, der aldrig fandt sted, men må nøjes med at høre idéerne genfortalt. "Her er vi kun optaget af værker, der aldrig blev realiseret," siger en af jurymedlemmerne. Ahmadpours performance leger hele tiden med, hvad der bliver vist og ikke vist, og hvordan man kan genfortælle noget, der aldrig er sket. Eller med andre ord: Det er en performance, der næsten ikke sker, om en række performances, der aldrig skete.

Nogle gange bliver det hele en tand for meta, men samtidig føles det store fokus på tekst og inspirationen fra teater som et friskt pust i forhold til den danske kunstscene, hvor det 'teatraliske' stadig er skældsord i en performancekontekst, og der stadig generelt er en insisteren på ikke at fortælle historier, men at arbejde med mere abstrakte, 'durational' værker. I samme forbindelse er det interessant at bemærke, at flere af de venues, hvor de forskellige performances finder sted, også minder mere om klassiske teatervenues. Der er scener og stolerækker og slukket lys og ro, hvilket er noget, vi ellers ikke er vant til i en kunstkontekst, hvor vi typisk har et publikum, der går lidt mere til og fra performances. Det lader til at være en strategi fra Performas side, for som RoseLee Goldberg siger: "Det her er ikke bare noget, hvor du går ind og ud. Her kommer du ind og sætter dig en time og tænker, og så har du en samtale. Det jeg prøver at lave, er et slags socialt rum for en samtale om, hvad der foregår i kulturen." Det peger på en anden kultur, som Performa prøver at skabe i kunstrummet: Lad os sætte os ned og kigge på performancekunst, på samme måde som man gør det i danse- og teaterverdenen. Det synes jeg er en god strategi i en kunstverden, hvor performances ofte bare bliver et festligt indslag til åbningen og ikke altid får det rum, de kunne trives bedst i.

Andre af rummene i festivalen ligner dog mere de typiske kunstrum, med den eneste forskel at der er sat stole op. Et af dem er det rå industrielle betonbyggeri, som den finske kunstner Teo Ala-Ruonas performance *Enter Exude* finder sted i. Performanceen handler om transmaskulinitet og biler og tager form som en sexet og delirisk bilvask. Tre performere gnubber sig op ad en bil, puster røg ind i munden på hinanden og snakker om deres fædre til et soundtrack, der blander techno og corny saxofoner.

I år har Performa lanceret programmet *Performance and Protest*, som desværre får alt for lidt opmærksomhed i kommunikationsmaterialet. Her indgik blandt andet Ahmadpours performance og Rabih Mroués spændende 'lecture performance' om protesterne i Libanon i 2019. Underligt nok bliver Palæstina ikke nævnt i noget som helst kommunikation eller i nogle af de talks eller performances, jeg så, med undtagelse af Teo Ala-Ruonas performance, hvor kunstneren og performerne besluttede sig for at tage sagen i egen hånd og bruge deres platform til at snakke om Gaza. Det er generelt interessant at bemærke, hvor få af de større kunstinstitutioner, der har markeret deres solidaritet, i forhold til hvor mange der var på pletten, da Rusland invaderede Ukraine. Herhjemme har jeg i skrivende stund kun set Overgaden komme med et officielt 'statement'.

I mellemtiden ser vi, hvordan kunstnere i blandt andet Tyskland får aflyst deres udstillinger for at lave opslag om Palæstina. Institutionerne holder sig stadig til manuskriptet, og igen er det kunstnerne, der må tage kampen. Efter showet kom Teo Ala-Ruona og de to andre



performere ind klædt i sweatshirts med palæstinensiske flag på og adresserede situationen i Gaza, selvom de havde fået at vide af Performa, at de ikke måtte. Tydeligt nervøse og med rystende stemmer fik de tre performere fremstammet et statement om det folkemord, der finder sted i Palæstina lige nu.

Det var ikke en del af manuskriptet, men når verden brænder, må man nogle gange improvisere.

Og i en biennale fyldt med ord, er det alligevel performernes afsluttende ord, der bliver i kroppen til sidst, som en påmindelse om ordenes kraft, om vigtigheden af snak, råb, sang og poesi og om at blive ved med at bruge sin stemme, selvom det kan virke håbløst:

"From the river to the sea. Free, free Palestine."

*Teksten er et udtryk for skribentens holdninger.*



SUPERFLEX: *FREE BEER*, Performa Biennial 2023, New York. Photo: Walter Włodarczyk





Soren Aagaard: *CAFE ZERO* – a nomadic smoke and fermentation house with no seasons. Art Hub Copenhagen commissioned for Performa Biennial 2023, New York. Photos: Whitney Browne





Artist Hannah Heilmann in conversation with independent curator Jeppe Ugelvig, Performa Biennial 2023, New York. Photos: Joseph Jagos



Artist Lina Hashim in conversation with curator at MOMA PS1, Ruba Katrib, Performa Biennial 2023, New York. Foto: Joseph Jagos





Special Edition of the Free Lunch Series with Ayoung Kim, Performa Biennial 2023, New York. Photo: Marisa Silva



Special Edition of the Free Lunch Series with huy-Han Nguyen-Chi, Performa Biennial 2023, New York. Photo: Marisa Silva

## PERFORMA23 – A BIENNIAL FILLED WITH WORDS

by Filip Vest

“I don’t understand why people are so obsessed with Nora Turato – doesn’t she just talk and yell a lot?” a curator asks me in the line to see the Croatian artist Nora Turato perform at Performa23. The day before, someone at Søren Aagaard’s performance had mentioned that “they do talk a lot”. And Performa23 is a biennial filled with words: not only in the packed, ambitious, program of talks, but throughout the diverse series of performances themselves. There are long scripts; appropriated texts; poems; songs; descriptions of performances that never took place.

Performa is a biennial for performance art founded in 2004 by the art historian and curator RoseLee Goldberg. For almost twenty years, the festival has explored the role of performance in contemporary art and the wider history of art through commissions of new work by both American and international artists and in talks, exhibitions, videos, and publications.

In the same way that earlier editions took inspiration from Dada and other art historical movements, the program for Performa23 is loosely inspired by the legacy of conceptual art. When I meet her to interview her on the history of Performa and performance art, RoseLee Goldberg explains that it not so much a theme as a “historical anchor.” “Oh, is performance back? But it never went away,” she notes, explaining how performance art has always been integral to the history of art. “It’s critical to Constructivism, it’s critical to Dada, it’s critical to Surrealism, it’s critical to the Bauhaus.” Performa simultaneously reflects on the past whilst looking to the future with commissions of new work (“I want to see something I’ve never seen before,” Goldberg says). In this way, Performa serves as a link between the legacy and the progress of performance art.

While the role played by conceptual art in the curation of Performa this year is not totally clear, it is evident that many of the pieces in Performa23 are very concerned with language. Speech plays a prominent role. In her performance, Nora Turato takes on the role of a form of coach. Barefoot, confident, she steps in, an expression both annoyed and sly on her face, to deliver a manic monolog about self-help and self-realization. “What has prevented you from crushing it?”, she asks before continuing the performance in blocks of text lifted from the internet in the semi-threatening language of self-help coaches and influencers: “You make yourself sick. You are not good for you.” Nora Turato does the same thing as she always does in her performances, “talks and yells” as the curator in the line said. But she has an amazing charisma, that you’re immediately drawn to Unfortunately, the script never really lifts off, and while I’m listening to Turato’s monologue, I’m thinking about how the disadvantage of working with appropriated text material, is that we know it so well already. In that way, there are no surprises and most of all it feels like being presented to the artist’s research material.

Søren Aagaard’s performance dinner *CAFE ZERO – a nomadic smoke and fermentation house with no seasons* is another very text-based performance, but here the text has a more mumbling quality. In it, a group of chefs stand in a post-apocalyptic scenography of tie-dyed



textiles, produced in collaboration with the Danish designer Anne Sofie Madsen. The chefs prepare a meal while discussing bacteria in a gastronomical and political perspective. One of them speculates that the reason people were so obsessed with making sourdough during the Covid-pandemic was, perhaps, that it was a way to control bacteria – to feel that one could control the virus. The performance is, like Turato's, filled with words and with smells and sound: wet things walloped against each other; hard shells crushed, separated, stirred; a clink, a rattle; the sour smell of ocean and herbs. Finally, the work gets another dimension when we are invited to eat the experimental food. Before serving it, the chefs discuss how the dishes might be presented to the guests when there are no seasons to connect it to. "With the right storytelling, it'll go fine," one of them says. In the end of the performance, the storytelling drowns a bit in the audience's chatter and the chef's mumbling conversation about bacteria are no longer separable from the noise of the audience talking, munching, gnawing – maybe intentionally.

Storytelling seems to play a role in several of the biennial's pieces this year. Which stories we tell and don't tell – and how we tell them. The Canadian artist Marcel Dzama's performance *To Live on the Moon (For Lorca)* is loosely based on Federico Garcia Lorca's never realized script *Trip to the Moon* from 1929 and is a mix of both live band, big capes, splashing fish, moon people, guitar play, and poetry readings in a story about surrealism and fascism. Dzama's work unfortunately ends up becoming a nostalgic homage to Lorca, that is not contextualized to the present. The performance also struggles with both wanting to be a film and a performance. Sometimes the performers on the stage do the same things as they do on the film projected behind them and the result just becomes messy. Dzama hasn't made performance before he was commissioned for Performa23, which is a strategy that Performa has been using several times before. It can seem a bit contradictory to make a biennale that puts the spot-on performance art, and then commission new works by artists, who have never made performances before. In many ways the commissions are both Performa's strength and weakness. It's "trust and risk" as RoseLee Goldberg says, but it's also 'hit and miss'. And maybe that's alright. Anyway, it definitely gives some unpredictable results.

"I'm Marcel Dzama" one of the actors in the beginning of Dzama's performance announces. In the same way, many of the performances at Performa23 operate on a meta-level, pointing at their own production and how they come to life in the meeting with the audience. Another example comes in the play reading by the Iranian artist Nashim Ahmadpour, part of an event by Pages, a bilingual magazine for performing arts in Farsi and English founded in 2004 by the artists Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi. Ahmadpour's performative reading takes the form of a fictionalized account of the meeting of a jury at an Iranian theatre festival from which several artists ended up withdrawing. On the stage are four performers, one of them Ahmadpour herself, playing the four jury members, one of which, again, is Ahmadpour herself (here played by another performer, shifting the relation between reality and fiction). The stage directions are displayed on a screen behind the performers: "Consider the reading of this text as a performance contract," we read. Later, it is described how the performers leave the room before re-entering and changing seats, even though it doesn't happen. Later still, we read how a poster is projected on the screen. But we never get to see it as an audience, much as we can never experience the performances that never took place and must settle

for having them retold. As one of the jury members says: "Here we are only concerned with unrealized performances." Ahmadpour's performance plays with what is shown and what is not, how something that never happened can be retold. It is, in other words, a performance that almost doesn't take place about a series of performances that never took place.

Sometimes it all gets a bit too meta, but at the same time the big focus on text and the clear inspiration from theatre at this year's Performa feels like a breath of fresh air in relation to the Danish art scene, where the 'theatrical' is still a swear word in a performance context that still for the most of the time insists on not telling stories, but work with more abstract, durational pieces. Similarly, it's interesting to note that many of the performance venues at Performa more resemble theatre venues than visual art venues. There are stages and seating, dimmed lights, muted phones, stillness: something we're not used to in a visual arts context, where the audience is typically more flaky, entering and leaving spaces, passing through performances. For Performa, it seems to be a strategy. As RoseLee Goldberg tells me: "This is not something where you walk in and you walk out. You come into your seat for an hour, and you think. And then you have a conversation. So I'm setting up a kind of social environment for conversation about what's going on in culture." This points to another culture Performa is trying to create in the visual arts world: let's sit down and engage with performance art in the same way we do in the world of dance and theatre. This feels like a good strategy in an art world, where performances often just become a fun feature at the opening and don't always get the room, they deserve.

Other spaces in the festival more resemble the typical visual arts venue, the only distinction being that they are filled with chairs. One such is the raw industrial concrete building inside which the Finnish artist Teo Ala-Ruona's performance *Enter Exude* takes place. The performance, exploring trans masculinity and cars, takes the shape of a sexy, delirious carwash. Three performers grind on a car, blow smoke into each other's mouths, and talk about their dads to a soundtrack mixing techno and cheesy sax.

This year, Performa has launched the program *Performance and Protes*. Unfortunately, it doesn't receive a lot of attention in the press material. This was the program including both Ahmadpour's performance and a highly interesting lecture performance by Rabih Mroué about the 2019 protests in Lebanon. Strangely enough, Palestine is not mentioned in any of the communication materials, talks or performances I saw, except for Teo Ala-Ruona's performance, in which the artist and the performers decided to use their platform to speak out about Gaza. It's interesting to note how few of the bigger art institutions here have made a statement compared to the number that showed their solidarity with Ukraine. Here in Denmark, at the time of writing, I've only seen Overgaden make an official statement. Meanwhile we see how artists in Germany, and other places, have their exhibitions cancelled for posting about Palestine on social media. The institutions still stick to the script. Once again, it's the artists that have to take the fall.

After the show, Teo Ala-Ruona and the two other performers came in clad in sweatshirts with Palestinian flags and addressed the situation in Gaza, even though they had been told by



Performa that they couldn't. Clearly nervous and with trembling voices, the three performers made a statement about the genocide happening in Palestine now.

It wasn't part of the script, but when the world burns, sometimes you have to improvise.

And in a biennale filled with words, is it nevertheless the performers' finishing words, that stay in my body, as a reminder of the power of words, of the importance of talking, yelling, songs and poetry and a reminder to keep using your voice, even though it can at times seem hopeless:

"From the river to the sea. Free, free Palestine."

*The views and opinions expressed in this text are those of the writer.*

# KALENDER

## CALENDAR

Free Lunch Series : Claudia Lomoschitz : 05.12.23 : 12.00-1.30PM

AHC : Partly : Film screenings by Kareem Estefan : 07.12.23 : 07.00-9.30PM

AHC : Open Call : Research Hosting : TBA : Deadline : 05.02.24



AHC : [www.arthubcopenhagen.net](http://www.arthubcopenhagen.net) : [info@arthubcopenhagen.dk](mailto:info@arthubcopenhagen.dk) : Halmtorvet 27, 1700 DK-Cph V

**AHC**