

Accompanying programme:

Wednesday, 8 February 2023, at 11:00

A guided exhibition tour by Goran Tomčić

The exhibition tour will be in English.

Wednesday, 22 February 2023, at 18:00

Goran Tomčić: On Transience in Art

A lecture on the history of participatory work in art history and today

The lecture will be in English.



Exhibition Colophon:

Goran Tomčić: Pompom mreže Škofja Loka

25. 1.–12. 3. 2023

Ivan Grohar Gallery

Škofja Loka Museum

Represented by: Saša Nabergoj

Curator: Saša Nabergoj

Design: Luka Kravanja

Proofreading: Branka Gradišar

English translation: Mateja Žuraj

Technical team: Vida Grah, Boris Krajnc, Karla B. Rihtaršič



The *Škofja Loka Pompom Nets* exhibition is a spatial installation by the Berlin-based Croatian artist Goran Tomčić. This is the first comprehensive exhibition of the ongoing participatory art project, titled *Pompom Nets*. As the main part of this project, the artist has been collaborating with the public since 2015, creating temporary situations and spatial installations all over the world; until now in Split, Novigrad, Hvar, Venice, Berlin, Potsdam, Lisbon, Cape Coast, Elmina and New York City.

The assembled pompom nets, which have been sewn by various participants together with the artist in ten locations, make up a colourful labyrinth in both gallery rooms. All the different colours of the used materials, and the playful exhibition layout with the hanging pompom installations are a walk down memory lane. The artist's aim is to evoke visitors' joy and responsiveness, while also addressing a different view of the art world today, and perhaps even the state of our Zeitgeist.

The seemingly simple idea of a series of participatory events for a general public is actually an intricate artistic project with a meticulous basic script (which is constantly enhanced by the artist), yet a flexible, open-ended execution and the final display of the work that is adaptable to the specificities of the location. The basic situation and activity, however, remain the same: the participants and the artist use fishing line to sew colourful pompoms into nets and, working together, they thus build both a temporary installation and a temporary community. The creative process behind participatory art usually involves the audience, aiming to create a sense of community and bonding, and to change society through artistic means so to speak.

The final result is always a pompom net installation, which is placed in situ, i.e. displayed in the very place where it was created. Each net is different – its final shape is decided by the participants and is not prescribed by the artist. The installation is adapted to the space and the

participants' suggestions. It is always temporary, even if it is currently still part of a more permanent story, such as the *Novigrad Pompom Nets* installation, which was first displayed as part of the *ART (er) I JA* festival of visual arts and then included in the permanent exhibition of the Lapidarium museum. The very material of the installation ensures transience, as the pompoms cannot be restored and are also quick to deteriorate, so the work is bound to (self)destruct relatively quickly by museum standards. The artist intentionally uses a non-permanent material, i.e. acrylic pompoms, thus ensuring the work's transient nature and diverting attention from the finished work of art to the process of its creation.

The locations and the venues are different, usually linked to an invitation extended by various art institutions, the choice of participants, however, it is always up to the artist. He has described his selection principle as “the search for the collective power of spectators”. Sometimes the participants are his friends, at other times the gallery audience, sometimes a group of fishermen, while random passersby too are often included. These connections occur in a relation with the project locations, which are site-specific to each *Pompom Nets* stop. For instance, the first installation was staged in a gallery space in Split, the second in a public park in Novigrad, the seventh in a residency art centre in Lisbon, and the ninth in an old port in Ghana. The duration of each event also depends on the individual situation, the participants' energy, and last but not least, on the amount of pompoms; previous events have lasted from a few hours to a week or two.

The current stage of the *Pompom Nets* project is characterised by the adaptivity of its basic concept, which the artist (who wants to lose or loosen his authorship) keeps constantly in the flux, while learning from the needs and suggestions of the participants. The Ljubljana event at Cirkulacija2 will be the first time the artist will include dance performers. Partly because the

contemporary dance scene in Ljubljana is extremely strong and the project itself aims to adapt to the specific features of each individual venue, and partly because after they had finished the pompom nets, the participants in Portugal and in Ghana started to spontaneously move around the space in performative ways. In both, Ljubljana and Škofja Loka, the artist will also include two accompanying lectures on the history of participatory work in art history and today, which he understands as an (additional, discursive) part of the project.

Tomčić's participatory practice is based on his knowledge of the history of contemporary art, which has certainly contributed to the well-thought-out concept of the *Pompom Nets* project. Tomčić is an art historian and before devoting himself to his artistic career, he was a successful curator in New York City for a number of years. His art-history and contemporary-art references are therefore complex, but he is also a poet that often uses text in his largely visual practice. He draws inspiration mainly from the conceptual art created from the 1960s onwards, when art moved from galleries and museums to public space, shifting attention from objects to a wider (social) context and the social role of art. As artistic media, prints, paintings, sculptures and drawings have been joined by performances, videos, spatial installations, online projects, as well as the involvement of individuals and communities in the creation of works of art. In fact, in the 20th and 21st centuries, socially engaged artists developed various innovative methods of engaging the audience in the process of creating and redefining the role of art, testing different collaboration formats, co-creation, as well as reflection on creating a better community and a more developed, more cultural society. The most radical at this was the German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys, who, from the 1960s onwards, based his artistic credo on the maxim “Every man is an artist”. He believed that art was a crucial activity yet to make individuals into a more developed community. According to him, this would occur when the entire humanity would creatively and

artistically participate in building a social structure, which Beuys believed was the highest form of society.

The *Škofja Loka Pompom Nets* exhibition is a delicate work that speaks on several levels and manages to address various audiences. The exhibition functions without a text, while being capable of evoking the visitors' feelings. With the help of a well-educated gallery attendant, a lecture on the history of similar artistic practices, this text, the artist's website and some independent further research, attentive and discerning visitors will be able to gain various insights into the complex conceptual context of this project and the topics it brings up. Art as a place where different ways of collaboration, exchange of knowledge, establishment of communities are tested, as is the role of the artist as a facilitator, researcher, mediator. Creativity today is the driving force and a hope for a better world. I believe that culture and art define us as a society, as a human community. Most people can survive without (seeing any) exhibitions, humankind, however, cannot survive without art.

Goran Tomčić (1964) is a Croatian artist who has been living in Berlin since 2009. He studied art history and comparative literature in Zagreb, and completed curatorial studies in the USA. From 1989 to 2008, he worked as a critic and curator, mostly in the USA, where he lived at the time. In the 1990s, his poetry in English was published in a number of magazines and anthologies in the USA and elsewhere. His poetry collection titled *Fragile* was published in Zagreb in 1991. He has been working as an independent artist since 2000. He has exhibited in numerous galleries and museums and various other spaces worldwide. His art is collected by museums and private collections, including the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg and Haifa Museum of Art.