



The image shows an art installation in a dark room. In the center is a tall, green, rectangular figure on wheels, with its arms raised holding a circular maze. To the left, a classical bust of a bearded man is on a tripod. To the right, several translucent, mask-like objects are also on tripods. The floor is lit with colorful projections of the central figure and other elements.

Selected Works

Vanja Smiljanić

ON BOARD WERE THE TWELVE

Installation, 2025

“*On Board were the Twelve*” unfolds a long-term artistic research into the mythology of Atlantis.

Following the legend of twelve survivors who escaped the great flood, the project conjures their return in a sequence of eight paintings: a procession of deities, farmers, poets, healers, magicians, and scientists crossing the space on boats, submarines, and flying vessels.

Mounted on mobile platforms, the figures traverse the exhibition space as a continuous procession.

For the duration of the exhibition, they step into presence, embodying Atlantis within a parallel world of possibilities shaped by the question:

What could be, if we were to abolish the imperialism of linear time?

Through this speculative framework, the work opens onto reflections on fluid and hybrid species and forms of co-existence beyond fixed identities.

Themes of belonging, exile, survival, and time regression intersect with notions of liquid identity at a time when borders—political, cultural, and bodily—are being violently reasserted.

The work resists closure, embracing instability and transformation as spaces where change can still emerge.

Formally, the installation draws on the archaic yet persistent tradition of ritualized movement through public space. Echoing religious processions, political demonstrations, and acts of collective assembly, the work understands procession as a tool of resistance and visibility—a way of carrying stories, bodies, and histories forward. Myth becomes here not a distant past, but a living structure through which alternative futures can be rehearsed.



On Board were the Twelve, Installation view,
artothek Köln, 2025
photo © Mareike Tocha, 2025

**ON BOARD WERE THE TWELVE
Float 1 - Side A**

passengers on board:

6/12: God № 2

5/12: Physician

*Oil on canvas, 160 × 200 cm painting on platform;
installation dimensions 200 × 240 cm;
two snakes, a dolphin, and a fish sculptures pulling
the platform, 2024/25.*



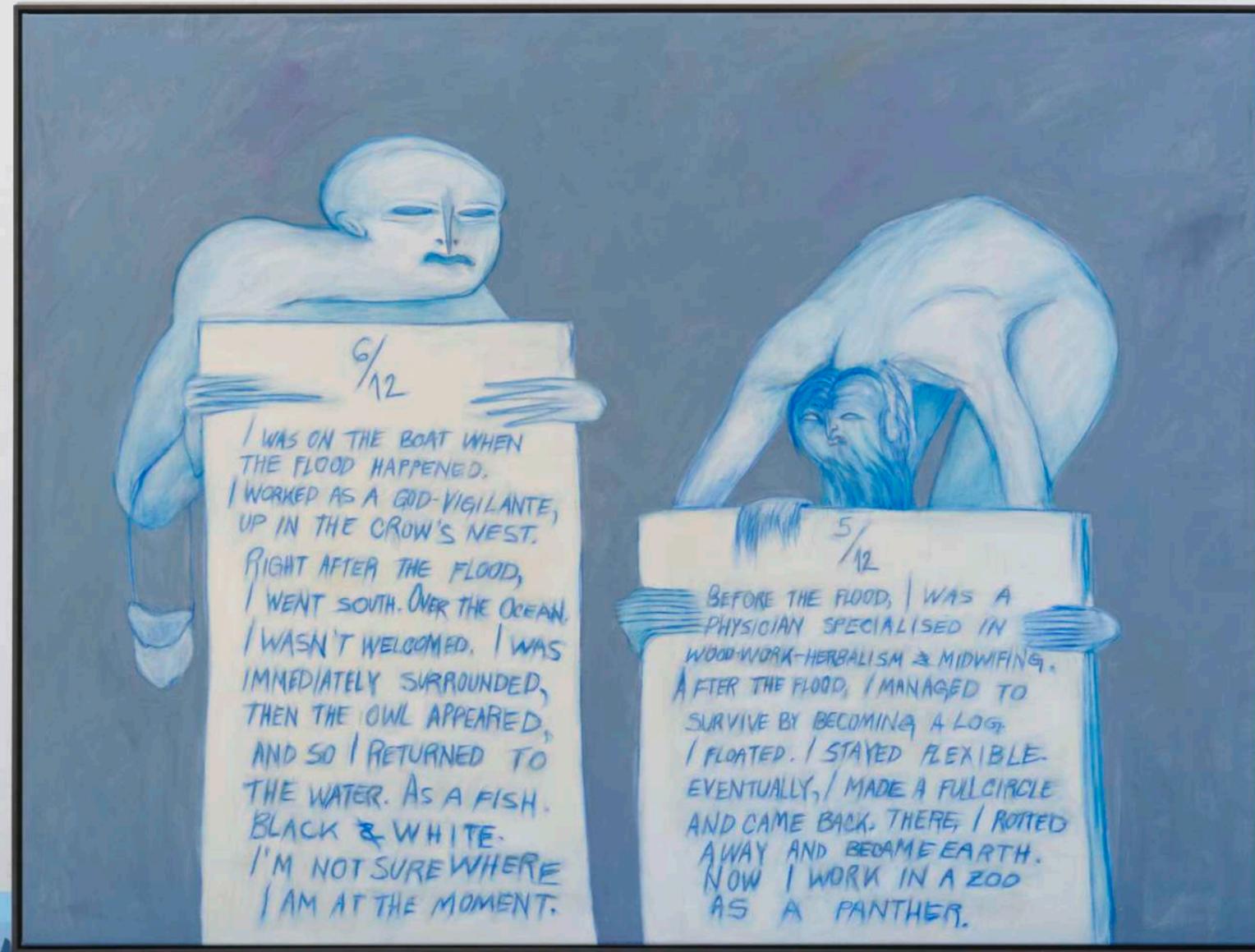
**ON BOARD WERE THE TWELVE
Float 1 - Side B**

passengers on board:

6/12: God № 2

5/12: Physician

Oil on canvas, 160 × 200 cm painting on platform;
installation dimensions 200 × 240 cm;
two snakes and a baby dolphin sculptures pulling
the platform, 2024/25.



**ON BOARD WERE THE TWELVE
Float 1 - Side B**

passengers on board:

6/12: God № 2

5/12: Physician

5/12: Physician

Before the flood, I was a physician

specialised in woodwork - herbalism, and midwifing.

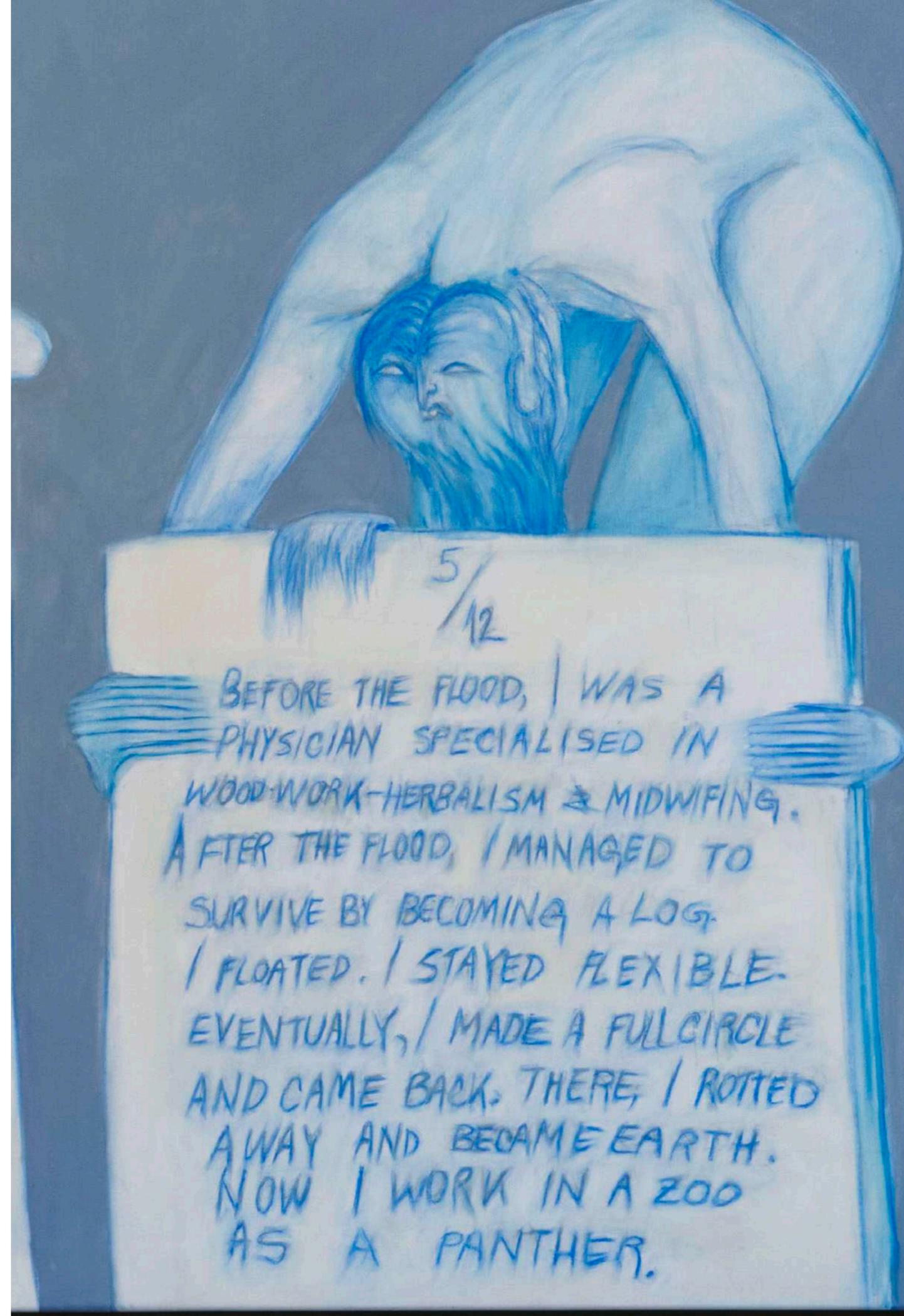
After the flood, I managed to survive by becoming a log.

I floated. I stayed flexible.

Eventually, I made a full circle and went back.

There, I rotted away and became earth.

Now, I work in the zoo as a panther.



5/12

BEFORE THE FLOOD, I WAS A
PHYSICIAN SPECIALISED IN
WOODWORK-HERBALISM & MIDWIFING.
AFTER THE FLOOD, I MANAGED TO
SURVIVE BY BECOMING A LOG.
I FLOATED. I STAYED FLEXIBLE.
EVENTUALLY, I MADE A FULL CIRCLE
AND CAME BACK. THERE, I ROTTED
AWAY AND BECAME EARTH.
NOW I WORK IN A ZOO
AS A PANTHER.



ON BOARD WERE THE TWELVE
The Submarine - Side A

passengers on board:

11/12: God №6

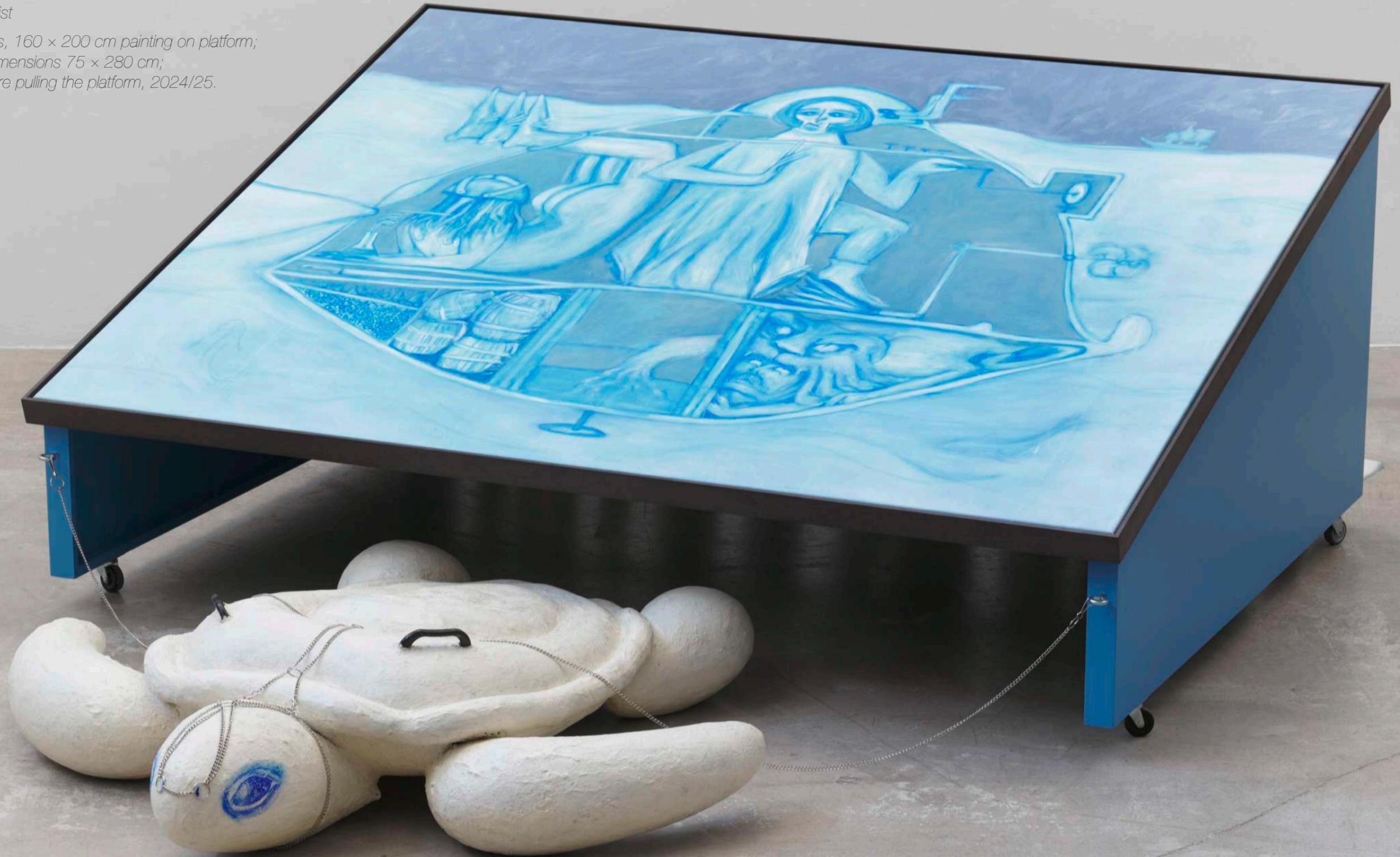
12/12: God №7

4/12: Scientist

Oil on canvas, 160 × 200 cm painting on platform;

installation dimensions 75 × 280 cm;

turtle sculpture pulling the platform, 2024/25.



ON BOARD WERE THE TWELVE The Submarine

passengers on board:

11/12: God №6

12/12: God №7

4/12: Scientist

12/12: God №7

(still in transit)

I'm waiting on the pier.
waiting and waiting
surrounded by a troop of soldiers.
(could they be my bodyguards?)

11/12: God №6

Before the flood, I was an animist animal.
Actually, I was just an animal,
but as I was foreign to them,
they started venerating me.
I became a symbol of male dominance. OK.
But there was a countercurrent too.
Primal scream was her mother tongue.
After the flood, the rift grew wider.
Yet we all ended up burning. Together.

4/12: Scientist

Before the flood I was a developer of augmented
garments.
Mostly shoes.
Sonar shoes, hovering shoes, cyber-samurai-knight
shoes, and so on...
So I became a motor.
Giving coordinates.
After the flood, I was a king for a short time.
I got killed and put in a sarcophagus.
They made me a monument.
I was taken by a big bird to come here.



**ON BOARD WERE THE TWELVE
The Submarine - The Tail**

passengers on board:
11/12: God №6
12/12: God №7
4/12: Scientist

Oil on canvas, 160 × 200 cm painting on platform;
installation dimensions 75 × 280 cm;
turtle sculpture pulling the platform, 2024/25.



TROUBLED WATERS – SEARCHING FOR ATLANTIS

Lecture performance, 2023/25

40:00min

The concept of “liquid identity” as a constantly changing process is explored through the myth of Atlantis by Vanja Smiljanić, in the con-formance “*Troubled Waters - Searching for Atlantis*.”

The artist’s personal history and origins provide the cue for a reflection on the fluidity of physical and ideological boundaries.

(Fanny Nina Borel, MAXXI Roma)

Exploring this infinite pool of Atlantis’ interpretations within literature, philosophy, critical and conspiracy theory, music, and pop culture, four things become evident to me:

1. Atlantis is the time-dweller.
2. Atlantis is a shapeshifter.
3. Atlantis is a safe haven for people who went through an archetypal experience of loss, who were washed ashore on the coast of unknown and remained foreign and misunderstood.
4. Atlantis has potential.

It comes to my knowledge:

“(…)After the flood, Atlantis sent out ships to all corners of the Earth. On board were the Twelve: the poet, the farmer, the scientist, the magician, the physician, and the 7 so-called Gods.”

Donovan, *Atlantis*, 4:58min, 1968

I self-hypnotise myself in order to find them.

They are scattered through dimensions.

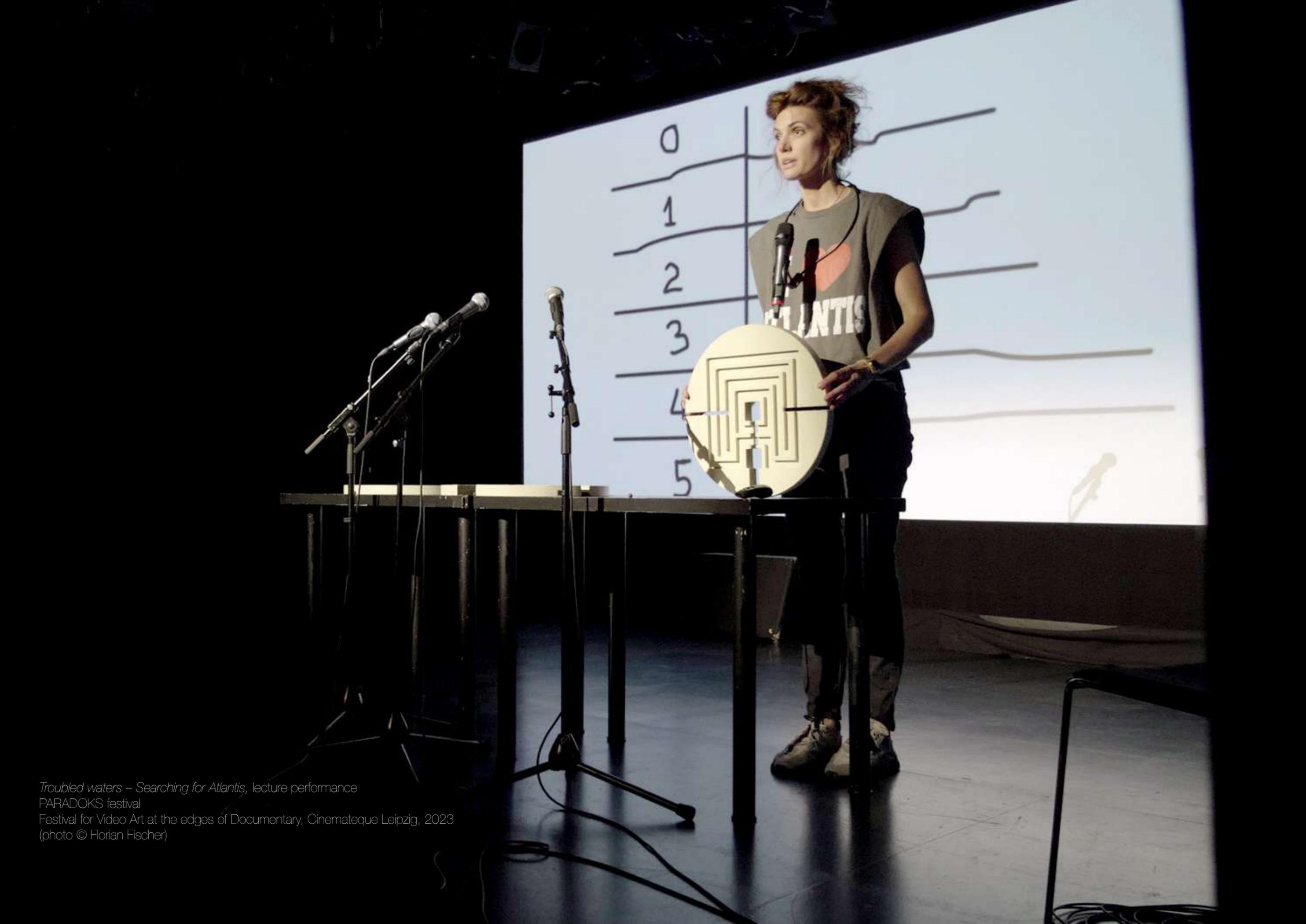
I travel every day.

Sometimes I fall asleep and I lose their trace.

Time traveling is not linear.



Troubled waters – Searching for Atlantis, lecture performance
Performa03, Performance festival, MAXXI ROMA-L'Aquila, 2023
(photo © Giada Spera)



Troubled waters – Searching for Atlantis, lecture performance
PARADOKS festival
Festival for Video Art at the edges of Documentary, Cinemateque Leipzig, 2023
(photo © Florian Fischer)

LABYRINTH RIDERS IN (DIS)REMEMBERING ATLANTIS

video, 2023/24

19:46min

In 9600 BCE, Atlantis was destroyed.
Only a few survived.
Following three former Atlantean citizens who have lingered in between dimensions ever since, *Labyrinth riders in (dis)remembering Atlantis*, is showing the bureaucratic challenges and torment these entities are facing as they strive to reintegrate into the Now.

But, like bureaucracy itself, Atlantis is not linear:

In the 0th dimension, it is a point.

In the 1st dimension, Atlantis is a line.

In the 2nd dimension, Atlantis is a shape (a square).

In the 3rd dimension, Atlantis is a critical tool triggered by the song *Atlantis* performed by Scottish singer-songwriter Donovan, on the B-side of his 1968 album *Susan on the West Coast Waiting*.

In the 4th dimension, it becomes TURBO!

Labyrinth riders in (dis)remembering Atlantis,
video, 19:46min, 2023/2024
(videostill)



Female



Labyrinth riders in (dis)remembering Atlantis,
video, 19:46min, 2023/2024
(videostill)

In 360 BCE the Greek philosopher Plato started writing “*Critias*” – a primeval story about the rise and fall of an ideal island-state called Atlantis.

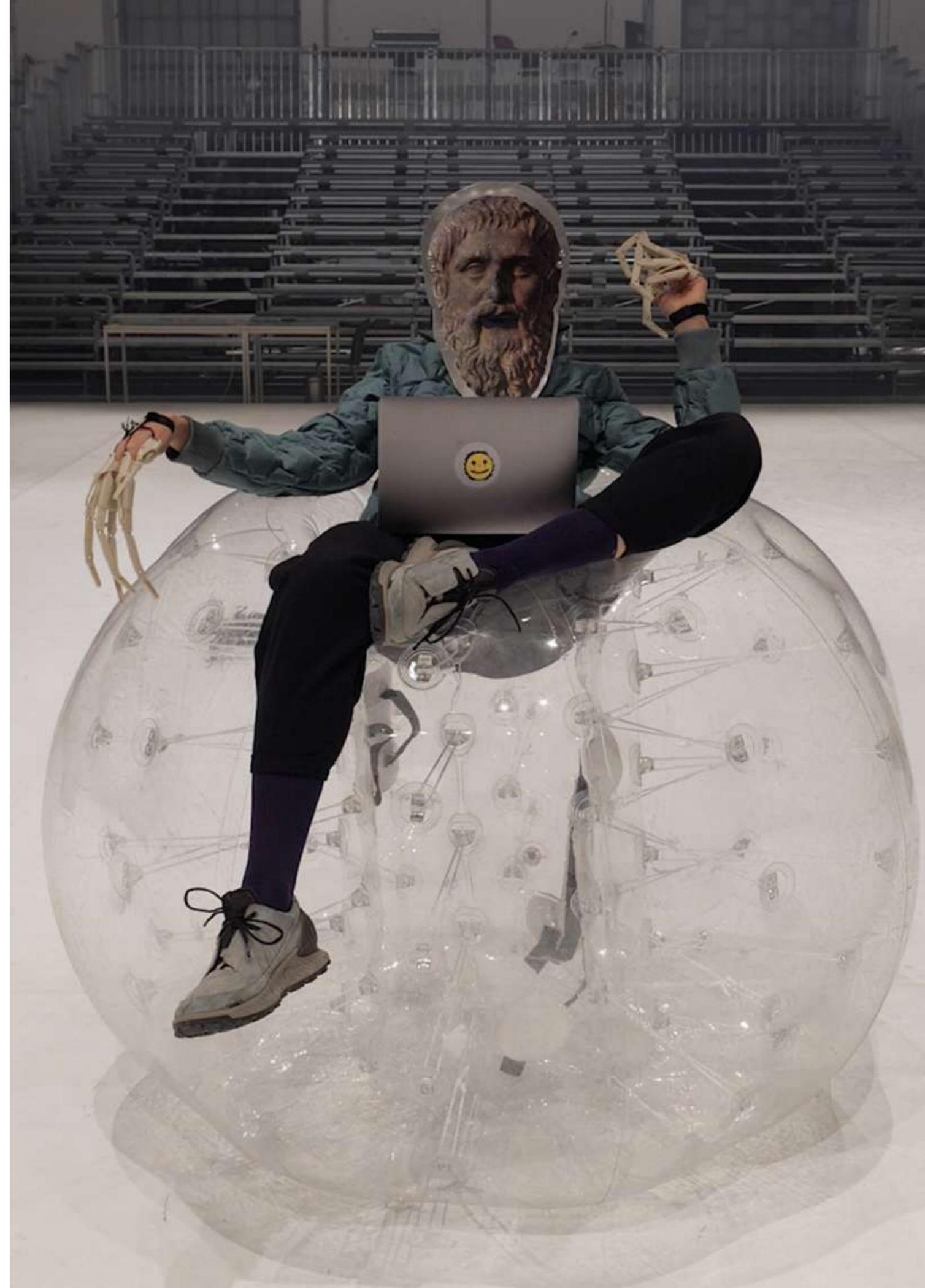
He meticulously explained the superior magnitude of their socio-political organisation that is supported by their urbanistic and architectural splendour. He raved about their fairness, how morally correct, and just in general – amazing, Atlantean inhabitants are.

Then he switched his tone and wrote about the time when they stopped being amazing and became corrupted.

As he was reaching the core of the subject and was just about to tell the story of the Atlantean fall, he broke off in mid-sentence.

The end of the “*Critias*” dialogue was never found, which created the greatest cliffhanger in the history of philosophy and drastically changed the course of the human imagination.

Labyrinth riders in (dis)remembering Atlantis,
video, 19:46min, 2023/2024
(videostill)



KAS

Lecture performance & exhibition, 2022

KAS is a group exhibition with a performative nature that focuses on the relationship between objects and their activations, re-evaluating forms of affective, somatic, visual knowledges censored or suppressed by Western ex-colonial modernity.

KAS reflects together with a group of international artists on the function of mythological topoi and of the collective fabrication of images of “primordial urbanity” in the founding processes of “imagined communities”.

KAS will become the starting point for artists to articulate a series of socio-political questions underlying certain mythological imaginaries that, despite being considered harmless, are in reality innervated by forms of critical struggle against oppressive architectures.

Labyrinth riders in (dis)remembering Atlantis, lecture performance
KAS, Drodesea Performance Festival, Italy, 2022
Curated by Simone Frangi & Barbara Bonisegna





FLUID CIRCULATIONS - Hydrofeminist Explorations in Post-Industrial Landscapes
Curated by Nada Rosa Schroer
Kunstwerk Köln,
(photo © Olga Holzschuh)

FLUID CIRCULATIONS - Hydrofeminist Explorations in Post-Industrial Landscapes

interdisciplinary research and exhibition project, 2023

The interdisciplinary research and exhibition project *FLUID CIRCULATIONS - Hydrofeminist Explorations in Post-Industrial Landscapes* brings together artists, curators, authors, hydrologists and environmentalists to investigate local bodies of water.

In times of massive interruptions of hydrological cycles caused by climate change and industrial usage, the artistic positions presented explore how we relate to water bodies. Which fluid milieus are we part of? What are the correlations between control, maintenance and care for water bodies in post-industrial landscapes?



FLUID CIRCULATIONS - Hydrofeminist Explorations in Post-Industrial Landscapes
Kunstwerk Köln, 2023
Curated by Nada Rosa Schroer
(photo © Olga Holzschuh)



AMONG THE PALMS, THE BOMB
or. Looking for reflections in the toxic field of plenty,
documentary film codirected with Lukas Marxt
85 min, 2024
(videostill)

AMONG THE PALMS, THE BOMB or: Looking for reflections in the toxic field of plenty

documentary film, 2024
85 min, color, sound,
with Lukas Marxt

“AMONG THE PALMS, THE BOMB or: Looking for reflection in the toxic field of plenty” is a film that brings together seven years of research on the Salton Sea—the largest lake in California—now on the verge of ecological collapse, and on the communities struggling to survive within this dystopian landscape.

This area concentrates some of the most severe and layered forms of violence in the United States: the highest incidence of childhood asthma, chronic nosebleeds, the genocide of Native American tribes, atomic bomb testing during the Manhattan Project, large-scale environmental contamination caused by monocultural agriculture that led to mass fish and bird die-offs, and the exploitation of undocumented migrant labor. These histories and ongoing realities intersect in the same territory.

By giving the landscape a voice through the stories of those who inhabit it, the film seeks to raise awareness of an environmental and socio-political disaster that has been unfolding for decades, yet remains largely silenced due to systemic disinterest in marginalized communities—Native tribes, undocumented migrants, and low-income families.

At its core, the film interrogates who holds the right to tell history. It contrasts dominant narratives shaped by institutions of power with the perspectives of Indigenous communities whose voices have been systematically erased, and whose right to speak and bear witness has been repeatedly denied.

AMONG THE PALMS, THE BOMB
or: Looking for reflection in the toxic field of plenty, 2024
(videostill)





AMONG THE PALMS, THE BOMB
or: Looking for reflection in the toxic field of plenty,
documentary film codirected with Lukas Marxt
85 min, 2024
(videostill)

NOVA. Future thoughts on surviving together

LARP performance & video installation, 2022
with Ana de Almeida & Alicja Rogalska

*In the future,
gender inequality was erased.
NOVA is a multitude of newly born, radical-
ly inclusive and self-managed communities.
Heterogeneous in their forms of commoning
and social organisation, NOVA share a vow
to never let oppression in any form rise again.*

NOVA. Future thoughts on surviving together is a feminist futurist LARP (Live Action Role Play) game written and run by Ana de Almeida, Alicja Rogalska & Vanja Smiljanić. *NOVA* is directed towards feminist and queer-feminist activists.

In *NOVA*, players become a multitude of performers who undergo a day of speculative gaming aimed at sharing survival strategies, exercising solidarity and intersectionality, strengthening networks and forming new alliances between different emancipatory movements.

Together, we propose to create a piece of feminist political fiction in which we collectively create a (fictional) world free of patriarchal oppression whilst developing strategies for harnessing radical imagination towards real political actions.

NOVA. Future thoughts on surviving together, LARP performance
Ana de Almeida, Alicja Rogalska & Vanja Smiljanić
Cybernetics of the Poor,
curated by Diedech Diederichsen & Oier Etxebarria
Kunsthalle Wien, 2020
(photo © David Avazzadeh)





NOVA, *Future thoughts on surviving together*, video
30min, 2022
(videostill)

NOVA

Future thoughts on surviving together

single channel video, 16:9, color, sound, 30min, 2020

Preview link: <https://vimeo.com/507173519>

Password: nova



ORION DEBACLE

Experimental documentary, 2019
color, sound, 29:04 min

Exploring the complex configuration of identity, nationalism and body politics by engaging with different New Religious Movements is the method Smiljanić has been using in her research for the last 9 years. By focusing on marginalized societies that operate on communal fringe, and collectively re-visiting their practices, her goal is to re-apply them as empowering tools within the current socio-political context.

Since 2017 the focus of her research is a UFO spiritual movement called Unarius. *Orion Debacle* depicts the group of nine Unarius students in the filming process of a psychodrama. They are travelling 800.000 year in the past, in the techno-theocratic society called Orion. According to Unarius, particular events in Orion were a primal cause of Smiljanić's current epileptic condition.

Using the non-scripted, improvisational techniques, and reenacting these ur-memories they strive to move beyond the binary oppositions: body – mind, sick – healthy, or conventional – queer.

By welcoming epileptic practice of thinking into the creative process, the sudden interruptions, gaps, crashes and changes in time and discourse are not treated as problems that need to be corrected, but as openings into a potentially trans-personal state.

The documentary approach of the psychodrama is therefore interwoven with ASMR role-play scenarios that further spectralize the perception of the memory, trauma and time.

Orion Debacle, experimental documentary, 2019
color, sound, 29:04 min





Orion Debacle, Experimental documentary, 2019
color, sound, 29:04 min,

ORION DEBACLE

single channel video, color, sound,
16:9, 29:04 min, 2019

Preview link: <https://vimeo.com/277455030>
Password: orion



Orion Debacle, installation view – *IKOB Art Prize for Feminist Art*, group exhibition
IKOB- Museum of Contemporary Art, Eupen, 2019
(photo © Jannis Mattar)



Orion Debacle, installation view – *Metaphyse*, group exhibition
Kjubh Kunstverein Köln, 2019
curated by Tamara Lorenz
(photo ©Tamara Lorenz)

PLANT RANT: MEA CULPA ON CHLOROPHYLL SLING

video installation, 2019

Plant Rant: Mea Culpa on Chlorophyll Sling gathers together three different elements: a labyrinth, a soft column, and a video.

This installation is a new chapter of Smiljanić's poetic study on cyclical temporalities. Subjecting materials – carpet, vinyl, moving images, sound, – to painterly cuts, Smiljanić not only offers alternatives to the linear, traditional progress of time we still long to obey; she also evokes some of its violence through reclaiming practices. Trauma and acknowledgment unleash the greener side of empowerment, in ways of a garden, where even the most innocent plant could be a remedy or a poison, depending on its dosage and combination. Establishing relationships with the past through the memory of oppressed agents create alliances. The different species in Smiljanić's installation propose a view on what bodies can do and what they can be made to do, weaving together multiple herstories of herbalism and activism.

Revisiting a psycho-drama experience set up in XVII century witch-trial, Smiljanić reflects on her role of a court witness that ultimately condemned a herbalist woman to a death by burning.

Weaving this event into a choreography of a walking the labyrinth the intention is to spectralize the array of possibilities in dealing with the trauma of being a “bad feminist”.

Though labyrinth in the installation should by no means be confused with a maze – a torturous structure that offers the walker multiple paths, some of which lead to dead ends – in the labyrinth there are no choices to be made, and the path inevitably leads to, and ends at, the centre, thereby forcing the walker to retrace her steps.

This cyclical manner of experiencing (exhibition)time, (museum)space, goes against the goal-oriented performance. The movement is dictated by the sound scape – each beat suggests a step (further, deeper) into healing introspection, while on a metaphorical level, it addresses the permanent reliving of the trauma

(Androletti/ Smiljanić)

*Plant Rant: Mea Culpa on Chlorophyll Sling, installation view,
Gemeinde Köln, 2019
(photo © Agustina Androletti)*



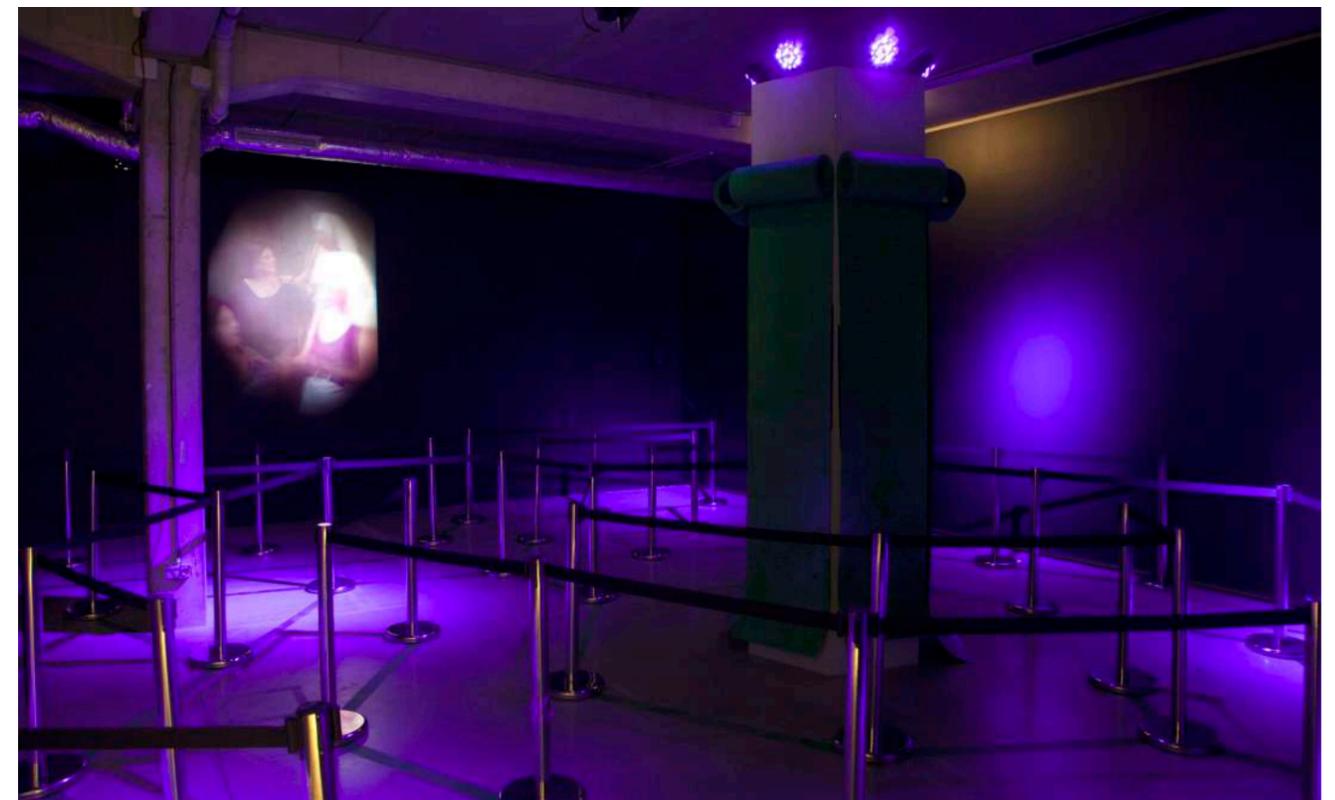


Nettle, Sage, Valeriana, Rose, carved carpet, 6 panels, 50 x 250 cm each, 2019
Mandragora, carved carpet, 160 x 200 cm, 2019

PSYCHO DRAMA (Urbadfem)

Single channel video, 9:16, color, sound, 13:45 min, 2019

Preview link: <https://vimeo.com/374829295>
passw: Plantrant



Plant Rant: Mea Culpa on Chlorophyll Sling, video installation,
IKOB - Museum of Contemporary Art, Eupen, 2020
(photo © Ludovic Beillard)

WAVES OF WORSHIP (WOW)

Lecture performance & video installation, 2016/2022

Waves of Worship (WOW) is the last part of a three-part examination of the relationship between new religious movements and nationalism. This lecture performance is based on a comparative examination of the Internet-based, religious UFO movement of the Cosmic People and the Flag Nation Society, a Christian community that expresses its faith through the practice of flag worship.

In *Waves of Worship (WOW)*, Vanja Smiljanić once again appears in her position as a Minister of the Cosmic People for the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, Portugal and the former Portuguese colonies. Her perspective changes between a clairvoyant vision of a dystopian future in which the Cosmic People are in a cyber war

against their primordial enemies, the Saurians, and the present, in which she is a hardware developer establishing a defense system against hacker attacks. During the lecture performance, Vanja Smiljanić introduces various tools, flags and strategies, with which one can produce noise (white noise), encode digital data and occupy Internet space, and she reflects on the process of individualisation in cyberspace.

In order to develop a new, collective dance practice that strengthens the community of the Cosmic People and should lead them to the digital social revolution, the artist subverts the orthodox vocabulary of flag worship and presents the New Alphabet for the Digital Proletariat.

(Inke Arns/Vanja Smiljanić)

Waves of Worship (WOW), lecture performance
HMKV Dortmund, 2019
(photo © Daniel Sadrowski)





Waves of Worship (WOW), installation view, *gemeinschaft und gemeinschaften*
Kunsthau NRW Kometimünster, 2022
(photo © Carl Brunn)

WAVES OF WORSHIP (WOW)

Lecture performance & video installation, 2018/2022

Excerpt of the performance, 2:32min
Drodesera Performance festival, 2016
<https://vimeo.com/176851449>

PYROPOLITICAL WAVES OF WORSHIP

2 channel video tutorial, 20:32 min, 2019

Preview link: <https://vimeo.com/507553414>
Password:Pyropolitical



Waves of Worship (WOW), Very Contemporary, Performance Festival Kunsthaus NRW, Kornelimünster, Showcasing the new acquisitions to the collection of the Nunsthaus NRW, 2022 (photo © Anna Gala)



Waves of Worship (WOW), installation view, Alt-Right Complex HMKV Dortmund, 2019 (photo ©Woidich Hannes)

MEDITERRANEANA - SCHOOL OF WATERS

Young Artists Biennale 2021

My journey into the ongoing project “(dis) Remembering Atlantis” started with an invitation to represent Serbia at *Mediterranea – School of Waters, Young Artists Biennale 2021* that as a curatorial concept had the objective to reassess the history of the Mediterranean area.

I’ve approached this matter by mapping various grand narratives that were shaping and (de)forming this culturally and politically turbulent area.

Consequently, the Mediterranean sea became a container of the new, alternative, and multiple pasts where Egyptian, Byzantine, and Greco-roman mythology; centuries-long colonial exploitation and resistance strategies; as well as the current migrant crisis, are just a few among the many actants that started forming my research case.

My contribution to the *Mediterranea – School of Waters* took the form of an performative installation comprising of a

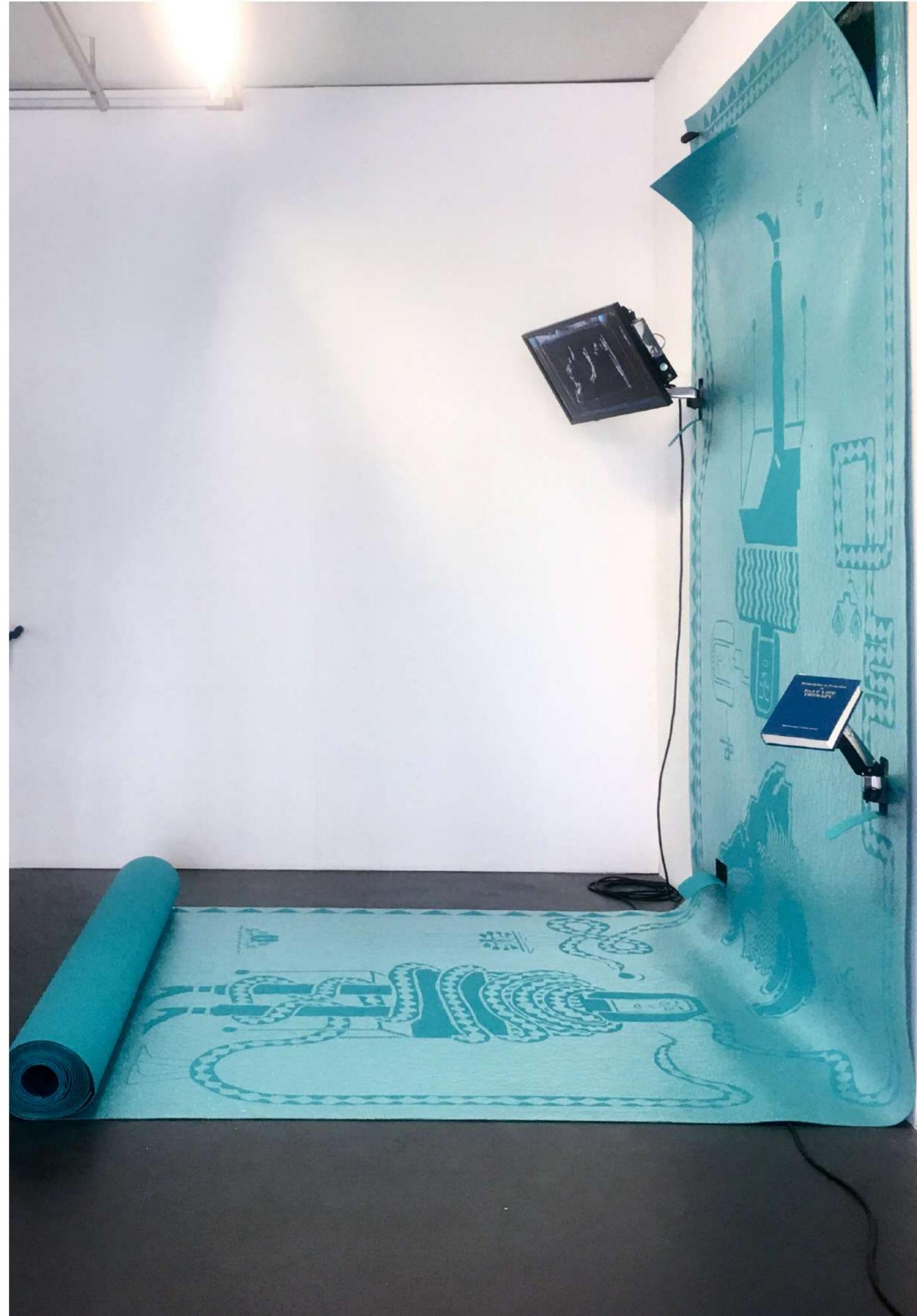
multi-media carpet and a sculpture that was shown throughout the entire duration of the Biennale, while the performative intervention and a 5 days workshop was executed during the opening week.

With the practice of carpet carving, I’m creating a parallel with the traditional carpet weaving of nomadic tribe members who were using this practice as a method for documenting their ever-changing surroundings.

Instead of waving actual threads, I’m using recycled fair-carpets and inscribing scenes captured in traveling through the past and future.

Using the shapeshifting concept of Atlantis as a research tool became my ongoing practice and has ever since appeared in variety of artistic contexts and exhibitions.

Atlantis Carpet#2: Snake-sex-cult, enjoyment, and a fish
Carved carpet, Past Life Therapy manual book, video, gas pipe, artificial stone
Installation view, Palazzo SUMS, San Marino,
2021



PLT MACHINE

performative tool

PLT Machine is conceived as a performative tool for practicing non-linear time and consequently exercising defragmented ways of storytelling.

Adapting the form of the three-dimensional (inception) labyrinth, mounted on the gyroscopic structure the user of the tool is invited to assign to each section of the labyrinth one voice and/or a time period. By driving the ball through the labyrinth (playing a game), one is weaving different narratives or voices and experiencing their contingency. The labyrinth is equipped with a microphone and a speaker that can facilitate this kind of experimentation.

Video preview: <https://vimeo.com/384931933>
Password: Atlantis



Installation view, Palazzo SUMS, San Marino,
2021



PLT Machine,
Aluminium, steel, wood, clay, stone, wheels, microphone, speaker,
100 x 165 x 90 cm, 2021/22

MUTUAL EMPATHIES

Lecture performance and exhibition, 2025

This project consists of a series of 32 paintings that engage with the verses of *Idyll Ipe Hiwen* (Coyote's Waiting), a lullaby shared with me by members of the Torrez-Martinez tribe of Cahuilla Indians from South California:

Isyl ipe hiwen.

Coyote is waiting.

Isyl ipe neken.

Coyote is coming.

Eh kusik tewal yaxal,

And he'll come and get you

Eh Kwa'ii tewal yaxal.

And he will eat you.

At first, the lullaby—promising inevitable death by a coyote—felt like a glitch in the soothing logic of lullabies. But it was precisely this paradox that became a generative force in my work. I began to use the lullaby's verses like a mantra, painting them again and again as a kind of ritual.

The act of painting shifted into a performative gesture—at times absurd, like an evangelical prophet announcing “The End is Near.”

Yet the longer I stayed with the rhythm of the lullaby, the more I began to sense its deeper potential. The performative act of lulling contains within it a methodology: one for care, for grieving, and for collective repair in the face of the social, ecological, and ideological collapse we are all navigating.

In the installation, the paintings are mounted on wooden sticks and leaned throughout the room. They resemble protest banners or demonstration signs—objects made to be lifted, carried, and moved.

This format underscores the performative dimension of these paintings. It brings the body into the space, inviting viewers not only to look, but to imagine picking them up, holding them, taking a stand. The paintings become tools of transmission—carriers of urgency, gestures of resistance, invitations to act.

*Mutual Empathies, (Coyote's Lullaby), solo show
Akademie der Künste der Welt, Cologne, 2025,
(photo © Spohie Dettmar)*





Mutual Empathies, solo show
Akademie der Künste der Welt, Cologne, 2025,
(photo © Spohie Dettmar)



Mutual Empathies, solo show
 Akademie der Künste der Welt, Cologne, 2025,
 (photo © Sophie Dettmar)

Mutual Empathies, lecture performance
 Meduza, Vilnius, 2025
 (photo © Amelie Devon)

