

**Zhana
Ivanova**

**Ongoing
Retrospective
(Chapter 2)**

**Kunsthalle
Basel**

**22.1.–
4.2.2016**

Performance Times

Borrowed Splendour, 2007/2016

Thu 21.1.2016	7.30–8	pm
	8.30–9	pm (in English)
	9.30–10	pm
Fri 22.1.2016	7–7.30	pm
	9–9.30	pm
	10–10.30	pm
	11–11.30	pm
Sun 24.1.2016	3.45–4.15	pm
Thu 28.1.2016	7–7.30	pm
Sun 31.1.2016	3.45–4.15	pm
Thu 4.2.2016	7–7.30	pm

For each performance, three different people agree to participate in a pre-scripted, pre-designed situation. They have no previous knowledge of what they are supposed to do, and they are guided by means of precise instruction.

This is the second chapter of an on-going project that upends the typical nature of the retrospective exhibition. **EN**
Not only is the Bulgarian performance artist Zhana Ivanova (b. 1977) at the beginning of her career (and not, as is usually the case with such shows, already renowned), but her exhibition is being staged chapter by chapter, over many years, creating a retrospective in reverse that only fully takes form over time. Whenever the artist believes that one of her new or older works “belongs” in her survey show, we begin planning how and when to stage it at Kunsthalle Basel. This unusual project exposes the conventions of the retrospective and finds its foundations in the work of the artist herself, specializing as she does in performance-based pieces that reveal the unwritten but omnipresent rules, codes, and systems in society. After having inaugurated the first chapter in 2015, Kunsthalle Basel now presents chapter 2.

Here Ivanova restages her very first performance piece, *Borrowed Splendour*, from 2007, in which she forged what would become her signature use of acute observation, instructional scripts, and meticulous but open-ended procedures. The piece’s elements are sparse: a table with pre-set markings, some chairs, everyday items (ashtray, cigarettes, drinking glasses), two performers cast as “instructors,” and a new set of three volunteers for each twenty-minute staging. And while it might appear to be a theater piece of sorts, it is better understood as a conceptual artwork in which Ivanova’s construction of an artificially induced situation makes gender and power dynamics visible. These “public demonstrations,” as she calls them, aim to bring forward the processes that lead to the production and interpretation of meaning. Thus, besides *representing* human behavior, Ivanova is also interested in *producing* it, and in so doing, uncovering how we perceive the social signals shared among us every day.

“From now on, everything you have to do will be instructed as concretely as possible.” So begins Instructor A, who then reads off a series of ordinary tasks for each of the three volunteers to follow, including walking toward the table, sitting in position, and crossing their legs. These participants—two men and

one woman—never see or rehearse the script before, and thus they, like the audience, discover their actions together. Quickly the instructed tasks become loaded and socially overdetermined, including head tilting, deep breathing, and long gazes between participants—the kinds of gestures that convey flirtation or uneasy encounters in which attraction, competitiveness, or anger between people are expressed through micro movements and body language.

“Think violent thoughts” another directive from the instructor announces. The person on stage responds, either thinking such thoughts or enacting what he believes someone thinking “violent thoughts” might look like, or simply refusing to think such thoughts at all (we might never know). The volunteers’ individual interpretations of their stage personae and the ways in which those personae reproduce conventional behavioral models and gender clichés are as much a part of the intrigue as the directed instructions they hear.

Like much of the artist’s work, *Borrowed Splendour* is informed by the artist’s study of linguistics and her initial career as a translator for the police. So too does the formal language of cinema sit in the background of several of Ivanova’s works. From utilizing principles of cinematic mise-en-scène, applying editing techniques to staging, or modeling scripts on scenes from popular movies, *Borrowed Splendour* borrows many of its gestures from a bar scene in Jean-Luc Godard’s film *Bande à Part*. But unlike a classic movie, *Borrowed Splendour* intentionally resists climax, resolution, or closure. It hinges on the conjunction of determinacy (extremely concrete instructions) and uncertainty (the enigma of how people will understand what is addressed to them). Just as in life, the particularities of individuals, their reactions, and the way in which they follow or resist instructions are counterpoints to a world in which some things are highly ordered and others are entirely beyond our control. It is a world where mastery of circumstance is fleeting, and where splendor is always only merely borrowed.

Zhana Ivanova was born in 1977 in Russe, Bulgaria; she lives and works in Amsterdam.

Zhana Ivanova
Borrowed Splendour, 2007/2016
Performance, approx. 20’
Courtesy Zhana Ivanova; Collection Fonds de dotation
Famille Moulin, Paris

Performed by Ilknur Bahadir, Ines Viktoria Butcher,
and guests

Thanks to
Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam, Uta Eisenreich,
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GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITIONS

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German
24.1.2016, Sunday, 3 pm curator’s tour, in English
and French

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find
an associative selection of publications related to
Zhana Ivanova and her artistic practice.

Kunsthalle Basel

Zhana Ivanova

Ongoing Retrospective (Chapter 2)

22.1.-4.2.2016

Pressebilder / Press Images









Zhana Ivanova, Detail *Borrowed Splendour*, (2007/2016), in *Ongoing Retrospective (Chapter 2)*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Foto: Philipp Hänger /

Zhana Ivanova, detail *Borrowed Splendour*, (2007/2016), in *Ongoing Retrospective (Chapter 2)*, Kunsthalle Basel, 2016. Photo: Philipp Hänger

Courtesy Zhana Ivanova und Collection Fonds de dotation Famille Moulin, Paris /
Courtesy Zhana Ivanova and Collection Fonds de dotation Famille Moulin, Paris

Pressekontakt / Press Contact

Claudio Vogt, Kunsthalle Basel, Steinenberg 7, CH-4051 Basel
Tel. +41 61 206 99 11, press@kunsthallebasel.ch

Zhana Ivanova

Geboren 1977 in Russe/BG; lebt und arbeitet in Amsterdam

AUSBILDUNG

2006 - 2008 DasArts, Advanced Studies in the Performing Arts, Amsterdam
1995 - 1998 Queen Mary University College, London

EINZELAUSSTELLUNG

2016 - *Ongoing Retrospective (Chapter 2): Borrowed Splendour*, Kunsthalle Basel (CH)
2015 - *Ongoing Retrospective (Chapter 1): All the Players*, Kunsthalle Basel (CH)

GRUPPENAUSSTELLUNGEN / PERFORMANCES (AUSWAHL)

2014 - *Predictions*, Robert Morris' Observatorium, Lelystad (NL)
- *Borrowed Splendour*, Fondation Galleries Lafayette, Paris
2013 - *In Mutual Agreement*, Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam
- *All the Players*, Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam
- *Borrowed Splendour*, Fiorucci Art Trust, Stromboli (IT)
- *Borrowed Splendour*, NASA, Amsterdam
- *Borrowed Splendour*, Performance Art Biennale Brüssel, Brüssel
2012 - *Fugue*, Rijksakademie Open, Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam
- *Flip Sides* [1], Cricoteka, Krakau (PL)
- *Flip Sides* [1], W139, Amsterdam
- *Now We Do It for Real* [4], Beursschouwburg, Brüssel
- *Borrowed Splendour*, Frascati, Amsterdam
2011 - *Borrowed Splendour*, Het Veem, Amsterdam
- *Now We Do It for Real* [1,2 & 3], Het Veem Theater, Amsterdam
- *B - Side*, Living Room Festival, Brüssel
- *B - Side*, Extrapool, Nijmegen (NL)
- *B - Side*, Zeebelt, Den Haag (NL)
- *B - Side*, Yxie, Alkmaar (NL)
- *B - Side*, Het Veem, Amsterdam
2010 - *Some Here, Others not*, Nadine tbc, Brüssel
- *A not B*, Nieuwe Vide, Haarlem (NL)

PREISE UND STIPENDIEN

2013 Fiorucci Art Trust (IT / UK), Recherche-Stipendium
2013 Prix de Rome (NL), Preisnominierung
2013 Mondriaan Fonds (NL), Recherche-Stipendium
2012 Prince Bernhard Cultuurfonds (NL), Recherche-Stipendium, Peter Paul Petrich Fonds
2012 - 2014 Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten (NL), Stipendium



Rory Pilgrim, *Wholeheartedly*, 2011, courtesy De Hallen, Haarlem

At the request of Metropolis M, two of the most renowned performance artists living and working in the Netherlands got together and discussed their work. As they had never met before, their encounter had something of the flavour of a blind date.

By Zhana Ivanova & Rory Pilgrim

Zhana Ivanova: To be honest, I don't really like a lot of performances.

Rory Pilgrim: Oh, that's funny.

ZI: But I don't actually see enough of them.

RP: I sometimes get nervous, seeing performances. I think I'm over-protective of myself, not wanting to see too much. I can get much more excited by other references; like, my boyfriend has shown me a lot of fashion shows recently and when I look at that, I think: 'Wow, this is so inspiring.'

ZI: Me too. In the last few months, I have been using the trams more than before, so I have been hanging around at tram stops quite a

lot, which is whole new aspect of Amsterdam for me. Watching people at the tram stops, trying to find a pattern in how they behave.... That's a bit more my thing, having a look at something and trying to detect some regularity or irregularity.

RP: Was this process of observation also part of your project for *Land Art Live* in the Flevopolder?

ZI: Yes, very much so, and the idea of being able to conduct what happens, or find a pattern that's repeatable, and then insert things that put that pattern in a bit of a flux, interests me. I watched the *Observatory* by Robert Morris for a long time, and then realised there is a certain choreography to the way things move around there.

RP: One of the struggles I have at the moment is compartmentalising different things. I don't know if it's the same with you. In the end I often think, 'I'm not going to do any performance whatsoever.'

ZI: I think that every time.

RP: I think it's because the preparation involved is so intense, and knowing that it only functions for a short period of time. It's partly because of who I am and what my interests are,

but it's so fragile. I feel like a performance can fall apart at any moment. It is also a mental preparation.

ZI: The nerves.

RP: Yes, the nerves... in some way it does have to be very secure, but at the same time, it has to have a degree of vulnerability.

ZI: That's an interesting question, actually: To what extent do you prepare? I prepare like crazy. Everything is super-calculated and drawn out in advance with scores and diagrams. I really take care of that – because I like doing it also, making the scores. I need some solid spine to what I am preparing, because I see performance almost like a sculptural thing. It's really scripted, but then I look for a set-up where all of that can be overturned – something like a counterpoint. For example, often I will have unrehearsed people enact the scripts, and their reactions and particularities are that counterpoint.

RP: My background or interest is much more affiliated with social practice, working with people. I might work with a group over a period of workshops or meetings, for which it is really essential to be able to get to know one another and actually talk



Rory Pilgrim, *Affection is the Best Protection*, 2014, launch disco, Land Art Live, Almere, foto Geert van der Wijk

through a series of issues. It requires time and also quite a safe space to do that, so people can speak quite honestly about something and not be put in vulnerable situation. At the same time, nothing is scripted, so it's building them up to a process in which they are comfortable about sharing something in public. That is not something that is completely rehearsed. I often see it as guiding people through a process in which they have to trust me, and when they get to actually doing it, that's when it makes sense to them, what they're a part of. Which is also very vulnerable for them, and for me.

ZI: How long does that process take?

RP: For the Stedelijk in 2012, I worked with a group of teenagers for two months, both as a group and individually; I interviewed and had a talk with each of them. For other projects, it has been much shorter and could be just two meetings beforehand. However, working for quite short periods of time and then making a performance can sometimes feel rather traumatic. The feeling that this quite intense connection with a group of people who could be brought together especially for

my work would not be sustained.

ZI: Do you remain in contact with the people you've worked with?

RP: Sometimes. I've worked with a few of them again and by now, I have a group of people who are long-term collaborators.

ZI: Do you imagine a longer-term involvement with the people you're working with now in Almere, or will it end when the project is over?

RP: For me, it was important to work over the period of a year on the *Land Art Live* project. When I started, I wanted to try and work with an LGBT group, but we realised that a defined or locally organised group did not exist. We discovered that some people in Almere had a desire to create one, though, and the project stimulated them to get started. This has had quite strong implications for them in what role they can play for LGBT issues, education and the wider community in Almere.

Is it important for you to work with people you know?

ZI: Depends, actually. There are people that I've worked with already for years; one actress, for example, is in almost all my projects. I work with Celine a lot for the graphics. So

indeed, you build up kind of a team.

RP: A cosmos.

ZI: Yes, a little cosmos with satellites and things, but it really depends on the piece. Sometimes, the more structured the score is, the more I need to bring in some unknown elements, because otherwise it'd be too rigid. A lot of the situations I create are not only to be looked at. The viewer completes them in a way by being present. In *Predictions*, the *Land Art Live* piece, everything that I arranged to happen could more or less happen on any day, except for some additional things that I did and structured, but if those people were not standing on a hill listening to the script in their headphones, nobody would have known there was a performance going on. Or in other situations, like in *All the Players*, the script is very visible; people read it and compare it to what they are seeing. I try to come up with roles for the audience that are quite active, in an understated way.

RP: I realise sometimes how hopeless I am at thinking about an audience. I'm usually so preoccupied with the people I'm working with and their experience of being a part

of the work, rather than thinking about the audience who will come and see it.

ZI: Those people are also a kind of audience?

RP: When it comes to my planning, I usually think metaphorically about the audience. For some works, I had a recurring image that the people I was working with were bonfires giving off smoke on a beach, and the audience would be this large sea in front of or surrounding them. The audience was therefore this mass made of individual waves, which has its own changing mood and uncontrollable essence.

ZI: For me, there needs to be at least one person who doesn't know what happens next, to make it work. Only then can these highly designed situations unfold. I like the relation between the super-designed and the very spontaneous. I think in terms of composition a lot. I probably would have liked to be a musician or a filmmaker or something, and maybe I'll become that later, but for now, it's these public demonstrations of certain things that move. Not movement as in dance, but patterns or an order of some kind; I find that very beautiful. So it's a lot more formal and a

lot less theme-based to begin with.

RP: I think I'm quite theme-based, and that's why it takes me ages to arrive at how what I am doing will manifest itself, even though it is inevitable that its form will be a continuum of my previous work. It takes a long time for me to think in terms of form, because I may be preoccupied with certain questions or things going on, and it takes a long period of digestion for me to sift out the heart of what I have found or wish to pursue. It's a bit like digging for gold through all of this stuff and sieving out all the dirt before I find the essence of the form or heart of what it is that I am doing. I am a musician, and composing music is very intuitive for me; but I am always surprised that I never start by thinking I am going to write a piece of music or by using a musical format. Perhaps because it is very embedded and natural to me as a form of expression, it becomes separate from my mental process, which I can get very lost in.

ZI: I read this article about an airport in my hometown that had not been used for a long time. In the 90s, some fortune-tellers predicted that aliens were coming to help us out

of the crisis and their UFOs would land on that airport strip. Two thousand people turned up at the airport with bread and salt to meet the guests. They waited a long time and nobody came. Then the fortune-tellers said this was because the President didn't show up: the aliens were insulted. In *Predictions*, some people arrive in a van and inspect the site for landing. They take measurements and make notes. They clean up little bits of rubbish from the ground, because they want to prepare the site for landing. Various stories are interwoven in my works, but I'm not so into pointing out what they are and what they are supposed to mean. I prefer to strip them of any connotation as much as possible, until the essential thing that remains is probably just the movements of the situations, or the points in space, and then try and see what they mean...

RP: At a certain point last year, I started getting a bit frustrated with the performances I did and worrying about what the audience would come away with. With performance in general, I feel there can be quite a consuming aspect, which really worries me at the moment. That people will



Zhana Ivanova, *Ongoing Retrospective (Chapter 1)*, 2015, Kunsthalle Basel, foto Philipp Hänger

come and take a picture that ends up on Instagram and feel like they 'got it' from just being there. I am more interested in doing things now which challenge and deny an instancy or consumptive aspect. That is why I created a disco to launch the *Land Art Live* project, which introduced the work I would be developing over a year. Because it was a launch and presented as a genesis, the audience were brought essentially to the middle of nowhere in Flevoland to witness something starting, but were denied going away with a feeling of something wholly produced. There was a level of commitment which was perhaps quite hard to comprehend or even feel tangible.

ZI: Yes, I wonder at what point would I feel that something is being consumed... I mean, I try to designate a role for viewers, so that if it's not taken, then the piece is not complete. I try to evoke some kind of responsibility in them ... I really like building stuff, not just physically.

RP: Yes, mentally.

ZI: To weave a scenario that you become part of, whether you want it or not. So maybe I don't mind this consuming aspect... I think my

things do look like something that they're not necessarily.

RP: As I get a bit older and do more and more stuff, I am more conscious of challenging myself. It's also so important to try and create space to reflect, learn and test things. Which can be a real challenge when making performance work, because just doing them is already fragile enough. That is why all the performances I made for two years were structured in a similar way, as a means of dealing with that and also being able to build an understanding of how I work with performance. It is not like producing a play or doing a music tour where you perform fifty times. Now I am in a place where I am much more unsure of how a performance takes place or unfolds, but that is exciting.

ZI: I feel like going back now to some things that I was doing eight years ago. There was a period when my work was more loose – here's a few parameters, and let's see what happens. I guess at some point you realize what your favourite thing to do is, and then you go back to it; well, it's not going back, but just doing it differently.

RP: Yes, I also find it hard to articulate something, even though I work so much with language. I have been inspired a lot recently by the British feminist artist Linder, who made these really crazy and amazing thirteen-hour performances. I heard her saying in an interview that as artists we make work because we are inarticulate and create things in a desperate attempt to become articulate.

ZI: My education is not that artistic. At university, I studied Russian, linguistics and literature. After that, I worked for the metropolitan police in London.

RP: For how long?

ZI: Three, four years or so... I was a translator. I was already a bit interested in the theatre though, and things like this. I went to see a lot of art, but I don't have a formal education in art that would make me revolt against something. Part of my drive to get involved was because I was impressed with how things can be prepared so precisely, the intricacy of it all, and I still find that very attractive.

RP: So how did you go from linguistics to the police?



Rory Pilgrim, workshop tijdens *Open*, 2012, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, foto Henri Sandront



Zhana Ivanova, *Predictions*, 2014, videostill, gefilmd door José Biscaya en David Djindjikhachvili

ZI: Well they were looking for people, I speak Russian well. I was living in England at the time, that was in the late 90s, early 2000s. Basically, it was freelance job, but super well paid. When they have somebody in custody who doesn't speak English, you get a call, and then you have to get there within an hour or so. I guess my thing with interpretation was formed in those years. Later on, in the early 2000s, I joined an artists' collective in London, people who were busy with live art, and that's when I started to make some work. I think I was 26 when I started to actually make art as such.

RP: Cool. I mean, I'm 26 now.

ZI: I'm 37.

RP: For me, a lot of the work I have been doing has just come directly from my background and the context of where I am from. When people write about or introduce my work, it comes up that my father is a church minister. People are very quick to make that connection. The language of what I do, the social aspect and the music I have written is perhaps a bit too filled with my religious background. I am trying to go back some-

what to my more experimental and pop band sensibilities as a teenager. Now that I'm 26 and have been working in art, sometimes I could also equally imagine just going to a university and studying a whole new thing.

ZI: What would that be?

RP: Well, I don't know. I'm always quite fluid in terms of thinking about whatever feels like the next right decision about what to do and it could be very transformative instead of working in just one context or trajectory. For the last six years, what I was doing made sense and evolved naturally. It could easily transform into something like starting a peace-and-social-justice initiative, or investing more time in music or linguistics, or maybe even working much more with film.

ZI: Yes, I also wonder what... I mean, there's not that many things I can do, but there are many things I can learn to do.

RP: Yes, that's exciting.

ZHANA IVANOVA

Zhana Ivanova is in Nederland vooral bekend van op sociale patronen gebaseerde performances, die ze afgelopen paar jaar onder andere op de Rijksakademie opvoerde. Dit jaar is ze een bijzonder project aangegaan met Kunsthalle Basel, waar ze komende jaren een keer per jaar een nieuwe performance presenteert. Voor *Land Art Live* in Flevoland ontwikkelde Ivanova *Predictions* (2014), gerelateerd aan het *Observatorium* van Robert Morris in Lelystad.

RORY PILGRIM

Na zijn opleiding aan De Ateliers werd Rory Pilgrim bekend met utopische performances waarvan hij zelf de muziek componeerde. Afgelopen jaren heeft hij zich ontwikkeld tot een regisseur van complexe langdurig voorbereide groepsperformances, waarbij de deelnemers zich soms heel kwetsbaar opstellen. Voor *Land Art Live* in Flevoland, reageert hij met het project *Affection is the best protection* op een land-art werk van Daniel Libeskind. 15 juni is de afsluitende performance.

Meer info:

zhanaivanova.com; rorypilgrim.com;
kunsthallebasel.ch;
landartlive.blogspot.nl/