

# Adelita Husni-Bey

## Maktspill

31.1. – 22.3. 2020

BERGEN KUNSTHALL

Libyan-Italian artist Adelita Husni-Bey describes herself both as an artist and a pedagogue. Her work uses noncompetitive learning models, inspired by pioneers such as the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal's participatory theater and workers' education initiatives. Often making use of the workshop as a format to engage groups in critically examining the present, her work results in a variety of formats: publications, radio broadcasts, archives, exhibitions and films, with schools, hospitals and legal aid organizations. Her practice is grounded in imagining change in contemporary society and analyzing the roots of power relations, conviviality and exclusion. At the same time, her approach reflects on how tools of learning and participation, with their inherent power dynamics, for example in the school system, play an integral function for the state and its economy.

At Bergen Kunsthall Adelita Husni-Bey presents an installation and workshop titled "Maktspill". A film, *Agency*, in the centre of the installation chronicles a 3-day intensive role-play with students from Manara High School in Rome, produced in 2015, in which the students enact some of the assumed roles in a neoliberal democracy: politicians, journalists, workers, activists and bankers. Through a set of rules, the participants play out and modify the power relationships between the groups, creating coalitions and negotiating their impact and dependencies through the game. Modeled after a citizenship education project developed in the UK as a form of critical learning, *Agency* asks the crucial and ambivalent question: how is 'agency' – the ability to enact change in society – intertwined with power?

The premise for the game was a situation based on an actual daily newspaper headline from the time: an earthquake had caused severe damage in a region of the country, leaving workers in a precarious position. In the workshop, the students developed the following scenario: The "activists" divided themselves into two fractions with differing ideologies, while the "politicians" attempted to form a grand left-wing coalition called the Maxxist League. The "activists" decided at this point to form an extreme right-wing party to challenge the Maxxist league, and wins in the course of the process the elections. The "bankers" are accused of selling their vote to the right-wing coalition, while the "workers" are left to their own devices and put together a third force called the Five Orange Movement, which they use as a vehicle to display dissent after a number of failed protests. The documentation follows the game and the reflections of the students about the impact of their actions.

During the exhibition period, the screening room will be used as a workspace and classroom for a

new iteration of the role-play, involving groups of young people in Bergen. Photographic backdrops are used both as a screen for the film and as elements against which the workshop takes place and leave its trace during the exhibition. For the workshop in Bergen, a new premise will be developed in response to the news of the day, and the groups will find their own ways to react. The difference in context – Italy and Norway – and the time that passed since the first workshop play a significant role in the exhibition. In some ways the project in Rome predicted developments that are characteristic of contemporary neoliberalism. The participants in *Agency* anticipated the rise of populist movements and the effects of austerity measures in their reflections on how power is shared and taken, but more importantly: how it can be redistributed. The new iteration in Bergen will draw from its own specific context, through introductory sessions with local experts and the use of news headlines from Norwegian politics. How do these power dynamics play out differently in the context of a Nordic welfare state? What has changed in the past five years that have seen drastic developments in the use of media, also in politics? In the installation, visitors are invited to follow this process, and speculate on their own. What will shift in order to create new scenarios for coming generations? What is the result of the neoliberal restructuring of sociality?

**Adelita Husni-Bey** (b. 1985, Milan, Italy) works and lives in Italy and New York. Her recent solo exhibitions include *Chiron*, New Museum, New York (2019), *White Paper: On Land, Law and the Imaginary*, CA2M, Mostoles and *A Wave in the Well*, Surssock Museum, Beirut (2016). She represented Italy at the Venice Biennale (2017) with a video rooted in anti-extractivist struggles.

The exhibition is a collaboration of Bergen Kunsthall and Borealis – a festival for experimental music.

**Workshop:** Class 2KDA (Art, design and architecture), Olsvikåsen videregående skole (high school), 9–13 March 2020. Teachers: Atle Kold Hansen and Lillian Presthus.

#### Film:

Adelita Husni-Bey

*Agency*, 2015

HD video, 27 mins.

Workshop framework and film editing: Adelita Husni Bey. With the participation of students from Manara Highschool, Rome. Courtesy Laveronica Arte Contemporanea