

Visitors of the Lithuanian Space Agency at the Biennale Architettura 2021 are becoming part of a new virtual celestial body

Halfway through the 17th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia (Venice, Italy), the Lithuanian Pavilion (aka the Lithuanian Space Agency) continues the ambitious artistic and scientific study of a hypothetical artificial planet made entirely from human bodies. Even though it would take a trillion years to truly implement such an idea, tens of thousands of visitors have already participated in the astrophysical simulation and begun to form the virtual asteroid.

The Lithuanian Pavilion transformed the interior of the Renaissance-style church of Santa Maria dei Derelitti into the Lithuanian Space Agency's (LSA) laboratory. In this laboratory, Julijonas Urbonas (the LSA's founder, artist and researcher) presents his most recent project *Planet of People*. The LSA explores what it would actually take to realise the architectural fiction of *Planet of People*, raising questions about its sociopolitical implications. In addition, the project explores current aesthetic, ethical and political issues concerning space prevalent in existing national and commercial programmes such as cosmic culture and imagination, space colonialism and pollution, policies governing the activities of space exploration and the privatisation of outer space.

Presented by the Lithuanian Council for Culture and organised by Rupert, Centre for Art and Education in Vilnius, the LSA exhibition is commissioned by Rupert's director Julija Reklaitė and curated by Jan Boelen, artistic director of Atelier LUMA in France, rector of Karlsruhe University of Art & Design (HfG) in Germany and the founder and former artistic director of Z33 – House for Contemporary Art, Design & Architecture in Belgium.

The LSA, a fictional organisation that explores space architecture and culture, was established in 2019 as a result of Urbonas' more than decade-long research into 'gravitational aesthetics'. Gravitational aesthetics is a genre of architecture, design and art concerned with the choreographing and locomotive power of things – both real and imaginary – and the effects these choreographies have on the sensual, psychological and social domains. 'The recent project is also a crossover between speculative design and architecture. Here, architecture is not physically tangible but instead imagined. By considering architecture on a planetary scale, for instance, terraforming, we can view earthly architecture differently. This unique critical perspective defines architecture as a very earthbound discipline, with gravity as its main problem', says Urbonas, 'This is why it is important to push architecture into more radical circumstances and consider the inversion of Vitruvian conceptual architecture. In other words: what would happen if in architecture humans gave up their long-held central position in favour of becoming raw material?'

Visitors approaching the LSA in the unique setting of the church will find a portable 'space camping' architectural constellation designed by Isora x Lozuraityte Studio for Architecture. The travelling lab anchors itself on two large reflective sails that bracket the project and protect the sensitive historical surfaces. The impression of mobility is based on deployable structures created by artist Vladas Suncovas, who also designed the 3D scanner rig. At the centre of the *Planet of People* installation, a machine made up of six 3D cameras programmed by Studio Pointer* (an interactive media design studio run by Asya Sukhorukova and Jakob Schlötter) scans the participants of the experiment and 'sends' them into one of the Lagrangian Points (L2). L2 is a point in space where gravity is almost absent, allowing frozen bodies to float freely until they converge into a blob due to their weak gravities. In this way, a new 'human' planet is extra-terraformed, making all participants planetary co-architects.

According to the LSA architects Ona Lozuraitytė and Petras Išora, 'the main aim of the visual layer was to create unrecognisable evidence of known technology.'. For this purpose, the architects addressed current material urgencies and used an unusual-looking material borrowed from the largest plastic manufacturer in the Baltic States and one of the leading plastic recycling companies in Europe. This material has been recycled several times and now, as part of the LSA, is just in another stage of its continuous circulation. Its mass represents a critical perspective on human-made shifting geology and the stratum of material flows and traces that humans are leaving behind as a species. The tangled structure and ironic ornamentation resembles human guts and engages in an interesting interplay with Urbonas' *Planet of People*, which consists of entangled human bodies. Conceptually referring to the idea of humans as post-fossil, this sinuous material was moulded into torus-shaped sitting elements and the surface of a rotating table that contains both a reception desk and the archive of the Lithuanian Space Agency. This archive encompasses some of Urbonas'

other works or 'prototypes' such as *Airtime*, *Barany Chair*, *Cerebral Spinner*, *Cumspin*, *Emancipation Kit*, *Euthanasia Coaster*, *Hypergravitational Piano* and *Oneiric Hotel*. These works and the research behind them have formed the basis of the main installation, *Planet of People*.

As part of the project, the LSA has produced its first annual report, edited by the assistant curator Milda Batakytė and Urbonas, and published by Six Chairs Books together with Rupert and Vartai Gallery. The publication features several texts on gravitational aesthetics by the artist himself, an in-depth presentation of *Planet of People* and commissioned feasibility studies by researchers from different fields of planetary science such as space architecture, design, art, engineering, astroanthropology, astronomy and astrophysics. Specially adapted for the Biennale Architettura 2021, the very first version of *Planet of People* was presented as Urbonas' solo show in late 2018 at Vartai Gallery in Vilnius. The planet had also been forming in 2020 at the Collective's City Dome exhibition space in Edinburgh and the Science Gallery in Dublin.

This is Lithuania's third time participating in the International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, and the second time that the country has produced the Pavilion independently. In 2016, Lithuania, together with Latvia and Estonia, participated as a united Baltic Pavilion. In 2018, Lithuania presented its first individual pavilion titled *The Swamp School*, curated by Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas and commissioned by Pippo Ciorra.

Credits:

Artist: Julijonas Urbonas
Curator: Jan Boelen
Commissioner: Julija Reklaitė
Assistant Curator: Milda Batakytė
Laboratory design: Isora x Lozuraityte Studio for Architecture
Deployable structures design: Vladas Suncovas
Graphic design and 3D scanner programming: Studio Pointer*
Engineering: Povilas Ambrasas
Producer: Mindaugas Reklaitis
Presented by the Lithuanian Council for Culture
Organised by Rupert, Centre for Art and Education in Vilnius

Address:

Chiesa di Santa Maria dei Derelitti
Barbaria delle Tole, 6691,
(Castello), 30122 Venice, Italy ([Map](#))

Opening Times:

22 May – 21 November 2021
10 am – 7 pm
Daily guided tours: 6 pm
Closed on Mondays

Every person must present an EU Covid Certificate (Green Pass) to access the Lithuanian Pavilion.
For further information, images and interviews, please contact media@lithuanianspace.agency.

Notes to Editors:

The LSA Team

Founder:

Julijonas Urbonas
Lives and works in Vilnius

Julijonas is an artist, designer, researcher, engineer, lecturer. He is the former Pro-Rector of arts at Vilnius Academy of Arts and the CEO of an amusement park in Klaipėda. For more than a decade, he has been working between critical design, amusement park engineering, performative architecture, choreography, kinetic art and sci-fi and has been developing various critical tools for negotiating gravity: from a killer roller coaster to an artificial planet made entirely of human bodies. As part of his research, he has coined the term 'gravitational aesthetics', which involves manipulating gravity to create experiences that push the body and imagination to the extreme. His work has been exhibited internationally and has received numerous awards, including the Award of Distinction in Interactive Art, Prix Ars Electronica 2010. His works have been acquired by private and museum collections.

Curator:

Jan Boelen
Lives and works in Karlsruhe

Jan Boelen is a curator of design, architecture and contemporary art. He is Rector of Karlsruhe University of Art & Design (HfG), artistic director of Atelier LUMA and the founder and former artistic director of Z33-House for contemporary art & design. He has curated the 4th Istanbul Design Biennial, *School of Schools* (2018), and was the initiator of Manifesta 9 (2012) in Belgium. Over the years he has been fashioning projects and exhibitions that encourage visitors to look at everyday objects in a novel manner. Boelen recently edited *Social Matter, Social Design: For Good or Bad, All Design is Social* (2020), in which his writing addresses the implications of design in everyday life and how design as a discipline is shaped by artistic practices.

Assistant Curator:

Milda Batakytė

Lives and works in London

Milda works as an independent curator and assists the artist Mona Hatoum at her studio in London. From June 2021 she works at Rupert as Acting Director. Milda received her MFA degree in Curating from Goldsmiths, University of London in 2019. Milda's most recently curated exhibitions include: *The Echo System* (Thames-Side Gallery, London, 2021), *More More More Morph!* (Chalton Gallery, London, 2019), *Coming to Terms with Sociotechnical Discrepancies* (12 Star Gallery, London, 2018). Her curatorial research revolves around current socio-political questions and how these feed into making and exhibiting art; her curatorial research outcome is abstract and lyrical, and therefore can have an open ended interpretation. In the past, she has gained work experience at White Cube (London), Lisson Gallery (London) and Peggy Guggenheim Collection (Venice), among others.

Commissioner:

Julija Reklaitė

Lives and works in Vilnius

Julija is the director of Rupert – centre for art, residencies and education. Between 2015 and 2019, she was the Lithuanian Cultural Attaché in Italy. In 2019, Julija worked as a commissioner of the Lithuanian Pavilion for the Triennale di Milano. She is a co-founder of the public organisation, Architektūros Fondas, which she directed between 2009 and 2012. She has worked on various projects in the fields of architecture, exhibition design, cultural diplomacy, contemporary art and theatre. Reklaitė studied at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, where she obtained a PhD in Architectural History and Theory. She is the author, co-author and editor of various publications and articles.

Laboratory Designers:

Isora x Lozuraityte studio for architecture

Live and work in Vilnius, Lithuania

The studio is led by Petras Išora and Ona Lozuraitytė. The creative duo work within the expanded field of architecture exploring the built environment, public space and infrastructure, landscape, material management and exhibition design and curating. The duo were one of the co-curators for the Baltic Pavilion, the joint Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian representation at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2016. The studio has developed exhibition architectures for Pakui Hardware, Jonas Mekas, Laure Prouvost and many others. Ona and Petras are also one of the co-founders of the project platform KILD that has won a number of international architectural competitions.

Deployable Structures Designer:

Vladas Suncovas

Live and work in Vilnius, Lithuania

Vladas Suncovas is an artist who creates spaces and tools using methods of architecture, design, engineering and art. His spatial practice expands across the fields of theater, exhibition and furniture design, architecture, installations and educational projects. After graduating from Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts Suncovas has been working internationally and lecturing several years at Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts. The distinctive features of Suncovas' work include modular constructions, elements of mechanical engineering, deployable structures, parametric design, as well as space transformations using conceptually sound, often critical solutions.

Programmers, Graphic Designers:

Studio Pointer* (Asya Sukhorukova & Jakob Schlötter)

Live and work in The Hague

Studio Pointer* is an interactive media design studio by Asya Sukhorukova and Jakob Schlötter. Jakob and Asya both received their degrees in Graphic Design at the Royal Academy of Arts in The Hague. Their work revolves around experimental storytelling and strives to explore the hidden potential in contemporary technologies, re-mixing found materials and researching different aspects of new media's role in anthropology and culture. In addition to their independent practice, Asya and Jakob have developed various projects that range from sound and website design and image making to the development of complex digital environments and interactive installations. They have worked on commissions for clients in cultural and commercial sectors. Works by Studio Pointer* have been showcased in various exhibitions and festivals in the Netherlands and abroad.

Pavilion Producer:

Mindaugas Reklaitis

Lives and works in Vilnius

Mindaugas is an architect, co-founder of the architecture office, sprik and an architect at the National Gallery of Art, Vilnius. He is a Ph.D. candidate at the Vilnius Academy of Arts researching performative architecture as critical spatial practice. In addition to over ten years of architectural practice designing award-winning buildings in Lithuania and abroad, he has been

involved in projects produced by various NGO institutions. He was a project manager of the Lithuanian Pavilion for the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2018 and a co-producer and architect of Golden Lion Award-winning *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, presented for the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2019.

Rupert is an independent, publicly funded centre for art, residencies and education, located in Vilnius, Lithuania. Rupert has been operating since 2012. Rupert's mission is to establish close cooperation between artists, thinkers, researchers and other cultural actors through transdisciplinary programmes and residencies. Rupert is committed to integrating with the social and cultural life of Vilnius and Lithuania, while also maintaining a strong international focus. Rupert manifests this mission through three related programmes: the residency programme, the alternative education programme and the public programmes. They are all dedicated to creating platforms for conversation, research and learning. Through these programmes, Rupert supports local international thinkers in realising their projects and establishing their creative practice on an international scale.