

Kunstmuseum Bochum

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Truth

Never

has

Been

in

Ours

Reality

Maya Deren Stano Filko  
26.4. – 21.09.2025

MAYA DEREN – STANO FILKO  
*Truth Has, In Reality, Never Been Ours*  
26.04. – 21.09.2025  
With artistic contributions by  
Ibon Aranberri and Martin Vongrej

*Truth Has, In Reality, Never Been Ours* is dedicated to the work of conceptual artist Stano Filko (1937–2015) and avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren (1917–1961). Both artists left behind impressive oeuvres, including some works that are deliberately incomplete and fragmentary. The exhibition can be understood as a kind of ‘experimental arrangement’ that gives form to the works. Site-specific installations by Slovakian artist Martin Vongrej (b. 1986) in the side wing on the ground floor and by Spanish artist Ibon Aranberri (b. 1969) on the second floor enhance the exhibition with their own interpretations of the infinite and the unfinished.

Although Maya Deren and Stano Filko were not contemporaries, they shared an interest in spirituality and metaphysics. Their works resulted in their own mythologies and cosmologies, which can also be interpreted as forms of resistance. In response to the totalitarian state regime in the former Czechoslovakia, Stano Filko developed a comprehensive classification system based on colours (chakras) and numbers. As an artist, Filko acted in an uncritical, even narcissistic manner, and was certainly obsessive, indeed almost messianically obsessed.

In addition to photography and poetry, Maya Deren created films that are still influential today. In the 1940s and 1950s, she travelled to Haiti several times to film Vodoun ceremonies. Excerpts from her *Haitian Footage* can be viewed as film sequences in the exhibition. She rapidly abandoned her original intention of filming dance after realising that Haitian dance was part of an extremely complex global context – on both a religious and a political level – and that a purely formal approach would not do justice to the subject as a whole.

While Maya Deren moved through rituals with her camera, Stano Filko moved through time and space dimensions in his multidisciplinary works. Both sought the truth behind everyday phenomena – and both found it in their own systems that transcend the boundaries of Western rationality.

Maya Deren’s haunting spiritual experiences and discoveries in mid-twentieth-century Haiti run parallel to Stano Filko’s cosmological and metaphysical endeavours. Both artists scrutinise the notion of time as linear and rationality itself, thus echoing contemporary, decolonial discourses – an approach that challenges Western modernity’s universal claim to interpretative sovereignty.

The exhibition was developed by the curators Lucia Gregorová Stach (Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava, until April 2025), Roger M. Buerger (documenta 12), and Julia Lerch Zajęczkowska (Kunstmuseum Bochum).

The title of the exhibition *Truth Has, In Reality, Never Been Ours* is based on an essay by the Slovenian curator and author Zdenka Badovinac: ‘Self-Historicization: Artist Archives in Eastern Europe’ (2023). In it, she describes how artists’ archives render their own reality visible – with an awareness of the extent to which wars, repressive political systems, and media biases have shaped and influenced cultural memory.

In light of the recent worrying political developments in Slovakia, which have affected cultural institutions, particularly the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava, the structure and content of the exhibition have been adapted to reflect these critically. Over the past year, as a result of the political shift to the right, colleagues in Slovakian cultural institutions have been dismissed and replaced with new staff by the government. The exhibition thus underlines both the resilience and adaptability of artistic practice and institutional collaboration in the midst of a difficult global political landscape.

Truth Has, In Reality, Never Been Ours.



On the roof of Stano Filko Snežienková’s studio in Bratislava / The structure inspired the architecture of the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bochum.  
Photo: Juraj Bartoš, 1995

#### STANO FILKO

Stano Filko (\*1937, Veľká Hradná – † 2015 Bratislava) was a Slovak neoavantgarde and postmodern artist whose radical vision transformed the very nature of what contemporary art could be. Over five decades, he constructed a deeply personal yet universal cosmology of thought, colour, and being – a philosophically physiological and spiritual system he called *System SF*, which charted existence across three ascending dimensions: Biology (3.D), Cosmology (4.D), and Ontology (5.D).

Far from a fixed theory, Filko’s system was alive – constantly rewritten, expanded, and inhabited through artworks, manifestos, installations, and his legendary studio on Snežienková Street in Bratislava, itself a total artwork and spatial archive. His practice was shaped by exile, return, and reinvention, always resisting linearity in favor of recursion, multiplicity, and “achronie” – time freed from chronology.

This exhibition offers not a conclusion but a constellation: artworks, digital reconstructions of his *Archive SF*, and metaphysical spaces that echo his search for transcendence. Rather than presenting a tidy legacy, it invites you into a reality where meaning is layered, open, and always in motion.

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#### STANO FILKO – SYSTEM SF

Stano Filko’s *System SF* is one of the most intricate artistic cosmologies in European art history. It is a total system of meaning, creation, archiving, and self-historization. The origins of *System SF* lie in the 1960s and 70s, when Filko, working within the constraints of socialist Czechoslovakia, began to



construct his own alternative to the collapsing public art institutions. Deprived of access to progressive galleries, journals, and curators after 1968 occupation of the state, Filko, like many of his Eastern European contemporaries, turned inward. He constructed the only institution left available: the Self. From this necessity emerged the foundational concept of his self-mythologizing practice —the „legend of the artist.“ This legend, drawing on mystical childhood memories and clinical death experiences in 1945, 1952 and 1984, evolved into the psychic and symbolic matrix of *System SF*.

*System SF* is Stano Filko's life-encompassing project: an attempt to map the entire structure of existence —from matter to spirit —through a unified system of dimensions, colours, senses, and symbols. Developed during Filko's emigration in the USA since the mid 1980s, it builds upon the conceptual terrain first explored in his *HAPPSOC* actions of the 1960s. *HAPPSOC* concept gradually shifting from everyday observation to metaphysical departure became the prefigurative terrain for Filko's elaboration of *System SF*. Where *HAPPSOC* enacted reality, *System SF* diagrammed it.

The system is structured around three main dimensions and domains: 3.D — Biology: body, sensation, and earthly experience (red, orange, yellow, green, blue and black), connected to flesh, body, erotic, senses, and survival. 4.D — Cosmology: intuition, faith, thought, love, altruism, and transcendence (indigo, pink and silver) correspond to intuition, soul, cosmos, and consciousness. 5.D — Ontology: spirit, genius, essence, and pure being (gold, white, and finally, transparent — Filko's ultimate spiritual "colour"). Filko developed a 7 and 12-chakra cosmology (even 20 late in life), extending Eastern spiritual schemes into his personal holistic art-language. Each chakra-colour-sense triad forms a rung in the ladder from (black) ego to (transparent) spirit. *System SF* was not a closed theory. It was a living, open system through which Filko sought to transcend death, time, and material limitations, offering a perspective on art as a spiritual worldview for the postmodern age and contemporaneity.

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#### STANO FILKO — *HAPPSOC: Total Reality — Participatory Metaphysics*

*HAPPSOC* was a radical, long-duration conceptual project launched in 1965 by the artists Stano Filko, Alex Mlynárčik, and curator Zita Kostrová, who together authored the original *HAPPSOC Manifesto*. *HAPPSOC* can be loosely (and ironically) translated as "Happy Socialism". More than a happening or performance, it was an effort to transform reality into an artistic medium —first through subtle critique, and later through metaphysical speculation. Structured in five phases, *HAPPSOC* reflects a trajectory from collaborative, socially grounded actions to Filko's solo cosmological vision.

*HAPPSOC I and II* (1965), created jointly by Filko and Mlynárčik, centered on the poetics of the everyday. The first took place between May Day and Victory Day and involved mailing out mock-statistical invitations that listed absurd inventories of the city — "1 Castle," "1 Bratislava" — exposing the ideological structures behind how reality is counted and categorized. The second asked participants to linger in a train station for extended durations, transforming time and presence into material. From *HAPPSOC III* onward, the project became Filko's solo continuation.

*HAPPSOC III: Altar of Contemporaneity* (1966) took the form of a mail-art invitation, accompanied by a map of Czechoslovakia, repositioning national territory as a metaphysical artwork. These maps became recurring elements in Filko's work, symbolizing the artist's appropriation of political reality into his own spiritual system.

*HAPPSOC IV* (1967) extended this leap —it was a conceptual call to cosmic travel, urging participants to "go into outer space, in mind and body." The work abandoned terrestrial context in favour of cosmic subjectivity.

*HAPPSOC 5: Invitation to Reincarnation* (c.1995) culminated this journey. Its form — a text-art mandala and cross, perforated in the center — signified a passage into 5.D (the fifth dimension), the highest ontological level in Filko's emerging *System SF*. The incorporated CD shape connected past and future: referencing his early vinyl works of the 1970s, while embracing the idea of the infinite loop, spiritual rebirth, post-sensory existence and immortality.

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#### STANO FILKO — *ARCHIV SF:*

##### *A System of Systems*

After returning to Bratislava from the emigration in the United States (1982 — 1990), Stano Filko began building *Archive SF* that was not a conventional record of his works, but a living, diagrammatic meta-system of works, concept, writing, photographs, slides, and objects assembled in plastic sheets in folders through which Filko reorganized his past and projected his vision into the future. *Archive SF* shows his anxious desire to understand contemporaneity in all its changing aspects.

Originated in his home and studio on Snežienková Street in Bratislava, itself transformed into a total artwork, *Archive SF* became the physical embodiment of *System SF* — Filko's lifelong cosmology. Each room in the house was dedicated to a different dimension and chakra; folders were grouped there by colour, symbol, and metaphysical function. Filko didn't archive for posterity. He archived to transcend. Old works were redated, annotated, overwritten, and recomposed in gestures of super-temporality — "uptime" in his interpretation, a layered understanding of time as nonlinear, recursive, and cosmic.

*Archive SF* is not a vault of memory, but a performative instrument. It enacts Filko's belief that art is not about representation, but reincarnation and immortality — the constant spiritual renewal of forms, meanings, and self. In its pages, symbols, and vibrations, *Archive SF* reveals Filko not just as an artist, but as a self-institution, philosopher, and kind of postmodern mystic.

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KVETO HEČKO – HAPPSOC  
Dokumentarfilm, 7 Clips, insgesamt  
26:16 min, 1997  
Mit freundlicher Genehmigung des  
Künstlers

The artfilm *HAPPSOC* (1996) by film maker Kveto Hečko is created as a cinematic portrait of Stano Filko's metaphysical project as lived reality: "By watching this movie you will explore the concept of HAPPSOC, as the uncom-promising, anti-political, anti-diplomatic, anti-militaristic, anti-petty bourgeois, absolute, free, naked, unstylized art." (K. H.) Shown in seven clips by the film director himself, the film reanimates Filko's presence at his Studio Snežienkova in Bratislava. Thus, Filko appears in the exhibition not only as a historical figure, but as a living agent within his cosmological *System SF*. When asked about the meaning of his life, he says: "Conditions for my work were never the best or the worst, because I don't create, I have it as my inner fanatic duty." (S.F.)



Stano Filko during the filming of *HAPPSOC*.  
Photo: Kveto Hečko, 1996

#### STANO FILKO – PERFORMANCE IN THE WHITE

*5th dimension = ontology – metaphysics – timeless absolute spirit – white chakra – transcendence = 1953–1995*  
Videoaufzeichnung, DVD, 33 min, 1995  
Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Bratislava City Gallery

Since the 1960s, Filko engaged the camera as a metaphysical witness: *Playing Chess with One's Own* (1968), *Building the Cosmos* (1968), *Entering the Breathing* (1970) or *Antiperformance Behind Closed Door* (1973) staged his evolving cosmology. *Performance in the White*, a video work from 1995, recorded during his exhibition *5th dimension = ontology – metaphysics – uptime absolute spirit – white chakra – transcendence = 1953–1995* at the C. Majerník Gallery, functions as a performative expression

of the "white" spiritual part of the System SF. In Filko's words, the 5th dimension marks "the victory of SPIRIT," the realm of "ABSOLUTELY UPTIME REALITY," where ontology, metaphysics, and transcendence converge into "the grandeur of the reality of inner ethics."



5.D vom Studio Snežienková / 5.D from the Studio Snežienková. 2005.  
Photo: Juraj Bartoš

#### MAYA DEREN – RESTORATION PROJECT OF THE HAITIAN FOOTAGE

The filmmaker Maya Deren was born in Kyiv in 1917, in the midst of the turmoil of the Russian Revolution. Her family fled the pogroms in 1922 and emigrated to the USA. It is reasonable to assume that these early experiences shaped the artist: Deren saw herself as a mediator between cultures, as someone who did not really belong or fit in anywhere, but for this very reason developed the ability to feel at home everywhere.

Under the influence of Katherine Dunham (1909, Glen Ellyn, IL – 2006, New York, NY), an African American dancer, choreographer, anthropologist, and activist, Deren developed an interest in Haitian culture, particularly forms of dance. For the artists of the Harlem Renaissance, Haiti was a special place – the site of a successful uprising of enslaved people that helped establish an independent Black nation.

Between 1947 and 1955, Deren travelled alone to Haiti several times. She rapidly abandoned her original intention of filming dance after realising that Haitian dance was part of an extremely complex global context – on both a religious and a political level – and that a purely formal approach would not do justice to the subject as a whole.

Deren was welcomed in Haiti with open arms and given the opportunity to study Vodoun practices. She took notes, which she later condensed into a book. She also recorded footage, primarily of religious ceremonies, but from a position that was neither that of a detached anthropologist nor of an over-identifying romantic. However, the material that was produced over these years (several hours of film and countless photographs) would never be touched again after her return to New York. Deren died in 1961.



Maya Deren in Haiti, late 1940s (c) Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Centre



Today, the question arises as to what can or should be done with this material – the *Haitian Footage*. Deren was a master of cinematic montage; she incorporated crucial lessons of revolutionary Russian filmmaking into her oeuvre. Much of what distinguishes her films was created in the cutting room. Does this mean that the *Haitian Footage* should be shown uncut? We don't think so. However, withholding it from the audience is not the answer either.

Which curatorial approach to the material is the right one – or, if there is no right option, which is the least wrong one? This question is the driving force behind the *Restoration Project*.

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IBON ARRANBERRI – *MAKINA ESKUA DA*  
(*THE MACHINE IS THE HAND*)

Installation im 2. OG

Ibon Aranberri (b. 1969) is one of the leading voices in contemporary conceptual art in Spain. His works critically examine aspects of transformation in politics, history, and the landscape. He often uses found materials, archival documents, or site-specific elements to render complex contexts visible. The installation here consists of steel profiles (blanks) and forged samples from apprentices learning the craft of (weapon) smithing. The samples themselves were collected by the artist from families and members of the blacksmiths' guild and come from various regions and different periods of the twentieth century. Shared practices, carried out as training exercises for industrial (weapon) production, produced certain forms throughout Europe that harbour a kind of inherent ambiguity – that of a material that is useless and yet serves its purpose as a mere learning tool. Made from solid steel profiles, these geometric elements are used as calibration, adjustment, precision, and composition models. As simple exercises in craftsmanship, they have an abstract power that maintains a certain distance from the original learning models of weapon making. Aranberri views his installation as a study, as a never-ending series of configurations that could have also been completely different. In dialogue with the works of Stano Filko and Maya Deren, his work reads as a plea to the infinite (number of possibilities).

*Makina eskua da* was previously shown at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid and was originally created as part of the Peace Treaty exhibition curated by Pedro G. Romero for the European Capital of Culture Donostia/San Sebastián 2016. Several artists were invited to respond to the theme of the main exhibition, which explored representations of peace in the history of art, culture, and law. Under this premise, Aranberri's exploration focused on the context of the arms industry, whose roots continued to spread out further – sometimes in the same industrial sector, but in most cases by diversifying and opening up to other branches of manufacturing, such as the production of typewriters or sewing machines.



Ibon Aranberri *Makina eskua da* (The Machine Is the Hand), 2016; Steel parts/exercise pieces, rolls of wrapping paper. Photo: Nader Koochaki

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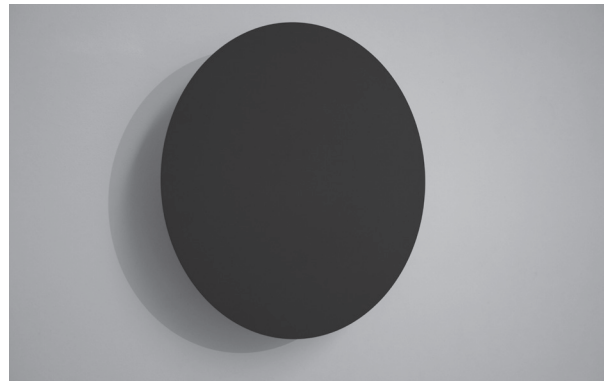
MARTIN VONGREJ – *BETWEEN LIGHT AND THOUGHT*

Installation im Seitenflügel, EG

Martin Vongrej's part of the exhibition offers a quiet reflection on consciousness, and of the subtle thresholds between thought and form. He explores how meaning arises – not through representation, but through presence and attention.

Vongrej's own practice was shaped, in part, by his acquaintance with Stano Filko, whose metaphysical systems and refusal of linear time left a lasting impression on his approach. While Vongrej speaks in a different visual language and is mostly interested in light, his work continues a similar search – for ways to access the immaterial, for spaces where seeing becomes a form of inner awareness.

Through minimal means, Vongrej invites us into a state of poetic and heightened perception. His work doesn't ask for interpretation. It asks us to pause, observe, and participate – to inhabit the fragile, living space where thought takes form.



Martin Vongrej *Spinning Blue*, 2024; acrylic and vinyl on wood, motor. Courtesy of the artist

## STANISLAV „STANO“ FILKO

\*1937 in Veľká Hradná;

†2015 in Bratislava, Slovakia

Influenced by modern architecture, mathematical algorithms, spirituality and the cosmos, Stano Filko created pneumatic sculptures and environments, assemblages, text-based art, and initiated happenings and actions in public spaces in the 1960s, which he opposed to the monumental representation of the socialist regime in his home country, then Czechoslovakia. His complex works are eclectic, multi-media and collage-like. They tell of political entanglements and artistic coping strategies in times of totalitarian regimes that still have an impact today. After his great successes in the 1960s, Filko became persona non grata as a result of the Prague Spring. He managed to flee to West Germany in the early 1980s, emigrated to New York in 1982 and finally returned to Bratislava in 1990. Following the principles of his System SF, he built and designed his studio house Snežienková into a complete work of art.

## MAYA DEREN

\*1917 in Kyiv;

†1961 in New York City, USA

The pioneer of avant-garde film, dancer, photographer and theorist began making films in the early 1940s. Beyond traditional notions of time and space, she created subjective cinematic realities, combined film, dance, rituals, choreography and poetry, designed surrealist dream worlds and cinematic choreographies, experimented with trick techniques and, last but not least, chiaroscuro moods. Maya Deren is considered the most important avant-garde filmmaker of the 20th century. Her short film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943, shot with Alexander Hammid) is an integral part of the modernist canon. Between 1947 and 1955, Deren travelled to Haiti several times to study dance and trance in the context of Voudoun rituals.

## IBON ARANBERRI

\*1969 in Itziar, Basque Country

Ibon Aranberri is one of the most important voices in contemporary conceptual art in Spain. His works deal critically with political, historical and landscape transformations. He often uses found materials, archive documents or site-specific elements to visualise complex contexts. Aranberri's installations, texts, films and photographs reflect processes of collective memory. In 2023, a major retrospective of his work was shown at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid.

## MARTIN VONGREJ

\*1986 in Bratislava

Martin Vongrej explores the limits of perception and the architecture of thought. His work draws on minimalist and conceptual traditions, yet remains rooted in a sense of sensory wonder and metaphysical enquiry. Vongrej's own practice has been shaped in part by his acquaintance with Stano Filko, whose metaphysical systems and rejection of linear time have left a lasting impression on his own artistic approach.

## KVETO HEČKO

\*born 1958 in Bratislava

Kveto Hečko is a producer and filmmaker based in Houston. He makes films and videos about art, the environment, people and objects. Among other things, he released the short film *Happsoc* in 1997, a documentary about Stano Filko's work on his concept and performance series *Happsoc*, which can be seen in the exhibition in the form of seven short clips.

### EXHIBITION- AND MUSEUM TEAM

#### PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Ibon Aranberri, Maya Deren, Stano Filko, Kveto Hečko, Martin Vongrej

#### CURATORS

Roger M. Buerger, Lucia Gregorová Stach, Julia Lerch Zajączkowska

#### CURATORIAL

CONSULTING  
Mira Keratová

#### DIRECTOR

Noor Mertens

#### DEPUTY DIRECTORS

Eva Busch,  
Julia Lerch Zajączkowska

#### EXHIBITION DESIGN

Max Hübener

#### EXHIBITION

INSTALLATION  
Muhamet Beqiri, Songül Edis, Frank Hellweg, Jörg Mertens, Fion Pellacini, Marie Pietsch

#### TECHNICAL SERVICES

Erwin Golze,  
Adrian Knuppertz

#### SEATING FURNITURE

SOFTY von Simon  
Stanislawski

#### EXHIBITION

ORGANISATION  
Jennifer Braun

#### COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK

Leonie Böhmer,  
Clara Stolz

#### GRAPHIC DESIGN

Bart de Baets und Sandra Kassenaar mit Kai Udemä

#### GRAPHIC DESIGN

IMAGE-TEXT SYSTEM  
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Dagna Salwa

#### ART EDUCATION

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#### ADMINISTRATION

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Tim Quiter, Marie  
Kristin Hilger

#### VOLUNTARY SOCIAL

YEAR (FSJ)  
Sara Manshöfer

#### EVENTS

Anja Schrader

#### ARCHIVE GRAPHICS

AND DRAWINGS  
Peter Abramowski

#### BUILDING SERVICES

Thomas Vieth,  
Uli Barnbeck

#### MUSEUM TICKET

OFFICE AND CAFÉ  
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Arne Krauß, Zoja Morina

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Liebert, Thorsten Menzel,  
Ahmet Methnani, Tanja  
Mordau, Ewa Obst, Jörg  
Pfaffendorf, Helga Sklorz,  
Maxim Wagner

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Slotta, Nathalie Litzner,  
Alicia Madloch, Agnes  
Motz, Chiaki Nakaune,  
Alla Zhyvotova

#### FUNDING & SUPPORT

The exhibition has been realised with the support of the Bratislava City Gallery (Galéria mesta Bratislavy), the P. M. Bohúň Gallery in Liptov (Liptovský Mikuláš), and the Central Slovak Gallery (Stredoslovenská Galéria, Banská Bystrica) and is sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Kunststiftung NRW, and the city of Bochum.