

Daniela Dostálková, Linda Dostálková: **Curatorial text for Martin Zetová's exhibition**

Translation: Nicholas Orsillo

Curatorial text for Martina Zetová's exhibition Disagreement at PLATO (20/2-27/4/2025).

“I will forecast it for you right now,” King Wen said. He sat down in the middle of the yin-yang symbol, his legs curled under him. He raised his head to look up at the ceiling of the Great Hall, his gaze seeming to penetrate the thick stones of the pyramid, until it reached the stars. The fingers of his two hands began a series of rapid, complex movements, like components of a calculating machine. In the silence, only the soup in the cauldron in the corner made any noise, boiling and bubbling as though the shaman being cooked within was dream-talking in his sleep.

The Three-Body Problem, Cixin Liu

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If we view an exhibition as a model in the form of a speculative diagram, it is possible to interpret it not only as a tool for developing communication strategies but also as a set of practical events articulating ideas about that which does not yet exist but which may be potentially realized. The relationship to a cultural experience can be understood as a continual process of deciphering meanings that were encoded and applied by other actors. The fundamental role signs play in our daily life is unquestionable. Their proliferation and complexity structure our thoughts and create both individual and collective identities – this is a phenomenon that often remains neglected in today’s public space.

Martin Zetová explores and analyses delicate expressions of the physical disagreement of human bodies in ordinary city scenes. Through photographs, sculptures, and installations he reveals hidden forms of human resistance when gestures of disagreement express silent opposition to an uncertain adversary or to unspoken social norms. Martin Zetová creates a new visual language that reveals authenticity and interweaves spontaneous moments with staged ones, opening up space for reinterpreting our doubts and the micro-movements with which our bodies react to omnipresent surveillance.

In the process of creating the exhibition, the artist gradually involved people and communities that could be viewed as symbols of a certain closed reality. In different locations and within different types of communities, he first tested a theoretical model that enabled him to expand his contacts and his list of stances taken up by actors, which he then applied to his own actions and recorded using different media. Not all his tests worked out. Thanks to them, however, the artist could easily encode the true reality of participants in his works and then offer viewers a parallel to their own observations and experiences.

A psychologically charged gesture takes up the entire window space of the first exhibition room in the form of photographic stained-glass windows. The randomly captured, time-tested gesture of the crossed legs of unknown actors in city streets offer up many explanations. This public act, which the artist considers to be a stance of disagreement, however, may evoke the firmer grounding of the body in an uncertain space or an act of self-defence or control over oneself. The photographic installation features a daytime and nighttime mode – during the light of day, it serves viewers, while at night it plugs into the immersive experience of the surrounding garden, dogwalkers, cyclists, drivers, and train passengers.

Martin Zetová explores how he himself takes up this “negative” stance. The concept of self-organization leads the artists to new arrangements, repetitions, and stagings of the same physical manifestations, but in private space. Legs crossed in the shape of an “X” slowly become looser, less stiff, and we then see body language as a sign nearly everywhere, most of all in the form of miniatures, brightly coloured 3D self-portrait sculptures that the artist calls DNR, Do Not Resuscitate. It is not a test of our attention. It is a sign that at first surprised us but of which we now have an abundance. In the exhibition’s foyer, where a wooden structure enters into the exhibition space, the 3D sculptures once again change their posture. They are making fun of us a bit – performing gestures such as thumbing their noses or sticking out their

tongues. Humorous expressions symbolically represent communication possibilities alienated from social reality. Whether these mischievous mini-creations of Martina Zetová are welcoming us or saying goodbye is up to us to decide.

In the first exhibition room, we can observe a collective gesture, and in the next one, the idea behind it. The whims of human relationships are staged by unlikely combinations of media, cultural references, and addresses made directly to us. Shelving, which conjures up scaffolding and tries to block all the entrances and exits, serves as a carefully calibrated act of disruption.

A disruption suggesting the outline of a future work. It is made up of simple wooden structures created from narrow, roughly made shelves, placed against the walls around the perimeter of the room at eye level. On the shelves sit, next to the small sculptures, local apple varieties. This installation, which spans across rooms and organically penetrates the space of the corridor, offers the opportunity to participate in a performative act, encouraging the audience to eat the fruit, but only if they leave the apple cores on the shelves. Here, the apple's symbolism, rooted in mythology and cultural tradition, lends itself to an ambivalent meaning. We can observe the decomposition process, or in contrast, the preservation of the apple's "mass". Visitors to the exhibition are constantly noticing and composing patterns, zooming in and out on details, and, in the process, discovering apple varieties – in the careful selection of displayed apple varieties; in information about sustainable fruit growing; in indirect references to Czech pomologist and fruit breeder Jan Říha, the author of *České ovoce* (Czech Fruit; 1915), a five-volume illustrated atlas of fruit varieties; or in details about the Fruit Growers Union of the Czech Republic's efforts to find resilient Czech apple varieties.

A table, broken up into pieces, in the first room, originally an undivided mass, mirrored the certain unfinished, provisional conditions of the *Temporary Structures* exhibition cycle held in a former Bauhaus hardware store, the erstwhile headquarters of PLATO gallery (the *Yellow* exhibition curated by Iveta Horáková, Marek Pokorný, and Alice Sovadinová). Hundreds of kilograms of unfired ceramic clay gradually dried out and became an open platform for educational activities. The new aesthetics of the now fired table in the gallery's current headquarters brings to life the restless, shape-shifting eclecticism of sculptural scenography. The hard work that went into taking the table apart, transporting it to a kiln, and then installing the transformed object is manifested in an act of narration, exploration, and its transmission. The message and the principle still are that the piece should remain unfinished,

never be glued back together. Instead of a hierarchically forced arrangement of events that predefines meaning and function and makes the audience into passive witnesses, the artist offers a different process that we experience by determining ourselves the forms and contents of newly acquired experiences and impressions.

Daniela and Linda Dostálková

