

Eva Kofátková

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The Dream Machine is Asleep

Pirelli HangarBicocca

Public Program

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of conferences, video screenings, concerts and guided tours that allow visitors to learn more about various aspects of the artist's work. Discover more on our website.

Cultural Mediation

To know more about the exhibition ask to our cultural mediators in the space.

#ArtToThePeople

Pirelli HangarBicocca

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Opening Hours

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Monday to Wednesday closed

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FREE ENTRY

Cover: Eva Kořátková, *Stomach of the World*, 2017. Video, color, sound, 44 mins 50 secs (video still)

Eva Kořátková

The Dream Machine is Asleep

15 February – 22 July 2018
curated by Roberta Tenconi

Pirelli HangarBicocca



House Arrest n. 1, 2009–2010. Books, performance, 180 x 85 x 30 cm

Eva Kotátková

One of the most renowned artists of her generation, in recent years Eva Kotátková (1982) has participated in important international Biennials, such as the Lyon Biennale (2011), the Sydney Biennial (2012), and the Venice Biennale (2013). Active since 2008, the artist analyses the situations that generate conditions of restriction and imposition, with particular respect to how social control is exerted and exercises its presence in the public sphere, from school life to adulthood.

Kotátková's practice draws on the experiences associated with the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century. Her investigation on the body and its relationship with objects refers particularly to Surrealism and Dadaism in the way it probes the subconscious and the media it uses, such as collage and photomontage. Joining a tradition of female artists whose work has focused on these themes, including Lygia Clark (1920–1988) and Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010)—both distinguished by the need to overcome the canons of a patriarchal culture in favour of a feminine dimension associated with plurality and diversity—Kotátková expands on these reflections to analyze the dysfunctional nature of contemporary society.

Kotátková was born in Prague, where she studied visual arts before taking up a series of important residencies abroad, including the ISCP in New York City and MuseumsQuartier Q21 in Vienna, which enabled her to gain a deep knowledge of practices such as video and performance art. She grew up in an environment where education and instruction played a primary role in shaping people's character and during an

historic time of great change for her country that, following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, started to question the very cornerstones of Czech society. Influenced by these realities, the artist initially examined institutional systems and educational methods, creating works unconnected with a specific period or society, but probing the anthropological quality that makes them universal. In one of her first works, *Sit Straight* (2008), simple wooden structures emphasize the body postures of students during school hours. During the same year she made the video and performance entitled *Walk to School*, in which film footage shows the artist retracing the path taken to reach her primary school on the outskirts of Prague every day for several months.

Her works were subsequently characterized by the recurrent use of steel or iron cage-shaped structures, giving physical tangibility—functioning as 3D drawings in the space—to the psychological constraints imposed by society and the means of control. These gradually became part of complex installations that embrace various media, including collage, sculpture, and performance art. For the 2011 Lyon Biennale she created *Re-Education Machine*, in which she uses elements from a disused printing press in Prague, evoking its past linked to state censorship. Composed of a dozen metal structures, books, and found objects, this work depicts the propaganda system as an archaic labyrinth and a dysfunctional machine. Kot'átková extended her studies on institutions to psychiatric hospitals, and for the 2013 Venice Biennale she created *Asylum*, an installation composed of metal sculptures, cut-outs, collages, and medical records, all arranged on a black platform to create a visual archive of

the anxieties, phobias, and visions of the patients of various mental institutions in the Czech Republic. As is frequently the case in her more recent works, the artist also incorporated live actions in the installation, carried out by performers.

Indeed, for Kot'átková, the body is simultaneously a means of enquiry and the subject of her investigation. The use of props, costumes, and other instruments to convey non-verbal expressions constitutes one of the main components of the work of the artist, who states, «I started to create part bodies, part objects, combining these two in a way that they could not exist without each other, they would construct one temporary skeleton.»

While Kot'átková's *oeuvre* draws on various artistic media such as collage, sculpture, photomontage, video, performance art and installation, her preferred medium remains drawing, which is the starting point for her practice. Her work often lies between different disciplines, such as literature and drama. Non-linear and deconstructed narrative forms like dreams or the stories of psychiatric patients give rise to works that probe mental and physical fragmentation. To enhance the performance possibilities of language, Kot'átková bases her research on extensive use of the conventions of theatre and the art of pantomime such as Black Theatre or puppet theatre, two characteristic theatrical techniques of Czech history and culture.

Following page: *Asylum*, 2013. Collages, painted wood, steel, cloth, gypsum, prints on paper, organic material.
Installation view and performance, "The Encyclopedic Palace," 55th Venice Biennale, 2013



The Exhibition

The Dream Machine is Asleep is Eva Kot'átková's first exhibition at an Italian art institution and presents a series of new works created especially for the event together with already-known ones by the artist, bringing together installations, sculptures, collages, and performances.

The exhibition concept is based on the idea of the human body as a machine, an organism whose functioning requires servicing and moments of rest and regeneration. Within this view, the theme of sleep is of central importance, intended as a moment in which new visions and parallel worlds are created through dreams.

Composed of large-scale installations and sculptures, the exhibition narrative starts with the 2017 work entitled *Stomach of the World*, which leads visitors into Kot'átková's imagination through a long, labyrinthine corridor. Some of the works serve as stage props, which can be activated by performers at certain times of day, while others are devised to host different activities involving the visitors.



Stomach of the World, 2017 (detail). Mixed media, variable dimensions.
Installation view, Belvedere 21, Vienna, 2017. Foto: Johannes Stoll © Belvedere, Vienna

1 *Stomach of the World*, 2017

Stomach of the World is projected in a small circular room accessed via a long, curved structure in fabric and metal, whose forms seem to hint at an organ of the human body. The work was inspired by a child's drawing in which the world is depicted as a digestive system.

The video is made up of a series of episodes showing a group of children participating in a sequence of strange exercises accompanied by a narrator's voice off-stage. This pronounces reflections and remarks on the body and its functions, giving at the same time instructions: «Breathing in an enclosed space, breathing from one source. If you lie on your back and breathe out freely, soon you'll have very little breath left.» The children perform different activities and exercises in a school gym and then at an open-air landfill: drawing to reproduce an x-ray of their body, breathing to recycle someone else's air, articulating to eat words.

The video is characterized by a hypnotic atmosphere, drawn-out time, and mechanical operations that recall the long waits of bureaucratic procedures. The camera records every tiny detail of the objects and bodies that make up the scenario from an analytical and external point of view.

Using media and languages derived from theatre, and by means of childhood imagery, Kotátková stages the fears and anxieties of childhood associated with the internal malfunctioning of the human body, but also with the external causes that can trigger physical discomfort and difficulties. At the same



Stomach of the World, 2017. Video, color, sound, 44 mins 50 secs (video still)

time, the work presents itself as an allegory of the world as a digestive system in which we are reflected by what we eat and consume, and where waste continues to accumulate. *Stomach of the World* thus introduces further and deeper possible meanings concerning contemporary social and environmental issues; it evokes and examines the body not just in its biological dimension, but also as a social and political body.

2 *The Dream Machine is Asleep*, 2018

Created for the exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca, this work takes the form of an oversized bed on two levels. While the space on the lower level is accessible only to children, visitors are allowed to the upper level and invited to lie down and listen to stories and dreams through a headset.

With *The Dream Machine is Asleep* Koťátková explores the boundaries between the imagination of childhood and the adult world, proposing the dimension of dreams as the meeting ground and creating an installation that is used in different ways by different groups. The lower level has an “office” for the creation of dreams: children use this space to create an archive of possible dreams to help those who have lost their oneiric abilities and are no longer able to dream. The upper level, on the other hand, allows people to lie down as though in a real bed and try to dream through the stories imagined by the children. An intimate place like a bed can become a public space where oneiric tales can be freely manifested to create a collective unconscious. For the artist dreams become a kind of alternative narrative that is equally effective for describing the surrounding reality.

The body is seen as a machine, that is equally vivid in night- and daytime: while in the day it performs various activities, in the night it continues to be active, but with tiny differences. In the artist’s words: «it walks without the legs getting tired, it speaks even if no one else can hear, it occupies places no one else is seeing and sees the world as it could work without the need to follow rules and daily routines.»

3 *Cutting the Puppeteer’s Strings with Paper Teeth* (*Brief History of Daydreaming and Control*), 2016

Originally created for Art Basel in 2016 as a live play, the work consists of a little puppet theatre in which numerous marionettes hang from a backdrop. They appear to be waiting to be activated and act as an unusual “background”. Thanks to a

soundtrack, visitors can listen to a narrator’s voice that recounts the actions and story of the original show.

The protagonists of the story are three puppeteers that follow the instructions given by an offstage male voice and interact with the figure of a silent boy seated next to the stage, who, in the original play, was a central figure in the performance as it was his story that was being told. The script transports the viewer inside Eva Koťátková’s imagery, presenting different forms of manipulation through a body language—through free or controlled movement—charged with metaphors. In this work too, more playful moments are permeated with disturbing images or situations that lead us to reflect on how control, authority, and physical and psychological violence may occur in ambiguous and unexpected ways. In its static form, *Cutting the Puppeteer’s Strings with Paper Teeth* is presented as an action frozen in time that is open to different possible interpretations. Thanks to an audio and a leaflet with its script, the audience can follow the story and imagine the actions on the stage.

- 4** *Head no.1: Hungry Head (Globus Hystericus), 2018*
- Head no.2: Busy Head (Hearing Voices Hallucination), 2018*
- Head no.3: Nervous Head (Insomnia), 2018*
- Head no.4: Lonely Head (Social Anxiety Disorder), 2018*
- Head no.5: Curious Head (Overwork), 2018*
- Head no.6: Trapped Head (Seizure), 2018*
- Head no.7: Incoherent Head (Schizophrenia), 2018*

Heads is a sculptural series of seven heads, made entirely from metal, whose stylistic characteristics bring to mind Italian



Cutting the Puppeteer's Strings with Paper Teeth (Brief History of Daydreaming and String Control), 2016.

Performance, Art Parcours, Art Basel, 2016 © Art Basel

Pittura Metafisica of the early 20th century, in which the figurative representation of the body was evoked by mannequins that acted as alien presences in the urban landscape.

At Pirelli HangarBicocca, each of the figures suggests a different emotional and psychological state, such as solitude or curiosity, and each assumes a different position within the space. The sculptures are equipped with everyday objects such as shoes or books, which further accentuate their anthropomorphic appearance. At certain times, the heads cease to be mere sculptures and are worn by performers—functioning as cages or body extensions—to enact the different states of mind.

Through these works, Koťátková gives visual form to those aspects associated with the body that usually remain more abstract and lack physical tangibility, continuing her reflection on the “traps” that condition human existence.

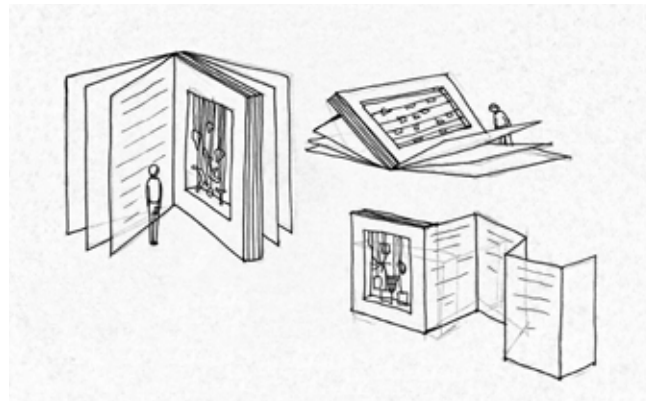
5 *Diary no.1 (I-Body or Body of the Others), 2018*

6 *Diary no.2 (I-Animal), 2018*

7 *Diary no.3 (I-Machine), 2018*

Literature plays a fundamental role in the artist’s work. Influenced by authors such as Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) and Franz Kafka (1883–1924), Koťátková uses stories and narrative in many different forms: the text is often conveyed in oral forms, while in other cases it has merely symbolic value. The artist also reflects on how narration is a powerful institutional and political instrument for modelling and influencing thought in certain directions. She has continued her research into these

themes for the exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca, with the creation of three new installations: a vertical book, another laid horizontally on the floor, and a concertina book to leaf through. These human-sized books are arranged in the exhibition space, also serving as display stands for collages and photomontages made by the artist. The latter create a visual diary for exploring and immersing oneself in Koťátková’s imagery: a collection of thought and notes on themes the artist is deeply interested in, such as the relations between the body and its surroundings (external forces, objects, other bodies), the miserable conditions of animals in contemporary society, the sociopolitical system seen as a machine.



Diaries, 2018.
Preparatory sketch

8 **Feeding the Cleaning Machine with What Others Didn't Finish, 2018**

This work presents the everyday activity that is carried out during the morning or evening hours in many institutional spaces, such as schools and hospitals, connected with the cleaning and hygiene of public areas. Often considered by society a secondary function of little value, this activity—hidden from our gaze and intended to prepare the stage for the “real” activities—becomes a subject of artist’s investigation. A group of performers occupies a circumscribed area, the plan of a flat or a house drawn on the floor. Above it, a platform acts as a prop used by the performers to carry out actions at certain times according to choreographies that integrate the human body in the machine that keeps the exhibition space clean. As in post-modern dance, an avant-garde movement born in the United States in the 1960s–1970s where everyday actions are transformed into dance movements performed by non-professional dancers, the artist elevates repetitive and monotonous actions to make them become part of a choral activity.

9 **Asking the Hair about Scissors, 2018**

Voice is a key element in Kot’átková’s works that is manifested through objects or recordings, both live and as a sound produced by a body. In this work a circular platform accommodates a chair overhung by numerous suspended objects, including scissors, forks, knives, spoons, and newspapers cutouts. This silent stage is brought to life at certain times of day when it

becomes a veritable hairdresser for the public. Visitors are invited to sit down and have their hair cut, while listening to excerpts of stories taken from news and related to various forms of body violence. The artist transforms everyday activities, such as those concerning personal care, into fertile contexts for the transmission of true stories and their possible fictional re-elaboration. The action of cutting recalls the collage practice that the artist uses selecting and assembling images in a kind of surgical operation.

10 **Theatre of Speaking Objects, 2012**

The artist drew her inspiration for the title of the work from sketches by the Czech architect and scenographer Jiří Kroha (1893–1974), who created drawings for puppet theatre plays, and entitled *Theatre of Things*. Made during a stay in a sanatorium, Kroha imagined bringing to life objects placed on a table by using voices that come from beneath it. Inspired by these experiments, Eva Kot’átková conceived this work for the Sydney Biennial in 2012, where she presented performances using key elements of the theatre such as stage and audience. By means of participant theatrical techniques like psychodrama—which enacts the dreams, fantasies and personal experiences of a group—the artist engaged a group of eight elderly people with interpersonal and relational difficulties, who try to give voice to their communicative problems through everyday objects.

On occasion of her exhibition at the Kunstverein Braunschweig in 2013, Kot’átková has created a new version of ***Theatre of Speaking Objects*** in which the performing element has dis-



Storyteller's Inadequacy. Speech organ of Anna, a girl who pronounces words from the middle, 2013. Mixed media.
Installation view and performance, Modern Art Oxford, 2013-14.
Photo: Stuart Whipps



Collection of Suppressed Voices, 2014. Steel, fired clay, prints on paper, cardboard, chalk, baskets, wood, variable dimensions.

Installation view and performance, Frieze, London, 2015. Photo: Dawn Blackman

appeared and the objects have come to the fore, taking on a sculptural presence. The current installation is composed of 13 large elements, each on a pedestal; the objects have been modified by the artist, who has given them anthropomorphic features such as arms and legs. A system of synchronized lights presents each of them in turn, bringing them to life to tell a different story. The audience can thus move freely among the sculptures on display and listen to their stories in different languages, for example that of a basket that voices a list of fears and phobias, or a vase that recounts its difficulties in telling a story. The artist connects the body with the material object in a play of confusing and unpredictable contrasts in which inanimate elements become the tools by which the body can overcome impediments and voice itself. This work drew inspiration from psychodrama and the “Theatre of the Oppressed,” putting on stage a mediation—and shared narrations—between the actors and the objects.



Theatre of Speaking Objects, 2012. Objects, audio installation, variable dimensions.
Installation view, Kunstverein Hamburg, 2017. Photo: Fred Dott



Anatomical Orchestra, 2014. Mixed media.
Installation view and performance, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, 2014.

Main Exhibitions

Eva Kotátková (1982, Prague, Czech Republic) lives and works in Prague. She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, training also at the San Francisco Art Institute (New Genres Department) and the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna. In 2013, she completed a PhD at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague (VŠUP). In 2007, she won the Jindřich Chalupický Award, assigned each year to young Czech artists. In 2014, Kotátková was awarded the Dorothea von Stetten Art Prize (Bonn, Germany).

Her work has been displayed at important internationally institutions, including 21er Haus, Museum for Contemporary Art, Vienna (2017); K21, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2017); Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld (2016); Parc Saint Léger, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Pougues-les-Eaux (2016); International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP), New York (2016); Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (2015); MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2015); Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (2014); Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2014); Modern Art Oxford (2013); Kunstverein Braunschweig (2013). She has also participated in important collective exhibitions, including *Paratoxic Paradoxes*, Benaki Museum, Athens (2017); *New Museum Triennial: Surround Audience*, New York (2015); *The Encyclopedic Palace*, Venice Biennale (2013); *Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art* (2013); *Sydney Biennial* (2012); *Lyon Biennale* (2011), *Liverpool Biennial* (2010).



Image atlas of Johan, a boy who cut a library of the clinic into pieces, 2014.
Glass vitrine, paper cutouts, strings, 140 x 185 x 35 cm.

**This publication accompanies the exhibition
“The Dream Machine is Asleep” by Eva Kofátková**

Lenders

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Eva Kofátková

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1 *Stomach of the World*, 2017
video, color, sound, 44 mins 50 secs
mixed media installation, metal,
fabric, wood, objects
variable dimensions, Ø 600 cm
Courtesy the artist

2 *The Dream Machine is Asleep*, 2018
mixed media installation, wood,
metal objects, furniture, paper,
performance
370 x 1000 x 800 cm
Commissioned and produced by
Pirelli HangarBicocca. Courtesy the
artist

3 *Cutting the Puppeteer's Strings
with Paper Teeth (Brief History of
Daydreaming and String Control)*, 2016
mixed media, puppets, stage set,
sound
variable dimensions
Kunstmuseen Krefeld, Collection
of the Freunde der Kunstmuseen
Krefeld e.V

4 *Head no.1: Hungry Head
(Globus Hystericus)*, 2018
metal, various objects
130 x 130 x 130 cm

*Head no.2: Busy Head (Hearing
voices hallucination)*, 2018
metal, various objects
240 x 150 x 150 cm

*Head no.3: Nervous Head
(Insomnia)*, 2018
metal, ten mattresses
150 x 90 x 90 cm

*Head no.4: Lonely Head
(Social Anxiety Disorder)*, 2018
metal, various objects
230 x 100 x 150 cm

Head no.5: Curious Head (Overwork),
2018
metal, various objects
200 x 130 x 130 cm

Head no.6: Trapped Head (Seizure),
2018
metal, various objects
2 parts: 90 x 40 x 40 cm
and 220 x 40 x 40 cm

*Head no.7: Incoherent Head
(Schizophrenia)*, 2018
metal, various objects
2 parts: 240 x 100 x 100 cm
and 140 x 50 x 100 cm

All works commissioned and
produced by Pirelli HangarBicocca.
Courtesy the artist

5 *Diary no.1 (I-Body or Body
of the Others)*, 2018
mixed media installation, metal,
wood, glass, paper, collages
230 x 297 x 170 cm

6 *Diary no.2 (I-Animal)*, 2018
mixed media installation, metal,
wood, glass, paper, collages
230 x 164 x 948 cm

7 *Diary no.3 (I-Machine)*, 2018
mixed media installation, metal,
wood, glass, paper, collages
139 x 330 x 230 cm

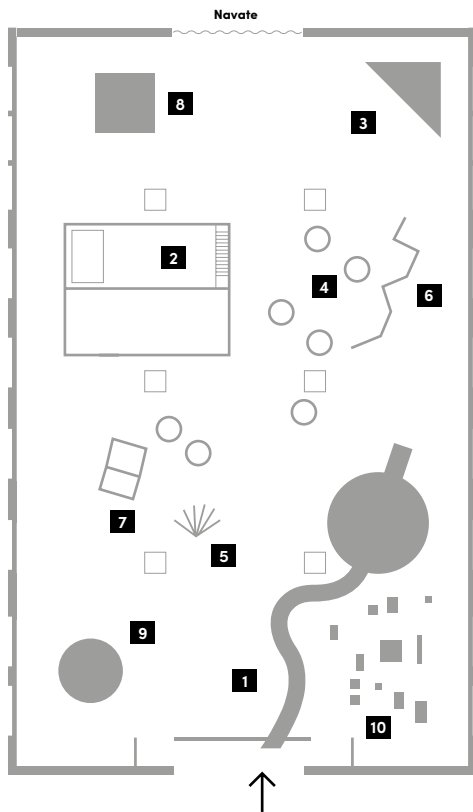
All works commissioned and
produced by Pirelli HangarBicocca.
Courtesy the artist

8 *Feeding the Cleaning Machine
with what Others Didn't Finish*, 2018
mixed media installation, wood,
cleaning tools, performance
variable dimensions
Commissioned and produced by
Pirelli HangarBicocca. Courtesy the
artist

9 *Asking the Hair about Scissors*, 2018
mixed media installation, platform,
chair, scissors, knives, forks, spoons,
paper and newspaper cut-outs,
performance
variable dimensions, Ø 300 cm
Commissioned and produced by Pirelli
HangarBicocca. Courtesy the artist

10 *Theatre of Speaking Objects*, 2012
objects, audio installation
variable dimensions
Courtesy the artist and Meyer
Riegger, Berlin/Karlsruhe

Performances every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday
Find the detailed program at hangarbicocca.org



Entrance to the exhibition *The Dream Machine is Asleep*

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and discovery covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and facilitators are on hand to help the general public connect with the art. Since 2013, Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: **Shed**, **Navate**, and **Cubo**.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*, commissioned for the inauguration of Pirelli HangarBicocca.



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