

Conversation with  
JOÃO MOURÃO AND  
LUÍS SILVA,  
Kunsthalle Lissabon —  
Part II of III

I is for

Institute

What's in a name? This is the question underlying our investigation into ICA: how it came to be, what it means now, and how we might imagine it in the future.

In a field so often defined by precarity, this project is grounded in a spirit of collegiality, a looking outward that aims to facilitate self-reflection. As such, we have engaged colleagues primarily from small- and mid-scale contemporary arts organizations to discuss their institutional histories and how they understand the stakes of their work. The *I is for Institute* website acts as a repository for these ongoing conversations, as well as archival material relating to ICA's history. We thank our many colleagues for their generosity, enthusiasm, and frankness. Their thinking has in turn energized our own.

— Alex Klein,  
Dorothy & Stephen R. Weber  
(CHE'60) Curator, Institute  
of Contemporary Art,  
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10.15.16

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Kunsthalle Lissabon — Part II of III

João Mourão and Luís Silva are the co-directors of Kunsthalle Lissabon, a contemporary art institution located in Lisbon, Portugal.

With Alex Klein and Gee Wesley

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### GEE WESLEY

In the context of the U.S., I feel like there's this increasing sense of anti-institutionalism. On the conservative right, you have this kind of anti-institutionalism against media institutions and the state as an institution. And then on the left, you have a critique of financial institutions, corporate institutions, commercial institutions. I feel like those frame the contemporary context of the U.S. I wonder, do you think about institute as a noun in relationship to this resurgence in anti-institutionalism that is perhaps linked to the precarity of the economic crisis? It seemed at the time of crisis that these pillars of society in the United States and Europe had collapsed.

### LUÍS SILVA

I think that's an interesting question. I don't think there is a collapse of our institutions. I think for a brief period of time we had a very neoliberal government who took it upon itself to dismantle some institutions that we had taken for granted, and that were achieved through democracy — one of them being the welfare state, which is one of Europe's major achievements.

The crisis was just an excuse for taking that apart. And not only in Portugal, but throughout Europe. It wasn't that the welfare state as an institution had collapsed or had failed; it's that neoliberal power wanted to break it apart.

There was an attempt to remove ideology from it and not make it a political thing, but make it a more bureaucratic thing. You know, it is a matter of just, "We don't have enough money for it." I don't think there is a sense of the collapse of our institutions. There was an attempt at destroying some of them.

ALEX KLEIN

Would you say that there is skepticism? I think one thing I pick up on with Gee's question is, at least in the U.S. context, there's a huge skepticism towards what the institution represents, right?

GW

Right.

LS

There's huge skepticism about Europe.

JOÃO MOURÃO

Yes.

AK

Is that more recent?

LS

It's been growing. It's been brewing for a while. I think that is the worst. We've had this conversation. We're the result of the European Union, you know?

AK

Right. Of course.

LS

We were lucky enough to have social mobility. We were lucky enough to travel.

AK

You work with artists that you can bring across borders.

LS

But what we signed up for is not what is happening right now. The Europe we signed up for, a Europe of solidarity, of equality, of development, is not the Europe we're getting. And even though the campaign and the reasons for the Brexit result are the worst, if I were asked whether or not I wanted Portugal to remain in the European Union, I don't know what I would answer. Because yes, I think the European Union is one of the most important projects of the last century in the continent. It gave us peace for 50 years after war after war. But now it's a neoliberal bureaucracy. Our destinies are being ruled by people who aren't elected. Or at least when Germany, for instance, decides on austerity measures for Portugal and we can't vote, we can't decide. We didn't put Angela Merkel in power, and she decides things about our daily lives. So that is a big problem. Or when there are a bunch of bureaucrats in Brussels, who weren't elected who also decide on my daily life, and I have no access. I can't elect them. That becomes a huge problem. This has gone so far away from what we signed up for that I don't know what I would answer. Because this is making people poorer. How could Europe let Greece happen?

JM

I think you are talking from a place...

LS

And this is where we disagree.

JM

You are always talking from the place that you have been living in. We've never lived with something quite like this before. For me, we have to stay in Europe. For me, it's a yes for sure, though of course I also disagree with some of the measures that have been taken.

LS

All of them.

JM

Not all of them.

JM

For me, it was really important because I became "João" because of Europe. Otherwise I would not have become João. I would be a shepherd because I would not have had the mobility. I would not have had the grades to come to study in Lisbon or to come to university because my father didn't know how to read. Europe is what made me.

AK

Right, Europe has enabled you.

JM

Yes.

LS

But that Europe doesn't exist anymore.

JM

I think it still exists. It is kind of dismantled in a way, but it's still there.

AK

But if you give up on it entirely it will never exist, right? Because with Britain leaving, that doesn't help anybody.

LS

I know. But I guess if we send enough signals, then there could be a change.

GW

You mean a reform?

LS

Yes.

AK

It's difficult, I'm assuming, because there are also power players within the European Union, and Germany has a heavier weight than Portugal.

JM

Of course. There are really different ways of instituting in Europe.

LS

But when an elected government in Athens, for instance, decides on a series of measures and Germany says no you cannot decide that, you cannot do that, then it's a bit of a problem because it is a rightfully elected government that is representing the interests of the Greek people. And then Germany says no. No, that's not what you're doing.

AK

Speaking of Greece, in  
Performing the Institution(al)  
Volumes 4 and 5, there is a  
conversation between the  
Kunsthalle Lissabon and the  
Kunsthalle Athens.

LS

Yes, Athens. It's a really funny story because for a while we didn't know about each other. But we formed our projects pretty much around the same time, maybe a difference of two or three months. And the principles are so similar, it's scary. Marina Fokidis, who is now the head of the Athens office of Documenta, was interested in the branding of Kunsthalle and the Kunsthalle as a brand that brings awareness to a specific set of conditions. Everything has always been a bit more difficult in Greece. Marina was really interested in this idea of reverse exploitation. We've been exploited by the North for so many years. Let's do the opposite. Let's exploit language and let's exploit these German words and benefit from it. It was this very clear branding strategy of a German word, of a German institution in Athens. And through that branding to get a lot of attention for what they were doing and what the state of the city was.

JM

Because they were also in a really crappy place.

LS

It was a really bad space. They couldn't operate during the winter. It has been a very productive dialogue with Marina and Kunsthalle Athens, even though they're not doing it any more. And even though the projects are very different, they want to achieve the same thing, which is really interesting.

JM

They also created *South Magazine*. That's this idea of the South in comparison to the North. There's only a South because there is a North.

LS

And there is a divide. Europe, for a better part of the 20th century, was divided between East and West, and that was a very clear political divide. With the turn of the century, what you witness is turning that 90 degrees, and now you have the North/South divide. But it's not political anymore. It's economical. It is financial. It's between the poor countries and the rich countries. It's very interesting, going back to both Kunsthalls, that at the same time in very

precarious countries in the south of Europe, two institutions that prey on a German word happen to appear at the same time. And at first, she was very excited about the idea of Documenta coming to Greece because it could bring awareness to a lot of issues and could deal with those issues. And not just Greek issues, but European issues. The divide, basically.

JM

The divide.

AK

That is certainly true, but on the flip side it also ends up catering to an art world leisure class that can travel between the two venues. There's only a little sliver of time where the shows even overlap. In a way, it is already structured for people who can afford to go to both openings.

LS

Or Manifesta: it arrives in a place, sucks up all the resources, does what it does for three months and then just takes off to the next location and there is nothing left.

AK

That's actually a really great segue into the fake hoax.

GW

The other day someone was like, "Oh, so Kunsthalle Lissabon is a joke?" And then our colleague said, "Oh, but it's serious." And then they laughed and were like, "Oh, it's a serious joke."

LS

But it has always been. We've always been playing with something and its opposite. It's a joke, but it's really serious. And it's fake, but it's not fake. It's very real. You know? We've been playing with that, of being something and simultaneously its opposite. But right at the beginning, it wasn't a joke. It was never a joke. It was a hoax, which is a very different thing.

GW

You're right.

AK

And I understand that. But they were just trying to put their finger on who and what you are because they were grappling with the fact that they didn't know there was a Kunsthalle in Lisbon and they were freaking out a little bit. They were caught off guard by the idea that they didn't know about the Kunsthalle and confronting their own insecurities about their level of knowledge.

LS

But going back to faking something into existence, one of our conceptual fictional godmothers is Tess McGill from the film *Working Girl* (1988).

AK

Yes, I remember that.

LS

She's amazing. And Kunsthalle Lissabon is Tess McGill. Do you know that movie? Basically, she's a secretary that, all of a sudden, starts pretending she's an executive. She plays it so well that everyone believes it until eventually, by the end of the movie, she becomes that person. It was a bit us, you know? We played this idea of being an institution so well that, after a while, we actually became it. And that's how I think we presented ourselves to the world in the first book.

AK

Your introduction resonated with me because it reminded me of some of the things that Mark [Owens] and I wrote about in our preface to *Contra Mundum*. I was thinking that there's something that we were all working out at the time, and it was super interesting.

LS

It's interesting how all these things appeared around the same time.

AK

The double negative, or the fake hoax, is not just a fake; it's not just a performance. It's now structural.

LS

Yes, claiming it was a hoax was a hoax in itself. And in the beginning, we thought of it as a fake institution, as this very playful way of inviting people to think about what an institution is. Does the fact that we call it an institution make it an institution or not? And if it does, what does it mean? If it doesn't, what does that mean? But we have the business cards and we have the website and we have the name, so we must be one, right?

AK

Right. Was the word impostor something that you ever associated with the project?

LS

No.

JM

No.

JM

It's far off.

AK

It's different.

LS

It's different. And it's a bit more negative.

AK

But also, you're not impostors.

LS

No.

AK

You're of the world, right?

LS

Yes, exactly. We thought of the idea of "the fake" and "the hoax," "hoaxing" and not "pranking." Almost tricking people into starting to think about these things.

GW

Right.

AK

Did you say "fake hoax" in English or Portuguese first?

LS

*Embuste.*

JM

No, it was *embuste*.

LS

In Portuguese. Because the Portuguese word is—I find it really beautiful. For no specific reason.

JM

*Falso embuste.*

LS

After a while we had to abandon it because as a critical position, it wasn't valid anymore.

AK

Now that you are seven years into this, at what point does this fake hoax institutionalize itself?

LS

When the community decides so.

GW

Interesting.

AK

When the community decides so?

JM

Yes.

LS

It's not about us. You know, if you assume that an institution is a set of subjective and socially defined protocols that kind of define what type of behaviors are available to you as a member of a community, then it is the community that defines that we are an institution. And there was a bit of a gap between those things.

JM

But we also need to be aware of that. So saying that you are a proper institution. But you have to listen to that...

LS

Exactly. It took us a bit of time between accepting that. We were still playing the fake institution when we had already been accepted as one.

AK

Right. When do you think that this acceptance happened? When did you institutionalize? When did the community decide this?

LS

I can't pinpoint it. I can't remember the day exactly. But we always have a lot of students from curatorial programs visiting, and we were having a visit by a group of curators from a curatorial program in London. It was in the second space, so I was in the round room with them and I was talking about the idea of performing the institution, of the fake, faking something into existence. And then one of the students just confronted me with something very simple: "Why do you call yourselves a fake institution? I don't get it. You have a program, a pretty solid program. You publish. You have a space, which is the same from show to show. You have a staff, even though it's small, but it's a staff and you have a budget. So why is Kunsthalle Lissabon a fake institution?" And I was like, "Damn, you're right."

We got ourselves into a lot of trouble. How do we solve this? You know, what we thought was relevant stopped being relevant. The experience had reached its conclusion. We can't continue claiming this position because it's no longer valid.

AK

Right. But that's one thing I really appreciate about the introductions from book to book is this kind of evolution, which I think is not necessarily innate to institutions. Because institutions often want to be stable in the perception of themselves

JM

It is. And I think it's smart, working more organically; it makes much more sense to the world we are living in.

LS

I think institutions tend to naturalize themselves. We're not a set of social and subjective protocols. We're not subjective at all. We're very objective. We have always existed. We will always exist this way. When you think of the family, you think it has always been this way. It hasn't. Family as we know it is a 19th century invention.

AK

Right. Friendship, adulthood. All of these things.

JM

All of those things.

LS

All of those things are subjective. And you know, we created them as members of a community, and we replicate and reproduce them.

AK

Within the course of two or three generations, which is not a lot of time.

LS

I think what we do with every introduction is to describe the status quo of where we are at this specific moment. We're transitioning. We're moving away from the fake because we can't hold on to that position anymore. Performing the Institution(al): Volume 3 is the diagram. And then for Volume 4 and Volume 5, the diagram needs a bit of tweaking here and there, to account for

why we do solos and not other things.

AK

Have you written the sixth volume's introduction yet?

LS

No.

AK

Do you have an idea of where that might go?

LS

No, not yet. Writing the introduction is the moment in which we solidify all of what we've been doing. Right now, it still seems like we just finished writing the introduction to volumes 4 and 5.

GW

There's an interesting part in the Simon Sheikh essay, "Instituting the Institution," where he's talking about the idea that an institution can perform institutionality and then be the reflection of its institutionality, reifying it as an institution that opens the door for you to realize that in some ways, this is how all institutions emerge. Institutions construct these mythologies, fictions, and ideas and then at a certain point, they become reified and then they retroactively seem like they always existed or something.

AK

There's a public mythology and an institutional mythology, and those might not always be the same things.

LS

It's interesting that you're mentioning that because at the beginning of the fake institution, we were so committed to the development of that mythology. It was very important for us to create that mythology, even if it was just paying really close attention to how we would archive every single piece of whatever we produced. If it was a piece of paper, a scribble, you know, that was part of the mythology. That goes into the archive. We wanted, in a very short period of time, to develop that mythology, in a way. I think one of the best ways of doing that was to create documents that testified to that. We had six-month-old documents that we cherished as part of what we used to be. And it was playful. It was a joke. And we kept those. Those are in those two orange boxes in the shelves. Everything is there. Now everything is pretty much digital.

JM

At the time we printed everything.

LS

It's so funny...

JM

We printed every review.

LS

Speaking about mythologies and how we were committed to that exercise as part of the whole performative gesture (we had already started in the digital age, obviously), but we printed every single exhibition view so that they could age.

AK

I hope you printed them on paper that's going to turn yellow.

JM

Yes.

LS

We printed them on regular photo paper, matte, so that you know, in 10, 20 years' time

AK

It can start to have a patina.

LS

Exactly. Because the digital file won't.

AK

That is amazing. You were foreseeing your archive and its aesthetics.

JM

Yes, the aesthetic of the institution.

LS

The institution depends on its archive to kind of legitimize itself. To justify its existence or its relevance or whatever. We were producing that, already aware of its relevance as a performative gesture. But that was very important to us in that phase. Once that disappeared, then that stopped being relevant. You know, we're still careful; we archive everything. But not because we want to produce this idea of this institution. Just because we want to keep it. The idea of reification, for us, was very present from the beginning through this idea of the archive. We want to perform our own archive as something very important.

GW

When you began, did you imagine that there would be an endpoint? Did you say this is something that's probably going to be five years?

JM

No.

LS

No, no.

AK

Were you just kind of like, "We're going to see where this takes us?"

LS

We always thought of it as an experiment. We never knew what the outcomes would be. At a certain point, as a joke, we said, "Well, we have two possible outcomes. Either this fails tremendously and we'll move on to the next project

or this will be a huge success and in 20 years time a star architect will design the building and it will be built and someone will direct a really impressive Kunsthalle Lissabon.”

AK

Now I’m understanding the master plan here.

JM

There is no master plan.

LS

There is no master plan.

AK

Or at least this idea that you guys could extract yourself eventually, that somehow the institution would be alive or something. That you had somehow brought something into existence.

LS

It is independent from us. You know, to a certain extent, correct me if I’m wrong, it belongs to the community.

AK

Now.

LS

Now.

AK

But it didn’t in the beginning?

JM

No.

LS

No, no, no, no.

AK

This idea that now when you

go somewhere, you're the directors of the Kunsthalle Lissabon and it's not so much the Kunsthalle Lissabon that is being represented.

JM AND LS

Yes.

AK

When did that articulation become part of the project? Because that's also a gesture of language, right? It's also a demarcation.

JM AND LS

It is.

LS

I think we we never thought of Kunsthalle Lissabon because, when we started performing it —

AK

But for example, when you curated the project in Mexico, it's not as Kunsthalle Lissabon, but it's as two individual people.

LS

Us.

AK

And then on the resume it says what you are. But maybe before that time, you could have been introduced as the directors of the Kunsthalle Lissabon or something.

JM

Before that, we were doing projects as Kunsthalle Lissabon and we're still doing projects as Kunsthalle Lissabon.

LS

Because Kunsthalle, as institutions, have offsite projects. But from the beginning, one of the first things we did after naming it and starting, was to create business cards saying that we were co-directors. We never saw ourselves as the Kunsthalle Lissabon. We saw ourselves as the directors. Of course, in the beginning, because the project was...

JM

Was so tiny that it was an extension of our existence, in a way.

LS

And it still is. You know, what, we're talking right now about Kunsthalle Lissabon, it's because we made Kunsthalle this. But it could be something else if we pass it on to somebody else. I think it's not, at least I don't feel it's ours anymore. I'm its keeper, but it's not mine.

AK

When do you think that shift happened?

JM

When you start to get funded and start to get...

LS

Exactly. You're right.

JM

You have all these mechanisms, even mental mechanisms, that you have to give something back.

LS

And I think he's absolutely right. Once we got public funding for the first time, then it wasn't us who were getting the funding.

JM

Yes.

AK

Once you're relying on other institutions for infrastructure.

LS

It wasn't us, it was Kunsthalle Lissabon who was getting the funding. And once,

at least for us, when we get public funding, then we're somehow mandated. And if it is a public service, then it's not ours anymore.

LS

It belongs to the community. We're just, you know, its keepers.

AK

Right. It's not just a private performance.

JM

Yes.

LS

It's not, no. And even, the thing is, even though we're its keepers, I don't know if somebody else will want it.

AK

Would you let it go?

JM

Yes.

LS

Eventually, we will let her go.

AK

At what point is it tied to your identity? How much does the Kunsthalle need you? How much do you need it?

LS

I think that was pretty obvious to us when we started applying to other jobs — at institutions, though, because we do think that this is the best scale for the work we want to develop. I don't think we would take pleasure in being constrained by huge amounts of bureaucratic stuff like at Tate or a big museum. We want to maintain control over the means of production and the means of visibility. You know? We want to have control over everything. So that's why a small to mid-scale institution is where I think we would do a better job. And I think once we decided we would apply for those positions is the moment where we, well, made public that Kunsthalle Lissabon could exist without us. Because it wouldn't make sense to move on to another job and

just end this. That would be so selfish.

JM

No, especially because you received funding. Especially because you get all these social responsibilities.

AK

And it's produced a lot in the community here.

LS

Exactly. And even internationally.

AK

If you were to move to another institution that's not of your own creation, what does that mean for you? Does it change? Because it would be such a different context. It would be an institution not of your own making.

LS

We would make it our own. That's the plan.

JM

That's why we are applying to these kind of scale institutions.

AK

And you would want to go in as co-directors?

LS

Yes.

AK

Can we talk about that?

GW

Yes, that's interesting.

AK

I want to talk about the

relationship building you do with artists, but you're in a relationship yourselves. You're co-directors and there's a non-hierarchical distribution of power that's embedded within the foundation of the Kunsthalle. I think that also then feeds into the kind of ethos of generosity of the institution.

JM

It does.

AK

And you talked about building families and it seems like it starts with the family on some level, right?

LS

On some level. I think it's the idea of directorship as dialogue. I think that's what I find appealing about it. Rather than, you know, me deciding whatever in a very isolated way or just doing whatever I want because I'm in charge, it's the dialogue. And the dialogue is so much more productive than being alone. And you know, what we're doing here is what we do together. Usually over food and wine, as it should be. But our most important decisions, our most successful ideas have come from...

JM

Company.

LS

Just engaging with each other. And sometimes I may have this idea I think is incredible and he may have this idea he thinks is incredible and then we talk to each other and it's like, "Yes, that is pretty stupid. Is it? Yes. Why? Because of this and this. Oh, you're right." And then that is, you know, it's done. And it's not about shaming the other person or whatever.

JM

Not at all.

AK

It's good to step outside of

yourself and have somebody give  
you perspective.

LS

And it's amazing to have someone who you absolutely trust to give you honest feedback about your ideas because, you know, then if they're good, they'll become part of the project. If they're not, then, you know...I think another thing that is really important is that we've always, always avoided compromise. There is no compromise in the directorship.

JM

No.

LS

It's not like, "Okay, if you let me do this show, you'll do the other one."

GW

Interesting. That's great.

LS

Either we both agree on an artist or...

JM

Or we don't do it.

LS

It won't happen.

GW

That's great.

AK

I understand, Oslo Editions is  
totally the same way.

LS

There is no way. It has happened that João would want to work with an artist and I'm like, "I don't know. I'm sorry." And the other way around.

JM

Yes.

AK

But then you would essentially be acting like a guest curator in your own space.

JM

Yes.

GW

Right. Totally.

LS

And that would create a weird shift, like, "Okay, so this is the artist we're working with, but I don't really want to work with that person. So you do it, I don't care." It only happened to us once that we couldn't agree on an artist.

AK

Did that artist get shown?

LS

I wanted to work with one artist, he wanted to do another artist. And he could see why I wanted to do this artist, and he liked my artist and vice versa, but we couldn't agree and we could do only one of them. And you know, it was over wine and pizzas. We threw a coin and that was it.

AK

And how did you feel about that?  
Did it work out okay?

LS

It was my artist.

GW

So, it was okay.

AK

He let you win.

LS

No, he didn't. It turned out to be one of the most rewarding projects we've done.

AK

I'm going to ask João that.

LS

No, no. It was amazing. It was one of the most expensive shows we've ever done.

AK

Really?

LS

But it was really nice.

AK

We were talking earlier about non-hierarchical positions and relationships. How does that ethos inform how you work with artists? How do you select those artists and then stay true to this idea that you have about the exhibition being a point where the relationship becomes visible?

LS

We try as much as possible to be non-hierarchical. We really appreciate that, you know. And it's difficult because there are hierarchies in place and we reproduce them in everyday life. It's hard not to reproduce them. But co-directing is a form of kind of bypassing that. We try with our team—and our team being small—to be as non-hierarchical as possible.

JM

Our preparator has the key to the space and all that.

LS

He can come in and out whenever he pleases. He uses the storage as his deposit if he needs to. I think there is this sense of trust and respect that either feeds into being non-hierarchical or is the result of being non-hierarchical. That is very appealing to us as, again, as a mode of instituting.

AK

But everybody who is in it is playing a crucial part.

LS

And Pedro, our preparator, he knows that, and even if he doesn't, we make it clear that we need him very much because of his technical skills. And those technical skills are extremely important. And you know, he doesn't feel that often because when he's building a house or whatever, you know, he's seen as an anonymous construction worker.

AK

He's seen for his labor.

JM

Yes.

LS

So he feels rewarded when he works with us because he knows that sometimes it can be a challenge technically, but his skills are as important as ours. They're just different. That, to us, is very important — to make sure that he's just not someone that we hired to do something that we don't know how to. He's part of the team, Kunsthalle Lissabon needs him as much as it needs us in order to function. That's how we perceive this idea of non-hierarchical relationships, basically.

AK

Right. Can you talk a little bit more about the relationship building with the artists and what the end product is for you? In the past, you've articulated that the exhibition is just one moment within the relationship, and that your job as curators, in a sense, is the role of maintenance, the maintenance of relationships.

LS

We say it's thinking practice through. Even though we have been doing this for a very long time, we either didn't have the time or we haven't done it long enough for it to become apparent or to think about what those conditions or consequences are. The idea of the relationship with the artist being something that materializes in the form of the exhibition is something that we've been dealing with only recently. At a certain point, we just started thinking, "Okay, so do we produce relationships? What are these relationships we're producing and how is that something that is relevant, or how does that

become visible?" Because as an institution with a public mandate, we need to produce something that is public. We can produce a lot of things like working conditions or discourse, or this ongoing reflection, which aren't necessarily visible or made public. But then we also need to make something public. And how do we make public these relationships with the artist? That's why we do solo exhibitions, because then the solo exhibition is when the public encounters a yearlong development of a relationship. That's why commissions are so important to us, as opposed to just showing works that have been shown elsewhere. Because then it's not just about shipping the work and installing it, it's about producing. It's about discussing the project, producing the project.

JM

Engaging the production.

LS

And then it becomes visible for a small period of time, and that is what is made visible. For the audience or the public, it's not even that the relationship is made visible. It's just an exhibition. But then, through discourse and through publishing, we start articulating and crystallizing those ideas into discourse, with writing or seminars or whatever. What is curious is that then the solo show becomes a different thing. It is a place where an authorial voice is made visible. Subjectivity is made visible. Specific modes of production are made visible. But it's also a place in which sociability is made visible. And you've witnessed that. And it is a place in which we work together, we think together and we achieve something together. It's not about authorship. It's never about authorship because we as curators remain backstage.

AK

Right. And you disperse your authorship to begin with.

LS

It's never about us. If you look at the brochure or the invitations, you don't see "curated by." It's not about that. It's not about us claiming what's happening there. It's about thinking how we can reclaim the format of the solo show into this experiment we're doing. Or thinking, how can we make it politically relevant when the solo show has been the locus of commercial activity? Galleries do solo shows. Museums do solo shows, sponsored by galleries. For us, the solo show is the place of being together. It's the place of thinking together, acting together, working together. And you know, the outcome — and it's not a condition, it's an outcome, it's a result — is friendship. What the solo show produces, or what the show at Kunsthalle

Lissabon produces, is this idea of friendship, this social relationship that we define as friendship.

AK

And then you continue to keep these friendships up over the years.

LS

Exactly. They never end.

JM

They never end.

LS

Which is a nightmare because every year, you have four more relationships to maintain.

AK

I was going to say, relationships are hard. I think about how many friends I'm not even in touch with anymore because I've moved across the country or whatever it is.

LS

Now it's easier to keep in touch.

JM

Yes, yes.

AK

It is easier to keep in touch. How prescribed is that maintenance?

LS

Again, it's very intuitive.

JM

It's not that prescribed.

AK

It's a friendship.

JM

That's right. The good thing about it being a friendship, is that it can be really different from artist to artist.

LS

Person to person.

JM

Some people we do not see that much. But some of the people really became family, and that's amazing. Like, in seven years, we have all these artists that are part of the family. That's, for me, the more relevant thing. And family being the place where friendship is really...

LS

Unquestionable.

JM

Unquestionable, yes.

LS

And again, it depends, because people have their personalities and it's true, we have clicked more with some people than with others, obviously.

AK

As with any friendship.

LS

Exactly. But you know, with some friends, you can spend six months without talking to each other and it's still there, and with other friends, you speak or interact on a more regular basis, and then you have some friends for whom you'll do whatever, you know, just because that's what you do.

As an example, Leonor Antunes is going to be in the Venice Biennale with a new commission in the Arsenale. She wanted to ask for money from an international grant. She couldn't apply because she's not based in Portugal, and she needed money to cover shipping and insurance, travel insurance. So we applied for her, and we did all the paperwork. It's not our project, but if we didn't do it, she wouldn't get it, period. We're waiting to find out if we got it or not. And it was a lot of work for us, but that's what you do. And that's it. And the same, like, you know, we're going to go to London. We're going to stay with Céline Conderelli because it's nicer than staying in a hotel. When João

turned 40, we were in Mexico, and Amalia Pica threw him a crazy birthday party.

JM

The artists that we have been working with, they come from this set of relations with the artists themselves. Some of the artists introduce us to the other artists, and so Nathalie du Pasquier came through Céline.

LS

Came through Céline. Mariana Castillo Deball

JM

Came from Amalia.

LS

It's a very long genealogy. We did a show with Melvin Moti. Melvin is married to a writer called Moosje Gosen. And Moosje had a project called The Uqbar Foundation with Mariana Castillo Deball and Irene Kopelman. So, then we did Amalia Pica. And then Amalia led us to Mariana Castillo Deball. And now we're doing Irene Kopelman next year. There are these threads.

AK

But those are also friendship threads.

JM AND LS

Yes.

LS

And for instance, André Romão suggested Luís Lázaro Matos to us. All these things are connected. We did Ahmet Ögüt and then we did Pilvi Takala, who are a couple. Well, they were a couple at the time.

JM

And we also have worked a lot with duos.

LS

We worked a lot with duos and couples. We did Haris Epaminonda and Daniel Gustav Cramer.

JM

We did Mona Vatamanu and Florin Tudor.

LS

Mona and Florin. Ahmet and Pilvi were a couple at the time. So that is something that is interesting also. Mariana and Francisco. We've actually done a lot of duos.

AK

Well, it's also nice because it mirrors your own position as a couple.

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