

**Panel discussion: April 15, 11 am (at the City Museum of Ljubljana)**

### **The Politics and Ethics of Participation**

With: Eda Čufer (dramaturge, curator, and writer, Faculty Member at AVA – Academy of Visual Arts, Ljubljana)

Mojca Puncer (Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Maribor)

Apolonija Šušteršič (visual artist, architect, and independent researcher)

Moderator: Zoran Erić (Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade)

This panel discussion will explore ongoing theoretical debates concerning the role of participation in contemporary artistic practices, particularly in public spaces. Drawing on Claire Bishop's definition of participation, where people themselves become the central artistic medium and material, the discussion will delve into the theoretical foundations and further critical reflections on this approach. Her arguments, informed by the theory of radical democracy, advocate for resistant and antagonistic art practices that challenge codependency and conviviality. In contrast, Shannon Jackson's *Social Work* offers a critique of the oppositions and tensions traditionally associated with participatory art. Jackson advocates for a more "eclectic," nuanced, and open-ended approach to social engagement and the aesthetic integrity of participatory art. Unlike Bishop, Jackson does not prioritize creative agency, a focus that could undermine the complexity of the social and institutional contexts in which participatory art is embedded.

Following this seminal debate on participatory art, recent theories have opened up new avenues for interpretation, placing strong emphasis on community engagement, collaborative practices, and the co-creation of works by artists and publics. As suggested by Michele Bonazzi, these processes empower engaged participants, transforming them from passive consumers into active co-authors of collective experiences. Another perspective, as articulated by Thomas Munley, emphasizes the importance of the concept of care in participatory art, advocating for an approach that fosters community development.

An additional relevant issue to be highlighted is the ethical dimension of participatory art, which often engages with the "sore points" of society. From this, a key question arises: Can aesthetics be interconnected with the concept of participation? Is there such a thing as a participatory aesthetic? The lingering question remains: Does participatory art hold transformative potential? If so, what conditions must be met for this potential to be realized?

In addition to these theoretical frameworks and questions, we will analyze another position: that of the artist as a catalyst and mediator, who sets up a "stage" for open-ended participation. This approach envisions a kind of *tabula rasa*—an unfiltered space, free from guiding principles or imposed limits—allowing participants to express themselves on blank walls in public spaces. While these walls may symbolically reference the institutional framework of the museum, they are perceived by the public as empty signifiers, not necessarily bound to institutional contexts or critique. The question that emerges here is whether such participatory art practices in public spaces are merely temporary and ephemeral channels for expression or whether they reflect a truly uncontrolled, decolonized public space.