

Daniel Blanga Gubbay

Voices (Towards Other Institutions) #15



Stills from *My Ailing Beliefs Can Cure Your Wretched Desires*. Courtesy the artist and James Cohan NY


1. “Where do programs and exhibitions go after their death?” I woke up in the morning and this sentence was the last thing I remembered from my dream. I was in a laboratory chatting with a friend: she was bent over a microscope, in search of the virus, and she was talking absently with me, while adjusting the lenses. She wanted to know where exhibitions and festivals ended once canceled, as was happening now. She was not interested in the programs, but curious about their afterlife. I was unprepared for that question. It reminded me of the one that haunted Holden, “*Where do the ducks in Central Park go in the winter?*” It was late March, the end of winter, when I woke up from that dream. During the day, my in box was slowly filled with emails with “canceled” or “postponed” in their subject line.
2. When I started writing this text, the dream came back to me. I started thinking about the idea of reincarnation. What about imagining that rather than being simply postponed, canceled events are dying and might reincarnate in a new body, in the body of a new time, which does not correspond to the body of

the previous one. The 2021 Biennial will be the unexpected reincarnation of the one that died in 2020: a soul in a different body. Or perhaps this site you are browsing, or these lines through which your eyes are scrolling, might be one of its reincarnations, clearly present in a new body and a new medium.

3. Reincarnation has a mysterious balance between the visible and the invisible. It is the invisible journey of souls, which occasionally incarnate in a visible body. What is nourished and supported in rituals is the invisible continuity of life, below the visible event of its appearance. There might be something similar in artistic creation, where an artistic practice exists, independently on the visible and punctual moment of its physical presentation. In the weeks of canceling events for Covid-19 I often thought about this, and the need to support the continuity of the artistic practice, even in the forced absence of its visible body. Perhaps the role of the institution is to remember the importance of invisible life; to claim that its primary role is to not to present an event, through which a practice can be then supported, but rather to support an artistic practice that has visible moments of presentation. In front of the neo-liberal paradigm of the event, the image of reincarnation suggests a shift between the event and the practice; and the institution taking care of souls beyond their moments of visibility.
4. In *My Ailing Beliefs Can Cure Your Wretched Desires*, created in 2017, Vietnamese artist Tuan Andrew Nguyen imagines a conversation between the souls of two extinct animals, who meet before knowing which new being they will reincarnate in. The leading voices are the spirit of the last Javan rhino in Vietnam – whose extinction is linked to the hunt for its horns – and a turtle. Talking like two old friends, and following a flow of images, their voices accuse humanity, its obsession for both abundance and rarity, horns and pangolins, colonisation and extractivism, and “discovery” as a human concept. In a human-dominated world, their souls talk about the political strategy

that should be adopted: whether it is better to spread the word that humans also reincarnate in animals, as a possibility of increasing their empathy, or simply decide to reincarnate as a virus as a political revenge on humanity.

5. “Now I am a wondering spirit, stuck between the past and the future before I can move on, I can reincarnate” the rhino’s voice finally says. This might be the situation of an institution that has just abandoned the body of its past program and is ready to reincarnate into a new yet unknown body. In this suspended time, it has the opportunity to speculate into what it will reincarnate: an act of imagination that obliges to be already in the future, and maybe to think the past from there. It can dream of becoming a future museum for an extinct past – our present; a museum displaying what could have been done to save it; a place to care for the invisible, to balance practices and events; to challenge *abundance* and *rarity*; to pass the mic to the rhino and the turtle, or to the building itself. I think of the times I visited the Russian Pavilion and its revivalist architecture, a style reincarnating other times in the present of its body. I fall asleep with the image of this convergence of times, dreaming of visiting programs and exhibitions of 2021. Some of them might look at once like the reincarnation of those that died in 2020, and the anticipated reincarnation of far future ones.

Daniel Blanga-Gubbay is a Brussels-based curator and researcher. He is currently the artistic co-director of the Kunstenfestivaldesarts. He has worked as an educator and an independent curator for public programs, among which: Sonic Dawn, Riga 2019, Can Nature Revolt? for Manifesta, Palermo 2018; Black Market, Brussels 2016; The School of Exceptions, Santarcangelo, 2016. He has worked as co-curator for LiveWorks, and was head of the Department of Arts and Choreography (ISAC) of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels. He graduated with Giorgio Agamben at Università luav di Venezia and he holds a PhD in Cultural Studies from the University of Palermo, Valencia and Freie Universität Berlin. Recent articles appeared in South as a State of Mind (Athens), Mada Masr  (Cairo)

and Performance Journal (New York).