



The Future is Now **A podcast series | ArtsLink Assembly 2021: Future Fellows**

Podcast by Selma Banich

Transcript abridged and edited by Anya Szykitka

Simon Dove:

Hello and welcome to *The Future is Now*, a podcast series from CEC ArtsLink. My name is Simon Dove. I'm the Executive Director of CEC ArtsLink. For this podcast series, we asked 10 independent artists and curators from different parts of the world, whom we call the Future Fellows, to talk about the current context of their work and to share their vision for how they see the future of arts practice. In this episode, we hear from Selma Banich, based in Zagreb, Croatia.

Selma Banich:

My name is Selma Banich, and I'm an artist and activist based in Zagreb, Croatia. I think of myself as an artist that is trying to figure out how art practices can be a tool for social change. This is how I see what I do and how my art path is related or interconnected to my activist work. My practice is mostly about understanding and building relations. It has a material aspect, but it's more. What I'm interested in is how art can build community, build relationships, or facilitate a process of voicing and embodying, and manifesting relations. And then community.

What works, or when my practice is making sense, or somebody else's practice that I take part in making sense, is when it's supporting the voices of people of the community, their agency, in a way that people—taking part in a workshop or art project or initiative, local or transnational—feel empowered by taking part. They are not only invited, but they are initiating and taking responsibility.

For example, this piece that I was speaking about that was commemorating, but actually condemning, the death regime being generated and executed by the European Union and nation states towards people on the move—migrants, refugees, and so on. The commemorative piece for the people who have died on their way to Europe through the Balkans, died in Croatian territory. The only way I could ever imagine doing something like that is by being locally embedded in my community, doing it with the people who had experience of that journey, who are here, who I'm sharing livelihood with, instead of generically addressing

issues that I'm not in any way related or embedded in my local context. Otherwise I would feel I'm appropriating somebody's voice instead of supporting it. And then using that to speak about something that is a global, planetary . . . not only situation, but like politics.

Kind of being put in this sweet spot where on one hand, you are curious about understanding what this practice can and should be for yourself, for your family, for your community, for this world, for the planet. And on the other hand, you need to also understand how to survive.

For me, the question is about how equality and equity and the social role that art has is interconnected with my personal responsibility as a human, and other way around. At this point in my life, this is becoming a very hard question. Because it's the challenging times we live in, it's really worth it, it has to be hard. And it is inviting me and all of us to kind of understand how and what is needed—more than how—what is needed to answer these questions genuinely and ethically, but also spiritually, just to yourself, but also to your community.

I'm referring to the last project I did with a group of woman from the collective Woman to Woman, the commemorative piece for the people who died on borders, because of borders, for example. That was very important that this commemorative piece, the practice of commemorating, and doing it as an art practice that was a collaborative communal process of a community and not individual person. So it is influencing a lot, of course, what I do, and how I do it, and with whom I do it.

On one hand, I feel there is a struggle amongst artists to survive this time, to build something that is missing and to offer each other that missing infrastructure and support. But for majority of us who are doing that, this is not a new thing. We do live that for 20 years, 30, 40, some of the more mature comrades. So of course there is this collectivity that is asking questions, how to rely on each other and rebuild what we need, by ourselves. But then also there is this notion of, it has to be a public responsibility. There needs to be a systemic solution. There needs to be a responsibility and solution coming from the system as well. Otherwise we would be talking about completely losing the notion of public culture that we had in the time of socialism and numerous other times, like with education, with health, with housing and so on.

So for me as a person who is inspired by anarchist philosophy and politics, to imagine sustainable autonomous solution, autonomous from the system, from the regime, it is compelling. It is something that I'm interested in, but also in the same time, I believe that there needs to be this pressure put on the system, on states that is addressing the state and demanding responsibility towards a functioning social services, where culture is one part of it of course, for me at least, culture and art.

In this time, we are also challenged to understand what is the material future of art? What do we choose? Do we choose producing art as any other commodity that then is going to be politically and materially and ecologically and socially and spiritually charged with one thing? So it's going to be put on the battlefield as any other commodity that you get different kind of appropriations and manipulations, and capital basically runs the show. Or we want to see art as a tool that we as different communities and peoples are ready to use to make our lives better and prosper. And also as a tool to help communities and peoples to emancipate and work towards a better future.

This transcript was exported on Oct 14, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

And then my personal question is also, in this moment of obvious environmental crisis that we are living in, what do we want to produce? We don't want to produce more commodity that will overload anyways, already. Art for decades is in over-producing hyper production.

Reminding the public that they have the right to have healthy, free, accessible culture. And I'm not talking about high art. I'm talking about art in every neighborhood, art in every community, art for all the people in a sense that you can become a practitioner. Bring a cinema in every village, bring creative workshops to all neighborhoods, bring art education in every community.

On the other hand, without having this opportunity to work also transnationally, to organize transnationally and travel, but also to learn from other communities and from other places on this planet, my embedding in my community would not be possible.

I still have some hope that by working locally or in a community in a local context, I can truly address the global political questions.

For me personally, I need to fall in love with people again, to again understand art from the perspective of desire. That's for me really personal, because after 20 years of struggle, you get these moments where your hopes are kind of getting low. But at the same time, having hope or losing hope is also a notion of privilege. So I still have hope, but I also need to speak to my desires again, to find this vitality again, because that's the only way, the grounds. That's healthy grounds for human interaction and such, and also respect towards everything that is alive. So yeah, I'm calling in this desire for life or desire for art. And maybe globally, I would call in for fair wages for all that are based on ethical economies and decolonization. Political and economical decolonization.

I'm very much now into figuring out what pleasure activism or pleasure arts can be, or could be. I'm in a moment when, this is also very personal, where I want to learn about how to get back, not only the notion, but also politically, to take back.

Simon Dove:

You have been listening to *The Future is Now*, a podcast series from CEC ArtsLink with support from HowlRound. All interviews and post-production is by me, Simon Dove, Executive Director of CEC ArtsLink. The specially composed music is by the extraordinary bass player and composer Shri. This podcast is part of the ArtsLink Assembly 2021: Future Fellows, supported by the Trust for Mutual Understanding, Kirby Family Foundation, John and Jody Arnhold Foundation, and of course, generous individual donors. These podcasts are available to listen to, or download the transcripts at our website, www.cecartslink.org, or at howlround.com.