

galerie frank elbaz.

Tomo Savić-Gecan

Untitled, 2023

Art Basel Unlimited
June 12-18, 2023

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Tomo Savić-Gecan is a Croatian artist who almost as rule exhibits 'nothing'. Conceived in the manner of tabula rasa, the author's projects function as empty sites filled with various charges, concealed tensions, references and interlinkings. By intervening in space, the basic 'material' of his work, the artist initiates marginal, uncommon interactions between the space, viewer and the non-existent object of exhibition. Dematerialization, absence and emptiness are the consequences of the specific treatment of gallery space.

- Excerpt from the CERN website



Every day for the duration of Art Basel 2023, a different, randomly selected art news article is analyzed in relation to the latest global art market report to provide the data that feeds an artificial intelligence algorithm; this, in turn, prescribes the times, locations, and durations of the changes of intensity in selected lights inside Art Basel to constitute Tomo Savić-Gecan's *Untitled, 2023*.

For Art Basel Unlimited, Tomo Savić-Gecan presents an ephemeral project that both extends the artist's uncompromising, conceptual practice and acutely reflects our contemporary moment.

Untitled, 2023 is a participative performance work based on randomly selected art news articles which are analyzed in relation to the latest 'Art Market: An Art Basel and UBS Report' to provide the data that feeds an artificial intelligence algorithm; this, in turn, prescribes the times, locations, and durations of the changes of intensity in selected lights inside Art Basel.

The various locations of the piece are announced daily on the website as well as on large screens situated at Unlimited and the booth of galerie frank elbaz. The public is invited to go to those locations and observe their surroundings, and becoming part of the performance themselves.

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other projects

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Every day for the duration of the 59th edition of the Venice Biennale of Art, the lead story from a different, randomly selected global news source provides the data that feeds an artificial intelligence algorithm, which in turn prescribes the time, location, duration, movements, and thoughts of a group of five performers in the city of Venice to constitute Tomo Savić-Gecan's *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)*, 2022.

[link to the 2022 Croatian Pavilion Website](#)

New viral infection rates, a war in Ukraine, supposed election manipulations, a Kardashian divorce, ecological catastrophes, the rise and fall of cryptocurrencies, one more political corruption scandal: there is no escaping the news. Global networked information flows penetrate practically every aspect of our daily lives. Simultaneously, an ever-increasing number of technological systems effectively guarantee the public burial of objective facts under an avalanche of rumor, emotion, and personal belief, even as our relationship to these is tracked and mined, predicted and modified. In the context of this total condition, Tomo Savić-Gecan's *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)*, 2022, is an artwork conceived in and for a "post-truth" era.

The practical functioning of the project could be described as follows: an artificial intelligence daily analyzes textual data from the lead article of a randomly selected major news source, such as Arab News, Corriere della Sera, El Tiempo, Le Monde, The Bangkok Post, The Namibian, The New York Times, etc. This AI is trained to recognize and classify a defined set of topics, spanning from climate change to violations of human rights, and from developments in technology to military movements. The result produces a set of algorithmically-derived instructions for a group of five performers: the start time, duration, exact location, and all the choreographic details of each of their variable number of performances for that day. The media-derived data's grid coordinates determine which of the various national pavilions inside and outside the Giardini the performers will infiltrate at any given time. It furthermore defines in what formation the performers enter or leave a space, what minimal movements they enact, and it even prescribes what they should think about while performing. These instructions change, as the news changes, every day for the seven months of the Biennial.

The performers will be present wherever the AI system directs them. Visitors, too, should they want to view the piece, will effectively have to follow the lead of this same "intelligence," with updates shared on the pavilion's official website or at an information hub located on the via Garibaldi. Still, the piece may well elude the casual observer: the five performers will not speak or carry props and will not wear any costume or badge or other signifier, thus there will be no outward difference between them and members of the audience, no spectacle of any kind. The performers' actions might only become legible when enacted synchronously and against the backdrop of a crowd of others who move randomly and according to their own free volition. *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)* uses the sparest of movements and means to leave an impression that ever so slightly troubles our experience of the otherwise ordinary.

The artist's decision to use the news as a starting point is not incidental: the experience of the publicly performed artwork will be a reflection of what is going on in the world, who reports on it, and how. Yet, regardless of the specific subject matter to which the artist's project turns (the movement of Russian troops, a Chinese hacker scandal), the project's actual subject is how we are informed about our present, and how we are literally formed by the stories we are sold. And, because the media, as well as the systems through which it circulates, are arguably machines for disciplining citizens, organizing perception, extracting profit, and articulating ideology, it is only fitting that these determine every aspect governing *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)*. Just as lives are transformed into data in the "real world," generating new forms of social control, so, too, does this artwork transform the news into directives, mimicking the quiet insidiousness with which technology advances what scholar Shoshana Zuboff has called "surveillance capitalism." As such, Savić-Gecan's project is devastatingly topical, pointing to our complex relationship with the media, control, and power in the digital age.

—Elena Filipovic, Curator of the Croatian Pavilion

ArtReview

Tomo Savić-Gecan's Quiet, Extreme Reconsideration of Artmaking

Martin Herbert Features 20 April 2022 ArtReview

If you're hoping for a glimpse of the Croatian artist's work at the 59th Venice Biennale – look anywhere *but* the Croatian Pavilion



Tomo Savić-Gecan at CERN, Geneva, 2017. © 2017-2022 CERN. Photo: Sophia Elizabeth Bennett

If you visit the Venice Biennale this year and want to see the work of Tomo Savić-Gecan, who represents Croatia at the storied event, here's a tip: look anywhere *but* the Croatian Pavilion. That venue is likely to be closed, or at least empty. Instead, Savić-Gecan's project

will locate itself unpredictably in other pavilions and exhibition spaces, and you may experience it without even realising it. Four times a day, five performers will be given instructions by an AI algorithm – which is in turn responding to information in the lead news story from a randomly chosen news outlet somewhere on the planet – about where to position themselves, how long to stay there, how to move, even what to think about. They won't be shouting or dancing; expect subtle, but not quite natural, movements like head-tilting, pretending to be touching a wall or moving in slow motion: humans impelled by artificial overlords, maybe.

Every day for the duration of the 59th edition of the Venice Biennale of Art, the lead story from a different, randomly selected global news source provides the data that feeds an artificial intelligence algorithm, which in turn prescribes the time, location, duration, movements, and thoughts of a group of five performers in the city of Venice to constitute Tomo Savić-Gecan's *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)*, 2022.

The artist never circulates documentation or representations of his artworks, but instead has always used a concise sentence describing each of his projects as its 'image'. This is the image for Tomo Savić-Gecan's *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)*, 2022.

You can, if you like, cheat a little by visiting an information kiosk on the via Garibaldi, where someone will tell you where the performances are happening that day. Or you can drift through the biennale and hope you see something. But if you don't see anything, that doesn't mean you haven't, in a way, partaken in Savić-Gecan's *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)* (2022) – all the Dutch-Croatian artist's works since he left art school in Milan in the mid-1990s have been effectively untitled – and if you do see something, that doesn't necessarily mean you've experienced his artwork. If that sounds contradictory, bear with me and buckle up. Savić-Gecan's practice is one of the most quietly – an appropriate word – extreme reconsiderations of the practice of artmaking you're likely to find today. In some ways it intersects with classic 1960s conceptual strategies of dematerialisation, since his art is primarily not object-based or permanent; and yet it's also strongly materialist (it needs people, places, all kinds of other things). The fact that there are no illustrations for this article – Savić-Gecan's preference, in catalogues, magazines and elsewhere, is for a blank space where an image should be, or an image-text that describes the artwork's operations – doesn't mean that there's nothing to see in his art, though sometimes there's not much and often you might feel like you're standing in the wrong place. Instead, there's another place to think about.

For example: 17 years ago, when Savić-Gecan made an earlier appearance at the Venice Biennale, he presented a line of text on a gallery wall that informed the viewer of a relationship between the number of visitors entering an art space in Amsterdam and the temperature of a public swimming pool in Tallinn. Also in 2005 Savić-Gecan 'showed' at a Brussels gallery by removing the front window, sending it to Slovenia to be powdered and turned into 150 glasses, and in turn offering these as drinking vessels for the show's run. By this point he'd put in a decade's worth of reductive, evasive gestures. In 1994 he covered a gallery entrance in Ljubljana with a white wall; in 1996 he sealed off an area of exhibition space in Cleveland with hazard tape. For institutional exhibitions in 2011 and 2020, any phone calls received by the curator triggered changes in the temperature of the gallery space. Such interventions verge on the infinitesimal; as when, in 2006 in Austin, Texas, visitors were informed that Savić-Gecan had collaborated with a Dutch art magazine to publish an issue that was exactly 1mm smaller than its usual size. Meanwhile, the viewers were in an American city just over 8,000 kilometres away.

With each airplane from Los Angeles that lands at Taiwan's Taoyuan International airport for the duration of the Taipei Biennial in 2012, the level of humidity in one of the biennial's exhibition spaces will change slightly.

This is the image for Tomo Savić-Gecan's project at the 2012 Taipei Biennial

You're cued, then, to ask who is having the art experience. The answer, in ontological terms, flip-flops. If you're holding the art magazine in Amsterdam, you're not standing in the show in Austin, thinking about Savić-Gecan's philosophical ideas. In such a way, and in various manners, the artist has raised the possibility of creating works of art that are impossible to fully experience (and thus, not at all irrelevantly, commodify even as a document) – a part of his works tends to be already gone by the time you show up. In 2005 Savić-Gecan participated in a group show in Brooklyn, for which he used a hidden gizmo to record visitors' entries and exits; two years later he used that information to adjust the controls on a thermostat in another show he was participating in; and then, a decade later, he used the data again on another thermostat, in another gallery, to adjust the humidity in

the space. Hands up if you saw all those shows. If you did, maybe Savić-Gecan will use the info again, in a show you'll miss.

Anyway, this is just part of it. Savić-Gecan also absents himself from the interpretative process of his work. It's a self-erasure that constitutes an enlargement, since Savić-Gecan accordingly opens the readings of his art while at the same time destabilising them. He encourages curators to promulgate their own interpretations, and as they do so, something fundamental – the 'truth' of what his art means – is seemingly allowed to escape, to dissolve. Instead, the art is populated by the beliefs of the curators at hand; and then, in turn, those of the viewers. The art, as with a number of his projects, becomes a marked-out empty space. It could be, as the pavilion's curator, Elena Filipovic, has suggested, that 'the "exhibition" might not be the name for a location and duration to show anything at all, but instead the name for a place where a public has come together to both individually and collectively allow an aesthetic experience to be created'.

During the 51st Venice Biennale of Art, the entries of visitors to W139 Center for Contemporary Art in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, determines the change of the water temperature in a public swimming pool in Tallinn, Estonia, by 1°C.

This is the image for Tomo Savić-Gecan's participation in the 2005 Venice Biennale

The more you think about Savić-Gecan's art, the more the contradictions both proliferate and sit in counterpoise. Sometimes it feels like there's nothing to look at; and yet the work occupies space (and time). On the other hand, the art's maker – or instigator – refuses to have it documented, so once the timeframe is over, it's gone. Then again, it may be revived, albeit differently. It would be foolish to miss the playfulness in all this, also the absolute seriousness, and the continual inventiveness. Savić-Gecan, after all, is – as far as I know – the only artist who has taken a sample of air from a gallery in Amsterdam, had it sent to the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN) in Geneva, where it was then turned into antimatter. Is the art in this case the air, the antimatter, the process, the idea? Make a choice, and *Untitled* (2018) slips through your fingers.

Untitled (Croatian Pavilion) partakes of all the intersecting angles on Savić-Gecan's art. It is also, of course, open to curatorial interpretation. To me, Filipovic framed the project in technological terms: as well as exploding the concept of a national pavilion, she said, "it comments on the strange and insidious ways technology increasingly controls us (and our passive acceptance of it), but also, in our own post-truth era, it is an incredible commentary on the news and its relationship to power, nationhood, distribution channels, etc." However persuasive that view, of course, it's just Filipovic's opinion, which in turn constitutes a structural component of the work. The latter waits to be filled in by the viewers who see it, who may in turn think of those who experience it as a rumour, which may not be a lesser mode of reception. And, of course, if you see someone moving a little robotically in a national pavilion this year, that means you're not standing in another national pavilion, seeing another performer. In that moment Savić-Gecan, and his art, have slipped into freedom once more.

From the April 2022 issue of ArtReview

Martin Herbert Features 20 April 2022 ArtReview

TOMO SAVIĆ-GEKAN was born in 1967 in Zagreb and lives and works in Amsterdam.

SAVIĆ-GEKAN studied at the School of Applied Arts in Zagreb and the Academies of Fine Arts in Venice and Milan, followed by postgraduate studies at Ateliers Arnhem, the Netherlands. In 2020 he was the subject of career-spanning retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb. Solo shows have taken place at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka (2017); Zuidplein, Amsterdam, and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands (2016); Jeu de Paume, Paris, and Bergen Kunsthall, Norway (2010); Etablissement d'en face, Brussels (2005); De Loge, Haarlem, the Netherlands (2000); Gallery PM, Zagreb (1998); Kapelica Gallery, Ljubljana (1994); and Gallery SC, Zagreb (1994), among others. Selected group exhibitions have taken place at Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2017); Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2011); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2011); Apex Art, New York (2007); De Appel, Amsterdam (2006); MoMA PS1, New York (2004); Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany (2003); Arti & Amicitiae, Amsterdam (2002); National Gallery of Art, Tirana, Albania (2002); and Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna (2001). He has participated in major perennial exhibitions, including the Sculpture Garden Biennale Geneva (2020), the Taipei Biennial (2012), the 51st Venice Biennale of Art (2005), the 59st Venice Biennale of Art (2022), and Manifesta, Ljubljana (2000), and various artist residencies, including Art Explora, Paris (2021); Accelerate Croatia with Arts, CERN, Geneva (2017); 1646 Experimental Art Space, The Hague (2012); and PS1, New York (2004).

Tomo Savić-Gecan

Born in 1967

Lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands

Education

- 1996 - 1997 Arnhem, the Netherlands: Ateliers Arnhem (MA)
1988 - 1993 Venice, Italy, Academy of Fine Arts & Milan, Italy, Academy of Fine Arts Brera

Solo Exhibitions (selection)

- 2023 *Untitled*, Art Basel Unlimited, Switzerland
galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France
2022 *59th Venice Biennale of Art*; representation of Croatia, Venice, Italy,
Towards Emptiness (with Julije Knifer & Goran Petercol), Galženica
Gallery, Velika Gorica, Croatia
2020 *Retrospective 2020*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia
2018 Greta Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia
2017 Mali salon Gallery of Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art,
Rijeka, Croatia
2016 Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands & Zuidplein (public
square), Amsterdam, the Netherlands
2014 Radnička Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia
2011 VN Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia
2010 Jeu de Paume, Paris, France & Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway
2006 Testsite, Austin, United States
Croatian Architects' Association, Zagreb, Croatia
2005 Établissement d'en face, Brussels, Belgium
Power of Emptiness (with Julije Knifer), PM Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia
2004 Isabella Bortolozzi Gallery, Berlin, Germany
2003 Ghetto Club, Split, Croatia

- 2001 Karas Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia
2000 De Loge, Haarlem, the Netherlands

Group Exhibitions (selection)

- 2023 *Immerse!*, Tallin Art Hall, Tallinn, Estonia
2022 *Slavonian Biennial / New Paradigms of Happiness*, Museum of
Contemporary Art, Osijek, Croatia
2020 *Sculpture Garden Biennale*, Geneva, Switzerland
2018 *Home Sequence*, private apartments, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
2017 *Ungestalt*, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland
2015 *(ON)begane Grond*, Provincial Government Building under
construction, Antwerp, Belgium
2012 Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia
8th Taipei Biennial: Death and Life of Fiction, Taipei Fine Arts
Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
2011 Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia
Melanchotopia, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art,
Rotterdam, Netherlands
2010 *Art Always Has Its Consequences*, former building of the Museum
of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia
Voda / Water, Štaglinec, Croatia
2009 *Take the Money and Run*, De Appel, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
2008 *Last Chance to See the Show*, Point Ephemere, Paris, France
Volume, vol. II, Badische Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany
2007 *Let Everything Be Temporary or When is the Exhibition?*, Apexart,
New York, United States
2006 *El albergue holandés*, La Station, Nice, France
On Mobility, Trafó House of Contemporary Arts, Budapest, Hungary
On Mobility, De Appel, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Grey Zones, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany
2005 *Low tech*, Arti & Amicitiae, Amsterdam, Netherlands
51st Venice Biennale of Art: Croatian pavillion, Venice, Italy
Les braves gars de Lianchanbo sont là, art3, Valence, France
Volume, several locations, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
The One, New General Catalogue Gallery, New York, United States

- 2004 *Visa for Thirteen*, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, United States
Dollhouse, private apartment in Orchard Street, New York, United States
Mediterraneans, Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome (MACRO), Rome, Italy
Flipside, Artist Space, New York, United States
- 2003 *IF*, Bitola, Macedonia
Verboden op het werk te komen, De Brakke Grond & W139, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Re:Action, Home Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic
Portal II, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany
- 2002 *Project: Broadcasting, dedicated to Nikola Tesla*, Technical Museum, Zagreb, Croatia
Fantasieën over niets / Fantasies About Nothing, De Loge & Nieuwe Vide, Haarlem, Netherlands
New Art from Amsterdam, Raid Projects, Los Angeles, United States
Becomings. Contemporary Art in South-Eastern Europe, Kosovo Art Museum, Pristina, Kosovo; City Art Museum, Ljubljana, Slovenia; House of Croatian Artists, Zagreb, Croatia; Chapelle de la Sorbonne, Paris, France
Visite III, Arti & Amicitiae, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Here Tomorrow, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia
Non – Members only, Arti & Amicitiae, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 2001 *Freedom and Violence*, Krolikarnia, Warsaw, Poland
Multiple meervoud, De Parel, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Adriatico: Le due sponde, Michetti Foundation, Francavilla al Mare, Italy
Becomings. Contemporary Art in South-Eastern Europe, National Gallery of Art, Tirana, Albania
What, How and for Whom. On the occasion of the 153rd anniversary of the Communist Manifesto, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, Austria
Common Ground, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, the Netherlands & shopping mall, Zagreb, Croatia

- Institute of Contemporary Art, Dunaújváros, Hungary
Conversations, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, Yugoslavia
Interstanding 4: end repeat, Rotermann Salt Storage, Tallinn, Estonia
Borders 2001: Suspense, Vladimir Bečić Gallery, Slavonski Brod, Croatia
20 Years of the PM Gallery, House of Croatian Artists, Zagreb, Croatia
Museum of Modern Art Dubrovnik, Dubrovnik, Croatia
- 2000 *Tandem Project*, Columbia Arts Center Gallery, Washington, United States
What, How and for Whom, House of Croatian Artists, Zagreb, Croatia
Manifesta 3, European Biennial of Contemporary Art – Borderline Syndrome, Energies of Defence, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Chinese Whispers, Apexart, New York, United States

Residencies

- 2021 *Art Explora artist residency*, Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris, France
2017 *Accelerate Croatia residency*, Arts@CERN, Geneva, Switzerland
2011 artist residency, 1646 experimental art space, The Hague, the Netherlands
2003 *PS1 artist residency*, New York, United States
1996 *ArtsLink Fellowship*, United States

Prize

- 1998 *AICA Award*, 33rd Zagreb Salon, Zagreb, Croatia