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An exhibition without objects Cosmin Costinaş on expo zéro

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BAK
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Dancing seems to be a popular medium in contemporary art institutions these days. In the context of the current [Springdance](#) festival in Utrecht, [BAK](#) presents a '[musée de la danse](#)', which involves an exhibition without objects. METROPOLIS M talks to BAK curator Cosmin Costinaş on his considerations for the exhibition.

Jolien Verlaek:

Can you explain the concept of *expo zéro*: an exhibition without objects?

Cosmin Costinaş:

'The ten participants - choreographers, dancers, visual artists, philosophers, theorists, and an architect - have spent four days working together in a type of think tank situation. They have reflected on the issues raised by the conceptual framework of a

'museum of dance', and worked on a staging of the exhibition taking place in the final two days of the project.

This joint process of debating, arguing, researching and performing offers a sense of how this "museum" is envisaged. *expo zéro* is thus an instrument to look at how today's cultural institutional framework relates to the structures of power in our society. It is an attempt to create a place for thinking and debating, but also a space where the language used for these critical processes is put under question. Thus we will be finding ourselves moving, touching or maybe still speaking while engaged in this critical act.

It is important to note as well - and this has been one of the issues raised in the closed door debates we had in the last week at BAK, that the "zéro" of *expo zéro* should not be understood as a negation, as an exclusion of objects, but rather as a proposition to imagine the structures that are in place in an exhibition beyond the immediately visible objects. And it is certainly not a question of emptiness, the space is charged, it is full with the memories and ideas that have been there and have been brought to light by the ten participants who will constitute the exhibition.'

Jolien Verlaek:

How did the collaboration start and what is your role in the project?

Cosmin Costinaş:

'I have been a participant in a previous edition of *expo zéro*, at [LIFE](#) in Saint Nazaire and the grains of the collaboration were seeded then, due to the multiple connections between the principles and the mission of *Musée de la danse* and *expo zéro* and the ones shared by BAK in its programme, in terms of imagining what a cultural institution can and should do today. And the collaboration with Springdance was an opportunity to stage *expo zéro* at this moment. For the current edition I am one of the participants, in the internal think tank and in the public days of the project. As the co-curator (with Martina Hochmuth of *Musée de la danse*) of the current edition, I function as a kind of connective organ between *expo zéro* and the context of the institution.

Thinking about it from the perspective of BAK, it is significant to consider that the public dimension of the project takes place as an exhibition, a format claimed by the field of contemporary art rather than by the established tradition of dance. And what *expo zéro* tries to do is not to offer the audience empty ticket stubs of uncritical, neoliberal participation, but rather to allow and invite for scenarios of empowerment. And this is also one of the long-standing institutional and conceptual concerns of BAK: defining the art field as a civic space for producing knowledge and debating the terms for common action.'

Jolien Verlaek:

What were the difficulties you experienced as a curator of visual art?

Cosmin Costinaş:

'Taking into account that the "object" of *expo zéro* is not a formal one, there

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was no situation where the format of dance might have been challenging for my (visual arts) curatorial praxis. Because *expo zero* is not about the format of dance, it is about what we share in terms of conceptual concerns in both fields.

On the other hand I have been involved in contemporary dance projects in the last years, but always engaging from my background in visual arts and always trying to identify the common ground between the fields and trying to see what we can say together, especially if we take into account the evolutions in dance in the last 15 years.'

Jolien Verlaek:

What does a 'musée de la danse' look like? Could you describe a visual image of what the visitor will experience during *expo zéro*?

Cosmin Costinaș:

'Well, this is for a large part a surprise, but the audience should expect to be engaged in a process of seeing and thinking, that is structurally not different from the way we experience a conventional exhibition. However, whereas a "conventional exhibition" can sometimes hide ideas behind the objects put on display, rather than revealing them, such a convenient route of escape will not be present here, the audience will be faced with seeing, experiencing and thinking, because there will be nothing to hide behind.

Just to mention a few specific situations from previous editions: At a certain point during the one in Rennes, the Congolese dancer and choreographer Faustin Linyekula stood outside of the venue with a few large plastic bags (colloquially called "refugee" or "immigrant" bags in many countries), thus creating a situation that might confront the audiences with their own assumptions and prejudices. Yet this action also engaged in a questioning the boundaries of the *expo zéro* project, and the idea that it can have an impact outside the realm of the event itself.

And in the Singapore edition of *expo zéro*, artist Heman Chong put together a contractual game. He approached individuals and asked if they would like to read a 500-word story, which they will never be able to read again, as it won't be published. But this offer came with the requirement of learning the text by heart, as a condition of being allowed to leave. Chong sees this proposition as a kind of social contract, one that creates an awareness of the economy of exchange in the field of knowledge and the hierarchical relations it presupposes.'

The public days of *expo zéro* take place at BAK, Lange Nieuwstraat 4, Utrecht on April 16-17, from 12.00–18.00 hrs.

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