

When Zdenko asked me 15 minutes before the application deadline for the exhibition at the Karas Gallery if I would agree to curate the exhibition, I said “of course“ without even asking what it was about. His first performance *Mama's Boy*, performed at *Antisalon 2022*, surprised me, made me laugh and delighted me at the same time. Then, combining personal experience with the experiences of famous and lesser-known individuals, he created a narrative of a typical evening of a young man squandering his potential by excessive gaming. And by simultaneously indulging in nutritionally deficient, processed food and excessive consumption of alcoholic and other beverages. Simple yet thoughtful, contemporary yet far from banal, hilarious and disturbing.

Thirteen minutes before the application deadline for the exhibition at Karas Gallery, I learned a bit more about Zdenko's new pop-up performance. At first glance, "Hold my Beer/People Pleaser" seems like a charming and somewhat self-indulgent jest. A used bathtub filled with water, ice and cans of Zden-Cola and Mikšičko beer, and the artist, Zdenko Mikša, in red swimming shorts and a bathrobe boldly immersing himself in the cold water. Yet beneath the surface lies a deeper exploration of artistic intention.

Art exhibition openings can be viewed as events where individuals gather to enjoy artistic creations and participate in social interactions, which often include alcoholic beverages. In short, visitors at exhibition openings engage in a tripartite experience, a kind of ritual that includes observation and discussion about what is on display, followed by enjoying a refreshing but not particularly high-quality drink and socializing with both close friends and peripheral acquaintances.

So it is clear that people like to socialize with refreshing drinks, especially (but not necessarily) when they also contain certain amounts of alcohol. However, if the artist's only wish was to provide people with an opportunity to socialize at the opening, they would simply put a couple of cans in the gallery fridge to chill. But placing one's own body inside what we might call a refrigerator in the middle of the gallery space during the opening is certainly unexpected.

The questions arise: why would the artist subject himself to immersing his own body in painfully cold water that, even without his intervention, would lower the temperature of the drink to a pleasantly refreshing level? Does he expect that the element of humour and a healthy dose of irony will particularly delight and/or amuse the audience? Maybe it's pure machismo, beating

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one's chest to show who is the main art dude with big balls (in this case shrunk after spending time in cold water) and incomprehensible performances that even those at home could do if they wanted to (but why would like)?

The curator, like you, the audience, struggled with these questions. To be honest, at first, I had a good laugh, but then I wondered even more: What exactly is art? What defines a performance? Where on earth does this fit in and how? To continue being honest, I had a drink, collected myself and remembered that the art of performance, from its avant-garde beginnings to contemporary solutions, is the art of dialogue. This art of dialogue has consistently pushed the boundaries of artistic expression, challenging us to confront our own assumptions and prejudices, and revealing to us that the significance of art lies not in its definition, but in its ability to challenge conventions and stimulate introspection. Zdenko decided to condense the holy triad of art openings, the adoration of art, hedonistic socializing and drinking, into a unique performative act. At the same time, he has encouraged those gathered to reflect on the primary motives that drive them to attend art events.

Some of you may think this is simply a way to grab attention, a sort of exhibitionism, "Hey, audience, I'm doing this for you! Watch my sacrifice and enjoy your drinks!". Others will comment on the hidden defiance, a desire to prove himself to himself, to parents, friends and non-existent rivals who most likely do not even care about his artistic experimentation. Personally, I somehow think that there are mostly those who say - "Hey, you can't do that!". Yes, I can. Hold my beer and watch me do it.

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