



## On Gender Equality

How do we perceive identity today? What role does gender play in the construct of who we are? In how far does it influence our creative selves? What is politically (in)correct, and what makes us angry when it comes to how the gender we feel we belong to is perceived? What is expected from us because of how we identify? Where is the freedom in it all? Our personal one as well as that one of the people we care for and of those we do not even know the struggle, be they close to us or somewhere else on the other side of Earth. These are the questions that the G12HUB DigiLabAir residencies opened with.

In Serbia, the battle for the right of choice has been ongoing for decades. The three artists-in-residence, Katarina Ranković, Aleksander Zain and Sara Kostić, depict a personal journey of identity in their performance films. Birth is a field out of our control, while rebirth becomes a field in which the control should be in our own hands. Our body, mind and self-perception are political and social entities. How do we fight for its liberation?

In making her performance video *Adaptation*, Katarina Ranković builds the community she feels is missing by planting seeds of *Sempervivum* in twelve flower pots. She gives life to them and then offers them away as her children to other women to grow. She provides them for adoption in trust and love.

Aleksander Zain and Sara Kostić go through solitary experiences. In both cases, the setting is a surgery room. We feel as if a part of their identity is being chopped off, like a leg or an arm, to defend what is healthy. The two artists' works have nothing else in common but the surgery room effect.

In *Satiating the Senses : dining on notification*, Kostić struggles with intravenous fluids, cutting her skin on the plates she serves herself on her knees. It represents an invisible meander of how she sees the social media pressure on gender, as she puts it: "Our sustenance, our daily food, and a captivating addiction that consumes our lives, shedding light on our modern habits and obsession."

In *The Day No 16*, Zain transforms a routine act of injecting himself with hormones into wings made of syringes with needles—an angelic vision. It is not a scream to fly away or to save himself from his journey, though. He is well aware of what it takes to be who he is, to be there for himself and others, past and present. He throws his quest for identity in your face, politically correct or not.

The strength of the three works is not just in their artistic vision and execution. It resides in the voice of the artists that scream ever louder into the political and social darkness. I hope they will see the day when absolute freedom is possible. In Serbia, in the Balkans, in the world. It was striking to accompany Ranković, Zain and Kostić in their artistic endeavour and see them creating works that reflect their intimate worlds while shedding light on our times, the transformation we are going through as human beings, and the struggle to be more ourselves, more aware and inclusive, humble and strong, to be open, upright alone, fragile enough to stand with others.

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