

Unborderings

Worlds



Unbordering

This book is dedicated to the children of Mitrovica

The artists would like to acknowledge that much of this work has been prepared on stolen country, the ancient traditional lands of the Larrakia, Wurundjeri, and Gadigal people, and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Worlds

Images

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Foreword

Hedwig Fijen, Director of Manifesta Biennial

For its 14th edition, Manifesta, the European Nomadic Biennial, was granted the challenging and thrilling opportunity to work in the city of Prishtina, Kosovo. The first time in the Western Balkans, Manifesta immediately seized the chance to work in a post-conflict country that had for decades been presented within the Western media in a one-sided manner as a country of corruption, poverty and pollution. Instantly recognising a youthful and dynamic people with a vast amount of creative imagination and resilient vibrancy, Prishtina was an important city to host the 14th edition of Manifesta.

With Manifesta 14 having taken place during a global pandemic and at an exceptional geopolitical moment in Europe, as we experience another appalling war, it made us rethink who we are and what difference we can make in such areas as the Western Balkans. In Prishtina, we worked on developing for a radical change in Biennial policies: one of supporting and co-creating relevant sustainable artistic solutions to increase creative capacity such as a mediation school, creating a making space for artists and involve a large array of local cultural practitioners to help develop culture as an economical force in Kosovo and change the perception of Kosovo and Prishtina. We worked in a much more holistic way, including artists, ecologists, architects and social designers working together with our local team and creative mediators to play a key role in stimulating the social and ecological transformation of neighbourhoods and working according to the interest of the communities.

Manifesta strongly believes in the role of critical thinking and reformation of our artistic institutions, in order to rethink our role and our relevance far closer to the needs and interests of the communities we serve. In other words, to work in a more interdisciplinary manner and create cross-pollinated projects where artists and communities work together, next to commissioning artists to work within a social structure and to initiate long-lasting social change; art has the capacity, and indeed, the responsibility to engage with these topics.

This was one of the leading reasons why we selected Petrit Abazi in collaboration with Piers Greville and Stanislava Pinchuk on their collective project located in the northern Kosovar city of Mitrovica. The project brought together international artists, presenting Pinchuk's project *Europe Without Monuments* alongside Greville's *What is Here*. It was born out of the need to create a collaborative and interactive project with and for the citizens of Mitrovica no matter what their ethnic background. These projects used interdisciplinary tools in which to aid the divided city and to celebrate and come together through the city's natural resource, that of the river. As the Director of Manifesta 14 I was hugely moved by this project, hearing about its physical and psychological impact and seeing the successful interaction between the communities of Mitrovica. It is projects, like the one brought together by Abazi, that not only showcase the relevance of art but also put cultural practices into motion to create a more open and harmonious society. We were honoured to have this project as part of the 14th edition of the European Nomadic Biennial and implore artists from around the world to learn from this sensitive, yet effective approach.



Prishtina, April 2022

Introduction

Petrit Abazi, Project Curator

*Art that doesn't attempt the impossible
is not performing its function.*

— William Butler Yeats

Unbordering Worlds: new narratives for northern Kosovo

is an artistic project presented by the Northern Centre for Contemporary Art (NCCA) in Garramilla (Darwin), and commissioned by Manifesta: the European Nomadic Biennial. As the project's curator, I was honoured that artists Piers Greville and Stanislava Pinchuk accepted my invitation to create new works responding to the geopolitical dilemmas facing the divided city of Mitrovica—my hometown.

In 2022, Manifesta 14: *It matters what worlds world worlds: how to tell stories otherwise*, came to Prishtina, capital city of Kosovo. Featuring a 100-day programme of art, performances, events and workshops, it set the goal of empowering citizens to reclaim and re-engage with public space in one of Europe's fastest growing capitals. *Unbordering Worlds* offered the opportunity to extend the concepts and concerns of the Biennial beyond the confines of Prishtina, and to propose regional perspectives on politically contested territory. Prishtina has experienced civic, cultural and economic regeneration since the 1998–99 war ended, but Mitrovica, just 37 km to the capital's north, is locked in a contrasting social-political stalemate. It may be the weakest link in a delicate chain that stabilises the Western Balkans, but this part of Kosovo remains in desperate need of repair and reunification.

Taking its cue from the Biennial's localised approach to storytelling and a citizen-led focus on public spaces, *Unbordering Worlds* promised to deliver two ambitious, site-specific artistic and social experiments: Pinchuk's *Europe Without Monuments* and Greville's *What Is Here*. Each situated at different points along the Ibër River that both divides and connects Mitrovica, these installation-performances were ephemeral propositions addressing two highly politicised bridges. Both works advocated a softening of hard geopolitical lines into centrifugal, mobile and overlapping zones, striving in the name of Mitrovica's peacebuilders to reclaim public space and reconnect a divided city. In questioning the status quo and bringing values shared by Mitrovica's citizens past and present into focus, Pinchuk and Greville's works invited all those in search of a brighter future to meet, perhaps, somewhere in the middle.

This publication is a visual and literary account that contextualises the key curatorial motives and artistic intentions that influenced and guided the delivery of this project and its outcomes. Among the multiple voices involved directly with the project is that of this local citizen who remembers a united Mitrovica, showing us how one precious and private dream became, after all, public.



View from old bridge ruins to the new bridge, Mitrovica, April 2022



Sometimes the River is the Bridge

Catherine Nichols, Creative Mediator, Manifesta 14: Prishtina

Sometimes I try to remember how I've learned the things I've been learning about Kosovo. How did I begin to visit, to enter the worlds that it worlds? How, I wonder, did the stories that came to be part of Manifesta 14 Prishtina, a Biennial seeking the means to tell stories otherwise, first come to me, to us, to the many people – whether from Kosovo, the region or beyond – involved in collectively creating the manifold layers of Biennial narrative? When did I begin to think of Kosovo in terms of a north and a south, in terms of two contested parts of one similarly contested whole? How did I first become aware that the once affluent, multiethnic, rock-and-roll city of Mitrovica has come to embody the seemingly entrenched division of the country along predominantly ethnic lines? Who introduced me to the Ibër, a river as ecologically endangered as most of Southeast Europe's waterways, flowing guilelessly between the two sides? Who or what drew my attention to the heavily guarded, at times barricaded bridge that spans its banks, at once connecting and dividing them? When did I become aware of the weight of its symbolism? At what point did I – like countless others before me – see in the city, its river and its bridge the protagonists of a story many are seeking to tell – or hear told – otherwise? What prepared us to recognise one such “otherwise” in the interventions proposed for Manifesta 14 by Petrit Abazi, Piers Greville and Stanislava Pinchuk? How did we envisage that the narrative strategies underlying their proposals might fuse with, and thus co-shape, the Biennial's open-ended investigation into the potential of collective storytelling to enhance political imagination and engagement?

It's a biting cold, bright sunny afternoon, sometime in the late autumn or early winter of 2021. Manifesta director Hedwig Fijen and I have been touring the north of Kosovo for the first time. A small team from UN-Habitat, whose mission it is to enact social transformation through the betterment of urban environments, has offered to show us around Mitrovica and some of the neighbouring towns and villages. On our way, we pass by the so-called Field of Blackbirds where the Battle of Kosovo was fought and lost against the Ottomans in 1389. It was here, 600 years later, that Slobodan Milošević, then President of Yugoslavia, delivered the infamous nationalistic speech many believe to have presaged the violent breakup of the federal republic in the early 1990s.

We begin our tour of Mitrovica in the southern part of the city. As we wind our way through the pedestrian zone, we happen upon the main bridge, which is located right in the centre of town. People call it “Austerlitz” after the famous bridge in Paris, supposedly on account of its arches. I don't entirely see the resemblance, but maybe I'm missing something. Though we step onto the bridge at speed, something makes us pause for a moment; something causes a lull in the conversation. Is it the presence of Italian Carabinieri troops standing guard at the north end of the bridge? Or perhaps the towering presence of Bogdan Bogdanović's *Monument to Fallen Miners* up on the hill ahead of us? Or is it merely the absence of people, the overall emptiness, the

uncanny sense of being at a site that is yet to become a place?

As we linger on the bridge, pensively shifting our weight from one foot to the other, it begins to dawn on me that we'll be changing guides. Listening to the waters of the Ibër flowing beneath us and the fragments of conversation I can pick up between Aferdita and Zana, our Kosovar Albanian guides from UN-Habitat, I realise the two are planning to stay on the southern side of the river while we tour the north. As soon as Dragana, their Kosovar Serbian colleague comes to meet us, they will greet her warmly, make arrangements for our return and then discreetly slip away. Almost no one from Kosovo really feels comfortable on the respective other side of the river. Even now, more than twenty years after the war, it still doesn't feel safe.

We wait for Dragana. The others are talking again, but my mind's wandering. I think of Ivo Andrić, of his 1945 novel *The Bridge on the Drina*, of how it was rereleased by Harvill Press back in 1994. I was working in a Sydney bookshop that year, at the height of the Bosnian War. Someone must have reviewed the novel on the radio because people were coming into the shop in droves. We were all struggling to understand the violence that had erupted around the breakup of Yugoslavia, first in Croatia, then Bosnia. The novel, it was said, could shed light on the seemingly impenetrable causes of the internecine fighting. Set in the small Bosnian town of Višegrad, the novel explores three centuries of conflict between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. It begins in the sixteenth century and ends at the outbreak of World War One. Looking at my copy of the book when I return home a few days later, I can see that I mustn't have finished reading it. There's a bookmark about halfway in, evidence that I didn't make it to the end. Most likely I never read the chapter about the summer of 1914, "when the rulers of human destinies drew European humanity from the playing fields of universal suffrage to the already prepared arena of universal military service". Most likely I never got up to the part when the town of Višegrad "provided a small but eloquent example of the first symptoms of a contagion which would in time become European and then spread to the rest of the world". And yet I recall the bridge in its own right. For Andrić, the bridge is an almost immutable, ultimately unifying force. In a short story on bridges, published in 1963, he writes that human beings always have something to bridge: "death, disorder, meaninglessness". Nothing a person "is impelled to build in this life" is finer and more precious. Bridges, he contends, "are more important than houses, holier, because more all-embracing, than places of worship. Belonging to everyone and the same for everyone, useful, built always rationally, in a place in which the greatest number of human needs coincide, they are more enduring than other buildings and serve nothing which is secret or evil". I wonder what Andrić would think of Mitrovica's "Austerlitz" with its recurring skirmishes and long phases of impassability.

I am hardly the first to associate "Austerlitz" with Andrić. Ian Bancroft, who served as coordinator of the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) in Kosovo from 2015 to 2018, makes the same connection in *Dragon's Teeth: Tales from North Kosovo*. Is it a coincidence that we're both outsiders, interlopers of sorts? Like me, Bancroft feels compelled to quote at length

from Andrić's short story on bridges. He, too, concedes their appeal as emblems of unity, connection and hope. What strikes him, though, is the Bosnian-Croat writer's omission of "the fears, apprehensions, and prejudices that prevent communities from bridging the disorder, death, [and] meaninglessness". Is it this fear I see embodied now in the line of empty park benches marking out a path from one side of the bridge to the other, like futile invitations to sit down and relax, to somehow meet one another halfway and pass the time of day? I remember seeing a series of short videos on YouTube that must have been shot on one of these benches. They were conspicuously staged encounters between pairs of teenagers, one from each side of the bridge. Too young to remember the city being one, the youngsters were palpably tense, manifestly uncomfortable, unable to look one another in the eye.

Upstream another bridge catches my eye. From a distance it looks like the flimsy footbridge described in Chris Marker's film *Un Maire au Kosovo*, part of *La Trilogie des Balkans*. The footage was shot in 1999, in the immediate aftermath of what Marker calls the "badly extinguished war" in Kosovo. Driving around the countryside with Bajram Rexhepi, a surgeon who, having served in the Kosovo Liberation Army had then recently been elected mayor of Mitrovica (and would later become the first elected post-war prime minister of Kosovo), Marker endeavours to portray everyday life in the early days after the war. The film opens with a description of Mitrovica. It is, we are told, a city in northern Kosovo that has "become famous because of a bridge: the one that cuts it in two, that separates the Albanian population from the last Serbian stronghold". Could the bridge I'm looking at be the one Marker was referring to? The one built "for the few Albanians who still live on the other side"? Might this be the bridge of separation, of division still casting its signficatory shadow over the far sturdier structure upon which we are standing? On closer inspection it looks more like a railway bridge, probably defunct. I'm guessing the NATO footbridge is long gone. Probably it would have been in a more central place, not far from where we are standing. One of many questions I need to look into.

Some of the buildings, I'm noticing, resolutely face away from the river. Facing the river must have been, must still be, hard. Eliza Hoxha, a well-known architect, activist and artist, has put considerable effort into turning people's gaze back towards the waterfront, back towards one another. I try my best to remember the article I read about her in Kosovo 2.0, the online journal that's become one of my most important sources of information about politics and everyday life in the region. Something called *Facing the River*, something about negotiating the city and placemaking. Later in the evening I will return to the article where I learn that placemaking is a methodology that directly involves the community in the decision-making process. Communities collectively decide on how a place is designed and the kinds of activities that go on there. Having studied the practice under New York-based urban planner Elena Maddison, Eliza Hoxha brought her to Mitrovica for a series of placemaking workshops with students from Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia. The Kosovar Albanian organisers had difficulty recruiting participants from north Mitrovica. It remains challenging to establish enough trust, enough desire, enough interest, enough belief in the potential of such initiatives to foment change.

Up until now, *Facing the River* is one of relatively few endeavours to collectively reimagine the riverfront as a communal, regenerative, reconciliatory space. The main problem, as Hoxha puts it, is that all the important decisions about the bridge, the river and the city at large are still “predominantly negotiated in Brussels or by the municipalities on either side of the river working independently of each other”.

Zana and Aferdita are waving at a woman walking towards us. It must be our next guide, Dragana, like her colleagues an urban planner and architect. We greet and begin to follow her into the northern part of town, while our Kosovar Albanian guides almost imperceptibly take their leave. Three stray dogs stare soulfully from the steps of Europe House as we start winding our way along the streets. We amble through neighbourhoods, most of which seem to have seen better days. Gradually leading us up towards the monument on the hill, commemorating the uprising of miners against the Nazi occupation during World War Two, Dragana points out lakes and meadows in the distance. These, she says, have been contaminated by heavy metals from the mining industry and the remains of unexploded cluster munitions from the NATO bombing, strewn plentifully across the landscape. We speak of isolation, of the preconditions of reconciliation in a city of conflicting historiographies, of differing religions, languages, currencies and municipalities, and even of the presence or absence of God. Walking back down towards the river, we touch upon the Mitrovica Rock School, which has been around since 2008, the year Kosovo declared independence. Does it succeed as well as it seems to, I ask? I mean, in bringing young Kosovar Albanians and Serbs together to play music? Does she think music might be the strongest bridge? “Yes, perhaps” — she replies. “At least it’s one of them.” In the distance I think I can make out Zana and Aferdita in the fading sunlight. They’re sitting on one of the park benches on the main bridge, chatting while they wait for us to return.

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It wasn’t long after that day in Mitrovica that we received a project proposal for Manifesta 14 Prishtina seeking to explore and reimagine the psychogeography of the north by focusing on the Ibar. Entitled *Unbordering Worlds: new narratives for northern Kosovo*, the project was initiated by Garramilla (Darwin)-based, Mitrovica-born curator Petrit Abazi. What made this proposal stand out was the collaborative, performative, participatory approach it envisaged for engaging with what Abazi refers to as “the weakest link in the delicate chain stabilising the region”. As with all other works chosen to be part of Manifesta 14 Prishtina, *Unbordering Worlds* was conceived to at once embody and bring forth new modes of storytelling.

The project consisted of two autonomous yet interrelated interventions by artists Stanislava Pinchuk and Piers Greville, each engaging in their own way with the riverscape. With her installation, *Europe Without Monuments*, Stanislava Pinchuk overtly referenced the three sculptural forms that comprise Bogdan Bogdanović’s imposing *Monument to Fallen Miners*. Built from scaffolding, the gigantic and yet minimalistic forms rising up out of the river looked to me like the skeletal remains of the monument, as though it had somehow decayed and come tumbling down the hill into the water, over time becoming

a playground and a place to sit – a kind of bridge, if you will, accessible from both sides of the river. In *What Is Here*, Piers Greville imagined a bridge embodied by people – swimmers – freestyling against the current. The artist invited citizens from both sides of the city to join him in swimming a relay of solidarity. The aim was to cover the equivalent of 35.1 kilometres, the distance along the river from the site of the swimming to the Serbian border, while swimming on the spot, holding one’s own against the flow. On either side of the site chosen for this relay, the artist positioned two large silk flags. Rather than displaying the conventional insignia of national pride or identity, used to lay claim on a given territory, Greville’s flags featured simple renderings of the surrounding terrain, both north and south of the river, each entirely devoid of territorial markings.

Situated in Mitrovica, the project was simultaneously presented in Prishtina’s Grand Hotel, one of the central sites of the Biennial, such that it could be better interwoven into the overall Biennial narrative and shared with those unable to see the interventions in situ. The project was shown in two hotel rooms, one for each intervention. These were located on the same floor of the hotel as *When You Talk of the Water*, the third of seven chapters comprising one of the Biennial’s thematic exhibitions, *The Grand Scheme of Things*. Ever since the realisation of the two works, photographs of which show people of all ages lingering on and around the structures in the river, my thoughts keep returning to an idea I picked up from Olafur Eliasson’s 2020 show in Tokyo: “sometimes the river is the bridge”.

When we first met as a group to discuss the production of the works, the whole undertaking seemed like a longshot, like an ambitious dream, a near impossible vision. Of the many obstacles the team was up against, what worried everybody most – even more than the funding – was the need to secure backing from both sides of the river, with so few precedents to build upon. And yet the team rose to the challenge, making the negotiations part of their work, part of what would become a large-scale collaboration between north and south. Though far less visible to the public, the countless conversations that took place, the stories shared, the arguments had, the agreements made, the risks taken on the path to making this project possible were a crucial element of the intervention – part of the bridge, I guess. The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that the complex and protracted dealings required to get this project off the ground, not to mention the many new relationships formed in the process, are just as important to the Biennial – and for that matter to me – as the interventions’ manifest invocation of new imaginaries.

Three weeks ago, when I was back in Kosovo for a visit, a young acquaintance of mine from Mitrovica told me how much she wished the interventions had stayed beyond the summer, how she was still hoping that a more permanent version of *Europe Without Monuments* might be installed in the future. “People were really starting to get into it”, she insisted. “People from both sides?”, I asked. “Yes,” she answered. “People from both sides.”

A Broken Heart for a Mended Bridge

Petrit Abazi, Project Curator

*Stop, Stop, Ibar water
Where are you going like that
I also have my sorrows
And it is not easy for me*
— Dragiša Nedović

“Do not cross the bridge, whatever you do. You can walk to the middle, if you must, but no further. Please. There is nothing there for you and it is dangerous.”

For almost two decades, variations of these orders have been repeated to me by my relatives, as they are to most children on both sides of the Ibër river where it passes through Mitrovica. These warnings, often combined with citations of the violent ethnic clashes to which the bridge has been witness since the official end of war in 1999, have their roots in lived experience, fearful perceptions and the intergenerational habits of ethnic mistrust.¹ However well-intentioned, this colloquial counsel to ‘stick to one’s side’ has widened the gulf separating ethnic Albanians in the south from ethnic Serbs in the north and perpetuated the presentiment Mitrovica is destined to remain one of Europe’s most divided cities. For almost two decades, feeling respect and the pinch of implanted fear, I complied with these rules, as they nurtured my dual sense of frustration and heartbreak. Until, one lonely morning, weary of being guided by the narratives of others, I submitted to a spontaneous instinct to visit my childhood home and confront the earliest traumas I bear from the city—and to embark on a journey that now leads me to tell a different kind of Mitrovica story.

It is August 2018. An acute case of early morning restlessness shakes me out of bed and out of doors before any whisper of dawn hisses from the horizon. The warm air is clear to the eyes and soft on the skin. There are no civilians loitering yet in Mitrovica’s empty streets. Even the stray dogs, who are easily rattled by the sight of a lone pedestrian, are too deep in slumber to notice my movements. Just one day before at sunset, I had scattered my late father’s ashes into the cool white waters of his beloved Ibër. The river already pulls for my attention. Without premeditation I find myself standing, alone, in the middle of the main bridge, absorbing the views of this old town.

Of Neolithic origins, Mitrovica is a settlement built on the back of multiple economic booms. Across centuries and cultures, its wealth and relevance have been fuelled by the Trepça mines that hug the city’s north. Despite evidence of both pre-Roman and Roman geological exploration, the extraction of minerals was perfected by expert ‘Saxon’ miners in the mediaeval period.² Silver, lead and zinc continued to be excavated under the Ottoman rule prevailing from the late fourteenth century onward. By the close of the nineteenth century the mines were neglected and, for a time, considered to be exhausted. When a railway connection to Thessaloniki was completed in 1874, Mitrovica transformed again, becoming a major garrison town and trading

hub. But the city would remain at the end of that line: plans to continue the tracks on to Sarajevo and into Western Europe were never realised.³ The dormant mines were reactivated in the 1920s by the British-American prospector Sir Alfred Chester Beatty. An ‘English Colony’ was established in Mitrovica, marking the beginning of a six decade mining renaissance that transformed Trepça into one of the richest silver, lead and zinc mines in Europe.

This heavy machinery, creaking and grinding beneath Mitrovica’s historical foundations, is belied by the sublime natural landscape within which this ‘city of three rivers’ (the Sitnica, the Lushta and the Ibër) abides. Its industry sprawls to the foothills of the eleventh century Zveçan Fortress, immured by verdant undulations that are themselves crowned by lofty, jagged mountains biting into the sky—to borrow one visitor’s poetic description—like dragon’s teeth.⁴

Standing there, in the middle of the main bridge, I wait for the summer sun to rise over this jaw of mountains holding the village where my father was born. I consider whether the dust of his body has already made it this far downstream. It strikes me he is, posthumously, fulfilling one of my enduring childhood desires: to float intrepidly down these unnavigable waters. This satisfying thought is interrupted by a murder of silky blackbirds passing over my head, from one side of the river to the other. The embarrassing, naïve, almost childlike question this sight has prompted for years goes without answer: if the birds can cross back and forth, why can’t we? Surely the people of this city also deserve to move freely and safely. What are we waiting for? This seed of thought having swiftly germinated, to turn back holds no appeal. Emboldened by the recent loss of my father and dismissing the fearful echoes of that advice to stay away, I muster my confidence and make my way casually across the bridge and into northern Mitrovica, as if it is something I do every day.

In the 1980s and 1990s of my youth, I did cross this bridge every day. Then, the north and the south of the city were not the binary opposites they have become. I grew up deep in the north and went to a school on the southern bank. Churches and mosques were distributed evenly throughout the city. My world as a child was a loose web of interconnected, trans-cultural nodes in public space, unimpeded by partitions, by ethnic antagonisms. The main bridge in the heart of the town was also its organ of congregation, orientation and circulation.

Everything changed after the war. It was not that one side occupied this place at the expense of the other: both sides lost its custody. Yes, a flashy new bridge was built in place of the older, more minimal structure, but this new bridge must now hang there, suspended as unhappily as a modern relic in a museum nobody visits. For over two decades international military and police barricades have bookended the bridge. All attempts to retire patrols and re-open car access have failed.⁵ For many, it is an emotional eyesore and an inescapable reminder of the state of affairs.

I walk to the end of the bridge, where a diminutive nineteenth century mosque, levelled during the war, once stood. I make a hesitant circuit of the makeshift bulwark of corrugated iron and blocks of cement that is the bridge’s terminus. The Bridge Watchers, an informal nationalist gang who ‘patrol’ movements

arriving from the south while they chain-smoke at a nearby café, are not yet at their post. I nevertheless hide my ID, bearing my very Albanian name, and rehearse a response in my best Italian should someone stop and interrogate me: 'Ciao, mi chiamo Patrizio Abazia, sono Italiano ...'. Right where I'm standing there is a remnant sense of security that must be widely shared. We're in the riverside district known as Bošnjaka Mahala (the Bosnian Quarter) and from my vantage point I can see the apartment my family lived in before I was born. This was once one of the most ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in all Kosovo, its residents identifying as Bosnian, Turkish, Gorani, Ashkali, Egyptian, Romani, Serbian and Albanian.⁶ Although the conflict and its aftermath have homogenised this rich variation, some vestiges of its former abundance persevere. That historic fusion of cultures preserves this place as a paradox—a safe thoroughfare in contested territory. But this is not the house of my youth. I press on due north.

Even an inattentive outsider would be struck by the emergent world-historical separation of the river's two sides. The south has seen relative 'progress', with new turbo-architecture apartment blocks mushrooming throughout the city, hovering over busy bars, cafes, restaurants and shopfronts stuffed with cheap imports. But the north has changed very little in these 20 years. Everything, more or less, is as I had left it. This is the place to visit if you want to see Mitrovica as it was in the 1990s. With my every nervous stride up the wide central pedestrian boulevard, the air feels quieter, greyer and cooler.

Looking around I am reminded of the special place Russia has for people living in the north. Our outsider could be forgiven for concluding Vladimir Putin was running for local mayor, so prolific are the posters that bear his smirking image. Nearby, Zvečan is among dozens of places in the region that have celebrated Putin as an honorary citizen. Russian interference in Mitrovica dates back to the 1890s, and peaked during an open, sustained obstruction of Kosovo's sovereignty following the 1999 conflict.⁷ At the top of the incline, a mural depicting the two flags and maps of Kosovo and Crimea shouts in Serbian Cyrillic script 'Kosovo is Serbia and Crimea is Russia', an explicit declaration of solidarity between these two states, specifying the alignment of their empire-building ambitions. 'So long as Serbia does not formally recognise Kosovo's independence', as one commentator has noted, 'it must rely on Russia's veto power in the UN Security Council. That dependency gives Russia a nontrivial degree of influence, both in the region and within Serbia itself.'⁸ Nationalistic paste-ups and imagery are the ideological filiations supplementing these more existential claims.

At the end of the boulevard stands a newly erected monument cast in bronze and framed in stone, snaring my attention. It is an outsized representation of Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, ruler of the fourteenth century Serbian Empire, a ruler killed fighting Ottoman invasion at the legendary 1389 Battle of Kosovo. Venerated as a martyr and a saint by the Serbian Orthodox Church, Lazar's guiding figure is a frequent citation in Serbia's claims to Kosovo. This domineering statue gives us a giant prince, crowned with sword in hand, left index finger outstretched southwards beyond the bridge, pointing to the Field of Blackbirds where he was killed. The intent is clear and territorial: 'Those lands, they belong to us'. Back here in Mitrovica, this meaning must be displaced and transformed for my understanding: 'You are not welcome. Turn around and go back.

You have no place here.' I persist despite the intimidations of this inanimate chunk of metal and rock, making my way to my former home, where I will come face to face with my first recollections of Lola Ribar Street.

Tanks grumble and gnaw at the core of my earliest childhood memory. It is March, 1989. Winter is coming to an end, but Serbo-Albanian relations are about to become frigid. I am five years old and I live with my family in an exposed red brick and cement apartment block. Our apartment in this building has been afforded to us by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for almost a decade, granted by virtue of my father's position as a senior director at the Trepça mines, situated just a few kilometres away. My mother has returned from Bulgaria carrying me the gift of a bright yellow bulldozer. I share this new toy with my best friend Fidan, who lives across the road. We scramble downstairs to the empty lot next door and put the machinery-in-miniature to work over a pile of dirt—our playground. We are totally absorbed in this labour, moving soil and rubble with purpose from one mound to another, over and over again. We are so consumed in this simulation we take no notice of the grander murmur that resonates across the valleys that circle Mitrovica.

Though Fidan and I didn't hear the approaching cavalcade of armoured vehicles as they rolled through the mountains bound for the plains of Kosovo, everybody sensed turbulence on the horizon. Kosovo was facing the loss of its political autonomy, enshrined in the Yugoslavian constitution of 1974 and chipped away by Serbian authorities since Tito's death in 1981. Those authorities neither needed nor wanted to consult Kosovo's ninety per cent ethnic Albanian population concerning their pending annexure. This was always going to be a problem, and Mitrovica was always going to be in the way—Kosovo's resistance movement began deep in the pits of the Trepça mines.⁹ During the preceding months thousands of miners, the vanguard of the working class famous for their trade unionism, went on hunger strike. The miners led a march to Prishtina, where they staged a non-violent protest that triggered a general strike across Kosovo. All public meetings and demonstrations were deemed illegal by the Serbian authorities. After that, even peaceful demonstrations were destined to end with violent repression. A state of emergency was declared in March 1989, in which tens of thousands government employees were sacked, and Kosovar-Albanians were, in effect, placed under authoritarian rule and military guard.¹⁰

I have been replaying this unsettling tank memory in my mind for almost 30 years. It is a scene in a cool blue-grey filter. An obnoxiously loud file of tanks rumbles violently past, metres from our front door, sending plumes of suffocating dust into the air. Through the haze I almost see the asphalt cracking under the weight of this abuse. Fidan and I rush back into my mother's soothing embrace, and from the safety of our apartment foyer we continue to witness this never-ending flood of metal as it fills our streets. Eventually, the truth arrives: this is not a simulation. Any fascination or curiosity are usurped by fear and anxiety. My sudden conviction that Fidan will never be reunited with his family terrifies me. I cry. I scream. I lament. My mother tries to calm me, but I am convinced he will be stuck on this side of the street, forever. I know my friend made it home that day, but I do not recall it. This early memory has a beginning and a middle but no end.

I cannot see the last tank roll by. To halt that dark river,
I must open my eyes.

Walking around the streets of northern Mitrovica, I reconcile with my past and consider the suffering of others in the ensuing war. My cousin Avni Abazi was executed alongside 26 of our civilian neighbours. My grandmother Sherife Abazi died at the end of a long wheelbarrow-assisted escape to Albania. My family remembers the faces and names of only some of the victims recovered from the mass graves that were dug after the massacres. I try to make peace with these unspeakable losses and many others, but to an Abazi, the denial that continues concerning what was done to Kosovo on such days by the Serbian state is still intolerable. It is still unforgivable.

All these thoughts and more consume me as I trace my steps back down Lola Ribar in the long shadow of Prince Lazar. Nevertheless, I cannot help but feel dispirited on behalf of north Mitrovica's Serbian enclave. On the surface, this is a depressing environment in which to grow up and to live: since the war the locals' protests for better living conditions have been frequent and enduring. Prospects for young and old are few and dim, and now, they are the second-class citizens of the city.¹¹

By this hour there are too many people out on the streets for my comfort. I go straight for the bridge's gates, and as I step past the military checkpoint the dogs are snapping at my heels. Do they smell fear, or just an Albanian? So my adventure ends as it began: back on the bridge, frustrated and broken-hearted. I think about tanks, segregation, bloodshed and hate. I am fed up with my memories of my city of birth, this city I love. I dream that one day I will cross the bridge freely and recall memories of joy, laughter and happiness. And I wish that soon we may all have the opportunity to tell other kinds of stories.

—

In late 2021 the Chair of my organisation, Alastair Shields, showed me an editorial announcing that Manifesta, the world's fourth largest art Biennial, was coming to Kosovo in 2022. I was surprised, then excited. I saw this festival could provide a perfect platform on which to test my faith that art has the potential to heal, unite and restore—and I also perceived Mitrovica could be a prime candidate for this test. Two obstacles arose in my way. Firstly, I was cowed by a memory of Manifesta 2008, when I applied to be a volunteer invigilator, but I did not make the cut. Secondly, the Biennial called for proposals in Prishtina only. To circumvent the former I called on the intervening 14 years to set aside my imposter syndrome, whereas the latter necessitated lateral thinking: a proposal to make works in Mitrovica that could be shown in Prishtina. Easy.

Finding suitable artists to meet and exceed the Biennial's brief was my next challenge. What world-worlding world could matter here? These artists would have to be outsiders to Kosovo—this Mitrovicali's biases already burdened the project enough. Each must have an investment in making socially and politically engaged art. Each must maintain practices connecting to nature, geography and landscape. The work of Stanislava Pinchuk and Piers Greville fit all the criteria.

I was introduced to Pinchuk's oeuvre on Instagram—of all places—by my friend Neda, a Bosnian-Serb Montenegrin—of all people. I was pointed to Greville's work by my friend Dushan—a man who bears a quintessentially Serbian name, but has no such heritage.

I reflected with fastidious care on the works of each artist before first making contact, armed with a two-paragraph outline of my plans. Both artists agreed to meet and, at short notice, both joined the project. Their concepts, later to be titled *Europe Without Monuments* and *What Is Here*, were radically distinct yet complemented each other.

There was no guarantee Manifesta would accept our proposal with its financial and political risks, never mind that obtaining an invitation to participate is famously competitive. However, by the time we had written our application, we were determined to follow through with our ideas with or without the auspices of Manifesta. However, in February 2022 we received notice our proposal had succeeded, and began the difficult work of realising its two ambitious provocations. The development and delivery of this project consumed our days and nights as we worked across three time zones, each of us far from Mitrovica.

Our challenges included sourcing funding, finding a scaffolding company courageous enough to take on Stanislava's designs, and recruiting volunteer swimmers for Piers' venture. But our greatest challenge—and the one that at times seemed to us to be impossible—was to obtain an agreement from both the Serbian and Albanian municipalities that they would work together in an unprecedented manner. It could be argued bringing these two parties into a positive framework of collaboration was our primary goal—this, for the three of us, was the project and was a vital element of the artworks themselves.

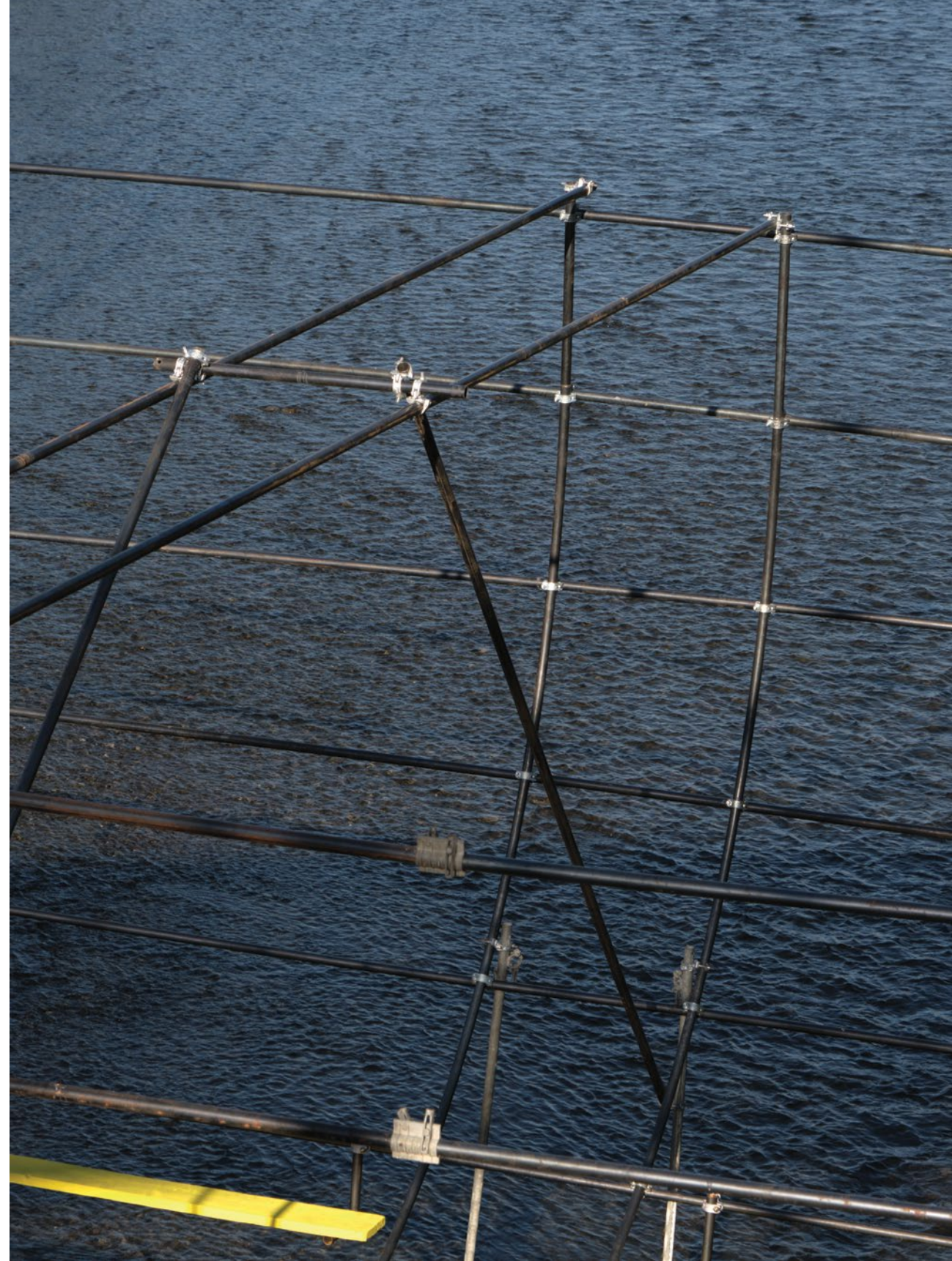
It was at the eleventh hour—the day prior to us needing to install the works—that we finally held a signed document confirming we had permission to work in the Ibër. This deceptively simple artefact had taken a thousand or more email exchanges, countless text messages and video calls, and a joint ten-day reconnaissance visit to Kosovo to produce. When, at the launch of *Unbordering Worlds*, Mitrovica's Director of Culture Valdete Idrizi declared the city intended to continue hosting intercultural artistic interventions at these sites, she also reinforced our project's great premise—that art can reconnect divided communities. In attempting and accomplishing such a difficult task, we had re-proven this truth all communities must closely guard.

Looking back on this struggle with the benefit of hindsight, I admit I, Stanislava and Piers had set ourselves a nigh impossible task in ever planning to make art in such a politically charged environment. With countless barriers in our way—historical, cultural, social, nationalistic, financial, administrative, logistical, environmental and bureaucratic—our propositions were aspirational and utopian. Throughout its development, I would suspect at times *Unbordering Worlds* would wind up as a great might-have-been in the annals of Manifesta 14. But with the assistance of many collaborators, and thanks also to Stanislava and Piers' 'inat'—that Turkish, Serbian, but uniquely Yugoslavian word I will translate as a stubborn and dogged determination to overcome every obstacle imagined or unimagined—*Unbordering Worlds* did achieve the bold ambitions it had promised, and now offers a working blueprint for art as a peacebuilding tool.

The works in this publication are the culmination of many sacrifices. Stanislava and Piers demonstrated not only the fine sensitivities necessary for working in a place like Mitrovica, where the fractures of history make for a delicate present, but also the grit and determination to realise our project in the face of its many apparent contradictions. On behalf of all citizens of Mitrovica past, present and future—but especially the children—I would like to thank these two brilliant artists for their untiring effort producing poignant works that reconstruct connections in difficult circumstances. During our one hot summer in Mitrovica, the power of art flowed freely, and our beloved Ibër became an ever-mobile stage for joy, laughter and new happy memories.



Children playing in the Ibër at Mitrovica, c.1970s



1. Since the end of the war in 1999, the bridge has been a stage for protests that have turned violent including 2004, 2008, 2011 and 2014. In 2018, just months before this visit, local politician Oliver Ivanović was assassinated on the streets of north Mitrovica. With enemies on both sides of the bridge, at time of writing it remains unclear who is responsible.

2. In fact Germans from Bulgaria and Transylvania. See Malcolm, *Kosovo*, p. 5

3. Ibid. p. 193

4. Bancroft's, *Dragon's Teeth*

5. The most recent attempt to unblock the bridge in 2014 lasted only a few days before Serbian 'Bridge Keepers' obstructed the bridge with a so-called 'peace park' (or garden of shame as it was known by the Albanians) of cement-potted trees and earth. See 'Clashes in Kosovo's Mitrovica over bridge blockade', in BBC, London 23 June 2014 (online)

6. Bancroft, *Dragon's Teeth*, pp. 63-74

7. Malcolm, *Kosovo*, pp. 234-5

8. Maxim Samorukov, 'A Spoiler in the Balkans? Russia and the Final Resolution of the Kosovo Conflict', in *The Return of Global Russia*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2019, (online)

9. Magaš, *The destruction of Yugoslavia*, pp. 179-190

10. Malcolm, *Kosovo*, pp. 342-7

11. Bancroft, *Dragon's Teeth*, 103-114

Bogdan Bogdanović in Conversation with Alexandre Mirlesse

Alexandre Mirlesse: In your mind is there something that binds Europeans together?

Bogdan Bogdanović: I often wonder. To me, at the present moment, Europe is still a collection of French people, Germans, Italians; the classic civilisations. Do the new Europeans understand what Europe is, in a general sense? And what should we make of the Polish President and his outdated nationalist fantasies?

These “new Europeans” are sometimes also the most enthusiastic.

I must explain my thinking. In Europe there are Romanians, Bulgarians, who, emotionally, all feel very European – but to belong to Europe demands a compromise between memories, between old national ideologies.

Take the example of Serbia. If you ask anyone in the street: “Are you for Europe?”, you will inevitably get a “yes”. But if you go on and ask: “Should Ratko Mladić be delivered?”, in that case the answer will be “no”!

Europe is a jumble of nationalisms, and these have not yet been tamed. The work of constructing a new Europe is honourable, but difficult...

Perhaps, as a way of getting round the “national” prism, we might think in terms of cities and their history? Many Central European cities were meeting places for different nationalities.

One thing is certain: providence destined Belgrade to become a town of this kind.

I think that a desirable Europe is a Europe of mixture: of languages, nations, traditions. This is something that is not understood in Serbia. Belgrade is quite a large city, in population – currently two million inhabitants – and size, but it has become uni-national. That is not right.

A town with such ethnic and geographic qualities was made to be a great European metropolis. Look at the map of Europe: a large city is needed at this exact location. The Serbs have never understood their luck: this part of their territory, where five great rivers come together, is their greatest asset.

They have wasted this asset by allowing it to become mono-national. An exclusively Serb Belgrade is unnatural. Belgrade was Turkish and then Austrian; it has the history of an international city. To have such a town on its territory is really good fortune for a small country like Serbia; it's a gift from the Gods! And yet...

And yet?

And yet many of my Belgrade friends do not understand this. And I'm not talking about nationalists, who are disturbed.

Other towns of the former Yugoslavia were “destined” to be multicultural...

Yes, this was the case of Sarajevo, even if the communities lived – alas – in a permanent state of rivalry. Recently I met a couple of young people in the street in Sarajevo – former students.



The Monument to Fallen Miners, photographed by Bogdanović at the time of construction, c. 1973

The girl refused to shake my hand, as this was forbidden by the rules of Islam. This type of thing is absolutely new for us, as our Yugoslavian Muslims were actually Slavs, with a European mentality and a civil spirit. In fact, they were even more European than, for instance, the Serbs, as they had spent a century inside the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The influence of the Eastern Orthodox church has increased, too. However, neither Belgrade nor Serbia has ever been home to the religiously-inspired sort of nationalism. The local Orthodox church has always been rather moderate, even homely. But now a terrible new phenomenon has appeared in Belgrade: a new version of Orthodox culture, similar to that in Russia – even if the Russian are themselves truly deeply devout.

I don't know what caused this development. But now, at the theatre, ladies cover their legs...

In any case, my Yugoslavian patriotism was a multinational patriotism: the beauty and the richness of that country was its multiculturalism. As architect of monuments across the country, I had the opportunity to get to know, the situation of Macedonians, Croats, Bosnian, and the Hungarian and Slovak minorities...

Yes, in your case multiculturalism was also pluralism – a conflict of memories, even.

How did you go about designing commemorative monuments to speak equally to different national groups which had fought each other during the war?

Above all, the majority of my monuments were in honour of victims, not victors. As they commemorated the pain of a country's civil war, there was little risk that they would be hijacked by national triumphalism.

Beyond that, my philosophy was very abstract, inspired by the ancient dualist thinking of good and evil. My constructions represented the struggle of these two principles, something that everyone could interpret differently: it was not for me to define good or evil.

And to be perfectly frank, I must say that my monuments... were not real monuments. At least, they did not have the appearance of monuments. Rather, they were stories, interesting objects, fantastical ones, and much visited, especially by young people.

There were always children playing on these constructions, even when it was dangerous. One day, a young Bosniak paid me the most wonderful compliment I could receive, when she admitted – a little embarrassed – that her parents had conceived her on my monument.

How was this possible? Well, because my monuments were very archaic.

What do you mean by that?

They are archaic. They might as well be Mesopotamian. To get around the finer points of nationalism, which always wants to know if such-and-such a shape is its own or not, I designed my work in such a way that it might have been artefacts from the origins of civilisation. I think that this was the winning recipe for these monuments: I always avoided national imperatives.

Could you imagine a European commemorative monument?

I prefer not to imagine it. I dream of a Europe without monuments. By that I mean: without monuments of death and disaster. Perhaps philosophical constructions: monuments to love, to joy, to jokes and laughter... or else symbolic constructions... and everything that expresses the desire for a civilisation without monuments.

It's also difficult to say it, but I must admit: I didn't enjoy building these monuments. I did it because it was my duty, and because I saw that I could meet the challenge in an anti-monumental way. I would not have been able to do this in another socialist country.

Tito, in all truth, did not have much artistic discernment. But he understood that my monuments were not Russian monuments (at the time, unfortunately, all the best sculptors had adopted the Russian formula: headless bodies, wounded figures, stretchers...). When he saw me, a bizarre man with a surrealist biography, ready to build him constructions which weren't Russian, he said, "Let him".

What do you think of the situation in Kosovo? Should Serbia accept its independence?

My family, on both sides, comes from there. But when my ancestors left their land in the nineteenth century, for them there was no question of going back one day. A lot of Serbs left Kosovo in this way, selling their land to Albanians for a good price, and many of today's nationalists have never set a foot in the place.

Serbs must not forget that when Kosovo was the cradle of the Serb Kingdom, Belgrade was Hungarian! Since then, Serbs have moved towards the north. There is nothing tragic in that.

The only problem is these Byzantine churches, really beautiful and interesting. But this difficulty could be settled with an international solution – just what the Serbs have never wanted to accept. And this in the name of the Orthodox church, which now demands that Serbs dominate a country they have abandoned!

Besides, there is a whole mythology surrounding this subject. As an architecture student, I travelled in Kosovo. I saw a good number of these monasteries: they are beautiful, certainly, but nothing more than that.

Your opinion is not shared by the majority of Serbs.

You know, I've always been a free-thinker. And when the former communists metamorphosed into long-bearded Orthodox nationalists, they accused me of being cosmopolitan.

Milošević's propaganda was unleashed against me. Two or three times a week there were attacks on me in the press, accompanied by big photos. People recognised me in the street and insulted me: "You're a traitor to Serbia!"

You chose to go into exile at the beginning of the 1990s.

How did you come to settle in Vienna, where you have lived for nearly 15 years now?

My first idea was to head to Paris, which is almost natural for a Serb. But we had very difficult relations with the nationalist Serb emigration officials, who were terrible, pro-fascist.

In Vienna I found a "Yugoslav" community. There are a lot of Croats, Macedonians, Bosniaks and Serbs (a few less of these). Most of them have stayed Yugoslav here. Even if there are a few war veterans.

And then there is another link between Vienna and Belgrade: the Danube, which I am in love with.

What does the Danube evoke for you?

When I was three or four years old, I only ever asked two questions: "What is it?" and "Where am I?" One day my parents took me up to the fortress of Belgrade and showed me the two rivers which joined: "Look, my son, that's the Sava, that's the Danube". And I wondered, "What's a Sava? What's a Danube?"

Later I understood that a river could move, when at the age of four, I went fishing with my father and I felt the current when dipping my hand in the water. It was cold, and my father scolded me. That was when I understood that a river could also be dangerous.

Do you think that a Danubian Europe exists?

There is probably no Danubian Europe. But the Danube is certainly a European river, the European river.

What is urbanity?

It is one of the highest abstractions of the human spirit. One can be urban in a little village. To me, to be an urban man means to be neither a Serb nor a Croat, and instead to behave as though these distinctions no longer matter, as if they stopped at the gates of the city.

And how do you see the future of Europe?

I remain a man of the twentieth century. I don't try to understand the 21st. I hardly have the right to think about what will happen; I didn't even understand what happened in my own century.

Can one define "Man of the twentieth century"?

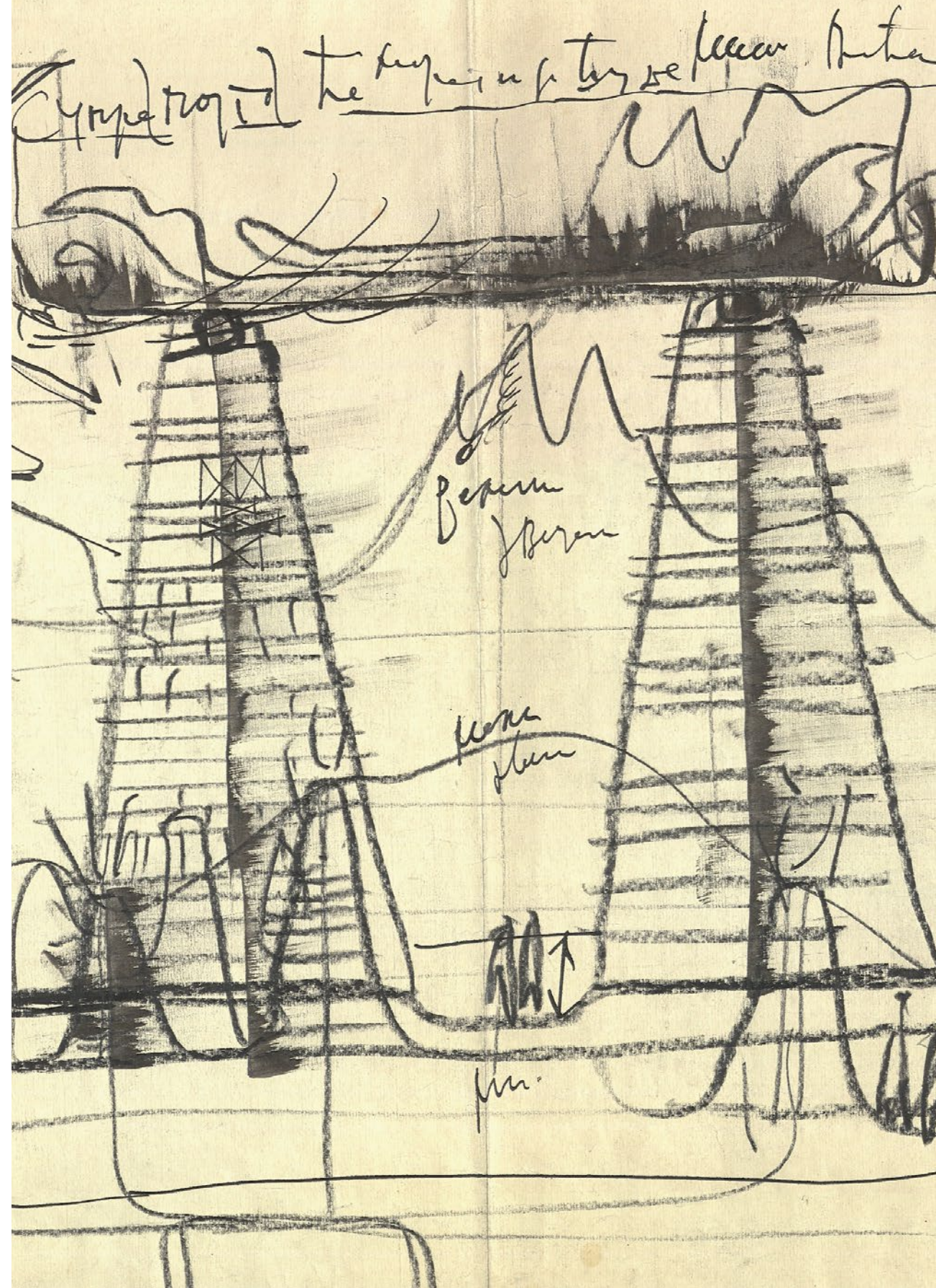
It is difficult to come up with a single formula to describe the Europe of the twentieth century - except that it was a monstrous century.

The twentieth century was a sad, dangerous century. In that time, Europe was chopped up into national boxes, with hermetic front lines. Half of my school friends perished in the war; the rest, in becoming communists or anti-communists, fought each other.

All that I can say is this: I saw it, I lived it, and I didn't understand it.

Those evils all have a European origin...

I dare say that all the world's evils are European. But today Europe must have it to other to invent evils. As Racine said: "Plût aux Dieux que ce fût le dernier de ses crimes!"



On *Europe Without Monuments*

Petrit Abazi, Project Curator

Stanislava Pinchuk (Ukraine, born 1988)

Europe Without Monuments, 2022

Steel and zinc scaffolding, wood, acrylic paint and textile
3000 x 3000 x 1400 cm (dimensions variable)

Stanislava Pinchuk is an artist from Kharkiv, Ukraine, living in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: two places that, like Kosovo, have come to know war since our continent decreed 'never again'. A multi-disciplinary practitioner who works constantly on the edge of the possible, her practice is bounded by its concepts and its outcomes rather than by any single medium.

A cursory glance at Pinchuk's oeuvre reveals her familiarity with the landscapes of political violence and environmental witness: *Surface to Air* (2015) data-maps the first year of the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia; *Fallout* (2016) surveyed the Fukushima Nuclear Exclusion Zone; *Sarcophagus* (2017) was produced following a visit to Chernobyl's Reactor 4; and *Borders* (2018) was a response to the legal-spatial topographies of the Calais 'Jungle' Migrant Camp in France. With this first-hand experience of the terrains of war and trauma, she possessed the skills, grit, and insights into the Balkans—not to mention the aesthetic sensibilities—requisite to the challenge of making site-specific work for Mitrovica.

I was aware of the obstacles that would face her work in a place such as northern Kosovo, so I set no expectations or limits on Pinchuk's response to our project's curatorial premises. Given the understated, minimalist aesthetic of some of her prior work, I had guessed Pinchuk might data-map northern Kosovo's peacebuilding undercurrents, applying her idiosyncratic technique of hammering pinholes through large sheets of paper, or producing miniature, cubiform sculptures from local Trepça materials.

However, for her contribution to Manifesta 14, Pinchuk chose to work in a new medium and did so at unprecedented scale. Her designs for *Europe Without Monuments* called for a 1:1 deconstructed installation, in scaffolding, of Bogdan Bogdanović's *Monument to Fallen Miners* (1973). The imposing original concrete trilithe, at 19 metres high and 18 metres wide, recalls a mining cart set on conical pillars. Pinchuk had designed her tribute to stand in the middle of the Ibër—adjacent its main bridge, like a playground at which people young and old, people north and south, to meet. Amazing. Impossible. Perfect.

Bogdanović's monument towers like a sentinel on the proximal Partisan Hill in the north, distinguishable from almost anywhere in Mitrovica, but its image had faded in collective consciousness, a relic of the promise and demise of Yugoslavia. Its authorship and original purpose have been layered in urban mythologies and misinterpretations, its nostalgia choked by the ambivalences and resentments of newcomers and new generations, expressed in over a dozen colloquial names. In the words of a local curator, Nora Prekazi, it has become 'a monument to everybody, and nobody at the same time.'¹



Europe Without Monuments pays its respects to the city and its residents by working with this conundrum, reviving it both as a symbol of the city's industrial heritage and as a memorial to a unified miners' revolt against Nazi occupation of Mitrovica. 'Kosovo's mineral riches,' notes historian Noel Malcolm, 'have made the territory a special target for conquest by many armies, from the Romans to the Nazis.'² Kosovo, like the rest of Yugoslavia, fell under Axis control within days of military assault. Under Nazi occupation, Trepça shipped 500 tons of lead and zinc concentrate per day to the metal-hungry war machine of the Reich.³ The embodiment of Mitrovica's pride in resistance in Bogdanović's great work would take on a greater poignancy during the 2022 development of *Europe Without Monuments*—Europe was heading into another war.

On 24 February 2022, Russia escalated its eight-year war in Ukraine by launching a full-scale invasion. Days earlier we learnt Manifesta had accepted our proposal. In our phone meeting that day, Stan and I shared stories, tears, memories and hopes, while watching footage of Russian tanks trampling through Ukrainian villages, those unsettling images identical to my memories of Kosovo from the 1980s and 1990s.

A powerful solidarity connecting Ukraine with Kosovo, so clear to us, was beginning to be seen by our collaborators and the Biennial. The urgency of Stan's work was further accentuated in June 2022, when all 700 memorial markers of Bogdanović's vast *Partisan Memorial Cemetery* in the similarly divided city of Mostar were destroyed by neo-Nazi vandals.

The concept for *Europe Without Monuments* was built on meticulous research from prior to the invasion of Ukraine, cementing our subsequent site visit in April 2022. Working with resources and structures preceding her in the environs of Mitrovica, Pinchuk developed strong and genuine connections, respectfully recalling the city's immanent memories. We visited the north, where the 'Z' symbol of pro-Russian nationalists had begun to appear graffitied on walls and printed on t-shirts. Framed portraits of Putin could be seen on some window sills, facing the streets. Russian flags were hung throughout the city, and its north did not hesitate to show it was in strong favour of Putin and his war. If Russia's conquest were successful, many in the south feared Russia would subsequently support a Serbian bid to retake Kosovo. However, by the time we returned to Mitrovica in July, after it was clear that Russia's 'special operation' was not going to plan, there were fewer flags, and fewer photos bearing Putin's image. Some, at least, had realised they were supporting a failed campaign.

*I dream of a Europe without monuments. By that I mean without monuments of death and disaster. Perhaps philosophical construction: monuments to love, to joy, to jokes and laughter.*⁴

– Bogdan Bogdanović

Pinchuk's *Europe Without Monuments*, 2022 pays a direct homage to Bogdanović and his work. A Serb with ancestral roots in Kosovo, Bogdanović was a humanist and intellectual, whose outspoken anti-war sentiments would lead to a permanent exile in Vienna. As the architect of over 20 monuments to Partisan victims against fascism, Bogdanović unusually loved the idea of people playing around his memorials. He was the first and one of the few major artists to turn away from showcasing horror in monuments, a trait that was admired by Tito, the President of Yugoslavia.





*I always tried to make monuments that wouldn't look like monuments. I started simply by playing with shapes.*⁵

– Bogdan Bogdanović

With sincere respect to the sanctity of the *Monument to Fallen Miners*, and guided by Bogdanović's own words, Pinchuk reinterpreted the structure's forms as a life-size, three-part playground. Using bespoke scaffolding in steel and zinc (a material mined in Mitrovica), the work would reimagine the city's riverscape, altering its historic urban topography, celebrating a popular bathing spot and facilitating safe congregation and play for Mitrovica's citizens and visitors. Like a shimmering whale skeleton laid bare on the shore, the work could be walked into and explored—it was a transient site at which new narratives could form.

Although her work envisioned an optimistic future for Mitrovica, and was an artistic prototype that both literally and metaphorically bridged the Ibër with its alternative, playful interpretation of *Monument to Fallen Miners*, Pinchuk held an acute awareness of the loaded legacy, tension and resonance of monuments not only in Kosovo, but in Ukraine—her home country, and incidentally, Manifesta's second choice for this iteration of the Biennial.

Now on 27 April 2023, *Unbordering Worlds* will open in Garramilla (Darwin). 12,000 kilometres away, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine will enter its 427th day. Pinchuk's home city of Kharkiv will endure another day of sandbags and scaffolding protecting the monuments which still stand. While we in Garramilla (Darwin) may dream of a distant Europe with no need for monuments to death and disaster, Europe faces a future that may be without monuments at all. For Pinchuk, who stands in both solidarity and grief, the project has become 'an interrogation of the wider meaning of monuments in Europe, or rather, its peripheries—that, like Ukraine and Kosovo, identify themselves as holding European values, history and ambitions, despite ambivalent reciprocity from the continent's more central nations.'

Pinchuk offered a touching work of necessary hope and respite within an empty space vacated by past and present, set against a Europe again at war. *Europe Without Monuments* opened in Mitrovica in the summer that Bogdanović would have celebrated his 100th birthday, fulfilling the great architect's utopian aspiration to create a 'monument to love, to joy, to jokes and laughter'. A gift to all people of Mitrovica, Bogdanović could not have wished a more fitting tribute to his legacy.

1. Naser Hajdari and Nora Prekazi Hoti, 'Përmendorja e Minatorëve, e të gjithëve dhe e askujt', in *Koha*, Prishtina, 2020 (online)

2. Malcolm, *Kosovo*, p. 5

3. Ibid.

4. Quoted in Alexandre Mirlesse, *En Attendant l'Europe*, Europe XXL, Paris, 2011

5. Bogdan Bogdanović quoted in Reinhard Seiss, *Architecture of Remembrance: the monuments of Bogdan Bogdanović*, 2009, (documentary film)

As You Name the Boat, So Too Shall it Float

Stanislava Pinchuk

There is no one way to call the city, or its river:

Ibër
Iber
Ibar
Ibri
Mitrovica
Mitrovicë
Kosovska Mitrovica
Mitrovica/ë

Neither is there one name for the monument that sits above it:

Memorial Shrine of Serbian & Albanian Partisans in the War of 1941-45
The Miner's Monument
The Miner's Cenotaph
Monument to the Fallen Partisans
Monument to Serb & Albanian Partisans
Monument to the Fallen Miners
Monument to the Mining Heroes
Shrine to the Revolution
A Memorial without Memory
The Communist Memorial
The Monument to the glory of Milošević
The Giant's Barbecue
The Alien's Barbecue
The Serb Memorial
A Serb and an Albanian holding up a lazy Montenegrin

'In Yugoslavia, they always said that the Albanians were the thieves, the Bosnians were the hot-headed and the Montenegrins were lazy.'

Memoriali i Minatorëve të Rënë
Përmendorja e Luftëtarëve të Vrarë në LNÇ në Bregun e Partizanëve
Monumentin e Minatorëve të Rënë
Përmendorja e Minatorëve
Kodra e Minatorëve
Monumenti i Trepçës
Përmendorja Partizanit Monumenti i Partizanit
Spomenik Rudarima Junacima iz NOB
Spomenik NOB
Spomenik Partizanima i Rudarima
Spomenik Srpskim i Albanskim Partizanima
Spomenik na Kukavici
Spomenik Rudarima Trepče
Spomenik, Monument
Sponument, Momenik

This is the key thing about public space — that it is not made, but that it's decided.

At no point did we think that this project would ever be referred to as *Europe Without Monuments* by the city, as we had designated it.

In part, we chose this convoluted title in the hope that its users would instead anoint a multitude of new names that better reflected its meaning in the multitudinous realities and uses of the city, which they did:

The Monument in the River
The Creative Monument
The Platform
The New Monument
The New Beach
Skenë Atractiv
Monumenti Krijues
Përmendorja në lumë
Letnji Paviljon
Spomenik u Reci

One man fixed its sails when they broke. Another tied a large Ukrainian flag to its top, and later painted its yellow seats half in blue. For this, we were investigated by local police. Some, we think, were undercover.

Others began to pick up the trash in river around the work, coming every single day to maintain its condition.

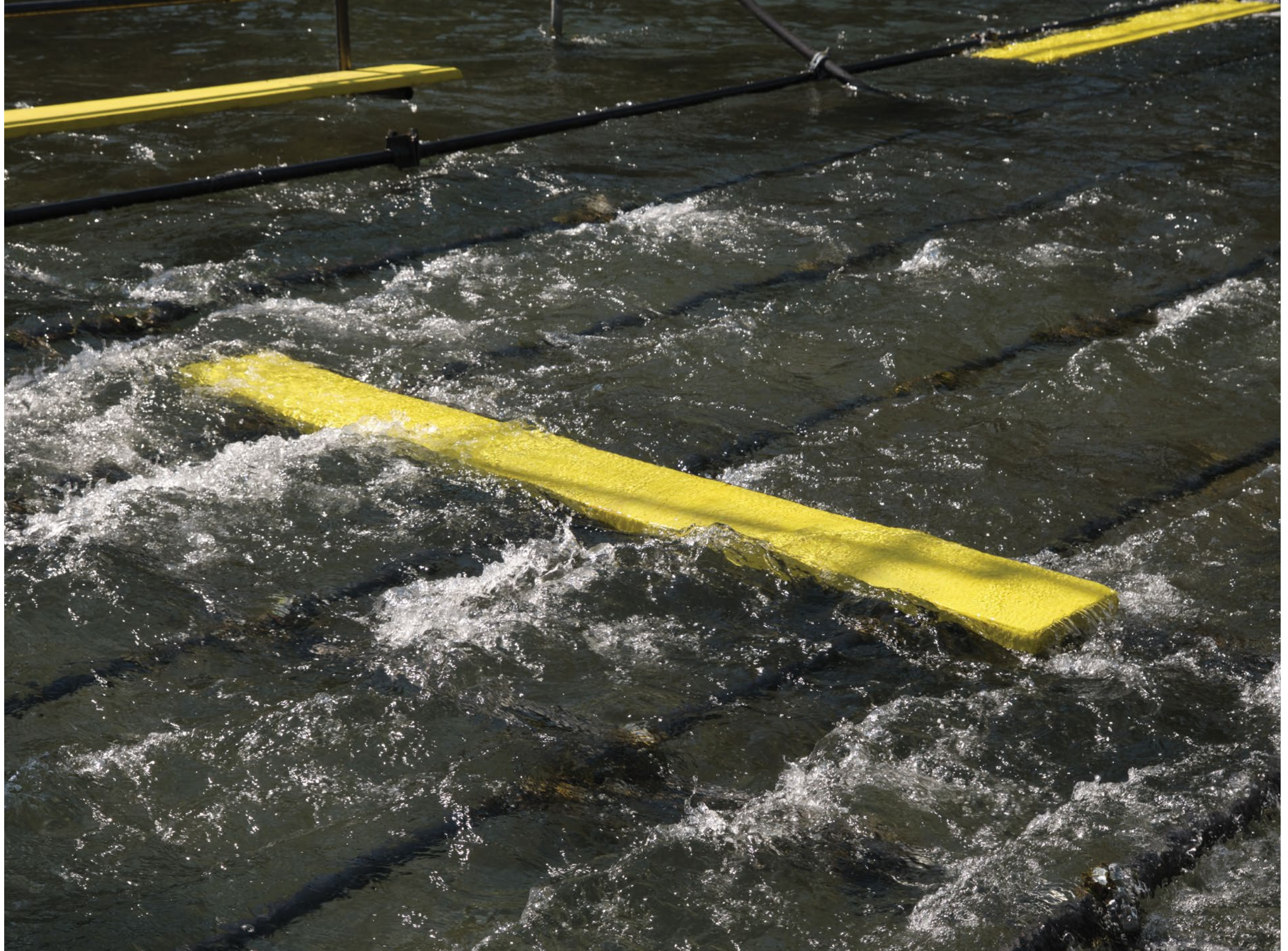
Teenagers earnestly made out on it. Pensioners put their shopping bags aside on the river banks and waded into the water to sit together,

— *all, the highest compliment.*



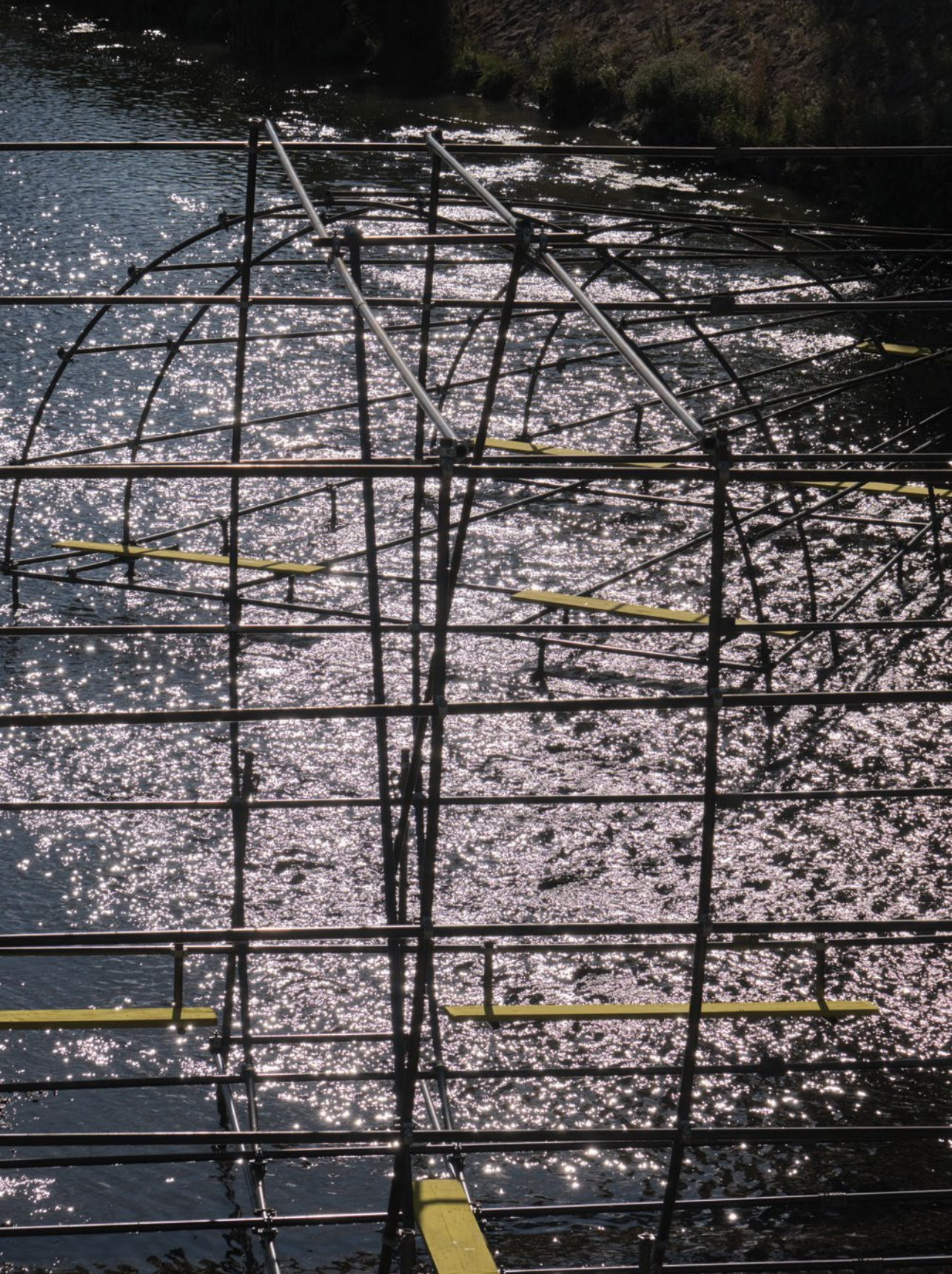












On What Is Here

Petrit Abazi, Project Curator

Piers Greville (Australia, born 1972)

What Is Here, 2022

Performance, live stream projection and ink on silk flags

*Art is never finished. It is only abandoned in an interesting place.*¹

— Dean Stevenson

Piers Greville is a painter and field-based performance artist living in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. A former mountain endurance athlete, Greville traverses remote landscapes as a working methodology, integrating physical and ecological meditations into his research practice. Drawing on personal and shared histories of landscapes, he interrogates cultural positions and human relationships to the environment, alongside political values which are likewise mapped into the terrain. A natural draughtsman, his work is distinguished by a sharp, observant eye and informed by a strong connection to the body's traversal through the natural world.

Greville's connection with landscape is genuine and profound. Some of his earlier works feel like a mirror reflecting the connections humans have with nature and argue for a universal, interspecies oneness between *animalia* and *plantae*. In his *Isolation* (2020) suite of paintings, truncated eucalypt trees feel like proxies for human forms; proposing just how intimately we embody landscape. If so, perhaps there would be no better place to extend such a proposition, than to the waters of the Ibër River, which reflect and transcend the commonalities of the diverse bodies which call it home?

Months before his first visit to Kosovo in April 2022, aided by digital mapping data, Greville had familiarised himself with the terrain, tracing the three rivers and the undulating mountains that envelop the valley of Mitrovica. By the time he landed, like a 'malësore' (Albanian mountain man), there was already a sense of arrival in a familiar place. Before we ever met, not content with merely walking on terrain, Greville had been experimenting with the idea of a stationary swim as an artistic performance; and upon learning the fact that so many locals learnt to swim in Mitrovica's once wild rivers, this felt like a fitting place to bring the idea to life.

While thinking of participatory performance as a proposition for change, he may not have realised how deep swimming runs in the hearts of the people of Mitrovica. The city was home to Kosovo's first swimming pool, built in the 1930s by the British company Selection Trust, which then owned and operated the Trepça mines. Nestled in a brand new village of English-style cottages, a stylish hotel, a banquet hall and tennis courts were a six-lane swimming pool and diving facilities adaptable for both recreation and competition. The modern, luxury amenities of the 'English Colony' were exclusive and somewhat unusual to this part of Yugoslavia at the time, clearly built to accommodate the international engineers that worked at the mines. And yet, while the pools at Stari Trg and Zveçan were open to locals with no

affiliation to the mines, most children, like my father, nevertheless learnt to swim in the rivers of Mitrovica.

On conquering the Ibër's flow, my father, Alush Abazi, became the first Albanian swimming coach at the Stari Trg pool. After graduating from the University of Sarajevo in physical education, he wrote the first comprehensive textbook in the Albanian language covering every aspect of swimming technique.² By the 1970s, my father was appointed the President of the Yugoslavian Swimming Federation, and was recently inducted into Kosovo's Swimming Hall of Fame. 'It's ok if you don't know how to swim,' he used to say, 'but you can't tell anyone you're from Mitrovica,' reflecting his particular pride that everyone in his city could swim. His passion for swimming carried over to Australia, a nation obsessed with sport, and continued to work there as a coach. Piers' open and public proposal therefore had a personal resonance for me.

*Thinking with water suggests staying with the trouble.*³

— Biljana Ćirić paraphrasing Donna Haraway



What Is Here presented a durational installation and performance, falling squarely in the middle of the Ibër near the ruins of a pedestrian footbridge. That post-war structure, which is today suspended like another haunted urban relic, once offered safe passage for ethnic Albanians to three nearby apartment blocks—built as an enforced experiment in the demographic re-diversification of the north bank. Still marked by a police checkpoint in the north, the bridge now hangs suspended in the river, severed of its parapets to each shore; a twofold artefact of its political dimension. At this point the Ibër runs exceptionally deep and fast, making it one of a few popular swimming spots close to town. Inspired by the bridge's history, and driven by his mantra that 'a swim is as good as a bridge', Greville invited all comers to join him in a durational stationary swimming relay.

In the first five days of Manifesta, participants in Greville's work took turns to swim at the spot against the river's current. Each person's swim was measured as a distance of water flow. The total length covered by the project was a symbolic 35.1km—the distance to reach the border of Serbia and Kosovo. The work attracted the excited attention of many young locals, including both Albanians and Serbian-speaking Romani. Sadly, despite our persistent attempts to recruit Serbian participants from the north, no swimmers were forthcoming. When we spoke to two Albanian boys who were keen to join the swim, they told us that while they had many and very dear Serbian friends in the north, that they would not chance to become participants: though they were curious and supportive of the idea. The young men explained that they generally only meet their Serbian friends in private homes and never outdoors—such was the taboo among some, particularly in the north, against public displays of interconnection.

Greville's labour intensive performance placed its participants in a state of meditation, only ending as swimmers yielded to the

Ibër's frigid waters. Participants persisted in their swimming, not to be pulled backward by the prevailing current, all so as to remain present in one place, their shared Sisyphean struggle led by Greville. Recalling the annual Yugoslavian Relay of Youth that was held in Tito's honour from 1945 to 1988, Greville's design honoured the landscape and to harness a collaborative spirit, expanding the space available for healing Mitrovica's territorial and ethnic divides. With the technical assistance of artist Mook Simpson, *What Is Here* incorporated bespoke instruments measuring swim distance in terms of the Ibër's rate of flow. This spectacle of human perseverance would be oriented to geography further downstream, with a live video broadcast at the Grand Hotel in Prishtina.

The severed bridge that hung over *What Is Here* was crowned by two flags designed by Greville. Since the end of the war, Serbian and Albanian flags have become ubiquitous on both sides of Mitrovica. They hang like festoons over every street, declaring each precinct's loyalty. In describing this local peculiarity, Ian Bancroft writes that the 'distinction between patriotism and



nationalism is the condition of the flag; the more folded and ironed, the more patriotic; the more torn and tarnished, the more nationalistic. The plastic masts and nylon flags epitomise the cheap, economical version of a nationalism that is eventually unaffordable. It is a perfect harmony of form and message.⁴ Greville's black and white flags, copies of the silk originals that hung in the Grand Hotel and displayed at the NCCA in Garramilla (Darwin), represent landscapes in a de-territorial way, devoid of the nationalistic affiliations which are ascribed to them. These flags represent the terrain surrounding Mitrovica, north and south, devoid of any human influence or ethno-religious markers. Featuring neither sky nor horizon, their periscopic, apolitical perspective on the greater surrounding landscape stakes no claim.

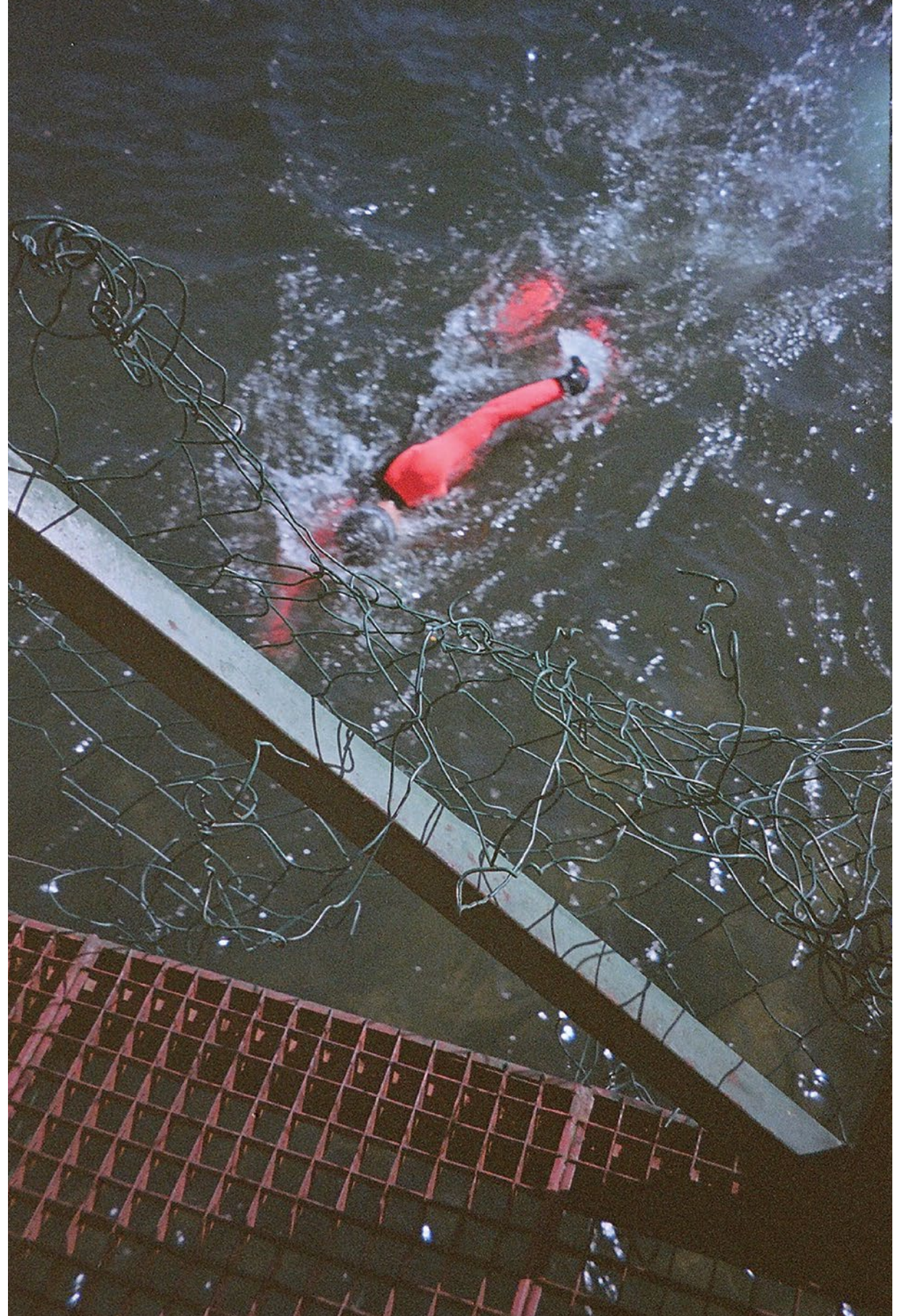
What Is Here was a collective environmental and artistic action. It inaugurated a new custom, one of un-marking the borders of a place scarred by segregation, damage and loss. A seasonal rite for reconciliation, repair and healing. The endurance of this new practice will be tested in summers to come. Speaking to the swimmers on the final day of the performance, it was clear the water under that broken bridge had already become a place of happy memories. "We should make this relay swim a tradition here" one of them said to us casually. With the swim now over, the work had begun.

1. Dean Stevenson cited by Sian Cain, 'I had to be taken out of the museum: the artistic challenge that almost broke Dean Stevenson', in *The Guardian*, 23 June 2022, (online)

2. Alush Abazi, *Fillet e Notit*, Prishtina, 1977

3. Biljana Ćirić, *Walking with water*, Pavilion of the republic of Serbia, Venice Biennale 2022 (unpaged)

4. Ian Bancroft, *Dragon's Teeth*, p. 64



Piers Greville in Conversation with Jonathon Cresswell

Jonathon Cresswell: What was the research process for the work?

Piers Greville: It started with reading about Kosovo and the Balkans, and discussions with the curator Petrit Abazi, about his personal and family history. Then we visited Mitrovica to meet people, to look at the site and immerse ourselves in the area.

That is where the experience of the place all kicked off, hearing personal stories of war, genocide and its lead up; but also the bodily experience of swimming in this river. From afar – being an optimist – I was always thinking of this nice, pristine river, thinking: “it’s going to be beautiful, I will swim in it, it will be cold, it might be a bit dirty, but I won’t worry about it”.

But once we arrive, we can see things we didn’t want to, like dirty water, possibly effluent, running into the river. So this goes from a concept planned in the safety of my studio on the other side of the world to “Oh, I’ve got to get into that water.” The ecological side of it became very real, I became aware of how it is intertwined with politics.

The local swim club happened to have their swimming centre on the Albanian Kosovar side, so we approached them for participants in the artwork, but at first they weren’t sure. Maybe they were thinking: ‘What is this idea?’ So viewing it from a sports background, we weren’t sure they understood it at first. Petrit’s background is in that town, he used to swim in that river, and his father had been a respected swim coach in Yugoslavia: a fact I did not know when I proposed the work. The current Mitrovica swim club coach, Arif Misimi made this connection however, and soon said: “...our swimmers, they will swim as much as you need, we will do this durational piece, however much you need, we will do it...!” So, quickly we had participants. But also, in that same meeting there were tears, just hearing about these stories: when asked if they could help recruit from the northern side, the two brothers, who are the manager of the swim team and the coach of the swim team, were sitting there and it sort of went quiet. Then they said they didn’t feel comfortable about approaching potential participants from the Serb side of the river, “We have let them into our pool, and we say hello politely, but every time we suggest meeting they don’t want to engage with us.” And then they told us this story of their enduring pain, of losing their 12 year old brother, who was murdered by Serbian troops during the war and how still nobody has been held accountable for this. This brought us really close to the conflict, sitting there and hearing this story, and interactions like that became research and very much part of the project.

When we set out, we sought to engage people from both sides of the geopolitical divide. We had meetings with people in the Serbian community, but it was hard to convince people from both sides to be in the work. Even though the ideal of this artwork was to have this kind of beautiful, peace-building, unifying action, it didn’t work out that way, but not without trying.

I’m particularly interested in river pollution. In general, in the Balkans, it is a humongous issue. In particular, the Ibër River is a very interesting example in terms of the dynamic of how the river leaves Serbia, and goes into Kosovo, and then back into Serbia. Conceptually, perhaps, it has an interesting dynamic of how Kosovo pollutes this water which then returns back into Serbia.

I feel this is at the heart of my work, the feeling that in some way the conflict has injured or distorted a community’s relationship to their surrounding ecology. The way you have framed it, if true, could be due to the society battered by war being also where the pollution is generated. I had the feeling there, that this relationship is aggravated by the river becoming a barrier, a margin. So, in a collective consciousness it loses its place at the centre, becomes the edges and discarded.

During those last few weeks of preparation a lamb carcass came floating down the river, which Stanislava had to pull off her sculpture. It floated down the swim site and it got caught on the structure which Stanislava was midway through constructing. We would often come out in the morning and pull all the plastic bags off. The huge things we had to untangle were quite astounding.

It became a process while Stanislava and myself were preparing the artwork in the summer: a ritual in the morning to clean up what had floated down the river overnight.

This was about the obvious forms of pollution. But there is a more pervasive microbial level to it. During the performance, with my face in the water and swimming for days, I really got to see in the shallow depth in the river, what comes past. I was surprised that there are several species of fish, and several invertebrates. But the day after the performance finished, I got violently sick for about three or four days. I don’t doubt that it was to do with something microbial that had entered me, because when you are swimming for hours and hours a day it is very hard to not swallow some of the water, even if you try not to.

Swimming this 35.1 km was the distance along the watercourse between where we were and the border upstream, where the water flowed out of Serbia. It was a symbolic distance, which we collectively swam.

The river was so strong that you weren’t really moving, right?

That’s correct. Basically, we were swimming on the spot, like a treadmill. We measured using a flow meter and attached it to an Arduino, a small computer which then fed distance data into a live kilometre ticker in the top left-hand corner of the live video feed, counting the kilometres as measure of the distance of water flowing through. In itself it was a way of thinking about a river as static but dynamic at the same time; you stay in one spot but the river is moving through.

This small flow meter, an agricultural device with a little propeller, was connected to the computer which then we broadcast with the video on the live streaming service, Twitch. At many points in this process, we had technological issues, but our system for measuring the distance kept working and there was always someone in the water. In the spirit of research, there were things that were not working well, it was not a kind of slick performance. This was in keeping with what I felt was the aesthetic of this part of Kosovo, where it seems half built and half broken.

It sounds like some levels of failure are part of the work: in terms of slight failures of technology, the pollution from the river, even you getting sick afterwards, and the failure to engage with Serbian populations. These aspects seem like part of the work as well. You know, glitches and malfunctions — and there is lots of theory which argues that these are important aspects that must be embraced when we think about ecological change, progression, and future. The idea of working with things over a sealed perfection.

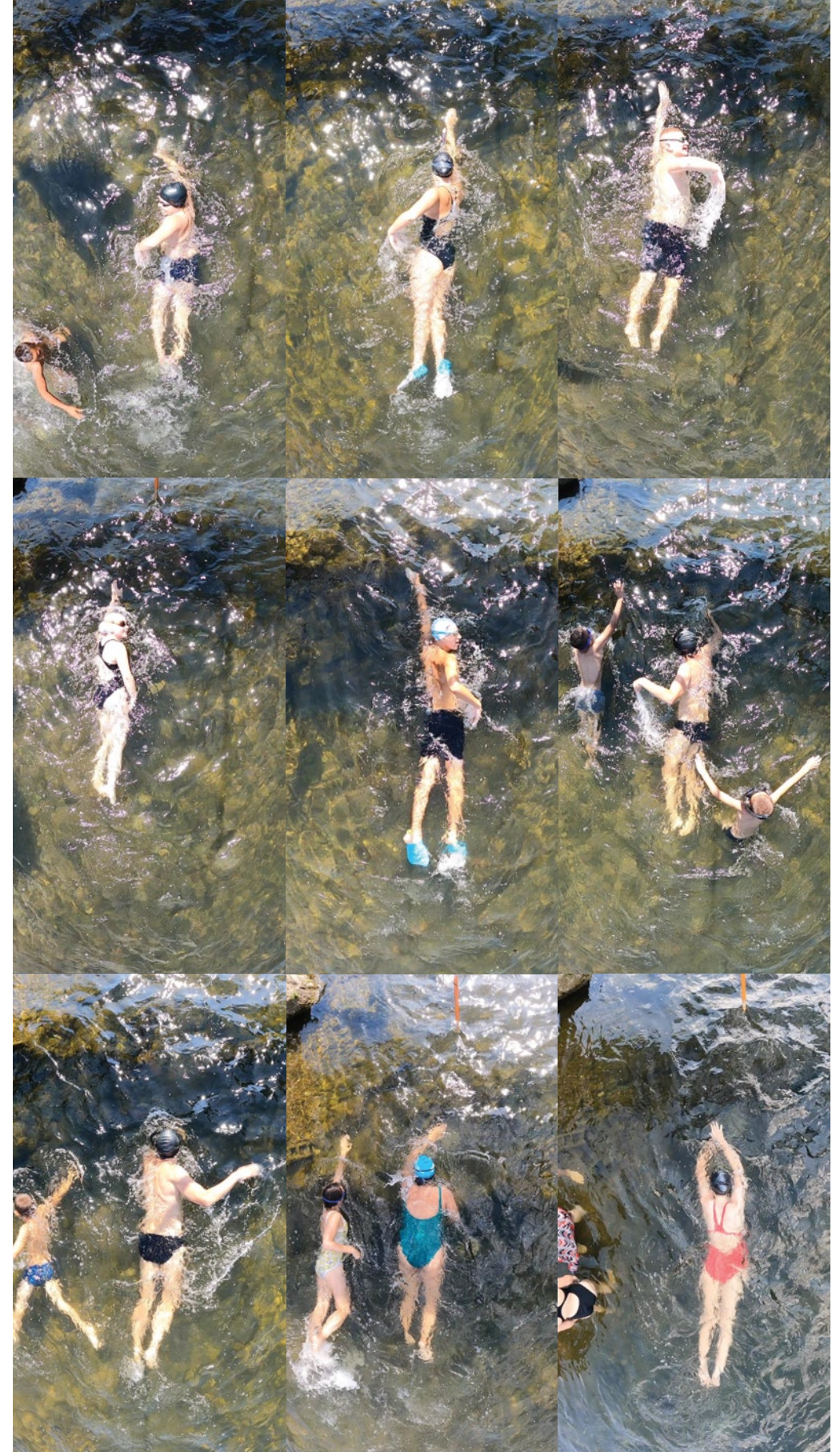
A few days before the performance was due to take place, the water level was a metre higher than it had been, and was going about 20 km an hour at about 8°C. It was like winter swimming all of a sudden. And I just thought, “OK, this thing is going to fail”, and that is what this whole thing will be: just an interesting failure. I was kind of a bit shaky, and I wasn’t sure of what to do.

There was that level of failure built into the project. I just think that is kind of the recipe of ecology and evolution: failure and learning from that.

I was interested in what your broader interests in ecology, and eco-theory might be, and how this might relate to your work?

A lot of my practice is alluding to problems of how we look at landscape. The motivation behind that is based in the ecofeminist perspective of Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, in that we are not apart from ecologies, we are a part of them. Broadly this is the methodology of my studio practice, whereas in the field work I am engaged in the doing. It is the open source code of that work. This is the act of looking, but it is also the act of experiencing, of embodying experience, to place the body into the river, to travel the distance.

Immersion into ecologies is the way that we can learn and experience from them, and that goes to conflict as well because, ultimately, conflict is one and the same with ecology, failure, growth and survival. The conflicts that happened in my body with the bacteria, or whatever I welcomed in, are not dissimilar to other kinds of colonisation.



A Swim Is As Good As a Bridge

Piers Greville

'What Is Here' is neither a question nor answer; it is a title for the struggle to remain, in defiance of the currents. This conscious presence also results from the meditative focus of the stationary river swimming act. Inside the mind of the swimmer, sound is distorted and suppressed, eyes are trained on a pebble, a still marker on the riverbed. At times chaotic, in the enduring struggle to remain in place against a freezing river and swirling eddies, this marker becomes the focus and essence of 'staying with the trouble'.

The people who live on either side of the river remain in this struggle, in spite of pressures flowing from far away. This ecological immersion, staying against the flow — is an act of solidarity with the people of Mitrovica.

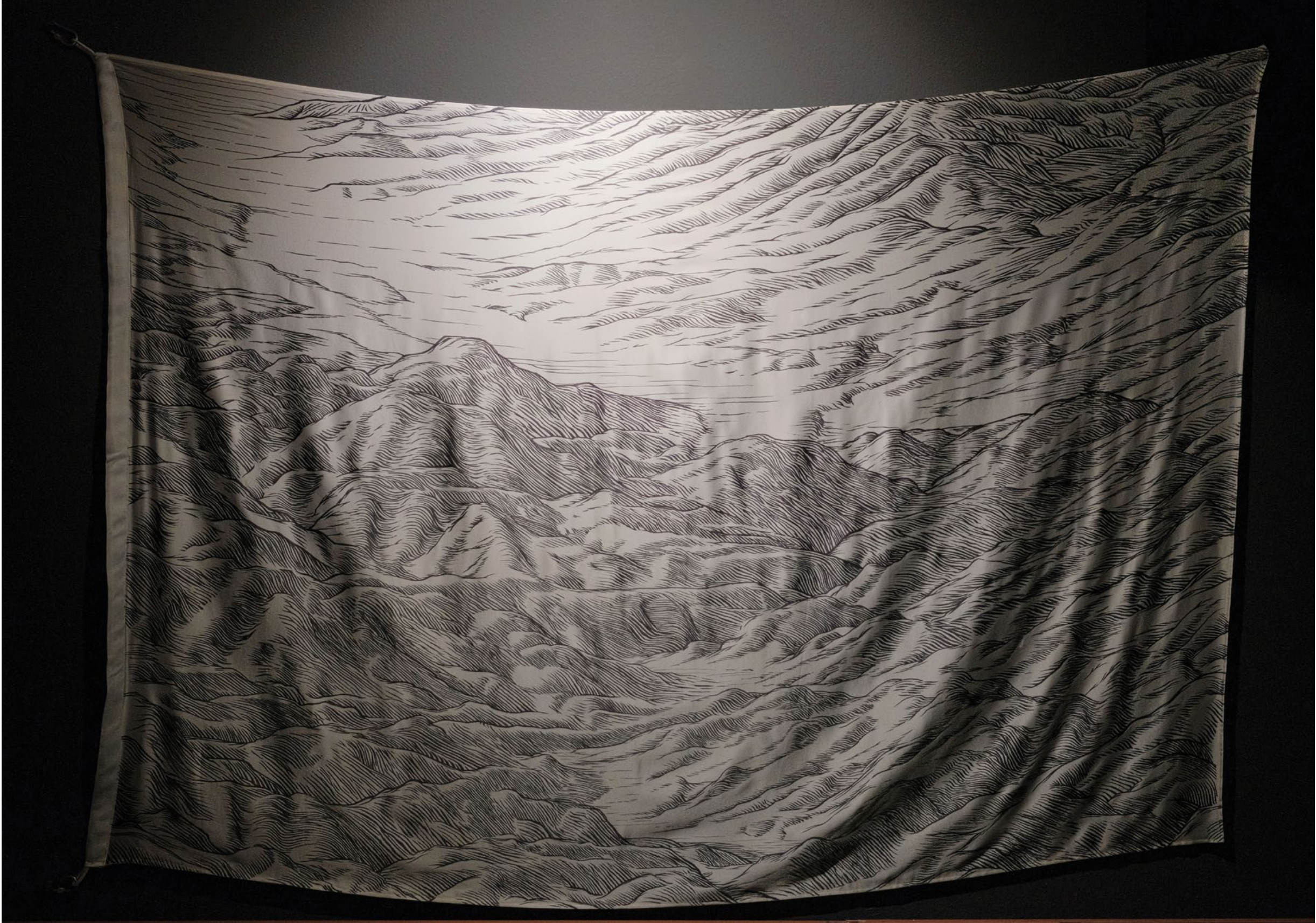
Where I live in Naarm (Melbourne), rivers have long been talked of as connective tissue and the circulatory system of the landscape by the Wurundjeri people. So it is with Balkan rivers: because they are shared, they form veins of hope. The water flowing down the Ibër eventually joins the Danube and then flows through and touches the territories of Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova, before eventually flowing into the Black Sea in Odesa Oblast in Ukraine. Along this path the river is passed on in relay, from one territory to the next and shared.

Flags flank the broken bridge, markers for peace. One flag depicts a gaze northward, as if from the south, the other in reverse. As orthographic parallel projections, they are not from single perspectives rather each implies a space looking onto another space. As maps, they show no pathway nor claim any territory.

Silk printed maps were used in the twentieth century by pilots in war: surveilling, navigating and claiming territory. Today, flags are in abundance in Mitrovica and mark out geopolitical alliances in great detail, signalling territory: bloc by bloc, block by block. To rethink these objects and the space of the river, flags are once again flown in silk, in neutral colours which signal terrain rather than territory.

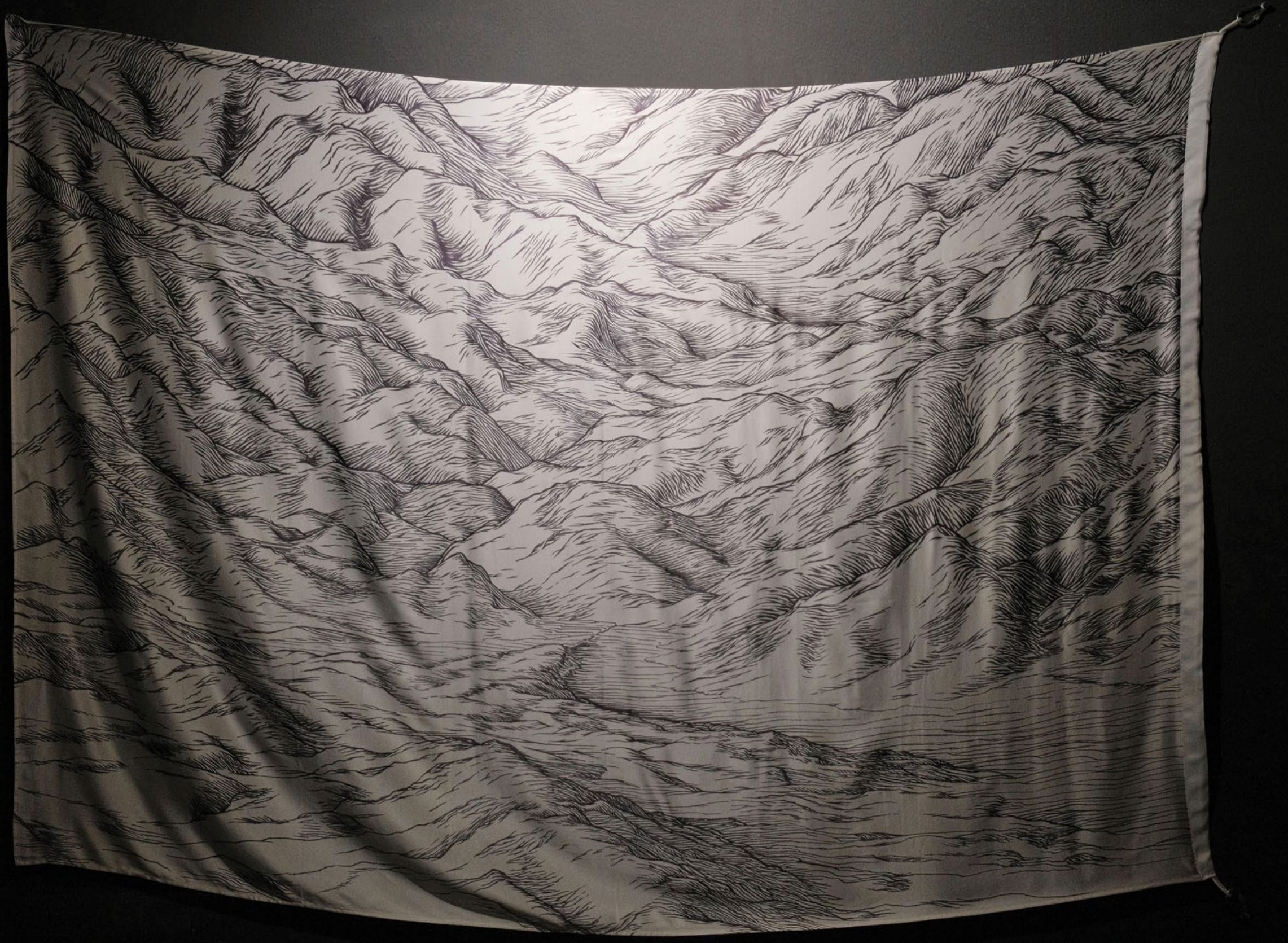






Topographical map of the region of the Alps, showing the mountain ranges and valleys. The map is a detailed relief map, showing the terrain in a three-dimensional perspective. The map is mounted on a wall, and the background is dark.







17.4 km



To Love Water

Nora Prekazi, Curator, Museum of Mitrovica

The Ibër lies beautifully in the middle of the city. It was – and is – an inexhaustible force that has engraved the line of life in this city for decades, centuries and millennia.

During the war, on 24 March 1999, I was 13 years old when our entire neighbourhood, Bair, with an Albanian majority was expelled from our homes by the Serbian army. Amidst our constant escaping from the Serbian paramilitary police, which meant daily family stays in different neighbourhoods of the city, we were forced to go to my grandfather's apartment - which was located in the northern part of the city, right next to the Ibër River. My grandfather lived on the third floor with his wife and two children, facing the Ibër bridge and the river itself. My family experienced the most difficult days of the war right there in my grandfather's apartment. I often have flashbacks to certain fragments of memories. The various tortures that I could see from the windows of the apartment: kidnappings, beatings, destruction of documents, violence, ridicule, rapes and murders inflicted upon the Albanian community. Such were the views that we secretly witnessed from the windows, whenever we sat on the freezer chest in the kitchen, together with my 19 year old aunt.

I will never forget the feeling of helplessness I felt in that apartment. The feeling of being small, fragile, voiceless, imprisoned. The feeling of wanting to do something, in the face of the absurdity of what was happening...

Over the years I have dreamt of my grandfather's apartment across the river countless times. The waiting room with the big clock on the wall. His balcony, the narrow corridor, as well as the kitchen with the freezer chest against the window, and the view of the river from that perspective... Once in a dream, I was wearing a military uniform, and suddenly on the balcony grew a big tree with red berries... I never understood the meaning of this dream.

While the Ibër still lies beautifully in the middle of the city, it always flowed freely and was an inexhaustible force that engraved the line of life in this city. The river, the bridge and everything that happened during and after the war hold an enduring part of this engraving of life, fear and love inside me. Over the years, I had to strengthen my convictions to be vocal, and not fragile; equal to everyone as a human being and as an individual. I had to rediscover my memories of the city, relearn boundaries and their breaking, and teach myself about the beauty and love of people and for people. To attach those souls as links in the historical chain of this city, because all those who made it were the brave, the dreamers and those who believed. Because this city, no matter how difficult life in it is, for me as a child, a teenager and a young woman, remains my one and only birthplace. But, with the river Ibër near the bridge, I had no opportunity to restore a connection, even though over the years we have organised many concerts, films and artistic events around it.



With the arrival of Petrit, Stanislava and Piers for the development of their artistic projects in the river as part of the Manifesta 14 Biennial, this part of the city took on a different flavour. Petrit wanted to bring art from the distant continent of Australia, and do it in his city of birth. We discussed in detail the reflection of the river Ibër's life as a new border in our city, which for me became an invitation to get closer to it. In their two busy visits, we were constantly circling the water, sitting by the water, standing in the water. With them, my husband Luli and my children, we talked endlessly about it: researched its history and meaning.

As we watched the three of them at work, I was given a reconceptualisation of the river in the city's life, recalling the play, the fun, and the care needed for this water, while the people around us were also interested; guessing, questioning, curious, trying to frame Stanislava's platform. Whether it would be a platform for concerts, or a mosque, or a place to bring communities together, no one knew; but passers-by still expressed their ideas. They were just as intrigued by Piers' measuring equipment, his daily swims and his constant dedication to cleaning the water, talking to the fishermen and anyone else who was curious about his work.

My kids could not wait to go there with the artists and play with the rocks and the river, to make new friends and make their own memories with it.

The work of remaking the structure of the *Monument to Fallen Miners*, intended by Stanislava as a place of play, a place to meet, a place of rest and community engagement, as well as Piers' proposal to the swimmers of the city – inviting its various citizens to swim in the river – was a return to the pulse of the main artery of my city, which was the Ibër itself.

I was lucky enough to host the official inauguration of the structure of the monument, a public conversation in which together with Petrit, Stanislava and Piers – as well as Valdete Irdizi, the Director of Culture in the Municipality of Mitrovica (a champion of the city with so much experience and courage), we shared our moments from the whole process that got us there. With the audience facing us on the river bank, we sat on the seats of Stanislava's structure, our bare feet in the Ibër's cool water. We were all emotional. I was in that place that had etched so many memories in me, but none like this. Petrit, the initiator of this event, a Mitrovica migrant who had fled the country when it turned hostile to him, had returned to bring some fun to his hometown together with two international artists. Stanislava comes from Ukraine, a country where the war had just started, and who had stopped all her other work and projects, bar her piece for Mitrovica, from which she promoted peace – and Piers, who barely knew the Balkans, and yet embodied the Ibër River every single day. As the water around him that challenged the flow of its current to witness life, the importance of water and peace.

It was a moment to share together, among tears and feelings never experienced before. We ended the conversation by inviting my friends Fisnik and Mevi next to us right there in the water, where we all read our poems dedicated to water, to the river and to life... The three of us who had shared the stage so many times together, but we had never had a more lively platform. Because the river lay so naturally under our feet, so free, and so alive – and continued to engrave life into itself and onto us, I dedicated this poem to it:

My legs are hurting, and my back stings
 remembering that there is more to it than this
 there is more than just repeating cycles
 I agree with myself that today is a beautiful day, isn't it
 A beautiful day
 And I promise to love water more
 water in a cup, in coffee,
 in the old drums that are poured over concrete to cool our feet
 to love water in children's bottles
 the water that waters the flowers
 the water that surrounds the pupils of your eyes in the glow
 I am intoxicated by the scent of the leaves of the big lindens
 everywhere on these hot days
 A scent that reminds me of Grandma Leman
 her basket with flowers for home brewed tea
 I have not felt the scent of linden more in the city!
 Maybe the Ibër has taken rest this year!
 Perhaps its water is at peace with the flow at last!
 Maybe all this is happening to remind us
 that the time has come for new memories
 that smell nice!

List of works

Stanislava Pinchuk

Ukraine, born 1988

Europe Without Monuments,

2022. Steel and zinc scaffolding, wood, acrylic paint and textile
3000 x 3000 x 1400 cm
(dimensions variable)

Exhibited

Unbordering Worlds: new narratives for northern Kosovo, Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Garramilla (Darwin), 27 April – 3 June 2023

It matters what worlds world worlds: how to tell stories otherwise, Manifesta 14, Prishtina, Grand Hotel, room 509
22 July – 31 October 2022

Unbordering Worlds: new narratives for northern Kosovo, site-specific installation, Ibër River, Mitrovica, Kosovo, Manifesta 14,
22 July – 22 September 2022

Literature

NCCA a Darwin: Spazio e Pittiaforma di Incontro Tra Artisti e Comunità' in Esplorazioni Culturali - Voci Impavide [Podcast]. Fondazione Franco Demarchi, 14 March, 2023. (online)

'Otherwise', *Manifesta 14 Catalogue* (Prishtina), January 2023, pp. 148-149, 504-511, illustrated

'Petrit Abazi, Kuratori nga Mitrovica i Cili Përdor Artin në Kufirin e Paqartë Politik mbi Lumin Ibër', in *Gazeta Express*, Prishtina, 14 September 2022, (online), illustrated

'Manifesta Biennial Prezanton Kuratorin nga Mitrovica që Sfidon Realitetet Politike Përmes Artit, in *Gazeta10*, Prishtina, 13 September 2022, (online), illustrated

Marton Dunai, 'EU-brokered Deal Leaves Kosovo and Serbia Mired in Antagonism', in *Financial Times*, London, 5 September 2022, (print and online), illustrated

Andrew Higgins, 'Blame, Hate and License Plates in a Divided Kosovo Town', in *New York Times*, New York, 5 September 2022, p.8 (print and online), illustrated

Lorenzo Csontos, 'Here We Are: Stuck by This River: Manifesta 14', in *C41*, Milan/Amsterdam, 5 September 2022, (online), illustrated

Nidzara Ahmetasevic, 'Manifesta 14, le Kosovo Comme Vous ne L'avez Jamais Vu', in *Courrier International*, Paris, 3 September 2022, (online)

Bronwyn Jones, 'Manifesta në Mitrovicë', in *New Perpektiva*, Kosovo, 1 September 2022, (online), illustrated

Martina Yordanova, 'Vision for Journal: A Manual to Manifesta 14', in *Journal of Social Vision*, Sofia, 1 September 2022, (online)

Tom Joyner, *Tensions flare again between Serbia and Kosovo* [Video Broadcast], ABC News, Kosovo, 29 August 2022, illustrated

'Exhibitions: Northern Territory', in *Art Guide Australia*, Melbourne, 18 August 2022, p. 234, illustrated

Paula Pintos, 'Europe Without Monuments', in *Arch Daily*, Santiago, 13 August 2022, (online), illustrated

Maria Muñoz, 'Bienal Nómada Manifesta 14 en Kosovo', in *Neo2*, Madrid, 3 August 2022, (online), illustrated

Maria Muñoz, 'Prishtina in Kosovo 'Manifests' Itself', in *A*Desk*, Barcelona, 30 July 2022, (online), illustrated

Dmitri Volchek, 'A Wrapper for the Concrete Partisans: 'Manifesta' in an Unprecedented Country', in *Radio Free Europe*, Prague, 29 July 2022, (online), illustrated

Cathryn Drake, 'It Matters What Worlds World Worlds: How to Tell Stories Otherwise', in *e-Flux Criticism / Art Agenda*, New York, 29 July 2022, (online), illustrated

Daniel Browning, 'Artists Head to 'Europe's Most Divided City' in Kosovo' [Radio Broadcast], *The Art Show: ABC Radio National*, Sydney, 27 July 2022

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Elke Buhr, 'Wanderbiennale Manifesta 14 Gibt Konzept und Künstlerliste Bekannt' in *Monopol Magazin für Kunst und Leben*, Berlin, 6 April 2022, (online)

'Manifesta Reveals Artists for 2022 Prishtina Iteration', in *ArtForum* (New York), 5 April 2022, (online)

'Manifesta's Pristina Edition to Feature 37 Kosovar Artists', in *Art Review*, London, 5 April 2022, (online)

Piers Greville

Australia, born 1972

What Is Here, 2022.

hand drawn silk flags (2),
120 x 180 cm each

Durational performance,
Ibër River, Mitrovica, Kosovo
20 – 22 July 2022

Live video feed to www.twitch.tv/@currentspace2022

Video (colour, sound) 9hrs

Exhibited

Unbordering Worlds: new narratives for northern Kosovo, Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Garramilla (Darwin), 27 April – 3 June 2023

It matters what worlds world worlds: how to tell stories otherwise, Manifesta 14, Prishtina, Grand Hotel, room 506
22 July – 31 October 2022

Unbordering Worlds: new narratives for northern Kosovo, site-specific installation, Ibër River, Mitrovica, Kosovo, Manifesta 14,
22 July – 31 October 2022

Literature

NCCA a Darwin: Spazio e Pittiaforma di Incontro Tra Artisti e Comunità' in Esplorazioni Culturali - Voci Impavide [Podcast]. Fondazione Franco Demarchi, 14 March, 2023. (online)

'Otherwise', *Manifesta 14 Catalogue*, Prishtina, January 2023, pp. 148-149, 504-511, illustrated

Roberto Brunelli, 'Il Fantasma di Tito', in *Collezione da Tiffany*, Pesaro, 22 October 2022, (online), illustrated

'Petrit Abazi, Kuratori nga Mitrovica i Cili Përdor Artin në Kufirin e Paqartë Politik mbi Lumin Ibër', in *Gazeta Express*, Prishtina, 14 September 2022, (online)

Further reading

Ian Bancroft, *Dragon's Teeth: Tales from North Kosovo*, ibidem-Verlag, Stuttgart, 2020

Naser Hajdari and Nora Prekazi Hoti, 'Përmendorja e Minatorëve, e të gjithëve dhe e askujt', in *Koha*, Prishtina, 2020 (online)

Jonas Von Lenthe, *Rejected: Designs For the European Flag*, Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin, 2021

'Manifesta Biennial Prezanton Kuratorin nga Mitrovica që Sfidon Realitetet Politike Përmes Artit, in *Gazeta10*, Prishtina, 13 September 2022, (online), illustrated

Lorenzo Csontos, 'Here We Are: Stuck by This River: Manifesta 14', in *C41*, Milan/Amsterdam, 5 September 2022, (online), illustrated

Nidzara Ahmetasevic, 'Manifesta 14, le Kosovo Comme Vous ne L'avez Jamais Vu', in *Courrier International*, Paris, 3 September 2022, (online)

'Exhibitions: Northern Territory', in *Art Guide Australia*, Melbourne, 18 August 2022, p. 234

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'Manifesta's Pristina Edition to Feature 37 Kosovar Artists', in *Art Review* London, 5 April 2022, (online)

Arna Mačkić, *Mortal Cities: Forgotten Monuments*, Park Books AG, Zürich, 2016

Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-up 1980-92*, Verso Books, London, 1993

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Alexandre Mirllesse, *En Attendant l'Europe*, Europe XXL, Paris, 2011

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