

## Dreaming over the Post-Burnout World

This exhibition began from a place of being fully overwhelmed.

One of us recently walked past a café that had rented the advertisement column in front of it. Instead of displaying a message of its own, the café left the surface blank, stark white, with a single line of text: *We rented this column so that there are no political advertisements on it. This is how we wish you a Merry Christmas. This is our present to you.* In a season of commercial urgency and political noise, their present was absent. Silence as a gift, a blank space – and yet, paradoxically, this absence or silence did probably cost them quite a sum. Also, this gesture of silence was still an advertisement, it formulated the image of this café. It is a stillness that is also a performance of stillness itself, a stillness that is, in fact, a commodity.

This contradiction is the climate in which the Great Burnout characterizes our world.

After a period of celebration and rest, as soon as the calendar turns, we are expected to switch gears again. New Year's resolutions bloom with implausible optimism. Next year, we promise, we will focus on ourselves. Next year, we will slow down. Next year, we will exercise, meditate, sleep better, and work less. Next year, we will realign with our slowly aging bodies, relearn rituals of care, appreciate time, and be present. But even these desires are shaped by a system where "self-care" is easily absorbed into productivity culture. Care becomes another assignment, another improvement project, another scheduled achievement.

All of us feel this tension acutely. This year has been heavy on all participants of this exhibition, marked by exhaustion disguised as perseverance and performance. Is there a form of self-care outside of the regimes of neoliberal capitalism? Is there an outside at all? And for those of us shaped by the postsocialist condition, what legacies, hauntings, and aesthetics do we inherit when we try to rest?

*Dreaming over the Post-Burnout World* resonates deeply with the ambivalent nostalgia of Central and Eastern Europe, where rest carries contradictory histories. Under late socialism, leisure was a collective infrastructure: spas, sanatoriums, thermal baths, retreats were part of life and were more accessible to a wider public. Wellness was medical, social, prescribed. After 1989, it became largely privatized, aestheticized, and Westernized. What was once a right became

an aspiration. Our aim is not to romanticize this past but to bring attention to the peculiarities and the aesthetics of this special flavour and hauntings of Central-Eastern European wellness culture that some of the works of the Great Burnout, our defining age also evoke.

The shift above produced its own distinct visual language: small-town wellness centres with amateur wall paintings of Mediterranean beaches; naïve mosaics of dolphins, seashells, and sunsets; pastel murals of palm trees; tiled rooms that smell faintly of chlorine and longing. These spaces attempt to conjure an elsewhere – usually the Mediterranean, sometimes an imagined "West" – but always fall slightly short. They are simulacra, imitations of fantasies we were never fully able to access. Their charm lies in this failure: they are portals that never were and most probably never will be fully open. Walking into such a spa is like entering a collective dream stitched together out of postcards, TV ads, and the memory of someone's cousin who once holidayed in Pompeii or Bibione. The exhibition invites us to listen to this dream as it collapses under the weight of contemporary exhaustion.

The current exhibition by the artist collective Monika (Anna Chrtková, Matyáš Grimmich, Karolína Schön) is closely linked to their previous show in TIC Gallery, Brno where they started to experiment with the critical investigation as well as the aesthetics of wellness and spa culture. What is our relationship to these institutions of rest? What aspects of them are truly relaxing and for whom? Could we allow ourselves to truly do nothing? This time, the space of Galerie Avu transforms into a somewhat nostalgic, somewhat haunting, half-used, half-abandoned wellness facility, where both remains of a past spa and fragments of a future one are on display. The various readymade objects (sheets, soaps, a jacuzzi) as well as the documentary video snippets of empty spa spaces or the floorplans of the resorts the artists visited are surrounded by a sound installation.

The sound piece is based on the utopistic text *The Great Burnout* which was the artist's first attempt to summarize the start of a new era: the period of constant fatigue and exhaustion. It described the hamster's wheel of daily duties, our addiction to the constant grind and outlined a not-so unimaginable or distant future, where the continuation of this lifestyle won't be possible anymore. *"More and more of them (us) were sinking into a cloud of fatigue. Suddenly, it was impossible to hospitalise*

Monika

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*everyone. The psychiatrists had full waiting lists; they couldn't keep up with the surge, and they even began to collapse. There were no more institutions to put us in. The new age has begun. The Great Burnout". This time, excerpts from the text read by a narrator are mixed with other sounds, like the atmospheric bubbling of water, or the receptionist's voice, who can be seen as a guide for this imaginary wellness facility, but who also does not really care about our well-being. An annoying businessman appears as well, whose loud chatter everyone has to endure, which folds into a sound-collage, a cacophonous mesh-up which could be attributed to a collective figure, the general discussions, murmurs and gossip of the various guests. The exhibition uses existing field recordings and research based practice as a starting point, but with the sound installation and the minimalistic display, it also challenges our imagination: it creates a new, not-yet-existing wellness center, maybe a special place for the artworld community, cultural workers to finally articulate their needs and wishes.*

And where is Monika in all of this? Could these sounds be the voice of Monika herself, who could be considered as the embodiment of a collective feeling of being tired and exhausted? Or is she rather an observer, listening from the "outside" really trying to get some rest in this imaginary spa? Maybe the exhibition encourages us to connect with our "inner-Monika's", that part of ourselves, who feels drained and burnt out. Not hiding or suppressing it anymore, but starting a dialogue with it.

Judit Szalipszki and Flóra Gadó

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