

Visionary Structures From Johansons to Johansons

Exhibition

13.02.2015. – 31.05.2015.

Kārlis Johansons
Gustavs Klucis
Valdis Celms
Jānis Krievs
Artūrs Riņķis
Gints Gabrāns
Voldemārs Johansons

Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles
Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussel
Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels

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Visionary Structures From Johansons to Johansons

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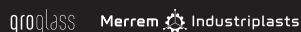
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Introduction

This exhibition traces a striking trajectory in Latvian art – a look at the most experimental and visionary artistic values of their day and their historical transformations. It is an encounter between artists and artworks belonging to different eras, yet allowing the viewer to perceive the legacy of ideas and common currents in the flow of art that have developed over time.

In the 1920s, artists Kārlis Johansons and Gustavs Klucis, who belonged to the Constructivists' group in Moscow, responded to the challenge for art to create a new way to materialise the dynamics of social life. They were interested in experiments, which searched for revolutionary forms, and were driven by confidence that art would be able to embody a new world. Today, the works of both artists are part of the international avant-garde.

The legacy of Constructivism and futuristic ideas returned to the spotlight in the 1970s, during the Cold War, when Latvia was one of the republics of the Soviet Union. There were several artists – among them, Valdis Celms, Jānis Krievs and Artūrs Riņķis – who were captivated by the quest for an alternative, ideal space and innovative forms. They came forth with surprising proposals for the residential environment in the city, in nature and even in outer space, which embodied the problems of the era and at the same time veered away from the real social space.

At the centre of the works of the youngest generation of artists in the exhibition – Gints Gabrāns and Voldemārs Johansons – are quests that instead of cosmic dimensions delve into micro-realities. Through aleatory organic forms and systemic, ideal structures they interpret the complex processes of both the visible and the invisible reality. The flow of energy and space of imagination are synthesised in these structures, uncovering new visionary worlds.



View of Constructivist Group's Part of the OBMOKhU Exhibition in Moscow, 1921

KÄRLIS JOHANSONS

Kārlis Johansons, also known in the West by his russified name Karl Ioganson (1890–1929), was the artist who developed his explorations of construction the furthest, becoming the most radical Constructivist of the early 20th century avant-garde art.

The course of World War One led Johansons to Moscow where he joined the Constructivist group, the members of which were engaged in lengthy discussions about the role of art and the artist after the revolution. They rejected preceding values of art and concluded that artists should become designer-engineers as part of the manufacturing process in factories. The new maxims were functionalism and efficiency.

Kārlis Johansons' most important legacy is a series of conceptual works which display the structure of things. He realised that the most important aspects of anything is its inner connections and the way it is put together. In his opinion, these connections were varieties of a spatial cross.

Nine of the 25 constructions in the Constructivist part of the renowned OBMOKhU (the Association of Young Artists) exhibit in 1921 in Moscow were Kārlis Johansons' work. Later a large part of this exhibit was included in an exhibition of Soviet Russian art in Berlin (*Erste Russische Kunstausstellung*) and photographs of the OBMOKhU exhibit were published in virtually all of the European avant-garde art publications, including teaching materials at the German Bauhaus, the most influential school of 20th century design.

The seeds of Kārlis Johansons' explorations germinated into what the world today calls tensegrity. It was developed further by designers The Bauhaus school and the renowned Black Mountain College in USA.

Construction A

1921 / 2013

The simplest, probably Johansons' first construction, consists of three wooden struts with right angle cross sections, held together by nine wires in tension. Geometrically centering three struts in a cross in three dimensional space requires each separate strut to be off-centre. The resulting form is visually both simple yet complicated, precisely because the separate elements are off center. The connection in the center is well-known to any builder who has connected a post and two beams. Johansons was aware of the hold-together synergy, created by the six connecting surfaces in the center and emphasized this by cutting out the part of the struts that was structurally not involved. In addition he was aware, that all twelve possible wire tension braces are not required and he only used nine, the minimum for this type of end bracing. No glue or fasteners in the centre are required.

Construction B

1921 / 2013

The surface connections in the centre of B are the same as in A. More extraneous material is removed, the square-with-a-part-removed strut cross section from A has become the cross section of an angle iron. The surface connections have been made with small bolts. The connection is repeated in a grid, and set on an angle, as if it were an exemplary part of a larger whole, showing a construction detail. The repetition of the six surface synergy connections creates a structure that needs no additional tension wire bracing. Three bolts suffice to maintain stability in all three dimensions.

Construction C

1921 / 2013

Imagine the same grid from B, made from square cross-sectioned wooden struts, but take out the three struts in the center. You are left with a structure that lacks stability. It is regained by the addition of six plywood bracing elements, and this structure begins to look like a part of a building.

Johansons did not consider his work art, and he felt that Constructivism would be better named construction, and that Constructivists were actually constructors, the Russian and Latvian word used synonymously for engineer. Paradoxically, the aesthetic qualities of Johansons' work are self-evident. He did sign his work and today we have no doubts that it is art.

Construction D

1921 / 2013

Working with different materials in different cross sections of simple geometric forms quite naturally led to struts with circular cross sections. But the work with round rods automatically eliminates the neat six-surface connection. The rods at best touch each other at only a point, so quite naturally Johansons returned to tension wire bracing, and, possibly tightening one wire too much or leaving another too slack, he realized that the same nine wires from A were enough to produce a stable cross of three round metal rods without any rod to rod touching. If you correctly wire the struts together they stay apart or, in other words, if you pull all the struts apart from each other with tensioned wires, they stay together.

It took years for the significance of Johansons's work to sink in. Structures made from isolated rods with tension end bracing later became known as 'tensegrity' structures. This construction from Kārlis Johansons was the world's first structure of this kind, and the development of ideas that started with Johansons have led to a new understanding about many different structures, including the human spine.

Construction E

1921 / 2013

This is Johansons' best known construction. Its picture was included in László Moholy-Nagy's Bauhaus book *Von Material zu Architektur*, published in Germany in 1929 and in USA later on (in translation as *The New Vision*). It became one of the most influential books of 20th century design.

Construction E, like D, consists of three metal rods, connected with wire, but the wires are only tensioned by gravity. Unlike D this construction is not stable, and if moved from its original position it can quite easily collapse. This is intentional: E is a kinetic object. Moving objects to artists in the early 20th century seemed to be superior to static objects. The movement added a touch of a type of fourth dimension, making the object more real.

Juris Sils

GUSTAVS KLUCIS

Gustavs Klucis (1895–1938) is one of the best-known representatives of the Russian avant-garde. After his studies in Riga and St Petersburg he was mobilized during the First World War and took part in the Russian revolution. Later he became part of the artistic avant-garde and joined the Constructivist group in Moscow, which engaged in formulating the new principles of art. In his search for revolutionary forms Klucis created both abstract compositions, which became architectonic forms and projects for the cities of the future, and politically inspired multifunctional structures. Klucis' most significant contribution was the development of photomontage – he saw its potential to represent the dynamics of post-revolution socialist life with maximum effect.

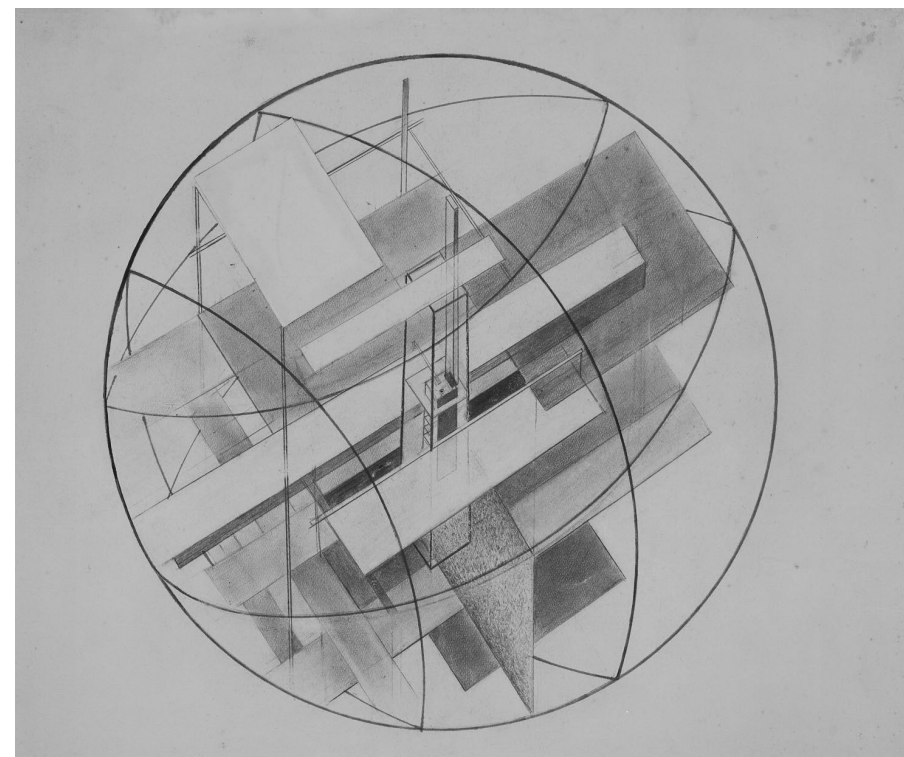
However, the artist himself became victim of the Stalinist regime – Klucis was arrested and shot in 1938 and although he was exonerated in 1956, his name and creative legacy have only gradually regained prominence.

The abstract compositions of Gustavs Klucis' earliest works became visionary architectonic forms and spatial constructions that created potentially realisable urban projects and showcased hitherto nonexistent realities and cities of the future. Later on his experiments in search for revolutionary forms were transformed into motifs and images of agitation and propaganda merging the boundaries of fine and applied art. Information stands, radio-orators, platforms and screens evolved as principally new multifunctional structures, which combined Constructive logic with artistic expression and the ideas of dynamism.

These forms and prototype ideas could have potentially been realised in practice as peculiar agitation structures, grandiose architectonic edifices, sculptures and environmental transformation concepts.

Ultimately they could take over and replace the activity of human beings.

The celebration of Socialist construction works depicted in Gustavs Klucis' photomontages was the culmination of the aesthetisation of politics and the ideology of art – Soviet leaders towering over the masses of workers jointly forging the collective might of Soviet modernisation.



Gustavs Klucis. *Construction*. 1919–1920
Collection of Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga

VALDIS CELMS

Valdis Celms (born 1943) was one of the leading artists of the kinetic and visionary art of the 1970s Latvia. Together with his confederates, he created exhibitions and projects dedicated to innovative explorations and avant-garde solutions that were inspired by utopian ideas and included expansive objects for the urban environment. These were based on accentuated form as well as theoretically and conceptually expounded solutions. Central to his work is the interpretation of the legacy of the Constructivists, in particular Gustavs Klucis, and a concurrent interest in both the past and the future.

Positron (1976)

The work was created as a model for a large-scale kinetic sculpture envisioned for the *Positron* electronics factory in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. It proposed the creation of an artistic and psycho-relaxing object, which would inspire positive emotions in the employees of the factory. The project was not realised in situ, nevertheless during the lengthy process of development different variations and a number of works were created – spatial and light objects, sculptures and photomontages. “Positron” also served as a subject of research and experiments devoted to exploring the possibilities of kinetic art and the interpretations of environment, natural structures, spatial organisation and movement, as well as the capabilities of human visual perception.

Visionary proposals (1978)

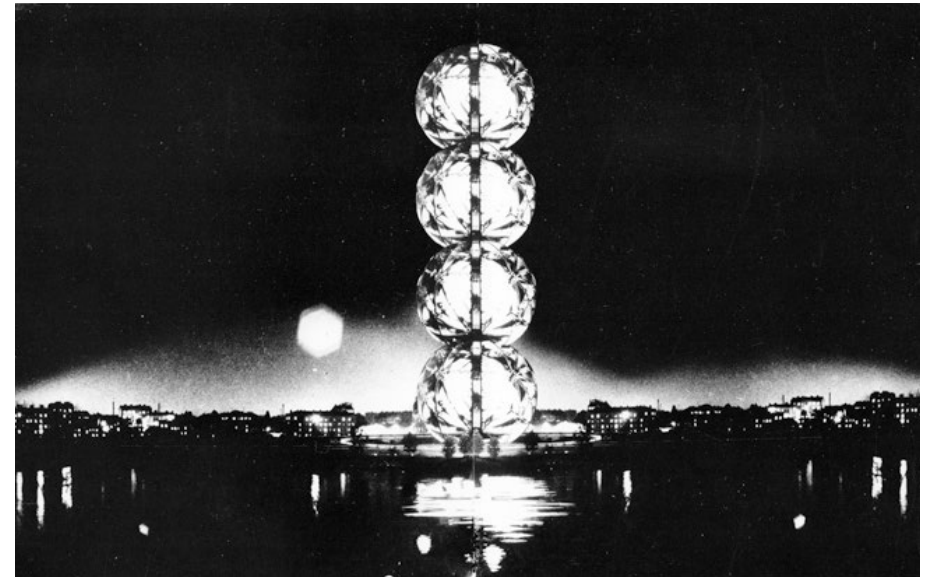
The motif of the kinetic sphere by Valdis Celms was developed in visionary environmental and architecture proposals. These proposals suggested unexpected solutions for urban and rural living spaces, and even for outer space. Although seemingly unrealistic, these proposals contained constructive ideas and a multi-functional approach – a grandiose information display over a residential district, light sculptures that accentuate and orientate urban space or, moving beyond the realms of reality – the popular artists’ quarters of creation as living capsules in outer space. These proposals manifested techno-utopianism inspired by the ideas of early constructivist artists and the exploration of current advances in science fiction and the scientific-technological revolution.

Bizarred Riga (1978)

The collectively created series of photomontages were ironic critical observations of the Soviet daily life, which highlighted various issues of the surrounding social and urban environment – disorganised and degraded cityscape and the contrast between contemporary living and the environment of the past, imprisonment in narrow living as well as cogitation space. The authors played with the visual in a witty and paradoxical way instead of applying didactic criticism. These observations were made while roaming around Riga and taking photographs, later supplementing these documentary images with visual and conceptual “bizarreness” – graphic insertions, repetitions, changes of scale. The authors were inspired by Gustavs Klucis’ approach to photomontage, concentrating on an idea and not the possibilities of formal or technical means.

Daugava (1974)

One of the early works of light kinetics by Valdis Celms synthesises technological approach with a meditative mood. The current of the River *Daugava* is cyclical and yet changing, it creates a counterpoint between mechanical repetition and the varying flow of colour and light similar to the flow of water through natural and manmade technological forces, rapids and hydroelectric power-plants. Along with poetic associations such as the “river of destiny” or the metre of folk songs, the author also highlights the socio-political context. “The submerging of Staburags [cliff] was on my mind, but visually, a screen, it is a conceptually meditative work.”



Valdis Celms. *Kinetic Accent – Tower*. 1978
Collection of Latvian Artists’ Union

JĀNIS KRIEVS

Artist Jānis Krievs (born 1942) has participated in several innovatory processes related to art, music and film, as well as other fields. In the early 1970s, he experimented with abstraction in painting, op art and pop art compositions of dynamic forms, although his work was censored as 'inappropriate' by the Soviet establishment. He then applied the principles of form composition developed in painting to actual physical space and urban environment.

His most significant works were created during the 1970s in the field of the so-called complex design topical at that time – in collaboration with other artists, designers, engineers and programmers, he created intricate projects of potential solutions for effective organisation of social space and urban environment.

A multi-programme light system in the clock tower of Riga Central Railway Station (1980 / 2014)

The light system of the clock tower, as well as the station reconstruction project itself, constitutes one of the examples of the so-called complex design proposals that was actually realised in practice. The project was planned to coincide with the Summer Olympics in Moscow in 1980 in hope that international visitors travelling via Riga, the capital of Latvia, by train would be able to appreciate it.

A built in strip of kinetic light further accentuated the clock tower, which had already become a landmark of the city and was visible from a distance. Its visual appearance and the rhythm were synchronised with the flow of time, incorporating the benchmarks of that age – aesthetics, dynamics and precision. Countless sources of light inside the electronic-dynamic light system formed mutable geometric images with intervals of minutes and seconds. Each light programme lasted 60 seconds and had a decorative as well as functional purpose – it was part of the city's time system and allowed visitors and commuters to keep track of the passage of time.

The complex electronic programme varied from a 23 minute long interval on weekdays to 256 minutes on Sundays and public holidays.



Riga Central Railway Station reconstruction project. 1980
Photo: Indriķis Stūrmanis

ARTŪRS RIŅĶIS

Artūrs Riņķis (born 1942) applied the principles of synaesthesia and synthesis to shape the technical execution of his work and influence the aesthetic and emotional perception. He explored the elements that interact with one another and affect our sight, hearing, rational and emotional perception simultaneously such as the flow of air, light, darkness, colour, music, water and other natural materials and rhythms. These painterly and yet technologically complex solutions were inspired by both, utopian ideas and nature – sky, land, sea, the flow of water and the genesis of light whilst also reflecting the “awareness of the world and the Universe” and the illusion of infinity.

Nako Inea (early 1980s / 2010)

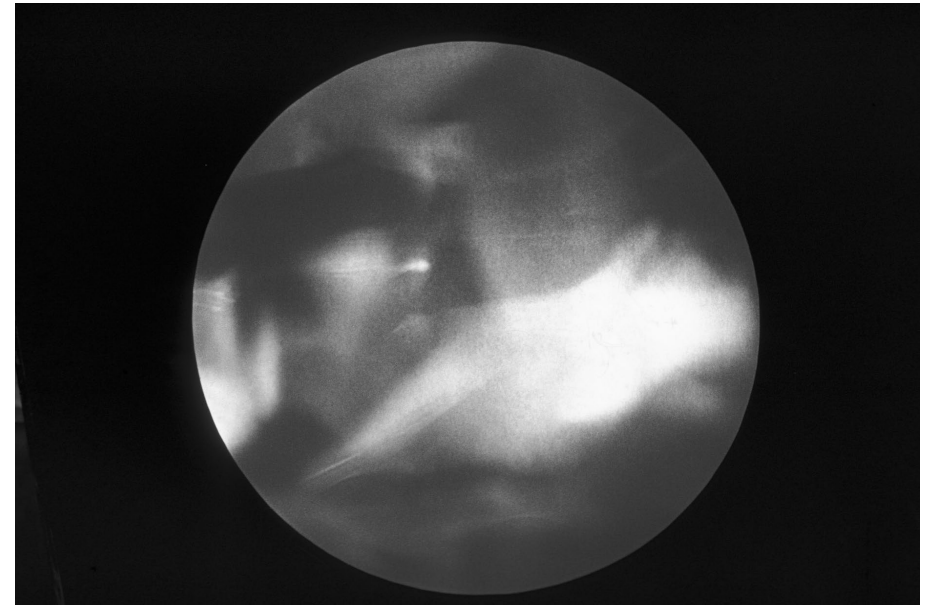
Nako Inea – two words in a nonexistent language that were ringing in the artist’s mind while he created this work. The kinetic installation is a visual representation of seemingly chaotically organised multi-directional movements, which project the flow of thoughts and the interconnections of the mind’s complex and at the same time logical conclusions.

In a Dream (1983 / 2014)

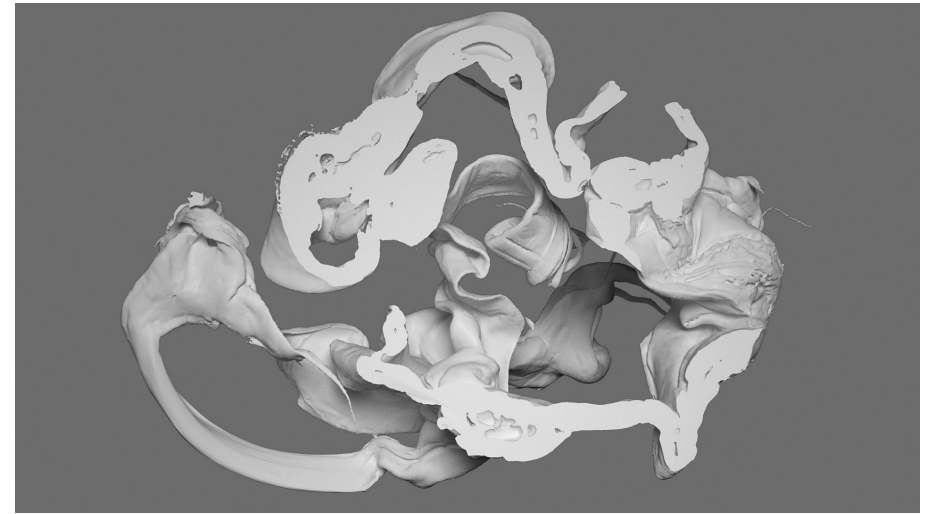
Created in the early 1980s from a series of kinetic paintings, this work is a succession of abstract forms, which reflect the indeterminateness of dream visions. The combination of changing colour nuances provides a wide range of associations produced by the brain during sleep and altered states of consciousness.

Mandala of the Universe (1984 / 2012)

Originally the idea for this work was realised as a kinetic information screen near the Planetarium or the House of Knowledge, which during the Socialist time was located inside the Nativity of Christ Cathedral in Riga. It simultaneously referred to a romantic vision of the space age and a pantheistic interpretation of the world – “the infinity of the starry sky and its absolute calm, which kindle interest in the inexplicable nature of eternity, the secret of being and the universe as a mandala, which calls and repels, which does not let free.”



Artūrs Riņķis. Kinetic painting *EMU*. 1984.



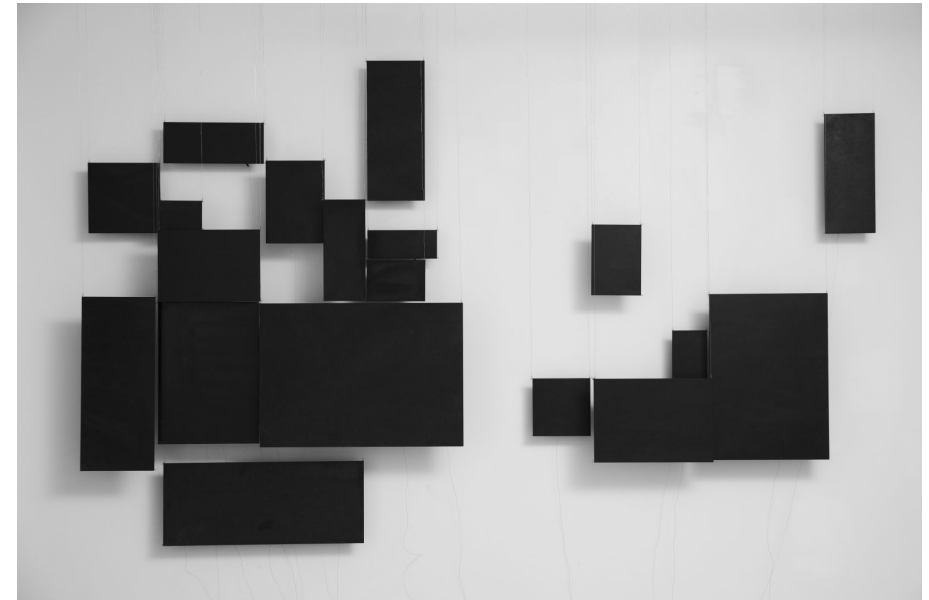
Gints Gabrāns. *Out of Nowhere*. 2010–2014

GINTS GABRĀNS

Gints Gabrāns (born 1970) integrates the latest achievements of technology and science in his works. These are experiments of art as well as perception and relate to the aspects of reality concealed from our vision. These experiments allow us to see how complicated structures are spontaneously created in a simple physical or natural formal process determined by chaos and the processes of self-organisation. The conceptual reference points applied to these works are determined chaos, open and self-creating systems, the synthesis and transformations of motion and energy. The confluence of scientific and non-scientific perception gives rise to awareness of the basic substances of art and reality.

Out of Nowhere (2010 – 2014)

The plastic sculptures have been made using a simple physical process of pouring liquefied polyethylene into cold water. Thus spontaneously, as a result of the principle of self-organisation, complex forms and structures are created. This process resembles the Latvian tradition of casting "fortune" on the night of Winter solstice by pouring liquid lead into cold water. It reveals a form-creation process which is close to nature, therefore it is easy to see organic, natural shapes, lines and ornaments in these objects. In nature such spontaneous processes of form-creation are managed by evolution, which selects the "working" models. The artist has simulated a similar strategy in creating the plastic sculptures by selecting, pairing and partially fusing the best object samples through four generations from 2010 to 2013. The power of evolution has been applied as an algorithm for the perfection of artificially created forms.



Voldemārs Johansons. From series *Emissions*. 2011

VOLDEMĀRS JOHANSONS

The work of Voldemārs Johansons (born 1980) merges his interests in art, sound and science. He creates experimental projects that synthesize art and sound and explore diverse phenomena representing the experience through audible forms and spatiality of sound as well as building environments from visual and acoustic structures.

In his work the borders of visible and invisible perception dissolve creating a perceptual situation where rationally built spatio-visual order and irrational yet objective temporal processes overlap. "Art has the privilege of being able to speak about the unproven, the unrecognised, thus broadening the horizons of thinking," comments the author.

Op. 34 (Emission). From series *Emissions* (2014)

Op. 34 is a sculptural composition of granite surfaces, which uses the resonance properties of stone to create a perceptible acoustic record of the waves/particles of ionising radiation.

The installation consists of black granite planes formed in a specified system of proportions. The choice of material is determined by its density and distinct resonant properties, which make the shape of the stone audible.

The *Emissions* series create an experiential situation of perception, where the rationally built spatio-visual order overlaps with the irrational yet objectively existing and physically observable sequence in time. In the installation *Op. 34* the observations of rhythm take place in real time. The applied rhythmical sequence is a reflection of the waves/particles of ionising radiation crossing the exhibition space as a result of emission. A Geiger-Müller counter is used to record the particles of ionising radiation – gamma rays and high-energy beta rays. When a high-energy particle crosses the electric field of the Geiger receptor, an avalanche discharge process takes place allowing the presence of a particle to be detected. The installation transforms this electric impulse into another impulse, which causes movement of the electromagnetic solenoid and oscillates the stone surface creating an acoustically observable event.

FOCUS ON LATVIA

Cultural programme MUSIC, EXPO, THEATRE & CINEMA

BOZAR EXPO

13.02.2015 > 31.05.2015

Visionary Structures. From Johansons to Johansons

14 & 15.02.2015 - 14:00 > 16:00

Workshop Visionary Structures (8+) BOZAR STUDIO

13.02.2015 > 31.05.2015

Ola Vasiljeva – The Limp of A Letter

05.05.2015 screening

BOZAR MUSIC

16.01.2015 - 20:00

National Orchestra of Belgium

Karel Mark Chichon, direction | leiding – Elīna Garanča, mezzo

25.02.2015 - 20:00

Gidon Kremer – Kremerata Baltica

Bridges to Bach

Gidon Kremer, violon | viol – Evgeny Koroliov, piano – Anna Vinnitskaya, piano –

Ljupka Hadzigeorgieva, piano

Oeuvres de | Werken van | Works by Valentin Silvestrov, Giya Kancheli,

Johann Sebastian Bach, Stevan Tickmayer

26.02.2015 - 20:00

Gidon Kremer

Gidon Kremer, violon | viol – Giedrė Dirvanauskaitė, violoncelle | cello –

Oleg Maisenberg, piano – Anna Vinnitskaya, piano

Oeuvres de | Werken van | Works by Mosey Weinberg, Alfred Schnittke,

Sergey Rachmaninov

→ Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles | Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel | Royal Brussels Conservatory

27.02.2015 - 20:00

Kremerata Baltica

Gidon Kremer, violon | viol - Martha Argerich, piano –

Alexei Mochalov, basse | bas – Sergei Nakariakov, trompette | trompet

Oeuvres de | werken van | Works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Dmitry Shostakovich

12.03.2015 - 20:00

Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest

Andris Nelsons, direction | leiding – Alexei Ogrintchouk, hautbois | hobo

Oeuvres de | Werken van | Works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Dmitry Shostakovich

15.03.2015 - 11:00

Laima Jansone Trio

Laima Jansone, electro-acoustic kokles, kantele, voix | stem –

Andris Grunte, double bass, electric bass – Artis Orubs, drums,

zarbugans, vibraphone | vibrafoon, electric pad

27.04.2015 - 10:00

Gidon Kremer Q&A

→ Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles | Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel | Royal Brussels Conservatory

27.04.2015 - 20:00

Kremerata Baltica

Gidon Kremer, direction | leiding, violon | viol – Mischa Maisky,

violoncelle | cello

Oeuvres de | Werken van | Works by Aleksandr Raskatov, Pyotr Tchaikovsky

28.04.2015 - 20:00

Gidon Kremer & Daniil Trifonov

Gidon Kremer, violon | viol - Daniil Trifonov, piano

Oeuvres de | Werken van | Works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Moisey Weinberg,

Franz Schubert

29.04.2015 - 20:00

Kremerata Baltica

Gidon Kremer, direction | leiding, violon | viol – Kremerata Baltica

→ Flagey

04.06.2015 - 20:00

Iveta Apkalna, orgue | orgel

Oeuvres de | Werken van | Works by Franz Liszt, Thierry Escaich, Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus

Mozart

→ Cathédrale Saint-Michel | St.-Michielskathedraal | St-Michael's cathedral

15.06.2015 - 20:00

Baiba Skride & Friends

Baiba Skride, violon | viol – Gergana Gergova, violon | viol –

Brett Dean, alto | altviool – Nils Mönkemeyer, alto | altviool –

Alban Gerhardt, violoncelle | cello

Oeuvres de | Werken van | Works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Brett Dean,

Johannes Brahms

→ Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles | Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel | Royal Brussels Conservatory

BOZAR THEATRE

13 > 14.02.2015 – 20:30

Sonja

Alvis Hermanis / The New Riga Theatre

BOZAR CINEMA

21.05.2015

En présence de | In aanwezigheid van | In the presence of Laila Pakalnina

19:00 *The Chimney [Skurstenis]* – Laila Pakalnina (LV, 2013, 54')

21:00 *Short Film about Life [Īsfilma par dzīvi]* & *Pizzas [Picas]* – Laila Pakalnina

(LV, 2014, 2' & LV, 2014, 66')

