



**Viktoria Draganova: João and Rosa, you opened The Green Parrot one year ago on the empty second floor of a five-storey building in Barcelona that was to be converted into a hotel. What came first: the premises or the concept?**

*João Laia and Rosa Lleó:* In our case it was the premises. Rosa was looking for a place to work, an office, and if possible somewhere where things could happen. But she was quite reluctant to pay rent because, on the one hand, the situation for cultural workers in Spain is extremely precarious and, on the other hand, there is a lot of empty space in the city that belongs to banks, the Council, and so on. It is an unfair situation, so Rosa spent a long time talking to people and trying to find a space for free that she could use for a certain period of time. Finally she got to know the owners of the hotel and the building. Using private property for art purposes is not very common in Spain, although there are some cases. We had both lived in the UK before and cases such as the Gallery House was an interesting story which inspired us. In 1972 an art dealer and an artist took a Victorian building – which would come to be known as Gallery House – in West London that was going to be renovated, and showed on each floor the work of four different artists. One of those artists was Marc Camille Chaimowicz, who took part in our inaugural exhibition, *The World of Interiors*.

There was also our joint interest in starting a long-term program. As independents, we were really keen on experimenting with a different model instead of the one-off projects we were usually involved in until then. Before starting the space, we both wanted to develop a program in time, create discourse through different projects, and stimulate dialogue. When Rosa found the space we got the chance and started working on what became The Green Parrot.

**How has the recent crisis affected art institutions and “small” alternative spaces like yours in Barcelona and, more generally, in Spain?**

During the 1990s there was a construction boom in the whole country and many museums were built in major cities but also in quite remote places. Then, the financial crisis that started around five years ago hit the cultural sector very strongly. This coincided with a right-wing nationalist government in the city and in the region, which saw culture as something dispensable. Many small museums and art centers became financially unsustainable and the majority closed down or continued to run – but very precariously. Other public institutions which once had interesting programs are being run by second-class technicians who program to simply defend their own political agendas. Faced with this void, several independent collectives of artists and curators decided to create their own small-scale organizations. In Barcelona there are some artist-run initiatives such as El Palomar, Fireplace, Halfhouse, and Bar. You have also Salon in Madrid and Combo in Córdoba, to name a few. They are all quite new, just like us, so maybe the crisis context actually triggered a bigger activity from artists and curators.

And we are living at a very interesting moment in the city

right now, with a new mayor coming from a newly founded citizen platform who is expected to change a lot of things. Let's see what happens, she has only been elected, but there are winds of hope in the air! The city of Barcelona is small and everything is interrelated, so if public institutions have an interesting program Barcelona will once again be on the international map of contemporary art. If we have an interesting policy on arts and culture, mid-career artists will stay and produce in the city – something that is not happening now. There will be more initiatives and the ecosystem will grow bigger and consequently more interesting. So of course everyone stands to gain from a renewed political will to support art in general and more experimentation.

**As of this time next year, you will be flying around, right?**

When we started talking about our present joint project us, you already knew that you will be leaving your space.

Yes, from Easter 2016 we will lose our physical space. Then we plan to explore different temporalities with a touring show, daylong events, and so on. We are a curatorial platform that wants to experiment with different models according to our situation and context.

We liked the figure of the green parrot because it is quite poetic and flexible: it is a tropical species that has adapted to the Mediterranean climate and settled in Barcelona. But it can also fly somewhere else if necessary. So it's not so much about abandonment than about being flexible to the conditions we find ourselves in.

We would of course love to have a space again.

**In November you will host a workshop where you have invited several small art spaces similar to yours to talk about common issues. Is it about establishing a network based on similar problems? Is there anything you would like to make politically stronger?**

The idea started out after we took into consideration our current context and how different and precarious it is from Northern Europe. We do not have any public support or it is very scarce, but we are not South America or other regions where private foundations are the ones creating the funding networks. We are somehow in-between, we have a similar working ethos, so that is why we thought that maybe getting ourselves together would make us more powerful. The idea of “south” works more symbolically than geographically, so yes, there are many other regions that can engage with these conditions.

**As an alternative art space, what do you think about commercial activity? To me it seems to be a not easy task, right?**

In the past we made some attempts at commercial activity, selling art. But for us as curators it feels right to work with content and form regardless of its marketable possibilities. If your final aim is to sell, your priority is a completely different one and you have to work with a completely different set of variables. Doing both things is a hard task and we are not in a privileged context where this can happen. So we are not going commercial, but of course we would like to have a stronger network of collectors that could support



our program in different ways, rather than through buying artwork. To us, an important funding tool are the editions that we usually produce from each exhibition. In this case, the aim is to sell; it is our priority to work together with the artist to find a marketable product that will help us finance our projects. The people who buy our editions usually know us already and support us in this way, be they gallery owners, small collectors, friends, directors of foundations or other institutions.

**There are also more and more art fairs that enable the participation of non-commercial art spaces – what are the incentives to participate in them?**

Nowadays art fairs bring together a lot of different people. For us, doing a fair abroad means having visibility internationally. We are very aware of what we represent, so we try to play around with the idea of the market without mimicking the status of a commercial gallery by selling specific objects. This was actually our second experience within this context. In October 2014 we were in Paris at a fair parallel to FIAC, and we were also part of a meeting at ARCO earlier this year.

**How does your idea to start moving around relate to your curatorial practice? What should curatorial practice be like?**

From our standpoint, one should always try to experiment. One should challenge what one does. So it is sad that we are losing our space because one gets attached to people and places; but then, it is positive because one has to review constantly what one does and not get too comfortable in what one's doing. So it's a bitter sweet feeling, but we are quite positive about it.

We cannot say what curators should do, as our job is too subjective and linked to affects; but we do enjoy seeing challenging models, spaces opening in different places not in order to be fashionable, but in order to really make a difference in their context, working with challenging practices that also challenge us to rethink our curatorial practice. It is also important to know how to disappear or move on if you are becoming too safe and/or predictable.

**The Green Parrot** is a non-profit organisation dedicated to contemporary art practices founded in 2014 by Rosa Lleó and João Laia in Barcelona. Recent exhibitions include solo presentations by Teresa Solar Abboud, Basim Magdy and André Romão. The project opened with a trilogy of exhibitions that brought together topics related to design, economy and sociology in an attempt to understand the shifting dynamics of human-object relationships showing artists such as Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Lua Coderch, Diogo Evangelista, David Ferrando Giraut, Patrick Hough, Henning Lundqvist or David Mutiloa, among others.

<http://www.thegreenparrot.org>

This conversation has been published online on [www.swimmingpoolprojects.org](http://www.swimmingpoolprojects.org) on occasion of **us**, an exhibition in collaboration with I: project space (Beijing), Jenifer Nails (Frankfurt), LambdaLambdaLambda (Pristina), Life Sport (Athens), Linda (Sofia), Opening Times (London), Peach (Rotterdam), and The Green Parrot (Barcelona) at SWIMMING POOL from 7 November to 15 November 2015. Organised by Viktoria Draganova. With the financial support of Stolichna Programa „Kultura“ and Austrian Embassy Sofia as well as with the generous support of all invited art spaces.

## **SWIMMING POOL**

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SWIMMING POOL is a space for art in Sofia. It hosts artistic and curatorial projects as well as readings, screenings and performances. Its premises are located on a rooftop in the city center of Sofia. Built in 1939, they consist of inner spaces as well as a terrace with a swimming pool situated in the middle. Director of Swimming Pool is Viktoria Draganova.