

RADICAL PLAY

Drawing on the wall with Dan Perjovschi

by Sara De Beer

Dan Perjovschi is standing on a ladder, He is drawing the word, future. The letter 'u' forms a valley, and a little stick figure of a person looks to be falling into the hole. "It looks a bit brutal, no?" he asks of the result, the confident line, black marker drawn straight onto the wall. When Dan visits a new place to work, he makes it his artistic practise to become what he calls a regular tourist. "I am not looking to present the Biggest Truth," he capitalises the words with his hands, invokes the metaphor of truth as a rock. "These are first impressions," he indicates to the drawings on the walls around us. "I visualise these impressions into a sort of logo, you could say."

There is nothing brutal about Dan Perjovschi drawing. The immediate, clear, line which he makes without faltering. His steady hand. The room is unforgiving. He is as calm as a monk drawing in the sand. But later, as we are walking through the room, he pulls his hood up over his head and hunches his shoulders, like a boxer psyching himself up for the match. His drawings are a brave stand against the white wall.

"This space is so big, and I don't have that much time." Dan will have been working in the studio for six days by the date of the opening. This is how he came up with the idea of the future room at the A4 Arts Foundation. It cannot be completed, and remains open to what it does not yet contain. "The idea is, where are you in the future? What role will you play?"

South Africa has eleven official languages. Already the Afrikaans is up: Toekoms, the Xhosa, next will come Zulu. There's Greek, Chinese, Arabic and Japanese. Dan is at the computer, he is trying to translate future into Hebrew. He beckons to A4's director Josh Ginsburg. "I need your help with this." Dan is easy to be around. I am sitting on the floor, Josh is staring at the walls with his arms crossed across his chest. "It looks to have been taped, and filled in," the artist Kyle Morland says, taking a photograph of the word, Viitor. 'Future' in Dan's native Romanian.

I worry that to write about his work is to go against his process. His outcomes are distilled ideas. "I have these elements that I come back to again and again and then I adapt them to the site, to the place I am in." The drawings speak for themselves. Does he think there is any value to writing about his work? "It can be done," is his reply.

This answer is a testament to Dan Perjovschi's collaborative nature. He is interested in the people around him. "I learn about the place I am in through the conversations I have," he encourages, adding, "with people like you." His conversation is brim-full with the presence of his wife, the artist Lia Perjovschi, and with his artistic collaborators and friends. One has the impression of sitting in a room populated by Dan's people.

His is a freeing presence to be around. "My art is based on the experience. Making it, and failing." This easy relationship to mistake making is of the jazz musician, the improviser, riffing off a potential error and transforming it into something else. This way of working gives permission to everyone around him to do the same. "Art is something alive. It is immediate. Collecting art, buying and selling it, this all places limitations on it, do you understand?"

I understand why he is held in such deep esteem by students in his country. He

is a natural teacher. Part of his practise entails what he terms 'unpaid commissions' - he creates slogans and pictures for protest action in Romania that can be printed freely off of the internet and distributed towards the cause. He updates a piece of public wall alongside the State Theatre Company in Sibiu in Transylvania with his take on global newsworthiness. Called Horizontal Newspaper, it is another 'unpaid commission.' For tools, he uses the remains of the simple black markers leftover from his commissioned projects. Once a year, the town council paints over the wall and he can start anew. The theatre company pays for the wall's upkeep should it begin to age or crumble.

Dan's artwork in Claire Bishop's book *Radical Museology* is what prompted Josh to invite him to A4 Arts. Cape Town has seen the sudden building and opening of public-facing art centres in the last two years, initiating a complex intersection with private funding. "I used to be very critical of art museums," says Dan, "but these days I find myself defending them, because they are under threat, and because they are still a space to look at art. Primarily, that is their purpose, not to sell it, as is the galleries' work."

Marius Babias, director of the New Berlin Arts Association, says that Perjovschi's use of a reduced graphic language gives him the freedom to respond quickly and effectively. He can adapt to the changing

environments that he finds himself in. Dan's directive is that the work he makes in museum spaces must be erased. Josh shows me a book of his drawings being painted over, the black marker being scraped off the walls. The marker is closest, Dan says, to evoking the text of newsprint.

What remains once the traces of his art have been wiped away are the newspapers he creates. They form part of the project at A4 arts, hanging delicately from the walls of the studio, roosting like slumbering homing pigeons with the dailies under their feathers. "The yellowest is oldest, and they go from there to whitish," Dan points out, as a way of ordering the chronology.

I am sitting with Nisha Von Carnap. We have the question of how to put Dan's works into more words before us – whether a page of dialogue between Dan and Josh, that can be read as a script, featuring single lines, and plenty of space on the page – or a cleaner idea, a single page of Dan's quotations.

But in the end both seem contrived, somehow too 'arty', which would undo his direct communication.

In the end, what is necessary is an attempt: to bring the energy of Dan's artistic process to the writing about his work. The language should be honest,

and plain. The other people in the room should be acknowledged, and brought into the story. There is place to play.

Later, Dan tells me that he doesn't really believe the line to be brutal. "The revolution prefers something very direct." He considers his work more marginal. The message is subtle, necessitating a double-take. The drawings work together in concert, but can be extracted as a single element, say, in a photograph or in the take-away zines that he creates as part of the exhibition. There's the potential to zoom in close to an image, or take the far-sighted view.

Positioned near the entrance, he has drawn a camera crossed out. No Photographs. He laughs. Another sign pokes fun at selfie culture. "The irony of it is that it all looks so good on instagram" says Josh. "Yes!" Dan agrees, "It does work very well for the two second attention span."

It's Dan's way to play with our impulses, to make ironies from our actions, as he invites us to participate in his artistic production.

Notes:

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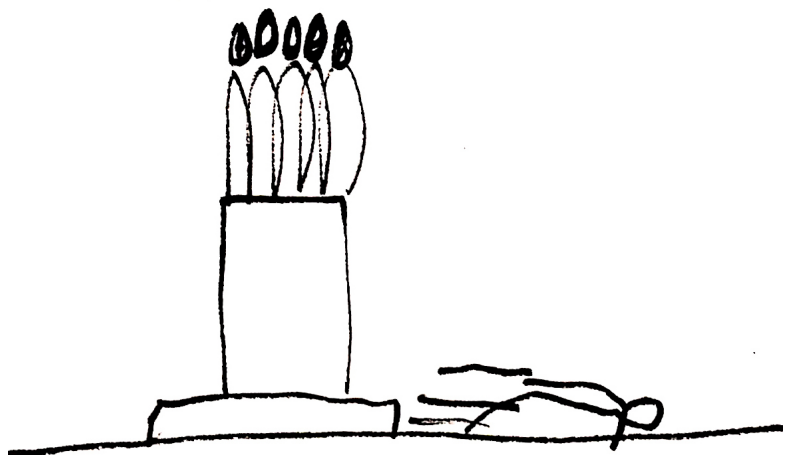
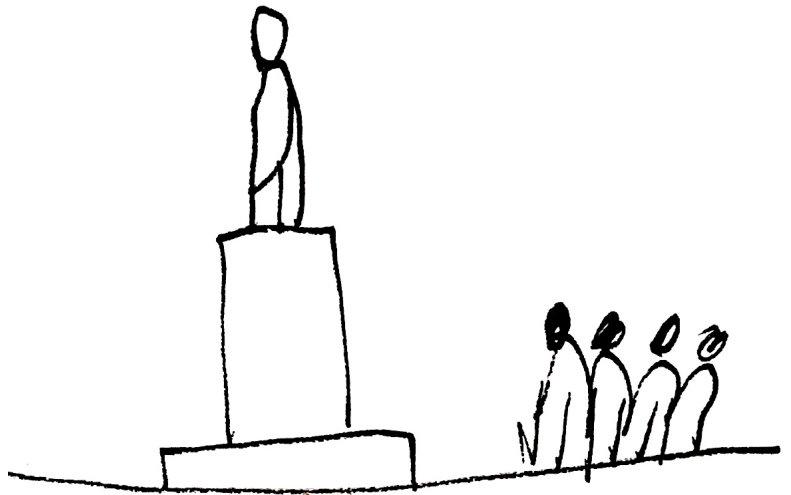
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Preparatory sketch from Dan's notebook