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Gallery hours Tue – Fri 1pm-6pm (Tue till 7pm)

The Bureau of Melodramatic Research: *Alien Passions*

March 07 → 28, 2014
curated by František Zachoval
opening: March 06, 6pm
workshop: March 10 - 11, 5 - 8pm (Academy of Fine Arts Prague)

Alien Passions, a solo show of the art collective The Bureau of Melodramatic Research (Irina Gheorghe and Alina Popa)*, introduces for the first time a trilogy of works: *Protect Your Heart at Work* (2012), *Lovegold. Contemporary Alchemy* (2013), and *Written on the Wind* (2014), which is the latest from the series.

The trilogy investigates the role of melodrama's key elements - emotions - in contemporary social mechanisms. At the core of these works is the effort needed to follow and capture the momentum of economic changes in a context which uses *emotional* capital in the process of production.** The title refers to the way Marx's concept of alienation plays out in contemporary economy but also to alien, weird, unhuman forms of affectivity in the age of the Anthropocene.

Protect Your Heart at Work (2012, HD video, 28 min) was created using the vocabulary of work health-and-safety instructions during a residency in the Centre for Contemporary Art at Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw. The video focuses on post-industrial economics, where goods are immaterial and feelings of fun and personal satisfaction are put to work to create value. The first part of the trilogy demonstrates how to acquire this attitude, which is nowadays essential in the work process. The thought underlying the work could be connected to what is called a theory of *media of success* (Erfolgsmedien), whose main feature is highly efficient communication skills that can, under certain conditions, be transformed into an efficient tool of manipulation. In the artists' video these are subverted by instructions for adopting a perfect smile.***

The video *Lovegold. Contemporary Alchemy* (2013, HD video, 25 min, premiere) makes use of a cooking programme as a framing device, proposing cosmic cooking as a model for today's material-immaterial economy which does not start or end with the human element. The work articulates the significance of a love-gold composite in the dynamics of a society desiring positive economic results and comfort. Cooking is a metaphor for *creativity, upbringing and production*, while the qualities of love are equated with gold. *Love is the new gold.*****

The trilogy concludes with introducing *Written on the Wind* (work-in-progress, 2014), a future performance using the structure of a weather forecast program. One of the main characteristics of the melodramatic genre was the emotional charge of its characters pitted against nature, and the name *Written on the Wind* refers to the notable film by Douglas Sirk from 1956. The broader context of global warming and climate change recasts emotions as alien forces coming from the non-human like uncontrollable demonic possession. At the opening visitors can engage in small talk about the weather with the Bureau.

The artists' stay in the Czech Republic is supported by the Romanian Cultural Institute in Prague and by the Academy of Fine Arts Prague.



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Further Details:

Workshop:

Irina Gheorghe and Alina Popa will hold a series of presentations on the affective modulations of contemporary politics and the emotional performance of labour in the current economy. The discussion will then be expanded to the way new strands of thought such as speculative realism and object-oriented ontology open up political economy, activism and labour to an inhuman, great outdoors through alien, anonymous, and dreadful passions.

* The Bureau of Melodramatic Research is an institution that defines itself by contemporary social concerns. The group's research moves between labour and the political environment, where you can find the strong influence of melodrama. The group was founded in 2009 and has been active both in Romania and internationally. Recently the group has participated in the following exhibitions and residencies: BAK art centre Utrecht (2013); MUMOK Vienna (2013); MNAC Museum of Contemporary Art (2013); Depo Istanbul (2013); Salonul de Proiecte Bucharest (2012); Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw (2012) and many others.

** The Bureau of Melodramatic Research responds to the current discussion that evaluates whether traditional economic principles based on trust are still viable in the present. Economic pillars that were built upon trust have been gradually shown to have rather uncertain foundations, but now if we think of the increased role of risk in contemporary economy, venture capital etc uncertainty has become central. The artists loosely follow re-groupings of economic strategies and contribute to the contemporary debate with new ideas and models. For example, to understand economics it is necessary to look at human capacity in its *whole* (its being/presence) and its positive emotions and empathy. The artists' subversive appropriation of educational and instructional formats in various media freely interprets current social trends.

*** *The media of success* are also described as communication media, according to the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, and they are *power, money, love, art and truth*. Their common attribute is that they force us to claim ownership of something: for example to buy a product, order a service or convince us to adopt ideas and opinions as our own. The artists' instructions lead us to acquire a *smile*, creating an important value of the present – vitality, but how to get protection for this capitalization of vitality? *The body makes our industry flourish*, our mimicry and our *body* influence and create our prosperity; or *our body is the heart of the production*.

**** The quotation could be connected to the former social function of love which was one of the main tools of religious institutions and, in fact, an antidote to capitalist production. The remarkable difference of this position and of our understanding of love can be traced in the story of *Hans in Luck* (Hans im Glück) from the Brothers Grimm Stories, where *love* for the homeland is stronger than a lump of gold, which John earns after working for seven years, but gradually wastes it all away on the way back home. A hundred-year-old human experience shows that some things can't be bought because they are naturally in conflict with this as a concept. For example, the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann mentions that when we think we can buy everything for money (gold) we are mistaken because we have known since the Middle Ages that passionate *love* can't be bought, yet nowadays *love* is considered a tool and part of production.

**** At the same time the contradictory role of gold/money has emerged lately; its function used to be to control protest and troubles, but at the same time it has been acknowledged that money produces human uncertainty. The paradox is supported by consumers' attitudes, who don't seem to realize that if they use money they evidently accept the insecurity. The film formulates these and comparative risks which are a defining sign of the present.