Galéria Jána Koniarka

12.12. 2025 - 28.02.2026

Park of Culture and Sighs

Curated by: Zuzana Jakalová, Eliška Mazalanová

Event participants: Celestína Minichová, Katarína Kucbelová, Martin Kosorin, Paula Malinowska, Marina Abramović po sebe neupratuje, Omar Mirza, Jakub Molnár, Jelisaveta Rapaić, Ivana Rumanová, Martin Toldy, Martin Zaiček, Lucia Žatkuliaková, other members of the Cultural Unions and invited guests

In order to make a living as cultural workers, we are forced to combine multiple jobs running in parallel, under different types of contracts, to operate across several areas of expertise at once, and to remain productive, efficient, and responsive both day and night, on any day of the week. We are expected to become entrepreneurs of ourselves, continuously building and marketing our own brand—or the brand of our projects—within a competitive free-market environment. We are imagined as nomadic entities, creative labour forces freely and actively moving across time and space in pursuit of professional and social opportunities. These opportunities are supposed to yield social, cultural, and economic capital that we may later—if we are agile enough, skilled enough, hard-working enough, and above all talented and creative enough—capitalize on and multiply.

Yet success is rarely the result of diligence and talent alone; it also depends on the ability to capitalise on the labour of others—on the invisible and undervalued labour of what has been called the dark matter of cultural work. This meritocratic approach, which elevates individual effort and talent, deliberately overlooks social and economic conditions as well as our mutual interdependence. Who, without sufficient social and financial backing, can afford to perform unpaid or poorly paid work in culture? And on the other hand, what is considered work in culture, and which activities are we willing to assign symbolic value to, and which financial value? What is considered success in art, and who gets to achieve it?

The abstract image of a diligent cultural worker tirelessly seizing opportunities does not correspond to the realities in which we live. Speculation on the housing market leading to unaffordable housing, rising prices of basic goods and services without stable wage or fee indexation, harsh government consolidation measures, devastating cultural policies of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, and interventions targeting the Slovak Arts Council all affect an already fragile ecosystem of labour within the expanded cultural field.

In such late-capitalist conditions, building solidaristic structures and collective organising may sound utopian—especially in the case of individualised and atomised forms of labour. Although this type of work is by no means new to art and culture, we must still ask: are we both slaves to ourselves and our own enslavers at the same time? Hacking the system requires a great deal of collective imagination, creativity, and perhaps even naivety—and also a maximum amount of energy!

Disillusionment with working and living conditions has been articulated by many generations before us. Among the inspirations for the Park of Culture and Sighs were therefore workers' clubs and workers' halls. These began to emerge in the course of the 19th century, originally also through self-organisation, as part of collective organising and the political emancipation of the working class. They were part of a broader trend of associational, cultural, and educational initiatives connected to class-, ethnic-, or religion-based emancipation. They functioned both as spaces and as tools for education, rest, and cultural and political awareness among workers.

The Park of Culture and Sighs at the Ján Koniarek Gallery is an attempt to collectively create such a space/tool for today's hectic and chronically exhausted workers in culture and beyond. Its programme consists of regular events—performances, discussions, support groups, and workshops—prepared through an open call by members of the Cultural Unions, a grassroots, collectively organised trade union representing cultural workers across Slovakia. At the core of the spatial design is a mutable structure made of plastic crates filled with energy drinks—substances we consume to maintain constant productivity, fight fatigue, and deny our own limits and needs. But what if we reversed this logic and overcame our exhaustion in order to support one another, learn together, care for ourselves, spend time together, or mobilise towards improving our (not only working) conditions?