

**POLISH
PAVILION
IN VENICE**

The Inflammatory States.

Norbert Delman

curators: Paweł Brylski, Jarosław Lubiak

Documentation (excerpt) submitted for the competition
for the curatorial project for the exhibition
in the Polish Pavilion at the
59th International Art Exhibition in Venice in 2022

Concept

The Inflammatory States exhibition will comprise a group of sculptures and the arrangement of the space of the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The title term defines the key places around which the construction of the sculptures develops. At the same time, it refers to the processes occurring in the body that struggle with trauma or infection. Moreover, the artist treats it as a metaphor, describing the conditions of societies plagued by crises in recent years - especially pandemics and their consequences. The sculptures and their arrangement create an abstracted study of tensions and relationships. They may be associated with the tradition of abstraction, but they are not limited to this association. It is a set of visual metaphors that viewers will be invited to relate to their own experiences.

Sculptures

In the morphology of Norbert Delman's sculptures, inflammatory states describe the places where mismatches between elements cause flare-ups. The mismatched pieces are squeezed together by force - and this resonates in the distant fragments, whose spasmodic flexing seems to be the result of pain transfer.

Around the areas of compression, the color changes, indicating inflammation. The colors of the sculptures are drawn from the palette of digital avatars populating virtual game worlds and the iconosphere of social media. This is also where the restless and unstable corporeality of these sculptures comes from. They are not digital entities themselves, but their tangible matter is formed in ways that resemble virtual phenomena.

Digital visibility is combined with new material technologies: polyurethane foam, computer-cut MDF, spray-painting with acrylic paints, lacquering, tritics. The latter make it possible to weld mismatched elements together, and their extreme strength makes it possible to join them by force, causing inflammation at the points of contact, which becomes an injury.

The arrangement of the sculptures in the space is a beautiful play of forms. At the same time, it wants to be a metaphor for the social body and the states produced in it.

Bodies

In the SPA project realized in 2019 at the Foksal Gallery, Norbert Delman subjected his body to painful treatments that, by producing inflammation, served to purify it. Even before that, he dealt with ways of sculpting the body developed in bodybuilding ("S/S/S" Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop, 2014). In parallel, he also investigated the influence of body states on consciousness and mind, e.g., the phenomenon of oxygen narcosis in divers (Biennale de la bitche, 2017). Since 2019, the artist has been exploring algorithmic and digital visibility, searching for visions that a disembodied, artificial consciousness could create. The inflammatory States represent the next phase of this search and a reversal of the process. These visions are embodied in the sculptures.

The porous border between the digital and analog realms - a barrier that the artist has crossed many times in both directions - becomes a source of a mismatch here. Connections are sometimes forced, although the elements coming into contact with each other are not sufficiently matched in many places. Delman reproduces this in the matter of the sculptures. The mismatch creates inflammation in the social body. And the sculptures make this evident. The inflammatory states have intensified in the pandemic period of shifting numerous areas of reality into the modes of remote functioning. Online work, entertainment, social relations, and socializing immobilized people's bodies in front of computers for hours, days and months. The mismatch between our bodies and these forced modes of functioning has caused organic and psychological inflammation - a sickness that changes our social lives. Worse yet, the inflammation can progress to a chronic state that persists after the pandemic compulsions have subsided.

Society

Delman's intuitions and diagnoses meet medical discoveries. These include the hypothesis that inflammation is the source of most disease processes (Virgil Stenberg, General Theory of Inflam-

mation [2020]). Similarly, in psychiatry, the dependence of depression on inflammation is explored (Edward Bullmore, *The inflamed mind a radical new approach to depression* [2018]). Also, in humanistic reflection, the medical concept of inflammation is captured to describe the dynamics of psychological and social processes (Natalia Sielewicz, *Theory of inflammation* [2021]). Inflammation is also a defensive reaction in case of damage or infection. It allows to fight their effects and to heal the affected tissues. Delman's sculptures are a metaphor for the social body that fights against injury or infection. The very image the arrangement creates is also a metaphor for social relationships. It resembles a startling bestiary full of various attitudes of deception, repulsion, attraction-repulsion, violence, and enforced submission.

Healing?

Far from being literal, Norbert Delman presents inflammation as an image of reality and hope for overcoming the crises that beset it.

The Inflammatory States and The Milk of Dreams

The trajectory of the development of Norbert Delman's work intersects with the themes proposed by Cecilia Alemani, and the proposal for the Polish Pavilion resonates with the ideas of the Biennale's curatorial exhibition. Referring to the Surrealist work of Leonora Carrington, Alemani focuses on transformation as the central process of art and life and imagination as the vital force capable of giving this process the desired direction. She proposes three core themes in her conception: "the representation of bodies and their metamorphoses; the relationship between individuals and technologies; the connection between bodies and the earth" (<https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2022/statement-cecilia-alemani>). The Inflammatory States exhibition addresses the first two themes. Norbert Delman asks about the struggle of the body and psyche with injury and infection, searches for the possibility of healing through the transformation of the body, creates metaphors of the social body for which contact with technologies causes inflammation, and examines the relationship between individual bodies in a collective exposed to various pressures.

Norbert Delman's *The Inflammatory States* exhibition aims to illustrate a particular moment of transformation of the world we live in.

Summary

The inflammatory States is a group of sculptures by Norbert Delman that, composed of overtly mismatched elements, create as much visual as metaphorical inflammation. The sculptures and their arrangement build an abstracted study of tensions and relationships. Intense colors at the joints direct our attention to the inflammability of human relations, the fragility of the body in the face of danger, becoming a multi-level metaphor of illness and purification.

In the formal layer, the sculptures refer to the modernist tradition, when artists looked for dynamics and kinetics in static structures, but Delman's art goes a step further. It could only happen as a reaction to the need to move seamlessly between the physicality of the body and the world of digital avatars, after the experience of hybrid presence, digital work, entertainment, and proximity, when isolation was a procedure to protect the body from infection, putting psychosocial resilience to the test.

In the morphology of Norbert Delman's sculptures, inflammation describes the places where the mismatch of elements causes disjunction. At the same time, the title refers to the processes undertaken by a body struggling with an injury or infection. The artist treats it as a metaphor describing the crises of modernity, the experience of pandemics, and social inflammations. The artist's sculptures assembled from mismatched elements-often remnants of other sculptures-composed and pressed together with structural cogs. The mismatch creates inflammation in the social body, organic and psychological inflammation. Inflammation is an act of defense and attack resulting from a sudden cause; it is also a study of fever, irritation, and the struggle for healing.

The exhibition of Norbert Delman's sculptures will be accompanied by a catalog, which will be a kind of visual travelog of a journey towards virtual, artificial consciousness, and corporeality. In the core of virtuality, the artist discovers inflammations resulting from the mismatch between various spheres. The visual essay will be accompanied by four texts by authors invited to comment on the journey from the perspective of art, digital consciousness and sensuality, the philosophy of medicine, and the choreography of virtuality.