



*Everything We Do Is
Really, Really Brilliant*

Eva **KAHAN**
Foundation

June 7th – August 27th 2023
Kahan Art Space Vienna

Driton Selmani

*Everything We
Do Is Really,
Really Brilliant*

Curated by
Hana Ostan Ožbolt

Driton Selmani: *Everything We Do Is Really, Really Brilliant*
Curated by Hana Ostan Ožbolt
Eva Kahan Art Space Vienna,
07.06–27.08.202

Driton Selmani's first solo exhibition in the German-speaking region combines a selection of his older (2012), more recent (2018– 2020), and new works exhibited for the first time. While Selmani's older projects are seminal for the understanding of the Kosovar artist's practice, selected new works also respond to the exhibition context site-specifically: *You, Yes You, Lucky You (2022)* is positioned at the entrance façade of the Kahan Art Space, whereas a set of interventions on billboards in public space, *Geisters or Vice Versa (2019/2023)*, inhabits the immediate surrounding of the exhibition space in the 2nd, 9th and 20th Viennese districts.

"I have been frustrated by the fact that my country is so often omitted from the world map. If I ordered things via Amazon, I could not select Kosovo as a shipping option. Or, if I purchased plane tickets, I had no place to fly to when I wanted to fly back home," I vividly remember Selmani telling me when we first met in 2018. Born in 1987 in the former Yugoslav province of Kosovo as an ethnic Albanian, the artist was originally an inhabitant of a country that split into several new states, marked by the Balkan wars and much political and social unrest. Following Kosovo's partial independence and renaming it into the Republic of Kosovo in 1989/99, the country declared its independence almost ten years later, in 2008.

Born in 1987 in the former Yugoslav province of Kosovo as an ethnic Albanian, the artist was originally an inhabitant of a country that split into several new states, marked by the Balkan wars and much political and social unrest. Following Kosovo's partial independence and renaming it into the Republic of Kosovo in 1989/99, the country declared its independence almost ten years later, in 2008. In the process of that political transition, Kosovo was encouraged by the international (Western) community to work on its 'branding': "Kosovars" as a new national identity, a political and conceptual strategy to lessen possible tensions between ethnic groups. Nowadays, Kosovo remains a country that certain political entities still do not want to recognize and for whom, therefore, still "does not exist".¹ This inability of positioning cements itself as both a weakness and strength simultaneously the in-between locus (of Kosovo) as a place of establishing dialogue. Therefore, the earliest dating work in the exhibition, the performative photograph *They Say You Can't Hold Two Watermelons In One Hand (2012)*, refers to the old Albanian proverb, which declares the inability to gain two things at the same time, implying the impossibility of being in two roles or two places, here and there, at once. Or, as Wikipedia notes: "One should not attempt to take on more than one can handle."² Photographed on a border bridge separating Albania and Kosovo (a sort of no man's land), this work remains the only self-portrait which the artist shows himself. Selmani's creative process is driven by the confrontation with his personal history, distinctly marked by the history of the country in which he grew up. For example, the video work *These Stories (2018)* combines two different moments from the same period: original clips from the Apollo 11 mission and the audio narration of Sadik Cena (b. 1956), a close relative of the artist. At the time of NASA's mission to the moon, many Kosovar families, including that of the artist, experienced a radical change...

in their lives with the arrival of electricity in their villages. By combining both global and local narratives, Selmani questions their significance and importance—“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”—and in so doing, constructs a single History. The personal and the political cannot be separated from each other, and even if one could define this as one of the characteristics of the vital Kosovo art scene that has recently received widespread international attention (*Manifesta 14*), Selmani seems to be moving from the geopolitics to “geoselves”—³—ongoingly, even obsessively, with humour, he documents and questions our banalities, uncertainties, longings, and belongings. He pokes fun at our screen time, right-swiping, updates and upgrades, filters and fillers, our comments sections. At the forefront of his media-diverse practice are therefore not solely issues of duality between the individual and collective, or of memory and history (revisionist tendencies in the context of political correctness), which particularly marked his early work, but more so the notion of contradiction and possibility in itself, especially in the building up of a (semiotic) relation between word and image. Handwritten with markers, Selmani’s one-sentence pronouncements read: “Past Resent Future” / “Never Say No To Yes” “Whatever You Do, Don’t Do It”... Freedom as possibility, as potentiality, as capacity (exemplified in the freedom of choice) is the best antidote to actual freedom; it has become a signifier of oppression, writes Alenka Zupančič.⁴ In this “freedom”, wherever we are surrounded by maxims such as “Intentionally act like the person you want to become!”, “It’s not how good you are, but how good you want to be!” or “If you can dream it, you can do it!”, the as if (als ob) modality as such tells us how to act. Still, it falls short of providing the real “push” (Triebfeder) that would, in fact, make it practically possible for us to act in this way.

Once I effectively act as if I have already had what I wanted, the question remains: how do I get to act as if I have actually received what I wanted? There seems to be a small, but significant gap here; Zupančič writes that this is precisely how freedom as oppression works in practice—“you can, therefore you must”. “Possibilities are here to be taken and realized by all means and at any price. You can do it, therefore you must! The culture (and economy) of possibilities is not suffocating simply because there are so many possibilities, but because we are supposed not to miss out on any of them.”⁵

An ongoing and extensive series of seemingly fleeting notes and drawings on found plastic bags, titled *Love Letters (2018–)*, plays a crucial role in Selmani’s oeuvre. Inspired by his wife’s shopping lists (for him and the children) as small daily gestures of care, his letters to everyone and no one will remain forever—plastic endures, even more so than love. Never directly intended as a critique of a contemporary consumer or a political statement, it was for Selmani a somehow natural decision to work with the material so present on the streets of Prishtina. For years almost manically collecting and storing the bags he either finds, gets, or is gifted, he uses them to vocalize and preserve his daily thoughts. On view are also three single works from the new series, *Fig. Drawings (2023)*, in which Selmani returns to working together with his mother (like at the beginning of his artistic path), who crafts embroideries after his initial digital drawings, sewing in his work also her time and touch.

Furthermore, the exhibition extends into public space. The project *Geisters or Vice Versa (2019/2023)* consists of artistic interventions on advertising surfaces in various locations in Vienna, reflecting on the complexity and gaps

between time, memory, and place. It documents and...It documents and represents the physical and mental journey of the artist's relative, Mr. Ismail S., and his "Gastarbeiter" migration history from the native Kosovo village to the West (Gstaad, Switzerland, and Paznaun-Ischgl, Austria) and, after decades, back home.

Hana Ostan Ožbolt

1 Although the United States and most members of the European Union (EU) recognized Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008, Serbia, Russia, and a significant number of other countries, including several EU members (Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, Romania, and Greece) did not. Given this lack of international consensus, Kosovo was not immediately admitted to the United Nations (UN). In 2010 the International Court of Justice ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law.

2 The proverb is, for example, similar to the Persian version "You can't pick up two watermelons with one hand."

3 Shumon Basar, Douglas Coupland, Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Extreme Self: Age of You*, König Verlag, 2020.

4 Alenka Zupančič, "The End", in: *Provocations*, Issue 1, 2016. Thanking Alenka Zupančič for her guidance within the psychoanalytical realm.

5 Ibid.

For more information on the project and its locations, please scan the QR code below.



Lastly, to accompany the exhibition *Everything We Do Is Really, Really Brilliant*, Driton Selman & the Dr. Eva Kahan Foundation created a special edition of the work *Unknown Proverb (2023)*, which is exhibited in the neighbouring restaurant space of Café Kraus.

For more information, please enquire at info@evakahanfoundation.org.

Artwork Index:

01 *They Say You Can't Hold Two Watermelons In One Hand*, 2012 C-Print on aluminium
150 x 100 cm

02 *These Stories*, 2018
Single-channel video installation 7.23 min, sound

03 *Howl*, 2021
Engraving on white marble 100 x 70 x 5 cm

04 *Binum Silentium*, 2021
Hermann tortoise shells 34 x 17 cm

05 *Past, Resent, Future* (from the *Love Letters* series), 2021
Marker on high-density polyethylene plastic bag
75 x 55 x 5 cm (framed)

06 *Three Times Yes* (from the *Love Letters* series), 2023
Acrylic on high-density polyethylene plastic bag
75 x 55 x 5 cm (framed)

07 *Hopes & Fears*, 2021
Tailor-made coat, metal rack 200 x 150 cm

08 *Fig. Drawings*, 2023
Needle embroidery on textile
60 x 60 cm x 5 cm each (framed)

09 *Zeitgeist*, 2019
Handcrafted oak cane, gear shift knob 101 x 85 cm

10 *You, Yes You, Lucky You*, 2022
Textile, embroidery 200 x 150 cm

Driton Selmani was born in 1987 in Kosovo; he lives and works in Prishtina, Kosovo. Recent solo exhibitions were held at 019 Ghent, Belgium (2023), MoCa, Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje (2022); Salon Galič, Split (2022); Tilt Radio, Prishtina (2022); Palace of Youth, Prishtina (2021); Muzeji i Galerije Podgorica, Montenegro (2021); Ta.da, Copenhagen (2021); U10, Belgrade (2019). His works have been exhibited as part of group exhibitions at, among others, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina (2022); Manifesta 14, Prishtina (2022); 18th Tallinn Print Triennial, Tallinn, curated by Róna Kopeczky, (2022); »Bigger than Myself. Heroic voices from ex-Yugoslavia«, MAXXI, Rome, curated by Zdenka Badovinac (2021); Škuc Gallery, Ljubljana (2020). In 2023, Selmani will hold, among others, a solo exhibition at Apiece Gallery, Vilnius; Eva Kahan Foundation, Vienna/Budapest and will exhibit as part of group exhibitions at Kunsthaus Graz and Beaufort 21 Triennale (2024).

All works Courtesy of the Artist ©
www.dritonselmani.com



Driton Selmani— *Everything We Do Is Really, Really Brilliant*
Curated by Hana Ostan Ožbolt
Installation view: Kahan Art Space, Vienna
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez



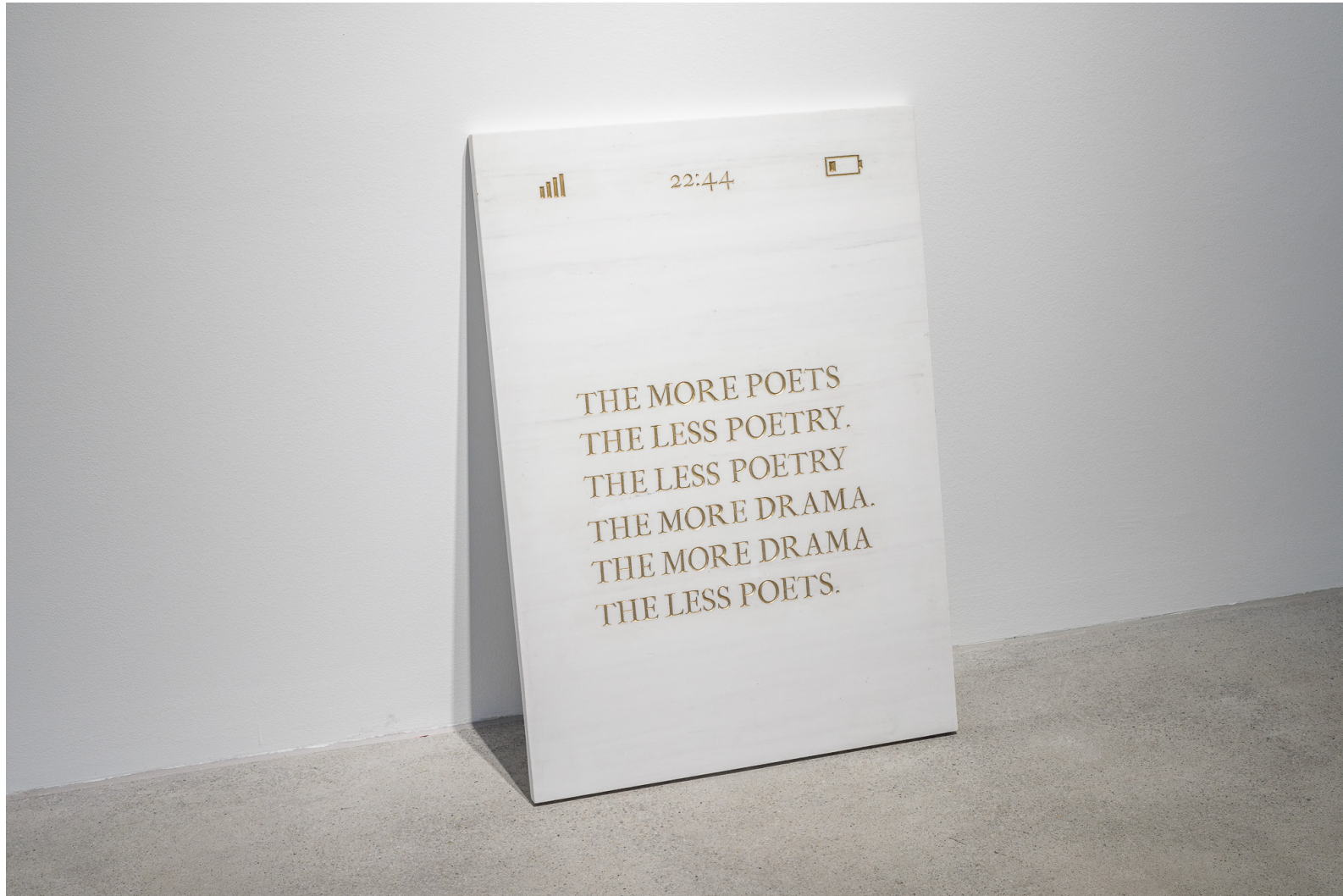
Driton Selmani— *Everything We Do Is Really, Really Brilliant*
Curated by Hana Ostan Ožbolt
Installation view: Kahan Art Space, Vienna
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez



You, Yes You, Lucky You, 2022
Embroidery, textile, 200 x 150 cm
Installation view: Kahan Art Space, Vienna
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez



Binum Silentium, 2021
Hermann tortoise shells, 34 x 17 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez



Howl, 2021
Engraving on white marble
100 × 70 × 5 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez





Zeitgeist, 2019
Handcrafted oak cane, gear shift knob, rubber tip,
101 x 85 x 5 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez



Driton Selmani— *Everything We Do Is Really, Really Brilliant*
Curated by Hana Ostan Ožbolt
Installation view: Kahan Art Space, Vienna
07.06–27.08.2023



These Stories, 2018
Single-channel video installation 7.23 min
screening ratio: 4:3, sound: stereo
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez

Hopes & Fears, 2021
Tailor-made coat, metal rack, 200 × 150 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez





Fig. Drawings, 2023
Needle embroidery on textile
60 × 60 cm × 5 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreón López



Fig. 4.2, 2023
Needle embroidery on textile
60 × 60 cm × 5 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez

Fig. 2.8, 2023
Needle embroidery on textile
60 × 60 cm × 5 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez





Fig. 2.3, 2023
Needle embroidery on textile
60 × 60 cm × 5 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez



Three Times Yes, 2023
Acrylic on high-density polyethylene plastic bag
75 × 55 × 5 cm (framed)
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez

Past, Resent, Future, 2021

Marker on high-density polyethylene plastic bag

75 × 55 × 5 cm (framed)

Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez





They Say You Can't Hold Two Watermelons In One Hand, 2012
C-Print on aluminium, 150 x 100 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez



Where? (from the Love Letters series), 2019
Marker on high-density polyethylene plastic bag
75 x 55 x 5 cm (height)


Where? (from the Love Letters series), 2023
Marker on high-density polyethylene plastic bag
5x 55 x 5 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez

Never Wrogn (from the *Love Letters series*), 2023
Marker on high-density polyethylene plastic bag
75× 55 × 5 cm
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez





Unknown Proverb, 2023
Lithography from aluminium plates on Daunendruck 300g^m paper
100 × 70 cm
Edition of 45 + 5 AP (each ed. numbered and signed)
Photo: Manuel Carreon Lopez



Kahán Art Space Vienna
Address: Große Sperlgasse 37/Große
Pfarrgasse 7 1020 Wien

Opening hours
Saturday-Sunday 11:00 - 17:00
www.evakahanfoundation.org

Eva **KAHAN**
Foundation