



Title

Animal farm residencies

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About the author(s)

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Cover image:

Animal farm residencies

by Diego Mantoan • 29.05.2024

In 2017 the Croatian artist Igor Grubić (b.1969) emblazoned the words 'DO ANIMALS DREAM OF FREEDOM?' on a billboard, superimposed onto a photograph of a defunct slaughterhouse. As part of the same series, the artist posed other questions relating to the spiritual, physical and legal conditions of non-human animals: DO ANIMALS HAVE LEGAL RIGHTS **FIG.1?** DO ANIMALS GO TO HEAVEN? The work was the result of an extended stay at RAVE East Village Artist Residency near Udine in Northern Italy, an animal shelter founded by Isabella (b.1963) and Tiziana Pers (b.1976) in 2011.¹ It was the Pers sisters who took Grubić to the abandoned spaces of the slaughterhouses on a night-time visit. Although the facilities have since been emptied and cleaned, Grubić's photographs – which capture the remains of cages, meat processing tables and huge scales – mark the persistent, morbid atmosphere of this otherwise invisible place of violence.

In a vivid account in the book *L'altro RAVE: East Village Artist Residency* ('The other RAVE: East Village Artist Residency'; 2023), Tiziana recalls that one night, when Grubić was filming the interior of the slaughterhouse, his dog Björk walked through the frame. A few days later, 'while we were watching the footage [...] we realised that she was actually the first non-human animal to enter and leave that place alive' (p.228). Thus, Björk became the protagonist of Grubić's footage, which the artist developed into the experimental documentary *INGRESSO ANIMALI VIVI* (*Entry of Live Animals*; 2023).² The title references the sign at the livestock entrance of the slaughterhouse, with *vivi* (alive) foreshadowing the 'exit' of death and dismemberment. Grubić completed his research at RAVE by interviewing Ivan Tavazzi, a former employee turned animal rights activist, who recounted the trauma of working daily in such a murderous environment. Grubić's output from the residency forms a triptych that discloses the industrial-scale violence perpetrated against non-human animals which, in a capitalist society, is purposefully hidden from consumers.



Fig. 1 From the series *Do animals...?*, by Igor Grubić. 2017. Photograph. (Courtesy the artist and Laveronica, Modica).

This publication documents the twelve-year history of RAVE and includes a wealth of material relating to the artist residencies that it has hosted since its inception. Through interviews, imagery and documentary information, it explores the collective experience orchestrated by the Pers sisters in search of a new relationship to the animal world. In a bid to encourage artists to forego an anthropocentric perspective, the sisters invited them to their farm to live with the animals that they have liberated from slaughterhouses [FIG.2](#). The different residencies are compiled into a single narrative, which outlines the powerful draw of RAVE for such established artists as Tomás Saraceno (b.1973) [FIG.3](#), Adrian Paci (b.1969), Liliana Moro (b.1961) [FIG.4](#) and Diego Perrone (b.1970).

The central part of the book is a conversation between the Pers sisters and the editors, Daniele Capra and Nico Covre, which traces the sisters' conception of an initiative that democratises art and nature – not through cliché or affectation, but by establishing a radical framework that aims to overcome the speciesism that defines the Anthropocene. This book, therefore, joins the ranks of manifestos, catalogues, magazines, scientific volumes and scholarly papers that have come to characterise ecological activism and, more generally, sustainability orientated work over the last two decades.³ Two points can be made about this recent growth in interest. The first is that it demonstrates the urgency of conceptualising ecological practices both in an art-historical context and as a social catalyst for sustainable culture.⁴ The second is that it helps to overcome a merely instrumental vision of art – one that positions artistic activity solely as the end product of the knowledge transfer process.⁵

In both senses, *L'altro RAVE* provides a paradigm for how one can

give form to artistic practices that address ecological subjects, while at the same time producing diverse modes of participatory knowledge building. In particular, the quality and international reach of the projects that began at RAVE stands out, and taken together, they make for powerful cultural discourse against speciesism.⁶ Moreover, several of the works of art produced during residencies have become milestones in the respective artist's oeuvres. By presenting the continuous debate fostered by RAVE, the book reconstructs how, for example, Tiziana's relationship with her horse Chico became the central subject of Paci's video installation *Inside the Circle* FIG.5, which was presented at Jeu de Paume, Paris, in 2013. Showing both woman and horse unclad, Paci's video removes contextual and temporal markers; human feet and animal hooves coalesce into an anatomical sameness. Tiziana and Chico enter into a symmetrical relationship: 'nothing changed for the horse at all. Whether I was dressed, or naked, or whatever else, it was always me to the horse, the same identical person' (p.222).

The Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo (b.1974) took this dynamic even further in her performance *La oveja negra* FIG.6, in which she completely subverted the hierarchy between humans and non-humans. With her arms and feet submerged in the earth and her head covered by her long black hair, she embodied the black sheep set apart from the white flock, which remained unconcerned by her presence. As outlined by Tiziana, here Galindo brought about the radicalism needed for a fuller subversion of the human-animal relationship:



Fig. 2 From *L'altro RAVE: East Village Artist Residency*, edited by Daniele Capra and Nico Covre, showing Isabella Pers, on the left, and Tiziana Pers, on the right. 2023. (Courtesy Quodlibet, Macerata).

When contemporary art talks about issues that should be revolutionary, such as anti-speciesism, there is often a patina of hypocrisy or superficial knowledge that fails to get to the heart of the matter. I have seen artists talk about these themes without having the radicalism it requires, that depth that really leads you to have a cohesion between the form adopted and the content of the work (p.225).

L'altro RAVE primarily focuses on the output of visiting artists, and therefore only gives a fleeting impression of the artistic expressions of the sisters themselves. Not documented, for example, are Isabella's participatory performances about water memory and Tiziana's practice of exchanging her paintings for the lives of animals destined for slaughter.⁷ However, expanding on their own practices would have distracted the reader from the perspectives of the animals, which are at the heart of the RAVE farm. The liberated animals take centre stage: Chico, a purebred horse who suffered abuses in an elite riding school, before his owner decided to sell him to a slaughterhouse because they could no longer maintain him; Toni Romeo, the donkey saved from being sold by weight, who was revived by students reading to him; and Pedro, the goat with whom Diego Perrone established a great relationship during his residency. At the heart of the book, then, are the many drawings by Isabella and Tiziana of animals who have sheltered on their farm **FIG.7**. By drawing their portraits and giving them names, the sisters effectively individualise each creature and mend the human-animal relationship.



Fig. 3 Tomás Saraceno observing spiderwebs during his residency at RAVE, Trivignano Udinese, 2015. (Courtesy RAVE, Trivignano Udinese).

In the central conversation of the book – aptly titled ‘Animals and art under the same tree’ – Isabella remarks: ‘We imagined

animalism as the starting point for a creative journey with no hierarchies between human and non-human' (p.216). Indeed, it is precisely this rationale that informed the sisters' decision to formalise their name, RAVE, from the reversed initials of East Village Artist Residency. They set out to subvert the traditional concept of an artistic residency, in order to create an environment in which animals were to relate to the invited artists, not the other way around. It was to be the goats, hens, donkeys and sheep to teach humans about art, nature and the world. One just has to listen to them.



Fig. 4 *In Onda*, by Liliana Moro. 2021. Blue neon and tubing, 22.5 by 60 cm. (Courtesy the artist and RAVE, Trivignano Udinese).



Fig. 5 Still from *Inside the Circle*, by Adrian Paci. 2011. Video, duration 6 minutes 33 seconds. (Courtesy kaufmann repetto, Milan and New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich and Paris).

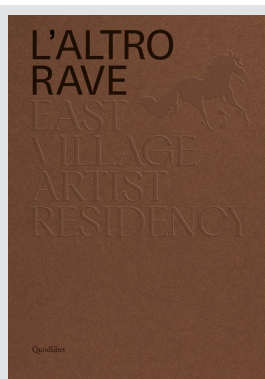


Fig. 6 *La oveja Negra*, by Regina José Galindo. Performed at RAVE, Torrealto, 2014. (Courtesy Prometeo Gallery Ida Pisani, Milan; photograph Nico Covre).



Fig. 7 From *L'altro RAVE: East Village Artist Residency*, edited by Daniele Capra and Nico Covre, showing portraits of Wendy and William, by Tiziana Pers. 2023. (Courtesy Quodlibet, Macerata).

About this book



L'altro RAVE: East Village Artist Residency

Edited by Daniele Capra and Nico Covre
Quodlibet, Macerata, 2023

Footnotes

- 1** The farm was first opened at a stable in Trivignano Udinese, in the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. In 2014 it temporarily relocated to a former quarry in Torreano because of a dispute with the landowner, who wanted the property to be shared with a hunter's association.
- 2** The short film premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2023, see [iffrr.com/en/iffrr/2023/films/ingresso-animali-vivi](https://www.iffrr.com/en/iffrr/2023/films/ingresso-animali-vivi), accessed 25th April 2024.
- 3** For manifestos, see H. Kurt and B. Wagner, eds: *Kultur – Kunst – Nachhaltigkeit*, Essen 2002; Julie's Bicycle: 'COP21 MANIFESTO', *CSPA Quarterly* (14th August 2016), pp.27–29. For relevant catalogues and magazines, see L.R. Lippard: 'Weather report: expecting the unexpected', in exh. cat. *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change*, Boulder (Museum of Contemporary Art) 2007; and M. Fowkes and R. Fowkes: 'The principles of sustainability in contemporary art', *Praesens: Central European Contemporary Art Review* 1 (2006), pp.5–11. For academic articles, see T.J. Demos, E.E. Scott and S. Banerjee, eds: *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change*, London 2021; and R. Wallen: 'Ecological art: a call for visionary intervention in a time of crisis', *Leonardo* 45 (2012), pp.234–42.
- 4** S. Kagan: 'Prefiguring sustainability: response-ability & spaces of possibility', in H. Van Den Bergh: *Art for the Planet's Sake*, Brussels 2015, pp.29–32.
- 5** A. Connelly, S.C. Guy, E. Wainwright *et al.*: 'Catalyst reimagining sustainability with and through fine art', *Ecology and Society* 21, no.4 (2016), doi.org/10.5751/ES-08717-210421.
- 6** Over the years the projects produced at RAVE have reached international venues such as Castello di Rivoli, Turin; Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome; Jeu de Paume, Paris; the International Film Festival Rotterdam, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana, among others.

7 A documentation of *ART_HISTORY/Vucciria* (2018) by Tiziana Pers, presented at Manifesta 12 Palermo is online, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Jza7k71dnk, accessed 20th May 2024; a documentation of the participatory performance *When Mind Becomes Form* (2018-19) by Isabella Pers is also online, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rmoaya_trvw, accessed 20th May 2024.

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