



***Dear Artist, (2020).* Meriç Algün in Conversation with Vlad Strukov**

Meriç Algün
Artist, Sweden

This item has been published in Issue 01 'Transitory Parerga: Access and Inclusion in Contemporary Art,' edited by Vlad Strukov.

To cite this item: Algün M (2020): *Dear Artist, (2020)*. Meriç Algün in Conversation with Vlad Strukov. *The Garage Journal: Studies in Art, Museums & Culture*, 01: 22-27. DOI: 10.35074/GJ.2020.1.1.003

To link to this item: DOI: 10.35074/GJ.2020.1.1.003

Published: 30 November 2020

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Access and inclusion are catch phrases in the contemporary art world. However, the structures of that world are often hierarchical and restrictive. Meriç Algün's *Dear Artist, (2020)** explores these concerns through an epistemological collage consisting of invitations to various projects e-mailed to the artist in recent years. Do these invitations offer a possibility of genuine engagement? Or do they manipulate artists? *Dear Artist*, reconstructs the artist's

experience in the form of a video and an e-mail subscription service. They can be experienced individually, or in combination, in order to achieve a greater effect. The artwork was developed in collaboration with the curator Vlad Strukov, and a reflection on Algün's experience, presented as a conversation with Strukov, is presented below. The interview took place over e-mail, with Meriç in Stockholm and Vlad in Barcelona.

Vlad Strukov (VS):

The artwork consists of two parts, a video and an e-mail subscription service. How does each reflect on your experience as an artist?

Meriç Algün (MA):

For the last ten years or so, I have been collecting e-mails inviting me to take part in different art fairs, exhibitions, prizes and organizations; participation would require a fee to be paid by the artist. I am — as you can imagine — completely against the idea that artists should have to pay in order to participate in an exhibition. This is a very precarious format, vulnerable to exploitation.

Upon the invitation from *The Garage Journal*, with the theme of access and inclusion in contemporary art, I was immediately drawn back to my collection of materials, which has also been widening rapidly since the pandemic. I used these e-mails in order to compose one ultimate invitation letter that promises opportunities to succeed, or 'make it' in the art world. In the video, which is made in the form of a screen recording, the viewer is allowed to skim through the letter and then peek into the actual e-mails and images, accompanied by Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 16*. Here it becomes visible that, for the inclusion and success,

* Meriç Algün, *Dear Artist, (2020)*. Specially commissioned research-based artwork. Screen recording (duration: 7'48") and e-mail subscription service. The artwork can be viewed on The Garage Journal's website: <https://thegaragejournal.org/en/article/21>

there is a price to pay. In my opinion, this is not so different from the contemporary art world in which we participate. The power imbalances and the hierarchies within the art world is something most artists have to experience on a daily basis. And this is what I indirectly wanted to talk about through this work.

VS:

Do you mean to suggest that your work offers a critique of the global neoliberal regime? Which aspects of it do you find particularly problematic?

MA:

In a way, it does. But in a humorous way. Because from where I stand, my hands are tied and the only thing I can do is to try to find a way to move forward within this system that I can't seem to shake. I am afraid that I do not propose a solution or a scenario to this very thing I am criticizing, besides from putting it under scrutiny. I (and the viewer) become more like witnesses or those subjected to this. For me the most problematic aspect is that by adhering to the market values, this regime completely exploits the human values. We are all expected to be achievement-oriented individuals and, somehow, we always fall short.

VS:

Did you explore any of these issues in your previous work? Is *Dear Artist*, connected to your previous work in any other way?

MA:

Not really, but as my work often stems from my subjective experiences, this one directly relates to my experience of working as an artist. And like I mentioned before, since the pandemic, my inbox has been almost under attack with all these invites. So, it felt natural to turn to them at this time. In the past, I had worked with geographical and cultural boundaries, with love, language, and with absurdities that arise when seeking to participate in new contexts, societies, and cultures. At the moment, I am working on a new range of works that relate to stepmotherhood and its relationship to power and exclusion. I am sure that one can make a connection among all these subjects upon closer inspection.

VS:

What ethical issues did you have to deal with when creating the artwork?

MA:

Well, first of all, the artwork deals with private e-mails, so there has definitely been an element of exposure, as I am publicizing them to

the readers of the journal. This is, in a way, why I have removed all the names and identifying information from the PDFs and blocked the logos and the eyes of everyone in the pictures. That being said, since I don't find these invitations themselves ethical in the first place, it does not seem unethical to make an artwork around it.

VS:

The artwork was commissioned by *The Garage Journal*. What was your experience like? Was it different from working with an art institution and curators? In what way?

MA:

My experience working with *The Garage Journal* has been very different from the usual way of working with institutions. Due to the particular context and the theme of the journal's issue, at the very early stage of the process, I decided to include you as a conversation partner. This has been a very interesting and fruitful part of making this work. For example, you told me the other day how you had learnt so much about communication and that you felt like you had been a part of the work as a collaborator; I guess, in a way, I succeeded with what I had attempted to do. I wanted you to be more involved in the different stages, as an idea was being refined before being formalized. It would have been quite a lonely process otherwise.

VS:

Do you work collaboratively a lot? If so, would you like to comment on your experience? Especially as regards collective authorship vis-à-vis the culture of transactionalism supported by neoliberalism.

MA:

I do not work collaboratively, but I always work in conversation with people. A good friend always likens this process to holding hands, which, I find, is a beautiful analogy. I do have a need to bounce back ideas and talk things through, as my work almost always starts with an idea before it gets physically formalized. I share a studio with the artist duo Goldin+Senneby, and my partner is a curator at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, which means I am always surrounded with people that work within the arts. This makes the boundaries fluid, as there is always an ongoing conversation in relation to work. I do not know how to speak of this in relation to the culture of transactionalism, as my 'collaborations' are not so structuralized. But then, there are also the formal aspects, where I have to ask others to produce parts of work for me, for example, bind a book, or edit a video, or build a shelf, or make a plaster cast, etc. For example, I have an artist friend who is also a very skilled carpenter, and I often work with him. In relation to monetary transaction, I make sure that

he (and others I work with) gets paid properly; often much more than I do, which is such a paradox in itself.



Meriç Algün, screenshots from the video *Dear Artist*, (2020) (courtesy of Meriç Algün, 2020)

Artist's bio

Meriç Algün was born 1983 in Istanbul and currently lives and works in Stockholm. The contrasting differences, particularly social and political, between the make-up of Istanbul and Stockholm, as well as her movement between the two, play a key role in her practice. Her multifaceted work concentrates on issues of identity, borders, bureaucracy, language, and mobility through appropriated and 'ready-made' texts, dictionaries, and archives. Selected solo exhibitions include *Day Craving Night*, Spike Island, Bristol (2019); *Transboundary*, ARoS Art Museum, Århus (2016); *Becoming European*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2014), and *The Library of Unborrowed Books*, Art in General, New York (2013). She has participated in group shows such as 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015); 56th Venice Biennale (2015); 12th Cuenca Biennial (2014); 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014), and 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011). She holds a BA in visual arts and visual communication design from Sabanci University, Istanbul (2007), and an MFA from The Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (2012).