

ARS VIVA 2010/11
"LABORATORY"
INTERPRETATION PACK

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INTRODUCTION TO SALT

SALT explores critical and timely issues in visual and material culture, and cultivates innovative programs for research and experimental thinking. Assuming an open attitude and establishing itself as a site of learning and debate SALT aims to challenge, excite and provoke its visitors by encouraging them to offer critique and response.

SALT Research sources diverse fields of knowledge and provides outlets for thought within the fissures and crossovers of different disciplines. The institution's research projects expand beyond linear chronologies, medium-based questions, and the traditional separation of fields of study. SALT assembles archives of recent art, architecture, design, urbanism, and social and economic histories to make them available for research and public use. These resources will be interpreted in the form of exhibitions and discussed in all other areas of programming.



SALT's activities are distributed between two landmark buildings located no more than a fifteen-minute walk apart, and also shared via [saltonline](#). The first building, SALT Beyoğlu, is on the pedestrian street İstiklal Caddesi, and shares its audience with a cluster of private cultural institutions, galleries and organizations. SALT Beyoğlu's program and circulation interiors are mostly occupied by exhibition and event spaces. The second building, SALT Galata, is the former 19th century Imperial Ottoman Bank headquarters designed by Alexandre Vallaury. SALT Galata houses a specialized, public library and archive; spaces dedicated to research, workshops, an exhibition and conference hall; as well as the Ottoman Bank Museum. The architectural renovation of both buildings has been undertaken by Mimarlar/Han Tümertekin, with specific interiors commissioned to six design and architecture offices from Turkey in an effort to underscore SALT's desire to advocate new experimental environments for living and working.

ARS VIVA

Since 1953, the ars viva prize for fine arts has been awarded by the Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft (Cultural Committee of German Business) to promising young artists based in Germany. Each year, the competition adopts a different search term that takes current tendencies in contemporary art into consideration. Previous themes have included Time, Mise en scène, and History, while the topic for 2010 is Laboratory. The entire selection process was therefore accompanied by questions concerning the practice of making art, with an emphasis on experimental forms and fields and on the importance of coincidence, accident, and error in the production of art.

Nominations for the ars viva prize 2010/11 were submitted by curators, critics, artists, and members of the Gremium Bildende Kunst (Fine Arts Committee). The jury selected prize winners Nina Canell, Klara Hobza, Markus Zimmermann, and Andreas Zybach from among the thirty-nine nominees. ars viva 2010/11 – *Laboratory* will be hosted by the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, SALT Beyoğlu, and the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart.



Klara Hobza training for ars viva 2010/11



Nina Canell, installation view Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, 2010

TO EDUCATORS

HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS

This SALT Interpretation Pack has been designed as a resource for you and your students as you explore the themes of the ars viva 2010/11 – *Laboratory* exhibition. It is our hope that — as a resource with the objective of stimulating dialogue — the following materials will not act as an authority on the concepts they introduce, but rather will encourage students towards further exploration and study, towards active discussion, and towards critical thinking about the exhibition and its themes.

Included in this Interpretation Pack are:

- *Opening Discussion: What is a Laboratory?*
- *Unit One: The Art of Process*
- *Watch & Discuss: Christoph Keller's
Cloudbuster Project*
- *Unit Two: The Art Object as a Laboratory*
- *Closing Discussion: Is the Modern Exhibition
Space a Laboratory?*
- *Additional Resources*



Markus Zimmermann, installation view Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, 2010

Each unit includes classroom activities, multi-media resources, terminology and opportunities for discussion; we encourage you to adapt, shape and build upon these materials to best meet the needs of your students and teaching curriculum.

*Please note that, for educational purposes, some images in this Interpretation Pack feature ars viva artists' previous works. As the artists are creating new works for the exhibition at SALT, the works illustrated in this document may not be the same as those on display in the ars viva 2010/11 – *Laboratory* exhibition. All images appear courtesy of the artists.

OPENING DISCUSSION: WHAT^T IS A LABORATORY?

Only in exceptional cases is scientific knowledge acquired merely by putting pen to paper. It is necessary to test new technologies, experiment, and fail; progress often arrives unexpectedly. The laboratory is the place for this. But although researchers must be open to the unexpected, the lab remains a hermetically sealed place where scientists retreat to carry out their experiments. Many artists adopt these kinds of procedures for themselves, but in the process, they open up the boundaries: they go into the lab, but use the basic freedoms and unconventional methods of their own ways of working. They experiment and act freely in different fields of research in order to produce new knowledge in scientific border zones outside of categories and hierarchies.

One of the questions that accompanied the search for the winners of the 2010/11 *ars viva* prize was: to what extent might artists really be able to expand the classic notion of science, make new discoveries, and perhaps, through experimentation, produce visible, tangible errors — all ultimately limited to the aesthetics of the work of art?

Your students may be familiar with some of the diverse forms the laboratory has already taken. For example, they may be aware of artist-in-residency programs, or social policy think tanks. As a starting point for your students to engage with the themes of the *Laboratory* exhibition, we suggest building a discussion around the traditional definition of the word “laboratory” and its contemporary contexts.

TERMINOLOGY

Laboratory — a place equipped for experimental study in a science or for testing and analysis; a place providing opportunity for experimentation, observation, or practice in a field of study.



Pendik Veterinary and Research Institute, Istanbul, early 20th century

DISCUSSION

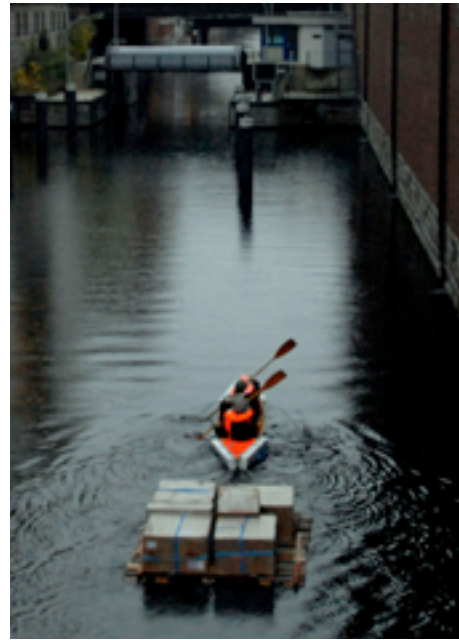
Some questions to shape your discussion can include:

- *Where have you seen laboratories?*
- *What kinds of things do you expect to find in a laboratory?*
- *What kinds of people?*
- *What is a laboratory's purpose?*
- *Why is it important to have venues where we can experiment with new ideas?*
- *How do you think the concept of a laboratory can relate to art?*

Record the ideas your students contribute to this discussion and revisit those opinions after your group has seen the *Laboratory* exhibition at SALT Beyoğlu. Did anything about your students' preconceptions change after seeing the exhibit?

UNIT ONE: THE ART OF PROCESS

“I give myself tasks that are almost impossible to fulfill. It is important, however, that there is a slim chance of success. As I’m trying to fulfill these tasks, performances, videos, drawings and texts emerge. They represent the stage that I’m in while trying several strategies to achieve my aims. I regard such products as symptoms. They are visual representations that orbit around the theme and the pursuit of the task, and may stand on their own.”—Klara Hobza, Artist Statement



Klara Hobza, *Departing America*, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the 2010/2011 ars viva competition, Laboratory, seeks to explore the act of experimentation — of approaching problems in art with the systematic trial and error that, traditionally, we are used only to seeing in the context of scientific practice. The exhibition asks: what happens when artists apply scientific methods to their work? Is it possible, when we introduce the framework of the laboratory into the artist's studio, for the artistic process to become just as — or more — meaningful than its product?

In this unit, students will discuss the artist statement of Klara Hobza, one of the 2010/11 ars viva prize winners. Hobza's performances and artistic narratives are based on the playful, sometimes risky challenges she imposes on herself. These activities all have one particular thing in common: none of them is likely to succeed. The efforts required are usually significantly more interesting than the achievement of the actual self-imposed goal, as can be seen in Hobza's documentary videos, lectures, drawings, and installations. Hobza's 2010/11 ars viva project, for example, will see her training to dive across the Bosphorus, documenting the process from beginning to end.

With their own challenges in mind, students will explore the concepts of scientific and artistic process. In *The Pursuit of the Task | Session 1*, students will create storyboards to map out courses of action; in *Session 2*, using a methodical approach that incorporates the traditionally scientific notions of experimentation and trial and error, students will use art practices to document the pursuit of their goals.



Klara Hobza, *The Cartographer*, 2010

OBJECTIVES

- *To draw connections between the artistic and scientific process*
- *To visually map out ideas using the medium of storyboarding*
- *To use art as a tool to document a process*

TERMINOLOGY

Artist Statement — a brief text composed by an artist and intended to explain, justify, and contextualize his or her body of work

Documentary — of, relating to, or employing documentation in literature or art

Experimentation — to try out a new procedure, idea, or activity

Fisheye Lens — a wide-angle photographic lens that has a highly curved protruding front that covers an angle of about 180 degrees, and that gives a circular image

Found Object (also, *Objet Trouvé*) — a natural or discarded object found by chance and held to have aesthetic value

Graphic Novel — a fictional story that is presented in comic-strip format and published as a book

Medium — a mode of artistic expression or communication

Process — a series of actions or operations conducting to an end

Representation — an artistic likeness or image

Storyboard — a series of panels on which a set of sketches is arranged depicting consecutively the important changes of scene and action in a series of shots (as for a film, television show, or commercial)



Andreas Zybach, *Untitled*, 2010

THE PURSUIT OF THE TASK

SESSION 1

MATERIALS

drawing tools, blank paper, old magazines, scissors, glue sticks

1. Discuss Klara Hobza's artist statement (on page 7) with your students. Ask them to consider one goal or objective they have that fits the criteria of Hobza's self-tasks – a goal that is almost impossible to fulfill, yet has a slim chance of success.
2. Once students have a specific goal in mind, ask them to write a step-by-step list of things they will need to do in order to accomplish this goal. Encourage these lists to be as detailed as possible, and to include contingency plans for potential obstacles.
3. Students will be creating a storyboard for their tasks, in much the same way Klara Hobza did before embarking on her *Departing America* project. Give students the option to create their storyboards with illustration (i.e. in the style of a graphic novel), collage, or any visual means that will best convey their process. The final frame of the storyboard should show the student realizing his or her original goal.
4. Give students the opportunity to present their finished storyboards to the class.



Klara Hobza, *Nay, I'll Have a Starling*, 2005

DISCUSSION

- *After completing your storyboard, did your task feel more or less attainable? Why or why not?*
- *Were there any steps you had difficulty representing visually in your storyboard?*
- *How, if at all, did creating an artistic representation of your task change its form?*
- *How long do you think it would take to complete the set of tasks you created for yourself?*

THE PURSUIT OF THE TASK

SESSION 2

INTRODUCTION

A critical aspect of Klara Hobza's work is the documentation of her process. Hobza systematically works through steps to accomplish her tasks, recording her progress with video, photography and illustration. Because hers is a creative process, Hobza may, at times, fictionalize particular accomplishments or obstacles — transforming her journey into a work of art. If time allows, give your students the chance to pursue and document the tasks they set for themselves in the previous activity. Note that this activity can spread over a few class periods, but has the potential to be expanded into an entire course unit.

MATERIALS

whatever available — mobile phones, cameras, drawing tools, blank paper, sound equipment

1. Ask students to organize themselves into groups of four. Each group will select one member's storyboard for use in this activity.
2. Giving students a set amount of time, ask groups to work step-by-step through this storyboard, towards the completion of its ultimate task. Note that the literal realization of each step may not be possible, but students can fictionalize the achievement of steps if need be. (For example, if a step requires sailing across the Bosphorus, students could build an improvised boat with found objects, and document a performance piece with their "boat" on land.)
3. Groups will document each step as they work through their storyboards. Documentation can take the form of video (on a mobile phone, for example), photography, illustration, sound recording, or a combination of multi-media.

4. At the end of their production period, give students a chance to edit and prepare their work for presentation. If they have created video content, students may consider using Windows Movie Maker or iMovie to edit their footage and add special effects or sound.

5. Give groups the opportunity to present their documentary projects to the class, to the school, or — potentially — to their communities as a short film festival addressing the theme of Laboratory.

DISCUSSION

- *Was your group able to achieve its original goal?*
- *Which steps in your group's storyboard presented the greatest obstacles? How did you overcome these?*
- *How did documenting the pursuit of your task influence your group's process? What do you see as the benefits of documenting a process?*
- *What surprised you most as you created your documentary? Was the outcome what you expected?*

WATCH & DISCUSS: CHRISTOPH KELLER'S "CLOUDBUSTER PROJECT"

INTRODUCTION

In 2003, former ars viva winner Christoph Keller initiated *Cloudbuster Project* on the roof of P.S.1 Contemporary Art Centre in Long Island City and on the Clock Tower in Lower Manhattan, New York. Cloudbuster Project reenacted the scientific experiments of Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian psychologist who from 1953–54 attempted to stimulate rainfall with a “cloudbuster” device he believed emitted orgone energy. Similar to Reich’s original creation, Keller’s cloudbuster was a construction of metal pipes connected with hoses to a water source.

Click the image to the right to watch Keller’s video documentation of his project, then discuss the piece with your students. Some questions to shape your discussion can include:



Christoph Keller, *Cloudbuster Project*, 2003

DISCUSSION

- *How does Keller’s re-creation of Reich’s cloudbuster experiments constitute a laboratory?*
- *Do you think the medium Keller used to document his project (fisheye lens video) was effective? Why or why not?*
- *Is there a difference between a scientific experiment, like Wilhelm Reich’s, and Keller’s Cloudbuster Project? What is the difference?*
- *Do you think the principles of a traditional science laboratory can apply in the context of a contemporary art laboratory?*

UNIT TWO: THE ART OBJECT AS A LABORATORY

INTRODUCTION

In much the same way that *Laboratory* examines the role that scientific process can play in the artist's studio, so does it explore the notion of art objects as experiments in and of themselves. ars viva winner Nina Canell combines her objects with electricity — creating sound or mist, for example — making it possible for the viewer to hear, see, and imagine the process of change. Andreas Zybach, too, addresses the concept of change in his work. By building his structures with organic materials — using peanuts and carrots as pegs and connecting pieces, for example, which age over the course of the exhibition — the artist deliberately reckons with the alteration of his installations.

In *Changing States*, your students will discuss Andreas Zybach's *Self-reproducing pedestal* (2005), an art installation designed to transform with public participation. When visitors step onto Zybach's wooden pedestal, red, balloon-like pneumatic bodies supporting the pedestal create pressure, activating an air pump to produce more pneumatic bodies. In this way, the growth and transformation of the installation directly correlates to the number of people that walk across it. Considering Zybach's work and the concept of art objects as laboratories, your students will create their own dynamic art installations.

OBJECTIVES

- *To examine dynamic versus static art installations*
- *To use everyday objects to creatively communicate an idea*
- *To critique the traditional definition of a "laboratory" in the context of contemporary art*



Nina Canell, *Perpetuum Mobile* (25 kg), 2009/11

TERMINOLOGY

Contemporary Art — defined variously as art produced at this present point in time or art produced since World War II

Dynamic — marked by usually continuous and productive activity or change

Installation — a work of art that usually consists of multiple components often in mixed media and that is exhibited in a usually large space in an arrangement specified by the artist

Pneumatic — moved or worked by air pressure

Static — characterized by a lack of movement, animation, or progression

CHANGING STATES

MATERIALS

drawing tools, blank paper, found objects

1. Andreas Zybach's *Self-reproducing pedestal* (pictured on the right) is a dynamic installation that grows over time. Discuss with students their opinions of art objects being dynamic versus static. What other examples have they seen of art that moves, changes or evolves?
2. Explain to students they will be creating their own pieces of dynamic art installations with found objects.
3. Students will first brainstorm ideas for their installations. These projects can take any form — the only requirement is that they must have the ability to change from their original form. This can be a physical change, like we see in Zybach's work, or a change produced by sound, a change of state, a change of smell, etc. Encourage students to think outside the box in terms of the ways in which objects can change and transform.
4. Give students time to sketch ideas and make a list of items they may need to create their installations.
5. Once students' designs are finalized, they will collect their production materials. This step can be incorporated into the lesson period, or students can collect found objects outside of school and/or bring them from home.
6. With materials collected, students will construct their installations in class. Depending on available time and the complexity of installations, the construction process can extend over a few class periods. Students may also complete their projects as homework assignments.
7. Give students the opportunity to present their completed installations to the class.



Andreas Zybach, *Self-reproducing pedestal*, 2005

DISCUSSION

- *How close was your final installation to your original sketches? Was there any aspect of your piece that did not turn out as expected?*
- *What obstacles did you encounter as you worked? At any point did you change your initial vision?*
- *Did any of your classmates' projects surprise you? How were their interpretations of dynamic installation different from or similar to your own?*
- *After completing your installation project, do you believe that objects have the potential to be laboratories? Why or why not?*

CLOSING DISCUSSION: IS THE MODERN EXHIBITION SPACE A LABORATORY?

After visiting the exhibition *Laboratory* at SALT Beyoğlu and engaging in some of the supplemental discussions and activities included in this Interpretation Pack, your students have considered the characteristics of a laboratory as they relate to the environment and by-products of the artist's studio. Taking this analysis one step further, what can the framework of the science lab mean in the wider context of the exhibition space?

In the modern exhibition space, works of art are turned into objects that can be examined. The viewer becomes a participant, taking on the role of the lab assistant and using himself as a test subject to explore the meaning of objects under optimal lighting conditions. An encounter with art becomes a learning experience, while the art itself and the act of viewing and engaging with art fundamentally become one.

As a conclusion to your students' study of the laboratory, we suggest building a conversation around their observations of the SALT Beyoğlu exhibition space, using the ideas triggered by their visit to explore and critique the notion that today's art galleries and museums have assumed the qualities of traditional scientific laboratories.



Garden at SALT Beyoğlu under construction

DISCUSSION

- *What was your opinion of the SALT Beyoğlu exhibition space? Did anything surprise you about the way in which art objects were displayed at the Laboratory exhibition?*
- *Did you feel like this exhibit was interactive? If so, as a participant, what was your role?*
- *Considering the characteristics of scientific laboratories — venues where we see innovators experiment with new ideas — do you think the exhibition space, too, qualifies as a laboratory? Why or why not?*
- *How, if at all, has your own definition of “laboratory” changed after visiting this exhibition? Are there examples from your own experience where you experiment, use the process of trial and error, and — at times — fail, as you try to solve a problem or explore a new idea?*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The ars viva 2010/11 – *Laboratory* catalogue is available at the SALT Beyoğlu Shop and the e-book at saltonline.org.

Klara Hobza | klarahobza.com

Christoph Keller | christophkeller.com

Johann König Gallery | johannkonig.de

Markus Zimmerman | wunderzimmer.de



ars viva 2010/11 publication

