

# SELECTIONS

ARTS / STYLE / CULTURE FROM THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND

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## Slavs and Tatars | From Mouth to Mouth

written by **Maija Rudovska***Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) Vilnius**September 8th – October 19th, 2017*

Slavs and Tatars' first solo exhibition in the Baltics, at the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius, is a logical step towards the explorations of the space that lies east of Berlin Wall

and west of China Wall. From Mouth to Mouth, a travelling exhibition celebrating a decade of the collective's work, is a mix of their well-known blockbusters such as *Molla Nasreddin the antimodern* (2012) and *Love Letters* (2014), among other works, and the most recent investigations which were produced last year. This latest work is called *Pickle Politics* and was developed from tapping into the local context, looking at the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth period and local communities like the Karaites, the anti-rabbinical sect of Judaism that still exists today in the territories of Lithuania, Poland and Crimea.



The exhibition unravels in the corridors of the CAC and its main exhibition hall on the second floor which is usually feared by artists because of its scale and roughness. Slavs and Tatars have approached it more playfully, putting up a wall resembling billboard in the middle of the room. It separates the space into two parts, offering a dichotomous approach to their own practice. The green neon light, in the shade of something between salad and cucumber, shedding on the works has been chosen as an aesthetically conjunctive element. Texts, slogans and adages covering the walls and pedestals all over the place provoke and tease, creating double meanings and shifting from one language to another. They work in both ways – as direct messages, almost like ads on the posters, and as gates to the imagination and intellectual stimulation.





*Pickle Politics*, the most recent cycle of works, is particularly compelling. Taking as its core the notion of fermentation, it relates to the local and regional context inspired from a 19th century literary movement in Vilnius University circles: *Towarzystwo Szubrawcow* or the Society of Rascals. For example, Pan Chrzan, a two-headed anthropomorphic horseradish that represents the transnational root indigenous to Eastern Europe and Western Asia signifies the dynamics of push and pull, attraction and repulsion. As put by Slavs and Tatars, “it helps to move beyond the reductive and confrontational thinking of our age.” Another visually and symbolically interesting element referring to binary politics is the *figa*, characteristic to Turkic and Slavic cultures. *Pickle Politics* is perhaps the wittiest part of the exhibition – it continues along the established road of work by Slavs and Tatars, revealing the conflicts, ambiguities and oddities of the world we live in. With this exhibition the collective proves without a doubt that they are still committed to their own language, so carefully crafted over the past ten years.

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Featured image: Pan Chrzan, 2016 woolen yarn, 200 x 300 cm. Picture by Andrej Vasilenko.

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by Maija Rudovska

Maija Rudovska's practice is shaped by independent curation, research, art criticism and writing. The focus of her work is inter-mediation and stimulation of relationships between spaces, contexts and institutions. She has worked extensively in the Baltic-Nordic region, curating exhibitions and projects at kim? Contemporary Art Centre (LV), Moderna Museet Malmö (SE), Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius (LT), The Living Art Museum (IS), etc. She has written for FlashArt, Calvert, Guardian, International Awards for Arts Criticism, Echo Gone Wrong and other published and online media. Rudovska is based in Riga (LV).