

Lesbians to the Rescue: A Social Model

LTTR is a feminist genderqueer artist collective with a flexible, project-oriented practice. *LTTR* produces a series of performances, events, screenings and collaborations, and publishes an annual independent art journal. The group was founded in 2001 with an inaugural issue titled *Lesbians to the Rescue*, followed by *Listen Translate Translate Record*, *Practice More Failure*, and *Do You Wish to Direct me?* *LTTR* is Ulrike Müller, Emily Roysdon, Ginger Brooks Takahashi and K8 Hardy.

Katharina Morawek and Eva Egermann spoke with members of *LTTR* during their visit to Vienna, Austria about their artistic practice as 'A Social Model'.

Eva Egermann: "Performing what we want instead of protesting against what we do not want." Can you explain this a bit more?

Emily Roysdon: Our practice is different from a protest group. Part of the flexibility of *LTTR* is entering different spaces and creating the context: to perform what it is that we want to have - what we want our community to have. It is not a utopian model at all. It is also about organising so that we have the power amongst ourselves, to [learn to] speak to each other instead of turning our backs on each other. We find great strength in creating a context where we can then walk out into the world and experience more of it. I find that very supportive.

Ulrike Müller: In terms of politics, a difference is that we are not creating a political model that makes demands towards the future. Even if you go out to the streets and say, "we want this and we want it now", it is not now that you will get it. Instead, *LTTR* asks questions: What can we do for each other now? What can we do in any given situation with the people that are present? How do we interact and understand that there is never

going to be pure harmony among human beings, not even among friends, and certainly not among lovers? How do you deal with all these overlapping desires, contradictions and conflicts? It becomes an ethical question of how we can really build a feminist way of dealing with each other and a more expansive social structure.

Eva: How do you feel about coming to Vienna? Does it feel different [from the United States]?

Emily Roysdon: It is radically different. I had a lot of fun yesterday during a conversation in the aRtmosphere gallery about what things needed to be explicated amongst all the people who were there. Coming to Vienna really highlights the strategies that we use in the context in which we are working. It is easy to say that we do not need to do the same things here that we do in other places. There are different sets of questions and there is a very different history here. This creates an incredible encounter; it has been fascinating to me. There is a lot to think about and it has been hard. I mean we come here with a project, besides a conversation.

The first real slap in the face was when we were at Stichwort, the feminist and lesbian archive in Vienna. I have respect for the organisation - they invest in the same things as we do, like vintage feminist texts - yet there were still so many differences between us. The thing that shocked me was the hostility; they did not meet us with an inquiring mind.

Ginger Brooks Takahashi: There was hardly any room for us to be excited about what we were interested in. It was really different.

Ulrike Müller: I used to live in Vienna; I left about five years ago, so for me it has been really interesting and different on another level. One of the things I see changing in the city is the broad notion of Austrian normality based around a white middle class citizen. I had good encounters with people who did not want to be associated with that kind of society of the "majority citizen" (Mehrheitsgesellschaft). Other encounters, however, strongly reminded me that I could not associate with Vienna: my lived model of queerness does not fit into the gay and lesbian politics here. This is why I am extremely happy to be part of *LTTR* and to live in New York, to experience a different model of thinking and living identity. In Vienna, I often experienced identity as very violent and very exclusive; for example, that you cannot try things out, you have to make up your mind. There are rigid boundaries. You have to have a stance and an opinion, almost like a party book.

Ginger Brooks Takahashi: Yeah, that is totally the opposite of how we operate. At live events, we ask people to perform whose work we have never seen before, or who are going to do something new. We like to create situations where people come together and try something out, with no plans.

Ulrike Müller: The events have a continuous energy; a certain spirit carries the projects. In Vienna, I realised that the four of us can never be *LTTR*: we edit the journal but the project is dependent on a large group of people. This community might be of friends, friends of friends, and people who you potentially know; strangers also become friends in [our project's] social model.

Kati Morawek: Financing is an issue for us editing the monthly publication *Malmoë*. How do you manage to do political work in a

very, let us say, sustainable way that makes it last longer than just a few years? Do you have a collective model for this?

Ginger Brooks Takahashi: We are not paid for this work, it is the pleasure of doing it that makes *LTTR* sustainable. You can figure out a way to do something if you want to. The project is also about creating a community supportive model: we sell the journal and that money goes back into the publication.

Ulrike Müller: We get snippets from art institutions. We sell complete sets of the first three *LTTR* issues for a higher price and that goes back into funding. In a way, it becomes easier all the time.

Emily Roysdon: We are all really broke at different points though. It puts us under an incredible pressure. If the journal is sustaining itself, that economic model and the journal is independent; but the four of us still experience financial difficulties. There is no answer to that.

Ulrike Müller: You can only have an understanding that you are all in a similar situation and that you will step back at certain times. We still have to negotiate this; we are not going to solve it any time soon. This is what makes *LTTR* not utopian: it is very real in the way that we have to work under the specific settings that we find ourselves in. We see how we can do it from these facts; we make arrangements and we [figure out] what we need to maintain just to keep on living and paying our rent.

Emily Roysdon: It is a question about labour - where you choose to put your work. This is how I understand being an artist. It does not seem like a choice in any way. If I am going to live, it is about my labour. There is no other question.

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