

SOFIA ART WEEK

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# Swan Song

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✦ SAW 020  
19–26 September

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*The swan song (ancient Greek: κύκνειον ᾄσμα; Latin: carmen cygni) is a metaphorical phrase for a final gesture, effort, or performance given just before death or retirement. The phrase refers to an ancient belief that swans sing a beautiful song just before their death, having been silent (or alternatively, not so musical) during most of their lifetime. This belief, whose basis in actuality is long-debated, had become proverbial in ancient Greece by the 5th to the 3rd century BC and was reiterated many times in later Western poetry and art.*

“Get in, loser. We’re going to hell” — Ocean Vuong

Today we are living in an ongoing pandemic and political damnation. We, the uncomfortable citizens who became the disturbing elements in the system.

Contemporary life has become the mimicry of a court case, which is the corrupt system of the *panopticon* — the prison, the asylum, the management, the government. In this climate of desperation and fear — of contagion, control, poverty, debt — the Last Judgment is already happening on earth, not before God, not after death.

The only possible moment of Truth is the articulation of thought; of the moment of speaking; of the presence of the sculpted body — recited, sung, danced, performed. The truth is in the condition of the presence.

We are the wrong citizens, but there is no right citizen until everyone is marginalized.

Swan Song is your last confession, your last performance before a new beginning. This is your wake-up call: if you want to say something, say it now.

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# open call ✨

We are looking for performative acts and speeches of the final judgement today. Swan Song urges you to regain your voice — because silence is complicity.

From 19 — 26 September, we offer an open platform that will briefly settle down at different locations in Sofia, reanimating the Speakers' Corner for your personal politics.

In Bulgaria today we are faced with the discriminative context where the public protests are not met with political reward. A voice is discriminated when it is not heard. We pose the question: how effective is the public protest? Has it become anachronistic, exhausted? What is the new way of protesting?

What forms the political body, and what is the physical relation to the act? Where are the radical voices, where is the political memory? What is the effectiveness of the self? Is sacrifice still a “thing” or a living condition?

We reject racism, patriarchy and white supremacy, systems of surveillance, failing political systems, Eurocentrism and Western supremacy, the exploitation of bodies, the exploitation of culture. We engage with feminism, poetry, personal politics, history, ancestry, spirituality, ritual, conviviality, coexistence with (non)humans, care, radical solidarity.

# practical ✨

Art is coming out of the white box, out of its comfort zone that is the center. We will engage with public spaces, the periphery of the panopticon. We will take the whole city as the ultimate platform, to *become panopticon*.

We want to destabilize the center and shift the center-periphery relation, to examine the movement. Rather than a cacophony, Swan Song will present a polyphony — a synchronization of different voices, that become melodic, a symphony.

We are routing between different platforms both physical and animated from the distance.

## offline platforms

- Choose a location in the city that for you has a place in history, or is related to your own personal history, past or recent.
- Propose a performance/ act/ speech/ object/ slogan/ installation in relation to the selected location and the topics of our brief.
- We provide the following places already through our mobile platform: NDK, Zhenski Pazar, Nadezhda/peripheral neighborhood; Crystal garden; and our headquarters Æther (opening and closing event).

## online participation

- When from abroad and due to the impossibility to be present, we will organize a screening event in an open-air cinema, where your video message (live or recorded)/ performance/ act will be screened to the public.
- We ask for contributions that respond to the topics of our brief.

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Your contribution will be between 5 and 20 minutes.

The political party GERB in Bulgaria has been known for corrupting by paying protesters to support their affairs, including their elections, with contributions of 30 up to 50 leva. We will take on this mechanism, and for this 3rd edition of SAW we will pay for your protest what the biggest party in the country is paying its 'supporters'.

Note that Swan Song is self-organized by Æther, Sofia. To date, the event is not supported by public or private funds.

For inquiries and how to participate please send an email to: [aetherartsofia@gmail.com](mailto:aetherartsofia@gmail.com). We need to receive your proposal not later than September 1, 2020.

SAW 2020 Swan Song is a collaboration between Æther Sofia and the research project *Migrating Voices*, co-curated by Voin Voinov and Lisette Smits.

For more information on the organizers, visit the website: [aethersofia.wixsite.com/artspace](http://aethersofia.wixsite.com/artspace)



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Æther Art Space is a self-organised, artists-run platform for exhibitions, discussions, community gathering, experimentation, workshops and publishing.

It is situated in the centre of Sofia. Æther partners with LGBT+, anti-fascist and human rights organisations internationally, to oppose dominant paradigms in society. Æther focuses on cross cultural, social, judicial, and artistic initiatives and practices that are active and directed towards visible changes and community improvement. Æther initiates and presents visual and discursive programmes that raise social awareness. In bringing together Bulgarian and international artists, activists and agencies, we want to create a common language that connects art with political imagination. By elevating underrepresented voices and collective thinking Æther Art Space facilitates dialogues where non-patriarchal, inclusive, and intersectional voices can be heard. In the context of Europe's political landscape, the aim of Æther's artistic and theoretical programme is to bring in a new perspective and offer a process of understanding the causes and effects of the aftermath of the embodied capitalist model of life, and bring forth prospects of new experiences, ways of life and radical ideas. Æther operates an alternative platform in the Hague, the Netherlands, called Æther Haga.

Lisette Smits is a curator, researcher and educator working between Amsterdam and Sofia. Her work focusses on the uses of voice within artistic practices, with a special orientation on the voice in relation to technology and gender. Her current research project "Migrating Voices" aims to further explore the agency of voice, both inside and outside of art, in a wider geographical context. "Migrating Voices" is directed towards the realization of performative, discursive and educational programs, that examine and question the implications of relation – cultural, economical and political – between 'Western' and 'non-Western' parts of Europe. "Migrating Voices" explores the migration of ideas, rather than of bodies, to counter contemporary political discourses around migration, and to engage in processes of decolonialization. The project animates the idea that the figure of the migrant represents our contemporary human condition.

