

Prospect Revenge
Robertas Narkus

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David Dale Gallery
161 Broad Street
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Prospect Revenge

How to push through (new ideas), when no one needs them? How to concentrate? How to transform disappointment, desperation and insecurities into financial instruments? Artist Robertas Narkus introduces an investment scheme which will turn your negative emotions into über-financial resources.

We at 'Prospect Revenge' have a solution: we will buy out your anxiety - anxiety caused by failing to sort out the trash; dependency on social media; war; those who voted wrongly; who parked the car badly; rejected ideas; not listening to your wife, husband, lover; bad investment; poor service; dirty shoes or holidays in Bali.

Don't tell us what to want, how to be, what to fight for. Fight? Are you kidding. To Survive, to live well, live a normal life, be positive. Peace of mind is what we want. Are we to be blamed? Don't you feel guilt on your shoulders?

No, everything is not going to be alright, but is that news? Why wait for tomorrow? Accept who you are now.

About Prospect Revenge

Prospect Revenge is the first UK solo exhibition of Lithuanian artist, Robertas Narkus. The project forms part of Narkus' wide-ranging practice that he describes as the 'management of circumstances in an economy of coincidence'. His various initiatives and collaborations include the founding of the Vilnius Institute of 'Pataphysics, the establishment of Autarkia, an 'artists' day-care centre' in Vilnius, which incorporates the restaurant Delta Mityba, the creation of eeKulgrinda, an experimental engineering camp that took place across Lithuania (2014 – 2018) and the foundation of 'a kind of bad idea', Visionary, a platform for art and hi-tech cooperation, amongst many others.

Prospect Revenge began during Narkus' residency at the Delfina Foundation, London and continued to develop in various ways in Liverpool, Vilnius and now in Glasgow. As part of an ongoing process that is related to the various strands of Narkus' practice, the project cannot be defined in any simple way and the closer you consider its various components

the more ambiguous it becomes. At its core, however, is an exploration of states of change and the ways in which change is managed and dealt with both within Narkus' own work and in the sectors where creativity has been co-opted as a company strategy, such as in tech start-ups. For Narkus, creativity is a form of playing that embraces conditions of complexity and contradiction and where 'solutions' are understood as continually contingent and unresolved. As he explained in an interview, 'I have no destination; we are just creating problems and then we create solutions.'¹

In the videos exhibited here, a fictional entrepreneur, played by Narkus himself, presents various business propositions with all the clichés of business speak. The piece is a series of ironic portraits and at the same time is based on Narkus' own projects. In one episode, for example, Narkus ironically presents himself as a property developer in the process of converting a former factory and warehouse. This is partly based on Narkus' own project of transforming a former Soviet factory in the now fashionable 'loft' district of Vilnius into an extension of Autarkia. His work is thus rooted in an awareness of how his own artistic projects are inextricably tied into the social and economic systems in which we live. His critique is consequently not about simple opposition, but about tactical embrace and negotiation.

While Narkus does not give one meaning to the title, *Prospect Revenge*, it can be read as the sometimes playful, sometimes bitter push-back of materials and systems to strategies of control. His work looks at how, for instance, the 'big ideas' of companies and property developers to transform place and person are met with the resistance of their social and material realities. Prospect, the outward facing counterpart to revenge, is associated as much with the long-view of an entrepreneur whose main aim is profit and growth as with the more 'embedded' view of taking up possibilities of play that are thrown up in the process of negotiating the material world. For Narkus, these possibilities to play emerge from actively embracing digressions and distractions that lead not to enhanced productivity, but to more ambiguity, questions and possibilities for amusement along the way: 'how to use the things that you can control', Narkus has asked, 'in order to achieve something you cannot control.'²

1. Robertas Narkus in conversation with Zane Ozola, "The Coincidences of Robertas Narkus: An interview with Lithuanian artist Robertas Narkus", *Arterritory*, 2015.

2. Robertas Narkus interviewed by Elvia Wilk, "If the Exhibition Were a Factory, it Would Be Producing Glue", *Mousse Magazine*, issue 59, Summer 2017. Summer 2017.

“The longer journey in trying to fix the house”

For Robertas Narkus from Yates Norton

An earwig is attempting to scramble across a field of sand particles in one of Robertas Narkus' videos. Its pathway evolves according to the frantic interdependence of legs, sand and a desire to get somewhere.

The building industry is very particular about the kind of sand it needs for cement and concrete: sand free of salt and matter that might corrode other materials, as well as sand that has the necessary angular shape to enhance traction and hold. The aim is fixity and strength. Smooth sand is for holidays in Bali.

As we know, buildings and infrastructure, as tightly as we may want to control them, will always involve loose parts.¹ Dust, pigeons on the parapet, leaking pipe. A loose part doesn't mean an isolated individual particle. It is something dangling off something else, waiting to be fixed one day, like a door knob, or like a house in general, always in the process of being fixed. The whole 'house' as concept tends to flail under house as assemblage of its greater parts. Either we are trying to hold the parts together as best as we can, always in the key of 'in spite of', or we try to change everything radically, out of frustration, boredom or the prospect of increased capital, like installing a new kitchen. The very wealthy tend toward ripping everything out and starting all over again. Most of us tend toward glue.

Lose parts tend to flick back in bitter or playful revenge at attempts at being subordinated to something like the 'house' as concept. Playing in this field of loose parts, in a sandpit for example, is a reminder that all these parts respond to one another in ways that constitute evolving possibilities for various directions of play and for various assemblages of these parts. If the earwig wants to change direction, the direction and moment of change is informed by the particular configuration of legs, sand, frustrated earwig, all responding to one another in a distributed field of agency.

Something is wrong here

And yet, the earwig may not be frustrated. If the aim is increased productivity, efficiency and speed, battling your way through a pile of sand to get from a to b is likely to be an exhausting enterprise. If the focus is shifted toward enhancing pleasure through digressions and pointless, spiraling itineraries, the activity may be, if not playful, then at least a basic fact of living in a world of interdependent things.

Robertas Narkus tends toward the spiraling itinerary. His project, *Prospect Revenge*, is probably best understood as one direction in a map of constantly expanding other directions leading to various projects and activities. These include, Autarkia, an 'artists' day-care centre' in Vilnius, which also incorporates a restaurant, Delta Mityba, an 'experimental engineering camp', eeKūlgrinda ('kūlgrinda' is a Lithuanian word meaning a secret pathway hidden under shallow swamps that was used to escape attack) and now the development of a studio and exhibition spaces in an old concrete building in Vilnius.

There's no time for deeper discussion

Robertas Narkus calls this mesh of activities a practice of the 'management of circumstances in an economy of coincidences.' We associate management and economy with the configuration of resources and energies to increase the efficiency of their flow and maximise performance.

Coincidences, like loose parts and pointless conversations by the coffee machine, tend to leak out of this network of control. In response or in anticipation of this, good management makes a structure that is flexible enough to either embrace these loose parts or efficiently cut them out so you can stay on the right path toward cornering the market. In such a system, there is no time for deeper discussion and the aim is to move beyond ambiguity and indecision. Incidentally, a definition of the term 'ambiguous' from 1690 includes 'mélange', 'a decision held in suspense' and tactical, probably rather longwinded negotiating.²

Robertas' practice and management include this ambiguous, indecisive mélange of loose parts. This is quite helpful in terms of enhancing pleasure and play. It is also helpful in enabling things to happen, because as long as there are parts to move and reconfigure, there are possible detours and various configurations to figure out.

This kind of management, let's also call it playing, can motivate response and responsibility, and tends along the serpentine lines of possibility rather than closure. These lines keep open a field of different looping pathways to follow. You can trace them in Robertas' work, sometimes figured out as arabesques, drawn over time by an interdependence of loose parts.

Go!

Yes, but where are we going? As we're scrabbling across a field of sand particles, the whole meaning, point, reason, of our scrabbling keeps shifting according to the different, often discordant configurations of the things in which we are embedded. The final, wipe-clean concept of house dismantles under the loose assemblage of its leaking parts. So, the journey is a potentially endless one, with more fixing to more problems along the way. But conceived as play in playing's long 'to-and-fro movement not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end'³, Robertas reminds us that we can only keep on going.

1. Simon Nicholson, "The Theory of Loose Parts, An important principle for design methodology," *Studies in Design Education Craft & Technology*, Vol. 4, no. 2. (Spring, 1972).

2. Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel, Contenant Généralement Tous Les Mots François Tant Vieux Que Modernes, Et Les Termes De Toutes Les Sciences Et Des Arts*. La Haye: A. Et R. Leers, 1690. Entry for 'ambigu'.

3, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 104.

Robertas Narkus (Lithuania, currently based in Vilnius, Lithuania) describes his practice as the 'management of circumstances in the economy of coincidence'. Drawing together a range of initiatives, collaborations and projects and working with a number of techniques and materials, Narkus explores perceived ideas of the useful and useless, the ordinary and the absurd, obsolescence and productivity, power relations and knowledge, play and the uses and abuses of creativity. Narkus is the founder of the Vilnius Institute of 'Pataphysics; the organiser of Autarkia, an artists' day care centre in Vilnius; the originator of eeKulgrinda, an experimental engineering camp; and he is involved with the Visionary, a platform for art and hi-tech cooperation. His numerous exhibitions and performances, include those at the CAC Vilnius, XII Baltic Triennial (Vilnius), Kim? (Riga), De Appel Art Center (Amsterdam), Etablissement d'en Face (Brussels), Ujazdowski Castle (Warsaw), Marrakech Biennale, among others. Robertas holds an MFA degree from the Sandberg Instituut at Rietveld Academie. In 2014 he was awarded a Young Artist prize from the Lithuanian Culture Ministry for significant achievements in the field of visual arts.

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The exhibition, organised in partnership with Rupert, Vilnius, Lithuania, is part of an ongoing series of organisational exchanges initiated by David Dale Gallery. The project is preceded by exchanges with The Workbench, Milan, Swimming Pool, Sofia and SALTS, Birsfelden. David Dale Gallery will present an exhibition in Vilnius as part of the exchange in Summer 2020.

Curator: Yates Norton

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