Interview: Pika Basaj

1. How do you create your artwork? How would you describe your artistic practice? Which media or approaches do you find crucial, and what is the primary focus of your interest or research?

My area of interest broadly focuses on the formation of ceremonial practices, rituals, and algorithms, aiming to restructure or undermine particular ways of functioning and thus provoke a specific shift or dislocation in reality. I am interested in the processes of relocating elements and rearticulating connections between them – I ask myself, for example, which elements are somehow aesthetically engaging and, above all, structurally compact enough to cause a specific point of degeneration by moving away from the dominant structural generality. The process of work is, in this way, quite diffuse – various levers form a conceptual basis that usually lasts for some time at the level of speculation before it is materialised or realised.

2. How do you interpret the concept of personal durational performance in your practice? What does such a form enable?

I understand personal durational performance as a tool that allows a specific part of the first regime of reality to gradually restructure, travel, and branch off into a second performative regime, which, however, always maintains an aporetic connection with the first. I could also describe it as a kind of *life-programming* that rearranges the map of possibilities, and thus also hierarchies and sensory perceptions, thereby opening up space for another system of existence.

3. Your work is also characterised by a longer time span of performance. When, if ever, is an artwork finished?

I want to refer to two concrete examples to answer this question. For instance, in the *M.M.* piece (2023, ongoing), I start with a specific relationship marked by recurring ideological frictions, which I intervene in with the possibility of using two head masks (one for myself, the other for my father). The core of the piece lies in launching a new layer of relationship that redefines the existing one, thereby altering its status. Even if the mask as an object is rarely used in the piece, it remains a material threat and, above all, a thought module. The mask is therefore a material tool-weapon that, likewise in its virtual prosthetic form, becomes inherent to the relationship; this is why the end of this so-called personal performance is also indeterminate. I recognise a similar principle in establishing the algorithm *chair – decision // thought – knot* (2025, ongoing): as little as a more or less precise set of selected parameters suffices for the work to be synthesised into a so-called immeasurable force that begins to exert a certain pressure on the subject (i.e., me). Although durational performative practice increases the algorithm's intensity and exacerbates its impact, the algorithm itself was effective even before its empirical implementation began. In short, because the artwork is primarily a diffuse mental structure, its scope is indeterminate, and therefore, where it ends remains elusive.

4. The artwork is embedded in an exhibition space, comes into contact with the audience, and thus becomes public. Does your work change as a result?

Of course, this change is generally unavoidable. However, in the case of a type of work such as *chair – decision // thought – knot*, which aims to transform psychological processes, there is another specific aspect – namely, that the algorithm can function smoothly only if it is predetermined which of its traces will be visible to the public and which will not. I decided not

to reveal the content of the decisions made within the ritual because had I done so, the algorithm's logic would have changed completely. The gallery setting is thus not so much about consistent documentation of the material traces of the algorithm/performance, but rather about an attempt to choreograph the space in a way that would provoke a complex set of associations and, perhaps, also colonise the viewer's mental space.

5. How do you interpret the relationship between the artist and the work within the context of the exhibited project *chair – decision // thought – knot*, where the work is not merely an object, but an algorithm?

I see the algorithm as a simulated compulsion that cannot be presented in its direct presence but only through its traces and effects. Despite the broad spectrum of manifest forms it takes – ranging from statements, concepts, images, and objects to bodily gestures, relationships, and situations – it is primarily an immeasurable force that, with its absent presence, tears the body and mind out of their existing choreographies. Since the algorithm demands a rapid circulation of novelty from its host (every day I have to photograph a different chair and make a different decision), it is constantly in a state of change and becoming. At the same time, the question arises: how long does it need to be implemented empirically for its effects to become sufficiently condensed and somehow stabilised (if this is even possible)? I am also interested in whether, if performed over a long period of time and repeatedly, such a structure could grow into an actual compulsion that would displace one of the existing ones, or, in this case, would the compulsions simply layer and reinforce each other? Is the algorithm heading in the direction of a destructive, dysphoric entity, or is the process of mapping mental space establishing the possibility of orientation amidst disorientation?

The interview was conducted by Vida Šturm and Aja Topolnik.