

Johana Merta: Over All Possibilities 2

22–28 August 2025

House of Arts Brno, Jaroslav Král Gallery and foyer

curator: Júlia Bútorová

*Equilibrium is not a static state, but a constant balancing of counteracting forces that stretch, support, and question one another. Johana Merta's exhibition exists within this space of tension between individual and community, process and result, silence and shouting.*

*Over All Possibilities 2* presents recent works by Johana Merta (1987), whose art straddles the line between installation, sculptural thinking, and environmental activism. Over the years, she has developed a relationship with found materials as bearers of experience and cultural memory and as a way of thinking critically about the world. The exhibition grew out of the artist's interest in the subject of balance, not only in the sense of form and composition, but above all as an important cultural, social, and existential question.

The exhibition understands balance not as a starting point or desired goal, but as a never-ending process of finding equilibrium that takes place on a number of different levels – physical, mental, and social. Merta explores this state as a structural tension that permeates not only the body and its biorhythms, but also power relations, the economics of labor, models of care, and the conditions of production. In this sense, her approach can be seen as a form of critical new materialism that reflects the cultural shift away from balance as harmony toward balance as constant negotiation.

Her installations can among other things be read as models of the post-industrial landscape: places where the natural, human, and technological collide, leaving behind traces of the body and of systemic production. In this setting, balance is being constantly reevaluated as a relationship between growth and depletion, presence and loss, center and periphery. In a world of post-Fordist economics, precarious labor, and cultural fragmentation, balance becomes a matter of survival. The art of Johana Merta, though quiet and restrained, reflects precisely this necessity: how to live and create in a world that itself has lost its balance.

In the exhibition, a fundamental role is played by comparison, by the juxtaposition of two objects that appear ordinary at first glance but that become bearers of fundamental semantic tension. For example, bread and a brick. Bread as a symbol of everyday satiation and sharing, of culture rootedness. The brick as a fundamental building block and a product of labor, but also as a commodity detached from relationships. The result is an eloquent materialistic allegory that asks: What nourishes us and what do we build? What do we maintain and what shapes us? What is soft, physical, and close, and what is hard, impersonal, and institutional?

The exhibition presents bread as more than food, but as a symbol with a fissure running through it. The brick is not just a piece of clay; it is a sign of order, which can be both a home and a prison. Nevertheless, Merta's intention is not to create binary contrasts between good and evil, but to ask questions about the nature of human enterprise, cultural values, and the conditions for survival.

This idea of relationships and contrasts closely relates to the artistic approach known as *expanded sculpture* – sculpture that understands space as a medium, the object as a relationship, and the installation as a situation. In Merta's work, this approach goes beyond merely working with the physical substance; it is present in the way she thinks about the world. Shape, weight, pressure, structure, composition – these are not just visual or physical parameters, they are modes of cultural analysis.

This layeredness is a decisive characteristic of Merta's work. It is not narrative layering, but the structuring a space in which personal and collective, historical and contemporary, concrete and abstract experiences can coexist. In this way, she shows that reality is not uniform, but complex, unstable, and always conditional. And precisely this instability lays the foundations for sensitivity, uncertainty, and reflection.

In this sense, her art is unpretentiously political. Not on the level of explicit messages, but in her choice of themes, methods, and positions. Her approach is not activist, but profoundly engaged: it engages the material, the space, and the viewer. Merta focuses on marginalia, remnants, and temporariness while simultaneously creating structures in which there is room for relationships, for sharing, for the unfinished. Her activism is not declarative; it is embodied in the construction of the work, in the way the objects exist side by side, how they touch, what tension they carry between them. In the imaginary maze of (state) borders made of Euro fences, which form the architecture of the exhibition, diverse fragments meet: fabric from parachutes, an inscription from the demolished Prior department store in Brno, Kyjov folk costumes, military camouflage netting, printing matrices from the former ADAŠT, plaster casts of the teeth of workers from the old Zbrojovka factory, river pearls that have never seen a river, and more. The exhibition thus becomes a place of ethical attention where balance can be understood not just as an aesthetic principle, but also as a fundamental condition for coexistence.

At a time when Europe and the world are divided by armed conflicts, migration, cultural misunderstanding, and the fear of the unknown, *Over All Possibilities 2* positions itself as an active venue for sharing and relating. The exhibition space has been designed to be a safe meeting place for local residents and for people who have been forced from their homes. Although even this space has its limits, it can become the seed for new relationships, both human and social.

The art of Johana Merta grows out of an awareness that visual art, too, can be a form of research – not just in the academic sense, but also in how we explore forms of coexistence. Her installations are not mere gesture; they are an open laboratory of interpersonal contact. Safety is created not through escape, but through the sharing of uncertainties. *Over All Possibilities 2* is not a utopia, it is an invitation to exist consciously in an ambiguous present.

Artists participating in the program of accompanying events: Petra Cihlářová, Sonya Darrow, Zuzana Kantorová, Monika Krchňáková

Accompanying events:

**Sunday, 24 August 2025 at 2pm**

Johana Merta: DIVADÝLKO  
workshop

**Sunday, 24 August 2025 at 2pm**

Jindra Žáková: UZLY

workshop

**Monday, 25 August 2025 at 6pm**

MgA. Pavla Nikitina, Mgr. Marcel Tomášek, MA, Ph.D., Lucie Řehoříková, MgA., Johana Merta: In what ways can one make art in a state of war?

lecture discussion

**Wednesday, 27 August 2025 at 6pm**

Sonya Darrow and Zuzana Kantorová: KROJ

participatory performance