

MARINA PAULENKA

Curator | Artistic Director | Educator | Consultant

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Curatorial Statement

Based in Berlin and originally from Croatia, Marina Paulenka brings over 18 years of experience in artistic direction, curating, education, leadership, management, and cultural development—alongside her own artistic practice. Her work spans contemporary visual, digital, and performing arts, with a specialization in photography and new media. Across these roles and mediums, she consistently pushes boundaries, provokes critical dialogue, and engages with urgent global concerns. Her practice is shaped by intellectual rigor, a commitment to innovation, and a focus on intersectionality, experimentation, and the transformative potential of art.

Drawing on her post-Yugoslav and Balkan heritage, Paulenka's curatorial approach is rooted in rich cultural histories and complex socio-political realities. She engages deeply with feminism, identity, gender, human rights, and social justice, as well as the politics of the body, digital representation, and the sociocultural impact of cyberspace. Her perspective is informed by non-Western epistemologies, and she actively centers voices from African, Asian, Latin American, Indigenous, and diasporic communities—foregrounding aesthetics and knowledge shaped by lived histories of resistance, displacement, and care. Working both locally and internationally, she builds bridges between diverse cultural contexts and imagined futures, and is interested in how knowledge is constructed at the intersection of art, science, spirituality, and technology.

She has built and led large-scale, multidimensional art projects and organisations that bring together artists, institutions, and the public, fostering collaboration and community. Her curatorial ethos prioritizes care, solidarity, and sustainability through inclusive and participatory infrastructures. Her approach to curating is guided by relational ethics—anchored in listening, exchange, and the ongoing reimagining of how art can be made, shared, and understood.

Her ongoing research into the Non-Aligned Movement informs a broader interest in decolonial and postcolonial thinking and how it can reshape global frameworks in the arts.

Professional Work Experience

2022–2025

Director of Exhibitions, Fotografiska Berlin

As the Founding Director of Fotografiska Berlin, Paulenka was responsible for establishing the museum's artistic vision, institutional strategy, and public identity from the ground up. Working alongside Yousef Hammoudah, she led the 18-month pre-opening development, co-developing community outreach initiatives that prioritized inclusivity and fostered dialogue with both local and international audiences. Paulenka developed the museum's curatorial strategy, focusing on socially engaged, multidisciplinary programming that reflects pressing contemporary issues. Her exhibitions, which addressed themes such as gender, ecology, and identity, often used photography and lens-based media to provoke reflection and conversation. The programming included work from artists such as **Candice Breitz, Juliana Huxtable, Sejla Kamerić, Josefa Ntjam, Eli Cortinas, Lebohang Kganye, Shirin Neshat, and Helga Paris**, among others. She also initiated the **Emerging Berlin Program**, which brought attention to underrepresented and emerging voices in the

Berlin art scene. Paulenka oversaw major public events such as **Fotografiska Days**, a dynamic festival-style platform that brought together talks, exhibitions, performances, and workshops.

2019–2020

Artistic Director, UNSEEN

(Unseen Amsterdam, Unseen Foundation, Unseen International, Unseen Media)

As Artistic Director, Marina Paulenka led a transformative phase in the development of Unseen, overseeing artistic and institutional strategy across the Unseen Foundation and its three affiliated entities. She expanded the platform's international scope by introducing galleries and artists from underrepresented regions such as Ghana, Iran, and Turkey, broadening the fair's global perspective. Under her leadership, the 2019 edition of Unseen Amsterdam featured 53 galleries, with 19 newcomers representing these regions. Paulenka curated exhibitions, including a solo show by **Tabita Rezaire** that explored themes of identity, technology, and spirituality and worked with artist such as **Zohra Opoku** and **Joana Choumali**. Additionally, she co-developed the **"Living Room" talk series** in collaboration with institutions like the **V&A Museum and LagosPhoto**, promoting critical discussions on curation and collection practices. As Editor-in-Chief of Unseen Magazine and the digital platform, Paulenka guided the editorial direction with a focus on emerging voices and experimental practices, amplifying boundary-pushing artists. She also conducted comprehensive research to inform the platform's future development and strategy, ensuring its continued relevance in the evolving photography landscape.

2008–2019

Founder, Director and Curator, Organ Vida Festival, Zagreb

Paulenka founded and led Organ Vida, Croatia's leading institution for contemporary photography and the first major photography festival in the Balkans. Under her visionary leadership, the festival grew into an internationally recognized event, evolving into a biennial format after 2019. The festival focused on the intersection of photography, visual arts, digital culture, and socio-political critique, becoming a platform for urgent global conversations. Paulenka emphasized community engagement, collaborating with over 20 museums, galleries, and unconventional spaces throughout Zagreb. Organ Vida's multifaceted programming included exhibitions, educational initiatives, discursive talks, and film screenings, all aimed at promoting inclusivity and diversity.

The festival's commitment to excellence and cultural dialogue earned it global acclaim, with The Guardian naming Organ Vida one of the top five photography institutions worldwide and the festival winning a prestigious Lucie Award for Best Photography Show in the World. In addition to curating major exhibitions, Paulenka established the **Marina Viculin Award**, the first photography prize in Croatia, to financially support emerging artists and offer them exhibition opportunities. Under her leadership, Organ Vida not only amplified art from the former Yugoslav territories on the international stage but also played a key role in positioning Croatia as a central hub for contemporary photography. The festival brought world-class artists and global perspectives to the region while nurturing and supporting the development of local talent. Paulenka worked with renowned artists including **Katalin Ladik**, **Hannah Starkey**, **Dana Lixenberg**, **Zanele Muholi**, **Pieter Hugo**, **Roger Ballen**, **Tomoko Sawada**, **Gillian Wearing**, among many others.

Additional Roles

Curator 3 day conference and exhibition **CULTURAL FABRIC – Rereading the Relationship Between Fashion and Art Practices**, Berlin, Germany

Curator, 2 day Conference and exhibition: **HYBRIDS: Forging New Realities as Counter Narratives**, Netherlands

Keynote Curator, **FORMAT21 International Photography Festival**, UK

Member, Creative Committee, **Bristol Photo Festival**, UK

Project leader for Croatia, **Parallel — European Photo Based Platform**, Creative Europe

Project leader for Croatia, **REFEST – A Storytelling Platform. Images and Words on Refugee Routes**, Creative Europe

Project leader for Croatia and guest curator, **THROUGH HER EYES**, Europe for Citizens

Project leader for Croatia, **LESSONS FROM 91**, Europe for Citizens

Recognitions

Lucie Award for Best Curator/Exhibition of the Year (2018) for Engaged, Active, Aware: Women Perspectives Now

Center for Women studies, first award for the project The Other Home, Zagreb, Croatia

Education

MA in Photography, Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb

MA in Graphic Design & Engineering of Printing Technology, Faculty of Graphic Arts, University of Zagreb

Graduate of the Centre for Women's Studies, Zagreb

Political School for Artists, BLOK, Curatorial Collective, Zagreb, Croatia

Academic & Advisory Engagements

Paulenka has taught at numerous leading **academic institutions** across Europe, including the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, ECAL in Switzerland, the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb, Fondazione Modena Arti Visive, Universität der Künste (UdK) in Berlin, Zurich University of the Arts, Manchester School of Art, and Utrecht School of the Arts.

As an international **keynote speaker**, she regularly lectures on art, photography, feminism, technology, and innovation. She frequently moderates and participates in panels and roundtable discussions at major international events. Her speaking engagements include the Investec Cape Town Art Fair, 1-54, Paris Photo, EXPOSED Festival in Turin, Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris, Les Rencontres d'Arles, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, the Inside Out Centre for the Arts in Johannesburg, PHotoESPAÑA PRO Talento a bordo, the Women in Photography: Fast Forward conference, and (IN)VISIBILITIES: Gender and Photography organized by FOTODOK in the Netherlands.

Affiliations

Member, IKT- International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art

Member, Oracle Photo – International Photo Curators Organisation

Jury Membership, Mentorship & Portfolio Reviewing

Paulenka is an active mentor to emerging photographers and visual artists, and frequently serves as a jury member, nominator, and **portfolio reviewer** for some of the most prestigious awards, festivals, and institutions in the field of photography.

Her roles have included **jury service** for the Joop Swart Masterclass, Prix Pictet, Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize, Les Rencontres d'Arles, and the Hamburg Triennial, Kassel Photobook, among others.

She has also contributed her expertise to platforms such as Magnum Photos, PHotoESPAÑA, Fotomuseum Winterthur, and the Prince Claus Fund. Her reviewing and curatorial input have supported a wide range of international photography festivals and initiatives across Europe, including Encontros da Imagem (Portugal), Photoworks/ Brighton Photo Biennial (UK), BredaPhoto (Netherlands), Fotofestiwal Lodz (Poland), FORMAT Festival (UK), Fotografia Europea (Italy), Art Weekend Aarhus (Denmark), Riga Photomonth and Self Publish Riga (Latvia), Boutographies (France), Photonic Moments (Slovenia), and Fotopub (Slovenia).

Publications & Papers

Marina Paulenka has contributed to a variety of publications and academic papers, primarily exploring photography, visual culture, and exhibition practices.

“Why Exhibit? Positions on Exhibiting Photographies” (Fw:Books, 2018) - A reflection on the theory and practice of exhibiting photography, exploring its evolving role in contemporary art institutions.

“Transformations: Exploring Changes in and Around Photography” (Viewbook, 2016) - This publication delves into the dynamic shifts within photographic practices, investigating how photography is influenced by technological, cultural, and social transformations.

“Position of Festivals and Fairs in Contemporary Photographic Practice” (Proceedings of the International Conference Photography as a Method of Visual Research, University of Novi Sad, 2017/2018) - A paper analyzing the role of photography festivals and fairs in shaping contemporary photographic discourse and practice.

“Lomography” (Conference of Graphic Arts, Senj, Croatia, 2010) - Co-authored with M. Mikota and I. Pavlović, this paper investigates Lomography as a photographic technique and its cultural implications.

“Evaluation of Color Reproduction and Print Quality Elements of Ink-jet Prints on Uncoated Paper” (Printing Future Days 2007, edited by C. Schuhmann and R. Baumann) - Co-authored with Rahela Kulcar and Maja Stanic, this paper focuses on technical aspects of color reproduction in print, offering insights into ink-jet printing technologies.

Curated exhibitions, selection

- 2025 **Helga Paris**, fur uns, solo exhibition co curated by Udo Kitlemann, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2025 **Lebohang Kganye**, Le Sale ka Kgotso, solo exhibition, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2025 **Sejla Kamberic**, EX YOU, solo exhibition, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2025 **Viviane Sassen**, The Body as Sculpture, solo exhibition, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2024 **NONOTAK**, FLUX, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2024 **MAOTIK**, In search of Equilibrium, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2024 **Eli Cortinas**, The Machine Monolog: Part I: The Storm solo exhibition, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2024 **Joanna Dudley**, We will slam you with our wings, solo exhibition, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2024 **Shirin Neshat**, The Fury, solo exhibition, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2023 **Juliana Huxtable**, -ussyfilia, solo exhibition, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2023 **Candice Breitz**, Whiteface, solo exhibition, Fotografiska Berlin
- 2023 **CULTURAL FABRIC** – Rereading the Relationship Between Fashion and Art Practices
- Julie Poly, Carlota Guerrero, Mous Lamrabat, Zohra Opoku, Irene Ha, Cibelle Cavalli Bastos, Jojo Gronostay, Šejla Kamberić, Anna Franceschini**

- 2022 **Viviane Sassen**, Venus & Mercury, solo show at Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia
- 2022 **Dangerous Bodies**, group show: **Anna Ehrenstein, Marisol Mendez, Dragana Jurisic, Gloria Oyarzabal and Selma Selman**, Kersgallery Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 2022 **Rahima Gambo, Danae Howrds**: I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it, Photofestival Lodz, Poland
- 2021 **Hybrids: Forging New Realities as Counter-Narrative**, group show, Melkweg Expo, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 2020-21 Keynote curator for FORMAT 21 festival, edition CONTROL, Derby, UK
- Matrix— fluid bodies, unlimited thoughts:**
- Juliana Huxtable, Tabita Rezaire, Martine Gutierrez**, QUAD , Gallery, Derby, UK
- 2019 Unseen Amsterdam 2019, artistic direction
- Tabita Rezaire**, Vortex of Infinity, solo exhibition, Transformatorhuis Westergas, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 2018 **Her New East**, group exhibition, Selma Selman, Asiana Jurca Avci, Karla Jurić, Tatjana Radičević Planinčić, Gallery Galženica, Nova Gorica, Croatia

- 2018 10th ORGAN VIDA — International Photography Festival
- Engaged, Active, Aware—Womens’ Perspectives Now**, 20 artists, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia
- Nina Berman**: An Autobiography of Miss Wish, solo exhibition, Gallery NOVA — WHW collective, Zagreb
- Anna Ehrenstein**: Tales of lipstick and virtue, solo exhibition, Gallery Shira, Zagreb
- Laia Abril**: A History of Misogyny, Chapter One — On Abortion, solo exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb
- Amalia Ulman**: Priviledge, solo exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb
- Arvida Bystrom**: Cherry Picking, solo exhibition, Gallery Kranjcar, Zagreb
- Monica Alcazar-Duarte**: Ascension, solo exhibition, Gallery Oris, Zagreb

- 2018 **Vigilance, Struggle, Pride: Through Her Eyes**, group exhibition
- Ahlam Shibli, Amak Mahmoodian, April Gertler, Hannah Starkey, Laia Abril, Lua Ribeira, Nina Berman, Nina Mangalanayagam, Nydia Blas, Sandra Vitaljić, Tasneem Alsultan, Tomoko Sawada, Zanele Muholi

	Art Gallery Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia
	Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany
	Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Croatia
	Kunsthalle Bratislava, Bratislava, Slovakia
2018	SHE —Through her Eyes / Sisterhood and Gentle Men , Forum Stadtpark Graz, Graz, Austria
2018	Scanning Delfshaven , Foundation MESH, Rotterdam, Netherlands
2018	Photobooks from Balkans: First Steps
	Stricka Villa Gallery, Riga, Latvia
	Museo Macro Testaccio – Spazio Factory, Rome, Italy
	National Gallery of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania
2017	9th ORGAN VIDA — International Photography Festival 2017 - New Citizens
	Artistic direction, exhibitions and discursive program
	New Citizens , main open call exhibition, 20 artists, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb,
	Dana Lixenberg : Imperial Courts, video installation, solo exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Arts Zagreb, Croatia
	Pieter Hugo : Verisimilar worlds, The West African works, solo exhibition, 2005 -2010, Museum of Contemporary Arts
	Christina de Middel : Shakification, solo exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Arts Zagreb, Croatia
	Anouk Kruithof : Ego, Eco, Crescendo, solo exhibition, French pavilion, Zagreb, Croatia
	Katrin Koenning : Indefinitely, solo exhibition, Gallery Kranjcar, Zagreb, Croatia
	Dragana Jurisic : YU- Lost country, solo exhibition, Archeology Museum, Yagreb
2016	8th ORGAN VIDA — International Photography Festival 2016 - Revelations
	Artistic direction, exhibitions and discursive program
	Revelations , main open call exhibition, 20 artists, French pavilion, Zagreb
	Phillip Toledano : Maybe, Gallery Kranjčar, Zagreb, Croatia
2015	7th ORGAN VIDA — International Photography Festival 2015 — Boundaries
	Artistic direction, exhibitions and discursive program
	Boundaries , Gallery Klovićevi dvori, Zagreb, Croatia
	Rob Hornstra & Arnold van Bruggen , The Sochi Project
	Maia Tammi, Markus Henttonen, Iiu Susiraja
2014	6th ORGAN VIDA — International Photography Festival 2014—Reflections,
	Artistic Direction, exhibitions
	Reflections , main open call exhibition, 20 artists, Lauba, Zagreb
2013	5th ORGAN VIDA — International Photography Festival 2013, Artistic Direction
2012	4th ORGAN VIDA — International Photography Festival 2012, Artistic Direction
2009-2011	1st, 2nd, 3rd ORGAN VIDA Photography Festival (national caracter)