



OUT OF THE BOX - Jakub Jansa

An interview series with the visionaries of the art world.

By Christine Hauptmann
April 2026



In this OUT OF THE BOX edition, we speak with artist Jakub Jansa, who represents the Czech Republic at this year's Venice Biennale alongside Slovakia, marking the centenary of their shared pavilion. His practice engages questions of identity, performance, and political imagination through narrative and filmic strategies. Set against an increasingly

charged European context, his project navigates the space between fiction and reality, subjectivity and representation, critically reflecting on the role of national identity within the Biennale framework.

CH Representing a national pavilion at the Venice Biennale inevitably carries historical and political weight. How do you position yourself as an artist within that framework of national representation today?

JJ I think it's partly shaped by the medium and my way of working. In recent years, I would describe myself as a "commission-based artist." I genuinely enjoy engaging creatively with the conditions in which a work is produced. At the same time, those conditions have become significantly heavier. Inevitably, you bring your own personal experience of navigating this situation into the concept. The strategy then becomes a kind of therapy through an alter ego - using the main character of the narrative to articulate a subjective position. With the aggressive rise of the far right in Europe, particularly in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and in light of the current situation at the Biennale (the Russian pavilion, the Israeli pavilion...), the framework is no longer just complex - it begins to feel like a form of horror.

CH The Biennale is often described as both a stage and a pressure cooker. What does it mean for you to develop a project under such intense international visibility. Does it shift your sense of responsibility or risk?

JJ So far, the pressure feels more like a unifying element. We are naturally in contact with other artists representing their countries -such as Aline Bouvy (Luxembourg), Li Yi-Fan (Taiwan), or Sung Tieu (Germany) and in many ways, this experience brings all the artists involved together. I don't really experience it as pressure. I'm genuinely looking forward to the friendships and encounters this experience might generate. At the same time, something like "international pressure" remains quite abstract to me - I'm not even sure I can fully perceive it.

CH Your practice has often engaged with questions of identity, performance, and the construction of social roles. How might these ongoing concerns enter into dialogue with the unique atmosphere of Venice?

JJ As if that wasn't enough, this year also marks the centenary of the Czechoslovak pavilion. We are therefore presenting the exhibition as a joint project of two formerly united countries - Czechia and Slovakia. At its center stands a character inspired by one of our most iconic animated figures, the Little Mole, as well as Kafka's short story The Burrow. The project unfolds as a story about the abduction of imagination into the hands of soft power. An innocent and universally acceptable hero is placed on the stage of high art in Venice, tasked with representing his country at a moment when political representation increasingly leans toward populism and folk aesthetics. The whole exhibition was developed through an ongoing dialogue with the entire team - the Artist duo Selmeči Kocka Jusko (SKJ) and curator Peter Sit. My focus is on the new film, while SKJ have created a series of abstract sculptures derived from the Mole's instruments, which fall silent under the pressure of the situation. Peter has edited an accompanying

publication that expands the project through contributions by invited authors such as Steve Goodman and Aaron Schuster.

CH In recent years, the idea of national pavilions has been increasingly debated. Do you see your participation as reinforcing, questioning, or complicating that format?

JJ In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the pavilion was selected through an open call. As I mentioned, the current context felt so heavy that we initially didn't even want to apply. At the same time, we didn't want to leave this position to conservative forces, and we felt that this might be one of the last opportunities, for a long time, to act within this platform. So we began looking for creative tools - our weapons - to engage with this situation. Our project is not just the Mole; it also operates as a Trojan horse.

CH Looking at your artistic trajectory so far, what feels different about approaching a platform like the Venice Biennale compared to institutional exhibitions you've realized before?

JJ Venice is a brand, globally recognizable. Honestly, I've always been skeptical of this kind of cultural economy - you're expected to move close to the "big elephants": do an internship at Dior, take a photo with Virgil Abloh, have coffee with Obrist (maybe I should finally do that, right?). I never really felt the need to operate that way. And yet, here I am - "the Artist from the Biennale." It's interesting to see how much symbolic weight that carries, how quickly it produces a certain kind of visibility. I observe it, I use it, but am not sure if I fully identify with it. At the same time, I'm aware of its temporality. It's a moment, a condition - something you pass through rather than arrive at. What matters more to me is what can actually be done from within that moment.

CH When you first learned that you would represent the Czech Republic at the Venice Biennale, what was the very first image, feeling, or doubt that crossed your mind?

JJ An explosion of mixed feelings - joy, anxiety, tears. Something surreal.

CH Venice is a city built on layers, reflections, and fragile foundations. Do you feel any parallels between that condition and your own way of thinking or working?

JJ At the end of the day, it's just one big cocktail of ideologies, thoughts, aesthetics, emotions, and ambitions. I think that in my own work and thinking - even when it becomes overwhelming - I can still orient myself better than within what actually unfolds in Venice every two years. I'm not sure whether Venice offers space for reflection, or if it simply produces another form of excess.

CH On a personal level, what does it mean to step into a space that carries decades of artistic history: does it feel like entering a conversation, a confrontation, or something else entirely?

JJ I would be lying if I said it meant nothing. I remember the moment when we picked up the keys to the pavilion at the reception - a large iron key. Everyone who held it took a photo with it as if it were David Beckham. Through that key, I felt all the emotions and

KODL ■■■ C ■■■ NTEMP ■■■ RARY

personal stories of the artists who had passed through before us. It felt like the key weighed about five kilos.

CH Large-scale international exhibitions often amplify expectations from the outside. How do you protect the inner, more intimate core of your practice in such a setting?

JJ Sure, that famous moment when form is losing its attitude. I'm not sure I have a clear solution, but I try not to stop being personal. To maintain, even within the spectacle, the ability to say how I actually feel.

CH If this moment at the Biennale were not a professional milestone but a chapter in your personal story, how would you describe it: as an arrival, a rupture, a risk, or a transformation?

JJ Haha, it would be better if an astrologer answered this. Let's leave it open and see what the planets say.



KODL ■ C ■ NTEMP ■ RARY



KODL ■ C ■ NTEMP ■ RARY

