

CUKRARNA

PRESS

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Špela Petrič: *Eating Back*

15. 9. 2026 — 3. 1. 2027

The Parterre Gallery, Cukrarna Gallery

On Tuesday, 15 September 2026, at 8 pm, Cukrarna Gallery will open *Eating Back*, an exhibition by artist Špela Petrič, curated by Alenka Trebušak.

What does a tomato look like through the eyes of a robot? Why does an algorithm deem one cucumber fit for sale while rejecting another? And what actually happens inside the high-tech greenhouses where the vegetables we encounter on supermarket shelves every day are grown?



Foto © Zuzanna Kuglasz

Špela Petrič's practice brings together art, science and technology. For *Eating Back*, she ventured into industrial greenhouses in the Netherlands, where she closely examined the technologically optimised production of tomatoes and cucumbers. The resulting exhibition is the culmination of several years of research and offers visitors an unexpected glimpse into the usually invisible workings of contemporary food production.

In the Parterre Gallery, visitors will encounter images of tomatoes captured by a robotic system designed to assess ripeness and predict crop yields, 48 jars containing cucumbers rejected by a machine-vision system because of their appearance, a self-driving robot and discarded tomato plants measuring as much as 12 metres in length. Through the artistic installation *Eating Back*, Petrič reveals a world in which data, cameras, algorithms and automated systems are playing an increasingly important role in food production.

EXHIBITION TEXT

Eating Back is a project by artist Špela Petrič that examines the high-tech cultivation of tomatoes and cucumbers in order to explore how algorithmic infrastructures shape our bodies.

Petrič uses the term 'awkward intimacy' to describe the relationships that arise between bodies and infrastructures as a result of consuming industrially produced food – a form of intimacy based on long-standing dependence on systems whose inner workings usually remain hidden, rather than on emotions or consent.

For this exhibition, Petrič draws on a series of performative interventions that she conducted in the greenhouses of Westland, a municipality in the Netherlands. Her choice of location was driven by the fact that the principles underlying the design of the modern industrial greenhouse, which have been adopted across much of Europe in the name of 'agricultural progress', originated in that country. Greenhouses of this kind are highly specialised, enclosed environments that involve comprehensive data collection about both living and non-living actants, allowing for the rapid introduction of digitalisation and automation. The exhibition has been conceived as a series of protocols or exercises that confront the visitor with the invisible and overlooked aspects of vegetable production. Visitors are met with images of tomatoes taken by a robotic system for the purposes of assessing ripeness and predicting yield. They hear a song of resistance about migrant workers that has been adapted from a traditional Polish song. The song played on the local radio contaminates the soundscape of the greenhouses, where large numbers of seasonal workers from Eastern Europe are employed.

Also on display are the results of an intervention in which Petrič worked as a volunteer on a packing line, collecting the cucumbers that had been rejected by the machine vision sorting system and then pickling them. The result is 48 jars of pickled cucumbers and a photobook documenting their profiling along with the reasons the algorithm had classified them as unfit for sale. Under the terms of her performative stewardship agreement, the artist then gifts the jars to decision-makers who shape business, politics and culture. Next to the jars is a conveyor belt that has been converted into a self-driving robot travelling through a seemingly endless landscape full of greenhouses. There are also numerous elements in the exhibition space that can be found in automated vegetable production facilities, including a rail trolley, as well as a greenhouse containing discarded 12-metre-long tomato plants. At the height of their productivity – itself the result of an automated and optimised system – their neatly packaged product was made available to consumers in the local supermarket.

Building on Petrič's direct access to the industrial greenhouse and its technological apparatus, *Eating Back* succeeds in contaminating the system from within. Through a series of performative interventions that adopt the principles of the system while simultaneously exploiting its cracks to enter it, the project reveals that the asymmetry between the infrastructure and the bodies subjected to it is integral to the system itself. It does not stop there, however. Petrič invites visitors to continue this process, not just by becoming aware of

these dependencies but also by 'eating back'. By following the protocols presented in the gallery – whether in the supermarket or at home – they are invited to actively engage with the awkward intimacy that arises from these encounters. In this way, the project extends beyond the walls of Cukrarna and enters into everyday life, where it subverts the routines and seemingly banal intertwining of relationships that form the basis of contemporary life.

-Alenka Trebušak, the curator of the exhibition at Cukrarna Gallery

ARTISTS BIO

ŠPELA PETRIČ (1980) is a Slovenian new media artist and former scientific researcher currently based between Ljubljana and Amsterdam. Her multispecies artistic practice lies at the intersection of biology, technology and ecology. She envisions artistic experiments that enact strange relationalities, revealing the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of our technological societies and exploring the limits of the adjacent possible.

Her work has been shown at numerous festivals, exhibitions and educational events, including *La Fabrique du Vivant* at Centre Pompidou (France), Abandon Normal Devices (UK), the Venice Biennale of Architecture (Italy), Touch Me Festival (Croatia), Ars Electronica (Austria), Nam June Paik Art Center (South Korea), HAIP (Slovenia) and 21_21 Design Sight (Japan). She has received several awards for her work, including the White Aphroid Award for exceptional artistic achievement (2016), the Bioart and Design Award (2014) and an Award of Distinction at Prix Ars Electronica (2019).

Further information about her life and artistic practice is available on her website:

<https://www.spelapetric.org/>.

EXHIBITION COLOPHON

Exhibition text: Alenka Trebušak (Cukrarna Gallery/MGML); Exhibition production and coordination (Cukrarna Gallery/MGML): Janja Buzečan; Public relations (Cukrarna Gallery/MGML): Mojca Podlesek; Educational and andragogical program (Cukrarna Gallery/MGML): Nina Vošnjak; Production assistant: Simon Gmajner (Studio Terratope); Exhibition design: Miha Turšič; Advice: Agnieszka Anna Wołodźko; Execution: Fabrikaid d.o.o.; Technical assistance: Valter Udovičić, Jure Sajovic; Thank you: Zuzanna Kuglasz, Stichting Tomatoworld, EatThis., Waag Futurelab, Piccolo Komkommers B.V., Projekt Atol, Adrijan Praznik, Rea Vogrinčič. Producer: Cukrarna Gallery (MGML); Co-producer: Zavod 2[^]32; Co-funded by: City Municipality of Ljubljana (MOL)

Cukrarna Gallery is part of the public institution Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana (MGML).

FOR MEDIA

The artist will be available for in-person interviews from 14 to 18 September. For further information, comments or interview requests, please contact Mojca Podlesek at mojca.podlesek@mgml.si or +386 31 486 794.

Photographs and press releases are available in the Press Materials section of the [exhibition website](#). Installation images will be available on the website following the exhibition opening.

The exhibition opening will begin in Parter Gallery on Tuesday, 15 September 2026, at 8 pm. Due to the scheduled opening programme, we kindly ask you to arrive on time.

Admission to the exhibition and the opening is free. The exhibition will be on view from 15 September 2026 to 3 January 2027 in Parter Gallery, Cukrarna's ground-floor exhibition space. Its programme follows the concept of "One Space – One Artist – One Project" and is dedicated to solo presentations by individual artists.

To date, Parter Gallery has presented Maruša Sagadin (*Wet Feet*, 2022), Meta Grgurevič (*Scraping for Gold*, 2022), William Forsythe (*Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time*, No. 3, 2022), Agnes Meyer-Brandis (*Hall of Fame*, 2022–2023), Sophie Thun (*Leaking Times*, 2023), Flaka Haliti (*I SHOUT, YOUR ECHOES BOUNCE, WHAT AM I?*, 2023), Saša Spačal (*The Library of Fallen Tears*, 2023–2024), Tarek Atoui (*Standing Waves*, 2024), Šejla Kamberić (*Perfect Tense*, 2024), Aleksandra Vajd and Anetta Mona Chişa (*Tar Star*, 2025), Hassan Khan (*GESTUS*, 2025) and Yein Lee (*Accomplice*, 2026).

Exhibition website: <https://cukrarna.art/en/program/exhibitions/63/spela-petric/>
Facebook event for the exhibition opening: <https://fb.me/e/4mobvSS7U>