

# INVINCIBLE

A BIG BACTERIA PROJECT BY SABINE KACUNKO  
 COLOSSEUM – ROME, 17TH – 19TH SEPTEMBER 2015, 8 PM – 2 PM

*Invincible* addresses concepts of sustainability, ecological structures and social models in calling attention to the iconic World Cultural and Natural Heritage site – *Amphitheatrum Novum* – Colosseum in Rome. The most famous amphitheater in the world and the symbol of the eternal city is neither used as a mere display for a political message nor is it instrumentalized for other purposes then to become itself highlighted as a model which may boost an envisioned interdisciplinary inquiry into heritage- and health. As the worldwide icon of cultural heritage, the Colosseum



**An interdisciplinary cultural project under patronage of UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Rome and the City of Rome Department of Culture.**

will be illuminated by a huge light-installation projecting live the bacterial biofilm (*patina*) on its most exposed northwest side. This recently restored spot of ca. 1.400 m2 considers carefully the day and seasonal light situations as well as the topography and traffic conditions. Together, they allow a whole-time illumination of the chosen spot which can be seen from Via Imperiale all the way long to Piazza Venezia.

Samples of patina – the natural organic film – has been removed from the surface of the building and placed under a microscope. The connected projectors transmit the images in real time, on the external surface of the object

from which the patina has been removed. For a moment the 'secret' microcosm of the patina emerges from the darkness into the light. The metabolism of the microorganisms produces substances of sediments – pigments – that create intense compositions of constantly changing and different lights and colours. In this way the patina in the dark appears as what it really is: a colourful world of pigments arising from the sediments of the microorganisms. The microorganisms protect the monumental good from destruction being evoked by the harmful environmental influences and secure in this way the transmission of our cultural memory. Seen in this perspective, *Invincible* stands as an example of lasting global cooperation in the conservation of cultural assets and natural resources.

The artist has decided to dedicate this project as the starting point for her own global 'Grand Tour' related to the co-initiated international *Big Bacteria*-network that is supposed to pool a wide range of disciplines to address the proverbial diversity, variety, ubiquity and other well-known superlatives of bacteria.

## PROGRAMME

15TH SEPTEMBER 2015

### PANEL DISCUSSION

*Big Bacteria For Micro-Humans?*  
*Health & Heritage In Focus Of Arts And Sciences*

15th September 2015, 5.30 pm  
 MACRO Museum, Via Nizza 138.

### PANELISTS

**Arch. Maria Beatrice Andreucci**, specialized in Landscape Architecture and Environmental Design, Faculty of Architecture, Sapienza University, Rome.

**Prof. Giovanni Antonini**, Prof. for Molecular Biology at the Dept. of Sciences, Rom Tre University.

**Dott. Claudio Crescentini**, Responsible of exhibition activities and major events at MACRO.

**Prof. Slavko Kacunko**, Professor for Art History & Visual Culture at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen. He is elected member of Academia Europaea (2014).

**Dott. Massimo Papi**, Responsible of the Task Force Ulcer and vascular dermatology, IDI-Rome.

**Federica Pirani**, Director of MACRO, Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome.

**Prof. M. Laura Santarelli**, Prof. for Chemical Engineering & Sciences and Technologies for the Cultural Heritage Conservation, Sapienza University, Rome.

**Sabine Kacunko**, Artist and Founder of MICRO HUMAN NPO, Berlin and Copenhagen.

17TH – 19TH SEPTEMBER 2015

### LIVE MEDIA PERFORMANCE INVINCIBLE

Colosseum, Rome  
 17th to 19th September 2015  
 8 pm – 2 am

The live media performance at the Colosseum will be visible to all visitors of the eternal city who decide to approach Forum Romanum. For all other people interested, a live stream will be available on the website [www.sabinekacunko.de](http://www.sabinekacunko.de).

17TH SEPTEMBER 2015

### OPENING RECEPTION

17th September 2015 at 8:00 pm  
 Monumento Nazionale a Vittorio Emanuele II,  
 Roof Terrace, Piazza Venezia, Rome.  
 PRIVATE EVENT/GUESTLIST ONLY

15TH SEPTEMBER 2015

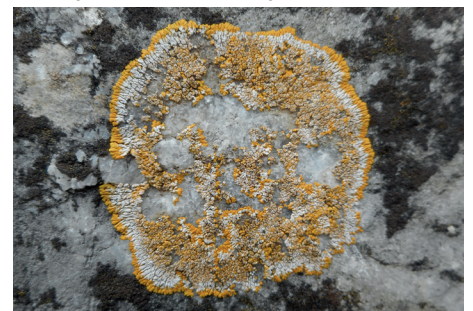
### PRESS CONFERENCE

15th September 2015, 11 am  
 Conference room  
 Associazione della Stampa Estera  
 Via dell'Umiltà 83/c

### SABINE KACUNKO – BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT AND PREVIOUS CONTEXTS

#### Light & Life

*High Light, Origin of Light, Vision, Looping Life, Transmission of Life, Life Flag, P.O.L. (Process of Life)* – a cursory glimpse on the titles of Sabine Kacunko's recent projects reveal clearly the central position of 'light' and 'life' in her art. Seen from this perspective, it appears just consequent that her actual project *Invincible* is being granted with the UNESCO-patronage in the context of the International Year of Light and Light-Based Technologies 2015.



The title of *Invincible* itself relates also to Constantine's adoption of the cult of SOL INVICTVS or the 'invincible sun' early in his career is highlighted on the medallion on the eastern

side showing the Sun rising symbolized by the Helios as chariot (and corresponding to the Moon on the western side). Together with the famous Constantine's coin which bears the inscription SOLI INVICTO COMITI 'To the Invincible Sun my companion' and the famous inscription INSTINCTV DIVINITATIS on the Arch of Constantine itself, the invincible and invisible – the sensitive and intelligible are addressed with a language and gestures of religious and cultural tolerance.

At the same time, the both Victories covering the upper part of the central Arch recall and prefigure both the Greek Nike and Christian Angels, so cancelling the distinctions and providing an universal and character to the complex which spans the Via Triumphalis between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill.



## Bacteria Art

Not least, the extensive usage of spolia on the Arch of Constantine attaches to the cultural and natural circles addressed by the bacteria as irreplaceable media of the recycling matter. Bacteria deserve this nomination first of all due to their metabolic diversity, enabling them to obtain carbon atoms and energy from practically everywhere on Earth. This diversity-based feature, seen by many as the true nature of bacteria, makes them to the real synonym of ubiquity.

Being the oldest, smallest, most abundant and structurally simplest organisms, bacteria are diverse and variant, as well as vital for all other life forms. As living solar cells, bacteria are 'messengers' of life, regarded as 'inventors' of photosynthesis and therefore responsible for the transformation of sunlight into chemical energy. As such, bacteria require to be treated not only as indispensable motives, metaphors and models of knowledge, but increasingly as material, medium and methods for its acquiring as well.

Sabine Kacunko's corresponding understanding and artistic usage of bacteria has been exemplified in a larger number of

public, site-specific and museal installations throughout the past fifteen years. The neologism 'bacteria art' has been applied for the first time to Sabine Kacunko's research-based artistic installations and performances around 2003, a couple of years after she already had demonstrated her perpetuating interest in the microbial induced processes of deterioration by intentionally applying bacteria and fungi on her precious black and white photo negatives.

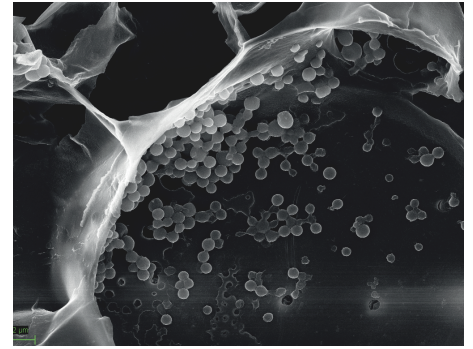
The reason for the labelling was also the strong impression about the artist's extensive and ever growing understanding about the role and meaning of bacteria and biofilm in a series of exhibitions and public actions. Furthermore, her top priority was to convey the respective contents by presenting her work deliberately to as wide an audience as possible, which was virtually confronted with the term *bio-art* (in the sense of the art identified with the rather not-publicly performed lab-art). It was from this perspective that the uniqueness of Sabine Kacunko's approach set itself apart from the most of the representatives of the *bio-art* because very few of them have placed the amplitude and meaning of ubiquitous application fields of bacteria at the centre of medial public with such a programmatic consistency.

## Previous Contexts

The quintessence of *Invincible* is the celebration of life and its basic condition: transformation or metamorphosis.

With the bacteria art by Sabine Kacunko in mind, alleged contradictions come undone even more naturally and without theoretical constraint when biology, the life science, is regarded as a fringe science *par excellence*.

In retrospect, it becomes evident how the 'fringe arts' and 'fringe sciences' found their medium in bacteria art, after the early interpenetration of biology and religion left the historical background to find a new context. The alchemy, operating preferably in the shadows, of this procreative and at the same time highly explosive mixture became the common working method of the graduate from the Düsseldorf Arts Academy in the 1990s, when she created extreme close-up pictures of still



life (in this case literally *nature morte*) by dint of daylight and thus revealed a fascinating, meaningful and important transformation. This transformation finally resulted in the bacteria art in the 2000s.

With this and numerous ensuing installations under the hyperonym *P.O.L. Art (Product of Life)*, Sabine Kacunko set out in uncharted artistic, medial and scientific waters. This group of works remained distinctive for the next decade, for example the installation *Culture Round Culture* (2002): Here the artist let bacteria eat an original negative with the image of a fish (*Fish [Fisch]*, 1997).

The process of the decomposing negative was projected live onto the wall with all the paradoxes showing up in this context. "*The observer becomes,*" Sabine Kacunko states in a description of the project, "*a witness of the different phases of decay and destruction. The fleeting has the potential for something completely new and different.*" This project questioned at a general level "*the present time in the context of culture and religion*" falling obviously on good ground. *Culture Round Culture* was the first realized collaboration between Sabine Kacunko and the geologist and microbiologist, Wolfgang Krumbein (Prof. Emeritus, University Oldenburg, Department for Microbiology). The fruitful dialogue between art and science in the artist's oeuvre has been deepened and intensified ever since; not least in the pursuit for the suitable mediation processes of this dialogue, which are increasingly shifting into the public sphere.

The required analysis of the meaning behind the origination process of large-sized photo objects by Sabine Kacunko stretches *pars pro toto* from her complete oeuvre to the highlighted origination process of her 'bacteria images'. The ensuing video installations,



among others *Life (Leben, 2002)*, can be seen as a consistent continuation of the photographic and videographic *natura morta e viva* of the artist, who has been evolving since the mid-1990s.

The early and interim phase of Kacunko's work was followed by the project *BO(O)TSCHAFT* that has been realised in several stages. This project focuses primarily on the objects in the public sphere with a particular cultural or ecological background. The project *BO(O)TSCHAFT* was based upon a seemingly simple 'observation': microbes produce the natural patina. Under the influence of the micro-organisms, temperature, wind, air, water as well as chemical and organic substances solved in them, create a protective



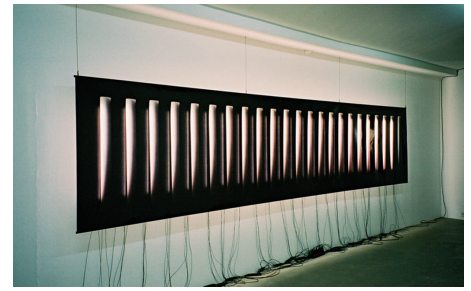
film, which adheres on the dusty surface of an object like a fingerprint. The natural biofilm – the 'patina' – protects objects from decay as analogous memory of the past. Art poses in this context as a 'guardian' of this sensible protective layer, which (re)presents simultaneously a medial-material 'natural-analogous'

bearer of culture/nature. From the chaos and the method, with which she artistically perpetrates death and its healing, Sabine Kacunko has unlocked an interdisciplinary field of research, in the best sense of the word, whose outcomes contribute to the pivotal questions: what the meaning of art in an engineered society is and to what extent does it still have the capacity to visualize, interpret and represent the world in the media age.

### Life Flag

In year 2010, Sabine Kacunko managed to create a special 'diplomatic' piece of art, in which the appellative aspect stepped out of the shadows of the visualized processes even more. On the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Charité Berlin, an exhibition and art action titled *LIFE FLAG – NEWS FROM EVERYWHERE* took place at the Robert-Koch-Forum / Institute for Microbiology and Hygiene as well as other places in Berlin. The project was realized in collaboration with the Institute for Microbiology and Hygiene of the Charité Berlin and the Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing. The densely distributed network out of 129 embassies in Berlin was used for the circulation of the *BO(O)TSCHAFT [SAY(IL)ING]*, which, printed out literally on flags, had a divided sensibility of ecological concerns. The participating 75 embassies received the *LIFE FLAG*, a flag with the same motif, which was flown in all the embassy buildings for a week.

The presentation of micro-organisms was chosen as a fundament for the motif. The visibly made ribosomes – by a team at the Institute for Microbiology and Hygiene at the Charité hospital in Berlin – appear both in bacteria, plants and animals as well as in humans. In the process a new subunit of the 16s rRNA sequence was discovered that occurs in plants, animals and humans and the artist as



its discoverer named this '*Oceanobacillus Pulvirenatu*s' – 'Dusty Rebirth'. The bacteria cultures originated from a historically unique dust sample from the Sahara Desert, which Alexander von Humboldt received as a gift in 1823.

### Big Bacteria: Arts, Sciences and 'Micro-Humanities' in dialogue

The intention which Sabine Kacunko pursues with *Invincible* is to 're-mediate' the visibility of chosen objects of special interest and initiate their 'healing' process. The core purpose of the project is to offer an interdisciplinary discussion platform that connects art, science, humanities and the widest possible public realm. The artist rewinds this interdisciplinary research field to the future by relating it to the nexus of artistic, scientific and humanistic approaches in the context of the emerging Big Bacteria research network (Rome-Berlin-Copenhagen), however, confining it to potentials of the benefits of an integrative health and heritage approach, linked to Colosseum itself. For cultural travellers, the Colosseum was always a highlight and destination of the Grand Tour. During UNESCO's International Year of Light and Light-Based Technologies 2015 Coliseum becomes the starting point of a global conceived 'Grand Tour', in which Sabine Kacunko will illuminate the World Heritage sites by projecting their own biofilm onto their façades.

### TEAM

**Science:** *Invincible* is scientifically accompanied and supported by Dr. Volker Brinkmann (Max Planck Institute, Berlin), Prof. Giovanni Antonini (Institute of Biology, Univ. Roma Tre), Prof. Thomas Bjarnsholt und Michael Larsen (Department of International Health, Immunology and Microbiology, University of Copenhagen), Prof. Slavko Kacunko (Department of Arts and Cultural Studies (IKK), University of Copenhagen), the MICRO HUMAN NPO, Berlin, among others.  
**Dancers:** Joris Camelin, Germany; Enem Gökce Ogultekin, Germany, **Sound:** Dr. Paul Modler University of Art and Design Karlsruhe

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### A special thanks to our partners who have contributed to achieve this project:



We make it visible.



The project *Invincible* is associated with the interdisciplinary research network Big Bacteria, non-profit organization MICRO HUMAN (Berlin), University Roma Tre, University Sapienza and University of Copenhagen.