

# TWO CITIES: AN AESTHETIC APPROACH TO ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

A comparative study of selected works by  
Irena Lagator Pejović and Christine de Pizan

English/German/Montenegrin,  
Vienna: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2024

## SHORT DESCRIPTION

At the heart of this text-image volume are two outstanding artistic works, Irena Lagator Pejović's *Knowledge of the Limited Responsibility Society* (2009-) and Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la cité des dames* [*The Book of the City of Ladies*] (ca. 1405), both focusing on female city-building. Monika Leisch-Kiesl reflects on the artistic and scientific practice of the Renaissance writer Christine de Pizan, on the one hand, and the contemporary visual artist Irena Lagator Pejović on the other, with regard to the tension between ethics and aesthetics that underlies these works.

In his introduction, Miško Šuvaković undertakes a journey into an exciting rebus of books and cities, spanning two different historical epochs and eco-political constellations. An afterword by Elke Krasny offers a feminist analysis of artistic practice under the maxim of urban responsibility.

## A LOOK INTO THE BOOK

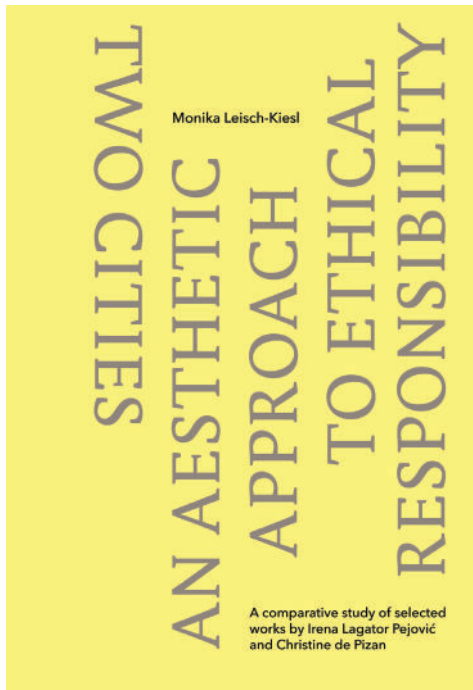
Just following Christine de Pizan's (\* 1364) literary-artistic construction of the *City of Ladies*, and then possibly also taking a look into the *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, is a discovery. When confronted with Irena Lagator Pejović's (\* 1976) *Knowledge of the Limited Responsibility Society*, a world of subtle paths opens up to the reader. Paths between an ex-Yugoslavian artist of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and an Italian-French author at the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance; paths between the societal and power-critical challenges of a neoliberal state and an economically differentiating kingdom, not least to a politically incensed and intellectually alert woman; paths between installative artistic works and masterpieces of book art. And revealing notions: How astutely must an artistic critique of capitalism or power perform in order to avoid a mere slugfest with well-worn concepts? What can be learned from the attitude of these two personalities, Christine de Pizan and Irena Lagator Pejović, for the virulence of feminist criticism that leaves courtly and bourgeois appeasement far behind? How can artistic concepts tackle such complex crisis zones and still be experienced as artistic positions? As an aesthetic response to ethical responsibility: this is the thesis of the book.

In a well-founded essay, Monika Leisch-Kiesl develops a fabric of observations and thoughts between selected pieces of Christine de Pizan's scientific-artistic oeuvre and that of Irena Lagator Pejović.



978-3-99153-077-0

[www.vfmk.org](http://www.vfmk.org)



Through this encounter between two works created completely independently of one another, each enhances the other, and they open up surprising perspectives on the field between aesthetics and ethics for the viewer-reader.

Miško Šuvaković responds not least to the aesthetic vigor of this text in a subtle introduction, in which he first seeks to resolve this rebus between books and cities, political and economic challenges and artistic potentials, and then moves into the middle of it, spreading out a bundle of suggestions in front of the reader. Elke Krasny, on the other hand, initially heads towards Irena Lagator's critical artistic practice in the face of global capitalism and affirms the urgency of an ostensibly political feminism: response-ability—in reference to Donna Haraway's "response-able"—in the medium of art. When she recalls *Witness of Time - Now*, an urban project from 2002, she indirectly draws a link back to Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la cité des dames*.

At 23 x 16 cm, the book initially appears restrained for an art book, and it is all the more impressive thanks to the skillful layout by Ivana Vujosević, who manages to combine two formally very different artistic positions and three linguistically fundamentally different theoretical texts into an illuminating picture-text volume—a treasure in a small format, so to speak.

#### THE AUTHORS

**Christine de Pizan** (\* 1364 in Venice) lived and worked at the court of the Valois in Paris and is considered France's first professional writer. She took part in political debates and was an important voice in the *Querelle des Femmes*. Among her approximately 40 writings, *Le livre de la cité des dames / The Book of the City of Ladies* and *Le trésor de la cité des dames / The Treasure of the City of Ladies* are among the best known today.

**Elke Krasny** (\* 1965 in Austria) is Professor of Art and Education at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She researches issues of care and social reproduction, social and ecological justice, transnational feminisms as well as memory work and the politics of history in contemporary art and architecture. Her recent editorial work includes: *Curating with Care*, with Lara Perry (Routledge 2022). [www.elkekrasny.at](http://www.elkekrasny.at)

**Irena Lagator Pejović** (\* 1976 in Yugoslavia) is an artist and art theorist. She researches pressing matters concerning the capitalocene, biopolitics and social responsibility. Her artworks have been exhibited internationally since 2000 and can be found in renowned public and private collections. Among her catalogs, *The Society of Unlimited Responsibility: Art as Social Strategy*, ed. by Neue Galerie Graz (Walther König 2012) remains a central source. [www.irenalagator.net](http://www.irenalagator.net)

**Monika Leisch-Kiesel** (\* 1960 in Austria), art historian and philosopher, is Professor of Art History and Aesthetics at the KU Private University Linz. She researches and teaches at numerous locations in Central and (Southern) Eastern Europe and the USA. Related publications: *Evoking a Sign / Perceiving an Image. Toba Khedoori: Drawn Painting* (VfmK 2021); *Lady Reason and the Writing of History. Christine de Pizan's < Livre de la cité des dames >* (Olms 2021). [www.leisch-kiesel.com](http://www.leisch-kiesel.com)

**Miško Šuvaković** (\* 1954 in Yugoslavia), professor at the Faculty of Media and Communication in Belgrade, is an internationally renowned theorist, lecturer, writer, artist and curator, and one of the region's finest connoisseurs of contemporary art. His publications include: *Impossible History*, ed. with Dubravka Đurić (MIT Press, 2003, 2006) and *Neo-Aesthetic Theory* (Hollitzer 2017). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miško\\_Šuvaković](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miško_Šuvaković)