

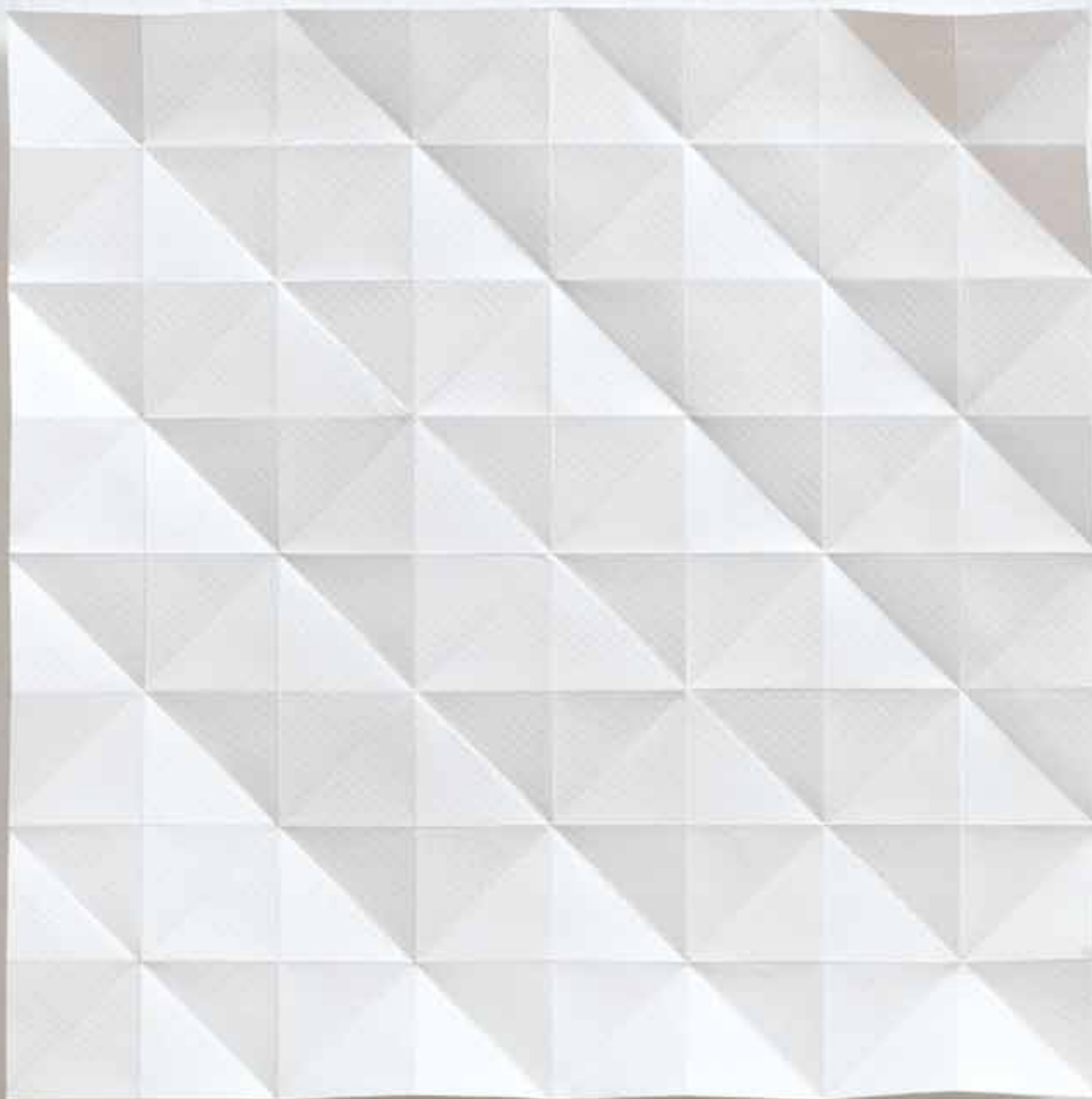
# ARTWORDS

Winter 2019

# 002

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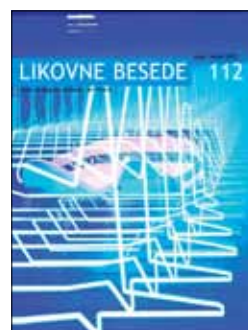
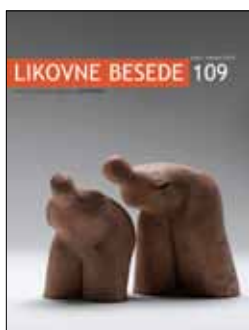
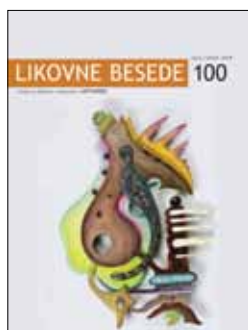
*international*





*Likovne besede*, or **ARTWORDS**, is the oldest and central Slovenian scholarly journal dedicated to fine arts. The Association of Slovene Fine Arts Societies (ZDSLU) has been publishing the journal since 1985. In 2019, ZDSLU – alongside its predecessors and regional societies – celebrated the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of uninterrupted activities aimed at supporting and developing Slovene fine art. In order to celebrate this occasion, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and the Slovenian Book Agency provided financial support for the publication of a thematic section titled *ZDSLU 120 Years* in the 111<sup>th</sup>, 112<sup>th</sup> and 113<sup>th</sup> issue of *Artwords*, as well as an online English language edition, *Artwords International 2019*.

The aim of *Artwords International 2019* is to spread information about the Slovene art scene by reaching the international readership of art enthusiasts and experts with translations of selected articles on contemporary Slovene art and artists (the articles were published in Slovene language in the *Artwords* journal between 2016 and 2019). The subjects in the journal range from painting and sculpture to printmaking, conceptual and performance art, video, media arts, and the newest hybrid art forms, as they interact with the Slovene and global international contexts. Furthermore, this English language edition collects the abstracts of scientific papers from the same period and thus provides an insight into the theoretical approaches and diverse research interests of contemporary Slovene art theorists and historians. The mapping of both fields, art practice and art studies, is equally important and closely connected in the *Artwords* journal.



<b>KSENIJA ČERČE:</b>	<b>The Erection of Language – About the Voice and the Inflamed Touch   6</b>
<b>PETJA GRAFENAUER:</b>	<b>How to Look at a Folded Piece of White Paper Properly   13</b>
<b>MIHA COLNER:</b>	<b>Mark Požlep, artist   16</b>
<b>ANDREJ BRUMEN-ČOP:</b>	<b>Shelter   22</b>
<b>SLADANA MITROVIĆ:</b>	<b>The Dialogic Nature of the Retrospective Exhibition by Jelka Flis   24</b>
<b>PETJA GRAFENAUER:</b>	<b>Finally!   30</b>
<b>HANA OSTAN OŽBOLT:</b>	<b>On Wunderblock, Luka Savić's Solo Exhibition   36</b>
<b>BORUT KRAJNC:</b>	<b>The Path, Rigonce, the green border, refugees and migrants in Slovenia   40</b>
<b>MIHA COLNER:</b>	<b>Ten Years with a Ten-Year Break. Domestic Research Society: Damijan Kracina, Alenka Pirman, Jani Pirnat   42</b>
<b>STAŠ KLEINDIENST:</b>	<b>13–18   50</b>
	<b>Salon ZDSLU 2017: An Image in a Medium, a Medium in a Context   53</b>
<b>ALEŠ VAUPOTIČ:</b>	<b>The Integration of Nanotechnology Research into Fine Art: The Polymorphic Impression by Uršula Berlot   57</b>
<b>BLAŽ MIKLAVČIČ:</b>	<b>The Politics of Skin   62</b>
	<b>Scientific Papers Abstracts   65</b>
	<b>Abstracts   81</b>



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**Ksenija Čerče**

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# **The Erection of Language – About the Voice and the Inflamed Touch**

**voice • touch • fire • tongue • body • sound • painting**

In front of us, there is a vascular system/a network with the formed points of focus for the time that we will venture, step by step, into the ins and outs for the archaeological investigation and its triggers of subject matter. The research began with an ongoing search for the depictions of sound (not music) in medieval painting and “the find” of the tongues of fire. Univocal, or even obvious, answers to questions where they derive from and what they mean, did not offer any justifiable or satisfactory answers. So, by employing verbalisation, I will try to come closer to the genesis of art events and the geology of individual epistemological segments, in order to touch upon the very anchor point of the fiery moment at which the voice conceives the erection of language.

The problem with the text at hand was its linearity. I continually perceived the text as a kind of spatial molecule. Language, sound and, above all, the voice have always been regarded as territories difficult and paradoxical for painting. So, by exploring and uncovering, I have attempted to penetrate into the geology of the mentioned elements. The aspect of the origin of the artworks offered itself as the territory for establishing one’s own epistemology, formed by specific hermeneutics. I have initiated/infected the words, which are being anchored in the text as deepening territories, into the explanation as points of origin and have developed them as methodological tools.

Words such as voice, tongue, touch, sound will therefore continually punctuate the present text, hence inscribing themselves into the body of the text by piercing it. The flow of events will therefore not proceed in a linear manner, but rather particular words are about to become venues/events in time. Venues/events to which we owe an immersion and deepening as the crucial driving force of investigation.

The venture point mentioned at the beginning evolves from language, therefore we will first focus on the position of language and its role for man. In Slovene, like in Greek, the word tongue (Gr. glossa) summarises unity, which is separate in certain other languages. In contrast to other languages (e.g. zunge – sprache, tongue – language), the word

jezik (tongue/language), combines two signifiers in the same word. On the one hand, the bodily organ physically articulating speech and, on the other, language that has been created as a symbolic/cultural element. In Greek and Slovene, the word for the bodily organ, physically articulating speech, is used for both cases.

Since the formation of the questions in the text through which we enter into the cognitive processes is conditioned by understanding certain phenomena, we will begin by asking ourselves: Why is it precisely language that plays such an important role in the process of individuation? Language represents a constitutive element for man. Giorgio Agamben declares that if we succeed in forming a new language then in consequence, we are able to create something new.

The argumentation that language is a constitutive element can be approached by comparing the relationship between man and language, and the relationship between animal and language. In the lecture *Animal, Man and Language*, Giorgio Agamben defines both in relation to language and clearly specifies why they differ:

In the course of the lecture, he asks where the power of language derives from and, through the aspect of its origin, discursively positions the awareness of its functioning. A question immensely present in the history of thought. In gaining understanding of man’s establishment, the point of anthropogenesis (when man becomes human) is a particularly significant fact. Scientists have historically understood anthropogenesis as an event of human cognition that caused the establishment of man. The event, therefore, cannot be placed within the evolution of mankind as a chronological event, but rather as a cognitive event. However, the differences between human and animal language should not be reduced to cognition alone. The difference also belongs to another order. Human language should also be understood in the broader context of cognition. Of course, animal language proves to hold an existence of its own, but the difference between the animal and the human being is reflected in their engagement through language. Animals use their language. But, contrary to man, animals



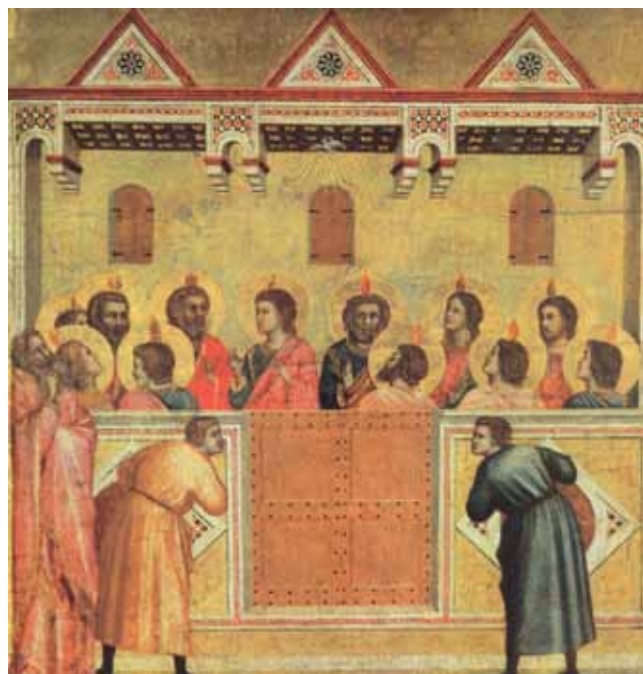
are not prepared to risk their lives for it. Man is defined by the willingness to risk his life and his nature for language. For an animal, the bare information received via animal communication, about something being dangerous is sufficient. Not in case of man. The significance of language for man reaches far beyond that fact. Man is willing to risk himself for language and defines/identifies himself through it. Therefore, not merely the cognitive aspect is at stake here, but also man's ethical, political and entire engagement through language.<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenon of language in the text is therefore understood as the fundamental impulse representing a constitutive element for man. However, let us turn to the central axis of the set task at this point and ask ourselves how can the touch of language/voice become a subject matter of painting? And where are the gnoseological anchor points of the tongues of fire to be found? As introduced previously, the investigation was initiated by searching for the depictions of sound (not music) in medieval painting. So, a seemingly simple task turned out to become an increasingly utopian undertaking despite long and arduous searching. Up to the moment, or better, up to the realisation that the acoustic moment is present in the voice. The realisation finally promised a locating of the object in search. Language/voice as an acoustic element is clearly present in the depictions of one of the Biblical events, when the Holy Spirit descends, according to Luke, through fire and mighty wind onto the gathered Apostles.

## The Tongues of Fire

The tongues of fire (unlike in everyday spoken language) are not the flames of fire descending towards the heights as the fire burns. In order to understand the source of the tongues of fire within the theological tradition, we must turn to the significance of the Pentecostal event, where the tongues of fire are actually linked to language. The distinctive tongues of fire can be located in the depictions of the Pentecostal event. They are to be found in the form of flames portrayed above the heads of the Apostles.

The word Pentecost is derived from the Greek word *pentekoste*, meaning fifty. The descent of the Holy Spirit is celebrated by the Roman Catholics on the 50th day after Easter. The appearance of the Holy Spirit is described in the second part of the Acts of the Apostles in the form of fire and mighty wind descending upon the Apostles gathered on that very day. An event where tongues, reminiscent of flames of fire, descend upon the Apostles, is described: "Tongues appeared to them, resembling flames, and each



Giotto and Workshop, *Pentecost*, probably about 1310–18, egg tempera on poplar, 45.5 × 44cm, National Gallery, London, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/giotto-and-workshop-pentecost>, 12 May 2019

one-sided above one of them.”<sup>2</sup> Upon the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles received the gift of speaking different languages so that they could be understood by the gathered people of different nations and speakers of different languages at the same time.

Interesting as part of the event, are the phenomena of glossolalia and xenoglossia.<sup>3</sup>

## Glossolalia and Xenoglossia

The phenomenon of glossolalia is regarded as a phenomenon of speaking a language that does not exist. It comes as a murmuring with a phonologically structured pronunciation. It is not similar to any language known. Unlike glossolalia, xenoglossia represents the ability to actually speak a foreign language without the person ever having learnt or having had any contact with that language.

<sup>2</sup> “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all gathered in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire separating and coming to rest upon each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,[b] 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.” (Acts of the Apostles 2, 1–13)

<sup>3</sup> Interpretations of the event vary. Some interpret/understand these as both glossolalia and xenoglossia. Others, however, see xenoglossia in the second part of the Acts of the Apostles.

<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben: *Animal, Man and Language*. 18 September 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNVvslTO8s>>. 21st minute



Ksenija Čerče, *Choir*, forbidden media, 2018, author of the photograph Damjan Švarc

It can be said for the interpretation of sound in glossolalia that it mostly consists of murmuring, chattering, semantically incomplete articulation of vocal syllables and acoustic events, which includes certain elements and remnants of spoken languages. The sound stream is taken on by the voice while preserving the rhythm, emotional charge, melodiousness. However, it is characteristic that neither the language nor the meaning of the words is comprehensible in the stream.

Regardless of the different interpretations of the event, glossolalia is significant as an acoustic event that goes beyond the semantic boundaries of language in the context of this research. In the case of the sound in the Pentecostal event, we can speak of a sort of cacophony. Through the blurring of meaning in language, sound steps into the foreground. The model, which I understand from the theological notion of the Pentecostal event as a universal form, where the unity of language<sup>4</sup> in opposition to its division

and hence its particularity, places precisely language into the foreground, communicating at the level of sound. By doing so, it reaches beyond communication conditioned by meaning and transcends the semantic conditions of language.

### **The Inflamed Touch – How to Dress Language? • fire • touch • second skin • dressing language**

Dealing with the subject matter at hand, I would like to branch off a channel of the text to the creation of two of my own works. Both works, the artist's book titled *Sketch of Inflamed Touch* (2012–2015) and the coat entitled *The Choir* (2018), emerged "with the phenomenon" of the tongues of fire in the most recent cycle of paintings. The subject matter of glossolalia from the Biblical event is present in the background of the two works mentioned, constituting the interlacement of meaning. Hence the tongues of fire address the soundscape and cacophony of the fiery voices of the women's choir.

The inside of the black coat, where a depiction of a women's choir of fiery tongues is to be found, is closely linked to touch. At first glance, the tongues of fire (appearing on the inside of the coat) confront the viewer with a provocative image. The coat itself invites to be dressed and undressed. The coat, like a second skin, calls for the tongues of fire to be dressed and hence the women with the tongues of fire to be touched. The image does certainly not offer a comfortable nor safe shelter.

The Tongue, or rather, its touch, in the case of putting on the coat, raises the question of boundaries. In the face of a negative moment, the image invokes a maze of feelings. The viewer takes up his position with regard to the image. In consequence, the image of the women's tongues of fire topples into a site/venue, through an overhang of the visible, which does not merely place the viewer into a position of contemplation, but rather makes him face the question of his own touch with the tongues of fire.

During an ongoing search for related examples in the history of art, I accidentally discovered one of the exceptional depictions of the tongues of fire in the image of a tent in the cycle of historical tapestries from the 15th century. It is important to note that I found the tent reference later, long after conceiving the idea for the coat with the tongues of fire. Among the famous Cluny tapestries entitled *The*

<sup>4</sup> In the book *Die Sprachverwirrung und das problem des Mythos: vom Turmbau zu Babel zum Pfingstwunder* Michaela Greb talks about the connection between the Pentecostal event and the Babylonian tower. The book explains that with the Pentecostal celebration, Christianity celebrates the moment that refers to the central linguistic motif in the image of the Tower of Babylon. The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel is characterised by the paradigm of language division.

The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the

LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. (Babylon)

Before the division, there was one mankind and one language. With the Pentecostal celebration, Christianity thus remembers the dreams of the linguistic uniqueness of the whole of mankind. In the relationship between the Tower of Babylon and the Feast of Pentecost, the thought of all-understanding (allverstehens) comes to life again with Pentecost. "Experiencing misunderstanding is briefly cancelled (interrupted)." (Greb 15)





Anonymous, *The Lady and the Unicorn: Touch* (1484–1500), tapestry, 373 × 358cm, Musée National du Moyen Âge, Paris, Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=The+Lady+and+the+unicorn+touch&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go#/media/File:The\\_Lady\\_and\\_the\\_unicorn\\_Touch.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=The+Lady+and+the+unicorn+touch&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go#/media/File:The_Lady_and_the_unicorn_Touch.jpg), 20 May 2019

occurs in the fifth tapestry, which addresses touch. The act of animation turns into the subject. The upright figure of the young woman holds a flag (the symbol of power) in the hand while touching/holding the vertical horn of the unicorn. (Gotfredsen 90–93)



Anonymous, *The Lady and the Unicorn: À mon seul désir* (1484–1500), tapestry, 377 × 473cm, Musée National du Moyen Âge, Paris, Wikimedia Commons-Public Domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Lady\\_and\\_the\\_unicorn\\_Desire.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Lady_and_the_unicorn_Desire.jpg), 12 May 2019

Lady and the Unicorn, the latter are classified in the tapestry series according to their thematisation of the senses: the first belongs to sight, the second to hearing, smell, taste, and the fifth to touch. The most enigmatic among them is the sixth tapestry. Interpretations attribute the sixth tapestry to the sixth sense or inner sense. (Serres 56)

The iconography of the tapestries includes various objects, animals, vegetation, symbols, and each of them carries its heraldic meaning. Everywhere, the scenes are positioned in a dark blue island/ellipse. The thematisation of the five (or six) senses is staged on each of the tapestries with a particular object, animated by the central female figure. In the first tapestry, which accentuates sight, the central female figure holds a mirror in the hand, whereas the second one thematises hearing with the playing of a musical instrument/organ. The third tapestry shows a woman feeding a parrot from a tray of food (taste) and on the fourth, the sense of smell is symbolised with the smelling of flowers. On each of the tapestries, a female figure is shown holding a prop in her hands, necessary for the animation of a certain sense. However, none of the tapestries shows the very act being performed by the woman herself. The actions are carried out by the animals. (Gotfredsen 93) The unicorn looks and listens in the first two tapestries. In the third tapestry, the act of tasting is performed by the parrot and the act of smelling is taken on by the monkey. A radical turn

### Touch

What does her gesture mean? The question is not posed tactically but rather as a subtle gesture of dramaturgy as evidenced from the scene's staging. At this point, I would also point to the significance of the unicorn's tail. In all the other tapestries, the tail is raised, while in the fifth tapestry, the single-horned animal bows down and drops its tail when touched. There is a hypothesis expressed through the logic of staging. The sense of touch in the tapestries is positioned hierarchically above the rest of the senses. (Gotfredsen 93)

Medieval thought attributed a high value to symbols and their staging. For example, in the Middle Ages, the understanding of images was closely related to exegesis. The teachings explaining the Bible were practised as an invention of an endless world of relationships, where each part works in conjunction with other parts. The exegesis invented the relationships between Biblical images and words. It created puzzles while at the same time preserving the mystiques of its core. (Čerče 93) The understanding of the tapestries is therefore not unique and heterogeneity occurs when contemporary interpretations animate the more or less courageous hermeneutics, encoded in the staging of the scenes. The very staging of the six tapestries is certainly part of an apotheosis. Because we are primarily interested in touch and language in this part of the

discussion, the fifth and sixth tapestry hold importance for us.

Scholastic thought distinctive for the Middle Ages deals with the aspect of the senses by dividing them. It divides them into internal and external.<sup>5</sup> The idea of the open and the closed is certainly staged in the sixth tapestry, where the lion and unicorn on either side are opening (or closing) the tent.

### The Inner Sense

After the five senses that are manifested in the five tapestries, does the sixth, most enigmatic tapestry, among other things, raise the question on the so-called sixth or inner sense? The sixth tapestry, in which the lion, unicorn, open/closed tent appear, shows itself as the most enigmatic. The interior and exterior are clearly addressed by the opening and the closing of the tent. This is also the case with the open chest into which the woman is placing an object. The necklace is removed from (taken off) her neck, wrapped in fabric and placed into the open chest beside her.

Until now, all the senses have been addressed and animated exclusively by symbols. But language (inscribed on the tent) appears in the tapestries once only. Also, the very settings of the scenes in previous tapestries take place on a blue elliptic island. In the sixth tapestry the blue elliptic islands are elevated/erected and become a blue tent. The entire surface of the blue tent is covered with the tongues of fire. The connection is therefore indicated in the last tapestry. The connection between the inner sense and language, appearing in a tapestry for the first time. None of the tapestries has any words except the sixth one, which features the inscription “À mon seul désir” in the form of words, inscribed above the entrance to the tent.

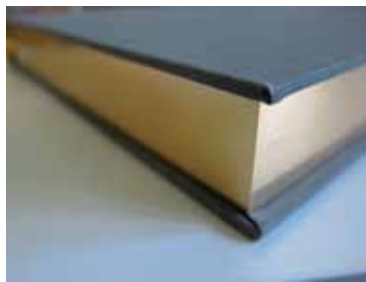
Language enters into being.

### The Erection of Language

So how to respond to the archetypal legacy of linguistic dimensions? Michel Serres ties the sensorium of senses and language to erection. (Serres 231) Erection is known as an element primarily attributed to the male erotic experience. Erotic arousal/tension, which appears in a different form in women, appears as erection in men due to their specific bodily functions. Before entering the field of Eros, however, erection itself should be specified more precisely. Erection does not yet mean the act itself; it means the tension before action. It means the tension<sup>6</sup> generated by potentiality.

<sup>5</sup> “Scholastic thought in the Middle Ages divided our sensorium into internal and external.” (Serres 53)

<sup>6</sup> The word tone, Gr. *tónos* ‘voice, sound, tone’, initially ‘string’, originally ‘tense, tension’. In music theory, “tone” is defined as the smallest unit of sound. At the same time, it of course represents a significant intersection, since tone is used both in painting (when it comes to colour tones, for example) and in music sound-terminology. (Snoj 796)



Gilt edging was used as part of the forbidden techniques in the making of the work Ksenija Čerče, *Sketch of Inflamed Touch*, forbidden technique, artist's book, 5 books, Berlin–Ljubljana 2012–2015

### Inflamed Potentiality

Was a question posed for exegesis – which represented an important part of the theological discourse in the early history of painting – of how to visualise an inflamed potentiality through the tongues of fire? A decisive and in some ways involved question pulsates in the tissue of matter, which we are battling with in this text. Agamben points out that potentiality is an abyss. The body that has been filled

with language is in a state of erection and the eruption of semantic layers/traps cannot be limited. The speaking body becomes flesh filled with language. (Serres 58)

The staging of inflamed potentiality certainly proves to be an extremely demanding task for painting. However, for painting of that time, it is true that the materials, colours, painting concepts serve as precisely the means that could bring together ambiguous meanings, play the game of connections and implement that which was not possible.

### The Act of Gentle Crime

Let us once again return to the image of the women with the tongues of fire. The artist's books titled *Sketch of Inflamed Touch* were produced as part of the precisely named "forbidden techniques" in *The Colour of the Forbidden* series of paintings. In artistic books, the notion of a forbidden pursuit is carried out precisely through a special bookbinding technique, which was used to hide images under what was known as gilt edging. The technique of hiding images under the golden edges of books dates back to the 19th century (England) and was used in the past especially for hiding obscene images in books.

In the same way, as the bookbinding technique conceals the actual content, the women with the tongues of fire<sup>7</sup> also confront the observer with an image that sets up a virtual screen while revealing a different content in the background. But as an artist, you ask yourself why to deprive an artwork of its simple reading and literally execute the act of castration, which will, of course, rob it of its unambiguous reading and apparent meaning? Why perform an act of gentle crime or employ the economy of secret as a strategy of concealing essences into the encrypted slits/depths/under-layers of the potential dimensions of the non-visual or visual language in artworks?

The technique designated as the "forbidden technique",<sup>8</sup> which can be found beside the work *Sketch of Inflamed Touch*, aims exactly at the strategies of concealment. It is not only about concealing something. But about how it has been hidden and the strategy of concealment, camouflage and the logic of hiding, used by the artist. In this respect, it is an embodiment of logic, which is comparable to the act of a strategic and incisively planned crime.

### The Hole

We have ventured a long way back into the history of painting for a simple reason, in order to find the archetypal matrix which, we can dwell on today, thus avoiding the trap of a shallow interpretation of images, seemingly liberated from the past. We have ventured into the past to provide

painting with its own and inherent territory. A temporality and materiality which, due to the painterly concepts, hermeneutics and specific exegesis, belongs to painting precisely.<sup>9</sup>

The resonance between the visible, the physical and the aural side of the language addresses the power of language and the power of its touch. In the text, the relationship to the visible, which we usually do not perceive through auditory experience, opens up questions of boundaries. Images have the potential to topple into scenes through an overhang of the visible, which do not manifest only the invisible, but also inflame language and conceive the erection of language.

Medieval painting, as we have mentioned, was tightly linked to exegesis. Motifs such as the cacophonous event of glossolalia were integrated into images by painting exegetes with precise conceptual thinking. And the depths of medieval painting actually begin to open, as we start to understand what type of concepts they actually attempted to portray through painterly means.

### Fade Out / The Voice

Throughout the text, we have tackled the fundamental question of why the complex theological diction required a visual sign for an acoustic event, and how the latter was able to become the subject matter of painting in its encoded form. We have touched upon the key scenes that have been opened up in this context with the words language, sound, tongues of fire, touch, body ... and have approached, among others, the very elements conveyed precisely through the voice.

In order to conclude, let us therefore ask ourselves how does language in relation to the body attach itself to the paradox of the voice, and how does precisely the voice, which is formed by its own graphics, catapult the body from its internal trail? Mladen Dolar says: "The voice, as we have seen, is the bond attaching language to the body. Yet the nature of this bond is completely paradoxical: the voice does not belong to either one. [ ] The voice is a bodily projectile that separates itself from the body as its source, emancipates itself from it, but nevertheless retains a bodily aspect." (Dolar 108)

The body and language therefore meet at a common intersection which, however, does not belong to either one or the other: "What the language and the body have in common is the voice which, however, is not part of language, nor part of the body." (Dolar 109) In the case of the

<sup>7</sup> The frog appears only in one book of *Sketch of Inflamed Touch*.

<sup>8</sup> Also, the designation of the technique as "secretive techniques", found in the past painting cycles of KČ.

<sup>9</sup> Isabelle Graw speaks of the exegesis created by painting in her lecture *The Economy of Painting – Notes on the Vitality of a Success-Medium*. In this context, she also speaks about the self-activity of painting and painting producing its own subject.



Pentecostal event, we have addressed the visualisation of the vocal/acoustic event through the tongues of fire in the form of glossolalia. Precisely because of its topological resonance, many interpretations burst open with the voice. The tongues of fire can be understood as an inflamed potentiality of the voice. With all provocation the tongues of fire, depicted in the coat, aim at the voice, the touch of language, the erection of language. They aim at a state, where the voice/speech can hardly stop and comes forth in fieriness like an eruption of words/sounds in an almost unearthly order.

Inflamed potentiality is not a scream that destroys and resurrects, but it nevertheless represents the very building block that conceives the audible/acoustic interlacement, hitting the voice and ejecting the being into the moment of a gap in fire, when consciousness does not float above speech. ■

Translation: Arven Šakti Kralj Szomi and Ksenija Čerče

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**Petja Grafenauer**

# How to Look at a Folded Piece of White Paper Properly

**Petra Varl: *Near light*  
Curator: Tevž Logar  
Božidar Jakac Gallery  
22 June – 26 August 2018**

Thanks to the local academically trained sculptor, painter, graphic artist and actor Jože Gorjup, Kostanjevica na Krki was culturally alive already during the mid-1920s. After World War II, the cultural life of the town was headed by the headmaster of the Lado Smrekar primary school, who focused on organising art exhibitions, and Kostanjevica has remained a cultural town ever since. Somewhat later, in 1961 to be precise, the sculptors Janez Lenassi and Jakob Savinšek came up with the initiative and helped establish the first Slovene *forma viva* in Kostanjevica and in Seča near Portorož; they also initiated the use of autochthonous material – the Krakov oak wood – in Kostanjevica.

The Božidar Jakac Gallery was founded in the 1970s, and today it encompasses the Lamut Salon and the spaces of the former monastery, which is the home to collections of work by important Slovene artists, including Božidar Jakac, brothers Kralj, France Gorše, Zoran Didek, Janez Boljka and Bogdan Borčič. The most important component of the former monastery, the church, stands on the northern side of the courtyard of the vast monastery complex which houses the Božidar Jakac Gallery. This and the cloister are the only remaining parts of the original 13<sup>th</sup> century complex of Bernard von Spanheim. The church, the construction of which began in the same year the monastery was established, i.e. in 1234, is a three-nave basilica of the Bernardine architectural type with a transept and a pair of chapels alongside the rectangularly ended presbytery. With the dissolution of the monastery, the church lost its sacral function in 1786 and following restoration and renovation works it obtained today's form in 1971. The Božidar Jakac Gallery uses this space as an exhibition space, for which the invited artists prepare various projects, most of which are created or adapted specifically to fit this space.

The church is one of the most desirable exhibition spaces for a solo exhibition in Slovenia, and the curators in Kostanjevica take great care as to whom they extend this privilege. Most Slovene artists are exceptionally pleased to receive an invitation to cooperate with the gallery as this

provides them with a vast exhibition space unparalleled by any gallery in Slovenia. This dominant space is not a simple space for setting up exhibitions, as it can quickly overshadow works that would dominate the space in most other galleries. The specifics of the space therefore set a great challenge to the artists who are given the honour to exhibit in this space. Some are successful in this, others are not.

Petra Varl used the church in Kostanjevica to present a completely new artistic expression to the broader public. Even though parts of this new expression could be noticed already in the series *Trees* (2016/2017), the poetics of her work was so deeply anchored in the collective consciousness of the local artworld that there was no way we could have imagined what she will prepare together with the curator Tevž Logar.

Already during her studies, in the late 1980s, Petra Varl and Zora Stančič exhibited lithographs in the Bežigrad Gallery. Her 'small stories' – images from everyday life – were prevalent already in those works. Black outlines of figures on white paper, marked by a hint of expressionism, appeared during this period. Petra Varl – who is one of the rare artists to have stepped outside of the artworld, as a result of which she was subjected to quite a few highbrow criticisms – entered the history of Slovene art and the Ljubljana urban scene with her works *Star* and *Odeon* and her drawings, with which she remained recognisable in numerous variations and motives for almost twenty years.

In 2016 in 2017 these drawings led to the project *Trees* (the exhibition was curated by Miha Colner), which were reminiscent of the cypresses created by Metka Krašovec. Apart from the change in her drawing style, the trees also provided a new path forward for the artist. She looked at folded carriers, at paper, and for her project in the Kostanjevica church she used empty, folded pieces of paper, which reflect light in different ways, depending on the fold. She described her decision on her homepage: 'I have started to work with folded papers in the series *Trees*, when I was using big formats of paper. Before I started to draw, I have spread them on the floor in my studio and thought, that actually it would be the best just to leave them blank as they are.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Varl, Petra. <<http://www.petravarl.com/folded-papers.html>>. 16. 10. 2018.





Petra Varl, *Near Light*, 2018, Galerija Božidar Jakac, Kostanjevica na Krki, photo: Jaka Babnik

After twenty years of following a precise line in her drawings, she decided to abort this practice. The exhibition appears to be a leap into new poetics, based on abandoning anything unnecessary, minimalism and an almost Zen-like feeling. What does it mean when a sketcher gives up drawing and becomes more comfortable with empty paper, when she ascertains that she does not need ink to draw a line on paper, that a folded piece of paper is not empty, but full of colours, which depend on the way the light reflects of it. If she was, as an artist, fed up with the forms that marked her over the previous twenty years, the exhibition in Kostanjevica presented an excellent exit from this situation.

Petra Varl's exhibition in the Kostanjevica church comprises of graphic, sculpting, sound and performance interventions into space, at which the performance component is handed over to the visitor. By taking into account the architectural dimensions of the space, Petra Varl manages to achieve sensual, bodily effects with minimal elements. The church floor is covered by minimalist objects – colourful metal seats that fit the colours of the space.

The sculpting minimalism in the form of metal seats visually communicates with the folded papers on the walls, and these in turn correspond to the architecture of the arches and vaults. The exhibition is on the very edge of withstanding the immense pressure of the architecture, the feeling of which it nicely emphasises.

In 1999 Igor Zabel described Petra Varl's work as being on the border between theatre and fine art, but stated that theatrical scenes are always at home in the field of fine art, and it seems this still holds true today.

The final note to the exhibition is provided by visitors walking through the exhibition in white habits – as they enter the gallery they are invited to put on something between a monk's habit and a Japanese kimono made from especially pleasant materials and only then walk around the church. This establishes a 'living' church and we find

ourselves in a situation that we imagine could have existed during the High Medieval period. The music that Olafur Arnalds composed especially for this project, airs tranquillity and calmness and adds to the feeling that time has stopped. It calms the visitor and makes him observe the movement of bodies, the changes in light, the sound of the church's silence in the moments without music and the creations of the frozen, almost mystical moment.

However, the folded papers on the church walls seem to be of key importance, for they represent the starting point, the centre of the project and it seems that everything else – the habits, sounds and the church itself – are here merely so the viewer can confront something so simple, pure, innocent and white, as folded pieces of paper. The peace and simplicity, which, in order for us to even notice them, to be able – like in Leonardo's smear – to see that they are not empty and that they hide a multitude of colours and paths within them, need theatre if they are to make the viewer of contemporary art to be able to experience them. Kostanjevica is Disneyland that makes us capable of experiencing the whiteness of a piece of paper. Truly. You depart the city in which you live, you reach Kostanjevica na Krki, observing nature on the way, and you finally reach the carpark in front of the monastery. This is followed by the walk to the inner courtyard, past the artworks and the monastery walls, past the entrance into the church, where one experiences the space, dressed into a habit, submerging into the surroundings. Time stands still, mobile phones are turned off, everyday life is far away and only then do we notice it, as I imagine the artist noticed it. A folded piece of paper, it's surfaces, light, regularity. This is the here and now. Simple.

■

**Dr. Petja Grafenauer** is an Assistant Professor of Art history and theory at the Academy of Fine Art and Design in Ljubljana. Since 2001, she has been working in the art world as a curator, art historian, and publicist.

**Miha Colner**

# Mark Požlep, artist

Mark Požlep (1981) is one of those contemporary artists who freely uses a variety of art mediums and ways of presenting work as the need arises. He started off as a painter, but soon expanded the painting into the space and into the event. After his pivotal work *Last Supper of Superheroes* (2006), he began to create extremely varied spatial installations and performative actions such as *Urban Savage* (2008) and *Napalm Your Personal Disco* (2010–2014). The focus of his creative path is an interest in social phenomena such as the construction of history, the occurrence of collective amnesia or the nature of the public space, which is always addressed with a healthy measure of distance and irony. After 2012, he created a series of works based on travelling, interaction with the audience and the establishment of alternative historical narratives, while using various modes of presentation: from a travel journal to a public sculpture, from a concert tour to a theatre performance. A few years ago, Požlep moved to Ghent, Belgium, where he currently lives and works, even though he is often to be found in Ljubljana due to production and presentation of his work. On this occasion, he was at Glej Theatre putting on a reprise of two of his performances.

**MIHA COLNER:** *Recently, two of your long-term art projects have been transformed into theatre performances, **Stranger Than Paradise** and **Blueprint for Revolution**. What is the difference in the execution itself, when you find yourself in the theatre, on the stage, under the spotlights, instead of in the gallery?*

**MARK POŽLEP:** The move into theatre came through the wish for a more complete presentation of the personal experience and process of the project. The first project that led to this was *Whatever Happened to Major Tom* (2012) when I first put on “an ongoing performance”. This was documented in a video and it was the first time that the text, diary of the process and journey also came about. I did not want to use the text in the video as a voice-over, but I did publish it in an artist’s book, which was featured in the exhibition alongside the video, two photographs and a showcase with fragments of the project. The next piece with a similar structure, *Stranger Than Paradise* (2014–2016), was even more intense in terms of the complexity of what was happening within the performance and public action. At the time, I felt that a gallery presentation of the docu-

mentation of this action would not have been communicative enough, given that it cannot present the whole context to the viewer.

*The Stranger Than Paradise piece included a concert tour of retirement homes and a host of unforeseen situations. So, everything could not have been presented by visual means alone?*

Initially, I tried with an installation featuring an LP recording of seven songs that were performed, a video document of the retirement homes and the audience during the concerts, an artist’s book summarising the diary of the journey, documentary photographs of the process, as well as a poster announcing the concert. Since most of the audience at an exhibition does not engage with reading texts, they only partially understand the message of the project. The viewers are mostly faced with age and nostalgia, but the project did not address only that. My intention was to analyse the socio-political structure of the former Yugoslavia through its protagonists. Images were not enough for this, text was also needed. At this point, the decision was made that the theatre provides a more meaningful way of presenting this work. I have a limited amount of time here, about an hour, and people are used to a directed focus of attention in the theatre. On the other hand, I can also allow myself anything I want in the theatre, from incorporating visual images to a concert. In the same way, I use my own text as a document of the process and my own experience.

*You say that the nostalgia in **Stranger Than Paradise** is of secondary significance, even though many elements are nonetheless implicative of it. You sang the songs of their youth to the elderly.*

I decided on the project because I was interested in who the people who, after 1945, established a new state from the ruins, believed in it, but which then fell apart after 45 years. That was my original fascination: how can it be that a country which functioned as a community, united under the slogan “brotherhood and unity”, deteriorates so quickly after so many years. People of different cultures, religions and languages coexisted solely because of their belief in this (utopian) idea. So, I was wondering who these people were, who built the country at the very beginning and how they live now. Due to the time frame, it was the easiest way

to find them in retirement homes, which are a very specific environment that you cannot just simply enter. It was imperative to find a ticket in, to make an offer that would spark interest in them as well. I offered a musical performance for voice and piano that would take the audience to the time of their youth and the golden age of Yugoslavia when this utopia actually took place.

It surprised me that they responded with laughter and tears of joy. No one spoke about the war. None of the elderly exposed the breakup of Yugoslavia as if there had been a war at all. This came as a surprise. Another thing that I found even more absurd is that, because homes are the cheapest in Serbia, people from all over Yugoslavia are moving there. This is how there are people from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Macedonia in Jagodina (Serbia). If I exaggerate, these people might have been killing each other at some point, but now they are waiting to die together.

*Your primary art practice is painting. Did you find that it had become not communicative enough at some point and decided to expand your work beyond that scope?*

I have always been excited by painting and still am, especially its process of creation. It's an extremely vibrant form. New possibilities, spaces and coincidences are always opening up. The only problem I have with the painting as an object is that it ends up on a wall once it's finished. Because I am more interested and fascinated by the process rather than the end product, I performed various experiments in which I linked a static and moving image. In the end, I decided to use the medium of the image and video separately and as the need arises.

*Was the work **Last Supper of Superheroes** (2006) the first transition into the live image (video)?*

I tried to link image and video already in *My Purple Valentine*, by shooting the surface and framing it using narration. But I used performance and its video document as a live image for the first time in the *Last Supper of Superheroes*.

*Many of your works refer to certain phenomena of pop culture that we all have in our consciousness today, be they superheroes or a desert island with a palm tree.*

I am not entirely sure whether these are phenomena of pop culture or social archetypes. I think that there is a cross-over and their meanings intertwine. I always drew inspiration for my work from the environment that surrounded me.

*What does the symbol of a desert island actually represent to you? Shipwreck, escapism?*

The symbol of the desert island is certainly tied to escapism. In my eyes, more to escapism than shipwreck. In *Whatever*



Mark Požlep, *Stranger than Paradise*, 2014–2016

*Happened To Major Tom*, I toyed with the idea of what happens if the stereotypical image of paradise, an island with a palm tree, materialises in front of you. The island where I planted the palm tree is located before the holiday island of Unije. The question I raise here is does the materialisation and proximity to “paradise” represent hope, or is it just another cynical image?

*Later you went back to boats. The **Hogshead 733** project had a different motif, but a similar process and image. You bought the boat together with your colleague, used it and changed its purpose.*

In this case, it was a transformation of the form and purpose of the object. White oak was used to make sailboats, and after the Industrial Revolution, and after the invention of the steam engine, white oak began to be used for making whiskey and wine barrels due to its special properties. My colleague Maxim Berthou and I managed to find a 1942 sailboat partly made of white oak, we decontaminated and repaired it, and sailed from Trébeurden in France to the Isle of Islay in Scotland. There, we cut up the sailboat, drenched in salt and adventure, and helped by experts, made two 250-litre barrels, which we filled with 500 litres of 11-year-old single malt whiskey at the Bunnahabhain distillery.





Mark Požlep, *Blueprint for Revolution*, 2017

***How have you been and will be presenting the project?***

For now, we have done an artist's book presentation and a whiskey tasting at the City Art Gallery in Ljubljana and at the Art Club in the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. The editing of the film is still underway. I want to present the film independently as a feature film and also as a gallery installation, where it will be presented as a multi-channel video projection in combination with the resulting artefacts and the pieces left over from the project.

***Was this project realised without institutional sponsors and clients?***

At first, we wanted to work with art institutions, but it didn't work out. We were candidates for the Slovenian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, but we were not selected, and we then also lost the other sponsors from the art institutions. So we turned it all around and started to deal with it from a purely commercial point of view. We looked for companies to which we could offer such a story in order to fund our production in return for the story and promotion. We found the Dugas company, a large distributor of alcoholic beverages in France, willing to invest money to create a promotion for their products. We also connected with the Bunnahabhain

whiskey distillery in Scotland, where they agreed to donate 500 litres of aged whiskey in exchange for advertising and we could then do what we wanted with the material obtained.

At first, this was a very big advertisement for Bunnahabhain, but then a big problem arose because the distillery did not apply for a license from the Scottish Whiskey Association for the production of salted whiskey, which put it at risk of having their license revoked. After many problems, we settled the matter legally by adding a banner to the first page of the book stating that everything had been done according to the rules, which would have meant in practice that the project had not happened at all. Yet it is precisely the book that is the document of the project.

***You are already preparing another project with your colleague Berthou that involves sailing – this time down the Mississippi River. What will happen in this action and how will it be presented?***

The Mississippi River holds significance in American history, from colonisation and slavery to industrial agriculture and the ensuing ecological problems. We bought a six-metre steamer with the funds raised from the sale of the whiskey from the *Hogshead 733* project. We will sail the



Mark Požlep, *Last Supper of Superheroes*, 2006

Mississippi with this vessel of historic and symbolic value and collect corn throughout the ten states. The United States is the largest corn producer in the world, and corn plays one of the most important roles in the local economy. It is mostly used for the production of ethanol, which is important in the oil industry. During the Anthropocene period, systematic exploitation of land is leading to the systemic collapse of many river and coastal ecosystems. We are setting off in September 2019, the voyage will take a month and a half and conclude in New Orleans. There, we will transform the steamer into a small distillery and distil Moonshine from corn with the help of the Seven Three distillery and the manufacturers of the Hillbilly Stills boilers.

#### ***What exactly is Moonshine?***

It is fresh, unaged alcohol produced through the distillation of corn, to which sugar cane is occasionally added. It was produced in the United States at the time of the Prohibition since its production was much cheaper than whiskey, for instance, but as a result, the quality was usually very poor. It is also interesting to note that Moonshine was banned until 2012. Yet today it is the emblem of the United States and a part of its history.

***The Blueprint for Revolution project also deals with the history of the United States, where you circled Manhattan by canoe and explored the hidden history of the area. What did you find?***

Having been born in 1981, I spent my early childhood in Yugoslavia, where the idea of America, at least in my surroundings, was quite romanticised. America represented democracy, freedom of speech and equality. My first contact with the Wild West and the Indians, however, was through the stories of Winnetou, the great Apache chief and his blood brother, Old Shatterhand, written by German writer Karl May in the 1980s and 1990s, at least twenty years before his first visit to America. When I decided to sail around Manhattan by canoe, I wanted to explore and expose the real picture of America and the position of the Native Americans today.

The Lenape tribe first lived on the island of Manhattan (the island of many hills) as the estuary of the river was quite abundant in natural resources. In 1626, however, the Dutch colonialists purchased the entire island of Manhattan from the Lenape Indians for what was 60 guilders at the time. That's about 1,000 US dollars today. The next step in the project was to find the descendants of the tribe. I found



Mark Požlep, *Hogshead 733*, 2015–

them in New Jersey, where they had bought a plot of land in a spot where their ancestors had had a ritual camp. Later, the path led me to North Dakota, to Standing Rock, which was the centre of Native American resistance in 2016 and 2017, wanting to halt the construction of an oil pipeline under the Missouri River. All the while, I tried to follow my own assumptions about America and the Indigenous peoples of my childhood, putting it side by side with reality as objectively as possible, thereby making a comparison.

***How did the process proceed from field research to theatre performance?***

In part, it was a matter of collecting personal stories and, on the other hand, extensive historical research. The text included in the play was later produced with the help of a playwright and other collaborators. The story recapitulates the romantic idea of America that we all share in this part of the world. I thought about how popular culture shapes us, and then confronted it with a reality that is completely different and far less dazzling.

***You tested the limits of escapism in the Island project, which took place in an urban area of Antwerp, where you spent***

***five days on a raft in the middle of the canal. What was the impetus for this action?***

I wanted to highlight the case where someone intentionally steps out of the social environment – or the social environment does not allow him to enter or it expels him. I made a raft with a living space measuring 2 × 2 metres, which I named the Island. I anchored in the Napoleon Dock in the centre of town, which is a square-shaped body of water surrounded by piers on all sides. I put myself in the position of being at the centre of what was going on, yet my movements and crossing were made completely impossible at the same time. My gesture can be understood as a conscious removal from the system or as a metaphor for how society eliminates someone from their environment. An interaction already took place on the very first night. Regardless of the fact that we had been collecting permits for three months and had also obtained them all, the police, the fire brigade and the rescue patrol came to the shore, demanding that I get to the shore. Because I didn't want to, they came to get me. They towed my island to the shore by boat, came to the raft and checked the papers, and when they found out I had all the permits, they towed me back with the island.

Mark Požlep, *Last Supper of Superheroes*, 2006Mark Požlep, *Whatever Happened to Major Tom*, 2012

*Besides that, you have created a monumental public sculpture in Antwerp, consisting of shipping containers. What does the sculpture represent and how does it tie in with the city?*

The sculpture is set at the intersection of two completely different districts, Brederode and Markgrave, which are very different. The first district is Flemish, the second immigrant, so their communication is not very good at all. There is a huge green area in between like a buffer zone, which has recently gained the status of a park. I felt it was important to place a symbolic sculpture right there to record this space. I wanted to set up a collection point, so I named the sculpture *Agora* (2018), and it is made using the Indian tepee principle, a very simple structure with three pillars that can support one another to coexist. I used containers because they represent contemporary society and global trade quite well, but also because the second large

est port in Europe is to be found in the immediate vicinity, which characterises the local environment to a large extent. The sculpture speaks for community and unity.

*I could conclude that in almost all your projects you seek to encroach into the social fabric in a non-violent way. So, does art possess this power?*

In a utopian way, I believe that art has this power. If not the immediate possibility of change, then at least the possibility of non-violent encroachment into the social fabric, cautioning and raising awareness. ■

**Miha Colner** is an art historian who works as a curator and programme coordinator at the International Centre of Graphic Art / Svicarija Creative Centre in Ljubljana. He is also active as a publicist, specialised in photography, printmaking, moving images and various forms of (new)media art, and a part-time lecturer.



**Andrej Brumen-Čop**

# Shelter

—  
like a dictation following one another  
drawing painting constructing  
writing reading being still

—  
the space was empty  
I needed flexible structures  
I started building spaces out of bamboo poles  
to follow ideas that came from the needs of my body  
the images emerged as the echo/afterimage of the seen  
but also as fantasies and constructions

—  
sometimes I write out of the need to refine my thoughts  
but I always want to paint again  
the motifs range from people's depictions  
to animals plants landscapes objects and other things  
to improvisations in the unknown  
as I play with colours and shapes  
perhaps with lights and spaces

photo: Matija Brumen





Sladana Mitrović

# The Dialogic Nature of the Retrospective Exhibition by Jelka Flis

**Jelka Flis: *The Geometry of Existence*  
In dialogue with Beti Bricelj, Milan Erič  
and Brane Sever  
14 December 2018–17 February 2019**

The overview exhibition by Jelka Flis at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Celje presented a wide public with the creative path spanning over more than thirty years of the painter, who characterised the Slovenian arena with the monumentally composed painting. According to curator Irena Čerčnik, the exhibition is part of the gallery programme that explores and purposefully presents the complete creative oeuvres of the artists from Celje, or those tied to the city. It should be highlighted at the outset that this is not a regular retrospective exhibition as we are used to in the form of a linear historical review presenting an artist's creativity. The exhibition at hand gained different dimensions by taking on a clear confrontation of the painter's creativity of the past and present. Another characteristic feature of the exhibition is the inclusion of other artists. Namely, Jelka Flis invited artists, who worked during a similar time frame and shared similar concepts regarding the practice of painting, to exhibit with her. An extensive catalogue with a wide selection of photographs of the exhibited artworks was published to accompany the exhibition, along with a text by dr. Nadja Zgonik and dr. Jure Mikuž, who presented the basic creative concepts of Jelka Flis.

Given the floor plan of the gallery space, the exhibition set-up is conceived by interweaving the different periods of Jelka Flis' works with those of the other artists. In the first two spaces, we encounter two one-wall monumental set-ups, *Whether you like it or not, they ARE here* and *Grey Fields*, which the artist originally presented at Likovni salon Celje and at the Falke Gallery in 1997 and 1998. Both set-ups consist of small-scale wooden tiles that extend into the space, invasively occupying the entire wall, or even the entire exhibition space, in the set-ups of the past. A sort of segmented organism is formed from the classical support, while at the same time, each tile can function completely independently, as a final autonomous work in itself. Jelka

Flis developed the composite painting in the mid-1990s since this represented the only possibility of developing a large format given the circumstances in which she worked. The spatial set-up *Whether you like it or not, they ARE here* is conceived as a rectangular grid, embedded with light-dark tiles featuring distinctly emphasised drawing of circular, spiral and serrated lines in an interchanging rhythm. A flat drawing with no spatial or planar illusions appears in black or white as a kind of graphism that reminds viewers of the traces preserved in prehistoric caves. The grid is formed by the empty space between the tiles and it is the basic structure of the entire set-up. The pictorial elements that stand out are pattern and repetition, which are persistently present in the creativity of Flis. The authors of the accompanying study in the catalogue explain:

"Another pictorial question decisively defines the work of Jelka Flis. This is the question of ornament, which is primarily a "pure" art subject, yet is at the same time also the very element whose patterning makes it pass into the decorative, which undermines the self-referencing of the pictorial and takes painting into expansion, into the nearby neighbourhood of the applied arts. The choice of ornament as the key subject of painting – it can be defined as a "soft" art precisely because of the above argument – moves the boundaries from "pure" to the zone of low art even though it is precisely formalised. Simple drawing elements: circles, crosses, squares and dashes complement each other into a grid, which establishes an order among the elements as a platform structure."<sup>1</sup>

The second one-wall installation *Grey Fields* exposes a bright drawing on dark painting supports. This time, the tiles were arranged linearly on a dark wall, thus creating empty geometric shapes as important building blocks of the composition in its entirety. It is clearly shown here that the concentrated presence of a very bright drawing on a dark ground necessarily requires the vacated in-between spaces, the so-called empty places, so that the saturated drawing can come to life on the ground that has been interrupted.

<sup>1</sup> Zgonik, Nadja and Jure Mikuž. "In-between State." *Jelka Flis*. Celje: Center for Contemporary Arts Celje, 2019. 8.

The composite images with exposed graphisms and a clear line are a contrast to the more recently dated paintings with embossed monochrome surface planes. *Between I* is a vertically positioned object – a painting consisting of four dark, almost black squares and four light paintings of the same format, that converge in an upright line so that the dark paintings are in the foreground, while the light ones represents the support to the composition and are visible to the viewer in horizontal in-between bands. These black-and-white painterly planes were created through a consecutive sequencing of horizontal lines; the painter produced them with a sharp tip in a dense mass of still fresh material. The effect of this kind of intervention is shown in the light reflected from each lined graft. In the most recent creative period, Jelka Flis' painting is no longer directed towards composing smaller paintings into larger compositions; rather, serial painting can be observed with multiple repetitions of the same motif on the same format in different executions. The 2017 series of small square paintings entitled *XY* represents a certain kind of return to Malevich's heritage of the cross as a primaeva form that can produce all other forms. If colour in its chromatic value cannot be

detected in the painting of Jelka Flis, then ultramarine blue appears in juxtaposition with black in the *XY* paintings, sometimes as an edge, and at other times as the central point of the cross. This series is defined by the considered treatment of the surface as it is painted on different velvet textures, each reflecting light in its own way, which further emphasises the contrast of the coarse and smooth surfaces. The installation *To the Edge and Beyond* was particularly noticeable in the exhibition. As a digital print on Kapa board, the artist re-actualised the motifs of the early light-dark wooden tiles, this time in blue and in smaller squares. In the exhibition space, the piece was composed into two large blue squares with a grid structure, in such a way that the side of the square was significantly offset in relation to the direction of the wall. The installation produced a distorted illusion in the viewer, making it appear as if the floor of the room was sideways.

The intense working of the canvas surface, which has several layers of material application on it, thus arousing a sense of tactility, can be recognised in a series of bigger rectangular black and white paintings with a pronounced light momentum, such as *Reflection*. The texture was either



Jelka Flis, *Whether you like it or not, they ARE here*, mixed media on wooden panel, 207 × 343 cm, photo: Arne Brejc



Jelka Flis, *To the Edge and Beyond*, 2018, installation, print on Kapa board, 310 × 660 cm,  
photo: Arne Brejc

created with thick applications of painterly means or, through the use of a bristly roller and a painting spatula, which gives the final appearance a shimmering and grainy feel. The opening of two black blocks on the left and right creates a passage of light, where the shadow of a human figure can be recognised in the outlines of the black and white stains. The characteristic graphism in drawing of the 1990s is here replaced by the sensual language of the surface and the clearly divided relationship between the field of light-dark, whereas the dynamic drawing has been swapped with a haze of the structured flickering of the material.

It is no coincidence that the artists present in the exhibition expressly accentuate the light-dark contrast that relieves their painting of the superfluous illusion of colour relationships. The exhibition was conceived as a monochrome world that opens up to the thinking of light and dark, drawing, sign and graphisms – that are more reminiscent of writing than of painterly stain. This emphasises the bare life of the painterly form, the articulation of the outline, the stroke and surface. The title of the exhibition *The Geometry of Existence* itself tells us that the artists have found a common point for the images to huddle through

the forms of circles, squares and grids. Geometry as the highest notion of beauty is rooted in Plato. The true shapes of the world are relative in their forms, while line and its underlying fundamental forms, such as the square, circle and triangle, are expressions of absolute beauty and truth. True and eternal beauty does not reside in living beings or their pictorial representations like most thoughts, but in geometric forms, so they can embody the universal pleasure of the senses. Because of their purity and objectivity, geometric figures represent the eternal good and truth, while mimetic painting merely mimics visual appearance. The ancient philosophers believed that it was geometry that could prepare the mind for the perception of Truth, Being and Knowledge, while psychoanalytic practice recognises the geometric figures as defence against chaos and destruction. The world around us can function in a logical order because of its skeleton in geometry.

The exhibition of Jelka Flis raises the question of involving other artists, Beti Bricelj, Milan Erič and Brane Sever, in the concept of a retrospective exhibition. At the level of a similar understanding of form, the painters can connect and together form the material and sensual tissue of



Beti Bricelj, *Untitled*, 2018, installation, acrylic on wooden panel, 125 × 200cm (left) and ø13cm (right),  
photo: Arne Brejc

painting. It is difficult to think about pictorial matter without establishing relationships with the world around; a certain form can be sharpened in its character if it steps into correlation with others, and at the same time, two different forms, in a joint dialogue, open up a new perspective to the world for us. In the image of the other, my painting self can get even closer to itself, free itself from pre-conceived ideas and established notions, since it has to open a place for new exploration and spontaneous action through a dialogue with the other. The set-up of the exhibition is conceived in such a way that the works of the artists complement each other compositionally, or express themselves through their structural differences. Installed in the first space in confrontation are the works of Milan Erič, *NGC 225* and Flis' monumental spatial layout, *Whether you like it or not, they ARE here*. Erič assembles two square compositions in a series of thirty-five circular, joined forms in horizontal and vertical bands. The set-up gives the impression that the artist was exploring the mechanism of arm rotation, the zeal of the centrifugal force in a single and inimitable gesture of the arm. The image seems to capture the speed and impulsivity of the rotation in the moment that the material is placed

on the ground. Erič's line movement across the ground can be reflected as a simple, subdued ellipsoidal shape, but it can also slip into several layers like the spiral movement of a form that rotates unceasingly across the ground until it has run out of the material base of the drawing instrument. The ellipse drawn with spray radiates a softness and seems to hover at the same time because of its capsized position. It is no coincidence that the multitude of spiral shapes and rounded turns on Jelka Flis' tiles provide the association to repetitive, endless movement, which is why an equivalent answer resonates with Erič's ellipsoidal turns. In the second gallery space, Flis' monumental painting installation *Grey Fields* stands diametrically opposite to the work of Beti Bricelj, *Untitled*. Bricelj presented a system of smaller circular images from 2015, which appear as dots in relation to the scattered arrangement on the wall. The circle has obtained its anatomical structure by being divided into internal monochromatic spaces of grey shades, highlighting the partitions between the planes with dark drawing. The set-up is divided into two fields: a mass of grey dot paintings that extends freely across the wall, and a red dot that fixates the movement. In both works we can take a closer



Brane Sever, series of paintings from the *Without Words* cycle, 2017, acrylic on plastic, 50 × 50 cm,  
photo: Arne Brejc

look at the contrast that is manifested between the installation of the objects in the space and the pictorial structure of each individual element itself. Even though Bricelj always steps into her painting in a constructivist manner by using a grid, her dialogue with Flis prompted her to conceive her composition in Celje freely for the first time. Just the opposite, Flis' *Gray Fields* have a composition with a very solid skeleton, which can be seen in the repeated sharpness of the right angle; the entire set-up could be summed up by adding up eighteen right angles on a grey ground. The clear firmness and sharp cuts are broken up by the accumulation of light, dynamic drawing that escapes from the format through a variety of loose and round shapes. The last room presents the juxtaposition of Jelka Flis' works with a series of five paintings by Brane Sever. In the cycle of squares of smaller format, *Without Words*, Sever engages with the primary gesture of the inimitable merger of stain and pictorial plane. The stain draws a trace through the energy of the body in its forcefulness and vigorous attack on the two-dimensional support, to produce a black line of expressive character spilt into the grey fields until it is completely lost in the mist of the grey ground. This is simply the gesture of the painter's hand who trusts in himself that he can capture the world into an image without mimesis. The processual

pursuit of the so-called "living, eruptive line", without the possibility of any prior anticipation, pictorial weighing-up of forms and painterly speculation, permits the formation or destruction of the painting in a single event. However, the destruction in this relationship is merely a process where the images glide over each other in a palimpsest way, so even when they are painted over, they still emanate a silvery-grey velvety softness from behind the surface, which is ultimately an important constituent of the rough eruption of line. Does Sever's magnanimity, this convulsive stain that is captured at a precisely certain point in time, which manifests to the viewer as a necessary instinctive excretion of the painter's body and which defiantly states that it cannot be recreated again, not come as a radical contrast to the pictorial expression of Jelka Flis, who composes the painting slowly, cautiously, by building up strokes and textures of surfaces, with the gradual revival of separate parts to the very last image, which finds satisfaction in the painter's eye?

The overview exhibition *The Geometry of Existence*, which is not only retrospective in its nature and therefore unique in its structure, primarily reflects the indelible mark that Jelka Flis has left in the Slovenian arena with her painting spanning over many years. Her artwork represents a step out from the confines of the limited rectangular



support that hangs on the wall in front of the viewer as a physically manageable object. The monumental spatial set-up by Jelka Flis is an organism segmented into the endless movement of the image. The invasive expansion of the image beyond its own edges to occupy the entire gallery space transforms the traditional coordinates of the white square into an endless field of images, into which we are immersed as viewers. *The Geometry of Existence* exhibition has shown that creativity is not a monadically closed off activity, tied solely to a unique unrepeatable event by one artist, but that a certain form can step out and gain sharpness only in correlation with the form of another artist. This

exhibition may represent a new way of thinking about retrospectives in the Slovenian arena, which must include, in addition to a historical line, also the relationships between different artists and their works. ■

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**Petja Grafenauer**

# Finally!

***Time Without Innocence.  
Recent Painting in Slovenia***  
**31 January 2019–31 March 2019**  
**Moderna galerija, Ljubljana**

**Curator:** Martina Vovk

**Participating artists:** Viktor Bernik, Suzana Brborović, Gašper Capuder, Ksenija Čerče, Nina Čelhar, Tina Dobrajc, Katja Felle, Mitja Ficko, Mito Gegič, Žiga Kariž, Staš Kleindienst, Vladimir Leben z Ercigoj Art, Uroš Potočnik, Adrian Praznik, Arjan Pregl, Ana Sluga, Miha Štrukelj, Maruša Šuštar, Iva Tratnik, Sašo Vrabič, Joni Zakonjšek, Marko Zorović, Uroš Weinberger

An exhibition of recent painting in Slovenia was put on at Moderna galerija, prepared by curator Martina Vovk, who was responsible for the last retrospective exhibitions of Pregelj and Stupica.

In fact, the gesture by Moderna galerija, which has not exactly been neglecting contemporary painting in the last twenty years but has not dealt with it in any particular depth, especially since 2005, comes across as rather bold. This is not a cross-section of the present-day painting production in Slovenia, but a presentation of that particular segment of painting that began to emerge in the late 1990s, fuelled by the advent of the digital image and the spread of the visual, changes in the social order and loss of the dominant position of the painting. The latter released itself from its ivory tower and opened itself up to communication with the reality that surrounded it, with other media and with the audience. As a result of these changes, a new painting developed which did not exactly shut the door tightly on modernism, since it (cynically, sometimes openly) still refers to it, but is significantly different from the paintings produced before that period. This new painting, which was primarily based on the responses to digitised visuality, spread, blossomed and developed various autopoetics in the later years and to the present day, as described by Vovk:

Recent painting is much more open to the world; painters treat the painting as a site in which to expose and express social dissent, the everyday, personal, and national and supranational pathologies, to retreat into the walled gardens of private anxieties, or cynical

and frivolous frolicking in the shallows of emptied media images multiplied ad infinitum, images that are fascinating precisely because of their core characteristic of infinite randomness. At the same time, none of this prevents the artists from euphorically playing with such images, from finding real joy in casually transposing, borrowing, copy-pasting, sampling them and more. Used in this way, images still construct, in all of their minor, ephemeral, temporary formulations, works full of content, oftentimes funny, caustically critical, cynically distant or merely reflective, meditative, even lyrical. (Vovk, *Introduction*)

However, the text is published online only and does not touch upon the analysis of each exhibited oeuvre. The fact that the exhibition is being produced without a catalogue takes away its power and gives it the opportunity of becoming forgotten within ubiquitous contemporaneity. The curator installed it into the space with a great sense for choreography, the halls seem to invite viewers from piece to piece and sitting on the (otherwise uncomfortable) benches of Moderna galerija this time offers plenty of pleasure for the gaze. And yet a catalogue would have much to add to the art scene and art history.

When we drill through the history of Slovenian art in search of similar reviews of paintings, we first stroll through the key exhibitions of Moderna galerija. The most visible is certainly the retrospective exhibition *Slovenian Art 1945–1978*, which opened in 1979 and highlighted the painting of high modernism with abstraction. The next one, relevant to our topic, took place in 1994<sup>1</sup>: the first U3, curated by Tomaž Brejc. We can call it the swan song of Slovenian modernist painting. Some critics had hoped that modernism – when I mean modernism, I mean hegemony, Greenberg, form and the metaphysics of painting – would be born again like a phoenix from the ashes, however, the point was merely that the dominant criticism was unable to change the horizon of expectation. What happened was everything but that. What happened was the second U3 (1997), curated by Peter Weibel, which finally projected a clear holler on the Slovenian art scene that art had

<sup>1</sup> Here I omit the exhibitions of styles that did, in fact, also represent excerpts from the painting production, but these were exhibitions that, as a rule, presented the audience with new painting practices in smaller exhibitions, whereas what is at stake this time is recognising a break in the painting paradigm and manner of working, displaying so-called contemporary painting.



Installation view, works by Ana Sluga and Nina Čelhar, photo: Dejan Habicht / Moderna galerija, Ljubljana

embarked on a rampage and it was going to be called “contemporary”. When the meritorious Zoran Kržišnik handed the baton over to MGLC, and the Centre also experienced a renaissance with the 24th Biennial of Graphic Arts (2001), both key institutions held their doors wide open to contemporaneity. The transition of the artwork from object to space, situation and relationship, the transition to the social arena, the new role of technology, images and media, new relationships between the work and the audience, the transformation of painting and critical, resistant and political strategies in art, is how these changes that took place in the decade represented by the Slovenian Art 1995–2005. Territories, Identities, Nets exhibition, were described by Igor Zabel.

In this respect, the new role of media imagery in painting and the new models underlying the structure of the pictorial field (photography, the silver screen, TV and computer monitor, etc.) are perhaps most obvious. These aspects became established in the second half of the 1990s with the younger generation of painters that includes Žiga Kariž, Miha Štrukelj, Sašo Vrabčič and others. But perhaps it is even more significant that the status of the image has changed. The painting is not “contemporary” only in that it reproduces media imagery, but rather that it introduces a highly open, internally contradictory, heteronomous

and multilayered structure that is built in a mutual tension of visual and sometimes also textual and conceptual fragments. It is not insignificant that the possibilities of technical production and manipulation of the image have had a great influence on the structure of the painting. On the other hand, technical (re)production has not ruled out handiwork, even though the meaning and role of these processes have changed dramatically in their new context. (Zabel 18)

The same Peter Weibel, who was referred to by the Slovenian critics as a charlatan and an impostor, was also responsible for the theoretical basis of the first wave of Slovenian contemporary painting, and all the artists that he invited to take part in the U3 of the time, have also been included in the show with their more recent works on display at Moderna galerija. Two years before U3, in 1995, Weibel organised the Pittura Immedia: Malerei in den 90er Jahren exhibition at the Landesmuseum Joanneum in Graz. To accompany this exhibition (Tadej Pogačar also participated, later exhibiting many of the artists currently on view at Moderna galerija in gallery P74, an artist-run space in Ljubljana), he published one of the most insightful analysis of the changes that take place in painting when confronted with images appropriated from the technical and electronic media (Ring Petersen 11).



Mitja Ficko, *The Ugly Duckling Sees Himself for the First Time*, 2015, oil on canvas, 250 × 235 cm, courtesy of the artist, photo: Dejan Habicht, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana

After about twenty years from the first works, we can now say with certainty that (some of us), along with Weibel, Zabel, Vignjevič as well as others, who were aware of these changes were right, and that the changes were not only shortlived and transitory, as predicted, since the dominant series of painting that is emerging today is more tied to the post-media image than to the expressiveness of the past (and, of course, continues to be produced to a high quality also today). Since Peter Weibel selected the paintings by Žiga Kariž, Miha Štrukelj and Sašo Vrabčič for the second U3, and presented them at a central art event that was supposed to represent the best pieces of Slovenian art production, 1997 can also be marked as the beginning of painting that falls within the field of contemporary art, even though some paintings had been created before that. It is not just a new style like pop art, minimalism, the new image or anything similar. This is a change in the paradigm of painting, which is experiencing its institutional recognition in Slovenia in 2019.

Until about 2004, the works of the first generation of artists (among them Bernik, Kariž, Pregl, Štrukelj and Vrabčič)

responded to a changed visibility, which was further consolidated in the Slovenian arena with the break of the social order, to a polluted visibility mainly tied to capital. These artists lived through the course as advertisements began to inhabit the façades of houses, cities, printed media, television and made their way into letterboxes. Today, their paintings, and those of other artists, who made a step into the art world more individually, are much more diverse, each having developed their own poetics, some even returning to more traditional starting points. Curator Martina Vovk summarises the situation today: "More than deciphering groupings, lines or styles that would be at best mutually exclusive, a powerful creative dynamics can be recognised in this phenomenon of painting by the younger generations that fundamentally co-shapes the field of contemporary art." (Exhibition)

Let us ask ourselves, what is the network of concepts upon which this painting lives, and why is it so strong in Slovenia, as the exhibition shows us? At the academic level of education in the visual arts, the Slovenian arena offers a strong, well-grounded education in the painting medium



33



Arjan Pregl, *Carnival*, 2018, oil on canvas, (6 slik: 120 × 100 cm; 3 slike: 80 × 60 cm), photo: Dejan Habicht, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana

power, which painting retains in economically and culturally sophisticated environments. In order to survive, it has to contend with countless other mediums and modes of visuality. One of the changes that took place in the late 1990s was also the loss of the position of painting as a privileged art medium. Due to the conservative nature of the institutions and the small size of the arena, this process took (too) long in Slovenia.

It should also be admitted that the painting that was presented at the exhibition *Time Without Innocence*. Recent Painting in Slovenia, compared to other media, was institutionally supported since its beginnings, yet as soon as we look beyond the local arena towards the more affluent countries with greater cultural traditions, we can see just how negligible this support was in material terms. Still, the painters have years of institutional study available to them, painting is still more acceptable than newer media, even among experts, easier to exhibit than sculpture or installation, and lugs a full truckload of tradition along. All this has led to the fact that painting in Slovenia possesses both strength and quality.

For the exhibition, the curator obviously deliberately selected large museum pieces, which was immediately ironised by Viktor Bernik with the largest, but barely noticeable painting in the main hall, while continuing his own poetics of intersection between the blank/white/pure and the social with his white piece. The revelation of the exhibition are the two pieces by Iva Tratnik, brutal and sincere, they cut like a knife and could be made anywhere on the globe. Mitja Ficko and Ksenija Čerče are showing visually rich, embodied works – psychedelia is not a word that should be removed from this exhibition (even in the case of Weinberger and Kariž – where it is constructed of course, but genuine in the case of Ficko). Čerče draws a visual richness from conceptual art, even body art, whereas Ficko is

really about personal, naive and authentic immersion into the visual worlds, a modernist belief in painting.

Maruša Šuštar's paintings are maps of contemporaneity, where blurred scenes of subjects, like in Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*, are inscribed into the cartography, only that they now inhabit large surface areas of the works. The perfection of handling the canvas achieved by Joni Zakonjšek is juxtaposed with Sašo Vrabčič's "quick realism". Both express the intimate and personal, although Zakonjšek does it through nature and expressiveness, whereas Vrabčič follows it through accessibility and motif.

Kleindienst combines a response to small scale, suburban life with humour and fantasy into increasingly sophisticated works that are among the few that – certainly intentionally – do not fall out of the bourgeois format. It comes to mind that Kleindienst is the juicy ironic Bruegel of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Slovenianhood. Štrukelj's mature works are still based on his offshoots as a painter, which he has steadily varied over the years. This time, too, he captures metropolitan scenes, and the 2016 series is certainly one of his better ones, as Štrukelj has proven that he is best particularly when he keeps to the two dimensions.

We were positively surprised by Marko Zorović (Arne Brejc exhibited his works at the Eurna Gallery in 2015) with a completely unique socially realistic and eloquent expression, which also works in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as Capuder, who also first exhibited his *Still Lives*, which work much better when they are paired up with objects, at Eurna (2016). Along with *Leben*, who seems better in the other works of his oeuvre, these are the works that possess the least strength in the show, but they also live on. Opposite, are Weinberger's canvases with colours that catch the eye and idyllic scenes that do not sense the danger that has already arrived, brilliant in their cool technological execution of merging already-communicated realities. Also

excellent is Ana Sluga, who shakes off a Magritte type of hardness in a larger format: her Triptych comes as another soothing surprise in the exhibition, reminding that Sluga should open herself up to museum formats.

Kariž seems like an old cat who weaves his own expressive thread without hesitation, during this period he continues to deconstruct sexual images, which he places on a value scale along with any other image of a marketable item, both of which he uses to produce lascivious, rich paintings. Arjan Pregl's carnival excites: he also seems to have reached a mature stage in which he combines all the components of his past creations – humour, colour and a penchant for the great themes and methods of modernist painting. Potočnik also makes a repeatedly convincing case in the exhibited large formats, despite the fact that he walks on the edge of photorealism and realism with some difficulty. The direction of the apparent digitisation of deconstructed building blocks, which Suzana Brborović focused on during her stay in Leipzig, does not impress me, since the coldness of the work has taken away from the social corrective that breezed from her earlier works, however, her superb mastery of the medium and skilful use of overlay tapes must nevertheless be acknowledged. Placed by her side is Nina Čelhar with paintings of architectures and their parts in delicate, almost fading grey-yellow tones. What should be said about the Dobrajc – Gegič couple, other than each proceeds in their own direction – she, with a convincing painting bordering illustration and Gothic novel, crossed with Slovenian folklore, he, with seemingly digitally distorted hunting scenes,

using a technique that he developed himself – achieving ever-greater mastery. The artists that belong to the youngest generation of those exhibited – Katja Felle and Adrijan Praznik – also conclude the selection in a more than respectable manner. Praznik's works with many gel coatings and the romantic, seemingly almost naive rhetoric of celebrating the depicted, and on the other hand, the sharp critical pop art aesthetics of Felle, who still needs a few years of painting practice to show what she can really do, indicate that recent painting in Slovenia is heading in many directions.

## Epilogue

The generation of painters born in the 1970s and 1980s is my generation. This painting is close to me, just as the painting of Tugo Šušnik is close to Tomaž Brejc, or that of Emerik Bernard, to Andrej Medved. A generational, or some other affiliation, is probably at stake here, but when I look at these, I feel that I can identify with them. However, since I am both, companion and promoter of the painting practices that have finally arrived at a unified presentation in a national institution, I cannot be completely trusted. ■

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Hana Ostan Ožbolt

# On *Wunderblock*, Luka Savić's Solo Exhibition

## Starting points

This text is an expansion of the text that accompanied Luka Savić's (born 1990) exhibition *Wunderblock*, which took place in the DLUL gallery in Ljubljana, between 22<sup>nd</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2018. The exhibition emerged within the frame of the Young Curator / Young Artist project, to which the Fine Artists Society invited me over a year ago, and after a short deliberation I decided to invite Savić. Why him? He is an AVA (Academy of Visual Arts) graduate who also graduated in Philosophy from the Faculty of Arts, and he had crossed my radar over the past three years with some of the art projects he created and exhibited within group exhibitions. His complex and technically perfected artistic practice, in which nothing is left to chance or improvisation, and everything is backed with consideration and deliberation, had so far not been presented in a solo exhibition, which is why I believed I had to make the best of this opportunity.

The exhibition *Wunderblock* emerged as a result of an intense and productive dialogue between the artist and the curator that spanned over a period of several months; Savić and I planned it as a part of a broader event. In our desire to provide an external view of the artist's practice and exhibition (which was prepared by the two of us), we invited the writer and theoretician, Dr. Rye Dag Holmboe to join us in Ljubljana, and he wrote a paper especially for this occasion.<sup>1</sup> In an environment that chronically lacks any sort of critical reflection on art production, we considered this to be of extreme importance. The exhibition in the DLUL Gallery was accompanied by the artist's solo presentation on the other side of town, within the frame of the initiative for supporting young Slovene artists, HOoST, which organises exhibitions outside of gallery spaces.<sup>2</sup> The presentation

known as *Wunderblock* #2, took place at the same time and was an extension of the existing exhibition, an addition to it as well as an insight into Savić's work process. While the DLUL Gallery exhibited works of art, the HOoST spaces presented sketches for these (exhibited) works, photographs and artist books. The second, smaller exhibition in a non-institutional context, was of a more documentary and informative nature.

Savić and I decided to exhibit his older work *Letatlin and Revolution* (2015) alongside his new and fresh work *Light and Dark* (2018) in the DLUL Gallery, with which we wished to indicate the continuity of certain issues and the problematic fields within his practice. By taking into account the specifics of the exhibition space (two rooms with different ceilings and totally different lighting; niches) and responding to them we wished to expose certain moments within the set up itself: repetition on one hand and the emptiness, absence, lack on the other. It was not merely about addressing the issue of the neglected side of the avantgardes (to be more specific their connections to mysticism, which the artist is extremely interested in in his more recent projects), but also a question of the failure of the avantgarde in general. A key element of the exhibition, which cannot be seen on the photographs, was the silence; at certain intervals this silence was ruthlessly broken by a deafening bang.

## The Delay of Action

The artist's work was strongly influenced by the generation of artists from the territory of former Yugoslavia, which included Goran Đorđević (Walter Benjamin or Kazimir Malevich from Belgrade), Raša Todosijević, Mladen Stilinović and the group IRWIN. They have created their own visual language based on quotes from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Western and European art, and they used the so-called retro-principle as a 'thought principle, a manner of behaviour and work' as 'a work method' (IRWIN, Programme 148–150).

space and elevate the living culture. Between November 2017 and October 2018 HOoST co-existed in the premises of the Tam Tam café on Cigaletova street 3 in Ljubljana.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rye Dag Holmboe has been a researcher and lecturer at the History of Art Department at the University College London (UCL), United Kingdom, since 2015. He mainly focuses on modernism and contemporary art. He is the co-author and editor of the book *JocJonJoch: Hand in Foot*, which was published by Sion Art Museum in Switzerland (2013), as well as the co-founder of the publishing house Matchstick Book, which focuses on the cooperation between writers and visual artists. Holmboe's work has been published in *The White Review*, *Art Licks*, *Apollo Magazine* and numerous other academic magazines.

<sup>2</sup> HOoST is a series of sale exhibitions of young Slovene artists that take place outside of gallery spaces. It aims to bring art created by promising Slovene artists closer to the general public, at which it endeavours to culturally enrich the public





Luka Savić, *Wunderblock*, DLUL Gallery, 22. 8. – 2. 9. 2018, photo: Lenart Kirbiš

When Hal Foster considered the relation between historic and neo-avantgardes he established an analogy with the establishment of a trauma as defined by Freud (at least two traumas are necessary for it to emerge, as summarised by Jean Laplanche) and the *Nachtraglichkeit* moment (who we are, emerges as a result of the delay of action). He stated that an avantgarde work is never historically efficient or fully important at the time of its creation, as it is 'traumatic' – 'it is a hole in the symbolic order of time that is not ready for it, that cannot accept it, at least not immediately, and at least not without structural changes' (28–29). The relevance of the avantgarde work is established retroactively, with a delay, in the delay of the action (the event is recorded by the other, who records it) or in the deferred action, 'which negates the simple schemes, before-after, cause-consequence, origin-repetition' (32). The avantgarde<sup>3</sup> has

returned (and continues to return), however, it is returning from the future; this is its paradoxical temporality.

While the representatives of the historic avantgardes strived towards the new, their heirs consciously refuse to produce anything 'original'. Or, if we paraphrase Groys: the essence of the new is not to reveal the hidden, it is not the discovery, the new is new in relation to the old, to tradition. The innovation can be found in the fact that we 're-evaluate the value of what we have always seen and known' (Teorija 16, 11–22). In his work Savić also uses the strategy of 'revisiting' certain ideas and works from the history of art. The works shown at this exhibition use the retro-principle method to re-appropriate, recontextualise and reinterpret the works of historic avantgardes; he opens and offers a different reading of them. This is not a deconstruction of the form, but its revival through the moment of repetition.

<sup>3</sup> It might be interesting to draw attention to the use of the word 'avantgarde' in its singular form or 'avantgardes' in the plural form; in Slovenia Aleš Erjavec (see the book *Heteronomy of Art and the Avantgardes*) uses the two interchangeably (even though he favours the plural form slightly), while Lev Kreft discusses the problem of the use of the term in its plural form and prefers the singular form. He views the avantgarde as an artistic formation of modernism, and not merely as a group of movements, which have identified with this term (many did not); the singular form also supports the assumption that the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the century of avantgardes (historic; neo; post avantgardes, which are not strictly separated movements). Kreft discussed this in great detail in his lecture *Politics of the Avant-garde(s) in Central Europe*, which he delivered at the Modern Gallery within the frame of the international summer school *Constructions of the Utopia – Eastern European Avantgardes and their Legacy*, on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2018. I use both forms in my text and I do not differentiate between the two.

## Confrontations

One of the key connections can be found in the flying machine *Letatlin*, which was designed by Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953) between 1929 and 1931. Tatlin was one of the main representatives of the Russian avantgarde, within which we distinguish between several '-isms', movements,



Luka Savić, *Light*, 2018, photo: Lenart Kirbiš

tendencies or groups.<sup>4</sup> He drew the plans for this machine in a period in which numerous Russian avantgarde artists decided to adopt an active role in the construction of the Soviet state (from 1917 onwards, more intensely from 1920 onwards).

While the Russian avantgarde persisted in artistic 'self-sufficiency' prior to the war, and was, as Gurianova stated, 'apolitical' and not 'interested in temporarily changing the world through revolutions or political representation', but instead wished to search for the 'new ontology' (33) (especially Malevich), the art and social revolutions later became an intertwined process. Artists believed that 'art and social revolution strengthen each other' (Lodder 225). Art was understood as a production activity: for instance, the early phase of Russian constructivism operated under the motto 'From representation to construction', while the later phase operated under the motto 'construction to production' (Erjavec 11). The artist – constructor was willing to place himself in the 'service of politics, as he didn't see any other way of fulfilling his initial project of total and global artistic renewal' (Groys, Stalinism 121).

<sup>4</sup> However, Tatlin is believed to have stated that 'he never belonged to any group'. (Strigalev, 24)

However, Tatlin did not wish to build a flying machine merely to (technically) serve mankind, for he also wished it to enable the 'freeing' and 'mystical' experience of flying, which differs from the mechanical one, in the plane, where 'we cannot feel the movement of our body through the air'. He wrote: '(These) dreams are as old as Icarus [...] I wish to return the feeling of flying to mankind, for we were robbed of it by the mechanical flying of the aeroplane' (Lodder 213–214). The machine (which was never built) did not have an engine, as it was powered by human legs. Many constructivist projects were already in their essence utopic, and similar to their hopes they became 'symbols of the utopic world, which the artists hoped they would build'. (Erjavec 27, 34)

*Letatlin and Revolution* (2015) is a reconstruction of Tatlin's machine at a scale 1:2 – with the difference being that Savić placed it on the floor and on its back. He tied it to a mechanical pulley, which loosened every few seconds; the wings rose from the floor, for a moment they remained balanced, but they soon slammed to the floor. As a result of the repeated move the thundering sound vibrated through the space at certain intervals – a perpetuated persistence regardless of the incapability (to fly). Savić's reinterpretation also plays with the semantics of the word revolution,

which has been, due to its overuse, totally emptied of its semantics; it has lost its historic and political meaning.<sup>5</sup> *Revolutio* (lat.) means to overthrow, to turn, revolution; it is derived from the Latin *revolvere*, which is translated as spin, topple or originally roll back.<sup>6</sup> The work should thus not be read merely as a commentary of the unsuccessful 1917 October revolution, but mainly as an interpretation, closer to the artist's original idea: revolution is repeated in its futility.

In his plan for the flying machine Tatlin mentioned Icarus. Even more, this mythological character was supposedly one of the inspirations for the machine. The latter is important, especially if we follow Savič's interest in iconography, which he understood as a 'universal language' and which he consciously introduced into his works. We can debate as to what extent iconography, a method used in the field of history of art, which studies the contents of the artwork on the basis of recognising its individual parts (motifs, attributes, symbols), their reciprocal relationships and larger entities, can be (today) considered a 'universal language' – as it is only available to the 'initiated' and those who can dedicate time to it.<sup>7</sup> And yet: *Letatlin*, turned on its back, is repeated in the work *Dark* (2018), albeit in a smaller format (3D print). Turned towards the sky, it raises from the floor and makes its way up the wall, placed in the position (instead of?) the crucified, or possibly an angel. The pair opens new levels of reading.

The retro-principle as the framework for Savič's work and artistic process also means that the historic experience is re-analysed; in his newer projects he is interested mainly in the presence of mysticism in the avantgarde movements and in the relationship between the two.

Hugo Ball (1886–1927) is best known as a German poet and a protagonist within the dada movement. Lesser known are his essays in which he wrote about the lives of saints.<sup>8</sup> Savič's work *Light* (2018) reveals itself in the form of Ball's clothes (headgear, body cylinder and cape, covers for

hands), that he wore when he performed his sound poems and held his performances in Cabaret Voltaire (established in 1916). In this work the costume, which was originally created from cardboard, is reconstructed in transparent plexiglass: the clothes are here, but where is the one wearing them? (Where is Hugo Ball?)

Above Ball's colourless costume (*acromia*) there is a monochrome (*monocromia*); or at least this is what it appears to be. Following the artist's original idea, the square wax object (without any pigment), represents one of those tablets (enlarged), that were used in Antiquity to write upon, and which had to be, once their surface was covered in writing, smoothened out with the same stylus that was used when writing. When considering this wax tablet (he calls it 'Wunderblock', which literary means miracle block) Freud speaks about memory and the way it is archived, the time and death (of memorising). He sees this 'miraculous wax tablet' as a physical representation of the psychological apparatus, which through writing, imprinting, recording, deleting and memorising introduces the techniques of archiving memories.<sup>9</sup>

By confronting Russian constructivism (which seems to be celebrated today for the things it did not create, rather than for the things it did) with the German-Swiss Dadaism, the exhibition *Wunderblock* poses questions of the 'anticipatory futures' and 'reconstructed pasts' (Foster); with this it also ponders on the spiritual and moral sides and the visions which are already here, the visions of the present.



**Hana Ostan Ožbolt** graduated from a double-major study of Comparative Literature and Germanic Studies at the Faculty of Arts in 2014. She has been working at Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana for a year. She has completed the World of Art (2014–2016) School for Curators and Critics of Contemporary Art and has performed a six-month curatorial practice placement at the Gregor Podnar Gallery in Berlin. She is currently writing her master's thesis in the Department of Art History at the Faculty of Arts.

<sup>5</sup> Merely for actualisation purposes: at the moment Telemach (Slovene mobile, television and internet provider) addresses their users and potential customers with "Become a part of the REVOLUTION FREE2GO"! For more on the FREE2GO package and REVOLUTION see: <<https://telemach.si/mobilna-telefonija/FREE2GO>>

<sup>6</sup> Snoj, Marko. *Slovenski etimološki slovar* (Slovene Etymological Dictionary, third edition). <[www.fran.si](http://www.fran.si)>

<sup>7</sup> Iconography appears paired with iconology, which interprets the work of art and places it into a broader historical and cultural context within which it was created.

<sup>8</sup> "There are saints who are saints in their words, and saints who are saints in their actions. There are saints who are constantly silent and saints who are constantly talking. Some show themselves constantly while others are always hiding. There are saints from whom everybody runs away and saints who everybody wants to find." In his essays Ball confronts the stories of three characters: John Climacus (John of the Ladder), Dionysius the Areopagite and Simeon Stylites.

<sup>9</sup> This model was described, analysed and presented by Freud in his text *Notiz über den "Wunderblock"* (1924/1925). Jacques Derrida also alluded to it in his work *Archive Fever: Freudian Impression* (19–23).

**Borut Krajnc**

# The Path, Rigonce, the green border, refugees and migrants in Slovenia

## Resurrection and Assumption / Himmelfahrt ... and El Greco

The two parts of the photo/graphed image... The light with the child is [now] mazzocchio = a punch in the eye that will clear the darkness and the clouds threatening in the sky... The tape with the words Poli/ce = town, polis, gente, masses of immigrants, substituting the flock of angels and priests... Figures in habits, bright clothes, woven with glitter, fabric and texture = manufactured to be beautiful, cover the wounded, vulnerable and scratched bodies... Light and brightness radiate from the body, Lichtung as clarity and he phos.

The man in the bright jacket is a witness [Joseph] to the fatal Event, as are all the men and women... Event as l'évenement, Ereignis as the appropriation of almost imaginary, separate and illusionary, illusionistic [in-ludere = in-played] ancient belongings. Ownership, in the darkness, through the clouds on the horizon, through the misty and darkened horizon, ownership of the souls... and priests who reject them, ditch them at their arrival, from-being = existing in our (un)holy, unfriendly world and space. Ownership of their bodies/figures that are invading the forbidden, yet rejected space/world. Der Ort as a city – a place in which the forbidden and restrained thought prevails, a thought as prohibition, and exile as expulsion from Eden. ■

Text by: Andrej Medved



Borut Krajnc, *The Path, Rigonce, the green border, refugees and migrants in Slovenia*. Cerkv Marije zdravja, Piran, 2018





Borut Krajnc, *The Path, Rigonce, the green border, refugees and migrants in Slovenia*. 23. 10 2015, pigment print on RC paper, laminated and mounted on Dibond, 225 × 150 cm

**Borut Krajnc** has worked as a documentary photographer and photo-journalist for the weekly *Mladina* magazine since 1991. His photographic works consistently address the social and political transition, the development of Slovenian society and the state. In 2015, he accompanied the biggest mass arrival of migrants and refugees to Slovenia.

**Andrej Medved** is an art historian, philosopher, translator, editor and poet. He is the author of numerous collections of poetry and has received the Valvasor Award for Lifetime Achievement (2014), the Veronika Award (2010), the Jenko Award (2008), the Cup of Immortality (2006) and the Prešeren Fund Award (2003) for his creative work. Until his retirement, he worked as Museum Councillor and curator at the Coastal Galleries.

Miha Colner

# Ten Years with a Ten-Year Break.

**Domestic Research Society:  
Damijan Kracina, Alenka Pirman, Jani Pirnat**

The Domestic Research Society is a dynamic collective that has been active in various social science and art fields since 2005. The three founders and permanent members, Damijan Kracina, Alenka Pirman and Jani Pirnat, whose work is also otherwise closely connected to the field of contemporary art, have carried out a series of projects and researches that focus on the study of specific past and present phenomena within the fields of ethnography, anthropology, linguistics and other related fields. In most cases they deal with the Slovenian cultural arena, even though it often turns out that many social and cultural phenomena are universal and cannot be restricted to the local (Slovenian) context. The work of the Domestic Research Society began in 2004 when the Society was founded, and in 2005 they started the ongoing project *The Unleashed Tongue*, as well as opened their independent exhibition space Cabinet in Ljubljana, and started with the initial concepts for the *Animals in the First World War* project. Various activities followed: they organised exhibitions, ran the Cabinet (2005–2010) and came up with the original concepts for the group exhibition *Word for Word, without Words* (2010), as well as the research projects *Jelenometry* (2007), *Domestic Spiders* (2011–) and the current *Casting of Death* (2017–), along with the user generated online dictionary *The Unleashed Tongue* (2005–), and the relationally-based initiative *Hard Facts* (2010–2013), which created the possibility for the exchange of experience and communication between participants. In short, the work ethic of the Society is hard to define, it is variable, sometimes unpredictable and always focused on peripheral social and folk phenomena in which science and established art show no interest. Even though the members of the Society stem from the art world, their joint practice also involves non-artistic action and creation tactics, which may explain why some of their projects have gained popularity among the broadest possible public.

*You come from different contexts (Kracina and Pirman are artists, Pirnat is a curator). What brought you together? Was it the simple need for collective work?*

**DAMIJAN KRACINA:** We often cooperated and worked together before, but in 2004, when I returned from my artist residency in the USA, I wanted to hide my individuality

and create my next work as a part of a group. We founded the Society and our first project was Cabinet. We decided to create a space that would follow the principle of the cabinet of curiosities. At the time I was influenced by the Museum for Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles. And we decided to adopt the name from Alenka Pirman's project.

**ALENKA PIRMAN:** The Domestic Research Society somehow fits in with the Institute for Domestic Research which finished with its operation at that time. In 1998 I decided that the method of a fictitious institution, which the artist uses instead of his name, no longer works. Especially not in Slovenia, where access to mass media is relatively simple, and it is also relatively easy to fool them. Suddenly everybody knows about everything. I considered this path to be too easy, which is why I abandoned it. The Institute for Domestic Research emerged from my dissatisfaction with the limitations that are brought forth by authorship in contemporary art. In the past I have tried out numerous tactics which enable the avoidance of authorship within the art system, in which I was supposed to be working professionally. Then, in 2004 we decided to establish an association which is a legal entity.



Domestic Research Society, logo, 2004

**JANI PIRNAT:** The establishment was strongly supported by the fact that Damijan Kracina returned from USA with great creative energy and enthusiasm, and he proposed that we start an association. Each one of us had certain knowledge and experience and you need three people to establish an association. The fact that the Domestic Research Society is a legal entity, was extremely beneficiary to us, for we could start applying for production funds. I originate from the field of History of Art, but each one of us is good in something.

*The question of authorship is probably a key issue in the art system. A lot of things have changed in this system, but the attitude towards authorship remains almost unchanged. Did the group appearances seem problematic at any stage, do you renounce a part of your references because of it?*

**AP:** We do not renounce anything. On the contrary, we gain references. Of course, you need to be aware that the Domestic Research Society does not represent a survival platform for any of us. As an organisation, the Society does not need a lot to keep it alive. All three of us have got other careers. The society mainly appears as a collective author, and two or all three members participate in individual projects; in most cases we are also accompanied by an array of external co-workers. Our regimes are very loose as we have never implemented rigid rules. They change and are adapted, from one project to another.

*So you don't have a statute or a manifest?*

**DK:** We have a statute, as it is impossible to establish an association without it. The statute includes an important article which we often use. It reads: 'The Society should never be a burden to us.' This is a very strong statement that we often turn to when deciding on things.

**JP:** I would only like to add that we can tolerate plenty of burdens in the large projects.

**DK:** If I return to the issue of authorship, I think it gives me a certain pleasure to view my work from a distance. It is nice to look at something I helped create and be taken aback. Our projects are often such that we can look at them from a slight distance even though we have created them.

**JP:** Authorship is predominantly important for the art market. Groups are harder to process than individuals. In the business world of art, authorship is always important and it is totally clear how a personal biography is created. We were never interested in this, as we have no idea how to evaluate our collective work in a marketable way. The idea of subduing ourselves to this system represents a burden in itself.

**AP:** This is an easy thing to say, however, we were never seriously tempted.

**JP:** We were tempted, or rather Alenka Pirman was tempted, and that was when our attitude to the art market was truly shown.

**AP:** Yes, that's true. A private gallery owner from Italy used to be very interested in the works created by Alenka Pirman, i.e. me as an artist, and he truly placed me in an embarrassing position. Operating in the art market does not go down well with my worldview, as I do not believe that works of art have a price that is defined by a psychological limit. The sort of price that you can add one or two noughts to if you are good at marketing. I think this is utterly stupid and I do not wish to participate in it. However, the temptation was great, after all, I need to pay the bills.

**JP:** The gallery owner turned to her in a rather vulgar way, as a head hunter, and presented a series of ideas how they could cash in on her works. He suggested that the project *Time is Money* (which was created within our Society) and a few projects created by Alenka Pirman could travel around galleries and make money. In order to avoid temptation, we reached an agreement and created a bizarre situation. Alenka suggested to the gallery owner that he should discuss this with me, as I have some experience with the art market. I suggested that a heavy travelling social rock would travel from one gallery to another. At this point Mika Hentz's project of a rock that had the intention to travel the world came in handy. This cynicism finally deterred him from his intention to represent us and we lost our opportunity for a commercial career.

*Is the project Time is Money your only potentially commercial project? Do people buy time?*

**AP:** Yes, they do. This is our only art project that makes money. We have two versions: one is an internet one, the other takes place in the form of a machine that appears in various contexts. You throw a coin into it and this buys you time, while online you can buy time with a banking card.

**JP:** These days individuals often take over and occupy certain fields – planets as well as stars are being sold. Individuals are allowed to economically take over an entire segment and sell it. And what could be more saleable than time? In this case our Society is the owner of time which means we can sell it under our trademark.

**AP:** The project originated from the fact that everybody keeps moaning that they don't have any time, so we offered it up for sale. The other saleable articles of our Society are our book publications which are not works of art, but a part of the publishing programme, which appears within the online dictionary project *The Unleashed Tongue*. This project represents one of the earliest examples of user generated content in Slovene language. The dictionary that collects words from the living Slovene language was started in 2004, and since then two printed editions have been published, and they can be purchased. Societies are by definition non-profitable, thus the money from the books is reinvested into the project.



*I would like to return to the issue of authorship for a moment. Damijan Kracina and Alenka Pirman are both artists with their own artistic practices. How do you separate this? When does a project become a part of the Domestic Research Society, and when does it remain a personal project?*

**DK:** In most cases somebody comes up with an idea. A lot of ideas are lost in the process, however some are developed together. The beginnings are usually very simple. In the project *Soldering* (started in 2011) Jani Pirnat simply begun to wonder what is a giant metal spider doing on the wall in his home. This made us think about it and the project emerged organically. We usually develop the ability to be attentive to the treated phenomenon. We have all found a place in the *Soldering* project; amongst other things we put together all of the collected material and organised it in a vast archive. We all have some sort of affinity to certain phenomena, and we tried to unify it.

**JP:** However, even when we are unified, we are not unified in this unification. This can be a difficult process that often ends in a cul-de-sac, and this provides us with some interesting solutions. Generally speaking, these dynamics are very close to the three of us.

**AP:** It seems that two lines appear. Projects that we develop as the Domestic Research Society usually emerge as a result of us all working on them. The ideas start to intertwine and flow from one into another, and some are dug out from the archives; for instance, there is a project that we started developing in 2004, but executed it only 10 years later. You can also use the platform as a producer, which means you can use the Society to carry out projects or products of others. We do not represent a closed system – this has ceased a long time ago and today numerous other individuals are involved in the projects of our Society.

*The project that has been going on since the very establishment of the Domestic Research Society is **The Unleashed Tongue** (2004–). This project was influenced by the experience gained within Alenka Pirman's exhibition project *Arcticae Horulae* (1997), however it moved on to develop outside of the art context.*

**AP:** *The Unleashed Tongue* emerged from the dictionary of German loan words, which was in the beginning created as a private collection and served as a party piece at family and other social gatherings. The project *Arcticae Horulae* was introduced through the art system and emerged within the frame of the fictitious Institute for Domestic Research. When creating the online project *The Unleashed Tongue* we made sure not to repeat the mistakes and we did not allow it to go in the direction of a work of art. The Society is a good platform, which prevents an artist from taking over something and cashing in on something that is contributed by others for free. Whenever you start a project involving



*The Unleashed Tongue*, book cover, 2007;  
designed and illustrated by Vasja Lebarič

language in Slovenia you can count on it being received with great enthusiasm and being a success. The media immediately picks up on it. For a dictionary of slang, idioms, jargons and neologisms it seemed fair to us that the people should know where they stand when they contribute their share. This means that nobody makes any money with this project, everything is created under the Creative Commons licence, which means that the contents can be taken and used by anybody. However, this would not be possible without the experience gained within the art context. A part of the success of this project lies in the fact that it is neither scientific nor artistic, but is located in the place in between, which the Society treats as non-invasive. It's all based on amateur principles.

**JP:** A big part of the dictionary's success stems from the skills of Damijan Kracina and Alenka Pirman who knew how to work with internet platforms in a way that allowed us to address the broadest possible public and gradually reach the critical mass.

**DK:** It is interesting that the public often perceived us as experts for certain phenomena, which was of course





DDR, *Animal Dance of Death*, exhibition at Mangart, 2014; photo: Ivan Jakac

not always the case. For instance, none of us are language experts or experts on idioms, even though we presented the project also to great language authorities, such as for instance Jože Toporišič. We only initiate the gathering or research, which in the end involves a lot of people.

*How did these language experts, such as for instance Jože Toporišič, react to the dictionary of slang?*

**AP:** Toporišič showed no reaction at all. Generally speaking, the beginnings were accompanied by ignorance and resistance, however, this was followed by an enthusiastic response of the young linguists, who started studying these issues on the academic level. In the end the project was accepted. But we had to hold onto it for at least ten years in order to achieve this. Today *The Unleashed Tongue* represents an essential platform.

**DK:** I recollect hearing the statement that the dictionary is alright as a project, but only as long as it does not divert funds from real dictionaries.

**AP:** One of the comments read: 'Valuable, but inappropriate.'

*This means that you are not experts, but merely good observers. You notice what experts fail to notice.*

**JP:** The only special thing in our work is that we invest a lot

of energy into it and this attracts the public, who become a source of general knowledge. We also cooperate with certain experts, and they give us credibility. This is important. We primarily start our projects as a result of our curiosity, which is why it does not matter whether we are artists or scientists.

*In the same way as The Unleashed Tongue started off within the artistic context and then spread out from it, your Society often appears to be within the art sphere, but it also often reaches out of it. Do you consider this to be a success?*

**DK:** I believe that today's art context is relatively limited. It is too elitist. As soon as you move away from it, interesting things start happening.

**JP:** Contemporary art and the art system are becoming increasingly limited with their own perception and are burdened by contemplating what art is. However, the world of science is also limited with its own rules and system, from counting points to counting number of publications. We are between these two poles which gives us the freedom not to be pushed to one side or the other.

**AP:** However, I think we are sufficiently self-critical. When, for instance, our products emerge alongside projects, we do not worry whether these are works of art that will live beyond their initial purpose. The exhibition *Word*

for *Word, without Words* was an excellent example of this. We gathered everyday objects, museum objects, artworks by other artists, and we also created some artworks of our own, which emerged from highly entertaining work seances. Some of these works still function independently, such as *Time is Money* or the video *To Have Butter on One's Head* (2010). Some of the works lost their value as soon as the exhibition was closed down. I want to say that we are truly not bothered whether we will produce works of art or something else. We are often asked what is it we do: is it art research or an amateur or free time activity? Our colleague Nemanja Cvijanović stated that we are populists. We usually understand contemporary art as a field of elitism, which demands of the viewer a lot of previous knowledge and sensitivity, but the projects created by our Society also demand a lot of knowledge and thought. And the three of us with our integrity guarantee that the projects and researches are not amateur, frivolous or manipulative. The freedom lies in the fact that we do not have the burden to deliver.

*And yet non-artistic objects/projects can easily appear within the artistic context. For instance, in the project Word for Word, without Words the main focus was on the exhibition.*

**DK:** And before that research. But an even better example for this would be the project *Animals 1914–1918*, in which the research lasted for ten years with a ten-year break. In the end the project manifested itself on canvass, as a classic work of art, to differ from those projects that exist merely as records or collections.

**AP:** Three projects were in action at the time the Domestic Research Society was started: *The Unleashed Tongue*, The Cabinet as an exhibition space and *Animals 1914–1918*, which emerged from the restoration work carried out by Damijan Kracina, who used to work on memorials in the Posočje region. These projects are active even today. In the beginning the project on animals during World War I was pure research; we buried ourselves into archives, talked to historians, read numerous books, went to Bologna to listen to a lecture delivered by the historian Lucio Fabio, who wrote a book on this topic. Our approach was most definitely serious and delved in great detail. In the end we presented our conclusions and the collected materials at an exhibition. As our civilisation had recently celebrated the centenary of the beginning of the war we were invited to continue with the project. The research has been done, so we just needed to create a work of art.

*And this work of art was Animal Dance Macabre (2014).*

**JP:** Yes, it is interesting how the project developed. Damijan Kracina and Katarina Toman Kracina were creating a copy of the *Dance Macabre* fresco from Hrastovlje for



DDR, *Cooking Trophy, Jelenometry*, 2007,  
photo: archive of Domestic Research Society

the Ljubljana castle. This sparked the idea for our work, in which the skeletons remained identical to the original, while the representatives of the mediaeval social groups were replaced by animals that participated in World War I. The skeletons are leading them towards an abyss. The most interesting part of the project was the process itself, the painting might be the final piece of the project, but there is an entire encyclopaedia behind it.

**DK:** We prepared a few projects on the theme of war and animals in the Cabinet. In one of them, *Specimen*, which we created together with Jani Pirnat, my long-term interest in animals and his knowledge of artistic iconography merged. We were looking for bizarre animals in nature and in works of art... From the very beginning the Cabinet was conceived as a space, into which the three of us could bring whatever, but we had to be unanimous if we wanted to remove anything. In the end it became a classic exhibition space, in which we set up new exhibitions a few times a year.

*In its essence the Cabinet was a state within a state, an alternative gallery in an establish gallery (ŠKUC).*





Igor Eškinja, *Untitled*, 2010, *Sweeping Something under the Carpet*, exhibition *Word for Word, Without Words*, Mestna galerija Ljubljana, 2010; photo: Dejan Habicht

**JP:** It was a symbiotic relationship. We were a sub-organism within a larger organism. The larger organism provided the infrastructure, and we created an exhibition space in the hut in the backyard and came up with the content. Credit should also be given to Alenka Gregorič and Joško Pajer, who were open enough to accept our proposal and personally support the activities of our Society.

**AP:** The actual spatial idea of an exhibition space that would operate under its own terms and conditions existed before. There was a totally delapidated hut in ŠKUC's backyard, and we sorted it out. The gallery team welcomed us and believed in us; however it was hard to incorporate our project into the context of the ŠKUC Gallery with all its history.

**DK:** Originally the Cabinet was conceived as a mobile gallery, which remained static. Mobility proved to be logistically complicated.

**AP:** For a long time, we had the idea for a mobile exhibition space, which was based on the principle of the Museum of Jurassic Technology or the Cabinet of Curiosities. It was not intended as a venue for regular exhibitions, but when

we started our Society it was important that we had a laboratory black cube in which we could test things. However, people enjoyed our events and as a consequence the Cabinet became a burden, for it suddenly became an exhibition space and people started inquiring about the possibilities of exhibiting there. We did simply not wish to service a gallery. And it is the same with the legal and formal form of the Society, which is there to service our interests. None of us are existentially dependant on the shared platform, as we earn our money elsewhere. This might be a rather discouraging fact but that's just the way it is. This is why we still understand the Society as a living and sensible platform, unlike some of our colleagues who have got involved in three-year financing programmes, and are forced to feed their company with finances and content.

**DK:** Yes, that's the point of our statute – that nothing should become a burden for us.

*One of the important projects within the Cabinet, was Jelenometry (2007), in which you researched the iconography of stags.*

**AP:** It is interesting, but the original idea was not ours. Alexei Monroe, an expert on Laibach and Neue Slowenische Kunst, who often visits Slovenia, mentioned that he was starting to research the cultural history of stags and we thought that was a great idea. We started cooperating. We offered the Cabinet and we all got involved in the research of the iconography of stags. Through long and tiring work meetings we produced a scheme, which in a way reveals the background of the research. That was when we truly understood how our activities emerge. If I return to the accusation of populism: even though we are interested in leaving the elitist circles, we created a structure and manner of work which is by no means naïve, for it is not about being astonished, romanticising or fetishizing science. This was when it truly became clear to us what we were doing. We have found our methodology.

**JP:** Alexei Monroe wrote a text about over identification, about how Neue Slowenische Kunst appropriated the iconography from Bavaria and Scotland and placed it into the Slovene context. Slovenes thus merely adopted this motif. We have discovered that there were no stags in Slovene forests after 1848, as the farmers hunted them all down after the payment for land, and they were reintroduced only much later. We were interested in the cultural appropriation of certain phenomena and how people identify with a certain motif. The problem with collecting stag motifs was that we had to find a way to analyse, treat and present them.

*You often address areas that are not that common in art, you delve into some sort of contemporary ethnology that experts have not addressed yet. So far, no research on stags or metal spiders on facades has been performed in the*



*Butter on One's Head*, exhibition *Word for Word, Without Words*, Mestna galerija Ljubljana, 2010; video still ( from left to right): Damijan Kracina, Alenka Pirman, Jani Pirnat

*academic circles. Where does this affinity for folklore and marginal stem from?*

**JP:** Some people perceive certain facts as extremely self-evident. With metal spiders this was precisely what happened: they are everywhere, on the walls, above doors, as decorations that people have hung in their houses. But when we started researching the phenomenon, we ascertained that it was endemic or regionally specific. It is not mentioned in expert books. The spiders are there, but we do not know why. I have one at home, hanging over the stove, but I do not know why. Usually other people also do not know why they have it. This is why we wished to get something out of it, which we did by addressing the public. As we are not scientists, we can freely and without any consequences address various themes.

**AP:** The spider project has not reached its end, even though it is currently hibernating. We also had a few events: an exhibition, which we positioned into a non-art space, into the former library at the Ljubljana railway station. We are still obtaining material and the blog continues to grow; thus we are going to continue with our work on this project. The project will be in hibernation until we have enough time and favourable conditions to continue with it. As regards marginality, I believe it is the exact opposite. In reality there was a lot of ethnology and anthropology in art. In the past numerous artists performed research and then showed their results in galleries. We did not come up with this idea. Our original contribution to it is that we did not perform this in galleries, that our form is not closed and that we do not operate with predictable approaches.

**JP:** Yes, we simply open up themes that other people then explore. For instance, Amir Muratović created a

documentary on the spider with us, and it is still shown every now and then on national television. The last time I saw it was before the World Ski Championship. When people see it, they contact us and the project continues. Apparently, this kick-started the production of metal spiders again, which was by no means our intention. However, we have no influence on this.

**DK:** Something similar happened with the project *Hard Facts*, in which we agreed at the very start that we will not document materials as we are not collectors. We invited people to bring objects and present their story.

**AP:** In comparison to the principles in contemporary art, we often managed to address the broader public. In the project *Hard Facts* we were interested in the relationship with everyday objects, which have a special meaning for their owners. When studying this phenomenon, we did not wish to use people as our material. However, it is absurd that people actually wanted our attention. They wanted the artist, journalist or scientist to record and distribute their stories and some participants were confused as a result of our aversion. When our project was hosted in Rijeka, we decided not to lead a workshop or have any of the usual forms of discursive events, instead we, in cooperation with Nemanja Cvijanović, prepared *A Fair of Optional Histories*. People came with their objects and they expected to share their stories with us, which lead to all round embarrassment. But we are not a medium that would share their stories with the public. Instead, they had to share their stories with each other. Luckily, reporters were also present, and they recorded certain stories. Using material that is shared by the public is a vulturous trap into which the artist gets caught easily and often.

*Your most recent project **Casting of Death** seems to have a vast number of participating partners. What was the original concept behind this project?*

**AP:** *Casting of Death* is a project by the Domestic Research Society, which takes place in Ljubljana, but is otherwise a part of the project *TRACES*, which researches and mediates questionable cultural heritages through art. The project is coordinated by the University in Klagenfurt, and the partnership includes eight other universities and two associations. The basic idea behind this project, which is financed from the scientific (and not cultural) budget of the European Committee, is that the art field can mediate in a different way to what we are used to. Not merely with an artistic intervention, in which the artist, hired by the institution as a provider of a creative service, guarantees the credibility of the execution with his trademark and previous opus. *TRACES* backs the idea that the artist can be more than this, that he can be – similar to a pedagogue – permanently useful in the work with the institutions that are obliged to preserve the heritage. In order to test this expectation, we have chosen death masks as a phenomenon, which we considered was dying out. We have discovered that when a museum or memorial room of a famous person is renovated, the death masks are removed from the exhibition. They are either no longer of any use as a form or they no longer fit the contemporary museum narration.

**JP:** The reason why we were invited to the project is interesting. This expectation was to be fulfilled by 'creative co-productions' that can be comprised of three participants: an institution with a questionable heritage, artists and scientists. The Domestic Research Society has been functioning in this way since its very beginnings. Apart from this, we also wanted to establish a new form of cooperation with the broader public and we were obviously interesting within this context. The administrative and scientific platforms lie above this platform.

**AP:** Not only is our task to come up with an invention in the integration, now we have also been given a meta-level, for our work is constantly observed by an ethnologist-researcher. We are his 'fieldwork'. This is the very first time we hear ourselves speak. In fact, I think we are asking a lot.

*What can we find in this field in Slovenia? Are there many death masks in the archives?*

**DK:** We are establishing a unique database within the frame of the Institute of Contemporary History, where all death masks in Slovenia will be recorded and published. So far, approximately 60 have been recorded. Some of them are repeated or the same mask has been found in numerous institutions. We thought this practice had died out in the 1960s, however this was proven not to be the case. As with most projects this research is expanding, as we are constantly obtaining new information.

**JP:** This platform made it possible for us to have someone to document the project. Before we used to perform all the roles ourselves, from production to research and archiving.

**AP:** In the production sense this is an interesting experience, as we are the producers. We have got the funds as a group of artists and Society. We are no longer the ones who will perform an order or a project for an institution, for the relationship has changed. This is very important. After twelve years, the Domestic Research Society is no longer a total unknown, and we are happy that we can cooperate with the Institute for Contemporary History on an equal footing. Once the project is finished the death masks database will remain in their archive. This is why I believe that this is an excellent example of the upgrade in the format, which can surpass the art project and be used for other purposes.

*Is the Domestic Research Society static or can it grow?*

**DK:** I think the three of us work very well together. We always have plenty of external co-workers, who are actively involved in individual projects.

**AP:** We try our best to function as well as possible on the human, friendship and professional level, even though we have breaks in between. Our operation does not continue non-stop and the intensity varies considerably. However, I'm not certain whether the Society will outlive us or will we outlive the Society. We do not really care either way. ■

**Miha Colner** is an art historian who works as a curator and programme coordinator at the International Centre of Graphic Arts / Svicarija Creative Centre in Ljubljana. He is also active as a publicist, specialised in photography, printmaking, artists' moving image and various forms of (new) media art. In the period 2006–2016 he was a curator at Photon – Centre for Contemporary Photography, Ljubljana. Since 2005 he has been a contributor of newspapers, magazines, specialist publications, and his personal blog, as well as part-time lecturer. He lives and works in Ljubljana, Slovenia.



## Staš Kleindienst

# 13–18

I have not given much thought to presenting my paintings in a series until recently. Every painting starts as an independent story, with its inner logic and its own point of entry. However, since the beginning of 2013 I have created a series of paintings that address more or less relevant social issues; these paintings have emerged as a result of a radical cut and today they form some sort of a loosely connected opus with a view from above. Formally speaking there might not be vast deviations within these works, however, during this period numerous smaller transformations took place, and these changed the way in which I approach and understand painting. This is why I have decided to write down my reflections on this period and the inner movements that took place. Hopefully, this will shed some light on my painting methodology, which might contribute to a more interesting reading of my works.

It all started at the end of 2012, as I was preparing for my first solo painting exhibition since 2005. I was preparing the exhibition *The Other Side of Painting* which was to be shown in the gallery above the Town Library in Idrija. During that period, I was still a part of the Leban/Kleindienst tandem, however painting had already started occupying most of my artistic endeavours. At the time I used to construct my paintings by counterposing images that I found on the internet, which I usually used to create dualistic views of social issues that I theoretically researched during the years I spent within the collective Reartikulacija (Re-articulation). At a certain moment in time the necessity appeared for me to abandon this manner of work and free the painting surface from ready-made images. I decided that the photographic images I found on the internet were too particular and prevented me from capturing the complexity of the issues I was trying to address. I also wanted to establish a deeper dialogue with the matter and the painting process itself. Before, I used to complete most of my work on the computer, but now I wanted to construct the paintings in a more organic manner, in which the paintings would respond to the interventions and the final image was not defined at the very beginning.

In the beginning of 2013, I started painting *The First Decade*, my first painting with a view from above. At the time this view became decentralised and proved to be a good solution for addressing and depicting complex and

multi-layered themes, for it enabled me to – by confronting various scenes – establish the relations between various levels of operation within the politics of contemporary colonialism, states of emergency and the creation of war areas. I could say that I loosely leaned upon the images of hell created by Bosch and the various paintings of mass scenes when planning my paintings; however, I was also interested in the simplicity of the formal and narrative solutions of naïve style painting.

*The First Decade* is the first in a trilogy of paintings that address the theme of the state of emergency as an instrument of power. My initial idea was to create three paintings in which I would depict the transformation of the state of emergency, from military intervention, characteristic of the post 9/11 period, through the use of an economic crisis as an instrument of abolishing social rights, to the dystopic view of the future, in which the compulsory need for identification forms an apolitical and egocentric society. It was this transition from reflecting scenes from our reality into the field of the imaginary, which is a part of the social, that has proven to be of key importance also for the painting *Mysteries of the Forrest*. In this painting I tried to nudge the discourses that were conditioned by the social climate at the time (corruption, managing public goods, etc.), into the frame of mythological, for even the hidden movers in the background of these processes, i.e. the lobbyists, appeared to be some sort of mythological beings in the public discourse.

Forest opened the path into the structure of the painting that emerges from today's ideological, economic and political coordinates, but builds its narrative through the dystopic social fiction scenarios. With small deviations, I stuck to this manner of painting for almost two years. At a certain moment I realised that I had to undermine the structure of the creative process, as it had become rigid and overly defined and thus no longer allowed the unexpected to penetrate the painting.

In the beginning of 2016, I thus started addressing the issue of how to remove the floor for underneath the feet of the painting, i.e. how to reopen the painting as regards its content and form, which I considered completely inseparable at the time. I began paying more attention to the figure, which I no longer positioned onto a pre-painted



Staš Kleindienst, *The Pastoral*, 120 × 130 cm, oil on canvas, 2016, photo: artist's archive

background, but I tried to integrate it into the painting already in the underlining painting. Even though this removed some of the manoeuvre space in the later phases, I considered this to be an important space change, especially as I started addressing the painting surface as homogenous, and stopped viewing it as a multitude of layers (sky, background, architecture, figure). I also started to gradually reduce the formats of my paintings, which led to the dramaturgy of the contraposed scenes retreating to a view that remained decentralised and fragmented in the larger pieces, however, they started to communicate with the contents, not in the strict narrative sense, but through the

landscape, architecture and the general atmosphere of the painting. It was somehow no longer enough for the painting to be merely a sum of readable rational explanations, for I decided it needed a certain lack, in which the verbatim would become absent and give way to imagination, which could then become a tool for potential thoughts to emerge. In this sense social criticism, clearly directed towards the mechanisms of power, started to oust the more or less explicit metaphors on space and social rituals.

I started becoming interested in the collective (sub) conscious and its attitude to ideology, especially in light of the social climate at the time, for the policies of fear have



Staš Kleindienst, *Tourists 5*, 40 × 55 cm, oil on canvas, 2018, photo: artist's archive



Studio, 2017, photo: artist's archive

already naturalised the nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric within the public discourse. Thus, I started thematising the rituals of exclusion, and consequentially the need

appeared to place the painting beyond the representation of the material, into the field of social imaginary, for this was the only way I could look into the psychology that conditioned these rituals.

I started looking at the issue of change and searching for a (utopian) break point or the conditions for it to materialise. In order to create a state of possibilities I tried to position the painting into a sort of post-time, a time without time, in which things lose their purpose and become impotent ruins of our reality, a space in which the battle between the desire for change on one hand and the lack of power and dependence on the authorities on the other, takes place.

I could say that my creative process is currently moving within a dialectic relationship between the search for a solid structure and being undermined, subverted. When verbatim starts catching up with me within the painting, I have to dodge it and establish the lack, in which I can no longer directly capture the image within the context, however, this is no longer trivial, for it has become a part of the social tissue that I consider to be essential to my work. ■



# Salon ZDSLU 2017:

## An Image in a Medium, a Medium in a Context

**National Museum of Slovenia –  
Metelkova, Ljubljana  
14 November 2017 – 25 February 2018,**

This year the main annual exhibition organised by the Slovenian Association of Fine Artist Societies (ZDSLU)<sup>1</sup> and titled *An Image in a Medium, a Medium in a Context* is dedicated to media art. Srečo Dragan, the creator of the concept and the president of the jury, who was also, alongside Janez Strehovec, the selector, wrote in his text for the catalogue: 'The focus of this year's Salon lies on the transition of paintings, graphic prints, sculptures and photography towards the protocols of media art. The emphasis lies on the use of new media art concepts in the spaces in between, the spaces that these trigger with the breakthroughs in individual phases of artistic research. These key moments are realised in printed statements, the placement of artefacts into new, different contexts, in recording the traces of communication (decoded reading) and raising awareness that a shared field of experience exists, for the artist as well as for the spectator/visitor.' The exhibition setup was devised on the basis of five platforms that chart the selection of the projects.

**Artistic research as performative practice.** From considering the co-evolution of living beings to sensory cognition within a gallery space, Maja Smrekar, Marko Glavač.

**Data structures as a new media object.** Narvika Bovcon and Aleš Vaupotič, Franc Solina, Matija Jašarov, TNM – V.A.T. (Zoran Poznič, Maša Jazbec, Andrej Uduč), Tilen Žbona, Peter Ciuha, Miran Kreš, Evelin Stermitz.

**Contextual spaces as a TV video collage.** Gorazd Krnc, Metka Zupanič, Artur Felicijan and Andraž Sedmak.

**Video as re-editing the history of visual art.** Robert Černelč: *Veliki rop vlaka* (*Great Train Robbery*), 1903.

The field shared by video and image. Dominik Olmiah Križan, Aleš Sedmak, Črtomir Freljih, Dorian Španzl, Duša Jesih, Zoran Srđić Janežič, Peter Marolt.

**Video art as documents, viewpoints.** Tomaž Furlan, Vanja Mervič, Vesna Čadež, Jure Fingušt Prebil, Eva Petrič.

The exhibition *Salon ZDSLU 2017* is not set up as a black cube, even though it is dominated by video art, for it is – wherever this does not disturb the projection – lit as décor, through which the visitor walks and sees himself, the

entire space and projects as well as the other visitors that he encounters during his visit.

The selectors chose 27 projects for the exhibition and the jury composed of Nicole Hewitt, Srečo Dragan and Janez Strehovec awarded the Main Prize of the Jury to Narvika Bovcon and Aleš Vaupotič for their work *3D Visualisation of Female Writers*. The final selection for the prize also included Maja Smrekar and her work *K9-Topology* and Marko Glavač with his work (*primeval*) *BREATH – (digi) INTACTNESS*. Members of the regional Fine Artist Societies awarded two additional Prizes of the Salon ZDSLU 2017: one to Gorazd Krnc for his work *Worth not Knowing where Knowing is / Europe 2017* and the other to Marko Glavač. Narvika Bovcon and Aleš Vaupotič deal with the transmutation of literary archives and use the fragile connections within databases to create fragile artefacts, miniature silver sculptures, which keep trace of their origin and thus become carriers of memory, fragments for the future. Marko Glavač connects art to science, culture and



Marko Glavač, ((*primeval*) *BREATH – (digi) INTACTNESS*, 2017, wood of a fir, fir soap, cream of white fir, fir honey, fir wax, essential oil of a fir, nano-cellulose, digital sound and image, 400 × 250 × 300 cm

<sup>1</sup> It usually took place in May and was known as the May Salon. The foreword to the catalogue was written by Mojca Smerdu, the president of the art council of ZDSLU, while Olga Butinar Čeh was the exhibition coordinator. The National Museum of Slovenia participated in the project as the host of the exhibition.





Darij Kreuh, *Pupa*, 1996, interactive installation, Majski salon '97



Dominik Olmiah Križan, *Being and Nothingness*, 1997, video ambient, Majski salon '97

ecology; he creates protocols for reading forests and with the aid of various technological solutions he creates etheric extracts that are offered by the forest. Through a combination of painting and new media visual interventions and approaches, Gorazd Krnc is constructing a message of contemporary Europe, the desired destination of many migrants.

Exactly twenty years have passed since the only previous ZDSLU's *May Salon* was dedicated to media art. At the 2017 Salon the 1997 exhibition *Wise Hand* was presented through video documents on display at the information desk. The 1997 exhibition *Wise Hand* showed an overview of Slovene videos from the 1980s.

*Some installations are based on the assumption that we are not the ones who observe the works of art, but that they observe us... They are placed alongside living matter, equipped with sensors as if they have eyes and ears, as if they could emit the uniqueness of autonomous perception. Their interpretation is linked to the most futuristic technological project: the invention of the sentient machine, a concept which is much more charming than the usual dull robots.*

Judita Krivec Dragan. 'Majski salon (May Salon)'. Majski salon '97: Modra roka / May Salon 97: Wise hand. 8.–22. 5. 1997. Ljubljana: ZDSLU. 1997

*In 1965 Nam June Paik uttered the historic thought which stated that in the same way 'as collage technique replaced oil paint, the cathode ray tube will replace the canvas. Someday artists will work with capacitors, resistors, and semiconductors as they work today with brushes, violins and junk.'* (H. H. Arnason: *A History of Modern Art* [...] 1986.) *His prophecy was not fulfilled entirely, especially not in the 1980s, when canvass painting experienced a peak in popularity, however, video has brought some essential novelties.*

Judita Krivec Dragan. 'Video-Narcis – novi avtoportret: Pregled slovenskega videa 80-ih (Video-Narcissus – New Self-portrait: An Overview of Slovene Video in the 1980s)'. Majski salon '97: Modra roka / May Salon 98: Wise hand. 8.–22. 5. 1997. Ljubljana: ZDSLU. 1997

*Technology is no longer a means, but a thought system, it has become an integral part of our existential experience and as such, the artist introduces it into his work as an integral part of everyday reality.*

*[...] at first glance it might seem that there is a growing gap between the artists who do not allow for the realisations of the new technological practices in their work and research traditional media (painting, sculpting, graphic art) and those who are fascinated by technology. Parallel to this lies the division between the representatives of the art theory, who predominantly deal with traditional art problems, and those who have specialised in the media discourse and its ideological traps. The gap between the two is getting smaller and smaller.*

*[...] The new artist no longer works with his hand, that is given its stimuli by the innocent eye; for his work he needs a wise hand, which is capable of fulfilling orders given by the brain. [...] Wise hand is the one that has decided not to get its fingers dirty with paint or clay, and will instead operate through an extension that it finds in science and technology. Wise hand is also the one which is dissolving in the blueness, in the blue glow that surrounds the television screen.*

Nadja Zgonik. 'Modra roka – Pozunanjeno čutilo za zaznavanje nove transcendence umetnosti (Umetnost – tehnologija – znanost) (Wise Hand – Externalised Sense for Sensing Transcendental Art (Art – Technology – Science)'. Majski salon '97: Modra roka / The May Salon '97: Wise hand. 8.–22. 5. 1997. Ljubljana: ZDSLU. 1997



*An Image in a Medium, a Medium in a Context: Salon ZDSLU 2017, exhibition view, photo: Miha Benedičič*



*An Image in a Medium, a Medium in a Context: Salon ZDSLU 2017, exhibition view, photo: Miha Benedičič*



*An Image in a Medium, a Medium in a Context: Salon ZDSLU 2017, exhibition view, photo: Miha Benedičič*



*An Image in a Medium, a Medium in a Context: Salon ZDSLU 2017, exhibition view, photo: Miha Benedičič*

Aleš Vaupotič

# The Integration of Nanotechnology Research into Fine Art: The Polymorphic Impression by Uršula Berlot

Uršula Berlot held her exhibition *Polymorphic Impression* in the UGM Studio Gallery in Maribor between 27<sup>th</sup> January and 25<sup>th</sup> February 2019. From the artistic aspect this exhibition recontextualised images that were created with the aid of electronic microscopy and crystallography in the research of materials linked to geometric modelling of crystal networks. The exhibition dealt primarily with the visual aspects of techno-images, i.e. images that are produced by machines and which demand (at least implicitly) cooperation between the creators of the images created with the machine and the user who includes the images into their work process. The concept of technological images was developed by Vilem Flusser, as he explains it in his unpublished monograph *Umbruch der menschlichen Beziehungen* (*The Turn in Interpersonal Relations*, 1973–74, which has been partially translated into Slovene in his collection *Digital Appearance*), where he introduced the distinction between elite and mass techno-images. Flusser's example of a situation in which elite techno-images are being created, is an x-ray image, the two-dimensionally coded records of which are used by doctors for diagnostic purposes. In rare cases, when the image shows something unusual, which could be interpreted in different ways, they try to explain it by debating it with the creators of the image, but they remain within the context of finding appropriate treatment. In the so-called mass techno-images, i.e. ones created with the use of a photographic camera, video camera... the situation is the opposite, for in this case the unusual images become interesting in themselves – and this is their goal – they are viewed aesthetically, in a non-interested context, according to Kant.<sup>1</sup> By confronting images created with electron microscopes and other measuring equipment used to research materials, the exhibition *Polymorphic Impression* addresses the same art problem

as Gerhard Richter in his works catalogued under 880-4, 882-7, the entire series 885 *Silicate* (2003) and the monumental 888 *Strontium* (2004) – linking it to his projects with glass surfaces, greys and works on glass<sup>2</sup> – or the series of projects, in which Narvika Bovcon, Vanja Mervič and Aleš Vaupotič participated, i.e. how to establish a bridge between reading a two-dimensional code within the contexts of research into materials and the field of visual art.<sup>3</sup> We are thus dealing with the artist addressing the situation of elite techno-images – Berlot has established cooperation with the researcher and professor of microscopy Sašo Šturm (Department of Nanostructured Materials, Institute Jožef Štefan) – which transforms into a problematic situation relating to the receiving of mass techno-images, in which the audience at an exhibition observes digital images and projections and fails to take into account the complex procedures behind the automatic production of these visible signs. I do not think the importance of Uršula Berlot's exhibition lies in the use of images that were created using a process that researchers call measurements, but in the artist's solution to mediate them and thus establish contact between the visible and invisible; the nanotechnological research deals with phenomena that are at least five times smaller than the wavelength of light, which is why they are invisible in the medium of light.

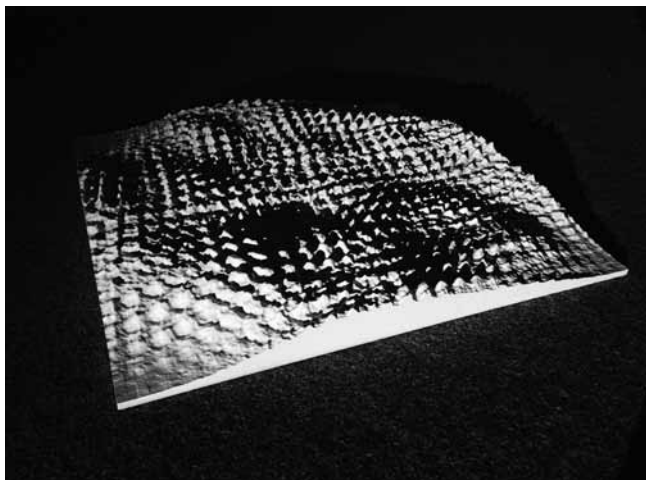
An internet search using the keyword 'nanoart' reveals a chaotic mass of approaches, one of the more common ones is the process of colouring images that were created with the scanning electron microscope. What artistic approach to the so-called nanoart did Uršula Berlot opt for? Uršula Berlot's opus is slowly condensing into unique

<sup>1</sup> Vaupotič, Ales. 'Teorija tehno-slike Vilema Flusserja (Theory of the techno-image as defined by Vilem Flusser).' *Primerjalna književnost* 37.2 (2014): 151–163. <<https://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-Y2B9LNI1>>.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Richter. *Catalogue Raisonné. 1993–2004*. Dusseldorf: Richter Verlag; New York, D.A.P., 2005. 233–249. It is interesting that Richter's characteristic painting technique of horizontal obscuring in the case of images of atoms is in the service of mediating what the painter saw, as the transmission electron microscope – due to the interaction of the electrons (and the two-dimensionality of the image) – shows the location of the atoms in the form of a special animated blur.

<sup>3</sup> Murnik, Maja. 'Tehniške slike nanosveta (Technological Images of the Nanoworld).' *Likovne besede* 102 (2015): 64–67s

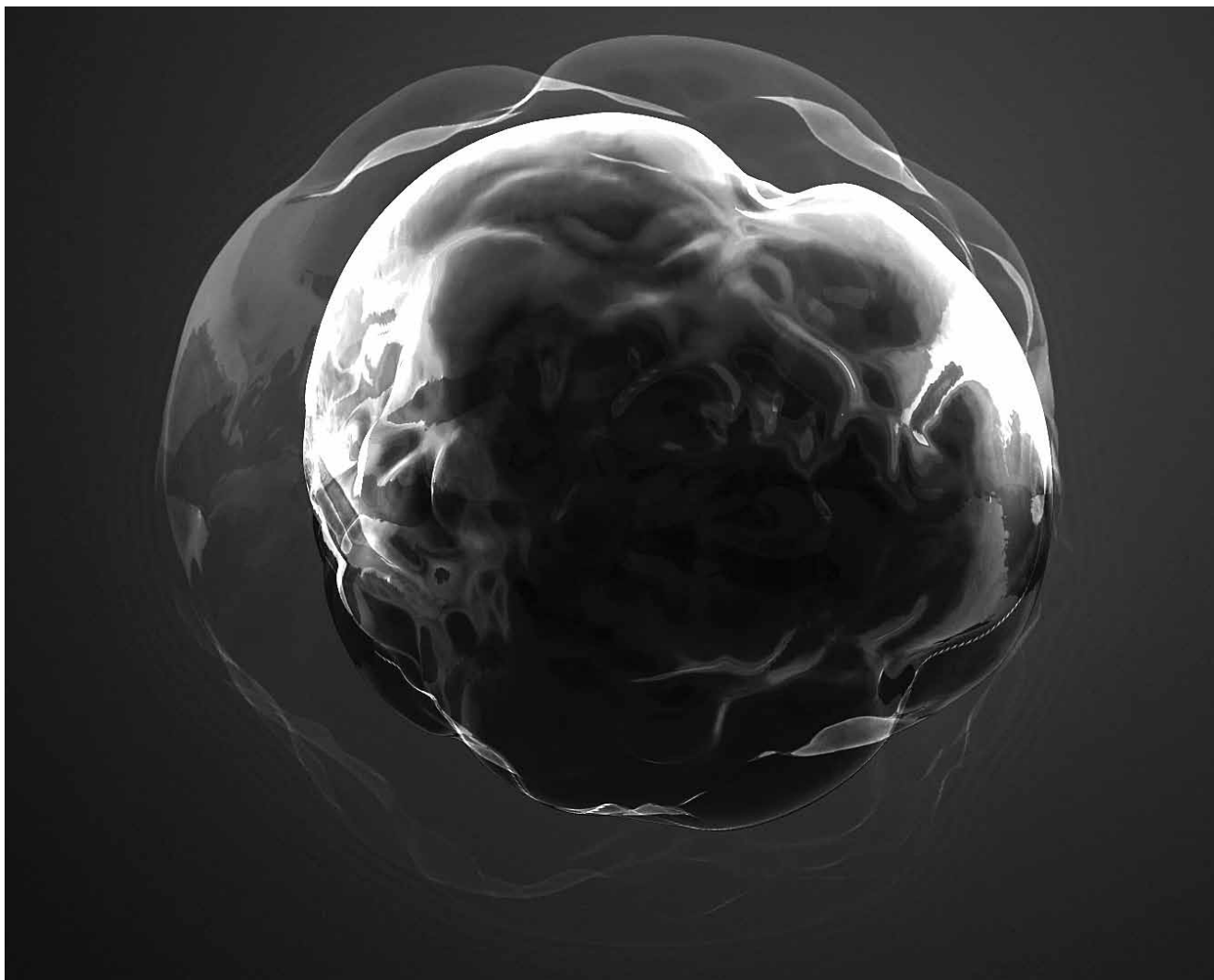




Uršula Berlot, *Polymorphic Imprint*, 2016, three-dimensional print,  
photo: archive of the artist



Uršula Berlot, *Observatory: Carbon Nanotubes*, 2016, kinetic object,  
photo: archive of the artist



Uršula Berlot, *Liquid Solidity*, 2017, screen image, sound: Scanner – Robin Rimbaud, 3-D animation: Sunčana Kuljiš Gaillot, 4 min. 49 s,  
photo: archive of the artist



Uršula Berlot, *Polymorphic Imprint*, 2017, installation in the lower space of the gallery, photo: Damjan Švarc

and sovereignly outlined artistic research, which offers a well thought out answer to the posed question. From its very start, visual art has been tied to visual light and the signals of the visible that are necessarily transferred by the media, and both of these two poles are of great importance to the artist's creativity. When viewed from a distance one might believe that her works belong solely into the black and white spectrum, however a close inspection will reveal that light itself lies in the core of this opus. Uršula Berlot's paintings, which are sometimes formed within transparent gelatine on a transparent glass plate, are seen simultaneously as without colour and filled with all the colours of the world, which break and reflect from the smooth surfaces. The whiteness shines in the game of light and shadows, as the light in the dark or semi-dark spaces condenses in the focal points of the images-screens-mirrors-lenses. The video cannot be black and white, in the same way as a mirror or a transparent material cannot be. The black and white imaginary is in reality a starting point for the artist's research, some sort of a working hypothesis, the checking of which leads to a more generally accepted ascertainment. In one of Berlot's larger exhibitions, *Vanitas*, which was hosted in Eqrna in 2012, one thread of her hypothesis was elaborated through the thematization of the photographic medium, which was with a personal touch transformed into a co-called *camera oralis* – the image was projected into the artist's oral cavity and fixed in the medium within her. If we followed the theoretical media continuity, the logical consequence of photography would be film, but it is at this point that the consistency of the artist's research is

revealed. Berlot thematised her potential step in the direction of the medium of the film. One path led her towards technological images, including x-ray images, however, it seems that Berlot paid the same attention to the execution of the photogram in dynamic black and white video images, which every now and then seem like an abstract drawing in motion. For instance, in the exhibition *Pulsation/Cross-sections* which took place in the Berlin Künstlerhaus Bethanien in 2007, the disruptions and reflections of white light into a new dimension at the end of the exhibition opened the video as a radically different source of light. In this context the video had the function of a unique narrative, and at the same time this new medium transformed the narrative outlines into a holistic connection of visual art records. The later exhibition *Vanitas* had, through its main motif of a skull, formulated the logical allegoric (as Walter Benjamin understands allegory in the field of new media<sup>4</sup>) efflux of reflections in the reflexivity of the video medium. The principle of symmetry obtained by mirroring merged with the techno emanation of the skull measurements. Benjamin stated (alluding to technical reproductive art): 'From the viewpoint of death, life is the production of corpses.' *Memento mori*. We also need to mention the tactile-performative side of Uršula Berlot's opus, in which the artist included the fragility of her body into the subtle weaving of spatial installations created from materials, light and videos. The artist, similar to the visitors of her exhibitions,

<sup>4</sup> Chapter Allegory and Tragedy in the book *Selected Essays*; this is a translation from the work *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*The Origin of German Tragedy*, 1928).

entered a network of reflections, which – in the exhibition *Vanitas* – reached a temporary artistic conclusion while opening new artistic research questions.

The exhibition *Polymorphic Impression* showed a decisive step forward in her artistic research, which moved away from the allegorisation of visual art images and the videastic reflection of the play of light. The artist decided to move away from measurements in the creation of images – i.e. what we would usually imagine to see when we use electron microscopes – and turn towards mediating what she saw and understood as an image as a painter. For instance, there are two installations, shiny black geometric objects, into which the visitor peeks through small holes, next to the entrance to the gallery. Within the installations the visitors can see a simulation of the external view of nanowires, however, these are not real nanowires, but models that imitate their appearance. The audience thus views a simulation of the nanowires, and not the assumed actual two-dimensional record of the nanowires created by the electron microscope that the artist saw and experienced in order to mediate it. The spectator, who is not a user of electron microscopes or acquainted with this field, cannot judge whether this is an appropriate representation, for in order to do this he would have to be acquainted with the actual material base that Berlot has seen. The writer of this text was pleasantly surprised to see that the nanowires were precisely as he had imagined, even though they were slightly different – they were rightfully presented from the side as I imagined in my thoughts.<sup>5</sup> So, what we have truly seen at the exhibition, could be wrongfully called an artistic ‘lie’. Why did the artist not show us the ‘truth’, the naked original materiality, as created by the scientific research machine? The answer to this seemingly artistic representational contradiction can be found in Flusser’s theory of technical images mentioned in the introduction, which states that the directness of the understanding of the flood of images, that are spat from contemporary multimedia devices, are an illusion and a mistake, for this is material that is incomprehensible to humans in the same way as the entire library of books that is available in digital form on a small screen of a mobile gadget is incomprehensible. Flusser always drew attention to the fake illusion of the directness offered by the seductive colourful techno-images, which in the actual attempt to understand appear in all its problemativeness. It seems that Uršula Berlot understands that the materials created by laboratory equipment and microscopes do not communicate on the level of visual art language, i.e. that the artistically coded techno-image is a product of the cooperation between numerous artists with various competencies, who manage to build a

visual artistic statement that makes sense only through dialogue – it is a result of the cooperation between those who understand the operation of, for instance, electron microscopes and their ways of recording the measured signals onto a two-dimensional surface through complex algorithmic calculations, and visual artists, such as Uršula Berlot, who have been addressing the issue of how light enters the field of visual art and in what ways can the artist control it, over a period of years. The impression in the exhibition *Polymorphic Impression* is not automatic – an emancipation of reality, as Roland Bathes calls the photograph in *Camera lucida* – but mediated through the visual culture that has accumulated in the visual artist, and it is her, who together with fellow artists – sound designer (Robin Rimbaud), 3D video modelling technician (Sunčana Kuljiš Gailiot) and laboratory researcher – tames the masses of design arrangements through the media of computers, two and a half dimensional animation, three-dimensional print, video, digital prints, slide shows, spatial light installations and similar, in a way that is appropriate for human reception.

Of course, as a visual artist with the experience in nanotechnological measurements with electron microscopes, the writer of this text understands the objects presented at the exhibition in my own way. Maybe my understanding differs to that of the artist. The lower exhibition space reveals four digitally printed three-dimensional objects that are positioned on the floor and dynamically lit. I recognised them as a record of the location of atoms, as created by the electron microscope after treating numerous sources of contrast. Of course, it is always fascinating to see individual atoms (or their layout within a crystal network), which are one tenth of a nanometre apart. Similar as was the case with nanotubes, the artist once again interfered in the representation, mainly by metaphorically freezing the viewing process, which usually, with its heat, quickly dissolves the observed material, into an Alpine landscape, as seen for instance from an aeroplane – which might remind us of the late futuristic *aeropittura*, which changes the point of observing the landscape as artists fly over it in aeroplanes. I have always imagined landscapes on nano rocks as extreme landscapes, unfriendly to living beings, but which can, never-the-less, be populated by smaller beings – such a disposition is of course understandable from the perspective of the macroworld, for we see the space between the atoms, and the imagination immediately projects new contents into it, of course within the frame of the visions of the world on our rocks. What is more important is that this space reveals another important characteristic of the research that deals with technological images, especially those from scientific research, i.e. the fact that artists, apart from objects, prints and installations also offer explanations of their works to the visitors. In the guided tours of her exhibition, Uršula Berlot explained this installation

<sup>5</sup> The miniature diorama is titled *2<sup>nd</sup> Observatory: Carbon Nanotubes*, however, I did not see them, which could be why they were more curved than the nanowires.

through two treatments of materials in measurements – visualisation of crystal structures: ‘We have an image that can be copied with the aid of the so-called Fast Fourier Transform [...] into the inverse or reciprocal space and that can be then copied back [...] When we change the information in the inverse space – which is more complex than the real space – we do this with the aid of filters [...] All four *Reliefs* were created on the basis of the original image, but they differ due to their partial views (reduction of information within the inverse space). Thus, they are in a way similar but also different.’ At the exhibition the artist has, alongside the visual art messages and the artistic context, also presented the language of the research, the world of concepts, and this enabled a view into the construction of

the matter that comprises this world on the physical level. This means that the visitor of this and similar exhibitions also has to show an interest, readiness, to take the step from being merely a visitor of an art exhibition into an analytical and mathematical mind that understands the models based on electron microscopes – an interaction that takes place in the form of a dialogue between various representation worlds. ■

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Blaž Miklavčič

# The Politics of Skin

***Next of Skin,*  
Glass Atrium in the Ljubljana Town Hall  
10– 23 April 2017**

The exhibition *Next of Skin*, curated by Tjaša Pogačar, confronts the spectator with five art pieces: *Sk234* by Andrej Škufca, *Towel 1* and *Spirit Level* by Živa Božičnik Rebec and *Safe Space* and *Quia Ego Sum Tanti* by the tandem Kladnik & Neon. The exhibition addresses the issue of how to consider the future of skin, at which skin is no longer human or belonging to humans. We are dealing with a series of procedures that peel the skin from the body and question the origins and legitimacy of its function as human tissue. By abolishing linear causality, which tried to subordinate skin to reason, the exhibited works plan the future of skin in its post-biopolitical applications. They articulate the layer between the skin and the surface (of the object) in various ways, abolishing the binary division into organic and non-organic surface and/or skin, which supposedly places the coherency of the human subject in opposition to the phenomenological placement of objects. The visitor is introduced to a new order of objects, which could be called meta-organic. By separating skin from the (human) body, skin enters the domain of objects, which can be subjected to a designer experience. The alienating effects of technology and neoliberal capitalism are played in the field of the (non) betweenness of the skin, stuck between the object and the (virtual) experience.

In the text that accompanies the exhibition Marko Bauer leaned upon Benjamin Bratton, who wrote: 'Epidermal sensors and nanobioelectronics combine and weave natural sensation and machine sensing so thoroughly that we can't tell which is which, and hinting at skin-based media and designable sensations: toward a molecular gastro-tactility. What sort of interface between inside and outside may we wish our skin to provide? What would we do with membranes that communicate, that know, that disclose us to the world in other ways?' Marx's belief that the human touch could only be visible in mass produced parts in the mistakes made while manning the machine used to hold true, however, nowadays the mistakes are programmed into the production process as a way of achieving authenticity and giving the product a hand-made effect.<sup>1</sup> We are witness

to a sort of dystopic romanticism – the desire to return to nature and the authenticity of the contact introduce us to the register of simulations and simulacres of synthesised nature. *Towel 1* can be read as the 'synthetisation' of this effect. Latex skin is folded on a towel rack. However, it is not the imitation or the casting of skin, it is the effect of the skin, the experience of its surface that is tautologically duplicated by the closeness of the used material (latex) and skin. An intermediary layer of a pseudo-authenticated intensification of the skin-towel contact is thus squeezed into one of the most intimate contacts between objects and human skin; this layer functions as a synthetic prosthesis, which aims to enhance the experience that is not sufficiently authentic. In the dystopic dispositive the future of the designed experience always moves towards the fulfilment of the intermediary space – the interface, which results in the immobilisation of the user. An ideal user is not a user who uses, but a user who is used.

Already Deleuze ascertained that the surface lies within the domain of effects and that depth is merely the effect of the surface. We will thus consider the interface as a sort of 'state of "being on the edge"',<sup>2</sup> as a scene and surface of virtuality. And yet this is not a state like stillness, interface as an effect – the surface of the object does not ultimately separate, but rather establishes a certain space of permeability, becoming – other. It is within this permeability that we can consider the intermediate surface between the skin and the surface of the object. If it is possible to subordinate one at the expense of the other, this will be possible through the transformation of the interface, through the designing of its flow and blockades. The interface as a 'space, in which information traverses from one entity to another, from one intersection within the system to another' also indicates the vastness of the (re)presentation logic and the effects of the circulation and the reading of images within the art system.

The issue of the reception of art thus represents the essential question of the interface as the effect of a certain constellation of knowledge and the genealogy of art – i.e. art as an institution and subject that addresses and sees the spectator as such. If human skin outlines the field of politics as a state (of relationships) on the border between objects and humans, in a slightly derivative sense (at this

<sup>1</sup> This effect of 'artificial; authenticity is mentioned in Kladnik & Neon's text *The Future is not yet Rendered*. <<http://www.kitsch-nitsch.com/the-future-is-not-yet-rendered/>>

<sup>2</sup> 'It is that moment where one significant material is understood as distinct from another significant material. In other words, an interface is not a thing, an interface is always an effect.' Galloway, Alexander. *The Interface Effect*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012. 31–33.



Andrej Škufca, *Sk234*, 2017, Glass Atrium, City Hall, Ljubljana



Živa Božičnik Rebec, *Spirit Level*, 2017, Glass Atrium, City Hall, Ljubljana

exhibition) the skin of the object within the regime of aesthetics presupposes politics as a relationship between the subject and the designed surfaces.

If – schematically speaking – we are, within historical modernism, dealing with the phenomenological directness of the experience of the medium as extending the borders of the possibilities of its surface, and in the conceptual and neo-avantgarde practices and the later relational aesthetics with the establishment of the relationship as a field of contemporary art in the dematerialised ways of mediality, the exhibition *Next of Skin* deals with the materiality of the medium, which emerges from the disbanded condition of the possibility of the relations and consequentially from the inadequacy of the dispositive-interface of such relationality within the art system registry. These are thus artworks that communicate the paradox of their own incompatibility as a positive experience. The non-relationship is no longer understood as a faulty relationship. On the contrary, the non-relationship is articulated as the reality of life once the interface has been self-abolished. The question that is posed by this dispositive is dystopic, however, it has important implications: what sort of life is possible once life has ended? Let's tread carefully – this articulation does not address the issue of life after death, for it is an attempt to consider life after it has been alienated and had transitioned across the border of what could still be understood within the register of life under the enlightenment logic.

Alienation is an unavoidable consequence of interface optimisation. Galloway quoted Serres: 'Systems work because they don't work. Non-functionality remains essential for functionality.' A certain level of failure is thus a precondition for the system to function. The output, which the system mediates to the user through the interface, and the input, that the user mediates to the system through the interface, are two directions of the same path that forms the data exchange. The interface as a layer-effect strives towards a consensus as well as towards levelling the objects of its separation. The communication channel is thus open only as long as the basic level of non-consensus that enables the flow of data exists. The paradox of object *Sk234* by Andrej Škufca lies in its optimisation of the interface design, which results in self-use. *Sk234* is a 3D print created from PLA plastics, which is reminiscent of a hypertrophied design of a fetishized electronic device. The design of its surface also refers to the logic of serial consumption as well as to the consumption of the highly modernistic art object. On one hand, the unease is based on the proximity of these two logics, while on the other, it originates from the impermeable character of the interface – the surface of the object. Apropos the logic of market consumerism, the *Sk234* consumes itself as an art artefact.

The level of spirituality that is evoked in Živa Božičnik Rebec's *Spirit Level* (and to a certain extent in the video *Quia ego sum tanti* by Kladnik & Neon) is also placed in



*Next of Skin*, 2017, installation view, Glass Atrium, City Hall, Ljubljana

the period that follows the self-abolishment – fulfilment of the communication channel – the interface. The spiritual level proposed by Živa's spirit level, which lies in equilibrium on a fitness mat, is the movement along the surface, at which the primary question 'who is moving?' should be transformed into the passive form 'who is moved?'.

This is thus not a question as to which concepts can be produced by the spectator, but more what sort of a spectator can be produced by the objects, which instead of a priori addressing his assumed political stance focus on his a priori alienation. Rancière stated that one of the problems of political art could be seen in its abuse of the effects of monumentalisation in order to anticipate its political effects.<sup>3</sup> A similar problem can be found in speeches on political art, the conceptual 'monumentality' of which emerges from the general consensus as regards the importance of their address within the register of political speech. The problem of the impotency of political art lies in its anticipation of the artistic value which results from the left-wing political

consensus as regards the exhibition space for contemporary art. The objects in the exhibition *Next of Skin* abolish any reading that operates on the assumption of this (or any) model of the (political) subject. However, if the political subject should remain possible, it has to reconstitute itself after it had abolished itself.

The effect of the exhibition is post-alienation. The incoherency of the spectator's speech establishes itself as the opposite to the coherency of the exhibition's non-human speech. The consolidation of the speeches on human skin occurs – if I paraphrase Deleuze – at the expense of the subject who was delving deeper instead of remaining on the surface, which has, with the transformation of the interface, become (in relation to the subject) a fleeting space of politics and a new division of its surface borders. ■

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<sup>3</sup> Rancière, Jacques. *Emancipirani gledalec (The Emancipated Spectator)*. Ljubljana: Maska, 2010. 46.

## Scientific Papers Abstracts

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Miha Valant, Beti Žerovc

### **Carniolan Fine Arts Societies from 1848 to 1918**

The article focuses on the development, structure analysis, and the effects of the various associations specialized in fine art in Carniola between 1848 and 1918. In the beginning we focus on the activities of the Carniolan branch of the Austrian Art Society (Österreichischer Kunstverein) established in 1852, and the occasional exhibiting of the Styrian Art Society (Steiermärkischer Kunstverein) from Graz in Ljubljana during the third quarter of the 19th century. Such societies included both, the so-called Friends of Art (*Kunstfreunde*; members of the bourgeoisie and nobility) as well as artists. Their introduction of regular artwork exhibitions in the form of commercial international group exhibitions had a strong influence on the field of art in Carniola.

An even more pronounced development and activity of fine art associations in Ljubljana follows at the turn of the century. During this period societies and groups of artists that were closely affiliated with the local environment emerged. Such associations were the Christian Art Society of Ljubljana (1894), the Slovenian Artists' Society (1899), the Vesna Artists' Society (1903) and the Sava Artists' Group (1904). Some of them showed a clear Slovenian national and party orientation. At the same time, we can also follow the well planned out and important art exhibition program which was organized by the bourgeois club Kazina in Ljubljana during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a social club for the members of more German-oriented city elite, it hosted a series of art exhibitions by prominent artists' associations from Graz and Vienna, such as Hagenbund and Künstlerhaus.

Even if we can not yet fully understand and define all the reasons for such a quick development and intensity of art events in Ljubljana in the period just before 1914, we can suspect it was probably, to the largest extent, fueled by heated political and ethnic tensions in Carniola. The period, brought to an abrupt end with the First World War, meant an important and blossoming period of art exhibiting in Ljubljana as it also resulted in the first contemporary art exhibiting grounds in the city – the Jakopič Pavilion.

Artwords 113, 2019

Asta Vrečko, Maruša Dražil

### **The History and Activities of the Ljubljana Fine Artists Society**

The article examines the reasons behind the establishment of the Ljubljana Fine Artists Society, its exhibition and art education practices, and their activities in the social and political sphere. The Ljubljana Fine Artists Society (Društvo likovnih umetnikov Ljubljana – DLUL) was established on 4 March 1982, after the Slovenian Society of Fine Artists (Društvo slovenskih likovnih umetnikov – DSLU) was reorganised into the Slovenian Association of Fine Arts Societies (Zveza društev slovenskih likovnih umetnikov – ZDSLJU). The reorganisation was due to the tendency of the government for decentralisation. From its beginnings, the Ljubljana Fine Artists Society was committed to the advocacy of social rights and improvement of working conditions for artists and the popularisation of their work. The Ljubljana Fine Artists Society organised more than two hundred exhibitions, countless lectures and artist talks, and cooperated with other artists' associations in Slovenia and abroad, also striving to reach a diverse audience. The Society focused strongly on art education for children and the organisation of didactical exhibitions. The aim of the Ljubljana Fine Artists Society was to participate in the cultural politics of the municipality, whereas one of their main agendas was to secure more working spaces and studios for artists living and working in Ljubljana.

Artwords 113, 2019



Petja Grafenauer, Nataša Ivanović, Urška Barut

## How Mala Galerija Stopped Being Social and Became Modern

The article presents the exhibition policy of Mala galerija in Ljubljana and its transition from the managing hands of DSLU, to the management within the framework of Ljubljana's Moderna Galerija (Museum of Modern Art), which occurred between 1958 and 1959. What happened in seven years with the social exhibition space for it to transform from the premises of the Society to being managed by Moderna Galerija is explained in detail for the first time by the ZDSLJU archive, which has recently been reorganised, and is now, after many years, available to the public at the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia. The archive material of ZDSLJU, the successor of DSLU, explains how the Society ran the gallery and how the leadership was transferred. Moreover, it goes on to elucidate the concept of the gallery. From a trade union exhibition space, which featured mostly young, yet to be established artists and presented projects unrelated to fine art, the gallery became an art salon with the change of leadership, where artists such as Antoni Clavé, Petar Lubarda, Zoran Mušič, Edo Murtić and others exhibited their works. Within DSLU, Mala galerija operated so that any member of the Society could sign up for an exhibition and also have one, while the Society's sessions decided on exhibitions by external applicants. Despite the strong activity of DSLU in the first half of the 1950s, it seemed that in the difficult post-war conditions, it functioned without a holistic vision and focused ideas regarding what to do with the exhibition programme, when it seemed better to focus on more important survival strategies such as selling and otherwise raising funds for its members, pedagogical questions, Cooperative issues and various orders, as well as questions of national, state and international selections, while Mala galerija was booked with exhibitions by members. In 1958, the last year DSLU oversaw Mala galerija, the fine art programme was very poor. Upon bad management, cited by the records since at least 1955, and an unattractive programme with no underlying theme, it was clear to DSLU that the gallery needed to be professionalised. It is not clear who convinced whom, but interestingly, Zoran Kržišnik emphasised at a session that the artists, who did not have good connections, wanted Moderna Galerija to take care of Mala galerija.

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Miklavž Komelj

## What Does it Mean to Create?

The article approaches the problem of artistic creation via some artworks, which are commonly perceived as the negation of the principle of individual creation: the readymades of Marcel Duchamp. Most interpretations consider these works as a complete demystification of individual creation, revealing the social determinism of art. For Boris Groys, for example, the readymades show that individual creation is pure illusion and that art is totally subordinate to the cultural economy of exchange. Nevertheless, for Duchamp, the accent was on liberty, not on subordination. When he demonstrated the workings of social determinism, his point was to show the contingency of that determinism itself. The question as to how it is possible for an already existing, contingently chosen object to become one's own creation, can be reopened if considered in the wider context of the Dada movement. This article proposes a reading of the Dadaist explosion in the field of art via Julius Evola's post-Dadaist essay "On the Meaning of the Most Modern Art". In his essay, Evola develops a theory of art as the function of the I, in which the I, during the process of its purification, obtains "the capacity to *experience* the real as the sum of subjective entities or the inner centres of freedom". What is especially interesting is that for Evola exactly the thesis that the observer is the real creator of the artwork does not mean social determination, but enables him to grasp art as the function of the I. The article attempts to take some additional steps in that direction, sketching some thoughts about solitude as the condition for art to become collectively engaging. In the end, these thoughts are juxtaposed with a remark by Jacques Lacan about the difference between the language of poetry and the language of a psychotic. It is not that the psychotic would venture *too far* away from society – while poetry is the creation of a subject that establishes a new symbolic relation to the world, the psychotic in his discourse *is not alone* and so he does not really speak but *is spoken* to by other entities.

Artwords 112, 2019

Eva Smrekar

### **Pathological, Prosthetic, Hybrid: The Body in Transmedia Art**

The body and a vast spectrum of concepts, deriving from the idea of corporeality, are very much present on the contemporary art scene and in theoretical thought. This text explores the latest projects in the field of transmedia art, which deals specifically with medical and biotechnological procedures and analyses the types of bodies that unravel through the language of each art project.

The article deals with the pathological body and the problem of establishing medical norms, explored in the artworks by Charlotte Jarvis, Špela Petrič and Mojca Založnik – the artists are creating interesting narratives of the body and disease, the medical gaze and language by using cancer cells and manipulating its metaphorical background. Next, thoughts on the human body as an obsolete object and the need for its augmentation – through anatomical theatre and Stelarc's ground-breaking imagery – are considered, taking steps to re-establish the definition of the prosthetic body through the work by Quimera Rosa and Neri Oxman. Last but not least, the text concludes with a speculative outline of the hybrid body, which only started to emerge in the field of transmedia art.

By using relevant philosophical concepts and authors such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault (genealogy and the body, writing and the personal name), Georges Canguilhem (scientific ideology and normativity in medicine), Elizabeth Grosz (the prosthetic body), Freddie Rokkum (Oedipus and the hybrid body) and others, an attempt is made to establish a loose classification of corporeality that prevails in the selected transmedia art projects.

Artwords 112, 2019

Nataša Smolič

### **Metamorphosis. The Paradox of the Hyper-Realistic and Surrealistic Content in the Work of Patricia Piccinini**

The work of Australian artist Patricia Piccinini is most often referred to as hyperrealistic, although imbued with mythological content and imaginative forms. As well as her colleagues, she uses modern materials which help her to create real imitations of the human body, skin, hair, eyes, though she often transforms the figures into an organic image that is incomparable to anything else in nature. Her works often remind us of the fictional chimaera or sphinx creatures. The group and solo exhibitions of the last two years prove her socio-critical position in contemporary art, which relies on the historical-artistic tradition. Her work poses a number of questions related to the major changes and improvements offered by modern science in the technical and especially bioengineering field. In her creatures, we recognise the forms of a human and an animal body, which can intertwine with parts of plants and various objects. She highlights the issues of the exploitation of nature and animals for the improvement of human wellbeing. Excited by the possibilities of modern science, she often sets questions that cannot be answered yet as the consequences are still unpredictable. The artist, however, raises the mirror in front of us and often even the rear-view mirror, with which she poses the question, "What can we learn from the past?" Her art process, sculptures, installations, videos always begin with drawings, after which she decides whether to process them into any other media or leave them as such. Piccinini, who collaborates with various specialists to realise her ideas, sees herself as a conceptual artist.

Artwords 112, 2019

Mojca Puncer

## Art in Public Space: Urban Social Choreographies of the City of Vienna

The article deals with the expanded discourse on art in the public space or new public art using the example of the city of Vienna, where there is an increasing emphasis on interactivity, participation and performativity. In addition to the agonistic public space, the author uses the concept of social choreography, which refers to public practice in the new conditions of social life.

In the first part of the article, the project of agonistic architecture and urbanism is presented, which stems from the idea of the agonist model of democratic politics introduced by Chantal Mouffe, and essentially concerns the issue of public space. As the "agonist" label itself suggests, there is no central consensus, but instead antagonism. In this context, one must take into account the broader picture of agonist democratisation of the entire architectural and urban process, which includes the pluralism of political positions and poses key questions about Western democracy itself. Contemporary art is often embedded in initiatives that seek to redefine urban public space and, at the same time, enter the field of activism. With the help of Peter Weibl's reflection on activism in new public art, the article points to the boundaries of participation and the shortcomings of representative democracy that need further consideration. The participation of civil society in the political sphere is parallel to the growing involvement of the viewer as a participant in visual arts since the emergence of a performative turn in the 1960s. This turn also included an urban public space, thus setting the classical concept of public sculpture in question, which is illustrated in the second part of the article using the example of good practice in Vienna, where the Vienna Institute of Public Art (Kunst im Öffentliche Raum – KÖR) was institutionalised in 2004.

From the view of the agonistic approach presented in the first part of this article, critical art is one that causes disagreement in public and makes visible what the dominant consensus conceals or erases (Mouffe). Thus, in the second part the focus is also on projects of new public art that are realised outside the KÖR's institutional frameworks: these include interventions and actions in the public space, initiatives of the politics of remembering, performative and participatory projects that are linked to participatory urban development procedures, and so on.

Furthermore, the article reflects on the role of performativity in the public space of Vienna using selected choreographies of the *Impulstanz 2018* festival, applying the concept of social choreography by Andrew Hewitt, which refers to ideology as a performance both in dance

and everyday movement. In the concluding part, the article affirms social choreography as a framework for the analysis of the current political ideology in the urban public sphere, using the example of Vienna.

Artwords 111, 2019

Tina Jerič, Jurij Selan

## The Role of Visual Variables in a Child's Artistic Development

One of the most important roles in the cognitive development of a child belongs to artistic development. We are familiar with different typical levels of artistic development, which are parallel to child's mental and physical development. Those levels do not always appear at the same children's age, but they always appear in the same sequence. With growing up and maturation we can see, there are more and more relations between visual art elements showing up in children's drawing, thereby also increasingly articulated visual art language. The development of children's drawing can, therefore, be studied in its relationship to the theory of visual art language. An important role in the articulation of artistic relations in visual art syntax (composition and space) belongs to the visual variables (like size, position, orientation, density, texture etc.). These are often "invisible" in the artwork, but have a big influence on a viewer by their mutual interactions. In the paper, we present results of the research in which we investigated the role of the visual variables in the articulation of visual art syntax in children artistic development. We conducted a qualitative study, based on analysis of children's drawing. The drawings were obtained by conducting art classes with three different age groups of children, that is in first grade, fifth grade and ninth grade of Slovenian primary school. The drawings from different stages of artistic development were then analyzed in relation to the visual variables (how their role is changing through different age and stage of development of drawing, what are variable's effects in children's artistic composition and space). The results led us to two conclusions: first, with growing up, the role of visual variables in children artistic expression is more and more complex; second, the progression in artistic development is more evident between first and fifth grade than between fifth and ninth grade, which confirms findings of different authors, that older children often face crisis in their artistic development.

Artwords 111, 2019

**Aleš Vaupotič**  
**Archive in the Arts**

The article outlines the place of the idea of archive on the conceptual map of art practices. The concept of archive has gained a lot of momentum in the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not merely as a functional tool for preserving cultural heritage but as a central issue regarding cultural memory and the understanding of, as well as dealing with, the reality. The first part of the article begins by pointing to the archaeological approach in the humanities, in the works by Michel Foucault. Next the theory of new media object by Lev Manovich is presented, which integrates the database of multimedia materials and a multiplicity, i. e. an archive, of interfaces. The technical level and the cultural level of the computer-based communication are considered. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has introduced a distinction in the understanding of avant-garde art practices between the aesthetics of montage/collage and the aesthetics of archive, which does not allow for the elements presented together to create a new unified whole. The inventors of the photomontage already after 1925 turn towards a didactical curation of photographic collections thereby rejecting the effects of the shock stemming from a surprising juxtaposition. The German artists after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War connect the archival art to the traumatic memory. The next step is the institutional critique (of the modern museum) of Marcel Broodthaers, which considers the archive as the law of what can be said (Foucault), considering the current discourses and dispositifs. Damien Hirst is also presented from the institutional-critique point of view. The nanotechnology and the contemporary digitized reality are both a sort of discursive realities, that can be construed as a dispersion of regularities that have no natural hierarchical order – the nanotechnology

homogenizes the world of materials on the atomic scale, dispensing with the traditional divisions of the material world, such as organic, inorganic etc. The mediatization of architecture and environment transforms the world into a surface of statements: the increasingly manipulated reality becomes itself a window into the cultural archive, according to Peter Weibel. The photographic reflections and their theorization by Allan Sekula are used to point to the duality of realism and nominalism in philosophy: realism of general terms is needed, unless the world disintegrates into fragmentariness of particular cases. Starting from photographs, criminology attempts to create the criminal type, whereas criminalistics nominalistically chases this particular criminal body. Lev Manovich's synthetic realism is presented as an uneven simulation of reality in new media, which makes it archive-like, a constellation of signs that represent (photo)realism. The second part of the article explains in detail Walter Benjamin's theory of the German counter-reformation *Trauerspiel* (mourning play) from his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), and aligns it with his theory of the technical media, e.g. from his famous paper *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproduction*. The reality and the artwork are both archive-like, but not in an empirical way, starting from experience, but and archive of ruins, filed sign vehicles that have lost all their meanings. Everything is corpse-like, which ominously points towards the impending holocaust. In the conclusion of the second part of the article a moment from a digital video by Slovene video artist Srečo Dragan, who together with Nuša Dragan is the author of the first video in former Yugoslavia in 1969, is analysed. Dragan's *Rotas Axis Mundi* (1995/96) video deals with the war in Bosnia in a way that does not betray the victims by exploiting their suffering by making it representable, even spectacular, and integrating it into the cultural industry (as criticized by the Frankfurt School).

Artwords 110, 2018



Petja Grafenauer

### **Reception of Expressionism in Slovene Art History. Transformations 1979–2018**

The article deals with the art historical reception of expressionism in Slovenia in three canonical art historical monographs: *Slovensko ekspresionistično slikarstvo in grafika: Duhovno usmerjena umetnost dvajsetih let dvajsetega stoletja* (1979) by Milček Komelj, *Ekspresionizem in nova stvarnost na Slovenskem 1920–1930* (1986) published by the Museum of Modern Art and written by a group of Slovene researchers and *Obrazi ekspresionizma – odtisi duha* (2018) published by Galerija Božidar Jakac and written by an international group of researchers.

The idea, what, when, how, why, and even where, Slovene expressionism occurs, is quite diverse in the three key monographs on Slovene expressionism. The abstraction, selection and construction procedures, which are the method for the creation of each individual art historical text, turn out to be dependent on many extrinsic and intrinsic circumstances.

The article concludes that expressionism in 1979 was viewed through the researcher's personal view of the world, in 1986 it served as a subbase of national art, and in 2018 it is placed in the fragile network of international connections, which is fused on the outskirts of the centers of the world of art.

Artwords 110, 2018

Miloš Kosec

### **The Public Monument between the Monumentalism of Consensus and the Intrusion of Private Interests**

The article deals with two specifically contemporary phenomena of construction of new monuments in the Republic of Slovenia. The "New Monumentalism of Consensus" appears as a state- and municipality-sanctioned return towards monumental spatial marking of historical personalities and events – especially those that are considered undivisible and do not seem to reopen historical and ideological conflicts. The "New Monumentalism" presents in some cases a literal return to, and in others, a reduced, minimalistic paraphrasing of the classical 19<sup>th</sup>-century monumental form. The "New Vernacular Monument", the other phenomenon dealt with in the article, seems at first sight like a popular rejection of the more formal and traditional New Monumentalism. Found in local roundabouts and on visual dominants on the periphery of settlements large and small, it is more of a syndrome of the all-pervasive touristic and commercialisation of the public space than that of planned memorialisation policy. It is often marked by a pluralist and formally trivial design approach, blending infrastructural problematics with local self-identification statements targeted mostly at passing visitors. More importantly, it often results in a more and more pervasive blurring between the public and private spheres of interests, as well as between the public and private space. Both of these contemporary monument phenomena, as contrasting as they might seem, are in fact two faces of the same tendency: a general retreat of the public space in favour of private commercial interests. Parallel to this, the article addresses the glaring lack of critical and artistic dialogue with some of the international contemporary practices within the field of public monuments, especially with regard to marking and memorialising collective trauma.

Artwords 109, 2018

Mojca Puncer

### **The Logic of Colouring Sensation According to Deleuze**

The paper first presents a schematically defined historical perspective of the philosophy of colour within the Western tradition of thought, which can be roughly divided into the classical and the romantic approach. In the next step, an analysis of the colour theory by Gilles Deleuze is given, with the aim to show how its interpretation speaks in favour of the balance of the two above-mentioned historical positions. Deleuze presents his colour theory in his writing about the painting of Francis Bacon, whose work is characterised by deformed figures in strange contortions, pictorial fields, and a mix of abstraction and figuralism. Bacon's use of colour in his painting cannot be seen as a conscious, applicative formula, but belongs to irrational logic or the logic of sensation, which, according to Deleuze, is the constitutive moment of painting. Here, we are particularly interested in the role of the irrational, unintended, random strokes and signs, which are not representative and are referred to as "diagrams" after Bacon. We further follow Deleuze in defining the notion of the diagram in painting, which he connects to the concept of analogue modulation and haptic colouring sensation. Deleuze's consideration of colour is an original contribution to the analysis of pictorial colourism in the branch of more recent painting that moves along the fine line between figuralism and abstraction. Even though Deleuze articulates his colour theory in terms that are characteristic of painting, it is structured through analogies with inorganic, electronic, machine systems and is in this respect highly compatible with the discourse on colour within electronic and new media aesthetics. It therefore makes sense to proceed with the discussion of the Deleuzian philosophy of colour, which offers a new paradigm for the conceptualisation of colour in the context of electronic media art. Synthetic colour holds a vital and generative role in the production of new effects, while Deleuze's concept of the diagram shows how colour achieves this goal both in the context of painting and in the context of more recent electronic art. What is of further interest in the article is the topicality of this theory within contemporary visual art, which also integrates new digital media (multi- and inter-media). The article is therefore rounded off with a final discussion focusing on contemporary perspectives.

Artwords 108, 2018

Robert Simonišek

### **The Role of the Rider in The Blue Rider Almanac**

The paper focuses on Wassily Kandinsky and his depictions of the rider in the works of the artist before the First World War. Until that period, it was one of Kandinsky's favourite subjects. Analyzing and comparing traditional depictions of the rider in European paintings and sculpture, the variety and different meanings in profane (e.g. historical battles, landscape painting) and sacral art (e.g. Saint George, Saint Martin, Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Journey of the Magi) through the centuries, we observe changes in the modern art of the 20th century. Although the rider became a significant expressionist symbol for Kandinsky, The Blue Rider group and The Blue Rider Almanac, the new meaning and symbolism of the figure have never really been explained to the public. Despite the fact that the editors Kandinsky and Franz Marc invented the name and title of "The Blue Rider", and that the rider was reproduced many times as a visual motif in the almanac, it is not possible to conclude what exactly they understood by this name. However, Marc's thinking and a statement by Kandinsky may be helpful in understanding the rider's new role, his position between the traditional rider and his contrast as depicted in futurist painting (e.g. Carlo Carrà). Furthermore, it is possible to claim that the new rider reflects the position of Expressionist artists and their relationship towards modern society, social revolution and the metaphysical.

Artwords 107, 2017

Tjaša Šavorič

### The Viewer Experience of Oto Rimele's Round Mirror

The paper deals with the analysis of Oto Rimele's painting, which is committed to colour, light and the set-up of artworks within the space in a way that uses minimalistic language to activate the viewer in a psycho-physical and spiritual manner. The viewer interprets the depicted narrative by changing his position of observation, since the whole cannot be captured by one gaze alone, while the image also changes with time. The colour of light is the basic constituent of the painting and message. The paper presents the installation *Illuminations* in the church of the former monastery in Kostanjevica na Krki (2003) and the exhibition *300 seconds: Composition for five images, four pieces of music and silence* (2016). The viewer that manages to grasp the painting as a whole and materialize the offered emptiness within himself, sees a beam of circular light in the rectangular image that appears to him as a mirror. Rimele enhanced the installation with music, which creates a state of connectedness between the space of the image and its temporality. The viewer was exposed to a similar experience in Novo Celje Mansion, where two paintings-objects were exhibited (*Lumiquadro 1* and *2*, 2015). Rimele hollowed out their centres and created a virtual passage between tangible actuality and sublime immateriality.

The paper presents Plato's bipolar concept of light and shadow, the famous allegory of the cave in the seventh book of *The Republic*, which still retains relevance in contemporaneity. The understanding of light is substantiated by the theory of Uršula Berlot and the considerations of Oto Rimele, who also backs up his images in theoretical terms. Also presented is the idea of the art installation and related problems of decentralized viewing tied to the philosophical and aesthetic interpretations of theoretician Claire Bishop, who describes four models of the viewer's experience. Rimele's model of spatial set-up corresponds to the phenomenological experience of activating the viewer, as Bishop defines it in connection with minimalism and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

Artwords 107, 2017

Uršula Berlot Pompe

### Intuition and the Subliminal in Contemporary Art

The development of neuroscience in the study of brain and cognition has in the recent decades prompted the emergence of new explanations on the psychophysiology of mental processes, including intuition, dreams, consciousness and aesthetic experience that break off with the dualism between the spiritual and the physical. In the light of these findings, intuition as an unconscious inner feeling or a spontaneous, irrational insight of truth is understood primarily as a bodily, visceral phenomenon, dependent on the action of the neuronal or brain substrate. In the past, artists saw intuition as a means of establishing an inner connection with the transcendent, the unknown and the invisible. As a source of inspiration, it enabled artists to reveal the mysterious and magical aspects of reality. Unlike traditional mystical descriptions of intuition as "enlightenment" or "inspiration", many modern and contemporary artists have invented new forms of intuitive creation with the intention of surpassing the personal and the familiar. In view of neuroscientific findings within the field of intuition, the article also outlines a concise and critical analysis of the selection of artworks that were on display during the two exhibitions this year in Venice (the exhibition *Intuition* at the Palazzo Fortuny and the *Venice Biennale Viva Arte Viva*) and, by taking a stroll through the creative procedures and poetics of the works, illuminates the artistic strategies of expressing spirituality, capturing the intuitive, magical, transcendent and subliminal within art.

Artwords 106, 2017

Petra Černe Oven

**Breaking New Ground with Brush and Story. Analysis of the Visual Image of the Slovenian Children's Magazine *Ciciban* During the Era of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.**

*Ciciban* is a Slovenian children's magazine. It is an example of excellent editorial, typographic and publishing achievement unparalleled by any of the later examples. Through its 70-year long history, *Ciciban* has served as a driving force of education and enlightened emancipation of young readers through a rich typography, excellent illustration and high level of interactivity.

Rooted in contemporary society, the magazine's issues were heavily influenced by the cultural changes and nuances in the political regime through the decades. In the aftermath of WW2, when it started as an optimistic modernist project, topics predominantly reflected national (Yugoslav) consciousness, the bravery of partisans as well as the commitment to Tito's agenda. This was later replaced with topics such as technology and science running in parallel with literature, poetry, drama, art, music and sports. Articles highlighted the everyday concerns of children, and also began to tackle less common topics such as gender equality, nature preservations, etc. very early on.

Visual narratives were produced through the teamwork of illustrators, designers, psychologists and teachers, who participated in editorial boards and used the opportunity to help teachers in classrooms with useful materials connected to the school curriculum. This was a modern changing world presented to children through fun subject matters, a lot of interactivity, and supported with exquisite illustrations and design. From the very beginning, the most renowned Slovenian artists participated in the production of the magazine, which was printed to a very high standard, normally rarely used for this kind of genre.

Today, *Ciciban* is a showcase of the *crème de la crème* of Slovenian illustrators, but important lessons and inspirations can also be drawn from the printing and typography of the magazine.

Artwords 105, 2017

Mojca Puncer

**A Sense of Discomfort in Art Criticism: An Example of Participatory Art**

The paper focuses on the critical reflection of the contemporary participatory art practices in light of the need to find new ways of analyzing art that would no longer be associated only with the visual. Starting from the point of view that participatory art can not be properly evaluated within the traditional framework of art criticism, which uses purely formal and aesthetic conceptual tools, we are resorting to more general concepts within the field of philosophy. In doing so, particularly Rancière's rehabilitation of aesthetics proves helpful, which significantly contributes to reflecting upon such art. Besides exposing the relationship between aesthetics and politics, Rancière also provides a critique of the so-called ethical turn, according to which ethical criteria in assessing participatory art (good/bad model of participation, etc.) prevail, which means the collapse of artistic and political disagreements in the new forms of reaching a consensus. Claire Bishop calls special attention to the discomfort of participatory art in relation to aesthetics, which is manifested as rejection or evasion of the aesthetic dimension and is also reflected in critical writing. The discursive framework for considering the causes of this discomfort can be found in the productive contradiction of Rancière's aesthetic regime between autonomy (the autonomy of the aesthetic experience tied to an art form) and heteronomy of art in its aspiration towards social change (overstepping the boundaries between art and social reality, a fusion of art and life). Given the rise of participatory art in the 1990s and its efforts for social change, the ability of art to connect to the community as a politicized aesthetic process, and consequently also as an accompanying critical discourse of this kind of art, should be questioned anew. Besides providing critically theoretical and aesthetically political perspectives, an attempt is being made to evaluate the importance of philosophical concepts for the articulation of critical discourse. The paper aims to contribute to the analysis of the occurrence of participatory art also by addressing a specific case in the Slovenian arena: the participatory practice of the artists from the circle of the Association of Fine Artists of Celje (DLUC).

Artwords 104, 2016



Miklavž Komelj

### **Towards the Problem of Aesthetization: The Infrathin Difference between the Aura and the Infrathin Difference, the Infrathin Difference in the Aura**

The starting point of the text questions the blocking effects of the ever-present superficial usage of the phrase “the politicization of aesthetics” from the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* by Walter Benjamin. Such superficial use leads to confusion between aesthetics and aesthetization, and the consequent refusal of the aesthetic as a potentially fascist category: e.g. Slavoj Žižek has recently marked Schiller’s conception of “the aesthetic education of man” as “the birth of fascism from the spirit of aesthetics.” Upon reading the very unconventional notes on Benjamin’s essay in the legacy of Jure Detela, however, the question arises as to whether or not the procedure that Benjamin recognized as “the aesthetization of politics” was used by him in the manner in which he defined the aura: he moved that subtle level of the existence of the artwork on the edge of sensory detection, which is not reproducible, from the area of potential readability into an area of magical ritual and cult – although doing this through the affirmation of their disappearance, when he fixed it into a ritual function that can not serve for the transfer of messages but only as fascination. It is necessary to redirect the concept of the aura itself, in order to make it really emancipatory. This task was presented in

the book *La ressemblance par contact* [Similarity Through Contact] by Georges Didi-Huberman, who read Benjamin’s concept of the aura together with Duchamp’s concept of the infrathin. The present text proceeds with this reading to show that a redirection occurs if the infrathin difference is inserted into the concept of the aura, from the aura as a metaphor towards pure literalness in the seeing that which is on the edge of vision and is disappearing from visibility. Only such sensitization for the borderline area of sensory perception allows for the inscription of the disappearance of the aura in its very concept. At the same time, however, this raises the question of the significance of such a reading in defining the relationship between “the aesthetization of politics” and “the politicization of aesthetics.” Detela’s reading of Benjamin, linked with the introduction of the concept of “transcendental sensuality”, conscious that sensuality can not be avoided, redirects the concept of “politicization” itself, from replacing aesthetic problems with political ones, towards identifying messages in that which is fixed by aesthetization into a sensual glare: not to deny this glare, but to recognize the message there, where this glare was visible only as something valuable. And this represents self-transcendence for sensuality itself. Only an “aesthetic revolution”, which extends beyond the sensibility of being trapped in the limits of the human world in attempts to establish a relationship towards “the beings from foreign worlds”, can ever prevent the conversion of “the politicization of aesthetics” into “the aesthetization of politics”.

Artwords 103, 2016

Uršula Berlot Pompe

### **The Minimum Difference and Modern Mimesis**

The debate considers the role of mimesis in modern art, which rejects the traditional forms of artistic imitation and focuses on the definition of the minimum difference or de-realization of the model, ideal and truth (simulation, repetition) in its development of differentiated thinking. Badiou describes the “differentiating desire” of modern art, which attempts to “invent content at the point of minimum difference, where there is almost nothing” and investigates the real as the small elusive link, the barely perceptible hue of the conceived and perceived. Duchamp’s idea of infrathin differentiation is reflected in the conception of the ready-made and the new forms of reproduction and projection. Hyper-realism conceives the least difference in the greatest similarity between the painting and the photograph after which it was produced. Seriality and repetition are the basic procedures of abstract and minimalist art that are principally engaged with the conception of difference in articulating similarities. Catherine Perret believes that modern art abolishes the primacy of the object (result), and with the invention of new forms of repetition, bets on the simple act and processuality as the key aspects of artistic content.

Artwords 103, 2016

Sebastian Korenič Tratnik, Aljoša Rakita  
in Franc Solina

### **Transferring Painting Style Through Deep Neural Networks Using the Works of Slovenian Impressionism as an Example**

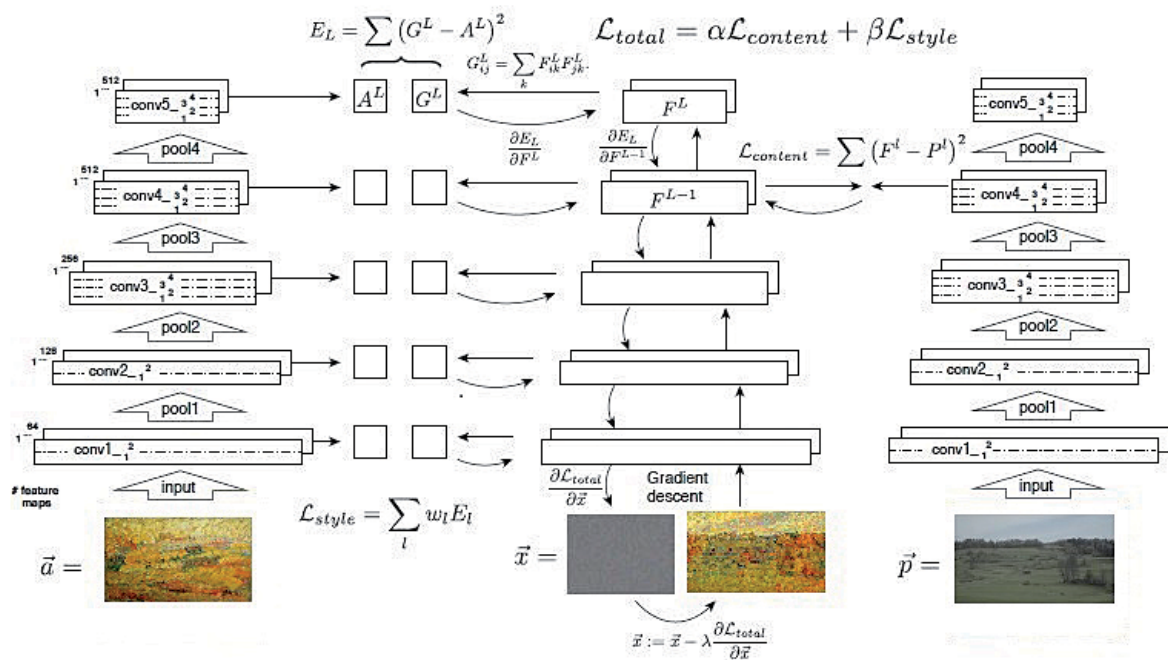
The article presents the creative possibilities of computational aesthetics on the case of using the technology of deep neural networks for the automatic production of works of art.

Generative art is one of the most pertinent creative procedures, which is able to present convincing cases of visual art created on a computer by using algorithmic procedures. The concept of deep or convolution neural networks (DNN or CNN) signifies a multiplicity of algorithms, which are taught to be able to recognise patterns in data. Neural networks belong to the field of artificial intelligence and are named after the fact that they work similarly as the human brain, being built out of a great number of knots called neurons, where computational operations are processed. The article contextualises this technology in the field of art by providing a short historical exposition of using computers in art and the parallel development of the field of computational aesthetics. It proceeds with a practical case of its usage in artistic style transfer. By extracting the formal parameters of style using many the samples from different artists, the program is able to form an algorithm for digital creation of new artworks. On the ground of reaching the deep structure of a composition by analysing the surface structure of a painting, the set of neural networks are able to extract a shape grammar, which works as a formalism or a generative matrix for creating new variations of a stylistic set. The text presents a case study that is centred on the paintings of the Slovene Impressionists – Rihard Jakopič, Ivan Grohar, Matej Sternen and Matija Jama. The success of the algorithmic operation can be measured with the criteria based on formal analysis, art-historical contextualisation and a comparative placement in the presented stylistic sets.

Artwords 112, 2019



The article describes how a painting style can be transferred from a source image depicted by a painter (left) to a photo (centre), to obtain a computer-generated image in a style similar to the original painting (right)



The algorithm used for the transfer of the style is based on VGG deep neural networks (Gatys 2016) that have been learned to detect and localize objects in images. The grid architecture consists of very small  $3 \times 3$  convolution filters and has a depth of 16–19 layers. Shown on the left is a schematic illustration of a synthesis of the original style of the painting, and on the right, an application of this style to the specified photograph. See the thesis of Aljoša Rakita (2018) for details





Matej Sternen, *Nude*, 1914, oil on canvas, 73 × 110 cm, National Gallery of Slovenia



Ivan Grohar, *The Sower*, 1907, oil on canvas, 108 × 120 cm, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana



Matija Jama, *Circle Dance (sketch)*, 1926–1935, oil on canvas, 26,5 × 38,5 cm, private collection, preparatory photos: Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana





Rihard Jakopič, *Kamnitnik in the Snow*, 1903, oil on canvas, 49 × 59,5 cm,  
Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia

The Impressionist style works particularly well for the style transfer due to its colourful and texturally regular structure. A survey found that people find it difficult to distinguish between man- and computer-made paintings. (Can you spot the original among the three paintings above? You can find the answer at the end of the article.)





Rihard Jakopič, *Sunny Hillside*, 1903, oil on canvas, 52 × 60 cm,  
National Gallery of Slovenia



Ivan Grohar, *Hillock*, 1910, oil on canvas, 50,4 × 74 cm, National Gallery of Slovenia





Matija Jama, *Quarry*, 1907, oil on canvas, 50 × 60 cm, National Gallery of Slovenia



Rihard Jakopič, *Autumn*, 1912, oil on canvas, 26,5 × 33,5 cm, National Gallery of Slovenia



Nataša Kovšca

### **The Art Pulse on the Border**

The article highlights only the activities of the leading artists in the 120-year history of the fine arts in the Goriška region, which were violently interrupted several times. Due to limited scope, this paper does not deal with the evaluation of the art production and does not include the intermedia practices whose presentations are primarily tied to galleries. The text seeks only to provide an insight into the continuing efforts of the artists themselves to raise cultural awareness, emphasise national identity and establish intercultural dialogue, which has been particularly intense after the two wars. On the other hand, the article points out the connection between the artists and this particular arena, from which many famous creators originate, whose artistic oeuvres significantly influenced the development of Slovenian modernism – for instance, Veno Pilon, Avgust Černigoj, Lojze Špacapan, Ivan Čargo, Zoran Mušič, Lojze Spacal, Silvester Komel, Vladimir Makuc and many others. It is precisely the dialogue with this specific arena that still inspires many artists of the younger generations, active in both the Slovenian and Italian art arena.

Artwords 113, 2019

Lilijana Stepančič

### **Come in August ... When the Exhibitions Open Ivan Cankar, Art Critic**

Ivan Cankar, a renowned writer of the Slovenian modern movement, was also a writer of fine art reviews. At the beginning of the 20th century, and during the process of the national awakening of the non-German nations in the Austro-Hungarian empire, his critiques were a means in the construction of Slovenian national empowerment. They defined what national (Slovenian) fine art was: art created by the Slovenian modern artistic subject with modern (internationally applicable) visual elements – a production that was moving away from ethnographic imagery and folk elements in the visual arts and that was focusing on intra-artistic visual content. Within this definition, we find the echo of the motto of the Vienna Secession concerning the free spirit of creation.

Cankar supported the Slovenian artists (Berneker, Jakopič, Grohar, Jama and partly Sternen) that had brought Impressionism, already accepted in Europe by this time, to Carniola. In doing so, he reinforced the social power of that part of Slovenian society, which did not see modernism as an enemy that would destroy Slovenian national identity, but as an element in the linking of Slovenia to the advanced and fashionable international world. Regardless

as to whether deliberately or unintentionally defined in this way, this was a national (Slovenian) art that encapsulated the characteristics of universal and modern fine art as conceived at the beginning of the 20th century by a part of Viennese liberal cultural circles as a new all-encompassing modern Austro-Hungarian fine art. It was an art that should not contain any national particularities.

Artwords 112, 2019

Petja Grafenauer, Zvonka T Simčič

### **Zvonka T Simčič And Her Artistic Path**

Zvonka T Simčič is a highly expressive artist who works with painting, video, photography, and performance. She is an engaged creator in the field of feminist art. At the forefront of her work is the reflection of social changes in her milieu. The article follows her art practice from the very beginnings in painting until today. In her projects on motherhood, for instance, in DOULAS “ad utero, ab ovo” she dealt with the questions of artificial insemination and the obstacles single women and single mothers have to cross, by publicly exposing her own story. From 2015, her focus is the community House on the Hill project, where she has brought together diverse artists to produce and exhibit their work in the countryside and nature.

Artwords 112, 2019

Maja Murnik

### **Slovenian Contemporary Art and the Shift in the Space**

The review of the book *Meprostorei umetnosti / The Inter-spaces of Art* (2018) by Mojca Puncer, PhD, focuses on how the author deals with the contemporary art practices in Slovenia, especially those that do not belong merely to the domain of visual art but also include the performative, corporeal and/or community-oriented dimension. The author of the book is primarily interested in the in-between spaces, raised by the hybrid nature of contemporary art as well as the humanities (the notion of transdisciplinarity). Special attention is devoted to participatory art in Slovenia (developed within the DLUC Celje circle), which addresses the key political and social topics of today. The phenomenon of participatory or community-based art has been evaluated from an aesthetic-political and ethical perspective, inspired by the philosophy of Jacques Rancière.

Artwords 112, 2019



Boštjan Jurečič

### The Function of Text in Contemporary (VISUAL) Art – The Confusion Continues

The 2019 edition of the *Venice Biennale* features a piece by the well-known Slovenian visual artist Marko Peljhan. It can be described as two (comfortable) seats surrounded by glowing panels of plexiglass. The piece is a design for some sort of a vehicle. The people in charge of the show together with Marko Peljhan are intent on convincing us that the piece is something entirely different. It is not merely a piece of trivial design, they tell us.

How do they do that? By the excessive use of the text that mimics theory.

If you are an artist, an art critic, a curator or a social or cultural theorist or a philosopher, you yourself might be using text in order to “explain” the supposedly inaccessible artefacts of contemporary art.

But the reality is that the artefacts of contemporary art in question are not really inaccessible. They are for the most part completely trivial. So, why so much text then?

The answer is fairly simple: you have to think you do not “understand” the piece in question so the text is there, not in order to explain it – it can be explained in two sentences, which in the case of Marko Peljhan’s project was done above – but to make you think you are in the presence of something great, complex, hard to understand.

How have we arrived at the situation that so much text is being produced alongside banal Kunst artefacts?

In his famous essay *The Artworld* (1964), American philosopher Arthur Danto laid the ground for his claim that art had been transformed into theory. He was looking at the replicas of the *Brillo Boxes* by Andy Warhol and asked himself what distinguishes Warhol’s replicas from the originals that can be found in any local shop. He concluded that the difference is “a certain theory of art”.

But there neither existed nor exists any theory that would determine the said difference. There is only text or an arbitrary agreement among the people in the art world – and nothing more – that tags Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* as art and the identical-looking boxes at a local store as mere consumer goods.

And while every theory is text, not every text is theory.

Artwords 112, 2019

Miran Erič

### Triglav: Upgrading Symbolism

The *TRIGLAV* project by the OHO Group has cut into the creative artistic body of the inhabitants in the geographical area of the north-eastern hinterland of the Adriatic Sea in definitive, profound and long-lasting ways. Its influence stretches well beyond into other arenas and continents through the prophetic sharpness of its initial reism and the contemporary art practices of the avant-gardism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From seemingly simple activist projects in which they were mainly engaged with the exploration of the direct, constant sense and perception of the essence, independent of rational segmentation and without any in-depth understanding, but with a magical commitment to the special sense of the sensitive dimensions of reality, they created a vast array of completely new creative artistic activities that had never been carried out until then.

The development of artistic creation after the break-up of the OHO Group followed the direction of questioning the artistic activities of the early 20th century, the increasingly rapid development of modern technology and information technology, the freedom of creative expression within the socio-political organisation of the contemporary world, and the role of art and creativity within contemporaneity. It is therefore not surprising that the early methodological foundations of the OHO Group have strongly marked all the subsequent generations of artists. Within the 50 years of the original implementation of the *TRIGLAV* action, six re-enactment events have been created over a period of several years with the direct participation of 20 artists from all of today’s generations. Astounding. The article aims to understand the extraordinary symbolic power that the members of the OHO Group may have captured very intuitively and without any deeper understanding. However, it becomes apparent that they made use of a universal symbol which in fact merely transcends avant-gardism, retrogardism, political activism, egocentrism [...] and is in its essence incomparably stronger than all the messages uttered – and purposefully used for their career needs – by the individual re-enactment artists.

Therefore, the *TRIGLAV* artistic plan needs to be understood in a much wider viewpoint – primarily as an idea that encompasses the entire scope of the appearance act – as can be conceived by individual artists and creators. Today, *TRIGLAV*, like all other world-renowned artworks, should be regarded as an independent *living masterpiece*, for which it does not seem that it will ever die.

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Petja Grafenauer

### **Tugo Šušnik, Painter of Late Modernism and Scenographer of Gledališče Pekarna**

Tugo Šušnik, the painter of high modernism, was completely different from Tugo Šušnik, the scenographer. The article presents a period when artists tested out different directions and approaches, but unlike others, for example, the OHO group who changed styles from pop art to conceptual art, Šušnik, as a painter, remained faithful to the framework of high art. He was different in the theatre. He introduced hyperrealism and conceptual art to Slovenian scenography.

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Petja Grafenauer

### **Edvard Zajec, the Harbinger of Changes to the Art Paradigm**

The idea of computer art appeared gradually in the 1960s and '70s in the US and Europe. The Slovenian artist, who started using the new media at the end of the 1960s, Edvard Zajec is one of the pioneers of computer art of international reputation. His work was presented at MoMA, the Pompidou Centre, Ars Electronica, ISEA and elsewhere. He is one of those artists, who was not appreciated in the Slovenian space at the time when he created his pioneering works, but only much later when he was already acclaimed on the international scene.

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# LIKOVNE BESEDE

## ARTWORDS

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ZDSLU, Komenskega 8, Ljubljana, Slovenija, tel.: +386 1 433 04 64, fax: +386 1 434 94 62, e-mail: likovne.besede@zveza-dslu.si

**Št. 100, zima 2014** Intervjuji: Josip Gorinšek, Christina Steinbrecher-Pfandt; Adrijana Praznik: Kunst Hauen! Miklavž Komelj: *Anagrami*; Jean Genet: Pismo Leonor Fini; Miklavž Komelja: *Od epifanije do epifanije*; Andreas Trosek: *Ko melanholik postane izvozni artikel*. Teoretska priloga: Števila in sistemi (Roman Opalka, Maša Jazbec, Bojan Anddelković, Vojko Pogačar in Kaja Pogačar ...)

**Št. 101, poletje 2015** Intervju: Samuel Grajfoner, Nadja Zgonik: *Bodo male kontroverze 56. beneškega bienala postale odločilne za umetnost v prihodnje?* Aleksander Bassin: *Kaj dela Marxov Kapital v Benetkah?* Mojca Puncer: *Performativni prevoji med umetnostjo in stvarnostjo*; Uroš Potočnik: *Dnevnik*; Tina Dobrajc: *Femmage*; Andrej Medved: *Ikonoklastične skulpture Dušana Tršarja*; Lilijana Stepančič: *Ne-spomeniki Lele B. Njatin in konstrukcija množinskega spominjanja*; Sotirios Bahtsetzis: *Eikonomia: zapiski o ekonomiji in umetniškem delu*; Teoretska priloga: *Portret* (Miklavž Komelj, Jean Luc Nancy, Hans Belting)

**Št. 102, zima 2015** Intervjuji: Tomaž Lavrič, Maria Elena González; Svetlana Jakimovska Rodič: *Dnevnik halštata*; Andrej Medved: *Jakšetovo slikarstvo: tesnobi vzrok univerzalne želje*; Tomislav Vignjevič: *Prestopanja medijskih mej ali iskanje sinteze*; Bojan Andjelković: *Obrnjena perspektiva*; Lana Lučin: *Skupina Neokonstruktivisti 1968–1972*; Jurij Selan: *Velika likovna teorija*. Recenzija Leksikona likovne teorije Jožefa Muhoviča; Teoretska priloga: *Strip* (Miklavž Komelj, Izar Lunaček, Iztok Sitar)

**Št. 103, poletje 2016** Uršula Berlot Pompe: *Minimalna razlika in moderna mimesis*; Miklavž Komelj: *K problemu estetizacije: infratanka razlika med avro in infratanko razliko, infratanka razlika v avri*; Didier Semin: *Zapis o infratankem*; Metka Krašovec: *Samo svojo svobodo imam*; Marcel Duchamp: *Infratanko. Zapiski 1–46*; *Ustvarjalni proces*; Boštjan Drinovec: *Vetrni ris Metelkova mesto*; Mojca Puncer: *Fotografova slutnja v rdečem*; Petra Kapš: *Red vsakdana. Poetsko-konceptualna fotografija Ivana Dvoršaka*

**Št. 104, zima 2016** Mojca Puncer: *Nelagodje v umetnostni kritiki: primer participatorne umetnosti*; Kaja Kraner: *Podobe krize kritike: poročilo o ciklu javnih predavanj* Kako kritično je stanje kritičnega pisanja?; Eva Mlinar: *Dnevnik / Diary*; Mojca Zlokarnik: *Vmesni, rahli svet*. Intervju s Silvanom Omerzujem; Simona Erjavec: *Slikarske poslastice so redke / Painting Treats are Rare*; Robert Inhof: *Enkratne stiske*. Monotipije Matjaža Gederja; Tomislav Vignjevič: *Neolepšane zgodbe mesta*. Manifesta 11 v Zürichu; Mojca Zlokarnik: *Podobe v gibanju*. Festival animiranega filma Annecy; Borko Tepina: *O razmerju med fizično in mentalno pojavnostjo igre*; Robert Lozar: *Kam z rokami?*

**Št. 105, poletje 2017** Petra Černe: *Oranje ledine s čopičem in z zgodbo*. Analiza vizualne podobe slovenske otroške revije *Ciciban* v obdobju SFRJ; Mojca Zlokarnik: *Osební nadrealizem v slikarstvu Nataše Ribič Štefanec*; Narvika Bovcon, Aleš Vaupotič: *Prostor, vržen iz tira*. Pogovor s Srečom Draganom; Jasna Samarin, Zvonko Čoh: *Dnevnik*; Aleš Vaupotič: *Vključevanje nanotehnoloških raziskav v likovno umetnost: Polimorfni odtis Uršule Berlot*; Sergej Kapus: *Potujitev*; Blaž Miklavčič: *Politika kože*; Nadja Gnamuš: *O zadnjih delih Zmaga Lenárdiča ali: »Ko gledaš, pozabi na umetnost!«* Alen Ožbolt: *Prostori in razmerja med arhitekturo in kipom*; Nataša Kovšca: *Prevrednotenje keramike*; Lilijana Stepančič: *Zgodovina tistega, kar se nam danes zdi, da je samo po sebi dano*

**Št. 106, jesen 2017** Uršula Berlot Pompe: *Intuicija in subliminalno v sodobni umetnosti*; Mojca Puncer: *57. beneški bienale, Viva Arte Viva: babilon umetniških svetov in govorici*; Hana Ostan Ožbolt: *Pogled v Benetke, VIVA ARTE VIVA, 57. beneški bienale*; Marko Košan: *Documenta 14 v Kasslu: Globalna miturgija Nemčije in Grčije*; Aleš Vaupotič: *Razučevanje: documenta 14*; Eugen El: *Documenta v Atenah*; Aleksander Bassin: *Kaj sporočajo letošnji kiparski Projekti in Münstru?* Narvika Bovcon: *Plasti mesta*

**Št. 107, zima 2017** Robert Simonišek: *Vloga jezdecov v almanahu Modri jezdec*; Tjaša Šavorič: *Izkušnja gledalca v Oblem ogledalu Ota Rimeleja*; Aleksandra Saška Gruđen: *Problemovanje spremembe – Grafični bienale v očišču*. Pogovor z Nevenko

Šivavec. Mojca Zlokarnik: *Maria Bonomi in jezik grafike*; Boštjan Kavčič: *Črta pri črti*; Nadja Zgonik: *Vesolje v čajni skodelici ali novi izzivi keramike za Unicum 2018*; Jure Mikuž: *Podoba, ki ni narejena s človeško roko*; Marjeta Ciglenički: *Bojan Golija – retrospektivna razstava*

**Št. 108, pomlad 2018** Mojca Puncer: *Logika barvnega občutja po Deleuzu*; Miklavž Komelj: *Prisotnost Metke Krašovec. Govor na pogrebu 4. 5. 2018*; Robert Inhof: *Tišina v slikah Mojce Zlokarnik*; Dušan Fišer: *Dnevnik*; Petja Grafenauer: *Tugo Šušnik, slikar poznega modernizma in scenograf Gledališča Pekarna*; Miha Colner: *Deset let z desetletnim predahom. Društvo za domače raziskave: Damijan Kracina, Alenka Pirman, Jani Pirnat*; Miklavž Komelj: *Baronica in baron – dve mejni figuri dadaizma*; Lilijana Stepančič: *Galerija Škorpjion*; Mojca Zlokarnik: *Po festivalu animiranega filma Annecy še Animateka*

**Št. 109, jesen 2018** Miloš Kosec: *Javni spomenik med monumentalizmom konsenza in vrinjanjem zasebnega*; Aleksandra Saška Gruđen: *Nekaj gre čudno narobe. Pogovor z Vlasto Zorko*; Marjetica Potrč: *Samoorganizacija, kjer se je država umaknila*; Barbara Borčič: *Urbanaria – Umetnost v urbanem kontekstu. Ponovni pogled*; Zoran Srdić: *Zadnje zatočišče – prvi pogled. Umetniška dela v cestnih krožiščih*; Boštjan Drinovec: *Kdo izbira – umetnost v javnem prostoru Ljubljane*; Franc Trček: *Bo aluminij novi beton?*

**Št. 110, zima 2018** Oliver Grau: *O vizualni moči digitalnih umetnosti. Za novo arhivsko in muzejsko infrastrukturo v 21. Stoletju*; Aleš Vaupotič: *Arhiv v umetnosti*; Vesna Teržan: *Arhivirajmo! Pogovor z Jano Intihar Ferjan*; Petja Grafenauer: *Umetnostnozgodovinska recepcija ekspresionizma na Slovenskem. Premene 1979–2018*; Lilijana Stepančič: *Fašistična umetnost v desetih slikah*; Robert Inhof: *Podobe iz Tisnikarjeve prosekture*; Milena Mileva Blažič: *Sreča je v knjigah. Slovenska slikarica in literarnozgodovinske prelomnice*

**Št. 111, poletje 2019** Mojca Puncer: *Umetnost v javnem prostoru: urbane družbene koreografije mesta Dunaj*; Tina Jerič, Jurij Selan: *Vloga likovnih spremenljivk v likovnem razvoju otrok*; Mojca Zlokarnik: *Nisem trpeči umetnik! Pogovor z Nathalie Du Pasquier*; Miha Colner: *Mark Požlep, umetnik*; Andrej Brumen Čop: *Skladišče*; Lela Angela Mršek Bajda: *Kočevje v ciklu Ljubljana se klanja Sloveniji*; Lilijana Stepančič: *Zofka Kveder o likovni umetnosti za sedanjorabo. Vloga likovne kritike nekoč in danes*

**Št. 112, zima 2019** Miklavž Komelj: *Kaj je ustvarjanje?* Franc Solina: *Prenos slikarskega stila s pomočjo globokih nevronskih mrež na primeru del slovenskega impresionizma*; Wolfgang Welsch: *O umetnosti v obdobju antropocena*; Ksenija Čerče: *Erekcija jezika – o glasu in vnetem dotiku*; Mojca Zlokarnik: *Najprej umetnost in potem ekonomija*; Miha Colner: *Plateausideue: Sub Persona*; Aleksandra Saška Gruđen: *Za gozd; umetniška dela in javni prostor*; Petja Grafenauer: *Štajerska jesen letos z naslovom Grand hotel Brezno*; Boštjan Jurečič: *Funkcija teksta v sodobni (vizualni) umetnosti*; Nadja Zgonik: *Beneški bienale za tukaj in zdaj*; Lilijana Stepančič: *Pridi avgusta ..., ko odprejo razstave*. Ivan Cankar, likovni kritik

**Št. 113, zima 2019** Miha Valant, Beti Žerovc: *Carniolan Fine Arts Societies from 1848 to 1918*; Miklavž Komelj, Mojca Zlokarnik: *From the Material on the History of ZDSLU in the Archives of Slovenia*; Petja Grafenauer, Nataša Ivanović, Urška Barut: *How Mala galerija Ceased to be Social and Became Modern in Seven Years*; Asta Vrečko, Maruša Dražil: *The History and Activities of the Ljubljana Fine Artists Society*; Judita Krivec Dragan: *The artist, the art society and society as a whole: 120 Years of Organised Activity of Slovenian Fine Artists*; Aleš Sedmak: *Slovenian Fine Artists Societies*; Nataša Kovšca: *The Art Pulse on the Border*; Dejan Mehmedović: *Art Events on the Coast*; Petra Vencelj: *A Tradition Older than the Society*; Agata Pavlovec: *In the Draught*; Janez Balazic: *Gazing into Universal Horizons*; Robert Lozar: *Small, Young and 'Dangerous' ...*; Vojko Pogačar: *Reflections on Open Issues*; Aleksander Bassin: *Times of Crises Today*; Mojca Smerdu: *Three Considerations Regarding the Art Market*; Gregor Štibernik: *We Have the Money, but No Collective Organization (Yet)!*; Carola Streul: *Collective management organisations for visual works in the European Union*; Aleš Sedmak: *The Copyright and Related Rights*