

IGOR BOŠNJAK

Accumulated History

Text: Cristina Munteanu

Ruins of former factories associated with dissonant rhythms and sounds, the distorted echoes of bygone work; underground galleries with thick walls, dug under mountains at the orders of a president authentically worried by the possibility of a nuclear attack; Chinese lanterns lit up in memory of a Yugoslavian Space Program that never was; cemeteries with futuristic built-in screens, trying to capture uncertain broadcasts from an uncertain dimension - these are just some of the visual and conceptual references comprising Accumulated History, the first personal exhibition of artist Igor Bosnjak in Romania.

The artworks, video installations for the most part, reconnect fragments of the former Yugoslavian history, or, better yet, reflect fragmentary images of this particular history. We are faced with an accumulated time, reassembled for the interrogation of both its dramatic or traumatic part, but also as subject of an exploration conducted from an ironically-reflective angle, in an attempt to come to terms with an overly debated and disputed past.

Exhibiting for the first time the trilogy *It is not the literal past that rules us, it is image of the past...*, title inspired by the words of philosopher George Steiner, the artist revisits the common places of former Yugoslavian socialism, from the latter's self-management doctrine up to the transformations, confusions and successive ideological ramifications that have successively marked this space.

History is continuity and discontinuity, according to the theories of Walter Benjamin. In a traditional sense, history as a mechanism serves the purpose of creating continuity by building a narrative which, in its unhindered linearity, should create the norm. However, what is generally perceived as a state of exception in linear history constitutes its true norm, the essence which generates the disruptive constellation of past and present. These states of exception are social traumas, events and conditions responsible for oppression, including herein the totalitarian regimes.¹

In the case of the former Yugoslavian socialism, attempts were made to encompass a humanistic dimension- partly shaped by theoretician Edvard Kardelj, the Yugoslavian version of the doctrine was meant to delimitate within itself, be it solely on a theoretical level, the truth that no state or political regime could ever ensure human happiness and that only man himself would have the ability to create his own happiness. This point of view seemed not to completely obliterate personal freedom. It is thus that the former Yugoslavian state evinced characteristics of a socialist self-management which were perceived as positive- artistic groups formed along guidelines parting with socialist realism, such as *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, and it was so that the communication with the West was not cut off.²

The installation *Selfmanagement*, part of the exhibition, consisting of steering wheels and books as items literally corresponding to the Bosnian term *samoupravljanje* ('self-steering')

addresses the political concept from a satirical view point, alluding to obvious shortcomings of the regime which ultimately led to its collapse and to the subsequent division of the state.

Images, historical or contemporary, represent historical constructs, myths of a social geography mapped in separate periods by categories and classes with distinct interests- these shape a heterogeneous fund of ideas about national identity, about the state as a whole, including of course the state of conflict, rhetorical disputes, but above all- invention. As an ineludible part of remembrance, invention is imminent when operating with something essentially intangible, like remembrance. Where there can be no direct contact with a situation, the human mind creates its own version to fill in the gaps.³

Gradually and purposefully building around this culture of remembrance, the artist fills in the gaps. His images may be variants of perceptual remembrance and invention. This process of rendering visible that which is no longer concretely available, consists, in the case of the exhibition, in visual and metaphoric sublimations of various periods marked by ideological and political transformations.

The perspective of remembrance, the act of recollecting is linked to the issue of identity, but also to the creation of a metanarrative as a premise of the need for asserting authority and for the tighter pulling together of masses around a common background of experiences, moments and ideas.

The perspective rendered through the exhibited artworks does not isolate the past within memory, but reintegrates it within a space-time entirety, in which the image may be overlaid with calculated variants of a potential future.

It is the case of the first work of the trilogy, Hotel Balkan, in which the futuristic feel of the space might arouse confusion: the bunker which translates former president Tito's fear of a nuclear attack corresponds to an imaginary future which never materialized. Everything You Thought Was Wrong and Future Cavern, the other two films of the trilogy, introduce elements in an utter state of decay, ruins of factories. The act of exploring these abandoned places occurs carefully and selectively with successive moments of defocusing and refocusing, inquisitive stepping into and withdrawal from the metaphorical spaces associated by the artist with a forest of decay.

From the romantic fascination for the ruinenlust -where the ruin becomes the encounter point between human aspirations and the unchangeable work of time - up to the writings of Jacques Derrida with regard to the seed of decomposition existing a priori in any item, organic or inorganic, the ruin is a powerful visual motif, recurring in contemporary artwork which approaches the theme of space identity in connection with history and utopia.

In the case of the exhibited work, the ruins concurrently bear within them the imprint of the historical past and the vision of a potential future. The works are integrated within a complete space-time dimension, they are not limited to a collection of pieces of the past stricto sensu- their conceptual approach focuses on the image as a generating force, projecting both past and future.

¹ Benjamin, Walter, On The Concept of History, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, New York, 2009

² Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art Under Late Socialism, edited by Ales Erjavec, University of California Press, California, 2003

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³Said, Edward W., Invention, Memory and Place in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2000, pp. 175-192