

Among Women: Contemporary Art from Serbia

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Curated by Rachel Klipa

Šejma Fere, Bojana S. Knežević, Marina Marković, Tijana Radenković, Simonida Rajčević, Vahida Ramujkić, Milica Ružičić, Maja Simić, Nina Todorović, Anica Vučetić, and Gordana Žikić

Among Women: Contemporary Art from Serbia features artworks by eleven women artists who are deeply connected to Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. Once part of the former Yugoslavia, Serbia's artists remain on the periphery of the global, contemporary art scene; however, the women presented here come from a long line of thoughtful and accomplished arts and cultural practitioners that span Serbia's complex history. Shown together, the artworks produced by these women provide a snapshot of Belgrade's productive and multilayered contemporary art scene from the perspective of some of its women artists. From the onset, it's important to note that there are more women artists from Belgrade and other parts of Serbia than what could be presented here.

Based on the works of these artists in this initial inquiry, questions arose about how women make art and why, and more importantly, how do their art practices congeal? Their education and practice-based graduate work at the University of Arts in Belgrade revealed a critical touchpoint in regard to the basis of their artistic concepts and influences, in addition to other sources. What seemed at first to be an eclectic mix of artwork and art practices, ongoing research unveiled that all of these women approach their work from personal perspectives that comment on their lives as women or share views about economics and globalization.

For some, that means place is key in site-specific inspired works that confront changes in a city's architecture and its effect on memory, the process of art production, or relationships to objects that can possibly heal and transform spaces. For others, it means that consumerism, technology, and social media alter concepts of the body, time, space, and reality. And finally, for some of the presented artists, the representation of the body is linked to identity, and responses to motherhood and the heteropatriarchy. These works are further linked by their immediacy – the foregrounding of subjects, lack of over embellishment, nearly non-existent horizon lines, and the use of repetition.

As we look at these works, a collective story about how women make art in Serbia emerges. Questions also form. How do we discuss and interpret art from different geographies in new contexts? What other identities are shared by women beyond gender? What are the expectations for women artists? And, what kind of spaces need to be made to support women?



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Nina Todorović
***Architecture of Memory*, 2010 – 2013**
Thirty-three digital prints, sizes vary

Multimedia artist Nina Todorović began documenting Belgrade in 2000, paying special attention to the city's architecture and urban landscape. Todorović says that the city is "slowly mutating," an apt metaphor that describes the ramifications of Serbia's transition from a socialist to capitalist economy over the past twenty years. This transition ushered in a period of property development that continues to change the face of the city. Part of

Todorović's artistic process includes walking the city of Belgrade and making a record of her routes, many of which are concentrated in the neighborhoods where she grew up – Bulbulder and Zvezdara. For Todorović, *Architecture of Memory* attempts to preserve the imprints of places that were, such as her childhood home, while also reflecting on her own relationship to Belgrade – an endeavor that explores collective and individual memories through architecture.

Nina Todorović completed her Ph.D. in 2014 at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade. Since 1995, she has exhibited work in 47 solo exhibitions and more than 200 group exhibitions. Todorović is the winner of several national and international awards; her works can be found in public, private, and museum collections.
<http://www.ninatodorovic.com/>



Nina Todorović
Pattern Recognition
(Deconstruction) I – V, 2017
Digital prints on acrylic (5 pieces),
48” x 71”

Pattern Recognition (Deconstruction) I – V works in tandem with *Architecture of Memory*. Todorović’s practice of walking in Belgrade is based on the concept of psychogeography. Invented by Marxist theorist Guy Debord (1931-1994) in 1955, psychogeography investigates how places make people feel and behave. Debord suggests that through the act of walking, a person can find alternative ways of navigating urban environments and examining architectural spaces. These large hanging acrylic panels encourage the viewer to walk around and in-between the works to mimic the act of

walking and observing a place. The panels contain randomly overlapping photographs caused by glitches in the images’ codes. The photographs capture trees and moss where buildings once stood, clouds that are no longer blocked by tall structures, and doorways leading to nowhere. Todorović says that the glitch causing the disjointed placement of the images is a metaphor that symbolizes the volatility and fragility of space, time, and memory.



Šejma Fere
***Order of things (Coffee two)*, 2016**
Mixed media, 19.6" x 41.3"

Šejma Fere's artistic practice focuses on collecting a vast array of images from advertisements, magazines, newspapers, the internet, and other sources. Her work explores the nature of consumerism by using the materials that it generates. Fere's collages rework the multitude of mass media images by separating each ad, figure, or face from its original context. By doing so, she questions the potency of the information generated by consumer culture, while simultaneously investigating new interpretations that arise from combining selected images. Possible meanings can be gleaned from Fere's collages. In *Order of*

things (Coffee two), an overall balanced composition contains a disjointed domestic scene that exists within several perspective planes. To the right two women sit toasting each other with wine, while to the left another woman fills a kettle as she gazes into the distance. A man in the foreground takes notes; a woman stands in the back doorway to look outside at individuals in protective gear digging holes. Interspersed throughout the work are graphs that chart the average prices of new homes and the power usage of residential fans. Near the lower left corner an Ikea ad hints at improved home organization, while in the upper right and lower left corners are thumbnails of ancient, classical, and neoclassical artworks that allude to beauty, domesticity, government, hierarchy, and sexuality.

Šejma Fere graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade with degrees in painting and printmaking. She was awarded the Onassis Foundation Distinction Prize for Painting in 2006, and a scholarship to the International Summer Academy of Fine Arts in Salzburg in 2017. Fere explores the borders of intimate and public relations to mass media, market systems, and consumer culture. She lives and works in Belgrade.
<https://sejma.jimdofree.com/>



Vahida Ramujkić, T. Cvetković, D. Prnjat, & C. Sing Tai
***minipogon*, 2017 – ongoing**
Plastic bowl 7” x 7” x 5.9”; documentary, 71 minutes

minipogon (mini-plant) is a collaborative project that involves socially-engaged artists Vahida Ramujkić, Tijana Cvetković, Danilo Prnjat, and engineer Chow Sing Tai. *minipogon* is a traveling, experimental recycling plant that explores alternative methods to capitalist production, self-management, economic equality – and most importantly – the creation of new social relations. The team builds its own machines to compress, cast, or extrude recycled HDPE (#2) or PP (#5) plastics into new items such as boards, pots, bowls or more complex objects. *minipogon* produces these items through long-term, site-based workshops that train individuals in the production processes, while also creating a versatile and welcoming workspace for participants. *minipogon*-created objects are

then sold by the group to earn money for their labor. From October 2018 until December 2019, *minipogon*'s central location was at the Krnjača refugee camp on the outskirts of Belgrade. The refugee camp houses migrants and refugees who fled places such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey in an attempt to make it to Western Europe. *minipogon* developed a series of workshops specifically for the people living at the camp. The space allotted for *minipogon*'s work created a dynamic environment for individuals to make wares from recycled plastics, language classes, and a place for conversation over coffee or tea. The bowl presented here was made at the Krnjača refugee camp, and the documentary shows *minipogon*'s process within the camp and other locations.

Vahida Ramujkić develops methodologies for collective work by focusing on social issues and the social function of art. Her time is divided between projects such as the Rotorrr collective, 'Disputed Histories,' and 'Documentary Embroidery' in collaboration with Aviv Kruglanski. She completed her Ph.D. in 2018 at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade, and commits her time to other collective initiatives such as No Name Kitchen, ReEX, and Irrational.org.
www.irational.org/vahida



Documentary Embroidery Office
Kaludjerica from A to Ш, 2010
Embroidered tapestry, 6' x 6'

The Documentary Embroidery Office (DEO), led by socially-engaged artists Vahida Ramujkić and Aviv Kruglanski, was located in the Belgrade suburb of Kaludjerica. Ramujkić and Kruglanski selected this neighborhood because it lacked cultural facilities, places to shop, and other social infrastructures. The team organized embroidery workshops in front of the neighborhood's local administration building. Over a 10 – 15 day period, the DEO became a place for people to learn embroidery, share stories, and collectively make a tapestry that represented their neighborhood by using the Cyrillic alphabet as a framework. Documentary embroidery is

a technique that has been used by Ramujkić and Kruglanski as a manner for documenting the social realities of a place by the people who live there. Moreover, the technique encourages social bonding between participants. Both artists have facilitated this practice throughout the Balkans, Central and Western Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East.



Vahida Ramujkić
***Disputed Histories*, 2006 – ongoing**
Eight 8 ½” x 11” booklets;
puzzle of Yugoslavia

Disputed Histories is a project that collects history textbooks from countries that were once part of the former Yugoslavia. After the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, different versions of history textbooks were published in the former republics. These revised textbooks propagated divisions, national identities, and other narratives that continue to prolong ethnic conflicts through misguided interpretations of history; a stark contrast to the once shared history under the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Ramujkić collects these history textbooks and leads public workshops comparing

and analyzing information found within the texts. From there, attendees become part of a collective experience that makes new history booklets based on the findings in the workshops, therefore questioning: who controls official versions of history, and in whose name are educational textbooks created? Textbooks make the claim that its contents are written by history experts; however, Ramujkić's booklets, created in a post-Yugoslav space, confirms the potential for untapped community knowledge. The booklets articulate lived events from non-expert, non-authoritarian, and noninstitutionalized points of view. The booklets contain multilingual texts in Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, English, German, Romanian, and Serbian. The prompt for each workshop centers on the depiction of the former Yugoslavia and its people in different contexts. The puzzle map of Yugoslavia was used as a teaching tool during the workshops.



Gordana Žikić *Red Deer Altar*, 2018
Mixed media,
Sizes vary

Red Deer Altar consists of arranged objects made of materials such as human hair, animal fur, copper wire, and beads. The installation

integrates bright aquamarine feathers, rich red muffs, pink Himalayan stone salt, orange crescent felt, and hints of turquoise and iron oxide; *papier-mâché* wings and deer lay near the perimeter of the pedestal. The objects' colors and textures enliven the senses such as sight and touch, and evoke different sensations of lightness, heft, softness, prickliness, and scratchiness. The white space behind the composition unifies the objects and creates a rhythmic flow that emphasizes the interrelated parts throughout the entire work and not individual artifacts. *Red Deer Altar* intends to create an ambient space that transports the viewer to another more sensorial reality outside of the day-to-day. The items in *Red Deer Altar* were either made or collected by artist Gordana Žikić. Žikić reworks these objects and small sculptures based on the concepts of Shamanism and Neo-Shamanism. Objects, even everyday ones, have the ability to be redefined and used toward otherworldly explorations that contradict societal expectations.

Gordana Žikić is a visual artist and the founder of Belgrade Artist in Residence. Born in Belgrade, she is a shamanic artist who studies and incorporates traditions and innovations in Shamanism and Neo-Shamanism. Žikić completed her doctorate in 2018 at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She is a member of the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia (ULUS) and exhibits nationally and internationally. <https://gordanazikic.wordpress.com/>



Šejma Fere

***Toothbrushes*, 2005 – 2020**

Twenty-five digital prints on wood planks, 3.1” x 17.7”

The chaotic feeling evoked in *Order of things (Coffee two)* intensifies in Fere’s *Toothbrushes*. Her long-standing series of digital collages are united by the continued use of toothbrush packaging. The “toothbrushes” are a cultural mash-up of multilingual texts, images of celebrities, and other pictorial elements. Each “toothbrush” is its own universe contained and stabilized within the boundaries of its wooden plank, neatly nestled among the other “toothbrushes.” For Fere, the dissemination of information is accelerated in our era of globalization. It evokes feelings of congestion, confusion, and a lost sense

of time, making the onslaught of imagery seem abstract. However, this abstraction is powerful. According to the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995) and Félix Guattari (1930 – 1992), the act of assembling images, for example, can be used as a provisional tool to relate items that would otherwise not be related. It disrupts assumptions about what kind of people, things, or ideas can be put together, therefore upending hierarchy and concepts of space – in essence, reterritorializing personal and public boundaries.



Simonida Rajčević
Strange Waves 11, 2016
Oil on linen, 62.9" x 79.9"

This large-scale painting is part of a series titled *Strange Waves*. *Strange Waves*' narrative follows a lonesome male figure that listlessly exists in an unusual and isolated environment. His body lays, floats, swims, or sits (as seen here) in an abstract landscape with ease, and yet at the same time, he never seems to fully integrate with his surroundings. The painterly and eye-catching strokes of color in this work highlight the alienation of the figure, but also disorient the viewer. The colors give the impression that this painting's "world" is inviting and habitable, until the viewer realizes that there is something amiss. Simonida Rajčević's work inspects the social environments of human beings and the difficulty in navigating them in this time of mass media culture, tense political climates, and technological advancements. Like the loinclothed figure in this painting, a person may choose passivity to disengage with the world around them in an attempt to protect the physical body, and/or the self, from a feeling of helplessness. There is no final outcome for the figure represented in *Strange Waves*. He remains trapped in the narrative's cycle, barely active and mostly atrophied. Rajčević permits doubt and uncertainty to flourish, and provokes questions instead of concrete answers, while also emphasizing that respite of any kind is temporary.

Simonida Rajčević finished her Ph.D. in art at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade in 2015. She obtained a DAAD stipend to do her postgraduate studies in Berlin, Germany. Since 2000, she has been working as an associate professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. From 2008 until 2010 she worked as a guest associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade. Rajčević has exhibited her work in solo and group shows, both in Serbia and abroad. <https://simonidasimonida.com/>



Tijana Radenković

***Perfect Time*, 2017**

Seven photographs on paper, 19.6" x 19.6"

Tijana Radenković's practice examines the relationships between art, archives, and science. Within these constructs, Radenković pays close attention to the notion of the body – whether that is a human body, other life-forms, or an object. She investigates how a living or non-living body is interpreted, manipulated, and consumed within contemporary capitalist societies. *Perfect Time* explores this concept of the body with plants, fruits, and vegetables. The seven, richly-colored square photographs mimic an Instagram account's grid-like format. Unlike the social media platform's carefully crafted images of toothsome foodstuffs and lavish floral arrangements, *Perfect Time* snapshots the decomposition of organic matter. Here, the flowers are droopy and dry; fruits and vegetables are no longer shiny, firm, or succulent. Radenković's work questions today's imposed standards on the body in regard to beauty and usefulness, especially when bodies (of any kind) can no longer maintain attractiveness and desirability as they age. The irony of decay is that it denies the ultimate goal of capitalism which is consumption; decay requires time and waiting – the rate of present-day

consumption does not.

Tijana Radenković received her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade, and she completed her Ph.D. in 2021. Her work examines the identity, problem, function, and perception of the human body, beauty, and ideals. Using the methods of collecting, archiving, and bacteria sampling, Radenković deals with the issues of the stability of things and organisms in personal space, but also the space that individuals share with others, questioning borders on the micro and macro levels.
<https://cargocollective.com/tijanaradenkovic>



Milica Ružičić
Annual, 2004
Eleven digitally
altered photographs,
11.8” x 15.7”

Milica Ružičić’s work ranges from photography and sculpture, to video, painting, and drawing.

She rejects cultivating a signature artistic style which allows her to remain curious and fulfill her own creative vision. Ružičić’s choice of medium directly correlates to the concepts in her work. Prevalent themes in her oeuvre address nationalism, alienation, eroticism, propaganda, politics, and social values. *Annual* tackles identity and memory in Ružičić’s series of classroom photographs. She superimposes her own face onto those of her classmates and teachers from kindergarten to high school. The repetition of Ružičić’s face questions social environments and how people perceive others through subjective views. She argues that individuals leave traces of themselves on others (and vice versa) through constant interaction. Ružičić wonders if a person’s identity is no more than the manifestation of millions of interpersonal interactions, thus suggesting that an individual’s true identity may be nothing more than a void. However, Ružičić’s face attached to her peers’ bodies becomes dynamic. The face distorts and appears alien-like in some places, while in others, it elicits joy or morphs into a unique expression. These variations suggest that an aging face, or self, projects on to others without objectivity. *Annual* is nearly placeless and timeless except for a few clues such as graffiti in Serbian, and the class photos taken on *Dan republike* (Day of the Republic), the biggest public holiday in socialist Yugoslavia.

Milica Ružičić is a multimedia conceptual artist. Ružičić received her Doctorate of Arts from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She has held thirteen solo exhibitions, and has participated in over 70 exhibitions worldwide, including but not limited to: Austria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Montenegro, Serbia, and the United States. She was an artist-in-residence at the International Studio & Curatorial Program in New York City, and was the recipient of the Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos Award in 2004. Ružičić currently teaches at the College of Fine and Applied Arts, Professional Studies in Belgrade. <https://milicaruzicic.wordpress.com/>



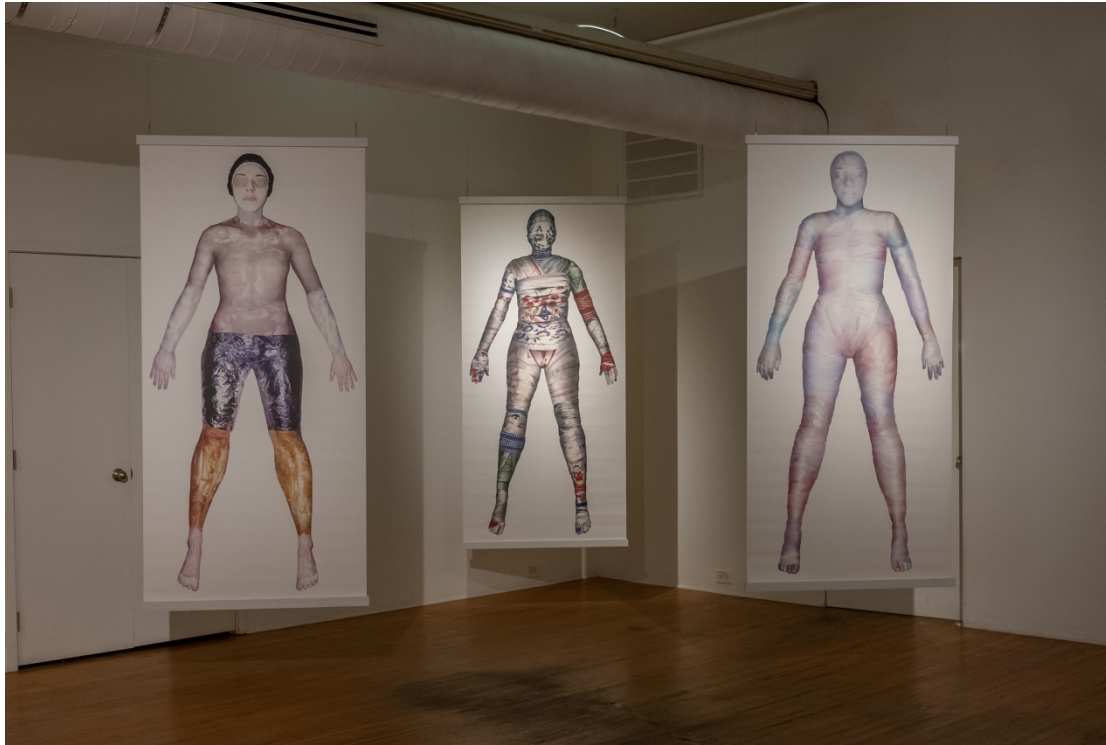
Anica Vučetić
***Creation II*, 2013/2017**
Video projection; loop 2' 27"

Nearly thirty years ago, Anica Vučetić made the career switch to video art from traditional kinetic sculpture; however, movement is still key in her work. Her videos focus on how the body moves through space and time. Vučetić controls all aspects of her videos from shooting footage, to editing, to screening. She uses her own body to explore durational movement that reflects possible states of being. *Creation II* is a slow and quiet video work to be savored. The figure in the center video lies still underwater and stares directly at the viewer. Her hands

cross to cover her breasts. At times it's unclear if the figure breathes, until there's a moment when she sinks deeper into the water and struggles, finally becoming calm, and again looking toward the viewer. In contrast, the bodies in the flanking videos roll effortlessly in the water. The movement is freeing, unlike the figure in the center image that seems unable to move, suppressed by the weight of the water. There's no beginning or end to these scenes, nor is there any sense of space. Without time, the figure eternally exists and reacts within this water being both dynamic and still.

Anica Vučetić was born in Belgrade. Her works consist of video installations and created video environments. Vučetić obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees in painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She has participated in numerous group exhibitions around the globe, and has had solo exhibitions in Europe and Latin America. Vučetić is also the recipient of several art awards. <https://anicavuc.wixsite.com/anicavucetic>

**The first edition of 'Creation II' is part of the Gallery of Contemporary Visual Arts' collection in Niš, Serbia.*



Maja Simić

On Dry Land 1, 2, 3, 2002/2020

Digital prints on canvas, 39.3" x 82.6"

On Dry Land 1, 2, 3 raise the unglorified female body. Printmaker Maja Simić showcases the banal, everyday rituals that dominate women's time. In the first print, the figure is streaked with leg wax, wrapped in foil, and saturated with hair removal and cold creams. The second print is mummified in dishtowels, while the third is a body suffocated by lightweight plastic bags used daily in Serbia. Whether maintaining beauty or household routines, or feeling the constant need to buy things, these acts become tedious when they are not associated with actual self-care or sustenance, but rather enacting expectations of what women should be

doing. These large female figures are immobile and are not actively participating. Like giant dolls, they are stuck in what they are "dressed" in, waiting for the moment when something might change. Much of Simić's work deals with the feelings of female ambivalence and the multiple identities women must enact as a mother, a professional, and partner. Simić looks to the subjects of the body and self-portraits as a way to practice confronting difficult aspects of the female self in the pursuit of greater self-awareness and personal development.

Maja Simić is a printmaker who has exhibited widely throughout Europe, China, and ex-Yugoslavia. Simić received her Ph.D. in printmaking from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She is the recipient of numerous awards for printmaking, and she currently teaches at the University of Novi Sad. <https://www.saatchiart.com/mayasimic>



Marina Marković
***To please, serve, and obey*, 2020**
Three ink drawings on paper,
27" x 118"

To please, serve, and obey interweaves contradictory ideas in regard to the female body. The female figures in this work are highly sexualized and bound, drawing attention to their protruding breasts, stomachs, and genitals. Fleishy body parts pile in heaps, and the figures are connected to each other by strings, or hanged as dismembered torsos. And yet, even in this state of pastel-colored sadomasochism, the female figures maintain a range of expressions: anger, defiance, fear, curiosity, sadness, and enjoyment. There is no consensus in this scene. Marina Marković attempts to deconstruct notions that are associated with the female body such as pain, emotion, sexuality,

dis/comfort, and un/acceptance, in addition to the difficulty of ascertaining the boundary between coercion and freedom. Marković considers these topics through the lens of corporeality. Corporeality is the notion that bodies are made of flesh, but are also shaped by ideas, which are constructed through techniques, norms, and experiences. Ideas about the body and the physical material of given bodies merge in corporeality's discourse. Corporeality provides a path for Marković to explore the possibilities of *jouissance* (the word refers to both enjoyment and sexual pleasure) in the life of a woman, however, Marković consistently reminds the viewer that a woman's fulfillment is never free of socio-political mechanisms that exert control, restriction, rejection, punishment, and alienation.

Marina Marković earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in new media art. Marković has exhibited in Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Serbia, and the United States. She was an artist-in-residence at the International Studio & Curatorial Program in New York City, Triangulation in Tirana, Albania and Q21 - MuseumsQuartier in Vienna. Marković was a recipient of the Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos Award in 2011 and the Vladimir Veličković drawing award in 2021.
<http://marinamarkovic.com/>



Bojana S. Knežević

A Queen of Montenegro (Self-portrait), 2018/2020

Digital print on canvas, 48” x 60”

As the only daughter of a Montenegrin father, artist Bojana S. Knežević confronts her Montenegrin origins and heritage from a feminist perspective in the long-term, multimedia and performance project *A Queen of Montenegro*. Montenegro is a small country in Southeastern Europe that was once part of the former Yugoslavia, and later part of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006, Montenegro declared independence and became a new Balkan state. Men are favored in the patriarchal society of Montenegro while women suffer discrimination in various forms, from exclusion on family trees, to sex-selective abortions that reduce the number of newly-born girls. In an attempt to use art as creative resistance to Montenegrin misogyny, Knežević subverts Montenegrin female identity by inserting herself into spaces traditionally dominated by men. She sits in the *stolovača*, a wooden three-legged chair that resembles a throne and is reserved for the male heads of household and male visitors. In her hands she holds a *gusle*, the national instrument of Montenegro and a common instrument throughout the Balkans; it is usually only played by men. Knežević is dressed in her family tree which displays the uninterrupted history of patrilineal succession. The sound of Knežević playing the *gusle* incorrectly can be

heard while looking at this work. Scan the QR code to listen to a pop-like song Knežević composed that further explores her family history and accompanies this work. Once the code is scanned, the lyrics to the song are also available (audio pieces are available in the gallery).

Bojana S. Knežević is a multimedia artist, performer, and facilitator of participatory art projects; she defines herself as a performer-recycler. Knežević holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in new media arts from the Department of Fine Arts, Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, Serbia. She completed her doctoral degree (Interdisciplinary doctoral art studies - Digital Art), from the University of Arts in Belgrade. She is the co-founder of FEMKANJE, a radio show/podcast, art and media project dedicated to contemporary art, culture, and feminism in Europe. <https://bojanasknezevic.com/>