

A TRIPTYCH OF SUNKEN BRIDGES

The artists use a new media-perceptual audio-visual-linguistic pontoon, synthesising various traumatised spaces, both geographic and profound, internal ones

Neva Lukić and Sara Rajaei

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Ivan Paić

This media triptych, the work of authors Sara Rajaei (1976) and Neva Lukić (1982) – active in both the Netherlands and Croatia – was held in November of 2017 at *Galerija 90-60-90 Pogon Jedinstvo*, Zagreb. This exhibition opens a series of artistic solutions, describing timeless causal and fundamental global shifts such as war conflicts, refugees, exile, semi-visible and obvious brutality – perpetuated by the powerful elite – and the desperation of the individual faced with the sinister historical force of the movement of beings and the rearrangement of space. This media-text-visual research, consisting of active, reductive works composed of three simultaneous projections submerged in a dark space, results in the viewer becoming both mentally and physically trapped. The hypnotic reality of the works, occasionally abstract and minimalist and veiled in symbolism, is founded on the slow passing of time, a rhythmically slow tempo of visuality that is synchronously, unassumingly, post-Satieesquely (ed. Erik Satie, French composer, 19th-20th century) and impressionistically accompanied by minimalist electronic music (Milan Gatarić, composer). The camera is nearly imperceptible, giving the works – except for their abstract passages – a high dose of documentary authenticity.

Sara Rajaei (video artist and film director) and Neva Lukić (art historian and writer whose texts trespass on other media) make a duet with an exceptional sensibility relying on 20th-century avant-garde tendencies, freed of the sentimentality and pathos that usually accompanies such themes. Taking into account that the passage of time is one of the key elements of video works, the selection of the gallery space was not coincidental, next to a bridge – in this case ironically bearing the name “Liberty” (Cro. *Most slobode*, “liberty bridge”) – alongside a river that flows, divides, and then connects spaces, mutely bearing witness to events near other, distant rivers.

Motel in the Well (Rajaei / Lukić, 2016) is the title of a work, also a motel / habitat, physically located along the old highway to the coast – symbolically, towards freedom. It is a poetic portrayal of the plight of refugees, the innocence of children’s play and memories, the search for the new, forced, identity of adults, attained after the fact. Families in exile, exiles whom the owner of the motel offers temporary shelter and transition on the way towards western geography, the *geography of so-called salvation* and causal tragedy. As such, it does not matter where the refugees come from and which religion they belong to, but these are – unfortunately – causal, crucial, inevitable, and conflicting categories in the dead-end that is southeastern Europe. Play with time is dominant in the film. Thematically, the work is tied to the past, while a fragile future can be sensed in the present, albeit unsurely. The video work puts the question of the individual powerlessness to oppose a merciless, deviant mind. The destructive, genocidal activity of the Non-Mind is the cause of epic tragedy, and its

consequent effects, eternal escape and exile, are apparent in the work. The sequence in the forest beside the motel called *Šuma (Forest)* is a film essay of a high category, interwoven with the artistic performance of mute people placed in a circle, staring into a magic mirror in the middle before them, alluding that they might see the future in the mirror. We can come upon a very similar process in the works of eminent American 1940's avant-garde artist Maya Deren.

A Composition in Blue, Red and Other Colours (author: Rajaei, associate: Lukić, 2017), a video piece, is compositionally placed upon the visual and aesthetic postulates of abstraction, passing over into the field of drama through its slow rhythm. The female narrator contributes to the intense associations of what the camera intentionally does not reveal, opposing basic, primary colours – Kleinesque blue, Rothkoesque red, and Van Gogheseque yellow.

The piece suggests there is no personal history (“The one biting her lip”), and that the only valid history is dictated by the majority's collective, atrophied, and aggressive awareness. The blue-red and then yellow composition, besides confronting two dominant colours in the first part of the video – the blue of the eternal search for peace, ethereal and spiritual, with aggressive, passionate, energetic red – is accompanied by the narrative revelation of sensitivity, myth, the unlucky fates of innocent faces, repression, and nothingness. The piece is composed in a similar way and is comparable to the video creations of highly esteemed American multimedia artist Bill Viola (one of his main characteristics is that the viewer can almost physically perceive the flow of time, an especially accentuated and immanent element, in his film and video experiment).

The video pieces refer to a river, and to transience in general. This can especially be seen in a site-specific work, *The Slightest Trace of Something* (Rajaei/Lukić, 2017), a nearly static scene within which the plot is only indicated through minimalist motion, the disappearance of some human form in the distance. It is also simultaneously a reflective link between the other two pieces, in which the search for eternity or the eternal search for water, the original element of life, can be discerned. The video pieces, leaving a large, unrecognised space behind them, are impregnated with foundational, ontological assumptions and questions, but with simple, human ones as well.

In a very subtle, enigmatic way, the video pieces attempt to explain the phenomena of hope and desperation, especially that of anonymous fates, associatively portraying what we have neither seen nor experienced. Rivers of hope, unreachable shores, sinking bridges collapsing into the bottom of the history of various worlds, soundlessly pulsing in our mental-associative spectrum. We are faced with the fact that we cannot see these bridges until the dried bottom of the river offers us the possibility... And only then can we begin to attempt to reconstruct the bridges in order to renew the possibility of communication and a potential future. History is somehow smirking at us mysteriously through these pieces, as if it has its own intentions in which there is no room for the communication of humaneness, which is – mildly put – brought into question.

Sara Rajaei and Neva Lukić are becoming artists who rise above temporal, geographical, and historical distances; their expressive sphere moves borders, making their work an expansion of unusual poetry, recollection, memories, traumas, myths, and individual Sisyphean journeys. When we add the very subtly composed music, tones, and sounds authored by Milan Gatarić, we are provided with insight into the delicacy and high expressive perception

of the work of these artists. The idea of a media-based, modern artistic triptych impinges on the equivalent past of the traditional triptych, creating and re-actualising historical events. Rajaei and Lukić, focused on individual history, come into contact with various geographic and historical spaces, composing a triptych that they tie to one of the first artistic media – in this case, oral literature, a structured, lyrical poetics of audio-visual minutiae, an empathy that is uncommon today, founded in exceptional knowledge and the creative use of widespread media.

The artists use a new media-perceptual audio-visual-linguistic pontoon, synthesising various traumatised spaces, both geographic and profound, internal ones caused by vulnerable external events, forming a global poetics of displacement, distorted, consciously constructed realities. Realities in which a faceless author squeezes and rips layers of normalcy, balanced sociality, rationality, and emotiveness out of individuals, casting them to the margins of history.

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