

about the artists:

Maja BAJEVIĆ

Born 1967, in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
Lives and works in Paris and Sarajevo.

Igor GRUBIĆ

Born 1969, in Zagreb, Croatia.
Lives and works in Zagreb.

Aydan MURTEZAOĞLU

Born in 1961, in Istanbul, Turkey.
Lives and works in Istanbul.

Adrian PACI

Born in 1969 in Shkodër, Albania.
Lives and works in Milan.

curated by:

Što, kako i za koga / What, How & for Whom|WHW
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about the curators:

WHW is a Zagreb-based independent curatorial team. Its members are **Ivet ĆURLIN**, **Ana DEVIĆ**, **Nataša ILIĆ** and **Sabina SABOLOVIĆ**. Since June 2003, **WHW** has been running a city-owned gallery ■●▼▲ in Zagreb.

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the quote:

"for sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
divides one thing entire to many objects;
like perspectives, which rightly gaz'd upon
show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry
distinguish form: so your sweet majesty,
looking awry upon your lord's departure,
finds shapes of grief more than himself to wail;
which, look'd on as it is, is nought but shadows
of what it is not."

[Shakespeare, Richard II, II/1]

what:

Looking Awry*

presents works that are invested in the potential of repetition, re-actualization, re-staging and re-enactment of certain

ordeals, which in order to be comprehended or resolved, need a new, "awry" look, or a look "with sober eyes" as Marx called it.

These works embody and materialize excessive disturbances which desire brings into objective reality and in that sense they are not realistic, but point to the Real, which cannot be symbolized. In the artists' analysis, the point is not to deconstruct the fascinating presence of images, but to recognize the unbearable presence of the Real, revealed when we "look awry" at the picture. In that sense the title of the exhibition functions also as the key to read the works and as an instruction for the viewer.

the footnote:

* The title has been taken from the book by **Slavoj Žižek** in which he analyzes cinema from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, *Looking Awry - An introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture* [October, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1992].

when:

11/12-12/20/03

who:

Maja BAJEVIĆ

Igor GRUBIĆ

Aydan MURTEZAOĞLU

Adrian PACI

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[01]

[02]

Croatian artist **Igor GRUBIĆ**'s work, *Velvet Underground*, presents photographs of people behind prison bars and costumed as children's stuffed toys along with a phrase that in legal terms informs us about the crime and punishment of a particular inmate. There is also an unedited record of childhood memories directly from an inmate. The placement of the texts and images suggests that these are the autobiographical notes of the costumed inmates. The charming illiteracy, grammatical and logical ineptness [which borders on inarticulateness] expresses an honesty which indicates that the costumed bodies must be the inmates. However, the masked inmate is actually the artist himself. The person in the stuffed toy costume, and his telling of his childhood memories, do not suggest a liberal redemption of a crime that originates in childhood traumas. This prevents the viewer from directly participating in nostalgia for the lost object or forming a self-complacent realization that even criminals were once children and are also someone's child. The work expresses an uncanny combination of

pic 1.



Igor GRUBIĆ | *Velvet Underground* | digital prints | 2002

[03]

pict 2.



Aydan MURTEZAOĞLU | Untitled | photograph | 1999

nostalgia for the lost object and childhood, for the naive, non-corrupted perspective of a child — a subject who can still experience immediate enjoyment — and the anxiety that we feel at the limits of freedom imposed by prison, captivity, and punishment. The immediacy of this identification is frustrated by the realization that it is not about the opposition between prison and freedom/childhood, or the nostalgia for the lost valley of childhood, but about the unpleasant knowledge that we are separated by an irredeemable gap from the naive gaze of the other, of the subject who can still immediately enjoy despite the tragedy of the human condition, and that the identification of the viewer with the object of the picture is out of the question. The artist as a prisoner communicates his own trauma of prison and his frustration by the regime of punishment, all the while appropriating other people's stories, behind which he stays hidden.

Turkish artist **Aydan MURTEZAOĞLU**'s photograph (above) shows the artist from the back, sitting on a bench on the bank of Bosphorus and facing the cityscape of Istanbul, which is slanted left. In another work in the exhibition, the artist again turns her back to us while standing on a roof overlooking the city. She holds on to an antenna and bends towards the right while trying to keep her balance against the strong wind. The slanted city seemingly refers to the trauma of the city's 1999

Aydan PACI | Vajtojca | video | 2002



pict 3.

[04]

earthquake and of the regime used to cope with the tremors of the renovation process. The angles in the tilted image invoke typical political leanings of left and right. Again, the artist herself is the protagonist, but while Grubić hides behind a mask, Murtezaoglu turns her back on us. The viewer's gaze is possible only over her shoulder. We cannot assume her perspective, but only decode a slanted view. Her back guards the city, and the artist is like a sphinx, not only an outside viewer but also a participant in the social situation. In a way similar to Grubić, who speaks about his own status, assuming the prison as the location and another person's childhood as his starting point, Murtezaoglu also speaks about the status of artists in Turkish society, in which she intervenes by her modest gesture of manipulation performed in *Photoshop*[®].

Adrian PACI, an Albanian artist who has been living in Milan for years, deals with the circumstances of our limited perception in his work, and with the shortages and impossibilities of experiencing important aspects of everyday reality. In his video *Vajtojca*, the artist stages his own death. The video depicts the ritual of mourning a deceased person, customarily performed by professional wailers in Albania. The mesmerizing singing of a wailer is highly suggestive, and there are moments when it seems that the singing creates an experience of the other side, but in fact since the wailers are hired professionals, the performance is not authentic. The enchanting quality of the voices delays the realization that the corpse on the altar is breathing, and when he stands up, we feel relieved for a

[05]

moment, although we are aware of the fact that the death is staged. The living corpse — the artist himself — is a metaphor of several identities — of artist, dissident and father. It is a minimal intervention into reality that fails in its efforts to make known the ultimate secret of death, and opens itself to the domain of social interaction and the traumatic permissiveness of multiple identities.

The work of **Maja BAJEVIĆ** is related to her personal biography and the political and social circumstances in Yugoslavia during the 1990s. The dissident position of Bajević, who has been living in Paris since the early 1990s, exists as a result of her connections to Sarajevo and her critical distance to the

pict 4.



Maja BAJEVIĆ | Back in Black | video installation | 2003

city and to the new dominant ideology, as well as to the political and national condition after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her work *Back in Black* consists of a double projection of a video taken in the nostalgic atmosphere of a café decorated by various portraits of Josip Broz Tito, the legendary president of Socialist, non-aligned Yugoslavia, a country in which the national, gender and class questions were supposedly solved once and forever. As on a stage, the masked persons tell dark, cruel and cynical jokes about wartime Sarajevo. The socks on their faces initially recall an armed and masked robber from the early ages of terrorism, when faces were still hidden, but the function of the mask is not to hide the face, but to make it recognizable — to make it identical and replaceable — and to prevent easy and naive identification. This is

[06]

also the function of the jokes: their dark humor eludes understanding, and they do not suggest that humor is the vital energy that triumphs over all the difficulties, nor does it create a distance from reality; humor denotes the very Real that cannot be symbolized. The cruelty of jokes is the only truth, the unutterable, the trauma that is not being discussed, and post-war Sarajevo acknowledges it in the form of jokes.

All the works function in a socially determined context: the dissident position of Paci and the symbolic death of the exiled, the war from the inside and outside, the social tissue of urbanity and the position of Murtezaoglu [who does not show her face] as woman and artist, and in the work of Grubić the prison as an

impossible and dreaded place for providing justice. The slanted gaze also refers to the situation in countries in transition, which is always ambiguous and equally oriented to renewing the golden history [nostalgia for the security of the Socialist age] as to the projections of a golden future [of real capitalism] in which everybody will have equal opportunities — in these countries normalization should guarantee the security of the future, as well as it guarantees the oppression of the *status quo*. The past and the future are a burden for the present, the present in which it is possible only to re-enact what was before, hoping that minimal shifts in this process will open a new perspective, pregnant with changes. ●

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