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Nonsens

Ob projektih Mladena Stropnika odpovejo ustaljeni mehanizmi razumevanja umetniškega dela, interpretacijski kanoni in definicije umetnosti, predvsem pa umetnostni slovar priljubljenih ključnih besed. Stropnik ustvarja zelo fragmentarno, na videz skopo in precej enigmatično. Svoje misli podaja ob odsotnosti vsega, kar je zanj odvečno. Podobe loči od nebistvenega in okoli njih pušča veliko nedorečenih praznin. V svoji umetniški drži tudi briše ločnice med posameznimi dejanji, dogodki, dejstvi svojega vsakdana, bodisi da gre za procese ustvarjanja grafike, risbe, kolaža, objektov, slike, videa, izvajanja performansa ali za procese denimo kuhanja, hoje, poslušanja glasbe, meditacije, menjave umetniških del, počitka, branja, druženja, pospravljanja, zabave ali obedovanja. Zanj je to en svet, v katerem je vsaka dejavnost enako resnična in stvarna, tudi spanje in sanje, nezavedno in imaginarno.

V preteklih desetletjih se je Stropnikov umetniški svet razvijal in prepletel v pomenske sklope, ki se danes gibljejo v razponu, kakršnemu sledi tudi postavitve v Mestni galeriji – vse od tem **namišljenih svetov, spolnosti, tranzicije, smrti, sprostitve, (ne)vidnega dela, (ne)dokončanosti pa do vprašanj polnega življenja in tranzicije**. Tako jih v tem obsegu lahko prvič vidimo kot celoto na enem mestu. Postavitev preči pomenska območja onkraj logičnega, območja čudnega, tujega, drugačnega, ki jih poganja Stropnikova igra s podobo in smislom, besedami, fantazijo. Ta dajejo občutek, kot bi skozi »Aličino ogledalo« prestopali ali se skozi »zajčjo luknjo« spuščali v svet nonsensnega¹, nesmiselnega, in to skušamo preliti

tudi v to knjigo. Knjigo v prvem delu tvori vizualni del, ki ga razlaga to besedilo in globlje interpretira besedilo Vladimirja Vidmarja, v drugem delu pa jo sklene dokumentarni del Stropnikovega ustvarjanja.

Trivialni podatki

Svet Mladena Stropnika je poln ironije, humorja, a tudi poetike, miline in romantike, njegov svet je igriv in hkrati razmišljujoč ter poln nasprotij in neobičajnih pogledov na absurd in banalno. Že če samo začnemo pri njegovem odnosu do biografskih podatkov, kronologij, seznamov razstav, vidimo, da mu ti ne pomenijo veliko, čeprav so sicer referenčni in še zlasti pritičejo objavam ob projektih v javnem umetniškem sistemu. Zanj so malenkostni in obstranski, skoraj trivialni. Raje kot s temi podatki se poistoveti s seznami glasbe, ki jo posluša, in knjig, ki jih bere.² Tudi življenje in ustvarjanje imata zanj pomene druge kakor običajno; kar je za večino trivialno, je zanj pogosto pomembno in nasprotno. Pri tem ne gre za pozo ali namerno nasprotovanje večini, ampak le za dosledno držo, ki ostaja pozorna na pojave, ki so pomembni predvsem zanj osebno in so daleč od pričakovanj množice. Stropnikova umetnost zato ne le s postavitvijo v galeriji, ampak tudi v tej knjigi nomenoma v svojem jedru obide pričakovano kronološko ali drugo podatkovno logiko. Tako je na tem mestu le delno nakazan referenčni okvir, ki je res bistven tako

Alice: The Child's Part, Yale French Studies, št. 43, Yale University Press, 1969, str. 128–144; Barbara Simoniti, *Nonsens*, Karantanija, Ljubljana, 1997.

2 Knjige: Milan Kleč, Esad Babačič (*Balkonci*), Andrew Holecek (*The Power and the Pain, Dreams of Light*), Simon Hanselmann (*Crisiszone*). Glasba: Daughters, Mad Season, Termina Sleep, Deerhoof, Lightning Bolt, Res Nullius.

1 Več o tem glej: Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, 1871; Jacqueline Flescher, *The Language of Nonsense in*

za Stropnika kot za gledalca/bralca za razumevanje umetnikovega dela in projekta v Mestni galeriji.

Mladen Stropnik v slovenskem in mednarodnem prostoru deluje od leta 2001 in se je uveljavil kot (post)konceptualni umetnik, ki deluje na presečišču različnih medijev. V Mestni galeriji Ljubljana je prvič celostno predstavljen njegov bogati dolgoletni ustvarjalni opus. Postavitev povzema Stropnikovo preteklo delo in hkrati zajema njegovo najnovejše ustvarjanje, zasnovano posebej za razstavo. Je hkrati tudi sinteza prejšnjih razstav in njihovih izhodiščnih vsebinskih stebrov: (ne)vidno delo, spolnost, repeticija. Sicer pa postavitev in knjiga poudarjata predvsem ključne točke razvoja njegove umetnosti, katere skupne teme so človek, njegove zaznave, odnosi. Zanima ga raziskovanje človekovega čustvovanja, psihičnih stanj, še posebej tistih, ki se v človeku dogajajo na meji med njegovo budnostjo in sanjami. V svojem delu črpa iz vsakdana in na videz banalnih dogodkov. Preizprašuje razumevanje marginalnega in meje med umetniškim ustvarjanjem in lastnim življenjem ter kaj je v umetnosti (ne)pričakovano. Njegova naracija je zelo minimalistična, a duhovita in polna miselnih zank. Pomembna sestavina njegovih umetniških projektov – od objektov, grafik, risb do instalacij, slik, performansov, videa, NFT-ja – so naslovi, njihova vsebina, pisava, oblika. Pomemben del postavitve v Mestni galeriji tvorijo avtorjevi tedenski performansi in dela gostujočih umetnikov, s katerimi avtor posega v lastno delo. Stropnik jih je povabil k sodelovanju, saj z njimi tudi sicer sodeluje in hkrati sestavljajo glavnino njegovega referenčnega okvirja.

Viktor, Vadim, Alice in Scott

Vključevanje drugih umetnikov in njihovih del v lastno ustvarjanje je avtorjeva ustaljena umetniška praksa. Drugega umetnostnega konteksta pri Stropniku zato ne bomo posebej razčlenjevali in bomo ostali pri bistvu, saj avtor tako že sam sebe samokontekstualizira. Z izbiro sodelujočih avtorjev na njegovi razstavi, ki niti ni tako nov model za sodobno samostojno razstavo, odkrito pokaže veliko mero spoštovanja do njih. Izbor ne preseneča, saj je pri vseh tako kot pri Stropniku zaznati posebno kombinacijo ustvarjanja vtisa napetosti, nelagodja, napačnosti, nemogočega, igrivega, čudovito vsakdanjega, zloveščega, neizrečenega, absurdnega, humornega – tudi prisotne odsotnosti, ki jo lahko opišemo tudi kot poskus umetnikov, kako podati ali

neubesedljivo misel ali nekaj, kar je na čuden način hkrati nedotakljivo, pa vendar fizično občuteno oziroma sublimno³. Tu so Vadim Fiškin, čigar delo lahko označimo kot metafizično utelešenje, ki izraža sposobnost ustvarjanja nenavadnega in celo ezoteričnega občutka ali stanja⁴; Viktor Bernik, ki duhovito pokaže, kako krhka in globoko podvržena pravilom je umetnostna izkušnja⁵; Alice Könitz, umetnica nedokončanega⁶; in Scott Lawrence ter njegova jukstapozicija smrti in igrivosti, kjer prav tisto, kar je odsotno, bolj kot dobesečna in neposredna predstavitev povzroči čustven udarec⁷.

Pri vseh gre za čudno moč del, ki nas preplavi z nerazložljivimi občutki, zlasti ob stiku z robom racionalnega in predstavnostnega, nekje na meji prisotne odsotnosti ali polne praznine. Ob vsem tem znova pomislimo na izraz sublimno⁸. Ob tem se spomnimo denimo nemškega romantičnega slikarja Casparja Davida Friedricha iz 19. stoletja ali reminiscenc na prelomne umetnostnozgodovinske ali bolj avantgardne umetniške pojave iz začetka 20. stoletja, zlasti suprematističnih in pozneje spacialističnih, kleinovskih ali rothkovskih praznin⁹. Še pozneje in v 21. stoletju jih kot sublimne raziskujejo James Turrell pa denimo Olafur Eliasson, Anish Kapoor, Mirosław Balka¹⁰, tudi Luc Tuymans ali pa zlasti Roman Ondák (More Silent Than Ever, 2006), Ceal Floyer (Garbage Bag, 2009), Gabriel Orozco (Empty Shoe Box, 1993). Lahko govorimo tudi o tako imenovani sublimni praznini¹¹, ki je pri Stropniku še posebej izrazita,

- 3 Kot je sublimno opisal James Turrell glej: James Turrell, *Statement in Mapping Spaces*, Peter Blum Editions, New York, 1987. Glej tudi: *Theories and documents of contemporary art*, ur. Kristine Stiles in Peter Selz, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996.
- 4 *Vadim Fishkin: Of Angels and Dreamers, Machines and Metaphysics* in Eda Čufer, *Detonation of a Gaze v: Вадим Фишкин / Vadim Fishkin*, Soros Center of Contemporary Arts, Moscow & Kulturkontakt, ni datirano in paginirano.
- 5 Vladimir Vidmar za razstavo Mladena Stropnika v Mestni galeriji Ljubljana, 2024.
- 6 Andrew Berardini, *Pieced Together: Alice Könitz and Kim Fisher*, Mousse # 45, 2014; <http://alicekonitz.com/pages/andrew-berardini-pieced-together-alice-konitz-and-kim-fisher-mousse-45-2014/>
- 7 EC Flamming, *A rope, pulled*, Art Papers, <https://www.artpapers.org/a-rope>
- 8 Jean-François Lyotard, *Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime*, Artforum, april 1982, 20(8), str. 64–69.
- 9 Mark Levy, *The Void in Art*, Bramble Books, 2005.
- 10 Simon Morley, *Staring into the contemporary abyss: The contemporary sublime*, Tate Etc., issue 20, 2010.
- 11 Za primer glej razstavo *The Sublime Void: On the*

dotikajo pa se je tudi gostujoči umetniki. Stropnikova dela so nekje na robu nam dojemljivega, ta rob pa je tako ali tako raztegljiv in se skozi zgodovino širi kot vesolje, meje ne vidimo in ta neotipljivost in hkratna prisotnost je tista sila, ki verjetno pritegne našo pozornost in jo tišči čez rob razumljivega.

Na tem mestu se z grobim umetnostnim kontekstom in v skladu s Stropnikovim umetniškim konceptom in zasnovo razstave in knjige spuščamo naravnost k njegovim delom, predstavljenim v Mestni galerij. Skozi devet pomenskih sklopov bomo tako potovali tudi skozi bistvo Stropnikovega dela, in to brez podatkovnega aparata, slednjega smo zato strnili na koncu naše knjige.

Nerazložljiva navzočnost¹²

Stropnik v svojem delu ustvarja umetniške situacije, ki jih postavlja v nenavadne kontekste. Tako kot jih srečuje, najde in vidi v svojem življenju, jih v okviru svojih umetniških del tudi poustvarja, vizualizira ter postavlja na nepričakovane lokacije in v časovne dimenzije. Prostori so različni, galerija je le eden izmed njih, je predvsem veliko odprto polje (je neke vrste naš in Stropnikov oder, telovadnica, kinodvorana, dnevna soba, dvorišče, igrišče in še najmanj od vsega razstavišče), ki omogoča svobodno, sinhrono in sežeto dogajanje, hkrati pa ga skuša Stropnik tudi presegati. Njegove postavitve se izogibajo standardom že preživetega modela razstavljanja. Svoje delo tako, če le gre, premika za zavese, pomika skozi zidove, stiska pod strop ali ob stikala, gasilne aparate, za vrata, potiska v skladišča, prepušča v stranišča, pisarne, plošči v tla, vriva med artikle v trgovini, širi v časovne, performativne in virtualne akcije. Objekte, ki so pogosto akcijski pomenski ključ, ki omogočijo vse te dogodkovne situacije, Stropnik podaja fra-

- Memory of the Imagination, Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen, 1993, in razstavo *Nothing is Lost. Art and Matter in Transformation: A Leap into the Void concludes the Trilogy of Matter*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo, Bergamo, 2021.
- 12 Termin je vpeljal Igor Zabel v svoji istoimenski zgodbi, po kateri je naredil tudi razstavo. V njej govori o nerazložljivem, naključnem in efemernem v našem življenju in o pojmovanje stvari. Glej: Igor Zabel, *Nerazložljiva navzočnost* (Kustosova delovna soba); katalog razstave *Nerazložljiva navzočnost* (Kustosova delovna soba); Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1997, in Galerija sodobne umetnosti, Celje, 1998; Društvo Igor Zabel za teorijo in umetnost, Ljubljana, 2020.

gmentarno, necelo, vizualno segajo čez mejo možnega pogleda. Svetlobi, ki jih naseljuje, ukrivlja pot, spreminja pot v svetlobne objekte in nenavadne gibljive podobe s še bolj nenavadno naracijo. Ta pogosto ostaja tudi nedorečena. Marsikatero stanje je za naš običajni pogled in dožemanje čudno ali celo nenavadno in zato prebujajo veliko mero radovednosti.

Stropnikova dela komunicirajo z nami na tri načine in so lahko tudi personalizirana¹³. Že v prvem sklopu, ki se osredotoča na območje **namišljenih svetov**, nekatera delujejo tako, da jih aktivira že naš običajni pogled ali branje (*bluemamma*, *pokrijem se s kolesom*). Nekatera dela potrebujejo že bolj poseben zorni kot ali položaj telesa (*Bakija in Zofka*), pozorno je treba iskati nenavadne lokacije (*new*), nekatera od njih iščejo celo nov dom (*pages*, *0100*, *štunf na steni*). Nekatera pa so akcijska, potrebujejo neke vrste kvas, da se aktivirajo, prebuditi jih morajo naše gibanje, prijem, uporaba ali pa performerji. Navodila za uporabo niso potrebna, namig zanjo so že sama nenavadna oblika, položaj in taktilnost, pa razne odprtine, smer svetlobe, »odložen, naključen« položaj v prostoru. V tem smislu uporabni in personalizirani objekt opener nagovarja k dvigu palic s pokrovkami in k raziskovanju položajev lastnega telesa. Ko jih neuspešno skušamo uravnavati v zraku, nastopi trenutek spoznanja o premoči sile težnosti nad našo voljo. *bluemamma* je video Stropnikovega performansa pred trgovino, kjer množica mimoidočih komajda opazi naravnost absurdno stanje. V njej maska s kitaro posnema, kar dela figura, trenutek absurda obvisi v zraku. Kolaž *pokrijem se s kolesom* se osredotoča na občutek zavetja, ki ga Stropnik zana ob vožnji s kolesom kot varen ovoj ali oklep, podoben občutku, ko se med spanjem pokrije z rjuho. Ta fenomen podobe, percepcije, videnja Stropnik še potencira v delu *Bakija in Zofka*. Na stropu vrteče se ogledalo pospešuje sliko, v kateri pa kljub njenemu gibanju naša podoba ostaja statična. Ironično stanje preizprašuje našo (ne)sposobnost dejanskega razumevanje stvarnosti in njenega vidnega pola.

Dela *pages* v galerijski trgovini, serija knjižnih multiplov, sestavljenih iz platna kot platnic in papirja kot enega in edinega lista med njima, se poigravajo s pojmom knjige, gesto listanja in dejanjem branja ter asociirajo na frazo »požreti knjigo«, ki jo radi upo-

- 13 Umetnik jih lahko glede na povpraševanje prilagodi in proda tudi zainteresiranemu uporabniku, kar je nov avtorjev eksperimentalni model trgovanja in zbiranja umetnin.

rabimo, ko preberemo dobro knjigo, in relativizirajo branje kot izkušnjo daljšega procesa vloženega časa ter ga zvedejo na golo dejanje listanja ene strani. Medtem ko video new kaže repeticijo (ne)smisla – pojavljanja nepomenskega znaka za zaveso – pa se v *Shoe VI*, katerega avtor je Scott Lawrence, odložen čevelj ugreza v tla in premika pozornost v polje (ne)razložljivega, tudi (ne)zmožnega in (ne)vidnega. Skozi razstavo sledimo tudi posameznim intervencijam Viktorja Bernika iz serije *Učinek metulja*, značilnim za njegovo prakso, kjer izhaja iz konvencij in protokolov institucije umetnosti, ki udobja konvencij, za katerimi pogosto najdemo varno zavetje pred zahtevno nalogo soočenja z umetnostjo, sprevrne v premislek prav te dinamike¹⁴.

Ogledala

Stropnik nenehno preobrača našo ustaljeno predstavnost stvarnosti. Podaja jo kot zelo relativno kategorijo, prav tako preobrača simboliko zrcal in s tem ustvarja posebno obliko umetniškega realizma. Če velja, da je bil realizem v zgodovini »prikaz povprečnega, običajnega profanega«¹⁵, bi v tej kategoriji danes seveda našli tudi Stropnikova dela. Ta so lahko nič več kot to, kar vidimo, torej običajne stvari: betonski kvader s črno žico, ploskev s tančico, rdeč kvadrat in gibajoč se trikotnik. Pa vendar, po drugi strani je zanj prav tako hkrati prava stvarnost v ogledalih teh istih stvari, njihova projekcija. Če pa je stvarnost tisto nekaj, kar loči naše razumevanje od namišljene prihodnosti, torej na stvarno in izvedljivo ter na čisto fantazijsko in romantično, ki nikoli ne bo uresničljivo¹⁶, je pri Stropniku še drugače. Zanj namreč ni ločnic, so le prehodi iz enega v drugo stanje. Na to namigujejo tudi na videz banalni in nelogični naslovi, saj so sestavljeni iz besed s konkretnimi pomeni in hkrati nelogičnimi povezavami, ki izhajajo iz umetnikovih izkušenj.

Z ogledali, ki jih Stropnik pogosto umešča v svoje delo, tako vznikneta najmanj dva vizualna preobrata zrcalno nasprotujočih si resnic, a enako stvarnih: eden je viden na prvi pogled, od zunaj, in drugi je viden od znotraj; to je trenutek prehoda vidnega, otipljivega v domišljijско, netaktilno. Je pa tudi ko-

rak, ki se skozi to neskončno Aličino zrcalo prestopanj svetov pomnoži, in številna nerazložljiva stanja zaradi teh zrcal lahko eksponentno rastejo. Stropnik, kot sam pravi¹⁷, pojmuje naše očišče, od koder gledamo ali nekaj vidimo, kot očišče prometnika, ki opazuje vlake na železniški postaji: lahko jih opazuje, daje znake, ne more pa jih premikati. Nakazuje na psihično stanje občutka (ne)nadzora in opazovanja, a hkrati tudi na nezmožnosti fizičnega izvajanja tega sicer nadzorovanega ali opazovanega dejanja.

Stropnik občutek različnih oblik te nezmožnosti poda v petih sklopih, v katerih se ukvarja z zanj pomembnimi življenjskimi vprašanji **spolnosti, tranzicije, smrti, sprostitve in (ne)dela**. Prvo večplastno razdeluje v nizu del, med katerimi se nekatera zelo neposredno, druga pa zelo simbolno in le za Stropnika logično dotikajo te teme. Uvede jih kolaž *mongolian hill*, ustvarjen iz prosojne tkanine odvrženih ženskih nogavic. V njem se ukvarja s frustracijo zaradi lastne neizpolnjene želje obiskati deželo, do katere je že skoraj prišel, a mu ni uspelo, občutka kot pri pričakovanju srečanja z žensko, ki se mu tik pred tem izmakne. Ta občutek stopnjuje delo muha, v katerem se še bolj vzpostavi napetost med pričakovanim in dejanskim. Črna točka je le konec odšči-pnjenega električnega kabla, molečega iz betonskega kvadra, s katerega v resnici ne bo vzletela muha, kot bi človek sprva pričakoval. Vanj je zajet avtorjev občutek nezmožnosti premika zavesti in občutij na višjo raven, posredno tudi dviga našega družbenega prostora na kulturnejšo raven. Ta želja, občutek neuresničljivosti in frustracija se potencirajo v delu *fuckin' good* na rdečem pravokotnem platnu, ki se osredotoča na pojma mesenost, strast, pa tudi na žensko, njeno krvavenje, rodnost in soočenje s tem, kar nadgradi še delo Viktorja Bernika. Njegov objekt *Učinek stola*, naslonjen na Stropnikovi deli *mongolian hill* in muha tako, da lahko nanj sedemo, namreč v tem okviru učinkuje kot sprožilnik občutka (ne)izpolnjenega pričakovanja, lahko tudi izmika ali izgube. Ta se nadaljuje v videu *mačka na pica*. Tu avtor z gibljivim trikotnikom, ki izginja v temi, spregovori o skrivnostnem izginotju hrane z mize, kamor jo je odložil, in o trenutku suma ter spoznanju, da jo je ukradla mačka. Naslov je kletvica, ki sicer ne deluje tako v sami besedni zvezi, ampak šele ko je izrečena v intonaciji, ki izrazi negodovanje nad stanjem. Stropnik jo uporabi v prepričanju, da taka vsebuje več pritiska, moči in s tem tudi lastne sprostitve čustev, če je izre-

čena nesorazmerno milo glede na stopnjo negativnega presenečenja¹⁸. Ko med svoja dela vstavi *Dark Times* avtorja Vadima Fiškina, ki so »nič drugega« kot čas, ki ga lahko slišimo, ne da bi videli, kako teče, brez številčnice in kazalcev, narašča občutek padanja v nevidno neskončnost, v tako imenovano temno snov¹⁹, navidezno praznino.

Omenjena dela preči delo *NE BO*, ki s stopnišča prehaja skozi okroglo odprtino onkraj stene v drug prostor in se razpotegne čez več del v okviru vprašanj, ki se dotikajo **tranzicije** in z njo povezane relativnosti, našega dojetanja in možnosti prehajanja med različnimi stvarnostmi. Na tleh leži betonski objekt *outside*, različica prvega dela, le da v njegovi nasprotni podobi, zato tudi ta zavajajoči naslov. V betonu odlita in personalizirana človeška silhueta je Stropnikov spomenik samemu sebi v trenutku popolne kontemplacije, kakršno poznajo zlasti budisti, ki obvladajo meditacijo in lahko dosežejo stanje zunaj sebe, popolno ločenost zavesti od telesa in zmožnost opazovanja tega ločenega telesa. Lahko bi ga razumeli tudi kot dosežek sanj, čez katerega se delo *NE BO* plazi kot svetlobni snop skozi zidno odprtino in se nadaljuje v odprto okrogolino tehnika na nasprotnem zidu. Tudi tehnik je avtorjeva ironična samopodoba, saj sebe raje imenuje z zanj manj vzvišeno besedo v naslovu kakor z besedo umetnik. Podvojena okroglina se ponovi v rumeni barvi v delu Alice Könitz. Njeno delo *Solar/Lunar* je umeščeno, kot bi bilo na krožnici imaginarnega solarnega sistema, ki ga sestavljajo Stropnikova dela tega prostora in ga poganja svetloba iz oddaljene odprtine. Stropnik v tem sklopu skuša ustvariti izkušnjo, ki jo poznamo, kadar nevede odtavamo z mislimi, zaspimo in pozabimo na svoje fizično telo v otipljivem svetu. Naš pogled se med temi deli odbija kakor žogica, ne zaznamo prehodov in premikov zavesti, pa vendar se ti zgodijo. Deluje kot nekakšno optično igrišče, kjer vse nerešljivo ali nemogoče postane rešljivo in mogoče.

Na tem mestu Stropnik vprašanja tranzicije postopoma prevede v temo **smrti** kot ultimativnih izgub, ki so nepovratne. Zahtevne in boleče procese obravnava z veliko mero subtilnosti in tihe žalosti, a hkrati brez posebne patetike kot dana dejstva. Tu Stropnikove luknje postajajo prostori vsega, kar ni več v

njih²⁰, postajajo spomeniki²¹, ki to, česar ni več, ohranjajo pred pozabo. So območja prehodnega, izoliranega, nejasno razmejenega ali bolje netipne snovi, ki jo zazna le njen vedno gibljivi relativni rob. Ta je lahko kosmat, gladek, oster, naguban, navidezen ali ima celo kljuko, ki odpira vrata v skrit prostor in ga zrcala lahko iluzionistično še potencirajo ali negirajo. Tako je a boš šot? odprtina s cigareto v zrcalu, kjer umanjka pričakovan akter. Je portret nekega Stropnikovega mladostnega prijateljstva v neceli podobi, ki je ostala v avtorjevem spominu kot osamljen vizualni fragment svobode, druženj z zatem umrlim prijateljem. Izkušnjo izgube nadaljuje z delom opeka, ki je prav tako poklon umrlemu prijatelju. Tudi delo *Foksi* je posvečeno njegovemu pasjemu prijatelju. V ploščici iz hiše, kjer so nekoč z družino živeli, je odprtina, obdana s pasjo dlako, prebarvana v rožnato. Skozi njo in ozka zrcala na robovih teče spomin v neskončnost. Delo *meet meat* je posvečeno otroku, ki je umrl v morju. Naslov se navezuje na frazo »zavedla ga je riba«, ki opisuje občutek nepremagljivosti in nezavedanja nevarnosti in lastnih omejitev, tudi roba, ki obstaja, a ga morda ne zaznaš, kot ga tudi izgubiš v zrcalih. *motorno olje (katra)* je kljub surovemu naslovu izjemno poetično delo, ki ga Stropnik posveča svoji pokojni mami. Skrije ga v prostoru, kot se skrijejo umrla življenja, in ostane le še simbolni kraj, kjer se prižigajo sveče, v njegovem primeru novoletne kresnice. Le njihova svetloba lahko optično vzvalovi nagubano črno površino in jo simbolno pretvori v neskončno polje čiste življenjske energije onkraj vse telesnosti. Tudi za delo *orange cloud* lahko govorimo o nevidni resničnosti in njeni energiji. Pozoren in dolgotrajen pogled namreč lahko v tem objektu zaradi sukcesivnega optičnega kontrasta, ki se zgodi v beli praznini znotraj njegove modre površine, uzre videz oranžne barve. Ta obrat percepcije je za Stropnika tudi obrat v dojetanju resnice in iluzije, kaj je dejansko in kaj videz. To je vprašanje, ki ga seli iz vsebinskih konkretnih izkušenj razumevanja našega bivanja tudi na raven čisto formalnih in fizikalnih pojmov in spoznanj. Ko v delu *cherry theft* naša roka zdrsrne po horizontalni lestvi, s katero Stropnik želi doseči naključen dotik ali nezaveden tik, jo lahko v

14 Vladimir Vidmar za razstavo Mladena Stropnika v Mestni galeriji Ljubljana, 2024.

15 Boris Groys, *Towards the New Realism*, e-flux Journal; Issue #77, 2016, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/77/77109/towards-the-new-realism/>.

16 Prav tam.

17 Pogovor z Mladenom Stropnikom, Ljubljana, marec 2024.

18 Prav tam.

19 Komponenta vesolja, katere prisotnost je razvidna iz njene gravitacijske privlačnosti in ne iz njegove svetilnosti. Prvotno znana kot »manjkajoča masa«, <https://www.britannica.com/science/dark-matter>.

20 Skoraj tako kot praznino, luknjo opiše svoje delo Anish Kapoor: »That's what I am interested in: the void, the moment when it isn't a hole. It is a space full of what isn't there.« Charlotte Higgins, *A life in art: Anish Kapoor*, 8. november 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/nov/08/anish-kapoor-interview>.

21 Gerhard Wajcman, Objekt stoletja, ki ga omenja Vladimir Vidmar v svojem zapisu v nadaljevanju knjige.

tem krogu razumemo tudi kot poslednji pogled ali vzdih na poti odhajanja.

Nasprotje prejšnje napetosti ustvarja sklop del, pri katerih se Stropnik ukvarja s pojmom **sprostitutve**, predvsem v okviru našega nebudnega stanja. Sanje in spanje obsegajo velik in pomemben del našega življenja. Spanju rečejo tudi mala smrt²², kolikorkrat odidemo spat in se zbudimo, toliko je smrti, poslavljanja pa tudi novega prebujanja, začetkov in življenja. V njem se dogajajo nedokončni, ponavljajoči se metafizični sanjski procesi, pogosto tudi strašljivo ali moteče nenavadni²³. Za Stropnika so sanje stvarnost, ki dopolnjuje, razlaga ali nadaljuje našo zavedno stvarnost, in so lahko tudi lucidne, lahko se gibljejo tudi na meji enega in drugega stanja²⁴. V tem krogu najdemo drobna dela, ki jim Stropnik pravi kar vizualni haikuji²⁵ bizarnih stanj, absurdnih podob, nesmiselnih zgodb in prav takšnih vprašanj; na primer, kdo je spuščena Tegi, kaj je v oklepaju na papirju med dvema vrvicama, zakaj žeblički v *Ljubim sluz*, od kod leteči pralni stroj? Čudna stanja nadaljuje v videu *mirroring*, kjer Stropnik tudi kadi skozi cev, ki prebada sliko, platno, in kaže trenutek sprostitutve, kot jo zaznamuje že v prejšnjem krogu smrti. Kako Stropnik razume vrhunec sprostitutve in lahkosti, nakaže zlasti v videu ko *spim*, kjer dih vzdiguje papirček na palčki, zapičeni v kroglico.

Čakalnice in sobe za izolacijo

V delu une Stropnik preide v pomensko območje **(ne)dela** in sproža več dilem, na primer, kaj mi razumemo kot početje ali nepočetje. Mora biti to produktivno dejanje ali je lahko tudi prazen čas, morda malevičevska lenoba²⁶? Kaj je potem une, ta nenaseljena in čakajoča mizanscena s stoli, v kateri Stropnik na željo obiskovalca izvaja performans za dve osebi? Gre zaupati metodi, ki jo Stropnik izvaja le v naključno določenem časovnem oknu, zunaj njega pa stanje miruje in s praznino stolov ustvarja napetost in pričakovanja? Vsa ta vprašanja stopnjuje še kolaž

portret, otroško in šablonsko podana podoba avtomobila, na katero je položena pisana pletena čepica s cofom, ki asociira na brezskrbnost, igro in dolgčas. Celoto na nenavadni lokaciji Stropnik zaokroži z interaktivnim delom *peace at last*, v kodo NFT-ja zašifrirano prelepo podobo miru.

Ločiti bistvo od preostalega lahko razumemo tudi kot izoliranje nečesa od okolja in balasta. Stropnik rešuje in izolira misel tako, da ona sama postane medij. Nastane lahko podoba **(ne)dokončanega** – necelega, abstraktnega, na neki stopnji tudi še nastajajočega in zato bolj prvobitnega in nedolžnega. V ta sklop vstopimo z zvočno instalacijo pohaje ki je igra besed, zvoka in našega premikanja skozenj, kjer igra pomembno vlogo vez gledalec–objekt–umetnik. Video bere belo ironizira proces, vsebino in formo branja, interpretira ga kot početje, ki lahko različno učinkuje pri različnih ljudeh, podobno kot pri seriji *pages. sleep'n eat* govori o smislu uživanja praznega časa v okviru osnovnih človekovih potreb, sam ga primerja tudi s časom niča ali nepočetja, kadar nekaj čakamo. V ta krog umesti tudi idejo čiščenja. Delo *talkin' true*, risba dveh rok, ki držita telefona z očesoma kot luknjama na zaslonu, poustvarja gesto odvezemanja. Vanj je zajel položaj generacije, rojene s telefoni in njihovo pretirano uporabo, ki pa hkrati postaja čistilka odvečnih informacij, saj slednje preverja, odstranjuje, da izlušči bistvo in potencialno resnico. Akcijska instalacija to *others you* preigrava vprašanje, kako vidimo drug drugega in samega sebe. Vrečki na palicah napolni in oblikuje le pihanje vanju, a proces ne more potekati z obema hkrati. Vedno se ena sesede sama vase, nazaj v svojo izvorno, resnično formo, ki je v resnici kljub pihanju ne moremo spreminjati in ne moremo resnično videti ali vedeti, kaj je v njej. Ali kot pravi Stropnik, »nikoli ne moremo vedeti, kaj misli drugi, gledati drugega je kot gledati alufolijo, ne moreš videti njega navznoter in tudi sebe ne, le svoj odsev na njej, ne sebe osebno«. ²⁷

Zadnja sklopa Stropnikovih del razpirata vprašanja o tem, kaj je **polno življenje**, kaj pomeni pravilno živeti, in o tem, kje nastajajo **tranzicije**. Tu najdemo dvoumne odgovore, večinoma vezane na Stropnikove spomine in želje, oboje prepletene z medsebojnimi nasprotji teže in lahkosti, sile in krhkosti. *hiša iz Šembij*, preprost personaliziran in uporaben objekt, sestavljen iz kosa opeke in bakrene palice, je tako eden tistih prijetnih spominov, ki jim Stropnik daje

²⁷ Pogovor z Mladenom Stropnikom, Ljubljana, marec 2024.

posebno mesto v svojem delu. Je pot sonca od vzhoda na zahod in pot svetlobe, ki potuje čez njegovo rojstno hišo, kjer je nekoč živel. Prepušča nam, da jo tudi mi sami lahko usmerjamo in sledimo svoji poti. Tudi igra na macesnovem hribu je avtorjev spomin na brezskrbno odraščanje, na hrib v Gabrkah, skozi neskončno odprtino v površini se vrača nanj, hkrati onkraj tega podaja tudi težo vsakdana. klovni so pojedli zvok je ironičen in humoren kolaž avtorja, ki je ob vsej resnosti odraslega življenja še vedno sposoben igrivega pogleda na trenutek kaosa, silo hitrosti in hrup urbanega vsakdana, ko pritegne njegovo pozornost banalen mimovozeči avto, iz katerega se slišijo kriki pustnih mask. Utiša jih, ko jih zamrzne v statičen kader kolaža in doseže občutek nadzora ter lasten odmik od tistega, na kar ne more vplivati. Humoren je tudi kolaž iz električnih kablov *hoh električista*, ki je parodija na tehnične okvare doma ali kje drugje, kar kot zapleteno in frustrirajoče doživlja vsak, ki ni elektroinštalater, ta pa jih vidi kot sicer preprosto, vendar mojstrsko opravilo, kar Stropnik občuduje pri svojem očetu. Mobilni, interaktivni ter personalizirani in uporabni objekt *for brooom* kaže drug kontekst moči oziroma sile. Na metli s poljubnim dodajanjem kolesc glede na število uporabnikov (v tem primeru ima štiri kolesca štirih Stropnikovih ožjih družinskih članov) na zabaven način raziskuje moč posameznika v kolektivu in vse bolj odtujeni družbi, kjer le seštevek in vleka vseh sil v isto smer dajeja optimalen rezultat.

Onkraj tega nastopita sklop **tranzicije** in delo *exam*, psihološka risba, na kateri je izpisano »a ni dans tork!?«. Značilen besedni izpad posameznika, ki se utaplja v morju vsakodnevnih opravkov in frustracij. V ta okvir spada tudi svetlobni objekt *klečanje na koruzi* ki razpira vprašanja o kazni in sili tako na ravni družine kot na ravni širše družbe. Govori o spoznanju, da je kazenski kot simbol discipliniranja ne glede na to, ali gre za dobesedni kot s koruzo, ki še obstaja v otroških spominih avtorjeve generacije, ali pa za kakšen drugačen današnji, tudi kolektivni »kot« – ne glede na to, od kod se mu približaš ali ga opazuješ, je vedno isti in prav tak je tudi neprijeten spomin nanj. Gibljivi kolaž *on a leash* raziskuje drugačno moč. S silo težnosti in v okviru našega telesnega zaznavanja razmišlja o življenjski moči in vprašanju, kdo smo za stvarnim telesom, ki deluje tako avtomatizirano kot pendulum na vrvici težnosti, ki se nenehno spreminja in se tudi vse bolj razteguje in podaljšuje vse do trenutka, ko se dokončno strga in življenje v tem telesu umre, ves občutek težnosti pa dokončno izgine.

Hkrati se nam ob tem odpira vprašanje vodljivosti posameznika in družbe, kdo je ta, ki vodi, in kdo je voden, kako smo podvrženi tej zagonetni mehaniki tekme moči ali smo odporni proti njej.

Krog sklene poetičnost. Svetlobni objekt *punk juice* razpira umetnikovo spoznanje, da v vsem tem svakodnevnem banalnem ritmu še obstaja neka davna želja, nekaj, kar ti je še zmeraj všeč, pa četudi zgolj punk glasba, ki pomeni Stropniku poseben vzgib in v njej išče nova odkritja. Nekaj, kar poganja življenje naprej, prav tako video *hi*, v katerem se iz beline vzdiguje krog in hkrati vanjo izginja kot želja, ki je v nekem hipu močna, v drugem se potuhne, a vseskozi ostaja prisotna.

Umetnost kot izkušnja

Umetnost Mladena Stropnika se dogaja onkraj znane vizualnega repertoarja, nastaja v nevidnih, nebesedljivih špranjah, razpokah; od njegovih različnih kolažev z luknjami do zamaskiranih performansov. Je komaj zaznavna, skoraj metafizična izkušnja, za današnji čas nekako nostalgичna, a prav zato tako intrigantna. Je korak nazaj in hkrati naprej onkraj zdajšnjega sveta sodobne kibernetike resničnosti, viralnih omrežij, virtualne tehnologije. Zahteva že pozabljen starodaven, skorajda šamanski pristop, ki nasprotuje prevladujočim merilom zlasti sodobnega zahodnjaškega umetniškega sistema, ki vse skuša narediti prevedljivo, razumljivo in funkcionalno, tudi na škodo pomena in bistva samega artefakta. Ta ni vedno prevedljiv v nam razumljiv jezik, deluje na povsem drugi, nebesedljivi ravni. Reduciranje pomena umetniškega dela zgolj na predmet gledanja, proučevanja ali druge podobne funkcije lahko deluje nasilno²⁸ in lahko velja ne le za naš kolonialni odnos do kultur, ki so dolgo ostajale zunaj uradnega umetnostnozgodovinskega kanona, ampak tudi za umetnost, kakršna je Stropnikova. Posredno lahko ta Stropnikov položaj vidimo tudi kot sporočilo o nujnosti vračanja družbe, ki izgublja stik sama s sabo, k izvornemu, avtentičnemu, k nekakšni neuvrščenosti onkraj vsiljenih in vnaprej določenih okvirov.

²² Homer v Iliadi poimenuje spanje kot brata smrti, budizem pa mala smrt.

²³ Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, 1919. V angleškem prevodu Uncanny.

²⁴ Andrew Holecek, *Dreams of Light*, Sounds True Inc, 2020, str. 2.

²⁵ Pogovor z Mladenom Stropnikom, Ljubljana, marec 2024.

²⁶ Kazimir Malevič je v svojem besedilu *Laziness as the Real Truth of Mankind* (1921) hvalil vrednost lenobe v nasprotju z delom.

²⁸ O tej problematiki na primer zelo lepo piše María Iñigo Clavoe v: *Traces, Signs, and Symptoms of the Untranslatable*, E-flux Journal, Issue #108, 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/108/325859/traces-signs-and-symptoms-of-the-untranslatable/>.

Technician for Stretchy Edges, Full Holes, Weird Absurdities and Soft Romance

Nonsense

With Mladen Stropnik's projects, the usual mechanisms of understanding artworks, interpretive canons and definitions of art, and above all the art dictionary of popular keywords, become redundant. Stropnik's work is very fragmentary, seemingly meagre and rather enigmatic. He hands out his thoughts in the absence of everything that is superfluous to him. He separates images from the non-essential and leaves many undefined voids around them. In his artistic stance, he also blurs the lines between individual actions, events, facts of his everyday life, whether they are processes of creating prints, drawings, collages, objects, paintings, videos, delivery of performances, or processes such as cooking, walking, listening to music, meditating, exchanging artworks, resting, reading, socialising, tidying up, entertaining or dining. For him, it is one world in which every activity is equally real and realistic, including

sleep and dreams, the unconscious and the imaginary.

Over the past decades, Stropnik's artistic world has evolved and developed into meaningful clusters, which today – as the set-up at City Art Gallery Ljubljana shows – range from **imaginary worlds, sexuality, transition, death, relaxation, (in) visible work, (in)completeness to the questions of full life and transition**. Thus, for the first time, they can be seen as a whole in one place on this scale. The set-up traverses the spheres of meaning that go beyond the logical, the spheres of the strange, the foreign, the other, fuelled by Stropnik's play with image and meaning, with words, with fantasy. They give us the feeling of stepping through "Alice's mirror" or descending into the "rabbit hole", into the world of nonsense,¹ of the

absurd, which is what we are trying to bring to this book. The first part of the book consists of a visual section, which is elucidated by this text and further discussed by Vladimir Vidmar's text and concludes in the second part with a documentary section of Stropnik's creative oeuvre.

Trivial information

The world of Mladen Stropnik is full of irony, humour, but also poetry, grace and romance, his world is playful and at the same time reflective, full of contradictions and unusual views on the bizarre and the banal. If we start with his attitude to biographical data, chronologies and exhibition lists, we see that they are not of great importance to him, even if they are referential

and part of established practice alongside projects in the public art system. For him, they are irrelevant and insignificant, almost trivial. Instead of this kind of information, he identifies with the lists of the music he listens to and the books he reads.² Life and creativity also have meanings for him elsewhere than customary; what is trivial to most, is often important and just the opposite for him. This is not a pose or deliberate opposition to the norm, but merely a consistent attitude that pays attention to things that are important to him personally and far removed from the expectations of the masses. At its core, Stropnik's art thus consciously circumvents the expected chronological and other information logic, not only in the gallery set-up but also in this book. This explains why only a partial indication of the frame of reference is given here, which is essential for both Stropnik and the viewer/reader to understand the artist's work and project at City Art Gallery Ljubljana.

Mladen Stropnik has been active on the Slovenian and international art scene since 2001 and has established himself as a (post)conceptual artist working at the intersection of different media. City Art Gallery Ljubljana presents his rich, long-standing creative oeuvre in a comprehensive manner for the first time. The set-up encapsulates Stropnik's earlier work and at the same time encompasses his latest production, which was conceived especially for the exhibition. It is simultaneously also a synthesis of

the three previous exhibitions and their set thematic pillars: (in)visible labour, sexuality, repetition. However, the exhibition and the book primarily illuminate the key points in the development of his art, whose common themes are people, their perceptions and relationships. He is interested in exploring human emotions, mental states, especially those that occur in a person at the juncture between wakefulness and dreaming. His work draws on everyday and seemingly banal events. He questions the understanding of the marginal and the boundary between artistic creation and one's own life, as well as what is (un)expected in art. His narrative is exceedingly minimalist, but witty and full of mental loops. An important component of his art projects – from objects, prints, drawings to installations, paintings, performances, video, NFT – are the titles, in content, writing and form. The artist's weekly performances and the works of the guest artists form an important part of the set-up at City Art Gallery Ljubljana, through which the artist intervenes into his own work. Stropnik invited them to participate because they are the artists with whom he collaborates and who also form the main part of his frame of reference.

Viktor, Vadim, Alice and Scott

Incorporating other artists and their works into his own work is the artist's established practice. We will therefore not go into other artistic contexts in Stropnik's work and will stick to the essential as the artist is already in the process of self-contextualisation. By choosing the participating artists in his solo exhibition, which is not really a new model for contemporary solo shows, he

openly demonstrates a great deal of respect for them. The selection is not surprising, since in all of them, as in Stropnik's work, one can detect a particular combination of creating an impression of tension, discomfort, wrongness, the impossible, the playful, the wonderfully mundane, the ominous, the unspoken, the absurd, the humorous – also the presence of absence, which can also be described as an attempt by the artists to convey either an "experience of wordless thought" or something "seemingly intangible, yet physically felt" or sublime.³ Here we have Vadim Fiškin, whose work can be described as "metaphysical embodiment expressing his ability to create an unusual and even esoteric feeling or condition";⁴ Viktor Bernik, who wittily shows how fragile and deeply subjected to the rules the experience of art is;⁵ Alice Könitz, "the artist of the unfinished";⁶ and Scott Lawrence with his juxtaposition of "death and playfulness", where "what is absent from a piece can bring the emotional

¹ For more on this see: Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865, and *Through the Looking-Glass*, 1871; Jacqueline Flescher, *The Language of Nonsense in*

Alice: The Child's Part, Yale French Studies, vol. 43, Yale University Press, 1969, pp. 128–144; Barbara Simoniti, *Nonsense*, Karantanija, Ljubljana, 1997.

² Books: Milan Kleč, Esad Babačič (*Balkonci*), Andrew Holecek (*The Power and the Pain, Dreams of Light*), Simon Hanselmann (*Crisiszone*). Music: Daughters, Mad Season, Terminal Sleep, Deerhoof, Lightning Bolt, Res Nullius.

³ As the sublime is described by: James Turrell, *Statement in Mapping Spaces*, Peter Blum Editions, New York, 1987. See also: *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996.

⁴ *Vadim Fishkin: Of Angels and Dreamers, Machines and Metaphysics* in Eda Čufer, *Detonation of a Gaze in: Вадим Фишкин / Vadim Fishkin*, Soros Center of Contemporary Arts, Moscow & Kulturkontakt, undated and unpaginated.

⁵ Vladimir Vidmar for Mladen Stropnik's exhibition at City Art Gallery Ljubljana, 2024.

⁶ Andrew Berardini, *Pieced Together: Alice Könitz and Kim Fisher*, Mousse # 45, 2014; <http://alicekonitz.com/pages/andrew-berardini-pieced-together-alice-konitz-and-kim-fisher-mousse-45-2014/>

whammy better than a straightforward representation".⁷

The work of all the artists possesses a strange power to overwhelm us with inexplicable sensations, especially when we come into contact with the border between the rational and the imaginary, somewhere on the edge of a present absence or an overflowing void. All this brings the term sublime to mind again.⁸ Let us think of, for example, the 19th-century German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich or the reminiscences of the pioneering art historical or avant-garde phenomena of the early 20th century, in particular the Suprematists and later the voids of Spacal, Klein and Rothko.⁹ Even later, and in the 21st century, these are explored as sublime by James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, Anish Kapoor, Mirosław Balka,¹⁰ Luc Tuymans, and particularly Roman Ondák (More Silent Than Ever, 2006), Ceal Floyer (Garbage Bag, 2009), Gabriel Orozco (Empty Shoe Box, 1993). One can also speak of the so-called sublime void,¹¹ which

is particularly pronounced in Stropnik's work and is also touched upon by the guest artists. Stropnik's works are somewhere on the edge of what we can comprehend, and this edge is invariably stretchy and expands through history like the universe, we cannot see any border, and it is this intangibility and simultaneous presence that is probably the force that draws our attention and pushes it over the edge of what is comprehensible.

At this point, with a rough art context and in line with Stropnik's artistic concept and the conception of the exhibition and the book, we leap straight into his works presented at City Art Gallery Ljubljana. Through the nine meaningful clusters, we will thus also travel through the essence of Stropnik's work, without the data apparatus, which is included at the end of the book in summary form.

Inexplicable presence¹²

In his work, Stropnik creates artistic situations, which he places in unusual contexts. Just as he encounters, finds and notices them in his own life, he also recreates, visualises and places them in unexpected locations and temporal dimensions in his artworks. The gallery is only one such place, it is above all a large

open field (it is a kind of stage for us as well as Stropnik, a gym, a cinema, a living room, a courtyard, a playground, and least of all an exhibition venue), which allows for sovereign, synchronous and succinct action, even though, Stropnik attempts to go beyond it at the same time. His set-ups avoid the standards of the outdated model of exhibiting. So, whenever possible, he passes his work behind curtains, manoeuvres through walls, squeezes under ceilings or against switches, fire extinguishers, behind doors, inserts into depots, concedes to the toilets, offices, flattens into floors, intermingles in shop merchandise, expands into temporal, performative and virtual actions. The objects, which are often the key to the meaning of the action that makes all these event situations possible, are rendered by Stropnik in a fragmentary, aimless way, visually reaching beyond the limit of the attainable gaze. He bends the path of the light that inhabits them, transforming the path into luminous objects and unusual moving images with an even more unusual narrative. This often remains undefined. Many situations are strange or even unusual to our ordinary view and perception and therefore arouse a great deal of curiosity.

Stropnik's works communicate with us in three ways and can also be personalised.¹³ Already in the first cluster, which focuses on the sphere of **imaginary worlds**, some function in such a way that they are activated by our usual view or reading (*bluemamma*, *pokrijem se s kolesom*). Some of the works already require a more specific view-

ing point or body position (*Bakija and Zofka*), we have to look carefully for unusual locations (*new*), some even seek new homes (pages, 0100, *štunf na steni*). Others are action-oriented, they need a kind of generator to activate them, they need to be awakened by our movement, grasp, use or by the performers. There is no need for instructions for use, the unusual shape, position and tactility are themselves clues, as are the various openings, the direction of the light, the "discarded, accidental" position in the space. In this sense, the useful and personalised opener object invites you to pick up the rods with the lids and explore the positions of your own body. As we try unsuccessfully to align them in the air, there is a moment of realisation of the superiority of the force of gravity over our will. *bluemamma* is a video of Stropnik's performance in front of a shop, where a crowd of passers-by barely notices the absurd situation. In it, a mask with a guitar imitates the actions of a figure, a moment of absurdity hangs in the air. The collage *pokrijem se s kolesom* focuses on the feeling of security that Stropnik experiences when cycling, like a safe shell or armour, similar to the feeling of covering oneself with a bed sheet while sleeping. Stropnik further potentiates this phenomenon of image, perception and seeing in *Bakija and Zofka*. The rotating mirror on the ceiling speeds up the image, in which, despite its movement, our image remains static. The ironic situation questions our (in) ability to actually understand reality and its visual scope.

The works pages in the gallery shop, a series of book multiples consisting of canvas as a cover and paper as the only sheet in between, play with the concept of the book, the gesture of turning pages and

the act of reading. They are reminiscent of the expression "devouring a book", which we like to use when we read a good book, relativising reading as an experience of a longer process of invested time and reducing it to the mere act of turning a single page. While the video *new* shows the repetition of (non) sense – the appearance of a meaningless sign behind the curtain – in Scott Lawrence's *Shoe VI* the discarded shoe sifts to the floor and shifts the attention into the field of the (in)explicable, as well as (in)capable and (in)visible. Throughout the exhibition, we also follow the individual interventions of Viktor Bernik's series *The Butterfly Effect*, typical of his practice, where he starts from the conventions and protocols of the institution of art, turning the comforts of convention, behind which we often find a safe haven from the difficult task of confronting art, into a rethinking of these very dynamics.¹⁴

Mirrors

Stropnik constantly shifts our established conception of reality. He presents it as a highly relative category, he also inverts the symbolism of mirrors, thus creating a special form of artistic realism. If realism has historically been considered the representation of "the average, ordinary, profane",¹⁵ Stropnik's works would naturally be found in this category today. These can be no more than what we see, that is, ordinary things: a concrete square with a

black wire, a flat plane with a veil, a red square and a moving triangle. Yet, on the other hand, for him, actual reality is at the same time also in the mirrors of these same things, their projection. But if reality is what divides our vision of the imaginary future into two parts, something realisable and pure fantasy and romance that can never be realised,¹⁶ then it is quite a different case with Stropnik. For him there are no dividing lines, only transitions from one state to another. This is also suggested by the seemingly banal and illogical titles, which are made up of words with concrete meanings and at the same time illogical connections that stem from the artist's own experience.

The mirrors which Stropnik often places in his work thus give rise to at least two visual turns of reflected, contradictory, but equally real truths: one is visible at first glance, from the outside, and the other from the inside; this is the moment of transition between the visible, the tangible, and the imaginary, the non-tactile. But it is also a step that multiplies through this infinite Alice's mirror of crossed worlds, and many inexplicable states can also grow exponentially through these mirrors. Stropnik, as he puts it himself,¹⁷ conceives the viewpoint as the point from where we look at or see something, as that of a traffic warden watching the trains in a railway station: he can observe them, provide signals, but he cannot move them. This suggests a psychic state of feeling (un)controlled and observed, but also the inability to physically perform this otherwise controlled or observed action.

7 EC Flammig, *A rope, pulled*, Art Papers, <https://www.artpapers.org/a-rope>
8 Jean-François Lyotard, *Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime*, Artforum, April 1982, 20(8), pp. 64–69.
9 Mark Levy, *The Void in Art*, Bramble Books, 2005.
10 Simon Morley, *Staring into the contemporary abyss: The contemporary sublime*, Tate Etc., issue 20, 2010.
11 For example, see the exhibition *The Sublime Void: On the Memory of the Imagination*, Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen, 1993, and the exhibition *Nothing is Lost. Art and Matter in Transformation: A Leap into the Void concludes the Trilogy of Matter*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo, Bergamo, 2021.

12 The term was coined by Igor Zabel in his story of the same name, which was also the basis for his exhibition. The story tells of the inexplicable, the coincidental and the ephemeral on our lives and our conception of things. gs. See Igor Zabel, *Inexplicable Presence (Curator's Working Place)*; exhibition catalogue *Inexplicable Presence (Curator's Workroom)*; Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1997, and Gallery of Contemporary Art, Celje, 1998; Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory, Ljubljana, 2020.

13 The artist can also adapt them according to demand and sell them to an interested user, which is the artist's new experimental model for trading and collecting artworks.

14 Vladimir Vidmar for Mladen Stropnik's exhibition at the Municipal Gallery of Ljubljana, 2024.
15 Boris Groys, *Towards the New Realism*, e-flux Journal; Issue #77, 2016, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/77/77109/towards-the-new-realism/>.

16 Ibid.
17 Interview with Mladen Stropnik, Ljubljana, March 2024.

Stropnik gives an impression of the different forms of this inability in five clusters, in which he addresses the themes of life that are important to him, namely **sexuality, transition, death, relaxation and (non-) work**. He treats the **first** in multifaceted ways as a series of works, some of which touch on this theme very directly, whereas others are symbolic and logical only to Stropnik. They are introduced by the collage *mongolian hill*, created from the transparent fabric of discarded women's socks. In it, he deals with the frustration of his own unfulfilled desire to visit a land he had almost reached but failed to do so, a feeling like that of anticipating an encounter with a woman that eluded him a moment before. This feeling is escalated by the piece *muha*, in which the tension between the expected and the actual is further established. The black point is just the end of a snapped electrical cable, sticking out from a square of concrete, from which the fly will not actually roam, as one would initially expect. It encapsulates the artist's sense of inability to move consciousness and feelings to a higher level and, indirectly, to raise the social sphere to a more cultured level. This desire, feeling of unrealisation and frustration is potentiated in the work *fuckin' good* on a red rectangular canvas, which focuses on notions of carnality, passion, but also on woman, her bleeding, fertility and confrontation with it, which is further enhanced by the work of Viktor Bernik. In this context, his object *The Effect of a Chair* that leans against Stropnik's pieces *mongolian hill* and *muha* so that we can sit on it, acts as a trigger for a sense of (un)fulfilled expectation, or even evasion or loss. This is continued in the video *mačka na pica*. Here, the artist uses a moving triangle that disappears into the darkness to

speak of loss, with the mysterious disappearance of the food from the table where he had placed it, and the moment of suspicion and realisation that it had been stolen by a cat. The title is a swear word, which does not function as such in the phrase itself, but only when spoken in an intonation that expresses annoyance at the situation. Stropnik uses it in the belief that it contains more pressure, power and therefore a greater release of emotion if it is said disproportionately mildly in relation to the degree of negative surprise.¹⁸ When he inserts Vadim Fiškin's *Dark Times* among his works, which is "nothing but" time that we can hear without seeing it pass, without dials and hands, there is a growing sense of falling into invisible infinity, into so-called dark matter,¹⁹ an apparent void.

The aforementioned works are intersected by the work *NE BO*, which passes from the staircase through a circular opening beyond the wall into another space and elongates over several works that deal with questions of **transition** and its accompanying relativities, our perception and the possibility of passing between different realities. On the floor lies the concrete object outside, a version of the first piece, but in its opposite form, hence the misleading title. The human silhouette, cast in concrete and personalised, is Stropnik's monument to himself in a moment of total contemplation, as known above all to Buddhists, who are masters of meditation and can achieve a state outside themselves,

a complete separation of the mind from the body and the ability to observe this dislocated body. It could also be understood as the attainment of dreams, beyond which the work *NE BO* creeps like a beam of light through the wall opening and continues into the open roundness of *tehnika* on the opposite wall. The term *tehnika* is also the ironic self-image of the artist, who prefers to ascribe himself the less lofty title of "technician" rather than artist. The doubled roundel is repeated in yellow in the work of Alice Könitz. Her work *Solar/Lunar* is positioned as if it were in the orbit of an imaginary solar system, made up of Stropnik's works in the space and powered by a light from a distant opening. In this set of works, Stropnik seeks to create the experience we know when we unconsciously drift off with our thoughts, fall into slumber and forget our physical body in the tangible world. Our gaze bounces between these works like a ball, we do not perceive the transitions and shifts of consciousness, and yet they happen. It works like a kind of optical playground where everything unsolvable or impossible becomes solvable and possible.

At this point, Stropnik gradually translates the issues of transition into the theme of **death** as ultimate losses that are irreversible. He treats complex and painful processes with a great deal of subtlety and subdued sadness, but at the same time without being particularly pathetic, as given facts. Here, Stropnik's holes become spaces of all that is no longer in them,²⁰ they become

monuments,²¹ preserving what is no longer there from oblivion. They are zones of the transient, the isolated, the vaguely demarcated, or rather of intangible substance, perceptible only by its ever-moving relative edge. This can be hairy, smooth, sharp, wrinkled, illusory, or even have a hook that opens the door to a hidden space, which can be illusionistically potentiated or negated by mirrors. In this sense the work *a boš šot?* is an opening with a cigarette in the mirror, with the expected figure missing. It is a portrait of one of Stropnik's youthful friendships in an intangible image that has remained in the artist's memory as a lonely visual fragment of freedom, of spending time with a friend who has since died. The experience of loss is continued in the work *opeka*, which is also a tribute to a deceased friend. The work *Foksi* is dedicated to his canine friend. In a plaque from the house where he and his family once lived, an opening surrounded by dog hair is painted pink. Through it and the narrow mirrors at the edges, memory flows into infinity. The piece *meet meat* is dedicated to a child who died at sea. The title refers to the phrase "he was deceived by a fish", which describes the feeling of invincibility and unawareness of danger and one's own limitations, including the limit that exists but which you may not perceive, just as you lose it in the mirrors. *motor-no olje (katra)* is an exceptionally poetic work, despite its crude title, which Stropnik dedicates to his late mother. He hides it in the space, as dead lives are hidden, leaving only a symbolic place where candles

are lit, in his case, New Year's sparklers. Only their light can optically ripple the wrinkled black surface and symbolically transform it into an infinite field of pure life energy beyond all corporeality. In the case of the piece *orange cloud*, we can also speak of an invisible reality and its energy. In fact, an attentive and prolonged gaze can see the appearance of orange in this object due to the successive optical contrast that occurs in the white void within its blue surface. For Stropnik, this reversal of perception is also a reversal in the apprehension of truth and illusion, of what is real and what is appearance. It is a question that he moves from the material and concrete experience of understanding our existence to the level of purely formal and physical concepts and cognitions. In *cherry theft*, when our hand slides down the horizontal ladder that Stropnik uses to achieve an accidental touch or an unconscious tic, it can also be understood in this circle as a last glance or sigh on the way out.

The opposite of the previous tension is created by a set of works in which Stropnik deals with the notion of **relaxation**, especially in terms of the state of wakefulness. Dreams and sleep comprise a large and important part of our lives. Sleep is also referred to as a small death²² because as many times as we go to sleep and wake up, there are as many deaths, goodbyes, but also new awakenings, beginnings and life. It is where the incomplete, repetitive metaphysical dream processes take place, often frightening or unnervingly strange.²³ For

Stropnik, dreams are a reality that complements, explains or continues our conscious reality, and they can also be lucid, they can also straddle the boundary between one state and another.²⁴ In this circle we find tiny works that Stropnik simply calls visual haiku²⁵ of bizarre states, absurd images, nonsensical stories and just such questions; for example, who is Tegi in *spuščena Tegi*, what is in the parenthesis of *v oklepaju* on the paper between two strings, why the pins in *ljubim sluz*, where did the flying washing machine come from in *leteči pralni stroj*? The strange states continue in the video *mirroring*, where Stropnik also smokes through a tube that pierces the painting, the canvas, showing a moment of release as marked in the previous round of death. Stropnik's understanding of the culmination of relaxation and lightness is particularly evident in the video *ko spim*, where his breath lifts up a scrap of paper on a stick stuck into a small sphere.

Waiting rooms and isolation rooms

In the work *une*, Stropnik moves into the area of the meaning of **(non-)work**, which raises several dilemmas, for example, what we understand as doing or non-doing. Must it be a productive act or can it also be idle time, perhaps laziness as defined by Malevich?²⁶ What is then *une*, this uninhabited and vacant *mise-en-scene* with chairs, in which Stropnik delivers a two-per-

18 Ibid.

19 A component of the universe whose presence is discerned from its gravitational attraction rather than its luminosity. Originally known as the "missing mass", <https://www.britannica.com/science/dark-matter>.

20 Anish Kapoor describes his work almost like a void, a hole: "That's what I am interested in: the void, the moment when it isn't a hole. It is a space full of what isn't there." Charlotte Higgins, *A life in art*: Anish Kapoor, 8 November 2008,

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/nov/08/anish-kapoor-interview>.

21 Gerhard Wajcman, *Object of the Century*, mentioned by Vladimir Vidmar in his note later in the book.

22 In the *Iliad*, Homer calls sleep the brother of death, and Buddhism the small death.

23 Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, 1919. Translated into English by Uncanny.

24 Andrew Holecek, *Dreams of Light*, Sounds True Inc, 2020, p. 2.

25 Interview with Mladen Stropnik, Ljubljana, March 2024.

26 In his text *Laziness as the Real Truth of Mankind* (1921), Kazimir Malevich praised the value of laziness as opposed to work.

son performance at the request of the visitor? Can we trust the method in which Stropnik only appears in a randomly determined time window, outside of which the situation remains dormant and creates tension and expectation through the emptiness of the vacant chairs? All these questions are intensified by the collage *portret*, a childlike and stencil-like image of a car, on which a colourful knitted bobble hat is placed, evoking carefree, playful and bored feelings. In an unusual location, Stropnik rounds off the whole with the interactive work *peace at last*, a beautiful image of peace encrypted in NFT code.

Separating the essential from the remaining can also be understood as isolating something from the environment and the baggage. Stropnik rescues and isolates thought by turning it into a medium itself. The result can be an image of **(in)completeness** – lacking, abstract, at a certain stage, still in progress and therefore more primary and innocent. We enter this cluster with the sound installation *pohaje*, a play of words, sounds and our movement through them, in which the connection viewer–object–artist plays an important role. The video *bere belo* makes an ironic comment on the process, content and form of reading and interprets it as an action that can have different effects on different people, much like with the series *pages*. *sleep'n eat* talks about the importance of enjoying vacant time in the context of basic human needs and also compares it to the time of nothing or doing nothing while we wait for something. He also places the idea of purification in this circle. The work *talkin' true*, a drawing of two hands holding phones holes for eyes on the screen, recreates the gesture

of taking away. It captures the position of a generation born with phones and their excessive use, but which at the same time becomes a purifier of superfluous information, scrutinising and removing it in order to extract the essential and the potential truth. The action installation to *others* you replays with the question of how we see each other and ourselves. The two bags on sticks are only filled and formed by blowing, but the process cannot take place with both at the same time. Inevitably, one collapses, back into its original, true form, which in reality cannot be changed despite the blowing and we cannot really see or know what is inside. Or as Stropnik puts it, "We can never know what the other person is thinking. Looking at the other person is like looking at aluminium foil, you can't see it from the inside, and you can't see yourself either, only your reflection, not yourself personally".²⁷

The last two clusters of Stropnik's work explore questions of what a **full life** is, what it means to live in the right way and where the **transitions** arise. Here we find ambiguous answers, mostly tied to Stropnik's memories and desires, both intertwined with the mutual oppositions of weightiness and lightness, force and fragility. *hiša iz Šembij*, a simple personalised and useful object made of a piece of brick and a copper rod, is thus one of those pleasant memories to which Stropnik gives a special place in his work. It is the path of the sun from east to west and the path of light that travels over his house of birth, where he once lived. He leaves it up to us to direct it ourselves and follow our own path.

²⁷ Interview with Mladen Stropnik, Ljubljana, March 2024.

igra na macesnovem hribu is also the artist's memory of growing up carefree, of the hill in Gaberke. He returns there through an infinite opening in the surface and beyond it conveys the heaviness of everyday life at the same time. *klovni so pojedli zvok* is an ironic and humorous collage by an artist who, for all the seriousness of adult life, is still capable of a playful look at a moment of chaos, the force of speed and the noise of everyday urban life, when his attention is drawn to a banal passing car from which the screams of carnival masks can be heard. He silences them by freezing them in a static frame of the collage, achieving a sense of control and his own detachment from what he cannot control. Also humorous is a collage made of electrical cables, *hoh električista*, a parody of technical breakdowns at home or elsewhere, which are experienced as complicated and frustrating by anyone who is not an electrician, who sees them as a simple but masterful task, something Stropnik admires in his father. Mobile, interactive as well as personalised and usable, for *broom* shows another context of power or force. By arbitrarily adding wheels to a broom depending on the number of users (in this case it has four wheels belonging to four members of Stropnik's immediate family), he entertainingly explores the power of the individual in a collective and in an increasingly alienated society, where only the sum and pull of all forces in the same direction yields an optimal result.

Beyond this comes the cluster **transitions** and the piece *exam*, a psychological drawing on which is written "a ni dans tork!?" [ain't it tues today?!]. A typical verbal black-out by someone drowning in a sea of daily tasks and frustrations. The

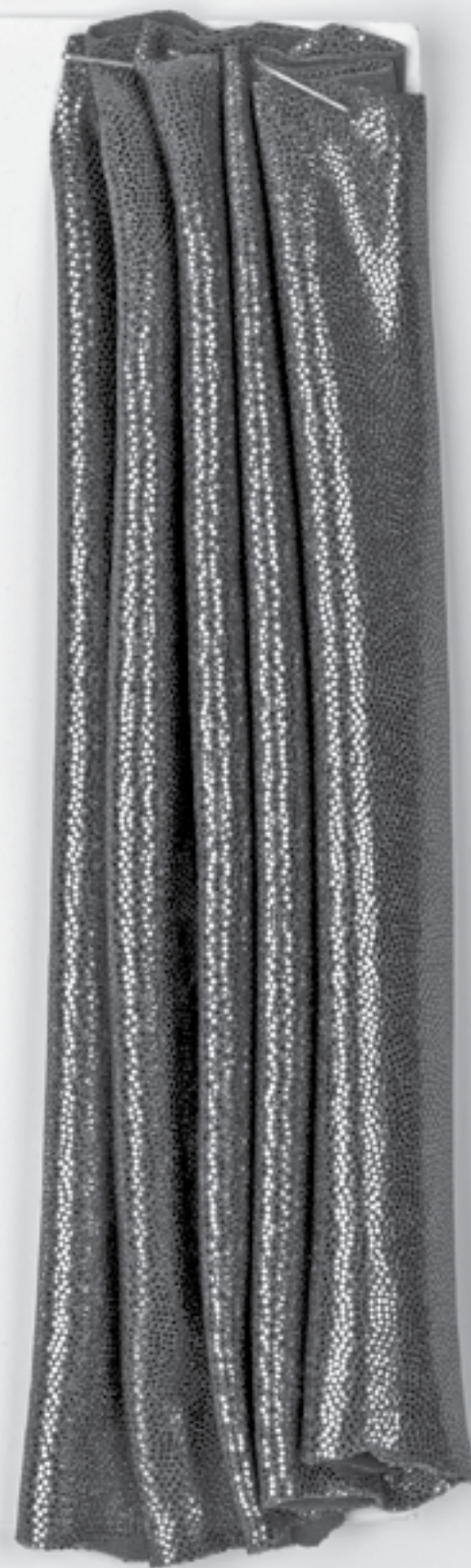
light object *klečanje na koruzi* also fits into this frame, raising questions of punishment and force both at the level of the family and the level of society at large. It speaks of the realisation that the punishment corner is a symbol of discipline, whether it is literally the maize corner that still exists in the childhood memories of the artist's generation, or some other contemporary, even collective "corner" – regardless of where you approach or observe it, it is always the same, unpleasant, as is the memory of it. The moving collage on a leash explores a different kind of power. With the force of gravity and within the framework of our bodily perception, it contemplates the power of life and the question of who we are behind the actual body, which functions in automation like a pendulum on the leash of gravity, constantly changing, stretching and lengthening to the point it finally breaks and life in this body dies and all sense of gravity finally disappears. At the same time, the question arises about the pliability of the individual and society, about who leads and who is led, about how we are subjected to or resist the incomprehensible mechanics of the power struggle.

The poetic completes the circle. The light object *punk juice* reveals the artist's realisation that in all the banal rhythm of everyday life, there is still an ancient desire, something you still like, even if it is only punk music, which is a special impulse for Stropnik and in which he seeks new discoveries. Something that propels life forward, just like the video *hi*, in which a circle rises out of the white and disappears into it at the same time, like desire, which is strong one moment and subdued the next, but remains ever present.

Art as experience

Mladen Stropnik's art happens beyond the known visual repertoire. It is created in invisible, indescribable crevices, cracks; from his various collages with holes to masked performances. It is a barely perceptible, almost metaphysical experience, somehow nostalgic for our times, but that is exactly what makes it so intriguing. It is simultaneously a step backwards and forwards beyond the current world of contemporary cyber reality, viral networks, virtual technology. It demands an ancient, almost shamanic approach that has been forgotten, which contradicts the prevailing criteria, especially of the contemporary Western art system, which tries to make everything translatable, comprehensible and functional, even to the detriment of the meaning and essence of the artefact itself. It is not always translatable into a language we can understand, it operates on a completely different, indescribable level. Reducing the meaning of a work of art to a mere object to be looked at, studied, or other similar function can be violent²⁸ and can apply not only to our colonial attitude towards cultures that have long remained outside the official art historical canon but also to art such as Stropnik's. Indirectly, we can also see this situation of Stropnik's as a message about the necessity of returning a society that is losing touch with itself to the original, the authentic, to a kind of non-alignment beyond imposed and predefined frameworks.

²⁸ For example, María Iñigo Clavoe writes very well on this issue in *Traces, Signs, and Symptoms of the Untranslatable*, e-flux Journal, Issue #108, 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/108/325859/traces-signs-and-symptoms-of-the-untranslatable/>.



Mladen Stropnik: Površina je oklep, za katerim smo vsi doma

»Umetnost ne reproducira vidnega, temveč nekaj naredi vidno.« *Paul Klee*

Najbolj konkretno

Nad domačim kavčem, mojim zavetiščem pred naporí sveta in tistimi, ki ga naseljujejo, že slabo desetletje visi Mladenov kolaž piknik. Kot drugih Mladenovih delih piknika ni težko opisati: to je rdeč list papirja majhnega formata, na katerega se pod ostrim kotom urezuje bel košček papirja, svojevrsten podaljšan pravokotni trikotnik s poudarjenim špičastim vrhom. Le malce težje ga je »interpretirati«, prebrati. Pri tem so vedno v resničnem, prvinskem duhu konceptualizma odločilni naslovi njegovih del. Ko pridemo tako daleč, se nam slika v glavi zelo hitro zapolni še z »manjka-jočimi« deli: trato, okoli zbrano veselo družino, otroškimi glasovi v ozadju ... Vendar pozornost tukaj ni na tem ozadju, pravzaprav je povsem irelevantno, fokus je izrecno na tistem koščku izkušnje pred nami. Jasno je torej, da pri tem delu ni niti kančka pripovednosti, le jasna, akutno jasna formula neke izkušnje. Vendar bi težko rekli, da pri tem delu in tudi pri drugih Mladenovih delih gre za abstrakcijo. V resnici bi si upal trditi, da bi bile težko bolj konkretne.

Že na formalni ravni je stvar kar se da to the point, vsi elementi se neverjetno skladajo, celo tako dobro, da bi lahko pomislili, da je delo pravzaprav priprava, vaja v osrediščenosti, natančna usmeritev naših misli in čutov v stanje zbranosti. Bel trikotnik se zarezuje v napeto opno rdečkastega pravokotnika, s podobno ostrino izkušnjo onomatopoično podpira zvok naslova, pik-nik, kot da bi dajal ritem tistemu pikanju noža v gladino prta. To izjemno sozvočje, ubranost tega in številnih drugih njegovih del, pravzaprav deluje kot formalno urjenje gledalca, njego-

va priprava na resničen vstop v delo in idejni svet Mladena Stropnika. Priznam, da sem od samega začetka v stikih z Mladenovimi deli čutil nekakšen magnetizem, hipnotično privlačnost, ki presega pravkar opisane uspehe asociativne ravni domislic, čeprav sta njihova pronicljivost in humor konstitutivna za izkušnjo njegovih del (in govor o njih). Pri tem pa nikakor ne bi želel tega besedila zapeljati v svobodne kontemplacije o nerazložljivem notranjem siju umetniških del, prav nasprotno, zato zavestno sledim Mladenovemu delu in o njem skušam govoriti čim bolj konkretno in osebno.

Pogled na piknik (in na marsikatero drugo Mladenovo delo) se že na ravni izrecne formalne jasnosti (zame) izkaže kot neka izostritev, mentalna in čustvena. To izostritev že na ravni asociativne linije podpira njena vsebina, rez (noža, če ga želimo videti) na ravnini (razprostrtega prta).Omenili smo že, da čeprav bi nam videz tega (in drugih Stropnikovih del), sopostavitev minimalnih vizualnih elementov, lahko delovala abstraktno, v tem primeru kot kakšna poenostavljena suprematistična kompozicija, je vse prej kot to, tukaj gre za izostritev določene izkušnje, povsem konkretne, ki je hkrati izostritev gledalčeve pozornosti. piknik je zame v tem smislu paradigmatičen za delovanje Stropnikove geste, ki nas vodi podobno kakšnemu učitelju meditacije. Rez ostrega noža je izostritev čisto konkretne izkušnje, izostritev tudi v smislu zajetja njenih minimalnih, bistvenih elementov, ki tako izostri gledalčev pogled, uri njegovo pozornost in vzpostavlja razmere za izkušnjo dela, nas zajame z nepričakovano močno fascinacijo.

Prav ta fenomenološki vidik je tukaj ključen. Opažil sem, da Mladen svojim objavam na družbenih omrežjih redno pripiše stavek »Slikam žive in izjemne scene iz tistega, kar vidim vsak dan«, torej tisto, kar se iz nekega razloga zareže (!) v nerazločno gmo-to vsakdana, tisto, kar se mu ureže v spomin. Prav neposrednosti in moči tega reza sledi v svojem delu in mislim, da prav želja, da bi jima sledil, ustvarja značilno redukcijo, neposrednost, tudi naivnost v njegovem delu, ki vendarle nikakor niso banalne. Nasprotno, njegova dela nastopajo proti banalnosti s svojevrstnim vztrajanjem pri čudenju izrednosti teh izrednih rezov iz reda vsakdana. Čeprav gre za prizo-re, prej kristalizacije kot zgostitve, ki jih prepoznamo in se njimi z neverjetno lahkoto poistovetimo, težko govorimo o njihovi pripovednosti. Čeprav – in to je izredna vrlina Stropnikovih del – skoraj takoj vemo, kaj govorijo, so vse prej kot narativna. Še več, ne samo da se Stropnik zavestno odpoveduje literarnosti, odpoveduje se tudi metaforičnosti. Namesto analogije, prenesenega pomena, imamo opravka z metonimijo, ki reducira, asociativno zgosti fenomen na njegov del ali element. Torej imamo namesto logike metafore, kjer nekaj vedno nastopa namesto nečesa drugega, poskus njenega preseganja: to, kar imamo pred seboj, je natanko to, kar je, le v najbolj izostreni mo-goči obliki. Pač piknik. Namesto metaforične logike zamenjave imamo opravka s fenomenološko izostrit-vijo, z okni, ki ne delujejo več kot tisto albertijevsko, v katerem se naš pogled s pomočjo geometrične perspektive poljšča vidnega sveta: tukaj se nam pogled ustavi, umiri in razjasni pred bistvenim izkušnje.

Umetnost pred ideologijo?

Značilna redukcija (ki je vendarle ne bi poimeno-val minimalizem) in specifična preprostost, neposrednost, tudi otroškost, so premišljene in precizne prvine Stropnikovega umetniškega spraševanja s poantirano namero. Ne gre za eleganco geste ali za humor, ki naj bi (predvsem) zabaval. Mislim, da pri tem res lahko predvsem prepoznamo nagovarjanje otroškosti v vseh nas. Pri tem ne mislim na nobeno nedolžnost, saj če bi hotel na hitro in ne preveč točno parafrazirati Hegla, niti kamen ni nedolžen, kaj šele otrok. Otroškost, ki je tukaj nagovorjena, je bistvena odprtost, naivnost, ki je skorajda prvi pogoj za resnično imeti opravka z umetnostjo bodisi kot umetnik bodisi kot gledalec. Resnično si velik del Stropnikovih del naloži zavestno nalogo vrniti nas v to stanje, ko smo še pripravljeni gledati, ne samo že videti.

On a more serious note, ta Stropnikova formalna gesta ima presenetljivo bližnjo filozofsko vzporednico v Husserlovi metodi »postavljanja v oklepaj«, epoché. Metoda, ki jo pozna že starogrška misel, dobesedno pomeni odrekanje sodbi in meri na načine, kako k fenomenom resničnosti pristopati neodvisno od nabora predsodkov, vzorcev pogleda na svet, prefabricirane vednosti. Ta interes za čim večje bližanje fenomenom, to je posamičnim izkustvom realnosti onkraj vsega balasta predpostavljenega in priučenega, ima tudi Stropnik. Njegova medijsko skopa, surova, a sugestivna in energična dela so rezultat njemu lastne epoché: vse, kar jim lahko kompromitira osnovno linijo, ki povezuje avtorjevo idejo in neposrednost njene uresničitve – protokoli, morebitni kontekst, metaforičnost in reference, včasih celo gledalci – je postavljeno v oklepaj. Drznil si bom to branje obesiti na neko naključje (ki to morda ni) in za to svoje branje uporabiti kolaž z naslovom v oklepaju. Gre za mizanesceno, ki jo sestavlja ena Stropnikovih značilnih poteh, iz zvezka iztrgan list papirja, pokončno položen, na katerega sta položeni dve vrvici in nonšalantno pritrjeni z vidnimi znaki lepila na koncih. Vrvici sta položeni dokaj pokončno in vzporedno, kar je morebiti bilo motivacija za naslov dela. Mislim, da je oklepaj, ki ga imamo pred seboj, neka skrajna točka redukcije, tako konstitutivne za Stropnikovo delo. Čeprav je delo v svoji zvedenosti na minimalno (umetniško) gesto in minimalna sredstva sugestivno za še kaj drugega (denimo dva profila), se izbira tega naslova ne naslanja na sugestivnost oblik omenjenih vrvic, temveč na Stropnikovo metodo, v kateri je dejansko v oklepaj postavljeno vse razen esencialnega. V oklepaju ne opisuje (v prvi vrsti) tistega, kar naj bi na kolažu videli in prepoznali, temveč prej to, kar je (bilo) potrebno, da to, kar imamo pred seboj, dejansko vidimo. To, kar je bilo treba postaviti v oklepaj, da bi se prebili do tistega, kar je bistveno: za to delo, za našo izkušnjo, za umetniško gesto ... za izkušnjo resničnosti. Podobno Kantu, Husserlu in vsem resničnim filozofom transcendentalnega (ne transcendentnega!) Stropnik ne išče stvari na sebi, temveč je zanj osrednjega pomena način, kako našo izkušnjo resničnosti oblikuje naš um. Ne gre za to, da bi trdili, da nimamo resničnega dostopa do resničnosti, temveč za to, da je za nas resničnost to, kar izkušamo: ne stvar sama, temveč naša izkušnja stvari.

Torej s tem, da nas napotuje na bistveno, osnovno, pa tudi na neposredno, otročje in naivno, Stropnik skuša ustvariti prostor za določeno izkušnjo, ki

se (vsaj za trenutek) izogne utesnjujočem bremenu vnaprejšnjih danosti. Z drugimi besedami, njegov asketizem je nenehno iskanje tiste točke, na kateri je mogoče vsaj za hip še vzpostaviti ločnico med umetnostjo in (njeno) ideologijo. Stropnik se zaveda nemogočnosti tega projekta, dejstva, da smo vedno že zapadli v ideologijo, vendar se hkrati zaveda nujnosti vsakokratne neprivolitve vanjo kot prvega pogoja umetniškega početja. Vsakič znova se je torej treba stvarjem odreči, spustiti v zorne kote, ki smo jih »prerasli« ali se vanje nikoli nismo podali, znebiti se vsega, kar grozi, da bo umetnost posrkalo v umetnostni sistem (in vedno jo bo, če je že ni). To za Stropnika nikakor ne pomeni ustvarjanja kontranarativa dominantnemu – on je vse kaj drugega kot umetnik velikih zgodb – saj bi to pomenilo igrati tisto igro umetnosti kot sistema, ki ji z akcijo go it hoče ubežati. Nasproti temu Stropnik afirmira umetnost kot nekaj redkega, a vendarle vedno potencialno blizu, tukaj. Ta misel povzema marsikatero Mladenovo delo, najpogostejše pa je vsebovana v njegovih akcijah in objektih. Vzemimo primer ene. Akcijo go it umesti v nedorečen kraj in čas, nekam na še neurbanizirano obrobje Ljubljane: na povsem neizjemni, odročni lokaciji ob nedoločeni uri nenapovedano in brez vabil izvede minimalno intervencijo. Odpelje se v trgovino in nakupi ribje konzerve, zatem se odpravi na obrobno točko sredi Ljubljanskega barja, da bi jih delil mimoidočim. Akcija temelji na nizu odpovedi: v prvi vrsti je nenajavljena, ob tem še umeščena na poudarjeno neobljuden kraj. Torej je povsem verjetno, da ta akcija, naravnana k stiku, neposrednega stika ne bo uresničila, torej se mu na neki način vnaprej odpove. Zanj ni bistveno to, ali bi kdo stopil v stik z umetnikom, ali bo ta dobil, odprl in konzumiral vsebinsko konzerve. Ni bistveno niti to, da vemo, da poteka. Vendar mislim, da prav v tej skrajni askezi sredstev (in predvsem protokolov umetnosti) zasije tisto za Stropnika bistveno dejstvo, da umetnik podaja svojo idejo, ki ni namenjena takojšnjemu zaužitju (!), temveč da nekje na daljnem obrobju oddaja svoj sij kot nekakšen idejni energetski svetilnik.

Debelina površine

Ni presenetljivo, da Stropniku ta metoda iskanja umetnosti onkraj sistema in izkušnje onkraj ideologije odpre nove prostore in dimenzije izkušnje. Tem »odkritjem« lahko sledimo tudi zelo neposredno, materialno, z že omenjenimi formalnimi momenti, rezi, luknjami, izdolbitvami, skozi katere pokukajo, mrgo-

lijo, iztečejo, prilebdijo nelagodne vsebine notranjosti. Vendar če pri Stropniku redno govorimo o delih, ki se poudarjeno držijo površine ne glede na to, ali gre za risbe in kolaže ali pa za objekte in videe, se moramo vprašati, kaj je sploh »notranjost« površine. Očitno imamo tukaj opravka s paradoksnimi dimenzijami prostora, nemogočo topologijo, ki ji ustreza neka- kšno nedvomno nelagodje, vsekakor konstitutivno za razumevanje njegovih del.

Če se za hip zatečemo h Gerardu Wajcmanu, lahko ta drobna dela beremo v dialektični napetosti slikovne debeline, v nekem medsebojno pogojujočem se odnosu med zaznamkom in podlago. V osnovi gre za logiko pisave, v kateri s tem, ko ustvarimo en element, zaznamek, ustvarimo dva, torej še podlago. Minimalne in ekonomične intervencije na belo podlago lista za beležke, ki je najpogostejše oder za Stropnikove mizanscene, se komaj odmikajo od ravni površine, vendar prav ta minimalni odmik izredno poudari dinamiko podlage in vpisa. Poleg tega, da Stropnikova dela vzniknejo na površino, isto površino tudi izdolbejo, preluknjajo. Iz njih tako izteče fluidna nelagodna vsebina, ki se gledalcu dozdeva kot material sanj, gonov, nezavednega. Vendar stvar pri Stropniku ni tako preprosta, saj težko nedvomno rečemo, kaj je zgoraj in kaj spodaj, marsikdaj je pravzaprav videti, da sta ti dve ravni zamenljivi. Zaznamek in podlaga sta tako oba hkrati figura in ozadje. Prav v tem je posebnost njegovega »odkritja«, v tej paradoksnosti površine, bodisi da gre za slikarsko površino ali za gladino vsakdana. Površina/resničnost je ena, vendar obstaja kot vozlišče planov v paradoksnih topologijah, ki zgovorno priča o strukturi izkušnje naše resničnosti.

Tako kot pri sliki klovni so pojedli zvok. Platno majhnih dimenzij, razdeljeno po načelih onkraj slehernega (modernističnega?) redoljubja v tri pokončne barvne pasove različnih širin in nič kaj natančno zarisanih meja. Iz enega izmed polj te nerodne in vse prej kot barvno usklajene mavrice, nekje okoli sredine slike – vendar spet ne prav tam – izstopajo tri žice industrijskega serijskega izvora različnih barv, ki se v vehementni odločnosti praktičnega obvladljivega materiala energično podajajo navzven. Tisto, kar nas po presenečenju tega nenavadnega dela najprej osvoji, je iskriv stik med delom in naslovom, ki nam, tipično za Stropnikovo gesto, v nezadržnem naletu humorja stvar naredi oprijemljivo in konkretno, ne da bi karkoli razlagal. Abstraktna kompozicija z barvnimi lisami postane določena uniforma, klovnova, žice, ki se iz nje podajajo, pa zvok, ki bi ga klovni pogoltnil? Genau.

Stvar je na tej točki v svojem kočljivem absurdu gotovo pozornost vzbujajoča in smešna, vendar učinek tega in drugih Stropnikovih del nikakor ni ludističen. Humor, ki ga vzbuja, je vedno, tako kot je vedno primer pri humorju, že obtežena reč. Tudi ta humornost klovna, ki je pojedel zvok, se že v naslednji točki, naslednji misli, našem naslednjem pogledu na delo prevesi v nelagodje: žice namreč ostro prebijajo membrano slike, življenjsko opno klovna, in kot kakšna ne nujno prijetna vsebina notranjosti prihajajo na dan ter se podajajo proti nam. Tisto, kar se je začelo duhovito, se nadaljuje v precej bolj ambivalentnih dimenzijah – vendar ne moremo nehati kar naprej zreti vanj.

Pred leti sem v Stropnikovih delih prepoznal tri klasične topose, ki sestavljajo polje Freudove psihopatologije vsakdanjega življenja, sanje, vic in spodrseljaje. Če samo na hitro prelistamo ta katalog ali se sprehodimo po razstavi, ki jo spremlja, ne bo težko prepoznati, kaj sem pri tem imel v mislih. Sanje nas v njegovem delu pričakajo na vsakem koraku, bodisi zelo neposredno kot pri dihu, ki mu sledimo v videu z naslovom ko spim, bodisi v širokem diapazonu nemogočih halucinatoričnih vsebin izrecne živosti, ki tako močno navdajajo njegovo prakso (leteči pralni stroji, tuširanje z Brankuziko, 80s prapor). Samo bežen pogled na naslove omenjenih del nas pripelje do naslednjega okna, v katerem se nezavedno prebija v naš vsakdan, do spodrseljajev. Stropnikovi naslovi so pogosto lingvistično malomarni, poenostavljeni, brez velike začetnice in potrebne interpunkcije, kar jih odpre čisto novi dinamiki pomenov, polni ambivalence, nepričakovanih poudarkov in spreobrnitev (kot pri njegovem zgodnjem delu ride ej horse, za katero je prejel nagrado OHO). Ti so usodnega pomena za naslednji freudovski element v nizu, vice. Pomenska ambivalenca, ki jo pripravijo spodrseljaji, so temelj za Stropnika tako značilnega humorja, robustnega in neposrednega, ki marsikatero njegovo delo opredeli kot svojevrstno vicevsko vinjeto.

Branje Stropnikovih del, njegovih rezov, lukenj, prepogibov kot oken, skozi katera se v naš vsakdan po freudovski topologiji vriva nelagodna vsebina nezavednega, je gotovo privlačno in nikakor ne brez temeljev. Ne nazadnje je v paradoksalni prostorskosti, ki se vedno drži njegovih površin, v kateri je tisto zunanje najbolj notranje, mogoče prepoznati tudi osnovno premiso te topologije, to, da je tisto najbolj »naše« prav želja Drugega. Vendar je stvar v tem, da sta Stropnikov dosegi in intenca širša – in tudi drugače investirana – kot nam to daje vedeti zanašanje na to terminologijo.

Vsi ti momenti luknjanja, dolbenja, trganja, vrezovanja služijo – in to zelo jasno in s polnim zavedanjem – skupnemu cilju, ustvarjanju špranj v simbolnem redu, saj delujejo kot rezi vanj, ki omogočajo nenadne in silovite vdore realnega skozi njegovo stabilno gladino. To ne velja samo za posamične »tehnične« posege prediranja površine v njegovih delih: ti so le svarilo, da je njegovo delo – tako v posamičnih primerih kot v njegovi praksi v celoti – treba razumeti natanko v teh ozirih. Stropnikovo delo se od osnovnih formalnih posegov do celote vzpostavlja kot orodje ustvarjanja rezov v površino simbolnega – jezik, podobo in vse drugo, kar strukturira misel – s ciljem, da bi omogočilo leakage realnega, (še) nesimbolizirane gmote, ki je v tem agregatnem stanju sposobna destabilizirati koordinatne sisteme pomena in smisla. V tem smislu je treba brati to surovo, neobrzdano moč Stropnikovih del, saj je prav v tem učinek realnega na simbolizirani red stvari. Hkrati pa moramo pri tem branju paziti, da ne impliciramo nobene ilustrativnosti in dobesečnosti, saj bi bila prav ta najbolj mogoče v nasprotju s pravkar povedanim: register realnega je že a priori odpor do tovrstnega poskusa zajetja. Bližamo se mu lahko le za hip in le toliko, koliko ga lahko prenesemo, preden se uredi in izgine v simbolizaciji. Mislim, da se tega Mladen Stropnik popolnoma zaveda.

To bi za sklep oziroma namesto njega rad ponazoril z njegovim delom pisateljičin noht, še enim oklepajem, tokrat nezaprtem. Postavljen na vrh lista formata A4, prihodnje tiskane strani, nekje v ravni naslova, ki, še enkrat, zareže v površino in hkrati odpre neki prostor, polje, ki je še nerazločljivo, neopredeljeno, belo. Ta minimalni zaznamek, ki je v naslednjem trenutku odprt oklepaj, pisateljev noht, kot pravi naslov, ali pa celo smajli, je vendarle v prvem hipu le nerazločljiv rez, ki deluje kot komaj odškrnjena vrata v realno, in natanko v tem trenutku, preden se nam delo razpre v humorju in za domiselna branja, učinkuje njegova neprosojna napetost kot rez v redu simbolnega. Sprostitev, ki jo začutimo ob tem, ko se naslajamo nad njegovo domiselnostjo, že pomeni simbolizacijo te izkušnje, ki je bila mogoča le za hip. In prav v tem je moč Stropnikovega dela, v zavedanju bežnosti tega trenutka, nezadržnosti in neizdržnosti (izkušnje?) realnega, vendar hkratni potrebi po dovezetnosti zanjo. Zato so njegova dela hkrati svojevrstna priprava, vaja v čuječnosti, in hkrati ozaveščanje vseh tistih toposov in izkušenj, špranj in kanalov, po katerih se realno vsaj za hip prikraše na dan.

Mladen Stropnik: Surface Is the Shell behind Which We Are All at Home

“Art does not reproduce the visible; it makes visible.” Paul Klee

Most concrete

Mladen's collage picnic has been hanging above my sofa at home, my refuge from the stresses of the world and the people who inhabit it, for almost a decade. Like Mladen's other works, picnic is not difficult to describe: it is a small-format red sheet of paper, into which a white piece of paper cuts at an acute angle, a sort of elongated right-angled triangle with an accentuated pointed tip. It is just a little more difficult to “interpret”, to read. In the true, authentic spirit of conceptualism, the titles of his works are always decisive. Once we get this far, the image in our head is quickly filled in with the “missing” parts: the lawn, the happy group gathered around it, the children's voices in the background ... But the focus here is not on the background, in fact this is completely irrelevant, the focus is explicitly on the little piece of experience in front of us. It is therefore clear that there is not even a hint of narrative in this work, just a clear, sharply defined formula for experience. Yet it would be hard to say that this work, and Mladen's other works, are about abstraction. I

would even venture to say that they could hardly be more concrete.

Already at the formal level, the matter is very much succinct, to the point, all the elements fit together incredibly well, so well in fact that one might think that the piece is actually a preparation, an exercise in concentration, a precise honing of our minds and senses towards a state of focus. The white triangle pierces through the tight skin of the reddish rectangle, with a similar sharpness the experience is onomatopoetically supported by the sound of the title, pic-nic, as if giving rhythm to a sharp picking of the knife into the smooth surface of the tablecloth. This remarkable attunement, the coherence of this and many of his other works, actually acts as formal training for the viewer, as preparation for the real entry into the work and world of ideas of Mladen Stropnik. I confess that from the very beginning in forging contact with Mladen Stropnik's works, I felt a kind of magnetism, a hypnotic attraction that goes beyond the successes of the associative level of the imagery just described, even though their insight and humour are constitutive in the

experience of his works (as well as talking about them). However, I do not in any way wish to lead this text into liberal contemplations on the inexplicable inner aura of the work of art; on the contrary, it propels me to consciously follow Mladen's work and try to speak about it as concretely and personally as possible.

A look at picnic (or Mladen's other works), even at the level of explicit formal clarity, turns out (for me) to be a kind of sharpening, both mental and emotional. This sharpening is supported already at the associative level by its content, the incision (of the supposed knife) on the plain (of the outstretched tablecloth). We have already mentioned that, despite the appearance of this (and Stropnik's other works), the juxtaposition of minimal visual elements, might strike us as abstract, in this case as a simplified Suprematist composition, it is anything but that; here we are dealing with the wheting of a particular experience, a purely concrete one, which is at the same time the honing of the viewer's attention. In this sense, picnic is for me paradigmatic of the functioning of Stropnik's gesture, who guides us like a meditation

teacher. The incision of the cutting knife is a sharpening of a purely concrete experience, a sharpening also in the sense of capturing its minimal, essential elements, which thus hones the viewer's gaze, trains their attention and creates the conditions for experiencing the work, engulfing us into an unexpectedly strong fascination.

It is this phenomenological aspect that is crucial here. I have noticed that Mladen regularly adds to his social media posts the phrase, “I paint vivid and extraordinary scenes from what I see every day”, i.e. that which for some reason makes an incision (!) into the indistinct mass of the everyday, that which is incised into his memory. It is the immediacy and power of this incision that he follows in his work, and I think it is the desire to follow it that creates the distinctive reduction, immediacy, even naivety in his work, which are by no means banal. On the contrary, his works act against banality with a peculiar insistence on wondering at the extraordinariness of these extraordinary incisions from the order of the everyday. Although these are scenes, crystallisations rather than condensations, which we recognise and identify with incredibly easily, it is difficult to speak of their narrativity. Although – and this is the exceptional virtue of Stropnik's works – we know almost immediately what they are saying, they are anything but narrative. Furthermore, Stropnik not only deliberately dispenses with literariness, but also with metaphoricity. Instead of analogy, the figurative meaning, we are dealing with metonymy, which reduces a phenomenon to its part or element, associatively condenses it. Instead of the logic of metaphor, in which something always appears in place of something else,

we are dealing with an attempt to transcend it: what we have before us is exactly what it is, only in the sharpest form possible. A picnic. Pure and simple. Instead of the metaphorical logic of substitution, we are dealing with a phenomenological sharpening, with windows that no longer function like that of Alberti, in which our gaze, aided by geometrical perspective, appropriates the visible world: here our gaze stops, stills and clears in front of the essential of experience.

Art before ideology?

The characteristic reduction (which I would nevertheless not call minimalism) and the specific simplicity, directness, even childlikeness, are the considerate and precise elements of Stropnik's artistic enquiry with witty intent. It is not about the elegance of the gesture or the humour that serves (above all) to entertain. I think what we can really recognise here is above all an appeal to the childlikeness in all of us. I am not talking about any innocence, because, to paraphrase Hegel quickly and not too accurately, not even a stone is innocent, let alone a child. The childlikeness at stake here is an essential openness, a naivety that is almost a prerequisite for truly engaging with art, whether as an artist or as a viewer. Indeed, much of Stropnik's work sets itself the deliberate task of bringing us back to this state in which we are still willing to look and not only see.

On a more serious note, this formal gesture by Stropnik has a surprisingly close philosophical parallel in Husserl's method of “bracketing”, epoché. The method, which is already known in ancient Greek thought, literally means the renunciation of judgement and measures the possibilities of approaching the

phenomena of reality independently of prejudice, worldview patterns and prefabricated knowledge. Stropnik also has this interest in getting as close as possible to the phenomena, i.e. the individual experiences of reality beyond all the baggage of what has been accepted and learnt. His medially concise, raw but suggestive and energetic works are the result of his own epoché: everything that could jeopardise the baseline between the artist's idea and the immediacy of its realisation – protocols, possible context, metaphor and reference, sometimes even the viewers – is put in brackets. I will venture to tie this reading to a coincidence (which may indeed not be one) and use a collage with the title in brackets for this reading of mine. It is a mise-en-scène, consisting of one of Stropnik's characteristic gestures, a sheet of paper torn out of a notebook, laid upright, onto which two strings are laid and nonchalantly attached with visible traces of glue at the ends. The two strings are laid fairly upright and parallel, which was perhaps the motivation for the title of the piece. I think that the brackets we have before us are a kind of extreme point of reduction that is so constitutive of Stropnik's work. Although the work is also suggestive of other things (for example, two profiles) in its reliance on the minimal (artistic) gesture and minimal means, the choice of title is not based on the suggestiveness of the forms of the aforementioned strings, but on Stropnik's method, in which everything but the essential is actually placed in brackets. in brackets does not (primarily) describe what we are supposed to see and recognise in the collage, but rather what is (was) necessary to actually see what is in front of us. What had to be put in brackets to get to what is essential: for this piece, for our

experience, for the artistic gesture ... for the experience of reality. Like Kant, Husserl and all true philosophers of the transcendental (not the transcendent!), Stropnik is not looking for things in themselves, but for the way in which our experience of reality is shaped by our minds. The point is not that we claim to have no real access to reality, but that reality for us is what we experience: not the thing itself, but our experience of the thing.

So by referring us to the essential, the fundamental, but also to the immediate, the childlike and the naive, Stropnik attempts to create a space for a certain experience that avoids (at least for a moment) the oppressive burden of preconceived givens. In other words, his asceticism is a constant search for the point at which it is still possible, at least for a moment, to establish a dividing line between art and (its) ideology. Stropnik is aware of the impossibility of this project, of the fact that we have always already fallen prey to ideology, but at the same time he is aware of the necessity of not always agreeing to it as the first condition of artistic endeavour. It is therefore necessary to repeatedly renounce things, to descend into perspectives that we have “outgrown” or never entered in order to get rid of everything that threatens to suck art into the art system (and always will, if it has not already done so). For Stropnik, this in no way means creating a counter-narrative to the prevailing one – he is anything but an artist of great narrative – because that would mean playing the game of art as a system, which he wants to escape with the action go it. In contrast to this, Stropnik affirms art as something rare, yet always potentially close, here. This thought encapsulates many of Mladen’s works but is

most often contained in his actions and objects. Let us take one as an example. The action go it is set in an indeterminate place and time, somewhere on the not-yet-urbanised outskirts of Ljubljana: in a completely inconspicuous, remote location, at an unspecified hour, unannounced and without invitation, he carries out a minimal intervention. He goes to a grocery shop and buys cans of tinned fish, then heads to a peripheral spot in the middle of the Ljubljana Marshes to hand them out to passers-by. The action is based on a series of cancellations: firstly, it is unannounced and takes place in a decidedly uninhabited location. It is therefore very likely that this action aimed at contact will not bring about direct contact and therefore in a sense forgoes it in advance. Neither is it essential for it whether anyone makes contact with the artist, but whether the artist receives, opens and consumes the contents of the can. It is not even essential whether we know that it is taking place. However, I think that it is precisely in this extreme asceticism of means (and especially of the protocols of art) that the essential fact for Stropnik shines through, that the artist hands out his idea, which is not intended for immediate consumption (!), but that it emits its aura as a kind of idea-energy beacon somewhere far out on the periphery.

The thickness of the surface

It is not surprising that for Stropnik this method of looking for art beyond the system and experience beyond ideology opens up new spaces and dimensions of experience. These “discoveries” can also be traced very directly, materially, with the aforementioned formal

moments, incisions, punctures, hollows, through which the uncomfortable contents of the interior peep, swarm, ooze, hover. However, if in Stropnik’s case we regularly talk of works that emphatically adhere to the surface, regardless of whether they are drawings and collages or objects and videos, we have to ask ourselves what the “interior” of the surface is in the first instance. Clearly, we are dealing here with a paradoxical dimension of space, an impossible topology, suited to a certain unmistakable discomfort, certainly constitutive for an understanding of his works.

If we turn to Gerard Wajcman for a moment, we can read these minute works in the dialectical tension of pictorial thickness, in a certain reciprocally conditional relationship between the notation and the ground. Basically, it is a logic of writing in which the creation of one element, a notation, creates two, namely also the ground. The minimal and economical interventions on the white ground of a piece of paper taken from a notebook, which is most often the stage for Stropnik’s *mise-an-scènes*, hardly deviate from the flat surface, but it is precisely this minimal deviation that really emphasises the dynamics of the ground and the inscription. In addition to emerging to the surface, Stropnik’s works also hollow out and puncture the same surface. Thus a fluid, unsettling content flows out of them, which appears to the viewer like the material of dreams, urges, the unconscious. But it is not quite that simple with Stropnik, because it is difficult to say with certainty what is above and what is below; in fact, it often seems as if these two levels are interchangeable. The notation and the ground are therefore both figure and background at the same

time. This is precisely the peculiarity of his “discovery”, this paradox of the surface, be it the pictorial surface or the surface of everyday life. There is one surface/reality, but it exists as a node of planes in a paradoxical topology that speaks eloquently of the structure of the experience of our reality.

Like with the painting the clowns ate the sound. A small-format canvas divided according to principles beyond all (modernist?) neatness into three bands of colour of different widths running lengthwise with not very precisely drawn borders. From one of the fields of this awkward and anything but colour-coordinated rainbow, somewhere in the middle of the painting – and yet not quite there – three different coloured wires from industrial serial production protrude, energetically projected outwards in the vehement determination of practical, malleable material. The first thing that strikes us after the surprise of this unusual work is the spirited contact between the work and the title, which, in a gesture typical of Stropnik, makes the matter tangible and concrete in an irrepressible frenzy of humour without explaining anything. An abstract composition with coloured patches becomes a particular uniform, that of a clown, and the wires coming out of it, the sound a clown would swallow? Exactly. The thing is certainly attention-grabbing and funny at this point in its delicate absurdity, but the effect of this and Stropnik’s other works is by no means ludic. The humour it evokes is always, as is always the case with humour, already a loaded thing. Even this humour of the clown who has eaten the sound turns into discomfort at the very next point, the very next thought, our very next glance at the work: the wires sharply pierce the

skin of the painting, the living membrane of the clown, and like some not necessarily pleasant content of the interior, they come to light and make their way towards us. What started out funny continues in much more ambivalent dimensions – but we cannot stop staring at it.

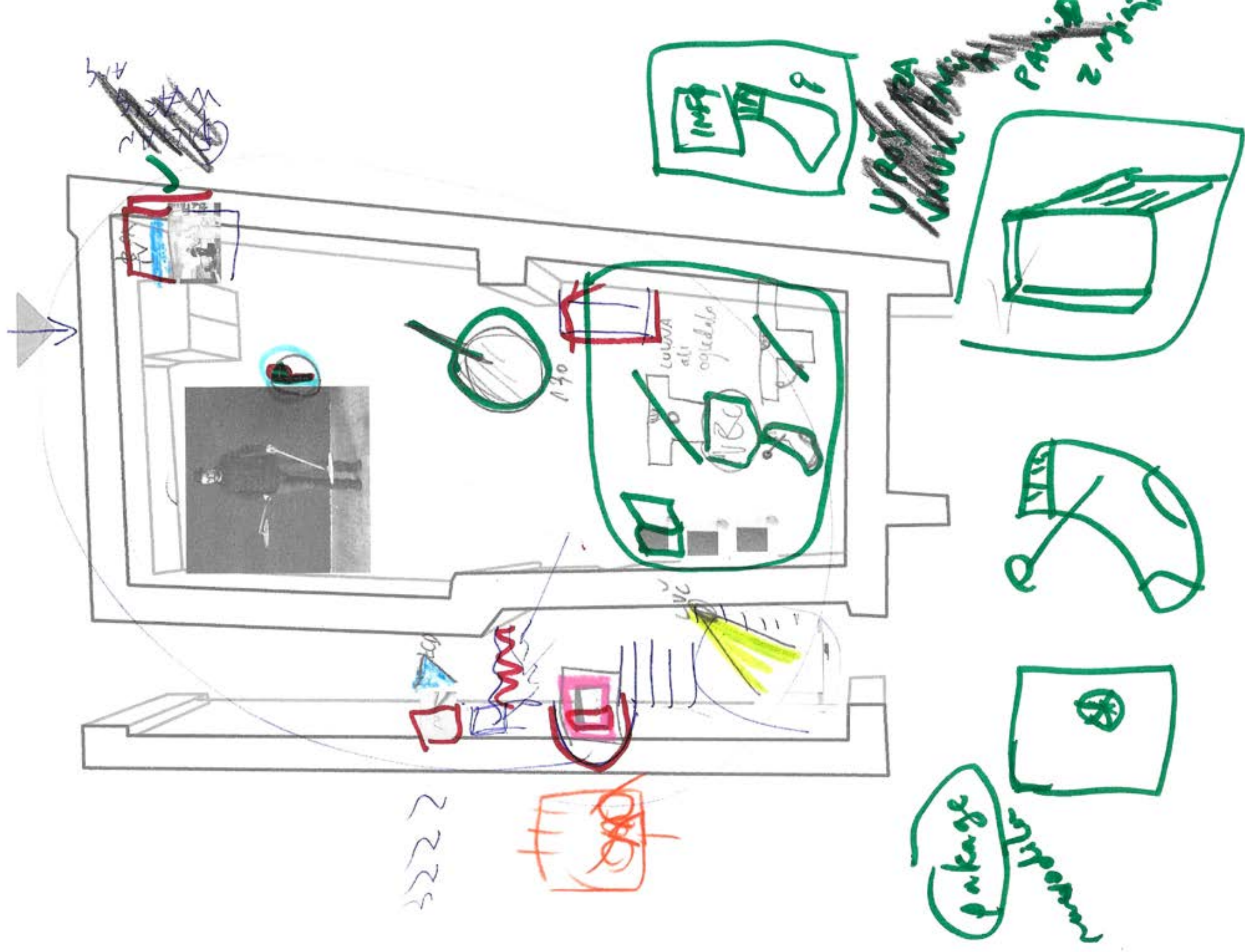
Some years ago, I recognised in Stropnik’s work the three classical topoi that make up the field of Freud’s psychopathology of everyday life: dreams, jokes and slips. If you quickly flip through this catalogue or stroll through the exhibition that accompanies it, you will easily see what I mean when I say that. Dreams greet us at every turn in his work, whether very directly, as in the breath we follow in the video entitled when i sleep, or in the wide range of impossibly hallucinatory themes of explicit vividness that inform his practice so strongly (flying washing machines, showering with Brancusica, 80s banner). A cursory glance at the titles of the works mentioned takes us to the next window where the unconscious breaks into our everyday lives, to the slips. Stropnik’s titles are often linguistically careless, simplistic, without capitalisation and required punctuation, which opens them up to a whole new dynamic of meanings, full of ambivalence, unexpected highlights and turnabouts (as in his early work ride ej horse, for which he received the OHO Award). These are fundamental for the next Freudian element in the series, the jokes. The ambivalence of meaning created by the slips is the basis of Stropnik’s characteristically robust and direct humour, which defines many of his works as a kind of jocular vignette.

Reading Stropnik’s works, his incisions, punctures, enfoldments, as windows through which the un-

pleasant content of the unconscious creeps into our everyday lives according to Freudian topology is certainly attractive and by no means unfounded. For in the paradoxical spatiality that always clings to its surfaces, in which the outer is the innermost, one can recognise the basic premise of this topology, that what is most “ours” is precisely the desire of the Other. But the point is that Stropnik’s scope and intention are broader – and also differently invested – than our reliance on this terminology would let us know. All these moments of piercing, hollowing, tearing, incising serve – quite clearly and with full awareness – a common goal, the creation of cracks in the symbolic order, for they act like incisions in this order, allowing a sudden and violent penetration of the real through its smooth surface. This applies not only to the individual “technical” interventions of penetrating the surface in his works: they are merely a warning that his work – both in individual pieces and in his practice as a whole – must be understood in precisely these terms. From the basic formal interventions to the whole, Stropnik’s work establishes itself as a tool for making incisions into the surface of the symbolic – language, image and everything else that structures thought – with the aim of making possible the leakage of the real, of the (as yet) unsymbolised mass, which, in this aggregate state, is capable of destabilising the coordinate systems of meaning and sense. It is in this sense that this raw, unbridled power of Stropnik’s works must be read, for this is precisely the effect of the real on the symbolised order of things. At the same time, in this reading we must be careful not to imply anything illustrative or literal, for that would certainly contradict what has just been said: the register of the real

is already a priori resistance to this kind of attempt at capture. We can only approach it for a moment and only as much as we can bear before it settles and disappears into symbolisation. I think Mladen Stropnik is fully aware of this.

To conclude, I would like to clarify this with his work the writer's fingernail, another bracket, this time unclosed, as a conclusion, or instead of it. Placed at the top of an A4 sheet, a forthcoming printed page, somewhere at the height of the title, which once again cuts into the surface and at the same time opens up a space, a field that is as yet indistinct, undefined, white. This minimal notation, which in the next moment is an open bracket, a writer's fingernail, as the title suggests, or even a smiley, is nevertheless only an inexplicable incision at first, like a barely open door to the real, and precisely at this point, before the piece opens up to us with humour and for imaginative readings, its opaque tension acts like an incision in the order of the symbolic. The release we feel as we revel in its inventiveness is already a symbolisation of this experience, which was only possible for an instant. And this is precisely the strength of Stropnik's work, the awareness of the fleetingness of this moment, the irreducibility and inexorability of (experiencing?) the real, but at the same time the need to be susceptible to it. This is why his works are at once a kind of preparation, an exercise in mindfulness and at the same time an awareness of all those topoi and experiences, cracks and channels through which the real creeps into the light, at least for an instant.







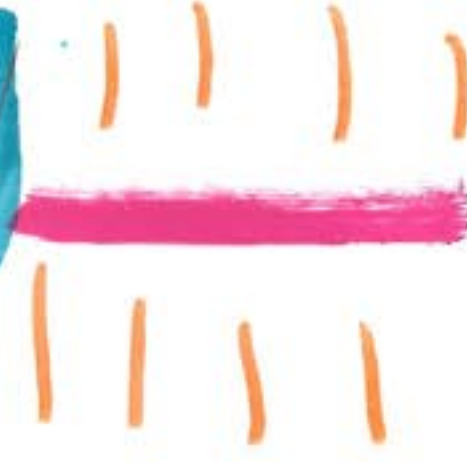






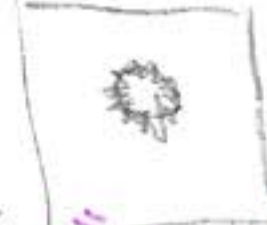
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Viktor Bernik, Učinek stola / The Effect of a Chair (iz serije / from the series Učinek metulja / Butterfly effect) ⁴⁸









Alice Könitz, Solar/Lunar ₅₄



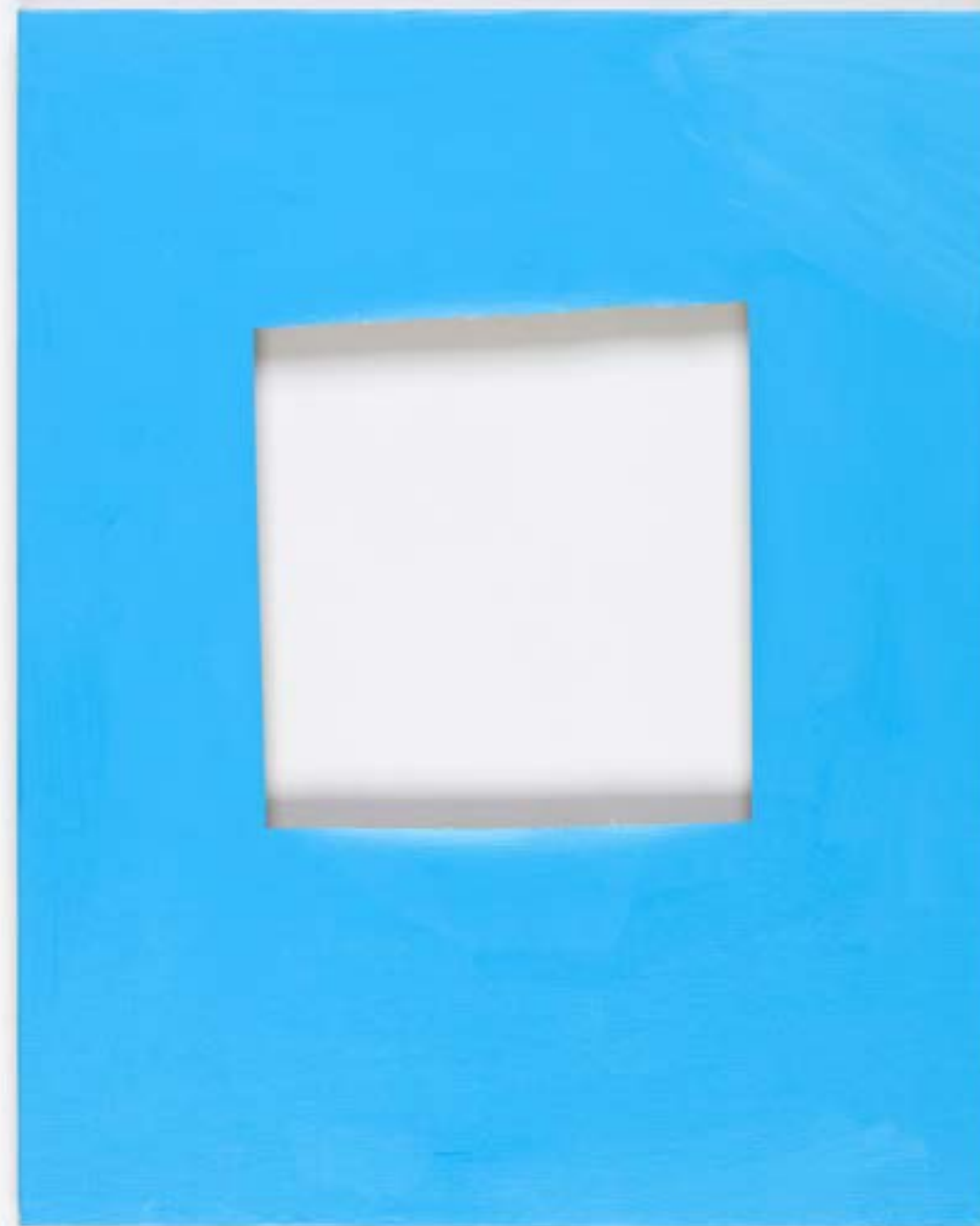
technik ₅₅



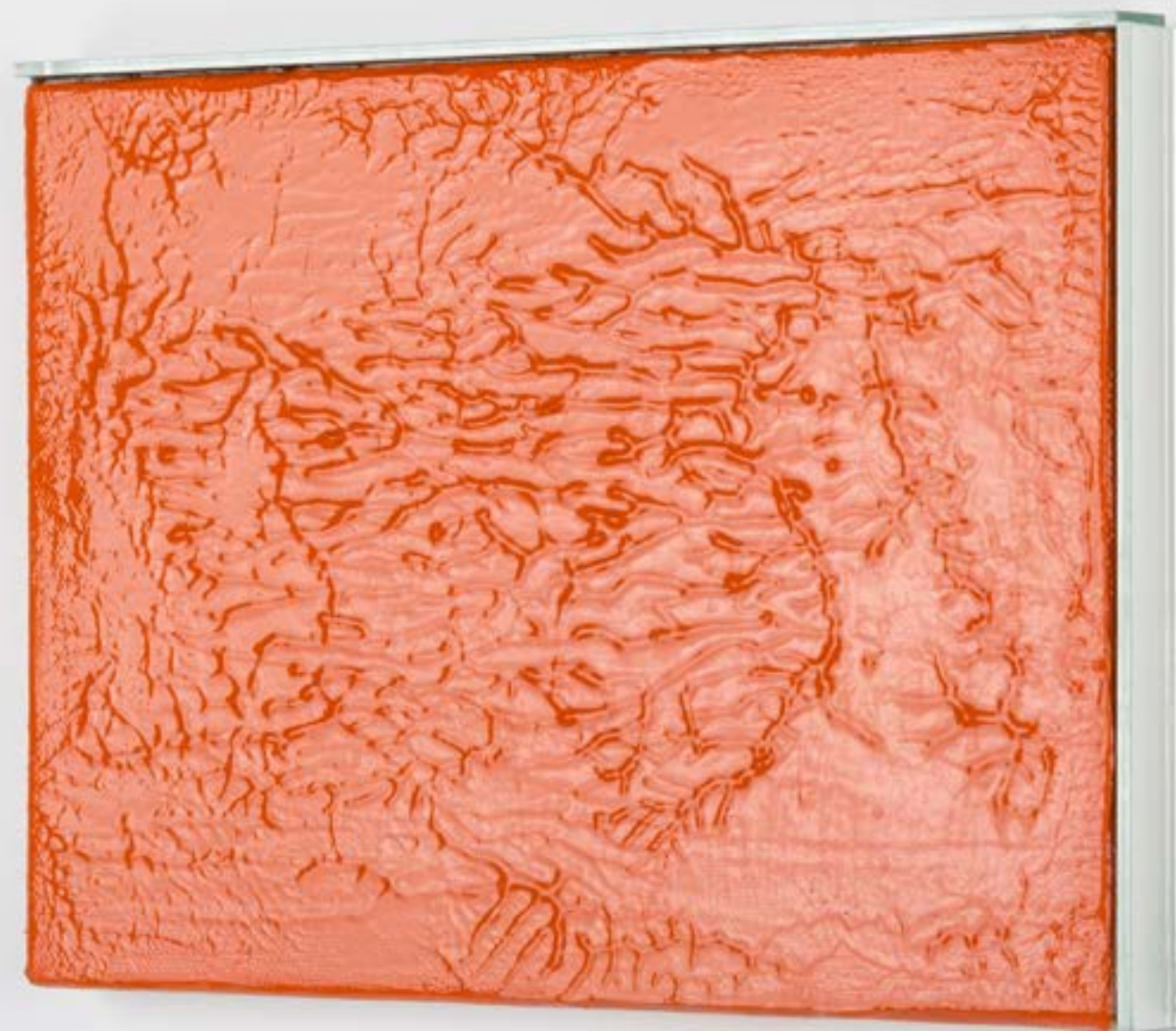




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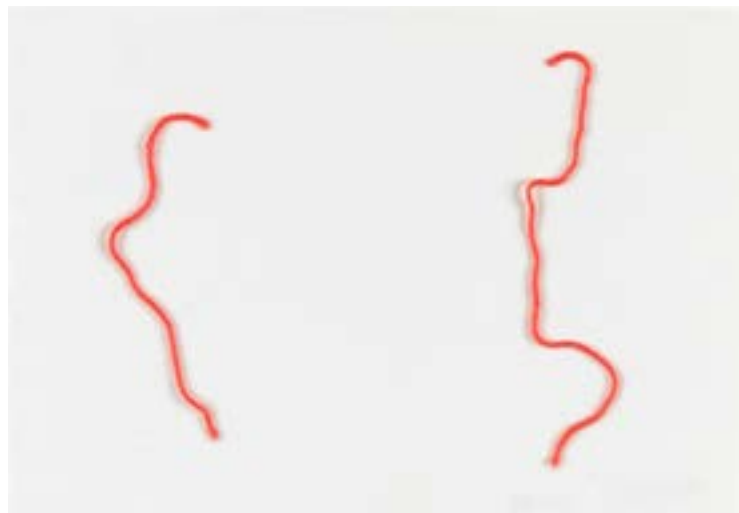
orange cloud ₆₁





motorno olje (katra) ₆₅

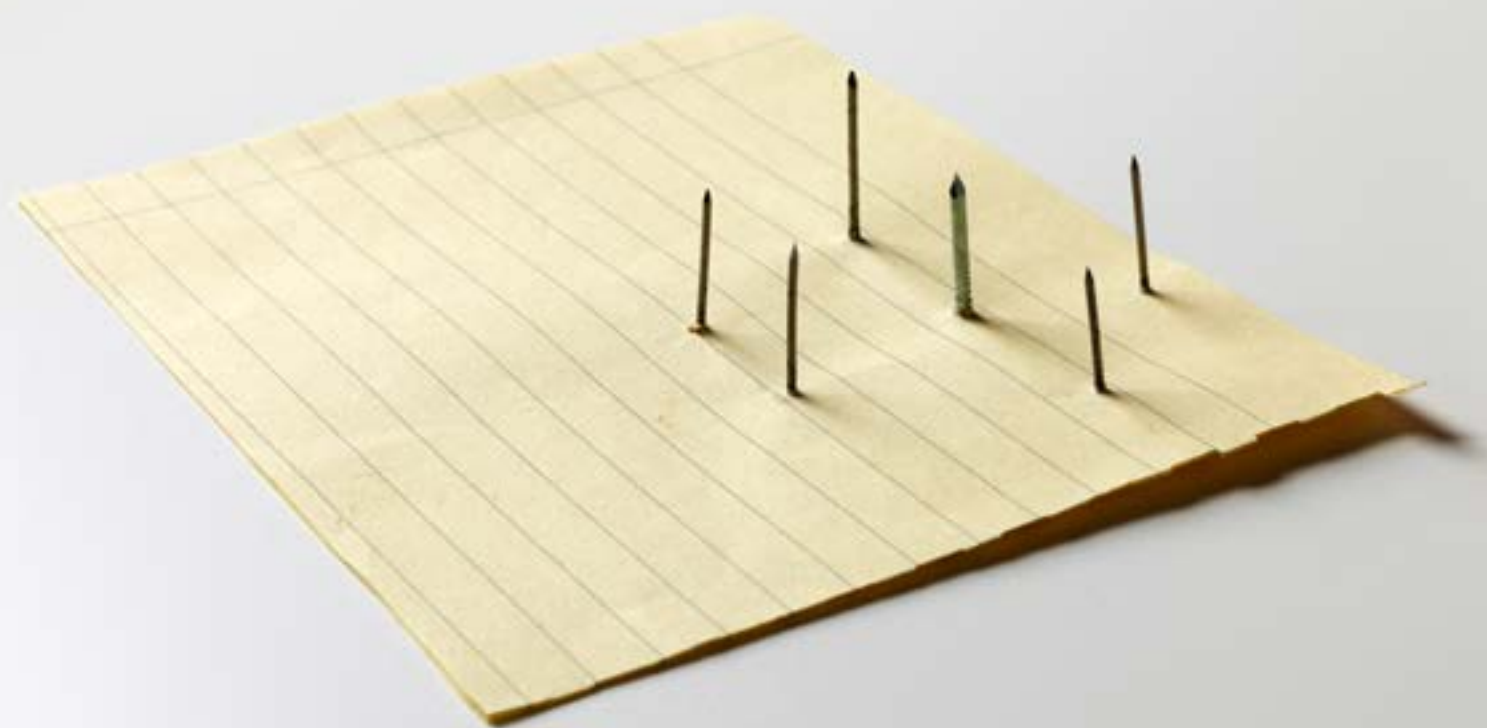


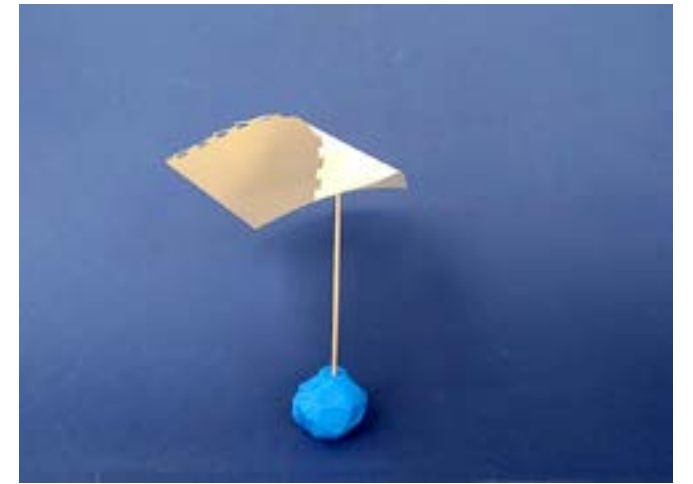
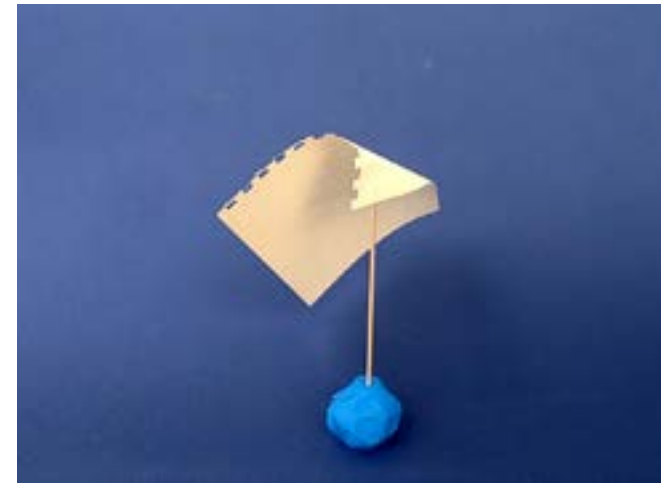


v oklepaju
yes sign
spuščena Tegi ⁶⁸



leteči pralni stroj ⁶⁹















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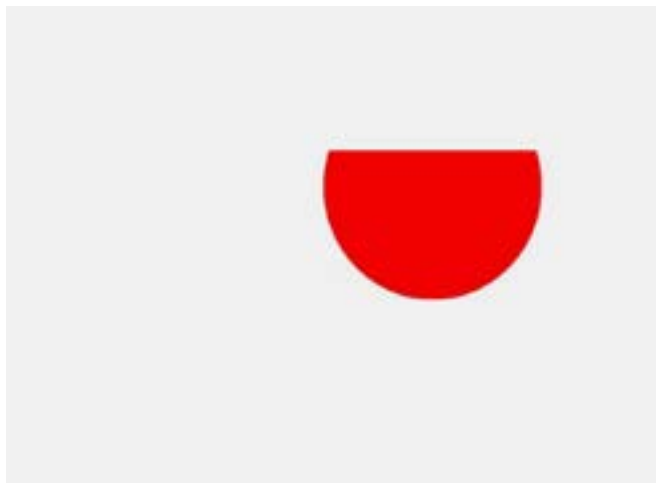
igra na macesnovem hribu ₉₄



klovni so pojedli zvok ₉₅











Seznam razstavljenih del / List of exhibited artworks

34/35	41	49	56/57
open akcijski objekt, 2 x 115 x 33 x 33 cm, emajlirana pokrova, leseni palici, vijaki, navdih: Zdenko Domančič action object, 2 x 115 x 33 x 33 cm, enamel lid, wooden sticks, screws, inspiration: Zdenko Domančič 2023 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik, Damjan Kocjančič	Scott Lawrence, Shoe VI objekt, 100 x 100 x 6 cm, usnjen čevelj, mavec, les object, 100 x 100 x 6 cm, leather shoe, gypsum, wood 2024 foto / photo: Scott Lawrence	mongolian hill kolaž, 40 x 35 x 3 cm, blago, papir, lepilo collage, 40 x 35 x 3 cm, fabric, paper, glue 2016 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	outside akcijski objekt, 13 x 49 x 94 cm, beton, les, kovinska konstrukcija, navdih: Charlie Morley action object, 13 x 49 x 94 cm, concrete, wood, metal construction, inspiration: Charlie Morley 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič
36	42	50	59
bluemamma videodokument, 4:53 min., performans, v sodelovanju s: Saša Lušič video document, 4:53 min., performance, in collaboration with Saša Lušič 2004 foto / photo: video sličici / video frames	štunf na steni objekt, nogavica, žebelj, embalaža, navodila, odprta serija object, sock, nail, packaging, instructions, open series 2024 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik	mačka na pizza video, 29 sek, serija 5/5 video, 29 sec., series 5/5 2017 foto / photo: video sličici / video frames	Foksi slika, relief, 6 x 30 x 40 cm, ogledalo, platno, blago, navdih: Foksi painting, relief, 6 x 30 x 40 cm, mirror, canvas, fabric, inspiration: Foksi 2018/2022 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik
37	43	51	60
new umetniški video, 1:52 min. (loop mode), navdih: Dominik Mahnič, serija 5/5 art video, 1'52 min. (loop mode), inspiration: Dominik Mahnič, series 5/5 2017 foto / photo: video sličici / video frames	pages reliefna slika, 30 x 20 x 23 cm, platno, akril, papir, lepilo, odprta serija relief painting, 30 x 20 x 23 cm, canvas, acrylic, paper, glue, open series 2023 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik	muha objekt, 10 x 29 x 29 cm, beton, električni kuhalnik object, 10 x 29 x 29 cm, concrete, electric stove 2022 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik	iz stripa slika, 15 x 21 cm, papir, gvaš painting, 15 x 21 cm, paper, gouache 2022 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič
38	46	52	61
Bakija in Zofka objekt, 60 x 130 x 130 cm, motor, kovinska konstrukcija, ogledalo, navdih: Alan Bakija, Zofka Seme, Darja Kogej, Andrej Rus object, 60 x 130 x 130 cm, motor, metal structure, mirror, inspiration: Alan Bakija, Zofka Seme, Darja Kogej, Andrej Rus 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	fuckin' good akcijski objekt, 110 x 160 x 70 cm, platno, akril emajl, kovinska in lesena konstrukcija, plastična cev action object, 110 x 160 x 70 cm, canvas, acrylic enamel, metal and wooden construction, plastic tube 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	NE BO instalacija, izrez grobe luknje v steno z usmerjenim reflektorjem, svetlobna točka na tleh, luknja premera 50 cm installation, rough incised hole in the wall with a directed reflector, light point on the floor, hole with a diameter of 50 cm 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	orange cloud slika, 40 x 50 x 1 cm, platno, akril emajl painting, 40 x 50 x 1 cm, canvas, acrylic enamel 2018 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik
40	47	54	63
pokrijem se s kolesom kolaž, 27 x 33 x 1 cm, papir, zobotrebci, lepilo, flomaster collage, 27 x 33 x 1 cm, paper, toothpicks, glue, felt-tip pen 2020 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik	Vadim Fiškin, Dark Times objekt, 31,5 x 31,5 x 4 cm, stenska ura, barva, tiktakanje object, 31,5 x 31,5 x 4 cm, wall clock, paint, ticking 2019/20 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik	Alice Könitz, Solar/Lunar objekt, papirmaše, 150 x 150 x 4 mm; kaširan objekt, 15 x 15 x 3 cm, papirna kaša, akril object, papier-mâché, 150 x 150 x 4 mm; laminated object, 15 x 15 x 3 cm, paper pulp, acrylic 2020 foto / photo: Alice Könitz	meet meat slika, relief, 24 x 18 x 1 cm, ogledalo, platno, akril emajl, navdih: Nejc Kek - Skušek painting, relief, 24 x 18 x 1 cm, mirror, canvas, acrylic enamel, inspiration: Nejc Kek-Skušek 2018 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik
48	55	65	70
Viktor Bernik, Učinek stola (iz serije <i>Učinek metulja</i>) / The Effect of a Chair (from the series Butterfly effect) serija intervencij v razstavo Mladena Stropnika series of interventions into the Mladen Stropnik exhibition 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	tehnik slika relief, 25 x 12 x 12 cm, platno, akril, papir, lepilo relief painting, 25 x 12 x 12 cm, canvas, acrylic, paper, glue 2023 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	motorno olje (katra) slika, relief, 50 x 40 x 3 cm, platno, papir, lepilo, novoletne kresničke, navdih: Pavla Stropnik - Čas painting, relief, 50 x 40 x 3 cm, canvas, paper, glue, New Year's sparklers, inspiration: Pavla Stropnik-Čas 2018 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik	ljubim sluz risba relief, 15 x 20 x 3 cm, papir, lepilo, žebliji relief drawing, 15 x 20 x 3 cm, paper, glue, nails 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič
72	74	75	77
a boš šot? akcijski objekt, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, ogledalo, cigareta, vžigalnik, navdih: Samo Korošec action object, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, mirror, cigarette, lighter, inspiration: Samo Korošec 2019 foto / photo: Marjorie Brunet Plaza z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen Stropnik, Gregor Podnar	Razi kolaž, 25 x 20 x 5 cm, papir, lepilo, akril, navdih: Marko Ranzinger collage, 25 x 20 x 5 cm, paper, glue, acrylic, inspiration: Marko Ranzinger 2018 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	osel kolaž, 40 x 30 x 6 cm, papir, lepilo, kuli, akril, karton collage, 40 x 30 x 6 cm, paper, glue, coolies, acrylic, cardboard 2023 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	mirroring video, 3:01 min., serija 5/5 video, 3'1 min., series 5/5 2018 foto / photo: video sličici / video frames
76	78	81	82
črna akcijski objekt, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, ogledalo, cigareta, vžigalnik, navdih: Samo Korošec action object, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, mirror, cigarette, lighter, inspiration: Samo Korošec 2019 foto / photo: Marjorie Brunet Plaza z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen Stropnik, Gregor Podnar	une performans, sodelovanje v performansu po objavljenem urniku, trajanje pribl. 3 min., navdih: Stjepan Domančič performance, participation in the performance according to the published schedule, duration approx. 3 min., inspiration: Stjepan Domančič 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	portret slika relief, 38 x 48 x 5 cm, barvice, lepilo, volna, karton relief painting, 38 x 48 x 5 cm, colour pencils, glue, wool, card 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	črna akcijski objekt, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, ogledalo, cigareta, vžigalnik, navdih: Samo Korošec action object, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, mirror, cigarette, lighter, inspiration: Samo Korošec 2019 foto / photo: Marjorie Brunet Plaza z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen Stropnik, Gregor Podnar

66	68	72	76
kraja češenj objekt, 60 x 125 x 5 cm, les, jekleni vijaki, bakrene cevi, navdih: finžgarjevci object, 60 x 125 x 5 cm, wood, steel screws, copper tubes, inspiration: finžgarjevci 2022 foto / photo: Jaka Babnik	v oklepaju kolaž, 21 x 14 cm, volna, lepilo, papir, navdih: Nataša Skušek collage, 21 x 14 cm, wool, glue, paper, inspiration: Nataša Skušek 2019 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	ko spim video, 38 sek. (loop mode), serija 5/5 video, 38 sec. (loop mode), series 5/5 2020 foto / photo: video sličici / video frames	črna akcijski objekt, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, ogledalo, cigareta, vžigalnik, navdih: Samo Korošec action object, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, mirror, cigarette, lighter, inspiration: Samo Korošec 2019 foto / photo: Marjorie Brunet Plaza z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen Stropnik, Gregor Podnar
68	70	74	78
yes sign kolaž, 23 x 30,5 cm, flomaster, svetlobna odsevnika, papir collage, 23 x 30.5 cm, felt-tip pen, light reflectors, paper 2019 foto / photo: Jan Hecl	spuščena Tegi risba 21 x 30 cm, flomaster, papir, navdih: Mateja Pucko drawing 21 x 30 cm, felt-tip pen, paper, inspiration: Mateja Pucko 2020 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	leteči pralni stroj kolaž, 36 x 33 cm, barvica, papir, sukanec, navdih: Robert Jukić collage, 36 x 33 cm, colour pencil, paper, thread, inspiration: Robert Jukić 2023 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	ljubim sluz risba relief, 15 x 20 x 3 cm, papir, lepilo, žebliji relief drawing, 15 x 20 x 3 cm, paper, glue, nails 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič
70	72	76	80
tree kolaž, 21 x 30 cm, flomaster, les, papir collage, 21 x 30 cm, felt-tip pen, wood, paper 2020 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	črna akcijski objekt, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, ogledalo, cigareta, vžigalnik, navdih: Samo Korošec action object, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, mirror, cigarette, lighter, inspiration: Samo Korošec 2019 foto / photo: Marjorie Brunet Plaza z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen Stropnik, Gregor Podnar	portret slika relief, 38 x 48 x 5 cm, barvice, lepilo, volna, karton relief painting, 38 x 48 x 5 cm, colour pencils, glue, wool, card 2024 foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič	črna akcijski objekt, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, ogledalo, cigareta, vžigalnik, navdih: Samo Korošec action object, 21 x 29 x 8 cm, mirror, cigarette, lighter, inspiration: Samo Korošec 2019 foto / photo: Marjorie Brunet Plaza z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen Stropnik, Gregor Podnar

82

peace at last
interaktivna fotografija, 10 x 14 cm,
fotografija oživi z uporabo aplikacije
artivive.com, na voljo v obliki NFT, serija
30/30
interactive photo, 10 x 14 cm, photo
comes alive through artivive.com,
available in NFT form, 30/30 series
2020
foto / photo: Mladen Stropnik

86

pohaje
zvok, 3 min. (loop mode), navdih: Velenjci
sound, 3 min. (loop mode), inspiration:
Velenjci
2024
foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič

87

bere belo
video, 2:11 min. (loop mode), serija 5/5,
navdih: Indija Stropnik
video, 2'11 min. (loop mode), series 5/5,
inspiration: Indija Stropnik
2020
foto / photo: video sličici / video frames

88

to others you
akcijski objekt, 85 x 25 x 25 cm (dva
kosa), kovinska cev, usnje, objemka,
navdih: Katja Skušek
action object, 85 x 25 x 25 cm (two
pieces), metal tube, leather, clamp,
inspiration: Katja Skušek
2022
foto / photo: Jaka Babnik in Damjan
Kocjančič

89

talkin' true
risba, 21 x 15 cm, papir, svinčnik, navdih:
Izabela Stropnik
drawing, 21 x 15 cm, paper, pencil,
inspiration: Izabela Stropnik
2023
foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič

90

sleep'n eat
slika relief, 40 x 30 x 11 cm, platno, akril,
karton, lepilo
relief painting, 40 x 30 x 11 cm, canvas,
acrylic, cardboard, glue
2023
foto / photo: Jaka Babnik

91/92

hiša iz Šembij
akcijski objekt, 180 x 30 x 17 cm, opeka,
bakrena cev, vijak s plastičnim vložkom
action object, 180 x 30 x 17 cm, brick,
copper tube, screw with plastic insert
2019
foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič in Jaka
Babnik
z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen
Stropnik, Gregor Podnar

94

igra na macesnovem hribu
slika, 30 x 40 x 1 cm, platno, olje, akril
emajl, navdih: Pavla Stropnik - Čas
painting, 30 x 40 x 1 cm, canvas, oil,
acrylic enamel, inspiration: Pavla Stropnik
- Čas
2017
foto / photo: Jaka Babnik

95

klovni so pojedli zvok
reliefna slika, 40 x 50 x 13 cm, platno,
akril emajl, žica, lepilo
relief painting, 40 x 50 x 13 cm, canvas,
acrylic enamel, wire, glue
2017
foto / photo: Jaka Babnik
z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen
Stropnik, Gregor Podnar

96

klečanje na koruzi
video, 10 sek. (loop mode), serija 5/5,
navdih: Terezija Stropnik
video, 10 sec. (loop mode), series 5/5,
inspiration: Terezija Stropnik
2021
foto / photo: video sličici / video frames

97

exam
risba, 21 x 30 cm, flomaster, papir
drawing, 21 x 30 cm, felt-tip pen, paper
2020
foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič

98

grace jones
video 41 sek., serija 5/5, navdih: Grace
Jones, video sličici
video 41 sec., series 5/5, inspiration:
Grace Jones, video frames
2023
foto / photo: video sličici / video frames

99

on a leash
giblivi kolaž, 45 x 36 x 1 cm, papir, vrv,
lesena krogla, jeklen pokrov, barvice,
lepilo
moving collage, 45 x 36 x 1 cm, paper,
rope, wooden ball, steel cover, colour
pencils, glue
2024
foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič

100

hi
video, 13 sek. (loop mode), serija 5/5,
video sličici
video, 13 sec. (loop mode), series 5/5,
video frames
2020
foto / photo: video sličici / video frames

101

hoh električista
relief, 35 x 45 x 5 cm, les, žebli, žica,
navdih: Franc Stropnik
relief, 35 x 45 x 5 cm, wood, nails, wire,
inspiration: Franc Stropnik
2021
foto / photo: Jaka Babnik

102

punk juice
video, 31 sek., serija 5/5, video sličici
video, 31 sec., series 5/5, video frames
2018
foto / photo: video sličici / video frames

103

hunt back
kolaž 30 x 21 x 4 cm, papir, svinčnik,
flomaster, lepilo, navdih: Miha in Barbara
Skušek - Kek
collage 30 x 21 x 4 cm, paper, pencil,
felt-tip pen, glue, inspiration: Miha and
Barbara Skušek-Kek
2020
foto / photo: Damjan Kocjančič

104

for brooom
akcijski objekt, 15 x 115 x 45 cm, les,
akril, vijaki, industrijski koleščki
action object, 15 x 115 x 45 cm, wood,
acrylic, screws, industrial wheels
2019
foto / photo: Jaka Babnik in Damjan
Kocjančič
z dovoljenjem / courtesy of: Mladen
Stropnik, Gregor Podnar

Biografije / Biographies

Mladen Stropnik (1977)

[mladenstropnik.com](#)

Rodil se je v Slovenj Gradcu in odraščal v Velenju. Leta 2001 je diplomiral na Akademiji za likovno umetnost in oblikovanje (Univerza v Ljubljani) in leta 2004 tam končal tudi magistrski študij. Živi in dela v Ljubljani.

He was born in Slovenj Gradec and grew up in Velenje. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) in 2001 and completed a master's degree in 2004 at the same institution. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

Samostojne razstave – izbor / Solo Exhibitions – selection

2023

UGM Studio, Umetnostna galerija Maribor, *Pristava* Gaberke Velenje, kuratorka / curator Živa Kleindienst, Maribor

2023

Galerija Loža, Obalne galerija Piran, *DUNAJC POMFRIT*, kuratorka / curator Majda Božeglav - Japelj, Koper

2023

Galerija Ravne, Koroška galerija likovnih umetnosti, *Družmirje*, kurator / curator Jernej Kožar, Ravne na Koroškem

2022

Lauba – Artigrad, Mladen Stropnik slikar, Zagreb, Hrvaška / Croatia

2020

Gregor Podnar, *13fifteen*, kustos / curator Gregor Podnar, Berlin, Nemčija / Germany

2018

Projektni prostor DUM / Project Space DUM, *fade in to the night*, kustos / curator Tevž Logar, Ljubljana

2015

Apoteka, *under the counter*, kustos / curator Branka Benčić, Vodnjan, Hrvaška / Croatia

2014

Galerija ŠKUC / Gallery ŠKUC, *night train (who's there?)*, kustos / curator Vladimir Vidmar, Ljubljana

2013

Gregor Podnar, *LET GO*, kustos / curator Gregor Podnar, Ljubljana

2012

Mednarodni grafični likovni center, sofa, kustos / curator Božidar Zrinski, Ljubljana

2010

Kapsula, Center in Galerija P74, *Pri Zlatem stegnu – Triki*, kustos / curator Maja Škerbot, Ljubljana

2009

Galerija Gregor Podnar, *fuckin' hanging*, kustos / curator Gregor Podnar, Ljubljana

2003

Galerie Jaspers, Open Art 2003 München, kustos / curator Michael Jaspers, München, Nemčija / Germany

2002

Galerija Velenje, *Square*, kustos / curator Milena Koren - Božiček, Velenje

Skupinske razstave / Group Exhibitions

2021

Mednarodni grafični likovni center, *Mladen Stropnik in / and Small But Dangers*, Ljubljana

2018

Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum, *Moving Silently*, Fremont, ZDA / USA
Galerija Galženica, *Temporary Encounters*, Velika Gorica, Hrvaška / Croatia

2017

Richter Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, *SintArt 07: Marko Tadić – Man standing in a Museum looking at something*, Zagreb, Hrvaška / Croatia

2016

Mednarodni grafični likovni center, *The Centres of Printmaking: At the Intersection of Knowledge, Learning and Cooperation*, Ljubljana; Beograd / Belgrade, Srbija / Serbia; Philadelphia, ZDA / USA

2015

Muzej sodobne umetnosti Metelkova, MG+MSUM, *Krize in novi začetki: Umetnost v Sloveniji 2005–2015 / Crises and New Beginnings: Art in Slovenia 2005–2015*, Ljubljana

2014

Mednarodni grafični likovni center, *Crossings*, Ljubljana

2013
Galerija ŠKUC, <i>THE PLEASURE IS MINE</i> , Ljubljana

2011
Mednarodni grafični likovni center, <i>29. grafični bienale Ljubljana / The 29th Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts, fuckin rabbit</i> , Ljubljana

2009
Gallery ISCP-NY, <i>geris magic acid bar</i> , New York, ZDA / USA

2006
Emergeandsee, <i>EU 2006 Tour</i> ; Berlin, Nemčija / Germany; Budimpešta / Budapest, Madžarska / Hungary; London, Velika Britanija / Great Britain

2005
<i>The 12th Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and The Mediterranean / 12 bienale mladih umetnikov iz Evrope in Sredozemlja</i> , Neapelj / Naples, Italija / Italy

Nagrade in priznanja / Awards and Recognitions

2022
Nagrada / Award Cesare Dell'Acqua, 57. Extempore, Piran

2020
COCA Project 2020 Finalist, Rim / Rome, Italija / Italy

2018
Artslant Prize Showcase Finalist, Los Angeles, ZDA / USA

2008
Nagrada OHO / OHO Award, Galerija P74, Ljubljana

2001
Prešernova nagrada Univerze v Ljubljani / Student Prešeren Award of the University of Ljubljana

Alice Könitz

(rojena v Essnu, Nemčija)
živi in dela v Los Angelesu (ZDA).

Könitz je svoja predstavila na številnih razstavah, med drugim na bienalu Whitney leta 2008, bienalu Made in LA leta 2014, v Galerie Nächst St Stephan (Rosemarie Schwarzwälder), pri Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, v muzeju Lehbruck v Duisburgu in muzeju Mülheim/Ruhr. Njeno delo zastopa galerija Commonwealth and Council. Könitz je magistrirala na CalArtsu ter prejela Akademiebrief in Meisterschülerbrief na Kunstakademie v Düsseldorfu. Je prejemnica nagrad in štipendij, med njimi štipendije DAAD, Förderpreis zum Ruhrpreis, Kreativkraftpreis/Mülheim, štipendije za samostojne umetnike COLA in nagrade Mohn.

(born in Essen, Germany)
lives and works in Los Angeles (USA).

Könitz has presented her work in numerous exhibitions, including the 2008 Whitney Biennial, the 2014 Made in LA Biennial, Galerie Nächst St. Stephan (Rosemarie Schwarzwälder), Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, the Lehbruck Museum, Duisburg and the Museum of Mülheim/Ruhr. Her work is represented by Commonwealth and Council. Könitz holds a MFA from CalArts and an Akademiebrief and Meisterschülerbrief from the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. Awards and fellowships include the DAAD fellowship, the Förderpreis zum Ruhrpreis, the Kreativkraftpreis/Mülheim, the COLA individual artist fellowship and the Mohn Award.

Vadim Fiškin

(rojen leta 1965 v Penzi, ZSSR)

je do leta 1996 živel v Moskvi, zdaj živi in dela v Ljubljani.

Fiškin je leta 1986 je diplomiral na Moskovskem inštitutu za arhitekturo. Svoja dela je predstavil na številnih samostojnih in skupinskih razstavah, med drugim štirikrat na Beneškem bienalu (1995, 2003, 2005 in 2017), na 1. bienalu v Valencii, Manifesti 1 v Rotterdamu, Manifesti 10 v Sankt Peterburgu, 3. carigrajskem bienalu, 8. baltskem trienalu mednarodne umetnosti v Vilni, Casinu Luxembourg v Luxembourgu, Secesiji na Dunaju, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume v Parizu, FRAC Lorraine v Metzu, Moderni galeriji v Ljubljani, Gregor Podnar v Ljubljani, Galeriji Škuc v Ljubljani, Centru sodobne umetnosti v Moskvi, Galeriji XL v Moskvi, Galeriji sodobne umetnosti v Leipzigu, Martin-Gropius-Bauu v Berlinu, Künstlerhaus Bethanien v Berlinu, Palazzo dell Ragione v Milanu, Fundaciji BAWAG na Dunaju, ZKM,

Umetniškem in medijskem centru v Karlsruheju, Muzeju za sodobno umetnost MACRO v Rimu, Muzeju Isabelle Stewart Gardner v Bostonu in Drawing Center v New Yorku.

(born in 1965 in Penza, USSR)
lived in Moscow until 1996 and is now based in Ljubljana (Slovenia).

Fiškin studied at the Moscow Institute of Architecture, where he graduated in 1986. His work has been presented in numerous group and solo exhibitions, including at four editions of the Venice Biennale (1995, 2003, 2005 and 2017); the 1st Valencia Biennial; Manifesta 1, Rotterdam; Manifesta 10, Saint Petersburg, the 3rd Istanbul Biennial; the 8th Baltic Triennial of International Art, Vilnius; Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg; the Secession, Vienna; Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris; FRAC Lorraine, Metz; Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, Gregor Podnar, Ljubljana; Galerija Škuc, Ljubljana; Contemporary Art Center, Moscow; XL Gallery, Moscow; Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig; Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin; Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; Palazzo dell Ragione, Milano; BAWAG Foundation, Vienna; ZKM, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe; MACRO Museum for Contemporary Art, Rome; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; and the Drawing Center, New York.

Scott Lawrence

(rojen leta 1975 v Annistonu, Alabama, ZDA)

živi in dela v New Havenu (ZDA).

Umetnikovi kipi, slike, risbe in videodela so bili razstavljeni po ZDA ter v Parizu, Berlinu, Seulu in Vancouvru. Samostojno je razstavljal v galerijah GRIN (Providence, RI) in NurtureArt (Brooklyn, NY). V galeriji Take it Easy (Atlanta, GA) se je predstavil na razstavi dveh izbranih umetnikov. Njegova dela so bila vključena v SPRING/BREAK, Brucennial BHQFU in White Columns Artist Registry. Lawrence je bil uporabnik rezidence v umetnostnem centru Kino Saito (Verplanck, NY). Njegova dela so bila objavljena v časopisu New York Times, reviji Art Papers in časopisu Atlanta Journal Constitution. Scott Lawrence prihaja iz Alabame in zdaj živi v Woodbridgeu v Connecticutu

(born in 1975 in Anniston, Alabama, USA)
lives and works in New Haven (USA).

The artist’s sculptures, paintings, drawings and video works have been exhibited throughout the US and in Paris, Berlin, Seoul and Vancouver. He has had solo shows at

GRIN (Providence, RI) and NurtureArt (Brooklyn, NY), and a two-person show at Take it Easy (Atlanta, GA). His work has been included in the SPRING/BREAK art show, the BHQFU Brucennial, and the White Columns Artist Registry. Lawrence was awarded a residency at Kino Saito (Verplanck, NY). His work has appeared in the New York Times, Art Papers and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Originally from Alabama, Scott Lawrence currently lives in Woodbridge, Connecticut.

Viktor Bernik

(rojen leta 1971 v Ljubljani)

živi in dela v Ljubljani.

Bernik je leta 1998 na Akademiji za likovno umetnost v Ljubljani diplomiral iz slikarstva in tam opravil še specialko. Študijsko se je izpopolnjeval v Združenih državah Amerike. Sodeloval je na številnih razstavah v Sloveniji in tujini, kot so nenaslovljeni projekt v Mali galeriji (Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, 2009), Čas brez nedolžnosti, novejše slikarstvo v Sloveniji (Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, 2019), Krize in novi začetki: Umetnost v Sloveniji 2005–2015, (Muzej sodobne umetnosti, Ljubljana, 2015), Sedanost in prisotnost (Muzej sodobne umetnosti, Ljubljana, 2012), 30. grafični bienale (Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana, 2013), Muzej na cesti (Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2008), The New Ten (Kunsthaus, Dunaj in MKM Museum Küppersmuhle, Duisburg, 2004).

(born 1971 in Ljubljana, Slovenia)
lives and works in Ljubljana (Slovenia).

Bernik graduated in Painting from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana in 1998. He went on to complete a specialist postgraduate study at the same institution and undertook further training in the United States. He has participated in numerous exhibitions in Slovenia and abroad, such as the untitled project at Mala galerija (Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, 2009), Time without Innocence, Recent Painting in Slovenia (Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, 2019), Crises and New Beginnings: Art in Slovenia 2005–2015 (Museum of Contemporary Art, Ljubljana, 2015), The Present and Presence (Museum of Contemporary Art, Ljubljana, 2012), The 30th Biennial of Graphic Arts (Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana, 2013), Museum in the Streets (Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2008), The New Ten (Kunsthaus, Vienna and MKM Museum Küppersmuhle, Duisburg, 2004).



Mestna galerija City Art Gallery Ljubljana

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On behalf of City Art Gallery Ljubljana
Barbara Sterle Vurnik

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Rod Jezerski zmaj / Lake Dragon Mine

V sodelovanju z / In collaboration with:
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**Muzej in galerije mesta Ljubljane /
Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana**
Zanj / Represented by: Blaž Peršin



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**Mestna občina Ljubljana
City of Ljubljana**



Mladen Stropnik
adijo pecivo / pastry
23. 5. 2024 – 1. 9. 2024

Razstava / Exhibition

Vodja projekta / Project leader
Barbara Sterle Vurnik

Kustosinja razstave / Exhibition curator
Barbara Sterle Vurnik

Gostujoči umetniki / Guest artists
Viktor Bernik, Alice Könitz, Vadim Fiškin,
Scott Lawrence

Produkcija / Production
Maruša Meglič

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video of the exhibition
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Spremljevalni program / Accompanying programme

23. 5. – 1. 9. (vsak četrtek / every thursday)
Mladen Stropnik in performerji: interaktivni performansi
Mladen Stropnik and performers: interactive performances

25. 5.
Vodstvo po razstavi s kustosinjo in umetnikom (v okviru Ljubljana Art Weekend)
Guided tour of the exhibition with the curator and artist (as part of Ljubljana Art Weekend)

15. 6.
Vodstvo po razstavi s kustosinjo in umetnikom (v okviru projekta Poletna muzejska noč)
Guided tour of the exhibition with the curator and artist (as part of Summer Museum Night)

29. 8.
Pogovor z umetnikom / Artist talk
Moderatorica / Convenor: Barbara Sterle Vurnik

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