

Staš Kleindienst

Lost Space

8 March–25 March 2017

KiBela, Space for Art
MMC KIBLA, Maribor

Lost in Space and Time

Lost Space recapitulates the idea of a depoliticized space, which appears in the works of Staš Kleindienst. This is an actualized space, which has lost the power of antagonism and only remains in service of the ideology of capitalism; a space, where mutual relationships have become ritualized and controlled, yet devoid of any kind of potentiality and political manifestation.

Staš Kleindienst has been depicting spaces since 2013, when he returned to the idea of “traditional” painting. His works lean against the tradition of Slovenian naive painting, and the period of American realism from the beginning of the 20th century. Especially the latter has had a powerful influence on the artist’s work: American realism has marked the world of art with a socially critical undertone, stemming from the times when the USA was undergoing a new transformation. Massive migration flows, industrialization, and urbanization were underway, transfiguring the very foundations of the society – these were the beginnings of establishing capitalism. It has now been over 25 years since Slovenia’s independence, but it pushed us into an even greater precariat: the social differences have escalated immensely, affecting mostly the middle class.

This situation only rekindles the memory of socialist ideology in the minds of Slovenian people, regardless of the fact that we are living – ironically – in the so much desired capitalism. In socialist times the worker was privileged, while today he is out there on the market, only beginning to realize that competition is a necessary evil. Meanwhile, the world overtakes him on the inside. We have entered an era that could be called ‘Slovenian social capitalism’: on one hand we are smothered by the demand for equality, and on the other by the desire for capitalist success. The society turns negative, passive, and ultimately apathetic – and apathy has been considered as the most contemptible of human traits already since the times of Dante.

The visual content of Kleindienst’s works thoroughly portrays precisely this apathetic state of mind: with enough empathy, we should have no problem feeling it. He achieves this by painting from a bird’s-eye view, which creates an effect of a seemingly remote space, full of people and events, but these are so distant that they cause the feeling they don’t concern us. Much is *too-much*, we would say. The artist adds to this effect by using large-scale formats, thus gaining a fundamental distance between the viewer and the object, which places him in the position of an *ex machina*: the scope of the visible horizon – deliberately – reminds us of a CCTV camera recording. The space is so distant from us that it simply fails to connect us with the people, who act only as marionettes; instead we see only *lost* spaces, packed with events and people we don’t know, which is why they do not evoke an emotional, social, spiritual, philosophical, or physical sense of concern with life and the world – we are apathetic; it is none of our concern; *CCTV in operation*.

Staš Kleindienst belongs to a generation that was raised according to the values of the socialist regime – he probably still remembers the (Yugoslavian) Pioneer pledge “...to study and work diligently, respect parents and my seniors, and be a loyal and honest friend who honors his word...” A melancholy of the values of respect, honesty, and hard work, for which it seems that today’s generation does not know them anymore. The situational paradox, however, is that the 1980’s generation are now parents, who fight for their children’s rights by being ready – in search for responsibility – to pin the blame on the present-day school system, which has replaced the “retrogressive”, i. e. the socialist one.

If we compare Kleindienst to Slovenian naive painters, we can observe a connection in the depictions of numerous spaces with an almost over-crowded visual content. Naive artists created without being familiar with the rules of the syntax of visual signs, of proportions and perspective and other fine art laws, though of course for Kleindienst, with a master’s degree in painting, and having received the Prešeren Student Award as well as the OHO Group Award, this does not apply. His intention is quite the opposite: by portraying the over-saturation of space (and thereby of time) in the technique of naive painting, he tries to vanish the border between the artificial and the created, between the non-living and the living, between form and content. Direct opposition also lies in the fact that naive painters idealized painting idyllic countryside scenes, while Staš Kleindienst lives in the capital, and paints scenes from urban life, where people are not “merry as ever in the true countryside spirit”, but rather apathetic inside an urban environment.

Another influence that can be attributed to Kleindienst’s painting is that of Slovenian “too-modern” painters, which is reflected mostly in his use of the color palette and free painting style. Members of the too-modern movement reject the elitism of academically trained artists, and consciously profanize art in all its aspects, in the creative practice, and in forms of institutional life. Content always comes before the stylistic and technical laws of an artwork. The motifs are often figural, there is plenty of realistic stylization, which enables the artists to communicate the narrative in a visual manner, wherein a too-modern work of art must contain a certain amount of bizarreness, irony, sarcasm, and humor – which is indeed evident in Kleindienst’s works.

In his career, Staš Kleindienst has reached the point of artistic freedom that reflects his unique painting style, which is undoubtedly also a reflection of the modern-day world. In the depicted floods of people, events, and information, which is but virtual, and which we can, at the end of the day, put to no use, it is really about focusing on the social reality and social changes from the perspective of the discourse of power and the role of authority. In this context, the artist attempts to form dystopian social fiction scenarios, which are nonetheless based on existing ideological, economic, and political coordinates, which should lean against the idea of imagination as a tool for developing a potentially different way of thinking, rather than just a literal interpretation of the current social phenomena.

Nina Jeza

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The exhibition will be showing until 25 March 2017.

Opening 8 March 2017, at 7pm.

KiBela / MMC KIBLA Maribor, Slovenia

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is open on weekdays between 9am and 10pm and Saturdays between 4pm and 10pm.