

And Now for Something Completely Different 8

A retrospective of 15 years of work
by Nika Oblak & Primož Novak

UGM Studio, Trg Leona Štuklja 2
MMC KIBLA, Ulica kneza Koclja 9

15 December 2017 – 13 January 2018

"One must imagine the artist happy," we could paraphrase Albert Camus. Camus was, of course, referring to Sisyphus, but also to any one of us – even to "the artist". His fate belongs to him, whether it was bestowed upon him, or chosen by himself. The social role of the artist is an issue almost invariably addressed by any artist through their work, directly or indirectly.

Through 15 years of their work together self-reflection, the re-questioning of oneself from the perspective of an artist, has been central to the works created by Nika Oblak and Primož Novak. Not uncommonly, the artists themselves are the stars of their projects: protagonists in their videos, portrayed in photographs, appearing as performers, or signed by their brand name Nika Oblak & Primož Novak on memorial plaques, film posters, and postcards. Their reference to the architecture of the art world and their role in it has always been ingenious and multifaceted.

On one hand, they reflect their position in terms of material circumstances and the work they perform. In search of a gallerist in three contemporary art capitals – New York, Venice, and Basel – they hung out simple hand-written adds with their phone number on the cities' streets, and mounted a jumbo poster in the woods to promote their personal brand. One of their (unnamed and undefined) works was immortalized on a memorial plaque in the public space. We can trace how they moved around the world for over a year and a half now by looking at the postcards sent each day from where they (as artists) find themselves in that given moment.

Another concern is the burden of the greatness of art history, which they as contemporary artists must also carry. References to the giants of 20th century art – Marcel Duchamp, René Magritte, Edvard Munch, and "many others", as they stress themselves – or to present-day stars of contemporary art – Tracey Emin, Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst – have often served as a starting point for re-interpretation, an homage, or parody.

The crucial connecting element of many works by Nika Oblak and Primož Novak is the use and abuse of advertising approaches and the language of popular culture. They explore the relationship between "high art" and "low art" and scrutinize the artist's relationship towards both. In a series of more than 40 photographs they are depicted standing next to signboards with descriptions of some rather absurd Guinness World Records they have reconstructed. In a series of posters and movie trailers they become fictional movie superstars, offering to the everyman (and to themselves) a taste of the red carpet experience.

Camus assumes that Sisyphus' fate belongs to him. "His rock is his thing." Nika Oblak and Primož Novak have been rolling their rock up the hill for fifteen years, only to be able to watch it roll downhill again. The persistence, the (mechanical) repetition of the same gesture, the inability to escape, is shaken up by means of humor, playfulness, moments of surprise, and self-irony.

On this occasion, with a retrospective of their 15 years of working together, they are promising to us something completely different for the eighth time – and this time, even in two parts. UGM Studio will exhibit works based on wordplay, visual gags, performance documentation, and hommages to artists and films, while KiBela Gallery at the MMC KIBLA will display complex kinetic objects that transgress the boundaries of technological constraints and push the limits of reality.

– Jure Kirbiš

Nika Oblak & Primož Novak have been working as a tandem in the field of contemporary art since 2003. In their artistic practice they explore modern society under the influence of media and capitalism and present their visual and linguistic structure in detail. Their work was exhibited in prestigious venues of contemporary art around the world, such as: Sharjah Biennial (UAE), Japan Media Arts Festival (JP), Istanbul Biennial (TR), Biennale Cuvee, Linz (AT), Transmediale Berlin (DE), FILE Sao Paulo (BR). They received numerous scholarships and awards, among others the CYNART Award by Trans-Media-Akademie Hellerau in Dresden (DE).

Opening

UGM Studio, Trg Leona Štuklja 2
exhibition opening: Friday, 15 December 2017, 19:00

KiBela / MMC KIBLA, Ulica kneza Koclja 9
exhibition opening: Friday, 15 December 2017, 20:00

On display until 13 January 2018.

KiBela / MMC KIBLA, Ulica kneza Koclja 9, Maribor, Slovenia
Monday–Friday: 9:00–22:00 / Saturday: 16:00–22:00

KIBLA

ACE KIBLA is co-funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and the Municipality of Maribor. Project RISK CHANGE (2016–2020) is co-financed by the Creative Europe program of the European Union.

ACE KIBLA is a member of M3C, Multimedia Centers Network of Slovenia; International Platform X-OP eXchange of Operators and Producers; and McRU, Network of Slovenian Arts Research Centers.