

Boris Beja

I Beg Your Pardon, I Never Promised You A Rose Garden

KiBela / MMC KIBLA

11 January 2019–9 February 2019

The artistic practice of academy-trained sculptor Boris Beja builds on the concept of patterns of everydayness, whereby patterns are seen as the link between life, transience and art. »Rose Garden« is Beja's most recent project, it is used to evoke the minimalism of the visual formality of arranging cut flowers into ikebana, which the artist explores as a pattern in sculpting and architecture, traditionally linked to notions of worshipping life and respecting death.

Beja builds his practice on the postulates of minimalism, and it is no surprise that he selects the ikebana as a model, as it allows a disciplined structuring of the composition with minimum means. The ikebana, by definition, is an artistic form related, among other, to a certain meditative quality, within which the author can reflect upon beauties of nature and build a sense of inner peace during the course of creating an art work.

The idea for making an ikebana was inspired by an old book, which Beja came across by chance while visiting a friend. Ikebana: zgodovina in načela japonskega urejanja cvetja (Ikebana: the history and principles of Japanese flower arrangement) contains ancient descriptions, rules and instructions for making an ikebana, and discusses the historical significance and traditions associated with it. It is perhaps no surprise that the original tradition of making ikebana derives from Buddhism, which came to Japan, the land of ikebana, from China. The book describes the care and nurture of cut flowers, how to handle them and create or arrange them into various creations, ike meaning alive in Japanese, and bana meaning flower. Flower arrangements (kado in Japanese) serving as offerings occur for the first time in the seventh century, extending to the rest of the world later through Buddhism. The fact that an ikebana is more than just a decorative element, but involves symbolism and the spiritual process associated with it (which could be called building one's inner peace), is of crucial importance to the artist, as it helps him to develop a sense of closeness with nature and at the same time allows him to connect the complex relations between the inner and outer space.

»I Beg Your Pardon, I Never Promised You A Rose Garden«, sang Lynn Anderson, from whom Boris Beja borrows the title for his exhibition in the space for contemporary art, KiBela Gallery. The exhibition space with its high walls is transformed by the artist into a veritable cathedral of flowers. The nave of the cathedral houses diagonally placed wooden shelves, positioned – like pews – one after the other, with diagrams, or visual instructions, placed under the glass coverings. The exhibited formats also incorporate objects created under the mentorship of the artist by students of Pionirski dom, a Ljubljana-based center for youth culture. These are five references to visual depictions from the above mentioned book, presented as independent sculpting forms, created by Lea Osolnik, Cvetka Logar, Dušanka Kuhl, Lidija Globevnik and Lidija Drobež.

Alongside an explicitly ambient ready made set-up, which primarily transforms the gallery space into a cathedral, thereby meeting the requirements for a formal artistic installation, Beja also emphasizes the significance of formative and substantial 'patterning' of contents from our everyday lives. The ikebana project works on both processes, the formal, expressed in the visual format as an architectural wallpaper pattern, and the content-related, through which we are taken into the world of formalistic organizational principles, which precisely determine the arrangement of cut flowers. The architectural – wallpaper – pattern acts as a diagram, rounded up by paintings in the technique of acrylic on canvas. The paintings are further adorned by means of wrapping paper, which upgrades the diagrams into individual works of art placed in wooden constructions – paravans, which turn the paintings into free standing objects in space. Colors, too, play an important part in this artistic set-up, Boris Beja prefers pink and green.

The exhibition is rounded up by two videos, which holistically connect the project into a whole, and at the same time emphasize the livingness of ikebana elements and the structural fluidity of the flow, which the artist compares to equality of life and death. After all, the ikebana is a living object – turning to etymology once again – that refers to living flowers, which symbolize birth and life, even if life starts to end (more or less slowly) in the same moment it begins. A typical vanitas therefore, a symbol of transience, which heralds the transitoriness of life, the futility of pleasure, and the certainty of death.

The videos symbolically complete and round up the whole both in terms of color as well as content. They depict the female and male form of flowers: the first is a recording of a lily's 'castration', the cutting of its stamens. The second shows the cleaning of an elephant's ear plant, which, at least by way of what its Slovene common name suggests (the elephant's ear is called Adam's leaf in Slovene), is a symbol of the Christian iconography of the paradise garden with Adam and Eve, and the lily as a symbol of virginity and purity, which was even believed to cure snake bites, as described by Benedictine Walafrid Strabo in his poem on gardening from the 9th century. Flowers have carried strong symbolic meanings since time immemorial, addressing their admirers in different ways, attracting attention with the diversified shapes of their blossoms, their colorfulness, their scents and their primal natural beauty. The attraction of the artist to the ikebana lies in its structure: whoever makes an ikebana must be familiar with sculpting or architectural principles, or, in the words of Boris Beja: »An ikebana consists of three rules. Just like in a 'classic' work of art, there has to be an object, a subject, and a third element, which is the observer, or visitor. The practice of ikebana is a practice of the correctness of concept and a number of visual patterns«.

The artist, therefore, enters into the field of various neo-avantgardist traditions, and in doing so he involves other people and their works, usually experimental in nature. In the works of Boris Beja, these traditions are conceptually related, and presented in a variety of media, which he has explored for years, from sculpting, drawing, collages, photography, video, to ready-made objects and various materials used to complement and enhance patterns and ornaments on the level of form and content. Beja creates spatial, ambient installations, which are really more like complex organisms. According to him, the space, into which he enters as an artist, is of key importance each time, because it represents an expansion and at the same time compression of his formal qualification as a sculptor.

The artistic practice of Boris Beja is defined by a committed dialog and the social developments of modern times. He is especially drawn to exploring and observing phenomena associated with powerful emotional states, such as anxiety, discomfort, or fear. He is especially interested in the way the crisis of society is reflected in the psychopathological structure of life, while he is also concerned with the perception of specific social patterns and behaviors in order to analyze the different levels of consciousness, reality, and experience.

Those who make ikebana are aware of the importance of not only silence, but also the physical space, which is not intended only to be filled, but is created and maintained with the help of arrangements, relationships and composition principles of the arranged objects. This connects the ikebana to other fine art principles, including minimalism, form and line, humaneness, esthetics, and balance. These terms occupy a special position also in Beja's professional artistic practice, where his own visual statements advocate clean and well thought-out spatial installations.

The exhibition »I Beg Your Pardon, I Never Promised You A Rose Garden« represents a specific pleasure, triggered by the sensual depiction of a subject in an internal conflict, which also partly determines it, by means of a modern moralistic message. In the same way that a pattern is reassuring due to its highly organized structure, giving us a sense of stability and harmony, Boris Beja achieves this effect with his photographic collages, created through his intervention into the ikebana flower arrangement handbook. The image of the ikebana is enhanced by means of a wallpaper pattern, whose colors match the composition on one side of the book. And even though an ikebana might be marked by a sense of transience, in Beja's case it is quite the opposite: the pattern is what determines this transience, and thereby justifies it in a certain way.

Rather than planting a rose garden, then, the artist releases the patterns of formalism and content to everydayness. His artistic interventions transform them into unconventional objects, extraordinary artifacts, contemporary vanitas.

Nina Jeza, Artists&Poor's

Boris Beja

»I Beg Your Pardon, I Never Promised You A Rose Garden«

IkebHana, 2017

photography series (20), 48 x 69 cm

Box of Chocolates II., 2018

acrylic on canvas, paper (4), 100 x 120 cm

Dedicated to Petra Varl

I Beg Your Pardon, I Never Promised You A Rose Garden I., 2018

video, 2'10

Dedicated to Katja Klobčar

I Beg Your Pardon, I Never Promised You A Rose Garden II., 2018

video, 2'04

Objects included in the exhibition were created by:

Lea Osolnik, Cvetka Logar, Dušanka Kuhl, Lidija
Globevnik, Lidija Drobež

The works were created at the sculpting studio of
Pionirski dom, Center for Youth Culture Ljubljana.

Credits:

Pionirski dom, Quadro, Mizarstvo Jan, Janez
Ostrožnik, Jure Kirbiš, Črt Potočnik, and DDT –
Delavski dom Trbovlje

Translation: Helena Fošnjar

Boris Beja: »I Beg Your Pardon, I Never Promised You A Rose Garden«

Exhibition opening: 11 January 2019, at 7 p. m.

The exhibition will be showing until 9 February 2019.

KiBela / MMC KIBLA, Ulica kneza Koclja 9, Maribor

Open on weekdays between 9 a. m. and 10 p. m., Saturdays between 4 p. m. and 10 p. m.

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Cvetka Logar

Let the Rose Garden Blossom, Scent, Glow
and Sing, 2018



Dušanka Kuhl

Take Me To The Rose Garden, 2018



Lidija Drobež

The Womb of Life, 2018



Lea Osolnik

The Content of Life, 2018



Lidija Globevnik

The Softness and Tenderness of Water,
2018