

Vesna Bukovec

I Can't Be Bothered With the End of the World

7 February 2019 – 9 March 2019

artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor

The beginning of the 21st century could be described as nearly two decades of "crisis". Not only because we are living through a continuous string of political crises and humanitarian and environmental catastrophes, but mostly because the state of a permanent crisis has become the new reality, and the supposed solution, or preservation of this reality is the new modus operandi of Western politics. One part of the new reality, one of the reactions that becomes legitimized through the maintained state of crisis, is the rise of political populism, which lays the blame for the existing state on others. As a result of this, the public discourse has for some time now witnessed attitudes of open racism, which is expressed, among other things, mainly in the form of hate speech.

Vesna Bukovec's retrospective exhibition represents her critical response to the current socio-political situation, which is marked by the hegemony of political populism and xenophobia, the emergence of new forms of fascism, the resurgence of nationalism and the rise of hate speech. She reveals the intense escalation of power in the hands of repressive authorities as part of the process of militarization of the state apparatus, under the guise of assuring safety (exclusively, of course) in times of refugee crisis as a consequence of a new age of imperialism. At the same time, she warns about the fact that empathy for the suffering and exploitation of others, both collectively and individually, as well as our historical memory, are short-lived phenomena.

Bukovec applies her critical artistic practice to enter the field of public discourse, the space defined by Chantal Mouffe as a battleground on which different hegemonic projects are constantly confronted. In this so-called agonistic model, critical socially-committed artistic practices, visualizing social inequalities and thereby giving voice to those excluded from the (public) political life, possess an important subversive potential. That is not to say, however, that Bukovec's artistic practice comes from a naive position of believing that art is politically emancipatory per se. The artist understands and continually re-questions her own (privileged) position and the limits of ethical behavior, which become extremely problematic once the artist enters into the field of representing the other. It happens all too often, namely, that (especially) socially engaged art becomes a way of self-promotion for the artist, i.e., it is abused as a tool for strengthening the mechanisms of the dominant system, which it is supposed to criticize.

Awareness about these issues and a strong critical distance are also demonstrated at the formal level of Vesna Bukovec's artistic practice. The choice of media, drawing and video, seems logical, both because of the position these media occupy in the history of art, as well as for their strong presence in our everyday lives. Bukovec uses a formally minimalistic

visual language and clear, recognizable forms to provide direct and unambiguous communication with the viewer, preventing in advance the possibility of any kind of external manipulation. In the same manner, the artist herself appropriates mass media images from the beginning of the refugee crisis: all the unmediated instances of hate speech as reactions of the public to the arrival of refugees and economic migrants to Slovenia are replaced with watchwords expressing tolerance, solidarity, and inclusion.

The works *In Search of Freedom (Ecce Homo)*, *Not in My Name*, *Circular*, *Abused Terms*, *Šenčur 1* and *Šenčur 2*, were all created as part of the author's immediate reaction to the refugee crisis of 2016. In this exhibition, they are juxtaposed with more recent ones, *I Can't Be Bothered* and *Sweet Oblivion*, created in the beginning of 2018. The exhibition title, *I Can't Be Bothered With the End of the World*, rounds up the selection of exhibited works with a hint of irony, and directly addresses the individual as an active co-creator of the social and political realities, who, however, falls into political apathy all too often. Namely, it is precisely these political and economic levers – which drive the structural processes of differentiation, discrimination and exploitation – that neutralize the individual at the same time. Consequently, as a society we are drowning in a crisis of humanist and democratic values – our increasing indifference to social inequalities and the downward spiral of solidarity and empathy. In the words of Vesna Bukovec, from an interview for the Sarajevo-based newspaper *Oslobođenje*: “*The world is falling apart right in front of our noses, and all we care about is ourselves and our social media images.*”

Živa Kleindienst

Vesna Bukovec (1977, Ljubljana) obtained a BA and MFA in Sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana. She works both independently and as part of the artistic collective KOLEKTIVA (with Metka Zupanič and Lada Cerar). Vesna works in a variety of media (drawing, video, photography, installation) using a range of methods and approaches (research, appropriation, participation, etc.). Her works have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions home and abroad.

Exhibition opening on Thursday, 7 February 2019, at 7 p. m.

Breakfast with the artist on Friday, 8 February 2019, at 10 p. m.

The exhibition will be showing until 9 March 2019.

Translation: Helena Fošnjar

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artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor

Tuesday–Friday: 10 a. m.–1 p. m. and 5 p. m.–7 p. m., Saturday: 10 a. m.–1 p. m.
(Closed on Sundays, Mondays, and national holidays.)