

The Rise of women in the Culture of Western Balkans



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WOMEN
ABOUT
WOMEN



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Introduction

About the project and the problems it deals with

Biljana Jotić, Art historian and curator;
Initiator and artistic director of the project

The international project „Rise of women in culture in Western Balkans” is a two-year project that gathers various experts in the cultural sphere of social reality focusing on female gender. It starts from art and the creative aspect and talks about the gender equality, status and presence of women in artistic, cultural and social creativity. In the pursuit of raising the criteria in the presence of contemporary creativity, several issues are problematic:

- the diversity and heterogeneity as part of contemporary age,
- linking institutional and non-institutional curatorial practices,
- the standard of art exhibitions and the participation of female and male artist in curatorial practices,
- solidarity and a common perception - a close relationship among curators and female artists,
- VR technology, new forms of curatorial practices and issues about global visibility
- Networking and exchange, in the sense of widening the viewing context.

From the point of view of artistic value, we would like to emphasize that conceptually this project is based on the idea of a woman as a subject in the process of creation and an object in the process of observation. The focus is on the present moment and testifies about the inner female being and the relationship of the individual to the collective and vice versa. In the close cooperation between female artists and curators, the specificity is visible in perceiving and transmission of the message. The starting point is cooperation and networking in the region and further.

In the dialogue with the generations of the 21st century, this project will try to show how a woman shapes contemporary Balkan cultural reality and how she shapes a woman. Through various forms of the creative identity of women, in personal expression, techniques and medium, the project tends to encompass and reflect the most challenging and open questions of diversity of our times and to connect through art. We are counting on providing us with a comprehensive artistic overview of contemporary creativity and the position of women in art in the region.

As far as gender equality and empowerment of women are concerned, our main target groups are female artists focusing the younger generation, including the female curators and various experts in the field of culture. The current estimation is that around 90% of the people involved in this project's implementation will be women. Partner leader is a gender-based organization and in this way we will further ensure that gender equality is

an integral part of all aspects of this project. We would like to emphasize that in our main target group are active female visual artists, focusing on the younger generation because we follow the creativity of the 21st century and we will deal with the problems of young people and their needs.

By implementing the general activities of the project, we strive to map and document our answers to the raised questions. These are: TOURING EXHIBITION (Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, Northern Macedonia, as well as VR, Virtual Reality) for which the selectors have pre-selected the female artists with recognizable and distinctive identities of women in visual art.

RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM. In Zadar, Croatia, Udruga Prizma and partners gathered new, youthful energy through an open invitation, and artwork that was created during this program is a part of new exhibition on display in Brussels in February 2023 and in VR, Virtual Reality. VR technologies introduce new shapes of curatorial practices and global visibility. RESEARCH deals with questions of social diversity and the identities of women in contemporary visual art and includes institutional and non-institutional curatorial practices. THE DOCUMENTARY SERIES documents female artists and curators in the process of creation. The NFC is network of female curators thematically connected relating the subject of women in arts, and in addition, integral part of the project are numerous valuable lectures and workshops.

The whole project is co-financed by the IPA funds of the European Union, the funds of the Ministry of

Culture and city secretariates from the territories of partner organizations:

FENOMENA, partner leader, Serbia
BEOART CONTEMPORARY, Serbia
NGO SPES, Montenegro
UDRUGA PRIZMA, Croatia
LOKARJEVA GALERIJA, Slovenia
SENSUS, Northern Macedonia

The key words of the project are: networking, empowerment, diversity, female identities in culture, gathering, exchange

For all information follow us on WEB address: riseofwomen.net and social networks: riseofwomen.balkan



Project activities

(January 2021 - March 2023)

KICK OFF CONFERENCE was organized in Belgrade at the start of the project from 16th to 17th of January 2021 by BeoArt Contemporary. In two days and two spaces, NGVU gallery and live stream online, the conference gathered all project partners and curators (selectors for each territory), as well as numerous guests. Conference thematized contemporary women's creativity from the common angle of artists and curators and adapting to new technologies of the modern age. Ivana Ranisavljevic performed „Traces of soft writing“ - intervention on skin.

WOMEN ABOUT WOMEN EXHIBITION, TOURING SERBIA - MONTENEGRO - CROATIA - SLOVENIA - NORTH MACEDONIA

Touring exhibition 'Women about women' started the tour from Belgrade, where it was originally set up by Beoart Contemporary, from where it continued to Modern Gallery in Podgorica, Montenegro from 10th to 27th of February, across Croatia in Galery "Prica" in Samobor from 9th to 28th of March 2021, then to Slovenia, Ajdovščina from 9th to 24th of April 2021 in "Lokarjeva galerija" and at last to National gallery of Republic of North Macedonia in Skopje from 14th May to 6th June.

DOCUMENTARY

Seven episodes of the documentary series "WOMAN about WOMAN", directed by Boris Miljković, are available for viewing online on the YouTube channel of the project: <https://www.riseofwomen.net/>.

RESEARCH

"Identity of women in contemporary visual creativity" by Institute for Cultural Development

Research, conducted in 2021-2022 in cooperation with Beoart Contemporary. The aim of the research was to improve understanding of problems, challenges and real-life context in which female visual artists and female curators in Western Balkans work. 256 female artists and 30 female curators, both institutional and noninstitutional were involved in the research. Results presented in chapter 07.

INTERNATIONAL RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM

International art residency was held from the 3rd to 18th of May 2022 in Zadar, Croatia by Udruga Prizma. 29 artworks created by 29 young artists during the art residency are an integral part of virtual and physical exhibitions.

EXHIBITION WOMEN ABOUT WOMEN, RESIDENTIAL, COMMITTEE OF REGIONS, BRUSSELS, 8th of February to 10th of March 2023. This international exhibition gathers artworks of 29 young female artists from Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Latvia, Romania, Finland and Moldavia. Artworks were produced at the Residential program in Zadar, Croatia.

VR (VIRTUAL REALITY) EXHIBITIONS

VR exhibitions "Women about women" were created on the platform VR All Art - dedicated to artworks exhibited in the travelling exhibition and residential exhibition.

VIRTUAL REALITY: <https://vrallart.com/vr-exhibitions/>

PANELS, LECTURES AND WORKSHOPS

Montenegro, SPES - February 2021: „Perspective of art“ – discussion with artists by Nela Gligorović; „The power of a woman's hand“ – lecture by prof. dr. Oliver Tomić about female artists in the 20th century who influenced changes in the social paradigm; „Conquest of art“ - lecture by curator Nela Gligorović, about the first artists in the history of art, from the Renaissance to the XX century; November 2021- the lecture „Gender Stereotypes“ held by Nada Drobnjak, founder of the office for gender equality in the Government of Montenegro; „Art and the Internet audience, tools and presentation techniques“ workshop by Vesna Opavsky consisted of two segments: Writing an artist statement and Promotion of the exhibition through digital channels; December 2022 -

„Discussion on regional cooperation: Curators as mediators“ by Nela Gligorović, Biljana Jotić and Anamarija Štibilj Šajn; „Philosophical language of feminism: humanity on the women's track“ by Kristina Bojanović; „Brand and online world of art“ by graphic designer Jovana Milović.

Croatia, UDRUGA PRIZMA, March 2021 – „The life and possibilities of contemporary female artists in Croatia today“, round table with artists moderated by Sonja Švec Španjol; May 2022 - "Position and role of women in culture, art and creative industries" - panel discussion during which Dragana Martinović presented research summary and participants were selectors of residential exhibition, Antonija Letinić and Mirna Oštarić Kerr.

Slovenia, LOKARJEVA GALERIJA, April 2021 – Weaving art workshops by Katarina Spacal and curator Anamarija Štibilj Šajn; Sculptor's workshops by Teo Curk Sorta. Public discussion "A woman and the power of image" by Lea Pisani; October 2021 – "Culture in the diplomacy and the role of women in cultural diplomacy" by Her Excellency Ms Marija Efremova, ambassador of North Macedonia to the Holy See.

North Macedonia, SENSUS - May 2021: „Digital marketing - Artists and artwork's related“, realized by Dimitar Atanasovski from Marketing Agency Idea Lab; "Copyright protection in the field of visual" by Maja Kambovska arguing that it is important to strike a balance between protecting an artist's work and allowing controlled access to it, while also avoiding the risk of forming a monopoly, and on the other hand, preventing piracy by providing easier access. October 2021: "The Importance of International Networking" implemented by Dr. Ivanka Apostolova Baskar. The workshop was attended by young people and it shared useful tips, ways and expert tools that can help artists in the process of networking and self-promotion.

NFC - NETWORK OF FEMALE CURATORS

Network of Female Curators – gathering around the common goals in promotion of female angle in the contemporary art. Process started on the Kick off conference in Belgrade. Document of NFC establishment was signed by curators in Podgorica in December 2022.

The Rise of women in the Culture of Western Balkans

WEBSITE: <https://www.riseofwomen.net/>

YOUTUBE: <https://www.youtube.com/@riseofwomen1148>

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/riseofwomen.balkan>

IG: <https://www.instagram.com/riseofwomen.balkan/>

#riseofwomen #europeanunion

#riseofwomenbalkan



We invite you to
Public Workshop
24. Apr. 2021

Lokarjeva galerija
Ajdovščina, Slovenia



Tea Curk Sorta
Sculptor

Panel rasprava
14. oktobar 2022.
Zadar, Hrvatska



We invite you to
Public Workshop
17. Apr. 2021

Lokarjeva galerija
Ajdovščina, Slovenia



Katarina Spacal
Textile artist

We invite you to
Public Workshop
16. Dec. 2022
7 pm

M-Tel Digital factory
Podgorica, Montenegro



Jovana Milovick

Brand and online art world



We invite you to
Public Lecture
22. Feb. 2021 5 pm

The Conquest of art
and female partners in the history of art
by Nola Gligencic




WOMEN ABOUT WOMEN

We invite you to
Public Lecture
23. Nov. 2021 7.30pm

M-Tel Digital factory
Podgorica, Montenegro



VADA DROBNJAJ

GENDER STEREOTYPES

We invite you to
Public Lecture
14. Dec. 2022
7.30pm

M-Tel Digital factory
Podgorica, Montenegro



dr. Ksenija Drobnjaj

The philosophical language of feminism

We invite you to
Public Lecture
16. Oct. 2021 11 am

Lokarjeva galerija
Ajdovščina, Slovenia




We invite you to
Public Discussion
18. Apr. 2021 6 pm

Lokarjeva galerija
Ajdovščina, Slovenia



We invite you to
Public Workshop
24-25. Nov. 2021 6-8 pm

M-Tel Digital factory
Podgorica, Montenegro



ART AND INTERNET AUDIENCE
presentation tools and techniques

VESNA OPAVSKY



We invite you to
Public Discussion
11. Apr. 2021 6 pm

Lokarjeva galerija
Ajdovščina, Slovenia



A woman and the power of image
by Lea Pizani

We invite you to
Public Workshop
22. May 2021

National gallery of North Macedonia
Skopje, North Macedonia



Maja Kambovska, PhD
Professor of contemporary painting

We invite you to
Public Lecture
18. Feb. 2021 5 pm

Museum gallery and archive space
Podgorica, Montenegro

The power of woman's hand
by Oliver Totnic

We invite you to
Public Discussion
15. Feb 2021

Museum gallery and archive space
Podgorica, Montenegro

4 pm
Exhibition guide
Nola Gligencic
4.30pm
Perspectives of art
Gordana Kuli
Mina Jovicki
Anka Gomboceni
Maja Subramani
Jovana Vujanovic

We invite you to
Art Residency
3-18 May 2022

ABOUT EXHIBITIONS



Biljana Jotić, Art historian, curator
Initiator and artistic director of the project

Biljana Jotić (Samardžić) is originally from Herzegovina, born in Mostar in 1977. Graduated in art history at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade (MA) and during her tumultuous student years (protests in 1996/97 and bombing in 1999), she volunteered in the library at the Department of Art History. After graduating, she continued her professional practice at the National Museum in Belgrade, as well as at the Vatroslav Lisinski High School of Music. She defended her habilitation and received the title of Curator. As a cultural entrepreneur, she founded a gallery dedicated to contemporary creativity and young people (Beoart-Liveart, 2006–2015), which she led as artistic director for nine years and one of the founders of an association that deals with project activities with a focus on youth and women (Beoart Contemporary, 2016). From 2021, she performs a function of v. d. director of the Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade.

*As an independent curator, she realized over 20 solo and more than 30 group exhibitions dedicated to young artists, regional and international. She initiated and realized more than five original projects, regional and international, independently or in cooperation with civil organizations and public institutions. Selector of more than ten international collective exhibitions, events and festivals, a member of jury of several award-winning exhibitions, initiated and moderated several panels on current topics about contemporary visual creativity. More than 30 of her catalogue author's texts were published, as well as in the professional magazine for contemporary visual art and spatial communication *Fine rt life (Likovni život)*. Also, she opened numerous solo and group exhibitions, held more than ten expert guides through exhibitions and was the author of more than 20 exhibition settings. Initiated and implemented several art events with a wider program solution, art meetings, open classes with pupils and students, multimedia workshops, humanitarian events and auctions of contemporary art, as well as art tours through current settings of contemporary visual art.*

She is the mother of two adult children. She advocates for improving the standards of contemporary artistic and curatorial practices, with a focus on younger generations and the issue of women. Her author's projects have been supported several times by the funds of the Secretariat of the City of Belgrade, the Ministry of Culture and Information and the IPA Fund of the European Union.

About the Exhibitions

This exhibition gathers twenty five female visual artists from the region of Western Balkans, from territories of Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia and North Macedonia. Through the immediate cooperation of female curators and female artists we raise awareness of the female perspective and reaction to reality, in art. In the direct contact with artistic processes, vivid creative energy, the role of us, female curators, is in the process of the observation, collection, capturing the present moment and documenting it. The exhibition „Women about women“, which takes place both in real and virtual space, in physical and in virtual reality as well, will be testimony of that.

Why woman? Because only a woman knows what and how she feels.

Why about woman? Because a woman is a subject, not an object.

Why art? Because it is closest to the truth.

Why region? Because of the need for networking.

Why project? To testify about the present and pass the message.

The topic of women is not new. Throughout the history of art, women have been and have remained an inexhaustible motif. The inspiration for a woman in a specific way carries antipodes and rests somewhere on the line between borderline feelings towards her. Woman is a living organism and the best witness of our existence. Time flows and thoughts change, and so does the role of women in society. This exhibition is dedicated to the topic of women, yet by women. It raises the question from the inside to the outside, about her inner states of being. That is why it is an immediate and concrete, raw topic that opens up to the observer in direct communication. It is not a close form of one's vision but a moment of expressing women's emotion in the process.

The idea of the exhibition was initiated by the awareness of the increasing presence of women in contemporary art, which comes from the need for expression, active participation in contemporary creativity, and not as an object of worship or hatred, beauty or ugliness, lust or fear, in an effort to influence the new context of reaction to reality. Focusing on the above stated, the exhibition aims to provide insight into the female aspects of creativity, to testify and document the present and activate the question to what extent social reality shapes a female artistic expression and how the society influences female creativity. We are witnesses that there have always been women who appear as individuals and leave a permanent mark in history and society, and this exhibition gathers several of them and passes a message about the present.

The exhibition „Women about women“ is a part of the international project with multiple activities and same targets, implying the direct connection between art and social reality. The project starts from art because art is closest to the truth and most open to the experience and further communication. The selection of female artists clearly indicates a combination of different forms of artistic expression, from the same basis – the echo of the inner female being and the need to release the power she carries within herself, as an artistically shaped scream, thought from which the idea was born and has formed the concept.

In accordance with contemporary trends and new media, the artists express themselves in a unique way in various media, from painting and drawing, through photography and sculpture forms, sculpture installation, from videos to performance. Heterogeneity of visual expression is an inevitable phenomenon of the modern age, as well as the diversity of media in which or with which it is expressed. In addition to the media, diversity is also visible in different approach to the women's identities in contemporary art, from forms and corporality, through abstraction, to the feminist artistic practices. In a way, this exhibition provides an answer to the mapping of women's identity in contemporary visual art.

This, the first of two exhibitions „Women about women“, includes pre-selected artists who

respond to the theme with their creativity, i.e. in whose expression the selectors recognized the contemporary identification with the role and needs of a woman. For the second exhibition, the selection was made through an open invitation for young artists for the reason of recording the needs of youth and the primary attitude towards expression within the framework of the given theme. In addition to the territories of the Western Balkans, it also included territories within the European Union.

Selectors for the first exhibition:

Biljana Jotić, independent curator, Serbia, Nela Gligorović, independent curator, Montenegro, Sonja Švec Španjol, independent curator, Croatia, Anamarija Stibij Šajn, independent curator, Slovenia, Shqipe Mehmeti, artist and curator.

Artists: Gordana Belić, Anđela Grabež, Vesna Vesić, Leonora Vekić, Natalija Miladinović, Milena Jovičević, Jovana Vujanović, Gordana Kuč, Anka Gardašević, Maja Šofranac, Ivana Bajcer, Marina Čorić, Mateja Rusak, Lena Kramarić, Mirela Blažević, Urša Toman, Teja Tejgelj, Anja Kranjc, Lona Verlich, Meta Šolar, Shqipe Mehmeti, Tanja Balać, Ana Lazarevska, Marija Milosevska, Hristina Zafirovska.

The Residency program in Zadar provided space and conditions for individual and collective creation and production of artworks, exchange of knowledge among young female artists and curators. This international program gathered young female artists from different countries, selected by six female curators from Europe and Western Balkans. Artworks created during the two-weeks residential program are an integral part of the collective exhibition in physical and virtual reality.

The exhibition is a logical continuation of the project goals. Twenty-nine international female young artists made various artwork, expressing themselves in paintings, sculptures, installation in glass, textile, paper, videos, performance etc. It carries a strong message of female perception of creativity in the contemporary visual art and energy of youth and diversity. Diversity of approaching to the women's identities is a logical artistic response to the life in the modern age.

Selectors for the Residential exhibition: Biljana

Jotić, Nela Gligorović, Anamarija Stibij Šajn, Sonja Švec Španjol, Shqipe Mehmeti, Nela Gligorović and Lana Stantieru.

Artists: Marija Zrnić (Serbia), Kristina Kusovac (Montenegro), Antonia Magdić (Croatia), Ivona Gjorgjiovska (North Macedonia), Monika Plamen (Slovenia), Ava Tribušon Ovsenik (Slovenia), Ana Trajkovska (North Macedonia), Eva Rotreklová (Czech Republic), Teodora Kipa (Montenegro), Moncea Malina (Romania), Ana Marinković (Serbia), Jana Stankovski (North Macedonia), Arijana Kadić (Montenegro), Ana Maria Maravić (Croatia), Jonna Lehtomaa (Finland), Tijana Mrvošević (Montenegro), Ena Antunović (Croatia), Aleksandra Đukić (Serbia), Doria Valković (Croatia), Danijela Savikj (North Macedonia), Varja Jovanović (Slovenia), Marija Tomić (Serbia), Tamara Pavičević (Montenegro), Nuša Fajfar (Slovenia), Ivana Samandova (North Macedonia), Linda Vilka (Latvia), Dragana Pendovska (North Macedonia), Lucija Marin (Croatia), Meta Mramor (Slovenia).



Jana Stantieru, Residential selector of young artists from EU countries and Managing director at Europe's Art.



Nela Gligorović, Art historian, curator

In addition to her experience in public administration, specifically as a Coordinator for Culture in the City of Podgorica, she is also active in the independent cultural scene. Earlier engagements were realised through a series of lectures on the rigidity of art history in mapping the female artists of the past and theoretical work with female art students within her project called Žartvizam. As an independent curator, she is the coordinator of a project The Rise of Women in the Culture of the Western Balkans, a platform for reflecting on the contemporary artistic practices of visual artists, curators and cultural workers. Her other ideas are multidisciplinary projects, elaborating on the contemporary art scene and dealing with the socio-ideological strategies of the time in which we live. A special focus of research is the conceptual art scene of the second half of the 20th century; she is the creator of a retrospective exhibition Microcosms of Ilija Šoškić and a monograph Ilija Šoškić about one of the pioneers of Yugoslav conceptual practices. A large number of her collaborations are focused on the regional scene as a contribution to building a platform for a common future. She is the coordinator of the Montenegrin edition of the Shared Reading Room project, the creator and curator of a program Marginalia of the Common. For a few years, she has been the co-editor of the International Book Fair in Podgorica, where she is in charge of an annual focus subject.

About the Exhibition / Montenegrin artists

The history of art is a gallery of male characters, artists-geniuses. Before a feminist art historian Linda Nochlin asked Why Have There Been no Great Women Artists? in the mid-20th century, the art history research did not question the social conditions that did (not) enable women to practice art freely. Nochlin opened an arena for different interpretations of social conditions

and decisions, because until then, the ever-ready answer was – there have been none. Perfidiously highlighting the genial male artists, the social structure which constructed such a gallery and banned women from artistic expression was not a subject of analysis.

During different historical periods, women's liberation as a social force transformed social relations, especially during socialist feminism whose legacy shapes the post-Yugoslav cultural arena. In the mid-20th century, the Yugoslav socialist society tried to liberate women from unpaid work by establishing social services. That idea turned out to be utopian, because it

reproduced gender roles in a specific variant of patriarchal socialism. Although the Yugoslav project was destroyed in the 1990s, the legacy of Yugoslavia still represents a potent strategy of our region against social oppression.

To date, the feminist theories have developed different discourses and led to a pluralism which does not contribute to consensus and solidarity, but open new fronts, strategies and goals for action. Conflicts that gravitate around the theoretical assumptions of feminism, open the capitalist terrain of bidding interests, while in continuity the dividing line keeps the society in the appropriate 'social balance' according to the criteria of the white heterosexual middle class man. The attitude of female artists towards feminism is uncertain, conditioned by the dominant heterosexual narrative; they declare themselves differently when it comes to feminism.

Nevertheless, the selected works of Montenegrin artists belong to feminist art because they articulate a specific artistic and socio-political position. They are created as a critique of patriarchy, capitalism and consumerism, they question gender roles and the system of communal and social care, they detect systemic inequalities as well as personal and collective oppression, they examine the boundaries and territories of the body caught in the net of neoliberal patriarchy. Body as a battlefield is the central motif of the selected works. They consider the society-body relation, the politics of society, the body of women in capitalism, resisting stereotyped femininity through their artistic practice.

Milena Jovičević's installation The Men's Games Over and Over Again presents women, key players in the neoliberal-capitalist game. Female capitalist competition according to the rules of dominant patriarchy and the process of transition in the Montenegrin society is normalised. Competition, not cooperation, is the structural social principle in the shackles of capitalism. Why the men's games? Because the struggle takes place in the public sphere, moderated from the position of a middle-class white male.

The installation contains five figures – stereotypical variations of Montenegrin women,

with authentic costumes and insignia: a woman in the function of biological reproduction, then a business woman belonging to neoliberal capitalism, then an aesthetically neurotic woman according to the dictate of mainstream culture, then a woman functioning as a man (virdžina) as a unique ethnic/ethnic phenomenon of the Montenegrin history and finally, a figure-representation of a traditional Montenegrin woman in the folk costume.

Consumerism as a program-concept of capitalism, possession as a triumph, marriage and family as a woman's only career, misinterpretation of traditionalism, conservatism in the remnants of clan-tribal social organisation – all are attributes of these figures. Each is a construct of a hybrid social environment generated as a synthesis of patriarchy, conservatism, capitalism and regressive tendencies. Figures are placed confronting each other, on bars controlled by society and the market. Cooperation, solidarity and support have been amputated from their relations. The use of gender stereotyping as a method of constructing an artwork emphasises structural oppressions, age-old social restrictions and prejudices about women, unpaid and invisible work of women, historical inequality and the present mechanism of oppression. Against the structural violence of capitalism and the spectrum of desirable, imposed roles of patriarchy!!!

Maja Šofranac's work The Single Woman consists of a drawing of a female body, positioned frontally, in dialogue with an observer, while a drawing of a section of an airplane engine is projected onto it. In the era of aggressive consumerism, the imperative of possession, the dictate of technology and the impossibility of opposing it – the female body is a battleground: of society, times, laws, regulations, technology and innovation.

Barbara Kruger's work Your Body is a Battleground created during the Women's March on Washington in support of reproductive freedom (1989) still hasn't lost its relevance. Today's policies, under the influence of regressive legislation, are trying to abolish the woman's freedom to make decisions about her own body. In the time of 'escalation of freedoms', the choices we make relate to mere specifications of utilities – the possession of

which builds our social position. These are the only decisions we make 'autonomously' – of course, if we exclude the propaganda strategies that shape our perception.

Maja describes her work as 'the activation of the unconscious structure of a personality as the authentic identity of a person modified by circumstances'. The process of liberation, the search for the inner, archetypal self, with the aim of constituting an identity that does exist, not one that should – an identity that resides outside the track of certain social discourses. Through the work *The Single Woman*, using a body mapped by today's refractions, the artist presents a woman sworn to resistance – resistance to the corpus of influences dictated by technological innovations that control lives and bodies. Released from individuality, a woman's figure is illuminated by a light projected by a drawing of an airplane engine's section. The projection of a machine onto the human body has a function of exposing the technological influence – which is a dictate of the times.

The body is here an intersection of geopolitics, biopolitics, migrations, dictate of machines and the market. A body of a woman is the paradigm of socio-political and collective spheres, along with biopolitical measures and governing practices. The pandemic situation has activated various biopolitical mechanisms that control life through digitisation and introduction of the new health policies that destroy privacy. Control over the body is the biopolitical challenge of the future – the global biopolitical strategy will implement such control using digital technologies. The body is the territory of reading in socio-political, ideological strategies that alter it according to dictate of the market.

Jovana Vujanović's installation *Orbiting* consists of two parts: a television screen and a black square with a circular opening in the middle through which a video is played – the female subject in capitalism. It shows circling of the body inside a social framework according to the dictate of the market, capital and patriarchy. The multiplied body of the artist forms a circle, and is resembles a clock, that is, evokes the passage of time, where each unit is marked by

a performance – the passive body of the artist. Time as a notion of philosophy, science and art, marks an uninterrupted continuum, while in life of a woman time is the imperative! The clock is biological, reproductive...

The repetition of the body in a rhythm of clock hands evokes 'feelings of alienation and absurd'. The female body under the dictate of time is the central point here, and its process-related manifestations – inertness, surrender, passivity, giving up – are forms of performativity. Precisely because of the rigid structure of society, the body gives up, it is present but inactive. The body which gives up interprets individualism as escapism. Orderliness through the linear organisation of time positions the artist's body, while the ideology of consumerism animates our collective body. Collective, not individual! – this is the key slogan of the necessity to create communities ready for change, as well as new forms of organising and uniting.

Anka Gardašević's work *Pietà*, with choice of a title, refers to the iconographic representation of the Virgin Mary holding a tortured body of Christ in her arms. By recomposing positions and relationships, the artist reads in contemporary rethinking of the motif. The artist's self-portrait assumes the role of the Mother of God with her back turned towards the viewer, while the body of Christ is replaced by a human skeleton.

Mourning, sense of duty and sacrifice are determined as experiences of the female gender. Taking responsibility for a world in ruins and bodies in decay is the woman's responsibility. The work is an iconic representation of the system of care that is assigned to female gender. Anka's photography presents the world of alienation and suffering, the artist with her back to the viewer, audience and world as a gesture of giving up, of a break in communication.

'How Madonna met Ms. Ciccone on the sunny terrace of the Hotel Mediterranean... and nothing is left except for a few photos here and there, from her youth of course, and an occasional smile frozen on them. Does everything begins or ends there?'

The statement which accompanies the photograph

immediately refers to the postmodernist roller coaster, the critique of absolute truths and identities. The meeting of Madonna and Ms. Ciccone is a meeting of the Christian canon and the pop icon Louise Ciccone, that is, the canon of the Church and the society of media and spectacle. On what foundations, principles and values does our world rest? On one hybrid platform – that of the Christian and consumer canons. Even though at the end of the 19th century an apocryphal early Christian gospel from the 2nd century that Jesus entrusted to Mary Magdalene was found, the Church rejected legitimacy of women as teachers. From the genesis, excluding women from the circle of power, privileges and ruling, women's space is strictly limited by the impositions of a religious-conservative society that perpetuates the matrix of oppression and subjugation.

In a work *I am Someone Else*, Gordana Kuč constructs formations of objects consisting of white painting canvas over which fishnet stockings are applied. This game of the network forms shapes evocative of the feminine symbols; thus the allusion is physical and sexual. A basic question *Who am I?* carries a spectrum of possible responses that determine the corpus of emotional and cognitive characteristics of an individual. The time we live in, the multitude of identities that we choose or not, lead to internal discontinuity or fragmentation of personality. In the context of postmodern culture and the technological revolution, structures and concepts of personality have been completely altered.

In the work *I am someone else*, the artist conducts a search for another identity, in the sea of projected ones; she conducts a revision of the female experience. The process of creating this work is an exile from one's own experience, questioning the framework and limits of the possible, clearing the remains of the empirical burden. The choice of material indicates to investigating female freedoms and sexuality; it represents a critique of a woman's objectivisation. The material implies the female experience, although its gender does not have to be determined as female at all. Objects which are the fragments of the installation represent artefacts related to life as 'interactions between the physical, sensory and intimate spheres',

further creating connections, relations and interspaces in the complex individual-community-society networks. Confused modernity with the authoritarian dictate of consumerism led to the complete acculturation.

Recognition, transformation and transposition of experience into artistic practice is a potent intervention of the Montenegrin artists. The common motif is the body as a territory of social refractions, oppression of patriarchy and conflicting positions of a Montenegrin woman's constant struggle between personal, family-related, public and socio-political realms. The group exhibition of female artists carries the possible impression of stereotyping, tiresome reproduction of gender stereotypes about male and female as binary oppositions. However, at the playground of contemporary art, types of associations, regional cooperation, a chance of united struggle, support and acts of solidarity for bettering the conditions of the female artists from the Western Balkans all build and improve the post-Yugoslav cultural scene. In an authoritarian, sexist and phallogocentric world dictated by the capital, which is a form of structural violence of capitalism towards men, women are looking for new modes of rallying against society's violence over their bodies, time and decisions!

(Translated from Montenegrin by Goran Gocić)



Sonja Švec Španjol, Curator, M.A. in Art History

Sonja was born in Zagreb, Croatia, in 1983. She graduated History of art and the Slovak language in 2008 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, with additional studies in museology. She completed specialist training at the Meštrović Studio in Zagreb and passed the professional exam for the title of museum curator in 2012. Since 2013, she has been working as an independent curator and art critic. She founded a web portal on art PerceiveArt (www.PerceiveArt.com), which she manages and edits. She collaborated with art magazines Kontura, Vijenac and portal Arteist. Since 2018, she has been writing an art column for a lifestyle magazine Grazia. Since 2016, she is the Chairwoman of the Arts Council and member of ZILIK (Winter Art Colony) in Karlovac. Since 2019, she is a member of the Program Council of the Kortil Gallery and a member of the Council of the Ideal City Gallery. From 2020 to 2022, she has edited and hosted a show on culture and art KolibriS. Since 2023, she is a member of the Art Council of the Crikvenica City Gallery. In the past ten years, she has curated and opened more than 200 exhibitions. She is a member of organisations DPUH and HULU, and since 2018 she has been active as a member of the Croatian Association of Independent Artists. Web: www.perceiveart.com

About the Group Exhibition

In the traditional anthropology, women symbolise the power of nature. Throughout the history of art and literature, they have often been perceived as the prime ideal or blessing – but also as the greatest sin or temptation. The characters of women have varied: from a weak, tender and fragile girl paired with the wife/mother idealisations, through an impulsive, emotional, intellectual, moral being,

all the way to the femme fatale or heroic, strong and fearless female persona. A woman has often been the symbol of great complexity, combining a variety of spiritual and emotional states.

The position of women in society has changed depending on socio-historical, ideological, economic and many other factors. Times have also changed significantly. Women as self-reliant and independent individuals demand their own free space for development and action, seeking active and equal participation in creating the world.

The group exhibition Women About Women is a

part of an international art project Rise of Women in the Culture of the Western Balkans, supported by the European Union through the 'Creative Europe' program. According to the initial idea of a curator Biljana Jotić, five curators from five countries – Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia and North Macedonia – acting as selectors, have chosen five female artists each from their country, providing that they confront women's role, issues and meaning in their artwork. Female subjects, launched by female curators and artists, focuses on women as active agents and protagonists of their own destiny, action, experience and interpretation of a woman's life in the contemporary world.

The wealth of different expressions and media, as well as the experiences and themes that these female artists problematised in their works, resulted in the exhibition within which the works sincerely and life-like convey the perception, thoughts, attitudes and experiences of the artists in question. By sharing a common space, the communication between unique works materialises, and a connection develops between the female authors and media. The borders vanish, giving way to mutual understanding and thematic links between visually strong works that embody unique semantic qualities of an author and country she comes from.

Artists from Croatia Ivana Bajcer, Mirela Blažević, Marina Ćorić, Lena Kramarić and Mateja Rusak, working in the medium of painting, photography and video, openly speak out about the concept and perception of women starting primarily from themselves. Thus even three among them express themselves through the subject of self-portrait. Ivana Bajcer in her video Washing honestly addresses the imposed expectations and prejudices about female artists, women, success and career that she continuously listened about and stored in her mind over the years. The residue of all these imposed restrictions destroyed her inner peace and pushed her into a paralysing state of helplessness. In her video, the artist sits in a bathtub, and prejudices, advices and limitations which hinder her progress are written on her body. Ivana Bajcer resolutely starts to wash the words from her body – words that were so deeply embedded in her mind. Washing

off inscriptions from a body is a ritual act that represents a cathartic experience in the context of solving burdensome and accumulated negativity and limitations. But its completion is impossible, because some thoughts remain permanently etched in us.

Similarly using the motif of the female body, Mateja Rusak invites women not to lose pace under imposed social values and expectations but to celebrate their freedom. A photograph Expose Yourself is a part of a larger series in which the artist explores outer and inner reality of the female body through the medium of photography. A carefully selected shot in shadow with fragments of back, shoulder and arm reveals and conceals at the same time, suggesting complexity of the female being. So much is pronounced, contained and indicated in this extremely refined ambience work. The poetry, beauty and composure contained in the photograph opens a complex topic: the contemporary world encourages and supports the struggle for one's rights and cherishes understanding for difficult situations and tragedies, but has the possibility that women were happy and felt free at the same time become a taboo? We can easily take a cue from that question and add up the topic of celebrating beauty. On one hand, the excessive objectification of women, that is, the conception of a woman as sexual object, is actively (and justifiably) criticised, while, on the other hand, the concept of aesthetics and classical beauty is suppressed and trivialised. Has it also become unwelcome nowadays? Should a woman be proud of her mental and physical wealth, abilities and beauty she possesses?

Marina Ćorić in a b/w photograph Lace strives for classicism, simplicity and purity of form, as well as the expression of aesthetic aspiration related to the universal ideal of beauty. Always honest in her work, with the aim of expressing her feelings through the presentation of her personal intimate world, Marina Ćorić defines her monochrome series of photographs, created 10 years ago, as an opposition to the rest of her artistic actions and expression, which are often recognisable by their vulnerability, exposure and the state of chaos. By contrasting two different series, the artist actually balances her artistic actions,

while the opposites of her opus emphasise their separate values.

In her work, Mirela Blažević uses the female body as a creative means of communication. As the artist says, 'body is the subject of experiencing the greatest satisfaction in painting process – at that moment I feel emptiness and the world flowing through me'. A painting *The World* is a self-portrait of the artist interpreted from an uncommon angle, where the viewer has a unique opportunity to see the world from the position of the artist. We don't see the artist's face, but look through her eyes. This unusual interpretation allows a glimpse of an intimate world, seen through the eyes of the artist, but handed to the observer to experience and interpret it as he sees fit.

A painting *Erasing-rewind* by Lena Kramarić introduces us to her world, but at the same time to our own. A very life-like work with an exceptionally pensive atmosphere with an extremely simple motif tells the story of time. A woman is placed at the centre of the composition, with a face covered by a rich bouquet of flowers. She represents the present, the blackness behind her back is the past, and the whiteness in front of her is the future. All these elements merge, that is, they are being erased and thus disappear in the central part, because the present includes acquired experience and our past, but also our wishes and hopes for the future. Moving forward depends solely on us.

Montenegrin artists Anka Gardašević and Jovana Vujanović follow up on the issue of time in their works, while Gordana Kuč, Maja Šofranac and Milena Jovičević focus on the issues of freedom, identity and imposed stereotypes. In her photograph *Pietá*, Anka Gardašević interprets a story of continuity and our awareness of finitude with the intention of activating and stimulating buried memories and opening another question: of our being.

With her installation *Orbiting*, Jovana Vujanović indicates to the very act of waiting through the striking implementation of her alter ego in the work, shown in a nightgown in the medium of b/w photography. Through the motif of a clock, which we often focus on in the process of waiting, she alludes to the passage of time. By positioning

her body and by her facial expression, the artist indicates to an exhausting state in which we enter a limbo of infinite duration where nothing happens; thus we lose all hope and meaning.

From the subject of time perception we enter identity issues in a series of images-objects *I am Someone Else* by Gordana Kuč. A composition of abstract, but allusive elements both in form and material (black net stockings) speaks out with maximum reduction, as the artist points out, about the female experience through allusion on the physical, sensual and intimate spheres.

Questions of identity and freedom continue in the work of Maja Šofranac. *The Single Woman*, a work executed in the monoprint technique on synthetic canvas, depicts a human body onto which the artist projects a section of an airplane engine as a symbol of socially imposed gender roles. According to traditional Montenegrin beliefs, the artist says, those make a woman worthy of existing. The projection covers the drawing, suppresses and denies it, imposing its own identity onto it.

Another issue opens here: that of woman's freedom to choose a course of action and lifestyle within society. The focus is on the struggle against imposed requirements and expectations of backward milieu that suppresses personal identity and strives to blend it in the stereotyped collective identity of the given community – which in turn does not contribute to the development and wealth either to individuals or the community itself.

A work of Milena Jovičević indicates to the problem of the patriarchal matrix to which Montenegrin society still adheres to. An installation *The Man's Games, Over and Over Again* indicates to several problems – that of inequality, stupidity, prejudices, imposed roles and stereotypes in society – with simple, but extremely clear and striking symbolism. The artist puts three female figures in context of table football game, shaping them as typical social stereotypes: a traditional woman as the personification of a good wife/mother, a silicone woman with exaggerated physical attributes who is reduced to a sexual object, and a career-obsessed business woman. However, the key message the artist sends with

this work is that the game they are participating in is not fair from the very start, because the participants play a man's game according to men's rules. Although there is no visual confirmation of the male presence in society, only he manipulates and scores points.

Serbian artists Anđela Grabež and Leonora Vekić continue with the story of identity, while Gordana Belić, Natalija Miladinović and Vesna Vesić focus on expressing emotions through personal stories. A video work *Someone* by Anđela Grabež is a story about the identity and masks we wear and hide behind, just like we hide behind the roles we play in the society. With a quick succession of shots in this video, the emphasis lies on various surfaces and textures as well as body parts, while touching upon the domain of eroticism allows openness and honesty in communication.

Leonora Vekić communicates through a story on the archetypal female identities in her series *Portraits*, executed in the medium of handmade lace fixed on a plexiglass frame. A face is suggested, but is transparent, while its richness is emphasised through the relationship between light and shadow in the background. The old-fashioned technique of crocheting suggests customs and traditions, evoking memories of a female line of ancestry in the family. Its encounter with the present time is manifested through a combination with the contemporary, cold material – plexiglas.

Using another ancient technique – felting – Vesna Vesić in her work *My Dears/Adorno's Letter to his Parents* (from a series *Tender Things – Conceptual and Useful*) indicates to touching or tactility as the important media for transfer of personal energy. The wool paintings contain parts of political and private texts of important philosophers from the 20th century that refer to great changes, to progressing and regressing of the world. The fabric paintings, on the other hand, offer a kind of physical and spiritual support – a blanket as a piece of tenderness, warmth, comfort and sense of security.

Gordana Belić and Natalija Miladinović introduce us to the world of an emphatically personal and intimate experience that focuses on connection with loved ones. A sculptural installation through

which Gordana Belić expressed the emotional state she found herself in after a sudden loss of her mother is composed of stretched hands – inviting a contact, embrace and closeness. Installation *Mother!* is an interactive work through which the artist expressed everything she could not express in words.

A completely different work, but with equally strong energy of connection and relevant emotional content, is a photograph *The Room of Loud Thoughts* by Natalija Miladinović. A naked female figure is kneeling, wrapping her arms around her pregnant belly, hair covering her face. The position of her body conveys emotion, as does the expressive background image with a dominant red colour, offering multiple meanings. A contrast of the calm female figure in contemplation and the expressiveness of the background artwork form a perfectly balanced unity, emphasising each other's states and emotions.

Summing up the works of female artists from different countries gathered at this exhibition, increasing number of connections and similarities in emotions and problems open up, even though individual experiences and completely different circumstances are in question. For example, in the works of artists from North Macedonia, Shqipe Mehmeti and Hristina Zafirovska, the problems which come to the fore – those of stereotypes, patriarchy and restriction of freedom – are also addressed in the previously mentioned works of Maja Šofranac and Milena Jovičević. On the other hand, the works of Tanja Balać and Marija Miloševska refer to the contemporary world, indicating to the importance of art, but also to some old, dying techniques and customs.

In a work *Silence*, done in combined technique of drypoint and pencil, artist Shqipe Mehmeti openly speaks out about a society in which she lives, where women and their needs even in the 21st century are considered taboo subjects. A close-up of a woman's face whose mouth is covered by a strong hand is clearly a symbol of repressing, subjugating, prohibiting and limiting female freedom of thought and action. In the country where women are still perceived exclusively as an instrument for the biological reproduction and family extension, the artist through her action

openly confronts all advocates of taboos. She hopes for a reaction – which is a key tool in the struggle for breaking away from the imposed traditional limitations.

A personal critique of the growing and extremely vulgar exploitation of women in the marketing industry is expressed by Hristina Zafirovska in an art object WOMAN. Namely, the artist points out that despite all the expressly acquired legal rights which treat women and men as equals, in practice the situation is far from ideal. She cites modern advertising campaigns as an example. Almost without exception, women are identified with biological reproduction and sexuality. Subtly, intelligently, simply and with refinement, as well as absolutely clearly and strikingly, Hristina Zafirovska poses her critique by means of visual-textual replacement of the well-known stereotypes. She changes the established generic roles through changing accepted colours and shapes which we associate with them.

Inspired by the extraordinary circumstances in which we all found ourselves during the global pandemic, Ana Lazarevska in her work Which One are You? evokes introspection. A luminous object with a question written in circular shape in its centre and attached to the wall resembles a mirror. But instead of a mirror, we encounter a question that encourages us to see our reflection in it and think about ourselves. A video work Memorabilia by artist Tanja Balać is also preoccupied with self-knowledge. Starting from the perception of the modern man as a lonely individual focused on virtual networking, the artist explains how she offers her imaginative world filled with art as a kind of alternative for fresh thoughts and new options for action.

While Leonora Vekić made a point of using crocheting technique and richness of lace, Vesna Vesić of using felting technique and wool – Marija Miloševska in her work Ad infinitum combines the filigree technique with fly tying. In her own words, her goal is to emphasise the role of women through filigree jewellery, defining the approach and practice of making jewellery as a critical discourse in the creation of culture. In this exhibition she achieves that through a striking, aesthetically appealing and refined photography.

In its focus is a female model painted and decorated with a series of elements pregnant with meaning, while colours, textures and shapes embody and intertwine with the richness of the filigree technique and the attributes of fly fishing.

Slav artists use different approaches to problematise searching and finding one's primordial self. Anja Kranjc points her finger on pressure of capitalist society focused on defining the role and perception of women in the contemporary world. Everyone tells us that we have to be sturdy and strong, as if the expression of fragility or sensitivity would be our defeat.

A painting The Embodiment of Wilderness IX is a vertical composition of a forest landscape with dominant meditative blue tones. In the centre the artist places a reclining female figure covered with a lightly ruffled fabric. Blue, as the colour of emptiness, infinity and the divine, signifies peace, contemplation and the mind, inviting a spectator to find his own spiritual being that embodies the wilderness. Lona Verlich in her work The Woman in Blue – Womb addresses a question of personal depth of the soul, also through a dominant blue colour. The painting embodies the artist's spiritual portrait through a highly stylised female figure placed in a vacuum, filled with a series of floating elements. Some of them we recognise at once, like the heart motif, while others introduce us to the artist's personal visual language.

Remaining in the domain of emphasised symbolism and stylisation, we arrive at the one and only animalistic interpretation within this exhibition. Such are sculptures Fish 1 and Fish 2 by Urša Toman, which at the same time personify evolution. The focus is on women as 'thinking, creative and invaluable creators of biological development'.

The aforementioned fragility is often concealed, because it is described as undesirable, but it is also the subject of a work Hiding Disappearing II by Meta Šolar. Although it is a frontal portrait, a face is hidden behind reflective sunglasses and a T-shirt that a female character pulls over her head. It is a depiction of a woman who hides her own face, just like she, out of insecurity and fear of reproach, she hides her thoughts.

A work Almost Love serves as a confirmation of the extent the female artists are in tune and imbued with their artistic activity. Teja Tegelj speaks out freely and expressively with stroke, line and colour in her large-scale drawing in order to explore the expansion of her body's boundaries into the realm of drawing. As a curator Anamarija Stibilj Šajn points out, the artist stands in the field of drawing and accepts it with her body. In such a way she imprints her inner images on the outer ones, thus materialising her completely intimate iconography.

The international project and exhibition Women About Women, which gathers twenty five artists from five countries, is a unique occasion within which artists speak out honestly and openly in their own artistic language, using different expressions and media, united by the common subject – women. Freelance female artists and independent curators, collaborating closely, active in the field of culture and art, often face the same prejudices, problems or obstacles. Each has her own solutions, depending on her character, temperament, circumstances and abilities. Such connection, understanding and experience made this collaboration rich and stimulating, void of any false, desirable etiquette or beating around a bush. The richness, diversity, understanding and discovering mutual similarities and differences as well as potentials of all individuals involved in the project created an incredible platform of diversity. It enriched all the involved through the exchange of experiences and opinions, then through the communication with audience, viewers, media and interested individuals. It is a unique international project dedicated to insight and highlighting the role and significance of women in shaping cultural and social reality. It does so through the most sincere form of communication – art.

(Translated from Croatian by Goran Gocić)



Shqipe Mehmeti, Artist and curator

Shqipe Mehmeti was born in 1981, Kicevo. She graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje (2004), she completed a postgraduate degree (2007) at the same faculty. As a visual artist, she has participated in over 200 group exhibitions in various countries, including North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Germany, Italy, Spain, England, Turkey, Egypt, Czech Republic, the United States, Canada, Lithuania, Andorra, Malta, and France. She has also held 30 solo exhibitions in cities such as Skopje, Sofia, Paris, Berlin, Nuremberg, New York, Pristina, Visby, Istanbul and Zurich.

She has received several awards, including the Grand Prix (2018) from the Ministry of Culture at the "17th Winter Salon" organized by the Association of Artists of North Macedonia.

She has attended various art residencies in Kosovo, Serbia, Bulgaria, Malta, Andorra, and France, organized by UNESCO and other organizations between 2005 and 2020.

Since 2011, she has been the chairman of the Association SENSUS Skopje, where she has organized and curated exhibitions and projects in collaboration with various organizations, including local municipalities, municipality of Botkyrka (Sweden), cultural institutions, NGOs, the Red Cross (Skopje, Nuremberg), and UN Women.

Since 2018, she works at the National Gallery of North Macedonia in Skopje.

<https://shqipemehmeti.blogspot.com/>

About the Exhibition / N. Macedonian artists

The exhibition "Women about Women" is a powerful reminder that the fight for women's liberation and equality is far from over. Despite the significant progress made in some societies, there are still countless places where women are oppressed and denied their basic rights and freedoms.

In many parts of the world, women are still seen as inferior to men and are denied the right to be recognized as individuals with their own identities. In some places, women are even forbidden from being recognized as people, and when they do assert their own identities, they often face aggression and intimidation from men who feel threatened by their self-awareness.

This exhibition is a tribute to the ongoing revolution for women's liberation, and a call to action to continue the fight for gender equality and human rights for all women. Women must

work to raise awareness about their place and position in society, and to assert their rights through cultural events, project presentations, and public speaking. By working together, we can create a world where all women have the freedom and opportunity to live their lives to the fullest.

Women have long been underrepresented and marginalized in the world of art and culture, but there are many ways that women can work to support and empower each other in this field. One of the most effective ways for women to make a difference is by amplifying the voices and work of other women. This can be done through promoting and showcasing the work of female artists and cultural figures, as well as advocating for their inclusion in exhibitions, festivals, and other events.

Another important way for women to support each other in the field of art and culture is by building networks and communities of support. This can include forming groups and organizations specifically for female artists and cultural figures, as well as mentoring and offering guidance to young women who are interested in pursuing careers in these fields.

Women can also work to create more inclusive and diverse environments within the art and culture world. This can include advocating for equal pay and opportunities for women, as well as actively seeking out and supporting work by artists and cultural figures from underrepresented communities.

By working together and supporting each other, women can help to create a more equitable and inclusive art and culture world for all.

In this traveling exhibition five artists from North Macedonia (Hristina Zafirovska, Marija Molosevska, Shqipe Mehmeti, Ana Lazarevska and Tanja Balać) explore various themes related to women and their roles in society.

In "Wo-man," Hristina Zafirovska criticizes the exploitation of women in marketing and media, which often objectify and sexualize women despite their legal rights to equality. The artwork reflects on the manipulation of images and societal norms that are imposed on women, and the negative impact this has on their perceived value and role

in society. The author's revolt comes from the constant barrage of media messages that distort and exploit women's bodies and identities, and the way this reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and undermines progress towards true equality.

With "Silence", Shqipe Mehmeti aims to portray feminist themes in a more pronounced manner because she lives in a society where women's needs are still considered taboo. In this society, women are often seen as merely instruments for reproduction and are denied personal choice, freedom of speech, and freedom of action. Through her art, Mehmeti addresses the universal needs and nature of women, even in less developed, patriarchal communities. In order to fight for freedom and the ability to freely express themselves, the artist believes that a direct reaction to accusers and taboo advocates is the best tool.

"Ad infinitum" is an art piece of Marija Milosevska that combines two interdisciplinary studies - the filigree technique and artificial fly/fly fishing - through visual presentation. The project aims to highlight the role of women in contemporary culture through filigree jewelry and to define jewelry as a critical discourse in the creation of culture. It also explores the use of jewelry as a way of thinking and interpreting through an innovative approach in the creative industries. The connection between filigree technique and fly fishing is depicted through unique filigree installations in professional photography, with the concept of "continue forever, without limit." The piece also touches on the ethics of fly fishing, including the catch and release philosophy.

Ana Lazarevska believes that it is important to ask oneself questions such as "Who am I?" and "What are my core beliefs?" in uncertain times. She also asks if one's thoughts and actions are for the greater good, if one is aware of their feelings and reactions, and if one has a choice in how they react to things. With her artwork "Who am I?" Lazarevska points out that the pandemic has shown how individual actions can affect the health and well-being of others, and suggests that individuals should reflect on themselves before acting or reacting to their surroundings.

In her artwork titled "Memorabilia", Tanja Balać

examines the relationship between memory and perception, and the role of the individual within societal constraints. Using a variety of media, including performance, painting, and collage, Balać explores the concept of freedom and the role of the imagination in shaping our understanding of the world. Through the process of capturing and extracting memories, Balać creates a dialogue between the individual and society, using esthetic synthesis to examine the presence of the subject in the imaginative world of freedom. The work also includes elements of sound and visual promises to create a multi-faceted and dynamic medium that engages the viewer and invites them to consider the role of the body in shaping our experiences and understanding of the world.



**Anamarija Stibilj Šajn, Art historian,
Art critic and curator**

Anamarija Stibilj Šajn (1965), art historian, art critic and curator, studied at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. She first worked as a teacher, and in 1999 became a freelance art reviewer and curator. For two and a half decades she has been managing the exhibition activities of the Kosovel Centre in Sežana as a freelancer and collaborated with various galleries in Slovenia and abroad, including the Turnac Gallery in Novi Vinodolski (Croatia), the Pavelhaus Gallery (Austria), the Ars Gallery in Gorizia (Italy), and has presented Slovenian artists on several occasions in Rome, Vienna, Brussels and London.

She has been involved in the formation of the Casoria International Contemporary Art Museum in Naples with a selection of Slovenian artists. In 2008, she presented ten Slovenian painters in the Netherlands Stedelijk Museum and Galerie Pand Paulus in Schiedam.

Since 1993 she has been involved as an expert collaborator in the International Art Workshop "Slovenia, Open to Art" (Sinji Vrh above Ajdovščina, Slovenia). She took over the management of the project in 2007, upgrading it to the level of a symposium. As part of her professional work she also follows and monitors other work meetings of artists in Slovenia and abroad.

In addition to reviews, she has also prepared monographic studies for a number of national and international authors (Nikolaj Mašukov, Adel Seyoun, Azad Karim, Eduard Belsky, etc.). In 2021, she prepared a monograph for Sonja Tavčar Skaberne, and in 2022 for Konrad Kranjc and Gregor Pratneker.

**About the Exhibition /
Slovenian artists**

LONA VERLICH (POLONA KUNAVER LIČEN)

The art world of Lona Verlich (Polona Kunaver Ličen) is figurative and about life. In her more recent works, the artist dives into her personal depths, into her soul – Anima being the protagonist of the action. It is with the soul that

she explores her intimate inner world. The states of her Anima reflect broader on-going events of her life, revealing her emotional and spiritual world, the happy and sad moments of life, her feelings of freedom on the one hand, and of entrapment on the other. She fills her »vessel« with her most intimate thoughts and feelings, identifying herself with them, thus making Anima her spiritual portrait. Anima is represented by a unique, archetypally formed figure which lives its own feelings within a defined framework of appearance. These feelings sensitively stream into variations of art and form, yet the

fundamental image remains convincing, well-formed and always recognisable. Its appearance evokes a bowling pin, a silhouette with a clear, fluid, sensually taut contour line that connects head and body into a unified whole. There is a certain sense of primordiality and even archaism in the articulation of the image. In addition to the central figure, the artist's figural repertoire also includes other figures, objects and formally pure, geometric figures, which add dynamism, sophistication and refinement to her creations. All the figures are realised in a flat manner, with effective, meaningful stylisation and authorial articulation. Lona Verlich's paintings are a fusion of colour and drawing elements, of painting and printmaking approaches. Besides this she also uses the technique of decoupage to create in her already tried and tested style. The compositions of Lona's paintings are perfectly balanced, even though the painting field is full of playfulness appearing on the surfaces which are pure in form and colour. The artist speaks from within herself - in a refined artistic language, genuine and honest, but thoughtfully concealed within the vocabulary that carries personal, symbolic meanings.

ANJA KRANJC

Sculptor Anja Kranjc surprises again and again, and there are several reasons for this. First, it is because she is tirelessly committed to research and experimentation, then it is because she so confidently transitions between different artistic fields, from sculpture to painting, drawing, illustration, printmaking and animation, and because within the sculptural medium she combines the conventional with the unconventional. And it is also because her works are so contemplative, profound, and imbued with her own philosophy of life and existentialist inclination.

The artist places the human being at the centre of her creative consideration, namely herself and her loved ones - her family. She reveals glimpses into her private life, and more so into her inner life, capturing a broader social reflection at the same time. In a materialised society she finds the individual, his uniqueness and exclusivity, the role and mission he plays or is ready for. It also touches on human fragility and transience.

In the sculptural medium, she explores the presentational potentials of sculpture, ranging them from the classical on the one hand, to the totally contemporary, unconventional, marked by a strong personal touch on the other hand. In the field of painting, however, she is delicate, subtle and illustrative, but behind such an image are concealed the depths of her reflections, awareness and self-awareness. She is interested in man's eternal relationship with nature, which leads him towards personal, intimate states of mind. This relationship is particularly pronounced in her recent paintings. Namely, it is in the peace and tranquillity of nature that lies a path to personal depths. The author reveals them indirectly through the stylised, artistically articulated image of a girl (a woman), which she places in a forest, among the mighty forms of tree trunks, while artwise, the image is set in an atmosphere of delicate, restrained, transparent multiple layers, with which the artist seeks the illusion of space, and yearns for light. The formal articulation of her paintings belongs to fluid and clear shape-forming drawing. We get to know the artist's lovely heroine, herself, by means of the language of postures, movements and details. The mood of the scenes is marked by a poetic feeling, even though beneath such a surface dwell deep thoughts about transitions, made possible by openness and love.

META ŠOLAR

Academically trained painter Meta Šolar remains within the framework of maintaining and building on the classical artistic tradition, which at the same time provides her with a foundation for creating a contemporary version of new figuration. The source of her creative perception lies within herself, therefore she chooses female figures as subjects. She depicts them in a realistic, recognisable form. She veristically traces the physical features of their bodies and models their appearances convincingly. In individual cases, however, figures, captured merely as a flowing contour line, are partially simplified and flattened. The author tends to present them with clarity. On the painting stage they come to life with the perfection of form and colour, but then they are obscured, veiled, covered in various, at times even unusual veils. Above all, the painter conceals

their faces, the most powerful identifying part of the human image, by putting "masks" and goggles on their faces, pulling ribbons over their eyes, covering them by painting fabric in various patterns, from geometrically sharp to organic and lushly blooming. Then, the figures are partially covered in clothes, presented from behind or as a reflection in a mirror. They are torn out of the context of reality, which makes them mysterious, unknown and unreal. Not only do the concealments involve the aforementioned attributes, but such solutions can also be highly artistic. Rhythmically accorded layers of colour traces also play an important part in veiling the figures. They overwhelm faces or body parts, whereas in some solutions they cover either the background or the whole painting surface, adding a special atmospheric effect to it. Such traces of colour make us feel the primal pulsation of the painting micro-structures, and perhaps they even guide us towards perceptions of contemporary digital technology. Segmented colour layers are an important means of artistic and contextual expression. Therefore, they do not only conceal, but also add life to the scenes they present, transforming them into vibrating performances. The paintings are pure in medium, original, and created in the fine technique of oil on canvas. Artistic richness emerges from different ways and approaches of visualisation, ranging from reflective to relaxed traces. Colour diversity is close to the author's heart, she swears by her own colour evaluation, by the vibrancy and power of each individual colour, and uses dynamic and even unusual colour confrontations. Creating meaningful figures Meta Šolar also deals with the phenomenon of the viewer's sight, which actually determines how the veiled-unveiled, classical-(post)modernist, and above all depersonalised beauties come to life.

TEJA TEGELJ

Teja Tegelj is a rationally analytical and sensually intuitive artist. She is also in thorough search of new possibilities of expression, and opts for experimental approaches. She seeks the intangible in and around herself and explores what emerges from a physical manifestation and materialises in her artwork. In her most recent drawings on paper, line becomes dominant. By

way of her expressive gesture, her large format works become documents of mental, emotional, spiritual and physical states, as she focuses on the concept of embodied cognition. While setting out to create a work of art, the artist attunes herself to what she is currently contemplating, to afterwards reveal her feelings and intercept the flow of her thoughts on the painting surface. She draws a line... and says everything. It is the most authentic way of visualising herself, while at the same time she perceives space, especially natural environments, and time. To her, the chosen primary manner of artistic articulation represents a central means of empowerment and expression by which she translates her inner vibrations into art, following her inner vocation without compromise. The drawings are made "her way". The gestural accents in them are not only the work of the hand, but involve the movement of the whole body. The series of works is therefore entitled "Out of the Body", as the artist virtually stands within the drawing field, enveloping it with her body. In it, she creates transitions from inside outwards, seeking connections between herself and the world. She imprints the inner "images" onto the outer ones, thus realising her own purely intimate iconography. In the technically accomplished conglomerate there is room for the artist's (in)visible body. The empty space that appears in the centre of the circular compositions evokes a silhouette of a human being. In this way, the artist proves that everything created is not only "out of the body", but that she herself is literally present in the drawing. If I were to rephrase the conception of her works with Leonardo da Vinci's study called The Proportions of the Human Body according to Vitruvius, I could say that Teja's works of this kind are studies of the inner "proportions" of herself, and at the same time they are an excellent proof of how fully they can be expressed by a line.

URŠA TOMAN

Academically trained sculptor Urša Toman is an artist in her own right. She has developed her own distinctive and original artistic language. In recent years, she has added to and enriched her sculptural repertoire with numerous figurative characters. She focuses her creative thoughts and actions on peculiar, unusual, mysterious, friendly,

even humorous creatures. They live beyond reality, in a fairy tale, in the world of different mythologies and civilisations. They represent the inhabitants of her own creative planet, where ideas spark and imagination is a special powerful engine that drives creativity. The author amazes us again and again with fresh solutions.

Urša Toman gives each creature a unique identity. Her figurative characters are characterised and personified above all by accentuated eyes and lips, which become expressive portrait segments in the depictions; sometimes the hands are oversized to add emphasis to them, at other times it is the body. The forms are articulated in the artist's own way, they are refined and sensually tense, while the original details become their distinctive features or the artist's hallmark. In some of the solutions, the sculptor also incorporates colours which put a special, personal stamp on the creations and represent an important artistic and contextual element.

Urša Toman's figures are diverse in style. The source of the variety lies in her sparkling ideas and in her use of different materials such as clay, wood and stone. Each has its own properties, its own characteristics, and requires a specific approach and processing method. With her creations, the artist is able to prove that each material feels different, that she can let herself be guided by its natural qualities, that she respects it, entrusts it with her thoughts and creative intentions, and makes it a fully empowered medium of her personal sculptural expression.

The varied life of her creatures has origins also in history, in different civilisations. It draws from the symbolism of diverse cultures, while at the same time the artist brings to all her works her personal visual and mental culture, engagement, and above all imagination and a child-like playfulness which are an inseparable part of her creative maturity.

WOMAN ABOUT WOMAN I *Touring Exhibition Artworks*

Artists

Croatia

Sonja Švec Španjol, selector

Ivana Bajcer
Mirela Blažević
Marina Ćorić
Lena Kramarić
Mateja Rusak

Montenegro

Nela Glogorović, selector

Anka Gardašević
Gordana Kuč
Jovana Vujanović
Maja Šofranac
Milena Jovičević

North Macedonia

Shqipe Mehmeti, selector

Ana Lazarevska
Hristina Zafirovska
Marija Miloševska
Tanja Balać

Serbia

Biljana Jotić, selector

Anđela Grabež
Gordana Belić
Leonora Vekić
Natalija Miladinović
Vesna Vesić

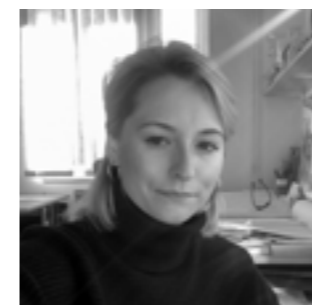
Slovenia

Anamarija Stibilj Šajn, selector

Ana Kranjc
Lona Verlich
Meta Šolar
Teja Tegelj
Urša Toman



Ablution

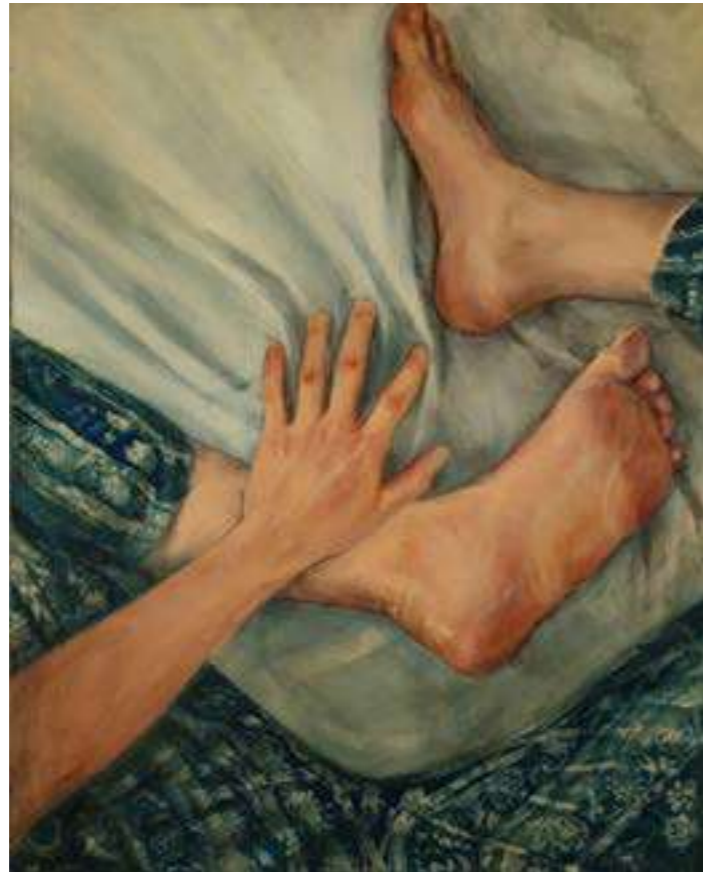


Ivana Bajcer

Ivana Bajcer was born on 12 September 1993 in Zabok. She studied graphic art at the High School for Art, Design, Graphics and Fashion in Zabok. In 2018 she graduated Graphic Art, receiving Magna Cum Laude, from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, class of Professor Tanja Dabo. Member of The Croatian Association of Visual Artists (HDLU) and The Croatian Association of Visual Artists in Split (HULU). Her works have been exhibited at numerous solo and group shows in Croatia and abroad. She participated at the international MAP Workshop in Budapest in 2016, 17th International Art Colony in Szentgotthárd in 2018, 22nd International Art Colony LindArt in Lendava, Slovenia in 2017 where she won the first prize. She was commended by the University in the academic years 2013/2014, 2014/2015 and 2016/2017. She was awarded, as a team member, the Rector's Award for the opera Agrippina by G.F.Händel, a joint project by the students of the University of Zagreb and the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in 2016. She won the prize for the best work of art at Kulturoš exhibition in Čakovec in 2018. She was awarded Erste Bank's scholarship within Erste Fragment 13 in Zagreb in 2017. She has been running numerous educational programmes and interactive workshops, such as Relief Printmaking at the international symposium Happy Children at the Croatian Museu of Education in Zagreb. She's currently employed as a teaching assistant for graphic art at the Academy of Applied Arts of University of Rijeka.

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World



Lace

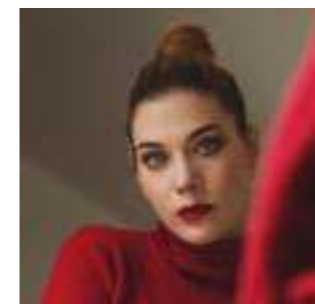


Mirela Blažević

Mirela Blažević was born in Vinkovci in 1993. After completing the grammar school in Vinkovci she enrolled in the Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek. Within Erasmus+ programme she spent a semester at the Akademia Sztuk Pięknych in Gdańsk in the class of Professor Piotr Józefowicz. She graduated from the Academy of Arts and Culture in 2018 with an MA in Art Education. In her artistic practice Mirela deals with subjects of her own body, cultural heritage and perception, through figurative painting.

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Marina Ćorić

Marina Ćorić was born on 29 March 1987 in Zadar, where she completed the elementary school and the High School for Textile, Design and Applied Arts. In 2017 she graduated with MA in painting from the Academy of Fine Arts of University of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the class of Professor Dragana Nuić-Vučković. She's currently employed as an arts teacher at elementary school. She's been engaged in photography in the last 10 years, having her works exhibited at solo and group shows. She won several important regional awards, to mention but a few: Third prize by the jury and Second prize awarded by the audience at the First Biennial of Croatian Youth Photography (2011) and First prize in the category Nude/Body at 9th Rovinj Photodays (2016). Her photographs have been published in photography magazines and on book covers.

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<https://www.facebook.com/Marina.Coric.Art.and.Photography>



Erasing-Rewind



Expoze Yourself



Lena Kramarić

Lena Kramarić was born in Zagreb in 1982. After completing the School of Applied Arts and Design she enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts (Department for Education, Section for Painting), where she graduated in 2008 and continued as a PhD student of painting. She completed a two-year education for a practitioner of expressive art therapy in 2020. She is a member of The Croatian Association of Visual Artists (HDLU) and of The Croatian Association of Independent Artists (HZSU) and the leader of the artist organisation Geniator. Besides her artistic practice, she has worked as an art history teacher, designed and ran numerous art workshops, practiced graphic design, illustration and interior design. She's currently living and working in Dubrovnik. Her works have been exhibited at numerous solo and group shows in Croatia and abroad.

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Mateja Rusak

Mateja Rusak was born in Varaždin where she completed the elementary school and the graphic design high school. In 2013 she graduated with MA in Art Education from the Academy of Applied Arts in the class of Professor Jasna Šikanja. Since 2014 she's been working as a fine arts and design teacher at a secondary vocational school in Varaždin. She is a member of The Croatian Association of Visual Artists in Varaždin since 2015. Her works have been exhibited at five solo shows and over 20 group shows in Croatia and abroad. For the series of photographs titled Water Game in 2012 she won Viktor Hreljanović award at the international photography show The Third Element. The same year she received the Plate for Achievement from the University of Rijeka. She participated in 15th and 16th International Graphic Art Workshops in 2016 and 2017 on Architecture and History of the City of Celje, for which she was awarded a commendation for developing visual culture of youth. At the Winter Art Colony in Karlovac she ran an art workshop. During 2017, 2018 and 2019 she mentored the school students who won the awards at the Croatian and international art competitions in Slovenia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Romania, India, Belarus and Bulgaria.

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Pieta



Anka Gardašević

Anka Gardašević (Nikšić, 1973)
She has a degree and a master's degree from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje, University of Montenegro. Currently, she is a doctoral student at the University of Arts in Belgrade, group Multimedia Art. She studied under the US State Department's JFDP program at the Department of Photography, George Washington University, Washington, USA. Employed at the ALU Trebinje as an associate professor, University of East Sarajevo, BiH. She lives and works in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

ankagardasevic@yahoo.com



Me is Someone Else



Gordana Kuč

Gordana Kuč (1970, Montenegro)
She graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje, Montenegro in 1993. She received her Master degree at the same Faculty in 2002. She has been a member of the Association of Fine Artists of Montenegro since 1994. In addition to paintings and drawings, she creates installations, objects and collages. Her works are part of prominent museum and gallery collections as well as of private collections. In addition to her active artistic work, Gordana Kuč worked as a curator at the Centre of Contemporary Art of Montenegro and she was an Independent Advisor in the Ministry of Culture of Montenegro.

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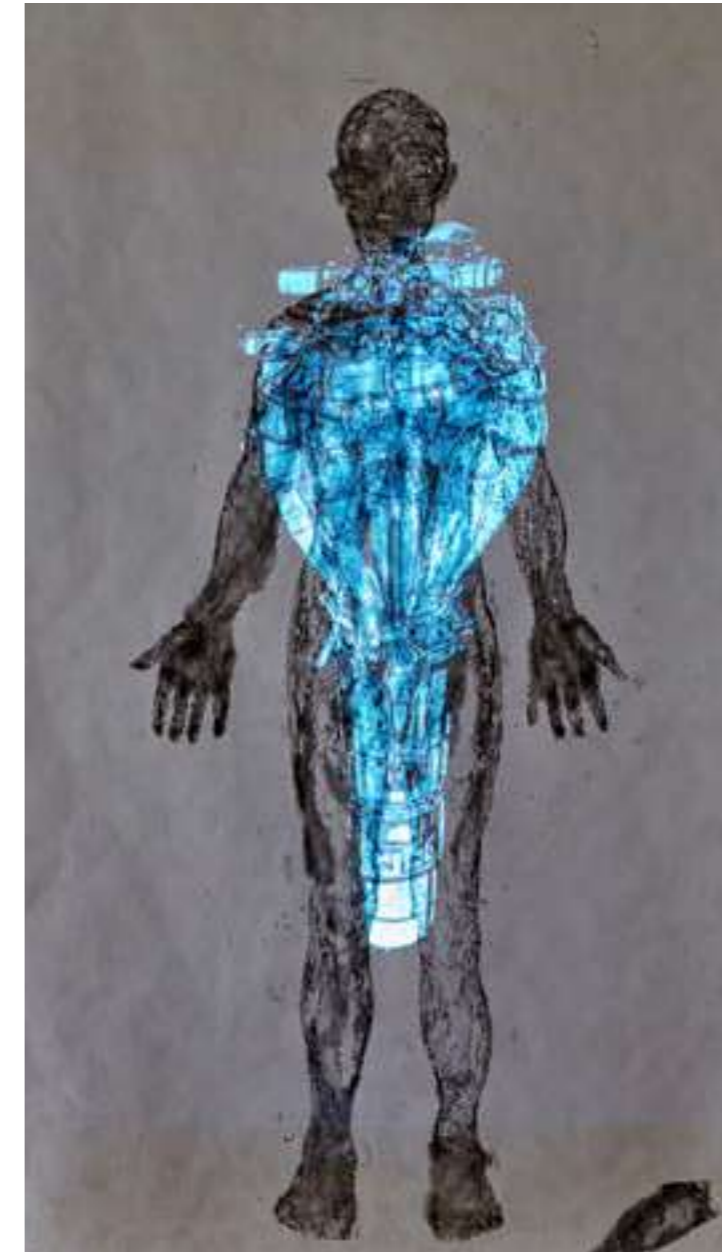


Orbiting



Jovana Vujanović

Jovana Vujanovic (1986, Podgorica)
She graduated at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje, Department for Graphic Art in 2011 and was awarded the Annual Award for Free Drawing by the Faculty in 2008. She attended the P: 142 Artist in Residence, Berlin in 2012. She won the Award for video work at the 39th Montenegrin Art Salon "November 13th" in 2017.
She has exhibited at solo exhibitions at home and across the region and has participated in numerous international and regional group exhibitions and projects. She lives and works in Podgorica.
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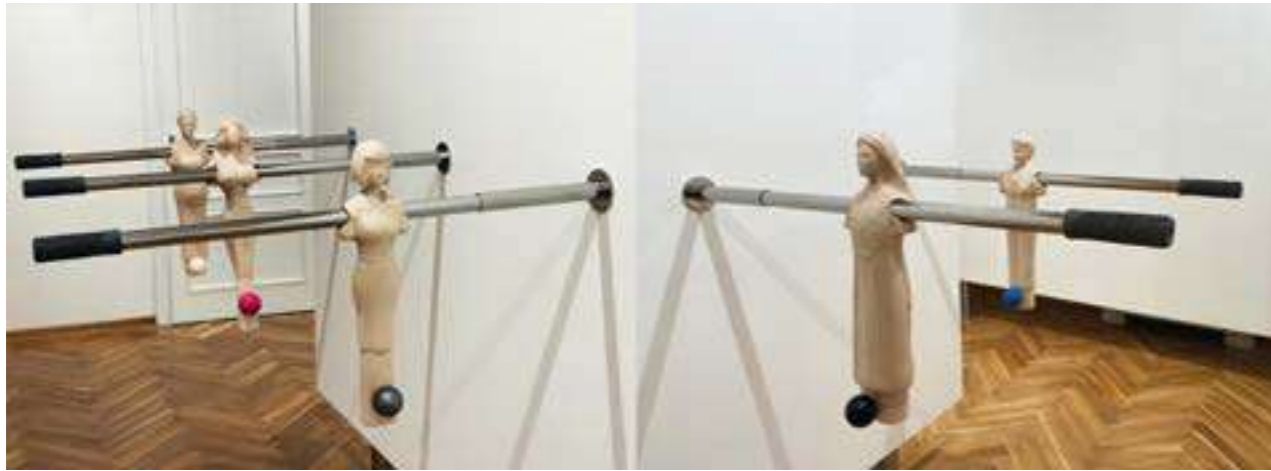


Single Woman



Maja Šofranac

Maja Šofranac (Podgorica,1981)
She completed her undergraduate and master's studies in painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje. Currently, she is a doctoral student at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. She studied in France, was on residential art residencies in Europe and America. She has had several solo and group exhibitions in Montenegro and abroad. She is the winner of the annual awards for drawing and painting of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje, the award of the Herceg Novi Winter Salon and the ULUCG award for the best exhibition for 2018. She lives and works in Podgorica and Cetinje.



Men's Games, over and over again



Silence



Milena Jovićević

Milena Jovicevic (Cetinje, 1976)

Graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje in 1999. In the same year she continued her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Le Mans (France), and in 2000 she continued her education at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure Des Beaux Arts in Paris, where she graduated and completed her postgraduate studies. She received her PhD from the University of Arts in Belgrade. She works at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cetinje.

www.milenajovicevic.com



Shqipe Mehmeti

Shqipe Mehmeti was born in 1981, Kicevo. She graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje (2004), she completed a postgraduate degree (2007) at the same faculty. As a visual artist, she has participated in over 200 group exhibitions in various countries, including North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Germany, Italy, Spain, England, Turkey, Egypt, Czech Republic, the United States, Canada, Lithuania, Andorra, Malta, and France. She has also held 30 solo exhibitions in cities such as Skopje, Sofia, Paris, Berlin, Nuremberg, New York, Pristina, Visby, Istanbul and Zurich.

She has received several awards, including the Grand Prix (2018) from the Ministry of Culture at the "17th Winter Salon" organized by the Association of Artists of North Macedonia.



Which are You



Ana Lazarevska

Ana Lazarevska was born in 1987, lives and works in Skopje, North Macedonia. As a visual artist, she targets themes of perception by using new media technologies and participatory practices within interactive installations and performance art. Through generated open stimulation and challenging the senses, she gives an accent to the self-reflexive experience. In ongoing collaborative work, she draws a line between socially accepted norms and the natural state of being. Her work has been exhibited at solo exhibitions in North Macedonia: "Self " duo show with Jianan Qu in The National Gallery of North Macedonia "Mala Stanica"(2019) , "Bodies of Water" Youth Culture center (2018), " Inner- traces" independent space Kula (2014), "OBSESSION" The National Gallery of Macedonia "Mala Stanica" (2014), "The Visual Story" National Gallery Kavadarci (2011), "The Visual Story" Cultural Center "CK" (2010) and numerous group exhibitions such as "IN BETWEEN STATES: New Art from North Macedonia" at Peacock Visual Arts in Aberdeen, Scotland (2019), Biennale of Young Artist at Museum of Contemporary art in Skopje, N.Macedonia (2018), Paratissima art fair in Torino, Italy (2014) and many others.



Woman

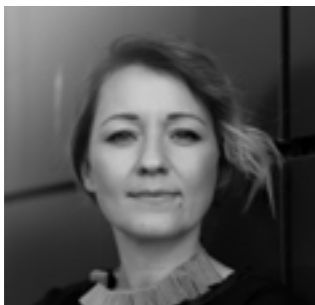


Hristina Zafirovska

Hristina Zafirovska was born in Skopje. She graduated in painting and graphic design department at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, R. Macedonia. Currently she is doing postgraduate studies in graphic design at the Faculty of Design and Multimedia in Skopje, North Macedonia. Since 2009, I am a member of the Association of Artists of my country. She is one of the founding members of the art group and cultural alternative art exhibition space "Art I.N.S.T.I.T.U.T." in Skopje, established in 2009, also a founder of the female artist group "MOMI" (LADIES) which begins in 2012 with the active implementation of projects across the country and the Balkans. She is working in the fields of painting, graphic design, installation, drawing, photography, scenography, restoration and conservation of paintings and fresco paintings, mosaic and video. She actively participate in local and regional projects, border cooperation in the field of culture, also she is taking part of many festivals, artistic gatherings, art symposiums, public presentations in the Balkans, Europe and beyond. She lives and works in Skopje.



Ad Infinitum



Marija Milosevska

Marija Miloshevska was born in 1982 in Skopje. After completing studies in ethnology and anthropology, she focused on studying and conveying the process of filigree technique through various media. She is an artist who specializes in the filigree technique, a process of creating intricate designs using wire. She has performed and exhibited her work in several cities, including Skopje, Rijeka, Gevgelija, Ljubljana, and Vienna. She has also created a documentary film about her work and has participated in the organization of a rock film festival in Croatia. In recent years, she has focused on the theme of home, migration, and identity in her performances and has exhibited her work in the UK and Norway. She is currently studying cultural studies and researching the creative industries and filigree culture. Today she is founder of a new brand MAMKA – the story of the Macedonian fly, whose designed products carries the story of the oldest record of fly fishing.

She is currently attending the master program of cultural studies at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities in Skopje and is working on her research of the creative industries and filigree culture.



Memorabilia



Tanja Balać

Tanja Balać was born in Skopje in 1968. She graduated at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje, in 1991, at the department of painting. Paving her artistic and professional path over the years, in 2008 she received her Master's degree from the Faculty of fine arts in Skopje at the department of painting. Member of the Association of Artists of Macedonia (DLUM) since 1996, she was also its President in the period of 2006-2013. Among her many professional visits outside the borders of her country, the study visit in Paris in 2003 is well worth mentioning. Her professional and artistic experience has been constantly enriched by work and study visits abroad, participation at conferences and workshops. Besides paintings, Tanja is also interested in creating installations, video art – projects, and art performances. At present, she lives and works in Skopje.



Someone

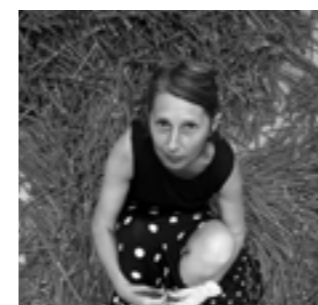


Anđela Grabež

Anđela Grabež was born in 1982. She graduated Sculpture from the class of Professor Mrđan Bajić at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade and later received MBA in Marketing Communications at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade. Sculptor and passionate cinephile Anđela is also active as set designer, art director, creative at marketing campaigns, documentaries and art videos author. She won the first award at a global competition for a visual identity of a campaign by the UN in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. Since 2011 she's been working as an art director with the Creative Team of the Serbian Public Broadcaster.

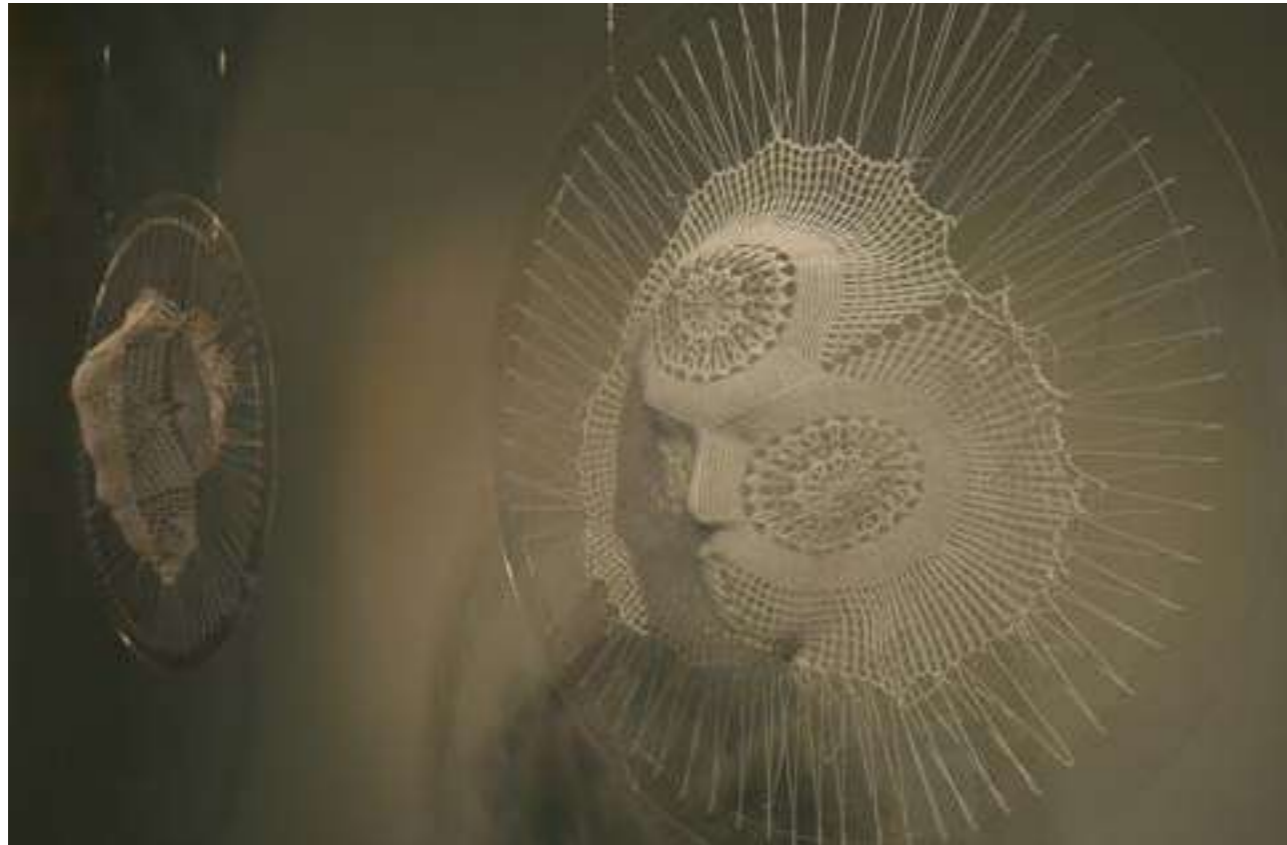


Mother!



Gordana Belić

Born in 1966. My professions are sculpture and psychotherapy. I studied sculpture at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, in the class of Professor Mrđan Bajić, receiving my MA in 2007. I studied psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade and Gestalt psychotherapy with Professor Lidija Pecotić. I'm currently a PhD student of sculpture at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade and a master student of clinical psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. My works have been exhibited at solo and group shows in Serbia and abroad. I'm the author of the research-artistic project *Iside art* that combines the experiences of artistic and psychotherapeutic work. My works explore the subjects of identity and sensibility, especially love, passion and death. I am exploring possibilities to communicate with myself and others through visual art in a direct way the words cannot describe. I live and work in Belgrade.



Portraits

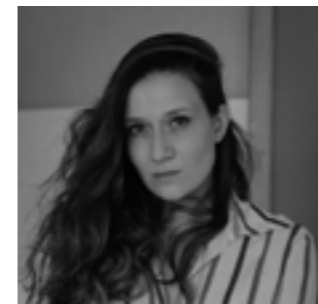


Leonora Vekić

After graduating from the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade 1995, Leonora Vekić engaged in new tendencies in tapestry, directed to discovering a new key and use of plastic, synthetic and metal, that made the concept of textile art fundamentally fluid. Conceptual thinking through material, space and form leads to the works of the last two years that are joining works of art and their light projections. Leonora Vekić is a Professor at the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade. She's active in textile art, fashion and other visual arts. Winner of awards and prizes such as Plate Award at the 22nd Tapestry Biennial by The Applied Artists and Designers Association of Serbia (ULUPUDS) in 2016, Acquisition prize by the Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrade in 2010, Grand Prix of 46th May Exhibition of ULUPUDS in 2014, Plate awards by ULUPUDS Section of Textile and Fashion in 2009, 2010 and 2011, First prize by ULUPUDS at the Tapestry Biennial in 2010, Plate Award by ULUPUDS at the Tapestry Biennial in 2000. Her works are included in public and private collections.

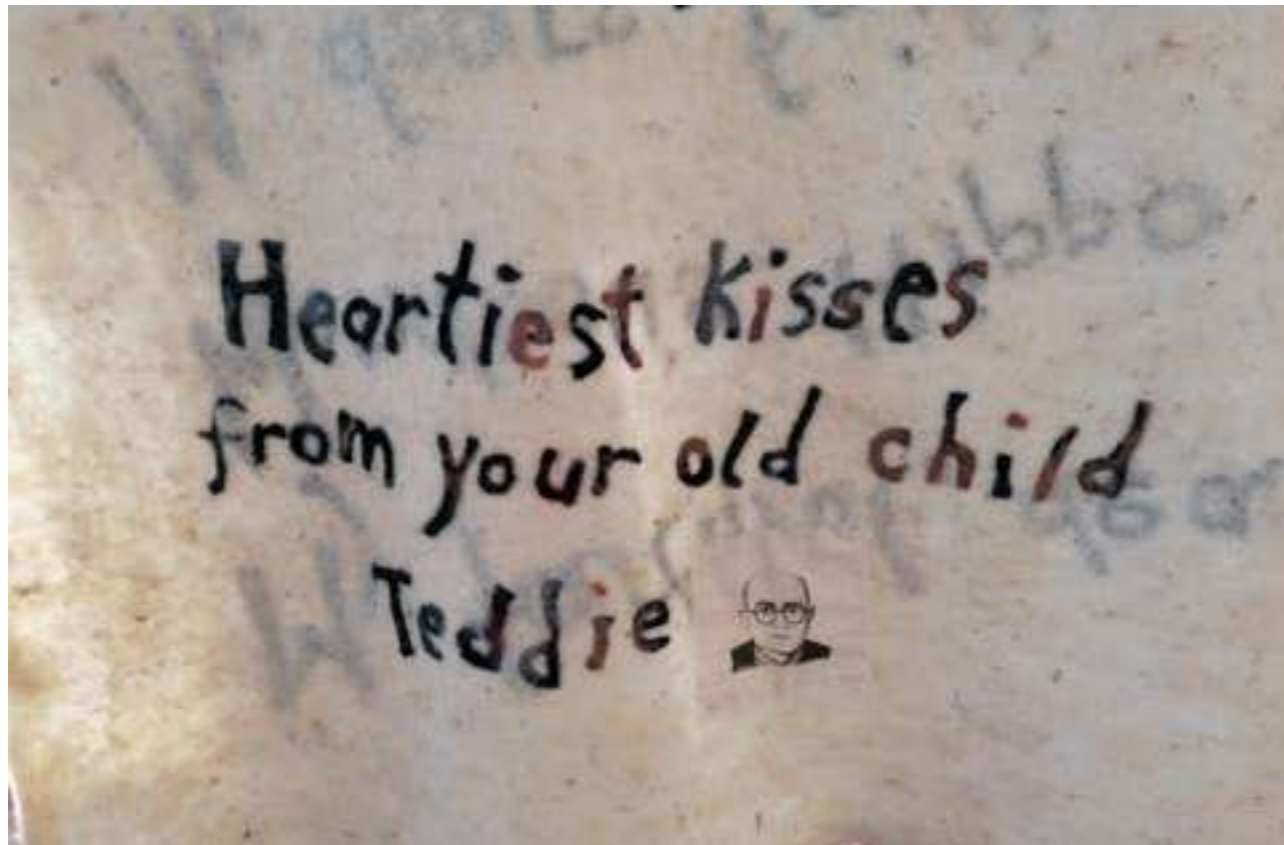


A Room of Loud Thoughts - Selfportrait



Natalija Miladinović

Natalija was born in Belgrade in 1988. Obtained BA and MA in painting from the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade. Produces painting, drawing, photography and sculpture. Finds painting and photography to be the means of expression where she fully realises her potential. Member of the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia (ULUS) since 2017 and of Beo Art Contemporary. Lives and works in Belgrade. Since 2009 her works have been exhibited at several solo shows and over 40 group exhibitions in Serbia, France, Belgium, Croatia, Austria, Cyprus, Japan, Bosnia and Herzegovina.



My Dears/Adorno's letter to his parents



The Embodiment of Wildlife



Vesna Vesić

Vesna Vesić (1975) graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade. She is multimedia artists, deals with first-person video, drawing in material (fabric, wool), sculpture as an intervention in space and reaction to the current situation in the architectural-archaeological-historical context. Crossing autobiographical, historical, intimate and social stories, she experiments with textures and materials, contemplating old and new artistic languages and maintaining an engaged attitude towards civilization and historical consciousness, togetherness and emotional-affective connections on which communities rest.

Active from study days, she started with independent exhibiting in the gallery of the Student Cultural Center, dealing with reflections on the process of artistic creation and aesthetics of the gallery white space as a social ambience. She has participated in numerous exhibitions in the country and abroad (Ljubljana, Vienna, Warsaw, Poznan, Venice, Trieste, Rome, Amsterdam, Tallinn).

Her video performance "Wash me and I will be whiter than snow" was exhibited at the 48th Venice Biennale, in the international selection of curator Harald Zeman (d'Apertutto exhibition, 1999). She has been a member of ULUS in the status of an independent artist since 2001.



Anja Kranjc

Anja Kranjc (1982), sculptor, painter and illustrator with a Master degree in Sculpture, lives and works in Slovenia. She started studying sculpture at ALUO in 2020. While still a student, she was actively preparing her own independent and group exhibitions at home and abroad, and received several awards, among others the Student Prešeren award (2006). In 2008 she graduated and in 2011 she finished her master Degree under the guidance of her mentors Professor Matjaž Počivavšek and Dr. Igor Škamperle. She is also engaged in painting and illustration. She focuses above all on the figural in her work. The human body interests her as a carrier of spiritual states and because it is the most efficient instrument for the intimate contemplation of the mysterious dimensions of life and particularly of its transitory quality.



Woman in blue - Uterus

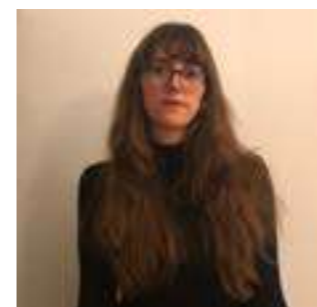


Hiding disappearing



Lona Verlich

The artist was born in Ljubljana, Slovenia in 1975. She graduated in design - Theatre poster on Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana. In the year 2000/01 she studied MA study of illustration and graphic arts in Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts and completed her first year in Helsinki, Finland. In 2005 she got her MA degree in illustrated authorial children's books. In 2006 she was awarded the first prize at an authorial book contest in Austria for her illustrated book entitled Old Man Bertold's Secret. In 2009 she received the highest grant for two of her books and in 2012 she received a work grant for her recent book for children The Sign of Seagulls. The artist is a member of Fine Artists' Association of North Primorska Region. Since 2003 Lona and her husband have been running the Centre of Arts and Design Licna Hisa in Ajdovscina. She lives and works in Ajdovscina.



Meta Šolar

Meta Solar was born in 1989 in Jesenice, Slovenia. In 2014 she graduated in painting from the Academy of Fine Art and Design in Ljubljana. Inspired by the human form, Meta Šolar's artwork is a mix of figurative and abstract painting. In 2016 she was a resident at Cité des Arts in Paris. Since 2016 Šolar has been a member of the Slovenian Association of Fine Arts Societies. She exhibits nationally and internationally.



Almost Love



Fishes



Teja Tegelj

Teja Tegelj (Slovenia, 1981) graduated with Faculty of Education, Program Art Pedagogy in Ljubljana. In 2016 she earned a Master of Science in Art Pedagogy. Currently she is studying at The Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana. The central fields of her creative expression are painting and drawing, where she has recently been intensively researching the concept of embodied cognition. She also explores in the field of video and sound art. She presents her work in independent and joint exhibitions in Slovenia and abroad. She also participates with articles in professional conferences and journals. Since 2015 Tegelj has been a member of the Slovenian Association of Fine Arts Societies.



Urša Toman

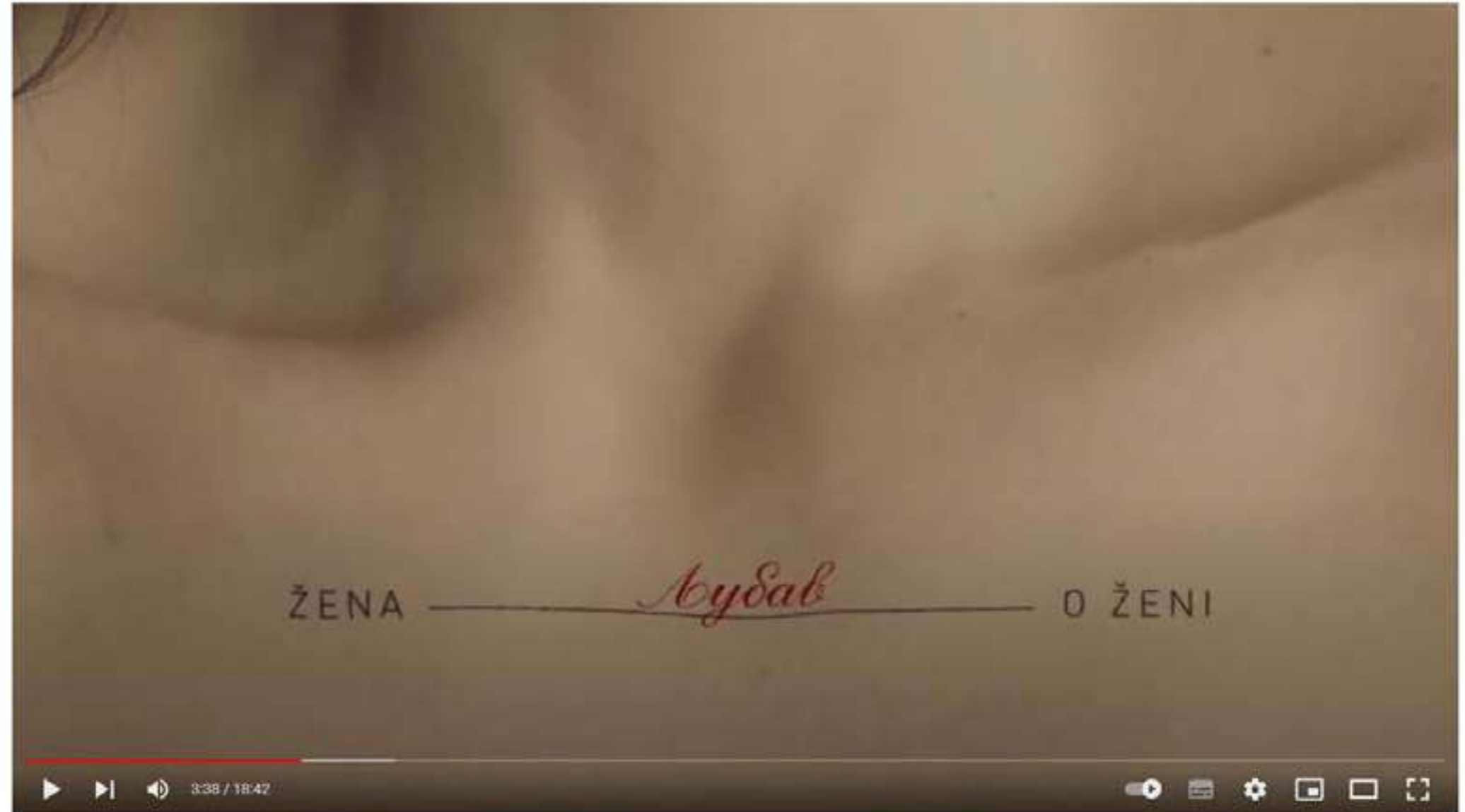
Urša Toman was born on the 16th of February 1972 in Ljubljana. She graduated in the department of sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana in 1998. From 1993 to 2000 she cooperated with Metelkova mesto, SEZAM and FAMUL Stuard School of Applied Arts Ljubljana. Her interest in placing sculptures in the natural environment, parks and gardens is reflected through her works often being displayed in such settings. She also hosts art workshops and takes part in pedagogical - andragogical projects. As a freelance artist she lives and creates in Ljubljana.
Ursa.Toman@guest.arnes.si

Documentary series

Documentary series "WOMAN about WOMAN", directed by Boris Miljković, broadcasted on the National channel, Radio television of Serbia (RTS, Cultural channel) and on the YouTube channel Riseofwomen.net. As a part of the project "Rise of women in culture in the WB" co-financed by IPA funds of the European Union and Ministry of Culture of Serbia the Documentary is created through the cooperation of Beoart contemporary association and Rubljov agency, initiated by Biljana Jotić.

It is worthily to say that this is a first time that 25 female artists and 5 female curators are gathered in the one documentary serial and available to the general public. One of the most important parts of the idea was that they talk about 'herself', about her expression, her state of mind and feeling about creating process as well as possibilities of creation and role in the society.

Contemporary time is the time of the diversity and contemporary art is a mirror of that. That's why diversity of expression is an essence of the contents of the documentary. Creating in the Fine Art, Applied Art, New medias, performance etc. those female artists are witnesses of the reality. Gathering with the curators they leave a mark of the present for the future generations. The words of the director, Boris Miljković, are the best evidence of the process of creation: "It was exciting to go through this story, theme, action, as you wish, interesting, well conceived and well organized, in any case. From Belgrade, via Podgorica, to Ajdovščina, Samobor, and to Skopje. Quite enough to be exciting, right? From the engaged action of a simple concept - women choose women, where curators choose their team, a series of small films about such teams



(and their captains) emerged, which come to us from similar environments of the once unique cultural space, the former Yugoslavia. What is left after all, travel, exhibitions in the crown space, visits, conversations, studios, apartments, works, intimacy, personal histories, is a series of twenty-five portraits of unusual, talented and brave women who best represent themselves. Add to that five great captains, menus or curators, you get the stories we are talking about here. Look at us, maybe that will help us all to understand each other more fully and better."

"The idea for the series was initiated by the awareness of the growing presence of women in contemporary art, which stems from the

desire to influence the new context of reaction to reality. We are witnesses that there have always been women who appear and leave an indelible mark in history and society, and this exhibition gathers more of them and carries a message about the present. The focus is on the present moment, so each episode testifies to the inner female being and the relationship of the individual to the collective and vice versa. In dialogue with the generations of the 21st century, the director strives to show how women shape contemporary Balkan cultural reality and how she shapes women. Through the diversity of forms of women's creative identity, in personal expressions, techniques and media, the series documents reflections of

the most challenging and open questions of the diversity of our time that connects the notion of art. It is an artistic overview of contemporary reality and the position of women in art in the region... By connecting institutional and non-institutional artistic practices, the series strives to approach the documentation of one part of contemporary movements of women in art in the most comprehensive way possible. Look at us, maybe we will open and encourage some new questions." (Biljana Jotic)

WOMAN ABOUT WOMAN II

Residential Exhibition Artworks

Artists

Croatia

Sonja Švec Španjol, selector

Antonia Magdić

Doria Valković

Lucija Marin

Ena Antunović

Ana Maria Maravić

Montenegro

Nela Gligorović, selector

Teodora Kipa

Tamara Pavičević

Arijana Kadić

Tijana Mrvosević

Kristina Kusovac

North Macedonia

Shqipe Mehmeti, selector

Ana Trajkovska

Ivana Samandova

Dragana Pendovska

Danijela Savikj

Ivona Gjorgjiovska

Serbia

Biljana Jotić, selector

Marija Tomić

Aleksandra Đukić

Jana Stankovski

Marija Zrnić

Ana Marinković

Slovenia

Anamarija Stibilj Šajn, selector

Varja Jovanović

Monika Plemen

Meta Mramor

Ava Tribušon Ovsenik

Nuša Fajfar

European Union

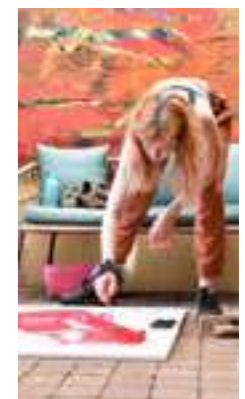
Iana Stantieru, selector

Eva Rotreklova

Jonna Lehtomaa

Linda Vilka

Malina Ioana Moncea





Fragmented memory

Antonia Magdić



Cradle and Gravity

Lucija Marin



Welcome I

Ana Maria Maravić



Two Dorias painting

Doria Valković



Untitled

Ena Antunović



Gentlemen, Please, Fill Out the forms

Teodora Kipa



When you're ready II

Tamara Pavićević



Đurđini dukati/
San je snažniji od iskustva

Tijana Mrvošević



Unwanted

Kristina Kusovac



The Wave

Ana Trajkovska



Body of tension

Ivana Samandova



Refraction

Dragana Pendovska



The REDo Project

Danijela Savikj



Modern Madness

Ivona Gjorgjiovska



Prva Karišik

Marija Tomić



I don't BLAME MYSELF

Jana Stankovski



Process of movement

Marija Zrnić



Puzzle

Aleksandra Đukić



VENUS

Varja Jovanović



Outline

Monika Plemen



Turn off your phone

Ana Marinković



Touch me Gently

Meta Mramor



Sound inventory

Ava Tribušon Ovsenik



Preedica časa/Spinner of time

Nuša Fajfar



Bricolage

Malina Ioana Moncea



I just want to be

Linda Vilka



Sensations

Jonna Lehtoma



Cleaning

Eva Rotreklova

Results of the Research and Recommendations

The aim of the research is to improve understanding of problems, challenges and real-life context in which young female visual artists and female curators in Western Balkans work. 256 female artists and 30 female curators, both institutional and noninstitutional were involved in the research.¹

Both female visual artists and female curators point out that transformation is necessary, which should and can take place in a subtle way, and "from within", in society itself, in institutions, so that certain good positions are used and emancipatory ideas are continuously advocated and to insist on equality between the genders. When such a base is provided, inappropriate cultural patterns are changed and people's awareness is changed, women will have equal opportunities for work and progress in visual creativity as well. First, it is necessary to start with deeper changes in society: to include the topic of gender equality in upbringing and education from an early age, to educate citizens in overcoming social and political stereotypes, to point out the exceptional value of women in the development of history, culture and art.

Female curators remind us that a hundred years ago it was difficult for women to be accepted, even though there were exceptional women in

¹ <https://www.riseofwomen.net/research>

art, politics and diplomacy, but today it seems as if they have regressed, as if they are not fighting for their status in the right way and that it is personally much more difficult for them to "start the path of emancipation" again. That is why "solving women's issues" should start with solving the pressure that exists in society towards women, by fighting against the ruling stereotypes, and this topic is especially important in the countries of the region where men still dominate women. Thus, it is possible to provide a special angle of observation of "women about women" and to answer the question - what can be learned about contemporary movements in visual art and how it is understood today, that is how this reality is projected in contemporary visual art creativity of women.

In all of this, as the interviewees emphasize, what is important is networking, cooperation, connecting, communication, shortly - "gathering" of women from the field of visual arts, digital marketing (presenting art in the field of culture), cultural diplomacy, copyright, through the filming of documentary series, organizing lectures, then round tables, as well as establishing a network of female curators, designing a residential program. These are all elaborated ways (within the current project of Biljana Jotić) by which it is possible to expand the context of action in the

present contemporary moment and document it, with the ultimate goal - to reach out to women - visual artists so that they consciously start to change their way of thinking (or to make those who are not interested to become more proactive). The curators believe that current timing is good to discuss this and the changes related to feminist issues within the visual arts as well to occur.

There are also associations of female artists, within which they organize themselves on projects, so that, as the curators have concluded, "women have an increasingly powerful role in art." Some female curators believe that the "lock down" due to the Covid-19 epidemic led to the return of the traditional roles of women and men, regressing women both physically and psychologically. They are pointing out that cultural theorists should focus on rethinking the private, collective, and even women's space, in the sense that the public but also the family space has become intolerant of minorities and therefore it is a good moment for a "louder fight" and winning the rights of the socially marginalized groups and emphasizing different identities. Therefore, the current situation would actually have to be directed towards a more open popularization of feminism, which until now has been viewed as a "microproblem" - to "emerge" again or it will definitely "cocoon" as marginal and unnecessary.

The results of the surveys, as well as the testimonies and suggestions of the female visual artists and curators who participated in this research point, first of all, to rethinking not only the economic status and the social, hierarchical statuses of female contemporary visual artists, but also their identities, in terms of the expected beliefs about them. The issue of gender differentiation of creators in relation to research conclusions is not revealed as political but as human, given that it is imposed simultaneously by the social context and the contemporary visual artwork. Therefore, the goal of the research, along with recommendations that follow, is in agreement with the defined goals of the entire project of which it is a part. Therefore, the essence of this research, as well as the project, is not to

emphasize the differences between women and men in contemporary visual arts and society, but to remove the subversive and destructive effects of those differences.

According to Biljana Jotić, the author of the project, the main intention is - "to mentally equate the artist and the female artist, female and male, into one absolute concept." Until these two terms are equalized, there is a need to empower women, to encourage the artistic expression of women, to observe the different identities of women-visual artists and to approach by art the question of what it is with which a woman identifies herself today through specific expressions within her visual creativity. Also, the essential thing that should be nurtured is the diversity of their artistic expression, the artistic media that they use in accordance with the development of modern technologies, historical conditions that led to a new reality, broadening, and directions."

Recommendations

The contemporary visual and curatorial scenes are faced with numerous problems in every country of the Balkan region where the actual research has been conducted, which is revealed from the conversations held with female curators, as well as from the open questions of female visual artists. The answers of the interviewees represent valuable guides that can be taken into account in the process of making decisions about national and local cultural policy priorities, especially since they coincide with the general state in this cultural activity. According to their opinion, it is necessary to first solve the shortcomings that have been existing for a long time in the culture, and then in the contemporary visual scene, which make it difficult to start facing specific problems, and to talk more specifically about the status of female visual artists within this system.

On a general level, there is a need to achieve dignified conditions for functioning, that is, to improve the system of visual creativity, which depends on the state of national and local cultural policy. It is with the instruments and

strategies of cultural policy that the capacity and system of visual creativity can be raised, in terms of encouraging the direction of actions of institutions and employees, but also organizations, as well as their priorities (work planning, proper allocation of material and human resources, action and financial plans, level of participation of audience, work evaluation, etc.). Considering that in overcoming the shortcomings, as well as in creating cultural policy should participate both equally the participants of the visual creativity system, it is important how clearly defined and transparent the national and local cultural policies are, and to what extent they include the strategy of incentives, i.e. development of visual creativity.

Therefore, the most important recommendation to the institutions is to work on the adoption of laws and by-laws specifically for the field of visual creativity through the adopted national strategies for the development of culture, provided for by the laws in the field of culture, and in whose proposals numerous subjects participate. In order to implement cultural development strategies, action plans are adopted that define goals, measures, activities, expected results, monitoring indicators, owners and partners in achieving the set tasks. Within the framework of contemporary visual creativity, in the countries where this research was conducted, great emphasis is on: digitalizing contemporary visual creativity in order to better preserve the content and enable its availability to all social and age groups and sensitive groups; then, professionalization and modernization of the visual arts system and the strengthening of the work capacity of institutions and organizations; equal development of the system of visual creativity; and then regional connection and internationalization, as well as development of audience and participation.

It is necessary:

- improving the standards of exhibition practices (more developed exhibition infrastructure, more developed market, more adequate technical equipment, more developed ways of presentation, interpretation and contextualization of contemporary visual art, revitalization of abandoned premises to turn

them into studios, creation of "hubs" of different types of creativity, etc.);

- providing support to projects of critical thinking, professional criticism, research in the field of visual creativity (work on situation analysis, establishment of various mechanisms, creation of platforms, etc.);
- further education and training of professional staff in the field of visual creativity at all levels through lifelong learning and exchange programs;
- realization of new competitions and support for curatorial projects, for young male/female artists, for various initiatives and productions:
- improvement of cooperation and dialogue of the institutional and non-institutional sector (public, private and civil partnership within the framework of contemporary visual creativity, with the aim of participating in proposing strategies for the development of visual art based on professional practices);
- supporting quality projects that are implemented in smaller and underdeveloped areas that enable the connection of creators from different local areas (strengthening and spreading culture and making it easier to engage in creative work outside of large city centers);
- developing modern concepts of art colonies and their networking at national and international level;
- presenting domestic visual creativity abroad, at international events (greater visibility) and increasing the number of visual artists involved in projects with professionals from the region and beyond (exchange projects);
- stimulation of projects of visual creativity with a higher degree of participation and work with the audience (exposure of contemporary visual art in public and non-gallery spaces and in institutions with the aim of its greater accessibility), as well as amateur creativity and creativity of national minorities;

According to the opinion of female visual artists and curators, all levels of government should participate in the realization of these goals (ministries, autonomous provinces, local authorities, cultural institutions, representative art associations, civil society organizations in the field of visual arts, independent female

and male artists and other professionals from the field of visual arts...). In accordance with the stated goals (recommendations), the interviewees presented some others that would be important for a livelier and more active scene of contemporary visual creativity, as well as for increasing the visibility of contemporary female and male visual artists and solving their social and material problems:

- encouraging the functioning of micro-scenes² within the framework of contemporary visual creativity;
- developing an information system, in terms of mapping female and male visual artists and creating a database at the national level (for the sake of easier selection of female and male curators, and therefore a higher quality of curation);
- forming a network of female and male collaborators in the field of visual creativity, as well as encouraging the cooperation of representatives from the field of visual creativity and those from economy through sponsorships, donations, contests;
- enabling a larger amount of assets used for visual creativity from EU organizations and funds;
- supporting projects that affirm and make available works and contents from the field of contemporary visual creativity in the media;
- monitoring of contests from the field of visual contemporary creativity, including the competitions of Creative Europe Desk Serbia, and their promotion on the websites of cultural institutions, galleries, art associations.

When it comes to the status, visibility and identity of female visual artists, based on the report and the final considerations of the research on the state and identified problems, the key recommendation is that culture institutions, art associations, civil society organizations in the field of contemporary visual creativity should start an initiative for the battle against the ruling stereotypes and the current status of female visual artists. This also refers to the

² As a kind of conceptual and contextual units, micro-scenes form individual curatorial practices and artistic works that together contribute to maintaining the continuity and pluralism of authorial expressions of several generations. See: <https://msurs.net/index.php/sr/izlozbe/arhivaizlozbe/izl2016/578-contemporary-thesaurus-29-24-2017>

creation of a new concept of relations within this area "which would be more focused on the role of women in culture and society, i.e. gender equality".³ Based on the research, it is concluded that it is necessary to connect the institutional and non-institutional sectors in the field of contemporary visual creativity, as well as to provide greater opportunities to female visual artists within the exhibition policy of gallery and museum spaces. In addition, as part of their business and exhibition policy, it is necessary:

- to promote the values of gender equality, the role of women in contemporary culture, society, creativity (through exhibitions, performances, panels, lectures, debates, festivals, etc.), through equal representation of visual artists in gallery and museum collections and at exhibitions, on art academies, but also equal valuation of their works when selling, equal fees, etc.;
- deal with buying the works of female visual artists (introduce buying gender policies in museums and galleries), organizing auctions of their works, but also competitions and exhibitions emphasizing gender themes in contemporary visual creativity;
- to continuously work with different target groups (from the youngest to the oldest) through cultural animation, education and other activities, with the aim of increasing the level of knowledge and informing the citizens about various socio-cultural issues, including those related to the status of women in culture and visual arts;
- bring the visual creativity of female visual artists closer to the public and the media through research in museum depots and existing gallery collections, as well as through research projects that would include women who created in a certain territory in the past;
- conduct research that would provide statistical data on the real problems and "figures" that visual artists face, with the aim of gaining insight, implementing measures and taking actions, in order to equalize the value of their works with the works of male artists, as well as "raising awareness" of both female and male members "of the industry";

³ provide greater media attention to female
V. Milanović, B. Subašić, B. Opačić, "Women in public institutions of culture", Institute for Cultural Development Research of the RS, Belgrade, 2017, p. 106.

- visual artists;
- ensure gender balance in the awarding of the highest professional awards, ranking of artworks at group exhibitions, as well as in national collections;
 - pay more attention to women who are engaged in certain types of visual arts traditionally dominated by men, such as sculpture, design, photography;
 - provide support for changes in language gender policies by creating promotional materials, with the aim of achieving balance and equality between male and female artists, i.e. raising awareness in public about equal gender representation of creators;
 - involve children and young people in creating contents that respect and affirm the principles of gender equality, in cooperation with schools, youth offices, civil society organizations⁴;
 - organize (additional) education of male and female curators in cultural institutions and organizations of visual creativity in more innovative curatorial practice, which also includes the inclusion of feminist theories and practices, theories of gender equality, etc.);
 - organize the education of visual artists in the field of marketing, for better presentation of their works, then in the field of organization and archiving, as well as in the field of entrepreneurship (develop services that would help female artists in those fields);
 - to popularize contents from the field of contemporary visual creativity that concern the identity of female visual artists through the inclusion of the audience in their presentation and organization (with the aim of better understanding the status and needs of women, as well as female visual artists in society);
 - design strategic campaigns and special programs with the aim of raising social awareness of the traditional observation of gender dualities and promoting the creativity of visual artists in public.

Given that in the countries that have participated in this research, a somewhat different situation is observed regarding the (non)existence of developed regulations on gender equality or special national strategies, action plans, etc.,

⁴ The same

here we will present general recommendations that can be applied in certain instances in each country. The mentioned laws and strategies can be adopted by the ministries responsible for human rights, but it is also in the competence of other organs and bodies of public authority (Government, ministries, coordinating bodies for gender equality, local authorities, organizations, public institutions, etc.), also, creation, implementation, monitoring, protection, promotion of gender equality in various areas for which they are responsible.

Interviewed female curators and surveyed female visual artists expect help mostly from state and local authorities, as well as from cultural institutions, art associations, even male and female curators, the professional public, and the media, but they point out that the cultural policy is insufficiently stimulating, and that there is no systemic and legal support especially for women in the field of visual arts. They believe that all institutional participants should be more open regarding the practical application of gender equality in the field of visual creativity. According to the observations, experiences and views of female curators and visual artists, we present recommendations to decision makers (the ministry responsible for culture and other competent ministries, the provincial secretariat, units of local or regional authorities). The recommendations are related to the need for greater support from the state sector in raising awareness of the importance of culture for society through strengthening the gallery system, social actions, education of citizens, among other things, and about gender equality and the importance of the presence of women in all aspects of our society, including in contemporary creativity; then, with the need for financial support, that is, greater material and financial resources for the production and presentation of artworks (especially economically disadvantaged female artists, single mothers...); with the need to change the material and working conditions for female visual artists, to create better opportunities for selling works (organizing the market of works of art⁵), for greater support

⁵ Namely, the idea is to create such a market of artistic works in which we would do business with female artists from

and appreciation from the local community and the entire society, as well as for equal participation in the decision-making process in culture. It is primarily important to formulate cultural development plans with the aim of systematically solving problems in culture, defining key issues of importance for cultural life and cultural development. Therefore, from the point of view of interviewed female curators and surveyed female visual artists, we present recommendations to institutions.

- It is important to adopt strategic plans (planning acts) at all levels with set goals (priorities) related to greater affirmation and representation of women in culture, in this case female visual artists (equal treatment in work, production, presentation, promotion, evaluation, sales and etc, with male artists), but also for their special protection during pregnancy, i.e. maternity⁶, working from home. This recommendation refers to the consideration of proposals for social and any other protection against gender discrimination of independent (autonomous) female curators and female visual artists.

- It is important to incorporate and affirm gender equality in various ways in laws and by-laws in the field of visual contemporary creativity, including the use of gender-sensitive language, cooperating with experts in science and education, independent female artists, independent female curators, representative associations in the field of visual arts, unions in the visual arts, civil society organizations in the field of visual creativity and education, with the aim of improving gender equality in this area.

- It is important to harmonize legal solutions with practice through a continuous dialogue between the ministries of culture and representative art associations, in terms of strengthening the social and economic security of women in the field of contemporary visual creativity and increasing public financial resources for the realization of new specialized competitions and other types of support for programs and projects of female curators,

different age, social and social groups, and work on buying their works and creating special collections from them.

⁶ Some countries are introducing policies that encourage fathers to take paternity leave, as well as paid work from home for female visual artists. See: <https://otvoreniparlament.rs/akt/4512>.

for young and unconfirmed female artists, for new initiatives and new production of female visual artists, which contribute to their greater visibility and improvement of their status.

- It is important to create an institutionalized space within which the empowerment of female visual artists would be done by connecting and engaging multiple connections at all levels (governments, ministries, local governments, cultural institutions, citizens' associations, the private sector, independent female artists, non-governmental organizations, independent female curators...), with the aim of increasing the number of projects that support contemporary creativity of women and activities in the profession, improving the production activity of female visual artists, repurposing premises into spaces for creation, etc.

- It is important to consider the possibilities for implementation of systemic measures that would allow greater representation of content from the field of visual creativity on national television and media, within which more space would be given for the presentation of visual creativity of female artists than before.

- In proportion to the increase of the republic's budget for culture, it is important to increase and finance contemporary visual creativity, and within it, to equalize allocations for visual male and female artists.

- It is important to connect the law on culture, the law on gender equality, the law on family protection and other relevant regulations, in order to systematically solve issues related to the position of women in culture, and in special cultural activities, such as contemporary visual creativity.

Special recommendations to state bodies, i.e. units of local authorities (municipalities), city councils for culture, management boards of public cultural institutions and other competent bodies, with the inclusion of members from the civil sector and various social groups:

- co-financing the work of specialized galleries and a network of new independent spaces that would affirm women's creativity and contribute to the development of cultural participation;
- encouraging the cooperation of national and local institutions of culture and contemporary

visual creativity, civil society organizations and individuals, with the aim of jointly creating a cultural offer and implementing programs related to the presentation of artworks and creations of female visual artists;

- defining the competitions specifically for supporting the projects of female visual artists and increasing the number of supported projects in the competition for female visual artists at all levels, in order to improve the diversity and dynamism of the local cultural scene;

- mapping of female visual artists who contributed to the region or city and the introduction of awards with the names of prominent visual artists, as well as awards for the contribution of women in contemporary visual creativity;

- realization of continuous education, training and improvement among employees in departments/secretariats in charge of the field of culture in state bodies, local authorities, as well as among citizens, related to gender equality and in the field of visual creativity;

- supporting the associations of female visual artists and curators, in accordance with possibilities and capacities through co-financing of the material costs of the associations, providing premises (free of charge or at preferential prices), encouraging intersectoral cooperation, public-civil partnership, etc;

- opening gallery and museum spaces, including virtual ones, dedicated to female visual artists, with efforts to expand the audience;

- paying more attention to the inclusion of female visual artists in projects concerning contemporary visual creativity, non-governmental organizations (about women and for women), the use of various local funds that support the activities of female artists;

- the inclusion of female visual artists during the process of local cultural planning in local cultural development strategies (for the field of contemporary visual creativity), because they can have important role in the creation of contemporary visual arts strategies;

- defining the contests for (co)financing of projects related especially to visual creativity, and to female visual artists, and harmonizing such contest procedure at all levels of public

authority;

- encouraging visual creativity by ensuring equal rights for independent female artists, as well as independent male and female curators locally;

- establishment of cooperation between institutions of education and visual creativity, as well as the system of education of children and young people about the history of art and the values of female visual artists;

- popularizing and affirming contemporary visual creativity through interactive modern ways of presentation.

The recommendation to participants in contemporary visual creativity refers to their more active implementation of initiatives that are particularly related to the definition of regulations referring to gender equality within the law on culture, that is, cultural policies within the law on gender equality. In addition, based on the opinions of the interviewees, the recommendations are as follows:

- when creating and promoting exhibitions of female visual artists, strengthen the cooperation of both male and female curators with marketing departments, with the aim of greater availability of information to experts, the public, and citizens, as well as a better understanding of wider circle of visitors;

- show more interest in young unconfirmed female artists by female curators, as well as art associations (research and monitoring of the work of female artists, promoting them on the contemporary art market, "launching" female artists outside the country, strengthening the curatorial network, networking female artists and female curators...);

- include research, archival, activist, in every respect transdisciplinary work in order to increase the capacity and creativity of female curators, and their credibility;

- collaborate more often with citizen associations (especially those dealing with women's rights), with the aim of educating different groups of people related to the status of women in culture and visual arts (implementation of partnership projects and research about problems faced by female visual artists and women in society, as well as within their profession);

- improve communication between male and

female curators and participants of both genders from local authorities in order to implement systemic changes within the framework of the development of contemporary visual creativity;

- connect with the educational sector (with an increase in number of art classes in schools), in order to approach the topic of gender equality through visual creativity, presentation of artworks and identities of female visual artists, both in the past and in the modern age;

- establish an internet platform with feminist issues within the framework of contemporary visual creativity, in cooperation with visual female artists and curators (with the possibility of presenting and promoting the works of female visual artists and regular organizing of their sales exhibitions);

- encourage mutual alignment, support, connection in clusters, and more (pro)active participation in joint actions, artistic residencies and colonies with female visual artists;

- organize thematic exhibitions, festivals, discussions, debates, round tables on the topic of the status and problems of female visual artists, etc. (either within artistic associations or on platforms);

- link with female artists and male and female curators from the region in joint projects, with the aim of "artist exchange", presenting and sharing experiences, reflections, opening up necessary questions regarding the present status of female visual artists;

- involve female and male theoreticians, female and male editors, female and male critics, female and male cultural workers in the gender aspects of visual art, with the aim of more objectively presenting and reflecting on the creativity of visual artists (through the prism of their quality and potential), returning given topics to the public and reaching out to "ordinary citizen".

In the results of this research, insufficient connection and weak communication between female curators and female visual artists in the countries that participated in the research can be seen. Therefore, the recommendation to female participants of contemporary visual creativity is to be more active in mutual connecting (networking) and communication, raising awareness of the problem of patriarchy

and breaking stereotypes about women, and also establishing mutual solidarity. (Extract of the research "Identity of women in contemporary visual creativity", Institute for Cultural Development Research, Belgrade, 2022, translated from Serbian by Danijela Kvrđić).



IMPRESSUM

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