

LOVE IN AN AGE OF HATE

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THE FLOATING WORLD

The pleasure of love lasts only a moment – while – the grief of love lasts a whole life through. The opening lines of this 18th century French poem and love song sketch out a pathetic paradox within daily life that still reverberates in the present.¹ Transposed here as the subject of the 56th Belgrade October Salon, *The Pleasure of Love: Transient Emotion in Contemporary Art* examines art in its social and political contexts, contrasting its humane aesthetic values with far less benevolent forces of power and control.

The idea of pleasure as being inevitably short-lived, as opposed to the more chronic human condition of disappointment or grief, seems to be ingrained within the human psyche. Pleasure, with its promise of gratification, is not quite the same thing as happiness, a more abstract state, yet both are often characterised as transient and difficult to attain. In art, this sentiment recalls *ukiyo-e* (images of the *floating world* of fleeting delight): brightly coloured Japanese woodblock prints. These celebrations of pleasure were derived, perversely, from the Buddhist idea that fleshly desire was an impediment to the eternal happiness of spiritual enlightenment; the reason why this world *floated* was that it had neither weight nor substance. Often depicting scenes from the Pleasure Quarters, these images from the 18th and 19th centuries are full of incident and desire but, like the orgasmic *petits morts* to which they implicitly refer, were also melancholic because it was understood that in life such pleasure could not, and perhaps should not, be sustained.

¹ In 1784 Jean-Paul-Égide Martini composed *Plaisir d'Amour*, a classic love song based on a poem by Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian who, one of many victims of Terror in the French Revolution, died in 1794. It has been performed (and recorded) many times since, both 'classically' and as popular music, by such diverse artistes as Vitoria de los Angeles, Paul Robeson, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Janet Baker, Placido Domingo, Joan Baez, Brigitte Bardot, Marianne Faithfull, Nana Mouskouri and Emmylou Harris. Even in its more recent renditions, the beauty of *Plaisir d'Amour* as a song both increases and ameliorates its sadness.



More recently, the unequal balance between pleasure and pain has been reduced to little more than a snafu paradox: a formulaic condition of bare existence from which escape is virtually impossible.² As well as being the title of Joseph Heller's famous World War II novel, *Catch-22* has become a familiar catchall to express widespread cynicism about what seem to be the inevitably cruel mechanisms of power.³ So, in an existential, materialist age of contemporary politics in which public life is characterised, with relatively few exceptions, by bureaucratic obfuscations of vested interests, greed, mendaciousness, stupidity and anger, the 56th Belgrade October Salon focuses on love, the exact opposite of such hateful characteristics, as both a subject and prism through which to view the world.

Because of its uncompromisingly individual conviction and commitment to conscience and truth, art, at its best, is the perfect vehicle for such an adventure and has been so in the West since at least the end of the 18th century. Because of its relative autonomy and lack of obvious power, it cannot avoid being seen in contrast to politics, while politics, combative by nature and the opposite of art, can only move forward either by defeating opponents, or through fudges, compromises and half-truths. This interpenetration of the ideal and the 'real' world in art has become a central topic of this exhibition.

Modernity, however, has always claimed to unite the real with the ideal under a single rubric and this, in its current, entropic form, is a worldwide rather than a specifically 'western' phenomenon. Now dog eared, the authority of modernity is ultimately derived from the efflorescence of new ideas about science, human consciousness and rights that characterised the 18th century European Enlightenment that were accompanied by an unparalleled period of technological invention. When applied to production, this led to successive waves of intensive industrialisation, supported by a succession of demographic explosions that created new breeds of migrant workers and consumers to tend and satisfy the newly invented machines.

For a short time, there was hope that a new dawn of social thought and political action would illuminate this 'new world' in which 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'⁴ would displace poverty and oppression. But, to the continuing benefit of the minorities who either held onto power or had newly grasped it, the age-old defaults of inhumanity - terror, tribalism, exploitation, small-mindedness, and greed - prevailed.

2 The word 'snafu' is derived from the World War II acronym 'Situation Normal All Fucked Up.'

3 Heller, an American novelist, started writing *Catch-22* in 1953 but it was not published until 1961.

4 These are three examples of unalienable human rights listed in the *United States Declaration of Independence* drafted by Thomas Jefferson and others in 1776. The American War of Independence was the first of many subsequent revolutions that also espoused similar ideals.

In her essay *Serious Frivolity: Demise in the 18th Century Pastoral*, Jelena Todorović describes the pre-revolutionary Arcadian ideals of the *fête champêtre*, a pastoral form of entertainment held outdoors in carefully contrived - but seemingly natural - gardens, that pivoted on the melancholic realisation that love, like life, is fragile, transient, and doomed ultimately to fail.⁵ In this she discusses two well-known paintings, Antoine Watteau's *Disembarking on Cythera* (1717) and François Boucher's *An Autumn Pastoral* (1749), which, in different ways, express the quintessence of what was then a new form of romantic love. These conveyed through artificial language and conventions 'the splendour of the mundane' that Todorović designates as 'the Rococo's most treasured legacy'. Martini's song *Plaisir d'Amour* expresses the same poetic sensibility that, in a rather mangled way, we can still enjoy today.

As both an ideal state of being and an indispensable agent of procreation, 'love' has since been consigned either to the cupboard of intimate, personal affairs, in an ideal world far beyond time, or sentimentalised within the family, often in the form of stultifying, self-righteous patriarchy. But the years of delicious, enervated, noble melancholy that (for some) had predated the French Revolution set a tone of balance between fleeting pleasure and life-long grief. This was then, and remains, the opposite side of the same coin that paid for the worldly advances of the Enlightenment. But, with benefit of hindsight, what we may perceive today is an unfriendly, psychotic paradox: people had no 'right' to extended pleasure or happiness because its 'price' would have 'bankrupted' them, emotionally and financially. The situation today is not so different, like the oppressed *citoyens* of ancient Rome or *ancien régime* France, we are bestowed with largesse from above in the form of abundant (but not at all nourishing) bread, circuses and cake. And, as we have noticed many times in the past, such a lack of balance is impossible to maintain.

DEEP DELIBERATIONS

Last year politicians decided that the, formerly annual, international Belgrade October Salon would be 'reborn' as a Biennale and its newly reconstituted Board would be given the task of making a 'new start'. This would present a spirit of openness as well as fresh opportunities for artists. About 18 months ago they approached me to write a proposal and the result, in expanded and elaborated form, is what you see here. But, before the contract was finalised, various anxieties were expressed: in previous iterations 'the same artists had always been shown' and there had been a 'failure to connect with a wider public'; this also seemed to be linked to a concern about the number of Serbian artists that would be included in the show.

Rather than answering this with bland generalisations - the process of making the exhibition had not yet started - my response was to refer the Board to previous large international exhibitions I had

⁵ Jelena Todorović's essay appears on pages 26 to 31 on the catalogue of the exhibition "*The Pleasure Of Love: the 56th October Salon in Belgrade*".

made that, although they expressed different viewpoints and themes to those I had proposed here, confronted similar concerns through the coherence of bringing together different kinds of ‘good’ art.⁶

Any large exhibition of contemporary art, wherever it is made, has to take into account local cultural and political contexts (as well as the specific characteristics of the different buildings in which it will be shown) and balance them with what is happening in art in a broader field. But to have any credibility, it must also present a clear idea of what ‘good art’ could possibly be and how this may be expressed through the thematic of the exhibition. The alternative is dilettantism, however trendily it may be disguised.

My proposal for ‘opening up’ this biennale, therefore, had three aspects: firstly, I would invite artists of any nationality or age whose work I felt reflected cogently on the exhibition’s evolving theme. Secondly, I would look through catalogues and data banks of Serbian and regional artists and visit exhibitions and studios in Serbia to bring myself up to date with recent developments.⁷ Thirdly, I would make a selection from an international open submission. There were not the resources to solicit, transport and show artists of any age from anywhere in the world, so I decided that, to address the Board’s concern about the ‘same faces re-appearing’, the submission should focus on emerging artists of 40 years or younger, and that its catchment area should reflect the traditional historical affiliations of Serbia as well as its intentions for the future. So, only artists who were resident in the 30 states that formerly had been part of the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian Empires could submit work as well as those from the European Union— a group of countries for which Serbia is now a candidate member.⁸ In this way, the inevitable randomness of such exercises was given structure by colonial and political ‘ready-mades’, each reflecting specific aspects of memory and desire. I also made it clear that once an artist had been selected via the submission, no distinction would be made in the exhibition between their work and that chosen by direct invitation.

6 Examples of these exhibitions are *The Beauty of Distance. Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age*, 17th Biennale of Sydney, 2010, *The Best of Times, The Worst of Times: Rebirth and Apocalypse in Contemporary Art*, 1st Kyiv International Biennale, 2012 and *A Time for Dreams*, IV Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, 2014.

7 I first visited Yugoslavia in 1966, before university and subsequently travelled widely in the country in the late 1980s and ‘90s at the time when I was preparing, with Bojana Pejić the exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*. This opened in Moderna Museet, Stockholm in 1999 and travelled to Budapest (Ludwig Museum) and Berlin (Hamburger Bahnhof) during 2000.

8 At different times, parts of Serbia were included in both the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Artists were eligible from the following countries, including from the EU: Albania, Algeria, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and Yemen.

In thinking about creating a dynamic mix between younger and more established artists, I was also impressed by the event's antiquated, but charming, title: *The October Salon*. As Bojana Pejić explains in her essay 'We' and 'Europe', or *How Many Serbs Do We Have in the Show?*, the Salon's early iterations, fixated on stereotypes of centres and peripheries, also had to take into account the ideologies of national and socialist art.⁹ Its name, therefore, invokes a strongly political memory as one of many events that celebrate victory over Germany in October 1945, at the same time echoing, in name if not substance, the revolutionary fervour of the Bolshevik October 1917 Revolution.

But the name and timing of this event also suggested to me a different poetic resonance: October represents the high point of autumn, a time of melancholy when the leaves begin to fall from the branches; and for some associative reason Jacques Prévert's poem *Les feuilles mortes*, (that also became a famous romantic song), led me to think of the *Salon d'Automne*, that first took place in Paris in 1903.¹⁰ Ostensibly, this event had little to do with romance as it was conceived as an alternative to the established Salon and openly accepted artists who had no other place to show their works.¹¹ But it provides here an illustrious and art-loving model for exhibiting emerging artists alongside those who are more established.

In terms of housing the 'new' Salon a number of buildings were offered and, in the end, I decided to work with the elegant and expansive dereliction of the former Military Academy on Resevska Street, now part of the Museum of Belgrade, and to contrast this with the crisp but not so abundant in terms of space, modernism of the more centrally situated Belgrade Cultural Centre. Each contained ghosts of entirely different kinds.

Now that the exhibition has been put together, the statistical results of my various deliberations start to tell their own story. Out of a total of 67 artists, 46% are 40 years old or younger, 28% are Serbian and the remainder originate from 25 other countries.¹² Another salient point is that 66% happen to be female, not a conscious choice on my part, but neither a surprise. I leave it for others to worry, or not, about questions of 'imbalance', or about whether men or women are intrinsically more 'emotional' in the ways they express themselves. This is not the result of any affirmative action, but a clear expression of how the idea and framework of this exhibition is in dissonance with how power has traditionally been disposed in relation to the Salon and many other projects. Unfortunately for the rest of the world, this is not only a Serbian problem.

9 Bojana Pejić's essay appears on pages 274 to 289 on the catalogue of the exhibition "*The Pleasure Of Love: the 56th October Salon in Belgrade*".

10 Jacques Prévert's song, with music by Joseph Kosma, was written in 1946 and is known in English as *Autumn Leaves*.

11 Many famous painters such as Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse, François Picabia and Paul Gauguin showed in the *Salon d'Automne* before their work was widely known.

12 The exhibition includes 67 artists from 26 countries; of these, 23 are male, 44 are female, 31 are aged 40 or under, and 19 are of Serbian nationality.



It may be that emotional response is usually overlooked in contemporary art because it is related either to personal embarrassment or to a fear of the irrational. Not only are such inhibitions frequently expressed in the increasingly academic careerism of artists, critics, curators and pedagogues, who would rather search for strategies, 'markers,' 'bench levels' or markets with which to assess artistic quality, but they are also the result of paying lip service to a false dichotomy between body and mind that good art rarely acknowledges. Emotion, like intuition or empathy, may be supremely rational in its origin (fear and flight [to protect oneself] or brave action [to protect others] in the face of danger are examples) but, by its nature, it is not as easy to conceptualise or control as 'rational thought' with its coolly numerical, more anti-individual mind set. In their different ways, the artists in this exhibition confront and challenge these ways of thinking about and looking at the world.

To be any good, art must be free of inhibition. Illusory or allusive, explicit or implicit, the creative, thoughtful embodiment of emotion through art covers a broad, long scale from love to hate yet, unlike entertainment - popular cinema or sentimental music, for example - it is never manipulative. It cuts critically like a red thread between these different elements so that the people who experience it may reach their own conclusions about what it is they have seen and felt.

CINEMA, BALANCE, BODY AND KIN

Although this exhibition was never conceived in terms of compartments or sections, and there is little space within the scope of this essay to discuss all the works in it, certain common motifs have emerged that resonate with its subject. The first of these is cinema, the child of 18th century masques and plays, which creates a parallel world of desire to our own with its heroes, heroines and genres. Cinema not only reflects experience but also feeds back into it, either as art, entertainment, or as a subliminal means of exerting conformism or control; sometimes it is an amalgam of all of them.

Anastasia Vepreva was born in northern Russia during the last years of the USSR, and her 3-channel video projection *Requiem for Romantic Love* (2015) addresses alienation at the end of empire by sampling failed popular cinematic dreams, once full of pathos but now alienated and abject. Tracey Moffatt, based in Australia, instinctively represents those who are marginalised in her works. Her video *Love* (2003), shown here, humorously addresses the kitsch gender and racial stereotypes propagated by mainstream Hollywood movies that she then turns on their heads by reediting them to show once submissive heroines as angry, dominant and lethal, their heroes as manipulative, absurd and violent and, as always in such cases, the 'natives' as getting increasingly restless.

In his continuing project *Endless Movie*, Radenko Milak obsessively focuses on moments from classic cinema by refashioning, through the medium of watercolour, iconic stills from different films to create dramatic, subliminal mediations of hopes, dreams and nightmares. Out of these he creates

imaginary animated narratives that rethink the logic of these images. Similar motifs surface in Nemanja Nikolić's *Double Noir* (2016), also a work in progress, in which images based on Humphrey Bogart's films are drawn on blackboards to provide the material for an animation that uses *cinéma noir* as a 'space for conscious and/or unconscious reflection on motives like repetition, identification, time, memory and absurdity' within contemporary reality.¹³

Bojan Faijfrić concentrates on a more specific aspect of *cinéma noir*, the prolific 'Black Wave' that marked Yugoslav film from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. In his video *The Cause of Death* (2015), he picks up the narratives of five leading characters from different films, re-ironising their original irony by re-enacting what he describes as their 'nihilistic, bloody, tragically Yugoslavian climaxes' and intercuts this with scenes from his current life in the Netherlands. In this way, he not only marks 'a critical point when Yugoslav society underwent a neoliberal turn,' but also highlights the arid absurdities of the current situation within the region.¹⁴

In her drawings, paintings and photographs shown here, Cecilia Edefalk takes a completely different tack, deconstructing Hollywood stardom by focusing on the pathos of the antiquated, pre-WWII slapstick comedy films of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. Working from film stills, she invests these peripheral losers with an absurdly timeless dignity and heroism that reconstitutes them as individuals freed from the cyclical inevitability of joint disasters that always typify their films.

The soundtrack for William Kentridge's short film *Tango for Page Turning* 2013, (made specially for the theatre piece *Refuse the Hour*), is a jumbled, Dadaist mash-up of Hector Berlioz's song *Spectre de la Rose* (based on the poetry of Théophile Gautier). As the artist leafs through the pages of an old book, images painted over its text are animated playfully as if in a zoetrope. Jumping from one logic, language and style to another in a series of carefully choreographed collisions, these texts and images make reference to relativity, melancholy, time, black holes and string theory as he duels and dances, both with himself and with constructivist geometrical figures. The climax is a 'tango' with Dada Masilio, the choreographer of the theatre piece, with whom he eventually collides in a 'black hole', mercifully confined within the pages and covers of the book.

The majestic, panoramic, reverse zoom shot that characterizes David Krippendorff's film *Nothing Escapes My Eyes* (2015) endows a tale of rise and fall with mythic dimension. His subject is no less than that of tragic love set within the history of ancient Egypt: in his grand opera *Aida*, Giuseppe Verdi's eponymous heroine chose love above her father's honour or that of her country. The action takes place in a shadowy, nondescript space, actually the site of this opera's première in Cairo in 1871. Here, to the intermittent soundtrack of the famous climactic aria, what seems to be the ghost of an actor, with great sadness, slowly divests herself of costume and make-up. But slowly we notice that the once opulent Khedival Opera House where *Aida* was first performed has disappeared into thin

¹³ From a statement by the artist August 2016.

¹⁴ From a statement by the artist 2015.

air. It was recently demolished and other priorities now occupy the Egyptian government. As we see from the closing frames of the film, this empty space is now a multi-storey car park on a busy square, in the bustling centre of a modern city that could be almost anywhere.

The images in Yang Fudong's 3-channel video installation *Flutter, Flutter...Jasmine, Jasmine...* (2002) are the chronicle of a love story as they illustrate the words of a popular romantic Chinese song but they also provide a commentary on it. Here, the life of a young Shanghainese couple initially reflects hope, idealism and emotional purity, but this slowly changes with the face and fabric of the rapidly growing, increasingly commercialised city around them.

The idea of balance – of harmony or disharmony – ecological, social, psychological or political crops up in both concrete and abstract forms throughout the exhibition. This is clearly expressed in Janet Lawrence's work that focuses on the natural world by concentrating on its despoliation. Regarding the lives of animals and plants as if they were human, she sets out to 'heal' or resuscitate them. *Underlying* (2016), the site-specific installation she has made for this exhibition, moves a dead tree into the gallery, laid like a dinosaur in a specially built cradle across its length; small green 'parasites,' growing between the cracks in its surface imply signs of regeneration in its magnificent hulk. Her two-channel film projection *Vanishing* (2009) also focuses on the precariousness and delicacy of life: in long, close-up sequences of the bodies of live animals, she concentrates on their repeated, rhythmical movements and the ebb and flow of their breath.

Leiko Ikemura's paintings address nature from an equally precarious but more animistic point of view in landscapes that summon a memory of traditional Asian art. Out of fluidly expressive images of 'classical' subjects such as lakes and mountains, a topography of human form emerges as if it were a spirit. Her small sculptures also focus on the human figure in a process of change. In *Memento mori* (2013), a young girl (perhaps a reflection of herself) lies silent and still, while the self-explanatory metamorphosis in her ceramic *Trees out of head* (2015) implies an overarching unity between humanity and nature.

In Biljana Đurđević's new triptych *Deep Water* (2016), shown for the first time, standing figures of young women in a lush, dense forest create an atmospheric sense of unease. Yet the frame of reference is different here, neither wood spirits nor *rusalki*, her characters are undeniably in the 'deep water' of contemporary awakening, conflict and angst. Vulnerability holds hands with psychic power in an intense pictorial interrogation of these individual women that both echoes and challenges the febrile sensibilities of such early modern male painters as Ferdinand Hodler and Edvard Munch.

Almost Nothing (2016), the ironical title of Ana Hušman's 15-minute-long video, highlights the appropriations of 'normality' and 'neutrality' that have become commonplace in neoliberal economies. By juxtaposing the flora and meteorology of the islands off the Croatian coast with the bland advertising images for speculative building recently constructed there by the tourist industry,

she exposes such self-serving reciprocities whilst, at the same time, emphasising the intractable, incorruptible power of nature.

The idea of balance is treated in a more abstract, metaphorical way in the three dimensional installations of Andreas Blank and Asako Shiroki. The platonic solids that underwrite Andreas Blank's large work installation *Hors Champ 1* (2015) combine different types of stone in both 'natural' and carved states 'balanced', absurdly, by with hyperrealistic facsimiles of everyday objects. Asako Shiroki's three-dimensional installations, *In the grid – floor, windows* (2014) is shown here, isare constructed out of wood and fabric and its calculated lack of completeness also suggests, vainly, the functions and proportions of everyday life. Each 'fragment' combines to imply a harmonious, stable, but easily disrupted, whole, tenuously held in place by gravity and friction. Although Mariana Vassilieva's sculptures touch on similar ideas, they have cast a more playful, ironical view on the idea of balance: in *Treasure is Everywhere* (2008-10), a hooded figure precariously balances on two legs of a chair in order to 'steal' light, while the rickety 5-metre high tower of seven metal chairs that comprises *Denkpause* (2016) suggests a more fundamentally hazardous structural insecurity. This is only partially assuaged by the 'togetherness' of her installation *Matches* (2016) in which three giant pairs of burnt matchsticks are anthropomorphised, spent in static poses of pseudo-cuteness.

Togetherness is also the subject of *Salt Dinner* (2012) and *Lublin Beach* (2016), two videos made by Nezaket Ekici and Shahar Marcus Shahar that humorously superimpose tired clichés of domestic bliss onto the current geo-political map of the Middle East. Working individually in Turkey/Germany and Israel, their respective countries, they combine periodically in quasi-domestic harmony to make joint performances/videos that implicitly lampoon the absurdity of ideological and religious fundamentalisms and, by extension, critique the misery and conflicts they create. The first is a romantic dinner doomed to fail, floating on the buoyant salt waters of the Dead Sea, while *Lublin Beach* is a typical summer family holiday, far away from the seaside, where sand and sun are replaced by snow and ice in the midst of a bitterly cold Polish winter.

Fragile Presence (2016), a large wall drawing and installation by Vladan Jeremić and Rena Rädle, focuses on the humanitarian disaster of the present refugee crisis, emanating from conflict and economic meltdown in Africa and the Middle East. In affluent, relatively stable, but divided Europe there seems little space or time for love when the urgent need for humanitarian aid becomes clear. It is transformed instead into a point of conflict as nationalist politicians and media fan the flames of fear of 'others' so that migrants become scapegoats for a whole panoply of domestic unhappiness and dissatisfaction for which they should never have to bear responsibility.

Johanna Kandler's oil paintings pursue a similar frame of analysis by concentrating on the marginal lives of Roma and other migrants who have been excluded from mainstream society. She depicts the incongruous folk art of transient markets reflecting, almost like a parody, the affluence that surrounds them, as they sit, uneasily perched, in the hinterland between city and its industrial suburbs.



In his 'science fiction' film *Freedom and Independence* (2014), Bjørn Melhus presents a chilling view of an extreme, unbalanced present by examining the ideas of Ayn Rand, the post-Nietzschean, Russian-American writer and philosopher who, posthumously, has been adopted as one of the cheerleaders of neoliberal capitalism. In such an implicitly fascistic and hateful dystopia, power takes the place of moral sense: "there is only one power that determines the course of history, just as it determines the course of every individual life. The power of man's rational faculty, the power of ideas, the power of freedom, the power of independence and the power of faith". The artist plays all the roles in the film, including that of Rand herself, in a parody that, through its dreamlike associative structure, touches on free markets, apocalyptic Hollywood cinema, entitlement, speculative gated communities, and the ideology of 'freedom'. The absurdity of both its plot and dialogue is a critique of the way in which, through neoliberal orthodoxy, Rand's ideas have become normalised and widely applied in the present.

Jenny Holzer's text-based works also focus on the normalisation of imbalance but through a critique of the rationale of 'inevitability'. The matter-of-fact logic of the texts she has chosen for the 10 uniformly presented bronze plaques comprising *The Living Series* (1980-82) initially appears incontrovertible, but this is because of the way in which its different messages are communicated. On closer scrutiny their content and tone of voice veer from the wildly authoritarian to the perverse, from the manipulatively self-righteous to the submissive and, once digested, the discrepancies between assertion and format invoke a sense of unease or dread. For Holzer, the forms into which language is put often disguise its controlling, subliminal content and she sets out to subvert this both linguistically and through design and application. Works such as *Truisms* (1977-79), shown here as a projection, put forward clichéd, dubious or erroneous propositions as if they were natural order or 'truth' yet, through the animation, distortion and sizing of their typefaces, and the conflicting order in which they appear, she transmutes their authority into absurdity.

A ghostly intimation of memory informs *Lines, Rows, Columns (Dormitory)* (2016), Ivana Ivković's site-specific installation for the former Military Academy. The body as a transient object of identity and desire is its dominant motif, shared with many other works in this exhibition. In a large room up to twenty-five naked men appear to be asleep on brightly coloured carpets; periodically, they turn onto their other side, but otherwise they remain silent and still like inanimate objects. As the exhibition continues the number of men changes; sometimes only a few are present. As a melancholic meditation on the military history of this building, the vulnerability and malleability of these oblivious, 'sleeping' bodies makes a strong impression. So also does the converse: the life force of their nakedness and the sound of their silent breath.

The bodily attributes evident in this work – gender, nakedness, desire, place and memory – take a radically synthetic form in *Venus I-III* (2016), Aurora Reinhard's site specific installation located along a wide walkway in the same building. Here the figure is the artist herself, 'hyper-feminised' by huge prosthetic breasts, rolled-up, see-thru, wet-look tops, skimpy shorts, blond wigs, masks and banally sexy poses that hover ambiguously between passion and parody. It is hard to tell whether these extreme projections of sexuality relate to male or female desire as conventional definitions of

humanity, or gender, have little space here. The sense of displacement is intensified by the realisation that many of the prostheses used by Reinhard to make these works are marketed to men who either wish to appear like women or are undergoing medical reassignment of their gender.

True Self (2012), Natalie Maximova's sequence of 12 portraits taken in different parts of Russia, was made in close co-operation with people of both sexes who are at different stages of gender reassignment. Shown both as they are and as they would wish to be, the distance between desire and reality evaporates in these actual and iconic views of evolving selfhood.

The seductive, machine-like objects, such as *Bettwurst* (2014) or *Feuerbock* (2015) constructed by Toni Schmale, have a more allusive approach to the body in that they appear as if they are designed either to pleasure or to discipline it. As a means of enabling desire, they have the character of both fetish and tool. Their aim is to surpass the banality of physical and visual gratification to approach a form of metaphysical ecstasy in which distinctions between pleasure and pain are eradicated.

The mythic heraldry of *Return of the chthonian* (2014-16), Sarah Lüdemann's installation of 102 images in gold paint, is formed by directly 'printing' her vagina onto paper sheets as both a sublimation of the 'hidden' sexuality of the female body and an assertive affirmation of its gender. Beautiful objects in themselves, these imprints are also imbued with a self-mocking humour, particularly when seen in contrast to countless male appropriations of the same subject. More cogently, however, they are an elegant refutation of a brutally simple maxim: if one hates oneself, how can one know the love of others?

The orange-red inferno in and around the large 'chapel' that Peter Johansson has constructed for *Let Us Now Rest and Await Guidance from Above!* (2016) refers to his childhood in Central Sweden. Conflating its strict, incompassionate Lutheran religion with its kitschified folk art and local food, he generates a raw sense of anger and disgust at hypocrisy that is only tempered by a strongly scatological sense of humour. Unpleasant early memories are exorcised here in a wild orgy of excessive consumerism in which the humble Dalarna sausage plays not only a comic but also an obsessively ritualised sexual role, alternating between lingam and denizen of a Glory Hole. A similar reaction to painful memories is evinced in Sun Xun's animated video *Some Actions Which Haven't Been Defined Yet in the Revolution* (2011) in which, reflecting the propaganda of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76), each violent image is painstakingly fashioned out of a woodblock print. Referencing a lost period of history, during which many people were wrongly accused and murdered, he clearly depicts a cold, passionless present in which cruelty and alienation are all too evident.

In her 5-channel sound installation *The Two Sisters* (2009), Susan Philipsz simultaneously presents two versions of an ancient Irish/Scottish ballad that tells a story of sorricide, justice and mourning in the form of a contemporary lament. Its echoing, ethereal sound interacts with both the architecture and the resonant memories of wherever it is shown as the sound of a violin bow dragged across single strings accompanies its bleak narrative: consumed by jealousy in love, one sister drowns another in a

fit of rage during a terrible storm; the decomposed body of the dead sister is found downstream by a travelling fiddler who fashions her bones and hair into a violin. But the instrument refuses to play any other tune than 'Oh the dreadful wind and rain!' - the repeated refrain of the very ballad that tells the story of this terrible murder. Within this ellipsis, the hypnotic interweaving of Philipsz's voice through the montage of the ballad's two versions, along with the ritualised repetitions of its refrain, create an otherworldly beauty that both commemorates and ameliorates the inevitability of loss.

I hesitate to begin a discussion of this essay's closing motif - family, kinship and close friendship - with a timeless image, in words and sound, of a sister murdering her sibling, but it seems as if I had no choice. Loss is tragic; yet never to have known grief is unnatural and, in its way, tragic too. Grief is a foil to pleasure and happiness.

The ambient sound and lack of dialogue, the washed out (almost monochrome) colours and powerful, steady flow of a very wide river that are lasting impressions in Anuk Miladinović's video *PARTING* (2015) create a dignified and magisterial homage to the life and loss of her father. A large bed, with finely embroidered sheets that detail letters once sent, and a mini-book, gently 'woven' out of dandelion seeds, are only part of *Fairytale about Mihailo* (1998), Snežana Nena Skoko's extended tribute to a lost dear friend - a work that travels far beyond specificity in its intimate exposition of tenderness. *Injured Parties. The Museum of Childhood* (2013), Vladimir and Milica Perić's installation of old, damaged, found photographs of children are not personal to them but its subject also speaks strongly through the same conduit of empathy.

In her 4-channel video installation *Personal Time Quartet* (2000), Gülsün Karamustafa recalls the different the stages of her childhood by letting a young girl reenact them amongst the furniture and objects she knew as a child - skipping, folding and sorting laundry, opening drawers and cupboards in old heavy furniture and, as a rite of passage to womanhood, painting her nails. The eerie and haunting soundtrack that completes the *Quartet*, different for each channel, changes each time the work is shown as its different parts are never synchronised. Far from consigning such carefree, but otherworldly, moments to the past, she telescopes them into the present, emphasising acknowledging their random, but vitally necessary, role in creating happiness, innocence and a strong desire for clear sense of freedom.

In his installation *Creation and Disintegration, or the Responsibility of Parenthood* (2016), Dimitar Solakov addresses childhood as a young father, trying to figure out the balance between his responsibilities as a parent and how these interact with the inherited characteristics of his child. The result, however, goes beyond this to approach, not without humour, a more cosmic consideration of creation along with its inevitable demise, and what responsibilities these may bring in their wake.

Siniša Ilić's installation *Without a Proposition for a Concrete Solution* (2016), combines the personal with the political in a meditation about friendship in the context of the Non-Aligned Movement, a large

group of states not formally connected with any major power bloc that was founded in Belgrade in 1961. The starting point for the work is a postcard to the artist's father, written in Serbo-Croat by an Egyptian, which refers to ideas of solidarity and friendship both on an individual and collective basis. Through the disposition of different texts, media and formal arrangements within the space, this work fans out into an elaboration of what such friendship could mean today in transformed nationalistic and neoliberal contexts.

Institutionalised friendship in the form of fandom lies at the heart of *I Never Stopped Loving You* (2016), the performance and installation that Dejan Marković has researched and facilitated specially for this exhibition. Impressed by the creatively elaborate ways that different groups of Belgrade fans support their local basketball teams (the title of the work is from one of their songs), Marković wondered how this could be integrated into the context of a different kind of cultural event, such as an art exhibition, with which they were not familiar. This meant that a group of interested fans would have the chance of experiencing and learning about the Salon so that, with the artist, they could, with a similar sense of support, critique and shared purpose that they apply to their team, translate this into their own series of performances which would be made within the space and as part of the exhibition.

kandid (2016), an installation and performance by Mariana Hahn, shown for the first time, examines the strength and solidarity of friendship through the pictorial and social motif of women braiding each other's hair. For her, this form of weaving is a metaphor for autonomy and akin to creating myths, telling stories or constructing identities. This particular work was prompted by images of Kurdish women peshmerga fighters in the media and by the more general women's belief that long hair represents strength and powerful essence. Hahn contacted Kurdish women living in Berlin to learn about what this means and how hair should be braided in subtly different ways to protect and show its power. In a series of performances, she will make her work in the Salon as she dyes and plaits human hair on its walls.

BEGINNINGS

As gestures, actions, images or objects, the works in this exhibition testify to the pleasure and necessity of love – as well as to the pain that is felt in its absence. Obliquely in this process, they also throw light on our age of hate. But this is only a beginning. They touch on, refer to, reflect, refashion, parody or critique ideas, ideologies, beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices and 'common wisdoms' with one inimitable imperative: that what results should be 'good' as art, in whatever sense this may be understood.

Fortunately, there is no formula for 'goodness' in art other than through truthful resolution within the object itself and how this relates to the world. It is fortunate, also, that not all people see and



experience the same thing in similar ways because, if it is any good, art should be able to exist and act away from its maker. Because it is independent from other realms of discourse, good art would never presume to tell any one what they should think or feel about it, or anything else. ItThere conceals no advice, no tricks or tips; this is one of its most precious attributes.

For some, the pleasure of love is like a weed, growing between the cracks in concrete, which has, against the odds, clung onto life. Its survival is part of its beauty. As the idealised bonds between individuals have frayed, and the poetic, pastoral paradise that sheltered them has evaporated, the world has changed immeasurably and we are faced by many choices but by few solutions.

The values of art are fundamentally human and humane and, in spite of what may appear to be the contrary, it has no rules, no orthodoxies, no formulae for success. This is its strength. The world, and all of which it is comprised, may be reassembled by the artist in elegant, horrible or beautiful ways but with no other interest than that of the artist to make good work. In this sense art has a potential for unspun wisdom, knowledge, even delight, that may give pleasure or pain through its immediacy. Only single-minded dedication, hard work, intellectual rigour, emotional openness, limitless curiosity and obsessive desire are necessary to make it.

The rest is up to us.