

Pavilion of Slovenia  
at 55th International Art Exhibition  
La Biennale di Venezia

la Biennale di Venezia

55. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte  
Partecipazioni nazionali

# IASMINA CIBIC

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FOR OUR  
ECONOMY  
AND  
CULTURE

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## FOR OUR ECONOMY AND CULTURE

The Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana and Škuc Gallery present the work of Jasmina Cibic at the Slovenian Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia, the 55th International Art Exhibition. Cibic's project, *For our Economy and Culture*, is commissioned by Blaž Peršin, director of Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana, and curated by Tevž Logar, artistic director of Škuc Gallery, Ljubljana.

Cibic's presentation for the Slovenian Pavilion, *For our Economy and Culture*, continues her interests and methodologies and takes the curatorial directive of the 55th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia: *The Encyclopedic Palace* as a starting point to further explore systems and hierarchies of knowledge and presentation. Using the architectural specificity of the Slovenian Pavilion, a repurposed private residence, and referencing state architectural strategies, Cibic creates an immersive multi-media installation that appropriates the entire space and explores issues around national representation and framing. Into this context, Cibic places a variety of elements, which further examine modes of exchange, reception and constructions of identity. These include two films, shot on official state locations, which underwent numerous redesigns concurrent with national cultural and political imperatives. The films present philosophical and architectural theories of purpose, form, function and aesthetic priorities through, in one, a staged interview between a (male) architect and (female) journalist, and in the other, a recreation of a 1957 parliamentary debate set up to decide which artworks might be suitable (i.e. nationally representative enough) to 'decorate' the newly built People's Assembly. In each film, the re-imagining and re-contextualising of such issues, dramatizes not only the power paradigms inherent in systems of authority, but also the explicit contradictions present in the transmutation of a national identity from past to present, place to place.

*For our Economy and Culture* also features a series of historical and contemporary paintings of flower arrangements drawn from the official art collection of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. Such paintings are routinely selected to decorate the current government offices, literally framing MP's as they hang behind their heads and presenting a particular ideal of state image. By utilising these apparently neutral and decorative images within the context of her installation, Cibic further articulates her interest in art as 'souvenir', a token of national identity. As a further framing device, the interior of the pavilion will be entirely covered with wallpaper carrying obsessively repetitive scientific illustrations of an endemic Slovene beetle, a 'failed' national icon that has almost been completely exorcised solely because of its ideologically charged name, *Anophthalmus hitleri*.

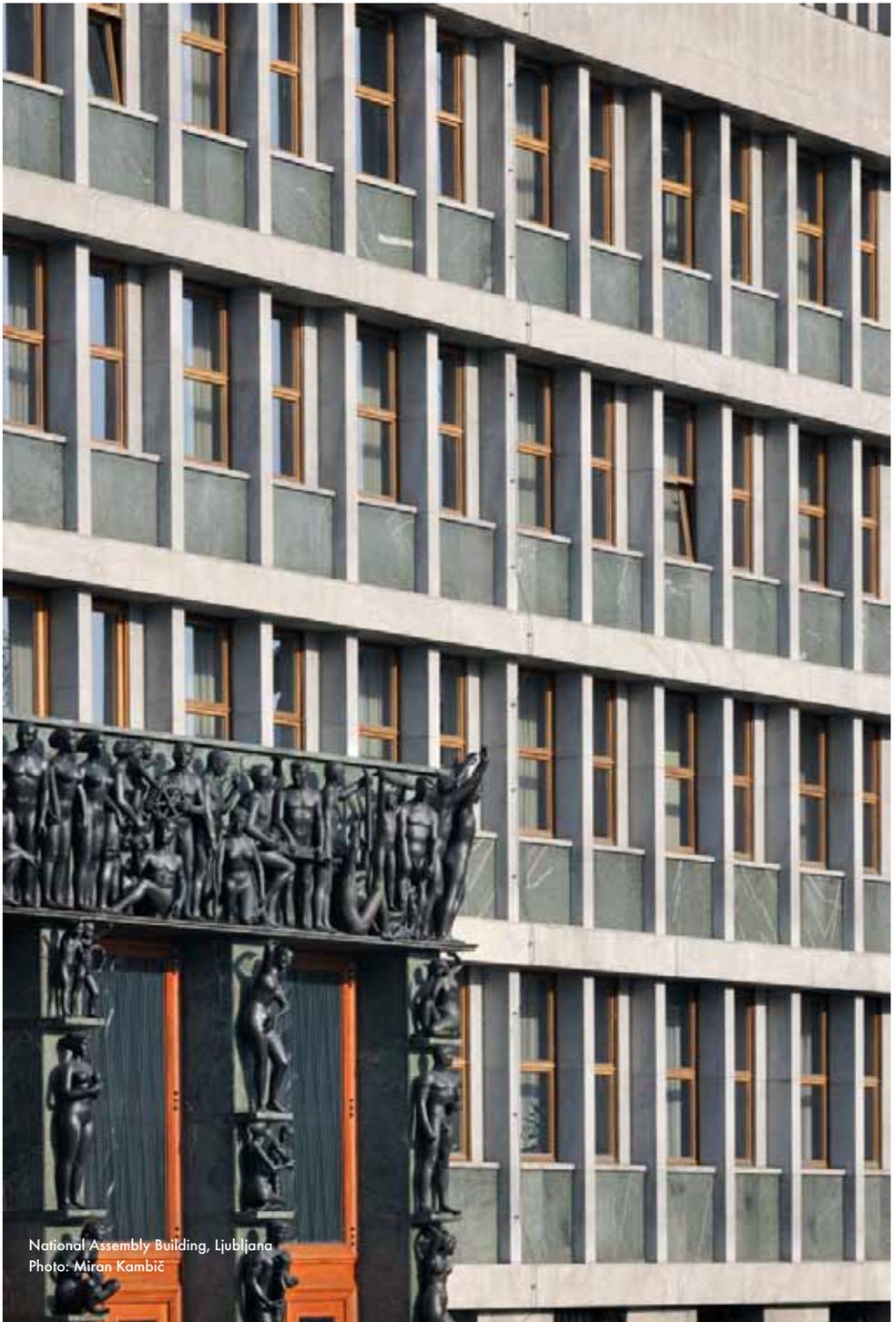
## THE ARCHITECTURE

The architecture built during the period of socialism in Slovenia expressed strong ideas about how to construct a neighbourhood, how to create the image of the social state. At the same time, it created hidden corners – like Villa Bled – which should not be forgotten.

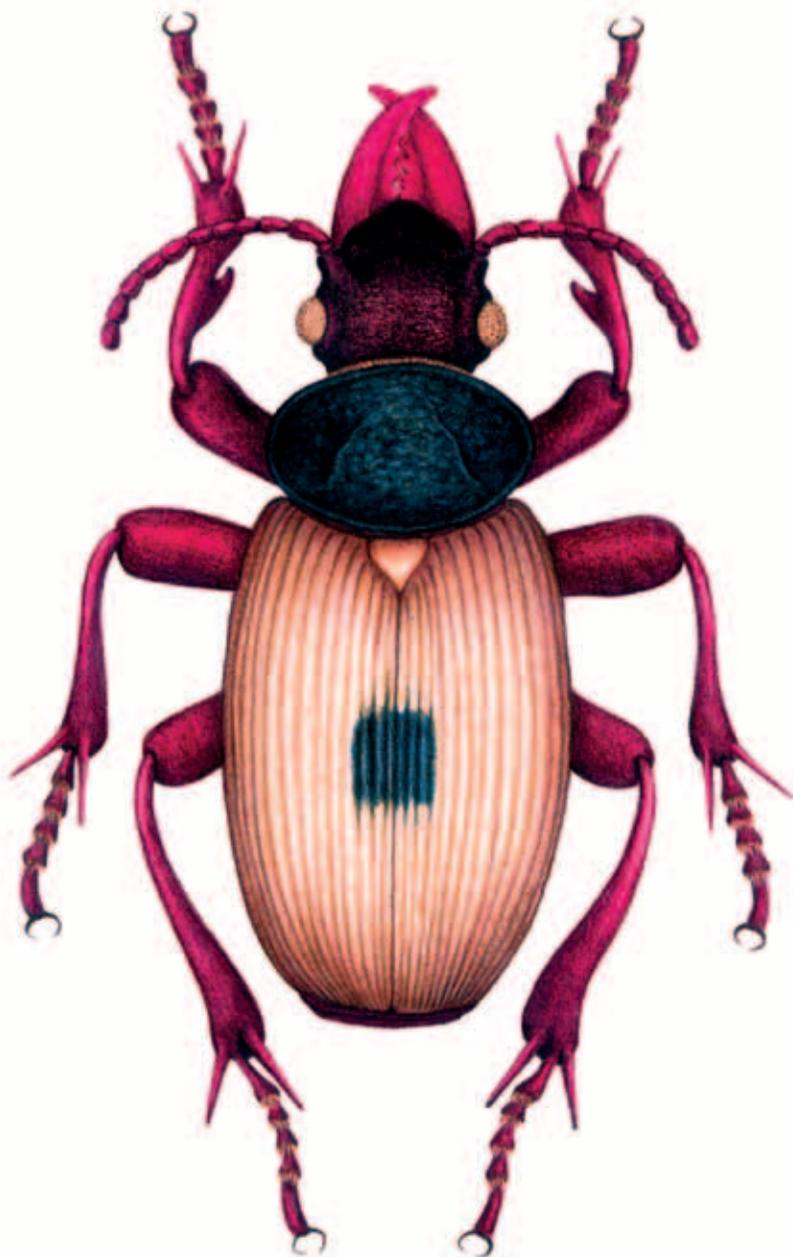
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One consideration relating to Glanz's legacy that is worth pointing out stems from projects that were hidden, removed from the public space, and in the end often forgotten by architectural history and theory. The spaces of the former bourgeoisie that fell into the party's hands are the other side of the coin – a contradictory truth for the context of socialism and for the question of representation. How, indeed, does one present exclusive locations as representative for the socialist elite of Yugoslavia? This was the dilemma Glanz faced when he redesigned Villa Bled. Elements that bore the memory of the bourgeois past were removed – whether this was decoration or some meaningless association. But how to create a monumental expression, a monumental frame? This question remained.

Excerpt from *Landscape Windows Wallpaper*,  
text by Nika Grabar from the catalogue of the  
Slovenian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale.



National Assembly Building, Ljubljana  
Photo: Miran Kambič



*Situation Anophthalmus hitleri*  
2012  
(Filipe Gudín)

## THE DECORATION

In 1937, Oskar Scheibel, the Yugoslav amateur entomologist of German descent and great admirer of Hitler, gave the name *Anophthalmus hitleri* to the endemic cave beetle discovered in 1933 in Slovenia. At that time, he could hardly have anticipated the complex ideological implications of the now infamous name. Cibic boldly includes a direct reference to this unique national blunder from Slovenia's nationalistic past, an era when the name Hitler had not yet become controversial. In this way, Cibic emphasizes the contradictory and paradoxical notion of the artist representing her nation. More precisely, she challenges some of the paradoxical aspects of identity politics such as the relationship between a proper name and national representation.

The images of hand-drawn beetles, that are scanned, multiplied, printed, and glued in the form of wallpaper all over the Slovenian Pavilion, stress the problematic notion of exhibiting a rare "animal" that exemplifies both "genus" and nationhood. If interpreted in an extremely metaphorical way, there is no great difference between the endemic *Anophthalmus hitleri* and the artist turned national representative. The isolated national-artistic "sample" exhibited in the context of any contemporary international exhibition, and particularly at the Venice Biennale which is one of the last remnants of traditional exhibition structures based on national selection and representation, closely echoes the problematic genealogy of the international exhibits in the imperial structures of the grand exhibitions of the nineteenth and twentieth century with their elements of a "human zoo".

## THE NARRATIVE

The scripts of the two films, *Framing the Space* and *The Fruits of Our Land*, are taken word for word from the stenographic minutes of a session of the Commission for the Review of Artistic and Sculptural Works in the New Palace of the People's Assembly – a document that was discovered a few years ago among the posthumous papers of the architect Vinko Glanz. The minutes relate to a discussion between a political functionary, an urban planner, an architect, and several art historians about which artists should be selected to create the mosaics, murals, and sculptures for the entrance to the People's Assembly building (the parliament). From beginning to end, the discussion revolves around the issue of whether the artist and artwork are suitable enough to represent the Slovenian nation appropriately: the commission members are trying to define the criteria for "suitability", which right from the start are (openly) ideological. Reading the different positions in the stenographic record reminds one of the classic film *Twelve Angry Men*: as in the film, we feel an atmosphere full of theatricality and claustrophobic tension, which arises mainly from ideological prejudices and personal affinities. The position of individuals in contact with the mechanisms and rules of the ideological "machine" brings about massive conflict, which, in the session minutes (and in Cibic's filmed dramatization) seems completely impossible – a conflict over impartial judgement.

Excerpt from *A double game*, a text by Tevž Logar,  
from the catalogue of the  
Slovenian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale.

In *For Our Economy and Culture*, Jasmina Cibic tackles this very “impossibility and inevitability” of representation in a Grosian “paradox-object”: an image and a critique of the image at the same time. Cibic dissects the mechanisms of national representation, or rather she over-identifies with them, embodying and channelling the processes and strategies employed in the creation and selection of national iconography. The viewer is immersed in an environment in which every element carries a historical narrative and illuminates the power relations and negotiations that are at play in the selection process.

One of the videos in Cibic’s installation shows a heated discussion where what is being debated is whether the artwork in question is fit to represent a nation. It is difficult to tell what the nature of the work is, or how it could possibly be so wrong, so inappropriate, to inspire such impassioned reactions from the committee. Is it Cibic’s own work that is being scrutinized in such terms?

It soon becomes evident that the work that is being discussed could be any artwork and that what we are witnessing is a moment of the formation of national iconography – a moment of mythmaking. This could be any meeting room, any country, and, perhaps most disturbingly, any era. The set of values, the desire to create a positive impression, to remove the image from its narrative, to remove it from its conditions of production, and present it as *truth*, whatever shape that may take, remains universal.

## THE ARTWORKS

The group of objects, or more precisely, the selection of paintings from the art collection of the Slovenian National Assembly, which Cibic recontextualizes in *For Our Economy and Culture*, reveals to the viewer the relationships between the economic, political, cultural, and personal values of a certain time and space. In addition, the art collection occupies a position of ambivalence: although it is public property, public access to it is in fact not possible, or rather, is possible only under certain conditions, since the paintings are scattered throughout the work spaces of the National Assembly building, where the state security service has strict controls in force. This is not one of the national art collections housed in storage rooms, but rather a collection of artworks that, by virtue of their location in the work spaces of parliamentary politics and administration, serve as a kind of background or stage scenery for the media whenever they want to create the spectacle that answers to the name "the state". The selected paintings – made by artists from various periods – are in the genre of still life, which in a way is connected to one of the elements in the project's created architectural disposition: namely, the directed gaze of the viewer. At the same time, however, through the artist's conceptual intervention, this same selection of paintings becomes a rectified "ready-made" object, which, in the most representative way, reveals the "strategies" of the ideological models of both past and the present and shows directly that, with such collections, exhibitions, or national selections of artists, we cannot avoid the question of ideological choices.

Excerpt from *A double game*, a text by Tevž Logar,  
from the catalogue of the  
Slovenian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale.



FRUITS OF OUR LAND

2013

Single channel HD video, 11 min 43 sec, 16:9, stereo



FRAMING THE SPACE

2012

Single channel HD video, 10 min 45 sec, 16:9, stereo

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Ljubljana, Slovenia in 1979, Jasmina Cibic studied at the *Accademia di Belle Arti*, Venice, Italy, before receiving an MA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, London, 2006. She is the recipient of prestigious awards including *Bevilacqua la Masa* (Venice 2002, 2005), *The Trend Award* for outstanding achievements in visual art in Slovenia, (2011) and *Catlin Commission Award*, (London, 2011).

Recent projects and exhibitions include: *Borderline*, Joanneum Museum Graz; *The Object of the Spectacle*, Galerija Škuc, Ljubljana; *U3 – 6th Triennial of Contemporary Art*, curated by Charles Esche, Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana; *The Secret of the Ninth Planet*, California College of the Arts, San Francisco; *Percorsi d'Arte*, Museum of Modern Art, Bologna and *Tourists Welcome*, Ljubljana International Airport. Forthcoming exhibitions include *U3- 7th Triennial of Contemporary Art*, (June 2013) curated by Nataša Bachelez-Petrešin, MSUM, Ljubljana and an invited artist's project for the 30th Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana, (September 2013) curated by Dr. Petja Grafenauer.

[www.jasminacibic.org](http://www.jasminacibic.org)

## SLOVENIAN PAVILION

Galleria A+A  
Slovenian Exhibition Centre

San Marco, Calle Malipiero 3073  
(next to Palazzo Grassi), Venezia

Tel/Fax +39 041 8501468

[www.aplusa.it](http://www.aplusa.it)

## OPENING TIMES

Preview days  
(May 29 to May 31, 2013)  
10 am to 8 pm

First week of the Biennale:  
(June 1 to June 7, 2013)  
10 am to 8 pm

June 7 to November 24, 2013  
from Tuesday till Sunday,  
10 am to 6 pm

## HOW TO REACH US

Vaporetto line 1, stop: Sant' Angelo or  
Vaporetto line 2, stop: San Samuele



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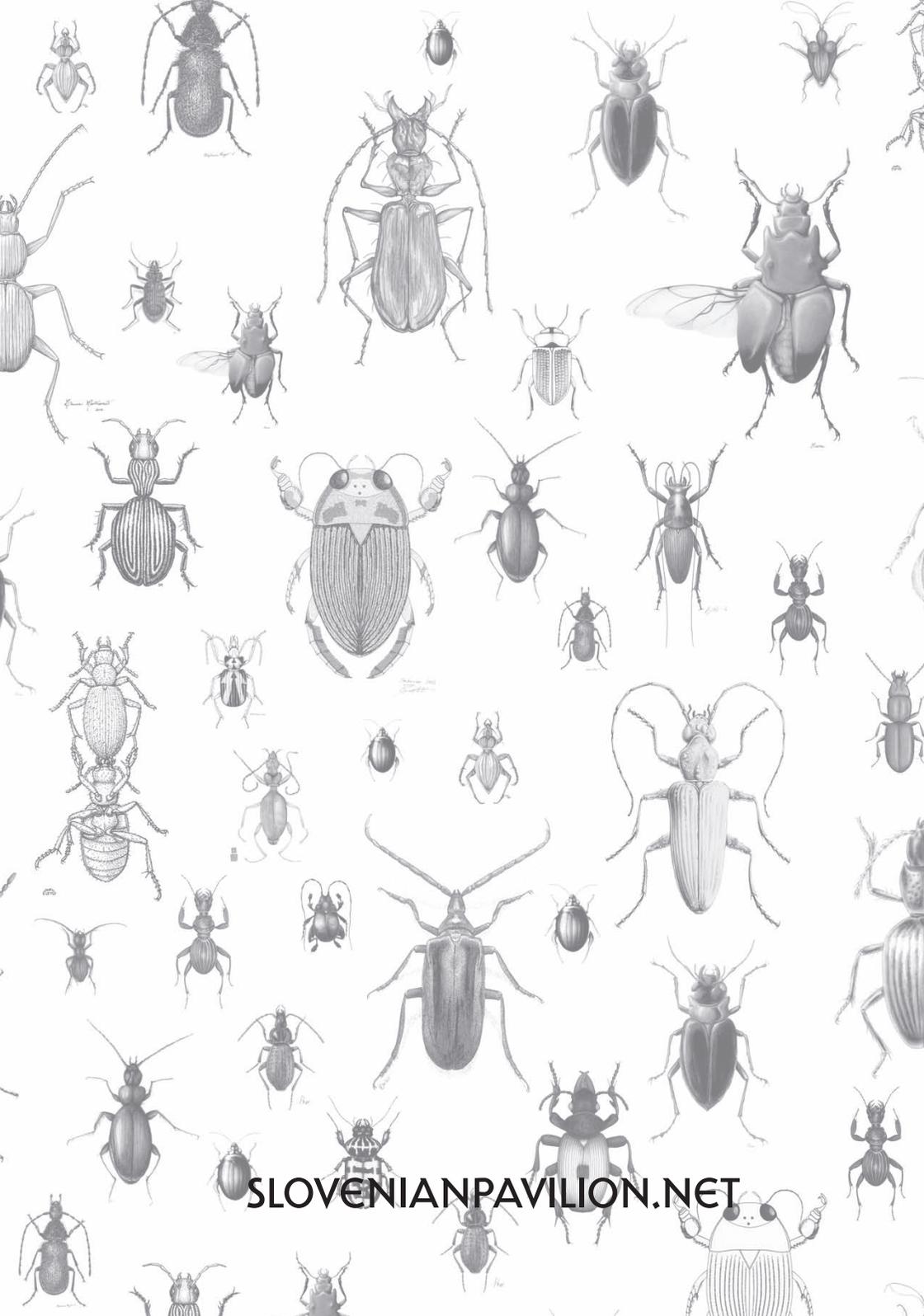
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Oscar Wilde

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