

Interview with Art Tribune, 55th Venice Biennial, June 2013

1. How and when was the project *For Our Economy and Culture* born?

For our Economy and Culture began its life as thinking around the concept of what cultural exports a country decides to put on display for events such as the European City of Culture or how public money gets spent for other, more economic centered soft power exercises such as the EU presidency. In the past years I have exhibited work within or simultaneously to such events, and the only proper engaged stance for an artist in my opinion is to also question the accompanying politics of state that come along with the PR of an art event presented within such circumstances. As the contemporary condition leaves a lot of politically engaged artistic practices without previously more likely available public funds, and as we are speaking of practices that are less convertible to commercial gallery entrepreneurship, the funding and the funding bodies themselves should be addressed. Why is a specific project funded and what role does soft power see in it?

2. Your works are profoundly connected with the concept of places, both in a physical and imaginative way. What kind of importance has this question for you?

You are speaking of the notion of site and context specificity. As my work investigates contemporary renditions of the art and life debate, it is only a natural consequence that I strive to understand not only the concept of a proposed art system authority (exhibition context) but also the wider authority – the context of the space, architecture and society surrounding and interacting with the art work. When a finite artwork is presented within a different location, it will always be re-imagined, basically re-cast following the specificity of the new location and its surrounding and accompanying meanings. The inner conceptual value of the artwork namely must remain the same, hence thwarting its output within a different set of external parameters is usually needed. If the conceptual value of the artwork does change, this will also be adapted for within the broader constituency of the new merger (the artwork within its new setting and new audience parameters). I believe that it is of utmost

importance for any artistic practice to arm itself with a set of parameters and methods that protect its core positioning and orientation.

3. What are the consequences of this attitude of state and funding institutions towards culture for the practices of artists - Slovenes in particular?

It is not a case of a specific attitude – it is merely a fact that the investments of public or private money are scarcer and being made on other fields. With the global picture of the crisis and its effects, artists must behave more strategically – I do not mean that every critically engaged practice should necessarily go against the current state of affairs, but it should definitely take the latter into account and behave knowingly around it. And hopefully the outcome should also somehow propose new paradigms within this cultural capitalism of ours.

4. Let's talk about the installation. You took possession of the space of the pavilion to turn it into a sort of private house: can you tell us the genesis of this idea?

My work always departs from (as discussed above) the site and context specificity of a particular exhibition. Hence the Venice Biennial brought along two strings of thought – what is the current condition behind the idea of national representation, the soft power element of nation's packaged cultural export and what is the architectural apparatus of its display – how does the latter ensure the gaze of the spectator is directed accordingly (and with the best effect). The Venice Biennial presents a situation where individual power states competed already with the typology and spectacularness of the exhibition architecture (the pavilions in Giardini), and it is of utmost political relevance that we take into account not only how and when other countries joined the big guns, but what is the space of their cultural diplomacy that the pavilions scattered around the city present. The Slovenian pavilion falls under the category of repurposed private houses and as such I thought it interesting to carry forward the idea of how does official state ideology (and national belonging tactics) permeate into the private realm. As I was looking into the official state architecture that is used to promote the idea of the national, the specificity and iconography of a nation, it seemed a natural flow to expand this thought onto the question of how it

resonates within the private sphere of a private dwelling. I ended up mimicking the architectural strategies of state Slovene buildings that paradoxically created a *budoir* within the exhibition space – a space which is historically the most private, intimate space of a private house and tainted with the question of *jouissance* – in terms of Lacanian enjoyment – and this brings us back to the idea of enjoyment that lies within authority (of state).

5. In 2003 you graduated from the Accademia di Belle Arti of Venice. What was it like to return to Venice as an artist selected by your country?

As Slovenia is one of the countries that leaves very little time to the artist to carry out the project (with the producers the Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana and Škuc Gallery we had only 3 months) – the fact that I had studied in Venice helped a great deal. It is an extremely difficult city and trying to deliver a project that relies on mere guerilla tactics of production is a great task. I have not been back to Venice much after basing myself in London, so it was an absolute pleasure to come back and work alongside Aurora Fonda and Claudia Zini from the A+A Gallery who have been absolutely wonderful. We also hosted a little artist talk at the IUAV University and it was brilliant to see the kids who were really energized and full of excellent questions and comments.

6. In the pavillion the visitors can watch two videos. Can you tell us what they mean?

The 2 film installations shown in the pavilion present two different approaches to dealing with revisitations of history – one presents a word for word re-enactment of a 1957 parliamentary debate about which artist is representational enough to represent the nation, the other an interview between Tito's chief architect, who was rebuilding the national architecture for the new state, and a western journalist Linda. Mostly I do work as an installation artist, but for this project, the inclusion of a narrative was of utmost importance – the format of moving image was identified as the correct counterpart in helping to achieve the desired effect of overlaying re-visited and re-addressed historical documents.

7. What your plans for the future?

Currently I am working on an invited artists project for the 30th International Graphics Biennial in Ljubljana, where I am constructing a large scale performative installation “Constructing a long passageway”, which deals with the history of the idea of social responsibility and the purchases of artworks that national companies were doing up to the 1990s. Later in autumn we are doing a special event during Frieze Art Fair at Waddington Studios in London and I am working on a new project for the October Salon in Belgrade in October this year.