

Excerpt from Ana Panić: In Search of the lost socialist space, p. 86-89

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In her 2013 videos that are part of the For Our Economy and Culture project shown at the 55th Venice Biennale, Jasmina Cibic (Slovenia) raises the question of which work of art is enough of a showcase piece to represent a nation, who we are and how we want to be seen by others. In the Pavilion of the Republic of Slovenia, at Venice Biennale she juxtaposed a selection of still life paintings by Slovenian artists, from the collection of the Slovenian National Assembly, with a wallpaper showing multiple images of an endemic beetle species *Anophthalmus hitleri*, which is not fit to be a national showpiece and is almost exterminated, because of its inappropriate ideologically loaded name. In such circumstances, paintings become ready-made objects, part of an installation that also raises the question of the necessity of an ideological choice, when it comes to national collections, selections, pavilions or, as it was called in socialist Yugoslavia, “choices made observing republic quotas”. The artist assigns her selection of paintings the same role they had in the National Assembly, that of a decoration or props, because flowers on canvas, as an ideologically neutral topic, become a souvenir, like flowers on the table, i.e. part of the stage design for the everyday life and work of politicians, their presentation in the media and the political show.

Two films provide a frame for this installation by highlighting the transformation of identity caused by a change in the cultural paradigm and the creation of a new myth through art and architecture. The script consists of a shorthand transcript of the meeting of the Art Review Committee inspecting the works of art displayed in the new building of the Assembly of the People’s Republic of Slovenia held on March 7th, 1958 (Logar, 2013: 45-54). While watching these two films, we feel as though we were witnessing the creation of a national iconography, because unlike watching archival footage, where we are always conscious of the historical distance, here we as viewers, find ourselves, time-wise, in the same reality as the protagonists of the film. In the film Fruits of Our Land, we follow a debate between professional architects, urban planners, art historians: and politicians, discussing which artists to choose, which timeless works of art are best suited to represent Slovenia, whether we choose an artist fit to represent the Slovenian nation or we focus exclusively on the

works of art. The issues of censorship and self-censorship are also present. In the film *Framing the Space*, the artist uses an interview a journalist conducted with the official architect of Villa Bled to analyze the particular ideological role of art, displayed in showpiece buildings, which has to follow the architectural agenda and reflect the spirit of the times, since these works of art were not created as independent pieces to be exhibited in galleries, but are the result of a compromise and an ongoing dialogue with the architecture of the building.

Jasmina Cibic excellently recontextualizes the topic of representation of national identity in the present time characterized a by change of values, although she visually takes us back to the period of socialist Yugoslavia and makes us ask ourselves questions about the nature of the mechanisms of power then and now in the contemporary post-Yugoslav societies. Now that we have "democracy", do we have a clearly defined national iconography?