

Ikona Gallery, 48 Dorsoduro, 30123 Venezia, tel 041 5205854

29 August through 27 September, 2009, open 11am –19pm

Slobodan Trajkovic

A Midsummer's Night Dream



Midsummer's night dream, 2009, 230x270x290cm,
fabric, resin, wood, wax, mirror, metal, elastic

Slobodan Trajkovic is a mid career artist who is not content to merely repeat himself but chooses to journey deeper into his own elusive, poetic practice to create subtle and powerful work. In the art world of the early twenty-first century this makes him something of an anomaly, where the career path for contemporary artists often consists of finding a signature style and repeating variations on the same theme. Certainly, the London art world that he finds himself working in today is one in which the art market remains dominant whether in periods of economic boom or credit crunch bust. As such, artists who regularly work across media or develop work in unexpected, tangential ways are often seen by that market as 'resistant to branding' and become a 'hard sell'. Trajkovic is an exceptionally versatile artist: his works range from painting to sculpture, from craft to multimedia installation. However, his diverse materials and methods demonstrate a shared concern with developing a self referential world of figuration and abstraction; symbols, colours and signs that make up a vocabulary that the artist uses, mutates and returns to time and again. Within this world, a small exquisitely painted watercolour of a shape hovering somewhere between an agricultural implement and musical score shares the same colour palette as discarded silk offcuts suspended as a sculptural object which in turn makes for a larger architectural intervention when positioned in the gallery space.

Trajkovic's new work, devised for exhibition in Venice, is one of these larger installation pieces. In early sketchbook ideas leading up to the final work, it was clear that the artist's own sense of merging the architecture of the space with its immediate exterior context were central

to his thinking. The play of light on water, the colour palette of Venice itself and the more prosaic interior space used as gallery were all going to be incorporated into the work. For the final installation a series of hanging textile fragments fan out into an elastic web feeding back to the earth where they are tethered to seven individual mirrors each carrying wax slabs which in turn support a series of Trajkovic's trademark simple sculptural forms. Trajkovic's repeated use of certain motifs over many years may have their roots in a personal symbolism, but they also serve to offer the way into a somewhat fugitive practice for the audience. These sculptural shapes, seen both in watercolour and made in three dimensions for the installation, emerge fully formed from the artist's subconscious as distinct pigmented forms. Despite the lack of variance between each in size and scale the viewer becomes aware each has its own specific emotional charge. There is a sense of dramatic tension yet also a surreal, almost narcotic, dream like quality. The work is called *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a title shared with William Shakespeare's much loved play, set in a fantasy land where identities shift and nothing is quite what it seems. Indeed, there is a feeling that here is a work that can be read in completely contradictory ways and yet each remains valid. The mirror on the ground is tilted so the viewers can see themselves. Wax looking like solid ice, but like ice unstable and liquid at high temperature. The seven sculptures pulling away from the central point or being pulled toward it. This is a work teetering between order and chaos. It is a credit to the artist's skill that he achieves this balance and allows the viewer to decide whether we are heading into chaos from order or building order from chaos.

Increasingly, he is an artist that is responsive to space and place. This diversity of practice is mirrored in the artist's own history. Growing up in socialist Yugoslavia, he studied in Paris and was a young, successful painter when the increasingly violent conflict broke out in his homeland. He moved to New York and was living and working in the shadow of the Twin towers when the events of 9/11 happened. His subsequent move to London in 2005 has meant a personal life of travel, change and cultural hybridity. That this personal journey has taken place against an historical background of collapsing political ideologies, the exponential rise of new technology and the re emergence of religious fundamentalism compounds the impact on the artist's concerns. As such, he has a profound interest in language and communication. His installation work; dream like, yet accessible, allows us to become physically aware of our own momentary place in the world and exist in a place without explanatory texts, explicitly political references or appropriated imagery. In 2005 the artist was awarded a place on the Florence Trust Studios annual programme, set in a beautiful church in North London. Whilst working there he produced a body of work that had an inbuilt responsiveness to their surroundings. Textile works suspended mid air, delicately stitched and swaying that looked like priests robes awaiting a sacred rite. There were small, haunting watercolours that looked at once familiar and strange. There was also a knowing awareness of art history shown in the forms with their blocks of colour, the abstraction of Barnett Newman or the emotional language of Rothko. This was work that was out of step with a younger generation of British artists reared on irony and postmodernism, however, it retained a quiet power. In the intervening years it feels that his work feels more at home as a younger generation of British artists have abandoned much of the posturing of the Bit Art 'Sensation' generation and concentrated on developing their own distinct voice away amongst the noise of the collapsing art markets.

Paul Bayley

July 2009

Paul Bayley is a contemporary art curator who is currently Director of the Florence Trust and ACE Art in Churches Officer