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Remix

The beginning of the 80s was a very interesting and exceptionally creative moment in the visual arts of Serbia that saw the appearance of several interesting and unusually creative artists. The atmosphere of change that took place in plastic arts opened the possibility for very different concepts and understanding of art held mostly by young artists, or those who were just making their first steps on the visual arts scene.

The events that definitively outlined the situation at the beginning of the 80s are complex in character and do not pertain exclusively to the visual arts, since postmodernism provoked a broad range of artistic changes that included subculture and pop culture phenomena like fashion, music, dress, appearance or simply behavior. These changes also influenced the complex shifts that took place within the language of art that did not only record the mechanical changes of the creative concepts in their continuous development, but more the discontinuous leaps *to the side* into the completely free space of experimentation that was carried out in different directions. However, even within such a confusing climate of quick changes and mobile tendencies, the position of a few artists was crystallized and they were even then marked out as the most important phenomena within these changes.

Although Slobodan Trajkovic belonged to the very young generation of Serbian artists at that time -- he was practically beginning his career -- he had a recognizable opus that placed him among the authentic artists even before the phase of the great and sudden transformation and before the end of the previous decade. The critics were quite controversial in their opinions on his early works, the ones he started his public career with, positioning them within a broad and flexible context of the end of the 70s. However the specific origin of Trajkovic's works from that period was quite clear. For one kind of critical reflection the radically changed process of constructing an artistic object was simultaneously a sign of agreement with the artistic practice of that decade. Apart for the fact that the works of Slobodan Trajkovic at that time disrupted the flatness of the picture, creating a jagged, open structural display of applied elements, they were simply still *artistic objects* with emphasized plastic qualities. These characteristics were in a semantic sense a direct continuation of the academic or traditional language of art, since it was still an interpretative elaboration of the basic elements of form which were modernized to a certain extent according to the sensual sensitivity of the artist and at the same time remodeled to be more like the general characteristics of the aesthetics that marked the time of change.

The first phase of Slobodan Trajkovic's painting opus posed the same questions on the level of meaning and provoked the same critical perplexities and interpretations. On one hand, judging by certain phenomenological characteristics, it is obvious that the work he did at the beginning of the ninth decade were in their general presentation close to the then modern painting practice. However, on the other hand it was obvious that they owed much to the plastic structure of his previous works where the tactile and material structure were also dominant. In a number of paintings that directly preceded these paintings/objects, there was a change in the organization of the works in so much that the artist paid all the more attention to the plastic appearance of the work, while at

the same time using familiar elements from the previous phase that insisted on the impression of *handiwork*, on the stuff made from rope, wax, canvas, metal and other things. His method of *cross-linking* and *remixing* the formal and formative elements was noticed even then.

Trajkovic would from time to time abandon the idea of such surface and spatial works and since the middle of the decade he chose to organize coloristic concepts on a plane. A possible scenic effect that might appear on those paintings in the sense that a story line was involved was not rationally defined, nor was it intended, but was unconsciously woven between the organic and inorganic forms. An accidental narrative was created more by the projected mechanisms of the observer, through recognition and discovery than by the need of the artist to paint in the formation of some events or states. Thus, these paintings were interpreted as *interlacing* the figurative and abstract where both components have only one goal: chromatic aggression of high intensity.

Although what the critics then observed about his spatial works and installations is open to discussion, by positioning them within the very flexible understanding of the *art of the eighties*, the one that tried to broaden the media base of its expression, the uniqueness of these works on our art scene was evident. It was noticed that some of the previous amorphous elements that he had defined in a three dimensional state were now *pressed* into the surface of the canvas. If something was lost in the general impression when he stripped them of their spatiality, the colorist intensity was kept even to a greater extent and the materiality of the paste was greatly intensified. These works created by almost *frantic* painting, represent a mode of expression that reveals the deepest creative impulses artists can have and manifest their obsessive wish to promote them publicly by painting.

As all artists working in a period of transition, Slobodan Trajkovic yielded to a certain *automatism* of painting, to a not too controlled activity of the hand that formed stratified meanings on the canvases. As is the case of these numerous elements, when they are installed on the surface of the walls or when they are condensed on the painting and in their final result build representations of mutually close kinship, the essential question is revealed: how to spatially organize, harmonize and mutually connect heterogeneous forms that have to *succeed* in such a way that the artists manages to achieve the necessary representations that will produce an affect by the strength of the pictorial experience.

For years, Slobodan Trajkovic lived in New York and then he returned to London, to his European tradition that he obviously missed. As he was artistically formed by the Belgrade figurative painting circle at the end of the 70s, he has always shown quite a visible interest in the abstract precede, the free life of form and color on canvas. However, in spite of that, his painting had a clearly inserted narrative content, a pseudo-literariness this artist liked to use in order to expand or complete his own iconism. As time went by, this layer of his works became more complex, almost endangering the compositional homogeneity of the painted scene. Trajkovic understood then that the further insistence on *literality* can only do his work harm. In his New York studio, Slobodan Trajkovic in the ambience of great art and directed mainstream flows, initiated a new disparate program of painting in which as far as painting was concerned there was only space for a pure authorial language of coloristic masses on the canvas surface. The *New York school of abstract painting* then was still an active source of inspiration even for artist who started in the 80s. Even then, he stubbornly advocated the

European painting credo whose highest divinity was *originality at any cost* (the so-called Belgrade School of painting specially insisted on this). Trajkovic succumbed to the positive influences of the not frustrated and perhaps not so original American pictorial representation in which the image was reduced and iconic, the colours intense. In the confrontation of these two artistic stands, Trajkovic, from the depth of the sheltered creative potentials of his own imagination, extracted this latest cycle of paintings with a recognizable international tone, all the time retaining the masterly execution of painting that made him one of our most successful internationally known artists.

It is possible even now, having in mind Slobodan Trajkovic's work, to notice the same relevant *remix* as a legitimate act of painting that is extracted from the mentioned layers of his pervious creative experience. A powerfully expressed need to watch and experience is created in the latest works, the ones made this year, influenced the artist to practically continue the same adventure of painting – with those shifts that retain the same visual syntax expressed in one plane. This artist's departure from the program of *new image* painting contributes to better understand that the sources and roots of the current period in his art are the same and that only the *visual power* of the final result, its plastic-formal structure and the conviction of the expressed is the level and value needed for the observers new convincement.

Although mutually independent in topic and manner of execution, these works are connected in such a way as to form a possible unique cycle. What they have in common is the *leaping out*, depending on the theme, from the uniform material content. Since the physical aspect of each work is again (over) emphasized, Trajkovic was once again faced with the challenge of the *handiwork* which he uses to deal with a wide range of problematic contents, that is, his interest in the coexistence of their adverse characteristics: organic-artificial, coloristic-non coloristic (or monochromatic), rough-delicate, hard-fragile..., all with the goal of defining and (self)understanding the unique idea of the *natural order of things* in that diversity.

The qualities of the visual representation which he still deals with confidently, the consistency in the technical execution of the drawings-watercolors, objects, sculptures, installations, two dimensional and three dimensional works, loads of different material in a kind of game of seeking, finding and interwinding, the uncompromising commitment to resolve their problems of abstract language models, represent for Slobodan Trajkovic lasting characteristics which were remixed long ago by the necessity of inner creative flows that for him are obviously inexhaustible. Thus, this exhibition anticipates quick leaps into new forms of thought – *now I think I am mature to forget all that was and to start moving freely*, as the artist himself points out.

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Translated by Vanda Perovic