

Slobodan Trajkovic: A Midsummer Night's Dream

An interview with Slobodan Trajkovic by Milenko Prvacki
16 October – 14 November

- Hi Slobodan let's talk about your work exhibited at TriSpace in October last year. Titled A Midsummer Night's Dream, it certainly was a complex installation with very clear Shakespearian narrative that fuelled this work. Where there additional elements that motivated and inspired you to create this work?

It's easy to forget how gloomy 2009 was, but it was that gloomy atmosphere following the worst recession since WW II which gave me the idea to work on something quite the opposite. I thought a fantasy story would be appropriate, a stage where identities shift and where nothing is what it seems would engage people in a different kind of thinking.

At that point I was in Venice. I was planning a show at Ikona Gallery, to be held during the Biennale. Looking at the people all around me, walking with their maps and smiles on their faces as they desperately tried to find their way through the labyrinthean streets of Venice – I thought here is the very proof that nothing is what it seems. I felt Shakespeare behind me, laughing. This is it, I thought, all these people have put the cake in the oven and forgot about it and went out for summer dreams.

Later, when I saw the gallery on Zattare, everything came together. The space was right on the water. As soon as you opened the door a massive amount of sunlight came in followed by light reflecting off the water. Everything sparkled. The sound of waves filled the last hole. I thought, my work is done! I'll open the door and the space will reconnect with water, sound, light . . . Then my friend Ziva Kraus, director of Ikona said: No, no, Mr. Trajkovic. Somebody already did that.

Shortly after I remembered someone at Yvon Lambert had exhibited empty space as a work, but this was entirely different. You had light, sound, and two spaces with tons of different materials and the connection of two different contexts. Nevertheless, I closed the door. Shortly after I took a mirror to bring that light inside the room and elusiveness arrived with it and my work started getting its shape.

How did you choose to develop story of a dreams?

I thought an installation would be an appropriate form to develop the idea with. By its nature, installation has the ability to expose layers of its contents. It allows you to literally walk through the work itself and see it from totally unexpected angles. It's like peeling an onion. I thought a conglomerate of materials and shapes would create a feeling of gathering, a street sort of situation, where a variety of people populate the space at critical spots. My idea was to isolate these hot spots and work on them. The narrative started to unfold. Critical spots became a metaphor for the seven stages of Jesus on the way to Golgotha. I decided to confront the elusiveness of the mirror with slabs

of the white wax. Both create a feeling of uncertainty because the mirror is unable to sustain the image of itself nor could the wax hold the imposed shape. At that point I was very pleased with the endless dialogue they were creating. Changing the angle of the mirror that was placed on the floor gave it a lift and brought energy to the setting so that all could go upwards. I took elastics to further enhance the feeling the movement towards the ceiling to create a triangle, a geometrical form in space, by holding strings at the top and letting it go down with a flourish into colours of fabrics and softness of forms.

- The fantasy story you have realized at TriSpace is definitely an extension of your Venice project. How do you develop your dreams in different geographical situations and how was it reflected in your work at ICAS?

Geography is very interesting. I love to think how things are placed in space. The substance, the character, the mind, the spirit . . . Add language as another spice. Earth is an exciting place – people, nature space . . .

In the past 20 years or so I have lived apart from my native place and I speak languages other than my native tongue. Being somewhere else doesn't mean that you are no longer a genuine person – it means that you are a normal human being with no political pretext. I am a Serb and I carry that with me wherever I go. That is an unfortunate act. That is the DNA of my soul. Apart from that, I am always trying to stay normal and make sense of my life. An additional set of tools is always needed to communicate with a foreign culture but that is always a good start to seeing oneself and the world from a different perspective.

Dreams remain an area of human behavior little understood. I believe that they are part of our soul. They are part of our mind set. They are constantly unfolding. But, you see, I wasn't on the Freudian view of dreams as subconscious wishes nor interpretations of Shakespeare's play. I used the story as a pretext for my agenda and on that I built the structure of the piece.

The installation at ICA was more developed than the one in Venice. I wanted to further develop a visual vocabulary I had been working on. I brought new forms and materials and used space between stations to create a continuation of the set – almost like a harmonica in its span. I used space between stations to make it active with applications such as photography, computer manipulated images of the head and ear and skin which was to make an attempt to touch a moment of the human condition.

I still think I was missing something in that work and I always come to the same conclusion that pure form is ultimately an abstract work and abstraction doesn't have something that our culture is particularly looking for, which I suppose is the sociological and moral aspect of the scene.

-I absolutely agree with you about creating a visual vocabulary as well as following your artistic agenda. Unfortunately, technology and general development (social, political and, of course, monetary) are not patient and collaborative partners to the "human condition" and utopian (or identity profiled) ideas. How do you manage existing disproportion of global interests?

My agenda is connected to the work I was doing. Issues come up in the process of developing a vocabulary to present that idea. In general I treat every idea in the same way which is to find a way to make the strongest possible statement and create a means with which to represent it.

That disproportion of interest in art and other aspects of life was always there. Imbalance is present all the time. We need to bridge that gap. Many things don't mix well: art, politics, economy – and that's how it's been for centuries. Antagonism is part of our character and as such is a big force in life. General development is based on the idea of profit and expansion and technology follows that idea by being a major contributor in creating new tools for people to use so that the idea of progress is achievable.

Should art follow that pattern of speed and the mentality of profit? Right now there are many artists and art institutions which believe in that idea of speed and the urge for progress. The work of art of a living artist has become a commodity worth more than \$1,000,000.

So, the central question is, as always, what should the artist do?

Art is not a necessity for most people. In many ways art today serves as a means of connecting people so they can exchange ideas on how to see things differently. To me, sometimes that all looks like a new form of cultural tourism, of consumption of art.

Art in its essence has a spiritual breathe. Art has a transcendental form in our life. It operates on the level of creating something that wasn't visible a moment ago. Art has an essential understanding of life and physical knowledge of giving birth to new artifacts. It is that newly born work which holds the understanding of our reality as a transcendental being.

In all the daily negativism towards popular media, I see television as the future art form. Simply because it is an instantaneous occurrence. It produces a miracle as soon as it's been turned on anywhere on the planet. That moment of surprise and participation is one of the few most valid aspects of art.

-And what is the next engagement after The Midsummer Night Dream and how will you develop your ideas and dreams?

I would like to bring my work to a different level, where you can see reflections of aspects of the human condition regardless of historical time or political agenda.

Somehow I always like things that I don't understand and I wish my work goes that way, in a direction of wonder – with the big question of 'what is it'? I would like a person to stop moving and think about the universal—something closer to the point where it all began.

Mr. Milenko Prvacki is an artist and Dean of LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore

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