

# IGOR BOŠNJAK

## INTERVIEW BY: CRISTINA MUNTEANU

1. Why 'Accumulated History'? What threads of history are accumulated herein and how did you tie up their (loose) ends?

There are quite a few threads of history intermingling in this exhibition. Some of its works are ironic in approach, they have a humorous twist to them, like the Yugoslavian Space Program. Some are not- the trilogy is not, and neither is Contemporary Cemeteries. These are serious in tone.

The works that you see here, they were a way for me to cleanse myself of the past, with all its spectrum of commonplaces- former Yugoslavia, Tito, socialist self-management, etc. A past that even the newer generations of my area do not seem to be able to let go of, a past that they still invest a lot of energy in, by constantly dissecting it and taking sides, whether it is at pointing fingers to establish who was responsible for what, or to blame and glorify figures such as Tito, Gavrilo and so on. As far as I am concerned, I have had my fair share of this particular accumulated history. These works are my way of expressing, projecting and releasing it, as a personal means of achieving closure.

2. The exhibition articulates the interior of the underground gallery space almost ideally- you played an active part in installing it. Is there a trajectory to be kept in mind or you can steer/self-manage your way through it freely?

All works are in some way interconnected, basically while we were installing the exhibition our main idea was that audience could flow easily through the dark labyrinth of this underground place. I found out (people from gallery told me) that this place was actually kind of a library or bookshelf place with a lot of books, maybe a few decades ago- this information was very interesting for me, in helping me understand this space.

3. Looking around, the exhibition is made up of mostly video installations. Is this your predilect means of expression? I have noted you hold a BA degree in painting. How do these directions converge and merge, overall?

I firstly graduated from painting, yes. But I have always been training for and experiencing with video, photography- media. It was somewhat circumstantial, the fact that I had to do my BA work in painting. Circumstantial, because media and photography were not an official universitarian

segment. So I painted and I got my degree. I still do that, painting, but mostly for my own self and it is not necessarily a means of expression I would employ for exhibiting, or making myself known. Media arts suit me better.

4. Exploring the sense of a place, its identity and memory- do all these call forth a concept or does a concept guide a literal search for a space in which it may imbedded?

In fact, all places with a lot of historical layers and meaning are very suitable and inviting for some site specific interventions. Places like these are very intriguing to me. Sometimes, concept puts me on the path to those places, but othertimes it is those places that litteraly "call me" to be present within them.

5. Getting to the first part of your trilogy, the video Hotel Balkan, filmed inside Tito's former nuclear bunker- how was it to access and make use of that space for your particular purpose? Had you been there prior to that?

That space was not even known of, not until rather recently. We had indeed organized a previous exhibition in there and it was that event, in fact, that facilitated me presenting my work here, with you.

It is rather amazing, come to think of it, how that place was constructed and the feel you get when inside it, in the underground. Its aura, the fact that it was meant as the refuge of 350 people- Tito's selected few, of which only one would have been a woman!- in case of some nuclear catastrophe that failed to happen.

That high pressure inside the bunker, it being right below the mountains; the thickness of the doors and walls, the pictures of Tito hung at the end of corridors, the (kitsch) wallpapers and the futuristic furniture- everything, translating the what-if terror of outside attacks. When the entire concoction, the regime together with the state, was actually destined to colapse from the inside.

6. What was the self-manageable part of the self-management in former Yugoslavia? And how did it collapse from the inside?

Selfmanagement would litteraly translate as samoupravljanje. In fact, it consists of two words "samo" and "upravljanje". The first one means 'self' and the second one, 'to steer'. So you can literally steer yourself in an attempt to manage yourself. The installation aims squarely at that particular reference. It is intended as a very funny and humorous work.

7. The only people appearing in the trilogy are made of paper - either wallpaper, or stickers and eikons of saints. They couldn't be more different as representation and semiotics, but at the same time, more- well, in a state of decay, bearing the imprint of absence and emptiness..

They are indeed remnants, echoes of preferences of real people, the things that they felt connected to. Some of these spaces now aren't anything like what I am showing in the trilogy. The print-making facility, for example, the one from 'Everything you thought was wrong' is currently a sort of a mall. Speaking of, it was that same printing facility- a very big and important one back in the days- to issue the editions of the books used on the steering wheels from the Selfmanagement installation- so you see how it all connects.

8. Tell me a bit about your filming technique- you de-focus and re-focus, gradually drawing attention on different elements of the scene where you are filming, on the symbolic value of the clair-obscur and the dramatic effects it creates throughout. How much of these aspects do you calculate and stage and how much do you rely on what the raw setting has to offer?

Some segments of the videos are really well planned and then edited in postproduction, maybe up to about 40%. The rest, however, are random shots where I am using the camera very freely, randomly (Dogme 95 style). I always try to capture the energy of a place and while I am shooting

I sense the possible vibrations and the kind of sound which I will use later. Depth of field, sharpness, blur, the relations between first planes and the background are very important to me because they built up the poetic and aesthetic structure of the moving image.

9. You keep on drawing attention to the sound, to watch it all with sound. How important is the sound in creating certain psychological responses within the viewer? Does this particular past have a soundtrack?

For me sound is equal to the moving image. The relation image-sound is like a ying-yang circle. Sounds and parts of the video without sound are always connected. Sound and moving image are apparently opposite or contrary forces, but they are actually complementary, interconnected and interdependent. I like the idea of a particular past that has a soundtrack. I would need to work on that concept, really...

10. Expanding a bit along the lines of the contemporary art scene of the states that used to comprise the former state of Yugoslavia- how do you personally fit within that scene?

I do not feel the need to be contextualised solely within the former Yugoslavia-Bosnia&Herzegovina- post-socialism frame, quite the contrary. I have presented my work as far as Australia, Hong Kong and all Europe and I have had quite a fruitful exchange of ideas based on that contact. What they- the people from there- got from my work was quite different from what I had set out to express, but it was and it is fine for me just like that, being able to reach out, universally, not confined within a frame of perception based on historical association and pinpointing.

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11. So, have you cleansed yourself of all this accumulated history?

Not yet, but in the very near future I will be able to clean myself from weird or awkward futuristic past which often feels very disturbing...