

## Gaia Radić, Hanging "Gardens" of Babylon

"Then they said:

Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens,  
so that we may make a name for ourselves,  
otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth

(...)

And the Lord said (...):

Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language (...)  
Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand  
each other"

(Vlašid, 1991: 236-237)

Rooted in the tradition of phenomenology and based on Deleuzean post-structuralist conclusions, Gaia Radić's art installation "Hanging „Gardens“ of Babylon" was created following the principle of spatial interdependence of the artefacts. The artist explores the relationships between literal materiality (as the elements of "physical" reality), virtuality as an explicitly visual intervention (means of creating illusion) and finally, pictoriality, figurative, non-verbal text as a means of reception of visual content. The story of the Tower of Babel, understood in wider discourse as an allegory of the primordial human aspiration for transcending this-worldly and reaching the "intangible", is a biblical narrative (Genesis chapter 11) indicating the importance that Homo sapiens attaches to his own system of signification. By denying the boundaries of the possible — by creating an (artificial) semiotic value system, one finds a way to make the perception of what "should be" their reality.

# GALERIJA KARAS

The exhibition at the Karas Gallery is an environment made of nine specific digital artworks, distributed around the space and intertwined with physical objects in such a way as to create a common, unique discourse. In the first room, on TV screens placed opposite each other, there are two visualizations as alternative interpretations of the fictional concept of the “Tower”, whose “gardens”, denoted with abstracted Babylonian fruit trees, are mediated by animations displayed on six separate tablet devices. Through the intervention of root-like structures as the material extensions of virtual space, the digital pictorial contents of the first room are connected using inorganic, geometrized multi-coloured cables, which, falling from the ceiling of the room, evoke the “hanging” gardens of Babylon. On the central wall of the second room, an animation of the floor plan of the ancient city is projected in a walkthrough perspective. Rising from the foundation of water, a symbol of purity and transcendence, like a “Tower”, Babylon emerges from the two-dimensional foundations of the floor plan into a three-dimensional virtual space. Central animation, as an iconic representation of the dichotomy between the “real” and “virtual” space, is accompanied by a mosaic, the literary narrative of biblical and Gilles Deleuze quotes. The auditory component, as signalling of a particular dialogue channel, consists of three sound sources: the keypad sounds of a mobile device (signalling the biblical quote), the sound of a mechanical keyboard (signalling the philosophical quote), and finally, environmental, background noise as a soundtrack of the inaudible frequency of the plant world, audible to humans exclusively through the use of technology, in the context of which the natural the world imposes as media articulation.

Listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the fantastic Hanging Gardens of Semiramis, as well as the mythical Tower of Babel, are limited by the endless possibilities of a “limited (...) and [!] delineated surface”

# GALERIJA KARAS

(Šuvakovid, 2005: 457). In other words, “the Hanging Gardens of Babylon”, as pictorial records of a fictitious idea (myth), exhibit different possible virtual interpretations, simulating in the gallery space what is in itself a simulation. With a simulacrum as a representation “that seems to show something in the world (...) [and] actually, does not show anything” (2005: 566-567), Radid points to the impossibility of detecting the boundaries of physical and simulated reality, especially in the context of everyday life of modern post-information society, the intangible extension of which is the virtual reality of the metaverse: “In this magical relationship, it becomes unclear (and irrelevant) to the observer where the reality ends and the simulation begins” (Duplaneid, 2022). As an allegory of man’s progressive effort to transcend this-worldly, physical possibilities, the “Tower” is particularly recognized in the contemporary, simulation society, defined by the function of the phantasm. The man overcomes his material embodiment in this world (defined as “reality”) through endless attempts to overcome the limits of physical reality. In the words of Serbian art theorist and critic Miško Šuvakovid, “The new artificial techno-world is not a projective metaphor of the future society and its architecture, but rather the actual reality in which contemporary man operates.” (2005:75)

Katarina Podobnik, MA in Art History and Philosophy



**GALERIJA KARAS**