

## *Illusions*

It is not hard to be disillusioned when dealing with art. It is an endeavour that interests so few people, and those who are interested are often divided into hostile factions. In contemporary, individualistically inclined society, it is very easy to relativize everyone's efforts from the perspective of this or that theory or poetics, but in reality, everything is based solely on personal preferences (even Borges wrote in one story that "praising and criticizing are emotional reactions that have nothing to do with the quality of the work"). One wonders what is the purpose of it all and why would one engage in art at all. A disarming question.

Before us are three possible answers, by the three painters. Three possible answers to the reason for the artistic creation. For instance, Luka Kušević seeks a mystical vision of reality. For the ecstatic merging of individual consciousness (the painter's, or that of the viewer of the painting) with the world. He transforms the initial inspiration he finds in the real landscape into intensely colourful forms of a rich sublayer. This creates the effect of a full experience into which we immerse ourselves when looking at his painting. However, like any follower of mystical teachings, the artist himself will say that the foundation of everything is - nothing. Simply put: our participation in the fullness of life, in the ecstasy of the moment, and in that other or higher reality is just an illusion. For it is merely an ordinary, everyday experience that reveals itself as what it truly is: the highest possible reality. "I have experienced enlightenment, and it's nothing special," said Siddhartha Gautama. Painting helps us reach this realization through a roundabout path - first emphasizing the "uniqueness" and "different nature" of aesthetic knowledge in the specific language of the medium, only to then return and integrate it into everyday experience.

Josip Rončević paints something that could be called linguistic games. Namely, in his paintings, he plays around with conceptual ideas defined by the language in which our consciousness resides. All our learned knowledge about painting, such as, for example, knowledge about the relationships between the figurative and the abstract, representation and expression, or the relationships of formal determinants of the painting, are the elements that he disassembles (deconstructs, if you will) and questions their role, their inviolability in our cognitive apparatus. The illusion he deals with seems to be the illusion of language that constructs our concepts. Its arbitrariness only emphasizes the arbitrariness of these supposedly solid conceptual constructs. In particular, in these paintings, he pokes at that pompous word that art theorists so easily throw

around, which is "reference." He repeats the abstract, hence non-referential composition twice. In this way, it becomes referential - referring to something that already exists, namely the first such painted composition. Rončević mocks the jargon and all those who think it can encompass the world and human creative efforts in all their many manifestations. He ridicules the vanity of Western intellectualism through intellectual humour.

And then there is Jurica Pušenjak. Partisan, revolutionary, monument builder, and destroyer of dogmas. I am referring to his construction of an impressive monument to national heroes a few years ago and his iconoclastic approach to the deity of today's liberal world – money. In his new series, he enlarges the American dollar, the Soviet ruble, and the Yugoslav dinar. The economic foundations of three regimes, one of which is still relevant today in its global hegemony. Money, like the state and like the socio-political regime, is a matter of consensus, or rather, ideology – a system imposed by the rulers of society on the consciousness of subjects. Within ideology (as well as within language), our lives take place. By painting enlarged banknotes, with all the fine lines of their original lithographic construction, Jurica Pušenjak emphasizes their absurd power over human lives but, in doing so, highlights that absurdity. He points to the impermanence of the economic (and every other ideologically constructed) foundation of society, especially because the images and coins represent states whose economic and political reality has disappeared, and whose banknotes are now merely collectible artifacts, mostly worthless items that can only serve for aesthetic or historical reflection. Once again, we are confronted with the instability of reality.

There remains one more question, "why," and it pertains to me. Why do I think that, based on some of my acquired knowledge, I can bring these three artists together and justify their creativity through the aspect of cognitive illusions? By proposing their joint exhibition, did I want to point out the illusory nature of everything that exists, a sentiment I deeply feel, or is that also just a construct through which I (more or less successfully) justify my engagement and the engagement of these artists? I do not have the answer, but I believe that no one can see anything beyond their own illusion.

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