

Text as an Object

The collaborative exhibition project between the Fine Artists Society (Društvo likovnih umetnikov) from Ljubljana and the Croatian Association of Fine Artists (Hrvatsko društvo likovnih umjetnika), titled *Text as an Object*, takes as a starting point selected works from both artistic practices that illustrate, deconstruct, expand, and transform text into an image and an object. The selected works use various contemporary artistic media and practices, ranging from drawings and artist's books to research methods. Text, as well as language, be it Slovenian or Croatian, represents, conceptualizes, and creates new meanings. According to Borges, as mentioned after the experience of *Aleph*,¹ language is a list of symbols, and in order to master them, interlocutors must share a common history (in terms of belonging to a certain community), even when describing something only in a taxonomic series. Within a coherent narrative framework, language paves the way for artistic experimentation. Language is not just a collection of letters, meanings, and ideas, nor is it used solely in contemporary art to question the idea of representation. This can be seen in works such as Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965), which questions the relationship between language (narrative description of the object), the image of the object as a form of representation, and the object itself. Or in Barbara Kruger's work *We Don't Need Other Heroes* (1987), which examines the relationship between image, language as representation, and the conceptualization of gender stereotypes in the image. Artists whose primary medium is literary text do not have to merely illustrate that text with images but can transform it into a collection of objects and a construction of reality through the medium of documentary fiction. The best example of such a procedure is the book and the eponymous museum of the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence*.² The objects that Kemal collects in the novel as a memory of Füsün creating a museum, exist in the real world as part of the museum that the writer conceived. Pamuk thus blurs the line between fiction and factography, as well as between language as a representation of an object and the object itself. This exhibition aims to re-evaluate the liminal boundaries of text, language, and object, continuing to ask questions that arose long ago, from Borges to Pamuk and from Kosuth to Kruger. The exhibition *Text as an Object* represents an international reciprocal collaboration that includes an exhibition of Slovenian and Croatian artists at the Extended Media Gallery in the Meštrović Pavilion (Home of the Croatian Association of Fine

¹ In the short story "Aleph" Borges describes a transcendental experience that occurs by interacting with a point in space, Aleph.

² The novel was first published in 2008.

Artists) and a reciprocal exhibition at the Gallery of the Fine Artists Society in Ljubljana (in March and April 2024). The curator of the Slovenian part of the exhibition, Nadja Gnamuš, has selected works by the artists Nina Čelhar, Tanja Lazetić, and Aleksandra Saška Gruden, as well as works by the artists Boris Beja and Ištvan Išt Huzjan. The coordinator of the Croatian part of the exhibition, Josip Zanki, has selected works by the artists Zorana Unković, Mija Maraković, Mihaela Rašica, and Antonela Šurbek, as well as the artist Željko Beljan. Slovenian and Croatian artists raise questions about text and language through their works, playing with the content of the text, transforming text into an image or object, employing lettering and the art of writing as an image of text, or simply referring to a specific literary work in their pieces. Thus, a dialogue is opened directly within the text, or language, which is often the cause of conflict, whether in translation or interpretation.

Josip Zanki