Isolation: Paths and Spaces

*“I wandered lonely as a cloud”*

William Wordsworth

Isolation as a state and as a process. As a space that opens inwards, a path of plunging into introspection and self-examination. Isolation as an open space of the interior, a space that needs to be filled. It is time spent working and thinking. It is a common premise of the shared experience during the period of closure following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, of the entry into force of regulations and provisions on the suspension of movement, the cessation of public activities. Of closing borders and institutions, workplaces. Isolation understood in this way is undeniably a concrete circumstance. It is not an arbitrary, contemplative practice, but an everyday and existential inevitability. In the physical space here, there are frameworks we are faced with. Directed to the space of home, of living, where we are alone or which we share. Sometimes, the space we are alienated from, that is or is not in accordance with our inner, metaphorical self.

Isolation is also a topic. The result of artistic work and the articulation of a response to the presented reality and circumstances. The exhibition brings together Ivana Ivković, Ivana Popov and Snežana Skoko whose works are thematically linked; they all react to isolation in an artistic process of sublimation of life’s circumstances through the visual shaping of what has been experienced. The thread that connects them is a materialized, media-articulated reaction to the spaces that surround them. Coupling the static and dynamic, each in her own way interprets paths and spaces through painting, the relationship between drawing and photography, video and objects, a combination of materials and techniques, the found and discovered. At the moment of a pronounced discrepancy between the external and internal, the moment when the public discourse is subordinated to the language of the private, the focus on the question of what isolation can bring us personally is determined on the inside-outside line. All three artists touch reality; it is implied by the material, choice of media, gesture, scene, visually shaped expression. Reality is written in the sensibility of the works themselves in the visual language; it is marked by the view of the experienced, subjective, on the level of experience that has always been and still is marked as collective on a global scale.

Combining drawings or collages with photographs, **Ivana Ivković** builds a series of diptychs as a sort of reaction to the situation of being caught up and imprisoned in circumstances where the intimate and global, the private and alienated were intersected**.** The whole titled *California Dream* was created during the artist’s stay in San Diego and Southern California, where she found herself due to the closing of borders and measures of social isolation in response to the pandemic. Through the form of a travel diary of her California experience, developed in the on-the-road manner, using visual language, Ivković emphasizes the dichotomies of lived experience and subjectively focalized reality, which is formally supported by the pairing of drawings / collages with photographs taken during her five-month stay in America. For the artist, the colouristic vibrancy of the collages and drawings is a characteristic of the spatial specificity of the geographical ambience, reflecting the colours of the sky and the environment and, at the same time, establishing a significant counterbalance to the atmosphere of anxiety, discomfort, not belonging and captivity, expressed by the textual elements in the drawing. Inscriptions such as *Panic, Ti ne ideš nigde [You're not going anywhere], Govorili smo u isti glas [We spoke at the same time], Wonders Panic Devastation, Feels better?, San Diego what-the-hell? I'm not free, Run away and hide...* “speak”, suggestively, through fragments, about the background drama of a personal, alienated, liminal traumatic experience*.* The photographs in the frames of individual diptychs both fix and deepen the discrepancy of the brightly and poignantly aestheticized discomfort, providing a documentary grounding. Through the perception of the concrete in the moment and the surroundings, they bring the visual synthesis of the experienced into the reality of the seen, additionally emphasizing the travelogue character at the level of the whole.

**Ivana Popov** started her cycle of large-format paintings in the weeks of pandemic isolation and developed it in stages through a complex relationship in the selection and processing of numerous materials. Her diverse painting process is reflected in the combination of spray acrylic, Indian ink, and tempera techniques, then in applications and interventions with different types of materials such as wool, make-up, bath salts, and procedures for applying and removing pastels. The final forms of such procedures are characterized by visually liberated surfaces that, with their strong colours, draw the eye into a meaningful, meditative observation. The intensity of colouration works directly and varies, from painting to painting, from distinctive strokes to almost multichromatic surfaces that invite you to immerse and gradually lead you to perceive the subtle play of textures and materials. Observing, as a kind of process and “built” relationship with the image, leads to an implicit identification with the specific circumstances under which they are created, with the moments when the accelerated rhythm of the everyday, “external” dynamics of life is replaced by a slow, more static and contemplative rhythm, which leads to a peaceful coexistence with the richness of the inner. The cycle titled *Colors, Colors just the Colors,* that marks the artist’s return to painting after many years of her work in collage and textile, is “an answer to the situation we all find ourselves in”, glorifying life and reflecting on the process of healing, self-healing, observation, questioning, love, experience. The paintings were developed through a gradual and long-term process of transformation of the painting material; the rubberized Blackout fabric on which they were made originally served as a curtain (an element of the living space) in which holes and slits were cut to allow daylight to pass through, and which was then taken off and sewn on a blind frame. The repurposing of the utility function of the material, which initiated the creation of the series of paintings, is at the same time a symbolic and associative bond between the immediate living environment and the imaginative, introspective view with which the sky can be seen from the paintings.

In her works *The Sky* and *News* **Snežana Skoko** thematizes the period of restrictive measures and movement bans during the pandemic. *The Sky* is a 46:42-minute video, shot on a mobile phone camera, showing the blue of a clear sky dotted with airy white clouds. Projected on the ceiling in a separate part of the gallery, it allows the viewer to isolate themself and be alone while watching a digitally reproduced slice of time and a view of the sky that the artist recorded from her window during the period of isolation due to the pandemic. Spending time watching the sky, which itself refers to contemplativeness, to “being present in the moment”, here is becoming more complex with the existence of the material, temporal, spatial, but also contextual distance. Contradictions between the watched subjects are brought together: the sky – as unfathomable, unending, spatial and constant and the video – as fragmentary, documentary, referring to a specific moment and experience, and of limited duration in its cyclical repetition. In both cases, the directed view is not a view of the world (content or event), but a refuge in liberation and isolation to a single moment. *The Sky* is also a form of commentary on a specific moment when the public character of cultural and art events was limited to digital and virtual online space. *News,* a work in space, was created by a shape transformation of newspaper sheets; dailies published during the period of the pandemic panic – today in the form of a document, an “imprint” of media opinion on the issues of public health and politics. The pieces of paper were folded into small fans and then organized and arranged in the composition of a spatial installation on the floor and wall of the gallery, so that it is no longer possible to read the content. It has now been transformed from material evidence and document of time into objects of aesthetic form.

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