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GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

Jakopič Gallery

JAKA BABNIK: PYGMALION

Exhibition

22 October 2019 – 26 January 2020

(Opening: 22 October at 7 p.m.)



Toy model of the Dresser 560B © Jaka Babnik

The myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, from Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, can be regarded as a symbolic thread running through artist Jaka Babnik's latest exhibition project. The myth has been recreated many times in literature, painting, sculpture and popular culture, no doubt due to the universal social themes contained within it.

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It should be stressed from the very beginning that this exhibition is not in any way a direct appropriation of the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Rather, the myth serves as a symbolic backdrop, facilitating in both substantive and formal terms a reflection on the relationship that invariably arises between the chosen object, its photographic image, and the space in which they are viewed. Given that the myth ends with a representation of a state of perfect fulfilment – Pygmalion's relationship with his own creation, Galatea – Babnik's latest project can be understood as a direct criticism of the relationships and mechanisms underlying the values of contemporary society.

None of us can return to a state of innocence: we cannot free ourselves from the ideas and symbolic values that dominate our everyday lives, but we can question them, and judge them. The selection of the objects Babnik explores either by means of their actual presence or through their photographic images is therefore of central importance. Each of the objects or their photographic images exhibited has a very specific symbolic value that can only be recognised within the context it has been taken from: Tacitus' *Germania*, ex-voto figures from the Church of the Mother of God at Mount Brinjeva gora, Tina Maze's Olympic gold medal, a silicone breast implant, a voting box from the 1990 referendum or a tiny fragment of the Berlin Wall, to mention just a few. Rather than concerning himself with an object's physical appearance, Babnik focuses on the symbolic value attributed to it by long-established social norms.

In addition to their visual value, the objects and photographs on display also represent a range of different time periods, geopolitical spaces and social structures, and the power relations between them. Babnik never loses sight of the relationship between what the viewer sees visually, and the symbolic meaning of the object in itself. As a result, what connects the objects and photographic images on display is not the theme or form of the exhibition, but the fact that each of them expresses, either visually or symbolically, an aspect of the state of perfect fulfilment. Whether – and how – the viewer recognises this state, however, is dependent on the way either that individual viewer or society as a whole experiences the object in question.

These elements are all complemented by a wider understanding of Babnik's artistic explorations; this can be achieved by carefully analysing his works, the way they are presented, and their relationship to the spectator. The system investigated by Babnik is also the system in which he works; for this reason, the mechanisms and structures of the system necessarily form part of his language. When we recall the artist's awareness that the form of the visual language is always just an expression of its inner content and that it is therefore important not to deify it, this exhibition project can be understood as a reflection on the role of the contemporary photographic image, and a fierce criticism of the values of contemporary society.

—Tevž Logar

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ARTIST

Jaka Babnik graduated in Cultural Sociology and History from the University of Ljubljana. From 1998 to 2006 he worked as a photographer and editor of photography for the skateboard magazine *Pendrek*. He wrote and directed several renowned Slovenian skateboard movies, such as *Damage* (2002) and *Listen to Srečna Mladina* (2006). In 2006 he co-founded the trans-Balkan street magazine *Kontejner*, and remained its editor until 2009. In 2007 he turned to more diverse genres of photographic practice; he became a professional photographer, mostly working with institutions and individual artists, while also becoming more distinctly involved with photography as an art form. In 2009 he published and exhibited *We are dogs!*, a series of photographs that led to his being awarded second place in the 2010 Emzin Photography of the Year competition. Between 2012 and 2014 he worked on a series that he called *Jebodrom*, taking a more topographical, anthropological and exploratory approach to his photography. Between 2015 and 2017 he worked on two different projects, *Holy Land* and *Heroes of my Time*, both of which used photography to explore silenced historic phenomena and events. In addition to his artistic and photographic work, Babnik is also the co-founder and co-owner of RostFrei Publishing. He lives and works in Ljubljana. For more information, see <http://jakababnik.com/>.

CURATOR

Tevž Logar is an independent curator working with various galleries and institutions. Between 2014 and 2017 he was associate curator and editor at the Galerija Gregor Podnar in Berlin. From 2009 to 2014 he was artistic director of the Škuc Gallery in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and a lecturer in 20th Century Art History at the Academy of Visual Arts (AVA) in the same city. He has curated or cocurated a number of group and solo exhibitions, including the *54th Zagreb Salon – Without Anesthesia* (2019), *Borderline Relation* (2018), *Ulay: I Other* (2017), *Vadim Fishkin: Light Chaser* (2016), *Ulay: Irritation* (2015), *Crossings* (2014), and *Jasmina Cibic: For Our Economy and Culture* for the Slovenian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013). For the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019 he acted as curatorial consultant for the Pavilion of the Republic of North Macedonia and as writer for the Pavilion of the Republic of Kosovo. He wrote the script for the full-length documentary *Project Cancer: Ulay's journal from November to November* (2013) and co-founded the Ulay Foundation in Amsterdam. In 2018 he edited and published a monograph on the work of the Croatian conceptual artist Goran Trbuljak. In 2014 he was nominated for the Gerrit Lansing Independent Vision Award (Independent Curators International) in New York. He lives in Rijeka, Croatia.

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PROGRAMME ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION

Guided tours in Slovenian: Sundays at 4.30 p.m.

Guided tours in English: Saturdays at 4.30 p.m.

Guided tour by the curator of the exhibition, Tevž Logar and the artist, Jaka Babnik

23. 10. 2019 at 6 p.m.

Guided tour by the artist, Jaka Babnik

3. 12. 2019 at 5 p.m.

Photography on a Sofa

Presentation of the new issue of the Fotografija Magazine (selected essays on the theory of photography) and a lecture by the artist and theoretician **Victor Burgin**, the author of the essays

5. 12. 2019 at 6 p.m

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue containing 33 photographs and texts written by Jaka Babnik, Dr George Baker, Dr Sami Khatib, Tevž Logar and Dr Katja Praznik.

COLOPHON

Production: Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana // **Artist:** Jaka Babnik // **Curator:** Tevž Logar // **Graphic and exhibition design:** Bojan Lazarevič (Agora Proars) // **Realisation of the exhibition:** Technical Service MGML, O.K.vir // **Editors of exhibition catalogue:** Tevž Logar, Julija Hoda // **Catalogue texts:** Jaka Babnik, dr. George Baker, dr. Sami Khatib, Tevž Logar, dr. Katja Praznik // **The project was made possible by:** City of Ljubljana // **Media sponsor:** TAM-TAM // **The opening was supported by:** Tektonik kraft pivovarna, Tilia Estate

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