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KUNSTHALLE EXNERGASSE

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And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out

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KUNSTHALLE EXNERGASSE

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Judi Wertheim

Secure Paradise

Single channel video, 15', 2008

In her work Judi Wertheim relishes in relinquishing control, moving art from the gallery into the world, where its power and effectiveness can be questioned. "Recognizing the individual power of the audience", Wertheim writes, "I attempt to provide them with an opportunity to recast the limitations of reality that structure our existence." "Colonia Renacer is twenty-five miles from Temuco (capital of the Araucanía Region in Chile). Its inhabitants are all, without exception, German. The only war criminal to have spent time in the colony was Walther Rauss, who, it was later claimed, had taken a part in certain torture sessions during the early years of Pinochet's regime. Neighbors used to speak of albino families driving tractors at night. Magazine articles from the time contain what are probably manipulated photos in which the dismayed Chilean public was able to examine a number of rather pale and serious individuals tirelessly working the fields. After the coup in 1973, Colonia Renacer disappeared from the news. Willy Schürholz, the youngest of five brothers, did not learn to speak Spanish properly until he was ten years old. Until then, his world was this vast domain enclosed by the colony's barbed-wired fences." (From Roberto Bolaño's, *Two Germans At The Ends of The Earth*, 1996)

related to the experience of life in an occupied city. For Tolj participating in specific social facts and sensually displacing them means mainly to perceive them in a concentrated way, and his artistic tactic is based on a sort of a perceptive appropriation where the artist becomes an integral part of the inherent tensions in the object of his focus. *Interrupted Games* is neither a found object nor something taken from reality, it is reality itself, completely ignorant of its own effect. Furthermore, the images resemble a scene from a film and have an inherent quality of time and duration evoking a sense of a haunting pause where the image gets frozen. In that breach between the 'image before and after' one encounters an uncomfortable and unsettling absence, a void.



Judi Werthein, *Secure Paradise*, 2008

And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out

/ 2nd chapter on stories and the 'immemorable'* /

Rosa Barba, Ann Böttcher, Ben Cain, Tina Gverović, Sven Johne, Kristina Kvalvik, Anders Kreuger, Marko Tadić, Slaven Tolj, Judi Werthein

Curated by: Ivana Bago & Antonia Majaca @ Institute for Duration, Location and Variables (DeLVe)

The truth is hidden, luckily, luckily.

J. Conrad, Heart of Darkness

In Michael Haneke's film *Caché*, the viewer finds himself in the midst of following a thriller story, a sort of an Agatha Christie plot, which develops around a quest for the mysterious sender of videotapes, disturbing the everyday life of what seems to be an ordinary French citizen and his family. The crime is not solved, the sender never identified, and the viewer's expectations are played out as he realizes that behind the surface of the plot, an entirely different drama had been taking place – the drama of colonization, dispossession, power and collective European guilt.

The exhibition *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out* explores the tensions resulting from these points of ruptures between dominant and visible narratives and collective truths and memory and what is suppressed in order to keep them together, cracks in the surfaces, the moments of clash between the visible and the hidden, between the articulated and the silenced, but also between the possibility and impossibility of articulation.

All works are ventures into story-telling and story-uncovering, ranging from intimate narratives to exploring the ways how these are intertwined with collective and national histories and how their voicing can subvert neocolonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation and cultural erasure. The works in the exhibition either create a fable-like cartography that reconstitute the history manipulated by time and personal approaches of suppressed and unknown memories.

The focus is placed on the concealed “immanence”, on something unimaginable that is about to break through. As Alain Badiou states, the truth is always indiscernible, it can never become classified as knowledge, because then it would no longer be truth. It can only be glimpsed in the process of deconstructing the dominant discourses of production of knowledge.



Slaven Tolj, *Interrupted Games*, 1993

Slaven Tolj
Interrupted Games

photo dyptich, black & white, each 100 x 100 cm, 1993

Slaven Tolj's artistic practice is heavily influenced by the war in Croatia and the disintegration of Socialist Yugoslavia. During the occupation of Dubrovnik by the Yugoslav army Tolj produced a number of works

Island, but develops into a number of possible narratives and fragments of many other stories. Tadić chooses the back side of postcards for the beginning of the story. By appropriating existing syntagms and adding new ones, he creates a collage of associations, motifs and situations about the archetypal theme of the Island, the (non-)place of literature, philosophy and science. This fragmentary narrative continues on the space-time level through the exhibition – in the video-installation and on the level of playing with the sign in cartographic interventions. Semiotic-symbolic play with a dose of enigmatic atmosphere and search for the unreachable truth, as the constant backbone of Tadić's work, is present also in *I Speak True Things*, in a complex, ambiguous and open web of relations of the sign, story and space.

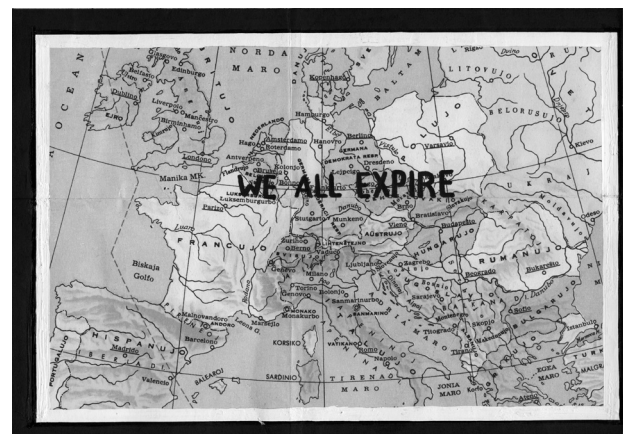
This exhibition depicts the sudden confrontations with the inner spaces of trauma, both past and present, and searches for the possible unveiling of histories that have never occurred or that have never entered the dominant historical and cultural narratives. For many works in the exhibition, the storytelling they develop is just a method of searching for the invisible, the unspoken – the subtext as the surface narrative is a curtain of visible appearance. The surface narrative is often a lullaby preventing us to see underneath: just as in the above quote of Joseph Conrad the words “luckily, luckily”, lullaby the reader away from the truth that would be too painful to face.

What the artists are searching for range from mysterious disappearance or stories of people and events of the past that might have had an impact on the way we perceive the history of the 20th century, philosophy, politics, art, cinema, conflicts, undiscovered territories, or questioning the totalizing ideas of Eurocentric notion of progress and modernity.

Wondering thorough speculative juggling between the accepted historical facts, and removing or at least peeping behind the curtains of the accepted truths, the spectator is put in a voyeuristic position of spotting the unseen, the unrecorded, the unknown.

* *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out* is the second of the trilogy of exhibitions dealing with the relation between storytelling and the memorable** started with the exhibition *Stalking with Stories: The Pioneers of the Immemorable* (Apexart, NYC, 2007) that presented works by Zbyněk Baladrán, Alejandro Cesarco, Felix Gmelin, Sanja Iveković, David Maljković, Ahmet Öğüt, Kateřina Sedá and Artur Żmijewski.

** In his book of essays, *Idea of Prose*, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben defines the concept of the *immemorable* as that which “skips from memory to memory without itself ever coming to mind [and which] is, properly speaking, the unforgettable.” This *immemorable*, or unforgettable, is an unconscious element that infiltrates the conscious memory and creates an involuntary memory. As Agamben further explains, “The memory that brings back to us the thing forgotten is itself forgetful of it and this forgetfulness is its light. It is, however, from this that its burden of longing comes: an elegiac note vibrates so enduringly in the depths of every human memory that, at the limit, a memory that recalls nothing is the strongest memory.”



Marko Tadić, *I Speak True Things*, 2009

Marko Tadić *I Speak True Things*

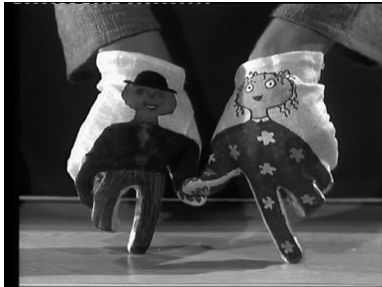
series of drawings, stop frame animation on cardboard, booklet, 2009

I Speak True Things includes a series of the artist's new works - drawings, video-installation and an artist-book, which together form a coherent unity, gathering at the same time diverse formal approaches the artist had used in his previous work. Archetypal (u)topos of myths and legends, novels, itineraries and scientific discussions, the Island is the symbol of the travel into the unknown, the unreachable goal of the explorers. The story begins like many other stories about the

Anders Kreuger
Subtitles

Single-channel video, 25', 2008

"Little Daddy Cardboard! Little Daddy Cardboard! That's me! Actually, you're not allowed to stand on tables if you're a human being, or a dog, or a table, or in the ceiling. Well, only if you're a fly!" (from *Subtitles*). *Subtitles* consists of Kreuger's own subtitles to an episode of the children's television series *Det Bara Händer* (an untranslatable pun combining two meanings: "just happening" and "bare hands") by Staffan Westerberg, produced for Swedish Television in 1972. "I have collapsed a whole archive of the Self into this one episode, which I found a few years ago when I spent several months studying audiovisuals from the 1970s. I remembered it, frame by frame, from when I was seven. I also remember being offended by the over-aestheticized pedagogy. But that might as well be someone else's memory." (A.K.)

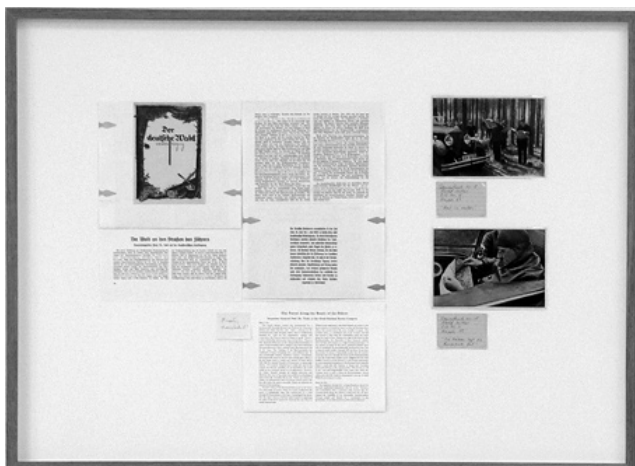


Anders Kreuger, *Subtitles*, 2008

Rosa Barba
It's gonna happen

16 mm, colour film, optical sound, 3 min, 2005

Rosa Barba is best known for her 16 mm films and installations. She has an interest in unusual sites or unlikely situations. In her own words, her filmic vision is "attracted by monumental leftovers, with a weakness for margins, interstices and interludes, and for remote architectural objects which have lost sight of - although not completely lost - the human." The locations portrayed in her works range from military test sites in the Mojave Desert, to concrete igloos in the woods near Mount Vesuvius awaiting catastrophe to fulfill their purpose, to an island whose inhabitants are attempting to stop the seaward drift of their homes. Impending menace is present in many of her works, but it is often punctuated by relics of modernist faith in technology or progress. *It's gonna happen*, 2005, Rosa Barba's 16-mm film is made up of subtitles describing a night scene in a fictional city. The sound track to this imageless cinema is composed of a conversation between a president and his assistant, a mysterious complot that somehow rhymes with the dialogue in the film's subtitles. Barba's piece imbues the space with enigmatic plots where the future becomes a black hole and creates new possibilities.



Ann Böttcher, *Der Wald an den Strassen des Führers (Der Umgang mit Mutter Grün)*, 2008

Ann Böttcher
Der Wald an den Strassen des Führers
(Der Umgang mit Mutter Grün)

framed collage, 68 x 93 cm, 2008
 Courtesy the artist and Galerie Nordenhake Berlin/
 Stockholm

Ann Böttcher artistic practice stems from her personal investigation into national identity's historically burdened relationship to the landscape. However, the research process behind her work reveals, upon closer inspection, a visual archaeology of the facts, myths,

late evening or early morning, still dark or beginning to get dark, and the only visible thing is the mist that is slowly moving into one image and out of the other. At the same time the visual gradually changes, subtly, yet unmistakably moved by her voice that seems to be situated right at its centre. The play of looking, seeing, watching and being watched does not stop within the videos themselves, but is extended in the installation towards the viewer. *Voices of the Unseen* has a narrative quality at the same time as its repetition. The impossibility of looking at the two screens at the same time creates confusion within the viewer. Both the images and the room they are presented in, together create a street: a new room for the spectator.



Kristina Kvalvik, *Voices of the Unseen*, 2008

Kristina Kvalvik
Voices of the Unseen

HD/Photo animation, 6'30"
two channel video installation, 2008
Voiceover: Nadia Mazzoni
Visual effects: Simon Möller

In the work *Voices of the Unseen*, the character is situated in a classic Scandinavian environment. In a street in an ordinary, timeless, middle-class environment we hear the voiceover of a woman who is slowly losing her mind, thinking she is being haunted. It is

memories and values by which "culture" attempts to represent "nature". The title of Böttcher's series of collages and drawings refers to a book written in 1929 by Walther Schoenichen, under the full title of *Der Umgang mit Mutter Grün: Ein Sünden- und Sittenbuch für Jedermann* (In the Company of Mother Earth: An Everyman's Book of Vice and Virtue). Schoenichen was a German biologist and environmentalist, and also an early member of the NSDAP. Göring appointed him in 1942 as Director of the Reich Forest Ministry. Böttcher's rich collages of index cards, notes, quotations, and photographs reflect on official Third Reich policy concerning its "woodland heritage". Slowly, an image of the forest emerges as a living monument to the German sensibility: its portrayed purity is a constructed projection of human imagination, an uncanny, abstract portrait of marching soldiers, standing tall and firm against the wind, in the form of stately spruces.

Ben Cain
You, Me, the Rock

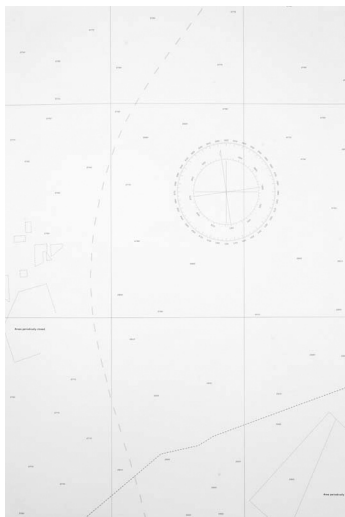
Installation including cast bronze, purpose-built table,
B/W giclee print on archive paper, dimensions variable
2009

No story here. In shamelessly attracting attention to the shiny bronze object as an extra-terrestrial geological find, or an artefact of anthropological significance, the work tempts story-making, and at the same time refuses a familiar desire to make things consumable and exchangeable through drawing them into a web of artificial devices of fiction and narrative. Thus again the bind of knowing that something is a hollow fetish totem, and yet nevertheless still investing fantasy in that thing, or using it as a transcendental link to 'other places'. It's a golden spectacle that says in a deadpan voice "there's nothing to see here; only three things that happen to be in close proximity, paper, wood, bronze", but that's just coy.



Ben Cain, *All Gold Melts*, 2009

and modify under these circumstances and how free is a person to decide upon his or her being? Building upon the gesture of collecting and reproduction and trusting in fictional-atmospheric elements Johnne opens the stage for fates and absurdities of today and frames them in a concrete and tangible way. Ten large-scale cartographic studies, *Seafaring Discoveries of Our Time*, show the navigational paths of young mariners bound to a peripatetic existence at sea for months at a time. Each demarcation shows the ostensible 'discoveries' made on their voyages, the accounts of their experiences transposed and visually represented with the help of a graphic designer. Among all ten of these nautical charts no trace of land can be seen. Whilst solidifying the inherent desolation within the maps, this stark absence paradoxically gives rise to a residual hope that there might lie something physical, palpable, amongst the void of nothingness.



Sven Johne, *Seafaring Discoveries of Our Time*, 2008

Sven Johne
Seafaring Discoveries of Our Time

10 nautical charts, each 70 x 100 cm
manual offset print, 2008, Courtesy: Patrick Majerus

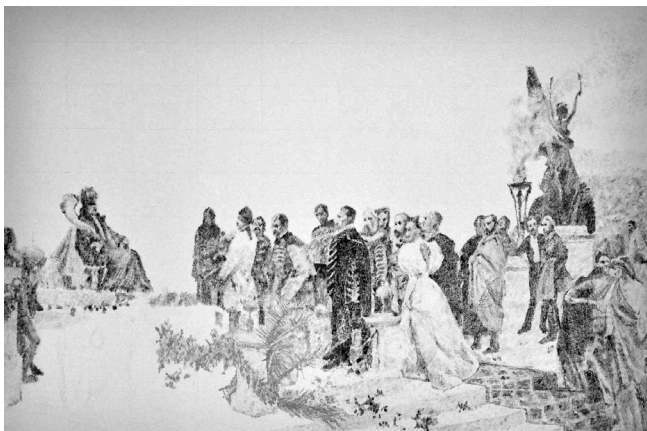
Sven Johne has approached the fateful relationship of the individual to social distortions and economic development in his image-text-cycles and video pieces, in which he always conflates personal stories with actual history, precise observation and pointedly invention. How do identities and life-concepts change

Ben Cain
All Gold Melts

Installation - 35 mm slide projection
Dimensions Variable, 2009

A series of momentary visions of several years hence, told from a place far out at sea, away from any signs of civilisation; told piece by piece, blow by blow, year by year so as to create a tale of the future – one which has no visual aid besides an infinite and empty (as yet) blue horizon. The belief in the potential for positive change on a grand scale is a hugely motivating force, but is shot through with doubt and scepticism, and the impending inevitability of catastrophe. So the future as an undetermined space for speculative thought and utopian projection is firmly held in one hand while in another there's the sense that the future is just as settled as the past. This is a simple 'what if' exercise that merges two positions – that of the disenfranchised low-key idealist forecaster, looking ahead, and the history chronicler looking back. Here are future projections that might elicit similar projections for a present, or more immanent and palpable future.

/ texts by Ben Cain /



Tina Gverović, *In the name of the people*, 2009

Tina Gverović

In the name of the people

acrylic on canvas, 61 x 91cm, 2009

Bacchanalia or when our world begun

acrylic on canvas, 61 x 91cm, 2009

(from an ongoing series of paintings *Colours couldn't change us*)

Noiseless strategies

series of 20 drawings in a vitrine, mix media, 2009

(size of individual drawing 22 x 26cm)

“Both paintings are made after two significant paintings from Croatian history. One is *Bacchanalia*, and the other *Croatian National Revival*¹. Both follow similar patterns in terms of composition, style, and in their depiction of celebration and decadence, both dealing with the yet-to-come, either impending disaster, joy, pleasure, or something bound to ‘civilisation’, or the lack of.. Both paintings depict what seems to be forming moment in a nation’s history. There is a clear sense of embedded national pride and the yearning for independence, which, in *Bacchanalia*, is related to free will, and morality. In very different ways, each painting depicts figures of dignitaries brought together near to the throne of independence. My interest lies not so much in particular events and figures that are possibly seen as crucial in forming a nation, the focus is rather to question whether there are, and what might be the intangible elements from our ‘heritage’ that remain unaffected by wars and the transitional periods of various political systems.” (T.G.)

¹ Cultural and political campaign initiated by a group of Croatian intellectuals during the first half of 19th century aimed to create a Croatian national establishment in Austria-Hungary through linguistic and ethnic unity among South Slavs.