

Igor Bošnjak  
portfolio



**EUtopia** / intermedia project  
video / color / hdv / 20:13 min / 2016



**EUtopia** / intermedia project / 2015  
painting / oil on canvas / 4,8 x 3,6 m



**Transformers** / video / color / hdv / 8:35 min / 2015



**If I Hadn't Done It...** / video / color / hdv / 13:03 min / 2014



Everything you thought, was wrong... / film / color / hdv / 12:42 min / 2014



**Hotel Balkan** / film / color / hdv / 10:25 min / 2013



**Fear of Flying** / analog photography / C - prints / 120x80cm / 2013





**Dictionary** / object / performance / video / 2011

The rationale behind the deconstruction of the dictionary, or rather its complete 'erasure' or crossing out, i.e. stamping out its meanings and entries, lies in the possibility to reduce the very same object or item (book, dictionary) to the significance level of zero. This work is based on the writings of Joseph Kosuth and some theoretical essays by Roland Barthes ('The Death of the Author'). The goal of the project is not simply to negate linguistic and semiotic phenomena, but also to exploit its performative quality in order to point to an issue people are faced with today, which is mass manipulation of information and dallying with relevant 'truths' and accurate 'statistics' within the global rhizomatic society. The Dictionary, seen as, speaking statistically, a 96- hour-long performance during which all of its 1420 pages were crossed out, which is 800,000 words and 50,000 rare and little-known terms (with 20 pens used up in the process), proves in an absurd kind of way and demonstrates the ease of analogous textual misuse, raising the issue of the danger and scope of possible manipulation and abuse of digital textual information today.



**Four in one** / video / 2010

The work entitled 4 in 1 is a self-reflection of and upon the impact of my art as observed in a broader social, cultural and political context. The multiplication of Igor Bošnjak as an artist, critic, theoretician and curator tells the story of personal 'schizophrenia' and a split identity, striving to be in the current, alert, attentive and sensible, dynamic and successful in his community.

## Accumulated History

1. Why 'Accumulated History'? What threads of history are accumulated herein and how did you tie up their (loose) ends?

There are quite a few threads of history intermingling in this exhibition. Some of its works are ironic in approach, they have a humorous twist to them, like the Yugoslavian Space Program. Some are not- the trilogy is not, and neither is Contemporary Cemeteries. These are serious in tone. The works that you see here, they were a way for me to cleanse myself of the past, with all its spectrum of commonplaces- former Yugoslavia, Tito, socialist self-management, etc. A past that even the newer generations of my area don't seem to be able to let go of, a past that they still invest a lot of energy in, by constantly dissecting it and taking sides, whether it is at pointing fingers to establish who was responsible for what, or to blame and glorify figures such as Tito, Gavrilo and so on. As far as I am concerned, I have had my fair share of this particular accumulated history. These works are my way of expressing, projecting and releasing it, as a personal means of achieving closure.

2. The exhibition articulates the interior of the underground gallery space almost ideally- you played an active part in installing it. Is there a trajectory to be kept in mind or you can steer/self-manage your way through it freely?

All works are in some way interconnected, basically while we were installing the exhibition our main idea was that audience can flow very easily through the dark labyrinth of this underground place. I found out (people from gallery told me) that this place was actually kind of a library or bookshelf place with a lot of books, maybe a few decades ago- this information was very interesting for me, in helping me understand this space.

3. Looking around, the exhibition is made up of mostly video installations. Is this your predilect means of expression? I have noted you hold a BA degree in painting. How do these directions converge and merge, overall?

I firstly graduated from painting, yes. But I have always been training for and experiencing with video, photography- media. It was somewhat circumstantial, the fact that I had to do my BA work in painting. Circumstantial, because media and photography were not an official universitarian segment. So I painted and I got my degree. I still do that, painting, but mostly for my own self and it is not necessarily a means of expression I would employ for exhibiting, or making myself known. Media arts suit me better.

4. Exploring the sense of a place, its identity and memory- do all these call forth a concept or does a concept guide a literal search for a space in which it may imbedded?

In fact, all places with a lot of historical layers and meaning are very suitable and inviting for some site specific interventions. Places like these are very intriguing to me. Sometimes, concept puts me on the path to those places, but othertimes it is those places that litteraly "call me" to be present within them.

5. Getting to the first part of your trilogy, the video Hotel Balkan, filmed inside Tito's former nuclear bunker- how was it to access and make use of that space for your particular purpose? Had you been there prior to that?

That space was not even known of, not until rather recently. We had indeed organized a previous exhibition in there and it was that event, in fact, that facilitated me presenting my work here, with you. It is rather amazing, come to think of it, how that place was constructed and the feel you get when inside, in the underground. Its aura, the fact that it was meant as the refuge for 350 people- Tito's selected few, of which only one would have been a woman!- in case of some nuclear catastrophe that failed to happen. That high pressure inside the bunker, it being right below the mountains; the thickness of the doors and walls, the pictures of Tito hung at the end of corridors, the (kitsch) wallpapers and the futuristic furniture- everything, translating the what-if terror of outside attacks. When the entire concoction, the regime together with the state, was actually destined to colapse from the inside.

6. What was the self-manageable part of the self-management in former Yugoslavia? And how did it collapse from the inside?

Selfmanagement would litteraly translate as samoupravljanje. In fact, it consists of two words "samo" and "upravljanje". The first one means 'self' and the second one, 'to steer'. So you can literally steer yourself in an attempt to manage yourself. The installation aims squarely at that particular reference. It is intended as a very funny and humorous work.

7. The only people appearing in the trilogy are made of paper - either wallpaper, or stickers and eikons of saints. They couldn't be more different as representation and semiotics, but at the same time, morewell, in a state of decay, bearing the imprint of absence and emptiness...

They are indeed remnants, echoes of preferences of real people, the things that they felt connected to. Some of these spaces now aren't anything like what I am showing in the trilogy. The print-making facility, for example, the one from 'Everything you thought was wrong' is currently a sort of a mall. Speaking of, it was that same printing facility- a very big and important one back in the days- to issue the editions of the books used on the steering wheels from the Selfmanagement installation- so you see how it all connects.

8. Tell me a bit about your filming technique- you de-focus and re-focus, gradually drawing attention on different elements of the scene where you are filming, the symbolic value of the clair-obscur and the dramatic effects it creates throughout. How much of these aspects do you calculate and stage, how much do you rely on what the raw setting has to offer?

Some segments of video are really well planned and calculated and edited in postproduction. Maybe up to about 40%, but the rest are really random shots where I am using camera very freely, randomly (Dogme 95 style). I always try to capture the energy of a place and while I am shooting I sense the possible vibrations and the kind of sound which I will use later. Depth of field, sharpness, blur, relations between first planes and the background are very important to me because they built up the poetic and aesthetic structure of the moving image.

9. You keep on drawing attention to the sound, to watch it all with sound. How important is the sound in creating certain psychological responses within the viewer? Does this particular past have a soundtrack?

For me sound is equal to the moving image. The relation image-sound is like a ying-yang circle. Sounds and parts of the video without sound are always connected. Sound and moving image are apparently opposite or contrary forces, but they are actually complementary, interconnected and interdependent. I like your idea of a particular past that has a soundtrack. That is a very tricky part. I would need to work on that concept, really...

10. Expanding a bit along the lines of the contemporary art scene of the states that used to comprise former Yugoslavia- how do you personally fit within that scene?

I don't feel the need to be contextualised solely within the former Yugoslavia-Bosnia&Herzegovina-post-socialism frame, quite the contrary. I have presented my work as far as Australia, Hong Kong and all Europe and I have had quite a fruitful exchange of ideas based on that contact. What they- the people from there- got from my work was quite different from what I had set out to express, but it was and it is fine for me just like that, being able to reach out, universally, not confined within a frame of perception based on historical association and pinpointing.

11. So, have you cleansed yourself of all this accumulated history?

Not yet, but in the very near future I will be able to clean myself from weird or awkward futuristic past which often feels very disturbing...

Interview Cristina Munteanu & Igor Bosnjak

In its over half-a-century long presence in contemporary art practice, video installation has become one of the dominant forms of artistic expression. In the context of its increasing representation and growing numbers of artists who resort to video from other mediums or who have used it as a dominant or “supplementary” medium at a certain point of their career, the prophetic words by artist Nam June Paik that “the cathode-ray tube will replace the canvas” uttered long ago, turn out to be truthful. In formal terms, this is the case with Igor Bošnjak, painter by education, who, in his own words, “having had enough of painting”, turned to photography and video, but also to art theory and curatorial work. Can thus his art be also treated as Gesamtkunstwerk – total work of art, which may be seen through several layers of perception (as suggested in his work *Four in One*), and he himself as entirely responsible for its creation and interpretation – as an artist, theoretician and curator? Isn’t the artist with his choice of themes in a specific way close to a shaman with his visionary, prophetic, anticipatory view of life, as Bill Viola maintains, whose work makes us “aware of our mortality which defines the nature of a human being”<sup>1</sup> and whose artistic concepts and manner of perceiving life issues are close to Bošnjak, too? *Micro Static Cinema* is a compilation of video works created over the past five years in which the artist employs an untypical treatment of video as a medium, interpreting it in direct relation to photography from which it came. “The static nature of a moving image devoid of movements (conditionally speaking), inaction and contemplation appearing as themes themselves or a leitmotif, is aimed at prompting the viewer (in this case stopping them) to discussion and reflection on multiple meanings and consequences this metaphor may have today” (I.B.). Avoiding the common technical procedures and using still shots, he examines the relations between the stillness and the mobility of the image which questions our perception and tests to what extent it is possible to understand the relation. Thus, “keeping the visual realism typical of the photographic process, the film gains plasticity formerly possible only in painting or animation.”<sup>2</sup> Minimalism in the application of technical means most often implies omitting the sound, or reducing it only to accidentally captured voices or noise apparently serving the purpose of breaking the dilemma if it is a photo or a still shot. The best example of such a procedure is the work “13 photographs” (2008) – a film which is a direct product of photography and which was “brought back” to photography in the way the scenes are experienced. The alternation of similar film frames with subjects posing “in the point of non-moving fixed in time” lasting for several tens of seconds, creates an impression of watching a slideshow. It is only the happenings in the background: the passage of passersby, street noise, undisturbed life, that “disturb” our perception. The way the meanings of the notion of time are rotated indirectly suggests how thin the line between these two mediums is, and what is of importance for their understanding is the context they are placed in. Time as a constant stands against time as a stopped moment in “double reality” – one in the background which is unstoppable and the other in the forefront which is frozen and which we view as a picture. In Bošnjak’s works, art serves the purpose of aestheticising the bleak (Balkan) reality strongly defined by religion, wars, politics and various media manipulations, whose intoxicating effect, sometime benign but more often malign, frequently hypnotizes us, but not in the manner of great hypnotists but by “bombarding” us with information and worthless oiliness usually passively absorbed by masses. “The hypnotic session of each film or video author turns out to be a beneficial act with which this universe, at least for some time, becomes a better / harder place to live in.” (I.B.) *Neo-cross* (2007) is part of the complex project *Messiah* bringing together works created in different mediums, from photography to video, in the period 2006-2008. Employing diverse means, Bošnjak examines the attitude towards religious representations in modern times. The time of rapid consumption turns everything into consumables. “Consumable pseudocyclic time is spectacular time, both in the narrow sense as time spent consuming images and in the broader sense as image of the consumption of time.”<sup>3</sup> And the reality of time has been replaced by the “publicity of time”.<sup>4</sup> The defragmented picture of Christ’s body represents a specific ethical discourse on the theme of the manipulation of everything and with everything including religion, which might be among the spheres of life where abuse is the easiest to achieve and less visible at first glance. By showing separate parts of his body on separate screens, the artist indirectly brings up the issue of (ab)use of the idea of Christ’s sacrifice. He offers a view departing from the common interpretation of death for the sake of redemption, understood “as temporality” and new life which is seen as the only finiteness: “Life and death (here) are not polarities, contrasting opposites within the all-inclusive Whole (the field of reality), but rather the same thing viewed from different UNIVERSAL standpoints.”<sup>5</sup> Introducing the story in the sphere of the media topical today, the author compares the meaning of the picture examining its role in relation to the previous epochs. “Can a photo or a work realized in a contemporary medium have the same power as a Renaissance painting in their expressiveness and description of a certain spiritual state?” (I.B.) We undoubtedly live in a society of the screen - Lev Manovich, which we are exposed to at every turn, whether in that we perceive the world through the screen or in that we ourselves become viewing objects. And no matter how accustomed we may seem to the conditions imposed by society implying the possibilities of adjustment to growing demands, “the capitalistic ethic of trading” and living, “we, as human subjects who happen to live in this new space, have not kept pace with evolution.... We still do not possess the perceptive apparatus which would suit the new hyperspace... partly because our perceptual habits were formed in the former kind of space, (...) with the space of high modernity.”<sup>6</sup> This brings us to a discrepancy between the imposed demands and real possibilities and wishes, leading us to “Schizophrenia”, not as an illness but as a reflection of a continual state of pressure individuals are exposed to and the need for a split personality in order to fulfil our own ambitions. In the 1990s, the interest of Western curators for the Eastern-European and Balkan art scene suddenly grew. For younger generations of artists, at that time burdened by a war environment, crossing the narrow local borders was of exceptional value. However, some of them built their careers on the world scene by exploiting war themes, offering what “sells well”. In a series of works, with the sensibility of an engaged and analytical artist/critic, Bošnjak explores the media exploitation of victims in Bosnia (*Contemporary Graveyards*, 2010), reliving events from his own history (*Re-construction*, 2009); then the consequences of war (*Dictionary*, 2011); relations between the art market and the gallery system from the position of power in relation to the Eastern-European artist (*Smoking and Rolling Tobacco*, 2010); and finally the attitude of Western curators towards artists and scenes formed over the past decades in Eastern European countries characterised by a significantly different socio – economic context. *Four in One* (2010) and *Smoking and Rolling Tobacco* (2010) shift the border in the criticism of the global systems of art and the market. In order to become “competitive” and rise up “against the so-called natural principles or against capitalist society” (Felix Guattari), the artist “designs” the artist / critic / theoretician / curator concept. All in one. He splits his personality with the aim of fulfilling all demands imposed on him as his own by the contemporary market and the need to cross the local borders, simultaneously striving to demystify the established norms in the functioning of the world of art.

Mirjana Dabović Pejović

1 Otto Neumaier, *Space, time, video, Viola*; u: *The Art of Bill Viola*, Thames&Hudson, London, 2004, 47

2 Lev Manović, *Metamediji*, izbor tekstova, priredio Dejan Sretenović, Edicija VIR co/No 2, CSU Beograd, 2001, 90

3 Guy Debor, *Društvo spektakla: Spektakulamo vreme*; paragraf 153. u: [www.crsn.com/debord/drustvospektakla/drustvo.htm](http://www.crsn.com/debord/drustvospektakla/drustvo.htm)

4 Ibid, voj Žižek, *Āudovišnost Hrista, Teologija i revolucija, Otkrovenje*, Beograd, 2008, 138

6 Frederik Džejmson, Valter Benjamin i presedan doba mehaniĀke reprodukcije; u: *Fotografija, kritiĀki uvod*, priredila Liz Vels, CLIO, 2006, 425

Every present was once part of the future, but nonetheless the imagining of a tomorrow that is initially just a projection is irretrievably different from the causality that thinks in terms of temporal moments between the actual and the becoming. Hotel Balkan is a video that makes use of atmospheric images that can only partially be assigned to a concrete epoch to examine futuristic memories of the past and present imaginings of the future. The film was shot in the nuclear bunker of Tito, the former president of Yugoslavia, and centres on the question of why images from the past often appear more futuristic than plausible images of an imagined future. Even science fiction films often look like a journey not so much into the future but rather into an unknown past: it is not the unimaginable that finds expression in such cases, but rather those variants of the past that obviously failed to be realized. Igor Bošnjak's film Hotel Balkan, too, presents a future of the past that apparently never managed to become the present, although it actually exists. In line with this approach, the nuclear bunker in Konjic in the present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina is introduced as a sort of hotel: not a place for the protection of yesterday's ruling class, but somewhere for the people of today to relax. However, without guests, the deserted hotel resembles a spectral film set.

Jacques Derrida defined the spectre as that which both is and is not; it represents temporalities that cannot be adequately grasped by present-oriented thought, because they involve a past that has not passed as well as a future that breaks with the present. Both the past and the future, as temporal dimensions, are thus seen in an interrelationship: without memories of the past there will be no future. This vision of the past and the future as temporalities that do not merge fully with the present is central to Derrida's concept of the "spectral": the living present's asynchrony with itself. A temporal schism is expressed in the spectral, and thus also the element that eludes the linearity of sequential present moments.

Tito's Yugoslavia was the most progressive socialist country in terms of architecture, design and the thought given to living environments in general. In cities such as New Belgrade and Skopje one can still see the architecture and urban design of a progressive socialist society. In retrospect, much from that time seems like a future of the past, with goals that ultimately remained just promises. The bunker in Hotel Balkan, with its furniture dating from somewhere between the outmoded and the timeless, has a similarly retro-futuristic effect: a place of power, encapsulated in an intermediate realm of time, with the paradoxical status of a spectre that pushes out of the past into a present that doesn't live in harmony with itself.

Vanessa Joan Miller

Historical references are also used by Igor Bošnjak in his photographic works entitled Messiah in order to provoke discussion not only about the media-related changes in art, but also about the sociocultural shifts that have been taking place - not only inside post-Socialistic societies. The artist and organiser, who studied painting in Trebinje, studied theory of art and media in Belgrade, has already become internationally networked with his video works and photographs. In his project Messiah, Bošnjak created a complex of questions not only about the possibilities of painting as a medium in the digital age, presented here quasi in the form of photography, but also about the perspectives of present-day society and how much they have borrowed from the religious utopias of the past. The question of what a new Messiah in the context of contemporary moral - and other - crises would look like, or whether the possibility of Messianic behaviour still exist at all, reveals, despite all our disassociated equanimity regarding what has gone before, a sense of social responsibility that is reflected not only in the question of how to adequately communicate explosive content through the media of art, but also in its expression in relation to society.

Rainer Fuchs

In his work If I hadn't done, Igor Bošnjak also deals with the simultaneous. Armed with cameras, he sets off on the march through downtown Sarajevo, visits various places and comments on what he has observed. The camera constantly shifts direction - upwards, downwards, from below, over passers-by, pointing to distant buildings - he shoots close-up and from afar, alternately. Turbulent shots and the view, which is at all times directed towards the sidewalk, accentuate the manner of movement as well as its great speed. However, as it turns out, this also reflects the mood of the narrator. He is under pressure, he feels the weight of the day behind him. The day is June 28, 2014, 100 years to the day since the assassination. The narrator is Gavrilo Princip himself, that is, he takes Princip's standpoint, talks about his feelings, thoughts, and goes to the exact spot of the assassination and compares the present and Sarajevo from 100 years ago. "Sarajevo, the city without present. The city of the past, the city of the future" - this is the commentary written on the advertisement banner showing Princip and Franz Ferdinand standing side by side. Igor Bošnjak draws the viewers into the walk through Bosnian capital, into the fictitious monologue by Gavrilo Princip. He takes us to a temporary place where history and present overlap, where committed act and memory, reality and fiction, come together. If I hadn't done - the phrase uttered or thought by all of us at one point or another - represents a story of synchronicity. Even though the phrase itself, without the implication of accusal, carries with it a deep human meaning, it still ruthlessly communicates that the moment of decision is long gone.

Stefanie Böttcher



**Igor Bošnjak** (b. 1981 in Sarajevo) lives and work in Trebinje (Bosnia & Herzegovina).

He is mainly working within the fields of film, video, installation & photography.

Currently works as an assistant professor at Academy of Visual Arts in Trebinje.

In 2005 he finished Academy of Visual Arts (BA) in Trebinje, Department of Painting.

From 2006 he is a founder and the curator of the international namaTREba biennial.

From 2007 to 2008 he finished (MA) Interdisciplinary studies, Theory of Art & Media Department at the University of Arts in Belgrade, Serbia.

His works have been shown at: Kunsthalle Wien; New Cinema & Contemporary Art, Rencontres Internationales, Gaîté Lyrique & Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; Atopia Film & VideoKunst Gallery, Oslo; Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Moscow; Hong Kong Art Hall; CAM Casoria, Contemporary Art Museum, Naples; Kunst Museum, Bonn; Agnes B. Foundation, Galerie du Jour, Paris; MOCAV Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina, Novi Sad; Galleria d'Arte Moderna Palazzo Forti, Verona; Museum of Contemporary Art RS, Banja Luka; Point Ephemere, Paris; The Museum of Modern Art Dubrovnik: Contemporary Music Centre, Dublin; MMC Kibla, Maribor; Espacio Center Canarias, Tenerife; Fabbrica del Vapore, Milan; Center of Contemporary Art, Plovdiv; Budapest Art Fair Mucsarnok, Budapest; Charinthan Museum of Modern Art Klagenfurt; Spazio Monitor, Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome; 2nd Project Biennial D-0 ARK Underground, Konjic; Tapetenwerk Halle C, Leipzig; Gallery Remont, Belgrade; National Art Gallery of B&H, Sarajevo; The Cultural Centre of Belgrade; Museo di Palazzo Poggi, Bologna; Eastwards Prospectus Gallery, Bucharest & etc.

In 2010 Igor Bošnjak was a finalist of ZVONO Young Visual Artist Award, organised by Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art; From 2009 to 2011 he was a finalist for B&H Henkel Art Award organised in Zagreb; 2007 was awarded with 1st prize for video art on 4th Salon Clovek Spomenik in Velenje, Slovenia.

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