

## FUTURE REPEATS ITSELF MORE THAN HISTORY USED TO

History repeats itself. It is a helix of events, situations, times and people - both past and present - that reoccur at periodic intervals, i.e., that are connected through similar matrices. While the beginning of the 20th century was marked by striking and rapid industrial development, what ensued was the biggest war in the history of mankind, which was itself followed by the Great Influenza pandemic. The current millennium commenced with another such spiral. With the digital and IT revolution in full spring, we were first faced with the corona virus pandemic, which has now been brushed aside by Russia's attack on Ukraine, which in the opinion of many represents the start of the Third World War.

These parallels feature in Igor Bošnjak's art in a most curious and intriguing way. He finds inspiration for his works in the aforementioned events dating back to the early 20th century, the phenomena that preceded them, present-day circumstances, events between those great episodes, but also in that which is yet to happen. The need for a redistribution of power between the old and new world and colonial powers led to the First World War, which caused a crisis that came to affect the whole world. Poor sanitary conditions and shortages led to the outbreak of the Great Influenza, aka the Spanish flu pandemic. False information, a weapon of war propaganda, continued to be spread even after the conflict. Thus, the virus was named after Spain, which maintained a neutrality policy and did not partake in the war operations, but was unfortunate enough to announce the breakout of the new disease (patient zero is believed to have come from a Kentucky pig farm). The unsatisfactory peace agreement and the numerous crises that shook Europe led to the emergence of fascism, Nazism and, ultimately, the outbreak of the Second World War.

The period after the Second World War took a somewhat different turn. The world was split into two blocs, two ideologies, with hostilities continuing by means of a series of proxy wars (Korea; Vietnam; the overthrowing of military and dictatorial regimes in Latin America; etc.), all of which was essentially manifestations of the ideological strife between the two blocs. The Third World – the countries that had, until recently, been dependent and dominated by colonial powers, formed a neutral bloc and worked hard on the modernization and industrialization of their economies, trying to survive as sovereign states. In general, the world sought to heal the wounds of the Second World War; in the process, it gradually transformed into a global village. The fall of the Berlin Wall ended the division into blocs, with capitalism taking over and globalism leading to the rapid development of communication technology and information systems, starting an IT revolution, which has continued to this day.

The turbulent 20th century brought about considerable changes, which were more profound and radical than anything before, but which were just as equally short-term. The changes introduced by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had to do with its being a big multi-ethnic and multi-religious constitutional monarchy, which made it a player in the international geopolitical arena. The second Yugoslavia, the socialist one, built on the ruins of the old monarchy, went a step further. Having won a great victory over fascism, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia grew from being a guerrilla movement to leading nation-wide defense and liberation operations, eventually coming to power and securing the legitimacy of its right to power by creating a new narrative based on

anti-fascism, which was also meant to supplant people's religious and ethnic affiliations. After communism collapsed in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the world began to settle, only to experience upheavals again in recent times. These movements – these tectonic disturbances – are the result of the brief period of complete world domination of the United States and the West. On the other hand, in the East we see the rise of the great powers of China and Russia, announcing their return, which is to lead to yet another split into blocs and a multi polar world.

Yugoslavia occupied a decisive role in the history of humankind, if only for a brief period of time. It did break up, but it has not vanished. We can testify to a great struggle. The small states created in the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia are mostly dysfunctional democracies, involved in quarrel between themselves and over their common past. The most interesting thing is their attitude towards that which made the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and gave the Communist Party of Yugoslavia the legitimacy to assume and exercise power over its people – their stance on anti-fascism. Our anti-fascist past and traditions, which we remember on the eve of but a few symbolic dates, survive only as a kind of formalism. On the other hand, its extremely valuable heritage memorials have been destroyed or systematically forgotten and abandoned to the ravages of time. Any discussions on the artistic value and the need to preserve this heritage are beyond pointless, as we have heard plenty on the topic from both local and international experts. When these heritage memorials are talked about, it has now become common to bring up the issue of the victims commemorated, their numbers and ethnicity, as is often done by revisionist historians. This kind of treatment of our heritage memorials and the tradition of anti-fascism has made the new generations completely oblivious to any aspects of our anti-fascist past. Less than a century has elapsed since the end of the Second World War, but monuments that serve as reminders of a glorious past are being destroyed, and we have also seen the occurrence of all kinds of neo-fascist phenomena, especially in the areas that suffered from fascism the most.

Igor Bošnjak's approach to and reinterpretation and representation of the SFRY heritage memorials is a highly interesting phenomenon, as it all began as a game. Bošnjak wittily surmised that the creative team behind the famous Transformers comic and cartoon series may have borrowed the aesthetics of their characters from the monuments of the socialist Yugoslavia. While the assumption may sound bizarre, there may as well be a grain of truth to it; nonetheless, it offers a completely new interpretation of and take on the monuments that celebrate the National Liberation War (NOB). Compared to the more recent interpretations, whether by heritage experts or revisionist historians, Bošnjak's reading of these memorials certainly sounds refreshing. That is why the first work displayed at the exhibition is his 2015 Transformers. Something that started as a game grew into years of research and exploration. The artist spent seven years after making the Transformers on a series of works that express this new way of seeing the monuments from the SFRY era. After he had actively researched the existing monument documentation, Bošnjak gradually began to connect seemingly unrelated things, inspired by the theory of Russian cosmism, as presented by Boris Groys in his seminal textbook.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Boris Groys, *Russian Cosmism*, Cambridge, MA: E Flux-MIT Press, 2018. The theories of Russian cosmism had previously similarly inspired Anton Vidokle,

well-known video artist from Berlin; all this combined opened up space for Bošnjak to employ similar methods in an attempt to offer his own reading of the NOB heritage memorials.

Russian cosmism grounded its theories in the assumption that death is nature's mistake and it is our obligation to correct it by becoming immortal and bringing all our ancestors back to life. Because this would lead to rapid population growth, we'd be forced to colonize the universe. Following the death of Nikolai Fedorov, the father of Russian cosmism, many scientists, esotericists, revolutionaries and other peculiar and interesting people continued to develop his original postulates, adding their own interpretations, such as that of the influence of solar radiation on our mood, or by establishing a political party whose main agenda was to advocate for immortality and space travel as basic human rights. These theories did not inspire only Anton Vidokle to produce a series of artworks on Russian cosmism, but also a number of today's multibillionaires, such as Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, who have invested substantial sums in space travel and various life-extending chemicals and technology.

Igor Bošnjak incorporated these theories into his own understanding and presentation of socialist heritage memorials. His works share a common methodology, i.e., the artist used drones and the latest software technology in making everything that can be considered video or motion pictures. The series of works made between 2015 and 2022, from the very first one to the latest, the monumental video installation called *Four Seasons*, provide insight into the evolution of the use of drones, not only as a new recording tool, but also as a tool that brings the observer to a new point of view, as well as the evolution of video production software. Bošnjak used the cutting-edge Unreal Engine software to make *Four Seasons*, creating highly realistic imaginary post-apocalyptic scenery, with the Kozara, Sutjeska, Kosmaj and Podgarić memorials shown as free-standing extra-terrestrial structures set in barren landscapes in different seasons of the year.

The exhibition *Future Repeats Itself More Than History Used To* is conceptualized as a big case study; it chronicles, more or less in the order of occurrence, the progression of the artist's explorations and the development of the technology used to make the artworks. They are mostly video works in various forms, such as animation, film, motion pictures and videos; specifically, they are *Transformers*, *Memorial to the Soldiers Fallen in a Future War*, *Every Man's Land*, *Mecha*, *Sightings*, *Drome*, *Future Repeats Itself More Than History Used To*, *Spinefield*, *Sentience*, and *Four Seasons*. All these works use drones, which allows the observer to see the Kozara, Sutjeska, Podgarić, Makljen and Kosmaj memorials as a sort of space artefacts, abandoned and sprawling like the Nazca lines in South America. In this case, the monuments are treated as merely aesthetic phenomena, as something that was rejected, something useless and strange, yet beautiful. There are no ideological undertones or interpretations in the works, no attitude towards the victims or the artists or designers of the monuments. They exist as an aesthetic form that easily fits in a fictional setting. Set outside their original context and deprived of their original function, the monuments look like sci-fi props – like crashed spaceships or remnants of ancient extra-terrestrial civilizations.

Besides motion pictures, the exhibition features two installations. *Future Repeats Itself More Than History Used To* is the name of one of the installations, which is associated with the video work of the same title. In essence, it represents a kind of personal archive of the artist, more concretely, a collection of objects, texts and relics of the past connected to the theoretical foundation of the research and exploration. *Sentience* is a spatial installation also accompanied by a video work and a poster made to resemble the classic film posters partaking of the aesthetics of sci-fi features from the 1970s and the 1980s. This installation is a real model of a post-apocalyptic landscape, with the Kozara, Sutjeska, Podgarić and Kosmaj monuments located in it as a kind of solitary megaliths. In the series of works called *Absence* the artist plays with the presence and absence of memorials as objects.

The monumental video installation *Four Seasons* rounds off the exhibition and the artist's explorations. It is a two-channel projection on monumental canvases that transform the architecture of the gallery interior. The animation was made using the cutting-edge Unreal Engine software application, and it completes the artist's journey through the worlds he created himself. The exhibition showcases the kind of methodological eclecticism used by Bošnjak in his explorations, ultimately characterized by and making, with its combination of recognisable visual motifs and modern technologies, a synthesis of the infinite possibilities of the digital and the timelessness of modernism. The future is repeating itself.

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