

## What Did Tomorrow Bring Us?

Act one: In *What Did Tomorrow Bring Us?* Dejan Kaludjerović sets up a theatrical space in which the exhibition's opening scene is staged in a dimly lit entrance. In this twilight Kaludjerović directs the eye to a carefree image of a bridge flanked by a handsome couple leaning one on each of its railings. The scene is completed by the relieving sound of a river.

Like the exhibition, the work is titled *What Did Tomorrow Bring Us?*, 2001, with those words spelled out beneath the entrance to the bridge. While the image appears to invite us to cross the bridge, the text becomes a physical obstruction to any mental stride on to and over it. As if to highlight that ambiguity the couple's gazes meet those of the viewers, as if they are trapped between a moment of self-reflection and the inquisitive presence of an outsider. What did tomorrow bring us? The question is simple but perplexing. The grammar negates standard chronology, collapsing past, present and future, but never becomes nonsensical. Rather, it invites the contemporary viewer to interrogate the authenticity of the question and of the projection. And to reflect upon the fact that how one re-interprets images, forms, structures and messages is linked to one's habits and the conscious or subconscious meaning being projected onto them by one's surroundings. And the fact that all of these factors change according to time and/or cultural setting.

The artwork *What Did Tomorrow Bring Us?* was produced by joining two images – one of Kaludjerović's mother photographed by his father, the other of his father taken by his mother – to create a whole that is simultaneously tacit and moving, simultaneously documentation and construction, simultaneously present and past. On a more personal level, the artist's own history, politics and cultural background produce a semantics that allow the work to evoke the socialist and communist dream embodied by his parents. Today, the omnipresent and immediate accessibility of images and information, pored with social (global) networking – all digital – through computers, or smartphones, has not made us all cosmopolitan philosophers as much as it has made us an irony loving and rejecting generation that may or may not have become cynical, or „hipsters“: hippies without a cause, quoting Dylan or Cash with a LOL or „“, or ;) edited in our Facebook or Twitter campaigns or status updates. In this context, 'What did tomorrow bring us?' is a pseudo-philosophical question, an intriguing impossibility – a smartphone beauty. And yet the question posed in the opening scene of the exhibition transcends that – asking also how would our parents reflect upon us?

Act two: A child on a staircase sings the chanson 'Je suis malade'. *Je suis malade*, 2008-2011 is a single shot looped and projected on a life-sized scale. Only the anonymous child is visible, eerily presenting a content that is mature beyond the visual evidence of its years, foreign in its language and disconnected to its history. Perhaps it's a subtle illustration of the pathology (malady) of our globalized consumer society. For this series of videos Kaludjerovic choose his subject via a worldwide casting call, blocking any direct biographical connection to the work, but nevertheless staging it as if to give his generation a melancholy response to the hopes and questions of an earlier generation: What did tomorrow bring us? Curating a gallery show around the theme Eastern Europe, the Romanian artist Ion Grigorescu, a contemporary of Kaludjerović's grandparents, stated Europe one hour before, or after, the sunrise frontier, is that which tried real socialism, a failed political regime, and which still cannot find its definition. It was a frenzy against the past, that the regime wished to destroy, but were limited to distort it and then made from the past a cause of nationalism.

Je suis malade

Act three: The final room – the final stage – has three scenes.

Scene one: Have no fear of small animals. An honest artist keeps his way despite all the political changes. The same is for those who remained at home. All have kept the habit to question the differences between the political regimes and to gather documents that are defining events. *Keine Angst Vor Kleinen Tieren*, 2004 is a projection on a freestanding wall construction setting a direction for the three- and (internal) two-dimensional space. The image is a group of three little children standing in front of a poster of three little children – a reconstruction of an image within an image that offsets any formal irritation of the double-featured composition. A little boy, placed standing on the far right, is a feeding a carrot to a little girl "kneeling" at his feet, their gazes interlocked ceremonially. A second little girl, far left, is looking down onto the scene.

As in *What Did Tomorrow Bring Us?* this work hovers optically between stillness and motion: it is in fact a looped projection of an approximately 20 second recording. It is also about fusing past and present into a form of contemporaneity. The motif, drawn from an advertisement for children's wear, originally appeared in the German magazine *Burda* during the early 1980s, under the heading „No fear of small animals“. Art-historian Branislav Dimitrijević calls out the iconography of pornography of this scene and the relationship between the advertising code of the seventies or eighties and the present day where this motif would never appear innocently or spontaneously. „So we have instability of meaning in a scene which is composed by adults to reflect innocence, blamelessness, an idyllic state of being, but which those same adults can condemn as an expression of perversion, a sick imagination, and social danger . But Kaludjerović has also picked up on an imagery going beyond the recent past – this composition evokes classical iconography – the trinity of the family, either religious or atheistic.

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Je Suis Malade

e Suis Malade

Scene 2: In 2004 Slavoj Žižek wrote a newspaper article commenting on the infamous pictures that exposed the torture taking place at the Abu Ghraib prison: The very positions and costumes of the prisoners suggest a theatrical staging, he wrote, a kind of tableau vivant, which brings to mind American performance art, “theatre of cruelty,” the photos of Mapplethorpe or the unnerving scenes in David Lynch's films. This theatricality leads us to the crux of the matter: To anyone acquainted with the reality of the American way of life, the photos brought to mind the obscene underside of U.S. popular culture—say, the initiatory rituals of torture and humiliation one has to undergo to be accepted into a closed community. Similar photos appear at regular intervals in the U.S. press after some scandal explodes at an Army base or high school campus, when such rituals went overboard. Far too often we are treated to images of soldiers and students forced to assume humiliating poses, perform debasing gestures and suffer sadistic punishments. These images so rapidly became part of an iconographic archive, yet stay irritatingly undefined and ambiguous.

As you turn away from the freestanding projection of the children, seven small works (2012) hang on the wall, framed and quiet. Kaludjerović has divided Oscar Wilde's fairytale „The Happy Prince“ into six equal parts and transferred each one, via carbon paper – a meticulous and time-consuming process that seems a total anachronism in a time that constantly celebrates the immediate transfer of information – onto the works in this room. In Wilde's story a swallow encounters the statue of the late „Happy Prince“ and discovers that it houses the soul of the very prince it commemorates. Furthermore, and despite his name, the prince had never actually experienced true happiness. The statue inspires the swallow to selfless acts. Here the words in Kaludjerović's works flow over playground images – intricate climbing frames, a swing and a merry-go-round – created in acrylic and coloured pencils in a manner that emphasises their architecture or functionality. But in case Wilde's words should appear to be merely a background to these objects, the artist has highlighted a few of them as well: Fear – Selfishness – Power – Mud – Rich – Corporation. The seventh work is made entirely of carbon paper, created by transferring the part of the story holding the word power. Capitalism has taken over for socialism and communism - a „new“ superimposed belief system.

Scene 3: What Did Tomorrow Bring Us? Kaludjerović places a stack of posters, almost hidden behind the projection. Images of a bridge, flanked by a handsome couple leaning on each side of its railings and the words What Did Tomorrow Bring Us? are now piled on the floor ready to be taken with or away. Drawing on an archive of imagery, not to document, but to question the social and generational imposed iconography, juxtaposition and transcending generations and cultures, Kaludjerović imposes ambiguity into the superficially certain. “Why can't you be like the Happy Prince?” asked a sensible mother of her little boy who was crying for the moon. “The Happy Prince never dreams of crying for anything.”

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\* text was published in the framework of Dejan Kaludjerović's solo exhibition *What Did Tomorrow Bring Us?* at HDLU – Galerija Karas, Zagreb, Croatia