

## *Repetitio Est Mater Studiorum* *Repetition is the mother of learning*

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Indigo is a colour that obtained its name from the dye produced from the plant *indigofera tinctoria*. When Isaac Newton divided the spectrum into the seven colours of the rainbow he defined the sixth one as indigo, a hue lying between blue and violet. In the colloquial mother tongue (Serbian) of Dejan Kaludjerović indigo also means carbon paper, a crucial element present in the majority of his handmade artworks. He started utilizing it as an apparent tool while still a student and continued to make use of it throughout his artistic career (even though less overtly). In his most recent drawings and paintings he returned to using carbon paper in a visible manner, thus coming round full circle.

The act of outlining and multiplying has always been an integral part in Kaludjerović's opus. In most cases he begins the work by tracing existing images onto a surface of choice (paper, canvas, table oil-cloth) with the use of carbon paper. The covert activity of following lines or letters is one of the secrets behind the faultless and uninterrupted contours found in his artworks. The artist renders a perfect image through a manual process, which is often labour intensive since his own hand is involved in every step of the development that employs elements associated with mechanical reproduction and duplication. Kaludjerović's choice of carbon paper is not coincidental – his interest in the realm of models, blueprints and archetypes of human

behaviour can be found in most of his compositions. The artist aims to bring to our consciousness our repeating patterns of conduct, often performed for the sake of safety and structure. He also wishes to draw attention as to how we take things surrounding us for granted without questioning. We are conditioned to believe in our realities that are served through Facebook, Twitter, various websites and television channels regardless of whether they represent political bodies or spokespeople for large multinational corporations. Kaludjerović has always used the past to comment on the present and the ways this can affect the future. He uses cues from his parents' generation who believed in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and were unable to question the state apparatus until it started crumbling in the late 1980's to remind us that histories are often repeated.

Oscar Wilde's fairy-tale *The Happy Prince* inspired the artist's latest painting entitled *3478 Words*. Over a period of one year, Kaludjerović has painstakingly outlined every sentence from the fairy-tale over an existing painting on canvas entitled *Blue Girls* (2005). The new piece is a multi-layered work in which the red tones from the previous painting can be faintly seen through the letters of the fairy-tale, while an airy image of a hybrid playground motif covers the final layer of the painting. How does one quantify the arduous gesture of painting three thousand and four hundred seventy eight words over approximately three hundred sixty five days in an era in which time is becoming a luxury and almost every realm of our lives is commercialized? Through the use of one of his old paintings the artist has consciously decided to literally recycle himself. Through an anti-consumerist gesture, a previous canvas is used in order to create something new. Kaludjerović unifies the various

avenues that are present in his opus in one single piece, probably the most complex painting to date. The faint depiction of adolescent girls prompts the viewer to reveal the imposed inhibitions and control systems that are present in our paranoid and politically correct societies. The decision to use *The Happy Prince* is not coincidental; it is used as a metaphor for ideals that are disappearing from our society: friendship for friendship's sake, kindness with no expectations and non-premeditated affection.

Kaludjerović's latest works on paper eradicate the figure and pay homage to children's playgrounds from the past. He retrieves these objects and gives them a new life. His first ready-made sculpture from this series is an electric car, a quintessential object of engagement in amusement parks for boys and girls growing up in the 70's and early 80's (see Fig. 27). Kaludjerović adds an extra layer to this piece that is not readily visible to the audience. Parts of the car's interior, the parts surrounding the engine, are hand painted with Kaludjerović's favourite childhood cartoon character. With this symbolic gesture the artist hints as to how we memorize certain aspects of our childhood and our ability to store, retain and recall information from the past. He brings his beloved childhood recollections into a space of art and tries to decipher their meaning today. Another important object from Kaludjerović's past is the swing, as one was located in front of the artist's apartment building when he was a child. For his solo exhibition in 2010 at the Steinek gallery in Vienna, he engaged his father to dismantle a swing from a public sphere, and recreate a new habitat for it in the gallery. His father appropriated something from a public area and used it to recreate the artist's private memory, thus Kaludjerović turns the object into an artefact in a gallery space (see Fig. 28). In return

the artist found another swing which he carefully hand painted with the same cartoon character as he used in the interior of the ready-made car object. He then positioned the swing in the same public space where the old one once stood (see Fig. 29). Now the hidden character from the car sculpture becomes accessible to everyone since it resides in the public domain. Kaludjerović took a photograph of the newly painted swing, and then he displayed it alongside the one from his childhood that his father secured for the gallery space.

In contrast to *3478 Words* where the entire fairy-tale is written on a single canvas, Kaludjerović divides the story into six equal parts and transfers them onto six drawings. Transferred to paper with graphite, he superimposes childhood signifiers, such as swings, ladders and merry-go-rounds that are rendered in acrylic and colour pencils. Once again he utilizes the carbon paper technique, transferring each letter onto paper, however this time he opts to fully bold a single word from the fairy-tale on each drawing. He chose the following words: fear, power, selfishness, rich, corporation, etc. In addition he created a drawing entirely from used carbon paper that belongs to the part of the story that holds the word power. At first glance everything seems carefree, however upon closer inspection one notices that parts of the seesaw are shaped as a canon and that certain structures resemble cages and torture devices. Through these works Dejan Kaludjerović poses an open ended question on the belief system that we face at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century. He comments on the powerless position of the individual within the larger social frame and the imposed ways of being, which seems to be naturalized throughout the world. The artist doubts our liberal democratic model of living that is driven by large

multinational corporations and in which a small minority make decisions for the vast majority. The selfishness and greed of the rich produces a small and closed circle of people with power. The global Occupy phenomenon that we have been witnessing lately shows how a minute proportion of people do not want to change the current financial system that clearly does not benefit the majority of the population. The most common way of manipulating the masses is through fear and this is becoming a *modus operandi* with the goal of slowly banning the freedom of expression. The word mud appears on one of the drawings acting as a symbol of collapse; however this also represents hope since we are able to generate new realms from mud – in the same way as the Great Mother Goddess from the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh created Enkidu, the wild natural man, out of clay and water.

The video installation *Je Suis Malade* consists of children's video portraits from around the world. The artist utilized the multiplication technique by depicting young human beings signing the same tune and standing in identical poses. The children perform the song a cappella style, stripped of all surrounding artefacts, exposing the viewer to the raw sound and beauty of the child's voice. During their interpretation of the song *Je Suis Malade*, which was originally performed by the Egyptian born singer Dalida, the children sing in French, a language that is foreign to them. They immerse themselves into the lyrics that they find distant as they do the experiences they sing about – smoking, drinking and depression. The lack of naturalness and spontaneity becomes an allegory on the maladies of the world that we inhabit, a world in which children are often placed in the roles of adults, thus creating a haunting experience for the viewer.

Within the last fifteen years technologies have changed, however the tracing and multiplying elements remain consistent within Dejan Kaludjerović's opus. Whether it is through photocopying, carbon paper, Photoshop or video the artist continuously illustrates his work by compiling existing elements that contain the meticulous touch of his hand. The history of humankind is enough for the artist to recreate new understandings of our ever-changing world and while the market becomes the regulator of the most important and basic processes in our lives, Kaludjerović hopes that his work will create a shift in our consciousness. ■