

David Maljković

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St. Gallen installation view, photo: Stefan Rohner

David Maljković, who was born in 1973 in Rijeka, Croatia, and lives in Zagreb, studied in Zagreb and at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. In recent years his work has been shown in some of the world's leading art institutions, including the Secession in Vienna, the Reina Sofia in Madrid, P.S. 1 in New York, the Whitechapel Gallery in London and at the Biennale events in Berlin in 2008, Istanbul in 2009 and São Paulo in 2010. The Kunstmuseum St. Gallen is showing large-scale installations and new photographic works by the artist in the Lokremise.

In his multimedia works, David Maljković deals with themes such as the legacy of the former Yugoslavia, the utopias of a bygone era and the promises of a failed vision of modernism. The cultural changes that accompanied the disintegration of social orders and the overcoming of modernism as meaningful entities make up the background of his oeuvre. Like an archaeologist, the artist unearths formal treasures from failed utopias layer by layer and reexamines them as potentials for the present. He also uses this thoroughly archaeological method in dealing with his own creations, which he examines in his current works and combines in his refined presentations in exhibitions, in turn generating new works and new forms of exhibiting. He thus questions the methods of narrative constructions and conventions of presentation: "In my artistic practice the structuring of the subjects chosen is much more important than the subjects themselves, but of course the subject is capable of grasping someone's attention and directing him on some superficial level." (David Maljković)

By directing the attention from the subject matter to its presentation, the artist ultimately uses his spatial interventions to exhibit the act of exhibiting. Among the aspects that he reveals are the infrastructure and media that are commonly used in the presentation of art: movable walls, pedestals, platforms, projections . . . Ultimately the artist is referring to the convention of the “white cube” that developed during 20th-century modernism as a neutral form of exhibition architecture and was intended to make possible a purely aesthetic perception of art, yet to the same degree neutralized art’s potential social impact. The exhibition conceived by the artist specifically for the Lokremise brings together large-scale installations such as *Display for Lost Pavilion* (2011) and *Afterform* (2013) as well as a series of new photo collages, the *New Reproductions* (2013).

The exhibition begins with the installation *Afterform* (2013), a simple slide projection “positioned” on a pedestal that in turn neatly “skirts around” a mobile partition. The projection itself shows a hand in an indeterminate space, which points to an abstract form or model that, due to its pixelated appearance, seems like a fleeting image from the future. The title *Afterform* points to the past, but as a projection also somehow seems to allude to the future. *Afterform* (2013) is also the name of the animation presented on a stage-like platform at the center of the exhibition. It is based on cartoon characters from the Croatian architectural magazine *Architectura*, which was published in the 1960s and satirized modern architecture. The artist makes reference to this by animating characters from the magazine, who sit at chess boards as they contemplate urban utopias or appear as waiters serving elegant high-rise buildings—accompanied by halting, sequential sounds. *Afterform* thus evokes the architectural visions of modernism, which Maljković in turn links to his own works: the characters not only play with set pieces of modernist architecture, but also interact with the artist’s own pictorial inventions. In this way, Maljković opens new interpretations to the viewer, while at the same time combining his ongoing involvement with the problems of form and the past. With its stand, the screen on the platform appears almost like a classroom demonstration and thus gains a didactic component, which is ultimately ironically negated, since the structure of the platform—a common element in museums—keeps the viewer at a distance. The platform itself as a means of exhibiting becomes a subject of the work and sparks a dialogue between it and the entire installation in the Lokremise.

The form of the pedestal appears repeatedly throughout the exhibition: the flat “base” of *Untitled* (2004), however, is less about a “medium of presentation” than about the object itself: in its right-hand corner is a digital display that shows the time like an alarm clock. The display negates its own function when the lines of the numbers are only partially illuminated, thus making the time barely legible. Instead, the focus is on the object itself.

In the installation *Lost Pavilion* (2009), Maljković created a replica of the American Pavilion designed by John Johansen in 1956 and shown at the exhibition grounds in Zagreb, which he placed on a pedestal. In its heyday, the Zagreb Fair served as an important economic link between East and West: during the Cold War it was the only trade fair where the United States, the Soviet Union and third-world countries were simultaneously represented. Maljković’s 2009 installation was an architectural symbol of the awakening and change in Yugoslavian socialism. In radically reduced form, Maljković now presents this earlier work anew in *Display for Lost Pavilion* (2011): the pedestal is exhibited without the sculpture, and the sound system remains silent. The microphone lowered to the wall-mounted pedestal at most emphasizes the absence of a speaker, and the pedestal becomes an absurdly empty stage. Here, too, the artist is less concerned with presenting or negating a subject and instead emphasizes the presentational structures of exhibiting and their instruments.

References to his own work—in a quasi-retrospective examination—are also central to the *New Reproductions* (2013). These are large-format photographic works in which various pictorial elements from the artist's earlier work are placed on top of one another like a collage. The works begin with a photograph of a watch on a wrist, which Maljković digitally edits, disassembles and combines or partially covers with images from earlier works. This layering creates a dialogue with the past, made symbolically visible through the motif of the watch. Likewise, the ambivalent title *New Reproductions* is a play on words that links past with present and points in two temporal directions. By layering images of earlier works over one another, he literally deposits them, but also reexamines them for the present by modifying, combining or partially covering them, thus reinterpreting them as a whole. This is also true of the wallpaper created especially for the Lokremise, which translates the principle of layering and uncovering into a large format.

At its core, David Maljković's work deals with the constant process of depositing and reexamination as a critical approach to heroic modernism and its ideas and utopias in architecture and art. However, the artist does not comment on these ideas from a historical distance, and instead always relates them to the present and thus extends them into the future. One of his strategies in this process is to reflect on the inventory of deposited forms and historical conventions, both in the artist's own work as well as in art and cultural history. In his work Maljković thus simultaneously addresses the acts of remembering and renewal—both in relation to his own work and to art and cultural history. This is also evident in the publication he created for the exhibition in collaboration with the graphic designer Toni Uroda, which is more an artist's book than an exhibition catalogue. The gestures of depositing and ordering visual materials, of layering and combining, find their formal equivalent in book format.

Konrad Bitterli / Céline Gaillard / Daniela Mittelholzer