

MAJA BAJEVIC***Watch Your Step***

April 8 – May 21, 2022

Zahnradstrasse 21

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present *Watch Your Step*, the fourth solo exhibition by Maja Bajevic (*1967 in Sarajevo; lives and works in Paris) at the gallery. The exhibition will include a new group of works that reflects the entire diversity of forms of expression in Bajevic's artistic practice. On display will be a new video work, three light sculptures, a room and an audio installation, an embroidery work, as well as a series of new collages on paper.

Maja Bajevic's exhibitions are like carefully developed choreographies in which single works take their own positions but act as well as connecting links for the larger discourse. In *Watch Your Step*, the larger discourse is overshadowed by the most recent developments of the Ukraine war. Drawing on her own autobiographical memory - she herself experienced the Bosnian war - Bajevic unravels a complex web of issues surrounding the collective trauma of our time, which is characterised by the abuse of power, exploitation and migration. More universal questions about gender roles and taboo topics in public society, such as weakness and growing old, are also examined and placed in the broader political context. These are issues of relevance across identities, one influencing the other.

Although the idea for the film *Hop, Hop, Hop* originated some time ago, the individual sequences are strongly influenced by the impressions of the past weeks. It is an exploration of a European present once again shattered by war, but also of general themes such as power games, loss, violence and anarchy, of which one can rarely say whether they are the cause or the result. The video shows a succession of film sequences from various well-known Hollywood blockbusters that focus on women as objects of male desire. The artist deliberately chose scenes with well-known actors, such as Leonardo di Caprio, Brad Pitt or George Clooney, who per se stand for potency and masculinity. The eroticism of the scenes is suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted by images of war. Footage from various armed conflicts collected by the artist from the news, strike like a punch in the gut. They come and disappear with breath-taking speed. The desirous looks of the men merge with the shots of machine guns. Desire turns into wild gunfire and makes war actors look like hormone-driven boys. The sound of heavy hissing lies over the images, as if coming from a tube of a magnetic resonance tomography. Suddenly the images give way to the proud, dancing breasts of a cancer patient moving to the rhythm of Balkan music. The political is questioned from the very private without imposing answers.

In the first room, the title *Watch Your Step* takes on a literal meaning: scattered on the floor are small glass marbles alerting the visitor to be careful when entering the room. Every step could end in an injury if we overlook the marble and slip on it. The pretty, colourful glass beads are a nostalgic relic from childhood. At the same time, they carry an imminent danger and stand for the attraction to the naïve curiosity of the child, for whom everything in the world still seems new and unexplored.

In the installation *A Conversation/ You Take My Breath Away*, two ventilators become the acting characters in a silent dialogue. Like interlocutors, they face each other and communicate through LED holograms projected onto their spinning blades. "I can't breathe" glows in bright letters. "Why?" appears as a question on his counterpart. The question-and-answer game that takes form is reminiscent of the conversation in psychotherapy, in which one entrusts oneself to the other. The intimate work speaks about the people in society who have most influenced the artist's practice. Those who are targets for violence and discrimination because of their origin, their sexual orientation or simply their personal desires and values. It is all too often ignored that each individual's voice as well as dialogue are as essential for the well-being of society as the air we breathe.

The light installation *we are all UNequal*, which flickers intensely on the wall of the exhibition space, also speaks of inequality and discrimination. The work is closely interwoven with Bajevic's installation *To be continued - We* from 2014, for which she collected short, concise slogans from the great social and political uprisings of the 20th century. Here, too, the phrase is of almost evocative power. "We are all UNequal",

because depending on where you come from geographically, life has a different value. The flickering of the LED lights triggers a feeling of unease and makes the meaning of the words strike us even more intensely. Against the backdrop of the Ukraine war, the artist had the letters "U" and "N" capitalised to refer to the United Nations. *People die*, the second light installation, wants to remind us of what we so often forget.

The work *Arts, Crafts and Facts (Untitled)* is part of Bajevic's ongoing series of the same title, which she first showed in the exhibition "All World's Futures" at the Venice Biennale 2015. While past embroideries thematised discrepancies in raw material prices and productivity in the course of globalisation, here the graphic embroidered in cotton represents statistics on wage inequality between men and women. Here, too, the private is inextricably interwoven with the political. Gender roles are an illustration of private power inside the patriarchal society we live in. Another aspect that interests the artist in this series is the real labour and time factor invested in creating the embroidery, which deeply contrasts to the fast pace of everyday modern life.

For the series *How to Explain the World to the Martians* (70 x 90cm each, see invitation card), Bajevic collected advertising posters in the streets of Paris, which she glued together as collages and painted over with stamps and pens. These are posters advertising products from the beauty industry and conveying messages of eternal youth to their addressees. The individual fragments, already removed from walls and advertising columns, create a natural collage by revealing layers of other, pasted-over posters. The works speak of the unrealistic ideals that are expected of women in particular to correspond in society, and which never seem to change.

As the visitor strides from work to work, he is accompanied by the intense murmur of a monotone, computer-generated voice reciting words like "Embargo", "Nato", "War", "My home", "Economic Sanction", "Humanitarian Aid" in an endless loop. These are timeless words Bajevic knows from the past and that now, as if in a *déjà vu*, once again fill the news channels and newspaper reports and thus remain lastingly significant.

Maja Bajevic's works have been exhibited worldwide since the early 1990s. Most recently, the Centre Culturel Jean Cocteau in Les Lilas / Paris presented the solo exhibition "Echos" (2022). Further solo exhibitions were presented in the following institutions (selection): Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2017); The James Gallery, CUNY, New York (2012/13); daadgalerie, Berlin (2012); Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofia, Palacio Cristal, Madrid (2011); National Gallery of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Sarajevo (2006) and P.S.1 MoMA, New York (2004). In addition, Bajevic's works are regularly shown in group exhibitions and biennials (selection): Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (until July 10, 2022); Johann Jacobs Museum, Zurich (2021); MAXXI, Rome (2021); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2020); CAPC, Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (2020); Museum für Konkrete Kunst, Ingolstadt (2019); Busan Biennale, Busan (2018); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2017); 56th Venice Biennale, Venice (2015); documenta 12, Kassel (2007). Her works are represented in the collections of the following institutions (selection): 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; FRAC Franche-Comté, Dôle and FRAC Pays de la Loire, Carquefou, France; MACBA, Barcelona, Spain; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain; National Gallery of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina; Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey; Erste Foundation, Vienna, Austria; The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway.

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