

Nataša Prosenč Stearns

code L – Fragments

KiBela / MMC KIBLA

20 September 2019–10 October 2019

Video installation by Nataša Prosenč Stearns

based on motifs from the original opera by Milko Lazar *code L*

CODEL – Fragments video installation at the KiBela Gallery presents a selection from the new series of videos by Nataša Prosenč Stearns, recorded for the original opera by Milko Lazar.

According to librettist Eva Kraševc, "*code L* testifies to the power and depth of human emotion – a unique selection of emotional culture moments captured in the time and space of today. Inspired by Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, it is fuelled by myths, archetypes, philosophical works, and the intimate."

Transparent screen projections integrate shadows, silhouettes, and reflections of architecture elements. What emerges is a space-inside-space, which in the opera occupies the stage, while in the gallery it is the space into which the visitors enter.

Human intimacy has been a topic of interest for Nataša Prosenč Stearns since the beginning of her career. Her focus is on "the human condition" – what goes on with human beings in the contemporary world; where is our psyche, our soul, our heart? As many times before, she explores these themes through interpretations of the human body – a figure, which is, however, always integrated in the environment. The exhibited works are moving collages based on image layering. They depict states of constant emergence; the integrity of the body disintegrates, establishing new connections with the environment and suggesting new possibilities for regeneration. Transformations occur under the influence of water, sand and other elements, which in the works of Nataša Prosenč Stearns change from natural elements into deconstructing or integrating visual artistic elements – in some of the works they trigger the disintegration of the image, in others, they are the substance that connects and protects them.

An intense concern with the body is the artist's response to the alienated existence of modern humans, which is becoming increasingly "disembodied" because a great part of human relationships has shifted from the physical world onto screens and into the virtual Internet space.

After participating in the international group exhibition *Osebno / Personal* (5 October 2018–8 February 2019) in KIBLA Portal, Nataša Prosenč Stearns this time presents a solo exhibition. As probably one of the most consistent and productive video artists in Slovenia, she has been faithful to her own, personal approaches, leaving a distinct author's mark on works exploring existentialist and existential themes

In her earlier works, she places humans at the center of the natural environment by means of various techniques and color palettes, reappropriating the image of the human body by emphasizing certain parts of the body, such as eyes. In her recent works, however, the human figure blends with the environment; it becomes a body, of which the silhouette remains as a shadow, moving across the given ambience. The internalization of this relationship unravels the corporeality, unlocks the interior, and highlights the intimacy of experience, thus affecting every one of us. Although her images are concrete, she (typically) transforms them into mirrors of the soul. Persons are abstracted into momentary creatures, who blend into eternity of existence. In an alienated world, she slows them down, so that in spite of all the rushing they are able to stop and listen, and offer to the viewer a space for reflection. Nataša Prosenč Stearns invites us into her own world, in which our perception acts a drive for reaction.

The hypnotic nature of her slow-motion visualizations, little gestures and static states, almost appears as if trying to stop time and emphasize space. Her poetic draws mostly from ancient, most frequently ancient Greek history and mythology, referring to ancient Greek philosophers, events, and places. The artist searches for and explores visual expressions, in order to find the appropriate narrative technique. Through texture effects juxtaposed by natural elements she achieves a visually rich effect. However, we are not to be misled by her flawlessly esthetic moving images. Behind the beauty of her works, Nataša Prosenč Stearns re-questions our existence and our endurance in the natural environment: to what extent are we even natural beings at all; how capable are we of emotion, of feeling, of compassion?

Seeming contradictions connect to form a unified whole, offering not only a top-level artistic experience and enjoyment upon seeing the video installation, but also encouraging a reflection about ourselves and about our attitudes towards fellow human beings and the environment. The succession of images, their intertwinement and the transitions of one image into the other, move from the magic of projection into the sphere of contemplation, which can and should be reflected by our insights and revelations – those genuine truths and answers to the questions of who are we, and where are we going.

Two of the central authors of the opera *code L* – on which the video installation *code L – Fragments* is based, Milko Lazar and Nataša Prosenč Stearns, are both originally from Maribor, where they used to attend the Prva gimnazija grammar school, which is why this year, apart from the exhibition of visual art works, we will also be hosting a concert by Milko Lazar in Maribor. Let's welcome the artists back in their hometown.

Peter Tomaž Dobrila

(translated by Helena Fošnjar)

code L – Fragments

Video installation, 2 HD video loops, 10 screens

Duration 8 min.

Screen designer Rocc

Video cast: Jasmine Akakpo, Issac Silva, Carmela Segal, Andrew English, Jmack, Frankie Arounwong, Danielle Viale, Ellis Moye

Camera operator: Lisa Stoll

The original opera *code L* based on the libretto by Eva Kraševc, with director and set designer Rocc, was performed for the first time in March 2019 at the SNG Opera in Balet Ljubljana.

Space for art KiBela / MMC KIBLA, Ulica kneza Koclja 9, Maribor, Slovenia

Open on weekdays between 9 a. m. and 10 p. m., and on Saturdays between 4 p. m. and 10 p. m.

Nataša Prosenč Stearns, born in 1966, lives and works between Venice, California, and Slovenija. She graduated from the Department of Design of the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, where she created her first videos and later installations and films. After her studies, she initially worked as a graphic designer, before the Fulbright Grant took her to Los Angeles, where she obtained her MFA in film and video production from the California Institute of the Arts.

Nataša Prosenč Stearns is a visual artist and filmmaker, screenwriter and editor, who works with video, film and digital techniques. She has directed several short films, numerous documentaries, and two full-length films, *Souvenir* and *The Trial of Socrates*. She is exploring innovative strategies in visual and narrative expressions and is known for her creative use of non-gallery spaces and large multi-channel projections.

Her project *Gladiators* represented Slovenia at the 48th Venice Biennial in 1999, and won her the Prešeren Foundation Award in 2001.

She has received a series of other grants and awards, and appeared for the second time at the Venice Biennial in 2015 as part of the exhibition *We Must Risk Delight, Twenty Artists from Los Angeles*. Her works are part of national and international permanent exhibitions, they travel to festivals and have been featured in such institutions as the Douloun Museum of Art in Shanghai, Círculo de Bellas Artes and ARCO Fair in Madrid, Künstlerwerkstatt in Munich, Bevilacqua La Masa in Venice, Spazio Erasmus Brera in Milan, Tel Aviv Museum of Art in Israel, LACE – Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, the Ruth Bachofner Gallery and the Lancaster Museum of Art and History in Los Angeles.

<https://www.natasastearns.com/>

