

Jože Šubic

GLORIOUS TWELFTH

KiBela / MMC KIBLA
18 May—5 June 2020

**GLORIOUS TWELFTH:
HUNTING FOR WOMAN, OR THE TWELVE PARABLES ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF WOMAN**

The Glorious Twelfth: in the hunting tradition

The Glorious Twelfth is the twelfth day of August, the start of the shooting season for red grouse, and to a lesser extent the ptarmigan in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This is the peak of the hunting season for wild bird shooting in this part of the world, and the date itself is traditional (since English law prohibits game bird shooting on a Sunday, the start date is postponed to 13th August on years when the 12th falls on a Sunday).

Game hunting has been present since ancient times, but it has changed during the course of history, always taking on a new shape. While in the past it was greatly important for survival, this importance was gradually lost since the times of the first domesticated animals. Thus, in the Middle Ages, game hunting mostly played a social role of a status symbol of the aristocracy that hunted for the purpose of collecting trophies. Nowadays, it refers to the legal and controlled activity of wildlife hunting, as distinct from the illegal, uncontrolled poaching. Hunting is controlled to the extent that hunters can only hunt certain game animals in a certain period of time, and its purpose is to regulate wildlife abundance. For some, hunting is a mission, a way of life, an indispensable task related to the protection and conservation of nature, for others it is a pleasure, a hobby similar to a sport, a game or competition in trophy collecting (the latter having many vocal opponents).

The Glorious Twelfth: in the art of Jože Šubic

Jože Šubic only brushes against the sphere of hunting in choosing the title for his new art project: rather than dealing with the topic of wild bird hunting, he is after a metaphor, an allegory, a parable, or a simple story with a moral lesson (a term borrowed from literature) of a man hunting for a woman as prey or trophy, as an object of desire or erotic fantasy. He then extends this metaphor of hunting as a predominantly male hobby or game to reconsider gender differences in the context of art, whereby a significant, if not crucial role is given to sexual undertones and a kind of eroticism. An important aspect of Jože Šubic's art is inspired by eroticism, about which Deleuze writes: "eroticism is able to act as a mirror to the world by reflecting its excesses, drawing out its violence and even conferring a "spiritual" quality on these phenomena by the very fact that it puts them at the service of the senses".¹ With a thoughtful and inventive use of visual language, images of this art directly affect the senses.

Glorious Twelfth consists of a series of twelve works: ceramic female figure sculptures comprise ten heads, two heads with a torso and one full-figure sculpture. The "twins" were created the first, in 2016 (Blowing Twins, designed with protective masks and copper horns on steel pedestals),² followed by female figures with meaningful titles: Shooter, Moon Observer, Medusa, Sister of Mercy, The Girl Who Wants to Know How Wet She Is, Girl on a Bike, Chess Player, Reader,³ Pearl Diver, Te-Ta, and Slovenian Nightingale. The works continue and upgrade a series of sculptures of life-size women's heads with wide-open mouths and eyes shut

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tight, which were on display immersed in water-filled glass containers and hung from the ceiling in cage-like structures. In light of the continuity of the work, which dates back to 2012, to an art intervention at the dilapidated Žiže Mansion in Maribor's Lent (six submerged heads in window niches), in 2014, at the Mihelič Gallery in Ptuj, the artist exhibited six figures of "drowning women" and two "captives" as a metaphor for social marginality and exclusion – and one of the sculptures from the new series is created in the same spirit (Slovenian Nightingale: a woman with a tattooed face represents an immigrant from Burma, whose tattoo helps her avoid being taken to a brothel). This gallery set-up, too, functions as a comprehensive ambience, in which at the first sight we witness another set of disciplined female bodies (Foucault). And yet the visible gallery setting delivers more than just iconically represented female figures immersed in a more or less excessive activity: it offers the viewer the chance for a yet unknown experience, sometimes driven to the point of unbearableness, in the form of clichés about the female body and pleasure. At the same time, this acts as a point of suspense, which the artist achieves through contagious humor and multifaceted appeals to the imagination. Unlike the usual dream-state scenario, which we normally experience in the first person, we witness a fantastic, phantasmatic scene that invites us, on the one hand, to identify with the character/figure (rather than playing out that role ourselves), but on the other hand it can also repulse us – and this kind of ambivalence, a play of attraction and repulsion, of pleasure and anxiety, is a typical feature of recent works in Jože Šubic's oeuvre. Such installations, with sculptural figures immersed in a situation instead of ourselves, may indeed prevent us from becoming the psychological central point of the work (Bishop), but on the other hand, they offer us many starting points for immersing ourselves in a live psychological confrontation with the subject matter, by means of unconscious and conscious cultural associations. The focus of Jože Šubic's work evolves in the direction of an associative intertwining of social rituals, sports, hobbies and games, art and sexuality.

A female player in a (man's) game of the world

An important aspect of Jože Šubic's new project is his interest in the concept of game. In summarizing the key characteristics of "the game mode";⁴ we see that the quality of immersion plays a central role. As Šubic's figures convincingly demonstrate, "players 'are taken in by the game,' they step into the game, they are inside it," "the game is everything to them in that moment, and there is nothing outside of the game that would motivate or bind them in any way."⁵ Switching to the game mode therefore also takes place in Šubic's art, and refers to the viewer's capacity to empathize and decipher cultural signals and symptoms of the dominant ideology in society, as reflected in sexuality, economics, politics and science. As Janez Strehovec notes, in order to survive authentically in the (present) reality, women need to switch between different modes of reality on a daily basis.⁶ Thus, for example, they switch from everyday practical modes to the spectacle mode (for male eyes) and to the player mode (for all kinds of games) – given today's all-encompassing immersion into computer-generated virtual worlds that encourage a playful approach, Šubic's examples of often highly unusual games or activities are all the more meaningful, e.g. in *Moon Observer*, *The Girl Who Wants to Know How Wet She Is* (blue color and downcast eyes suggest shame due to own activity – shame is an affect that occurs when we are caught in a situation in which we see our own view framed by the view of someone else), or in the sculpture *Te-Ta*, where the knitted collar alludes to the sexual practices of the BDSM subculture, i.e., consensual bondage sex games. Any activity can be turned into a game, as long as there is no fear of consequences, and the game can be enjoyed. However, the effortless appearance often conceals a strict observance of rules and long trainings to achieve mastery; in the narrow sense of the word, games are generally seen as highly professionalized activities, which is why professional athletes, actors, etc., play their games un-playfully, without being spontaneous or free from care. A game can be a fight for something or the representation of something, whereby competition is often the underlying matrix driven by moments of winning, rewards, roles and prizes (Huizinga). Part of the provocation from the perspective of Jože Šubic's project is to see the various cultural and general social phenomena through the matrix of a game (e.g. chess game or sex game) or a hobby (from observing the moon to the more ordinary hobbies of reading or bike riding), which occasionally turns into a more or less extreme (professional) activity. With regard to the latter, there is an interesting ambiguity in the artist's implication of prostitution: the woman behind the Venetian mask is like a "rose-picker" from Leonard Cohen's song *Sisters of Mercy*; then there is also the high-risk occupation of pearl-diving: *Pearl Diver* was inspired by a Japanese tradition of women known as *ama* who free-dive into the deep sea to collect pearls. Games can be divided into categories, for example, Caillois categoriz-

es them according to whether the main element in them is competition (in Šubic's works chess, cycling and shooting sports are used as metaphors, e.g. *Shooter* uses painful "love nails" as her weapon), risk (implying BDSM and promiscuous sexual practices), make pretend (hiding behind a mask, staging a kind of fictitious reality), or vertigo/adrenaline (extreme use of the body, like in free-diving). Games can also be categorized according to the predominance of Dionysian tendencies and the degree of their restriction by the Apollinic principle (Nietzsche) or, in other words, to games dominated by the principles of entertainment, boundless imagination and improvisation, and those dominated by rules, imperatives and conventions. While, for example, professional sports as an occupation impose many constraints on the players (performers), in the art of Jože Šubic we encounter a play of the "as-if mode" (Strehovec), which serves as a symbolic representation of notions in the real world (if not its entirety, as in Eugene Fink play-based theory) – "the female players in it [are] representatives of world power."⁷

The artist's consideration of the issue of the non-existence of Woman

In view of the intriguing nature of this artistic endeavor, which refers to women, who on the surface appear to be entirely subjected to the male view and the male desire, it seems reasonable to resort to psychoanalytic thought. This can help us shed light not only on the confusion regarding gender differences and female sexuality, but also on the mysterious (Lacanian) question of Does Woman exist?, which is reflected in the work of Jože Šubic as well. While some of his portrayed women may seem hopelessly trapped in patriarchal logic, the rest of them appear to succeed in overcoming that logic. This entrapment is perhaps most eloquently evidenced by the subdued mythological character of *Medusa*, a monster with serpents in place of hair, devoid of her former power of a deadly gaze which turned anyone who looked upon her into stone. Instead of a typically Freudian answer to the question What does a woman want? – a "master", someone who holds the key to her hysterical unconscious desire, – the artist provides a multifaceted allusion to the never-to-be-unraveled mystery of femininity. Although Šubic is clearly not a feminist, who would distance himself from failure of the so-called phallocentrism, he succeeds in demonstrating in some points that the female aspect of human desire refuses to be trapped in the passive role of a sexual object, or merely as an agent of society's reproduction. According to Judith Feher-Gurewich, a connoisseur of one of the key elaborators and interpreters of Freudian thought, Lacan, there is nothing else to be found beyond the mysterious power of the master and vague knowledge, but freedom of desire.⁸ This might be the path leading away from a fundamental fallacy of the Freudian project on the mystery of femininity/the female sex, which is at the core of the hysterical disposition of this so-called "dark continent" (Freud). In this perspective, the enigma of femininity is a key agent for that which resists being captured by power/authority and knowledge – that, to which art (unlike tremendous attempts to control on behalf of authority discourses and science) can still point, even if it does so by means of allusion, in the form of metaphors or parables, such as those found in the work of Jože Šubic.

— Mojca Puncer

¹ Gilles Deleuze: *Predstavitev Sacherja-Masocha: hlad in krutost*. In: Alenka Zupančič (ed.), *Mazohizem in zakon*, Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, Ljubljana 2000, p. 29.

² The first sculpture that was made, *Blowing Twins*, was exhibited at the group exhibition *Magicscape* (Istanbul, 2016), curated by Başak Avci and Jože Šubic.

³ The premiere presentation of the sculpture *Reader* took place at the Maribor University Library as part of the 22nd edition of the literary festival *Slovenski dnevi knjige* (Slovenian Book Days) in Maribor (April 2019). The sculpture has an imprinted mirror inscription of an excerpt from a poem by Petra Kolmančič *Kako ostati zvesta* (How to Stay Faithful), and of a stereotypical, not yet fully obsolete saying: a woman that reads is a "dangerous" woman.

⁴ Cf. Janez Strehovec (ed.), *Teorije igre pri Johanu Huizingi*, Rogerju Cailloisu in Eugenu Finku, Študentska založba, Ljubljana 2003.

⁵ Janez Strehovec, *ibid.*, 337.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁸ Judith Feher-Gurewich, *Preface*. In: Paul Verhaeghe, *Does the Woman Exist? From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine*, Other Press, New York 1999, p. viii. Lacan's discourse of the analyst, *inter alia*, points to an illusion as the cause of desire.