

# Martina Grlić

## MINDSCAPES

29 March–26 April 2023

MMC KIBLA / KiBela

»Metaphors are all we have to describe memory.«<sup>1</sup> This is the quote which the artist Martina Grlić came across while reading various texts and it remained in her mind for a long time during the creation of her cycle of paintings »Mindscapes«. Her works are conceptually and aesthetically connected to the previous series *Hypernesia*<sup>2</sup> (2021), in which the artist explores the field of memory using the method of introspection and with the use of archival photos from family albums questions the learned ideologies that participate in the formation of consciousness and identity.

Before we embark on an attempt to read Martina's works, it is important to first ask the question: What is the role of metaphors in the representation of personal or collective memory?

One of the founders of cognitive linguistics, a researcher of metaphor, the relationship between language, mind and body, and political discourse, George Lakoff explains in his capital work *Metaphors We Live By* (2003) how metaphor is a fundamental mental mechanism that allows us to understand an infinite number of new and different phenomena using what we know from our immediate physical, social and cultural experience. Therefore, metaphor is not only a linguistic, let alone a poetic device, but a mental basis that organizes our conceptual system and enables the understanding of experience. Metaphor is what we are guided by in life, by means of which we find our way in life and the world, by means of which we understand and recognize life and the world and shape our truths.

As a result, ideas and concepts, called secondary images in scientific discourse, are manifested in each individual as mental images or mindscapes of fantasies and memories. What are the elements that Martina Grlić selects as representative in her paintings, using documentary photos, personal and collective, from which, almost forensically researching her own subconscious, she extracts individual memories of situations or events?

In the work *Things which make history* (2022), red carnation petals and golden shell casings float together in a transcendent space, a magnified field of photography that emanates consciousness. Flowers for the artist personally evoke the once ubiquitous object of the family table. However, the attempt to represent memory in the works goes beyond any direct autobiography. In this case, the carnation has a political charge and is inevitably associated with

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<sup>1</sup> *Metaphors are all we have to describe memory: Kristin Prevallet's 'A Burning Is Not A Letting Go' at Guernica*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet-books/2016/05/metaphors-are-all-we-have-to-describe-memory-kristin-prevallets-a-burning-is-not-a-letting-go-at-guernica>.

<sup>2</sup> The term hypernesia denotes a state opposite to amnesia, but also a very specific state in which a person describes and recalls individual details from his own memory with incredible accuracy.

labour movements, where, juxtaposed with golden casings, it suggests the transformation of Yugoslavia from a socialist state into a network of European-style capitalist democracies, with the associated self-imposed erasure and reconstruction of the national past.

Whether in the form of a bouquet of mimosas or a plastic decoration, the element of flowers is repeated as a motif in *Sense and sensibility*, *Striving for the significant other I* and *Plastic flowers*, this time as a possible metaphor of femininity and fragility. In addition to the previously mentioned paintings, the works *Piece for eternity*, *Decoration II* and *Contemplating innocence*, which depict parts of a wedding dress, various decorations for girls and strands of women's hair, all belong to the group of paintings in the cycle aimed specifically at reflecting on the ideals of female beauty and the imposed social conventions against women. From the title of the paintings, as well as from the deliberate deviation of the display, one can sense a kind of attitude of the artist, which includes the entire spectrum of emotions - from defiance, (auto)irony and humour all the way to nostalgia and romance. In the works *Remains*, *Birthday wishes* and *Daddy's love* elements appear such as melted candles that probably belong to a birthday cake, cigarette butts and the remains of gift arrangements in washed-out pastel colours that reminisce some customs of the past. On the other hand, works like *Precious objects*, *Dissociated* and *Noble rag* evoke objects of longing or status symbols from childhood, indications of the consumer culture of a certain era.

We sense that all the works in the series offer traces of universal ideas and attitudes, but what is characteristic of all of them is that they do not offer answers to complex questions of personal identities and collective experiences. By deliberate transformation of the display, abstract intervention, the artist imitates the passage of time and the impossibility of repeating and seeing the past realistically. In the pop surrealist style of David Lynch, the works exude elusiveness. The relationship between memory and fiction is blurred in a complex way - what Freud calls *the uncanny*<sup>3</sup> Grlić uses as the main element. With the lack of context, the artist skilfully achieves a feeling of discomfort and anxiety, which is further enhanced by enlarged ultra-lucid fragments that emerge from abstraction and threaten to disintegrate into indeterminacy again.

Referring to a world that no longer exists, the artist in her own words recreates memories that go beyond direct autobiography - her nostalgic works become a reflection of public social attitudes, a set of fantasies and naive superstitions. Although her realities do not necessarily correspond to ours and the present traces of ideas do not have to be interconnected, the artist ultimately expresses herself with a visual language that allows the audience to go deeper into themselves in search of meaning. In this search for meaning, they may get new answers about the world around them.

- Tena Bakšaj

## BIOGRAPHY

Website



**Martina Grlić** (1982, Zagreb, Croatia) is a Croatian artist whose main focus is figurative painting. The methodology of her work includes the exploration of political, economic, and social heritage through the deconstruction of politics of memory, image reading, and gender aspects. The method she employs is based on ethnography and autoethnography of everyday life and popular culture, as well as the transformation of found imagery into the painting background. Grlić explores the phenomenon of memory and remembrance focusing on the changes that have taken place, and are still taking place in post-socialist society. In 2009, she received her M.A. from the Academy of Fine Arts Zagreb, Croatia. Her works have been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Croatia, France, Poland, China, Italy, Austria, Germany, USA, and Russia. Some selected solo and group exhibitions are: Fragment gallery, New York (2022), Bačva Gallery, Zagreb (2022), Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2017), National Museum Gdanjsk, (2016), Ningbo Museum of Art, Ningbo, ROC (2015), KIBLA, Maribor (2014), Kunstlerhaus Vienna, (2011). In 2017, Martina Grlić won the HPB Prize for Young Artists, and in 2012, the First Prize for painting from Erste bank. In 2019, Grlić participated in De/construction of the painting residency in Leipzig, Germany. Her work is part of collections at the National Museum of Modern Art in Zagreb and the Zuzeum Art Centre (Zuzans Collection) in Riga.

<sup>3</sup> There is no unequivocal translation in the Croatian language: unusual, mysterious, creepy, otherworldly, unknown.