

1981–84. From 1988 to 1998, he created multimedia light installations with holograms, video and computer animations. Since 1992, he has lived in Essen, where he is a member of the board of directors of the Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen/Red Dot Design Museum and since 2018 he has been the managing director of Red Dot.

His first solo photographic exhibition was held in 1977 at the Kočevje Fine Arts Salon. Later he participated in festivals and exhibitions, among others in Basel (FotoKopie – Fotografie und Imitation 1989), Berlin (Räume aus Licht 1991, Holographic Network 1996), Dortmund (Reservate der Sehnsucht 1998), Essen (LichtFormen 1993), Hamburg (Feuer Erde Wasser Luft 1993), Hanover (Fotovision 1988, Die aufgehobene Zeit – W. H. Fox Talbot 1989, EXPO 2000 1996), Genoa (MEDIARtE 1983), Jena (Botho-Graef-Kunstpreis der Stadt Jena 1998), Karlsruhe (Multimediale 2 1991), Kassel (Photo Recycling Photo 1982, Ausstellung auf Plakatwänden 1982), Ljubljana (GT Gallery 1990, New Tendencies in German Holography 1991, The Eye and its Truth 2001, Signature – Composites of Photographs and Texts 2015, Ljubljana Bows Down to Slovenia III: Kočevje 2019), Melbourne (The Antipode Media Arts 1992), Montreal (Image du Futur 1990 and 1991), Osaka (AU International mail art exhibition 1984), Osnabrück (Experimental Film Workshop/Europäisches Medienkunst Festival 1983–1990), Perugia (Olografia, Holografie, Holography, Avanguardia dell'Arte Olografica 1992), Ribnica (Recognize and Discern 2006, Expatriots I 2010, Expatriots II – I Carry It All With Me 2013), Wrocław (Film poza kinem 1985) and Zagreb (Westeast 6 1981, Media-Scape 1991) and again in Kočevje (DASEVIDIDASENEKIDELA 1980, Kočevje 2000–2040: Photo-essay in four acts, first act 2001, second act 2011, Signature. What exists, what is happens, what is narrated 2022). He is represented in the collections of Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten, Marl, Kunstmuseum Moritzburg, Halle (Saale), Museum of Holography Chicago, MIT Museum, Cambridge, Modern Gallery Ljubljana, Miklova hiša Gallery, Ribnica, Kočevje Regional Museum.

Vito Oražem and Lela B. Njatin  
SIGNUM PUNCTUM  
10 May–8 June 2024

MMC KIBLA/KiBela, Ulica kneza Koclja 9, Maribor  
Opening hours: Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

# Vito Oražem and Lela B. Njatin

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### Sentences and Views

**Lela B. Njatin** uses letters, words and sentences, and **Vito Oražem** uses photographs, motifs and light to make mosaics of reading-viewing composites, which in different numbers, from 2 to 5 or 6, compose a visual semantic composition, which is built up by the interaction of the written and the recorded in a signal point, the *Signum Punctum*, as they have titled the exhibition. The duality is transformed, transfigured, evolved into a unity, in which both media discover each other's messaging and, through their own immanent paths, concretize and abstract each other in the singularity of the elemental and the metaphysical, the documentary and the fictional, the external and the internal, but in each case their intimate perception of the bodily-spiritual environments that they either witness or think about.

Lela B. Njatin wrote about their collaboration in the magazine *Sodobnost* (nr. 4/2024) under the title *Trust in the Name of Art* (a memoir on the genesis of a structure): "Both Vito Oražem and I grew up in Kočevje. We were connected by our will to discuss and our love for art. We first discussed art. Then we created something together from time to time. Which continues, even now, when he has lived in Essen for many decades, and I live in Ljubljana. Vito mainly makes photographs. I mostly do literary texts. Perhaps. We don't know that much about each other. We are connected in trust, based on a long-term exchange of ideas. We don't explain a lot of things to each other because of this trust.

When he approached me about combining his photographs and my texts in a joint art project, I didn't hesitate. I just trusted him. I didn't wonder whether our starting points of reflection on art were aligned. His desire to point out that in both photography and text there are semantically undefined parts – signatures that can point us towards the meaning of a work of art – was enough for me. And I had already agreed that we would explore these signatures together and hope to see the meaning of doing so. This exploration then took place spontaneously through the mechanical method of physically juxtaposing photographs and texts. Without any particular discussion, I responded to the photographs he submitted to me with texts that I had written for that very purpose.

After repeating this a few times – it seemed to us that a series had been created – we talked it over and realized that the narrative function of the photographs and texts had been strengthened, even though they retained their autonomy. We found a name for the artistic format we co-created: a composite. (...) At that point we came to the conclusion that there is something directly photographic in the photographic signature, something that eludes the perfect wording of the image, and we presented it as an authorized replica (Weißenborn dixit). By linguistic analogy, we could probably call the literary signature that place in the semantic structure of literature where the literary escapes the perfect wording of the text."

Worded images and depicted words. Letters and sentences, stories and views, wells of thought, springs of light. Pillars of consciousness and containers of memories. Glimpses in the mosaics of our intertwining between the perceivable and the imagined, the meeting point of the ineffable at the center of the story. Narratives. Walks through reality and through the monuments of creation. Through space-time, through the spaces of sensation and existence. Life. Images. Signs. Moments. Transient in the past, timeless in the present. Instant and captured. In the visible and the expressible. In the existing and the moving. In wholeness and unity.

The duality, the duality of observation, the ambiguity and simplicity, the vastness and purity combine text and image, unzip the photograph, open it with buttons and let it loose to capture time in the story, in that infinite space where the horizons converge. In the exhibition, this search for the contact between word and image is the task of the visitor to become a simultaneous spectator, a viewer and a reader, searching for signs, symbols, structures, rationally and associatively deciphering the rebus “theses” and “antitheses” until the cathartic “synthesis”, when in the semantic light of both media the light bulb of knowledge shines, which, when the real world of the artworks is shown, appears in the reflection of the world of each individual as (self-) reflection.

The composites of photographs by Vito Oražem and literature by Lela B. Njatin stimulate and trigger the ability to observe and evaluate our own cognitive, emotional and behavioral processes on the one hand, while on the other hand they also test our commitment and perseverance in exploring the guts of the exhibited works and their mutual internal correspondences and the inherent worlds of both media and creative approaches into common, coherent and consistent stories. The coming together of two forms of expression could also be called visual prose or prose visuality, although the two elements are separate, which seems only at first glance and first thought. If we pass by. It is only when my second, third, fourth, fifth... spark lights up that the stars of their Universe shine through, to which I am not only invited and welcomed, but also a desirable and necessary cosmonaut.

The works on display are composites of photographs by Vito Oražem and words by Lela B. Njatin. In one of their previous exhibitions, which they put on Instagram, they ask: “What does the word contribute to the photograph; what does the photograph contribute to the word.” Through the participation or response of visitors on the platform, they “wanted to find out how communicative is the ‘additional effect’ that is created when we connect a photograph and a textual unit, that is, the additional effect’ of the way in which it exists in the photograph for itself or the textual unit for itself.” With the analogue format, they have “intervened” on the digital environment during the pandemic and have linked the analogue and the digital in their own way, which can be debatable at a time when almost every electrical device is also digital.

Their visual-verbal art is expressively subtle and has multiple meanings: sometimes the words draw the image into a melody, at other times the image draws the words into a rhythm. The reciprocity of the two elements and their interaction with other influences in the space where their works are installed resonates in the audio-visual harmony that we compose with our presence. The duality of the “media” establishes a dialogue, as if by looking and hearing, by thinking and feeling, we find ourselves in real and at the same time parallel worlds, where the text also becomes visual and, together with the photograph, forms its own, intimately perceived meta-meanings, thus turning the confrontation with their works into an individual meditation.

At the same time, the textual part can also be seen as visual, as it contains graphic elements that build on the basic aesthetic with mimicry, concealment and mystery. In the process of intertextuality and interpictureality, the two layers overlap, and just as photographs can have

multiple meanings, it is the same with words. Even if they seem comprehensible, especially when they are written, they do not (as a rule) have only one meaning either, and they can live many lives in different phrases, for which the exhibition expects the viewers/readers to activate the impression, to recognize the clues and to reflect.

As an epilogue, here is Lola’s conclusion from the magazine *Sodobnost*: “[...] I don’t just trust art radically, I trust it absolutely. For I trust that it will not be constitutively involved in the ultimate end of humanity, ex uno ad plures can be summed up as: “I will lie down to rest, full of fire, full of strength, unused ” (Kosovel *dixit*) – O art, you fiery force! – And in the name of art...”

- Peter Tomaž Dobrila

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Lela B. Njatin** is a self-employed interdisciplinary contemporary artist and writer. She holds a PhD and has graduated in philosophy and literary comparative studies. She lives in Ljubljana. In her works she often combines the visual and the literary, but mostly she moves creatively between different artistic media, using approaches and materials outside the traditional parameters.

In 1980 she made her debut as a visual artist in the group exhibition *Desevididasenekidela* at the Fine Arts Salon in Kočevje. In 2013, she held her first solo exhibition *I Didn't Want to See, But I Saw* at the Vžigalica Gallery/MGL, Ljubljana. Her major solo exhibitions are the following: 2015 – *Djevojka sa pištaljkom. Koliko drugih je u meni, koliko mene je u drugima* at the Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb; 2020 – *Anatomy of Home Science* at P74 Gallery, Ljubljana; 2023 – *City Peak. Fixating the Point III* at the Gallery Gallery, Ljubljana. Some of the selected exhibitions are: 2012 – *Life Cycle* (European Capital of Culture Maribor, installed in Murska Sobota); 2016 – *The Nation Will Write Its Own Judgement* (51st Maribor Theatre Festival, Maribor); 2019 – *Here. Once and Today at the Novo Celje Manor* (ZKTŠ Žalec); 2022 – *The Return of the Gaze* (MGML/ Cukrarna, Ljubljana), *Prints and Impressions 2* (MGLC, Ljubljana) and *May Salon: The Blue Line - From Renaissance to New Media* (ZDSLJU, Ljubljana; installation at the KIBLA PORTAL, Maribor); 2023 – *May Salon: Mystery of Gea* (ZDSLJU, Ljubljana; installation at the Zasavje Museum, Trbovlje) and 2023/24 – *Always Available* (Modern Gallery, Ljubljana).

Two documentary films have been made about her visual work: 2014 – *Lightnings in Kočevje* (directed by Rudi Uran), produced by Studio Kramberger Uran, Maribor, and 1983 – *Lines of Force* (directed by Marijan Osole), produced by ŠKUC-FORUM, Ljubljana.

**Vito Oražem** was born in 1959 in Ljubljana, lived in Kočevje until 1978, then studied Media Science, Photography, Literary Theory and Art History in Münster, Kassel and Osnabrück, and holds a M.A. Artium (MA). Since 1972, he has been working with photography, in between with mail-art, experimental film, xerography and holography. Since 1980, he has held lectures and written professional articles on media-immanent aesthetics, and also articles on other artists, e.g. Michael Najjar 2001, Duane Michals 2004, Jochen Gerz 2006, Ilka Lauchstädt 2009, Stanko Oražem 2014, Xu Bing 2020, co-publisher of *Vipecker Raiphan, Revue für Medien-Transformation*