

Nika: Do you read biographies in exhibition catalogues?

Marina: Well, yes, I always read the bio first, then the edition notice, or perhaps the other way around, but that's what I try to get as soon as I get the chance, that's why I like biographies as wall-texts, too!?

Nika: Wall? You do work in a large institution. But why? I usually want to see how old the artist is, to understand the context in which I look at a work... What do you see in a bio?

Marina: Well, I want to know who did it! I'm interested in people, not in objects, I'm interested in works only as an eloquent continuation of a thinking creature, I'm interested in the place where the work attaches to the man.

Nika: That's fine; I'm just wondering how much you can see the man, that thinking creature, from a list of exhibitions. It seems to me that it's a pattern which we do read somehow, but the interesting bits are not actually written. You can see something from the matrix of year of birth, education and where people have exhibited, but it's all some kind of aftertext. I want to know what you see from it, or which element you use to project something of your own into it. Or is it not a projection?

Marina: It's true that reading a bio in a catalogue is often similar to that feeling when you're in an unknown country and trying to figure out what's in some vacuum-pack, and when you fail in it, and you don't understand the language, in the end, there's always the conditioned reflex, and you try to smell it. But you try to figure out what can be figured out through information on offer.

Nika: Like for instance?

Marina: Well, is it a man or a woman, how old they are, where they were born, and even what and where they studied, it's still very interesting to me. Where they live and where they exhibited, I try to find out something from the titles of the exhibitions and the places where they exhibited. Of course, it's interesting to know who they worked with, especially here, where I know the curators, so it tells me something important. It's somehow fun to put together some sort of a puzzle from all those incoherent bits and pieces. There's some purely intellectual pleasure in it, but primary it's about curiosity.

When it comes to complete unknowns from unknown environments, I immediately start with very strong images, what life could be like for the artist who does such and such work, and look where they've exhibited before. I don't know how other people do it?

Nika: Perhaps that's why, sometimes, they let the artist talk about her work, or at least they show the author off at the opening. Is talk (maybe something like this) some sort of further reading instruction?

Marina: Well, it seems to me that there's nothing universal to be said about that. My reading instruction is your desire to talk about it. Some artists speak the most through their inability or lack of will and desire to talk about their work. And that's the most eloquent thing, the one that probably helps the most. There are no rules. This relationship towards their work is part of the work, but often people don't take it into account.

I don't know why, or perhaps I don't want to talk about why that's not respected, because then I would go to some spheres of material-spiritual relations, ha... So, in my mind, it's really not particularly important what we're going to say about it, we only create a road sign through our talk, and that road sign can be more or less beautiful, depending on how good we are in being smart. But beauty isn't really important here ...

Nika: When we only understand the things we already know anyway ☺

Marina: Of course! But sometimes we forget that one can look the other way, too, that could bear some work..

Nika: I always quote Luhman, that communication is only an allocation of surprise within the known. The question is, then, how one can arrive to the known in the first place. Perhaps not in communication? Or in some other communication? Inarticulate?

Marina: Communication would mean here that we exchange something?

Nika: Yes. In principle, I disagree with the theory in which communication is a process in which one side is sending a message while others receive the same message with more or less interference. I think that communication is primarily the setting of the commune. Here, biography seems to me, no matter how discreetly, to be put into the area in the hopes that someone will come along who can share the experience, or at least who is familiar with the experience. A person like that is then capable of seeing where that "surprise" of Luhman's is, which can be interesting as an element of work.

Marina: Yes. And this talk is, I think, just such an institution of a recognisable field where then one could notice that small, surprising move of yours.

The problem is that work is still today read as "object", as a consistent unity, while I feel that 99.9 percent of many good works consists exactly of that well-constructed basis, on which

there is this one little surprise (which we also share with the author as an experience, because otherwise we wouldn't be able to see it)

I'm afraid that this is already hard to understand.

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Marina Viculin

Nika's biography

For several years now, Nika Radić has been dealing with always the same problem of reception of works of art, through different works, or different forms of verbal and non-verbal communication. Reception is, of course, just a special kind of understanding and communicating. By that, I do not mean to say that work of art is exhausted in the idea of emitting a message, but the presence of the recipient is implicit in the very idea of art. In order to speak about a work of art at all, it has to exist in its actual social context.

In the case of Nika's work, that social context, characteristics and abilities of the recipient become, in fact, an inseparable part of the work. I'd go so far as to say that the reception of Nika's work is actually the real work, and what is exhibited in the gallery is merely the stimulant meant to spur that reception. Namely, what is expected and sought reception is much wider, more layered, more complex than visual or auditive, or any other perception of the exhibited; that reception, which is in fact the work itself, demands common experience of the author and the recipient. Nika wonders whether such common experience exists, if there is any overlap in experience, because, if there isn't, what is it that we're doing, anyway?

Of course, there is also the question of how we can talk about reception if experience overcomes what could be reached by our senses in the gallery itself. What is it then that we can or cannot receive? Probably the meaning, the reasons and the qualities of existence. This is about our own abilities to receive them and enjoy them. Nika has been working on the characteristics of language, the ratios of verbal and non-verbal expression we use in communication (Conversation in Nagarrindjeri), she investigated the amount of prejudice and platitudes we use in our judgement without being aware of it (Zi), she investigated the reasons for choosing certain forms of communication completely inappropriate for the objective circumstances which surround us (Party)... trying to trace the ways through which meaning comes to us.

The most general question we can ask would be: How much can we understand, how much can we hear and accept from what someone's telling us? If we claim that we do not understand each other, that could be an honest attempt to exchange experiences, the beginning of communication. But that sounds very rough. People like to believe they are understood, so the claim that we should be aware of the fact that we do not understand each other sounds more like an insult than as the beginning of a beautiful conversation.

Even the expression "I do not understand you" is often used as a hidden insult or an expression of disagreement, a roundabout way to tell someone they're talking nonsense. This is why I always must stress that I really do not wish to express any attitude towards what has been said or done, but am simply asking for further explanation.

Vlado Kristl liked to talk about this key contradiction which the art must bear, because, when good, it's always the destruction of the system, and outside the system, communication is not possible. Thus it turns out that it would be normal, almost desirable, that a good work of art be unintelligible, but, luckily, that is not so.

Something truly new can only be understood on very well-known background. Thus, what makes a good portion of Nika's work is also the constitution of a situation recognisable to everybody. That is what I'm talking about when I want to stress that one of the most important misunderstandings regarding contemporary art is the fact that, regardless of their form, works of art are still read as consistent objects, while it's actually a completely different form of expression.

If we want to show something truly new, truly different, we shall come across almost insurmountable communication problems. An important part of our human nature consists of this fondness of thinking in recognizable patterns. Our thought, no matter how much we fight it, looks and finds recognizable patterns in order to squeeze the new content into them. That is why something new and different is difficult to show, we have no means and no way. We have neither the language nor formation principle for what is truly new, what gets out of the system.

In *Biography*, Nika builds a complex story of multiple places where she lived. Of the divergence between her memory and her mother's memory of what the places looked like, which symbolizes the eternal disconcert between what I think when I write, say, see something and what you are going to read, hear, see. Even when we understand each other very well, the images are moved like Nika's layouts, there is always a grey area of non-

coverage, where one can put a great love or complete disappointment, anger and pain due to trust betrayed.

Nika is trying to detect those points that directed her reception of the world, and wonders in what manner they could be noted. How does one turn those actual pointers into a biography? She extracts and contracts, retouches and adds, all in order to ask the very simple question, can one count on some sort of reception at all?