

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME:

Due to the epidemiological situation, the accompanying program will be carried out virtually.



Exhibition Colophon:

Maruša Štibelj: Chronically Late
28 January–21 March 2021

Ivan Grohar Gallery
Škofja Loka Museum
www.loski-muzej.si

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Maruša Štibelj

**CHRONICALLY
LATE**

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Maruša Štibelj is a visual artist from Kranj who specialises in collage. Apart from this, her artistic interests lie in film, video production, book illustration and literature. She usually presents her artistic complexity through analogue and digital collages as part of multimedia projects, where collage is combined with the written and spoken word, music and animation. She is also the initiator and main curator of the International Festival of Contemporary Collage (KAOS), which has been hosted at the Layer House in Kranj every summer since 2018.

At the Ivan Grohar Gallery, Maruša Štibelj is presented with a series titled *Chronically Late*, which was created between 2018 and 2020. The series consists of twenty-five collages on small and medium format canvases. For the first few collages from this series, the artist received an award presented by an expert panel of judges at the Salon des Beaux Arts Paris in 2018.

The *Chronically Late* series consists of recycled glued images from a wide variety of materials. They are grouped into smaller sets according to different topics, exploring various topical contemporary issues, such as racism, women's emancipation, the moral and economic divide during the pandemic, gender relations and a number of other social anomalies. The artist draws attention to the issues of global warming, the vanishing core values, the increasing inequality between people and disruptions in the labour market. She takes an engaged and artistically provocative stance towards the future of humanity and highlights the thing that sets humans apart from other beings – our ability to imagine, tell and recognise stories. She encourages viewers to reflect on what is truly important and worth engaging in in the cacophony of a world filled with uncertainty. Her collages may not offer any clear answers to global problems, they are, however, able to open our eyes.

Maruša Štibelj first got the inspiration for this concept while leafing through an old German medical book

about eye diseases and disorders. She uses blurred vision as a metaphor for human dullness, insensitivity and ignorance. She finds that “fake” individualism, which is thought of so highly in modern consumer society, often drives people apart and has a devastating effect on empathy. She uses imagery to remind us of our passivity in the face of everyday disasters that could have been prevented, but were not, of the fear present at all levels of society, and of missed opportunities to improve both global and individuals' circumstances. She urges us to take responsibility in the constant pursuit of a balance between responsibility and comfort. In fact, getting comfortable means fighting against guilty conscience.

The concept of Maruša Štibelj's visual language in the *Chronically Late* series is clear and simple and its execution precise and convincing. By gluing and patching together various graphic, photographic, design and painting elements into contentually gripping, yet generally understandable and completed narratives, the artist continuously reveals her intimate state of mind and thoughts, materialised in a way that evokes aesthetic comfort and lucid associations. Visually, she thus presents her state of mind, which encompasses everything from her mood to the structure of her thoughts. She reveals her mental kaleidoscope, covering both cognitive and dream spheres. Her works of art are visually compelling and explore many current issues related to the search for meaning in the chaotic world of the current pandemic, which makes them of interest to different generations of art lovers. The art of Maruša Štibelj, who works in spheres between classical collage and modern visual practices, is characterised by conceptual experimentation, boldness, a sense of drama, wit, compositional and contentual diversity, as well as a signature style.

Although Maruša Štibelj is a contemporary conceptual visual artist, she has retained ties with the European tradition of fantastic painting. The *Chronically Late* series is the result of an original (at times shockingly

direct) creative form, which is conceptually and contentually sometimes perfectly clear, at other times obscurely mysterious, but always formally innovative and information-rich. The artist draws inspiration for her anachronistic forms, textures and structures from nature, the urban environment and its fringes, yet also upgrades and changes the factual layers arising from real representation through imaginative experimental procedures. Her collage making is much like her temperament: bold and impulsive. Her imaginary experiential world is the cornerstone of her ideas and a playground for well-thought-out creativity, which combines spontaneity with technique and is crucial for exploring complex art themes. The artist's main focus is for the most part on figures interlaced with full-fledged movements and relationships. In constructing figurative art, she initially moves away from reality, but later returns to the realistic premise (much like the painter France Mihelič). In Maruša Štibelj's artistic practice, figures constitute the central element of her artistic narrative. In line with “imaginary expressionism“, both pictures and animations reflect her contempt for a morally empty and value-perverted social reality, while calling for a return to a world of values. The development of her artistic creation is characterised by the tension between a visual-tactile experience of the world and a visionary art conceived in a spiritual world. The former is impressive, the latter expressive.

The artist uses a variety of different materials (fabric, crêpe paper, napkins, handkerchiefs etc.) – she tears them up and then glues onto the canvas or attaches them in some other way. Such artistic process allows her to effectively establish the atmosphere of an undefined space, often one that is defined by whiteness with various symbols and structures incorporated in it. By using an appropriate colour scale, which is usually dominated by intense shades, she centres the atmosphere onto individual coats or layers. Her collages are a blend of drawing, design and painting techniques, and the pictures live as an independent organism and a harmonious unit of vari-

ous surface textures, unusual surface contacts and colour contrasts. They show pictorial-tactile landscapes that are inhabited by humans or human-like figures and are full of experiences following one another with varying intensity – from illustrative anecdotal wholes to playful colour layers, unusual shapes and thinned structures.

As part of this exhibition, Maruša Štibelj enhances the conceptual whole with a video that ties individual works together into a whole. The basis, however, is the picture – at once an indicator of an intimate journey into oneself, into unexplained areas of collective consciousness and uncanny visions. The video illustrates a transition, a ritual call – an invocation, the tendency to establish harmony between an individual, society and the all-encompassing universe which can only be reached by going down an indefinite road. For the artist, the video is not merely a series of moving images; it is a uniform and captivating rhythm of feelings, one that connects the reality of her own spiritual space with the real conceptual world, archetypes and magical notions.

Maruša Štibelj uses the motifs, themes and contents from the debris of consumer society and popular culture, translating them into her one-of-a-kind artistic language. A single visual fragment or seemingly insignificant detail can have multiple meanings and dimensions that bring fragments from different contentual contexts into a new conceptual universe. She offers an exciting narrative composed of realistic fragments of objectivity and anthropomorphic figurativism, immersed in an imaginary landscape that may rarely seem idyllic, yet is always convincingly suggestive and mature.

Boštjan Soklič,
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