

Accompanying programme:

Wednesday, 3 May 2023, at 18:00

A guided tour of the exhibition with the artist and the curator



Exhibition Colophon:
Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs: *The Circle or The Sound of One Hand Clapping*

22 March – 14 May 2023
Ivan Grohar Gallery
Škofja Loka Museum

Represented by: Saša Nabergoj
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Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs

22. 3.–14. 5. 2023 THE CIRCLE

Ivan Grohar Gallery

Curator: Boštjan Soklič

OR THE SOUND OF

ONE HAND CLAPPING

The Ivan Grohar Gallery is presenting the work of Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs, a visual communication designer, a prominent member of the Škofja Loka Artists' Association and a recipient of the 2021 Grohar Scholarship. As a freelance culture professional, she has been involved in various projects in the broad field of visible communications over the years. Her work is based on painting and paired with typographic elements. Her favourite expressive technique is watercolour – a technique characterised by vibrant colours, subtle colour overlaps and white gaps. The logos, signage, posters, graphic design, conceptual designs and corporate visual identities created by her are the result of a successful combination of various artistic expressions, which feature the artist's strong signature style visible in the way the final mass-produced product looks like. Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs has particular interest in socially-engaged, sociological topics that specifically deal with man and his relationship to the world. The experience of painting is clearly visible in her design oeuvre. A specific painterly character in the form of sensitive illustrations with an emphasis on colour is one of the fundamental building blocks of her design aesthetics. No matter what she works on, she devotes herself to it fully, thoroughly and analytically focusing on the employed artistic expression and the message it conveys, but never really strays from painting and the way painters think. A special characteristic of her artistic practice is that in the era of digital graphic tools she still swears by drawing by hand, maintaining expressive directness and the irreplaceability of random moments.

The exhibition of works by Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs offers viewers a selection of her most important design projects and campaigns (both completed and ongoing ones) from the fields of complex visual communications, illustrations, ceramics, visual identities and posters.

Although the largest number of exhibited works date back to the so-called coronavirus period, the core of the exhibition is mainly in the display of the "Renaissance" diversity of the artist's oeuvre, her ability to master

different design languages in the context of both verbal and non-verbal messages and the way their meaning is actualised. In terms of the content, the recurrent themes found in the seemingly unrelated projects created for different needs and purposes are all (regardless of the year of creation) related to nature and the projects aimed at sustainable and responsible preservation of ethnological, cultural and environmental values. Being close to the earth, taking care of it and sustainable development are the decisive impulses and ideas that Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs uses to slowly yet steadily build bridges with potential clients, maintain long-term business relationships and actively engage in the projects focused on the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and traditional crafts in terms of sustainable development.

The exhibited works include two classic-format posters (*Braindrain*, *Metamorphosis*), which were created as a commentary on social change: the first of the two is a work for a street gallery campaign on the topic of emigration of educated people, and the second one is as a commentary on the premonition of changes during the coronavirus period, however, it is applied as a broader message of social change. The artist has used an effective colour narration to establish a socially critical reflection on the brain drain and the eternal changeability of the world, which was a topic explored as far back as the times of the Ionian materialists of ancient Greece and many philosophers from the East and West. The mysterious but humorously expressive image of a human figure in the painting titled *Man – Insight*, which invites viewers into the exhibition room from the frontal position, is a visual gag that exposes the absolutism and objectivism of the Western world as opposed to the rest of the planet. This is an enlargement of a digitally edited motif, originally executed in a smaller format in mixed painting techniques, however, it also represents a constitutive part of an older conceptual project titled *Circle*, my means of which the artist has actively returned to the early period of her creation. After more than twenty years, she revisited her undergraduate thesis

titled *Green Thoughts*, for which she received the Student Prešeren Award, and later recreated their redesign in more noticeable, more saturated colours. While redesigning the environmentalism-themed posters, she preserved the original message of the texts, and painted the white surface with strong colours. The Circle series consists of four paintings with a touch of Eastern philosophy (*Water – Pond*, *Earth – Flower* as a reference to the Hvar cactus, which blooms only in spring, *Air – Flight*, and *Man – Insight*). The link between the elements is the lettering/the title – an accentuated Circle in a quasi-circular form, reminiscent of Chinese seals, which further enhances the Zen feeling of the entire work.

The exhibited cube is filled with original ceramics, created in different parts of Slovenia (Liboje, Ljubljana) in collaboration with the company Keramična industrija Liboje and the local potters. The exhibits are an excellent example of the synergy between traditional craft and the knowledge and artistic enhancement (painting added by the artist with the accompanying lucid comments/messages and modelling ceramics by hand before they are fired for the final time), while the designer's efforts were aimed at actualising top-grade traditional ceramics, a revival of pottery, research into technical procedures and product multiplication. The cube in the other exhibition room reveals the design chapter of Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs' portfolio that is dedicated to mostly "environmental" commissions, such as graphic symbols on packaging, conceptual designs, labelling, corporate visual identities, packaging, publications, design products and the like. The exhibited items include a wide array of bags, boxes, stickers etc., i.e. all sorts of packaging products of various companies, which consumers embraced a long time ago and even identified with certain ones (to some extent). These products are accompanied by a poetry collection titled *The House of the Heart* by the painter Silvester Plotajs, who is first and foremost a painter and Nataša's partner, and the packaging for Alpina shoes from 1993, which features graphic design in the form of illustrations.

The works of Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs are connected by the sometimes more, sometimes less pronounced painterly tissue; one that flourished during the coronavirus times, when the artist created the colourful images that are part of a smaller-format set, which fill the walls of the second gallery room like an oriental screen. This is an ongoing, yet-to-be-finished project. As part of a square-shaped wall installation consisting of abstract and figural iconographic fragments, Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs plays freely with a rhythmic layering of different colours, thus revealing a series of humorous fictitious collage creations so to speak and drawing details, which are born associatively one after the other. The painter's kaleidoscopic imagination is enhanced through impressions from nature and all sorts of organic structures, all of which is reflected in these vivacious works of art, where the emotional world is closely intertwined with the rational world. Much like in her works from the design field.

Nataša Šušteršič Plotajs (1968) graduated cum laude from the Department of Visual Communication Design of the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts in 1993 under Professor Radovan Jenko with the environmental project *Green Thoughts* and in theory with the thesis titled *The History of the Environmental Poster* with Dr Stane Bernik as her mentor. Already during the second year of her studies, she won a competition for the logo of the 17th ICSID Congress in Ljubljana. Her undergraduate thesis received the Student Prešeren Award and a special award for student work from the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA) in 1994. Later that same year, she embarked on a freelance career path, acquiring the status of a self-employed culture professional. Over the past thirty years, she has worked on various design projects, including several socially engaged campaigns, and has been actively involved in the development of the design profession and the integration of related fields. She is an Associate Professor and lecturer at the Faculty of Design. She lives and works in Ljubljana and Škofja Loka, where she grew up.