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Svetlana Racanović

The Glimmering Sensitivity of a Private Cosmos

Irena Lagator's installation *Living Room* is presented in two interconnected gallery rooms. In one spacious, open room floats a corridor of gold and silver tassels hanging from the ceiling. The silver threads make up the walls of the corridor, almost reaching the floor. The gold threads, however, are truncated higher above the floor, creating a passageway between the two silver walls. The smaller, isolated room has a low ceiling and is unlit, offering the illusion of a star-lit sky above.

The main ingredient of the first room's floaty, sparkly passageway, the twinkling curtain of silver and golden rain, is made of ordinary silver and gold-colored yarn – an “unconsecrated”, “un-artistic”, profane substance. However, this material is on the edge of the visible, on the periphery of the tactile and on the border of the physical. Its weight, in fact, radiates lightness. This lightness of material, the easy radiation of each thread, induces here the glimmering sensitivity of the entire installation. This, in turn, sensualises the space of the gallery. The density of this “embroidery” created by the multitude of hanging threads, surprisingly does not increase the sense of substantiality of the passage as a whole. Paradoxically, the multiplicity of threads creates a sense of diminution: each thread reduces the weight of the others, and as a multitude they bring to life their meta-sensual existence. This vibrant creation, therefore, seems to be on the threshold between appearing and disappearing. The passageway at the edge of the material seems to oscillate between an object and a painting, belonging equally to both media. Like a holographic image that lends itself to materialization, this piece appears as a projection in space creating the illusion of a new *space within space*, offering an interior in which one is able to move.

This floating construction at the edge of the visible seems to sway and quiver on the cusp of becoming and disappearing. It is not intended only to be seen; it does not engage only the “pure” view, the sense that keeps distance, in front of which the piece remains physically *intact*. This consecrated space is intended for the body; it was formed to allow the visitor to move with hands outstretched, to attempt direct contact, to touch the very

immaterial body of the installation. Therefore, instead of walking “around” this gold and silver passageway, we step *into* it – but not to reach out and offer relief and fulfillment to our tactile urges. The possibility of making sensory, tactile contact with the piece is offered from within it. Lagator’s installation internalizes us, contains us, and subsumes us purely, directly and entirely. It heightens as well our awareness that we can, easily and without constraints, make that contact, experience it directly, all via fine seduction and *suspension of disbelief*. With little initiation, the experience finally makes us choose sweet self-restraint. The viewer becomes a witness and the subject of a rare and precious experience. By abandoning ourselves to the installation, by approaching it with a *light step*, coming closer to it without effort of moving through the space or pondering what we are getting ourselves into, we touch it only with our visual senses; a *gaze that is more than looking, and an astral touch that is less than physical contact*. We wish for the touch, but the greater pleasure is in deciding not to fulfill that desire, not to disturb the fluttering rhythm of those *lightly raining* threads. These threads do not *pierce* the space offered by Lagator but rather slide down the *curves* of the space through which one can touch the Emptiness. The lack of tactility, the voluntary *blessed self-denial* from touching seems to add to the dual nature of the piece, its intimate, *visible* immateriality and its *sensual* non-tactile quality.

The fact that the urge to touch is “unrequited” triggers a lasting desire, a longing that finally introduces us to an experience of a higher order. That is our precious “new” power, a rare sense of the harnessing of *multiple sensations* that leaves us overwhelmed in gentle, *slowly advancing* waves of flickering tranquility and sober calm. That is how this piece “touches” us: like dew settling on skin, we sense it without seeing or overtly feeling, and it leaves traces of quietude on our being.

This installation’s glittering passageway was not designed specifically for the dimensions and conditions, the *physicality*, of this particular gallery space. On the other hand, it does not occupy a “random”, autistic, self-sufficient area; indeed, it is supple, flexible, willing to *flow* and to change and shift. It can be constructed in varying situations where it will consistently be, following a multiplicity of patterns, somehow *different*: offering a protected, secluded space but one that gives new actualization, energy or subjectivity to the area to which it momentarily belongs. The very title of the work *Living Room* implies its *utility*, the possibility of routine occupation of this newly created space. However, that designation also leads us to believe that this is a live or re-animated entity that breathes, pulsates and changes and that is the *daily* environment of our happy, transitory experiences, the times when we challenge ourselves and the environment in which we find ourselves.

The light at the beginning (or, conversely, the end) of the gold and silver “tunnel” does not symbolically demarcate the space. This light neither represents transcendental illumination nor is it the mediator or trigger of certain primal experiences, an omen of some supernal event. The light is not there in order to define the direction or quality of the passage; it works in both directions simultaneously, when faced by the viewer and when the viewer turns around and walks toward the shadows. The light facing us and the light in our background are there to twice remold the threads and create the silver and

gold rain. This swelling sparkly passage, come to life, shows its two faces and reveals itself sensitive, receptive, capable of change under the targeted lighting that weakens at the end of the passage. This phenomenon also offers the possibility of changing one's sense of space and the sense of oneself in relation to our surroundings and opens opportunities for multiple, varied experiences.

In the registry of the visible, the silver threads are long, almost touching the floor, while the cropped golden threads create a new, "textured" ceiling to this floating corridor. Moreover, we are overwhelmed by the illusion that the gold expands and spreads out in "more intense registers", higher and wider. The very limit of the ceiling appears permeable. It seems to be disintegrating, decomposing, and inducing in us the feeling that we are witnessing the appearance in the zone of the visible of just one small part of multidimensional space, an expanse to us incomprehensible. But this space can sometimes become temporarily *habitable* and, to us exclusively, attainable. This piece works as a kind of *camera lucida* that has the power to translate and *reproduce* matter outside the visible into something objectified, tangible and *representative*. Thus are opened two views, making it possible to become aware of and to see the parallel existence of two worlds in their fortuitous overlapping.

Near the installation's main room offering the sparkly passage that "breathes" as it exists, there is the small unlit room featuring an image of a star-filled sky (*Near Universe*). The isolated space of this dark room initially appears swathed in impenetrable darkness, closed in by obscurity. When we first enter it, there is an expectation that at any instant we might bump into a wall or find otherwise that we cannot move any further. There is also the sense that the incapacity of not being able to explore visibly will inevitably segue into the discomfort of facing our own fears, the only tangibles in this space. However, by offering the illusion of a starry sky and by that vivid, piercing of darkness, the space suddenly opens up and expands. Its real, physical limits, as well as our awareness of the limits of our gaze when scanning the sky on a clear, starry night, work as assurance and as an exciting notion. And in addition provides a gratifying sense that there is something *beyond* and *further*. Like a megalith, to evoke the Clarke-Kubrick brilliant crystal, "The thing's hollow – it goes on forever – and – oh my God! – *it's full of stars!*"

Despite the limitations of our senses – or independently of them – and our innate desire to reach out, to grab, we feel, we sense and suddenly become aware that there is endlessness around us and also *for* us. This being *close to the stars*, the psychic closeness to the infinity of starry ceiling, creates the illusion that the stars appear to be moving farther away and extending infinitely. We are then overwhelmed by the enlightening feeling of "swelling", a quiet but liberating growth of our own being in the space of a "private night sky". This becomes a personal planetarium that expands to take us beyond our own borders towards a discreet, smooth crossing, a small leap into the *other*. It is as though we find ourselves in a unique *camera obscura*, a dark and magical box in which each star is a small opening into the infinity of space and light. The light is sufficient to enable us to project our own image and idea of the self somewhere outside of the dimensions of space and time. And we can retrieve these *from somewhere* with an image

of what we are, making us aware, for a moment and purely, of ourselves in the here and now. This limitless firmament therefore illustrates that *exchange* is possible.

By a auspicious inversion, this simulation of an endless expansion of star-studded sky and cosmos occurs in the smaller, isolated gallery of this installation, which is a space “aside” where we *leave ourselves*. The more spacious, open, *public* gallery offers paradoxical intimacy. This Lagator installation creates an almost den-like environment intended for individual, private occupation, a consecrated space where we *enter into ourselves*. There is a certain balance here, a common measurement of what is close and what is distant, what is visible to the “naked eye” and what is reserved for the inner eye alone, for making the cosmos intimate and making the endless and intangible visual and graspable, obvious and present. This is analogous to the “snow” that can cloud a TV screen and is said to be an amalgamation of radiation originating at the time of the Big Bang and traveling to us over the space of ten billion years.