

Exhibition: **Blurred Landscapes**, by Irena Lagator Pejović
Curated by **Karolina Majewska-Güde**

The research exhibition **Blurred Landscapes** examines the affective heritage and possible futures of the utopia of peaceful coexistence championed by the Non-Aligned Movement and materialized, among others in a collection of the former Art Gallery of the Non-Aligned Countries "Josip Broz Tito". It activates the idea of symbiotic living through the conceptual and performative engagement with the art collection of the non-aligned countries. The exhibition offers the embodied view of the NAM legacy and its decolonial practices, and its expansion through artistic engagement with objects, ideas, broken developments and the surrounding nature of the mentioned collection. The exhibition consists of two parts, an intervention on the pathway in the park and three artworks in the space of the Foundation.

NAM was initiated by Yugoslavia in 1961 as an alternative political alliance between countries of the Global South that refused to take sides in the Cold War conflict. Solidarity between the non-aligned countries concerned mainly political and economic exchanges. But NAM was also a cultural project that enabled a circulation of objects and an exchange of and between artists and cultural workers in the Global South. The material aspect of this collaboration and exchange provided an opportunity to access different cultures without alienating and hierarchizing them. The collection of the former gallery founded in Podgorica in 1984 preserves the materiality of this political project of the non-aligned, functioning as an embodiment of horizontal, non-hierarchical culture of collecting based often on the practice of donation and gift. It is also a place of aligned connections between different modernisms and modernities. The collection was a part of the daily life of Titograd's (present day Podgorica) citizens, until the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In 1995 it was integrated into Center for Contemporary Arts of Montenegro.

In her video installation **Blurred Landscapes**, Irena Lagator focuses on activating the legacy of art collection of the non-aligned countries from her personal embodied perspective. The artist proposes reimagining it through the practice of blurring, resisting both a nostalgic and historical perspectives. Lagator works with the Jacques Merleau-Ponty's concept of lived distance which creates an optimal tension between the inner horizon and the outer horizon of the thing. Losing that distance means losing the ability to perceive. A blurriness is also a figuration that the artist uses to speak both of approaching the collection from a certain distance and of articulating its organizing principle i.e. a blurring of categories imposed by the Western gaze on material culture (good art, high art, ethnographic objects, non-art, decorative objects, etc.). It is also a critical device of expanding the collection outward, as blurring the boundaries also means connecting and intertwining.

In a series of small, intimate paintings **Shared Air** Lagator creates poetic landscapes constructed through a repetition of chemical symbol of carbon (C) combining different models of representation of the natural world. In the series of drawings **...there is already a feeling of a flow** and in the process-oriented work **Symbiotic Collection**, the artist highlights a taxonomy of the art collection of the non-aligned countries and expands it by incorporating names of living organisms, trees and plants from the park surrounding the gallery. Through this radical gesture the artist draws our attention to the materiality of the collected objects and reconnects them conceptually and performatively with the natural environment. The **Symbiotic Collection** aims at collectively placing and marking the names of the plants from the park and objects from the mentioned collection together on the concrete walkway. This work will be carried out in a collaboration with diverse local audiences during three workshops organized in spring (Karolina Majewska-Güde, Toni Hildebrandt), summer (Anđelka Badnjar Gojnić) and autumn (Bojana Piškur) in the Kruševac park as well as in cooperation with the Laboratory - art collection of the non-aligned countries. Together with the artist, the participants will learn, unlearn, perform and reimagine potential futures of the art collection of the non-aligned countries heritage.

Irena Lagator Pejović - Artistic Statements

“The video installation **Blurred Landscapes** was filmed during my visit to the *Southern Constellations* exhibition in MSUM in Ljubljana, curated by art historian Bojana Piškur, in 2019. Five artworks from the art collection of the non-aligned countries from the former „Josip Broz Tito” gallery in former Titograd, were included in that exhibition. This installation derives from a study of the part of the collection at the exhibition in Ljubljana.

1995 was a year in which I started my art studies, and the last year when the art collection of the non-aligned countries was still open to the public in its entirety. It was also a year in which the institution changed its name into Center for Contemporary Arts after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Seeing the artworks again in Ljubljana initiated a chain of questions about the artistic, cultural as well as political relevance of the mentioned collection for our present time.

Blurring as a process can be viewed as indistinguishability of things, but also as a way of creating oneness - connecting and bonding between heterogeneous elements and thus understanding them more directly and experientially. Approaching the landscapes with a lens while not zooming in produces a blurred scene just like in a foggy moment when we don't know what is going on. Not using the lens possibilities but a body, by stepping closer, is an act of connecting rather than describing. “

“Several sculptures which were made during artistic residencies at the Josip Broz Tito Gallery in the 1980s are on the permanent display in the surrounding park. I felt the urgency to look into potentials and poetics of that site. If we regard the sculptures of the mentioned collection and the plants as a content of the park, then we can't ignore the relations and potentialities that they mutually and in conjunction produce.

Symbiotic Collection questions the possibility of reinventing the art collection of the non-aligned countries. My research also focused on the processes of symbiotic living between the plants in the park in order to unveil different potentials of coexistence and their ability to adapt to living conditions. I engaged in the process of finding, counting, measuring and listing the names of all the varieties of plants that are currently present in the park – the dendroflora – with an intention to draw attention of the audience toward the importance of the bare facts that are present in our immediate vicinity. By intertwining and combining them with the names of artists, titles and dimensions of the artworks from the mentioned collection (composed of the available public documentation and through my research and collaboration with librarians from the National Library of Montenegro), I compose a labelling list to visualize, imagine and invent the new models of togetherness and interconnectedness.

Indexing what still exists in both collections, in the institution and in the park, and merging this data into a free and new textual form that is produced over several months in the park, is an effort at indicating the possible vocabularies for a more inclusive future for all. “

Exhibition dates: **24.03. – 10.05.2022.**

Dates of the intervention in the park: **24.03.2022. until the colour disappears**

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