

Dalibor Bača at the Gallery of Modern Art in Hradec Králové

Dalibor Bača *Za kulisou / Behind the Scenes*

12/05/20 – 31/03/21

Curator Rado Ištok

Artist Dalibor Bača's intervention *Za kulisou / Behind the Scenes* consists of physical architecture, a chamber which is sunk into the entry hall, and the artist's own performance within that chamber. Over the course of 9 months, the artist will spend three week-long stays within the dark and soundproof space he created. The chamber is fit only with a bed and bathroom and he will have no access to food, news from the outside world, or human contact of any sort, including media and social networks. The artist will present his experiences, and possible epiphanies, at GMU in the beginning of 2021.

The title *Za kulisou / Behind the Scenes* refers to the way in which the overload of information from the media leaves us disinformed because of how media outlets knowingly twist reality, creating a screen which hides the truth. The artist's fast from media, endured in silence and darkness, is, therefore, a tool which allows the artist to look behind the scenes of our quotidian media overload, thus achieving the calm and holism appropriate for mysticism in the broader sense: One of the artist's sources of inspiration are neuro-psychological studies of consciousness. One may also perceive the Art-Nouveau building and the interior of the gallery, a former bank, as part of the set.

With its minimalist architecture, interest in the limits of the body and altered states of consciousness, combined with Eastern philosophy, psychedelics, and anti-psychiatry, Dalibor Bača's work draws inspiration from the art movements of the 60s and 70s. He is also in dialogue with the timeless tradition of hermitry and seclusion with the goal of spiritual cleansing and contemplation, which has a long history in Eastern Bohemia, especially in the Broumov region and the unique Baroque space of nearby Kuks. *Za kulisou / Behind the Scenes* is also, however, a free continuation of the artist's examination of human consciousness and personal experience in the time of many crises which point to the unsustainability of today's society. These unexpected turns are often felt by artists and artistic institutions the first. Given the current situation, it is impossible to turn a blind eye to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the precautions preventing its spread, on our entire society. Despite the parallels between the artist's stays within his chamber and today's isolation measures and quarantine, the artwork has a different set of inspirations.

The two situations, that is, the artist's isolation in the chamber and the nation's quarantine, are different in fundamental ways: The artist undergoes isolation willingly, in answer to an inner calling, and deliberately, after long-term physical and mental preparation. For many of us, the current isolation is merely a state we have been forced into without warning and which poses quite some stress, caused by fear and uncertainty, often resulting in panic. On the other hand, one of the recommendations of psychologists for life in isolation or in quarantine is limiting media consumption, which is to say consuming less information, and that resonates with the core of *Za kulisou / Behind the Scenes*.

The installation presented by Dalibor Bača at the Gallery of Modern Art consists of covering the windows of the gallery with photographic prints of the actual views from these windows. This intervention is easy to miss, not only because it is illusionary by nature but also because it doesn't offer the baroque or surrealist illusion of opening into a (media) landscape or fantastical architecture but, rather, is a „mere“ illusory representation of an actual view from a window. Like every illusion - even an illusion representing reality - it only works from certain angles. And, as with every illusion, our eyes are, in fact, the ones to fool us, and our mind to co-create, the illusion at hand, through reason, that is, by taking it to be reality. From the street, one sees only the white of the back side of the photographic prints, which resembles the way windows are covered for the purpose of exhibitions and therefore also has the air of the ordinary rather than that of a creative gesture.

Thanks to the photographic prints, the gallery windows, which usually form a transparent dividing line between the gallery (as both a building and an institution), and the rest of the world, become imaginary projection screens which harken back to the original idea of media, but also become metaphysical theater sets concealing reality. Only the ventilation system passes through them. Therefore, the world “beyond the scenes” is not accessible through the windows but only through a meditative stay in the adjacent chamber which, though closed in on itself within the gallery, is the only space which allows one to peer “behind the scenes.”

Dalibor Bača (*1973, Bratislava) lives and works in Prague and Bratislava. He belongs to a generation of contemporary artists with a classical training as a sculptor combined with a critical view of the role and form of the monument within public space. He was a co-founder of the Slovak group *Veřejný podstavec / Public Pedestal*, which lobbied for the use of pedestals left over from removed monuments for the presentation of contemporary art. Bača also temporarily placed a bust, *Doc. JUDr. Robert Fico, CSc.* (2010), in front of the House of Trade Unions in Bratislava. He gained broader public attention for his socially-engaged work *CZ_SK_HU_D_PL* (2014) in the shape of a flag at the exhibition *Privátní nacionalismus / Private Nationalism* in Prague and Košice. The piece was characteristic of the artist's inquiry into the meanings of national symbols. Lately, Bača has been focusing more on abstract, process-oriented, though no less political, projects, like his monumental installation *Definitivně nedokončené / Definitively Unfinished* (2018) in the New Synagogue in Žilina. The crumbling towers made of glass panes connected with melted asphalt are a metaphor for the unsustainability of society in a time of environmental crisis. His installation for GMU is a free continuation of his exploration of human consciousness in the context of the end of humanity.

Rado Ištók is a curator, editor, and art historian. He curates the 4Cs program: From Conflict to Coexistence through Creativity and Culture in the art colony in Nida, Latvia, and heads the research project *Spaces of Care, Disobedience and Longing* at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, Sweden. His recent exhibitions include *Černý Atlas* and *Tekuté obzory* in Bratislava and *Jiné vize* at the animated film festival in Olomouc. He is a contributor to *Art Antiques*, *Flash Art* (Czech and Slovak editions) and to *artalk.cz*.

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