























1

Vstopili ste s svetle in hrupne ulice mesta, iz vrveža vsakdana, v tiho, čisto, temačno izolacijo umetnostnega prostora. Dobrodošli. Zapustite svoje profane, vsakdanje skrbi za sabo in dovolite, da vas izkušnja tega prostora preobrazí. Tako kot sicer. Začutite tisto nenavadno vznemirjenje. Podajate se po zarisani poti, tiho se premikate po prostoru. Prejehate med in pred stene, kjer vas sicer pričakajo podobe, ki jih spoštljivo gledate. V galeriji ne govorimo veliko: smo nagovorjeni, da se obrnemo navznoter, v občutje ali razmislek o doživetem. Verjamemo v to, kar vidimo, sicer ne bi niti vstopali. Razstava je vaš ritual in umetnost vaša vera.

Kot vsak drug ritual, vas obisk te razstave povzdigne. Povzdigne vašega duha nad nepregledno morje vsakdanjega, kjer se utapljam v nujnih, rutinskih opravilih in o njihovem smislu pretirano ne preiščujemo. Tukaj se bomo dvignili nad gladino nujnega. Tu smo, da razumemo, se približujemo resničnem spoznavanju sveta in s tem samih sebe. Vsak korak, narejen po teh institucionalnih prostorih, ki vsebujejo odgovore na skrivnosti sveta, vas bolj približa vam samim. Vsak žejen pogled v objube umetnosti je korak bližje k smislu. Tukaj ste varni pred banalnostjo vsakdana in ulice, ki ste jo malo prej zapustili.

Vstopili ste v zakladnico vednosti. Tukaj vas radi poučimo o svetu in bivanju. Ekologija, politika, kultura, družba: vse je tu.

2

Prepustili ste se, da vas razstava vodi, da vam odkriva neznano, razblinja predsodke, razkriva resnico. Vsak vaš korak po tej razstavi je korak bližje k resnici. Na tej točki se vam ta že razbira. Zdaj ste že na pol poti, njeno sijočo, temo razblinjajočo luč že nazirate. Pojdite proti njej. Sapere Aude. Upajte si vedeti. Vsako razumljeno delo, vsako prebrano ali slišano besedilo naredi luč na koncu poti bolj močno, bolj otipljivo. Vemo, da vam ni lahko. Razumemo vas. Težko se je prebijati skozi te prostore, naseljene z dražljaji in informacijami vseh vrst. Zdi se, da od vas preveč zahtevamo. Vas izigravamo. Prepričujemo vas z vsemi sredstvi in od vas velevamo razumevanje in celo angažma. Ko se le spomnite nepregledne množice informacij o tem in onem, ki ste jih skozi leta dobili v tem prostoru... A vendarle vztrajate, vedno znova se vračate. Zakaj? Morda zato, ker verjamete?

3

Ali pa se vračate zato, ker uživate v tem trpljenju? Tej odgovornosti, teh nalogah? Zdaj smo že čisto blizu luči. Nikar naj vas ne skrbi, ne

bomo razkrili vaše skrivnosti. Vemo, da uživate v občutku nezadostnosti ob vseh teh nalogah, ki jih v galeriji vsakokrat postavljamo pred vas. Vemo, kako zelo všeč vam je ta komplicirana in ritualizirana pot skozi galerijo. Niste edini. Ni vam do potešitve, uživate v tej lakoti in obljudi njene potešitve. Njeni odgovori. Razumemo vas. Všeč so vam tudi občutki frustracije, neprosojnosti, beganja, ki vam jih tukaj redno postrežemo. Po to uživanje prihajate sem. Tudi danes ste prehodili dolgo pot po galeriji in spet... nobenega zadoščenja, vedno ga prestavljamo iz ene točke v drugo. Ampak vztrajajte še malce z nami. Vemo, da boste.

Prehodili ste celo pot in ste neposredno pred koncem, zaključnim poglavjem. Luč zdaj že močno sveti. Opravili ste pot, očiščeni ste predsodkov, navdani ste z vednostjo in vaša vera je na višku. Razsvetljenje je za vokalom. Potrebne so samo še poslednje priprave. Katere? Že veste. Opustiti morate še zadnje ostanke dvoma, ki vam majajo zaupanje v nas, v institucijo. Edino tukaj in prek nas je možen dostop do tistega, kar iščete. Mi vam zagotavljamo, da ste na pravi in resnični poti. Mi smo vaše najboljše upanje, da je cilj pred vami. Ostalo je metafizika. Vemo, da ste na tej točki že neučakani, zato le vstopite, zaslužili ste si. Pred vami je...

Spoštovane obiskovalke, spoštovani obiskovalci, prosimo vas, da se skozi temo pomikate proti svetlobi.

Spoštovane obiskovalke, spoštovani obiskovalci, sledite glasovom, ki vas bodo vodili do razsvetljenega prostora.

Spoštovane obiskovalke, spoštovani obiskovalci, poslušajte glasove, smisel bo prišel sam od sebe.

Spoštovane obiskovalke, spoštovani obiskovalci, prosimo vas, da se ne zadržujete v temi. Sledite glasu, ki vas bo vodil do svetlobe.

1

You have stepped from a bright and noisy city street, from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, into the quiet, clean, dark isolation of an artistic space. Welcome. Leave your profane and quotidian worries behind you and allow your experience of this space to transform you. As it certainly will. Feel the unusual excitement. Venture onto the indicated path. Quietly move through the space. Pass between and in front of the walls where images await you. Look at them with respect. You should not speak very much in the gallery: you are compelled to turn inward, into sensation and reflection on your experience. Believe in what you see; otherwise there is no point. The exhibition is your ritual and art your faith.

Like every other ritual, your visit to the exhibition is a form of elevation. Elevation of your spirit above the vast sea of the everyday where you drown in necessary, routine tasks, never reflecting on their exaggerated significance. Here you will rise above the necessary. Here, let us be clear, you will approach a true understanding of the world and of yourself. Each step through this institutional space contains answers to the mysteries of the world and brings you closer to yourself. Each thirsty gaze into the promises made by art is a step closer to meaning. Here you are safe from the banality of the everyday and the street that you left only moments ago.

You have entered a treasure chest of knowledge. Here you will learn about the world and existence. Ecology, politics, culture, society: everything is here.

2

Now you have surrendered to the exhibition, and it has led you to the discovery of the unknown, the disappearance of prejudice, the revelation of truth. Each step you take through this space is a step closer to truth. At this point, you are beginning to understand. You are already half way there. You can already discern the shining light that will banish the darkness. Go toward it. Sapere aude. Dare to know. Each understood work, each read or heard text makes the light at the end of the path stronger, more palpable. We know it is not easy. We understand you. It is difficult to go through this space filled with stimulation and information of all kinds. It seems as if we are asking too much of you. That we are tricking you. That we are persuading you with all possible means and demanding your complete understanding, your total engagement. When you remember the inconceivably vast quantity of information about all sorts of things that you acquired in this space over the years... But nevertheless, you persist, returning again and again. Why? Perhaps because you believe?

3

Or do you return because you enjoy this torment? These responsibilities, these tasks? Now you are very close to the light. Don't worry about anything. Your secret will not be revealed. We know that you enjoy the feeling of inadequacy when faced with all the tasks that are presented to you each time you enter this gallery. We know how much you like this complicated and ritualized path through the gallery. You are not the only one. It is not satisfaction that you want. You enjoy the hunger and the promise of being sated. But you have given up on it. We understand you. You like the feelings of frustration, non-transparency, confusion which we regularly serve you. You come here for this enjoyment. Even today you have walked the long path through this gallery and again... no satisfaction. We always move the possibility of satisfaction from one point to the next. But persist a little longer with us. We know you will.

You walked the whole path and you are nearly at the end, the last chapter. Now the light is shining brightly. You have completed the path, you are cleansed of your prejudices, you are filled with knowledge, and your faith is at its peak. Illumination is just around the corner. Only the final preparations are needed. But what kind of preparations? You already know. You have to abandon your last shreds of doubts that make your belief in us, in the institution, waver. Only here and through us is it possible to gain access to what you seek. We guarantee that you are on the right and true path. We are your best hope of achieving the goal that stands before you. The rest is all metaphysics. We know that you are already impatient. So just come. You deserve it. Just around the next corner, waiting for you, there is...

Dear visitors, we invite you to move through the darkness toward the light.

Dear visitors, follow the voice that will guide you to the illuminated space.

Dear visitors, listen to the voice and meaning will emerge on its own.

Dear visitors, we urge you not to remain in the darkness but to follow the voice that leads you to the light.

Viktor Bernik: The End (to ni tematska razstava)

TEMA

»Tema«, osrednja ideja, koncept, fenomen, je dandanes ne samo izhodišče, ampak celo osrednji povod za razstavo. Razstave sodobne umetnosti, od najmanjših galerijskih prostorov do kolosalnih bienalov, sledijo izbranim temam, bolj ali manj kompleksnemu predmetu, ki nam z izborom, postavitvijo in obravnavo del ponuja določeno branje. Določeno branje sveta. Razstave v sodobni paradigmi imajo torej določeno pretenzijo raziskave, poglobljenega premisleka in premevanja fenomenov predvsem sodobnega sveta in družbe, kateri skozi umetniški razmislek ponujajo ogledalo ali celo alternativne odgovore. Tokrat ne. V režiji Viktorja Bernika, na razstavi s pomenljivim naslovom The End (to ni tematska razstava), namesto sledenja temi dobesedno tavamo v temi. Na strukturnem mestu, kjer se v programu Mestne galerije Nova Gorica sicer nahaja tema, tokrat nastopi tema. Vendar to, k čemur stremi ta intervencija, nikakor ni kritika tematske razstave, je prej razgradnja njene konstrukcije s ciljem ogolitve določene izkušnje. Ta tekst ji bo sledil v naslednjih štirih točkah.

TEKST

Fenomenologija tematske razstave, naš trajektorij kot gledalcev, skozi katerega poteka branje določene teme, je kompleksna reč, ki je vsaj toliko odvisna od gledanja podob, statičnih ali gibljivih, momentov participacije in poslušanja kot od neposrednega branja. Čeprav lahko tematsko razstavo v prenesenem pomenu razumemo kot tekst, je ta v resnici v veliki meri odvisna od neposrednega, dobesednega teksta. Čeprav se dela v svoji postavitvi lahko sestavijo v svojevrsten »tekst«, je dobesedni tekst hkrati garant integritete takšne razstave. Neodvisno od uspešnosti našega povezovanja zbranih del v smiselno celoto je tukaj vedno tekst, uvodno besedilo, ki nam radodarno predstavi svet, v katerega vstopamo, spremna beseda ob posameznih delih, ki nas vodijo po razstavi, včasih tudi razlage posameznih »podpoglavij«. Tekst deluje kot prvo in zadnje pribežališče tematske razstave in marsikaterega izmed njenih obiskovalcev.

Kaj pa dela? Za tematsko razstavo je ključna konfliktna dinamika med deli in tekstom. Nikakor ne gre samo za tekstualnost velikega deleža umetniških projektov, ki sestavljajo tematske razstave: relacije med deli in tistim, kar le-ta potrebujejo za smotrno umeščanje v univerzum sleherne tematske razstave, so usodnega pomena za njen »uspeh«. Tematska razstava je svojevrstna trditev, bolj ali manj odprta, ki za svoje dokazovanje potrebuje dela kot svoje gradbenike, svojevrstne argumente. Dela vsekakor pomembno prispevajo k celovitosti in prepričljivosti teme kot teze, vendar se pri tem pogosto kompromitira njihova izvorna integriteta. Dela, ki so izbrana za

skupinske tematske razstave, prihajajo v nov, pogosto preddoločen kontekst, ki je velikokrat le delno komplementaren njihovemu izvornemu namenu ali celo pomenu. Po drugi strani so tu dela, naročena prav za tovrstne razstave, ki jih je čedalje več – institucije in bienali zmeraj bolj naročajo dela za svoje kontekste. Vendar ta še bolj dokazujejo isto: da je tema kot osrednja misel, teza ali problemski sklop uravnalna načelo branja del, njen najbolj neposreden zastopnik na razstavi je tekst.

PROSTOR

Ta koreografija skupinske tematske razstave se umešča v prostor sodobne institucije za umetnost, ki je po tipologiji tisto, kar je sodobna paradigma podedovala od prejšnje – bela kocka. (Sodobna) tematska razstava ima torej paradokсно nalogo, da v prostor, ki je tendenciozno izpraznjen vsebine, »ideologij«, konteksta, slehernih posebnosti in idiosinkrazij, torej izpraznjen od sveta, ponovno vnese svet. To, kar modernizem izprazni, da bi se lahko zgodila umetnost, sodobna paradigma pusti prazno, da bi ga lahko napolnila s svojo različico sveta. Podobno kot modernizem pred njo se sodobna umetnost, vsaj v veliki večini primerov, odloči zanemariti, kar ostane potem, ko prostor izpraznimo. Neoporečno belo notranjost, ki jo je modernizem potreboval kot garanta avtonomije umetnosti, sodobna umetnost razglasi za iluzijo avtonomije in pokaže na njene globoke ideološke premise. Hkrati pa se sama obnaša, kot da so po tej racionalizaciji dinamike umetnostnega prostora njene podtalne silnice preprosto izginile. Pravzaprav se zdi, da sodobna umetnost enostavno ponovi gesto moderne v odnosu do umetnostnega prostora: tam, kjer je modernizem prostor iz meščanskega salona spremenil v belo kocko in ga razglasil osvobojenega, sodobna umetnost opomni na nevidne predpostavke te beline in se obnaša, kot da jih je s to racionalizacijo izbrisala ali vsaj nevtalzirala.

Vendar vse prej kot to. Umetnostni prostor – muzej, galerija, razstavišče – ohranja sebi lastno produktivnost tudi po svoji demistifikaciji. Umetnostni prostor je presečišče silnic, od tistih ideoloških, institucionalnih, tradicionalnih do družbenih, psiholoških, ki imajo kljub svoji nevidnosti kar realne učinke. V tem je posebna zmožnost umetnostnega prostora, da tudi sam po sebi, brez ali celo kljub vanj vnesenim vsebinam, proizvaja učinek, izkušnjo. Pri tem razmišljanju sploh ne gre za poskus ponovne mistifikacije umetnostne izkušnje, temveč za usmerjanje pozornosti na tisto »čarovnico«, ki ima vse prej kot čarobne temelje.

GLAS

Tej fenomenologiji umetnostnega prostora sledi intervencija Viktorja Bernika za naslovom The End (to ni tematska razstava). Že tako nezainteresiranemu obiskovalcu je takoj jasno, da nekaj – pravzaprav marsikaj – umanjka,

predvsem neka »pozitivna« vsebina. To, kar nastopi namesto njene pozitivne vsebine, umetnikovega opusa, aktualnih tem, družbenih problemov ali kulturnih fenomenov, je sam mehanizem grajenja razstav in predvsem logika njihovega uživanja. Vstopamo v galerijski prostor, ki nas kljub pričakovanjem preseneti z neko odpovedjo uživanja, verigo prestavljanja zadostitve, ki si jo kot ljubitelji umetnosti obetamo v centralnem prostoru Mestne galerije Nova Gorica. Ta nas pričaka s temo, negacijo izkušnje videnja, ki je prestavljena na nek konec obiskovalčeve poti, v tisto, kar sicer deluje kot njeno zamolčano materialno jedro – skladišče. Prostor, ki ga ne vidimo in se ga trudimo ne videti, hkrati pa vsebuje vse tisto, kar sploh omogoča, da razstavo postavimo. Je neko nevidno jedro, ki sploh omogoča vidnost. Je nek hardware, na katerem sloni software, je tista trivialna materialnost, so barve, žebli in orodja, na katerih nujno slonijo vsi visokoleteči koncepti in vzvišen svet umetnosti. Bernik zato sledi specifičnemu tlorisu Mestne galerije, v kateri se skladiščni prostori nahajajo tako rekoč v njenem središču. Ti iz zatemnjenega ozadja postanejo središče, medtem ko galerija postane samo okvir, pot, po kateri se premikamo do s svetlobo nasičenega jedra, svojevrstne luči na koncu tunela, ki ni nič drugega kot izpraznjeno skladišče.

Simptomatično je tudi dejstvo, da je edina »pozitivna« vsebina na razstavi The End – glas. Glas je tisti, ki nas vodi skozi razstavo, in je razstava. Glas kot fenomen efemerne prezenze, paradokсна materialnosti med prisotnostjo in neujemljivostjo, se tukaj ponudi kot prava mera za zajetje osrednje problematike razstave – to je izkušnja umetnosti. Podobno kot glas je tudi ta v nenehnem odtegotovanju, veleva razumevanje in napotuje k njemu, vendar se mu hkrati nenehno odteguje. Glas je hkrati osrednji medij, nosilec in parabola razstave The End: na samosvoj način, s tremi postojankami poti te razstave, pripoveduje o izkušnji razstave, izkušnji umetnosti, ki je takšna, kakršen je on. The End je razstava, ki pripoveduje o sami sebi, in to počne skozi medij – glas – ki govori o sebi. Glasovom, ki izpovedujejo izkušnjo razstave in stopnjujejo njeno napetost, se pridružuje nadglas: nadrejeni, zapovedovalni glas, ki subtilni naraciji izkušnje razstave dodaja disciplinarno nalogo institucije. Mešanje glasov pa vendarle poteka v dopolnjujočem se sozvočju, v presenetljivo »smiselnem« seštevku, čigar ugodje verjetno izhaja iz tega, da v njem prepoznavamo svojo izkušnjo porabnikov umetnosti. Sozvočje hkrati deluje kot zgostitev zgoraj omenjene mreže silnic – momentov umetnostnega sistema, družbe, vzgoje, tradicije, discipline in psihološkega – ki s svojim vozlom naredijo izkušnjo razstave tako specifično, tako posebno. Tako posebno, da tudi totalna redukcija razstave proizvaja svojo izkušnjo, kar kaže na to, da mehanizem deluje tudi brez goriva, brez pozitivne vsebine. Da je na nek način sam sebi gorivo.

Prav razsežnost glasu, ki se vselej kaže kot presežek nad osnovno strukturo označevanja, na razstavi Viktorja Bernika odlično povzema to nenavadno produktivnost razstave kot medija. Glas je, če sledimo Mladenu Dolarju, v najbolj osnovni opredelitvi presežek učinka nad vzrokom, paradokсна entiteta, področje vmesnosti. Glas naj bi bil nevtralni medij prenosa pomena, vendar se vselej kaže kot presežek nad pomenom, ki fantazmatsko izraža dvojno preseganje simbolnega in kulture. Na razstavi The End se prav zato v dimenziji glasu konstitutivno povežeta tekst in prostor kot osnovni strukturni determinanti razstave. Prvi kot moment simbolnega, drugi kot moment telesnega. Prav glas, ki na tej razstavi vsebuje razstavo, njeno vsebino in formo hkrati, s svojo paradokсно naravo – del telesa, a se mu nikoli povsem ne prilega, prenašalec (jezikovnega) pomena, a vedno presežek nad njim – priča o paradokсни naravi umetnostne izkušnje sploh.

THE END

In kam nas glas na koncu pripelje? K svetlobi. Vendar je konec te poti vse prej kot razsvetlitev, nagrada za naše prizadevno stopanje po zastavljene poti. Je resnično soočanje s koncem kot neko mejo, kjer nas poleg slabe tolažbe umetelnega šopka – ironičnega trenutka neizpolnjene oblube – pričaka le potreba, da se ozremo nazaj in vrnemo po poti, ki smo jo pravkar prehodili. Namesto velikega finala – THE END! Tudi na kraju velikega zaključka, sklepnega poglavja, se nam zadeva še enkrat – dokončno – izmuzne. In prav izmuzljivost je tisto, kar skuša kristalizirati Bernik v ikonoklastičnem sprehodu, ki ga predlaga. Prav ambivalentnost pomenov in izkušnje, hkratna sla po spoznanju in odrekanje, odtegotovanje sklepov ter hkratno uživanje v tej izkušnji, predstavlja točko, kjer se zajetju umetnosti najbolj približamo. Zato je potreben sestop v temno galerijo, moramo si dovoliti tavanje v temi in si priznati, da večji del svojega življenja tavamo v temi – da imamo veliko manj trdnih odgovorov, kot si to v resnici priznamo. Premikamo se od točke do točke v prizadevanju, da se prek (navideznih) trdnosti dokopljemo do resnice – kot to skušamo na razstavi The End. Vendar si za razliko od našega vsakdana v galeriji lahko dovolimo tudi uživanje v tej izkušnji zmede, ambivalentnosti, izginjajočih poti in dozdevkov novih. Tukaj si lahko privoščimo luksuz iskanja, ki je smoter na sebi. In zato je sestop v temo Mestne galerije Nova Gorica, v kateri tokrat prominentno umanjajo umetniški objekti, vstop v prostor, v umetniško izkušnjo, ki jo manj kot vrhunska dela opredeljuje naša radovednost.

Vladimir Vidmar

Viktor Bernik: The End (this is not a theme show)

THEME

Nowadays, a "theme", main idea, concept, or phenomenon is not only a starting point but also a central reason for an exhibition. Contemporary art shows (from the smallest of gallery spaces to colossal biennials) follow selected themes, more or less complex subjects – which, through the selection, layout and consideration of works, encourage specific readings – a specific way of reading the world. Exhibitions in the contemporary paradigm thus have a particular pretension of research, in-depth consideration and pondering over phenomena, particularly of the world and society of today – which, through artistic reflection, provides a mirror or even alternative answers. Not this time. At this exhibition suggestively entitled *The End* (this is not a theme show), "directed" by Viktor Bernik, instead of following a theme, we literally wander in darkness. This time, in the spot where City Gallery Nova Gorica casts light on key themes of our contemporaneity, the theme unfolds into darkness*. Nonetheless, what this intervention strives for is certainly not a critique of the theme show but rather a deconstruction of its structure: a process of stripping away in order to create a particular experience. This text will follow this experience in the following four points.

TEXT

The phenomenology of a theme show, our trajectory as viewers, which encourages reading of a particular theme, is a complex matter that is equally dependent on viewing images, whether static or moving, moments of participation or listening, as it is on direct reading. Although in its metaphorical sense a theme show can be understood as a text, in reality it is greatly dependent on direct, literal text. Although artworks in terms of layout can be assembled into their own kind of "text", literal text simultaneously guarantees the integrity of such exhibitions. Independent of the success of our interlinking selected works into a meaningful whole, there is always a text, an introductory text that generously introduces the world we are entering into, the accompanying words alongside individual works that lead us through the exhibition, and sometimes also explanations of individual "sub-chapters": text serves as the first and final place of refuge for a theme show and many of its visitors.

What about the art works? In theme shows, conflicting dynamics between works of art and text are key. It certainly involves more than the textuality of a large portion of art projects that constitute a theme show: the relations between the art works and whatever they need for meaningful placement in the context of a theme show, are of key importance for its "success". A theme show is a statement, more or less open, which needs art pieces as its points, its own kind of arguments, to sustain its claim. Art works surely contribute to the integrity and persuasiveness of the theme as

thesis, which in turn often compromises their original integrity. Art works that are selected for a group theme show enter a new, predetermined context, which is often only partially complementary with their original purpose or even meaning. On the other hand, art works are often commissioned for such exhibitions, an increasingly common practice in today's artworld: commissions by institutions and biennials are becoming ever bigger and more prominent. This, however, proves the same point: that a theme (as a central idea, thesis or complex set of issues) is a key regulatory principle on reading artworks, and that text is its most direct representative in an exhibition.

SPACE

This choreography of a group theme show occurs in the space of a contemporary art institution – which, in terms of typology, is what a contemporary paradigm inherited from the previous one – the white cube. So, the paradoxical task of a (contemporary) theme show in a space that tends to be emptied of content, "ideologies", context, any speciality and idiosyncrasy, and thus emptied of worldliness, is to reintroduce the world. What modernism emptied so that art can take place, is left empty by the contemporary paradigm so that it can fill it with its own version of the world. Similarly to modernism, contemporary art chooses (at least in the vast majority of cases) to neglect what remains in the seemingly emptied space. An impeccable white interior, which was needed by modernism to vouch for the autonomy of art, has been proclaimed by contemporary art an illusion of autonomy, pointing to its deep ideological premises. After having rationalized the dynamics of an art space, it acts as if its underlying grid has simply disappeared. In fact, contemporary art seems to simply repeat the gesture of modernity in relation to an art space: while modernism transformed the space from a bourgeois salon into a white cube, proclaiming it liberated, contemporary art – by reminding us of invisible assumptions of its whiteness – acts as if it has erased or at least neutralized them through this rationalization.

However, the reality is anything but that. An art space – a museum, gallery, exhibition – preserves its own productivity, even after its demystification. An art space is an intersection of flow lines, from those ideological and institutional ones, traditions, to social and psychological ones, which despite their invisibility have real effects. A special ability of the art space is that, even without or despite the contents entered, it produces effect and experience. This way of thinking is not at all an attempt at re-mystifying the art experience but at directing attention to that "magic" which has anything but magical foundations.

VOICE

Viktor Bernik explores this phenomenology of an art space in the intervention entitled *The End* (This isn't a theme show). It is immediately clear we are faced with a lack of something – in fact,

many things – particularly "positive" content. What arises instead of its "positive" content, the artist's oeuvre, current topics, social problems or cultural phenomena is the mechanism of constructing exhibitions and, particularly, the logic of their enjoyment. We enter a gallery space that, despite expectations, surprises us with a certain renouncement of enjoyment, a chain of shifting the satisfaction that we, as art lovers, expect in the space of the Nova Gorica City Gallery. It awaits us with darkness, the negation of the experience of vision, which is moved to the end of the visitor's path, into what otherwise acts as its concealed material core – a storage space. A space that we don't see (and try not to see), yet it simultaneously contains everything that allows us to set up an exhibition. It is an invisible core that makes visibility possible. A certain hardware essential for the workings of software. A trivial materiality (the colours, screws, tools) that the high-flying concepts and elevated world of art necessarily lean on. For this reason, Bernik follows the specific floor plan of the City Gallery, utilizing its storage rooms which are virtually located in its centre. These are transfigured from a darkened background to the centre, whereas the gallery itself merely becomes a frame that we move through toward the light of a saturated core, the light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel of sorts, which is nothing but an emptied storage room.

Another symptomatic feature of *The End* exhibition is the fact that voice is the only "positive" content. Voice is what leads us through the exhibition and is the exhibition. Voice, as a phenomenon of ephemeral presence, the paradoxical materiality between presence and evasiveness, is presented here as a true measure of capturing the exhibition's central issue – the art experience. Similarly to the voice, an art experience is constantly detracting, it instigates understanding and orients us toward it, yet at the same time, it keeps withdrawing. The voice is simultaneously the central medium, carrier and parable of *The End* exhibition: describing through three pit stops in the journey of this exhibition the exhibition experience itself, the art experience. *The End* is an exhibition that tells us about itself and it does so through a medium – the voice – talking about itself. Voices talking about the exhibition experience and enhancing the suspense are joined by a superior, "master's voice", adding the disciplinary role of the institution to the subtle narrative of the exhibition experience. Nonetheless, the mixing of voices occurs in a complementary way – in a surprisingly "meaningful" sum – wherein pleasure likely arises from the fact that in it we recognize our experience as art consumers. This "harmony" simultaneously condenses the network of flow lines we mentioned before – moments of the art system, society, upbringing, traditions, disciplines, psychologies. This is what ties the knot, making the exhibition experience so specific, so special – so special that, despite a total reduction of the exhibition, it still produces its own experi-

ence. This indicates that the mechanism truly works, even without fuel, without positive content – that, in some way, it is its own fuel.

It is this dimension of the voice, always in surplus over the basic structure of signification, that perfectly summarizes the unusual productivity of the exhibition as a medium. The voice, according to Mladen Dolar, in its most basic definition, is a surplus of effect over cause, a paradoxical entity, an in-between zone. The voice is supposed to be a neutral medium for transmitting meaning, yet it always manifests itself as a surplus over meaning, which phantasmatically expresses a double transcendence of the symbolic and culture. So, at *The End* exhibition, within the dimension of voice, text and space are constitutively linked as basic structural determinants of the show, the first as a moment of the symbolic realm, the second as a moment of the physical. Here it is precisely the voice that contains the exhibition, its content and form simultaneously, with its paradoxical nature – a part of the body, but never truly fitting in it; a transmitter of meaning, but always a surplus over it – testifies to the paradoxical nature of the art experience in general.

THE END

And where does the voice finally bring us? To the light. However, the end of this journey is anything but enlightenment, a reward for our effort of crossing the charted path. It is truly a confrontation with the end as a limit, where apart from the poor comfort of a kitschy bouquet – an ironic moment of an unfulfilled promise – all that awaits is the need to look back and return along the path that we just walked. Instead of a grand finale – *The End!* Even at this place of the grand conclusion, the final chapter, the matter at hand once again – finally – slips away from us. And it is precisely this evasiveness that Bernik aims to crystallize in the iconoclastic walk he proposes. It is precisely this ambivalence of meanings and experiences, of the urge for discovery and its renunciation, eluding conclusions and the joy of this experience, that represents the point where we get closer to capturing art. That is why we had to descend into the dark gallery – to let ourselves wander in darkness and thus admit that we wander in darkness most of our lives – that we have far fewer solid answers than we truly care to admit. We move from point to point trying to grasp some points of certainty in our quest for the truth – as we do at this exhibition. However, unlike in our daily lives, in the gallery we can enjoy this experience of confusion, ambivalence, disappearing paths and specters of new ones. Here, we can afford the luxury of engaging in a search that is an end in itself. So, by descending into the darkness of the Nova Gorica City Gallery (with prominently fewer art objects this time), we are entering an art experience, a space defined much less by top-notch art works than by our own curiosity.

Vladimir Vidmar

*Note that in Slovene the words for theme and darkness are homonyms, implying that in Bernik's project tema (theme) unfolds into tema (darkness).









Viktor Bernik
The End (to ni tematska razstava)
The End (this is not a theme show)

3.–31. 3. 2023

Kurator
Curator
Vladimir Vidmar

Založila
Published by
Mestna galerija Nova Gorica

Zanjo
Represented by
Pavla Jarc

Besedila
Texts
Vladimir Vidmar, Viktor Bernik

Prevod v angleščino
English translation
Erica Johnson Debeljak, Multilingual d.o.o.

Lektoriranje slovenščine
Slovenian proofreading
Tea Finžgar Plavčak

Fotografije
Photographs
Tadej Vaukman, Janko Lipovšek, Viktor Bernik

Oblikovanje in prelom
Design and layout
Vasja Cencič

Tisk
Printed by
Present d.o.o.

Naklada
Print run
300

Nova Gorica, marec/march 2023



Mestna galerija Nova Gorica
Trg E. Kardelja 5
SI 5000 Nova Gorica

Razstavo sta omogočili
Supported by



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mestnagalerija@kulturnidom-ng.si
www.kulturnidom-ng.si

REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
MINISTRSTVO ZA KULTURO



MESTNA OBČINA
NOVA GORICA

GO! 2025
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