

antun
maračić

**mara bratoš i
marko ercegović,
dvoje mladih
dubrovačkih
fotografa**

**mara bratoš i
marko ercegović,
two young
photographers
from dubrovnik**

▼ U posljednje su vrijeme Mara Bratoš (1974.) i Marko Ercegović (1975.), dvoje generacijski i porijeklom bliskih autora, intenzivnije prisutni na hrvatskoj likovnoj sceni, a početkom godine njihove su se samostalne izložbe, sasvim slučajno, istodobno održavale u dvjema zagrebačkim galerijama: u zagrebačkom KIC-u i Galeriji Miroslav Kraljević.

Oboje autora dolaze iz Dubrovnika koji je, zajedno sa svojom okolicom, i poprište događanja njihovih slika. Oboje su i relevantni predstavnici suvremene dubrovačke likovnosti, odnosno fotografije. No ovi se autori u svom pristupu međusobno bitno razlikuju - kako u motivima i tehnici rada, tako i u izražajnom učinku kaptiranih prizora. Budući da su na svojim spomenutim posljednjim izložbama pokazali radove koji uvjerljivo prezentiraju njihove poetike i dosege, nastojat ćemo pojasniti cjelokupno djelovanje ovih mladih fotografa koristeći upravo konkretnu prigodu.

Dosad poznati radovi nešto mlađeg autora, Marka Ercegovića, još uvijek studenta kamere na zagrebačkoj Akademiji dramskih umjetnosti, bijahu mahom obilježeni odsutnošću ljudskog lika. Marka je zanimala tišina i melankolija južnog krajolika u kojem se nerijetko zatječu detalji željeznih ograda, stupova, asfalta... tj. geometrizirajući komplementi tehnoloških penetracija u prirodni okoliš, ali pretežno u ruiniranom stanju i entropijskom izdanju. Često se u kadrovima pojavljivala cesta, pripadajući znakovi, reklamni panoi, razna vozila. No, Ercegović ne slavi brzinu i putovanje. Prije bi se reklo da iskazuje neodlučnost između kretanja i zastajanja, odlaska i povratka, štoviše, između izbora prirodnog i urbanog. Čini se kako upravo taj moment kolebanja na margini zbivanja, zamišljanje na granici različitih sfera, predstavlja glavno obilježje Ercegovićevih radova.

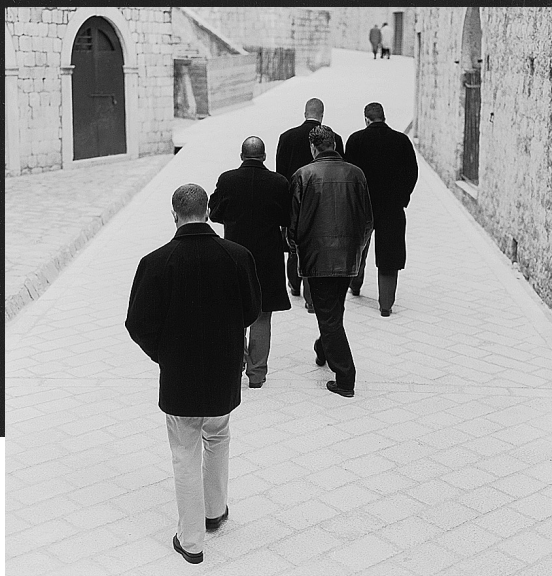
U prilog tomu govori i *Vjetar-vrtuljak*, jedan njegov nedavno nastao video rad koji je, čini se, paradigmatičkog značenja. U tom radu odluku za kadar i zbivanje autor većim dijelom prepušta stihiji. Naime, kamera je fiksirana na dječjem vrtuljku koji na uzvisini Gradac iznad Dubrovnika naleti vjetra pokreću čas na jednu, čas na drugu stranu. Tako kamera, bez ljudskog predumišljaja i plana koji se svode tek na određivanje početne pretpostavke, ovisno o jačini i smjeru vjetra, bilježi prizore oko sebe. Snimak pritom nije tek vizualni podatak okoliša, zabilježeno vrijeme u kronološkom i meteoro-

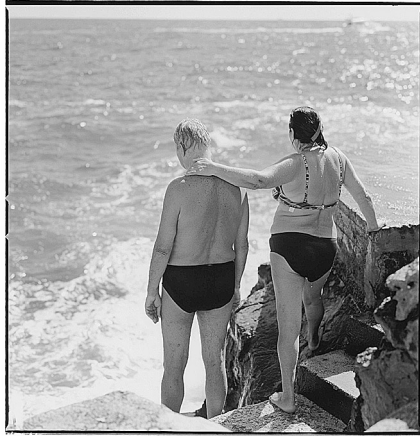
● In the past few years, Mara Bratoš (1974) and Marko Ercegović (1975), two authors of the same generation and origin, have been intensely present on the Croatian art scene. Early this year, their solo exhibitions accidentally took place at the same time, in two Zagreb galleries: KIC and Miroslav Kraljević Gallery.

Both authors originate from Dubrovnik and that city, together with its surroundings, is also in the focus of events on their photographs. Both of them are also relevant representatives of the contemporary visual arts in Dubrovnik, more precisely of photography. However, their approaches to art - their motifs, techniques, and the expressive impact of their captured scenes - differ considerably. Since the mentioned exhibitions featured some of their pieces which convincingly present their poetics and achievements, we will try to clarify the work of these two young photographers in its entirety with the help of this specific occasion.

The renowned pieces of the younger author, Marko Ercegović, who is still studying for cameraman at the Academy of Drama in Zagreb, have been chiefly marked by the absence of human figures. Marko is interested in the silence and melancholy of Mediterranean landscape, often characterised by details such as cast-iron fences, pillars, or asphalt... that is, by the geometrising complements of technological penetrations into natural environment, but mostly in a state of ruin - in their entropic version. His frames frequently contain roads and the corresponding road-signs, advertisement panels, and various vehicles. However, Ercegović does not glorify speed or travelling; one should rather say that he is expressing that reluctance between movement and stagnation, between leaving and coming back, and especially the choice between the natural and the urban. Apparently, it is precisely that moment of reluctance on the margin of events, that reflection on the borderline between different spheres, which functions as the main feature of Ercegović's work.

The same impression we will get when looking at the *Vjetar-vrtuljak* (*Wind/Roundabout*), one of his recent video pieces, which seems to be paradigmatic for his work. There, the decision about the frame and the happening is predominantly left to chance. The camera is fixed on a roundabout, which is located on an elevation called Gradac, above Dubrovnik, and is

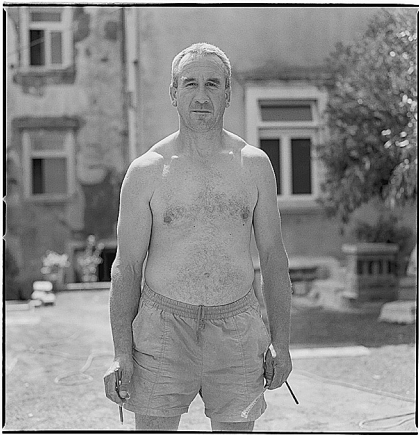




3



4



5



6



7



8

loškom smislu, nego je i snimak ritma prirode, elementa samog.

Kao i većina gorespomenutih radova, i serija predstavljena ovom prilikom u Galeriji Miroslav Kraljević nastala je u Dubrovniku i njegovoj okolini. Štoviše, sada i sam naslov (*Dubrovčani*), naglašava tu odrednicu mjesta, a pojava ljudskog lika dodatno specificira i obogaćuje prostor.

Riječ je o portretima, figurama te figuranim grupama u pejzažu ili gradskom okolišu, o krupnijim, bližim i udaljenijim planovima. Katkad su to portreti u klasičnom smislu riječi, snimke ljudi koji poziraju, lica i tijela autoru prisnih osoba, prijatelja, rođaka... No vrlo često su to iz prikrajka, sa strane, izdaljega, plahovito "ukradeni" prizori, pri čemu se mutež neizostrenih okrajaka objekata i likova iz prvih planova često proteže na većem dijelu površine slike.

U izboru motiva Ercegović će se, čini se, više nego vlastitoj odluci, prepustiti impulsu zbivanja. Na jedan manje vidljiv i svakako manje doslovan način, primjenjivat će načelo vrtuljka, tj. "prepuštiti će vjetru" da odredi prizor i kadar. Takvu, već spomenutu radnu kolebljivost, u sretnijim će slučajevima znati pretvoriti u stilsku vrijednost. Zahvaljujući takvom pristupu prizori su lišeni profane, klišeizirane atraktivnosti, ukazuju se u, utilitarno gledano, nejasnoći svoje svrhe, što im daje dimenziju snovitosti i sjete. Tomu pridonosi i fragilnost fokusa. Začas se (već i zbog autorova insistiranja na većem otvoru zaslona) očekivana oštrina razblažuje, a prizor postaje vizualno i značenijski krhak, rizično balansirajući na rubu između razložnog konstrukta i nepotrebne bilješke.

U prigodama društvenih događanja, fešta, neformalnih sportskih natjecanja, siesta, u ambijentima dvorišta ili sjenovitih soba, ekstenzivno, čak pomalo lijeno, autor će realizirati snimke koji imaju lokalnu boju, ali ne insistiraju na trivijalnoj tipičnosti. Prije su to trenuci koji odbijaju biti sudbonosni, a više govore o zaobilazanju svrhovitosti, promičući zbivanja ispod površine, na štetu događaja na prvu loptu. Rijetko će to biti slike-poante, vicevi, anegdote, a češće ćemo pak uočiti pokušaj traženja suglasja ljudi i stvari u trenucima intermezza u dnevnom ritmu, ne-događaja s humornim elementima. Tek katkad Marko će kalkilirati s profano intriganthim atributima fotografiranih (debelo, mršavo, groteskno, egzotično), ali tu je riječ o prizorima koji se u danom podneblju i ambijentu - koji je sav svojevr-

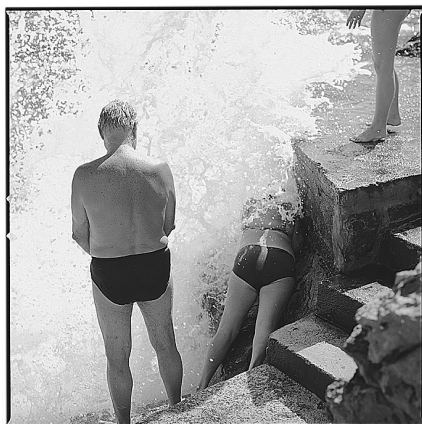
being moved hither-thither by gushes of wind. Thus, the camera is acting without any human premeditation or plan; the latter is reduced to the mere determination of initial preconditions, while the camera is recording scenes around it depending on the power and direction of wind. In this way, the recording is no longer a mere visual fact about the environment, time eternalised in terms of chronology and meteorology, but rather a recording of the rhythm of nature, of the elements as such.

Similarly to most pieces presented to the public at the Miroslav Kraljević Gallery, the above-mentioned series was created in Dubrovnik and its surroundings. Its very title (*Dubrovčani / The People of Dubrovnik*) accentuates that place determinant, while the appearance of human figures additionally specifies and enriches the setting.

The series consists of portraits, figures, or groups of figures in landscape or urban setting, shown at various focal lengths. Some of them are portraits in the classical sense of the term, photographs of people who are posing, faces and bodies of persons known to the author: his friends or relatives... But more often they are timidly "stolen" moments shot from the side or from a distance, as if from hiding. There, the vagueness of unsharpened edges of objects and figures in the front is frequently stretching over most of the image surface.

When choosing his motifs, Ercegović seems to rely on the impact of events rather than his own decision. He will apply the principle of the roundabout in a way that is not too evident or literal, that is, he will "leave it to the wind" to define the scene and the frame. In his more fortunate moments, he will employ this working reluctance, which has been mentioned before, to his stylistic advantage. Owing to this sort of approach, his scenes will be free of profane, formulaic attraction and will appear vague in purpose - speaking in terms of utility - which will give them a dimension of dream and melancholy. The fragility of focus will contribute to that. In a moment, the expected sharpness will become rarefied (not the least because of the author's insistence on a wider aperture) and the scene will appear visually and semantically fragile, balancing dangerously on the edge between a rational construct and a needless footnote.

On the occasion of social gatherings, parties, informal sports events, or siestas, in settings such as backyards or shadowy



9



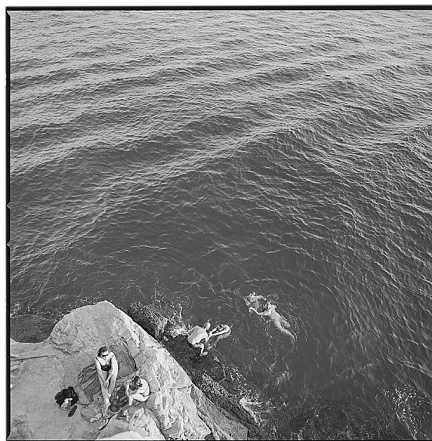
10



11



12



13



14

na kazališna scena, u kojem su Dubrovčani i oni koji se tu tek zatječu - ne mogu izbjeći. No i tada fotograf zapravo "proigrava" potencijal banalno-bombastičnog unoseći u prizor dimenziju usporenosti i umekšanosti.

Jer, Marko Ercegović ubraja se u kategoriju onih hrvatskih fotografa koji zamišljanje i zastajanje, kontempliranje krajolika, ljudskog lika i atmosfere, pretpostavljaju dominantnoj konjunkturi trke, šarenila i bljeska. Pomalo konzervativan i inertan, tehnološki i medijski nostalgičan, pobornik klasičnog reduktivnog crno-bijelog registra, Ercegović se pridružuje onima koji tišinom svog izraza i teme čine enklavu u vremenu vatrometne kompeticije, žestokog nadglasavanja. Njegov rad događa se na planu i u svrhu spašavanja naše moći mirne percepcije.

Osim po mjestu nastanka (dubrovački akvatorij) i klasičnoj tehnici, fotografije Mare Bratoš po svemu se razlikuju od onih Ercegovićevih. Osim što je riječ o kolorima, za razliku Markovih crno-bijelih povećanja, one se bitno razlikuju i po svome pristupu. Dok su Markove snimke nastale gotovo stihijski, slučajno, Marine su plod studioznije pripreme i koncepta koji je prethodio činu snimanja. Iako se i tu radi o portretima bliskih osoba, snimke su pomno režirane, a čitava izložba zapravo je sastavljena od dviju cjelina koje evociraju filmsku priču, štoviše i referiraju se na konkretni filmski predložak.

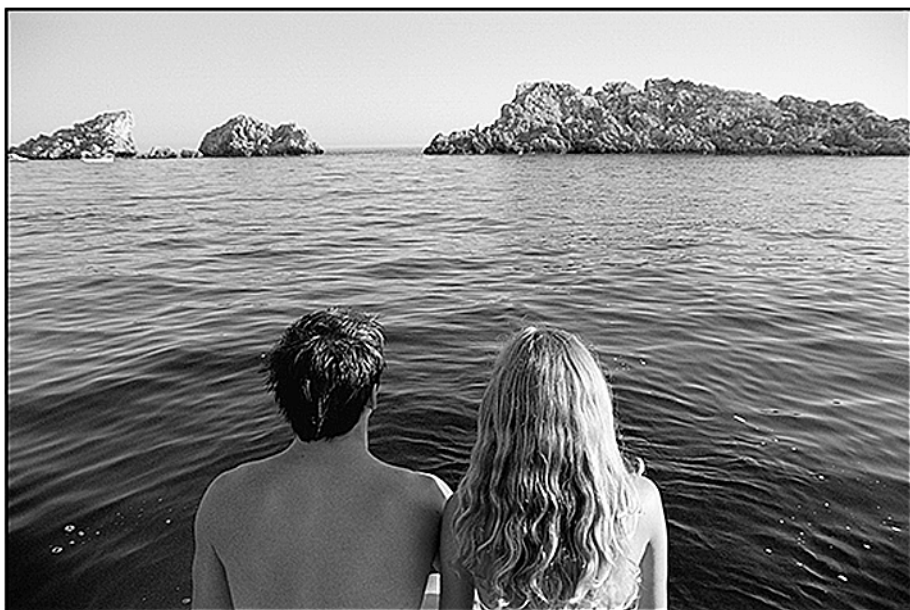
Riječ je o 12 većih fotografija u boji koje prikazuju dva mlada para u zasebnim, mjestom i atmosferom povezanim sekven-cama. Snimljene su na moru, u barci, što nam otkriva tek jedna od fotografija koja prikazuje djevojku i mladića kako mirno poziraju sjedeći na krmu, u dnu plovila. Niz od 4 fotografije prvog para, čija lica uopće ne vidimo, snimljen je po sunčanom vremenu, ispred njih je more i bliski grebeni na horizontu. Grupa fotografija drugog mladog para snimljena je pri difuznom svjetlu, nebo je blago oblačno, u pozadini je more i valovita promjenljiva linija koja ocrtava brdovito kopno. Vidimo tri različito zumirana profila mladića, potom tri sekvence pokreta glave djevojke, od profila do en facea, te spomenutu zajedničku snimku njih dvoje, okrenutih frontalno, na dnu barke s motorom i kormilom.

Konačno, vidimo fotografiju koja se razlikuje od svih ostalih: izrez samih tijela u profilu; lice mladića od linije gornje usne do ispod grudiju; djevojčinu ruku odsječenu pri zapešću koja se oslanja na rame mladića.

rooms, the author will lengthily, even lazily produce photos which will have local, but not necessarily trivial and typical colouring. These will be moments which refuse to be fateful and will speak instead of avoiding purposefulness and advancing events under the surface rather than first-chance happenings. We will rarely see there images/morals, jokes, or anecdotes; more often, we will observe attempts of reaching a consensus between people and things in the moments of intermezzo in everyday activities, or non-happening with elements of humour. Only occasionally, Marko will count on the profanely intriguing attributes of photographed persons or objects (fat, thin, grotesque, exotic), but it will always be in those scenes which cannot be avoided in that particular locality and atmosphere - and this will feature in its entirety as a sort of stage, together with the people of Dubrovnik and all those who are incidentally there. But even then, the photographer will actually "squander" the potential of the banal and the bombastic by adding a dimension of slowness and softness to the scene.

Marko Ercegović belongs to those Croatian photographers who prefer reflection and interruption, contemplation of the landscape, of human figure and atmosphere, to the dominant trend of haste, colour, and brilliance. Somewhat conservative and inert, impervious to new technologies and media, a devotee of the classical, reductive black and white register, Ercegović belongs to those artists whose serenity of expression and topic makes them an enclave in the times of turbulent competition and violent hustle. In this way, he is working on and with the goal of saving our powers of composed perception.

Apart from their place of origin (the aquatorium of Dubrovnik) and their classical technique, the photographs of Mara Bratoš are different in all aspects from those made by Ercegović. Beside the fact that they are chromatic, contrary to Marko's black-and-white enlargements, they are also entirely different in their approach. Whereas Marko's shots are made almost impulsively, incidentally, Mara's photos are a fruit of studious preparation and there is a concept preceding the act. Although they are likewise portraits of well-known persons, they are carefully designed and her entire exhibition is composed of two entities which evoke a film story, referring to a particular synopsis.





Vidi se još dio djevojčina lijevog bedra i koljeno desne noge u dnu, pri samom rubu kadra. I to je sve.

Autorica je izložbu nazvala *Klarino koljeno*, prema istoimenom filmu Ericha Rohmera iz 1970. godine. U tom filmu, koji je tek nedavno otkrila, pronašla je dodirne točke s vlastitim radom. Naime, kako u sižeju filma u kojem se sklonost intelektualnoj refleksiji sukobljava s bolnom opsesijom starijeg muškarca ljepotom mladog ženskog bića, tako i u filmskoj fotografiji koja, maestralno ističući pojedine detalje, slavi ljudsko tijelo, Mara Bratoš pronalazi analogiju svojoj već utvrđenoj poetici i estetici; prepoznaje vlastitu temu.

Tako ohrabrena svojevrsnom potvrdom legitimnosti svog opredjeljenja ona u ljeto 2004., imajući u vidu Rohmerovo *Klarino koljeno*, ostvaruje ovu seriju fotografija.

Nije, dakle, riječ o jednostavnom nadahnuću filmom. Jer, u odnosu na dosadašnji rad, ništa se bitno ne mijenja u Marinoj temi i pristupu. Riječ je i dalje o portretima njezinih prijatelja u kojima se usredotočuje na plastičke vrijednosti ambijenta i modela. Kao i dosad, svjesni kamere, oni poziraju, ali bez egzibicionizma, karakterističnih smiješaka, grimasa, gestike, odnosno truda da pokažu bilo što osim svoje mirne datosti.

Lica njezinih modela odbijaju biti polygonom izraza, ona jednako kao i bilo koji drugi dio tijela (fotografkinja ravnopravno tretira lice, potiljak, ruku, trbuh, leđa...) nose mir, koji ih poput nevidljiva štita brani od kontaminacije vanjskog svijeta, njegove turbulentnosti, nasilja, posesivnosti. Ljepota Marinih modela, odnosno njezinih prikaza istih, obrambena je. Stoga ne služi i ne želi služiti nikome i ničemu, promiče tek vlastitu egzistentnost.

Upravo je ta drska radikalizirana afirmacija ljepote, koja prkosi balansirajući na opasnoj ivici pretjerane dopadljivosti, ono što obilježava ovaj ciklus.

U statičnim, stabilnim, središnje komponiranim kadrovima u kojima se na plavoj pozadini mora i neba sjaji kosa i glatka koža mladih ljudi, toliko je čistoće, svjetla i boje da se oni doimaju nadrealno i snovito. Toliko, da u konačnici gotovo izazivaju zebnju. Ta senzacija podsjeća na još jedan slavni filmski opus, konkretno, na scene pritajene jeze usred bijela dana u djelima Alfreda Hitchcocka.

Dovoljno je pogledati niz od tri fotografije lica prelijepe mlade djevojke koje se otkriva od profila preko poluprofila do en

It is a series of twelve large photographs in colour, which show two young couples in separate sequences, connected through space and atmosphere. They were shot at the sea, in a boat, but this fact is revealed to us in one photograph only, which shows a girl and a boy calmly posing seated on the stern, at the rear of the boat. The series of four photographs presenting the first couple, whose face we cannot see at all, was made on a sunny day; in front of them, we can see the sea and the cliffs, which appear close on the horizon. The second group of photographs, showing another young couple, was shot in diffuse light; the sky is slightly clouded, while the background consists of the sea and a wavy, varied line demarcating the hilly mainland. We can see three differently zoomed profiles of the young man, followed by three sequences of the girl's head, moving from the profile to en face, as well as the above-mentioned common shot of both, frontal, taken at the rear of the boat, together with the motor and the steering wheel.

Finally, there is a photograph that is different from all the rest. It shows elements of bodies in profile: the face of a young man, shown from the line of his upper lip to the area below his chest; a girl's arm, cut at the wrist, leaning on the young man's shoulder. One can also see a piece of the girl's left thigh and the knee of her right leg in the lower section, at the very edge of the frame. And that is all.

The author has entitled her exhibition *Klarino koljeno (Claire's Knee)*, after the homonymous movie by Erich Rohmer from 1970. She has only recently discovered that movie, finding in it some common points with her own work. She has found an analogy between its story, in which tendency towards intellectual reflection conflicts with the painful obsession of an elderly man with the beauty of a young woman, as well as its photography, which magnificently accentuates certain details in order to celebrate human body, and her own established poetics and aesthetics: she has recognised her own theme.

In the summer of 2004, encouraged by this sort of confirmation of the legitimacy of her orientation, she shot her series of photographs with an eye on Rohmer's *Claire's Knee*.

Thus, we are not speaking here of simple inspiration with a movie. With respect to her previous work, nothing essential has



17

18



facea. To kretanje lica doima se kao *slow motion*, a susret s velikim djevojčinim očima u posljednjoj sekvenci čini se kao trenutak eksplozije, rupture sna.

Koljeno iz naslova pojavljuje se doslovce na rubu, u kutu posljednje (ili prve) fotografije, u sjeni, manje sjajno i napeto, manje zanosno i nestvarno od ostalih detalja tijela. Ta se fotografija, međutim, razlikuje od svih drugih. Jedina je u ovoj seriji u kojoj Mara Bratoš primjenjuje otprije karakteristično dekapitiranje svojih modela, afirmirajući manje rječite dijelove tijela. U toj fotografiji naglašavaju se čiste plastičke, gotovo apstraktne vrijednosti slike: kompleменти i asonance različitih krivulja i masa. No istodobno je lišavanjem prizora značajnske dominante glave oslobođen govor tijela. Osamostaljeni udovi, grudi, bedra, brada, adamova jabučica... preuzimaju ulogu lica postajući intrigantno personalizirani, zadobivaju sadržaj koji nismo ranije primjećivali.

A marginalizirana pojavnost naslovnog koljena upućuje na njegovu simboličnost; ono je, dakle, tek skrovlita metafora jednog suverenog fotografskog ponašanja.

Ako bismo, osim datumske koincidencije njihovih nastupa, odnosno mehaničke geografske i generacijske povezanosti i bliskosti, u radu ovih dvoje fotografa različitih pristupa pokušali pronaći još zajedničkih obilježja, možda bismo mogli istaći njihovu psihološku distanciranost od dokumentarizma utilitarnog značaja. Odbijajući, svaki na svoj način, na ilustrativan način svjedočiti neko objektivno vrijeme i prostor, oboje pokušavaju ostvariti - kako medijsku, tako i umjetničku, pa i osobnu - ljudsku autonomiju. Nastoje oblikovati vlastitu psihološku enklavu, realizirati sintetičan doživljaj stvarnosti.

U svojevrsnom eskapizmu i tako nastaloj većoj ili manjoj distanci od tvrde pojavnosti svijeta oboje se, a naročito Mara Bratoš, povlače u metafizički prostor iz kojeg - usporavajući naglost izraza te osporavajući plošnost i jednodimenzionalnost, odnosno jednostavan učinak slike - emaniiraju mimikriranu potkožnu strepnju. Na taj način posredno, ali nedvojbeno, govore o općem stanju stvari i osjećaju trenutka zajedničkog nam svijeta. ▼

changed in Mara's topic or approach. She is still making portraits of her friends, in which she focuses on plastic values of the setting and the model. Conscious of the camera, her friends keep posing, though without any exhibitionism or typical smiles and without peculiar grimaces or gestures, that is, without making an effort to show anything but their calm factualness.

The faces of her models refuse to become polygons of expression; instead, they carry peace just as much as any other parts of their bodies (the photographer treats them all with equal attention: faces, necks, arms, waists, backs...) - peace that protects them like an invisible shield from the contamination of the outer world, its turbulences, violence, and possessiveness. The beauty of Mara's models, or better: of her presentations of these models, is defensive. Therefore, it serves nobody and nothing; it does not want to serve, but to promote only its own existentiality.

It is precisely this bold, radicalized affirmation of beauty, defiant with its balancing on the dangerous edge of overstated attraction, which is specific for this cycle.

In the static, stable, and centrally composed frames, in which the hair and smooth skin of the young people glisten against the blue background of the sea and the skies, there is so much purity, light, and colour that they appear surreal and dreamlike. So much, that it eventually becomes almost creepy. This sensation reminds of another famous filmmaker and his scenes of creeping horror in broad daylight: Alfred Hitchcock.

It suffices to have a look at the series of three photographs showing the face of a beautiful young woman, revealing herself from the profile, through the semi-profile, to en face. This movement of her face strikes us as slow motion, while our encounter with her big eyes in the last sequence feels like a moment of explosion, of rupture in a dream.

The knee from the title is appearing literally on the edge, in the corner of the last (or the first) photograph, in the shadow; it is less glowing and tensed, less seductive and surreal than other details of the body. However, this photograph differs from all the rest. It is the only one in the series in which Mara Bratoš has applied her characteristic decapitation of her models, advancing the less articulate parts of the body. In this photograph, she has accentuated pure-

ly plastic, almost abstract values of the image: complements and assonances of various curves and weights. But at the same time, the absence of the head's semantic dominance liberates the body language. The now autonomous limbs, breasts, thighs, chins, and Adam's apples... they all assume the role of the face, thus becoming intriguingly personalized - they embrace meanings which could not be notice before.

And the marginalized appearance of the knee from the title indicates its symbolism and is to be understood merely as a hidden metaphor of the self-conscious photographic performance.

If we tried to find other common features in the opus of these two photographers with their different approaches, apart from the time coincidence in their appearance and their strictly geographical and generational connection and proximity, perhaps we might point out their psychological detachment from all utilitarian documentarism. By refusing, each in their own manner, to illustrate and thus attest some objective time and space, they are both striving to realize their autonomy with respect to art and the media, as well as their personal, human autonomy. They are seeking to create their own psychological enclave, to achieve a synthetic experience of reality.

In a sort of escapism, resulting in a greater or lesser distance with respect to the tough manifestation of the world, both of them, and especially Mara Bratoš, retreat into a metaphysical space, from which they emanate a mimicked, subcutaneous anxiety - by slowing down the suddenness of expression and rejecting all flatness and one-dimensionality, that is, the simple impact of the image. In this way, they indirectly, but unambiguously speak about the overall state of things and about that feeling the moment of the world, which is common to us all. ●

→ Antun Maračić - završio slikarstvo na Akademiji likovnih umjetnosti u Zagrebu. Umjetnik i kritičar, ravnatelj Umjetničke galerije Dubrovnik. Živi u Zagrebu i Dubrovniku.

Antun Maračić - graduated painting at the Academy of Visual Arts, Zagreb. He is active as artist and art critic, and he is also chief manager of Art Gallery, Dubrovnik. He lives in Zagreb and Dubrovnik.