

Future of Melancholia

22.3. – 8.6.2025

Opening: 21.3.2025, 6 pm

HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark

Burgring 2, 8010 Graz (AT)

Ilija Bašičević Bosilj, Ljiljana Blaževska, Kosara Bokšan, Vane Bor, Lidija Delić, Milena Dragicevic, Biljana Đurđević, Vukadin Filipović, Olga Jevrić, Bogoljub Jovanović, Marko Obradović, Radomir Reljić, Marko Ristić, Leonid Šejka, Sava Sekulić, Marija Šević, Ivan Tabaković, Saša Tkačenko, Aleksandar Vučo & Dušan Matic, Nina Zeljković, Radojica Živanović Noe, Milica Zorić

Cooperation: Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade (MoCAB),
HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark (HK Styria)

Press talk: 21.3.2025, 11 am

HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark, Burgring 2, 8010 Graz

Artist Talk: 22.3.2025, 11 am

Curator: Sandro Droschl

The exhibition *Future of Melancholia* explores the role that art can play in furthering our understanding of the future. It is evident that we are living in complex times that can bolster elegiac and melancholic sentiment. Melancholy stands for the mood of our time, both globally and regionally. It also enables us to think about inner and outer circumstances, deepening our understanding for our relationship to our psychological, social, and natural environments, and also looking at “other” possible worlds.

When we consider the shared experiences of such different countries as Serbia and Austria, which have been connected by a long history of both pleasures and sorrows, then we think again and again of such contradictory set of ideas as the preservation, restoration and prolongation of the status quo contrasted with a nonetheless existent faith in progress and a better future that also entails an element of the utopian. This leads to a diffuse mood of melancholy and nostalgia for tradition, also oriented toward a form of heroic dreaming, as if by way of a response to the experiences and images of the course of history and their still tangible effects on the present day.

This view of what has become a confusing state of affairs under the sign of a lack of self-confidence and simultaneous self-affirmation against the other stands, however, not just for a regional specificity but rather reflects a global picture of our age. It shows not only the complexity and an erstwhile uncertainty when dealing with the diverse and ever more numerous demands of the present, but also a backlash that sees alleged salvation in a more traditional view of the world posited against a striving for progress and change—and it is not clear where this will lead. Linked to this is a withdrawal into the private realm and away from events in the outside world, partly as a form of self-protection and partly as an emotional state of being that is often termed melancholy.

This is a little reminiscent of a famous passage in Robert Musil’s epochal work *The Man without Qualities* (1930): “If there is a sense of reality, there must also be a sense of possibility.” Musil’s character Ulrich is unable to commit to anything in earnest and avoids all fixed definition concerning his own life, wishing to keep new options and constellations open.

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The exhibition particularly looks at how artists explore this heavy-heartedness and introspection that also reflect an inner conflict between tradition and progress. Often, they turn to the surreal and dream-like, which offer opportunities to address the interplay between inner sentiment and the state of the outside world. The resulting works follow a narrative structure that is sometimes very bleak and unfathomable, but can also be humorous and hopeful. This melancholic sentiment is the focus of this exhibition, which presents historical, modernist, and contemporary positions from both Serbia and Austria both in Belgrade and Graz in three chapters shown almost simultaneously: at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (Gallery-Legacy of Milica Zorić & Roduljub Čolaković and Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art) and at HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark (HK Styria) in Graz.

The exhibition at HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark (HK Styria) in Graz presents three generations of artists from Serbia, exploring the continuities of surrealist imagery from the 1920s to the present, with historical positions from the surrealist group around Marko Ristić, Vane Bor, Radojica Živanović Noe, and others, who were the founders of surrealism in Serbia and who interacted internationally with other surrealist artists. From the 1950s to 1990s various positions emerged with profoundly individual approaches and poetics presented in the practices of artists such as Ljiljana Blaževska, Olga Jevrić, Bogoljub Jovanović, Radomir Reljić, Leonid Šejka, Sava Sekulić, and Milica Zorić. Through figuration or abstract forms, a metaphysical view, elements of the surreal, manifestations steeped in allegory, or the exploration of the relationship between spirit and matter, these artists produced unique renderings of immediate reality and the experiences of the world. The exhibition also presents contemporary Serbian artists, who, like their Austrian contemporaries whose works are shown in Belgrade, use allegories of the surreal and nostalgia that envision fantastic, atmospheric, and sometimes bleak worlds. Like their predecessors, this generation, represented here by Lidija Delić, Biljana Đurđević, Marko Obradović, Marija Šević, and Saša Tkačenko, can also be described as idiosyncratic – a generation that, in new contexts, connects with other artists across borders in order to enter into a supranational and multilateral dialogue.

However, this is not a decidedly regional phenomenon, but rather the melancholy that is articulated in the surreal and fantastic in current artistic practice is a global phenomenon that is examined more closely in this exhibition with a focus on Austria and Serbia.

Future of Melancholia is a cooperation of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade and HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark. This would not have been possible without the generous support of the Cultural Department of the State of Styria, the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (BMEIA), the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia. The project was initiated within the BMEIA program *Imagine Dignity – Laboratories Of Hope: Regenerating Democratic Prosperity*.

As a whole, the project aims to promote deeper exchange and cultural understanding between Serbia, Austria, and Styria within the context of a shared European space, providing dialogic insight into current activities in art in these neighboring countries.

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