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DOSSIER: TRUTH

DOSSIER: TRUTH

BY

JASNA BOGDANOVSKA

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Art in Imaging Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology

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February 27, 2007

To my Mom,
The bravest person I know

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The writing of this book was a challenging and amazing process. It took a lot of hard work, patience and reflection to make the pieces of the puzzle become a whole. I wish to show appreciation to all the people that helped me make this journey a beautiful experience. It is because of their help I grew so much.

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Finally a heartfelt thanks to Lynn Walz and Kathy Giunta.

DOSSIER: TRUTH

By

Jasna Bogdanovska

B.F.A., Advertising Photography, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2000

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines two very different themes. The first one is a historical look on the change of female roles in society shown through very well known symbols, and the second one is the search for truth in times of war.

I used mythology as a bridge from our ancestors to understand historical and present roles of women in society. Through my artwork I was asking questions about female identity: How are women portrayed in society? Do we make decisions about our lives or do we live by preset traditional rules? Is anatomy defining our destiny; Or we are just raised to think that way?

As a result of very unfortunate events in both my home countries Macedonia and United States in 2001, I found myself very much interested in the search for subjective and objective truth.

Although these two themes seemed very different at first, upon deeper examination and research I realized the similarities between the two. They share a sensibility. With this thesis I have built a bridge between the two.

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ZEMLJA

Ovo je zemlja za nas
Ovo je zemlja za sve naše ljude
Ovo je kuća za nas
Ovo je kuća za svu našu decu

Pogledaj me
O pogledaj me
Očima deteta

U zemlji vidim spas
Iz sna me budi glas
Koji prepoznajem
Dok grane miluju naša tela
Dok senke prave
Pokrov za nas

Čujem vrati se
Čujem ostani
Čujem vrati se
Oprosti mi
Ne idi ne idi ne

U svakom porazu
Ja sam video deo slobode
I kad je gotovo za mene
Znaj
Tek tad je počelo

Pogledaj me
O pogledaj me
Očima deteta

LAND

This is a land for us
This is a land for all our people
This is a house for us
This is a house for all our
children

Look at me
Oh, look at me
With eyes of a child

In the land I see salvation
I'm awoken from a dream by a
voice which I recognize
While the branches caress our
bodies
While shadows make a shroud for
us

I hear - come back
I hear - stay
I hear - come back
Forgive me.
Don't go, don't go, no

In every defeat
I saw a part of freedom
And when it's over
Know, that for me it has just
started

Look at me
Oh, look at me
With eyes of a child

1. INTRODUCTION

Since I became aware of my existence as a young child, I remember the myths that were part of my everyday life. Growing up in Macedonia, a country with such an enormous and rich history and mythology, I was surrounded by stories and symbols from the past. Although these myths were from ancient times they felt very contemporary and real to me. There was a natural connection, I was part of the myths and they of me. This childhood interest of myths, symbols and their meanings emerged in my artwork at the very beginning of my Graduate studies.

In the summer of 2000, right after I finished my undergraduate studies, I became a part of the "Photography in the Southwest" class. The concept of the one month class was that it would be held in various places in the Four Corners area of the US. We were to experience living in nature and at the end of the class we were expected to create a portfolio of photographs made on the trip. I was excited to be part of the class and to explore different parts of United States. But once I was on the road, the trip became so much more than what I expected. By living in nature all the time, I felt freer as a person and as a photographer at the same time. For the first time I was not planning my photographs, but I was letting my senses lead me. The clicking of the shutter became a natural and unconscious result of everything that I have experienced.

I became more connected to the Earth and Nature, and I renewed my interest for Mythology. I was introduced to the myths of Native Americans, to their rituals and symbols.

After my return to Rochester, I developed the photographs from the trip and I then realized that my hands became the main focus in many of them. My knowledge of Macedonian mythology and of Native American Mythology subconsciously became a part of my artwork. The human hand, particularly the placement of the human hand in ancient Macedonian drawings or objects, has important meaning in Macedonian culture. In the Native American culture, the human hand symbolizes identity, imagination, strength and healing. Through the symbolism of the hand, I felt I was connecting myself to the Mother Earth.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

2.MOTHER EARTH

In the fall of 2000, I started my Graduate studies at RIT. I was eager to start working on a body of work that would grow each quarter. Never before had I experienced working on the same idea for 2 years, so the journey was something completely new for me. The challenge was in front of me and I was ready to take it.

After several weeks into our Graduate studies, in our Core critique class, we were asked to start working on a body of work, on a subject that is of a great importance for each one of us. Influenced by the Southwest trip experience, I decided that my work would be about mythology. Since mythology is such an enormous subject and there are so many different subtopics that interest me, I had to narrow it down, and search for something that was of a particular interest for me.

I decided that I would allow the particular subject of interest emerge naturally and unconsciously. I knew by reading mythology books I could define the subject of my interest.

I began by looking for the meanings for the hand as a symbol in different cultures. "The human hand, together with the human brain is that specific element that separates humans from animals. The hand is an instrument by which the human brain, actually changes the world around it. The human hands make the World move and change, and in some way to even exist. Starting with these physical functions of the hand, human beings have

imaged it as part of their mythological presentations, where together with the function of "showing", the human hand also receives the meaning of a factor that "acts"."¹ In the Macedonian as well as other Balkan traditions, the positioning of the hand, as well as the objects held by the hand, have very important role in identifying the meaning of the hand symbolism.

"The meaning of the hand is not very specific, rather it is about the functions of showing, force, dynamics. It receives specific meaning depending on the object held by it. At the same time, the object held by the hand also receives a new more dynamic meaning."²

Separate from the Macedonian culture, "in the Sumerian/Semitic tradition, the hand represents the Mother Earth as a giver and protector."³ In the Egyptian it shows the unity of the fire and the water, the masculine and the feminine. In the symbolism of the Bogomils from the Balkans, the hand is a symbol of "the five elements that built the World."⁴

I researched the Macedonian, Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Celtic, Native American myths. The different stories, from different times, written by different people, are very similar in their basic structure as well as in the message they convey. Similar to animal instinct, the collective thought pattern of the

¹ Translated from Никос Чаусидис, *Митските Слики на Јужните Словени* (Скопје: Мисла, 1994), 104.

² Ibid., 104.

³ Translated from Mario Lampić, *Mali Rečnik Simbola* (Beograd: Libretto, 2000), 138.

⁴ Translated from Hans Biderman, *Rečnik Simbola*, ed. Mihailo Živanović, Hana Čopić and Meral Tarar-Tatuš (Beograd: Izdavačka kuća ПЛАТОН, 2004), 333.

human mind, whether we are talking about a person of today, or one that lived 3000 years ago, is similar and inherited.

"Although the specific shape in which they express themselves is more or less personal, their general pattern is collective. They are found everywhere, and at all times, just as animal instincts vary a good deal in the different species and serve same general purposes. We do not assume that each new-born animal creates its own instincts as an individual acquisition, and we must not suppose that human individuals invent their specific human ways with every new birth."⁵

Mythology is a universal thread that connects all people regardless of time, place they lived in, or race. Jung believed that myths are a kind of large, collective dreams.

"The same model by which many myths are made in separate times and places, the same myths and symbols that are used in myths, stories, traditions and religious dogmas of different people show that they are not our own personal product, but they are made from the same unconscious spiritual matrix. This inherited, universal, deepest unconscious structure of the psyche is what Carl Jung referred to as the "collective unconscious."⁶

The universality of Mythology can be found also in the myths of Mother Earth. In many different traditions it is

⁵ Carl G. Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung and after his death M.-L.von Franz (New York, New York: Doubleday, 1964), 75.

⁶ Translated from Robert A. Džonson, *ON-Razumevanje Psihologije Muževnosti*, trans. Ivanka Knežević (Beograd: B&D Books: Pirc, 1994), 7

believed that Mother Earth is the source of all life. In some stories the list of the elements "born" from Mother Earth, even incorporates the Sun, Moon, Stars, Minerals, Water etc.

The Earth in folk beliefs of the Slavs (including Macedonians) is the fertile element of the Cosmos that bears. This is indicated by the belief according to which the Earth is a female divinity named as "a Mother who gives birth to plants, a Mother of everything that could be found in the world."⁷

Whether is Ishtar in Babylon, Mahimata in Hinduism or Gaia in Greece, the concept that everything is derived from Mother Earth is the same. This concept held domination over Incan, Assyrian, Babylonian, Slavonic, Roman, Greek, Proto-Indo-European and Iroquoian fertility religions in the millennia prior to the inception of patriarchal religions.⁸

The more I knew about the Mother Earth myths, the more I became interested in how the role of a single main female deity has changed during time, and has been relegated to a secondary, inferior role. The role of female deities went from one Main Goddess, Female maker of all in the World, to many subordinate Goddesses. As wives, lovers or mothers of the, now Male Main God maker of all, they held substantially lesser power than the main God.

⁷ Танас Вражиновски, *Народна Митологија на Македонците*, вол. 1 (Скопје, Книгоиздавателство Матица Македонска, 1998), 287.

⁸ Wikipedia contributors, "Mother Nature," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mother+Nature&oldid=77794267> (accessed September 19, 2000).

Joseph Campbell writes about the process and the result of the patriarchal religions taking over the place of the matriarchal:

"And then a very interesting conflict happened between a patriarchal culture that was less refined but physically more powerful, and a goddess-worshipping civilization of much higher sophistication. Of course the barbarians dominated and then assimilated the local mythology.

Look at Genesis.⁹ Whoever heard of a man giving birth to a woman? Yet we find this silly thing in the Garden of Eden with Adam giving birth to Eve; the male is taking over the role of the female. In Hebrew, *adam* means "earth". So humankind was born from the earth; and yet, it is from an earthly father, not an earth mother."¹⁰

I wanted to use mythology as a bridge from our ancestors, to help me understand historical and present roles of women in society. Through the myths of Mother Earth and her relationship with the Male Gods of the elements, Wind, Fire and Water, I worked to interpret the change of the place of women in society from ancient times to today.

I started by making my silhouette out of earth in the backyard of my house. I felt the need not just to photograph what is already there in nature, but to become part of it. "From dust to

⁹ First book of the Old testament, with an account of the creation of the world.

¹⁰ Joseph Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss: mythology and personal transformation*, ed. David Kudler (Novato, California: New World Library, 2004), 38.

dust" it is the Biblical quote, but we keep forgetting its meaning. It seems to me that the more technological our society becomes the easier it is for people to forget that we all are part of nature. I wanted to go back to my roots, to Mother Earth. I was the artist and the model also. The role of an artist is usually considered male, and the one of a model is considered female. I was using the "male" role also to act. My model role was general, only my silhouette was used my images, but my artist role was very individual. I was making a difference. I was making my own mythology.

I photographed my silhouette, and I was going to work on the images in the digital form. The use of digital images, and therefore computers, is a complete contrast to nature. I was showing the detachment of our world with nature. If nature is female element, then culture (and therefore all technology) is male. Again I was using male elements, to add power to my women.

I superimposed images of fire, water and wind, on the images of my silhouette. I was using mythology and well known symbols such as hand imprints to show the change in domination from matriarchy to patriarchy. As in the ancient Macedonian drawings, the placing of my hand prints had a very important role in the meaning of my artwork. My silhouette is a symbol of womanhood, and my hand imprints are the elements that give individuality and power to it.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

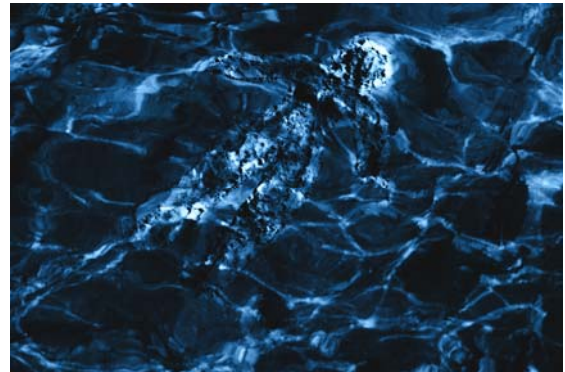


Fig. 10



Fig. 11

3. NATURE VS. CULTURE

Women have been associated with nature since ancient times. The woman, same as Mother Earth, gives birth. Inherently she takes care for her children, which leads to taking care of all domestic duties. The man on the other hand, is associated with culture, human consciousness and its products.

"Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it "natural" to subordinate, not to say oppress, them."¹¹

These thoughts were starting point for my work in the second quarter. Reflecting upon my work from the first quarter I felt that the photographs on the wall were a little detached from the viewers. I however wanted the audience to be able to enter the work and be surrounded by it.

My starting point was to show the contrasting male-female roles in society. I was going to let the work lead me. As I started working I realized that I was more drawn to the black and white images, since there is no better way to indicate the contrasting roles then by using black and white. Through my artwork I was asking questions about female identity: How are women portrayed in society? Do we make decisions about our lives

¹¹ Sherry B. Ortner, *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture* essay from *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford University Press, 1974), 73.

or do we live by preset traditional rules? Is anatomy defining our destiny? Or we are just raised to think that way?

I started making Polaroid images of a woman gasping for air while her face was covered with clear wrap. I then continued taking pictures of her left hand, her right hand, and her feet also covered by clear wrap. I then made a Polaroid emulsion transfer onto white plates. I used clear wrap so it would seem as if the woman is stuck in the plates. I have made a conscious decision not to use any high quality, expensive plates, but to use plates that are used every day, since the domestic chores that are expected to be finished by the woman in the house, are repeated everyday.

"In the overwhelming majority of societies cooking is the woman's work. No doubt that stems from practical considerations. The woman has to stay home with the baby, this is convenient for her to perform the chores centered in the home. But if it is true, as Lèvi-Strauss has argued (1969b), that transforming the raw into the cooked may represent, in many systems of thought, the transition from nature to culture, then here we have woman aligned with this important culturalizing process, which could easily place her in the category of culture, triumphing over nature. Yet, it is also interesting to note that when a culture such as France or China develops a tradition of *haute cuisine* - "real" cooking, as opposed to trivial ordinary domestic cooking - the high chefs are almost

always men. Thus the pattern replicates that in the area of socialization, women perform lower level conversions from nature to culture, but when the culture distinguishes a higher level of the same functions, the higher level is restricted to men.”¹² I have found this to be true in both USA and Macedonia.

Thus, in my installations I placed the plates on the corners of a rectangular table covered with black tablecloth. The position of the images of the head, hands and feet on the plates mimicked a crucifix. They resembled, in some way, the symbolism of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ in Christian religion. While Jesus Christ was believed to sacrifice for the good of mankind, women, as shown in my artwork, were sacrificing themselves for the good of their families.



Fig. 12

¹² Ibid., 80.

The next piece started with images of women in expected roles in different part of their lifetimes, from little girls to older women. The images included girls playing with dolls, a teenage girl putting on make up, a bride and a mother doing laundry. I cropped out the faces of the women, so it would be more general. The work was not about a particular woman, but women that find themselves in those roles. These images were placed on the palm of a woman's hand, corresponding to the parts of the life line which indicate when those roles were supposed to be played. The images were being placed on the female palm by a male hand. The image of the palm with the images on the life line was then projected onto a mannequin with a female form.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

"The most basic meaning of modeling are passivity, obedience and silentness. . . .

A woman which is beautiful, and at the same time mute, is one of the most cunningly made male fantasies in culture." ¹³

Objectification of women became the main idea behind this piece. The more objectified and passive women are the easier it is for expectations to be imposed on them. I was raising the question "*Is anatomy destiny?*" The more we live by somebody else's expectations, the harder it becomes to differentiate what comes naturally to us and what is being forced.

The third piece consisted of projections on the wall of two identical images of white fingerprints on a black background. Underneath the one image was the word "Superior" and underneath the other was the word "Inferior". I used the fingerprint as something that does not have any male or female connotations, it is a completely genderless way of identifying human beings.

By using the words "Inferior" and "Superior" I showed the absurdity of dividing people to inferior and superior based on their gender. The use of black and white added even more to that idea. Dark cannot exist without light and light cannot exist without dark. If one is missing we would not be aware of the

¹³ Translated from Светлана Слапшак, *Женски Икони на XX Век*, (Skopje: Templum, 2003), 73-80.

existence of the other. The same is true for female and male.
Male cannot exist without female and vice versa.

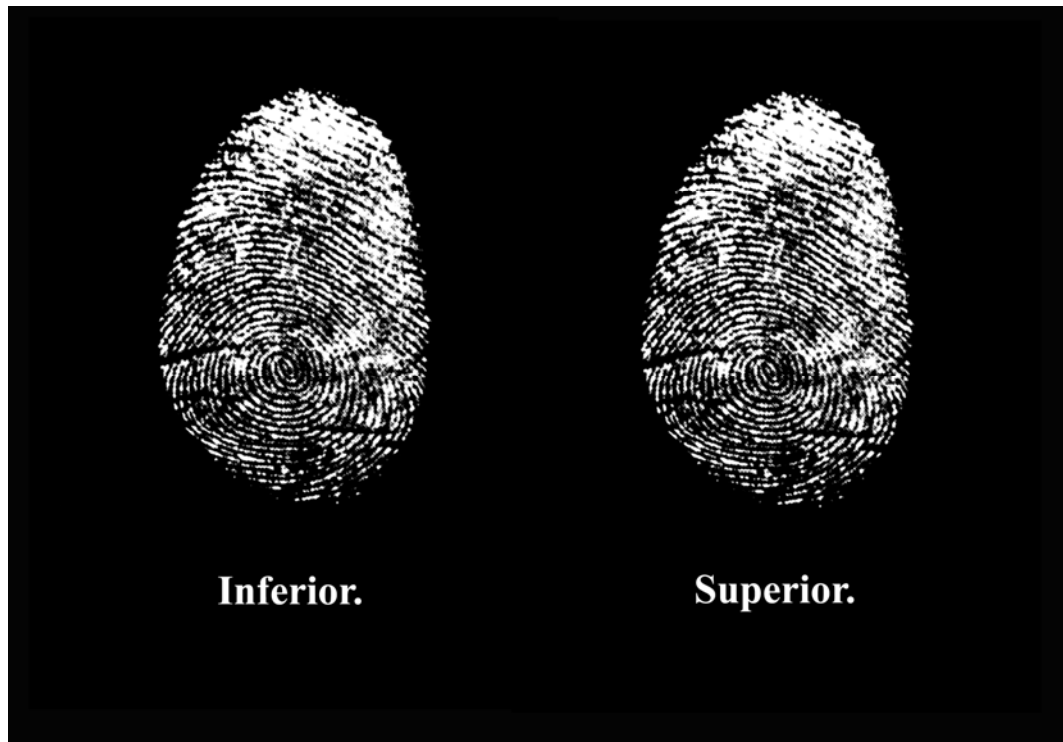


Fig. 15

I was satisfied with this work. The pieces worked very well together and at the same time they worked individually -each one telling their own story. Each of the three pieces could have worked as starting points for new artwork in future. They offered space for more exploration.

4. WAR

At the beginning of the second year of my graduate studies, Macedonian rebels of Albanian origin started terrorist attacks on the Macedonian police, army and people. Although I was trying to continue working on the issues from the previous quarters, I found myself more and more drawn to the questions raised by the conflict. These questions led to a change in my artwork.

Since I moved from Macedonia and started living in the United States, I felt I had two homes. Two lives, but one biography. I could not imagine myself without the one or the other.

"Home is a projection and basis of identity, a staging of personal memory.

...Home is not an object, a house, but a complex web that brings together memories and images, desires and fears, the past and the present." ¹⁴

For me the past and the present were intertwined. I spent my childhood and my teenage years in Macedonia, and my adult life in United States, but I was going back to Macedonia frequently. Traveling back and forth, my past and my present were shifting. When I was in US, my US life was my present, and Macedonia was my past and my future. When I was in Macedonia, my Macedonian life

¹⁴ Tanja Milicic-Wagner, *Home, essay from Here Comes the Rain Again: Rain: The World About Milcho Mancevski's Before the Rain*, ed. Marina Kostova and Blagoja Kunovski (Skopje : Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 96-97.

was my present and the US was my past and my future. I belonged to both places equally. Every time I was traveling from one home to the other, there was a sense of sadness and longing to go back to the place I was leaving, while at the same time there was happiness for the one that I was going to. I have a great appreciation for both places; my travels made me realize how much they both mean to me.

“‘Home’ simply cannot be understood except in relationship to the outside.”¹⁵

Since the beginning of the war in Macedonia, my memories and images of Macedonia were becoming blurry. Not blurry in a sense that I did not remember them, but in a sense that I felt I was losing them, since they might not exist anymore in reality. Before the war, every time I returned to Macedonia, the people were the same, the places were the same; it was a familiar, cozy place. Now I did not know what to expect. Not being in Macedonia, while the war was going on, and not knowing what was really happening was hard for me. Getting the news from the Internet, a wide variety of newspapers and through telephone conversations with my relatives and friends in Macedonia, I was not able to find out the truth. I was getting contradictory information on a same event depending on the source of the news. Being in need of information, I started creating my own stories, about the war reality in Macedonia. By combining memories and the news, I was creating my own, new reality.

¹⁵ Ibid., 97.

I started asking myself, 'What is truth?' Is there one universal truth? Who would tell the Absolute Truth if there is such a thing as Absolute Truth? Can a person that is outside of a country that is in war, and has not seen anything with her/his eyes really know the truth? Or, could a person that is in the middle of a war, and people are dying in front of her/him, be objective? And finally, can the truth be objective at all?

At that time I watched the film *Before the Rain*¹⁶, again, by the director Milcho Manchevski, who was born in Macedonia, and lives in NYC and Macedonia. The first time I saw it was in 1995. At that time, there was a war going on in Bosnia and Croatia, which like Macedonia, were also republics of former Yugoslavia. Macedonia was the only part of former Yugoslavia that somehow managed to escape that war. The film was made 6 years before the war in Macedonia started, at a time when there were not any signs that would show that there will be a war at all.

The film *Before the Rain* is fiction. It is about three love stories that all end because of the violence of ethnic hatred. In each of the three parts: Words, Faces and Photos, the characters are intertwined in a very specific way. Each story makes sense on its own, but when put together there is a time contradiction. There is no correct order to each sequence. As Oliviera said: "All of the three orders are as possible as they are impossible,

¹⁶ Milcho Manchevski, director, *Before the Rain* (Polygram Audiovisuel: 1994)

depending on the way one looks at them."¹⁷ The decision how one should view and understand the film and the order of its parts depends and varies with each viewer. No matter how one sees the order, each one is correct and truthful.

The film raised the questions about truth again. Like the parts in the film, the news that I was getting, made sense on its own but was contradictory when put together. If the truth was one big puzzle, the news I was getting, were not only pieces that were not part of the puzzle, but they were puzzles on their own.

Few years ago I was introduced to the Journals of Dan Eldon (b.1970-d.1993). Born in London, his family moved to Kenya when he was 7. At 22 he became the youngest Reuters photojournalist ever. At age of 23, while photographing in Somalia, he was stoned to death by Somali mob that was reacting against a UN bombing.

I have seen a lot of his photojournalistic work, but his journals seemed more truthful to me than his photojournalism. They were not influenced by how they would look on a cover of a newspaper; they are just pure truths about his own feelings. What can be more truthful than something that is not declared as the truth? Was the famous Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard right when he said: "Subjectivity is the truth"¹⁸?

¹⁷ Joao Vincente Ganzarolli de Oliviera, *Before the Rain - An Aesthetics of Paradox*, essay from *Here Comes the Rain Again: Rain: The World About Milcho Mancevski's Before the Rain*, ed. Marina Kostova and Blagoja Kunovski (Skopje : Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004) , 84.

¹⁸ Soren Kierkegaard, *Truth is Subjectivity*, from *Self, Society and the Search for Transcendence: An Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. William H. Bruening (Palo Alto, California: National Press Books, 1974), 360.

The artwork I made was a combination of the thoughts and feelings where reality and fiction were intertwined. The images I made were predominately in black and yellow-orange colors. The orange was warm and inviting, and the black was frightening and mysterious. They were a combination of the memories I had and the stories I was creating on my own as a result of the inability to find out the truth.

I felt that this work was starting point. It was a way for me to define what was going on in Macedonia and what my place in this new situation was.



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

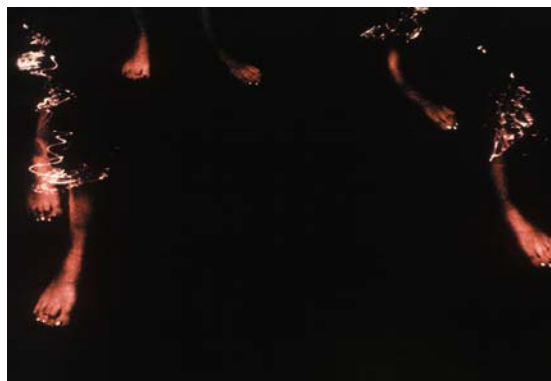


Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

5. VICTIM VS. WITNESS

After spending the summer of 2001 in Macedonia I returned to Rochester. On the morning of September 11th 2001, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in NYC collapsed; the Pentagon in Washington D.C was damaged and flight number 93 was downed as a result of terrorist attacks.

Suddenly I found myself in the middle of the aftermath of these attacks which brought a sense of universality to my art. The feelings of pain are universal. No matter what the reasons for the suffering are, people suffer the same way. My work was not about one particular country, it was about home. Not just my home, but the specific home for each one of us.

Although I was in US when the 9/11 attacks have happened, I felt the same as at the beginning of the terrorist attacks in Macedonia. There was a sense of losing something precious and fear of not being able to go back to the life I had before. As I was thinking of my feelings, I became interested in the differences and similarities of a victim and a witness. I saw myself as both.

"Victim- an unfortunate person who suffers from some adverse circumstances."¹⁹

¹⁹ victim. Dictionary.com. *WordNet*® 2.0, Princeton University.
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/victim> (accessed: September 21, 2001).

"Witness- a close observer, someone who sees an event and reports what happened."²⁰

Could one be a victim only by watching news on TV? Could one be a witness even if s/he is in the middle of war? Could a person be a victim by being a witness? Is one a witness by being a victim? Who makes the decision whether one is a victim or a witness?

The boundaries between the definitions of a witness and a victim are blurry. Each witness is a victim in some way and each victim is also a witness. In the short story *The Wall*²¹, by the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, the main character Pablo is both victim and a witness. *The Wall* is a story of three prisoners spending the night before their execution in jail. Together with the prisoners in the cell is also a physician who is there to observe their psychological reaction. Whether the prisoners are rightfully imprisoned, or if the Spanish Civil war is just or unjust, it is not important in this story. What is important are the human feelings. Pablo, who is the narrator, at times seems like the analytical doctor, by consciously observing the reactions of the other two prisoners. He is very conscious about everything that is happening with and around him. By being both victim and a witness at the same time, he is the only one in position to deeply understand both.

²⁰ witness. Dictionary.com. *WordNet*® 2.0, Princeton University. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/witness> (accessed: September 21, 2001).

²¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *The Wall: And Other Stories*, (USA: New Directions Publishing Corporation, June 1969), 1-17.

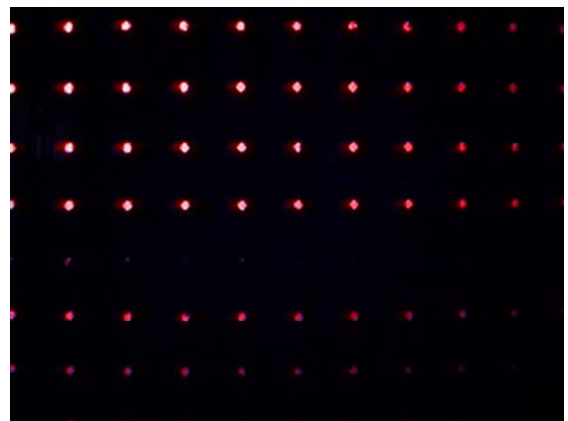
Working on these thoughts I also continued with the ideas about objectivity and finding the truth from the previous quarter. The more information I got the less I knew. At times they were so different, it seemed they were not even part of the same story.

I made a video of news footage, interacted with footage I took while I was in Macedonia during the summer. I overlapped different videos, until they were so full of information that they were meaningless. It seemed like they cancelled each other. I purposely used video for this piece, since video is thought of as the most *realistic* medium. Paradoxically, I used *reality* to show confusion. The video was playing on a little TV that was placed right before the entrance of the studio where I was showing my work.

In order to show universality of the questions I was raising, I decided that the best way to do that is to make the viewers be part of it, to create a claustrophobic, disturbing space. I wanted them to feel my art.

I built a cube, large enough so one person could sit in the middle of it. The walls of the cube were made of a translucent material. On the same distance from the four sides of the cube there were projectors, which were projecting a video I made. The video was of a man holding a piece of wooden board, marching towards the camera. The background was red, and the person was shown as a dark silhouette. As the man moved closer to the camera, the only thing visible was the board. It seemed like the

man was imprisoning the person that was inside of the cube. The timings of the other videos were such, so after the first board was set on one of the sides of the cubes, the second one would follow and so on until the whole cube was 'closed' with the boards. I used sounds of a hammering nails on a board, gun shots and people screaming. I was also using videos shot through little holes on the board. The person in the cube would become prisoner of the images.



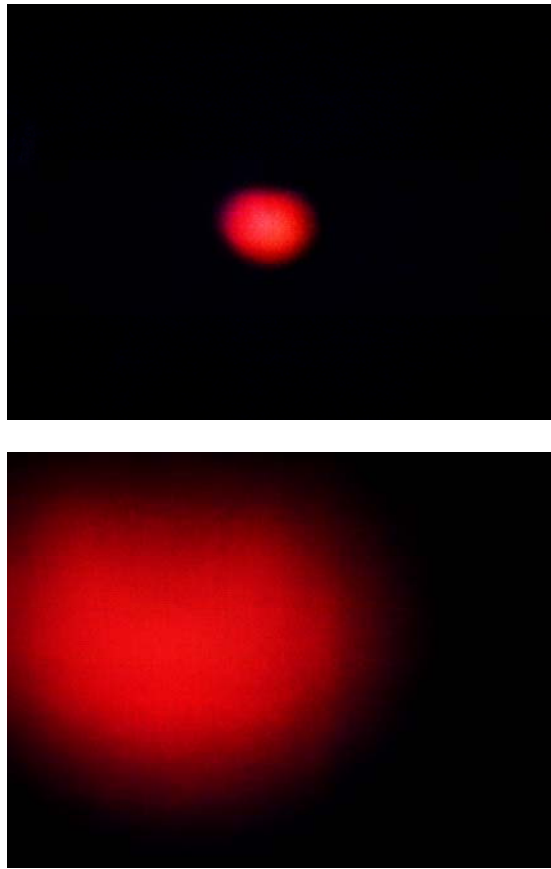


Fig. 23-27

As the visitors entered the gallery, one would be in the cube, while others would walk around it. The behavior of the viewers became codified. Every movement of the visitors around the cube was shown as a different shadow on the cube. The person in the cube was terrorized by both the images of the video and the shadows of the visitors around the cube. Witnesses were becoming victims, and the victims were terrorized by the witnesses. The roles were interchangeable.



Fig. 28

What was going on, on the outside was reflecting on the inside. The videos were on a loop, so after some time, one would know what was coming next. The repetitions of the video were mimicking days spent in prison cell, or days and days of one being bombarded by bad news, whether they are on TV, newspapers or radio. Of course, in contrast to one being actual prisoner, the person surrounded by the news, can change the channel, or not read the newspaper, but there is always something that matters, something that is cared about. When that is the case, one needs more and more information, but the more information one gets the harder it is. The more one knows the more one has to torture themselves by playing the information over and over in their head. On the other hand, the less one knows the more imagination comes into play. The lack of information is substituted with

imagination. It is a destructive circle; you are either prisoner of the images of your imagination, or of someone else's images.

The visitors, although different people, with different backgrounds, experienced the installation in very similar way. For many of the visitors it was a reminder of something that caused a disturbance in their lives. One professor, came out of the cube visibly disturbed. He said that the whole experience in the cube was very similar to the nightmares he had been having for some time.

The installation was abstract enough so people could find a way to relate to it. What caused the disturbance in different people when they were inside the cube was not important. What mattered to me was that the feelings were very similar if not the same for different people. The only reality was one's feelings, not the cause.

The cube was mimicking how the macrocosm was influencing the microcosm. Everything that was happening in the world consciously or subconsciously influences people. Especially that is true if something happens close to home. The cube was making people aware of how we are influenced by the outside world, and how we influence the outside world.

6. DOSSIER: TRUTH

After I was finished with the cube installation, I started thinking where to go next. I had just finished the last Walkthrough and what I was supposed to move on to was my thesis show. I was satisfied with the cube installation, I liked the fact that it was raising a lot of questions, and that it was interactive. What I did not like was the fact that I liked it very much. It is hard for me to begin creating new artwork, while still attached to the previous one.

I realized the best way to start working on my thesis show, and to continue the work from the two previous quarters, was to change my environment. I needed to go to Macedonia. I was in search of answers, although I did not really know what the questions were. There were so many questions raised in the work from the previous quarters, and I felt I would find the way to put them together by experiencing everything that was happening in Macedonia.

For the next three months I was in Macedonia, interviewing refugees, filming in burning houses and places left by the refugees. I was filming and photographing as much as I could, so once I returned to Rochester, I would have a lot of raw material to work from.

Upon my return I spent a lot of time reviewing the footage I brought from Macedonia, and I began reading the book "The Body

in Pain" by Elaine Scarry. Thinking about my experiences in both Macedonia and the US, along with the previous artwork I had done, I realized that the idea of home was very important to me.

"Home- A place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest or satisfaction."²²

I was very much interested in the idea of losing the security of a home. Everything that has happened in both of my home countries influenced how I felt in my own home. When in a middle of a war, people are hiding from the outside world, in a home which is their shelter. When one, is not physically in a middle of a war, but is personally connected to it, and the only news is from the media, the home becomes the source of the news. It loses the function of shelter, and it becomes a cell where a person is imprisoned by the images in the imagination or the images of others. Again the outside world was influencing the inside world. The outside was mutilating the domestic. The home, whether that is a room, house, or a country, loses its beautiful qualities and becomes ugly. The home becomes a jail, same as if lovemaking became rape, or if one's mother suddenly becomes an enemy.

"In normal contexts, the room, the simplest form of shelter, expresses the most benign potential of human life. It is, on one hand, an enlargement of the body: it keeps the individual warm and safe. It houses the same way the

²² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Home"

body encloses and protects the individual within; like the body, its walls put boundaries around the self preventing undifferentiated contact with the world, yet in its windows and doors, crude versions of the senses, it enables the self to move out into the world and allows the world to enter. But while the room is a magnification of the body it is simultaneously a miniaturization of the world, of civilization . . .

In torture, the world is reduced to a single room or set of rooms. Just as all aspects of the concrete structure are inevitably assimilated into the process of torture, so too the contents of the room, its furnishings, are converted into weapons. . . The prisoner's physical world is limited to the room and its contents; no other concrete embodiments of civilization pass through the doors."²³

Starting with these ideas, I began by making plans to build different rooms. I knew I wanted my thesis show to be interactive. As with my previous work, it was very important for the visitors to become part of the artwork.

²³ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (USA: Oxford University Press, April 23, 1987), 38-41

FIRST ROOM

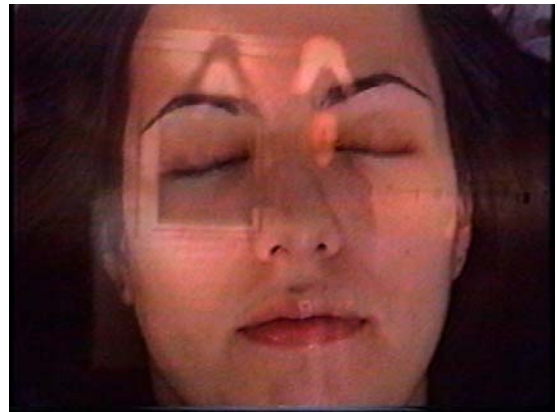
In the first room I mixed the meanings of a room and a cell. I was working on the idea on how meanings are interchangeable depending on outside influences. In a room the inside is secure, it protects the inside from the outside. The cell on the other hand, is a place that is a source of danger, and the outside is the secure place.

The room I built was a combination of a shelter and a cell. A TV was put inside one of the walls with its screen level with the surface of the wall. Thus the TV seemed like a small window. The room was dark, and the only light that entered came from the TV. The symbolism of a window as a window to the world, and the TV as window to the world played very well together. On the TV, how much of the world would be seen did not depend on how far outside one looked but on what and how much was shown. On this TV I showed my story. I included myself in the video, so it would be even clearer that I was telling my story, telling my truth, knowing it was not *the* truth. I don't have the moral right to say I tell the truth if that somehow gives the connotation that I am telling *The Absolute Truth*, I believe nobody can. Truth is subjective. The video was a combination of my experiences, views and interpretations. The beginning of the video started with a

sentence from the movie "Andrei Rublyov"²⁴, I was saying it both in English and Macedonian:

"I have passed this birch every day, when you know you will never see it again, it is beautiful"

This one sentence, summed up the idea that home can only be understood in relationship to the outside.



²⁴ Andrei Tarkovsky, director, Andrei Rublyov (Soviet Union: Mosfilm, 1966).



Fig. 29-34

The rest of the wall in which the TV was placed, had wallpaper made of Macedonian newspaper pages. I wanted my work to be universal, but I made a conscious decision to use the videos I shot in Macedonia and newspapers written in Macedonian. If I used videos of something that has happened in the US, or newspapers that were written in English, then the visitors would be able to understand them. The more a person knows about something (or

thinks they do), the more assumptions come into play. I did not want them to understand.



Fig. 35

The wall to the right to the 'newspaper/TV wall' was made using bars to connote the idea of the cell. As part of this wall was an entrance to the second room. The metal bars were covered with a milky transparent material, so the visitors were not able to see what was going on in the second room until they entered it.

SECOND ROOM

The main idea behind the second room was to make the visitors aware of the way each of us influences the environment and how we have to change to get a better understanding of that environment.

The second room was more general. I started by watching the interviews with refugees I filmed in Macedonia frame by frame, looking for frames which when taken out of context would have opposite meanings. From a video where a person was crying, I would find a frame where the person looked as if was smiling. All the stories they told were stripped of sound and all the other modifying elements, so at the end the whole story became a single black and white image, similar to ones seen in newspapers. I made pairs of two opposing images for each person I interviewed.

The second room was very narrow. It was physically impossible for the two most distant walls to be viewed at the same time. On each of the two ends of the room I simultaneously projected the paired images. The viewers had to choose which image they would see. The projected pairs were changing fast, so even if a viewer wanted to look at the other image of the pair, they were not able to. Once they would turn to look at the other image, the images of the next pair would show on the walls. The images also could not be seen without seeing one's own shadow covering part of the projected image.



Fig.36



Fig.37

"The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe"²⁵

Our own assumptions always influence the way we view things. The whole cannot be seen because we are always part of it. What part one decides to see or ignore, whether consciously or unconsciously, tells much more about that particular person, than about what has been told in the first place. The shadows of each visitor in this piece were representing the beliefs, views and assumptions of each one of them. With their shadows, as part of the projections on the wall, each visitor had a different view and therefore was experiencing different Truth about what was seen.



Fig.38

²⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1977), 8.

While the paired images were changing on the walls, the voices of the refugees telling their stories were playing in the background. The voices were overlapping, so even if one would understand Macedonian, the exact story could not be understood. Again I was playing with the idea of the overlapping videos from the previous quarter and I was continuing with the idea of the newspaper wall from the first room.

The artwork of the second room, although saturated with information both in image and sound form, was not telling the Truth told by the refugees, but the Truth was each visitor's point of view. What was said by the refugees was not important at all. The reality of the refugees was reduced to a point of view.

THIRD ROOM

The third room was the most general one. The first room was explicitly about my experiences, the second was the bridge and the third was all about the viewer.

Upon entering this room, the viewer was immediately put on stage. The room was built in such a way that the entrance from the second room to the third seemed like an entrance from backstage to the stage. On the stage was a stand with a microphone. The room was dark and the only light was the one shining on the person entering the room. The emptiness of the room made each viewer on the stage become the center of

attention. The viewer became viewed. It was a way of making viewers conscious of their role in Truth Telling and the influence of their stories on other people.

My story from the first room became a story of the viewer in the third room. Similar to the children's game Telephone, my story from the beginning changed more and more with each step. Whether the end would have a resemblance to the beginning story depended upon each viewer.

"The big problem in art is being able to tell the story of your own village, while at the same time having your village become everyone's village. I want to be faceless. I hold a mirror to my face so that those who look at me see themselves and therefore I disappear."

--Christian Boltanski

Starting as a personal story, through my art it became everyone's story. It was not confined by place, time or characters; it was not even about a war. Rather it was about each of our personal truths.

I communicated with the viewers. I began the dialogue and I let them continue. My audience became conscious of the reasons why particular decisions are made. The beginning was about me but the ending was about them. Through my artwork the personal became general, and the general became personal.

Similar to when a baby leaves its mother's womb and is influenced from the world that surrounds it, truth, once stated,

is influenced by the outside world and receives shape given by the person telling it.

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