

Ana Čigon

PHONY TOWNS II

13 December 2019—11 January 2020

KiBela / MMC KIBLA

Phony Towns II by Ana Čigon is a second iteration of the project Phony Towns, a satirical critique of contemporary socio-political changes which we have been witnessing in the local, European and global sphere over the past few years, or decades. The artist – starting from the fact that contemporary society is overwhelmingly pacified, neutralized, underappreciated and manipulated both on behalf of the media and politics, and out of her desire to defy the mindset of not being able to understand the systemic functioning and the foundations of neoliberalism – has created a transmedia installation, in which she constructs a universally understandable imaginary, through which she gives meaning to modern political developments.

The short experimental film *Phony Sights*, which due to its mode of presentation acts as the central piece of the exhibition, creates an ironic version of the world by means of digitally manipulated vedutas of different cities and locations, as well as intimate letters read by various voices. In terms of content, the artist clearly takes a (political) position and uses this video essay to tackle the burning issues which define the zeitgeist of our era: class inequality, the criminalization of refugees, elitization of urban centers, political apathy and powerlessness, accumulation of wealth of the richest elite, political and economic fight between the superpowers, and the changing (global) relations of power. The viewer travels between various geopolitical spaces, from the local to the global and the universal; between the East and the West; between the bottom and the top. The animated urban scenery with carefully selected images of city sights and iconic vedutas, ensures a universality of the visual language employed by the artist, and at the same time testifies to the fact that cities, like organisms, are inherently connected to the development of capitalism. Ana Čigon creates layers of this visual material through narratives in the form of intimate letters, with an emphasis on the position of the individual within the capitalist system, thereby vividly reflecting the structures of contemporary society and exploring the institutionally anchored power relations within them.

In this particular gallery set-up, the videos are complemented by digitally manipulated photographs, in which the subject of discussion are the local Maribor cultural, political and economic issues. The author uses special effects to manipulate the Maribor vedutas, the location of the would-be cultural center MAKS, and the former TAM Automobile and Motor Factory, which used to be one of the largest and most successful companies in Yugoslavia, employing thousands of workers. Due to political and financial interests, it later became a site of looting and privatization, which led to the gradual collapse of Maribor's industry. One of Slovenia's biggest transition stories is problematized by the author

through a revival of the memory of the art project *Was ist Maribor?*, a documentary celebration as a tribute to TAM and its employees, which was designed by Aljoša Ternovšek, Sebastijan Horvat, Matjaž Latin and Andreja Kopač in 2012, during the European Capital of Culture Maribor. The entire event, which took place in the former TAM boiler room, was recorded by the national RTV Slovenia, but for unknown reasons the recording was never fully released or made available to the creators or the public. With new works and specific local well-researched references, the artist encourages the viewer in a satirical way, to reflect on the political-economic motives, especially the private interests as well as other circumstances in which the wasted financial investments, cultural policies and the stealing of social property occurred in the first place. At the same time, the viewer is confronted not only with a reflection on the (historical) identity of the city of Maribor, but also on the global society in general.

Phony Towns II humorously deals with the alarming condition of our contemporary society, which, due to capitalist appetites and an uncontrolled desire for power by the ruling elites, is permeated by an erosion of humanist values and collective consciousness, the rise of political populism and structural violence, dehumanization of interpersonal relationships and the impoverishment of the most vulnerable social groups.

Živa Kleindienst

Ana Čigon (1982) is an artist that creates in the fields of video art, film and performances. Her projects tackle social issues, such as under-representation of women in history, memory and public monuments, LGBTIQ+ topics, critique of neoliberalism, its brutal impact on people's lives and its devastating impact on nature, etc. Her works often contain elements of humor, irony and satire. She presents her works at solo and group exhibitions and film festivals in Slovenia and internationally. For her video art she received several awards: she is the winner of OHO Award, finalist for the Slovenia Henkel Award and finalist of Vordemberge Gildewart Foundation Award. Her films have been selected in competition programs on international film festivals worldwide, and her animation *Rebellious Essence* received five international awards. She is also the author of a few solo performances, and often participates in the performances of other authors.

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Production: X-OP Association for Contemporary Art

Co-production: ACE KIBLA

Consulting: Andreja Kopač

Exhibition opening on Friday, 13 December 2019, at 7 p. m.

The exhibition will be showing until 11 January 2020

MMC KIBLA / KiBela, space for art, Ulica kneza Koclja 9, Maribor

Opening hours: Monday–Friday: 9 a. m.–10 p. m., Saturday 4 p. m.–10 p. m.