

## Olja Triaška Stefanović: Yutopislavia

The exhibition will take place from 16 October 2024 to 15 January 2025 at the Artwall Gallery on the Embankment of Kapitán Jaroš and Edvard Beneš. **The opening will take place on 16 October at 18:00 at Acid Coffee, in the Centre for Contemporary Art, Dukelských hrdinů 500/25a, in Prague 7. The opening will be accompanied by a discussion with the artist.** The project is part of Fotograf Festival.

Olja Triaška Stefanović is a photographer originally from Yugoslavia living in Slovakia. In her latest project entitled Yutopislavia, she focuses on her relationship with Yugoslavia's past and explores the historical memory of her generation. Triaška visits and photographically documents various places in the former Yugoslavia. In the exhibition realised for the Artwall gallery, she presents photographs from the storage room of the Museum of Antun Augustinčić, Tito's "court" sculptor.

The photographs, featuring an effect reminiscent of artificial laboratory lighting, show unexpected assemblages and fragments of sculptures: soldiers, a hand holding a gun, a horse torso, a naked female figure and the famous statue of Marshal Tito. The style of the sculptures corresponds to the monumental realist sculpture of the time; Augustinčić worked from the 1930s to the 1950s. The niches that make up the Artwall gallery were built in the 1950s and timewise correspond to the theme of the exhibition. The sculptures intended for the public space thus move from the interior of the museum storage to the public space and regain their monumental dimension.

After the establishment of Yugoslavia, Augustinčić, who knew Tito from the partisan resistance movement, became an official artist, whose task was to materialize political ideals by means of his sculptures. For the UN headquarters in New York, he created a peace monument in the form of a horsewoman with an olive branch. The utopia of Yugoslavia, which was based on the ideas of peace, solidarity and coexistence of nations, ended in a disaster as an unfulfilled idealistic political experiment.

Olja Triaška Stefanović symbolically depicts the ideals of that time put away in storage. The relationship of contemporaries and the artist to this historical period is ambivalent. It is based on questions rather than clear answers. Yutopislavia is a country that never existed, but might have existed in another time and with different people. The artist says of her series, "Yutopislavia tells a deeply visual and personal story of my cultural heritage and upbringing during the Cold War, situated between East and West within the Non-Aligned Movement in the former Yugoslavia. I question what aspects of Yugoslavia's history have been forgotten or overlooked and how members of my generation identify with the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement."

The relics of the sculptural and ideological past at Artwall Gallery also raise questions about the nature of the present. With the abandonment of grand narratives in past decades, ideals have often left political reality. Olja Triaška Stefanović comments on the legacy of her exhibition and the lessons of the past: "Now, thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we are facing new global crises and the threat of a new (hot) Cold War. We need to discuss the importance of democracy, the threats posed by wars, nuclear weapons and the dangers that dictatorships and autocratic political regimes can bring to humanity."

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