



Katarina Zdjelar, Not A Pillar Not A Pile (Tanz für Dore Hoyer), 2017, Videostill, courtesy of the artist

Katarina Zdjelar

Exhibition runs: April 13 – July 8, 2018

Based in Rotterdam, Katarina Zdjelar (Belgrade, 1979) presents the first solo exhibition of her work in Austria. Consisting of several video installations, this exhibition presents a combination of new and previously-existing works as an early survey of her oeuvre.

Zdjelar has long investigated idioms and problematics of narrative, meaning and association as they slip through different languages and cultural expressions. Her most recent work deftly tests these notions through sutures and slippages, especially between music and song.

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Katarina Zdjelar: Vladimir

Text by Séamus Kealy

Zdjelar's first solo exhibition "Vladimir" in Austria, here at the Salzburger Kunstverein, features three video installations combined into a sculptural installation, comprising two video projections, one video installation and a sculpture, with each work adjoining to the next.

The central video installation is the artist's latest work *Not A Pillar Not A Pile (Tanz für Dore Hoyer)*, playing on four monitors over and around the central wooden floor-sculpture. This work is inspired by archival documents from an all-women's dance studio founded in 1945 in post-war Dresden by Dore Hoyer. Hoyer was a German choreographer and expressionist dancer. She is credited as "one of the most important solo dancers of the Ausdruckstanz tradition." Her choreographies, as was the general praxis and activity of Hoyer throughout her life, have some sort of manifestation in this central installation. Born in Dresden in 1911 into a working class family, Hoyer later became a known expressionist dancer and after WWII she went on to found a woman's dance school in Dresden. Hoyer's praxis as a dancer and educator, her philosophy of dance, her focus on the human condition in dance expression (she was called the "first existentialist in Modern dance"), as well as her commitment to social justice, are all of great import to Zdjelar in this work. The title alludes to a dance piece by Hoyer: *Tanz für Käthe Kollwitz* which premiered at the State Opera in Dresden in 1946 and was inspired by the graphic works of Käthe Kollwitz (died 1945), who, depicted the effects of poverty, hunger, and war on the working class in the previous decades in Germany.

In this installation, we see performers relating to Hoyer's *Tanz für Käthe Kollwitz* for the camera. Coordinated body parts from different performers align in movement and form, and then break apart again, all with minimal gestures and seeming flights of symbolism or meaning-production in these very gestures. This is a clear nod to Hoyer's expressionist style on the one hand, with bodies twisting, holding difficult patterns, bending and leaning in still poses for minutes at a time. Upon close inspection, gestures begin to take on political meaning as well, including the closed fist of the anti-fascist resistance. Indeed, the backdrop and the costumes arise out of designs by women working at PAUSA, a textile factory run by a Jewish family who took part in the anti-fascist resistance. The choreography of the piece—here repeated continuously by the fragment bodies in a digitally-synchronized loop—plays out these languages of the bodies, both older ones and newer ones generated from them, as quiet sites of resistance that might actually have more meaning today than we might first consider.

The dark-grey wooden boards supporting these four monitors—onto which the artist has had carved abstract forms—act as a damaged stage and simultaneously a sculptural support structure. The marks on the floor are reminiscent immediately of the art and physical labour of woodcuts, which Kollwitz herself often used as a medium in her work. Overall here, Katarina Zdjelar's work references a small chain of histories of anti-fascist resistance as they were produced and performed by these two women artists, one after the other, as if one through the other. These references form a living chain into the present, re-vitalizing these histories, and perhaps indicating that they are always available to call upon.

On the far left side of the gallery is projected another recent video work of Zdjelar: *AAA (Mein Herz)*. This single-shot video work shows a young woman simultaneously performing four compositions. While preserving the original style, tempo, and rhythm of the individual works, she maintains the key of the different music pieces. Silence, music, sound and words alternate and collide through the short, combined fragments of these four musical and poetic works (Rachmaninoff's 'Vocalise,' Womack & Womack's 'Teardrops,' a Polish poem

by Rafał Wojaczek, and Schubert's 'Die Post'). Despite a clear reference to the fragmentation of sound and image (as well as meaning, essence and implication) that is consistent with contemporary digital and especially online media, this video has been produced in one coordinated shot as collaboration between the artist and performer. However notions of fragmentation (of the body, of idea, of culture, of language, of living memory) are the heart of this work, while the performer literally stutters and skips gracefully from one violently-edited reference to another. Today's universal condition of disrupted meaning (through digital media, through deliberate political manipulation of information or what have you) is here mirrored and thwarted in the same gesture. The performer's sounds appear to be continuously torn out of their sockets, thus emphasizing not only the multiple and the partial but also simultaneous temporalities that all arise as common, everyday experience today. When we consider this contemporary condition after experiencing the initial video installation in the gallery, we begin to sense more and more Zdjelar's concerns as an artist for constructions and re-vitalizations of common forms of political agency today given recent and not so recent histories, and especially given the tendency for political narratives, cultural expressions or national identities to themselves emerge out of fragmented narratives at this time. Here, as often in Zdjelar's practice, it is the interruptions that speak out, both in agony and in despair, as well as with a tingling fury. The humanity of the singer and her powerful engagement with the camera—especially her unwavering gaze into the eyes of the viewer—again speak of the artist's spirit of resistance, here embodied in combined, wonderfully sung musical compositions bracketing language that must be spoken despite its condition.

The third video work on the right side of the gallery is titled *My Lifetime (Malaika)*. This work features Ghana's National Symphony Orchestra recorded in the National Theatre in Accra. The players are performing *Malaika*, originally a cheerful and empowering postcolonial composition that was famously performed by musicians like Miriam Makeba, Harry Belafonte, Boney M. and many others. The orchestra originates from the late 1950s when Ghana, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, had become independent from the United Kingdom. Nkrumah's government introduced new cultural structures in order to establish and enforce national consciousness and make the shift from colonial rule to an independent country which related to the ideas of the middle course, in accordance with the states in the Developing World. To establish new institutions of culture also meant to introduce a new attitude: traditional culture and music is functional and participatory, hence a gap between the audience and performers had to be created, dividing an on-stage body of doers and an off-stage body of spectators. This reorganization of spatial and behavioral conditioning suggested the formation of a new citizen of a new state who appreciates rather than only participates in music, and therefore changes traditional applications and functions of music and its presence in the public domain.

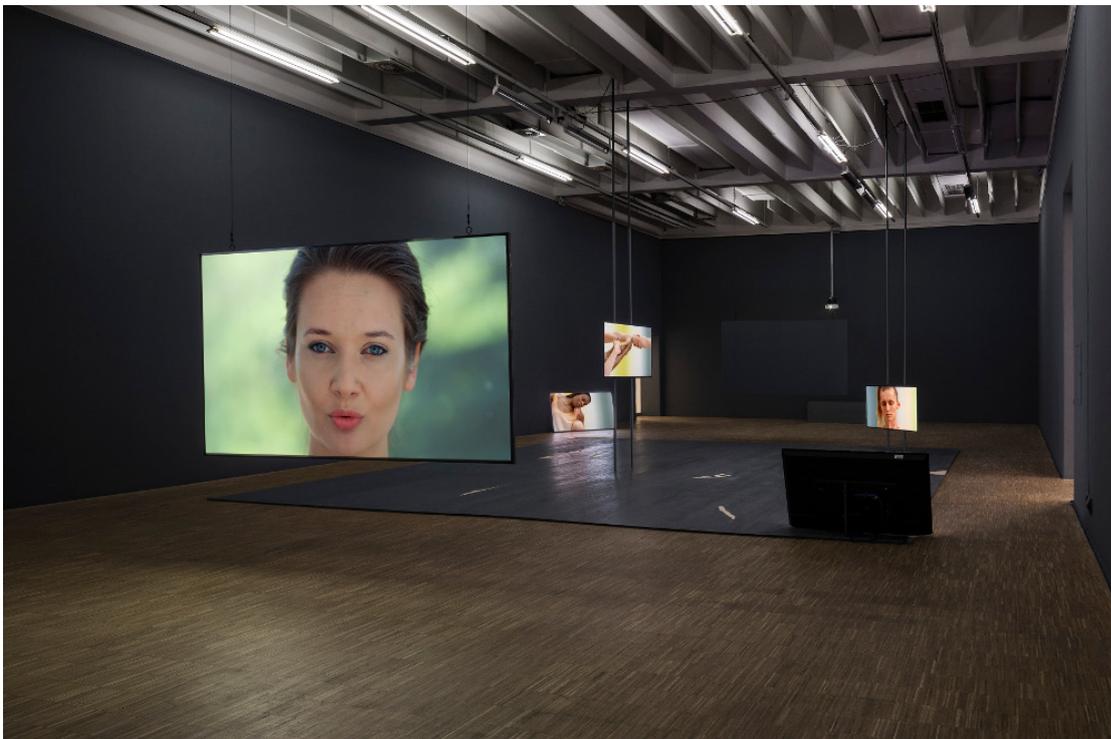
Being part of the political and cultural legacy of its founder Kwame Nkrumah, the national orchestra today has become an institution which witnessed this shift of one social rule to another. It cannot be abolished without provoking political turmoil, but which at the same time is too insignificant in contemporary Ghanaian society to be supported financially; thus, the orchestra's existence simply remains ambiguous. The indetermination that seems to resonate through the instruments, which are ideologically connected to the stereotypical image of the ever-so-civilized European colonialist, reflects the lack of being embedded in tradition and local values. It is telling that the players have to negotiate their time, and shift between different social roles, as they need to have additional jobs to be able to support themselves and, because of that, are unable to attend, late for or tired during the rehearsals. *My Lifetime (Malaika)* is neither a portrait of the musicians, nor is it a documentary about the National Symphony Orchestra of Ghana. With great sensitivity, Zdjelar rather deploys the orchestra in order to draw a sketch of a complicated state of affairs in which grand ideas and the mechanism of a nation state project takes root in and affects individuals.

Altogether Katarina Zdjelar explores how people perform and reinvent their own identities, using their voice, language and bodily gestures to move within and between cultures and societies. Moving seamlessly between natural and staged actions and personae, Zdjelar's films oscillate between artifice and reality, calling us to ponder the ambiguity, struggle and beauty of human experience.

Biography

Katarina Zdjelar (*Belgrade, 1979) lives and works in Rotterdam. She studied at Piet Zwart Instituut, Rotterdam and participated in other various programs and platforms. She is a former resident of the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, and has attended other academies. She is currently a tutor in the MA Artistic Research Program at Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten and a board member of Withe de With in Rotterdam.

In 2017 Katarina was shortlisted for the Dutch Prix de Rome, and won the Dolf Henkes Art Prize. She has exhibited extensively, including at the Muzeum Sztuki Lodz; Kunstverein Bielefeld; The Serbian Pavilion of the 53rd Venice Biennial; MACBA Barcelona; MNAC Bucharest; De Appel Contemporary Art Centre, Amsterdam; 5th Marrakech Biennale; The Power Plant, Toronto; Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; HMKV in Dortmund; MuHKA Antwerpen, and the Total Museum of Contemporary Art Seol.



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