

Vučić Četković
About residency program in Atelierhaus Salzamt

“I had a passport with an Italian visa which I had had no problem obtaining in Belgrade; I had some money on me, and the invitation from this foreign foundation in my pocket. To them, back then, I was still just some young writer from Serbia, a country which was in a desperate state, and which was bad to live in. I did not know how, and have never found that out, but I received this grant enabling me to spend a month at Lake Como, to work and write in peace there. This was their idea, not mine. At that moment I had absolutely no interest in working or writing in peace. At that moment I had absolutely no interest in any work at all. I had already given up publishing books. The situation in Serbia was extremely bad indeed, it was appalling, but I was not doing so badly and I can say that I was able to make ends meet: I did a little bit of everything and managed to live on it. The only thing I was writing at the time were short stories for a daily paper, which paid my rent; I ate and drank, and mostly drank, and managed to live somehow, but on writing less than anything else. I was writing something for myself as well, in ordinary small notebooks, having no serious intentions with it or any ambitions whatsoever. When out of the blue the invitation for a stay at Lake Como arrived from the Rockefeller Foundation, I duly filled in the form, and to their question as to what I was going to do there, I simply replied that I was going to work on a novel. I was drinking beer while writing a brief outline for the novel; I made it all up and my friend Vlada translated it into English; and then he corresponded with them for a while in my name, and returned the completed form to them. I kept him company, drank beer and learnt English from him. It wasn't long before the reply came; an official invitation arrived and I was ready. In those years, people were leaving the country all the time. People had always been leaving this country, from time immemorial. I left only for a month, and my friend Vlada was the one who had done and deserved it all.”

Como, Srđan Valjarević

The main motive of creation during my residential stay in Austria was the exploration of black-and-white painting technique, or mapping the possibilities of visual expression by opposing the two extremes in the colour range. At the same time, it was also a quest for a new individual manner of expression by combining the influences of two painting traditions, abstract and Op art; it was an exploration of the possible symbolisms of the two colours – black and white, of the possibilities of expressing the most complex impressions and thoughts about life and the world through a spectrum reduced to two colours, its two extremes. Could all the complexity of the world experience be encapsulated in the contrast of black and white, through the dualism or antithesis of the two extreme positions of the spectrum? Art is a field of freedom, and I used this freedom to explore the boundaries of my own expression by using black and contrasting its weight and concreteness to the wandering, elusive, boundless white; by comparing white as a colour associated with light to black as the colour of shadow. How to express visually all the emotional charge and tension caused by external stimuli relying merely on two possibilities? Being limited by the extreme colours of the spectrum led me further on to the investigation of the meaning of artistic expression through the contrast of the shapes, positions, intensity and dimensions of the elements, to the creation of a painting or drawing which reflects the essence of things – the paradox that harmony and contrast are self-sustaining only if they do not negate each other.

I find motives for my works in real life, and these motives continuously change, develop and adjust to the form, but it is vital that the essence always remains the same. They are essential forms of nature and man in it. Artists, by the way, thoughtfully observe the world and owing to their objectivity notice what others do not see. We watch things in their entirety rather than in their individual forms of expression. In a way, paintings describe what we would see in front of us if we did not observe the world and things around us within the given time and in the framework of what is visible and well-known to us all; if we had an insight into their essence and what makes them what they are, regardless of their present level of development. I tried to focus on the minutest details, but in such a way that, by depicting them in a simple manner, I convey the idea of the species we belong to. Thus, a painting is sometimes closer to the idea than the real thing as it offers pure form. The simpler a work is, the more clearly it conveys the essential idea, and beauty itself lies in simplicity. Beauty is always based on a similarity with nature, but this similarity does not necessarily have to be straightforward and is not always so in my works. The similarity does not lie in the form of what is depicted but in the very nature of the form itself.

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