

Maja Bajevic

Most of Maja Bajevic's work stems from her personal experiences, the socio-political turmoil that took place in the former Yugoslavia in 90s and the subsequent period of transition after the war in Bosnia –Herzegovina. **Back in Black** is a work that deals with the personal dimensions of trauma in the face of war and violence. In the video – a double projection – which was filmed in a traditional café decked with portraits of the late Yugoslav leader Tito, masked individuals recount disturbing, sick jokes about the war in Sarajevo in a cynical, alarmingly pedestrian and deadpan fashion. The dark humour here can be seen both as a strategy of catharsis but perhaps also as a mechanism that can enable the expression of the unspeakable, the unutterable or ultimately, what is, by-and-large, unrepresentable. How one can deal with such personal and collective trauma, seems to be one of the questions raised? How can one convey and represent personal suffering that resists description because of its sheer magnitude?



Back In Black, 2003 / Double Projection, 10' 9" / Courtesy the artist

About the work

The work of Maja Bajevic is related to her personal biography and the political and social circumstances in Yugoslavia during the 1990s. The dissident position of Bajevic, who has been living in Paris since the early 1990s, exists as a result of her connections to Sarajevo and her critical distance to the city and to the new dominant ideology, as well as to the political and national condition after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her work *Back in Black* consists of a double projection of a video taken in the nostalgic atmosphere of a café decorated by various portraits of Josip Broz Tito, the legendary president of Socialist, non-aligned Yugoslavia, a country in which the national, gender and class questions were supposedly solved once and forever. As on a stage, the masked persons tell dark, cruel and cynical jokes about wartime Sarajevo. The socks on their faces initially recall an armed and masked robber from the early ages of terrorism, when faces were still hidden, but the function of the mask is not to hide the face, but to make it recognizable – to make it identical and replaceable – and to prevent easy and naïve identification. This is also the function of the jokes: their dark humor eludes understanding and they do not suggest that humor is the vital energy that triumphs over all the difficulties, nor does it create a distance from the reality; humour denotes the very Real that cannot be symbolized. The cruelty of jokes is the only truth, the unutterable, the trauma that is not being discussed, and post-war Sarajevo acknowledges it in the form the jokes.

What, How & for Whom / WHW (Zagreb-based curatorial collective)

www.scca.ba/artistfiles/maja/main.htm