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Maja Bajevic

PALACIO DE CRISTAL, MUSEO CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFÍA, MADRID, SPAIN



In the brochure for her exhibition, 'Continuará' (To Be Continued), Maja Bajevic likens the architecture of the venue – the Palacio de Cristal, an 1887 iron-and-glass structure in the grounds of the Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofia modelled on Joseph Paxton's 1851 Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park – to a sleepy princess in a lace dress, lying long-dormant in the beautiful Parque del Retiro. It's a striking image, and highlights the confluence in this exhibition of elements found elsewhere in Bajevic's oeuvre: lace and embroidery, windows and glass, ephemeral structures and states, a powerful feminine presence, an intimate sense of history. But in 'Continuará' Bajevic has widened the scope of her thematic focus to take in nothing less than the tumultuous history of much of the world over the past 100 years, and accordingly extends her use of metaphoric confluences with deftness and dexterity.

The exhibition combines various formats and registers – performance, video, participatory sculpture, sound installation, research and archival material – in an intricately layered configuration woven together via a unifying motif: a compendium of political and advertising slogans from the last 100 years, such as 'Better Dead Than Red', 'Guns Don't Kill People, People Kill People', and 'No Blood For Oil'. They are presented in an archive of plastic-covered files to be consulted. The same slogans are chanted, litany-like, by male and female voices in a recording that echoes through the exhibition space. An opera singer performs the slogans a capella on certain days of the exhibition, while at other times hired performers cover some of the Palacio de Cristal's windows with dust into which they trace the slogans with their fingers. Each evening, after museum opening hours, a steam-generating machine produces a fog-cloud onto which the words are projected and which can be seen from the exterior of the glass building.

Like religious credos or vernacular craft, slogans such as these are the vertebrae on which collective identity is structured – and where, after all, does the division between collective and

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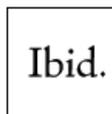
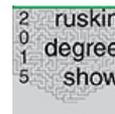
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individual identity fall, exactly? This nagging question, including in its darker and more grisly variants, underlies much modern history, even into the world's present-day popular movements and uprisings; it is a question Bajevic has explored in her work over the past 20 years. At the same time, while these slogans serve as the exhibition's unifying thread, the dominant visual motif of 'Continuará' is scaffolding; taken together, the words and the structure (which also finds a formal echo in the Palacio de Cristal's overarching skeletal frame) reinforce the suggestion that not only identity but history itself is a kind of construction. And as Bajevic's uneasy art proves, what is constructed can be deconstructed.

This careful assemblage of minimal and ephemeral material manages to fill the soaring space of the Palacio de Cristal far more than objects could possibly have been capable of doing, literally or conceptually. However, an object is also very much present in 'Continuará' – a large, grim, bunker-like construction which spectators are able to ascend via scaffolding and descend via a wide sliding-board, and which is inset with five video screens showing Bajevic's 2010 video *Wende* (German for change, turning point). The contrast between the bunker – closed, blind, unlovely – and the diaphanous Palacio de Cristal could hardly be greater. But on a deeper level, the bunker-cum-sliding-board adds little to the intricate poetry of 'Continuará' – on the contrary, its presence sounds a distinct false note within Bajevic's otherwise harmonious installation.

George Stolz

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