

POBEG IZ ALKATRAZA / ESCAPE FROM ALKATRAZ

GALERIJA ALKATRAZ / ALKATRAZ GALLERY

Who does not know the infamous military prison - a federal prison Alcatraz on an island in San Francisco Bay, famous for its notorious prisoners like the gangster Al Capone? It is still veiled in the repute of a prison nobody could escape from. The insidious streams between the main land and the island are the ones that should make any escape impossible. But this myth was refuted way back in 1933 by three young swimmers, three ladies, off whom the fastest covered the distance of 2.4 kilometres to the mainland in only 43 minutes!¹ Even before that, in 1918, there were four prisoners who escaped on a raft.² But the most famous of all was undoubtedly the escape of three prisoners in 1962, made eternalized in the film *Escape from Alcatraz* with Clint Eastwood starring in it in 1977.

Alcatraz Gallery is named after a prison. The space covered by former army barracks and the accompanying prison in Metelkova has symbolically changed - it has been transformed from a space of the reign of repressive apparatus of the former Yugoslav Army - into a gallery space, a space where it is desired to think with one's own head. It is the captivity in the presumably no exit fortresses that Matej Stupica deals with in the exhibition *Escape from Alcatraz*.³ To the artist, the idea of „Alcatraz“, represents an isolated system that deliberately and according to certain rules operates inside the walls of surveillance systems. Art is one of the systems the artist talks about and, gallery as an exhibit space personifies it.

The exhibition is an opportunity for reflection on the meaning of exhibiting inside a gallery space. This means subordination to the rules of its organization and, consequently, to the system of surveillance, as defined by the institution of a gallery, itself being a part of a (art) system, since its own operativeness is financially supported by various sources, who request galleries to follow certain protocols and produce proves of realization. An artist who wishes to show her or his creativity in a gallery, has to comply with the rules of co-operation with the institution and, at the same time, also join in the organisational context encompassing financial arrangement, legal provisions, logistic challenges, and numerous other things. Artefacts have to be placed inside a white cube, after the end of the exhibition they have to be removed and the keys returned. Stupica is aware of bureaucratic traps waiting for him, that's why he is thinking of a possibility to work outside the walls of the exhibition space; in his exhibition he discloses the "plans" for an escape from „Alcatraz“.

In the series *Here are the Dogs*, realized in Prague and Ljubljana this year, Stupica cuts a relatively large-format painted image of a street dog into 72 pieces, glues each of them separately on the walls of the streets of Prague and Ljubljana, photographs them and then puts them together into the original arrangement. Around each photograph of a part of the drawing in the integral artwork there is now a frame of the surroundings where the photograph was taken. Beside the exhibited series, there will also be photo-documentation, through the mapped locations of the misplaced pieces of the integral original, telling us in details the story of exhibiting in

the vastness of a city. It tells us about alternative exhibit spaces in urban space, exhibit spaces already gained by the works of other artists or "street dogs" as he named them, that the artist co-used. Using creative expressions they acquire their piece of land; like dogs mark it with pissing. Stupica is asking himself where there is artist's space nowadays; whether it can be found within rigid institutions difficult to co-operate with, and even more difficult to find one's own place in their programmes or, is an outdoor space - offering more freedom for creation - a better choice? In spite of the proclaimed "escape", gallery space remains the space for representation of Stupica's works; however, under the condition that their contexts are linked (in material, conceptually, as well as regarding their message) and connected to the outdoor space as the space of interaction, social contexts and daily life.

At the first sight it seems that the work of Matej Stupica is imbued with the type of modernism we are used to from the works of the students of the Ljubljana Academy of the Fine Arts, however, a more detailed look and a moment of time for reflection are the ones that disclose quite the opposite. "Modernism redefines the role of the form as a special form of »dialogic structure« or »visual discourse« that, within the frame of an artwork actively co-operates in constitution of meanings. Modernists were not interested in the form as rhetorical frame, but from the inside out, from the view of subtle emotional nuances, textures of meaning and shades of contents."⁴ With Stupica however, we find numerous stories from the culture of daily life, which let themselves be read by the viewer. It is actually the roguishly ironical title of the exhibition he has had in Tukadmunga Gallery, *Classic Painting Exhibition*, that says that he thoughtfully and not without hindrance, approaches the visual creation. Matej Stupica is a versatile artist; an author of comics, an illustrator, a musician, a creator that finds it natural to pass over from one medium to another, experiment with materials and research of techniques. At the group exhibition entitled *Postvirtual*, Tadej Pogačar said that an artist builds her or his three-dimensional works according to the principles of construction of two-dimensional ones, using primarily assemblage and collage, but his work expresses a dialogue with Rauschenberg and younger authors. »The tradition of collage is connected to the times of crises from Dadaism onwards, subverting some formal models, trying to speak of un-integrity of an image, a fragment, incorporation of found objects, recycling« explains Pogačar. »All this applies to the works of Matej Stupica, representing his personal commentary on some civilizational topics.«⁵

The artworks that he creates with the help of uncommon means and elements of chance convey the message that an image is a means to express one's thoughts. The accumulation of 72 photographs is a completed conceptual construction, and the same applies to the upright piano project *Organ 2011*, that may be a fruit of spontaneous creativity and good fun, while at the same time also a refined instrument of musical experimenting. The work is a joint idea of Matej Stupica and a musician Sašo Vollmaier. They have incorporated elements of daily life, light objects, as well as parts of used and found objects into an upright piano. They extend the music, symbolically place it into urban space, while providing interactivity in the way we are not used to. Without computer software, flash animation and high-tech devices *Organ 2011* offers a reflection about contemporary western

society and its infatuation and saturation with the latest technology.

Stupica's art is looking for its own ways out of the limitations of the art system; from the materials that he chooses himself, he is constructing his own subjective system, wide and empty, de-concentrated, open, always in progress, fragmentary and, unfinished. If the exhibition of Alkatraz Gallery, entitled *Escape from Alkatraz* of 2002 in Williamsburg Art and Historical centre in New York, represented a breakthrough of Slovenian artists of Metelkova from the Slovenian art system and their expansion outwards, a breakthrough towards the west, then Stupica's attempt to pull down the system represents a breakthrough inwards, a path to reflection and re-consideration, encouragement to escape towards disintegration of the system from the inside out. Like every revolution - after it has become recognized and has come to power - institutionalizes itself and turns into its own opposite, in the same way there are always new "prisons" and systems emerging, that need to be questioned incessantly and liberated from their oppression. With his open works Stupica illustrates these processes very well. But there is always hope, as pelicans can always fly off the island.⁶

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