

“In Another Life I was a Stone”

Ovidiu Toader's recent artistic projects stage environments that challenge the relationships between beholders and objects, beholders and space, objects and space. To generate these ambiances, Ovidiu revisits the personal and collective past, selects elements, which he reinvests sensorially and conceptually. The worktable, as a place of creativity, process, observation, takes on monumental proportions in the solo exhibition "The First Lockdown Among Insects" (2021), introducing the body into unexpected situations and relationships with familiar objects and with beings often situated on the edge of our visual field. The negative space of the table becomes a collective and non-hierarchical one, where human and non-human entities coexist within a present moment in crisis. The next show, "After Image of Hope" (2022) explores the physical possibilities of the island as a catalytic space for conviviality and for critical and creative reflection on the past, present and future. Populated by gigantic plants, which carry out their existence in the absence of man, developing survival tactics, Ovidiu brings up one of the recurring scenarios about a non-human future, destabilizing the human-nature asymmetry.

Read as heterotopias, the ambiances become spaces that function according to other social and temporal rhythms. In the process of exploring/going through the exhibition, viewers activate objects, interact with one another. Daily time is replaced by exhibition time. The time of the exhibition encompasses the multiple temporal registers of the objects. Within the current exhibition, the interest in heterotopias and other types of viewer involvement is manifested by the insinuation of the presence of a laboratory. In it, a futuristic scenario in which technological elements intersect with those of magical thinking is woven. This ambience is correlated with the condition of the artist as explorer, and the method seems to be "the estrangement of the world for the world"¹.

The approach to reality and the chosen artistic medium, the installation, inscribe Ovidiu's approach in what Svetlana Boym calls *off-modern perspectivism*². Ambiguity persists in the ways

¹ Victor Shklovsky, „Art as Technique” în *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Lee T. Lemon, Marion J Reis (eds), University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1965, pp. 3-24 *apud* Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern*, pp. 18-19. Conceptul de înstrăinare îi aparține lui Shklovsky. Acesta, explică Svetlana Boym, se referă la distanțarea văzută ca un instrument de stimulare a curiozității pentru lume, care este reinvestită senzorial și conceptual prin înstrăinare. Lumea se înfățișează, în acest caz, sub o formă nouă, ca o întrebare, nu ca un răspuns grandios.

² Svetlana Boym, *The Off-Modern*, Bloomsbury, Londra, 2017, p. 35.

of representing, seeing and thinking³. This can result, Svetlana explains, from capturing in the same image two ways of seeing, as in the case of anamorphosis⁴. But this play of perspectives is doubled, Svetlana continues, by a logic of alienation⁵. Not only can an image host another image accessible to the viewer from another perspective, but this repositioning and double deciphering generates an ambiguity that opens up a spectrum of possibilities. In the case of Ovidiu's new artistic project, the created ambience contains multiple perspectives, from which only certain elements can be discovered. The corporal engagement of the viewer in navigating through the space, placing her/him in certain angles, in order to discover aesthetic entities and reconfigurations of relationships between them does not lead to ambiguity consumption and meaning decoding. The installation works as a frame, as a enclosing a situation where ambiguity persists, in order to reflect critically and creatively regarding a problematic present that can be read in an individual or collective key.

Ovidiu Toader (b. 1991, Braşov, Romania) is interested in exploring the individual and collective memory, using various forms of recollection of personal or historical experiences. In his artistic practice, he uses the assemblage as a method to juxtapose found, collected, and sometimes recycled objects collected from his travels, the space where he lives in, from his grandparents' house or from his workshop.

³ Svetlana Boym, *The Off-Modern*, p. 35.

⁴ Svetlana Boym, *The Off-Modern*, p. 37.

⁵ Svetlana Boym, *The Off-Modern*, p. 35.