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Flaka Haliti
Partly Cloudy or Partly Sunny
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“Why is the sky blue?”, wonders Maggie Nelson in her hybrid prose poem *Bluets* (2009). In search for answers, the author remembers that the colour of any planetary atmosphere viewed against the black of space and illuminated by a sunlike star will appear blue. In an anecdote in Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (1927–40), a child looks in awe at a panoramic painting, remarking “it’s only too bad that the sky is so dreary” to which his mother responds, “that’s what the weather is like in war”. It’s precisely this gloomy sky and its political landscape that Flaka Haliti’s exhibition *Partly Cloudy or Partly Sunny* at Deborah Schamoni is centred on.

In many ways, Haliti’s exhibition can be understood as a continuation of her ongoing investigation into what she terms the “demilitarisation of aesthetics”, challenging the pervasive influence of military aesthetics on societal structures and collective consciousness. Rooted in the lived experience of the Kosovo War (1998–99) and emerging from the shadows of the nation’s fraught history with NATO’s peacekeeping forces, Haliti’s works often incorporates or directly references materials sourced from the visual vocabulary of defence forces. At the centre of her show is the eponymous sculpture *Partly Cloudy or Partly Sunny* (all works 2024), a lacquered cloud modelled from wood sitting between bulletproof glass and suspended from the ceiling with a military cargo net. Not only does the work call to mind Haliti’s earlier photo series of clouds *I See a Face. Do You See a Face.* (2014) but its title is also a reference to the inherent contradictions of the work: the fluidity and formlessness of the cloud juxtaposed with the solidity and violence of the materials used to create it.

While Haliti’s earlier works¹ considered how the colour blue serves as a social code of unified Western values – indicated by its use in flags of international bodies like the European Union and the United Nations – here it is not the blue sky but the blurry cloud that signifies tactics of obstruction during war. For *The Emperor Was Extremely Chatty*, the artist enlarged an image of the dreary sky in Anton von Werner’s *Sedan Panorama* (1883) and printed it on separate metal plates. Originally installed at Berlin’s Alexanderplatz as a massive canvas of 1735m², the panorama depicts the Battle of Sedan (1870) at a decisive moment in the victory of the German forces over the French. Giving the illusion of a rotunda, the shape not only draws on architecture of control and the ways in which the original panorama – in its sheer size and prominent placement – intended for the audience to be immersed into a collective experience of war, but also on W.J.T. Mitchell’s concept of the meta-picture: images that expose their own conditions of possibility or problematise the act of representation itself.

Conversely, the motifs of the drawings in *Empty but Present, Absent but Full* only reveal themselves while looking past the bulletproof glass at which various bullets have been fired: a horse’s head and a dog’s snout, symbols of animals historically exploited in warfare. By placing the drawings behind the glass, Haliti alludes to the urge to recognise the gap between an image’s form and its deeper, constructed meaning – what Roland Barthes referred to as contemporary myth – which reinforces dominant ideologies by disguising them as universal truths.

Throughout the last two centuries, the rhetoric surrounding empires has evolved in tandem with their decline. However, what has endured – and what Haliti’s exhibition attests to – is the persistent use of military power to assert dominance. In *Partly Cloudy or Partly Sunny*, she seems to suggest that one way to challenge the persisting entanglement of aesthetics and warfare that governs contemporary societies is by means of ambiguity and abstraction – strategies that disrupt prevailing myths and

¹ The most prominent example is likely to be the installation *Speculating on the Blue* (2015), presented at the Kosovo Pavilion at the 56th La Biennale di Venezia, for which she covered the floor with blue sand and metal constructions resembling border wall supports. Experimenting with the concepts of visibility and invisibility, the light colours shifted throughout the day – from white to yellow, red, pink and finally blue – to alter the viewer’s perception and evoke disorientation, symbolizing the psychological and physical barriers of national borders.

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narratives of power and dominance. Throughout her work, Haliti offers a potent reminder of art's potency to reimagine a collective future rather than merely echo the current state of affairs. As a result, perhaps in future, we might ask not why the sky is blue, but rather, why it is partially cloudy and sunny, calling for a more nuanced and complex view of the world.

Text: Carina Bukuts