

ARTCAL

Stalking with Stories at apexart

By Elaine Kaufmann | Features, Reviews | October 16, 2007



Stalking with Stories: The Pioneers of the Immemorable
Curated by Antonia Majaca and Ivana Bago
apexart – 291 Church Street, New York NY
19 September – 3 November 2007

Too often the works in thematic exhibitions have a predictable sameness to them. The theme provides a narrow focus, with one work after another conveying a similar take on the subject. The current show at apexart, Stalking with Stories, is a welcome change. Curated by Antonia Majaca and Ivana Bago, the works are unified through their consideration of nostalgia and memory, while each piece plays with the friction between stories known to a group and the individual experiences of those stories. What can be revealed and what is left out vary considerably from artist to artist. These investigations into

narrative collectively manifest its elusive and shifting nature.

Felix Gmelin's video installation, *Farbtest, Die Rote Fahne II*, includes two monitors. One shows a red flag being carried through the streets of Berlin in 1968; the other depicts a recreation of this performance in 2002 Stockholm. Though the political landscape of a walled Berlin provides the backdrop for the earlier video, so does the knowledge that the artist's father appears in the Berlin video. Divorced from the 1968 context, the younger Gmelin's inhabiting of the past strips substance from the action, suggesting the impotence and emptiness of parroting historical acts of social protest.

Sanja Ivekovic also speaks to shifting contexts with *Ponos* (Pride), an installation built around a remade neon shop sign from socialist Yugoslavia. The sign hung at a textile shop and bore a name typical of the time. But the reference to mandated respect for the country's economic system is now outdated; pride has been removed from the shop walls and brought into the art world. The sign's physical movement reflects the shifting consequence of a single word and the impossibility of persistent meaning.

It Doesn't Matter by Katerina Seda has no tangible relics from the past. Instead we see a video of the artist's grandmother drawing a catalogue of objects from memory. One item after another, this elderly woman depicts the merchandise sold in the shop where she worked for many years. This project arose from Seda's attempts to connect with her grandmother, a woman who refused to utter much besides the title's "It doesn't matter." She has blocked access to more than a slight window onto her experience. Unaware of the circumstances that led to her tired resignation, we can only speculate about this woman's story.

In *KOLDOM*, Zbynek Baladran also creates a drawing from memory, his focus the layout of an apartment. He revises his efforts, crossing out walls as the process reveals gaps and inconsistencies. Baladran's drawing refers not to a space he lived in but to a utopian apartment first imagined by architect Karel Honzik. Our yearnings for the past include much that was built only in the landscape of the mind.

Stalking with Stories includes work by eight artists in total. apexart provides a brochure with a short essay written by the curators that thoughtfully examines the theoretical underpinnings of their selections.