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Milena Jovičević's exhibition entitled "Pjevaj Maro, Pjevaj Zlato... "Sing Maro, Sing My Precious..." at the Gallery Art in Podgorica



Milena Jovičević's exhibition entitled "Pjevaj Maro, Pjevaj Zlato... "Sing Maro, Sing My Precious..." was opened on 17/12/2021 at the Gallery Art in Podgorica. The exhibition is organised by the Public Institution Museums and Galleries of Podgorica in partnership with the UNDP. The curator of the exhibition is Maša Vlaović, art theoretician and historian.

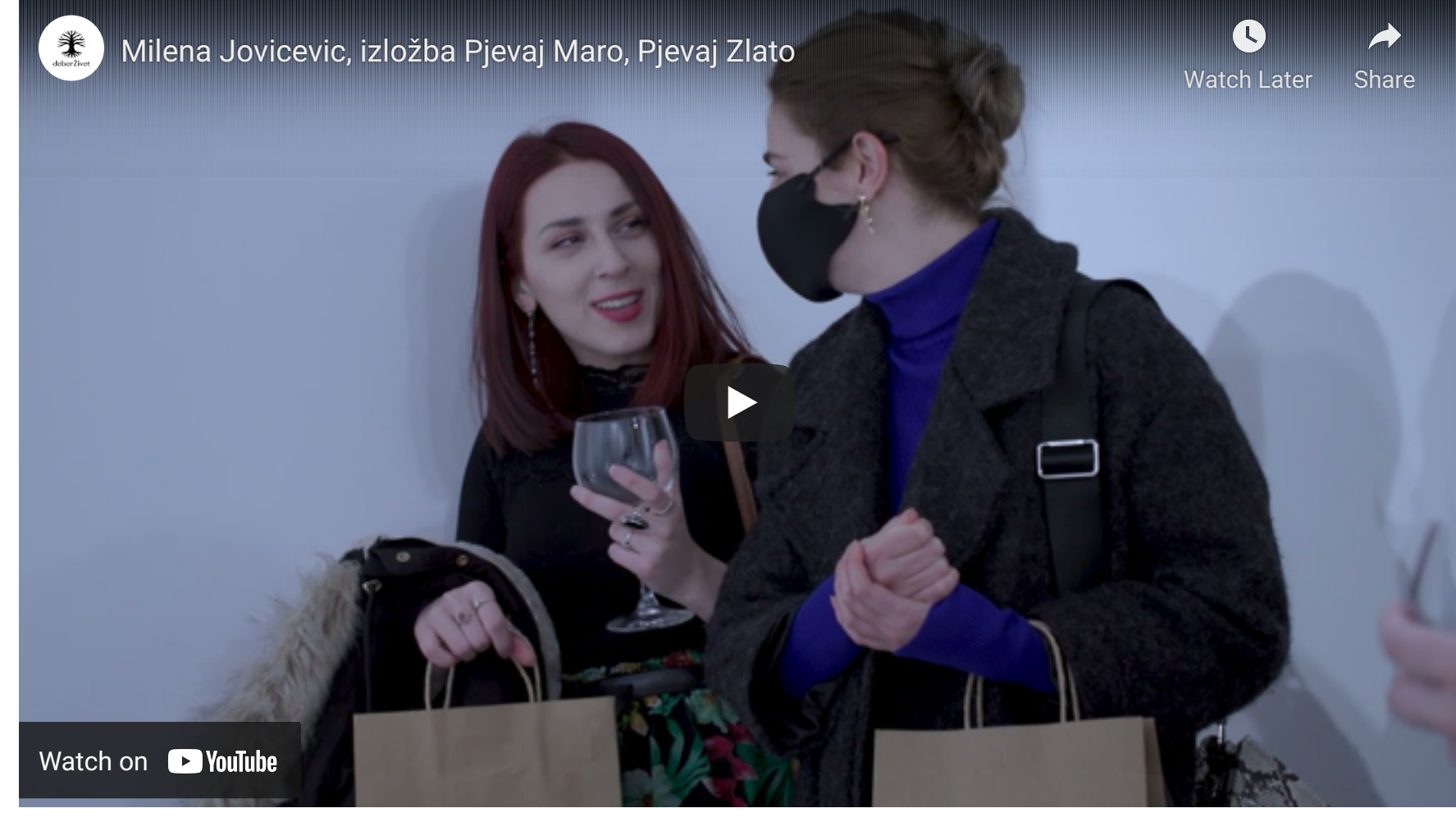
The Montenegrin artist Milena Jovičević prepared a multimedia exhibition for her new encounter with the art audience. Neither the artist, nor the curator of the exhibition attended the opening of the exhibition at the Art gallery. The exhibition itself, with its intriguing title "Sing Maro, Sing My Precious", which did not have the usual opening ceremony and a catalogue with an introductory review, disturbed the a priori performances organised for visitors of gallery spaces. The exhibition has a socially engaged character and demands vigilance and audience involvement.

Milena Jovičević insists that art should unsettle expectations in the domain of the narrative. She decided to provide the audience with the freedom of perception and interpretation of her work, thereby demonstrating that visual art provides the possibility of unique experience to the perceiver. The exhibition focuses on gender, as well as other stereotypes that define women in a patriarchal society, and the works are predominantly focused on the aforementioned phenomenon in the Montenegrin society.



"Sing Maro, Sing My Precious" aims at breaking gender and other stereotypes, which define the role of women in a patriarchal society. Although the topic is current in the global art scene, this exhibition predominantly deals with the phenomenon as experienced in Montenegro. The concept of the exhibition also challenges established forms of presenting the work, disregarding the "ceremonial" act of opening the exhibition.

Instead of the usual catalogue, visitors were presented with a "User Manual" at the entrance. As the audience arrived, the question of: "And where is the artist, why is she not there and will she come?" occupied them. The artist and the curator were not physically present at the exhibition, sarcastically placing themselves in the position of Mare who is taking care of the children back at home, while the husbands attend exhibitions. Although the artist and the curator did not greet the audience, their presence could be felt through the video work "Sing my precious, although you are married..." installed at the Gallery windows. They address the visitors with the words: "Good day, good evening, welcome, please proceed".



To the right and left of the video installation, we see fairly detailed data from their lives – their height, weight, blood type, marital status, husband's name, husband's salary, flaws, details on their relationship with their mothers-in-law, Latin designations of surgical procedures that they underwent...

One of the first instructions given to the audience is not to approach the work "on an empty stomach", adding that the works are "best digested with adequate food", which is why catering was placed at the entrance to the gallery space. The menu of the day is elaborate – the dishes are "enriched" with names containing various art techniques: sfumato kebabs, lazare puree, mâché peppers with onions... "The catering is aligned with the concept of the exhibition. In the central room we 'celebrate' the birth of the son, the heir, the rifleman, the extender of the bloodline... How could it go without weapons, cannons, kebabs, burgers, pork, onions..." says Milena Jovičević.



A famous Montenegrin folk wedding song echoes in the gallery – "Sing Maro, My Little Lamb" performed by Bojana Nenezic. The longer you stay in the gallery, the more melancholic the verses become, while their repetitiveness evoke discomfort and sadness.

"I think that the text of the Montenegrin folk wedding song 'Sing Maro, My Little Lamb...' could be a piece of its own. Imagine the lyrics of a wedding song in which the groom effectively 'threatens' the bride, and we hum it without even realising what it means. The song is truly something special: the mismatch between the beautiful melody and what the lyrics convey can be a true reflection of the historic and present-day Montenegro. In Bojana Nenezic's fantastic interpretation, the song conveys real emotions, those of sadness, irritability, restlessness, revolt..." said Jovičević.

The audience is greeted at the entrance to the gallery space by the installation "Men's Games Over and Over Again", which illustrates the author's intention to approach the deconstruction of gender stereotypes through a satirical framework. Typical men's entertainment, such as table football, is tuned upside down in the author's interpretation, whereby the players are female figures that represent the most established stereotypes about women. The artist says: "If you 'feel' like playing the game, and you're not a 'Man' – don't do it. And if you are a 'Man', again, don't play it because you'll be bored – you've been playing it since birth, and you'd have to pay if something were to happen to the piece."

It is followed by an interesting "Welcome for men" and "Welcome for women", in which Milena Jovičević deals with gender stereotypes through language – words are written in a combination of Cyrillic and Latin script. It is very simple for men – "You are all welcome", while for women, it contains an array of labels attached to them on a daily basis – My dear "bachelorettes", "situated women", "chicks", "beautiful" ... you are all welcome.



A festive red carpet then leads to the central piece, the painting-installation "Sing Maro, Sing My Precious". The painting is inspired by the work of the famous French artist from the era of romanticism, Théodore Géricault piece, The Raft of the Medusa. The artist recontextualises the topic, and instead of the characters in the original painting, she introduces our contemporaries who, in a rapture, celebrate one of the most venerated customs in Montenegro – the birth of a son / heir / rifleman / bloodline extender. Of course, as befits the celebration, the painting features the use of all sorts of weapons. Additionally, the back of the painting features "Recipes for obtaining a male offspring", which caused a great deal of interest among the audience. Jovičević also left the observers with the possibility to write down their own recipe on the back of the painting. We then finally see the piece "Everything Will Come To An End", which is a warning. The big hourglass has a stone stuck in its structure, which is unable to pass through the bottleneck, but it breaks the glass. The piece evokes the act of being static, the impossibility of action. It indicates stagnation in time and space with personal and collective frustrations.

Milena Jovičević showed the audience how a woman born in Montenegrin lives, and even employed precise statistical data shared by the UNDP, which are featured in the "User Manual". On its first reading, the exhibition makes one smile, due to its satirical approach, but when one looks a bit deeper, it is a strong critical review of the aforementioned topic and an invitation for deeper thought.

At the end of the evening, the visitors were given a gift prepared by the artist and the curator, along with Djevojčice sa kikerima. The exhibition was supported by Savremena Karitajada, while Danijela Radovanovic is a friend of the exhibition.

Photos: Duško Miljanić, Djordje Cmiljanić

The exhibition will be open to visitors until January 27.

Courtesy: PR team of the Public Institution Museums and Galleries of Podgorica

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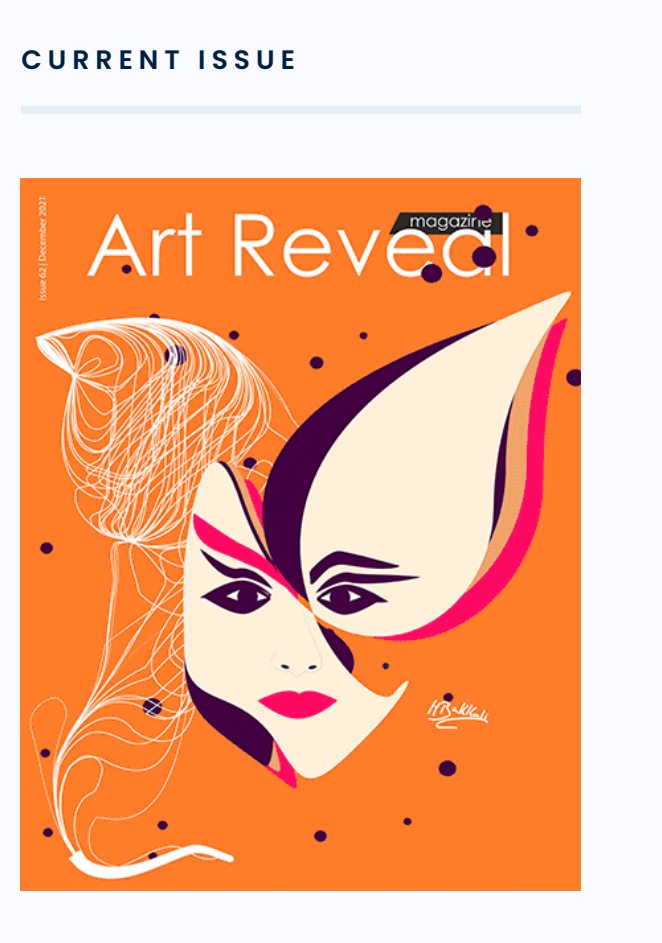
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