

In the traditional anthropology, woman symbolizes the power of nature. Throughout the history of art and literature, women have often been perceived as the greatest ideal or blessing, but also the greatest sin or temptation. The characteristics of women varied from a fragile, tender and fragile girl and the ideals of a wife and mother, through an impulsive, emotional, intellectual, moral being, all the way to a fatal woman or a heroic, strong and fearless female person. The woman was often a symbol of great complexity that combines spiritual and emotional states. The position of women in society changed depending on socio-historical, ideological, economic and many other factors. But times have changed significantly. As an independent and autonomous individual, a woman seeks her own space of freedom for development and action, and wants to actively and equally participate in the construction of the world.

The group exhibition Women about women is part of the international art project Rise of women in culture in the Western Balkans, co-founded by the European Union. According to the initial idea of curator Biljana Jotic, five curators from five countries - Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia and Northern Macedonia - selected five artists from their country who deal with the meaning, role and issue of women in their artistic work. The theme of women initiated by female curators and artists focuses on women as an active participant and protagonist of their own destiny, actions, experiences and interpretations of women's lives in the modern world. The richness of different expressions and media, as well as the experiences and topics that the artists problematize within their works, resulted in an exhibition in which the works vividly and sincerely convey the perception, thoughts, attitudes and experiences of the presented artists. By living in a common space, communication between unique works is realized, a connection between individual authors and the media develops, while borders disappear and give way to understanding and thematic connections between strong visual works that embody the semantic characteristics of the author and the country she comes from.

Croatian artists Ivana Bajcer, Mirela Blažević, Marina Ćorić, Lena Kramarić and Mateja Rusak openly talk about the perception and perception of women in the medium of painting, photography and video work, starting primarily from themselves, so that even three authors express themselves through the theme of self-portraits. In the video work "Rinsing", Ivana Bajcer speaks honestly about the imposed expectations and prejudices about artists, women, success and careers, which she has continuously listened to and stored in her mind over the years. The residue of all imposed restrictions destroyed her inner peace and put her in a paralyzing state of helplessness. In the video work, the artist is sitting in the bathtub, and prejudices, tips and limitations are written on her body that hinder her further progress. **Ivana Bajcer** begins to resolutely wash the words from her body that are so deeply ingrained in her mind. Washing the inscription from the body is a ritual act that represents a cathartic experience in the context of resolving burdensome and accumulated negativities and limitations, but its complete fulfillment is impossible because some thoughts remain permanently written in us. Also through the motif of the female body, **Mateja Rusak** urges women not to succumb to imposed social values and expectations but to celebrate their freedom. Photography "Expose yourself" is part of a wider cycle within which the author explores the exterior and interior of the female body through the medium of photography. A carefully selected shadow frame with a fragment of the

back, shoulders and arms simultaneously reveals and hides, and suggests the complexity of the female being. So much has been said, contained and indicated in the extremely purified ambient work. The poetics, beauty and serenity contained in photography opens a complex theme - the modern world encourages and supports the struggle for their own rights and has an understanding for difficult situations and tragedies, but at the same time the possibility of a woman being happy and free has become taboo? We can easily add to this question the theme of celebrating beauty. On the one hand, the excessive objectification of women, ie the notion of women as a sexual object, is actively (and justifiably) criticized, while, on the other hand, the notion of aesthetics and classical beauty is suppressed and trivialized. Has she also become undesirable today? Can a woman be proud of her mental and physical wealth, abilities, and the beauty she possesses? In black-and-white photography "Lace", **Marina Ćorić** strives for classicism, simplicity and purity of form, as well as for expressing the aesthetic aspiration related to the universal ideal of beauty. Always sincere in her work with the aim of expressing her own feelings through the presentation of her personal intimate world, Marina Ćorić defines the monochromatic cycle of photographs, created 10 years ago, as opposition to the rest of her work and expression, which is often characterized by vulnerability, exposure and chaos. By opposing two different cycles, the author actually balances her work, while the opposites of the opus emphasize their separate values. In her work, **Mirela Blažević** uses the female body as a creative means of communication. As the artist herself says "the body is the subject of the experience of achieving the greatest pleasure in the act of painting - at that moment I feel the emptiness and the world flowing through me". The painting "World" is a self-portrait of the artist interpreted from an unusual angle where the viewer has a unique opportunity to see the world from the position of the artist. We do not see the author's face, but we look with her eyes. This unusual interpretation allows a view of an intimate world, seen through the eyes of the artist, but dedicated to the observer to experience and interpret it himself. **Lena Kramarić's** painting "Erasing-rewind" introduces us to our own world, but at the same time to our world. A very lively work of an extremely thoughtful atmosphere with an extremely simple motive tells the story of time. In the center of the composition is a woman whose face is covered with a rich bouquet of flowers. She represents the present, while the blackness behind her back is the past, and the whiteness in front of her is the future. All these elements merge or disappear and disappear in the central part, because the present is our past and acquired experience, but also our desires and hopes. Moving forward is entirely up to us.

Montenegrin artists Anka Gardašević and Jovana Vujanović follow the question of time in their works, while Gordana Kuč, Maja Šofranac and Milena Jovičević focus on the question of freedom, identity and imposed stereotypes. Through the photograph "Pietà", **Anka Gardašević** interprets the story of duration and our awareness of finality with the intention of stimulating and activating buried memories and opening the question of our battle. With the installation "Orbiting", **Jovana Vujanović** points to the very act of waiting through the impressive implementation of her own character in the work, shown in a nightgown in the medium of black and white photography, alluding to the flow of time through the clock motif we often focus on in the waiting process. With her body position and facial

expression, the artist points to a state that is exhausting and by which we enter a limbo of infinite duration in which nothing happens and we lose hope and meaning. From the field of perception of time, we enter the field of identity in the cycle of images-objects "I am someone else" by **Gordana Kuč**. The composition of abstract, but in the form and material of associative elements (black fishnet stockings) with maximum reduction speaks, as the author points out, about the female experience through the association to the physical, sensory and intimate. The question of identity and freedom continues in the work of **Maja Šofranac**. The work "Single woman" performed in the monoprint technique on a synthetic canvas depicts the human body on which the author projects the cross section of an airplane engine as a symbol of socially imposed and gender roles which, as the author says, make traditional Montenegrin beliefs worth living. The projection covers the drawing, suppresses it, denies it and imposes its identity. The question of the freedom of choice of life and action of women in society arises. The focus is on combating the imposed demands and expectations of an unconscious environment that suppresses personal identity and leads to drowning in a stereotypical collective community identity that does not contribute to the development and wealth of both the individual and the community. The work of **Milena Jovičević** points to the problem of the patriarchal matrix according to which Montenegrin society continues to operate. The installation of "Man's games, over and over again" with simple but extremely clear and impressive symbolism points to the problems of inequality, limitations, prejudices, imposed roles and stereotypes in society. The author portrays three female figures in the position of table football players and shapes them as classic stereotypes in society: a traditional woman as the personification of a good wife and mother, a silicone woman with overemphasized physical attributes reduced to a sexual object and a career-obsessed businesswoman. But the key message that the artist sends with this work is that the game in which they participate is not fair from the beginning, because the actresses play a male game according to male rules and although there is no visual confirmation of male presence in society, only he wins points and manipulates.

Serbian artists Anđela Grabež and Leonora Vekić continue the story of identity, while Gordana Belić, Natalija Miladinović and Vesna Vesić focus on the expression of emotions through a personal story. The video work "Someone" by **Anđela Grabež** is a story about the identity and masks we wear and hide behind, just as we hide behind the roles we play in society. The rapid changes of shots within the video work emphasize different surfaces and textures as well as body parts while the field of erotica allows for openness and honesty in communication. **Leonora Vekić** communicates the story of the archetypes of female identity through the series "Portraits" performed in the medium of handmade lace fastened to a plexiglass frame. The face is indicated but transparent, while its richness stands out through the relationship of light and shadow in the background. The ancient technique of crocheting is associated with customs and traditions, evokes memories of the heritage of the female line in the family, and its encounter with the present is manifested through a combination with modern cold material - plexiglass. Using another old-fashioned technique - felting - **Vesna Vesić** in her work "My dears / Adorno's letter to his parents" (from the series "Gentle things - conceptual and

useful") points out the importance of touch or tactility as a significant medium for energy transfer. Woolen paintings contain parts of political and intimate texts by important philosophers of the 20th century that refer to great changes such as world ups and downs, while fabric paintings offer a kind of physical and spiritual support - a blanket as a place of tenderness, warmth, comfort and security. Gordana Belić and Natalija Miladinović introduce us to the world of emphatically personal and intimate experience that focuses on the connection with loved ones. Outstretched arms that call for contact, hugs and intimacy form a sculptural installation through which **Gordana Belić** expressed the emotion and condition in which she found herself after the sudden loss of her mother. Installation "Mother!" it is an interactive work in which the artist expressed everything she could not express in words. A completely different work, but with equally strong energy of connection and relevant emotional content, is the photograph "Room of Loud Thoughts" by **Natalija Miladinović**. The naked female figure kneels and embraces the pregnant belly with her hands, her hair covers her face, and her body position expresses emotions, as does the expressive background image with a dominant red color that offers multiple meanings. The contrast of the calm female figure in her own contemplation and the expressiveness of the background artwork form a perfectly balanced whole, emphasizing each other's own states and emotions.

Looking at the works of artists from different countries united in this exhibition, more and more links and similarities in emotions and problems are opened, although it is an individual experience and completely different circumstances. For example, in the works of artists from Northern Macedonia Shqipa Mehmeti and Hristina Zafirovska, the problems of stereotypes, patriarchy and restriction of freedom are also brought to the fore by the previously mentioned Maja Sofranac and Milena Jovičević, while the works of Tanja Balać and Marija Miloševska refer to the modern world. to the importance of art, but also of some old extinct techniques and customs. The work "Silence" in the combined technique of drypoint and pencil speaks openly about the society in which the author **Shqipe Mehmeti** lives, and in which women and their needs even in the XXI. century considered taboo. The close-up of a woman's face covered with a strong hand is a clear symbol of repression, repression, prohibition and restriction of women's freedom of thought and action. In a country where women are still perceived exclusively as an instrument for reproduction and continuation of the family line, the author openly confronts taboo advocates through her artistic work in the hope of a reaction that is a key tool in the struggle to break free from imposed traditional frameworks. **Hristina Zafirovska** expresses her personal criticism of the growing and extremely vulgar exploitation of women in the marketing industry in the art object "WOMAN". Namely, the author points out that despite all the declaratively acquired legal rights that make women and men equal, in practice the situation is far from ideal. As an example, she cites modern advertising campaigns in which almost without exception women are defined as synonymous with reproduction and sexuality. Subtle, intelligent, simple and refined, and extremely clear and impressive, Hristina Zafirovska presents criticism by visually-textually replacing known stereotypes, changing their established roles through accepted colors and shapes that we associate with a certain gender. **Ana Lazarevska** motivated by the extraordinary circumstances in which we all found ourselves at the

time of the world pandemic through the work "Who are you?" calls for introspection. The luminous object in the center of which the question is written in a circular shape and applied to the wall is associated with a mirror, and instead we come across a question that encourages us to look in it and think about ourselves. The video work "Memorabilia" by **Tanja Balać** also deals with self-knowledge. The artist explains that starting from the perception of modern man as a lonely individual focused on virtual networking, she offers her imaginative world filled with art as an alternative to new thoughts and choices of action. While Leonora Vekić pointed out the technique of crochet and the richness of lace, Vesna Vesić pointed out the technique of felting and wool material, **Marija Miloševska** in her work "Ad infinitum" combines filigree technique and artificial fly fishing. As she says, her goal is to emphasize the role of women through filigree jewelry, defining the approach and practice of jewelry as a critical discourse in creating culture, which she achieves in this exhibition through impressive, aesthetically appealing and refined photography. , while colors, textures and shapes embody and intertwine the richness of filigree technique and the characteristics of fly fishing.

The search for and discovery of their primordial being is problematized in various ways by Slovenian artists. **Anja Kranjc** points to the pressure of capitalist society focused on defining the role and perception of women in the modern world. We are all told that we must be strong and strong, as if the expression of fragility or sensitivity is our own defeat. The painting "Embodiment of Wildlife IX" is a vertical composition of a forest landscape with dominant meditative blue tones, in the center of which the author places a reclining female figure covered with a light ruffled fabric. Blue as the color of emptiness, infinity and the divine signifies peace, contemplation and mind, and calls for the discovery of one's own spiritual being who embodies the wilderness. The question of personal depth of the soul, also through the dominant blue color, is dealt with by **Lona Verlich** in her work "Woman in Blue - Uterus". The painting embodies the author's spiritual portrait through an extremely stylized female figure placed in an airless space filled with a series of floating elements, some of which we recognize at first, such as heart motifs, while others introduce us to the author's personal visual language. Staying in the area of emphasized symbolism and stylization, we come to the first and only animalistic interpretation within this exhibition. These are the sculptures "Fish 1" and "Fish 2" by **Urša Toman**, which are also the personification of evolution, with a focus on women as "thinking, creative and invaluable creators of biological development". The previously mentioned fragility is often hidden, because it is characterized as undesirable, and it is also dealt with by **Meta Šolar** in the work "Hiding disappearing II". Although it is a frontal portrait, the face is hidden behind reflective sunglasses and a T-shirt that the female figure pulls over her face. It is a depiction of a woman hiding her own face as she hides her thoughts out of insecurity and fear of condemnation. The work "Almost love" confirms how much the artists are brought to life and imbued with their artistic work. In a large drawing, **Teja Tegelj** speaks freely and expressively with stroke, line and color in order to explore the expansion of the boundaries of her own body into the field of drawing. As the curator Anamarija Stibilj Šajn points out, the author stands in the field of drawing and accepts it with her body, thus imprinting the internal images into the external ones and thus realizing her completely intimate iconography.

The international project and exhibition Women about women, which brings together 25 artists from five countries, is a unique space within which artists speak honestly and openly in their own artistic language, different expressions and through different media united by a common theme of women. Independent artists and independent curators, working closely and working in the field of culture and art, often face the same prejudices, problems or obstacles, and each solves them in its own way depending on the character, temperament, circumstances and possibilities. Such connection, understanding and experience have made this collaboration stimulating and rich, and devoid of any false twists and wrapping in desirable cellophanes. The richness, diversity, understanding and discovery of similarities and differences and potentials of all involved individuals within the project created an incredible platform of diversity enriching all involved through mutual exchange of experiences and opinions and then through communication with audiences, viewers, media and interested individuals. It is a unique international project dedicated to insight and pointing out the role and importance of women in shaping cultural and social reality, and it does so through the most sincere form of communication - art.

Selectors: Biljana Jotić (Serbia), Nela Gligorović (Montenegro), Sonja Švec Španjol (Croatia), Anamarija Stibij Šajn (Slovenia), Shqipe Mehmeti (North Macedonia)

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