

## ***From Phantasmagorias of the Interior to the Poetics of Fall***

One of the main aspects of Sanja Medic's artistic practice is her decision to touch upon different levels of our perception, from playing with the imperfection of our senses to destroying the illusion of an all-perceiving eye. For this, she often uses photographs as a starting point and as a final result of her research. The transformation which happens in between gives birth to not only visual collages, but to collages of narratives and meanings as well. In site-specific interventions, Medic often underlines the difference between the image of reality created on the basis of photographs and the actual perception of photographed spaces. This way, she formulates modes in which to destabilize phantasmagoric nature of human-made interiors. The most present notions in her work are recomposition, transformation and memory, as well as an invitation for a different perception of our overprotected reality. By addressing these issues, Medic formulates a strong social critique told through the images of interiors characterized by a powerful individual poetics about the ephemeral nature of human existence.

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### *Sanja Medic: From Phantasmagorias of the Interior to the Poetics of Fall*

*Nineteenth-century domestic interior. The space disguises itself – puts on, like an alluring creature, the costumes of moods. Interior is itself a stimulus to intoxication and dream; an aversion to the open air; to live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider's web.*

Walter Benjamin, *The Interior, The Trace*. The Arcades Project

Born into a particular surrounding, we normally do not question the reasons for the objects and things being placed and organized in a particular way. The interiors of our houses are not only a comforting protection from the outside world but also give the illusion of individual expression within already defined structures. From her side, Sanja Medic dedicates a large part of artistic investigation to these intimate, inner worlds, intuitively expressing the other side of coziness – seeing it as a potential trap for the individual. In his reflections on the bourgeois developments of interior design, Walter Benjamin puts them in relation to the new phase of capitalism in which reality becomes hidden behind this visual protection shield. According to him, modern human animal has found numerous new ways to create artificial surroundings of phantasmagoria, using the principle of magic lanterns to trick the senses. By flooding human senses, capitalism manages to transform sensory or aesthetic experience into a powerful anesthetic. This way, it becomes possible to survive the permanent shocks of everyday life.

In her black and white collages situated in the safe haven of bourgeois interiors, Sanja Medic rips the textures, disturbs the orderly effect of objects and creates the cracks through which the reality breaks into this total environment. In the performance entitled *Repetition no.2 (Sloopzacht)* (2002), she literary drilled holes through the walls, imitating a wallpaper pattern making inner patterns visible on the outside facade, while in *Still-life* and *Zebra* (2004) Medic turned everyday objects into chameleons of urban environment. From the other side, in *Bedroom – Insomnia* (2004) the self-portrait 'explodes' in the room, stressing the unbearable easiness of existence in protected coziness. In the series *Drawings for interior monologue* (2005) we find statements about the interpolated nature of subjectivity even more palpable, being reminded of the effects the architecture has on the formation of each of us individually. In the *Event* series (2004), the equilibrium of everyday environment is destabilized by its transformation into dream-like images, making the hallucinogenic effect of interiors visible by repeating the same gesture. When exhibited in the gallery space, these images underline the connection between the safety of individual homes and the safe white cubicles of

museum rooms. In here, the same intoxicating effect is being produced not through everyday objects, but through the art works.

Those 'destabilizing' collages underline yet another aspect of Sanja Medic's work, namely her ability to remind us of the visual pleasure of destruction to which we participate every time we tune into our media polluted world. Here, Medic becomes a visual archivist of everyday decay that we normally do not pay attention to, where frozen moments are transformed into the works carrying subtle poetics of evanescent existence. In the *Remake: The Big Bear (Tremor)* (2006), we find a unique example of an earthquake destruction captured and made permanently visible in the form of a new aesthetic configuration. In the *Untitled* (2006) the image of the wall is 'frozen' in only one moment of its permanent destruction whose layers are being peeled off with the passing of time. Perhaps the best example of the ability to slow down reality and remind us of the sad beauty of passing of time is to be seen in her video projection *Free Fall* (2007). By creating a video in which we see documents testifying about the change of governments in free fall, Medic reacts not only to the political context of the parliament where the work is being permanently installed, but also questions the importance of decisions contained in archived documents in some imaginary future times.

In numerous works executed in public spaces, Sanja Medic has created pieces with a strong sensibility for the context in which they are being installed, both in the architectural and socio-political meaning of the word. In some, she plays with the blurring of the border between the inside and the outside, as in in *Het Uitzicht* (2008) where the inner structure becomes 'invaded' by the outside. In *De Batavier* (2006) the outside world is being condensed by turning the names of poets given to surrounding streets into titles of books on the library shelves built into the facade of a building.

Another important aspect of Medic's work is her interest in the traces, both real and fictional. In *Palais Kamer* (2006), a hotel room is transformed by the insertion of collaged wallpapers conveying fragments of an interior from the time of Louis XIV. Through this visual play, two-dimensional images on the walls are turned into a three-dimensional environment, creating a new space whose narrative is formed on the basis of this fragmentary imaginary past. On another level, Medic's permanent interest in the libraries and archives reveals a need to explore traces left by life in other forms as well. This perhaps has its strongest expression in Medic's work entitled *Bijlmer Diary* (2009), created for one of the ghettoized communities in Amsterdam. In the form of an ironic collage, Medic gave her interpretation of the ideas behind this urban experiment, but at the same time giving back the heroes of everyday life their place in history by taking them out from the hidden and dusty newspapers archive. Perhaps too heavy to fly, this space ship had managed to take off, continuing to travel into the uncertain future burdened by its past. In this science-fiction ghetto, people are still being born, finding their ways to bring signs of life to the alienating architectural structure. Through this gesture, Medic's work becomes a statement about belief into the power of human beings to make changes, to leave marks in their environment, no matter how small they might seem.

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