



EXHIBITION

Zlatan Vehabović, Foundations in Mud, Zagreb

Venue: **Museum of Contemporary Art**

Duration: **15.09 - 04.10.2015**



One doesn't have to be an art expert to notice that Zlatan Vehabović's paintings represent a particular set of motives. Abandoned houses, shelters in the middle of woods, playful children, stranded whales, icebergs, marooned boats, empty tents in the wilderness and faceless human figures are just some of the scenes which appear, almost obsessively, in this artist's work.

Instead of dealing with the problems posed by painting as a medium, several modern artistic movements and tendencies focused on the potentials of symbolic representation. For example, both surrealism and fin de siècle art rely on realistic methods of display, but they do not do so in order to depict the daily life of citizens of that time – this task had been undertaken by impressionism several decades earlier – but in order to reveal a reality of a higher order, something that lies beyond the scenes we encounter in our everyday life.

Examples of such artistic tendencies in Croatian art include works by Mirko Rački and Bela Čikoš Sesija. They are among a large number of painters who chose, at the end of the 19th century, to focus on codified meanings contained by the ancient and Judeo-Christian iconography, using the well-known themes, motives and symbols to point – or so they hoped – to that which is universal in human life.

In order to interpret Vehabović's paintings, we need to employ another iconology, because nothing about his paintings is safe or codified. However much he tries to explain the meanings behind his paintings – among others, through his personal blog – it appears to me that the uncertainty in their interpretation and understanding keeps growing. In fact, the more a painting of his focuses on a single motive – such as an iceberg, an empty tent, etc – the more the viewer must increase their mobility, flexibility and discursiveness, so to speak. The interpretation of contemporary paintings, including Vehabović's paintings as a part of visual culture, does not lie in the discovery of a hidden meaning which is obscured by banal layers of everyday life, but in pointing to the network of historical and cultural forces which determine our quest for meaning. Also, iconology has always been a discipline where different media of (artistic) communication have intensely pervaded each other (music, literature, film, art, television, etc) so for the purposes of interpreting Vehabović's paintings, one must constantly be aware of the influence of rock music, films or the internet on

art and on us, the public.

At first sight, Vehabović's paintings appear to represent a single idiosyncratic repertoire of subjects, motives and symbols which are difficult to understand. Even though communication is rendered difficult, it is still established: we are drawn into figuring out the scene. Something attracts our attention, although we cannot locate the source of the stimulus. In my opinion, the process in which we participate together with the artist creates a contemporary iconography whose roots lie in the field of Western – now global – popular culture. We participate in forming a new set of attitudes and beliefs about life and the world, which becomes increasingly elusive and undetermined while it becomes more current. (Klaudio Štefančić)

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