



Rajko Bizjak | Evolution

Gallery of Contemporary Art, 28. 2. – 6. 3. 2016

Evolution, the title of the exhibition, in which Rajko Bizjak places recent and older works into a dialogue, offers a number of considerations, including the author's relationship to the photographic series produced to date. The body and corporeality represent the central position in his creative work. He uses them to address particularly sexuality, desire and pleasure, social and moral constructs and prohibitions, the comparability of man and the universe. But the main guiding principle of his photographic gaze is exploration. How to look at the things that we usually only see in a certain way, in a different way. He frequently visualizes that which is invisible to the eye: from *Game* (1986), into which he captures the forms made up by two bodies in motion in the middle of the sexual act, *Kanaan* (1996), in which he brings us extremely close to the female organ, to the two series of *Stardust*, where he captures the thousandth of a second in which a large amount of light shines through dead human tissue in one, bringing sperm and the starry sky closer to us with a microscope and a telescope, in the other. His work speaks of the close intertwinings and connections that can also be discovered totally unexpectedly, such as in the series *Stardust*, but contain an almost transcendental, although purely physical truth that opens up new spaces of exploration for him. In the breadth of three decades, his photographic series speak about the external and the internal, about the distant and the nearby, about the intertwining between the conscious and the unconscious, familiar and foreign, about the similarity of patterns and structures found in nature, the body, the universe. His work is at once the depiction of beauty in the sense of pleasure, and the attainment of an uncomfortable and anxious feeling. He finds beauty in the female body, like in the *Hommage a Eikoh Hosoe* series (1991, referring to the cultural differences in defining pornography), where, by erasing the identities of the women, he totally directs the viewer's gaze to the line of the body and genital area to become that which looks out, and in the *Hommage – 23 Years Later* series (2013) as he repeats the same situation with more mature bodies. He achieves the effect of discomfort particularly with total closeness as he brings the gaze at and into the vagina so close that it turns into a foreign, unknown, almost scary scenery. In the collection *Short Stories* (2011–2015), with a view into the dark crack, he calls its landscape Dante, or Mare Imbrium (Sea of Rains), after the enormous crater on the lunar surface. Even earlier, in the *Kanaan* (1996) series, it is the River Jordan, Source of Life or Gates of Paradise. If the vagina in these photographs is presented as a region of the mysterious, powerful, even threatening, it is fragile, delicate and inviting in the series of *Blossoms* (2001). He finds forms similar to its form in the world of blossoms and names it with the Latin: Tulipa, Magnolia, Rosa. In the *Archetype* (2016) series which stems from *Blossoms* (2002), he builds its image on the connection between the erotic and the unconscious, on the existence of the unconscious aspects of human perception. With images in which the vagina takes such form that at first glance it appears to be a form taken from nature, he talks about how certain symbols and shapes that have become quite commonplace

to us, have their origins in the erotic. Bizjak plays with the viewer's knowing of what he is actually seeing, with a similarity between the forms in nature and parts of the body, reaching the pinnacle with the photos inside the body, as in the series *Stardust – Incarnation* (2007) we encounter Corona, Dark Matter, Strings, therefore the layers of matter and particles that inhabit space, until we realize that we are looking at illuminated tissue. In all of these carefully thought-out series of photographs, some of which also took several years to emerge, there is no Promised Land of Moses, no blossoms or supernova remnants, there is only the surface and the inside of the female organ and the body. Yet, with his method of building up the images and their entitling, the skilful passage between reality and illusion, Bizjak raises complex issues which take shape widely outside the images themselves. Through the visual delivery of the existence of identical structures within man and the universe, the close connection between everything that surrounds us and is within us, he leans on the astrophysical theories of the structure of the universe and the transmission of life in both series of *Stardust*, the incarnation and the comparison. In the incarnation, the titles are those that indicate the comparable structure (Dark Matter is for instance a photograph of the intestines), in *Stardust – Comparison* (2016) Bizjak compares the similarity of structures formed by a group of stars and a host of sperm. With his latest piece, a large photograph entitled *Evolution* (2016) derived from Michelangelo's depiction of the Biblical Genesis and the main scene of The Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel, with all the meanings and associations that it triggers, he rounds off the stories of the series produced so far. Contemplation on man and creation, desire and pleasure, prohibition and control (as a tool for the existence of the system) is connected with the idea of God, its meaning along with all the scientific discoveries and astounding theories, with the question of whether the contemporary subject still needs God, where is the driving force of humanity, history and progress.

Bizjak's series of photographs always stem or relate to one another, build upon each other or expand into new spaces that he foresees or establishes on the basis of chance. They may seem as opposites, as a break, but there is an essential link between them, a focus on the body and the erotic, on a view into the veiled and concealed. (*Irena Čerčnik*)

Exhibited series: Blossoms (2002), Archetype (2016), Stardust – Incarnation (2007) Stardust – Comparison (2016), Hommage a Eikoh Hosoe (1991), Hommage – 23 Years Later (2013), Evolution (2016), Solar System triptych from the Short Stories series (2011–2015)

Rajko Bizjak (1963, Postojna) graduated in 1990 from the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb, majoring as a film and television cameraman. He works as a cameraman and photographer and is a lecturer at the Academia Maribor Vocational College, FAM Faculty of Media in Ljubljana, School of Arts in Nova Gorica and the VIST Higher School for Photography in Ljubljana. His works are held in national and international collections. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

Center for Contemporary Arts Celje

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