

2018

“Lately, I’ve Been Feeling Distraught” Self and Fear

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“Lately, I’ve Been Feeling Distraught”

Self and Fear

Jelena Prljević

B.F.A., Academy of Arts, University of Novi Sad, 2013

Project Statement

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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At the

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2018

APPROVAL PAGE

Master of Fine Arts Project Statement

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The Wind of Change

In order to understand the present, we must link it to the self-transforming urges of the past. We must see it as an evolutionary urge toward a transformation of all traditional notions as a gradual process of growth in which several earlier currents have penetrated one another and thus changed their very essence.

—Laslo Moholy-Nagy

As a child, the first phenomenon I related to as an unknown source of fear was *promaja*. In the Balkans, *promaja* is a mystical force of nature responsible for the ailments and deaths of millions of people throughout history. It is the belief that you will get sick with a headache or pain in the bones if you leave windows on opposite walls open to cause a draft. As a kid who suffered migraines from an early age, I was always blamed by my parents for not protecting myself enough from this specific type of wind. It is a wind created as two opposite spaces clash; stillness and motion, the self and the fear. Neither ocean breezes nor gentle winds are *promaja* and people don't cower from a normal windy day. This phenomenon can affect any human being and one can be affected by it in any part of the world. I stopped consciously believing in *promaja* many years ago, but my muscle memory still reaches for additional clothes to protect myself from the ills brought by this type of wind, born of confrontation. My interest in the processes of change and transition is aligned with this idea of confronted dualities that makes us fragile and is rooted in the history of my country.

I was born in Serbia, a southeastern European country formerly known as Yugoslavia. Throughout my growing up, Yugoslavia's borders gradually shrunk, which both emphasized and amplified the Other. By the time I was ten years old, my country had changed its name four times. As part of the Balkans, it was identified as a space of historical atrocities, including the

only genocide in Europe after WWII, and it suffered NATO bombing. Being exposed to these constant changes made me seek a deeper understanding of the customs, traditions and relationships around me. I was surrounded with different “truths” where the roles of heroes, war criminals and traitors could easily be switched depending on the storyteller’s background and experience. During middle school, my history books changed in content depending on the climate of the most recent events, which created a conflicted understanding of mutually shared realities. Serbian youth, including myself, were immersed in the belief that life happens somewhere else; through time, this belief became a constructed reality that complicated the relationship between the self and fear. In struggling with the past, one was fighting for the future, carrying the burdens of history, individual and collective responsibility, and punishment for an incomprehensible hatred. Understanding the complexity was only possible through intentionally nurturing compassion, empathy and tolerance. The buildup of these capacities increased my curiosity about the process and mechanisms we use to create meaning and understand each other in this perpetually changing world. Who defines whom? Does a final form exist or is its essence fluid? My inquiry starts with these questions.

In-Between

“The Sun is shining. Small collage painting my sister made during her undergrad is hanging in the corner. Breakfast is on the table with the books about perspective and seeing. The armchair we found earlier that week fits perfectly in the scenery. The squirrels are jumping all around the place. I hear laughter from the neighborhood. Everything seems peaceful.
Why am I crying?”

–*Willimantic Porch, September 2015*

In-Between is my first series of large format charcoal and graphite drawings. They depict the first house I moved into after arriving in the U.S. Inner spaces shift, merge and overlap which makes the drawing be a construction field and the field that is constructed. Blending of different architectural structures and shapes describe the state of flux I experienced in different stages of my life. The houses are the presentation of my obsessive desire at that time to make this unfamiliar and foreign place closer to the one I could recognize as stationary and call home.

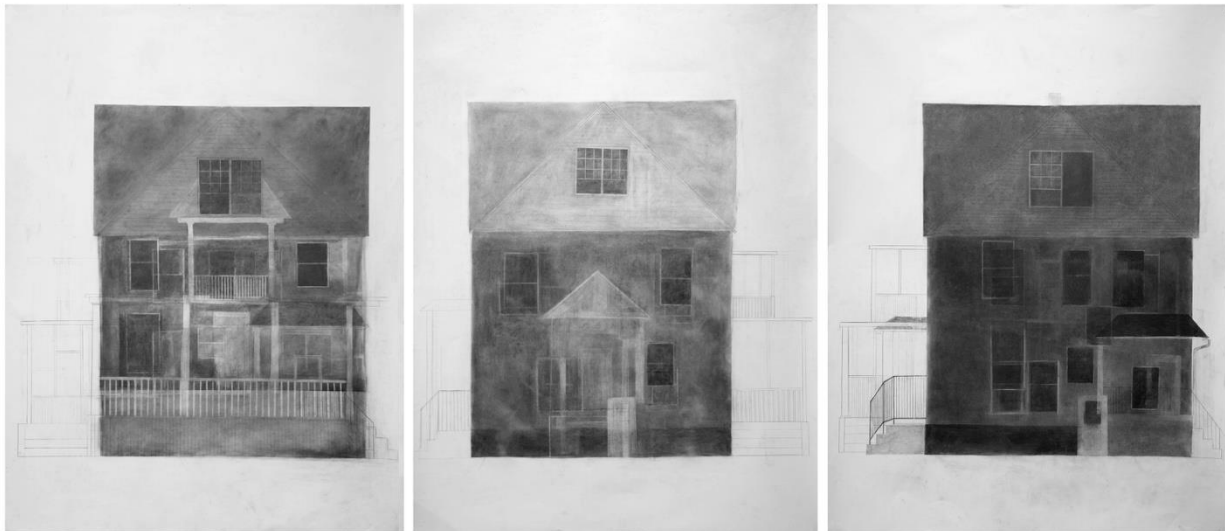


Fig. 1. Phase 2 In-Between (image left), Phase 3 In-Between (middle image), Phase 4 In-Between (image right), 2016, Charcoal and Graphite drawing

When I was a child, I saw the house where I lived as a huge playground, where each room was a world in itself that was waiting to be explored. As Annette Kuhn describes, doors and windows are powerful in-between or transitional spaces that “allow the child to be in enclosed and open space in the same time, at once secure and going exploring” (Kuhn 86). Made of charcoal and graphite dust, the houses become the presence of spaces but also the “absence of the thing that has been there” (Gibbons 32). Charcoal and graphite are materials flexible enough to allow a change and a build-up of ideas so the drawing has a visible history. An active layering process within static imagery intensified the time component in my work. The natural progression was to bring my drawings to life.

I started projecting my hand-drawn animations onto my drawings with the desire to intensify the sense of movement and revelation. Animation appears and fades away, leaving the still imagery vivid in the viewer’s mind. Drawn spaces function as fixtures made to accommodate the moving image timed with the intention of keeping the viewer awake and ready for a change that slips away once recognized. As the animation emerges and fades away, it leaves behind spaces that accumulate the residue of time passing.



Fig.2. Passage (detail)
Drawing combined with the
projected hand-drawn, 2016

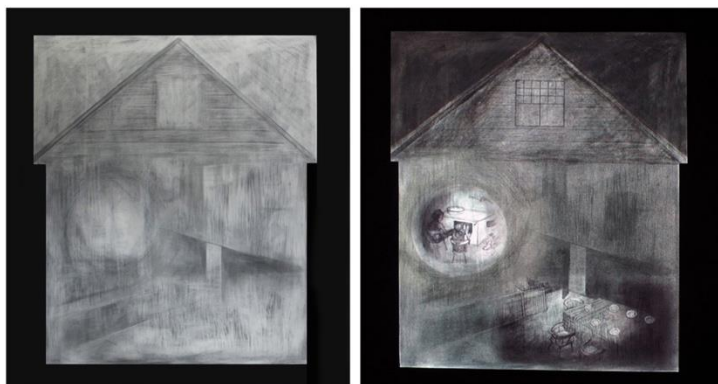


Fig.3. Passage, Drawing with (right image)
and without (left image) the projection

Trained as a painter, I have always worshipped the respective strengths of gesture and personal mark making. I encountered inviting dreamlike spaces that translate the sense of flux and multiple perspectives in the series of prints *Imaginary Prisons* by Giovanni Battista Piranesi. They reflect a deep understanding of construction and of manipulating perspective. The use of multiple vanishing points captures the sense of angst, negation of time and incoherent spaces. The power of imagination makes them read almost as nightmares, but still tempting enough for the curious mind to explore. Similar layering and compression of time, space and place I found later in the work of abstract painter Viera da Silva in her museum in Lisbon. Influenced by Cézanne's fragmented forms and spatial ambiguities, as well as a cubistic palette and perspective, da Silva's paintings are known for dense compositions, which seen in person, are revealed to be complex spaces constructed by minimal layers of paint.

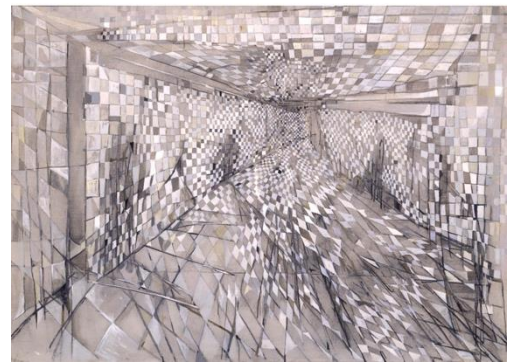
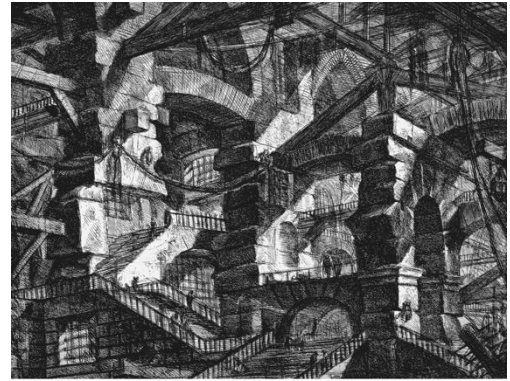


Fig.4. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Gothic Arc*, 1761(top image); Viera da Silva, *The Corridor*, oil on canvas, 1950 (bottom image);

Both Piranesi's and Viera da Silva's work use the play of light and imitated vanishing points to create illogical and almost theatrical disjointed spaces that I relate to as stories of no location, more imagined than actual realities.

Shadow's Play

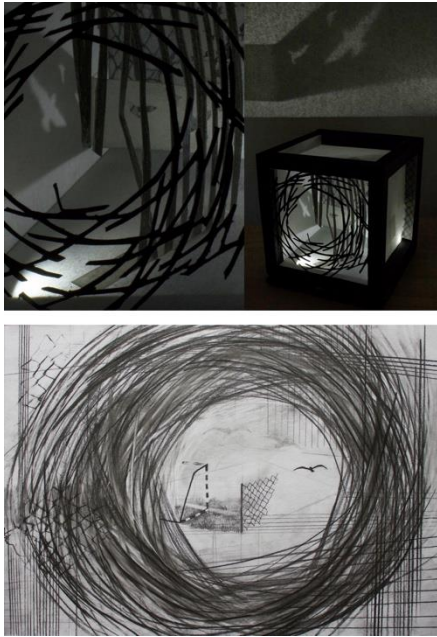


Fig. 5. From the series of interactive light objects *Play Ground*, 2015 (top image); From the series of drawings *Playground*, 2015 (bottom image)

I came to the University of Connecticut with a series of interactive light objects entitled *Play Ground*. Each object was a three-dimensional presentation of one of the drawings from my previous *Playground* series, which showed the play spaces from my surroundings. Instead of being drawn, the fences became paper structures physically present in space. These light objects read as miniature sets translated from the information depicted in the two-dimensional imagery. The light responds to interaction with people, and the sculptures cast shadows transforming the walls of the white paper cube to bring new narratives to life.

The drawing shown in Figure 5(bottom image) captures one of the playgrounds in Detelinara, which is an industrial part of Novi Sad, the city in Serbia where I lived before I came to the U.S. My apartment building and this playground were situated at an intersection of rail tracks that seemed to lead to nowhere in a financially devastated landscape. Childhood is usually thought of as one of the most innocent periods of one's life. Playgrounds operate as public and private spaces where earlier experiences of childhood innocence are contained. This kind of abandoned playground portrays exposed childhood and the resultant traces of physical and emotional existence. Through time, these traces, as non-fixed forms, transform themselves, influenced by their surroundings. Play becomes an essential tool for challenging limitations.

In my first semester at UConn, I was fortunate to work with Ray DiCapua as his teaching assistant for the Drawing I class. Figure 6 is a page from the blurb book we had to make in response to the class' *Collectanea* project. The handwriting is a note I made during one of Ray's drawing classes which I always revisit as an entry point to my drawing process. The note reads as follows:

"How things appear...it's not about realism. Ellipse is itself activity. It makes memory active. 50% drawing, 50%looking...learning to see more accurate – building a spatial map - I know where I am...having a visual access...imagine that nature said: "I got to get it right" – silly...we are trying to understand the understanding...the distance creates objectivity (e.g. cars in highway)"

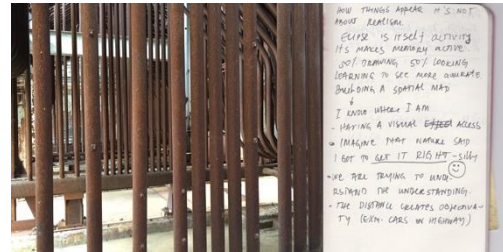


Fig.6. Sketchbook page, 2015

The writing is combined with a photo of Stephen Vitiello's layered sound installation *All Those Vanished Engines* that I took during one of our field trips to MassMoca. My experience of this site-specific installation resonated with these written thoughts and inspired me to rethink and analyze the sensorial aspects the artist used to produce an atmosphere I experienced as haunting. As visitors move through the space, the soundscape changes. The sounds come close to your ear and then fade away, creating the invisible residue of vibration. This reverberation makes the industrial past of the site, once used to heat the factory campus which the museum now inhabits, present and alive.

I tried to translate this type of relationship between motion and stillness and the spatial play they produce, in the installation piece *Shadow's Play* (Figure 7), created during my first semester. *Play Ground* light objects (Figure 5, top image) were translated into a human size installation, where paper fence-like cutout structures were combined with the drawings of landscape, people and objects from my everyday environment. I used hand drawn animations,

shadow imagery and still drawing to describe the intersection of different stimuli from the outside world we experience as the understanding of our immediate surroundings. The projector is placed in front of the cube's entrance. Animated imagery becomes the source of light. Confronted with the paper cutouts, the light casts shadows and brings new and different meanings to the landscape presented in the still drawing which is attached to the back side of the cube. People are invited to engage and examine the inside space of the installation. Once inside, they become a part of *Shadow's Play* - a game where the viewer is unable to grasp all the information from the built space due to the interference of one's own shadow. The paper fences act like borders - boundaries between real and imagined.

The struggle between our impulses and a sense of security...is an eternal struggle; and it is acted out in our engagements with transitional phenomena, in childhood and beyond (Winnicott 144). It is the character of an individual's engagement with boundaries and spaces in the object-world that shapes his or her own ways of dealing with the unfamiliar and new throughout life (Kuhn 85).

Each participant within the *Shadow's Play* cube simultaneously becomes a performer and observer. One, the physical, wants to participate while the other, projected shadow, breaks the illusion and separates factual and what is projected. Reflecting upon my explorations within the observational drawing, spatial relations and objects I made during my studio practice at UConn, *Shadow's Play*



Fig.7. Shadow's Play, 2015

(Figure 7) seems like a container of memory work that had to be dismantled, analyzed and joined again. All the media I used within this installation I continued to explore separately, focusing on the idea of stillness and motion as a metaphor for connection between remembering, un-remembering, and eventually healing through forgetting.

Erasing to Remember

...memories are not discrete packages, but fluid in their form and content, and the act of remembering is almost a matter of them being assembled anew for every recollection. Learning often comes from painful experiences. The only thing we can learn from the experience is how to recover from it, and that is a creative act of choice that requires our transcending the pain, not merely reliving it by remembering, but transforming the memory into something entirely new and affirmative.

—Lebbeus Woods, *Beyond Memory*



Fig.8. Family Photo, 1995

Memory work is always a secondary revision (Kuhn 155), a story retold many times and each time remembered slightly differently. Figure 8 is a picture taken by my mother that I found several years ago. It shows my sister, my father and myself. The photograph is evidence of the infrequent leisure time my family shared together.

These occasions were not common throughout my childhood, but still are a symbol for safety in my recollection considering what the near future had in store for us. The only description on the back of the photo is the year - 1995. That same year, Serbs committed the largest massacre in Europe since WWII, a genocide in Srebrenica, an area of Bosnia supposedly proclaimed as protected by a contingent of UN peacekeepers. This so-called safe area of Srebrenica fell without a single shot fired by the UN forces. The child in the photo wasn't exposed to the terrible atrocities in the neighboring country, and cannot recall these events. The passage of time and adulthood brought even less clarification considering the tangled relations between war criminals, heroes, traitors, peacemakers, and the eventual blending of individual and collective responsibility. What stayed clear were the number of victims, the pain and loss, and the destruction that wars, and NATO bombing several years later, left behind on each side. The idea of change was the gate towards a better future. This change was enveloped in awareness and the

conclusion that “(t)here may not be blame but there is responsibility” (Kentrige as cited by Bennett 76).

Using time as a process and material, my drawing serves to reflect this conflicted state of mind, a recognition of different truths, and the process of transition. Illustrating a fragmented understanding of the whole helps me to elaborate the mechanisms my emotional being uses when confronted with the unknown and uncontrollable process of change. From my experience of practicing Wing Chun, a Chinese martial art, I learned that a gesture becomes a reflex action after being repeated 5,000 times. An experience that previously felt unknown, different, and challenging serves as an opening gate for a new set of movements. This relationship between repetition, memory and movement enters my work through the animation process. As a material, charcoal allows me to create spaces fragile as dust and full of potential that portrays a search for placement. Their neither-here-nor-there presence becomes a space for thinking about the passage of time, and of immediate experience. The photograph served as an inspiration to explore this compression of time which intensified the usage of hand-drawn animation in my work.

Sheltered

“We skyped with our mother from my sister’s new place. It was a small studio in Brooklyn. We looked happy, lying on a thin mattress surrounded with canvases and paint. I asked my mother about the place where my sister and I used to play. The front of our apartment building was a military camp in the past. The sound of trumpet that calls the solders for a morning workout would wake me up every day. I enjoyed watching their jumping so well timed and paced. The park was covered with trees full of birds and nests. Old people from the neighborhood would use wooden chairs to rest. The sound of crows would announce September, Fall and new school days. My mother didn’t say much that winter day. She pointed her camera towards the old military camp. Skype window was filled with silent stumps and empty chairs. Later that day, Paris was attacked.”

–Brooklyn, November 2015

Sheltered (Figure 9) is an installation of drawings combined with the projected hand-drawn animated imagery. The animation describes the relationship between my sister and myself from different stages of our lives. The figure of myself as a child, presented on the far-left corner of the drawing observes

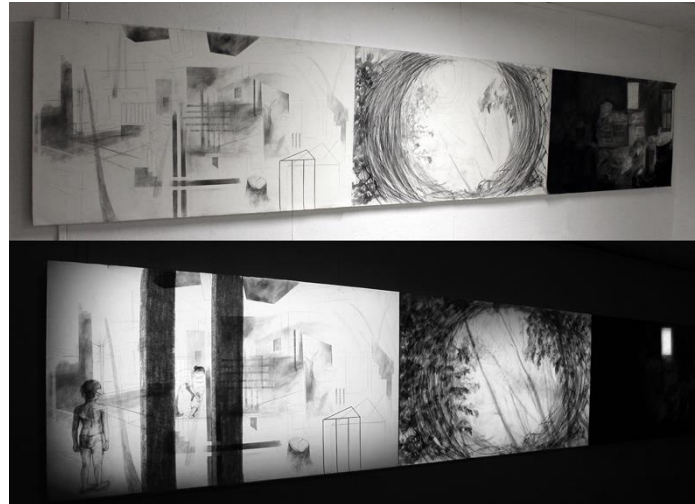


Fig.9. Sheltered, drawings without (top) and with (bottom) projection

the sisters in the dismantled architectural space, drawn from the referential images of places where I lived during my time in Serbia. The child figure transforms into a pigeon, a bird that always finds its way back if attached to a place of departure. The sense of attachment is tied to the elusiveness of memory, visually described in the drawing that functions as a background still shot. As the bird flies from one panel to another, from light to darkness, it activates other hand-drawn animations with its presence and ends its journey in a form of light, which reveals the interior of the abandoned house my sister and I played in during our childhood days in Serbia. Combined, my drawings and animations illuminate intimate observations, grounding them in a present moment.

The usage of animation in my work is deeply inspired by the work of South African artist William Kentridge and Japanese animator Hayao

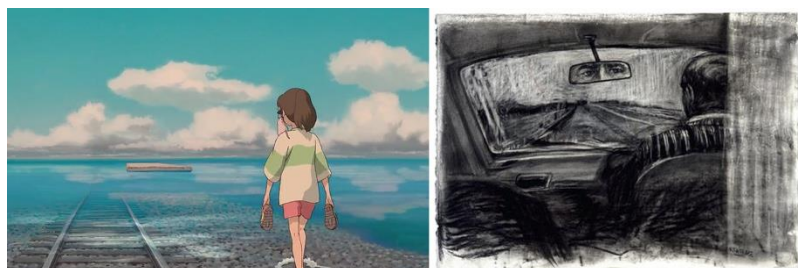


Fig. 10. Hayao Miyazaki, Spirited Away, 2001, Animation StillShot (left image); William Kentridge, History of the Main Complaint, 1996, Animation StillShot (right image);

Miyazaki. Both artists are dealing with factual and fixed aspects of history rendered through the negating lens of change.

The palimpsest technique of erasure makes the history of drawing visible; rear-view mirrors bring again the idea of multiple perspectives. These perspectives are mutually negating and describe the contradictory feelings, opposing attitudes, that Susan Stewart describes “as wanting to emigrate and deciding to renovate a house in the same time” (Stewart 120).

Spirited Away is an animated film by Miyazaki about ten year old Chirico and her journey to free her bewitched parents. During her family’s move to the suburbs, she wanders into a world ruled by gods, witches, and spirits, where humans are changed into beasts. While in this other world, Chirico needs to forget her name to avoid Yubaba’s black magic. Miyazaki states that his intention was to imply how much words have lost their power and meaning in the contemporary world. In his own words:

In an era of no borders, people who do not have a place to stand will be treated unseriously. A place is the past and history. A person with no history, a people who have forgotten their past, will vanish like snow, or be turned into chickens to keep laying eggs until they are eaten (Miyazaki 5).

As not physically strong or uniquely intelligent, Chirico’s main virtue that protects her from vanishing is her bravery and curiosity to understand worlds different from her own. Collective responsibility of fighting for the greater good becomes individual. Beautifully rendered drawings are charged with imagination, symbolism, and metaphor - themes I am trying to maintain in my own work.

Sisterhood



Fig.11. StillShot from *Sisterhood* animation, 2018

“Ispred dvorišta je kuća. Sastoji se iz dva dela. Prva polovina je od kamena, a druga od drveta. Tu su podrum i sprat. Dvoje vrata, dva prozora, dve sobe i dva mirisa. Zove se kuća na četiri vode, iako se nalazi na vrhu stenovitog brda i nigde u blizini nema reke. Zašto se zove tako niko ne može da objasni.”

“There is a house in the middle of the courtyard. It consists of two parts. The first part is made of stone and the other of wood. There is a basement and the first floor. Two doors, two windows, two rooms and two smells. It’s called the house on four waters even though it’s on top of a rocky hill and there is no river nearby. Why it is called like that, no one can explain.”

–Excerpt from the script *Sisterhood*

The weaving of different perspectives, past and present, appears in the story *Sisterhood*, which I animated during my time at UConn. Written in long-distance collaboration with my sister and artist Nataša Prljević, it describes an intimate experience of early maturing seen from a child’s perspective. At the time the story is written, Nataša was in the U.S. while I was in Serbia. The narrative centers around the abandoned house from our childhood where we used to play as kids. Our recollections are separate considering the difference of our spatial-temporal positions. My

sister speaks from the perspective of the child pulling threads from her childhood memories while I am responding from a direct confrontation with the contemporary condition of the house. Our individual voices are spoken as one and present the urge and inability to reconnect and create mutual memory. The bond between sisters freezes time, capturing the emotional transitions that shape the landscape of a dissolving country.

Empty Nested

“I remember the last time our grandma brought the cows to the pond. She shared a story with us about the cow she couldn’t save from drowning. “Her curiosity swallowed her,” our grandma’s voice still resonates in my head. The last time you and I were sitting there, we were deadly quiet and alone. I can still see your reflection in the pond. I remember, it was red, like never before. Was it anger or despair, I still cannot decide. You were silent with a face that screams. You wore a sweater I always wished to have. I tried to reach you. The wall, made by your fear stopped me and prevailed. When it was built, I could not tell. The ocean wide distance between us shocked me. I still can feel the pain.

I remember how during spring time our grandma used to say: “Red clouds bring the rain.” Back then, we would wait for hours to feel the red drops fall from the sky. When it came, it tasted like the cherry syrup our mother used to make. So sweet and refreshing, but never enough. People said its color was a sign we weren’t safe.

Our neighbors would hide in their homes, afraid of this unknown creature that was knocking on the door. People from our countryside never liked the change. You and I would use this time to dance. The front yard of our house was our sacred field with the apple tree as our totem. Each circle we made was a greeting to a new day that would come. The water was our path, its redness our protection and a blessing from the Gods. Our cheeks, too, became red. The warmth was a sign that we were still not dead. We looked healthy like the apples resting on the ground. We hoped the rain would never stop. Way back then we were not afraid.

Now I see the red sky every day. But my restlessness has chased away the rain. The apple tree still recalls our dance. In my dreams its branches cry and curse the day we went away. I asked my mother if the pond was still there. She was confused. Of course, it drained.”



Fig.12. *Empty Nested*, StillShot, video by Nataša Prljević

—Willington, March 2017

While I was working on the *Sisterhood* animation, I continued developing other narratives by working with professors from the Creative Writing Program, Penelope Pelizzon and Ellen Litman. I started exploring sculpture as a host to implement my stories onto three-dimensional objects. This resulted in an animated sculpture piece.



Fig.13. Empty Nested,
2017, installation view

Empty Nested (Figure 13) is an object made from the birdhouse I found sitting quiet and alone in the dumpster in front of my studio. I added missing shingles and replaced some of the old ones that were beyond repair, keeping the traces of time visible. Its reconstruction functions as a metaphor for an interrupted habitat that is forced to transform and become a display of someone else's fears and desires. The hole reveals the inside space where the viewer encounters a video made by my sister Nataša. The video shows our grandmother and the landscape of our

countryside. By intertwining inside and outside spaces, the story overlaps imagination and actual events, emphasizing the mixture of factual and imagined.

The Blank Page Known as Process

Transformation always has to do with understanding world as process. The drawing is the process of arriving at the image. The art is to try to finish at the same speed you begin with, to try to keep a looseness and an open-endedness right to the end.

—William Kentridge, *Anything is possible*

After many years of intense studio training and practice, I realized that for me the most driving part of the art making is the process itself. I am interested in the glue substance that ties things together and makes the final product which people perceive as the object. My new body of work is usually the expansion of a fragment from a previous one, an expansion of a part I couldn't understand, a mechanism I didn't figure out. Each of my projects is born from many storyboards and sketch writings (Figures 14 and 15).



Fig. 14. *Sisterhood*, 2017, photo documentation of the process

This type of directing allows me to delve deeper into the relation between the layers of the piece, which eventually becomes the atmospheric essence of the space I am depicting. I like to refer to myself as a drawing person who uses mediums such as installations, projections, performance and animation as tools for navigating through all the sensorial and temporal aspects of the spaces we perceive as three-dimensional. My drawings are felt spaces landed on the objectively flat surface of the paper. This is the same mechanism one encounters while entering a deeper conversation with the stranger. The stranger is often called the Self. My process of drawing could also be compared with the process of navigating within the bilingual space. The second language is the house that one inherits but never fully inhabits. Many times, I would confront misunderstanding while translating statements from Serbian to English. While in this

space, one starts questioning the statement itself...what does it really mean and how does it relate to the person to whom one is trying to explain oneself? Then, you become You. You, as I, start to understand. The subject of presentation becomes less important. The process of behavioral exchange becomes the presentation itself.

As a person who is curious about the mechanisms we use to create meaning and relate to each other, I naturally delved into collaboration with people from different departments. I took Approaches to Theatre Devising with Margarita Blush, former UConn professor of Art Directing in Puppetry and Performance. During

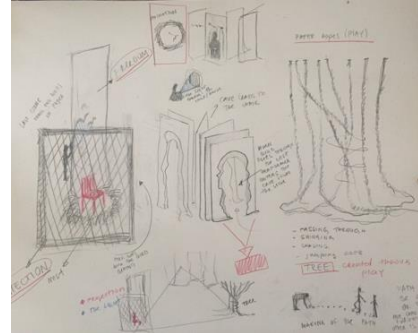


Fig.15. The Red Chair, 2017, storyboard, page 1

this class, I generously shared my work and allowed my classmates to bring sections of my *Shadow's Play* installation into the theatrical environment and use it for the development of a second iteration. The group, composed of a writer, a puppeteer, a dancer and an art director, came to my studio to gain a better sense and perspective of my practice outside of the installation which they had been assigned to continue developing in the movement room of the Puppet Arts Complex. The challenging part of this process was to allow myself not to be in complete control of the final outcome of the piece, as is usually the case when I am working alone in my studio. The idea of letting go and being open to receiving what is given by a different voice was a fruitful experience for my further artistic practice, but also closely related to the juxtaposition of the processes of change and remembering which I was intensively exploring.

Light as Perspective

Greek architecture taught me that the column is where the light is not, and the space between is where the light is. It is a matter of no-light, light, no-light, light. A column and a column brings light between them. To make a column which grows out of the wall and which makes its own rhythm of no-light, light, no-light, light: that is the marvel of the artist

–Louis Kahn

The use of projections throughout my studio practice intensified the visual contrast and emphasized the duality of light and darkness in my work. Being immersed in close collaboration with the people from theatre inspired me to continue working with Margarita Blush, acting undergrad student Braley Degenhardt, and costume designer Jelena Antanasijević. Together, we created a performance piece entitled *The Red Chair*. Through the collaboration with these three people, I was exposed to a theatrical understanding of art and the creative process. The rehearsals we had were pure interdisciplinary dialogue that broadened my perception of process and creation. I learned how to guide people, and how to let myself be guided.

The Red Chair

For *The Red Chair*, I built a room-size paper installation that hosted the performance we created. Each part of the set design had to be filled with metaphors that could inspire performers to interact with the material and imagine the atmosphere of the world I was craving to create. I had to prepare objects that we could play with during our rehearsals. I found this functional aspect of the set construction liberating as I felt like I was building a place. The result was a room size paper installation that hosts the performance and is an integral part of it in the same time.

Paper is used as the primary material and conceptual tool because of its transformative and resilient qualities. It inspired me to translate the two-dimensional marks I am using in my animation and drawings into three-dimensional objects that offer the stories I am interested in. The play with paper seemed to me as a parallel to the play of the charcoal marks I use to create my hand-drawn animations. The charcoal residue in my drawings is analogous to paper wrinkles in object creation. Animation projected onto the paper construction emphasized the movement,



Fig.16. The Red Chair, photo documentation shoots of the performance Dixon Place, NYC

creating a dream like environment.

Having the work presented in Dixon Place in New York City (Figure 16), a professional venue famous

for its history of experimental performance, allowed me to explore what my installation offers when used as a set on stage. Being a performer, a set designer and a director of the visual imagery furthered my understanding of the relationship between movement and light.

As a performer, I had to inhabit my installation as a place that is constantly changing as a support for stories that are informing and tapping into each other. Stepping out of the light meant stepping out of time. The spaces within the set could be transformed depending on the narrative each episode carried within the visual triangle created by different elements on the stage. While on stage, the light was the time, and catalyst for the change. After the performance is done, the set installation becomes a structured narrative container tied to a specific story. I was intrigued by the charged space left behind after performers leave the stage. The ephemeral interactions of

time, space, and memory in this theatrical experience encouraged me to explore the question of how we inherit places once they are abandoned.

Thinking about the absence of performers on stage translated into my two-dimensional work as an absence of projected hand-drawn animations (Figure 17). The light reveals the animation and eventually becomes the proclaimer of change. When drawn with shadows, flat objects are read as three-dimensional and alive. In my



Fig.17. People from our country side never liked the change, 2017, detail

work, the light and shadow are opposed elements that are simultaneously revealing the beauty and oddness of each other. Whenever I would think of my country these types of dualities would come up since Serbia was always considered as a crossroad between East and West, an intersection of opposed cultures and values beautifully described in Tanizaki's book *In Praise of Shadows*:

I possess no specialized knowledge of architecture, but I understand that in the Gothic cathedral of the West, the roof is thrust up and up so as place its pinnacle as high in the heavens as possible and that herein is thought to lie its special beauty. In the temples of Japan, on the other hand, a roof of heavy tiles is first laid out, and in the deep, spacious shadows created by the eaves the rest of the structure is built (Tanizaki 17).

My daily life is an attempt to appreciate both light and shadows, and an exploration of bridging the two. In my work, the shadow is a metaphor for reality. The visual contrast of light and shadow accentuates the dualities not as conflicted, but rather as altering. Memory is a projection of what we know onto a specific site, a solid space turned into something temporal. My work reads as a film, a sequence that reveals the ephemerality of time.

Dismantled Architecture as a State of Mind

If buildings could talk what would they say?

–Wim Wenders, *Cathedrals of Culture*

Cathedrals of Culture is a film directed by six filmmakers and it celebrates the soul of six classic buildings around the world. The Salk Institute for Biological Studies in California was one of the buildings that created a huge impact on me, considering the use of light in shaping the spaces imagined as collaborative environments. Designed by Louis Kahn, it encourages a contemplation on the future of humanity. The light is used as an element to bring rhythm to the static monumental structure. When confronted with this structure, the occupant physically senses the dual nature of existence, becoming aware of the deep division between the spiritual and the secular within himself or herself. Jonas Salk described it as:

...a curious place, not easily understood, and the reason for it is that this is a place in the process of creation. It is being created and is engaged in studies of creation. We cannot be certain what will happen there, but we can be certain it will contribute to the welfare and understanding of man (Jonas Salk as cited on Salk Institute website).



Fig.18. Kadinjača memorial complex,
1979

I personally experienced the sensorial aspects of these ideas during my visits to Kadinjača, a memorial complex built in 1979 (Figure 18). The complex, designed by Miodrag Živković is located 14 km (8.5 miles) from my hometown Užice. In the period between 1960 and 1980, then president of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito commissioned more than 100 monuments to commemorate the victims of fascism and Kadinjača was one of them.

These monuments were not intended to recall WWII or any sort of violence. The abstract forms

are lacking any symbolism of political ideology, war heroes or religion, which inspires the visitor to think about a shared future. They are a representation of what Bogdan Bogdanović, one of the designers, called “indestructible joy of life.” As Arna Mačkić writes:

...they were intended to appeal to any Yugoslavian...The monuments suddenly emerge from the landscape, without many clues announcing their presence...The landscape design is constantly changing ...Upon arrival the site feels like entirely new, surreal, and at the same time ancient location...as a result, every visitor experiences the monuments in his or her own way, depending on their connection with the location or historical events (Mačkić, 32-36).

Neither Here nor There is a project shaped by these constructions.

Neither Here nor There

Dismantled architecture presents a state of mind, the state of flux one experiences when confronted with changes and different truths. There is no stability, only walls, partially built. What is strong and stable is projected light, shaped by these constructions. My structures are a representation of the body that is always under construction, and never fully built and accessible.

The idea of healing is beautifully translated in the work of two artists, Lebbeus Woods and Doris Salcedo. Both are using damaged structures as an entry point for a dialogue that calls for nurture and recovery with deep consideration of equal importance between processes of remembering and the ways in which we un-remember. Salcedo's installation piece *1550 chairs* uses empty chairs as building material to fill the gap between two buildings and address the history of migration and displacement in Istanbul. An empty chair has the power to communicate both absence and human connection, and conveys the individual as well as the collective.

War and Architecture projects of the 1990s by Lebbeus Woods, addressed war-damaged buildings in Sarajevo, Bosnia and their reconstructions. In Lebbeus Woods' own words, the

SCAR constructions don't celebrate violence, but rather the creative healing of the wounds they caused. The project wasn't useful because people preferred to remember what they lost through war than to "cut their losses" (Woods, *Beyond Memory*).

The architecture in my work is an organism, dismantled and joined again. I champion the power of personal mark-making to build structures, erase them and build again to reveal life as it moves between light and shadow. Drawn spaces are what the viewer is projecting onto them. They are not fixed realities, but changing experiences. Stillness and motion are a metaphor for connection between remembering, un-remembering and eventually healing through forgetting. The hectic organization of abstract spaces presents the conflicted perspective of the insider and the outsider, active versus passive observer. In the process of writing, I concluded that the silence between words commemorates what is missing. The motion of light in my work is a metaphor for the silence, a time for a break, a time for reflection. When confronted with the piece, the observer is guided by light to bring outside and inside spaces into contact. This connection can appear as an introduction, a confrontation or a clash. The inside is the past, fragile and inner depth, while the outside brings the future, stability and defined self. The change of light is timed so that the whole sequence cannot be fully consumed in one passing. Before I started animating, I created storyboards where the lights were numbered by the order of their appearances. Quick note taking allowed me to keep track of focus and helped me direct the animation.

My drawings invite the viewer to act as both outsider and insider. I use memory as a strategy to keep the viewer's attention span long enough to engage and consider the nature of dualities and of the awareness of nonsingular truth. Like Tito's memorial complexes, the abstract spaces in my drawings are inviting you to enter into them. Documentary, magical and sentimental, my

work embraces the healing potential of storytelling through fragments of time, memory, and motion.

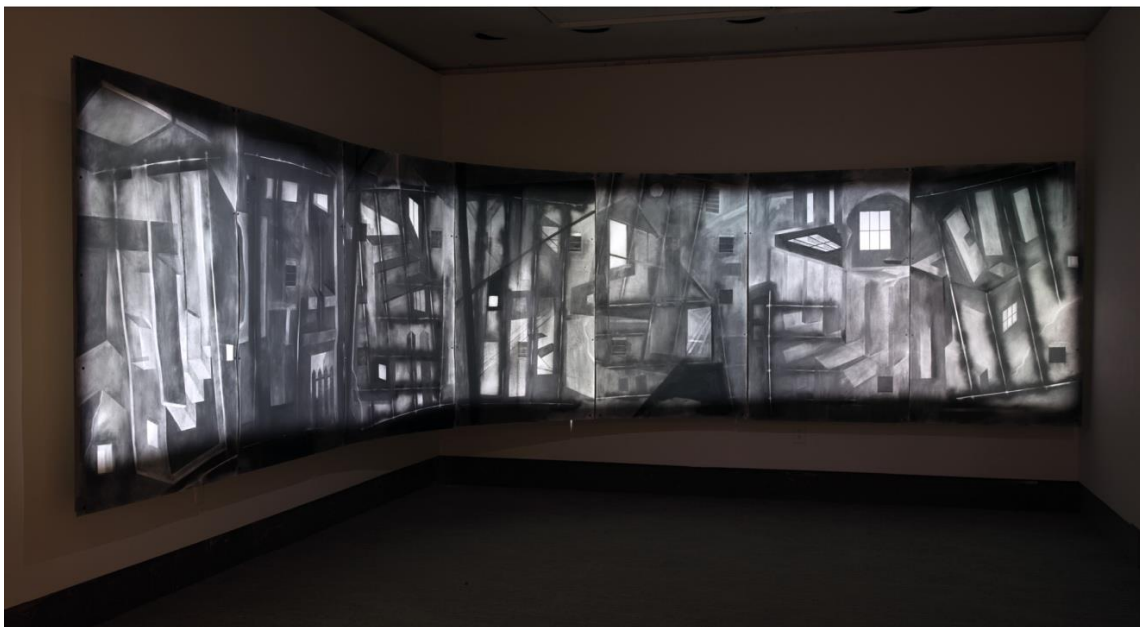
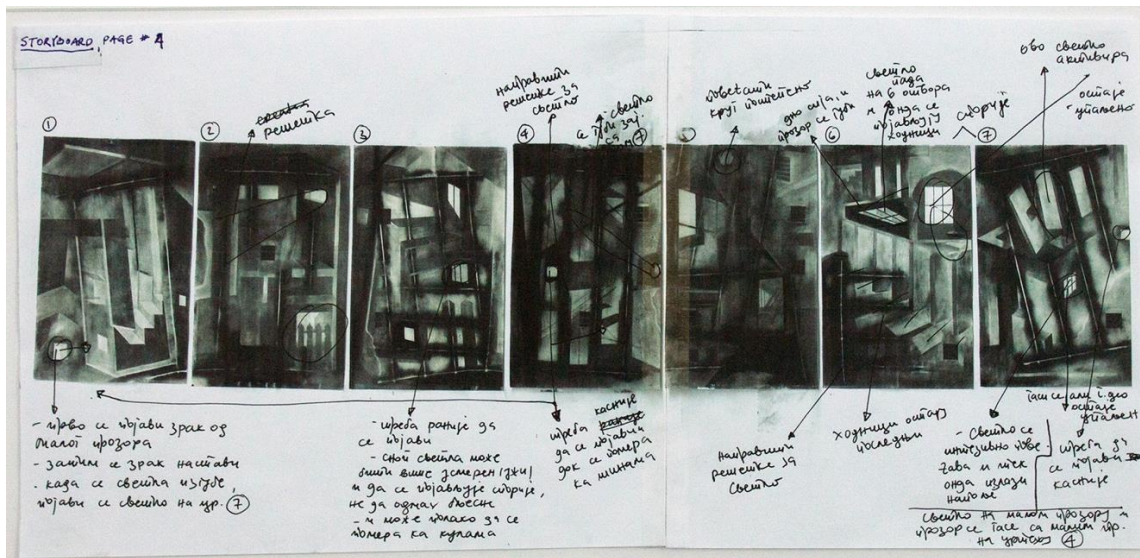


Fig.19. Jelena Prljević, *Neither Here nor There*, 2018, installation view (bottom image); Storyboard (top image)

Conclusion

In my future work, I will continue to create clashing of different spaces, with the intention of creating a basis for mutual understanding and empathy. My art is not a bold statement that nurtures the conflict and proclaims unseizable truth, but rather a question, a gate for dialogue. Every day is a struggle to unfold the layers beneath the surface of the known and confront the fears of hidden damages. The drawing process liberates me to reveal and meditate upon narratives previously suppressed by the fear of confrontation. Each piece of paper teaches me how to create a poetic space, a space inclusive enough for other voices to echo. My graphite marks, stories and animations frames are the voice, loud and present enough to show the potential of objects and spaces, without defining the borders or definite truths.

After leaving this place, I will be searching for a new home, a new safe place to land on. When compared with the past, I don't see this challenge to be different in form from the ones I have had before. What makes the distinction is a newfound awareness that transition and change are an unavoidable part of life. Traveling between Serbia and the U.S. has made me appreciate the light of engagement my culture has given to me, and understand the shadow of the Western influences it suffers. Three years of intense studio practice gifted me with greater insight of my own history, imagery and self. Through working with people from different cultures, I could explore different behavioral patterns and leave this place with a better articulation of my own fears and desires. Hopefully, this insight will result with new bodies of work that will function as a place for a wider audience beyond myself to self-reflect and question the layers of safety. I am looking forward to expanding this exploration through future collaborations with my sister and others; where I can delve deeper into the intersection of culture, emotion and change to create an understanding of mutual perspectives through the healing potential of storytelling.

*Still we carry this immortal city
within / I fear the city without memory,
just as I fear people without subconsciousness.*

Polis

Metropolis

Megapolis

Necropolis.

Partisan Necropolis in Mostar, Bosnia, quotes by Bogdan Bogdanović, inscribed in the sheets
laid in front of the Partisan Necropolis (Mačkić 76)

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