

IBRO HASANOVIĆ



*Circle and Line*

*2009*

*selfadhesive black and gold vinyl on wall*

*variable dimensions*

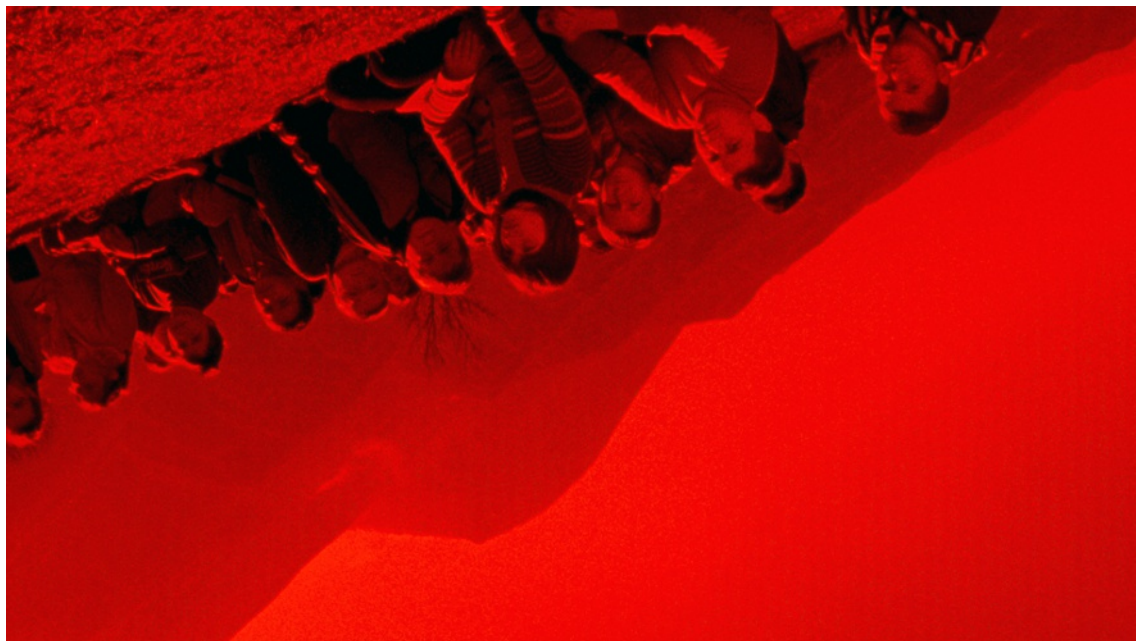
*Installation view, Galleria d'Arte Moderna Palazzo Forti, Verona*

Text on the wall:

Back when I was at the art academy, I think it was my 1st or maybe 2nd year, I once read an interview in the newspaper or magazine with a “contemporary” artist from ex-Yugoslavia. I don’t remember exactly where was he from nor his name, but what stayed with me from this interview is a statement he made at one point, saying something like:

If I were to live in France or Norway... I, as well, would like to or would make works that analyse or study the relationship between “line” and “circle”. But look at me and look where I live, I can’t just stand with my arms crossed, I have to make art that is socially engaged, art that reacts to the situation that I am in.

Today, when I moved from Bosnia to France, I decided to use the naivety of this statement...



*A Short Story*

*2011*

*16mm film transfered to HD*

*10 min 20 sec*

*Production: Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains*

*Co-production: Academy of film and multimedia Marubi, Tirana*



*Piccolo Greenland*

2012

4K transferred to HD

6 min 22 sec

*Production: Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains*



*The song sustained us, to her we are thankful!*

*2012*

*loudspeakers (variable size), marbles*

*sound duration: 53min (loop)*



*Spectre*  
2012  
HD  
7 min 30 sec

*Produced in collaboration with The SIZ Gallery and Kamov Residency Programme, Rijeka*

*Supported by The City of Rijeka - Department of Culture, Primorsko-goranska County, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia*



*Situation*  
*1993/2013*  
*inkjet prints*  
*20x15cm each (framed)*



30.Nov'93 - Pieter Bruegel in the letters of my father  
2013  
VHS transfered to DVD  
3 min 37 sec

*The Bridge*  
 2013  
 Knauf gypsum boards, facade, acrylic facade colors  
 cca. 280x230cm



\*1993





*Study For An Applause*

2013

HD

5 min 34 sec

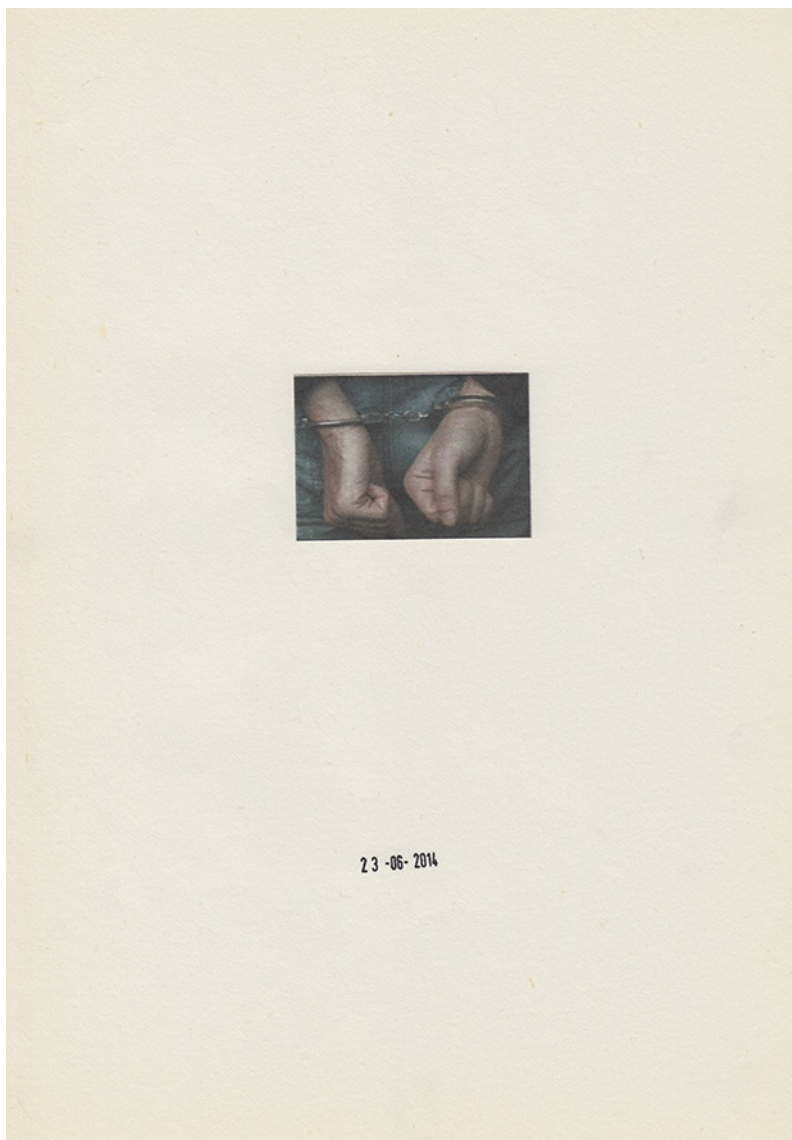
9 inkjet prints 30x40cm

*Note*

*Reenactment of an applause captured in a photograph by Gerard Julien (AFP), taken 14 December 1995 at the Elysee Palace in Paris showing: Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzales, US President Bill Clinton, French President Jacques Chirac, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, British Prime Minister John Major and Russian Premier Victor Chernomyrdin, Serbian President Slobodan Milosević, Croatian President Franjo Tudman and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović applauding after signing of the peace agreement on Bosnia. The accord was reached in Dayton, USA, 21 November ending over four years of war in former Yugoslavia.*



*Untitled*  
2014  
inkjet print  
50x30cm



*Black Chronicles*  
 2014  
 photographic archive  
 cutout newspaper, collage  
 21x29.7cm

*Note*  
*Black Chronicles is an archive of cut out photographs that are used as "illustrations" in the crime rubric of the Bosnian daily newspaper Oslobođenje.*



The works of Ibro Hasanović are revealed to us as places of “impossible encounters” that embody connections with the past.<sup>1</sup> They have a specific relationship with the past, where romanticised narratives and elements of nostalgia coexist. In the same way that nostalgia emanates from physical and temporal distance from the object of desire, the films of Ibro Hasanović represent places where memory, time, the past, interpretation and imagination meet. The image of nostalgia, as Svetlana Boym points out, is an image of double exposure – a collision of the past and the present, illusion and reality.<sup>2</sup>

The works by Ibro Hasanović are a meeting place of different references, narratives and texts from the fields of film, art, literature, and like Tarkovsky, Godard, Sidran or Caspar David Friedrich. The images and stories that are evoked in his films are immersive and poetic, with special attention paid to the shaping of the soundscape, where the moulding of the sound plays an important role in the creation of the experience, the atmosphere and the layers of meaning. By the use of visual codes and the language of film, Ibro Hasanović explores the complex relations of individuals and society.

The landscape in *A Short Story*, is metonymically representing a space where territory and destiny have been intertwined for centuries, the (constructed) iceberg in *Piccolo Greenland*, and the (real) ship ‘Galeb’ in *Spectre*, all represent almost mythical places, which the author uses not only to mediate information about the space or the event, but also to insinuate at a certain situation or emotion. The meaning of these places is deeply rooted in our collective memory, and they become topoi of artistic interest, of describing the indescribable, of articulating visual language as a transfer between the subconscious and images, while the moving pictures draw us into an associative space of relations between reality and fiction.

In *A Short Story*, the narrator retells a string of events that took place in the recent past, and some premonitions about the future, which are mediated by way of oral narration. Here, the narration of the past is intermingled with indications of future events, as the form acquires an uncertain position on the narrator’s reliability, so that the unclear narratives are placed between the past and the future. The paradigm of oral narratives – oral history, oscillates on the edges between fiction and reality, documents, truth and falsehood, history and narrative.

The act of narration and the narrator’s monologue represent a frame of reference and the centrepiece for forming the narration of the work. The cyclical repetition of the mythicised elements reveals the models that participate in the formation, maintenance and regulation of the social and natural order; codes which are inscribed in our collective memory.

The opening frames are of a mountainous landscape, an almost pastoral image of grassy meadows situated between the somewhat ominous mountain tops. The frame outlines the static scene of the landscape. As Simon Schama points out in *Landscape and Memory*, “scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock”, opening a range of questions about the interrelationship of nature and history. The landscape as an artistic construction, representation, genre of pictures, is a product of western culture and allows for mediation of the relationship between man and nature, in the same way that it represents the models of man’s conceptualisation of nature, in order to reflect different moods and complex relations, thus becoming a place for questioning the interrelationship of space, history, memory or identity.

The next scene is framed by an angled, awry frame. Such frame represent a result of the author’s subjectivity and self-awareness of having disturbed the idyllic landscape with his intervention, and

represents the author’s (director’s) comment as a hint at the narrative frame, future events, undefined fears, feelings of discomfort, premonitions of ignominious effects, instability, and uncertainty in the story and imagery. This almost literal “awry look” is opposed to the usual image, while the narrative content and the film’s expressiveness participate equally in the construction of the meaning of the work.

While the narrator carries out his *storytelling*, the retelling of the story, the movement of the camera reveals that his figure is not alone in the landscape. We gradually discover who he is talking to, and that he is in fact standing in front of an audience of children, resembling a class sitting on the grass, listening to the narrator with attention and wonder.

In *Piccolo Greenland*, we once again come across the relation of man and nature, where the poetic scenes of the cold icy and romantically spirited landscape represent a frame for individual struggle and engagement, aimed at achieving a certain goal. In this binary pair of nature and culture we discover a melancholic image. The protagonist is a lone individual who uses all his energy against the power of nature. In the film the sense of fantasy is mingled with reality, solid borders melt away, while the natural and the artificial coexist in miraculous harmony, because this image of the north, cold and ice, which exist as an artificial landscape constructed in the studio, is a representation of an imagined state territory that is being established by way of conquest. Through the interaction of the different elements, the set design and the mise-en-scene, Ibro Hasanović reveals the “political potential of the poetic”.

*Spectre* is the only film lacking a human presence. The camera moves inside the hull of war ship ‘Galeb’, anchored in Rijeka harbour, while the work itself was created during the author’s stay in Rijeka. Ships are places of interesting histories, both known and unknown, visible and invisible, and of mysterious auras. The “ghosts” of ‘Galeb’, as spectres of the system, occupy the vacant social and ideological place as their referential field, while glimpses are shown of the true destiny of the ship, which is to become a commodified tourist attraction.

Optically unconscious, the camera moves through “interior landscapes”, the deserted, empty remains of a glorious history, progress, journeys, representations of modernism, enclosed spaces, spaces of fiction, evoking the tradition and concept of the cabinet of miracles as remnants of the “theatre of memory”, exploring and reflecting different positions and manners of structuring the meaning of space, which displace and transform the common understanding, evoking different feelings, insecurities, disorientations, transience. It is as if the film slides through the representation of genres, the cinematography of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, representing the joining of culture and cinematographic structure.

The psychological and symbolic qualities of his architecture, just like the interrelations of the constructed ambience, material, real and artificial space, become places for creating meaning.

The disintegration of fixed understanding points to the complex relations between constructed space and subjectivity, as well as questions that bring us places whose meaning is articulated in the gap between the past and the present, while allowing for a special perception of space and reality, as well as the relation towards the perception of space and time, approximating to Bachelard’s term “poetic space”, as the space of imagination that contains compressed time and serves the compression of time. In *Spectre*, it is about the space – the ship, the story or the film, where, as Georges Perec said, “we inexplicably feel the cracks, gapes, points of friction; at times we have the vague impression that in certain places space falters, shoots or crashes...”<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of whether we have had a direct encounter with the past, which is formed on the basis of memory or forms of mediated memory, narration, films, photographs, the attitude towards the past is renewed and reshaped in the present. In this way the societal, collective “remembering of the past” is not

only the fruit of confirmed facts or direct experience, but also represents a narrative as a construction, subject to individual reinterpretations. By establishing contact with the past, using images and the tools of memory, the author can attempt to define the time we live in, articulating recognisable feelings through the clarity of the visual language. The works of Ibro Hasanović represent spaces whose meaning is articulated in the gap between the past, present and future. In them, Ibro Hasanović often refers to Tarkovsky, the filmmaker of nostalgia and condensed time, in whose films time is slowed down in order to conserve memory through a “reflexive journey towards the inner world”. The models of representation of certain places are created on the basis of different fragments – layers of the immediate surroundings, elements of everyday life, myths, stories, parts of history, culture and society that build and shape the process of opinion and perception, corresponding to the socio-political or historical context of the place where they were brought to fruition, while at the same time representing a reflection of internal states, experiences, history or stories.

Branka Benčić

Translation: Igor Stefanovski

<sup>1</sup> Hal Foster: The Return of the Real, October Books/MIT Press, 1996

<sup>2</sup> Svetlana Boym: The Future of Nostalgia, Basic Books, 2001

<sup>3</sup> Georges Perec: Vrste prostora, Meandar, Zagreb, 2005

30. Nov '93 - Pieter Brueghel in the letters of my father

In his book *Images in Spite of All*<sup>1</sup> philosopher Didi-Huberman wrote that in order to know, we must *imagine* for ourselves. So, what do we imagine when watching Ibro Hasanović's short film made in 2013? Are we watching an artistic film or a homemade video that was originally recorded on a VHS tape by Hasanović's father Hamdija back in November 1993? There is no written explanation about this piece, except a short notice by the artist that says: Video made out of the "VHS letter" that my father sent me during the war in Bosnia.

But when we start imagining, when we spend some time doing that (because imagining *is* work as Didi-Huberman reminds us), we realize that we are not only watching sequences of cheerful images of children playing in the snow in a small town in Bosnia, but that we are dealing with a specific archive of absences. These absences, these incomplete images refer to events that happened in real time and space; they are memories recorded for the absent Hasanović family, in order to preserve and understand the family history.

What Ibro Hasanović actually did in his work was reactivate the relationship between the poetical (children playing, people talking in the streets, the almost bucolic atmosphere of a snow-covered town) and the political (the harshness of war, not evident at first glance). It often happens in contemporary art that the political and the ideological overlap with the poetical, especially in the context of so-called tortured geographies. Obviously this is not the case in Hasanović's video. There are, however, some resemblances between this work and Godard's short piece *Je Vous Salue, Sarajevo* from 1993. In his film Godard speaks about culture as a rule and art as an exception, saying that everything speaks about the rule but nothing about the exception because art cannot be told, it can only be filmed, composed... or lived. Similarly, Hasanović uses a very personal document, his father's VHS recording, which he reorganizes in such a way (by changing the video format) that it becomes a place for imagination, for the creation of absent history. Not only for his family, but also for us, observers in a gallery space. What we really see in this film is "the art of the living".

Another element that is strongly present in the film is the element of play, or more precisely, images of children playing in the snow. What does play signify in such a context? For one thing these sequences echo Breughel's paintings depicting children's games in wintertime. The beauty of this resemblance lies in the fact that children always play, regardless of the circumstances, season, place, economic conditions, anything. Here we could mention another artist, Slaven Tolj, who made a piece consisting of two photographs of children playing in wartime Dubrovnik. The children in Tolj's photos, in the same way as the children in Hasanović's film, are completely unaware of what is going on around them, they are so absorbed in their activities that we actually feel what Agamben meant by "invasion of life by play"<sup>2</sup>. According to Agamben, the invasion in question is a change and acceleration of time. Play is not only about the present moment, it is about the destruction of calendar, when people free themselves from regular time and, in Hasanović's case, from the time of war atrocities and suffering. Observing children at play in a war-torn town could only mean one thing: what children are playing with are not merely toys but history as well. Play is historical, then, and this is something that already Heraclitus wrote: Time is a child playing a game of dice; the kingdom is in the hands of a child. But children alone cannot exorcise the phantoms of the past (war); what every society must do is get rid of those phantoms so that children can live and one day take the adults' place<sup>3</sup>. And this, it seems, is the subtle message of Hasanović's film.

<sup>1</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman: *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, University of Chicago Press, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Agamben: *Infancy and History*, Verso 2007, p. 76

<sup>3</sup> See Agamben

### *Study For The Applause*

In art historical terms a study represents the most common process for an artist when creating complex artworks such as allegorical or historical paintings. While highly idealised and mythologised, historical paintings have always been based on actual events that had to be commemorated for political and ideological reasons. Aware of its historical context, Ibro Hasanović commemorates the eighteenth anniversary of the infamous signing of the Dayton Accords, an event that took place in the Élysée Palace in Paris on 14 December 1995 and has been widely recognised as the agreement that ended the bloodshed of Yugoslav wars, particularly the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In *Study for the Applause*, a series of nine photographs and one video, Hasanović re-enacts a scene from a Gérard Julien photograph showing three representatives of the conflicting parties along with their patrons, the presidents of the world's superpowers, who initiated the peace talks and assisted with the adoption of the agreement.

Before the emergence of photography the factuality of historical paintings was not of significant importance: such are Diego Velázquez's *The Surrender of Breda* (1635) where the Dutch commander hands over the keys of the besieged town to the Spanish opponent or Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon at the San Bernardino Pass* (1800) where the new French emperor, mounted on a white horse, leads his army into Italy. The fact that the painters themselves might not have witnessed the actual event depicted was not problematic because the final picture was always highly idealised. Historical paintings are therefore acts of political will, in order to perpetuate a particular discourse in collective memory and, consequently, history. The American neo-classicist painter Benjamin West's attempt to depict the signing of the *Peace Treaty of Paris* (1784), which ended the independence war in the USA, documents delicate nature of the task of depicting such subjects. This painting of great significance remained unfinished because diplomats representing the British Empire at the time refused to pose for the historical painting commemorating their defeat.

The need to commemorate significant events by recording them – as a painting, photograph, or film – derives from the idea that visual representation serves as proof that the event really happened in the way in which it is depicted. Over the past 170 years, as a result of the availability of reproductive media that superseded and eventually succeeded the complete imaginary idealisation of allegorical and historical painting, certain protocols for portraying politically significant events have been developed. However, several diplomatic conventions were adopted for significant occasions such as official political meetings, negotiations and signing agreements. This can be seen in the images from Compiègne depicting the signing of armistice between France and Germany in 1918 and later in 1940 when the Third Reich managed to locate the same train carriage in which German surrender in WWI was publicly declared in order to pose in front of it again as a symbolic gesture of revenge. Through enacting a set of diplomatic protocols, the uniformed military officials and state representatives aim to convince the audience that their decisions are correct and righteous.

Capturing decisive moments of politically significant events in a distinctive and controlled way requires a fair amount of staging. The images of conferences, talks, meetings, or signing ceremonies have the immediate intention of becoming iconic or at the very least definitive depictions of the event, and therefore have to convey a very clear message. Likewise, the images of Dayton Accords signing ceremony in Paris have the intention to convince the audience, the consumers of the photograph and footage, that the agreement was the best and the only option in the given situation. The agreement indeed brought peace to the war-torn areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina after almost four years; however, it has also caused

formal ethnic division of the state and brought on additional mass migrations that have been already caused by war. The Dayton Agreement actually proved that the war was fought in vain for all sides involved in the conflict. From today's perspective one could conclude that the war in Yugoslavia was mostly dependant on political decisions of its warlords who managed to persuade their loyal followers to voluntarily participate in a marginal episode of global geopolitical changes.

Hasanović's video and photographs show clapping hands in an empty space recreating the applause of every particular participant as a metaphor for visual image's potential to idealise and manipulate broader picture. He, himself collateral damage who spent the war as a refugee, is seeking to review and question the aftermath of the agreement that, as a side effect, created an invalid and dysfunctional Bosnian state.

The protocol of the Dayton Accords signing ceremony followed by a solemn applause and a patronising speech of US president Bill Clinton addressing the chieftains of the warring sides, stripped of protocols and embellished rhetoric, demonstrates the banality of the bargain for territory. The applause too was aimed at the chieftains, in order to commend them for accepting the terms set by influential states: the incorporation of democracy and free market economy as unquestionable values. The *Study for the Applause* ironically points out the paradoxical outcome of armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which could be seen as a blueprint for a number of recent wars taking place around the globe caused and triggered by economic interests.

Miha Colner

Ibro HASANOVIĆ (Bosnian, b. 1981) lives and works in Pristina. He studied product design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo and contemporary art and cinema at Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains in France. Selected solo exhibitions and screenings include: *Letters*, Tobačna Cultural Center, Ljubljana (2013); *Artists' Cinema: Ibro Hasanović*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2013); *A Short Story*, Turku Art Museum, Finland (2012); *Stories*, Galleria A+A (Slovenian Exhibition Centre), Venice (2011). Group exhibitions: *Memory Lane*, Galerie du Jour – agnès b, Paris (2014); *Attention Economy*, Kunsthalle Wien (2014); *...Was ist Kunst? ...Resuming Fragmented Histories*, Künstlerhaus, Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz (2013); 2nd Project Biennial D-0 ARK Underground, Konjic (2013); *Voices of Truth*, Villa Romana, Florence (2012); *It's time we got to know each other*, 52nd October Salon, Belgrade (2011); *Windows upon Oceans*, Thessaloniki Concert Hall (2011); *255.804 km2*, City Museum of Ljubljana (2010); *Il padiglione immaginario di Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna Palazzo Forti, Verona (2009); *When Absence Becomes Presence*, Washington Project for the Arts (2008).

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