

Acompanying programme:

Wednesday, 4 October 2023, at 18:00

A guided tour of the exhibition with artists and curator:



Exhibition Colophon:

Nika Oblak & Primož Novak: And Now for Something Completely Different 16

27 September – 12 November 2023,

Ivan Grohar Gallery

Škofja Loka Museum

Represented by: Aleksandra Saša Nabergoj

Curators: Saša Nabergoj, Boštjan Soklič

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Ivan Grohar Gallery

27. 9.–12. 11. 2023

Curators: Saša Nabergoj in Boštjan Soklič

Nika Oblak & Primož Novak



**AND NOW FOR
SOMETHING
COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT 16**

The exhibition *And Now for Something Completely Different 16* presents the works of visual artists Nika Oblak and Primož Novak, who have been part of the contemporary art scene as an artist duo for twenty years. Their artistic practice includes video, photography, installations, kinetic installations, spatial interventions and performance. The exhibition at the Ivan Grohar Gallery showcases a selection of works from an extensive oeuvre, in which direct implications for the current economic and social reality can be recognised. The two artists deal with the absurdities of the modern world in a lucid and humorous way, while also exploring the complex mechanisms of today's neoliberal reality. We have selected five projects that focus on controversial aspects of modern life (the pitfalls of consumerism, the dangers of uncritical reliance on various technologies, the ambivalence between reality and fiction, repressive structures of work and politics) and social relations. The works created between 2005 and 2020 highlight an individual trapped in the wheel of a day-to-day routine, filled with repetitive protocols of (often) totally meaningless actions.

The exhibition *And Now for Something Completely Different 16* is an illustration of the present age, where reality and the world of media are closely intertwined, while humanistic principles are (unfortunately) subordinated to economic ones. The exhibited works are stories about individuals subjected to repetitive patterns, competitiveness, social media presence, work, constant absorption of information and stimuli, which on the one hand provides them with a sense of security, belonging and fulfilment, and on the other hand all this is a departure from one's own essence and the basic humanistic values (the metaphor of "running on empty").

Room One features two works titled *Where Do We Come from? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* and *Untitled*, and Room Two contains the works *The Scream*, *Infinity* and *We Did This and That*.

Where Do We Come from? What Are We? Where Are We Going?, created in 2019, is a kinetic video installation

that can be seen as a reflection of progress and an allusion to our constant use of technological devices. The male performer inside the LCD screen moves continuously, but does not advance whatsoever. Trapped inside the screen and adapted to the way it moves, he keeps walking and is transformed into a cogwheel tooth (in terms of suspension). This is when he becomes part of the device and its slave. The unusual device alludes to the rat race, to endless and (often) senseless and even stressful interactions with modern technology. The title of the installation is based on Gauguin's identically-titled iconic work, the content, however, is a reference to Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times*.

The *Untitled* photo series was created between 2010 and 2020. It is based on a concept that places both creators in different roles or contexts, which is, in fact, a fundamental characteristic and constant (continuum) of their artistic practice. As part of this photo series, they play around with the clichés that have been present in the art world for decades or even centuries. The titles of the works are derivatives of typical, ever-present titles that are recycled in art constantly (regardless of geographic location or ethnicity), *Untitled*, *Fountain*, *Self-Portrait* etc. The series consists of the photographs *Fountain*, *after Duchamp*, *Nauman*, *Signer* and many other prominent twentieth-century visual artists, *Homage to Nika Oblak and Primož Novak*, *Untitled and Self Portrait* (2061).

The 2015 video titled *The Scream* is based on Edvard Munch's iconic painting *The Scream*. The video content is condensed, symbolically strong, expressively shocking and meaningful. It presents a radical (timeless) symbol of human anguish. It shows the female protagonist in deep concentration and then she screams out in pain and distress at the top of her lungs, thus breaking the screen with her voice (the scream). The video reveals a personal, dramatic narrative, confronting one's own traumas and the omnipresent, ever-topical existential questions. At the forefront of the story are the atmosphere and feeling that evoke associations with German expressionism. The scream is a central symbol of expressionism, both in film and theatrical performances.

Infinity (Digital) is a 2020 video installation that (digitally) depicts running. The main protagonist, who is shown running in an endless and senseless loop from screen to screen, can be seen as a manifestation of the myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus was condemned by God to repeat the meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again just before reaching the top. The two artists have used the gesture of perpetual absurdity to draw attention to how people take technological progress for granted, to emphasise the necessity of adapting to all kinds of changes, as well as to critically highlight the loosening of basic humanistic values.

The *We Did This and That* project, created between 2005 and 2007, consists of a series of 43 photographs and a series of 13 videos. It is a humorous (pseudo) interpretation of achieving the Guinness World Records based on unusual, almost absurd ideas. Nika Oblak and Primož Novak arouse the viewer's attention with spectacular and entertaining stunts that are parables for the modern society's widespread obsession with success and fame. The sense of directness evoked by the project is also characteristic of advertisers, reporters, authors of reality shows.

As a medium, video production has existed in Slovenia for almost half a century. It is a medium with its own specific characteristics and is embedded in social and production frameworks. Its beginnings are closely related to conceptual (alternative) practices; the latter used to use video as an element of artistic action and a means of documenting various artistic practices in public. Nika Oblak and Primož Novak use video as an independent medium – as a more-than-convenient means of expression for realising ideas that cannot be realised through any other media, as well as the possibility of direct communication with the audience. Their works are self-reflexive, filled with a great deal of irony and humour, as well as social criticism, with less emphasis on image manipulation and transformation. Their complex stories in the context of artistic inter-medial practice come close to a film presentation. As such, they establish an arc with

home video production in the 1990s, which highlighted individual authorship, while video "migrated" from alternative venues to galleries and film festivals.

Nika Oblak and Primož Novak's video stories are a synthesis of personal experiences, transplanted into a wider context, where the two artists usually also take on the roles of the main protagonists. They draw inspiration from the real world and imaginations, and share information through stories that the viewers may find entertaining, captivating, moving or as something that helps them pass the time. The two artists have enriched the contemporary Slovenian art scene with a fresh video genre that follows the feature film narrative. It is a combination of fiction and reality, which shows fictional events in a documentary, yet thoughtfully structured, visually perfected and refined way. They present the content in the form of documentary accounts – a subgenre of mockumentary prank docs, thus consciously blurring the boundaries between film genres and video art, and co-creating the world in a participatory and interactive way.

Boštjan Soklič, Curator, Škofja Loka Museum

Nika Oblak & Primož Novak have been working collectively since 2003. In their art practice they examine contemporary media and capital driven society as they dissect its visual and linguistic structure.

Oblak & Novak have exhibited worldwide, in venues like the Sharjah Biennial (UAE), Japan Media Arts Festival, Tokyo (JP), Istanbul Biennial (TR), Biennale Cuvee, Linz (AT), Transmediale Berlin (DE), FILE Sao Paulo (BR)... They received numerous grants and awards, including the CYNETART Award by the Trans-Media-Akademie Hellerau in Dresden (DE), an honorary mention of art critics at Biennale WRO, Wroclaw (PL), White Aphroid Award for artistic achievement by MMC KIBLA, Maribor (SI) and Rihard Jakopic honorable mention, awarded by the Association of Slovene Fine Artists Societies, the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, Moderna galerija and the Slovene Association of Art Critics (SI).