Andrej Marjanovic

BLOCKHEADS

June 9–19, 2023
Cultural Information Center – Skopje

"Blockheads" is my second solo exhibition. It is inspired by the urban environment and the visual style of street-art culture. The core of the exhibition consists of painted wooden-beam sculptures, complemented by large-format acrylic paintings. Like some kind of street-art totems, these Blockheads embody the characters you meet every day in the city and in contemporary popular culture: the skater ("Sk8r"), the graffiti writer, the hacker, the drummer, the punks, the policeman, the politician, the old woman, the suspicious character, etc. I find that the particular blend of two-dimensional drawings on a three-dimensional surface makes them quite alive and recognizable, each of them fulfilling their individual block of space in their own "mentally limited" way. In the accompanying Blockhead acrylic paintings, I approximate street-art murals inspired by urban life, where I can render larger-scale compositions with the Blockhead characters in various urban settings.

Ever since I was little, I was interested in caricature, comic books, and animation. Maybe because of their likability, their ability to make me laugh and to cheer me up, or the simplicity of their graphic solutions—creating recognizable characters with the least amount of lines and with a reduced palette of colors… In any case, I have always practiced this style of expression, both for my own sake, and for "commercial" purposes (in animation, illustration, etc.). However, our "academic" environment didn't approve much of these types of artistic expression—at least, not when I was a student… When I would ask for any comic books in the library of our Faculty of Fine Arts, they were amazed as if it was not an appropriate thing to ask for. I was not asking for any "Marvel" heroes in tights and on steroids, but for something by Robert Crumb or Art Spiegelman (since someone had already lent me "Maus" in high school, and I was regularly following the comic book magazine "Lift", which had many interesting world famous "underground" comic book artists, as well as some of our domestic misunderstood and genius comic book artists). Anyhow, this style of drawing was often brewing in my notebooks, and at times, it would escape on some wall in the city… Only after I would see how other people reacted to my characters and recognize them (after having seen some of my animations or caricature drawings), I started to become aware that there is something more to this than only a quick laugh or a doodle.

The "Blockheads" happened in a completely spontaneous way: I had a piece of wooden beam lying around, so the idea came to me to create a character out of it, this time with acrylic paint instead of spray paint and markers. And the experiment was successful—this amorphous piece of wood had turned into a character with attitude and emotion, and then it would assume its place in some of the rooms, and it would always surprise my visitors in a positive way. So, from time to time, a new piece of timber would pop up, with it an idea for a new character, and little by little, more characters were assembling. I was fascinated by the way in which this minimal 3D form was able to transform itself into something completely different only by a simple 2D drawing. And it contained all the elements of everything that had influenced me, at least in the field of caricature, animation, and comic books. The idea was to find a quick solution, as one plans a graffiti—a simple sketch, some color, and an expeditive execution—to do the "damage" before an unwanted witness comes by. When I finally decided to gather all these experiments into one cycle, I got more ideas than I could realistically have the time or money to realize for this exhibition, but the seeds have been sawn, and soon enough, more works may gather up for another series in this cycle.

These are images, scenes, and characters from our everyday city lives, by which I attempt to portray the current society we are living in—analogously to the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Hieronymus Bosch, or James Ensor, who all played with the grotesque, thus offering their critical commentary about the life and people of their own time. My portraits are stylistically very different, of course, since I was brought up with video games, comic books, animation, graffiti, and street art. In this exhibition, with the application of a simple drawing and the basic visual elements and principles, the Blockhead sculptures transform the amorphous and minimal timber objects into artifacts with character, emotion, and attitude. Among the "portraits" of everyday characters, I've also included several "portraits" of contemporary artists whom I wanted to pay homage to: Banksy, with his subversive prank art, which simultaneously wants to criticize and make people laugh; Andy Warhol, with the banal, the consumerism, the fame, and the fashion as the main subject of his art; and Yayoi Kusama, with her obsessiveness in creating art and her persistence with her own style of expression, despite all obstacles. These three "portraits" are merely an apéritif before a larger cycle of "Celeblocks" ("Celebrity Blockheads"), which are going to follow next.

Andrej Marjanovic
June 5th, 2023

The suspicious character (Banksy?)

Andy Warhol

Yayoi Kusama

Joey Ramone

Real Ghetto
Character

Graffiti writer

The hacker

The drummer

Homeless

NDRJ

Poor Little Rich
100 x 70 cm
Acrylic on canvas

Biography

Andrej Marjanovic (b. 1978, Skopje) graduated in 2004 at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University – Skopje, Department of Printmaking and Graphic Design, under the mentorship of prof. Mirko Vujisic.

His first graphic arts exhibitions—related to his solo exhibition

"Recurrences" (2007, Open Graphic Studio, Museum of the City of Skopje)—were remembered as a rare experimental research in the field of printmaking with their use of cylindrical polyethylene pipes and the possibility for creating unlimited formats in size ("The Tower of Babel", 198 x 254 cm).

Although first and foremost he considers himself a graphic
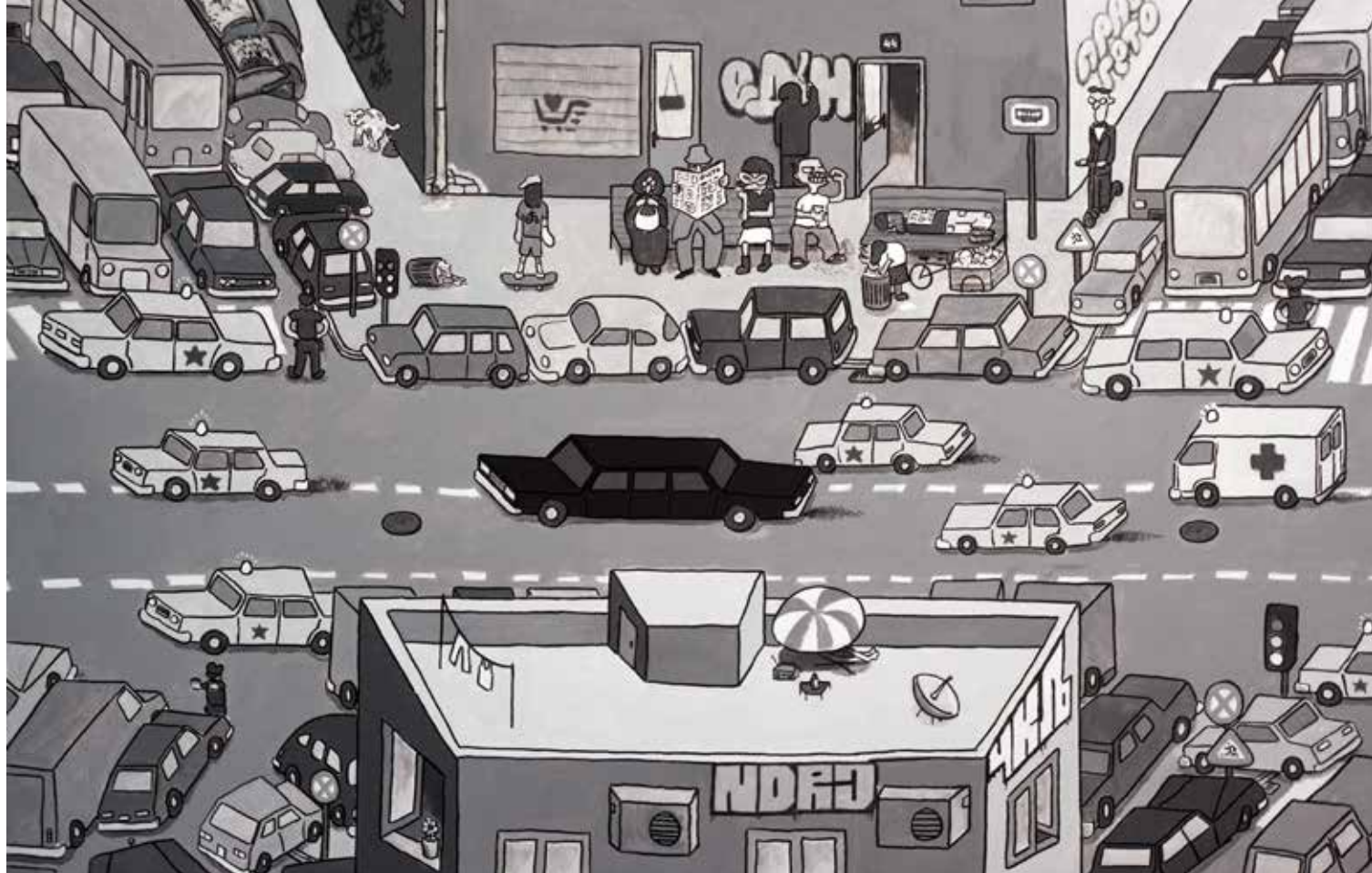
My city
120 x 80 cm
Acrylic and marker on canvas

artist, Andrej Marjanovic works a lot in both multimedia and in many classic arts techniques (painting, sculpture, and drawing). But it is less known that he was also a graffiti artist during the emerging Skopje graffiti culture of the 1990s, working under many pseudonyms (НДРЈ/NDRJ, ЧКЉ Кру/ CHKLJ Crew, Право гето/Real ghetto). Since about the same time, he was part of the birth of the Macedonian underground electronic music scene under various pseudonyms (NDRJ, Partybreaking Inc., Кисела куќа/Acid House), using sampling as his main constructive technique. From 2000 onwards, he works professionally in branding, graphic design, web design, photography, video production, audio production, and animation.

With regard to technique, Andrej Marjanovic is always interested in experimentation, innovation, and intermediality. In his interartistic and intermedia fine art explorations, he is often inspired by music, comic books, street art, computer art, video art, video games, and film. Whatever the technique, medium, or application, his art stylistically gravitates toward the minimalist, symbolic, and abstract, always grounded on deeply deliberated concepts, a critical approach, autoreferentiality, and humor.

He was born and raised in Skopje, but from 2014 he lives in the Prespa area. He is a member of the Association of Fine Artists of Macedonia since 2007.

The bus
165 x 80 cm
Acrylic and marker on canvas

Exhibitions:

Exhibition from the Open Graphic Studio's Collection – group exhibition (Museum of the City of Skopje, June 2022)

Macedonian Artists' Exhibition in Sofia / Македонски уметници во Софија – group exhibition of the Association of Fine Artists of Macedonia (Gallery of the National Palace of Culture – Sofia, July 2009, catalogue p.25)

GraphICON – group exhibition (Open Graphic Studio, Museum of the City of Skopje, December 2008, catalogue p.13)

Slang Dictionary – installation (White Night Festival, Open Graphic Studio, Museum of the City of Skopje, September 2008)

Recurrences, solo exhibition (Open Graphic Studio, Museum of the City of Skopje, 2007)

Music Releases / Performances:

NDRJ + SAKO = Split – collaborative double CD release of experimental electronic music (Alexandria & FOSM, 2001; promotion in the Museum of Contemporary Art – Skopje)

Live electronic music performance (Spoeni Sadovi – Multimedia Art Festival, Youth Cultural Center, Skopje, 1997)

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Container
100 x 70 cm
Acrylic on canvas

Front page: "Miroljub", "The politician", "Dobromir", The little critic" and "Homeless"