

Jelena Tomasevic

Documentary about the work of the artist - <https://youtu.be/KlpKIRmoAag>

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Jelena Tomasevic

Born 1974 in Podgorica, Montenegro. Lives and works in Berlin and Montenegro. MFA, Academy of Fine Arts, Cetinje 2004.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2022 - Guilty Knowledge
- 2019 - Mixed Memories, Rita Urso Gallery, Milano, Italy
- 2016 - Burden of Proof, Galerie Perpetuel, Frankfurt, Germany
- 2016 - Installation Life Interest, Handel Street Projects, London
- 2013 - Installation *Object of Punishment*, Galerie Perpetuel Frankfurt, Germany
- 2013 - Video Rain, Residency Unlimited, New York, USA
- 2010 - Video Installation, Just Kidding, Galerie Herrenhausen, Hannover, Germany
- 2010 - Apparent Servitude, Artopia Gallery, Milano, Italy
- 2010 - Apparent Servitude, Center for Contemporary Art Podgorica, Montenegro
- 2008 - Just Kidding, Video, Gallery Thrust Projects, New York
- 2007 - Exhibition "Now That We Have Gone As Far As We Can Go...." Galerie Conrads, Dusseldorf, Germany
- 2007 - Just Kidding, Artopia Gallery, Milan Italy, Curated by Gabriela Serusi
- 2007 - Buero.DC, Cologne, Germany, Curated by Susanne Prinz
- 2006 - Joy of Life II, Thrust Projects, New York

Group Exhibitions:

2019

- Exodus, National museum Montenegro

2018

- White Anxieties Whitebox Art Center New York, USA.
- Unprofessionals, Art Gallery, Podgorica, Montenegro.
- Perceptions, National Museum Cetinje, Montenegro

2017

- Onufri Prize Exhibition, Collective Memory/Personal Memories, National Art Gallery Tirana, Albania, curated by Gaetano Centrone.
- Autostrada Bienale, The Future of Borders, curated by Manray Hsu.
- Art of the Postcard, Handel Street Projects, London, UK.
- Beacon Bureau at Roaming Room-Roaming Room, London
- Gallery Centar, Podgorica, Montenegro.

2016

- Concrete+Clay, Roaming Room, London, UK.
- Coming all Together Galerie Perpetuel Frankfurt, Germany.
- Cold Winds from Balkan, Pera Museum, Istanbul, curated by Ali Akayi and Alenka Gregoric.
- Midpointness, Transart Triennial. UK.
- Midpointness Airspace Gallery, Stoke, UK.
- Strageness/ Amazingness, 49. Hercegnovski zimski salon, Galerija Josip-Bepo Benkovic, Herceg Novi, Montenegro.

2015

- Exhibition Recycling Religion, White Box Gallery New York, USA
- Exhibition Recycling Religion, Satellite Art Fair, MIAMI, USA
- Satellite Art FAIR, Miami, USA
- Intimate Transgressions White Box Gallery New York, USA
- Wo das Gras gruner ist, Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein
- Coexistence for a new Adriatic koine, Fondazione Museo Pino Pascali, Podignano a mare, Italy

2014

- Exhibition Coexistence, National Museum, Cetinje, Montenegro
- Exhibition Procvetaj, Cveta Zuzuric, Beograd
- Exhibition Coexistence, National Museum Tirana Albania
- Exhibition EGO SUM, Center for Contemporary Art Montenegro
- Paint Me Sculpturly, Artopia Gallery, MILANO, ITALY

2013

- Exhibition, Imaginarni Balkan, Belgrade, Serbia, Curated by Bosko Boskovic
- Exhibition, Subjective Maps/Disappearances-National Gallery of Iceland
- Group Exhibition Sarajevo
- Charlama Balkana, Luciano Benetton, Italy

2012

- Exhibition Crossing, National Centre for Contemporary Art, Ekaterinburg, Russia.
- Exhibition Fluiditeti ArsAevi, Sarajevo.BIH
- Exhibition Crossing Museum of Contemporary Art *Erarta* u Sankt Peterburgu , Russia.
- Exhibition Multipla Market, Handel Street Project, London, UK.

2011

- Exhibition Free Port of Art, Trieste Contemporanea, Italy
- 1 Time Machine Biennale, Atomski bunker, Konjic, Bosnia and Hercegovina The Quadrilateral Biennial_Out of Left Field-MMSU-Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Rijeka, HR
- Exhibition Real Presence, Belgrade-Serbia

2010

- Quartet-Four Biennials Reflected in Prints-International Centre of Grafic Arts MGLC, Ljubljana, SLO. Curated by Rene Block
- Exhibition Sweet Little Dirty Things, Kultur Kontakt, Wien, Austria
- Exhibition, Gender Check, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw
- Exhibition, The Rise and Fall of Excess Culture, Stux Gallery NYC

2009

- Exhibition, Dear Countryman and Women, Gallery MC, New York
- Exhibition Gender Check, MUMOK Museum, Wien, Austria
- Exhibition Piccolo Stato, San Marino
- Exhibition, Festival novih vizuelnih tendencija, While Rome is Burning, Dom omladine Beograd

2008

- Exhibition farmers Market, Gallery Handel Street Projects, London
- Quartett/Vier Biennalen im Spiegel grafischer Blätter, TANAS, Berlin/Germany, curated by Rene Block
- Art Forum Berlin, Galerie Conrads
- Arco Madrid, Galerie Conrads
- Exhibition Artist/Citizen 49 October Salon, Belgrade
- Pulse Art, NYC, U.S.A
- Art Brussels, Galerie Conrads

2007

- Exhibition Best Regards from the blind spot Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Bilbao
- Exhibition Regards from Serbia and Montenegro, Sacramento State University
- Exhibition Horizon EFA Gallery, Curated by David Humphrey, New York

- Inbetweeness, Roma, Italy
- Off – Center Femininities, Windows of Kimmel Center, New York University, Curated by Jovana Stokic
- Art Brussels, Galerie Cobnrad
- Lollypop, Body and Consumption, Museum of Contemporary Arts of Vojvodina - Serbia

2006

- Collapsible Monuments, Thrust Projects, New York
- Art , Life & Confusion, 47th October Salon Belgrade, Serbia, Curated by Rene Block and Barbara Hinrich
- Scary Tels, Filiale. Berlin, Germany
- Vienna Art, Thrust Projects
- Cross the Line, Galerie Conrads, Dusseldorf, Germany
- East to West, AP4-ART, Geneva, Switzerland

2005

- FEM5-Video Festival, Video Drive, Spain
- The Biennial Portfolios, 9th International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Curated by Rene Block
- Montenegrin Beauty, Künstlerhaus Behanien Berlin, Germany
- Montenegrin Beauty, Mottorenhalle, Dresden, Germany
- The Eros of Slight Offence, Pavilion of Serbia & Montenegro, 51 st Venice Biennial, Venice-Italy
- S1 Salon-Sheffield, UK
- In the Gorges of the Balkans, Kunsthalle Fridericianum Museum Kassel

Awards

- Award Podgoricki likovni salon 1990-Montenegro
- Award Hercegovski likovni salon 1991-Montenegro
- Award Milunovic-Stijovic-Lubarda - Montenegro
- Award Hercegovski likovni salon 2001- Montenegro
- Award for best young artist of Montenegro, Centar for Contemporary Art 2007
- Award Hercegovskog likovnog salona 2016-Montenegro
- Onufri International Prize, National Gallery of Arts, Tirana, Albania 2017

Selected bibliography:

- Art in America, by Linda Nochlin, "Venice Biennale, What Befits a Woman?", September 2005 p. 123
- Flash Art, by Andrea Bellini "Cautions Alternatives" August - September 2006
- Art In America "by Stephen Maine, "Report from New York Down East" May 2006, p. 65
- NY Arts Magazine by Jovana Stokic "Cosmopolitan Subject" March-April 2007, p. 38
- ARTIBUNE Italia, by Cristiana Colli, " Il nuovo Kosovo passa per Autostrada Biennale" 31 August 2017
- Journal Frankfurt, by Ana Maria Milkovic" Auf der Suche nach Schwimmbad und einem Gedanken von Jean-Christophe Ammann" September 2016
- Sacramento News&Review, by Jonathan Kiefer, "Sharpest Regards", June 2007
- Financial Times London, by Harriet Fitch Little, "Is loyalty to an art gallery outdated?" 23 September 2016
- The Paris Review, by David Gendelman, "Offsides, part 2", 24 January 2013
- Psychology Tomorrow Magazine, New YORK, "Concrete Counterpoints", 10 May 2013
- FREENET, by Bulent Gunduz, "Grobte Kunstschau der Welt" 24 November 2003

- Focus, by J Emil Sennewald, "Zwischen Erfahrung und Engagement" 7 August 2005
- Artmargins online, by Dimitri Kozyrev, "Un-doing monoculture: women artists from the "Blind spot of europe"- the former Yugoslavia", 10 March 2006
- Wall Street International Art "Paint me Sculpturally" , March-May 2014
- Kunst Bulletin, by J .Emil Sennewald, "Zwischen Erfahrung und Engagement" August 2005
- Pudding Explosion, by Michalea Fila "Jelena Tomasevic - Object of Punishment in der Galerie Perpetuel"
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, by Christoph Schutte, " Duschen und Staunen" 19 October 2013, p. 50

Jelena Tomasevic
Guilty Knowledge

2022

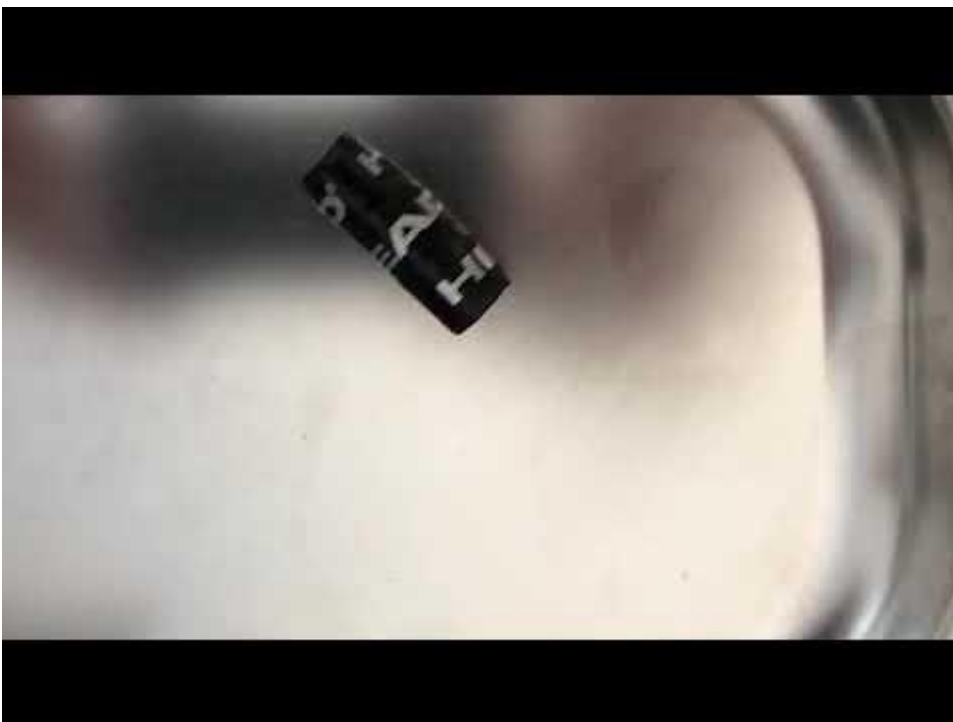
Courtesy of the Artist

The title, *Guilty Knowledge*, coming from legal terminology, is used when you know that an unlawful situation exists but you choose to ignore.

How we are trying to exist in society of constant movement and dominant political environment. The motor powering the vibration comes from a dildo, keeping the "head" in constant movement and noise. The stickers that say Head come from the sports company Head, which produces sports and leisure equipment. Everything is made of materials and things that already exist and that have already been produced and devised by someone. In this experiment, different objects for different purposes and from different perspectives have been merged and put into function and in a shared space, together, as an attempt to preserve a kind of collective memory.

The intention is to understand that from the point of view of, say, walls or the environment, we are just passer-by in every "space".

Post-human world not as a vision of the end of the world, but as a possible suggestion of a new beginning, some space after the end of everything in which things and parts of the body began to assemble themselves as a suggestion of some new beginning.



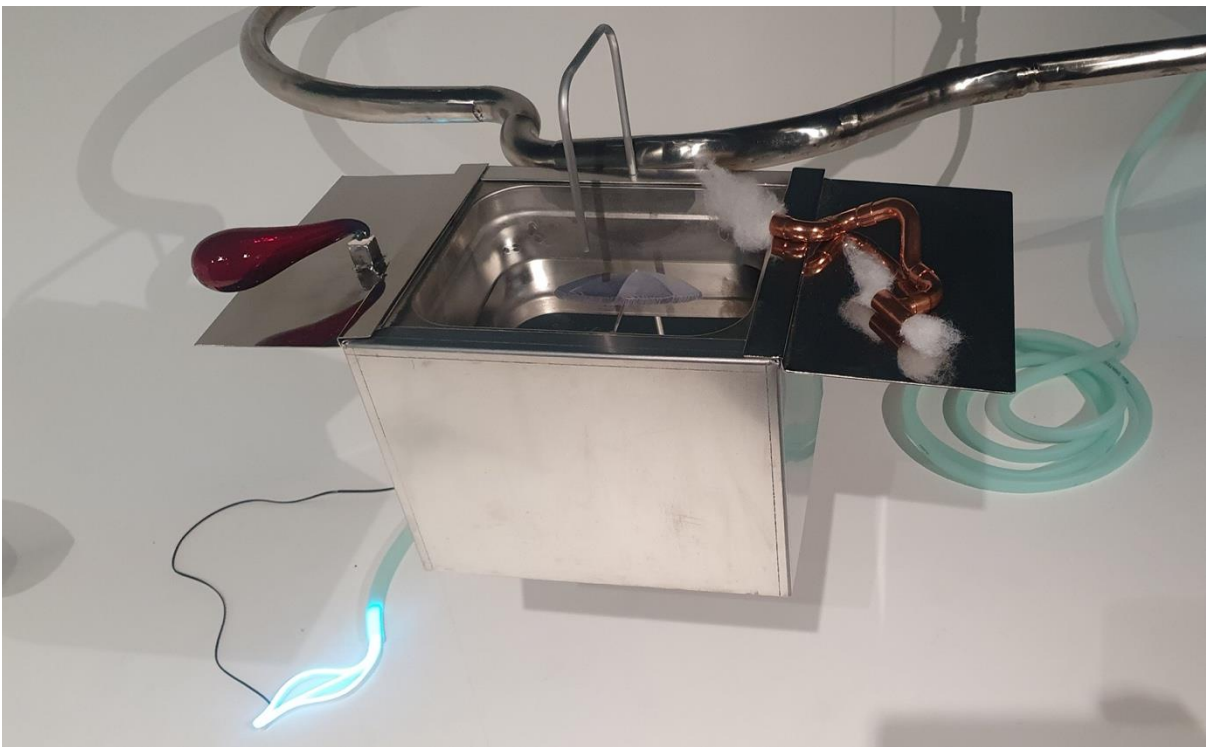
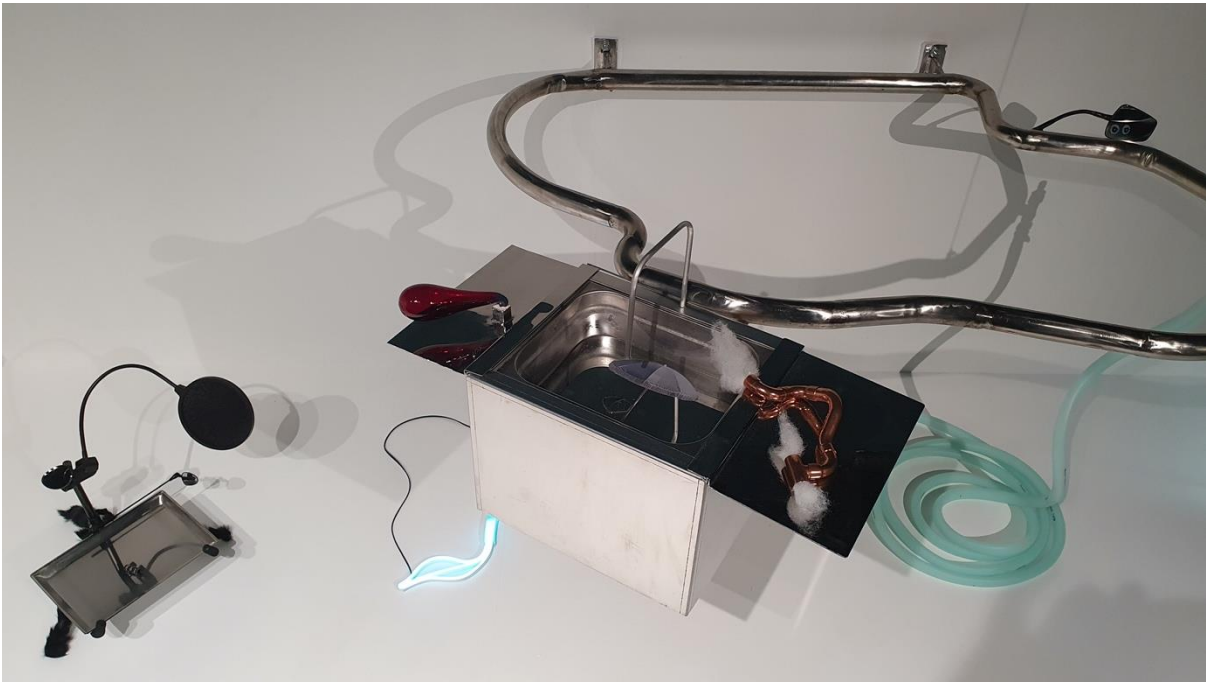
[Video 1 \(Youtube link\)](#)

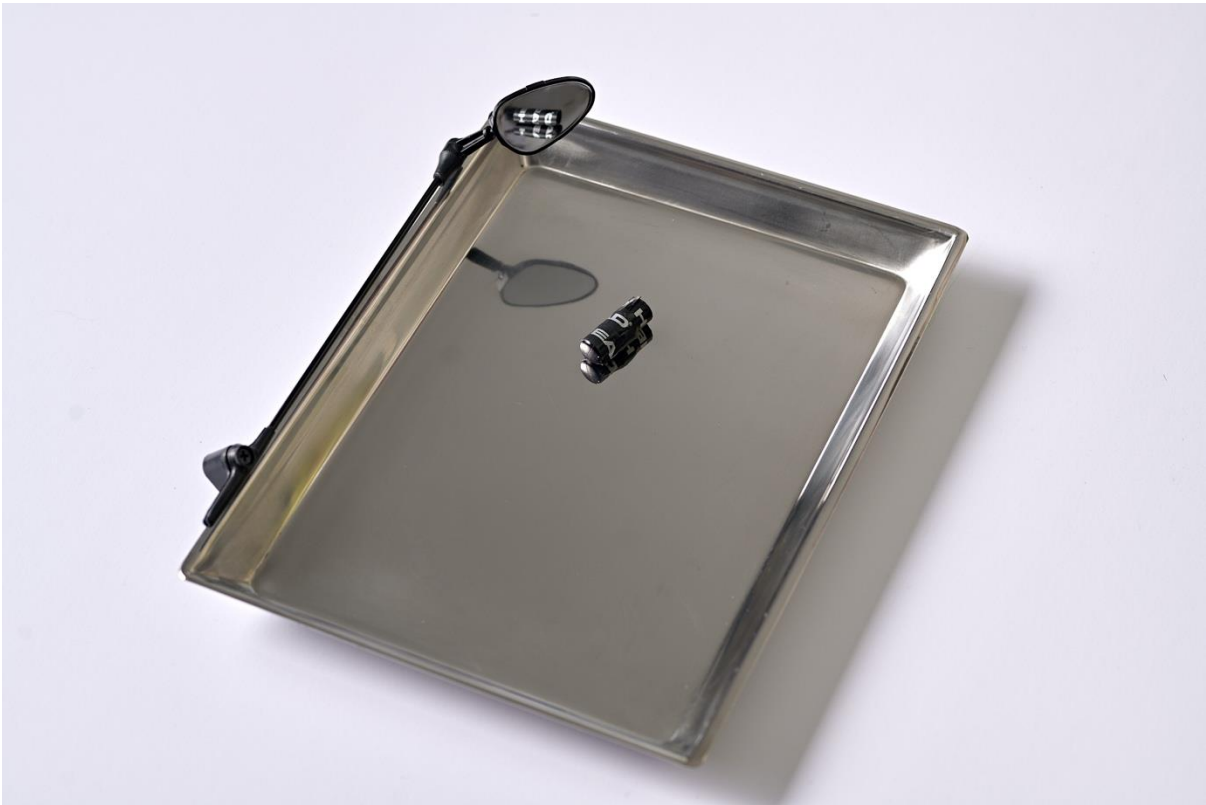
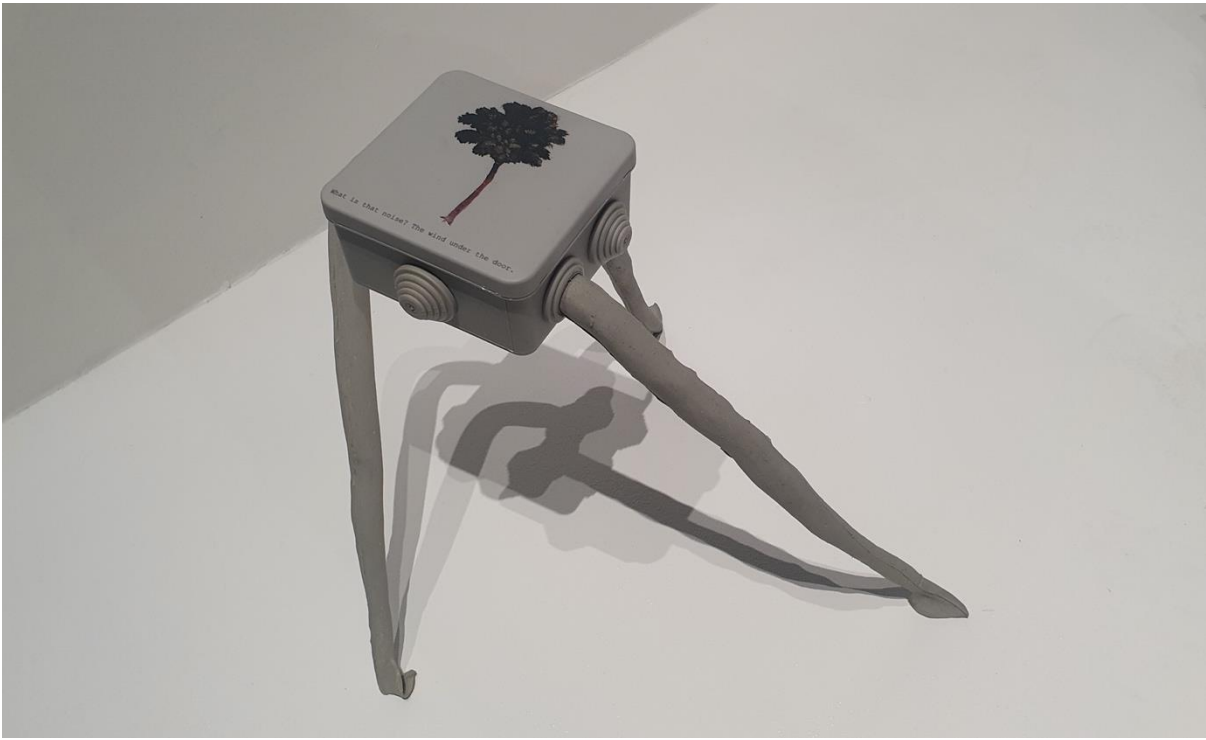


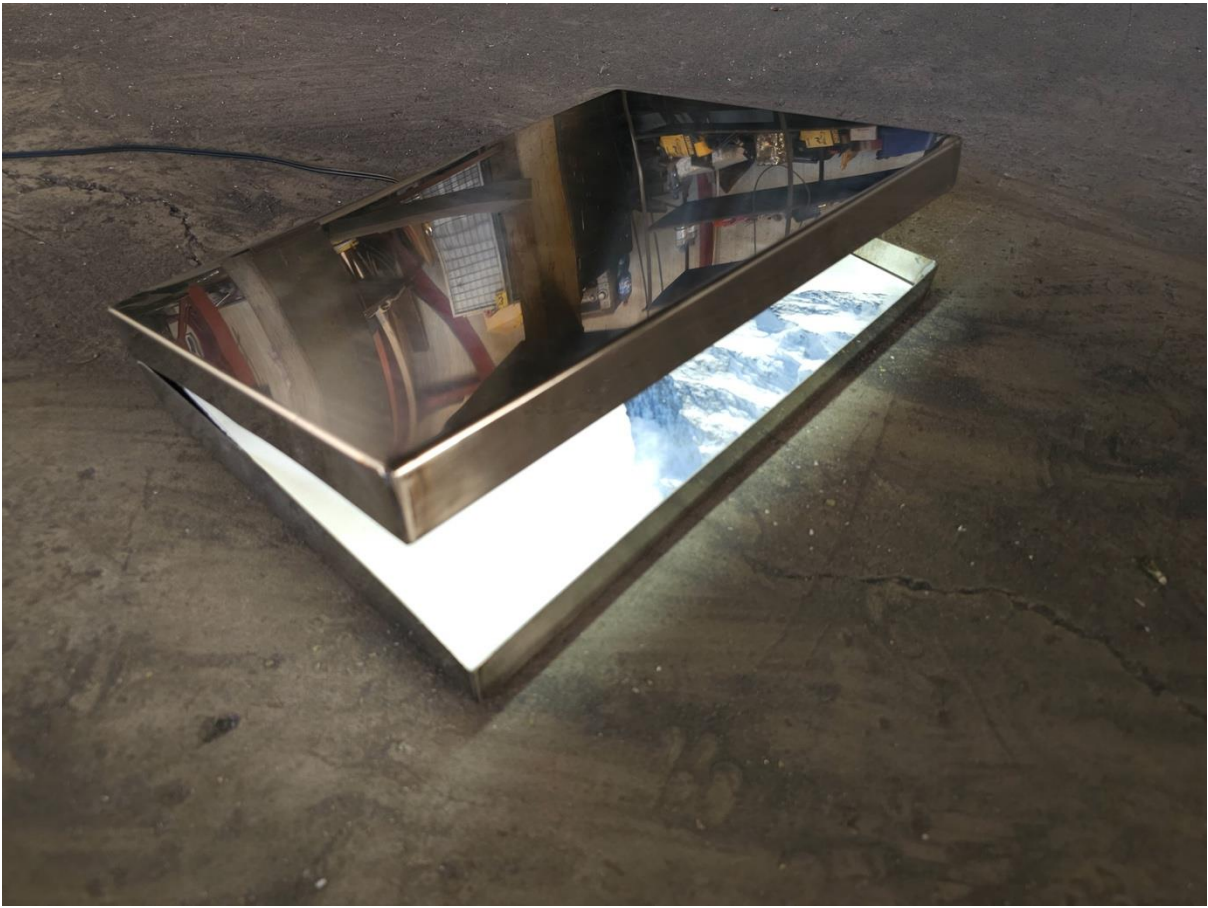
[Video 2 \(Youtube link\)](#)









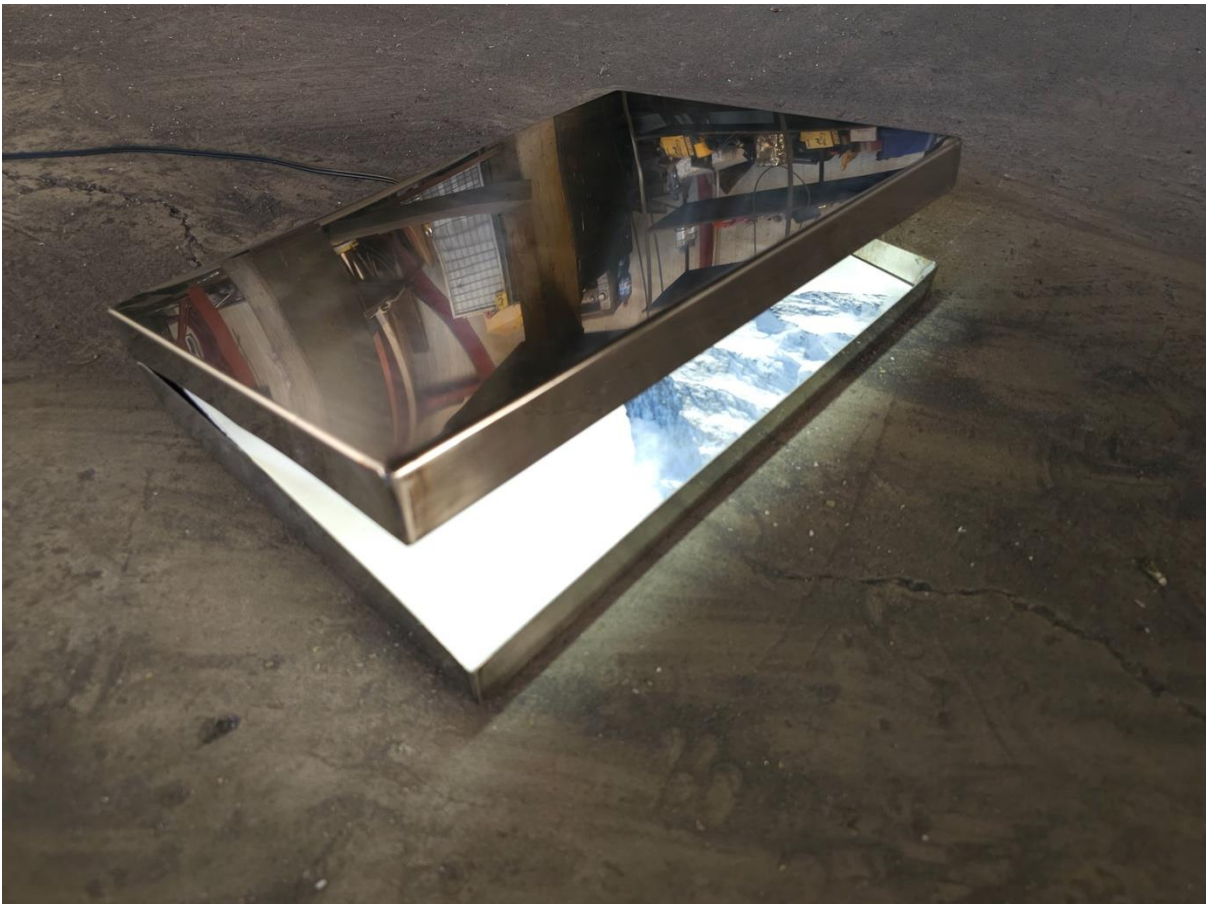


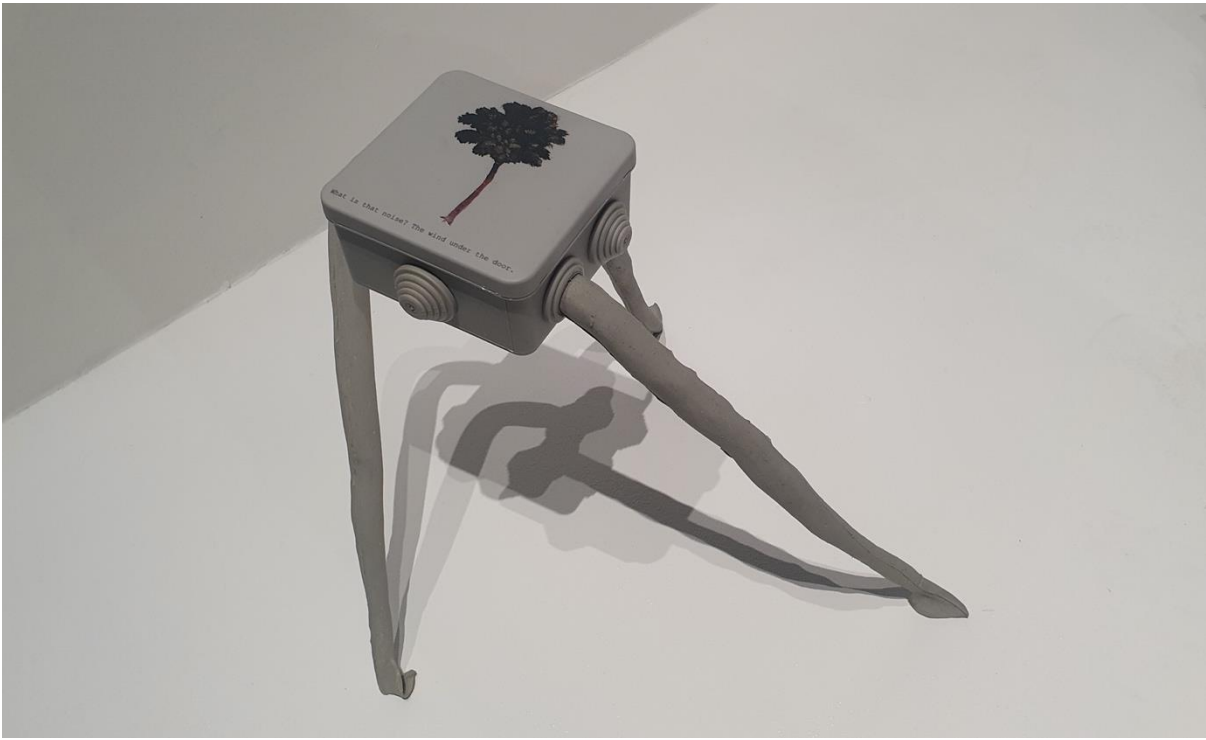














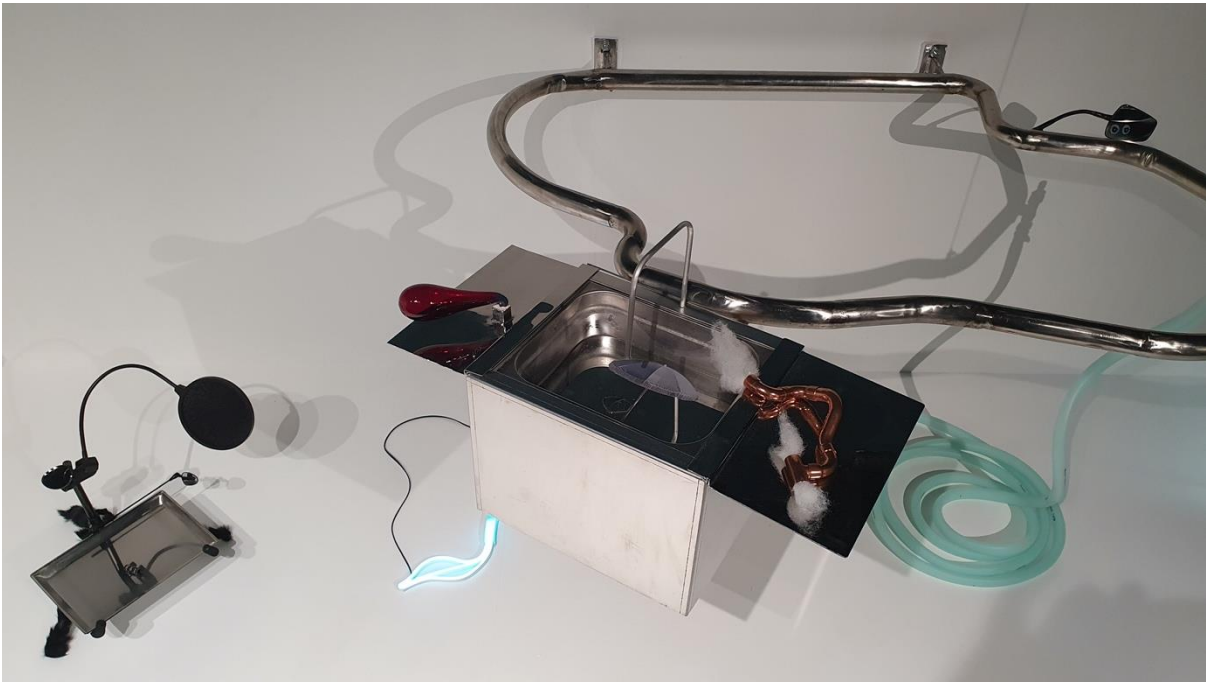


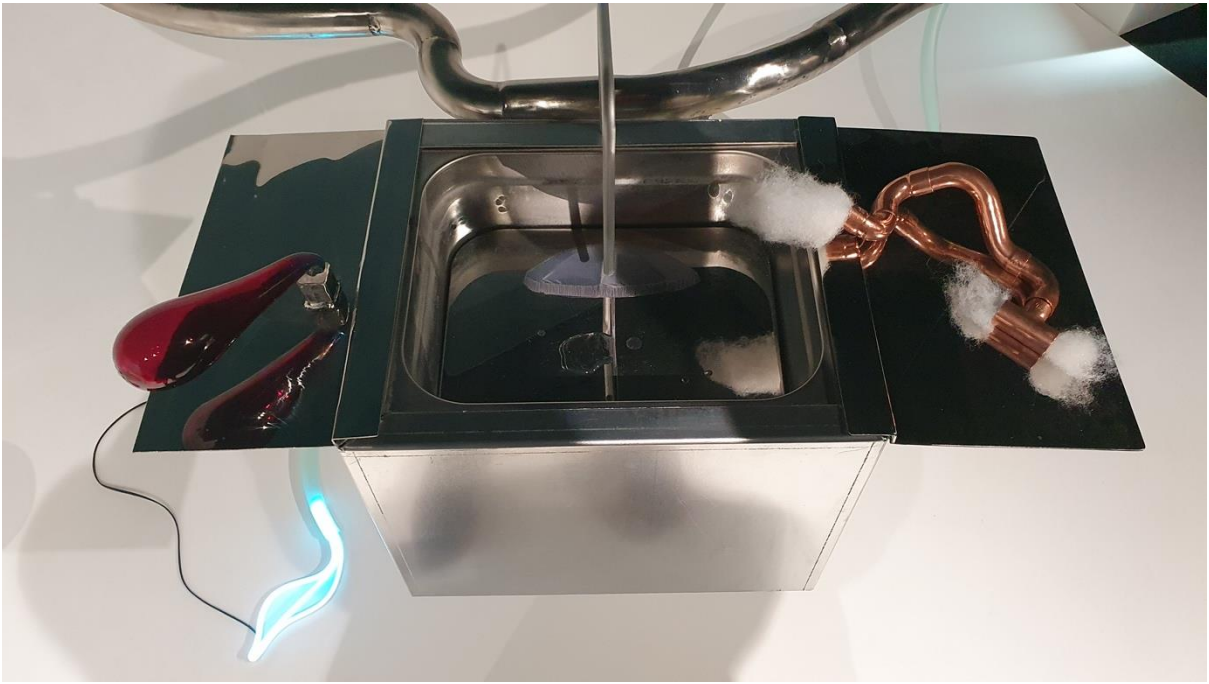


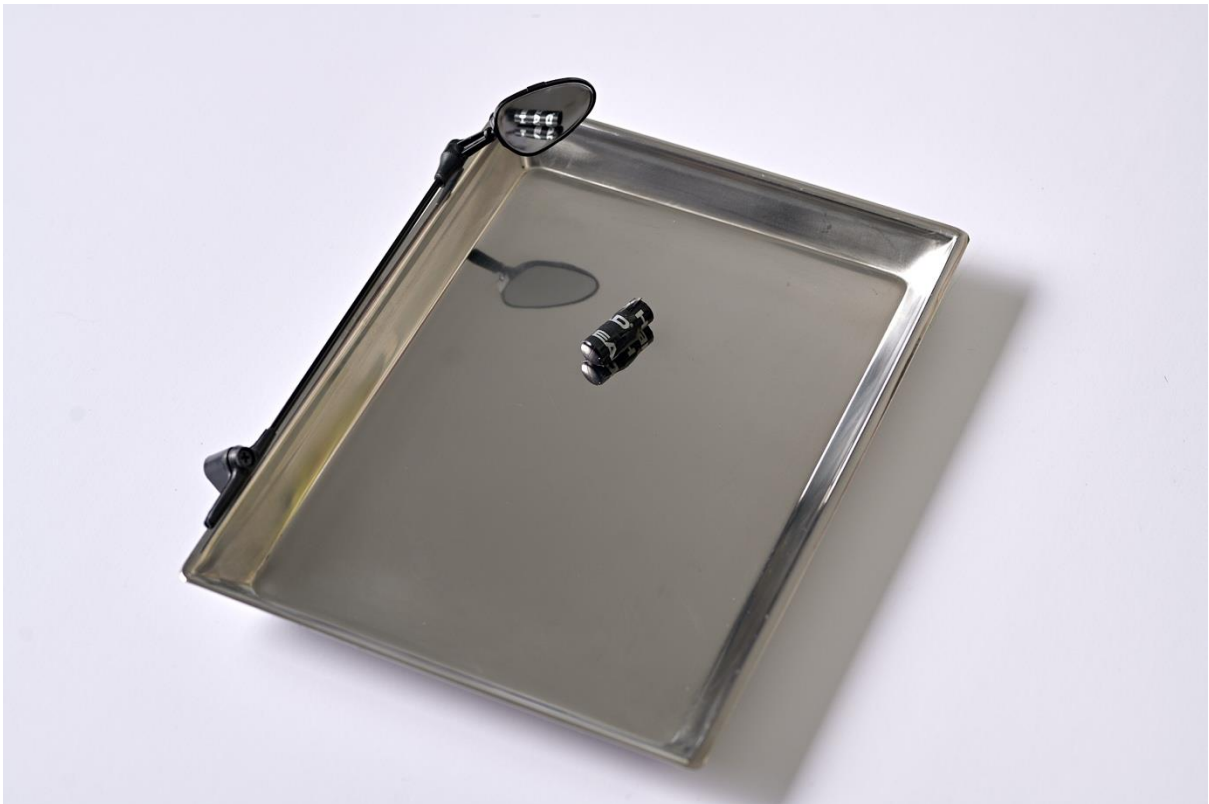


2022







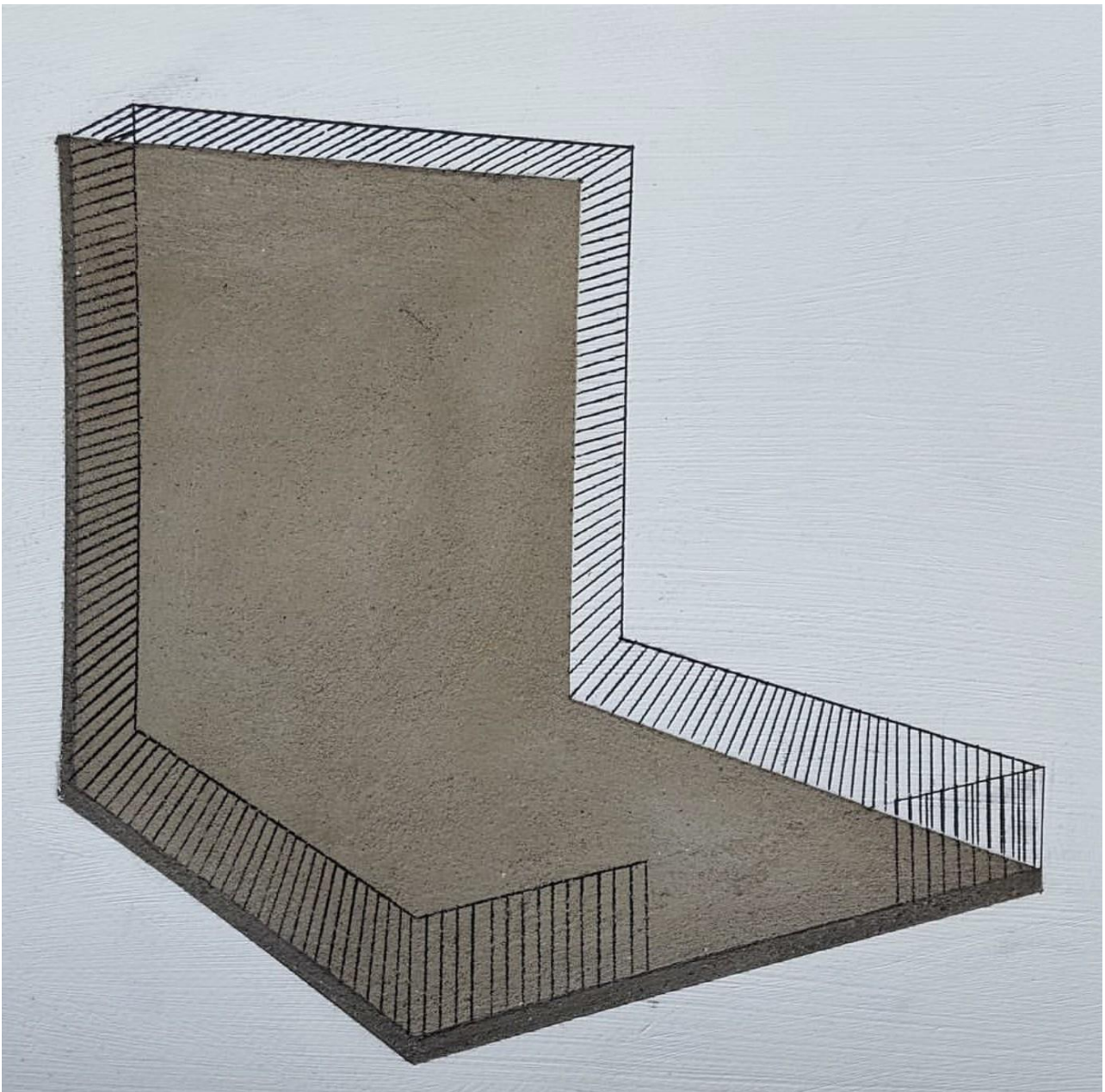




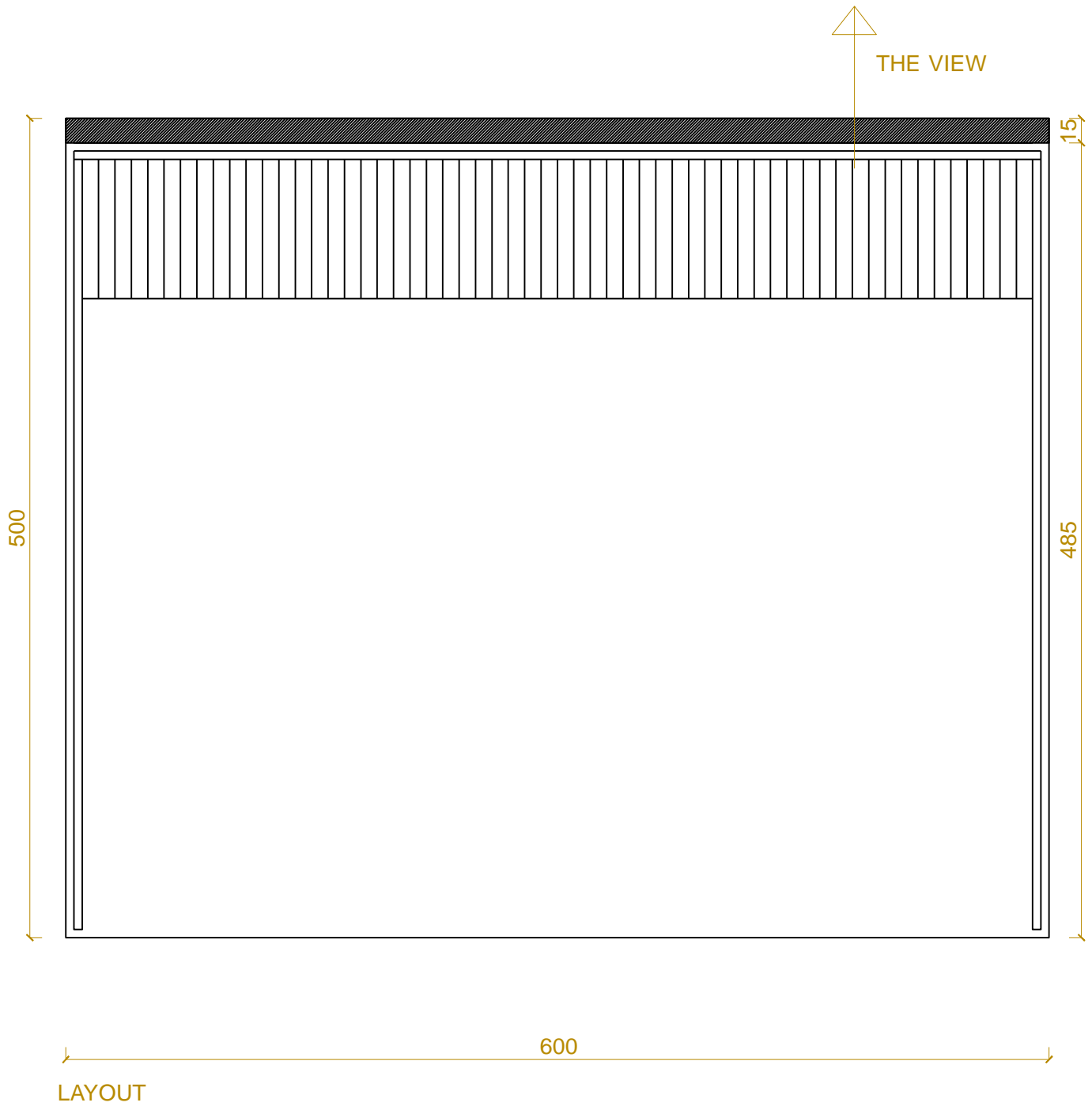
Jelena Tomasevic
Installation

Recapitalisation of Memory
Fehlgehen der Tat

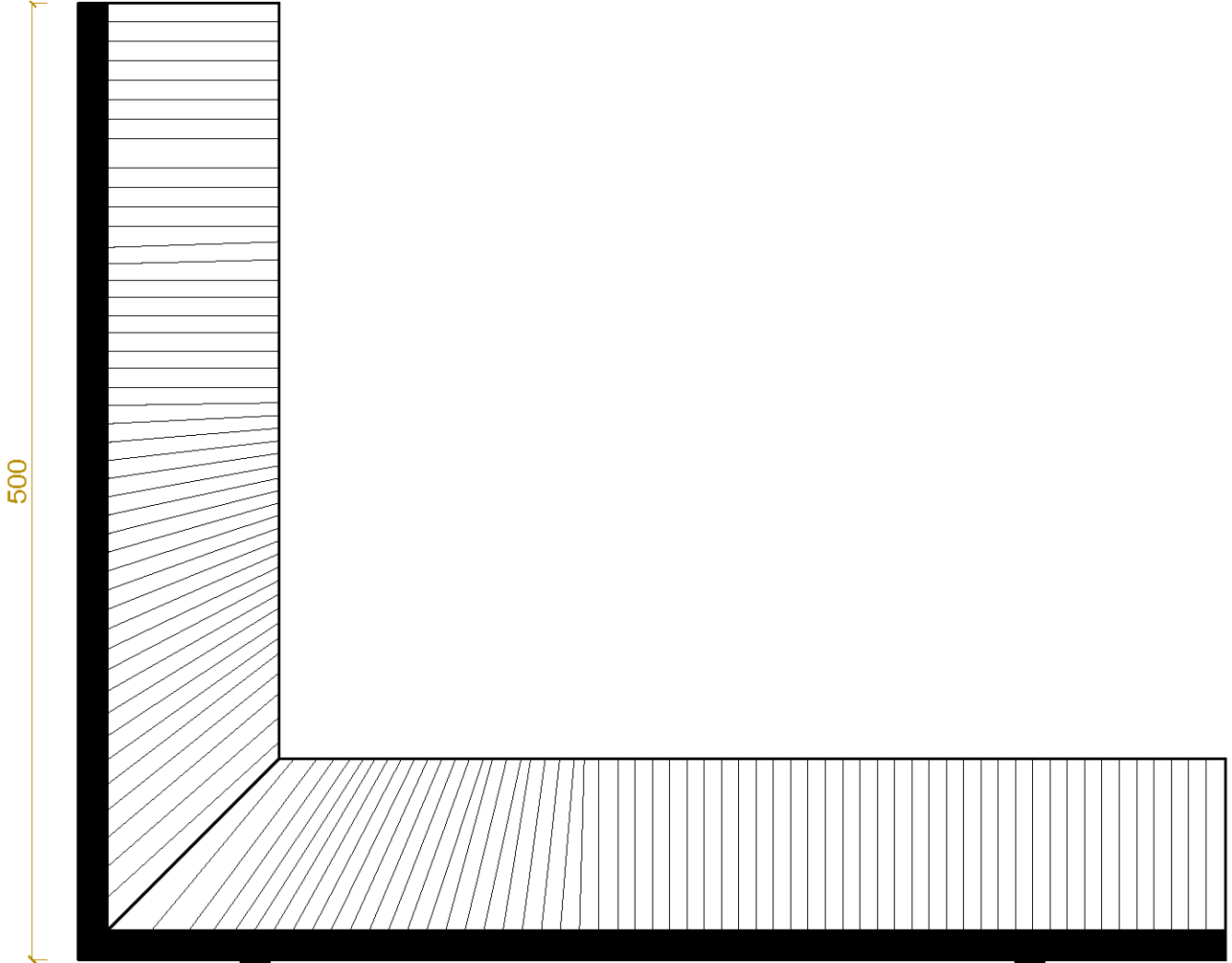
Dimension variable
2018



Specific object made out of plaster boards and metal. It is envisaged to be shown in the gallery space, with the lower side of the terrace lying on the floor and the other side backed up to the wall.



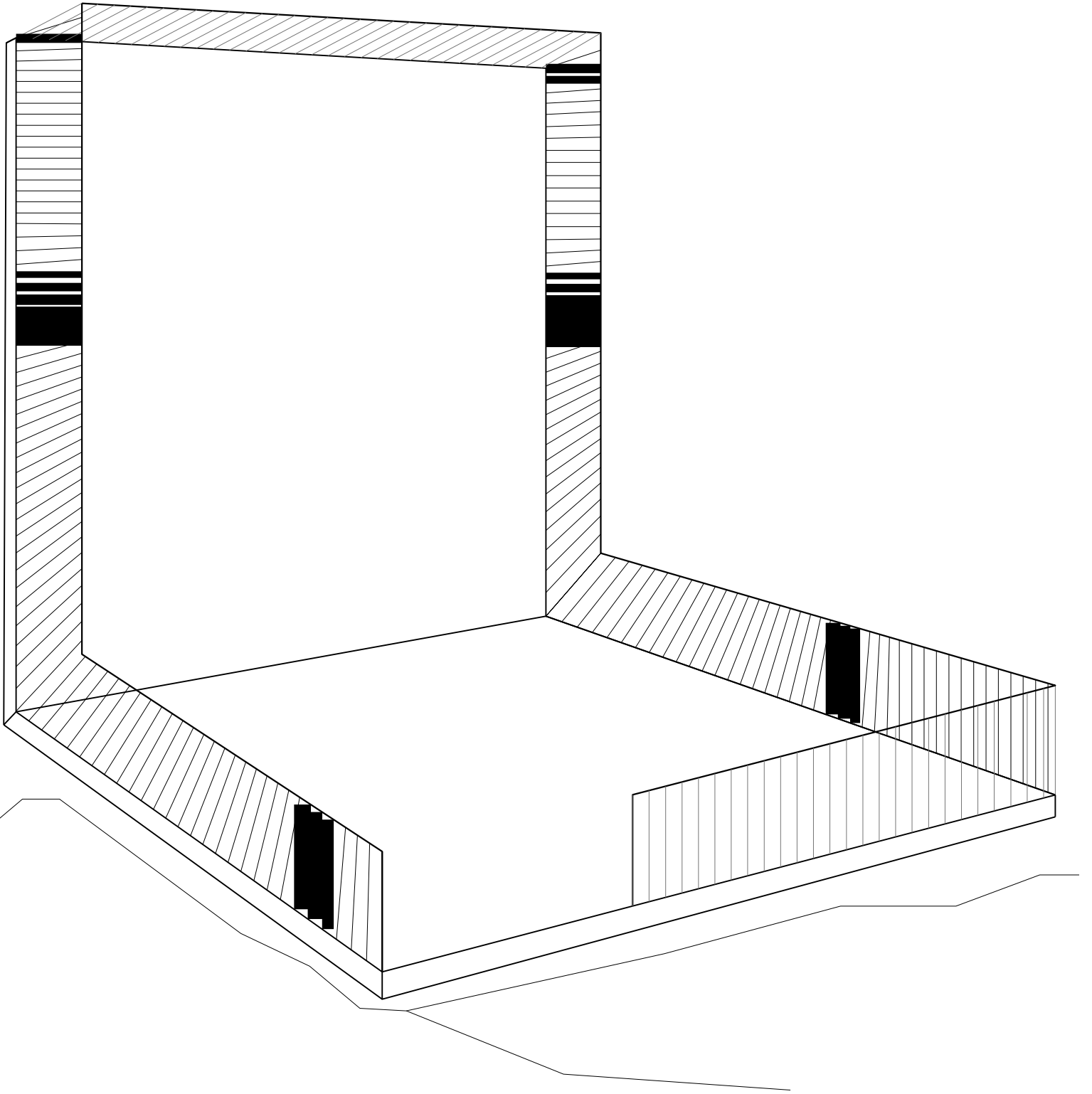
THE VIEW

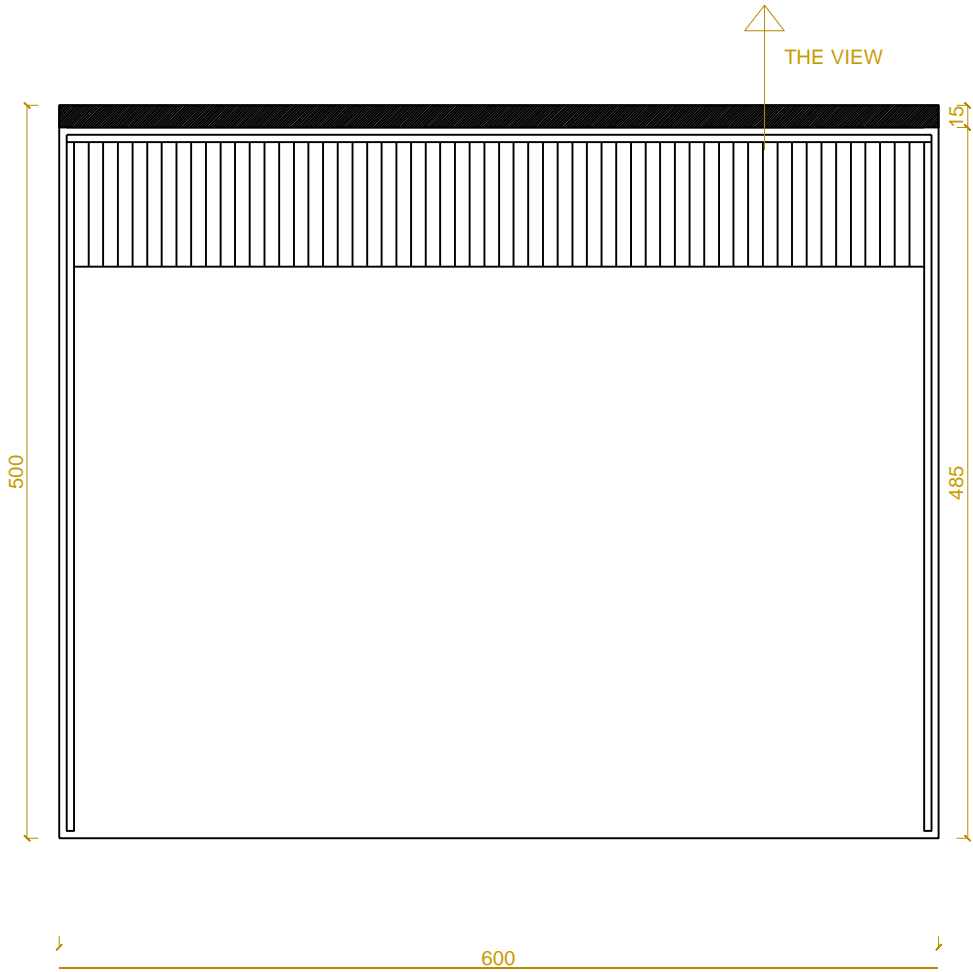


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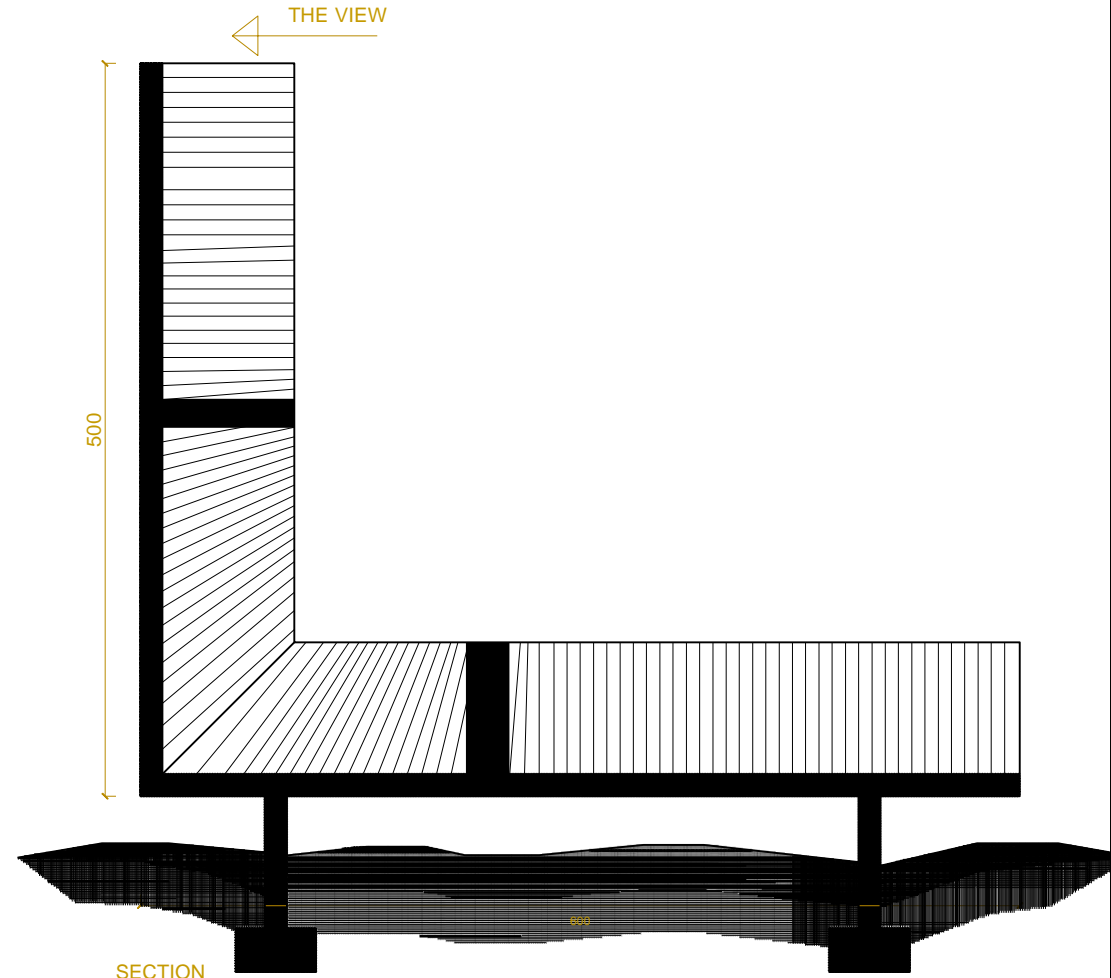
SECTION





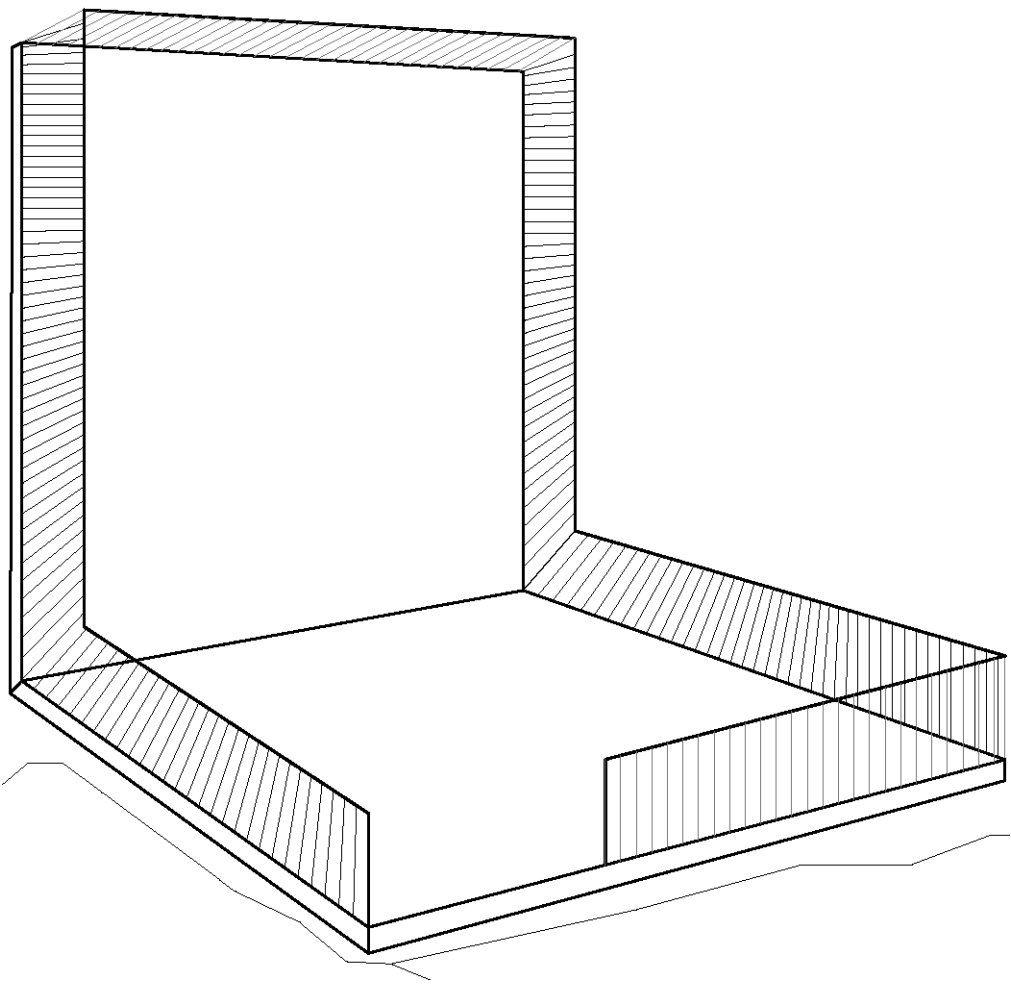


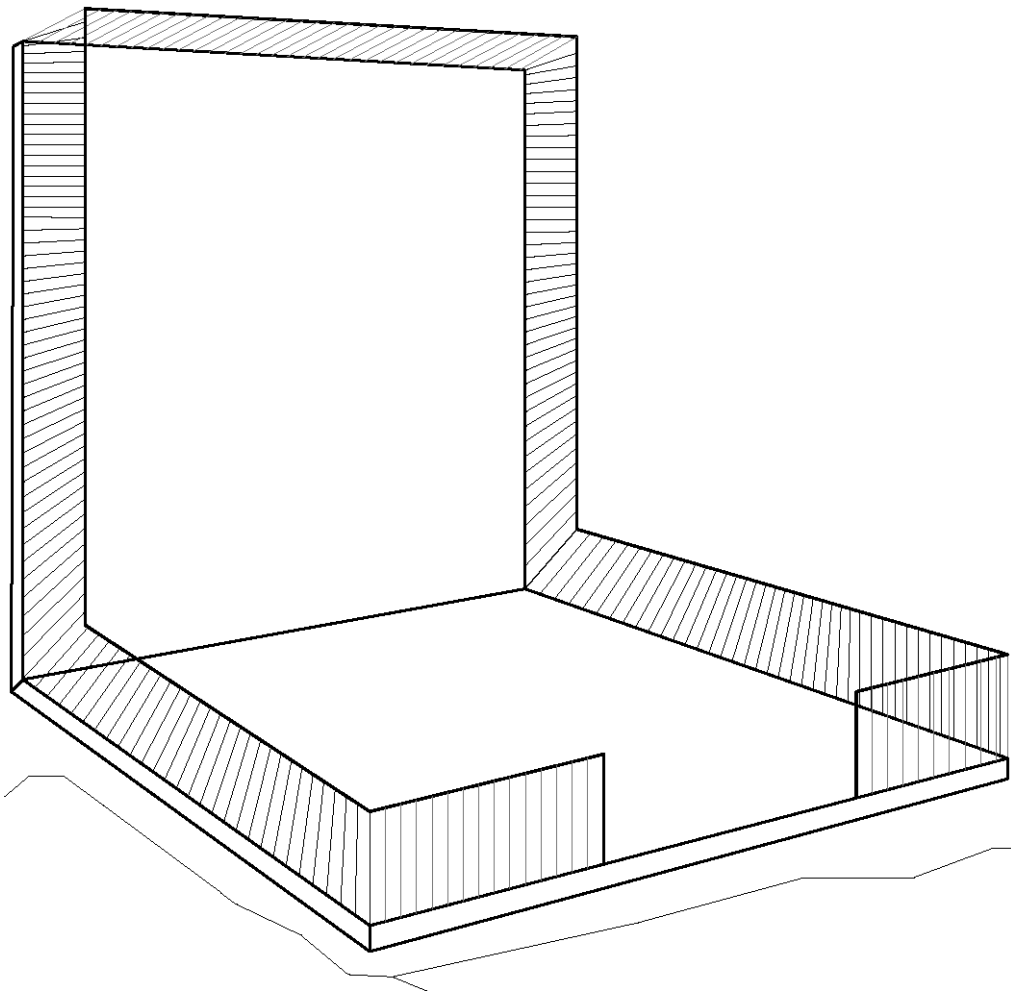
LAYOUT



SECTION

THE LOOKOUT is the concrete construction made according to precise drawings that will be provided provided. It is an L-shaped section construction elevated from the ground so it gives a impression of levitation above





JELENA TOMAŠEVIĆ

BURDEN OF PROOF

Size-specific installation

width 3m, height 2.2m, depth 1,1m, weight cca 700kg, exterior - stainless steel, interior - plaster walls

Installation, 2017

Autostrada Bienale

The Future of Borders



This outdoor/indoor installation is made from 75% mirror stainless steel. A glossy stainless steel object that resembles a guard house, or soldiers' house, or a police border object.

The object has a proper door, that automatically close upon spectator's entrance, increasing the claustrophobic feeling even further. Inside of the steel object, a table and a chair is installed, along with a small sink.

Since the object is made of glossy stainless steel, a spectator could see his or her own distorted reflection on the outer walls. Entering the object, the spectator could feel the anxiety of the work itself. The installation insists on the theme of (me, memory, personal freedom and reminiscing, and the work is dedicated to the people who live and work isolated in the small one-man cell spaces where even the architecture is a form of punishment.

Specific object made out of plaster boards and metal. It is envisaged to be shown in the gallery space, with the lower side of the terrace lying on the floor and the other side backed up to the wall.

Marko
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is a sort of
ed to be shown in
Specific object made out of plaster boards and the other. It is envisaged to be shown in the gallery space, with the lower side of the terrace lying on the floor and the other side backed up to the wall.











Mixed Memory

2017/2018

Installation

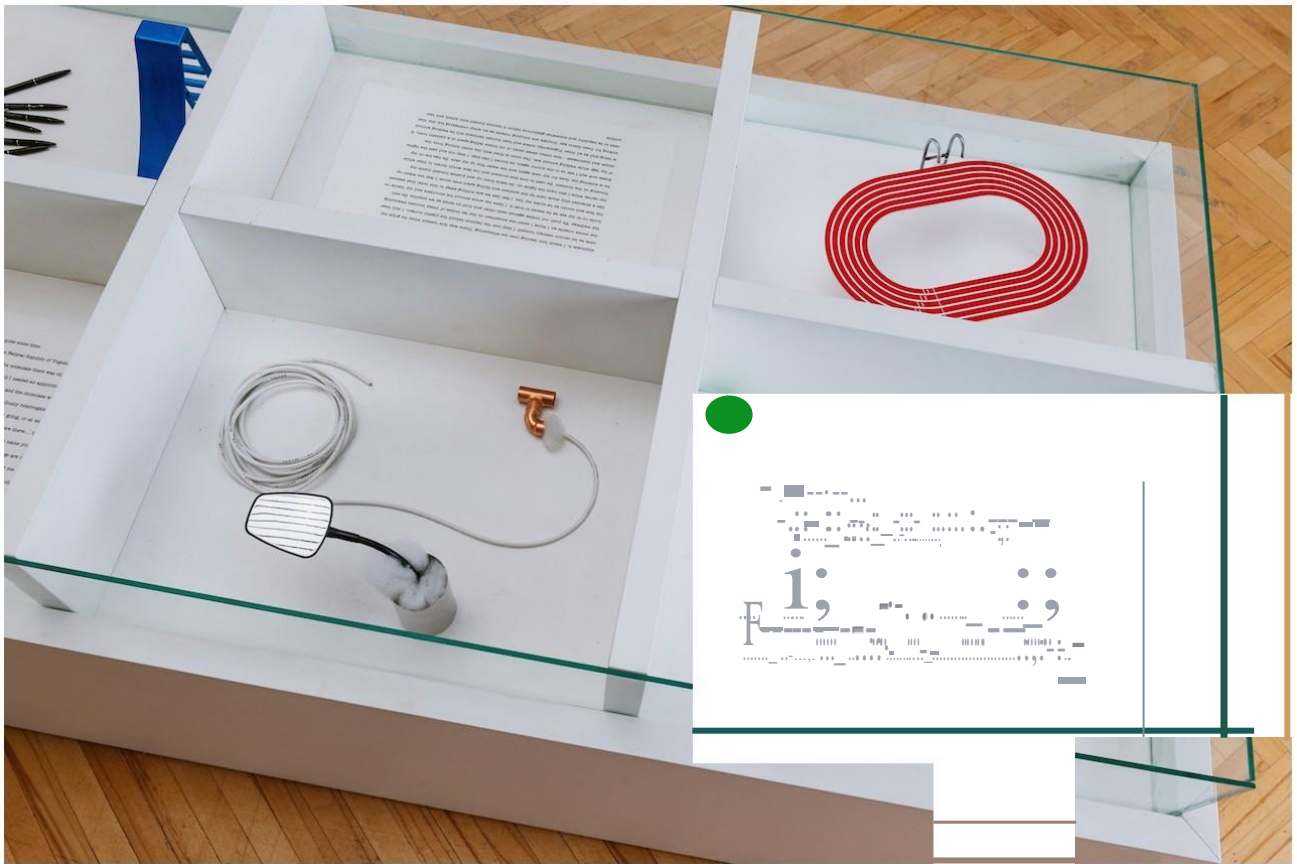
Glass, metal, wood, paper, plexiglass, plastic objects, grass etc. Very important part of this installation are 8 short stories written by professionals and workers from the former Yugoslavia.

„Displacement, dislocation, disorientation

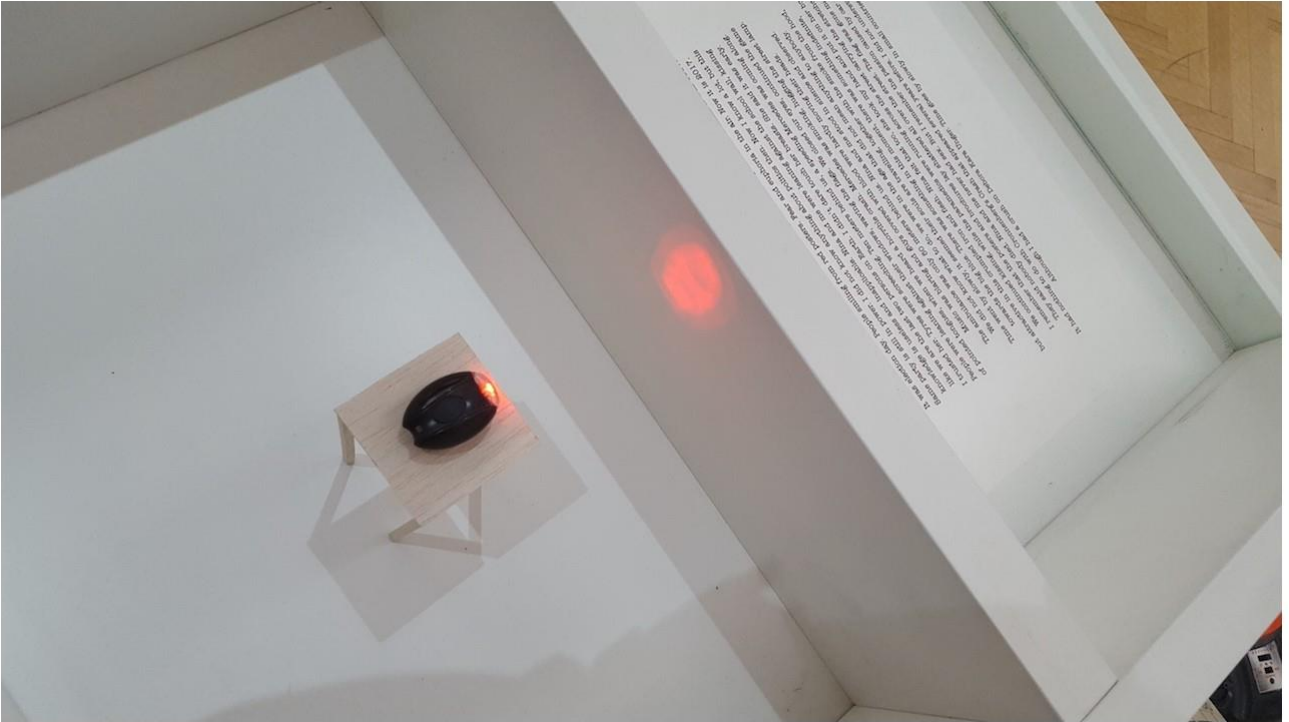
*The horror vacui is [also] the sentiment that characterises much part of the work of Jelena Tomasevic, the author of a complex work of more linguistic, stylistic, formal and content levels. The artist who handles the different languages with rare simplicity, eminently painting and sculpture, but also videos, all employed with formal expertise but also with a declared post-conceptual matrix. Memory as the subject of *Au fil du temps* has therefore grappled without any friction on its usual obsessions concerning human condition, space (even architectural), violence, social constraints. With *Mixed memories*, the unpublished work presented here, she has given life to an installation, created ad hoc for the exhibition space, and including paintings, sculptures, objects and texts. For the occasion she asked eight people, professionals and workers from the former Yugoslavia, to write a page of memoir, in which personal memories mingled with a historical episode. All the eight authors of the memoirs wrote personal episodes on the background of the war that crushed the Balkan Country, thus highlighting both the inauspicious nature of this page of history, as well as the spontaneous unanimity of the work itself. The other moments of the installation are deployed with the usual language of Tomasevic, the author of a real historical and sociological fresco. Human figures copied with carbon paper from magazines or her own photos; embossed and real architectural parts, jarring slenderness of these human figures; objects constructed, adapted or invented by the artist-demiurge, creator of her own personal world in miniature. All pervaded by a dreamlike dimension, sometimes claustrophobic, sometimes suspended. Because the dominant feeling in her is just this: the suspension of any judgement, a life consumed in expectation.“*

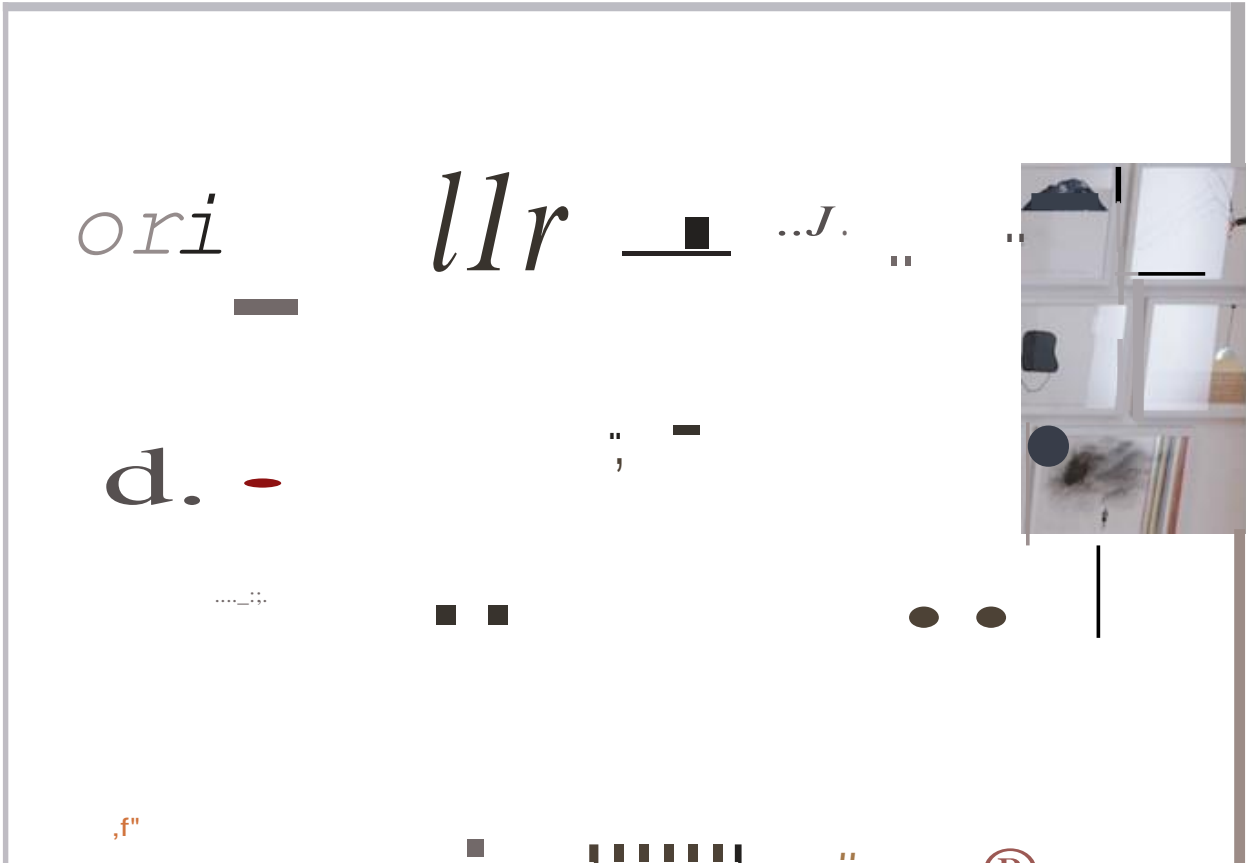
Gaetano Centrone

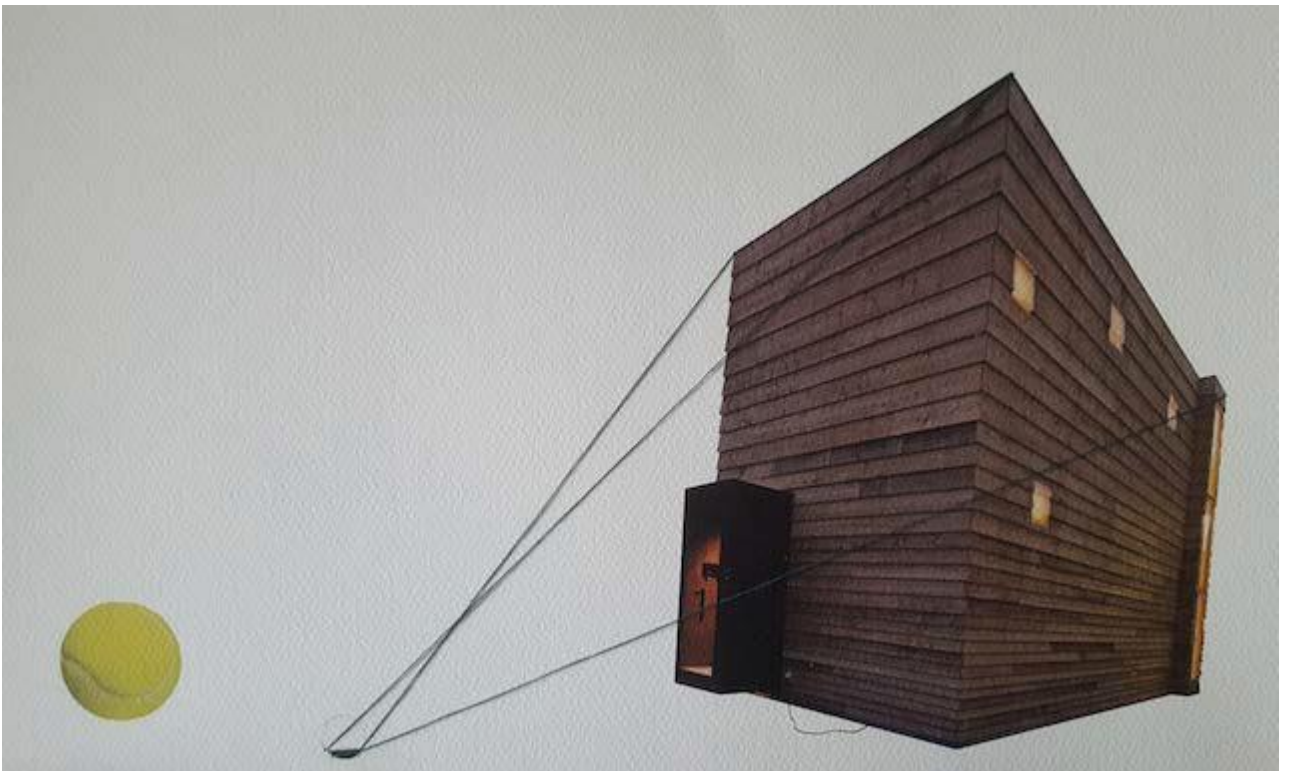


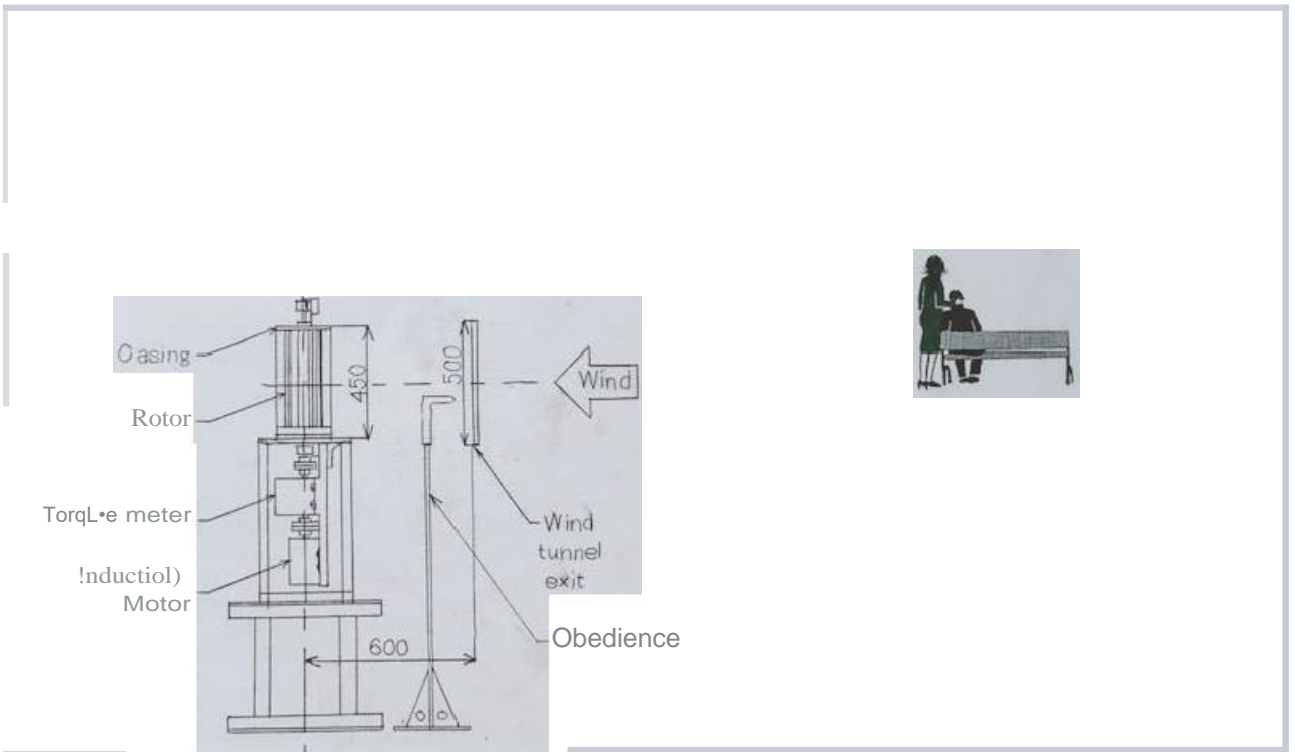


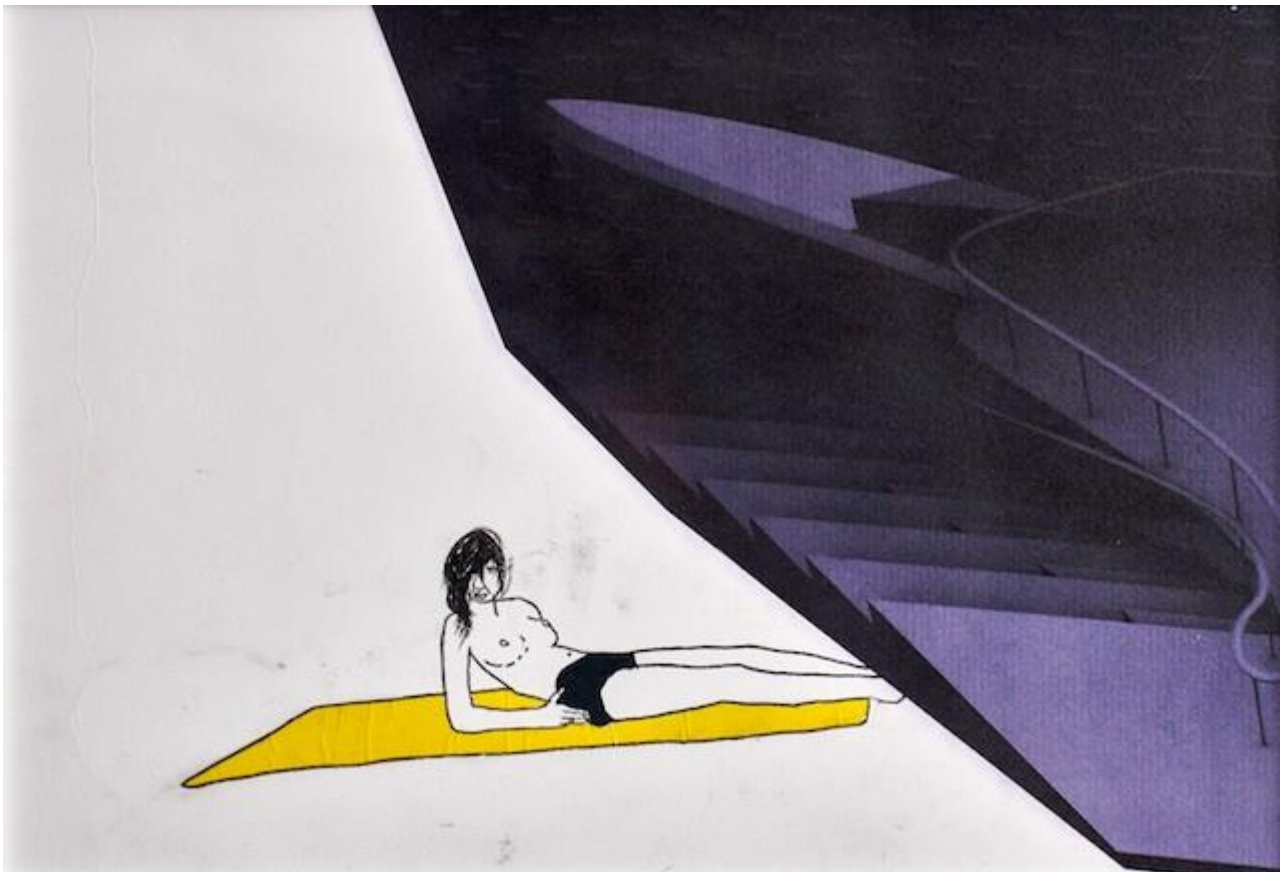
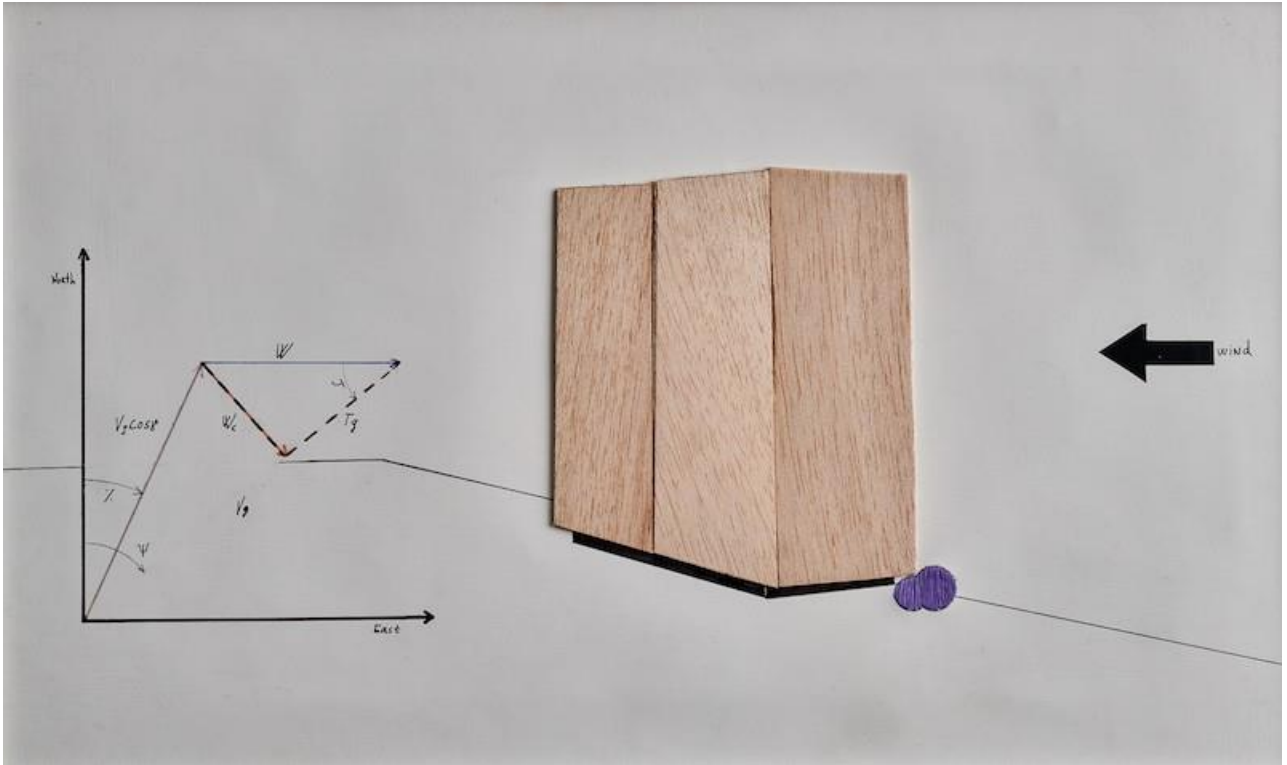












One neighbour often grabs my attention. He is tall, no more than 50 years old, but looks eighty. Every time I see him. I feel physical pain. I remember reading somewhere that the so-called 'mirror neurons', located in our brains, are responsible for this. It's like when we see someone has been hit and we feel pain

in the same spot where that other person hurts. These neurons are the ones responsible for empathy. This neighbour always sits on a bench in our hood, hunched, stiff, his hands hardened into fists. One fisted hand always holds a cigarette. So, etc: as he talks, not for long, always repeating the sentence: 'Politicians, bankers and journalists have destroyed this world.' A girl from the hood says that when she feels

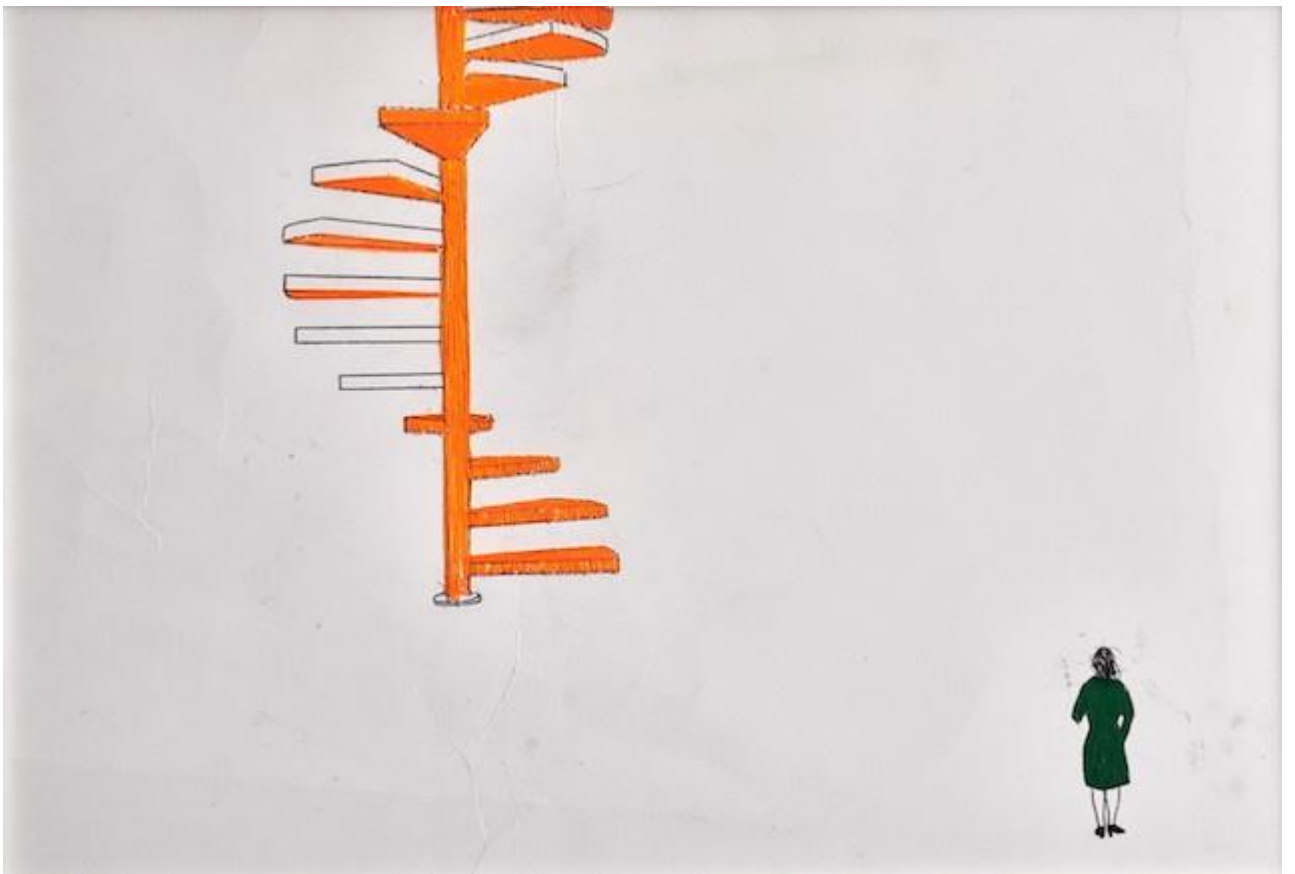
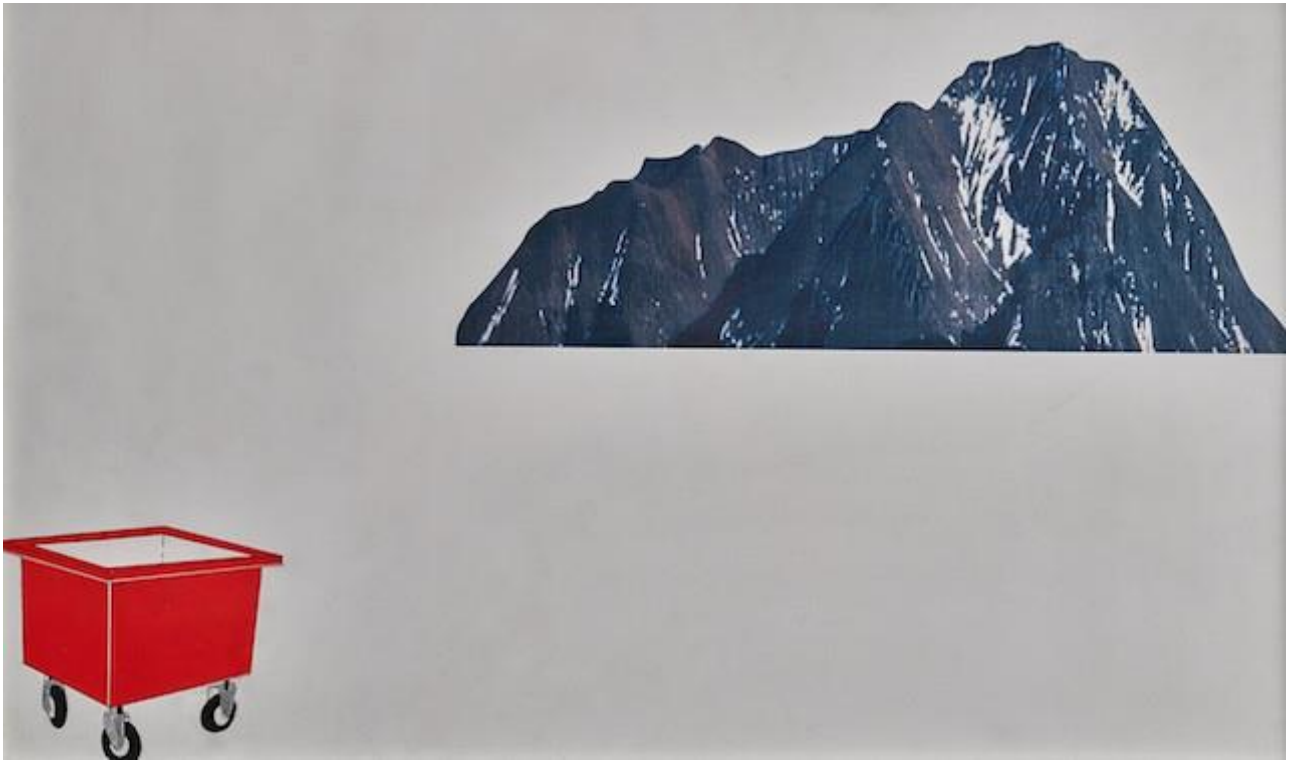
about depression coming, she goes out and looks for him and she feels better when she sees how depressed she is. She says, 'It's at least as much more than any other person.' I think, though it would be stupid to say it to the girl, that what our neighbour has is not depression, but an even more serious condition, although, on the outside, it seems like pure depression with its obvious symptoms. The neighbour was in the war during the '90s, and he has actually never returned from the war.

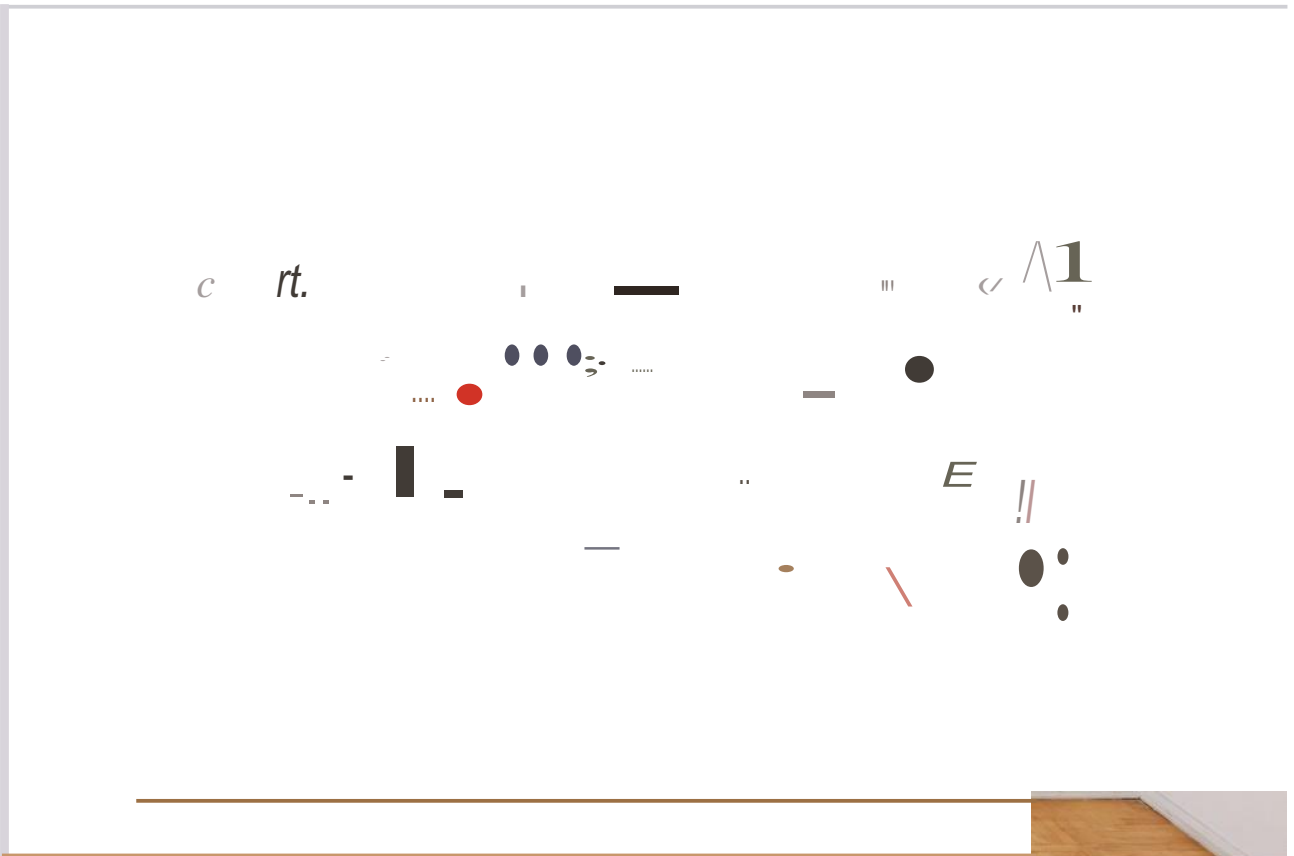
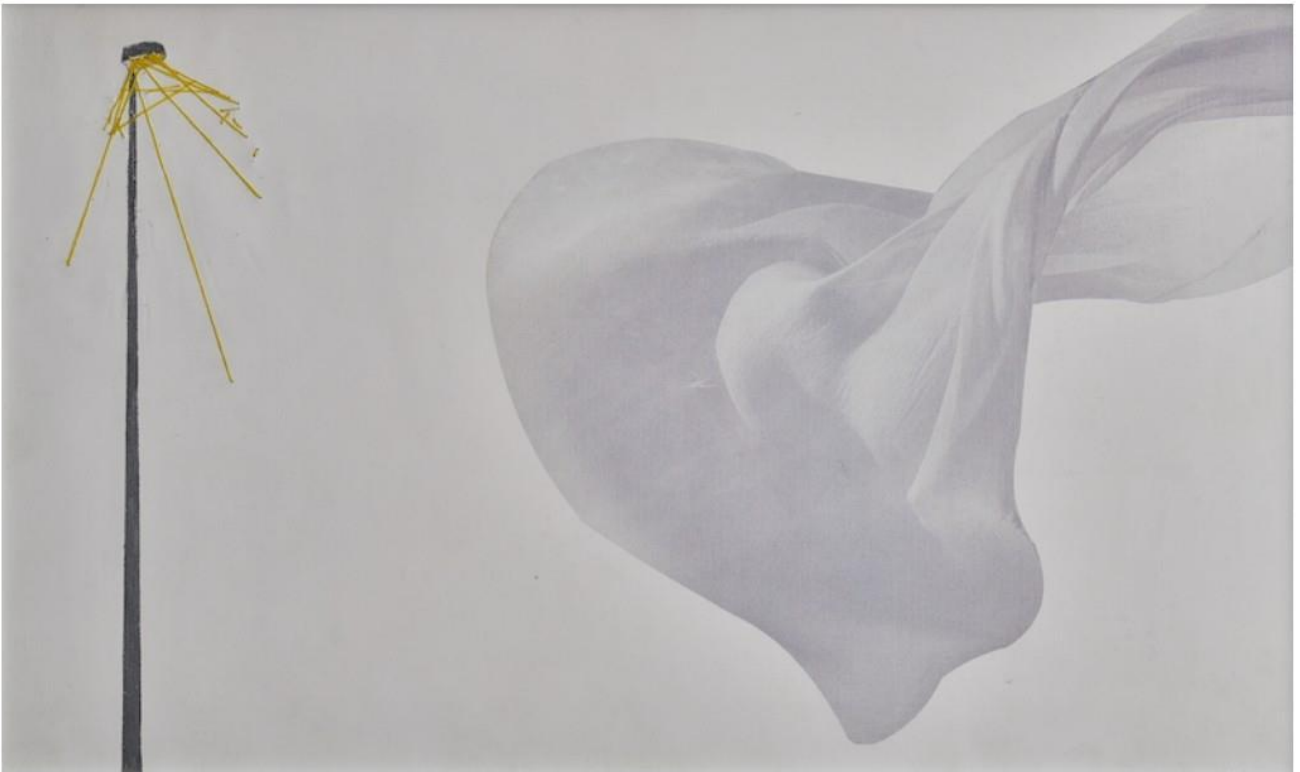
When he came back from the war was not a man, but a piece of meat inside human skin. He has a wife, a rather short woman, who walks the street together with him. He always walks three steps ahead of her. You would hardly think they're walking together unless you pay attention, and when you do, you'd think he is running away from her and she is chasing him. She has a mildly embarrassed expression, which she tries to hide with a smile and a strong ke-up. This is his second wife.

His first wife died of cancer after only several years of marriage. She was tall. There is a laundry net on their balcony. It's been fixed rather high - obviously while the first wife was still alive. The second wife had to jump

with a technique of throwing the laundry over the net, because she can't reach that high.

I guess the laundry is a kind of revenge to the passers-by. One night, late, I saw her leaning against a tree, having sex with a taxi driver. It was summer. That tree is near the bench on which her husband is spending his life, smoking, mumbling and looking down, to the ground.





Jelena Tomasevic

Installation

production year 2013

Title: ***Object Of Punishment***

Object Of Punishment is a phrase taken from the legal terminology. It discusses the ultimate goal of applying legal penalties on civilians and states. It deals with the ethical values of punishment and the very purpose of the punishment.

Twisted pool is actually a real pool (in modern architecture pools are made from stainless steel) which is twisted, smashed and bended. The pool is made of stainless steel sheet plate, inner surface is covered with real pool colour, twisted smashed and bended. Pool dimensions are 3,8m x 2.5m depth is 1,4.

Pool is placed in such manner to block and to fit this exhibition space.

I am interested in how much one object can be extended in the space and in the same time operate as a work of art.

Production process that can be shown beside this work can be seen in the following video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IRRyzX1ryE>

Technical list for *Object Of Punishment*

dimensions - dimensions: 3,8m x 2.5m x 1,4 (depth)

mass: 230 kg stainless steel

entrance to the exhibition space should be 2,5 m wide

there should be a direct source of lighting from the ceiling of the exhibition space







Galerie Perpetuel, Frankfurt, Germany

Instala'on
Thought

2010
Stux Gallery NYC

Tomasevic creates a composi'on with un-related mundane elements such as model of swimming pool with full of water, a hair blower, table, and a bunch of soil with grass.

The blow of the hair drier causes the water to flow over the edge of the pool and water the grass, turning its green. For Tomasevic only "thought" contextualizes another thought. A thought also contextualizes not only the origin of a thought, but also the thinking process and its intended des'na'on.





Just Kidding is a short film of an 8 minute single take, a narrative of surreal and enigmatic imagery using elements previously seen in her paintings such as a house, swimming pool, girl, and hair dryer.

“In Cinema, the long take is usually a means to explore duration of the time and mimetic potential of the imagery, but in ***Just Kidding***, this stylistic device is used as an allegorical compression; an artificial sublimation of the displacement, i.e. of the human Ex-sistence. Jelena Tomasevic’s vision is both melodramatic and ecstatic, functioning as both an anxious description and a serene analysis. Within the strange landscape: a house, a chair, a sliding board, a pool. Enters one person, a girl. She inscribes herself into this topography, this constellation of objects, and we as spectators are suddenly confronted with a hermeneutical enigma, maybe even with suspense - What's going on here, where does all of this lead? The answer lies in mise-en-scene: things have their meaning according to their (architectonic) position in the created symbolic network. As we watch our heroine, the girl, as a developing short story, different aspects are noticed; the sand being a disruptive element, the acknowledgment of the camera in the end, the hair dryer as the sword of Damocles hanging over the girl's head. When she enters the pool, one wonders if it is a blissful or tragic event, but that is Jelena Tomasevic’s ***Just Kidding***: a mystery, that acute danger, that fragile beauty of our existential Frisson.”

Aleksandar Becanovic, 2008











Jelena Tomasevic

Installation

"Road on the Wall

Wall as a Road"

2003

The work consists of 4 asphalt slabs, dimensions 1.50 x 1.90, 4cm thick, 8% granulation. The thickness corresponds to road construction standards. Each of the slabs is a factual resection of a road. The weight of all four slabs approximates one ton. This project deals with the objecthood of walls.





Jelena Tomasevic
Installation

"Life Interest"

2016

dimensions: 30cm x 50cm material: 3mm steel

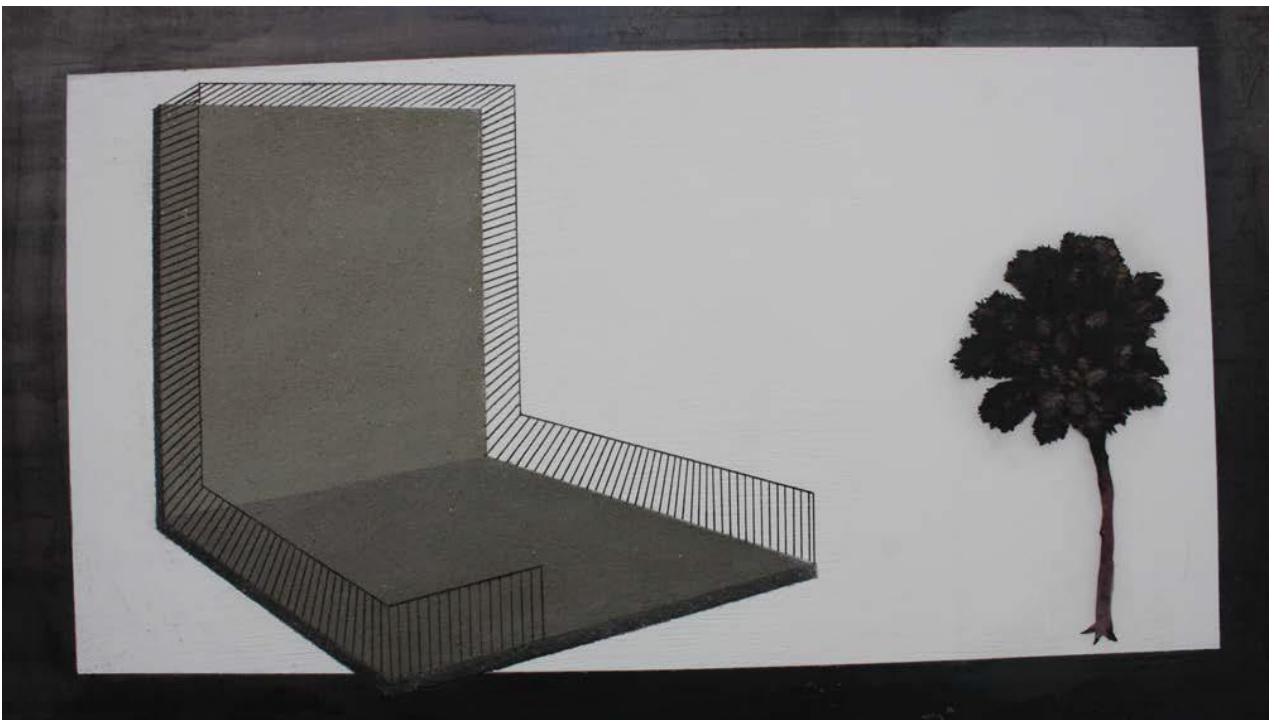
*Plaster box is installed the door frame between two rooms,
with 16 collages on small steel plates inside of it*

In my paintings on steel plates, images are copied with graph copy paper from my vast and diverse collection of photographs, ranging from fashion magazines to found photographs and my own random photographs of sights and scenes that we remember through peripheral vision. Using other people photos and mixing them with mine I try to make a group of work that will be a kind of collective memory. These paintings are loaded with surreal scenes, with figures, objects and concrete, brutalist architecture that float in white undefined spaces. The architecture is reminiscent of my home town, which was entirely destroyed during WW2 and rebuilt as a modernist utopian experiment with inhabitants not able to cope with the challenges of new communal ways of living and pressure from 'political and social mechanisms exerted upon them'. In particular, they express the difficulty for women to escape the stereotypical images of femininity and the anxiety resulting from the social pressure to conform to a masculine ethos. These dreamlike fragments are absurd, ironic, violent, melancholic, humorous and they are always shown in random groups from the ceiling to the floor of exhibition space or rotating in groups of four on specially made posts.

Life Interest refers to the law term, where the survivor is given the right to live in the property for the rest of his or her life. For this exhibition, a space within the space, purposely made container, has become a setting for visitors to enter into this world of spectacle and as Aristotle would like to say 'world of collective memory'. As Linda Nochlin points out seeing Jelena's paintings in Montenegrin pavilion at 51st Venice Biennale: 'It is difficult to describe the effect of these paintings, or to say how their memorable strangeness is achieved: yet they have remained in my head ever since I saw them'.

Venue: Handel Street Projects London

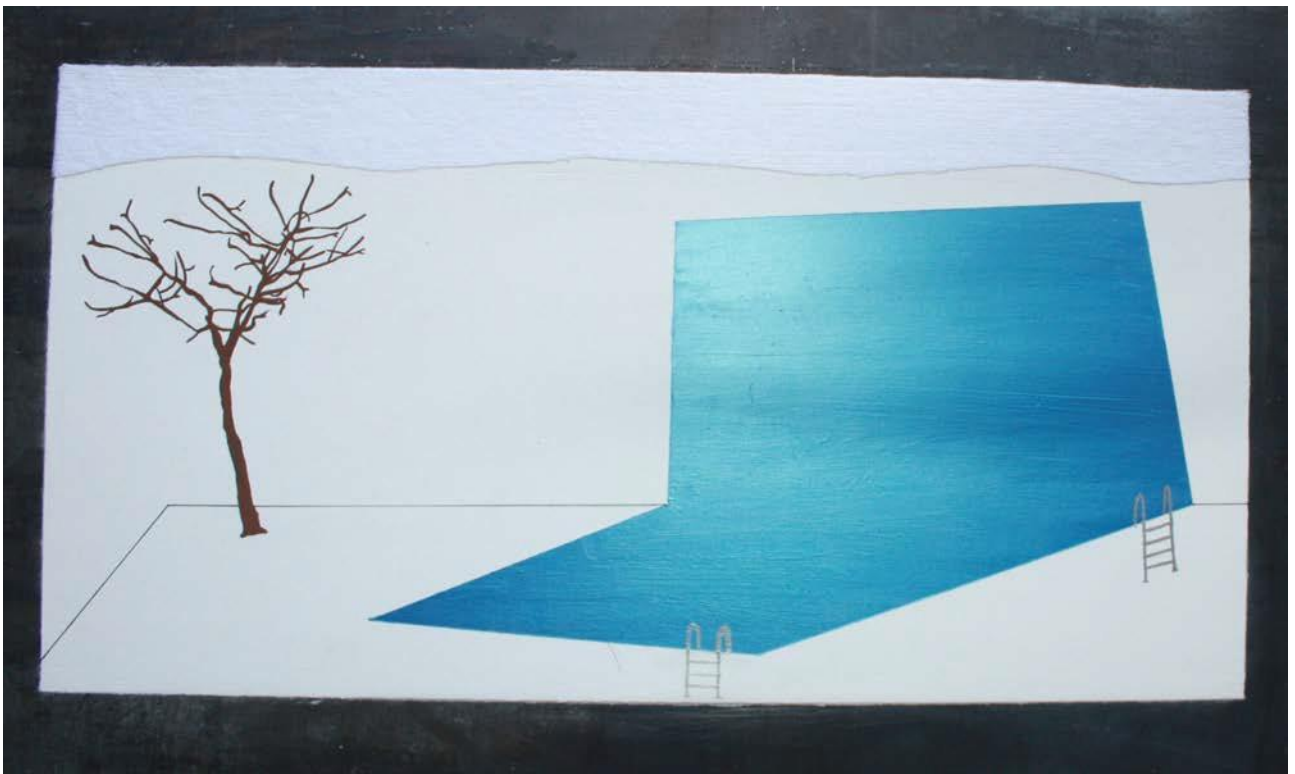






One neighbour often grabs my attention. He is tall, no more than 50 years old, but looks eighty. Every time I see him, I feel physical pain. I remember reacting so much more that the so-called 'mirror neurons', located in our brains, are responsible for this. It's like when we see someone's been hit and we feel pain in the same spot where that other person hurts. These neurons are the ones responsible for empathy. This neighbour always sits on a bench in our hood, hunched, his hands hardened into fists. One fist always holds a cigarette. Sometimes he talks, not for long, always repeating the sentence: 'Politicians, bankers and journalists have destroyed this world.' A girl from our hood says that when she feels a bout of depression coming, she goes out and looks for him, and she feels better when she sees how depressed the man is. She says, smiling: 'He is at least three times more depressed than any other depressed person.' I think, though it would be stupid to say it to the girl, that what our neighbour has is not depression, but an even more serious condition, although, on the outside, it seems like pure depression with its obvious symptoms. The neighbour was in the war during the '90s, and he has actually never returned from the war. What came back from the war was not a man, but a piece of meat inside human skin. He has a wife, a rather short woman, who walks the streets together with him. He always walks three steps ahead of her. You would hardly think they're walking together unless you pay attention, and when you do, you'd think he is running away from her and she is chasing him. She has a mildly embarrassed expression, "which he tries to hide with a smile and strong make-up. This is his second wife. His first wife died of cancer after only a few years of marriage. She was tall. There is a laundry net on their balcony. It has been fixed rather high - obviously while the first wife was still alive. The second wife had to come up with a technique of throwing the laundry over the net, because she can't reach that high. I guess the laundry is some kind of revenge to the perpetrators. One night, late, I saw her leaning against a tree, having sex with a taxi driver. It was a full moon. The tree is near the bench on which her husband is spending his life, smoking, musing and looking down, to the ground.

















One neighbour often turns my attention. He is tall, no more than 50 years old, but looks elderly. Every time I see him, I feel physical pain. I read where that the so-called 'mirror neurons', located in our brains, are responsible for this. It's true when someone has been hit and the pain in the body, apart from where that other person hurt. These neurons are the ones responsible for empathy. My neighbour always sits on a bench in our hood, bench-d, a tiff. Me banda hardened into 'tata. On that day band always holds a cigarette. So that day he Ulka, not for long, always repeating the sentence: 'Politicians, bankers and journalists have destroyed this world.' A girl from our hood says that when she feels a bout of depression coming, she goes out and looks for him, and she feels better when she sees him. She says, 'He is at least three times more depressed than any other depressed person.' I think, though it would be stupid to say it to the girl, that what our neighbour says is not depression, but an even more serious condition, although, on the outside, it's like pure depression with its obvious symptoms. The neighbour was in the village; the 'goa', and he has actually never returned from the war. What came back from the war was not a man, but a piece of shit inside him. He has a wife, a rather short woman, who walks the streets together with him. He always walks three steps ahead of her. You would hardly think they're walking together unless you pay attention, and when you do, you'd think he's running away from her and she's chasing him. She has a wildly exaggerated expression, which she tries to hide with a smile and a strong attempt. This is his second wife. His first wife died of cancer after only a few years of marriage. She was tall. There is a laundry net on their balcony. It's been fixed rather high, obviously while the tint was still alive. The second wife had to climb up with a technique of throwing the laundry over the fence, because she can't reach that high. I just see the laundry as a kind of revenge to the past by one night. Late, I saw her leaning against a tree, with a tall driver. It was a car. That car is near the bench on which her husband is sitting; his legs, as usual, are down to the ground.













Jelena Tomasevic
'Life Interest'

Handel Street Projects, London 2016

'Life Interest'



Jelena Tomasevic 'Life Interest'

As we enter 'Life Interest', Jelena Tomasevic's first London solo show, we find ourselves in an empty room. The walls of Handel Street Projects are bare, and it takes a moment to realise that there is another structure that has been built adjacent to it, that the bare walls in fact house something on the other side. We turn a corner, pass beneath a harsh neon light, and we are in a concrete box with a thick black rubber floor. The space is implausible, genuinely claustrophobic, a step back in time to the styles and materials of the 60s and early 70s and the urban architecture that most of the 14 works arranged asymmetrically inside depict.

The paintings are tacked randomly onto the walls, as if to suggest a kind of graffiti or postcards pinned haphazardly. The zig-zag positioning disorients the viewer, and we have to twist and turn and crouch to be able to see the works properly. It emphasises their place as accretions or interventions within another space, the concrete box-like structure that contains them both representing and embodying the coercive frame of an artificial environment.

This tension is inscribed in the paintings themselves, all executed on steel plate. A girl sits at the side of a vast blue pool, its water not translucent but substantial and massy. Her scale gives a sense of isolation, a tiny figure in the void, surrounded by bare white paint, yet the aquatic mass is its counterpoint, a vast block of colour, and this contrast is played out in many of Tomasevic's works: fragile, wiry figures and massive, heavy objects and structures.

The same discrepancy is approached by Tomasevic's mixing of style and genre. A factory building is connected to a pipe with pump, yet the scales are totally awry. The pump is drawn in almost cartoonish strokes, and dwarfs the scale of the building. On the other side, a ramp exits the factory door yet then peels up into space at a sharp right angle,

another ubiquitous feature of Tomasevic's work. Fences and buildings follow their own antigravitational agendas, first flat and then rising sharply into the sky, like a minimalist reduction of the famous scenes in 'Inception' where clogged city streets fold upward.

Yet rather than suggesting a surreal or 'dream-like' logic, as is often claimed, Tomasevic's interventions on space aim at the heart of embodied existence. Like many of her contemporaries, she grew up in one of the newbuild towns that sprung up in many parts of Europe after the bombings of WWII. Proto-modernist architecture was the template for many of these projects, and whole communities were suddenly moved there, forced to inhabit strange concrete spaces with their new geometries of life. For many of these people, the experience remained bizarre, even after years of living there. It was as if they were living in someone else's utopia, someone else's architectural drawings.

Hence the repeated mismatch between people and places in Tomasevic's paintings, and the way in which the spaces themselves do things that empirical spaces tend not to. They are following the logic not of a space built for people but of a more abstract rational space. In one of the works, a swimming pool bends up into the sky at a perfect right angle, evoking not only the geometry of an architectural plan, of line, but also an impossibility, like the frictionless planes or perfect geodesics of Galileo's thought experiments. Just as the figures are set in contrast to these lines, so too the massy substantial forms that return in Tomasevic's work indicate an excess that line and measure are unable to contain.

Space, for Tomasevic, is ultimately less an enabling container than a violent constraint, and several of the works portray invasion or injury. In one, the architectural outline of a house is tilted on its side as a hollow structure enters it; in another, a couple support a collapsed figure while a huge cartoon hammer strikes him, the action of hitting reiterated by the bold dotted lines of motion. Once

again, two disparate genres and two disparate scales share the same space, suggesting the violence of the abstract, the violence of abstraction itself. As Tomasevic says, she is focusing here on "pressure from political and social mechanisms exerted upon individuals, presented in the form of mechanical tools hurting people".

In one of the paintings, a blank space is punctuated by four tiny butterflies and, in the far corner, a piece of collaged masking tape hides a matchstick female body, annulled in the surrounding space. If humans are the losers here, there is no idealisation of them. In one text work, we read of a miserable scene on a park bench where a war veteran sits hunched, smoking and reviling the world around him. The artist observes his wife having sex with a taxi-driver against a tree. No formal system of architecture can mitigate their imperfection and pain.

Tomasevic takes her figures from photographs, either her own or from magazines and other sources. By placing them in her scenes, she mimics the utopian project itself of placing 'real' people in artificial spaces. This presence of abstraction is echoed in Tomasevic's use of bold, highly artificial colour blocks. A dark factory on one side of a painting is offset by a bright red container bin on the other, drawn with firm unreal lines and a uniformity of colour that indexes its own semiotic density. Contrasting this, and present in other works, we find collage elements - a bit of tissue, a scrap of tape - the very opposite of the formal features and angular geometries that characterise her architectural spaces.

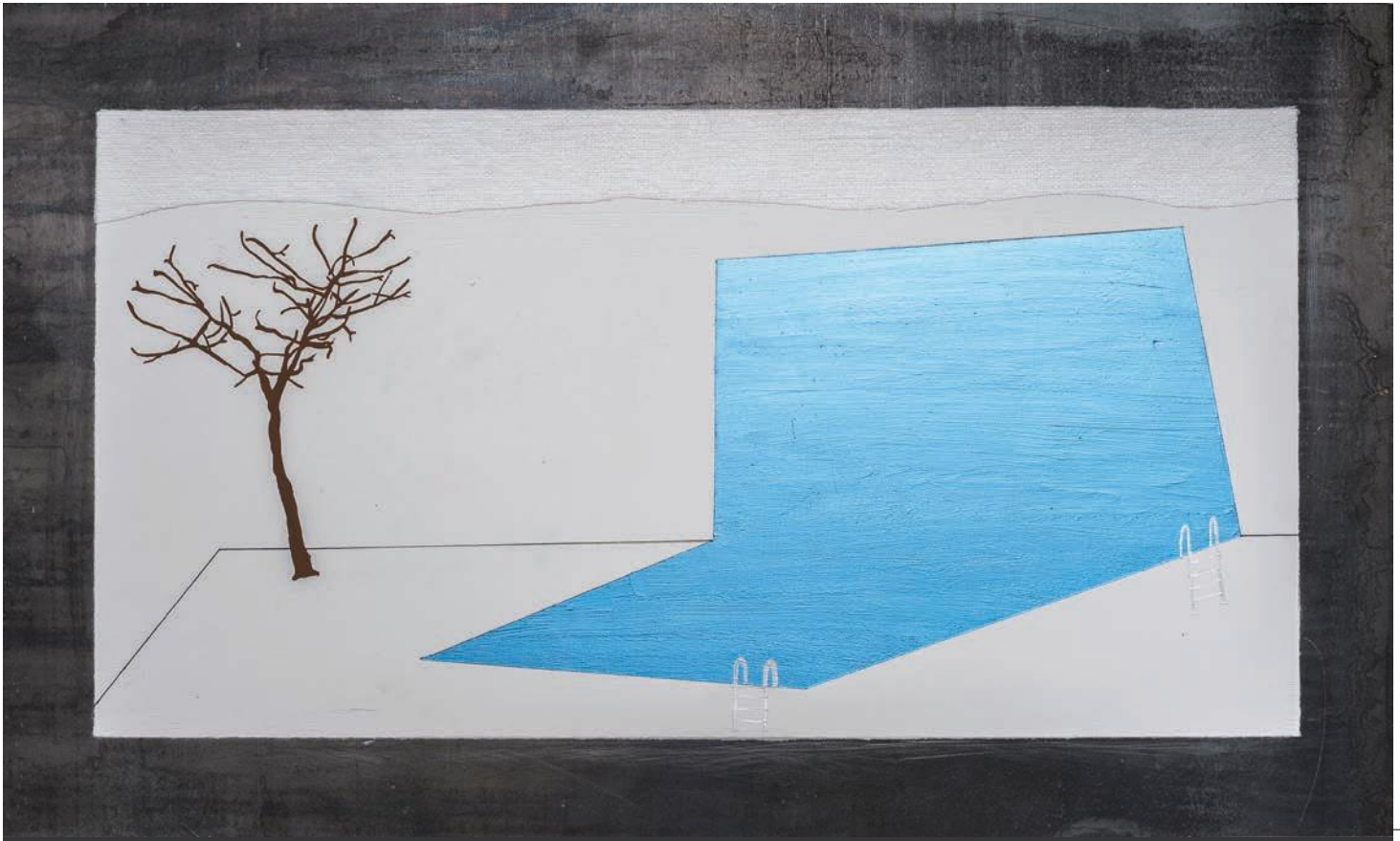
Part of the richness of Tomasevic's work is how she is able to convey this idea about the experience of growing up in a new modernist town, where real bodies were made to live in abstract spaces, while at the same time saying something about representation itself. These paintings are as much about autobiography as they are about concepts. The violence is that of the symbolic itself. The legal terminology that Tomasevic often uses to title her shows

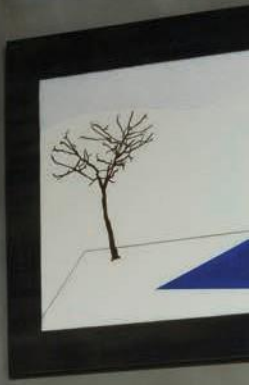
evokes this quite directly: 'Life Interest' can designate the right of a person - the life tenant - to occupy a property during their lifetime, after which it may revert to its owner. The owner here is both the bureaucratic and social system that built the town and formal abstract space itself.

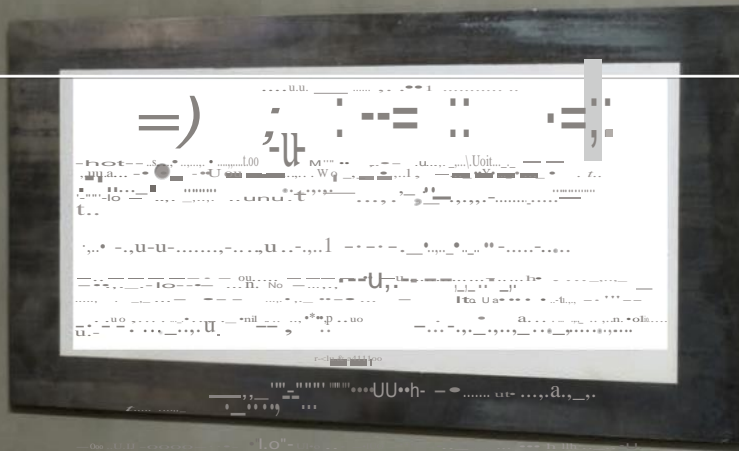
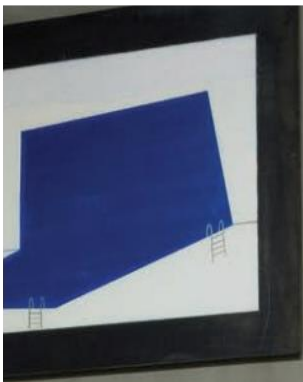
We realise now that this is the concrete box that we are standing or crouching in to look at Tomasevic's paintings: an artificial space that does not give us the room we need. We view the paintings from the very space that the paintings chronicle. And inhabiting this space, as Tomasevic wants us to understand, is difficult.

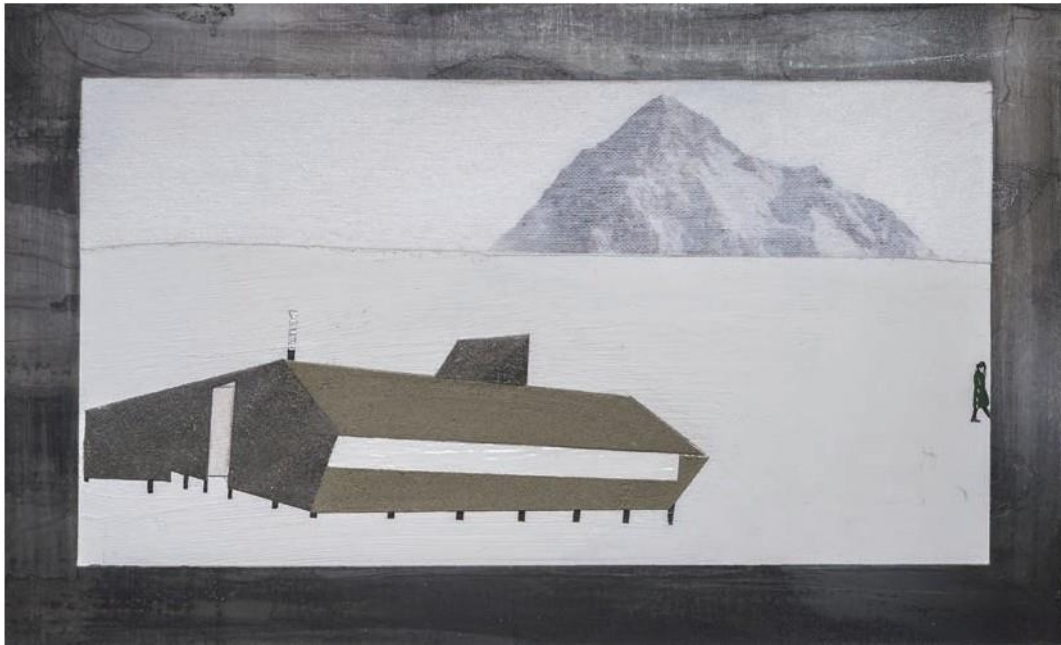
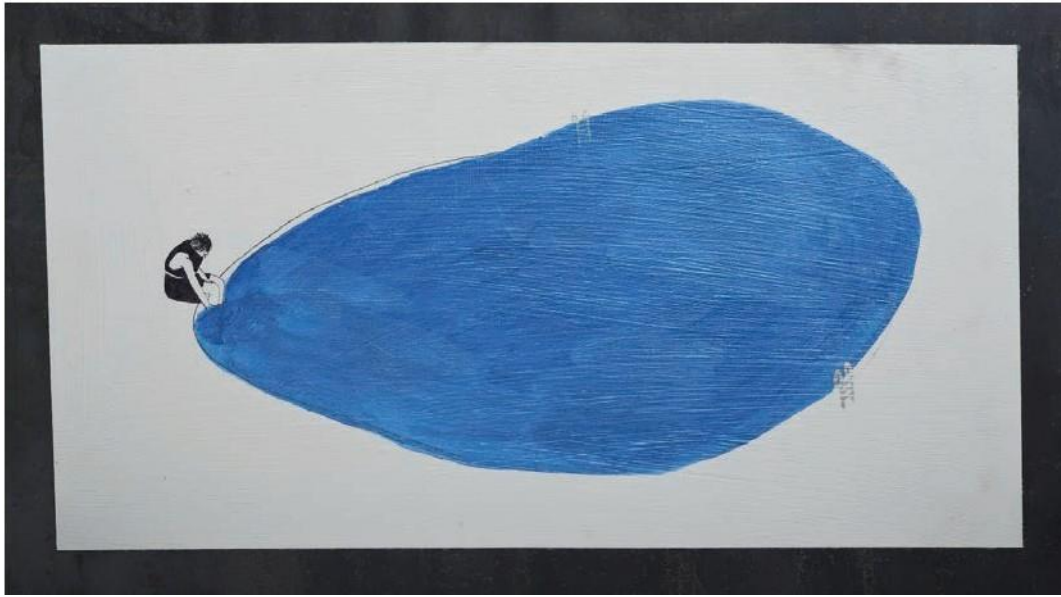
Darian Leader

dimensions 30x50cm, material: 3mm steel, mixed technique





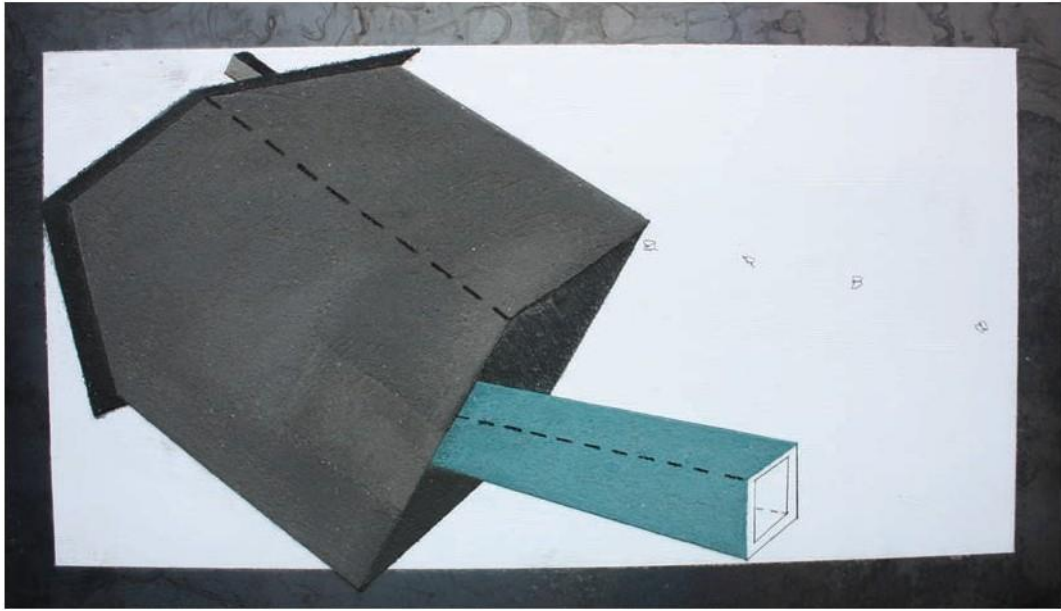




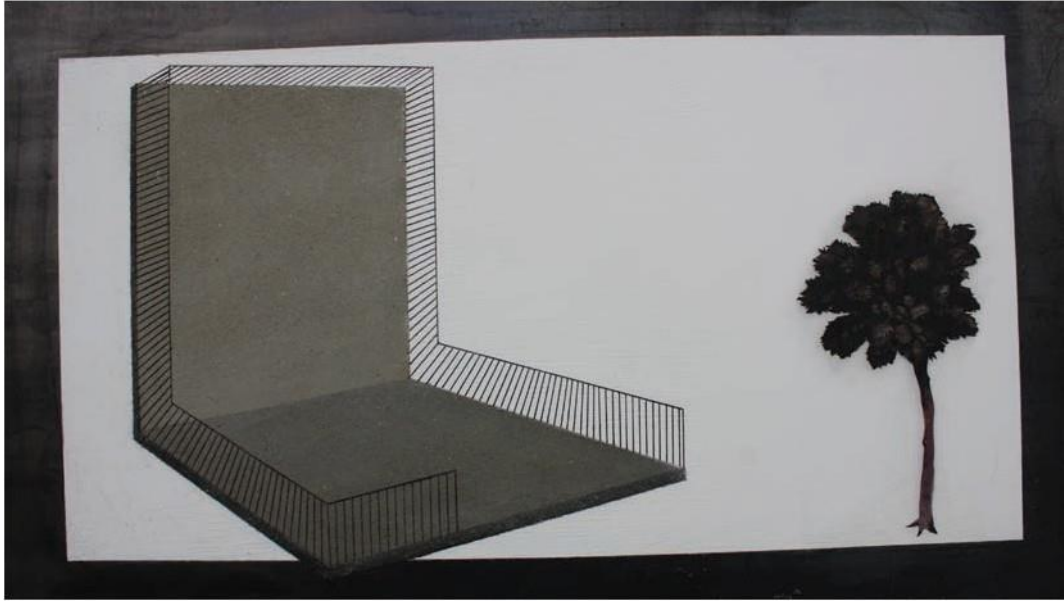
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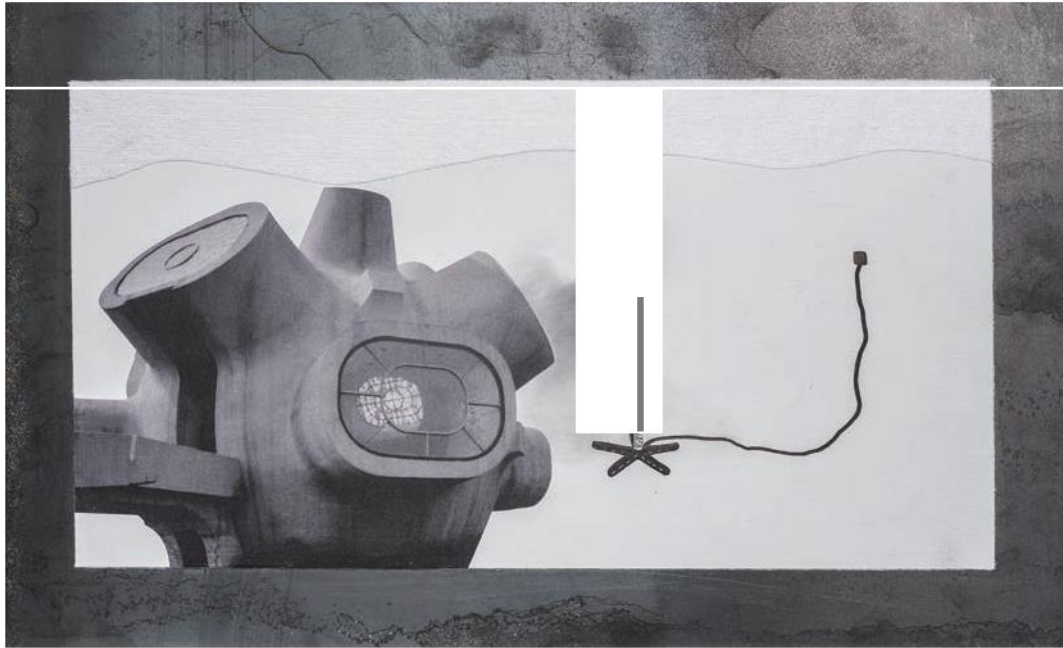
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Darian Leader is a psychoanalyst and author of *Introducing Lacan*, *Why do Women Write More Letters Than They Post?*, *Promises that Lovers Make When It Gets Late*, *Freud's Footnotes*, *Stealing Mona Lisa*, *Why do People Get Ill*, co-written with David Cornfield, *The New Black*, *What Is Madness?* and *Srticly Bipolar*. His latest book *Hands* is published in June 2016 by Hamish Hamilton. He practises psychoanalysis in London and he is a founding member of Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research and a member of the College of Psychoanalysts UK.



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