

Jaro Varga
In Someone Else's Game

02.02 - 25.03.2023

Ivan Gallery, Atelierele Malmaison, 1st floor, Calea Plevnei 137C, B side, Bucharest

Opening event: 02 February, 6-9 pm, with a guided tour by the artist

We invite you to the opening event of Jaro Varga's solo show, "In Someone Else's Game," on Thursday, February 2nd, between 6-9 pm. The artist will conduct an in-depth guided tour through the exhibition at 7 pm.

"In Someone Else's Game" is a project developed by Jaro Varga in the past two years, starting as a critical research on the stereotypes of Native Americans' representation in literature, especially in the popular phenomenon of Karl May's novels. The artist aims at a possible rewriting of these troubled common places by means of artistic gestures, in new works created for this context. Devised as a playground for thought, the exhibition employs the apparently innocent, yet subversive approach of game-playing in order to render a more just and inclusive counter-narrative to the 'Cowboys and Indians' genre - be it in literature, film, or children's games.

Inspired by his own personal history of childhood books, movies and games, Jaro Varga creates four site-specific 'games' of unlearning, deconstructing and revisiting cultural tropes and clichés deep embedded in our cultural subconscious. The first is the "Game of Books and Covers", a strategy previously used by the artist in diverting the message of a book by overlapping it with a counter-cover, thus creating a new body of knowledge that bridges together past and present ideologies. The second is the "Game of Small Statues", in which a carpet from the '80s becomes a backdrop mapping new typologies of characters, representatives of marginal or excluded groups from the official, heteronormative depiction of the 'Wild West': women, transgender persons, people of Asian or African American descent, etc. The third game is a "Film" made of fragments cut-out from the "Winnetou" movies of early '60s and recombined in the guise of a homoerotic romance - a strong taboo inside the cowboy culture. The fourth and final game is the "Book Illustrations" chapter, with drawings inspired by Patricia Nell Warren's novels, the first widely popular bestsellers depicting gay narratives.

"In my childhood, I collected and redrew postcards, made bows, arrows and headdresses, watched The Treasure of the Silver Lake with bated breath, mourned the death of Winnetou, memorised the names of Native American tribes, drew imaginary prairies on maps, invented chiefs' names, wrote a book. These days, I'm returning to childhood play.

I am creating a new section of Karl May's novels (set in the U.S. Old West) which reveals a critical look at the tradition of 'playing Indians' in our environment, especially in the context of German literature and culture where 'playing Indians' has been deeply rooted since the nineteenth century. As in my childhood, anew, I redraw illustrations from books onto transparent covers. I overlay motifs and try to put them into critical relationships. Play can be an effective ideological-didactic tool. Relatively unopposed by us, it inculcates power schemas, racism, violence."

(Jaro Varga)

Jaro Varga (b. 1982, Slovakia) is an artist and curator who lives and works in Prague, Czech Republic. He earned a master's degree and a PhD from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava. His projects were shown in solo and group exhibitions, including "The Artist's Book Triennial" (Book Art Museum, Łódź, Poland, 2022), "The Yellow Book" (solo show, Chiquita Room, Tàpies Foundation, Arús Library, Museum Picasso, Barcelona, 2021), Triennial Kortrijk (Paradise, Belgium, 2021), "Secret Language" (Ivan Gallery, Bucharest, 2021), Triennial 2021 (Museum of Arts, Olomouc, Czech Republic), "History is His Story" (NEST ruimte voor kunst, The Hague, 2019), "SIGNAL – The Story of Slovak (Post)conceptual Art" (Ludwig Museum Budapest, 2019), "Traveling to the End" (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, ChangDong, Seoul South Korea, 2019), "I Found It Somewhere but I Cannot Find It" (solo show, site-specific installation in an old synagogue, Samorin, Slovakia, 2018), "When Artists Speak Truth" (The 8th Floor Gallery, New York, 2016), among others. "In Someone Else's Game" is the artist's second solo show at Ivan Gallery, after the 2017 exhibition "Missing Something and Itself Missing".

The exhibition can be visited in Ivan Gallery's space inside Atelierele Malmaison on Calea Plevnei 137C, B side, 1st floor, until the 25th of March 2023, Wed-Sat 1-6 pm, or by appointment outside the visiting hours.

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