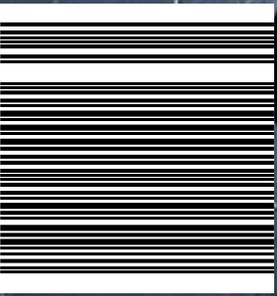


# FRAULEIN

ISSUE 37 NEW WAKE

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 by David Paige & Sina Braetz & Katharina Baron

# CONDITIO (IN)HUMANA

## have migration in their personal family history?"

Born in 1990 in Podgorica, Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists, Bajagić grew up in Egypt and the US, spending much of her time in New York. Her works, primarily wall-hung, are hybrids of drawings, paintings, and installations using graphite, oil and acrylic. Figurative motifs are mostly in black and white, with abstract and symbolic forms in bright, signal colors, especially red. Photography is collaged with prints, paintings and drawings, framed in symbolically charged forms such as crosses, runes, or related religious relics. Bajagić represents Montenegro at the 60th Venice Biennial in 2024.



Ex Axes  
Pink Sweater,  
2015



by Marcus Boxler

Ex Axes  
This Is Serenity!  
2017



Molly 5 (Woods),  
2016

Artist:

# Darja Bajagić

Merely 200 meters in diameter, the island is situated in the Adriatic Sea, perfectly circular. A significant portion, about 90 percent, is occupied by a fort named after the Austro-Hungarian General Lazar Mamula, constructed in 1853. During World War II, Italian Fascists under Benito Mussolini repurposed the island as a concentration camp. Today, it lies within the territory of one of Europe's youngest countries: Montenegro.

Since achieving independence from Serbia in 2006, this Balkan state has been undergoing a process of identity formation, marked by privatization and societal transformation. Remnants of Tito's socialist Yugoslavia are rare, brutalist relics of ideological gigantomania. Multilingual street signs in Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, and Montenegrin are common and, occasionally, one might stumble upon a predominantly Russian-speaking town.

In January 2016, the Montenegrin government announced that the former concentration camp, Fort Mamula, is set to enter the 21st century: sold to Swiss investor Orascom Development Holding AG, the fort and island has been transformed into a luxury beach resort, "a hotel surrounded by the sea, with you at its heart," as the website promises. The company boasts projects in Oman, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, the UK, and now Montenegro in its portfolio. The former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali expressed his profound astonishment at this misguided attempt to recontextualize cultural heritage. However, in 2024, another light will be shed on the fort. A light by artist Darja Bajagić.

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"What isn't a migration story? Apart from a few generational aristocratic families, who doesn't



Molly 4 (Dagger),  
(2016)

The most significant global exhibition, launched under the title "Stranieri Ovunque/Foreigners Everywhere," gathers artistic positions dedicated to alienation, uprooting and migration stories, alongside the ostensibly obsolete, at least repeatedly criticized, national pavilions. But what exactly are migration stories? Further contemplation often leads to a generic dead-end: What isn't a migration story? Apart from a few generational aristocratic families, who doesn't have migration in their personal family history? Whether Bohemians or Prussians, Russian Germans ("Russlanddeutsche"), Jews or Palestinians, Mongolians, Taiwanese or Chinese, US Americans or indigenous peoples, Pakistanis or Indians – moments of oppression and displacement are found across all sides of history, even in the supposedly repressive societies of today. The present is permeated with complexity, replacing truth with various realities.

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Ex Axes  
Corna,  
2017

It is this intricacy that Darja Bajagić manifests in her art. Religious and spiritual symbolism, family archive materials, pop cultural references, and art-historical formalism merge into a post-real conglomerate of signs, decoupling from their original meanings and refusing categories such as “Right and Wrong” or “Good and Evil.” In 2022, for example, Bajagić exhibited works like “Sacrifice” (2022), a darkly collaged depiction of a sheep, alongside “DA MEANS YES-OR ELSE” (2022) at Galerija Novembar in Belgrade. Referring to Mussolini’s political campaign for the “election” in 1934, which presented voters with a violent “Yes or...” choice, she juxtaposes the metaphor of humans as blindly following sheep alongside pseudo-democratic affirmations. A truncated, distorted “Yes, we can” lies next to embodied ambiguity: the sheep as a lemming, the sacrificial lamb, the body of Christ, the wolf in sheep’s clothing.

The “Ex Axes” series, ongoing since 2015, portrays women posing with axes, images sourced from fetish sites dedicated to women with weapons, in the form of axes. Literally: axes. The implicit scenes blur the lines between perpetrator and victim, simultaneously executioner and condemned, hunter and prey. As associative as these interpretations may seem, the ambiguity is justified solely based on the semiotic adaptability. About 150 years ago, the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure outlined in his theory of signs the relationship between signifier (the sound-image) and signified (the concept).

“Not only since de Saussure have we witnessed a growing distance

Ex Axes  
This Is Serenity!,  
2017



I Know It's Sick But It's  
So Much Fun, 2016

I KNOW IT'S SICK  
BUT IT'S SO MUCH  
FUN

“What are migration stories? Further contemplation often leads to a generic dead-end: What isn't a migration story?”



Sacrifice,  
2022

between signs and what they denote, between language and what we discuss.”

In short, his theory highlights precisely what Bajagić demonstrates in her works: the dependency of signs (words, symbols, images) on their context, which always includes a personal level of interpretation and experience. And it is this personal level that increasingly matters. Not only since de Saussure have we witnessed a growing distance between signs and what they denote, between language and what we discuss. This disconnect is palpable in the tension between various works by Bajagić: “T (Nocturne),” “New Dark Ages (Saint Nino’s Cross),” and “The Awakening (Saint Nino’s Cross Inverted)” utilize various formations of the cross, combined with photographs of the artist’s brother during his baptism in Cairo. The tau cross was Saint Francis of Assisi’s personal seal and signature and was used as a symbol of conversion during the Fourth Lateran Council. Contrary to the painting’s dark atmosphere, the content refers to the baptismal rite, an optimistic “rite of passage,” a transfiguration. In “The Awakening (Saint Nino’s Cross Inverted),” this ritual rite is further emphasized by the Algiz (Z-rune) – the “life rune,” symbolizing rebirth, but distorted by the Nazis and, therefore, ostracized in the present day. The Georgian baptizer and preacher, Saint Nino, also illustrates Bajagić’s ambiguous language and imagery: between volition, obedience, ideological conformity, and sacrifice.



Endangerer D, 2023



No Transmission, 2023



Virgin, 2023



Hacked 2 Pieces, 2023



The Awakening (Saint Nino's Cross Inverted), 2022



New Dark Ages (Saint Nino's Cross), 2022

“Amidst all ambiguity, semiotic ambivalence, and aesthetic sophistication, an unshakeable truth remains readable both in the works of the Montenegrin artist and in current political events: As it stands, things cannot remain.”

T (Nocturne), 2022



Da Means Yes - Or Else, 2022

In Venice, Bajagić also focuses on the relationship between the individual and the collective. The privatizing sell-off of the Baltic states, comparable to all former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and Asia, plays into the hands of corrupt state leaders and capitalists at the expense of citizens and national cultural histories. Amidst all ambiguity, semiotic ambivalence, and aesthetic sophistication, an unshakeable truth remains readable both in the works of the Montenegrin artist and in current political events: As it stands, things cannot remain. The Venice Biennale, as well as other the advancing privatization of Italian cultural policy, need to be able to apply this realization to themselves, recognizing the absurd extent to which the privatization of culture can reach.