

Inconspicuous conquering of new space

I first encountered Milena Dopitová's work in 2005 at the *Sixty-something* exhibition at Galerie Švestka. The project consisted of several videos introducing Milena and her twin sister, and their transformation into older women using make-up. The author then put the characters into ordinary, yet special situations that are only possible between the closest relatives: the sisters (or rather their older alter egos) slowly dance together on an empty dance floor in a public park, play almost forgotten pieces on a piano together, and take pictures with each other. I found this double portrait both very intimate and distant, both understandable and incomprehensible, and both emotional and intelligent; all that in the exactly right amount to stick in my mind for a very long time.

The idea of old age was then far too remote not only to the barely twenty-year-old gallery visitor. In the late nineties, affected by the boom of cosmetic surgery, pornography and the growing adoration of the "perfect body", old age, ugliness, and dying were not considered attractive material. It was Dopitová's projects such as *Oholit naličit* (Shave and make up) (1999) or the aforementioned *Sixty-something* (2003 onwards), and then later Kateřina Šedá's works (*Je to jedno* [It Doesn't Matter], 2005) that introduced the theme of old age within conceptual art practice to wider audience.

Artworks concerning themes traditionally perceived as "womenly" – such as intimacy, erotica, exploring one's own body, motherhood and the role of women in relation to it, the everyday routine, stereotypes, and social segregation were typical of the strong generation of woman artists entering the art scene in the nineties (Veronika Bromová, Štěpánka Šimlová, Lenka Klodová, Kateřina Vincourová). In this respect, Milena Dopitová and her contemporaries are often considered the pioneers of feminist art in Czechia. Although the artists themselves admit that they approached the feminist ideas rather tentatively and intuitively, they definitely opened a whole new range of art themes and questions with their works, including the discussion on art itself.¹ It is possible to understand their projects as foreshadowing the ever growing discussion on inclusion and care in connection to visual arts.

Příště u vás

It is typical of Dopitová to balance on the verge between conceptual and intuitive.² In the *Příště u vás* (Next Time at Your Place) exhibition, Dopitová faces the atmosphere of uncertainty and unease crawling throughout the unstable Europe and also the prospect of uncertain future relating to the state of the environment. She addresses the same topics as her colleagues a generation younger than her, whether it is the presage of

² Art historian Martina Pachmanová characteristically calls her work "emotional conceptualism". in: Milena Dopitová, I stejně je jiné, Pachmanová Martina (ed.), Akademie výtvarných umění, Praha, 2017, p. 21.

¹ ČERMÁKOVÁ, Alena, Emancipace bez feminizmu?, in: Někdy v sukni, Umění 90. let, Pavlína Morganová (ed.), Moravská galerie v Brně a Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 2014, p. 65.

apocalyptic scenarios and the desire for a different and better world, or the need to understand the mechanisms of today's society. Instead of trying to comment, analyse, or call for action, she creates an abstract installation that is supposed to be unsettling in that "something" familiar to us.

Dopitová approaches the exhibition as a cohesive installation, starting with its title and ending with the moment the visitors leave the gallery. "The titles are integral and irreplaceable part of the projects. They analyse, shift, explain, doubt, and emphasise the topics. Words have great power, and I enjoy combining the way we perceive them with looking for their multiple interpretations."³ The title phrase "next time at your place" may pose as a promise, as well as a threat – it creates anticipation and a feeling of uncertainty – the state on the border between what could happen and what will actually happen.

³ KALINOVSKÁ, Milena, Rozhovor s Milenou Dopitovou, in: Milena Dopitová, I stejně je jiné, Pachmanová Martina (ed.), Akademie výtvarných umění, Praha, 2017, p. 250.

The artist builds her large-format galvanised sculptures into a formation which does not make it clear whether its position is offensive or defensive. The objects seem familiar to us, and we know the shapes well: after a brief examination, we recognise a door hinge, cookie cutter and other ordinary objects found at home. We cannot be sure whether the cavalry represents a threat or just innocently demonstrates its superiority with its dominant proportions and noble shine of the metal.

The unmistakable aesthetics of Milena Dopitová's works are famous for their almost cold precision which she immediately denies by a warm feature. Similarly to the author's installations from the nineties and the noughties, distinctive by contrasts in materials (metal sculptures wrapped in fabric, unit furniture covered in crocheted shawl etc.), at the **MeetFactory** gallery, she also abolishes the cold dogmatism of galvanised sculptures with colourful fabric and video installation accompanied by soft music composition using aliquot voices.

"Something is happening, but we don't know what it is yet," Dopitová noted during the installation of her exhibition *Příště u vás*. I believe that it is the ability to capture "something" and the ability to extract the essence of ordinary things and turn it into an art form in a simple, poetic, sometimes even dramatic way that makes Milena Dopitová's work exceptional.

Eva Riebová

Milena Dopitová (*1963, Sternberk) is a conceptual artist who, amongst other things, has been actively reflecting on women's position in today's culture and society since the nineties. As the only woman artist and member, she participated in activities of the Pondělí (Monday) group (along with Pavel Humhal,

Petr Lysáček, Petr Zubeck, Michal Nesázal, and Petr Písařík) founded in 1989. Dopitová graduated from Akademie výtvarných umění v Praze (the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague), where she studied in Milan Knížák's atelier (1986 - 1994) and her works were showed at exhibitions both in the Czech Republic and abroad.

As an example, let's mention Galerie Hlavního města Prahy (Prague City Gallery), Brooklyn Museum (New York), Akademii der Künste (Berlin), Display Gallery (Prague), The Whitechapel Art Gallery (London), Polansky Gallery (Prague), Museum of Contemporary Art (Helsinki), Artists Space (New York), Aperto, XLV.

Venice Biennale (Venice), Ninth Biennale - The Boundary Rider (Sydney), 22nd Biennale Sao Paolo, Ludwig Museum (Budapest), Ronald Feldman Fine Arts (New York City), The Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston), etc. Apart from other recognitions, in 2011, Dopitová was awarded the Michal Ranny prize.

On the occasion of the *Příště u vás* exhibition, the **MeetFactory** gallery will publish a catalogue with visual documentation of the installation. The launching of the catalogue will take place on 23rd May 2019 during an evening of showing Milena Dopitová's videos at the **MeetFactory** theatre.

Accompanying events:

30. 4., 19:00, guided tour with curator Eva Riebová

23. 5., 19:00, screening of videos by Milena Dopitová, foreword by doc. Mgr. Martina Pachmanová, Ph.D., launch of the exhibition catalogue

8. 6., 20:00, guided tour (part of Prague Museum Night 2019) with Milena Dopitová and Eva Riebová

26. 4. — 9. 6. 2019
MeetFactory (Gallery)



Next Time at Your Place

Milena Dopitová
Next Time at Your Place

Galerie MeetFactory

26. 4. — 9. 6. 2019
Opening: 25. 4. 2019, 19:30
as part of the Public house event

Music: Petra Gavlasová-Šuško
Curator: Eva Riebová
Production: Anna Eliášová, Tomáš Janík
PR: Libor Galia, Zuzana Kolouchová
Translation: Lenka Koudelková

www.meetfactory.cz

Gallery opening hours
open daily from 13:00 to 20:00



MeetFactory is supported in 2019 by a grant from the City of Prague amounting to 10.000.000 CZK.

Milena Dopitová