



MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
MILICA ZORIĆ AND RODOLJUB ČOLAKOVIĆ GALLERY-LEGACY

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Working hours: 12–8 PM, except on Tuesdays

Bojana
Barltrop

THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING

05/26 – 07/03/2017

Exhibition Curator: Marina Martić

Bojana Barltrop is an artist that earned her reputation among the Belgrade and Yugoslav art scene as Bojana Komadina working in the field of performance and photography. Distinctive influence of the classical painting in terms of subject and colourism, from Baroque and Mannerism to English Pre-Raphaelites, is recognisable throughout the whole of her work, and as her principal subjects stand out self-portraits, still lifes, and floral motifs.

In the middle of the 1970s, the Belgrade art scene saw the rise of the Polaroid. This new instant medium swiftly became an object of interest for the artists gathered around the Happy Gallery at the Student Cultural Centre (Dragan Papić, Dragan Taubner, Ljubomir Šimunić, the group "Izgled" [Appearance], et al.). Although she exhibited her works at the Happy Gallery, Bojana's production stylistically and thematically differs from that of the authors of this generation. The essential feature of Bojana's work is an original approach to the medium of photography, especially the use of the Polaroid, which remained the constant characteristic of her expression throughout the whole of her career. She uses the Polaroid to narrate in a peculiar way her most precious memories, those that are told to the closest friends, and which slowly introduce the spectator to the intimacy of Bojana Barltrop.

The exhibition's title itself refers to the idea of "The Great Chain of Being", which can be traced back as early as the Ancient history, and which was described for the first time by the American philosopher Arthur O. Lovejoy in the lectures he held at Harvard from 1933 to 1939, and later also in his book *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (1936). Insisting on the "internal value of diversity", Lovejoy offers an inspiring history of a conception of the universe as a great chain, in which every being is related to every other by pre-determined degrees. Each of us passes through these degrees during his/hers lifetime.

Similarly, the exhibition at the Čolaković Legacy aims at representing a unique universe of Bojana Barltrop, with all of the degrees constituting the chain of life. *The Great Chain of Being* includes the works from all periods of her career, as well as documentation of her art activities. In the latest series of works, Bojana once again uses the Polaroid, which made its grand return onto the art scene in the past few years. Through personal and family history, in these works she is concerned with both the history of the country which she long ago moved away

from and which does not exist any more, but also the collective destiny of the people that lived there. This imbues her work with universality, and makes it relevant for the moment we are in right now.

Bojana Barltrop was born in 1949 in Skopje. She graduated and received her MA from the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade, at the Department of book design. In Copenhagen, she attended specialist studies at the School for Art and Design (Skolen for Brugkunst) and the Royal Graphic Arts College (Grafiske Højskule). She defended her PhD thesis at the Architectural School in London. During the 1980s, she was employed as the design programme editor at the Sebastian Gallery in Dubrovnik. She had solo shows at the Happy New Art Gallery in Belgrade (1979, 1982); in the framework of the exhibition *The Art of Photography and the Serbs 1893–1989* at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts Gallery (1991); at the Museum of Applied Arts (1992); and the Belgrade Culture Centre (1992). Aside from performance and photography, Bojana Barltrop is involved with theoretical work, stage and graphic design. For her work in the field of graphic design, she received numerous major awards in Yugoslavia and abroad. She has been living and working in Great Britain for 20 years.

Translation of the first floor gallery text:

Yugoslav artist Bojana Barltrop emerged in the Belgrade art scene at the very end of the 1970s, doing performances and photography. The onset of her career is linked with the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, which during the 1970s and the 1980s was one of the major and most influential institutions devoted to the development of art in SFRY. At SCC gathered and met the spokespersons of the avant-garde and alternative art scenes from entire world. It was precisely there that the first steps in the development of the conceptual art took place, as well as the first video-projections, and a while later, by the end of the 1970s, the first punk and new wave rock concerts.

Within this extremely lively and vibrant scene at the end the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s also active was a number of artists and art groups using the Polaroid, but this tendency was short-lived. Bojana Barltrop, however, persisted in using this medium throughout the whole of her career, never giving up on exploring its possibilities. Her latest productions bear all of the hallmarks that made her a unique figure in our art scene. They are testimonials of the unflinching desire for permanent experimentation and inventing of the new possibilities of this instant medium.

In terms of her style, subjects and ideological outlook, Bojana Barltrop diverges fundamentally from the authors of her generation, which enabled her to maintain a position marked by originality and authenticity. What we have in her work is a clearly noticeable influence of the classical painting, both in the selection of subjects — self-portrait, still life, landscape — and the colour gamut. Her vast erudition and the eclecticism of interests, outstanding knowledge of visual arts, literature and philosophy, made it possible to her to operate within a truly broad field of reference.