

TANYA LEIGHTON

Contemporary Magazine

KALEIDOSCOPE

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highlighting ALEKSANDRA
DOMANOVIĆ, HIGH LINE ART,
TRI ANGLE RECORDS,
DESIRE MACHINE COLLECTIVE
and SYLVIA SLEIGH, investigating
THE RESURGENCE OF
POST-HUMANISM, exploring
the art of FRANK BENSON,
featuring our regulars, tips and
three special inserts.

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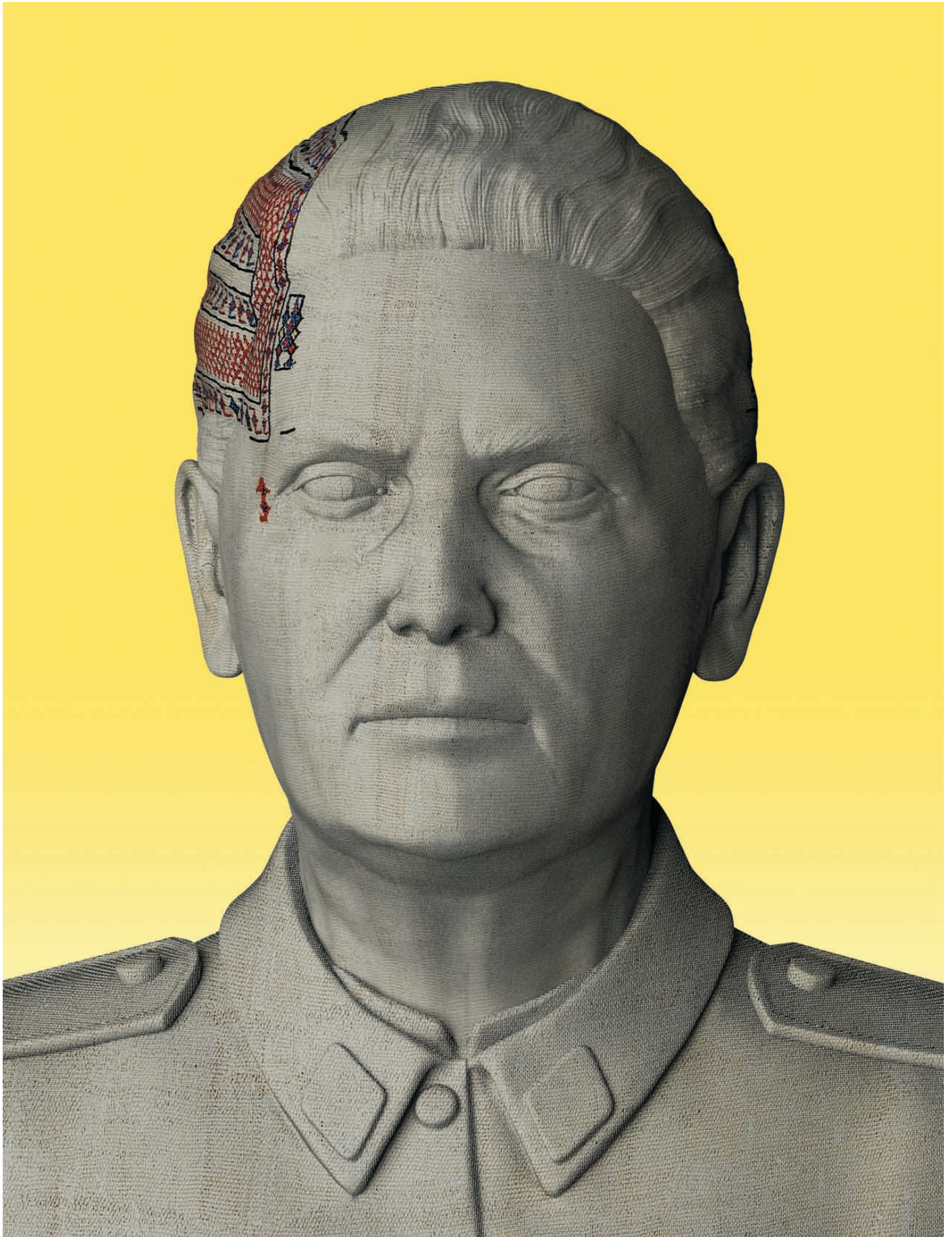
HIGHLIGHTS

Fusing elements
from history with
the communal
pop-cultural
language of bad
taste,

ALEKSANDRA
DOMANOVIC'S
videos and
sculptures are
framed by *Pablo Larios*
as embodiments of
the perpetually productive
disunion of politics and art.

Portrait (film), 2012

TANYA LEIGHTON



Biography

ALEKSANDRA DOMANOVIĆ (b. 1981, former Yugoslavia) lives and works in Berlin. Together with Oliver Laric, Christoph Priglinger and Georg Schnitzer, she founded the curatorial project and website VVORK. She recently had solo shows at Kunsthalle Basel; Villa du Parc, Annemasse; and Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin. Her art has also been shown at the Venice Biennale; New Museum, New York; Autocenter, Berlin and the Sculpture Center, New York.

Current & Forthcoming

ALEKSANDRA DOMANOVIĆ will release her first book, "From Yu to Me" in the beginning of October. She is working on a film on the history of the Internet in former Yugoslavia due in 2013. She will have a solo show at Tanya Leighton in early 2013 and is currently participating in several group shows at Utah MOCA; la Casa del Lago, Mexico; Wilkinson Gallery, London; and Lukas Feichtner Galerie, Vienna.

Author

PABLO LARIOS was born in Honduras and raised in the US. He writes fiction and criticism and lives in Berlin. His writing has appeared in various international publications. He edits the occasional publishing series If A Then B (ifa-thenb.org).

HIGHLIGHTS

Politics, as historians and dictators well know, lodges itself like soot or chewing gum within the nooks and crannies of culture—in the neglected iconography of a park fountain, say, or the chorus of a Top 40 song. The link between art and politics in Aleksandra Domanović's work can recall the two main characters in the Cold War-era Warner Brothers cartoon *Ralph Wolf and Sam Sheepdog* (1953–1963): Every morning, the two animal-protagonists sip coffee and read the morning paper together before clocking into their day job, in which one tries to outsmart and seize the other. The wolf never succeeds in catching the sheepdog (that would mean game over), so they shake hands and say goodnight as friends, only to repeat the exact same scenario the next morning. Similarly, politics and art can form a productive, perpetual disunion, even as one is often called upon to buttress the other.

"In January 2010," a steely voiced narrator tells us in Domanović's video essay *Turbo Sculpture* (2009–2012), "a life-size Johnny Depp statue was erected in an artificial mountain village, Drvengrad, in southwestern Serbia." The corresponding video still shows a bearded Depp next to a sculpture depicting himself, placed against a wooden pole. The likeness conjures a cigar-store Native-American statue or a wax replica from Madame Tussauds: Depp's shiny homage is so naturalistic as to delve into kitsch. Like many of the Berlin-based artist's projects, *Turbo Sculpture* functions at once as a visual archive of a phenomenon taken from pop and folk culture and as a translation of it into a new medium. In this case, Domanović traces instances of a trend she began to observe in the postwar Balkan region: the appropriation of Western (mainly American) cultural icons (both real and fictive) in the public sculpture of the former Yugoslavia.

In the 1990s, as the artist's video relates, figures including Bill Clinton, Bruce Lee and Rocky Balboa began making appearances-in-effigy throughout the former republic, often with official support from local municipalities or political figures. One theory behind this phenomenon of icon borrowing was that the actual agents of the Balkan wars—the Miloševićs, the Ratko Mladićs—were too tainted by the specters of war to serve as actual icons. The term "turbo sculpture" (Domanović's coinage) is a back-formation from "Turbofolk," the high-octane, nationalistic techno-folk music from the same region. Thus the spectator witnesses, via Domanović's video's stick-on image effect, a culture's desire to tap into the virtuous effects of distant celebrity power while avoiding the local and deleterious aspects of political power.

"Don't start with the good old things, but the bad new ones," Bertolt Brecht told Walter Benjamin in 1934. Likewise, Domanović's projects incorporate the communal languages of globalized bad taste—ethno-kitsch, 1990s-era techno—which she makes resonate with ideological concerns like the nature of collectivity and material history. Often the artist achieves this by copping elements from pop culture (like the trashy ubiquity of big-breasted celebs) and institutional or public history (such as state-owned broadcasting stations) to create longitudinal projects that run the gamut from Internet-based works, sculptures, videos, prints and archives, to remixes and self-translations of all of the above. She takes translation as a principle of form, filtering source material through a new medium, almost algorithmically, to see what happens.

For *19:30* (2010–2011), for example, Domanović traveled through the former Yugoslavia and collected news "idents," the hooks used to introduce television news hours. In an essay on a website accompanying the piece (www.nineteenthirty.net), Domanović explains that during the regional wars in the 1990s, these tunes became musically and symbolically encoded in those Yugoslavians who gathered around their television sets at the same time each night (the aforementioned 19:30)

TANYA LEIGHTON



HIGHLIGHTS

for updates on the day's tumult. Interested in the psychology of this act of encoding, the artist created a video that incorporates the intro clips. Then she took the work a step further, appropriating the psychological and musical rhythm of '90s-era techno and rave culture, another of the period's notable sites of collectivity. The project continues as Domanović began distributing the idents to DJs to remix and sample.

From the artist's geopolitical background—she comes from a region that has experienced political line-bending, the shifting of demonyms and place names—one might trace her choice to work formally with hybrids, pluralities, mash-ups and remixes. Domanović was born in 1981 in Novi Sad, a city in the former Yugoslavia (currently Serbia). She went on to study architecture and design at the University of Ljubljana and the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Domanović reflects her home region's cultural balkanizations, in which sound becomes image, and the Internet becomes material, in works that maintain levity despite the weight of their historical and political themes. Often, her works can feel like seeing a Burger King sign through a stained-glass window in a small European city and, in this image, the conquest and pressure of a mutant capitalism, in which serialized taste meets yesteryear.

The exhibition "From yu to me" at Kunsthalle Basel, in 2012, featured white plinths printed with sprawling forms of color—amoebas, perhaps, or supernovas. For this *Untitled (19:30)* (2011) series, Domanović created stacks of white A4 and A3 paper—contemporary icons of standardization—that functioned as pedestals on which nothing rests. The faint horizontal lines on each plinth were ghostly, evoking the watermarks of 3-D printing technology. The abstract colors that run down the sides of the works are mostly taken from Flickr images of quintessential Balkan imagery that Domanović digitally manipulated. If the A4 format is a defining emblem of transfer, communication and documentation, the plinths are simply stacks of paper that can be printed out by anyone (a downloadable PDF is offered on Domanović's website). Thus the artist takes a quiet, implicit approach to metaphors of transfer and circulation, her concepts resonating with Marcel Broodthaers's maxim (recently popularized by Seth Price) that "the field of artistic activity occurs, first of all, in the field of distribution." Here, then, Domanović overlays disfigured icons of an ethnic region with the A4's rhetorical overtones of standardization and distribution.

Rave culture, public sculpture, the materiality of the Internet, folk art: their commonality lies in the way they unite individuals and make claims on collectivity and group identity. In Domanović's method of remixing motifs and hooks from history or pop culture, she seems informed by the utopian potential of the early Internet. Before today's relentless status updates, individuals would largely connect based on shared niche interests or esoteric humor. The faux-earnest, boy-band sounding title of her Basel exhibition is a reference to the expiry of the Yugoslavian top-level domain (.yu), which morphed into .me and .rs in March 2010. Marked as they are by elasticity and formal dynamism, her projects remain historiographic even as they're attuned to amnesia and erasure. It's a raver's logic of impassioned forgetfulness.

In a recent project, Domanović makes a 3-D-rendered print of Yugoslav marshal Tito, adapting the kind of poster that once hung in every Yugoslavian classroom. In *Portrait* (2012), however, Domanović subtly rendered the flesh to make Tito look like a woman. The trace of the hermaphroditic here is satirical, much like a phallus drawn on a statue of a Greek goddess, or Duchamp's moustache dabbed on the Mona Lisa. In this case, it represents the warped, subjective ways that history is remembered and misremembered, like an obscene doodle in a class textbook.

Pylop Nymph, 2012
Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2012
Photography by Gunnar Meier

Bubanj Fair relief, 2012
Installation view at Kunsthalle Basel, 2012
Photography by Gunnar Meier

TANYA LEIGHTON

