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Darja Bajagić
Unlimited Hate
11 06 — 08 09 2016

Press talk
June 10, 12 noon

Opening
June 10, 6pm

Das Land Steiermark
Kultur, Europa, Außenbeziehungen
GRAZ KULTUR
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→ *We live in a world where more than ever lies are masqueraded as truth. Whatever the media says people blindly accept and follow without question. A world where speaking the truth could send you to prison or the cemetery. The truth isn't popular. It's almost always hard to swallow. One who searches for truth and the reasons for this decay will certainly find an incredible and insurmountable darkness. But the answers are there, and they are not found in any controlled media outlet. The Internet is both a trove of knowledge and a heap of garbage. But invaluable to those who are persistent in seeking the truth.*

For her first institutional solo, Darja Bajagić (born 1990 in Montenegro, lives in New York) turns to the murky terrain where real and staged violence bleeds one into the other with an ease that is both unsettling and inexorably alluring. This has been a key undercurrent in a practice that to date spans painting, sculpture, video and installation. Heeding the lure of the fringes, the artist culls her imagery from fan-gore magazines, true crime TV shows, fetish websites, obscure on-line forums and hidden chatrooms tucked away in the darker reaches of the Web. She handles these disparate source materials with a dose of humor, working them into densely layered compositions that are at once confrontational and poetically fragile. Through these, she explores laden questions of embodiment, viewership and visual power relationships—all the while interrogating our driving need to make images accountable.

The body count in "Unlimited Hate" assembles an unlikely cast of women memorialized as cutout busts that evoke fanzine clippings as much as the flattened passion of Byzantine icons. These include "Manuela and Sophie," 2016, a diptych using found photographs of Manuela Ruda and Sophie Lancaster. Ruda is a self-proclaimed Satanic murderess who together with her husband stabbed his mild-mannered workmate who loved The Beatles 66 times at the Dark Lord's bidding in Witten, Germany (the couple would later say that they'd chosen him as their sacrificial victim because he was "so funny and would be the perfect court jester for Satan"). By contrast, Lancaster was a 20-year old Lancashire, England native who was fatally beaten in 2007 by five teenage boys, inexplicably enraged by her and her boyfriend's 'goth' appearance.

"Manuela and Sophie" are joined by five iterations of Molly ("Molly 1 – 5," 2016), the co-founder and centerfold of choice on a long-running right-wing Web 'zine devoted to interviews and reviews of black metal and death metal artists, releasing materials mixing erotic photography, occult imagery, articles and poetry. Set against canvas backdrops painted to resemble bruised, bloodied bodies, each "Molly" is a "bleeding" fountain, coming alive as its motion-sensor is activated, bleeding from its wounds—a profane Madonna caught in perpetual rapture. In a surrounding space, a series of video interviews with aspiring alternative models found on Craigslist plays. Prompted by sometimes banal, sometimes scary questions, these women share everything from the inconsequential to the existential, resulting in a haphazard confessional that reveals as much as it conceals.

In all of these encounters, the specter of violence hangs omnipresent but diffuse, its subject and object inextricable as Bajagić presents these images impartially and

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undigested. The trauma of true crime seeps into the theatrics of staged ritual; personal fears mix with sexual fantasies; markings on bodies attest to physical wounds or perhaps they mimic them in a manner that inadvertently doubles as painterly flourishes. This has been a strategy favored by the artist from the onset, from her early appropriations of pornography into intimate collages, to her later usage of fetish nudes against monochrome fields—defiant figures that both invite and resist narrative meaning. Bajagić has previously described this brand of provocation as "blank," not to negate these women's unique contexts and histories, but, simply, to underscore her own mode of re-presentation that leaves them open to new and unexpected encounters with fresh viewers.

In this, Bajagić may be less interested in the pornographic than the obscene—that which is cast to the margins, which she harnesses to shed light on the complex networks and hidden economies which define our contemporary visual world. Perhaps hers is a timely revision of the minimalist adage, "What you see is what you see." In the age of pervasive information networks, it is the 'unseen' that counts—a nebulous horizon where the failed liberatory promise of the Internet comingles with pleasures both polymorphous and dangerously obscure.

In medieval lore, blood was a potent substance whose power inhered in its liquidity—its uncanny ability to both define and transcend physical bodies. Bajagić recognizes this protean nature and employs it as a leitmotif throughout the installation, including a new suite of paintings. Blood lines, blood rites and blood trails become markers of injured bodies, institutionalized violence and politicized conflict while conjuring up a far-reaching art historical legacy, from depictions of religious martyrdom and the legacy of the female nude to the currency of the gestural. These are punctuated by cryptic taglines that double at titles ("UndeRage Headless Goatriders," 2016; "I Am Not Dead Yet," 2016). Not unlike tabs in a browser window, these references are left open, suspended in frontal compositions that invite prurient views. Looked at long enough, their nuances materialize as an interplay of surfaces that rub one another, like skin upon skin. —Text by Franklin Melendez

The show will be accompanied by a catalogue. Curated by Sandro Droschl.

Short biography

Darja Bajagić received her MFA from Yale University in 2014. Recent exhibitions include "When Blood Runs Dark" (as a part of "Co-Workers") at Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; "The Offal Truth" at New Galerie, Paris; "Diesel" at Bed-Stuy Love Affair, New York; "Softer Than Stone And Sick In Your Mind" (with Aleksander Hardashnakov) at Croy Nielsen, Berlin; and group shows at LUMA Westbau, Zurich; W139, Amsterdam; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; MoMA, Warsaw. Forthcoming shows include a solo London debut at Carlos/Ishikawa.

Press download: http://www.km-k.at/en/exhibition/darja-bajagic/press/
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June 23, 2016, 6pm: Curator's Talk Sandro Droschl
June 30, 2016, 6pm: Lecture Natalia Sielewicz, MoMA, Warsaw

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Darja Bajagić, I Know It's Sick But It's So Much Fun (collage), 2016
Acrylic, canvas, ink, magazine pages, paper printouts on paper, 29,2 x 43,2 cm , Courtesy New Galerie, Paris;

Darja Bajagić, Untitled (Forever O), 2016, acrylic paint, ink, paper printouts, plastic on paper, Courtesy New Galerie, Paris; Carlos/Ishikawa, London

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