

RADOVAN KRAGULJ

Radovan Kragulj

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ZEC I KRAVA, ŠARA I BARKA

RABBIT AND COW, PATTERN AND ARK

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Hoću da pišem o Radovanu Kragulju, ali oklevam. Nije u pitanju „strah” koji sam osećao. Kada sam pisao o Radomiru Reljiću, već sumnja da mogu da napišem tekst onako kako Kragulj crta, što bi, uveren sam, bio jedini način da se o njemu piše. Stvarno, može li se pisati onako kako se crta? I da li sumnja u tu mogućnost, sumnja koju sam već izrazio, čini ceo postupak neostvarljivim, budući da je ona, ta sumnja koju sam već izrazio, podjednako stvarna kao i stvarnost ovog teksta. I isto toliko stvarna kao rege muzika uz koju ovo pišem (album *Na mostu*, grupa Graundejšn) ili kao mačka koja, nakon što sam odbio da je pustim da mi skoči u krilo, pokunjeno odlazi na kutiju ispod mog radnog stola. Sve se to događa sada (i komšija, čujem, čisti sneg ispred svoje kuće) i sve me to onemogućava u naporu da stignem do odgovora. Kragulj je, sudim po njegovim pismima, uvek teže pisao nego što je crtao, dok sam ja uvek lakše pisao nego što sam crtao. Nikada, u stvari, i nisam crtao, ne znam zašto to govorim. Zato što izbegavam da priznam da sam sebi postavio nedostižan cilj, to je pravi odgovor. I odmah se lakše osećam. Dakle, neću crtati, možemo svi da odahnemo, ali zato ću pisati o Kragulju na jedini mogući način: onako kako se njegovo delo prelama u meni. Nema teksta o drugome; svaki tekst je o onome ko ga piše; pišući o Kragulju, naučiću nešto o sebi; razjašnjavajući sebi sebe, možda ću uspeti nešto da razjasnim i Kragulju, njega samog, ali i moje delo koje se prelama u njemu. „Sve više osećam”, piše mi oktobra 1993. godine, „da si moj pisac”. I ja sam uvek osećao da je Kragulj moj slikar, moj crtač, tvorac šara koje su, u stvari, glasovi. O tome ću sada pokušati da pišem.

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O tome sam, zapravo već pisao. „Glasovi, šare” je naslov teksta/priče koji sam napisao za jednu mapu Kraguljevih grafika i uvrstio je u moju zbirku priča *Jednostavnost*. U to vreme, sve što sam viđao od njegovih radova sastojalo se od beskrajnih varijacija šara koje su poticale sa kravičnih leđa i bokova. Krave na njegovim crtežima prvo stoje, potom leže, zatim Kraguljevi crteži ulaze kao objektiv kamere među same šare; onda šare počinju da se oslobađaju belina i da žive same za sebe; šara postaje glas. Apstrakcija je jedina konkretnost. U mom tekstu otišao sam korak dalje i došao do beline i tišine, koji su, za mene, pravi preduslov za priču. Ne znam da li je Kragulj prešao put od crnila šare koje je polako popunjavalo prostor njegovog crteža do potpune beline papira, ali znam da je ostao u svetu apstraktnih formi, na razmeđu belog i crnog, dakle, na razmeđu odsustva boja i odsustva odsustva boja, odnosno, prisustva svetlosti i prisustva mraka.

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Nikada nisam imao priliku da sagledam celokupni likovni razvoj Radovana Kragulja. On sam na jednom mestu kaže da je počeo sa „figurativnim formama biljaka u gotovo metafizičkom prostoru, i životinja u otuđenoj i neodređenoj površini. Zatim sam došao do toga da postepeno fragmentujem, a potom i prevaziđem konkretnu formu. Time se konkretna predstava počela pretapati u apstraktni pojam. Tako je ostavljeno gledaocu da kreira svoju sopstvenu viziju slike.” Ne mogu da zamislim te biljke i životinje, kao što ne mogu sebi da predstavim metafizički prostor koji one nastanjuju, ali zato dobro razumem želju da gledalac sam formira sliku koju gleda. Nešto slično imam u vidu i kada pišem svoje priče: njihovo značenje ne određujem ja, već to čini čitalac u procesu čitanja. Čitaočeva i moja priča mogu da budu beskrajno udaljene jedna od druge, kao što gledaočeva predstava Kraguljeve slike ne mora da ima nikakve veze sa slikom koju Kragulj vidi u sebi.

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Kada sam upoznao Kragulja, on je već duboko zašao u opsednutost domaćim životinjama, njihovim odnosom sa ljudima, tragičnošću njihove sudbine i celokupne uloge u našem ekološkom sistemu. Krave, svinje i zečevi su dominirali tim prostorom. Nisam nigde video konja. Za razliku od ostalih životinja, konj se ne gaji da bi bio pojeden. Konj koji bi se pojavio na Kraguljevom crtežu bio bi nesrećan konj.

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Ne znam za svinju. Naime, februara 1977. Kragulj mi je iz Pariza poslao crtež svinje načinjen na kartonu, tako da je poslat kao dopisnica. A svinja je nacrtana olovkom; ima uvrnut repić i zvezdasto oko; njuška joj nagoveštava osmeh, doduše sasvim blag osmeh, pa izgleda da se svinja sarkastično smeška. Svinja se nalazi između latiničnih slova P i G, prvog i poslednjeg slova u engleskoj reči “pig”. Slovo i koje se nalazi nasred njenog tela, prosečeno je u kartonu i zamenjeno palidrvčetom, dok je sam crtež svinje precrtan jednim odlučnim Dž. Palidrvce je zalepljeno providnom lepljivom trakom i kada se karton okrene na drugu stranu, tamo gde je Kragulj ispisao moju adresu i poruku koju je želeo da mi saopšti, palidrvce kao da lebdi u praznini.

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Na uljanim slikama sa kraja sedamdesetih nešto doista lebdi iznad polja na kojem se nalaze krave. Lepo se vide ta dva okrugla objekta i njihove senke na travi. U tekstu u katalogu izložbe crteža, uokvirenih pomenutim slikama, jedan od likovnih kritičara definiše ih kao „crtačeve alatke, njegove olovke”. Olovke su nezaoštrene, jedna od njih ima gumicu, za drugu nisam siguran; one kao da bdiju nad kravama koje pasu, na kvadratnom, veštačkom pašnjaku.

Na jednoj slici, na onoj na kojoj se leteće olovke nalaze u samom uglu, rampa vodi na pašnjak, ali na drugoj nema rampe, već se okupljene krave (koje kao da pokušavaju da pobegnu od letećih olovaka koje su im sada znatno bliže) neodlučno zadržavaju oko stepenica. Kako će krave sići niz stepenište? Umeju li uopšte da koriste stepenište? Ili će na kraju, kada im se leteće olovke sasvim primaknu, morati da se odluče na skok sa platforme sa veštačkim pašnjakom? Teško je opisati utisak koji ostavlja ova slika. Ni magritovska ni dalijevska, ona u svom prikazu apsurdnog i krajnje realnog pripada tim slikarskim opredeljenjima, s tim da je njena poruka znatno češće povezana sa svakodnevnom stvarnošću našeg sveta. Kragulj, kako u seriji crteža sa kravama tako i u seriji crteža sa zečevima, otvoreno upozorava na brutalnost industrije mesa, na životinje koje svoj kratki život provode takoreći u ćelijama, kao osuđenici na smrt. Apsurd koji pritom u nama stvaraju njegovi crteži i slike dolazi kao svojevrsan šamar, čuška koja nas vraća u stvarnost.

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Na nešto kasnijim crtežima krave gotovo nestaju, odnosno, sve više se pretvaraju u apstrakciju. U prvi plan izbijaju ostali elementi kravljeg sveta: bale sena, ambari, štale, prilazne rampe, i svi ti elementi se neprekidno, kao kakve lego kocke, premeštaju, kombinuju, preraspoređuju, sve dok pašnjak na jednom crtežu ne dobije izgled zaravljene piramide. Sve vreme njegovi crteži pokazuju zadivljujuću usredsređenost i preciznost, koje u isto vreme prati suptilno nijansiranje, te poigravanje sa senkama i njihovom gustinom. Crteži su uglavnom smešteni u samo središte odabranog formata papira, uspostavljajući tako stalni dijalog sa belinom koja ih okružuje. Jedan likovni kritičar je, ako sam dobro upamtio, govorio o izvesnom pozorišnom utisku koji ovi crteži ostavljaju na posmatrača, i ima u tome istine. Ovi crteži doista podsećaju na scenografsku pripremu, na utvrđivanje

detalja za pozornicu velikih razmera, i odjednom shvatim da je to spektakl koji je trebalo izvesti: na bini, u pozorištu, podignut je veliki pašnjak i na njemu pasu krave. Predstava traje onoliko koliko svaki posetilac želi. Krave ionako nemaju nikakav drugi izbor.

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Ne znam da li je Kragulj ikada pomislio na takvu predstavu, ali on je često širio i dopunjavao svoje izložbe raznim trodimenzionalnim objektima i pažljivo pripremljenim instalacijama. Na primer, izložba crteža sa zečevima, održana u Antverpenu aprila 1980. godine, dopunjena je u samoj galeriji raznim objektima i instalacijama, dok je prostor ispred galerije ispunjen balama sena, upakovanim u plastiku i sa Kraguljevom adresom u Velsu. Na otvaranju izložbe Kragulj je pustio četiri zeca iz kaveza. Sve to piše u katalogu, kao što piše da Kragulj definiše svoj stil kao „koncentrisani realizam”. Podseća to, naravno, na prljavi realizam Rejmonda Karvera; ista je to svedenost, ista usredsređenost koja odbacuje najveći deo stvarnosti da bi proizvela najuverljiviju moguću sliku stvarnosti. Otuda taj osećaj apsurdna koji prožima i Kraguljev i Karverov realizam: ta koncentrisana stvarnost, izdvojena iz šireg konteksta, više ne liči na stvarnost, već se doima kao nešto izvan ovog sveta.

Konkretnost zečijeg sveta na Kraguljevim crtežima je njihov najveći apsurd; njihov realizam je, zapravo, ono što ih pravi krajnje nerealističnim, kao što Karverov „prljavi realizam” na čitaoca ostavlja isti utisak neobičnosti kao i Markesov „magijski realizam”.

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Još samo nekoliko reči o zečevima. Uveren sam da su u Kraguljevo kraljevstvo ušli posle krava. Predpostavljam da su se nametnuli svojim malim dimenzijama i belinom krzna. Krave se ne mogu upakovati jedna po jedna, dok se zečevi mogu kombinovati na razne načine, što je omogućavalo Kragulju da ih crta, između ostalog i upakovane u razne kutije, kućice i gajbice, odnosno, da njihova belina (tamne su im samo uši) posluži kao prirodni kontrast zatamnjenim delovima crteža. Osim toga, zečevi ostavljaju veći utisak na posmatrača nego krave. Retko ko, kada vidi crtež krave (ili pravu kravu, svejedno), poželi da je zagrlji i privije uz sebe, ma koliko osetio užas zbog njene hude sudbine. Milog zeca, s druge strane, svi bi rado uzeli u ruke, milovali, mazili i šaputali mu nešto na uvo. Tada užas zbog onog što očekuje zeca postaje nepodnošljiv. Prelaz sa krava na zečeve je

svojevrsno nastojanje da se pronađe kraći, brži i efikasniji put do posmatrača, da se njegov posmatrački angažman proširi iz galerijskog prostora u širi prostor, stvaran prostor u kom domaće životinje postaju upakovani proizvod još pre nego što ih zadesi nesrećna sudbina. Kragulj ne traži posmatrača, već saučesnika, istomišljenika koji je spreman da se uključi u borbu za poboljšanje životnih uslova domaćih životinja, pogotovu onih koje se proizvode za potrebe prehrambene industrije.

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Zečevi su isčezli sa Kraguljevih slika i crteža. Krave su ostale, ali sve manje u ranijem izvornom obliku a sve više kao nevidljiva podloga apstraktnih šara. Na slikama iz osamdesetih godina šare se nameću gotovo kao neka vrsta jezika. U početku, to je gotovo zagrcnut iskaz, i na slikama se nalazi obilje šara, poput gusto ispisanog teksta. Vremenom se broj šara smanjuje – jezik postaje siromašniji ali precizniji – da bi na kraju svako platno bilo samo jedna šara, krupna i uveličana, glasna kao krik. Odjednom te šare nisu više sa kravljih bokova, jer Kragulj počinje da ih natapa bojama. Crno – beli contrast ga očigledno više ne zanima. Boja takodje postaje reč.

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Šare su sada u boji. U maju 1991. godine Radovan Kragulj šalje mi jedan crtež: u sredini lista pelira nalaze se dve male pravougaone šare. Leva je crno-žuta-zelena; desna je crno-bela-crvena-zelena. Kragulj je ispod njih napisao: šara na šaru – šare. Time je zatvoren krug koji sam otvorio svojim tekstom. „Glasovi, šare.” (Uzgred: crvena, žuta i zelena, pa i crna boje su rastafarianstva. Na taj način Kraguljeve šare dobijaju za mene dodatni smisao.)

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Poslednja decenija dvadesetog veka je, možda najzanimljivija u dosadašnjem stvaralaštvu Radovana Kragulja. Trodimenzionalni objekti, kombinacije drveta i platna, intenziviranje konceptualnog pristupa, pojačano korišćenje vlastitih citata, svi ti elementi prisutni su u delima nastalim u ovom periodu. Prvo pada u oči činjenica da su šare potisnute na rub. Krug postaje dominantna figura. Životinje su iskoračile iz stvarnosti i pretvaraju

se u simbole, u vlastite naznake. Boje su jarke, žarke, ponekad je teško gledati u njih. Kragulj deluje razigranije nego ikad ranije, ali ništa manje ozbiljan. I dalje je opsednut ekologijom, čistotom našeg odnosa prema svetu. Eksplozija malih formi na kojima radi u ovoj deceniji nije odraz neuspeha ili odustajanja, već ubrzanih pokušaja da se definiše put kojim ide. Kada istekne ova decenija, kada se zakorači u XXI vek, Kragulj će se još jednom promeniti, da bi, u stvari, ostao isti.

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Negde u to vreme, stiže mi nekoliko njegovih pošiljki. Šalje mi, na primer, kartonske podmetače za čaše, koji se koriste u barovima, i koje je on dizajnirao. Jednom prilikom dobio sam pregršt zaštitnih omota od pomorandži. Nisam siguran šta je radio sa njima; možda je samo želeo da ih imam, da u prisustvu tih omota osetim prisustvo pomorandži. Dobio sam i pismo u kojem je napisao samo jednu rečenicu. Međutim, jedno drugo pismo imalo je čak tri stranice. Nekoliko puta poslao mi je razglednice. Dva puta je pisao na poledini pozivnica na otvaranje nečijih izložbi. Imam i jednu fotografiju: stojimo negde u Beogradu i delujemo kao ljudi koji ne znaju u kom pravcu da krenu. Doista, nismo znali. Na drugoj fotografiji, snimljenoj deset godina kasnije, u Parizu, delujemo smirenije, što je razumljivo, jer nismo više u odlasku, nego u povratku.

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Nisam se skrasio dok nisam pronašao omote od pomorandži: dva su iz Maroka, dva iz Španije. Svaki je drugačiji. Jedino što im je zajedničko je zlatna boja koja je korišćena na svakom omotu: svugde postoji bar jedan zlatni krug.

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U međuvremenu, Kragulj je započeo svoj verovatno najveći projekat, *Mlečni put*. U vrhu papira na kojem mi piše napisano je sledeće:

Šta je bilo pre večnosti?
Početak vremena.
A šta je bilo pre nego što je vreme počelo?
Prvobitni par.
Prva krava i prvi bik.

U dnu papira piše:

Odakle potiče život?
Život potiče iz Mlečnog puta.
A odakle potiče Mlečni put?
Iz tebe, Hator, pra-kravo!

Hator je, naravno, drevno egipatsko božanstvo, jedno od najstarijih božanstava u egipatskoj mitologiji. Najčešće se prikazuje kao žena sa kravljim rogovima, između kojih se nalazi sunce, zatim kao prelepa žena sa kravljim ušima, te kao krava koja nosi sunce između rogova. Pozivanjem na drevnu mitološku figuru, Kraguljev likovni projekat je uspostavio istorijsku vertikalu, odnosno mitologizovao svoju poetiku, uspostavljajući kravu (i njen par, bika) kao središnju životinju u našoj civilizaciji. Naspram te vertikale mogao je slobodno da uvede horizontalnu, aktuelnu, savremenu ravan svoje poetike. „Primarna tema mog rada”, napisao je Kragulj, „jeste čovekovo stalno udaljavanje i izolovanje od prirode.” I još: „Uspostavljajući naše dnevne živote, razvili smo društvo koje stvara i okružuje nas veštačkom ‘neprirodnom’ životnom sredinom.” Otuda njegov projekat prevazilazi granice umetničkog izražavanja i postaje, da tako kažem, edukativan, odnosno, upozorava na opasnost da jedan sistem, razvijajući se bez kontrole i preko svake mere, uništi sam sebe. U tom smislu, raniji Kraguljevi crteži i slike, kojima je usmeravao našu pažnju na loše uslove u našem odnosu prema domaćim životinjama, postaju vizionarski, ali takođe upozoravaju na činjenicu da se vizionari najmanje slušaju.

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Zanimljivo je da se uporedo sa Kraguljevim posezanjem za bojom i novim formama, sa onim što sam nazvao njegovom razigranošću, odigrava i suprotan proces, koji vodi u namerno lišavanje boja, monohromatske crteže i grafike, svodenje na najjednostavnije

elemente. Asimilacija postaje njegova opsesivna tema: proces pretvaranja u nešto novo, kao i istovremenog prilagođavanja. Na grafici koja se takođe zove „Asimilacija” i visi na zidu spavaće sobe u našoj kući u Kalgariju, šest kvadratnih stvorenja sa malim repovima čeka da im se pridruži isto takvo sedmo stvorenje; jedina razlika između njih je u nijansi: sedmo stvorenje je malo svetlije, dok je ostalih šest već skoro tamno kao grafitni mrak koji ih okružuje. Kragulj je uvek bio sklon mističnom i nadnaravnom, ali ovog puta, u seriji radova pod nazivom „Asimilacija”, nikako ne mogu da uhvatim nit mogućeg tumačenja. Da li je asimilacija proces kroz koji moramo da prođemo da bismo se uklopili u Kraguljev znatno širi projekat ekološke obnove i očuvanja sredine? Ili je, upravo suprotno, asimilacija ono što će se na neki način isprečiti na tom putu? Napokon, da li je asimilacija put ka sreći ili put ka lišavanju svih osobenosti, onoga što od svakog od nas pravi jedinstveno i neponovljivo živo biće? Možda nas ovom serijom Kragulj upozorava da se najveća opasnost krije upravo u brisanju razlika, da su pokušaji genetskog modifikovanja i stvaranja istovetnih poljoprivrednih proizvoda put koji najbrže vodi do kraja, do mraka koji izvire iz pomenute grafike? Ako je to tačno onda je Kraguljeva vizija krajnje sumorna, ali i razumljiva posle toliko godina uloženi u stvaranje dela koji upozoravaju i opominju. Ipak je shvatam kao najavu nade, jer kada mrak ispuni do kraja prostor njegovih slika, objekata, crteža i grafika, mora da dođe do novog otvaranja. Odnekle će, prvo krišom pa onda naglo, istupiti svetlost i zečevi će veselo trčati livadom na kojoj pasu krave.

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Kragulj ovako govori o svom odnosu prema bojama: „U mojim radovima boja nije dominantno prisutna; uglavnom koristim crno-beli dijalog, u svim nijansama i dubinama crne i bele. A kada koristim boju, ona je za mene važan element za komunikaciju i kontemplaciju. Svaka boja ima svoju priču.” Znači li to da je serija pod nazivom „Asimilacija” prica o gubljenju priče ispričana gubljenjem boje? Ali, crna i bela su takođe boje ili, bolje rečeno bezbojne boje, bar u očima laika, i ako je to tačno, onda nije u pitanju gubitak priče već odustajanje od jedne priče u korist druge, povratak tamo gde se pripovedač najbolje oseća. U Kraguljevom slučaju to je povratak u prividnu „bezbojnost”, praćen verovatno odlaskom u Vels koji, slutim, predstavlja rajsko mesto za njega. On se, naravno, dobro oseća i u Parizu, kao i u Beogradu, ali Vels je mesto koje je dobilo mitsku snagu u njegovom životu. Sve ono što čini njegov unutarnji svet, uveren sam, Kragulj je preneo u Vels, sagradivši tamo unutrašnji zamak, svet iscrtan grafitnom olovkom,

svet nad kojim bdije kao čuvar u nacionalnom parku, povremeno dodajući jednu crtu ovamo i jedno zasenčenje onamo, kad god nešto ugrozi taj svet ili poremeti ravnotežu u njemu. Zečevi, krave i svinje mirno se kreću tim prostorom, najzad slobodni, oslobođeni stega transportnih kutija, kaveza, štala i obora. A kada sam Kragulj kroči u taj svet, kakav radostan metež nastaje! Na slaništu se napravi red, jer svaka životinja želi da liže so sa njegovog dlana. Kragulj se saginje i svakoj od njih šapuće nešto na uvo. Za to vreme kristali soli svetlucaju i zaslepljuju slučajnog prolaznika, odnosno, mene. Tako ne stižem da ga pitam šta šapuće svim tim životinjama na uvo, a i da sam ga pitao, verovatno ne bi odgovorio ili bi, možda, rekao da tajne moraju da ostanu tajne i nastavio da im tiho zbori na uvo. Tako je Noje, pretpostavljam, dozivao zveri u svoju barku da bi ih sačuvao od potopa koji tek što nije naišao. Slično njemu, suočen sa mogućnošću ekološkog potopa, Kragulj priprema svoje životinje i pokušava da ih sačuva od tragične sudbine. Njegovi crteži su, zapravo, male barke.

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Moja barka je rastegnuta između crteža kravice na zidu moje radne sobe u Zemunu i grafike posvećene asimilaciji koji visi na zidu spavaće sobe u Kalgariju. Od lepote kravice stigao sam do straha od asimilacije. I ne pokušavajući da to uradi, Kragulj je nacrtao moj život.

Možda sam ja, i ne znajući to, opisao njegov život u nekoj mojoj knjizi. Šare su, u svakom slučaju, postale glasovi; sada glasovi ponovo postaju šare, što znači da se neću iznenaditi ukoliko jednog dana, kad pogledam kroz prozor, ovde u Kalgariju, ugledam u našem zadnjem dvorištu kravu. Zečevi su već stigli.

„Uspomena na slikarstvo”, Umetnička galerija Nadežda Petrović, Čačak, 2007.

Radovan Kragulj

Radovan Kragulj rođen je 1935. godine i odrastao je na malom imanju blizu Prijedora u bivšoj Jugoslaviji, sada Bosni i Hercegovini. Studirao je na Likovnoj akademiji u Beogradu od 1953. do 1960. godine. Od Britanskog saveta je dobio stipendiju za pohađanje Centralne škole za umetnost i veštine u Londonu 1962-63, a zatim je i predavao u umetničkim školama u Engleskoj, Belgiji i Francuskoj, među kojim: Manchester College of Art, London College of Printing, Central School of Art u Londonu, Les Ecoles des Beaux Arts u Monsu i Briselu i Parson School of Art u Parizu. Početkom sedamdesetih je prvi put posetio Vels te je ubrzo nakon toga kupio malu kuću na jednom imanju u blizini Bilt Velsa. Od tada živi i radi na relaciji Vels-Pariz. Prve samostalne izložbe u Londonu, održane su na Institutu za savremenu umetnost 1965. godine te u galeriji Angela Flowers 1977. godine. Godine 1978. izlagao je u Flamanskom kulturnom centru Westrand - Dilbeek (Belgija), Salonu Muzeja savremene umetnosti u Beogradu 1979, zatim u Fondaciji Veranneman Kruishoutm (Belgija) 1978-1981. godine, Međunarodnom kulturnom centru Antwerpen (Belgija) 1980. godine.

Među kasnijim samostalnim izložbama, tu su izložba u Centru za savremenu umetnost Bemis u Omaha državi Nebraska (SAD) 1988. godine, zatim izložba u Muzeju moderne umetnosti u Parizu 1989. godine, Umetničkoj galeriji u Sarajevu 1990. godine, Muzeju moderne umetnosti u Ostende (Belgija) 1991. godine, u umetničkom centru Chapter u Kardifu 1995, u Salonu Muzeja savremene umetnosti u Beogradu 1998, Galeriji Linear-Dilbeek (Belgija) 2011. godine.

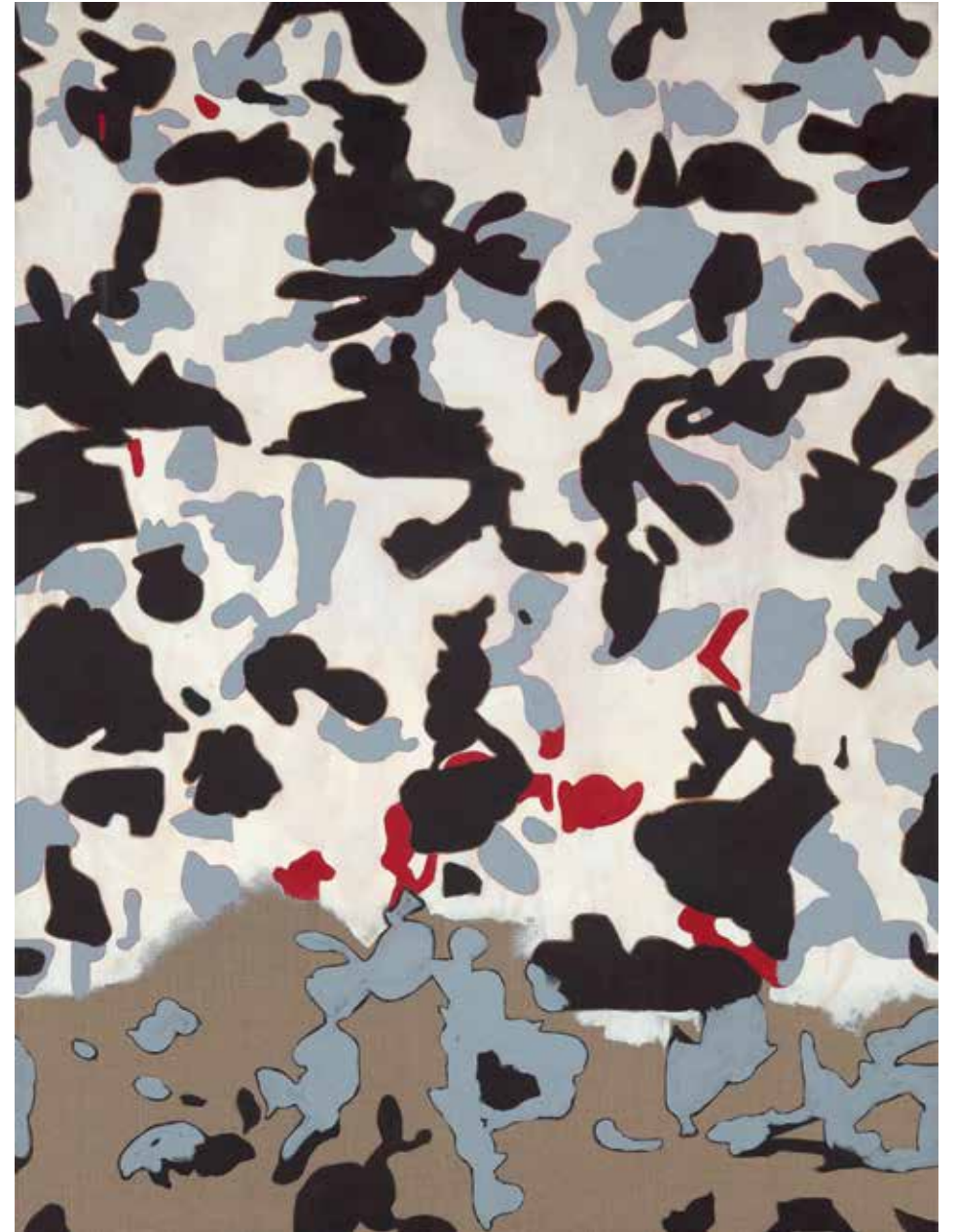
Tokom godina, učestvovao je na više od 200 grupnih izložbi, kao i na bijenalima u šesnaest zemalja. Među važnijim zbirkama koje sadrže njegove radove su zbirke Britanskog muzeja i Viktorijinog i Albertovog muzeja u Londonu, Muzeja moderne umjetnosti u Njujorku, Umetničke galerije grada Mančestera, Muzeja moderne umetnosti grada Pariza, Nacionalnog muzeja i galerije u Kardifu, Nacionalne biblioteke u Parizu, Briselu, Aberistvitu (Vels), Kongresne biblioteke u Vašingtonu i Roland Penrose zbirka u Ujedinjenom kraljevstvu, Muzeja savremene umetnosti u Beogradu, Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu...

Premинуo je u Parizu 2022. godine.

KATALOG / CATALOGUE



1. *Livestock*, 1987.



2. *Impulsion 4*, 1988.



3. *Traite*, 1989.



4. *Voies lactees*, 1989.



5. *Livestock*, 1997.



6. *Identification: Containment*, serija (p) 2012/13.



7. *Voies lactees*, 1990.



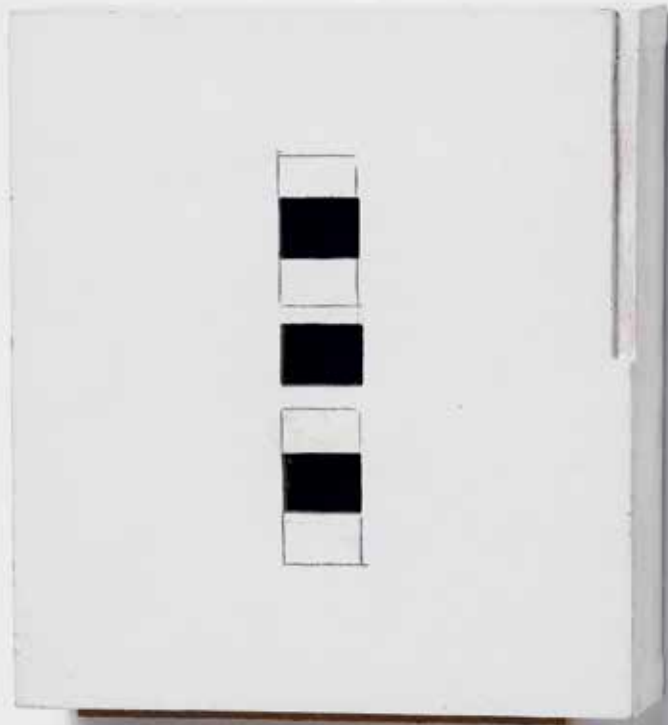
8. *Inscription: Connection*, 1990.



9. *Containment*, series 2005.



10. *Containment*, series 2005.



11. *Polarisation: Identification*, 2009.



12. *Inscription: Description*, 2009.



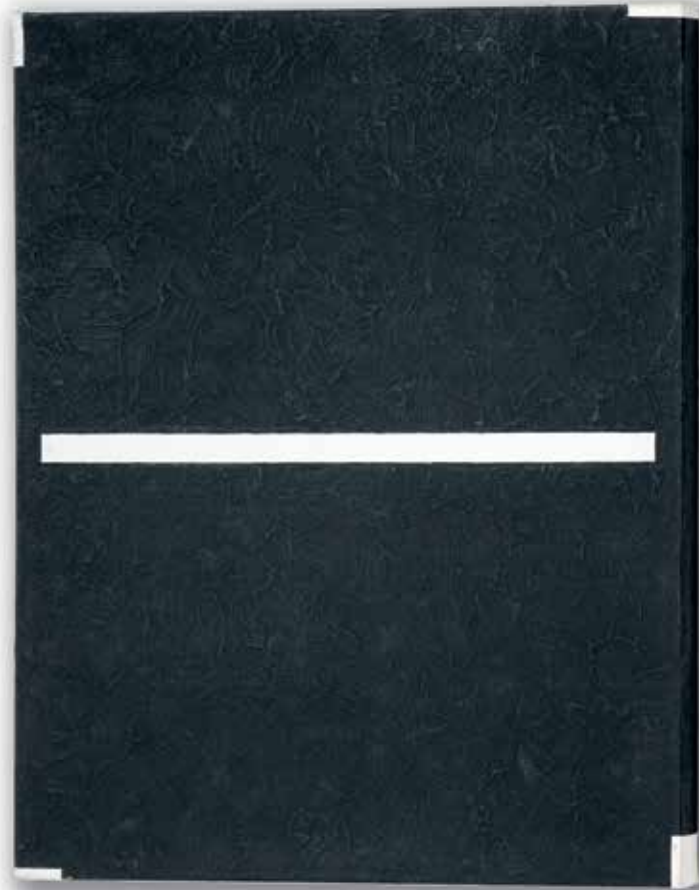
13. *Polarisation w/w*, 2008.



14. *Identification: Containment*, series 2000/12.



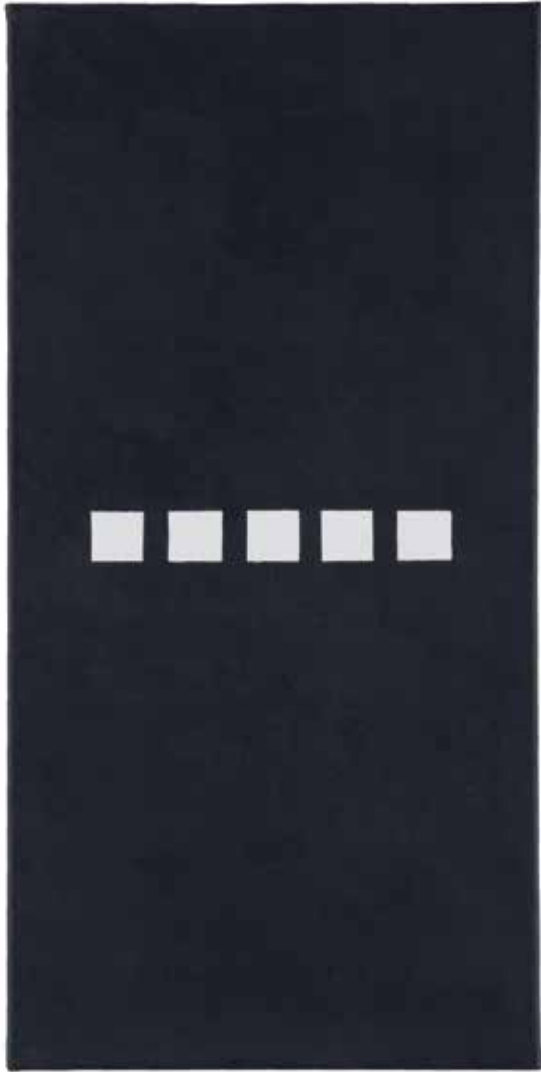
15. *Polarisation: Resonance*, diptih, 2009.



16. *Identification: Containment*, 2013.



17. *Identification: Containment*, 2013.



18. *Identification: Containment*, diptih, 2015.



19. *Inscription: Celule*, poliptih, 2017.

*

It is my wish to write about Radovan Kragulj, but I am hesitant. It is not a matter of "fear" that I felt when I wrote about Radomir Reljić, but rather my doubts that I can write a text the way Kragulj draws, which, I believe, would be the only way to write about him. And really, can one write the way one draws? And does doubting that possibility, which I have already expressed, makes this undertaking unfeasible, in view of the fact that the doubt I have voiced is as real as the reality of this text. And is it just as real as the reggae music to the sounds of which I am writing this (the album *Upon the Bridge* by the group called Groundation) or as the cat which, after I refused to let it jump into my lap, dejectedly climbs onto a box under my writing desk. All of that is happening now (my neighbour, I hear, is removing the snow in front of his house), and it all thwarts my efforts aimed at arriving at an answer. Kragulj, judging by his letters, always found it more difficult to write than to draw, whereas with me it was the other way round. In fact, I have never drawn myself, I don't know why I'm saying this. Because I'm hesitant to admit that I have set myself an impossible goal, that is the real answer. And I feel better immediately. So, I'm not going to draw, we can all breathe a sigh of relief, but I'm going to write about Kragulj in the only way possible to me: showing how his work is refracted inside me. There is no text about another; each text is about the one who is writing it; writing about Kragulj, I'll learn something about myself; explaining myself to me, I may manage to explain something to Kragulj, himself, and also my work that is refracted inside him. "I increasingly feel", he wrote to me in October 1993, "that you are my writer." I, too, have always felt Kragulj to be my painter, my drawer, creator of patterns that are, in fact, voices. That is what I'll try to write about now.

*

Actually, I have already written about it. "Voices, Patterns" is the title of a text/ story that I wrote for inclusion in a map of Kragulj's graphic works; I also included it in my collection of stories *Simplicity*. At that time, all I saw of his works were endless variations of patterns taken from the backs and flanks of cows. The cows in his drawings stand, to begin with, then they lie, and then Kragulj's drawings enter among the patterns themselves in the manner of a camera lens; then the patterns begin to rid themselves of the white parts and to live for themselves; a pattern becomes a voice. Abstraction is the only thing that is concrete. In my text, I went one step further, reaching whiteness and silence, which, for me

at least, are the real prerequisites for a story. I don't know if Kragulj went all the way from the blackness of the pattern slowly filling up the space of his drawing to the total whiteness of paper, but I do know that he has remained in the world of abstract forms, at the boundary of white and black, therefore, at the boundary of absence of colour and absence of absence of colour, that is, the presence of light and the presence of darkness.

*

I have never had the opportunity to review the entire fine arts development of Radovan Kragulj. He said himself once that he had started with "figurative forms of plants in an almost metaphysical space, and of animals on an alienated and indeterminate surface. Then I gradually came to fragmentation and subsequently overcoming of concrete form. Thus a concrete image started turning into an abstract notion. In this way, it was left to the viewer to create his or her own vision of the picture." I cannot imagine those plants and animals, just as I cannot visualise for myself the metaphysical space that they inhabit, but I understand quite well the desire for the viewer to form the picture he/she is watching for him/herself. I envisage something similar when I write my stories: it is not me who determines their meaning, but the reader in the process of reading. The reader's story and mine can be immeasurably distant from each other, just as the viewer's notion of Kragulj's picture does not necessarily have anything to do within the picture Kragulj sees inside himself.

*

When I got to know Kragulj, he was already deeply obsessed with domestic animals, their relations with people, the tragic nature of their fate and their overall role in our ecological system. Cows, pigs and rabbits dominated that space. I couldn't see a horse anywhere. As opposed to other animals, a horse is not bred in order to be eaten. Any horse that appeared in a drawing by Kragulj would be an unfortunate horse.

*

I wouldn't know about pigs. Actually, in February 1977 Kragulj sent me from Paris a drawing of a pig made on cardboard, so he used it as a postcard. The pig was drawn using a pencil; it has a coiled tail and a star-shaped eye; its snout suggests a smile, true, a very mild one, so it appears that the pig is smiling sarcastically. The pig is placed between Latin script letters P and G, the first and the last letter in the English word "pig". The letter I, which is placed in the middle of the pig's body, was cut out of the cardboard and replaced with a matchstick, whereas the actual drawing of the pig is resolutely crossed by the Serbian letter Dž. The matchstick is glued to the cardboard using a see-through adhesive tape, and when the cardboard is turned over, in the place where Kragulj wrote my address and the message he wanted to send me, the matchstick seems to be floating in a void.

*

In his oil paintings dating from the late 1970's something does float above the field where the cows are. One can clearly see two tubular objects and their shadows in the grass. In the text included in the catalogue of his exhibition of drawings, framed by the pictures mentioned above, they are defined by one fine arts critic as "the drawer's tools, his pencils". The pencils are not sharpened, one of them is equipped with an eraser, I am not sure about the other one; they seem to be watching over the grazing cows standing on a square, artificial-looking pasture.

In one picture, the one where the flying pencils are placed in one of its corners, there is a ramp leading to the pasture, while in another one there is no ramp, and the gathered cows (which seem to be trying to run away from the flying pencils, now much closer to them) pause indecisively around a flight of stairs. How will the cows climb down the stairs? Can they use the stairs at all? Or will they eventually, when the flying pencils get quite close to them, have to opt for jumping off the platform containing the artificial pasture? It is difficult to describe the impression that this picture imposes on the viewer. Neither Magritte-like nor Dali-like, in its presentation of the absurd and the extremely real, it belongs to those painterly options, bearing in mind that its message is rather more often connected to the everyday reality of our world. Both in his series of drawings of cows and the series of drawings of rabbits, Kragulj openly warns of the brutality of the meat industry, of the fact

that animals spend their short lives in cells, as it were, in the manner of death row inmates. The sense of absurdity that his drawings and pictures evoke in us comes as a slap in the face of sorts, a blow that brings us back to reality.

★

In his drawings created somewhat later, cows almost disappear, that is to say, they increasingly turn into abstraction. Other elements of the cows' world come to the foreground: bales of hay, barns, stables, access ramps, and all those elements are incessantly shifted, combined and rearranged in the manner of Lego cubes until, in one drawing, the pasture assumes the shape of a truncated pyramid. All the while his drawings manifest an admirable focus and precision, which are simultaneously accompanied by subtle nuancing and playing with shadows and their density. The drawings are, for the most part, placed in the very centre of the chosen paper sheet format, thus establishing a continual dialogue with the whiteness that surrounds them. One fine arts critic, if my memory serves me well, spoke of a theatrical impression that these drawings evoked in the viewer, and there is an element of truth to this claim. These drawings do remind one of preparations for a set design, of working out details for a large-scale stage, and all of a sudden I realise that it is a spectacle to be performed: on a stage, inside a theatre, a great pasture has been erected and cows graze upon it. The performance lasts as long as each and every visitor wants it to. The cows do not have any other choice anyway.

★

I don't know if Kragulj has ever thought of such a performance, but he has often expanded and added to his exhibitions by means of various tridimensional objects and carefully prepared installations. For example, an exhibition of his rabbit drawings, held in Antwerp in April 1980, was added to inside the actual gallery by using various objects and installations, while the space outside the gallery was filled with bales of hay, packed in plastic foil, containing Kragulj's address in Wales. During the opening ceremony, Kragulj let four rabbits out of a cage. All that is mentioned in the catalogue, as well as the fact that Kragulj defines his style as "concentrated realism". This, of course, is reminiscent of Raymond Carver's dirty realism; we see the same austerity, the same kind of focusing that rejects the major

part of reality in order to produce the most convincing picture of reality. Hence this feeling of absurdity that permeates both Kragulj's and Carver's realism: that concentrated reality, separated from the broader context, no longer looks like reality but seems like something outside of this world.

The concreteness of the rabbits' world in Kragulj's drawings constitutes their greatest absurdity; actually, it is their realism that makes them extremely unrealistic, just as Carver's "dirty realism" leaves the reader with the same impression of strangeness as Márquez's "magic realism".

★

Just a little bit more about rabbits. I am convinced that they entered Kragulj's kingdom after cows. I suppose that they imposed themselves owing to their small dimensions and the whiteness of their fur. Cows cannot be packed one by one, whereas rabbits can be combined in various ways, which made it possible for Kragulj to draw them, among other things, as being packed in various boxes, little houses and baskets, that is, to make their whiteness (as only their ears were dark) serve as a natural contrast to the darkened segments of the drawing. In addition to this, rabbits make a greater impression on the viewer than cows. Few people, when seeing a drawing of a cow (or a real cow, for that matter), wish to embrace it and hold it next to themselves, no matter how horrified they may be by its horrible fate. As opposed to this, everybody would gladly take a cuddly bunny in their hands, caress it, cuddle it and whisper endearments in its ear. Then the horror felt because of the fate that awaits the rabbit becomes unbearable. The switch from cows to rabbits constitutes Kragulj's effort to find a shorter, quicker and more efficient access to the viewer, to expand the viewer's engagement from the gallery space to a broader, real space wherein domestic animals become a packed product even before their sorry fate befalls them. Kragulj does not look for a viewer but for an accomplice, a like-minded individual who is prepared to get engaged in the struggle for improving the living conditions of domestic animals, especially those bred for the benefit of the food industry.

*

Rabbits disappeared from Kragulj's paintings and drawings. Cows remained, but increasingly less in their former original shape, and more and more often as the invisible grounding of abstract patterns. In his paintings from the 1980's, the patterns impose themselves almost as a kind of language. Initially, it is an almost choked-up statement, and the pictures contain an abundance of patterns, reminiscent of a densely written out text. Over time, the number of patterns decreased – the language became reduced but more precise – until eventually each canvas was a single pattern, large and magnified, as loud as a scream. All of a sudden, those patterns were no longer from cows' flanks, for Kragulj started drenching them with colours. The black-white contrast was obviously no longer of interest to him. Colour also became a word.

*

The patterns were now coloured. In May 1991, Radovan Kragulj sent me a drawing: in the middle of an onionskin sheet of paper there are two small rectangular patterns. The one on the left is black, yellow and green; the one on the right is black, white, red and green. Underneath, Kragulj wrote: pattern on pattern – patterns. This closed the circle which I opened with my text entitled "Voices, Patterns." (Incidentally: red, yellow and green, even black, are the colours of Rastafarianism. For me, this confers additional meaning on Kragulj's patterns.)

*

The final decade of the twentieth century is perhaps the most interesting one in Radovan Kragulj's opus so far. Tridimensional objects, combinations of wood and canvas, intensifying the conceptual approach, increased use of his own quotes, all these elements are to be found in his works created during this period. What one notices first is the fact that patterns were pushed to the edge. The circle became the dominant figure. Animals stepped out of reality and turned into symbols, into their own signs. The colours were loud, hot, sometimes difficult to look at. Kragulj seemed more playful than ever before, but no less serious. He was still obsessed with ecology, the purity of our attitude towards the world. The explosion of small forms on which he worked during this decade was not a reflection of failure or

giving up, but of accelerated attempts to define the path he was moving on. When this decade came to a close, giving way to the 21st century, Kragulj would change once again in order to actually remain the same.

*

Around that time, I received several parcels from him. For example, he sent me cardboard coasters of the kind used in bars which he designed himself. On one occasion I received a pile of orange wrappers. I do not know for certain what he did with them; perhaps he merely wished for me to have them, to feel the presence of oranges in the presence of those wrappers. I also received a letter in which he wrote just one sentence. However, there was another letter that contained no less than three pages. On several occasions he sent me picture postcards. On two occasions he wrote to me on the back of invitations to someone's exhibitions. I also have a photograph of us: we stand somewhere in Belgrade and look like people who do not know which direction they should take. In truth, we really did not know that. In another photograph, taken ten years later in Paris, we seem to be calmer, which is understandable, for we are no longer leaving but returning.

*

I could not rest until I found the orange wrappers: two of them were from Morocco, two from Spain. Each one is different from the rest. The only thing they have in common is the gold colour used in each one of them: every wrapper contains at least one golden circle.

*

In the meantime, Kragulj embarked on what was probably his greatest project, The Milky Way. At the top of the sheet of paper on which he wrote to me it said:

What was there before eternity?
The beginning of time.

And what was there before time began?
The original pair.
The first cow and the first bull.

At the bottom of the paper it said:

Where does life originate from?

Life originates from the Milky Way.
And where does the Milky Way originate from?
From you, Hator, the ur-cow!

Hator, of course, was an ancient Egyptian deity, one of the oldest deities in Egyptian mythology. It is most often presented as a woman with cow's horns, between which is the Sun, then as a beautiful woman with cow's ears, and as a cow that carries the Sun between its horns. Through the reference to an ancient mythological figure, Kragulj's fine arts project established a historical vertical, that is, mythologised his poetics, establishing the cow (and its pair, the bull) as the central animal in our civilisation. Against the said vertical, he could freely introduce a horizontal, current, contemporary plane of his poetics. "The primary theme of my work", Kragulj wrote, "is man's constant distancing and isolation from nature." Also: "Establishing our ancient lives, we developed a society that creates and surrounds us with an artificial 'unnatural natural' environment." Therefore, his project exceeds the boundaries of artistic expression and becomes, so to speak, educational, that is, it warns of the danger that a system, by developing without control and excessively, may destroy itself. In that sense, Kragulj's earlier drawings and paintings, through which he directed our attention towards the bad aspects of our attitude to domestic animals, become visionary, but they also warn of the fact that visionaries are least listened to.

★

It is interesting to note that, parallel with Kragulj's reaching out for colour and new forms, parallel with what I called his playfulness, there unfolded an opposite process, which led to an intentional deprivation of colours, monochromatic drawings and paintings, reduction to the simplest elements. Assimilation became his obsessive theme: the process of transforming into something new, as well as simultaneous adaptation. In a graphic work

also called "Assimilation", which hangs on a bedroom wall in our house in Calgary, six square creatures with tiny tails wait for a seventh such creature to join them; the only difference between them is a matter of nuance: the seventh creature is a little lighter, while the other six are almost dark already, as dark as the graphite darkness that surrounds them. Kragulj was always prone to the mystical and the supernatural, but this time, in a series of works entitled "Assimilation", I can never manage to capture the thread of a possible interpretation. Is assimilation a process that we must undergo in order to fit into Kragulj's considerably broader project of ecological renewal and preservation of the environment? Or is it precisely the opposite, is assimilation that which will somehow crop up on that path? Finally, is assimilation a path towards happiness or a path towards being deprived of all the specificities, of that which makes every one of us a unique and unrepeatable living being? Perhaps through this series Kragulj warns us that the greatest danger lurks precisely in erasing differences, that attempts at genetic modification and creation of identical agricultural products constitute the quickest path to the end, to the darkness emanating from the said graphic work? If that is correct, then Kragulj's vision is an exceptionally bleak one, as well as understandable after so many years spent creating works that warn and alert us. And yet, I understand it as a declaration of hope, for when darkness entirely fills the space of his pictures, objects, drawings and graphic works, some new opening must occur. Light will break in from somewhere, at first stealthily and then abruptly, and rabbits will merrily run across the meadow where cows graze.

★

Kragulj speaks of his attitude towards colours like this: "In my works colour is not a dominant presence; for the most part, I use a black-white dialogue, in all the nuances and depths of black and white. And when I do use colour, for me it is an important element for communication and contemplation. Each colour has its own story." Does that mean that the series entitled "Assimilation" speaks of losing a story through loss of colour? But black and white are also colours, or to put it more precisely, colourless colours, at least in the eyes of a layman, and if that is so, then it is not a matter of losing a story but of giving up one story in favour of another one, of returning to where the narrator feels best. In Kragulj's case, it is a return to a seeming "colourlessness", probably accompanied by his going to Wales, which, I sense, represents a heavenly place for him. Naturally, he feels good in Paris as well, and also in Belgrade, but Wales is a place that assumed a mythical significance in

his life. I am convinced that, whatever makes his inner world, Kragulj took along to Wales, building an inner castle there, a world drawn using a graphite pencil, a world he watches over in the manner of a guard in a national park, occasionally adding a line here and a shade there whenever something threatens that world or disturbs its balance. Rabbits, cows and pigs move through that space peacefully, free at last, freed from the confines of transport boxes, cages, stables and pigsties. And when Kragulj himself steps into that world, what a joyous chaos ensues! A queue is formed, for every animal wants to lick salt off his palm. Kragulj leans down and whispers something into each animal's ear. All the while, salt crystals glitter and blind a casual passer-by, that is, myself. That is why I don't manage to ask him what it is that he whispers into all those animals' ears, and even if I had asked him, he probably wouldn't have answered me, or perhaps he would have said that secrets had to remain secrets and continued softly speaking into their ears. That was how Noah, I suppose, called animals to get them onto his ark in order to preserve them from the Deluge that was imminent. In a similar manner, faced with the possibility of an ecological deluge, Kragulj prepares his animals and tries to save them from their tragic fate. His drawings are actually small arks.

★

My ark is stretched between the drawing of a little cow on a wall of my study in Zemun and a graphic work dedicated to assimilation that hangs on a wall of my bedroom in Calgary. From the beauty of the little cow I arrived at fear of assimilation. Without even trying to do so, Kragulj drew my life.

Maybe I, without knowing it, described his life in one of my books. The patterns, in any case, turned into voices; now voices are turning into patterns again, which means that I won't be surprised if one day, when I look through my window here in Calgary, I see a cow in our back yard. The rabbits have already arrived.

"A Memory of Painting", The Art Gallery Nadežda Petrović, Čačak, 2007

Radovan Kragulj

Radovan Kraguly was born in 1935 and brought up on a small farm near Prjedor in the former Yugoslavia, now Bosnia-Herzegovina. Kraguly studied at the Academy of Fine Art in Belgrade 1953-60 and received a grant from the British Council to attend the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London 1962-63 before going on to lecture at art schools in England, Belgium and France, among which: Manchester College of Art, London College of Printing, Central School of Art London, Les Ecoles des Beaux Arts in Monsu and Brisel and Parson School of Art in Paris. In the early 1970s he first visited Wales and soon after bought a farmhouse deep in the countryside near BUILT Wales. Since then, his life and work have alternated between mid-Wales and Paris. First solo exhibitions in London were held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1965 (ICA) and Angela Flowers Gallery 1977, Flamish Cultural Centre Werstrand - Dilbeek 1978, Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU) in Belgrade 1979, Fondation Veranneman Kruishoutem 1978-81, Internacional Cultural Centre (ICC) Antwerpen 1980.

Amongst later solo exhibitions were those at the Bemis Center of Contemporary Art in Omaha 1988, Musée d'Art Moderne (MAM) in Paris 1989, Umetnička galerija in Sarajevo 1990, Museum of Modern Art (PMMK) in Ostende 1991, Chapter Art Centre in Cardiff 1995 and Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU) in Belgrade 1998, Gallery Linear - Dilbeek (Bxl) 2011.

Over the years, he has taken part in more than 200 group exhibitions, and in biennales in sixteen countries. Major collections in which his work is represented include the British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Museum of Modern Art in New York, Manchester City Art Gallery, National Museum and Art Gallery in Cardiff, Bibliothèque Nationale and Prenten Cabinets, Paris, Brussel, Aberyswith and Library of Congress, Washington, Roland Penrose Collection UK, Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, National Museum in Belgrade... He passed away in Paris in 2022.

KATALOG / CATALOGUE

1. *Livestock*, 1987, akril na platnu, 116x89 cm
Livestock, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 116x89 cm
2. *Impulsion 4*, 1988, akril na platnu, 130x97 cm
Impulsion 4, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 130x97 cm
3. *Traite*, 1989, model makete za instalacijo, skulptura boja na drvetu, 19x10.5 cm
Traite, 1989, model maquette for installation, sculpture wood paint, 19x10.5 cm
4. *Voies lactees*, 1989, asamblaž: platno, tekstil, akril, pleksi, 41x30x5,5 cm
Voies lactees, 1989, assemblage: canvas, textile, acrylic, plexi, 41x30x5.5 cm
5. *Livestock*, 1997, akril na platnu, 50x50 cm
Livestock, 1997, acrylic on canvas, 50x50 cm
6. *Identification: Containment*, serija (p) 2012/13, akril na panelu, 50x40x4cm
Identification: Containment, series (p) 2012/ 13, acrylic on panel, 50x40x4 cm
7. *Voies lactees*, 1990, akril na drvetu, 14.5x11 cm
Voies lactees, 1990, acrylic on wood, 14.5x11 cm
8. *Inscription: Conection*, 1990, akril na drvetu, 12x6,5x4 cm
Inscription: Conection, 1990, acrylic on wood, 12x6,5x4 cm
9. *Containment*, series 2005, akril na drvetu, 11x11x2 cm
Containment, series 2005, acrylic on wood, 11x11x2 cm
10. *Containment*, series 2005, akril na drvetu, 11x11x2 cm
Containment, series 2005, acrylic on wood, 11x11x2 cm
11. *Polarisation: Identification*, 2009, akril na drvetu, 12.5x11.5x4 cm
Polarisation: Identification, 2009, acrylic on wood, 12.5x11.5x4 cm
12. *Inscription: Description*, 2009, akril na drvetu, 14.5x9x4.5 cm
Inscription: Description, 2009, acrylic on wood, 14.5x9x4.5 cm

13. *Polarisation w/w*, 2008, karton, akril, perforacija, 12.5x13.5x14.5 cm
Polarisation w/w, 2008, cardboard, acrylic, with perforation, 12.5x13.5x14.5 cm
14. *Identification: Containment*, series 2000/12, akril na drvetu, 12.5x11.5x4 cm
Identification: Containment, series 2000/ 12, acrylic on wood, 12.5x11.5x4 cm
15. *Polarisation: Resonance*, diptih, 2009, akril na platnu, 33x17 cm
Polarisation: Resonance, diptych, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 33x17 cm
16. *Identification: Containment*, 2013, akril na panelu, 50x40x4 cm
Identification: Containment, 2013, acrylic on panel, 50x40x4 cm
17. *Identification: Containment*, 2013, akril na panelu, 65x24x4 cm
Identification: Containment, 2013, acrylic on panel, 65x24x4 cm
18. *Identification: Containment*, diptih, 2015, akril na platnu, 60x30 cm
Identification: Containment, diptych, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 60x30 cm
19. *Inscription: Celule*, poliptih, 2017, akril na platnu, 30x30 cm
Inscription: Celule, polyptych, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 30x30 cm

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