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## BREDA'S LESSON





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Trieste Contemporanea and Juliet

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a few introductory words by Giuliana Carbi Jesurun	14
contributions by	
JANKA VUKMIR	18
MIHA COLNER	26
MARTINA MUNIVRANA	32
ANA ČAVIĆ	38
FIORA GANDOLFI	46
DUBRAVKA CHERUBINI	50
MARIO FLECHA	54
BERISLAV VODOPIJA	60
MARKO SOSIČ	64
biographies	70
about Breda Beban	74







It is great pleasure that Trieste Contemporanea now makes this little book available to friends and scholars. This is a collection from the symposium on the art and life of Breda Beban organized on April 22th, 2017 in Trieste, curators Ana Čavić and Dubravka Cherubini and in association with the artist's estate and the Kalfayan Galleries (Athens - Thessaloniki).

The symposium had the collaboration of the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, that gave us the joy of seeing the video recording of a lecture Breda gave at this educational institution in 2008, and amazingly commenting her 2006 video *The most beautiful woman in Gucha*.

Drawing on the experience of international art curators and art world professionals that were also Breda's close friends, this first symposium, dedicated to Breda Beban five years after she died, offered a unique perspective in considering the significance and impact of her artistic work and the teaching.

With very personal memories, critical themes in contemporary art have

been explored, which are closely related to Beban's work – such as artist and morality or photography (humans and love) on the margins of big stories about geography and politics. So, now an intense and complete portrayal of the great artistic and moral figure of Breda, who I too had the honour of knowing and loving, emerges from these pages.

I hope that they are a stimulus for further studies and also for the study of the projects that the artist has left uncompleted and which are very current and absolutely worthy of being implemented with an enthusiasm equal to hers. Among them the exciting educational project *The Endless School*, which she has described as "not a school of illusion, but a school of real space; not a school of isolation, but a school of participation; not a school of indoctrination, but a school of inspiration" and whose goal she has focused with the words of Philippe Starck: "To be swept away with euphoria, enthusiasm, with optimism: to be taken to extraordinary places which are about our origins, about what life should be today, about what we should

become tomorrow”.

As of now, Trieste Contemporanea is ready to help fulfil her dream to put this school into operation – an extremely important new kind of school which is needed today more than ever.

I sincerely thank everyone who contributed to the Trieste meeting – Ana Čavić, Miha Colner, Mario Flecha, Fiora Gandolfi, Martina Munivrana, Marko Sosič and Janka Vukmir – and Dubravka Cherubini and Berislav Vodopija that added their love for Breda to this book.

Giuliana Carbi Jesurun  
President  
Trieste Contemporanea Committee





What I liked most about this invitation, which I thank you for, is that this is not only an academic exploration of Breda's work, but it also includes the opportunity to remember her life. These two things are inextricably interwoven, maybe especially so in Breda's case, and I will endeavour to steer my presentation exactly on this thin border line.

I never worked with Breda, I never exhibited or curated her works, but as I get older, each day, I find myself belonging to an ever-smaller group of people who remember Breda from her times in Zagreb.

I knew of Breda from attending exhibitions in Zagreb and from the places we were all went to, regardless of age-group. Breda was the most beautiful woman in town and she was part of a strikingly beautiful couple together with her husband Ognjan. We lived in a similar neighbourhood, so I would see them strolling past my house. Breda was already an artist when I was still a school pupil and student, although the age difference today wouldn't have been that substantial. She started exhibiting in the early 80s, with her first solo show, and many other later professional

appearances in Belgrade and other places in Yugoslavia, and Zagreb of course. Being a child of a mining engineer, she had the Yugoslav-style nomadic life, often moving due to her parents' work-duties, so she probably felt at home all around the country. This nomadism stayed with her all of her time. She made sudden and unchangeable shifts between units or chapters of her life.

The 80s were the time of a great New Wave in Yugoslav music and overall culture too, so we were all travelling to concerts and exhibitions between Zagreb, Belgrade and Ljubljana. By the mid-80s Sarajevo as well. The whole country was in a flux after Tito's death in 1980 – politically, economically, and culturally. There were great parties all over the country, but it wasn't all positive, unrest was in the air and the war was coming.

Her first solo exhibition was in SKC Gallery in Belgrade, she appeared several times in Belgrade Television TV Gallery program curated by legendary Dunja Blažević, she made TV performances and had a solo exhibition in 1987 in the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade.

In Zagreb, she exhibited solo in the PM Gallery, on 17–24.3.1981, just after the gallery was established at the end of January of the same year. Her exhibition, entitled *My Work – Paintings [Moj rad – slike]*, was among first 10 events organised there. Her paintings were exhibited, and she herself wrote the introduction text: *I have been solving my own dilemma for a long time: is the material language of the painting a trap for the soul? What is more important – the content or the form?*

*The answer now seems to be very simple: “As long as the human eye can see, there is something to look at.” The body speaks according to the soul, the form equally so. It finally became clear to me that I have the right to everything in my life. I wish to be the participant and the witness of this right.*

*My aim is to make a work of art which will become an object in this world, not a commentary on this world.*

*My work is not determined by the intention towards originality and achieving the skill of painting by the hand; but I am devoted to decorative painting.*

*It makes me happy to form little*

*images by hand and by brush, and by whose repetition I perform spatial and temporal rhythm of painting, a simple net which forms a decorative structure of the painting – object. I feel the impulse, or I feel forced, to paint, paintings are the material proof of my need to eliminate the energy exactly in this way.<sup>1</sup>*

Two days after the show closed, the magazine “Maj 75 – F” was published/promoted, where she published a conceptual piece: a photograph of herself, with arrows showing parts of her body she wants to use.

“Maj 75” was an independent magazine - catalogue initiated by the group of friends who have held exhibition-actions since 1975. And the “F” issue was made with the intention to present the works of female artists whose works can be included within the problematics of “New art practice”.<sup>2</sup>

Breda was in her late twenties then, but the general direction of her work was obvious, she was growing up, emancipating, she was always oriented to her body but was at this time more inclined to painting and narration, icons and grids than conceptualisation.

Breda’s artistic practice of the early

80s became part of what was called the New Image, in Yugoslavia the New Painting, an equivalent to Transavanguardia or the Neue Wilde. She participated in a major painting show of the time titled *Nova slika / New Painting* curated by Zvonko Maković in Zagreb 1981, and the exhibition *Podobe / Immagini* (19.3–3.4.1982) in Piran and Celje, organised by Piranske galerije, curator Andrej Medved, assisted by Zvonko Maković, with a text written by Achille Bonito Oliva.<sup>3</sup> Curator and art critic Zvonko Maković describes her works as: *She presents herself with large format paintings, where she continuously repeats, in a regular rhythmical row, the same simplified motive (tulips, parrot...).* *Expressive decorativeness of her paintings, plošnost and serial repetition of the same element, from which one can assume even an ornament, indicate the American source of the New Painting.*<sup>4</sup>

Later Maković was very negative about her work in the context of postmodernist appropriation art, which must have been very disappointing for her. Shortly after the 80s Breda switched to a totally different kind of painting

– due to her 1983 art residency in the monastery of Sopoćani in the south of Serbia.<sup>5</sup>

Those paintings were superficially simpler, geometrical and were based on Byzantine mysticism, spiritualism and rituals. Her art and live performances went in the same direction, taking place in darkness and in the candlelight. It was a kind of withdrawal from her geographical place of existence to the places related to her by a memory and probably other personal issues. The whole generation of the above-mentioned artists of the 80s left Yugoslavia, and many of them never returned there, many never returned to art. This rupture has left consequences in art production in Croatia, although some of the artists who came back later started teaching at the art academies, but this is another story and the story of another country.

Hrvoje Horvatić was a nice kid. He was very popular with the girls in kindergarten and especially later in school. He was a bit shy and lonesome among all those girls and seemed more mature and serious than his fellow schoolmates. Later he became a film director, met Breda, they fell in love in mid-80s

and left Zagreb in the early days of the war in early 90s.

They were a bit of an unusual couple, not because he was younger and shorter than Breda, but because they became a bit detached from the art population, although they were professionally very visible, as they worked for Zagreb Television.

They were similar to the most well-known video couple in Zagreb, Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis. Other than both being into video art, Hrvoje actually came from avant-garde film, there was not that much connection between their works.

As Miha Colner eloquently writes in the introduction to Breda's posthumous exhibition in Photon Gallery, Breda's career can easily be identified through several chapters of her geographical and media nomadism. Once with Hrvoje, she left all her painting dilemmas, and painting in general, and she left Zagreb, only to come back occasionally, especially after Hrvoje passed away in 1997, and of course to spend time with family and Dubravka.

Breda became a video artist with a film in the Nouvelle Vague aesthetical background. She and Hrvoje worked together all the

years they spent together. It was a bit strange at the beginning, this sudden change of the medium and entire life, but it happens, and in time one becomes used to the fact that the painter in Breda is no longer there.

But at least in the Croatian art scene, Breda was no longer the Breda of before. She didn't participate in exhibitions of artists from the diaspora, as the diaspora was growing fast. She didn't even make contacts with other fellow artists in the UK who also left Croatia, she and Hrvoje lived their very own life and fought for the professional affirmation which also meant existential affirmation.

Paradoxically, once life had put so many burdens on her, in her late 40s and 50s, alone and abroad, she found her professional stamina and success again. She became well known, a properly established international artist, with exhibition and teaching careers, proactive and involved in many projects.

Her later projects, although videos, still hold French New Wave film feel, but she also got back to some regional, Balkan mythologies, rituals and female, even feminist attitude. In her entire professional life, there

is something difficult something dark and something mystical. Her work, even when working with Hrvoje, was referring to some other art, but still was hermetic, probably because of a sensuality she was incorporating in her works and which gave a strong mark of the atmosphere in her videos.

Many of her films, from *Jayson's Dream*, over *Little films to Cry*, *Beautiful Exile*, *My Funeral Song*, *The Most Beautiful Woman in Gucha*, and her photographic series such as one of her last ones, *Arte Vivo*, they are all obsessively about human relations, and not any human relations, but the subtle intimate relations and experiences. Just as she, as a young artist, was oriented towards her body, now she became orientated towards her feelings, her atmosphere. Her works are about existence which depends on human relations and human rituals.

To me it is interesting how a body of work of an artist who is so determined to work in the realm of personal, human, individual and consequently poetical context, can be an example of pure political reflection of the time. We can follow this, chapter by chapter,

through different countries and events the artist was migrating through, even to the fine details of differences among Yugoslav cultures, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the changes she had to fight, and the West that she got to know during her 20 years of life abroad. It is always sad to revisit her untimely completed lifetime, but there is so much material she has left us to learn from, that will be a pleasure for many colleagues to research. Thank you!

<sup>1</sup> <https://digitizing-ideas.org/en/search:all:all/author:%20Breda%20Beban/page:1/entry:19908>, translation J.V.

<sup>2</sup> <http://digitizing-ideas.org/si/vnos/19656>, translations J.V.

<sup>3</sup> It was a generation of artists like Igor Rončević, Damir Sokić, Ante Rašić, Milivoj Bijelić, Nina Ivančić, Nella Barišić, Marina Ercegović Fortunatović, Zvezdana Fio, Dušan Minovski, Danilo Dučak, Vesna Popržan, Branka Uzur...all of the same generation and Ferdinand Kulmer and Đuro Seder heading the

older generation.

(Slovenian artists at the show:  
Andraž Šalamun, Jože Slak, Živko  
Marušič, Metka Krašovec.)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ipu.hr/content/zivot-umjetnosti/ZU\\_33-34-1982\\_006-019\\_Makovic.pdf](https://www.ipu.hr/content/zivot-umjetnosti/ZU_33-34-1982_006-019_Makovic.pdf), translation J.V.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ipu.hr/content/zivot-umjetnosti/ZU\\_41-42-1987\\_131-132\\_Denegri.pdf](https://www.ipu.hr/content/zivot-umjetnosti/ZU_41-42-1987_131-132_Denegri.pdf)





In the following talk I will present and analyse some of the most distinctive and significant photographic works of Breda Beban. Her photographs may not be as widely known and acclaimed as her other works because the public knows her, primarily, as a filmmaker who created and/or produced a number of films and videos. Some of them became, undoubtedly, iconic. However, Beban was actually an extremely versatile artist who worked across different visual media and genres. Trained as a painter at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb she quit her painterly practice in the mid 80s when she met her partner, Hrvoje Horvatić, and decided to shift her artistic career in order to try something completely new. Together they became one of the most prominent and active video artists of their time, first in Yugoslavia (1986-1991) and later in the wider international context (1991-1997). After Horvatić's tragic and unexpected death in 1997 Beban gradually continued her artistic career, on her own, and at that point she also started using photography extensively.

Beban was not, however, a typical

photographer. She did not own professional equipment or large format cameras. Instead, she always carried a small portable digital camera to capture situations that she found appealing and interesting. She once told me that she had been taking photographs for a while but hadn't considered them as elements of her/their artistic practice, simply because that was not something what was expected from her/them. However, following Horvatić's death, she was suddenly liberated from all expectations of the art world and the public, which had perceived her as a filmmaker, and hence she purposely started building a body of work based on photography.

The first series of photographs that she published and showcased was closely related to her personal tragedy. These photographs appeared almost as a form of therapy—painfully straightforward and exceptionally intimate. *The Miracle of Death* (2000) series is the direct manifestation of her grief; a glimpse of the time when she tried to put her life back together after the loss and shock. Moreover, it was her observation on life and death. The work was an instant

success and soon afterwards it was also included in an influential book about the new photography, *Photograph as Contemporary Art* by Charlotte Cotton, side by side with some of the most acclaimed contemporary photographers. Cotton wrote:

“The photographer’s emotional state is touchingly conveyed in the Breda Beban’s series *The Miracle of Death*. These images capture the profound sense of the loss that Beban experienced after the death of her partner and artistic collaborator. The box containing the ashes is photographed in their home, in a room still containing his personal belongings and signs of their cohabitation. The series documents Beban moving the box, unable to give it a fixed place.”

Another very intimate piece, created around the same time and with similar intentions, is *I Lay on the Bed Waiting for His Heart to Stop Beating* (2000), a series of four-part composite photographs where she focused on the places where she and her partner lived or stayed together after they took refuge from war-torn

Yugoslavia (more specifically, they fled widespread and dangerous nationalism in Croatia, which had just declared its independence in 1991). These pictures, especially, are very important examples of her practice as they clearly show that the pictures were conceived long before they were arranged into an artwork and displayed publicly. The series has a central piece from which it got the title—the picture taken at Homerton University Hospital in London, where Horvatić died. The composed photographs follow a certain protocol: first there is an image of a bed in an interior; then there is an image as from a gaze out of the window; and finally there are two close-ups of the outside world. In a way, the work shows the outside world where life goes on undisturbed and uninterrupted despite her personal drama.

The principle of an inside-out perception of society or of the individual is actually very common in her work. Beban often combined intimate and socio-political issues in the same work, pointing out the relatedness of personal and collective aspects of life. Furthermore, the series clearly shows

the flow of her work as she carefully archived materials in order to (re)use them later, when the time and the context were appropriate. Besides these completed and presentable works she often took simple snapshots that sometimes served as sketches and outlines for further development. However, many of these pictures were never upgraded to the status of artworks and therefore it is impossible to predict what would have become of them had she managed to process them. Like many artists, Beban's working process was very unpredictable and often reversible because she would most often use material which had been stored for years.

But there were also several smaller, ongoing projects that never received proper exposure. For instance, there is a series of photographs entitled *An Exile Encounters Baby Jesus* (1991-2003) where she documented her traumatic experience of becoming a refugee stationed in the countryside of Tuscany, in Italy. There is also an untitled series in which she continuously documented little paths people make in urban environments in order to create shortcuts. There is

the work entitled *Airport Chapels* (2003) where she depicted the absurdity and banality of the representation of religion within the generic architecture of airports, which are the ultimate visual manifestations of globalisation. In a similar way Beban planned but never managed to create a series of imprints/photographs of drain covers found in the streets of cities she visited, showing the visual and historical characteristics of particular places and, at the same time, the universality of their appearance. She believed that the cultural milieu of every single place on the planet is somewhat reflected in the visual appearance and design of its cultural landscape.

And of course, there is one of the most acclaimed among her series of photographs entitled *Arte Vivo* (2008-2011) that was still in the process of creation up until her death. In it, she referred to Argentinian conceptual artist Alberto Greco who, back in the 60s, installed a man in the middle of a circle and through that gesture declared him/her a piece of art. She was more specific in her approach, only photographing couples kissing

in a circle, which was drawn by her with a piece of white chalk in order to celebrate moments of tenderness and love in the very places that were chosen by the protagonists in the pictures.

All these works that I have here described reflect the very same issues Beban was addressing throughout her career. She was always concerned about and sensitive to topical socio-political circumstances such as migration, economic injustice and war in the world, but, always from the perspective of an individual, an ordinary human being like herself. At the same time, she closely observed and visualised manifestations of interpersonal relationships and love, issues that sometimes cannot be separated from political reality. The war in Yugoslavia, which broke apart many relationships and families based upon differences in nationality and religion, is a perfect example of that.

But I will now conclude in a more cohesive way. Even though I was talking about Beban's photography, these works cannot be separated from her other practices such as film, text or installation. Like so

many great artists she would only use the medium that was most appropriate for a particular piece of work.





My name is Martina Munivrana and I am a senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb. I want to thank the organizers and Dubravka Cherubini for inviting me to participate in this conference dedicated to Breda Beban. Unlike most of you in this room, I did not know Breda Beban personally, but I very much appreciate her artistic work and my fascination with it inspired me to research it more closely and ultimately choose it as the subject of my scientific research. Participating in this conference today and creating new friendships and acquaintances will greatly help me in contextualizing and researching the work of Breda Beban.

My research is based on the performative construction of identity and postcolonial body performance in the artistic work of Breda Beban. In this presentation, I will try to give a brief overview of the topic and the theoretical framework within which the work of Breda Beban will be discussed and analysed.

In her work, Breda Beban problematized women topics from the position of a woman, an artist

and a migrant through the prism of autobiographical letter (on partnership, the search for love, security and belonging) and the themes of migration/immigration, national belonging and not belonging, in which spirituality, emotions of pitying or glorifying the lost homeland, as well as the associated sense of marginality resulting from her personal experience of migration, are emphasized. This approach implies the formation of a relationship toward a both personal and collective identity, its construction and performance, where the term otherness has an important role. The artist herself accepts this reality of the "other" and understands the concept of the "other".

In the context of the artistic production of Breda Beban, the question of the performative construction of identity is discussed within feminist artistic discourse. The performance is determined by its geopolitical position, which shows Breda Beban to be an artist who determines the performative construction of identity through the autobiographical - postcolonial body performance in which

personal identity construction is intertwined with the geography of the permanently lost homeland. Life events and circumstances that led to changes (relocation, the death of a partner) are considerably intertwined with her artistic work.

Therefore, we cannot view the work of Beban without having insight into her private life, which was marked by cultural and geographical heritage, relocation (from her childhood to her mature years) for the purposes of finding a new home and coming to terms with what home represents, the position of continuous migration, cooperation with her life partner, the loss of her partner, etc. Certain changes on the geopolitical plan that influenced the artist's personal decisions and relocations should also be considered.

Examples of autobiographical performances enter the performing arts in the 70s and personal experience has proved as crucial for many artists in the performance of their own identity. Marvin Carlson indicates that working with one's own biography shows the corresponding "I" that is accepted through the deep-set cultural codes.

Accordingly we can deduce that the identity which is expressed through the autobiographical performance is actually a role that is not controlled by the performer but by the culture as a whole.

In her artistic work Breda Beban articulated a speech from the first person point of view in terms of an unstable and non-coherent subject which leads to the identity being expressed as a performative category, a performative act capable of forming what it stands for. Therefore, her artistic work must be analyzed inclusively, taking into account and depending on the other determinants in identity formation.

When talking about the performative construction of identity in the performance of Breda Beban, in my research I refer to Judith Butler's performativity and her thesis on identity as a performative category.<sup>1</sup> For Butler the participation in the semiotic structures of reality, in terms of performative unawareness which arises from the semiotic determination of identity, is actually a form of desire to exist. It implies

the necessity of a conscious being in the polysemy of its own subjectivity. Ambiguous subjectivity is the foundation for reading the works of Breda Beban.

In that context, her artistic performance should be viewed through the theoretical issues of autobiographical and postcolonial body. The body seen as an instrument of artistic expression can be interpreted through feminist theoretical frameworks which indicate that it can be seen both as a social and discursive object.

The autobiographical body in the figure of post-colonial body performance as the intersection of meaning implies a duality. On the one hand, referring to the thesis of Luce Irigaray<sup>2</sup>, the self-introduction of the woman's body which does not remain an object of male discourse and male art, but becomes a part of female subjectivity which tests and identifies itself and as such defines the ideas of subjectivity and culture.

On the other hand, the postcolonial body through the metaphorical appeal of femininity uses the

body that indicates the double colonization and places of resistance; it becomes the place of action, which is associated with the notion of displacement, transferal and implies the complexity of identity, its displacement and hybridization. The postcolonial body indicates the implicit connections between the postcolonial otherness and female otherness. It presents itself as a signifier of that connection and becomes a place of testimony.

By using postcolonial discourse, through the analysis of Breda Beban's work, we can answer the question of how the body of a migrant from the East is presented to the West, or rather how women of the East are presented to the West. We can also observe the effects of performative performances on the construction of the cultural and political placement of female artists from post socialist countries.

As of yet, Breda Beban's artistic work has not been fully explored, described, classified and evaluated. The goal of this research is to explore her work in such a way. The main hypothesis is the confirmation

of her artistic status as a feminist artist, whose articulation of the “female voice” occurs at the intersection of the postcolonial and feminist perspectives.

This process will also allow the positioning and subsequent “placement” of Breda Beban among other female Croatian artists who use the body in the performative performance in a different way and who are already positioned differently and typologically determined. The artistic work of Breda Beban in its performative acts makes a vivid statement of how the postcolonial and feminist entries into the physicality of the performance function beyond the so-called classic chronology, how it moves boundaries and is both diachronic and heterotemporal.

The application of the performance and postcolonial theory onto feminist art has the ultimate goal of establishing new terminology of the performative construction of identity and positions the artist’s work in the context of the Croatian and international feminist art.

The construction of identity within the context of postcolonial theory and its interpretation makes this topic open to new interpretations. The postmodern age manifests itself as a time of crisis of identity, where the very concept of identity represents a problem area. The question is how to approach thinking on the topic of identity and its construction through performing in this particular context.

In the example of Breda Beban and the analysis of her artistic work, among other things, we can find the features of current situation of large-scale migration conditioned by geopolitical changes. We are witnesses to different fates which are results of certain life circumstances. The loss of identity, the East meeting the West, the need for home and love - all of these are topics which can be detected not only in the work of Breda Beban but also in the overall geopolitical humanitarian crisis.

In addition to the fact that until now, nobody has systematically researched her artistic presence, what also motivates me is the possibility of applying contemporary

interdisciplinary theoretical approaches and methods and trying to keep up with the new research on performing practices, performativity and identity construction, as well as the use of postcolonial feminist theory in the analyses of such artistic accomplishments. In the foreword of her book "The Criticism of the Postcolonial Mind The History of the Present Dying" (Belgrade Circle, Belgrade, 2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states that the relationship of postcolonial theory towards the Balkans as a metaphor is the key task of our world. In this context, I believe that it is necessary to carry out an analysis of the artistic events in Croatia viewed within the context of geopolitical changes and what these changes brought with them both on a global scale and to personal stories of individuals. I believe that we must look at and critically reflect on the context and art production of the turn of the century that is faced and challenged with questions of identity and belonging / not belonging, and make space for reflecting on our relationship towards space and the personal definition of identity.

I hope to achieve this through

further research and to emphasize the importance of Beban's activities and influence within the framework of both Croatian and international art history.

Thank you for your time!

<sup>1</sup> Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge. Performativity is the central concept in the work of Judith Butler and it manages the semiotic constitution of particular executional categories: identity, body, subject, gender and the category of naturalness, gender and the category of the sociability of gender as well as other identity attributes.

<sup>2</sup> Irigaray, L. (1999). *Ja, ti, mi: za kulturu razlike*. Zagreb: Ženska infoteka.

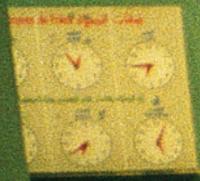


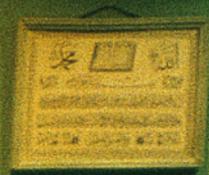
I can only tell the story of the profound effect Breda Beban had on me from my own specific, and very personal point of view. Undoubtedly, the four short years I knew her, from 2008 to 2012, have had an enduring influence on me and on my artistic practice—perhaps more than any other. Our story starts one evening in 2008 at the Slade School of Fine Art where I was a graduating art student and Breda Beban was giving an artist talk.

The first time I met Breda is a story she liked. At the end of the aforementioned talk, Professors Sharon Morris and Susan Collins, my then personal tutors literally took me by the hand and marched me down to the front of the lecture theatre to meet Breda. I remembered this detail because it seemed out of the ordinary; it felt faintly ritualistic and urgent. One or the other of them said ‘You two *must* meet.’ and promptly left us to it. Evidently, both had decided that our meeting was fated and since all the best stories have the hand of fate in them, we obliged. I think Breda thought (as I did, and, still do) that our meeting was meant to be. Although she lived her life with such

formidable agency and such fierce independence to ever have believed that things “happen for a reason” she was nevertheless a deeply spiritual person who embraced the mysteries of life and the magic of human relationships, endowing them with enduring meaning and purpose through her art.

She once told me, “We are the stories that we tell ourselves.” With that image in mind, I am going to tell a story, our story, for it is a fitting tribute to Breda who was, for me, above all a wonderful storyteller. I think that is what made her such a remarkable artist; her ability to tell compelling stories out of her own life’s material and transform them into universal narratives about the human condition. During the talk at the Slade she described this process of transformation in her own words when discussing the motivation behind her 2006 work *The Most Beautiful Woman in Gucha*, which is the story of a chance encounter of two would-be-lovers, the two central “characters”, told through a combination of documentary and edited footage filmed and edited by Breda during her time spent at the annual trumpet competition





and festival in Guča, Serbia. She had been filming the off-stage ruckus in the thick of the festival when she happened to notice and proceeded to capture the encounter and mutual captivation between a beautiful belly dancer and a young man.

'I remember clearly how I felt about the event, so I basically reedited it, I fictionalised it, in order to make it closer to the reality I experienced.'

Breda's artworks give us an insight into her heightened imagination and the accompanying intensity of feeling with which she isolated instances of her life and 'fictionalised' them in her art. Although her art was carefully choreographed, crafted and controlled she embraced improvisation during filming and the chance elements she captured in her documentary footages. Her work thus inhabits a place in between fiction and reality. And, similarly, although her moving image works are filled with real-life characters—she often filmed her friends—the portraits are not character studies, for Breda's art foregrounds the story above all: the setting (mise-

en-scène), situation, staging and sound are all in the service of the dramatic encounter between (often contrasting) characters, images, ideas and ideologies. Her 2000 film *Let's call it love* enacts this dramatic contrast sonically and visually. It captures the unfolding drama of the 1999 Belgrade bombings and personal feelings of loss and helplessness through the unexpected juxtaposition of footage of a turntable playing a Chet Baker love song<sup>1</sup> and footage of NATO war planes flying over Belgrade. The video installation foregrounds the competing soundtracks: Chet Baker's seductive, husky voice pleading for love—almost obsessively when the record jumps—contrasts with the jarring sound of military jets flying their deadly load. When Breda screened *Let's Call it Love* at the talk, she emphasised the 'big contrast' between the two, and how she wanted the audience to be 'physically attacked by the sound' through the use of state-of-the-art speakers turned up loud. I was utterly fascinated by the idea that anyone could tell a moving story through the juxtaposition of two inanimate objects, as though they were characters, epitomising the

best and worst of human activity.

Breda knew how to tell a story. She collected stories like charms on a charm bracelet. Now that I can no longer sit with her and see her pluck a charm out from that metaphorical bracelet and hold it up against the candlelight (the ever-present candlelight in her London home) like mental jewelry and hear her unfold its chiming narrative to the evening, I sometimes wonder, "Did I *imagine* it? Our story?" I say imagine because, for me, 'imagination' is imbedded in reality, being that which can be, or can happen, in reality. Not to be confused with 'fantasy', being that which invents things that are not real, or cannot be real. A bright, burning imagination is what I think of when I think of Breda. I think her imagination is the source of the unresolvable tensions in her artwork as well as her poetic juxtapositions of objective and subjective reality. It is the feather-light framework that lifts her unflinching portrayals of the beauty and the tragedy of life into something irreducibly elegant, something comparable to poetry.

The story of how I met Breda Beban

is not as interesting as the stories we shared together. Like the time we met in Mokra Gora, in Serbia, at my family home, and she suddenly took amused interest in the seahorse charm around my neck for she had seen one just like it that morning, in her coffee cup, during a coffee cup reading—analogue tea leaf reading familiar to anyone living in the Balkans. Or how she came to be my cupid, by chance, when she invited me to perform in the Baku Biennale, in Azerbaijan, where I met and fell in love with my partner. Our meeting echoed how Breda and I had met, only this time it was Breda who took me by the hand and introduced me to him, then left us to fate. Or how I cut her hair when she was seriously ill and told her then how, when I was seriously ill with cancer, three sisters—three beautiful and kind hairdressers who also happened to be my girlfriends—had cut my hair on a hospital chair. One had brushed it, the other had plaited it and the third had cut it off. She said it was a great story and would make a beautiful start of a film. Beautiful was the highest compliment Breda could offer, "for beauty was the highest category of art and most desired condition of life".

The four short, intense years of our friendship also span the life of her final work, *My Funeral Song*, which for me is her most poignant work, not only because I was also one of the participants. In early 2010, Breda had told me she had been filming intimate video portraits of her closest friends listening to their funeral song. She would ask her friends to select the song that meant the most to them at that moment, so much so that if they were to die that day, they would want it played at their funeral and film them listening to it in the intimacy of her home. Her conceiving of such a dark, daring and at the same time touching portrait intrigued me, so when she asked me to select a song and sit for her, I agreed. In it she captured one of the most formative moments of my life when I was deeply unhappy and yet deeply hopeful about the future and she did so with her held-held camera while my chosen funeral song, *Ne Volim Januar* by Đorđe Balašević, played one evening in her London flat. In *My Funeral Song*, Breda turns the contemplation of death into a celebration of life, making it seem insignificant by comparison. Although she completed the piece

before being diagnosed with terminal cancer, the timeliness of the illness is difficult to untangle from the work itself and has become a part of its story, of her story, my story and our story (here) too.

Of course, these are some of my personal memories of Breda, my friend and my mentor. The stories Breda told through her art have a much wider scope. They show her to be a citizen of the world; aware of the historical moment she was living in and determined to participate in it. This is especially evident in her work as creative producer of *imagine art after—a* project I also participated in—where she focused on issues she personally experienced and cared about: the experience of being a migrant; a woman; and an artist.

Her talk at the Slade School of Fine Art began with, “I was born in Yugoslavia, a country that doesn’t exist,” and proceeded to show works made in the UK as a result of her exile from her home country that were inspired her personal experiences of exile during the years of her constant literal and figurative returning to it—a recurring theme in

her work. The talk ended where it had begun, thematically, with the end of Yugoslavia, and a screening of *Let's Call it Love*. The story of Yugoslavia is, therefore, another story intimately intertwined with her own.

At the very end of the talk she said "I... wanted to make some kind of "white magic" basically, with this piece." That can be said of every piece she made; she put a spell on it, and on us. So I will end with that image of Breda Beban—the spell-casting storyteller.

<sup>1</sup> Chet Baker, *For Heaven's Sake (Let's Get Lost)*, Chet Baker, from the album 'Chet Baker Sings and Plays from the Film "Let's Get Lost', RCA Novus, 18 April 1989.



She was indescribably different: she seemed young, but she was sixty; she looked healthy but she was ill, she seemed fragile, but she was strong.

Maybe this strength was derived from her name, Breda.

Like the Slavic goddess Breda? No.

Like the Flemish city Breda? No.

Breda.... She was as strong and indestructible as a locomotive.

In fact, in Italy, the name Breda is associated with trains: it is a company that still produces trains that are exported throughout the world.

My friend Breda was like a locomotive: nothing could stop her. She had the strength and energy to work day and night for a whole week.

In Venice the terminally ill Breda felt at ease, because everything in the city is ailing and decrepit – while maintaining an archaic, primordial, dreamlike, playful and mortal dignity.

In Venice Breda came across images of illness in marble – of cysts and tumours of the face. The Mascarone on the Church of Santa Maria Formosa comes to mind.

Disease is not a representation

of the devil – but of life, which succumbs to illness and changes. In Venice, the walls speak to and observe you. With Breda, we would look at the doorbells that stare back at you with an air of distrust, some with a sneer. Breda noticed that a number of doorbells, set in the wall together with a letterbox, are the embodiment of some of her early works, where you see the imprint of a hand, a plaque with the name of the occupants and a golden doorbell.

In Venice Breda never felt alone.

When we walked together through the cramped alleyways, there was no need to speak; we'd both be looking at the same thing at the same time. Nobody can escape the silent gaze of the walls, of the doorbells, or of the flaking plaster.

All the letterboxes are faces, masks or monsters that peer at you.

In Venice, everything is broken and everything is alive, and it is never desolate. What is broken can also be ironic, artistic: the patched-up window grilles resemble works by Rauschenberg; the doors that have been repaired a thousand times bring to mind paintings by Tàpies. Here, people with cancer can feel at ease. How could they feel flawed

when they see the superbly artistic devastation of craftsmanship at every step?

In this city, planted in the mud, we value the marble corroded by time, the chipped brickwork, the doorbells and the doors that in other cities would have been simply thrown away.

In Venice, nothing can be discarded.

The sick are not marginalised; they feel accepted in their failing health.

In Venice, there is a recycling of life. A person suffering an incurable illness may feel pulled into this cycle of life, death and rebirth.

In Venice, reflections break up reality and make a new one appear.





All that art is, Breda made me (learn to) love. She was my friend, my sister, my daughter, my teacher and, sometimes, my pupil. She could have been hundreds of other things too in our fifty years friendship. Even though, in the past five years, her body is not around anymore, the air sparks with her work, her thoughts, her ideas.

Even as a kid in the primary school, she was different from the rest of us in class. She was sharp and smart, fearless and rebellious and always original in whatever she was doing. Already at that time, one could only learn from her. Thinking of her now, I have come to realise that she must have been artistic since her very childhood for whatever she did, said, or imagined she weaved into art.

Breda's work is autobiographical and reveals essential or hidden truths. Her paintings from the late 70s to the beginning of 80s and her later performances and video works reflect her background. Her ideas themselves were already works of art and she physically realised most. Behind many of her works, which were created in the most

intimate way, are her family, friends, partners, and the war that destroyed what was once her country. Her work is about love, solitude, pain, joy, exile, death – it's about life. And life, she lived her life to the full, deeply and heartily, investigating every corner of her mind, making a treasure of her wounds and respecting her scars.

Having such a person in my life for fifty years was like a priceless present from a fairy tale. Among the greatest privileges imparted to me were witnessing the birth of the idea for some of her projects; being a collaborator on some of her films; and being her companion on our long, marvellous journeys through the Balkans. The most precious were the endless lessons that took place from the early morning coffee to the late afternoons' umpteenth grappa, while we were still in our nighties, in her London flat or in my kitchen in Trieste. Even though we sometimes talked about trivial issues, such as our friend's £300 haircut or the must-have Jill Sander shoes I bought at an 80% off sale, we would always end up talking about art, literature, psychoanalysis, film, and music.

Whether explaining *My Night at Maud's*, *Chungking Express* or *Le Quattro Volte*, or telling me about her conversation with Kyra Muratova, or remembering her friendship with Derek Jarman or Mike Scott, she would switch back and forth referencing endless lists of books or the latest playlist of the most exciting world music. All these were equally important to her.

Living under such an aesthetic influence and for such a long time, I internalised her art, which became tightly bound up in my body. Breda used to say that I was her longest and oldest student and she was the most generous and the most demanding and severe teacher. Her last words to me were, "The ball is now in your court, and you better know how to play it".





I would like to say thank you to all the people who made this event possible.

I decided to approach my talk in a very personal way. For me it is a strange honour and a confusing task to talk about a friend. For some unknown reason, it is difficult to know where to begin.

Perhaps I'll start with her voice.

— "While filming or taking photos, I tend to go blank."

I cannot say I met her for the first time because I only had a glimpse of her at the studio of a mutual friend, Ferdy Carabott. She was leaving the studio when I arrived. Ferdi was working with her on a project and I was working with him on another one.

As we know, the presence of Breda Beban, (I only found out her name a few weeks later), was difficult to ignore. Her old fashioned hairstyle brought to my mind images of Eva Peron, the wife of the Argentinian president in the nineteen forties.

Back in London, some Sunday evenings Ferdi and Roseanna had small gatherings at their house and in one of these I met Breda for the second time. We were very polite and talked about the weather in London, when in Rome do what the

Romans do. Soon I realised that the subject had little interest for her and was better dropped.

She mentioned work and said something like,

—"I tend to go blank. Editing becomes a process of trying to make sense".

The origin of her name and where she came from were a mystery for me. Yes, I did know about the horrendous war in ex-Yugoslavia, but all that for me was an abstract tragedy that I knew very little about – as much as the crimes of the military government in Argentina was a very remote conflict to her. After that, we met socially many times. Our subjects were far from discussing about art or the art world but from time to time our personal histories were creeping into the conversation shaping our friendship. I learnt that at the age of 10, she survived the Skopje earthquake which left a quarter of a million people homeless. She lived part of the struggle in Yugoslavia. That ended with her exile to Sweden and the fragmentation of Yugoslavia into several countries.

I asked myself how I should feel if I had my eyes and brain saturated by the suffering of other human beings

around me. I had flashes of the 70s in Buenos Aires.

— “That’s what you do when you are bombed. You cry”, Breda said one day.

I learned that she arrived in London in 1991. We were both immigrants.

She arrived from the Mediterranean coast and I from the shores of Rio de la Plata. We agreed that leaving our countries meant losing our identity, history, family and friends.

Suddenly you are alone, a kind of empty blackboard, meanwhile your past stays paralysed in your country of origin, in a place where the daughter or son of someone, where your friends live and speak the same language as you and they recognise you and you recognise them.

To fill the empty blackboard that one becomes, it is necessary to adapt yourself to a new code of behaviour, to accept that emotionally, people of your adopted country live on another planet and you need to learn how to survive. Nevertheless you are a foreigner and that is magnificent. You can take what you like and ignore the rest.

By 2003 after the First Biennial of Jafre which I organised, we sat around her kitchen table. I can still

smell the coffee boiling in a pot. I hear us discussing the possibility of exhibiting her work in the Catalan Medioeval village and for the first time we talked about art, about the passion of pushing the boundaries of knowledge and feelings and agreed that the only way to do it was through intuition followed by a sort of intelligence and a bit of luck. We spent hours looking at her videos and films and discussing her work, until the smell of coffee gave way to the taste of wine.

—“I am one of those women on the other side of the screen”, she said. She tackled her artistic practice with passion and intellectual freedom. Breda the artist had a sharp sensibility able to dissect a frog with her brilliance.

She choose to show two video works which encompassed her interests at that moment. Those were:

*Let’s Call it Love* which is an emotional film of seduction and loneliness. A fixed frame of a turntable playing the soundtrack of Chet Baker’s nostalgic jazz, only interrupted by the flight of menacing American warplanes. Gloomy atmosphere pervades the work, it is one of helplessness,

sadness and hope.

The other piece was *Walk of the Three Chairs* which is a film of joy. Taking its name from a traditional Balkan ritual, Breda remembered her grandfather performing it after winning at gambling.

The ritual consists in creating a way home from the gambling place using three chairs. You walk on top of the seats of the chairs while people move the last chair in front of the first one until you arrive home.

This atmospheric film shows Breda as she drifts down the Danube on the outskirts of Belgrade on a boat which she shares with a small gypsy band. As she does so, Breda and the band break out into a well-known folk song *Who Does Not Know How to Suffer, Does Not Know How to Love*.

We projected *Let's Call it Love* in a cave in my house and *Walk of the Three Chairs* at the Plaza de la Iglesia in front of the church of Sant Martí in Jafre. After various loops of the film, Breda performed the ritual of the three chairs, mirroring the screen around the plaza.

Back in London, as always, she was working on more films about life and love, her main subjects, as well

as teaching in Sheffield.

One day when we were drinking wine waiting for some food, she asked me about Buenos Aires, its people, the art world. I was surprised and I knew close to nothing of what was going on in my city after living in London for 35 years.

I could not understand her curiosity until I found out that she had been offered a residency for a few months in Buenos Aires.

I told her the little I knew plus mentioned an artist called Alberto Greco. I had always been fascinated by his work, he was the father of Conceptual Art in Buenos Aires. In 1959 he and a few colleagues founded a movement called Informalismo.

Greco was a painter, a bad writer, a great performer and installation artist but more than this, he was a troublemaker.

At the Venice Biennial in 1962, he freed some rats when the Italian President walked close to him, creating a huge scandal.

In the same year he wrote the manifesto *Dito del Arte Vivo* and it was this as a performance that won Breda's imagination.

The circle is an esoteric geometrical

drawing which for the Sufis is the symbol of eternity and unity, having no start or end. Ouspenski, the Russian orientalist, mentions that when he drew a circle around a person, he or she became a prisoner and could not break free from his Magic Circle.

The performance of Alberto Greco involved him walking in the streets of Rome and deciding which of the passers-by was a work of art, then encircling them with white chalk and pointing at them with his finger, while saying — “Live Art”.

Breda went to Buenos Aires. She arrived there at the right time, Buenos Aires was a great party, and Breda loved parties. The cobbled roads of San Telmo reminded her of Belgrade and she enjoyed Buenos Aires so much that when she came back to London, she kept talking about going back to write and dance milongas.

While she was there, she twisted the meaning of a circle one more time and produced a series of photographs of two people kissing each other. Squatting next to them, she encircled them with a chalk and held up a poster with the names of the lovers.

At the same time she was working on another project in Buenos Aires – a political one – not an irritated discourse about the state of the country but a silent glimpse. She researched the Argentine economic history in a peculiar way.

Holding a piece of paper in one hand and graphite in the other, she knelt on the street in front of a metal round or square top, one of those hundreds of cast iron access points on the streets of Buenos Aires that belong to the utility companies that for centuries have managed the exploitation of telephone, gas, electricity and water.

These very ornate tops, like logos, provided the history of when they were installed. Mapping them around the city and using the simple technic of frottage, she printed on paper the story of colonialism in Argentina.

We discussed how the Argentinians suffered the good intentions of three empires. The good intention of Spanish people, followed by the good intention of English people and now it is the turn of the Americans.

In 2006 I saw her film, *The Most*

*Beautiful Woman in Gucha* and invited Breda to the 3rd Biennial of Jafre. Of this film, Breda said: —“I filmed 20 hours of footage. As I was viewing it, I knew that a film was to be found somewhere in the 19 minutes recording of a particular event. I could remember the genuine intensity of the moment as I was filming, however the recorded footage didn’t really match the memory of the reality I experienced on location.”

The film was awesome and I say a film because the visual structure and timing has more to do with a film than a video work.

And now, I remember Breda in the words of French poet Rene Char: —“Poetry will rob me of my death.”



In April 1983 I started talking to Breda Beban about her *author's bookstore window*.<sup>1</sup> Breda had the idea to use the sidewalk as extended window, in a very particular way. One day she brought a colour sketch of the painted bench, with some plants in "jardinières". The strong colours she would use to paint the bench were borrowed from the colouring of her painting "Garden of Eden", which was of the same dimensions as the bookstore window where it was meant to be exhibited.

Although parking on the sidewalk was prohibited, it was nevertheless full of cars. To place the bench on the sidewalk required permission, first from the local community, then from some sort of municipal department for communal affairs and so on and so forth. Various investigative commissions come to check the location, suggested other streets where the bench could be placed, in other words suggested giving up, for where is the sense in placing a colourful bench in a place that's nothing but a drab street? I remember thinking that, at the time, it was maybe even easier to place Boris Podrecca's masterpiece

on Zagreb's Flower Square than for us to place Breda's bench on the street then called Ulica socijalističke revolucije. For their part, the local community was worried about the damage caused to the sidewalk by the four holes that would remain, after fixing the bench to the asphalt. We bought a nice wooden bench, identical to those placed in the park Zrinjevac, and in some atelier Breda started work.

And so, one pleasant eve in June, we had the opening of Breda's bookstore window. We always held openings, informed the media and occasionally, like on this occasion, issued a suitable catalogue. The text for the catalogue, which was actually a folded piece paper, titled *Tamed Bench* was written by Antoaneta Pasinović among whose words were these:

"Here's the bench! Breda's tamed it for you. In the street where trams, cars race by or otherwise cars park and block the sidewalks, where the pedestrians are often intimidated, in the street where is almost impossible to imagine a pedestrian, the bench is an invitation for a moment of exceptionality, non-anonymity. As

an invite to participate in Breda Beban's author's window, the bench is a mediator when patrolling the city, a mediator in the awareness of the reciprocity between man and the city, between man and the man-artist inside of him..."

As it turned out, remarkably, many visitors responded and appeared. Everybody took turns sitting on that bench and, for a moment, they found themselves in her Garden of Eden, where colours spill over into sound, full of joy and with the feeling of reconciliation with themselves and their loved ones.

I remember that late afternoon; it felt like *The Rite of Spring*. A performance that was more radical than Picasso and Stravinsky, with pagan elements (in the sense of the unbridled celebration of life) set against the default religious theme: That was Breda.

The destructive forces that be, disturbed by any faith in the future, any faith in love, for whom any man was a potential enemy and for whom the boundary of their own skin was the only measure of humanity, launched their mission

to save the world. Thirty years before Leopold Museum in Vienna exhibited a male nude in art, people in Zagreb could see Adam excited by the beauty of the Garden of Eden, in his total nudity, in the bookstore window.

It was a problem for the local community and for the police, but also for Božo Beck whom I had informed of the frequent visits of moral citizens and police officers. Since then, neither policemen nor moralists came, ever again.

The photos of Breda's *Garden of Eden* appeared in almost all the press. After only a few days, some citizens stole the "jardinières" with all the plants. A few years later, the painting *Garden of Eden*, which was stored in the bookstore, was stolen. Today, false Gardens of Eden hide behind big fences and the real ones, like this one in a bookstore window, still has the potential to be dangerous for a whole army of unemployed people going to the employment office next door. Unfortunately, for many of my fellow citizens, the garbage container has become the Garden of Eden, in which there is nothing that

could excite some Adam.

Nobody can steal the sunset on Ugljan, nobody can tame Adriatic waves. The ashes that Breda has turn into can only disintegrate but cannot be destroyed. The building material for a Garden of Eden could be a necessity one day, so we better use what nature has to offer.

own work, their selection of books, art monographs, photos, photocopies, newspaper articles, manuscripts, objects etc. I tried to offer a wider outlook on art and culture in general. (Translator's note: The *author's bookstore window* was one of the windows in bookstore „Znanje“ in Ulica socijalističke revolucije in Zagreb.)

<sup>1</sup> For this type of artistic, cultural manifestation I used a shop window covered with wooden blinds, which lay completely emptied and disused in a neglected area of the bookshop. This is how, in 1981, I originated the concept of the *author's bookstore window* which enabled all invited guest artists to create their own space for presenting their work of art in the form of a specific response to certain cultural events or situations occurring at that time, in Zagreb and beyond. The concept of the *author's bookstore window* was, as I imagined it to be, to communicate as any shop window: directly, with the street; visitors; and passers-by, while giving the artist complete freedom of expression. The authors could present their



His face is the first thing I see standing out in the dark spring sky like an oil painting. His face lives in my memories like a painting by Lucien Freud. The face of Hrvoje. At the same time, inside me, there is the canvas that Breda wore just before entering the calm and transparent sea. The sea that reaches her ankles. The canvas that is wrapped around her, undoes and makes her seem like a Byzantine *Primavera*, it makes her seem like a migratory bird that has just finished its long journey.

Then I hear Hrvoje's words in front of my house in Trieste. 'I got baptised' he says, and an abyss of uncertainty and silence opens up inside me. For a moment I think about his Croatian origins, about him having not been baptised, I think about the Orthodox religion that he has just embraced. For the love of her, Breda, immersed in her life and her childhood, like prime sources of emotion in that iconography that is elegantly woven into her interpretation of art.

And then I see her again, Breda, I see her unwrap the canvas from her body, and around her the surface of the sea with her image reflected in it. Like a moment before wearing

her painting, while staring at me in the eyes, with a white shirt and black skirt. At the same point she finds herself now, with her arms opened, with a lit candle in the palm of her hand. It is like a scene from the Renaissance, a figure from the Byzantine Renaissance. Her, her canvas, the sea. As if she had worn part of her childhood memories.

The war is about to kick off in Yugoslavia. Hrvoje and Breda can no longer stand the unstoppable advance of fascist ideologies and decide to abandon their homeland. The national fascists in Zagabria say that in reality they are not abandoning their homeland, but that they are escaping abroad and that for this reason they are traitors of the people.

At first I receive them in the house I live in with my parents. They stay for about two weeks. Breda's smile is beautiful and radiant, but the more it shines, the more I think about how much she should have to fight with an unknown future, with concern for their lives. They plan to move to Tuscany, to the holiday home of an English curator, which seems not to have any heating. So, two weeks later they leave for Tuscany and for a long time I receive

no news. I do not know anything about them.

Later I discover how hard it was for them in that period, that the local people brought supplies so they could survive the winter.

And then I see them again, Breda, standing in the calm and transparent sea, with the water at ankle depth, while she lifts her arms up, vertical to her body, then lowering them again, tired and exhausted from memories. And I see the canvas, her painting wrapped around her like a coat, around that tired migratory bird.

Then London, where once again they have to fight to survive. Hrvoje sends me some Easter cards where Breda has painted some wild flowers. He asks me to sell them in Trieste and to send the money to London. I look at all those cards with wild flowers. There are no other cards like those in the world, as if she had collected those flowers from her own memory. In her hands and on her canvas even this wild sales initiative seems noble and refined.

I try selling the cards. I am no trader, but still I manage to sell many to a news kiosk. I do not remember how I sent that little

money to London.

Then I hear nothing more from them. My life is too hectic, full of painful experiences, for the first time in my life I have to deal with human wickedness and try to understand it. It is the period when Rade Šerbedžija, who I offer a place to for a few months in the theatre I direct, was studying Slovene so he could act in the play I was producing. In a certain way, in my imagination, Rade is my only link to Breda and Hrvoje. Then also Rade leaves for London and I lose all links to them. Except for a few telephone calls from Hrvoje where he asks me what I am doing, what I am writing, and I can hear from his voice that he is battling to keep for his artistic faith, battling for his and their survival. And then I see Breda, as she is turning away, like a Byzantine woman who through her arm movements unveils to us her story, so full of suffering and dignity. Like a bird that has been flying for a long time and has arrived at its destination, in its safe-haven, and still does not know how many traps there are hidden. Like a mother and woman, like a lover and friend, she, in the calm and transparent sea, tells her story, discovers her body.

And then I see them a few years later in Ljubljana. They have found a co-producer for their film, for a real film. The Slovenian television. I meet them again after many years. That day Hrvoje is alone in his Ljubljana apartment, Breda has already left to go to a meeting. His face is grey. I am happy for him and his film. I do not know the screenplay, I still do not know the screenplay, because I have never read it, because I do not have it and no one wants to give it to me to finally read. Can someone let me have their screenplay so I can read it? Back then Hrvoje gives me a book. The biography of Samuel Beckett. A gift that makes me very happy. Then we say our goodbyes and I have the feeling that that will be the last time I ever see him. And it was.

Then I hear Breda's voice in the heart of the night. With a broken voice she tells me of his death. I feel powerless, I almost feel guilty because of my powerlessness. Now Breda is the only link left to my old friend. I am going backwards and forwards like I have been possessed, traveling, writing. I go one month to Ireland, I just do not

stop. I go to find Breda in London, I reach England by ferry and the coach that leaves Dublin everyday for London. Breda is waiting for me at Victoria station. We drink a whiskey, we are drunk from the alcohol and an irrational joy.

Later, over those days I spend with her, in the room where she slept with Hrvoje, I have the sensation that my presence irritates her, that it provokes suffering. This feeling passes after a while.

She shows me some photographs of their moves and his death. I look at the Tuscan countryside, the abandoned corrugated iron shacks, I look at the reflexion in the trees, their road. Fibianno Montanino, Tuscany, September 1991, a bed with yellow sheets, a window with a view on to the village, the clouds. Toronto, December 1992, a bed with predominantly yellow multi-coloured covers, a window facing a conservatory, the blurred detail of a man and a child in the snow. San Paolo, 1994, Hotel Residential, an unmade bed with white sheets, the view of the city through the half-closed hotel window, the view of a cross-roads from the balcony of the hotel, the blurred detail of a person standing at the cross-roads.

Dresden, Lange Strasse, November 1995, a hotel room, a bed with blue sheets under a high window, facing the buildings of the city, the view of a suburban street, the detail of a fence that borders the property where the corrugated iron structure is located. Liverpool, April 1996, George's Hotel, the room, the bed with a high wooden headboard, the window half-closed, beyond the glass the distant city, the road, the detail of an empty road. London, December 1997, Homerton Hospital, two empty beds, one for the patient and the other for family or friends, a window facing the awning of an internal hospital courtyard, the shoots of a birch tree, the view from the internal courtyard window, the leaves on the birch branches which nearly reach the ground. A detail, the window frame, bits of birch branches.

And finally him, his ashes in a rectangular urn on the desk in front of the apartment window in Lenthall Road. His ashes in the urn next to the kitchen sink, his ashes on another desk next to a brass lamp, his ashes on a kitchen table in front of a window with the curtains half-closed. Outside a glimpse of a horse chestnut tree without leaves. The

urn with its mortal remains on the bed with a striped cover. The ashes of this friend in an urn lit up by the sun in some part of the apartment. Then I see Breda again who raises the canvas to tell her version of the modern and ancient story of humanity. The light all around makes it understood that the sun is setting from one moment to another, but it is as if she knows that it still is not the moment, as if the sun that carries within itself the knowledge of creation and of art does not want to set, at least as long as Breda stays in the water, with her glance to the right, with her face sculptured in marble and lit by the last rays of this sun that does not want, does not want, to set. I look for their last home, again and again. I find it in Lenthall Road, again and again.

I am in front of their house and I observe it, I photograph it, but photographs on the telephone get cancelled, so I know I must go there again, to go back to their old house and to be still, silent, in front of their house, silent, now and then, while I look at Breda standing in the sea water, which reaches her ankles and is calm and transparent, while I listen to the silence in her eyes and

I watch her unwrap the canvas to  
unveil her own story full of light.



ANA ČAVIĆ is a Yugoslav-born performance artist based in London, UK. She graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2008 and started performing both solo and as part of the creative duo *Ladies of the Press\**. As a solo performer she is an experimental artist, while the *Ladies of the Press\** (Ana Čavić & René O'Drobnjak, working collectively since 2007) re-imagines theatrically the role of the publisher and the publicist. She has performed both nationally and internationally.

DUBRAVKA CHERUBINI is born in Zagreb, lived in Rome, Kuala Lumpur and since 1990 has settled in Trieste. Assistant in various video works of the artist Breda Beban, collaborator in the exhibition activity of her work (*I mille occhi - International Film Festival, Trieste; Trieste Contemporanea, Trieste*) and the trustee of her archive. The author of short stories published by C.A.C.I.T. – Coordination of immigrant associations and communities, Trieste 2005, 2006, 2008 and Cosmo Iannone Editore, Isernia 2015 (Migrant Books, Kumacreola - Migrant Writings).

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MARIO FLECHA is an Argentinian-born craftsman, writer and publisher. He studied journalism in Argentina before moving to Europe, where he worked as an artist and directed the Mario Flecha Gallery in London (1987-1992) and the Mario Flecha Space in Jafre (Catalunya) until 2003. In Jafre he founded the Jafre Biennial of Contemporary Arts, inviting both international and local artists; the festival is now in its eighth edition.

FIORA GANDOLFI is an artist, journalist, fashion designer and writer. Attracted by the unusual and undiscovered and passionate about the moral value of aesthetics, she has written and illustrated articles

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MARTINA MUNIVRANA is an art curator. She graduated in Art History and in Philosophy at the University of Zagreb, where she is currently pursuing her doctoral studies on the work of Breda Beban art in the context of post-colonial and feminist theory. In 2001 she became program coordinator and curator at the SCCA-Institute for Contemporary Art Zagreb and then moved in 2005 to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, where she is currently responsible for the Collection of Paintings.

MARKO SOSIČ is a Trieste-born Slovenian writer, theater and film director. He graduated at the Academy of Dramatic Arts, University of Zagreb, and he worked as artistic director for several theatres and festivals, such as the National Theater in Nova

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IVAN BERISLAV VODOPIJA took a degree in Slavonic studies and comparative literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of Zagreb University. He has devoted the whole of his working life to the book trade and today is held to be one of the most informed about books in the area of literature and art in the whole of what used to be Yugoslavia. He has written poetry and prose since his student days.

JANKA VUKMIR is an art historian, art critic and curator based in Zagreb. In the 1990s she directed the Soros Center for Contemporary Art in Zagreb and in 1998 she co-founded the Institute for Contemporary Art in Zagreb, of which she is the current president. She was also president of the Croatian Independent Publishers, vicepresident of Academia Moderna and a member of the Executive

Board of AICA–Croatia. She is an editor, publisher and author of numerous publications on contemporary art published in Croatia and internationally.



Breda Beban (1952-2012) was an artist, filmmaker and curator/creative producer whose work deals with contemporary notions of subjectivity and emotion that occur on the margins of big stories about geography, politics and love. Breda Beban's films and photographs are recognized as unique expressions of intimacy, vulnerability and authenticity. Born in Novi Sad, ex-Yugoslavia in 1952, Breda Beban was raised in Macedonia and Croatia. She studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb. Starting her career as a painter and performance artist, she began to work with film, video, and photography after meeting her partner and collaborator Hrvoje Horvatic in the mid-eighties. Exiled together in 1991 after outbreak of the war in former Yugoslavia, they travelled from place to place before eventually settling in London, where they continued their collaboration until Horvatic's untimely death in 1997. Working independently and/or in collaboration with other artists or filmmaker, she has fashioned a range of productions that have been exhibited at major museums of contemporary art in Europe and the U.S. Breda Beban lived in London

and Sheffield, where she was Professor of Media Arts at Sheffield Hallam University.





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