

Walczak writes, “to your friends, [or] to a laser printer.” As Jay tells us in “Empire,” networks, and mobility within them, are good for building capital: “I can make it anywhere, yeah they love me everywhere,” he asserts, and then name-drops a bunch of places and people, from Biggie to Beyoncé. Like pop stars, paintings are worth little if their content doesn’t circulate, if they’re unable to, as Joselit writes, “sutur[e] a virtual world of images onto an actual network composed of human actors.” Returning to Kurzweil, maybe Walczak’s show, while lo-fi, was futuristic after all, primed for “hard drives attached to bodies” taking over the world, its webs of arrows and lines and open spaces facilitating flow, calling for viewer input.

But when a speech act (here, as song lyrics) is recorded, the flow becomes fixed, and even more so when those lyrics are transcribed and become writing. To then take that extracted speech and commit it to a commodity form such as painting, as Walczak did—or record tracks, as Jay-Z did—is to turn an immaterial social exchange (with all of its 1960s Happenings or 1990s relational utopian potential) into something that can be sold. Walczak is aware of all these references and probably assumes his viewers are too—assumes that they’re able to calculate that his paintings, made mostly with free labor and exhibited in a young gallery located beside the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, obviously aren’t going to do anything to corrupt the most intensely commodified lyrics of the year. And what better way to pay homage to New York than with the image of language, fragmented into bits of words, texted acronyms, or shorthand code that only your own network can decipher?

—Caroline Busta

“Serbia: Frequently Asked Questions”

AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM NEW YORK

Yugoslavia’s disintegration commenced in 1991 with the secession of various republics, triggering an ethno-religious civil war among Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and Muslim Bosnians. Much of the conflict centered on Bosnia-Herzegovina, and, for many in the West, the genocidal campaign against Bosnian Muslims, orchestrated by the Milošević-led Bosnian Serb ultranationalist army and paramilitary, came to typify the egregious violence of the war. Aware of this legacy, the curators of “Serbia: Frequently Asked Questions”—organized by the Austrian Cultural Forum New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade, and featuring artists from several nations in the region—hoped to counter the “stereotyping” of Serbs as “intolerant and nationalistic people” by presenting work that engages critically with the history and contemporary traces of this conflict, and in various ways interrogates the volatile psychological, social, ethnic, and religious entanglements that can lead to a nationalism gone awry.

Perhaps the most unnerving work here is Belgrade-based Zoran Todorović’s *Warmth*, 2009. Considerably scaled down for its presentation here, the piece consisted of wooden dollies stacked with dark gray felt blankets made from human hair and six small monitors that played videos of the cutting of the hair at barbershops, salons, and military barracks and the processes of manufacturing the fabric. Though the felt itself is an artifact of comfort and survival, Todorović evokes an insidious biopolitics: the extremes of social instrumentalization by which the body is converted to “bare life,” to use Giorgio Agamben’s term. One can experience the work as an allegory of the reemergence of the concentration camp apparatus during the Balkan wars, and imagine it in relation to Agamben’s notion of the fundamental,



paradoxical interpenetration of the sovereignty of the body and the sovereignty of the nation-state.

A number of other works here—including Serb Milica Tomić’s video *One day, instead of night, a burst of machine-gun fire will flash, if light cannot come otherwise*, 2009, and Albanian Anri Sala’s *Naturalmystic (tomahawk #2)*, 2002—also considered the body as a site of identity mediation. The former work portrays the artist, holding a Kalashnikov rifle in one hand and a plastic supermarket bag in the other, walking to places in Belgrade where armed resistance to the Nazis took place, and the latter depicts a man from Belgrade vocally simulating the sound of NATO missiles flying through the sky. Austrian Marko Lulić contributed an intriguingly enigmatic experimental dance video, *Jasenovac*, 2010, that somehow corporealizes a 1966 modernist monument commemorating the Serbs, Jews, and Roma who perished in a notorious World War II-era extermination camp in Jasenovac, Croatia. Czech Stefanos Tsivopoulos’s two-channel *The Interview* continued the thread, featuring, on one screen, a Serb soldier speaking about atrocities he committed during the Bosnian war, and, on the other, an actor repeating the same testimonial. It is up to the viewer to determine which is the actual soldier, or whether such distinctions are pertinent in relation to the transmission of the facts of the narrative itself, which takes on particular resonance in relation to the way in which the evidence of war crimes is reconstructed.

The difficulty of cutting through the fog of war to reconstruct the (historical) facts on the ground came across with heightened urgency in Slovenian Marko Peljhan’s *Territory 1995 Evidence*, 2006–10. Based on fastidious research into the military, legal, and technological conditions of the Srebrenica massacre, Peljhan’s project comprises twelve palimpsest-like plates (featuring a layered agglomeration of information) and audio elements (including intercepts of the military’s communications used as evidence during the genocide tribunals) that together generate a complex analytic remapping of communications, command, and control networks utilized by the Bosnian Serb military and paramilitaries leading up to the tragedy.

Still, queries remain. Is Serbia—an independent republic since 2006 and a candidate for EU membership—recuperated in the global consciousness? Did it ever need to be? And does the artistic “culturalization” of its past serve to ameliorate, or merely sublimate, the traumas of the Balkan war? Art, as demonstrated in this show, is an aporia that allegorizes its own indeterminate relationship to the real, and therefore cannot answer such questions.

—Joshua Decter

Marko Lulić, *Jasenovac*, 2010, still from a color video, 5 minutes 30 seconds.