

Desire for an Enemy

Juraj Poliak

Curator: Adrián Kobetič

I met Juraj Poliak years ago in Kremnica. A small distinctive town connected to mountains, history, art, and mining. It is precisely this combination that gives the town its distinctiveness, manifesting in a certain type of small-town mental environment. Kremnica gave both of us a great deal – experiences, work, friends, but also bitterness and disappointment. The search for balance in the middle of nature, surrounded by monuments, turned into a complex network of relationships, characterized by closedness and dissatisfaction, leading to a shared desire for an enemy.

At that time Juraj was working on the scenography for a theatre play created based on a concept by the Austrian playwright Bernhard Studlar, staged at the Slovak National Theatre in 2017. However, this is not scenography in the traditional sense, but an integral part of the dramaturgical and semantic concept of the performance. In addition to the sound component of the installation, an instrument called ORGA~ZILLA, created by the composer Matej Sloboda, the exhibition also presents interactive transparent objects allowing one, through light on one's smartphone, to find oneself inside selected interiors of Kremnica. These are originally socially valuable spaces that were materially or otherwise degraded by human activity. Whether it is a church, monastery, school, or museum.

Through works creating an immersive audiovisual environment, visitors of the gallery become part of the process of forming the installation. It is formed as a place of searching for balance, tension, and their temporary release, while thematizing the possibility of a symbolic "armistice" in contemporary social relations. The exhibition is dedicated to the memory of our friend Martin Chmelík, who taught us a great deal about Kremnica, but also about life...

Art has a transformative power. A painting inspires a poem, a poem becomes music, and music gives birth to further works. Something similar was experienced also by the scenographic sound object of Juraj Poliak. Originally created for a production, it was later deconstructed and reassembled by the composer Matej Sloboda into an instrument called ORGA~ZILLA (pronounced: organzilla). The pipes, once placed in stands like beams in a forest, are now placed vertically and arranged in space in the shape of a triangle.

Whether it is still an organ is also questioned by the title of the work – Ceci est peut-être une pipe (2023) (This is perhaps a pipe). The allusion to René Magritte's La trahison des images (1928–1929) is in this case striking. Yes, the pipes are powered by air from an organ motor. Yes, their sound is known to us from the organ. But the style of playing, changes in pressure, and the use of different mutes and air columns open the question of whether it is still an organ. Perhaps we are witnessing an artistic transformation. Perhaps it is an organ – and perhaps it is already something entirely different. Questions without answers... And that is good.

Matej Sloboda

Mother: Do you know what is happening out there? A demonstration. In this damn city there are demonstrations all the time and nothing works. Metro, buses. You can completely forget about taxis. Who knows who it is today. Leftists, rightists, all the same. Today the workers are demonstrating, tomorrow the unemployed. Excuse me, every day it is the same shit. I tried as fast as I could...

Father: Well. It is true. Retraining is the only thing they care about. You disappear from the statistics, and instead you rot in a stinking room with a bunch of other losers and do fake job interviews. And the lecturer is terribly ambitious because she is afraid she will lose her job. Everyone is deadly bored by it, but she keeps thinking everything is "totally great". And then... but screw it. (falls silent)

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Loan shark: Damn it. Such a beautiful night and no lucky star that would smile at you. (sighs) Ah, you really are a generation of losers. Everything is in front of you, but nothing in your hands. That's shit, isn't it? (no response) You can be glad that people like me exist. Yes, it is so. I help such miserable creatures like you. And what do I get from it? Nothing. Eternal imbalance of fate. Stop! I will start philosophizing. So. Time is up. I am listening.

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Actress: You are not laughing anymore, are you? But smiling still works. It takes quite a lot of strength, but it still works. (pause) If I could, I would conjure a smile onto your face right now. People would at least think you died peacefully.

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Doctor: No, listen to me. This is not fair. It is simply not fair. I... every day I work myself to exhaustion for people I do not know. I do everything I can. Always. For everyone. I do not make distinctions. And that is how it should be. That is my job. My vocation. That is what I wanted to be. Okay. But I also want someone to finally hug me. Damn it! I also want someone to comfort me. When someone dies on my operating table. I want someone to hold me when I drag myself home after a 20-hour shift from this damn hospital. But there is no one! No "darling". There is simply nothing. Absolutely nothing. (breaks into hysterical crying) Nothing, nothing, nothing. For months I have been at my limit and suddenly I meet you and...

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Patient: It is okay. Injustice is not your fault. You have your life and I have mine. We are all accountants of our own deals. We keep accounts and must accept losses. Day after day. And one day we balance everything. We draw the final line and leave. We are puppets in the hands of God, as my mother used to say. And she was not even religious. She also died of cancer.

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Death: More melodramatic? No problem. If you want, I can call a nurse and you can give her a traumatic experience as a farewell. It would be best if you stood right on the windowsill. When she opens the door, you take the first step. She will scream like crazy, you will try to catch yourself, but gravity will be faster. Her piercing "Nooooo" will still be heard when you splat onto the asphalt below.

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Girl: Nonononono. Now it is my turn! I am asking you: Is it allowed? To be happy? In today's time? Is it allowed? When the world is the way it is? Is it allowed? To drink tequila when the father has cancer? And only wants to die?

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Statue of Liberty: Believe me. Swimming, falling in love, taking a stand. Those are the three most important things in life. (takes her familiar pose) Torch of enlightenment up high! – Now I have to go. You must not tell anyone that you saw me. Do you promise?

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Bernhard Studlar: Desire for an Enemy
