



Esplanade
Presents

Visual Arts

CONSTRUCTION SITE 2016

Delia & Milenko Prvacki

14 Jul - 18 Sep 2016
Esplanade Concourse

A collaborative effort between established Singaporean artists Delia and Milenko Prvacki, this installation is a dressed-up stage combining both artists' notable styles of work. Inspired by the landscape of change in Singapore's geographical and economic development over the past five decades, the two artists use a wide array of contrasting and complementing construction materials to create a metaphorical and theatrical stage of an island that has been through rapid changes, akin to those undergone by a colourful stage production. Situated within the heart of the Esplanade performing arts centre, it is an allegorical representation of life in a fast-developing country, where people must find a balance between preserving their natural surroundings and the needs of urban life – and where life is theatre and theatre mimics life.

Although we have exhibited together several times, this is the first time that we are doing an installation as a collaborative project. It is a significant and meaningful endeavour for both of us as we are able to assess and evaluate the similarities and differences between our practices, sharing an interwoven common vision and aesthetic sense that has developed over more than four decades.

This exhibition is an opportunity for us to crystallise our creative forces and accumulated experiences in an effort to find the right form and content for a composition that is relevant to our separate, individual artistic identities. It is also a response to the challenge of creating a work of public art that is site-specific and integrated in architecture, while still conveying a strong message to the viewer.

The many challenges imposed by the monumental space were the starting points for conceptualising the visual interpretation of the work.

We are inspired by opera, ballet and the theatre stage, and we decided to take the articulating elements of the three and juxtapose them over a panoramic vista that resembles and is reminiscent of a construction site. In this way, the actors and performers are replaced with the installation, with the use of objects as metaphors. It becomes a creative construction site. The Concourse space with its irregular steps is used for temporary exhibitions. As a systematic way of working, we first used the architecture features of the space by covering the steps with wooden platforms. These platforms become a *carte blanche* for the re-composition of fragmented sites and activities which related to the process of building and construction. We wanted to focus on the idea of demolition and destruction that is found in the perpetual process of man-made urban creations – the unavoidable sacrifice that allows new forms and vistas to be generated. It is also a reminder of the human instinct for survival and innovation.

The audience is encouraged to reflect on the complex processes of creating a work of art, be it a stage performance or a visual artwork. The projection or tentative search for similarities to a "real" location is left to the viewer's imagination and is achieved by an introspective reflection on



issues linked to irreversible progress, development, urbanisation and dependence on advanced technologies.

We also wanted to capture elements of nostalgia, aesthetic value and picturesque qualities embedded in apparently "profane" materials found at any construction site. Other than a few authentic and original raw materials, most of the objects found in the installation are recreated, represented and materialised in surrogate materials as a sketch, a tri-dimensional drawing, and a frugal "artist's impression" that contrasts with the precise technical 3D rendering and perfection of execution found in construction plans.

The reflecting mirror acts as a metaphor for a picture created in a virtual space, or as an aerial view, or as a focused, cropped frame much like collectible, "trophy" postcards, or spectacular and panoramic vistas that are kept as memorabilia from one's travels.

This project is an attempt to reconcile reoccurring themes and processes with some of our distinctive creative efforts. We built the concept and its realisation in the form of a mixed media installation based on a compilation of ideas from Milenko's well-known installations, such as *Construction Site* (2002-2006) and *The Ultimate Visual Dictionary* (1997). The process of creating the sculptural entities draws from translating forms and shapes frequent in Milenko's oil and acrylic paintings, as well as his mixed media on paper, into sculptural entities. The materials used in the sculptures range from organic material such as twigs and rattan, to synthetics such as sponges. The hybrid combination of a large variety of materials is meant to be a stimulating visual and sensorial element, and not an obvious narrative approach. The stories are hidden and built *ad libitum* by the viewer in a multi-sensorial interactive connection and perception of the composition, as a whole with abundance of details and textures contained in a rather austere chromatic display.

On the other hand, I insisted on making work in my beloved medium, clay, and used a full range of colours and suggestive tactile effects that are available through ceramic firing methods.

Several of my objects originate in forms reminiscent of my earlier works like *A Piece of Land* (2000), *Lines* (1998) and *Slice of Landscape* (1995-2000), where my concerns were a fascination with tropical nature, the succession of vegetation



and nature reserves. However, most of the objects that I have created follow from my last installation *Mine and Rare Earths* (2010), where the focus of the successive transformation of raw materials and ores for the utilisation of new technologies, emphasises the relevance of natural resources for modern civilisation – an issue with deep implications in the global economy.

The utilisation of old bricks and roof tiles seeks to renew the discourse of the survivability of materials and the conservation of heritage. These objects exist within the shared space of memory and the present, which my artistic and creative processes continually redefine.

The artists...

Delia Prvacki

Delia Prvacki was born in 1950 in Baia Mare, Romania. She became interested in ceramics as a teenager and had her first solo exhibition at the age of 20. After completing her studies at the Institute of Fine Arts Bucharest in 1975, she lived and worked for 17 years as a professional artist in Belgrade. She immigrated to Singapore in 1992 and became a citizen in 2002. She has had more than 20 solo shows and participated in numerous international group exhibitions.

Delia's body of work includes extensive ceramic wall murals, life-size sculptures and intricate tapestries, demonstrating her high level of sensitivity and understanding of her materials, whether ceramics, GRC, bronze or other mixed media. She is known for the use of vibrant colours in her ceramics pieces, combining found materials and bringing them to life, and bridging natural and urban forms in a contemplation of the environment that we live in.

Milenko Prvacki

Born in 1951 in Yugoslavia, Milenko graduated with a Master of Fine Arts (Painting) from the Institute of Fine Arts in Bucharest, Romania. He is one of Singapore's foremost art educators, having taught at LASALLE College of the Arts since 1994. He was Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts for 17 years and currently holds the position of Senior Fellow. Milenko became a Singapore citizen in 2002 and was the recipient of the prestigious Cultural Medallion for Visual Arts in 2012. He has exhibited extensively in Europe since 1971 and continues to pursue his art career with solo and group exhibitions across Asia and the rest of the world.

Over the past 45 years, Milenko has developed a distinctive visual language in his paintings, reflective of his memories and extensive travels and life experiences. The playful use of visual elements in his paintings, often combined with written words, creates a new way of looking at things around us and challenges us to break from stereotypes and refresh our lazy mental dictionaries.

Acknowledgements

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- Delia Prvacki



