

## ABOUT LANDSCAPE AND HIDING IN THE WORKS OF IVAN ŠULETIĆ

The artistic practice of Ivan Šuletić is based on a fundamental analytical approach to the medium of painting and also on the examination of its representational qualities – a precise painterly methodology consequently carried out during the process of the structuring of a painting as a contemplative space with its own complex history and political role, and its subsequent execution on the canvas. In his recent works, shown at the exhibition *Cityscape: Sequel* Šuletić applies that procedure starting from landscape – the artist does not perceive it as a picture defined by genre, but as a concept of scene (of natural or urban scape) constitution by the means of painting. In other words, he is not interested in landscape as the subject matter, for him it is a self-reflexive painterly practice, a culturally defined practice.

Šuletić's paintings and drawings are structures generically organised through repeatedly painted details randomly extracted from the chosen digital photograph of countryside or urban ambience. The magnified detail of the selected sight/scene turns into a motif, a kind of pattern that constructs an infinite painted panoramic configuration. Such a procedure in the construction of landscape has a direct reference to the ontology of landscape as the space within which representational problems have been solved during the long history of painting since landscape was born in the Renaissance by the separation of a single fragment of the countryside panorama and its translation into a painting, or by the *framing* of a section or a scene from the countryside into the picture of landscape.[1] Šuletić imitates this principle, but the premises of his procedure are significantly different: the section of nature that serves as the point of departure in his work stems from an already reproduced image of the landscape, and he destabilises the frame that defines the framework of the landscape by creating the structure of the picture which spreads into infinity by means of repetitive expansion of the initial section/pattern of the landscape – thus turning it into the mask of landscape.

The insistence on landscape as the polysemantic practice is founded in the theory that re-examines its historic status and recognises landscape as the space of constitution and representation of the technique and manner of perception through the past.[2] The theorist of visual culture W. J. T. Mitchell has proposed that the image of nature in painting should not be treated as a scene observed or a text read, but as a process that influences the formation of social and individual identities. Landscape understood in such a way appears as a cultural medium that offers the observer a space of representation where the sight/scene and the site/place[3] overlap, in other words as a cultural praxis that participates in the process of ordering social relations. Studies of landscape in the works of Ivan Šuletić serve also as comments to this function of the countryside: his interest in the procedures of transposing the

scenes from nature into culturally shaped patterns that generate the picture imply that landscape is a constitutive part of the process of positioning and finding of the human individual within the world he lives in and structures, whose image is produced by his constant interventions in the countryside. Nevertheless, similar to solving of the problematic issue regarding the constitution of the picture of landscape by the mimicry of methods, the representational aspect of the landscape is not revealed directly but by means of sabotaging the mechanisms that facilitate representation. The image of the sight/scene generates its own disguise by eliminating the space of subjectivity in the landscape, even endangering the possibility of perception.

[1] More about this in: Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, Oxford University Press, New York 1999.

[2] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1998, xi-xxxv.

[3] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction", in *Landscape and Power*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1994, 1-2.

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