

Unsetting

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Sophie Jung

in collaboration with Elena Radice

Category

Art, Solo exhibition

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“Unsetting”—is the title given by Sophie Jung to her first solo exhibition in Italy, which she developed together with the Milan-based artist Elena Radice. “Unsetting” is an invented term which recalls on the one hand the reverse of a setting, a scene or even a stage, and on the other it implies a ‘refusal to set’—a sun, but perhaps also a system, an era. Stepping into this somewhat unsettling, even disconcerting scenario and onto this stage we are greeted by a cornered, slightly misshapen, black half-sun that does not want to set, mirrored by the shiny ground back into a whole.

“Unsetting” works as a unifying installation with objects, drawings, and sound. The individual components are connected and interwoven through Sophie Jung’s exploration of (feminist) linguistic theory, as well as through her fascination of polyphonic and non-linear display formats. The sculptures approach us as ambiguous figures. They sit somewhere between ready-mades in their true sense and assemblages of found, made and sought-after materials and objects—deprived of their original function, alienated or freed. We see, almost hear, upside down, oversized wine glasses, the skylight of a demolished bank building converted into a coin fountain come drowning through, a hanging elephant carrying additional trunks—a perverse merging of found costumes, a Christmas tree wearing a perfectly round ballet skirt (hidden in a second room), an antique-looking pulpit—all mirrored, all doubled. The drawings expand this un-world, while the sound work conceived by Elena Radice mocks, torments or momentarily worships the objects and figures, connecting and confusing them, filling the space with many half-uttered enunciations.

“Unsetting” is in essence nourished by a workshop which the two artists held ten days before the exhibition’s opening. Departing from theory-based questions about the dis/embodiment of language, about the mechanisms of power and exclusion inherent in it and about the revolutionary potential of a collective messing with it, Sophie Jung and Elena Radice, along with the participants of the workshop, created collective texts—among other things utilising the method of the ‘Cadavre Exquis’ developed in surrealism—which in their polyphony try to break the claim of representation of language and the individual voice. Some of the sculptures exhibited in the space were already present during the workshop and served as friction, reference objects or even instruments. The 17-minute sound work by Elena Radice is composed from “text sculptures”, as Sophie Jung calls her collective text improvisations, which were created in the workshop. Having recorded the workshop’s exercises and text-sculptures with 5 randomly movable microphones for which she built carts, Elena Radice made a point of not adding any elements, but working only from defamiliarized source material.

So now we find ourselves on this stage, walking between the objects on a rather uncertain ground, while the sound—at times loud and sometimes soft—resonates polyphonic in our ears. “Unsetting” invited divergent narrations; Sophie Jung is invested in a destabilisation of assumed readings of the world and undermines the supposed clarity of language, categorisations, narratives and designations. In doing so, she references—among many others—the Russian writer Viktor Šklovskij, who pleaded for an ‘estrangement’ of things in order to prolong the process of perception and to replace mere recognition with a ‘new seeing’. She also frequently references the French writer Hélène Cixous, who uses a post-structuralist approach to propagate a female writing, a “écriture féminine” that is not descriptive but generative, searching, unruly and non-linear. The objects, figures, and voices on the stage of “Unsetting” extends precisely this moment of perception and challenges the dominant voice with a polyphonic whispering, talking, shouting.

The ecclesiastical lectern placed in the centre of the exhibition room is an exact miniature of the relative dimensions of the room, which are reminiscent of a church nave. It is an example of institutional, clear, exposed and unambiguous speech and at the same time aims to create a reference to the context: the headquarters of the Istituto Svizzero as the official Swiss cultural institution in Italy, in the immediate vicinity of the Swiss Consulate General in Milan and the branch of UBS. In other words, institutions that stand for a ruling value system, a ruling language regime that, despite repeated harsh criticism, does not want to set. And so the pig-shaped police mug—as a further indication of a regulating, ordering power—continues to stand, a little bit leaky, untouched on the podium.

As visitors we are called to reflect on our position in this arrangement. Where do I stand, who do I align myself with? Do I long to speak from the pulpit or join the polyphonic, whirling, unruly choir that surrounds me? Which voice can and will I embody? And which voice embodies me, even against my will? We find ourselves again in a brief moment of indecision, of disorientation, confronted with the question of solidarity versus obedience, authority versus the emergence in this reflecting space that seems to expand into infinity every now and then. A security light brightly jumps on, the shadows reflected by the mirrored floor scurry across the wall. “Unsetting” allows us to pause for a moment in the process of rash recognition and classification, and so proposes a strategy for resistance, an ongoing challenge to the dominant order.

Gioia Dal Molin, Autumn 2020

Thanks to Dafne Boggeri, Enrico Boccioletti, Peter Burleigh and Barbara Casavecchia, as well as all the participants in the workshop on 20 September 2020: Daria Blum, Guendalina Cerruti, Simone Colonna, Adji Dieye, Jacopo Furia, Eleonora Luccarini, Elke Mählmann, Valeria Napolitano, Marvin Gabriele Nwachukwu and Emma Passarella.

Sophie Jung's exhibitions "Unsetting" at the Istituto Svizzero Milano and "They Might Stay The Night" at the Casino Luxembourg function as two independent, yet connected sequences. Perhaps the voices heard in "Unsetting" are precisely those of the silent figures who stayed in Luxembourg overnight. As a third part, an artist book will be published in spring 2021 by Mousse Publishing in Milan.

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Sophie Jung (b. 1982, lives in London and Basel) works across text, sculpture and performance, navigating the politics of *re/re/representation* and challenging the selective silencing that happens by concluding. She employs humour, shame, the absurd, raw anger, rhythm and rhyme, slapstick, hardship, friendship and a constant stream of slippages. Her sculptural work consists of bodies made up of both found and haphazardly produced attributes and defines itself against the dogma of an Original Idea or a Universal Significance. Instead it stands as a network of abiding incompleteness, an ever-changing choir of urgencies and pleasures, traumas and manifestations that communally relay between dominant and minor themes. She's invested in triggering a de-categorizing of concepts and a de-conceptualization of categories, hopes for unholy alliances, cross material solidarity and assemblages that defy resolution. Her approach to "stuff"—both legible utensil and metaphoric apparition sits somewhere between materialist responsibility and wild becoming. Her writing exists in the tradition of *écriture féminine* and lives as polyvocal collage, often materialized and extended collaboratively. Recent exhibitions include Sincerity Condition at Casino Luxembourg; Taxpayer's Money for Frieze LIVE, Dramatis Personae at JOAN, LA; The Bigger Sleep at Kunstmuseum Basel; Come Fresh Hell or Fresh High Water at Blain Southern, London; Producing My Credentials at Kunstraum London; Paramount VS Tantamount at Kunsthalle Basel and Äppärät at Ballroom Marfa. She is currently working on solo exhibitions at E.A. Shared Space in Tbilisi and Galerie Joseph Tang in Paris. In 2016 and in 2019 she won the Swiss Art Awards and in 2018 she was the recipient of the Manor Kunstpreis.

Elena Radice (b.1987, lives, works and practices in Milano) holds a BA in Visual Arts/Sculpture from Accademia di Belle Arti di Urbino, and an MFA in New Technologies of Art/Video & Cinema from Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera; she has been an exchange student at WORK. MASTER of Haute École des Art et Design in Geneva. Her actions cut across different media, and are led by a strong interest towards open and dialogical aesthetic forms, greatly influenced by the dynamics produced by attentional economy and the Internet. The relationship with the space, either considered as an abstract or as a geographical concept, is pivotal for her creative process. The space informs and gets informed by her work: videos become portals and sound becomes a presence that travels through distances. During the last two years, Elena Radice has been teaching Multimedia in two different highschools and has been building the furniture for her studio, shaped to become—hopefully—a permeable research place. Through the years, she had the pleasure to start constructive and collaborative dialogues with A gee in the fog, Enrico Boccioletti, Dafne Boggeri, Graham Burnett, Ed.Clinamen, Mattia Capelletti, Marina Cavadini, CM Gratitude, Jeff Dolven, Estar(Ser), EuroStandard, Giulia Mengozzi, Leonard Nalencz, O', SPRINT, Bianca Stoppani, Guido Tamino, TeatrumBotanicum, Lucrezia Calabrò Visconti, Almare.