



Vlatka Horvat  
(See 53rd October Salon)  
*In Holes*, 2012. Photo: Ana Kasic.  
Courtesy: Cultural Centre of  
Belgrade

## 53rd October Salon

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Former Geodetic Institute, Belgrade  
22 September – 4 November

In a time of economic, political and social crisis, and of consequent cuts in culture funding in the Serbian Republic, the cheery title of this year's edition of the October Salon in Belgrade – *Good Life* – reads like dark satire. Standing in front of the exhibition venue, a derelict yet strangely beautiful monumental building, I find the title's black humour even more pronounced. I am in the city for the first time (full disclosure: I was on the jury for one of the event's prizes). Since 2005, the exhibition, the first edition of which was held during the 1960s and which is organised by the

city's cultural centre, has become more international in scope, and in its choice of artists and curators. This year's curatorial duo, Mika Hannula and Branislav Dimitrijević, use the strong melancholy of this rundown building, erected at the beginning of the twentieth century to house the city's stock market, to initiate a thought-provoking dialogue with the artists about the failure of that era's utopias, as well as the loss of – as they put it in the accompanying publication – the 'social imagination' of the century we are now living in.

With straitened financial support, the 30 or so invited artists (one third international, the rest local) had to use what they could bring with them or find on the spot. Nevertheless, the site-specific works that resulted from such necessity are the ones that engage most strongly in an exchange with the building, the city and the current political situation. Annika von Hausswolf's new photographic series, *An Oral Story of Economic Structure* (2012), installed almost like wallpaper, depicts gold teeth found on online auction sites. In the neglected rooms, where high ceilings and stucco remind us of wealth and past grandeur, they speak of poverty and desperation: the good life seems very far away. Vlatka Horvat, meanwhile, has used everyday materials and discarded objects – old doors, metal pipes, old rubber bands – to construct minimal yet powerful,

spatial sculptural interventions that make us aware of the different uses of the building and its various historical layers.

Reconstruction and reenactment, as ways to remember and debate our images of the past, are recurring artistic methods here. In Ana Hušman's film *Lunch* (2008) we find a humorous but still political approach. Her careful adaptations of advice from Yugoslavian etiquette books of the 1970s show us how to set a table, arrange the correct seating and entertain guests. Amid the nostalgia for the clothes, makeup and furniture, the social patterns and gender roles hidden inside these manuals are brought to light. Around the stairs and corridors of this huge building, meanwhile, are a series of framed ink-wash paintings on paper: Vladimir Miladinović has carefully reproduced pages from Serbian newspapers from the time of the civil war of the 1990s. The slow process of replicating the old newspaper pages is a work of remembering – the past rescued from oblivion. For the artist – too young to have read them at the time – this extensive, ongoing work is a revelation of the propagandistic nationalist discourse of his own childhood, and of how the brutal truth of the reality of war is hidden, distorted or denied, with the media as a willing tool.

**SARA ARRHENIUS**