

Ivana Keser: My life is (not) your life

It is enough to mention ethics and politics for an artwork to be viewed from an engaged perspective—one which, as a curator and critic, I believe we must uncover. No one is innocent. If we do not seek to reveal and foster the critical and political dimensions of an artwork, we are also playing a political game. This is a reactionary game, one that pretends museums can be filled with objects that say nothing to us.

I believe we do not want art that merely occupies the empty rooms of a museum and nothing more. Can we instead search for art that speaks about our lives and the world we inhabit, rather than simply reaffirming what we already think? Art places us in a situation of crisis; it compels us to question our position and everything that surrounds us. The question is: how?

In *Esthétique relationnelle*, Nicolas Bourriaud wrote about the end of the revolutionary spirit and of social utopias in art. Indeed, the art of this century has not brought about a world revolution, and the world is not a better place to live in despite the proliferation of artworks. Even art that has explicitly sought to expose and denounce real conditions has often failed to achieve its aims. More often than not, it has devolved into either political pamphleteering or mass-media spectacle. Institutions, in turn, have appropriated this information as their own and neutralized its critical force. There have been calls to proclaim the end of art and its capacity for engagement. But must this path be taken? Are there no alternatives? I believe there is a way through this dilemma.

Ivana Keser's work provides a compelling example of political engagement. She offers a more subtle and astute possibility. Her practice operates through a certain kind of perversion or displacement. It is not enough to be satisfied with a simple description of her work. Photographs combined with text, often situated within the language of graphic design, appear both in publications such as this newspaper and in publications that she herself composes. Through these works, she presents, in an allusive manner, a kind of vital portrait and a personal commentary on life and her place in the world. Ivana no longer speaks to us of an absolute social utopia. Through her experience, she knows better than anyone the failures of social utopias. Rather than promoting such ideals, she seeks to expose their limitations. Through the interplay of text and image, she offers us a private, everyday utopia shaped to the measure of our own limitations. Her work speaks of the necessity of constructing our lives day by day. Ivana Keser's message is one of discernment.

The importance of this critique, and of the acidity with which social issues are addressed, lies in its movement from the private and personal to the private and personal. It strikes at the gut with the intention of making the individual conscious of their own individuality. I have spoken of the perverse strategy at work in Ivana Keser's practice. The message appears in the newspaper, not in the museum, and it

takes the form of a mass medium. Its intention is to transform mass consciousness into individual consciousness. The message is addressed to you and to me.

Ivana Keser seeks to alter the very mechanics of the daily newspaper. She shifts attention away from global politics and institutional news in order to create a truthful news of the individual. Her work is perverse because it asserts that there is a virus contaminating the genuine necessity of building consciousness day by day. What becomes of an artwork if it remains localized, if it is fleeting and unstable? What happens when it enters a public medium and reaches the individual directly? None of this has anything to do with the desire to change the world or to propose a global revolution. That would be naïve. It is only a private, transitory, and limited utopia. However, it is large enough to allow us to survive.

In any case, the aim is to bring about slight and momentary changes in people's intimate lives. I recently read that the purpose of art is to transcend our daily miseries. I believe that, had Flaubert read this, he would have been furious. I also believe that the purpose of art is to depict us, to probe our misery, and to make us conscious of it. Ivana Keser speaks to us of the right to indifference, to live and let live. This is an idea that could be politically fundamental. None of this has anything to do with the desire to change the world or to propose a global revolution. That would be naïve. It is only a private, transitory, and limited utopia. However, it is large enough to allow us to survive.

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Global Positions, Museum in Progress, <http://www.mip.at/de/werke/432.html>
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