

Jasmina Cibic: The Fruits of Our Land
solo exhibition at Saw Gallery, Ottawa, Canada

Artist Talk: Friday 12 September 5.30 pm
P.V. Friday 12 September 7pm -10pm
exhibition continues until 15 November 2014
www.galleriesawgallery.com

The exhibition *The Fruits of Our Land* presents part of London- and Ljubljana-based artist Jasmina Cibic's project *For Our Economy and Culture*, with which she represented Slovenia at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 along with a new video work and sculpture. *The Fruits of Our Land* is Cibic's first major exhibition in Canada. The project, which presents a kind of synthesis of Cibic's past conceptual and formal investigations, points directly to the powerful role of the mechanisms that create the framework of geopolitical iconographies, an investigation that is central to Cibic's work. The installation at Galerie SAW Gallery directs the viewer's gaze and formulates the exhibition space as a "theatre box," where authorities developing a national iconography and mythology become the central player. The project traverses the concepts of ideology and art, attempting to reveal the mechanisms of ideology - their contribution to the creation of national myths and their manner of presentation. The connecting element in the installation's architectural disposition is a wallpaper created by the artist, which features images of the beetle *Anophthalmus hitleri*, an insect endemic to Slovenia and a failed national icon - a species that almost became extinct thanks to its ideologically charged name, which was given to it by its discoverer, a Nazi sympathizer, in 1937. Conceptually, the architectural disposition of the installation, which is based on the interior of the Slovenian National Assembly, and the images on the wallpaper question the state's relationship to the choice of a national iconography, or more precisely, to the representation of art within established models of the national. On the conceptual level, Cibic associates the endemic species with national architecture and foregrounds the issue of constructing and establishing the mechanisms of national identity through a nation's icons. On the formal level, however, we have an example of a delegated artwork, as each piece of wallpaper displays more than forty different "variations" of the *Anophthalmus hitleri* beetle, all made by international entomologists and scientific illustrators. The wallpaper presents

an almost encyclopaedic series of depictions of the endemic insect and provides a formal background to the visualization of the issue of ideological models. By reproducing and multiplying ad infinitum images of *Anophthalmus hitleri*, Cibic seeks to problematize the discourse through a critical treatment of ideologically conditioned themes and their removal or withdrawal upon contact with a new political regime, new structural order, or simply the conscripting of a new authority. A second visual-art element that is juxtaposed to the architectural disposition in Cibic's project is made up of two live-action films that reveal the contradictions inseparable from the transformations and representations of national identities over time through architecture and visual art. The script of the film *Fruits of Our Land* is taken word for word from the stenographic minutes of a session of the Commission for the Review of Artistic and Sculptural Works in the newly built People's Assembly in post-WW2 Slovenia. The minutes relate to a discussion between a political functionary, an urban planner, an architect and several art historians about which artists should be selected to create the mosaics, murals and sculptures for the entrance to the People's Assembly building (the parliament) and whether the artists and artworks are suitable to represent the nation appropriately. The characters that appear in the films are free of labels relating to such things as their nationality or profession, which makes them seem completely "anonymous." They are defined only by their dialogue with each other and the expression of their individual views; consequently, they seem universal and, as protagonists, are no longer tied to any specific geopolitical phenomenon but rather become the protagonists of "the mechanisms of a universal ideology" that could happen anywhere and anytime. Cibic, then, is not encapsulating any specific ideological model; instead, she directly reveals mechanisms that are more broadly applicable and that belong to ideologies both in the past and in the present. The second film *A Double Game* shows the actors playing the members of the committee assembling a model of the actual national parliament building as a silent visual paraphrase, an echo of the verbal debate. A third element is presented within a small dark room, spot lit and elevated to the status of a souvenir: a crystal sculpture of the model of the first architecturally coherent national presentation - one of the pavilions of the National Slovene Trade Fair of 1941. The model of this never realized building is another collaboration of the artist - this time with one of the last remaining factories of national production in Slovenia, a crystal factory that has throughout its history served different versions of nation-states and their heads of state. Within

this model, an actual *Hitleri* beetle is displayed. The visual elements placed within Cibic's constructed theatre box dramatize the contradictions inseparably connected with transformations of past and present national identities and, as a direct but unfinished dialogue between art and architecture, question their reciprocal influences in the formulation of national iconographies and their echoes in the present day. The exhibition *The Fruits of Our Land* thus plays a double game: on the one hand, through a convincing gesture of complementarity between its individual elements, it gives us a feeling of certainty, for it speaks directly to the basic experiences of the viewer's past and present; on the other hand, however, the same total "choreography" of these elements is precisely what asks new questions of the viewer and triggers a slight uncertainty at the thought of the future.

Tevž Logar