

METRO PICTURES

Güner, Fisen. "David Maljkovic: Nothing is Lost," *Elephant* (Autumn 2015): 115-121.



DAVID MALJKOVIC is fascinated by the potential for finding new uses, new meanings, for old things—things that once appeared so potent and powerful. 'We have produced so many images—we have to ask what we can do with this strong visual pool,' he tells **FISUN GÜNER**.

For an artist who's never had so much as a driving lesson, David Maljkovic clearly has a fascination with cars. They've appeared in many of his videos. But rather than icons of machismo and speed, they're presented as inert symbols of the past—and often of a projected future that never quite materialized.

In *Lost Memories from These Days*, a six-minute film by the Croatian artist dating from 2005, the camera pans across the grey expanse of what could be a car park, though it is in fact the interior of the former Italian Pavilion, built for the Zagreb Fair in 1961 by Giuseppe Sambito, an architect who has since featured in other work by Maljkovic and has proved something of an abiding fascination.

Sambito's building was used to host trade shows during the Fair's heyday—that is, the three decades of both the Cold War and the post-war boom under the Yugoslav president Tito. But it was a car show held elsewhere during one of Zagreb's many current trade fairs that initially inspired Maljkovic's work. He invited the young hostesses/models playing their decorative parts as they posed with the display cars to take part in his film. He shot it during a particularly sweltering heatwave. 'It was almost 40 degrees,' Maljkovic says. 'Super-hot. And they

started to feel dizzy—it was exhausting. There was no air inside.'

Indeed, the young women in *Lost Memories*—glamorously dressed in what one might rudely call 'Eastern European high-street chic'—do appear exhausted. Because of the stifling heat, we see their eyes begin to glaze over and their bodies droop; they slump listlessly forward as they grip the open car doors for some purchase. It's as if we're watching an absurdist take on the cliché of the languid skinny model who often looks like she's barely got the strength to stand up straight. Or perhaps the TV game show *Touch the Truck* comes to mind—see who can last the longest to claim the cash prize.

And what should we make of the big polystyrene shapes that lock the tyres? These are cars that are clearly going nowhere—all appearance and no motion. Must we read into them an allusion to the state of Croatia's economy as a relatively new independent state after the horrors of the previous decade's war?

Maljkovic's work often appears to take a political line, not only through the deployment of motifs such as cars, but also through the use of defunct modernist architecture which served a particular function during the communist regime. *Scenes for a New Heritage* (2004), for

Below

Untitled (Out of Projection)
2009–2012
Inkjet print
150 x 100 cm

Opposite

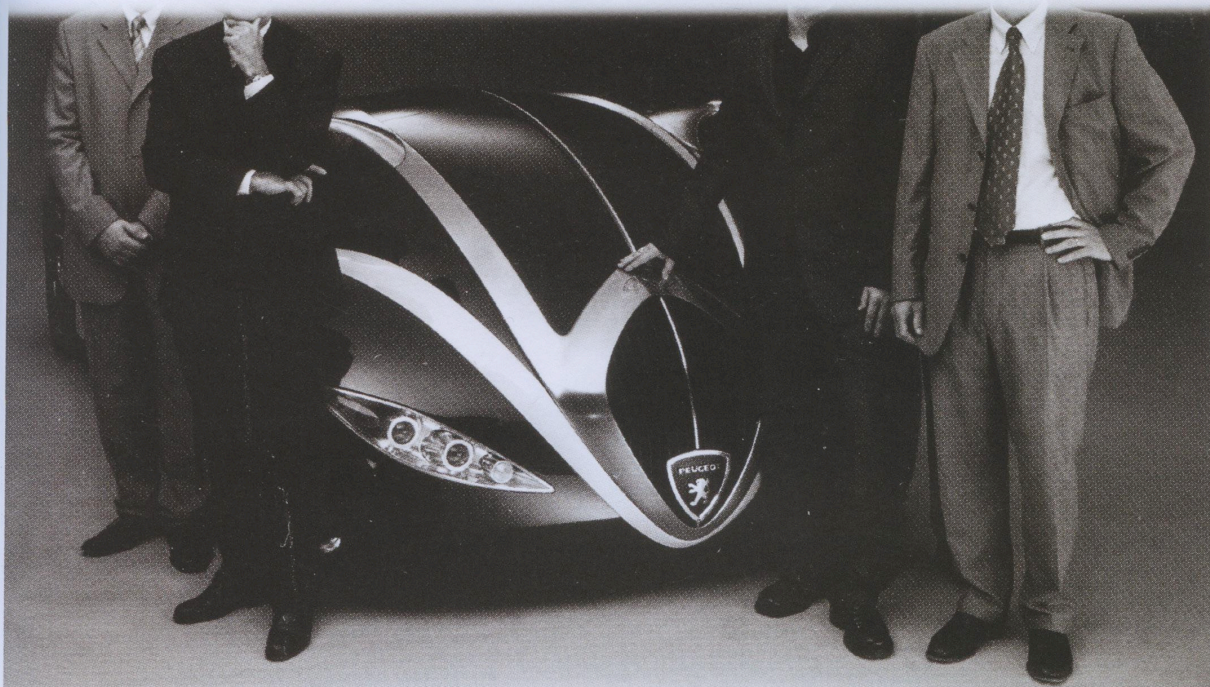
Untitled (Out of Projection)
2009–2012
Inkjet print
100 x 150 cm

Previous spread

Portrait by Paolo Di Lucente



ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SPRÜTH MAGERS



**“THESE ARE CARS THAT
ARE CLEARLY GOING
NOWHERE—ALL APPEARANCE
AND NO MOTION”**



Left
New Reproduction
2013
Inkjet prints
collaged
and mounted
on alubond
150 x 100 cm

Right
New Reproduction
2013
Inkjet prints
collaged and
mounted on
alubond
150 x 100 cm



Right

All images

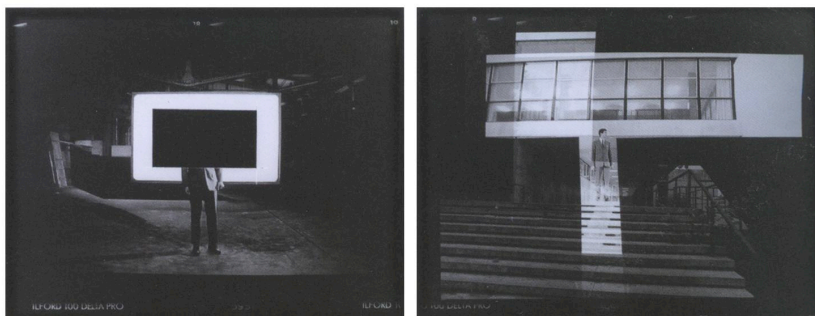
Recalling Frames
2010

Black-and-white print from
collage on negative
106 x 131.2 cm (framed)
Edition 1 + 1 AP

Opposite

Installation view

Sprüth Magers London
10 April–9 May 2015

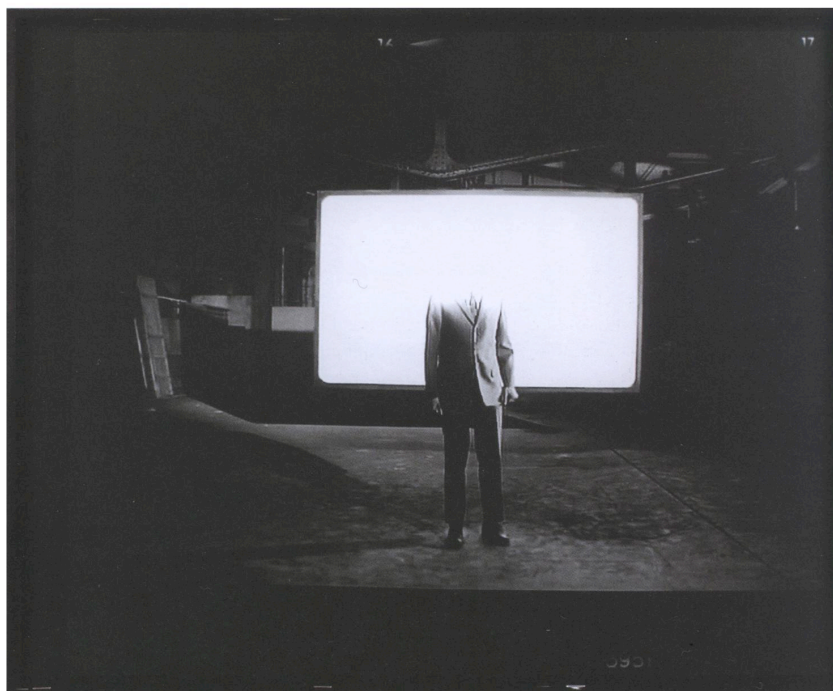


**“SOME STORIES SIMPLY
STOP BEING USEFUL TO THE
NATIONAL OR
COLLECTIVE MEMORY”**

example—which is set in the future and so has a kind of sci-fi feel to it—features a war memorial designed by the artist Vojin Bakic in memory of the Yugoslav victims of World War II. Over the course of three episodes, three different moments in time are presented, along with the varying attitudes that groups of young people have towards a historical monument whose meaning and significance are all but lost to them.

‘It was posing the question, “How can we deal with the form when the ideology has been cast aside?”’ Maljkovic explains. ‘All this history left aside when we became independent. And so I decided to bring a new, a future generation of visitors to the work, who didn’t understand what it was—to see if we could create new possibilities for the work.’ In the end we see the monument simply utilized as a recreational spot for the city’s youth. If anything, the work reminds us that often, or perhaps more often than not, what we remember and what we forget as a nation are deliberately imposed from above, not only through acts of suppression but also through neglect. Some stories simply stop being useful to the national or collective memory.

Maljkovic, who currently divides his time between Zagreb and Berlin (he spent several





years permanently based in Berlin and only recently bought an apartment in Zagreb, where he lives with his young family), also keeps a vast archive of photographic images, which he delves into to make large-scale collages. These random images are all from his different projects. Nothing is discarded. The photographs are blown up, becoming almost abstract in the process, and layered, creating evocative, formal juxtapositions.

Both *Lost Memories* and *Scenes for a New Heritage* featured in a major survey of the artist's work at the Baltic Centre in Gateshead, his first in the UK, in 2013. And earlier this year they also featured in a major solo exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. While many of Maljkovic's works make reference to particular historical figures or monuments from Yugoslavia's communist past, a more recent work, *Out of Projection* (2009–14), was filmed in Sochaux in France, near the Swiss border, in a highly secure testing site for Peugeot Motors.

Gaining access to the site proved particularly difficult, since the factory designs prototypes and so is especially careful to guard against industrial spies. Maljkovic first approached Peugeot in 2006, but the idea was rejected. He

persisted, and was eventually allowed to film there three years later. 'I was a bit naïve,' he says, 'because during the first meeting I came to the centre with my cameraman and a photographer, but we couldn't even bring a mobile phone.'

The Peugeot centre is in the middle of a forest, where tracks have been built to drive the prototype cars. Maljkovic decided to invite retired Peugeot workers to the test site, most of whom had never been near the secure centre. It was a chance for them to see the prototypes that had never been built, as well as the ones they'd helped make. 'It was an exciting moment for them, and for me, to bring them there,' he says. 'For the film, I made a selection of 11 cars—some of them from the eighties, some from the nineties. These now look kind of weird.'

'What was the most interesting for me was the question of how we try to visualize our future—how we try to predict what things will look like,' he says. 'But what was also fascinating for me was the emotional side of the encounter—the ex-workers with these prototypes. We have these really old people, and these models of the future. And most of the models were never manufactured. It was a very interesting experience.'