

METRO PICTURES

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MAP

BUT TO GO BACK



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Jenny Brownrigg looks at the meaning of monuments and memory in the work of Croatian artist David Maljkovic

...but to go back to the film. A bright light appears to emanate from the object itself. It is hard to see it against the white light, but there, the camera is moving along its outline, never revealing the whole form, but showing that it is made out of a hard, mirrored stone. Dark foliage is reflected upon its flat angular planes. The people, all from an older generation, now surround the object. They do not move, they stand, quite separately from each other, and watch. It is as if they do not know why the object is there in front of them. It is as if they have just found it.

The individual works of David Maljkovic, 'loop time' within the same frame, referencing past, present and future. This particular object in the introduction is a long forgotten monument in Memorial Park, Zagreb. Sculpted by Vojin Bakic, it was inaugurated in 1968 in remembrance of the victims of WW2.

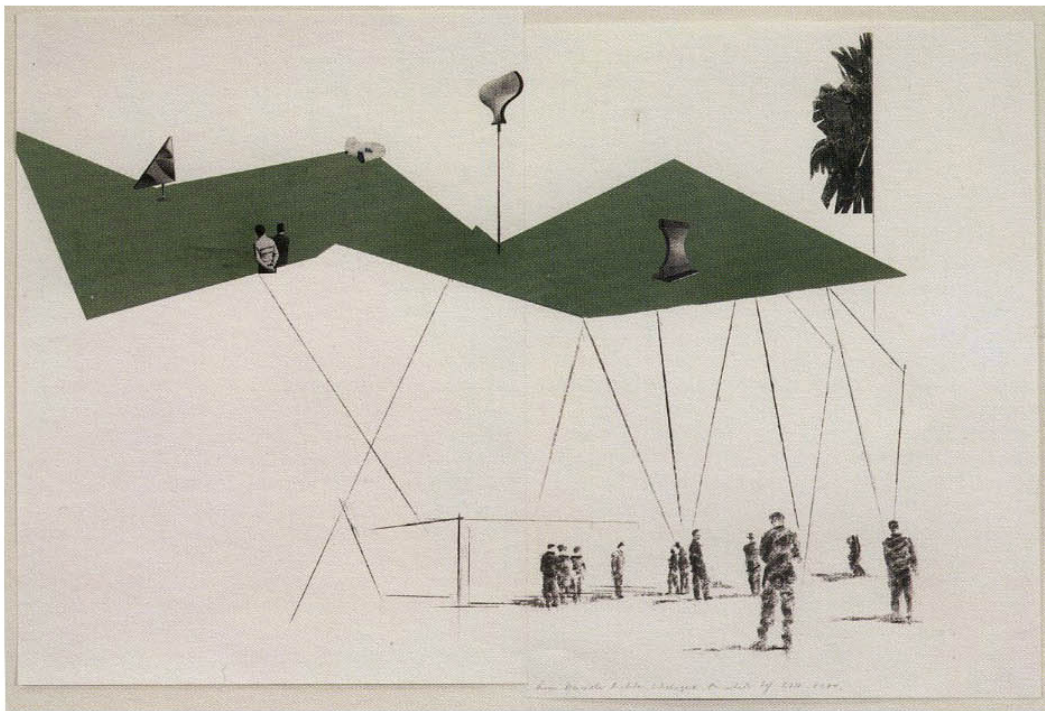
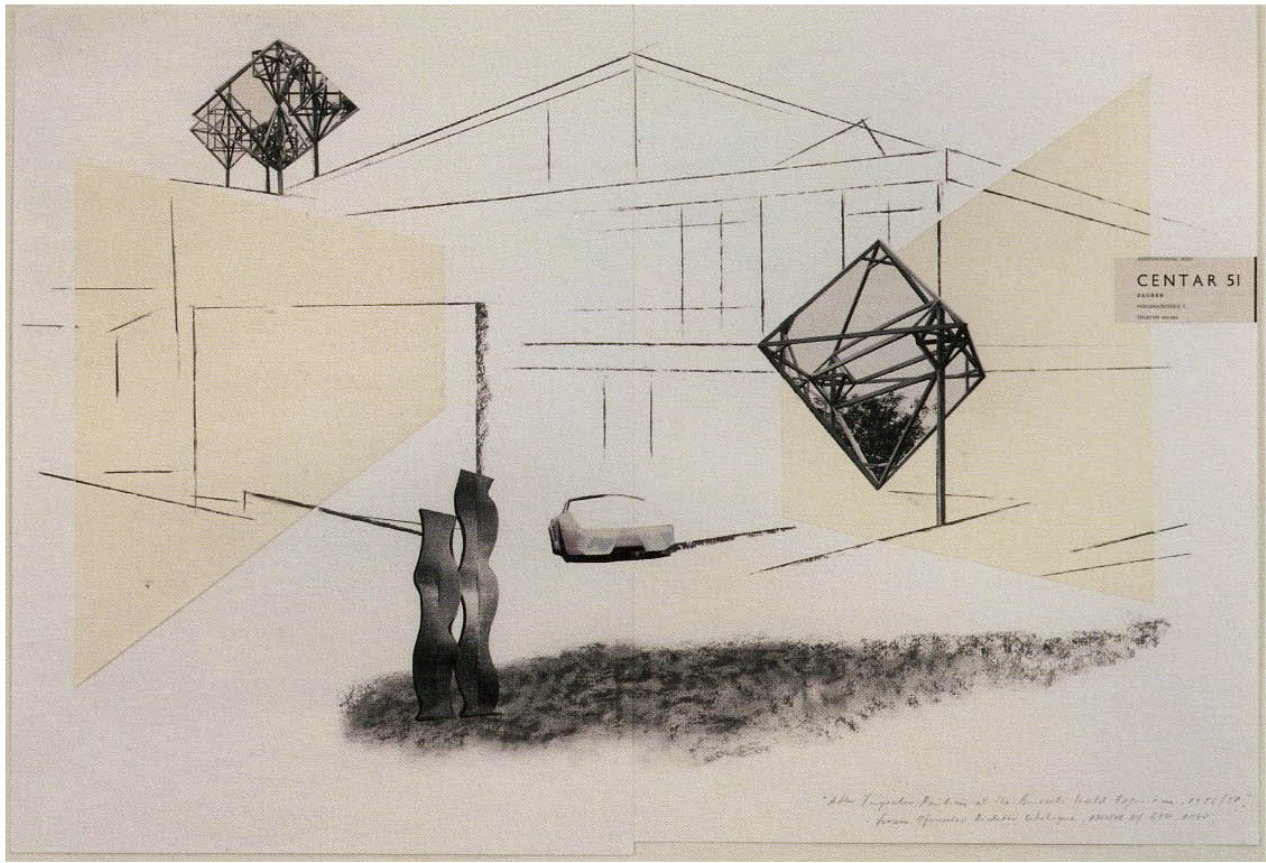
In his film, 'Retired Form', 2009, Maljkovic recasts the monument as an abstract form that looks alien in the space in which it finds itself. He never shows the monument's pedestal, or lets the camera zoom back to show the whole object in order for us to understand it. Inviting a number of people

who had grown up during WW2 to gather round the monument, Maljkovic films them looking as if they are trying to communicate with it in order to understand what it is. All we can hear is the sound of a projector, distancing us further from what appears to be a futuristic scene, just as the mechanisms of the projector are reminiscent of past technology.

To examine this strange, suspended dislocation of time and space, it is appropriate to refer to the film work 'Lost Memories From These Days', 2006-08, shown at Berlin Biennial 5 *When Things Cast No Shadow*. Again, in this, there is no logical progression following a narrative to conclusion. As audience members we are caught with the 'promotional' models who loll among the cars pinned to the concourse with cardboard clamps, in one continuous moment in the moment. The models remain silent and non-conversant. The only sound is of a car engine, running, then switching off, unable to move on.

The ennui of the models defy description. Their lack of desire coupled with the emasculation of a male symbol of progress, the car, meant that neither people nor object could act. They were forever, as Adam Phillips describes boredom, held in a state that is 'merely an interruption – after something and before something else. Like all genuine transitional states, their destination is unclear'. In this way the film echoes the social and political situation of Maljkovic's country of origin, Croatia, which, in the 20th century moved from communist to capitalist, now waits since accession was announced in 2004, to become the 28th EU member state, a status scheduled to come into being around 2011.

The building that Maljkovic places all this inaction within is the Italian Pavilion, designed by Giuseppe Sambo, for the Zagreb Fair. Post WW2, this complex of pavilions and trade exhibitions (which is still located on the banks of the River Sava, Zagreb), was a microcosm of world trade, with pavilions representing USA, USSR, European and some third world countries. Run by the state, the fair's priorities in 1947 were to promote the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia's five year plan, to symbolise economic power, and to demonstrate a link between east and west. Maljkovic often returns, in his films, collages



Previous page: 'Retired Form', 2008, collage on photo paper
 Above: 'Images With Their Own Shadow', 2008, collage and pencil on paper
 Left: 'Images With Their Own Shadow', 2008, collage and pencil on paper
 Right both: 'Retired Forms', 2009, digital video stills

and installations, to the Zagreb Fair. 'Lost Memories From These Days' is the antithesis of the aims of the event, subverting ideals of the latest models, business, promotion, sales, targets and progress.

In Maljkovic's 2009 exhibition at Metro Pictures, New York, 'Lost Pavilion', is a sculptural reconstruction of the American Pavilion by architect John Johansen, built in 1956 in the grounds of the Zagreb Fair. *Lost Review*, the publication accompanying Maljkovic's show at Berlin biennial 5, is a comprehensive collection of collages that edit together his present day photographs of the fair's empty buildings, with idealistic fragments from the *Yearly Reviews* published by Zagreb Fair in its 1960s' heyday.

However, it is never for purely nostalgic reasons that Maljkovic returns to this location. It is more that through the dislocation and displacement



1960s. Richter was a member of the collective EXAT 51 (Experimental Atelier), a group of artists and architects against social-realism in art, instead promoting and exploring abstraction. By abstracting the speech of his cast in 'Images With Their Own Shadows', Maljkovic succeeds in mirroring the values of Richter before they became accepted, thus asserting the place of the 'shadow' in re-telling history.

The value of heritage is always questioned in Maljkovic's work. At the end of the 1990s Vjenceslav Richter's home and studio were passed on to the Museum for Contemporary Art, to be kept for the nation. In marked contrast to this act, Maljkovic juxtaposes it with Vojin Bakic's monument of remembrance, long since forgotten, in 'Retired Form', 2009. He takes on the role of the custodian for these relics, continuously reframing the monuments and



of the buildings and their function in his work. Simultaneously, different time frames and possible futures can be suggested. For example, the American Pavilion is taken back to the USA; in a collage, the industry of a sunny forecourt crowded with 1960s visitors, is transplanted onto the snowy foreground of the blank façade of building no 34. Maljkovic neither accepts nor denies history, rather, provides a third reading within the same frame.

His philosophical editing technique is also apparent in 'Images With their Own Shadows', 2009. Filmed at night, the work is made up of static compositions of the studio, house and kinetic sculptures of Croatian architect Vjenceslav Richter (1917-2002). A group of young people, a new generation as the artist refers to them, are posed in the house. Each time one opens their mouth to speak, it is the sound of a mechanical projector that comes out.

The audio is from the last television interview Richter made. Maljkovic has edited the dialogue, removing any descriptions the architect makes of his work, his house and studio, or about himself. Removing absolutes, what is purposefully left is the architect talking about difficulties he experienced on certain projects, such as his compromise on designs for the Yugoslav Pavilion for Brussels Expo 58.

In retaining these excerpts Maljkovic reflects the atmosphere and problems of the 1950s and

their possibilities. How does time change a monument for each new generation? With Maljkovic, it is the people in his work who try to figure out what the meanings might be, such as in 'Scenes for A New Heritage', 2004-2006, where the action begins in 2045, and a group attempt to understand a memorial park in Croatia.

Lately however, in his series of collages 'Retired Forms', 2008, the monuments employ their own self-determinism, reinventing themselves after a working life, transplanted into a series of ideal retreat destinations such as islands or beaches.

Maljkovic proves that by juxtaposing history with present and future, that the gap between reality and fiction is a complex, but infinitely creative one. In this unmonumental society we find ourselves living in the 'now', how might we live without the symbolic image of leadership?

Returning to history, Pythagoras (580-500 BC), according to Simon Critchley's latest work, *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, is beginning to be thought by classical scholars as never having existed. Rather, a group invented him, going on to live and die, 'in a manner consistent with those beliefs'.

Sounds like a Maljkovician solution.

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David Maljkovic, Retired Compositions, Metro Pictures, New York, 17 January-21 February